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Compound formation in Danish children's language acquisition

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The development of compounding is particularly interesting in a language where compounding is very productive in word formation, and where compounds have a rather high frequency of occurrence. Exactly such a language is Danish.

In most Danish compounds the final part constitutes the main category (head), and the initial part specifies this main category (modifier). This specification is a kind of attribution as in for example *saltvand* 'salt water' and *fuldmåne* 'full moon'. *Saltvand* is *vand* 'water' but it is specified by the initial part *salt* 'salt' and through this specification the compound refers to a limited category of water. The relationship may superficially resemble an adjective modifier specification of a noun as head, for example *salt vand* 'salty water' but in Danish there are significant semantic as well as prosodic differences (Basbøll 2005, Hansen & Heltoft 2011). More complex compounds in Danish can have several roots, and there can also be derivatives leading to even more complex structures.

This study examines the emergence and development of compounding in Danish children's language production as well as in the language input from their parents – both lexically, semantically, prosodically and morphosyntactically.

On the basis of earlier research in child language acquisition (e.g. Bleses et al. 2008; Kjærbaek et al. 2014) we predict that:

1. the Danish children produce their first compound before their second birthday
2. the first and most frequent compounds are prototypical noun-noun compounds
3. adjective-noun and verb-noun compounds appear later and are less frequent
4. derived (synthetic) compounds appear late

We shall furthermore discuss the role of lexicalization in Danish compounds.

The predictions will be examined on the basis of empirical data consisting of a corpus of longitudinal, naturalistic, spontaneous speech from four monolingual Danish speaking children in the ages of 0;10-3;11 – and their parents.

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