

Salience of space in the blinds' strategic meaning construal

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Introducing their volume on space in languages, Hickmann and Robert explain linguists' fascination with space by stressing the fact that space is a universal cognitive primitive that "conditions all of our experience" (2006: 1).

The blind experience restrictions in their exploration of space because they lack visual input, and visual experience plays a crucial role in developing a representational framework for spatial representation (Silverstone et al 2000). However, specificities of haptic exploration of space result in the blinds' extraordinary experience of the world, and, therefore, it is reasonable to assume that linguistic meaning construal of the blind is likely to show bias towards topological elements in composite wholes.

The aim of this study was to investigate meaning construal by (re-) hypothesizing the results of two previous bodies of research: a) the investigation into semantic determination (lexical vs. topological) in the process of constructing meaning of English particle verbs (PVs) (author 2011, author and Maldonado 2011, and author and Letica Krevelj 2011), and b) the investigation into salience and situatedness in the language of the blind (author and Stanojević 2006, author and Šimunić 2009).

The sample used in this study was 30 blind English language users (9 congenitally blind and 21 adventitiously blind), and 45 sighted users of English used as a contrast group.

We hypothesized that: a) in both groups topological determination will prevail with PVs containing light verbs, and lexical determination will prevail with PVs containing heavy verbs, and b) the blind will show bias towards topological components in PV constructions.

The results confirm both hypotheses. There is a statistically significant difference between the frequencies of topological determination with PVs containing light verbs and those containing semantically heavy verbs. More specifically, topological determination prevailed with light verbs ($t=7,299$; $df=74$; $p<0,05$), whereas lexical determination prevailed with heavy verbs ($t=3,586$; $df=74$; $p<0,05$). Also, the results of χ^2 test showed statistically significant difference between blind and sighted users of English in the frequency of topological determination, with blind users providing a higher number of instances of topological meaning construal ($\chi^2 = 15,416$ $df=7$; $p<0.05$).

The results obtained support the idea that meaning construal is a tremendously dynamic process, as well as provide tentative evidence that the extraordinary perceptual experience of the blind is likely to affect the ways in which they construct linguistic meaning.

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