

LOOKING DIFFERENTLY: DESCRIBING VISUAL DIRECTION IN RUSSIAN AND ENGLISH

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The study focuses on semantic peculiarities of the Russian perception verb *look* and the typical patterns it is involved in in the Russian and the English languages.

Orientation and direction are traditionally regarded as cognitively relevant parameters that influence language use, which has been shown for topology of objects and for verbs of motion (following the ideas of Leonard Talmy, see Talmy 2000). However, directedness is also significant for verbs of perception such as *look*, but its relevance is different across languages. Cf. the following English and Russian sentences:

1. *He was sitting and **looking down** at his shoes.*

On sidel i **smotrel vniz na svoi botinki.*

LOOK DOWN

The combination of words *smotret'* and *vniz* is possible in Russian but its interpretation is fairly different compared to its English counterpart, hence the mistake in (1). In contrast to *look down* in English, the Russian phrase is marked and describes a limited set of situations. These are either special schemes where the gap between the experiencer and the target object is much bigger than the experiencer him/herself, or metaphorical uses where *smotret' vniz* refers to a person's low internal emotional state, e.g. sorrow or embarrassment, cf. (2-3):

2. *Drugie turisty tože **smotreli vniz**, v propast'*

(There were other tourists **looking down** into the canyon, too...)

3. *Šerborn vsě eščě ne govoril ni slova — **prосто stojal i smotrel vniz.***

(Sherburn never said a word — just stood there, **looking down.**)

English *look down* covers a considerably wider range of meanings including those that don't require any adverbial satellite accompanying *smotret'* in Russian, which is supported by corpus data. Cf. the following sentences from the parallel Russian-English subcorpus of the RNC:

4. *Hagrid **looked down** at his umbrella and stroked his beard*

*Xagrid **posmotrel** na zontik i pogladil borodu.*

Asymmetry is also found in combinations of the verbs *look / smotret'* with adverbs *up / vverx*. Such a combination in English is most frequently used for cases when the experiencer, usually seated, is looking at someone standing or something placed above him / her. This type of situations is conceptualized differently in Russian, where it is mainly expressed through body parts' movements: *podnjat' glaza, podnjat' golovu* (lit. 'lift one's eyes', 'lift one's head'), cf.:

5. *Ja **podnjala glaza** i uvidela malen'kogo liftëra...*

(I) **looked up** to find the sad little elevator man...

Interestingly, while people can both 'lift' their eyes and their head, animals can only do the latter in Russian:

6. **Sobaka **podnjala glaza** i zaryčala.*

*Sobaka **podnjala golovu** i zaryčala.*

(The dog **looked up**, and growled.)

These peculiarities indirectly support the idea that vertical direction is of more cognitive relevance in English and horizontal direction is cognitively more important for Russian (cf. similar observations made in Guiraud-Weber 1992 for French). They also show that the presence of analogous word combinations in several languages doesn't necessarily point to the area of symmetry between them, but rather raises the question of its relative salience.

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