

A Comparative Study of Motion Events Encoding in English and Italian

Authors : Alfonsina Buoniconto

Abstract : The aim of this study is to investigate the degree of cross-linguistic and intra-linguistic variation in the encoding of motion events (MEs) in English and Italian, these being typologically different languages both showing signs of disobedience to their respective types. As a matter of fact, the traditional typological classification of MEs encoding distributes languages into two macro-types, based on the preferred locus for the expression of Path, the main ME component (other components being Figure, Ground and Manner) characterized by conceptual and structural prominence. According to this model, Satellite-framed (SF) languages typically express Path information in verb-dependent items called satellites (e.g. preverbs and verb particles) with main verbs encoding Manner of motion; whereas Verb-framed languages (VF) tend to include Path information within the verbal locus, leaving Manner to adjuncts. Although this dichotomy is valid altogether, languages do not always behave according to their typical classification patterns. English, for example, is usually ascribed to the SF type due to the rich inventory of postverbal particles and phrasal verbs used to express spatial relations (i.e. the cat climbed down the tree); nevertheless, it is not uncommon to find constructions such as the fog descended slowly, which is typical of the VF type. Conversely, Italian is usually described as being VF (cf. Paolo uscì di corsa 'Paolo went out running'), yet SF constructions like corse via in lacrime 'She ran away in tears' are also frequent. This paper will try to demonstrate that such a typological overlapping is due to the fact that the semantic units making up MEs are distributed within several loci of the sentence –not only verbs and satellites– thus determining a number of different constructions stemming from convergent factors. Indeed, the linguistic expression of motion events depends not only on the typological nature of languages in a traditional sense, but also on a series morphological, lexical, and syntactic resources, as well as on inferential, discursive, usage-related, and cultural factors that make semantic information more or less accessible, frequent, and easy to process. Hence, rather than describe English and Italian in dichotomic terms, this study focuses on the investigation of cross-linguistic and intra-linguistic variation in the use of all the strategies made available by each linguistic system to express motion. Evidence for these assumptions is provided by parallel corpora analysis. The sample texts are taken from two contemporary Italian novels and their respective English translations. The 400 motion occurrences selected (200 in English and 200 in Italian) were scanned according to the MODEG (an acronym for Motion Decoding Grid) methodology, which grants data comparability through the indexation and retrieval of combined morphosyntactic and semantic information at different levels of detail.

Keywords : construction typology, motion event encoding, parallel corpora, satellite-framed vs. verb-framed type

Conference Title : ICELLL 2017 : International Conference on English Language, Literature and Linguistics

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : January 19-20, 2017