Valentina M. Gavranović
Medicinska škola ''Nadežda Petrović'' Zemun
gavranovic.tina@gmail.com

COMPOUND NOUNS IN OLD AND MIDDLE ENGLISH[1]

ABSTRACT: This work deals with the diachronic study of compound nouns found in the Old and Middle English texts of the Helsinki Corpus. The compound nouns of both periods are analysed, and further classified into types. The classification is based on the word class of constituent elements. The basic theoretical background on compounding is provided, with the emphasis on the difficulties of defining and classifying compounds in a straightforward way. The types of the two periods are compared and the development courses described: types which were no longer used in Middle English; types which survived, and the new ones introduced in Middle English.

Key words: compound noun, word class, corpus, change.

1.   Introduction

Language change is a natural phenomenon characteristic of every language, and when a language ceases to change, it is no longer considered to be a living language[2] (Baugh 1993: 2). However, even though a language goes through various changes, it still keeps its identity, and after many centuries, it is still recognized as the same language. The reasons why changes occur in a language are complex and numerous, but in many cases it is possible to follow their development, which is influenced by both linguistic and non-linguistic factors. Changes happen at all levels of language structure, in sounds, forms, grammatical categories, vocabulary, syntax and meaning of words. Still, the most obvious changes are reflected in the vocabulary of the language: some words die out, others change their form or meaning, sometimes insignificantly, but at other times beyond recognition; and, finally, the new ones are introduced in the language, either through borrowing or various word-formation processes.

Compounding has been a very productive word-formation process throughout the historical development of the English language, and it has enriched the English word-stock for centuries. In this work we will focus on Old and Middle English compound nouns, analyse and classify them according to constituent elements they are composed of, and, finally, compare the types of the two periods. The aim is to describe the developmental courses of compound noun types from the Old English to the Middle English period. Although compounds and patterns used to form new compounds show evolution which goes hand in hand with changes occurring at all linguistic levels, in this work we will describe changes affecting compounds only in terms of parts of speech of their constituent elements.

The study is engaged in textual evidence, since the primary source for the research we used are the texts of the diachronic part of the Helsinki Corpus, a relevant corpus in terms of its size and representativeness. The material analysed was taken from texts which belong to the Old and Middle English periods, dating from 750 to 1150, and from 1150 to 1500, respectively. What makes the Corpus relevant and resourceful for

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[1]Ovaj rad je deo doktorske disertacije pod nazivom Složenice u staroengleskom i srednjoengleskom periodu, mentor prof. dr Biljana Čubrović.

[2]This is exactly what happened with Latin, because it has not changed for almost 2000 years.

various kinds of diachronic research is the selection of texts which belong to different genres: verses (hymns, songs, riddles), law, handbooks, philosophy, religious treatises, medicine, prefaces, histories, chronicles, Bible, science, astronomy, homilies, rules, geography, travelogue, biographies, lives, fiction, documents, romances, sermons, letters (private, non-private), tales, drama, mystery, and plays. The Corpus also contains both formal and informal types of texts, as well as the sociolinguistic information on authors for Middle English texts – their age, gender and social status. The length of the texts vary: shorter texts are cited in toto, while the longer ones are fragmented[3]. The length of the texts or paragraphs varies between 2,000 and 10,000 words. The corpus of Old English texts contains 413,300 words, while the corpus of Middle English texts amounts to 608,600 words, which makes the total number of words in research over a million. The material of the Helsinki Corpus used in this work was obtained from Oxford Text Archive. No computational tools available to subscribers of the Corpus were at disposal to the author in this work, so the compounds were searched in a traditional way, with no search tool options. The analysis of compound nouns taken from the Corpus relies upon relevant Old and Middle English dictionaries.

2.   Compounds – characteristics, definition and classification

Compounding, even though the most productive process of word-formation in English, opens many questions and problems which have not been solved yet (Trips 2009: 132). Compounds are interesting, and at the same time intriguing and controversial linguistic constructions in terms of their analysis. They do not take a clearly determined position within grammar, since they connect several important linguistic and non-linguistic areas: syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations; syntax and morphology, and linguistic and pragmatic knowledge (Scalise 2010: 2). Some linguists (Algeo) perceive word-formation as a grammatical rather than a lexical phenomenon due to the productive power it has in the English language. When it comes to compounding in particular, Algeo positions compounds on the border between lexis and grammar, and says that it is 'part vocabulary, and part syntax' (Algeo 2007: 74). The complexity of different types of compounds confirms this assertion.

Linguists have defined compounds from different perspectives, casting light on some aspects, but neglecting others, and thus creating a limited perception and understanding of the whole picture. Even though all these different approaches complicate the study and understanding of compounds, still, they make the area of research more serious and profound. Štekauer and Lieber (2009) compared the problem of defining compounds to the parable of an elephant and blind men who tried to describe and define the elephant from their limited perspectives.

All the definitions endeavour to answer the following questions: 'What kind of linguistic unit is a compound?' and 'What kind of linguistic unit is it made of?' (Montermini 2010: 77). Various terms are used in the answer: word, lexeme, base, root, free/ bound morphemes.

Many linguists used word-based explanations of compounds. One of the earliest definitions of compounds was given by Morris: 'Two or more words are joined together to make a single term expressing a new notion.' (Morris 1872: 221) Benczes (2006) also defined compounds as words composed of two words. Other linguists used the term 'lexeme' when defining the constituent elements of compounds. Bauer defines compounding as 'the formation of a new lexeme by adjoining two or more lexemes.' (Bauer 1988: 33) The same terminology is used by McMahon, Scalise, Kastovsky,

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[3]The majority of text samples are segments.

Kavka, Booij, to name some linguists.

Linguists have also used other linguistic notions to give a more precise and complete explanation of compounds. Thus, Bauer defined a compound as 'A lexical unit made up of two or more elements, each of which can function as a lexeme independent of the other(s) in other context, and which shows some phonological and/ or grammatical isolation from normal syntactic usage.' (Scalise 2010: 6) Donalise defines compounds combining several criteria. Compounds are complex, formed without affixes, spelled as one word, they are right-headed, inflected as a whole, syntactically inseparable. They are also syntactic-semantic islands, perceived as conceptual units with a specific accent (Scalise 2010: 6). Donalise's definition raises several issues related to different explanations and interpretations by different authors. Pyles includes the semantic criteria in the definition: 'Putting two or more words together to make a new word with a meaning in some way different,…' (Pyles 1964: 276).

Another complex aspect of studying compounds is their classification, which has been much debated in linguistics. It is not unified, and linguists tackled this issue in different ways, using different approaches. The classification of compounds faces various challenges, and the difficulty to establish a straightforward classification arises from the complexity of the process of compounding, but also from the absence of clear terminology. Linguists have classified them on various bases: semantic and syntactic criteria, parts of speech of its elements and of the compound as a whole, grammatical relation between its constituents, and headedness.

The formal classification of compounds based on parts of speech involved has been proposed by many linguists. English compounds are made from different parts of speech. However, this classification shows some drawbacks, and some linguists have called it inadequate and simplistic from the perspective of lexical theory and reality (Milojevic 2000: 41), or unsatisfactory due to neglect of semantics[4]. Still, this classification is valuable for pragmatic reasons, and illuminates the characteristics of compounds from one aspect, which does not exclude other perspectives.

3. Compound noun types in Old English

The total number of compound nouns found in the Corpus is over 2,300. The Table 1 shows the types of compound nouns, and the number of examples found for each type:

noun + noun	adjective + noun	adverb/ preposition + noun	pronoun + noun	Past participle + noun	Noun + present participle	number + noun	noun + adjective	adjective + adjective
>2,000	>200	>100	4	5	5	1	3	1

Table 1: Compound noun types in Old English

3.1. Noun + noun type

The analysis of the compound nouns from the Corpus shows that the commonest type consists of two nouns. The relation between the constituents is of various kinds,

[4]Bloomfield illustrates this with the examples *fire-screen* and *producer-director*. These compounds, although having the same pattern of parts of speech involved, do not share the same relational meanings (Bloomfiled 1963: 344).

and the following examples illustrate some of them:
1. The determinant gives additional characteristic to the determinatum, e.g. *freawine*
'friend *(wine)* who is also a lord *(frea)*'.

2. The constituents have synonymous relation[5], e.g. *brimstream* 'sea', *eagorstream*
'ocean', *deaþcwealm* 'death', *feorhlif* 'life'.

3. The determinant marks the gender of the whole compound, e.g. wifman 'female
member of a household'.

4. The second element denotes profession, and the first narrows its meaning, e.g. *dure-
weard* 'door-keeper', *feohbigenga* 'cattle-keeper', *geatweard* 'gate-keeper'.

5. The compound shows subclass of the determinatum, e.g. *fictreow* 'fig-tree', *æeppel-
leaf* 'apple-leaf'

6. The determinant and determinatum can denote various notions, such as place,
source, material, object, goal, instrument, time, action, etc, e.g. e.g. *brimlad* 'flood-
way, sea-way', *eagsealf/ eahsealf* 'eye-salve', *eagwyrt* 'eye-wort', *eahðyrel* 'eye hole',
garcwealm 'death by the spear', *gargewinn* 'fight with spears, battle'.

7. The constituent elements can have the same status[6], e.g. *agendfrea* 'owner and lord';
suhtergefæderan/ suhtorfædran 'uncle and nephew'.

    The first noun can be used in its genitive form, e.g *Sunnandæg* 'Sunday';
cynnesman, *landesman*, *Frigedæg*, *oxanhryde*, *ælmesgedal*, etc.

3.2. Adjective + noun type

    This type was very productive. The majority of nouns from the Corpus show clear
relations between the adjective and the noun: adjective has the attributive function,
qualifying the noun. This type is sometimes difficult to distinguish from the similar
phrase consisting of adjective and noun. Some examples illustrating this type are the
following: æðelbeorg 'glorious king', *bealosorg* 'baleful sorrow', *cearseld* 'sorrowful
place', *godspell* 'Gospel'[7], *frumgar* 'leader', and many others.

3.3. Adverb/ preposition[8] + noun type

    There are over 100 compounds found in the Corpus consisting of a particle
and a noun, and the majority of nouns belonging to this type have a clear structure
and meaning. The following examples illustrate this type: æfterfylgend 'follower',
forðfæder 'forefather', æteaca 'increase, addition', *ellorgast* 'allien spirit', and many
others.

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[5]These compounds are also called tautological compounds.

[6]They are the examples of exocentric compounds because none of the elements is the head.

[7]The literal meaning of the compound is 'good message'. It was formed on the basis of the Greek word
εὐαγγέλιου (evangelium), which in its original form was a compound consisting of two Greek words for
'good' and 'message' (Bloomfield 1963: 169).

[8]The term particle is often used to denote both an adverb and a preposition.

3.4. Pronoun + noun type[9]

There are only five compounds found in the Corpus which belong to this type: *angylde*[10] 'full value', *sylfcwala* 'suicide', *sylfdema* 'somebody who depends on his own judgement', *sylfwill* 'self-will'.

3.5. Past participle + noun type

The following examples illustrate the compound noun type consisting of a past participle and a noun: e.g. *æhtemann* 'unfree labourer'< *æhte*, past participle of *agan*; e.g. *brægdboga* 'bent bow'< *brægd*, past participle *of bregdan*; e.g. *fætedhleor* 'ornamented cheek'< *fæted*, past participle of *fætan* 'to adorn, ornament' + *hleor* 'cheek'.

3.6. Noun + present participle

The following examples illustrate the type: e.g. *bordhæbbende*, 'bearing shields, equipped with shields'< *bord*, n. 'shield' + *hæbbende*, present participle of the verb *habban* 'to have, possess, hold, keep'; e.g. *dælnimmend* 'participant'< *dæl*, n. 'part' + *nimmend*, from the verb *niman* 'to take, receive'.

3.7. Number + noun type

The only example found in the Corpus belonging to this type is the compound *fifleafe/ fifleaf*, consisting of the cardinal number *fif* and the noun *leaf*, meaning 'a plant cinquefoil or five-leaf'.

3.8. Noun + adjective type

Only three examples are found in the Corpus: *Ecgbryht* 'Egbert'< *ecg*, n. 'edge, sword' + *bryht*, adj. 'bright, excellent'; *flitgeorn* 'quarreller'< *flit*, n. 'quarrelling' + *georn*, adj. 'eager, desirous'; *furlang* 'furlong'< *furh*, n. 'ditch, furrow' + *lang*, adj. 'long'.

3.9. Adjective + adjective type

The only compound noun found in the Corpus which consists of two adjectives is the proper name *Æðelberht* 'Ethelbert'< *æðele* adj. 'noble' + *bryht*, adj. 'bright, clear, lucid'.

3.10. Closing remarks on Old English compounds

The majority of Old English compound nouns were formed when an adjective, adverb/ preposition or another noun were used as the determinant to a noun determinatum. Other cases can be viewed as marginal.

The important finding the research revealed are the three types found in the Corpus, which are not defined anywhere in the literature consulted. These types are: numeral + noun, noun + adjective and adjective + adjective.

On the other hand, the only type defined in the literature which was not found in the Corpus is verb base + noun (Kastovsky 2005). This type is often difficult to

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[9]In the literature on compounding in Old English, this type is defined as self/ æl+noun (Marchand 1960: 32).

[10]*an* is defined as both an adjective and a pronoun in the DOE.

distinguish from the type noun + noun due to the fact that the verb base is similar to the deverbal noun in the position of determinant. Korać (1993) says that type is rare in Old English[11].

4. Compound noun types in Middle English

The total number of compound nouns found in the Corpus amounts to less than 600. The Table 2 shows compound noun types in Middle English and the number of examples found for each type:

noun + noun	adjective + noun	adverb/ preposition + noun	verb + noun	verb + adjective	noun + present participle	present participle + noun	adverb + past participle	past participle + noun	numeral + noun
>400	>100	25	8	1	5	1	1	2	1

Table 2: Compound noun types in Middle English

4.1. Noun + noun type

The majority of Middle English compound nouns were composed of two nouns, which exhibited various relations, among which the dominant one was of determinative type, e.g. *abbotrice* 'abbacy', *appel-trowe* 'apple-tree', *barly-bred* 'bread made of barley', *bocstaff* 'letter of the alphabet', *blood-stream* 'bloodstream', *orefcwealm* 'murrain', and many others.

Although the leveling of the genitive form started to happen in Middle English, genitive nouns were still found in the texts[12], e.g. *hertes-horn* 'horn of a hart', *Oxenford* 'Oxford', *sondes-man* 'messenger', *domesman* 'judge', *domesdæg* 'judgement day', and days of the week: *Thorsdai* 'Thursday', *Wednesday*.

4.2. Adjective + noun

Compound nouns belonging to this type consist of an adjective as the first element which attributes a certain characteristic to the noun, and the meaning of the whole compound is usually transparent, because it sums up to the meanings of its constituent elements. The following examples illustrate the structure and semantics of the compound belonging to this type: *craftyman* 'craftsman', *freoman* 'free man', *saufgarde* 'safety', *gentil-man* 'a man of noble birth', and many others.

4.3. Adverb/ preposition + noun type

Some of the examples illustrating this type are the following: *oferlufe* 'excessive love', *uten-ladde* 'foreigner', and *aftyr-non* 'afternoon'.

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[11]Still, when the determinatum is a potential argument of the determinant, the whole construction can be interpreted to consist of a verbal base and a noun. For example, the OE noun *delfisen* 'spade' can be analysed as a compound consisting of a verbal base (*delf* is a verbal stem from the OE verb *delfan* 'dig') and a noun, or two nouns (when the first element is interpreted as a noun *delf* 'digging') (Kastovsky 2005: 371).

[12]The structure of the compound *hernpanne* illustrates the loss of genitive inflection: *hernpanne*< *hernes+panne*, *s* is lost in the compound.

4.4. Verb + noun

Several compound nouns consisting of a verb base and a noun were found in the Corpus. The following examples illustrate the pattern: *chapmann*< from OE *cēap-man* and *cȳp-* (this form was influenced by the verb *cīepan*, *cȳpan*); *cnawleche* 'knowledge'< *cnaw* (from the verb *cnawen*) + *leche*; *sunegilt* 'female sinner'< *sun* (from the verb *sinnen*) + *gilt*.

4.5. Verb + adjective

The only compound exemplifying this type found in the Corpus is *mysse-masche* 'jumble, hodgepodge'< *mis*, adj. + *mashen*, verb. However, the structure of this compound is not quite clear, and this definition is also marked with a question in the dictionary[13].

4.6. Noun + Present participle

The following examples illustrate the type: *noyse-makyng*, *arke-makyng*, *childe-bering*.

4.7. Present participle + Noun

There is only one example illustrating this type: *leorningcniht* 'a disciple'.

4.8. Adverb + Past participle

This is another type represented by only one example found in the Corpus: *vppe-rysynge* 'uprising'.

4.9. Past participle + noun

Compound nouns belonging to this type consist of a noun modified by past participle, e.g. *hered-man/ hirdman*< hiren 'to hire', *hired-cniht*.

4.10. Number + noun

Only one compound noun belonging to this subtype was found in the Corpus: *tuelfmoneth/ tuel-moth* 'a year'.

4.11. Closing remarks on ME compound nouns

The most productive pattern for the formation of ME compounds was noun + noun type; even two thirds of the total number of compound nouns found in the Corpus belong to this type. Other productive types are adj. + noun, and adv/ prep. + noun.

The important finding the research revealed are the four types found in the Corpus, which are not defined anywhere in the literature consulted. These types are: present participle + noun, adverb + past participle, noun + past participle and adjective + verb.

However, there are some types described in the literature which were not found in the Corpus:

a. verb base + adverb. Examples illustrating this pattern are *break-up*, *come-down*, *knock-out*, *run-away* (Bradley 1955: 114).

b. pronoun (personal he/ she) + noun. This pattern was typical for Middle English

[13]Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary

period, which was characterized by the weakening of derivational patterns and the loss of inflection, including the loss of gender. As the result of these changes, new compound nouns appeared, with the pronouns *he* or *she*, denoting the gender of the whole compound. These compounds are called sex-determining compounds, and some of the examples are the following: he-lamb, she-cat, she-cousin (Korać 2002: 157).

c. noun + adverb. This pattern was new in Middle English and it produced many compound nouns from the 14th century onwards. The first element is an agent-noun, and the second and adverb, e.g. *holdere up*, *fynder up* (Bradley 1955: 126).

d. The post-modified type, when the second noun modifies the first one, was recorded from the 14th century due to the French influence[14]. This order is not typical for English, and it never became productive. There are few examples for this type, such as *knight-errant*, *falcon gentle* or *sum total* (Strang 1970: 193).

e. The new formation which consisted of a personal name and a noun appeared in the 13th century, but there were few examples recorded that early, e.g. *Tom-fool* (first recorded in 1356), and only in the period of Renaissance was it developed and produced more compound nouns (Blake 2006: 442).

5.   The development of compound noun types

If we compare compound noun types from the Old and Middle English period, we can perceive several tendencies of the development:

5.1. Types which survived into Middle English

The following patterns survived into Middle English: noun + noun, adjective + noun, adverb/ preposition + noun, verb + noun, numeral + noun, noun + present participle, past participle + noun, and pronoun + noun.

5.2. Types which no longer produced noun compounds in Middle English

There are two types from the Old English period which did not survive into Middle English: noun + adjective and adjective + adjective type.

5.3. New types in Middle English period

New types introduced in Middle English are the following: noun + adverb, verb base + adverb, verb + adjective, and adverb + present participle. Even though the type consisting of a pronoun and a noun existed in Old English, it was only in Middle English period that personal pronouns *he/ she* were used to create sex-denoting compounds[15].

The close contact between English and French in the Middle English period resulted not only in the borrowing of words, but also of patterns and grammatical features. Due to the French influence, a new subtype of noun + noun structure (post-modified type) was recorded, within which the second element modifies the first one.

5.4. Old types, new compounds

Some types which existed in Old English survived into Middle English, but

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[14]This order also existed in Old English words borrowed from Celtic, e.g. MacArthur, Kirkpatrick (Strang 1970: 192).

[15]It resulted from the loss of inflection to mark genders.

compound nouns from Old English were lost. The patterns still existed, and they produced new formations. The following patterns illustrate this tendency:

a. Verb stem + noun

This pattern existed in Old English, but none of the compounds produced by it survived into Middle English. This type gave many compounds in Middle English, such as *leap-year, google-eye, bere-man*, etc. (Burnley 2005: 442).

b. Noun + Present participle (-ing/ -ung)

Another type which survived in Middle English consisted of a noun and present participle. None of the examples from Old English survived, but many new formations were created, e.g. *back-bitting, blood-shedding* (Strang 1970: 257).

6. Conclusion

Middle English dictionary was considerably changed in comparison to Old English. When a new word was needed to express new notions, Old English used native elements which were combined together and formed compounds. In Middle English, borrowed words were readily used to name new concepts, and the power of compounding it had had in the earlier period was in decline. To illustrate the immense decrease in the use of compounds in Middle English, we can compare the total number of Old and Middle English compound nouns found in the Helsinki Corpus. Even though the total number of Middle English words in research is considerably bigger than the number of the Old English ones, the number of Old English compounds is almost four times bigger than the number of Middle English compounds.

Although compounding in Middle English was not as productive as in Old English, still, it continued to enrich the English vocabulary. Some of the old patterns survived and produced new compounds, other patterns went out of use. What was characteristic for the period was the phenomenon that some of the old patterns survived into Middle English, and new compounds were created on these models, but compounds from Old English formed on these patterns died out. Without a comparative analysis of these patterns one may come to the wrong conclusion that these types were new in Middle English. Finally, there were completely new patterns for formation of compounds.

The analysis of the development of compound noun structures shows that the most productive types from Old English (noun + noun, adjective +noun, adverb/ preposition + noun) survived into Middle English, and retained the same productive power of the earlier period. It supports the fact that even though 85% of Old English word-stock of Germanic origin was lost from the language[16], and even though Middle English was under great influence of Roman languages, still, English preserved its original Germanic roots.

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[16]Kastovsky (2005).

Source

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Valentina Gavranović

SLOŽENE IMENICE U STAROENGLESKOM I SREDNJEENGLESKOM PERIODU

Rezime

Ovaj rad bavi se dijahronim istraživanjem složenih imenica u staroengleskim i srednjeengleskim tekstovima *Helsinškog korpusa*. Prikupljeni materijal je analiziran, a potom su složene imenice klasifikovane prema vrsti reči kojoj pripadaju njihovi elementi. Obrasci složenih imenica oba perioda potom se porede, i razvojni tokovi opisuju na nekoliko nivoa: obrasci koji su prestali da se koriste za građenje novih složenica; obrasci koji su i dalje bili produktivni u srednjeengleskom periodu, i potpuno novi obrasci za građenje složenica u srednjeengleskom periodu.

Ključne reči: složena imenica, vrsta reči, korpus, promena.