

Abstract

Explorations in the world of locative alternation

Paul Hirschbühler
Université d'Ottawa

I discuss some morpho-syntactic and semantic characteristics of the locative alternation (*load hay on the cart* vs. *load the cart with hay*), including the conditions for the fit between the semantics of the construction and that of the verb, focusing on the requirements which have to be satisfied for a verb to appear in the Ground/Location (object) frame variant (*load the cart with hay*). I limit myself to a few cases and a very few languages. In section 1, I go over syntactic representations, focusing mostly on the Ground frame, and I adopt the view that the syntax of this construction may vary in limited ways depending on what licences the construction, in particular on whether the construction is licensed by the verb on its own or in conjunction with other elements in the construction. In section 2, concentrating on some facts of French, I address the question of the choice between a projectionist versus (neo)-constructionist approach to the fit between verbs and constructions, favoring the non-projectionist approach. In section 3 I have a quick look at English and other languages which, by and large, behave in the same general way regarding which classes of verbs alternate, such as French (the Romance languages in general), Arabic, etc., to bring out the fact that they differ regarding the behaviour of some verbs/verb classes, contrary to what one might expect from Pinker's 1988 categorization of verb classes as well as from the semantic generalizations he makes regarding the constructional versatility of locative verbs; some of the classes he sets up for English actually do not behave as expected from his generalizations, and compared to the other languages considered, English seems to be the funny guy. A question briefly discussed is the source of the difference in behaviour, e.g. whether it is due to the fact that the verbs considered are, despite appearances, actually sufficiently distinct in their semantics to account for the distinct behaviour, or whether the conditions to be satisfied by a verb to occur in the same construction are somewhat different. Finally, in section 4, I look at some aspects of the determinants of the locative alternation in Korean, which (as Chinese, Japanese, many languages from Asia, and others) allows nearly all verbs, including the counterparts of *fill*, *cover*, *decorate*, to occur in the Figure frame (*load hay on the cart*). Following initial proposals by Alan Juffs (esp. 1993, 1996), I link this to the existence of an Incompleteness Effect on accomplishment situations found in the same languages. However, Juffs's account appears to be too stringent, and I sketch a more flexible account. I then look at (some of) the Korean equivalent of two English alternating verb classes, the *smear*-type class, which alternates, and the *spray*-type class, which is restricted to the Figure frame, at least in the absence of additional licensors in the clause. I discuss one of these elements, the telic aspectual marker *nohta*, whose presence makes it possible for *spray*-type verbs to alternate. Interestingly, this marker does not allow *pour*-type verbs to alternate, neither does it stop a verb from occurring in the Figure/Theme (object) frame: its role is therefore quite different from that of applicative-like prefixes like German *be-* or Russian *ob-* and in part *za-* (which may licence the Ground construction for a number of basic Figure frame verbs, but are in many cases also possible with the Figure frame use of these verbs). Consideration of *nohta* allows us to see that just as Pinker argued for distinguishing between *pour/spray/smear* type verbs in English, his distinction finds support in Korean too, once telicity is taken into account.