The linking element in Afrikaans compounds: testing the effects of cognitive and formal determinants

In Germanic languages like Afrikaans, Dutch, and German, linking elements (hereafter LEs) are a regular occurrence in complex words, occurring in roughly 30% of the mentioned languages' compounds. Examples of LEs are the *-er-* in *kindermoord* (**child·LE·murder**), the *-s-* in *arendsklou* (**eagle·LE·claw**), and the *-d-* in *leerder* (**learn·LE·NMLZ**) (where NMLZ stands for nominalizing suffix). Some linguists analyse these units as morphemes, others argue that they are merely phonemes, devoid of any (grammatical) meaning.

There have been numerous attempts by linguists to pinpoint the nature and systematic occurrence of LEs, varying from descriptive or historical linguistics (Combrink, 1990; Van Tiel *et al.*, 2011), to psycholinguistics (Krott *et al.*, 2011). The combination of outdated viewpoints (specifically with reference to Afrikaans) and non-conclusive description even after experimentation (with reference to Dutch and German), justifies an alternative approach.

This research aims to postulate a linguistic model (i.e. categorization network) of the LE in Afrikaans from a Cognitive Grammar (CG) perspective. CG allows the maximal use of data within a conceptually unified field, which will be significant in this study. The majority view by linguists is that the LE only has a phonological role, and that its semantic import is negligible. CG supplies the necessary tools to postulate a categorization network of the LE, unifying the phonological aspects and the (limited) semantic aspects. Two networks are postulated - one for compounds and one for other complex words. In the case of compounds, signs of semantic import are indicated, while in other complexes (like derivations), the LE has no semantic import whatsoever.

Native speakers of Afrikaans as well as second language speakers of Afrikaans were asked to take part in an online multiple choice survey. Nonce compounds and their potential meanings were presented to respondents, and they had to choose between different forms of the compounds, based on the meanings presented to them.

Apart from specific differences between the native and second language speakers, the results show, among other things, that respondents tend to insert LEs in two specific situations - where vowels bordered and where there were a genitive-/possessive relationship between components. The question that arises is whether the LE in Afrikaans will become purely phonological, similarly to the *s*-LE in German (Nübling & Szczepaniak, 2018), or with traces of semantic import like the *en*-LE in Dutch (Van Tiel *et al.*, 2011).

References

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