LNG2211
ENGLISH MORPHOLOGY

Term 2/2022

Department of English

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

HELLO!

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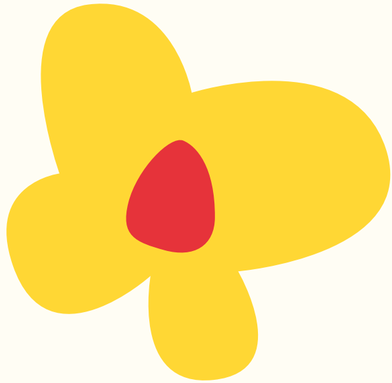
MEANING AND STRUCTURE

The predictability of word meaning depends on how the structure of complex word forms guides their interpretation. Even with words that are lexically listed, unless their meaning is entirely different from what one might expect, such guidance is relevant.

HELPFUL is derived from the noun base HELP.
By means of the adjective-forming suffix -ful



AFFIXES AS HEADS

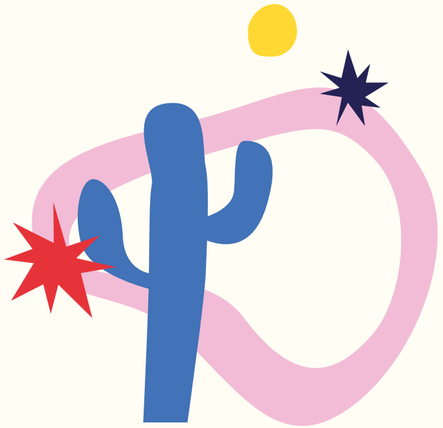
Most compounds are headed, with the head on the right.

greenhouse

head

It determines the compound's syntactic status (as a noun), and also its meaning.

greenhouse = a kind of house for plants



teacher

verb ➡ noun = someone who Xs (X = teach)

AFFIXES AS HEADS

Left-headed compounds (such as attorney general)

re-; rearrange, repaint, re-educate

The only prefix that are unequivocally heads are those that change

word class, such as

de- in delouse (nouns ➡ verbs)

en- in enfeeble and enslave (nouns & adjectives ➡ verbs)

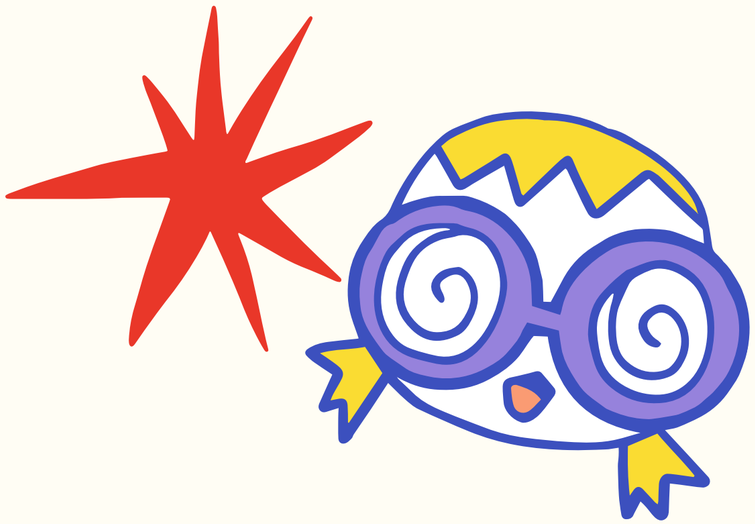
MORE ELABORATE WORD FORMS: MULTIPLE AFFIXATION

Flat-structure is , they each consist of merely a string of affixes plus a root, no portions of the string being grounded together as a sub-string or smaller constituent within the word.

N = noun

V = verb

A = adjective

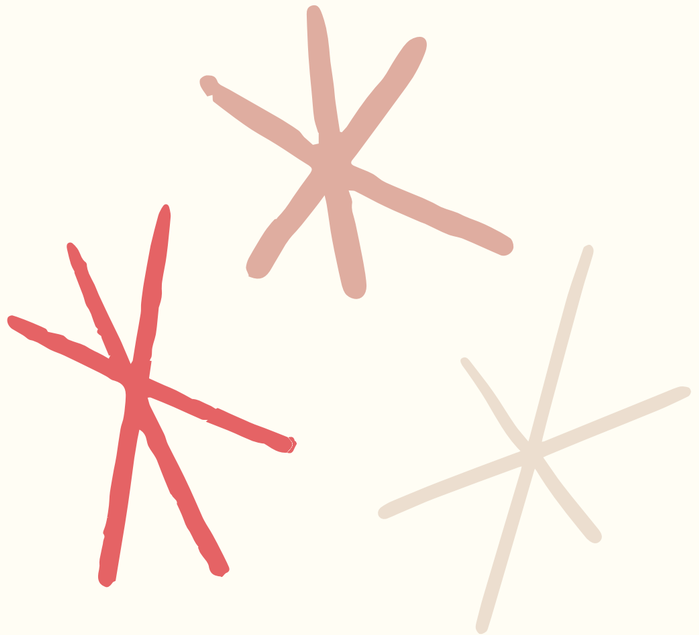


MORE ELABORATE WORD FORMS: MULTIPLE AFFIXATION

The successive processes of helpfulness affixation:

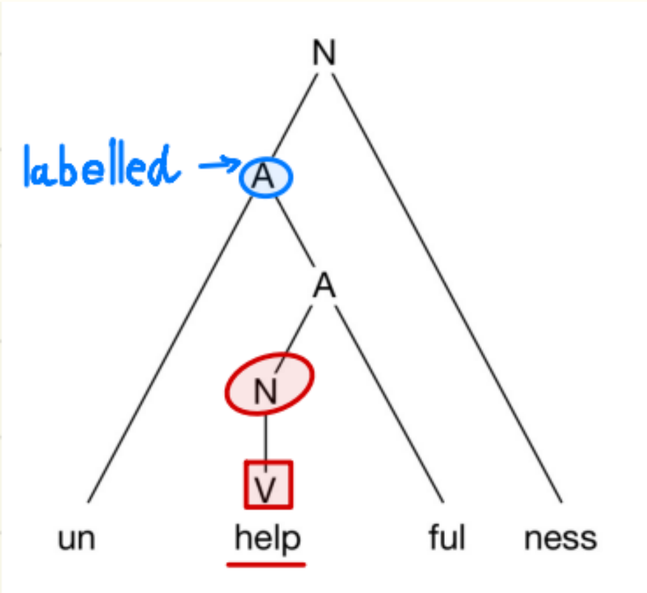
(1) helpN + -ful → helpfulA
un- + helpful → unhelpfulA
unhelpful + -ness → unhelpfulnessN

(2) helpN + -less → helplessA
helpless + -ness → helplessnessN

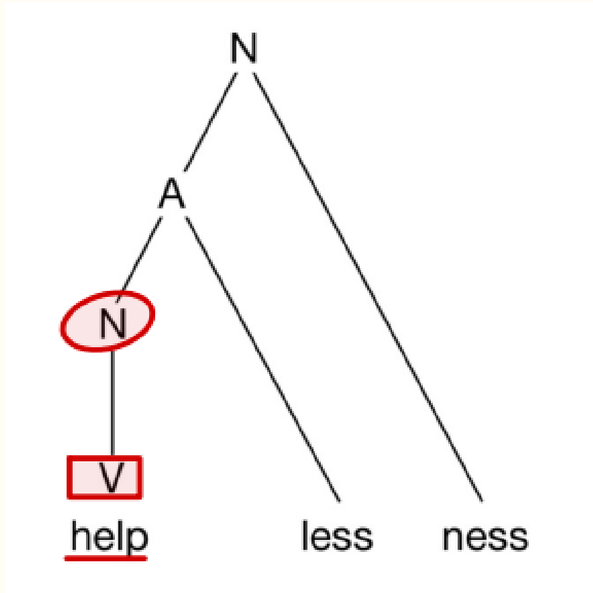


TREE DIAGRAM

(3)



(4)

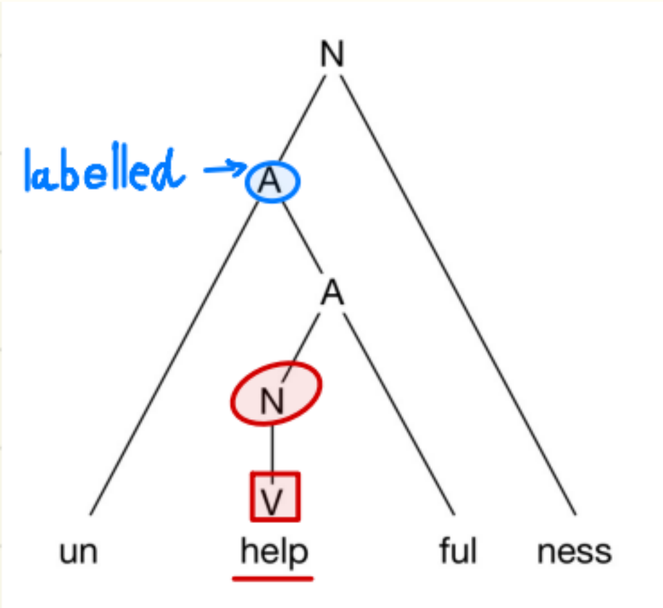


In (3) & (4) noun help is formed by conversion from the verb. The points in a tree diagram from which branches sprout are called nodes. The nodes in (3) & (4) are all labeled, to indicate the word class of the string that is dominated by the node in question.

Ex. The second-to-top node in (3) is labeled ‘A’ to indicate that the string unhelpful that it dominates is an adjective.

TREE DIAGRAM

(3)



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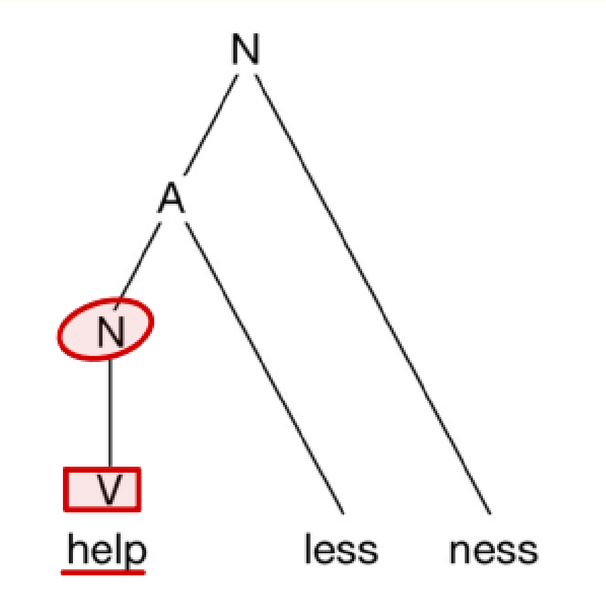


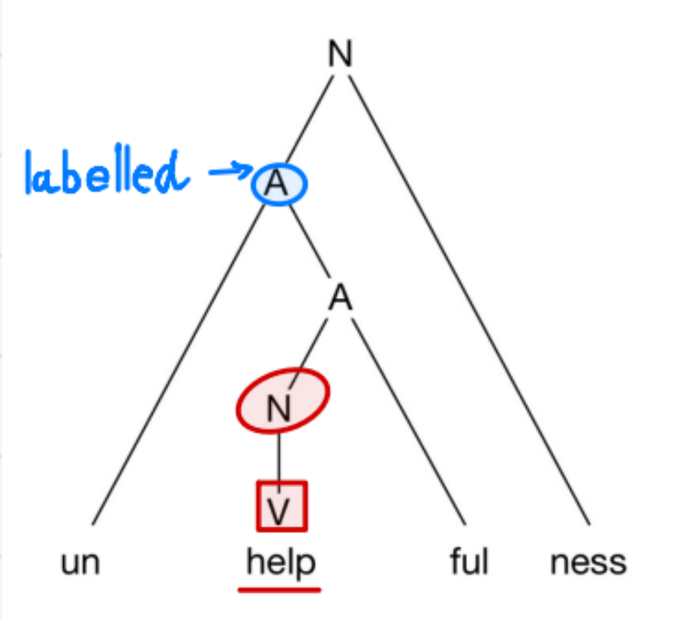
Labelled bracketing One pair of brackets corresponds to each node in the tree:

(3) [[un-[[helpV]N-ful]A]A-ness]N

(4) [[[helpV]N -less]A-ness]N

TREE DIAGRAM

(3)



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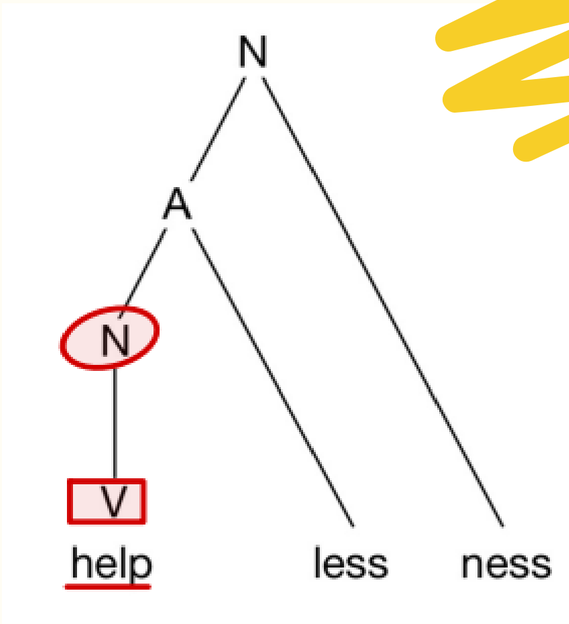
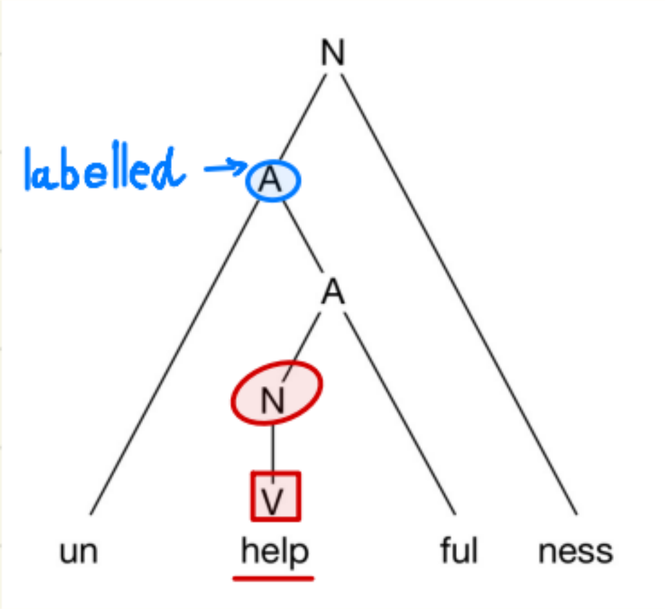


One thing stands out about all the nodes in (3) and (4): each has no more than two branches sprouting downwards from it. This reflects the fact that, in English, derivational processes operate by adding no more than one affix to a base, constituting what is sometimes called a circumfix.

TREE DIAGRAM

(3)



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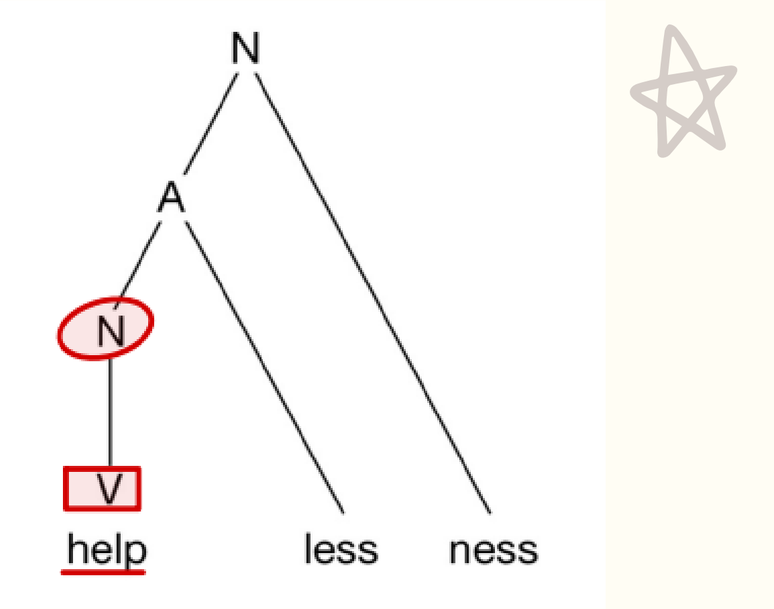
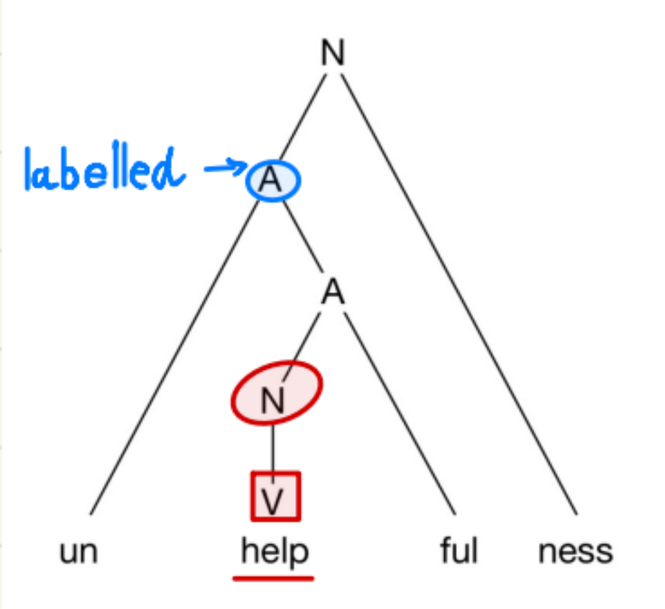


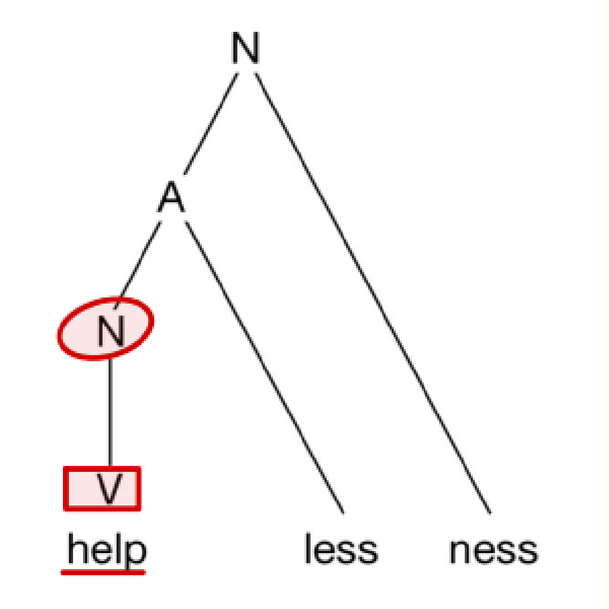
Branching within word-structure tree diagrams is never more than binary (i.e. with two branches). (The only plausible candidate for a circumfix in English is the en-...-en combination that forms enliven and embolden from live and bold; but en- and -en each appears on its own too, e.g. in enfeeble and redden, so an alternative analysis as a combination of a prefix and a suffix seems preferable.)

TREE DIAGRAM

(3)



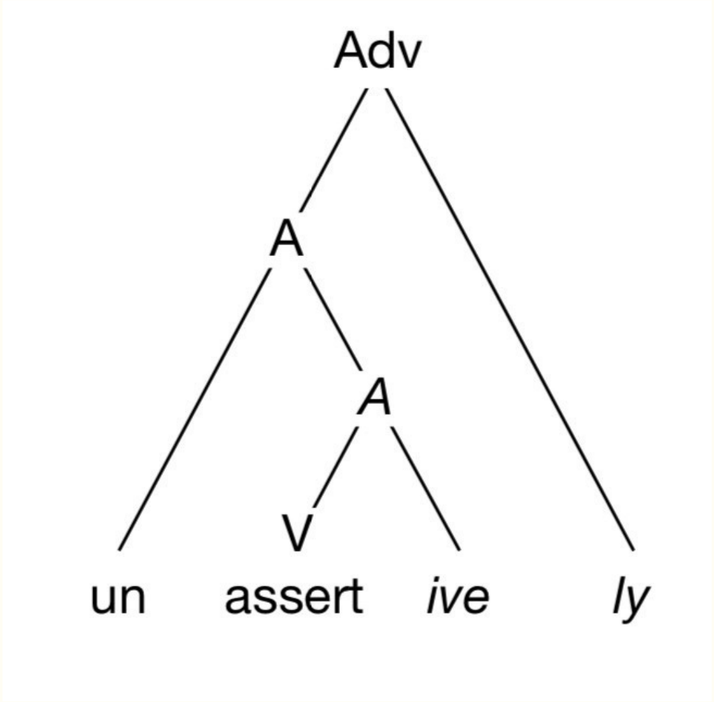
(4)



The single branch connecting N to V above help in (3) and (4) reflects the fact that the noun help is derived from the verb help by conversion, with no affix.

TREE DIAGRAM

(5)



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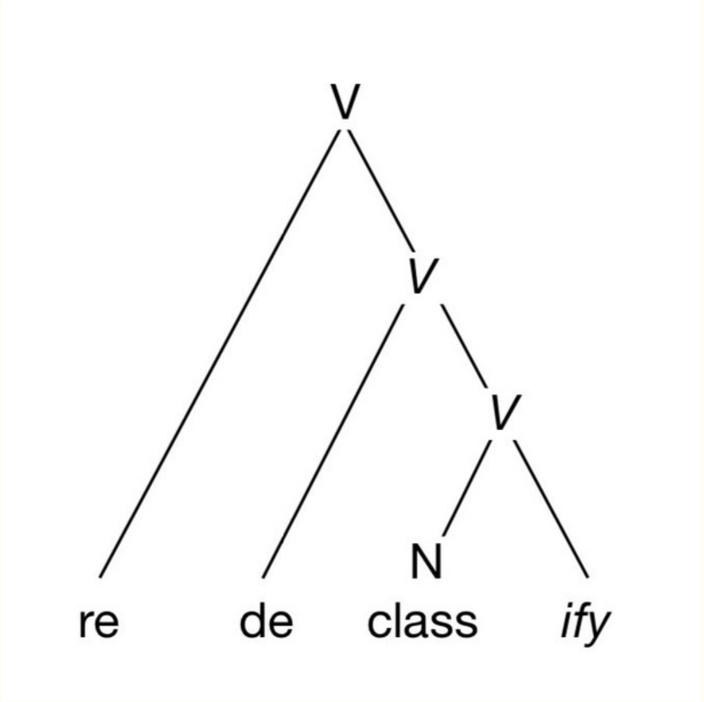
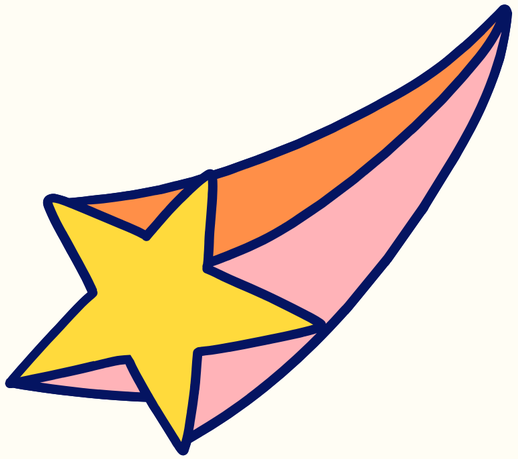


Note: More than one node in a tree diagram may carry the same word class label.

MORE ELABORATE WORD FORMS: COMPOUNDS WITHIN COMPOUNDS

Compound words three diagram: any compound has just two immediate constituents.

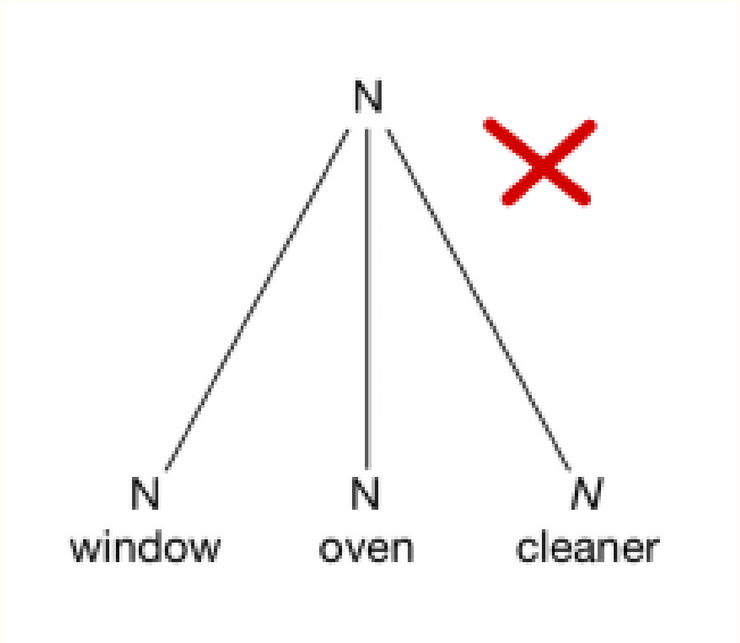
The secondary compound hair restorer are the two two-part compounds oven cleaner and window cleaner.



MORE ELABORATE WORD FORMS: COMPOUNDS WITHIN COMPOUNDS

A three-part compound ❌

(7)



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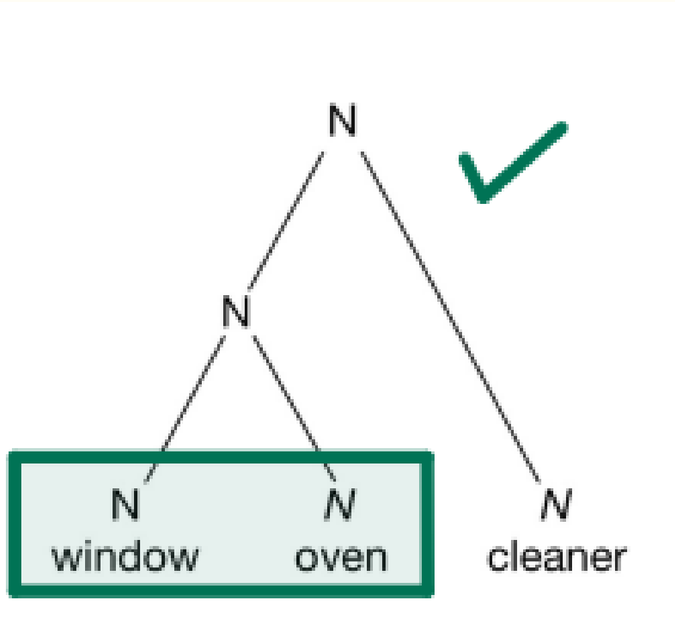
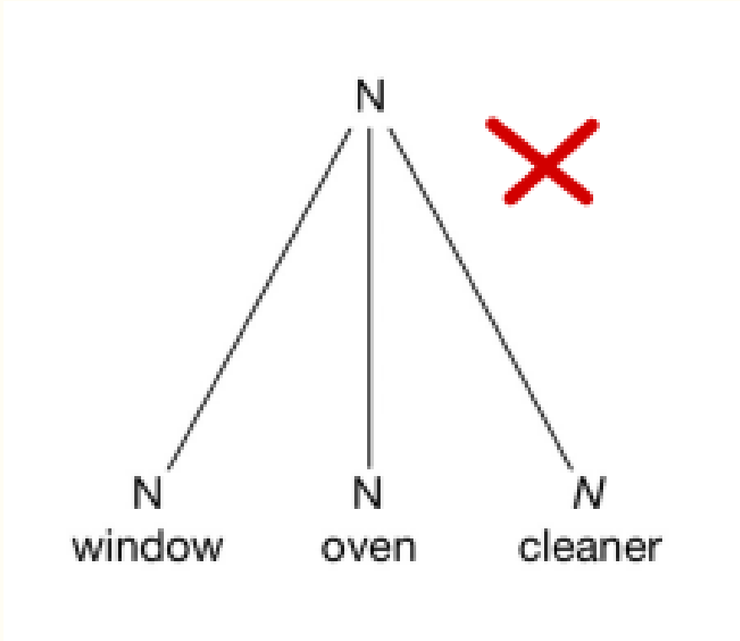


MORE ELABORATE WORD FORMS: COMPOUNDS WITHIN COMPOUNDS

(7)



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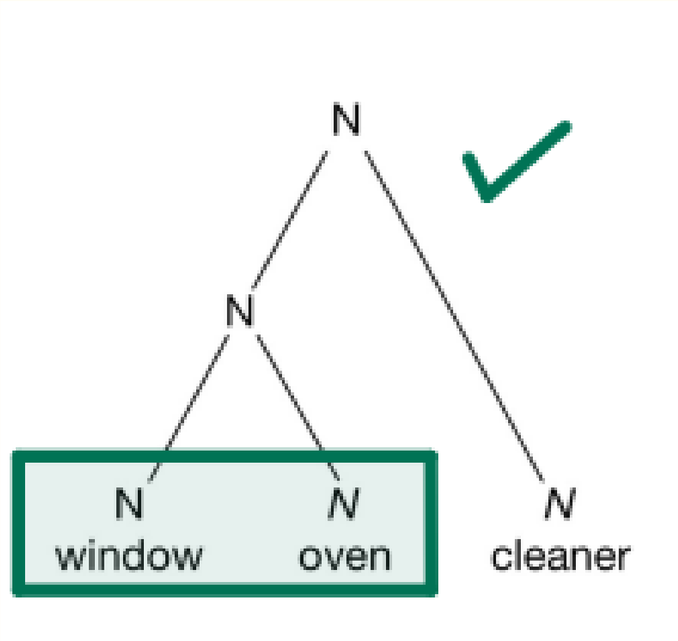
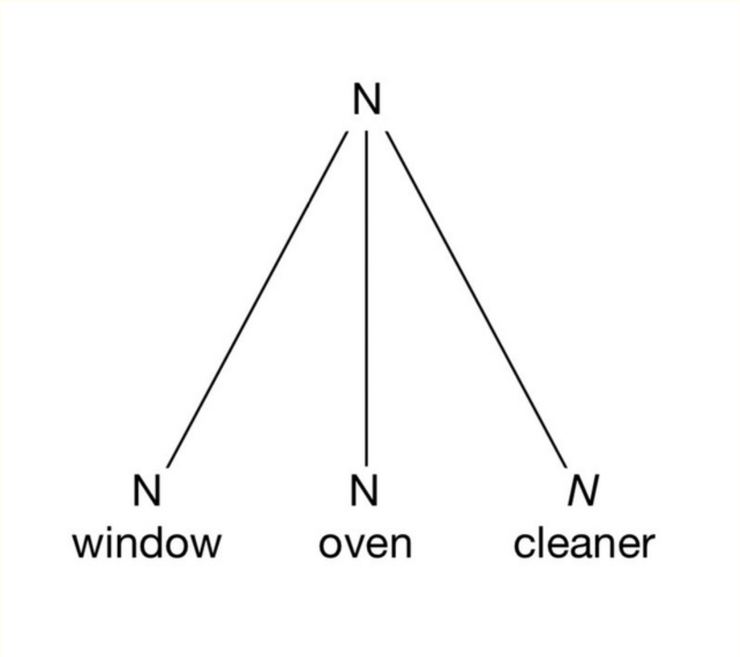


It makes sense that,in some compounds, one or both of the compounds should itself be a compound (8)

MORE ELABORATE WORD FORMS: COMPOUNDS WITHIN COMPOUNDS

The meaning of 'marketing of product for cleaning window ovens'

(9)



main stress on the lefthand element

window oven

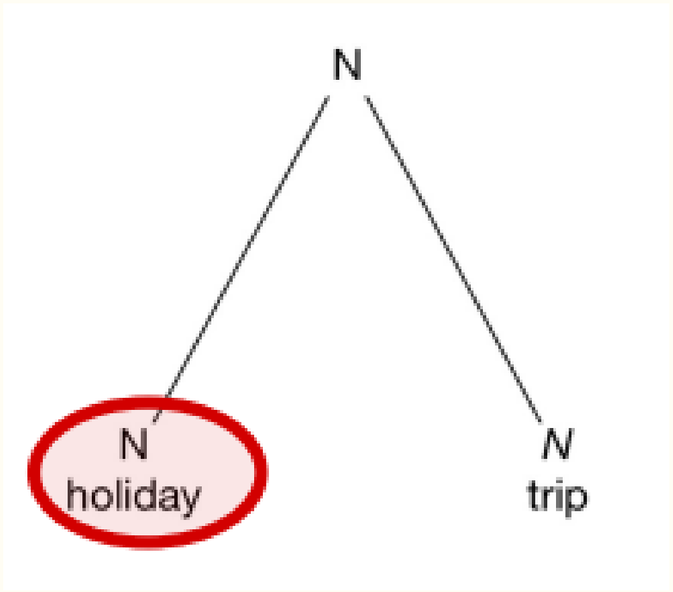
window oven cleaner

So the whole compound at (9) should have its main stress on the lefthand element too

MORE ELABORATE WORD FORMS: COMPOUNDS WITHIN COMPOUNDS

- All complex compound nouns follow the left-stressed pattern of simple compound nouns.

(10)



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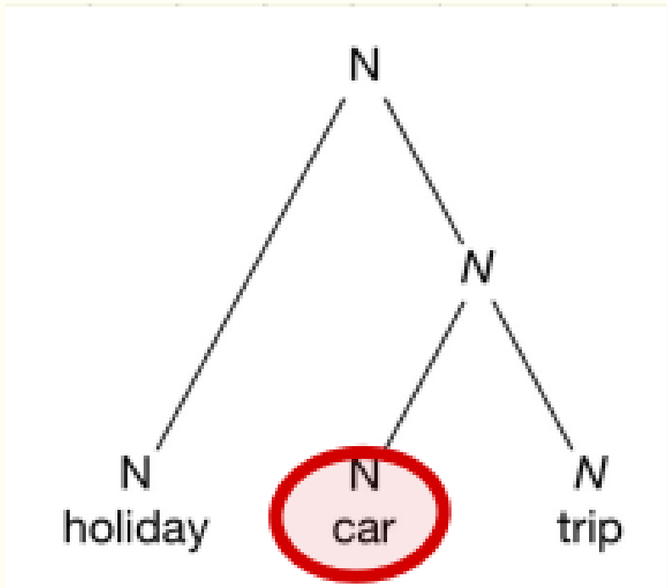
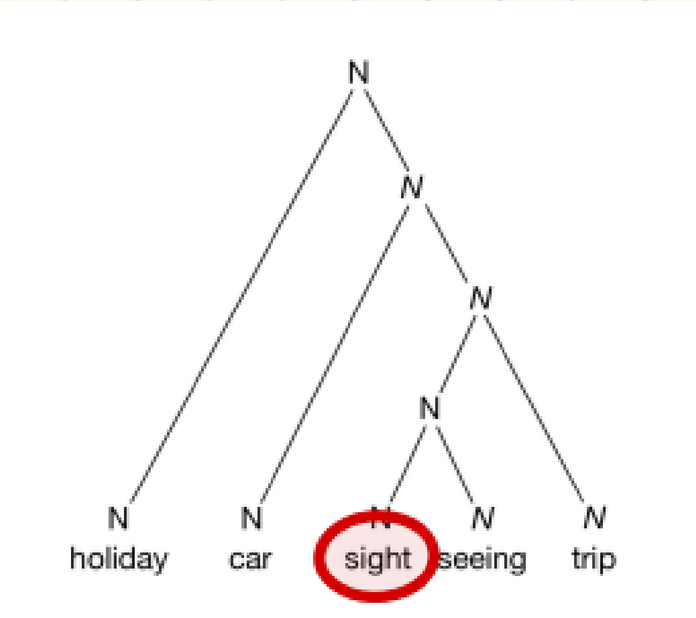


MORE ELABORATE WORD FORMS: COMPOUNDS WITHIN COMPOUNDS

- All complex compound nouns follow the left-stressed pattern of simple compound nouns.

(12)



APPARENT MISMATCHES BETWEEN MEANING AND STRUCTURE

Nuclear physicist

nuclear = adjective

physicist = noun

[[nuclear] [physicist]] = ‘a physicist who is nuclear’ ❌

bracketing paradox

[[nuclear physic-]-ist] = ‘someone who is an expert in nuclear physics’ ✅

APPARENT MISMATCHES BETWEEN MEANING AND STRUCTURE

*from the semantic point of view
[[French histori-]-an]

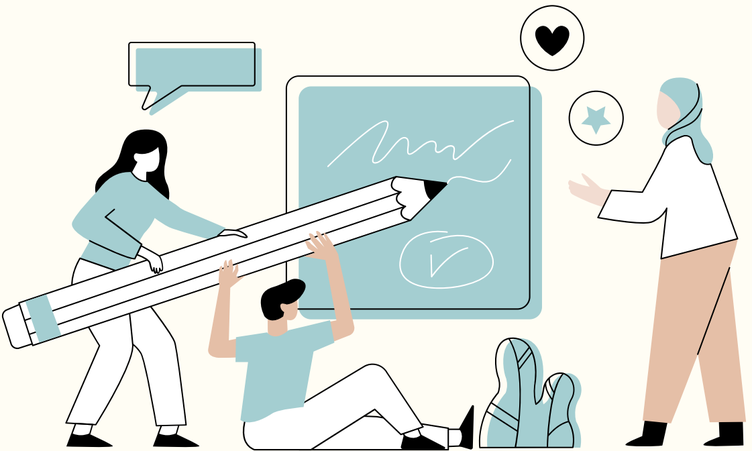
plastic surgeon & chemical engineer ≠ nuclear physicist & French historian

French history teacher
[[French history] teacher] or [French [history teacher]]?

APPARENT MISMATCHES BETWEEN MEANING AND STRUCTURE

A clue to a way out of this problem lies in comparing the actual expressions at (13) with the non-existent or ill-formed ones in (14):

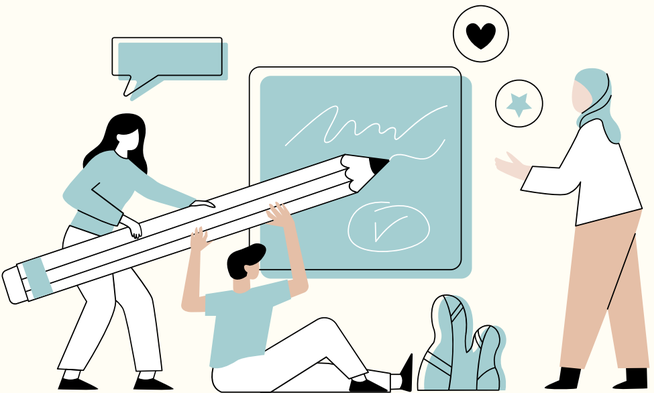
(13) a. fresh air fanatic
b. open door policy
c. French historian ‘expert in French history’
d. nuclear physicist
e. sexually transmitted disease clinic



APPARENT MISMATCHES BETWEEN MEANING AND STRUCTURE

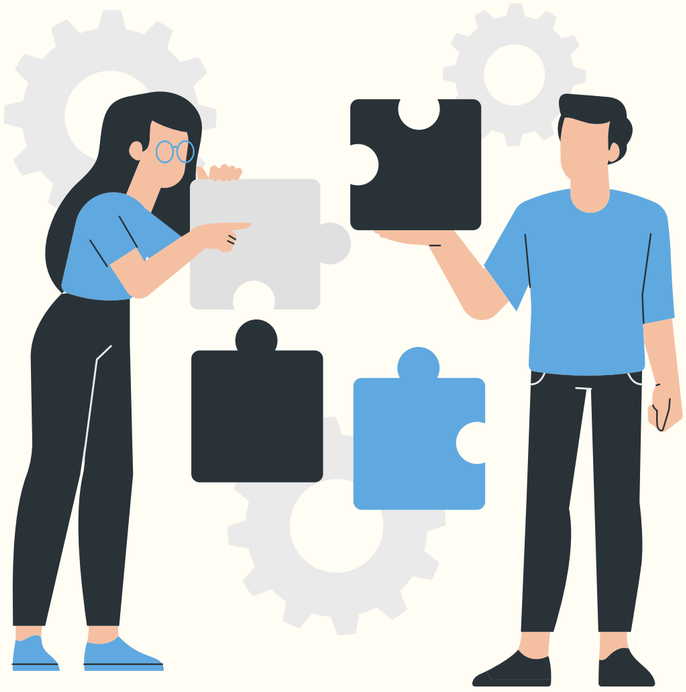
A clue to a way out of this problem lies in comparing the actual expressions at (13) with the non-existent or ill-formed ones in (14):

(14) a. cool air fanatic ‘fanatic for cool air’
b. wooden door policy ‘policy on wooden doors’
c. suburban historian ‘expert on the history of suburbs’
d. recent physicist ‘expert on recent physics’ (not ‘recent expert on physics’)
e. easily transmitted disease clinic



TECHNICAL TERMS

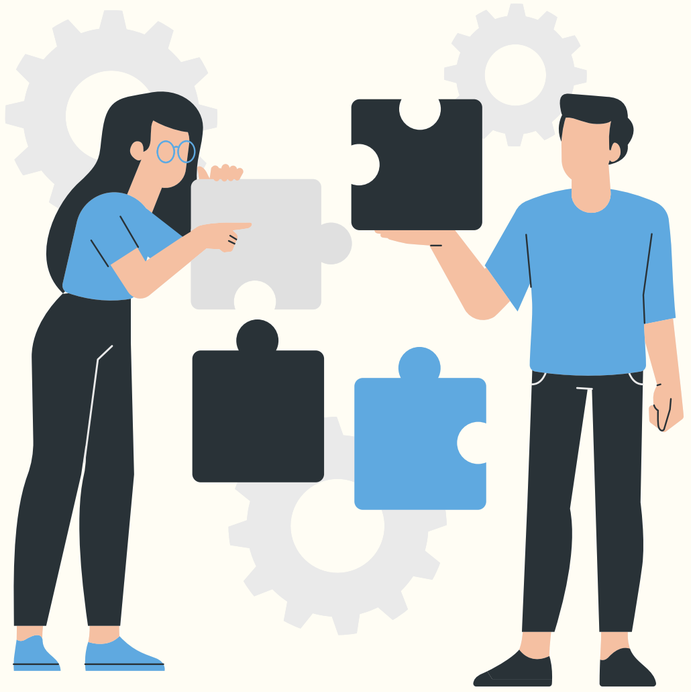
Binary - of a tree diagram, having two branches (or more than two branches) at each node.
Bracketing paradox - inconsistency between the structure suggested by the syntactic or morphological properties of an expression and the structure suggested by its meaning.
Circumflex - a two-part affix, one part preceding and the other following the base.



TECHNICAL TERMS

Labelled bracketing - an alternative to a tree diagram as a way of representing the internal structure of words.

Tree diagram - a way of representing the structure of a complex word or sentence in terms of a branching structure in which the branching points (notes) and the ends of the branches may bear word class or phrasal labels.



UNIT COMPLETE!

QUESTION?

we can discuss in class or
contact me via LINE or Email.

SEE YOU NEXT WEEK

See Ya!