Static and dynamic events in modern Greek: a typological perspective

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Static and dynamic events in modern Greek: a typological perspective

The cognitive system humans use to compute and specify spatial relations has long been thought as universal, deeply built into the neurocognition of our species (Burgess et al. 1999; Fodor 2001). In the domain of motion and spatial location, however, recent cross-linguistic research has started showing that spatial language varies significantly across languages and plays an important role in structuring the fundamental domain of spatial thought (Evans & Levinson 2009; Majid et al. 2004; Slobin 1996; Hickmann 2009). Such variability is realized with spatial semantic elements mapped across the languages of the world in very different ways onto lexical and syntactic structures. According to Talmy's (2000) cognitive linguistics, the conceptualization of a spatial setting (static or dynamic) integrates a series of conceptual components: a *conceptual core* which specifies the localization of a *Figure* with respect to a *Ground*, and a *core schema* that links the *Association function* with the *Ground*. According to this framework languages conceptually map the *core schema* differently: *Verb-framed* languages (e.g., French) lexicalize it in the verb (i.e. Path of motion/localization), whereas *Satellite-framed* languages (e.g., Dutch) express it in constituents that stand in a sister position to the verb (satellites) lexicalizing manner of localization or manner of motion in the verb. Lemmens (2002) underlines this variability in the realm of static events and image-schemata, emphasizing cross-linguistic differences in conceptualization: *Verb-framed* languages put more grammatical and lexical emphasis in the description of the *Ground* (i.e., French speakers use neutral verbs like *être, exister* 'to be/ to exist' in locative phrases focusing on the existential relation the *Figure* has with the *Ground*) whereas *Satellite-framed* languages do it to a lesser extent rather focusing on the *Manner* the figure is located into space (i.e. Dutch speakers are compelled to use one of the three cardinal posture verbs *to sit*, *to lie* and *to stand* in order to consider aspects that pertain to the orientation, the shape, or the functional position of the located *Figure*) (but see Caroll et al. 2012 and Kopecka 2004). However, some languages are harder to classify into binary categories, rather presenting *intermediate systems* with double typological strategies (cf. typological continua proposed by Slobin 2004 and Lemmens 2005), such as Greek – a language that shows parallel *verb-* and *satellite-framed* constructions (existential and posture/causative location verbs for static events; lexicalization of Manner and/or Path for dynamic events – cf. Papadimitraki in preparation; Soroli 2012). The present comparative study investigates experimentally how speakers of typologically different languages (English, French and Greek) perform a variety of production tasks implying static and dynamic stimuli, with special focus to *parallel systems of conflation* through a systematic analysis of the use of posture verbs and spatial prepositions. The findings show that typological properties of languages can have an impact on how speakers encode spatial information in static and dynamic contexts and that speakers' performance do not necessarily follow traditional binary classifications. This paper opens new perspectives for spatial conceptualization and contributes more generally to the discussion for a unified typological framework in the domain.

Keywords: spatial language, location, motion events, Greek, typology, posture and motion verbs, production

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