

## ***Trans* + NOUN and the compound-phrase distinction in English**

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*Trans* has become an important gender identity label in the past 20 to 30 years. Zimman & Hayworth (2020a; 2020b) observe that *trans* became the most popular term in online trans communities in the 2000s, with *transsexual* showing a downward trend. The correct usage of *trans* has been, however, a matter of debate, within and across social groups (trans people, trans allies and anti-trans actors). In a previous study, I have analyzed discourses linked to the statement "trans is an adjective" on Twitter from 2009-2022, finding that the statement is very often used to argue for spelling *trans* + NOUN as two separate orthographic words and, either implicitly or explicitly, against using *trans* + NOUN as a compound (Johannsen 2024).

While it is easy to confirm with corpus data that *trans* is mostly used as an adjective, either predicatively (1) or in prenominal position (2), it remains unclear whether the latter, i.e. *trans* + NOUN combinations, are used as compounds or phrases.

- 1) But no one knew you were trans. [COCA SPOK 2016]
- 2) Chest reconstruction for trans men and other surgeries may include skin grafts. [COCA ACAD 2011]

The present study describes how *trans* + NOUN combinations are used in texts from three different corpora – the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), the iWeb corpus, and the Corpus of News on the Web (NOW) – addressing the compound-phrase distinction in English. I analyse a selection of the properties that have been discussed as potentially distinctive for compounds and phrases (s. e.g. Schlücker 2020 for a cross-linguistic overview and Bauer 2019 for English): orthography (open vs. closed vs. hyphenated spelling, e.g. *trans men*, *transmen*, *trans-men*), morphosyntax (possibility of modification and coordination) and semantics (intersective vs. relational adjectives), distinguishing between different head noun lemmas (e.g. *man*, *woman*, *community*, *flag*, *history*, *identity*).

The results suggest that *trans* + NOUN combinations do not form a completely uniform pattern, but that there are subpatterns, some of which are more compound-like, while others are more phrase-like. I will discuss first, focusing on language structure, how these results agree with approaches that regard lexicon and syntax as a continuum and that have described the distinction as extremely blurred in English (Berg, 2012; Giegerich, 2005; Klinge, 2009), and second, focusing on sociopolitical issues, the implications for activist language interventions.

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