A-N Nominals between Naming and Description: Enlightenment from Mandarin?

German and Mandarin Chinese show interesting differences in their encoding of A-N nominal constructions. Both languages have essentially three different possibilities, cf. (1) for German and (2) for Mandarin (the three-way division here essentially follows Paul (2005)).

(1)   a.   der Schwarzspecht   [A N compound]
           the black-woodpecker
      b.   der schwarze Specht   [phrasal A N modification structure]
           the black   woodpecker
      c.   der schwarze Tod   [idiomatized phrasal A N modification structure]
           the black   death

(2)   a.   hei1 ban   [A N compound]
           black board
      b.   yi1-tiao2 hei1 gou3   [phrasal A N modification structure]
           1-CL   black dog
           'a black dog'
      c.   yi1-tiao2 hei1 de   gou3   [phrasal A DE N modification structure]
           1-CL   black SUB dog
           'a black dog'   Note: *de* DE is a functional particle.
      For b,c, cf. (45) in Paul (2005)

In both languages, two of the three constructions are used for naming: In German, the compound and the idiomatic modification structure, in Mandarin, the compound and the phrasal A-N structure. Importantly, while in German the compound may or may not be semantically transparent, the phrasal structure never is, whereas in Mandarin, the compounds tend to be non-transparent and the phrasal A N structures are always transparent.

This leads to a straightforward line-up between structural complexity and naming vs description for Mandarin, whereas German presents a far less clear picture, cf. table 1.

	Modification	Transparent Naming	Naming
Mandarin	A DE N	Phrasal A N	Compound A N
German	Phrasal A N	Compound A N	Compound A N/Idiomatic phrasal A N

Tabelle 1: Structural complexity vs naming/description in Mandarin and German

My paper investigates firstly whether the structural three-way division proposed for Mandarin can be maintained by taking a closer look at the data, especially with regard to the coordination test which is crucial for the phrasal A N vs A N compound

distinction in Mandarin but has been argued elsewhere to reflect phonological and not syntactical processes (cf. the remarks in Giegerich (2004) in his discussion of English N-N compounds). Secondly, it investigates in how far the Mandarin and the German data can, despite their surface dissimilarity, be taken to reflect general principles in the mapping of semantics on syntax and morphology across languages.

References

Giegerich, H. J. (2004), 'Compound or phrase? english noun-plus-noun constructions and the stress criterion', *English Language and Linguistics* **8**(1), 1–24.

Paul, W. (2005), 'Adjectival modification in mandarin chinese and related issues', *Linguistics* **43**(4), 757–793.