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Ευστάθιος Σελίμης. *Γλωσσική κωδικοποίηση του εννοιολογικού πεδίου της κίνησης: Κυριολεξία και μεταφορά στα ελληνικά παιδιών και ενηλίκων.* Διδακτορική διατριβή, Πανεπιστήμιο Αθηνών. 2007.

In this thesis, linguistic representations of motion are investigated in order to contribute to our understanding of how language affects conceptualization at the moment of speaking. Both literal expressions of physical motion as well as their non-literal extensions to encode more abstract phenomena, such as temporal changes, are analyzed. In a developmental and cross-linguistic approach, data from Greek children and adults are compared with corresponding data from English.

Three studies on physical motion focus upon Manner and Path elements in the verb phrase, testing theoretical and empirical claims that typological differences in the way languages code for motion affect speakers' attention to Manner. They compare descriptions of motion events in Greek and English, a verb-framed and a satellite-framed language respectively — the former coding Path in the verb and Manner in optional adjuncts and the latter coding Manner in the verb and Path in satellites. Three types of discourse are analyzed: spontaneous conversations between children (in the age range of 1;8–4;6 years) and adults as well as two types of narratives by children (aged 4, 7 and 10 years) and adults. The narratives were elicited through pictures and a film, with the interviewer having no recourse to the latter whatsoever. Results show, on the one hand, predictable cross-linguistic differences. Greater attention is paid to Manner in English than in Greek, with the difference arising even at the age of 2 years and increasing in adults. On the other hand, similarities are also occasionally noted across ages and languages (e.g. limited repertoires of Manner verbs in the picture narratives). This is reflected in differences being sharper and earlier in the conversations, somewhat less so in the film narratives and least of all in the picture narratives. Such complicated patterns are, nonetheless, argued not to counteract the effect of language structure on speech habits, but to highlight instead how research results can be affected by the content of discourse (e.g. restricted chances for Manner in the picture narratives but abundant in the conversations) and its communicative exigencies (e.g. greater need felt by speakers to explicitly code Path and Manner information in the film relative to the picture narratives).

Three more studies examine the development of abilities to produce and understand non-literal uses of motion verbs. Based on the conversations noted above, one study reveals various types of non-literality in both Greek and English child and child-directed speech, some even earlier than 2 years. Such evidence supports recent findings on spontaneous child speech which follow the cognitive semantics conception of figurativity as a basic and often conventionalized phenomenon of language. The remaining two studies focus upon how metaphoric motion in narratives is used and comprehended by Greek children aged 3–10 years. Results show such abilities even at 3 years, but also their gradual enrichment with age both in frequency and variety of non-literality. Therefore, traditional claims that acquisition of figurative language is a long-term process are also not undermined. The developmental sequence suggested for the various types of non-literal motion (e.g. metaphors, fictive motion) is ascribed to their degree of cognitive abstractness as well as conventionality. In fact, relative frequency in the ambient language can even speed up the appearance of a non-literal type in one language as compared to another.