Is Manner expressed in a fore/backgrounded way? – A case in French and Italian

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Aim of study

The verb-framed languages such as French and Italian use a main verb to encode path information and subordinate verb forms or adverbial elements for manner information. Then, the verb-framed languages have a lot of options to express manner of motion as for its position and frequency. In previous studies, however, the manner expression in the verb-framed languages is not sufficiently explored. The aim of this paper is to elucidate the cognitive cost for expression manner of motion in French and Italian through analyzes of the frequency and syntactic positions of French *gérondif* and Italian *gerundio*.

Method

To use video-elicited narratives as corpus, the participants of the experiments are requested to explain what they have seen on the screen after each clip. They are composed of 26 French and 15 Italian native speakers, and each video clip of a combination of 3 manners (waling, running, skipping), 3 paths (horizontal motion on a road, upward motion on a flight of stairs, and inward motion to a rest house in a park), and 3 angles (toward/away from camera and neutral direction).

Result and discussions

First, in both languages, running and skipping are expressed more frequently than walking (see Table 1). Walking is the least salient manner of motion and its frequency is the lowest, which suggests a correlation between perceptual saliency and the frequency of linguistic expressions.

Then, the two languages have a strong tendency to use a focus position to express manner of motion (see Table 2). Potentially, *gérondif* and *gerundio* may appear at various positions such as (a) – (c) in the following examples. In these options, the participants of the experiment chose frequently the position after the complement of the main verb or the sentence final position (c).

> (a) Maria est (b) allée à la gare (c)   [French]
> (a) Maria è andata (b) alla stazione (c) [Italian]
> 'Maria went to the station running'

The position (c) is quite natural for the manner expression. However, at the same time, it is the focus position that allows partial negation of the manner meaning and makes a contrast with another manner: *il n'est pas allé à la gare en courant, mais en marchant / Non è andato alla stazione correndo, ma camminando* 'he did not go to the station running, but walking'. Talmy (2000: 128-133) proposes a correlation among frequency, informational fore/backgrounding, and cognitive cost, according to which an expression is easier to appear in the background position such as the main verb or elements close to it with a low cognitive cost, which leads to a high frequency. Against this principle, we will argue that there is a correlation between high frequency and speaker's effort, but informational fore/backgrounding does not always pertain to this correlation.

Finally, many differences have also been found between two Romance languages. In particular, the positions of Italian *gerundio* seem less restricted than those of French *gérondif*. As for these differences, we will show that gérondif is always following the preposition *en* and may construct a quasi-complex predicate (position (b)), while Italian *gerundio* can float more freely as an adverbial element.

Tables

	French	Italian
walking	30 (12.5%)	14 (9.9%)
running	114 (47.5%)	38 (27.0%)
skipping	96 (40.0%)	89 (63.1%)
total	240 (100%)	141 (100%)

Table 1: Manner occurrences

	French	Italian
focus (c)	174 (72.5%)	49 (39.2%)
topic (a)	0	30 (24.0%)
after main verb (b)	66 (27.5%)	11 (8.8%)
others	0	35 (28.0%)
total	240 (100%)	125 (100%)

Table 2: Positions of the gerundives

References

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