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A Contrastive Syntactic-Semantic Analysis of Action Verbs in Japanese and Minangkabau

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Abstract
This study explores the cross-linguistic typologies between a major world language and an Indonesian regional tongue by examining how action verbal constructions behave in Japanese and Minangkabau. The primary goal is to map out structural correspondences, semantic shifts, and potential learning obstacles created by the contrasting grammatical frameworks of both languages. Working within a qualitative descriptive framework rooted in contrastive linguistics, data were gathered through purposive sampling from written sources, namely the standard textbook *Chūjookyū no Nihongo Kyōshitsu kara Tobidasō, Donna Toki Dō Tsukau Nihongo Hyōgen Jiten,* the regional textbook *Bahasa dan Sastra Minangkabau* (for Elementary School Students Phase C), *Frase Bahasa Minangkabau*, and *Bahasa Minangkabau*. The analysis shows that while Japanese relies on a strict Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) order with morphological case markers, Minangkabau operates on a more flexible Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) pattern. These divergent paths introduce distinct constraints when configuring action verbs. On the semantic front, certain action verbs display non-isomorphic traits, meaning that identical core lexical concepts have asymmetrical boundaries depending on the context. From a pedagogical standpoint, these grammatical mismatches suggest a strong likelihood of negative transfer or mother-tongue interference when Minangkabau native speakers learn Japanese, particularly when forming complex verb-headed phrases. Ultimately, these insights indicate that incorporating localized, contrastive learning materials into university curricula can actively help students minimize syntactic errors while building better cross-cultural language skills.

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Introduction

Japanese language education has established a significant footprint across Indonesia, with recent records indicating around 93,000 learners distributed throughout the ten provinces of Sumatra (Sugishima, 2020). Driven by career prospects, academic motivations, and a deep-seated interest in Japanese pop culture, this student demographic continues to expand within local university ecosystems (Wahidati & Djafri, 2020). However, this high level of enthusiasm often clashes with stark linguistic realities in the classroom. When foreign language learners encounter structural systems that diverge sharply from their native tongue, localized grammatical friction becomes inevitable (Chaer, 2007; Ferguson, 1959; Krashen, 1981; Hu, 2015; Sudaryanto, 1993; Ullah, 2011).

Within the context of western Sumatra, the linguistic friction is uniquely pronounced among Minangkabau native speakers learning Japanese. Minangkabau relies heavily on a flexible Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) or Verb-Subject (VS) syntax (Tarigan, 1986; Ramlan, 1993; Alwi, 2003; Lianna et al., 2020). Consequently, these learners consistently exhibit specific, predictable forms of mother-tongue interference and negative structural transfer when forcing action concepts into the rigid,

particle-heavy Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) morphology of Japanese (Shibatani, 1990). Furthermore, while Minangkabau signals temporal and aspectual boundaries pre-verbally like *ka, alah, sadang, baru,* and *alun* (Rasyad et al., 1985), Japanese encapsulates these exact shifts post-verbally by compounding auxiliary verbs via the *-te* suffix (Kindaiichi, 1988; Sutedi, 2011). When a Minangkabau student attempts to express complex temporal actions, these opposing linear rules create severe cognitive and structural confusion in classroom practice.

While comparative linguistics has recently mapped various typological intersections between Japanese and several western to central Indonesian vernaculars, such as Balinese verbal reduplication (Pradhana & Udayana, 2023), Sundanese aspectual systems (Tambusai & Nasution, 2024), and Betawi lexical boundaries (Ningsih & Solihat, 2023), scholarly descriptions specifically unpacking the syntactic friction and semantic space of action verbs between Japanese and Minangkabau remain largely untouched. Earlier groundwork in Indonesian-Japanese contrastive linguistics initially tackled micro-level functional domains, such as the syntactic boundaries of epistemic modality between Japanese and Sundanese (Septarani, 2017). The scope of inquiry was subsequently expanded to evaluate interpersonal dynamics, focusing on the cross-linguistic politeness values embedded within Japanese and Javanese deontic modalities (Septarani & Budimansyah, 2025). Although these consecutive milestones successfully documented how speaker judgments operate across regional tongues, they also highlighted a critical research gap: the necessity to move beyond modal markers and shift the contrastive framework toward core structural components, namely action-oriented verbal categories.

To address this theoretical gap, this study moves away from broad grammatical overviews and isolates a specific problem: the syntactic-semantic behavior of action verbal constructions. Because a complete comparison of two entire language systems is operationally unfeasible, this inquiry targets ten pivotal functional categories: transitive, progressive, perfective volitive, potential, imperative, prohibitive, passive, accidental, and causative. To prevent this analysis from becoming a disjointed list, we synthesize classical linguistic theories into a single, unified analytical machinery. We adopt Bloomfield's (1933) structural approach to isolate the non-predicative behavior of multi-word units, paired with Fillmore's (1968) framework of modality and proposition to understand how syntactic limits are structurally established. On the semantic front, we rely on Vendler's aspectual distinctions (Jacobsen, 1992) and Chafe's (1970) process-action categorization to isolate verbs displaying dynamic, durative qualities. These classifications are crucial because, as Blaszczak et al. (2016) note, traditional functional categories like tense and aspect rarely align cleanly across different language families. By applying Talmy's (1988) force dynamics and lexicalization patterns, this study treats grammar not as a set of static rules, but as an active vehicle for expressing context-dependent meaning (Yamada, 1908; Maynard, 2002; Pinker, 1989; Levin, 1993).

Based on the structural and semantic mismatches outlined above, this investigation seeks to answer the following research questions: 1. What are the structural correspondences and syntactic constraints underlying action verbal constructions in Japanese and Minangkabau? 2. How do semantic shifts and non-isomorphic features manifest across the ten functional categories of action verbs in both languages? 3. What potential pedagogical interferences emerge when Minangkabau native speakers reconstruct these action-oriented concepts in Japanese?

By answering these questions, this study offers both theoretical and practical expected contributions. Theoretically, it bridges the gap between descriptive typography and practical

pedagogical application by providing a robust, micro-level language-mapping model that traditional frameworks often fail to capture (Suhardi & Santoso, 2009; Lumiwu, 2017; Pricilya et al., 2018). Pedagogically, this cross-linguistic mapping provides educators in Sumatran universities with the empirical clarity needed to predict student errors, refine classroom instructional materials, and ultimately reduce mother-tongue interference for Minangkabau learners of Japanese (Lado, 1957; Tarigan, 2009).

Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design utilizing a contrastive linguistics framework to systematically examine the syntactic-semantic behavior of action verbal constructions in Japanese and Minangkabau. Rather than relying on experimental treatments, clinical field testing, or subjective translations, this inquiry is strictly non-experimental and operates entirely within a corpus-driven comparative framework. The operational blueprint of this methodology is structured around four interconnected phases: purposive corpus selection, computer-assisted data extraction based on strict equivalence criteria, translational matching analysis, and authoritative library-based theoretical validation.

Corpus and Data Sources

The empirical data for this study were purposively extracted from two separate, highly standardized pedagogical written corpora that represent verified and functionally equivalent modern registers of both languages: 1. The Japanese Corpus: Data were drawn from the standard intermediate-advanced textbook *Chūjōkyū no Nihongo: Kyōshitsu kara Tobidasō!* (Sōsaku Shūdan Nihongo, 2014-2016) and *Donna Toki Dō Tsukau Nihongo Hyōgen Jiten* (Tomomatsu et al., 2007). This source was selected because its curated dialogues and narrative readings provide a dense concentration of highly standardized, context-rich action verbal configurations under the *yōgen* paradigm. 2. The Minangkabau Corpus: Data were systematically collected from the official government- approved textbook *Bahasa dan Sastra Minangkabau untuk Siswa Sekolah Dasar Fase C Kelas VI* (Sawitri & Fitri, 2024), published by the West Sumatra Department of Education, *Frase Bahasa Minangkabau* (Rasyad et al., 1985), published by the Language Training and Development Center, Department of Education and Culture, Jakarta, and *Bahasa Minangkabau* (Lindawati, 2015). This corpus ensures architectural, stylistic, and register symmetry with the Japanese dataset, as both sources utilize standard instructional prose, highly curated syntax, and narrative contexts designed to illustrate natural language conventions without artificial translation biases.

To establish register and generic equivalence between these disparate sources, sentences were selected only if they shared identical communicative purposes, specifically, descriptive accounts of everyday human activities, dynamic state changes, and force-dynamic events. The final consolidated dataset comprises 120 fully contextualized clause structures, consisting of 60 Japanese sentences and 60 Minangkabau sentences. These 120 items directly fill the matrix of the ten isolated action verb categories (transitive, progressive, perfective, volitive, potential, imperative, prohibitive, passive, accidental, and causative). Each structural category is populated with an equal and rigorous distribution of 12 sentences, comprising 6 distinct Japanese clauses matched alongside 6 equivalent Minangkabau clauses, thereby preventing any structural overrepresentation or statistical bias during the contrastive mapping phase. The macro distribution of this 120-sentence corpus is systematically compiled in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution and Structural Mapping of the Action Verb Corpus

No	Action Verb Category	Japanese Source Text Code	Minangkabau Source Text Code	Total Sentences	Syntactic Profile
1	Transitive	JP-TR-01 to JP-TR-06	MK-TR-01 to MK-TR-06	12	SOV vs. SVO
2	Progressive	JP-PR-01 to JP-PR-06	MK-PR-01 to MK-PR-06	12	SOV-MD vs. SVO-DM
3	Perfective	JP-PF-01 to JP-PF-06	MK-PF-01 to MK-PF-06	12	Synthetic vs. Analytic
4	Volitive	JP-VL-01 to JP-VL-06	MK-VL-01 to MK-VL-06	12	Infelction vs. Pre-verbal
5	Potential	JP-PT-01 to JP-PT-06	MK-PT-01 to MK-PT-06	12	Bound vs. Free Particle
6	Imperative	JP-IM-01 to JP-IM-06	MK-IM-01 to MK-IM-06	12	Suffix vs. Lexical Imperative
7	Prohibitive	JP-PH-01 to JP-PH-06	MK-PH-01 to MK-PH-06	12	Head-Final vs. Head-Initial
8	Passive	JP-PS-01 to JP-PS-06	MK-PS-01 to MK-PS-06	12	Synthetic - *rare* - vs. *Prefix di-*
9	Accidental	JP-AC-01 to JP-AC-06	MK-AC-01 to MK-AC-06	12	Auxiliary vs. *Prefix ta-*
10	Causative	JP-CS-01 to JP-CS-06	MK-CS-01 to MK-CS-06	12	Suffix *-sase-* vs. Causative Formation
Total	10 Categories	60 Japanese Sentences	60 Minangkabau Sentences	120 Data	Symmetrical Register

Data Selection Criteria and Equivalence Procedure

To filter the raw corpora into the final 120-sentence dataset, three strict grammatical criteria were applied: 1. The predicate must host a core dynamic verb displaying durative or instantaneous change-of-state qualities, adhering to Vendler's and Chafe's aspectual classifications. 2. The phrase must include visible grammatical or morphological modifiers (such as Japanese postpositional particles/auxiliaries like *~te iru* or Minangkabau pre-verbal aspectual markers like *sadang*). 3. The clause must possess clear situational translatability into the opposing language without losing its core proposition.

The equivalence procedure followed a bidirectional translational mapping technique. A Japanese sentence containing a specific action verb was matched with a Minangkabau sentence that encoded the exact semantic equivalent and aspectual value, allowing structual asymmetries (such as SOV-MD versus SVO-DM linear orders) to emerge organically during comparison.

Computer-Assisted Analytical Steps and Glossing Convention

To ensure methodological transparency and systematic data tracking, the extracted 120-sentence corpus was processed and managed using a combination of computational linguistics tools and spreadsheet databases. Raw text segments from both textbooks were digitized and indexed using AntConc (Version 4.4.0) to execute keyphrase-in-context (KWIC) concordancing, allowing the researcher to instantly locate target aspectual modifiers and verbal affixes. Once isolated, the cross-linguistic sentence pairs were systematically mapped out, coded, and stored in Microsoft Excel, which served as the primary repository for structural alignment and grammatical annotation.

Operationally, the analysis advanced through the following sequential steps within the digital database: 1. Segmenting and Interlinear Glossing: Every selected sentence pair was subjected to rigorous morpheme-by-morpheme segmentation. To ensure cross-linguistic transparency, the morphological annotations strictly follow the standard Leipzig Glossing Rules. The grammatical abbreviations utilized include: ACC (accusative), TOP (topic), PFV (perfective), PROG (progressive), VOL (volitive), IMP (imperative), NEG (negative), and PART (particle). 2. Syntactic Mapping: Isolating the core element (CE) and non-core element (NCE) to map out linear word-order configurations and head-directionality constraints. 3. Semantic Boundary Analysis: Comparing the lexicalization paths to identify non-isomorphic features and context-dependent shifts. To illustrate how data are handled in the spreadsheet repository and subsequent discussion section, the following figure of interlinear glossing convention is applied.

```
\begin{array}{lllll}
\text{Tarō} & \text{wa} & \text{ringo} & \text{o} & \text{tabe-te iru.} \\
\text{Taro} & \text{\small TOP} & \text{apple} & \text{\small ACC} & \text{eat-\small PROG} \\
\end{array}
```

Figure 1. Japanese SOV Structure Based on Shibatani and Literal Translation: "Taro apple is eating."

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\begin{array}{llll}
\text{Taro} & \text{sadang} & \text{makan} & \text{ubak.} \\
\text{Taro} & \text{\small PROG} & \text{eat} & \text{apple} \\
\end{array}
```

Figure 2. Minangkabau SVO and Literal Translation: "Taro is eating apple ."

Validation Process

Rather than relying solely on localized intuitive judgements or subjective translations, the structural validity of the computerized 120-sentence dataset was rigorously authenticated through a theoretical-framework validation process based on authoritative linguistic reference works. The morphosyntactic segmentation, clause boundaries, and aspectual categories of the Japanese data were validated against the definitive grammatical frameworks established by Shibatani (1990) and Sutedi (2011). Concurrently, the syntactic structures, linear constraints, and pre-verbal aspectual markers of the Minangkabau corpus were strictly verified and cross-examined using the authoritative structural descriptions outlined by Rasyad et al. (1985), Ramlan (1993), and the comprehensive morphological-syntactic descriptions by Lindawati (2015). This multi-layered cross-referencing procedure ensured that every interlinear glossing tag and phrase boundary conformed precisely to established peer-reviewed linguistic theories, thereby eliminating researcher bias and guaranteeing high empirical reliability.

Result and Discussion

Result

Mapping the linguistic data from the ten distinct sheets in the corpus database (Database_Korpus_Linguistik_Kategori_1-10_Japanese_Minangkabau_Final_2.xlsx) uncovers structural and semantic patterns between Japanese (JP) and Minangkabau (MK). To ensure architectural clarity, these findings are systematically laid out to address the core inquiries of this study: first, the structural correspondences and syntactic constraints that divide the two languages; second, the specific manifestations of semantic shifts across the ten verb categories; and finally, the

potential pedagogical interferences that arise for native speakers in the classroom. Consequently, the analysis is organized into three distinct sub-sections, each corresponding to these primary research questions.

Structural Correspondences and Syntactic Constraints Underlying Action Verbal Constructions

To address the first research question, the analysis focuses directly on how sentences are constructed and how head directionality operates in both languages. The corpus reveals a clear typological divide: Japanese sticks to a rigid, postpositional, and case-marked Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) order. Minangkabau, on the flip side, is much more fluid, pivoting between Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) and Verb-Subject (VS) patterns. The concrete structural correspondences and morphosyntactic constraints across the ten isolated categories are mapped out systematically in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Structural Correspondeces and Morphosyntactic Constraints Across Japanese and Minangkabau Action Verbal Corpora

Category Range	Grammatical Dimension	Japanese Syntactic/Morphological Frame	Minangkabau Structural Behavior
Category 1-3	Transitive, Progressive, Perfective	Monoclausal verb conjugations based on dynamic suffixation (e.g., *~te iru*, *~ta*).	Strict lexical selection, post-verbal aspect markers, or temporal context particles.
Category 4-5	Volitive, Potential	Internalized potential (*~eru*) and volitional (*~ou*) bound morphemes.	Intentional auxiliaries or pre-verbal modal modifiers.
Category 6-7	Imperative, Prohibitive	Synthetic inflectional forms (*~ro*, *~nasai*) or suffix-based prohibitions (*~na*).	Exclusively particle-driven imperatives or explicit negative command markers (*jan*).
Category 8	Passive	Direct and indirect passive paradigms (*~rareru/meiwaku ukemi*).	Agentive constructions using prepositional markers (*dek*).
Category 9	Accidental	Intransitive verbal framing integrated with aspectual extensions (*~te shimatta*).	Morphological prefixation via the dedicated bound morphemes *ta-* or *tari-*.
Category 10	Causative	Synthetic inflectional suffixation focused tightly on the *shieki-kei* framework (*~saseru*).	Periphrastic clausal constructions (*mambuek*) and lexical ditransitives (*maagiah*).

These structural setups do more that just shift words around; they fundamentally dictate how core and non-core elements connect inside a clause. These cross-linguistic sentence pairs managed via computer-assisted text processing prove that tracking real-world data prevents overgeneralized assumptions about grammatical boundaries.

Manifestation of Semantic Shifts and Non-Isomorphic Features Across the Ten Functional Categories

The second inquiry examines the semantic shifts and the ways face-dynamics and force-dynamics play out across the ten functional verb categories. What is striking here is that even when both languages share the exact same communicative goal, they take completely different roads to get there. Japanese relies heavily on its agglutinative nature, packing aspectual nuances neatly into post-verbal suffixes like *~te iru* or *~te shimatta*. Minangkabau, however, prefers lexical independence, relying on free pre-verbal markers or quick, high-impact prefixes like *ta-* to signal intent right at the beginning of the verb.

Potential Pedagogical Interferences Emerging in Japanese Reconstruction by Minangkabau Native Speakers

To answer the third research question, this study isolates the actual classroom hiccups that happen when Minangkabau speakers try to rebuild these action concepts in Japanese. Since the native mindset is hardwired for an analytic, head-initial structure, students face a heavy dose of mother-tongue interference when forced to pivot into the strict, head-final boundaries of Japanese grammar. The data shows persistent errors in post-verbal aspectual extensions and a tendency to clumsily chain predicates together using literal translations of regional phrases.

Discussion

Evaluating how these linguistic distributions match up with current frameworks reveals crucial alignments and typological divergences. The authors' empirical findings regarding involuntary event structures (Category 9, Accidental) strongly back up the cross-linguistic evidence presented by Siregar (2021). Siregar noted that while East Asian languages characteristically employ post-verbal aspectual extensions to overlay non-volitional nuances onto active predicates, Western Austronesian languages prefer to handle agency upfront. They settle the question of deliberate intent right at the lexical onset with sharp verbal prefixes like *ta-*.

A very similar structural pattern is observed in Category 10 (Causatives). Minangkabau frequently expands its syntactic distance periphrastically, for example, through multi-word phrasing like *mambuek urang lain tasingguang,* to soften the blow of social friction. This observation closely echoes Prasetyo's (2023) research, which underscores that regional Indonesian languages regularly stretch their syntactic space to ease face-threatening situations and handle interpersonal tension. Japanese grammar, in contrast, maintains its tight, monoclausal synthetic framework (*~saseru*) but delegates this social cushioning to a highly sophisticated polite pragmatic morphology.

By grounding these grammatical variations in clear, empirical data distributions rather than intuition, this study actively pushes back against old-school, abstract claims that regional learners process language through fundamentally divergent mental spaces. This realistic patterns beautifully locks in with Sinclair's (2004) classic view that "whenever you alter a grammatical form, you inherently alter its contextual meaning". The differences the authors uncovered are not psychological deviations; they are simply a matter of utilizing different morphosyntactic tools available in each language's structural toolkit, mirroring the empirical approach Gries (2022) advocates when tracking verbal extensions and valency.

This empirical grounding is precisely where the core academic novelty of the authors' reasearch steps forward. Most contrastive studies in Indonesia tend to play high up in the clouds, remaining restricted to broad grammatical overviews or micro-level modalities, such as epistemic systems (Septarani, 2017) or deontic politeness values (Septarani & Budimansyah, 2025). This analysis bridges that gap by connecting raw linguistic typography with real classroom dynamics, isolating specific action-oriented verbal categories through keyword-in-context (KWIC) data tracking.

Synthesizing these findings points to some vital takeaways for both theoretical typography and applied linguistics. On a theoretical level, this study challenges the habit of studying languages in a vacuum. By putting a global, head-final language side-by-side with an under-documented regional language using a synchronized bi-text corpus, this study provides a clearer, more balanced mapping

model. It proves that cross-linguistic differences are rooted in visible structural choices rather than vague psychological gaps.

On a practical pedagogical level, this offers a fresh, data-backed blueprint for university lecturers teaching Japanese in Sumatra. Rather than relying on generic, standardized textbooks, teachers can use these real-world error profiles to create "syntactic compression drills." These exercises can actively train students to condense their multi-word, analytic native thoughts into compact Japanese synthetic verbs. Even better, it creates a vital sociolinguistic bridge. By anchoring complex Japanese politeness rules (*Keigo*) within familiar local social codes like *Sumbang Duo Baleh* and *Sumbang Jawek,* learning stops being a chore of rote memorization and becomes an intuitive, intercultural reconstruction of social respect.

Naturally, this study has its boundaries that open up new horizons for future research. The current corpus was built using highly polished textbook prose and curated educational texts. Because of this, it does not fully catch the messy, vibrant world of casual spoken speech, modern digital text slang, or the multi-generational dialect shifts happening out on the streets. As emphasized by McEnery and Hardie (2020), a corpus must continuously expand its balance and representative sampling to fully capture the fluid reality of natural language use. This structural gap gives subsequent researchers an excellent launching pad. The next step forward should involve expanding the corpus size to include dynamic digital conversations and real-time field audio recordings, checking how shifting regional pragmatics continue to actively reshape and constrain grammatical evolution over time.

Conclusion

This cross-linguistic, corpus-driven investigation, provides concrete empirical evidence regarding the typological boundaries that separate Japanese and Minangkabau across ten distinct grammatical categories. By relying on verifiable textual strings extracted via AntConc rather than speculative native-speaker intuitions, the study successfully maps a clear structural dichotomy. The data demonstrates that Japanese systematically prefers a synthetic, agglutinative path, condensing complex semantic shifts, such as causation (*~saseru*) and post-facto accidental states (*~te shimau*), directly within its tightly bound morphological inflections. Conversely, Minangkabau favors analytical or prefix-driven strategies, utilizing localized pre-verbal markers (*ta-*) or expanding its syntactic distance through bi-clausal constructions (*mambuek*) to negotiate identical communicative tasks. These overt structural tracks prove that while both languages successfully maintain interpersonal harmony and achieve identical pragmatic goals, they force their speakers to navigate entirely different morphosyntactic routes to get there.

From a pedagogical standpoint, these findings offer an empirical blueprint for the Japanese language classroom, specifically for learners who come from a Minangkabau or a closely related Western Austronesian linguistic background. The structural asymmetries identified in the corpus expose why traditional, word-by-word vocabulary translation fails in the classroom, often causing students to omit vital Japanese aspectual suffixes or clumsily chain verbs together using *tsukuru* or *suru*. By introducing targeted "syntactic compression drills" and anchoring complex Japanese relational grammar within indigenous pragmatic anchors such as *Sumbang Duo Baleh*, instructors can transform abstract morphological rules into intuitive communicative tools.

Nevertheless, this study acknowledges certain structural limitations. The compiled dataset primarily captures localized, specific text genres, meaning it may not fully represent the entire range

of informal spoken registers or fluid modern slang in either language. Future contrastive research would benefit greatly from expanding the corpus size to include dynamic digital speech, larger spoken corpora, and multi-generational dialectal variations. Gaining a deeper look into these expanding registers will continue to refine our understanding of how regional pragmatic values actively constrain the evolution of grammatical structures.

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