

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

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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

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 attestations 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)

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

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

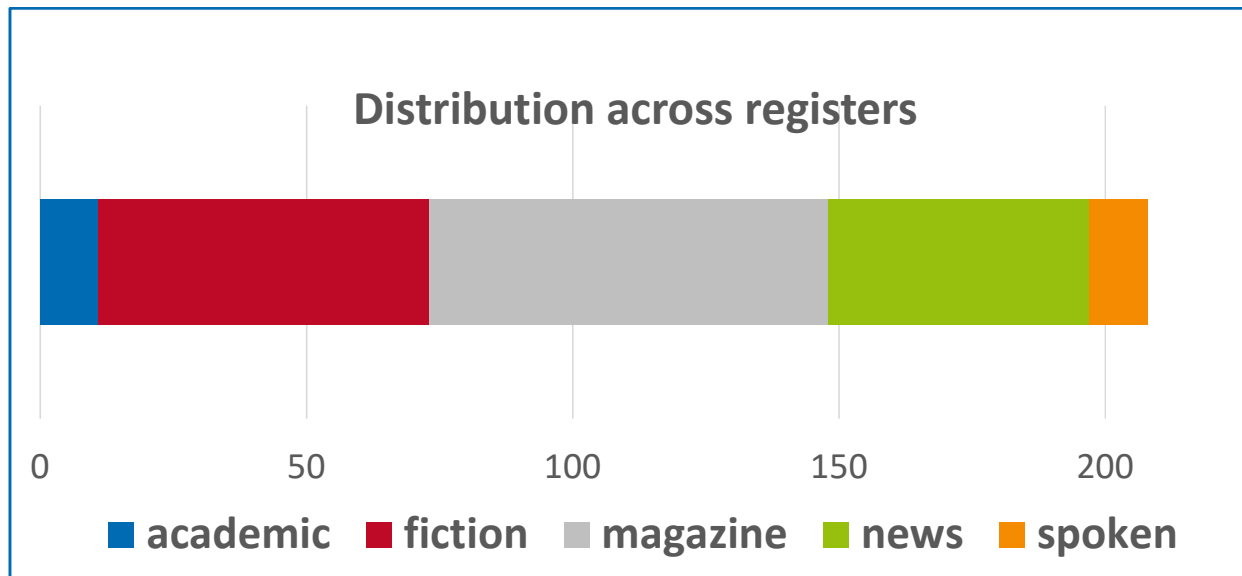
- 207 adjectival phrasal compounds
 - 187 adjectival heads
 - 20 participial heads

- 3 to 10 constituents in phrasal non-head
 8. ...at least in part, you always felt so **crazy-as-catshit** scared.
 9. ...if you don't mind my boldness, you look stunning. **Make-'em-run-round-around-the-block-howling-in-agony** stunning.

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

Register



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

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 simulative 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

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 similitive (similitude established to hyperbolic/stereotypical situations)

Semantic relations

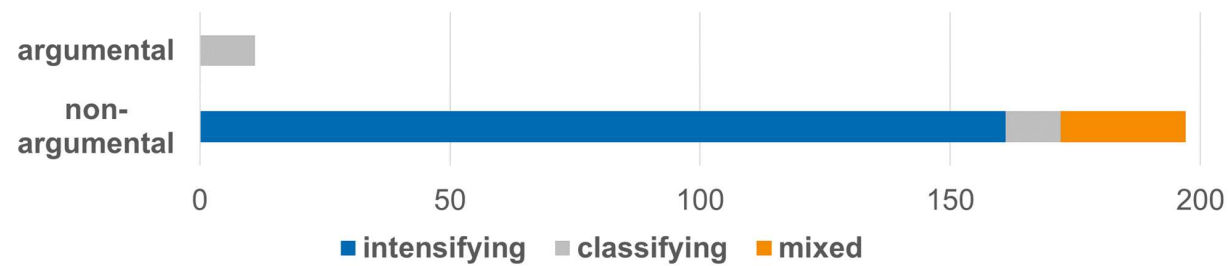
Non-argumental compounds with mixed interpretations

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

Semantic relations

Distribution of semantic interpretations



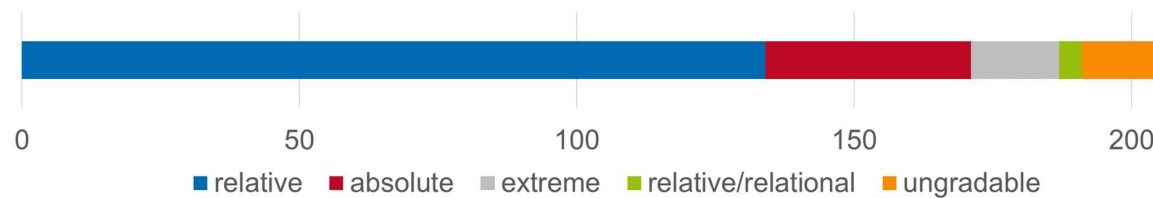
- All cases in our data are **right-headed**, both structurally and semantically (no coordinative compounds)

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



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

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_{evaluative/human propensity} = intensifying semantics]** accounts for **59%** of items (123 out of 207)

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

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

Similarity to NA-compounds

- Phrasal adjectival compounds share several characteristics with **elative compounds** (*ice-cold, dog-tired, crystal-clear*)
- Similitive 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*

cf. Bauer 2017, Hoeksema 2012

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]

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

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)

	N-A	XP-A
argumental	reader-friendly	chin-and-nose friendly
non-argumental	hospital-clean	eat-off-the-floor clean
measure	skin-deep	(1.5-cubic-yard deep)

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

cf. Givón 2001, Hamann 1991, Krifka 1995, Morzicky 2009, Pustojevsky 1995

THANK YOU!



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