

Linguistics of weather: cross-linguistic patterns of meteorological expressions

Category: oral presentation

Meteorological expressions (such as *it is snowing* or *the wind blows*) constitute an interesting construction type linguistically. Perhaps their most striking feature lies in the fact that the situations they describe inherently lack proper participants, such as agent, patient or experiencer, which has clear consequences for their linguistic coding. This makes weather phenomena different from canonical intransitive and transitive events that can be distinguished from each other based on the nature of their participants. Weather phenomena do not, however, form a physically completely homogenous group. Instead they include different types of events perceivable by humans visually (e.g. clouding, snowing, lightning), acoustically (e.g. thunder, rain) or by sense of feeling (e.g. chilliness, heat, rain). Moreover, weather phenomena display aspectual variation. For example, a struck of lightning is typically telic and punctual, whereas raining is rather atelic and durative. These differences are also relevant to the linguistic coding of weather phenomena.

Our paper examines the formal variation attested in the coding of meteorological expressions across languages. We propose a formal typology of meteorological expressions and also briefly discuss some other formal properties of these constructions (such as their restricted passivization and causativization). Based on the clausal constituent primarily responsible for the coding of weather, we have divided the meteorological expressions into three major types, labelled as predicate type, argument type and split type (the typology is based on obligatory elements only, optional adverbials including manner or time, for example, are not considered). In the predicate type, the verb expresses the denoted weather phenomenon, while the potential nominal element(s) (arguments) of the construction lack(s) semantic content of its/their own (as in *it rains*). The type also includes expressions, in which an adjective or an adverb is used for coding weather (such as *the weather is sunny*). The argument type constitutes the opposite of the predicate type, since a noun (usually some kind of argument, e.g. a subject) is primarily responsible for coding weather, while the verb is semantically rather vacuous (e.g. *the rain falls*, or 'the rain goes'). In the split type, finally, arguments and predicates are both semantically relevant (e.g. 'the snow rains'). All major types include subtypes. For example, the predicate type can further be divided into atransitive (*rains*), expletive (*it rains*), intransitive (*the cloud rains*) and transitive (*the cloud rained snow*) subtypes. It is important to note that our paper classifies constructions, not languages. This follows, since in some languages, one and the same weather phenomenon may be expressed in multiple ways, for example Digo has four ways of expressing the event 'it rains'. This also distinguishes meteorological expressions from other situation types, which do not allow this kind of extensive variation in their coding.