

Classifying modifiers in common names

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Abstract

Complex common names such as *Indian elephant* or *green tea* denote a certain type of entity, viz. *kinds*. Moreover, those kinds are always subkinds of the kind denoted by their head noun. Establishing such subkinds is essentially the task of classifying modifiers that are a defining trait of endocentrically structured complex common names. Examining complex common names of different lexico-syntactic types (NN compounds, N+N syntagmas, NP/PP syntagmas, A+N syntagmas) and from different languages (particularly English, German and French) it can be shown that complex common names are subject to language-independent formal and semantic constraints. In particular, complex common names qualify as name-like expressions in that they tend to be deficient in terms of formal complexity and semantic compositionality.

1 Introduction

In this paper we argue that languages such as English, German or French avail themselves of a certain type of expression which we call ‘common name’.¹ Common names are neither singular terms nor general descriptions but establish a distinct type of general term that is used to refer to ‘kinds’. Focussing on complex common names that are instances of endocentric structures we claim that complex common names of this type are built up of a head and a so-called classifying modifier, a special type of modifier to be distinguished from qualifying and referential modifiers. In contrast to these types of modifiers the task of classifying modifiers is essentially the creation of subkinds. To support this claim, we draw mainly on data from English, French and German, and in certain cases also from Polish, Hungarian and Dutch.

The paper is structured as follows: In section 2 we define the notion of a common name as a special type of general term by setting it apart from singular terms on the one hand and other types of general terms (so-called general descriptions) on the other. Common names are names of kinds, complex common names including classifying modifiers are names of subkinds. Section 3 addresses the question of how

complex common names are formally expressed in the languages under discussion. Restricting ourselves to endocentric structures, four different types of complex common names are presented: endocentric compounds, N+N syntagmas, N+NP/PP syntagmas and A+N syntagmas. Section 4 concerns itself with the semantic conditions which a classifying modifier has to meet. We claim that there are exactly two necessary conditions: conceptual restriction and non-referentiality. As for non-referentiality, we argue that it presupposes context independence but cannot be defined in terms of it. As for conceptual restriction it cannot be a sufficient condition since non-classifying modifiers may function restrictively too. Sections 5 and 6 deal with the question of how complex common names qualify as name-like expressions in terms of form (section 5) and meaning (section 6). It can be shown that the syntactic and semantic complexity (compositionality) of complex common names is often reduced in comparison to corresponding general descriptions. Since prototypical names are neither syntactically nor semantically complex, it is argued that the less complex an expression is in terms of syntax and semantics the more name-like it is. Section 7, finally, gives a summary of the relevant conditions which a complex general term must fulfil in order to qualify as a common name.

2 Singular terms, general terms, general descriptions and common names

Before looking at complex common names in any more detail it is necessary to set them apart from singular terms on the one hand and other types of general terms on the other. The notion of a singular term includes proper names (*Socrates*) and definite descriptions (*the man with the long beard*). Both are used to refer to individuals or – in the case of plural expressions – sets of individuals (*the children playing in the garden*), but they cannot be used predicatively (cf. Quine 1960: §25). General terms denote properties or n-ary functions and can be characteristically used in predicative function. They divide in two major types of expression: first those that cannot be used as (heads of) referring expressions (e.g. verbs and adjectives), and second those that can. The latter in turn fall into two subtypes: general descriptions (cf. (1a)) and common names (cf. (1b)).

- (1) (a) *students from abroad, elephants living in Africa*
 (b) *tiger, hammer, lawn mower, domestic animal, Indian elephant*

With general descriptions and common names it is important to distinguish a generic use from a non-generic use. Examples of the non-generic use are given in (2), those of a generic use are found in (3).

- (2) (a) *The people sitting next to me bother me.*
 (b) *The tiger has eaten my steak.*
- (3) (a) *People eating crackers in the subway bother me.*
 (b) *The tiger will become extinct soon.*
 (c) *The Indian elephant has five toenails on the front foot whereas the African elephant normally has four.*

Importantly, it is with respect to the generic use that common names and general descriptions behave differently in terms of semantics. In general, two basic types of generic sentences are to be distinguished (Krifka *et al.* 1995: 2; Krifka 2004: 111): characterizing sentences (generalizing over objects or situations) (cf. (3a)) and sentences with a kind-referring NP selected by predicate verbs like *to be/become extinct*, *to be widespread*, *invent* or *make popular* (cf. (3b)). There are also mixed cases like (3c), where a kind-referring NP co-occurs with a predicate verb that characterizes individual objects belonging to the kind ('specimens' of the kind).

In English as well as in German, singular NPs with a definite article are used when ascribing properties to kinds, whereas in characterizing generic statements bare plural NPs are preferred. There is an important asymmetry between these two types of expressions: Bare plurals can be arbitrarily complex, from simple common nouns up to complex nominals containing several modifiers like the ones in (4a)–(4c).

- (4) (a) *Lions without teeth are vegetarian.* (Krifka *et al.* 1995: 70)
 (b) *Green bottles have narrow necks.* (Krifka *et al.* 1995: 11)
 (c) *Old ex-basketball-players that drink ale (are a nuisance).* (cf. Carlson (1980: 197))

The occurrence of definite singular expressions, corresponding to the complex nominals in (4a)–(4c) in a kind-denoting reading or in a 'mixed' statement, is highly restricted, though:

- (5) (a) **The lion without teeth is nearly extinct.*
 (b) ?*The green bottle has a narrow neck.*
 (c) **The old ex-basketball-player that drinks ale (is a nuisance).*

Thus, ascribing a kind property presupposes the existence of more than just a random set of objects that fall under a nominal description. Rather it presupposes 'a stable generalization' (Carlson 1991: 391), 'a class of objects that display a sufficiently regular behavior' (Chierchia 1998: 348) or in short an 'established kind' (cf. Krifka 2004: 129; Krifka *et al.* 1995: 70). Those established kinds can be referred to in a similar way as individuals are referred to. They can even be considered as individuals of a certain sort. The simple or complex nominals in examples (3b,c) denote such established kinds and are therefore considered to be common names. In contrast, the complex nominals in (3a), (4a)–(4c) are general descriptions, since they do not refer to established kinds.²

As a diagnostic test for common names we can check whether a nominal expression has a possible use in the context of a kind-selecting predicate. Since this test does not build on the presence of any formal features it can easily be applied crosslinguistically, e.g. in languages without a grammaticalized definite article such as Polish, cf. (6).

- (6) *Słoń indyjski niedługo wymrze.*
 elephant Indian soon die out
 'The Indian elephant will soon die out.'

Another test applies to languages which have a definite article, such as English, French, German and Hungarian, and says that a nominal expression is a common name if it can occur as the head of a singular NP with a definite article in a generic sentence (cf. (3b,c)). Results from these two tests can be further corroborated by the ‘so-called’-test (Carlson 1977: 442):

- (7) (a) *Cardinals are so-called because of their colour.*
 (b) *Coke is so called because it once contained cocaine.*

Note that also complex common names pass the ‘so-called’-test (cf. (8)), whereas general descriptions do not. With general descriptions, any application of the test yields a tautology (cf. (9)).

- (8) *Indian elephants are so called because their largest population is found in India.*

- (9) (a) *Big elephants are so-called because they are big.*
 (b) *Russian immigrants are so called because they are from Russia.*

3 Types of complex common names

Common names are either morphologically simple or complex. Complex common names in turn divide into two semantic types. First, there are common names expressing a concept that is not a subconcept of any concept expressed by one of its parts. This type comprises derivations and exocentric compounds. For instance, the concept expressed by the French derivation *pommier* (‘apple tree’) is not a subconcept of the concept expressed by its lexical base *pomme* (‘apple’). Similarly, the French exocentric compound *ouvre-bouteille* expresses a concept (‘bottle opener’) that is neither a subconcept of the concept ‘open’ nor a subconcept of the concept ‘bottle’. In what follows this type of complex common name will be disregarded throughout.

Second, there are common names expressing a concept that is a subconcept of a concept expressed by one of its parts. Such subconcepts are created by conceptual restriction, with the role of the conceptual restrictor played by a modifying constituent. We will call such modifiers ‘classifying modifiers’, in accordance with proposals found in the typological literature (cf., e.g., Rijkhoff (2004)).

In the languages under investigation here, this type of common name is formally manifested in four different ways: endocentric compounds (cf. (10)), N+N syntagmas (cf. (11)), N+NP/PP syntagmas (cf. (12)) and A+N syntagmas (cf. (13)). N+N syntagmas are either mere juxtapositions of two Ns (cf. (11a)) or built up of a ‘genitival’ modifier and a head noun (‘descriptive genitives’, cf. (11b)).³ We rely on the pertinent literature in assuming that the distinction between NN compounds and syntactic N+N juxtapositions in English can be established in principle (cf. Jespersen 1956: 85–86; Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 448–451; Rosenbach 2006: 82–89). That does not exclude the possibility that the distinction may be blurred and difficult to draw (cf. Giegerich (2004)).

- (10) ENG *apple tree*, GER *Apfelbaum*, FRE *mode-homme* ‘men’s fashion’, HUN *almafa* ‘apple tree’, POL *zegarmistrz* ‘watchmaker’

- (11) (a) ENG *Bush administration*, LAT (scientific) *canis lupus* ‘wolf’
 (b) ENG *women’s magazine*, *bird’s nest*
- (12) (a) GER *Beruf des Lehrers* ‘profession of the teacher’, POL *kierowca samochodu* (driver car.GEN) ‘car driver’, *color włosów* (colour hair.GEN.PL) ‘hair colour’, *dzień pracy* (day work.GEN) ‘working day’, HUN *állatok világa* (animal.PL world.POSS) ‘animal kingdom’
 (b) ENG *weapons of mass destruction*, *bird of prey*, FRE *chemise de nuit* ‘night gown’, *homme de la rue* ‘man in the street’, POL *kropka do nosa* (drop.PL for nose.GEN.SG) ‘nose drops’, *książka dla dzieci* (book for child.GEN.PL) ‘children’s book’, NLD *man van God* ‘priest’
- (13) ENG *urban transit*, *cellular division*, *musical critic*, FRE *taches solaires* ‘sunspots’, *intervention militaire* ‘military intervention’, *chat domestique* ‘domestic cat’, GER *schwarzer Tee* ‘black tea’, *nukleare Waffen* ‘nuclear weapons’, POL *hala dworcowa* ‘station concourse’, *sok jabłkowy* ‘apple juice’, *białe wino* ‘white wine’, HUN *kerti bútor* ‘garden furniture’, *nyári szünet* ‘summer holidays’, *szülői ház* ‘parents’ house⁴

It should be noted that the four patterns of modification are not equally (well) represented in the languages under discussion. Thus N+N syntagmas are found in English only and the creation of NN compounds is highly limited in French and Polish (cf. Rohrer 1977; Engel *et al.* 1999: 475). Furthermore, within a particular language, the choice among different types of common names may be subject to additional semantic constraints. For example, Rosenbach (2006) argues that in English the modifier of a ‘descriptive genitive’ commonly denotes an animated entity, whereas that of a N+N juxtaposition does not.⁵

4 Semantic constraints on classifying modifiers

The question to be asked now is by what features a modifier qualifies as a classifying one. First of all, we can identify two basic requirements a classifying modifier has to meet: conceptual restriction and context-independence. As for the first requirement, we have seen that a classifying modifier has to function as a conceptual restrictor since the concept expressed by a complex common name is always a subconcept of the concept expressed by the head noun. As for the second requirement, viz. context-independence, we have to take care that such a modifier does not introduce any context-dependent information which would make the use of the entire general term context-dependent too. Such context-dependent information is usually introduced by non-generically referring modifiers, i.e. modifiers referring to specific entities in the universe of discourse (see below).

We start out with endocentric compounds and N+N syntagmas. In both cases the modifying part restricts the concept expressed by the head noun. It is never referential and thus should not be able to introduce context-dependent information.⁶ As for NP/PP modifiers, it should be noted that they may be either restrictive or non-restrictive. Since we will discuss the issue of (non-)restrictiveness in more detail when dealing

with adjectival modifiers, non-restrictive NP/PP-modifiers will be disregarded in what follows. The relevant question in connection with this type of modifier is rather whether it may introduce any kind of context-dependent information. Recall that NPs/PPs are prototypical referential expressions, referring to (sets of) individuals in time and space in their non-generic use. When functioning as modifiers the concept expressed by the head noun is restricted by being tied to such (sets of) individuals and thus becomes context-bound. For instance, in *the book on that table* the concept 'book' expressed by the head noun is related to a particular table, which is either deictically or anaphorically accessible in the utterance situation. Since the entire general term *book on that table* includes context-dependent information, it cannot qualify as a common name.

To conclude, NP/PP-modifiers must not refer to specific entities in order to serve as classifying modifiers. This is supported by the fact that prototypical classifying NPs/PPs cannot be pronominalized, as can be seen from the two examples given below. (14) is an example from French, where classifying PPs are for the most part defective in that the NP they include lacks an article. Such PPs can only function as classifying modifiers; they are never referential as they always fail the pronominalization test.

- (14) **le panneau de réclame_i que_i j'ai vue hier* (Wandruszka 1972: 140)
 'the advertisement_i sign which_i I saw yesterday'

Note that the PP to be pronominalized in (14) would have to refer to a particular entity, since only particular entities can be perceived at a particular time. Interestingly, as the examples from German in (15) demonstrate, even NPs/PPs referring generically are excluded from the classifying function. To begin with, (15a) shows that according to the pronominalization test generic NPs must indeed be regarded as referential expressions. But then the corresponding NP-modifiers in (15b) can not be considered as referring generically since they fail that test.

- (15) (a) *Der Lehrer_i ist heutzutage nicht mehr das, was er_i früher einmal war. Seine_i Rolle hat sich in den letzten 50 Jahren stark verändert.*
 'Nowadays the teacher is no longer what he once used to be. His role has changed considerably over the last 50 years.'
 (b) **Dann sprachen wir über die Rolle des Lehrers_i in der Gesellschaft. Sein_i Beruf hat sich in den letzten 50 Jahren stark verändert.*
 'We then spoke about the role of the teacher in society. His profession changed considerably over the last 50 years.'

In conclusion, context-independence, one of the two requirements we started out with, turns out to be too weak a requirement a classifying modifier has to meet. This is because generically referring NPs/PPs can be considered to be context-independent too, as they do not introduce context-specific information. Therefore, it is non-referentiality rather than context-independence that should be regarded as the relevant requirement.

Turning now to A+N syntagmas we will focus on the second requirement, that of conceptual restriction, thereby taking for granted that adjectival modifiers are not referential in principle. Adjectival modifiers are commonly divided into qualifying and

classifying ones. A qualifying adjective – in its attributive use – is usually taken to denote a concept that is applied to the concept denoted by the head noun. Considering, for instance, the syntagma *red scarf* we would say that the concept ‘red’ applies to the concept ‘scarf’ yielding the concept ‘red scarf’. In contrast, a classifying adjective denotes a concept that is put into relation to the concept denoted by the head noun. For example, in *musical critic* the concept ‘music’ is related to the concept ‘critic’ giving rise to the concept ‘musical critic’. The nature of the relevant relation is unspecific and subject to restrictions relating to encyclopaedic and language-specific knowledge. It is therefore exactly the same type of semantic relation that usually holds within (root) compounds.

It should be noted that restrictiveness is not a uniformly defined notion. In most of the pertinent literature, either of the two following definitions is offered: (i) A modifier functions restrictively with respect to its head if the extension of the entire modifier-head syntagma is a true subset of the extension of the head (cf., e.g., Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 554). (ii) A modifier functions restrictively with respect to its head if the information provided by the modifier is necessary to identify the referent of the modifier-head syntagma (cf., e.g., Quirk *et al.* (1985: 1239)).

Note that both notions do not necessarily coincide. According to the first definition, restrictiveness is essentially a semantic notion, according to the second one it is obviously a pragmatic one. Consider example (16):

- (16) *There was a red shirt and a blue shirt in the wardrobe. I chose the *(blue) shirt for dinner. When I arrived at the restaurant I detected an ugly stain on my (blue) shirt.*

In the first and the second sentence both colour adjectives have a restrictive reading both in terms of semantics and pragmatics. In each case a subset of the set of shirts is specified and the information provided in this way is necessary for the hearer to identify the right shirt. It is essentially because of its pragmatically restrictive function that the adjective cannot be omitted in the second sentence. This is different in the third sentence, where the hearer could identify the correct (blue) shirt even if the adjective was missing. Hence, from a pragmatic point of view, the adjective no longer functions restrictively here. However, it is still semantically restrictive, since it still serves to determine a subset of the set of shirts.

Now, qualifying adjectives may be semantically restrictive or non-restrictive. Commonly they are restrictive as in (16). Non-restrictive uses may occur with proper names, because the concept expressed by a proper name won’t be restricted by an adjectival modifier in examples like (17a). In such cases the meaning of the syntagma can best be rendered with a non-restrictive relative clause, a phrase like *stupid John* simply meaning ‘John, who is stupid.’ Another case in point are pleonastic expressions like the ones in (17b). Since the concept expressed by the adjective is already included within the concept expressed by the head noun, the adjectival modifier cannot possibly fulfil any restrictive function.

- (17) (a) *stupid John*, FRE *le petit Nicolas* ‘the little Nicolas’
 (b) *grey elephant, round circle, unmarried bachelor*

Classifying adjectives, in contrast, turn out to be restrictive throughout, the exception being geographical adjectives, which will be discussed below. Usually, the combination of a classifying adjective with a proper name leads to ungrammaticality (cf. (18a)) or forces it to assume a qualitative meaning (cf. (18b)). Note that (18b) cannot mean ‘Rome, the city’, which would be an appropriate reading if *urban* retained its classifying meaning and modified non-restrictively.

- (18) (a) ENG **presidential Mark* ‘Mark, the president’ (intended meaning)
 (b) GER *urbanes Rom* ‘urban Rome’

As for geographical adjectives, two types of construction need to be distinguished. First, those in (19), where the adjective may be either restrictive (cf. (19a)) or non-restrictive (cf. (19b)).⁷

- (19) (a) *Indian government* ‘government of India’, *Russian immigrants* ‘immigrants from Russia’, *French journey* ‘journey to France’
 (b) *French Burgundy* ‘Burgundy from France’, *Italian Chianti* ‘Chianti from Italy’, *Scottish kilt* ‘kilt from Scotland’

Importantly, syntagmas of this type do not qualify as common names even when the adjective functions restrictively as in (19a). This is because none of them denotes a subkind – an Indian government is not a special kind of government etc. – and they also fail the ‘so-called test’ (cf. (9b)). The adjectival modifier, though not being referential, relates to an individual. In this way its function is similar to that of a (non-generic) referential modifier, as can be seen from the corresponding paraphrases. In both cases a kind-denoting head is modified by being put into relation to an individual. Apparently, no subkind can be created in this way, since relations to individuals are just a matter of empirical and thus contingent circumstances.

Second, there are A+N syntagmas involving geographical adjectives that do denote subkinds (cf. (20)). Here the adjective functions in a more classifying way and gives rise to restrictive readings only.

- (20) *Indian elephant*, *French fries*, *German shepherd*, *American pie*

Summing up, we see that classifying adjectives always meet the requirement of restrictiveness. On the other hand, restrictiveness can only be a necessary condition for defining classifying modifiers, since non-classifying modifiers, including qualifying adjectives, may act restrictively, too.

5 Common names: formal characteristics

The next question to be addressed is in what sense and to what degree common names qualify as name-like expressions in terms of form. More precisely, the issue to be dealt with concerns syntactic complexity. Since prototypical names are clearly not syntactically complex, it holds that the less complex a general term is, the more name-like it is in terms of form. Crosslinguistically, this is also reflected in the fact that syntactically complex common names tend to be syntactically deficient in one way or

other. We first look at names including NP/PP-modifiers and then proceed to those having classifying adjectives.

As for NP/PP-modifiers a well-known case in point are N+PP syntagmas without a PP-internal article, as found e.g. in French (cf. (21)).

- (21) (a) *journal du matin* ‘morning paper’, *homme de la rue* ‘man in the street’
 (b) *chemise de nuit* ‘night gown’, *château d’eau* ‘moated castle’, *voiture de sport* ‘sports car’, *moulin à vent* ‘wind-mill’

As (21a) shows (classifying) PP-modifiers in French can well be syntactically well-formed while nevertheless being non-referential. However, in classifying function it is more common for a PP-modifier in French to lack an internal article, as indicated in (21b). A similar situation holds for German, cf. (22).

- (22) (a) *Mann von der Straße* ‘man in the street’
 (b) *Zimmer mit Aussicht* ‘room with a view’, *Urlaub ohne Kind* ‘holidays without children’, *Abwesenheit wegen Unfall* ‘absence due to accident’
 (c) *Obst vom Markt* ‘fruit from the market’, *Steak vom Rind* ‘beef steak’, *Haus am See* ‘house by the lake’

(22a) is the German counterpart of (21a). Here we find a syntactically complete PP-modifier which would usually function in a referential way. Moreover, even PPs including NPs which are syntactically incomplete in that they would otherwise require an article are possible in German (cf. (22b)). Another case demonstrating reduction in terms of form are PPs exhibiting so-called *Verschmelzungen* (‘fusions’) in German. In cases like these the definite article appears in some way to be absorbed by the relevant preposition (e.g. *vom* ← *von dem*, *am* ← *an dem*). Note that the use of such a *Verschmelzung* is mandatory when the PPs is to function as a classifying modifier.

As for (classifying) adjectives, instances of reduction in terms of form can even be found here. Thus Booij (2002: 47) points out that in Dutch A+N syntagmas such as those in (23) a classifying adjective may omit its inflectional ending. Importantly, though the resulting phrases appear to resemble compounds, they retain their phrasal stress pattern, with primary stress on the second component.

- (23) (a) *een/de controlerend geneesheer*
 ‘medical officer’
 (b) *een/de toegepast taalkundige*
 ‘applied linguist’

Another case of reduction with respect to constructions involving classifying adjectives can be found in German. Here we observe that even derived adjectives (ending in *-al*, *-il*, *-an* or *-ar*) may enter into AN compounds as classifying modifiers (cf. (24)), where they must occur in their uninflected form. Note that in German derived adjectives are otherwise barred from entering into compounds. As (24a) shows, there are cases where both a compound and a corresponding A+N phrase exist, though the usual case is that one construction blocks the creation of the other, cf. (24b).

- (24) (a) *nukleare Waffen* vs. *Nuklearwaffen* ‘nuclear weapons’, *soziale Struktur* vs. *Sozialstruktur* ‘social structure’
 (b) *soziale Marktwirtschaft* ‘social market economy’ vs. **Sozialmarktwirtschaft*, *medialer Wandel* vs. **Medialwandel* ‘media change’

6 Common names: semantic characteristics

Let us now look at the semantic characteristics of common names and ask in what sense and to what degree they qualify as name-like expressions in terms of meaning. This question essentially concerns matters of compositionality. Now, simple names, which can arguably be considered as prototypical common names, are trivially non-compositional. In this sense, it holds that the less compositional the meaning of a general term is, the more name-like it is. Indeed, it can be observed that syntactically complex common names tend to be deficient in terms of compositionality.

However, this kind of deficiency is not a necessary condition, since syntagmas where the semantic relation between head and modifier is highly specific usually do have a compositional meaning. A case in point are N+PP syntagmas where the PP is headed by a ‘semantic’ preposition, i.e. a preposition having a conceptual content. Examples from French, German and Polish are given in (25):

- (25) (a) FRE *chambre avec douche* ‘room with shower’, *cuisine sans fenêtre* ‘kitchen without a window’, *voyage par avion* ‘flight’, *périodes hors saison* ‘low seasons’
 (b) GER *Zimmer mit Aussicht* ‘room with a view’, *Ferien auf dem Bauernhof* ‘holidays on a farm’
 (c) POL *książka dla dzieci* ‘children’s book’, *salatka z drobiu* ‘chicken salad’

To begin with, the question arises why these terms should be considered to be common names in the first place.⁸ One piece of evidence showing that they are not ‘ordinary’ syntactic phrases is revealed by the non-referentiality of the PP-modifier. Consider examples (26) and (27) from German:

- (26) (a) *Wir besuchen jetzt den Palast [des Kaisers]_i, der_i hier von 613 bis 622 lebte.*
 ‘We are now visiting the palace of the emperor, who lived here from 613 to 622.’
 (b) *Wir besuchen jetzt den Palast [des Kaisers]_i. Er_i lebte hier von 613 bis 622.*
 ‘We are now visiting the palace of the emperor, who lived here from 613 to 622.’
 (c) *Wir besuchen jetzt den Palast [des Kaisers]_i. Er_i wurde bekanntlich im alten China wie ein Gott verehrt.*
 ‘We are now visiting the palace of the emperor. As is well-known, he was idolized like a god in Ancient China.’
- (27) (a) *Wir machen Ferien auf [dem Bauernhof]_i, den_i wir schon seit Jahren besuchen.*
 ‘We take a holiday on the farm, which we have been visiting for years.’
 (b) *Wir machen Ferien auf [dem Bauernhof]_i.⁹ Wir besuchen ihn_i schon seit Jahren.*
 ‘We take a holiday on the farm. We have been visiting it for years.’
 (c) *Wir machen Ferien auf [dem Bauernhof]_i. *Er_i hat für uns mehr Charme als die Berge.*
 ‘We take a holiday on the farm. For us it has more charm than the mountains.’

In all these examples pronominalization concerns an embedded NP/PP. It should be noted that for reasons relating to information structure embedded phrases generally appear to be subject to stronger constraints as regards pronominalization than immediate constituents of a clause. Nevertheless, despite their structural similarity there are remarkable differences in acceptability between the examples in (26) and in (27). In (26a,b) the preferred reading of the modifier is non-generic. Since it can be pronominalized – by a relative pronoun (cf. (26a)) or by a personal pronoun (cf. (26b)) – it qualifies as referential. In (26c) the preferred reading of the modifier is generic: the sentence is about the Chinese emperor as a kind, not about any particular emperor. Again, pronominalization by a personal pronoun is possible, indicating the referentiality of the generically interpreted modifier.

In (27a), the restrictive relative clause forces the definite NP-modifier to assume a non-generic referential reading. Without the relative clause it could no longer be interpreted as (non-generically) referring to any particular individual. This is apparently due to the presupposition of familiarity and/or contextual uniqueness induced by the definite article. Consequently, an anaphoric resumption by a personal pronoun is not fully acceptable (cf. (27b)).

In (27c) – just as in (26c) – the context again suggests a generic reading of the modifier: It is the farm as such (as a kind) that is said to be attractive. However in contrast to (26c) pronominalization does not work here, showing that a generic and thus referential reading is excluded. The modifier must therefore be a classifying one.

Interestingly, these observations indicate a specific restriction on modification patterns. While NP/PP-modifiers may be ambiguous in the way indicated in (28a) and (28b), an ambiguity as shown in (28c) does not seem to exist.

- (28) (a) non-generic referential vs. generic referential (cf. (26))
 (b) non-generic referential vs. classifying non-referential (cf. (27))
 (c) generic referential vs. classifying non-referential

This suggests that classifying NP/PP-modifiers can be considered as grammaticalized and therefore non-referential versions of their generic counterparts. Note also that in more idiomatic expressions including a classifying PP-modifier like GER *Mann von der Straße*, FRE *homme de la rue* or ENG *man in the street* even a non-generic referential reading is ruled out. Restrictive relative clauses that would force such an interpretation (cf. (27a)) are therefore not acceptable:

- (29) **der Mann von der Straße, die, hier abzweigt*
 ‘the man in the street that branches off here’

Further evidence that the complex syntagmas in question should be classified as common names concerns modification. For instance, in French a complex common name containing a (postnominal) PP-modifier can be further modified by an (postnominal) adjective. This shows that the common name is parsed like a simple noun since otherwise a postnominal adjectival attribute would have to precede the PP-modifier (cf. (30a)). Similarly, in (30b), an example from Polish, the same type of PP-modifier appears to occur twice within the same noun phrase, contrary to what is expected from Polish phrase structure rules.

- (30) (a) FRE [_N *voyage par avion*] *le plus économique / commercial* ‘cheapest / commercial flight’
 (b) POL [_N *salatka z drobiu*] *z majonezem* ‘chicken salad with mayonnaise’

As for N+PP syntagmas in which the PP modifier contains a grammaticalized, semantically bleached preposition the semantic relation between head and modifier is often unambiguous. The same holds for N+NP syntagmas with the NP not being marked by a semantic case, A+N syntagmas as well as NN compounds (cf. (31)). Such expressions are all instances of minimal compositionality.

- (31) (a) FRE *chemin de fer* ‘railway’, *boîte à lettre* ‘letter box’, GER *Mann von Welt* ‘man of the world’
 (b) POL *sok jabłkowy* ‘apple juice’, *wino białe* ‘white wine’, GER *Apfelsaft* ‘apple juice’, *Weißwein* ‘white wine’, HUN *almalé* ‘apple juice’, *fehérbor* ‘white wine’

Such common names still exemplify compositionality, if only to a low degree. First, two distinct concepts are related to one another, and second the semantic computation follows the head-modifier asymmetry, which means that the kind denoted by the whole structure is always a subkind of the one denoted by its head. However, it can be argued that reduced compositionality (in the relevant sense) even has a functional point. The objective is to define a certain subkind, which can be achieved in an optimal way when it is identified with as little descriptive effort as possible. This is because the less descriptive detail the identification of the subkind includes the less it resembles a general description and the less it resembles a general description the more name-like it is. Note that complex common names which appear to be highly compositional like POL *książka dla dzieci* (‘children’s book’) are systematically ambiguous between a reading as a common name and one as a general description. Polish does not have articles which is why classifying NPs/PPs are not formally distinct from referential ones.

The classifying modifier within a complex common name serves more as a label than as a descriptive device, since its main purpose is to subcategorize a kind into subkinds. Note that the descriptive content of such labels may even become irrelevant in terms of truth function: While the assertion that red wine is red is true, the corresponding assertion that white wine is white is plainly wrong.

7 Conclusion: towards a definition of common names

We have identified two sufficient conditions and three necessary conditions which complex general terms must meet in order to qualify as common names. The two sufficient conditions are reduced syntactic complexity and reduced compositionality. General terms that exhibit these features always fall within the class of common names. But we have also seen that these are not necessary conditions because some general terms are perfectly well-formed complex syntactic expressions having a transparent compositional semantics but still must be treated as common names. As for the necessary conditions we found that complex common names must be parsed as expressions that lack internal syntactic structure, they do not contain referential modifiers and

they denote subkinds. We also found that the two latter conditions cannot be derived from notions which they apparently relate to: Non-referentiality cannot be derived from context-independence; and neither can subkind-formation be derived from restrictiveness.

Notes

1. We are grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for numerous helpful comments, as well as to the audience of the *Workshop on Naming Strategies* (Freie Universität Berlin, 6–7.10.2008), where a previous version of this paper was presented.
2. The idea of common nouns as names of (natural) kinds can at least be traced back to Geach (1970), Gupta (1980) and especially Carlsons' (1977, 1980) influential publications. Still there is an ongoing debate on the nature of generic sentences, generic NPs and their correlation with kinds. We follow here Krifka's approach (cf. Krifka *et al.* 1995, Krifka 2004).
3. Rosenbach (2006: 80) points out that the 'genitival' modifier of a 'descriptive genitive' may also include a modifier of its own (e.g., *old man's belly*). Crucially, such complex modifiers cannot have a determiner, which is why they do not qualify as full NPs. In what follows we disregard N+N syntagmas with such complex 'genitival' modifiers.
4. Following Bally (1965) derived classifying adjectives as in *cellular division* or *musical critic* are often called 'relational adjectives'. Relational adjectives classify the entities denoted by the head noun by relating them to the denotation of their nominal base (*cell*, *music* respectively). Underived classifying adjectives as in *schwarzer Tee* are not covered by the traditional concept of relational adjective.
5. Restrictions on classifying adjectives in English, German and French and their relation to alternative patterns of classifying modification are discussed in Gunkel & Zifonun (2008); a detailed and more fine-grained description of patterns of classifying modification in German and French is given in Gunkel & Zifonun (to appear).
6. For the non-referentiality of the modifier in both types of N+N syntagmas see Rosenbach (2006).
7. Interestingly, geographical adjectives cannot combine with personal proper names, cf. the ungrammaticality of **American Mark* with the intended meaning 'Mark, the American'.
8. Note however that such syntagmas usually fail the 'so-called'-test, since an application of the test would yield a tautology, cf. '*Haus am See* is so called because the house is located at a lake.' This is because the 'so-called'-test is essentially a test for compositionality and, as we have seen, the meaning of N+PP syntagmas having a semantic preposition can usually be computed in a regular compositional way.

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