IDIOMATIC ADJECTIVES AS AN ARGUMENT AGAINST HEAD-RAISING

Introduction

In a series of publications (Cecchetto & Donati 2015, 2010; Donati & Cecchetto 2011), a specific version of the raising analysis of headed relative clauses has been developed, namely the so-called HEAD-raising analysis. In the standard raising analysis (Vergnaud 1985; Bhatt 2002; Henderson 2007; Heycock 2014), the head noun corresponds to an NP that is moved out of the relative clause (cf. 1). According to the HEAD-raising analysis, the moved head noun is never a phrase but corresponds only to an N° (cf. 2). In order to deal with cases where the head noun overtly corresponds to something bigger than just an N°, for example when the noun is modified by an attributive adjective, the HEAD-raising analysis assumes that such adjectives are merged after N° is moved out of the relative clause (cf. 3).

(1) DP (2) DP (3) DP

D° NP D° NP D° NP
the man tNP the N° man tNP

The requirement for the adjective to reconstruct is particularly clear in 6b: dicke Bretter is an idiom chunk and cannot be moved out of the relative clause. This proposal entails that if the head noun is made up of an adjective plus a noun, only the noun but not the adjective reconstructs into the relative clause. This is so because the adjective at no stage of the derivation occupies a position inside the relative clause. The aim of this talk is to show that this prediction of the HEAD-raising analysis is incorrect. There are cases where an adjective contained in a head noun must reconstruct together with the noun. The relevant examples come from German and involve adjective-noun combinations with idiomatic readings. After the presentation of the relevant data in the next section, I argue in the final section that the theoretical modifications that are necessary internal to the HEAD-raising analysis to deal with such cases must be discarded on empirical grounds.

Idiomatic adjectives in German

German possesses adjective-noun combinations with idiomatic readings. 4a is a bare adjective-noun idiom, 4b involves an adjective-noun idiom that is part of an idiomatic VP.

(4) a. kalter Kaffee ['kafe] b. dicke Bretter bohren
cold coffee thick blanks drill
‘old and uninteresting information’ ‘to deal with a serious issue’

The idiomatic meaning crucially depends on the adjective, the noun, and the verb: replacing either with a synonymous lexical item or leaving one out results in the loss of the idiomatic reading (cf. 5).

(5) a. kalter Kaffee [ka'fe:] b. feste Bretter bohren c. dicke Bretter kühlervon Kaffee [kafe:] dicke Holzleisten bohren
‘cold coffee’ ‘thick blanks’
‘kühler Kaffee’ ‘to drill thick blanks’
‘cold coffee’ ‘*serious issue’

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As for 5a, German possesses two words for coffee that are pronounced differently, namely ['kafe] and [ka'fe:], which happen to be written identically. Importantly, only the former one can be used in the adjective-noun idiom. Replacing kalt by the near-synonymous kühl also only yields a non-idiomatic reading. Similarly for 5b: replacing either dicke or Bretter by synonymous expressions results in the loss of the idiomatic reading. Finally, 5c shows that dicke Bretter in itself does not have an idiomatic reading.

What is important about adjective-noun idioms is, first, that they make head nouns in relative clauses, and, second, that the idiomatic reading is available inside the relative clause (cf. 6).

no-one interests this old coffee which you us here present
‘No one is interested in this old coffee that you present to us.’

b. Das gilt besonders für die dicken Bretter, die gebohrt werden mussten.
that applies especially for the thick blanks which drilled became must
‘This applies in particular to the serious issues that had to be dealt with.’

If the idiomatic reading is available inside the relative clause, then the adjective must reconstruct into the relative clause, which is incompatible with the HEAD-raising analysis of adjective-noun head nouns. The requirement for the adjective to reconstruct is particularly clear in 6b: dicke Bretter is an idiom chunk and
requires the presence of the verb *bohren*. It is hence insufficient to reconstruct the idiomatic meaning into the relative clause by some non-syntactic mechanism, as one could suggest for 6a (Donati & Cecchetto 2011: 542-3). For what is then reconstructed in 6b is the non-idiomatic reading of the head noun *dicke Bretter* and the resulting reading internal to the relative clause is the literal meaning of *dicke Bretter bohren*.

**Two non-solutions** There are two ways to handle the reconstruction of idiomatic adjectives within the HEAD-raising analysis. First, the adjective and the noun both originate inside the relative clause but are moved out separately. In the first step, N° moves out, and in second step, the AP moves outside and merges with the NP (cf. 7). Since this second movement step occurs DP-internally, no island violation is predicted. Second, one could assumes that adjectives and their nouns form a complex head [N° A° N°]. This complex head moves out of the relative clause, and in a second step, the adjective excorporates (cf. 8).

(7) NP
(8) NP

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{AP} \\
\Delta \text{dicke} \\
N° \\
\text{Bretter} \text{[NP tAP tN°]} \text{tN°}
\end{array} \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{A°} \\
\text{dicke} \\
N° \\
\text{Bretter} \text{tA°} \text{CP} \text{tby}
\end{array} \]

Both solutions are confronted with serious empirical problems. The first solution faces two problems. On the one hand, it requires that adjective-noun idioms can be split, for otherwise the first movement step would be illicit. Although German allows NP-splitting (Ott 2012), splitting of adjective-noun idioms is impossible, as shown by the loss of the idiomatic under splitting (cf. 9).

(9) *Kaffee haben sie uns nur kalten gezeigt.*

coffee have they us only cold shown
‘They showed us only cold coffee.’ / **‘They showed us only old information.’**

On the other hand, this solution does not capture that also the head noun can receive an idiomatic reading. Note that *dicke und Bretter* in 7 do not form a constituent after being moved. If the whole NP in 7 merges with the verb *bohren*, it is predicted that the idiomatic reading of *dicke Bretter bohren* is unavailable because *bohren* and *dicke Bretter* do not form a constituent either. But this prediction is not borne out.

(10) *Wir müssen natürlich auch die dicken Bretter bohren, die langfristig anzugehen sind.*

we must of-course also the thick blanks drill which in-the-long-run to address are
‘We will of course also deal with the serious issues that in the long run need to be addressed.’

The second, excorporation-based, solution has the merit that it captures the existence of doublets as in 11.


Rotes Kreuz ‘Red Cross’ Rotkreuzschwester ‘Red Cross nurse’

What 11 shows is that certain adjective-noun idioms alternate with adjective-noun compounds. The natural step to take is to generalize this pattern to all such idioms and employ it for the data in 6 (cf.8). However, this pattern cannot be generalized: there are doublets that are made up by the same pair of adjective and noun, but crucially come with different idiomatic interpretations. Two examples are given in 12.


dicker Kopf ‘hangover’ Dickkopf ‘stubborn person/stubbornness’

When using the idiom *dicker Kopf* as head noun, 8 predicts that its reading inside the relative clause corresponds to the meaning of *Dickkopf* because this is the source for *dicker Kopf*. However, this is not the case.

(13) *Der dicke Kopf, den du hast, kommt von dem vielen billigen Lambrusco gestern.*

the thick head which you have comes of the much cheap Lambrusco yesterday
‘The hangover you have is due to the cheap Lambrusco.’

**‘The hangover such that you are stubborn is due to the cheap Lambrusco.’**

**Conclusion** The HEAD-raising analysis cannot capture the reconstruction of phrasal head nouns, in particular adjective-noun idioms. It hence must be rejected in favor of analyses that allow phrasal head nouns.