

Is Japanese Really a Verb-Framed Language? – An Empirical-Contrastive Study on Motion Event Representations by Japanese and German Speakers

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In Talmy's typology of lexicalization patterns, Japanese is classified as a verb-framed language, in that the PATH-component of a motion event appears in the main verb (Miyajima 1984; Matsumoto 1996). In contrast, German is a satellite-framed language, because the PATH-component is encoded in a satellite and/or preposition. However, the integration of Japanese in Talmy's framework is not without contradictions: According to Talmy (2005), the possibility of serial verb constructions indicates that Japanese possibly belongs to the "equipollent" (Slobin 2006) type. The MANNER-salience-hypothesis on the frequency of mentioning MANNER (Slobin 2006) could not be confirmed by a test with Japanese and English speakers (Akita et al. 2009). Intra-typological differences within the verb-framed class were observed with regard to both sound-symbolic expressions for MANNER and the co-occurrence of manner-of-motions verbs with a GOAL-phrase.

The typological classification of Japanese so far has mainly grounded on 'boundary-crossing' events (such as an *emerging-of-an-owl* event). In the present Japanese-German contrastive study, however, the focus is on 'boundary-reaching' events - i.e., events in which the path does not cross a boundary. We aim first to examine empirically whether the classification of Japanese is appropriate with respect to descriptions of 'boundary-reaching' events, and second, to propose explanations which cross-linguistically hold for encoding both 'boundary-crossing' and 'boundary-reaching' events.

The data was elicited on the basis of a set of short film clips (7 sec.) by native speakers of the two languages (each n=26). Each of the eight critical clips depicts someone walking along a trajectory for a little while and stopping at a goal object such as a fountain. The participants were asked to retell the depicted event after watching each clip. The descriptions were analysed with respect to the encoding of the following semantic components: MANNER, VIA-DIRECTION (e.g., expressed by the preposition *toward* or the Japanese marker for progressiveness and the deictic anchored path *-teik(u)*), and GOAL (e.g., expressed by *to*).

Results are as follows: (1) In the Japanese data, the absolute majority of the main verbs (64.2%) encode the MANNER-component, but not the VIA- or GOAL-component. For 40.0% of the clauses, VIA-DIRECTION appears in the 'auxiliary verb' *-teik(u)* - i.e., a satellite -, and for 23.2% of the clauses, GOAL is encoded in a postpositional phrase. These results do not conform to the proclaimed PATH-conflation in the main verb for verb-framed languages. Talmy's typology can therefore not apply to boundary-reaching events. (2) The German speakers employ a manner-of-motion verb as the main verb for 90.6% of the clauses. A prepositional phrase is used for encoding VIA-DIRECTION (56.1% of the clauses) or GOAL (48.3% of the clauses). (3) The main cross-linguistic difference concerns the frequency with which the GOAL-component is involved in an event description ($\chi^2 = 22.3256$, $p < .000$). This suggests that speakers rely on their language-specific schematic representations of an event, which differ from each other regarding '+/- boundedness'. I will discuss how the language-specificity in encoding both boundary-crossing and boundary-reaching events could uniformly be explained by reference to the schematic representations.

References

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