Remembering How:
Language, Memory, and the Salience of Manner*

Michele I. Feist¹ and Paula Cifuentes Férez²

¹University of Louisiana at Lafayette
feist@louisiana.edu
²Universidad de Murcia
paulacf@um.es

Inspired by Talmy’s (1985, 2000) seminal work on the lexicalization of motion events, the linguistic encoding of elements of motion events has been an active area of research. Recently, Slobin (2003, 2004, 2006) refined Talmy’s typology, pointing out the differential salience of manner of motion across languages. Among the potential cognitive consequences of this differential salience of manner, Slobin (2003) postulates that manner might be more memorable for speakers of high-manner-salient languages than for speakers of low-manner-salient languages. In this paper, we take up this suggestion, asking whether English speakers and Spanish speakers will show different patterns of errors in a test of recognition for short video clips of motion events, consistent with the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis. We observed that English speakers produced fewer errors overall, and fewer errors in responses to previously unseen items. Responses to previously viewed items revealed a more subtle effect, with the number of videos viewed at study playing a role in the language effect: English speakers made fewer errors on previously viewed items when they had seen fewer items at study, while Spanish speakers made fewer errors when they had seen more items at study. We discuss the implications of these findings for the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis and for the role of manner salience in memory for motion events.

Key words: motion verbs; manner salience; linguistic relativity; cross-linguistic comparison

*We thank Roxanne Benoit Raine and Derek James for their help with the collection and tabulation of the English data. We are also grateful to the Language and Cognition Lab at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette for helpful discussions of this research.

©2013 Institute for Cognitive Science, Seoul National University
Introduction

Research into the question of whether language influences thought has been greatly facilitated by Talmy’s (1985, 2000) demonstration of the logical separability between the linguistic encoding of a motion event and conceptual elements of the event itself. Talmy identified six elements of complex motion\textsuperscript{1}: the moving object (figure), the reference object (ground), the fact of motion, the trajectory (path), the way in which the figure moves (manner), and the cause. These six elements may be encoded in a variety of combinations across lexical items. Nonetheless, with particular attention to verbs and satellites, Talmy argued that languages will demonstrate characteristic lexicalization patterns, and that these patterns are a source of typological variation amongst languages.

Of particular note has been the distinction between languages like English, which tend to encode manner in the verb, and languages like Spanish, which tend to encode path in the verb. Talmy (2000) proposed a two-way typology focused on where path is encoded in a motion description, referring to English-type languages as satellite-framed, or S-framed, and to Spanish-type languages as verb-framed, or V-framed, as illustrated in (1) and (2).

\begin{align*}
(1) \textbf{English:} & \quad \text{The bottle floated } \textit{into} \text{ the cave} \\
(2) \textbf{Spanish:} & \quad \text{La botella } \textit{entró} \quad \text{a la cueva (flotando)} \\
& \quad \text{The bottle } \textit{moved-in} \text{ to the cave (floating)}
\end{align*}

While elicited descriptions of motion across languages reveal striking typological differences in the relative prevalence of path and manner verbs (e.g., Berman & Slobin, 1994; Gennari, Sloman, Malt, & Fitch, 2002; Naigles, Eisenberg, Kako, Highter, & McGraw, 1998; Papafragou, Massey, & Gleitman, 2002, 2006; Slobin, 1996), the evidence for cognitive effects of these differences is mixed (e.g., Cifuentes-Férez & Gentner, 2006).

\textsuperscript{1}Talmy (2000) argues that a basic motion event is made up of just four elements: the figure, the ground, the path, and the fact of motion.