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Teaching English Word Formation in Academic Writing - Analysis and Remedy

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ABSTRACT

This paper is both a linguistic study and a search for learning using word formation, such as English compound. Compound constructions are very common in everyday speech and all types of written texts. They have been selected for study because ELL (English Language Learners) often ignore them from their academic writing. The reasons for conducting such research are also linguistic and pedagogic in nature. ELL might find it difficult to cope with the complex constructions which might absent in their languages.

Key words: compounds, strategies, problems, ELT and semantics

INTRODUCTION

Different approaches to English Language Teaching have dealt with word formation in different ways. Not so long when Michael West's books were in vogue, there was a great deal of emphasis on the teaching of word formation, based on the well-known word-frequency counts. Those word formation processes were found to be most frequently used in written texts.

In the 1950s, and as some sort of attention to the teaching of formal grammar and the emphasis on vocabulary, the audio-lingual approach went to the other extreme, focusing on the structures of language which had to be taught in a practical manner. This considerably de-emphasized the role of word formation Kharma & Hajjaj (1989:36).

Though the ELT scene is radically changing nowadays, no serious attention is being paid to word formation as such. It is being taught without any reference to word counts, even in spoken English, and without any predetermined plan. The emphasis at present is neither on structure nor on word formation, but on the functions of language. It is too early to tell now what will happen to the word formation of those under graduate students being taught English in this way, or what the outcome of the whole approach is going to be Kharma & Hajjaj (1989:36).

I agree with Kharma & Hajjaj (1989:36) when they give their opinion on teaching word formation. They state that "that whatever the approach to ELT or the method of teaching EFL may be, word formation must have a prominent place in the overall plan of TEFL." Thus, they have reached their conclusion through observing during their long years in teaching TEFL. The very important and simple fact that learners of English in a non-English environment are apt to forget more words than those they can store and recall either for speech or writing. There are several ways of forming words in English, but as the most common ways are derivation,

inflection and compounds. I will limit myself to discuss the types of English compounds in general.

BACKGROUND

Compounds are groups of two or more elements treated as a unit. They consist of two or more bases joined together without the use of derivational affixes. Compounds are either primary or secondary Al-Jarf (2004). In a primary compound or base-compound, two bases (derivationally bound forms) are joined together Al-Jarf (2004). In a secondary compounds or stem-compound, both or all of the constituents of the compound are stems (free forms) Al-Jarf (2004). Many derived forms are very complex, involving two or more layers of derivation. The formation of larger compounds is generally based on those of two-element compounds as light housekeeper is constructed from housekeeper and light (house) Al-Jarf (2004).

Adjectives may be embedded in nominal constructions with no special marker (black coffee). For analyzing embedded constructions, the term head is used to refer to the centre of the construction, the term attribute for the modifier. An endocentric construction is one in which the primary constituent or constituents are comparable to the complete construction Al-Jarf (2004). An exocentric construction is one in which the primary constituents do not function like the complete construction Al-Jarf (2004). The contrast between endocentric and exocentric is present in compounds as well as in derivatives. If the function of the compound is the same as that of one of its elements, it is to be classed as endocentric. If the compound belongs to a form-class or subdivision of one different from that of its elements, then it is exocentric Al-Jarf (2004).

Compounds constitute a considerable part of English vocabulary, and the process is very productive in the sense that new compounds are being used daily in written texts. They can also be virtually any part of speech. We do not only have compounds nouns such as *goldsmith*, compound adjectives like *seasick*, and compound verbs like *overcome*, but there are also compound pronouns such as *yourselves*, adverbs like *moreover*, prepositions such as *in front of*, conjunctions like *whenever*, numerals like *twenty-five*, and a compound of indefinite such as *another*. (Kharma& Hajaj, 1989:48). The most disturbing fact about English compounds is their irregularity and the high complexity of their methods of composition, and of the syntactic and semantic relations that hold between the elements composing each word.

The majority of English compound types are headed – especially, right –headed and the heads of these compounds display the syntactic and semantic characteristics that are expected of heads Maalej (1994). These compounds refer to classes of things and they have used daily. Compounds play a role in the lexicon because they have the ability for creating a class of noun phrase (NPs) intended for naming entities with no pre-existing names. According to Downing (1977:823) cited in Maalej (1994) is characterized by “packing a maximum amount of information into a minimal amount of linguistic structure”. Finin (1980:310) cited in Maalej (1994) claims that one of the characteristic features of compounds in English is their semantic compactness, i.e. the covert nature of the relations linking the head (the one which is modified and often occupies the right most position in the nominal sequence) and the non-head (the modifier). Compounding widen

the range of combinational possibilities for the suffixes which create new meaning. The following combinations of lexemes may exemplify such productivity: bathroom towel rack, designer training program (Selkirk, 1982:5). It is found that major issues to be studied in compounding are the generation, interpretation, and headedness of compound.

COMPOUNDS OF NOUNS

This kind of compound is considered the largest one because is divided into four main categories with subdivisions. These categories are N.N, A.A, V.N and P.N. According to Selkirk (1982:14) a compound noun could have a syntax like N.N (livingroom), A.N (wellwisher), P.n (outbuilding) and V.N (rattlesnake). N.N is divided into two word and multi word. Two word is divided into non-deverbativity (nominal verbles compound), deverbal with –er (nominal verbal compound), deverbal with (-ing,-ment,-ion), deverbal with countable and the last one is deverbal with deriving preposition.

The difference between non-deverbal (nominal verbles compound) and deverbal with –er (nominal verbale compound) is that the verbale element of non-devebativity (nominal verbless compound is) is missing Dillon (1977:51), which means the headnoun of non deverbativity does not take suffix like –er,-ing,-ment and –tion, but this kind of compound consists of two sequences noun.noun and the interpretation of the noun compounds depends on the relation that is understood between them.

Another kind of compounds of noun is the nominal verbal compound with suffixes to the headnoun (deverbal). The headnoun of nominal verbal compounds is formed by adding the suffixes –er, -tion, -ment, -ing to base verb to make deverbal noun. Dillon (1977) described this kind of compound: “The sense of the compound can be at least roughly paraphrased as a sentence in which the verb is the one underlying the second (deverbal noun) and the first plays some role in relation to it”.

The figure below shows compound of nouns and its kinds:

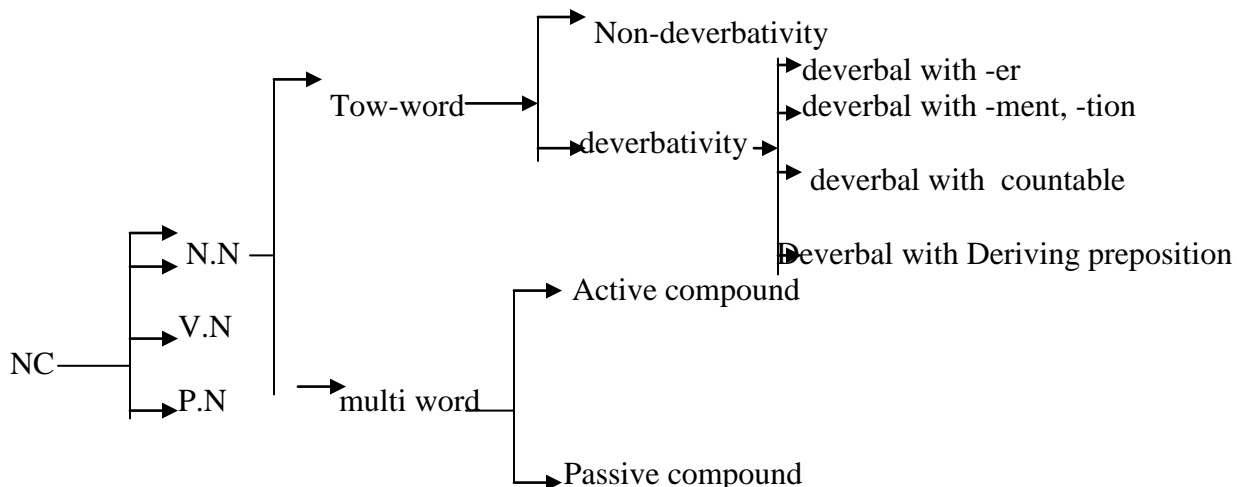


Figure 2. Categories of compound of nouns

COMPOUND OF ADJECTIVES

Compound adjectives are formed according to a large number of different patterns. They consist of three categories noun, adjective, and preposition. According to Selkirk (1982:14), ‘a compound adjective may consist of a noun, an adjective, or a preposition followed by an adjective’. As in the following example which are quoted from Selkirk. “ NA (headstrong), AA (icy cold), PA (overwide)”.Selkirk (1982:15).The figure below shows compound of adjective according to Selkirk’s theory

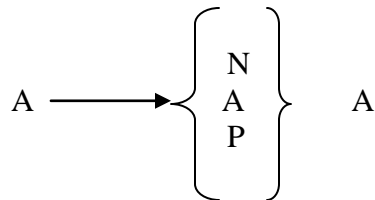


Figure 3. Kinds of compound of adjectives

COMPOUNDS OF VERBS

In relation to this kind of English compounds; Bauer (1983:207) cited Adams as saying: “The majority of compound verbs in English are not formed by putting two lexemes together to form a new verb, but by back-formation or conversion from compound noun”. According to Selkirk (1982:14), “ a compound of verb may consist of a preposition followed by a verb” as in the following example which is quoted from Selkirk (1982:15), ‘outlive’. So, this kind of English compound is different from compounds of noun and compounds of adjective because it consists of two words namely a preposition and a verb to produce one construction of compound which is compound of verb. The following figure shows the kinds of compounds of verbs:

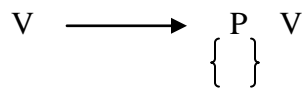


Figure 4. Kinds of compounds of verbs

SYNTACTIC AND SEMANTIC RELATIONS

As suggested by (Karma & Hajaj,1989: 49) that the syntactic relations that hold between the elements of a compound noun, while semantic relations are unlimited in number. The following sections give examples to illustrate the both cases:

(a) Syntactic relations

- (i) syntactic word-group relations, e.g *part of speech, son -in- law, good-for-nothing and out-of-work*
- (ii) co-ordinations, e.g. *bread and butter , gin and tonic*
- (iii) qualifier and noun, e.g. *blackbird, bluebell*
- (iv) Adverb and verb, e.g. *downpour, outlay, afterblast*
- (v) Adverb and noun, e.g. *outpost*
- (vi) The first element may denote the subject, e.g. *day-break*
- (vii) The first element may denote the object, e.g. *bloodshed*

(b) Semantic relations

- (i) the first element denote place or time, e.g. *headache, nightclub*
- (ii) the first element denote purpose, e.g. *wineglass*
- (iii) the first element denote means or instrument, e.g. *handwriting, sword-cut*
- (iv) the first element denote resemblance, e.g. *goldfish*
- (v) the first element denote sex, e.g. *manservant*

THE STUDENTS' ROLES

1. A grouping method is useful to be used and adopted in learning English compounds structures. Especially, those made of similar syntactic and semantic relations. Grouping system can be expanded to cover all types of compounds. As the students' stock of such compounds increases, the grouping system can be refined to cater for finer differences in syntactic and semantic relations between elements (Karma & Hajjaj, 1989:55).
2. Reading a daily newspaper can enlighten and enrich the students' capability to master many types of English compounds. Newspaper articles represent materials, which are meant for public consumption. In other words, the readers are not a specialized group of people; they are laymen. As such these newspaper articles are expected to be of a more general nature.
3. A student should read different types of newspaper articles, since they are expected to be enough to yield all types of English compounds and, they could provide them with different results for their investigation.

CONCLUSION

It has found that students often faced difficulty in their academic writing when they use word formation. English words formations have many types and different semantic and syntactic relations. The main reason teachers of English should pay much attention and consideration to how to teach compounds in academic writing. And find best method discuss the English words formation in the classroom. Personally, I have found that my underground students have their weakness in constructing suitable compounds, especially when these compounds link with adjective, nouns, adverb and prepositions.

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