

Compounding as a Morphological Process on *TikTok*

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Abstract

This essay examines compounding as a morphological process in online platforms, focusing on *TikTok*, a social media site where users express their opinions about events and happenings in their community. Social media users have been found to coin new terms with connotations exclusive to online usage, which may seem odd to people who are not on social media. Thus, by looking at the morphological compositions and descriptions as well as the semantic implications of such compound words, this work takes a descriptive approach to studying the morphological process of compounds. Ten compound terms were chosen for a thorough in-depth analysis out of the thousands that were gathered for the study through user observation and extraction from posts, comments, captions, and hashtags. The results show that the compound words' semantic connotations are limited to online usage and effectively capture the language of social media in general and *TikTok* in particular.

Keywords: compounding, TikTok, morphology, social media, internet, online

1.0 Introduction

The TikTok platform was released worldwide in 2017; it consists of mobile short-form videos that users perform to showcase to their various communities their singing, lip syncing, dancing, acting, comedy and other creative skills. There are currently over one billion users in 150 countries (Eghtesadi & Florea, 2020). Being one of the fastest-growing apps in China, TikTok is the most successful video gathering for music (PR Newswire, 2017). It is especially common in China with Internet users younger than 30. In the first half of 2020, TikTok accumulated more than 315 million downloads worldwide in the App Store and Google Play over the quarter than any other app (Briskman, 2020).

TikTok is a free phone app for both Android and iOS users (Schwedel,

2018). According to Sehl (2020), it is a tool that gives “creators” the ability to create 3-60 seconds videos set to audio or pre-recorded footage with creative effects, including “GIFs,” “Filters,” “Screen split screens,” and “Green screens”, all at the disposal of the user. The making of TikTok videos is done using a mobile-friendly method such as filming desired footage and then applying audio and visual effects to the features within the application. After the video has been made, it is posted to a TikTok account, and the videos with text and hashtags can be distributed to the user's followers. They will be informed that a new video has been created for everyone.

Additional capabilities include the ability to record videos with lip-syncing audio, upload video clips with their audio, or even create videos using audio clips, sound bites, and visual footage. According to Hayes (2020), TikTok App enables people to use their creativity, but also brings people together in an interactive way, social-emotional environment in videos featuring “Duet” or “Stitch” and “providing both the ability to share their creativity and collaboration with others” (users film themselves reacting to videos). “Live Videos” functionality allows users to record themselves, and have their feedback/comments and likes to appear on the screen at the same time, helping users to connect with and communicate with one another. People who use this service also have the opportunity to like other videos and make comments on them. One of the major benefits of using TikTok is that content can be easily shared on various sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The advantage of this sharing feature is that it provides greater access to creators to an even larger audience and allows those who have no TikTok account to view their videos.

1.1 The English Language and *TikTok*

The use of the English language on TikTok as a means of communication on social media has resulted in instances of linguistic deviation. Linguistic deviation is a conscious change from the existing norm. According to Norgaard *et al.* (2010, p. 95), “Deviation refers to moves away from a norm on all linguistic levels”. It is associated with an infraction or a violation of a linguistic norm either for aesthetic purposes or to achieve a foregrounding effect. The ideology that surrounds a piece of discourse or writing most time informs and dictates the writer’s choice of style.

As TikTok users communicate using English, many new words have emerged that bear resemblance to their original English forms. This increasing use of social media platforms has led to the formation of new words with distinct meanings. Additionally, some new words and unusual collocations have also emerged from such usages which emanate from the

need to express concepts specific to the social and cultural context of the social media users in economic and fast lexical expressions. In recent times, these formed words have become parts and parcels of everyday speech, as speakers use them liberally in informal conversations. These formed words are slowly finding their way into the English lexicon. A study of how these words are formed morphologically will help to explore the novelty, processes, and linguistic aesthetics inherent in this word formation and their unique social media meaning.

In our daily use of language, we are often not aware of word-formation processes, which create, produce, or form new words in a language. Most of the time, we have no problems with understanding these new words. Furthermore, we immediately know the various forms of that new word and include them all in our vocabulary. Sometimes we even may build them ourselves. This ability to adopt, understand, and use such a new word results from the fact that these word-formation processes are based on certain rules and regulations. Our remarkable ability to comprehend and incorporate new words into our vocabulary stems from the systematic word-formation processes governed by language rules. When encountering unfamiliar words, our brain analyzes their structure and context, making it easier to grasp their meanings and related forms. Whether through prefixes, suffixes, or other morphological patterns, we instinctively recognize various word forms, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. This seamless adoption and understanding of new words showcase the efficiency of language in conveying meaning. Moreover, we can even create new words ourselves by applying these established rules. Overall, language's inherent structure and our brain's language processing capabilities enable us to swiftly embrace and utilize novel vocabulary in our daily communication.

According to McCarthy and O'Dell (2007), when we listen to or read English, it is sometimes possible to guess the meaning of a word that we do not know before we look up or ask its meaning. We need to decide first what part of speech the word is and then look for clues in its context or form which leads to morphological processes.

2.0 The Concept of Morphology

Traditionally, morphology can be defined as a study of the internal structure of words (Katamba, 1993). The word “morphology” is derived from the Greek word *morphe* meaning “form” and *logos* meaning “science” (Carstairs and McCarthy, 2002). Morphology belongs to the area of grammar involving the internal structure of words. Essentially, it deals with processes of word formation in a language. The word formation

process in English can be classified into two: Major and Minor word formation process. The majors are Affixation, Conversion, and Compounding while the minors are Clipping, Blending, Acronym, Sound imitation (or onomatopoeia), Back-formation, and Reduplication. The focus of this study belongs to the one major word formation process, which is compounding.

2.1 Compounding

Compounding is a morphological process of combining two or more words to form a new word (Maledo, 2021). In linguistics, a compound is a word that consists of more than one stem. Compounding is the process of word formation that creates compound words. That is, in familiar terms, compounding occurs when two or more words are joined to make a single word. The meaning of the compound may be similar to or different from the meaning of its components in isolation. The component stems of a compound may be of the same part of speech. It may consist of a head, i.e. the categorical part that contains the basic meaning of the whole compound, and modifiers, which restrict this meaning. Odebunmi (2001) observes that in forming compounds, two or more words are combined, with or without hyphenation (for example, schoolboys, blackbird, call-girl, and playboy), closed (offshore) or hyphenated (shore-boat). It is important to note that compounds are constantly generated by good users of English to do their specific bidding in informal situations. In most of these instances, the structure of compounds may go beyond the two-word level: for example: “a not-too-brilliant idea”, “chop-I-chop party” and “a-do-or-die affair”.

In morphology, compounds are classified into three main categories: endocentric, exocentric, and synthetic compounds. Endocentric compounds are described by Fromkin et al. (2013) as those in which a clear head or dominant element determines the basic meaning or grammatical category of the compound. This head typically exists at the right-hand side of the compound, following what is known as the Right-Hand Head rule (Williams, 1981). Non-head elements provide additional information or modify the head. For instance, "blackbird" is an endocentric compound where the head "bird" is modified by "black". In contrast, exocentric compounds do not have a clear head that determines the overall meaning or category of the compound (O'Grady, Archibald, Aronoff, & Rees-Miller, 2015). These compounds form a meaning that cannot be directly attributed to any specific element. For example, "turnkey" is exocentric because the head member is a verb while the compound belongs to the category of nouns. Another good example here is “pickpocket”. Synthetic compounds, on the other hand, combine the

meanings of their constituents in a non-predictable way (Bauer, 2001). This type of compound includes words like "blackbird" and "whitewash", where the compound as a whole has a unique meaning that is more than just the combination of its parts. In morphology, synthetic compounds are a specific type of compound that resembles verbal constructions. They are formed by combining a head derived from a verb with another element functioning as an object. Synthetic compounding involves a combination of compounding and derivation.

The discussion around compound classification is not without its complexities and exceptions. For instance, Selkirk (1982) devotes significant attention to exocentric compounds, which are seen as an exception in the English language. Moreover, some compounds may exhibit both endocentric and exocentric features. Despite these challenges, the classification of compounds provides valuable insights into the structure and semantics of language, enriching our understanding of how meanings are formed and conveyed.

3.0 Literature Review

The social media platforms have attracted an array of studies. Faradisa (2019) is a study carried out to identify the different types of word formation processes used in Instagram. It concludes that knowing the word formation processes used in such a platform will help to account for the semantic implications of such lexical items. In a similar vein, Crisnova (2020) is a morphological study devoted to Sherena's Instagram account with the objectives of identifying the word classes and word formation processes inherent in Sherena's Instagram account. Nweze (2013) combines a meta-pragmatic and a transformational approach to study the morpho-syntactic elements that underlie the linguistic personalities of SMS creators using data from students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Furthermore, Tabe (2018) analyses 230 informal emails and charts to explore how Anglophone Cameroonians form words in a social media context, focusing on the morphological processes in platforms such as email, Facebook, and Yahoo Messenger. Kadiri et al. (2018) examines the effect of social media language characterized by linguistic features like acronyms, abbreviations, and word contractions on the academic writings of university undergraduates. Jeresano and Carretero (2022) is a descriptive study that explores the digital culture and social media slang of Generation Z (Gen Z) and its effect on their language use and writing skills. Posca (2014) is a study of the use of blending as a morphological process on Instagram. The findings of the study reveal that two types of

blends are prominent in Instagram usage: blending with front clipping and blending with back clipping. Maledo and Edhobor (2023) investigate the morphological processes and the semantic implications of internet-based slang. Lutfiah and Sudarwati (2021) examine the jargon used on TikTok to determine the types and the specific significance of jargon as used on TikTok. The study also identifies the forms and contexts of jargon on TikTok, which involves evaluating all data collected from the application and analyzing it systematically.

What is obvious from the above review is that there is a plethora of studies on the morphology of language use on social media platforms. However, to the best of our knowledge, it appears as if much has not been done in the area of compounding on the use of language on social media platforms

4.0 Methodology

This research makes use of both primary and secondary sources of data. The data consists of compound words sourced from internet-based platforms through observation and extraction of the compound words from users' posts, comments, captions, and hashtags. Among the morphologically created words sourced for this study, ten that manifest the morphological process of compounding and which are used in social media communication were selected for analysis. They were analyzed by identifying their social media meaning, morpho-syntactic description, semantic composition, and their usage on TikTok. For ease of analysis and identification, the data is numbered from the Roman numeral datum i to datum x.

5. Data Presentation and Analysis

The analysis focuses mainly on compounding as a word-formation process on TikTok, an internet-based platform.

Datum i. *Multi-Guest*

Social Media-Based Meaning

On TikTok, a *multi-guest* is a feature that allows creators to host guests during their live video. Viewers can send guest requests or creators can invite a limited number of guests to connect in audio or video mode. Other viewers can then send gifts to the creators and guests during the live video. Multi-guest exemplifies the morphological process of compounding, where two words are combined to create a new term with a distinct meaning. In the context of TikTok, it specifically denotes a feature that enhances the social and interactive aspects of the platform by allowing multiple participants to engage in shared digital experiences.

Morpho-syntactic Description

Multi-Guest on TikTok is a hyphenated exocentric compound. In this case, multi- (indicating multiple) and guest (referring to an invited person) are joined to form a compound word, multi-guest. Components of the word have a meaning that is not related to the meaning of the individual parts which is why it is classified as an exocentric compound. The syntactic word class of multi-guest is a noun, made up of "Multi (adjective)" and "guest (Noun)".

Semantic Composition

On TikTok, *multi-guest* refers to an entity or concept involving multiple guests. It is commonly used in the context of digital platforms like TikTok to describe a feature or setting that allows multiple users to participate simultaneously in an event, live stream, or collaborative content creation. The *multi-guest* feature on TikTok enables creators to engage with their audience in realtime.

Usage on TikTok

It is used for live streaming. Creators on TikTok can use the multi-guest feature during live streams, allowing them to interact with and include multiple participants in their content. It is also used for collaborative content interactions. The term is often associated with collaborative and interactive content creation, where several users can contribute to a shared experience.

Datum ii. Double Tap

Social Media-Based Meaning

Double tap is a term used on social media, particularly TikTok. It refers to the action of tapping on a photo or video twice to like it. Double tapping is a quick way to show your appreciation for a post without having to comment or write a lengthy review.

Morpho-syntactic Description

The term *double tap* on TikTok exhibits an open endocentric compound. In an endocentric compound, one component (usually the first one) serves as the head, and it carries the primary meaning, while the other component provides additional information or specification. In this case:

- Head (Primary Meaning): Tap
- Modifier (Provides Additional Information): Double.

The primary meaning of the compound, *double tap*, is derived from the head, *tap*, while the modifier, *double*, adds specificity by indicating the repetition of the action. It is a compound where the second component functions as a modifier or specifier, enhancing the meaning of the head. In this case, the words *double* and *tap* are compounded to form a single term. It can function as a noun phrase or verb phrase as the examples below indicate:

As a Verb Phrase: In this context, the *double tap* is used as a verb phrase, indicating the action of tapping the screen or button twice.

- a. Make sure you *double tap* that post.
- b. I always *double-tap* her videos.

As a Noun Phrase: In this context, the *double tap* is used as a noun phrase, referring to the action of tapping the screen or button twice and indicating approval or liking.

- a. Give this post a *double tap* if you enjoyed it.
- b. The video received many *double taps*.

The word class of *double tap* depends on how it is used in a sentence—either as a verb phrase or a noun phrase.

Usage on TikTok

Liking Content: On TikTok, users can express appreciation or liking for a video by double-tapping the screen, and the term *double tap* is often used in captions or comments to encourage viewers to like the content. Double tap exemplifies the morphological feature of compounding, where two words are combined to create a new term representing a specific action related to user interaction on social media platforms like TikTok.

Datum iii. Capcut

Social Media-Based Meaning

Capcut on social media, especially on platforms like TikTok, refers to a video editing application used to create and edit content for sharing. Users often mention *Capcut* when discussing or recommending video editing tools within the context of social media content creation.

Morpho-syntactic Description

Capcut is an exocentric closed compound formed through combining the free morphemes *Cap* and *cut* to create a new term with a specific meaning

related to video editing capabilities on TikTok. *Capcut* is a proper noun, representing the name of a specific brand or product. The term semantically combines the elements of *Cap* and *cut* to convey the main function of the app, which is video editing as exemplified below.

- a. I edited my *TikTok* video using *Capcut* and the result is fantastic.
- b. *Capcut* has some great features for enhancing your video content.

Usage on *TikTok*

Capcut is commonly used and mentioned on TikTok, where users create and share short video content. Creators may discuss their editing process or recommend *Capcut* to their audience. *Capcut* is a compound proper noun representing a video editing application, commonly used and discussed within the context of social media, particularly on platforms like TikTok. Its usage reflects pragmatic considerations related to content creation and enhancement. The meaning expressed is distinct from the individual constituents that make up the compound word. Often relying on contextual or cultural association, the meaning of *Capcut* is inferred from the use of the TikTok app.

Datum iv. *Data Saver*

Social Media-Based Meaning

Data Saver is a feature on WhatsApp that can be used to reduce the amount of data that the app uses. When this setting is enabled, WhatsApp will not automatically download images, videos, or other files. Instead, the user will need to manually download each file.

Morpho-syntactic Description

Data Saver is a synthetic open compound formed by combining the morphemes *Data* and *Saver*. The meaning of the word is inferred from both constituents but not in a predictable way. It is formed by compounding and derivation. *Data Saver* belongs to the noun as a word class referring to a tool or feature related to the conservation of data.

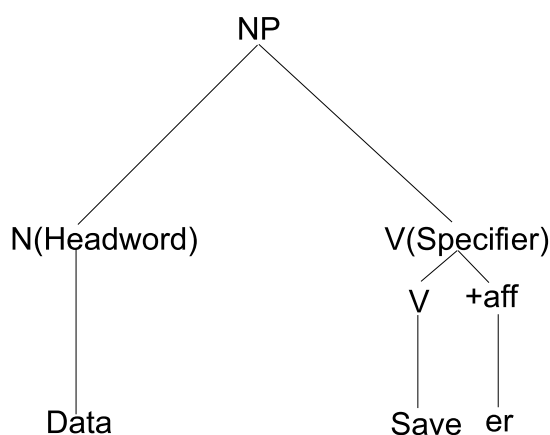
Semantic Composition

Semantically, the compound conveys the idea of preserving or conserving data. *Data* specifies the kind of content being preserved, and *Saver* indicates the tool or feature responsible for the action.

Semantic Field

Data saver is a term that falls within the semantic field of internet technology. It refers to a setting or feature on a mobile device that is designed to conserve data usage. It typically does this by restricting background data usage, reducing background data usage, reducing image quality, and disabling the auto-play function. You will find *Data savers* around words like smartphones, data, and tablets among others.

The figure below shows the morphological analysis of *Data Saver* with a clear head-dependent relationship. Semantically, it conveys the efficient preservation of data, and pragmatically, it aligns with user empowerment and control over data consumption in the technological landscape of social media.



Datum v. *Shadowban*

Social Media-Based Meaning

Shadowban is a term used on social media platforms to describe a form of censorship. When someone is *shadow-banned*, their content is hidden from other users on the platform, so they cannot see or interact with it. This can happen for several reasons, such as violating the platform's community guidelines or engaging in spammy or harmful behavior. This is a social media word and it has become part of the online lexicon.

Morphological Description

Shadowban is an exocentric compound which can be a closed or an open compound. It is formed by two free morphemes which are *Shadow* and *ban*. The meaning of the word cannot be known except if you are a social media user. There is no clear head in this compound word because it is an exocentric compound that does not possess a clear head. Depending on the context, *shadow-ban* can be a noun or a verb. In the expression "My account is on shadow ban" it is a noun where it functions as a compliment to a preposition while in "Your account will be shadow banned" it is a

verb in the past tense form.

Semantic Composition

Semantically, the word *shadow* refers to something that is hidden or in the dark, and *ban* refers to something that is forbidden or not allowed. So, in total shadow ban means something that restricts a user's content without their knowledge by not showing any of their content on other's feeds. The user does not know that other users cannot see their content.

Semantic Field

Shadow ban is found in the field of online communication and censorship. It is a term that refers to the practice of blocking or restricting user's online content without their knowledge. Words like algorithms, censorship, visibility, access, and online speech are associated with *shadow-ban*.

Datum vi. Hashtag

Social Media-Based Meaning

On social media, the *hashtag* is commonly used to categorize content and make it easier to find. A *hashtag* is a word preceded by the hash symbol (#) and used to identify messages on social media platforms. It is mostly used on platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. The use of *hashtags* allows users to search for specific topics and join conversations about them. *Hashtags* can also be used to promote brands, events, or causes. It can be used to track the popularity of a topic or to express opinion.

Morphological Description

Hashtag is an endocentric compound, it is a closed compound formed by two free morphemes. There is a clear head in this compound word because it is an endocentric compound. It can function as a noun or as a verb. As a noun, it refers to the actual *hashtag* symbol, and as a verb, it means to add a hashtag to a post: *hash* (Noun) and *tag* (Verb).

Semantic Composition

Semantically, the word *hashtag* is a word that has the symbol “#” which is of the Dutch origin *hash* “haschen” which means to chop. *Tag* is a word which means to fasten. The word, *Hashtag*, means to add a label to a post on social media. The meaning of *hashtag* is derived from the use of social media platforms.

Semantic Field

A *hashtag* is used to identify and categorize content on social media platforms. Words like trending, topics, curate, and filter are related to hashtags.

Datum vii. Voice Note

Social Media-Based Meaning

A *voice note* is a recorded audio message that can be sent via a messaging app or other digital platform. It allows the sender to record and send their voice instead of typing out a message. *Voice notes* are becoming increasingly popular as it is faster and more convenient than typing, and they can also be more personal and expressive. Some popular social media platforms that use Voice Note are WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook.

Morphological Description

Voice Note is an endocentric compound, it is an open compound. It is formed by two free morphemes which are *Voice* and *note*. There is a clear head in this compound word because it is an endocentric compound. As a compound word, a *voice note* is a noun.

Semantic Composition

Semantically, the word *voice note* can be broken down into two components: *Voice* and *Note*, the word *voice* carries the meaning of speech, sound, or vocal expression while *note* carries the meaning of a written or recorded message. Together, they create the compound noun *voice note* which refers to an audio message that is sent via a digital platform.

Semantic Field

Voice note is within the field of digital communication, specifically, it refers to a type of audio message that is sent using a mobile device or online platform. The term may also be associated with specific apps or services that allow users to send voice messages, such as WhatsApp or Facebook. Audio messages and text messages are also in that field.

Datum viii. Last Seen

Social Media-Based Meaning

Last seen refers to the last time the contact used WhatsApp. Through our privacy settings, you have the option to control who can see your last seen and online. You may not be able to see someone's last seen or online unless they have you saved as a contact or have previously messaged you

(WhatsApp Inc., 2023).

Morphological Description

Last seen is an open endocentric compound formed through combining the free morphemes *last* and *seen* to create a new term with a specific meaning related to the visibility of a WhatsApp user's activity. *Last seen* functions as a noun phrase. It comprises the head noun *seen* pre-modified by the adjective *last*.

Semantic Composition

Combination of temporal and visual information: The term semantically combines temporal information (*last*) with visual or perceptual information (*seen*) to convey when the user was last visually active or visible on the platform.

WhatsApp Feature: *Last seen* is prominently featured on WhatsApp, where users can view the last timestamp indicating when their contacts were last active or online.

Semantic Field

Online Presence: Last seen falls within the semantic field of online presence, providing information about a user's recent activity on a messaging platform.

Pragmatic Considerations

Social Etiquette: Users often consider last seen as a social cue for appropriate timing to send messages. For instance, if someone's *last seen* is a long time ago, they might not be currently available for a chat. *Last seen* is a compound term with a specific social media-based meaning related to online presence and activity visibility. Its usage extends beyond mere functionality, influencing social interactions and etiquette within these platforms.

Datum vix. Auto Cut

Social Media-Based Meaning

Auto cut in a social media context, particularly on platforms like TikTok, refers to an automated editing feature or process. This involves automatic segmentation or trimming of videos, where the software detects and removes unnecessary parts such as silence or pauses, creating a smoother and more engaging viewing experience.

Morphological Description

Auto Cut is an endocentric open compound. *Auto* is a prefix derived from the Greek word “autos”, meaning "self" or "automatic". *Cut* is a verb that means to divide, remove, or separate. Together, *auto-cut* forms a compound noun phrase, indicating a process of automatic division or segmentation. The headword is cut while the modifier is auto. *Auto Cut* functions as a noun phrase.

Auto is a prefix meaning self or automatic. *Cut* is a verb indicating division or separation, or as a noun, it refers to the act of cutting or a defined incision or division. Thus, *Auto cut* is a compound word referring to automatic division or segmentation.

Semantic Composition

The combination of *auto* and *cut* implies a process of automatic cutting or segmentation, particularly in the context of video editing or content creation. It suggests a tool or feature that autonomously trims or segments videos without the need for manual intervention.

Usage on TikTok

On *TikTok*, an *auto cut* could refer to several things as listed below:

- i. It might describe a built-in editing feature that automatically trims videos to a desired length or removes pauses.
- ii. Content creators might use the term to refer to their editing process, indicating that they utilize automatic cutting tools to enhance the quality of their videos.
- iii. Users might also discuss tips or tricks for achieving smoother transitions or edits using automatic cutting techniques.

Datum x. *Live Centre*

Social Media-Based Meaning

Live Centre could refer to a feature or section within a social media platform dedicated to live content. This section typically aggregates and showcases ongoing live streams from various users or creators. Users can access the *Live Centre* to discover and engage with live content in realtime.

Morphological Description

Live is an adjective indicating something happening or occurring in real-time while *Centre* is a noun referring to a central location or focal point. Together, *Live Centre* forms a compound noun denoting a central hub or focal point for live content.

Morphological Analysis

Live Centre is an endocentric open compound, the headword is *center* while the specifier is *live* which tells more about the type of centre. *Live* is an adjective indicating real-time activity. *Centre* is a noun referring to a central location or focal point. Therefore, *Live Centre* is a compound noun denoting a central hub for live content.

Semantic Composition

The compound word *Live Centre* conveys the idea of a central location or hub specifically dedicated to live content. It suggests a place where users can find and engage with live streams, events, or broadcasts happening in realtime on the social media platform.

Usage on TikTok

- i. While TikTok primarily focuses on short-form video content, it has introduced live-streaming capabilities for users and creators.
- ii. *Live Centre* could refer to a section or feature within TikTok where users can discover and access ongoing live streams.
- iii. Users might navigate to the "Live Centre" on TikTok to explore live content from their favorite creators, participate in live Q&A sessions, or engage with live events happening within the platform.

6. Conclusion

The study has shown the utilitarian value of compounding as a morphological process on TikTok and other social media platforms. Its usage in social media discourse is not just based on the creative ingenuity of social media users but also as a relevant part of social media language which goes a long way to characterize the language of social media. The study has shown that understanding the semantic implications of the studied compound words is a necessary prerequisite in social media communication and in understanding social media language. For instance, a user who does not understand the semantic implications of *auto cut* or *live center* may not be able to apply these terms or understand them when they are used. This paper is not foreclosing studies on morphological

processes on social media; it is, therefore, recommended that specific studies be conducted on other aspects of the morphological structure of social media language.

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