Dissertation Summary

Issues of Modern Greek and German Compounding: A Contrastive Approach*

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Abstract

In this contribution, I offer a summary of my 2013 University of Patras Ph.D. dissertation on compounding in Modern Greek and German.

Keywords
contrastive morphology – compounding – Modern Greek – German – prototypical compounds – linking element – head

* This research was funded from 1/11/2007 to 29/02/2008 by the DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst) and later, during the period between 1/10/2008 and 31/03/2011, by the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation.
1 Introduction

Contrastive Linguistics\(^1\) is oriented towards the comparison of corresponding phenomena in a pair or a group of languages. A contrastive analysis can be applied to any level of linguistic structure. This dissertation belongs to the field of contrastive morphology; it examines the morphological process of compounding in Modern Greek and German on a synchronic level. The selection of these two languages is not arbitrary but instead is based on the similarities that they share. Both are synthetic languages displaying a fusional morphological system, which is very rich, specifically as far as the word-formation processes are concerned. Moreover, both languages display very high productivity in the process of compounding and particularly in the production of one-word formations involving all major grammatical categories, as shown in examples (1) and (2).

(1) a. ψαρόβαρκα ←\(^2\) ψάρ(ι)\(^3\) βάρκ(α)
[psaˈrɔvarka]_N ['psar(i)]_N [vark(a)]_N
‘fishing boat’ ‘fish’ ‘boat’
b. ολόλευκος ← ολ(ος) λευκ(ός)
[ɔˈlɔlɛfkɔs]_A ['ɔl(os)]_A [lɛfˈk(ɔs)]_A
‘totally white’ ‘whole’ ‘white’
c. ξυλοφορτώνω ← ξύλ(ο) φορτώνω
[ksilɔfɔrˈtɔnɔ]_V ['ksilɔ]_N [fɔrˈtɔnɔ]_V
‘to beat up sb’ ‘wood’ ‘to load’

(2) a. Großstadt ← groß Stadt
[ˈɡʀoːsˌʃtat]_N [ɡɹoːs]_A [ʃtat]_N
‘big city’ ‘big’ ‘city’
b. liebevoll ← Liebe voll
[ˈliːbəˌfɔl]_A ['liːbə]_N [fɔl]_A
‘loving’ ‘love’ ‘full’

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1 For a detailed analysis of the concepts of contrastive linguistics see some recent studies: Gast (2011), König (2012), van der Auwera (2012).
2 The use of this arrow means that the compound structure is composed of the following two constituents.
3 The suffix is given in parentheses only when this constituent appears as a stem in the compound.
Compounding is responsible for the production of new complex words, consisting of two words (Fabb 1998), or two stems (Pállη 2007), depending on the language characteristics. Several researchers proposed a more general definition of compounding, according to which a compound consists of two lexemes (Bauer 2001, Booij 2002, Neef 2009, Ralli 2013). Furthermore, compounding is a morphological process, whose boundaries cannot be clearly defined, either within the domain of morphology, i.e. between derivation and compounding, or between morphology and syntax. For this reason a delimitation of the scope of this study was necessary.

The present analysis focuses on “prototypical compounds”. In Dressler’s (2006) terms, a prototypical compound is a formation consisting of two “prototypical lexical words”. In simple words, a prototypical compound is a morphological formation displaying all standard structural properties, as specified for each language. In this respect, structures displaying any kind of interaction between the word formation processes or between morphology and syntax are not examined further in this study. To be more specific, structures with bound stems, as for instance the neoclassical compounds (Geographie ‘geography’), but also the so-called “borderline cases”, namely formations that display morpho-syntactic features (μαύρη αγορά, mavri agora, ‘black market’), are left out of the scope of analysis of this dissertation.

The aim of this dissertation is the contrastive analysis of Modern Greek and German compounds in order to discover the morphological parallels and the divergences between them. As with most contrastive studies, this dissertation focuses on the differences rather than the similarities between the languages compared, aiming to define the parameters that are responsible for these differences. An additional purpose of this dissertation is to provide new outcomes regarding the morphological process of compounding in the languages under study. Apart from these primary aims, it is also expected that this study will lead to a better understanding of the word formation process of compounding, at least as far as fusional languages are concerned. Thus, this study contemplates a clearer definition of compounding and its delimitation from other closely related phenomena.
The Study

2.1 Theoretical Framework

According to the theoretical framework adopted in this dissertation, compounds are viewed as morphological objects formed independently from syntactic influences. Therefore, morphology is considered an autonomous component in grammar, independently defined from syntax (Aronoff 1976, Lieber 1980, Selkirk 1982, Kiparsky 1982). Despite the autonomous existence of morphology in grammar, several kinds of interactions are not excluded; either between morphological processes and especially between the two word-formation processes, or between the morphological and the syntactic component. In this respect, this dissertation argues in favour of the existence of a morphological continuum, along which boundaries with respect to syntax are not sharply distinguished (Bybee 1985). However, the degree of the morpho-syntactic interaction varies according to language (Bisetto & Scalise 1999, Lieber & Scalise 2006, Gaeta & Ricca 2009).

In particular, as far as the languages under study are concerned, several studies are available. Compounding in Modern Greek has been investigated within a morphological framework mostly by Ralli (Ράλλη 2005, 2007, Ralli 2013) and Anastassiadis-Symeonidis (1983, Αναστασιάδη-Συμεωνίδη 1986, 1996). Morphologically oriented studies of compounds in German are also numerous (Fleischer 1975, Wellmann 1991, 1992, Becker 1992, Fuhrhop 1998, Motsch 1999, Olsen 2000, Donalies 2007, Neef 2009, Fleischer & Barz 2012). Nevertheless, a morphological contrastive study concerning the process of compounding in Modern Greek and German⁴ has not been carried out before.

2.2 Data

Data gathering for this dissertation was of paramount importance, specifically regarding the detection of phenomena that would be interesting for a contrastive analysis between Modern Greek and German compounds. The vast majority of the data presented belong to the standard languages under study (Κοινή Νέα Ελληνική ‘Standard Modern Greek’ / Standarddeutsch ‘Standard German’). Given that compounding in Modern Greek has been recently studied in a very systematic way, the gathering of data for German was more neces-

⁴ As far as I know, recent contrastive studies concerning the German compounding are mostly restricted to within the Germanic languages (e.g. Gast 2008, Kürschner 2010), although there has also been some contrastive research conducted between German und the Romance languages (e.g. Catalani 2004).
sary than for Modern Greek. Moreover, compounds are not only to be found listed in dictionaries, due to the high productivity in this word-formation process\textsuperscript{5} they are frequently formed ad hoc as neologisms. Consequently, the prototypical German compounds cited in this dissertation were gathered at first while studying the relevant bibliography and later by systematic data mining from German daily newspapers and magazines (\textit{Bild, Die Welt, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Stern, Spiegel}).\textsuperscript{6} Occasionally, compound neologisms were also compiled from internet websites or blogs. The constructed corpus consisting of about 830 structures has been checked by German native speakers. The same strategy of data gathering has also been followed for Modern Greek compounds, producing a corpus that includes about 230 formations.

\subsection{Structure}

This dissertation is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 discusses the object of this study, presents its various aspects, and limits the research scope.

Chapter 2 outlines the basic theoretical principles adopted for this study. Compounding is defined under various aspects:

a) according to the morphological, phonological, and semantic criteria that distinguish “prototypical compounds” (as discussed previously) not only from other morphological formations but also from syntactic phrases;


c) with regard to the main lexical categories of compounds (nouns, adjectives, verbs) available in both languages under study (see examples (1), (2)).

Chapter 3 provides an extensive contrastive description of Modern Greek and German compounds, containing numerous examples from both languages. Given that many of the compounds that came up during the data collection do

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{5} German has been characterized by Coseriu (1977) as a “kompositionsfreundlich” (‘compounding-friendly’) language.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{6} The data selection took place primarily during my stay at the University of Potsdam (on a DAAD scholarship).}
not belong to the prototypical ones, the last part of the third chapter discusses cases where compounding interacts with derivation in various ways for both languages in comparison.

Chapter 4 focuses contrastively on the possibility of the appearance of a linking element in Modern Greek and German compounds. Its different properties in the languages under study and the parameters that cause them are analyzed in detail, inasmuch as the existence of a linking element is a special characteristic for the compounding process.

Chapter 5 examines headedness matters. The existence of a head parameter with regard to the compounds of each language is shown to be a reflection of a general principle, given that there are several underspecified phenomena with regard to the existence of exocentric or coordinative structures, two compound categories that are productive in both languages under study.

Finally, chapter 6 presents the conclusions reached from the above analysis and offers some proposals for future research. The six chapters are followed by the bibliographical references and an appendix including all Modern Greek and German compounds provided throughout the dissertation.

3 Conclusions

Contrastive Linguistics is considered to be a fruitful domain of linguistic research, insofar as it allows the determination of parameters that explain the parallels and the divergences between languages. Thus, contrastive research is regarded to be a pilot study in typology (van der Auwera 2012). The present dissertation provides a detailed analysis of the similarities and differences displayed in the word-formation process of compounding in Modern Greek and German. The main similarities found in the languages under study are the following: a) the right-headedness of the determinative-endocentric compounds and b) the possibility of the appearance of a linking element between the two constituents. As far as the differences in the compound formation in the two languages under study are concerned, I argued that two basic parameters are responsible for them: a) stem vs. word-based morphology and b) rich vs. limited nominal inflectional paradigms.

In addition to the conclusions that have been drawn concerning the contrastive examination of the compounds, various new outcomes came to light concerning special issues in the process of compounding of these two languages. For instance, with regard to Modern Greek coordinative compounds, I argued that there is a morphological constraint that determines the selection of neuter grammatical gender in the nominal structures (αστραπέβροντο, NEU
astrapovronto, ‘lightning and thunder’ → αστραπ(ή)_{FEM}, astrap(i), ‘lightning’, βροντ(ή)_{FEM}, vronti, ‘thunder’).

Another conclusion reached, as far as the German compounds under study are concerned, is related to the function of the linking element. Taking into consideration that the various forms of the German linking element fulfill different kind of functions, I have argued that these different forms are undergoing a morphologization process, given that there is evidence that they are gradually losing the syntactic features of their diachronic origin and acquiring a new synchronous character, namely a morphological function.

The arguments provided in this research can be further applied in similar contrastive studies, for example between Modern Greek and other Germanic languages, or in contrastive research that would examine structures, where there is interaction between compounding and derivation. Another linguistic area where the conclusions drawn from the present study could be also useful is psycholinguistics. Moreover, contrastive analysis always carries the potential of being used in applied linguistics studies, especially in foreign language teaching or in translation.

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