

Verb + Noun Function-Describing Compounds

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Abstract

In this study we examine a class of exocentric nominal compounds (i.e. compounds with an unexpressed noun head) in Spanish, French, and Chinese. This class consists of nominal compounds formed by a verb plus a noun complement, usually though not necessarily a direct object, which combine to describe a function or characteristic of a new whole. In the three languages studied here, compounds of this type tend to fall into three semantic groups: (1) utilitarian objects, such as ‘paperweights’ and ‘armrests’, which are perhaps best and most easily described by their functions; (2) specialized professions, like ‘drivers’ and ‘switchmen’; plus a subcategory of often pejorative, tongue-in-cheek descriptions of certain types of people, like ‘wet blankets’ and ‘quack dentists’; and (3) plants and animals.

The fact that languages in such diverse families as Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan – selectively comparing, however, only SVO languages – exhibit the same type of compound, and use it to indicate extremely similar referents, suggests that certain objects with a prominent function or peculiar characteristic (e.g. an umbrella, the main function of which is to protect one from the rain) are more likely than words not of this type to be expressed in a Verb + Noun exocentric compound, in languages in which this compound type commonly occurs. This is also true of profession names, in which function is an outstanding element, as well as of certain types of people, who are identified chiefly by a particular characteristic (such as being a ‘fight-picker’), and plants and animals possessing some salient feature.

A similar compound type occurs in Burmese and Persian, both SOV languages, but in an inverted Noun + Verb format, bearing out Comrie’s (1989) observation that the syntax of a language is reflected in its morphology.

1. Introduction

There is a class of compounds in many languages – to a much greater extent in some than in others – in which a verb and a noun complement combine to form another noun with a new meaning. The verb describes an action, and the noun is generally the direct object or patient or recipient of the action, though sometimes the noun complement stands in a looser relationship to the verb, e.g. when the verb is intransitive. The result is a descriptive, one-word gloss of an object or person by one of its/his/her functions or characteristics.

There is only a small number of such Verb + Noun function-describing nominal compounds in English. One common example, probably seldom thought of in terms of its component parts due to vowel neutralization and other phonetic change (as also happened with *cupboard*), is *breakfast*, a meal taken to ‘break’ a ‘fast’. ‘Breakfast’ is itself neither a ‘breaking’ nor a ‘fast’, but the two concepts combine morphosyntactically to describe one of its characteristics. Because the noun head or referent of the compound (‘meal’) is not expressed, this compound type is defined as exocentric, following Bloomfield (1933). Exocentric compounds are contrasted with endocentric ones, in which the nominal element **is** the noun head, e.g. **snow**storm (a type of storm) and **star**fish (a type of fish). Exocentric compounds are also known by a term borrowed from classical Sanskrit scholarship, *bahuvrihi*.

Marchand (1969:11-17) argues that formations like these which lack a head are “pseudo-compounds” or a kind of unspecified “derivation” rather than full-fledged compounds. He reserves the term “compound” for those which are an “expansion” of an expressed noun head, or as Bauer (1978:154-159) puts it, “a hyponym (i.e. subclass) of its own head”. We will not restrict the term “compound” to endocentric compounds as Marchand does, but will continue to use the term in referring to the exocentric compounds under study here.

Some common compounds in English with this composition are *breakwater*, *lockjaw* (‘tetanus’, from the earlier term *locked jaw*), *passport* (a document allowing one to *pass* through a foreign *port*), *pastime* (the extra *s* has been dropped), *pickpocket*, *scarecrow*, *shearwater* (a kind of sea bird that skims the water), *spoilsport*, *tattletale*, *wagtail* (another bird), plus the somewhat dated *cutpurse* (‘pickpocket’), *cutthroat* (‘murderer’), *dreadnought* (‘a thick woolen coat’ or ‘early 20th century British battleship’), *killjoy*, *lickspittle*, *makeweight*, *rotgut* (‘bad whiskey or liquor’), *sawbones*, *scofflaw*, and *turnkey*. While some compounds of this type may have originated as a second-person verbal command form, a reanalysis appears to have subsequently taken place without a corresponding inflectional adjustment. The form seems now to be analyzed as a third person singular verb – in spite of its lack of an *-s* marker – plus an object or other noun complement, i.e. ‘one who (V)s (N)s’ or ‘something that (V)s (N)s’, e.g. *scarecrow* = ‘something that scares crows’.

It will be seen that many of the examples listed above have isomorphic equivalents in other languages. Some may have come into English or gone into other languages as loan translations, but others, like *pickpocket*, may have an inherent natural tendency to be expressed in this kind of compound. There are, in addition, a number of direct foreign borrowings of this word type into English which give us such examples as *mountebank* (mounts + bench = ‘charlatan’), from Italian, and *portmanteau* (carries + overcoat = ‘travel bag’), from French.

This compound form seems to show almost zero productivity in English at present; note how many of the English examples cited have long been out of common use. Occasionally this form turns up in a commercial brand name, like *Xpel Air*, an air cleaning device (Bauer 1983:204-205). Other methods of composition are much more common in English, for example, Noun + Verb + *-er*, e.g. *shop* + *lift* + *-er* = *shoplifter*. Because of the paucity of examples in modern English of the compound type we are interested in, we will focus on other languages here: Spanish, French, and Chinese.

2. Spanish

Spanish has a considerable number of Verb + Noun function-describing nominal compounds, with two fairly predictable and invariable forms.

The first is composed of the third person singular indicative form of a verb plus a plural noun, both in contrast to their respective forms in English. Theories have been postulated (Darmesteter 1967:168-234; Lloyd 1968) that the verbs in these compounds in Spanish and French were originally second person singular command forms, as seems also to have been the case in English. However, as the form became more productive, a reanalysis may have taken place: the verb came to be viewed as being in the third person singular present indicative, and new compounds were subsequently formed analogically on this basis. This study will leave the historical issue aside and concentrate instead on the synchronic forms of this compound type.

Many of these compounds refer to practical, everyday objects and tools. These objects and tools might otherwise be difficult to name, so it is natural that they be referred to by a description of one of their functions, usually the main one. Examples:

- (1) *(el) abrelatas* (opens + cans) = ‘can opener’
- (2) *(el) cuentagotas* (counts + drops) = ‘eye dropper’
- (3) *(el) espantapájaros* (startles + birds) = ‘scarecrow’ (cf. English)
- (4) *(el) lavamanos* (washes + hands) = ‘lavatory’
- (5) *(el) limpiadientes* (cleans + teeth) = ‘toothpick’

- (6) *(el) paracaídas* (stops + falls) = ‘parachute’ (cf. English via French)
- (7) *(el) pisapapeles* (tread-on + papers) = ‘paperweight’
- (8) *(el) rascacielos* (scratches + skies) = ‘skyscraper’ (this is a calque from English into Spanish; a similar calque is used in French, Chinese/Sino-Japanese, and other languages. ‘Sky-scrapping’ is neither an obvious nor even factual function of the object; this compound describes rather what the object may appear to do.)
- (9) *(el) rompecabezas* (breaks + heads) = ‘puzzle’
- (10) *(el) rompeolas* (breaks + waves) = ‘breakwater’ (cf. English)
- (11) *(el) sacacorchos* (removes + corks) = ‘corkscrew’
- (12) *(el) tocadiscos* (plays + records) = ‘record player’

As in English, this is not only the way Spanish has to express such function-describing words. Another form serving essentially the same function in Spanish is stem + *-dor* or *-dora*, for example:

- (13) *(el) borrador* ‘eraser’
- (14) *(la) (máquina) lavadora* ‘washing machine’

Another such form is (stem) + *-ero*, e.g.:

- (15) *(el) invernadero* ‘greenhouse’
- (16) *(el) abrevadero* ‘trough’

This kind of compound construction, like the Noun + Verb + *-er* form in English, uses a more predictable and standardized form, unlike the exocentric Verb + Noun combination, which is a noteworthy, creative, and still highly productive phenomenon of Spanish. Note that all the Noun + Verb examples cited above have a plural nominal element *-s* and take the masculine gender.

There is another compound pattern very similar to this first type, differing mainly in that the second element, the noun, is not plural. Some of these words, however, as will be seen below, have alternate forms with the final *-s*. The objects denoted are of the same utilitarian type. Examples:

- (17) *(la) parabrisa* (protects-from + breeze) = ‘windshield’
(el) guardabrisa (both forms are used; also called *el parabrisas*)
- (18) *(el) guardafango* (protects-from + mud) = ‘fender’
 (also called *el guardabarros*; same semantic breakdown)
- (19) *(el) guardapelo* (holds + [lock of] hair) = ‘locket’

(20) (*el*) *pasatiempo* (passes + time) = ‘pastime’ (cf. English)

(21) (*el*) *parasol* (stops + sun) = ‘parasol’

Note that the noun elements in the above compounds either generally occur (i.e. in most contexts) in the singular (like *sol* ‘sun’ of *parasol*) or occur logically in the singular in the context of the specific compound; or they are collective nouns like *fango* ‘mud’ and *pelo* ‘hair’. This is probably the main reason why this form with a singular nominal element exists apart from the larger first class.

While most of the items in this second list are masculine like those in the first, we find here for the first time some belonging to the feminine gender. The consistency in gender of the words of the first list underlines their exocentric nature. The new whole is generally given one predetermined gender, the masculine gender, regardless of the gender (or number) of the nominal element. However, some compounds with a singular, feminine nominal element may tend to take the feminine gender themselves. A final *-a*, or just the fact that the noun element is feminine, may in some cases make the compound feel feminine, despite the new meaning of the word as a whole, and the compound eventually becomes accepted as being feminine.

Examples:

(22) (*la*) *parabrisa* (stops + breeze) = ‘windshield’ (See (17))

(23) (*la*) *guardasilla* (protects-against + chair) = ‘wall-mounted protector against damage from chairs’

In some cases, differing gender for the same external form may distinguish two discrete referents, e.g.:

(24) (*el*) *guardarropa* (holds + clothing)

is a ‘wardrobe’ (the English word is a French loan with a parallel form and etymology), i.e. a cabinet or closet in which to hang up clothes;

(25) (*la*) *guardarropa*,

on the other hand, is a ‘coat check’. The choice of which gender goes with which meaning seems to be arbitrary, established by convention. This use of gender to distinguish two related meanings of a word probably occurred incidentally and out of convenience.

Another notable trait of this compound type is that certain verb elements tend to recur again and again, like *guarda-* (‘holds’, ‘keeps’, ‘protects from’), *porta-* (‘carries’), *para-* (‘stops’), and *quita-* (‘removes’). These are basic actions essential to the performance of many

functions, and it is thus not surprising that they turn up so frequently.

The second main semantic category of the Verb + Noun function-describing nominal compound is names of professions. Examples:

- (26) *guardabosques* (watches + forests) = ‘forest ranger’
- (27) *guardafrenos* (watches + brakes) = ‘(railway) brakeman’
- (28) *guardalmacén* (watches + store) = ‘storekeeper’ (the *-a* of *guarda* is absorbed through elision)
- (29) *portavoz* (carries + voice) = ‘spokesperson’
- (30) *lavaplatos* (washes + dishes) = ‘dishwasher’
- (31) *limpiabotas* (cleans + boots) = ‘bootblack’, ‘shoe shine boy’

The nouns above are generally of the masculine gender, but could also theoretically be feminine, depending on the sex of the referent.

Subsumed under this category is a large subcategory of designations of certain types of people. These epithets tend to be pejorative or humorously intended, as illustrated in the following examples:

- (32) *aguafiestas* (spoils/waters + parties) = ‘wet blanket’ (cf. English ‘spoilsport’)
- (33) *matasanos* (kills + healthy-people) = ‘quack doctor’
- (34) *picapleitos* (picks + disputes) = ‘fight picker’
- (35) *quitamotas* (removes + motes/thread-specks) = ‘sycophant’
- (36) *rascatripas* (scratches + strings/tripe/animal-gut) = ‘lousy violin player’
- (37) *saltatumbas* (jumps + tombs) = ‘clergyman who makes a living from funerals’

This category is an especially rich one in Spanish, and the nouns cited above represent only a very small sampling of the total number of examples.

There is also a semantic group of ‘living things’ that occur in this compound type. Lloyd (1968) classifies the examples of Verb + Noun functioning-describing nominal compounds he uncovered into eleven categories; however, those outside the main categories of ‘practical objects’, ‘names of professions and types of people’, plus the smaller ‘living things’ group, are a very small proportion of the total, and include many regional, rare, and obsolete forms. Examples of ‘living things’ expressed in this compound type:

- (39) (*el*) *saltamontes* (jumps-over + hills) = ‘grasshopper’
- (40) (*el*) *portaalmizcle* (carries + musk) = ‘muskdeer’
- (41) (*el*) *rompesacos* (tears + sacks) ‘long-spiked hardgrass’
- (42) (*el*) *quitameriendas* (removes + lunch outings) = ‘meadow saffron, autumn crocus,

colchicum' (i.e. this plant discourages outings in its immediate vicinity because of its bad odor)

This final item has another equivalent in Spanish which is also a Verb + Noun function-describing compound. This might suggest that certain nouns, perhaps because they have some highly salient characteristic, are more likely than others to be expressed in this type of compound; or maybe an earlier usage in this particular format influenced a subsequent coinage of another term for the same object. This second term is:

(43) (*el*) *espantapastores* (startles + shepherds)

i.e. meadow saffron is an unpleasant surprise to shepherds in the pasture. These pejorative descriptions of meadow saffron are reminiscent of the 'names of types of people' category above. Even more interesting is that the French equivalent of the word is:

(44) (*le*) *tue-chien* (kills + dog),

a reflection of toxicity of the plant, and a further demonstration of its tendency to be expressed by a Verb + Noun function-describing nominal compound.

There are numerous other examples in which two or more names, all in the form of the compound under study, are used to refer to the same object, as already noted in examples (17) and (18), as well as in the 'meadow saffron' example above. 'Meadow saffron', however, is something of an exception to the usual pattern in that the alternative term offers a wholly different view of the plant. Usually, words for the same thing have only superficial or minor differences, i.e. a close synonym may replace either the noun or verb element, e.g.:

(45) (*el*) *guardasol* (protects-from + sun) =

(*el*) *quitasol* (removes + sun) =

(*el*) *parasol* (stops + sun) = 'parasol'

(verb element substitution)

(46) (*el*) *sacacorchos* (removes + corks) =

(*el*) *sacatapones* (removes + stopper) = 'corkscrew'

(noun element substitution)

Some compounds, like *paraguas*, after becoming well established in their own right, become incorporated into a new compound of the exact same sort, e.g.:

(47) (*el*) *portaparaguas* (*porta* + [*par(a)* + *aguas*]) = (holds + [stops + waters])
= ‘umbrella stand’

(48) (*el*) *limpiaparabrisas* (*limpia* + [*para* + *-brisas*]) (cleans + [stops + breeze])
= ‘windshield wipers’

This can be represented by the formula:

$V^2 + (V^1 + N) = V + N =$ “compounded” compound

Note the use of the verb *parar* in both examples. The second two elements (e.g. *para* + *aguas*) are treated as a single unit like any other noun in their incorporation into the new compound. Both examples here involve a “secondary” or “auxiliary” utilitarian object (e.g. ‘umbrella stand’) performing a function on a relatively “primary” utilitarian object (e.g. ‘umbrella’); at least the hierarchy is clear when analyzed from the Spanish morphological point of view. The occurrence of this phenomenon further bears out the connection of practical objects and this compound form.

As mentioned earlier, this type of exocentric nominal compound is very widespread and productive in Spanish. Lloyd tallied up a total of 1,674 such compounds in modern Spanish, including, however, many dialectical, specialized, rare, and nonce usages. But even with these qualifications, it is clear that this compound type is a very vigorous one in the Spanish language today.

French

French and Spanish are closely related, and also share the feature of Verb + Noun function-describing nominal compounds. This word type seems to be even more widespread in French than in Spanish. It occurs mainly in the same general categories: utilitarian objects, names of types of people, and various living things. There are, however, certain formal differences between the two languages, most of which concern the written form of the compounds.

In addition to generally being hyphenated in French, this type of compound is much more variable in French than in Spanish. This is perhaps at least partly because the larger numbers of this word type increase the probability of inconsistency. Also, French orthography is less phonetic than Spanish. It is sometimes difficult to know, for example, if a form is in fact plural, and should have an *-s* or *-x* plural ending added to the written form, since these two final consonants are silent in modern French, unless they occur in liaison with a

following vowel sound.

Words in this class are, as in Spanish, usually masculine:

- (49) (*le*) *couvre-lit* (covers + bed) = ‘bedspread’, ‘coverlet’
(‘coverlet’ is the anglicized form of the original French)
(50) (*le*) *passe-bouillon* (strains + broth) = ‘soup strainer’

but some are feminine:

- (51) (*la*) *garde-robe* (keeps + clothing) = ‘wardrobe’ (cf. Spanish, English)
(52) (*la*) *lèse-majesté* (harms + majesty) = ‘*lèse-majesté*’, ‘high treason’

The word *lèse-majesté* is perhaps the most unusual item encountered in the category of compounds examined here in that it is the most abstract, neither an everyday object nor the name of a profession, type of person, or other living thing. There are most certainly other such examples, but they do not seem to be very common.

For some words, usually names of professions, gender depends as in Spanish on the sex of the referent:

- (53) (*le/la*) *porte-bannière* (carries + flag) = ‘color bearer’
(54) (*le/la*) *garde-malade* (watches + sick-person) = ‘male nurse/nurse’

Sometimes the noun element of the compound in its singular form carries a plural *-s* or *-x* ending. This does not seem to be governed by any hard and fast rule. However, in some cases, the nominal element either does not normally take a plural in any situation (cf. Spanish example (21)), or it is a collective or mass noun, not requiring a plural marker in the context of the compound (cf. example (22)), e.g.:

- (55) (*le*) *presse-purée* (presses + puree) = ‘potato masher’
(56) (*le*) *porte-bonheur* (brings + good-luck) = ‘good luck charm’
(57) (*le*) *passe-thè* (strains + tea) = ‘tea strainer’
(58) (*le*) *grille-pain* (toasts + bread) = ‘toaster’

Other nominal elements whose referents occur naturally in quantity in the context of the compound in which they appear may tend to be pluralized (the compound as a whole, however, is still singular); e.g.:

(59) (*le*) *monte-plats* (lifts + plates) = ‘dumb waiter’

(60) (*le*) *coup-ongles* (cuts + nails) = ‘nail cutter’ (although normally only one nail is cut at a time)

Still others can go either way, and have an optional plural marker on the noun element; e.g.:

(61) (*m l'*) *arrache-clou* = (*m-l'*) *arrache-clous* (removes + nails) = ‘clawhammer’

(62) (*m l'*) *ouvre-boîte* = (*m-l'*) *ouvre-boîtes* (opens + cans) = ‘can opener’ (cf. Spanish example (1))

which would seem to reflect an ambiguity in the mind of the speaker (or more appropriately for French, the writer, since the issue here is spelling, not pronunciation) as to which form is more appropriate. Some compounds have more than one or one set of generally accepted forms; for others, different dictionaries have different opinions as to a “correct” standard. Convention, whatever path it takes, seems to be the main determiner of the final form of a word.

The compound as a whole may be made plural by adding a final *-s* or *-x* to the nominal element:

(63) (*le*) *torche-pinceau* (wipes + brush) = ‘painter’s rag’

plural: (*les*) *torche-pinceaux*

(64) (*le*) *fixe-cravate* (holds + tie) = ‘tie tack’

plural: (*les*) *fixe-cravates*

The most common is the invariable or zero-ending plural. Such a word can be recognized as being plural only by context, articles (*les* or *des*), or other forms of grammatical agreement. The singular form of words that have an invariable plural may or may not already have an *-s* or *-x* ending on the nominal (not verbal) element; either way, no change takes place when the word is used as a plural. Examples:

(65) (*le/les*) *bat-tapis* (beats + carpet[s]) = ‘carpet beater(s)’

(66) (*le/les*) *ferme-circuit* (closes + circuit) = ‘circuit closer(s)’

(67) (*le/les*) *garde-vue* (protects + view) = ‘visor(s)’, ‘lampshade(s)’

(68) (*le/les*) *brise-vent* (breaks + wind – not in idiomatic sense!) = ‘windshield(s)’ (cf.

Spanish (17)).

(69) (*le/les*) *ouvre-lettres* (opens + letters) = ‘letter opener(s)’

Some words have more than one established plural form; e.g.:

(70) (*le/la*) *garde-magasin* (watches + store) = ‘storekeeper’

plural: *les garde-magasin* or *garde-magasins*

(71) (*le*) *garde-nappe* (protects + tablecloth) = ‘placemat’

plural: (*les*) *garde-nappe* or *garde-nappes*

There are additional idiosyncrasies of plurality for this type of word, which seem to vary from dictionary to dictionary; however, these will not be further dwelt on here, except for the following cases, in which plurality and semantics are interdependent. An example:

(72) (*le*) *porte-cigarettes* (carries + cigarette) = ‘cigarette case’

This compound has a final *-s* in the singular and an invariable plural.

(73) (*le*) *porte-cigarette*

on the other hand, means ‘cigarette holder.’ Its plural is (*les*) *porte-cigarettes*, the same as for the preceding. This use of plurality or its absence in the nominal element of the singular compound to distinguish meaning is parallel to the use of gender to do the same (see examples (25) and (26)). In this instance at least, the distinction seems to be based on logic – a cigarette case holds many cigarettes; a holder holds only one at a time.

In the following two examples, two distinct referents share the same surface form in the singular:

(74) (*le*) *garde-pêche* (watches + fishing) = (a) ‘fishery service boat’

(b) ‘fish warden’

(75) (*le*) *garde-côte* (watches + coast) = (a) ‘coast guard vessel’

(b) ‘coast guard’

The distinction between the words in each pair above shows up in the plural forms: (a) is in both cases invariable and (b) is written *gardes-pêche* and *gardes-côte*, respectively; *garde-côte* also has the alternate plural of *garde-côtes* for (a). These two examples are closely related, semantically as well as formally, and their similar formal features undoubtedly developed through mutual analogy. A general property of *garde* + (Noun) nominal compounds is illustrated in these examples: those for which the plural form consists of an *-s* (or other plural marker) added either to just the verb element or to both the verbal and

nominal elements tend to refer to people. (Other verb elements of the type of French compound under study here do not generally take a plural marker.) One reason *garde-* may tend to take an *-s* ending in such cases (which does not make it what its surface structure might indicate, i.e. the informal second person singular present indicative of *garder*) is because the verb form *garde* coincides with the noun *garde* ('a guard'), and by analogy attracts a plural ending when it refers to a person. Contrarily, *garde-* compounds like:

(76) (*le*) *garde-feu* (protects-from + fire) = 'firescreen'

(77) (*le*) *garde-manger* (keeps + food) = 'pantry'

(78) (*le*) *garde-poussière* (protects-from + dust) = 'dust guard'

which have an invariable plural, usually fall into the 'practical objects' category; thus plural form distinctions can coincide with semantic distinctions.

Chinese

The final language in which we will examine this type of compound is standard Chinese, or "Mandarin". There is not an overabundance of examples of Verb + Noun function-describing compound nouns to be found in modern Chinese, at least when compared to Spanish and French. But the ones there are fall into three fairly clear-cut categories which correspond closely to what we have already found in Spanish and French: utilitarian objects, names of certain professions – including the subcategory of sometimes pejorative names of types of people – and various living things.

The *Pinyin* system of Romanization is used in all Chinese examples.

Compounds of this type in the 'professions' category used to be extremely plentiful in Chinese. Some examples date back to Zhou dynasty (11th century BC-221 BC) records of the Xia dynasty (ca. 21st century BC-16th century BC). The Zhou dynasty was probably the peak period for the compound quantitatively. In the *Cihǎi* dictionary, over 70 examples using one verb element (司 *sī*) alone were found, and most of these were names of government officials of the Zhou dynasty. Compounds of the same type using other verbal elements also existed in considerable numbers.

Similar to the situation in English, Verb + Noun exocentric nominal compounds, especially profession names and official titles, have decreased sharply in productivity. However, a number of such compounds are still in use, and there is some evidence of limited productivity of the form in modern Chinese. Parallel to the English Noun + Verb + *-er* form, modern Chinese has a 'one who (or 'something that') (Verb)S (Noun)' form that has unlimited productivity, and is undoubtedly the most common way of describing or expressing

an object or profession by its function or main characteristic. This form is: (Verb) + (Noun) + 的 *de* (neutral-toned nominalizing particle; it functions here as ‘someone who...’ or ‘something that...’). This is an elliptical form for (Verb) + (Noun Complement) + 的 *de* + (noun head or agent), e.g.:

- (79) 修車的 (人) *xiū chē de (rén)* (‘fix car *de* [person]’)
= ‘a person who fixes cars’ = ‘auto mechanic’
(80) 裝錢的 (東西) *zhuāng qián de (dōng xi)* (‘hold money *de* thing’)
= ‘a thing that holds money’

Unlike in English, in which the Verb + Noun order is reversed to Noun + Verb for the *-er* forms (e.g. ‘pickpocket’ would become ‘pocket picker’), the Verb + Noun order remains the same for both forms in Chinese. Thus the only step between the noun phrase with a 的 *de* particle and the exocentric compound noun is the presence or absence of 的 *de*, and it is likely that at least some modern exocentric compounds originated from a 的 *de* noun phrase.

It is interesting that some of the very same objects expressed by Verb + Noun function-describing nominal compounds in Spanish and French have isomorphic counterparts in Chinese, e.g.:

- (81) 鎮紙 *zhèn zhǐ* (press-down + paper) = ‘paperweight’
cf. Spanish: *pisapapeles* (treads-on + papers) = ‘paperweight’
French: *presse-papiers* (presses-down + papers) = ‘paperweight’

In Chinese we have none of the verb form, gender, plural marking, or hyphenation variables as in Spanish and French, since Chinese is uninflected, has no grammatical gender, does not have a true system of plurals, and does not use hyphens in the written form of compounds. More attention will be paid in this section to individual compounds and their breakdowns, since this type of compound in Chinese is often more semantically opaque – even to a native speaker – than in e.g. Spanish or French.

There are quite a number of compounds of this type in Chinese which refer to objects featuring some kind of ‘protection’ or ‘padding’. Many of these are generated by the productive verbal element 護 *hù*, which means ‘to protect.’ It will be recalled that the Spanish *guarda-* and French *garde-*, close to the Chinese 護 *hù* both in meaning and function, are highly productive verbal elements. Many of the following are for use in athletics, in which adequate body protection is important.

- (82) 護面 *hù miàn* (protect + face) = ‘protective mask’
(83) 護手 *hù shǒu* (protect + hand) = ‘hand shield’

- (84) 護腿 *hù tuǐ* (protect + leg) = ‘shin guard’
- (85) 護胸 *hù xiōng* (protect + chest) = ‘chest protector’
- (86) 護陰 *hù yīn* (protect + private-parts) = ‘athletic supporter, jock strap’
- (87) 護耳 *hù ěr* (protect + ear) = ‘earflaps, earmuffs’
- (88) 護膝 *hù xī* (protect + kneecap) = ‘knee pads’
- (89) 護岸 *hù àn* (protect + river-bank) = ‘levee, embankment’
- (90) 護軌 *hù guǐ* (protect-from + railroad-track) = ‘guardrail’

Five similar compounds with different verb elements are:

- (91) 墊肩 *diàn jiān* (pad [v.] + shoulder = ‘shoulder pads’
- (92) 綁腿 *bǎng tuǐ* (tie [v.] + leg) = ‘leggings’ (formerly worn by military troops for leg support)
- (93) 束腹 *shù fù* (bind + abdomen) = ‘girdle’
- (94) 束胸 *shù xiōng* (bind + chest) = ‘brassière, bra’
- (95) 蓋頭 *gài tóu* (cover + head) = ‘Turkish style cap’

Four compounds of this type refer to ‘rests’:

- (96) 枕頭 *zhěn tóu* (rest + head) = ‘pillow’
- (97) 扶手 *fú shǒu* (support + hand) = ‘armrest’
- (98) 靠手 *kào shǒu* (lean + hand) = ‘armrest’
- (99) 靠背 *kào bèi* (lean + back) = ‘backrest’

Like the 護 *hù* compounds, these utilitarian objects might be hard to express in a way other than by a functional description. Compare to the French:

- (100) (m-l’) *appui-main* (supports + hand) = ‘handrest’
- (101) (m-l’) *appui-bras* (supports + arm) = ‘armrest’
- (102) (m-l’) *appui-tête* (supports + head) = ‘headrest’

The Chinese word 手 *shǒu* is often used where ‘arm’ might be used in another language, although the basic meaning of 手 *shǒu* is ‘hand.’

While examples (97) and (98) refer to the same object, they are structurally different. 扶手 *fú shǒu* (98) is closer to the French *appui-bras* (supports + arm), in which the unexpressed noun head ‘rest’ is the subject or agent and the ‘hand’ the object or patient. In (98), 靠 *kào* means ‘lean on’, and 靠手 *kào shǒu* means ‘thing to lean one’s arm on’; thus the ‘owner of the hand’ becomes the unexpressed subject or agent; the ‘hand’, the object or patient; and the

‘rest’ an unexpressed prepositional object or locative goal. Example (96) has a structure similar to (97).

Two compounds relate to objects that protect from the wind:

- (103) 屏風 *píng fēng* (shield-from + wind)
(104) 披風 *pī fēng* (disperse + wind) = ‘a cape’

The verb 披 *pī* in (104) has another meaning: ‘to drape on (a piece of clothing)’, which might also be a perceived meaning in the breakdown of this compound; the two meanings tend to run together because of their relatedness in this compound. This second meaning is clearly the only one in:

- (105) 披肩 *pī jiān* (drape-over + shoulder) = ‘shawl’

The following two compounds concern protection from dust:

- (106) 承塵 *chéng chén* (catch + dust) = ‘ceiling’ (i.e. a ‘ceiling’ keeps dust from falling into a room; this is an older form used mainly in written Chinese; cf. French example (78))
(107) 拂塵 *fú chén* (whisk + dust) = ‘featherduster’; also the ‘horsetail whisk’ said to be carried by immortals

The compound:

- (108) 頂針 *dǐng zhēn* (push-up-from-underneath + needle; this object offers ‘protection’ from getting stuck by a needle)

is a basic, functional description of a ‘thimble’, as opposed to the English, which simply states on which finger it is (or once was) worn: the thumb.

An item of riot gear suggests the same period in the history of transportation as the Chinese word for ‘road’ (馬路 *mǎ lù*, horse + road = ‘road, street’):

- (109) 拒馬 *jù mǎ* (repel + horse) = ‘barbed wire barrier’ (i.e. this object provides ‘protection’ from intruding horses – or rioting demonstrators; it could, however, also be that the noun element in this item, ‘horse’, refers to the barriers themselves, comparable to the English *sawhorse*; the compound would thus be interpreted as a (repelling + horse), in which case it would not qualify for inclusion in this compound type.)

Unlike the Spanish examples (see (45) and (46)), Chinese compounds of the type under investigation are generally invariable, i.e. have low or zero commutability; one usually cannot substitute a synonym for either element and still retain the original meaning. For example, the compound:

(110) 調羹 *tiáo gēng* (stir + thick-soup)

describes one of the functions of a ‘spoon’. The forms:

*(111) 調湯 *tiáo tāng* (stir + soup – noun element substitution) and

*(112) 攪羹 *jiǎo gēng* (mix + thick-soup – verb element substitution)

however, may theoretically exist, but do not mean ‘spoon’, and are not even nouns.

Languages with a larger number of such compounds may perhaps offer more flexibility in the surface form of the compounds than a language like Chinese, in which the compounds are fewer and more set in their form. (Note, however, examples (117) and (118)).

The compound:

(113) 點心 *diǎn xīn*

is a very common word in this category. It is better known in the West by its Cantonese form, *dim sum*. 點心 *diǎn xīn* can refer to traditional Chinese pastries, or it may simply mean ‘snack’, i.e. something to tide one over between meals. Some English language Chinese cookbooks give the literal translation of ‘dot hearts’ or ‘something that touches the heart’. We may get more insight into this compound by looking at another expression that uses 點 *diǎn* in the same sense:

(114) 點飢 *diǎn jī* (dot/touch + hunger) = ‘to have a snack to stave off hunger’

點 *diǎn* means to ‘skim’ or, in this case, to eat just enough to rid oneself of the worst hunger pangs, but not to eat until satisfied (cf. English slang *to graze*). 心 *xīn* means ‘heart’, but also refers to the mind, will, and intentions. Since ‘hunger’ is more a perception of the body’s need for food than the actual lack of it, we can interpret 點心 *diǎn xīn* as something that lessens (‘touches’) the will or desire (‘heart’) for food.

Other compounds of this form that refer to foods include:

(115) 下水 *xià shuǐ* (bring-down + water) = ‘offal, innards’ (i.e. internal organs, usually of a chicken or pig, that ‘bring down’ the ‘water’ or liquid wastes of the animal)

- (116) 划水 *huá shuǐ* (paddle + water) = ‘fish tail’ (a fanciful, euphemistic name used in Chinese menu selections, usually in 紅燒划水 *hóng shāo huá shuǐ*, ‘fish tail cooked in brown sauce’)
- (117) 下酒 *xià jiǔ* (bring-down + wine) = ‘snacks eaten while drinking wine’ (to help ‘bring down’ more of the beverage; cf. (115); there is also a headed version of the same item: 下酒菜 *xià jiǔ cài*)
- (118) 按酒 *àn jiǔ* (press-down + wine) = same meaning as for (117); this expression is now seldom used.

The Chinese word for compass is:

- (119) 指南針 *zhǐ nán zhēn* (point + south + needle; the Chinese use the opposite end of a magnetized needle to find south, the direction an emperor’s residence faced, rather than north, as in the West)

This word does not in itself interest us here; but if we remove the final element, 針 *zhēn*, we get:

- (120) 指南 *zhǐ nán* (point + south),

meaning ‘guide’ or ‘guidebook’, a word which does meet our criteria. This is from the extended meaning of ‘(something that) points south’; i.e. helps one to get ‘oriented’ (English: ‘to arrange with reference to the east’) or to get where one wants to go.

The second category of function-describing Verb + Noun exocentric nominal compounds – that of names of certain professions or types of people – depends to a great extent on two productive verb elements, which like 護 *hù* also show some similarity to the French *garde-* (also note (177) through (179) below); and a nominal element, 事 *shì*, a general word for ‘business’, ‘matter(s)’, or ‘affair(s)’.

The first of the verbal elements is 司 *sī* ‘to manage, to control’, as mentioned earlier in this section. Although 司 *sī* is nowhere near as productive as it once was, it still occurs in a number of modern compounds. Probably the two most common examples are:

- (121) 司機 *sī jī* (operate + machine) = ‘chauffeur, driver’
- (122) 司儀 *sī yí* (manage + ceremony) = ‘M.C. (master of ceremonies)’.

司 *sī* also appears in a number of compounds that refer to various professions, some of which are outdated or local usages:

- (123) 司庫 *sī kù* (manage + treasury) = ‘treasurer’
 (124) 司爐 *sī lú* (operate + oven) = ‘furnace stoker’
 (125) 司事 *sī shì* (manage + matter) = ‘clerk’
 (126) 司務 *sī wù* (manage + service) = ‘servant’
 (127) 司藥 *sī yào* (manage + medicine) = ‘pharmacist, apothecary’
 (128) 司帳 *sī zhàng* (manage + account) = ‘cashier’
 (129) 司鑽 *sī zuàn* (operate + drill) = ‘driller’

Two *sī* compounds are currently used in the context of Christian church services:

- (130) 司琴 *sī qín* (operate + musical-instrument) = ‘pianist’, ‘organist’
 (131) 司會 *sī huì* (manage + gathering) = ‘church service leader’ (a lay pastoral assistant)

The list of ancient officials (the 百司 *bǎi sī* ‘one hundred *sī*’ or ‘various officials’) is too long to even begin to list. There is much overlap, too, since many of the examples are merely different names for essentially the same official; different titles were current in different dynasties. Virtually all of these titles are now obsolete and remain in some dictionaries only as artifacts for historical reference. Some examples are:

- (132) 司土 *sī tǔ* (manage + land) = ‘official in charge of equal distribution of land’ (Xia dynasty)
 (133) 司分 *sī fēn* (manage + equinox) = ‘astronomer’ (Zhou)
 (134) 司服 *sī fú* (manage + garment) = ‘official who chooses auspicious garments for the king’ (Zhou)
 (135) 司禮 *sī lǐ* (manage + ceremony) = ‘minister of rites’ (Tang, 618-907 A.D.)

A small number of these compounds, like:

- (136) 司令 *sī lìng* (manage + command) = ‘commanding officer’

have been retained in modern usage.

Two such official titles survive today as two-character family names:

- (137) 司馬 *sī mǎ* (manage + horse) = ‘minister of war’
 (138) 司徒 *sī tú* (manage + disciple) = ‘minister of education’

A number of ancient names for various gods and stars have names similar to the officials’ titles, with 司 *sī*. Gods are often conceived as immortal versions of officials, thus it

is natural that they be identified by characteristic or function, and be assigned this type of compound. Examples:

- (139) 司慎 *sī shèn* (manage + caution) = ‘god of heaven’
(140) 司寒 *sī hán* (manage + cold) = ‘god of the North’.

Stars, like other aspects of nature, tend to be personified and deified, or as in the astrology more familiar in the West, associated with specific aspects of human destiny. Examples:

- (141) 司命 *sī mìng* (manage + life)
(142) 司危 *sī wēi* (manage + danger)
(143) 司怪 *sī guài* (manage + demon).

The other productive verbal element is 領 *lǐng* ‘to lead’, a verb that is close semantically to 司 *sī*. The original meaning of 領 *lǐng* is ‘neck’, and by extension, ‘collar’. The ‘collar’ and ‘sleeves’ are the main parts of a garment that determine its basic form; and the ‘collar and sleeves’ (領袖 *lǐng xiù*) of a group or organization is its ‘leader’. This word does not fit into our category, but with its derived meaning of ‘to lead’, the element 領 *lǐng* is used to form the following compounds, which do meet our requirements:

- (144) 領班 *lǐng bān* (lead + work-team) = ‘foreman’
(145) 領隊 *lǐng duì* (lead + group) = ‘group leader’
(146) 領港 *lǐng gǎng* (lead-in + port) = ‘river pilot’
(147) 領航 *lǐng háng* (lead + ship) = ‘navigator’
(148) 領路 *lǐng lù* (lead + road) = ‘guide’
(149) 領事 *lǐng shì* (lead + business) = ‘consul’

The nominal element 事 *shì* has already appeared in examples (125) and (149) above, and is further used in the following names of professions:

- (150) 參事 *cān shì* (participate-in + affair) = ‘counselor’ (e.g. in the foreign service)
(151) 董事 *dǒng shì* (direct + affair) = ‘member of board of directors’
(152) 幹事 *gàn shì* (perform + business) = ‘executive secretary’
(153) 管事 *guǎn shì* (manage + affair) = ‘manager, steward’
(154) 理事 *lǐ shì* (manage + affair) = ‘board member, trustee’
(155) 推事 *tuī shì* (deduce + affair) = ‘judge’
(156) 通事 *tōng shì* (put-through + matter) = ‘interpreter’ (now seldom used)

Note the bureaucratic nature of the ‘affairs’ referred to by 事 *shì*.

Below follows a list of miscellaneous names of professions or of certain types of people, again not exhaustive, strikingly in accord with those we have already seen, especially in Spanish:

- (157) 當局 *dāng jú* (act-in-capacity-of + office) = ‘authority’
(158) 將軍 *jiāng jūn* (manage + army) = ‘general’
(159) 參謀 *cān móu* (participate-in + stratagem) = ‘staff officer’
(160) 幹部 *gàn bù* (manage + section) = ‘cadre’
(161) 監工 *jiān gōng* (supervise + work) = ‘foreman’
(162) 捉刀 *zhuō dāo* (hold + knife) = ‘ghost writer’ (reduced from 捉刀人 *zhuō dāo rén*, ‘hold + knife + person’; this formerly meant ‘armed guard’, but by at least the 17th century the compound had assumed its current meaning. This compound apparently suggests that the true writer of a work, rather than the nominal author, ‘holds’ the ‘knife’ of power or achievement)
(163) 跟班 *gēn bān* (follow + retinue) = formerly, ‘a footman or servant in a yamen’ (public official’s office); now ‘a tag-along helper’ (used tongue-in-cheek)
(164) 聽差 *tīng chāi* (comply-with + order) = ‘a pageboy’ (sometimes called *dāng chāi* [act-in-capacity-of + order])
(165) 管家 *guǎn jiā* (manage + household) = ‘housekeeper’ (cf. (153) and (166)).
(166) 當家 *dāng jiā* (manage + household) = ‘household manager’
(167) 跑街 *pǎo jiē* (run + street) = ‘errand boy’
(168) 跑堂 *pǎo táng* (run + hall) ‘waiter’
(169) 填房 *tián fáng* (fill-in + room) = ‘a second wife’ (i.e. one to fill the vacancy left by the first)
(170) 知己 *zhī jǐ* (know + self) = ‘bosom friend’ (i.e. a friend who ‘knows one’ very intimately)
(171) 知音 *zhī yīn* (know + sound) = ‘a bosom friend’ (same as preceding; alludes to a person who immediately understood the zither music played by another)

The verb 知 *zhī* of (170) and (171) was formerly rather productive in this compound type, but in its older sense of ‘to administer’, ‘to be in charge’, rather than ‘to know’. It occurred in the titles of various officials – now all obsolete – much like the 司 *sī* compounds, e.g.

- (172) 知州 *zhī zhōu* (administer + prefecture) = ‘governor of a *zhou* ‘prefect’
(173) 知縣 *zhī xiàn* (administer + county) = ‘governor of a county, county magistrate’

(now called 縣長 *xiàn zhǎng*)

(174) 知府 *zhī fǔ* (administer + *fu* [administrative unit below county]) = ‘magistrate of a *fu*’

(175) 知寨 *zhī zhài* (administer + encampment) = ‘person in charge of an encampment (e.g. of brigands)’

Finally, the subcategory of ‘various living things’ expressed in this type of compound in Spanish and French has an equivalent in Chinese, illustrated in the following examples, of which two are plants and two animals:

(176) 忍冬 *rěn dōng* (endure + winter) = ‘honeysuckle’ (a plant that can withstand low temperatures)

(177) 防風 *fáng fēng* (guard-against + wind) = ‘the *-fangfeng* plant (*Saposhnikovia divaricata* – a plant that acts as a windbreak)

(178) 守宮 *shǒu gōng* (guard + palace) = ‘gecko’ (which protects the place it inhabits by eating insect pests)

(179) 守瓜 *shǒu guā* (guard + melon) = ‘beetle’ (*Aulacophora femoralis*)

Conclusion

We have dealt in this paper with only a small number of the many examples of the type of compound under study, exocentric Verb + Noun function-describing nominal compounds, especially in the cases of Spanish and French. From the examples cited, however, a clear pattern has emerged of certain categories of referents that are sometimes expressed in this type of compound: utilitarian objects, profession names or names of certain types of people, and various living things. Adopting a comparative approach has helped expand and confirm our findings; important generalizations might have been missed if only one language had been studied.

A recently coined lexical item can provide a ready example of modern productivity of this compound type. The item is a ‘carrier sheet’, a stiff sheet of paper with a clear plastic film folded over the top, used to send nonstandard-sized documents by fax. It is translated into a Verb + Noun function-describing compound in both Spanish (*portapapel* – carries + paper) and French (*porte-document* – carries + document), supporting our observation that this compound type is still a commonly used method of naming functional objects in these two languages. The Chinese translation, however, is 夾套 *jiá tào*, ‘enclosing cover’ – an Adjective + Noun rather than Verb + Noun compound – reflecting the much lower productivity of the exocentric Verb + Noun nominal compound type in modern Mandarin.

This compound type is also common in Romance languages other than French and Spanish, such as Italian (e.g. *apriscatole* – opens + cans = ‘can opener’, *asciuga-capelli* – dry

+ hair = ‘hair drier’) and Portuguese (e.g. *afia-lapis* – sharpens + pencil = ‘pencil sharpener’, *porta-novas* – brings + news = ‘newsmonger’). It is possible that a model for this compound type was inherited from their common ancestor language, since the compound type did occur in Latin (Comrie 1990:201), apparently based on a Greek model, but in Noun + Verb form. This suggests a historical process which merits a separate study. It seems clear that borrowing among the Romance languages, particularly from French (e.g. Spanish compounds of this type with the verbal element *porta-* tend to be modified French loans), and analogical formation also played key roles in the expansion of this compound type.

We may well ask: in what kinds of languages does this compound type tend to thrive? Bauer (1978) notes that this compound type is rare in Germanic languages such as German and Danish, and that there are only a few dozen examples left in English. Does that mean that English and German belong to some language type that does not favor the development of this compound type? Or was it more or less coincidental that the type faded out after a period of limited development in English? Romanian is a Romance language, and while it has a number of French borrowings of this compound type, it does not seem to have developed its own native version of this compounding pattern, suggesting that membership in e.g. the Romance branch of languages does not imply automatic adoption of this compound type. Similar borrowings from French of this type of compound occur even in non-Indo-European languages such as Turkish, which is SOV.

Does a compound type need to first gradually establish a foothold for itself before it can be freely productive and develop? Our examples would seem to support such a hypothesis, as does Aitchison (1991:92-101). But how does it begin, and what determines whether it can successfully establish itself? Again, further comparative work would have to be done in many other languages representing diverse language families and typologies in order to answer these questions.

The examples of this compound type cited so far come from languages which are basically SVO. Comrie (1989:216ff) has observed that the syntax of a language tends to be reflected in its morphology. If we had included SOV languages in our survey, we would have discovered some with a similar compound type, but with the Verb + Noun order generally reversed, as in Latin and Greek.

Burmese is an SOV language in which the type of compound under study is quite common. The work for ‘cook’, for example, is *htamin-hce* – (rice + cook [v.] = ‘one who cooks rice’); ‘pickpocket’ is *hkapai-hnai* – (pocket + dip) = ‘one who dips in pockets’; and ‘eraser’ is *hkeh-pye* – (lead [n.] + erase) = ‘something that erases lead’. Modern Persian or Farsi, an Indo-European SOV language, also has words of this type in the Noun + Verb format like Burmese, e.g. *ashpaz* (thick-soup + cook) = ‘cook, chef’, *jibbor* (pocket + take-away) = ‘pickpocket’, and *badbezan* (wind + hit) = ‘fan’. Thus word order typology seems to be the deciding factor in the ordering of the elements in this compound type.

In this study, we have treated this compound type relatively thoroughly in only three languages, so we are in no position to posit any linguistic universals. However, the consistency of tendencies across both closely related and unrelated languages strongly suggests that this compound type merits further examination in other languages of all word order typologies. Such an examination might provide additional insights relevant to the study of language universals, word order typology, comparative morphology, and the interrelationships among the three.

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Chinese abstract 中文摘要

「動一名」異心複合詞之研究

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西、法、漢諸語中都有一種類似的異心「動一名」複合詞：第一個成分是及物或不及物動詞，第二個則是這個動詞的名詞補語；但此補語非「中心名詞」(noun head)。譬如「調羹」所指的是「可以用來調羹的《器具》」而不是「羹」。雖然西、法、漢語屬兩個不同的語系（印歐、漢藏語系），但此類複合詞的結構卻完全相同，所指的對象易極為相近；即：（一）實用的日常物品，如「鎖紙」、「扶手」等；（二）職稱，如「司機」、「推事」等；以及（三）動植物的名稱。因為本篇只探討此類複合詞在這三個語言理的情形，所以無法提出相關的「普遍現象」(language universal)；不過，根據這三個語言的觀察，或許我們可以這麼說：在常用這種構詞方式的語言中，有的事物（即有凸出功能或特徵者）與職稱，以此類複合詞表現出來的機率高於非此類事物與職稱。因西、法、漢等語皆屬 SVO（主—動—賓）型語言，所以動名詞詞序也相同；如舉例自具有詞類複合詞的 SOV 型語言，則其詞序將反轉為「名—動」。由此可知，一個語言的句法規則亦反映在其構詞模式中。