Word-Formation and Contextualism

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Abstract

While there is, under the heading of “morphopragmatics”, some research on the relation of pragmatics and word-formation, especially with a focus on diminutives, the major theoretical models of word-formation do not account for the word-formation/pragmatics interface in any systematic fashion. Moreover, in recent contextualist approaches to the semantics/pragmatics interface, the typical grammatical unit referred to is the sentence (including words that constitute a sentence), but not word structure or the morpheme. Drawing on morphological data from German, I will show the influence of pragmatic processes and principles on word-formation, arguing that word structures are also units that may be semantically underdetermined and thus are in need of pragmatic enrichment. Hence morphological theories have to account for pragmatic effects, and contextualist approaches have to account for other entities beyond the ones lying on the “what is said”-“what is implicated” spectrum.

Keywords

morphopragmatics – word-formation – morphology/pragmatics interface – contextualism – pragmatic enrichment

1 Introduction

Every linguist knows that there is something like “morphopragmatics”, yet there are only few attempts to spell out this domain of linguistic research in a systematic fashion. Major contributions stem from the research on diminutives and augmentatives, as undertaken in Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi (2001). Earlier, Stump (1993) discussed the notion of “evaluative morphology”, and this notion has also been taken up in Bauer (1997), with a focus on morphological
universals. In addition, some authors distinguish between “plain morphology” and “expressive morphology” like Zwicky and Pullum (1987). According to the (somewhat circular) definition of the latter authors, “expressive morphology is associated with an expressive, playful, poetic or simply ostentatious effect of some kind” (Zwicky and Pullum, 1987: 335).

Dressler (2000) also introduced the notion of “marginal morphology”, i.e., morphology that is peripheral to the grammatical core system of word-formation. Following Dressler (2000), marginal morphology covers morphological phenomena that either transgress the external boundaries of the morphological module or the internal boundaries between morphological submodules.¹ Clitics and Umlaut are, for example, morpho-phonological phenomena, i.e., the boundary between morphology and phonology is touched. In the case of the comparative, the infinitive, and the participle, the boundary between inflection and word-formation is touched. Some bona fide morphopragmatic phenomena like diminution and augmentation (“evaluative” morphology, cf. Bauer, 1997), as well as “affective” or “expressive” morphology (Zwicky and Pullum, 1987) possibly fall under the heading of marginal morphology, too. Furthermore, lack of productivity is another feature that is typical of marginal morphology (Dressler, 2000: 7). Hence we may conclude that marginal word-formation is connected with (a) the transgression of boundaries of modules, (b) evaluative or expressive meaning, and (c) the lack of productivity.

To sum up: morphopragmatics seems to cover a set of morphological phenomena like pejoration, melioration, diminution, augmentation as well as “expressive morphology”. Some of these phenomena may also fall under the heading of “marginal” as opposed to core or “plain” morphology. This is, of course, a sketchy picture that lacks some of the rigour achieved in more modular or systematic accounts of theoretical morphology.

The issue of modularity is also touched upon in a controversy between Dressler and Kiefer related to the locus of pragmatic information. Thus, Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi (1997: 2) claim:

¹ Note that Dressler (2000) draws a distinction between marginal morphology and extragrammatical morphology, the latter being divided into metamorphology (i.e., deliberate reflexion and production of morphology), premorphology (i.e., early morphology in language acquisition) and paramorphology (e.g., clipping, blends, reduplication, back formation, etc.). For him, paramorphological processes are not subject of a separate morphological component, since they basically are an interface phenomenon.
The morphopragmatic approach is against the claim that pragmatic meanings can be completely derived from semantic meanings with the help of general pragmatic principles. It rather favors the position whereby a morphopragmatically relevant rule possesses some non-semantic, autonomous pragmatic feature in its meaning description.


Morphopragmatics is the study of the interrelationship between morphology and pragmatics. Morphology is relevant pragmatically in so far as word structure (affixes, clitics) can be taken as indication of the speech situation and/or the speech event.

In the following, I will proceed from the assumption that there is an interface word-formation/pragmatics. In the next section, I will sketch a number of morphopragmatic phenomena with respect to German data. Surprisingly, neither theorists of word-formation nor theorists of pragmatics felt the need to spell out this interface in more detail. This is shown in the Sections 3 and 4. My conclusion is that word-formation is in need of pragmatic principles that determine the overall meaning of the respective word. Theories of word-formation should respect this process and should incorporate an interface to pragmatics. Finally, contextualist pragmatic theories should obey the prelexical level in their analyses of underdeterminacy.

2 Data

2.1 Compounding
In Bauer (1979), it is argued that nominal compounding cannot be explained without any reference to pragmatics. The reason for this is the fact that “nominal compounds are characterized semantically by a paucity of information in the surface structure” (Bauer, 1979: 45). Assuming that in an N+N-compound, there is a basic relation of the type “there is a connection between” the denotation of the non-head (A) and the head (B), the road map for interpreting the specific compound is simple:

(...) there is a connection between lexeme A and lexeme B in a compound of the form AB such as can be predicted by the speaker/hearer partially on the basis of her knowledge of the semantic make-up of the lexemes involved and partially on the basis of other pragmatic factors.

BAUER, 1979: 46
The kind of information that is needed in order to enrich the relation between A and B is of the following kind: (a) knowledge of the world, (b) beliefs about the structure of the world, (c) knowledge of the artefacts connected with the society, (d) knowledge of the qualities associated with a particular entity. Bauer concludes that the necessary pragmatic information (understood as “knowledge and belief about the world and the society in which the speaker/hearer lives”, Bauer, 1979: 49) “can be put into the lexicon, but some needs to be formalized—if indeed can be formalized at all—in some other way” (Bauer, 1979: 49).

(1)  

   b. Germ. *Walfisch* “whale”  
   c. *lyre-bird, razor-grinder* (exocentric compounds denoting plants, birds, etc.)  
   d. *bush lawyer* (“bramble”), *settler’s clock* (“kookaburra”)

It could be argued here that world knowledge stored in the lexicon has not much to do with pragmatics—if pragmatics is understood as a general theory about producing and comprehending meaning dependent on context. Hence the “formalization” Bauer alluded to should be sought in genuine pragmatic principles such as the principles guiding pragmatic inferences in general.

This works for the typical ambiguities that are found in N+N-compounds. Take a German standard example like *Fischfrau* (“fish woman”) that may have a multiplicity of meanings, e.g., woman selling fish, woman who looks like a fish, woman that is a fish (mermaid), woman having Pisces as zodiac design, etc. Like in other cases of ambiguity, the ambiguity has to be resolved in the context of utterance. The prominent mechanism to do that is pragmatic inferencing.

Similarly, in the classic example discussed by Downing (1977), the reference of an ad hoc compound like *apple juice seat* (denoting a particular seat in front of which a bottle of apple juice is placed) demands contextual knowledge plus the ability to provide an adequate interpretation, thereby excluding a number of alternative or rival interpretations.

Hence the inclusion of pragmatic information into lexical entries (Bauer, 1979) as well as the inclusion of pragmatic information into rules of word-formation (Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi, 1997) is a possible way to go—but not the most promising way, as I would like to argue.
2.1.1 Phrasal Compounds

A more special case that nevertheless can give us deep insights into the word-formation/pragmatics interface is the phrasal compound. Consider the following text drawn from Meibauer (2007):

(2) Während diese Zeilen entstehen, werden mehrere hundert laminierte „Kaufe-Ihr-Auto-Kärtchen“ hinter die Hubscheibenwischer alter Mittelklasse-Mercedes geklemmt. Dabei würden deren Besitzer viel lieber an den freundlichen jungen Mann verkaufen, der sich so rührend um seine anderen alten Autos kümmert.

Youngtimer 2/06, S. 55

“While these lines are written, several hundreds of laminated buy your car cards are stuck behind the lift windscreen wipers of old middle class Mercedes. Yet their owners would prefer to buy their cars to the friendly young man who is so very solicitous towards his other old cars”.

The phrasal compound Kaufe-Ihr-Auto-Kärtchen is an ad hoc formation, i.e., there is no conventional German expression denoting such little cards. In the context, the writer has several stylistic alternatives, some morphological, some syntactic.

(3) a. Autokärtchen
   car card_{DIM}

b. Kaufkärtchen
   buy_{V/N} card_{DIM}

c. Kaufe-Ihr-Auto-Kärtchen
   buy_{1PS.SG.} your car card_{DIM}

d. Kärtchen „Kaufe Ihr Auto“
   card_{DIM} “buy_{1PS.SG.} your car”

e. Kärtchen mit der Aufschrift „Kaufe Ihr Auto“
   card_{DIM} with the writing “buy_{1PS.SG.} your car”

f. Kärtchen, auf denen „Kaufe Ihr Auto“ steht
   card_{DIM} on which “buy_{1PS.SG.} your car” is written

Ad hoc phrasal compounds, so much is sure from the literature (cf. the survey in Meibauer, 2007), are felt to display a certain expressivity. They fulfil nearly all of Levinson’s (2000) criteria for markedness: in comparison with the unmarked N+N-compound Autokärtchen, they are “morphologically more complex and
less lexicalized, more prolix or periphrastic, less frequent or usual, and less neutral in register" (Levinson, 2000: 137).

In Meibauer (2007), the expressivity of phrasal compounds has been explained by invoking an interaction of the Q- and the I-principle (as outlined in Levinson, 2000):

(4) Expressivity in CP-Phrasal Compounds

Expressivity of phrasal compounds stems from a conflict between a principle that requires enrichment of a minimal and underdetermined structure in normal compounds (e.g., the I-principle) and a principle that requires maximal informativity (e.g., the Q-principle) and leads to the integration of a phrase into word structure.

A questionnaire study revealed that ad hoc phrasal compounds, in context as well as in isolation, are evaluated as witty as well as understandable to a high degree, when compared to its rivals on word level and on syntactic level. Hence the very appearance of a phrase within a word may lead to the impression of incongruence, this being a typical source of expressivity.

2.1.2 Expressive Compounds

Another case in point are German expressive compounds. German adjectival and nominal compounds like the ones under (5) contain meliorative or pejorative elements as part of their structure.

(5) a. ratten+scharf (“rat sharp”)
    b. sau+schlecht (“sow bad”)
    c. Hammer+auftritt (“hammer performance”),
    d. Arsch+gesicht (“arse face”)

The left-hand evaluative members of these compounds are usually considered as so-called semi-prefixes. Contrary to recent approaches within constructional morphology (Booij, 2009, 2010), it has been argued in Meibauer (2013) that these elements are still lexemes, but that they have undergone metaphorical extension.

Evidence stems from the consideration of right-hand members like Kommunisten+schwein (“communist pig”) that have never been considered as semi-suffixes in a similar way. The metaphorical meaning of these heads and non-heads is systematically connected with expressive meaning.

Note that a compound like Kommunisten+schwein is, in principle, ambiguous between a literal meaning “pig belonging to a communist” and the meta-
phorical meaning “person who is despicable by virtue of being a communist”. In fact, even in a non-conventional case like Kommunisten+krokodil (“communist crocodile”) those two readings should be available. This shows that metaphorical interpretation is active in these compounds; if you stick to a classical Gricean account of metaphors, you would say that the Maxim of Quality has been exploited here and plays a role in the hearer’s interpretative procedure (pragmatic inferencing).

Hence metaphors may show up as parts of compounds without this fact forcing us to give up a traditional approach to compounding. What is interesting about these expressive compounds is that expressive meaning is integrated on the level of word structure. I do not think that this must lead to a multidimensional word semantics along the lines of Potts (2007), or to the assumption that expressive meaning is connected with conventional implicatures (Williamson, 2009; Predelli, 2010); rather, I assume that it is the expressive meaning connected to the evaluation of the source domain of the respective metaphors that brings in the expressive meaning.

2.2 Expressive Derivation
In the realm of derivation, evaluative morphology comprises at least augmentation and diminution, as well as melioration and pejoration. Of these four categories of evaluation, diminution has attracted most attention (Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi, 1994; Jurafsky, 1996; Schneider, 2003). Especially Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi have developed a certain view of what “morphopragmatics” is that I will shortly go into (cf. Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi, 1997; Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi, 2001; Merlini Barbaresi 2006; Merlini Barbaresi and Dressler, 2011).

Take their example of Italian suffixes as a starting point (Merlini Barbaresi and Dressler, 2011: 279):

(6) mangi come un maial-ino
    you eat like a pig-DIM
    “you eat like a little piggy”
(7) mangi come un maial-one
    you eat like a pig-AUGM
    “you eat like some huge pig”

Examples (6) and (7) are connected to the same pragmatic effect, namely “hedging the critical remark, i.e., of downgrading the illocutionary force of the evaluative assertion, by adding some playful character” (279) This observation is taken as evidence that there must exist a morphological feature [fictive], as
well as a more specific feature [non-serious]; this feature is a “non-semantic, autonomous pragmatic feature” (: 279) being part of respective morphological rules.

Consequently, the respective feature is part of a lexical entry for Ital. -ino and -one. However, it is not self-evident that this is the right way to go, for there is an alternative analysis in which the meaning of “fictivity” is derived as a conversational implicature, the vantage point being the exploitation of the Maxim of Quality.

A quick look on a related problem is telling. There is a long-standing discussion on the question under what circumstances a sentence like **Nietzsche was a kraut** is true. Some have argued that such a sentence is neither true nor false; others have argued that it is true under a certain perspective and false under another perspective. The former approach is held by Saka (2007) who sticks to an attitudinal approach which contradicts truth-conditional semantics.

(8) a. Nietzsche was a Kraut.
   b. As a member of the anglophone community, S thinks “Nietzsche was a kraut”.
   c. For any member S of the Anglophone community, S thinks “Nietzsche was a kraut” ≡ (a) S thinks that Nietzsche was German and (b) S disdains Germans as a class.

According to him, the proper subject of an analysis of pejorative utterances should not be sentences like (8a), but attitudinal sentences like (8b). The semantic analysis of (8b) then has the general form (8c). This argument can easily be extended to the cases of evaluative suffixes.

Others have proposed an analysis as conventional implicature, because the pejorative meaning is quite stable. These proposals are not altogether convincing, not only because notorious difficulties with this concept in general, but also with respect to the suspendability of the pejorative meaning in special contexts (see the recent approaches of Celis, 2003; Hom, 2007; Saka, 2007; Williamson, 2009; Predelli, 2010). To sum up: the general point is that the assumption that there are pragmatic features built into a morphological rule is by no means self-evident. Pejorative aspects of meaning may be conveyed on the basis of pragmatic inferences.

In German, the following suffixes may be said to convey a pejorative flair (Fleischer and Barz, 2012).

(9) a. -bold **Lügen-bold** “liar”
   b. -ian **Grob-ian** “boor”
c. -ler Gewinn+ler “winnerPEJ”
d. -ling Kümmer+ling “weakling”
e. -erei Lauf+erei “running around”
f. Ge- … -e Ge+red+e “gossip”

The main problem is that the pejorative meaning of these lexemes is not contributed by the suffixes in a uniform way. Not only is the word base of these lexemes often negatively evaluated, too, we also have cases in which the overall word-formation is not pejorative although the respective suffix occurs. Take a closer look at the following word-formations with -ling (Fleischer and Barz, 2012: 217):

(10) a. Verbal base: Lehr+ling “apprentice”, Emporkömm+ling “upstart”
b. Nominal base: Lüst+ling “lecher”, Schreiber+ling “hack writer”

According to Fleischer and Barz (2012: 217), the word-formations with nominal base display a pejorative connotation (10b), and the ones with adjectival bases are said to be “fast ausschließlich pejorativ” (almost exclusively pejorative); however, the same suffix with verbal base needs not be pejorative at all, and also with the adjectival base, we find exceptions.

Yet there are clear-cut cases in which there is evidence for pragmatic inferencing with regard to the intended meaning. Take the suffixes -itis and -istan as examples (for -itis, see Feine, 2003):

(11) Vielleicht leiden die Betroffenen in Deutschland auch einfach nur an Nörgelitis. Langzeitarbeitlose haben oft eine sehr starke negative Ausstrahlung. Einfach nur machen, machen, machen—und die kilometerlangen Bedenken mal wegfallen lassen. Ob man einen Job bekommt, liegt weniger an der AfA.

“Maybe the affected in Germany suffer simply from the grumbling disease. The long term unemployed often have a very strong negative personality. Simply to do, to do, to do—and to simply let drop the kilometre long qualms. Whether you get a job has not so much to do with the AfA”. (Agentur für Arbeit “Agency for Labour”)
Another case is the suffix -istan, which is borrowed from proper names denoting countries, e.g. Kurdistan, Afghanistan. If combined with adjectival or nominal bases, a new meaning arises that may be paraphrased with “exotic country with strange or suspect customs”. The following text reports on the political group “Deaf” (with a big D) that is part of the emancipatory movement of American deaf:

(12) Der Eigenname ist Programm. Anders als die tauben Menschen mit dem kleinen t, die versuchen, sich in die hörende Gesellschaft mittels Lippenlesen und Lautsprache zu integrieren, verstehen sich die Bewohner dieses Gehörlosistans als kulturelle Minderheit, die sich gegen die Mehrheit behaupten muss.

DIE ZEIT 18 (2002): 27

“The proper name is program. Other than the deaf people with the little d who try to integrate themselves into the hearing society with lip reading and oral language, the inhabitants of this deaf country see themselves as cultural minority that has to stand up against the majority”.

Thus, if the literal meaning of -itis is connected with names for diseases and the literal meaning of -istan with names for countries, the coinages in (11) and (12) show evaluative departures from these standard meanings that may be derived on the basis of pragmatic inferences, for instance on the basis of the Maxim of Manner. Alternatively, the new meanings may be understood as metaphorical in nature, metaphor being related to the Maxim of Quality.

2.3 Other Processes

In the previous paragraphs, I have shown that pragmatic inferencing plays a role in the interpretation of compounds and derivations. Further cases include blending and expletive insertion. These types of word-formation usually count as witty or expressive.

(13) a. Engl. sexcapade (< sex + escapade, “sexual escapade”)
    b. Engl. alcoholiday (alcohol + holiday, “holiday with alcohol”)

DYNEL, 2009: 1287

(14) a. Germ. Fortschrott (< Fortschritt + Schrott)
    progress + rubbish (“progress that is rubbish”)
    b. Germ. Ehrgeizhals (< Ehrgeiz + Geizhals)
    “ambition + skinflint” (“s.o. who is ambitious and a skinflint at the same time”)

SCHULZ, 2004
Coinages such as these are apparent violations of the Gricean Maxim of Manner, especially the requirement to be clear. When coming across such word-formations in a text the reader has to work out that the violation is only apparent, and she must trace back the segments to the word material they are made of, thus building up a hypothesis about the intended word meaning. In blendings, there is always an extra meaning in play that cannot traced back to the literal meanings of the components involved.

Similarly, the well-known cases of expletive insertion may be seen as apparent violations of the Maxim of Manner. In these cases, elements like fucking, bloody, freaking, etc. are inserted into words, thereby violating principles of regular word-formation (but observing phonotactics), see McCarthy, 1982; Zonneveld, 1984:

(15) a. un+fucking+believable (also: unbe+fucking+lievable)
b. abso+fucking+lutely

An addressee not acquainted with this type of word-formation has to infer that the expressive element serves to intensify the meaning of its host.

2.4 A Note on Blocking
Lack of productivity may also have to do with blocking effects. Blocking is brought together with the operation of the so-called M-principle by Levinson (2000). The M-principle is a pragmatic principle that basically spells out the M-heuristic under (16):

(16) M-heuristic
What’s said in an abnormal way, isn’t normal; or Marked message indicates marked situation.

The M-principle, then, is defined as under (17) (Levinson, 2000: 136–137):

(17) The M-Principle
Speaker’s maxim: Indicate an abnormal, nonstereotypical situation by using marked expressions that contrast with those you would use to describe the corresponding normal, stereotypical situation.
Recipient’s corollary: What is said in an abnormal way indicates an abnormal situation, or marked messages indicate marked situations, specifically:
Where S had said “p” containing marked expression M, and there is an unmarked alternate expression U with the same denotation D which the speaker might have employed in the sentence-frame instead, then where U would have I-implicated the stereotypical or more specific subset d of D, the marked expression M will implicate the complement of the denotation, namely \( \overline{d} \) of D.

Note that the M-principle is seen as “essentially parasitic on corresponding I-implicatures” (Levinson, 2000: 137), the I-principle requiring of the speaker to say as little as necessary, while the recipient should “amplify the informational content of the speaker’s utterance by finding the most specific interpretation” (Levinson, 2000: 114–115). As follows from (16) and (17), Levinson assumes a certain concept of markedness:

(18) **Markedness**

A marked expression is, in comparison to an unmarked expression, morphologically more complex and less lexicalized, more prolix or periphrastic, less frequent or usual, and less neutral in register.

Levinson (2000: 138–158) presents a list of phenomena that may be analyzed with the help of the M-principle. In the realm of word-formation, Levinson draws attention to rival words or word-formations, N+N-compounding, and the un-prefixation (litotes).

Let us concentrate on rival word-formations and N+N-compounding here. Obviously, what Levinson has in mind when relating these cases to the M-principle, are blocking effects. Classical examples for blocking are the blocking of *goed because of the existence of went, or the blocking of *stealer because of the existence of thief. Because there exist numerous principles proposed in the literature such as the principle of contrast, “Avoid synonymy!”, the Elsewhere Principle, etc., it is useful to be more precise about the definition of blocking (see Giegerich, 2001). I will follow the recent proposals of Embick and Marantz (2007: 8) here:

(19) **Standard Blocking**

Some forms are ungrammatical only because other forms happen to exist and beat them; competition is at the level of the word/phrase/sentence.

Standard blocking surely applies to the abovementioned cases *goed and *stealer. The so called “Poser Blocking” (named after Poser, 1992) is a special
case of Standard Blocking that allows for blocking relations between word and phrase level (Embick and Marantz, 2007: 8):

(20) **Poser Blocking**

Words beat phrases by standard blocking.

Thus, the word *smarter* beats the phrase *more smart*, whereas *intelligenter* cannot beat *more intelligent*.

What Levinson aims at, is not to explain the workings of these principles; he simply assumes that there are such principles. His idea is that where blocking is expected but in fact does not arise, the M-principle creates an additional meaning, a conversational implicature. The presupposition is here, of course, that the competing items have “the same denotation”, as is required by the M-principle.

With respect to rival word-formation, Levinson (2000: 139) shortly discusses but one example, drawing on Kiparsky (1982):

(21) **to inform** inform+er

inform+ant

*Informer* counts as the unmarked expression, *informant* as the marked expression. *Informer* has two meanings, i.e., “one who informs” and “one who informs against his own”, the latter being a case of narrowing. *Informant*, on the other hand, “picks up an exclusive (if not complementary) denotation, as in the linguistics usage” (Levinson, 2000: 139). Thus, the M-principle connects with Kiparsky’s generalisation “Avoid Synonymy!”, it is a principle of anti-synonymy.

What is unclear in this approach is how and when the M-principle comes into play. Why the rivalry arises in the first place, remains unclear. Thus, it could be the case that *informant* is deliberately coined in contrast to *informer*; then, the requirement that the rivals should have the same denotations would not be fulfilled. It appears, then, that Traugott (2004: 19) is right in emphasizing: “(...) anti-synonymy, in so far as it operates, does so AFTER a form has come into existence; it does not block innovation but rather motivates realignment among forms competing over times”.

Cases not mentioned by Levinson are clippings and -i-derivations (Féry, 1997; Köpcke, 2002; Wiese, 2006):2

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2 Note that in the case of clippings the result may be seen as the simpler form, thus contradict-
Thus, the words in the left column should be blocked by the words in the right column, if they have the same denotation. But in fact, they aren’t. Why? I assume that the respective word-formation processes aim at adding a new, hypocoristic meaning. Therefore, there might be no room for invoking the operation of the M-principle.

To sum up: the discussion has shown that the precondition of the M-principle, namely that the rivals should have (exactly) the same denotation, possibly is not fulfilled. This is the reason for their not being blocked. Thus the M-principle may be seen as a general principle for realignment, but it cannot explain why the rivals appear on the scene in the first place. However, when a speaker comes across such a word-formation, she should be able to use the M-principle in the derivation of the extra meaning.

Let us now consider N+N-compounds. Here, we turn to cases of Poser blocking that is, cases in which there is rivalry between a word and a phrase, and in which the word should beat the phrase. Again, Levinson (2000: 147) discusses but one example (but implicates that there many more of this type):

N+N-compounds, as pointed out above, are systematically underdetermined. For every N+N-compound there is as set of paraphrases (possibly built from a stock of meaning relations) that spell out the enriched meaning. It is obvious then that these paraphrases are a result of observing the I-principle: The speaker says “as little as necessary”, and the recipient has to amplify or enrich

\begin{enumerate}
\item This is a box for matches \textit{vs.} matchbox. + > This is a (nonprototypical) box specially made for containing matches.
\item This is a box of matches \textit{vs.} matchbox + > This is a box containing matches.
\end{enumerate}

\begin{enumerate}
\item This is a box for matches \textit{vs.} matchbox. + > This is a (nonprototypical) box specially made for containing matches.
\item This is a box of matches \textit{vs.} matchbox + > This is a box containing matches.
\end{enumerate}
this meaning. If some of these paraphrases are used instead of the single word, is there a violation of an otherwise operating blocking effect at stake? I think that this not the case, because the word and the syntactic construction do not really mean the same. A simple substitution test easily shows this. For example, if I ask someone “Do you have a matchbox?” this does not mean “Do you have a box for matches?”. Again, the M-principle may be operative when someone does not know what the special meaning connected with the respective construction is.

2.5 Arguments from Language Acquisition
Merlini Barbaresi and Dressler (2010: 280) present an argument in favour of their “assumption of the priority of pragmatics over semantics”. This argument relates to language acquisition: “At early stages (...) children do not connect diminutive suffixes to the semantic notion of smallness, which they express by the use of ‘small’”. (: 280) Thus, their early use of diminutives is pragmatically steered; only in a later stage they attach diminutive meaning to the suffix itself. However, the reason for this could be that the children first have to learn to segment the whole words. If segmentation is difficult, for instance because of the productivity of the diminutive suffixes in Viennese dialect, they may very well pursue the strategy to use adjectival modifiers. In German, children often use Baby- as non-head in a compound, for example in Babyputer (Baby+computer, “Laptop”), as my daughter once put it (aged 2;2). While it is certainly correct that young children rely heavily on pragmatics (or the ability of their audience to enrich their utterances in a proper way), children find ways of incorporating diminutive meanings into word structures. Affixation seems, at least in German, a later process than compounding (see also Rainer, 2010).

3 Lack of Interface to Pragmatics in Recent Morphological Models
While it appears to be acknowledged that pragmatics intrudes into the interpretation of word-formations, a clear conception of how pragmatics is linked to word-formation is lacking in comprehensive morphological models such as the ones developed by Rochelle Lieber and Ray Jackendoff (the observation extends to further models, such as Ackema and Neeleman, 2004, but an exemplary discussion must suffice here).

Lieber (2004, 2009) puts forward a lexical-semantic approach to word-formation that builds on the metaphor of skeleton and body. The skeleton comprises a set of semantic features that go into the composition of the complex
word meaning, this being the decisive criterion that these features are relevant to the syntax in a given language (Lieber, 2009: 79). For English, this set has seven members, among them the feature [scalar] that plays a role with respect to substances/things/essences where it “will signal the relevance of size or evaluation (i.e., this will be the feature which characterizes augmentative/diminutive morphology in those languages which display such morphology” (: 80)). Note that no mention is made here of pejorative meanings.

The body is sketched as encoding “various perceptual, cultural, and otherwise encyclopaedic aspects of meaning including shape, size or dimension, colour, orientation, origin, use, and so on” (: 82–83). Moreover, Lieber distinguishes two layers of the body. The first is a layer of meaning that “is relatively systematic, consisting of those universal semantic features that are not syntactically active in the language in question” (: 83). The second layer, in contrast, is “purely encyclopaedic, consisting of assorted bits of information: colour, precise shape contours, precise manners of motion, special functions or origins, and so on” (: 83). While the first layer may be conceived of as the muscular structure of the body, the second layer may be conceived of as the fat, the point of the metaphor being that fat may vary widely, whereas the muscular structure is similar across human individuals.

In the case of an endocentric attributive compound like dog bed, the Principle of Coindexation requires that both parts of the compound, having a single argument each, be coindexed. Since (a) dog bed is predicated of a single referent, (b) the semantic features of both parts are incommensurate (dog having the semantic features <+animate>, <-human>, bed having the semantic features <-animate>, <+artefact>, <+function>), (c) coordinative and subordinative relations are ruled out, “the relationship between the head and the non-head of an N+N compound is free to be fixed by context” (Lieber, 2009: 98).

While it is common practice to rely on the context when it comes to determine a meaning, the linguist cannot be happy with this practice (Meibauer, 2012a, b). Not only can the context not do such a thing—only interlocutors can—a comprehensive theory of word-formation has a story to tell about exactly how “fixing by context” might happen. In short, we need a morphology-pragmatics interface.

Lieber (2009: 99) acknowledges a parallel between reference transfer cases like ham sandwich and exocentric compounds like birdbrain. Just as ham sandwich could refer to someone who has ordered a ham sandwich in a restaurant, so birdbrain could refer to someone's brain that is so little (and constrained) as the one of a bird. What the two cases unites, is metonymy. However, in order to be able to arrive at the correct interpretation, hearers have to use pragmatic inferences (e.g., based on the Maxim of Quality).
Next, we consider Jackendoff’s Parallel Architecture Model (1997, 2009). In this system, Jackendoff draws a distinction between simple and enriched composition. Whereas the former does not allow for pragmatics in the way lexical conceptual structures (LCS) are combined, the latter is tolerant against pragmatics to a certain extent: “The conceptual structure of a sentence may contain, in addition to the conceptual content of its LCSs, other material that is not expressed lexically, but that must be present in conceptual structure either (i) in order to achieve well-formedness in the composition of the LCSs into conceptual structure ['coercion'] or (ii) in order to satisfy the pragmatics of the discourse or extralinguistic context” (Jackendoff, 1997).

A case in point are Reference Transfer Functions, as in (24):

(24) a. Look! There's King Ogpu hanging on the wall.
    b. A truck hit Bill in the fender when he was momentarily distracted by a motorcycle.
    c. The ham sandwich in the corner wants some more coffee.

(25) Interpret an NP as VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF/VEHICLE CONTROLLED BY/PERSON CONTEXTUALLY ASSOCIATED WITH NP.

In order to interpret (24), the hearer uses the directive (25). However, since pragmatics is no separate component in the “tripartite parallel architecture”, it is not clear, how pragmatic principles or inferences become active.

In Jackendoff (2009: 117), one finds an interesting speculation about the meaning of N+N-compounds like boxcar and pontoon bridge.

(26) boxcar  “car that carries boxes"
    “car that resembles a box"
    “car that serves as a box"

The multiple meanings displayed in (26), so the idea goes, are not a matter of ambiguity or vagueness. Instead, words such as these are “promiscuous”:

(27) “A learner attempts all possible strategies for combining N₁ and N₂ (presumably in parallel), and since there are multiple satisfactory strategies that do not conflict, all such semantic combinations are stored in memory as part of the meaning of the compound”.

JACKENDOFF, 2009: 117

Since Jackendoff is certainly right in warning “the insistence on a single best solution is only a prejudice” (117), one wonders why he does not reflect upon
the typical “minimalist” strategy, namely to assume a basic relation of the type “the referent of N₁ is in some relation to the referent of N₂” and leave the rest, i.e., figuring out the exact relation, to pragmatic inferencing. Once again, while in this paper, there are allusions to pragmatics on several occasions (: 119, 123, 128) it is left in the dark, how exactly pragmatics is thought to interact with the tripartite parallel architecture or word-formation in general.

4 Lack of Prelexical Pragmatics in Recent Contextualist Theories

While there is a neglect of a clearly defined interface between word-formation and pragmatics, as we have previously seen with respect to Lieber and Jackendoff, pragmatic theories seldom are aware of the fact that there is “prelexical pragmatics”. So let us shortly go into recent discussions of the semantics/pragmatics divide.

Roughly, there are two (partly intertwined) debates in the field, the one between Neogriceans and Relevance Theorists, and the one between Contextualists and Minimalists. As for the former debate, Neogriceans by and large tend to defend the conceptual value of Gricean maxims or principles (e.g., Levinson, 2000; Horn, 2009), while Relevance theorists argue against such maxims or principles and refer to general cognitive principles such as the Principles of Relevance (e.g., Sperber and Wilson, 1995; Carston, 2002). Quite surprisingly, Neogriceans as well as Relevance theorists go for the assumption that propositional structures are systematically underdetermined and therefore are in need of enrichment. These processes of enrichment are of an essentially pragmatic nature, and hence pragmatics is conceived of as being able to influence semantics. In (28), typical cases of enrichment that were repeatedly discussed, are shown:

\begin{itemize}
\item [a.] She surprised the man in the pyjama. (multiple encodings)
\item [b.] Now I like it. (indexical references)
\item [c.] In the cave./Super 90 is better./This fruit is red. (missing constituents)
\item [d.] She didn’t toast the bread with a knife in the bathroom./I didn’t eat breakfast. (unspecified scope of elements, e.g., negation)
\item [e.] The way was uneven. (underspecificity or weakness of encoded conceptual content)
\item [f.] The room was silent. (overspecificity or narrowness of encoded conceptual content)
\end{itemize}
Several terminological proposals are on the market to fix the phenomenon of pragmatically steered propositional enrichment: explicature (Carston, 2002; Capone, 2009), impliciture (Bach, 1999; Garrett and Harnish, 2009), pragmatic intrusion (Levinson, 2000), or intuitive content (Recanati, 2004). The detailed comparison of these proposals, or, more generally, the explicit/implicit distinction, is of course on the pragmaticist’s research agenda (for the distinction between impliciture and explicature, see Bach, 2010).

Insofar as underdeterminacy is taken as a serious linguistic phenomenon, there is an in-built tendency of the approaches mentioned to restrict the realm of truth-conditional semantics, or to downplay its importance. According to those approaches, there are truth-conditions or logical forms for sentences, but they occur only at a certain stage in the development of the comprehensive meaning of an utterance.

The tendency sketched has of course provoked conjectures. This leads us to second strand of debate, namely the one between Contextualists and Minimalists. Thus, some researchers defend a classical, minimalist approach to the truth-conditions of a sentence, and consequently assume a more powerful apparatus for pragmatic interpretation (e.g., Borg, 2004; Cappelen and Lepore, 2005). Minimalism is thus opposed to Contextualism, which is understood as the persuasion that context influences semantics, not only in the case of indexicals, but also in numerous further aspects.

The resolution of ambiguities and the instantiation of indexical variables were already covered by the Gricean conception of “what is said”. While Grice was far from assuming “pre-propositional pragmatics”, he nevertheless was a Minimalist in that he defended a fundamental division between “what is said” and “what is implicated”.

In developing his recent approach of “truth-conditional pragmatics”, Recanati (2010) summarizes the minimalist picture as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{sentence meaning (character)} + \\
\text{pre-propositional pragmatics (saturation)} = \text{what the sentence says} + \\
\text{post-propositional pragmatics (modulation, implicatures, etc.)} = \text{what the speaker means}
\end{align*}
\]
Saturation is, according to Recanati (2010: 4), defined as “a pragmatic process of contextual value-assignment that is triggered (and made obligatory) by something in the sentence itself, namely the linguistic expression to which a value is contextually assigned”. Indexical variables that are contextually instantiated are a case in point. Modulation, by contrast, is a “free” pragmatic process, as in the case of metaphor. Recanati’s (2010) “truth-conditional pragmatics”, as a contextualist approach, says that truth-conditional processes may be affected not only by saturation but also by modulation.

As far as I see, all contextualist approaches (and it seems the minimalist approaches as well) refer to sentence/utterance level. This has of course a certain reason because sentence level is the level where truth-conditional semantics and pragmatics meet. It is granted that indexicality plays no role in word-formation (i.e., with respect to complex words). However, to take a simple example, if you ask what the interpretation of *This boxcar is red* is, the answer involves that you have a certain set of interpretative strategies at hand that account for the ambiguity (or promiscuity, as Jackendoff would have it) of the N+N-compound. This is a very simple observation: In order to be able to fix the truth-conditions of a sentence like *This boxcar is red*, one must have access to the context of utterance and one must use pragmatic inferencing in order to figure out the adequate sense. And similarly for the other cases of word-formation we have been discussing in this paper.

5 The Case of “Prelexical Pragmatics”: Pragmatic Principles Have Access to Processes of Word-Formation

Let us take stock. Starting from recent conceptions of “morphopragmatics”, we have found that there are modular accounts (Ferenc Kiefer) and “pragmatic priority over semantics”-accounts of the type Lavinia Merlini Barbaresi and Wolfgang U. Dressler have pursued over the years. Both approaches acknowledge the fact that pragmatics has an influence on the production and comprehension of complex words. As I have argued, this influence has to do with the operation of Gricean principles that lead to pragmatic inferencing.

Turning to theories of word-formation, we have seen that, e.g., in the models of Rochelle Lieber and Ray Jackendoff, pragmatics is somehow taken serious, yet there lurks the classical “pragmatic wastebasket” attitude that something is done by the context, or left to pragmatics, and so on. This is somewhat premature, although it seems to reflect the state of the art (see the handbooks by Booij et al., 2000/2004; Štekauer and Lieber, 2005; Lieber and Štekauer, 2009). What we need are models that have systematic access to pragmatics, including
not only pragmatic principles, but also detailed ideas on the influence of context on word-formation.

Resolution of underdeterminacy is a well-known process figuring prominently in contextualist approaches to sentence/utterance comprehension. Yet contextualists (e.g. Stephen Levinson, Robyn Carston, François Recanati) typically focus on the sentence level, thereby neglecting the lexical level where complex words are coined and interpreted.

Levinson (2000: 188) proposed a picture of presemantic and postsemantic pragmatics that obviously served as a role model for similar pictures (Recanati, 2010; Garrett and Harnish, 2009). Before the operation of what he calls compositional semantics and indexical pragmatics, both components leading to the output of semantic representations, there is a word-formation component, to which Gricean pragmatics has already access (call it “Gricean pragmatics 0”). Or, if you like to think in terms of tripartite parallel architecture: you need a fourth “parallel” column, pragmatics.

References


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