**ON THE NATURE OF PAST EVENTS IN JAPANESE *-TE I-RU*
CONSTRUTIONS**
ている構文の過去事象の性質について

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1. Introduction

The Japanese aspectual marker *V-te i-ru* is often equated with the English present perfect (i.e., *have V-ed*), since they both relate a past situation and a present situation (Mihara 1997, Yoshikawa 1979, 1995). The equivalence of the two expressions is illustrated in (1) and (2).[1]

(1)a. Peter has injured his ankle. (Leech 1971:36)
  b. Peter injured his ankle.
  c. His ankle is still bad. (Leech 1971:36)
  d. At its most general, the Perfect Aspect is used for a past happening which is seen in relation to a later event or time. Thus the present perfect means 'past-time-related-to-present-time.' (Leech 1971:30)
(2) Peter-wa   ashikubi-o kega-si-te i-ru.
   Peter-TOP ankle-ACC injury-do-TE I-NPST
   'Peter has injured his ankle.'

In (1), the past situation or event expressed by (1a) is (1b). The present situation implied by (1a) can be phrased as in (1c). In English, *have V-ed*, along with the simple past, is a way of indicating past time, but unlike the simple past, it means 'past-time-related-to-present-time', relating the past event to the present situation, as Leech (1971), cited in (1d), claims. Likewise in (2), it is possible to postulate similar past and present situations and to claim that *V-te i-ru* relates them.

However, the distributions of *have V-ed* and *V-te i-ru* do not completely overlap. Some uses of *have V-ed* correspond to the simple past tense form (i.e., *V-ta*) rather than *V-te i-ru*, and some uses of *V-te i-ru* have as a counterpart the present progressive form (i.e., *be V-ing*) rather than *have V-ed*. On the basis of these distributional differences, Mihara (1997:183-186) makes this observation: The various uses of *have V-ed* make up a single group with the past situation as a common denominator, while the various uses of *V-te i-ru* constitute a single group with the present situation as a common denominator. The question remains, however, as to why *have V-ed* and *V-te i-ru* differ in the way Mihara suggests.

The present paper proposes a possible explanation for Mihara's observation in terms of the two differences between *have V-ed* and *V-te i-ru* in (3).

(3)Two differences between *have V-ed* and *V-te i-ru*

Have V-ed	*V-te i-ru*
Describes the past event in relation to the present situation	Describes the present situation in relation to the past event
Asserts that the past event actually happened	Does not assert that the past event actually happened

First, *have V-ed* and *V-te i-ru* differ in which of the two, the past event or the present situation, they describe. The former describes the past event in relation to the present situation, as Leech (1971), cited in (1d), argues. The latter, by contrast, describes the present situation in relation to the past event. Second, *have V-ed* and *V-te i-ru* differ in whether they assert that the past event actually happened. The former makes such an assertion, while the latter does not. The second difference can be derived from the first in the following way. Since *have V-ed* describes the past event and indicates past time, just as the simple past tense form does (Leech (1971:30)), it always asserts that the past event actually occurred. In the case of *V-te i-ru*, on the other hand, the speaker starts with the present situation and searches for an appropriate past event (e.g., a past event that may have brought about the present situation) for describing the present situation. However, not all past events are accessible to him, and he often has no other choice but to settle for the most plausible past event. Thus, *V-te iru* itself does not assert that the past event actually happened. When it seems to make such an assertion, the assertion is actually supported by the context and is not part of the inherent meaning of *V-te i-ru*.

Two assumptions are made in this paper. First, I assume Teramura's (1984:127) definition of *-te i-ru* as *kizen no kekka ga genzai sonzai-shite iru koto* 'current existence of the result of a past event'. Similar definitions are found in Ota (1972), Soga (1983:117), and Soejima (2007:117-135). Furthermore, I assume that Teramura's definition can be divided into three parts that correspond to *-te, i-* and *-ru*, respectively: *-te* marks the past event, *i-* stands for the "existence of the result of" part and *-ru* corresponds to the "current" part of the definition. In other words, I assume a particular interpretation of Teramura's definition that is given diagrammatically below.

(4) 'current | existence of the result of | a past event'
   -ru   *i-*   *-te*

  ....X…………………….……………………………….…..|…
  'a past event'   'existence of the result of'   'current'
                                                   speech time
    |_____|
    -te   *i-*   *-ru*

Here the dotted line represents the flow of time from left to right. On the time line, first comes a past event, marked by *-te*. Then comes the "existence of the result of" part, which corresponds to *i-*. Finally, the "current" part refers to the speech time in the case of *-ru*. Thus the expression *-te i-ru* mirrors a temporal order of the three parts of a

situation and creates an interval, often called the '-*te i-ru* interval' (Jacobsen (1992:180)), that shows the inside of the situation.

Second, I assume a parallel structure for *have V-ed* and *V-te i-ru*. Mihara (1997:124-127) claims that *V-ed* of *have V-ed* describes the past situation, while *have* means *hi-itoteki shoyuu* 'unintentional possession' and ensures the current relevance of the past event. Adopting his claim, I assume that -*te* and -*ed* both mark the past event, -*ru* and the present tense of *have* mark the present situation, and *i-* and *have* relate the past event and the present situation, as shown below.[2]

(5) past event   present situation

   |_____|

   V-ed   *have*   present tense
   V-te   *i-*   -*ru*
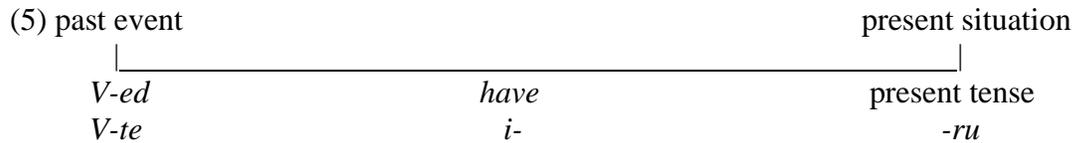
This parallel structure accounts for the similarity between *have V-ed* and *V-te i-ru* in relating the past event and the present situation.

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section, I review the way Mihara (1997) compares the various uses of *have V-ed* and *V-te i-ru* and then discuss his observation about their partial overlap, pointing out that it leads to the first difference in (3). In Section 3, I first examine the examples of *V-te i-ru* that do not assert that the past event described by *V-te* actually happened and show that they point to the second difference in (3). Then I discuss examples of *V-te i-ru* that express the present situation only without regard to the past event and are usually translated into English as 'be + adjective or particle' and state verbs. Section 4 concludes the paper by summarizing its main arguments and showing the way the second difference in (3) is derived from the first.

2. Mihara's (1997) observation

Mihara (1997) examines the various uses of *have V-ed* and *V-te i-ru* and summarizes their partial correspondence as shown in (6). In (6), *have V-ed* corresponds to *V-ta* (i.e., past tense form) and *V-te i-ru*, while *V-te i-ru* can be translatable as *have V-ed* and the present progressive form *be V-ing*.

(6) Mihara's (1997:183) summary of the distributions of *have V-ed* and *V-te i-ru*

ENGLISH	JAPANESE
have V-ed	V-ta
be V-ing	V-te i-ru

The summary is based on the examples like (7)-(11). (7) exemplifies the cases in which *have V-ed* corresponds to *V-ta*, the past tense form, rather than *V-te i-ru*.

(7)a. John has pressed the button.
   b. John-wa   botan-o   oshi-ta.
      John-TOP button-ACC press-PAST
      'John pressed/has pressed the button.'

(7b) has the past tense form *oshi-ta* and can mean 'John pressed the button' as well as 'John has pressed the button.' It is often claimed in Japanese linguistics (e.g., Teramura (1984:119-122, 195-196, 313-358)) that in the former interpretation, *-ta* denotes the past tense, while in the latter interpretation it expresses *kanryou* or the perfect aspect.[3]
   The cases where *have V-ed* is equivalent to *V-te i-ru* are illustrated in (8)-(10). The form *-de* in (9) and (10) is a phonetic variant of *-te*.

(8)a. The taxi has arrived.
   b. Takushii-ga ki-te i-ru.
      taxi-NOM   come-TE I-NPST.
      'The taxi has arrived.'
 (9)a. I have lived in London since 1980.
   b. Watashi-wa 1980-nen-irai   London-ni sun-de i-ru.
      I-TOP   1980-year-since London-in live-DE I-NPST.
      'I have lived in London since 1980.'
 (10)a. I have read the book before.
    b. Watashi-wa katsute sono hon-o   yon-de   i-ru.
       I-TOP   before the book-ACC read-DE I-NPST
       'I have read the book before.'

In (8), the past participle *arrived* and *ki-te* both express a change of location of their subjects, and *has arrived* and *ki-te i-ru* mean that the result of the change of location still holds at the speech time. In (9), *have lived* and *sun-de i-ru* describe the continuation of the state of living in London. In (10), *have read* and *yon-de i-ru* refer to the speaker's experience of having read the book before.
   Finally, (11) illustrates the cases where *be V-ing* rather than *have V-ed* corresponds to *V-te i-ru*.

(11)a. He is writing a letter.
    b. Kare-wa tegami-o   kai-te i-ru.
       he-TOP letter-ACC write-TE I-NPST
       'He is writing a letter.'

The English progressive *be V-ing* describes the present situation only, making no reference to any past situation or event. Therefore, the use of *V-te i-ru* in (11b) highlights the present situation without regard to the past situation. On the other hand, *have V-ed* cannot be used in place of *be V-ing*, which means that the present perfect always gives prominence to the past situation. On the basis of these considerations, Mihara (1997:183-186) makes an observation that the various uses of *have V-ed* make up a single group with the past situation as a common denominator, while the various uses of *V-te i-ru* constitute a single group with the present situation as a common denominator. His

observation suggests that *have V-ed* is concerned with the past event, while *V-te i-ru* focuses on the present situation. In other words, English present perfect is for describing the past event just as the past tense form is. Japanese *-te i-ru*, by contrast, is for describing the present situation just as the present tense form with state predicates is. This is the first difference between the two aspectual expressions that is listed in (3).

3. Nature of Past Events in *V-te i-ru*
3.1. Past events

In this subsection, I present four arguments that *V-te i-ru* does not assert that the past event actually happened but that the context sometimes induces an interpretation in which the past event actually happened.

First, *V-te iru* and the past tense form differ in their contexts of use. In declarative sentences, the past tense form usually asserts that the past event actually happened. However, *V-te i-ru* cannot make such an assertion, as illustrated by the following examples from Suzuki (1979:47).

(12)a. Kono yama-goya-wa   itan-da   ne.
     this   mountain-hut-TOP damage-PAST SFP
     'This mountain hut got damaged, didn't it?'
   b. Kono yama-goya-wa   itan-de i-ru   ne.
     this   mountain-hut-TOP damage-DE I-NPST SFP
     'This mountain hut is damaged, isn't it?'

(12a) has the past tense verb *itan-da*, while (12b) has *itan-de i-ru*. Suzuki observes that when the speaker sees the mountain hut for the first time, he can use (12b) but not (12a). This difference can be explained in the following way. (12a) asserts that the hut actually got damaged and underwent a change of state. In order to make this assertion, the speaker needs to compare the states of the hut before and after it got damaged. Therefore, (12a) cannot be used when the speaker sees it for the first time. (12b), by contrast, makes no assertion about its actually having got damaged and thus can be used when the speaker sees it for the first time. In other words, (12b) simply describes, and asserts the truthfulness of, the current state of the hut as looking as if it had got damaged. In sum, unlike the past tense form, *V-te i-ru* does not assert that the past event denoted by *V-te* actually happened.

Second, Inoue (2001:105-107) makes similar observations concerning the differences between the past tense form and *V-te i-ru* in the following examples.

(13)The speaker has been waiting for the water to boil, now sees it starting to boil and
     says:
   a. Yoshi, wai-ta.
     good   boil-PAST
     'Good, (the water) boiled.'
   b. ??Yoshi, wai-te i-ru.
      good   boil-TE I-NPAST
      'Good, (the water) is boiling.'

(14) The speaker put a kettle on the stove but missed the moment of the water starting to boil. He now finds the water already boiling and says:
    a. O, wai-ta.
      oh boil-PAST
      'Oh, (the water) boiled.'
    b. O, wai-te i-ru.
      oh boil-TE I-NPST
      'Oh, (the water) is boiling.'

(15) When the speaker passes by the kitchen, he sees the water boiling, though he has no idea of who put the kettle on the stove, and says:
    a. ??Are, oyu-ga   wai-ta.
      oh   water-NOM boil-PAST
      'Oh, the water boiled.'
    b. Are, oyu-ga   wai-te i-ru.
      oh   water-NOM boil-TE I-NPST
      'Oh, the water is boiling.'

(13)-(15) show that the past tense form can be used only if the speaker has some knowledge about the previous state of the water (cf. (13) and (14) vs. (15)). (15) indicates that the past tense form cannot be used when the speaker sees the water for the first time, just as in the case of (12a). Since the past tense form in declarative sentences always makes an assertion about the past event, it can only be used in contexts where the speaker has access to the states obtaining before and after the past event. So long as the speaker knows the previous state, he can use the past tense form both at the moment of the water starting to boil and later than that moment (cf. (13) and (14)).

(13)-(15) suggest two points about the use of *V-te i-ru*. First, unlike the past tense form, the speaker's access to the previous state of the water is not required but optional (cf. (14) and (15)). This means that *V-te i-ru* itself does not assert that the past event actually happened and can be used when the speaker sees the water for the first time. Second, unlike the past tense form, *V-te i-ru* cannot be used at the moment of the water starting to boil (cf. (13) vs. (14)). This is because the expression, by definition, involves an interval (i.e., *-te i-ru* interval) immediately following the past event but has no interval at the moment of the water starting to boil.

(14b) and (15b) describe the present situation of the water boiling, but seem to assert or at least imply that the past event actually happened or that the water started boiling at some point in the past. This assertion or implication is due to our knowledge of the world, namely our knowledge that the water cannot be boiling now without having started to boil in the past. In other words, the past event is construed as true in examples like (14b) and (15b) on contextual grounds and not on the basis of the inherent meaning of *V-te i-ru*.

Third, one and the same present situation can sometimes be described equally appropriately using real and unreal past events.

(16) a. Saya-o   puchinto oshi-waru-to,   usu-midori-iro-no   hachikireru-youna,
      pod-ACC snap   push-break-when light-green-color-GEN burst-seeming,
      marui mame-ga san-tsubu deki-te i-ta.

round pea-NOM three-CL come into existence-TE I-PAST

'When (I) pushed the pod snap open, three light green plump round peas (had come into existence and) were there.'

  b. Saya-o   puchinto oshi-waru-to,   usu-midori-iro-no   hachikireru-youna,

    pod-ACC snap   push-break-when light-green-color-GEN burst-seeming,

    marui mame-ga san-tsubu hait-te i-ta. (Takahashi 1987:105)

    round pea-NOM three-CL go into-TE I-PAST

    'When (I) pushed the pod snap open, three light green plump round peas (had gone inside and) were there.'

Both (16a) and (16b) describe the same current situation of three peas being found inside a pod. *Deki-te i-ta* in (16a) denotes a real past event (i.e., a past event that can happen in the real world) of their having come into existence inside the pod, while *hait-te i-ta* in (16b) involves an unreal past event (i.e., a past event that never happens in the real world) of the peas' having gone into the pod. Nonetheless, both real and unreal past events are conceptual or are created in the mind of the speaker. If a conceptual past event has a counterpart in the real world, it is a real past event. If it does not, it is an unreal past event. Since (16a) and (16b) are equally appropriate, the past event denoted by *V-te* may be only conceptual and can be unreal or without any counterpart in the real world.[4] Hence, *V-te i-ru* does not assert that the past event actually happened in (16a) and (16b). It is our knowledge of the world that leads us to believe that (16a) makes such an assertion but that (16b) does not.

    Finally, Matsumoto (1996:132) notes that *V-te i-ru* is often used to describe things without any knowledge of their previous states and that the speaker infers them from their expected or normal previous states. (17), for example, can be uttered by a speaker with no knowledge of how the leaves have actually come to be on the ground.

 (17) Happa-ga   takusan ochi-te i-ru.

     leaf-NOM much   fall-TE I-NPST

     (Lit. 'Many leaves are in the state of having fallen.')

     'There are many leaves (on the ground).'

The speaker simply draws upon his knowledge of the expected or normal previous state of leaves (i.e., leaves are normally on the tree before they end up on the ground) and describes their present state as resulting from an inferred past event of falling. Matsumoto's observation lends support to the contention that *V-te i-ru* does not assert that the past event actually happened. The speaker claims that the described present situation is true, but does not commit himself on the question of whether the past event actually occurred. It is true that (17) seems to make an assertion that the leaves actually fell in the past, but that is because such a past event is plausible in light of our knowledge of the real world.

    Soga (1983:142, 145), albeit admitting that examples like (17) do not imply that the past event truthfully occurred, maintains that examples like (18) imply that the past event truthfully happened.

(18) John-wa   kyonen Tokyo-de hatarai-te i-ru.

John-TOP last year Tokyo-in work-TE I-NPST
'John has worked in Tokyo, (and it was) last year that he worked./John has an
experience of having worked in Tokyo last year.

It is true that (18) implies that John actually worked in Tokyo last year, but this
implication comes from a particular context and not from the meaning of *hatarai-te i-ru*
itself. To see this, it might help to consider the past event and the present situation
involved in (18). The past event is that John worked in Tokyo last year, and the present
situation is that John has an experience of having worked in Tokyo last year. Since the
speaker asserts that the described present situation holds true, John's experience must
also be true or it must be the case that John worked in Tokyo last year. This in turn
means that the past event actually happened. In (18) the adverb *kyonen* creates a context
conducive to the interpretation in which the past event truthfully occurred. In sum,
Soga's observation about the truthfulness of the past event in examples like (18) is
correct, but the truthfulness implication is a contextual meaning and not part of the
inherent meaning of *V-te i-ru*.

In this subsection, I have shown that *V-te i-ru* does not assert or imply that the past
event denoted by *V-te* actually happened, but that contextual factors sometimes make
such interpretations possible.

3.2. Further uses of *V-te iru*

As a translation equivalent of *be V-ing*, *V-te i-ru* describes the present situation only
without regard to any past events. This subsection presents further examples of a similar
sort where *V-te i-ru* is usually translated into English using 'be + adjective/particle' and
state verbs, as discussed extensively in Yoshikawa (1979, 1995:184-186, 208). Thus
Mihara's (1997) summary of the distributions of *V-te i-ru* and *have V-ed* should be
modified in the following way.

(19) Modified summary of the distributions of *have V-ed* and *V-te i-ru*

ENGLISH	JAPANESE
have V-ed	V-ta
be V-ing	V-te i-ru
be + adjective/particle; state verb	

The use of *V-te i-ru* that is equivalent to 'be + adjective/particle' and state verbs is similar
to the one that corresponds to *be V-ing* in the sense that they both concern the present
situation only, making no reference to any past event.

Yoshikawa (1995: 185, 208) gives the following examples to illustrate the use of *V-te
i-ru* as a translational equivalent of 'be + adjective/particle' and state verbs in English.

156

(20)a. Oh, my, he is dead!.
   b. Kono hito,   shin-de i-ru!
      this   person die-DE I-NPST
      'This person is dead.'
(21)a. The stars are out.
   b. Hoshi-ga   de-te i-ru.
      star-NOM go out-TE I-NPST
      'The stars are out.'
(22)a. Chris resembles his father.
   b. Kurisu-wa chichioya-ni ni-te i-ru.
      Chris-TOP father-to   resemble-TE I-NPST
      'Chris resembles his father.'

In (20), *shin-de i-ru* relates to the current situation of a person being dead and can be translated as *is dead* in English. In (21), *de-te i-ru* depicts the stars visible at the time of speech, jus as *are out* in English does. In (22), *ni-te i-ru* refers to the current resemblance of Chris to his father and corresponds to *resemble* in English.

Yoshikwa (1979:385) gives many other examples where *V-te i-ru* corresponds to English 'be + adjective': *okot-te i-ru* (be angry), (*onaka-ga*) *sui-te i-ru* (be hungry), *shimet-te i-ru* (be damp), *kawai-te i-ru* (be dry), *yogore-te i-ru* (be dirty) and *aset-te i-ru* (be impatient). She holds that verbs in these examples denote an instantaneous emergence of a state and that *V-te iru* describes the continuation of the state that emerged. She further notes that Japanese uses *V-te i-ru* to make up for a smaller number of adjectives that it has than English does.[5]

Nishi and Shirai (2001) and Shirai and Nishi (2002) discuss the relationship between English state verbs and Japanese *V-te i-ru* on the basis of their aspectual analysis of 100 most common verbs in the two languages. Their analysis reveals that Japanese has fewer state verbs and instead more achievement verbs (i.e. instantaneous change of state verbs) than English.[6] They point out further that "Japanese may be compensating a lack of State verbs by referring to result state by Achievement verbs combined with the durative aspect marker *-te i-(ru)*"(p. 282). The English state verb *know*, for example, is usually translated as *shit-te i-ru*, which is the combination of an achievement verb *shir-u* 'get to know-present tense' and *-te i-ru*.

The examples in this subsection provide further support to the view that unlike *have V-ed*, which describes the past event, *V-te i-ru* concerns the present situation and that the past event denoted by *V-te* remains unasserted and may not have a counterpart in the real world (e.g., (21b)).

4. Conclusion

This paper has shown that although *have V-ed* and *V-te i-ru* are similar in relating past and present situations, they crucially differ in two respects. First, the former describes the past situation or event in relation to the present situation, while the latter depicts the present situation in relation to the past event. Second, the former, just like the simple past tense form, asserts that the past event actually happened, while the latter does not. The second difference can be derived from the first in the following way. In the case of

have V-ed, the speaker starts with the past event, which he knows well since it is what he wants to talk about in relation to the present situation. Moreover, he knows the present situation, too, because he believes that the past event has the current relevance to it. Thus by using *have V-ed* in declarative sentences, he asserts that both the past event and the present situation are true. In the case of *V-te i-ru*, by contrast, the speaker starts with the present situation, which he knows well because he wants to talk about it in relation to a past event. In order to describe the present situation, he seeks for an appropriate or the most relevant past event (e.g., a past event that might have brought about the present situation). However, he may lack knowledge of the relevant past events and often has to resort to inferences. Thus *V-te iru* itself does not make an assertion that the past event actually happened. When it seems to make such an assertion, the assertion is actually supported by the context (e.g., our knowledge of the real world) and is not part of the inherent meaning of *V-te i-ru*.

Endnotes

[1] The following abbreviations are used in the gloss: TOP=topic, ACC=accusative, NPST=non-past, NOM=nominative, SFP=sentence final particle, GEN=genitive and CL=classifier.

[2] Mikami (1972:8-9) treats *-te* of *V-te* as one of the conjugation forms of *-ta*, the past tense marker.

It is widely observed that Japanese *i-ru* corresponds to English *have* in other areas of the grammar (e.g., possession expressions). Since *i-ru* means 'be-present tense', Ikegami (1991:298-300) takes Japanese and English as a BE-language and a HAVE-language, respectively, following the typological distinction made by Issatschenko (1974).

[3] It has been controversial that *-ta* has both past tense and perfect uses. Inoue (2001:125-131) demonstrates that the so-called perfect use of *-ta* is an incidental meaning derived from its past tense use in the context where the speech time falls within the time period in which the event in question is expected to occur. See Suzuki (1979:51-53) for a similar view.

[4] Unlike my use of the term *conceptual*, Nishi and Shirai (2004, 2006) use it in the sense of 'unreal', contrasting it with *real*. In my account of *V-te i-ru*, *V-te* always denotes a conceptual past event, and the presence of the conceptual past event is part of the inherent meaning of *V-te iru*. It depends on the context (e.g., the meaning of *V* in *V-te*) whether the conceptual past event has a counterpart in the real world or not. If it does, it is a conceptual and real past event with the result that *V-te i-ru* expresses a dynamic situation. If it does not, it is a conceptual and unreal past event and *V-te i-ru* denotes a static situation.

[5] The question remains as to why Japanese has a smaller number of adjectives than English. In this connection, Uehara (1995:70-78, 229) claims that adjectives (and verbs) in Japanese are a closed class because of the morphological boundness of the adjective inflectional ending. For example, if we compare *huru-i* 'old-present tense' and *kirei da* 'pretty copula', we find that the adjective ending *-i* is more tightly bound to the adjective root *huru-* than *da* is bound to *kirei*, e.g., *huru-i rashii* 'appear to be old' as opposed to *kirei rashii* 'appear to be pretty' rather than **kirei da rashii*. This boundness prevents newly coined words from entering into the adjective class.

[6] Among the most common 100 verbs, Japanese has 8 state verbs and 63 achievement verbs, while English has 14 state verbs and 57 achievement verbs. In both languages, the achievement verb is the biggest group. Here the question remains as to why Japanese has a smaller number of state verbs and more achievement verbs than English. One possible explanation is to attribute the difference between the two languages to that of perspectives in the linguistic representation of situations. Yoshikawa (1979:400-401, 1995:206-210) and Kageyama (1996:10-13) propose that the English perspective emphasizes the state or the result of a change, while the Japanese perspective highlights the change that brings about the state. Even when the change involved is hard to imagine or a causal relation is hard to establish, Japanese tend to view the present state as arising from some possible or imaginary change. Kunihiro (1985) refers to this kind of perspective as *konsekiteki ninchi* or cognition of a state as a trace of some prior event (cf. Teramura (1984:136)).

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