Phrasal compounds with adjectival heads: Extravagant but following well-known patterns

Christine Günther, Sven Kotowski & Ingo Plag
Universität Siegen & Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf
Phrasal compounds

Combinations of lexical head and phrasal non-head

1. a “chicken and egg” situation
2. the “why should it happen to me?” variety

(Trips 2014: 44f.)

- Similarity to typical non-phrasal nominal compounds: determinative compounds
- Obvious difference to non-phrasal compounds: phrasal nature of non-head
  - Issues for morphological theory
Phrasal compounds

Heads

- Compounding is not restricted to nominal heads
- In phrasal compounding, it is generally assumed that the head must be nominal (Lieber 1988, Lawrenz 2006, Trips & Kornfilt 2015)
  - Some rare attestation for adjectival phrasal compounds in German mentioned in the literature
  - No evidence for English

**Question** Can phrasal compounds have adjectival heads?

- Non-phrasal adjectival compounds do exist and are productive (Bauer et al. 2013)
Method

Corpus search

- Corpus of Contemporary American English (520 mio. words, 1990-2015; see Davies 2008)
- Search for hyphenated material preceding an adjective (2 or more hyphens)
  
  *-*-* -j* -[nn*]

- Restriction to predicative adjectives (avoiding scopal ambiguities)

3. a not-ready-for-prime-time dirty word
Method

Exclusion of items

- ‘Adjectives used as nouns’
  4. the "I'm-in-total-control cool"

- Adverb phrases as non-heads
  5. oh-so-very-much worse, all-too-readily available

- Non-phrasal non-heads
  6. air-traffic-control related, shaving-cream-commercial handsome

- Measure phrases
  7. twenty-two-days old
Phrasal compounds can have adjectival heads

- 207 adjectival phrasal compounds
  - 187 adjectival heads
  - 20 participial heads

- 3 to 10 constituents in phrasal non-head

8. ...at least in part, you always felt so crazy-as-catshit scared.
Results

Inventory of phrasal non-heads

- Noun phrases/determiner phrases
  10. one-skier-at-a-time narrow, edge-of-your-seat scary

- Adjective phrases
  11. weak-in-the-knees tired, black-and-white strict

- Prepositional phrases
  12. up-to-the-minute modern, in-your-face aggressive

- Verb phrases
  13. hides-the-dirt brown, eat-off-the-floor clean

- Clauses
  14. please-do-that-again amazing, is-she-really-human beautiful
Results

Register

Distribution across registers

- academic
- fiction
- magazine
- news
- spoken
Similarities to nominal phrasal compounds

- Register: Written phenomenon
- Similar inventory of phrasal non-heads as attested for nominal phrasal compounds (cf. Trips 2016)

**Question** What sets these apart from nominal phrasal compounds?

- Closer look at their semantics
Adjectival compounds

Non-phrasal adjectival compounds

Major word classes as non-heads: V, A, N, and P

- Similar semantic classes as other kinds of compounds
  - Argumental adjectival compounds
    - cost-intensive, event-related
  - Non-argumental adjectival compounds
    - Often express a similative relation ➔ intensifying function
      - steel-strong, stone-hard
  - Measure-terms
    - ankle-deep, week-long

cf. Bauer et al. 2013: chs.19/20
Semantic relations

Argumental compounds

- Non-head as subject, prepositional object, phrasal complement in syntactic paraphrases

15. ...we were all [...] too growth-at-any-cost focused
16. ...the collar is chin-and-nose friendly
17. ...get the meters plug-and-play ready

- 11 items, 7 of which past-participle heads

- Classifying: denote ‘subclasses’ of or spell out the concrete contribution of the head
Results

Semantic relations

Non-argumental compounds (non-head not a core argument of the head adjective)

18. The short ribs were [...] **falling-off-the-bone tender**
19. ...powdered steel that’s **out-of-this-galaxy sharp**
20. It’ll get you **flat-on-your face drunk**

- Dominant pattern in the data set: **Intensifying** (not classifying)
- Often similative (similitude established to hyperbolic/stereotypical situations)
Results

Semantic relations

Non-argumental compounds with mixed interpretations

21. But his eyes were bright blue, **center-of-a-flame blue**...

22. ...150 styles and colors ranging from **turn-of-the-century traditional** to **state-of-the-art contemporary**.

- Both intensifying and classifying
- Possibly dependent on how the head is classified
Results

Semantic relations

- All cases in our data are **right-headed**, both structurally and semantically (no coordinative compounds)
Results

Classification of adjectival heads

**Gradability of heads** (compatibility with comparative morphology, *very-*/fully-*/slightly-*/downright*-modification)

- relative adjectives (*cool*), absolute (*clean*), extreme (*fabulous*), relative/relational (*traditional*), relational/ungradable (*Irish*)

**Gradability of attested heads**

![Gradability of attested heads graph](image)

- relative
- absolute
- extreme
- relative/relational
- ungradable

* e.g. Kennedy & McNally 2005, Kennedy 2007, Morzicky 2012
Results

Classification of adjectival heads

Variety of different notional head classes, e.g.

- Dimension (*narrow, cheap*)
- Physical state (*drunk, fresh*)
- Evaluative (*difficult, fabulous*)
- Human propensity (*stubborn, crazy*)

Pattern \([XP-A]_{\text{evaluative/human propensity}} = \text{intensifying semantics}\) accounts for 59% of items (123 out of 207)

e.g. Bache & Davidsen-Nielsen 1997, Dixon 1982
Results

Expressivity

Dominant pattern connected to expressive nature of many of the examples, majority of heads evaluative themselves

- “associated with an expressive, playful, poetic or simply ostentatious effect of some kind” (Zwicky & Pullum 1987: 335)
- “a language property that has to do with emotions or emotion-related evaluations” (Meibauer 2007: 246)

23. ED WOOD, 30, our hero. Larger-than-life charismatic, confident, Errol Flynn-style handsome

24. Tina had been born beautiful. Stop-traffic, is-she-really-human beautiful.

Also Bauer 1997, Trips 2012
Results

Similarity to NA-compounds

- Phrasal adjectival compounds share several characteristics with **elative compounds** (*ice-cold, dog-tired, crystal-clear*)
- Similative relation (often bleached in elatives)
  - **Not superlatives**: *This chili is rip-your-lips-off hot, but my mom’s even hotter*
  - **Odd with very-modification**: ??*This chili is very rip-your-lips-off hot*
  - **Odd with comparative morphology**: ??*This chili is more rip-your-lips-off hot than that one*
  - **Odd as nominalization**: ??*The rip-your-lips-off heat*

Resolution of polysemy/vagueness

- Standard degree modifiers do not resolve polysemy/vagueness
  25. The weather/chili/lava was very/extremely/incredibly hot.

- By virtue of their verbosity, phrasal adjectival compounds at times do
  26. It will be hot at times [...] **sweat-down-your-back hot** [WEATHER MAPPED ON TEMPERATURE SCALE]
  27. the Homemade Bakery [...] will sell them only **straight-out-of-the oven hot** [FOOD MAPPED ON TEMPERATURE SCALE]
  28. They’re spicy but not **rip-your-lips-off hot** [FOOD MAPPED ON PUNGENCY SCALE]
Summary & Conclusion

Adjectival phrasal compounds exist

- Evidence for the existence of phrasal compounds with adjectival heads from COCA
- Productivity not entirely clear
  - Search restricted to predicative structures spelled with hyphens between the individual elements in the non-head
  - At least moderately productive
- Widening corpus searches to other structures may also influence the dominant semantic relations and classes of heads
Summary & Conclusion

Similarity to nominal phrasal compounds

- Adjectival phrasal compounds share characteristics with nominal ones
  - Both right-headed, formally and semantically
  - Allow for similar diversity in non-head position

- Crucial differences between the two
  - Clear divergence wrt preferred semantic relation between (non-)head
  - Nominal phrasal compounds are determinative (classifying)
  - Adjectival phrasal compounds are (largely) intensifying
Summary & Conclusion

Similarity to adjectival compounds in general

- Adjectival phrasal compounds share characteristics with other adjectival compounds
  - Both argumental and non-argumental patterns
  - Just as NA-compounds mostly similative-intensifying relations (different kinds, though)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N-A</th>
<th>XP-A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>argumental</td>
<td>reader-friendly</td>
<td>chin-and-nose friendly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-argumental</td>
<td>hospital-clean</td>
<td>eat-off-the-floor clean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>measure</td>
<td>skin-deep</td>
<td>(1.5-cubic-yard deep)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary & Conclusion

Differences between phrasal compounds

- Similarity to AN-compounds and differences from nominal phrasal compounds emerge from semantic differences between head categories
  - Most nouns made up from multitudes of features or properties; nominal gradability a restricted phenomenon
  - (Canonical) adjectives typically encode a single feature; gradable relative adjectives most frequent
  - Nouns easily allow for subclassification head via spelling out/modifying single properties; modifying an adjective’s single feature makes void the adjective’s contribution

References


References