

(In)transitivity of a possessive verb in Japanese



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Outline

- Background (possessive expressions)
- HAVE vs. MOTSU
- Transitivity and Intransitivity of MOTSU
 1. GOAL/PROCESS orientation
 2. AGENT/THEME orientation
- Wrap up

Background

possessive expressions



HAVE-language vs. BE-language

HAVE-language

❖ transitive verb

➤ POSSESSOR = SBJ.

➤ POSSESSEE = OBJ.

BE-language

❖ intransitive verb

➤ POSSESSOR = OBL.

➤ POSSESSEE = SBJ.

ENGLISH vs. JAPANESE

ENGLISH (HAVE-language)

POSSESSOR **have** POSSESSEE.

↑
subjectification

grab, hold, ...
(physical control)

+ ASP-marker

intransitive use

JAPANESE (BE-language)

1. POSSESSOR *ni-wa*

LOC-TOP

POSSESSEE *ga i ru/aru.*

NOM be

2. POSSESSOR *wa*

POSSESSEE *wo mo t-teiru.*

ACC hold-ASP

Transitivity & Intransitivity of MOTSU

an ambiguous verb



MOTSU: transitive vs. intransitive

transitive

(1) 彼は手に拳銃を持っている。

Kare-wa te-ni kenjyu-wo mot-teiru.

he-TOP hand-LOC gun-ACC **mot**-ASP

(v.t.)

‘He is holding a gun in his hand.’

(‘He **has** a gun in his hand.’)

【physical control】

intransitive

(2) この電池はよく持つ。

Kono-denchi-wa yoku motsu.

This-battery-TOP well **motsu**

(v.i.)

‘This battery lasts long.’

【maintenance】

spectrum of *motsu*

(3)

- a. 彼は手に拳銃を**持っている**。=(1) 【所持】
- b. 彼は東京に店を**持っている**。 【所有】
- c. 彼はあの店を20年間**持っている**。 【所有・継続】
- d. あの店は彼の人柄で（20年間）**持っている**。 【持続】
- e. あの店は立地条件で**持っている**。 【持続】
- f. 現政権が来年まで**持つ**か疑わしい。 【持続】
- g. この電池はよく**持つ**。=(2) 【持続】

spectrum of MOTSU

(3)

transitive

a. *Kare-wa te-ni kenjyu-wo mot-teiru.* =(1) 【physical control】

b. *Kare-wa Tokyo-ni mise-wo mot-teiru.* 【possession】

c. *Kare-wa ano-mise-wo nijyuu-nenkan mot-teiru.* 【possession】

d. *Ano-mise-wa kare-no hitogara-de (nijyuu-nenkan) mot-teiru.*

【maintenance】

intransitive

e. *Ano-mise-wa ricchi-jyouken-de mot-teiru.* 【maintenance】

f. *Genseiken-ga rainen-made motsu-ka utagawashii.* 【maintenance】

g. *Kono-denchi-wa yoku motsu.* =(2) 【mainenance】

Synchronic Boundary

(4) 「いえね、もう十五年も持った冷蔵庫がちょうど壊れちゃいましてね」

(江波戸哲夫『くたばれ成果主義!』 飛鳥新社, 2007)

jiyugonen-mo

15 years-as many as

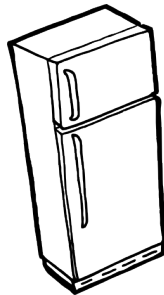
mot-ta reizouko

mot-ASP

fridge

(has just broken)

ambiguous



a fridge

➤ which SBJ. has had for 15 years

transitive 【possession】

➤ which has lasted for 15 years

intransitive 【maintenance】

Synchronic/Diachronic Boundary

‘do not know how to fill in a period of time’

➤ 間が持てない (proper)

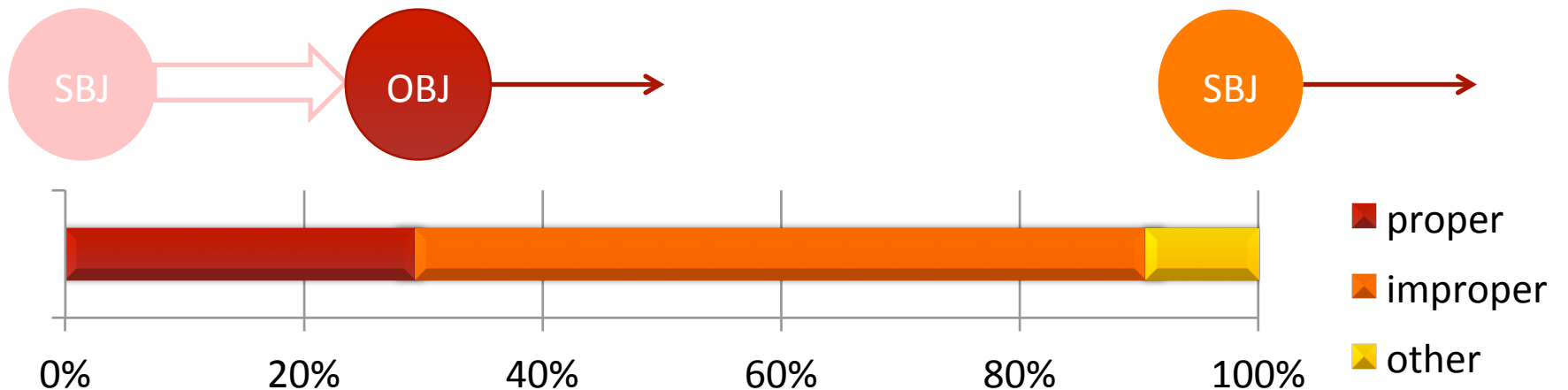
Ma-ga *mot-e-nai.*

interval-ACC mot-NEG(potential)

➤ 間が持たない (improper)

Ma-ga *mot-a-nai.*

interval-NOM mot-NEG



(from a poll on Japanese use by Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan, 2010)

Diachronic View

➤ According to 『日本国語大辞典(Nikkoku)』 (Shougakukan's Japanese Dictionary), the word appeared for the first time in:

❖ **transitive** 【possession】 古事記〔712〕下・歌謡

(5) 「八田の一本菅（ひともとすげ）は子**母多**（**持た**）ず…」

‘Yata-no-Hitomotosuge has no child’

❖ **intransitive** 【maintenance】 俳諧・花見車〔1702〕

(6) 「魚は酢で**持つ**汝は我で**持**」

‘Fish lasts long with vinegar, and you last long with me’

Diachronic View

- An older example of the **intransitive** use I have been able to find so far is:

吉川家文書 Kikkawake Monjyo (ancient documents)

安国寺恵瓊による書信 (a letter written by Ankokuji-Ekei)

〔1573〕

「信長の代、五年三年は**持ち**たるべく候 ...」

‘Nobunaga’s reign should last for 5 or 3 years’

Verbal Aspect

Process or goal?



GOAL vs. PROCESS -oriented

➤ Ikegami (1981, 2000)

“The semantic focus of the Japanese verb of action is on the process, which may or may not lead to the achievement of the goal.” (2000:194)

(7) 燃やしたけど、燃えなかった。

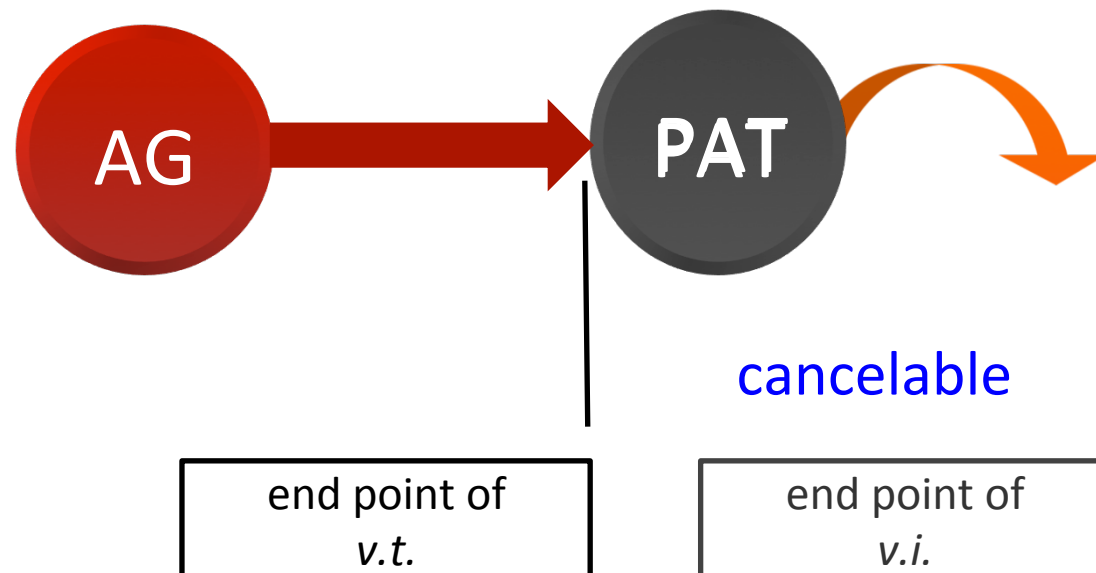
Moyashi-ta kedo, moe-na-katta.

burn-ASP adv.-CONJ burn-NEG-ASP

lit. ‘(I) burned (it), but (it) burned not’

‘*I burned it, but it didn’t burn.’

Japanese verbs: PROCESS-oriented



PROCESS: v.t. + GOAL: v.i.

AG-ga PAT-wo v.t.

NOM

ACC

➤ 壊す	<i>kow-asu</i>
➤ 曲げる	<i>mag-eru</i>
➤ 縮める	<i>chijim-eru</i>
➤ 固める	<i>katam-eru</i>
➤ 乾かす	<i>kawak-asu</i>
➤ 止める	<i>tom-eru</i>
➤ ...	

break

bend

shorten

harden

dry

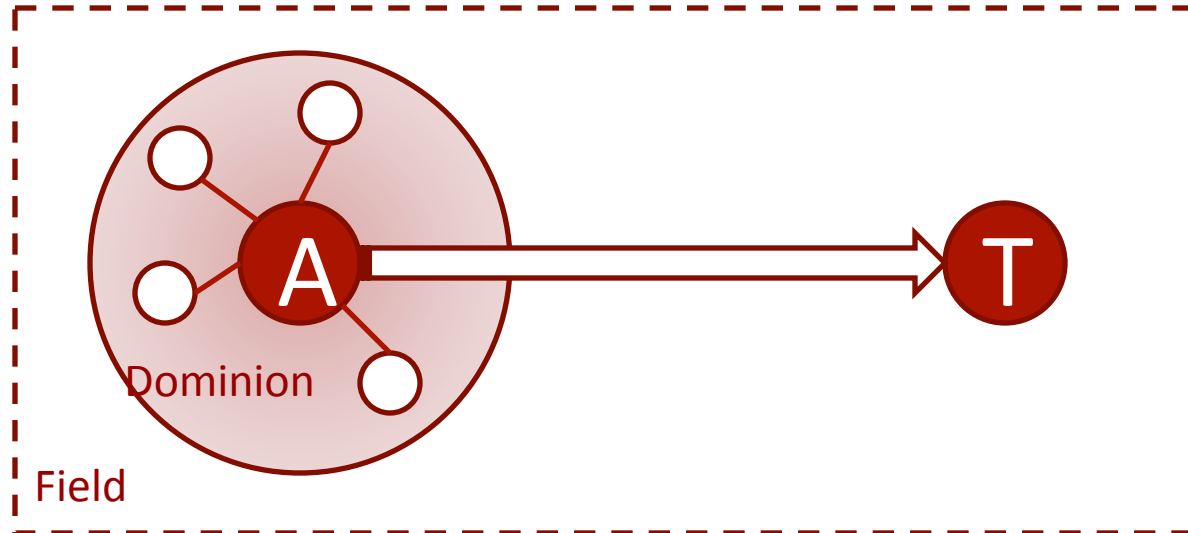
stop

PAT-ga v.i.

NOM

➤ 壊れる	<i>kow-areru</i>
➤ 曲がる	<i>mag-aru</i>
➤ 縮まる	<i>chijim-aru</i>
➤ 固まる	<i>katam-aru</i>
➤ 乾く	<i>kaw-aku</i>
➤ 止まる	<i>tom-aru</i>
➤ ...	

Control Cycle (Langacker 2002)



Baseline
Potential

motsu (perfective)

Action
Result

have (imperfective)

(Un)differentiation

Agent or theme?



spectrum of MOTSU

(3)

transitive

- a. *Kare-wa te-ni kenjyu-wo mot-teiru.* =(1) 【physical control】
- b. *Kare-wa Tokyo-ni mise-wo mot-teiru.* 【possession】
- c. *Kare-wa ano-mise-wo nijyuu-nenkan mot-teiru.* 【possession】
- d. *Ano-mise-wa kare-no hitogara-de (nijyuu-nenkan) mot-teiru.*

【maintenance】

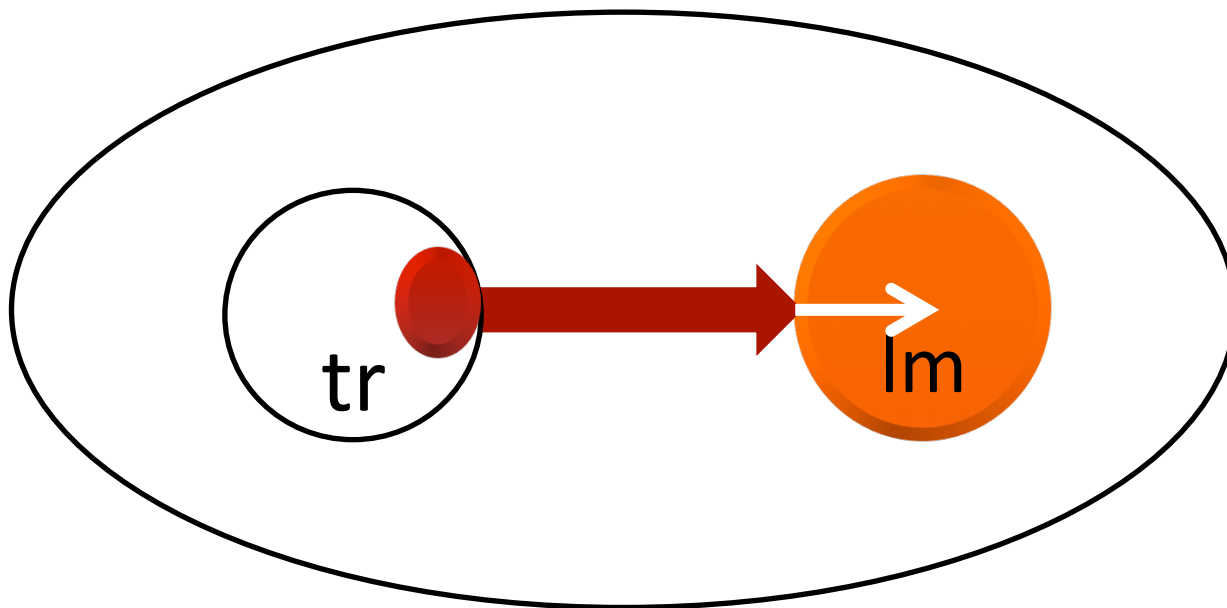
intransitive

- e. *Ano-mise-wa ricchi-jyouken-de mot-teiru.* 【maintenance】
- f. *Genseiken-ga rainen-made motsu-ka utagawashii.* 【maintenance】
- g. *Kono-denchi-wa kanari motsu.* =(2) 【maintenance】

*a. Kare-wa te-ni kenjyu-wo **mot**-teiru. =(1)*

【physical control】

‘He has a gun in his hand.’



b. *Kare-wa Tokyo-ni mise-wo mot-teiru.*

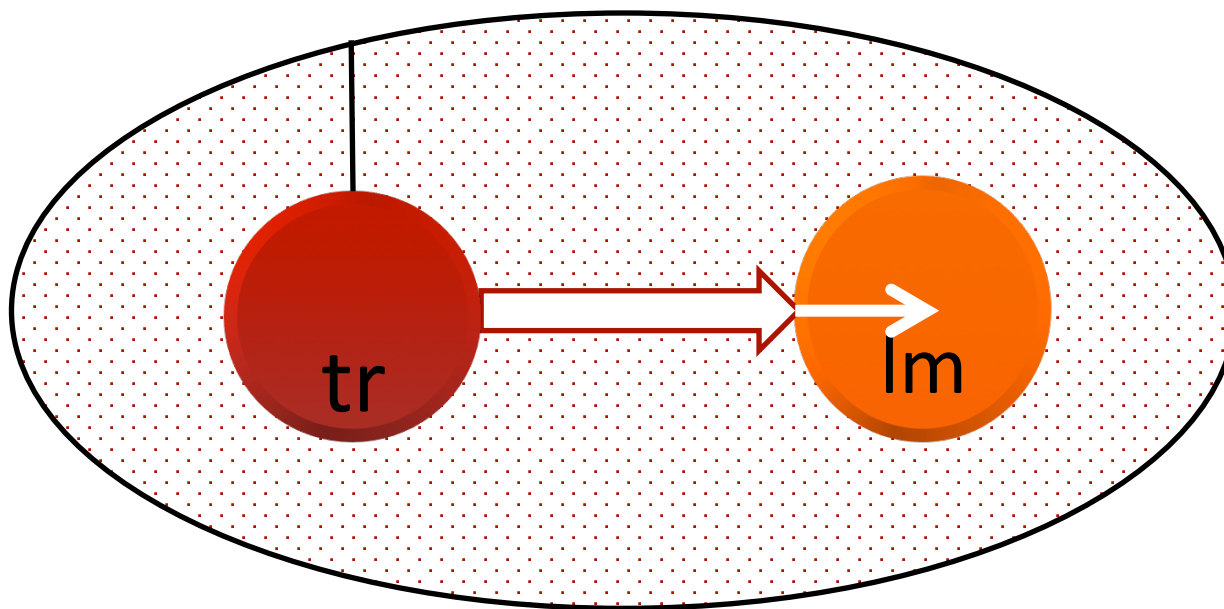
【possession】

‘He has a shop in Tokyo.’

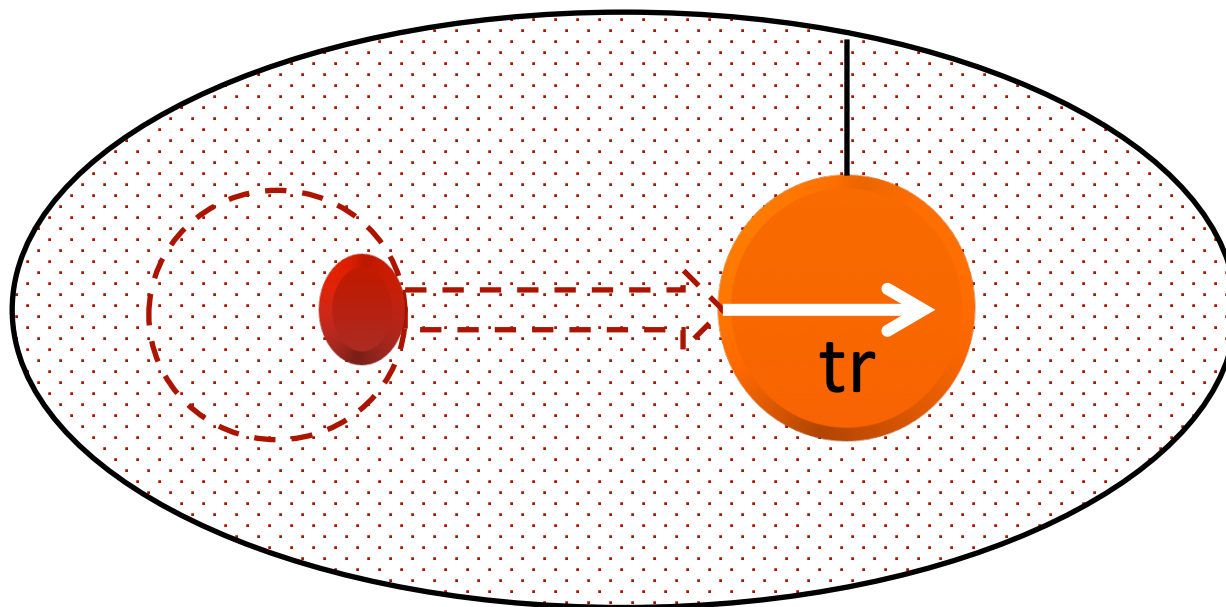
c. *Kare-wa ano-mise-wo nijyuu-nenkan mot-teiru.*

【possession】

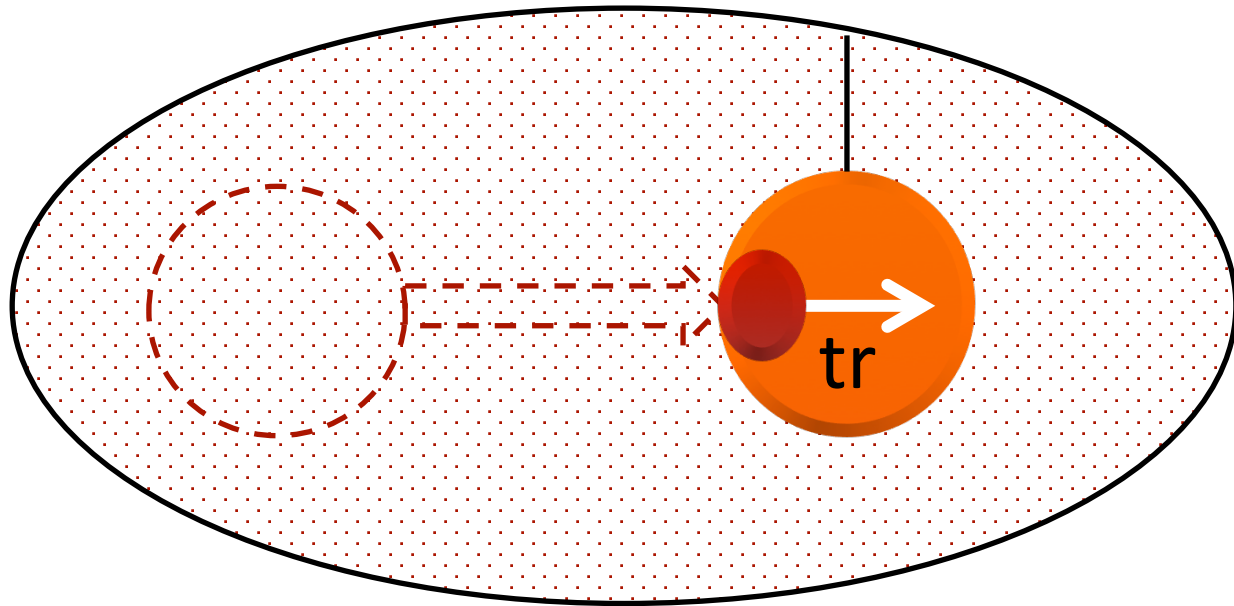
‘He has had the shop for 20 years.’



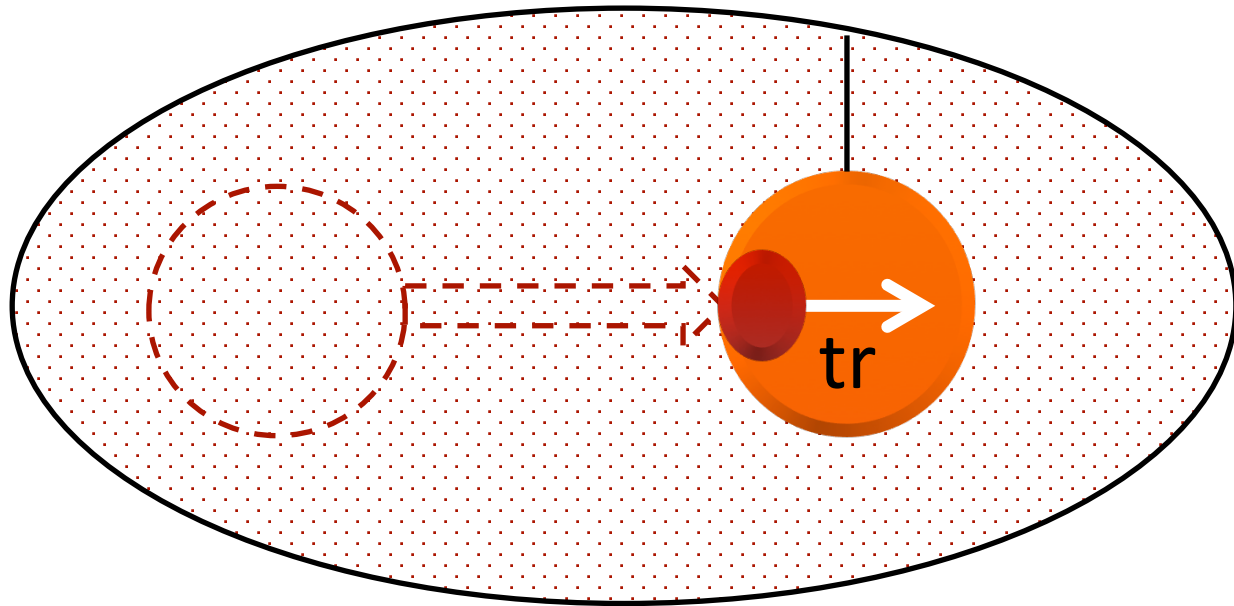
d. *Ano-mise-wa kare-no hitogara-de* *mot*-teiru. 【maintenance】
‘His personality keeps the shop going.’



e. *Ano-mise-wa ricchi-jyouken-de **mot**-teiru.* 【maintenance】
‘Having a good location, the shop keeps going.’



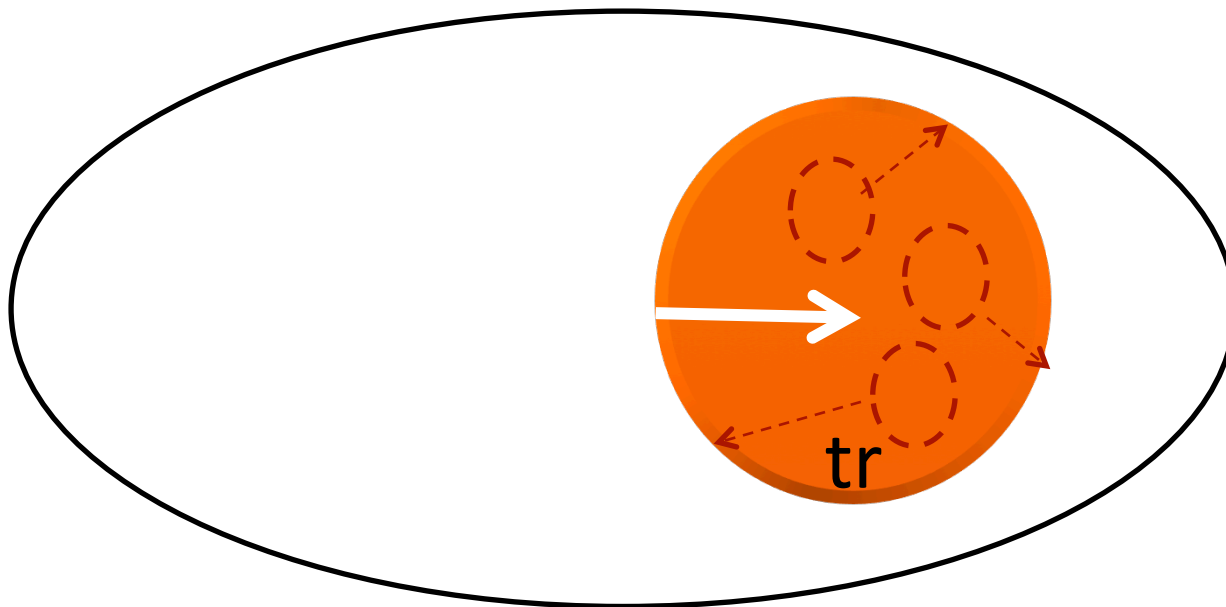
e. *Ano-mise-wa ricchi-jyouken-de **mot**-teiru.* 【maintenance】
‘Having a good location, the shop keeps going.’



e. *Genseiken-ga rainen-made motsu-ka utagawashii.*

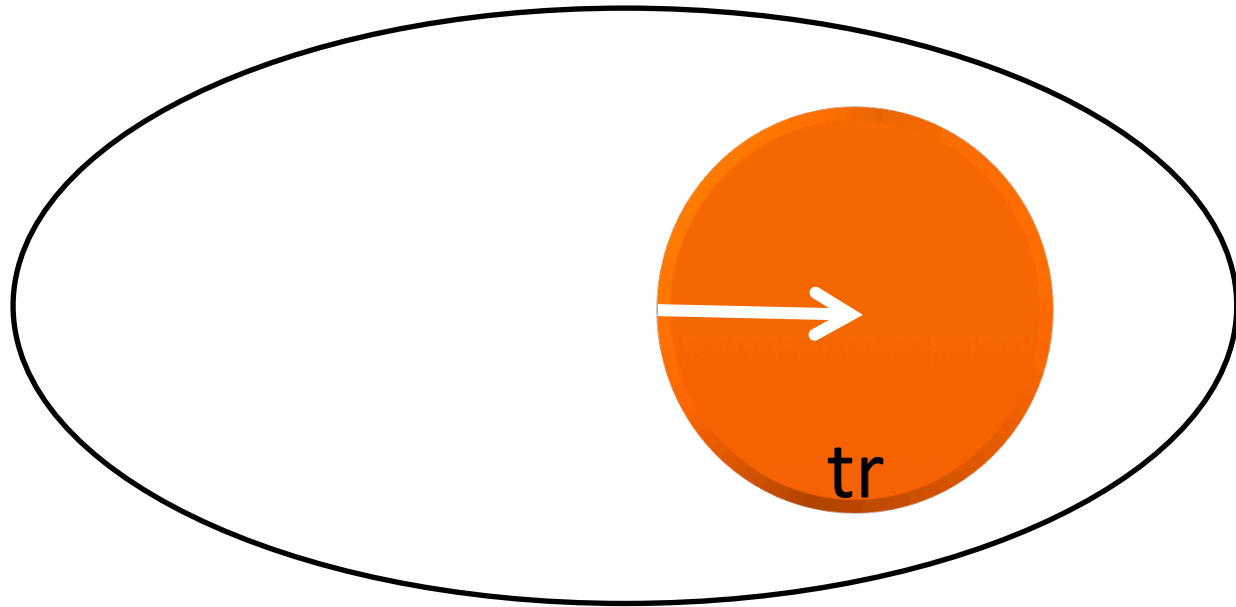
【maintenance】

‘It is doubtful whether the current government can last until next year.’



f. Kono-denchi-wa kanari motsu. =(2)
'This battery lives long.'

【maintenance】



AGENT/THEME-oriented

➤ Langacker (2008: 377)

agent orientation vs. theme orientation

✧ theme: patient, mover, experiencer, zero

Agents belong to the “active” realm – that of action, change, and force, of mobile creatures acting on the world. Here a willful human actor stands out as a paragon with respect to other active roles (like instrument, experiencer, or natural force). On the other hand, **themes** belong to the “passive” realm of settings, locations, and stable situations, where objects with particular properties are arranged in certain ways.

Wrap up

	HAVE	mot- (v.t)	mot- (v.i.)
verbal aspect	result	action-resut '-ing' action + <i>-teiru</i> or 'have -en' result	-
process/goal	goal-oriented	process (v.t.) + goal (v.i.)	
agent/theme	agent-oriented	theme-orientated	

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