Speaker's territory as a factor in the use of deictic verbs and verb affixes:

The cases of Kupsapiny and Newar

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The present study shows that unlike demonstratives, a COME verb and an affix for 'hither' can be used to describe not only motion toward the speaker in space, but also motion into a space where the speaker is located as well as motion into an area on which the speaker fixates his/her sight, based on the results of a production experiment with speakers of Kupsapiny (a Nilotic language of Uganda) and Newar (a Sino-Tibetan language of Nepal). This suggests that the use of these forms involves the notion of the speaker's territory.

Previous studies on deictic expressions (e.g. Fillmore 1971) have analyzed them as having purely spatial meanings characterizable in terms of the direction of motion relative to event participants. However, there are almost no studies that have examined how they are used based on quantitative data. Recently, Matsumoto et al. (2017) found that the COME verbs in English, Japanese, and Thai can be used for cases where a moving entity moves not necessarily toward the speaker, but into the speaker's territory. The present study elaborates this notion of the speaker's territory by examining two more languages, considering factors that Matsumoto et al. did not look at. It also investigates the use of a deictic affix in relation to the speaker's territory, which was not considered in Matsumoto et al.

We had 13 Kupsapiny speakers and 14 Newar speakers describe video clips depicting motion events that differ in the direction of the moving entity's motion in relation to the viewer. Both languages are highly deixis-salient, almost always mentioning deictic information in describing motion events. Setting aside demonstratives, for deictic information of a motion event, Kupsapiny uses deictic suffixes, which attach to most motion verbs, as well as deictic verbs (as main or participle verbs), and Newar uses deictic verbs obligatorily as main verbs.

We examined how speakers of the two languages express the following types of motion events with these deictic elements: (i) motion into a delineated space (specifically, to the floor) where the speaker is located, (ii) motion out of an enclosure into an open space where the speaker is located, and (iii) motion into the speaker's visual field where s/he fixates his/her sight on a certain entity. We compared the results with those of the speaker's descriptions of motion events not involving these factors, and found that the COME verbs and the 'hither' verb suffix are both used for these types of motion more frequently than their 'thither' counterparts. We also found that in the two languages, these factors can even override the factor of the direction of the moving entity's motion relative to the speaker in a way clearer than in previously studied languages.

Thus, the use of both a COME verb and a 'hither' verb affix can involve the notion of the speaker's territory, which is found to be relevant in a wider range of languages and verbal elements than uncovered before. Deixis is a subjective concept, and especially the use of 'hither' verbal elements tends to be sensitive to a moving entity's motion into the speaker's territory, because such motion could affect his/her interests, and this instigates his/her projection of himself/herself on his/her territory.

References

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