

Taken from: Zapata Becerra, A. A. (2000). Handbook of general and applied linguistics. Trabajo de Ascenso sin publicar. Mérida, Venezuela: Escuela de Idiomas Modernos, Universidad de Los Andes.

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).