

Analogical constructions

Barbara Schlücker
Freie Universität Berlin

This paper presents a combined analysis of a constructionist and an analogical approach to word formation and the mental lexicon. Both theories deal with the properties and the structure of the lexicon, although from different perspectives. The benefit of combining these approaches is demonstrated on the basis of German adjective + noun (A+N) compounds and phrases.

As has been frequently observed, (nominal) word formation entities are very likely to be used as “names”, i.e. as conventionally established expressions that refer to well-established kinds, whereas (nominal) phrases are rather used as descriptions (cf. Bauer 1988, among others). The case of German A+N compounds and phrases provides an illustrative example of this differentiation: whereas A+N compounds such as *Buntspecht* (lit. colourful woodpecker, ‘spotted woodpecker’) are common names for well-established kind concepts, A+N phrases such as *buntes Bild* (‘colourful illustration’) are singular descriptions that do not denote established concepts. A+N phrases, however, are also used as names, if they are lexicalized, as in the case of *bunter Abend* (lit. colourful evening, ‘evening of music and entertainment’). Closer inspection reveals that such naming phrases are not single exceptional cases but that they can be found quite regularly.

This observation indicates, in addition to other arguments, that the functional difference between naming and description is not (strictly) correlated with a difference between word formation and syntax. Rather, it raises the question of how to analyze phrases with a naming function adequately, as they are syntactic and lexical entities at the same time. Within a constructionist view on grammar these properties are not conflicting. A basic insight with regard to the lexicon from the perspective of constructionist approaches (cf. Goldberg 2006, Jackendoff 2002, Booij 2009, among others) is the rejection of a sharp boundary between the lexicon and syntax. Instead, morphological and syntactic entities of differing degrees of complexity and regularity are represented as constructions, that is, as fixed pairings of form and meaning. Analyzing both A+N phrases and compounds as constructions allows to put the phrases on a par with compounds and to treat them as competing naming devices.

The question that arises then from analyzing those compounds and phrases as competing constructions is which principles govern the choice between them when new names are coined. As to formal restrictions, A+N compounds cannot be built up from polymorphemic adjectives (with few exceptions). Thus, polymorphemic adjectives enforce the realization as a phrase. However, this formal restriction can explain the distribution of compounds vs. phrases only to a small extent as monomorphemic adjectives are also found frequently with phrases. The hypothesis put forward in this paper is that the choice between compound and phrase is primarily based on analogy. In general terms, analogy means to transfer information from existing data to other, in particular new, data. Very often, analogy is invoked to account for exceptional cases, i.e. single, idiosyncratic examples that serve as models. However, the analysis pursued in the present case treats analogy differently: instead of an individual idiosyncratic model word it is rather a whole paradigm that functions as model (cf. Krott et al. 2007). This analysis is supported by experimental data. In a production study, participants were asked to coin new names for new concepts, using adjectives and nouns that form part of existing compounds and phrases with the naming function but have not been combined before. It can be shown that analogical relations are in fact a strong predictor for the choice between compounds and phrases. In particular, the adjectival constituent is shown to be more influential than the noun constituent with regard to the form to be chosen.

The paper discusses the results of this study with regard to the combined analysis and the implications for the theory of the mental lexicon and word formation.

References

- Bauer, Laurie (1988): *Introducing Linguistic Morphology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Booij, Geert (2009a): "Compounding and Construction Morphology". In: Rochelle Lieber & Pavol Štekauer (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Compounding*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 201-216.
- Goldberg, Adele E. (2006): *Constructions at Work. The nature of Generalization in Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jackendoff, Ray (2002): *Foundations of Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Krott, Andrea, Robert Schreuder, R. Harald Baayen & Wolfgang U. Dressler (2007): „Analogical effects on linking elements in German compound words“. *Language and cognitive processes* 22/1, 25-57.