Types of Compound Words

“Compounds may be interpreted as abbreviated clauses or parts of clauses”. (Lehmann 1983: 88). Based on this statement, Lehmann (1983) classifies compound words into four common types, as follows:

1. **Coordinative** (or coordinating) compounds are compounds in which the two component elements are usually syntactically and semantically parallel and would be equivalent to phrases in which the elements are joined by a coordinative conjunction, such as ‘three and ten’ for thirteen, Swedish-American (= Swedish and American), ‘gray-green (= gray and green), etc. In Sanskrit, the term for this type of compounds is *dvandva*, meaning ‘two plus two’.

2. **Subordinative compounds** are compounds in which one element (usually the first one) modifies the other; e.g., tapeworm, clotheshorse, greenhouse, she-pony, rowboat, etc. “Most English compounds are subordinated, with the first element modifying the second”. (Lehmann, 1983: 87).

3. **Synthetic compounds** are compounds in which its component elements make compact expressions. They may be unabbreviated, as in the name of the flower *forget-me-not*, which is a complete imperative sentence. But commonly synthetic compounds stand for shortened clauses, as in pickpocket (= ‘He picks pockets’), show-off, good-for-nothing, etc. (cf. Lehmann, 1983). Synthetic compounds are more common in ancient Latin, Greek and Sanskrit.

4. **Possessive** (or exocentric) compounds are compounds in which the relationship between the component elements does not provide the essential meaning of the compound; rather, possession of the stated characteristics is central. E.g., greenback (=
object that possesses a green back, usually ‘a dollar bill’), blockhead, tenderfoot, whiteface. In modern English their connotation is often derogatory, as in redneck, baldhead, bigmouth, highbrow, etc. The Sanskrit term for this type of compound is bahuvrihi (= ‘much rice’) (cf. Lehmann, 1983).