Semantic non-transparency in the mental lexicon: On the relation between word-formation and naming

Holden Härtl
Universität Kassel
holden.haertl@uni-kassel.de
Novel compounds seem to be able to function as names “right from the beginning”.

Adjective-noun phrases and compounds

(1)  
   a. *ein sogenannter heißer Tag*
       ‘a so-called hot day’
   b. *ein sogenannter Heißtag*
       ‘a so-called hot_day’

(2)  
   a. *sogenannter starker Regen*
       ‘so-called heavy rain’
   b. *sogenannter Starkregen*
       ‘so-called heavy_rain’
Also, novel A-N compounds seem to be more **salient in discourse**.

In a questionnaire study (conducted in German), we found **more causal attributions** to the Stimulus role of a psych-verb if the role was realized by a novel compound:

(1) *The flat saw*$_i$ fascinates Max because *it*$_i >$ *he* …
   ‘flache Säge’

(2) *Die flatsaw*$_i$ fascinates Max because *it*$_i >>$ *he* …
   ‘Flachsäge’

$n(2) > n(1)$
Questions and roadmap

- Are novel compounds in comparison to phrases indeed more prone to function as names?
- How is the naming function related to semantic specialization and lexicalization of novel compounds?
- What pragmatic factors are involved in this interplay?

1. Evidence for the naming function of compounds
2. Meaning specialization and lexicalization: A pragmatic perspective
3. Conclusion
Evidence for naming

Naming: can be defined as a function that establishes a **node** in a **conceptual-ontological taxonomy**.

- In naming contexts, transparent phrases are less acceptable than the respective compounds:

  (1)  
  a. ??*Man nennt sowas ein rotes Dach.*  
   ‘one calls this a red roof’

  b. *Man nennt sowas ein Rotdach.*  
   ‘one calls this a red_roof’

- We can conclude that **compounds provide names** more easily in comparison to the phrasal equivalents.

  cf. Bücking (2010); Härtl (2014)
Evidence for naming

- Descriptive nominal modifiers don’t combine with classifying (i.e. naming) ones:

  (1)  a. **beeindruckende und Kanarische Kiefern**
       ‘impressive and Canarian pines’

  b. **beeindruckende und große Kiefern**
     ‘impressive and big pines’

  (2)  a. **beeindruckende und Großkiefern**
       ‘impressive and big_pines’

  b. **Kanarische und Großkiefern**
     ‘Canarian and big_pines’

- We can conclude that compound modifiers embody classifiers, i.e. create naming expressions.

  cf. Booij (2010); Härtl (2014)
Compounds easily accommodate **kind** interpretations:

1. a. *Das ??rote Dach / Rotdach wurde in Belgien entwickelt.*
   ‘the red roof / red_roof was developed in Belgium’

   b. *Die ??schwarze Hyäne / Schwarzhyäne ist ausgestorben.*
   ‘the black hyena / black_hyena is extinct’

Lexicalized “labels” / names sanction a **temporal dissociation** between subject and predicative, see (2a):

2. a. *Mein Arbeitskollege ist ein ??Flüchtender / Flüchtling aus dem Tschad.*
   ‘my colleague is a flee-PARTPRÄS_MASC’ / flee-EE (refugee) from Chad’

   b. *Nur einer der Professoren ist ein ??Kind / Kindergartenkind.*
   ‘only one of the professors is a child / a kindergarten child’

   ‘only one of the professors is a pupil with top grades/ a top grades pupil’

We can conclude that compounds provide **kind names and labels**.

cf. Bücking (2010); see Rapp (2013)
Evidence for naming

- *almost* and scales

(1) a. *Die Situation ist sehr ernst, fast schon dramatisch.*
    ‘the situation is serious almost dramatic’

b. *Das ist ein guter Gedanke, fast schon eine Theorie.*
    ‘that is a good thought almost a theory’

Scalar particles like *almost* signify that some property of the modified element is not fully attained and that its **complement** still holds: *almost X → not X*

- Compounds are closer to the **right** edge of a **category scale**:

(2) a. *Das ist eine extreme Analyse, fast schon eine Extremanalyse.*
    ‘that is an extreme analysis almost an extreme_analysis’

b. *??Das ist eine Extremanalyse, fast schon eine extreme Analyse.*

(3) a. *Das ist ein kurzer Bericht, fast schon ein Kurzbericht.*
    ‘that is a short report almost a short_report’

b. *??Das ist ein Kurzbericht, fast schon ein kurzer Bericht.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- We can conclude that compounds provide the **stronger category name**.

Meaning specialization

The meaning of a compound often deviates from the “purely” compositional meaning.

*Intersectiveness*

- A-N compounds allow **non-intersective readings** only

  (1)  
  
  a. *ein schöner Tänzer*  
  ‘a beautiful dancer’  
  → intersective: sb. who is beautiful  
  → non-intersective: sb. who dances beautifully

  b. *ein Schöntänzer*  
  ‘a beautiful_dancer’  
  → non-intersective: sb. who dances beautifully

Generally, novel A-N compounds do not denote their compositional meanings, cf. *Blauschachtel* (‘blue_box’, a box for blue items?), *Schmalmesser* (‘slim_knife’, a knife used in narrow openings?).

Why is this so?

cf. Egg (2006); Schäfer (2011)
Observe that there is nothing in the compound itself that indicates the shift in meaning.

- Both the phrase as well as the compound suggest a subsective semantics:
  \[ \text{schmal-}_A \text{ messer}_N \quad \text{‘slim- knife’} \]
  \[
  \parallel \text{AN} \parallel \subseteq \parallel \text{N} \parallel \\
  \{x \mid x \text{ is } A \text{ for an } N\}
  \]

- But compounds easily accommodate the kind interpretation and display meaning shifts:
  \[ \text{Schmalmesser}_{\text{ANC}} \quad \text{‘slim_knife’} \]
  \[
  \parallel \text{AN} \parallel \subseteq \parallel \text{N} \parallel \\
  \{x \mid x \text{ is a kind of } N \text{ associated with } A\}
  \]

The reason for the interpretational difference must lie in the difference of form.
A pragmatic perspective

- Note that novel A-N compounds give rise to a relatively strong novelty effect.

  Compare:  
  - *Fahrradkiste* — *Flachkiste*  
    - ‘bike_box’ — ‘flat_box’
  - *Kamelhaarkamm* — *Weichkamm*  
    - ‘camel_hair_comb’ — ‘soft_comb’

- We can ascribe the effect to a **manner implicature**:  
  
  Deviance from the standard form (i.e. the phrase) indicates deviance from the stereotypical denotation.

- The implicature relates to **Levinson’s M-principle**:  
  - *box for matches* → non-stereotypical box  
  - *matchbox* → stereotypical box of a specific type

---

cf. Barz (1996); Grice (1975); see Levinson (2000: 136ff.)
The analysis implies that the “markedness” of A-N compounds causes semantic specialization and kind interpretation:

Novelty > Semantic specialization / Kind interpretation

The affinity of compounds to be lexicalized can be seen as a result of the kind reading:

Kind interpretation > Kind name / Lexicalization
Compounds in German can take on a naming function “right from the beginning“.

The compounds‘ novelty effect can be ascribed to a manner implicature.

The compounds‘ affinity to be lexicalized results from their semantic specialization and kind interpretation – and not vice versa.

The analysis is compatible with a rule-based grammar model, which upholds a categorial and functional distinction between compounds and phrases.

Thank you.
All cited references can be found in


The paper is available here: www.uni-kassel.de/go/haertl