

Crosslinguistic preferences in encoding reported speech and thought events: Evidence from a parallax spoken corpus

In this paper, we aim to contribute to our understanding of the crosslinguistic verbalization of reported speech and thought events by investigating whether preferences of encoding events in the motion domain are echoed in the speech/thought domain. We test this hypothesis across a genetically and geographically diverse sample of 14 languages, more than half of them less well described, using data from a parallax corpus (Barth & Evans 2017) elicited with an interactive task, the Family Problems Picture Task (San Roque et al. 2012). In the motion domain, some languages such as Spanish tend to encode the path of motion in the verb, while other languages, for instance English, encode it outside the verb (e.g. Talmy 1991). Languages that express the path outside the verb have been found to encode manner of motion in the verb more frequently (e.g. Slobin et al. 2014). Our point of departure is a study by Caballero & Paradis (2018) who compare large corpora of literary texts from English and Spanish regarding potential parallels in encoding preferences in the motion and reported speech domains. Their results do not point to a complete mirroring of preferences: While Spanish indeed seems to encode path (in the sense of conversational management) more frequently in verbs framing reported speech than English, English did not show a higher frequency of encoding manner in the verb. In this study, we extend the hypothesis to include expressions framing reported thought, and tackle it with a larger sample of languages and with spoken instead of literary written data. In addition, we use exploratory clustering techniques to investigate what other variables may play a role in explaining the cross-linguistic differences in encoding preferences of speech and thought framing expressions, such as the existence of a general ‘say’ verb that encompasses both speech and thought, and a preference for direct vs. indirect speech.

References

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