



# **Is Japanese Really a Verb-Framed Language?**

## **An Empirical-Contrastive Study on Motion Event Representations by Japanese and German Speakers**

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The starting point of the research:

Within Talmy's (1991) framework ('typology of lexicalization patterns'), Japanese is classified as a verb-framed language, whereas German is a satellite-framed language.

(1) Watashi-wa      ie-ni      kakekon-da. (Croft et al. 2010)  
I-TOP      house-GOAL      run-go into-PAST  
Lit.: 'I went into the house running.'

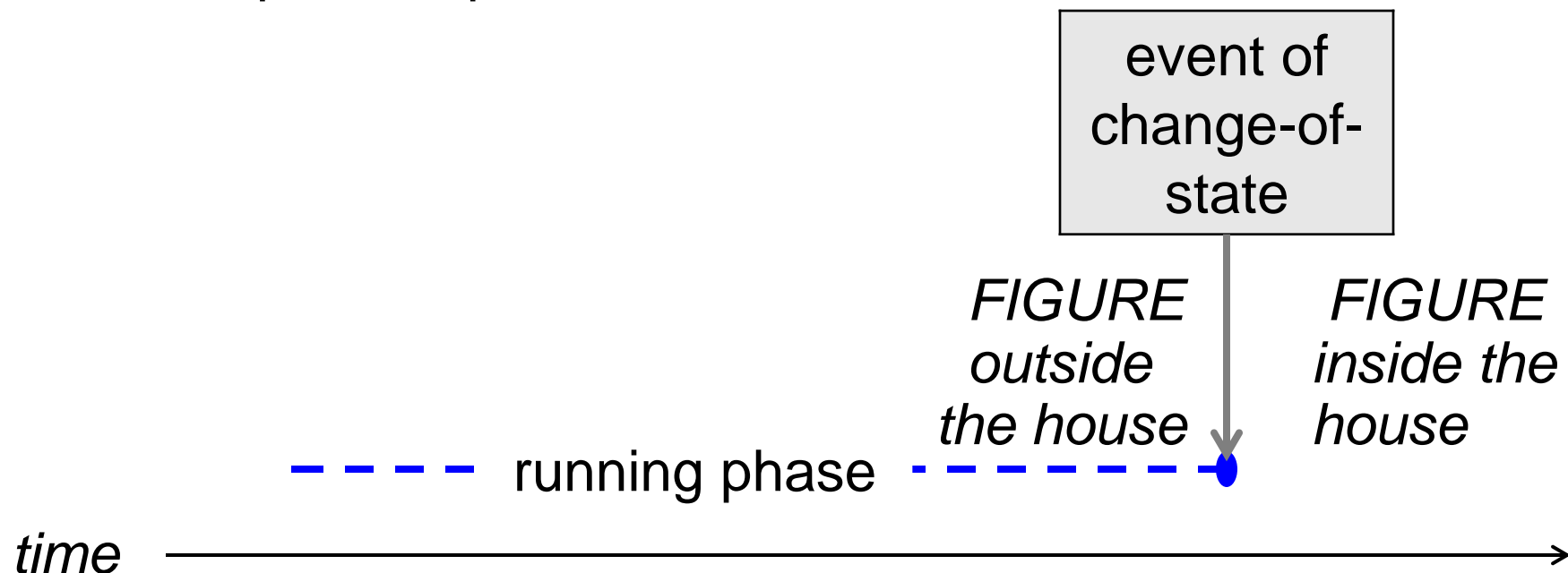
(2) Johann lief      ins Zimmer      hinein. (Slobin 2005)  
John      run:PAST      into the room      thither in  
Lit: 'John ran thither into the room.'

Real-world situations:

‘Boundary-crossing’ events vs. ‘boundary-reaching’<sup>1</sup> events

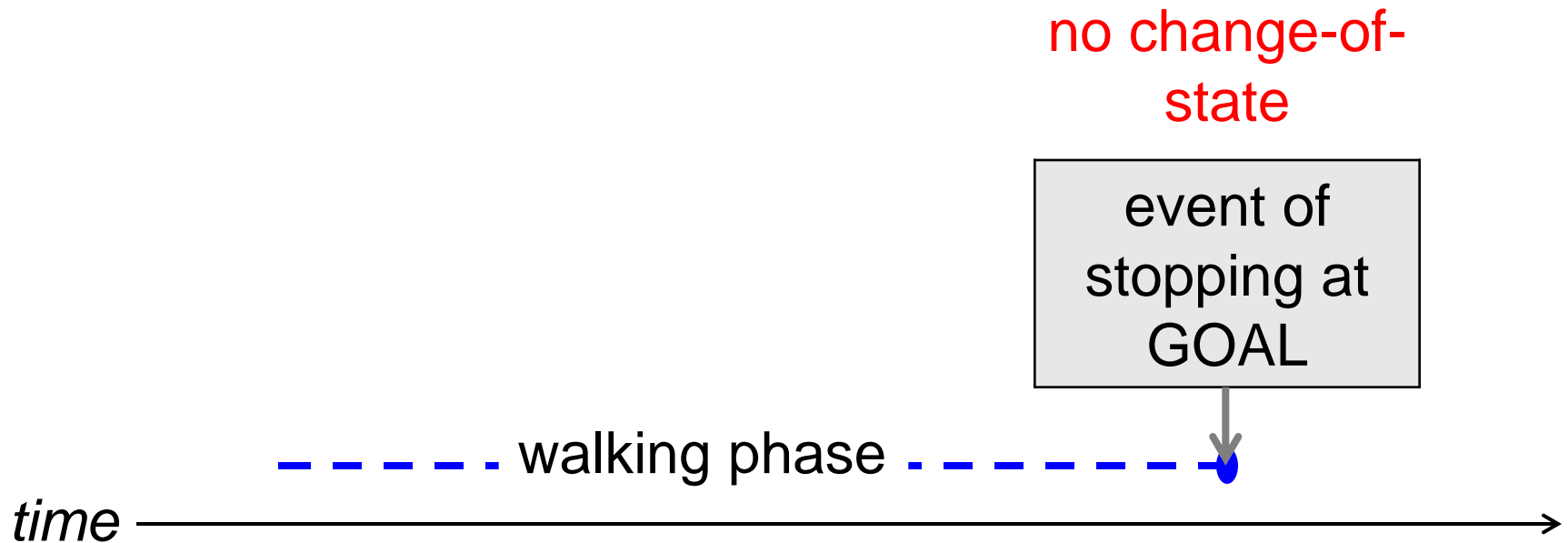
1 ‘Boundary-crossing’ events (e.g., running-into-the-house)


← prior empirical research



1 Both terms are borrowed from Slobin 2006

2. 'Boundary-reaching' events (e.g., walking-to-a-bulletin board) ← this empirical study





The aims of this Japanese-German contrastive study:

- To examine whether Talmy's framework holds for descriptions of 'boundary-reaching' events in Japanese and in German.
- To propose a psycholinguistic explanation that holds cross-linguistically for patterns of event encoding regarding both 'boundary-reaching' and 'boundary-crossing' events.

## Data elicitation under controlled conditions:

- Native speakers of Japanese and German (26 monolingual subjects each)
- Short video clips (each, approx. 7 sec.) as visual stimuli
- Each of the eight critical clips depicts a 'boundary-reaching' event in which the moving figure is a person walking.

e.g., A woman is walking to a bulletin board, and then stops at it.

- After seeing each clip, the participant retold the scene depicted in the clip within a 12 second interval.

# Coding

- The event descriptions were analysed with regard to which semantic component of a motion event appears in which morpho-syntactic category.
- Morpho-syntactic categories:
  - main verb
  - satellite
  - adpositional phrases
- Semantic components:
  - GOAL
  - VIA/DIRECTION
  - LOCATION
  - MANNER

## VIA/DIRECTION vs. GOAL

*(Jackendoff 1983; Aske 1989; Kageyama & Yumoto 1997; Ikegami 1993)*

- VIA/DIRECTION concerns a trajectory along which a figure moves gradually in a particular direction.
  - temporal unboundedness
- GOAL concerns the endpoint of the travelled trajectory.
  - temporal boundedness



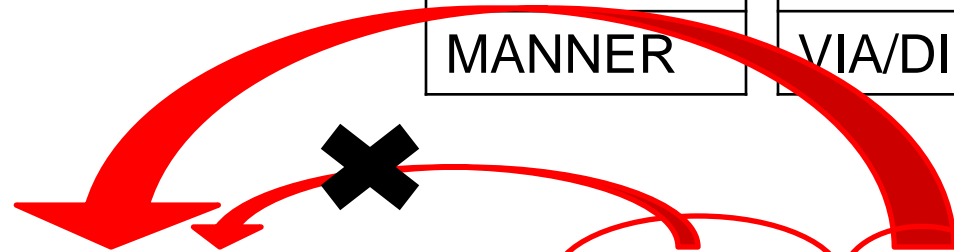
## Examples for coding:

- (3) **Kooen-no-michi-o** josei-ga **arui-te-iki-mashita**.  
park-GEN-path-ACC woman-NOM walk-CONN-PROG-PAST  
'A woman was walking along a path in the park (toward there).'

postp. phrase
VIA/DIR

main verb
MANNER

satellite
VIA/DIR



- (4) Dareka-ga **zoo-no-mae-ni** **arui-te** **iki-mashita**.  
someone-NOM statue-GEN-front-GOAL walk-CONN go-PAST  
Lit.: 'Someone went walking to the front of the statue.'

postp. phrase
GOAL

main verb
VIA/DIR

- (5) Eine Frau ist zu zwei sitzenden Frauen hin gelaufen.  
a woman aux. to two sitting women thither walk:pp  
'A woman walked thither to two women sitting.'

prep. phrase
GOAL

satellite
VIA/DIREC.

main verb
MANNER

## Results

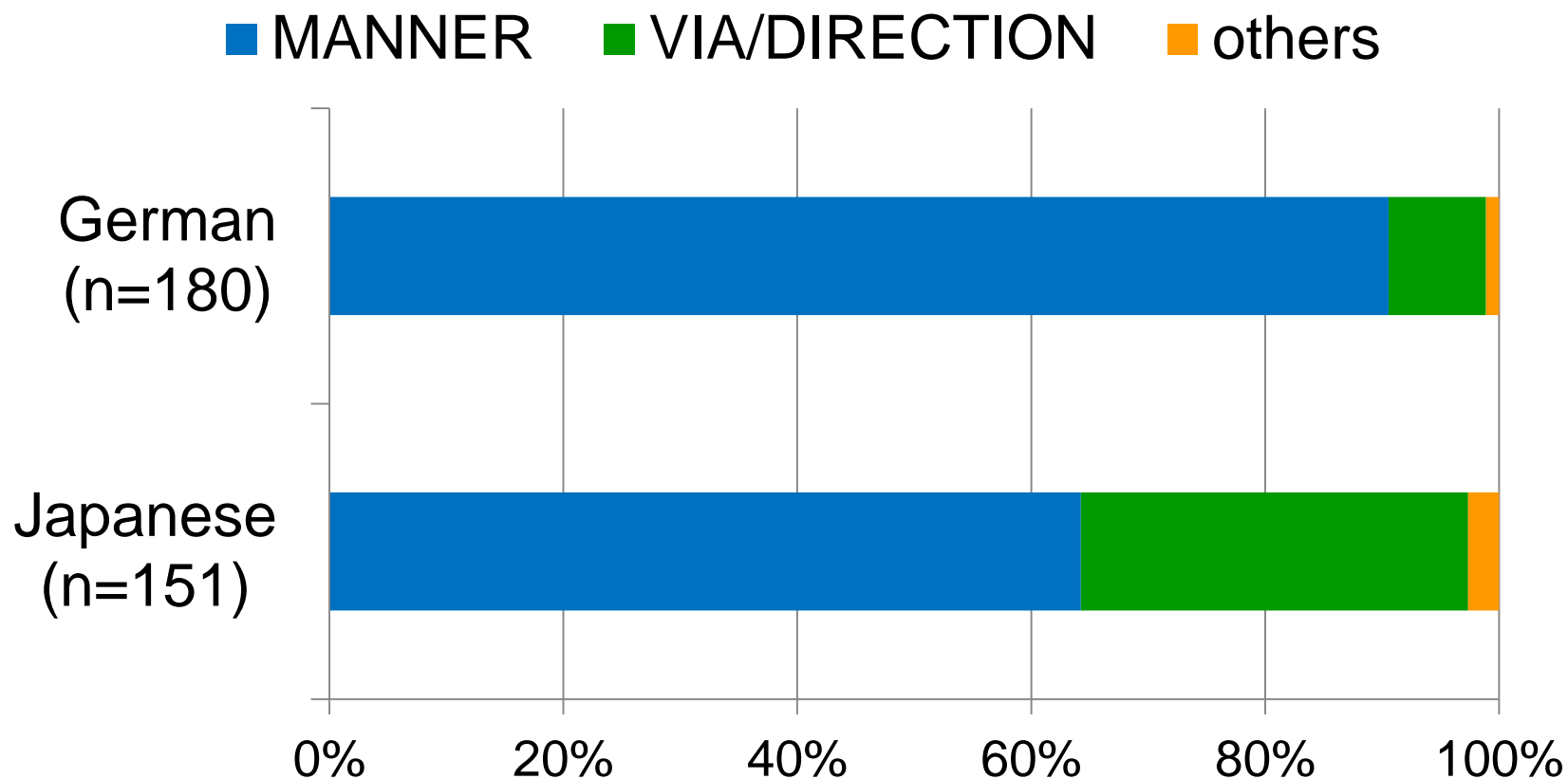


Figure 1: Semantic components appearing in the main verb

## Results

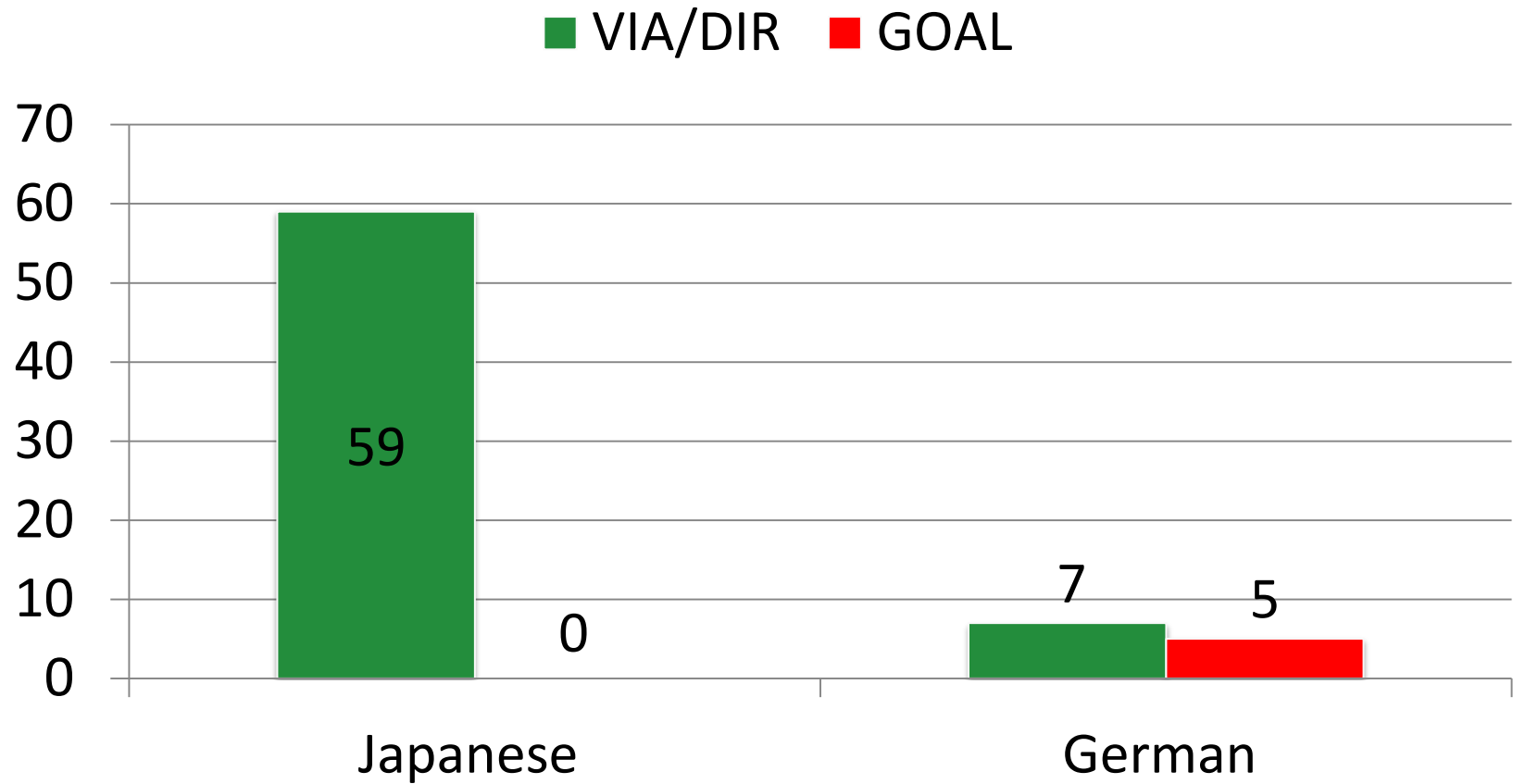


Figure 2: Semantic components appearing in stellites

## Results

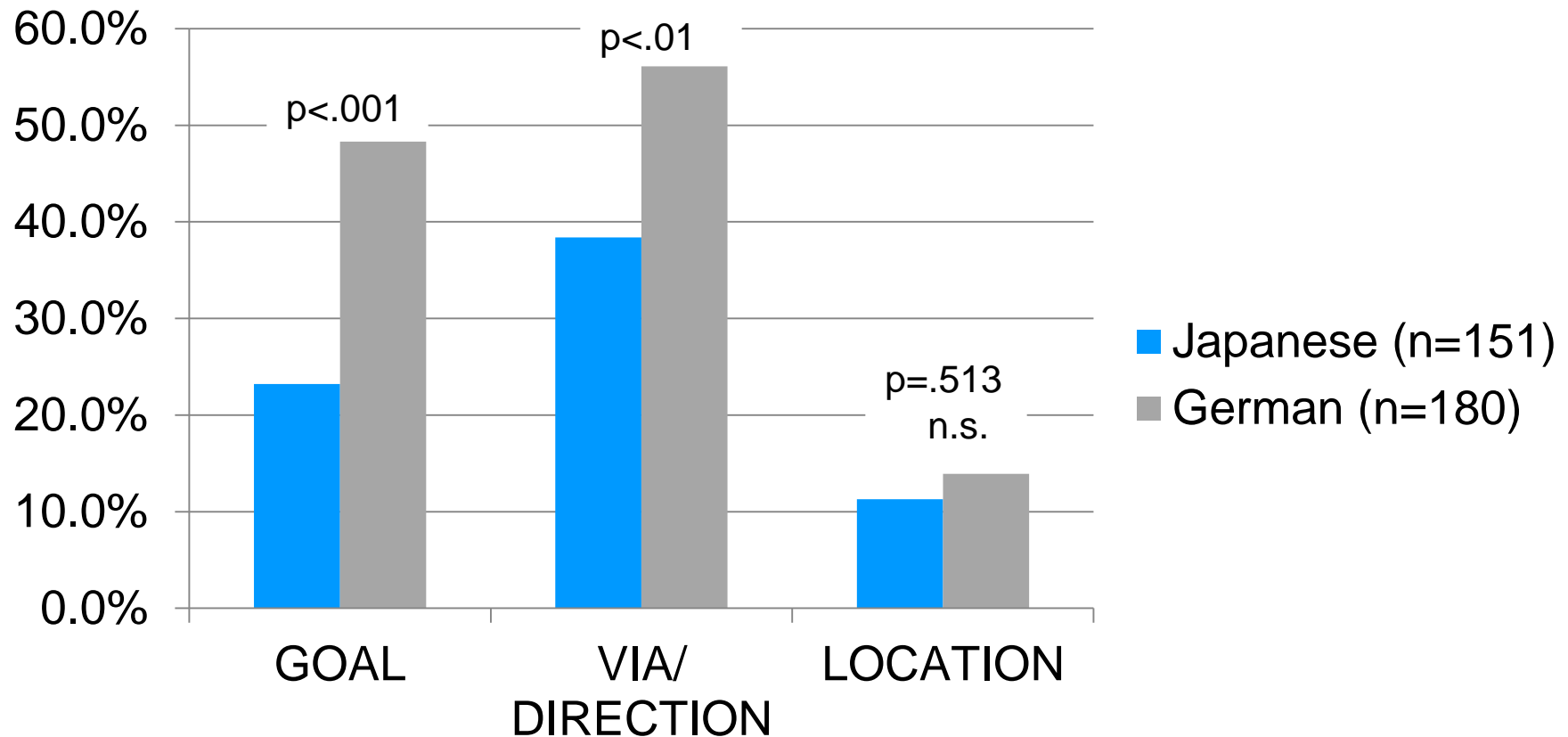


Figure 3: Clauses which contain an adpositional phrase expressing a spatial component

Examples from the elicited data (the *bulletin board* clip)

Japanese:

(6) Onnanohito-ga rooka-o arui-tei-mashita.

woman-NOM hallway-ACC walk-IMP-PAST

‘A woman was walking along a hallway.’ (J19)

→ temporally unbounded

German:

(7) Eine Frau ist zum schwarzen Brett gegangen. GOAL

a woman aux. to the bulletin board go:past participle

‘A woman went to the bulletin board.’ (G4)

→ temporally bounded

## Summary of the empirical analysis

- Talmy's typology cannot apply to Japanese descriptions of boundary-reaching events.
- The main difference between the two languages concerns the frequency with which the GOAL component is involved in an event description. ( $\chi^2=22.3256$ ,  $p<.001$ )

## Discussion

- The infrequent usage of a GOAL phrase in the Japanese data cannot be attributed to the valence of Japanese manner-of-motion verbs.

Josei-ga  
woman-NOM

aruki-mashita.  
walk-PAST



## Discussion

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Josei-ga  
woman-NOM

\* zoo-no-mae-ni  
statue-GEN-front-GOAL

aruki-mashita.  
walk-PAST

## Discussion

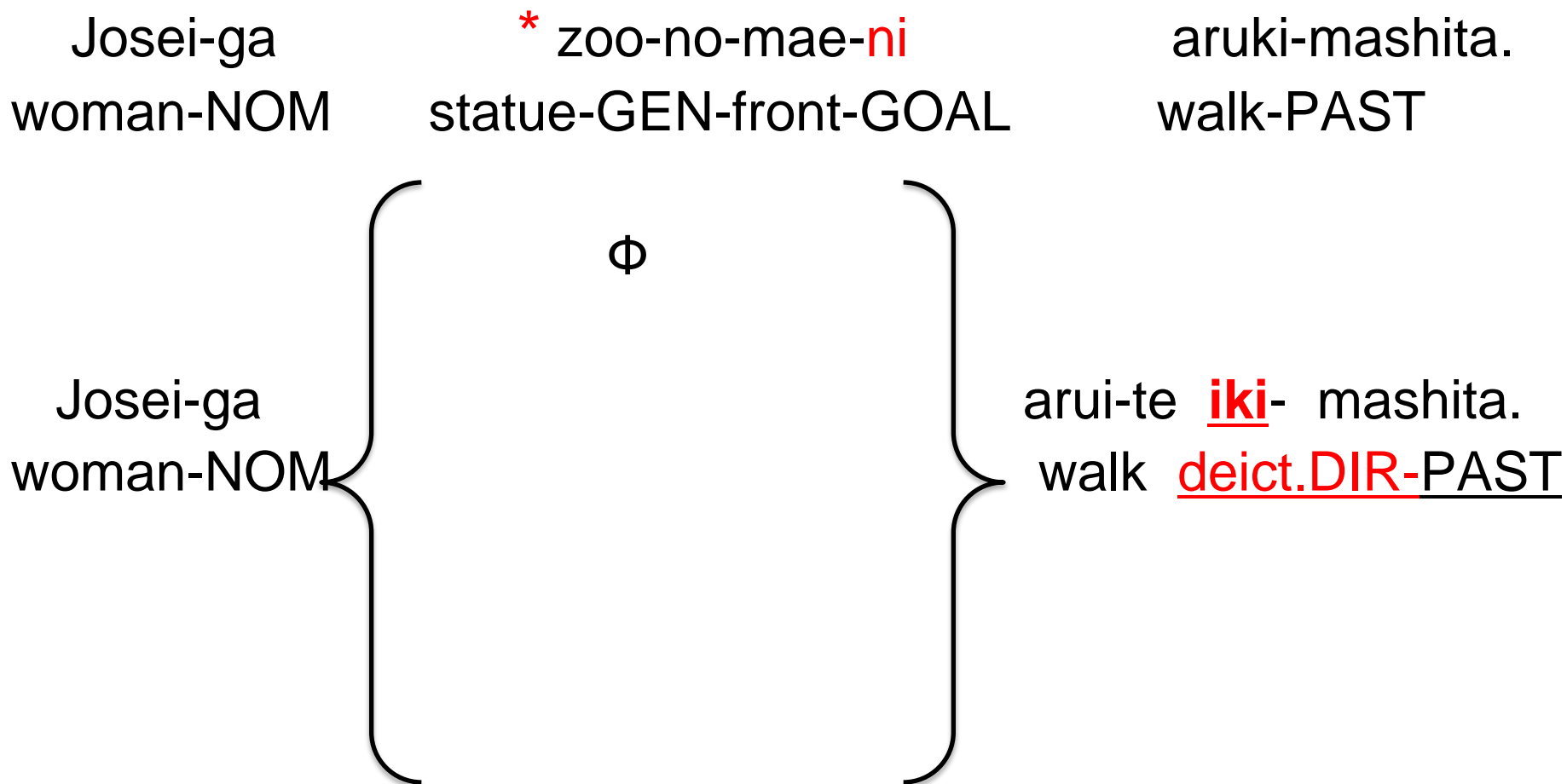
- The infrequent usage of a GOAL phrase in the Japanese data should not be attributed to the valence of Japanese manner-of-motion verbs.

Josei-ga	* zoo-no-mae-ni	aruki-mashita.
woman-NOM	statue-GEN-front-GOAL	walk-PAST

Josei-ga	arui-te <u>iki</u> - mashita.
woman-NOM	walk <u>deict.DIR</u> -PAST

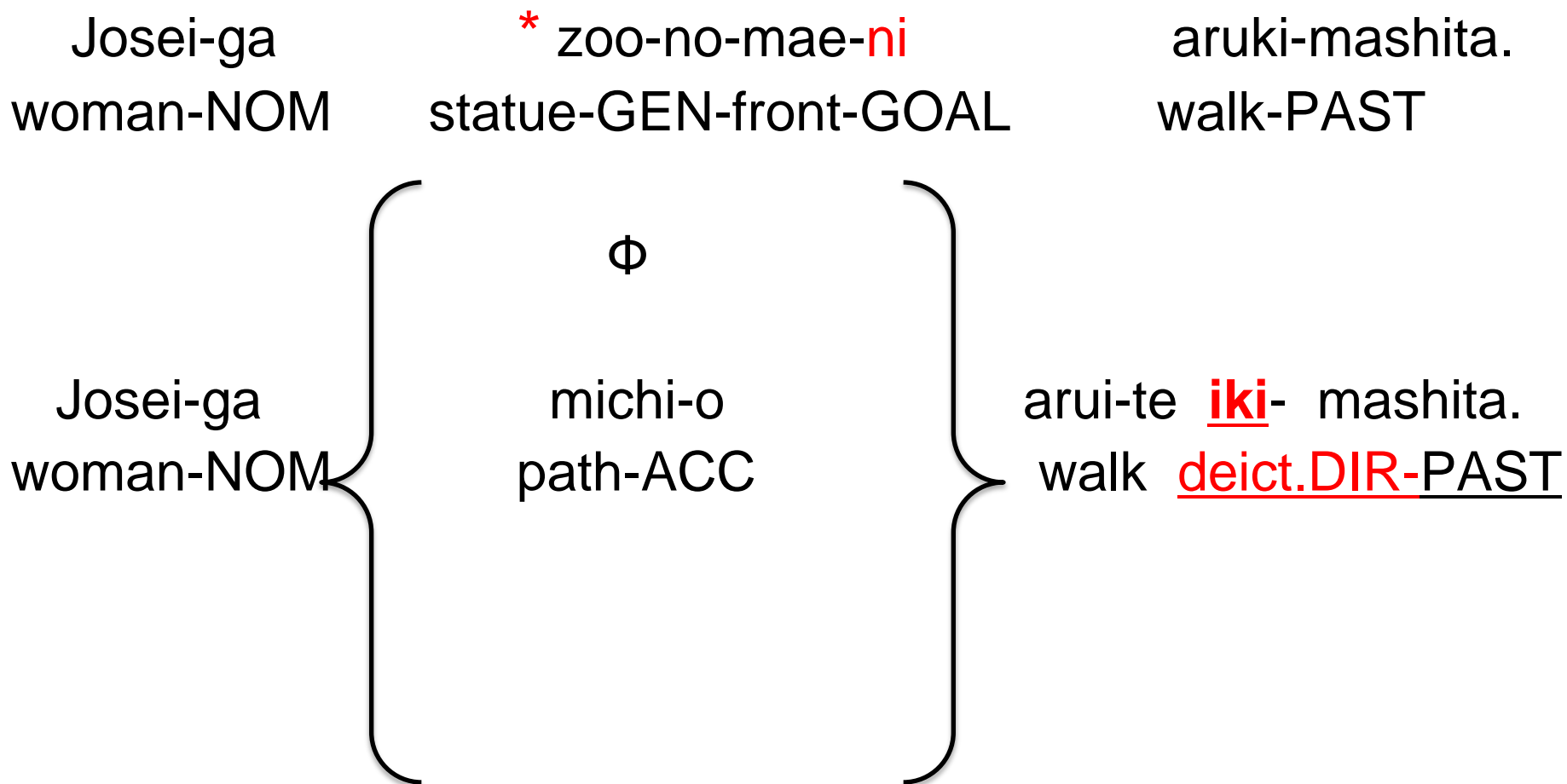
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Josei-ga \*zoo-no-mae-ni aruki-mashita.  
woman-NOM statue-GEN-front-GOAL walk-PAST

Josei-ga michi-o zoo-no-mae-ni arui-te iki- mashita.  
woman-NOM path-ACC statue-GEN-front-GOAL walk deict.DIR-PAST

Josei-ga michi-o aruki-mashita.  
woman-NOM path-ACC walk-PAST

## Conclusion:

1. Including or not including GOAL information in the clause concerns **speakers' preferences** during conceptualization processes.
2. Speakers of German and Japanese rely on a particular **schematic event representation** during conceptual planning processes of an event description.
3. Those schematic representations are language-specific with regard to the **temporal perspective**.

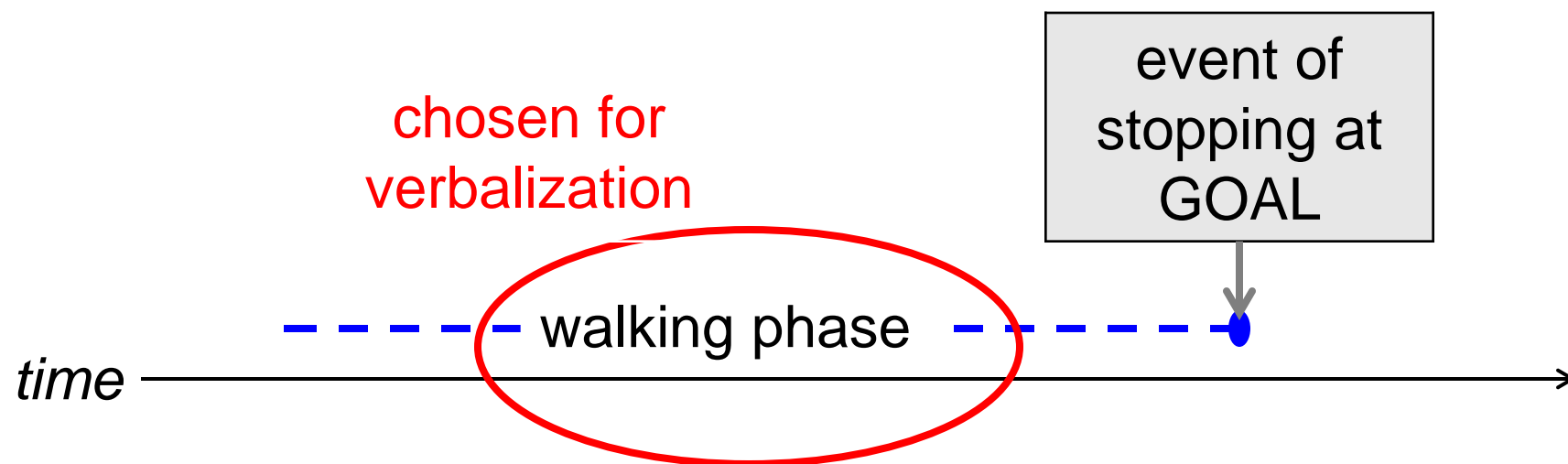
German representation: temporally **bounded**

Japanese representation: temporally **unbounded**

Japanese schematic representation (= **unbounded**) and conceptual planning for a **boundary-reaching** event:

Event (real-world situation):

A woman is walking to a bulletin board, and then stops at it.



Linguistic encoding:

Onnanohito-ga      rooka-o      arui-tei-mashita.

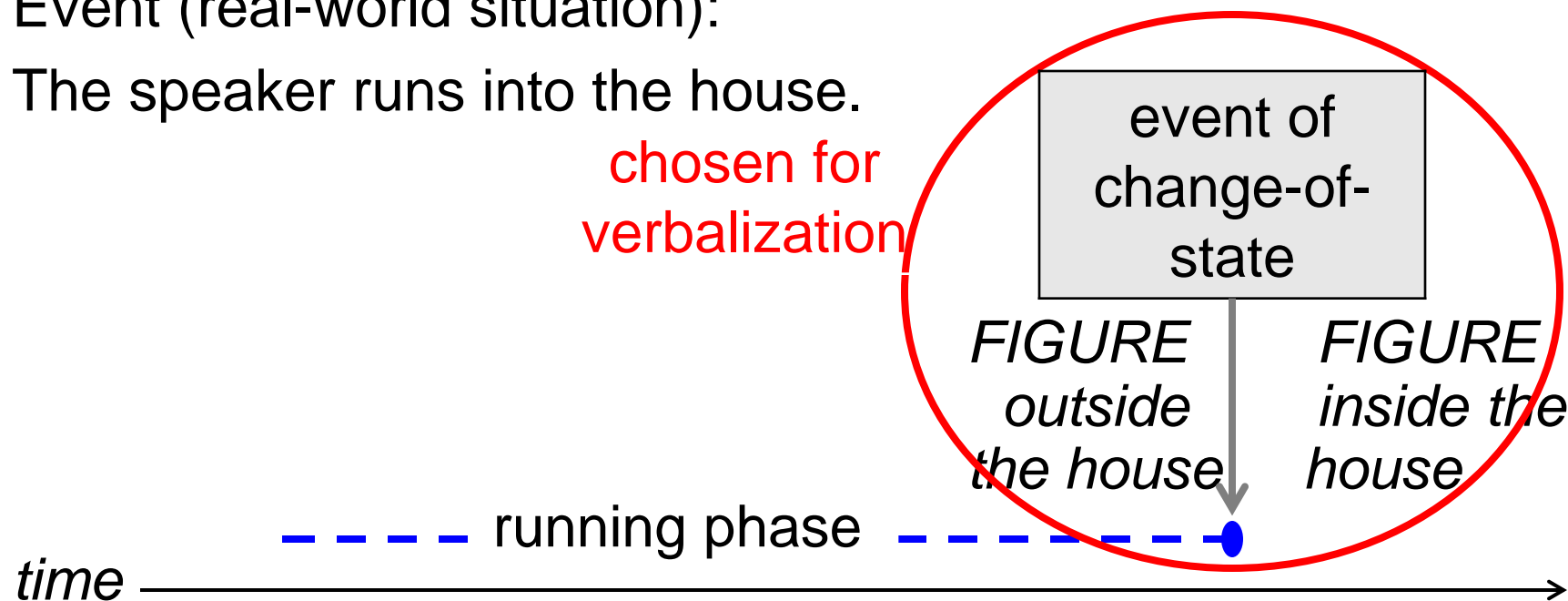
‘A woman was walking along a hallway.’ (J19)

Japanese schematic representation (= **unbounded**) and conceptual planning for a **boundary-crossing** event:

Event (real-world situation):

The speaker runs into the house.

chosen for  
verbalization



Linguistic encoding:

Watashi-wa ie-ni **kakekon**-da. (Croft et al. 2010)

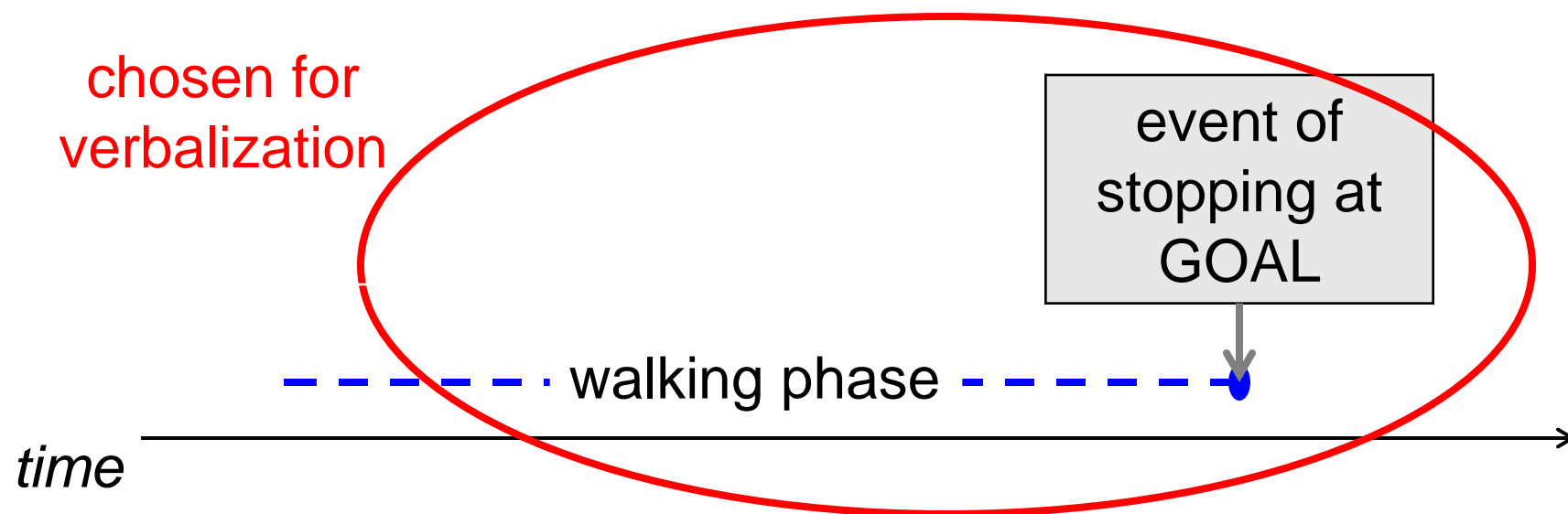
Lit.: 'I went running into the house.'



German schematic representation (= **bounded**) and conceptual planning for a **boundary-reaching** event

Event (real-world situation):

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Linguistic encoding:

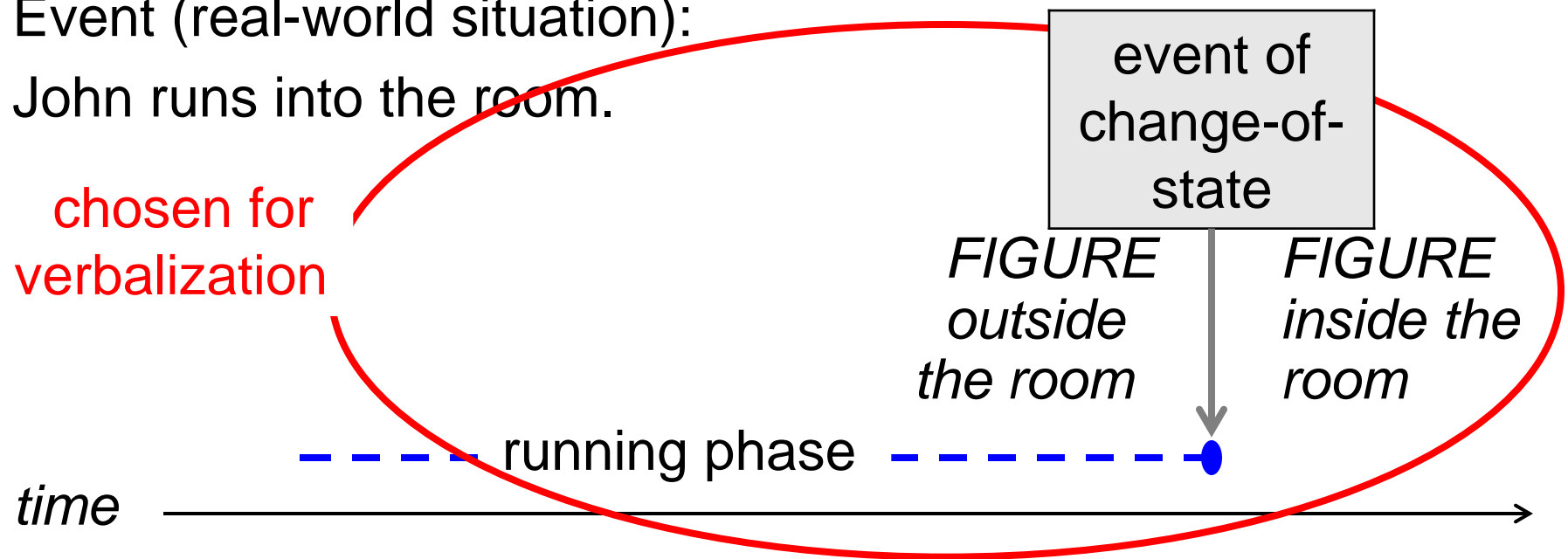
Eine Frau ist zum schwarzen Brett gegangen. (G4)

‘A woman went **to the bulletin board.**’

German schematic representation (= **bounded**) and conceptual planning for a **boundary-crossing** event:

Event (real-world situation):  
John runs into the room.

chosen for  
verbalization



Linguistic encoding:

Johann lief **ins Zimmer** hinein. (Slobin 2005)

Lit: 'John ran thither **into the room**.'



Thank you for your attention!

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For information about motion event descriptions in English, Czech, Russian, Spanish, Dutch, and Arabic, please visit our website:

<http://www.idf.uni-heidelberg.de/institut/sprachwissenschaft/sprachproduktionsforschung/weitere-einblicke-in-die-fragestellungen-und-methoden.html>

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