

Running across the mind or across the park: Does speech about physical and metaphorical motion go hand in hand?

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Keywords: physical motion, metaphorical motion, crosslinguistic variation

Expression of physical motion (e.g., *girl crawls over carpet*) shows systematic variability not only between language types (i.e., inter-typological) but also within a language type (i.e., intra-typological). Inter-typological variation becomes evident for both packaging and lexicalization of motion elements^{1,2}. Satellite-framed language (S-language) speakers rely more on conflated strategies, expressing manner in the verb and path in a satellite associated with the verb within a single clause (e.g., English *run into the house*). Verb-framed language (V-language) speakers, on the other hand, opt to rely more on separated packaging strategies, with path and manner expressed in separate clauses (e.g., Spanish: *entrar en la casa corriendo* = enter into house by running). The intra-typological variability becomes evident largely in the lexicalization of motion, particularly with respect to the extent and diversity with which path and manner components are expressed either in the verb or in a secondary motion element.³

In this study, we asked whether the patterns of inter-typological and intra-typological variability remain similar in physical motion (*man runs through the park*) and metaphorical motion (e.g., *idea runs through the mind*) events. To investigate this question, we randomly extracted 450 physical motion (150/language) and 450 metaphorical motion (150/language) descriptions from novels originally written in German, Polish—both S-languages, and Spanish—a V-language. We utilized a two-pronged approach by focusing on both packaging strategies (i.e., conflated, separated) speakers employ in arranging manner and path components of motion and lexicalization strategies that become evident in the more detailed aspects of the motion event description (i.e., choice of manner vs. path verb, inclusion of secondary motion elements encoding manner or path).

Our results showed strong inter-typological differences in the expression of both event types: German and Polish writers (both S-languages) differed from Spanish (V-language) writers: they used more conflated packaging strategies and more lexicalization of manner in the verb than Spanish speakers, while Spanish writers used more separated strategies with more lexicalization of path in the verb than both German and Polish writers. The strong inter-typological differences were accompanied by more modest intra-typological variability, largely limited to metaphorical events, with Polish speakers expressing a greater diversity of manner verbs in their descriptions than German speakers. Our findings thus provide evidence for a robust inter-typological pattern across both motion event types, accompanied by a relatively less robust intra-typological pattern that varies by event type (i.e., metaphorical motion)—highlighting event type as an important factor in understanding crosslinguistic variation in the expression of motion.

Overall, our study provides a comprehensive account of physical vs. metaphorical motion encoding across languages from the same (i.e., inter-typological variation) vs. a different typological group (i.e., intra-typological variation)—thus expanding our understanding of the cross-linguistic factors that underlie the linguistic construal of motion in space.

References

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