

Contrasting English noun-phrase complexity with German and Swedish – from *Highclere gardeners* to the *climate change denial movement*

The noun phrase (NP) is one of the prime sites where languages have different preferences. A key issue here is that while some languages like English and German typically place a lot of information before the NP head, others, such as Swedish, prefer the postposition (see, e.g., Ström Herold & Levin 2019). This study targets one specific premodifying structure in English, the noun premodifier, which occurs in so-called noun sequences (Biber, Grieve & Iberri-Shea 2009; Biber & Gray 2016; Smitterberg 2021). This type of construction has undergone a “spectacular increase” in English in recent decades (Leech et al. 2009: 206). Two English examples are given in (1) and (2) with their German and Swedish translations:

- (1a) a *BBC* photographer (LEGS; En. original)
(1b) einen *BBC-Fotografen* [‘a *BBC*-photographer’] (Ge.)
(1c) en fotograf från *BBC* [‘a photographer from the *BBC*’] (Sw.)
- (2a) the *climate change denial* movement (LEGS; En. original)
(2b) die Bewegung der *Klimaleugner* [‘the movement GEN-climate-deniers’] (Ge.)
(2c) rörelsen för förnekelse av klimatförändringen [‘the-movement for denial of the-climate-change’] (Sw.)

As illustrated, English noun sequences may vary in length and complexity, the premodifiers may be either proper (*BBC*) or common nouns (*climate change*) (cf. Smitterberg 2021), and the translations showcase different strategies, ranging from compounding (1b) to paraphrases with prepositional phrases (PPs) (1c) and genitives (2b). Although there is an abundance of monolingual research on English noun sequences, there is a lack of studies contrasting these structures with other languages (recent exceptions being Ström Herold & Levin 2019 and Kosmata & Schlücker 2022). Thus, our study explores English noun sequences through the lens of German and Swedish correspondences:

- What are the German and Swedish correspondences (in translations and originals) of English noun sequences?
- What do the German and Swedish correspondences tell us about language preferences, and/or translation-related effects, such as explicitation and implicitation (Baker 1993)?
- How do the NP length and complexity, the categorial status of the modifiers, and the semantic relationship between modifiers and heads affect the choice of correspondences?

Our data originate from the five-million-word *Linnaeus University English-German-Swedish* corpus (LEGS). The corpus consists of recently published non-fiction texts such as popular science, history and self-help books. The LEGS corpus is particularly suitable for focusing on noun sequences since non-fiction texts are information-focused and relatively condensed (Smitterberg 2021). We extracted noun sequences in both English originals and translations from tagged text files, and then classified the instances according to formal and functional features.

Preliminary findings indicate that the most common correspondence type regardless of language and translation direction is the compound noun (as in (1b); cf. Carlsson 2004). Swedish does indeed seem to use more postmodification than German (e.g., (1c)), as noted above. We also find that factors such as the categorial status of the premodifier is relevant – modifiers that are proper nouns seem to favour paraphrases with PP postmodifiers, making the semantic relationships more explicit. In this study we will shed new light on NP modification and condensation in three languages, as well as the various strategies available to translators.

References

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