Verbs of oscillation in Japanese
Maria Shapiro
National Research Institute Higher School of Economics

Introduction

This study presents a part of a broad lexicotyntical research of oscillation verbs.

Methods

1. Frame approach: a questionnaire containing descriptions of typical situations of oscillation; used during fieldwork (with help of language experts)
2. Analysis of lexical combinatory of the verbs in question
3. Reveals the key oppositions between lexemes
4. Create a reliable semantic map (Haspelmath 2003): a configuration reflecting the cognitive organization of senses. Each nod represents a microframe of oscillation established on the basis of both the topological feature and the functional one

The case of Japanese

The semantic field is considerably rich: seven lexemes
1. Yuri: dominant verb, almost no restrictions on its usage. The only odd frame is animate Trajector unable to control his/her motion (a person staggering)
2. Nabiku: soft objects and surfaces
   Nabiku is the only one that combines with horizontal surfaces:
   (5) Kaze ga aru to suimen ga nabiite shimatte
   When there’s wind, the water surface waves.
   (6) Jamaika no hata ga kaze ni soyogu
   The flag of Jamaica is floating in the wind.
   Soyogu, as well as nabiku, applies to flexible stalks, while hatameku does not:
   (7) Attusa no naka de kiku no hana
   Chrysanthemum flowers are swaying in the heat.
   (8) Kata ni haosta jaletto no fūdo to suso ga
   The way the hood and the hem of his coat looks natural as well.
   (9) Guratsuku, buratsuku and furatsuku: 'function' frames, the situations that might be inconvenient or even dangerous for a human.
   Guratsuku: anything with parts not properly attached to one another; furniture or instruments likely to fall apart.
   (10) Tatoeba jitsunsha no handoru ga
   We take apart unsteady chairs and glue them back together.
   (11) Heddohon no shiyori ga furatsuiteta
   Buratsuku: something that dangles, like a rope or a wire, and causes inconvenience.
   (12) Jitsunsha de kitaku suru to chu zempō yori
guratsukure iruite... When he was going home on bike, a man, staggering, came up to him...

Conclusions

• On the one hand, the system of Japanese corresponds to the semantic map designed previously; the parameters observed on the basis of other languages are attested here as well, which proves their typological relevance.
• The configuration is unusual: at the same time, there’s a verb with an extremely wide area of usage and a lot of very specific lexemes.
• Japanese demonstrates a more detailed system compared to most languages studied, especially in the ‘soft’ domain, but also in the domain of loss of functionality. The new oppositions observed allow to extend the questionnaire for further research.

References