Handout 3: Compounding  
(Seminar Issues in Morphology; Andrew McIntyre)

1. Three types of compounds

- **Endocentric compounds**: AB is an instance of B: houseboat is a type of boat; a person who is seasick is sick. Here the final element is the head, and the other element(s) provide additional information about the head.

- **Exocentric compounds**: AB is neither an A nor a B (but a C somehow associated with A and B): sabretooth is neither a tooth nor a saber, but a tiger with teeth resembling sabres.

- **Copulative compounds** (also called appositive or coordinative compounds): AB is A and B. Frequently written with hyphens in English.

2. The headedness of compounds

- Irregular inflection can be inherited in English compounds only if the right-most morpheme is the head. Thus, only endocentric compounds have irregular inflection:

  (15) a. a men's room  
  b. bloc-notes, wagon-lit, gratte-ciel, voituriste

- Cases like flowerchildren give the lie to the idea that irregular plurals are ruled out with lexicalised compounds.

- Various possible explanations for behaviour with respect to inflection:

  - In headed compounds, the info associated with the head ‘percolates’ (is transferred) to the whole compound, cf. (17)(a). Percolation is impossible without heads, cf. (17)(b).

  - Inflection is a head operation, i.e. an operation performed on the head as if the nonhead material were not there. If there’s no head, then head operations are impossible, so default inflection is applied.

- Exocentric compounds have a head, but it is unpronounced, a zero morpheme, cf. (17)(c). This corresponds to how the compounds in (16) are interpreted. Sabretooth is interpreted as if were formed by clipping from sabretooth tiger. In the other cases, there could be a silent morpheme denoting a thing, person etc. Since the silent head has no irregular inflection features, the compound will receive default inflection.

3. Linking morphs and inflection inside compounds

- It is normally said that there is no inflection inside compounds: “cars driver ‘driver of more than one car’.” Many apparent cases of compound-internal inflection are really cases of linking morphs (interfixes). E.g. in the following German examples, the underlined morphemes are neither plural nor genitive inflections:

  (18) Sonnenschein, Frauenkirche, Massenmord

- F. (For German speakers) Explain why the nouns below have a different gender from that normally found with the righthand nouns (die City, das Grammophon/Bild).

- What do these cases tell us about the explanation for (16)?

- Do the same for the following French compounds: compositeur-pianiste, porte-parole, bloc-notes, wagon-lit, gratte-ciel, voituriste sport

- A. Certain types of exocentric compounds are called possessive compounds. Why?

- B. The Sanskrit term dvandva (‘pair’) describes a compound of the type pāpīṇḍaṃ (‘limbs’, literally: ‘hands-feet’) ajvāyōṣa ‘sheep and goats’ (lit. ‘sheep-goats’). The term has also been used for compounds of the type singer-songwriter, but Bauer (2008) notes that this terminology is inaccurate. What are the differences between the relationship between the two nouns in this English compound and the relationship between the nouns in the Sanskrit compounds just mentioned?

- C. Are these compounds endocentric, exocentric or copulative or something else: author-publisher, birdbrain, wheelchair, sugar Daddy, Austria-Hungary, greenback, apple tree, parent-child relationship

- D. Do the same for the following French compounds: compositeur-pianiste, porte-parole, bloc-notes, wagon-lit, gratte-ciel, voituriste sport

G. Most cases of irregular inflection in compound nonheads involve irregular plurals (teethmarks, lice-infested) or semantically irregular inflection (glassess case). Speculate on why this would be the case.

- H. Why could one argue that the –s in (1) in compounds with man is a linking morph rather than an instance of possessive or plural –s? The words in (2) give clues.

- I. The structures in (1) are often seen as compounds. Why do the facts in (2) argue against treating such structures as standard cases in which possessive –s has a full NP in front of it?

- a. gol’s milk, cat’s eye, beeswax, bull’s eye, driver’s licence, child’s play

- b. those men’s jackets (ambiguous)
Compounding

- General result from the above exercises: compounding patterns can require the insertion of morphemes which initially look like inflectional morphemes, but seem to be synchronically arbitrary (the -ing in dressing room may be another example). Sometimes this synchronic effect is the result of diachronic reanalysis of syntactic phrases as compounds.
- The German type Gottesfurcht goes back to the Saxon genitive used in older German (des Königs neue Kleider)
- The English type with possessive –s (bondsmen, goat’s milk) goes back to older times when –s was a genitive case marker on nouns rather than being the clitic that attaches to full NPs that we find today.

4. Compounding patterns

To say that compounding is/isn’t productive in a language is oversimplifying, since different compounding patterns may differ in productivity. Cf. the (incomplete) list of compounding patterns in English below. Those marked * are unproductive. The others range from somewhat productive to very productive.

### Compound Nouns

(20) a. [N N] endocentric: word stress, silkworm, diesel motor, bookshelf
   b. copulative: owner-builder, maidservant, producer-director
   
   (21) a. *[V N] endocentric: crybaby, scrubwoman, dress pants, bakehouse, drawbridge, driftwood, mincemeat, skim milk, whetstone
   b. exocentric: pickpocket, spoilers, killjoy, answershooter, cutthroat
   
   (22) [Ving N] exocentric: filing cabinet, writing table, drinking water, cleaning lady
   
   (23) a. [A N] endocentric: blackbird, drylock, redbrick, wetsuit, greenhouse
   b. exocentric: paleface, redskin, redneck, reddy, redhead, highbrown, bigfoot
   
   (24) a. [P N] endocentric: outhouse, outgrowth, undergrowth, offprint
   b. exocentric: afterbirth, afternoon, underground
   
   (25) [V Particle] exocentric: handout, padout, sit-in, walkout, breakdown, fallout, bailout, pushup
   
   (26) [XP N] endocentric (these are called phrasal compounds, compounds with a whole phrase as nonhead): leave-me-alone gestures, Chinese print collector, God-is-dead theology, over the fence gossip, who’s-the-boss wink

### Compound Adjectives

(27) [N A] endocentric: bloodthirsty, pain-free, theory-neutral, colourblind, class-specific, sky blue, brain-dead

(28) *[A A] exocentric: bittersweet, deaf-mute

### Compound Verbs

(29) *[V V] copulative: stirfry

Structures like babysit, grandstand are generally considered to involve either backformation or conversion (see introductory handout).

### Compound Prepositions

(30) *[P P] into, onto, *undereto, *besideto

5. The interpretation of compounds

There is much literature on the interpretation of compounds; we just discuss basic points here (see Plag, 2003:148 for related discussion). We concentrate on compound nouns.

- The grammar doesn’t seem to specify the relationship between the two nouns in a N+N compound. Arguably, English grammar only tells us that an endocentric structure AB means ‘A B which has something to do with A’. The number of possible meanings may be unlimited, as can be tested with new compounds.
- cat woman = woman [looking like/with/near?] a cat
- Two women were standing on the street. One of them had a cat on a leash. The cat woman said something to the other one.
- Knowledge about normal states of affairs gives other clues. Compounds may name language-independent memorised concepts. This is common with [AN] compounds.

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- Many compound nouns like rattlesnake, repair work, pay TV, dropkick, may or may not belong to the group in (21)(a). What is the alternative analysis?
- Which compound pattern above refutes the belief that syntactic structures cannot be part of words?
- The examples below illustrate the productive German [VN] compound pattern which is impossible in English. How does English express these concepts?

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**M. Give three more examples of synthetic compounds.**
6. Compound stress

**Rule 1:** If the right-hand member of a compound is branching (i.e. itself a compound), it receives main stress.

**Rule 2:** If the right-hand member is non-branching, stress the first member.

- This may be represented with diagrammes like the following (s = 'strong'; w = 'weak'):

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(40)  a. s w s s w
      finance committee selection panel

b. s w s w w
      finance committee chair
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Note: (b) is intended to have the reading 'chair of the finance committee', not 'committee chair who has to do with finance', which would be stressed according to Rule 1 because it would have the structure [[finance][committee chairman]].

When discussing rules for stressing compounds and phrases, it is important to control for **contrast accent**, the stressing of a particular morpheme which is contrasted with another:

- **Normal accent:** the finance committee selection panel
- **Contrast accent:** the Finance committee selection panel (not the Building committee selection panel)

**6.1. Systematic and unsystematic exceptions to Rule 2**

- Exceptions I have found to Rule 1 seem to involve 2nd members that are memorised as units rather than put together 'online':

  - **Normal accent:** the finance committee selection panel
  - **Contrast accent:** John likes music. John likes music, he doesn't hate it

**N. Draw the appropriate diagrammes for the following compounds:**

1. law degree requirement changes
2. evening computer class administration fee
3. community centre building council
4. World Trade Center conspiracy theories

**O. Define the semantic relations between the compound members for each set of examples.**

- **Groups of compounds obeying Rule 2:**
  - **Synthetic compounds:** drug dealer, talent search, busdriver, house owner, watchmaker, stargazer, jigsaw puzzle, maths teacher, pâtisserie cook, landscape painter, crowd control, potholder
  - **Olsen** (2000) argues that initial stress occurs whenever we can infer the exact relation between the two constituents from the meaning of one of them:
    - a. space scientists (all scientists study something; here it must be space)
    - b. gas mask (we know masks help filter out something, in this case gas)
    - c. paper clip (clips hold things together, probably paper in this case)
    - d. fingernail, toilet seat, bedhead, table top, shirt sleeve, horse hoof, eggshell, doorknob (B is an inherent part of A)
    - We could add the following examples in support of (49):
      - a. factory worker/owner/builder/building (which factories inherently have)
      - b. factory janitor/canteen/gates (factories needn't have these)
      - c. factory window (sounds like a type of window designed for use in a factory; needn't have been built in yet) vs. factory window (window in factory). Similar: car door
      - Hotel room/guest/owner vs. hotel kitchen/toilet/garden/laundry/cook (hotels inherently have rooms etc, but needn't necessarily have kitchens etc.)
      - There are exceptions that nobody can explain:
        - Moonlight/Spring/d-minor Sonata vs. Waldstein/Kreuzer/Tempest Sonata
        - Thompson Street vs. Thompson Avenue/road/lane/boulevard
      - Beyond N+N combinations, there are some other classes of compounds which disobey Rule 2 systematically:
        - lefthanded, shortsighted, coldhearted, absent-minded, bad-tempered, six-fingered, dim-witted, one-armed
      - There are exceptions where Rule 2 applies to classes of compounds other than simple N+N:
        - law degree requirement changes
        - evening computer class administration fee
      - **Examples where Rule 2 applies to classes of compounds other than simple N+N:**
        - [A N]<sub>dc</sub>: blackbird, drydock, upside-down cake, wetsuit, greenhouse
        - [Particle/Preposition N]<sub>dc</sub>: outhouse, outgrowth, undergrowth, offprint
        - [V N]<sub>dc</sub>: pickpocket, spoilsport, killjoy, answerphone
        - [V Particle]<sub>dc</sub>: handout, blackout, feedback, putdown, sendup, walkout, sit-in, breakdown, bailout, pushup
        - [N A]<sub>dc</sub>: bloodthirsty, pain-free, theory-neutral, colourblind, class-specific, sky blue
        - [P N]<sub>dc</sub>: afterbirth, afternoon, underground
      - With some patterns it’s difficult to see a regularity:
        - [N A]<sub>dc</sub>: drug dealer, talent search, busdriver, house owner, watchmaker, stargazer, jigsaw puzzle, maths teacher, pâtisserie cook, landscape painter, crowd control, potholder
    
  - **M. Olsen** (2000) & **Spencer** (2003) note that what I call Rule 2 has a lot of exceptions. Many correspond to coherent semantic patterns of compounding:
    - owner-builder, singer-guitarist, kidnapper-killer, rockstar-rebel, scholar-activist
    - gold ring, cardboard box, silk dress, copper wire, paper/leather bag, lead pencil,
    - court jester, village idiot, home video, a Leipzig pub, Sydney University
    - may flowers, summer dress, July weather, Autumn leaves, Christmas dinner

- **Groups of compounds obeying Rule 2:**
  - **Synthetic compounds:** drug dealer, talent search, busdriver, house owner, watchmaker, stargazer, jigsaw puzzle, maths teacher, patisserie cook, landscape painter, crowd control, potholder
  - **Olsen** argues that initial stress occurs whenever we can infer the exact relation between the two constituents from the meaning of one of them:
    - a. space scientists (all scientists study something; here it must be space)
    - b. gas mask (we know masks help filter out something, in this case gas)
    - c. paper clip (clips hold things together, probably paper in this case)
    - d. fingernail, toilet seat, bedhead, table top, shirt sleeve, horse hoof, eggshell, doorknob (B is an inherent part of A)
6.2. **Comparison to phrasal stress**

Phrasal stress works much like the reverse of Rule 2 for compounds:

(63) In a phrase [[A][B]]

(64) [[V] likes músic], [[A] big trées], [[A] very bíg]. [[w John rán]]

(65)

![Diagram of stress placement in a phrase]

John read the paper every morning

7. **Literature**


