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Tracing Paths and Directions in Finnish

Abstract:

This presentation focuses on expressions of Path and Direction in Finnish. It relates the patterns found in motion descriptions of Finnish, an alleged satellite-framed language (Talmy 2000), to the discussions of motion typology. Relatively extensive data collected from 50 native Finnish speakers with visual elicitation stimuli (Ishibashi et al. 2006) allow for the study of language-internal variation alongside typological points of view. The study is based on an ongoing cross-linguistic project.

The categories of Path and Direction (as defined by Zlatev 2007) differ from each other in relation to spatial boundedness: When expressing Path, the trajectory is presented as having a starting point (e.g. ulos luolasta ‘out of the cave’), an end point (e.g. sisään luolaan ‘into the cave’) or a middle point (e.g. pihan poikki ‘across the yard’). In the case of Direction (e.g. ylöspäin ‘upwards’, talolta poispaan ‘away from the house’) motion is presented as unbounded. In my presentation, I will show how the means of expression for these categories in Finnish are diverse, partly intersecting, and situationally defined. The different phases of Path are asymmetrical, regarding both frequency and complexity. Granularity of expression in the middle point of Path is unexpectedly high considering a generalization that it typically is a category less elaborated than the beginning and end of Path (cf. Papahagi 2011).

I will pay special attention to descriptions of crossing a spatial boundary. These expressions are most typically discussed with respect to verb-framed languages that are known to have constrained resources for boundary-crossing (cf. Aske 1989). A language like Finnish that allows boundary-crossings with all kinds of motion verbs should be rather uninteresting from this point of view. However, the fact that Manner verbs are allowed in boundary-crossing situations does not necessarily make them the primary means of expression (cf. e.g. Taremaa 2017). In Finnish, the deictic verbs mennä ‘go’ and tulla ‘come’ seem to be rather strongly connected to boundary-crossings, creating a pattern of "existential deixis" to the borderlines of Path and Direction.

References:


