



## Andreaa Calude

Senior lecturer in linguistics at the University of Waikato

Two weeks ago, the Labour Government unveiled its Budget. Needless to say, everyone has an opinion, from cafe owners to radio talkback, no matter their training or expertise.

The preoccupation with the economy may also be reflected in an incoming change which has been brewing in English over the last decade: words derived with *-nomics*. From *Trumponomics* and *Teslanomics*, to *tweetonomics*, *likeonomics*, *peoplenomics*, *fashionomics* and *infonomics*, our lexicon seems to have been invaded of late by words involving *-nomics*.

Three Serbian linguists recently traced newly coined words with *-nomics* by scouring language samples over the past 10 years and found a whopping 780 new words. This is interesting because if they are right, then the insurgency of *-nomics* words in English could be telling us that society is shifting towards greater attention to economic matters.

It is always difficult to pinpoint how new trends arise. One important catalyst in the popularity of *-nomics* words



Roger Douglas - whose economic thinking led to the coining of the phrase Rogernomics - runs over his 1986 Budget speech in his office before delivering it in the House. STUFF

# Roger that

## Language Matters

appears to be a book. In 2006, *Freakonomics* (by Levitt and Dubner, 2006, Penguin), which would eventually become a bestseller, set out to convince the wider public that economic ideas are not just relevant to business people and entrepreneurs but that they influence everyone's lives in interesting and unexpected ways.

Trying to leverage the same linguistic strategy, other books followed in its footsteps: *Tweetonomics* (by Nic Compton, Adam Fishwick and Katie Huston, 2010, Barron's Educational Series) explains principles of economics in 140 characters or less (tweet format). *Comparonomics* (by Grant Ryan, 2022,

Big Idea) claims to explain why your life is better than you imagine.

But how do *-nomics* new words (neologisms) arise? The process works like this: the word *economics* is truncated to *-nomics*, and this splinter (as linguists call it) is then attached to various nouns, including both proper nouns (politicians like *Trump*, *Thatcher*, *Reagan* and companies like *Apple*, *Google*, *Tesla*), as well as common nouns (*pulse*, *perks*, *price*, *news*, *fashion*).

This is called a blend because it involves the blending of two words, albeit one truncated, to give rise to a new form with a related but novel meaning. *Wikinomics* is obtained from *wiki* + *nomics*, *likeonomics* from *like* + *nomics*.

Blends are neither new, nor unusual

in English (see also *Wordle schmerdle*, April 4). English speakers are well-versed in coining and decoding new blends and they know, implicitly, that the meaning of the new words is derived from the parts, but often with a twist. Writing in the journal *English Today*, the Serbian scholars show that *-nomics* words fall into three categories, whose meaning is related to economics, but not always in the same way.

Some words reference a person's (or company's) economic policies: *Reaganomics*, *Teslanomics*. Others refer to the study of a group's economic point of view: *povertynomics*, *spousonomics*. And others still refer to economic advice given to a particular group: *brokenomics*, *lockdownomics*, *pandenomics*.

Nevertheless, further inferencing is required in blends whose meaning is not immediately obvious, for example, *likeonomics* references the economics of consumer loyalty and *barkonomics* references economic advice for dog owners.

If this flux of new *-nomics* words is indeed new, or at least growing, Kiwis must have already been ahead of the trend. In 1985, New Zealand journalists coined the term *Rogernomics*, to refer to Roger Douglas' neoliberal economic policies implemented while he was serving as finance minister during the Labour government of the time.

As for the current Budget, according to the *National Business Review* "Jacindanomics does not exist" (4 Feb, 2021), but perhaps new *-nomics* words are already in the wings: *kiwinomics*, *Luxonomics* and *Robertsonomics*.

## Contact us

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## Statue for 'slave' would be fitting

Views from around the world. These opinions are not necessarily shared by *Stuff* newspapers.

Joseph Knight is a hugely important figure in the history of Scotland, its laws and the abolition of slavery. And yet his extraordinary story remains largely unknown.

Captured as a child in West Africa, he was taken to the Caribbean where he was sold as a slave to a Scottish plantation owner, John Wedderburn, before being brought to Scotland in 1769.

At the time, it was not clear if slavery was actually legal in Scotland or not. However, after a series of legal battles with his supposed "owner", Knight won a ruling by the Court of Session that slavery was not recognised in Scots law, three years after a similar decision in England.

## Viewpoint

Interestingly, Henry Dundas, whose statue dominates St Andrew Square in Edinburgh, acted as Knight's lawyer - the same Dundas who later earned the condemnation of many for his role in delaying the abolition of the slave trade for years.

While Knight is to be the subject of a new work of art commissioned for Perth's City Hall redevelopment, it would be fitting if he was honoured in a more permanent way, like his lawyer, with a statue. Indeed, given how important this ruling was and the difficulty of achieving it in what was for Knight a foreign land, perhaps he should be reunited with Dundas in St Andrew Square.