Some Observations on “Conative” and Other Related Meanings

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0. Introduction

As is well-known, different languages use morphosyntactically different linguistic maneuvers to describe the same events and scenes. This paper examines what linguistic strategies are used in English, Spanish, Warlpiri, Berber and Winnebago to express the events which have not necessarily been completed. It also points out that their strategies may refer to other types of events in addition to the one mentioned above. In pursuing these goals, we are specifically concentrating on English ‘V + at’ forms and semantically equivalent expressions in the other languages mentioned above.

Section 1 describes the phenomena of the so-called “conative” alternation in English, Spanish, Warlpiri, Berber and Winnebago, and then mentions their morphosyntactic and semantic properties, making reference to the studies in the past.

Section 2 provides further data in English and Warlpiri, which would reveal that Levin’s (1993) definition of the “conative” alternation is not sufficient, given other related meanings that the same relevant forms may also have.
1. Cross-Linguistic Description

The main aim of this section is to cross-linguistically describe the "conative" alternation. We first provide the definition of "conative" in section 1.1, and describe the "conative" phenomena in the above-mentioned languages in the subsequent sections.

1.1 "Conative" Alternation

The alternation we are examining here is the following type:

(1) a. Paula hit the fence.  
 b. Paula hit at the fence.  (Levin (1993:41))

Both of the examples in (1a) and (1b) use the identical lexical forms, except for the preposition 'at' in (1b). This type of alternation is called "conative" alternation in the literature, whose name comes from the meaning typically expressed in the intransitive variant, as in (1b). Levin (1993:42) gives the precise definition of the term:

The conative alternation is a transitivity alternation in which the object of the verb in the transitive variant turns up in the intransitive conative variant as the object of the preposition in a prepositional phrase headed by the preposition 'at' (sometimes 'on' with certain verbs of ingesting and the 'push/pull' verbs).

The use of the verb in the intransitive variant describes an "attempted" action without specifying whether the action was actually carried out. The conative alternation seems to be found with verbs whose meaning includes notions of both contact and motion. (op. cit., p.42)

Thus, sentence (1b) represents the event in which Paula attempted to hit the fence, but nobody knows whether she actually hit it or not.

Although Levin(1993:42) seems to state that intransitive "conative" alternants invariably have the "conative" meaning, we will show in section 2 that this is not the case.

The linguistic data with only the "conative" meaning are provided in the subsequent sections at the outset.

1.2 English

In this section we are considering the syntactico-semantic properties of the alternation, and also its derivation. The list of the English verbs which may or may not take part in the alternation is provided in the appendix.

1.2.1 The Syntax and Semantics of the English "Conative" Sentences

As described in (1b), English intransitive verbs and the preposition 'at' may play a role in expressing the "conative" meaning. Note that the combination of the verb and the preposition, not the preposition alone, is responsible for the meaning. The differences in meaning between transitive and intransitive "conative" variants are best manifested in the following paradigm:

(2) a. ?He shot the deer, but/and missed it.  
 b. ?He shot the deer, but only gazed it.  
 c. ?He shot the deer, and/but only wounded it.  
 d. ??He shot the deer, but it died.
e. He shot the deer, and it died.  
   \textit{(Green (1972:91))}

(3) a. He shot at the deer, but/and missed it.
   b. He shot at the deer, but only gazed it.
   c. He shot at the deer, and/but only wounded it.
   \textit{(ibid.)}

Given this paradigm, it is possible to say that the use of the transitive verb 'shot' in (2) specifies that the action is actually accomplished, but that of the intransitive verb 'shot' with 'at' in (3) refers to an action without such an implication.

The fact that intransitive variants may not refer to the resultant states of the events which transitive variants represent is further supported by the sentences below:

(4) a. John was shot dead.
   b. * John was shot at dead.  \textit{(Simpson (1983:147))}

Likewise, inalienable possessor constructions lend themselves to the exploration into the differences between transitive and intransitive alternants.

(5) a. John seized Bill's arm.
   b. John seized Bill by the arm.
   c. John seized at Bill's arm.
   d. * John seized at Bill by the arm.  \textit{(Ikegami (1985:292))}

Ikegami (1985:292) remarks that the ungrammaticality of (5d) indicates that it implies an achievement in a more serious sense than (5c). To put it in a nutshell, by being seized, the direct object 'Bill' in (5d) is represented as having been affected in a more real sense than the object 'Bill' in (5c). While 'Bill' in (5d) is presented as a sentient being affected by John's act, 'Bill's arm' in the sentence (5c) is presented as a location at which Bill's act affected John.

Ikegami (1985:280) also notices that either form can combine with the verb phrase 'try to', but these would have a different implication.

(6) a. John tried to shoot the target.
   b. John tried to shoot at the target.

His informant has pointed out that (6b) implies 'some obstacle or difficulty', and that the implication comes from the fact that the undertaking of the action is held as the goal in the sentence.

Ikegami (1985:281) further observes a distinction between the preposition 'at' and 'on' as follows: with 'at', the entity in question is represented as a goal yet to be attained; with 'on', it is represented as an object acted upon. Consider the sentences below.

(7) a. Claud spat at the palms of his hands.
   b. Claud spat on the palms of his hands.  \textit{(Cobuild (1987:1405))}
1.2.2 Derivation

Concerning which variant is “basic” in the “conative” alternation, Guerssel et al. (1985) and Gawron (1988) take a totally different position; Guerssel et al. (1985) regard transitive alternants as “original”, but Gawron (1988) does not think so.

Guerssel et al. (1985) assume that a conative rule operates on the Predicate Argument Structure (henceforth, PAS) of a transitive verb and results in the modification of the Lexical Conceptual Structure (henceforward, LCS). To put it specifically, the conative rule in (9) changes the LCS of the transitive verb ‘cut’ in (10) into the one in (11) for the intransitive “conative” variant like (8b).

(8)a. Margaret cut the bread.  
   b. Margaret cut at the bread.  (Levin (1993:41))
(9) Conative rule: Change the input LCS into a purposive clause subordinated to an introduced clause ‘x causes ENTITY to move along path toward y.’  (Guerssel et al. (1985:58))
(10) LCS of transitive ‘cut’: x produce CUT on y, by sharp edge coming into contact with y.  (Gibid.)
(11) LCS of conative ‘cut’: x causes sharp edge to move along path toward y, in order to produce CUT on y, by sharp edge coming into contact with y.  (Op. cit., p.59)

The conative rule in (9) cannot apply to all verbs’ LCSs, and the restrictions in (12) are imposed on it, which would explain the distribution of “conative” alternating verbs.

02 Restrictions on the conative rule: The conative rule can be applied only if the verb’s LCS includes both an EFFECT clause, ‘x produce effect on y’ and a CONTACT clause, ‘by ENTITY coming into contact with y.’  (Ibid.)

The fact that the causative verb ‘break’ does not show the alternation can be explained in terms of the violation of the restrictions in (12): the LCS of the verb in (14) lacks a CONTACT clause.

03 * Japanangka broke at the boomerang.  (Ibid.)
04 LSC of causative ‘break’: x cause (y come to be BROKEN)  (Op. cit., p.55)

On the other hand, Gawron (1988) has maintained that transitive variants are derived from their intransitive counterparts via ‘Goal Promotion’ specified in (15), a morphological redundancy rule.

05 If any participant is marked as ‘changed’, it has to be realized as a direct object.  (Gawron (1988:367))

06a. John punched Bill.  
   b. John punched at Bill.  (Ibid.)

If the noun phrase ‘Bill’ in (16b) is marked as ‘changed’, it has to realize as the object like (16a), and it does. Moreover, the construction whose argument is marked as ‘changed’ would get the holistic reading, while the
unmarked construction would get the partitive reading.

The following are some instances of the constructions in which ‘Goal Promotion’ is crucially involved.

(7) a. John loaded the truck with hay.
    b. John loaded hay onto the truck. (op. cit., p.366)
(8) a. A yellow roadster traveled this road last night.
    b. A yellow roadster traveled on this road last night.

( ibid. )

Considering the peculiarity of the meaning “conative” and the constrained syntactic behavior of “conative” sentences, Gawron’s (1988) assumption on the derivation, however, should be abandoned, in favor of the Guerssel et al.’s (1985) assumption that transitive variants are “deep”.

(9) a. * John was shot at dead. (Simpson (1983:147))
    b. * John seized at Bill by the arm.

(Ikegami (1985:292))
    c. * John kissed at his girlfriend.

1.3 Spanish

Like English, Spanish also uses the complex of an intransitive verb and the preposition ‘a’ to express the “conative” meaning.

(10) contestar a la pregunta.
    ‘to answer the question.’ (Bolinger (1956:106))

⇒ No ha contestado a mi carta.
    ‘He hasn’t answered my letter.’ (ibid.)

Bolinger (1956:106) has noted that transitive and intransitive variants “have to some extent divided the semantic field: the transitive member of the pair has taken on the meaning of “really doing” the act in question (saturating the object with it, so to speak), leaving the less earnest meanings to the intransitive member.” Given this remark, the prediction is borne out that the following sentence is perfectly acceptable, and actually this is so.

(11) Contestó a la pregunta pero no la contestó.
    ‘He contributed a response, but not a satisfactory one.’

( ibid. )

1.4 Warlpiri

Warlpiri, a Pama-Nyungan language of central Australia, can exhibit the alternation, though how to express the meaning is different from the one in English and Spanish.*

    kangaroo shot Jakamarra-erg
    Jakamarra shot the kangaroo.
    kangaroo-dat-3sgO-PURP shot Jakamarra-erg
    Jakamarra shot at the kangaroo.

(Guerssel et al. (1985:58))
What distinguishes the two sentences is the form of the auxiliary clitic which is construed with the dative case-marked NP bearing the object grammatical function. The object NP 'Marlu' (kangaroo) in (23a) is in the absolutive case, but the one in (23b) is marked by the dative clitic ‘-ku’, and the dative-double dative clitic complex ‘-rla-jinta’ is coreferent with the dative case-marked NP ‘Marlu-ku’. The dative clitic ‘-ku’ and the dative-double dative clitic complex ‘-rla-jinta’ are needed for the “conative” meaning in Warlpiri.

Warlpiri also distinguishes transitive variants from intransitive “conative” ones by meaning.5

   tree-1sg chop-past but neg-1sg chop-past
   *’I chopped the tree, but I didn’t chop it.’

   tree-dat-1sg-3dat chop-past but neg-1sg chop-past
   ‘I chopped at the tree, but I didn’t chop it.’
   (Laughren(1988:231))

Like English, the Warlpiri verbs ‘marnpurnu’ (touched) and ‘rdilykipungu’ (broke) do not involve in the alternation.

   Japanangka-erg-1sgO-PURP touched me-dat
   * Japanangka touched at me.

(26) * Japanangka-rlu-rla-jinta rdilykipungu karli-ki.
   Japanangka-erg-3sgO-PURP break boomerang-dat

* Japanangka broke at the boomerang.
   (Guerssel et al. (1985:59))

According to Guerssel et al. (1985), the LCSs of these verbs do not contain both a CONTACT and an EFFECT clause, so that they cannot show the alternation. Remember the discussion in 1.2.2.

1.5 Berber

Berber, an Afro-Asiatic language, spoken in the Middle Atlas of Morocco, does not superficially have the “conative” alternation. Some Berber verbs themselves, however, can simply express the “conative” meaning, without any particular clitics and forms.

(27) Y-wtu wrba aydi.
   3sgM-hit boy-CST dog
   The boy hit the dog./The boy hit at the dog.
   (Guerssel et al. (1985:60))

(27) is ambiguous as to whether the subject ‘wrba’ (the boy) hit the object ‘aydi’ (dog). Guerssel et al. (1985) have concluded that the LCS of the Berber verb ‘ut’ (hit) in (28) is essentially similar to that of English “conative” verbs.

(28) LCS of ‘ut’: x cause ENTITY to move along path toward y, in order to produce EFFECT, by ENTITY coming into contact with y.
   (op. cit., p.59)
Berber also has verbs which are basically verbs of contact and do not entail any effect. One of such verbs is ‘ssigh’ (reach, touch, hit, bump, strike), which has the LCS in (29).

(29) LCS of ‘ssigh’: x come to be contact with y, by ENTITY moving along path ending at y. 
(op. cit., p.60)

The contrast in meaning between ‘ut’ and ‘ssigh’ is well shown in (30).

(30) Lla n-bennatsa licart, al tt n-ttcat. Udin tt yssighn
impf 1pS-build target and it 1p-hit. one-who it hit
We set up a target and shoot at it. The one who strikes it

y-awy    afunas.
3msgS-take ox
wins an ox. 
( Ibid. )

1.6 Winnebago

Winnebago, a Siouan language, does not have the alternation either. Some verbs in Winnebago do not require any special elements to express the “conative” meaning, paralleling Berber.

(31) Maanskook-ra guuchshannan.
can-DEF    hit-DECL
He hit (shot) the can./He hit (shot) at the can.

( Ibid. )

The sentence above may give two different readings. One reading is that he actually hit or shot the can, and another is that he attempted to hit or shot the can. The LCS of the Winnebago verb ‘gutch’ (hit, shot) is specified in (32), which is analogous to that of English “conative” verbs.

(32) LCS of ‘gutch’: x cause ENTITY to move along path toward y, in order to produce EFFECT, by ENTITY coming into contact with y.
(op. cit., p.59)

Winnebago, like Berber, has verbs which are essentially verbs of contact and do not imply any effect. The Winnebago verb ‘hapa’ (hit) is one of such verbs, whose LCS lacks an EFFECT clause.

(33) Kununga shuunk-ra hapaanan.
Kununga dog-DEF 3sg-hit-DECL
Kununga hit the dog.
(op. cit., p.60)

(34) LCS of ‘hapa’: x come to be contact with y, by ENTITY moving along path ending at y. 
( Ibid. )

2. Further Meanings

While Levin (1993) appears to delimit the meaning of an intransitive “conative” variant to only the “conative”, the following data in English and Warlpiri will lead us to acknowledge the involvement of other meanings in the “conative” construction. It proves that if the “conative” alternation is defined as Levin (1993:42) has done, it is quite unsatisfactory.
2.1 English

Some English “conative” verbs can take one of the prepositions among ‘at’, ‘on’ and ‘against’, though the other typical “conative” verbs do usually take ‘at’ only.

\[\text{a. I pushed the table.} \]
\[\text{b. I pushed at/on/against the table.} \quad \text{(Levin (1993:42))}\]

The verb like ‘spit’ may express an “attempted” event with the preposition ‘at’, which we have already compared to the ‘on’ counterpart in 1.2.1, but some other verbs including ‘push’ may describe other sorts of events with the same preposition ‘at’. Cobuild (1987:1168) has noted that “if you push at something, you touch it repeatedly with a pushing movement”. The event described by sentence (35b) turns out to be different from the one represented by the verbs we have so far examined. It has depicted a “repeated” action, rather than an “attempted” one. If it is on the right track, the definition given by Levin (1993:41) should be reconsidered, because she appears to state that “conative” variants have only the “conative” meaning. The following data also supports the idea that the complex of the “conative” verb and ‘at’ would express a “repeated” action.

\[\text{a. Mary threw the book at John.} \]
\[\text{b. Mary flung the package at Sue.} \]
\[\text{c. Mary kicked the ball at John.} \]
\[\text{d. John flicked the coin at her.} \quad \text{(Pesetsky (1995:139))}\]

\[\text{a. * Mary pulled the trunk at Sue.} \]
\[\text{b. * Mary pushed the boulder at John.} \]
\[\text{c. * John dragged the sack at Bill.} \]
\[\text{d. * Mary schlepped the box at John.} \quad \text{(ibid.)}\]

Given this paradigm, we can assume that the “conative” meaning is more strictly associated with the directional and spatial meaning of ‘at’ which is typically expressed in (39) than the “repeated” meaning. The asymmetry will be discussed in terms of the Grammaticalization theory in Kuroasaki (in preparation).

\[\text{Did you throw it at him or to him?} \quad \text{(Eibunpoo Jiten (1970:1060))}\]

2.2 Warlpiri

Warlpiri uses the complex of the dative clitic ‘-ku’ and the dative-double dative clitic complex ‘rla-jinta’ to express the “conative” meaning.

\[\text{a. Watiya-rna paka-rnu ngajulu-rlu (jurldara-ku).} \]
\[\text{tree-1sg chop-past 1sg-erg} \quad \text{(honey-dat)} \]

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(A. L. Huxley, ‘Young Archimedes’)
(Dooshi Jiten (1980:340))

---
‘I chopped a tree (for honey).’ (Laughren (1988:216))
   tree-dat-1sg-3dat-dd     chop-past
   ‘I chopped at the tree.’     (op.cit., p.217)

The identical complex ‘-ku-rla-jinta’, however, may participate in the “benefactive” construction. Consider the following sentences.

   honey-dat-1sg-3dat-dd     chop-past 1sg-erg
   ‘I chopped for honey for him/her.’
   honey-dat-1sg-3dat-dd     chop-past 1sg-erg     J-dat
   ‘I chopped for the honey for Jakamarra.’
   (op. cit., p.218)

Note that the “benefactive” construction in (41) is assumed by Laughren (1988:218) to be derived from the “goal dative” constructions in (42b).

   honey-1sg     chop-past 1sg-erg     (tree-loc)
   ‘I chopped out the honey (in the tree).’
   honey-dat-1sg-3dat     chop-past 1sg-erg     (tree-loc)
   ‘I chopped for the honey (in a tree).’
   (op. cit., p.216)

One of the verb classes which may participate in both the “conative” and “benefactive” construction is “impact” verbs such as ‘jarnti-ri’ (to carve), ‘liwa-ri’ (to hit with missile), ‘paji-ri’ (to cut), ‘pangi-ri’ (to dig), ‘panti-ri’ (to pierce), ‘yurrpa-ri’ (to grind, file).

The fact that the “benefactive” meaning may be involved in the “conative” alternation in Warlpiri will make us admit that the definition of the “conative” alternation given by Levin (1993:42) is not sufficient.

3. Conclusion

This paper has dealt with the “conative” alternation, and tried to describe its morphosyntactic and semantic properties in English, Spanish, Warlpiri, Berber and Winnebago. It has also particularly shed light on the meanings other than the “conative”, which have not been fully discussed in the literature so far. At first glance, the variety of meanings involved in the alternation appears unsystematic, but it can be captured in a more systematic way, for example, in terms of the Grammaticalization theory. Whether we can treat all constructionally observable meanings in the alternation in one way is another issue, which will be considered in Kuroasaki (in preparation).

Appendix

The following is the list of the English verbs which may or may not formally participate in the “conative” alternation, though they do not necessarily mean “conative” as described in the text. Most of the verbs listed here are quoted from Levin (1993:41f), though I have added some
verbs in the list, and reclassified a few verbs into the class which is different from the one in her list.

1. Alternating Verbs

(A) Verbs of Contact by Impact:
   a. Hit Verbs: bang, bash, batter, bump, butt, dash, drum, hammer, hit, kick, knock, lash, pound, rap, slap, smack, smash (where no effect implicated), ??smite, strike, tamp, tap, thump, thwack, whack
   b. Swat Verbs: bite, claw, paw, peck, punch (person), scratch, shoot (gun), stab, swat, swipe
   c. Spank Verbs: thrash
(B) Poke Verbs (some): dig, jab, poke, stick
(C) Cut Verbs: chip, clip, cut, hack, hew, saw, scrape, scratch, slash, snip
(D) Spray/Load Verbs (some): dab, rub, splash, spray, squirt
(E) Push/Pull Verbs: ?draw, heave, jerk, press, pull, push, shove, ?thrust, tug, yank
(F) Verbs of Ingesting:
   a. Eat Verbs: eat
   b. Chew Verbs: chew, chomp, gnaw, lick, munch, nibble, pick, peck, sip, slurp, suck
(G) Obtain Verbs: grab, seize, snatch
(H) Get Verbs: catch
(I) Negative Judgment Verbs: ??flout, mock, ??scorn

2. Non-Alternating Transitive Verbs

(A) Swat Verbs: slug
(B) Spank Verbs: belt, birch, bludgeon, bonk, brain, cane, clobber, club, conk, cosh, cudgel, cuff, flog, knife, paddle, paddywhack, pummel, sock, spank, strap, truncheon, wallop, whip, whisk
(C) Carve Verbs: bore, bruise, carve, chip (potatoes), chop, crop, crush, cube, dent, dice, drill, file, fillet, gash, gouge, grate, grind, mangle, mash, mince, mow, nick, notch, perforate, pulverize, punch (paper), prune, shred, slice, slit, spear, squash, squish
(D) Alternating Verbs of Change of State including:
   a. Break Verbs: break, chip, crack, crush, fracture, rip, shatter, smash, snap, splinter, split, tear
   b. Bend Verbs: bend, crease, crinkle, crumple, fold, rumple, wrinkle
(E) Touch Verbs: caress, graze, kiss, lick, nudge, pat, peck (= kiss), pinch, prod, sting, stroke, tickle, touch
(F) Destroy Verbs: annihilate, blitz, decimate, demolish, destroy, devastate, exterminate, extirpate, obliterate, ravage, raze, ruin, waste, wreck
(G) Verbs of Ingesting:
   a. Gobble Verbs: bolt, gobble, gulp, guzzle, quaff, swallow, swig, wolf
   b. Devour Verbs: consume, devour, imbibe, ingest, swill
(H) Verbs of Sending and Carrying including:
   a. Send Verbs: airmail, convey, deliver, dispatch, express, FedEx, forword, hand, mail, pass, port, post, return, send, shift, ship, shunt, slip, smuggle, sneak, transfer, transport, UPS
   b. Slide Verbs: bounce, float, move, roll, slide
(I) Attack Verbs: attack, assault
Negative Judgment Verbs: deride, ridicule

Hold Verbs: clasp, clutch, grasp, grip, handle, hold, wield

Spray/Load Verbs (some): swab

Eat Verbs: drink

Chew Verbs: crunch

3. Non-Altering Intransitive Verbs

(A) Verbs of Nonverbal Expression: jeer, scoff, sneer

(B) Verbs of Manner of Speaking: bawl, bellow, cry, groan, growl, grumble, holler, moan, roar, scream, shout, shriek, thunder, whisper, yell

(C) Run Verbs: dart, dive, fly, gallop, jump, leap, run, rush, spring

Notes

Guerssel et al. (1985:50) have posited two levels of representation in the Lexicon: the LCS, which is a specification of a word’s meaning, with variables used to indicate its arguments, and the Lexical Structure. These representations are associated by a set of ‘linking’ or ‘mapping conventions’ formulated in terms of ‘thematic’ or ‘semantic role’ derivable from the LCS. The PAS is an LCS linked to an LS. The LCS of the transitive verb ‘cut’ is, for instance, specified as follows:

(i) LCS of transitive ‘cut’: x produce CUT on y, by sharp edge coming into contact with y.  

(Guerssel et al. (1985:51))

(xi) PAS for the verb ‘cut’

\[
\begin{array}{c}
V' \\
\arg V
\end{array}
\]

x produce CUT on y, by sharp edge coming into contact with y.  

(op. cit., p.52)

Guerssel et al. (1985:61; note 2) have noted that the upper case ‘CUT’ needs further elaboration.

Guerssel et al. (1985:61; note 2) have also noted that the upper case ‘BROKEN’ needs further elaboration.

The following abbreviations are used in the glosses: m - masculine, sg - singular, p - plural, S - subject agreement, O - object agreement, 1 - first person, 3 - third person, erg - ergative case, dat - dative case, dd - double dative, 3 dat - third person singular dative case, CST - construct state (case), loc - locative case, PURP - purposive, DEF - definite, DECL - declarative, impf - imperfective aspect, neg - negative.

To a very large extent, these are those of the original authors, although some of the abbreviations used in the glosses have been changed for consistency.

Probably (24b) is wrong, which should be changed into (i). Otherwise, it would represent the “goal dative” meaning. See the sentences in (ii) to understand why.
     tree-dat-1sg:3dat-dd       chop-past but neg-1sg     chop-past
     ‘I chopped at the tree, but I didn’t chop it.’

     kangaroo-dat-1sg:3dat-dd    shoot-past
     ‘I shot at the kangaroo.’

   b. Marlu-ku-rna-rla           luwa-rnu.
     kangaroo-dat-1sg:3dat shoot-past
     ‘I shot it for/with the kangaroo.’

   (Laughren (1988:239))

6 The following contrast is worth considering, relating to the “conative” alternation.

   (i) a. Mary threw the book at John.

   b. *Mary pushed the boulder at John.

   c. Mary threw the book in the room / into the room.

   (Pesetsky (1995:139))

   d. Mary pushed the heavy box in its proper place / into its proper place.

   (op. cit., p.140)

The preposition ‘in’ in (ic) is ambiguous in that it can be interpreted as either a locative or a goal, whereas the one in (id) is unambiguous; only a locative meaning. The contrast seems to be related to the difference in grammaticality in (ia) and (ib).

The same contrast can be found in the preposition ‘on’. Consider the sentences below.

(ii) a. Mary kicked the ball at John.

   b. *Mary pulled the trunk at Sue.

   c. Mary kicked the ball on the field / onto the field.

   (op. cit., p.139)

   d. Mary pulled the trunk on the mat / onto the mat.

   (op. cit., p.140)

Prof. Akira Ota (p.c.) has indicated that the verb phrases ‘jump in the lake’ and ‘walk in the room’ would get a different status each other with respect to the ambiguity of ‘in’. He has further pointed out the contrast in the verb phrases ‘jump at the tightrope’ and ‘walk at the tightrope.’

7 The judgment whether or not the verb ‘thrash’ is an alternating verb seems to greatly depend on individuals. Levin (1993:41) has classified it into the class of non-alternating transitive verbs, whereas Ikegami (1985: 280) into the alternating class, though he has admitted that it is less acceptable. According to my four informants, all have judged (ib) completely acceptable, yet one informant among them has made a comment that a particular context may change the judgment.

   (i) a. Liz thrashed the stranger.

   b. Liz thrashed at the stranger.

8 Levin (1993:41) has considered the verb ‘slug’ as an alternating verb, but my two informants have regarded it as completely unacceptable, one informant more or less acceptable, and another perfectly acceptable.
(i)a. Len slugged the door.
b. * Len slugged at the door.

"As to the verb 'grip', Levin (1993:145) has observed it a non-alternating transitive verb, and Ikekami (1985:281) an alternating verb. Nevertheless, my two informants have deemed it completely unacceptable, one informant more or less acceptable, and another perfectly acceptable.

(i)a. Pat gripped the handle.
b. * Pat gripped at the handle. (Levin (1993:145))

10 Although the verb 'run', of course, has a transitive variant, as in 'She ran the office', the relevant construction here is like 'Jack ran at the train (and got on)'.

Dictionaries


References


Kurosaki, Shigeki. in preparation. Cross-linguistic research on “conative” and other related meanings. Ms., Kobe University, Kobe.

