Intra-language variability of path framing and manner encoding

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Typological research can provide insight into the deep and complex mechanisms of languages, although it also risks creating unwarranted generalisations. A case in point is Talmy (1985), who distinguished between verb-framed (henceforth V) languages and satellite-framed (henceforth S) languages, based on how the path of motion is linguistically encoded. While this typology appears suitable from a descriptive point of view, it is well-known that variability exists in how language users frame the path of motion and that some languages adhere less to the typological expectations than others (Slobin 2004). Despite the fact that the distinction between V- and S-languages is not categorical, Talmy's typology has been used in research to predict cognitive patterns (Hickmann et al. 2018), while, historically, little attention has been paid to intra-language variability in path of motion framing. In order to predict cognitive patterns and understand language differences, it is relevant to investigate the relationship between the described situation and the linguistic schema by which it is described, and also how tight the link is between the two.

The present study investigates how well highly proficient users of British English, Castilian Spanish and Swedish adhere to typological expectations in terms of path of motion framing and manner of motion encoding, based on elicited participant descriptions of motion events. Through a survey with video stimuli portraying *directed motion events* (DMs) and *caused accompanied motion events* (CAMs), event descriptions are gathered as data. The stimuli consist of 24 DMs, 24 CAMs and 12 distraction items. The DMs and CAMs systematically vary combinations of four manners and six path types. Two variants of the survey are used, one where the descriptions are made in writing and one where they are voice-recorded. Data is collected through both surveys to see if path framing is expressed differently in speech and writing. Data collection is still ongoing but so far, descriptions were gathered from 87 participants with about 30 from each language group, by sending out links to the survey on various online platforms, image boards and networks. More than 2000 event descriptions were collected, coded and analysed with, and will be further analysed through, entropy computation, Bayesian mixed models, frequency and correlation tests to quantify the non-event related variability.

Preliminary findings show that the event properties are not able to account for variability in path and manner encoding. The Swedish speakers were more consistent in their path framing than Spanish and English speakers, inter- and intra-speaker, both in the written and spoken descriptions. The English speakers showed least consistency in path of motion framing, both inter- and intra-speaker, when describing the events, both orally and in writing. The Spanish speakers reveal inter-speaker variability regarding path framing, but not to the same extent as the English speakers. The CAMs, where manner becomes more obvious in the event, caused an increase in manner encoding for the Spanish speakers. Comparatively, the Swedish and English speakers exhibited no significant change in manner encoding between the event types. The implications for cognitive linguistics research are discussed.

References

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