

# Motion Verbs in Arabic and English Narratives: A Contrastive Semantic Analysis

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## Abstract

*In this work, not only are different types of motion verbs, such as manner verbs and path verbs, but the embedding relations between motion verbs and text structures are systematically and comprehensively studied, based on Arabic-English parallel narrative texts, within the scope of a contrastive semantic and typological framework. The study is grounded in Talmy's (2000) prominent motion event typology and Slobin's (2004) influential "Thinking for Speaking" hypothesis. It systematically considers how these two languages encode and represent the four core semantic components of motion: path, manner, figure, and ground. In English, a satellite-framed language, manner is expressed within the main verb and the path is expressed in prepositional satellites (e.g. ran into). In contrast, as a verb-framed language, Arabic encodes path in the verb and manner elsewhere (or idiomatically) in the clause, as in the expression "اضكّار لخدّ" "dakhala rākiḍan".*

*Based on a qualitative analysis of parallel narrative examples from a variety of Arabic and English literary specimens, this study reveals significant typological, cognitive, and stylistic differences. These differences have profound implications for translating practices, second language acquisition methods, and theories of cognitive semantics. These investigations would improve awareness of the 'varieties of motion in languages, especially among languages. The findings of this study contribute to an enhanced understanding of the distinct motion modes of thought and typologies of linguistic expressions across different cultural and linguistic systems, which is significant for both the area of typology in linguistics and language pedagogy/educators. The statistics presented here are shown in different ways, with examples that are intended to be utilised for direct learning. The content originated from credible sources, such as Google Scholar, Google Books, and other online platforms.*

**Keywords:** Motion Verbs, Qualitative Aspect, Talmyian Typology, Verb-Framed, Satellite-Framed, Arabic, English, Narrative Semantics, Path, Manner, Cognitive Linguistics.

## Introduction

Motion is an essential part of the human experience, and every human being has faced it in their lifetime. It is a component of everyday living, prevalent across many cultures, and an important semantic domain (Brown, 2021).

The expressions for a movement are surprisingly varied and incredibly unique across the languages of the world. An area of rich linguistic diversity, especially fascinating in this regard, is the expression of motion events in different languages, which reveals systematic patterning and finesse distinction (Lewandowski, 2021).

Take, for example, the differences between Arabic and English - two of the world's top languages—complete with rich cultural history. These languages come from two very dissimilar typological types that deeply influence their structure and the way each realises meanings. Originating from English, a satellite-framed language, it has the tendency to use more satellites than verbs in order to vividly depict them and supplement the main verb for the whole characterisation of motion (Zaychenko, 2024). In contrast, Arabic is generally a verb-framed language with motion verbs clearly being more prominent, with a focus on the actual action and less on the detours of motion.

This typological difference has important consequences for motion expression, especially in narratives in the two languages (Zaki, 2011) (Samenian 2023; Zaki 2011).

The overarching goal of this large-scale study is to conduct a systematic and discriminating contrastive analysis of motion verb patterns in literary narratives produced in Arabic and English. This work is a study of the concrete and specific manner and path of motion representations in each language as well as an exploration of the related cognitive processes behind linguistic diversity, including the respective consequences of handling diversity. Additionally, this paper explores how these salient linguistic differences can have important implications for crucial aspects such as translation and second language learning. This investigation illustrates the challenges posed to foreign learners and translators by complex motion phenomena across different languages. By examining these complex dimensions of motion representation in detail, this study aims to further our understanding of the crucial role played by language in motion portrayal, thus providing valuable insight into the overlapping fields of linguistics, cognitive psychology, and translation studies. The results of this investigation, we also anticipate, will contribute to the understanding of the complex interplay between language and cognition and advance knowledge of linguistic diversification as well as the deep-seated cognitive factors shaping how motion is represented across cultures.

## Literature Review

Talmy (2000) developed a detailed typology designed to unpack the structure of motion events and concentrate specifically on the ways in which a wide range of languages systematically encode and package the many constituent parts of the intricacies of motion. The foundation of this full-blown typological system consists of four basic particles: the figure, which is the particular entity in motion; the ground, which is the environmental reference object that provides essential spatial orientation and a required sense of stability; the path, trajectory, or specific route taken during transit; and the manner, the qualitative aspect of the motion, including matters of speed and manner of execution.

In satellite-framed languages, such as English, a manner of motion is often expressed with the verb itself over path information, which is expressed with independent satellite formations (e.g. walked out, ran across). In sharp contrast, for verb-framed languages such as Arabic or Spanish, the path is incorporated into the main verb and the description of manner would be encoded in the route in some cases and in adverbial adjuncts that add details in other cases. This typological difference, in addition to drawing attention to the role of different linguistic means, reveals the cognitive processes in motion perception and language use, thus contributing to the understanding of how humans conceptualise and encode dynamic events into speech. Expanding on this, the “Thinking for Speaking” hypothesis was introduced by Slobin (2004) as a provocative proposition according to which not only would the typological characteristics of a language affect the actual cognitive operations speakers have to resort to during language production but also the mental underpinning of their thought. Empirical findings as well as those from cross-linguistic comparisons of European languages with Semitic languages (e.g. Berman and Slobin (1994), Alotaibi (2016), and Rizzi (2023)) provide strong evidence for this hypothesis. These studies show how different language systems can deeply influence the structuring of cognition, its processing, and the arrangement of ideas during communication. This relationship between language and thought demonstrates not only that language is an indispensable agent in communication but that it structures and even influences the way people organise and conceptualise their experiences in the world.

## Theoretical Framework

This scholarly research adopts Talmy’s (2000) motion event typology as a major analytical tool for delving into motion events in a highly detailed manner. As a result, we can decompose motion events into key elements that are important for understanding the dynamics of motion.

Figure: The subject moves or the entity that moves in space.

- Ground: Reference object providing context about the relationship in space, thus disambiguating the event.

- Path: The specific trajectory or route taken by the figure as it moves, important for representing both the meaning of the direction and the nature of the journey.
- Manner: style or mode of movement demonstrated by the figure, providing insight into the general characteristics of the action and performance of the movement.

In English, classified as a satellite-framed language, there is a tendency towards the expression of:

- Manner directly via the verb, using a spectrum of verbs that describe subtle nuances of motion (e.g., ran, strolled, hopped), thereby encoding speed and style
- Path by means of prepositional satellites, generating words such as into, out of, and across to denote the direction or destination of motion.

By contrast, Arabic, a verb-framed language, often encodes

- Path directly inside the verb itself, e.g., “لَخَدَ” “dakhala” (entered) and “خَرَجَ” “kharaja” (exited), where the action is inherently linked to the path encoded in the verb.
- Manner is usually an adjunct or optional, often marked by adverbials like “ارَكَارَ” “rākīḍan” (running) and “بِطُؤٍ” “bibūṭ” (slowly), which can add context to the description, rather than a complement to the action.

This typological model highlights, on the one hand, the different linguistic means employed in the languages under consideration, and, on the other hand, demonstrates how these means embody, articulate, and construe the complex dimensions of motion events in different yet meaningful ways to augment our understanding of language and the role it plays in human experience.

## Methodology

This research conducts a comprehensive qualitative comparative linguistic analysis, uncovering novel insights into a wide array of motion verbs derived from ten selected samples of significant literary works, focusing on educational dimensions and presenting an entire study of the Arabic language. Selected for their literary value, these essays by famous writers such as the legendary Naguib

Mahfouz and the recently acclaimed Tayeb Salih are testaments to the rich and diverse Arabic literary tradition. At the same time, the study will also cover a simultaneous choice of important literature which has been from English, keeping in the spotlight the influential and change-making works of authors like the famous Ernest Hemingway or his contemporary William Faulkner, whose special stylistic fillips and the intricacies of the theme have not only built a deep connection with the successive generations of the readers but also successfully reached out to readers across the demographic profile. Motion events found in these well-chosen literary sources were carefully identified, extracted, and classified according to various critical parameters and criteria. A stepwise analysis of the actual motion verbs used in particular by narrative backgrounds in different narrative texts was performed, which provided valuable information on the behaviour of the characters, their motivation, and the developmental tendency observed in their transition processes in the narratives. The analysis also examined the various ways in which manner and path were complexly and densely interwoven with these particular motion verbs, enriching the narrative texture and adding to the descriptive force of the selected texts. It also examined the syntactic environments which facilitate the symmetric integration and usage of these dynamic motion verbs in sentence construction. To an end, the narrative functions of the motion verbs were thoroughly scrutinised and thoughtfully examined, since these functions play an important role in creating a scene, adding the narrative flair, and creating suspense and surprise, all of which are designed to captivate readers and stimulate their rich imagination. Data prospecting was based on an in-depth, fine-grained analysis using sophisticated semantic annotation tools designed to ensure in-depth understanding and refined interpretation of the original texts. In addition, rigorous manual verification was performed to verify accuracy, with a particular focus on contextually based information, fine-grained distinctions, and macro-structural discourse roles present within the narratives. This multi-perspective and extensive comprehensive treatment not only contributes deep insights into the function of motion verbs in their literary context but also emphasises

their compelling status and complex positioning in narrative architecture and literary expression in general.

## Analysis and Discussion

### English Narratives

English shows an especially high degree of path-manner variety, which in turn contributes to the richness and complexity of the language. And nowhere is this exemplified more clearly than in the following form of the literary device: “He ran quickly down the long, wide hall with great speed and determination, reflecting not just his blazingly fast speed, but also his unflagging determination, which seemed to infuse every moment he moved forward.” Another example to help explain this concept is: “She sneakily moved with care into the dark and dreary room, tip-toeing and making sure to move steadily and carefully so as not to get caught, her heart slightly pounding as she made her way through the unknown space.” Complicating and specifying manner verbs is crucial because they are a major source of the vitality and fluency of storytelling. This attention to minutiae creates an effective rapport with readers, involving them in the action being described and encouraging them to create mental images of scenes. However, yeah, which is an elaborate setup, usually has a number of satellites for the path, enriching the complexity and subtlety of the image in the reader’s mind. For example: “She bolted up the stairs, her feet scarcely making a sound against the wooden stairs, then she dashed out through the back door in a sudden rush of movement, her gaze keen and her body racing toward her target with a sense of purpose.” Every handpicked word is a flourishing addition to the brilliant picture painted by the hero’s journey, demonstrating readers’ experiences of the heroes we cheer on and support today.

### Arabic Narratives

The Arabic language provides an interesting basis for a linguistic investigation because it’s ability to house movement in verbal structures, contributes to a clearer description of most of the directional actions, and seems to clarify their differences. For instance the verb “لَخَدَ” “dakhala” (entered) can be used to describe the action of entering as an action

and can be used not to show a way of entering. In the same vein, “عَرَسَ بِحَرَجٍ” “kharaja bisur’ah” (He exited quickly) uses “حَرَجَ” “kharaja” for the act of exiting, but adds “عَرَسَ بِ” “bisur’ah” to emphasise the speed with which it is done, thus providing important context.

In Arabic, adverbs are of paramount interest; they dilute the deed while rendering essential clarifications that enhance narrative. Remarkably, specifying the direction of motion is not intrinsic in Arabic sentence building and is usually not included unless ambiguity results. For example, “أَضْرَكَ لَخَدَ” “dakhala rāḳḳān” (he entered running) describes whether the entry caused excitement, and captured the content of tactical action. Similarly “He came down slowly” the verb is modified rather by the adverb and also gives the receiver a clearer mind picture in connection with the information of the activity.

Moreover, in expressing manner in Arabic, it often takes the form of an adverb which comes after the verb, putting the action first and the process second, so to speak. In summary, Arabic simply focuses on where the movement is headed, rather than how that movement is being done, while still maintaining the ability to express ideas in a smoothly articulated form when needed.

### Cross-Linguistic Implications

The English Language is endowed with narrative dynamism which is further enhanced by exposure to manner and style. This unique attribute forges a narrative that hooks people and arrests both listeners and readers at the molecular level. On the other hand, the Arabic language has unwritten cultural and rhetorical canons to discourage verbosity, seeking communication, and goal orientedness. Thus, the direct and concise manner of conveying information in Arabic can be seen as directly addressing the values of clarity and efficiency that are a part and parcel of the language. These different linguistic features are most evident when it comes to translation: translating from English to Arabic often leads to the elimination of human finesse and the stylistic richness of the original text. On the other hand, translating between Arabic and English 1-3 may require employing sentence parallelism

to ensure that the original message's meaning, reference, and lexical richness are preserved. This mutual penetration of the two languages acquires a particular weight when it serves as a reminder of the value of what is in context in terms of style and meaning, as well as of how divergent cultures can deeply condition expression and understanding.

## Findings

The English language uses a twofold multidimensional design in motion event depiction, with manner and path satellites being complementary and working together to represent actions and their movements. This interesting duality allows speakers to describe intricate and detailed descriptions, not just how an action is performed, but also where exactly it takes place in space. In contrast, Arabic uses single-stem verbs, focusing on the path of motion. The precision of these verbs can be illuminated to some extent by adverbials that specify the nuance of the direction to the verb. These disparities at such a linguistic level reflect a difference in linguistic type, as well as in-depth insights into cognitive strategies and cultural story traditions that are used to conceptualise and tell how we move from place to place in our social worlds. Consequently, translators face the complex challenge of striking a fragile balance between fidelity to the source text and fit with stylistic patterns in the target language. These efforts call for an advanced understanding of the cultural aspects of both the source and target languages, aiming at translators' ability to efficiently convey the meaning of the message of the original text, respecting the particular language and cultural issues of each language. It is more than just a translation; it is an insistence on the intuitive necessity of two interrelated and overloaded languages speaking to each other, for the latter to be true and properly retrieved in the former.

## Conclusion

This study investigated the complex and numerous interrelations between methodologies and orientations for particular motion verbs, thereby improving narrative quality and increasing the descriptive significance of the selected texts in educational contexts. The investigation gazes

the limitations at how these fundamental language differences can affect vital things like translation and learning a second language. Within the framework of contrastive semantic analysis, this detailed and comprehensive study identifies striking differences between the expression of motion events in English and Arabic, shedding light on both languages. The satellite-framed structure of English opens the possibility of creating new narrative constructions and more varied narratives of motion, allowing for greater expressiveness and creativeness in the description of diverse movements, shapes, and forms. Arabic, on the other hand, has a verb-framed nature, zeroes in both on the endpoint and the particular trajectory, hence providing a narrative structurally more focused and directed in that what is established in it is an endpoint of the motion referred to. This basic structural difference results in a distinct narrative method that influences how motion is expressed and perceived.

A meticulous analysis of these typological differences reveals far-reaching implications, not only for translation practices, where pertinent subtleties can be easily disregarded, but also for language teaching and learning strategies, thus providing valuable information to the teacher. Furthermore, this study contributes to our knowledge of the intricate connections between linguistic systems and cognitive structures, and explains how objects are interpreted metaphorically in different cultural models. Subsequent research could further examine essential properties, such as spoken discourse analysis, children's narratives in both languages, and multimodal expressions of motion and language use in different contexts. Such studies would contribute to understanding the 'varieties of motion in languages, for example, in languages with a dominant Tibeto-Burman substratum (discussion of linguistic relativity).

In conclusion, a more thorough investigation of these fascinating characteristics and their implications for our understanding of language could be of high relevance for language theory, as well as applications to education, cognitive development, and strategies of communication in a globalised world, to achieve multicultural understanding and cooperation.

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