Fictive motion expressions (Talmy, 1996, Talmy, 2000, Ch. 2; Langacker, 1986; 2008; Waliński, 2014) are used to depict spatial configurations of stationary objects in terms of motion over the object’s extent, e.g. “This wire fence goes all the way down to the wall”. The described object is stationary and there is no entity traversing the depicted path, however, it is represented as moving along or over its spatial configuration. It has been established that the choice of phrasing in fictive motion is not insignificant or random, but is grounded in embodied cognition (Langacker, 2005; Matsumoto, 1996; Matlock, 2004).

This study employs a cognitive corpus-based approach to language study to demonstrate that structuring fictive motion is subject to a number of conceptual constraints, which dictate using specific linguistic patterns, while precluding others, in expressions of this type. For example, data found in the British National Corpus and the National Corpus of Polish (NKJP) indicate that fictive motion tends to avoid semantic patterns conflating instrumentality in the absence of a sentient agent capable of making use of the motion instrument, which appears to explain why roads typically run, but not drive to destinations.

In more general terms, findings presented in this paper fit into the broader cognitive framework of mental imagery and cognitive simulation (Bergen, 2012). Examination of usage examples found in linguistic corpora indicates that our cognitive ability to mentally simulate motion implied by the linguistic pattern plays a key conceptual role in structuring fictive motion.

References


