

Use of verbs of motion in German and Portuguese

The German and Portuguese languages differ with respect to the features immanent to the verbs of motion and are assigned to different language types on this basis. German belongs to the satellite-framed and endocentric languages. There, the manner of movement is specified by the verb and the direction of movement is expressed by adjuncts. In Portuguese, a verb-framed and exocentric language, the direction of movement is inherent. In this study, the research question of how Portuguese and German languages differ in the use of verbs of motion is addressed. For this purpose, first the verbs of motion in both languages are collected, their meanings are described and contrasted. With the help of corpora-based frequency lists, the distribution in terms of frequency is examined. The frequency distribution is contrasted and conclusions are drawn. The analysis shows that there are hardly any Portuguese base words that resemble German base verbs in all specifications. The mentioned language typologies can be confirmed by the analysis and even further secondary features could be identified. Hence, German verbs of motion often include the speed of motion and the Portuguese verbs the environment. Primarily, however, Portuguese movement verbs include the direction of movement and German ones the type of movement. Since there are fewer possible directions of motion than types of motion, Portuguese verbs can be classified as more generic than German verbs. This is also reflected in the frequency of the verbs. In German, there are many different motion verbs with a lower frequency compared to Portuguese. In this language, some motion verbs are used with a high frequency. Thus, the very high specification in German may lead to less frequent use of each verb. Overall, the derivational tendency is evident in both languages: the more specific a verb is, the less frequently it is used. When verbs are very similar in their properties, their frequency is very similar in both languages.

In summary, it appears that the features intrinsic to the motion verbs exert influence on the frequency of their use. The German movement verbs include the type of movement and are thus more specific and have a lower frequency per verb than the Portuguese movement verbs, which include the direction of application, and of which some verbs have a very high frequency compared to German.

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