

AGENTIVE AND NON-AGENTIVE ADJECTIVAL SYNTHETIC COMPOUNDS IN ENGLISH

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1. Introduction

This paper aims to examine the syntax of English synthetic compounds based on the passive participle. The study revolves around the following questions:

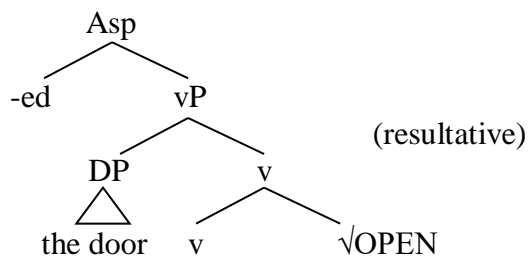
- Can synthetic *-en* compounds function as deverbal adjectives and/or eventive passives?
- Is the external argument licensed by adjectival synthetic *-en* compounds?
- Are all synthetic *-en* compounds syntactically eventive?

2. Theoretical background – Embick's participles
Embick (2003) divides participles in English into three types: stative, resultative and eventive:

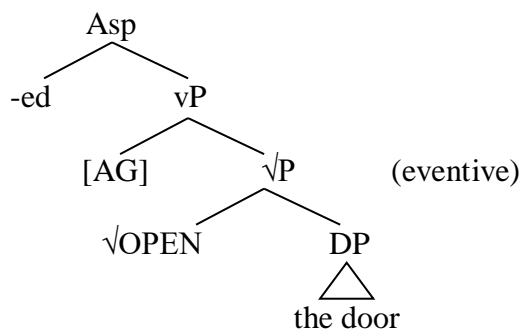
(1) a. The door is open.



b. The door is opened.



c. The door was opened (by John).



The structure in (1a) is that of a simple adjective. The reason why vP is not present in this structure is that *open* expresses a state not linked to an event. The vP head is present (1b) indicating that *opened* denotes a state resulting from a prior event. The structure in (1c) is that of an eventive passive.

3. Synthetic *-en* compounds

Synthetic *-en* compounds are formed by merging nouns with passive participles of verbs. Semantically, the great majority of such compounds incorporate left-most elements which are in an agentive, instrumental or locative relation to the head participle.

(2) agentive: expert-tested, man-made, researcher-developed, student-written

(3) instrumental: pencil-drawn, computer-generated, chain-locked, radio-controlled

(4) locative: home-made, truck-delivered, studio-produced, farm-raised

4. The syntax of synthetic *-en* compounds.

Synthetic *-en* compounds exhibit a number of features typical of adjectives. They are frequently found in the attributive position:

- (5) a. student-written articles
b. pencil-drawn pictures

c. home-made clothes

They can appear as complements of copular verbs (*seem, look, remain, etc.*):

- (6) a. This article looks student-written.
b. The door remains chain-locked.
c. The cake seems home-made.

Synthetic *-en* compounds can be found with modifiers pointing to the presence of the external argument.

- (7) a. Everything seemed computer-designed by someone with no imagination.
b. This picture looks pencil-drawn by an artist.
c. The furniture looked (home)-made by an experienced carpenter.
d. Carefully teacher-prepared materials.
e. A deliberately blood-stained suit.
f. A skilfully home-made cake.

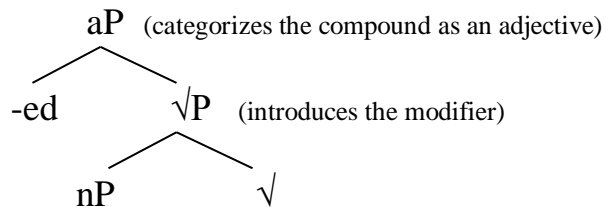
There are a group synthetic *-en* compounds which do not allow the licensing of external argument modifiers.

- (8) a. This film seems action-packed (*by a skilful director).
b. The company is customer-oriented (*by the management).
c. John's condition is ageing-related (*by the doctor).
d. A (*carefully) adult-themed book
e. A (*skilfully) heart-shaped box
f. A (*deliberately) battle-proven weapon.

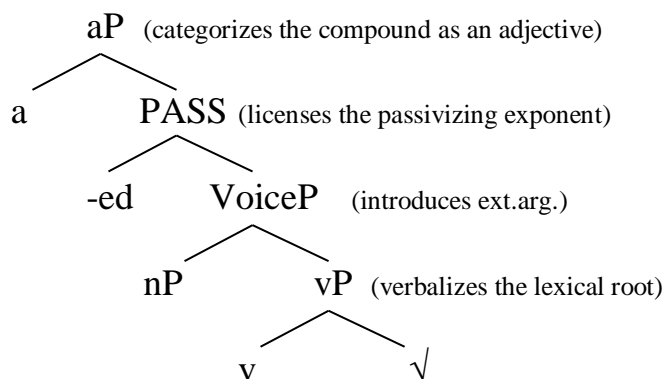
Such compounds are interpreted as simple adjectives.

5. The internal structure of synthetic *-en* compounds

(9) stative (*action-packed, goal-oriented, health-related, etc.*)



(10) resultative (*student-written, pencil-drawn, home-made, etc.*)



Deverbal *-en* compounds commonly function as eventive passives:

- (11) a. This soup was expert-tested by John. (Di Sciullo 1992: 74)
b. The antennas were computer designed by Custom Metalworks.
c. The breakfasts were home-made by the host.

As eventive passives, synthetic *-en* compounds are headed by PASS (Alexiadou et al. 2014), with no aP present.

Not every deverbal *-en* compound can be selected by copular verbs and therefore function as an adjective:

- (12) a. ??This soup seems expert-tested.
b. ??The water looks truck-delivered.
c. ??The data looks field-collected.

Compounds such as *action-packed*, in contrast to deverbal *-en* compounds, exhibit strongly adjectival features such as the ability to license *very* and accept the suffix *-ness*.

- (13) a. very action-packed/family-oriented/adult-themed/heart-shaped
b. *very student-written/chain-locked/pencil-drawn
c. action-packedness, family-orientedness, health-relatedness, adult-themedness...

Adjectival synthetic *-en* compounds only occasionally accept modification with *very*:

- (14) a. Egypt used to be a very state-controlled economy.
b. The music sounds very computer-generated.
c. The food tasted very home-made.

-ness suffixation is extremely rare with deverbal *-en* compounds:

- (15) a. *student-writeness/pencil-drawnness computer-designedness
b. (...) there's something about the home-madeness of it that makes my stomach feel like it's rotting. (web example)

Additional evidence pointing to the non-eventivity of compounds of the *action-packed* type:

- They can only be derived from a limited number of roots (deverbal *-en* compound, on the other hand, are fully productive)
- They can be idiosyncratic (e.g. *spellbound, crestfallen, gobsmacked*)

6. Conclusions

- Synthetic *-en* compounds fall into two categories with respect to the ability to license the external argument.
- Deverbal *-en* compounds, with several exceptions, can form both resultative adjectives and verbal passives.
- The stative nature of compounds such as *action-packed* means that not all synthetic compounds in English are deverbal in morphosyntactic sense;
- At least roots such as √PACK, √ORIENT, √RELATE, √SHAPE can give rise to both deverbal and non-deverbal adjectives.

Selected references

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