In spite of extensive morphological research into complex-word formation and psycholinguistic research into complex-word interpretation in recent decades, creativity as a word-formation and meaning-predictability factor has not been studied yet. The paper, therefore, presents new insights into the way in which language users of unequal creativity characteristics form and interpret complex words. We start with basic theoretical principles that are followed by our research methodology. The underlying idea is that of competition in natural languages (eg. MacWhinney et al. 2014). It manifests itself in word-formation as competition between various rules available for the formation of a new complex word (e.g., Bauer 2009, Aronoff 2013, Lindsay & Aronoff 2013) and as competition between various potential readings of novel complex words (eg., Gagné & Shoben 1997, Spalding et al. 2010, Stekauer 2005).

The project reported on in this paper covers two different age groups of respondents (250 secondary school and 250 university undergraduates). They undertook the Torrance Test of Figurative Thinking that is based on four indicators of creativity: elaboration, fluency, flexibility and originality. Each indicator was evaluated and, by the application of the median value, both age groups of informants were further divided into two subgroups for each indicator. Subsequently, all the respondents were tested for the formation and meaning-predictability of potential complex words. The word-formation experiment is based on three sets of tasks, each of which aimed at giving names to Agents, including (i) multiple choice; (ii) naming based on a description; and (iii) naming based on drawings of people in unusual situations. The evaluation of the experiment reflects two tendencies that compete in each act of word-formation: the tendency towards semantic transparency vs. the tendency towards economy of expression. The meaning predictability experiment includes potential complex words. The respondents were asked to propose as many meanings for each of them as they could think of, and to rate their level of acceptability. This kind of experiment can be advantageously evaluated using Luce’s (1959) choice rule which makes it possible to weigh the strength of the most predictable reading against the strength of any number of competing readings. Each group of respondents that resulted from the Torrance test will be evaluated in terms of the results obtained by both the word-formation and the meaning predictability experiments. This will enable us to draw conclusions on the interrelatedness between the four creativity indicators, on one hand, and the word-formation and meaning predictability, on the other.

References:

