Manner of motion in Spanish motion events: A corpus based approach

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In the cognitive linguistics literature it is well accepted that languages encode motion events differently. Talmy (1985), in his seminal work on lexicalization patterns, grouped languages into the so-called satellite-framed type and verb-framed type. However, as is well known, the dichotomy is not all encompassing and leaks quite a bit. Spanish, e.g., can go against Talmy's typological predictions and allows a manner verb in the main verb slot plus path expression (see ex.1&2). Most notably, Slobin has tried to account for this finding (1996, 2004, etc.), and attributes the felicitous conflation of manner and path in Spanish to what he calls the boundary-crossing constraint. Preliminary quantitative research of a corpus study I have undertaken with Spanish motion events, however, has revealed that these findings are statistically not significant. This result was surprising and against the expected outcome.

The boundary-crossing constraint states that when a spatial boundary of some sort is crossed, it is not possible for a verb-framed language to have a manner verb in the main verb slot (3&4).While the constraint has been seized and elaborated upon by other researchers in this field (Naigles et al.,1998, etc.), there has – as to my knowledge – not yet been a quantitative analysis of this seemingly crucial variable, along with neither telicity (cf. Aske, 1989), nor type of Path segment (e.g. Source, or Goal), which both play a role as well in explaining why and when Spanish employs the satellite-framed pattern.

I created a corpus of English novels and their Spanish translations in order to find out whether the above mentioned variables influence the use of Manner and Path verbs in the Spanish translations of two English fantasy novels and carried out three analyses. What makes translations particularly interesting is the fact that translators may stretch the target language to maximum capacity in order to maintain equivalence with the source text.

The quantitative analyses revealed that for the variable path segment Manner+Goal/Source is less frequent than expected while Manner+Trajectory is more frequent, however, not statistically significant. As regards telicity, Manner+telicity is less frequent than expected while Manner+atelicity is more frequent than expected. Here, the deviation from the expected frequencies is statistically highly significant ($p < 0.001$) and substantiates Aske's (ibid.) original claim, that telicity, or better atelicity, factors into Spanish being able to employ a satellite-framed pattern.Last but not least, Manner+boundary-crossing is less frequent than expected but not significant ($p > 0.05$). However, boundary-crossing is a complex issue. Most studies fail to clearly define what they perceive to be a boundary and its properties and consequently boundary-crossing. Thus they leave the boundary-crossing constraint possibly a matter of definition, calling the results into question, and complicating a comparison of the various results. While Naigles et al. (1998) undertake to refine boundary-crossing events, there is need to refine the spatial properties of a boundary as well as to carry out further corpus-based analyses on a larger scale.

Data – Examples
1. *Todos se precipitaron a la sala* - 'They all ran to the parlor'
2. *Un muchacho (...) saltó del carruaje al suelo*. – 'A boy (...) jumped down from the carriage.'
3. *La botella flotó en la cueva* – 'The bottle floated in(side) the cave.' LOC.!) vs. *La botella entrò la cueva (flotando)* - 'The bottle entered/moved-in the cave (floating).'
4. Sale un buho -'Exits an owl' vs. 'An owl popped out' (Slobin, 2004:6)

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