

Exocentricity in Compounding: Evidence from Cypriot Greek

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In linguistic literature, exocentricity in compounding is usually related to the absence of a head from the compound structure. Since headedness can be semantically shown by hyponymy, exocentric compounds cannot be interpreted as hyponyms of one of their constituents (Bloomfield 1933, Bauer 2008a). However, according to Scalise et als. (2009: 52) semantics is not the only problem with exocentric compounds, and there are three dimensions along which the limits of exocentricity should be investigated: typological, categorial and semantic. Generally, there is disagreement in the literature about the types of exocentric compounds. For instance, Bauer (2008b) challenges the idea that compounds which are understood figuratively (metaphorical compounds), or are historical accidents, should be listed among those which are considered as exocentric, since their interpretation does not depend on the construction of being a compound. He reaches the conclusion that in very few languages the creation of exocentric compounds is a productive operation of word formation, and, in a way, agrees with Dressler (2006), who has argued that exocentric compounds are a marked option in regard to endocentric ones. Crucially, on the basis of an extensive corpus of compounds from several languages, Scalise et als. (2009) have shown that exocentricity is not a marginal phenomenon in compounding, although there are different degrees in which it can be manifested. Following an approach based on features, and not on constituents as a whole, they have proposed that this phenomenon can be better understood if it is split into categorial, semantic and morphological exocentricity, depending on the type of head of the construction it is referred to, i.e. categorial, semantic and morphological head. This separation has also led these authors to postulate that morphological and categorial exocentricity are language specific, while the semantic one is independent of the typological properties of each particular language.

In this paper, we will investigate exocentricity in Cypriot Greek, a language particularly rich in compounding. First, we will show that our data cannot be sufficiently analyzed if only semantic criteria are used, and that Cypriot Greek exocentric compounds are better dealt with if both categorial and semantic properties are taken into consideration (Andreou ms.). Second, we will argue that morphological/inflectional features (e.g. gender or inflection class) cannot be a safe criterion for exocentricity, in the way Scalise et als (2009) have proposed, since Cypriot, like Greek, has many endocentric compounds, which display a different inflectional ending from that of the head, when taken in isolation (e.g. *egiomalon* ‘goat’s wool’ < *egi(a)* ‘goat’ + *mal(in)* ‘wool’). Third, we will suggest that exocentricity occurs if compounding and derivation interact in such a way that compounding precedes derivation, at least in Cypriot Greek (as well as in Greek). In contrast, a structure is endocentric, if it contains only compounding, or involves derivation and compounding, in this particular order. Following this analysis, all Cypriot Greek exocentric compounds seem to be created on the basis of a common structural pattern, where the combination of two stems (compounding) precedes derivation, derivation is realized by an overt, or a zero, suffix, and inflection marks the edge of the word:

(1) [[[stem stem]_{STEM-Suff/∅}]_{STEM-Infl}]_{WORD}

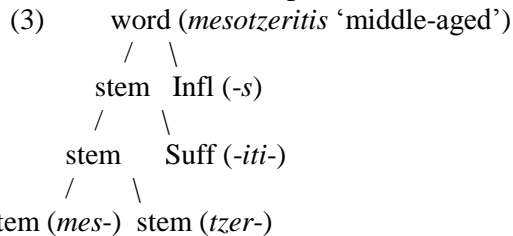
Examples:

- (2)a. mesotzeritis < mes(os) tzer(os) -iti- -s
 middle-aged middle time Suff NOM.SG
 a. bukoglosos < buk(ono) glos(a) ø -os
 who eats his words fill the mouth tongue Suff NOM.SG

For this pattern to be applied the following assumptions are also needed (see Ralli 2007, 2009, in preparation):

- a) Compounding involves stem combinations.
- b) Compounds are headed constructions.
- c) In a morphological structure, a head is locally defined, in that its features are projected to the immediately preceding mother node, but do not necessarily percolate to that of an upper level.

According to these assumptions, the structure of exocentric compounds is not entirely headless. However, there is a different head at each word-formation level: the head of the lower level, i.e. of the compound as such, is one of the two stems, the suffix (zero or overtly realized) is that of the upper level, while the head of the whole inflected word is the compounded-derived stem. See (3) for an illustration:



NB: the compound-internal *-o-* (e.g. *mes-o-tzeritis*) is a linking element/compound marker (Ralli 2008).

Finally, in this paper, we will challenge the view that exocentric compounds do not belong to the productive word-formation mechanism by showing that Cypriot Greek compounds are predominantly exocentric, reminiscent of the very productive Ancient Greek ones.

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