

Non-actual motion in Swedish, French and Thai

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Abstract

Motion expressions have been extensively studied in semantic typology, but less attention has been paid to the relation 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: 69)

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

(Talmy 2000: 104)

Sentences such as (3) and (4) 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 motivations (cf. Blomberg & Zlatev 2014). Following the argumentation presented in the latter, we discuss the phenomenon as *non-actual motion* (NAM).

We focus on the expression of NAM in Swedish, French and Thai, considered to be typical examples of satellite-framing (Swedish), verb-framing (French) and equipollently-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 picture-based elicitation tool was designed to empirically investigate the extent to which NAM occur in these languages (Blomberg 2014). Following a two-by-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. French participants predominantly used such verbs or Path-verbs whereas Thai speakers typically used serial-verb constructions with the Manner-verb typically omitted. 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 elements of actual motion downplayed or demoted.

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