Lexicon-Grammar
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Lexicon - Grammar

The Representation of Compound Words

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The essential feature of a lexicon-grammar is that the elementary unit of computation and storage is the simple sentence (subject-verb-complement(s)). This type of representation is obviously needed for verbs: limiting a verb to its shape has no meaning other than typographic, since a verb cannot be separated from its subject and essential complement(s). We have shown (Gross 1976) that given a verb, or equivalently a simple sentence, the set of syntactic properties that describes its variations is unique: in general, no other verb has an identical syntactic paradigm. As a consequence, the properties of each verbal construction must be represented in a lexicon-grammar. The lexicon has no significance taken as an isolated component and the grammar composed, viewed as independent of the lexicon, will have to be limited to certain complex sentences.

Since be-Adjective forms are close to verbs, their description is quite similar, that is, they are considered as sentences.

We have applied lexicon-grammar representation not only to the two obvious predicable parts of speech, verb and adjective, but to nouns and adverbs as well. In the same way as we adjudge the verb to be an adjective, we have systematically introduced support verbs (Vsup) for nouns and adverbs, as in the following examples (Z.S. Harris 1976, M. Gross 1986, 1986):

Vsup = to be

The text is in contra/iction with the law

Vsup = to have

This text has a certain importance for Bob

Vsup = to occur, etc.

Accidents occur at random

The text is in contradiction with the law

Both forms play the same syntactic and semantic role in sentences such as:

Bob knows that Max has moved to Tampa

Bob keeps in mind that Max has moved to Tampa

Support verbs are frequent in technical texts, and may have stylistic variants, as in this last example.

Grammatical elements such as determiners, prepositions and conjunctions, do not belong to the lexicon-grammar in the same sense as the four major parts of speech do, since they are parts of structures or rules. For example, prepositions appear in the columns of the lexicon-grammar.

An early representation of verbs in a lexicon-grammar of about 12,000 verbs is given in figure 1. Each row of the matrix is an entry whose main construction is defined by a table or class code. In figure 1, the code G corresponds to the class of constructions subject-verb-direct sentential complement, noted:

\( G \text{ sup} = \text{to } \text{be} \)

Each column is a syntactic property, and corresponds to a structure into which \( V \) may enter, roughly a syntactic transform of the main structure. For example, in columns we have placed the Passive forms, Extraped and nominal forms. Thus, the related structures are semantically close. The matrix contains the formalized lexicon-grammar of 12,000 French verbs, as in this last example.

Each column is a syntactic property, and corresponds to a structure into which \( V \) may enter, roughly a syntactic transform of the main structure. For example, in columns we have placed the Passive forms, Extraped and nominal forms. Thus, the related structures are semantically close. The process of accumulation that led to the formalized lexicon-grammar of 12,000 French verbs has run into what seemed to be at first a minor problem of representation of words: the difference between simple and compound words. On the other hand, there are simple words such as the verb know and complex (idiomatic) forms such as keep in mind. Both forms play the same syntactic and semantic role in sentences such as:

Bob knows that Max has moved to Tampa

Bob keeps in mind that Max has moved to Tampa

but the lexical content (one word vs three) requires different identification procedures (simple dictionary lookup vs a certain amount of syntactic analysis).

The representation of figure 1 treats two forms such as to know (someone, something) and to keep (someone, something) in mind in the same way, thus emphasizing the semantic equivalence between simple and compound verbs.

But compound terms raise a problem of representation. The unit of representation in a linear lexicon is roughly the word as defined by its written form, that is, a sequence of letters separated from neighboring sequences by boundary blanks. As a consequence, compound words cannot be directly put into a dictionary the way simple words are.

An identification procedure is needed for their occurrences in texts, and this procedure will make use of the various simple parts of the compound utterance. Hence, the formal linguistic properties of compound terms will determine both the procedure of identification in texts and the type of storage they require.
We thus have to discuss the main types of compounds and to single out those properties that bear on automatic parsing and dictionary lookup.

1. Compound adverbs

We call adverb any circumstantial complement, including sentential phrases, as in the following examples:

(1) The show took place nightly
   at night
   during a busy night
   the night Bob missed his plane

By compound adverbs, or frozen or idiomatic adverbs, we mean adverbs that can be separated into several words, with some or all of their words frozen, that is, semantically and/or syntactically noncompositional. In (1), of night is a compound adverb, the lack of compositionality is apparent from lexical restrictions such as:

*at day, *at afternoon, *at evening

and by the impossibility of inserting material that is a priori plausible, syntactically and semantically:

*at (coming, present) night
*at (cold, dark) night

during the (coming, present) night
during a (cold, dark) night

Notice that nightly can also be considered as a frozen compound, though not constituted of words but of a word and a suffix. Again, lack of compositionality stems from the observation that daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, etc. which are compounds of the same formal type have a regular formation, in the sense that their interpretation is homogeneous. Thus, nightly is an isolated case, as opposed to an open series of identical forms with a different interpretation.

The two other adverbs of (1) are free forms. Thus, the determiners Det and modifiers (Adj and Rel clause) of:

during Det Adj night Rel clause

can vary freely (within semantic constraints). In the same way, the event associated with the sentence S in the form:

the night (E, that) S

can be expressed by a large variety of unconstrained forms.

Frozen or compound adverbs constitute the simplest case of compound forms because they do not allow variations of their components. As mentioned above, in at night no adjective is authorized. Moreover, one cannot insert a determiner: *at (a, this) night, the plural is forbidden: *at nights and no relative clause can be appended: *at night (that, which) was agreed on.

Such observations are general, and apply to many adverbs of varied form and lexical content:

it rained cats and dogs

*many cats and dogs
*big cats and dogs
*cat and dog

---

TABLE 6 Verbs with Sentential Complements
(From M. Gross 1975)
that whereas in current dictionaries there are about 1,500 one word

Consequently, these compound adverbs could be identified by a simple
recognition procedure, for they do not require any lemmatization or
syntactic analysis to be reduced to a dictionary form, as is the case
with verb forms for example.

A lexical study of compound adverbs has been performed in French
and a systematic inventory has been compiled from various dictionaries.

These compound adverbs have been classified according to their
syntactic shape. The syntactic forms are described at the elementary
level of sequences of parts of speech. We use symbols with obvious
interpretations such as Prep, Det, Adj, N, V, Conj (the conjunction) and W for a variable ranging over verb components, etc. We write:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Prep} & \quad \text{N} && \Rightarrow \text{at night} \\
\text{Prep} & \quad \text{Det} & \quad \text{N} && \Rightarrow \text{in the end} \\
\text{Prep} & \quad \text{Det} & \quad \text{Adj} & \quad \text{N} && \Rightarrow \text{in the long run} \\
\text{Prep} & \quad \text{Det} & \quad \text{N} & \quad \text{of} & \quad \text{Det} & \quad \text{N} && \Rightarrow \text{in every sense of the word} \\
\text{V} & \quad \text{W} && \Rightarrow \text{to begin with} \\
\text{S} && \Rightarrow \text{all things being equal}
\end{align*}
\]

Figure 2 shows the classes that have been defined on this basis,
together with examples and the number of items in each class:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tabled</th>
<th>Structures</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PADV</td>
<td>Adv</td>
<td>soudain</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>Prép C</td>
<td>en bref</td>
<td>460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDET</td>
<td>Prép Décl</td>
<td>contre toute orientation</td>
<td>570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAC</td>
<td>Prép Adj C</td>
<td>de sa belle mère</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCA</td>
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<td>à gorge déployée</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCD</td>
<td>Prép C de C</td>
<td>en désempar de cause</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCPN</td>
<td>Prép C, prép N</td>
<td>par rapport à</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCPC</td>
<td>Prép C, prép C</td>
<td>des pieds à la tête</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCON</td>
<td>Prép C, conj C</td>
<td>en tout et pour tout</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PV</td>
<td>Prép V W</td>
<td>à dire vrai</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PF</td>
<td>P (phrase figée)</td>
<td>Deux sois le sais</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PICO</td>
<td>(Adj) comme C</td>
<td>comme ses pieds</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PICO</td>
<td>(V) comme C</td>
<td>comme un cheveu sur la moustache</td>
<td>210</td>
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<td>comme dans le buisson</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIC</td>
<td>Conj C</td>
<td>et tout le tremblement</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>84 190</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frozen Adverbs (N. Gross 1970)

Table 2

The examples discussed so far are entirely frozen. Hence, as a
practical matter, they can be located in a text by using the search
function available for strings in any text editor system. There are
however more complex examples that require deeper analysis. Consider
for example the idiomatic adverb in the sentence:

* My older proposed ideas from the top of his hat

It is largely frozen: no other determiner is allowed, no adjectives can
be appended to either noun, etc., but the person of the possessive
adjective must refer to the subject of the sentence, and varies accordingly:

*Max proposed ideas from the top of your hat

In this case, the recognition procedure is no longer a simple string
matching operation, since a variable slot must be dealt with inside the
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Once this compound adverb has been identified in a text to be processed, it

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In this case, the recognition procedure is no longer a simple string
matching operation, since a variable slot must be dealt with inside the
fixed string. More general matching rules are required here.

Once this compound adverb has been identified in a text to be processed, it

can be given an interpretation, for example in terms of a simple adverb
such as leisurely or lightly and the referential information
carried by Pass can then be ignored. However, one can easily
construct particular discourses where the obligatory coreference
relation involved will disambiguate some analysis. Thus, not only the
variation of Pass must be accounted for at the lexical level, but
its referential information has to be kept for possible use in a parser.

Other compound adverbs offer different degrees of variation. There
are cases where one part of the adverb is frozen and another part is
totally free:

Max organized a party in honor of Bob
Max hid the car at the far end of the parking lot

The parts in honor, of the far end are frozen. For example, they
do not allow modifiers. The parts of N are free, for we observe variations such as:

Max organized a party in his honor
Max hid the car at the far end, I think, of the parking lot

Consider the adverbs:

ter the sake of raising things
for the sake of Bob
for God's sake

for the sake of raising things
for the sake of Bob
for God's sake

We call the combination for--sake frozen, since the noun
sake does not occur elsewhere than in adverbial phrases with the
preposition for: it cannot be the subject or object of any verb.

On the other hand, the modifiers of sake are quite varied and
regular from the point of view of the syntax of noun modifiers.

There are also cases of seemingly free adverbs which require an ad
hoc treatment. For example, dates such as:

Monday March 13, 1968 at 9 p.m.

are described in a natural way by a finite automaton.

Technical or specialized families of adverbs come close to being
frozen adverbs:

(2) They elected Bob on the (first, second) ballot
(3) Max ate his noodles in a bowl

The special semantic relations that hold between the adverbial
complement and the rest of the sentence are limited. There are few
verbs such as to eat which combine with in a bowl and which
have the non locative interpretation of (3). The usual interpretation
is that found in:

6. PRISLOG rules are particularly well adapted to recognizing such
frozen forms (P. Sabatier 1980).

7. There are nonetheless restrictions on them:

*for a heavenly sake
Max put his noodles in a bowl.

Enforcing frozen adverbs into a lexicon-grammar raises many new questions. The bulk of adverbs can be described by means of the following type of derivation (J. S. Harris 1976):

Bob left; that Bob left occurred at 9

\[ \text{Det N of N} = \text{the moon} \]

\[ \text{Adv N} = \text{noisy, powerfully}, \text{the way Bob sang was} \]

\[ \text{of, in particular} \text{stroke of bad luck;} \]

and support verbs play a crucial role here. However, there are cases where no general support verb is found and where adverbs have to be considered as a part of the elementary sentence. Consider the adverb:

| Bob sang at the top of his voice |

It is syntactically and semantically analogous to free adverbs such as noisily, powerfully. For these two free adverbs, a derivational source involving the adjective is available:

\[ \text{The way Bob sang was (noisily, powerfully)} \]

This is not the case for all the top of his voice which is practically limited to modifying the verbs of saying. Moreover, the obligatory coreference link of his leads to a representation where the adverb is not analyzed. Thus two semantically similar types of adverbs have to be represented quite differently in the lexicon-grammar.

All the situations just exemplified with adverbs are quite common, and are also encountered with nouns, adjectives and verbs. The paradox of representation they lead to can only be solved by introducing a complex level of semantic equivalence for the entries of the lexicon-grammar.

2. Compound nouns

Compound nouns form the bulk of the lexicon of languages. Language creativity is largely associated with the growth of technical vocabularies which consist mainly of technical nouns. Compound nouns number in the millions for European languages. They are usually built from the vocabulary of simple words by means of grammatical rules which may involve grammatical words. By definition, their meaning is recompositional. The compound nouns can be described in terms of the sequence of their grammatical categories, in the same way as for adverbs (M. Gross, D. Tremblay 1995). We have for example:

\[ \text{Det N of N} = \text{the moon} \]

\[ \text{Adv N} = \text{noisy, powerfully} \]

This is not the case for any, powerfully.

\[ \text{of, in particular} \text{stroke of bad luck;} \]

of, in particular stroke of bad luck; 9. There are however a limited number of frozen discourses such as:

\[ \text{stroke of bad luck;} \]

- board of governors can be modified in several ways: board and governors take separate determiners and adjectives; the powerful boards of the twelve governors of my bank. Such a compound noun comes close to being a free form. It is the limited number of second nouns such as director, governor or regent that suggests we are dealing with a compound noun. Also, the meaning of these phrases is noncompositional in the sense that they have a legal or institutional meaning that their components do not have clearly.

The variations of form we have enumerated can be partly handled by attaching a finite automaton to a given entry, and this automaton will describe the main grammatical changes allowed. The adjunction of free relative clauses to compound nouns may require a different treatment.

The kinds of variation of compound nouns are so numerous that determining whether a given nominal construction is a compound noun or not almost requires an original demonstration. Thus, automaticizing the construction of a lexicon is an activity that will present severe limitations.

Determining the support verbs for compound nouns does not seem to raise other problems than those encountered with simple nouns.

3. Compound verbs

Compound verbs or frozen sentences as we have termed them (M. Gross 1982), can be described as sequences of categories allowing for efficient matching procedures with texts, they do not differ from adverbs and nouns.

**Examples are:**

- the table is as clean as a new pin
- the book is up to date
- Bob is the world’s (best, worst) teacher
- They discussed it, on a take it or leave it basis

**Compound modifiers**

Adjectives, noun complements and relative clauses can be complex and yet apply to free nouns. From the point of view developed here, that is, the representation in terms of sequences of grammatical categories allowing for efficient matching procedures with texts, they do not differ from adverbs and nouns.

**Examples are:**

- the table is as clean as a new pin
- the book is up to date
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**Compound verbs**

Compound verbs or frozen sentences as we have termed them (M. Gross 1982), can be described as sequences of categories allowing for efficient matching procedures with texts, they do not differ from adverbs and nouns.

**Examples are:**

- Bob hit the Jackpot
- Bob took the bull by the horns
- Bob’s dream came true

We outlined in 1 the description of a lexicon-grammar of French verbs and the reasons why compound verbs had to be separated from simple ones.

Systematic search through dictionaries (monolingual, bilingual, and specialized) has yielded close to 20,000 compound verbs belonging to the same level of language as the 12,000 simple verbs. A syntactic classification has been built for them (Figure 3).

Compound verbs are the most complex forms that have to be entered into a lexicon. The compounds discussed previously were simple.

9. There are however a limited number of frozen discourses such as:

\[ \text{It was for all the world as it is} \]

which need an extra level of complexity (L. Danlos 1995).
In the case of compound verbs, the various parts of each utterance remain syntactically independent. Thus, the verbs of (1)-{4) can take any tensed form, as in:

**At that time, Bob will be hitting the jackpot**

Sentential inserts can separate a verb from its complements:

**Bob hit, it seems to me, the jackpot**

in example (2), the direct complement $N_A$ is free and general, hence, sentential structures can separate the verb from its second (frozen) complement:

**Bob look the fact that Joe was absent yesterday into account**

Notice that parts of compound verbs may be recognized directly, for example the jackpot, or into account, but these parts may be ambiguous, whereas the full utterances can rarely be confused with free forms.11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tables</th>
<th>Structures</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>$N_1 , V , C_1$</td>
<td>Il a touché le coche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAN</td>
<td>$N_2 , V , (C , , , , de , N_3)$</td>
<td>Cela a été une larme de Max (mai)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDN</td>
<td>$N_2 , V , (C , , , , de , N_3)$</td>
<td>Il a currenté le sens saus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>$N_2 , V , Préc , C_1$</td>
<td>Il chante dans les hémisphère</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPN</td>
<td>$N_2 , V , Préc , (C , de , N_1)$</td>
<td>Il abonde dans le sens de Max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPN</td>
<td>$N_2 , V , C_1 , Poly , N_3$</td>
<td>Il a déchargé sa bile sur Max</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNP2</td>
<td>$N_2 , N_1 , Préc , C_1$</td>
<td>Il a certa Max par les oreilles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNP2</td>
<td>$N_2 , V , C_1 , Préc , C_1$</td>
<td>Il met de l'eau dans son vin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5</td>
<td>Que $P , V , Préc , C_1$</td>
<td>Que Max reste collé en sa voiture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6</td>
<td>$N_2 , V , Qu , Préc , C_1$</td>
<td>Il a pris du bon côté que Max reste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7</td>
<td>$N_2 , V , C_1 , à , Qu , P$</td>
<td>Il a dit non à ce que Max reste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLI</td>
<td>$N_2 , V , C_1 , de , Qu , P$</td>
<td>Il se moque des dents dont il reste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CADV</td>
<td>$N_2 , ADV$</td>
<td>Cela ne place plus loin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNX</td>
<td>$N_2 , ADV$</td>
<td>Il est parti sans baiser d'adresse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>$C_2 , ADV$</td>
<td>La monte-temps monté au tor de Max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>$N_0 , avoir , C_1$</td>
<td>Il a eu le mot de la fin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1PN</td>
<td>$N_0 , avoir , C_1 , Préc , N_1$</td>
<td>Il a barre sur Max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANP2</td>
<td>$N_0 , avoir , N_1 , Préc , C_1$</td>
<td>Il a en lacet</td>
</tr>
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<td>$N_0 , avoir , Adv$</td>
<td>Il a la vue basse</td>
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<td>AI2</td>
<td>$N_0 , avoir , Préc , C_1$</td>
<td>Il a mal aux cheveux</td>
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<tr>
<td>EO1</td>
<td>$C_1 , de , N_1 , Adv$</td>
<td>La triche de Max est faite</td>
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<tr>
<td>EO1P</td>
<td>$C_1 , être , Préc , C_1$</td>
<td>Les rieurs sont du côté de Max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>142800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Frozen Verbs**

(M. Gross 1982)

Table 3

4. Some conclusions

How to organize the lexicon of compound utterances is an open question. From a computational point of view, many solutions are available for the lookup of a compound term:

(i) In classical algorithms in which left-to-right analysis is essential, the compound term could be viewed as an extension of the first morphological unit while scanning the sentence. For example, the adjective long is the first such element of the compound adverb in the long run. Among many other possibilities, the program, passing on the word long would test the occurrence of the and in to the left of long, and the occurrence of run to the right. Notice that the left-to-right constraint has to be somewhat relaxed in order to test both left and right contexts of long.

(ii) In a futuristic view of parsing involving parallel computing, one might envision several levels of lexicon. At the first level, long on the one hand and run, on the other, would be two sets of constructions whose intersection would contain the compound in the long run; the latter can then be searched for in the input text. For compound verbs, one would have to synthesize a matching utterance, rather than simply looking it up. Such a procedure can always be simulated sequentially.

In all cases, the representation of utterances which we have used, namely the sequences of syntactic categories, allows for the separation of the lexicon of compound terms into classes for which direct access can be provided. In this way, dictionary lookup can be sped up.11

**REMARK**

In favor of left-to-right analysis one could point to the fact that complex forms can often be abbreviated and that abbreviations are mostly right truncations. In such situations the remaining part (the smallest part) of the truncated term must carry the information that describes the right context in order to allow reconstruction of the reduced part. There are however exceptions where abbreviations are carried out on the left part of a term, (e.g. a programming language: a language).

Preliminary figures have shown that compound terms form the essential part of a lexicon-grammar. It is also interesting to observe that they fuse both the linguist and the computer specialist to adopt a much more abstract view of language.

- semantically, by definition, compound utterances cannot be decomposed into simple utterances; in other terms, meanings is not compositional for compounds. Hence, in a certain sense, one has to recognize that meaning has not much to do with words;

- syntactically, it has become a rather general habit to attach properties to individual words. In the case of compounds this mode of representation is no longer possible. Why privilege one part of a compound with marks rather than some other part? For example, there is no reason to attach the Passive marking to the verb rather than to either of the complements of the utterance to put the cart before the horse. Lexicon-grammar representations eliminate such questions by defocalizing the syntactic information and by attaching it to the full sentence. In this sense, compound expressions provide a powerful motivation for representing lexical and syntactic phenomena in the form of a lexicon-grammar.

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10. As a matter of fact, when an utterance is learned to be ambiguous, with one analysis as a frozen term and the other as a free term, ignoring competing free forms altogether is a good parsing strategy.

11. The same use of sequences of syntactic categories is found in a strong grammar (Z.S. Harris 1961), which has proves to be quite efficient in syntactic recognition (N. Sager 1981, M. Salkoff 1973, 1975).
REFERENCES


