Routines and Innovations in Novel Word Formation

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Speakers benefit from entrenched routines that allow them to access, combine, and interpret linguistic material with little cognitive effort. At the same time, they can use language creatively, e.g., by inventing novel words. Such lexical creativity spans a continuum from F(ixed)-creativity to E(xtending)-creativity, cf. [1], i.e., from routine-based, productive pattern application (e.g., compounding, which is highly productive in German [2, 3]) to more exceptional and formally innovative departures from established routines (e.g., blending, which is only marginally productive in German [4, 5]). To explore the range of creativity in word formation, we developed a new elicitation paradigm – the Prompted Word Creation Task (PWCT). The PWCT tests (i) which word-formation strategies speakers spontaneously recruit when naming novel hybrid entities, (ii) which strategy they prefer, and (iii) how consistently they apply that strategy. Participants are asked to imagine that they had a dream in which they saw hybrids composed of two animals and/or objects and now want to tell a friend about them. In experimental trials (Figure 1), participants see two words and then provide a name for the imagined dream figure that is composed of those two entities. The instruction does not mention specific word-formation types, nor does it explicitly encourage creative solutions. **Method**: We used the PWCT with 16 German nouns (Figure 2), combined into 240 pairs and distributed across lists. Each participant (N = 61) gave written responses to 40 experimental item pairs and 8 distractor pairs. **Results**: Surprisingly, participants produced compounds and blends to a similar extent (1149 vs. 1197). Responses show linguistic creativity at different levels: (i) conceptually, by replacing one or both of the input words by semantically related alternatives, e.g., *Teichasi* (lit. 'pond slob') in response to *Ente* 'duck' and *Taube* 'pigeon', and (ii) formally, by blending, e.g., *Adlente* for *Adler* 'eagle' and *Ente* 'duck', and occasionally at both levels simultaneously as in *Kehrbel* for *Besen* 'broom' and *Zwiebel* 'onion'. Interestingly, most individuals were highly consistent in their choice of word-formation strategy (Figure 3). **Discussion**: (i) The PWCT has proven to be an effective paradigm to evoke F-creativity as well as E-creativity. (ii) Though the production of blends may have been stimulated by the imagined hybrid entities, their high number is still unexpected, given the low productivity in German and the low number of blends previously found with hybrid pictures [6]. (iii) The observed split into "compounders" and "blenders" raises questions with regard to the linguistic processes underlying creative word formation and individual differences in cognition and personality, which we address in a follow-up.

References

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Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Prompted Word Creation Task

Birds		Mammals		Food		Tools	
Ente (F)	`duck‘	Katze (F)	`cat‘	Kirsche (F)	`cherry‘	Harke (F)	`rake‘
Taube (F)	`pigeon‘	Ziege (F)	`goat‘	Zwiebel (F)	`onion‘	Schere (F)	`scissors‘
Adler (M)	`eagle‘	Hase (M)	`rabbit‘	Apfel (M)	`apple‘	Besen (M)	`broom‘
Rabe (M)	`raven‘	Igel (M)	`hedgehog‘	Kürbis (M)	`pumpkin‘	Spaten (M)	`spade‘

Figure 2: All 16 items from four categories resulting in ordered 240 item pairs (48 within-category pairs, e.g., *Ente* – *Taube*, and 192 between-category pairs, e.g., *Ente* – *Katze*)

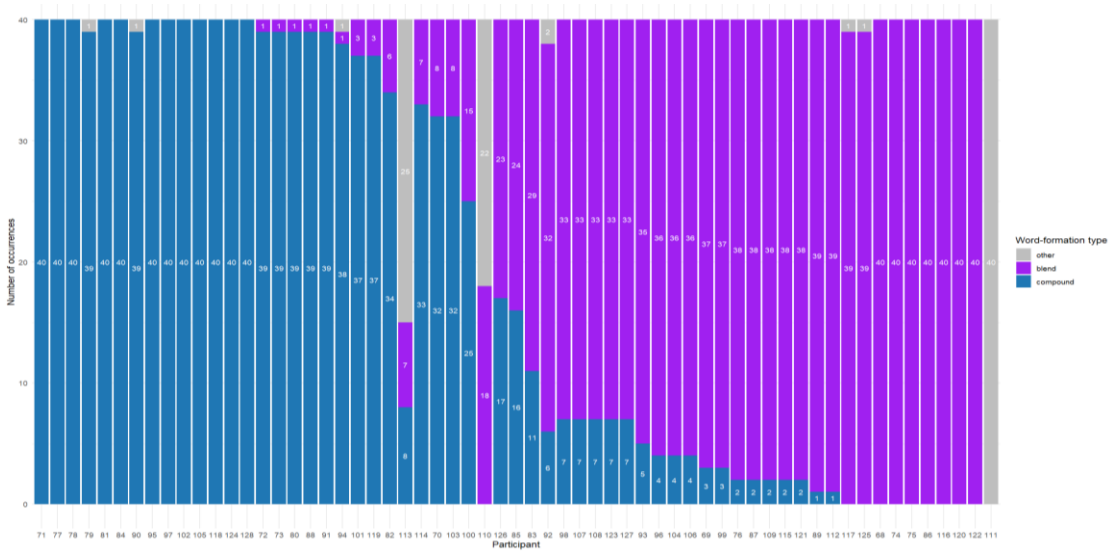

Figure 3: Distribution of word-formation types per participant. Digits indicate the number of response per word-formation type.

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