

Adjectival suffixed compounds in German: a hierarchical sub-lexicon.

German displays a wealth of complex words made up of two lexical bases and the adjectival suffix *-ig*:

(1) B_1 - B_2 -*ig*

The linear sequence of these constituents may be structured following various schemas. Among others we find:

(a) suffixation of compound words;

$[[[B_1]_X [B_2]_Y]_Y -ig]_A \rightarrow [[[\textit{sommer}]_N [\textit{sprosse}]_N]_N -ig]_A$; *sommersprossig* “freckly”

(b) compounding of B_1 and a derived adjective;

$[[B_1]_X [[B_2]_Y -ig]_A]_A \rightarrow [[\textit{risiko}]_N [[\textit{freude}]_N -ig]_A]_A$; *risikofreudig* “venturesome”

(c) apparent simultaneous application of affixation and compounding where neither the compound formed by B_1 and B_2 nor the derived adjective formed by B_2 and *-ig* are attested; *leerköpfig* “stupid, lit. with an empty head”, *dreimotorig* “tri-motored”

From a large German Web-corpus of 200 million tokens (the first segment of *deWaC*, part of *WaCky!* project; Bernardini et al., 2006) I obtained around 166 000 tokens and 6357 types showing the linear sequence in (1), but just 295 of them belong to group (a), the vast majority (3680) being instead subordinative compounds of type (b). The group (c), as one can see from the examples, might be further divided in at least two subschemas: the first, which has an adjectival B_1 , consists of 923 types, while the second, whose B_1 is characterised by a numeral, consists of 1149 types.

The schemas cited above differs from the point of view of what syntactic categories can fill B_1 and B_2 slots (such tendencies are already described in the literature: DWb 1978, Sugarewa, 1972), but also from the point of view of the profitability of such schemas. A schema such as (a) might be included under a more general schema of derivation by suffixation, and its relative narrow type-frequency should perhaps be considered part of the productivity of such higher level schema. Structures like that in (b) show a higher productivity, a large amount of which is nevertheless due to the great productivity of just a few heads often recognised in the literature as elements midway between affixes and free forms, i.e. the somewhat controversial category of suffixoids like *-artig*, *-mäßig*, *-fähig* (Fleischer, 1969, Schmidt, 1987). Finally, the formations in (c), beyond the dicotomy already proposed, display a great variety of lexemes in both slots B_1 and B_2 , leading to the apparent conclusion that both the slots are open. However one can recognize a fine-grained web of short analogical series both in the adjectives which usually fill B_1 (*lang-* ~ *kurz-* ~ *zentralseitig*, *hoch-* ~ *niederleuellig*) and in the nouns that always fill B_2 (*langbeinig*, *-haarig*, *-wellig*, ...), leaving as well space to *hapax* complex words made up of *hapax* constituents (*glattrindig* “smooth-rinded”).

After having classified the formations found in the corpus following the proposal of Bisetto and Scalise (2005) I will attempt to build a hierarchical map of this subset of German lexicon in a Construction Morphology framework (Booij, 2010).

References

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