German AN-phrases and compounds – how do they differ in terms of lexicalization and generic readings?

Are AN-compounds and AN-phrases treated differently from a cognitive perspective?

Experiment I: 3-session memorization study

Learning Phase: Subjects were asked to memorize unknown picture labels

Recall Phase: Subjects were asked to decide whether the presented picture labels were correct or false

Results: main effects

1. Learned items were decided faster
   (p < .001)
2. Subjects decided faster over time
   (p < .001)
3. Phrases were decided faster
   (p < .01)

Interaction: ITEM TYPE X DAY / LEARNED X ITEM TYPE

4. Neither item type was memorized better over time
   (p < .26)
5. LEARNED X ITEM TYPE interaction
   Subjects took longer to decide unlearned compounds than unlearned phrases
   (p < .001)
   This effect disappeared for learned compounds
   (p < .67)

We find a stronger memorization effect for novel compounds

Theoretical implications: Lexicalization and genericity

How could this effect relate to lexicalization and kind readings regarding the compound-phrase distinction?

Complex kind-referring NPs always have to be semantically connected to a “well-established” kind (cf. Krifka et al. 1995)

a. The Coke bottle has a narrow neck.
   b. ??The green bottle has a narrow neck.

Linguistic realizations of such kinds are therefore typically lexicalized names – or suggest lexicalization (e.g., in novel contexts) – in complex expressions either compounds (blackbird) or phrases (best man) can fulfill this function

Despite numerous exceptions (i.e., lexicalized phrases), German compounds appear to have a stronger affinity to featuring as kind names. AN-phrases (with qualifying modifiers), in contrast, are prototypically descriptive

In endocentric constructions, complex common names always describe subkinds of the kinds denoted by their heads – they thereby rely on a relational modifier-head structure and typically lack in compositionality

These features are typical for compounds – lexical modification oftentimes introduces an underspecified, mediating function between predicates; (qualifying) phrase modification prototypically an identity/interceptive relation (cf. Bücking 2009):

ModLex

Kotrossel (‘red thrush’; reducible) → totum pro parte
Langschäfer (‘long sleeper’, late riser) → adverbal reading
Leichtathlet (‘light athletics’, track and field) → transparent

ModPhr

role Drossel (‘red thrush’) → interactive
langer Schlaf (‘long sleeper’) → ambiguous
leichte Athletic (‘light athletics’) → transparent/ outside the head’s selective restrictions

Do we find preferred linguistic realizations (compound / phrase) for new complex concepts?

Experiment II: Rating study (questionnaire)

Subjects were provided with novel concepts and two linguistic realizations (contradictory): AN-phrases / novel A-N-compounds, which they had to rate for suitability on a scale from 1 (very good) to 6 (very bad)

Concept types:
1. holist + generic
2. holist + set reading
3. totum pro parte + generic
4. totum pro parte + set reading

Possible explanation:
- Introduced concepts too complex for subjects to grasp differences
- The mismatch in contradictory AAN-phrases cannot be resolved
  → the underspecified nature / flexibility of compounds’ modifier-head relations allows subjects to circumvent semantically “infelicitous constructions”

Summary

- Novel AN-compounds show a more pronounced memorization effect than phrases
- Prototypically, German compounds display an underspecified modifier-head relation and are, therefore, more affine towards lexicalization as well as featuring as kind-referring NPs
- For novel complex concepts, compounds are preferentially lexicalized due to their “flexible interpretation”

References

[Provide a list of references related to the content of the document]

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