

Abstract

The study reported in the present paper builds on a previous investigation (Cardini 2008, in press) in which speakers of English and Italian were found to differ significantly in availability and use of manner of motion verbs in colloquial speech (with English speakers displaying a much wider repertoire and a much more frequent mention of such verbs than Italian speakers). Because of the substantial linguistic difference emerged between the above linguistic groups in that investigation, we now set out to check whether such difference would give rise to linguistic relativity phenomena. Thus, in this new study it was decided that speakers of English and Italian should also be contrasted on non-linguistic abilities.

Nineteen English and nineteen Italian native speakers of similar age and background were tested on twenty-six triads of video-clips showing motion events. The participants underwent first a non-linguistic trial consisting of a *forced-choice similarity judgement task* which was designed to check a *permanent* kind of language effects on general cognition, that is, linguistic effects that take place even beyond speech time. In order to avoid the occurrence of covert speech during testing, the task was carried out in a shadow condition. After this non-verbal trial, participants were then asked to provide verbal descriptions of the same stimuli material used for their similarity judgements.

An analysis of such verbal descriptions confirmed what had already been found in Cardini (2008, in press). Once again, English speakers provided much more information about the manner in which some motion occurs than Italian speakers. The task also showed that the distribution of the manner of motion semantics across the clause differs considerably between these two languages, and in a way which is consistent with Talmy's (1985) classification of language types. In a typical satellite-framed language fashion, English speakers expressed manner of motion almost systematically in the main verb of the clause rather than through some adjunct to the clause (e.g. a gerundive form, an adverb, or a PP); by contrast, in nearly a third of the cases in which Italian speakers delivered manner information at all, such information lay outside the main verb. Moreover, while English speakers practically never used path verbs in their descriptions, Italian speakers uttered such verbs more often than manner of motion verbs.

In contrast to the significant difference found in the verbal task, the performance of the two linguistic groups in the forced-choice similarity judgment task was close to identical. When visually attending to the motion events displayed in the video-clips, English and Italian speakers exhibited the same differential attention for manner vs. path of motion. In other words, the greater *linguistic* salience for manner of motion shown by the English group in the verbal task did not have any coherent equivalent in the particular *non-linguistic* cognitive area examined. The data collected in the present study have therefore provided evidence against linguistic relativity theories. In particular, they suggest that language cannot permanently bias visual attention.

References

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Cardini, F-E. (2008, in press). Manner of motion saliency: An inquiry into Italian. *Cognitive Linguistics*, Vol. 19 (4).

Talmy, L. (1985). Lexicalization patterns: Semantic structure in lexical forms. In T. Shopen (Eds.), *Language Typology and Lexical Description: Vol. 3: Grammatical Categories and the Lexicon* (pp. 36-149). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fig. 1: Verbal task: quantity and distribution of manner information in the average sentence

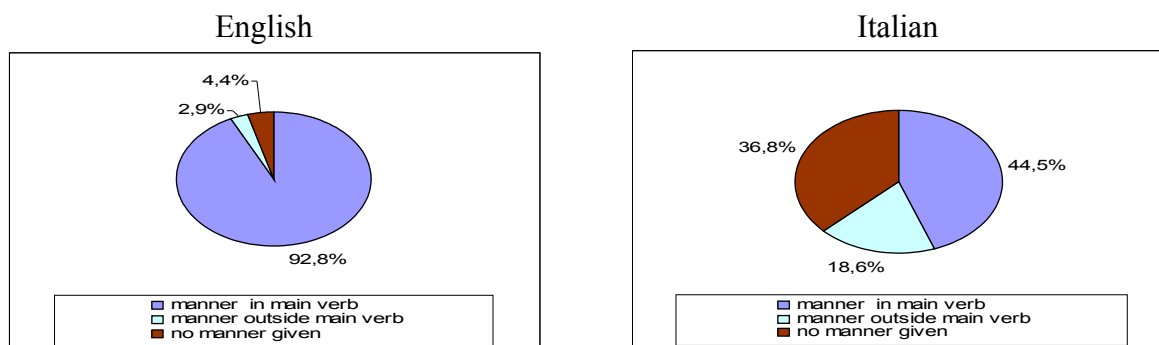


Fig. 2: Verbal task: quantity of different kinds of verb used as main verb of the clause

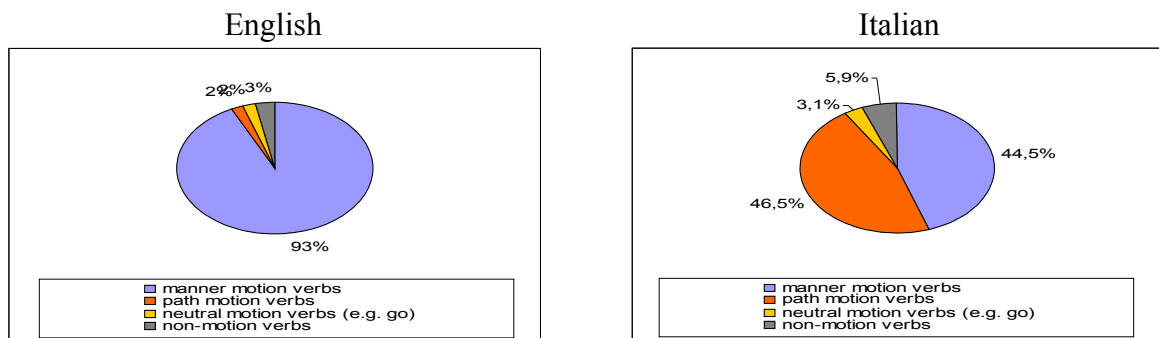


Fig. 3: Non-verbal similarity judgement task: percentage of same-manner and same-path choices

