

Verbalizing motion events in French, Swedish and Thai

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The ways in which experience is verbalized depends on complex interactions between (visual) perception, cognition, communicative goals, and the conventional resources of one's language. According to Slobin's version of motion event typology (Slobin 2004, cf. Zlatev & David 2003), French, Swedish and Thai should instantiate three different types: *verb-framed*, *satellite-framed* and *equipollently-framed*, respectively. Apart from data from Frog Stories (Strömquist & Verhoeven 2004), however, this proposal has not been supported by a "bottom-up", onomasiological approach. Furthermore, the stylized and quite culture-specific black-and-white drawings of *Frog, Where are you?* are several steps removed from the actual experience of motion situations.

To address these issues, we conducted a study in which verbalizations were obtained from 11 speakers of French, 17 of Swedish and 14 of Thai, by asking them to verbalize 76 video-clips, developed within the project *Trajectoire* (Ishibashi, Kopecka & Vuillermet 2006). Each of the clips, between 8 and 14 sec. long, displays one or more human agents involved in various actions and kinds of movements in an environment with much vegetation or else by the sea. The first two clips were used for training, two showed static situations (a person sleeping and reading), 18 showed actions and movements in which the agent did not change his/her average position (non-translocative motion) and the remaining 54 showed *translocative motion situations* (Zlatev, Blomberg & David 2010).

The data, which was videotaped for Swedish and Thai, allows multiple levels of analysis and comparison. We focus on *three aspects*, with different levels of granularity. First, in considering the ratio of nouns to verbs for the three languages we found the highest N/V ratio for Swedish (types: 2.38; tokens 1.93), followed by French (1.49; 1.32) and then Thai (1.3; 0.83). Second, there were very similar ratios of motion verbs expressing Path+Direction/Manner in French and Thai, both differing from Swedish, where Manner verbs clearly dominated. Third, we analysed the verbalizations of 15 clips in which the person moves in the direction of the camera/observer, and found a much higher proportion of Deixis expressions in Thai than in the other two languages (45%), which were approximately the same (Swedish: 21%, French: 17%). Even on the basis of this preliminary analysis we can conclude that the linguistic resources of the three languages contribute to differences in verbalization. But we also find considerable overlap, as well as a substantial degree of variation within the languages. Therefore we consider it somewhat premature to assign the three languages to "three types", especially if these are seen as largely determinative of language use. We are currently applying this method of analysis to a number of other European and non-European languages in order to help determine the parameters of this variation.

References

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