

Title: Spatial Cognition Through the Lens of Russian and Latvian Languages

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Abstract:

The subject of this presentation is inspired in part by several studies addressing cross-cultural spatial cognition (Levinson, 2003; Talmy, 1983), in particular, spatial relations expressed by means of noun groups with locative meanings in Russian and Latvian. For instance, two locative Russian phrases with the preposition на (on), as in картина на стене (a picture is on the wall) and пятно на стене (a spot is on the wall), will be translated into Latvian by means of two different prepositions 1) pie (at), as in Glezna ir pie sienas (a picture is on the wall) and 2) uz (on), as in Traips ir uz sienas (a spot is on the wall). As such, the structure of similar semantic fragments identifying spatial relations differs between Russian and Latvian. In order to express the position of an object on a non-horizontal surface, Latvian speakers must take into consideration more spatial parameters than Russian speakers, i.e., the preposition pie (at) is used if the object is detachable from the surface and the preposition uz (on) is used if the object is not discrete. The proposed analysis reflects data collected from corpora searches, selected dictionary articles, and images of topological relations (the BowPed Project, Bowerman, Pederson, 1992). This research offers important findings that contribute to the understanding of spatial cognition through grammar.

Bibliography

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