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The Conceptual Relationships in N+N Compounds in Arabic Compared to English

Authors : Abdel Rahman Altakhaineh

Abstract : This paper has analysed the conceptual relations between the elements of NN compounds in Arabic and compared them to those found in English based on the framework of Conceptual Semantics and a modified version of Parallel Architecture referred to as Relational Morphology. The analysis revealed that the repertoire of possible semantic relations between the two nouns in Arabic NN compounds reproduces that in English NN compounds and that, therefore, the main difference is in headedness (right-headed in English, left-headed in Arabic). Adopting RM allows productive and idiosyncratic elements to interweave with each other naturally. Semantically transparent compounds can be stored in memory or produced and understood online, while compounds with different degrees of semantic idiosyncrasy are stored in memory. Furthermore, the predictable parts of idiosyncratic compounds are captured by general schemas. In compounds, such schemas pick out the range of possible semantic relations between the two nouns. Finally, conducting a cross-linguistic study of the systematic patterns of possible conceptual relationships between compound elements is an area worthy of further exploration. In addition, comparing and contrasting compounding in Arabic and Hebrew, especially as they are both Semitic languages, is another area that needs to be investigated thoroughly. It will help morphologists understand the extent to which Jackendoff's repertoire of semantic relations in compounds is universal. That is, if a language as distant from English as Arabic displays a similar range of cases, this is evidence for a (relatively) universal set of relations from which individual languages may pick and choose.

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