A corpus-based contrastive approach to name blending in German and English

Whereas compounding and derivation have been investigated from the cross-linguistic perspective (cf. e.g., Fernández-Domínguez et al. 2011), many marginal word-formation patterns remain under-researched with respect to their formal and semantic properties in different languages. This is especially true for word-formation units with proper names as constituents.

To bear on this issue, the paper investigates personal name blending (e.g. *Brangelina* from Brad and Angelina) in German and English. Personal name blends comprise two personal names and refer to the name beares as a couple or to their relationship. Contrary to lexical blends (cf. e.g., Renner et al. 2012), the properties of name blends have not been systematically investigated from the perspective of contrastive linguistics. The paper aims to fill this gap by addressing several methodological and empirical questions that arise from the fact that proper names bear extralinguistic knowledge about name bearers and therefore pose a challenge for contrastive studies: 1) How can we account for the comparability of nonlinguistic factors, such as the collective knowledge of the speech community about the relationship between name bearers? 2) Which factors must be considered in defining the tertium comparationis on the semantic level and building comparable corpora given that the knowledge about name bearers contains culture-specific aspects? 4) Does the productivity of blends differ between language-specific name blends and those attested in both languages? 5) Can language-specific tendencies regarding the preferred blend structure and the order of constituents be identified? 6) How does the pattern develop over time and do the languages provide evidence for domain-specific differences?

The paper presents the results of a corpus-based contrastive study based on some 2000 types. To obtain comparable data, two strategies were applied. First, a list of names from three domains: politics, sport, and show business, served as a starting point for manual data collection in the German Reference Corpus (W-archive of written German) and the Digital Dictionary of the German Language (corpus WebXL) for German data and the iWeb, NOW, and COCA for English. In the second step, name blends were extracted semi-automatically from these corpora using search strings *couple / Paar, the Brangelina of / (die) Brangelina des / unter, new Brangelina / neue Brangelina, couple name / Paarname*. Regarding the comparison on the semantic level, the data have been manually coded in *Maxqda* for semantic readings (i.e., determinative, such as *Billary* < Hillary (Clinton) is like Bill (Clinton), additive: *Brangelina* < *Brad and Angelina*, or ascriptive: *Brangelina* < the marriage of Brad and Angelina, cf. Kotowski et al. 2021) on the basis of information about the relationship between the name bearers indicated in the context in which the blend occurs, namely the semantics of the verb that agrees with the blend in number (abstract, such as in *Brangelina is dead / Brangelina ist tot* or concrete: *Brangelina are coming to Berlin*) and the competitor forms from the context that refer to the relationship between the name bearers (e.g., *the famous couple, the cooperation, Brad and Angelina,* alternative forms, such as *Angelbrad*).

The results indicate that additive readings with concrete verbs in the plural and the names of both name bearers provided in the context are preferred in both languages. Furthermore, the analysis yields a limited set of formal and semantic patterns with a similar distribution of structural properties and semantic readings in both languages. Contrary to previous studies that define blending as a rather peripheral phenomenon (cf. Štekauer et al. 2012), the results of the present study indicate that name blending is a productive word-formation pattern in both languages (based on the number of types).

References

Fernández-Domínguez, Jesús, Marie-Aude Lefer, Vincent Renner. 2011. Poznan Studies in Contemporary Linguistics. Special Issue: on contrastive word-formation.

Körtvélyessy, Lívia; Štekauer, Pavol; Genči, Ján; Zimmermann, Július. 2018. Word-formation in European languages. In: Word Structure, 11/3, 313–358.

Kotowski, Sven, Sabine Arndt-Lappe, Natalia Filatkina, Milena Belosevic & Audrey Martin. 2021. The semantics of personal name blends in German and English. https://www.anglistik3.hhu.de/fileadmin/redaktion/Fakultaeten/Philosophische_Fakultaet/Ang listik_und_Amerikanistik/Ang3_Linguistics/Dateien/Detailseiten/Kotowski/Kotowski_et_al_ blends.pdf

Renner, Vincent, Maniez, François and J.L. Arnaud, Pierre. 2012. Cross-disciplinary perspectives on lexical blending. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter.

Štekauer, Pavol; Valera, Salvador; Körtvélyessy, Lívia. 2012. Word-formation in the world's languages. A typological survey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.