

Semantic components of motion in Berber

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PATH and MANNER are key notions in the semantic construal of motion events. My contribution deals with their linguistic expression in Berber varieties (Tashelhit, Tamazight). Beyond the descriptive interest for Berberologists, this ties in with a current debate in cognitive linguistics concerning a broader range of complex event types (Bohnenmeyer et al. 2007; Croft et al. forthcoming).

Systematic cross-linguistic differences in the construal of motion events have been described and analysed by Talmy (1985, 2000) who has proposed a twofold typology (verb-framing versus satellite-framing languages) based on the question how PATH is coded. Typologists have pointed out that certain languages defy this dichotomy, among them African languages such as Ewe (Ameka & Essegbey 2006) and Emai (Schaefer 1986). Slobin (2004) proposes to solve the problem by adding a third type, the so-called equipollently-framing languages. In contrast to Talmy's original proposal, Slobin focuses on "manner saliency", arguing that Talmy's two-way distinction should rather be understood as a cline between those languages promoting manner of motion (satellite-framing type) and those demoting manner of motion (verb-framing). His equipollently-framing type encompasses languages at an intermediate ("manner-neutral") position.

More recently, Croft et al. (forthcoming) argue that it is indeed necessary to expand Talmy's twofold typology, rather than simply adding another type. Instead they shift the attention from entire languages to specific constructions used to express complex event types (including motion events), and they propose a more fine-grained distinction of types. Most importantly, Croft et al.—as observed by other scholars also, among them Talmy (2000, forthcoming)—underscore the significance of motion events by showing how their semantic construal relates to other complex event types (e.g. resultatives).

My contribution aims mainly at showing that Berber languages are problematic with regard to the original typology. They cannot easily be classified in terms of the two-way distinction of verb- versus satellite-framing. This is a pertinent observation, because the languages that are typically regarded as "problematic" are those relying on verb serialisation or complex compounding and incorporating strategies to express complex event types. Berber does not share these typological properties. Classifying Berber simply as equipollently-framing is not a viable solution. Instead, the construction-based approach (Croft et al. forthcoming) and their notion of a "symmetric type" provide better tools for the description of the Berber language data.