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Lexicalizing motion in Finnish

The expression of motion has long been known to deviate from the classic principle “one meaning – one form”. Semantic categories and linguistic forms often have more complex ways of combining: one form can *conflate* the meanings of more than one semantic category (e.g. Talmy 1985), or the meaning of one semantic category can be *distributed* across many forms (e.g. Sinha & Kuteva 1995). Finnish appears to be a textbook example of these phenomena.

Lexicalization of motion situations is one subject under investigation in the project *Variable Competence* (Pajunen 2014; in collaboration with Jordan Zlatev), which uses a multi-method approach to study the linguistic competence of adult native Finnish speakers. Data about motion is gathered using two elicitation tools – one for actual motion discussed here (Ishibashi et al. 2006) and another for non-actual (fictive) motion (Blomberg 2014). The Finnish data is provided by 50 informants of varying backgrounds. A thorough analysis of a Non-Indo-European language with an extensive case system adds up to what has been discovered about other, typologically distant languages with the help of the same elicitation tools (e.g. Blomberg 2014).

In my presentation I provide examples of the Finnish data concentrating on patterns of conflation and distribution occurring within the expression of motion. The conceptual framework is adopted from Zlatev (2007). It seems that in Finnish some spatial categories tend to be encoded more accurately than has been acknowledged in previous research. Wide attention has been paid to the case system, which has led to a slight disregard for other forms participating in the expression of motion.

The example below displays a case of rich spatial description. The informant describes a video clip of a man coming out of the forest and could convey the information simply with a phrase like *mies tulee metsästä* ‘man comes from the forest’. Instead the informant implies the twisty shape of the path with the verb *pujotella* ‘zigzag’ and with the route expression *oksien välistä* ‘from between the branches’ (which also implies the route being slightly blocked). The beginning of the Path is expressed with *metsästä* in which the elative case encodes the meaning ‘out of’. Yet the expression is reinforced with the optional Direction adverb *pois* ‘away/out of’.

Mies	pujottelee	oksien	välistä	metsästä	pois
man	3SG-zigzag	branch-GEN.PL	between-Elative	forest-Elative	away
‘A man zigzags from between the branches away from the forest.’					

References

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