The Semantics of Urdu Compounding with a Special Reference to "Deewan-e-Ghalib: The Persian, Arabic and Native Urdu Patterns

Dr. Saima Jamshaid
saima.jamshaid@uog.edu.pk
Lecturer, Department of English, University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan

Dr. Nazia Anwar
nazia.anwar@uog.edu.pk
Lecturer, Department of English, University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan
Corresponding Author: * Dr. Saima Jamshaid saima.jamshaid@uog.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Compounding occupies a central position in Indo-Aryan languages, where it plays a crucial role in morpho-semantic change and derivational morphology. Its primary function is to merge two lexical items to generate a new word with an independent meaning, as in ʃehər-e-xamoʃa~ ("city of silence"), where ʃehər ("city") and xamoʃa~ ("silence") combine to form a novel expression. In Urdu, compounding represents a vast and diverse phenomenon, encompassing multiple structural patterns. Frequently, it involves noun–noun combinations that result in entirely new lexical items, distinct from the individual components. While many writers and poets have employed compounding as a stylistic and semantic resource, it is perhaps most innovatively realized in the poetry of Mirza Ghalib. This study explores the use of compounding in Deewan-e-Ghalib, showing how Mirza Ghalib expanded the expressive potential of Urdu by employing compounds drawn from Urdu, Persian, and Arabic. His hybrid formations demonstrate both morphological inventiveness and semantic depth, illustrating how compounding functions as a productive mechanism of meaning-making in Urdu poetry. By examining these structures, the paper argues that Ghalib not only enhanced the stylistic and rhetorical force of his poetry but also highlighted compounding as a key site of morpho-semantic development. The discussion engages with Rahman's (2012) framework for Urdu compounding, situating Ghalib's work within broader linguistic and literary traditions.

Keywords: *Urdu compounding, Indo-Aryan languages, morpho-semantic change, derivational morphology, Mirza Ghalib, Deewan-e-Ghalib, Urdu–Persian–Arabic compounds, poetic innovation*

INTRODUCTION

Derivational Morphology: Morpho Semantic Change and compounding:

As compounding comes under the phenomena of derivational morphology, it is important to define it first. "The term '**morphology**' has been taken over from biology where it is used to denote the study of the forms of plants and animals. . . . It was first used for linguistic purposes in 1859 by the German linguist August Schleicher (Salmon 2000), to refer to the study of the form of words. In present-day linguistics, the term '**morphology**' refers to the study of the internal structure of words, and of the systematic form-meaning correspondences between words. . . . (Booij, 2007)

"Morphology may be divided into **derivation**--rules that form a new word out of old words, like xʊʃ and xʊʃ**:nɘsi:b** --and *inflection*--rules that modify a word to fit its role in a sentence, what language teachers call conjugation and declension." (Pinker, 1999)

But this paper is concerned with derivational morphology only as compounding is a part of derivational morphology.

Derivational morphology studies the principles governing the construction of new words, without reference to the specific grammatical role a word might play in a sentence. In the formation of *drinkable* from *drink*, or *disinfect* from *infect*, for example, we see the formation of new words, each with its own grammatical properties."

The main objective of this research paper is to study the ~~of~~ compounding in Mirza Ghalib`s ~~book~~ "Deewan-e-Ghalib".This paper supports the ideas presented by Motiur Rahman and discusses some of its points in the light of the compounding patterns used in Ghalib's poetry. Compounding plays a key role in the formation of new words. Here in this paper, it is to be proved that Ghalib has shown a diametrically astounding variety of compounding. No poet has attempted as many attention grabbing types of compounding as Ghalib does. This paper aims at exploring the multidimensional areas of compounding, used by Ghalib, whether it be endocentric compounds, exocentric compounds, copulative compounds, compounds made of combining Persian- Persian words, Persian –arabic words, Arabic to Persian words, Arabic to Arabic words, Arabic to native Urdu words,native –native, Persian –native, or the compounds where masculine and feminine nouns are combined, feminine and masculine nouns are combined, adjectives and nouns are combined, nouns and verbs are combined, adjectives and adjectives are combined and vice versa. All the above mentioned patterns of compounding will present the mastery of Ghalib over language and his way of beautifying the process of compounding.

Research Questions

Based on the review of literature and the identified research gap, this study addresses the following questions:

1. What structural patterns of compounding are employed in *Deewan-e-Ghalib*?
2. How do these compounds contribute to morpho-semantic change in Urdu?
3. In what ways does Ghalib's use of compounding reflect the multilingual influences of Urdu (e.g., Persian and Arabic)?
4. How does compounding function as a stylistic and poetic device in Ghalib's work?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative linguistic approach, focusing on the analysis of compounds in *Deewan-e-Ghalib*. The methodology is divided into the following stages:

1. **Corpus Selection**: The primary data consists of selected ghazals and couplets from *Deewan-e-Ghalib*, which provide a representative sample of Ghalib's use of compounding. Particular attention is given to verses where compound words play a central role in meaning construction.
2. **Identification of Compounds**: Compounds are identified using standard morphological criteria (Masica, 1991; Rahman, 2012), such as the merging of two or more independent lexical items to create a new lexical unit with distinct semantic value.
3. **Classification**: Identified compounds are categorized according to their structural types (e.g., noun–noun, adjective–noun, noun–verb) and their linguistic sources (Urdu, Persian, Arabic). This classification helps capture both formal patterns and cross-linguistic influences.
4. **Semantic and Stylistic Analysis**: Each compound is analyzed for its semantic contribution, particularly in terms of morpho-semantic change and metaphorical extension. In addition, the

stylistic functions of compounding within poetic discourse are explored, following frameworks in literary linguistics (Faruqi, 2001; Pritchett, 1994).

5. **Interpretive Framework**: The focus of the data analysis is a morpho-semantic perspective to find out how Ghalib's poetry becomes meaningful with the help of these compounds.

DATA ANALYSIS

Formation of Urdu Compounds

Compounding is a word formation process where two or more words are combined together to form new words. The same process in Urdu is called as *murakkab* (مرکب), and the formed compounds are called *murakkabāt* (مرکبات). Compounds usually consist of two or more roots, where one element often functions as the head and the other(s) as modifiers (Booij, 2007; Delahunty & Garvey, 2010). Depending on their structural and semantic properties, compounds may be written as a single word (e.g., *kam-bakht*), or linked through an infix such as *-e-* (e.g., *lab-e-tashna*).

Early grammarians and modern linguists have classified Urdu compounds into systematic categories (Beg, 1988; Beames, 1966). These include copulative compounds, determinative compounds, and attributive compounds, among others.

a. Copulative Compounds

Copulative compounds are those in which both components function as syntactically coordinate members, though the conjunction (such as *and* or *or*) is omitted. These compounds may be formed in several ways:

- By combining two words with distinct meanings (e.g., *subah-sham* "day and night").
- By combining two words with near-synonymous meanings (e.g., *dukh-dard* "suffering").
- Through vowel insertion, such as /a/, replacing the need for a conjunction (e.g., *ghuta-ghat* "to drink quickly").
- By pairing a meaningful word with a meaningless rhyming element, used for stylistic purposes (e.g., *saj-dhaj* "to decorate or prepare oneself").

b. Determinative Compounds

In determinative compounds, the first element is syntactically dependent on the second. One important subtype is **numeral determinatives**, in which the first element is a numeral (e.g., *chaar-chaand* "to enhance beauty"). Such forms illustrate how quantifiers contribute to the semantics of compounding in Urdu (Beames, 1966).

c. Attributive (Possessive) Compounds

Also known as possessive compounds, these forms generally function as adjectives that denote qualities or attributes of a noun. For instance, *aadha-jala* ("half-burnt") or *neem-jaan* ("half-dead").

Ghalib's Use of Compounding

Mirza Ghalib's *Deewan* provides one of the richest examples of compounding in Urdu literature. His poetry demonstrates not only his mastery of the standard structural types of compounding (endocentric, exocentric, and copulative) but also his innovative blending of multiple languages (Urdu, Persian, Arabic, and even Hindi) within compound formations.

Endocentric Compounds:

According to Delahunt and Garvey (2010) endocentric compounds represent a subtype of whatever the head represents.

In addition, Booij (2007) ~~said~~ says that endocentric compounds ~~are compounds~~ take with a head constituent. The term 'endocentric' means that the category of the whole, syntactic or morphological, construction is identical to that of one of its constituents.

An endocentric compound consists of a head, i.e. the categorical part that contains the basic meaning of the whole compound, and a modifier which restricts this meaning. It is called مرکب اضافی ` in urdu. Example from Ghalib`s poetry is the following

ʃa:m-e-xiʤər شامِ ہِجر

In this compound, the word ʃa:m, `evening`is the head and xiʤər–the desertion of some friend or a beloved`, is the modifier. These two words are brought together with the help of the infix `e`. The meaning of this compound word is `an evening spent in the absence or with the desertion of a friend or beloved`.

Some more examples of endocentric compounds from Ghalib's poetry are

[ʈərk-e-ʈalʊk]   'to break relation'

[ʤʊnuːn-e-ɪʃq]   'passion of love'

[ʈəzkəra-e-ɣær]   **'**talking about some other person/

 or a stranger

[xof-e-rəkᵢːb]   'fear of the rival'

[kədə-e-xæsti]   'imprisonment of soul/existence/life'

Exocentric Compounds

Exocentric compounds are hyponyms of some unexpressed semantic head (e.g. a person, a plant, an animal...), and their meaning often cannot be transparently guessed from its constituent parts. The definition of exocentric compounds according to Booij (2007) is the compounds with no head inside. Delahunty and Garvey (2010), state that exocentric compound is the compound that names a subtype, but the type is not represented by either the head or the modifier in the compound. Ghalib makes a very beautiful use of exocentric compounds in his poetry. For example **ʃexhər-e-xamoʃa~** شہرِ خاموشاں

Here in this compound, two words, **ʃexər ʃexhər and xamoʃa~** are used. The first word, **ʃexhər** means `a city`, Whereas the second word **xamoʃa~** means `silent`, But when these two words are combined together, they give the meaning` a graveyard`, which is altogether different from the original meanings of the two words. Some other examples are:

[zəwa:le-ama:ɖa]   'agree to be declined'

[sitʌm-zəri:f]   'an opressor'

Copulative Compounds

According to Delahunty and Garvey (2010) copulative compounds are compounds which have two semantic heads. Both elements are heads; each contributes equally to the meaning of the whole and neither is subordinate to the other. On the other hand, Booij (2007) said that copulative compound is a special class of compounds. In these compounds there is no semantic head, the relation between the constituent is a relation of coordination. Copulative compounds are compounds which have two semantic heads. The example of copulative compound in Ghalib`s poetry is the following

qkexhər-o-ɣəzəb قہروغضب

In this compound, both words are separate but have the same meaning. **qkexhər kexər** means `**fury**` or `**anger**` ɣəzəb also means `**fury` or `anger**'. The purpose of such words, having almost the same meaning, is to support the meaning of the other word or to intensify the meaning of each other Both words are giving a sort of support to each other. The compound word **qehər-o-ɣəzəb** would be used to convey the meaning of `**accute anger**'. There are some other notable changes in this compound. When we write the first word of this compound separately, we use it as **qehər.** The phoneme `ə` is added. But when we use this word in a compound, we don't use this phoneme.

Some other examples of copulative compounds in Ghalib's poetry are the following

[ɖərɖo-ələm]   'sufferings'

dʒaxo-dʒəla:l]   'dignity/fear'

[gʊlo-la:la]   'flower'

peitʃo-ṭa:b]   'restlessness'

[a:xho-fərija:ɖ]   'sighing/lamenting'

Formation of compound words, combining words of different languages:

Ghalib has a fabulous tendency that he experiments different languages to make compound words. He does not restrict himself to make compound words from Urdu language only. Rather he uses different words from different languages. For example usually he uses the following patterns

   i)   Persian- Arabic

If we observe Ghalib`s poetry, we can find a very interesting process of compounding in which two different words constituents from two different languages are combined together to make a compound word. This is a very interesting tendency. Very few poets have tried these patterns with such a marvelous success. Ghalib choses one word from Persian language and the other word from Arabic language, and creates a new word. For example

ʃərminɖa-e-ṭabi:r شرمِندہِ تعبیر

Here in this compound word, the word **ʃərminɖa** is a Persian word which means `**to be ashamed of something**'. The other word, **ṭabi:r** is an Arabic word which means `**interpretation**'. But when these two words with two different meanings, are written together, they present a different meaning that is `**THE COMPLETION OF SOME IDEA OR DREAM ETC**` or `**any effort TO meet its expected results**`.

ii)   Persian – Persian:

In Ghalib`s poetry we find a large number of compounds that are made by combining two words, both from Persian language. When these two words are combined together, they bring ~~semantic and~~ sometimes both semantic and morphological change. Examples of such compounds are presented below

تیغِ یار   tæɣ-e-jar

Here in this compound, the word **tæɣ** is a Persian word which means `a sword`.It is combined together with the second word jar, also a Persian word which means a `**friend**'. Both these words are brought together with the help of the infix `**e**`. Now this compound word means `**the assault of a friend**` or `**the harsh words spoken by a friend or the beloved'**. And this meaning is altogether different if we look at both words as separate words.

iii)   Arabic-Persian:

There is a tendency in Ghalib`s genius that he makes a beautiful combination of Arabic and Persian words in compounding. For example

موجِ خون modʒ-e-xo:n

In this compound, the Arabic word **modʒ** ~~means~~ `a wave` combines with the Persian word, **xo:n** ~~is a Persian word which means~~ `blood'.~~The~~ compound modʒ-e-xo:n as a whole means `the circulation of blood'. Such kind of skill in compounding shows Ghalib`s multidimensional approach towards poetry.

iv)   Arabic- Arabic:

It has been observed that Ghalib`s poetry is full of such examples in which we find compounds, that are made of combining two Arabic words to give a new charm and flexibility of language ~~in the process of compounding~~. The example of such type of compounding is given below.

iʃrəṱ-e-kəṯra   عشرتِ قطره

~~In this beautiful example,~~ the word **iʃrəṱ** is an Arabic word which means `**happines**s` whereas the second word **kəṯra** is also an Arabic word which means `drop` like drop of water. When both these words are combined together, they convey the meaning `**the desire of the drop of water'**. Here in this compound, one more thing can be noticed that one word is a feminine noun and the second word is a masculine noun. So a feminine noun is being combined with a masculine noun to make a new word which is a feminine noun.

v)   Native Urdu-Persian:

Sometimes Ghalib combines Urdu words with Persian word to create a compound, having a new meaning. For example

xhʌmsaija ہمسایہ:

In this compound, there are two words which are normally written and spoken together. But in fact they are two different words, combined together. The first word **xhʌm** is an Urdu word which means `**we or fellow**'. The second word **saija** is a Persian word, which means `**shadow**'. But when both these words are combined, they convey the meaning 'a neighbour`, which is altogether different from the meaning of both these words, if used separately.

vi)   Hindi- Persian:

Another interesting pattern, followed by Ghalib, has been observed that sometimes he also combines Hindi and Persian words, to make compound words. It seems very much appealing that two words from two different languages are being used together to create a new word. For example

gərmi-e-bəzm گرمیِ بزم

In this very compound, the first word **gərmi** is basically a Hindi word which means `heat, summer or passion'. The second word, **bəzm** is a Persian word which means `a gathering'. When these two words are combined together with the help of the infix –e-, they create the meaning `splendor or elegance of some gathering`.

Apart from working tremendously in the above mentioned patterns, Ghalib uses so many other patterns of compounding to bring derivational effect. For example

vii)   Adjective + Noun=Adjective:

This is a very interesting thing to observe that Ghalib combines an adjective with a noun and creates a new adjective with a different meaning. For example

ʃoxi-e-nerʌŋg شو خیِ نیرنگ

Here the first word **ʃoxi** is an adjective which means` cheerfulness or jollity'. The second word **nerʌŋg** is a noun, which means ``charm or magic'. When the two words are combined together, they give the meaning `strange kind of cheerfulness of someone'. And this meaning is altogether different from the words' base meanings.

viii)   Noun + Adjective=Adjective:

In Ghalib`s poetry, we notice another important thing that he always tries to create a newness in his poetry. He plays with words in a very intellectual manner. Here in this compound, Ghalib has combined a noun with an adjective and creates an adjective out of them, with a new and different meaning, showing semantic change. For example

Səbza-e-noxeiz سبزہ نوخیز

In this compound, the word **Səbza** is masculine noun which means 'greenery or grasses. The other word **noxeiz** is an adjective means `new`**.** When these words are combined together, Ghalib creates the meaning `a young person` or a young person having passionate desires`

ix)   Feminine Noun + Feminine Noun= Feminine Noun

It is very interesting to quote here that in Ghalib`s poetry, we find another varying feature ~~regarding compounding~~ that he often combines two feminine nouns to make a new noun, that is also a feminine noun. For example, ~~in Deewan-e-Ghalib,~~ he uses the compound:

gərd̪-e-ra گردِ راہ

In this compound, **gərd̪** is a feminine noun which means `dust'. And **ra** is also a feminine noun which means `road, way, or manner'. When these two feminine nouns are brought together, they make a new feminine noun, having a semantic change as it conveys the meaning `unimportant`.

x)   Masculine Noun + Feminine Noun=Masculine Noun:

Ghalib has proved himself to be a great poet who experiments different tendencies in his poetry.There is another inclination of Ghalib that he introduces compounds in his poetry, where he joints masculine nouns with feminine nouns and creates a masculine noun out of them. This is a good thing to be observed.For example he uses the compound

Zoqk-e-gʊfţəgʊ   ذوقِ گفتگو

Here in this compound, a masculine and a feminine noun is combined together.

The word **Zoq** is a masculine noun, which means 'skill or interest`, whereas the second word, **gʊfţəgʊ** is a feminine noun, which means `conversation or dialogue'. When these two nouns are united, they present a masculine noun, having the meaning `the good skill or art of talking ~~of someone~~`.

xi)   Masculine Noun + Masculine Noun=Masculine noun:

In Deewan e Ghalib, we see another pattern of combining nouns to make new nouns by the process of compounding it is noticed Ghalib, combining masculine noun with another masculine noun to make a new noun. For example

zəbţ-e-ʃok ضبطِ شوق

In this compound, the word, **zəbţ** is a masculine noun, which means 'to control'. The second word, **ʃok** is also a masculine noun which means `interest or desire'. When these two masculine nouns are combined together, they make another masculine noun, which means `to control or stop desire of something'. Both nouns are combined

a.   The infix -e- functions as grammatical case i.e (ki):

In Urdu compounding, in some cases, the infix (e) is used as a grammatical case (ki) as in the word

sozəʃ-e-dil سوزشِ دِل (دِل کی تکلیف)

b.   The infix -e- functions as grammatical case i.e (se):

In some cases, the same infix (e) functions as the grammatical case (ka) as in the word

Visa:l-e-ya:r وِصالِ یار[mehbo:b-se-mila:p]

Here in this compound word the infix –e- has been used as the grammatical case –se-.The meaning of this compound word is 'the union with the beloved'.

c.   The infix-e-functions as grammatical case i.e (ko) and (pʌr):

Sometimes the infix (e) functions as the grammatical case (ko) or (pʌr) at the same time, as in the word

zəbţ-e-ʃok (ضبطِ شوق)

Here in this compound, the infix –e- can be used as two grammatical cases as

(شوق/ہواہش کو قابو کرنا)) یا   (شوق پر قابو پانا

d. The use of the infix –o- showing antonymous relation:

While working on compounding, Ghalib shows his intellectual genius and presents different patterns of compounding such as he uses the infix –o- for the purpose of combining the words together. For example he uses words like

wədʒo:d̪ o ədə̃m:عدم و وجود

Here in this compound, the infix –o- is showing two functions.

The first word **wədʒo:d̪** means `existence`. The second word **ədə̃m** means `non-existence`. When both these words are combined together, they give the meaning `**existence and non-existence'.** The first function of the infix –o- is that it is uniting two words. The second function is that it is showing the antonymous relation of the two words

e. The use of the infix –o- showing synonymous relation:

If in one pattern, the infix –o- shows the antonymous relation between the words of the compound, it also functions as showing the synonymous relation of the words. For example

ənd̪a:z o əd̪a:ادا و انداز

Here in this compound, the first word is a Persian word, which means `manners or gestures`.The second word is also a Persian word which also means `manner or gesture'. So the infix –o- has shown a synonymous relation between the two words.

CONCLUSION

In Urdu, compounding is one of the various devices used to form or coin new words. It is very productive device through which different words are constructed. In Urdu language, a large number of compounds are borrowed from Persian and Arabic. After the analysis of the different kinds, methods and patterns, used by Mirza Ghalib in his book "Deewan e Ghalib", it is safe to say that the present research paper has proved in a very authentic way that Ghalib has used the vastest range of compounding. The different patterns of compounding show different morphological and semantic changes.

Placing Ghalib's compounding practices within broader linguistic and poetic frameworks reveals how his creative manipulation of morphology serves both **lexical expansion** and **aesthetic innovation**. His compounds enrich Urdu not just lexically but culturally, embodying the fusion of languages, traditions, and sensibilities that define its literary identity.

Future scholarship may profitably compare Ghalib's compounding methods with those of other classical Urdu poets or trace their influence on modern Urdu poetry. Such investigations would further clarify how **compounding operates as a key mechanism of morpho-semantic evolution** and as a vital conduit of artistic expression within the Indo-Aryan linguistic tradition.

REFERENCES

Akhtar, S. (2000). *Urdu morphology in Indo-Aryan perspective*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel   Publications.

Beames, J. (1966). *A comparative grammar of the modern Aryan languages of India* (Vol. 1–3).   New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal. (Original work published 1872–1879)

Beg, M. A. J. (1988). *Some aspects of the grammar of Urdu*. Delhi: Bahri Publications.

Booij, G. (2007). *The grammar of words: An introduction to linguistic morphology* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Delahunty, G. P., & Garvey, J. J. (2010). *The English language: From sound to sense*. Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse.

Faruqi, S. R. (2001). *She'r-e-shor angez: Ghalib's poetic thought and style*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing.

Masica, C. P. (1991). *The Indo-Aryan languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Matthews, P. H. (1997). *The concise Oxford dictionary of linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pritchett, F. W. (1994). *Nets of awareness: Urdu poetry and its critics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rahman, M. M. (2012). A linguistic approach to comprehensive study of compound words: With special reference to Urdu language. *Language in India, 12*(2), 367–384. http://www.languageinindia.com/feb2012/moturrahmancompoundwords.pdf

Russell, R., & Islam, K. (1995). *The Oxford India Ghalib: Life, letters, and ghazals*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Shapiro, M. C. (2003). *A primer of modern standard Hindi*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.