
Motion Verbs in English and Spanish: a Feature Analysis

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This talk presents a feature-based analysis of motion verbs in the tradition of Talmy (1985, 2000) and Rappaport Hovav & Levin (1998 et seq, [Henceforth RHL]). I propose a unified framework for stating generalisations about different classes of motion verb, in addition to the typological distinction between Verb-framed and Satellite-framed languages. Unlike previous typologies, this work incorporates 3 binary features, ‘Boundary Crossing’, ‘Path’ and ‘Manner’, or schematically $[\pm B, \pm P, \pm M]$. A further feature subdivision is that two of the features, Path and Manner, are active i.e., with a positive value they must be expressed. Boundary Crossing however is a passive feature. It allows the crossing of boundaries when positive but does not mandate it. Path and Boundary Crossing as features of motion verbs are conflated in previous work (RHL 1998 et seq, Talmy 1985 et seq), but they are distinct and we need both. For example:

- (1) i) Jack brushed along the road. Brush $[-B, +P, +M]$
 ii) Jack traipsed along the road. Traipse $[+B, +P, +M]$

Both of these verbs, ‘brush’ from a class that disallows Boundary Crossing and ‘traipse’ from a class that permits it are otherwise identical in feature values. Here we see both sentences are well-formed as they operate over a path. However, compare:

- (2) i) *Jack brushed into the room.
 (In the sense, Jack came brushing into the room.)
 ii) Jack traipsed into the room.

Here we see that because brush does not permit Boundary Crossing, (2i) is ungrammatical. Nevertheless, (2ii) is well-formed because Boundary Crossing is permitted here.

To motivate the existence of these features, I present a series of tests for each. Path is formed via the “out-of-the-blue test”. For example: “What did you do yesterday? I ran [-P]. *I ambled [+P]. ‘Amble’ is ill-formed here because it requires a path to operate over, whereas ‘run’ does not. Similarly, Boundary Crossing requires that the motion event can cross a boundary: “He danced into the room [+B]. *He cleaned into the room [-B]. Finally, Manner is more difficult. In many cases it can be reduced to scalar change (RHL, 2008), and I discuss special cases where it cannot in the talk.

- (3) i) I wiped the table.
- ii) I cleaned the table.

In (3i) ‘wiping’ [+M] a table effects change but it is not scalar: imagine that someone has used an oily rag. In (3ii) however, ‘cleaning’ [-M] is a degree achievement that operates on a scale.

This categorisation presents eight logical possibilities instead of four. The inclusion of an extra primitive is justified on two accounts: it allows for a more complex system and provides another more empirically accurate definition of V-framed languages. I show that Spanish does not possess the class [+B, +P, +M]; that is, there is no equivalent of ‘traipse’, a verb that requires a path to be well-formed and can cross boundaries. This ultimately gives a more accurate account of the problem of the framing typology mentioned in the introduction.