The Historical Development of Fictive Motion
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Fictive Motion is a phenomenon in language where a static scene is expressed in terms of motion. This leads to sentences such as *The road runs along the river* and *The field extends in all directions*. Fictive Motion is ubiquitous both across genres and languages. The notion of Fictive Motion goes back to the earliest days of Cognitive Linguistics, having been first studied by Talmy (1983) and Langacker (1986).

Research on Fictive Motion so far has concentrated on the processing and understanding of this phenomenon, and it has been shown that we mentally simulate movement along the path during processing despite the absence of real motion (Matlock 2004; Matlock 2010). Fictive Motion also influences our understanding of time (Matlock, Ramscar & Boroditsky 2005) and our eye-movements (Matlock & Richardson 2004).

While this research provides further evidence that language is a dynamic system, one dimension of Fictive Motion has been neglected so far: the historical development. In my talk I will present results from a study based on the Oxford English Dictionary. Fictive Motion is no new feature of language: Some quotations go back as early as the 14th century. I will present evidence that the earliest occurrences of fictive motion are temporally congruent with occurrences of other complex motion metaphors. Additionally, my study shows that different types of Fictive Motion behave differently according to the type of motion verbs being used. The study shows that wide variety of types can be used in combination with Fictive Motion, indicating that it is a very productive construal operation. This is also supported by the fact that new verbs are easily incorporated into Fictive Motion sentences. Furthermore, I found out that verbs occurring later in the English language are adapted more quickly in order to be used in Fictive Motion constructions. For example, verbs with a French origin, such as many path verbs, take considerable less time to be used in Fictive Motion than older verbs with a Germanic origin.

My results shed new light onto Fictive Motion in detail and Cognitive Semantics as a whole, showing that Fictive Motion is a creative and productive semantic extension that can be easily applied to a variety of verbs without any problem. It is a prime example of how language is not governed by a set of rigid, fixed rules, but a dynamic system that continuously changes and expands meanings.

References