

Sebastian Wasak

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

Synthetic *-ing* compounds in English: adjectives or nouns?

Synthetic compounding in English has been extensively studied in morphosyntactic literature (e.g. DiSciullo 1992, Harley 2009, Borer 2012 and Alexiadou 2017). Much of the research into synthetic compounding has been focused on deverbal nominal compounds (*truck driver*, *book reading*, etc.). This study aims to shed more light on synthetic adjectival *-ing* compounds (e.g. *sleep-inducing*, *power-generating*, *life-giving*, etc.). More specifically, the study will be centred around the question of whether adjectival *-ing* compounds can also perform the nominal function. The study has two primary objectives: firstly, to categorize synthetic *-ing* compounds as regards their ability to function as both adjectives and nominals and secondly, to identify the semantic and morphosyntactic constraints that prevent certain adjectival synthetic *-ing* compounds from functioning as nominals.

Our observation is that synthetic *-ing* compounds in English can universally perform an adjectival function, which is evidenced by the fact that all *-ing* compounds can occur in a prenominal position without restrictions. However, only selected *-ing* compounds can function both as adjectives and nouns. The majority of *-ing* constructs, including the above-mentioned *sleep-inducing*, *power-generating* and *life-giving*, can hardly be used as nominalizations (as opposed to, for example, *decision-making*) unless they are equipped with morphology allowing the nominalizing suffix *-ion* to attach to them. Thus, synthetic *-ing* compounds in English appear to fall into two categories. The inconsistent behaviour of synthetic *-ing* compounds (illustrated below with examples from the Corpus of Contemporary American English) poses a challenge for Distributed Morphology and related frameworks in which language units are not divided into classes such as verbs or nouns until they are inserted into a syntactic structure.

- (1) a. Students must be encouraged on a regular basis to take risks and learn not only that they can be successful but also that risk-taking is rewarding.
- b. All wealth is created and all growth is generated by risk-taking entrepreneurs.
- (2) a. A life-giving torrent flowed on the land, erasing the months of drought.
- b. ??the life-giving of rain

The syntactic analysis of synthetic *-ing* compounds leads to the following conclusions: firstly, compounds whose right-most element is a verb projecting a volitional external argument (e.g. *decision-making*, *gift-giving*) are unrestricted in their ability to be nominals as opposed to compounds involving verbs controlled by causer external arguments (*time-consuming*, *sick-making*, etc.); secondly, compounds that can be used predicatively tend to be unable to function as nominals (*This thought is panic-inducing* vs. ??*This position is decision-making*); thirdly, nominal *-ing* and *-ion* compounds exhibit the unlimited ability to license argument structure modifiers such as *by*-phrases; finally, nominal compounds based on biargumental verbs show evidence for high eventive complexity whereas nominals derived from unergative and unaccusative verbs can only denote simple events.

References

- Alexiadou, Artemis. 2017. "On the complex relationship between deverbal compounds and argument supporting nominals." In *Aspect and Valency in Nominals*, edited by Maria Bloch-Trojnar, and Anna Malicka-Kleparska, 53–82. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Borer, Hagit. 2012. "In the event of a nominal." In *The Theta System*, edited by Martin Everaert, Marijana Marilj, and Tal Siloni, 103–149. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- DiSciullo, Anna Maria. 1992. "Deverbal compounds and the external argument." In *Thematic Structure: its Role in Grammar*, edited by Iggy Roca, 65–78. Dordrecht: Foris.
- Harley, Heidi. 2009. "Compounding in Distributed Morphology." In *The Oxford Handbook of Compounding*, edited by Rochelle Lieber, and Pavol Štekauer, 129–144. Oxford: Oxford University Press.