Stress in morphologically complex words and compound words

In English, as in many other languages, stress interacts with the morphology, so that the addition of particular suffixes causes stress to shift. Most suffixes are stress-neutral, and do not affect stress placement at all: for instance, if we add -ise to (atom), the result is (atomise), similarly, adding -ly to (happy) or (grumpy) produces (happily) and (grumpily), with stress remaining on the first syllable. However, there are two other classes of suffixes which do influence stress placement. The first are stress-attracting suffixes, which themselves take the main stress in a morphologically complex word: for example, adding -ette to (kitchen), or -ese to (journal), produces (kitchenette and journalesse). Other suffixes, notably -ic, -ity and adjective-forming -al, do not become stressed themselves, but cause the stress on the stem to which they attach to retract one syllable to the right, so that (atom), (electric) and (parent) become (atomic), (electricity) and (parental).

There is one final category of word with its own characteristic stress pattern. In English compounds, which are composed morphologically of two independent words but signal a single concept, stress is characteristically on the first element. Despite the fact that, the general rule is that if the first element of a compound is a noun, it takes the stress, for example; ‘post office, sunrise’. But if the first element is an adjective, the second element takes the stress with a secondary stress on the first, for example (second ‘class’ and loud ‘speaker) There are many exceptions to it such as the compound ‘ice cream’ in which primary stress can be placed on both the first or the second element in the compound, other examples are ‘hot dog’, ‘head master’... etc. Stress placement helps in distinguishing the compounds (greenhouse and blackbird) from the phrases (a green house and a black bird). The compounds take the stress on the first syllable, while the phrases take it on the second. Semantically too, the difference is obvious: there can be brown blackbirds (female blackbirds are brown), or blue greenhouses, but (The green house is blue) is semantically ill-formed. In phrases, the adjectives (black and green) are directly descriptive of the noun, and have to be interpreted that way; on the other hand, the meaning of compounds is not determined compositionally, by simply adding together the meanings of the component parts, so that (greenhouse) signals a particular concept, with no particular specification of colour. Stress is clearly crucial in marking this difference between compounds and phrases.