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’\(^1\) events

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

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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).’

(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.’
Eine Frau ist zu zwei sitzenden Frauen hin gelaufen.

‘A woman walked thither to two women sitting.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>prep. phrase</th>
<th>satellite</th>
<th>main verb</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GOAL</td>
<td>VIA/DIREC.</td>
<td>MANNER</td>
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Results

Figure 1: Semantic components appearing in the main verb

Japanese (n=151)

German (n=180)

Figure 1: Semantic components appearing in the main verb
Figure 2: Semantic components appearing in stellites
Figure 3: Clauses which contain an adpositional phrase expressing a spatial component.
Eexamples 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)
   → temporarily unbounded

German:
(7) Eine Frau ist zum schwarzen Brett gegangen.
   a woman aux. to the bulletin board go:past participle
   ‘A woman went to the bulletin board.’ (G4)
   → temporarily 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

- 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 * zoo-no-mae-ni aruki-mashita.  
woman-NOM statue-GEN-front-GOAL 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.
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michi-o
path-ACC
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 *zoo-no-mae-ni* aruki-mashita.
woman-NOM statue-GEN-front-GOAL walk-PAST

Josei-ga *michi-o* arui-te iki- mashita.
woman-NOM path-ACC walk deict.DIR-PAST

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

Geman 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.

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

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.

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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