

CONSTRUCTIONS OF SPATIAL SITUATIONS IN VIETNAMESE

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Abstract: This paper investigates constructions which express spatial situations – location and motion – in Vietnamese. The main aim is to achieve an understanding of Vietnamese language specific typology of motion events in the sense of Talmy (1985) and Slobin (2004). Three types of linguistic typology of motion events which are proposed by Talmy with verb–framed languages and satellite–framed languages and by Slobin with equipollently–framed languages have been examined with details using lexical representation and predicate-argument structure approaches.

Motion events, defined as events in which an entity moves from one place to another, are one of the earliest, most basic and most pervasive experiences in our lives. Spatial situations, which include both location and motion, are fundamental to our common experience. The language of space is central to grammar, e.g., spatial deixis in pronouns and adverbs, spatial adpositions, and verbs of location, motion, contact, application and removal. Linguistic expressions referring to relative spatial situations are semantically and syntactically complex. Almost all of the important analytical issues in verbal semantics start with spatial predicates of various classes. Thus a perceptive analysis of the verbal semantics of spatial situations crosslinguistically will go a considerable way towards an adequate model of verbal semantics.

By applying the frame of linguistic typology of motion events developed by Talmy (1985, 2000) and others to investigate motion constructions, which pair form and meaning, to an analysis of Vietnamese data, we see that Vietnamese exhibits characteristics that have been associated with both satellite-framed languages such as English and verb-framed languages such as Spanish (Talmy, 1985, 2000). Vietnamese differs from Spanish, but patterns with English because it uses a rich range of motion verbs (mainly manner–of–motion verbs coupled with another word which expresses ‘path’). However, Vietnamese tends to encode a complex motion event into multiple verbal components forming serial verb constructions. On the other hand, Vietnamese

differs from English, but patterns with Spanish, in the light references to ground elements and relatively rich descriptions of the physical settings in which movement takes place. As a whole, the regular patterns of motion event expressions are consistent with the characterization of Vietnamese as belonging to the class of equipollently-framed languages (Slobin, 2004). However, there is a category of non-dynamic spatial words whose syntactic category affiliation has been much debated. These words typically follow the verb or verbal complex. This paper argues that these words are neither nouns nor verbs but belong to the class of preposition.

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