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Motion events in Chinese novels: Evidence for an equipollently-framed language

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Abstract

Motion events typically involve an entity moving along a path in a certain manner. Research on language typology has identified three types of languages based on the characteristic expression of manner and path information. In satellite-framed languages, the main verb expresses information about manner of movement and a subordinate satellite element (e.g., a verb particle) to the verb conveys the path of movement. In verb-framed languages, the main verb expresses the core information of the path of movement, and the manner information is expressed in a subordinate structure (e.g., a gerundive). Both manner and path, however, are expressed by equivalent grammatical forms in equipollently-framed languages. In this paper, we explore the place of Mandarin Chinese in motion event typology through an examination of motion event descriptions in Chinese novels. We find that Chinese writers do not pattern their narrative descriptions of motion events as do writers of satellite-framed languages, nor as writers of verb-framed languages. Rather, Chinese writers follow unique habitual patterns of language use that lead to the contention that Chinese is an equipollently-framed language.
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1. Introduction

Motion events, which typically involve an entity moving from one place to another, are among the earliest, most basic and pervasive events in our lives (Johnson, 1987). We move around the world every day, changing our perspective relative to people and objects around us, and from birth forward we experience the movement of ourselves and others.

Each language has many different means for talking about objects and their motion through space, but one of them is more characteristic than others. According to Talmy (2000:27), an expression of motion event is characteristic in a language if (1) it is *colloquial* in style, rather than literary or stilted; (2) it is *frequent* in occurrence in speech, rather than only occasional; and (3) it is *pervasive*, rather than limited—that is, a wide range of semantic notions are expressed in this type.

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Research on typology of language has revealed that languages differ with respect to their characteristic expression of motion events. This paper examines the various ways of talking about motion events in actual language use in Mandarin Chinese in order to identify its characteristic expression of motion. By doing so, it offers a new type of evidence for the typological properties of the language.

2. The controversy over the place of Mandarin Chinese in motion event typology

By looking at characteristic expression of motion events, Talmy (1985, 1991, 2000) has proposed a two-way typology differentiating satellite-framed languages from verb-framed languages.[1] Satellite-framed languages (e.g., English) characteristically encode the path of movement in a satellite element such as a particle (e.g., *in*, *out*, *across*) subordinate to the main verb of a clause, whereas verb-framed languages (e.g., Spanish) characteristically encode the path in the main verb. This contrast may be illustrated by example (1) from Slobin (1997:438).

(1) English original   Spanish translation
     I ran <u>out</u> the kitchen door,   *Salí por la puerta de la cocina*
                                          "I <u>exited</u> [by] the kitchen door"
     <u>past</u> the animal pens,   *pasé por los corrales*
                                          "<u>passed</u> by the animal pens"
     <u>towards</u> Jasón's house.   *y <u>me dirigí</u> a casa de Jasón*
                                          "and <u>directed myself</u> to Jasón's house"

As shown in (1), while English employs a set of locative particles and prepositions (*out*, *past*, *towards*) to encode changes in location, Spanish typically makes use of a set of separate verbs (*salí*, *pasé*, *me dirigí*) instead.

Satellite-framed (and hence S-) languages and verb-framed (hence V-) languages also differ in their preferences for encoding the manner of movement. S-languages typically encode it as part of the main verb, and contain a rich lexicon of manner verbs (e.g., *crawl*, *creep*, *dash*, *dart*, *fly*, *jump*, *leap*, *limp*, *run*, *slip*, *splash*, *splat*, *stroll*, *throw*, *walk*). Therefore, an English speaker would most likely say *I ran out the kitchen door* as in (1), rather than (2) even though both are grammatical.

(2) I exited the kitchen door, **running**.

In contrast, V-languages contain fewer such manner verbs, and the manner information may be expressed in a separate lexical item from the main verb. For example, in the Spanish translation in (1), the main verb, *salí*, indicates that motion has occurred in a particular direction and information about manner of movement is omitted altogether. Although the translator might have encoded manner in the main verb (**corrí** por la puerta de la cocina "(I) ran through the door of the kitchen") or added a separate linguistic unit subordinate to the main verb such as the gerundive *corriendo* "running" in example (3) to indicate manner, such perfectly grammatical options are not characteristic of Spanish.

(3) Salí por la puerta de la cocina **corriendo**
     exit by the door   of the kitchen running
     "I exited the kitchen door, running."

Talmy's binary typology hinges on a single crucial criterion: does a given language preferentially express path (i.e., change of location) in the main verb (as in V-languages) or in satellite elements associated with the main verb (as

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[1] Talmy's typological framework is not limited to motion events, but embraces a broader range of conceptual domains including the conceptual domain of aspect, change of state, action correlation, and event realization.