„Anfall, Ausbruch, Attacke“ – Intensification of symptoms of physical condition in context

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Examining doctor-patient dialogues reveals that common disorders such as dizziness and pain rarely appear as stand-alone terms, but rather as the first element of a compound. *Anfall* (*seizure*), *Ausbruch* (*outbreak*) and *Attacke* (*attack*) are used as the second part of the compound. When viewed individually, there are no significant semantic differences between the compounds. For example, *Schwindelanfall* (*dizziness occurrence*), *Schwindelausbruch* (*-outbreak*) and *Schwindelattacke* (*-attack*) reflect the initial point in the progression of dizziness as a form of suffering. However, in the context of the conversations, the second elements imply a scale that makes the dizziness appear more or less intense.

The phenomenon involves compound words: the first part contains all the relevant meaning and can be understood on its own. The second part adds a gradience value on an implied scale. The relevant pattern here is [[suffering]$_N$+[intensifier]$_N$]$_N$. While the first part is strongly context-dependent, the second part is more variable.

Typically, the lexeme describing the symptoms is modelled in terms of intensity by the second part, and the speaker’s intended meaning, as the goal of comprehension, results from a process in which the intensity of suffering is enriched through implicit contextual knowledge and inference procedures relating to an intensity scale. Larger corpora (deTenTen2023) confirm that the described compositional pattern involves an interpretation of intensity. Both the first, (e.g. *Schwindel* (*dizziness*), *Panik* (*panic*)), and the second elements, (e.g. *Anfall* (*seizure*), *Attacke* (*attack*)), occur in different compounds.

Some of these, such as *Schlaganfall (stroke)* and *Panikattacke (panic attack)*, appear frequently and can be considered lexicalised forms. Others imply different degrees of intensity, suggesting systematic correlations between compositional elements and intensity mapping. In this context, intensifications are special mental configurations that exist independently of linguistic expression (cf. Dölling 2005). Our particular interest lies in the basic units (generalised or individual contexts, default assumptions, prototypes, etc.) that derive inference rules for symptoms and their intensity in medical contexts.

References: • Dölling, J. (2005). Semantische Form und pragmatische Anreicherung: Situationsausdrücke in der Äußerungsinterpretation. *Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft,* 24(2), 159–225.