Levels of constructional organization. Typological differences.

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Construction grammar frameworks (e.g. Fillmore 1988, Goldberg 1995) suggest that clausal information is organized in constructions at different levels of specificity. There are, from this point of view, at least two ways in which information is organized in basic clause structure: A) In lexical constructions, and B) In schematic constructions. In addition, clausal expressions are, according to some CXG-frameworks (e.g. Croft 2001), supposed to be built on language specific construction types. One important insight is that English tends to organize the basic clausal information in schematic argument structure constructions, and that this information is specified in lexical constructions, particularly by the verb:

(1)  [Peter [fought] his way out of the restaurant] way-construction: [SUBJ, V POSS, way OBL]

I will argue, on the basis of contrastive data, that Spanish seems to differ systematically from English in this respect:

(2) Pedro se [abrió] camino ([a codazos]) para salir del restaurante

Pedro for himself opened way (by using elbows) to get out of the restaurant

Examples like (2) suggest that Spanish, as opposed to English, tends to organize the basic clausal information (in (2) the basic meaning of the way-construction) lexically by the verb, while supplementary information may be provided by means of schematic (adverbial) constructions (a codazos).

This contrastive analysis has interesting implications for Talmy’s descriptive typology of macro-events (patterns of satellite- versus verb-framing of the main event and the co-event, Talmy 1991, 2000), and for its theoretical status. The present construction-based typology provides a solution to a serious flaw in Talmy’s typology: In (3) it is counterintuitive that the satellite lexeme (out) should determine the main event (‘X caused Y to move Z’):

(3)  [Peter [pushed] him out of the restaurant] caused motion construction: [SUBJ V OBJ OBL]

(4) Pedro lo [echó] del restaurante [a empujones]

Pedro him threw out from the restaurant by pushing

The parallelism between (3)-(4) and (1)-(2) indicates that the typological patterns observed by Talmy should not be interpreted as differing lexical mappings of directed motion, as hitherto claimed, but rather as specific manifestations of differing constructional organization of clausal information in English and Spanish as suggested in this paper.

The primary data used in this study stems from a contrastive analysis of short stories by H. C. Andersen. The corpus material has been available in six parallel versions: The original Danish version, and an English, German, Spanish, Italian and French version (The Mulinco project, University of Copenhagen). This material has been supplemented with systematic searches in the Spanish corpus CREA (200 million words).

References
CREA. Corpus. Real Academia Española (RAE).


