

Postprint in *Discourse, Context and Media*, 12 (June 2016), 77-86.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2015.10.002>

“All those Elvis-meets-golf-player looks”: A corpus-assisted analysis of creative compounds in fashion blogging

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Abstract

This paper offers a comprehensive analysis of compounds as creative forms of self-expression in a leading fashion blog (Style.com), where users engage in conversations about fashion. The aim was to determine to what extent and how compounds are used by fashion bloggers, with particular attention to creativity, and how this usage may be influenced by the online communicative context. Compounds are notoriously difficult to investigate due to their marked structural variation and inconsistent orthographic representation. However, thanks to a corpus-assisted approach, it was possible to first systematically identify compounds in the blog, and then analyze them in context to detect forms, patterning, functions, and creative usage. Most compounds functioned as adjectives, in line with the descriptive and evaluative nature of fashion discourse. However, a high level of creativity was seen in compounds with uncommon structural components (e.g., verb + preposition as in *go-to*), novel combinations (e.g., *skull-embellished*), creative recycling of participial constituents (e.g., *-inspired*, *-inducing*), and especially phrasal structures that trigger striking mental images (e.g., *stripper-cum-S&M freak*). The study contributes to a better understanding of how bloggers use creative language to construct their identities as members of a distinctive and cohesive social community.

Keywords: fashion blogs; fashion discourse; creativity; compounds; corpus methods; identity

1. Introduction

Over the years, linguists have shown considerable interest in compounding as a process for generating new words and creating novel units of meaning from existing words. According to Katamba (2009: 101), “compounds are complex words containing at least two bases that are themselves words”. Similarly, Bauer (2003: 40) defined compounding as the “formation of a new lexeme by adjoining two or more lexemes”. While these straightforward descriptions capture the basic componential dimension of compounds, there are several other issues that come into play. For example, Bauer (2006: 485) argued that lexemes in compounds must be independent from each other. In this sense, *greenhouse* would be a compound, whereas the reduplicative *namby-pamby* would not, as the two elements are interdependent and cannot stand alone. With particular reference to phrasal structures, there are contrasting viewpoints as to their status as compounds. Bauer (2006: 485) maintained that items such as *love-in-a-mist* are not compounds because they are derived from the lexicalization of a syntactic structure, and thus strictly interdependent. In contrast, Carter and McCarthy (2006: 321) described items such as *right-of-way* as *phrasal compound nouns* with two dependent elements joined by a preposition, also pointing out that they are among the most common types. Bauer et al. (2013: 437) returned to this issue when discussing “so-called ‘phrasal compounds’”. They excluded items such as *book-turned-movie*, *mother-in-law* and *take-it-or-leave-it* (though the latter two are classified as compounds by Quirk et al., 1985), but included items linked by *cum* (e.g., *cozy-cum-corny*) as similar to appositional compounds, e.g., *actor-director* (Bauer et al., 2013: 438). Challenges have also arisen when trying to distinguish compounds from multi-word units (MWUs). For example, Bauer and Renouf (2001: 111) consider the hyphenated premodifier in *patient-satisfaction study* to be part of a MWU, and therefore not a compound, though they admit possible problems with this interpretation. In the same vein, Granger and

Paquot (2008: 33) noted that decisions about whether an item is a compound or a MWU are often “quite arbitrary”. As Bauer (2006: 497) aptly summed up, compounds are lexical items “whose ultimate status and unity is still not entirely clear.”

A systematic description of the components of English compounds has also been problematic. The right-hand element has traditionally been classified as the *head* (Williams, 1981), which also determines the word class of the compound. Accordingly, *pan* is the head of *saucepan* which functions as a noun. In such cases, the compound is actually a hyponym of its right-hand element. However, Bauer and Renouf (2001: 103-104) noted that compounds do not always follow these rules (e.g., *pickpocket*, *egghead*, *after-tax*). Some compounds are left-headed (e.g., *attorney general*) or even lacking a clear head (e.g., *has-been*). Moreover, the right-hand element does not always determine the word class of the compound. In fact, items such as *high profile* or *top quality* often function as adjectives rather than as nouns (Katamba, 2009).

Compounds can also be difficult to distinguish on the orthographic level. Their representation in writing is quite inconsistent (Lieber and Štekauer, 2009). In fact, it is possible to find variations of the same compound across dictionaries, e.g., *coffee-pot*, *coffee pot*, and *coffeepot* (Bauer, 2006: 485), an example that illustrates the three orthographic variants of English compounds: hyphenated, separate and closed (or solid). Thus, the presence of a hyphen is not always a reliable indicator, particularly in the case of compound nouns.

One approach that has instead found consensus is description based on the grammatical function of a compound, further articulated according to the word class of the components (Bauer, 2006; Katamba, 2009). For example, compound nouns are described as N + N (e.g., *schoolhouse*) or Adj + N (e.g., *blackberry*), while compound adjectives are described as Adj + Adj (e.g., *squeaky-clean*) or N + Adj (e.g., *ice-cold*). Because this approach is based on objective descriptions, in the upcoming analysis I also adopt it to analyze compounds

according to grammatical function and compositional structure (e.g., the adjective *eye-catching* = N/Adj + present participle).

Some of the literature on compounds has explored their creative dimension. This often involves some form of analogy, as in the example *scarlet-collar worker* inspired by *blue-collar worker*, cited by Benczes (2006: 187). This author introduced the term “creative compound” to refer to N + N compounds based on metaphorical or metonymical associations (Benczes, 2006: 6). She proposed Langacker’s (2000) notion of extension from cognitive linguistics to analyze creativity in N + N compounds, explaining that “the more extended a compound, the more imaginative, associative thinking is required from the listener to arrive at the compound’s meaning” (Bencze, 2006:189). Examples can be seen in *lawnmower parent* and *bulldozer parent* as “novel metaphorical compounds” that extend the meaning of *helicopter parent* from a parent who is simply protective to one who is actually intrusive (cf. Benczes, 2013: 10). Maguire et al. (2010) identified novel uses of N + N compounds, using corpus tools to extract creative combinations, e.g., *wind breeder* and *ladder breeder* inspired by the more conventional *dog breeder*. However, both of these studies looked at creativity exclusively in N + N compounds. This points to the need for additional work to analyze creative uses of compounds with other functions and compositional features, such as compound adjectives (e.g., N + Adj or Adj + Adj), which have received less attention in the literature (Bisetto and Scalise, 2005), but are common in English and also highly productive (Biber et al., 1999; Crocco Galèas, 2003).

Shifting towards the focus of present research, relatively few studies have specifically targeted English compounds in online discourse. Among these, Rumšienė (2006: 59) found that compounds accounted for many of the various neologisms analyzed in a dataset of Internet chats (e.g., *group hug*). Hassan and Hashim’s (2010: 42) exploratory analysis of a corpus that included blogs, chats, and instant messages highlighted compounds such as

camwhore, i.e., the clipped form of *camera* + *whore*. With particular reference to blogs, Wengao (2009) found compounds in a corpus of blog posts (excluding comments) about daily life experiences. These included a variety of structural compositions, ranging from nominal (e.g., *metalhead*), to adjectival (e.g., *gas-guzzling*), to phrasal (e.g., *never-to-be-opened*). Research that has looked specifically at creative uses of compounds in online discourse appears to be limited to a series of papers dedicated to N + N compounds containing the word *carbon* in the context of climate change discourse (cf. Nerlich and Koteyko, 2009; Koteyko, 2010; Koteyko et al., 2010). For example, in the latter, the authors analyzed a corpus of blogs, news sites, and other digital sources to identify creative metaphorical uses, i.e., *carbon footprint* and *carbon addiction* derived from *carbon emissions*.

Following this brief overview of some key issues involved in defining and analyzing compounds,¹ in the next section I turn to the specific domain and communicative context of the present study: fashion discourse and fashion blogging.

2. Fashion discourse and the fashion blogosphere

Thompson and Haytko (1997: 15) characterized fashion discourse as “ways of talking about fashion”. This entails the expression of perceptions and experiences in relation to fashion, as well as ideals and images linked to self-identity.² These authors further suggested that fashion

¹ A detailed discussion of the complex theoretical dimension of compounding is beyond the scope of this study. For exhaustive treatments, see Marchand (1969), Bauer (1983), Bisetto and Scalise (2005), and Lieber and Štekauer (2009).

² This tendency is also seen in such popular expressions as *making a fashion statement*, *you are what you wear*, as well as the quote *clothes make the man*, attributed to Mark Twain (Budd, 1992).

consumers perceive themselves and others in relation to certain fashion brands. Discourse about fashion revolves around products with an elaborate visual dimension based on colors, shapes, and textures that trigger well-articulated descriptions (Crawford Camiciottoli et al., 2014). In addition, fashion brands can evoke positive or negative attitudes and, according to Rageh Ismail and Spinelli (2012), consumers may even form an emotional attachment to them, particularly when associated with the iconic personalities of designers (e.g., Valentino, Calvin Klein, Karl Lagerfeld). Thus, fashion discourse is typically richly expressive on the descriptive and evaluative levels, as seen in adjectives such as *crisp*, *airy*, *chocolaty*, *timeless* and *gorgeous*, cited in Crawford Camiciottoli et al. (2014).

For the fashion discourse community, fashion journalism found in magazines and newspapers has always been an important point of reference (cf. Barthes, 1990, Rocamora, 2002). However, with the rise of new media, fashion blogs in particular have become “a central platform for the circulation of fashion-related news and information.” They are often written by “citizen journalists,” (Rocamora, 2012: 98), who are not associated with established news sources. This has re-defined the way fashion discourse is produced and consumed, also reflecting shifting business models. More specifically, fashion blogs tend to be less strictly dependent on advertising than print fashion media, and therefore have greater freedom of expression in terms of blog content (Rocamora, 2012).

With respect to other social media genres such as Twitter, used for short messages, or Facebook, used mainly for social interaction, blogs typically place more emphasis on content. Puschmann (2013: 90) described blogs as “topic-centric” (i.e., information and opinions about something in the external world) or “author-centric” (i.e., self-reflection focusing on the internal world of the author). Moreover, according to Myers (2009: 98), blogs are often expressions of “the writer’s personal aesthetic preference, moral judgement or emotional response”, through which bloggers can articulate their unique voices and construct self-

identity within an online community (Miller and Shepherd, 2004). All these features make fashion blogs a popular interactional setting where enthusiasts can engage each other in extensive ‘virtual conversations’ to exchange thoughts and opinions without physical or temporal constraints (Rickman and Cosenza, 2007).

The present study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of how compounds are used in fashion blogging, with particular attention to creative usage. Generally speaking, what counts as creativity in language can be difficult to pin down due to its inherently subjective nature. According to Carter (2004: 9), creativity “involves a marked breaking or bending of the rules and norms of language [...] including a deliberate play with its forms and potential for meaning”. Similarly, Mahlberg (2007: 221) noted that for language to be distinguished as creative, it must in some way “stand out”. Corpus studies have shown that creativity does indeed emerge in the departure from expected norms and meanings, but also in the formation of patterns (cf. Vo and Carter, 2010). An example of the first case is creative collocation, i.e., unusual or amusing combinations such as *charmingly ugly* (Hori 2004: 82). In the second case, creative pattern forming occurs when interlocutors more or less overtly echo each other’s expressions, often to achieve a humorous effect (Carter, 2004). For the purposes of this study, I draw on all these notions to define creative compounds in fashion blogging as those that prompt clever associations and/or striking mental images, or those that express or recycle meanings in unexpected and/or entertaining ways. The following research questions will be addressed:

1. To what extent are compounds used in fashion blogging, and what are their compositional structures, lexico-grammatical forms, and functions?
2. How are compounds used creatively?
3. How is creative usage influenced by the online communicative context?

3. Methodology

3.1 Corpus compilation and description

The analysis is based on an ad hoc corpus sampled from a top-ranking fashion blog hosted on Style.com.³ It was selected as the source of data for several reasons. Firstly, it is consistently present among the top five fashion blogs according to Blogmetrics' Blogrank, based on factors such as unique monthly visitors, Alexa traffic and Google indexed pages.⁴ In addition, a perusal of ten random posts across each of Blogmetrics' top five fashion blogs showed that content of Style.com focuses more on fashion products and brands compared to the others that dedicate considerable space to celebrity lifestyle and gossip, and are therefore less representative of "ways of talking about fashion" (Thompson and Haytko, 1997: 15). Finally, blog post/comments were archived for approximately four years, which provided an adequate amount of textual data for collection into a small specialized corpus.⁵

The corpus was compiled according to a brand-based sampling process, i.e., posts and comments dedicated to a particular brand were identified by means of tags incorporated into

³ <http://www.style.com/>. In 2015, Style.com transitioned into an online shopping site linked to Vogue.com and is no longer available in the original form from which the data were collected.

⁴ <http://www.blogmetrics.org/fashion>. Alexa currently describes Style.com as one of the top 10,000 sites in the world with 85,666 unique monthly visitors.

⁵ Aston (1997) indicated a minimum of 20,000 words for most small corpora. However, following Flowerdew (2004), I used my judgement to determine the range of 100,000-500,000 words as appropriate for the purposes and corpus-assisted methodological approach of this study.

the blog itself and then collected into separate files. In this way, the corpus better reflects a cohesive discourse community that follows favorite brands and engages in ongoing interaction about them. From the 300+ brands that were present on the website, I selected the fifty that generated the highest numbers of posts/comments to enable the compilation of a corpus that was large enough to generate meaningful frequencies of compounds (311,296 tokens), but also small enough for extensive follow-up qualitative analysis, in line with a corpus-assisted approach. The Fashion Blog Corpus (hereinafter FBC) covers a timeframe that spans from 2009 to 2013. Descriptive data are provided in the Appendix.

The particular characteristics of the participants of Style.com also factored into its selection. Unlike many fashion blogs, Style.com is multi-authored with posts written by staff, as well as numerous guest contributors. Comments may then be posted by anyone around the world who registers on the site. Thus, the participants are likely to include both paid experts and non-paid lay users, each with different communicative aims. For example, posts may be written by professionals with strategic performance-linked goals, or amateurs who write for pleasure, while comments may be written by lay fashion enthusiasts who desire to engage with others and be part of a social community. As a result, the blog represents a multi-faceted community of practice that uses English to engage in conversations about fashion. While it was clearly not possible to verify the language backgrounds of the participants based on the post authors' signed names or the commenters' screen names (typically opaque), the language found in the blogs suggests that the participants were either native speakers of English or non-native speakers with a high level of competence. Most posts refer to a photograph of fashion, reflecting the growing importance of visual displays in modern blogging (Baron, 2008). Both posts and comments include metadata to indicate dates/times, as well as hypertext links to other posts and media sources (e.g., photo slideshows, videos, online magazine articles), demonstrating the high degree of intertextuality that characterizes blogs (Myers, 2009).

Generally speaking, the language in the blog reflects features of informality identified in previous corpus-based studies of online communication. These include first person pronouns, discourse particles, and *to* clauses with desire/intent verbs (Grieve et al., 2009), as exemplified in (1), and non-standard spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, acronyms, interjections and emoticons (Mosquera and Moreda, 2012), as exemplified in (2) and (3).

(1) In 2010, you're going to want a trench.... OK, we know what you're thinking [...]

(post)

(2) be more choosey when you showcase a hot new face. how about daphne groenweld.

hope i got spelling right. btw love your site. (comment)

(3) OMG!!! Wow this is cute!!! I like this soo much =D (comment)

3.2 Analysis

As discussed in Section 1, compounds may appear in hyphenated, separate or closed orthographical forms (Lieber and Štekauer, 2009). This posed the dilemma of how to identify compounds in the most exhaustive way possible across a relatively large amount of data. In an effort to address this issue, I adopted a two-pronged approach. Firstly, corpus methods were used to automatically retrieve all hyphenated items for subsequent in-depth analysis. This methodology was inspired by *corpus-assisted discourse analysis* (cf. Baker et al., 2008: 277) which uses corpora to investigate features of particular discourse types, typically requiring extensive manual analysis of retrieved items in their context of usage to identify distinctive patterns and themes. Secondly, I closely read fifty randomly selected blog posts and accompanying comments in the FBC (one for each brand) to detect compounds in non-hyphenated forms. Unlike hyphenated forms, these compounds cannot be retrieved systematically with corpus software across all their compositional structures. Although this

procedure obviously cannot provide a complete analysis of all the non-hyphenated compounds in the corpus, it can serve to complement the corpus-assisted analysis of hyphenated forms to shed light on possible differences.

With reference to the first approach, a few words of explanation are in order. Despite the challenges of using hyphenation to distinguish compounds (cf. Bauer, 2006), I opted to use it for three main reasons. Firstly, this procedure enabled the retrieval of large numbers of compounds across all structural compositions, thus resulting in a more comprehensive analysis of creative uses compared with other studies limited to N + N compounds (cf. Benczes, 2006; Maguire et al. 2010; Koteyko et al., 2010). Secondly, with particular reference to compound adjectives, Biber et al. (1999: 533) considered hyphenation to be a “clear objective indicator”. Bauer et al. (2013: 56) also affirmed that hyphens are used “regularly” in compound adjectives. Because fashion discourse is highly descriptive and evaluative (Crawford Camiciottoli et al., 2014), it stands to reason that compound adjectives may be among the most prominent types. Finally, the presence of a hyphen suggests that the writers had a clear perception of the compositional nature of the expression, especially with multi-hyphen items. Thus, we can have some degree of confidence that hyphenated items were actually perceived as compounds in this communicative context. For all the reasons outlined above, I believe that this two-pronged approach can offer a reasonably comprehensive analysis of compounding in the FBC.

WordSmith Tools (Scott, 2008) was used to automatically retrieve all hyphens using the query string *-*. The output was displayed in concordances (i.e., the queried item embedded in some co-text), which were then manually filtered to remove entire categories of items that were not of interest, as will be explained in the following paragraphs.

It was first necessary to remove duplicate concordances generated from the many cases of compounds with multiple hyphens (even as many as ten, as will be illustrated later). In

addition, it was necessary to remove items with hyphens used to separate proper nouns and double names (e.g., *Saint-Tropez*, *Jay-Z*, *Huntington-Whiteley*), suffixes from roots (*co-founder*, *ex-husband*, *pre-fall*), as well as those that appeared in hypertext links to websites. I also eliminated items that were factual in nature and not subject to personal interpretations (e.g., *8,000-square-foot*, *20-year-old*, and *New York-based*), as they do not express the creative usage of particular interest to this study. In addition, items that can be found in any context of general English usage and were not specifically used to refer to fashion entities in the FBC were also removed (e.g., *real-life*, *know-how*).

A somewhat more problematic issue emerged when hyphens appeared as a form of punctuation to substitute a period, comma or colon (example 4). To identify and delete these items, it was necessary to examine adjacent items and determine their function in relation to the clause.

(4) Looking forward to seeing their designs - seems like a very good fit! (comment)

Finally, there were many instances of hyphens in items with non-standard forms of orthographic representation (e.g., *graffiti-esque*). These were removed from the data because they are not compounds. However, they are nonetheless worth mentioning as they anticipate a highly creative style among bloggers to emphasize meanings and draw attention to their verbal prowess. For example, a hyphen was often used to separate a suffix or inflectional morpheme from the root word, e.g., *vintage-y*, *fetish-y*, *bling-y*, *statement-y*, *A-list-y*, *boudoir-ish*, *now-ish*, *wear-er*, *intarsia-ed*, *bling-ed*, *Chanel-esque*, *macho-ism*, and *Karl-ism* (the latter cleverly categorizes the type of expression that one may attribute to the designer Karl Lagerfeld). Hyphens were also used to separate the prefix *be* in some novel expressions: *be-poufed*, *be-shouldered*, *be-Gucci'ed*. One particularly interesting case was a hyphen in the word *absolutely* found in a user comment. The initial letter *a* was transformed into the interjection *ah* as a way to upscale an expression of admiration: *It's ah-absolutely beautiful*.

Once all the unwanted items described in the preceding paragraphs were removed, the remaining concordances of compounds were carefully examined to identify patterns, with particular reference to creativity.

As the second step, all the non-hyphenated compounds that emerged from the close reading of the blog post/comments were queried in the corpus to determine frequency of usage. The same compounds in their alternative hyphenated forms were also searched in the FBC to shed light on possible differences.

For comparative insights, I used the 1.7 million word Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) downloadable sampler, which consists of randomly selected texts from the various spoken and written genres comprised in the complete COCA corpus (Davies, 2008-).

The results of the two-pronged analytical approach were then interpreted with reference to the fashion discourse community's purposes and communicative practices, as well as the 'virtual' online communicative context.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Hyphenated vs. non-hyphenated compounds

The initial corpus query of hyphenated forms in the FBC returned a total of 5,736 items. After the numerous phases of filtering to remove unwanted items described in Section 3.2, the remaining number of hyphenated compounds used to specifically describe or evaluate fashion-related entities was 3,064.

The close reading of the fifty random samples from the FBC revealed twenty compounds in closed and/or separate forms. These items are shown in Table 1, along with their frequencies in parentheses and any corresponding hyphenated forms in the corpus.

Non-hyphenated form	Hyphenated form
*wear (279) (e.g., <i>menswear</i> , <i>swimwear</i> , <i>knitwear</i>)	-
runway (188)	-
limited edition (19)	limited-edition (50)
lineup (12)	-
handmade (11)	-
trench coat/trenchcoat (10)	-
comeback (9)	-
cutout (9)	-
high fashion (8)	-
surefire (8)	-
handpicked (8)	-
handmade (5)	-
red carpet (4)	red-carpet (21)
high waisted (3)	high-waisted (12)
knee length (2)	
hip length (1)	
knock out (1)	
high quality (1)	
street style (6)	street-style (42)

Table 1. Non-hyphenated vs. hyphenated compounds in FBC

As can be seen, there were large numbers of closed *wear* compounds as basic categories of fashion products (e.g., *menswear*, *sportswear*, *eyewear*, *swimwear*, *knitwear*), and the item *runway* which typically referred to the visual images of fashion models on which posts are based. The other non-hyphenated items were relatively infrequent and most did not occur in a hyphenated version. This suggests that, overall, non-hyphenated forms were less prominent than hyphenated forms in the FBC and, more importantly, did not seem to express particularly creative meanings. For this reason, the remainder of this section focuses only on the automatically retrieved hyphenated compounds. Since it was not feasible to perform follow-up qualitative analysis on all 3,064 items, in the following subsections, I report selected results to illustrate key trends in compound usage in terms of frequency, structural composition, forms, patterning, functions and creativity.

4.2 High-frequency compounds

High-frequency compounds were identified by means of keyword analysis in *WordSmith Tools*. This procedure determined which items had a statistically higher frequency in the FBC compared to the COCA sampler as a reference corpus. The fashion-related compounds that emerged as keywords in the FBC are shown in Table 2, along with their structural composition, an example in context of usage, frequency counts in FBC vs. COCA, and the relative keyness scores. As can be seen, the compounds had a minimum of ten occurrences, all with keyness scores above 10.83 as the cut-off point for a confidence level of 99.9 percent ($p < 0.001$).

Table 2. High frequency compounds

Compound	Composition	Examples/grammatical function(s)	FBC (N)	COCA (N)	Keyness score
ready-to-wear	Phrasal	<i>a ready-to-wear line/adj</i> <i>the house's ready-to-wear/n</i>	54	0	178.71
limited-edition	Adj + N	<i>a limited-edition collection/adj</i>	50	1	163.47
street-style	N + N	<i>Tokyo's street-style aficionados/adj</i>	42	0	127.92
behind-the-scenes	Phrasal	<i>behind-the-scenes preparations/adj</i>	31	2	88.35
pop-up	V + Prep	<i>an online pop-up shop/adj</i>	23	1	68.23
red-carpet	Adj + N	<i>red-carpet style/adj</i>	21	1	61.79
front-row	N + N	<i>a front-row regular/adj</i> <i>to sit front-row/adv</i>	21	3	47.21
one-of-a-kind	Phrasal	<i>one-of-a-kind pieces/adj</i>	19	3	41.32
up-and-coming	Phrasal	<i>up-and-coming design darling/adj</i>	15	1	42.58
high-waisted	Adj + partic.	<i>a high-waisted skirt/adj</i>	12	0	39.71
ultra-wide-leg	Phrasal	<i>ultra-wide-leg trousers/adj</i>	12	0	39.71
one-off	N + Prep	<i>a one-off collection/adj</i>	11	0	36.40
high-end	Adj + N	<i>the high-end fashion market/adj</i>	13	5	36.24
go-to	V + Prep	<i>the go-to brand for VIPs/adj</i> <i>the go-to for the biggest labels/n</i>	16	5	32.02
must-have	V + V	<i>This season's must-have color/adj</i> <i>Ponchos, capes, always a</i>	10	1	26.82

		<i>must-have/n</i>			
black-and-white	Phrasal	<i>a black-and-white gown/adj</i>	14	12	12.88

The examples show that most of the high-frequency compounds functioned as adjectives to describe or evaluate a fashion product or brand, a fashion-related event, or a person associated with the fashion industry, in line with the nature of fashion discourse (Thompson and Haytko, 1997). While these items do not exhibit particularly creative meanings, on the compositional level, a rather unexpected trend emerged. More specifically, only two out of the sixteen compounds (*street-style* and *front-row*) present the structure N + N, as the most frequent compound type in English (Bauer, 1983). Several have unusual structural components, falling under what Bisetto and Scalise (2005: 321) call “neglected categories”, i.e., compounds containing prepositions and verbal forms. In particular, *go-to* and *must-have* are headless compounds (cf. Bauer and Renouf, 2001). These are considered to be relatively rare in English (Akmajian et al., 2001), but instead emerge as keywords in the FBC. In addition, five of the most frequent compounds have a phrasal composition, a feature considered by some to exclude them from compound status (see Section 1). However, because such items emerged as keywords in the FBC, following both Carter and McCarthy (2006) and Quirk et al. (1985), in this study I count them as compounds in an effort to achieve the most comprehensive analysis possible. Overall, the strong presence of verbs, prepositions and phrasal structures in these high-frequency compounds seems to render them particularly dynamic, reflecting an exciting and fast-paced world that is driven by the constant renewal of fashion collections and designers.

4.3 Forms, patterning, functions and creative usage of compounds

During the filtering procedures described in section 3.2, some interesting trends in compound usage emerged. In particular, three forms appeared to be rather prominent throughout the corpus: compound adjectives, prepositional compounds, and phrasal compounds. In the following paragraphs, I report the findings from targeted analyses of these forms.

4.3.1 Compound adjectives

Compound adjectives were used to accomplish the primary objective of fashion blog participants to comment about a fashion product, the person who designed the product, or the person who is wearing the product. These compounds often contained past or present participles as their second element, found in both attributive and predicative positions as illustrated in examples 5 and 6, respectively.

(5) With a *corset-crammed* Jean Paul Gaultier show, yesterday was quite the moment for innerwear and outerwear. (post)

(6) Sometimes the simplest of forms are the most *breath-taking* and beautiful. (comment)

To further investigate their role in the FBC, I performed searches with the query strings **-ing* and **-*ed* to automatically retrieve all hyphenated participle forms. For comparative insights, the COCA reference corpus was queried in the same way. Table 3 illustrates the quantitative results in raw frequency counts and normalized frequencies per thousand words (ptw), together with some examples extracted from the FBC.

Table 3. Compound adjectives with participial components

Composition	Examples from FBC	FBC		COCA	
		N	ptw	N	ptw
N/Adj + past participle	<i>velvet-trimmed, amoeba-shaped, punk-inflected, fur-accented, acid-splashed, bubble-gum-colored, skater-flavored</i>	455	1.46	1607	0.95

	<i>gold-flecked, best-dressed, sharp-edged, high-styled, green-soled, floral-printed</i>				
N/Adj + present participle	<i>eye-catching, body-hugging, form-fitting, décolleté-enhancing, bling-loving, thigh-grazing, gut-wrenching poor-fitting, younger-skewing, easy-wearing, green-leaning</i>	161	0.52	705	0.41
Totals		616	1.98	2312	1.36

A comparison of the overall totals confirms that compound adjectives are somewhat more frequent in FBC (1.98 ptw) vs. COCA (1.35 ptw). As shown in the examples, compound adjectives typically took the form of a noun or adjective adjoined to a past or present participle. They were used mainly to articulate descriptions of fashion products, along with some evaluative meanings (e.g., *best-dressed, high-styled*), as shown in the examples provided. While some of these items are rather conventional in nature, others are more creative, evoking clever analogies that convey vivid images, such as *bubble-gum-colored* and *amoeba-shaped*.

In addition to the examples shown in Table 2, the second element in some compounds ending in *-ed* was actually an adjective derived from a noun, e.g., *sorbet-hued, jewel-toned, shawl-collared, pointy-shouldered, ice-cream-cone-heeled*. From a morphological perspective, these have been classified as derivational compound adjectives, where the second constituent is a noun plus the adjective suffix *-ed* (Crocco Galèas, 2003). This particular usage seems to reflect a tendency among the blog participants to provide rich descriptions that allow them to capture the detail-oriented visual aspect of fashion, while prompting vibrant mental images. Compound adjectives with a present participle had a descriptive function, but also expressed positive or negative evaluations (e.g., *eye-catching, poor-fitting*) and emotions (e.g., *breath-taking, gut-wrenching*).

Some particular right-hand components of compound adjectives generated whole series of items in the FBC. Following Bauer (2006), this reflects the morphological process of

productivity in which new words are formed in a rule-governed and predictable way. In this case, the same participle form was used to create new words (cf. Bauer, 1983). Among the *-ed* forms, some of the most prolific were:

- *-inspired*, e.g., *art-inspired*, *menswear-inspired*, *military-inspired*, *lingerie-inspired*, *tribal-inspired*, *vintage-inspired*, *Alice-in-Wonderland-inspired*
- *-themed*: e.g., *pastoral-themed*, *gladiator-themed*, *Olympic-themed*, *carnival-themed*, *equestrian-themed*, *sea-themed*, *fetish-themed*
- *-embellished/-encrusted*, e.g., *feather-embellished*, *skull-embellished*, *pearl-embellished*, *crystal-encrusted*, *gem-encrusted*, *Swarovski-encrusted*

With reference to present participle forms, the three most productive were:

- *-looking*, e.g., *fresh-looking*, *delicate-looking*, *good-looking*, *derelict-looking*, *gritty-looking*, *fierce-looking*, *mechanical-looking*, *languid-looking*, *weird-looking*
- *-inducing*, e.g., *envy-inducing*, *gasp-inducing*, *vertigo-inducing*, *hysteria-inducing*, *green-with-envy-inducing*, *aww-inducing* (the latter conveying an expression of endearment with the interjection *aww*).⁶
- *-baring*, e.g., *belly-baring*, *leg-baring*, *thigh-baring*, *nape-baring*, *skin-baring*

In addition, a few present participle compounds also appeared in adverb form: *awe-inspiringly*, *head-swivelingly*, *jaw-droppingly*, *eyeball-spinningly*.

Finally, there were some interesting compound adjective patterns based on components that were not participle forms:

- *-clad*, e.g., *bikini-clad*, *Armani-clad*, *lace-clad*, *leather-clad*, *black-dress-clad*
- *-chic*, e.g., *sporty-chic*, *tough-chic*, *geek-chic*, *gothic-chic*, *hippie-chic*
- *-like*, e.g., *mermaid-like*, *carnival-like*, *scalpel-like*, *diaper-like*

⁶ According to the online Urban Dictionary, <http://www.urbandictionary.com/>.

For illustrative purposes, Figure 1 shows a sample of ten concordances for the query item *–*like*. As can be seen, the compounds trigger striking and amusing images based on objects (lines 1, 2, 8), settings (lines 5, 7), styles (lines 3, 9), people (lines 4, 10), and mythical creatures (line 6). Interestingly, the two negative evaluations (lines 1 and 6) were found in users’ comments, highlighting how the blog serves as a vehicle for sharing opinions and engaging in conversations about fashion.

The various compound adjectives analyzed in this subsection are vividly descriptive and often reflect creativity. In particular, creative pattern forming (cf. Carter, 2004) is seen in the incorporation of novel elements while echoing other patterns (e.g., *Alice-in-Wonderland-inspired*, *aww-inducing*, *green-with-envy-inducing*), or creative collocations (cf. Hori, 2004) that introduce unusual twists in meaning (e.g., *fetish-themed* and *skull-embellished*).

Figure 1. Concordances of *like* compound adjectives

N	Concordance	
1	8:50 am 18. Some of them almost look	diaper-like , which is really unfortunate.
2	, the models appeared on a giant	scaffolding-like structure, and about a
3	has just been released. Valade sports a	mullet-like blond ‘do in the minimalist
4	borrowed clothing-going on a Hunter S.	Thompson-like , acid-fuelled road trip.
5	limited success). It was an exuberant	carnival-like , laughter filled affair
6	but sometimes can come off too	mermaid-like for my taste. Dolce looks
7	Fendi’s latest menswear collection. In a	lab-like setting , a door opens and a
8	cutout houndstooth coats had a	scalpel-like precision . Roberto Cavalli,
9	pink confection with elaborate	origami-like detail from designer Basil
10	the face of the chain’s Autograph label),	Rosie-like proportions , alas, not

4.3.2 Prepositional compounds

As anticipated in Table 2, prepositions were found as the second constituent in a number of items. Follow-up analysis of concordances containing prepositional compounds showed that

those with *up*, *out*, *down* were the most frequent. The examples in Table 4 show that most prepositional compounds were used as adjectives, except for those followed by /N to indicate noun.

Table 4. Prepositional compounds in the FBC

Preposition	Examples from FBC	FBC		COCA	
		N	Ptw	N	ptw
Up	<i>pop-up, lace-up, stitched-up, beat-up, sexed-up, luxed-up, souped-up, hyped-up, warm-up/N, button-up/N</i>	72	0.23	149	0.09
Out	<i>stretched-out, cut-out, blinged-out, glammed-out, grunged-out, whacked-out, burned-out, shout-out/N</i>	13	0.04	39	0.02
Down	<i>pared-down, scaled-down, toned-down, dress-down</i>	14	0.05	34	0.02
		99	0.32	222	0.13

Overall, these prepositional compounds were more frequent in the FBC (0.32 ptw vs. COCA 0.13 ptw). Compounds with *down* had a mitigating function: *a pared-down look, toned-down colors, a dress-down kind of gal*. *Up* and *out* compounds functioned to describe physical features, taking the form of a phrasal verb transformed into an adjective (e.g., *lace-up booties, stitched-up jeans, stretched-out T-shirt, cut-out heels*). However, they were also used creatively to amplify or intensify perceived attributes by transforming nouns into verbal forms, and then inserting them into a phrasal verb structure (e.g., *sexed-up wares, blinged-out denim, grunged-out rockers*), even inventing new words as the first elements as seen in *glammed-out event* and *luxed-up parka a with a fur collar*.

4.3.3 Phrasal compounds

Perhaps the most creative uses of compounds were those that included more than two elements: a phrasal structure that incorporated various word classes, or even a clausal

structure in which a complete sentence functioned as a compound adjective. Table 5 shows phrasal compounds in the FBC based on some common elements that appeared to be recycled by bloggers in other compounds, in line with creative pattern forming in interactional contexts as described by Carter (2004). Frequency data are reported here only for the FBC as there were no occurrences of compounds containing these elements in the COCA corpus sampler. This is an indication that these particular patterns of phrasal compounds may be a distinctive feature of fashion blogging.

Table 5. Phrasal compounds in the FBC

Common element	Grammatical function	Examples	N	ptw
turned	Noun	<i>model-turned-actress, sons-turned-business-partners, pop-star-turned-designer</i>	13	0.04
of-the-moment	Noun	<i>model-of-the-moment, muse-of-the-moment, Swede-of-the-moment</i>	10	0.03
cum	noun/adj	<i>socialite-cum-bag-designer, model-cum-It-girl, store-cum-studio</i> (nouns) <i>fantasia-cum-horror epic, workwear-cum-dress clothes, stripper-cum-S&M freak</i> (adjectives)	12	0.04
meets	Adjective	<i>boy-meets-girl look, schoolmarm-meets-sexpot look, raw-meets-glam embellishments, ocean-meets-urban retailer, country-club-meets-seventies-rec-room aesthetic, pirate-meets-Peter-Pan theme, Elvis-meets-golf-player looks</i>	9	0.03

Table 5 shows that compounds based on *turned* and *of-the-moment* functioned as nouns to characterize people associated with the fashion world. These expressions have the effect of highlighting evolving roles, which appears to be a topic of considerable interest among fashion blog participants. Figure 2 shows a sample of concordances based on *turned*. In line 3, the elaborate *turned* pattern seems to take on a humorous tone, playfully suggesting the ephemeral nature of the person involved.

Figure 2. Concordances of *turned* phrasal compounds

N	Concordance
1	sure it'll be an insanely glam affair, like everything the designer-turned-filmmaker touches. We wish we
2	Filipowski, and Cecilia Dean, were a testament to the designer-turned-artist's lasting draw. "It's really a
3	Ford's Lady In Red July 12, 2012 6:59 am Tom Ford, designer-turned-director-turned-designer once more
4	some fun new details, including that Greenfield and his sons-turned-business-partners made a few visits to
5	on hand were Miranda Kerr, Tali Lennox, and pop star-turned-designer Fergie, who paired a turquoise
6	Whoa. [Dazed Digital] Eva Herzigova is the latest model-turned-designer . The Czech siren unveiled a
7	admired her sense of style. You can count on the editor-turned-designer to have honed in on somethin
8	Fashion Law Institute at Fordham University, Ziff and model-turned-scribe pal Jenna Sauers formed the
9	[Page Six] In other male fashion news, British actor-turned-Prada-model Gary Oldman tells Harpes
10	Aoki May 15, 2009 10:39 am Devon Aoki, a Lagerfeld muse-turned-actress (her new project, Rosencrantz

Table 5 further illustrates several patterns based on the Latin word *cum*. This term is often used in English as a conjunction to indicate a dual nature of an entity, i.e., a *studio-cum-apartment* is a studio which also serves as an apartment. In the FBC, it seemed to express a perception of creative versatility in relation to people and events linked to fashion. *Cum* compounds found in the corpus present the structure noun-*cum*-noun, the most common pattern of such constructions according to Stein (2000), and functioned as both nouns and adjectives. Some could be interpreted as humorous and even provocative, as shown in example 7 (a comment about a pop singer who attended a fashion show) and example 8 (a post about costume designs for a film).

(7) She looked like a *stripper-cum-S&M freak*. (comment)

(8) That's what you get when you hire Rodarte's Kate and Laura Mulleavy to design a working wardrobe for your ballet *fantasia-cum-horror epic*. (post)

A variation of this pattern was seen in some instances of the word *slash* to express the same meaning as *cum*, perhaps representing a modernized version for the era of digital literacy, e.g., *model-slash-designer*, *friend-slash-interiors-guru*. In one interesting case, the word *slash* was replaced with the keyboard symbol (*/*) and the compound structure was then further integrated with other constituents: *Gaga's spacewoman/ambiguous-religious-icon Armani Privé dress*.

The use of *cum* to communicate pragmatic meanings of humor or ironic disapproval was also

noted by Franceschi (2013) who found instances such as *mild-mannered Jewish baker-cum-boxing manager* in his study of this lexeme in large corpora of both spoken and written English. Indeed, he suggests that such pragmatic intentions actually prompt the use of *cum*-constructions. This also appears to be the case in fashion blogs.

Phrasal compound adjectives that incorporated the verb *meet* inflected for the present tense illustrate some of the most innovative expressions in the corpus. This particular construction allows blog participants to describe an integration of two very different entities in a way that evokes a striking mental image, as well as a sense of entertainment derived from the witty verbal choices of the writer, e.g., *raw-meets-glam embellishments*, *pirate-meets-Peter-Pan theme*, *Elvis-meets-golf-player looks*, *country-club-meets-seventies-rec-room aesthetic*. *Meet* compounds can be quite culture-specific: in the last example, it is necessary to be familiar with the term *rec room* used in some Anglo-Saxon cultures in order to grasp the compound's ironic meaning. This implies an in-group approach to blogging in the online fashion community whose participants are assumed to comprehend and appreciate such complex meanings.

In addition to the productive patterns described above, there were also some novel ad-hoc phrasal compound adjectives that are worth mentioning: *a mad-woman-on-a-mission runway walk*, *the quirky hat-scarf-belt-boots-stripey top combo*, *her infectious SoCal-by-way-of-the-Second-Arrondissement vibe* (SoCal is an abbreviation for Southern California). Another interesting case combined a string of compound adjectives, two with a carefully dropped *g*, to describe the demeanor of a designer making his debut: *He was in fist-pumpin-high-fivin-kid-in-a-candy-store form*.

The final type of phrasal compound construction that merits discussion refers to the presence of a syntactically complete clause that functions as an adjective, as illustrated in examples 9-11:

- (9) the label's *girls-and-boys-just-wanna-have-fun message* (post)
- (10) that whole *I'm-so-gorg-I-can-wear-anything attitude* (comment)
- (11) the *people-like-dead-celebs-because-they-are-reminded-of-their-childhood thing* (post)

These compounds seemed to have been uniquely formulated in this context, even if the compound in example 9 is inspired by a popular song in the 1980s.⁷ In fact, in the COCA sampler, there were no occurrences of these items. Examples 10 and 11 are particularly interesting as the compound adjectives are actually complex sentences structured with main and subordinate clausal elements, with the latter containing ten hyphens. While elaborate hapax compounds were not particularly frequent in the corpus, their presence nonetheless reinforces the significant creative potential of fashion blog participants.

In sum, all the results presented and discussed in this section suggest that in the communicative context of fashion blogging, compounds are important devices of creative expression, which deserve to be analyzed in their own right.

Concluding remarks

This study has provided new insights into how fashion blog participants use compounds creatively to position themselves as members of an online discourse community. Thanks to a comprehensive two-pronged methodological approach, it was possible identify forms, patterning, functions and especially creative uses of compounds across all compositional structures, thus expanding considerably on previous work limited to only N + N structures (cf. Benczes, 2006; Koyteko et al., 2010). In this way, the study also highlights the usefulness of a triangulated research approach to better understand compounds as linguistic features that are

⁷ *Girls Just Wanna Have Fun* by Cyndi Lauper.

particularly challenging to investigate. In addition, the analysis of compounds across both blog posts and comments offers a window on their interactional dimension, beyond previous work that looked only at compounds in blog posts (cf. Wengao, 2009)

For a more complete understanding of creative uses of compounds in fashion discourse, it would be necessary to expand the corpus to include other fashion blogs and other forms of digital media linked to fashion, as well as other types of fashion discourse, e.g., magazine/newspaper articles and broadcast media, and fashion house websites. Despite the limitations of the data, the analysis revealed some interesting trends. With reference to the first research question, the keyword analysis of compounds in the FBC vs. the COCA sampler suggests that compounds are a relatively prominent feature of fashion blogging. The most frequent compounds were based on lexical items that encode traditional descriptors associated with the fashion industry, e.g., *ready-to-wear*, *limited-edition*, *high-end*). However, there were several high-frequency compounds with unusual structural components based on verbs and prepositions (e.g., *go-to*, *must-have*). On a grammatical level, most compounds were used as adjectives, with a range of different compositional structures and lexico-grammatical forms. Qualitative analysis of the compounds in their context of usage highlighted various functions linked to description, evaluation, amplification and mitigation, as well as meanings that reflect humor, irony and provocation.

The analysis also shed light on creative uses of compounds, thus responding to the second research question. The compounds often reflected both creative recycling and novel combinations (cf. Carter, 2004; Hori, 2004). Creative patterns were formed to achieve higher levels of expressivity, e.g., *envy-inducing* → *green-with-envy-inducing*, *menswear-inspired* → *Alice-in-Wonderland inspired*, *boy-meets-girl look* → *schoolmarm-meets-sexpot look*. Moreover, the blog participants seemed to be particularly apt at inventing ad-hoc and complex phrasal compounds to evoke strong images that communicate a particular message in a clever

compact format, e.g., *a boarding-school-girl-gone-bad look*. Even on a visual level, the presence of multiple hyphens seems to call greater attention to the compound itself, thus underlining the creativity and verbal adroitness of the writer.

Regarding the third research question, creative usage of compounds seemed to be facilitated by the ‘virtual’ online setting. This allowed extended conversations to develop around a shared visual stimulus that triggered rich descriptions and exchange of opinions in which interlocutors seemed to echo each other’s creativity. Interestingly, because creative usage was found across both posts and comments, the different profiles and communicative aims of the participants did not seem to be a determining factor. Indeed, what appears to emerge is a close-knit community of practice that has established and also perpetuates its own distinctive style: highly articulate, sophisticated, knowledgeable, clever and witty, all at the time. In this way, the blog participants also express personal meanings that provide a window on their self-identity (cf. Thompson and Haytko, 1997), while conveying “the complexity, interest and novelty of the views they are expressing” (Myers 2009: 95).

To build on this line of research, compound usage could be investigated in other online communities. For example, compounds may be used very differently in social media platforms dedicated to electronic products, such as digital cameras that, with respect to fashion products, are less visually elaborate and less likely to evoke emotions (see Section 2). Similarly, a completely different type of compound might characterize blogs that cater to ‘foodies’ (i.e., people who are passionate about food and cooking), where creative expressions encoding gustatory and olfactory perceptions are likely to be prominent. In addition, a better understanding of creative uses of compounds could be achieved by means of interviews or focus groups to investigate how others may assess creativity in these items.

In conclusion, the findings of this study can find useful interdisciplinary applications in both professional and academic settings. In the field of marketing, blogs are seen as an

“ecosystem” in which all participants (regardless of their role as professional experts or lay users) are “‘real’ consumers” (Kozinets, 2010: 241). Therefore, an understanding of how these consumers use compounds to express perceptions of fashion brands is an important source of actionable business intelligence (Rickman and Cosenza, 2007). More specifically, this knowledge can be exploited to make strategic decisions about which attributes of the brand may need to be reinforced or adjusted, on the basis of the values that fashion consumers express through creative linguistic choices. On a pedagogic level, the findings can inform marketing communication courses by providing learners with insights into the language used by consumers to convey attitudes towards brands. Learners can also see how this language may be accessed in digital environments as increasingly important resources for building relationships with consumers (Yoon et al., 2008). Targeted instruction on creative features such as the compounds identified in this study is especially important for non-native speakers of English, who may be challenged by the unconventional and culture-specific expressions in the authentic discourse of fashion bloggers.

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Appendix. The Fashion Blog Corpus

	Brand	Tokens	N. posts	N. comments
1	Akris	2045	9	20
2	Alberta Ferretti	6339	20	22
3	Alexander McQueen	7217	32	9
4	Alexander Wang	4501	26	11
5	Alexis Mabille	4294	14	67
6	Altuzarra	3515	15	18
7	Balenciaga	1415	7	8
8	Betsey Johnson	2571	13	14
9	Burberry Prorsum	2343	13	16
10	Carven	2602	16	12
11	Chanel	8130	28	34
12	Christian Dior	5382	28	10
13	Dolce & Gabbana	6658	26	56
14	Emilio Pucci	4258	15	50
15	Fendi	11068	55	41
16	Giorgio Armani	12695	25	20
17	Gryphon	2789	10	12
18	Gucci	4235	13	5
19	Hermes	5408	15	17
20	J Crew	6215	24	19
21	Jason Wu	9229	28	13
22	Juicy Couture	751	5	5
23	J W Anderson	5481	17	12
24	Karl Lagerfeld	15518	70	34
25	Marc Jacobs	16235	72	29
26	Missoni	3928	25	10
27	Narciso Rodriguez	6090	30	13
28	Olivier Theyskens	7249	31	20
29	Opening Ceremony	10731	46	23
30	Oscar De La Renta	9043	36	38
31	Peter Som	6398	20	82
32	Pierre Balmain	5619	24	11
33	Prabal Gurung	9967	43	21
34	Prada	14223	59	66
35	Pringle of Scotland	7146	32	25
36	Proenza Schouler	13039	66	42
37	Rachel Roy	1923	10	15
38	Rag & Bone	5016	26	16
39	Rebecca Minkoff	3385	22	9
40	Roberto Cavalli	898	6	5
41	Rodarte	2100	13	8
42	Salvatore Ferragamo	5636	20	17
43	Stella Mc Cartney	8831	51	24
44	Suno	3462	17	12
45	Thakoon	4424	14	14
46	Tom Ford	7851	31	13
47	Tory Burch	2926	12	5
48	Valentino	9447	39	32
49	Versace	7682	33	32
50	Vivienne Westwood	3388	14	5
Total		311296	1316	1112

