

# Constructions and Historical Linguistics

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My contribution deals with the question of how a constructionist approach can be applied to the development of idiomatic adjective-noun-combinations (A+N-combinations) in Dutch.

There are basically two kinds of A+N-combinations:

- |                |                  |             |                  |             |
|----------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|
| (1) compounds: |                  |             |                  |             |
|                | <i>gróotstad</i> |             | <i>snéltrein</i> |             |
|                | big-Ø-city       |             | fast-Ø-train     |             |
|                | ‘big city’       |             | ‘express train’  |             |
| (2) phrases:   |                  |             |                  |             |
|                | <i>vrij-e</i>    | <i>tíjd</i> | <i>rod-e</i>     | <i>wíjn</i> |
|                | free-INFL        | time        | red-INFL         | wine        |
|                | ‘leisure time’   |             | ‘red wine’       |             |

Compounds like (1) are clearly distinguishable from phrases because of the adjective which is uninflected and which carries the main stress. In phrases like (2), on the other hand, the adjective is usually inflected and the noun carries the main stress. Although phrases and compounds are formally different and belong to different modules of grammar (syntax and morphology), both strategies can be used for coining names (see Hüning. To appear.). However, it is often assumed that there is a functional separation of morphology providing names on the one hand and syntax providing descriptions on the other hand (see Bauer 2003, p.131).

In a constructionist approach, on the contrary, both phrases and compounds can be analysed as *constructions*, i.e. “learned pairings of form with semantic or discourse function” (Goldberg 2006, p. 5). The notion of construction allows considering phrasal names (as well as compounds) as a principally possible output of a productive naming process. Thus, their naming function is not necessarily the outcome of individual lexicalisation processes, but it can be seen as inherent to the construction itself. Phrases and compounds as naming devices are thus treated alike and

we are able to give an adequate treatment of both morphological and syntactic word combinations that function as terms and account for both their similarities and their differences (complex word versus phrase) in a model of the grammar in which there is no separation of syntax and the lexicon (Booij 2009, 416).

A+N-phrases with a naming function can then be seen as the outcome of a *constructional schema*, i.e. an abstract pattern in which a special structural configuration is linked to a particular semantic interpretation (see Booij. In preparation.).

Following this approach, a diachronic analysis has to deal with several questions: How did these constructional schemas come into being? How abstract are these patterns? Which historical linguistic factors might have influenced the development of a productive phrasal naming device? What is the distribution of (morphological) compounds and (syntactic) phrases as naming strategies throughout history? This paper will try to shed more light upon some principal matters with respect to construction grammar as a diachronic tool and the process of *constructionalization*, i.e. the „formation of new units (constructions) out of hitherto independent material“ (Bergs and Diewald 2008, p. 4).

To treat these questions for A+N-combinations, I use data extracted from historic dictionaries for Dutch.

## References

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