A smurf-based analysis of placeholder expressions

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Outline

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3. Properties of smurfing
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1 Introduction

2 Previous approaches to placeholder expressions

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Placeholder expressions

- **Placeholder expressions (PHE):**

  1. English: whatsit, whatchamacallit, thingamajig, what’s-her/his/their-name you-know-WHO,

- **Characterization (Cheung, 2015):**
  - substitute a *target* expression
  - target: can be phrase, word, syllable
  - pragmatics: speaker cannot utter target for *pragmatic reasons*
Smurfing

• *The Smurfs*: Belgian comics series by Peyo, since 1958, originally in French, translated into 25+ languages
• Smurfs speak “their own language, Smurf.”

(2) a. What a disaster!
   It makes you want to *smurf* (= tear) your hair out! (en)

   b. Welch eine Kata*schlumpfe* (= Katastrophe ‘catastrophe’)! Es ist zum Schlümp*feraufen* (= Haare ‘hair’)!(de)

   c. Quel désastre! C’est à s’arracher les *schtroumpfs*!(fr)

*The Hungry Smurfs*. p. 7
Smurf as a placeholder expression

- *smurf* replaces another expression (target)
- pragmatic reasons to use *smurf* instead of target
- analysis of smurfing as step towards an analysis of placeholder expressions in general.
- frequency:
  - smurfing (French, Spanish) 8.5%, 8.9% (Bollig, 2016, 51, 75)
  - placeholder expression 0.5% (Podlesskaya, 2010, 12)
- Here: Smurfing in German
Overview

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2. Previous approaches to placeholder expressions

3. Properties of smurfing

4. HPSG modelling

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Enfield (2003)

- Target: vague, general truth-conditional meaning
- Pragmatics: special conversational restrictions, speaker-hearer attitudes
- Captures differences: what’s-her-name vs. you-know-WHAT

(3) you-know-WHAT (Enfield, 2003, 107)

- Target: something
- Pragmatic reason:
  - I don’t want to say the word for this thing now
- Recoverability:
  - I don’t say it now because I know I don’t have to
  - By saying you-know-WHAT I think you’ll know what I’m thinking of.

⇒ Pragmatic reason and recoverability: Can be modelled as use-conditions Gutzmann (2013), i.e. conventional implicatures with speaker attitudes.
Problem: Enfield’s Target

- placeholders not always exchangeable with general items.
- occur in positions with high lexical restrictions (collocations, idiom parts)

(4) zeigen, wo **Barthel**/ #jemand/ #etwas den Most holt
    show where ??/ someone/ something the cider gets
    ‘show s.o. what’s going on’

(5) [sie] waren so motiviert, uns zu zeigen, wo **Dingsbums**
    they were so motivated to us to show where PHE
    (= Barthel) den Most holt, daß…
    ?? the cider gets that
    ‘they were so motivated to show us what’s going on that …’ (www)

⇒ Placeholders can refer to *concrete expressions*!
Placeholders as metalinguistic demonstratives

- Cheung (2015)
- Placeholder is pronoun referring to any linguistic expression
- placeholder combines syntactically with an operator **SHIFT**
- **SHIFT**: maps linguistic expression to its meaning.
- Solves problem of highly specific targets
Problems

- Targets without denotation: syllable

\[ (6) \text{Ao-} \text{shenme-} \text{de} \text{shi} \text{ xianren Faguoy zongtong.} \]

Ho-llan-de be current France president

‘Ao-something-de is the current President of France.’

(Cheung, 2015, 301)

- \([[[\text{shenme}]]] = \text{lang}\)

- \([[[\text{SHIFT}(\text{lang})]]] =?\)

- Licensing of the \textbf{SHIFT} operator?
Placeholder expressions: summary

- Target can be specific, even meaningless.
- Different placeholders can have different pragmatic reasons.
- Recoverability required
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General properties

- Chatzopoulos (2008): literal vs. “semantically unspecified” use:
  
  (7)  
  b. Are you making smurf (= fun) of me? (The Fake Smurf, 4)  
  
  ▶ literal: refers to small blue creatures  
  ▶ semantically unspecified: can take various meanings or remain empty  

- Two smurf lexemes  
‘smurfing’: use of “semantically unspecified” smurf  
“semantically unspecified” smurf is placeholder expression  
- Dörner (2012): 536 smurfings from 6 German Smurf stories
Chatzopoulos (2008): smurfing is a strong marker of Smurf identity.

- smurfing only used by Smurfs; non-Smurfs only use literal *smurf*
- Smurfing is presented as a defining criterion of the Smurfs.

⇒ Smurfing is an in-group marker; Smurfs are depicted as a special sociolinguistic group.

(8) A speaker is marked as Smurf and signals their Smurf-ness.
Recoverability of smurfing

- Chatzopoulos (2008): OT constraint
  SMURF: “smurf all lexical morphemes.”

- Outranked by recoverability constraint
  → smurfing only in recoverable contexts.

- Factors facilitating recoverability of smurfing:
  ▶ phonological similarity:
    
    (9) \textit{smurf}day (= birthday)
  
  ▶ multiword expressions
    (“proverbs, idioms and phrases with some degree of fossilization”)
  ▶ pragmatically rich context

- Just like for \textit{you-know-WHAT} (Enfield, 2003, 107):

  (10) I don’t say the target expression because I know I don’t have to. By using \textit{smurf} I think you’ll know what I am thinking of.
Phonology of smurfing

Chatzopoulos (2008): English -smurf- can replace one syllable, conserving overall metrical properties of the target.

Smurfing of individual (underlying) syllables in German as well:

(11) a. Ka.ta.schlumpf.e (\(\equiv\) Ka.ta.stroph.e ‘catastrophe’) 
\[\rightarrow\] Ka.ta.schlum.pfe

b. schlumpf.est.ier.en (\(\equiv\) pro.test.ier.en ‘protest’) 
\[\rightarrow\] schlum.pfes.tie.ren
But: second type of smurfing

- different inflectional paradigm

  (12) Hast du ver-schlumpf-t (\(\equiv\) ver-stand-en)?
      have you DER-smurf-pcp (\(\equiv\) DER-stand-pcp ‘understood’)
      ‘Do you understand?’

  (13) *Hast du ver-schlumpf-en (\(\equiv\) ver-stand-en)?

- derivational affix not present in the target

  (14) Eine schlumpf-ig-e (\(\equiv\) gut-e) Idee!
      a smurf-DER-f.sg good-f.sg idea
      ‘a good idea’

⇒ Smurfing of a morphological unit!
Size of smurfing

- only a root:

  (15) Hast du ver-schlumpf-t (|= ver-stand-en)?
      have you DER-smurf-AFF.pcp (|= DER-stand-pcp ‘understood’)

      ‘Do you understand?’

- a root plus a derivational affix:

  (16) Um das Nützliche mit dem Angenehmen zu schlumpf-en
      to the useful with the pleasant to smurf-inf
      (= ver-bind-en), ...
      (= DER-bind-inf ‘connect’)

      ‘to mix business with pleasure, …’

- a compound:

  (17) Herzlichen Glück-schlumpf/ Schlumpf (= Glück-wunsch)!
      hearly luck-smurf/ smurf! (|= luck-wish)

      ‘Congratulations!’

- Any morphological unit, excluding inflection, can be smurfed.
Syntactic transparency of smurfing

The smurfed expression vs. target:

- **inherited:**
  - part of speech
  - N: gender; V: auxiliary selection
  - in general: argument selection

  (18) Für wen schlumpf-st (= hält-st) du dich?
      for who smurf-2.sg (= hold-2.sg) you yourself
      ‘How do you speak to me? Who do you think you are?’

- **not inherited:** inflection class

  (19) a. halt-en ‘hold’ – hält-st ‘hold-2.sg’
      b. Für wen *schlümpf-st du dich?
## Phonological vs. morphological smurfing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>p-smurfing</th>
<th>m-smurfing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>replaces single underlying syllable</td>
<td>replaces (simple or complex) morphological unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>depends on syllable structure</td>
<td>depends on morphological structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>form constant</td>
<td>form determined by paradigm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>schlumpf</em></td>
<td><em>schlumpf/schlümpf</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kata.<em>schlumpf</em>.e (= Katastrophe)</td>
<td>Schlümpf-e (= Haar-e)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>catastrophe</td>
<td>smurf.pl-pl (hair-pl)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
P- and m-placeholding

p-/m-distinction applies to other placeholders:

- Cheung (2015): Chinese *shenme*: Ao-*shenme-de* ‘Hollande’
  (p-placeholding)

- German:

  (20) m-placeholding: (target is compound)
  Herzlichen **Dings** (= Glück-wunsch)!
  heartly **PHE** luck-wish ‘Congratulations!’

  (21) p-placeholding: (target is syllable)
  soll an irgendeinen support eine analy...**dingens** datei
  must.1.sg to some support an analy-**PHE** file
  (= Analyse-Datei) senden.
  analysis-file send
  ‘I must send an analysis file to some support.’
Summary: Properties of smurfing

- single inflectional word *Schlumpf* ‘smurf’ with Umlaut.
- literal and placeholder use
- placeholder use has use condition of “Smurf-ness” and recoverability constraint
- p-smurfing: replaces syllables
- m-smurfing: replaces morphological units
- same as for placeholder expressions!
HPSG modelling: Overview

- applied to compounds: Desmets & Villoing (2009)
- lexeme(s) for Schlumpf ‘smurf’
- Smurfing is use of Schlumpf ‘smurf’ in already existing placeholder constructions.
Lexemes

- Bonami & Boyé (2006): lexeme with stems value for inflection
- lexical-identifier (lid) value – not a head-feature!!

```
s|loc
  stems
    slot1 schlumpf
    slot2 schlümpf
  cat
    hd noun
    lid schlumpf-lid
  cont|index
    num sg
    per 3rd
    gen masc
```
One *smurf*-lexemes, two lexical identifiers

- Sort hierarchy for the *schlumpf* lexical identifiers (lid):
  
  \[
  \text{schlumpf-lid} \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{schlumpf-lit} \quad \text{schlumpf-phe}
  \]

- literal *schlumpf*: refers to a smurf
  
  \[
  \left[ \text{s|l|cat|lid schlumpf-lit} \right] \Rightarrow
  \]
  
  \[
  \begin{align*}
  &\text{index } [1] \\
  &\text{restr } \left\{ \left[ \text{smurf-rel} \right] \right\} \\
  &\text{s|l|cont}
  \end{align*}
  \]
Placeholder lexemes

- Placeholder lexemes:
  
  \[
  \text{phe-lid} \quad \text{dings-phe} \quad \text{dingsbums-phe} \quad \text{schlumpf-phe} \quad \ldots
  \]

- Pragmatics: **Smurf**-specific use condition (**Smurf-UC**):
  A speaker is marked as Smurf and signals their Smurf-ness.

- Recoverability constraint (**Recov**)

- Placeholder use:
  
  \[
  \left[ s|l|\text{cat}|\text{lid} \text{ schlumpf-phe} \right] \Rightarrow \left[ s|l|\text{ctxt}|\text{backgrd} \{ \text{Smurf-UC, Recov} \} \right]
  \]

- No further special restrictions on **schlumpf-phe**

Compound: complex lexeme with lexemes on its M-DTRS list:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{compound-lxm} \\
\text{m-dtrs} \left< \text{lexeme, lexeme} \right>
\end{align*}
\]

Placeholder compounds:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{compound-lxm} \\
\vdots \quad \text{phe-cmpd} \quad \vdots \\
\text{p-phe-cmpd} & \quad \text{m-phe-cmpd}
\end{align*}
\]
Placeholder compounds

- combination of a target lexeme and a placeholder lexeme
- lid-value inherited from target (1)
- some use-conditional information inherited from placeholder (2)
- head-information inherited from the target (3)

\[
\text{phe-compd} \Rightarrow \left[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{s|l} \\
\text{m-dtrs} \\
\oplus
\end{array} \right] \left[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{head} \left[ \begin{array}{c}
3
\end{array} \right] \\
\text{cat} \\
\text{m-dtrs} \\
\oplus
\end{array} \right] \left[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{major-pos} \\
\text{cat} \\
\text{lid} \left[ \begin{array}{c}
1
\end{array} \right] \\
\text{head} \left[ \begin{array}{c}
3
\end{array} \right] \\
\text{lid} \left[ \begin{array}{c}
1
\end{array} \right] \\
\text{ctx} \left[ \begin{array}{c}
\Sigma \cup 2
\end{array} \right] \\
\text{s|l} \\
\text{cat|lid} \\
\text{phe-lxm}
\end{array} \right] \left[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{phe-lxm} \\
\text{ctx} 2
\end{array} \right] \left[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{phe-lxm}
\end{array} \right] \left[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{ctx} 2
\end{array} \right] \right]
**Phonological placeholder compound**

- Placeholder is the morphological non-head
- It only contributes use-conditional meaning and phonology.
- Everything else is inherited from the target.
- Placeholder must be simple, target can be simple or complex.

\[
\text{phon-phe-compd} \Rightarrow \\
\begin{cases}
\text{stems} & \text{phe-phon}(7,6) \\
\text{s l} & \text{cat } 4 \left[ \text{lid } \neg \text{phe} \right] \\
\text{cont } 5 \\
\text{ctxt } \Sigma \cup 2 \\
\end{cases}
\]

\[
\begin{cases}
\text{m-dtrs} & \left\langle \text{simple-lexeme} \\
\text{stems|slot1 } 7 \\
\text{s l|cat } \left[ \text{lid } \text{phe} \right] \\
\text{ctxt } 2 \\
\right\rangle \\
\text{stems } 6 \\
\text{s l|cat } 4 \\
\text{cont } 5 \\
\end{cases}
\]
**Kataschlumpfe** (= Katastrophe ‘catastrophe’)

\[
\text{inflected-word} \\
\text{phon } \langle \text{Kataschlumpfe} \rangle \\
\text{phon-phe-cmpd} \\
\text{stems 9} \quad \begin{align*}
\text{stem1} & \quad 8 \quad \text{Kataschlumpfe} \\
\text{stem2} & \quad 8
\end{align*} \\
\text{cat} \quad 4 \\
\text{cont} \quad 5 \\
\text{ctx} \quad 2
\]

where 9 = phe-phon([7, 6])

\[
\text{stems} \quad \begin{align*}
\text{stem1} & \quad 7 \quad \text{schlumpf} \\
\end{align*} \\
\text{ctx} \quad 2 \quad \begin{align*}
\text{Smurf-UC, Recov}
\end{align*} \\
\text{stems} \quad 6 \quad \begin{align*}
\text{stem1} & \quad \text{Katastrophe}
\end{align*} \\
\text{cat} \quad 4 \\
\text{cont} \quad 5
\]
Morphological placeholder compound

- Placeholder is morphological head, determines inflection
- shares HEAD, VAL, and CONT with target.
- simple or complex (schlumpf-ig); target is simple or complex

morph-phe-cmpd ⇒

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{stems} & \quad \exists \\
\text{cat} & \quad \text{head} \\
\text{lid} & \quad 1 \quad \text{phe} \\
\text{val} & \quad 4 \\
\text{cont} & \quad 5 \\
\text{ctxt} & \quad \Sigma \cup 2
\end{align*}
\]
PoS-changing derivation

- German: default derivational affixes for PoS-switching/conversion: \(-ig\) (N→A)
- no change in LID value: collocations are LID co-selection

\[(22)\] strong tea/?car → strength of the tea/?car
power of the car/?tea → powerful car/?tea
"eine schlumpf-ig-e (= gut-e) Idee" \('a smurfy (= good) idea'\)
Exclude free use of placeholders?

- Parallel to Cheung (2015): placeholder lexeme $\approx$ shenme
  placeholder compound $\approx$ SHIFT.
- Placeholders must occur inside placeholder compounds.
- Constraint: no word can have a phe LID-value

$\text{(23) } \text{word } \Rightarrow \neg \left[ \text{s|l|cat|lid phe-lid} \right]$
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“Semantically unspecified” *smurf* is a placeholder expression.

- special: pragmatic condition (marker of Smurf-ness)
- else: standard placeholder combination

- Smurf comics: rich database for investigating placeholders

- basic analytical technique: (semi-)transparent combinations (Pollard & Sag, 1994; Levine, 2010)

- Enfield (2003): use-conditional semantics adopted; but specific target

- Cheung (2015): placeholders as replacing lexemes adopted; but p-/m-placeholding solves technical problem

- Chatzopoulos (2008): insights on smurfing adopted; but only looks at p-smurfing
Further research

- investigation of smurfing in other languages (p- and m-smurfing)
- application of the theory to classical placeholder expressions
- extension to other phenomena of subtractive morphology
- other types of placeholder compounds?
- distinction between different placeholders:

  (24) Smurf1: Auweija, der Dings (= Krakakass) ..., der ...
        oh dear the PHE (= howlibird) the
        Smurf2: Der ... der Krakakass!
        the the howlibird

Smurfing cannot be used if the speaker lacks a word, i.e., more like you-know-WHAT than whatchammacallit.

- Analysis of placeholders with internal structure: what’s-her/his-name
Vielen Dank fürs Schlumpfen!

Thank you for smurfing!
References I


References II


Krisnato, Bara Diska Putra. 2010. The intended meaning of smurf words in *Smurf* comic strips. Undergraduate thesis, Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta. [https://repository.usd.ac.id/26296/2/044214016_Full%5B1%5D.pdf](https://repository.usd.ac.id/26296/2/044214016_Full%5B1%5D.pdf).
