

Non-actual motion in Swedish, French and Thai

Motion expressions have been extensively studied in semantic typology, but less attention has been paid to the relations between the expression of actual motion, as in (1) and (2) and expressions where a static spatial configuration is described using motion verbs, as in (3) and (4).

(1) *The bottle floated out of the cave.*

(2) *La botella salió de la cueva.*

(Talmy 1985, p. 69)

(3) *The mountain range goes from Canada to Mexico.*

(4) *The mountain range goes from Mexico to Canada.*

(Talmy 2000, p. 104)

Such sentences have been discussed in terms of “virtual motion” (Talmy 1983), “subjective motion” (Langacker 1987; Matsumoto 1996), “fictive motion” (Talmy 2000) and “abstract motion” (Matlock 2010). The phenomenon is typically attributed to some sort of “mental simulation”. Such an explanation, however, is a much too general, as it conflates different kinds of perceptual and imaginative experiences, or motivations (cf. Blomberg & Zlatev 2014). Following the argumentation presented in the latter, I will discuss the phenomenon as *non-actual motion* (NAM).

I will focus on the expression of NAM in Swedish, French and Thai, considered to be typical examples of satellite-framing (Swedish), verb-framing (French) and equipollent-framing (Thai) languages, see Slobin (2004). The present work addressed the question to what extent this typological characterization of actual motion can be also applied to non-actual motion sentences such as (3) and (4). A novel picture-based elicitation tool was used to empirically investigate the extent to which NAM occur in these languages (cf. Blomberg 2014). Following a 2x2 design, the pictures included figures that *afford human motion (+afford)* (e.g. roads) and figures that *do not afford human motion (-afford)* (e.g. fences); crossed with these conditions, the figure extended either across the picture from a *third-person perspective* (3pp) or from a possible observer’s viewpoint or *first-person perspective* (1pp). Sixteen Swedish, thirteen French and fourteen Thai speakers were asked to describe each picture in one sentence.

Even though speakers of all three languages predominantly produced NAM-descriptions, they did so with clear language-specific constraints. Swedish speakers mainly used generic motion verbs together with prepositions and adverbs, as in (5) and (6). The French participants predominantly used such verbs or Path-verbs, see (7) and (8). Thai speakers typically used serial-verb constructions with the Manner-verb typically omitted, (9) and (10). This suggests that the difference between actual and non-actual motion is semantically marked in all three languages. It can thus be proposed that NAM-descriptions will use the language-specific resources for expressing actual motion, but with the semantic elements of actual motion downplayed or demoted.

Data

5. En väg som gå-r in i en tunnel.
DET.INDF road COMP.REL go-PRS in in DET.INDF tunnel
'A road that goes into a tunnel.'
6. Avgränsning på strand-en som led-er ner till hav-et.
delimitation on beach-DETCOMP.REL lead-PRS down to sea-DET.DEF
'Delimitation on the beach that leads down to the sea.'
7. Une barricade qui va jusqu'à l' horizon
DET.INDF.F barricade COMP.REL go.3SG.PRS until DET.DEF.M horizon
'A fence that goes to the horizon.'
8. Les canalization-s qui rentre dans un mur.
DET.DEF.PL pipe-PL COMP.REL enter.3SG.PRS in DET.INDF.M wall
'The pipes that enter in a wall.'
9. Thangdoen khâw pai nai umong.
path enter go inside cave
'A path enters goes inside a cave.'
10. Pen thànõn thî tât phaàn phukhaõ.
be road COMP cut-through pass mountain
'A road that cuts-through and passes a mountain.'

References

- Blomberg, J. (2014). *Motion in Language and Experience*. Doctoral dissertation. Lund University.
- Blomberg, J. & Zlatev, J. (2014) Actual and non-actual motion: Why experimental semantics needs phenomenology (and vice versa). *Phenomenology and Cognitive Sciences* 13(3), 395-418.
- Langacker, R. (1987). *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar: Theoretical Prerequisites*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Matlock, T. (2010). Abstract motion is no longer abstract. *Language and Cognition*, 2(2): 243-260.
- Matsumoto, Y. (1996). Subjective motion and English and Japanese verbs. *Cognitive Linguistics* 7(2): 183-226.
- Slobin, D. I. (2004). The many ways to search for a frog: linguistic typology and the expression of motion events. In S. Strömquist and L. Verhoeven (eds.), *Relating Events in Narrative: Typological and Contextual Perspectives* (pp. 219-257). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Talmy, L. (1983). How language structures space. In J. H. L. Pick and L. P. Acredolo (eds.), *Spatial Orientation: Theory, Research, and Application* (pp. 225-282). New York: Plenum Press
- Talmy, L. (1985). Lexicalization patterns: Semantic structure in lexical forms. *Language Typology and Syntactic Description* 3 : p. 57-149.
- Talmy, L. (2000). *Toward a Cognitive Semantics: Concept Structuring Systems*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.