Cross-linguistic variation patterns in the locative alternation

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We discuss the differences between languages with respect to the possibility of locative verbs to enter the Figure frame (Locatum = direct object; Location = oblique complement) or the Ground frame (Location = direct object; Locatum = oblique complement). The main facts to be discussed are illustrated below with examples from French (1), German (2), Japanese (3), Korean (4), and Chinese (5).

(1) Jean a chargé des briques dans le camion./ Jean a chargé le camion de briques.
‘John loaded bricks in the truck.’/ ‘John loaded the truck with bricks.’

(2) Er lud das Heu auf den Wagen./ Er belud den Wagen mit Heu.
‘He loaded the hay on the cart./ ‘He loaded (litt.be-loaded) the cart with hay.’

(3) Sityoo-wa sakazuki-ni osake-o mitasita./Sityoo-wa sakazuki-o osake-de mitasita.
Mayor-TOP cupDAT sakeACC filled/Mayor-TOP cupACC sake-with filled
litt.*‘The Mayor filled sake in his cup./‘The Mayor filled his cup with sake.’/

(4) Yumika mwulul cepey chaywuessta. / Yumika cepul mwulo chaywuessta.
YumSU waterACC cupLOC fillPast-Decl / YumSU cupACC waterweNST fillPast-Decl
litt.*‘Yumi filled water into the cup./‘Yumi filled the cup with water.’

(5) Wo ba shui Zhuang zai pingzi li. / Wo ba pingzi Zhuang le shui.
we BA waterDO fill at bottle inside / we BA bottleDO fill ASP water
litt.*‘we filled water into the bottle./‘we filled the bottle with water.’

We attribute the differences in the realization possibilities of arguments of locatives verbs to two main factors: a) differences in lexical representations and b) differences in the way telicity is encoded in different language types.

1. The Figure frame usually expresses a change of location and the Ground frame a change of state. We attribute this to properties of the constructions themselves. Verbs are able to occur in one of the constructions, or both, if there is no incompatibility between their meanings and that of the constructions. For morphologically simple alternating verbs in Romance languages and in English, we adopt the view that these verbs may have multiple semantic representations, each constructed independently (contra Pinker 1989) as a result of the verb connecting to a central multi-faceted concept, each facet of the concept being at the root of a distinct verbal representation (Labelle 1992, 2000). For languages like German, unprefixed verbs whose central meaning is that of change of location do not enter the Ground frame despite the fact that a facet of the verb concept could in principle licence it. We claim that this is due to a blocking effect induced by the existence of various derivational prefixes (like be-) that force the presence of a Ground direct object.

2. Assuming that the mapping principles associating semantic representations to syntactic structures are universal, we address the question of why it is that, while languages like English, French, and many others have a sizeable class of simple non-alternating Ground verbs, the vast majority of the semantically parallel simple verbs in Japanese (kishimoto 2002), Korean (Meesook 1999, Pak 2000), and Chinese (Lidi 1998,
Pao 1996) appear preferably in the Figure frame. A number of facts suggest that in these languages, the semantics of these verbs, basically ‘fill’ type verbs, is compatible with a change-of-location interpretation in addition to the change-of-state interpretation expected on the basis of the behaviour of their counterpart in languages like English. We relate this to the way telicity is encoded in these languages. We propose an analysis that differs from that defended by Juffs (1992, 2000) and Hanjung Lee (1998) regarding cross-linguistic differences in the conflation possibilities of various meaning components in root morphemes and that builds on Kageyama’s (2002) typological Boundedness Parameter as well as on recent work by Travis (2000, 2002).

3. In the final part, we extend the discussion to differences in the possibility of the Figure argument of ‘fill’ type verbs to map to direct object in three Slavic languages, Russian, Slovenian and Bulgarian (Russian does not allow it, Slovenian (Zaucer 2002) does in a restricted way, and Bulgarian allows it rather easily (Dimitrova-Vulchanova 1996)).

References


