



# Language-specific and universal influences in children's syntactic packaging of Manner and Path: A comparison of English, Japanese, and Turkish <sup>☆</sup>

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## Abstract

Different languages map semantic elements of spatial relations onto different lexical and syntactic units. These crosslinguistic differences raise important questions for language devel-

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opment in terms of how this variation is learned by children. We investigated how Turkish-, English-, and Japanese-speaking children (mean age 3;8) package the semantic elements of Manner and Path onto syntactic units when both the Manner and the Path of the moving Figure occur simultaneously and are salient in the event depicted. Both universal and language-specific patterns were evident in our data. Children used the semantic-syntactic mappings preferred by adult speakers of their own languages, and even expressed subtle syntactic differences that encode different relations between Manner and Path in the same way as their adult counterparts (i.e., Manner causing vs. incidental to Path). However, not all types of semantics-syntax mappings were easy for children to learn (e.g., expressing Manner and Path elements in two verbal clauses). In such cases, Turkish- and Japanese-speaking children frequently used syntactic patterns that were not typical in the target language but were similar to patterns used by English-speaking children, suggesting some universal influence. Thus, both language-specific and universal tendencies guide the development of complex spatial expressions.

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## 1. Introduction

Speaking requires linearization of multidimensional information into sequential speech segments. This process is especially evident in talking about three-dimensional spatial information (Levelt, 1984). Different languages have different ways of distributing features of the same spatial information into linguistic units. Recent research has shown significant crosslinguistic differences in the way semantic elements of space are mapped onto lexical and syntactic structures (Choi & Bowerman, 1991; Slobin, 1987; Talmy, 1985). For example, lexicalization of the semantic elements differs across language types. Speakers of satellite-framed languages such as English tend to conflate Motion with Manner in the main verb (e.g., *roll* in (1)) and express the Path in a non-verbal element, namely a “satellite” (e.g., *down*). In contrast, speakers of verb-framed languages such as Turkish and Japanese tend to conflate Motion with Path in the main verb (e.g., *in-* in (2)) and express Manner in a subordinate verb (e.g., *yuvarlan-*), an adverbial, or not at all. Further, Manner and Path occurring simultaneously in a motion event can be encoded in speech within one or two clauses depending on the typology of the language (Talmy, 1985). Speakers of satellite-framed languages typically use one clause to encode Manner and Path, as shown in (1). However, speakers of verb-framed languages typically use two separate clauses, mostly in a matrix–subordinate construction, as shown in the Turkish sentence in (2).

(1) *The ball rolled down the hill*

(2) *Top yuvarlan-arak tepe-den aşağı in-di.*  
 ball roll-Connective hill-Ablative downness descend-Past  
 ‘The ball descended the hill while rolling’.

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