

BINOMIALS – A LITERATURE REVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

The last three decades have witnessed a growing interest in vocabulary (Meara 2002); it has been acknowledged as an essential part in language acquisition and language teaching. Lewis (quoted in

Moudraia 2001), argued that children acquire a structured lexicon rather than a lexicalized grammar. Commenting on Palmer and Hamdan & Abu Guba The Treatment of Binomials 106 Hornby's Second Interim Report on English Collocations (1933), Cowie (2000:5) posited that their work "showed how much of everyday speech and writing is in fact made up of fixed phrases" Such expressions including binomials as multi-unit words have a key role in promoting fluency because words "are stored not

only as individual morphemes, but also as parts of phrases, or as longer memorized chunks" (Bolinger, quoted in Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992: 31)

Binomial is a linguistic phenomenon, which despite its presence and pervasiveness in nearly all languages, is an insufficiently researched area and has not received the attention it deserves. Since the inception of the linguistic phenomenon of binomials, it has been treated under different labels, including "*irreversible binomials*" (Malkiel 1959; Bolinger 1962; Gustafsson 1984; Kadi 1988; Saeed 2010), "*freezes*" (Cooper & Ross 1975; Oden & Lopes 1981; Gill 1988), and "*conjoined lexical pairs*" (Bakir 1999) (cited in Gorgis & Al-Tamimi 2005) and "*double*" (Mayoral Asensio, 2003). However, the difference is a matter of labeling and the common thread running through all of them is that they conceive of binomials as "the sequence of two words pertaining to the same form-class, placed on an identical level of syntactic hierarchy, and ordinarily connected by some kind of lexical link" (Malkiel, 1995).

Definition of binomials

In language studies, a pair of words (for example, *loud and clear*) conventionally linked by a [conjunction](#) (usually *and*) or a [preposition](#).

When the word order is fixed, the binomial is said to be *irreversible*.

According to Macmillan Dictionary, a binomial is “[a phrase containing two nouns that are joined together by a conjunction and always appear in the same order, for example cup and saucer](#)”

The term "binomial" is defined by Malkiel (1959:113) as "the sequence of two words pertaining to the same form-class, placed on an identical level of syntactic hierarchy, and ordinarily connected by some kind of lexical link". Malkiel maintained that while the constituents of a binomial such as *snow and cold* are reversible and even changeable by some semantically related items (*cold and snow, wind and cold*), the sequence of binomial such as *odds and ends* has become fixed. Gustafson (quoted in Kadi 1988) claimed that a semantic relationship such as synonymy, antonymy should exist between the constituents of a binomial.

The two constituents of a binomial, according to Malkiel (1959) may be connected by a preposition or a conjunction. Farghal and Jaber (1995:100 – 101) distinguished between two types of binomial, namely transparent and opaque or idiomatic. While the meanings of the former directly derive from the members of the pair, the latter do not.

According to Hamdan (2005), only words of the same form-class can be conjoined together to make a binomial. Examples of conjoined verbs, nouns, adjectives, prepositions and adverbs are: *give and take, ups and downs, right and wrong, from and into and on and off*.

According to Khatibzadeh & Sameri, binomials, as a subcategory of collocation, consist of two words from the same category which are joined with a linguistic link. Like collocations, binomials are mostly language specific.

Examples of binomials in English include *aches and pains, all or nothing, back and forth, beck and call, bigger and better, bit by bit, black and blue, black and white, blood and guts, bread and butter, bubble and squeak, cease and desist,*

checks and balances, cloak and dagger, cops and robbers, corned beef and cabbage, cut and dried, dead or alive, death and destruction, dollar for dollar, dos and don'ts, fair and square, fast and loose, fire and brimstone, fish and chips, flesh and bones, goods and services, ham and eggs, hand to mouth, hands and knees, heads or tails, hearts and flowers, hem and haw, high and dry, high and low, high and mighty, huff and puff, hugs and kisses, kiss and make up, knife and fork, leaps and bounds, life and death, little by little, long and short, lost and found, loud and clear, make or break, milk and honey, needle and thread, nickel and dime, nip and tuck, now or never, null and void, nuts and bolts, old and gray, one to one, open and shut, part and parcel, peace and quiet, pins and needles, pots and pans, rags to riches, rise and fall, rise and shine, rough and ready, safe and sound, saints and sinners, short but sweet, show and tell, side by side, slip and slide, soap and water, song and dance, sooner or later, spic and span, sticks and stones, strange but true, sugar and spice, thick and thin, time after time, tit for tat, tooth and nail, toss and turn, ups and downs, wash and wear, and win or lose.

Types of Binomials

Reversible and Irreversible Binomials

In the typical newspaper headline *Cold and snow grip the nation* it is proper to set off the segment *cold and snow* as a **binomial**, if one agrees so to label the sequence of two words pertaining to the same form-class, placed on an identical level of syntactic hierarchy, and ordinarily connected by some kind of lexical link. There is nothing unchangeable or formulaic about this particular binomial: Speakers are at liberty to invert the succession of its members (*snow and cold . . .*) and may with impunity replace either *snow* or *cold* by some semantically related word (say, *wind* or *ice*). However, in a binomial such as *odds and ends* the situation is different: The succession of its constituents has hardened to such an extent that an inversion of the two kernels--**ends* and *odds*--would be barely understandable to listeners caught by surprise. *Odds and ends*, then, represents the

special case of an irreversible binomial.

Synonymous and Echoic Binomials

The third most frequent **binomial** in the DoD [Department of Defense] [corpus](#) is *friends and allies*, with 67 instances. Unlike the majority of binomials, it is reversible: *allies and friends* also occurs, with 47 occurrences.

Both *allies* and *friends* refer to countries which accord with US policies; as such, the two coordinates of the binomial may incline us to categorizing the binomial as 'synonymous' (Gustafsson, 1975). Rhetorically speaking, *friends and allies* may have an intensifying function, similar to 'echoic' binomials (where word 1 is identical to word 2), such as *more and more* and *stronger and stronger*."

Type of relationship between two pairs of the binomial

Noun and noun:

Many binomials combine words which are similar or closely connected in meaning:

peace and quiet: freedom from noise and disturbance

He sent his children to the park so that he could have **some peace and quiet**.

life and times: the story of someone's life, especially in its social context

I'm reading a book about **the life and times of** Winston Churchill. It's fascinating.

law and order: the maintenance of a good society because people follow the laws and criminals are caught and punished.

After the war there was a serious breakdown in **law and order**. It has taken a long time for the police to gain control of the situation.

Other binomials refer to things that are closely or frequently connected:

fish and chips: the popular and traditional take-away food in Britain

I can't be bothered to cook, I'll go and get some **fish and chips**.

salt and vinegar: the condiments or flavourings that are often had with chips

Do you want **salt and vinegar** on your chips?

pros and cons: the advantages and disadvantages of something; the things for and against something.

What are the **pros and cons** of capital punishment?

Rhyme and alliteration:

Many binomials combine words that rhyme:

odds and sods: a collection of small and unimportant things. **Odds and ends** has the same meaning.

I've done all the important building work; I've just got the odds and sods left, you know, like fitting the door handles.

hustle and bustle: a lot of noise and activity
I love the **hustle and bustle** of city life. I'd get bored in the countryside.

Many binomials use **alliteration**. This is when the sounds at the beginning of the words are similar.

Grammar words:

Many binomials combine grammar words such as prepositions and conjunctions.

ups and downs: the good and bad times in life
The **ups and downs** of life are similar all over the world, but people react differently to them.

ins and outs: the details and fine points of something.
I don't know all the **ins and outs**, but it seems the Prime Minister has made a serious mistake.

down and out: a homeless and jobless person. This is also often used as an adjective.

Did you see the poor **down and out** sleeping in the park? Should we tell the police about him?'

ifs and buts: the reasons why someone doesn't want to do something; their objections

Whenever we try to change the work routines, the workers have so many **ifs and buts** that we never manage to change anything.

Abbreviations

Many common binomials are referred to by an abbreviation of the initial letters.

R and R: rest and relaxation

I'm going on a 2 week beach holiday. I really need some **R and R**.

P and P: postage and packing - usually seen when you buy something that needs delivery.

You know you want to buy that bicycle over the Internet? Did you check that the price includes **P and P**?

R and D: research and development - usually a department in an industrial business.

Sony has a very strong **R and D** division: that's why they keep coming up with new products.

CONCLUSION

The study has summarized major theoretical issues related to the topic of binomials, as one subcategory of English collocations in EFL/ ESL. The issues serve as nothing but a warning to ESL learners in mastering the target language if their competence is to be regarded as native-like. Other issues concerning errors of Vietnamese ESL learners in using binomials will be dealt with in a separate paper incorporating a number of corpus-extracted examples, but on the basis of the general remarks presented in the paper.

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