

DOMINANT SEMANTIC PROPERTIES OF ADJECTIVAL COMPOUNDS IN ENGLISH

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Abstract. *The paper is concerned with some of the most important semantic characteristics of compound words in adjectival sentence positions in English. Its aim is to study the morphemes and combining elements that make up such compounds, more specifically compound adjectives and noun compounds in attributive and predicative functions. This empirical research is predominantly based on an analysis involving meaning implications of the combinatory elements of adjectival compounds, both the initially and finally positioned ones. The analysis has been conducted on authentic language material collected for the purposes of a larger-scale research into a corpus incorporating several works of different genres totalling around one million words. The number of ACs examined is around 1600 words. More significant conclusions reached in this inquiry would be those concerning the semantic fields these elements most often belong to, the most productive morphemes, as well as the characteristic types of semantic feature bundles.*

Key Words: *Compounds, adjectival position, meaning, the English language, Morphology*

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with the different semantic qualities that characterize the group of compound English words found in adjectival sentential positions. Its main objective is to analyse the prevailing meaning propensities of the combining elements involved in this primarily morpho-syntactic phenomenon, and attempt at identifying any recurrent features of the relations between the compound elements. The analysis based on examining a corpus-based set of examples is meant to provide insight into the most frequent formative elements in the compounds and some of the most significant traits of their semantic composition, as well as answer questions such as which adjectivals undergo composition most often.

Viewed from the perspective of meaning, adjectival compounds make a heterogeneous group in the English lexicon, even if not so versatile as other sections of the entirety

of English compounds may be. This semantic diversity is decidedly conditioned by the structure of the compound words themselves performing functions of modifiers or subjective complements. Understandably enough, since these are words at adjectival positions, these lexical items contain elements the meaning of which indicates manifestation of certain characteristics, qualities or quantity of the nominal entity they refer to. Differences among qualifying compound words do exist and these will be presented in this paper.

To delineate the problem correctly, we shall determine **adjectival compounds** as words which structurally correspond to compound words, i.e. involve at least two free morphemes, and which function as simple adjectives in higher organizational units. The most common form of adjectival compounds is that of compound adjectives.

English compounds, and more specifically compound adjectives have been studied to a greater detail in general considerations of English Word formation, separate studies and papers by a number of scholars such as Adams (1976), Bauer (1984), Chomsky (1970), Downing/Locke (2002), Jespersen (1965), Lees (1963), Lieber (1983), Marchand (1969), Meys (1976), Quirk (1972), Selkirk (1982), Sinclair, ed. (1996) and others.

The language data used for this research into adjectival compounds of English consist of examples extracted from integral texts of literary works, as well as from several books in the domains of social sciences and humanities, presenting a unique corpus for this analysis. The volume of the language sample investigated includes around 2,500 pages of written language or approximately 950,000 words from different decades of the second half of the twentieth century. The selection of texts is diversified in terms of genre and register to the end of obtaining a well established set of compounds for a relevant analysis of a complex problem. The largest section of the corpus is made up of the novels by the prolific American writer Stephen King. The other section of non-fiction written language encompasses books in psychology, sociology, literary criticism, and history. This insistence on sections somehow presents the bases for examining another of the features of adjectivals, namely their presence in written language of different genres. It should be perhaps mentioned here that the number of adjectival compounds in the written language of fiction has proved to be twice as large as the one detected in non-fiction writing. As it can be easily deduced, the formation and use of adjectival compounds is much more characteristic of the artistic, creative written language than it is of the language used by scientific disciplines.

The corpus upon which the entire analysis has been conducted has yielded a total of 1584 examples of compound words in adjectival positions, 90% of which are compound adjectives.

2. ANALYSIS OF SEMANTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ADJECTIVAL COMPOUNDS

At the very beginning, it should be perhaps stressed that there appear to be three dominant traits in the meaning of adjectival compounds based on the results of the analysis of data from the corpus. These would present the general meaning orientation in the first element of the compound expressed either as the manner of realization of an action/presence of a characteristic quality, the quantity of the present quality and finally directionality toward the agent of the action. However, the starting point of a more concrete account should be what presents a very present tendency in combining formatives to obtain compounds i.e. polysememic structures on adjectival positions. Colour names and

numerals make very productive semantic domains when it comes to forming compound words to function as modifiers. This is vouched by a high percentage of these sememes, which could also be interpreted as almost inexhaustible sources of potential adjectivals.

2.1 Reference to colour

A total of 100 instances of all ACs in the corpus had some kind of reference to colour. Different combinations of elements expressed different semantic and functional relations, be that a coordination relationship between two colours, or a comparison structure based on the specificity of a nominal entity, or colours presenting a modifying element of a noun. All these speak of the fact that colours present a considerably important expression feature with composing compounded adjectivals.

When colour adjectives are in question, either as the first or the second element of the compound, the combinations registered in the corpus were significantly varied. Establishing specific hues of colours and chromatographic mixtures presented by compounding two colours also proved to be one of the most efficient ways of idiosyncratic language. It may be worth observing that these words were not necessarily used in attributive grammatical roles. A number of examples could illustrate the previous statements:

- (1) *His snapping jaws closed on one **brown-black** wing.* (SK,20)
- (2) *Beer foamed **white-gold** across the storeroom floor...* (SKPS,157)
- (3) *His eyes glared a bright **red-orange**...* (SKPS,313)

Another important characteristic of ACs is that colour adjectives with less precisely expressed qualities regularly appear as derivatives in the first element of the compound. Derivational prefix *-ish* can be appended to the base of almost any colour to establish indeterminacy of similarity with the colour in the base. Thus, it is not likely to expect formations such as **white-greenish*, whereas *whitish-green* and examples on this pattern are numerous. Such formations appear to be more in use to bring into a connection colours not so close to each other in the spectrum, but which could produce, one should think, a certain chromatic harmony, in which the first element morphologically derived serves the function of embedded modification of the second element. The corpus contained a number of words of this sort and together with the previous group they made up a quarter of the entire section of adjectivals with reference to colour.

- (4) *...tore open the **whitish-green** belly of the alligator-thing...* (SKPS,583)
- (5) *...the **reddish-golden** light of the wandering fireball...* (SKPS,552)
- (6) *...**bluish-yellow** arcs of what looked like lightening...* (SKPS,207)

On the other hand, colours can be found in classic coordinated compounds with *-and-*. However, in this case hues and colour transitions are not taken into account, but independent existence of two colours different enough to be distinguished distinctly. With lexical items of this sort the retained coordinator proves to be necessary to point the parallelism in colour, or independent existence of the two, even three colours. The following are all of the examples from the corpus.

- (7) *...the enormous **yellow-and-purple** sign of a shopping mall.* (SKPS,242)
- (8) *...his small **blue-and-white** truck...* (SK,185)
- (9) *...with his **white-and-red** kilt...* (SKPS,539)

Another domain where colours find formal matrix to appear is the condensed comparison on the basis of a noun, following the pattern »as... (colour) as... (noun)«, with the noun

on the primary position in the newly-formed compound, giving an overall tone to the entire compound word. Out of the hundred examples involving colours in any way, 23 belong to this morpho-semantic scheme. The formation process entails movement of the noun to the word-initial position to the purpose of »accentuating« the standard of the model and thus strongly distinguish compounds from plain syntagms. Some of these formations are not used frequently, whereas the others are perhaps unique creations of their authors.

- (10) ...*shaking their milk-white feet in a ring...* (RW,129)
- (11) ...*in his puke-green BMW...* (SKPS,295)
- (12) *His eyes went from donkey-brown to tomcat-green.* (SKPS,222)
- (13) ...*down to the sloeblack [...] sea...* (RW,241)

Very close to this formative model are compounds which belong to the set of words the second element of which is the past participle *-colored*, *-toned*, or *-tinged* with the difference that these do not specifically express the name of the colour on the surface, but evoke a shade close to the conceptual ideal of the model. Instances of this sort are of somewhat lesser expressive force due to the missing colour reference or shifting meaning components depending on one's own concept of the comparison model, but are not, therefore, infrequent in the language, nor today cause any impairment to the communication process. However, the research corpus offered a relatively small number of cases, a little below 10% of all the adjectivals.

- (14) ...*as a sepia-toned photograph...* (SK,137)
- (15) ...*beamed at him with pumpkin-colored eyes...* (SKPS,446)
- (16) ...*a horror of dun-colored canvas and rawhide lacings.* (SKPS,436)

At the end of this analysis, another group of ACs should be mentioned here. This set of examples are words of descriptive function, the first element of which appears to be a name of a colour and the second past participle referring to the entity emanating the quality in question. These words are perhaps better viewed as cross-breeding of compounding and affixation on the basis of *-ed* adjective forming suffix. An enormous number of *nonce* words that are used in the language are based on this pattern of adjectivization and arguably present a segment of modifiers with greatest vividness of all.

- (17) ...*old, white-blossomed trees...* (GMT,535)
- (18) ...*but the red-rimmed eyes which regarded...* (SKPS,672)
- (19) ...*plain russet-coated captains...* (GMT,252)

2.2 Reference to numbers

The second significant segment of corpus examples is composed of words which contain different numerals or reference to numbers. A total of 95 compounds have this relation to numeral, or in the form of percentage 5.99% of the entire number of adjectivals in the corpus.

Separate subsets could be distinguished here, as well. A line of difference could be drawn, first of all, between those compound adjectivals which include ordinal, and those which include cardinal numbers. A group of 16 compounds had an ordinal number, exclusively as the first element, not taking into consideration the case of *late-twentieth-century* (SK,88). As regards their semantic characteristics, most often these establish classification levels and parameters in terms of class, rate, degree, order in the temporal or locative sense. These adjectivals are closest to factive compression of a phrase into a

lexicalized item, concerning the fact that the ordinal number is an immediate attribute. Expandability, both formal and semantic, can be ascertained by the fragment in (23):

- (20) ...a few **first-rate** comedies... (RW,411)
 (21) But his **second-quarter** marks had been a lot better... (SK,302)
 (22) ...the early **eighteenth-century** domestic drama... (RW,307)
 (23) The ad faded in on a deserted **fourth-or-fifth-grade** classroom... (SK,27)

Cardinal numbers, as a rule, are to be found as primary compound elements, which is quite understandable due to their distributory capacity. However, the corpus contained several examples where the number was required at the secondary position. The next sentential fragments can show that such words usually imply lexicalization of phrasal structures with numbers as head elements:

- (24) ...and a **straight-eight** Herbert Tyron by the other... (SK,57)
 (25) ...a little thing like an **after-six** long-distance call... (SK,230)
 (26) ...an old **flathead-six** engine... (SKPS,60)

A great majority of compound adjectivals containing numerals of sorts possessed a countable noun as the second element. A sum of 54 or 56.84% ACs contained as the second element a noun which could be taken as a measuring unit of:

time

- (27) ...are a regular **one-hour** lecture... (RW,175)
 (28) ...on a **six-month** trial basis at first... (SK,302)

length/width

- (29) ...within a **six-mile** radius... (GMT,300)
 (30) ...gone in for the **hundred-yard** dash. (SKPS,68)

height

- (31) ...near it with a **ten-foot** pole... (SK,30)
 (32) ...to accept a **six-foot-five**, sixteen-year-old werewolf... (SKPS,317)

Adjective compounds which refer to dimensions, are combined on the basis of numbers and derived adjectives, not nouns, as it can be deduced from some of the instances below:

- (33) ...man becomes veritably '**one-dimensional**'... (NH,43)
 (34) It was like two half pictures coming together to make a **three-dimensional** whole... (SK,286)

monetary units

- (35) ...Sawyer and Sloat was **five-million-dollar** business. (SKPS,87)
 (36) ...which ranged from the **seventy-nine-cent** plastic jobs... (SK,122)

quantity/weight/power

- (37) ...a cluster of **two-hundred-watt** bulbs... (SKPS,273)
 (38) ...a small brown **two-gram** vial... (SK,536)

age

- (39) ...the **thousand-year-old** nuisance... (RW,453)
 (40) ...**twenty-three-year-old** woman named Lorette... (SKPS,207)

An interesting feature can be registered in the example listed as (41), which indicates a formal and semantic interface of sorts. In certain cases, the normal absence of categorial markers with compound elements which is rule-governed when a unit of weights and measures are considered seems to be suspended. Even though an entity can be *seven-year-old*, *three-meter-long* or *ten-foot-high*, the example in (41) has a nominal with the plural marker. The reasons for this phenomenon can be, probably, looked for in the curiosity of the compound itself and the unusual last element in the compound. The simplified compounding process and its formal inconsistency is there as a device of indicating semantic uniqueness. Be that as it may, this is a rather rare occurrence in English.

(41) ...*that six-years-dead conversation had aroused in him.* (SKPS,204)

other

(42) *Trolleys run on ten-gauge track...* (SKPS,606)

(43) ...*staring at the one-eyed-man's star attraction...* (SKPS,247)

Combining numerals with past participles on the surface produces compound adjectivals as words for denoting human and animal characteristics along the lines of their physical deformities or blemishes. This insistence on number when a quality is in question is almost never a feature when normal and obvious qualities are present. It is difficult to envisage an ostensible reason for the existence of a formation such as *?a two-eyed man*, or *?a four-legged horse*. On the other hand, bringing this inadequacy to the foreground is a means to further specify and characterize an entity by its most striking feature.

(44) ...*and two-headed ponies...* (SKPS,174)

(45) *You don't need a one-legged cameraman...* (SK,192)

2.3 Reference to physical and mental qualities

In general, adjectival compounds in the corpus were most often used in the samples from the corpus to express qualities of a nominal antecedent such as man or any other part of the living world. Combinations of this sort encompass an adjective first part and participial second. Thus, these adjectivals which originated through lexicalization of attribute-head nominal phrases obtain in the process certain dynamics in the form of non-finite verb forms, but do not necessarily involve a subject-predicate relation. As pointed out in 2.1, all adjectivals used to implicate physical characteristics or mental traits are also items which could be taken as adjectival compounds formed by simultaneous operation of composition and affixation. The following could be included here:

(46) ...*clutched in his greasy, big-knuckled hands...* (SK,110)

(47) ...*too neat for a dirty-shoed carter...* (GMT,490)

(48) ...*Wolf's long-nailed, hairy toes to protrude...* (SKPS,524)

This semantic field is the domain of those compounds which tend to characterize the phenotypical qualities of a being, express characteristic traits of human personalities, specify the features of plants, animals, parts of their organisms, and the like. The commonest of adjectival compounds concern bodily parts and extremities:

Head

(49) ...*a pack of the big-headed dogs...* (SKPS,558)

(50) ...*they looked stupid, flatheaded, and essentially evil...* (SKPS,582)

The use of the formative *-headed*, can attain a figurative meaning, where the head is the centre of the character and intellectual capabilities of an individual. Some of the words that have this kind of meaning would be in the same group as *pig-headed*, *round-headed*, *hard-headed*, etc.

Face

(51) ...*room of shuffling, sullen-faced drunks*... (SKPS,160)

(52) ...*the image of spectacled, serious-faced Richard Sloat*... (SKPS, 244)

Eyes

(53) *Perhaps he looked too wild-eyed, too frantic*... (SKPS,315)

(54) *Gardener looked at him, shiny-eyed*... (SKPS,691)

Mouth /lips

(55) ...*when the loud-mouthed old bitch popped off*... (SK,11)

(56) ...*a dry, tight-lipped idiom*... (RW,221)

Legs / feet

(57) ...*the swift-footed young bastards*... (GMT,132)

(58) ...*on the woman, stiff-legged and growling*... (SK,272)

Hair

(59) ...*a pretty, dark-haired woman*... (SK,38)

(60) *It was a small, lively, short-haired dog*... (SK,303)

Other body parts

(61) *Their victim was a narrow-chested, bespectacled kid*... (SKPS,364)

(62) ...*watched with heavy-lidded eyes*... (SKPS,564)

(63) *Camber flattened the paper out with one blunt-fingered hand*... (SK,81)

Certain pairs of adjectival compounds call for attention in semantic considerations of this kind. One of those would be the pair of compounds *right-hand* and *right-handed*, which we focus on as typical of a set of similarly formed words which could be a cause of potential misinterpretation. These two adjectival compounds are not interchangeable, and it is semantic reasons that prevent this possibility, on condition that we accept the assumption that the formation matrix of these two adjectivals is not identical. Even though they are functionally concurrent, i.e. both are prenominal modifiers, the verb in relative clause of the paraphrase is not necessarily the same. In the first instance we could postulate a copulative verb, as in »*a man who is someone's right hand*«, and in the other the verb *to use*, as in »*a man who uses the right hand dominantly*«.

When specificities of human character are in question, 15 compounds of the total number involve an element which descriptively determines the character, i.e. the characteristic traits of a personality or animal by association. However, in certain examples it can be perceived that the said qualities may be attributed to non-human and non-living entities, such as countries or states, in accordance with the existing trend to personify them when it comes to the use of personal pronouns, such as *she*, *her*, etc. The most prominent formative elements ending in *-ed* that can be registered in the formation of such adjectival compounds are *-tempered*, *-natured*, *-minded*, *-humoured*, *-hearted*, etc.

(64) ...*won over her soft-hearted mother*... (GMT,67)

(65) ...*a hard-hearted and cynical frivolity*... (GMT,260)

(66) ...*pious and decent-minded families*... (GMT,261)

Close to this model are those adjectivals that refer to characteristics of objects which are associated with humans or are in a close connection to people, such as clothes, food or the immediate living space. Out of seventy adjectivals which could make up this group, somewhat over 10% would be within this segment.

(67) ...wearing the brown **double-breasted** suit... (SKPS,509)

(68) ...a **broad-brimmed** hat on his head... (SKPS,628)

(69) ...was held in a large **bare-walled** room... (SKPS, 365)

3. CERTAIN PRODUCTIVE COMBINING FORMS AND THEIR MEANING

After a detailed analysis of the corpus and the selection of adjectival compounds therefrom, a group of morphemes with special semantic formative capacity has been created. This section deals with those formative elements that proved to be particularly frequently used first or second compound elements in English adjectivals. The group is represented here by a series of separate descriptions, and it entails the elements *half-*, *self-*, *well-*, *ill-* and, as a significantly present second element, the element *-like*.

half-

This free morpheme is one of the most frequently used in forming compound adjectivals. Statistically speaking, it appears to be one of the few that repeatedly makes the first compound element. Its semantic versatility is considerable when one wants to express insufficient or inadequate presence of a quality or characteristic, or a quality semantically unmarked. Absurdly enough, adjectivals containing this element as the first, when viewed in a greater detail, primarily contribute to gaining a more precise reference image or a clearer idea of an entity. This feature is existent in many other languages, such as Serbian (*polumračan*) or German (*halbdunkel*), and presents words based on the pattern of Latin based prefixal morphemes *semi-*, *demi-* and the Greek *hemi-*. The entirety of adjectival compounds in this corpus of English contained as many as 48 words which had *half-* as the first part. As opposed to some other elements, in our corpus *half-* allowed more combinations with nouns (*half-price*, *half-mast*), and in 13 instances with adjectives proper. A segment of the corpus has been given below:

(70) It was a **half-familiar** voice... (SKPS,642)

(71) ...the old **half-feudal** world... (GMT,241)

(72) ...thrown in a wedge through the **half-open** door... (SK,1)

(73) ...its **half-communal** agriculture... (GMT,126)

Only one case of compounding with the present participle was detected, whereas over 30 examples show that the greatest number of adjectivals are formed by past participial forms. This could indicate that the commonest context in which the noun modified by the compound is the context of passivity or placing emphasis on the object of action, without implicating any conscious, acting, logical performer of the action.

(74) It seems a **half-felt** example... (RW,18)

(75) ...crazily **half-timbered** with wide black wooden x's... (SKPS,205)

(76) ...and Tad's **half-lidded**, half-swooning state... (SK,250)

(77) ...the **half-starved** dominies... (GMT,203)

Beside the underlying semantic component that all the instances formed on the basis of *half-* possess, it may be of interest to consider two pairs of examples which have been

registered in the corpus and which call for a separate treatment. The first of the two is the pair of compound adjectives *half-open* and *half-closed*, one based on an adjective and the other on past participle as the second part. Their meaning can be viewed as similar to a considerable extent, if not identical, and yet it presupposes certain differences. Since these involve a quality which could be approached as discretely structured, both of the adjectivals would give a meaning which expresses the presence of the quality up to the middle part of the scale, and thus offer a possibility of alternating the adjectivals in the similarly contextualized situations. On the other hand, the existence of two separate compounds could point to the fact that here we could make a distinction on the basis of perspective differences, thus, the end of the discrete scale we start looking from. With the mention of the popular belief that this is a question of a more »optimistic« or more »pessimistic« view of the world, it may well be postulated that these two adjectivals present nothing else but two adjacent points around the central point of the line: the starting point is *open*, and the ending one is *closed*.

The other pair of adjectival compounds which reveals semantically significant relations is *half-full* and *half-filled*. Formally, the second elements again surface as simple adjective and past participle, respectively. Perceived from the angle of verbal categories of voice and aspect, the former designates the state of utter manifestation of a quality, namely that of the extent of containing any substance, e.g. a vessel or any container, whereas the latter implies that the emphasis is put on the action itself which causes the state. The entire word indicates that the action has been partially carried out as if it had been stopped in the middle and a continuation was expected. However, we could judge that »fullness« is yet another discrete value, and both of these adjectivals basically have quite a close position on the scale, having more or less the same referent in the extralinguistic reality. The next example from the corpus can corroborate the stance that the quality of »fullness« can be viewed as something measurable by units lesser than half.

(78) *He yanked out half-and three-quarters-full bottles...* (SK,234)

self-

Among the more productive formatives in the first part of the compound is the element *self-* which is itself generated from the nominal *the self* from the original relative structure as a general matrix with different concrete realizations in terms of the category of person. Within this formative context, this element would appear in various propositions and a number of prepositional phrases. However, it should be mentioned that *self-*, which signals reflexivity of action or emphasis that the logical subject or the agent possesses the given quality, appeared almost exclusively in non-literary language, typically marked by speculation, reflection, cogitation or introspection. The number of 52 different adjectivals composed on the bases of this element as the first, tells a lot about the considerable combinatory potentials of this morpheme, first of all due to its semantic characteristics. Aside from more common compounds, as the ones presented here,

(79) *...an inherently self-destructive family...* (RW,100)

(80) *...a terrible self-imposed burden...* (GMT,521)

(81) *...and had been much taken with his self-appointed task of covering...*
(CWM,220)

(82) *...the laconic, self-evident, resigned tone...* (RW,355)

we can encounter those that could be taken as more unusual products of composition in English:

- (83) *By self-flattering fallacy...* (GMT,24)
 (84) *...because of the self-fulfilling prophecy...* (NH,88)
 (85) *...this [...] self-revealing, self-acting tone...* (RW,58)
 (86) *The self-sufficing, self-clothing village...* (GMT,474)

When the form of the second element of *self-* compounds is taken into account, we obtain the fact that four fifths of these are participial in nature, with the preponderance of the present participle forms. This can indicate a strong tendency that the meaning potential of these compounds is employed to express active engagement on the part of the functional subject, not taking into account the reflexive aspect of the action.

well-

The third most frequent free morpheme that occurred as the first adjectival compound element in the corpus examples is *well-*, and its antonymous counterpart *ill-*. This is not odd since the two belong to the group of so-called syncategorematic expressions, thus allowing for free association with qualities of many nominals, i.e. entities in terms of meaning. All of the 34 words from the research corpus incorporating *well-* were combinations with past participle forms, the half-verbal character of which receives a proper credit here. Having this in mind, it is much clearer why *well-* is more often present in compounds than *good-*, for instance.

- (87) *...and also a number of well-reasoned and sensible views...* (CWM,431)
 (88) *...most of them are personally kind and well-intentioned.* (NH,85)
 (89) *...hosed kerosene on a well-banked fire...* (SKPS,650)
 (90) *...the well-loved orchard with its green walks...* (GMT,111)

In contrast to cases like these, account needs to be taken of the example in (91), which suggests that the formation of the word involved a different process from that of compounding. Concerning the fact that the first element is not *well-* which itself indicates a particular underlying structure of the compound, we can say that this is an instance of the attributive use of the compound *good humour*, in a case we could label as partial conversion of a compound noun to verbal, this participial form being the only possible.

- (91) *...a little good-humoured satire...* (GMT,239)

ill-

As opposed to *well-*, only 14 words had *ill-* as their first part, with the implication of a badly performed action or a negative or unfavourable quality that specifies the noun. Except for one word (*ill-fitting*) which stands for a composition with the second present participial element, the corpus examples are exclusively formed with the past participle. More illustrative samples would include:

- (92) *...and ill-mended bridges...* (GMT,56)
 (93) *Yet the hard, ill-furnished room...* (GMT,440)
 (94) *...the ill-provisioned ships of the period...* (GMT,195)
 (95) *...the ill-omened invasion of whisky...* (GMT,432)

-like

The only formative singled out as particularly significant in terms of productivity is *-like*. Adding that part of meaning to the compound which establishes a link of similarity with what is found in the first element, in order to achieve a detailed and to-the-point description of the quality a noun has, this element possesses a wide array of possible uses.

The findings from the corpus suggest that these compounds can be spelt with or without a hyphen, with no distinct differentiation criterion. Most often the composition implies free morphemes which refer to insects, birds and other animals:

(96) ...and the smooth *snakelike* root... (SKPS, 629)

(97) His head was narrow, *weaselike*. (SKPS, 163)

(98) ...faintly conscious of the *beelike* figure... (SKPS, 720)

but it can pertain to the qualities and visual characteristics of any object or shape.

(99) ...was the *keylike* thing... (SKPS, 729)

(100) She reveals a *waxlike* face. (RW, 182)

(101) ...had a definite *manelike* look... (SKPS, 221)

Almost an equal part of the group of 32 cases, or nearly 2% of all adjectivals, are examples of the use of *-like* compounds where the comparison with the original entity is not established upon one dimension, not based on the primary visual characteristics and appearance. Although the contingent of English compounds with this element is generally semantically homogeneous, a thin line of distinction can be drawn between two symmetrical sections. This actually suggests that the homogeneity is not so prominent as it might be thought of at first. The difference can be reduced to relating the referent noun in the compound to the modified entity on the basis of its phenotypical, physical features, and on the other hand on the basis of other inherent characteristics of a relational pair in this condensed simile, as in the example (103).

(102) ...reducing the patient to a *vegetable-like* cretin... (NH, 84)

(103) ...should not accept the *parrot-like* assertion... (NH, 126)

(104) ...watching Jack's face with still, *catlike* concentration. (SKPS, 167)

(105) ...in the *chapellike* silence of the deserted camp. (SKPS, 553)

Adjectival compounds such as the one in (103) or as *witch-like* also have certain important semantic implications. It is important to state that in compounds of this type, the meaning, or to put it more precisely the interpretation, heavily rests on the modified head of the nominal phrase that entails the adjectival. In this relation of **semantic dependence**, without the expressed head, such modifying compound words like *witch-like* would be taken in their broadest sense, the »default« sense, usually invoking our mental images of the concept's visual qualities. The ascriptive, instead of the associative sense of the first element of the modifier seems to be playing a decisive part in this, supported by the nature of the semantics of the second element. However, in a phrase such as *a witch-like cry*, the impression is that the meaning of the adjectival shifts to an extent, it narrows down to one specific aspect, as if focusing a relevant feature, formerly positioned in the background and unspecified. This becomes particularly evident when we analyse another phrase such as *a witch-like silhouette*.

In the conclusion to this paper we could say that among the dominant bundles of semantic features of adjectival compound words are the ones that signal the visual quality of possessing certain colour, then the ones referring to the numerically expressed quantity, qualities for description of human and animal phenotypical characteristics and features of personality. Formative elements which are distinctly more productive than the others are *half-*, *self-*, *well-* *ill-* and *-like*. Finally, certain adjectivals can be used to point out that a part of the meaning of adjectival compounds is inevitably obtained in a synergic relation between the adjectival as a modifier and its nominal head.

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DOMINANTNE SEMANTIČKE OSOBINE ADJEKTIVALNIH SLOŽENICA U ENGLESKOM JEZIKU

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Ovaj rad se tiče nekih od osnovnih semantičkih svojstava koje karakterišu složenice na atributivnim funkcijama u rečenici. U njemu su analizirani tvorbeni elementi koji ulaze u sastav oko 1600 adjektivalnih složenica iz posebnog korpusa engleskog jezika. Na osnovu analize značenja utvrđeno je da elementi sadrže najviše referenci na boju, zatim numeričke izraze, ali i na mentalne i fizičke karakteristike ljudi i životinja. Posebno produktivnu ulogu u formiranju ove vrste leksičkih jedinica pokazali su elementi half-, self-, well-, ill- i, kao drugi, element –like. Osim toga, u radu su razmatrani slučajevi formalne i značenjske međuzavisnosti elemenata složenica, kao i pojedine morfološki uslovljene semantičke promene kod parova adjektivnih složenica.

Ključne reči: *složenice, adjektivali, značenje, engleski jezik, morfologija*