Missing parts in lexicalization strategies: the case of [A N] and [N PP] constructions in Croatian

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Multi-word units (MWUs) have long been regarded as one of the topics which illuminates the intricate relationship between lexicon and grammar, as well as the relationship between syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations in language (Saussure 1916, Lyons 1977, Cruse 1986). In constructionist accounts, MWUs are often used as examples of the lexicon-grammar interaction, e.g., in observing how constructional schemas provide a grammatical basis for the productive formation of words (cf. Booij 2009, Culicover, Jackendoff & Audring 2017). This study will, however, focus on missing parts of such constructional schemas in language use in Croatian [A N] and [N PP] constructions. Specifically, we will focus on cases when they are used with an ellipsis of one of their parts, while still retaining the naming function of the whole MWU, e.g., *kemijska*.ADJ *olovka*.N 'ballpoint pen' > *kemijska*.ADJ 'ballpoint', *mikrovalna*.ADJ *pećnica*.N 'microwave owen' > *mikrovalna*.ADJ 'microwave', *roditeljski*.ADJ *sastanak*.N 'parental meeting' > *roditeljski*.ADJ 'parental'; *četkica*.N *za*.P *zube*.N.ACC 'toothbrush; lit. brush.DIM for teeth' > *četkica*.N 'toothbrush' ≠ *četkica*.N 'any type of brush'. The two constructions, [A N] and [N PP], are interesting because they point to different morphosyntactic properties of ellipsis, given that the omission of [PP] in [N PP] can lead to ambiguity but not change of the morphosyntactic features of the MWU, whereas the omission of [N] in [A N] constructions may indicate partial conversion (cf. Babić 1988, Tafra 1998, Balteiro 2006). From a usage-based perspective, ellipsis can be seen either as contextually facilitated, with the full form being the only relevant lexical entry, or as a type of lexicalization strategy in Croatian. As to our knowledge, this type of "multi-word ellipsis" hasn't been investigated for Croatian, and therefore the main aim of this study is to provide a systematic account of the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic factors influencing a subset of Croatian MWUs.

Since many of the examples appear predominantly in colloquial (spoken) Croatian, a specific goal of our study was to confirm that ellipsis is produced by speakers on a regular basis. Therefore, we designed a study consisting of acceptability judgments and multi-word production tasks to address our main research questions: a) is ellipsis acceptable across different [A N] and [N PP] MWUs, b) is it acceptable and/or unambiguous in different contexts, c) can it be considered a type of lexicalization strategy. A total of 60 students (M age=21,66) participated in the study as volunteers, and stimuli were collected based on data from the Croatian web corpus (MWU frequency > 100) and lexicographic sources. The results of the study indicate that ellipsis in both types of constructions is used as a lexicalization strategy, with high acceptability ratings for MWUs prone to ellipsis, compared to non-target items (M(NPP)=4,54, M(AN)=4,71, M(other)=2,45) and a high percentage of speaker agreement in multi-word production tasks. This indicates that "parts" can be conceptually salient and serve as cues for the whole MWU, and that encyclopedic features they lexicalize and their high degree of entrenchment allow for their distinct placement in the lexical system.

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