

Re: Word count of minimum vocabulary

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- *From:* Oliver Cromm <lispamateur@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
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Mok-Kong Shen wrote:

Oliver Cromm wrote:

If compounding is a linguistic phenomenon, most linguist would argue that different writing conventions alone don't constitute evidence that there are different types of compounding. In the case in question, I'd say there aren't any differences. A <tea pot> and a <teapot> are the same word written in different ways.

Suppose an existing vocabulary in a certain language has only the words for "tea" and "pot" but not a designation for teapot, then one is likely to come up either with "tea pot" or "teapot". One of these would enter into the enlarged vocabulary (hence become a dictionary entry), but not both, right?

No, beacuse they're the same word, it is possible that more than one way of writing this word could be mentioned in a dictionary, under the same headword.

Writing system is an established subfield of the sciences of languages. So what's wrong, if discussions are said to be concerning writing systems?

Even so, writing alone constitutes very weak linguistic evidence.

I was only saying that it is not illegitimate to say e.g. that a discussion currently concerns only writing systems. No more, nor less.

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That would tell me that you're not interested in concrete languages like Chinese or English.

In that case I should mention that there are several other ways to graphically represent complex terms, for example – just staying with the Latin alphabet – using an apostrophe as in <that's>, <aujourd'hui> or a slash, like <and/or> or <marketing/PR>, using capitalization <MultiVan>, quotes, parentheses and others. And since you're not talking about concrete languages, you are free to invent your own ways as well.

Now are these all different types of compounding for you? Go ahead. But it would be clearer not to use a linguistic term like "compounding", rather say "joining" or something, because it's not a linguistic distinction.

"Telephone" also consist of two morphemes. It is different from "body building" in that the constituents "tele" and possibly "phone" are not words in their own right ("phone" as an independent word is the shortened form of "telephone" and not contained in words like "anglophone" or "phonograph"). Therefore, "telephone" has to be written without space. This is the only rule that I can give with certainty about English writing.

Why then one doesn't find "bodybuilding" in a dictionary?

I said that in the above paragraph. In the case of "telephone", there's a reason for this way of writing, with "body building", it is convention.

Still, there is ample linguistic evidence that the compounding mechanism that creates "Canada Child Tax Benefit" is essentially the same that produces German "Kindersteuerfreibetrag".

Essentially the same, sure. Formally, however, one can distinguish on the textual level the three types of compounding.

Or more than three, see above.

Since, if a dictionary has a compound word, it is given in the form of one of these types (never in all three), only that form should be considered the correct one in the current language, right?

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Your position leads to consequences that are ridiculous to me, like that in the recent German spelling reform, a lot of "words of the German language" have been "banned" (because now only the form written as two orthographic words is considered correct writing), and, conversely, some new words have been invented. I say that the language hasn't changed, because the writing is just a graphical representation, and if all English-speaking people agree to use Chinese characters to write English from next year on, it would still be English, with or without hyphens. If the English word "teapot" is written 6ö, is it still one word or two words or two tze or what?

Given that, the status of multi-"tze" terms is equally unclear.

Is there any convention to write Chinese with spaces for some purpose? In Japanese, there is: in children's books. And many researchers would agree that what is separated by spaces in this case roughly corresponds to the best definition of a Japanese "word".

Example:

Children's book: _ FLhFM‡FkDc_

Conventional writing: *ÎLq-kLc_

Conventional transcription: Tarô ga Tôkyô ni itta.

To indicate the "words" in the above: Tarô-ga Tôkyô-ni itta.

[...]

I don't yet quite understand your point concerning spaces. In Chinese printed text, each character is separated from its neighbours with a (tiny) space. But this is in principle similar to the case that English words in printing are separated by spaces, isn't it?

I have only two interpretations for your answer, both of which are not favorable to you. Either you are so convinced of your pet theory that you refuse to understand what I'm talking about, or you really haven't noticed yet that English (and other languages written in similar alphabets) has a two-level representation, with letters, roughly representing phonemes, separated by (not necessarily rectangular) tiny spaces, and words, sequences of letters, separated by bigger spaces. It is thus not obvious to which kind of spaces the spaces between Chinese characters correspond, or if they have a fundamentally different nature from both.

More to the point, I explained – maybe not clearly enough – that in Japanese, the space between, say (and å in (å doesn't have the same linguistic status as the space between, å and < in the sequence ; (å<_, because this could, if one chose to employ such a writing system, be

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spaced as

; (あ_

but never as

; (あ_

The latter would be contrary to Japanese language; even the pronunciation of (and あ can only be derived by seeing them as neighbors in connection. Actually, (and あ don't have a pronunciation in this sentence, only the combination (あ has. The two characters clearly represent one word in Japanese.

One can ask the same questions for intransparent terms in Chinese, best for illustration look at some technical term imported from Japanese, like ?».

Referring to an example previously given by me, telephone is translated to two "tze" meaning "electricity" and "talk". Could one who has never used nor heard of that modern means of communication really capture the right meaning from these two "tze" alone? That's evidently highly questionable.

That's why I said its meaning should be explained in a monolingual dictionary. Whether it would constitute a headword or not is a matter of taste and convention. I believe that in most bilingual dictionaries, it would be entered as a headword.

Further I indicated that one seems to have more freedom in doing compounding in German than in the few other languages I happen to know a bit, which I think is true.

Not as much as the writing convention makes you believe. I'd say there is little systematical difference between German and English in this respect, but a difference in usage: in German, it is more natural to use compound terms in everyday language, and to make new ones up on the spot.

Well, "more natural" would mean having greater chance of being accepted by the natives of a language as an item belonging to the vocabulary of the language in my view.

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I'm sure any native speaker of English, on first reading "child tax benefit", considers it a legitimate part of the language. What you call "vocabulary" is again your choice. Germans don't enter "Fischrestaurant" in a dictionary any more than "italienisches Restaurant", and spontaneous coinages are normally not considered part of the vocabulary of the language, rather as the utilization of one of the means of the language to combine elements, besides inflection, derivation and syntax.

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Oliver Cromm

kotoba-nante iranai / yuka-ni korogaru-dake

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Shigesato Itoi/Akiko Yano: The Stew

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