

ZAZZIFICATION IN AMERICAN SLANG

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The coinage zazzification is my expansion of the American slang term **zazzy** (jazzy, sexy). I use it to designate the strong tendency, in American English, to render words slangier than they already are by substituting a Z-sound (sometimes written ZZ) for other consonants.

Although any kind of consonant can be zazzified, voiced stops (B, D, J, G) seem most readily to undergo zazzification: bonkers (crazy) to zonkers, -diggety (hurray!) to ziggety, jillion (a huge number) to zillion, and gook (an Asiatic, usually pejorative) to bazook. As illustrated by the last example, slang terms in English are frequently prefixed by BA-, as in bazoo.

Non-obstruent sonorants (M, N, R, L, W, H, Y) are also prone to zazzification: scum to scuz (a worthless person), nigger-boy to zigaboo, hurrah to huzza, loony to gazoony (an oaf), wham (usually pronounced without the H) to zam, mahoola (money) to mazoola (also mazuma or mazoo), and Yippie (a political hippie) to Zippie (a violent hippie). The fourth example employs the frequent slang prefix GA-, as in galoot. Zippie may instead be derived from zip-gun, in which whip (or flip) zazzifies to zip.

Other consonants are zazzified only sporadically (P, T, TH, SH) snappy (stylish) to snazzy, jit (semen) to jizzum, thing to gazink-us (gadget), and swish to swizzle. One of the most common slang-forming suffixes is -UM, as in stickum. Dingus (an unspecified object) forms an intermediate link in the zazzification of thing; it uses the mock-Latin suffix -US, as in phonus-balonus. The suffix -LE, while not restricted to slang, is common in slang, as in razzle-dazzle.

In a few cases, zazzification seems to involve the replacement by Z of a two-consonant cluster (the earlier digraphs TH and SH are ordinarily pronounced as one consonant): slap (snap, whap) to zap, plunk to yazunk (plop!), frig (to copulate) to zigzig. The prefix YA- is analogous to BA- and GA- noted earlier; reduplication (booboo, doodoo, googoo) is a favorite device in informal English.

The two consonants that Z appears most often to replace in slang words are J, as in jig (Negro) to zig, and R, as in snore to snooze. The former of these two alternations may reflect fluctuating degrees in the Gallicization of Greek-derived words, as in jealous-zealous; the latter, an inherited Germanic pattern, as in was-were.

In a few cases, the appearance of Z in slang variants may be due to processes other than zazzification in the strict sense. Sometimes these processes are phonic, as in the case of jazz to zazzle (sex appeal), an extreme form of consonant assimilation with the Z appearing in two places (forming an internal palindrome). At other times they may appear to be grammatical, as in the case of fool to foozle (to confuse or deceive), in which the Z has been inserted into the middle of a word.

As a process, zazzification is the consonantal equivalent of the vocalic substitution which I earlier termed **ooglification** - that is, replacement of other vowels or vowel-sounds by an OO-sound. Examples of this can be found in my article in the February 1977 issue of *Verbatim*: skedaddle to skedoodle, cigarette to cigaroot, diddle to doodle, goggle to google, guzzle to goozle, snout to snoot. The juxtaposition of both Z and OO in any colloquialism serves to render it doubly slangy-sounding, as in such cases as zool (attractive specimen) or booze. This slanginess is intensified when the Z both precedes and follows the OO, as in the verb gazoozle (to cheat) - a maximally slangy word with a slang prefix and a slang suffix. And it reaches a peak when both vowel and consonant are repeated, as in Zoonooz, the title of a politically satirical comic strip which depicts public figures as animals.

If any **Word Ways** readers find vocabulary of this kind as zazzy as I do, I hope that they will pass further examples along to the editor.

Editor's note: An earlier and more technical version of this article appeared in *Forum Linguisticum*, Vol. III. no/2, pp. 185-187, and is reproduced here with the permission of Jupiter Press.