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Compounding and its locus of realization: Evidence from Greek and Turkish

Compounding has been at the center of interest in recent years and presents valuable challenges for refining our understanding of word formation. However, attempts to define compounding and its locus in grammar encounter several problems (Scalise & Vogel 2010). On the one hand, similarity to syntactic structures and partial visibility to syntactic operations - often observed in a number of compounds – have led a number of linguists to consider compounding as a matter of syntax (e.g. Anderson 1992, Aronoff 1994). On the other hand, structures involving combinations of lexemes with morphological categories of an unclear nature (e.g. affixoids) render difficult a radical separation of compounding and derivation and, thus, they advocate a morphological status of compounding (see Booij 2005 and Ralli 2010 for details).

In this presentation, I propose that a proper delineation of compounding should be given on formal grounds and that an approach relying on pure semantics is misleading. Assuming that compounds are binary structures combining lexemes, I suggest that the diversity of views for defining compounding and the variety of theoretical approaches that are put forward for the analysis of compounds are highly dependent on the data which are used for illustrating the various working hypotheses. I defend the position that on the basis of their structural properties compounds can be distinguished into two categories, morphological objects and phrasal units bearing an atomic status, depending on the language one deals with. Assuming that syntax and morphology are separate structure-building modules, the first category includes compounds resulting from morphological rules (or templates/schemas), and involves units specific to morphology. As such, compounds may share properties with other morphological objects, e.g. derived words, but are distinct from them. The second category contains phrasal compounds, which may be invisible or semi-visible to syntax, their semantics may be non-compositional, but their structure is derived in syntax, in that it is not based on morphologically-proper units and is not the product of morphological rules or templates. Phrasal compounds should also be distinct from listemes, since they do not constitute hapax formations and their structural pattern could be systematically reproduced for the creation of neologisms.

Accepting the view that there are different categories of compounds and that compounding is a process which cuts across two grammatical domains, i.e. morphology and syntax, crucial evidence can be provided for the morphology-syntax interaction.

In this presentation, claims and proposals are illustrated with data drawn from two genetically and typologically distinct languages, Modern Greek (Ralli 2007) and Turkish (Göksel 2009), which significantly diverge as far as compounding is concerned.

Selected references

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