

## Deponent Morphemes: A Case Study of Linkers in German Compounds

The concept of deponency covers phenomena where it looks as though there is a mismatch between form and function (Baerman (2007)). Five types of approach can be distinguished (Stump (2007), Müller (2013)): (i) Spurious Morpho-Syntactic Deponency (Bobaljik (2007), Keine (2010), Grestenberger (2014)); (ii) Spurious Morphomic Deponency (Sadler & Spencer (2001), Kiparsky (2005), Brown (2006), Hippisley (2007)); (iii) Spurious Semantic Deponency (Xu et al. (2007), Kallulli (2013), Zombolou & Alexiadou (2014), Alexiadou (2013)); (iv) Property Deponency (Stump (2007), Embick (2000)); (v) Form Deponency (Stump (2006), Weisser (2014)).

Crucially, only Form Deponency analyses postulate that there can in fact be a *featural mismatch* between a morphological exponent and the morpho-syntactic property set that it realizes. However, there are so far very few analyses of this kind. There are arguably two reasons for this: First, a Form Deponency approach may require giving up the assumption that a given morpheme always maintains its inherent meaning; and second, such an approach then requires a model of grammar in which discarding of a lexically determined, inherent property of a morpheme is indeed an option.

An optimality-theoretic approach to deponency instantiating a Form Deponency approach is sketched in Müller (2013). The basic idea is that a higher-ranked constraint blocking the use of a faithful morpheme can lead to optimal selection of what is initially a “wrong” morpheme (i.e., a form with conflicting features); by discarding its original meaning (and thereby violating a lower-ranked faithfulness constraint mandating against changing values of inherent morphosyntactic features), this morpheme can become optimal. The analysis in Müller (2013) covers some well-known cases of deponency, like deponent nouns in Archi and Tsez (Corbett (2007)), deponent stems in Tübatulabal (Brown (2006)), spurious antipassive in Chukchi (Bobaljik (2007)), and deponent verbs in Latin.

Against the background of this study, I develop an optimality-theoretic analysis of linking morphemes in German nominal compounds. It has often been noted that these linking morphemes all have the form of regular genitive or plural markers (*e*, *r*, *n*, *s*, *ns*); but there is a general consensus that they cannot be analyzed as such because this would often involve formally “wrong” genitive exponents, or semantically illicit plural exponents (Fanselow (1981), Eisenberg (2000), Fuhrhop (2000), Schlücker (2012), among many others). In contrast, I argue that *all linking morphemes in German nominal compounds are genitive or plural morphemes* that discard their inherent meaning (thereby violating faithfulness) in response to a higher-ranked constraint, just as, e.g., passive morphemes lose their inherent meaning (thereby violating faithfulness) with deponent verbs in Latin, or plural morphemes get rid of their inherent meaning (thereby violating faithfulness) with some deponent nouns in Archi. On this view, the only fundamental difference between linking morphemes in German compounds and standard cases of deponency concerns the nature of the high-ranked constraint leading to an optimal violation of faithfulness. Whereas deponency is triggered by lexically encoded feature co-occurrence restrictions in the latter case, options for the former case include phonological requirements, purely morphological requirements on the first member of a compound (Gallmann (1998)), and, as I will suggest, syntactic requirements related to external licensing of arguments of the first member.

The talk thus provides an argument for a more flexible approach to form/meaning association in morphemes, and ultimately an optimality-theoretic approach to morphology.

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