

УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ „ГОЦЕ ДЕЛЧЕВ“ - ШТИП  
ФИЛОЛОШКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ

UDC 81  
UDC 82  
UDC 008



ISSN: 2545-3998  
DOI: 10.46763/palim

# ПАЛИМПСЕСТ

МЕЃУНАРОДНО СПИСАНИЕ ЗА ЛИНГВИСТИЧКИ,  
КНИЖЕВНИ И КУЛТУРОЛОШКИ ИСТРАЖУВАЊА

# PALIMPSEST

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR LINGUISTIC,  
LITERARY AND CULTURAL RESEARCH

PALMK, VOL 9, NO 17, STIP, 2024

ГОД. IX, БР. 17  
ШТИП, 2024

VOL. IX, NO 17  
STIP, 2024

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Меѓународно списание за лингвистички, книжевни  
и културолошки истражувања

# PALIMPSEST

International Journal for Linguistic, Literary  
and Cultural Research

Год. 9, Бр. 17  
Штип, 2024

Vol. 9, No 17  
Stip, 2024

PALMK, VOL 9, NO 17, STIP, 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46763/PALIM24917>

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International Journal for Linguistic, Literary  
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The International Scientific Journal “Palimpsest” is issued twice a year in printed form and online at the following website of the web portal of Goce Delcev University in Stip: <http://js.ugd.edu.mk/index.php/PAL>  
Papers can be submitted and published in the following languages: Macedonian, English, German, French, Russian, Turkish and Italian language.  
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## INVESTIGATING THE HIGH FREQUENCY AND MORPHOLOGICAL PRODUCTIVITY OF VERB AND ADJECTIVE COMPOUNDS IN LEGAL ENGLISH CORPUS

**Jeta Hamzai**

South East European University, Tetovo  
jeta.rushidi@seeu.edu.mk

**Brikena Xhaferi**

South East European University, Tetovo  
b.xhaferi@seeu.edu.mk

**Abstract:** This paper explores the complex relationship between morphological productivity and the high frequency of words in English. It delves into the theoretical underpinnings of these concepts, their empirical manifestations, and their significance in linguistics and cognitive science. By examining key studies and theories in the field, this paper aims to shed light on the complex interplay between morphological productivity and word frequency, offering insights into language acquisition, processing, and evolution. The paper also analyses the high frequency and the morphological productivity of adjective and verb compounds in EFL written contexts (Legal English context). The instruments used in this paper were research papers written by SEEU EFL students. A quantitative analysis of the high frequency and morphological productivity of compounds was performed using this dataset. Also, the correlation between morphological productivity and high frequency is being elaborated. The high-frequency list of compounds was calculated based on the compounds that appeared more than once in the analysed corpus. Whereas hapax legomenon was the quantitative indicator used to assess the output of the compounding patterns. The participants involved in this study were 35 undergraduate Law students at South East European University in Tetovo and Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia. The participants were attending the following courses: Level 5, Legal English 1 and Legal English 2. Findings imply that adjective compounds are more morphologically productive compared to verb compounds. Correspondingly, verb compounds are less morphologically productive however they are identified as highly frequent compounds compared to adjective compounds in the analysed corpus.

**Keywords:** *high frequency; morphological productivity; adjective compounds; verb compounds; Legal English; corpus.*

### 1. Introduction

One of the many elements that have been shown to be important for lexical processing and lexical storing is morphology (Bradley 1980; Cutler 1980; Lukatela et al. 1987; Manelis and Tharp 1977; Taft and Forster 1975). The capacity of

speakers to create new words using the tools available in a given language has drawn a lot of attention recently, particularly in the context of the English language.

Morphological productivity and high-frequency complement yet contrast each other. Morphological productivity looks at new words that are once used in a context whereas the high-frequency concept analyses the words that are repeated/over-repeated in a context as well. Correspondingly, words with high morphological productivity are the low-frequency words, and words with low morphological productivity are high-frequency words. These claims and conclusions raise a question of whether these two approaches are so different that they have no touching point at all. In other words, to what extent frequency is of importance to morphological productivity and vice versa?

The most crucial factor in studies on memory and word processing is word frequency. Nonetheless, the availability of the measure, not quality, has been the primary factor in choosing word frequency norms. As a consequence, many studies continue to use the outdated Kukera and Francis frequency norms (Brysbaert & New 2009).

## **2. Previous studies**

There is no doubt that traditional morphological research has mainly concentrated on understanding linguistic competence, overlooking the aspect of how morphology operates in real language usage. Consequently, it's not surprising that the role of frequency in relation to morphological productivity is rarely discussed, and even when it is, its relevance to this concept is often debated or denied. This is where Baayen's 'corpus-based approach' stands out for several reasons. He argues that productivity and frequency are intricately linked and that examining frequency significantly enhances our understanding of morphological productivity as a linguistic phenomenon.

Importantly, Baayen's perspective doesn't mean that he disregards the fundamental distinction between the factors that influence linguistic competence and those that affect language performance when it comes to morphological productivity, nor does it imply that he questions the significance of competence factors. However, what this means is that in Baayen's research, factors related to how language is actually used take a more central role, which sets his work apart from most other studies that emphasize morphological productivity. Baayen's contributions to the study of morphological productivity, as seen in his publications (Baayen 1989, 1990a, b, 1991), are widely acknowledged as both highly stimulating and important. This acknowledgment arises from his innovative use of advanced statistical and mathematical methods. The overall significance of Baayen's research is beyond dispute, and it is evident that his work will substantially enhance our comprehension of fundamental characteristics associated with morphological productivity.

We can often figure out what a word means by looking at the way it's put together with its smaller parts. In fact, when students encounter new words in books, they can often guess the meaning of around half of those words by breaking them down into their smaller pieces. Studies by Nagy and Anderson (1984) and

Nagy et al. (1989) found that more than 60% of the new words readers encounter have parts that give clues about the whole word's meaning. Knowing how words are built from smaller parts has been connected to improving your vocabulary, as shown in research by Baumann (2002), Brusnighan and Folk (2012), and Levin et al. (1988), readers often rely on these word parts to figure out what words mean. Correspondingly, Graves (2006) believes that being aware of how words are formed from smaller parts has also been linked to growing vibrant vocabulary, as seen in studies by Baumann (2002), Brusnighan and Folk (2012), and Levin et al. (1988).

Even less scholarly attention has been dedicated to the study of neoclassical compounding and what the Oxford English Dictionary categorizes as “combining forms.” The limited existing research in this area, such as the works of Warren (1990), Prčić (2005, 2007, 2008), McCauley (2006), and Kastovsky (2009), has predominantly adopted a theoretical approach and refrained from making substantial claims about the productivity of these linguistic structures.

Another researcher has delved into the morphological productivity of nominal and verbal compounds in the context of Legal Discourse. As referenced by Hamzai (2019), the relationship between word frequency and morphological productivity is approached as follows:

According to this productivity measure, high-frequency word categories exhibit a substantial value of “N” and consequently possess a low level of productivity. Therefore, when a corpus contains a greater number of hapax-type words, the productivity rate is higher. Conversely, a corpus with an abundance of high-frequency words or forms results in a higher “N” value and, consequently, a decrease in productivity, indicating lower levels of morphological productivity.

Productivity is also characterized by an abundance of low-frequency words, as stated by Plag (2004, p.9). A multitude of hapax-type words indicates a high “P” value, signifying a productive morphological process. Conversely, an abundance of high-frequency words or forms leads to a high “N” value, resulting in a reduction in “P” and indicating low productivity.

Another research conducted by Fernandez-Dominguez (2009) explored the productivity of nominal N + N compounds. However, it is important to note that neoclassical compounding differs significantly from these compounds in several aspects. The intricate status of combining forms within the English word-formation system, which seems to lie somewhere between affixation and compounding, may contribute to the existing research gap.

Another intriguing aspect under investigation in current research pertains to a descriptive claim regarding compounding, primarily regarded as a morphological process, and the varying levels of productivity among its constituent elements. Keeping this in consideration, Jacobsen (1972) proposes that the components forming a compound in Danish should exhibit higher productivity, either in the position of the head or the modifier. This observation appears to hold true for English as well. For instance, the word “water” is more frequently utilized as a modifier and is involved in a broader range of combinations compared to its usage as a head noun. In essence, it possesses a larger “modifier family size.”

### **3. Present study**

#### **3.1. Research questions**

This paper aimed to analyse the high frequency and the morphological productivity of adjective and verb compounds in EFL written context through the following research questions:

3.1.1. Which are the most frequent compounds (adjective or verb compounds) in Legal English written corpus?

3.1.2. How are the high-frequency compounds formed in the analysed legal context? What patterns do they follow?

3.1.3. Which compounds (adjective or verb compounds) are more morphologically productive in Legal English written corpus?

3.1.4. What are the formation patterns of the high morphologically productive compounds in a legal context?

#### **3.2. Instruments**

The instruments used in this paper were research papers written by SEEU EFL students. The analysed corpus consisted of 30 000 words from research papers related to legal studies submitted to Google Classroom. Afterwards, the corpus was analysed and 1800 (noun, adjective, verb and adverb) compounds were identified in total. Since the paper investigated two types of adjectives only, the identification of verb and adjective compounds was done based only on the classification of compounds suggested by Jackson and Ze Amwela (2005, pp. 79-85). They explore how compounds are categorized based on their word class (form word classes) and the syntactic connection between their roots. The classification by word class stands apart from the syntactic relationship between the roots, resembling an algebraic equation. Typically, the word class of the final element in the compound dictates the compound's class.

Word classes can be categorized into two main groups: form and function. Form word classes, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, are fundamental components of sentences. They convey meaning and play significant roles in sentence structure. Function word classes, including auxiliaries, prepositions, pronouns, determiners, conjunctions, and interjections, support the form word classes in constructing sentences by providing grammatical structure and connecting elements.

Correspondingly, the classification of verb and adjective compounds suggested by Jackson and Ze Amwela (2005, pp.79-85) are as follows:

- noun + verb: baby-sit, brain-wash, house-keep;
- verb+verb : dive-bomb, drop-kick;
- adjective + verb: dry-clean, sweet-talk, white-wash;
- adverb +verb :down-grade, over-do
- noun +adjective :earth-bound, ox-eyed, sea-sick
- adjective+adjective: blue-green, metallic –green, south-west
- adverb +adjective: near-sighted, off-white.

A quantitative analysis of the high frequency and morphological productivity of compounds was performed using this dataset. After manually identifying the 1800 used compounds, the high-frequency list of compounds was compiled based on the compounds that appeared more than once in the analysed corpus. Whereas hapax legomenon was the quantitative indicator used to assess the output of the compounding patterns (Baayen & Lieber, 1991). The formula  $[P = n1 / N]$  was used to calculate the morphological productivity of compounds. P stands for productivity in the narrow sense (the rate of vocabulary growth), n1 for the number of words of the hapax legomenon type (on forms that only appear once in a large corpus), and N for the total number of observed phenomena in the corpus where the derivational type is analysed.

### 3.3. Participants

The participants involved in this study were 35 undergraduate Law students at South East European University in Tetovo and Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia. The participants were attending the following courses: Level 5, Legal English 1 and Legal English 2.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

**4.1. Findings from the first research question** (*Which are the most frequent compounds (adjective or verb compounds) in Legal English written corpus*) show that out of 1800 compounds, there were 152 verb compounds detected and 182 adjective compounds. The paper investigated two types of compounds only by exploring how these compounds are categorized based on their word class (form word classes) and the syntactic connection between their roots (Jackson & Ze Amwela, 2005, pp.79-85). Correspondingly, the table below (Table 1) illustrates the frequency of the compounds and their formation patterns. As illustrated below, there are 21 verb compounds which multiplied by the number of their occurrences lead to the total number of 152 verb compounds. Whereas 26 adjective compounds appear through the corpus which multiplied by their number of occurrences leads to the total number of 181. According to these data, it is implied that adjective compounds are more frequent compounds in the analysed corpus compared to verb compounds.

**Table 1.** Verb and adjective compounds detected in the analysed corpus

Verb compounds	Number of occurrences (152)	Adjective Compounds	Number of occurrences (181)
Brainwash	24	Bad-tempered	16
Blackmail	16	Legally binding	15
Understand	13	Good-tempered	14
Counterattack	11	Law-abiding	13
Firebomb	11	Open-ended	12



Backfire	10	Self-imposed	10
Outsource	9	Government-backed	10
Cold-call	8	Level - headed	10
Exchange	8	English-speaking	9
Handcuff	8	Overcompensatory	8
Outbid	6	Worldwide	6
Overrule	5	Above-mentioned	6
Undertake	4	Absentminded	6
Countersign	4	Fast-paced	6
Cross-check	4	Middle-aged	6
Outline	4	Old-fashioned	6
Outnumber	4	Overqualified	6
Fast - forward	1	Full-blown	5
Downshift	1	Densely-populated	3
House-sit	1	Over-leveraged	3
Kick-start	1	Cold-blooded	1
		Deep-rooted	1
		Free-standing	1
		Highest-taxed	1
		Long-lasting	1

**4.2. Findings from the second research question** (*How are the high-frequency compounds formed in the analysed legal context and what patterns do they follow?*) provide the following results: The high-frequency compounds (adjective compounds in this case) are formed according to the following classifications illustrated in Table 2:

**Table 2.** Adjective compounds and their form word class classifications

<b>Adjective compounds</b>	<b>Number of occurrences</b>	Classification of compounds based on their <i>form word class</i> ( such as <i>nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs</i> ) suggested by (Jackson & Ze Amwela, 2005, pp. 79- 85)		
Bad-tempered	16		Adj+Adj	
Legally binding	15			Adv + Adj
Good-tempered	14		Adj+Adj	
Law-abiding	13	N+ Adj		
Open-ended	12		Adj+Adj	
Self-imposed	10	N+ Adj		
Government-backed	10	N+ Adj		

Level - headed	10	N+ Adj		
English-speaking	9	N+ Adj		
Overcompensatory	8			Adv + Adj
Worldwide	6	N+ Adj		
Above-mentioned	6			Adv + Adj
Absentminded	6		Adj+Adj	
Fast-paced	6		Adj+Adj	
Middle-aged	6		Adj+Adj	
Old-fashioned	6		Adj+Adj	
Overqualified	6			Adv + Adj
Full-blown	5		Adj+Adj	
Densely-populated	3			Adv + Adj
Over-leveraged	3			Adv + Adj
Cold-blooded	1		Adj+Adj	
Deep-rooted	1		Adj+Adj	
Free-standing	1		Adj+Adj	
Highest-taxed	1		Adj+Adj	
Long-lasting	1		Adj+Adj	

The table provides valuable information on the frequency and grammatical patterns of various adjective compounds, illustrating how they can take on different forms and occur with varying frequencies in the English language.

**4.3 Findings regarding the 3rd research question** (*Which compounds (adjective or verb compounds) are more morphologically productive in Legal English written corpus?*) show the following:

The adjective compounds that appear only once in the analysed corpus are the following:

1. Cold -blooded
2. Deep - rooted
3. Free - standing
4. Highest-taxed
5. Long-lasting

Whereas the verb compounds that appear only once in the analysed corpus are the following:

1. Fast-forward
2. Downshift
3. House-sit
4. Kick-start

According to the morphological productivity formula,  $[P = n1 / N]$ , findings (Table 3) show that the morphological productivity (the rate of vocabulary growth)

of adjective compounds equals 0.0276243094 (P=0.0276243094). The total number of observed adjective compounds in the analysed corpus is 181 (N=181) and n1 = 5 (for the number of words of the hapax legomenon type; adjective compounds that only appear once in the analysed corpus).

**Table 3.** The morphological productivity of adjective and verb compounds in the analysed corpus

	<b>n1</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>P</b>
<b>Adjective compounds</b>	5	181	0.0276243094
<b>Verb Compounds</b>	4	152	0.0263157895

Correspondingly, according to calculations (Table 3) through the same morphological formula, the morphological productivity of verb compounds equals **0.0263157895 (P= 0.0263157895)**. The total number of observed verb compounds in the analysed corpus is 152 (N=152) and the n1 = 4 (for the number of words of the hapax legomenon type; verb compounds that only appear once in the analysed corpus). In summary, the research findings demonstrate that adjective compounds have a slightly higher morphological productivity than verb compounds in the Legal English written corpus, with specific examples provided for both categories.

**4.4. Findings from the 4th research question** (*What are the formation patterns of the high morphologically productive compounds in a legal context?*) suggest that Adjective + Adjective (Adj + Adj) compounding classifications are highly productive in generating new vocabulary within the context of adjective compounds. Correspondingly, these classifications are contributing significantly to the expansion of vocabulary and the expression of nuanced meanings in the field of study, which in this case is Legal English. Researchers and linguists may find this information valuable for understanding the structure and evolution of language in this specific domain.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study set out to examine the frequency and morphological productivity of adjective and verb compounds within the context of EFL written discourse, specifically in the domain of Legal English. To achieve this goal, research papers authored by students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at South East European University (SEEU) were used as the primary data source. A quantitative analysis was conducted to assess the high frequency and morphological productivity of these compounds within the dataset. Additionally, the study explored the correlation between morphological productivity and high frequency, shedding light on the relationship between these two linguistic aspects. The high frequency list of compounds was generated by considering those compounds that appeared more than once in the analyzed corpus. To gauge the output of compounding patterns, the study relied on the concept of “hapax legomenon.” The key findings of this investigation indicate that adjective

compounds exhibit higher levels of morphological productivity compared to verb compounds in the context of Legal English. In contrast, verb compounds, while less morphologically productive, are identified as more frequently occurring compounds within the analyzed corpus. This research contributes valuable insights into the dynamics of compounding patterns in the domain of Legal English, with implications for language learners and researchers alike. In summary, this research contributes to our understanding of compounding in Legal English, highlighting the prevalence of adjective compounds and their diverse formation patterns. Additionally, it underscores the significance of specific compounding patterns in expanding vocabulary and expressing nuanced meanings in this specialized field of study. These findings have implications for linguists, language learners, and professionals working in the legal domain, offering valuable insights into the structure and evolution of language in this context.

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