Construal and linguistic expression of caused-motion by Chinese adults: An empirical analysis

Na Liu[1], Xiaofang Wu[2]
[1]Beihang University (Beijing, China), selinaliu@buaa.edu.cn
[2]Sichuan Normal University (Chengdu, China), shevon5@163.com

Theoretical background & research target – In the last forty years or so the domain of space has increasingly attracted researchers' attention in various disciplines including language typology, psycholinguistics, language acquisition, etc. Caused motion, a situation where an agent exerts some external forces on an object which causes its direct movement, is a complex type of motion and contains a number of semantic elements, including CAUSE (*take*, *carry*), PATH (*into*, *out of*), MANNER (*push*, *pull*), etc. (Talmy 1985). According to Goldberg (1995: Chap. 7), English caused-motion construction can be syntactically and semantically schematized as [SUBJ [V OBJ OBL]] and X CAUSES Y TO MOVE Z, respectively. Previous research on motion event lexicalization mostly focus on voluntary motion event, and only few studies (Choi & Bowerman 1991; Hendriks, Hickmann & Demagny 2008; Hickmann & Hendriks 2010; Ji et al. 2011) have explored caused-motion event. This study expands the sphere of research by investigating how Chinese adults construe and encode caused-motion in their mind and language, with regard to caused-motion at a coarse-grained and fine-grained level, viz. extended caused-motion and onset caused-motion correspondingly. The difference between extended and onset caused-motion (cf. Talmy 2000: Chap. 8) lies in the presence of simultaneity of the causing and the caused event in the former, and the absence in the latter.

Research questions – 1) How do Chinese adults express caused-motion event in Mandarin? 2) How do Chinese adults differentiate extended caused-motion and onset caused-motion in Mandarin?

Data & method – With 20 video stimuli (10 for each sub-type) and 50 participants (25 females and 25 males, all graduates from Beijing University of Technology), we collect 764 valid descriptions (413 for extended caused-motion and 351 for onset caused-motion) in total. On the one hand, we report the common syntactic structures that Chinese adults use to express caused-motion event, regardless of the difference between the two sub-types of caused-motion event. On the other, we compare the syntactic structures that characterize extended and onset caused-motion, and summarize the features.

Preliminary findings – An examination of the results suggests, firstly, in conceptualization, Chinese adults construe the semantics of causation in the video stimuli, and probe into the indispensable causal component (i.e., the causing and the caused event), followed by setting up the conceptual substrate and forming either single or coordinate causative sentences, both with low specificity. Secondly, with the overall referential frame (the causing event + the caused event), the temporal dimension construing mechanism drives subjects' attention toward the asymmetry of the two different time frames involved, following which linguistic representations fill in, elaborate, and add conceptual details, thus providing high specificity (e.g., 她吹走了羽毛 lit. 'She blew away the feathers' vs. 她用力地吹了一下羽毛，羽毛飞起来了 lit. 'She blew on the feather hard, and the feather flew up'). The transformational relationship between the two concepts can yield a hierarchical model of causation structuring, ranging from a general, simple pattern to more elaborate and complicated patterns. This study is significant as it first reveals how caused-motion and its subtypes are construed and expressed by Chinese adults.

References:

Choi, S. & Bowerman, M. 1991. Learning to express motion events in English and Korean: The influence of language-specific lexicalization patterns. *Cognition* 41. 83-121.

Goldberg, A. E. 1995. *Constructions: A construction grammar approach to argument structure*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hendriks, H., Hickmann, M. & Demagny, A. C. 2008. How English native speakers learn to express caused motion in English and French. *Acquisition et Interaction en Langue Étrangère* 27. 15-41.

Hickmann, M. & Hendriks, H. 2010. Typological constraints on the acquisition of spatial language in French and English. *Cognitive Linguistics* 21. 181-188.

Ji, Y., Hendriks, H. & Hickmann, M. 2011. How children express caused motion events in Chinese and English: Universal and language-specific influences. *Lingua* 121. 1796-1819.

Talmy, L. 1985. Lexicalization patterns: Semantic structure in lexical form. In T. Shopen (ed.), *Language Typology and Syntactic Description*, 36-149. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Talmy, L. 2000. *Toward a cognitive semantics, Vol. I: Concept structuring systems*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.