

How Typological Exceptions Develop: Talmy's Distinction between Topological and Euclidean Semantics Revisited

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A foundational contribution to linguistic typology and cognitive linguistics is Talmy's (2000: 25) generalization that the meaning of closed-class elements "generally [has] a topological rather than a Euclidean character". Exploring an exception from Talmy's generalization, this paper argues that exceptions emerge through the interaction of largely independent historical processes, and that exceptions are more likely to occur in target domains of metaphors than in their source domains.

As Talmy (2000:26) points out, *the ant crawled across my palm* (a very small distance) and *the bus drove across the country* (a long journey) are equally felicitous, since the semantics of closed-class *across* is topological, i.e. insensitive to the magnitude of the path in question. Likewise, the meaning of the past tense morpheme *-ed* is equally felicitous in the sentence *Alexander died, with dignity*, "whether the time referred to was last year, in speaking of an acquaintance, or over two millennia ago, in speaking of Alexander the Great". However, Russian temporal adverbials with *v* 'in(to)' represent an exception to Talmy's generalization.

Modern Russian has a peculiar rule for temporal adverbials, whereby the case government of *v* 'in(to)' depends on the length of the time span in question. Simplifying somewhat, if the preposition combines with a time span shorter than a week, the accusative is used (cf. *v ètu minutu_{ACC}* 'in this minute'), whereas for longer time spans *v* governs the locative case (hence *v janvare_{LOC}* 'in January'). In Talmy's terminology, Russian temporal adverbials display Euclidean semantics, since case government depends on the magnitude of the time span (longer or shorter than a week).

Based on corpus data from Old and Middle Russian I argue that the Euclidean system is the result of language change in case syntax (the increased use of analytic constructions with prepositions), aspect (the emergence of the delimitative aktionsart), and the lexicon (the metonymical shift in the meaning of *nedelja* from 'Sunday' to 'week'). To the extent that these historical processes are independent, the proposed analysis lends support to Harris' (2008: 76) idea that "typologically unusual constructions [...] are due to the unusual co-occurrence of quite usual processes".

Prepositional constructions with *v* show Euclidean semantics only in the temporal domain; in spatial constructions the accusative signals movement into a three-dimensional space (cf. *v karman_{acc}* 'into the pocket'), while the locative is used about stative location inside such a space (cf. *v karmane_{loc}* 'in the pocket'). I argue that this is no coincidence, but depends on the fact that not all structure transfers from the source to the target domain of the TIME IS SPACE metaphor. Since the movement/location contrast appears less relevant in the temporal domain, it is argued that case government is "freed up" to capture other distinctions, in this case between time spans shorter or longer than a week. Engaging central concepts in cognitive semantics and metaphor theory, the proposed analysis testifies to the value of cognitive linguistics in language typology – including the study of typologically exceptional constructions.

References

- Harris, Alice C. (2008): On the Explanation of Typologically Unusual Structures. *Linguistic Universals and Language Change*. Ed. Jeff Good. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 54-76.
- Talmy, Leonard (2000): *Toward a Cognitive Semantics* (vol. 1). Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.