

A new look to neoclassical compounding in Italian and French

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Various recent approaches to derivational morphology adopt a holistic view of the semantics of word-formation processes. It is the case, for instance, of Construction Morphology (Booij 2010), of onomasiological approaches (Štekauer 2005), but also of Aronoff (2007). According to this view, the meaning of a morphologically complex lexeme cannot be straightforwardly computed as the sum of the elements it is constituted of. Rather, it is constructed in a global way by the interaction between the meaning of the base and the semantic instruction attached to a construction. The main claim of this talk is that if morphological constructions are holistic from the point of view of semantics, they are likely to be also holistic according to the other dimensions they imply, i.e. their formal (phonological) and categorial properties. In other words, for instance, the phonological form of a complex word cannot be segmented into discrete sequences corresponding to different morphological units, exactly in the same manner that its meaning cannot be segmented and ‘distributed’ among the different elements it is composed of (roots, affixes, etc.). The final form of a derived word, on the contrary, depends from the interaction between the phonological representation of the base lexeme and the phonological instruction linked to a construction.

In order to illustrate this point of view, I propose an analysis of some word formation strategies in Italian and in French that are traditionally classified as neoclassical compounds. In contrast to the tripartite classification traditionally proposed in the literature (compounding, neoclassical compounding, affixal derivation), in this work I adopt a global model of morphological constructions. Accordingly, I do not establish any distinction in nature between the various types of morphological constructions encountered in languages (cf. Lüdeling *et al.* 2002 for a similar view). Rather, constructions are distinguished in their degree of grammaticalization (i.e. of conventionalization of their properties). The fact that neoclassical compounding occupies an intermediate position between canonical compounding and derivation is simply an outcome of the degree of grammaticalization of each individual construction.

This proposal focuses on three phenomena in particular, proposing a comparison between Italian and French for each of them:

- 1) the construction of nouns (adjectives) denoting the speakers of a language in *-fono/-phone* (*italofono, germanophone*);
- 2) the construction of nouns denoting instruments of measure in *-metro/-mètre* (*altimetro, dosimètre*);
- 3) the construction of nouns (and/or adjectives) in *-cida~-cidio/-cide*, denoting the agent or the event of a predicate corresponding to ‘kill’ (*infanticida/infanticidio, germicide*).

The analyses proposed are based on large databases of lexemes extracted from large corpora (in particular the corpora related to the *WaCky* project, Baroni *et al.* 2009 and *Google books*). The main claim I develop is that at least some of the constructions traditionally labeled ‘neoclassical compounds’ are closer to canonical affixation processes by virtue of their degree of grammaticalization. The examples considered are intended to show that a holistic analysis holds not only for the meaning of the phenomena in question, but also for their phonological and categorial properties.

As far as category is concerned, the examples 1) and 3) in particular show that a view that reduces morphological constructions to a relation between an input and an output category is inadequate. The derivatives in question, in fact, function both as an agent noun and as the corresponding relational adjective. The morphological constructions, in this case, have primarily the role of inserting a lexeme within a morphological family displaying complex semantic and categorial relations. In particular, as a consequence of the phonological evolution French has undergone, the formal distinction between agent event nouns has disappeared, whereas it is still visible in Italian. Moreover, the ambiguity in question only concerns one of the semantic subtypes that can be identified (it is not encountered, for instance, when the base denotes a harmful object, cf. the impossibility for Fr. *insecticide* ‘insecticide’ to denote an event).

Phonologically, the behavior of the constructions in question is comparable to that of canonical affixation. First, the data considered show that the selection of a base stem is not performed in a deterministic way. For instance, for a device used to measure conductivity the following forms are attested (with variable frequencies) in the database for Italian: *conduttimetro*, *conduttometro*, *conducimetro*, *conduttivimetro* e *conduttivitometro*. Formally, each of these derivatives is based either on one of the stems of the verb *condurre* (‘conduce’) or of the adjective *conduttivo*, with no apparent semantic distinction between them.

Moreover, the selection of a base stem interacts with the other parameters that determine the form of a derivative. In particular, I claim that describing the formal instruction linked with a construction as the simple concatenation of two morphological objects (a base and an affix) is too reductive. Rather, it should be viewed as a constraint on the form of the output (a view which is similar to the template-based model proposed, e.g., by Vihman 2010 and Vihman & Croft 2007). According to such a view, an exponent possesses a default form and a set of secondary forms hierarchically ordered. For It. *-metro*, for instance, the following hierarchy can be proposed: [ometro] > [imetro] > [Vmetro] > [Xmetro] (where V and X stand, respectively, for any vowel or any phoneme). The presence of [o] and [i] in the forms dominating the hierarchy clearly depends from their frequency in other neoclassical forms in the lexicon. For the same reason, the hierarchy is partially inverted for *-cida/-cidio*, although a significant amount of forms in [otʃid-] is also attested.

These observations suggest that the final form of a neoclassical compound, as for other – more canonical – derivatives, depends from the interaction between different, possibly contrasting and hierarchically ordered, constraints. In particular, a key role is played by constraints that guarantee faithfulness either to the form of the base or to the default form of the exponent.

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