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The Structure and Semantics of Word Compounds in Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and *Luka and the Fire of Life*

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Abstract:

The formation of compound words is an ongoing process in English. Salman Rushdie, like many postcolonial English writers, invented new compound words, thus contributing in some way to the expansion of English vocabulary. Many of these words tell us about the cultural and artistic expressions of people who are not English but who speak English in a way that suits them best. The compound words in the two novels *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) and *Luka and the Fire of Life* (2010) are the focus of this paper. The structure of these words generally follows the rules of English word formation. However, sometimes the same rules are not strictly adhered to. In such cases, the author chooses to follow the conventions of the various languages from which many loanwords have been adopted into English. By adopting standard terminology here, the compound words in Rushdie's two novels are classified into two distinct types, endocentric and exocentric or *bahuvrihi* compounds.

Keywords: head, root, modifier, endocentric compounds, exocentric compounds.

Postcolonial writing in English shows consistency in how the English language has been personalised by non-native writers who do not necessarily always follow the rules of English writing but seek ways to innovate with word structures and sentences by endorsing the rules that speakers of languages other than English follow. Caliban's words, "You taught me language; and my profit on't/Is, I know how to curse" (Shakespeare *The Tempest* I.ii.366-68), has become a catchphrase whenever colonized nations had to offer representations of their culture. English as a language offers its users considerable flexibility in accepting borrowings, both of words and structures, from other languages. One can try, but it is not easy to forget what Jespersen observed many years ago: "English is free from the narrow-minded pedantry which in most languages sacrifices the former to the latter or makes people

shy of saying or writing things which are not 'strictly grammatical'" (14; parenthesis original). Invaluable contributions to the English language have been made not only by writers whose mother tongue is English but also by those who learned English as a second language but learned to write in the same way as English writers. Postcolonial English writers, born in cultures other than typically English, often offer stylistic innovations aimed at making English fit to express cultural and artistic creativity in their way. This paper examines the compound words that Kashmiri-born English novelist Salman Rushdie used in two novels, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) and *Luka and the Fire of Life* (2010), as he explored innovative ways to create new and alternative structures in English.

Previous literature and the Present study

Some articles deal with word formation processes in some of Rushdie's works. Mariane Utudji refers to *Midnight Children* in her conference paper "Salman Rushdie's Compound Adjectives: A Challenge for Romance Language Translators" (2017). It focuses on the challenge translators face when trying to translate the compound adjectives coined by Rushdie accurately. Catherine Pessa-Miquel studies the image of pre-colonial India found in the essays of Amartya Sen and Salman Rushdie. Her article "Refracting the "India idea" through the Prism of English Rhetoric: The Essays of Amartya Sen and Salman Rushdie" (2009) argues that while both writers express themselves in English, the latter is constantly trying to innovate by changing the structure of words and sentences.

The processes of compound word formation can seem complex, and sometimes they are. However, there are ways to understand these processes through simple word formation rules. As seen in the following sections, Rushdie often forms compound words in the usual English way. At other times, he chooses to follow the rules of word composition that work in the languages he borrows words from and tries to fit them into the structure of English. In order to keep things simple, this paper categorizes and discusses the compound words found in the two novels, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and *Luka and the Fire of Life*, into two main groups: endocentric compounds and exocentric or *bahuvrihi*-type compounds.

Word Compounds: Structure

In his novels, Rushdie invented compound words to quaintly name places, objects and imaginary characters introduced from stories familiar to people whose culture is close to the author's. Compounds in *Sea of Stories* and *Luka* are mostly made up of words and can be open or solid. The space or dash appears randomly in open compounds, e.g. 'Dark Ship' (*Haroun* 163) and 'Night-time' (*Haroun* 204). There are also nouns such as 'Luxury Class

Houseboat' (*Haroun* 25), 'Left-Hand Path' (*Luka* 10), 'Tickler-in-chief' (*Luka* 16), and 'Fat-cat smiles' (*Haroun* 20) consisting of three or four words. Sometimes a new word is added to an existing compound ('Houseboat'; 'Left-Hand') to form a long compound. Less frequently, one encounters words like 'aeromouse' (*Haroun* 63), 'semi-desert' (*Luka* 163) and 'Electro-clubs' (*Luka* 12) where a constituent element is not a free form.

When nominal compounds apply the principle of recursivity, the resultant expressions have a stable and coherent structure. Such compounds may consist of two or more words, but their modifier-head is easily identifiable. Consider the following examples.

Modifier	Head	Compound
Dark	Bulbs	Darkbulbs (<i>Haroun</i> 163)
Mist	Balls	Mistballs (<i>Luka</i> 98)
Dark	Ship	Darkship (<i>Haroun</i> 163)
Story	Tap	Story Tap (<i>Haroun</i> 59)
Turtle	Room	Turtle Room (<i>Haroun</i> 54)
Airborne	Whale	Airborne whale (<i>Haroun</i> 63)
Hand-eye	Coordination	Hand-eye coordination (<i>Luka</i> 13)
Left-Hand	Path	Left-Hand Path (<i>Luka</i> 10)

Table 1

In the last three examples in Table 1, a pre-existing compound modifies the head of the new compound. Although the modifier for the new compound word invented by Rushdie is often a noun, it can also be a verb or an adjective, as the examples in Table 2 show. The use of an adverb or a preposition as a head and a verb as a modifier is sporadic in the two works that interest us here.

Modifier	Head	Compound	
Verb			
	Splash	down	Splashdown (<i>Haroun</i> 68)
	Punch	Bottoms	Punchbottoms (<i>Luka</i> 50)
	Blabber	Mouth	Blabbermouth (<i>Haroun</i> 183)
	Stink	Making	Stink-making (<i>Haroun</i> 47)
Adjective			
	Super	Poor	Super-poor (<i>Haroun</i> 18)
	Super	Rich	Super-poor (<i>Haroun</i> 18)

Table 2

The head always appears on the right side of the modifier, as it does in proper English. The stress also falls on the head. When the head and modifier are concatenated together, the resulting compound exhibits the syntactic and semantic properties of the head. Nominal compounds, which are more frequent than verbal compounds in both works, do not alter the noun-noun pattern shown in Table 1. An inflexional suffix is attached to the head items.

Inflexional Suffix	Modifier	Head	Compound
-s	Story	Streams	Story Streams (<i>Haroun</i> 79)
	Dog	Birds	Dogbirds (<i>Haroun</i> 81)
	Egg	Heads	Eggheads (<i>Haroun</i> 80)
	Peacock	Tails	Peacock-tails (<i>Haroun</i> 81)
	vegetable	tentacles	vegetable-tentacles (<i>Haroun</i> 82)

Table 3

A few two-word compounds with and without inflected heads from Rushdie's *Sea of Stories* and its sequel *Luka* could be illustrated to show the relationship of the modifier to the head.

a.

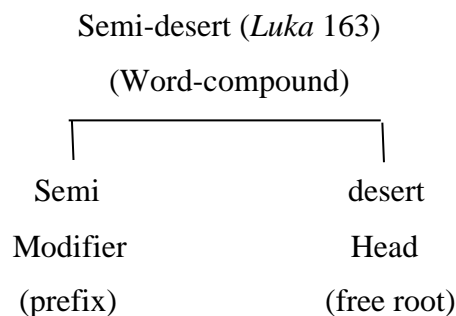


Fig. 1

b.

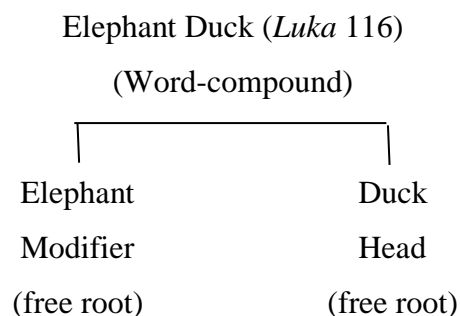


Fig. 2

c.

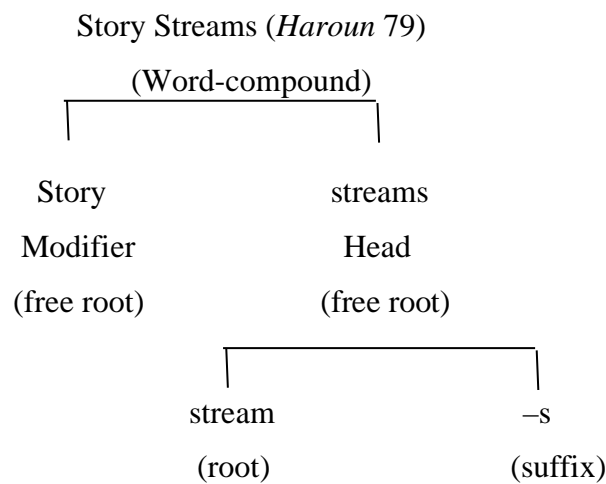


Fig. 3

d.

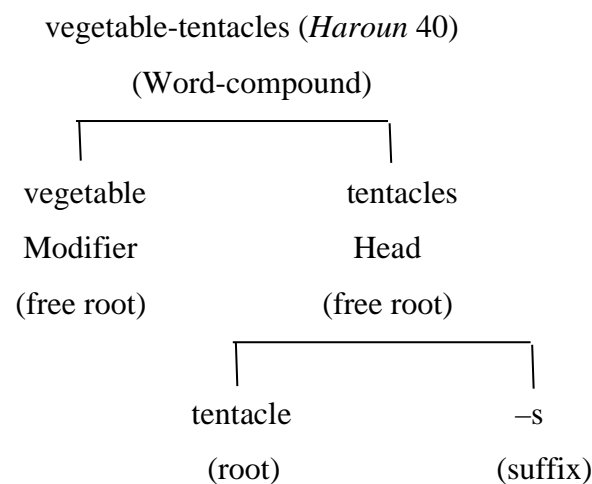


Fig. 4

A maximum of four to five words combine to form compound nouns. Some interesting three-word compounds are ‘Tickler-in-chief’ (*Luka* 16), ‘A-number-one’ (*Haroun* 72), ‘Bite-a-Lite’ (*Haroun* 165), ‘Mail Coach Driver’ (*Haroun* 41), ‘High-speed vegetation’ (*Haroun* 82), ‘Imaginary Flying Organism’ (*Haroun* 63). Examples of four words making a compound are ‘Luxury Class Houseboat’ (*Haroun* 25) and ‘Red-and-black face’ (*Luka* 11). Word strings like ‘Process Too Complicated to Explain’ (*Haroun* 57), ‘Number One Super Express Mail Coach’ (*Haroun* 33) are phrasal compounds that contain lexical heads and phrasal non-heads.

Cases in which the principles of English word formation have been violated are not uncommon. As Rushdie would have liked to say, all of this is done consciously, ‘to break up

the language and put it back together in a different way' (Reder 10). The author's penchant for omitting the ultima from the first word and compounding it with another word is strong.

English Word	Syllables in Modifier	Syllables in Head	Compound
Edible	/Edi-ble/	/Fish/	Eddyfish (<i>Luka</i> 66)
Otter	/ott-er/	/List/	Ott list (<i>Luka</i> 89)
Permanent Termination	/per-ma-nent/	/ter-mi-na-tion/	Permination (<i>Luka</i> 54)
Nobody Daddy	/no-bo-dy/	/da-ddy/	Nobodaddy (<i>Luka</i> 27)

Table 4

He uses a makeup language with many Indic and Perso-Arabic expressions in many passages. The two books that interest us show Rushdie's preference for certain forms of expression that seem to be little used in English. There are many passages in which he uses a makeup language with many Indic and Perso-Arabic expressions to adapt the English language to the cultural context from which the materials for his stories are drawn. Rushdie has been candid about how he likes to use the English language. His admiration for the new techniques introduced by G.V. Desani in *All About H. Hatterr* (1948) is genuine and reflects what he would rather do himself. Compounds in which the modifier or head is a non-English word appear in both novels but less frequently than those using only English words. Examples of hybrid compounds are shown in Table 5.

Modifier	Head	Compound
Alif (Arabic)	Bay	Alifbay (<i>Haroun</i> 1)
Adi (Hindi)	Ratshit	Adi Ratshit (<i>Luka</i> 6)
Chup (Hindi)	City	Chup City (<i>Haroun</i> 91)
Sniffle	Heim (German)	Sniffelheim (<i>Luka</i> 123)

Table 5

Non-English words are often used in compounds that refer to places or people. These combinations do not rigorously adhere to the rules of English word formation but follow the rules dictated by the structures of the languages to which the words belong. Examples are –

Modifier	Head	Compound
-	-	Badlo-Badlo (<i>Luka</i> 141)
Gyara	Jinn	Gyara-Jinn (<i>Luka</i> 142)
Jaldi	Badal	Jaldibadal (<i>Luka</i> 121)

Khatam	Shud	Khattam-Shud (<i>Haroun</i> 91)
Baadal	Garh	Baadal-Garh (<i>Luka</i> 201)
-	-	Bahut-Sara (<i>Luka</i> 141)
-	-	Jo-Hua (<i>Luka</i> 139)
-	-	Jo-Hai (<i>Luka</i> 1339)
-	-	Jo-Aiga (<i>Luka</i> 139)
-	-	Bat-Mat-Karo (<i>Haroun</i> 185)

Table 6

The first word in Table 6 is a reduplicative compound, while the last five do not distinguish the modifier from the head. Sometimes the head carries the semantic load, but it is also likely that neither the modifier nor the head alone conveys the intended meaning. These cases allow for various semantic possibilities, which will be discussed in the remaining half of this paper.

Word Compounds: Semantics

With regard to the meaning that compound words express in the two works of Rushdie, *Haroun* and *Luka*, two types could be distinguished, adopting standard terminology.

a. Endocentric Compounds

In many cases, a constituent performs the same function as the compound itself: pyjamas are ‘aubergine-shaped’ (*Haroun* 81) or ‘having the appearance of an aubergine’; similarly, a ‘suction pad’ (*Haroun* 163) is like the ‘fleshy underpart of the Floating Gardener meant to suck debris’ while ‘Endless Sunshine’ (*Haroun* 80) is ‘a place where the sun shines eternally.’ ‘Perpetual Night’ (*Haroun* 79) refers to ‘a place of eternal night,’ a realm different from Endless Sunshine. Also, consider the following examples.

Compound	Gloss	Phrase/Sentence
red-nosed	‘the nose that is red’	‘garlanded the red-nosed’ (<i>Haroun</i> 185)
Peacock-tails	‘peacock tails’	‘birds with snake-heads and peacock-tails’ (<i>Haroun</i> 81)
pitch-blackness	‘total darkness’	‘Long beams of absolute pitch-blackness raked the weed-jungle’ (<i>Haroun</i> 168)
weed-jungle	‘forest where weeds spread	‘Long beams of absolute pitch-

	like anything'	blackness raked the weed-jungle' (<i>Haroun</i> 168)
joke shop	'a store that sells jokes'	'Life is not a storybook or a joke shop' (<i>Haroun</i> 20)
Tree-shaded	'shaded by trees'	'elegant tree-shaded walkway' (<i>Luka</i> 50)
Shouting Men	'angry screaming men'	'The shouting men began to shout even more loudly' (<i>Haroun</i> 27)
Disconnecting Tool	'a tool for disconnecting or reconnecting'	'Take the Disconnecting Tool, and just tap it against this space where you imagine nothing to be' (<i>Haroun</i> 58)
Story Tap	'tap from which stories flow like water'	'go up in the air six inches, and there should be your Story Tap' (<i>Haroun</i> 55)
sadness factories	'factories that produce sadness'	'the sadness factories are still in production' (<i>Haroun</i> 208)
darkbulbs	'bulbs that emit rays of darkness'	'"darkbulbs" – producing this strange darkness.... Darkness you can switch on and off' (<i>Haroun</i> 150)
wishwater	'water that grants wishes'	'The Wishwater gave off so dazzling a light that Haroun had to avert his gaze' (<i>Haroun</i> 69)
fat-cat smiles	'smile contentedly like a well-fed cat'	'political parties...came to Rashid smiling their fat-cat smiles' (<i>Haroun</i> 20)

Table 7

Although most endocentric compounds are relatively simple, the subtlety of Rushdie's coined words is evident in the last five examples. The experience of distress in the real world parallels Khattam-Shud's attempts to fill the Dark Ship ('darkbulbs') in the Land of Kahani with gloom. 'Wishwater' in *Haroun* is reminiscent of a fairy tale. Endocentric compounds formed from three words are sometimes simple but sometimes innovative enough to build a new vocabulary. Other similar words coined by Rushdie could also be mentioned.

Compound	Gloss	Phrase/Sentence
A-number-one	'best of all'	'Guaranteed to make you feel A-number-one' (<i>Haroun</i> 72)
Luxury Class Houseboat	'a houseboat with first class facilities'	'He told Haroun about the Luxury Class Houseboat waiting for them' (<i>Haroun</i> 25)
Cleaning-Up operation	'the task of cleaning thoroughly'	'joint responsibility for the very large Cleaning-Up operation' (<i>Haroun</i> 192)
Plentimaw Fishes	'many-mouthed fish'	'These particular Plentimaw Fishes... Their multiple mouths frequently spluttered and coughed' (<i>Haroun</i> 85)
Bite-a-Lite	'bite something to light it up'	'little emergency something... Bite-a-Lite, was still hidden under his tongue. Quickly he put it between his teeth and bit' (<i>Haroun</i> 165)

Table 8

We also have the "Plentimaw Fishes", an imaginary species of fish that swims in the Sea of Stories and keeps the water clean. They are as huge as a shark with 'dozens of mouths' all over its body (*Haroun* 84). Old stories always change in its gut, and when they come out, they come out in a truly original way. Plentimaw fish move in pairs and remain loyal to their mates. But the Hoopoe tells Haroun: "They are faithful to partners for life. To express this perfect union they speak, only and always, in rhyme" (85). Bite-a-Lite is an invention to lift the darkness of the Dark Ship, but only temporarily. It causes a glare similar to that of a camera flash. Elephant Birds are exotic creatures with 'duck-like bodies and large elephant heads' (*Luka* 66); they have the memory of an elephant and an appetite like that of a duck.

b. Exocentric or *Bahuvrihi* Compounds

There are instances in *Haroun* and *Luka* where a compound may not appear to be the hyponym of one of its constituents, yet, even these *bahuvrihi*-type compounds have heads like endocentric compounds. The fantasyland in Rushdie's *Haroun* is called 'Alifbay', a compound of two Arabic words – 'alif', meaning 'one', and 'beh', which is anglicised to 'bay', meaning two. As Greek equivalents, we have the words 'alpha' and 'beta'; the English word 'alphabet' is derived from the Greek compound 'alphabetos'. Why Rushdie named the country 'Alifbay' deserves no other explanation than that which he gives us himself: "In the

country of Alifbay many places were named after letters of the Alphabet. This led to much confusion, because there were a limited number of letters and an almost unlimited number of places in need of names" (24). Places in this country have names like the Town of G, the Valley of K, the mountain of M, the Pass of H, the Tunnel of I, etcetera. This description would fit the description of children learning letters by playing with alphabet blocks. 'Alifbay' also takes on a second meaning when the second noun is understood to mean a part of the coast where the land curves inward. Where Haroun lived as a child is a 'sad city' on the edge of the 'mournful sea' (15); the city has forgotten its name or the Alphabet. Abundant 'glumfish' were found in the sea, and they were "so miserable to eat that... people belch with melancholy even though the skies were blue" (*Haroun* 15). The 'Sickfish' lives in the River of Time, feeding on 'the lifelines of the diseased' (*Luka* 61). These hideous creatures hasten the death of the sick. 'Eddyfish' is a 'small, speedy' (*Luka* 66) variety of freshwater fish that Elephant ducks like to eat.

'Sniffelheim' (*Luka* 123) is the land of ice ("Ice Country") in the World of Magic. Here, culprits are imprisoned in blocks of ice. Illness, sadness, suffocation and discomfort are associated with the verb 'sniffle'; 'heim' is the German word for 'home'. Similar word forms are compiled in the table below.

Compound	Gloss	Phrase/Sentence
child-stuff	'the matter that produces children'	'We used up our full quota of child-stuff in making you' (<i>Haroun</i> 19)
sleeper agents	'Insultana's Emergency Infiltration Squadron'	'sleeper agents...available to the lady twenty-four/seven' (<i>Luka</i> 174)
Chatterbox	'Parliament of Gup'	' <i>Chatterbox</i> because debates there could run on for weeks or months' (<i>Haroun</i> 88; emphasis original)
gloom puss yarns	'melancholy stories'	'None of your gloompuss yarns! If you want pay, then just be gay' (<i>Haroun</i> 49)
sob-stuff	'to contain matter that makes you cry'	'saddest of sob-stuff' (<i>Haroun</i> 48)
vegetable-tentacles	'a long tendril of weeds of which the Floating Gardener is made'	'it waved vegetable-tentacles in the air in a most disturbing fashion' (<i>Haroun</i> 82)

splashdown	‘a landing on the ocean waters of the Streams of Story’	‘Splashdown in thirty seconds, twenty-nine, twenty-eight’ (<i>Haroun</i> 68)
Floating Gardener	‘vegetation capable of walking, hoping, or floating in human form’	‘The Floating Gardener was now running lightly over the surface of water’ (<i>Haroun</i> 82)
Blabbermouth	‘a talkative person’	‘This Page... introduced himself as ‘Blabbermouth’, which...was a popular name in Gup for girls as well as boys’ (<i>Haroun</i> 98)
Airborne whale	‘an artificial whale-like ride suspended in air’	‘A person may even select a flying creature of his own invention, for example winged horse, flying turtle, airborne whale’ (<i>Haroun</i> 63)
brain-box	‘a metal cube in Butt the hoopoe’s head that aided his thought processes’	‘The Chupwala who had removed Butt the Hoopoe’s brain-box stepped forward’ (<i>Haroun</i> 154)
Stink-making H47	‘the polite form of a word to indicate a fart’	‘the boy wants to cover up his stink-making with inventions’ (<i>Haroun</i> 47)
Red Bottom	‘a person whose buttocks have turned red’	‘led by his hated rival Adi Ratshit, aka Red Bottom’ (<i>Luka</i> 6)
Anti-story	‘the opposite of an existing story that can destroy the original story’	‘if you pour this anti-story into the story, the two cancel each other out, and.... End of story’ (<i>Haroun</i> 160)

Table 9

The first three examples are familiar formations among those just cited. In the context of stories, however, they take on other meanings. ‘Child stuff’ means something suitable only for children or something simple and trivial. The ‘Fire Alarm’ sounds when something catches fire, but in the World of Magic, it sounds when fire thieves attempt to steal the Fire of Life (*Luka* 144). ‘ Sleeper cells’ or ‘sleeper agents’ is Post-war coinage. Spies or informants were then trained to put someone to sleep or commit treason. Insultana’s ‘sleeper agents’ were not trained to spy but rather to ambush someone so they could stock up on supplies Insultana needed. A ‘Chatterbox’ is a talkative person, and so Haroun calls the Guppees

'chatterboxes' (*Haroun* 82), but the term is also used to describe the Parliament of the Gup. In the compound 'gloom puss', the constituent word 'puss' is the Irish equivalent of lips. Rushdie uses this word to refer to someone who opens their mouth to narrate sad tales.

'Anti-stories' or 'shadow-tales' (*Haroun* 160) poison the corresponding real stories in the ocean of stories. Khatam-Shud is the Arch-Enemy of stories and the Prince of Silence. He hatches a nefarious scheme to destroy all original stories with shadow stories. His 'Shadow-Self' (*Haroun* 167) can exist independently of the true self. The meaning of 'anti-story' is related to the meaning of the compound 'anti-Rashid' (*Luka* 26). Nobodaddy, the transparent spectre who resembles Rashid, leads Luka into the World of Magic as a father would lead his child. However, every moment Rashid approaches death in suffering, Nobodaddy is full of 'Rashidness' and will burst upon Rashid's death. Interestingly, Nobodaddy ceases to exist at the same time as Rashid.

The exocentric compounds that build Rushdie's vocabulary do not always express their meaning directly, and there are instances where the meaning of invented words remains implied. These include 'Fire Bug' (*Luka* 144), 'time-jump' (*Luka* 61), 'Thought Beams' (*Haroun* 57) and 'heart-shadow' (*Haroun* 121). The Fire Bug is no ordinary firefly, but a 'tiny living flame with wings' (*Luka* 58) and 'one of the most dangerous' (*ibid* 144) that can set off Fire Alarms. Travelling from one era to another is possible thanks to a real 'time-jump' (*Luka* 61). 'Thought Beams' is a telepathic technology used in the Land of Kahani. The Water Genie struggles to explain to Haroun: 'It's a Process Too Complicated To Explain... Thought Beams' (*Haroun* 57). Once in the Land of Kahani, Haroun suffers from 'Heart-Shadow' (*Haroun* 121), a mixed sense of petrification and mistrust as he gazes into the darkness that spans the Twilight Strip. He fears that the Chupwalas will defeat him.

Postscript

Rushdie had always had a penchant for innovation when it came to using the English language to translate ideas related to cultures other than English and to express sympathy or empathy for people who mainly speak English as a second language. In an interview with Michael Reder, he once described how he felt reading Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* (1948): 'The way in which English language is used in that book is very striking; it showed me that it is possible to break up the language and put it back together in a different way...' (10). He tried to innovate not only with the stylistic and structural aspects of the English language but also with its punctuation. The scope of this paper has allowed its author to address only one

aspect of the techniques used by Rushdie to experiment with the English language – compound word formation. His passion for inventing new forms of words, especially compound words, was evident when he wrote *Midnight's Children* (1981), and by the time he finished *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) and its sequel *Luka and the Fire of Life* (2010), he had already perfected the art. The current study supports the assertion just made.

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