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COMPOUNDING

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Introduction

Compounding is a process of combining smaller words i.e. lexical categories (nouns, adjectives, verbs, prepositions) into larger words and can be found with many languages world-wide. It is often considered to be a convenient method of being concise as well as meaningful. That may provide an answer to why compounding is so often used in poetry and technical language. Nevertheless, compounding is not the only means of word formation. Other methods will be described only briefly further on as a contrast to what is not considered a compound although it may seem so on the first sight. Most of the time will be devoted to discussing various types and categories of compounds, especially in regard to the lexical categories, and then I will provide an insight to several rules of hyphenating the compounds. Quite some rules regarding word stress will also have to be pointed out. In the end I will provide several patterns of forming plurals of compound nouns.

The contents of this paper will be presented in a surveyable, not-difficult-to-find-what-you-are-looking-for manner and will, hopefully, serve well to those students of English who are not completely sure about the rules of such a broad topic as compounding.

1. Word-formation processes

As I have already mentioned in the introduction, it is useful to mention other processes of word-formation besides compounding, mainly because some words may look like compounds but actually qualify as some other type of word-formation product. Note that compounding has been left out for it will be dealt with following this chapter on.

There are three very common productive processes of word-formation in the English language:

1.1. Conversion

The process changes the class of a certain word without changing its form.

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| [1] <i>carpet</i> (noun) | → | <i>...to carpet the stairs.</i> (verb) |
| [2] to guess (verb) | → | <i>My guess is that...</i> (noun) |
| [3] down (adv., part., prep.) | → | <i>We downed a few beers and left.</i> (verb) |

1.2. Derivation (affixation)

Derivation changes the meaning or part of speech of a word by adding affixes (derivational morphemes): prefixes, infixes, and suffixes.

- | | | | |
|------------------|---------------------|---|----------------------------|
| [4] Prefixation: | <i>large</i> (adj.) | → | <i>to enlarge</i> (verb) |
| [5] Infixation: | <i>impossible</i> | → | <i>in-fucking-possible</i> |
| [6] Suffixation: | <i>snob</i> (noun) | → | <i>snobbish</i> (adj.) |

1.3. Compounding

Compounding is a formation of new words by stringing together other words. Note the syntactic difference between the compound ‘blackbird’ and ‘black bird’, which is a nominal phrase.

There are also several less productive processes of word-formation in English:

1.4. Clipping

This process is especially common in informal language and shortens a certain word.

- | | | |
|------------------|---|-------------------|
| [7] <i>telly</i> | ← | <i>television</i> |
| [8] <i>doc</i> | ← | <i>doctor</i> |

1.5. Acronyms

A word formed from the initial letters of a name or by combining initial letters or parts of a series of words is called an acronym.

[9] *RPC* ← *Remote Procedure Call*

[10] *STA* ← *Site Technical Assistance, Slovenska Tiskovna
Agencija*

1.6. Backformation

Backformation is a process where a new word is formed by removing an imagined affix from another word.

[11] *edit* ← *editor*

[12] *burgle* ← *burglar*

1.7. Blending

Blending is a process where two words merge into one another

[13] *catalo* ← *cattle + buffalo*

[14] *brunch* ← *breakfast + lunch*

1.8. Neologisms (coinages)

The invention of new words without employing any other word or word parts already in existence is called word coining. These words are often invented trade names.

[15] *aspirin, dot-com, kleenex*

1.9. Borrowings

A word is introduced from one language into another.

[16] *goulash* (Hun.)

[17] *ketchup* (Chin.)

[18] *afna* (Slo.; Germ. Affenschwanz)

[19] *standpoint* (Germ. Standpunkt)

2. Compounding

2.1. Types of compounds – a brief classification

2.1.1. Determinativkomposita (endocentric compounds)

Endocentric compound's referent is not the same as the referents of any of its constituent parts, meaning that one element (often the left one) specifies more narrowly the meaning of the other element (usually the right one), which is the semantic head of the compound. Endocentric compounds have one head only and are the most common compounds in English.

[20] *truck driver* → someone who drives a truck as an occupation

[21] *dog food* → a type of food for dogs

[22] *cave man* → a type of man

[23] *Student film*

Student film society

Student film society committee

Student film society committee scandal

Student film society committee scandal inquiry

[24] *Hinterbliebenenlebensversicherungsgesellschaftskrise*

behind-left-life-insurance-company-crisis

(crisis affecting life insurance companies that aid the widows and orphans of deceased captains)

As you can see in the examples (23) and (24), compounding is recursive - has a constituent structure. Note that with proper placing of word stress ambiguity and different interpretations may be avoided:

[25] *Student [film society]* → film society for students

[26] *[Student film] society* → society for student films

The relations between the compound elements here are syntactic; the head is in brackets and the modifier put beside.

2.1.2. Possessive compounds (exocentric compounds)

The meaning of the exocentric compound cannot be derived from the rule applied to endocentric compounds - e.g. a redneck isn't a type of neck. Such compounds are called exocentric. They lack a syntactic head element.

- [27] *lazybones* → a lazy person
- [28] *spotted dick* → a suet pudding containing currants
- [29] *doughnut* → a small ring-shaped fried cake
- [30] *shoplifter* → a non-traditional shopper shopping without paying

2.1.3. Copulative compounds (appositional compounds, dvandva)

Copulative compounds are words consisting of two elements having a coordinate relationship as if connected by 'and'. The elements share an equal status.

- [31] *Slovene-Croatian relationship* → false friends
- [32] *bitter-sweet* → bitter and sweet
- [33] *songwriter-producer-arranger* → a multioperational person

2.1.4. Other obscured compounds

The element division in compounds especially of those from the Old English has become blurred during the past centuries.

- [34] *garlic* → (OE *gār līc* 'spear' + 'leek')
- [35] *holiday* → (OE *halig dæg* 'holy' + 'day')
- [36] *woman* → (OE *wīf mann* 'lady' + 'person')
- [37] *sheriff* → (OE *scir-gerefa* ('shire' + 'reeve'))

A form of compounding called kenning exists in the Old English poetry. By the use of kennings the poet creates a new compound word or phrase to describe an object or activity. The resulting compound is like a riddle.

- [38] *hron-rade* → “whale-road” → sea
- [39] *beaga brytta* → “ring-giver” → lord

Kennings are still in use today but are much less common than in earlier centuries.

[40] *beer-goggles* → to describe the way one's judgment of appearances becomes hazy while intoxicated

[41] *gas-guzzler* → a motor vehicle that burns comparatively large amounts of fuel

2.2. Compound categories

Combining various lexical categories (nouns, adjectives, verbs, or prepositions) produces a compound word, which may be a noun, a verb, an adjective, and in some cases also a preposition. In most compounds the right-most element of the compound determines the linguistic category of the entire word. Otherwise, the morpheme which decides the category of the whole word is known as the head.

2.2.1. Noun compounds

A noun compound is an expression which is made up of more than one word and which functions in the clause as a noun. Compound nouns may be countable, uncountable, singular, or plural.

[42] *galley-slave, x-ray* ← countable

[43] *hodge-podge, make-up* ← uncountable

[44] *long-shot, mother-tongue* ← singular

[45] *French fries, vocal cords* ← plural

(Collins Cobuild 1998)

Noun compounds can be formed by combining different lexical categories:

[46]

The two parts may be:	Examples
noun + noun	waterpistol honey-bee
noun + verb	haircut rainfall
noun + preposition	passer-by hanger-on
verb + noun	swimming pool walking stick

Noun+noun compounding is said to be 'true' compounding (Spencer, A.).

* Many noun compounds are formed from phrasal verbs (preposition + verb or verb + preposition).

verb + preposition*	take-off cover-up
adjective + noun	greenhouse bluebird
adjective + verb	blackmail dry-cleaning
preposition + noun	outsider overseer
preposition + verb*	input outlet

2.2.2. Adjective compounds

Compound adjectives may be qualitative, classifying, or colour adjectives.

[47] *absent-minded* ← qualitative adjectives

[48] *present-day* ← classifying adjectives

[49] *snow-white* ← colour adjectives

(Collins Cobuild 1998)

The most common patterns for forming adjective compounds are as follows.

[50]

The two parts may be:	Examples
noun + past participle	computer-related handwrought
adjective + adjective	deep-blue red-hot
noun + adjective	post-free ice-blue
adjective + noun	deep-sea blackbird
past participle + preposition	cast-off made-up
number + singular countable noun	five-door five passenger

Some adjective compounds have been borrowed from other languages, especially from French and Latin.

[51] *a priori*

[52] *de facto*

[53] *ad hoc*

[54] *laissez-faire*

(Collins Cobuild 1998)

2.2.3. Verb compounds

The meaning of compound verbs cannot be always guessed correctly in comparison to noun and adjective compounds. The meaning is often metaphorical in nature as is the case with ‘to soft-soap’, which means ‘to flatter in order to gain something’.

Some most common verb compound formation patterns are listed below.

[55]

The two parts may be:	Examples
noun + verb	to brainwash to mass-produce
adjective + verb	to dry-clean to short-change
preposition + verb	to overlook to underestimate
verb + verb	to breakdance to test-drive

Some compound verbs have been borrowed from foreign languages.

[56] to kow-tow → to kneel and touch the ground with your forehead

[57] to ad-lib → to improvise

2.2.4. Compound prepositions

Compound prepositions are not very common in the English language.

[58] into

[59] onto

2.2.5. Compound sentences

Coordinate clauses are clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction ‘and’, ‘so’, ‘or’, ‘for’, ‘but’, or ‘yet’. Sentences that contain coordinate clauses are sometimes called compound sentences. Two clauses (ideas) are joined to show a relationship of equal importance.

[60] *I bored my parents, they bored me.* (Robert Lowell, Life Studies)

[61] *I made a mistake, for I was in a hurry.*

Larger compounds can be formed from other compounds, for we already know that compounding is recursive.

[62] *Sony - 52W x 4 XM-Ready CD/MP3 Deck*

[63] *Donaudampfschiffahrtsgesellschaftskapitän*

[64] *the sudden-at-the-moment-though-from-lingering-illness-often-previously-expected death* (De Vere)

2.3. Spelling and hyphenation

Whenever we come across a compound it may become a problem of how to write it down; should we hyphenate it or not? English, unlike German, has three forms of spelling compounds.

- The OPEN FORM, which does not involve hyphens and thus leaves words separate. It is the most common of three forms.
- The HYPHENATED FORM connects words with hyphens.
- The CLOSED/SOLID FORM, which compounds elements to form a single word with no hyphens or spaces between them.

It is commonly accepted that every new invented compound goes through transitional changes over time. For example, words like ‘homemade’ are today written as closed form, but when the compound came into existence in 1659, it was written as a separate word. Because of the word’s increasing use, one step further was made and the word took on its hyphenated form until it finally became closed. This process has become accelerated nowadays, often skipping the intermediary stage of hyphenation. Words like ‘web site’ (1995) simply took on its closed form and became widely accepted.

[65]

OPEN FORM	→	HYPHENATED FORM	→	CLOSED FORM
‘ <i>fire fighter</i> ’ (1903)		‘ <i>fire-fighter</i> ’		‘ <i>firefighter</i> ’
‘ <i>work station</i> ’ (1931)		‘ <i>work-station</i> ’		‘ <i>workstation</i> ’
‘ <i>data base</i> ’ (1962)		‘ <i>data-base</i> ’		‘ <i>database</i> ’

'cell phone' (1984)

'home page' (1992)

'cellphone'

'homepage'

(Huckin & Olsen)

We could say that when a word comes into existence it first serves as a temporary compound and through time when fixed by common usage establishes itself as a permanent compound and can then often be found in the dictionary. Temporary compounds are often made to avoid ambiguity or to modify another word.

Statistically speaking, it has to be noted that the majority of compounds are still written as separate words.

The English language lacks clear rules for hyphenating compounds. The safest way is to consult the dictionary; however, if you are the kind of person that likes to figure things out on their own, you may want to take into account the following guidelines (The American Heritage Book of English Usage).

2.3.1. Compound modifiers are generally hyphenated.

[66] *high-school teacher*

[67] *video-game industry*

If there is no possibility of confusion, omit the hyphen.

[68] *bubonic plague outbreak*

2.3.2. When an open compound is preceded by an adjective, the compound is often hyphenated to avoid confusion.

[69] *wine cellar* → *damp wine-cellar*

[70] *house cat* → *old house-cat*

2.3.3. Compound adjectives formed with high- or low- are generally hyphenated.

[71] *low-budget films*

2.3.4. Compound adjectives formed with an adverb plus an adjective or a particle are often hyphenated when they occur as modifiers.

[72] *well-known actors*

Note: *the actor is well known*

2.3.5. Omit the hyphen when the adverb ends in *-ly* in adverb-adjective compound.

[73] *nicely done job*

2.3.6. Compound adjectives formed with an adjective and a noun with *-d* or *-ed* added should be hyphenated.

[74] *soft-hearted women*

2.3.7. Compound adjectives formed with a noun, adjective, or adverb and a present participle are hyphenated when they occur as modifiers.

[75] *never-ending story*

2.3.8. Compound nouns formed with a noun and a gerund are generally open.

[76] *trout fishing*

Some compounds have become closed.

[77] *housekeeping*

2.3.9. Do not hyphenate compound modifiers formed of capitalized words, unless they are in apposition.

[78] *Old English poetry*

[79] *African-Americans*

2.3.10. Nouns or adjectives that consist of a short verb combined with a preposition are either hyphenated or written solid (depending on the usage).

[80] *a breakup*

[81] *a bang-up job*

2.3.11. Two compound elements put in apposition should be hyphenated.

[82] *director-producer*

2.3.12. We do not usually hyphenate scientific compounds (names of chemicals, diseases, animals, insects, plants).

[83] *carbon monoxide poisoning*

[84] *guinea pig raising*

2.3.13. Phrases used as modifiers are normally hyphenated. If a phrase is foreign, do not hyphenate.

[85] *a happy-go-lucky person*

[86] *bona fide transaction*

2.3.14. Put a hyphen between the elements of compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine and in adjective compounds with a numerical first element.

[87] *twenty-first*

[88] *10-minute delay*

[89] *two-sided question*

2.3.15. A modifier consisting of a possessive noun preceded by a numeral is not hyphenated.

[90] *two hours' work*

2.3.16. A hyphen should be put between the elements of a fraction, but not between the numerator and the denominator when the hyphen appears in either or in both.

[91] *two-fifths*

[92] *thirty-four thousandths*

2.3.17. Compound colour adjectives are hyphenated.

[93] *dark-brown eyes*

[94] *a red-gold sunset*

When colour compounds follow the noun, they should not be hyphenated.

[95] *The sky is reddish gold.*

2.4. Word stress in compounds

It is difficult to provide indisputable rules for placing the word stress in compounds mainly because there are many exceptions and irregularities. Incorrect placement of word stress may result in unintelligibility or in a change in meaning. You may find it difficult to understand fast-speaking native speakers, and the native speakers may find it difficult to understand you. Nevertheless, certain generalizations have been made, which allow the speaker to stress compound elements correctly in about 90% according to Collins, Šuštaršič and Komar (2002: 97).

There are two types of stress in English: 1st element stress and 2nd element stress

2.4.1. The ‘made-of’ rule takes the 2nd element stress. The first element should be a material of which the whole object is made.

[96] *apple* ´pie ← *a pie made of apples*

2.4.2. Compounds following the ‘location’ rule take the 2nd element stress. There are a number of categories:

[97]

Specifier:	Examples
name of a country, region or town	German ´measles
place names (not ending in street)	Park ´Place, Newport ´Road <i>but</i> ´King Street
two-component names of cities, states, districts,...	New ´York, West Vir´ginia
names of parks, bridges, stations, public buildings...	Central ´Park, Angel ´Island
parts of a house or a building (not ending in room as the second element)	garage ´roof, office ´phone, <i>but</i> ´bedroom
a positioning element	left ´hand, upper ´class, inner ´circle
time location	morning ´coffee, winter ´sports
names of magazines, newspapers,...	the New York ´Times, the Daily ´Mirror

2.4.3. 1st element stress applies to names of skills, academic subjects, sports, ...

[98] ´English class

[99] ´basketball

[100] ´law school

2.4.4. 1st element stress applies also to compound nouns formed from a verb + particle.

[101] ´set-up

2.4.5. Compound nouns take 2nd element stress when formed from a verb + er/ing + particle.

[102] *passer-ˈby*

2.4.6. Compounds formed from verb + ing + noun take the 1st element stress only when a purpose is achieved or aided by the object.

[103] *ˈswimming pool* ← enables you to swim in

[104] *ˈwashing machine* ← enables you to wash clothes

2.4.7. Compounds formed from verb + ing + noun take the 2nd element stress only when a characteristic of the object is suggested.

[105] *whistling ˈkettle* ← a kettle that whistles

[106] *flying ˈpig* ← a pig that flies

2.4.8. Compounds formed from adjective + verb + er generally have 2nd element stress.

[107] *best-ˈseller*

[108] *low-ˈdowner*

2.5. The plural of compound nouns

Blaganje and Konte (2002:48-49) point out three ways of pluralizing compound nouns:

2.5.1. The last element is pluralized regardless of the part of speech. The compound even does not have to contain any noun:

[109] *handful* → *handfuls*

[110] *lady-bird* → *lady-birds*

[111] *policeman* → *policemen*

[112] *forget-me-not* → *forget-me-nots*

2.5.2. Both elements are pluralized when the first element is man or woman and denotes the sex of the compound. Note that after woman sometimes only the second element is pluralized.

[113] *man officer* → *men officers*

[114] *woman doctor* → *woman doctors* → *women doctors*

Both elements are pluralized also when the first element is a classifying genitive. Here, however, some differences in meaning may occur.

[115] *a printer's error* → one specific error on a specific printer

[116] *a printers' error* → one specific error on several printers

[117] *printers' errors* → different errors on several printers

2.5.3. The first element is usually pluralized where the noun is postmodified by a prepositional phrase, an adjective, an adverb, or an infinitive.

[118] *editor-in-chief* → *editors-in-chief*

[119] *passer-by* → *passers-by*

Note that in some compounds the plural –s is added at the end:

a) in compounds consisting of a verb base + an adverb

[120] *lay-by* → *lay-bys*

b) in compounds where a noun is postmodified by an adjective and the compound is felt as a single unit

[121] *court-martial* → *court-martials*

Especially in American English the second element instead of the first is pluralized in ‘noun + prepositional phrase’ structures. This phenomenon is becoming more and more common also in British English.

AmE		BrE
[122] <i>armfuls</i>	←	<i>armsful</i>
[123] <i>mother-in-laws</i>	←	<i>mothers-in-law</i>

3. Conclusion

Compounding is a very wide-spread process of combining lexical categories into larger word groups with rules differing from language to language. General rules have been pointed out and will help the readers of this paper to be aware of and avoid certain mistakes foreign language speakers commonly make. In my opinion, it would be pointless listing each and every single rule (I have come across some really nitpicking rules), because there are so many exceptions and irregularities regarding compounds that even all the dictionaries do not always have the same entries (as regards spelling and hyphenation). At the end of the paper I wanted to deal with the question of translating compounds from English into Slovene and vice versa, but I believe it is better to leave this question open for further research than just deal with it swiftly. Better nothing than something that might prove not to be enough.

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