Structural, functional and cognitive aspects of adjective-noun combinations

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The paper discusses the interplay of structural, functional and cognitive aspects of adjective-noun (AN) combinations in German, French and English.

Structural basis: We can clearly distinguish compounds and phrases by means of inflectional agreement in German and French (cf. Großmutter vs. große Mutter, grand-mère vs. grande mère). Although this is not possible in English, stress might play a crucial role and has to be investigated further.\(^1\)

Functional basis: German has a strong tendency to use compounds as naming (e.g. Rotfuchs) and phrases as descriptive units (e.g. blauer Schuh) (Bücking 2009, 2010; Hüning 2010). In contrast, French favors phrases for both the naming (e.g. poudre noire) and descriptive function (e.g. table blanche) (Van Goethem 2009). Finally, English AN combinations typically have initial stress if they function as naming units (e.g. BLACKbird) but non-initial stress if they describe phenomena (e.g. black BIRD).

Cognitive basis: Recent evidence (Kotowski et al. 2014) suggests that compounds show a memorization advantage in comparison to phrases in German. I will report on two new studies that investigated the memorization of AN combinations in the aforementioned languages. I found memorization advantages of novel German compounds (e.g. Jungtourist) compared to French phrases (e.g. jeune touriste). Also, my analyses revealed a memorization advantage of English combinations with initial stress over combinations with non-initial stress if the former were semantically non-compositional (e.g. SLOW pen) and the latter compositional (e.g. short BRUSH). I will interpret the results with respect to the structural-functional separation between compounds and phrases.

References


\(^1\) Although stress has been extensively studied for NN combinations in English (e.g. Arndt-Lappe 2011; Bell & Plag 2012, 2013; Giegerich 2004, 2005; Plag et al. 2007, 2008), the amount of research on AN combinations is still quite low (e.g. Vogel & Raimy 2002).


