

Causality in Spanish

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Previous work on Spanish caused-motion events (Filipović 2013, Ibarretxe-Antuñano 2012, Ibarretxe-Antuñano et al. 2016) has shown that Spanish speakers categorise these events on the basis of two main components, the degree of intentionality and force-dynamics (e.g. caerse vs. dejar) and the three-dimensionality of the ground (e.g. meter vs. poner). This talk expands this characterisation and explores how causality in general is conceptualized and encoded in Spanish.

Data were collected using the CAL videoclip stimuli, a set of 58 live action videos of interactions among humans, natural forces and inanimate objects. Thirty-two native European Spanish speakers participated in two tasks: a non-verbal categorisation task where participants have to attribute different degrees of responsibility to the actions performed in the clips, and a verbal description task, where participants responded to the question “what happened?”.

Results confirm that intentionality is a key concept in the conceptualization of (any type of) causation events in Spanish. Statistically significant differences are found in the attribution of responsibility between intentional and non-intentional events. Together with intentionality, Spanish speakers care for other semantic components such as volition and guilt. These components are crucial not only the non-verbal categorization of causation events (intentional vs. non-intentional, guilty vs. non-guilty), but also in the oral and gestural encoding of these events in Spanish.

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