



The Morphological Analysis of Compound Words in Kendrick Lamar's Song Lyrics on The *Gnx* Album

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Abstract. This research is carried out to study the types and meanings of compound words found in Kendrick Lamar's song lyrics on the GNX album. The main goal is to identify how the compound words are formed and to understand their meanings. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method. The theory from McCarthy (2002) is used to group the compound words into three types: noun compounds, verb compounds, and adjective compounds. To analyze the meanings, the study uses Booij's (2007) theory, which explains two kinds of meaning in compounds: endocentric and exocentric. The data for this research are taken from all twelve songs on the album. The results show that the lyrics include all three types of compound words. The meanings found in the compounds include both endocentric and exocentric types. These findings are explained using simple written descriptions to give a clear understanding of the compounds found in the lyrics. The analysis shows that the lyrics contain many uncommon compound words, which shows the use of creative and modern language.

Keywords: compound words, meaning, song lyrics

1. INTRODUCTION

The process of word formation is important in developing how language is used. It allows the creation of new vocabulary, supports clearer communication of ideas, and helps language adjust to various meanings and purposes. Without an understanding of words, it is impossible to fully comprehend the nature of language (Katamba, 1994:6). The area of linguistics that focuses on the formation and structure of words is called morphology. As it is to characterize the structure of the words, to have the ability to use them, produce, and understand speech (Katamba, 1994:3). Word formation refers to the process of producing new words by modifying, combining, or removing parts of words. One common method within this process is compounding. According to Booij (2007:75), compounding is the most common method to form a new lexeme. In simple terms, compounding happens when two words are joined together, with one word (known as the head) giving the main meaning. This combination forms what is known as a compound word.

McCarthy (2002) explains that compound words can be grouped into three categories: noun compounds, adjective compounds, and verb compounds. For example, the word *hairnet* is a noun compound formed by combining two nouns. It refers to a net that is used to cover hair. Based on this meaning, the word *net* acts as the head, while *modified by the word hair*

(N). Compound words often appear in song lyrics, formed by combining two words to create new and expressive meanings. These combinations help convey emotions and ideas in a creative way that captures the listener's attention. Song lyrics are a form of linguistic creativity that blend sound, emotion, and meaning. They bring together rhythm and language, making songs a special kind of communication that can reflect and shape culture. However, the use of compound words in English lyrics can sometimes be unclear. Even if the listener knows the meaning of each individual word, the meaning of the full compound may not be obvious. This shows the importance of understanding compound words, as it helps listeners better understand the meaning behind English song lyrics. The writer selected all the songs in the *GNX* album because they not only contain many compound words, but also offer interesting meanings worth analyzing.

Kendrick Lamar's most recent album, titled *GNX*, takes its name from the Buick Grand National GNX, a high-performance car from the 1980s known for its speed and power. This car serves as a symbol of strength and movement, reflecting the themes in Lamar's late 2024 album, which has been praised for its complex lyrics and deep messages. The album *GNX* explores Lamar's personal journey, his views on the hip-hop industry, and broader social issues. This study focuses on the classification and meaning of compound words found in the lyrics of the *GNX* album. The combination of words in compound form often leads to meanings that differ from the meanings of the individual words. In *GNX*, compound words are used frequently, serving as an important tool for telling stories and expressing identity, both of which are central aspects of hip-hop music. While compound words have been studied in the context of pop songs, novels, and other written texts, there is still limited research that examines their use in hip-hop lyrics. This study is significant because it highlights how compound words help convey personal and cultural messages within the genre.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Compound Words Types

According to McCarthy (2002:59), compound words are formed by combining two or more root words to create a single, meaningful unit. These combinations allow speakers and writers to express new ideas by joining existing words. Alongside compounds, McCarthy also mentions a smaller category known as phrasal words. These words resemble phrases in their internal structure but are used as single words in a sentence. While they may appear more complex, they function similarly to regular words in both grammar and meaning.

Compound words are typically divided into three major types, based on the grammatical class of the head element, the word that carries the main meaning of the compound. These types include compound nouns, compound verbs, and compound adjectives. The head word plays an important role in identifying the compound's overall grammatical function. For example, if the head is a noun, then the compound as a whole will function as a noun.

1. Compound Verb

According to McCarthy (2002:60), compound verbs are formed by combining two elements such as a verb, noun, adjective, or preposition with a verb as the final element, which typically serves as the head. Although less common than affixed verbs, compound verbs appear in several patterns, including verb–verb, noun–verb, adjective–verb, and preposition–verb. Most are right-headed, meaning the last verb determines the compound's category and meaning. For instance, *stir-fry* combines *stir* and *fry* to describe a method of frying while stirring.

2. Compound Adjective

According to McCarthy (2002:61), compound adjectives are made by joining two parts, such as noun–adjective, adjective–adjective, or preposition–adjective, with the adjective usually at the end acting as the head. Most compound adjectives are right-headed, meaning the final word (an adjective) decides the meaning and word class. Some, like those starting with *over-* (e.g., *overconfident*), are productive and often mean "too X." While there are a few left-headed compound adjectives, they are not as common. For example, in the noun–adjective compound *sky-high*, the word *sky* adds meaning to *high*, describing something extremely tall.

3. Compound Noun

Compound nouns are one of the most productive types of word formation in English. This is because cultural and technological changes often create new objects or ideas, which leads to a greater need for new nouns than for new actions or qualities (McCarthy, 2002:62). Compound nouns can be formed through different word class combinations, such as verb–noun, noun–noun, adjective–noun, and preposition–noun. Among these, noun–noun combinations are the most common. Some have clear meanings that are easy to understand, while others are more difficult and rely on context or real-world knowledge. In these cases, the meaning of the compound may not come directly from the dictionary meanings of each part, but from how the words are commonly used in daily life. Compound nouns can also be formed by pairing a verb with another word class. For example, *playtime* (meaning "time to play") joins a verb and a noun to create a new term that expresses a specific idea.

Compound Words Meanings

1. Endocentric Compound

Booij (2007:79) explains that endocentric compounds are formed when the grammatical category of the whole word is the same as one of its parts. For example, the word *airplane* is made up of *air* and *plane*. The word *air* acts as the modifier, referring to the space above the ground, while *plane* is the head, meaning a flying vehicle. Since the head (*plane*) defines the overall meaning of the compound, *airplane* is classified as an endocentric compound. This type of compound creates a specific meaning by combining two words, where one part clearly determines the meaning of the whole.

2. Exocentric Compound

According to Booij (2007:79), exocentric compound words are those where the overall grammatical category does not match either of the individual parts. For example, the word *pickpocket* combines *pick* (meaning to take or steal) and *pocket* (a small part of clothing used to hold items). However, the meaning of *pickpocket* is not about a pocket or the action of picking, but instead refers to a person who secretly steals from others' pockets. This shows that the meaning of the compound goes beyond the literal meaning of its parts, making it an exocentric compound. In this type of compound, the main idea or head word is not directly shown. As a result, the meaning is not always clear from the individual words, and people often understand it based on how the word is used in daily life or in certain situations.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research method to explore and understand the meaning of compound words, based on Creswell's (2014) approach. The data were collected through documentation, using note-taking to identify and group compound words found in the lyrics. The data source was Kendrick Lamar's GNX album, accessed from the Genius website. The researcher carefully read the lyrics to fully understand their meaning and highlighted compound words. These words were then written down and grouped by type, allowing the data to be organized in a clear and structured way.

The analysis process involved several steps guided by relevant theories. The compound words were organized by numbering them and including the line of the lyric where each one appeared. After that, they were classified into noun, verb, or adjective compounds following McCarthy's (2002) theory. Their meanings were then examined using Booij's (2007) framework, which explains how compounds can be endocentric or exocentric. This overall

process made it possible to describe the structure and meaning of compound words in the song lyrics more effectively.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Compound Words Types and Meanings

1. Compound Verb

I was **stargazin'** (Squabble Up, Line 3)

The word *stargazing* is a compound word formed by combining the two words *star* and *gazing*. These elements are written together as a single unit without any space between them, which classifies it as a closed compound. In terms of word class, *star* functions as a noun, while *gazing* is a verb in the -ing form, also referred to as the present participle. These two parts are joined to create the compound word *stargazing*, which is used as a verb in context. Structurally, this compound is categorized under the noun–verb type, where the first component is a noun followed by a verb. This classification follows the theory proposed by McCarthy (2002), which groups compound words based on the grammatical category of each element.

The word *star* refers to a large ball of burning gas in space, usually seen from Earth as a small point of light in the night sky. Meanwhile, *gazing* means to look at something steadily for a long period, often with admiration. When these two words are combined into the compound *stargazing*, the meaning can be understood from both individual parts. The word refers to the activity of looking at stars or celestial objects. Since the overall meaning is clear and directly related to both *star* and *gazing*, it is classified as an endocentric compound. Based on Booij's (2007) theory, the head of the compound is *gazing*, which appears at the rightmost position and determines the word's grammatical function and meaning.

2. Compound Adjective

I watch 'em pander with them **back-handed** compliments (Waced Out Murals, Line 14)

The compound adjective *back-handed* appears in the line as a hyphenated word formed by joining *back* and *handed*. The word *back* functions as a noun, while *handed* is an adjective, derived from the noun *hand* with the suffix *-ed*. These elements are combined to create a compound adjective that is classified as a noun–adjective structure. This classification is based on the grammatical roles of the two components and their order *back* as a noun precedes *handed* as an adjective. The construction illustrates how words from different grammatical categories can be merged to produce a compound that functions as an adjective.

The word *back* typically refers to the rear side or position of something, and *handed* relates to an action involving the hand or the manner in which something is given or done.

However, when joined into *back-handed*, the compound does not retain a straightforward meaning based solely on its individual parts. Instead, it carries an implied or figurative sense, often used to describe something subtle or deceptive. For example, a *back-handed compliment* is a statement that seems flattering but actually contains an insult. According to Booij (2007), this makes *back-handed* an exocentric compound because its overall meaning cannot be directly predicted from the meanings of the individual components, and it lacks a clear internal head that defines the word's category.

3. Compound Noun

Heartache, she only doin' what she know (Luther, Line 14)

The word *heartache* is a compound word that is formed by merging two nouns: *heart* and *ache*. These two elements are written together as one unit without any space, creating what is known as a closed compound. Structurally, this word is classified as a noun–noun compound because both components belong to the noun category, and the resulting word also functions as a noun in a sentence. The first element, *heart*, typically refers to the organ located in the chest that is responsible for pumping blood throughout the body. The second element, *ache*, refers to a type of pain that is usually steady and mild but unpleasant, and it often implies a lingering or emotional discomfort. When combined, *heart* and *ache* form a new word, *heartache*, which conveys a deeper emotional meaning that goes beyond the literal sense of physical pain. In common usage, *heartache* refers to the emotional distress or sorrow someone experiences, usually due to personal loss, disappointment, or longing.

The overall meaning of this compound can still be linked directly to one of its constituents, particularly *ache*, which functions as the head of the compound. Since the final element determines both the grammatical category and the main meaning of the word, *heartache* is considered an endocentric compound. According to Booij's (2007) classification, an endocentric compound is one in which the meaning of the entire word is determined by one of its parts, usually the one in the final position. In this case, *ache* serves that role, giving the compound its core meaning while being modified by the word *heart*, which specifies the source or type of pain.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Following McCarthy's (2002) classification, the data revealed three types of compound words: verb compounds, noun compounds, and adjective compounds. This indicates that the lyrics include all the main categories of compounds, reflecting a broad and diverse use of language that enhances the richness and depth of the album's expression.

The compound words found also represent both endocentric and exocentric forms, showing the varied ways in which meaning can be constructed through compounding. Based on Booij's (2007) theory, endocentric compounds have a clear head that determines the overall meaning, whereas exocentric compounds do not follow this pattern. This range contributes to the lyrical complexity and interpretive depth.

Among these types, noun compounds appeared most frequently in the GNX album lyrics. Their frequent use suggests that the artist relies on noun-based constructions to express detailed ideas and convey layered meanings, helping deliver messages with more clarity and impact.

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