

## Stress in Compound Nouns

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### Abstract

The relationship between morphology and phonology is very evident in the stress assignment of compounds. The present paper aims at shedding some light on the stress patterning in compounds. Both single and double stresses are identified as stress patterns. Compound nouns are either initially-stressed or finally-stressed. Also, five types of influence are identified as factors leading to what's called "stress shift": morphological, phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic. The study falls into two sections and a conclusion.

### Introduction

Compounds are defined by Bloomfield as "a combination of more than one free form, and they function as one word, as a unit" (1933:309). Jespersen (1940: 134) adopts this definition adding that the components of any compound should have the ability to stand alone, and should have certain "formal ,external features" , i.e., orthographically ,phonologically ,and grammatically. Linguists believe that the most important eature is phonological, to the extent that morphophonemics is given birth as a result. In other words, the cornerstone of compounding, as far as phonology is concerned, is the assignment of stress to compound words<sup>1</sup>.

As defined in most of phonology books, stress is "the use of extra respiratory energy during a syllable" (Ladefoged, 1993:297). Foreign learners face some problems in assigning the stress of simple words due to the unpredictability aspect of stress; therefore, assigning stress for compounds will be more difficult. The difficulty lies in which word the stress lies, even there is agreement among linguists that the first word is primarily-stressed.

Compounds are written in three ways: sometimes they are written as one word like **armchair** and **sunflower**, sometimes with the words hyphenated (i.e., separated by a hyphen) like **gear-shift** and **fruit-cake**, and sometimes the two words are separated by a space as in **desk lamp** and **battery chargers**.

The present paper focuses on the stress assignment of compound nouns. Stress patterning and stress shift will be examined below.

### 1. Stress Patterning

The majority of studies dealing with the relationship between phonology and morphology have concentrated on discussing the controversial aspect of the stress placement of compounds. This, on the one hand, can really justify

Kingdom's statement (1958:146) that the stressing of the English-type (i.e., nominal compounds) presents the foreign learners with one of the important problems, i.e., knowing how many stresses the compound word may have. However, many phonologists<sup>2</sup>, Roach (2000:108) among them, believe that the criterion of stress placement is only applicable to noun compounds. This criterion is usually decisive in distinguishing compounds and syntactic structures. The former is usually characterized by having nuclear stress (i.e., primary stress) on the first element 'black~ bird<sup>3</sup> while the latter having nuclear stress on the second element 'black'bird. This will entail a difference in meaning, since not all black birds are blackbirds, and not all dark rooms are darkrooms (Quirk, et.al., 1985:1568-70).

To Kingdom (op.cit.146-47), compound nouns present three possibilities:

- Single stress on the second element.
- Double stress: primary on the first and secondary on the second.
- Single stress on the first element, especially when then first element is unstressed.

The real problem lies in the second and the third types because in such cases they are similar to the syntactic structures. Zandvoort (1975:279-80) states that double stress has the tendency of lessening the unity of a compound and emphasizing also the individuality of its constituent elements.

Within the framework of this paper, Kingdom (op.cit.:149-155) states that noun compounds constitute 62% of the whole list of compounds he used in his study. He divides them, for the purpose of simplicity, into four types:

#### **A. Both elements are ordinary nouns**

This type embraces 55% of all compounds under study and 88% of noun-noun compounds. They turn out to be single-stressed on the first element. The general case here is that when the first component names a material or an article that can be used in manufacture, the compound is double-stressed if it names something made out of or containing the first component: otherwise it is single-stressed.(op.cit.:150)and the following are some examples:

'rock ~salt                      'peach ~brandy                      'salt~water  
'cream ~cheese                      'fish ~sauce

The double-stressed compounds are of the type ( ' ^ ) and here the first element is fully attribution to the second element, stating what kind of a thing of its class it is, for this reason the kinetic stress can be seen on the second element , as in :

'rock ^plant                      'peach ^stone                      'fish ^market  
'mutton^ head                      'cream ^jug

**B. Noun + Noun Agentis**

When the second element is a "nomen agentis", i.e., a noun taking ( -er ) or ( -or ) to indicate the doer of the action expressed by the verb, the rule is the following: when the first element names the object of the action, the compound is single stressed. Otherwise, it is double - stressed. The following examples will make this rule clearer:

'armour ~bearer	'diamond ~cutter	'house ~keeper
'fault ~finder	'pain ~killer	'tale ~teller
'gold ~digger	'proof ~reader	'fortune ~hunter
'school ~teacher		

in contrast to:

'company ^commander	'wrong ^doer	'district ^visitor
evil ^doer	'gas ^burner	'vacuum ^cleaner
'stage ^manager	'town ^crier	

**C. Noun + Gerund**

To make a kind of distinction between single- stressed and the double-stressed compounds:

When the first component has predicative function towards the gerund, the compound is single- stressed. The resulting compound may be either a noun or an adjective.

When the first component has an attributive function towards the gerund, the compound is double- stressed. The resulting compound is always a noun (kingdom, 1958:153).

The following are some examples to illustrate:

'arms ~giving	'fox ~hunting	'blood ~poisoning
'health ~giving	'time ~serving	'peace ~offering
'love-~making	'thank ~offering	

in contrast to :

'ball ^bearing	'mass ^meeting	'fellow ^feeling
'thank ^giving	'lead ^poisoning	'summer ^lighting

**D. Possessive Noun + Noun**

Here included all compounds with (s) whether preceded by an apostrophe like **bird's eye** , or not like **craftsman**. The distinction between single- stressed and double- stressed compounds is difficult to draw. But Marchand (1969:65-67) states that all the double- stressed compounds are written with an apostrophe. He also mentioned three lists: the first two show

single-stressed compounds with an apostrophe and without respectively, while the third is for double-stressed compounds:

'addison's	˘disease	'death's-head	'bird's-eye
'dragon's-blood		'bird's ˘nest	'duck's-egg
'cat's ˘meat		'fool's ˘cap	'cat's -paw <sup>4</sup>
'craftsman <sup>5</sup>	'huntsman	'draughtsman	'guardsman
'spokesman	'townspeople	'tradespeople	'trades ˘folk

in contrast to the double-stressed compounds:

'camel's ^hair	'ship's ^paper	'sailor's ^knot
'Queen's ^Beach	'baker's ^dozen	'Herald's ^College
'Jew's ^harp	'King's ^Counsel	

Fudge (1984:134) confirms the rule that compounds are initially-stressed, but also he mentioned some instances in which this rule is violated:

1- From a transformational point of view, the only context in which the stress assignment of compounds is not held is when, for instance, **black** in **blackboard** has a contrastive stress:

- The 'black˘board, not the white one.

2- There are certain exceptions that need to be mentioned here. 'Christmas˘ Case has the normal compound stress patterning. On the contrary, compounds with **pudding** and **pie** are usually with syntactic structures stress patterning, i.e., ˘Christmas 'pudding and ˘Christmas 'pie.

3- Combination with **street** and **gate** are usually initially -stressed whereas with **road** and **avenue** and all other words denoting thoroughfare take final stress, as in:

'London ˘street	'London ˘road	'London ˘avenue
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Roach (2000:108-09) adds other instances of final stress, but all of them are related to other types of compounds like compounds functioning as adjectives, adverbs, and verbs:

bad-˘tempted	head-˘first	down˘grade
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## 2- Stress Shift

The above discussion has been concentrated mainly on stress assignment of compounds when they are in isolation. But such assignment is subject to stress shift, and this is due to the following reasons:

- 1- The main reason behind stress shift is "to avoid a clash between two stressed syllables next to each other" (Hornby, 1995: inside backcover).
- 2- Stress consistency is individually influenced. This means that each individual has his own consistency, and this is mainly due in turn to his speech community. Bauer (1984:48) states that an individual speaker pronounces the same compound with different stress assignments on

different occasions as in **peanut butter** and **bean soup** (see Chomsky & Halle, 1968:93).

3- The stress assignment is determined by the context of an utterance. That is, the ordinary stress patterning is subject to a lot of variation when they are in an utterance. For example, one of the cases where variation occurs is emphasis. Kingdom (1958: 147) states that **undertaker** and **underwriter**, which are primarily- stressed in isolation, will have primary stress on **taker** and **writer** in the following sentence:

- Are you talking about **undertakers** and **underwriters**?

4- The stress assignment of compound adjectives is determined by their syntactic functions. There is a difference in stress patterning when they are used predicatively or attributively, as in the following sentences:

- Her dress was **peacock blue**.

- She was wearing a **peacock blue** dress.

5- According to Fudge (op.cit.:138-39), stress shift is associated with those that are finally -stressed like **North Sea**. A shift in this stress pattern will occur when an additional element is added to the compound to form a large finally-stressed compound. Thus, if **oil** is added to **North Sea** the result will be **North Sea oil**, instead of **North Sea oil**.

6- Bauer(1978:94) states the fact that in certain cases there is a difference of meaning reflected solely in the change from single to double stress, as in **birth day** ( day of birth ) and **birthday**( date of birth).

As a general rule, the vowel of the second element in compounds, and the first element in syntactic structures, is reduced. A clear instance of vowel reduction in those compounds with **man** as their second element like **fireman** /fai m n/. Not only that, but Bolinger & Sears (1981:250) claim that it is possible to detect fusion in vowel reduction; they state that **fireman** is more fused for most speakers than **trashman** /mæn/.

Pennanen (1980:257) claims that stress shift “illustrates the different stages of the essentially diachronic process of the nuclear (or primary) stress shift in a synchronic view”. Therefore, it is possible to claim that stress assignment passes three different steps as the first stage in any stress shift:

	Steps	Word combination	Notes
Stage One	One	'word 'word	Both isolated words have a primary stress as indicated in any dictionary.
	Two	'word + 'word	The two words combined, but still no stress shift occurs.
	Three	'word ~ word	The two words combined to form a compound word. Also, in this stage, a stress shift occurs leading to emphasizing the prominence on the first element and at the same time downgrading the vowel in the second.

The five above-mentioned reasons indicate that stress patterning of compounds is subject to five types of influence that can occur separately, or more than one lead to stress shift:

Stage	Type of influence	Notes
Two	Morphological	This influence leads partially to state the part of speech of the compounded words, and partially to state which word is the head as in <b>girl + friend</b> and <b>arm + chair</b> .
Three	Phonological	This influence depends upon the speaker's pronunciation, speech community and other phonological aspects like fusion and vowel reduction as in <b>fireman</b> /fai m n/ and <b>trashman</b> /mæn/.
Four	Syntactic	This influence leads to state the syntactic function of the compound. This influence is evidently clear in compound adjectives, as in <b>'peacock 'blue</b> and <b>'peacock 'blue</b> .
Five	Semantic	This influence leads to specify the semantic relations between the compounded words as in <b>snowball</b> and <b>rubber ball</b> .
Six	Pragmatic	This influence includes all the extra-linguistic factors (or occasions of utterances) that may lead to a stress shift as in <b>undertaker</b> and <b>underwriter</b> .

## Conclusion

The main concluding points are the following:

- 1- There is an agreement among linguists about the initial stressing of compound nouns; other types of compounds need to be examined if a general conclusion is required.
- 2- Linguists usually use stress assignment as a decisive difference between compound nouns and syntactic structures.
- 3- Compound nouns are either with single stress or double stress.
- 4- Stress assignment is subject to different types of influences: morphological, phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic.
- 5- Vowel reduction and fusion can be realized within stress shift.
- 6- Teaching compounds and teaching stress should take these points into consideration.

## Notes

- 1 This idea is stated by Bloomfield (1933:227) as " stress is the best criterion".
- 2 See also Kingdom (1958:146) , Fudge ( 1984:134).
- 3 The stress markers is used here are the following.: ( ' ) refers to a nuclear or primary stress while ( ~ ) to a secondary stress and ( ^ ) to a kinetic stress

- 4 It seems clear that the hyphenated compounds have only a primary stress while non-hyphenated one are with two stresses.
- 5 The majority of the examples in this list are solid and the second element referring to sex

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