

## COMPOUNDING: CLASSIFICATION OF COMPOUNDS, THEIR STRUCTURAL AND SEMANTIC FEATURES

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### Abstract

This article explores the process of compounding as a productive method of word-formation in the English language. It presents a detailed classification of compound words based on their structural and semantic features, highlighting distinctions between closed, hyphenated, and open compounds, as well as between endocentric, exocentric, copulative, and appositional types. The paper also analyzes the grammatical behavior, stress patterns, and syntactic roles of compounds in modern English. The study emphasizes the importance of compounding in vocabulary expansion and reflects on its growing role in adapting language to cultural and technological change.

**Key words:** Compounding, Word-formation, Compound words, Structural classification, Semantic classification, Endocentric compound, Exocentric compounds, Copulative compounds, Appositional compound, Compound nouns/adjectives/verbs, Stress pattern, Morphology, Lexical unit, Productivity, English lexicon

### Introduction

One of the most significant and productive processes in English word formation is compounding — the combination of two or more stems to create a new lexical unit. Compounding allows language to expand efficiently, generating words that capture new ideas, objects, and relationships. The study of compounds is essential in understanding the dynamic nature of language, as it touches upon grammar, semantics, phonology, and morphology.

#### 1. Definition of Compounding

A compound word is a lexical unit formed by joining two or more words that function as a single item. Unlike phrases, compound words often have a fixed meaning that may not be deducible from the meanings of the individual components.

Example: blackboard is not just any board that is black, but a specific object used in teaching.

#### 2. Classification of Compounds

## 2.1 Structural Classification

According to their written form, compounds are usually divided into:

- Closed (solid) compounds — written as one word.

Examples: notebook, sunflower, toothbrush

- Hyphenated compounds — linked by a hyphen.

Examples: mother-in-law, check-in, brother-in-arms

- Open (spaced) compounds — written as separate words but function as one lexical item.

Examples: post office, school bus, real estate

## 2.2 Grammatical Classification

Compounds are also grouped according to the part of speech they belong to:

- Compound Nouns – bookcase, hairbrush, earthquake
- Compound Adjectives – blue-eyed, well-dressed, old-fashioned
- Compound Verbs – to babysit, to freeze-dry, to spoon-feed
- Compound Adverbs/Prepositions – therefore, into, within

## 3. Semantic Classification of Compounds

Semantically, compounds are categorized by the relationship between their components:

### 3.1 Endocentric Compounds

These compounds have a clear semantic head, usually the second element, and the compound denotes a type of that head.

Examples: doghouse (a kind of house), bedroom(a kind of room)

### 3.2 Exocentric Compounds

These compounds lack a semantic head. The meaning is not directly inferable from its components and refers to something external.

Examples: pickpocket (a person who steals), redhead (a person with red hair)

### 3.3 Copulative Compounds (Coordinative)

Both components are of equal weight and importance; the compound refers to something that combines both.

Examples: bittersweet, deaf-mute, sleepwalk

### 3.4 Appositional Compounds

The components describe the same referent from different perspectives.

Example: poet-translator (someone who is both a poet and a translator)

## 4. Structural Features of Compounds

### 4.1 Stress Patterns

- In English, compound nouns typically have primary stress on the first element.

Example: 'blackbird vs black 'bird

### 4.2 Inflection

- Usually, only the second component takes grammatical inflections.



Example: bookcase → bookcases, not books-case

#### 4.3 Syntactic Behavior

- Compounds usually behave as single syntactic units.

Example: This is a well-known fact. (compound adjective modifying “fact”)

### 5. Productivity and Change

Compounding remains a highly productive process in English, especially in technical, scientific, and cultural domains. New compounds constantly enter the language, such as smartphone, climate-change, or cybersecurity, reflecting changes in society and technology.

### Conclusion

Compounding is a fundamental mechanism in English morphology that provides insight into how language evolves and adapts to human needs. Understanding its classifications — both structural and semantic — helps reveal the complexities of word formation and enriches the study of linguistics. With growing influence from global languages and technological innovation, compounding is likely to remain a vital and evolving feature of English vocabulary.

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