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## Exploring the Translation of English Compounds into Arabic: A Contrastive Analytical Study

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the translation of English compounds into Arabic, highlighting the lexical challenges posed by English compounding, which is more prevalent than in Arabic. A comprehensive review of English and Arabic compounding practices provides the theoretical foundation for this analysis. In Arabic, the distinction between compound lexical items and other syntactic structures remains unclear, making compounding a contentious subject.

The study aims to classify English compounds into nouns, adjectives, and verbs, and further into endocentric and exocentric types, based on form and meaning. Differentiate between common and esoteric compounds to clarify their uses. Quantitative data is analysed using statistical analysis to identify and assess the translation methods used for each compound type and their frequency and to propose translations for English compounds lacking Arabic equivalents in existing dictionaries.

The main objectives of the study lie in classifying and analysing different types of English compounds to understand their structural and semantic properties. The study explores the various strategies and methods adopted in translating English compounds into Arabic to determine if certain compounds are more challenging based on cultural or contextual nuances.

The lack of Arabic equivalents, as a TL, for providing corresponding processes of compounding and the discrepancies between English, as a SL, and Arabic as a TL almost poses problems in translating compounds where rendering them into Arabic requires special treatment. It is,

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therefore, hypothesised that rendering English compounds into Arabic is one of the problematic areas in translation. This problem can be attributed to linguistic and/or extra-linguistic differences between the two languages.

Findings reveal that translating English compounds into Arabic is challenging due to both linguistic and extralinguistic factors, with exocentric compounds being particularly problematic. Besides, the most frequent translation methods are calque or loan translation, single lexical-item equivalent, paraphrase, one-to-one translation, and definition.

The study concludes that exocentric compounds, which lack direct Arabic counterparts, require translators to understand their contextual meanings. Many English compounds have entered Arabic through translation, enriching the Arabic lexicon.

**Keywords:** Translating. English compounds. Linguistic methods. Contrastive study. Analytical study.

## استكشاف ترجمة المصطلحات الإنجليزية المركبة إلى العربية : دراسة تحليلية تقابلية

عبدالله نعمة الساعدي

كلية التربية للبنات / الجامعة العراقية

### المستخلص

تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تبيان الأساليب اللغوية لترجمة المصطلحات الإنجليزية المركبة إلى اللغة العربية وتحليل هذه الأساليب للوقوف على المشكلات عند ترجمة هذه المصطلحات نتيجة العوامل اللغوية وغير اللغوية.

تنطوي ترجمة المصطلحات الإنجليزية المركبة على مشكلات معجمية عند ترجمتها إلى اللغة العربية لكون التركيب سمة معجمية بارزة في صياغة المفردات في اللغة الإنجليزية بيد أن اللغة العربية تفتقر إلى مثل هذه السمة.

لقد تم إجراء بحث شامل للتعامل مع المصطلحات المركبة وعملية تركيبها في اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية للإفادة منها في الإطار النظري لهذه الدراسة.

تشكل عملية التركيب في اللغة العربية مثار جدل لعدم وجود مزايا وضاحة يمكن من خلالها تمييز المفردات المركبة من التراكيب التحوية الأخرى.

لقد تم إستطلاع أصناف مختلفة من المصطلحات الإنجليزية الواردة في كتب النحو الرئيسية والمعاجم التي تتناول المركبات وعملية تركيبها ، إضافة إلى المعاجم الإنجليزية-العربية العامة والتخصصية لتحقيق الأهداف التالية:-

1. انتقاء عينات ممثلة وتصنيفها نحويًا حسب أصنافها النحوية إلى أسماء ونعون وأفعال ودلالات إلى

مصطلحات مركبة داخلية وخارجية المركز. ومن ثم التوسع في تصنيف المصطلحات المركبة

حسب مكوناتها الأساسية.

2. التمييز بين المصطلحات المركبة العامة والتخصصية لإعطاء القارئ صورة واضحة عن استخداماتها.
3. ايجاد الأساليب المعتمدة في ترجمة كل صنف.
4. اقتراح ترجمة لتلك المصطلحات المركبة التي تفتقر إلى مكافئ عربي في المعاجم الإنجليزية-العربية.
- أثبتت الدراسة أن ترجمة المصطلحات الإنجليزية المركبة إلى اللغة العربية تعد إحدى المشكلات في الترجمة نتيجة للعوامل اللغوية وغير اللغوية. وعلى وجه الخصوص، تعد المصطلحات المركبة خارجية المركز في اللغة الإنجليزية أكثر المصطلحات أشكالاً قد تعلق الأمر في الترجمة.
- تم إجراء تحليل إحصائي لبيان التالي:
1. المصطلحات التي تشكل الجزء الأكبر من بين الأنواع الأخرى.
  2. معرفة العلاقة بين صنف المصطلح المركب والأساليب التي تبناها المعجميون في ترجمته وقد تبين من التحليل الإحصائي أعلاه التالي:-
    - أ. يشكل المصطلح المركب الاسمي الغالبة العظمى من بين المصطلحات المركبة على كون المصطلحات المركبة النعتية خارجية المركز أكبر عدداً من مثيلاتها داخلية المركز ولا تنطبق هذه السمة على الأصناف الأخرى.
    - ب. تم تحديد الأساليب اللغوية لترجمة المصطلحات الإنجليزية المركبة إلى اللغة العربية على النحو الآتي:-
      - 1) استعارة مترجمة
      - 2) مكافئ واحد للمصطلح المركب
      - 3) ترجمة تفسيرية
      - 4) ترجمة المصطلح المركب إلى مصطلح مركب آخر
      - 5) تعريف
- ويعزى عدم وجود طريقة لترجمة بعض المصطلحات الإنجليزية المركبة إلى اللغة العربية كونها خارجية المركز دلاليًا ونحويًا لذا ينبغي أن تتوافر لدى المترجمين الدراية المسبقة لمعرفة هذه المصطلحات المركبة عند استخدامها سياقيًا.
- دخل الكثير من المصطلحات الإنجليزية المركبة في اللغة العربية عن طريق الترجمة، أي أنها لم تكن نتاج الثقافة العربية وبذلك أغنت المفردات العربية.
- الكلمات الدالة:** ترجمة. مصطلحات مركبة. أساليب لغوية. دراسة تقابليه. دراسة تحليلية.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Translating compounds between languages is challenging, especially when one language, such as English, uses compounding extensively while the other, like Arabic, does not. This difference creates lexical issues in translation. Compounds can be semantically ambiguous, leading to potential misinterpretations. For example, an inexperienced translator might confuse "greenhouse" (a structure for growing plants) with "green house" (a house painted green).

According to the semantic criteria, compounds are categorized as exocentric or endocentric. As As-Saadi (1997:1) puts it, "endocentric compounds, like *armchair*, usually present fewer translation problems because their meaning derives from their components. In contrast, exocentric compounds, such as *redskin* (Amerindian), pose greater difficulties as their meanings are not directly derived from their parts."

This study aims to investigate English compounds and the challenges of rendering them into Arabic. It will dig out the similarities and differences between English compounds and Arabic phrases to come up with effective translation methods. The study suggests that translating English compounds into Arabic is problematic due to linguistic and extralinguistic differences, including semantic and syntactic inconsistencies.

The conclusions will be helpful for developing language-teaching materials and assisting translators, lexicographers, and students. Data are collected from grammar books, dictionaries, and other publications, with Arabic terminology presented in phonemic transcription.

### 1.1. Definition and Characterization of Compounds

As-Saadi (1997:4) sees that "defining compounds is complex and varies among linguists. Some view compounds as "units" or "lexical units" (e.g., Eckersley, Quirk), while others consider them "words" or "new words" (e.g., Pyles, Bradley). Alternative definitions include "vocables" (Zandvoort), "new entities" (Robertson), and "lexemes" (Bauer)."

The terms used to describe the parts of a compound also vary. They are referred to as "parts" (Eckersley), "words" (Kruisinga), "elements" (Zandvoort), "bases" (Quirk), "sequence of letters" (Sledd), or "stems" (Langacker).

According to As-Saadi (1997:10), compounds fall into two categories:

"1. Meaning related to components: Some definitions suggest that a compound's meaning is related to its components' meanings (e.g., Bradley, Zgusta).

2. Meaning not related to components: Other definitions argue that a compound's meaning is not simply the sum of its parts (e.g., Pyles, Quirk).”

Compounds often have meanings that are liked to but not directly deduced from their constituent parts. For example, *black market* refers to an illegal market, not merely a market that is painted in black.

## **1.2. Formation of English Compounds**

English expands its vocabulary through compounding, combining two independent lexical items to create new compounds. This process is distinct from derivational morphology but is crucial for vocabulary expansion. Compounding involves semantic relations, where the first component typically modifies the second. For example, "darkroom" is a specialized term for a room used in photographic processing.

While most compounds consist of two free lexical items, some have three or four components, such as "hand-me-down" or "point-of-view."

Compounds can be created based on conventional usage and historical changes. For instance, "book lover" is a common compound, but "book liker" is not. This is due to historical and cultural factors rather than grammatical rules.

Compounds often reflect syntactic structures, with the second part acting as the head and the first part as the modifier. For example, in "furniture shop," "shop" functions as the main noun, defining the type of shop. Langacker (1972) suggests that the internal structure of compounds mirrors syntactic rules, with both components functioning as nouns in "armchair."

### **1.2.1. The Syntactic Criterion**

Phrases and compounds differ fundamentally in syntax. Compounds, being unitary lexical items, function as single parts of speech, whereas phrases do not. As Shopen (1985) notes, compounds often exhibit non-compositionality because they are syntactically indivisible. This means you cannot pause or insert material between the components of a compound. For instance, in speech, you don't typically insert anything between "sweet" and "heart" in "sweetheart." In contrast, in "She has a sweet heart," you can insert modifiers like "sweeter" or "sweet, kind," indicating that "sweet heart" is a phrase rather than a compound.

A compound like *madman* functions as a single noun, while the phrase "mad man" involves two separate lexical items with distinct grammatical roles. For example, "hard ball" is a noun phrase

where "hard" can be modified to "very hard," but you cannot modify "baseball" in the same way, illustrating that compounds are syntactically unitary.

This syntactic unity is sometimes referred to as the lexicalization of a compound.

### **1.2.2. The Semantic Criterion**

The semantic transparency of phrases versus compounds further distinguishes them. Phrases like "a black bird" or "a blue jay" have meanings derived from their individual components—black and bird, blue and jay. In contrast, compounds like "blackbird" and "bluejay" represent specific species, and their meanings are not predictable from the constituents. For example, "ladybird" refers to a beetle, not a bird, and "silverfish" is neither a fish nor a silver item.

Some compounds, such as "yellowhammer," are opaque in meaning, making it difficult to infer their meanings from the constituent parts. Thus, the semantic criterion alone is insufficient, as it may sometimes include phrases that share semantic characteristics with compounds.

A useful test for compounds is that their meanings often cannot be derived from the meanings of their parts. For example, "blackboard" and "greenhouse" mean something more specific than "black board" or "green house." Compounds like "housedoor" and "watermelon" illustrate this as well, as they represent concepts not directly inferred from the component meanings.

### **1.2.3. The Pragmatic Criterion**

From a pragmatic perspective, understanding compounds often requires contextual knowledge beyond their syntactic and semantic structures. Transformational accounts suggest that compounds may involve abstract verbs deleted in deep structure, but predicting these verbs based solely on compound components is challenging. For instance, "fireman" refers to someone who extinguishes fires, but this interpretation relies on cultural assumptions about the profession.

Therefore, the complete understanding of compounds often involves not just the structural elements but also the societal context and the speaker's assumptions about the world.

## **3. COMPOUNDING IN ARABIC**

According to As-Saadi (1997), "the concept of compounding has been debated among Arab scholars, who often use the term "an-naħt" to describe word formation processes similar to compounding. Compounding refers to "at-tarkiib," which involves combining lexical items to

create new meanings. This is different from "an-naḥt," which involves creating a single lexical item from parts of different roots" As-Saadi (1997:27)

At-tarkiib in Arabic involves the combination of two lexical items to create a new one with a meaning derived from both constituent parts. For example, "ba'labakk" (a town in Lebanon) combines "ba'l" (a deity) and "bakk" (a worshipper).

Al-Najjar (1984) distinguishes between various types of Arabic compounds which are: "endocentric compounds where the meaning is predictable from one of the components, such as "shuruq ash-shams" (sunrise) and "harj wa marj" (chaos), and exocentric compounds which lack a direct correspondence with their components' meanings, like "ta'abbata sharran" (he carried mischief under his arm) or "raama Allah" (a town in Palestine)."

Arabic compounds can be noun-noun or adjective-noun combinations, often reflecting idiomatic meanings. For instance, "istiqaal ḥaar" (warm reception) conveys a special connotation different from the literal meanings of its components.

### **2.1. Formation of Compounds in Arabic**

As-Saadi (1997) sees that Arabic compounds can be formed by combining two independent lexical items, leading to a new meaning.

- "Endocentric compounds: These compounds retain a semantic link to their components. Examples include "fakru d-dam" (anaemia) and "baytu l-hikmah" (house of wisdom).
- Exocentric compounds: These do not directly reflect the meanings of their components, such as "shibhu jaziirah" (peninsula) and "naatiḥaatu s-sahaab" (skyscrapers)" As-Saadi (1997: 33).

Some compounds include words like "ibn" (son) and "abu" (father), which form specific lexical items like "ibn aawa" (jackal) and "abu sayf" (swordfish).

### **2.2. Influence of Foreign Culture on Compounding**

Al-Najjar (1984) believes that "the influence of Western languages has introduced new lexical combinations into Arabic, although these often diverge from traditional Arabic compounding patterns." Examples include:

- "an-nashiidu l-wataniyy" (the National Anthem)
- "ad-difda'u l-bashariyy" (frogman)
- "al-fununu l-jamiilatu" (fine arts)

"Some compounds have adopted a negative particle "laa" (no) between the definite article "al-" and the noun, as seen in "al-laanihaayah" (infinity) and "al-laashu'uur" (the unconsciousness).

These influences reflect a broader trend of integrating foreign terminology into Arabic, expanding its lexical scope while adapting to new contexts and concepts”, (As-Saadi, 1997:70).

### **3. LINGUISTIC METHODS FOR TRANSLATING ENGLISH COMPOUNDS INTO ARABIC**

An examination of English-Arabic dictionaries reveals seven methods used by Arab lexicographers to translate English compounds into Arabic. These methods as As-Saadi (1997:69) classifies them are:

“1. Loanword (نقل صوتي): Transliterating the English compound into Arabic, adjusting for phonological differences. Examples include:

- Zinc oxide: أوكسيد الزنك
- Sodium carbonate: كاربونات الصوديوم

2. Loanblend (نقل صوتي مهجن): Combining loanwords with Arabic equivalents. This can be further categorized into:

- Complete Loanblend: Entire compound is transliterated, e.g., Baking soda صودا الخبز
- Loanblend with Expansion: Adding extra lexical items for clarification, e.g., Tear gas: غاز مسيل للدموع
- Loanblend with Substitution: Replacing parts of the compound with Arabic terms, e.g., Liquefied gas: الغاز السائل

3. Single Lexical-Item Equivalent: Translating the compound into a single Arabic word, often metaphorical, e.g.,

- Maidservant: خادمة
- Overcoat: معطف

4. One-to-One Translation: Using an Arabic compound to match the English compound, e.g.,

- Rattlesnake: ذات الأجراس (أفعى)
- Double-barreled: ذو الأنبوبتين

5. Calque (استعارة مترجمة): Translating each component of the English compound directly into Arabic. This includes:

- Complete Calque: Word-for-word translation, e.g., Snowball: كرة ثلج
- Calque with Extension\*\*: Adding extra words for clarity, e.g., \*\*Armchair\*\*: كرسي ذو ذراعين
- Calque with Substitution: Replacing some components with Arabic terms, e.g., Death duty: ضريبة الإرث



- Calque with Expansion and Substitution: Combining substitution with additional explanation, e.g., Prison camp: معسكر أسرى الحرب

6 - Definition (تعريف): Providing a descriptive phrase that explains the compound's meaning, e.g.,

- Plastic surgeon: طبيب مختص بالجراحة التكوينية

- Covering letter: رسالة تشرح وثيقة مرفقة

7. Paraphrase (ترجمة تفسيرية): Rewording the compound to convey its meaning in Arabic when direct translation is not feasible, e.g.,

- Yearbook: كتاب ينشر سنويا حاملا معلومات وإحصاءات عن عام معين

- Stonewall: "يحاول إعاقة التصديق على مشروع قانون".

Each method will be discussed with examples and a statistical analysis will examine whether there is a correlation between the method used and the type of compound translated.

#### 4. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Having surveyed the linguistic methods adopted in translating English compounds into Arabic, a statistical analysis <sup>1</sup> has been carried out to illustrate the frequency of the available classes of compounds and correlation between the methods and class as shown in tables 5-1, 5-2 and 5-3.

Type of CMs	Frequency of CMs	%
N. CMs	971	68.8
Adj. CMs	266	18.58
V. CMs	131	9.28
Non-translated CMs	43	3.04
Total	1411	

Table (5-1) The Frequency of CMS Main Classes

Type of CM	Frequency of CM	%
Endo. N. CMs	680	70.03
Exo. N. CMs	291	29.96
Endo. Adj. CMs	106	39.84

Exo. Adj. CMs	160	60.15
Endo. V. CMs	69	52.67
Exo. V. CMs	62	47.32
Non-translated Endo. CMs	34	79.06
Non-translated Exo. CMs	9	20.93
Total	1411	

**Table (5-2) the Frequency of CMs' Subclasses**

<sup>1</sup> Our statistical analysis is based on the alphabetically arranged representative examples cited appendices "A", "B", "C" and "D".

Types of CMs													Zero method
	C.C	C.E	C.S	C.E.S	LW	C.LB	Lb.E	Lb.S	S.L.E	O.T.O	D	P	
Endo.N.CMs	385	37	68	9	12	32	1	0	82	15	23	16	0
Exo.N.CMs	2	2	31	7	0	0	0	0	116	15	3	52	63
Endo.Adj.CMs	30	6	22	2	1	1	0	0	28	14	2	0	0
Exo.Adj.CMs	1	0	24	3	0	0	0	0	98	4	5	12	13
Endo.V.CMs	17	6	12	6	0	1	1	0	51	0	7	4	0
Exo.V.CMs	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	26	0	10	20	2
Non-translated Endo. CMs	8	5	8	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	7	2	0
on-translated Endo. CMs	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	1	3
total	443	56	167	30	13	34	2	0	367	54	57	107	81

Table (5-3) the **Correlation Between the Methods of Translation and the Classes of CMS**

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The morphological processes for forming English compounds are more varied than those in Arabic, making Arabic less flexible in creating new compounds and adapting foreign neologisms. While Arabic \*an-naḥt\* resembles English blending, it does not align with English compounding, highlighting the distinct methods of lexical expansion in each language. Both English and Arabic compounding differ from inflection and derivation by not involving affixes; instead, they rely on combining lexical items. Stress plays a significant role in English compounding but is not a phonemic feature in Arabic.

Neither English nor Arabic features compound verbs or adjectives where the left-hand member is a verb. English compounds often consist of two lexical items and follow various patterns. Compounds differ from phrases in terms of lexicalization, stress, pattern, and interruptability. Translating English exocentric compounds is particularly challenging due to both linguistic and extralinguistic factors, which also complicate the translation of English compounds into Arabic.

Arabic predicative compounds (al-murakkabu l-isnaadiy) include a verb and a noun but do not feature compound verbs like those in English. Translation by Loanblend results in Arabic equivalents that are hybrids of source and target language elements, while one-to-one translation often leads to appositional or additive compounds in Arabic, typically forming an annexation (idaafa). When using Calque Substitution, the replaced Arabic term is generally considered a precise equivalent, but definitions in translation tend to make the semantic content heavier and harder to decode.

Exocentric compounds translated by Paraphrase often have metaphorical meanings, whereas endocentric compounds are rarely handled this way. Compounds translated by Calque Substitution are typically exocentric, with substituted elements potentially altering the compound's function. In Noun-Compound translations by Calque, the second element is usually the head. Arabic equivalents for English compounds translated by Single Lexical-Item Equivalent often follow Arabic derivational patterns, and translating exocentric compounds relies significantly on the translator's familiarity with the compound.

Arabic equivalents of exocentric compounds translated by Calque or Substitution often refer to plants, animals, diseases, or personal attributes. Some Arabic equivalents from Single Lexical-Item Equivalent translations may require footnotes due to unfamiliarity. Many English compounds translated into Arabic are foreign in origin and have enriched the Arabic lexicon. Noun-Compounds are the most common and are primarily translated using Calque, while Exocentric Adjective Compounds are more prevalent than endocentric ones and are often used figuratively. English compounds are most commonly translated using Calque, Single Lexical-Item Equivalent, and Calque Substitution methods.

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