Medium of motion: Towards a revision of the typology of motion verbs

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This paper looks at expressions of motion events in German and Dutch. More specifically, we will reconsider the well-established two-dimensionsal characterization of motion verbs in terms of path and manner of motion. The two semantic components of path and manner have been said to be the core distinguishing features in descriptions of motion events (cf. Talmy 1985, 1991, Slobin 2000). According to Talmy, languages fall into two types on the basis of where path is conflated in a single lexical item. The preferred lexicalization pattern in *satellite-framed languages* (e.g. Germanic) is to encode the path of the movement in a "satellite", an element associated with the main verb. The manner component is most often expressed by the main verb in these languages. By contrast, *verb-framed languages* (e.g. Romance) predominantly encode the path in the verb root, the manner being an optional adjunct.

We will argue that the two-way typology of motion events in terms of path and manner gives too narrow a view of the semantic variation in motion verbs. It will be proposed that probably at least a third major dimension should be recognized, viz. the medium in which the motion event takes place. Generally, verbs like *swim* and *fly* are characterized as manner verbs. However, what seems to be of importance for these verbs, is not so much the way in which some agent moves, but rather the substance in which the motion event is conceptualized. Thus, the crucial difference between *walk* and *swim* is in terms of the medium in which the motion event takes place, viz. water vs. land. For example, dogs and humans swim in radically different manners, but still both are said to "swim" when they move through water. Similarly, airplanes and birds fly in different manners, which means that the distinguishing characteristic of the verb *fly* is the medium in which the motion event takes place.

Our in-depth analysis of motion verbs aims to show which different dimensions (in addition to manner and path) are part of the semantics of motion verbs, how these dimensions may interact, and whether there are cross-linguistic differences in the interactions of dimensions.

References

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