

Specific Characteristics of Endocentric and Exocentric Compound Words in English

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Abstract. This article considers about some specific characteristics of endocentric and exocentric compound words in English language. This study structured as the field research using descriptive qualitative method. The result of this analysis is found that the modifier head phrases.

Key words: exocentric compound, compound construction, lexicalized metonyms, grammatical head, possessive compound.

In endocentric compounds, one of the constituent lexemes is the head, that is, the lexical item with the semantico-syntactic features that are passed on to the whole compound. In exocentric compounds, the features of the whole are not attributable to the constituents and must be sought elsewhere.

In morphology, an *exocentric compound* is a compound construction that lacks a head word: That is, the construction as a whole is not grammatically and/or semantically equivalent to either of its parts. Also called a *headless compound*. Contrast with *endocentric compound* (a construction that fulfills the same linguistic function as one of its parts).

Put another way, an exocentric compound is a compound word that's not a hyponym of its grammatical head. As discussed below, one well-known type of exocentric compound is the *bahuvrihi compound* (a term that is sometimes treated as a synonym for exocentric compound).

Linguist Valerie Adams illustrates *exocentricity* in this way: "The term *exocentric* describes expressions in which no part seems to be of the same kind as the whole or to be central to it. The noun change-over is exocentric, and so are 'verb-complement' noun compounds like *stop-gap*, along with adjective + noun and noun + noun compounds like *air-head*, *paperback*, *lowlife*. These compounds...do not denote the same kind of entity as their final elements." Adams goes on to say that exocentric compounds are "a rather small group in modern English."

Examples and Observations

Delmore Schwartz

"The new public attitude becomes clear if you ask this leading question: 'Which would you rather be, an *egghead* or a *blockhead*?'"

Matthew Ricketson

"[Barry] Humphries, whose act combines *lowbrow* antics with a *highbrow* aesthetic, is both well educated and well read, as the range of images and references in his conversation displays."

Lexicalized Metonyms

According to Volkmar Lehmann in "Categories of Word-Formation." "[E]xocentric compounds are a major type of metonyms, not only in ad hoc settings... but also as lexicalized items with often highly idiosyncratic, fixed interpretations, as a few examples in show:

green beret, blue jacket, red shirt, blue stocking, brass hat, red cap
red skin, flatfoot, red head, long nose
pickpocket, fly over, scarecrow, breakfast

Lexicalized metonyms are frequently adjective-noun compounds with the bearer of the specified attributes providing the head, as the examples (84a) and (84b) show; other types are based on verb complement combination where the omitted agent of the verb supplies the head, as in cases like (84c)."

Bahuvrihi Compounds

According to Laurie Bauer in "The Typology of Exocentric Compounding," "There is no surprise in having bahuvrihi compounds as one of the types of exocentric compound—or at least, if there is, it is because the Sanskrit label is sometimes appropriated for exocentrics as a group rather than for one type of exocentric.... As is well known, the label is from Sanskrit, where it exemplifies the types. The elements are *bahu-vrihi* 'much rice' and it means 'having much rice' (e.g. of a village) or 'one who/which has much rice.'... The alternative label 'possessive compound' is explained by the example of *bahuvrihi*,...though there are some examples where the gloss is less obvious: for example, English *red-eye* (with various meanings including 'cheap whisky' and 'overnight flight') does not clearly denote anything which has red eyes, but rather something which causes someone to have red eyes.

"Typically, bahuvrihis are made up of a noun (the possessed noun) and a modifier for that noun."

In "Adjectives as Nouns," Anne Aschenbrenner says, "Exocentric compounds can also function as a means to denote a characteristic of a person. Marchand (1969) however, refuses the term 'compound' in 'exocentric compound' because he argues that a bahuvrihi compound like *paleface* would not imply the paraphrase *'a face that is pale' but 'a person who has a pale face.' Hence, the combination must be called a derivate (i.e. due to zero-derivation) in his opinion."

Reference:

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