

Compounds or phrases: The analysis of nominal constructions with *à* in French

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1. Introduction

Nouns in French can be modified by a prepositional phrase headed by *à*. This is a very general preposition, for which a single translation cannot be given. Some examples are given in (1).

- (1)
- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| a. un livre à moi | ‘a book of mine’ |
| b. une manif à Paris | ‘a demo in Paris’ |
| c. une vache à lait | ‘a cow for milk’, i.e. a milk cow |
| d. une machine à écrire | ‘a machine for writing’, i.e. a typewriter |

Semantically, the examples in (1) fall into two clearly distinct classes. In (1a-b), we have syntactic constructions in which the PP-modifier adds to the description of the item referred to by the noun. In (1c-d), we have expressions that are used to name concepts. In Germanic languages, they are often translated as compounds. In (1c), the correlation with an English compound is transparent. In (1d), English has a different naming motive, but the German compound *Schreibmaschine* ‘write-machine’ corresponds more closely to the French expression. Apart from the difference in the order of the French construction and the English and German compounds, the main difference is the presence of the preposition in French.

The question we investigated is whether the similarity of expressions such as (1c-d) to compounds in English and German is strong enough for them to qualify as compounds according to the definition of compounding given by ten Hacken (2021: 10), quoted in (2).

- (2)
- A compound is a word with a structure $[X\ Y]_Z$ or $[Y\ X]_Z$, such that:
- The denotation of Z is a subset of the denotation of Y;
 - The range of possible relations between X and Y depends on the semantics of X and Y;
 - X does not have independent access to the discourse.

The definition in (2) makes a compound a binary structure. In (2a), Y is identified as the head, but as both orders are stated, Y can be the right-hand or the left-hand component. For (2b), we have to consider the relation between the head and the non-head in the meaning of the entire compound. The question is to what extent the construction contributes to the meaning of Z. In

(2c), the question of whether the non-head introduces a separate concept is the decisive factor. If it does, the non-head can be, for instance, the antecedent of a pronoun.

In considering the role of *à* in expressions such as (1c-d), the first question is what role prepositions can play in the context of the definition in (2). This question is addressed in general terms in section 2. In order to investigate the class of nominal expressions with *à* in more detail, we collected a set of expressions and analysed it. Section 3 describes how we collected the set of expressions and section 4 presents our analysis. In section 5, we turn to the question of how the conditions (2b) and (2c) can be applied to these expressions. Finally, section 6 places our conclusion in a broader theoretical environment and compares the consequences of taking (2) as the definition of compounding with other approaches.

2. Genitives, prepositions and compounds

The connection between genitives and compounds has long been observed. Paul (1886: 279) suggests that the linking element in German compounds has its origin in the genitive. In English, genitives are often used when the non-head refers to human beings. Table 1 illustrates this correlation for English, German and French.

Table 1. English, German and French equivalents for *peace treaty* and *children's book*

<i>English</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>French</i>
peace treaty	Friedensvertrag	traité de paix
children's book	Kinderbuch	livre d'enfant

In the German translation of *peace treaty*, the non-head *Friedens* is in a form that is identical to the genitive of *Frieden* 'peace'. However, the final *-s* is generally analysed as a linking element (cf. Koliopoulou 2014, 2020). In *Arbeitsamt* 'job centre', the same linking element is used, although *Arbeit* 'work' is a feminine noun that never has an *-s* in its inflectional paradigm. In *children's book*, the form is ambiguous, as illustrated in (3).

- (3) a. She wrote a successful children's book.
b. The children's book was a gift from the council.

In (3a), the combination with the indefinite article requires an interpretation of *children's book* as a compound. The adjective modifies the entire expression *children's book*. In (3b), an interpretation along the lines 'the book the children have' is plausible. In this case, a modifying adjective, e.g. *favourite*, will go between *children's* and *book*. The French equivalents in Table 1 both have the preposition *de*. In the absence of a morphological genitive, the construction with *de* can be considered a periphrastic genitive. Grevisse (1980: 1146) gives as one of its core senses "Un rapport d'appartenance, de dépendance" ('a relation of belonging, of dependence'). Ten Hacken (2013: 102) illustrates the parallelism with the genitive in (4).

- (4) a. car factory
b. usine d'automobiles 'factory of cars'
c. fabryka samochodów 'factory cars_{GEN}'

The equivalents of the English compound in (4a) are the French *de* expression in (4b) and the Polish morphological genitive construction in (4c).

The question that needs to be asked at this point is to what extent the behaviour of French *de* is typical of French prepositions in general. In this context, it is worth looking at (5), an example from COCA, in which three compounds are underlined.

- (5) Diane Sawyer mentioned the immigration vote in Arizona, the abortion vote in Mississippi, and the collective bargaining vote in Ohio but neglected to mention the vote on Obamacare in Ohio.

For the French translation of the underlined compounds in (5), the expressions in (6) can be used.

- | | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|--|
| (6) | a. vote sur l'immigration | 'vote on (the) immigration' |
| | b. vote sur l'avortement | 'vote on (the) abortion' |
| | c. vote sur la négociation collective | 'vote on (the) collective negotiation' |

In the translations in (6), the article is in brackets, because it is part of the French expression but cannot be used in the English one. In French, it marks the generic interpretation of the noun it specifies. Although both (4b) and (6) are translations of English compounds, there is a significant difference between them. In (4b), the combination of the nouns *usine* 'factory' and *automobile* 'car' is used to name a concept. The role of the preposition *de* is limited to connecting these nouns. The relation between *usine* and *automobile* can be inferred from the meanings of these nouns and from world knowledge. The correct interpretation depends on the concept that is named by the expression. This is the same as for compounds such as (4a). In (6), however, the preposition *sur* specifies the relation between the head noun *vote* and the noun designating the theme of the vote. Although the expressions in (6) can be used in the translation of the English compounds underlined in (5), they do not get their meaning in the same way. The relation between the nouns is expressed by the preposition in (6), but understood without being expressed in (5). Therefore, the expressions in (6) do not fulfill the condition in (2b) and are not compounds according to the definition in (2).

We can now reformulate our original question about the status of naming expressions with *à* such as (1c-d) as the question whether *à* patterns with *de* or with *sur*. In order to answer this, we have to look at a larger set of expressions with *à* and consider the relationship between the nouns it connects.

3. Compilation of a sample

In order to investigate the class of naming expressions of the type illustrated by (1c) and (1d), we needed a set of examples. The question of representativeness does not play a role here, because representativeness is a relationship between sets. We can investigate the electoral preferences by means of a representative poll because the electorate is a well-defined set of people. For each person it can be unambiguously determined whether they are in the electorate or not and the size of the electorate is known exactly. For French nominal expressions with a modifier introduced by *à*, we cannot do this. It is not possible to enumerate all relevant expressions and there is no empirical way to determine whether a particular expression is (correct) French. Therefore, the main criterion we used as a starting point is to collect a large set of examples.

We started with a set of nominal multi-word entries retrieved from the French *Wiktionnaire*. This is a set of 51,613 items. From this set, we extracted expressions in which *à* occurred as a word. We also included contractions with the definite article, *au* in the masculine singular and *aux* in the plural. In this way we obtained a set of 3,765 expressions. This is the base set which we analysed by formal means. From this set, we extracted a random sample of 350 expressions for a more detailed semantic analysis.

Taking the *Wiktionnaire* as a starting point means that the expressions were judged worth a description in a dictionary. The nature of the resource does not guarantee that such decisions

were based on professional lexicographic expertise, but users contributing to the content apparently perceived these expressions as names for concepts. Therefore, the data set does not command any immediate authority, but it tends to reflect intuitions by users that are keen enough to volunteer a contribution.

4. Analysis of the sample

In a first step, we carried out a formal analysis, classifying our set of 3,765 expressions with nouns modified by means of *à* according to the three criteria in (7).

- (7) a. Is *à* followed by a definite article?
 b. Does the head consist of more than one word?
 c. Does the modifier consist of more than one content word?

Examples such as (1c-d) yield negative answers to all questions in (7). The examples in (8) illustrate the kind of expressions that result in positive answers.

- (8) a. marché aux poissons ‘market with the fish_{PLUR}’, i.e. fish market
 b. chemin de fer à crémaillère ‘road of iron with cog’, i.e. cog railway
 c. chapeau à trois cornes ‘hat with three horns’, i.e. tricorne

In (8a), the definite article *les* is contracted with the preposition *à*. Articles occurred in this pattern in 21.0 % of the expressions in our sample. In these cases, the definite article is used to mark a generic interpretation of the following noun. A generic interpretation is also typical of the non-head of compounds in English, as the translation *fish market* shows. There is no obvious semantic difference between the French expressions with and without an article.

In (8b), the head noun is *chemin de fer* ‘railway’, itself a strongly lexicalized multi-word expression that qualifies as a compound according to the definition in (2). It has its own entry in dictionaries such as Académie française (1992-2024). Cases such as (8b) are relatively rare. They account for 6.5 % of our data set. As only formal criteria were used at this stage, we also found cases such as (9).

- (9) bâton de rouge à lèvres ‘stick of red for lips’, i.e. lipstick

In (9), the string that precedes *à* is not a constituent. The head noun is *bâton* ‘stick’ and the modifier is *rouge à lèvres*. This means that (9) should actually be excluded from our data set, but this is only possible by a semantic analysis, which we only carried out for our sample of 350 expressions. In this sample, we excluded 7 expressions (2 %) for this reason.

In (8c), it is the constituent following *à* that consists of more than one word. Such cases are much more common than the ones of the type in (8b). They make up 34.1 % of our data set. Although it is in principle possible that some of these should be excluded for the same reason as (9), we did not find any such examples in our sample of 350. What we did find is that many of these expressions refer to species of animals and plants. Some examples are given in (10).

- (10) a. inule à feuilles en glaive ‘inula with leaves in sword’, i.e. sword-leaved inula
 b. canard à bec jaune ‘duck with bill yellow’, i.e. yellow-billed duck

In both examples in (10), the head designates a group of species and the modifier narrows this down. In (10a), *inule* ‘inula’ is a genus of plants with about 80 species. In (10b), *canard* ‘duck’ is a non-monophyletic group, i.e. it cuts across the taxonomy reflecting the evolutionary

relationships between species. In these names for species, the modifier is headed by a noun which is itself modified typically by a prepositional phrase, as in (10a), or an adjective, as in (10b). Table 2 summarizes the relation between the frequency of the appearance of a modified noun after *à* and the use for designating a species of animals or plants in our sample of 350.

Table 2. Species names and the complexity of modifiers with *à*

<i>Semantic class</i>	<i>Simple noun</i>	<i>Noun with modifier</i>	<i>Total</i>
Animal	19	54	73
Plant	19	20	39
Other	166	44	210
Total	204	118	322

Table 2 shows both the remarkable frequency of species names, amounting to 32 % of the sample, and the preference for complex modifiers, resulting in 62.7 % of the expressions with a complex modifier being species names.

The numbers in Table 2 do not include the expressions in which the modifier is not headed by a noun. This explains that the total number of expressions is less than 350. Examples with verbs and adjectives are given in (11).

- (11) a. table à repasser ‘table for ironing’, i.e. ironing board
 b. démarrage à froid ‘moving_off with cold’, i.e. cold start

Examples of the types in (11) are relatively rare. In our sample of 350, there were 16 expressions with an infinitive verb (4.6%) as in (11a) and 12 with an adjective (3.4%) as in (11b). As they require a separate analysis but the number of items in the sample is too small to serve as a basis for this, we excluded them from our analysis here. We plan to return to these constructions in a future study.

We can summarize the analysis so far as follows. The naming construction with *à* introducing a modifier of a noun is quite flexible. The preposition may or may not be followed by a definite article. The modifier can be a noun, a noun with an adjective or prepositional phrase, a verb, or an adjective. We only consider cases in which the modifier is headed by a noun. The noun modified by *à* may also be complex, but this is relatively rare and in some of these cases, the structure is different, so that the expression has to be excluded.

5. Application of the definition

On the basis of the data we collected, we can now apply the conditions in the definition of compounding in (2). As the headedness in (2a) has already been used in the selection of the data, the focus is on the conditions (2b) and (2c).

The central question in the application of (2b) is the degree to which the preposition *à* contributes to the meaning of the entire expression. Two examples illustrating different relationships between the nouns connected by *à* are given in (12).

- (12) a. moulin à légumes ‘mill for vegetables’, i.e. food mill
 b. moulin à billes ‘mill with balls’, i.e. ball mill

Both (12a) and (12b) designate instruments, but the role of the referent of the modifier in the use of the instrument is quite different. In (12a), we have a hand-operated kitchen utensil for puréeing food, especially vegetables. This means that the item is a *moulin à légumes* whether or not the *légumes* ‘vegetables’ are in or near it. The *légumes* only indicate the purpose of the

instrument, which is why we translated *à* as ‘for’ in (12a). In (12b), we have a professional instrument for grinding dry substances into powder by means of small balls. It is typically used, for instance for grinding cacao in chocolate manufacturing. The *billes* ‘balls’ are a crucial component of the instrument and without them something cannot be a *moulin à billes*. Therefore, we translated *à* as ‘with’ in (12b).

The two relationships in (12) are clearly different. At the same time, they are quite vague, as can be seen when considering the examples in (13).

- (13) a. moulin à papier ‘mill for paper’, i.e. paper mill
b. moulin à vent ‘mill for wind’, i.e. windmill

The examples in (13) correspond to the well-known English pair used by Allen (1978) to illustrate the Variable R Condition. Although *for* can be used in the description, the relation between the *moulin* and the modifier is quite different to the one in (12a). In order to specify the relation, we need to add a further predicate. In (12a), we can say that the instrument is ‘for processing’ *légumes*, i.e. the *légumes* are the input. In (13a), we have an instrument ‘for producing’ *papier* ‘paper’, i.e. the *papier* is the output. In (13b), the *vent* ‘wind’ is the source of energy. We might describe it as ‘for being driven by’ *vent*. This shows that classifying the expressions as involving *for* or *with* in the relation does not fully determine the nature of the relation.

When we quantify the use of the *for* and *with* relations, we have to take into account the particular frequency of the names for species of animals and plants as noted in section 4. Table 3 therefore gives separate figures for the full set and for the set without the species names.

Table 3. Frequency of *for* and *with* relations

<i>Type of relation</i>	<i>All N à N</i>		<i>Excluding species names</i>	
for	62	19.7 %	56	27.6 %
for or with	8	2.5 %	8	3.9 %
with	178	56.5 %	80	39.4 %
other relations	67	21.3 %	59	29.1 %

The interpretation of the relation between the two components of a compound depends on the type of object that is named by it. In the case of species of animals or plants, a frequent naming strategy is to choose a hyperonym and add information about a particular feature of the body that is different from other species covered by this hyperonym. The examples in (10) illustrate this. This naming strategy explains why the *à* construction is often used in this context. It also explains why the preposition can often be paraphrased as ‘with’. Therefore, the fact that more than half of the expressions in our sample can be described as having ‘with’ as the type of relation, as seen in Table 3, should not be taken as crucial for the analysis of the *à* construction. If species names are excluded, the different relation types are much closer in frequency, as shown in the right-hand column. Even without excluding them, however, it is clear that it is not just the preposition that determines the relationship.

In a few cases, both the ‘for’ and the ‘with’ relation are applicable. Two examples are given in (14).

- (14) a. pot à lait ‘jar with/for milk’, i.e. milk jug
b. capsule à crayon ‘capsule with/for pencil’, i.e. fuel rod case

In both examples in (14), a container is marked by what it contains or is meant to contain. In (14a), it is a household item. Whether it is filled with milk or not, it is a *pot à lait*. However,

also a different *pot* can be referred to by (14a) if it contains *lait*. Therefore, as long as one of ‘for’ or ‘with’ applies, (14a) can be used as a designation. In (14b), we have a specialized item in the domain of nuclear energy (FranceTerme, 2016: *capsule à crayon*) which has the same dual use. Here, *crayon* ‘pencil’ is used metaphorically for the fuel rod of a nuclear reactor.

For the purpose of determining the range of possible relations, the last category in Table 3 is particularly relevant. Two examples of this category are given in (15).

- (15) a. *pâte à sucre* ‘dough from sugar’, i.e. sugar paste
 b. *nid à rats* ‘nest of rats’, i.e. rats’ nest

In (15a), the *pâte* ‘dough’ is made out of *sucre* ‘sugar’. Here, ‘for’ does not apply, but it would also be wrong to characterize the relation as ‘with’. In order to create the *pâte*, the *sucre* is transformed, so that there is no *sucre* as a substance in the *pâte*. In (15b), the proper characterization is that the *rats* have built the *nid* ‘nest’. There is no implication of ‘with’, because it remains a *nid à rats* when there are no *rats* in it. It would also be wrong to characterize the relationship as ‘for’, because this would imply that someone might have built it for use by rats, as in *cowshed*. In fact, (15b) is used mainly metaphorically. However, the metaphor is based on the shape and structure of what rats build, not on the purpose of the result.

Taking together the information about the relation between the two components in the *N à N* expressions, we can say that the contribution of the preposition *à* to the meaning is much more limited than in the cases with *sur* in (10). There is a certain bias towards certain relations, but, as shown in (12), it does not go into a uniform direction. With ‘for’ and ‘with’, there are two poles of attraction. Moreover, as Table 3 shows, there are quite a few examples that do not go into either direction. Therefore, we argue that condition (2b) is met.

Let us now turn to (2c). Ten Hacken (2021: 11) uses the pronominal reference test for this condition, which was introduced originally in ten Hacken (1994: 74-77). In (16), this test is applied to the expressions in (1c) and (12a).

- (16) a. Jean a une vache à lait_i. Il le*_i boit chaque matin.
 ‘Jean has a cow for milk. He it drinks every morning.’
 i.e. Jean has a milk cow. He drinks it (the milk) every morning.
 b. Marie a un moulin à légumes_i. Elle les*_i achète au marché.
 ‘Marie has a mill for vegetables. She them buys at the market.’
 i.e. Marie has a food mill. She buys them (the vegetables) at the market.

In (16a), *lait* ‘milk’ is not introduced into the discourse, so that it is not available for pronominal reference. This effect is the same as for the corresponding English compound. In (16b), *légumes* ‘vegetables’ is in a similar position. In the English translation, there is no direct equivalent to *légumes*, because the English compound has a different non-head. As a result, *them* in the translation cannot be interpreted at all. However, if *them* is replaced by *it* to make the pronoun compatible with the English non-head *food*, the same effect is obtained. It is interesting to note that the French expressions with an article, e.g. (8a), behave in the same way, as illustrated in (17).

- (17) Au marché aux poissons_i, ils*_i sont toujours frais.
 ‘At the market with the fish_{PLUR}, they_{PLUR.MASC} are always fresh.’
 i.e. At the fish market, it (the fish) is always fresh.

In (17), *poissons* ‘fish_{PLUR}’ is not introduced into the discourse. The pronoun *ils* could in an appropriate context be used to refer to a kind of fish, e.g. *saumons* ‘salmons’, if a suitable form

had been introduced in the preceding context, but not to *poissons* as it appears in (17). This is exactly the same for *it* in the English translation. It should also be noted that this pronominal reference effect depends on the preposition. For the examples in (10), pronominal reference is possible, as shown in (18).

- (18) Après le vote sur l'immigration_i, celle-ci_i a diminué sensiblement.
 'After the vote on the immigration, it has diminished markedly.'
 i.e. After the immigration vote, it (the immigration) diminished markedly.

The French coreference in (18) is entirely natural. In English, it is natural in the gloss, but ungrammatical in the translation in which a compound is used. In view of (17) this cannot be attributed to the definite article. The form of the pronoun *celle-ci* deserves a comment. It is a demonstrative rather than a personal pronoun. Although it is more natural in (18) than *elle*, the latter is also possible. Replacing the personal pronouns by the corresponding forms of the demonstrative in (16) and (17) does not improve the grammaticality. In (17), using *ceux-ci* instead of *ils* results in an ungrammatical sentence.

On the basis of the examples (16) to (18), we can conclude that the N *à* N construction fulfills condition (2c) of the definition of compound. As the fulfillment of the other conditions was shown before, this means that the N *à* N construction as illustrated in (1c), (8a) and (12) to (15) is a compounding construction according to the definition in (2).

6. Discussion

In the literature on French word formation, there is no general consensus on what constitutes a compound. Grevisse (1980: 118) proposes the definition in (19).

- (19) Un mot, quoique formé d'éléments graphiquement indépendants, est *composé* dès le moment où il évoque dans l'esprit, non les images distinctes répondant à chacun des mots composants, mais une image unique.
 'A word, even if formed from orthographically independent elements, is a compound as soon as in the mind it evokes a single image rather than the distinct images corresponding to each of the component words.'

The definition in (19) identifies a much broader set of items than the one in (2). Among the examples he gives are the expressions in (20).

- (20) a. hôtel de ville 'hotel of town', i.e. town hall
 b. chou-fleur 'cabbage-flower', i.e. cauliflower
 c. contredire 'against_speak', i.e. contradict

Because of the way (19) is formulated, it is not possible to derive tests from it as a way of determining the status of borderline cases. It appeals to unaided intuitive judgements. In the context of Grevisse's (1980) descriptive grammar, this is not disturbing. A descriptive grammar does not have to present a general theory of language. Examples such as (20c) show that the notion of compound is quite wide. The definition in (2) identifies in much more detail how a compound gets its meaning and restricts the set of expressions classified as compounds.

A different approach is taken by Fradin (2009). Following Corbin (1992: 50), he adopts the principle that compounds are morphological constructs and as such may not be built by syntax. He elaborates this in (21) as a set of two conditions (2009: 418).

- (21) a. The sequence of elements could have been generated by syntax.
 b. The phonology of the sequence of elements is that of a syntactic unit.

Fradin's proposal is that, if both conditions in (21) are fulfilled, we are dealing with a syntactic construct, which excludes a classification as a compound. As an illustration of the application of this principle, he gives (22).

- (22) Le cavalier mit pied à terre.
 'The horseman set foot on ground.', i.e. The horseman dismounted.

The fact that the sequence *pied à terre* occurs in a sentence such as (22) can be used to exclude the noun *pied-à-terre* in the sense of 'a flat or house where one does not live permanently, but only occasionally'. This means that the conditions in (21) take no account of the semantics of the expression. Fradin (2009: 432-433) also discusses the opposition in (23).

- (23) a. espace fumeurs 'space smokers', i.e. smoking area
 b. espace pour (les) fumeurs 'space for (the) smokers'

Expressions such as (23a) fail the tests in (21). They contrast with syntactic expressions such as (23b). The bracketed article in (23b) indicates an optional element. As generic NPs are often expressed with a definite article in French, the article is more common in French than in English. Fradin (2009: 433) states that "the expressions in (33) also exist with a preposition heading a PP". His (33) is a set of examples including our (23a). This suggests that Fradin takes (23a) and (23b) to be the same expression. We contend that this is not the case. Whereas (23a) refers to a concept by naming it, (23b) describes a particular *espace*. This is related to the intuition underlying Grevisse's definition in (19). The way (23b) gets its meaning is similar to what we saw in (6). The preposition, *pour* in (23b), *sur* in (6), determines the relation between the two nouns.

For the construction we discuss here, Fradin (2009: 419) gives the examples in (24).

- (24) a. avion à réaction 'plane with reaction', i.e. jet plane
 b. serpent à sonnettes 'snake with bells', i.e. rattlesnake

According to Fradin (2009: 419), "[b]y the same token, the nouns in [(24)] must not be considered as compounds". Here, "the same token" refers to the reasoning for *pied-à-terre* in view of (22). He refers to an earlier edition of Booij (2012: 85), who includes French N à N constructions among "lexical expressions in Romance languages [that] are sometimes incorrectly called compounds although they have in fact a phrasal form".

What is striking about the approach by Fradin (2009) and Booij (2012) is, first of all, their complete exclusion of semantic considerations. In our view, language cannot be analysed without taking into account the meaning of expressions. Secondly, they present their concept of *compound* as the only possible proper concept.

We argue for an approach that is more terminological in orientation. In terminology, a term can be defined in different ways and the choice of a definition should be based on how useful the concept delimited by the definition is in formulating theoretical insights. In our view, the definition in (2) identifies a useful concept. It is more constrained than the *composé* as defined by Grevisse (1980) in (19). By means of the additional constraints, a more precise set of expressions can be identified. These expressions share not only the nature of their place in the mental lexicon, but also the way they are associated with a meaning.

In his discussion of the borderline between compounds and phrases, Booij (2012: 84-87) does not invoke a definition, but only states for a number of constructions that they “must be considered phrases”. This includes also genitive constructions of the type illustrated in (3a). Booij (2009) argues for a distinction between naming and description that is independent from the one between words and phrases. What we aim to do is to identify a cross-linguistic class of expressions that have certain properties in common. The properties described in the definition in (2) are more important than the name *compound* assigned to this class. It remains the case, however, that prototypical N N compounds in languages such as German and English belong to this class. The selection of properties in the definition and its application to a range of constructions in different languages gives insight into the nature of naming.

For the French N *à* N construction illustrated by (1c), we have shown that it belongs to the class of constructions identified by the definition in (2). We call these compounds. They constitute a proper subset of the expressions identified as *composés* by Grevisse (1980). This result is significant from the perspective of how word formation is used as a naming device. In ten Hacken & Panocová (2024) the theoretical background for this perspective is elaborated in more detail.

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