

Keeping Company in The City: compounds in the lexicon of the New Zealand Treasury¹

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1. Introduction

This is a study concerned not so much with register² as with the jargon of one particular part of the New Zealand public sector, an organisation which has been described as having “a certain monastic quality...a palpable culture into which people...were inducted, and to which they were abidingly committed....something like a cult” (Clark 2004:17). Jargon has been defined as language “associated with a subject field which is clear to the experts using it, but not to outsiders. Jargon shares with other special-language varieties like slang an in-group orientation which outsiders often criticise” (Hartmann & James 1998:78). It will be seen that much of the New Zealand Treasury’s lexicon as illustrated in their documents written to advise the government involves both new words and specialised usages of existing words, both of which can cause confusion or non-comprehension for the uninitiated.

This brief paper is a case study from a larger work which aims to collect and analyse the new words used in the New Zealand public sector during the period of radical political and economic reform begun by the fourth Labour Government in the early 1980s. Three categories of ‘new’ words are treated here:

- words which appear in neither the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), second edition³, nor in the *Dictionary of New Zealand English* (DNZE)
- words which do appear in the OED but have gained a new and different sense in New Zealand
- words for which the dataset yields significant post-datings, i.e. a decade or more since the last OED citation. (Some words are used in New Zealand Treasury documents which post-date the OED’s most recent citations by more than a century). No ante-datings have been

¹ The title is inspired by Dianne Bardsley’s “Keeping company in the country: collocations, compounds, and phrasal verbs in the rural lexicon” (Bardsley 2001), to which this paper might be viewed as a companion piece.

² As defined by Strang and Halliday, discussed in Lipka 1990: 16 & 19

³ Including the Additions Series and the Draft Entries online for the new edition

collected due to the timeframe of this study: its period of data collection begins after the publication of both the dictionaries used as reference points.

Throughout this paper both types of neologism, namely those not listed in either dictionary, and new senses of existing dictionary entries, have been highlighted in bold, while the post-datings collected appear in italic typeface.

2. Key Finding and Scope of this Study

It became apparent very early in this project that Treasury language is noticeably rich in multiword units, or MWUs. It is this characteristic - lexical cohesion as a form of linguistic innovation - which is the focus of this article.

The discussion is restricted to new compounds, and phrasal and prepositional verbs. Abbreviations, acronyms and proper nouns such as the names of government bodies or programmes have not been included. Forms derived from other parts of speech (for example **bundled**, **compartmentalisation**, *expansionary*) have also been excluded, as these are typically not accorded headword status in a dictionary, but appear as run-on entries under their base lexeme. And because adjective-noun type combinations are not usually included in dictionaries, collocations of this sort will not be listed here either. However productive affixes which are widely-used in the discourse of our public sector are mentioned, for the important role they play in creating new compounds.

3. Source Documents

The dataset used for this case study is the New Zealand Treasury's *Briefings to the Incoming Government* (BIGs) published during 1984. A BIG is written by every Ministry every three years as part of the preparation for a national election. Each briefing is then handed over by its ministry to the relevant new minister immediately following their appointment and the formation of a government, to help them become familiar with their new portfolio. This would normally occur immediately after the election, though not always, as was seen in 1996 when it took some time to form a coalition.

Within the Treasury, overall responsibility for authorship of the BIGs rests with the Policy Co-ordination and Development Unit, a thinktank-like group

within the Treasury⁴. The documents are lengthy, each one like a book in itself, with each book often divided into two volumes, and each volume running to as many as 15 chapters. In key years for policy formation such as 1984 and 1999, two sets of briefings were produced. They offer detailed and in-depth advice to the new, post-election governments, and cover all aspects of New Zealand's economy, from the structure of the financial system itself to specific issues such as export markets for certain types of manufacturer. Because 1984 was a very important year signalling a major change in policy direction, the briefings put out during July of that year are the longest ever produced by Treasury. At a total of 31 chapters as compared to the next longest (17 chapters in total for the two briefings from 1999), they are almost twice as long as any year's BIGs, from the earliest records available online through the following two decades up to the present day.

4. Multiword Units

How to deal with multiword strings has long been a thorny issue for lexicographers worldwide, and there is as yet no one accepted approach to the way they are entered in a dictionary. Let us begin therefore by clearly defining the terms to describe them which this paper will employ. A multiword unit is taken here as a string of two or more words which acts as a single lexeme. It is used here as the superordinate term, or the genus, of which collocations of varying degrees of strength, transitional combinations and compounds, can be viewed as subordinate species. At one end of a spectrum, we could imagine completely free associations of words, where any meaningful concatenation may occur. At the other end would be that most invariable sequence of words, the frozen idiom. This paper will not concern itself with either of these two extremes, but with the middle ground, that murky territory where almost as many definitions of 'collocation' dwell as there have been writers on this subject.

4.1 Collocations

A collocation can be defined as a bond of varying strength, from loose to tightly cohesive, between two or more words. These words have a preference for the company they keep; their combination is not entirely free. A collocation then is a co-occurrence of words characterised by "a certain mutual expectancy" (Jackson 1988:96), their combination a likelihood greater than chance, but not a fixed expression. Without a mutual information index

⁴ "PCD's role is to maintain an overview across Treasury policy development, keep abreast of emerging ideas and research and review and challenge existing Treasury thinking. PCD provides analysis and advice on medium-term strategy issues." (NZ Treasury, 2005/2006:44)

it is impossible to know the exact strength of each collocation's bond, however various observations have been made:

The leading researcher on collocations in the Brown Corpus, Kjellmer (1982:25), noted that a characteristic of collocations was that they were combinations which co-occur 'more often than the frequencies in the corpus of the constituents of the combination would lead us to expect'. (Kennedy 1998:112)

If words co-occur in a manner which is so frequent that it cannot be ascribed purely and simply to random collocation, then we may assume that there is some special relationship between those words. (McEnery & Wilson 1996:128)

The double issue of which part of the collocation is more 'basic' than the other and under which the collocation should be entered in the dictionary has not been settled satisfactorily. (Hartmann & James 1998:23)

A collocation then, is taken within this paper as a somewhat fluid association, of the kind not normally included in traditional dictionaries. (They are however usefully included in learner dictionaries for second language speakers, to aid both comprehension and production). It is often very difficult to determine how tightly-bound a new term is, and therefore whether it should be classified as a collocation or a compound, or whether it is in the process of moving between the two, and therefore falls into the grey area of what have been termed 'transitional combinations' (Benson, Benson & Ilson 1986: 254): less variable than collocations but not yet as unchanging as a compound. As stated in section 2 above, Treasury collocations will not be discussed here, although there are some words in Treasury-speak which stand out clearly as popular collocates with other words. One example would be 'performance', which often appears in company such as 'performance management', 'performance review', 'performance target', 'key performance indicators' and so on.

4.2 Compounds

Next along our spectrum come compound words, although it should always be borne in mind that none of these categories are as simple or as clearcut as they sound: "Bloomfield (1933) observed that 'many forms lie on the borderline between bound forms and words, or between words and phrases'" (Wray 2002:7). Compounds have been divided into many different types, and called by many names, but clearly that there be component parts to a compound must be a *sine qua non* of any definition. This paper will refer to open (words separated by a space), hyphenated, and closed (words written solid with no

space or hyphen) compounds. This contrasts with, for example, Zgusta's definition of a compound word as one "indicated by the absence of space, the hyphen, or a similar device, even if there is no other difference in the form of a compound in contrast to its single parts"(1971:132).

A compound then, in this paper, is a lexical unit consisting of a set, invariable combination of two or more words which has a single referent or designatum. Sometimes the meaning of a new compound will be opaque, but even if the meaning is derivable from the sum of its parts, (and here again in trying to draw the line between opacity and transparency lexicographers find themselves in a "somewhat indeterminate transitional zone"(Cruse 1986:40)) a compound will have been collected from the Treasury source documents because it is new, and because it clearly designates a single notion, in exactly the same way as a single-word lexeme does.

New compounds tend to make their first appearance in the English language as open compounds, and often, as with all new words, in inverted commas. They might also be accompanied by phrases such as "so-called", revealing the writer's tentativeness at using the term. Then the two (or more) parts of the compound often inch closer together over time until they acquire a hyphen, finally asserting their total integration into the language by discarding the hyphen (along with the telltale inverted commas and any other punctuation such as special typeface or capitalisation which acts as a giveaway to their newness) and closing firmly into one, after which they blandly slip into place alongside much older companions in the dictionary.⁵ The words would have come together in the first place because of some semantic link. "In most cases, the individual elements retain their meaning and spelling, although established compounds often develop a history and senses that are unique"(Berg 1993:68).

This combination of free lexical morphemes via the compounding process is "one of the most productive ways in which new words have been coined, especially in modern times..."(Jackson 1988:30), and new combinations are continually appearing. Every decade, the proportion of English that is compound nouns increases. "Most compounds are nouns; they are coined because there is a need to 'name' an object or thing that has not been named before. And because the meaning of a compound is usually transparent...it readily commends itself to acceptance by the speakers of the language"(Jackson 1988:31).

⁵ Cf. also Crystal 1980: 65-66, Jackson 1988: 3, and Katamba 1994: 12-13 on the stages compounds pass through.

As suggested earlier, words lead lives of infinitely varying gradations of freedom or restrictions, and it is not always easy to draw the boundaries among them and decide what is a compound and what is not. Again one could picture a cline, from single-lexeme compounds (**baseload**) through to syntactic structures of several lexemes which look compound-like but are strictly not ('unregulated electronic information processing industry'). Opitz has posited a useful distinction in terms between obligatory and optional compounds, with the former referring to compounds where one element, usually an adjective or a noun used attributively, "restricts the denotative range of the other...in an obligatory way so as to require that particular compound in any occurrence of its new meaning..."(Opitz 1983:61). It is this type of compound, which should be treated as a quasi-technical term and entered in a dictionary, which is of most interest for this paper.

5. Results

When we come to look at the new compound words found in this particular set of Treasury publications, we find that the statement in section 4.2 above that "most compounds are nouns" is certainly true in this case. Fifty-two new or post-dating compound nouns were identified, as compared with ten adjectives, three adverbial phrases and two verbs. It remains to be seen whether this ratio holds true when a larger dataset is examined.

5.1 Compound Nouns

The largest category, the nouns, can be divided by their form into 29 open compounds, 20 closed, two hyphenated and one blend. The blend, *stagflation*, a mixture of 'stagnation' and 'inflation', is an OED post-dating which has been used overseas before appearing here. Words formed in this way are also known as telescoped or portmanteau words. Zgusta calls them "unorganic compounds"(1971:136). The hyphenated nouns are **cost-recovery** and **user-pays** – their meanings self-explanatory from their components.

5.1.1 Open

The largest category of compound nouns found were those written open, and when we further subdivide these we see that a large majority of them (20 out of the 29) are new rather than post-datings. It is quite possible that the small size of the data means that this difference is not significant. However if this ratio is borne out when the next two decades of BIGs are trawled, it is interesting because, along with the fact that more open than closed compounds have been found overall, it might provide corroborating New

Zealand evidence for the statement, well-accepted internationally, in 4.2 above that this is how new compounds begin their lives.

To consider the largest group first, the “new” open compound nouns include some locally well-known terms such as **old age benefit**, **national superannuation**, **universal superannuation** and **tall poppy** (attrib.)⁶. No claim is made that these are New Zealandisms, first coined here, because in fact none of them are; they are only “new” in the sense that they are not listed in either the OED or the DNZE. Other terms are not so self-explanatory, unless one is an economist: **capital flight** refers to billions of dollars of mostly illegal outflow from this country (usually done when a devaluation of the New Zealand dollar is anticipated, as happened in 1984), while **weak selling** describes a situation where New Zealand sellers undercut each other in order to make a sale. Within our Treasury a formal policy review sometimes presented to the Minister of Finance for consideration during the parliamentary recess is known colloquially as the **Christmas Reading**. Other Treasury terms are **cost squeeze**, **fob price** and **tender premia**: premium prices received through tenders. Paired terms found include **horizontal** and **vertical equity**, **price** and **wage accord**, and **gift** and **instrument duty**. More ominous-sounding are **bottoming out**, **labour shedding**, **sinking lid**⁷ and a **sunset clause** to your contract.

Turning next to the open compound post-datings, we find the following terms. All have OED citations from the 1960s and 1970s except for the two otherwise specified: *crawling peg*, *credit squeeze*, *estate duty* (1896), *fringe benefit*, *phase out* (sic, as a noun), *pressure group*, *spot price* (1882), *standing committee*, *wage drift*. The crawling peg is a type of exchange rate; spot prices, for oil for example, are what you expect to pay on the open market upon delivery of a barrel today, as opposed to ‘real price’ long run trends; and wage drift (usually but not always in an upwards direction) is a general movement of wages, usually associated with centralised wage setting systems where settlements in one area feed through into other sectors.

5.1.2 Closed

When we come to look at the closed, or solid, compounds, we find that the ratio of new nouns to postdatings is in inverse proportion to that found for the open compounds. Here the new are in the minority, at nine of the total twenty. The inverted commas of a ‘**bounceback**’ in prices signify its newness, the anonymous Treasury writer distancing him- or herself from the word, or

⁶ In OED only as a person; this context “taller poppy items” and “tall poppy industries”

⁷ Listed in the DNZE but not the OED

at least acknowledging the novelty of the term in this context. **Baseload** exports and imports as an economic term and also **woodpulp** from the New Zealand forestry industry are in the OED as both open and hyphenated, last citations 1966 and 1866 respectively, so in the fact that they have ended up closed we see here that chronological progression in the stages of a compound referred to earlier in section 4.2 of this paper. Another forestry word is **clearwood**: a high grade of timber, such as that from virgin forest. In farming **headworks** are part of an irrigation scheme, **pipfruit** appears to be a new closed compound, and **sheepmeats** as a plural, countable noun is also a new development. Turning to the financial sector, we find **underpricing**, new as a verbal noun although in the OED as a transitive verb. **Framework**, used often by our Treasury in such contexts as a legal, regulatory or conceptual framework, interestingly does not appear in the OED in this figurative sense.

Looking now at post-datings, which constitute slightly over half of the closed compound nouns found, we are well-used to *backbencher* and *benchmark*. Treasury also speaks of ad hoc amendments made to plug *loopholes*, last cited in the OED in this sense in 1888. Market forces are a *touchstone* - last cited in its figurative sense in 1871. A natural group is formed by *inflow*, *outcome* and *outflow*, all last cited in the late 1800s, and then *overhang* (the overhang of stocks from the previous season, or “an overhang from past policies”), *rundown*, *turnover* and *uptake*, all with more recent OED citations from the 1970s.

5.2 Adjectives, Adverbial Phrases and Verbs

New and post-dating compound adjectives both hyphenated and closed have been located in the 1984 BIG. In New Zealand’s industries meat is weighed **bone-in**, we have *inshore* fisheries, **on-stump** sale prices in forestry, and the Wool Board operates a **floor-price** operation rather than a **price-smoothing** one. In the government sector *thorough-going* reforms have resulted in policies which provide *downstream* benefits as **flow-on** effects. **Draw-down** periods are restricted and **short-run** disturbances are to be overcome.

In the realm of adverbial phrases Treasury has revived *ad valorem* as a rate of subsidy (last OED citation 1866), used **in good part** in a new sense (as a synonym for “for the most part”) and speaks of the dairy industry as having market returns **at farm gate**.

To *safeguard* the payments system and to *underpin* the Government’s priorities and policies are transitive verbs used by Treasury which post-date the OED’s most recent citations by 55 and 100 years respectively.

5.3 Phrasal and Prepositional Verbs

Post-datings by some twenty and thirty years have been gathered for the OED for the phrasal verbs (verbs plus an adverbial particle) *flatten out* (v.i.) and *level off* (v.i.) and for the prepositional verb *impact on* (v.t.). To **draw out** was used in a new sense (as a synonym for to highlight or emphasise), and to **roll back** measures in good times that were introduced during a downturn is new.

5.4 Affixes

Familiar prefixes are being used productively to form unfamiliar new combinations: *disinflation*, *dis-save* as a transitive verb, **macropolicy**, **non-OECD**, **nontradeables** as a plural count noun, **post-audits**. And popular Treasury suffixes are **-wide**, as in economy-wide and system-wide, and **-driven**: result-driven, visitor driven (open, sic).

6. Conclusion

The data referred to here are part of a pilot study, and a great deal of further work remains to be done in order to deepen our understanding of the contribution of the Treasury in this country to the use of English in New Zealand. The next step in this project will be to trawl more *Briefings to the Incoming Government*, namely those for the twenty-year period following the 1984 change of government and subsequent policy shift. As there is approximately a 50% turnover in staff within Treasury's Policy Coordination and Development Unit from one election year to the next, it is possible that the changing authorship over time might contribute to different new vocabulary being used. For a second and then a third dataset Treasury's annual reports and annual *Statements of Intent* would be the logical choice, firstly because the production of both, like the three-yearly briefings, is required by statute, and secondly because all are readily available to the public online. For a detailed and exhaustive study of Treasury-speak, New Zealand's annual Budget documentation, which consists of the Speech, the *Fiscal Strategy Report*, *Economic and Fiscal Update*, and *Estimates of Appropriations*, might also be worth examining.

This case study of one year's BIGs suggests that Treasury's published papers have a distinctive style, which is characterised, among other features, by a large number of multiword units. The indications are positive that this core control agency, so important to policy-making in this country, is the instigator of a rich vein of neologisms to be mined by lexicographers. What these words

reveal about the effects of far-reaching social and political change on our language will be another story.

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