Motion Event Framing in Fu'an Chinese: An Empirical Study

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Abstract. The framing typology of motion events focuses on how languages fall under the categories: Talmy's satellite-/verb-framing dichotomy and Slobin's satellite-/verb-/equipollently- framing trichotomy. The present study is an empirical attempt to investigate the event framing typology of Fu'an, an Eastern Min Chinese, through exploring the characteristic expressions of motion events in its spoken discourse collected. The analysis concentrates on the patterns of main verb constructions in the clauses. Evidence shows that Fu'an Chinese falls under the category of satellite-framed languages in general, but it manifests the features of verb-framed languages and equipollently-framed languages as well.

1. Introduction

Motion events, which typically involve the translocation of an entity, are among the most basic and pervasive events in our lives. After Talmy proposes a typological dichotomy about motion events [1], much effort has been exerted in the investigation of the encoding or framing of motion events in different languages, including Chinese. Previous studies concerning Chinese in this regard focus on Mandarin, which remains to be a controversial issue, while less attention has been extended to the motion event framing of other Chinese dialects.

Fu'an Chinese is a Min dialect spoken in Fu'an county located in the northeast of Fujian Province, China. It belongs genetically to the Funing group, aka. Northern subgroup, of the Eastern Min [2]. The previous researches on Fu'an Chinese mostly focus on the phonological system of the dialect [3], and no previous research on motion events of Fu'an Chinese has been found. The present study adopts an empirical approach to examining how Fu'an Chinese represents a motion event in actual language use in order to identify its typological framing.

2. Theoretical background

Talmy believes that path is the core schema of motion events and he divides different languages into two categories based on how path is characteristically encoded in an utterance [1]. Verb-framed languages (henceforth V-language), like Spanish, characteristically express path via the main verb while satellite-framed languages (henceforth S-language), like English, conventionally encode path in a satellite element such as a particle [1]. After probing into serial verb languages such as Thai, Chinese, Slobin proposes the third category of language, equipollently-framed languages (henceforth E-language), which attach more attention to the verb conflation pattern [4]. Talmy points out that his original typology rests on observing which of the semantic components (such as path, coevent or figure) in the motion event characteristically appear in the main verb or verb root [5]. Thus, the identification of the particular constituent within a cause that functions as the main verb is crucial for the investigation of the characteristic pattern of motion events in languages.

Similar to Mandarin, Fu'an Chinese has a pervasive serial verb construction that allows for at least two verb slots in a single clause. In order to find out the typological language use of motion events in Fu'an dialect, the present study focuses on identifying the main verb(s) and the semantic component(s) encoded in the identified main verb(s). Talmy differentiates two subtypes of the serial construction: C2-plus pattern (verb + verb) and C2-chiefly pattern (verb + satellite) [5]. In the verb + verb

constructions like (1), the path-specifying morpheme serving as C2 (jin^4 'into/enter') can be used as an independent verb (jin^4 'into/enter') with essentially the same path meaning. In the verb + satellite construction like the clause (2), the path-specifying morpheme serving as C2 (kai^1 'away') means differently when used as an independent verb (kai^1 'open') [5].

(1) Ta^1 pao^3 jin^4 qu^4 le.
 3sg run into thither PERF
 "She/He ran in. "

(2) Ta^1 pao^3 kai^1 le.
 s/he run away PERF
 "She/He ran away."

Talmy's criteria of differentiation of the two serial constructions is applied in the identification of the main verb status in the present study.

3. Methodology and research design

Li points out there exists an error concerning the methodology applied in most motion event researches in China, which has ignored Talmy's strict methodological requirements in this regard [6]. According to Talmy, an expression of motion event is characteristic in a language if (1) it is colloquial in style, rather than literary or stilted; (2) it is frequent in occurrence in speech, rather than only occasional; and (3) it is pervasive across a range of semantic domains, rather than limited to just one or few [5]. In the present study, an examination of motion events in the spoken discourse of Fu'an Chinese is conducted to find out its characteristic expression of motion events.

The motion event data are collected from the stories elicited from 10 speakers of Fu'an Chinese after showing them the wordless book *Frog, Where Are You?* [7]. It is a book composed of 24 illustrations, telling the story of a boy going out with his dog in search for his missing frog. The illustrations demonstrate the extensive usage of motion events and are strong enough to elicit the narration of motion events. The 10 male/female speakers range from 35 to 75 years old with various education backgrounds from primary school to university. The speakers read the wordless book page by page and understand the main story of the book and then they are asked to narrate the story. The narrations are recorded and then transcribed in texts. The author follows the practice of focusing on the description of self-agentive motion, which means the figure undergoes the movement voluntarily. The spoken data are divided into clauses following Berman and Slobin's definition of 'clause' as a linguistic unit that contains a unified predicate, i.e., "a predicate that expresses a single situation" [8]. The analysis excludes the consideration of the agent, figure and ground NPs, as well as any markers for aspect, modality, negation and the like, and focuses on identification and coding of the verb constructions, including serial constructions in Talmy's definition mentioned above. The examples of Fu'an Chinese in the next section are transcribed according to the romanization system developed in *Diccionario Español-Chíno, Dialecto de Fu-an (houc an)*, a Spanish-Fu'an dictionary published between 1941 and 1943 [9].

4. Research results and discussion

A total of 357 descriptions of self-agentive motion events are collected from the data and seven types of main verb constructions are found: A. a manner verb is used as the main verb independently (hence V_{Mi}) (see clause (3)); B. a manner verb is used as the main verb and a deictic verb as the satellite (hence V_M+Satellite) (see clauses (4)(5)); C. a path verb is used as the main verb independently (hence V_{Pi})(see clause (6)); D. a path verb and a deictic verb are combinedly used as the main verbs (hence V_P+V_D)(see clause (7)); E. a manner verb and a path verb are combinedly used as the main verbs (hence V_M+V_P) (see clause (8)); F. a manner verb and a deictic verb are combinedly used as the main verbs (hence V_M+V_D)(see clause (9)); G. a manner verb, a path verb and a deictic verb are combinedly used as the main verbs (hence V_M+V_P+V_D)(see clauses (10)(11)).

The main verb constructions in the examples below are demonstrated with bold font. Types A and B fall under the S-framing, C and D the V-framing and types E, F and G the E-framing.

(3) k'ein³ eit⁷-teit⁶ **chou³**
    dog always run
    "The dog kept running."

(4) siu³-meing² ma³-siong **pa²** **k'i³**
    Xiaoming immediately crawl up
    "Xiaoming immediately crawled up."

(5) **ou⁵** ch'üi⁶-lam² ten² **k'üe⁵**
    hide woods inside go
    "(The boy) hid in the woods."

(6) yiong²-pe² **to⁵** kuan⁵ ten²
    frog return jar inside
    "The frog returned to the jar."

(7) choung² chie⁷ ch'eiu⁵ toeng4 ten²-pen² yeiu⁴ **ngie⁴** **lei²** süi⁶ t'au² yiong²-pe²
    From this tree hole inside again exit come one CL frog
    "Another frog came out of the tree hole."

(8) **soec⁷** **to⁵** chüi³ ten²
    fall arrive water inside
    "(The boy) fell into the water."

(9) ko³-luei³ yeiu⁴ **pa²** **k'üe⁵** ch'a²-ch'eiu⁵ mein⁵-t'au²
    kid again crawl go tree on
    "The kid crawled up the tree again. "

(10) toeng¹-toeng¹ yie4 **t'iu⁵** **a⁴** **lei²**
     Dongdong also jump descend come
     "Dongdong also jumped down."

(11) chie⁷ toeng⁴ ten²-pen² **chou³** süi⁶ t'au² lau⁴-ch'üi³ **ngie⁴** **lei²**
     This hole inside run one CL mouse exit come
     "One mouse ran out of this hole."

When identifying the serial constructions like (8) (9)(10) , the author follows Talmy's framework elaborated above in section 2. Some explanations need to be given to the identification of main verb constructions like (5) and (11), which are not covered by Talmy [5]. In (6), *k'üe⁵* 'go' used independently at the end of the clause is read in an unstressed mannaer, which shows that it is highly grammaticalized. It is considered to be subordinate to the head verb *ou⁵* 'hide' and treated as the satellite. The practice is also applied to independent *lei²* 'come' at the end of a clause. However, *ngie⁴ lei²* 'exit' at the end of the sentence is not read softly, which is considered to gain the main verb status like *chou³* 'run'.

The distribution of the seven types of main verb constructions is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of types of main verb construction

No.	Type	Token	Total of Token	Percentage	Language Typology
A	V_{Mi}	138	209	58.54%	S-language
B	V_M+Satellite	71			
C	V_{Pi}	30	37	10.37%	V-language
D	V_P+V_D	7			
E	V_M+V_P	27	111	31.09%	E-language
F	V_M+V_D	26			
G	V_M+V_P+V_D	58			
Total	7	357	357	100%	

Talmy argues that equipollent framing is "rarer than proposed" and is considered to be "an unstable stage" [10]. The present study bears no intention to argue about the two-way or three-way prototype. It is clearly shown in Table 1 that the most characteristic expressions of self-agentive motion events in Fu'an Chinese fall under the category of S-languages. The data of Fu'an Chinese is found to contain 33 manner verbs (e.g., *leic⁷* 'jump', *chou³* 'run', *soec⁷* 'fall', *pa²* 'crawl'，*pui¹* 'fly'，*kiang²* 'walk',

t'iu[5] "jump", *lo[6]* 'fall') , 5 path verbs (*ch'out[7]*'exit', *ngie[4]* 'exit', *to[5]* 'return'，*to[5]* 'arrive', *tun[3]* 'return') and 2 deictic verbs (*lei[2]* 'come', *k'üe[5]* 'go'). The richer diversity of the lexicons of manner verbs further suggests Fu'an Chinese shows the typical features of S-language.

However, it is also noticed that Fu'an Chinese quite strongly displays features of E-language. The findings partly support the previous studies which argue that Chinese has underwent a typological shift from a V-language to a S-language and the change is not complete [11,12]. Yiu finds that "the modern Wú dialect has moved closer to becoming a satellite-framed language than the other four modern dialects, whereas the modern Mǐn and Cantonese have exhibited more features of verb-framed languages than modern Mandarin" [12]. Even though no comparison between Fu'an Chinese and Mandarin has been made, it is quite evident that Fu'an Chinese shows weak features of V-language. The discrepancy may be partly attributed to the data collected from different regions. Yiu's study include the Fuqing variety of Eastern Min dialect, which is different from Fu'an Chinese. For example, *loʔ[5]* is identified to be a path verb referring to "descend" in Fuqing Chinese [12]. However, according to the semantic meaning from the data of Fu'an Chinese, *lo[6]* (the same character as *loʔ[5]*) is identified to be a manner verb referring to "fall". The divergence of identification of the word indicates a very important issue in the study of motion event framing, that is, the differentiation of manner verb and path verb. Criteria with stronger operability should be proposed to avoid subjective intuitive decision of the researchers, which deserves further research. Besides, Fu'an Chinese is used in the region closer to Zhejiang province, where Wu Chinese prevails, and, in terms of the representation of motion events, Fu'an Chinese might be more likely to be influenced by Wu, which adopts, to a greater extent, S-framing. A further research needs to be conducted for the comparison between Fu'an Chinese and Wu dialects in Zhejiang.

5. Conclusion

Languages differ considerably when describing motion events. Compared to the rich literature available for Mandarin motion event framing, study on the typological status of non-Mandarin Chinese dialects calls for more attention, which will undoubtedly expand the academic dimension of the motion event framing in Chinese. An empirical approach is adopted in the present study to better meet the methodological requirements of motion event typology. The author mainly investigates different patterns of the main verb construction of self-agentive motion events in actual language use in order to gain insights into the characteristic expression of motion events in Fu'an Chinese and its typological classification. The statistical results show that the characteristic representation of motion events in Fu'an Chinese falls under the category of S-language. The occurrence of features of E-language suggests that Fu'an Chinese is not as typical as other S-languages like English.

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