

Romance conversions from a cognitive perspective

Birgit Umbreit
University of Stuttgart

Cognitive approaches to the phenomenon of conversion, understood as the use of one morphological form in different word categories, e.g. *to kiss* – *kiss*, have so far mainly dealt with English examples, whereas there are hardly any cognitive accounts for conversion in Romance languages, which in comparison to English are characterized by a richer inflectional morphology.

My presentation will try to fill this gap by discussing to what extent the existing cognitive descriptions (e.g. those that adhere to the Langackerian tradition as Twardzisz 1997 and Gaeta 2003, metonymy-based approaches as Dirven 1999 and Schmid 2005 as well as approaches based on category underspecification as Farrell 2001), are suited to account for a type of verb-noun-conversion in French, Italian and Spanish that does not exist in English: the so called nominalized infinitive (NI), as e.g. It. *nuotare_V* 'to swim' -> *nuotare_N* 'the swimming' (syntactic type) and Sp. *decir_V* 'to say' -> *decir_N* 'saying, dictum' (lexicalized type). In both cases the whole word form, i.e. the verbal stem with the inflectional morpheme, is converted.

It will be shown that the afore-mentioned approaches are only partly suited to describe the Romance NIs from a cognitive perspective. Farrell's (2001) account of category underspecification fails because in the case of NIs the conversion base is always categorically specified due to the presence of the infinitival morpheme. Langackerian and metonymy-based theories do not provide a sufficient description of conversion, as they account for only one of the two NI types presented above: Whereas according to Schmid's (2005) approach lexicalized NIs such as Sp. *decir_N* could indeed be explained metonymically (in this case ACTION for RESULT), it cannot be applied to syntactic NIs such as It. *nuotare_N*, which doesn't stand in a metonymic relation to its verbal base, but is rather semantically identical to the latter. Gaeta (2003), on the contrary, correctly accounts for the syntactic NI in distinguishing it from other nominalizations by its *aktionsart* properties, but doesn't offer an analysis of the lexicalized type.

In view of these findings, I will provide a unified cognitive description of the Romance NI based on the analysis of corpora occurrences. It will be shown that syntactic NIs such as It. *nuotare_N* 'the swimming' indeed focalize the internal dynamics of the event expressed by the verb (Gaeta 2003: 112), while the lexicalized NIs have undergone a bounding process that involves the highlighting of varying components of the verbal event and a concretization to different degrees (cf. Fr. *rire(s)_N* 'action(s) of laughing', Sp. *decir_N* 'saying, dictum' and It. *vestire* 'clothes'), and are therefore comparable to other deverbal nominalizations, which typically have a variety of meanings. I will attach to the view that all types of NI can be placed on a continuum between a verbal and a nominal pole (Gaeta 2002, Ehrich 2002).

References

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