The Verbs of Oscillation in a typological perspective
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   This work presents a part of a lexico-typological project studying a group of verbs describing a type of motion : oscillation verbs. This semantic field was first considered in [Рахилина, Прокофьева 2005], where it was compared between two closely-related languages, Russian and Polish. We aim to continue this study from the typological point of view in order to reveal the relevant parameters and create a reliable semantic map[1] for the semantic field in question.

   By the monent, we have achieved results in several Indo-European languages (English, German[2], French), several Finno-Ugric languages (Finnish, Komi-Zyrian and Tundra Nenets) and also in Korean[3]. Normally, closely related languaues are not included in selections for typological studies, since the resemblance between them can be explained by their common origin and not by universal principles of language. However, they have proved to provide very significant data when it comes to lexical typology : for example, the studies of another group of verbs of motion, rotation verbs, have shown that Russian and Polish had considerably diverged and the same semantic field is not structured by the same parameters in both languages, despite the phonetical resemblance of the lexical items.

   Our approach is based on comparison of the lexical combinatory of the items that form the semantic field of oscillation in each language. The comparison reveals the relevant parameters that oppose lexemes one to another and shows the way verbs combine different meanings in each system.

   One of the essential features of the semantic field is whether the system is dominant in every given language. For example, according to the previous studies, in the system of Russian there exists a dominant verb that can describe different kinds of oscillation and several lexemes with narrower use, while in Polish the whole semantic field is divided by its lexemes in almost equal zones. However, the two systems do share some features : both oppose vertical surfaces to horizontal (e.g. a curtain vs. a waving meadow) and hanging objects to those attached by the lower end (e.g. a tree), both systems have means to emphasize that an object is unstable due to its loss of functionality (e.g. a rotten chair). Russian also opposes firm objects to the soft ones, and Polish verbs can be opposed by the amplitude of the oscillation they describe.

   These parameteres can be found in other languages as well. Thus, Indo-European languages also oppose firm objects and soft surfaces (e.g. tissue) and vertical surfaces to horizontal, mark out the objects unstable because of a damage. In addition, these languages also provide means to point out the pattern of the oscillation or its direction. Another parameter, relevant for German languages especially, is whether the object is animated. The Finno-Ugric system is human-oriented: the essential organizing factor is the extent, to which the situation is controlled by human. There is are special lexemes for animated objects and for the objects that are supposed to oscillate by their function (e.g. a cradle, a swing). Korean provides a very rich system with one dominant verb and a wide range of peripheral lexemes, allowing to oppose objects by their topological type, their firmness/softness, the pattern and direction of the oscillation, its amplitude and cause. There is also a dictinction between animated and inanimated objects.

   The overview of the semantic field of oscillation verbs in languages given shows that, though the systems might be organized in different ways, there are some parameters that one can trace in every language and that might therefore turn out to be universal : soft surfaces, damaged objects and animated objects tend to be isolated by special lexemes. Several characteristics of the oscillation itself, such as its amplitude, its pattern, its direction also seem to be quite important for the semantic field overall. However, every system has its own special features, and the shared features are combined with each other in different ways : most often, a lexeme combines several features of different nature, for example, a functional feature together with a physical characteristic

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1see [Haspelmath, 2003]
2 based on the data from [Велейшикова, 2010]
3 based on the data from [Рудницкая, 2012]

of the situation. Nevertheless, it seems quite possible to create a semantic map based on our results, that could afterwards be supplemented by further investigations.

References

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