

COMPOUNDING WORDS IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE LANGUAGES

Nguyen Thanh Thao, Vuong Thi Hai Yen

Hanoi Metropolitan University

Abstract: *The research clearly outlines some brief information about the structure of compounding between English and Vietnamese to find out its similarities and differences in both languages. In addition, the factors can be used in the contrastive analysis of compounding between the two languages. Learning the foundations of language, understanding how words fit together, and looking at the meaning behind them helps us get a full picture of how language works. It's like uncovering the rules that guide how we talk and write. Beyond the rules, we also get to explore how people use language in creative and unique ways. By studying these basic elements, we discover the interesting and imaginative aspects of how we communicate. This kind of understanding makes language learning more enjoyable and shows us the diverse ways people express themselves.*

Key words: *compounding, contrastive analysis, differences, English, similarities, Vietnamese.*

Nhận bài ngày 10.02.2024; gửi phản biện, chỉnh sửa và duyệt đăng ngày 30.06.2024

Liên hệ tác giả: Vương Thị Hải Yến; Email: yenvth@daihocthudo.edu.vn

1. INTRODUCTION

Compound words serve as crucial elements in human comprehension, expression, and communication. They contribute significantly to enriching vocabulary, conveying precise meanings, diversifying expressions, and tailoring language for specific domains, thereby enhancing communication flexibility. Moreover, compound words play a pivotal role in reflecting cultural aspects and fostering creative thinking.

In the realm of education, especially in students' language development, compounding plays a vital role. It actively supports the comprehensive enhancement of language skills, including reading and writing proficiency.

Throughout the process of learning English, learners globally, including those in Vietnam, often face challenges in acquiring a vast vocabulary. It is this recognition of the challenges involved that led the writers to choose the topic of identifying similarities and differences between compound words in English and Vietnamese. This exploration aims to shed light on the intricate nature of compound words and how they contribute to language acquisition for learners in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

Linguistic studies delve into the intricate ways in which language forms meaning, particularly through the combination of vocabulary. This exploration offers a profound understanding of the structures and patterns that contribute to the richness of expression and

communication. On the practical side, language applications involve the development of tools such as machine translation and search tools. These applications leverage linguistic insights to create efficient and effective tools that facilitate communication and information retrieval in various contexts. Furthermore, studying how languages work, especially when comparing English and Vietnamese, goes beyond just understanding the words. It helps us explore and learn about the cultures connected to these languages. By comparing the two, we discover subtle cultural details hidden in how people express themselves. This, in turn, gives us a better overall picture of the cultural settings where these languages are used. In the context of education, these linguistic and cultural insights find practical application in language teaching. By incorporating a comprehensive analysis of language structures and cultural elements, educators can tailor teaching methods to enhance students' language acquisition, fostering a more profound appreciation for linguistic diversity and cultural nuances.

Learning the foundations of language, understanding how words fit together, and looking at the meaning behind them helps us get a full picture of how language works. It's like uncovering the rules that guide how we talk and write. Beyond the rules, we also get to explore how people use language in creative and unique ways. By studying these basic elements, we discover the interesting and imaginative aspects of how we communicate. This kind of understanding makes language learning more enjoyable and shows us the diverse ways people express themselves.

In this article, the writers are not just looking at how words are combined in English and Vietnamese; they are also checking out other things that are related to their main topic. The authors are systematically delving into additional domains surrounding the central concept to attain a more comprehensive understanding. Therefore, it is not only about compound words but also about different interesting aspects connected to their study. To compare and contrast compound words between English and Vietnamese, the writers use the Contrastive Analysis approach.

2. CONTENT

2.1. An overview on previous studies related to compounding

2.1.1. *In the world*

According to “Word knowledge and Word usage” by Vito Pirrelli, Ingo Plag, Wolfgang U. Dressler (2020), compound words are like building blocks of language, and they are super important for how we use language and understand it. When we deal with compound words, our brains think about the whole word as one thing, but at the same time, we also think about the smaller parts that make up the word. It's like seeing both the big picture and the little pieces. This way of dealing with compound words helps us express ourselves better and shows how language is always changing and adapting [1].

In addition, the research was conducted by Danin Christianto (2019) in his research entitled “Compound words in English”, the study looked into different kinds of English compound words and the types of words they create. The initial findings revealed that English compounds fall into three categories: ones where one part is the main element (endocentric), ones where the meaning is not in the individual parts (exocentric), and ones that join two equal parts (copulative). Another result showed that the words formed through compounding can be nouns, verbs, or adjectives [2].

Furthermore, in the research paper "Experience with compound words influences their processing: An eye movement investigation with English compound words," Barbara J Juhasz (2016) demonstrated that individuals' abilities to recognize compound words is affected by their prior experiences and familiarities with those words. Increased exposure and familiarity generally contribute to improving the speed and efficiency of recognizing and understanding words. This phenomenon can be clarified by the notion that our past interactions with words influence our capacity to quickly comprehend and process them. For instance, if an individual has regularly encountered specific compound words in their reading or daily activities, they have probably established a stronger mental representation, or "memory trace" for those words. Consequently, once they come across these familiar compound words, their minds can more effectively recall and grasp the intended meaning [3].

In the study titled "Bilingual Reading of Compound Words," In Yeong Ko; Min Wang; and Say Young Kim (2010) explored whether bilingual readers engage the elements of compound words in one language when dealing with compound words in another language through decomposition. The researchers carried out two experiments involving a lexical decision task with adult bilingual readers proficient in Korean and English. The findings supplied supporting evidence for the processes of morphological decomposition and cross-language activation during the bilingual reading of compound words [4].

Moreover, according to "Generation of Compound Words in Statistical Machine Translation into Compounding Languages" by Sara Stymne; Nicola Cancedda; and Lars Ahrenberg (2012), the researchers examined different methods of separating and joining compound words when translating into languages that use closed compounds. By exploring various strategies, the authors aimed to enhance the ability of statistical machine translation systems to deal with the intricacies of compounding languages [5].

These studies collectively illustrate the complexity and importance of compound words in both linguistic theory and practical application. Compound words are not only crucial for language comprehension but also for language evolution, as they allow speakers to create new expressions that fit changing contexts. From an educational standpoint, understanding compound word formation can enhance language learning and teaching. In addition, the role of familiarity in processing compound words underscores the need for frequent exposure to new vocabulary to develop linguistic proficiency. The cross-linguistic findings for bilingual readers indicate that compound words offer a fascinating area of study in multilingual contexts, suggesting that our brains may activate multiple linguistic systems when interpreting compound words. This knowledge can be beneficial for designing language education programs, particularly for bilingual students. Furthermore, advancements in machine translation that focus on compound words could greatly enhance communication in global contexts where language barriers persist. Overall, these studies underline the adaptive nature of language and how compound words are integral to its development and understanding.

2.1.2. In Vietnam

Hoang Trong Canh (2020) has highlighted in the research "Giáo trình từ vựng tiếng Việt" (Vietnamese Vocabulary Textbook) that the fundamental principle governing the construction of compound words is the semantic association rule. Therefore, to form

compound words, the root elements must have meanings. Each type of semantic combination will give us a specific type of compound word with distinctive semantic characteristics. There are two basic types of semantic compounds: the type that combines non-equivalent elements, where one element signifies the type and the other signifies the characteristic of that type and the type that combines equivalent elements in both grammar and meaning [6].

In the words of Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (2021) in the book “Ngữ pháp tiếng Việt” (Vietnamese Grammar), the research paper has identified two types of compound words. These are parallel compounds and subordinate compounds. In parallel compounds, each constituent is a meaningful element, and the two elements are connected in an equal relationship. Therefore, the order of the two elements in a parallel compound can be changed. On the other hand, in subordinate compounds, each constituent is meaningful, but the main element can function as a word, while the subordinate element may not have grammatical status [7].

Additionally, as outlined by Diep Quang Ban and Hoang Van Thung (2022) in “Ngữ pháp tiếng Việt” (Vietnamese Grammar), the authors have clarified why the compounding method has been widely understood in recent times. This is because the characteristics of the affix have not been clearly defined, and there is a phenomenon of changing states of meaning within the compound in various directions. Additionally, the authors have also clearly defined the compound word as a word containing two (or more) morphemes, generally without the phenomenon of "semantic harmony created by phonetics" [8].

Besides, according to the insights presented in Vu Thi An's work, "Giáo trình cơ sở tiếng Việt ở tiểu học" (Elementary Vietnamese Foundation Textbook) (2022), the author has identified numerous methods for distinguishing compound words. Regarding the grammatical relationship between morphemes, compound words can be divided into coordinate compound words and subordinate compound words. Additionally, based on the semantic relationship between morphemes, compound words are categorized into two types: compound words of aggregation and compound words of classification. Consequently, the author presents the structure of compound words in the context of teaching vocabulary in elementary school [9].

Furthermore, the research “Characteristics of compound words repeat meaning and the application of teaching in schools” conducted by Le Duc Luan; Pham Ngoc Doan; Ho Quach Trieu Dong and Tran Thi Hien (2019) on isomorphic compound words aimed to contribute to a precise differentiation among diverse categories of compound words, discerning the distinctions between compound words with repeated meanings and those with repeated syllables. This effort aided educators and learners in dissecting the significance of these compound words within educational materials. Moreover, the author recognized that the recurrence of compound word meanings stems from linguistic interactions between nations, regions, and across different temporal contexts in the historical evolution of the Vietnamese language [10].

These studies emphasize the complexity and richness inherent in Vietnamese compound words, showcasing their extensive semantic and grammatical diversity. By delving into the various ways compound words are formed and categorized, these research efforts shed light on how meaning and structure interact within the Vietnamese language.

Understanding these distinctions is crucial for effective teaching and learning, particularly in educational settings where a clear grasp of compound word formation can significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition and linguistic proficiency. The evolving nature of compound words, coupled with their significant role in language development, highlights the importance of precise classification and tailored instructional approaches. This is especially relevant in elementary education, where foundational language skills are established. Effective instruction in compound words not only aids in language comprehension but also supports cognitive development by helping students grasp the nuances of how words combine and change meaning. Thus, incorporating detailed studies of compound words into the curriculum can enrich educational practices and foster a deeper understanding of language mechanics among young learners.

2.2. Theoretical background

2.2.1. *Compounding in English*

In the research paper "Morphological Theory and the Morphology of English" by Jan Don (2014), the author contended that the creation of new lexemes involves the combination of two free morphemes to form a compound word. This particular method of word formation is commonly known as compounding. This perspective aligns with the understanding that language evolves not only through the introduction of entirely new words but also through the creative combination of familiar elements [11].

Timothy Shopen (1985), in the book "Language Typology and Syntactic Description", claimed that compounding is a process of creating words by combining two or more potentially independent forms, often from open lexical classes like nouns or verbs. This word-formation technique differs from forming phrases in various aspects. Nominal compounding generates new nouns, and verb compounding produces new verbs. Compounding is not limited to specific word classes and can occur in various languages, with the potential for compounds to become lexicalized, leading to a less transparent structure. While compounding is present in languages of all types, it is particularly prevalent in isolating languages [12].

Additionally, according to Ririn Dwi Cahyanti (2016) in the study "Compound Words Used in Stephenie Meyer's Twilight," a compound word is like a special word made by joining smaller words together. This group is much smaller than phrasal words, which are like words but have the structure of phrases. Compounds are usually easy to recognize because they're different from phrases that have two important words. compound word is like "basketball," where "basket" and "ball" come together to make a new word. On the other hand, phrasal words, like "pick up" or "break down," are like small groups of words acting as a single unit [13].

As outlined by Rochelle Lieber and Pavol Stekauer (2009) in "The Oxford Handbook of Compounding", creating compound words means putting together two or more simple words to make a single unit that makes sense both in how it is structured and what it means, especially in a specific situation. It is crucial to think about the context, as compounds should not be looked at alone as just grammar or vocabulary things. The writer says it is easier to understand compounds when we see them as important pieces of specific, context-driven phrases [14].

According to Valerie Adams (1973) in "An Introduction to Modern English Word-formation", a "compound word" is usually formed by combining two separate words in a fixed manner. Despite being composed of two elements, compounds share traits with individual words: their parts cannot be separated by other elements, and their sequence remains constant. For instance, consider the word "lipstick," where "lip" and "stick" come together to form a compound with a fixed structure. The elements "lip" and "stick" cannot be rearranged, highlighting the characteristic nature of compound words [15].

The research on compound words underscores their pivotal role in language development and evolution. Compounding, the process of combining free morphemes to form new words, is a fundamental mechanism through which languages grow and adapt. This technique of word formation reflects the creative and dynamic nature of language, enabling speakers to generate novel expressions from familiar elements. Studies reveal that compounding is not just a linguistic phenomenon but also a key aspect of how languages expand and diversify, particularly in isolating languages where this process is notably prevalent. Understanding compounding provides insights into how words are structured and used, highlighting the intricate relationship between grammar, vocabulary, and context. This knowledge is crucial for both theoretical linguistics and practical applications, including language teaching and lexicography, as it illustrates how languages innovate and respond to changing communication needs.

2.2.2. *Compounding in Vietnamese*

According to "Giáo trình cơ sở tiếng Việt ở tiểu học" (Elementary Vietnamese Foundation Textbook) by Vu Thi An (2022), compound words are words formed by combining two or more morphemes, and their meaning is a harmonized combination of all the constituent morphemes. I take the compound word "xe buýt" (bus) as an example. In this compound, "xe" means vehicle, and "buýt" refers to the concept of public transportation. Combining these morphemes results in the compound word "xe buýt," representing a harmonized combination that specifically refers to a bus—a vehicle used for public transportation [9].

Moreover, drawing from Vu Tien Dung's perspectives in "Giáo trình tiếng Việt" (Vietnamese Textbook) (2021), compound words are the result of the compounding method—a technique for forming new words by combining two or more morphemes [16].

In addition to this, in the study titled "Ngữ pháp tiếng Việt" (Vietnamese Grammar) by Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (2021), compound words can be composed of two words, or they can be made up of multiple words. They are words constructed through the method of semantic coordination between two words used as building elements. An example of a compound word in Vietnamese composed of two words is "mặt trời" (sun). In this compound: "mặt" means face or surface and "trời" means sky. Together, "mặt trời" forms a compound word meaning the sun—a combination of "face" and "sky" referring to the celestial body that lights up the sky [7].

In the words of Hoang Trong Canh (2020) from his work "Giáo trình từ vựng tiếng Việt" (Vietnamese Vocabulary Textbook), compounding is a method by which language affects two or more morphemes (sounds), causing them to combine according to specific semantic rules to create new words. Due to the association based on semantic rules, the root morphemes must independently carry meaning when combined with each other [6].

Diep Quang Ban and Hoang Van Thung (2022), in "Ngữ pháp tiếng Việt," (Vietnamese Grammar) emphasized that compound words are words that consist of two (or more) morphemes, and generally do not exhibit "phonemic coordination creating meaning." The majority of Vietnamese compound words are composed of two syllables, where they manifest all the typical characteristics of compound words in general. Therefore, our examination will primarily focus on those compound words consisting of two syllables [8].

The research highlights the sophisticated nature of Vietnamese compound words, illustrating their importance in understanding the structure and development of the language. The systematic combination of morphemes to form compound words reveals how meaning is constructed and conveyed through specific linguistic rules. This complexity underscores the value of studying compound words for both theoretical and practical purposes. In educational settings, a deep understanding of how these compounds are formed and how their meanings are derived can significantly improve teaching methods and curriculum design. This knowledge not only aids in effective language instruction but also enhances students' grasp of linguistic concepts, providing them with a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of Vietnamese language mechanics. Overall, the insights from these studies emphasize the need for focused research and teaching strategies to fully appreciate and utilize the intricacies of compound words in language education.

2.2.3. Contrastive Analysis of Compound Words: Exploring Key Factors

In the book "Language Typology and Syntactic Description" by Timothy Shopen (1985), the author identified four crucial factors in the analysis of compound words, covering morphological, syntactic, semantic, and phonological aspects [12].

Additionally, as outlined by Rochelle Lieber and Pavol Stekauer (2009) in "The Oxford Handbook of Compounding", the author presented the following three criteria: phonological criteria, syntactic criteria, and inflection and linking elements [14].

Besides, according to "Vấn đề phân loại từ theo cấu tạo ở tiểu học" (The issue of word classification by structure in elementary school) by Le Van Trung (2015), the author focused on two criteria: the semantic and the syntactic [17].

Moreover, drawing from Vu Thi An's perspectives in "Giáo trình cơ sở tiếng Việt ở tiểu học" (Elementary Vietnamese Foundation Textbook) (2022), the author also points out that the factors under investigation for compound words are primarily grammatical and semantic [9].

In essence, there are numerous criteria and factors that authors analyze and explicitly point out in compound words in both English and Vietnamese. However, due to limitations in time and research capabilities, the authors will focus solely on two specific factors present in both languages concerning compound words: semantic and syntactic criteria.

The exploration of compound words through various criteria—such as morphological, syntactic, semantic, and phonological—reveals the multifaceted nature of language analysis. While different studies emphasize various aspects, the focus on semantic and syntactic criteria proves particularly effective for understanding compound words in both English and Vietnamese. These criteria are essential for grasping how meanings are constructed and how words are structured within sentences. By concentrating on these two factors, researchers and educators can streamline their analysis and gain clearer insights

into the functional roles of compound words. This targeted approach not only simplifies the study of complex linguistic phenomena but also enhances teaching methods and learning outcomes by providing a focused framework for understanding how compounds operate within different languages.

3. CONCLUSION

The analysis of compound words in both English and Vietnamese reveals their intricate nature and the diverse criteria used to study them, including semantic, syntactic, morphological, and phonological aspects. The data from various studies highlight the complexity of compound words and underscore the importance of semantic and syntactic criteria in understanding their formation and function. By focusing on these two specific factors, researchers and educators can gain a clearer insight into how compound words are constructed and how they operate within sentences. To enhance the practical application of these research findings, it is recommended that educational programs integrate a focus on semantic and syntactic criteria when teaching compound words. This approach will provide students with a solid foundation in understanding the structural and meaning-related aspects of compound words, thereby improving their linguistic skills and comprehension. Additionally, further research should continue to explore the interplay between different criteria to offer a more comprehensive view of compound word formation and usage across languages.

REFERENCES

1. Pirrelli, V., Plag, I. & Dressler, W. (2020), *Word Knowledge and Word Usage: A Cross-Disciplinary Guide to the Mental Lexicon*, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110440577>.
2. Christianto, D. (2019), Compound words in English. *A Journal on Language and Language Teaching*, 28(1), 27-36. doi.org/10.24071/llt.2020.230103.
3. Juhasz, B. J. (2016), Experience with compound words influences their processing: An eye movement investigation with English compound words, *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 71(1), 103-112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17470218.2016.1253756>.
4. Ko, I.Y. & Wang, M. & Kim, S. Y. (2010), Bilingual Reading of Compound Words, *Journal of psycholinguistic research*, 40(1), 49-73. 10.1007/s10936-010-9155-x.
5. Stymne, S. & Cancedda, N. & Ahrenberg, L. (2012), Generation of Compound Words in Statistical Machine Translation into Compounding Languages, *Computational Linguistics*, 39(4), 1067-1108. 10.1162/COLI a 00162.
6. Hoang, T. C. (2020), *Giáo trình từ vựng tiếng Việt (Vietnamese Vocabulary Textbook)*, Vinh University Publishing House.
7. Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (2021), *Ngữ pháp tiếng Việt (Vietnamese Grammar)*. Social Sciences Publishing House.
8. Diep, Q. B. & Hoang, V. T. (2022). *Ngữ pháp tiếng Việt (Vietnamese Grammar)*, Vietnam Education Publishing House.
9. Vu, T. A. (2022), *Giáo trình cơ sở tiếng Việt ở tiểu học (Elementary Vietnamese Foundation Textbook)*, Ho Chi Minh University of Education Publishing House.

10. Le, D. L. & Pham, N. D. & Ho, Q. T. D. & Tran, T. H. (2019), The elements structuring in compound word repeat meaning: Characteristics of compound words repeat meaning and the application of teaching in schools, *Language and Life*.
11. Don, J. (2014), *Morphological Theory and the Morphology of English*, Edinburgh University Press.
12. Shopen, T. (1985), *Language Typology and Syntactic Description*, Cambridge University Press.
13. Cahyanti, R. D. (2016), Compound Words Used in Stephenie Meyer's Twilight, *Journal on English as a Foreign Language*, 6(1), 59-70.
14. Lieber, R. & Stekauer, P. (2009), *The Oxford Handbook of Compounding*. 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199695720.001.0001.
15. Adams, V. (1973), *An Introduction to Modern English Word-formation*, London: Longman.
16. Vu, T. D. (2021), *Giáo trình tiếng Việt (Vietnamese Textbook)*, Vietnam National University Press, Hanoi.
17. Le, V. T. (2015), Vấn đề phân loại từ theo cấu tạo của tiểu học (The issue of word classification by structure in elementary school), *Ho Chi Minh City University of Education Journal of Science*, 6(71), pp.186-191.

TỪ GHÉP TRONG TIẾNG ANH VÀ TIẾNG VIỆT

Tóm tắt: Bài nghiên cứu trình bày một số thông tin ngắn gọn về cấu trúc của việc tạo từ ghép giữa tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt để tìm hiểu về sự tương đồng và khác biệt giữa hai ngôn ngữ này. Ngoài ra, các yếu tố có thể được sử dụng trong so sánh đối chiếu của việc tạo từ ghép giữa hai ngôn ngữ cũng được đề cập đến. Việc nắm bắt cơ sở của ngôn ngữ, hiểu cách từ ngữ kết hợp và nhìn nhận ý nghĩa phía sau của việc này giúp hiểu rõ ngôn ngữ hoạt động như thế nào. Điều này tương tự như việc khám phá ra những quy tắc hướng dẫn kỹ năng nói và viết của tiếng Việt. Vượt ra khỏi những quy tắc đó, cách sử dụng ngôn ngữ bằng sự sáng tạo và độc đáo đã tạo ra cơ hội khám phá. Nghiên cứu những yếu tố cơ bản này giúp khám phá những khía cạnh thú vị và sáng tạo qua giao tiếp. Sự hiểu biết như vậy giúp quá trình học ngôn ngữ trở nên thú vị hơn và cho thấy sự đa dạng trong diễn đạt bản thân của mỗi cá nhân.

Từ khóa: Từ ghép, so sánh đối chiếu, sự khác biệt, tiếng Anh, sự tương đồng, tiếng Việt.