Lecture 8

Compounding. Conversion. Shortening

I. Composition. Compound words

Composition is the way of word-building when a word is formed by joining

two or more stems to form one word. The structural unity of a compound word

depends upon:

a) A unity of stress. As a rule, English compounds have one uniting stress, e.g. 'best-seller. We can also have a double stress in an English compound: 'blood-‚vessel. The main stress may be on the second component: ‚sky-'blue.

b) Solid or hyphenated spelling. Spelling in English compounds is not very reliable because they can have different spelling even in the same text, e.g. war-ship, blood-vessel can be spelt through a hyphen and also with a break. Insofar, underfoot can be spelt solidly and with a break.

c) Semantic unity. It is often very strong. in such cases we have idiomatic compounds where the meaning of the whole is not a sum of meanings of its components, e.g. to ghostwrite, skinhead, brain-drain. In non- idiomatic compounds semantic unity is not strong, e.g. airbus,

astrodynamics.

d) Unity of morphological and syntactical functioning. They are used in a sentence as one part of it and only one component changes

grammatically: These girls are chatter-boxes.

There are two characteristic features of English compounds:

a) both components in an English compound can be used as words with a

distinctive meaning of their own, e.g. a 'green-house and a 'green 'house;

b) English compounds have a two-stem pattern, with the exception of

compound words which have form-word stems in their structure, e.g.

middle-of-the-road, off-the-record.

II. Ways of Forming Compound Words

English compounds can be formed not only by means of composition but

also by means of:

a) reduplication: too-too – sentimental;

b) partial conversion from word-groups: to micky-mouse, can-do;

c) back formation from compound nouns or word-groups: to fingerprint

(fingerprinting), to baby-sit (baby-sitter);

d) analogy: lie-in (on the analogy with sit-in);

e) contrast: brain-gain (in contrast to brain-drain).

III.Classification of English Compounds

1. According to the parts of speech compounds are subdivided into:

a) nouns: baby-moon;

b) adjectives: power-happy;

c) adverbs: headfirst;

d) prepositions: into, within;

e) numerals: fifty-five.

2. According to the way components are joined together compounds are

subdivided into:

a) neutral, which are formed by joining together two stems without any

joining morpheme: ball-point;

b) morphological where components are joined by a linking element:

astrospace, handicraft, sportsman;

c) syntactical where components are joined by means of form-word stems,

e.g. do-or-die.

3.According to their structure compounds are subdivided into:

a) compound words proper which consist of two stems: to job-hunt, train-

sick;

b) compound-affixed words, where besides the stems we have affixes: ear-

minded, hydro-skimmer, astrophysical;

c) compound words consisting of three or more stems: cornflower-blue,

singer-songwriter;

d) compound-shortened words, e.g. V-day, Eurodollar, Camford.

4. According to the relations between the components compounds are

subdivided into:

a) subordinative compounds where one of the components is the semantic

centre and the structural centre and the second component is subordinate:

honey-sweet, gold-rich, love-sick, Tom-cat;

b) coordinative compounds where both components are semantically

independent. Here belong such compounds when one person (object) has

two functions. Such compounds are called additive: Anglo-Saxon,

woman-doctor. There are also tautological compounds. They are formed

by means of reduplication: no-no, fifty-fifty or with the help of rhythmic

stems: criss-cross, walkie-talkie.

5. According to the meaning of the whole compound we can point out

idiomatic and non-idiomatic compounds. Idiomatic compounds are very

different in meaning from the corresponding free phrase: a blackboard is

quite different from a black board. Non-idiomatic compounds are not

different in their meaning from corresponding free phrases: airmail,

speedometer.

IV. Conversion

Conversion is a characteristic feature of the English word-building system. It is also called affixless derivation or zero suffuxation. Conversion is the main way of forming verbs in Modern English. Verbs can be formed from nouns of different semantic groups and have different meanings because of that.:

a) verbs can have instrumental meaning if they are formed from nouns

denoting parts of a human body, tools, machines, instruments, weapons:

to eye, to hammer, to machine-gun, ti rifle;

b) verbs can denote an action characteristic of the living being: to crowd, to wolf, to ape;

c) verbs can denote acquisition, addition, deprivation: to fish, to dust, to paper;

d) verbs can denote an action performed at the place: to park, to bottle, to corner.

Verbs can be converted from adjectives, in such cases they denote the

change of the state: to tame, to slim.

Verbs can be also converted from other parts of speech: to down (adverb), to pooh-pooh (interjection).

Nouns can also be converted from verbs. Converted nouns can denote:

a) instant of an action: a jump, a move;

b) process or state: sleep, walk;

c) agent of the action expressed by the verb from which the noun has been converted: a help, a flirt;

d) object or result of the action: a find, a burn;

e) place of the action: a drive, a stop.

Sometimes nouns are formed from adverbs: ups and downs.

V. Disputable Cases of Word-Formation

There exist syntagmaswhich are intermediate between compounds and word-

combinations: complexes of the “give up”, “stone wall” and “mother-in-law” type.

1) Complexes of the “give up” type are highly productive. The first

component is a simple verb. The status of the second one is disputable:

an adverb, a postpositive, etc. The units are often polysemantic and idiomatic: come off (to take place), fall out (to quarrel). They are more colloquial than thier synonyms of Romance origin: give up (abandon).

2) Complexes of the “ stone wall ” type are very productive in bookish

style: office management, steel production. The second element is a

noun. The status of the first one is disputable: an adjective, a noun, a noun-stem. The units are motivated and correlate with prepositional phrases. his life story – the story of his life. their spelling is inconsistent: haircut, crime report, arm-chair.

3) Complexes of the “mother-in-law” type are phrases that are used as one word. they are mostly occasional units coined in speech: Some people are do-it-nowers, others do-it-some-other-timers. These complexes are usually hyphenated in writing and are pronounced with one heavy stress like many compound words.

VI. Shortening

Shortenings (or contracted words) are produced in two different ways. The first is to make a new word from a syllable of the original word. The letter may lose its beginning (phone from telephone, fence from defence), its ending (hols from holidays) or both the beginning and ending (flu from influenza).

The second way of shortening is to make a new word from the initial letters of a word group: U.N.O., B.B.C., M.P. This type is called initial shortenings (acronyms). They are found not only among formal words but also among colloquialisms and slang: g.f. (girl-friend).

Here are some more examples of informal shortenings. movie (moving-

picture), specs (spectacles), I.O.Y. (I owe you), metrop (metropoly), posish

(position).

Undergraduates‘ informal speech abounds in words of the type. exam, lab, prof, vac. hol, co-ed (a girl student at a coeducational school or college).