Motion expression patterns in African languages

This study examines how African languages fit in Talmy's motion typology (1985, 1991, 2000) by investigating Akan (Kwa; Ghana), 'Alle (East Cushitic; Ethiopia), Bende (Bantu F12; Tanzania), Herero (Bantu R31; Namibia and Botswana), Kumam (Western Nilotic; Uganda), Kupsapiny (Southern Nilotic; Uganda), Saamia (Bantu E34; Uganda), Sidaama (East Cushitic; Ethiopia), and Yoruba (Yoruboid; Nigeria).

Although Talmy's typology is based on various languages of the world, he only classifies Bantu languages as verb-framed languages (2000:222), and does not mention any other African languages. Thus, the questions are first: What pattern(s) do African languages show? Second, do they follow the pattern(s) consistently across different types of motion events? Third, if they do not, why? Fourth, is there any pattern found across African languages?

Our general findings are as follows.
- Most of the languages can show different typological patterns depending on language-specific factors (e.g. motion component, tense).
- All the languages have multi-verb/clause constructions whose verbs/clauses express a co-event and a framing event in this order, though their construction type varies.
- Most (perhaps, all) of the languages have verb-framed constructions.
- Only Kupsapiny has clear instances of satellites.

Our findings on specific languages are as follows.
The three Bautu languages somewhat differ from each other. Bende normally follows the verb-framed pattern in expressing motion events with manner as a co-event, but for motion events with other types of co-events, a coordination is usually used. In Herero, basically a verb-framed language, a simultaneous clause and the main clause characteristically express manner and path, respectively. However, depending on the type of path and the verb, two other non-verb-framed patterns are also observed: (i) the main verb expressing manner takes a path complement, and (ii) the main verb and an infinitive verb or a simultaneous clause express manner and path, respectively. On the other hand, Saamia does not show many verb-framed properties. It usually uses a coordination, whose verbs are both finite and express a co-event and a framing event in this order, but depending on the combination of the tense categories of the verbs, it uses a simultaneous construction, where a finite verb for a co-event precedes a simultaneous clause for a framing event.

Yoruba, which uses a serial verb construction, normally exhibits the equipollent pattern. On the other hand, Akan, which is also considered an equipollent-framed language in the literature, can be regarded as a verb-framed language, because the second verb of the serial verb construction shows main verb properties.

'Alle basically follows the verb-framed pattern, where a gerund with the instrumental case marker and the main verb express a co-event and a framing event, respectively. Sidaama also has a construction similar to this, but also uses a converb construction extensively.

Kumam expresses motion events with a construction where the verb for a co-event takes a prepositonal complement for the path and the ground, or a multi-verb construction where the verb for a co-event is followed by the infinitive form of a verb for a framing event or by a 'while' clause containing a verb for a framing event, depending on the type of path. Kupsapiny more clearly exhibits the satellite-framed pattern, where the deictic suffix usually serves as a satellite, in expressing motion as long as the described path components fit in a certain range of complexity.