Towards a Formal Description of Serbian Compounds within a Meaning-Text Linguistic Model

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Abstract

The paper proposes a preliminary description of Serbian compounds within a Meaning-Text model. It focuses on synchronic productive compounds, constructed by word-formation rules, as opposed to diachronic compounds, stored in the dictionary. Properties of synchronic compounds are established and sample rules are formulated allowing for their synthesis from underlying semantic representations. Some “intermediate cases” of compounding are discussed and their possible treatment outlined.

Keywords

Compound, compounding, diachronic compounding, Serbian, synchronic compounding, word-formation rules

1 Introduction

This paper does not aim at an exhaustive description of compounds in Serbian. Its goal is, rather, to show what a description of compounds could look like within a Meaning-Text model and to explore some related theoretical problems. The discussion makes use of the system of morphological concepts put forward in Mel’čuk (1990), (1993-2000) and (2004).

1.1 Basic concepts: compound₁ vs. compound₂

A compound is a wordform (and, by extension, lexeme) containing a compound radical [R]. A compound radical consists of at least two radicals, a “governing” radical [R₁] and a “governed” radical [R₂], linked by a dependency (→):

\[
\text{compound } R = R_1 \rightarrow R_2.
\]
For instance, the wordform in (1) features a compound radical (bracketed). The morphological process by which compounds are produced is called *compounding.*

\[(1) \ [\text{tr}\{2\text{[Num]}\}^+\text{o}\text{Compound.Marker}^+\text{dnev}-\text{R1}[\text{A-duration}]] + o \text{ ‘three-day’} \]

(as in *trodnevno putovanje* ‘[a] three-day trip’)

It is important to insist at the outset that a compound is not a phrase (= a complex of wordforms linked by syntactic dependencies) but indeed a (single) wordform. This warning is in order for at least three reasons. First, speakers easily perceive compounds as phrases, i.e., they see elements of a compound as separate words (understandably enough, since some of them—free radicals—are used independently). Second, the dependency relation holding between radicals in a compound is highly reminiscent of, although not identical to, the syntactic dependency holding between wordforms within a phrase (cf. *scare*\(_1\text{[V]}\)\(^+\text{crow}\text{\_2}[\text{N}]*) and *(to) scare\(_2\text{[V]}\) crows\(_\text{\_2}[\text{N}]*);* this resemblance is reflected in a traditional classification of compounds into coordinate, attributive, and actantial (see note 3). Finally, the term *compound* is often used in a very vague sense and applied to expressions of type Fr. *chemin de fer* lit. ‘road of iron’ = ‘railway,’ which actually are (set) phrases. However, even if a compound wordform is in a way a borderline case between a word and a phrase (just as, at the other end of the “morphological spectrum,” a clitic wordform is at the borderline between a word and an affix), it possesses all the necessary properties of a wordform. I will return to this point later, in connection with Serbian compounds.

In the present framework, a sharp distinction is made between *synchronic compounds/compounding* (compounds\(_1/\text{compounding}_1\)) and *diachronic compounds/compounding* (compounds\(_2/\text{compounding}_2\)); our description of compounds follows naturally from this distinction. (The same distinction is made in the other word-formation domain, i.e., derivation.)

Compounds\(_1\) are regularly and unrestrictedly constructed out of existing radicals. *Regularly* means ‘according to a pattern, i.e., a rule,’ and *unrestrictedly*—‘according to any rule (that may apply).’ Regularity corresponds to the compositionality of the resulting expression (which exhibits no phraseologization, no formal deviations and no “unexpected” combinatorial restrictions), while unrestrictedness corresponds to the absolute productivity of the rule(s) used to construct it. It follows that compounds\(_1\) can be dynamically produced in the process of speaking according to rules of the language \(L\) and need not be stored in the dictionary of \(L\).

The wordforms in (2), along with the one cited above, are compounds\(_1\):

\[(2) \ [\text{bled}_\text{\_2}[\text{A}]+o^+\text{zelem}-\text{R1}[\text{A}]] + i \text{ ‘pale-green’, } [\text{paradajs}_\text{\_2}[\text{N}]+\text{čorb}_\text{\_1}[\text{N}]] + a \text{ ‘tomato soup’} \]

Compounds\(_2\) are not constructed regularly and unrestrictedly. They are vestiges of historical compoundung, phraseologized to a varying degree and/or formally unpredictable, possibly exhibiting “strange” syntactic behavior; the patterns used to produce them are no longer productive. This means that, from a synchronic viewpoint, compounds\(_2\) are in fact simple signs (*morphological phrasemes*, in the sense of Mel’čuk 1993-2000, vol. 4) and must be stored in the dictionary. The wordforms in (3), still formally analyzable but semantically non-compositional, are compounds\(_2\):

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1 Radicals entering into a compound radical can themselves be compound or derived; some inflectional elements can be present on the governed radical and the governing radical is fully inflected.
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Compounding patterns are still largely transparent for language users; thus, even though these patterns are not used in regular word formation, they may be exploited creatively in order to produce puns, jokes or play on words; some such creations may “stick” and eventually enter the language. 2

Compounds, which are potential lexical units—in the sense that they are freely constructed in speech and not stored as such—are described within the Meaning-Text model of a language by means of compounding rules, which synthesize compounds from some underlying semantic representations. Compounds, which are actual lexical units, are given a lexicographic description; in addition, they are dealt with in the meta-model (of the given Meaning-Text model), where compounding patterns and their possible use in creative word-formation are described. 3

While the distinction compound ~ compound is theoretically clear-cut, in “real life” intermediate cases abound—compounds that are constructed regularly but not unrestrictedly (i.e., they are compositional but the corresponding compounding patterns are not fully productive). For instance, the meaning “[P] of color X having a shade of Y” is regularly but restrictedly expressed according to the pattern L(Y) + L(X):

(4) [maslinast(A)+o+zelen(A)]+I ‘olive-green’, [zlatn(A)+o+žut(A)]+i ‘golden-yellow’, [pepeljast(A)+o+siv(A)]+i ‘ashy-gray’, [golubij(A)+e+siv(A)]+i ‘pigeony-gray’, etc.

In fact, at least in a number of Indo-European languages, compounds as those in (4) are more frequently encountered than “pure” compounds. If we were to treat all cases of not completely unrestricted compounding as compounding (which, strictly speaking, we should), the resulting description of compounds would be too compartmentalized and some useful generalizations would be lost. A more nuanced approach, which I will adopt here, is to treat these intermediate cases as not quite well-behaved compounds, adding to their description whatever is needed to account for their specificities. As we shall see, such a description involves both word formation rules and the dictionary.

1.2 A snapshot of Serbian compounds

Compounding in general, and compounding in particular, is poorly represented in Serbian (the poor representation of compounding is rather the norm in Slavic).

2 This is the case, for instance, with coll. nogopisN ‘very bad handwriting’ [lit. ‘footwriting’; nogopisN+o+pis-R1(V), constructed on the model of rukopisN ‘handwriting’, kišonasac [lit. ‘rainbringer’; kišonasac+o+nos-R1(V)+ac] used as a rock album title and calqued from the English original stormbringer, has remained a one-time creation.

3 In other frameworks, the distinction between compounds and compounds corresponds to that between compositional (sometimes called loose) and lexicalized compounds. However, this distinction is nowhere as strictly “enforced” as in the Meaning-Text approach. Three other sets of oppositions are routinely used in characterizations of compounds (they cut across each other and across the opposition compositional ~ lexicalized): 1) endocentric [handbag] ~ exocentric/bahuvrihi [pickpocket], 2) root [schoolboy] ~ synthetic [truck driver], 3) attributive [blackboard] ~ actantial [truck driver] ~ coordinate/dvandva [Austria-Hungary].
Clear cases of compounding involve adjectives and, to a lesser extent, nouns. Cases of regular but somewhat restricted compounding are found in both adjectives and nouns. Examples of compounding patterns are given in Table 1.

| N | R2(N)+o+R1(N) | brod+o+gradnja ‘ship building (industry)’, oc+e+ubica ‘parricide’, jug+o+zapad ‘South-West’ |
| A | R2(A)+o+R1(A) | st+o+godišnj ‘hundred-year’, francuski+o+ruski ‘French-Russian’, tamm+o+plav ‘dark-blue’ |

Bound radicals are found in both compound types; in some compounds they contain obligatory derivational suffixes (cf. a compound: [vatrogas]+acAgent ‘fire-fighter’ and [vatrogas]+n(i)Relation ‘fire-fighting’, on the one hand, and the inexistence of *gasac and *gasni [in the intended sense] on the other). Compound radicals can serve as bases for derivation, e.g., [dvadeset+o+godišnj]+i ‘twenty-year old’ [dvadeset+o+godišnj]+ak (+akinja) ‘a twenty-year old male (female)’) and derivation1/2 is possible from most compound radicals (e.g., velegrad ‘metropolis’ ~ velegrad+ski ‘metropolitan’, tvrdoglav ‘stubborn’ ~ tvrdoglav+ost ‘stubbornness’, etc.).
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2 Serbian compounds

Three specific questions will be addressed: (2.1) criteria for compound-hood in Serbian, (2.2) sample compounding rules for adjectival compounds and (2.3) description of intermediate cases of (adjectival and nominal) compounding.

2.1 Properties of compounds

Since compounds are similar to free phrases (cf. p. 2), a description of compounds has to establish properties by which the former can be told from the latter. Being (a particular case of) a wordform, a compound is, generally speaking, more cohesive than a complex of wordforms, i.e., a phrase. Wordform cohesion manifests itself in a number of features—semantic, syntactic, morphological and phonological—the combination of which is language-specific. Table 3 (next page) shows how things look for Serbian compounds, according to features frequently used in the literature (see, for instance, Mackenzie & Mel’čuk 1986, Bauer 1998, Kiefer 1991 and Bresnan & Mchombo 1995).

As we can see, the decisive criteria for compound-hood in Serbian seem to be syntactic and morphological (more specifically inflectional): a compound is a “syntactic island,” i.e., its dependent element is inaccessible to modification/pronominal reference (the impossibility of pronominal reference to the dependent element of a compound is linked to the non-referential character of this element) and it is inflected as a whole.

Semantic unity is not greater in a compound than in a free phrase, both being free complexes of signs. (We can speak of the semantic unity of a compound only by analogy with compounds, which are semantically fused wholes, and with which compounds share formal characteristics.) Ellipsis—in particular tmesis—of the governing element is possible with some compounds, which should not be the case; this issue needs to be examined more carefully. Sandhies of the internal type do not conclusively identify a linguistic unit as a compound; they are not a reliable criterion in Serbian, since, on the one hand, they may fail to apply between stems and affixes (i.e., between parts of a wordform), and, on the other, may apply between a clitic and its host (i.e., between two wordforms). Finally, unique stress is not a necessary feature of compounds (and not even of compounds).

2.2 Synthesis rules for compounds

Sample rules for the synthesis of two types of Serbian adjectival compounds will be cited. Familiarity with Meaning-Text models [= MTMs] is assumed.

Within an MTM, compounding is taken care of by two sets of rules: 1) lexical-semantic compounding rules, belonging to the semantic module of an MTM (transition Semantic

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4 Other questions relevant to determining the properties of compounds, which I cannot address here, include the distinction between compound and derivative; and that between compound and collocation.
Structure \([\text{SemS}] \sim \text{Deep-Syntactic Structure} \([\text{DSyntS}], \text{are a subclass of lexical-semantic rules for potential lexical units, which cover all cases of regular word formation; 2) deep-morphological compounding rules, belonging to the deep-morphological module (transition \text{Deep-Morphological Structure} \([\text{DMorphS}] \sim \text{Surface-Morphological Structure} \([\text{SMorphS}]). \text{Other modules of an MTM do not contain rules specific to compounding}\).}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEATURES</th>
<th>SEMANTIC</th>
<th>COMPOUNDS₁</th>
<th>PHRASES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Referentiality of the dependent element</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>*kućevlasnik u Jovanovoj ulici ‘houseowner on Jovan Street’</td>
<td>YES vlasnik kuće u Jovanovoj ulici ‘owner of a/the house on Jovan Street’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Referentiality of the dependent element</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>*drvene FEM.SG.GEN kućevlasnik (masc)SG.GEN ‘wooden houseowner’</td>
<td>YES vlasnik drvene FEM.SG.GEN kuće(fem)SG.GEN ‘owner of a/the wooden house’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) External modification to the dependent element</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>*kućevlasnik njih, nekoliko ‘houseowner of several of them’</td>
<td>YES vlasnik nekolikih kuća, njih, nekoliko ‘owner of several houses/of several of them’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Ellipsis of the governing element</td>
<td>Inconclusive</td>
<td>brodo- i mašinogradnja ‘ship- and machinebuilding’ BUT ALSO *mlado- i bledolik ‘young- and pale-looking’</td>
<td>YES gradnja brodova i mašinina ‘building of ships and machines’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Unique inflection</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>*dva radio-aparat+aGEN.SG ‘two radio-sets’ [cf. *dva radiji+aGEN.SG ‘two radios’] AND NOT *dva radiji+aGEN.SG-aparat+aGEN.SG</td>
<td>NO kuć+dGEN.PL-lavirint+tNOM.PL ‘houses-labyrinths’ AND NOT *kuć+dGEN.PL-lavirint+tNOM.PL ‘houses-labyrinths’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Sandhis</td>
<td>Inconclusive</td>
<td>Optional devoicing paradaži-lavirint BUT ALSO paradaži čorba ‘tomato soup’</td>
<td>NO paradaži (*paradaži) sa lukom ‘tomato with onion’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Special radicals/markers</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>sedamdesetogodišnji BUT ALSO umnoplat ‘seventy-year’ ‘dark blue’</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Unique stress</td>
<td>Inconclusive</td>
<td>sedamdesetogodišnji BUT ALSO umnoplat ‘seventy-year’ ‘dark blue’</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Properties of Serbian compounds, opposing them to free phrases

Let me start by indicating compounding₁ rules for adjectives of type \([\text{bled}+o+zelen]+i \) ‘pale green’, \([\text{bled}+o+[jubićast]+i \) ‘pale lilac’, \([\text{bled}+o+siv]+i \) ‘pale grey’, etc. The governing radical denotes a color and the governed radical BLED ‘pale’ a low intensity of this color; the radicals are linked by the compounding₁ marker \(-o- \langle-e- \rangle \) (an interfix). The following lexical-semantic₁ compounding rule constructs the name of a compound₁ lexeme out of corresponding lexical meanings.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{SemS} & \quad \text{DSyntS} \\
\cdot \langle X \rangle \rightarrow \langle \text{color} \rangle & \leftrightarrow \langle \text{intensity} \rangle & \cdot \\
2 & \leftrightarrow \bullet & [(L('X')) \rightarrow \text{BLED}] \text{ Adj} \\
1 & \cdot & \langle \alpha \rangle \\
& \bullet & \langle \text{small} \rangle \\
\end{align*}
\]

Figure 1: Lexical-semantic compounding₁, rule Rule \(_{\text{COMP/SEM}}\)
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Comments

1) This rule (as all compounding₁ rules) is actually a rule schema, not an individual rule.
2) The name of the compound lexeme (in the right-hand side of the rule) is in square brackets, which shows its lexemic unity. Within the name of a compound lexeme, an arrow ‘→’ shows the dependency relation: L(‘X’), more precisely, R[L(‘X’)], the radical of the corresponding lexeme, for short R₁, governs BLED-, i.e., R₂. This information is used later on to properly position R₂ with respect to R₁ (which are NOT linearly ordered at this stage) and to introduce, if need be, the compounding marker.

For X = ‘green’ the above rule constructs the name of the compound lexeme in (5):

(5) DSyntS [ZELEN- → BLED-].

Since there are no syntactic rules specific to compounding, the name of a compound lexeme is transferred as-is—just like all other lexeme names—into the DMorphS. Then the following deep-morphological compounding₁ rule linearly orders the radicals, based on the direction of dependency between them, and introduces the compounding marker.

\[
\text{DMorphS} \quad \text{DMorphS}'
\]

\[
[R₁(A) \rightarrow R₂(A)] \Leftrightarrow R₂(A) + \text{INTERFIX} + R₁(A)
\]

Figure 2: Deep-Morphological compounding₁ rule RuleCOMP/MORPH 1

Comment

The above rule is an atypical deep-morphological rule in two respects. First, it performs linear ordering of parts of wordforms, a task normally carried out by surface-morphological rules, applying at the morphic level and using for this purpose the information about combinatorial features of morphs (order with respect to the radical/each other), stored in their syntactics. However, syntactics of radicals do not carry information about the relative position radicals will have within a compound wordform so that the ordering of radicals has to be done according to the dependency relation between them, i.e., at an earlier stage of synthesis. This makes the present rule look suspiciously like a syntactic rule. Second, and related to the first, the output of this rule is an intermediate structure (noted above as DMorphS’) of the same level as the input one (and not, as would be normal, a structure of the level n+1). Interestingly enough, the same type of structure seems to be needed for the treatment of Serbian second-position clitics (see Miličević, to appear), albeit not for the same reasons. This reflects the special nature of both the compounds and the clitics, which are borderline cases of wordforms (cf. the discussion of the properties of compounds₁ above).

In our case, the above rule produces the DMorphS’ in (6):

(6) DMorphS’ BLED- + INTERFIX + ZELEN-

At this stage, rules non-specific to compounding take over to finish the synthesis of the compound₁ wordform. ²

I will conclude this subsection by citing the semantic-lexical compounding₁ rule needed to produce adjectival compounds₁ of type [sedamdeset+i+godišn](j)+i (rat) ‘seventy-year (war)’, [šest+i+mesečn]+i (ugovor) ‘six-month (contract)’, [tr+i+dnevni]+i (izlet) ‘tri-day (excursion)’, [dv+i+časovn]+a (operacija) ‘two-hour (operation)’, [pet+i+minutni]+a (pauza) ‘five-minute

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5 The Surface-Syntactic agreement rules (used for lexemes of all types) compute gender, number and case grammemes for the compound, adjective according to the corresponding features of the governing noun (= L(‘P’)); for instance, if the governing noun is TKANINA(Nlem)[gen] ‘cloth’, the complete DMorphS of our adjective looks like this: [ZELEN → BLED] fem, sg, gen.

6 Here is what happens. 1) The Morphemic structure of the adjective is computed: {BLED} [O] (ZELEN) [FEM.SG GEN]; 2) The Morphic structure is computed, including the choice of appropriate allomorphs of radicals and of the compounding marker (-o- vs.-e-): bled+i+zelën+i+ih.
The governed radical is a numeral and the governing radical an adjective denoting duration of an event, derived from a temporal noun godina ‘year’, mesec ‘month’, dan ‘day’, čas ‘hour’, minut ‘minute’, etc.

The notation bound-2nd is an indication that the corresponding radical is used only as the second element of a compound (this is a feature of the syntactics of the radical). Together these two indications help pick up, in the Explanatory-Combinatorial Dictionary of Serbian, the needed lexicographic sense of the adjective (there is at least another radical DNEVNI, a free radical meaning ‘occurring every day’, not used in compounds.)

For ‘X’ = ‘hour’ and ‘Y’ = ‘three’, the above rule produces the name of the compound lexeme in (7a). A deep-syntactic rule computes the value of the lexical function A_{duration} for ČAS and constructs, at the Surface-Syntactic level, the compound radical in (7b), which is carried over as-is to the Deep-Morphological level.

(7) a. DSyntS [A_{duration}(ČAS) → TRI] b. SSyntS/DMorphS [-ČASOVN- → TRI].

The synthesis then proceeds in much the same way as in the previous case (using a Deep-Morphological compounding, rule almost identical to the one given in Figure 2 and the same rules non-specific for compounding,).

2.3 Intermediate cases of compounding

Description of (at least some) cases of regularly but restrictedly constructed compounds can be carried out along the following lines. Only one radical—the governing one—receives a lexical entry, in which the possible governed radicals are listed. Where possible, the governed radicals are described as elements of the Government Pattern [= GP] of the governing radical or as particular collocates (elements of the value of a non-standard lexical-function) of the latter and a pointer is given to the corresponding compounding, rule in the grammar. Here are three illustrations.

1) The meaning ‘assassin [of Y]’ is regularly but restrictedly expressed according to the pattern L(‘Y’)\_N^0+UBICA ‘assassin’; L(‘Y’) designates either a male royal or a relative in the first degree except daughter or sister.

(8) kraljeubica ‘king-assassin’ vs. kraljiceubica ‘queen-a.’; oceubica ‘father-a.’, materoubica ‘mother-a.’; sinoubica ‘son-a.’, ženoubica ‘wife-a.’, mužubica ‘husband-a.’ vs. sestroubica ‘sister-a.’, ĉerkoubica ‘daughter-a.’, dedoubica ‘grand-father-a.’

The corresponding compounding pattern is indicated in the GP of UBICA, as a possible expression of its Deep-Syntactic Actant II, with the exceptions and a pointer towards the corres-
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ponding compounding₁ rule: \[ \mathbf{II} = \ldots \mathbf{N} - \sim | \mathbf{N} = \text{KRALJ} \text{‘king’}, \text{CAR} \text{‘emperor’ or the name of a relative in the 1ˢᵗ degree except … [compounding₁ rule n° …].} \]

2) Adjectival compounds₁ as those cited in (4) above, in which the governed radical \( \mathbf{R}_2 \) indicates a particular shade of the color expressed by the governed radical \( \mathbf{R}_1 \), can be treated in the following way: \( \mathbf{R}_2 \) is described in the entry of \( \mathbf{R}_1 \), by means of a non-standard lexical function \{[color X] having a shade of color Y\}; in addition, a reference is made to the corresponding compounding₁ rule (the one used to produce compounds₁ of type bledoželen ‘pale green’, given in Figure 1 above). Thus, in the entry of ZELEN(Adj), we will have the following description: \{having a shade of olive color\} = maslinasto ~ [compounding₁ rule n° …].

3) The meaning ‘(domain of) industrial activity consisting in constructing Ys’ is regularly but restrictedly expressed according to the pattern \( \mathbf{L(‘Y’)_{(\mathbf{N})} + \mathbf{GRADNJA} \text{‘construction’} \):

\[
(9) \text{mašinogradnja ‘machine-}c’, \text{b rodogradnja ‘ship-}c’, \text{ mostogradnja ‘bridge-}c’, \text{ vs. } \text{zgradogradnja ‘building-}c’, \text{ autogradnja ‘car-}c’, \text{ *tenkogradnja ‘tank-}c’. \\
\]

The second radical, -GRADNJA (a bound radical),\(^7\) is listed in the dictionary and the possible first radicals are indicated in its entry; at the same time, mašinogradnja, etc., is indicated as a value of a non-standard lexical function in the entry of MAŠINA, etc.

### 3 Conclusion

The paper has sketched a Meaning-Text style description of Serbian compounds, based upon the distinction “compounds₁ (compositional, productive, rule-driven) ~ compounds₂ (phraseologized, non productive, stored in the dictionary).” As can be expected in a Slavic language, compounds in general, and compounds₁ in particular, are not well represented. Moreover, pure compounds₁ are rare and intermediate cases of compositional but not entirely productive compounds₁ are predominant. Such ill-behaved compounds require a description that involves both word-formation rules and the dictionary. Sample rules for pure compounds₁ have been proposed and a possible description of some intermediate cases suggested. A strong interaction has been found between compounding₁ rules and the dictionary: on the one hand, a proper formulation of the rules depends on good dictionary descriptions (of elements entering into a compound₁); on the other hand, organization of the lexicographic information benefits from reference to these rules.

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\(^7\) There is also a free radical GRADNJ(A) ‘the action of constructing’, with co-occurrence properties different from those of the bound radical; cf.: Gradnja mosta je trajala dve godine ‘Construction of the bridge lasted for two years’ vs. *Mostogradnja je trajala dve godine ‘Bridge-construction lasted for two years’. — A secondary meaning ‘[name of a] company working in the domain of constructing Ys’ is regularly derived from the -GRADNJA compounds₁.
Bibliography


