

Expanding the lexicon through debonding: a constructionist perspective

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In this paper, we will study the emergence of new adjectives and adverbs through the process of ‘debonding’, i.e. “a composite change whereby a bound morpheme in a specific linguistic context becomes a free morpheme” (Norde 2009: 186), with special focus on debonding of the first element in head-final compounds. Drawing on corpus-based case studies from Dutch, German, Norwegian, and Swedish (cf. Norde & Van Goethem 2014, Van Goethem & Hüning 2014, Van Goethem & Koutsoukos 2016 (submitted)), we will demonstrate that debonding is a dynamic process of linguistic innovation. Under specific semantic and formal conditions, the modifying (often evaluative/intensifying) left-hand members of compounds may be reanalysed as free morphemes of a different word class (adjective or adverb), and with a different meaning. Examples are given below:

- (1) (Dutch) *een luxe_Nhotel* ‘a luxury hotel’ (compound) / *zeer luxe_{ADJ} en vernieuwd sanitair* ‘very luxury and renovated sanitary facilities’ / *de kamer is luxe_{ADV} afgewerkt* ‘the room is finished in a luxury way’
- (2) (Swedish) *en kanon_{Ndag}* ‘litt. a cannon-day; a great day’ (compound) / *det blir kanon_{ADJ}* ‘it’s going to be great’ / *det funkar kanon_{ADV}* ‘it works very well’

The process is characterized by some ‘problematic’ features, such as counterdirectionality (from bound to free morpheme) and possible defectiveness (e.g., only partial adoption of inflection). For these reasons, we believe that its analysis may greatly benefit from a constructionist approach. More particularly, it will be examined if the semantic and formal changes accompanying debonding may allow us to consider this process as an instance of ‘constructionalization’ in the sense of Traugott & Trousdale (2013). In this way, we will complement the study by Trousdale & Norde (2013) who examine the relation between two other types of degrammaticalization (degrammation and deinflectionalization), on the one hand, and constructionalization, on the other.

References

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