

LEXICAL SOURCES FOR SPEED ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

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Among qualitative concepts, that of SPEED is likely to be one of the most complex, and, at the same time, tending to a universal lexicalization. Interestingly, within the process of lexicalization, it displays both very special patterns of metaphorization (cf. ‘quiet, soft, gentle’ → ‘slow’, as in Russian *tixij*) and develops non-trivial instances of grammaticalization (cf. ‘quick’ → ‘if’, as in Polish *skoro* or Russian *kol’ skoro* ‘as long as’). All these properties are highly relevant for linguistic theory (and lexical typology in particular) and make it particularly pertinent to pay attention to different lexicalization patterns moulding the concept of speed in the world’s languages.

The paper considers main conceptualization patterns for the two domains: those of high and low speed, respectively.

The domain of *high speed* is usually rich and well elaborated. For example, Russian disposes of more than 15 adjectives denoting high speed (as *bystryj*, *skoryj*, *šustryj*, *sporyj*, *prytij*, *provornyj*, *stremitel’nyj* etc.); however, there is one dominant unit (*bystryj*) which covers all semantic varieties – other units are either more specialized or getting obsolete. Within this domain, a typical polysemy is between ‘velocity’ meaning (roughly, describing a higher intensity of a non-homogenous process, as in *spread quickly* ≈ ‘at a high speed’) and ‘immediate’ meaning (roughly, describing a reduced interval between two events, as in *answer quickly* ≈ ‘answer immediately [after being asked]’). Less often, a third meaning can be added, namely, ‘early / premature’ (as in Japanese *hayai*).

Typically, two main sources for lexical expression of high speed are detected. The first one is provided by prototypical “high-speed” situations of fast physical motion – such as falling, running, flushing, hitting, throwing, etc. Cf. Latin (and Romance) *rapidus* (< *rapere* ‘grasp, grab’), Lithuanian *ristas* (etymologically related to ‘run’, cf. C.-Sl. *ristati* ‘run, leap, ride’), Russian *šibkij* and Polish *szybki* (both etymologically related to ‘throw; hit’), Polish *prędkie* (etymologically related to ‘flush, flow’), Czech *rychlý* (attested in all West Slavic, etymologically related to ‘move’ and ‘break down’), etc. The second one is related to habitual situations – properties of prototypically “quick” agents. Cf. Rus. *živoj* ‘alive’, *vesělýj* ‘merry, cheerful’ (esp. as quasi-imperatives of the type *živee!*, *veselee!* ‘<be> quick!’, ‘lively!’) and Chinese *kuài* ‘quick’ < ‘joyful, pleasant’. Both positive and negative connotations of high speed terms are possible: high speed may be perceived as an advantage (witness Russian *živoj*), as well as disadvantage (witness Slavic *nagl-*, combining, in different Slavic languages, meanings ‘quick / sudden’ and ‘insolent’). Negative connotations are well attested, e.g., also in French, cf. colloquial expressions such as *aller plus vite que la musique*, *il y va un peu vite*, etc.

The domain of low speed is usually less elaborated, but displays similar characteristics; here, typically “slow” situations and typical human qualities are at work as well.

For high-speed terms, a frequent grammaticalization is attested. We argue that the two main grammaticalization paths are intensifiers and temporal or conditional connectors developing from ‘velocity’ meaning and ‘immediate’ meaning respectively.