

Motion events and synchronic variation in Greek: Theoretical and methodological issues

The languages of the world vary radically in the way they map motion components onto lexical and syntactic structures. According to Talmy's (2000) typology, *Verb-framed* languages lexicalize Path of motion in the verb, whereas *Satellite-framed* express Path in constituents that stand in a sister position to the verb (satellites), lexicalizing Manner of motion instead. In recent years, the growing literature in this domain – especially for Indo-European languages – has shown that there are more ways to linguistically encode motion as originally proposed by Talmy. The consensus now is that classifying languages on the basis of the most frequently used encoding strategy does not capture the diversity of mappings across and within languages (Slobin 2004, Croft et al. 2010).

One of the languages that is of special interest in this respect is Modern Greek. Greek – despite a general consent of a clear V-framed system (Papafragou et al. 2006) – presents an *intermediate (parallel) system of conflation* employing both parallel *verb-* and *satellite-framed* constructions (Talmy, 2000), multiple morphological preverb configurations (Ralli 2004) that may function as satellites, as well as complex *Manner-first* syntactic patterns (Soroli 2012). The present comparative study investigates spatial encoding strategies in Greek across these dimensions, comparing them with Satellite-framed English and Verb-framed French, using both experimental and parallel corpus data (see next page). The analysis examined four aspects: the number of spatial components expressed in the utterances (the *semantic density*), the organization of the spatial components (the *syntactic density* and *order* of the clauses), the types of information expressed (the *focus: Path vs. Manner*), and the means whereby this information was expressed (the *locus: Verb vs. Other devices*).

The data showed that English, among other strategies, offers the possibility to use syntactically compact and semantically dense structures that allow expressing both *Manner (systematically encoded in the verb)* and *Path* information (encoded in other devices) in a compact way. In contrast, French mostly – but not only – allows the lexicalization of *Path* information, providing little information about *Manner* in either loci. The Greek data were coded twice with a theory-neutral coding that viewed Greek either as a V-system (verbs coded as monomorphemic) or as an S-system (path prefix + verb root). The double coding showed that Greek offers the possibility for complex lexicalization strategies as well as big variation in the syntactic conflation preferences: (i) expression of Path in the verb together with other Path devices in the periphery; (ii) lexicalization of Manner in the verb together with Path in other devices (mostly prefixes and adverbials); and (iii) organization of the spatial information following both V- and S-conflation patterns.

These results indicate that coding decisions have a big impact on the description of motion event encoding. When Greek verbs are coded as monomorphemic, this language seems closer to the French (V-framed) lexicalization pattern, whereas if Greek verbs are coded as consisting of path prefixes + verb roots, then Greek is more similar to English (S-framed). The cross-linguistic findings and the variation (across and within languages) that emerge from this research indicate the need for precise multi-dimensional (semantic, morphological and syntactic) investigations, as well as for theoretically and methodologically neutral analyses when proposing typological classifications.

Data

The data consisted of comparable usage data on motion event encoding in three typologically different languages (English, French and Greek). This data came from two sources, an experimental study and a parallel corpus study.

The experimental data was collected in a controlled production task during which 60 native speakers of English, French and Greek (20 per language) were asked to describe visual scenes showing motion events. The materials in all language groups comprised a set of 12 stimuli that showed voluntary motion events. These stimuli consisted of animated videos showing characters (humans in diverse settings) performing displacements in different Manners (e.g., walking, running, jumping, roller skating, riding a scooter, riding a bike) along six types of Paths (up, down, into, out of, across and along). The participants were shown the stimuli one by one on a screen and asked to tell “what happened” to a naive interlocutor.

The parallel corpus data was taken from a parallel corpus of 20 Indo-European languages that was specially constructed to study motion event encoding (Verkerk 2014). This corpus consisted of the originals and the translations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Through the Looking-Glass and what Alice found there* (both by Lewis Carroll) and *O Alquimista* (by Paulo Coelho). The corpus consisted of a selection of motion extracts that featured a large range of different constructions in the originals, and at least one instance of each attested motion verb. The set of selected motion event extracts constituted 221 sentences. This paper takes into account the originals and translations of these 221 sentences in English, French, and Greek.

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