HOW TO MOVE TOWARDS SOMEbody IN Plautus’ COMedIES: SOME REMARKS ON THE ADVERB OBUIAM

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1. Introduction

Motion verbs are strictly—even though not unavoidably—related to deixis. It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that most investigations concerning such verbs have been devoted to this particular relationship. In the case of Latin, the two verbs *ire* ‘to go’ and *uenire* ‘to come’ turn out to be prototypical, as it were: the former, from the root *h1ei*-, typically denotes motion whose origo—the point that is supposed to coincide with the utterer’s location—coincides with the point where the motion starts, whereas *uenire*, from the root *g”em*-, denotes motion whose origo is the final goal of the motion.¹ As a consequence of this typicality, verbs coding motion like *ire* are frequently labeled “itive”, whereas verbs that code motion like *uenire* are labeled “ventive”.

One of the most interesting developments of this line of investigation is the relationship between deictic motion verbs and aspect and/or actionality.² On this topic there is a huge amount of literature, and among the contributions at our disposal the excellent dissertation by D. Ricca (1996) stands out as one of the few where Latin is treated in detail.

However, things are not as simple as presented so far. Of course, the remark that also non-deictic motion verbs exist—one example thereof being a verb like Lat. *mouere* “to move”—ends up being trivial: motion can be simply described as a transfer from a place to another,

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¹ It is worth mentioning that *uenire* is cognate with the English verb *to come*, whereas *to go* derives from the root *g”em*-, (see Ernout and Meillet 1980: s.v.), and, obviously, is unrelated to the verb *ire*.

² “Actionality” is the label that has replaced the old German term Aktionsart. It is worth mentioning that some scholars simply employ the term “action”.

conceptually opposed to the state of steadiness, implying no *origo* from which the motion starts or at which it stops: a sentence like *aer mouetur* simply means ‘the air moves’.

But there is in fact another way of looking at motion verbs and describing them, a way in which deixis does not count, as it were, or, to put it mildly, is only loosely involved.

In 1975, L. Talmy published his seminal paper on the way motion verbs, looking at them in a completely different way, connected with the cognitive perspective. I report the words Phil Baldi, our honourand, used to describe Talmy’s proposal: “Talmy categorizes the world’s languages into two types based on the parameter of manner of motion plus path; these are *verb-framed* and *satellite-framed* languages. … in verb-framed languages such as Spanish, Hebrew, Japanese and Turkish path is encoded in the main verb with manner as an adjunct … Satellite-framed languages are those which express path through a satellite to a main manner verb, and typically do not combine the path into the verb” (Baldi 2006: 14; bold print and underlining original).

Since Talmy published his paper, the literature on this topic has grown impressively. Scholars have now at their disposal accurate descriptions of motion verbs in different languages of the world, including numerous non-Indo-European ones. Talmy himself has contributed to the debate with new papers (see at least Talmy 1985 and Talmy 2000) and his proposals have been revised and refined: there are languages that can hardly fit into one of the two types envisaged but rather belong to mixed types; the terminology employed has undergone some revision; and finally, besides the parameters of Path and Manner, a new parameter has been added, Shape, indicating what type of object is in motion, i.e., whether a long one or a round one, etc.3

Also the classical languages have been investigated within Talmy’s framework, and one of the merits of Phil Baldi that deserves to be stressed is the fact that scholars owe him one of the very few updated papers on this topic, in which the diachronic perspective is broadened as to include a comparative look at other Indo-European languages (Baldi 2006).

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3 Recommended readings concerning the state of the art on this topic remain Wälchli (2001, 2006), but the most updated volume on this entire topic is now the excellent dissertation by Spreafico (2009), who discusses in some detail the earlier literature.