

Motion events in Telugu and Thai: Two “deviant languages”?

Viswanatha Naidu, Dravidian University, India

Jordan Zlatev & Johan Blomberg, Lund University, Sweden

Vasanta Duggirala, Osmania University, India

The binary typology of Talmy (1991) has been the focus of numerous studies of motion events (e.g. Bohnemeyer et al. 2007; Croft et al. 2010). There is general consensus that e.g. Germanic and Slavonic languages are *satellite-framed*, i.e. tend to express the Path component in a satellite, and that e.g. Romance and Semitic languages are *verb-framed*. However, any clear two-type division of languages on the basis of their expression of Path is problematic. Basic concepts such as Path, Manner and “satellite” have been ill-defined (Zlatev et al. 2010). Furthermore, serial-verb languages like Thai (Zlatev & Yanklang 2004) and Ewe (Ameka & Essegbey 2013) differ from either of the two Talmian types by allowing verbs expressing Manner, Path, and Deixis in the same clause. The proposal of a third “equipollently framed” type (Slobin 2004) has not resolved the issues (Blomberg 2014).

Telugu is another language, whose typological classification remains unclear (Naidu & Vasanta 2011). It allows the combination of main verbs expressing Path or Deixis (*veLLADu* ‘go’) with verbal participles of Manner (*parigett-kunTu* ‘run’). In addition, it uses case markers (e.g. *-nuMDi* ‘from’) to express Path and nominals (*IO/bayaTi* ‘inside/outside’) to express Region, which can be combined with case marking, e.g. *IO-nuMDi* (‘from-inside’). Could Telugu possibly belong to the “third type” of languages?

We compared Thai and Telugu motion descriptions in “frog stories” (Strömquist & Verhoeven 2004) from 10 speakers per language. These were coded in terms of the categories of *Holistic Spatial Semantics* (Blomberg 2014). The results (Figure 1) showed very two different profiles. There were comparable rates of Path expression, but in Thai this was done predominantly with verbs, while in Telugu almost exclusively with case marking.

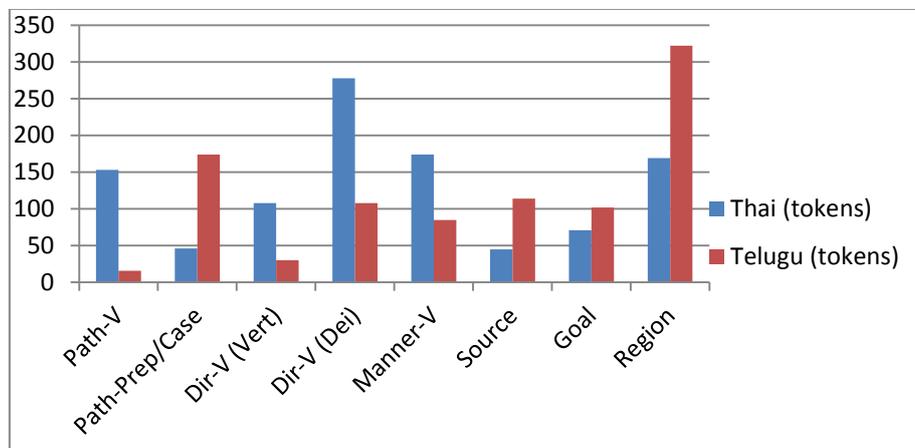


Figure 1. Tokens of the semantic categories in 10 Telugu and Thai “frog stories”

The Thai speakers expressed Direction (unbounded motion) as well as Manner much more often. On the other hand, the Source and Goal of the motion event were coded in Telugu more often, as well as the Region (IN, AT, ON, UNDER...).

In sum, Telugu and Thai cannot be subsumed under the same “third type”, while not clearly belonging to either of the original ones. The profile of Telugu follows from its consistent use of case-marking. Thus, to the extent that motion event typology should be based on the expression of Path, Telugu (and possibly other languages with extensive case-marking) can be seen as forming a “fourth type”: *case-framing*.

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