

The *SugarTexts* Project

In themselves, the cognitive mechanisms underlying humans' perception and conceptualization of *relocation* processes and events – that is, the enterprise of moving (or being moved) from one place (Loc₁) to another (Loc₂) – appear to be of a universal nature. Yet the means through which such mental representations can be transformed into *linguistic* representations display profound and systematic crosslinguistic differences, even among closely related languages such as the Indo-European. To take a clear-cut example:

Danish	French	
<i>hunden gik/løb ind .</i>	<i>le chien</i>	} entra
<i>fisken svømmede ind</i>	<i>le poisson</i>	
<i>fuglen fløj ind</i>	<i>l'oiseau</i>	
<i>bilen kørte in</i>	<i>la voiture</i>	
<i>skibet sejlede ind</i>	<i>le navire</i>	

The sort of differences at issue complicate the transfer of information across different (proto)types of languages in various ways, most obviously in the course of translation. This includes specialized (LSP) translation, a self-evident example being step-by-step descriptions of technological processes such as the *SugarTexts* described below. Such descriptions simply cannot be translated in a word-by-word fashion from, say, French into Danish or vice versa, causing quite tangible complications and pitfalls for translators... and fascinating challenges for linguists and cognitive scientists.

Aims

The *SugarTexts* Project was initiated in the spring of 2004 by Viktor Smith and Lita Lundquist, with Svetlana Ozol as a research assistant (now PhD student) and further includes a growing network of internal and external partners. It aims at:

- ✓ *Providing*
a new type of empirical evidence for investigating the lexicalization and verbalization of relocation processes and events in selected Indo-European languages
- ✓ *Contributing*
to the further development of existing linguistic typologies and the underlying ontologies and theoretical frameworks
- ✓ *Testing*
the impact of the typological differences and preferences discovered on crosslinguistic communication and translation as well as on nonverbal thinking and problem solving

Introducing *SugarTexts*

Continuing the idea underlying the well-known Frog Stories Project (Berman & Slobin 1994; Strömquist & Verhoeven 2004), the project builds on a multilingual corpus containing spontaneous verbalizations of uniform extralinguistic scenarios involving a wide variety of relocation processes and events. Only, in this case the verbalizations have not come about on the experimenter's initiative. They have been produced quite voluntarily by specialists and/or technical writer simply

doing their job – telling the *SugarStory*. That is: Presenting the consecutive steps through which humble sugar beets eventually turn into fine sugar crystals in a sugar factory. The resultant *SugarTexts* – as found in textbooks, research reports, information folders, sales material, on websites, etc. – provide an excellent basis for quantitative and qualitative analyses of cognitive and linguistic variables of potential interest. By March 2005 the corpus contained a total of 67 *SugarTexts* in Danish, French, Italian, English, and Russian. The number of texts is expected to increase significantly during this year. The next object languages in line are German and Spanish.

Some preliminary results

The results gained at the present early stage include (1) a first step towards further refining the traditional idea of “motion events” by suggesting a sharper distinction between activities/states on the one hand, and actions on the other, incorporating certain basic insights from cognitive psychology on humans’ interpretation of visual stimuli in terms of figure-ground relationships (2) evidence contributing to a clearer positioning of Russian in the “classic” dichotomy between MANNER languages (e.g. Danish, English) and PATH languages (e.g. French, Italian), suggesting that Russian is a MANNER language in the process of switching over to a PATH oriented approach which presently “works both ways”. What makes this interesting is that Russian speakers therefore may (and must) make certain choices that are never at issue for speakers of e.g. Danish or French, leaving much more room for pragmatic and rhetorical influences. For details, see Smith (2003, 2005) and Ozol (2004). The work currently in progress includes more detailed observations concerning Italian and French, experimental investigations into the translation aspect, and further development of the overall ontology and metalanguage.

Intended Project-World Interfaces

✓ *Project Web Site*

e.g. www.sugartexts.dk containing the full text corpus together with current project information, interactive multimedia and database facilities, etc. which should serve as a international forum for interested researches. The site is expected to be launched in the spring/summer of 2005.

✓ *International SugarTexts Conference*

to be held in Copenhagen 2006/7 where established and new researchers will have an opportunity to apply their own approaches, hypotheses, analyses, etc., to the *SugarTexts* material. A preparatory mini-conference with partners from Department of Cognitive Linguistics, University of Lund, and Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics, University of Copenhagen, will be held at CBS in the fall of 2005.

✓ *Publication*

of written versions of the conference papers, ultimately as a *SugarTexts Book*, along with other publications: journals articles, teaching material etc.

Selective bibliography

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