

Original Contributions - Originalbeiträge

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Constructional Meaning and Knowledge-Driven Interpretation of Motion Events

Examples from Three Romance Varieties

1. Introduction

Due to the utmost perceptual pervasiveness and the consequent fundamental role that the domain of spatial relations plays in structuring human understanding, the study of the linguistic expression of motion represents a very prolific research branch at the edge of linguistic and cognitive sciences. In fact, starting from the 1970s, it was precisely due to the pioneering investigations on the role that the categorisation and expression of space plays in the categorisation and expression of more abstract domains (cf., a.o., Miller & Johnson-Laird, 1976; Jackendoff, 1983; Talmy, 1983; Lakoff, 1987; Langacker, 1987) that a new discipline, i.e. cognitive semantics, emerged. Such a discipline, based on the observation that the processes of meaning attribution and understanding start with a percept and reflect general cognitive processes, allowed for the first time to extend (more or less explicitly) the gestalt principles to linguistic and semantic theory (cf. Osmańska-Lipka, 2012), thus drifting from atomistic, oppositional and dichotomic approaches to holistic analysis models, which consider cognitive and experiential phenomena as an integral part of meaning attribution and interpretation processes. A direct consequence of this change of perspective was the emergence of newer linguistic approaches (e.g. Gestalt and Construction Grammar), which, as we will shortly read, had a major impact also on the studies of motion event typology by considering each linguistic expression as independent and different from the sum of its constitutive parts.

By adopting a holistic, variationist and constructional approach, the present study aims at pointing out the main strategies attested diachronically in Italian, French and Spanish for the encoding of motion in which the motional meaning is completely independent from the lexical semantics of the items of the clause and for whose understanding the mediation of grammatical and co(n)text-established knowledge is crucial. Besides the present introduction, this paper is articulated into four more sections. Section 2 briefly outlines the theoretical development of motion event (ME) typology with a particular focus on the languages of the Romance family. Section 3 describes the corpus investigation on

which the present study is based and is followed by Section 4 in which the results obtained from parallel text analysis are illustrated. Recapitulative considerations are made in Section 5.

2. Theoretical Background

From a cognitive point of view, a ME is here understood as the conceptualisation of a 'change of location from a spatial position A to a different position B, whereby the moving figure was located at position A at time T1 and then located at position B at another time T2' (Filipović & Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2015, p. 527). Moving forward to the level of semantics, we follow Leonard Talmy (2000), considering a ME as being made up of four internal components: (i) Move (the act of moving), (ii) Figure (the moving entity), (iii) Ground (the entity with reference to which the Figure moves) and (iv) Path (the directional relation occurring between Figure and Ground). The external component of Coevent (in the forms of Manner or Cause) is also involved in ME encoding. It is worth noticing here that the notions of Figure and Ground, despite being overtly taken from Gestalt psychology, are not used in a perceptual sense, but rather they identify semantic units, respectively, referring to what has already been perceived and meaningfully categorised as either a 'moving or conceptually movable object whose path or site is at stake', for Figure, or as 'a reference point stationary within the reference frame, with respect to which the Figure's path or site is characterized', for Ground (cf. Talmy, 1975, p. 419).

Given the conceptual prominence attributed to Path, the traditional typological classification of ME encoding distributes languages into two groups, based precisely on the preferred lexico-syntactic slot for the expression of Path. According to Talmy's model, *satellite-framed* (SF) languages typically express Path into verb modifiers called satellites (e.g. adverbial items such as preverbs and verb particles), thus leaving the verb root free to encode Manner. Since satellites can be accumulated, very articulated descriptions of both Path and Manner can be produced. On the other hand, *verb-framed* (VF) languages tend to encode Path information within the verbal locus, whereas Manner is expressed in an adjunct and added only when functionally relevant. As Path information is immediately conveyed by the verb, no detailed descriptions of either Path or Manner can be economically given (cf. Slobin, 2004). Below are few examples meant to illustrate the difference between the two encoding types. More specifically, (1) shows a SF clause taken from a Latin text – where the preverb *ex-* is used for Path encoding and (2) reports its translations in Italian (2a), French (2b), Spanish (2c), Portuguese (2d) – where, coherently with the VF type, the verb forms *uscirà*, *sortira*, *saldrá*, *sairá* are responsible for the encoding of Path.

(1) Latin SF [Ov.Met.XV.370]

<i>de</i>	<i>parte</i>	<i>sepulta</i>	<i>scorpius</i>	<i>ex-ibit</i>
from	part.ABL.F.SG	hide.PTCP.PRF.ABL.F.SG	scorpion.NOM.M.SG.	out-go.FUT.3SG
Path		Ground	Figure	Path-Move
'a scorpion will come out from the buried part'				

(2) VF translations

a. Italian [F. Ermolao, Antonelli, 1844]

<i>uscirà</i>	<i>dal</i>	<i>sepolto</i>	<i>uno</i>	<i>scorpione</i>
exit.FUT.3SG	from.the	buried	a	scorpion
Path+Move	Path	Ground		Figure

b. French [J. Chamonard, Garnier-Flammarion, 1966]

<i>de</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>ensevelie</i>	<i>sortira</i>	<i>un</i>	<i>scorpion</i>
from	the	part	buried	exit.FUT.3SG	a
Path		Ground		Path+Move	Figure

c. Spanish [A. Pérez Vega, BUV, 2003]

<i>de</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>parte</i>	<i>sepultada</i>	<i>un</i>	<i>escorpión</i>	<i>saldrá</i>
from	the	part	buried	a	scorpion	exit.FUT.3SG
Path		Ground			Figure	Path+Move

d. Portuguese [A.A. Predebon, Univ. de São Paulo, 2006]

<i>de</i>	<i>seu</i>	<i>corpo</i>	[<i>na</i>	<i>terra</i>]	<i>sairá</i>	<i>escorpião</i>
from	its	body	in.the	ground	exit.FUT.3SG	scorpion
Path		Ground			Path+Move	Figure

Despite the great fortune enjoyed in typological studies by the SF/VF opposition, this has undergone a number of revisions based on the assumption that the mere opposition between verb and satellite taken individually is neither always applicable nor fully representative in the description of languages. A well-known example of the inefficacy of this dichotomic model is precisely represented by the languages of the Romance family which not only allow for SF constructions (cf., a.o., Aske, 1989; Slobin & Hoiting, 1994; Slobin, 1996; Filipović, 2007, 2013; Iacobini & Fagard, 2011; Kopecka, 2013; Iacobini, 2015; Buoniconto, 2018, 2019a) but also differ in the level of complexity in the encoding of Path and Manner (cf., a.o., Slobin, 2004, 2005; Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2009, 2017; Hijazo-Gascón & Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2013; Buoniconto 2019a). This is exemplified in (3), where a set of SF constructions is listed so that Italian (3a) and French (3b) are in fact different translations of (1) and equivalent to VF (2a) and (2b). Also, Spanish (3c) and Portuguese (3d), despite not being direct translations of (1), can still be overlapped to (2c) and (2d) since they encode the same event of 'exiting'.

(3) SF constructions

a. Italian [V. Sermonetti, Rizzoli, 2014]

<i>Dal</i>	<i>resto</i>	<i>sepolto</i>	<i>spunterà</i>	<i>fuori</i>	<i>un</i>	<i>minaccioso</i>	<i>scorpione</i>
from.the	rest	buried	pop.FUT.3SG	out	a	menacing	scorpion
			Manner+Move	Path			
'a menacing scorpion will pop out from the buried part'							

- b. French [T. Villenave, Gay, 1807]

<i>vous</i>	<i>verrez</i>	<i>sen</i>	<i>élancer</i>	<i>un</i>	<i>scorpion</i>
you	see.FUT.2PL	REFL.from.there	throw	a	scorpion
		Path	Manner+Move		

‘a scorpion will throw itself out of there’

c. Spanish [Corpus CREA]

<i>Antes</i>	<i>tenía</i>	<i>que</i>	<i>salir</i>	<i>afuera</i>
before	had.IMPF.3SG	that	exit	out
			Path+Move	Path

‘he had to get out first’

d. Portuguese [Corpus do Portugues]

<i>e</i>	<i>foi</i>	<i>por</i>	<i>aí</i>	<i>afora</i>
and	go.PST.3SG	through	there	out
	Move			Path

‘and he left through there’

Such observations have led to the conclusion that rather than classifying languages in terms of dichotomies, ME encoding would be better described adopting a holistic perspective that considers the whole utterance as the minimal unit of analysis (as opposed to verb and satellite alone) in which the meaning of its parts depends on the whole utterance and vice versa (cf. Zlatev, 2003; Fagard, Zlatev, Kopecka, Cerruti, & Blomberg, 2013; Naidu, Zlatev, Duggirala, Van De Weijer, Devylder, & Blomberg, 2018). In this approach, spatial semantic categories are assumed to be based on prelinguistic bodily experience which is later language-specifically conventionalised. Conventionalisation involves both the identification of the salient semantic components of a ME and their distributed, constructional expression (cf. Sinha & Kuteva, 1995; Croft, Barðdal, Hollmann, Sotirova, & Taoka, 2010; Fortis & Vittrant, 2016), that is, involving several elements of the clause and the clausal unit as a unified whole. This latter process is based on restrictions determined by ‘motion-independent properties’ of morphological, lexical and syntactic nature (Beavers, Levin, & Tham, 2010, p. 332), as well as by inferential (Iacobini & Vergaro, 2014), cognitive, discursive, usage-related and cultural factors that make semantic information more or less accessible, frequent and easy to process both cognitively and linguistically in accordance with the law of *Prägnanz*. A striking example of this latter point is that of the so-called ‘covert’ or ‘zero’ encoding (cf. Sinha & Kuteva, 1995; p. 181; Nikitina, 2008, p. 177; Buoniconto, 2019b), in which none of the sentence items individually encode ME or one of its components as these are actually inferred due to grammatical, cotextual and contextual information. For instance, in the Italian example in (4), none of its lexical items expresses motion information and it is the shared extralinguistic knowledge on traffic codes (i.e. drivers are expected to stop at a stop sign) which allows to interpret that a Figure who ‘does not respect a stop-sign’ is probably moving past it (without stopping).

(4) Italian (Buoniconto 2019b, p. 269)

<i>Non</i>	<i>hai</i>	<i>rispettato</i>	<i>lo</i>	<i>stop</i>
not	have.2SG	respect.PTCP.PST	the	stop sign
'You drove through the stop sign'				

Finally, a cognitive-semantic linguistic analysis of ME encoding following a truly holistic approach cannot be limited to the study of synchronic variation. In fact, synchronic phenomena of variance in constructional and distributional choices often reflect gradual diachronic processes which are derived from a slow and dense succession of microchanges (cf. Giacalone Ramat, Mauri, & Molinelli, 2013). These are circularly motivated by the competition of overlapping synchronic constructions, thus existing at the root of major diachronic change phenomena such as typological shifts (consider, for instance, the drift from SF Latin to VF Romance; cf. Iacobini & Fagard, 2011; Stolova, 2015).

In light of what outlined so far, the following sections illustrate the strategies found in a diachronic corpus of Italian, French and Spanish for the covert encoding of MEs and their components, in which the motional meaning expressed by the clause is completely independent from the mere sum of the lexical items contained in it and for whose understanding the mediation of co(n)text-established knowledge becomes crucially functional.

3. Data Set and Methodology

The occurrences analysed in this paper are taken from a parallel corpus created for a wider previous study (Buoniconto, 2019a) dedicated to the diachronic comparative analysis of the encoding of MEs in the Romance languages. The study in question is based on the collection of 42 translations of the first 14 paragraphs of book 1 of Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* put together by Peter Stein (1997) and it takes as object of quantitative analysis 10 parallel texts (62,424 words), of which one is the original Latin version and the other nine represent its respective translations in Italian, French and Spanish in three different temporal stages, covering cc. 14th–15th (Stage 1), 16th–17th (Stage 2), 18th–19th (Stage 3), respectively. In order to avoid overlooking the cases of covert encoding, automatic electronic extraction has been neglected in favour of the punctual reading of the texts. In doing so, a total of 1,283 ME-encoding occurrences were extracted. Table 1 reports on the number of ME occurrences extracted for each language in each of the phases investigated.

For the purpose of the present study, all the occurrences showing the covert encoding of ME were isolated from the corpus and later annotated. The annotation methodology used is based on a constructionist annotation scheme named Modeg (Iacobini, Corona, & Buoniconto, forthcoming), which thanks to the help of the Analec software (Landragin, Poibeau, & Victorri, 2012) allows to

Table 1. Number of MEs extracted per language per stage

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Total
Latin				145
Italian	129	132	135	396
French	129	136	127	392
Spanish	128	94	128	350
Total	386	362	390	1,283

constantly relate the ME-expressing constructions to the semantic content that they convey, without losing track of the cotext in which they occur. The subsequent labelling process took into account the following factors: absence of Motion verb in the ME-expressing clause (e.g. *the car did its job right to a safe place*); lack of other ME-expressing linguistic items (satellite, prepositional phrase, noun) in the absence of Motion verb (e.g. *you didn't respect the traffic light*); presence of dummy verbs governing a noun designating an entity rather than a motion-assimilable activity (e.g. *make way* vs. *have a walk*); semantic incongruence between the type of Motion information expressed by the verb and its clause (e.g. *hit the road*); semantic incongruence between the type of information expressed by the individual items of the clause and the clause as a whole (e.g. *cover miles*). Table 2 provides an overview of the percentage of occurrence in the corpus of the constructions showing covert encoding with reference to the total number of MEs isolated as reported in Table 1.

Table 2. Percentage of covert encodings with reference to the total number of MEs per language per stage

	Stage 1 (%)	Stage 2 (%)	Stage 3 (%)	Total (%)
Italian	0.8	1.4	0.7	1
French	0.8	2.9	2.3	2
Spanish	0.8	3.2	0.8	1.4
Total	0.8	2.4	1.2	1.5

Due to the intuitable constraints imposed by diachronic comparative research, the corpus thus shaped is representative only of the written modality and idiolectal traits of translators and copyists. Thus, as shown by the figures reported above, a very small number of covert encodings could be retrieved. The frequency of occurrence is homogeneous in its paucity in all the languages and stages investigated, with French being the language that uses covert encoding the most among those of the corpus and Stage 2 being the diachronic phase with the highest frequency as compared with the other two. From a diachronic point of view, in all three languages there is an increase in frequency from Stage 1 to Stage 2 and then a slight

decrease from Stage 2 to Stage 3, which still shows higher figures than Stage 1 (except for Italian).

4. Discussion

The occurrences extracted and annotated according to the methodology outlined above allowed to draw some classificational generalisations which are illustrated in this section following a qualitative, corpus illustrated approach. The instances found can be grouped into two macro-categories, based on whether the motion-interpretation attributed to the covert construction is mediated by either (a) the knowledge that speakers have of their own language system or (b) extralinguistic knowledge.

As for (a), the process of meaning encoding and decoding can be triggered by (i) knowledge of the global meaning of fossilised syntagmatic constructions and multiword expressions treated semantically as individual constructional units (cf. Croft & Cruse, 2004) and (ii) implicit competence of morphosyntactic mechanisms that determine a given syntactic pattern. Our data set offers a few examples of (i), as shown by the idiomatic expression reported in (5), where the spatial and motional meaning of ‘to be headed’ can only be gathered by knowing that all the items of the sentence make up a single semantic unit of whose non-componential meaning speakers are implicitly aware.

(5) Spanish – Stage 3

<i>dirigió</i>	<i>lo</i>	<i>pasos</i>	<i>al</i>	<i>lugar</i>
directed.3SG	the	steps	to.the	place

‘he headed toward that place’

Several examples of (ii) are also present in all the languages and stages of the corpus analysed. Consider, for instance, the sentence in (6), where, besides Move (expressed in the verb), the ME components overtly expressed are only two: Manner (in the verb form *saltó*) and Ground (*las nuevas murallas*). However, the implicit grammar of Spanish speakers makes speakers aware of the fact that the verb *saltar*, when used in a transitive construction in which the second argument of the verb encodes Ground, licences a Path interpretation to the event, which, in this case, is that of ‘across’.

(6) Spanish – Stage 3

<i>Remo</i>	<i>saltó</i>	<i>las</i>	<i>nuevas</i>	<i>murallas</i>
Remus	jump.PST.1SG	the	new.F.PL	walls

‘Remus jumped over the walls’

Another interesting example of (ii) is represented by non-verbal constructions, in which, despite the lack of heavy clause constituents (e.g. the verb), textual and syntactic mechanisms help the speaker to correctly interpret the event. Take, for instance, the example reported in (7) following its original spelling, also attested

in all the texts of the corpus as a calque from the original Latin text. Here, the sentence, devoid of the cotextual information reported in square brackets, would only pinpoint the location of the Figure, without suggesting any motion in space. However, the presence of the preceding bracketed clause allows to identify this as a case of verbal ellipsis and triggers a mechanism by which speakers implicitly associate to the verbless sentence both the predicate and the argumental grid of the preceding clause. Since the verb *montare* overtly encodes motion, the verbless event acquires the same motional meaning.

(7) Italian – Stage 1

[Romolo monto nel monte palatino.]	<i>Remo</i>	<i>in</i>	<i>auentino</i>
['Romulus went up the Palatine hill'.]	Remus	in	Aventine
'Remus went up the Aventine hill'			

In the cases previously encompassed in (b), no grammatical or cotextual information can be used to trigger ME interpretation. In such cases, despite the non-spatial nature of each lexical item and the non-spatial semantics of the construction considered as a single unit, it is the prior knowledge of the world that triggers ME interpretation (iii) to the whole clause, as already seen in (4), or (iv) to one of its lexical items. An example of (iii) is shown in the occurrence reported in (8) extracted from our corpus. Here, the spatial experience that speakers have of the world suggests that, in order for the Figure to end up being located inside of a place, a dislocation towards that place is needed, thus a ME has to happen beforehand.

(8) French – Stage 2

<i>si</i>	<i>tost</i>	<i>qu'</i>	<i>ilz</i>	<i>furent</i>	<i>dedans</i>
thus	soon	that	they	were	inside
'as soon as they got inside'					

Inferential mechanisms may also occur at the lexical level, thus affecting the interpretation of the whole sentence. In fact, the semantics of a single lexical item, being anchored to the extralinguistic knowledge of the speaker, can trigger a chain of inferences which leads to associate a further motional hint to what is overly encoded in the sentence (cf. Buoniconto, 2019b). For example, since the encyclopaedic knowledge of speakers allows to infer that Motion performed under the weight of gravity determines a certain velocity of displacement, a verb such as the Italian *precipitare* 'to fall/crash down', although prevalently expressing a Path oriented downwards, also entails high speed Manner of Motion. A widely attested verb form of our corpus to which such an inferential pattern applies is the translational equivalent in Italian, French and Spanish of the verb *flee* (*fuggire*, *fuir*, *huir*), which refers to someone who moves away from a place (Path) with the purpose of leaving a specific place without being caught, which is what adds to the verb Manner interpretation (i.e. hasty, anxious attitude).

5. Conclusions

To sum up, this article has shown that among the strategies available to languages for the encoding of MEs, covert encoding represents an interesting example of applicability of Gestalt theory to the study of linguistics and cognitive semantics. In fact, in such cases, besides the behaviour of morphological and lexical items, the motional meaning expressed by the clause does not coincide with the mere sum of the semantics of its lexical items, thus making the mediation of grammar and co(n)text-established knowledge crucially functional to the process of understanding.

The corpus investigation carried on three diachronic stages of Italian, French and Spanish has led to a classificational generalisation by which covert encoding strategies can be grouped into two macro-categories based on whether the motion-interpretation attributed to the covert construction is mediated by either (a) the knowledge that speakers have of their own language system (phraseology, syntactic patterns, ellipsis) or (b) extralinguistic knowledge (clausal and lexical inferences).

From the point of view of the diachronic analysis, the usage frequency of such constructions is nearly homogeneous, thus proving that such patterns of interaction between language and cognition may be regarded as functional for speakers of all languages and time stages, also confirming that a holistic, constructional approach to language study can help shed light on linguistic and cognitive phenomena on the basis of language variation and change.

Abbreviations

In-text		Glosses					
ME	Motion event	2PL	second person plural	F	feminine	PL	plural
SF	Satellite-framed	1SG	first person singular	FUT	future	PRF	perfect
VF	Verb-framed	2SG	second person singular	IMPF	imperfect	PST	past
		3SG	third person singular	M	masculine	PTCP	participle
		ABL	ablative	NOM	nominative	REFL	reflexive

Summary

Covert encoding is one of the strategies available to languages for the encoding of motion, in which, in accordance with the laws of Gestalt, the meaning of an expression encoding motion is not coincident with the mere sum of the meanings of each of its constitutive units, relying on the mediation of grammatical and co(n)text-established knowledge for its interpretability. Moving on from a data set gathered for a previous study and adopting a holistic, constructional approach, several strategies were found in a diachronic corpus of Italian, French and Spanish for the covert encoding of motion in such languages, based on whether the motion-interpretation attributed to the covert construction is mediated by either linguistic or extralinguistic knowledge. The diachronic investigation also showed that the use of such patterns is diachronically consistent in frequency, thus proving that such patterns of interaction between language and cognition may be regarded

as functional for speakers of all languages and time stages, also confirming that a holistic, constructional approach to language study can help shed light on linguistic–cognitive phenomena on the basis of language variation and change.

Keywords: Motion events encoding, covert encoding, Romance languages, inferences, knowledge-driven interpretation, constructional semantics.

Konstruktive Bedeutung und Wissensgeleitete Interpretation von Bewegungskodierung

Beispiele aus drei Romanischen Sprachen

Zusammenfassung

Verdeckte Kodierung ist eine der Strategien, die Sprachen zur Kodierung von Bewegung zur Verfügung stehen, wobei die Bedeutung eines Ausdrucks, der Bewegung kodiert, in Übereinstimmung mit den Gestaltgesetzen nicht mit der bloßen Summe der Bedeutungen seiner konstitutiven Einheiten deckungsgleich ist. Für die Interpretierbarkeit essentiell ist dabei die Vermittlung von grammatikalischem und ko(n)textbasiertem Wissen. Anhand einer Belegsammlung aus den historischen Korpora der französischen, spanischen und italienischen Sprache, die für eine frühere Studie erstellt wurde, wurden unter Anwendung des holistischen bzw. konstruktiven Ansatzes verschiedene Strategien zur verdeckten Kodierung von Bewegungen in diesen Sprachen ermittelt. Das Hauptkriterium war dabei, ob die Bewegungsinterpretation, die der verdeckten Konstruktion zugewiesen wurde, durch linguistisches oder durch extralinguistisches Wissen vermittelt wird. Die diachronische Untersuchung ergab auch, dass die Verwendungshäufigkeit der ermittelten Muster diachronisch konsistent ist. Dies beweist, dass die Interaktionsmuster von Sprache und Kognition für Sprecher aller Sprachen und ihre Entwicklungsstadien gültig sind und bestätigt darüber hinaus, dass der holistische bzw. konstruktive Ansatz für das Sprachenlernen dazu beitragen kann, linguistisch-kognitive Phänomene auf der Grundlage von Sprachvariationen und -veränderungen zu beleuchten.

Schlüsselwörter: Kodierung von Bewegungsereignissen, verdeckte Kodierung, romanische Sprachen, wissensbasierte Interpretation, Konstruktionssemantik.

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