On the margins of standard compounding: the phrasal compound adjective playing with the norms

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About the author

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Abstract

This article investigates the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable phrasal compound adjectives in pre-nominal position. Considered marginal by many existing studies, the phrasal compound is often said to be non-standard; phrasal compounding consists of the linking of several lexical elements linked together, usually by multiple hyphenation.

First, this article will explore the ways in which this multi-faceted element is defined in the existing literature; I will seek to determine if the phrasal compound could potentially become part and parcel of the existing definitions and typologies of compounding. Then, I will consider whether phrasal compound adjectives are still considered marginal when they occur in works of literature.

Keywords: compound, compounding, adjective, hyphenation, norms, margins

Résumé

Cet article a pour objectif d'étudier à quel point les frontières de la notion que l'on appelle composition sont solides, en étudiant la forme surcomposée lorsqu'elle se trouve en position adjectivale. De nombreuses études considèrent ce format comme marginal et ne respectant pas les normes propres à la composition ; le mot surcomposé consiste en une concaténation d'éléments lexicaux qui se trouvent liés ensemble, généralement par le recours au trait d'union à répétition.

Dans un premier temps, cet article explorera la manière dont cette construction multiple est définie par la littérature existante ; nous tenterons de déterminer si la forme surcomposée pourrait potentiellement faire partie intégrante des définitions et des typologies existantes de la 'composition'. Par la suite, notre article se proposera d'étudier des exemples tirés de quatre œuvres littéraires du vingtième siècle, avec en tête la question : est-ce que les adjectifs surcomposés à plusieurs éléments sont toujours marginaux lorsqu'ils sont insérés dans des contextes littéraires adéquats ?

Mots-clés : composé, composition, adjectif, trait d'union, normes, marges

1. Introduction

In the existing literature on English morphology and more specifically on compounding, the notion of phrasal compounding is often discussed, but phrasal compounds rarely find their way into the existing typologies and conclusions. I used the existing typologies of compounding to consider what standard compounding is, as opposed to non-standard compounding: a typology of the compound form is a classification of what each linguist considers as acceptable compounding. A typology is often followed by a conclusion, in which each linguist describes the boundaries he sets around the notion he has examined and asks questions about what the future investigations should focus on. In this article, I will consider the study of the existing typologies and of the existing conclusions on compounding as the first two steps which will lead me to investigating why the phrasal compound often fails to be considered as a standard compound, even though it resembles a standard compound both syntactically and semantically.

In this article, I will try to answer the following research question: is it possible to consider as standard English lexical constructions made up of at least three recognizable elements of the English language, linked together by multiple hyphenation, and whose function is to modify the noun?

To answer this question, I will examine both sides of the debate surrounding phrasal compounds: studies which clearly reject multi-element forms as standard, and studies which accept these forms in their conclusions. I will begin by examining existing theories and existing definitions of the different notions that an analysis of phrasal compound adjectives

requires: compounding, adjectival compounding and phrasal compounding. This stage will help establish what the norm is for adjectival compounding and test the solidity of the notion's boundaries. This test will consist of the syntactic and semantic analysis of examples of phrasal compound adjectives taken from four literary works of the twentieth century: Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood (A Play for Voices)* (1954) and three published works by American writer David Feinberg: his two novels – *Eighty-Sixed* (1989) and *Spontaneous Combustion* (1991) – and the collection of essays he published shortly before his death – *Queer and Loathing: Rants and Raves of a Raging AIDS Clone*[1] (1994).

2. Definitions of standard compounding and standard adjectival compounding

What is interesting when working on the notions of compounding and of adjectival compounding is to realize how difficult it is to reach a consensus and therefore a definition each linguist will agree with. There are tendencies, though, that enable us to consider one example as standard, and another as marginal.

2.1. Definitions of standard compounding

Most grammars and scholarly articles on compounding illustrate their remarks with two-item examples (Castairs-McCarthy 2002, Haspelmath 2002, Bisetto and Scalise 2009, Bauer 2017). This suggests that a standard compound is composed of two items. However, if we examine the definitions that linguists give of compounding, a different picture emerges:

Table 1: definitions of compounding[2]

Authors	Definitions of compounding
Marchand (1969, 11)	When two or more words are combined into a morphological unit, we speak of a compound.
Bauer (1983, 28)	When two (or more) elements which could potentially be used as stems are combined to form another stem, the form is said to be a compound. A compound lexeme (or more simply a compound) can

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[1] The rest of the paper will refer to this collection of essays as "*Queer and Loathing*".
[2] In this table, I underline.

	thus be defined as a lexeme containing <u>two or more</u> potential stems.
Matthews (1991, 37)	Compounding [is] the branch of morphology which deals with the relations between a compound lexeme and <u>two or more</u> simple(r) lexemes.
Fabb (1998, 66)	A compound is a word which consists of <u>two or more</u> words.
Haspelmath (2002, 85)	A compound is a complex lexeme that can be thought of as consisting of <u>two or more</u> base lexemes.
Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 1644)	A compound base (…) is one composed of <u>two (or occasionally more</u>) smaller bases.
Bauer, Lieber and Plag (2013, 24)	[A compound is] a lexeme that is composed of <u>two or more</u> bases.

As can be seen from these definitions, and the points that I have underlined, none of the definitions states that a compound can only be formed of two elements. In fact, no specification of the exact number of elements is given. It therefore appears that there is a discrepancy between the definitions that are given on the one hand, and the examples that are traditionally used to illustrate the definitions. The question is whether the same number of elements is to be found in the definitions of the standard compound adjective.

2.2. Definitions of standard adjectival compounding

Adjectival compounding has received comparatively less attention than nominal compounding in linguistic literature. There are, of course, notable exceptions (Gram-Andersen 1992, Jovanovic 2005, Conti 2006), but it is very difficult to find a clear, stable definition of compound adjective.

One way to understand what a standard compound adjective looks like is to examine the examples used by linguists who have discussed adjectival compounding. Light may also be shed on how adjectival compounding is perceived by looking at the tests that linguists use to identify them.

Once again it is to be noted that linguists seem to prefer to use two-item compound adjectives in their discussions. Haspelmath uses the example "bitter-sweet" (2002, 85), Bauer uses "grey-green" (2017, 1), Bisetto and Scalise use "bitter-sweet" and "girl crazy" (2009, 38) and Carstairs-McCarthy uses "sky-high", "red-hot" and "overactive" (2002, 61). While these linguists agree that a compound adjective is composed of two elements, it is unclear whether there is any limit on the number of elements that can form a compound.

A two-item compound adjective is usually presented as being a combination of two elements which already exist in the lexicon. The following example from my corpus is an example of a standard, two-item compound adjective:

(1) "He wore <u>wire-rimmed</u> glasses" (*Eighty-Sixed* 9)[3].

What we have here is a lexeme which contains two stems. Each of these stems contains one root, so this compound adjective contains two roots. This compound adjective is in attributive position and its function is to both modify *glasses* and to create a category of glasses – those whose rims are made of wire, in contrast to any other kind of rim. The noun *rim* takes an *-ed* suffix, which turns it into an adjective.

These classic, two-item compounds are often referred to as Shakespeare compounds[4] because this format was widely used by Shakespeare, and some instances are first found in Shakespeare's writings – *broken-hearted, cold-blooded, fast-rising* – are still in use today.

On the contrary, as soon as a third element enters the adjectival construction, there is a departure from the norm, notably in examples of compounds which make use of adverbs or conjunctions, such as *the <u>all-but-sufficing</u> answer* or *the last <u>ready-to-wear</u> collection*. I propose to examine in the following section the way these constructions are defined.

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[3] In all the examples of compounds I quote, it is I who underline the structures I work on.
[4] See Gram-Andersen (1992, 17) and Jackson (2014, 77).

3. Phrasal compounding, phrasal compounds and the debates about their status

3.1. The label "phrasal compound"

The term phrasal compound is not used by all linguists; however as can be seen in *Table 2*, it is widely used, and I shall adopt this term in my analysis.

Table 2: the labels given to multi-element compounds in the existing literature

Authors	Label given to multi-element compounds
Bauer (1983, 230)	"phrase compounds"
Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 1646)	"dephrasal compounds"
Jovanovic (2005, 214)	"phrasal compounds"
Plag (2003, 96)	"syntactic phrases"
Meibauer (2007, 233)	"phrasal compounds"
Bisetto and Scalise (2009, 42)	"phrasal compounds"
Stekauer and Lieber (2009, 12)	"phrasal compounds"

3.2 The acceptability of adjectival phrasal compounds as standard compound adjectives

The problem that arises after the study of *Table 1* and *Table 2* seems to be a problem regarding the boundaries of both syntax and terminology.

3.2.1 Are compound adjectives true adjectives?

If we are to decide whether a phrasal compound adjective is a standard compound adjective, it is first of all essential to define adjectives as a word class.

According to Quirk, Greenbaum and Leech (1985, 402), "we usually cannot tell whether a word is an adjective by looking at is in isolation".

However, they argue that an adjective can be identified by four characteristics:

- An adjective can occur in attributive position, *an ugly painting/the low-sailing clouds*
- An adjective can occur in predicative position, *the painting is ugly/the clouds are low-sailing*
- An adjective can be premodified by the intensifier *very*, *the painting is very ugly/the clouds are very low-sailing*
- An adjective can be modified by the comparative or the superlative, *the painting is uglier than the first we saw, this is the ugliest painting in the museum / these clouds were lower-sailing than those others over there, these are the lowest-sailing clouds I've ever seen.*

These criteria define a norm, a standard of what an adjective usually is. But it is very easy to find instances of widely-accepted adjectives which do not meet this standard.

Grammars abound in examples of adjectives which only occur in attributive position, or only occur in predicative position. *Mere*, for instance, can be used only in attributive position, but is still considered to belong to the class of adjectives.

The last two characteristics involve gradability and degree; they are often said to be essential adjectival qualities. But even these two characteristics do not apply to all accepted adjectives. While gradability and degree apply uncontroversially to the adjective *good* (*good, better, best, very good/quite good*), it is not the case with a common adjective such as *dead* (**he is more dead than you*, **he is very dead*).

What emerges from the existing studies on adjectives and from my remarks on gradability and degree is that adjectives do not conform to one standard behaviour. That suggests that adjectivization is a notion which is not discrete but scalar, as all the English adjectives have some features in common, but also have differences which, even though they are undeniable, do not necessarily make adjectivization a weak notion.

Is it possible to apply the four criteria listed above to compound adjectives? Will they, like simple adjectives, challenge these criteria?

If we return to the earlier example:

(1) "He wore <u>wire-rimmed</u> glasses" (*Eighty-Sixed* 9).

We have an example of a compound adjective used in attributive position, but which can also occur in predicative position:

(1a) The glasses he wore were <u>wire-rimmed</u>.

Problems appear with the third and fourth criteria, though: (1b) and (1c) are problematic:

(1b) *He wore very <u>wire-rimmed</u> glasses.
(1c) *His glasses were very <u>wire-rimmed</u>.

Wire-rimmed is a compound adjective which does not express degree but simply a characteristic of the subject that it is not possible to evaluate. The same conclusions are reached with the fourth criterion:

(1d) *Paul's glasses are more <u>wire-rimmed</u> than John's.
(1e) *These are the most <u>wire-rimmed</u> glasses I've ever seen.

Wire-rimmed therefore does not obey all four criteria listed by Quirk, Greenbaum and Leech (1985, 402), but because it obeys two of these four criteria and behaves in the same way as many instances of accepted simple adjectives, it is fair to say that standard compound adjectives are close to standard simple adjectives.

Morphologically, adjectives can be simple (*red, small, happy*), derived (*impossible, unfair, unhappy*) or compound (*blue-eyed, short-sighted, far-fetched*). Compound adjectives are morphologically and syntactically more complex than simple adjectives. The juxtaposed elements, while grammatically a single unit, express various syntactic and semantic relations. Semantically, simple, derived and compound adjectives are all intrinsically qualitative: whether you attribute a characteristic to the referent of a noun with a simple, a derived or a compound adjective does not challenge this idea, so semantically, compound adjectives are indeed adjectives.

3.2.2 Are phrasal compound adjectives true compound adjectives?

As mentioned above, many linguists have wondered over the years whether or not phrasal compounds are indeed standard compound forms. Bauer gives the following example:

(2)   He was the groundsman, handyman, <u>if-there's-any-sort-of-difficulty-ask-William-and-he'll-fix-it-for-you</u> person (2007, 42).

According to Bauer, the high number of elements concatenated in the underlined structure is not an argument for rejecting the form as a compound adjective. I will expound in the following lines the different opinions regarding the phrasal compound and will conclude this part of my article by summing up the existing issues and then by giving my own opinion on the subject.

A major argument for considering phrasal compound adjectives as non-standard is that they contain phrases. Spencer, for example, lists the basic claims and assumptions about English compounds, one of which is "compounds do not include phrases" and gives as examples "*black-as-coal bird, car-of-the-month competition, slightly-used-car salesman, why-does-it-always-have-to-happen-to-me air*" (1991, 319). Meibauer suggests that phrasal compounds are "a sort of morphological provocation" (2007, 233) since they do not respect the "No Phrase Constraint" (2007, 233): this rule states that the incorporation of syntactic phrases into words is not allowed. Meibauer points out that phrasal compounds have been considered marginal also because "lexical integrity is weakened" (2007, 233), and these constructions "display an expressive flavour typical of marginal morphology" (2007, 233). I will return to this notion of "expressive flavour" in the final part of my article.

For Tournier, compound adjectives using more than two elements are "impossible to categorize"[5] (2007, 123) even though they represent 1,16% of the examples classified in his typology of the compound adjective[6]. The same conclusion is reached by Conti who refuses to consider examples such as *mind-your-own-business (attitude), on-the-spot (inspections)* and *down-to-earth (extensions)* as compounds because they "represent cases of syntactic conversion" (2006, 53).

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[5] "Divers composés inclassables" (2007, 123) in French.
[6] Tournier (2007, 123) classified the 2916 compound adjectives he found in the *Cambridge Online Dictionary*: he ranked them from the most often found type (26,37% of the compound adjectives he classified were Adjective + Noun + *-ed* compound adjectives, as with *absent-minded* or *fair-haired*) to the least often found type (1,16% of the compound adjectives he classified are phrasal compound adjectives).

Other linguists have argued that the compound adjectives usually occur as a two-item structure (Gram-Andersen 1992, 21). But Gram-Andersen also notes that adding other elements into the compound structure is not ungrammatical, and the establishment of a standard does not necessarily mean excluding any attempt of the language to modify this standard. For Gram-Andersen, the presence of syntax in a compound, whether "coordination, adverbs or any other element" (1992, 22), may indeed depart from the standard, but it does not weaken the whole structure. Gram-Andersen therefore establishes the example "*white-haired*" (1992, 22) as the most common format of the compound adjective but does not reject examples such as "*out-at-elbowed, moulded plastic- and aluminium-sided showroom, stiff-upper-lipped behaviour*"[7] (22). He even accepts four-item compounds in an adjectival position, such as Dickens's "*flower-pot-saucer-shaped hat*".

For Jovanovic, even though phrasal compound adjectives could be considered statistically as "non-standard", they are part and parcel of the adjectival compounding typology. Jovanovic's typology of the compound adjectives shows that 6.81% of all his compound adjectives are phrasal, with examples such as *the take-it-or-leave-it confession* or *the same indulgent but-isn't-he-cute voice* (2005, 214). In Jovanovic's typology, we see that phrasal compound adjectives may contain coordination, subordination, negation, adverbs, comparative and superlative forms, conjunctions and/or conjugated verbs. Jovanovic's conclusion leads me to think that syntax can occur in a compound form in adjectival position. I would argue that such compounds challenge the existing boundaries of the word class and illustrate the creative powers of language.

In example (2), the compound occurs in attributive position. Could this give us a clue as to whether or not (2) is an actual, genuine compound adjective?

3.2.3 Are compounds positioned as adjectives always compound adjectives?

The analysis of (2) raises one of the main questions addressed in this article. Is an adjectival position enough to make this type of concatenation an example of compound adjective? Bauer's example in the sentence modifies the noun "person", it describes the referent of the

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[7] Gram-Andersen (2002) takes these examples from Dickens's *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1985), Alther's *Kinfliks* (1975) and *The Sunday Times Magazine* (September 1985).

noun: *he was the groundsman, handyman, <u>if-there's-any-sort-of-difficulty-ask-William-and-he'll-fix-it-for-you</u> person* (2017, 42).

This compound form has the prototypical position of an attributive adjective; we can replace this compound by a simple attributive adjective – *he was the groundsman, handyman, a <u>generous</u> person* – or by a derived attributive adjective – *he was the groundsman, handyman, a <u>helpful</u> person* – or by a standard compound attributive adjective – *he was the groundsman, handyman, a <u>service-minded</u> person*. Therefore, the fourteen-item compound Bauer uses is the equivalent of an adjective. As I said before, the mission of this fourteen-item is that of the prototypical adjective: describing the referent of the noun of the sentence, giving it a characteristic, creating a class of "person" willing to help.

We therefore see that (2) is not only positioned as an adjective, but it also behaves like one and is used by the speaker in (2) as an adjective; the goal of the speaker in (2) is to express the qualities he finds in the "person" he describes. Moreover, we saw that we can replace the fourteen-item compound by a standard two-item compound: if we can successfully replace the non-standard compound by the standard compound and *vice versa*, that suggests that the two forms share points in common.

The main problem with labelling (2) as a "compound adjective" is its behaviour with regards to the list of criteria I examined when I tried to define what an adjective was. Let us now compare and contrast *service-minded* with *if-there's-any-sort-of-difficulty-ask-William-and-he'll-fix-it-for-you*.

Criteria 1 and 2: whether a lexeme can be used both predicatively and attributively. It is possible to use *service-minded* in both positions: *he is service-minded, he is a service-minded person*. It is impossible to use it as a predicative: **this person is if-there's-any-sort-of-difficulty-ask-William-and-he'll-fix-it-for-you*, which may prove that the use is not identical to that of *service-minded*.

Criteria 3 and 4: it is possible to premodify *service-minded* by very – *he is very service-minded/he is a very service-minded person*, but it is not possible to do the same with *if-there's-any-sort-of-difficulty-ask-William-and-he'll-fix-it-for-you*. The same conclusions

apply to the last criterion and modification by comparative or superlative forms. This work on the third and fourth criteria indicates that the notion of degree is not applicable to the non-standard fourteen-item compound, but is applicable to the standard two-item compound.

In fact, only one criterion can be used for *if-there's-any-sort-of-difficulty-ask-William-and-he'll-fix-it-for-you*: it is possible to use it in an attributive position.

Is it problematic that none of the other three criteria works with this example of phrasal compound?

The fact that *if-there's-any-sort-of-difficulty-ask-William-and-he'll-fix-it-for-you* does not respect three of the four criteria indicates that there is a departure from the norm, especially when it is compared to the standard compound adjective *service-minded*.

That being said, I could also use again the simple, standard adjectives *mere* or *dead* which are accepted as adjectives, but which are either impossible to move in a sentence (*a mere remark, *the remark is mere*) or impossible to evaluate (*he is dead, *he is more dead, ?he is completely dead*). As *mere* and *dead* do not have all the standard qualities of an adjective, they are less prototypical than *ugly* or *service-minded*. Some standard simple compound adjectives are also less standard if we use the same set of criteria: *blue-eyed* can be used both predicatively or attributively, but cannot be premodified either with *very* or with *more/most*, exactly as I noted in my discussion of *wire-rimmed*.

I will consider that compounds positioned as adjectives are indeed compound adjectives, even if their degree of adjectivization is slightly less satisfying than for more standard forms, meaning that they are less prototypical. In other words, the speaker can describe the person hired to help do the housework as "a very service-minded person", or "if-there's-any-sort-of-difficulty-ask-William-and-he'll-fix-it-for-you person": the first is a more prototypical adjective, but I will argue that the second, in spite of the fact that it meets fewer prototypical lexical criteria, can be used for specific purposes. Using experimental data, Meibauer points out that "*ad hoc* phrasal compounds are understandable and witty to a high degree" (2007, 233) and he even goes as far as to add that phrasal compounds are considered "wittier than their alternatives" (2007, 256).

3.2.4 Preliminary conclusions

Although a two-item compound may be more common, and could indeed be considered a norm, the creativity of language means that phrasal compounds cannot be rejected on the grounds of being non-standard. The problem with creating categories, rules and boundaries about what is standard and what is not, is that those forms which cannot be accounted for within the system become exceptions. Compounding is a morphological phenomenon which uses recursion, i.e. a compound can be indefinitely lengthened since it can in turn be used as the base for a new compound. I will consider as a compound adjective, no matter how many elements are used, a construction that is in adjective position and functions as an adjective in a sentence; it will be in either attributive or predicative position and its function is to modify the word in its scope.

Feinberg's novel *Spontaneous Combustion* (1991) offers the following example:

> (3) a <u>too-horrible-for-words</u> musician was playing troubadour (*Spontaneous Combustion* 2).

This adjective is composed of four elements linked by hyphens and has a similar function to the more standard *a horrible musician*. Interestingly, the phrasal compound includes the notion of degree with the adverb *too* in the construction; this is because "horrible" is a gradable adjective. "Too" has scope only over "horrible".

I want now to examine Meibauer's claim that phrasal compounds are humorous or witty. To do this, I will study a set of examples taken from Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood (A Play for Voices)* and David Feinberg's *Eighty-Sixed* (1989), *Spontaneous Combustion* (1991) and *Queer and Loathing* (1994).

4   Thomas's and Feinberg's use of creative phrasal compounds

4.1. Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood (A Play for Voices)*

Dylan Thomas (1914-1953) was a Welsh poet and writer. From 1943 onwards, he wrote and recorded short stories for the BBC, and from 1945, he became a recurrent reader in the BBC Radio programme called "Book of Verse" and started writing a play which was supposed to be read and played by actors on this BBC programme: this play is now known as *Under Milk Wood* (*A Play for Voices*). *Under Milk Wood* was written in order to be read and played as a theatre play, so the orality of the language and Thomas's linguistic playfulness will also be considered.

There are 83 compound adjectives to be found in *Under Milk Wood*, which all exhibit the "expressive flavour" that Meibauer (2007, 233) attributes to compounds departing from the norm and playing with the limits and margins of English morphology.

I propose to examine three instances of phrasal adjectival compounds used by Dylan Thomas, considered as non-standard by some linguists.

    (4) Mrs Rose Cottage's eldest, Mae, peels off her <u>pink-and-white</u> skin (*Under Milk Wood*, 340)

Example (4) illustrates how a phrasal compound can be formed using the coordinator *and*. In (4), we have two adjectives denoting colour: *pink* and *white*. Neither adjective is subordinate to the other. The question of the position of the adjective is important: in attributive position, it seems easier to stabilize a phrasal compound with the double hyphenation as we see in (4). If this element was in a predicative position, we would have:

(4a) Mrs Rose Cottage's eldest, Mae, peels off her skin which was pink and white.

But we would lose the idea of the colours combining and merging into one actual colour that defines best the skin of the character Thomas described.

But in (4a) the two colours are separated, while the hyphenated form suggests combination. What I will suggest about this example is that it is perfectly in accordance with what I expect from an adjective in a sentence, used to describe the characteristics of the subject. Furthermore, the comparison between *her pink-and-white skin* on the one hand, and *her skin was pink and white* on the other hand, leads me to think that the phrasal compound is even more efficient in the description of the character's skin than the predicative form. The phrasal compound in (4) is more direct, straightforward; the notion of information packaging is important to be considered when we evaluate the way a message is delivered.

On the continuum of standard adjectival compounding, the example used in (4) is more marginal than, say, *her rose-pink skin*[8], which would have been in perfect accordance with the existing typologies. But *pink-and-white* is no less understandable than a more standard two-item compound, and there seems to be no reason why the presence of coordination inside the construction makes of it a less acceptable form of description via adjectivization.

The second example I will examine is a four-item adjectival compound:

(5)   His loud get-out-of-bed bell (*Under Milk Wood* 343).

In this example the phrasal compound is preceded by the simple adjective *loud*. In (4), two simple adjectives were coordinated using *and*. In (5), the phrasal compound is not so semantically transparent. A predicative phrase has been transformed into an adjective:

(5a) His bell that signals you must get out of bed.
(5b) His bell that tells you to get out of bed.

It is not totally clear what the predicative phrase would have been. The resulting adjective is a compact structure: the verb is no longer conjugated and the object is omitted. However, the hyphenated sequence guides the reader and its meaning is not really problematic, even if this particular phrasal compound has been coined by Thomas and is therefore not lexicalized. Thomas takes this compound adjective one step further:

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[8] I have created this example.

(6) Now, woken at last by the <u>out-of-bed-sleepy-head-Polly-put-the-kettle-on</u> townhall bell (*Under Milk Wood* 344).

In (6), the notion phrasal compounding is pushed to the extreme, morphologically and semantically. The lengthy expression resembles an adjective and functions as such, and at the same time sounds like a sentence. However, it is difficult, in this instance, to form a syntactic phrase from the compound. There are two sentence fragments within the one compound: "(get) out of bed sleepy head" and "Polly put the kettle on". The second fragment is part of a well-known nursery rhyme, while the first is a common saying. The meaning relies on the context. First, Thomas poses *his loud get-out-of-bed bell* in a stage direction. A few lines later, in yet another stage direction, we find (6), *the out-of-bed-sleepy-head-Polly-put-the-kettle-on townhall bell*. The goal here for Thomas is to first place into the reader's mind the idea of a bell that wakes up the whole city. Then, for the character Lily Smalls who struggles to wake up, Thomas develops the everybody morning bell into a specific subtype of bell. In the context of the play, [sleepy-head] refers to character Lily Smalls.

Compared to (4), example (5) is more context-dependent. It is also more playful, with an internal rhyme (*bed/head*).

I propose, in *Table 3*, to position the three examples studied here, plus the more standard two-item compound in example (1):

Table 3: a continuum of the compound adjective in Thomas's Under Milk Wood

Classic adjectival compounding	Marginal adjectival compounding	Extreme adjectival compounding
(1)two-item compound adjective	(3)four-item compound adjective (4)three-item compound adjective (5)four-item compound adjective	(2)fourteen-item compound adjective (6)ten-item compound adjective

Phrasal compounds are more marginal than classic two-item compound adjectives but phrasal compounds can also be more or less standard and can be placed on a continuum.

4.2. David Feinberg's novels and essays

David Feinberg's literature is called 'AIDS Literature': Feinberg is one author among many whose career started when the virus emerged in America and ended when this virus eventually killed him. His literature is a tool he used to cope with this unknown deadly virus: contrary to what one usually encounters in fiction and non-fiction about AIDS, Feinberg's rhetoric uses humour and sarcasm. He tried to explain to his readers – and to himself – what was happening to him and his New York gay community. By trying to name what was still impossible to name back then, Feinberg chose to cynically laugh at himself and at his own disease. Using this fictional character's voice, Feinberg tackled the question of the AIDS crisis in the 1980's America like no one before him – that is, as Feinberg put it, by "laughing to avoid crying" (*Queer and Loathing* 87). Feinberg defined his own style as follows: "There's my specialty, gay Jewish humor for HIV-positive men whose T-cell counts hover around 200" (*Queer and Loathing* 63). In the preface to *Queer and Loathing*, Tony Kushner, the playwright author of *Angels in America* (1995), wrote: "David Feinberg has produced a work that holds its audience excruciatingly on the razor's edge between comedy and horror" (*Queer and Loathing* ix).

In Feinberg's works, the transgressive humour he chose to serve his goals took several forms, notably compounds: in his three published works, we find many compound forms, including many compound adjectives[9]. The way he intended to tell the story of AIDS had an impact on the language used in Feinberg's literature. A Master's Degree in Linguistics was surely no handicap for Feinberg's wit: his ability to play with words was limitless and overcame easily the existing linguistic definitions and stylistic boundaries.

Whether Feinberg joked about the daily life of gay men in the midst of the AIDS crisis or about how life was transformed once the virus started to spread, the multi-element compound adjective allowed him to describe with surgical precision the unsuspected details of everyday life in the times of AIDS. The humorous references, shaped into multi-element, multi-hyphenated constructions, enable the reader to get in touch with a difficult period from a brand-new angle.

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[9] 300 compound adjectives in *Eighty-Sixed* (1989), 287 in *Spontaneous Combustion* (1991), 271 in *Queer and Loathing* (1994).

In *Eighty-Sixed* (1989), Dennis, the friend of the main character, B.J. Rosenthal, jokes about the way Feinberg's character trapped men inside his apartment when he announced his HIV status to them:

> (7) "Oh", said Dennis. He carefully extricated himself from the loo. "The old <u>lock-'em-in-the-bathroom</u> routine. B.J., you should be ashamed of yourself! You got me all riled up" (*Eighty-Sixed* 53).

(7) is a five-item compound adjective, used to qualify the "routine" B.J. used to lock potential boyfriends in the bathroom. In this example, the use of a compound adjective composed of several elements compacted and linked with hyphens enables the writer to describe a funny situation as precisely as possible; but he also wants to be efficient and clear as he tries to achieve a joke by going straight to the point. This compound format helps Feinberg: the compound adjective is a straight-to-the-point tool because it avoids the use of paraphrases, longer sentences or subordinate clauses.

(7a) You should be ashamed to use the routine that consists in locking them in the bathroom.

In (7a), the reformulation is not only lengthier but the wittiness the compound successfully encapsulated is lost. The fact that these compound forms are often said to be "compact" is also visible by the insertion, within the compound, of syntactic elements such as personal pronouns: this is the case here with *'em* being part of the whole construction. As the compound adjective is used to be quick and witty, all the elements of the joke must be compacted into one element which has to be as short as possible: the *'em* which imitates the contracted sound of *them* in a sentence, evokes colloquial language and familiarity .

Another example, from *Spontaneous Combustion* (1991) also illustrates Feinberg's wit via the use of expanded compounds.

The way Feinberg built his novels was unique: in between two chapters, the reader stumbles upon lists. Some are carefully constructed lists, each with a title and the items numbered and ordered. The passage I focus on here is taken from a list entitled "Why Did We Break Up?". This list is presented in the novel as follows:

(8) 1) We had absolutely nothing in common, aside from HIV-antibody status. 2) Roger was deeply committed to a long-term, till-death-do-us-part-or-at-least-   till-I-run-out-of-conditioner relationship, and I, a novice at deep, meaningful, fulfilling relationships, had read only fifty pages of *The Male Couple's Guide to Living Together* (*Spontaneous Combustion* 93).

In (8), the compound is composed of fourteen elements, all compacted and linked by as many hyphens. In this example, humour is brought by the juxtaposition of unexpected elements in the compound. From the solemnity of the wedding vow, we move to the everyday mundane "till I run out of conditioner". All this occurs in a passage which is supposed to be sad, thus inviting us to smile at a situation which is in fact not funny. But the number of details Feinberg has managed to compact into one long compound, also inserts a humorous form of irony about B.J.'s lack of success with love during the AIDS crisis. Humour is strong in this passage as the non-standard compound, positioned as an adjective and functioning as an adjective but sounding more like a sentence, makes the reader laugh at a moment he did not expect to laugh. The large construction in (8) would be difficult to find on any other writer's page. Feinberg's coinage not only plays with the norms of compounding, but also with the norms of the English language. Because of the very specific way Feinberg tells us the personal stories of his characters, and because of what we said about his goal when he published his works, a construction like (8) can be understood by the reader who either knows Feinberg, is accustomed to his style or has the literary context and the author's style and agenda explained to him/her.

(8) made use of fourteen elements in its structure; to illustrate the recursive aspect of compounding, I will examine one last example, this time taken from *Queer and Loathing* (1994). What happens if one adds one more lexical element in the structure?

(9) When I told Barry in January 1993 that I was down to 90 T-cells, but I was okay about it – I wasn't hysterical, as I was last year when I dropped below 100 once – he said, "Why aren't you?" So, of course, I immediately became hysterical. This wasn't your traditional standing-on-the-tabletop-pulling-your-hair-and-screaming-at-the-top-of-your-lungs hysteria: I like to think of it as a persistent low-grade hysteria, like a persistent low-grade fever (*Queer and Loathing* 171).

This extreme instance of compounding is used to qualify the "hysteria" Feinberg wanted to talk about and laugh at. This hysteria was very difficult to describe and was put into contrast with a more standard instance of hysteria which therefore took a more standard form of compounding – *a persistent low-grade hysteria*. What we find in this example is humour to describe a situation which is everything but funny. But because Feinberg, through B.J. Rosenthal, aimed at emphasizing that his struggles to express what he really felt went as far as to prevent him from reacting appropriately to an alarming blood test in AIDS times, the way in which he described the situation in (9) was the perfect way to put into words on paper what he did not manage to put into words in reality.

Examples (8) and (9) are very similar; they make use of the same linguistic devices and have the same goal. These extreme compounds, which are clearly atypical, could be considered a characteristic of Feinberg's style.

I want to consider (8) and (9) as phrasal compound adjectives because what we encounter in both cases are lexical constructions, composed of recognizable elements of the English language, perfectly understandable, despite being highly specific, and which function as an adjective to modify and describe the nouns they accompany in the sentence. The fourteen- and fifteen-element compounds examined in (8) and (9) are, whatever we think of their lexical liability, used as modifying adjectives of respectively "relationship" and "hysteria". In both cases, the reader, no matter how much of a Feinberg expert he is, understands the lexical relationships in the sentences. It must also be noted that these extreme constructions are relatively rare and difficult to use in every possible literary or poetic context. However; excluding them systematically because of their apparent differences does not really serve the purpose of the linguist who tries to draw a picture of compounding as wide as possible.

I now try to position (7), (8) and (9) on the continuum of the compound adjective started in *Table 3*, and see how the Feinberg's compounds fit in the spectrum of the compound adjective.

Table 4: a continuum of the compound adjective in Thomas's Under Milk Wood and Feinberg's publications

Classic adjectival compounding	Marginal adjectival compounding	Extreme adjectival compounding
(1)two-item compound adjective	(3)four-item compound adjective	(2)fourteen-item compound adjective
	(4)three-item compound adjective	(6)ten-item compound adjective
	(5)four-item compound adjective	(8)fourteen-item compound adjective
	(7)five-item compound adjective	(9)fifteen-item compound adjective

I will therefore consider three degrees of adjectival compounding represented on this continuum: the left-hand side representing the norm, the centre representing an expansion of the norm, and the right-hand side representing an extreme expansion of the norm which lies at the margins of the notion at the heart of this article.

The continuum that I draw in *Table 4* is a gradient which finds its starting point in what I propose to label examples of classic adjectival compounding, i.e. standard compounding, in the sense of a commonplace, conventionalized type of morphological constructions which do not raise questions; the continuum in *Table 4* ends with what I propose to label extreme adjectival compounding, i.e. marginal, very marginal or questionable compounding, in the sense of a non-conventional, non-standard type of morphological construction which is understandable through the analogy the readers draw with the convention. I will argue that it is possible to position both (1) and (9) on the same continuum because (9) is understandable once the reader has understood the way (1) works from both the syntactic and semantic viewpoints: when a reader encounters (1) first, and then (9), an analogy is created between the convention and the one-off creations of Thomas or Feinberg, which are nothing more than pure language plays.

I suggest (2), (6), (8) and (9) play with the rules and margins of language and language use, not necessarily with syntax and morphology, which is a key aspect of the way I draw both a continuum of adjectival compounding and a typology of adjectival compounding.

I will also say that notions of standard and non-standard are not universal, but rather personal, Their margins are at different places depending on who is speaking and who is reading. The fact that I was not persuaded by the arguments of Conti 2006, Meibauer 2007 or Tournier 2007 does not mean they are wrong and I am right; it means we reach different conclusions because the methodologies and the sources we use are so different that the results can only be different.

Compounding is a notion which is very difficult to define and comprehend: when one compiles all the different definitions of this process, the result is more blurry than clear, and this is what my Figure 2 underlines: there is a blurred boundary between acceptable and non-acceptable, between standard and non-standard, mainly because the boundaries of the compounding process are themselves blurred. But I am convinced, following Stekauer and Lieber's argument about compounding and its lack of clear boundaries that "each of us might have a limited perception, illuminating and interesting in its own way, but no one perspective gives the whole story" (2009, 21). For them, as for me, the different views of compounding and its standards are not necessarily a weak point of compounding: on the contrary, they open the possibilities *ad infinitum* as each research and each linguist will shed light differently on the same notion. What should matter the most in the end is that each linguist does not consider the blur surrounding compounding, and even more so adjectival compounding, as the Achille's heel of the notion, but to take advantage of the lack of standardization of the notion to explore it differently each time. If I adopt this point of view in the debates surrounding standard and non-standard adjectival compounding, I can argue that none of the examples studied in this article can be definitely accused of being non-standard because of the lack of standard in the first place: for me, the language plays proposed by Thomas and Feinberg are less standard than *blue-eyed* or *French-speaking*, but remain in the domains of standardized compounding because there is no established standard accepted by all in the same way.

I agree to distinguish between *blue-eyed* and *standing-on-the-tabletop-pulling-your-hair-and-screaming-at-the-top-of-your-lungs*, but I refuse to remove *standing-on-the-tabletop-pulling-your-hair-and-screaming-at-the-top-of-your-lungs* from adjectival compounding discussions and typologies.

Conclusion

This article aimed at examining instances of unorthodox compound adjectives to test whether or not they could be inserted into the classifications of compound adjectives. As I said in the analysis of these examples, it is to be borne in mind that they represent a departure from the norm. In these grammatical constructions, we find all sorts of grammatical elements which all are usually found in sentences rather than compounds, let alone adjectives: prepositions, articles, *-ing* forms, coordination, *etc.* This hybrid construction, made up of elements belonging to various grammatical categories all linked together in an organized way, makes me say that these compounds are concatenations of words positioned as adjectives in attributive position and function as both adjectives and phrases, hence the appellation phrasal compound adjective, or phrasal adjectival compound.

The hybridity of the constructions studied in this article is surprising at first; but, when we consider Feinberg's humorous writing, they are comprehensible and adaptable to the existing definitions of different key notions: adjective, compounding, phrasal compounding and adjectival compounding. They are extreme constructions, which challenge the existing typologies and classifications, but their inner meanings and their behaviour in sentences make sense when inserted into a sufficient context.

Therefore, I will argue that: if one considers that compounding consists in the syntactic, semantic, lexical and morphological associations of several existing elements of a given language, and if one considers that an attributive adjective is positioned before the noun and subject of the sentence that it modifies, then all the examples[10] examined in this article are attributive, phrasal, compound adjectives, in spite of the number of elements involved in the compound constructions.

A question that arises, and which will be tackled in future publications, is the expansion of the nominal compounds: would I formulate answers comparable to those around the expansion of the adjectival compounds? Here are two instances of nominal constructions that it would be interesting to investigate in connection with what has been said in this article about adjectival constructions:

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[10] Except (1), which was used as an example of non-phrasal compound adjective.

(10)　　Bertha eventually married her <u>friend-who-is-a-boy-but-not-a-boyfriend</u> (*Eighty-Sixed* 306).

(11)　　Richard was in the category of <u>cute-possible-boy-toy-but-unfortunately-too-spacey-to-make-a-date-with</u> (*Queer and Loathing* 115).

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