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A corpus-based investigation of the use of Finnish and Hungarian posture verbs for motion events

Introduction

In terms of Talmy's (2007) well-known typological classification, Hungarian and Finnish are so-called satellite languages regarding the expression of motion events, i.e. the finite verb form indicates the manner, and a satellite marks the path of the motion (Pasanen & Pakkala-Weckström 2008, Slobin 2015: 115). In languages like English, posture verbs (*lie, sit, stand, kneel*, etc.) need to be modified by a satellite to signify getting into the posture (Talmy 2007: 118). In Hungarian and Finnish, by contrast, motion events can be expressed by posture verbs. Expressions like *székre áll* (chair.SUB stand) 'get up on [a] chair' and *hän istuu sohvalla* (he/she sit sofa.ALL) 'she/he sits down on the sofa' lack path satellites that are systematically distinguished from elements of nominal constructions (prepositions, case markers) (Talmy 2007: 141–146). Nevertheless, these expressions can be described in a constructional framework (Goldberg 1995). Under this approach, although the linguistic perceptual conditions of posture verbs do not involve motion (see Dimény 2021), they are able to elaborate a "lative-framed path construction" by extending the scope of verbal meaning. This construction, into which locative verbs may also integrate, are form-meaning schemas partially independent of lexical items (even if the schema is best instantiated by a motion verb). The present research investigates the use of 'being-in-a-state' type verbs as motion verbs on a corpus basis.

Material and methods

The analysis primarily focuses on the Hungarian verbs *áll* 'stand', *ül* 'sit', *fekszik* 'lie', *guggol* 'crouch', *térdel* 'kneel' (analysed as posture verbs in Dimény 2021) and their Finnish equivalents *seisoa* 'stand', *istua* 'sit', *maata* 'lie', *kyykkiä* 'crouch', *polvistua* 'kneel'. Additionally, it also explores posture verbs that exhibit distributional similarity with these five verbs according to the Thesaurus tool of Sketch Engine applied to Hungarian Web and Finnish Web corpora. The key step of the research is a contrastive analysis of how the five locative

verbs listed above are used in the [verb + lative case/postposition] construction, based on a representative sample of data from the Finnish (fiTenTen 2014) and Hungarian corpus (huTenTen2023), both available in the Sketch Engine framework. By manually analysing a representative sample of the five locative verbs, the research reveals the semantic and structural features of the schema under investigation and infers the productivity of the [verb + lative case/postposition] construction from frequency values. From a cross-linguistic perspective, we expect the construction to be more frequent with the corresponding Finnish verbs, since the path of a motion event in Hungarian can be specified by preverbal (satellite-framed) path constructions as well (e.g. *le-ül* down-sit ‘sit down’).

Results and discussion

In line with our hypothesis, the overall proportion of the “lative-framed path construction” is higher for Finnish verbs, but its distribution is more uneven than for their Hungarian equivalents. The two languages are similar in that verbs with ‘kneel’ and ‘crouch’ meaning (*térdel* and *polvistua*, *guggol* and *kyykkiä*, respectively) which denote postures of shorter duration than the other three are used most in the construction, while ‘lie’ (*fekszik* and *maata*) is hardly used at all. The use of locative verbs as motion verbs does not depend on the frequency of the lexeme, but verbs other than the five verbs used as a starting point for the research, which are more specific (e.g. expressing the inaction of the agent, prolonged waiting), are not used and do not seem to be compatible with the construction. Overall, the use of locative verbs as motion verbs seems to be fundamental in languages such as Finnish and Hungarian, where case constructions and postpositions systematically express whether the Ground is a location or a destination in relation to the Figure (the two are less consistently separated in European languages). That is how a group of Finnish and Hungarian locative verbs can express the MOVE/BE_{LOC} opposition, more specifically, the ‘be in a posture’ and ‘get into a posture’ opposition (Talmy 2007: 120) in a “lative-framed path construction”. The construction can only be classified as having a *satellite* if the term is interpreted much more broadly than in its original sense.

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