Spatial-temporal complementarity of motion-framed distance representations

There has been a long lasting debate on the entanglement of space and time in cognition (Núñez & Cooperrider, 2013). One way to find some credible information about that relationship is to gather data on the distribution of spatial and temporal representations from linguistic corpora (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 2005). A context that appears to be well suited to this purpose is the domain of prepositional expressions of distance, since they happen to take both spatial and temporal complements (Langacker, 2012). Using standard reference language corpora for English and Polish, this study demonstrates an overall proportion between spatial and temporal prepositional phrases denoting spatial distance in absolute terms. The data reveal that the preposition away (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; cf. Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985) is used more frequently with temporal units to specify distance in space than to express temporal relations, which indicates that in the context of ways separating spatial locations both English and Polish speakers tend to express distance in temporal terms. This paper explores a hypothesis that the outstanding temporality of away-PPs results from the semantic component of motion, which acts as an underlying modulator that shifts conceptualizations of distance from spatial to temporal terms.

Keywords: space, time, motion, distance, propositional phrases, empirical linguistics

References

Corpora
The National Corpus of Polish (2010). Available at: www.nkjp.pl