Does the result justify the means?
The representation of resultative events in Mandarin and Spanish
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Languages differ as to how they verbally encode resultative events (i.e. events in
which actions are directed towards the achievement of a result, e.g. “burn the paper”).
Mandarin and Spanish differ prominently: Mandarin has resultative verb compounds (RVCs)
separately encoding manner of action in the main verb and result in a resultative morpheme:
shao-hui le zhi (burn-destroy PERF paper) (Chen, 2016). Spanish, as a result-oriented
language (Slobin, 1996), uses main verbs which encode either manner of action: quemó el
papel (burned the paper), or result of events: destruyó el papel (destroyed the paper)
(García del Real, 2015). We compared Mandarin and Spanish native speakers in two
experiments (Verbal & Non-verbal) to investigate to what extent habitation to the use of
different verbal structures influences the representation of resultative events in memory.

Participants saw 24 short movies: 12 events progressing towards a clear result, 12
without such a result. The events were shown in different stages of completion: either as
ceased (action came to an end) or as ongoing (action was still in progress at the end). In
the event encoding stage of the Verbal experiment, participants described the events in their
native language (Spanish n=22; Mandarin n=21). In the encoding stage of the Non-Verbal
experiment participants had to detect event repetition (a screenshot appeared and
participants indicated whether the image matched the last video they had seen) (Spanish
n=20; Mandarin n=21). After the encoding task, a surprise recall task was carried out:
participants were shown screenshots of the videos’ final frames, depicting events either as
ceased or ongoing, and they had to judge, by pressing a button, whether the screenshots
showed the actual ending of the videos watched during the encoding phase.

In the production data Mandarin speakers distinguished the four types of movies,
using RVC structures almost exclusively to describe ceased resultative events (60% of the
cases), whereas Spanish speakers produced no specific patterns. Results of the memory
tasks are shown for the two crucial conditions in Table 1. Overt verbalization of results by
way of using RVCs boosted the memory of event endings in Mandarin speakers, supporting
thinking for speaking (Slobin, 1996). In contrast, Spanish participants were equally good at
remembering ceased resultative events in both encoding conditions with a similar accuracy
as the Mandarin Verbal group. Given that Spanish is a result-oriented language (but
Mandarin is not), the Spanish are more focused on the representation of result states of
events. We argue that this supports linguistic relativity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition per language group</th>
<th>Verbal experiment</th>
<th>Non-verbal experiment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ceased resultative (Mandarin)</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
<td>60.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing resultative (Mandarin)</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceased resultative (Spanish)</td>
<td>79.5%</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing resultative (Spanish)</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chen, J. (2016). When transparency doesn’t mean ease: learning the meaning of resultative verb
Universidad del País Vasco.
Rethinking linguistic relativity (pp. 70–96).