

# Structuring space in Chinese and French narrative discourse

---

Arnaud Arslangul

INALCO-CRLAO

[arnaud.arslangul@inalco.fr](mailto:arnaud.arslangul@inalco.fr)

**Key words: discourse analysis, information linearization, referential movement, Motion events**

The aim of this study is to investigate how languages express space domain (Motion events) at the discourse level. This work gives a cross-linguistic comparison between French and Chinese, of the way information is organized in the narrative discourse, given the same communicative complex task. The procedure used is the analysis of an oral corpus comprised of the verbal production of adult native Chinese and French speakers. The discourse produced is a fiction story based on a picture-book. Creating a functioning spatial surrounding for events involves a number of skills such as: cognitively representing the various spatial configurations; keeping track of the spatial information across utterances in a specific order for the narrative to be coherent; and finding the appropriate linguistic means to express those spatial concepts. This analysis describes the relationship between those three dimensions: spatial concepts, linguistic forms and information organization. The spatial concepts used to inter-relate spatial information in texts fall into different subcategories that reflect different ways of conceptualizing the configuration under description into spatial episode. The study reveals that those concepts influence the linguistic form used, with, for example in Chinese, the recurrent directional resultative 到 *dào*. They also influence the linearization of information at the discourse level between main structure and side structures of the text. Moreover, information organization plays a role in linguistic forms; for example, the use of 来 *lái* / 去 *qù* in the directional resultatives has a close relation with the location expression. The analysis shows differences at every level between the two groups. Besides the fact that the two groups of speakers retell the same story, their discourse differ in the spatial concepts chosen to express space domain and the information organization in spatial episode.

## References

- Carroll, M., and von Steutterheim, C. (1993). "The representation of spatial configurations in English and German and the grammatical structure of locative and anaphoric expressions." *Linguistics*, 31(6), 1011-1041.
- Hickmann, M., and Hendriks, H. (1998). "Référence spatiale dans les récits d'enfants français : perspective inter-langues." *Langue française*, 118, 104-123.
- Klein, W., and von Steutterheim, C. (1991). "Text structure and referential movement." *Sprache und Pragmatik*, 22, 1-32.
- Talmy, L. (2000). *Toward a cognitive semantics. Vol. 1. Concept structuring systems*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Watorek, M. (1998). "L'expression de la localisation spatiale dans les productions de locuteurs natifs italo-phones et franco-phones, et d'apprenants italo-phones du français." *CALaP*, 16-17, 17-50.