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## Suffixorama

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## SUFFIXORAMA

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Relentless competition in the business of capturing public attention has made the field of advertising highly productive as a source of new words. Most of these coinages are abhorred by the language purist, for to him the very principle of coining words without regard for existing synonyms and often with utter disregard for etymological relevance is reprehensible. The coiners are castigated as "semantic innocents" or "linguistic barbarians", and pious hopes are expressed that such deplorable practices will soon die out. For the student of language, however, the linguistic activity in question is a perennial source of interest. He may agree that most of the new words are redundant; he may feel that some are unattractive, if not ludicrous; and he is certainly aware that many are etymological absurdities. Yet all of them command his attention, not because the words are significant in themselves, but because of the patterns of word formation they exemplify and because of the evidence of linguistic vitality they provide.

This vitality is nowhere more evident than in the practice of forming derivatives through the use of suffixes. In recent decades advertisers intent on catching the public eye have freely exploited such suffixes as *-orium* and *-ry* (well established in *auditorium* and *bakery*) to form *hairorium*, *meatorium*, *sportorium*, and *beanery*, *bootery*, *drugery*. Such neologisms, and there are hundreds of them, involve the use of a wide range of productive suffixes. Occasionally, a word coined in this manner gains general currency, as in the case of *racketeer* (1927), which follows a long established pattern evident in *privateer*, *profiteer*, *sloganeer*, and so on.

During the past few years, a less common process of word-formation has become fashionable. By this process, called "adaptation", some part of a widely known word is added to a part or the whole of another word; this pseudo-suffix thereby becomes a new morpheme with its own special meaning. Thus *racketeer* has given rise to such blends as *black-marketeer*, *grey-marketeer*, and *stockateer*, the last being applied by American newspapers to sharp-practicing Ontario stock salesmen. Once several such blends have been coined, the part-word "*-ateer*" becomes a productive suffix meaning, say, "illicit trader".

This process accounts for *butterlegger* (from *bootlegger*), *carnapper* (from *kidnapper*), and *rockerthon* (from *marathon*). To the same class belongs the suffix *-eteria*, which had its origin in the Spanish loanword *cafeteria*. When borrowed, this word referred to a retail coffee store or

coffee shop; in twentieth-century American usage, however, the term came to mean a self-service restaurant. The immediate popularity of the cafeteria-style restaurant resulted in a spate of new words exploiting the new suffix *-eteria* "self service": *buffeteria*, *drugeteria*, *foodeteria*, *gaseteria*, *groceteria*, *kitcheteria*, *marketeria*, and so on.

Yet another suffix in this class is *-matic* (*-omatic*, *-amatic*), from *automatic*. Admen all over the continent have coined hundreds of magic brand names with this productive adaptation suffix, exploiting to the full the suggestion of "minimum effort" it connotes. A few examples will illustrate some of the many forms such coinages take: *Accumatic* watch, *Ajustomatic* pipe, *Coffeematic* percolator, *Convertimatic* gocart, *Flexi-matic* electric shaver, *Fordomatic* drive, *HiLoMatic* gas broiler, *Injecto-matic* razor, *Knif-O-Matic* sharpener, *Ladymatic* watch, *Maid-O-Matic* gas range, *Safe-a-Matic* wringer, *Tiptoematic* transmission, *Ultramatic* drive, *Windomatic* sash.<sup>(1)</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting of the fashionable adaptation suffixes is *-rama* (*-orama*, *-arama*), which means "a display, spectacle, or exhibition of scope and variety." In the United States the suffix has been commonplace in advertising for several years; in Canada it gained wide currency only during the past year, a delay doubtless to be attributed to cultural lag. Among the earliest exploiters of *-orama* in this country was the Boy Scout Association, which publicized its international jamboree at Niagara-on-the-Lake (August, 1955) as the "Scoutorama", no doubt following the lead of the New York Boy Scouts, who had used the term a year or so previously. Admen soon awoke to the possibilities of *-rama*, with the result that dozens of adaptations were concocted. Recent newspaper advertisements in Kingston, for example, have called attention to a "fooderama", a "Fordorama", a "gasorama", and a "lafforama", touching off an editorial blast against the "new" suffix by the very paper that carried the ads.

Actually, the suffix is far from new, though it has certainly been revitalized of late. Its source is in *panorama*, a neo-Greek compound (*pan* "all" and *horama* "view"), the first English record of which is 1796, in the sense "a landscape picture exhibited by being unrolled before the spectator." As a common-European word, *panorama* was the model for *diorama*, a term coined in 1822 by the French painter Daguerre for an invention which improved on the panoramic technique. According to Honoré de Balzac, in *Le Père Goriot*, a mania for ending words in *-rama* subsequently broke out among Paris art students, one of whom introduced the practice to the "Pension Vauquer" as a sort of parlour game.<sup>(2)</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century another word of similar genesis came into use in Europe, namely, *cyclorama* "a type of landscape painting arranged on the inside of a cylindrical surface so that the viewer might stand in the middle." This device, widely popular in the late 1900's, is still in use;

<sup>1</sup> Mr. C. J. Lovell of the *Canadian Linguistic Association* and the present writer have amassed well over two hundred coinages employing the several forms of this suffix; we have recorded just as many for the suffix *-rama*, which is discussed below.

<sup>2</sup> Fernand Mosse, "Honoré de Balzac and the Suffix *-rama*," *American Speech*, XXX (Feb., 1955), 77-9.

at Ste. Anne de Beaupré, Quebec, for example, there is a "Cyclorama" which depicts the Holy City of Jerusalem. At the same shrine may be found the "Christorama", a panoramic representation of Christ's life.

In the foregoing examples, all of which incorporate Greek roots, *-orama* (Greek *horama*) takes on the function of a suffix. The next development in the history of the pattern is reflected in *Futurama*, the title given by General Motors to its futuristic automobile display at the New York World's Fair, 1939-40.<sup>(3)</sup> Here the etymological lines of the suffix are obscured, for the word is clearly a blend of *future* and *panorama*, the two /r/ phonemes coalescing through bimorphemic fusion.<sup>(4)</sup> Perhaps the echo of *Futurama*, with its connotations of novelty and spectacular display, led to the coining of *Cinerama* for the wide-screen motion picture which (with its sequels) has made recent box-office history.

Although the blend *Cinerama* (CINEMA plus CYCLORAMA) was coined in the mid-forties, it did not become widely known until the fall of 1952, when the movie opened in New York and several other large American cities. The immediate and continued success of the picture made the word and its favourable connotations familiar to millions of people, a development which Madison Avenue soon began to exploit. Shortly after the successful premiere of *Cinerama*, a New York liquor dealer adjacent to the theatre labeled his display of spirits a "liquorama". Before long, other advertisers were calling attention to their wares by capitalizing on the success of the movie. As a result, the part-word *-rama* became increasingly productive as an adaptation suffix, being added to stems of Greco-Latin or Germanic origin indiscriminately. As with *Futurama*, words or part-words ending in the phoneme /r/ lent themselves most freely to the process (*furniturama*, *wonderama*). But stems ending in an unstressed vowel, as in *Cinerama*, were no less adaptable (*idearama*, *pianorama*). Moreover, the addition of an unstressed vowel, variously spelled but pronounced /a/ equipped almost any word as a stem (*bowlerama*, *twinatorama*, *glidarama*). In such words the allomorph /ə'ræmə/ has no direct etymological reference to Greek *horama*, although the most common variant spelling o-r-a-m-a may suggest that it does.<sup>(5)</sup>

The *-rama* words I have encountered fall into three general categories: those associated with the world of entertainment or spectacle; those associated with merchandising, including the names of products; and those which are obviously facetious. The following lists will exemplify the nature and variety of these adaptations:

1. *adventurama* (movie ad), *aquarama* (swim meet), *bathorama* (display of antique bathtubs), *boatorama* (boat races), *fun-a-rama*, *galarama*, and *gasorama* (all fun fairs), *hooperama* (basketball tournament), *lafforama* (cartoon programme), *motorama* (a T.V. show), *naturama* (a wide-screen movie technique), *newsorama* (newscast), *riverama* (a

<sup>3</sup> More familiar in 1956-7 is Revlon's *Futurama* lipstick; it might be added that *diorama* has turned up again — as the name of a perfume prepared by Christian Dior.

<sup>4</sup> See John Lotz, "The Suffix *-rama*," *American Speech*, XXIX (May, 1954), 156-8. Several of the examples cited herein are drawn from this article.

<sup>5</sup> For the most part, this is the line of development suggested by Professor Lotz, *loc. cit.*

water-sports show), *screamerama* (cartoon programme), *Shrinerama* (Shriners' show), *spinnerama* (disc-jockey programme), *striperama* (burlesque show), *ventriloquirama* (voice-throwing contest), *vistarama* (wide-screen movie technique), *weatherama* (T.V. weather report), *Wonderama* (a musical).

2. *accessorama* (display of accessories), *alumarama* (of aluminum goods), *camerama* (of cameras), *le citérama* (model of Montreal housing development), *figurama* ("amazing new 3-dimensional girdle"), *Fordorama* (display of used cars), *furniturama* (of furniture), *golforama* (golf school), *lamp-o-rama* (of lamps), *Motorola-Rama* (of Motorola products), *ninerama* (sale of articles priced at less than ten cents), *refrigerama* (of refrigerators), *silverama* (a T.V. picture-tube), *summerama* (sale of summer goods), *sunerama* (tropical cruise), *turkeyrama* (sale of turkeys), *value-rama* (sale).

3. (many of these words were coined by journalists directly or indirectly ridiculing the fashion) *dramarama* (suggested for a movie ad), *glamorama* (for a cosmetics display), *idearama* (the title of an editorial decrying the "-rama craze"), *panamarama* (suggested for a straw-hat display), *ramarama* (suggested for an article on -rama words), *skinorama* (from a newspaper article ridiculing baldness cures), *smellorama* (from an article on experiments in sensory entertainment), *talkerama* (suggested for a convention), *trackorama* (suggested for a racing meet), *wordorama* (for a spelling-bee).<sup>6</sup> The apogee of sensationalism is to be seen in *sinerama*, a direct pun on the movie title; this gem appeared in the jacket blurb of a book entitled *Jest and Sex*: "Sexplosively Sexational Sinerama of life!" Surely this is blending gone berserk.

Yet another step in the derivational process is reflected in the suffix *-ramic*, which is used in adjectival formations, as in the following excerpts from advertisements: "Flashy new coloramic paint styling" and "Scenaramic Windshield" (Nash Rambler, 1956). Quite a number of blends in this class have been coined: *cineramic* (used by a reviewer referring to scenes in *Cinerama Holiday*), *futuramic*, *iceramic* (ice-crusher), *jetoramic*, *silveramic*, *space-a-ramic*, *teloramic*, *vacuramic*, *videoramic*, *weatheramic*, *wonderamic*. It seems improbable, however, that *-ramic* will become highly productive as an adaptation suffix, for the very nature of the *-rama* words would seem to preclude such a development; indeed, some of the "adjectival" forms listed are simply brand names, that is, adjectives used as nouns. After all, such coinages are nonce-words having virtually no currency outside the specialized milieu of advertising. Their value lies in their power to arrest and hold attention. Consequently, they have little significance as English words; yet, as examples of "adaptation", a process of word formation that is becoming increasingly productive, they merit more than passing attention from students of language.

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<sup>6</sup> That some persons find *-rama* words "barbarous" is apparent from this excerpt from a letter to the *Milwaukee Journal*: "No daughter of ours will attend a powerama in a Futuramic car and a Figurama bra — not until we have lost our sensorama altogether!"