A goal bias in prelinguistic thought and language: How strong is the homology?

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In language, the categories “goal” and “source” are abstract, extending to motion of animate and inanimate objects and to a variety of event types. Across languages and event types, goal paths are privileged over source paths in the linguistic encoding of events. Three studies tested the hypothesis that the linguistic salience of goal paths derives from non-linguistic features of event representation. Twelve-month-old infants encoded end points in preference to starting points when viewing motion events involving a toy duck and a self-moving balloon that had a face. Infants did *not* privilege end points in their encoding of motion events involving an inanimate balloon. Thus, unlike in linguistic event coding, an end point bias in pre-linguistic thought may be strongly modulated by the intentional structure of the event. These results raise the question of how children later learn to collapse over conceptual domains for purposes of coding paths in language.