

Contrasting goals across languages: the interdependency of lexicalization pattern and grammatical viewpoint in event conceptualization

Goals of motion and the role of goal preference as a reflector of cross-linguistic differences have recently gained increased attention in the language-of-space literature. Two distinct factors have been reported to determine goal preference, namely the cross-linguistic differences in lexicalization patterns of motion events and the presence of grammatical viewpoint aspect encoding. The impact of the former has been investigated in Georgakopoulos and Sioupi (2015), who showed that German and Modern Greek (henceforth Greek), a Satellite- and a Verb-framed language, respectively, differ in the degree of the goal bias's robustness: German shows a more robust bias compared to Greek. Regarding the latter, various studies have shown that speakers of aspect languages are more prone to omit the goal of motion than are speakers of non-aspect languages (e.g. Athanasopoulos & Bylund, 2013; Schmiedtová, von Stutterheim, & Carroll, 2011; von Stutterheim & Nüse, 2003).

Assuming that the two factors affect the realization of goals, we can expect an interdependency of lexicalization pattern and grammatical viewpoint aspect to occur in processes related to event conceptualization. To test this hypothesis, the present study focuses on three languages, which differ with respect to either aspectual encoding or their lexicalization pattern: English: aspect, Satellite-framed; German non-aspect, Satellite-framed; and Greek aspect, Verb-framed. There are two possibilities: either the two factors have an additive effect or the weight of each factor is different resulting in different clusters (e.g. if the lexicalization pattern is more important than the presence of aspect, German and English will cluster together and Greek will be different).

To investigate the impact of the two factors, we conducted two empirical studies, one corpus and one experimental. In the corpus study, we extracted data from the British National Corpus for English; from the COSMAS II corpus compiled by IDS Mannheim for German; as well as from the Portal for the Greek Language and the Corpus Manager (see Kouklakis et al., 2007) for Greek. We picked two verbs that presumably do not to include an inherent directionality: FOLLOW and RUN.

In the experimental study, we tested cross-linguistic differences in the online verbalization of motion events. The stimuli used in the study were 40 real-world video clips created by the research team of Schmiedtová, et al. (2011). The observations from the corpus study and the transcribed data from the experimental study were coded for (a) reference to goals and (b) the aspectual distinctions.

Our findings suggest that both parameters have an impact on the number of goals mentioned, but to different degrees. For example, Greek speakers tend to omit goals more often than English and German speakers; and English speakers include goals in their descriptions less often than German speakers, but only in an experimental condition in which the goal is actually reached (e.g. A WOMAN IS WALKING INTO A STATION).

We discuss the implications of our findings with respect to the Thinking-for-Speaking hypothesis and regarding the question as to whether cross-linguistic conceptualization differences should be viewed as hard-wired cognitive differences or rather as online effects.

References

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Corpora

British National Corpus for English. <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>.

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