

Comparison of Motion Verbs in Persian and English Languages (A Cognitive and Typological Approach)

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Abstract

In different languages, motion can be expressed through motion verbs that are encoded differently in different languages. The aim of this research is to compare the motion verbs in both Persian and English languages from the cognitive and typological perspectives based on the theoretical framework of Talmy (2000b) regarding the verb-framed and satellite-framed languages. He (Talmy, 2000b, p. 102) describes “satellite as the grammatical category of any constituent other than a noun phrase or prepositional-phrase complement that is in a sister relation to the verb root”. It can be a bound affix or a free word. According to Talmy, the following can act as satellites in languages:

“1- English verb particles, 2- German separable and inseparable verb prefixes, 3- Latin or Russian verb prefixes, 4- Chinese verb complements, 5- Lahu non head versatile verbs, 6- Caddo incorporated nouns, 6- Atsugewi polysynthetic affixes around the verb root.”

Levin (1993) classified the verbs in terms of motion, measure, avoid, color, communication, weather, etc. Ferez (2008) investigated the motion verbs in English and Spanish languages. This comparison showed similarities and differences between two languages. One of the similarities is that both languages have Path verbs. He also found that both languages have more Walking verbs than Running or Jumping verbs. One of the differences that was found was that path verb lexicon in Spanish is larger in size than English. In Iran, Azkia (2012) investigated motion in Persian language from the cognitive and typological approach. After collecting 435 motion verbs based on Talmy’s definition of motion events from “Sokhan” and “Moin” dictionaries, she analyzed them based on cognitive and typological framework. She also analyzed them under lexicalization pattern.

She found that in Persian language, 3 forms of satellites, namely “Figure”, “Path” and “Ground”, can be located beside the verb. She also drew the following diagram, while mentioning it is just a hypothesis and extensive research should be done to confirm it (Azkia, 2012, p. 251):

Figure > Path > Ground

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Afrashi and Hemmati (2016), Nateghi (2012), and Mesgar khoyi (2013 & 2016) have worked on motion verbs and motion events, too.

Based on sorted corpus of Azkia (2012), 180; and a total of 360 motion verbs (Persian and English) were collected, checked and translated in the context of sentence using bilingual and monolingual dictionaries (Oxford, Aryanpur and Amid). Then, they were compared in terms of being verb-framed or satellite-framed, classification of semantic elements and the dominant satellite. Our research involved discussion and analysis of data collected about manner, path, ground and figure.

We divided path into 5 parts in Persian that involved:

1. Satellite-framed specified path, in this kind of path, the path shows the exact path (e.g. so'ud kardan); 2- verb-framed specified path (e.g. afrāštan); 3- verb-framed unspecified path (e.g. āvardan); 4- satellite-framed unspecified path (e.g. tey kardan); and 5- satellite-verb-framed specified path (e.g. bar afrāštan). Also, we divided path into 3 parts in English language that involved:
2. Satellite-framed specified path (e.g. come out); 2- verb-framed specified path (e.g. crash); and 3- verb-framed unspecified path (e.g. traverse). Manner in Persian language is divided into two parts:
3. In satellite-framed verbs (e.g. pilipili kardan); 2- in verb-framed verbs (e.g. šalidan). In English it has two forms too:
4. In satellite-framed verbs (e.g. overturn) and in verb-framed verbs (e.g. dance). Figure and ground can be found in Persian language in the form of satellite-framed:
5. Figure in verbs like “šāne zadan” and ground in verbs like “havā kardan”. In English, figure can be seen in verbs like “weight lift” and “iron” in the form of satellite-framed and verb-framed, respectively, and ground is seen in the form of verb-framed in a verb like “fly”.

The prefixes and co-verbs mentioned here are examples of satellites in Persian language:

1. *bāz* / *bar* (*bāz* gaštan / *bar* gaštan): back / opposite
2. *boland* (*boland* kardan): upward
3. *xārej* (*xārej* šodan): outside
4. *dāxel* (*daxel* šodan): inside
5. *nazdik* (*nazdik* šodan): near, front
6. *vāred* (*vāred* šodan): inside

The results showed that the Persian language, unlike English tends to be more satellite-framed. Manner and path are the dominant satellites in the Persian and English, respectively. Finally, the semantic elements of Persian language are more satellite-framed than the English language. Each of these two languages has its own special classification toward Talmy's theory. We can draw the satellites hierarchical diagram in both languages as follows:

Persian language:

Manner > Specified Path > Unspecified Path > Figure > Ground

English language:

Specified Path > Manner / Figure

Keywords: Semantic element, Motion verb, Typology, Satellite-framed, Verb-framed