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On the Formation of Spatiotemporal Metaphors in Japanese

Yuichiro Ogami

1. Introduction

It is widely recognized that people talk about time using the vocabulary of space and motion in a broad range of languages. In English, for example, the elapse of time is expressed in terms of the ‘locomotion of people’ or ‘locomotion of time’, using motion verbs such as ‘come’ and ‘approach’, as those shown in the example (1) and (2).

- (1) a. Christmas is coming.
b. Christmas is approaching.
- (2) a. We are coming up on Christmas.
b. We are approaching Christmas.

These kinds of expressions are said to be examples of ‘Moving Time metaphors’ and ‘Moving Ego metaphors’, respectively, in the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999, Lakoff 1993, Moore 2001, 2006, 2011, etc.). Lakoff and Johnson (1999) suggests that these are figure-ground reversal:

The two metaphors are, strictly speaking, inconsistent with each other: In one, times are objects that move past a stationary observer; in the other, times are locations in a landscape that an observer moves over. But these are actually minimally differing variants of one another. In short, they are *figure-ground reversals* of one another. In the Moving Time metaphor, the observer is the ground and the times are figures that move relative to it. In the Moving Observer metaphor, the observer is the figure and time is the ground—the times are locations that are fixed and the observer moves with respect to them.

(Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 149)

As with the cases in English, the Japanese language also has expressions which describe time in terms of motion, using verbs such as ‘*kuru*’, which corresponds to ‘come’, and ‘*tikazuku*’, which corresponds to ‘approach’. These Japanese words have been conventionally regarded as the instantiations of Moving Time metaphors and Moving Ego metaphors. However, the Japanese time metaphors represented by ‘*kuru*’, ‘*tikazuku*’ and some other motion verbs show different behavior from corresponding metaphors in English: whether or not “reversal” of the figure and the ground between the “Moving Time” and “Moving Ego” usage varies from verb to verb in Japanese. Consider the following sentences for example.

- (3) a. *Kurisumasu ga (yatte)kita.*
Christmas NOM come.PST
‘Christmas has come.’
b. *Kurisumasu ga tikazuitekita.*
Christmas NOM approach.come.PST
‘Christmas is approaching.’
- (4) a. **Kurisumasu ni (yatte)kita.*
Christmas LOC come.PST
b. *Kurisumasu ni tikazuitekita.*
Christmas LOC approach.come.PST
‘We are approaching Christmas’

(3a), ‘*Kurisumasu ga (yatte)kita*’, corresponds to ‘Christmas has come’ in English, and (3b), ‘*Kurisumasu ga tikazuitekita*’, means ‘Christmas is approaching’. These are examples of Moving Time metaphors in Japanese, and both of these sentences appropriately express the passing of time toward Christmas. As for the examples of the Moving Ego metaphor, (4a), which is represented by the verb ‘*kuru*’, is inappropriate, while (4b), which is represented by ‘*tikazuku*’, is natural. As shown here, the pair of the metaphors represented by ‘*kuru*’, (3a) and (4a), cannot be “reversed”, while examples (3b) and (4b), which are represented by ‘*tikazuku*’, can. In this way, the behavior of motion verbs used in time metaphors in Japanese sometimes differs from corresponding lexical items in English.

Judging from the above, the metaphor system for time in Japanese may be different from that of English. However, little attention has been given to this problem because Lakoff and Johnson’s view has had sizable influence in metaphor studies in Japan as well, and most of the researchers have assumed that it can be used to explain metaphors in Japanese. Then, what is the organization of spatiotemporal metaphors in Japanese actually like?

This paper reviews the formation of spatiotemporal metaphors in Japanese, observing the usage and meaning of motion verbs used in the metaphors in detail. The paper consists of 5 sections. Firstly, we will consider the temporal metaphor system of the ‘*X ga tikazuku*’ and ‘*X ni tikazuku*’ constructions in section 2. Following this, we will show that the temporal meanings of ‘*X ga tikazuku*’ and ‘*X ga kuru*’ are different in section 3. After that, we will discuss another kind of temporal metaphor featuring the verb ‘*kuru*’, the ‘*X made kuru*’ construction, in section 4. Finally, in section 5, we will summarize the main points of this study and propose an alternative model, which groups the Japanese time metaphors under three classification.

2. On ‘*X ga tikazuku*’ and ‘*X ni tikazuku*’ in time expressions

In this section, we will focus on the temporal use of the verb ‘*tikazuku*’ and examine its meaning and experiential motivation. Here, the paper claims that Japanese time metaphors created by ‘*tikazuku*’ such as those shown in examples (3b) and (4b) are based on the concept of “a human’s motion”. In other words, my assumption here is that although example (3b) seems to depict “time’s motion” at first sight, actually it is motivated by the experience of “human motion”, as the example (4b) is, and it describes the “mover’s view”.

I will give examples to show this. Firstly, let us see the sentences in example (5), which describe the “motion of a movable object”.

- (5) a. *Kuruma ga tikazuitekita.*
 car NOM approach.come.PST
 ‘A car is approaching.’
 b. *Kuruma ga sekkinsitekita.*
 car NOM approach.come.PST
 ‘A car is approaching.’
 c. *Kuruma ga watasi ni tikazuitekita.*
 car NOM I DAT approach.come.PST
 ‘A car is approaching me.’

Japanese constructions such as ‘*X ga tikazuitekita*’ (5a), ‘*X ga sekkinsitekita*’ (5b) and ‘*X ga watasi ni tikazuitekita*’ (5c) can all be considered to be representing the referents of the NP moving toward the speaker. Accordingly, (5a), (5b) and (5c) appropriately express the approaching of ‘a car’ toward the speaker. As opposed to this, when used as time expressions, ‘*X ga sekkinsitekita*’ (6b) and ‘*X ga watashi ni chikazuitekita*’ (6c) are usually regarded as unnatural, while ‘*X ga tikazuitekita*’ (6a) is regarded as quite natural.

- (6) a. *Kurisumasu ga tikazuitekita.* (=3b)
 Christmas NOM approach.come.PST
 b. ??*Kurisumasu ga sekkinsitekita.*
 Christmas NOM approach.come.PST

c. ??*Kurisumasu ga watasi ni tikazuitekita.*
 Christmas NOM I DAT approach.come.PST

In this way, Japanese Moving Time metaphors do not necessarily behave in the same way with expressions which describe the motion of movable objects toward the speaker. This suggests that it may be inappropriate to suppose that “time’s motion” is part of the experiential basis for the Moving Time metaphors in Japanese.

Then, what it is that motivates these metaphors? Let us now turn our eyes to sentences in example (7), which formally describe the “motion of a stationary object”.

- (7) a. *Gakkou ga tikazuitekita.*
 school NOM approach.come.PST
 ‘School is approaching.’
- b. ??*Gakkou ga sekkinsitekita.*
 school NOM approach.come.PST
- c. ??*Gakkou ga watasi ni tikazuitekita.*
 school NOM I DAT approach.come.PST

As shown in (7a), stationary objects or destinations are often said to be “approaching” in Japanese to express the motion of the speaker. In this situation, the speaker feels as if the object is drawing closer, and directly tells his/her “view” as he/she sees or feels it. Example (8), which was collected on the Web, plainly illustrates this scene.

- (8) *Gakkou ga tikazuitekuru to omou to, sugoku kimotiwaruku narimasu. Hontou ni gakkou ni ikitakunai.*
 ‘I get depressed when think about the fact that the school is approaching. I’m absolutely sick of going to school.’

In this sentence, the motion of the speaker is described as the “approaching of the school”. We can find many expressions of this kind in Japanese. Note here that ‘*X ga sekkinsitekita*’ and ‘*X ga watasi ni tikazuitekita*’ are unnatural when used in this way: (7b) and (7c) are usually interpreted as “supernatural” sentences which represent that a school literary moves toward the speaker. Here, we should notice that the behavior of Moving Time metaphors, such as shown in example (6), is identical with that of expressions of the “motion of a stationary object”, such as those in example (7). From this view point, it seems reasonable that Moving Time metaphors involving ‘*tikazuku*’, such as those shown in (3b) and (6a), derive from the experience of motion events such as those shown in (7a). To be more precise, we can say that the Moving Time metaphors in the form ‘*X ga tikazuitekita*’ are derived from the “mover’s view” effected by the “mover’s motion”.

Concerning to this point, let me quote a passage from a Japanese literary work, *Yukiguni* by Yasunari Kawabata.

Kagami no soko ni wa yuugesiki ga nagareteite, tumari uturu mono to utsusu kagami to ga eiga no niju-utsusi no youni ugoku no datta. ... Ano yuu-gesiki no nagare wa, satewa toki no nagare no syoutyoudeatta ka to, kare wa futo sonna koto o tubuyaita.
 (Yukiguni, Yasunari Kawabata. Underline added.)

In the depths of the mirror the evening landscape moved by, the mirror and the reflected figures like motion pictures superimposed one on the other. ...He wondered whether the flowing landscape was not perhaps symbolic of the passage of time?

(*Snow Country*, Translated by Edward G. Seidensticker)

In this scene, the character of the novel sees the “motion of the landscape from the train window” superimposed on the “passage of time”. I regard this as an example of the unconscious reflection of time conception in Japanese culture. Taking this into account, it may not be unrealistic to assume that the “mover’s view” for the experiential motivation of the metaphors in ‘*X ga tikazuitekita*’ form.

Connected to this, Honda (2011) proposed the ‘Moving Ego unitary theory’, which hypothesizes from the Affordance theory that the experiential basis of the Moving Time and Moving Ego metaphors in English is always “human motion”. Previous studies considered that temporal metaphors like those shown in (9a) and (9b) are motivated by motion experiences like those in (10a) and (10b), respectively. As opposed to this, Honda suggests that (9a) and (9b) are derived from motion experiences such as those shown in (11a) and (11b).

- (9) a. Christmas is approaching.
b. We are approaching Christmas.
- (10) a. The bus is approaching.
b. We are approaching Kyoto.
- (11) a. Kyoto is approaching.
b. We are approaching Kyoto.

As we have seen, although Japanese Moving Time metaphors created by ‘*tikazuku*’, such as those shown in example (3b), seem to depict “time’s motion” at first sight, actually they describe the “mover’s view”. In short, time is not actually moving in the Moving Time metaphors in Japanese, and we should suppose that “human motion” is its experiential motivation. From this view point, we may conclude that metaphors such as those shown in (3b) and (4b) are both represented by our experience of moving toward some object or destination, and the two metaphors are distinguished as expressions of the “Mover’s View” (3b) and the “Mover’s Motion” (4b), respectively.

3. On the difference between ‘*X ga tikazuku*’ and ‘*X ga kuru*’ in time expressions

As I pointed out in the previous section, Moving Time metaphors in the ‘*X ga tikazuku*’ construction can be seen as expressions of the “mover’s view”. In this view, the metaphor in question may be regarded as an example of what is called “fictive motion”. An example of fictive motion is shown in example (12).

- (12) The scenery rushed past us as we drove along.

In other words, we can point out that phrases like (3b) and (4b) emerged out of a “shift in perspective”. On the other hand, Matsumoto (2007) disagrees with this view referring to the examples (13) and (14).

- (13) a. *Kurisumasu ga tikazuitekita.*
Christmas NOM approach.PST
‘Christmas is approaching.’
b. *Kurisumasu ga yattekita. (=3a)*
Christmas NOM come.PST
‘Christmas has come.’
- (14) a. *Mokutekiti ga tikazuitekita.*
destination NOM approach.PST
‘The destination is approaching.’
b. **Mokutekiti ga yattekita.*
destination NOM come.PST

In Japanese, the ‘*X ga tikazuku*’ construction is used both for temporal expressions and motion expressions, as shown in (13a) and (14a). Contrary to this, the ‘*X ga kuru*’ construction cannot be used for motion expressions, although it is used for temporal expressions. From this, Matsumoto (2007) points out that we cannot find parallelism between the temporal and motion usages of the verb ‘*kuru*’, and suggests that it is incorrect to regard Japanese Moving Time metaphors as an instantiation of “fictive motion” expressions.

On this matter, I claim that Matsumoto's argument, although insightful, is not to the point, in that it overlooks the semantic difference between the '*X ga tikazuku*' construction and '*X ga kuru*' construction, and it needs to be critically reviewed. Here, I will point out that we should make a distinction between temporal '*X ga tikazuku*' and '*X ga kuru*' contrary to Matsumoto's general view. To begin with, let us pay attention to the two meanings of '*X ga kuru*' in motion expressions.

(15) a. *Mukou kara yuuzin ga (yatte)kuru.*
the other direction from friend NOM come
'A friend comes towards me from the other direction.'

b. *Mae kara yuuzin ga (yatte)kita.*
front from friend NOM come.PST
'A friend came towards me from the front.'

(16) a. *Asita yuuzin ga (yatte)kuru.*
tomorrow friend NOM come
'A friend will come to see me tomorrow.'

b. *Kinou yuuzin ga (yatte)kita.*
yesterday friend NOM come.PST
'A friend came to see me yesterday.'

In (15), the '*X ga kuru*' construction has an "approaching" sense, capturing the '*yuujin*' (a friend)'s "process of changing position", while in (16) the construction represents a sense of "arrival", focusing on the "result of the '*yuujin*' changing position". In this way, '*X ga kuru*' has two meanings when used as a motion expression: "approaches" (15) and "arrives" (16). On the other hand, '*X ga tikazuku*' does not have the "arrival" sense in motion expressions, just the "approaching" sense.

(17) a. *Mukou kara yuuzin ga tikazuitekuru.*
the other direction from friend NOM approach
'A friend approaches me from the other direction.'

b. *Mae kara yuuzin ga tikazuitekita.*
front from friend NOM approach.PST
'A friend approached me from the front.'

(18) a. **Asita yuuzin ga tikazuitekuru.*
tomorrow friend NOM approach

b. **Kinou yuuzin ga tikazuitekita.*
yesterday friend NOM approach.PST

In this way, '*X ga tikazuku*' does not convey a sense of "arrival" when used as a motion expressions. The point here is that the manner of representing "motion" is different in '*X ga tikazuku*' and '*X ga kuru*', and I claim that the two expressions, inheriting this difference, take different meanings in their temporal usage. In my view, '*X ga tikazuku*' only represents the "process of time passing" through the relative change of position between the object and the speaker, while '*X ga kuru*' expresses the "result of time passing" through the "arrival" sense conveyed by the construction.

Keeping this in mind, let us now observe the temporal uses of the '*X ga tikazuku*' and '*X ga kuru*' constructions. Firstly, I would like to show examples (19a) and (19b).

(19) a. *Simekiri ga tikazuitekita (ga, ronbun ga dekiteinai).*
deadline NOM approach.come.PST (but paper NOM unfinished)
'The deadline is approaching (, but I haven't finished my paper).'

b. *Simekiri ga (yatte)kita (ga, ronbun ga dekiteinai).*
deadline NOM come.PST (but paper NOM unfinished)
'The deadline has come (, but I haven't finished my paper).'

As shown in the English translation, the meaning of the two expressions are different. There is still some more time in the situation shown in (19a), but there is not a shred of hope in (19b). Secondly,

let us see the examples (20a) and (20b).

- (20) a. *Haru ga tikazuku niturete, atatakaku nattekita.*
 Spring NOM approach as warm become.come.PST
 ‘It has grown warmer as Spring comes closer.’
- b. ??*Haru ga (yatte)kuru niturete, atatakaku nattekita.*
 Spring NOM come as warm become.come.PST

The Japanese construction ‘*ni turete...*’ indicates the correlation of two factors, and it almost corresponds to ‘in accordance with...’ in English. We can use ‘*X ga tikazuku*’ in the ‘*ni turete...*’ sentence as shown in (17a), while ‘*X ga kuru*’ cannot be used here as shown in (17b). This means that the temporal ‘*X ga kuru*’ does not represent the process of time passing, while ‘*X ga tikazuku*’ does. Thirdly, we will see examples (21a) and (21b).

- (21) a. ??*Mousugu simekiri ga tikazuitekuru.*
 soon deadline NOM approach.com
- b. *Mousugu simekiri ga (yatte)kuru.*
 soon deadline NOM come
 ‘The deadline will soon be upon me.’

The adverb ‘*mousugu*’ represents that the content denoted by the verbs will be realized in a short time. As shown in (21a), it cannot be used in the ‘*X ga tikaduku*’ construction, while the ‘*X ga kuru*’ construction accepts it as in (18b). This shows that ‘*X ga tikazuku*’ represents a “gradual transition of situations” as oppose to the “instantaneous attainment” represented by ‘*X ga kuru*’.

In this way, ‘*X ga tikazuku*’ and ‘*X ga kuru*’ represent different meaning in their temporal uses. The ‘*X ga tikazuku*’ construction inherits its meaning in motion expressions to specialize in representing the “process of time passing” as a time event “approaching”. On the other hand, the ‘*X ga kuru*’ construction, as was shown in (3a) and (10b), takes one of its meaning when used in motion expressions and represents the “result of time passing” as a time event “arriving”. I regard this being motivated by our experience of “meeting/greeting a visitor” because we can find many expressions which liken time to a visitor, such as the Japanese example shown in (19).

- (22) a. *Haru o mukaeta.*
 Spring ACC greet
 ‘Spring has come.’
- b. *Haru ga otozureta.*
 Spring NOM visit.PST
 ‘Spring has come.’

Note here that the time event or season is not portrayed as “moving” in expressions of this type, although I used the verb ‘come’ in the English translations above. In these sentences, what is mentioned is just the aspect of encountering the time event or season. From this, I suggest that the experiential motivation for temporal ‘*X ga kuru*’ is “A Visitor’s Arrival”.

From what has been discussed above, we can conclude that it is reasonable to make a distinction between temporal ‘*X ga tikazuku*’ and ‘*X ga kuru*’ contrary to Matsumoto (2007)’s view. To sum up, the former represents a time event “approaching”, capturing the process of time passing, while the latter represents a time event “arriving”, abstracting the process of time passing. In this view, we can regard ‘*X ga tikazuku*’ as a metaphor which depict the “mover’s view”, unlike ‘*X ga kuru*’. Here, I would like to add that although Matsumoto (2007)’s analysis was insufficient, his suggestion is still important because it makes us realize the need for distinguishing between the two constructions.

4. On ‘*X ni kuru*’ and ‘*X made kuru*’ in time expressions

I pointed out in the previous section that temporal expressions containing ‘*X ga kuru*’, such

as those shown in (3a), represent the “arrival” of a time event, abstracting the “process of time passing”.

- (3a) *Kurisumasu ga (yatte)kita.*
 Christmas NOM come.PST
 ‘Christmas has come.’

In connection with this issue, recall the discussion in section 1 that the ‘*X ni kuru*’ construction, such as the one shown in (4a), is inappropriate as a temporal expression.

- (4a) **Kurisumasu ni (yatte)kita.*
 Christmas LOC come.PST

As I mentioned above, the process of time passing is portrayed by the ‘*X ga kuru*’ construction. In other words, there is no motion in this type of expression, so inevitably “reversal” between expressions which depict “time’s motion” and “the mover’s motion” does not occur here. This is why the temporal ‘*X ni kuru*’ construction, such as the one given in (4a), is inappropriate.

Considering this, it seems that we cannot use ‘*kuru*’ as temporal expressions in sentences which depict “mover’s motion”. However, we can use the ‘*X made kuru*’ construction as temporal expression, as shown in example (23).

- (23) a. *Kurisumasu made kita.*
 Christmas LOC come.PST
 ‘Christmas has come.’
 b. *Nyuu-si tou-jitu made kita.*
 entrance-exam the-day to come.PST
 ‘The day of the entrance exam has come.’

In motion expressions, ‘*X ni kuru*’ and ‘*X made kuru*’ are both appropriate and their meanings are very similar. In fact, both sentences are usually translated in the same way in English, as follows:

- (24) *Doubutuen ni kita.*
 zoo LOC come.PST
 ‘We came to the zoo.’
 (25) *Doubutuen made kita.*
 zoo LOC come.PST
 ‘We came to the zoo.’

Then, what is the difference between ‘*X ni kuru*’ and ‘*X made kuru*’? Generally, ‘*ni*’ is said to indicate only the terminal point when used with motion verbs, while ‘*made*’ implies that there has been a process of locomotion and indicates that the final point of that process has been reached. The semantic difference between the two constructions is thought to be originated from this difference between the two postpositions. Based on this, ‘*kuru*’, as an instantiation of the “Mover’s Motion” metaphor, can be said to represent temporal meaning.

Thus, although it seems that the verb ‘*kuru*’ cannot be used as a temporal expression in a form which depicts “mover’s motion”, we can use the ‘*X made kuru*’ construction as a temporal expression. This is because ‘*X made kuru*’ construction captures the process of time passing contrary to ‘*X ni kuru*’, and the construction can be classified as a variety of a “Mover’s Motion” metaphor.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I pointed out that the temporal metaphors created by the ‘*X ga tikazuku*’ and ‘*X ni tikazuku*’ constructions are both thought to be motivated by our experience of locomotion toward some object or destination. In this view, the two types of metaphors are distinguished as

expressions of “the Mover’s View” and “the Mover’s Motion”, respectively.

I also suggested in section 2 that it is reasonable to make a distinction between the temporal ‘*X ga tikazuku*’ and ‘*X ga kuru*’ constructions. We found that the former represents a time event “approaching”, capturing the process of time passing, while the latter represents the “arrival” of a time event, abstracting the process of time passing. From this viewpoint, I claimed that the experiential motivation for the temporal ‘*X ga kuru*’ is “A Visitor’s Arrival” here.

The other factor I discussed is the usage of the temporal ‘*X made kuru*’ construction. The example of this construction, as I mentioned in section 4, captures the image of a “mover’s motion” as opposed to the ‘*X ni kuru*’ construction. ‘*X made kuru*’ can be classified as “Mover’s Motion” metaphor, the same category as the ‘*X ni tikazuku*’ construction.

From what has been discussed so far, I propose my model for the spatiotemporal metaphor system in Japanese in Table 1 as a counterproposal to the conventional view shown in Table 2.

Types of Metaphors	Examples	Meaning
Mover’s View	ex. (3b) <i>Kurisumasu ga tikazuitekita.</i>	approaching
Mover’s Motion	ex. (4b) <i>Kurisumasu ni tikazuitekita.</i>	approaching
	ex. (23a) <i>Kurisumasu made (yatte)kita.</i>	arrival
Visitor’s Arrival	ex. (3a) <i>Kurisumasu ga (yatte)kita.</i>	arrival

Table 1. The model for spatiotemporal metaphor system in Japanese

Types of Metaphors	Examples
Moving Time	ex. (3b) <i>Kurisumasu ga tikazuitekita.</i>
	ex. (3a) <i>Kurisumasu ga (yatte)kita.</i>
Moving Ego	ex. (4b) <i>Kurisumasu ni tikazuitekita.</i>

Table 2. Conventional Moving Time/Moving Ego model

The ‘Types of metaphors’ in the tables can be regarded as the experiential motivations for each metaphor. I divided these into three classes: Mover’s View, Mover’s Motion and Visitor’s Arrival. I also defined whether the metaphors represent a time event “approaching” or its “arrival”. This classification may explain the formation of spatiotemporal metaphors in Japanese more inclusively than the conventional model does.

As shown here, it is necessary to consider the semantic difference between each lexical item such as verbs and postpositions to illustrate the spatiotemporal metaphor system in Japanese in full. I’d like to stress that metaphor system for a concept vary from language to language, and lexical level scrutiny of metaphors is needed to reveal the relationship between the concepts of time and space in different cultures. From now on, more extensive examination of these metaphors, including the ‘SEQUENCE IS RELATIVE POSITION ON A PATH’ metaphor, will be needed to clarify the system of Japanese spatiotemporal metaphors comprehensively.

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