Title: Productive Formation of French Compound Nouns: 
A Morpho-syntactic Analysis Based on the Construction Morphology

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The purpose of this study is to explain how deviant structures of contemporary French such as “Noun-Noun” construction can be formed productively. We focus on the productivity and the internal structure of French pause-café type compounds, where the second element (N2) functions as a complement of the first element (N1 = head), and where we can suppose a telic meaning (i.e. N2 for N1). The study also covers [N1 + spécial + N2] constructions, which can be a derived form of pause-café type compounds.

We discuss especially the following questions: 1) why can pause-café type compounds be particularly productive compared to other French “Noun-Noun” constructions, whereas all of them are syntactically deviant; 2) which combinations of constituents are possible; 3) are these compounds compatible with other compound constructions such as [N1 + AdjR] (AdjR = relational adjectives : e.g. fermeture estivale) and [N1 + à + N2] (e.g. couteau à beurre), and 4) what is the difference between phrases, affixes and compounds, or how should compound nouns be defined within the relationships between lexicon-morphology and syntax.

Our analysis is based on the Construction Morphology (CM) proposed by Booij (2010). It is a lexeme-based approach which supposes that a complex word is formed not through an addition of morphemes, but by operating lexical information which each lexeme contains. The characteristic of the CM is that not only fully lexical items, but also word-formation models, which have some underspecified slots (e.g. N1 and N2 slots in [N1 + spécial + N2]) can be registered as a lexical information. Separating the internal structure of word-formation models from the general syntactic rules, this approach enables to explain how some syntactically deviant constructions, such as French pause-café type compounds, can be nevertheless productive.

This thesis consists of six chapters.

In the Chapter 1, we discuss the definition of compound nouns, comparing other linguistic units of various sizes which are involved with compounds, namely free syntactic constructions (i.e. phrases), highly
fixed constructions, idioms, affixes and blending. Focusing on the fact that every unit, regardless of its size, can be lexicalized or be productive to some extent, we consider the difference between affixation and compounding, the difference between free noun phrases and compound nouns, and, further, the problem with the definition of “word”. Through the considerations, we argue that the lexicon-syntax interface is not a simple linear continuum, but rather a bidimensional spectrum, where the degree of productivity plays an important role for mapping each unit in question. In addition, the historical factors on formation of compound nouns are also mentioned in this chapter.

Chapter 2 concerns the theoretical issues on the position of syntax and that of lexicon. Examining the advantages of the lexeme-based morphology which supposes a dynamic nature in the lexicon, we focus on the approach of Construction Morphology (CM) proposed by Booij (2010). By the notion of schema, this approach makes an explanation for the productivity of syntactically deviant structures in English and in Dutch. Our attempt is to apply this notion to French word-formation processes. Through the analysis on French compounds and idiomatic constructions (e.g. [multi + N/A] and [Tu es belle comme X]), we demonstrate that the approach of CM is also valid for French word-formation. In the second part of this chapter, we focus on the movements which occur in the bidimensional spectrum discussed in the previous chapter. We demonstrate how these movements, namely constructionalization, lexicalization and delexicalization, can be mapped in the lexicon-syntax interface.

The Chapter 3 concerns the discussion on the position of pause-café type compounds within French [N1 + N2] constructions. The examination is based on the distinction of two types of N2: “attributive” and “relational”. We argue that French pause-café type construction is “relational” compounds. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that elliptic noun phrases such as parking cars 200m have only the function of “description”, whereas compound nouns such as pause-café have both “description” and “naming” functions. Considering this fact, we conclude that compound nouns should be clearly distinguished from noun phrases. As for word-formation models for pause-café type construction, we propose a model in which one of the constituents is lexically fixed, whereas the other slot remains underspecified.

In the Chapter 4, we examine the validity and the concrete forms of the word-formation models for pause-café type compound nouns. In order to investigate which combinations of lexemes are possible, we refer to 1,083 types of pause-café type compound nouns collected by the author from August 2010 to September 2017. The result of the analysis suggests that: 1) there are mainly two types of semantic relation between N1 and N2, namely “telic” and “affiliation”, and that 2) a significant productivity can be observed only when specific nouns (e.g. espace, pause, assurance) is present in N1 slot (i.e. [espace + N2], [pause + N2], [assurance + N2], respectively). Concerning the second remark, the result also suggests that most of such nouns concern with so-called “underspecified nouns (noms sous-spécialisés : cf. Legallois 2006)”, which does not indicate a concrete object by themselves (e.g. espace, rayon, coin, accès, pôle), but which have a function of “naming” a certain spatial unit which enable to create a sub-category network (e.g. espace laverie beside espace pressing).

In the Chapter 5, we focus on the nature and productivity of N2 of pause-café type construction. The result shows that there are relatively numerous nouns indicating a type or group of people (e.g. enfant,
étudiant) in N2 slot. As for the syntactic characteristics of N2, a compatibility with relational adjectives (AdjR) is suggested. Since there are many cases where adjectival form is absent (78%), and that even if there is a formally compatible AdjR, its function is not always relational, we point out that the role of this type of N2 is to complement the function of AdjR which cannot be fully applicable for relational compounds. We illustrate this complementary relationship of multiple models as a sub-schema network.

Chapter 6 is dedicated for the examination of [N1 + spécial + N2] construction. Our analysis of 299 examples of this construction (collected by the author) suggests that spécial in this construction has the same function of à in couteau à beurre etc., rather than a simple qualificative adjective. Since spécial functions as a connector, we consider that [N1 + spécial + N2] is not a sub-type of pause-café type construction in which the connector is absent, but the construction which is compatible with [N1 + spécial + N2]. However, the collected examples indicate that the lexical meaning of spécial is still present in the construction. In this case as well, we estimate that the CM can be an appropriate solution: the idea of schema explains how a lexical element shifts to a grammatical element retaining nevertheless its original lexical meaning. In the end of chapter, we summarize the sub-schema network for French relational compound nouns, in which there are three sub-schemas without connectors and another three sub-schemas with connector.

Throughout the discussions, we argue that syntactically deviant constructions in French, such as pause-café and [N1 + spécial + N2], can be formed productively by a word-formation model as a lexical information. Locating within the spectrum consisted of idiomaticity (i.e. lexicon-syntax continuum) and productivity, these “lexicon-based” formations have influence on both lexicon and syntax.