Merci Jens and *Villen-Spahn*. The evaluative semantics of personal name compounds in German

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This paper investigates evaluative meanings underlying the word formation pattern referred to as personal name compounds (PN compounds) in German. Consider the following example from Twitter:

Wer übernimmt die Verantwortung für das Versagen? Mit BILD bzw. Herrn Reichelt stimme ich selten überein, ABER sein Kommentar ist wirklich gut. Die fette Frau im Kanzleramt und der unfähige **Villen- Spahn** sollten das lesen und dann zurücktreten! (Twitter)
‚Who takes responsibility for the failure? With BILD or Mr. Reichelt I rarely agree, BUT his comment is really good. The fat woman in the Chancellery and the incompetent **villa-Spahn** should read this and then resign!'.

The compound Villen-Spahn/'Villa-Spahn' refers to the former German minister of health, Jens Spahn who bought an expensive villa in Berlin. It comprises a personal name in the head position and a lexical unit *Villen* as a modifier. *Villen-Spahn* expresses a negative attitude toward the name bearer and highlights the contrast between his social role as a politician and the purchase of a very expensive vila. The contrast is verbalized by juxtaposing the modifier and the head. We argue that PN compounding in German conveys an evaluative function that cannot be captured by existing approaches to evaluation in compounding (cf. Meibauer 2013) because evaluation in PN compounds is related to extralinguistic knowledge about events in which name bearers were involved. We show that German PN compounds, apart from a referential, also bear a systematic evaluative function (cf. Grandi & Körtvelyessy 2015) that can be described as a deviation from the standard value according to the terminology of evaluative morphology (e.g., extralinguistic expectations about the social role of Jens Spahn as a politician). We hypothesize that the evaluation is reflected in a more positive or negative perception compared with the respective personal name. For instance, our findings (cf. Eichel et al. submitted) indicate that the valence values of PN compounds, computed on the basis of valence norms (cf. Köper & Schulte im Walde 2016), range between 3.95 (*Folter-Bush* ('Torture-

Bush')) and 5.89 (*Tore-Klose* ('Goal-Klose')) with an average compound valence at 4.81 and an average modifier valence at 4.22. In this regard, *Willkommens-Merkel* ('Welcome-Merkel') is an interesting case of a mismatch between a highly positive valence value for the modifier (7.9) and a negative connotation of the compound.

To account for this novel type of evaluative semantics, we propose two complementary approaches. First, we combine evaluative morphology with the multidimensional model of formal semantics (Potts 2005) to test the hypothesis that modifiers, such as *Villen*/'villa' in *Villen-Spahn* are used to conventionally implicate a negative/positive event-based evaluation with respect to the categorical meaning conveyed by the name constituent. To this end, we draw on the corpus of some 400 PN compounds compiled from the German Digital Dictionary (DWDS), the German Reference Corpus, and Twitter and show how conventionally implicated evaluative meanings arise on the scale of semantic values underlying event-based evaluation in PN compounding. The values are derived from the contrast between the default value conveyed by the name and the event conveyed by the modifier.

In the second step, we present a computational method to model the evaluative semantics of PN compounds from our dataset. Our statistical analysis revealed that valence scores of the linguistic context differ significantly between PN compounds and their corresponding name constituents. Differences can be positive or negative, with the direction being co-determined by the discourse domain (e.g., politicians vs. athletes) and other contextual factors. Finally, we enrich our data with personal, domain-specific, and extra-linguistic information and perform a range of regression analyses revealing that factors including compound and modifier valence, domain, and political party membership influence the evaluation of a PN compound.

References

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