
Phrase or Compound? A psycholinguistic experiment on German modifiers and the role of relational adjectives.

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The rivalry between compounding and NPs with relational adjectives (RAs) is an established topos in the literature (since Levi 1978), not only for German. Factors influencing the choice of the respective construction include semantics, family size, type frequency, lexicalization, and the role of the modifier (e.g., Schlücker/Plag 2011). By contrast to qualitative/property adjectives, denominal RAs (1a) display lack of gradability (1b), modification and negation (1c), predicative use (1d), and nominalizability (1e). RAs used this way shift to property semantics (glossed with # under 1). Despite some variation (see 2a), RAs in an NP (as in 1) possess an argument structure relation with the deverbal head noun where they usually have the role of the external argument (e.g., Kratzer 1996), while the non-heads of compounds tend to take the role of the internal argument (as in 2b). In our psycholinguistic experiment based on PsychoPy 2022, we investigate which construction, NPs with RAs (such as a) *mütterliches Suchen* ‘maternal search’) or compounds (such as b) *Muttersuchen* ‘mother search’), is the more preferred one, especially when influencing factors are different.

Both stimuli for a) and b) consist of a noun (e.g., *Suchen*) derived from an agentive verb and a lexically animate modifier (e.g., *mütterlich* or *Mutter-*). In experiment I, latencies are measured to assess which construction is easier to track in order to determine different degrees of routinization vs. creativity. In II, participants are asked for their primary semantic interpretation for evaluating to what extent creativity is (un-)licensed given the theoretical predictions. Over all, it is aimed to determine a potential hierarchy of factors triggering the routine/creativity divide.

- (1)
 - a. *richterliches Ernennen* > *Richter* (N) ‘judge’
 - b. *#richterlich-er-es Ernennen* ‘more judicial appointment’
 - c. *#(sehr) (un-)richterliche Ernennen* ‘(very) (un-)judicial appointment’
 - d. *#Die Ernennung ist richterlich.* ‘The appointment is judge-like’
 - e. *#Richterlichkeit der Ernennung.* ‘Judgelikeness of appointment’
- (2)
 - a. *kindliche Entwicklung – Kindentwicklung* ‘child development’
 - b. *studentisches Belauern – Studentenbelauern* ‘student stalking’

References: • Levi, J. (1978): The Syntax and Semantics of Complex Nominals. • Schlücker, B. & Plag, I. (2011): Compound or Phrase? *Lingua* 121, 1539-1551 • Kratzer, A. (1996). Severing the External Argument from its Verb. *Nat. Lang. Linguist. Theory* 33, 110-137.