

Chapter 34

On blended selfies and tainted smoothies

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1 Introduction

There's a particular kind of word that acquires such a cultural momentum that it is able to skyrocket from non-existence to ubiquity within the span of a dozen years. The word *selfie* is a textbook example. Due to the rise of both mobile phone cameras and social media, the selfie now has a wide cultural distribution, and as such the word has become commonplace. Such is its popularity that it was elected Word of the Year in The Netherlands (2013), Belgium (2013), Great Britain (2013), France (2014), Spain (2014, as *selfi*), and as *Jugendwort des Jahres* in Austria (2014).¹ All this is hardly news, but a more interesting phenomenon is that the word *selfie* has been spawning a plethora of variants, such as *groupfie* and *shoefie*, and not just in English, but in several of the languages that have borrowed the word.

In this article, we present an impressionistic inventory of new words based on *selfie* in Swedish and Dutch. Adopting a Construction Morphology approach (Booij 2010; Norde & van Goethem 2015), we will examine which word formation processes are used to create these new forms. We also compare what we will call the *selfie* 'family' to the *smoothie* 'family', which shows the potential for similar morpho-phonological

¹ <https://onzetaal.nl/nieuws-en-dossiers/dossiers/woorden-van-het-jaar;> [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%96sterreichisches_Wort_des_Jahres.](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%96sterreichisches_Wort_des_Jahres)

processes in word formation, but which has a much smaller level of actual productivity.

2 Formal and semantic properties of *selfie* and *smoothie*

The suffix *-y/-ie* has diminutive meaning, both when used with proper names (*Charlie, Davey*) and when used with other nouns (*baby, ducky*) (Shields 2001). The coinage of the word *selfie*, first attested in Australian English in 2002 according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*,² makes use of the nominalisation function of the diminutive suffix, a process that is used extensively in Dutch (Booij 2010: 54), but also in other English words such as *quickness, cutie*, and *smoothie*.

The meaning of *selfie* is non-compositional – after all, it does not mean ‘small self’ – and seems to be subject to change, since the OED definition “a photographic self-portrait; esp. one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media” need not strictly apply in all cases anymore. This was recently illustrated by the case of British national Ben Innes posing with Seif Eldin Mustafa, the Egyptian hijacker of EgyptAir Flight 181, in a photo that went viral on the Internet and was often described as a *selfie* of him and the hijacker.³ Despite the label, the photo was not taken by Innes himself, but by a stewardess. It is, strictly speaking, not a *self*-portrait, but a regular one. All the same, the usage indicates that the meaning of *selfie* is expanding to include the meaning ‘photograph of self with someone notable’, with the meaning of the ‘self’ element shifting from who actually holds the camera to who is the ‘topic’ of the photograph. This broadening in meaning is illustrative of the flexibility in semantics that we also encounter in the derivatives of *selfie*, as we will see.

The term *smoothie*, in turn, has been attested in its currently relevant meaning since 1977.⁴ The *smoothie* itself is a blend – physical, not linguistic – of fruit/vegetable juice/pulp and dairy (e.g. (soy) milk or yoghurt). The mouth texture of the drink appears to be the reason to use the suffix *-ie* to transform adjective *smooth* into a count noun. Again, the semantics are non-compositional, since a *smoothie* is not just anything that is smooth (to the taste), but a specific type of drink.

The construction of *selfie* can be represented in the following way, using conventions of Construction Morphology:

- (1) $[[self]_i -ie]_j \leftrightarrow [photograph\ that\ features\ and\ is\ taken\ by\ SEM_i]_j$

Similarly, *smoothie* is constructed as follows:

- (2) $[[smooth]_i -ie]_j \leftrightarrow [drink\ that\ has\ a\ SEM_i\ mouth\ texture]_j$

² <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/390063?redirectedFrom=selfie#eid>.

³ <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/mar/30/briton-ben-innes-posed-selfie-egyptair-hijacker-praised-by-relatives>.

⁴ See <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/182768?redirectedFrom=smoothie#eid>. The word also has an earlier meaning ‘smooth talker’, ‘suave man’, but this sense is not likely to be relevant to the *smoothie* that is our current subject.

Both the formal and semantic make-up of these constructions is flexible when it comes to the coinage of variants of these original words, as will become clear in the treatment of these new forms in Swedish and Dutch.

Finally, we may observe that in both Swedish and Dutch the original words are treated as a unit with respect to syllable boundaries, rather than keeping the suffix as a separate syllable; that is to say, for the purposes of expanding the pattern, *self-ie* and *smooth-ie* are re-segmented as *sel-fie* and *smoo-thie*, respectively. Thus, *-ie* qualifies as a cohering suffix (Booij 2005: 115; 2010: 8–9). As we will see, this re-segmentation is reflected in the usage of *-fie* and *-thie* as word creation suffixes.

3 Data

3.1 The *selfie* group

3.1.1 Swedish

To collect our Swedish data, we used the Twittermix-subcorpus of Språkbanken (324,570,469 tokens), which was queried on September 8 and 9, 2016.⁵

According to the Swedish *Institutet för Språk- och Folkminnen* (ISF) the word *selfie* appeared in the Swedish language in 2013.⁶ In that same year, it was chosen as the most popular new word by readers of the popular scientific journal *Språktidningen*. In line with the Swedish tradition to find Swedish equivalents for foreign words, ISF recommended to use *egobild* ‘ego picture’, or *självis* (formed from the pronoun *själv* ‘self’ + the nominalizing suffix *-is*) instead. However, these alternatives did not really catch on. In the *Twittermix* corpus, the singular form *selfie* occurs 4,939 times, against 43 for *självis* and 27 for *egobild*. Attempts to at least establish native inflection of the loanword have not been very successful either. According to *Svenska Akademiens Ordlista*, the plural form of *selfie* ought to be *selfier*.⁷ However, this form is only attested once in the corpus. The most frequent plural form is *selfies* (1,060 tokens), according to what in Swedish grammars is known as the seventh declension (Teleman, Hellberg & Andersson 1999: 79ff). This declension features a plural in *-s* and is largely restricted to loans, particularly those from English (Mickwitz 2010).

So let us now turn to the neologisms based on *selfie*. Using the *Korp* interface of *Språkbanken* we searched for all words ending in *-fie*, excluding personal names – to avoid the Swedish fondness of compound first names with *Sofie* as the second member – and irrelevant nouns such as (misspelled) *filosofie* or *coffie*. This left us with 6,907 tokens, many of which were unanalysable and/or impossible to check as the original tweet was long gone. We therefore had to refrain from providing a detailed quantitative analysis, but a survey of the available data suggests some interesting

⁵ <https://spraakbanken.gu.se/korp/>.

⁶ <http://www.sprakochfolkminnen.se/download/18.42699e142b734b551101b3/1398151044710/Nyordslistan-2013.pdf>.

⁷ <http://www.sprakochfolkminnen.se/sprak/sprakradgivning/frageladan.html?url=-27634753%2Fcgi-bin%2Fsrf1%2Fvisasvar.py%3Fsok%3Dselfie%26svar%3D78404&sv.url=12.c17e514db30bb2a810ea>.

patterns nevertheless. First of all, most new-formations appear to be compounds,⁸ which fall into various semantic categories:

- (a) **pictures of self with a specific group or person:**
gruppselfie ‘group selfie’, *familjeselfie* ‘family selfie’, *påve-selfie* ‘selfie with pope’;
- (b) **pictures of self with some being or object:**
ko-selfie ‘selfie with cows’, *kyrksselfie* ‘selfie with church’;
- (c) **pictures of self in a specific state:**
nakenselfie ‘picture of naked self’, *sjuksselfie* ‘picture of sick self’, *svettselfie* ‘picture of sweating self’;
- (d) **pictures of self in a specific location:**
tunnelbaneselfie ‘picture of self on the tube’, *toaselfie* ‘loo selfie’, *badrumsselfie* ‘bathroom selfie’;
- (e) **pictures of self at a specific time:**
morgonsselfie ‘morning selfie’, *julsselfie* ‘Christmas selfie’;
- (f) **pictures of self performing a specific activity:**
valsedelutdelningssselfie ‘ballot-paper-handing-out-selfie’, *skiselfie* ‘skiing selfie’;
- (g) **pictures of object belonging/related to self:**
skuggselfie ‘picture of own shadow’.

Quite frequent, but less interesting, are *-fie* formations and blends borrowed directly from English: *wefie* ‘picture of us’, *dogfie*, *felfie* ‘farmer selfie’, *shelfie* ‘picture of bookshelf’, *smellfie* ‘picture of self in a badly smelling situation’,⁹ *trelfie* ‘selfie with two others’.

Finally, there are some *-fie* formations involving native roots, but these are rare, presumably because Swedish lacks a diminutive suffix and hence English *-ie* (and its extended variant *-fie*) were not always recognized as a potential suffix (also because English *-ie* is not particularly productive anyway). Interestingly however, some of the *-fie* formations below have a *-selfie* equivalent (*familjeselfie* – *familjfie* ‘family selfie’, *skiselfie* – *skifie* ‘skiing selfie’):

<i>bomfie</i> ‘barrier selfie’	<i>badfie</i> ‘bathroom selfie’
<i>hissfie</i> ‘elevator selfie’,	<i>barnfie</i> ‘selfie with kids’
<i>famil(j)fie</i> ‘family selfie’,	<i>skifie</i> ‘skiing selfie’
<i>tomtfie</i> ‘picture with Christmas Gnome’	<i>chantarellfie</i> ‘picture of Chanterelles in a frying pan’
<i>valfie</i> ‘picture of self voting’	

⁸ Note that there are bound to be many more *selfie* compounds in *Twittermix*, given the Swedish tendency to spell compounds as two words (*Språkriktighetsboken* 2005: 43), but we did not look at these.

⁹ Mostly falling into two categories: people smelling their own armpits, and (primarily) men changing a baby’s nappy with nose and mouth covered.

Also worth noting is *ny frisyrfie* ‘new haircut selfie’, where *-fie* takes scope over a noun phrase.

3.1.2 Dutch

The inventory of Dutch forms is based on the *Groningen Twitter Corpus*, which was queried on August 4 and September 25, 2016.¹⁰ To take stock of Dutch coinages based on *selfie*, we looked at the most frequent words starting with a hash (#) and ending in *-fie*. This allowed us to find forms that were often used along with a photo, so we could look at it and determine the semantics of the form in question in cases where there was any doubt.¹¹

Similarly to the Swedish case, the introduction of *selfie* in Dutch met with some resistance. Notably, upon *selfie* becoming the Dutch Word of the Year 2013, writer and comedian Kees van Kooten suggested that it be replaced with *otofoto*, a form derived from *auto-* ‘self’ and *foto* ‘photograph’.¹² While the suggestion garnered some positive responses, the form appears not to have caught on, appearing only 333 times in the Groningen Twitter Corpus, as compared to 182,423 for *selfie*.

While Dutch also uses compound variants on *selfie* (e.g. *sambaselfie*, *nomakeup-selfie*), blended and suffixed forms appeared to be more common than in Swedish. In terms of semantic variation, the Dutch forms cover a range similar to that of the Swedish forms:¹³

- (a) **pictures of self with a specific group or person:**
soelfie ‘picture of self with a soldier’, *polfie* ‘picture of self with a police officer’;
- (b) **pictures of self with some being or object:**
brilfie ‘picture of self wearing glasses’;
- (c) **pictures of self in a specific state:**
pietfie ‘picture of self in blackface as Zwarte Piet’;
- (d) **pictures of self in a specific location:**
stufie ‘picture of self in a recording studio’, *kanselfie* ‘picture of self preaching from a pulpit’;
- (e) **pictures of self at a specific time:**
ontbijtselkie ‘picture of self at breakfast’, *oranjeselfie* ‘picture of self at Koningsdag [King’s Day]’;
- (f) **pictures of self performing a specific activity:**
stemfie / *stemselfie* ‘picture of self voting’, *stufie* ‘picture of self studying’, *doehetselfie* ‘picture of self making DIY renovations to the house’;

¹⁰ <http://www.let.rug.nl/gosse/Ngrams/>.

¹¹ Interestingly, this indicates that in the case of some tweets, not just the linguistic but also the photographic context is needed to determine the meaning of the *selfie* coinage.

¹² <http://nos.nl/artikel/587976-otofoto-ja-zeggen-twitteraars.html>.

¹³ Note that some of these forms may have additional meanings.

- (g) **pictures of object belonging/related to self:**
zwerfie ‘picture of collected litter’;
- (h) **pictures of self reflected in object:**
spiegelfie, ‘picture of self in mirror’, *balfie* ‘picture of self reflected in spherical Christmas ornament’.

3.2 The *smoothie* group

3.2.1 Swedish

In the *Twittermix* corpus, the loan *smoothie* occurs 1096 times in the indefinite singular, and 448 times in the indefinite plural, but we found only two spin-off formations, to wit *groothie* (< *grod* ‘seed’ + *-thie*), and *semloothie* (< *sembla* ‘sweet bun’ + *-thie*). Both of these cases appear to be one-off coinages by individuals.

3.2.2 Dutch

In Dutch the *smoothie* family appears to be similarly limited. While we had initially hoped to find more forms because of the presence of the word *oathie* in the Dutch linguistic landscape,¹⁴ no analogous forms were found in the Groningen Twitter Corpus. The only reasonably frequent forms were regular compounds such as *aardbeiensmoothie* ‘strawberry smoothie’ and *spinaziesmoothie* ‘spinach smoothie’.

Interestingly, the *Oathie* is *not* a type of drink; instead, it is the brand name of a type of wheat-free bread that is marketed primarily on health grounds,¹⁵ which might explain the association with a *-thie* suffix. The presence of the suffix is indicated by the *-h-*, since the base word is *oat*, on account of the oat flakes that are a key ingredient. It would have been possible to simply have called the bread *Oatie*, using the classic *-ie* suffix; the fact that it was not indicates that an association with *smoothie* was likely intended. In the case of Dutch, the combination of a word like *oat* with *-thie* may be made easier due to the frequent pronunciation of /ð/ and /θ/ as /t/ in English loans. This is affirmed by the *Oathie* brand itself, who offer a pronunciation guide “ootie” (i.e. /oti/) on their website.¹⁶

While strictly falling outside of the scope of this section, we may mention the existence of *Fruithie* brand names in both Czechia¹⁷ and Taiwan,¹⁸ which indeed refer to types of fruit smoothie. This further suggests that in the case of the *smoothie* family, the creation of original brand names is a main contributor to its admittedly limited productivity.

¹⁴ Among other places on billboards of the supermarket chain AH to go.

¹⁵ Tapping into the recent consumer trend of treating wheat and gluten as unhealthy, even for people who have no gluten allergy.

¹⁶ <http://www.oathie.com/wat-is-het.html>.

¹⁷ <https://vimeo.com/103649373>; <https://www.facebook.com/cafelagarto/photos/a.167918056565094.36662.114764291880471/1129909533699270/?type=3&theater>.

¹⁸ https://www.facebook.com/fruithie/?hc_location=ufi.

4 Blends and taints

Before we move on, some brief words on the terminology of different types of morphological word formation processes will be helpful.

Some of the forms we've described appear to have a lot in common with blends. Blends (e.g. *smog*, *motel*) are often defined as “a word constructed from the beginning of one word and the end of another” (Bauer 2004: 22).¹⁹ Analysis as a blend is possible if the form in question is composed of a first part of word X and a latter part of *selfie* or *smoothie*. This is particularly plausible in cases where the overlap is greater than just the *-fie/-thie* element, such as *helfie* ‘picture of one’s hair’, *belfie* ‘picture of one’s posterior’, *welfie* ‘workout selfie’, *drelfie* ‘picture of self when drunk’, and *felfie* ‘farmer selfie’. The aforementioned *groothie* ‘seed smoothie’ and *semloothie* ‘sweet bun smoothie’ are examples from the *smoothie* family.

The other cases, such as *groupfie* and *oathie*, are composed of one lexical morpheme and a generalized suffix-like element *-fie/thie*. These cases are slightly different from so-called *-gates* (i.e. variants on *Watergate*, such as *nipplegate* and *Monicagate*) where the conjoined element is recognizable as a full lexeme in its own right. (Hüning 2000).²⁰ Rather, what we are dealing with is an original suffix that acquires part of the phonological material of the word to which it is attached, a process described by Jespersen (1922: 386–388) as *extension of suffixes*. Haspelmath (1995: 8–9; 2002: 56) calls it *secretion*, using *-aholic* and French *-tier* (as in *bijou-tier* < *fruit-ier*) as examples.²¹ More specifically, *-fie* and *-thie* represent a sub-type of such a process of extension, namely *tainting* (Jespersen 1922: 386–388), in which the suffix not only acquires phonological material from the attached word, but also a more specific meaning than the original suffix.

5 The formal and semantic properties of the *selfie* and *smoothie* families

As we have seen in our inventory, the neologisms based on *selfie* and *smoothie* differ in terms of both the formal and semantic relationship between the head word and the postposed element. In the case of compounds such as *stemsselfie* ‘vote selfie’ or *morgonsselfie* ‘morning selfie’, the meaning is compositional and transparent. However, for words made with a tainted suffix and blends the meaning isn’t always obvious due to missing phonological material of the head word and/or the non-compositionality of the semantics.

¹⁹ For an elaborate exploration of blends and related phenomena, see Fertig (2013: 66–67) and Lepic (2016).

²⁰ Such forms are called “libfixes” by Zwicky: <https://arnoldzwicki.org/2010/01/23/libfixes/>.

²¹ For Jespersen, *secretion* is a slightly different phenomenon where a part of a word is reanalysed as having grammatical meaning, e.g. the reanalysis of *-n* as a plural suffix between Old and Middle English (Jespersen 1922: 384–385).

5.1 The *selfie* family

As we've established, *-fie* has a distinct meaning from its origins in *-ie*, but it also differs from *selfie*. When we analyse the neologisms ending in *-fie*, it becomes challenging to assign a very specific semantic value to the suffix. It would be safe to define *-fie* as 'a photograph', but the relationship between the suffix and the head word may be different in each case.

The starting point is the fully substantive micro-construction mentioned in section 2:

- (3) $[[\text{self}]_i\text{-ie}]_j \leftrightarrow [\text{photograph that is taken by and features SEM}_i]_j$

However, in the neologisms, we encounter a range of related but subtly different constructions. In these cases 'self' is always the person *presenting* the photo, but not necessarily the one who *took* it:

- (4) $[[a]_{N_i}\text{-fie}]_j \leftrightarrow [\text{photograph that is taken by and features self plus SEM}_i]_j$
(e.g. *groupfie*)
- (5) $[[a]_{X_i}\text{-fie}]_j \leftrightarrow [\text{photograph that features self plus SEM}_i]_j$
(This construction applies to various usages of *selfie* neologisms where self is not the photographer.)
- (6) $[[a]_{N_i}\text{-fie}]_j \leftrightarrow [\text{photograph that is taken by and features self at SEM}_i]_j$
(e.g. *badfie* 'bathroom selfie')
- (7) $[[a]_{X_i}\text{-fie}]_j \leftrightarrow [\text{photograph that is taken by and features self while performing SEM}_i]_j$
(e.g. *stufie* 'study selfie')
- (8) $[[a]_{N_i}\text{-fie}]_j \leftrightarrow [\text{photograph that is taken by self and features SEM}_i \text{ belonging to self}]_j$
(e.g. *chantarellfie* 'picture of my Chanterelles')
- (9) $[[a]_{N_i}\text{-fie}]_j \leftrightarrow [\text{photograph that is taken by self and features self reflected in SEM}_i]_j$
(e.g. *balfie* 'Christmas ornament selfie')

5.2 The *smoothie* family

For *smoothie*, we encounter a similar situation, albeit one with less diversity in terms of derived constructions. Again, the basic construction of *smoothie* is as follows:

- (10) $[[\text{smooth}]_i\text{-ie}]_j \leftrightarrow [\text{drink that has a SEM}_i \text{ mouth texture}]_j$

For the Swedish *-thie* coinages *groothie* and *semloothie*, as well as *Fruithie*, the construction is different:

- (11) $[[a]_{N_i}\text{-thie}]_j \leftrightarrow [\text{smoothie that contains or tastes like SEM}_i]_j$

Finally, we may analyse the construction underlying *Oathie* as follows, where the semantic broadening from *-thie* ‘a type of smoothie, a healthy drink’ to ‘healthy food or drink’ is expressed formally:

$$(12) \quad [[a]_{Ni}\text{-thie}]_j \leftrightarrow [\text{healthy nutritional item that contains SEM}_i]_j$$

6 Conclusion

While differing in terms of actual productivity, we have shown that *selfie* and *smoothie* (in both Swedish and Dutch) have the potential to spawn neologisms based on a spectrum of word creation methods: compounding, blending, and (tainted) suffixation.

The fertility of *selfie* is primarily analogically driven by its form, and by the core meaning ‘photograph’. In other words, the tail ends of various blends and the suffix *-fie* indicate a type of photograph, but the exact relationship between them and the word they attach to depends on the context. In many cases, the full meaning of the *-fie* word is partly determined by the picture for which the *-fie* word serves as a caption. This symbiosis between linguistic meaning and graphic context adds an extra dimension to these particular word formations. In addition, in all cases the presence of a ‘self’ featuring in or related to the photo is heavily implied, even if the morpheme *self* is not used anymore.

In the case of the *smoothie* family, productivity is mostly driven by the need for creating original brand names. The lack of wider productivity may be explained by the smaller cultural relevance of the smoothie as opposed to the selfie. In both Swedish and Dutch, *selfie* was at least twice as frequent as *smoothie*.

Finally, we may note that the repeated coinage of words using the word creation processes described here has a jocular and playful character as well, as also pointed out by Lepic (2016: 104). Many forms appear to be created mainly or in part to be funny and/or original, rather than to fill serious gaps in the lexicon. While this kind of word creation rarely leads to particularly frequent or long-lasting neologisms, it reminds us that the role of creativity and playfulness in intentional language change needs to be considered. It is not unthinkable that by now commonplace words such as *selfie* and *smoothie* began their lives in such a humble fashion.

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