

A corpus-based study of the linguistic representation of change-of-state events in Japanese: An examination of the parallelism between motion and change

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In this presentation we will discuss the question of the parallelism between the linguistic representations of motion (e.g., going out) and change of state (e.g., dying, becoming happy) (Gruber 1965, Jackendoff 1983, Goldberg 1995, Talmy 2000, Iwata 2010, Ito 2018). Talmy (2000), for example, claims that his typology of event integration applies to the descriptions of motion events and change-of-state events: e.g., verb-framed languages for motion also encode a change in the main verb. However, in comparison to motion, fewer quantitative studies have been done as to how often languages use the main verb and other positions to describe changes.

We present our corpus study of how the Japanese language describes 12 different changes of state to understand the linguistic representation of the change-of-state events in this language. The changes examined are SITTING DOWN (posture), DYING (life), WAKING UP (brain state), BECOMING HAPPY (emotion), BECOMING BIGGER (size), BECOMING RED (color), OPENING (space-based states), BREAKING (integrity), FREEZING (phase of matter), BECOMING HOTTER (temperature), BECOMING CLEAN (cleanness), BECOMING BETTER (evaluation), and the causative counterparts of these changes. For these changes of state, we searched the Book subcorpora of the Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese (BCCWJ) for a broad range of expressions representing them, including a) change-of-state verbs (e.g., 'die'), b) resultative constructions (e.g., '(paint) ... red'), c) general change verbs and their complement (e.g., 'become bigger), and d) expressions involving nominals representing a state or a state-inducing entity (e.g., 'remove dirtiness'), etc. We examined the coding positions of two components of a change 1) transition (comparable to TO) and 2) resulting state (comparable to GOAL GROUND).

Our findings show that the predominant position for indicating a change in Japanese is the main verb, accounting for an average of 68.0% of the descriptions of 12 changes. However, the change-coding positions vary considerably according to particular changes of state: Unlike changes such as OPENING and DYING, which are almost always coded in the main verb, changes such as BECOMING CLEAN and BECOMING RED are most often indicated by a general change verb (indicating transition) and its complement (indicating a resulting state). Further findings include the variation in the change-coding position depending on the presence of "a coevent" (cause of change or means of its causation) in the same clause. The omission of a coevent leads to the more frequent use of the main verb position for certain changes.

Those tendencies are compared with the patterns of the motion-event description in Japanese (Matsumoto 2017, 2018, Koga to appear). The use of the main verb position is indeed common for both motion and change of state, but the tendency is clearer in the case of the latter. Sources of this difference are 1) the poverty of the lexical inventory for adjectives describing certain states, 2) the absence of the equivalent of deixis in changes of state, and 3) the stronger tendency to omit a coevent in change descriptions.

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