

MORPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF NOUN COMPOUNDS IN ENGLISH LEGAL TERMINOLOGY¹

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Abstract

Compounds are the result of the tendency in languages for concise, clear and meaningful expression. They are an essential part of English legal language.

In this paper the morphological analysis of noun compounds in English legal register was made on the basis of the word class to which the constituents of the compounds belong.

In two-constituent noun compounds, one of the constituents is a noun and the other may be a noun, verb, an adjective, present or past participle or a particle, so the noun compounds in legal register may be divided into the following groups: 1. noun + noun, 2. genitive + noun, 3. adjective + noun 4. gerund + noun 5. past participle + noun, 6. infinitive + noun 7. noun + adjective, 8. noun + gerund 9. noun + participle, 10. noun + prepositional phrase. According to our research the most frequent compounds in legal English terminology are noun + noun compounds and the least productive are the groups : adjective + noun and preposition + noun.

Noun compounds and compounds in general are an important part of word formation, both in general as well as in legal English and they should be presented in legal textbooks and inserted in all legal dictionaries.

Keywords: *English legal language, word formation, noun compounds, morphological classification, endocentric compounds, head, modifier.*

Introduction

Language is the basic means of communication and it must always interpret the changeable extra linguistic reality and react with its own changes, adaptations and innovations. Very often the existing language material is combined into new lexical items. Throughout centuries English language has lost many inflections and consecutively the ability to express certain syntactic relations. These syntactic relations were replaced by combinations of free morphemes which have all the characteristics of words.

Compounds are the result of the tendencies in English language for shorter, clearer and more concise expression characteristic for science, and for law as a science discipline as well. Compounds are also very often used in legal practice.

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The separation of lexical items which are part of the legal register from those which are part of the general language is not an easy task. Law is a part of all domains of social and economic life and of all everyday human activities, starting with everyday, ordinary purchase of products which are part of Consumer Law up to the most complicated business transactions and contracts which are part of the Business and Contract law.

Methodology

This research is based on a corpus which consists of : 1. legal texts excerpted from English textbooks for lawyers, for example James, F. P. *Introduction to English Law*, Riley, A. *English for Law*, Heinman R. *Political Science: An Introduction*, Curtis, M. *The Great Political Theories*, 2. works from judicial practice like : Judge Satter, R. : *Doing Justice*; handbooks like : Derbyshire, P. *Eddey on the English Legal System* etc. 3. legal dictionaries : Garner, B. *A Dictionary of Modern Legal Usage*. Gifis, H.S. *Law Dictionary*, Martin, A. E. *A Dictionary of Law*, etc.

We have to point out that due to the restricted space not all the examples which were found in the corpus were registered in this paper, but we have shown and analysed only the most specific ones.

Definition of compounds

Compounds can be defined as lexemes which consist of two or more roots and have not been exposed to a derivational process (Bauer L. 1983:29).

Marchand (1960:11) considers compounds and prefixed words as subgroups of one larger class of words called expansions. He calls the combinations in which the determinatum (the bearer of the basic meaning) and the determinant (the specifier of the meaning) are free morphemes – compounds. They differ from prefixed words because in the latter ones the determinatum is a free morpheme whereas the determinant is a bound morpheme.

From semantic point of view the determinatum is an element whose spectrum of meaning is narrowed and restricted by the determinant. For example *ballot box* denotes a box, but while that lexeme as an independent item may refer to many types of boxes, in combination with the lexeme *ballot* as in the compound *ballot box* its meaning is restricted to one special type of box, the one in which ballots are put in and in that way it differentiates from all other types of boxes. So in compounds the determinatum undergoes semantic restriction or determination by the determinant.

The defining of compounds and their status as language units is not that simple. In order to accomplish that, compounds should be analyzed on several levels.

Compounds are lexical units which mean that they belong to the *lexical level* of language. But according to their characteristics and functions they are connected with other levels as well.

Considering the fact that the morpheme is accepted as the basic unit of language structure with its own meaning, and compounds have at least two free morphemes that means that the *semantic level* should also be examined.

The parts of the compounds enter into certain grammatical relations, they have their surface structure, and according to the transformational- generative theory they are the result of transformations in the deep structure , and that is why they also belong to the *syntactic level* of language.

In the process of word formation *the phonological level* takes part, too and that level in compounds is considered the most important.

These language levels are mutually connected and even overlap very often and that is why the analysis of compounds and determining the real criteria for their differentiation is a difficult task.

Classification of compounds

Considering different criteria there are different types of classification of compounds. One of these possible classifications is the one according to the type of word group to which the whole compound belongs, i.e. the function which the compound has in the sentence – noun, adjective or verb.

So compounds can be divided into *noun, adjectival and verbal* compounds. When trying to classify compounds we can encounter the problem of determining the type of certain parts of the compounds because some words as for example *cross* may be verbs, nouns and adjectives.

Compounds can also be classified as endocentric or exocentric .In endocentric compounds one member functions as the head and the other as its modifier, attributing a property to the head.

For example the compound *ballot box* as compared with the noun *box* is a modified, expanded version of the noun *box* with its range of usage restricted, so that *ballot box* will be found in basically the same semantic contexts as the noun *box*. This compound also retains the primary syntactic features of *box* since both are nouns.

Exocentric compounds lack a head word, i.e. the construction as a whole is not grammatically and/or semantically equivalent to either of its parts. For example a `*green beret*` is not a beret but a colloquial term for a member of the United Special Forces; `*blue jacket*` is not a `*jacket*` but an enlisted person in the US or British Navy, a sailor in the Navy; a `*pickpocket*` is not a `*pocket*` but a thief who steals things out of pockets or bags etc. The exocentric compounds are a rather small group of compounds in general as well as in legal English, so they are not subject of our research.

The endocentric compounds are always right-headed, i.e. their centers or heads are on the right side of the compound. The endocentric noun compounds have a noun, adjective, verb or preposition on their left side and a noun on their right side.

NN (noun+noun) *state attorney*
AN (adjective +noun) *electoral roll*
VN (verb+noun) *cease-fire*
PN (preposition + noun) *by- election*

Morphological analysis of English legal noun compounds

From all three types of compounds (noun, adjectival and verbal) noun compounds are the most frequent ones both in general as well as in legal English.

The morphological analysis of noun compounds in this paper was performed on the basis of the word class to which the members of the compound belong. In two member compounds one of the members belong to the class of nouns, whereas the other part may also be a noun or a verb, adjective, present or past participle or a particle.

Noun+noun (N+ N). This is the largest group of compounds, whose basic characteristic is the non- syntactic structure of morphemes.

The greatest number of these compounds are semantically transparent, which means that their meaning can be figured out of the meanings of their constituents, but in order to understand most of them it is necessary to have knowledge of legal terminology, and knowledge of British or American legal system. Such noun compounds are: *bail hostel* (a rehabilitation center where people who have left an institution, such as a hospital or prison, are helped to readjust), *bench trial* (a trial with a jury), *bench warrant* (a warrant to bring the witness in court) etc.

Genitive of a noun + noun (N`s + N). Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish the compounds with genitive of nouns and a noun from noun phrases and in that case we should consider whether the accent and the determinatum refer to the whole compound, as for example in *his first Speaker`s dinner*.

Zandvoort(1966:277) thinks that compounds consisting of the so called `classifying genitive` and a noun can not be replaced by an *of*-construction because they express certain type of activity, duration, nominal value etc. For example *day`s wage*, *product`s price* etc.

In legal language the use of compounds with genitive for the names of courts, court sections, and lawyers` chambers is very common : *King`s bench*, *magistrates` court* etc.

Adjective +noun (Adj.+N). The compounds in which the first member is an adjective and the second is a noun are on the second place according to their productivity, immediately after those which consist of noun+noun. These compounds differ from noun phrases by their accent, the nuclear accent on the adjective shows a compound (`deep structure), but if the nuclear accent is on the noun it is a noun phrase (deep `structure). There are adjectives which do not have comparative and superlative form as for example: *criminal*, *dead*, *electoral*, *final*, *foreign*, *joint*, *judicial*, *legal*, etc. and those are the so called categorical adjectives. Descriptive adjectives like *high*, *old*, *safe*, *sick*, etc. may be compared, but not when they are part of a compound, which is another criterion for distinguishing compounds from noun phrases: *high treason*, *old age benefit*, *safeguard*, *sick leave* etc.

A great number of adjective +noun compounds are non-transparent, i.e. their meaning is not a simple total of the meanings of their constituents but it is necessary to have some knowledge of the profession and the legal system. Such are the following compounds : *black-letter law*, *blue ribbon jury*, *common law* etc.

Gerund/present participle +noun (V-ing +N). Regarding the fact that the construction V-ing has characteristics of both verbs and nouns, these type of compounds may be treated as noun + noun and as verb +noun compounds. But the semantic relation between the two elements looks more like that of a verb +noun. So, a *building permit* means 'a permit for building', similar to *family allowance* which means 'an allowance for a family'.

Some authors like Jespersen(1942:159) and Zandvoort, (1966:28) classify these compounds in the group of verb+noun compounds in which the verb may have its basic form or the form V-ing.

According to Marchand(1969:24) the major criterion for distinguishing compounds from phrases is the accent on the first syllable. For example : *opp`osing party* (a compound) and *folding `door* (a noun phrase).

Past participle +noun (V-ed +N). The participles in compounds have the role of modifiers of the noun: *suspended sentence, limited liability, native – born citizen* etc.

There are examples when the suffix *-ed* may be added to a noun: *skill-ed*, so in some cases we have a dilemma whether the base of the participle is noun or a verb. That is the case with the word *limit* which may be both a noun and a verb as in *limited liability*.

Infinitive +noun (Inf+N). The appearance of this morphological form is very rare. There are two types of compounds on the basis of the functional criterion. The first type of compounds are exocentric compounds in which the noun is the direct object of the verb and such are these examples: *cutpurse, cutthroat, daredevil, telltale, turncoat*. The second type are endocentric compounds like *break clause, cease-fire, workplace*, in which it is difficult to say whether the first member is a noun or a verb.

Noun +adjective (N+Adj.) This is a more rare combination than the opposite one (adjective +noun) and in legal terminology it usually signifies people – doers of various actions : *Advocate General, Attorney federal, executor dative* etc.

Noun +gerund (N+V-ing).The number of these compounds is considerably smaller than the compounds with the opposite combination ((V-ing+N). Most of the compounds with noun +gerund are written with a hyphen or as one word. The accent is always on the second member, i.e. the gerund: *court hearing, law making, vote-buying*. All examples found are endocentric.

Noun + past participle (N+V-ed). This is a rather rare combination and in this research we found only fifteen examples. The participle here is in postmodifying function. For example : *court appointed attorney, statute barred debt* etc.

Noun +prepositional phrase. The compounds of this type are called phrase compounds. In this type of constructions a whole phrase participates in the formation of a new word. Phrases are very often used in legal register.

The most frequent is the combination noun + preposition + noun (N+ P+N). The phrases-compounds have a strictly determined syntactic structure which cannot be changed. Thus, for example the compounds *board of appeals, board of directors, court of appeal*, cannot be found as * *appeal board, *directors board, or * appeal court*. All the examples of these

phrases-compounds are endocentric . They usually denote lawyers` titles, names of courts, boards or chambers. The combinations in which the first member is an imperative is rather transparent and expressive.

There is a combination with an imperative as a first constituent which is rather transparent and expressive. It often has the conjunction *and* as in: *open-and-shut case*, *hit-and-run driver* etc.

The exocentric phrase-compounds also belong to this group, but such examples were not found in our corpus, because such compounds cannot be found in legal terminology; they usually denote flowers like *forget-me-not* etc.

Nominalisation of a verb + particle. Nominalisation is a process by which a noun is created from a word that belongs to another word class. In generative grammar this term is used for derivation of a nominal syntagm from an underlying clause. For ex. His answering of the letter has been derived from: He answered the letter (Crystal, 1993: 233).

In English language verbs often appear in the role of nouns, where the form remains the same and the grammatical meaning is changed. In the corpus we analysed, these verbs appear with particles. For. ex. *call-up* is a noun compound of a nominalized verb + particle and means “a call for military service” then , *trade-in*, *trade-off*, *takeover* etc.

Conclusion

On the basis of our research we concluded that the most productive type of compounds in legal terminology are noun compounds. Then, the adjective compounds follow, whereas verb compounds are the least productive.

The morphological classification of noun compounds in legal terminology was performed on the basis of the class of word to which the members of the compound belong. Regarding the fact that in two-constituent compound nouns one of the constituents is a noun and the other may be a noun, verb or adjective , present or past participle or a particle, we divided the noun compounds in legal terminology into the following groups:

1. Noun + noun 2. Genitive of a noun + noun 3. Adjective + noun 4. Gerund + noun 5. Past participle + noun 6. Infinitive + noun 7. Noun +adjective 8. Noun +gerund 9. Noun + past participle 10. Noun + prepositional phrase 11. Nominalisation of a verb + particle.

On the basis of our research we came to a conclusion that the greatest number of compounds (almost 50 %) belong to the group noun + noun compounds; then the other groups follow in the following order which shows their frequency :

1. noun + noun (N+N), 2. adjective + noun (Adj + N) 3. noun + prepositional phrase(N + Prep. Phrase) 4. gerund/present participle (V-ing + N) 5. noun + gerund (N + -ing).

As the least productive are the groups: nominalization of a verb + particle (V + Particle), adjective + gerund (Adj + G) and preposition +noun (Prep + N).

In legal terminology we can also find compounds which consist of more than two constituents, i.e. three or four.

In most three-constituent compounds in legal terminology the determinant is a compound : *assembly-line work, birth confirmation record, cease fire agreement*, whereas the determinatum rarely appears as a compound noun as in for example *marriage breakdown, minority shareholder etc.*

Noun compounds are linguistic products of syntactic transformations and that is why syntactic paraphrase may be used as a means of decoding the meaning of compounds. Nevertheless, the process of finding out the source sentences is not always easy because in compounds consisting of noun+noun there may be a whole series of verbs by which the nouns in the source sentence are connected. Linguists agree that the real meaning of compounds can be revealed by means of the lexical meaning of the constituents, the general knowledge of the speaker and on the basis of the context.

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