

**WILL LINGUISTS EVER ARRIVE AT AN AGREEMENT
ABOUT THE COMPOUND STATUS?
(A few remarks with special regard to Spanish compounds.)**

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The title of the present modest contribution suggests that the concept of ‘compound’ is not understood and explained unanimously in respective languages. Laymen, and very often even linguists, have taken the term for granted, assuming that a compound is ‘a composite word’, the meaning of which can be sensed from the Latin *componere*. Nevertheless, this etymology, ubiquitous as it were, takes on many lacunae once the process of compounding is judged more closely by those who distinguish between composition and derivation. In order to illustrate, in Czech, for instance, the composition proper is due to fairly rigid rules, which, on the one hand, make it necessary to set off another specific category of ‘compounded words’, referred to as ‘spřežky’, e.g., *zeměkoule* [the Globe], and on the other hand, they determine certain frequently used, recursive constituents as suffixes and prefixes rather than genuine compound elements, e.g., *zeměpis* [geography], *veletrh* [trade fair], and similarly *dějepis* [history], *dluhopis* [debenture]; *velehory* [alpine mountains], *velezrada* [high treason], etc. As far as German is concerned, composition is regarded traditionally as a subcategory of so-called ‘extension’ (Erweiterung), its other subcategory being derivation (Ableitung). And again, as in Czech compounds, certain ‘fuzzy’ points which militate against leading clear-cut boundaries make linguists establish a transitional word-formation process, bordering on derivation, referred to as Zusammenbildung, e.g., *Bundestag* [Assembly]. Speakers of English seem to be very often convinced that compounds are expressions consisting of two or more originally independent words which are spelt solid or with a hyphen between them, e.g., *goldfish*, *old-fashioned*. The problems they face, however, are basically of two kinds: there are expressions we regard as compounds and yet they are spelt as separate constituent words, e.g., *common sense*; and there is hardly any prescribed template (besides the dictionary entry?) to tell which way the respective ‘compounds’ are to be spelt. It seems then, and quite rightly, that it is the spoken form which will qualify a combination of words for a compound. Namely, we tend to assume, willingly enough, that compounds unlike free syntactic junctions are bound up with one word stress, placed initially, into the bargain, e.g., *'grindstone*. Unfortunately, also characteristic for certain compounds is so-called double stress, e.g., *for 'get-me- 'not*, and very often stress positions alternate, e.g., *a 'dead 'letter* vs. *a 'dead-letter 'office*.

Compounds in Spanish

While our potential readers will be informed fairly well on the situation in the aforementioned languages, they may like to know more about compounds in Spanish, namely, in a language typologically different from English and Czech. People tend to accept the idea that compounding in Spanish is less productive than in German. It is difficult to say, since we do not have any reliable statistical data, and besides, we would have to specify what in fact is meant by productivity – is it the absolute number of compounds in the lexicon, or the ways of composition? There are quite a few compounds which people ignorant of varieties of the

standard Spanish language and / or professional jargon would hardly understand. It is true, however, that in some cases their meanings are predictable, and good dictionaries will also help. Nevertheless, difficulties that even native speakers sometimes face are of different characteristics: in the first place, it is the meaning proper of the Spanish (often unusual) compounds, reflecting specific referents of the world, while in German we come across rather long concatenations of primary independent words (lexemes), the mutual ordering of which in terms of determination has to be solved in mind; let us compare, e.g., *anquialmendrado*; *Arbeitsfoerderungsgesetznovellierung*. Needless to say that in casual speech periphrases are recommended, by means of syntactical phrases, e.g., *un hombre ojinegro* → *un hombre de ojos negros* [a black-eyed man]. The above-mentioned high ‘productivity’ should be understood in such a way that we distinguish between the Spanish expression ‘repetición’ as sometimes used in this connection and the generally well-known (English) concept of ‘recursiveness’. It means practically that in Spanish, unlike in German, piling up of elements of the potential compound is rather an exceptional case, e.g., *parabrisas* → *limpiaparabrisas* [car windshield wiper]. However, creating (generating) new and new compounds is practically an unlimited process, but always and strictly under the conditions which are given by the current working of the language system, including the elements, features and phenomena inherited from Latin and / or borrowed (exceptionally) from dialects. We can expect, quite justly, that there must be certain constraints imposed upon the ways through which Spanish compounds can be formed. Yet what actually do linguists mean by a compound?

In *Nueva Gramática* (2005: 169) a very short definition is offered: ‘Dos o más palabras pueden entrar en la formación de una palabra.’ [Two or more words can enter a formation of one word.] Lozano (1993: 205) seems to be more explicit and more precise, speaking of ‘los lexemas componentes que funcionan como una sola unidad prosódica, ortográfica, morfológica y de significado...’ [...composite lexemes which function as one single prosodic, orthographic, morphological and meaningful unit...] And in search for a certain classification, Bosque & Demonte (2000: 4761) have the following to say:

‘Formalmente, las propiedades que definen compuestos léxicos y compuestos sintagmáticos serán las que definan, respectivamente, su integridad léxica y su fijación sintáctica.’ [Formally, the properties which are to define lexical compounds and syntagmatic compounds will be those that define, respectively, their lexical integrity and syntactic unity.]

Let us note that, on the one hand, to operate with the notion ‘palabra’ [word] is not a right way of rendering Spanish compounds (and hardly in any other language, either), but, on the other hand, we must admit that it will be possible to treat at least some syntactic junctions, namely phrases, as ‘compuestos imperfectos’ (imperfect compounds). In principle, however, the claimed independence of ‘word’ does not hold in many a case: reminding us of similar phonetic changes in Czech and English, *pelirrojo* (pelo → peli-) [of red hair], for instance, will be a good proof of that (cf. *vodovod* [water main], *Anglo-Saxon*). Moreover, such changes on the morphemic suture, too, may bring about changes in the number of syllables, as in *norte* + *oeste* > *noroeste* [northwest], together with the changes in stress contours, compare *noro'este*. Arriving at a morphological unity must be quite an obvious thing: a test is easy to perform in order to show that (1) no re-structuring of elements or insertion of other, additional element(s) is possible, e.g., *sacacorchos* [corkscrew], and not **corchossaca*; *abrecartas* [paperknife], not **abrebiencartas*; and (2) morphological exponents are attached to the second element only, e.g., *girasol* → pl. *girasoles* [sunflower]. These and other examples, such as *pelirrojo*, *ricadueña* [noble woman] represent ‘compuestos léxicos’ (lexical compounds) as mentioned in the definition above, and, generally, what has been said on this category in

Spanish works well in other languages, too. (Let us notice that even the English *forget-me-not* with its plural *forget-me-nots* is considered a compound, while *woman-driver* / *women-drivers* is not.) On the other hand, however, elements as parts of so-called ‘compuestos sintagmáticos’ or ‘compuestos improprios’ (syntagmatic compounds) remind us of truly independent words: in *fin de semana* [weekend], for example, the features of a common syntactic structure are retained, from the expected stress contours to the prepositional constructions, without affecting the forms of the respective elements. It is here that linguists examining the issue of compounds in different languages do not come to unanimous, straightforward results. We will probably agree, having taken all the complexity of characteristics into consideration, that *Hochzeitstorte* [wedding cake] is undoubtedly a compound, and so also *girl friend* (unlike *woman-driver*; see the plural *girl friends*); but the question is whether the formal, syntactical aspect plays the exhaustive (or at least sufficient, satisfactory) rational for us to claim, as some indeed do, for *cow’s milk* being a syntactic phrase, as well as *casa de campo* (cf. *country house*), or to doubt the compound status of *ricaduena* (Is it because of the rather exceptional double plural exponent *ricasduenas*, unlike *girasoles* or *finés de semana*?). We can say that the way of judging these issues in Spanish is more subtle than in German, the approach which allows for the status of compound to be extended and to encompass under the very term ‘compound’ also such expressions that may otherwise be referred to as syntactic phrases. Nevertheless, following the primarily formal aspect of Spanish compounds and taking into account the properties of ‘repetición’ and ‘recursiveness’, we must mention the fact that there are certain constraints imposed on the way(s) by which compounds can be formed. Linguists recall this in connection with another word-formation process, namely, derivation, which is said to be much richer in the new forms coming into existence. Examples are *bocanada* [mouthful], *bofetada* [slap], *boletería* [box-office], *pasadera* [footbridge], *desmadedado* [degenerated], etc.; or, the typical lexical compound *sordomudo* [deaf and dumb] can enter its alternative syntactic position as the substantive *sordomudez*, let alone the obligatory inflectional affixation cooperating with the composition proper, as is in *mar* → *marino/a* + *agua* → *aguamarina* [of colour like sea water, used in jewellery].

It is worthy of note that unlike in German and English, the Spanish compounds proper consist of only two elements (constituents) and the head elements of N+A compounds are never longer than two syllables, semantically relating mostly to parts of human or animal body, e.g., *ojinegro* [of black eyes], *carirredondo* [of round face], *faldicorto* [wearing a short skirt] (cf. Lozano, in Varela, ed. 1993: 205-215, also *Esbozo* 2005: 169-170). All compounds are only nominal forms, either nouns or adjectives, and so also are their respective elements, combining as N+N, A+A, or N+A / A+N, e.g., *carricoche* [rattletrap of a car], *bocacalle* [backside street]; *sordomudo/a*, *agridulce* [sweet-and-sour]; *aguamarina*, *aguardiente* [hard liquor], *pelilargo* [of long hair], *altavoz* [loudspeaker]. It should be observed that expressions such as *rascacielos* [skyscraper], *sacacorchos* [corkscrew], and similar, are not viewed as being composed of V+N elements but rather as formations copying the French manner of ‘*tirebouchon*’ [corkscrew]. A closer inspection may also be paid to the ordering of heterogeneous elements, namely, the mutual position of NA / AN coming into a compound: whenever the elements are of different word-classes, their relation is subordinating, in other words, determinative, e.g., *un hombre pelilargo* (<pelo>N + <largo>A) has “long hair”, not “short hair”. With elements of identical word-classes, however, the relation can be either determinative or copulative. It seems that (1) Spanish compounds are more sensitive to the ‘copulativeness’ of the elements on the background of formal relation of syntactic coordination, and (2) thanks to the rich means of affixation the Spanish language can react adequately and fairly aptly to the need of expressing degrees of copulative-determinative

relation between the elements. The former can be illustrated by the expressions such as *carta bomba* [letter bomb], *salón-comedor*, *comedor-sala de estar* [parlour, 'drawing-room in which meals are served'], where the respective elements indicate, without any doubt whatsoever, the referents described by them. With only a modicum of native-like sense for Spanish it is not difficult to distinguish these compounds from the equally homogeneous (ie. N+N or A+A) *bocacalle*, *blanquiazul* [white-blue], and similar, irrespective the stress contours. The latter is best documented by *blancoamarillento* – the colour is white [*blanco*], yet tinged with yellow [*amarillo*]. This could perhaps be matched with the Czech *žlutobílý*, spelt solid, but it will be rather difficult to depict the hue using one (compound?) expression in English or German. In any case, however, the mutual ordering of the compound's elements seems to be a matter of preference by usage, although as far as the determinative (unlike copulative) relation is concerned the original attributive ordering will be taken into account. This will play a significant role in Spanish, which can very briefly be illustrated by the following: *blanquiazul* does not suggest 'white and blue "boxes"' but rather a shade between white and blue; and similarly *rojiblanco* [red-white], *rojiazul* [red-blue]. However, in most cases native speakers seem to prefer using no genuine compounds but rather junctions of the type 'Premod Adj + Head'. If the determinant follows, which is typical of Spanish, its form has various suffixes, e.g., *blancoamarillento*, *verde amarillento*, *amarillo blanquecino*, *amarillo verdoso*. These, of course, will be classified as determinative rather than copulative, provided we opt in for their compound status. Thus the meaning of *amarillo verdoso*, for example, is not sensed as 'both yellow and green' but preferably as 'yellow tinged with green'. In this respect Spanish is similar to Czech, and partly also to English: suffice it to consider such compounds as *žlutozelený*, *žluto-zelený*, *zelenožlutý*, and *green-yellowish*. On the other hand, the German *blauweissrot*, for instance, can only be read as 'blue, white and red'.

Last but not least, worthy of note are so-called exocentric (Bahuvrihi) compounds, e.g., *cariblanco* [a species of monkey], *colirrojo* [redstart], *altavoz*, *pasatiempo* [pastime, amusement], and numerous lexicalised compounds. The latter came into being through metaphorical processes: thus while *un hombre ojinegro* is used in its literal meaning 'un hombre con ojos negros' [a black-eyed person], *un hombre cabizbajo* cannot be understood as 'con cabeza baja' [with low head] but rather idiomatically in the sense 'ashamed'; and similarly, e.g., *manirroto* (<*mano*, hand + *roto*, broken → prodigal), *peligudo* (*pelo*, hair + *agudo*, sharp → delicate, fussy), *alicaído* (*ala*, wing + *caído*, fallen → depressed, blue), etc. It may be attractive and also useful to examine whether and to which extent the English language matches these compounds through figurative (idiomatic) expressions; randomly selected examples will illustrate: *empty-handed* (=carrying nothing), *swollen-headed* (=conceited), (*wear*) *a hair shirt* (=be penitent). And similarly, German, too, has compounds of this type, e.g., *Hartkopf* [pig-headed], *Hasenfuss* [yellow-belly], *Taugenichts* [good-for-nothing].

To finish up the brief overview on Spanish compounds let us comment once again on the issue of the two categories as these are referred to in Bosque & Demonte (2000: 4761, see above). It is plausible, indeed, to speak of compounds proper, namely, lexical compounds, and syntagmatic compounds; however, by accepting the classification we do not suggest that there is a sharp-cut boundary line between the two categories. Just on the contrary, viewed semantically, one category borders on the other and even on what we can call 'free combinations', or 'syntactic groups / strings'. Thus we can imagine a number of these, such as *tela blanca / elástica / metálica / para sacos / de proyección*, but in one particular case, namely *tela de araña*, the string becomes fixed (certainly due to convention), referring not to

any ‘fabric’ but to the stuff spun by spiders – hence meaning ‘cobweb’. The expression ‘tela de araña’ represents a syntagmatic compound, as a matter of fact a prototype of genuine lexical compound, which just in this case does exist, namely, *telaraña*. It is markedness in terms of semantic unity that differentiates free combinations from what most German linguists would call simply ‘Komposita’ and Spanish scholars would refer to as ‘compuestos sintagmáticos’, an intermediate stage before genuine lexical compounds on the scale of assimilation. Bosque & Demonte (2000: 4763) claim that

‘...los compuestos no resultan de la simple adición de los rasgos de sus constituyentes. El compuesto lleva consigo la formación de un concepto unitario que permite la designación de una realidad específica.’ [...compounds do not come into existence through a simple computation of features of their constituents. A compound brings about in itself a formation of one unifying concept which makes it possible to name a specific reality.]

As already touched upon, syntagmatic compounds do not lose all features and properties of syntactic structures: likewise the above-mentioned plural form *fines de semana*, also *telas de araña* is acceptable all right. Needless to say that genuine lexical compounds tend to place the grammatical exponents finally, e.g., *abrecartas* (not *abren+*), *blancoamarillento/-s/-a/-as* (not *blanca/-s +*), and, of course, *telarañas*. Only exceptionally do we come across a different distribution of affixation, e.g., *ricasdueñas*, *cartas bomba*.

In reaction to the main title of the present article, its introductory sentence mentioned the problem of concurrence of views upon the concept of compound. Our intent is to show that no full agreement has yet been achieved. Although the situation in Spanish seems to be well-organised, it is because we tried to make it look so, more or less for pedagogical reasons. Yet the truth is that in the works dealing with the issues involved much has been said about subclasses of compounds without defining, in a fairly exhaustive way, the class proper. We will very probably agree that a compound is ‘la formación de un concepto unitario’ (Bosque & Demonte 2000: 4763), but it is not always true that the total meaning of a compound can never be predicted from the computation of meanings of its respective constituents (op. cit.). Neither is fully acceptable what Bosque & Demonte (2000: 4761) wrote to say in the following, simply because their statement is not clear enough:

‘... Formalmente, las propiedades que definen compuestos léxicos y compuestos sintagmáticos serán las que definan, respectivamente, su integridad léxica y su fijación sintáctica.’ [Formally, the properties which are to define lexical compounds and syntagmatic compounds will be those that define, *respectively* (italics ours), their lexical integrity and syntactic unity.]

Had they have omitted the adverb ‘respectively’, the statement would be truthful, since compounds indeed are generally believed to be characteristic of both lexical and syntactic unity (indivisibility); it is doubtful, however, to ascribe strictly and solely one or the other property in order to differentiate between the two classes of compounds.

An alternative approach

For reasons of space we cannot pay more heed to similar issues in other languages, be it only Czech, English, and German. Nevertheless, as we pointed out elsewhere (Kavka & Štekauer 2006: 7-14, 27-34, 116-131), it does not seem to pass muster to define compounds as formal combinations of primarily independent meaningful units based solely on certain phonetic contours or solely on certain conventional ways of orthography. Moreover, even if we revert to semantics, which is believed to act as an arbiter in such issues, we shall only

hardly arrive at a satisfactory solution. These notes are meant to remind us of the fact that some degree of hesitancy about the compound status exists within the system of each language as well as across systems of the languages compared. It is understood, hopefully, that we only consider the languages which make use of compounding as one of the word-formation processes! And yet our little idea is to contribute to the topic by developing the fact of ‘fluidity’ within and between these processes, and to investigate whether there are some universal features characteristic of expressions that we wish to call compounds.

As we have touched upon, the concept of compound is usually judged in the context of individual languages, both in synchronic and diachronic perspectives. Namely, the expression referred to as ‘compound’ in one language does not need to be ranked as compound in another language: for instance, the English *country house*, which we would prefer to list as a prototype of (a class of) compounds (cf. Kavka 2003: 16-33), is matched with the Spanish *casa de campo*, which in terms of the traditional English nomenclature would rather be described as a phrase, or syntactic group / string. For good measure, there is a variety of relations existing within the expressions, the relations of which are on both the formal and semantic levels; and the degree of variety will certainly differ in respective languages, too. The nature of compound structure seems to be relatively unconstrained and therefore a serious object of psycholinguistic research. By the way, Aitchison (2003: 177) is right to claim that ‘the knowledge of processes of compounding will help us to understand less obvious, new word combinations, which appear in every language and very often enter concatenated expressions’.

In believe that it is possible to find a common denominator for the compound concept, namely one that would act well in all languages using composition. We basically agree with Sonomura (1996) and others, who regard compounds as a specific category of idioms. For Sonomura compounds DO represent the specific category because they are not believed to manifest all the characteristics attributed by definition to idioms. We are convinced, however, that there are many more points of contact than differences between compounds and idioms: besides others, compounds, like idioms, are highly conventionalized, context-bound expressions. On the other hand, as we have pointed out above (see Bosque & Demonte op. cit.: 4763; also in Strässler 1982), the meaning of a compound can very often be derived from the meanings of its constituents, which is not the case with idioms proper. Hence we prefer to regard compounds as MINIMAL idioms, in the sense of what we call ‘idiomatic expressions’, ie. lexemes encompassing both genuine idioms and habitual collocations (On setting off the two categories and their overlaps see Kavka 2003: 12-22.)

To our best knowledge, no thorough attempt at a general definition of compound concept as applicable to two and more languages has yet been undertaken.* Neither has our brief contribution any greater ambitions than give a start, and a template, to further, comparative investigations. Nevertheless, accepting the opinion that compounds are actually idiomatic expressions, we should observe them as representing an ingenious ‘texture’ of interrelations: these must be viewed, on one axis at least, as a continuum (or a gradient), and on the other axis, as a movement from the literal to the figurative reading (interpretation). The two moments, characteristic of all idiomatic expressions, hence presumably also for compounds, will now be foreshadowed.

The principal concept is ‘compositionality’, or rather non-compositionality, as the product of the continual complex interplay of variability and literalness, and as a complex phenomenon whose common denominator is the reference to semantic unity.

By ‘variability’ (or ‘flexibility’) we understand grammatical and /or lexical alterations, and we maintain that these are hardly possible with compounds (likewise with idiomatic expressions). Syntactic transformations and permutations are excluded (*redbreast* and not **breastred*; and likewise only *světoznámý* [world-famous]; *Hauptbahnhof*; *aguamarino*; *kitchen cum scullery*; *fin de semana*); only certain morphological exponents can occur, such as case, number and gender morphemes (*playgrounds*; *stříbropěnná/-é* [‘of silvery foam’]; *Schreibtische*; *sordomudá*; *altavoces*). Let us note that violation of this type of variability will normally lead to nonsense words (e.g., **lie white*, and above), or to new meanings (*footbridge* > *bridge foot*; *žlutozelený* > *zelenožlutý*; *Wandschrank* > *Schrankwand*; seldom in Spanish, e.g., *épico-lírico* > *lírico-épico*). In the latter case, of course, the formal ‘counterparts’ will, by definition, be compounds too. It may also be worthy of note that the order of constituents in languages compared will sometimes differ, it being a matter of preference (*clock-radio* – *Radiowecker*; *sweet-and-sour* – *agridulce*). As for the lexical flexibility, we will probably take it for granted that occasional attributive determinations, if any at all, are only external, namely, they will affect the whole compound rather than one or the other constituent (*a new {door-knob}*, not **a {new door} knob*; **the snow-White House*; and also only *známý {zvěrolékař}* [a well-known vet]; *Berliner {Bundestag}*; *una {bocacalle} oscura* [a dark backside street]). No wonder that traditionally we tend to refer to ‘indivisibility’ of compounds! Nevertheless, the concept of indivisibility is not identical, or synonymous, with that of (non-)compositionality; it is ‘literalness’ that co-builds the phenomenon of compositionality.

For reasons of space, the issue of literalness will only be outlined, also because on the one hand an extensive citation is required from the languages compared, and on the other hand, many concepts and certain hypotheses would have to be explained first and taken into consideration from the psycholinguistic point of view. Nevertheless, the following notes will adumbrate, hopefully enough, the complexity of the phenomenon of literalness.

We will not have doubts about the proper understanding of the labels ‘literal’, ‘non-literal’, and ‘figurative (idiomatic)’, when speaking of meaning. Thus, e.g., *playground*; *Radiouhr*; *ricaduëña* will be read literally, whereas *scarecrow*; *Hartkopf*; *rascacielos* will only hardly be interpreted as literal. Moreover, there are such syntactic strings which are predicted, on the interlocutor’s part, as figurative and literal, depending on the context which is to bias the interpretation: let us consider, for instance, *dark horse*, whose figurative meaning is ‘a man of unknown character’. It is worthy of note that the scope between the two extremes, namely, between typically literal and typically figurative (non-literal) meanings, is fairly large and makes us think of certain prototypes, such as [*playground*] – *stone-fish* – *lifeboat* – *red carpet* – *greybeard* – [*white lie*]. These are not viewed as box-like categories, though; smooth transitions and overlaps eliminate fuzzy points, which is due to the degree of cumulative association of semantic roots of the constituents. Using the English examples above to illustrate, *playground* as well as *stone-fish* and *lifeboat* are literal, and yet their associative processes are not identical: *playground* draws nearer the free-combination category, namely, what it refers to is literally ‘a ground to play on’, whereas *stone-fish* cannot be interpreted as ‘fish made of stone’ and *life boat* does not mean ‘living boat’; viewed from the other extreme point, *red carpet* to stand metaphorically for ‘respectful welcome’ remains ‘a carpet of red colour’ in our mind, although perhaps unrolled, and thus it is less figurative than *greybeard*, which refers to ‘an old wise man’, this meaning being based on a fairly patent underlying metaphorical concept. We can wonder whether, and if so, then to which extent, German, Czech, Spanish (to name at least these languages) dispose of similar categories, or prototypes to represent positions within a cline.

In place of conclusion

In any case, however, what is also characteristic of compounds, from both the synchronic and diachronic perspective, is the fact of continuity, or ‘fluidity’. Namely, the given expression can be limited in its variability and becomes less literal; as time passes, it becomes fixed and conventionalized in its new, figurative meaning. In other words, a junction of originally independent expressions (lexemes) travels, as it were, along the scale of compositionality: the less compositional the given expression is, the more justifiable it is for us to call such a new lexeme a compound. It should be needless to keep in mind the fact that only a partial invariability makes the expression non-compositional (allowing for smooth gradients, of course).

*A voluminous *Handbook of compounding*, which is to appear in OUP in March 2008, offers various views on processes of compounding in a great number of languages, but it does not aim at providing any unifying concept.

Résumé

V našem pojetí představují kompozita lexémy, které mají řadu společných rysů a vlastností s idiomatickými výrazy. Přijmeme-li takovou představu, můžeme možná překlenout dosavadní nejednotu v definicích kompozita jako konceptu, a odtud uvážit existenci kompozit jako jistého univerzália (pochopitelně v jazycích, které skládání běžně užívají coby slovotvorný proces). Kompozitem budeme pak nazývat takový výraz, který vznikl kombinací dvou či více původně samostatných lexémů (byť někdy foneticky a mnohdy hlavně morfologicky modifikovaných), a který v daném kontextu představuje novou pojmenovávací jednotku, jež je zcela nebo částečně nekompozicionální, to znamená, že vykazuje alespoň minimální stupeň lexikálně syntaktické invariability nebo literární respektive figurativní interpretace, nebo obojí charakteristiky.

En nuestra concepción, las palabras compuestas representan lexemas que comparten muchos rasgos y propiedades con las expresiones idiomáticas. Si nos conformamos con tal concepción podremos, acaso, pasar por alto la divergencia hasta ahora existente en cuanto a las definiciones del concepto de palabra compuesta, y de ahí que podríamos considerar la existencia de las palabras compuestas como uno de los universales lingüísticos (naturalmente, sólo en el caso de lenguas para las cuales la composición es un recurso neológico corriente). Entendemos, pues, por palabra compuesta aquella expresión que se ha generado mediante la combinación de dos o más lexemas, anteriormente independientes (aunque, a veces, modificados fonéticamente y, ante todo morfológicamente, en muchos de los casos) y que, en un determinado contexto, representa una nueva unidad denominativa, que es entera o parcialmente no compositiva, es decir, se destaca, por lo menos por el mínimo grado de invariabilidad léxico-sintáctica o de interpretación literaria, respectivamente, figurativa o por ambas características.

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