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### A Brief Analysis of Chinese Compound Features

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#### ABSTRACT


As Booij (2016) stated, morphology refers to the study of the "internal structure of words" and the rules by which words are formed (p. 7). As a significant branch of morphology, English speakers are accustomed to composing a compound phrase with several single lexemes or free morphemes. As a ubiquitous linguistic phenomenon, compounds have become an indispensable component of language lexeme formation. Compounds, by definition, are "words that are composed of two (or more) bases, roots, or stems" (Lieber, 2010, p. 43). In Mandarin Chinese, almost all words can be considered as compounds. Xing (2006) remarked that approximately 80% of Chinese words are in fact compound words. There are some peripheral morphological phenomena in Germanic language such as English, which is just as prevalent in Chinese as the Sino-Tibetan language. According to the previous studies, the most obvious characteristics of Chinese compounds exhibit four common head morphologies: right-headed, left-headed, two-headed and headedness in "metacompounding". The aim of the paper is to highlight the distinct feature of Chinese in morphology through introducing the linguistic concepts with regard to compound.


#### INTRODUCTION

In order to explain the largest distinction between both languages, an important concept I need to introduce in advance is that of the head of a compound. "In compounds, the head is the element that serves to determine both the part of speech and the semantic kind denoted by the compounds as a whole" (Lieber, 2010, p. 46). For instance, "greenhouse" as one noun consisted of an adjective, "green" and a noun, "house." The right morpheme "house" determines the part of speech of "greenhouse," thus "greenhouse" is a classical right-headed compound. Lieber and Stekauer took the view that English compounds are generally recognized as right-headed, both in terms of semantics and syntax (2009, p. 366).

However, other languages whose semantic category are dependent on the leftmost lexeme are known as left-headed languages, such as Vietnamese and French. Interestingly, compared with the Indo-European language branches, four headed compound all can be found in Chinese. Therefore, one of the reasons why Chinese has become one of the most complicated languages in the field of international linguistics is that up to now, all experts have failed to reach a common conclusion on the grammatical rules of Chinese compound.

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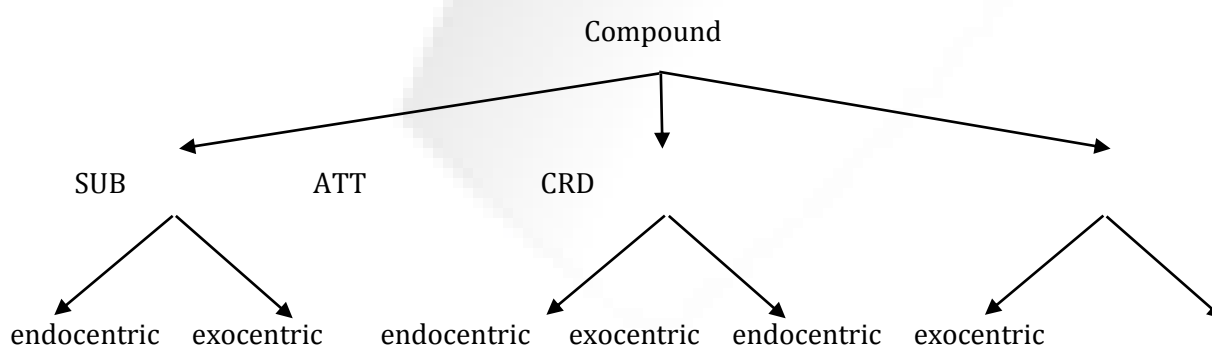
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### The Head in English Compound

structure	Compound 1	Head 1	Compound 2	Head 2	Part of speech
Noun + Noun	Birdbrain	brain	Book store	Store	Noun
Adjective + Adjective	Icy cold	cold	Blue-black	black	Adjective
Adjective + Noun	black hole	hole	Hard hat	hat	Noun
Noun + Verb	Spoon-feed	feed	Sunrise	rise	Verb

In linguistics, there can be a plethora of distinct ways to classify compounds. The classification method proposed by Bisetto and Scalise (2005) is the most widespread. According to this method, compounds can be separated into three compounds: subordinate (SUB), attributive (ATT) and coordinate (CRD). The definition of ATT is that “the non-head acts as a modifier of the head” (Lieber, 2010, p. 47). Two examples are given: “lemon yellow” is a variety of the color yellow that is like a lemon, and “blackboard” is a tablet which is black in color. In CRD, “the first element of the compound does not modify the second” (Lieber, 2010, p. 47). To put it differently, the two components have equal status. Typically, this happens when the two components are antonyms, such as “prince-consort,” “pass-fail,” and “stir-fry.” SUB is defined as “those in which constituents have an argument-head (or head-argument) relation” (Lieber & Stekauer, 2009, p. 480). The right element of the compound be generally recognized as the object of the verb in this situation. For instance, a “truck driver” is someone who is driving a truck, and “home invasion” demonstrates that an invasion is happening at home. Above three macro-types can be further classified into four compounds field types: copulative, appositional, endocentric and exocentric varieties. Copulative compound is actually two-headed compound, whereas appositional compound refers to a combined word consisting of two contrary meaning head (antonyms). In the view of the linguistic studies, most of experts inclined to research relatively sophisticated endocentric and exocentric compounds.



#### RESEARCH

The difference between endocentric and compounds is whether the reference of the compound is the reference of its head. If it is, it is endocentric; if not, it is exocentric (Lieber, 2010, p. 48). For example, the head of “doctor-parent” denotes two individuals with different identities, but the reference of the whole compound mentions the relationship between the two individuals, so it is an exocentric phrase.

“Blue-green” is a kind of dark green with a bias towards blue, “windmill” is a kind of mill, and thus they belong to endocentric. That is to say, endocentric compound consists of a modifier and a head,  $\alpha+\beta$  denotes an unusual kind of  $\beta$ , such as bedroom and doghouse. Conversely, exocentric compound means that  $\alpha+\beta$  denotes an unusual kind of an unexpressed semantic category, such as skinhead and white-collar. Under this circumstance, learners need to understand its figurative and non-literal meaning based on the target language cultural environment.

The structure of right-headed compounds in Chinese is similar to English, with the leftmost base or the first morpheme serving as modifier for the right base. Both SUB and ATT in Chinese contains right-headed compounds. To name an example of ATT, 突审 *tū-shěn* is composed of an adjective, 突 *tū* “unexpectedly,” and a verb, 审 *shěn* “interrogate.” This compound as a whole means “to interrogate someone by surprise”. The function of 突 *tū* “unexpectedly” is to describe how fast the interrogation is going, while 审 *shěn* “interrogate” is obviously the most significant component in this compound. To name an example which reflects SUB, 毒贩 *dú-fàn* consisted of two nouns: “Drug” and “criminal,” which means “drug trafficker”. The noun 毒 *dú* “drug” acts as the verbal constituent of verbal head 贩 *fàn* “criminal”. In SUB, one constituent can be generally interpreted as the argument of another constituent: 毒 *dú* “drug” serves as the supplementary explanation of 贩 *fàn* “criminal”. In fact, in Chinese, frequently only the nouns which take the SUB form are recognized as right-headed compounds; conversely, almost all verb forms of SUB belong to the category of left-headed compounds.

**Table 1. Right-Headed Compound**

Compounds	主页	完胜	互动
Pinyin	zhǔ yè	wán shèng <sup>0</sup>	hù dòng
Head	页	胜	动
Structure	Adjective + Noun	Adjective + Verb	Adverb + Verb
Part of speech	Noun	Verb	Noun
Gloss	“main”+ “page” = “homepage”	“whole”+ “win” = “win a complete victory”	“mutually” + “move” = “interaction”

It is easier for native English speakers to understand Chinese left-headed compounds as infinitives, “to do something”. 禁毒 *jìn-dú* means “to ban the abuse of drugs”, which is comprised of a verb, 禁 *jìn* “prohibit,” and a noun, 毒 *dú* “poison.” Its word order is just the opposite of right headed compounds: the right constituent plays the role on semantic supplementary of the left one. In addition, what is most striking in Chinese compounding is two-headed compounding. CRD compounds in Chinese are basically two-headed. As Sun said, “the constituents of coordinate compounds are coordinate in nature or are parallel with each other within a semantic domain” (2006, p. 55). The two constituents that make up two-headed are generally synonyms. For example, 亮丽 *liàng-lì* consists of two synonym adjectives: 亮 *liàng* “bright” and 丽 *lì* “beautiful,” and the phrase as a whole means “bright or brilliant and beautiful” (Lieber & Stekauer 2009). Owing to the sophistication of Chinese morphology, Ceccagno and Basciano even banteringly evaluated that “Chinese is a headless language in its morphology since neither the rightmost nor the leftmost member of a compound uniquely determines the category type of a compound.” (2007, p. 281).

**Table 2. Left-Headed Compound**

Compounds	花心	入住	攀高
Pinyin	huā xīn	rù zhù	pān gāo
Head	花	入	攀
Structure	Adjective + Noun	Verb + Verb	Verb + Adverb
Part of speech	Adjective	Verb	Verb
Gloss	“attractive but insincere”+ “heart” = “unfaithful to love”	“enter”+ “live/shop” = “live into somewhere”	“climb” + “high” = “climb up”

**Table 3. Two-Headed Compound**

Compounds	餐饮	天天	打压
Pinyin	cān yǐn	tiān tiān	dǎ yā
Structure	Noun + Noun	Noun + Noun	Verb + Verb
Part of speech	Noun	Noun	Verb
Gloss	“food”+ “drink” = “homepage”	“day”+ “day” = “every day”	“hit” + “suppress” = “combat &supress”

Besides the three headed positions, an amusing linguistic feature in Chinese compounds is headedness in metacompounding. “Metacompounding” refers to a particular compound, of which at least one element has the meaning of an underlying compound that does not occur on the surface (Ceccagno & Basciano, 2007). This category closely resembles idioms in English and exocentric compound. Readers can understand the meaning of each individual element, but unable to figure out the whole combined word meaning. Hence, a large proportion of exocentric compounds are headed in metacompounding. 东西 dōng xī is composed of two nouns, 东 dōng “east” and 西 xī “west,” but the whole compound means “things”. It is often difficult for non-native speakers of Chinese to associate these two localizers with this meaning.

## CONCLUSION

From what have been mentioned above, linguistic experts proposed that there are four distinct types of Chinese compounds: headedness in metacompounding, right-headed, left-headed, and two-headed. In the right-headed and left-headed, some components become the head of compounds, and the other components will act as modifiers for the head. SUB in noun form and most ATT compounds are right-headed, but SUB in verb form is left-headed. Nearly all CRD compounds are two-headed, both elements in the two-headed equally contribute to the meaning of the whole compound. The two elements consist of two-headed compounds are generally synonyms. Eventually, a multitude of exocentric compounds can be classified as headedness in metacompounding as well, which is a phenomenon worthy of attention in Chinese. In conclusion, unlike the fixed-head-position in other languages, the head in Chinese does not have an immutable position, so the element that can act as the head is determined by various semantic situations.

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