Introduction: Compounds between syntax and lexicon

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Compounds have traditionally been seen as resulting from syntax, either in a diachronic (as was typical for the neogrammarian school in the nineteenth century, cf. Gaeta 2008) or in a synchronic perspective (as has been the case for most early generative treatments and notably Lees 1960). On the other hand, compounding is regarded as the minimal piece of morphology occurring even in isolating languages like Chinese. In this light, compounds are at the heart of language, and their investigation may shed significant light on how a grammar's language must be conceived of (see also the recent volume edited by Lieber & Štekauer 2009).

Clearly, both issues are crucially related to the general conception of the lexicon, which cannot simply be the repository of morphemes, but must be rich enough to allow severely restricted generalizations on the basis of entrenched patterns that speakers make use of. In recent years, a number of independent investigations converge in emphasizing the major role played by the lexicon as a source for pattern generalizations which are of relevance both for word formation *stricto sensu* and for syntax (cf. among others the thought-provoking book by Jackendoff 2002).

This special issue presents parts of the results of a research developed within the PRIN-project COMPONET (coordinated by Sergio Scalise, 2005-2007), in particular along the lines followed by the Neapolitan research unit, whose aim was to investigate the formal properties of compounds across several European languages.

The authors of the contributions presented in this volume were asked to focus their attention on this 'transitional' status of compounding, in particular concentrating on the following issues:

- explicit, cross-linguistic criteria to identify compounds;
- formal properties of compounds (e.g., head, linking elements) and their status with respect to similar properties displayed by other linguistic constructs (e.g., head in phrases, agreement markers);

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- competition among different coding strategies in which morphological and syntactic patterns are involved in a parallel way (e.g., verbal prefixation vs. phrasal verbs);
- lexical entrenchment and the status of compounds, particularly in relation to frozen expressions;
- naming and the privileged status of compounds with respect to other labeling or descriptive strategies.

As may be gathered from this list, the main points of interest lie on the one hand on the classical issue of finding out explicit properties characterizing compounds with respect to syntactic patterns (cf. Spencer 2005 for a recent survey of the relation between word formation and syntax). On the other, we also wanted to explore the far less investigated status of compounds as a fundamental device for naming, in particular by means of concept blending (cf. in this regard the insightful survey by Gagné & Spalding 2006).

Giorgio F. Arcodia, Nicola Grandi & Fabio Montermini test the behaviour of NN compounds comparatively in a number of fusional languages from the Standard Average European area and in languages from the East and South-East Asian region, namely Chinese (isolating) and Japanese (agglutinating). Starting from Bisetto & Scalise's proposal (2005), whereby compounds may be divided into three classes, each of which may contain both endocentric and exocentric complex words, the authors show that these classes are not discrete, but rather that they constitute the poles of a *continuum*. Their findings seem to lend support to Bisetto & Scalise's view that attributive / appositive compounds and subordinate compounds apparently behave similarly in different languages, but having a phrasal constituent is possibly a unique property of subordinating compounds. As far as coordinating compounds are concerned, Arcodia, Grandi & Montermini argue that two subclasses of coordinating compounds should be distinguished, namely "hyperonymic" and "hyponymic" compounds, as they behave in a rather different way.

Livio Gaeta & Davide Ricca focus on the criteria that are usually invoked to identify compounds as lexical units or morphological objects. They argue that to save the notion of compoundhood from the traps of overgeneration one has to distinguish carefully between what should be attributed to the lexicon (i.e. what should be considered as lexicalized), and what should rather be seen as the result of a

morphological operation. Accordingly, only the latter are called compounds. The paper tries to put to interest a quadripartite approach which carefully distinguishes between compounds and phrases by treating the properties of being a lexical unit (or listeme) and being the output of a morphological operation as independent. Elaborating on Bauer's (2001) idea of formal isolation as a basic criterion for compoundhood, Gaeta & Ricca emphasize the relevance of morphological activation. This is intended as the set of explicit properties which characterize compounds in morphological terms and are independent of their lexical status. Their quadripartite approach is able to show an intriguing convergence as for the morphological status of certain constructs, which cannot always be considered lexicalized, in three typologically and genetically different languages like Italian, Chinese and Modern Hebrew.

Maria Grossmann & Franz Rainer devote their attention to Italian adjective-adjective sequences as a borderline phenomenon oscillating between morphology and syntax. The authors suggest a distinction between two types of AA compounds: a) a pattern with a linking vowel *-o-* at the end of the first adjective and a single morphological locus for agreement at the end of the sequence, undoubtedly morphological in nature, and b) an asyndetic pattern with double inflection: in this latter case, the distinction between compounds and coordinative AA phrases is a tricky matter, depending solely on semantics. The paper shows how the asyndetic compound-type arose besides the one with a linking vowel taken over from Neo-Latin in the seventeenth century, and characterises their mutual relationship in present-day Italian in terms of blocking. The phenomenon of apocope of the type *imperial-regio* 'imperial-royal', specific to Italian, is interpreted as an iconic strategy to achieve greater formal integration in asyndetic AA compounds.

Phrasal verbs have some structural and semantic characteristics in common with morphologically complex words, even though they originate from phrasal constructions. Focusing on the role played by lexicalization and grammaticalization processes in the gradual shift from syntactic to morphological structures, the paper of Claudio Iacobini deals with semantic and morphotactic characteristics of Italian phrasal verbs. The overlapping between the range of directional meanings conveyed by prefixed verbs and phrasal verbs is considered a further piece evidence in favor of the strict correspondence between phrasal verbs and transparent morphological constructions.

A constructionist approach allows him to explain the processes that led to the origin of phrasal verbs, their hybrid characteristics, and their tendency toward the acquisition of lexical status. The possibility to convey directional meanings by means of spatial relators, both pre- and post-posed to the verb, and with different degrees of fusion, is another example of the gradual, dynamic, and non-clear-cut division between syntax and morphology. In the case of Italian phrasal verbs, lexicalization and grammaticalization processes have determined the formation of constructions which, analogously to word formation patterns, select possible verbal bases according to a limited set of productive configurations that result from generalizations over sets of frequently used verb + particle combinations.

Swedish nominal compounds with a personal proper name as their first component, e.g. *en Mozartsonat* 'a Mozart sonata', *Palmemordet* 'the Palme murder' or *en Drottning Silviabrytning* 'a Queen Silvia accent', are investigated by Maria Koptjevskaja-Tamm. The paper shows that such compounds are truly situated between lexicon and syntax. It is suggested that some of the theoretical claims on the morphology of compounding are not particularly relevant for this kind of compounds, since their defining property is that they are based on personal proper names or on what is conceived of as a personal proper name. These expressions can have quite different structural properties ranging from single simplex words to phrases, but all these structures (including certain types of close appositional structures) are allowed to function as the first-most component in compounds as long as they are recognized as a name for a unique referent – a person or a group of persons. The only exception is constituted by complex names with a preposed syntactic determiner that has to be dropped in compounding.

Gary Libben, Monika Boniecki, Marlies Martha, Karin Mittermann, Katharina Korecky-Kröll & Wolfgang U. Dressler examine the role played by linking elements or interfixes in German compounding. While the majority of German biconstituent compounds are formed through the concatenation of unsuffixed roots, many left constituents in German require the presence of an interfix. This brings structural complexity into what might otherwise be considered a relatively simple morphological structure. For the noun-noun German compounds examined, at least five interfixation patterns are discernable. The authors investigate which factors may be at play in native speakers' determinations of whether a given compound contains the correct

interfixation pattern. They employed a well-formedness judgement task in which participants were asked to decide, as quickly as possible, whether the compound presented on the computer screen was a well-formed German compound. The findings reveal that, among the five interfixation patterns, uninterfixed structures, and those with the *-n-* interfix, are the most likely to be judged acceptable. Compound frequency as well as the positional family size of the initial constituent and the number of compounds sharing the exact interfixation pattern for that constituent also affected judgments.

The paper of Edoardo Lombardi Vallauri deals with Japanese complex predicates made of a verbal noun and the light verb *suru* 'to do'. It tries to shed light on the question whether they should better be classified as lexicalized units rather than syntactic constructions on the one hand, and as compounds activated morphologically rather than syntactically on the other hand. In this regard, the author considers that *suru*-predicates appear essentially in two possible forms: (a) VN-*suru* and (b) VN-*o suru* (where *-o* is an accusative marker). A set of parameters is examined, leading to the conclusion that, while the two constructions seem to occupy a similar intermediate position between compounds and phrases with regard to their lexical status, the type (a) closer resembles truly morphologically built-in compounds than type (b). In this light, the majority of the features considered allows the author to draw a neat boundary between VN-*suru* and VN-*o suru*, characterizing the former as morphologically, and the latter as syntactically activated compounds.

Barbara Schlücker & Matthias Hüning examine the semantic and functional properties of German A+N compounds and their corresponding phrases (e.g. *Altpapier* 'recovered paper' vs. *altes Papier* 'old paper') and argue that, although there is a clear and unambiguous formal difference between compounds and phrases in German, only few distinctions can be made concerning their semantics and pragmatics. As a result, the authors show that neither semantics nor pragmatics alone are able to predict correctly whether a given A+N combination is likely to be realized as a compound or a phrase. Instead, an interplay of semantic, pragmatic and syntactic factors seems to be at work, which are carefully analysed in the paper.

Finally, Italian verb reduplication is investigated by Anna M. Thornton, who focuses her attention on the development of several lexemes and abstract lexical constructions that have originated from

a syntactic device of Italian, the use of imperative forms for descriptive functions. Two types of lexical constructions are investigated: the VV type (e.g., *fuggifuggi* 'stampede', lit. 'run_away.run_away'), and the V*e*V type (e.g., *mordi e fuggi* 'extremely quick', lit. 'bite and run away'). Both types developed by generalizing a construction on the base of specific exemplars that had become entrenched as nominalizations of descriptive imperatives. The data are interpreted as evidence in favor of a usage-based means of establishing lexical constructions. In this view, the findings support a non-modular view of the relationship between syntax and the lexicon: similar forces shape the coming into being of both syntactic and lexical constructions.

Probably, the main results of this collection of papers may be found in the repeated attempts at establishing explicit, formal criteria for assessing the status of compounds, whereas the semantic aspects of naming and of concept blending remain rather in the background. It is probably an urgent challenge for the future to call into question the general onomasiological problems raised by compounds as a special word formation device with respect to other strategies of naming, respectively based on syntactic or on affixal patterns. At any rate, we hope that the results presented in this volume will be of stimulus for other researchers to proceed with further investigation of compounds, which reveal more and more interesting, subtle properties, as long as we go on questioning the essence of their transitional status.

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