

CENTER FOR COGNITIVE SCIENCE
University at Buffalo, State University of New York

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280 Park Hall, North Campus

2:00 pm –4:00 pm

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**When going means becoming gone:
Framing motion as state change in Yukatek Maya**

This presentation discusses the framing of motion as change of location in Yukatek Maya and crosslinguistically. Jackendoff (1983, 1990) advances a number of arguments to the effect that representations of motion events at Conceptual Structure cannot be reduced to state change functions – as suggested by Dowty 1979 and Miller & Johnson-Laird 1976, inter alia – but require primitive conceptual functions representing translational motion and path relations (i.e., relations of motion to, from, past, into, out of a ground, etc.). Jackendoff builds his case in particular on the encoding of 'route' paths, defined wrt. grounds in between source and goal, and the use of path functions with state descriptions in metaphors of 'fictive motion' (Talmy 1996, 2000). However, evidence from motion event descriptions in Yukatek suggests that Jackendoff's rationale is not universally valid.

In Yukatek, path relations are not expressed in satellites or adjuncts. These semantic distinctions are derived instead from the event structure of verbs of location change with English glosses such as 'enter', 'exit', 'ascend', and 'descend'. That path relations are not lexicalized in these verbs either, and thus not encoded at all in Yukatek, is suggested by the fact that descriptions headed by such verbs are applicable to events that involve location changes coming about without the figure moving, e.g., by the ground moving instead of the figure. Such uses of location change verbs were first documented by Kita (1999) in Japanese. Yukatek shows similar phenomena at a broader scale. The absence of path lexicalization has a number of secondary reflexes, including the necessity to break down multi-ground motion events into sequences of single-ground location changes, each encoded in a separate clause. Fictive motion metaphors are unavailable, and Yukatek likewise lacks temporal connectives with meanings such as 'after' and 'before' – and these have often been argued to draw on motion metaphors as well. And motion events involving route paths receive a highly under specified treatment, abstracting away from the distinction among 'over', 'across', 'through', etc., and reducing encoding to a single verb meaning 'pass'. All of these sources of evidence suggest that motion is indeed framed linguistically as location change in Yukatek. Typological evidence will be support spatial reasoning.

References

*Dowty, D. R. (1979). Word meaning and Montague Grammar. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Reidel. *Jackendoff, R. (1983). Semantics and cognition. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 1990). Semantic structures. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. *Kita, S. (1999). Japanese ENTER/EXIT verbs without motion semantics. Studies in language 23: 307-330. *Miller, G. A. & Johnson-Laird, P. N. (1976). Language and perception. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. *Talmy, L. (1996). Fictive motion in language and "ception". In P. Bloom, M. A. Peterson, L. Nadel, & M. F. Garrett (Eds.), Language and space. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 211-276. (2000). Toward a cognitive semantics. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Refreshments will be available

Everyone is welcome to attend!

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