

## Compounding at the interfaces

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Despite extensive contributions on the role of morphology within the language design, we do not presently have really explanatory answers to at least the following questions concerning root compounding phenomena in Germanic and Romance: **(1)** Right-headedness (Germanic) vs. left-headedness (Romance) (cf. i.); **(2)** Unconstrained interpretation (Germanic) vs. constrained interpretation (Romance) (cf. ii.); **(3)** Recursion allowed (Germanic) vs. highly constrained recursion (Romance) (cf. iii.); **(4)** Presence of inflection-related linking elements (LEs) (Germanic) vs. presence of “light” prepositions (Romance) (cf. iv.); **(5)** Presence of non-interpreted inflectional morphology (Germanic) vs. presence of interpreted inflection (Romance) (cf. v.)

In this contribution, we propose to view compounding as a sort of Parallel Merge (PM), according to which two structurally identical syntactic objects (roots or root extended projections) are combined with each other (cf. Citko 2005). Parallel Merge clearly violates Kayne’s LCA, which we essentially regard, following Moro 2000, as a PF-constraint. LEs and light prepositions are arguably inserted to avoid a LCA violation. More particularly, the choice between them depends on the fact that the objects to be combined are nominalized roots ( $\sqrt{+n}$ ) in Germanic and morpho-syntactically inflected nouns ( $\sqrt{+n} + a$  language-specific bundle of  $\phi$ -features, crucially including Class/Gender) in Romance (property 4). LEs attract a declension class feature on one of the two little  $n$ Ps in Germanic: the attracted root, which is spelled out in the *spec* of LE, qualifies as the non-head (cf. Brody 2000), deriving right-headedness for Germanic. For Romance, we argue that a +interpretable but unvalued feature (cf. Pesetsky & Torrego 2004) expressed by a light preposition (*di, a, da*, etc. in Italian) select a valued -interpretable feature on one of the two inflected nouns: the attracted noun, which qualifies as the head on straightforward interpretive grounds, ends up asymmetrically c-commanding the non-head, deriving left-headedness (property 1). The relevant interpretable feature is related to Pustejovsky’s *qualia* structure and activates a default predicative representation satisfying the independent requirements posed by semantic compositionality for the interpretation of the compound as a whole. In this way, we get a principled explanation for the fact that the interpretation of Romance N+N compounds is quite more constrained than in Germanic: the set of admissible interpretations has to conform to the requirements posed by *qualia* structure activation, whilst in Germanic the interpretation of root compounds is freely computed by the conceptual-intentional system (property 2; cf. Jackendoff 2007). In comparing Romance and Germanic we find thus that a purely formal property (headedness) turns out to be strictly intertwined with the choice of a specific interpretive modality. The emerging picture strongly suggests that the difference between what superficially looks like a more ‘morphological’ and a more ‘syntactic’ form of compounding (a difference that is likely to be generalized typologically) corresponds in fact to the level at which we perform PM and break the arising point of symmetry: at the deepest level (involving mere roots, as is the case – we will argue – for English and Chinese), at an intermediate level (the rest of Germanic) or at a very high level (Romance and, at the extreme of the scale, Slavic, where root compounding is marginal at best). The reason why PM cannot be performed at a deep (or even at an intermediate) level in Romance has to do with the language-specific requirements posed by lexicalization and with the universal requirements posed by interpretation by phases: the compound-phase that has to be sent to PF qualifies, in Romance, as an ill-formed PF-object. This depends on the fact that such a compound phase only involves nominalized roots ( $\sqrt{+n}$ ): being still in need of a desinence, these roots necessarily count as bound morphemes in Romance and cannot thus be PF-licensed within the phase. Finally, we intend to show that the proposed difference between categorially-driven (Germanic) and semantically-driven (Romance) compounding offers interesting insights as to why recursion is unconstrained in Germanic and highly constrained in Romance (property 3). On the grounds of the approach sketched above, we argue for the following theoretical conclusions: **(a)** Compounding phenomena are fully subsumed by syntax; **(b)** Root compounding is a standard syntactic process in that it is subject to the standard interface requirements (LCA and (as a matter of linguistic variation) semantic compositionality); **(c)** Compounding involves more syntactic and semantic structure than it appears at the surface and, quite interestingly, syntax and semantics go hand in hand even at this very ‘low’ level; **(d)** A principled

account of linguistic diversity in compounding requires the adoption of the tools for lexical decomposition of words recently developed in lexical semantics research; (e) The source of variation cannot be identified in macro-parameters but essentially depends on the language-specific feature endowment of lexical items.

### Examples

- (i) a. DE Hund**futter** 'dogfood'  
 b. IT **pesce** spada 'sword fish'
- (ii) a. DE Fischfrau 'fish woman'  
*woman that sells fish*  
*woman that has brought fish*  
*woman standing close to fish*  
*woman eating fish*  
*woman looking like a fish*  
*spouse of a fish*  
*woman and fish at the same time (i.e. mermaid)*  
*woman having Pisces as zodiac (German Fisch)*  
*woman as cold as a fish*  
 b. IT donna **pesce** 'fish woman'  
*woman resembling a fish / sharing distinctive formal properties of a fish*
- (iii) a. Donau – dampf – schiff – fahrt – s – gesell – schaft – s – kapitän – s – mütze  
 Danube – steam – ship – journey – LE – journeyman – suffix – LE – captain – LE – cap  
 'Cap of the captain of the Danube steam ship company'  
 b. occhiali da sole a specchio glasses + P + sun + P + mirror 'mirror sun glasses'
- (iv) a. DE Hose-**n**-rock pants+LE+skirt 'pantskirt'  
 DU Boek-**en**-kast book+LE+case 'bookcase'  
 NO Arbeid-**s**-dag work+LE+day 'working-day'  
 b. FR verre à vin glass + P + wine 'wine glass'  
 IT occhiali **da** sole glasses + P + sun 'sun glasses'  
 SP pantalones (**de**) campana trousers + P + bell 'bell trousers'
- (v) a. DE Freund-es-kreis friend + gen.sg. + circle 'circle of more than one friend'  
 b. IT camicia a righe shirt + P + stripe(pl) 'striped shirt'

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