

## A Contrastive Analysis of English and Japanese Past Form of Verb from Syntactic Views

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### Abstract

*This study explores the similarities and differences between English and Japanese past form verbs, aiming to provide insights into their linguistic characteristics for both linguistics and pedagogy. The research investigates how past tense verbs are formed in both languages and whether notable contrasts exist in their regular and irregular verb forms. Using a contrastive and descriptive method, the study compares 534 regular and 288 irregular English verbs with 302 regular and 5 irregular Japanese verbs. The findings reveal that the number of regular verbs in both languages is relatively similar, but the disparity becomes evident in the irregular verb forms, where English contains 283 irregular verbs, while Japanese has only 5. These results highlight a clear difference in the complexity of irregular verb conjugation between the two languages. The study's significance lies in its contribution to contrastive analysis in linguistics, offering valuable insights for language learners and educators. For English and Japanese language learners, understanding these differences can facilitate more effective language acquisition and teaching practices. The novelty of this research is its focus on the comparative analysis of English and Japanese verb forms, which can aid in the development of targeted pedagogical strategies, particularly for learners transitioning between these languages. The findings suggest the importance of tailored instruction to address the challenges posed by irregular verb usage in English and the relative simplicity of Japanese verb conjugation.*

**Keywords:** Contrastive, Past Form Verb, Syntactic

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## INTRODUCTION

All languages have their own characteristics and rules that distinguish them from one another (Sevarakhon, 2024). For instance, English and Japanese, especially their verb systems, are interesting to compare to determine their similarities and differences (D'Angelo et al., 2021; Joyce & Meletis, 2021; Kusano, 2025). The Japanese language is one of the unique languages. Not only is its structure different, but its patterns are also difficult to translate into English or other languages (Al-Tarawneh, 2024; Ye, 2024). Although Kanji is based on pictographs, the Japanese language itself is not; it is used more intuitively and artistically, directly appealing to the brain and nervous system (Lensun et al., 2024). In Japanese, aesthetic matters are considered more important than grammar itself. It can express what one wishes to communicate, as the social norms emphasize implicitness rather than direct or complete speech (Schouten, Boiger, Kirchner-Häusler, Uchida, & Mesquita, 2020; Suryadimulya, Dienaputra, Machdalena, Nugraha, & Kartika, 2023). The “uniqueness” of the Japanese language is caused by its vocabulary, grammatical constructions, and idiomatic expressions, which are not found in other languages (Lance, 2022; Mielick, 2023; Musaev et al., 2021). In the Japanese language, emotional relationships are considered very important (Schouten et al., 2020; Shimizu, 2020).

Through a simple contrastive analysis, the similarities and differences between the two languages can be identified (Azam et al., 2023; Cranfield et al., 2021). Based on this notion,

the researcher aims to analyze the past tense of verbs in English and *ta-kei doushi* た形動詞 (~たけい どうし) in Japanese to understand their similarities and differences.

Previous studies on English and Japanese verb forms have highlighted key differences in their conjugation patterns, particularly focusing on irregularities and tense formations in both languages. One notable study by Hirai and Terauchi (2016) discusses the challenges English speakers face when learning Japanese verb forms, especially the nuances of the *ta-kei* verb form in Japanese, which is not directly translatable into English. This study primarily examines the syntactic and morphological structures of verbs in the two languages but lacks a detailed contrast of the past tense conjugation systems in both. Another important work by Saito (2017) focuses on the verb conjugation systems in both languages, analyzing how cultural and linguistic differences influence verb formation in Japanese compared to English. However, it does not fully address the specific comparison between regular and irregular past forms, which is the core of this study. Research by Kaneko (2019) revealed that Japanese learners often omit or misuse past tense forms in English, especially irregular ones. Similarly, Fitria (2021) found that students tend to make more errors in irregular past tense verb usage than in regular forms in English writing. In the context of Japanese learners studying their native verb forms, Yusuf, Taulia, and Mawaddah (2024) discovered that the *~te* and *~ta* conjugations pose consistent difficulties, especially in oral and written expression. Furthermore, Suzuki and Shirahata (2020) emphasize that Japanese verb conjugation requires high contextual awareness, which complicates contrastive learning when compared to English verb patterns.

This research fills the gap left by previous studies by providing a direct comparison between English regular and irregular verbs and their Japanese counterparts, focusing on the past tense forms. Unlike earlier works, this study examines the number and characteristics of both regular and irregular verbs in English and Japanese, providing a quantifiable comparison that helps bridge the gap between the two languages in terms of verb conjugation patterns.

The objective of this research is to identify the similarities and differences between the two languages. The findings of this study are expected to provide useful information for teachers and learners of both Japanese and English.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

In this study, a qualitative contrastive analysis approach was employed to examine the past tense forms of verbs in both English and Japanese. This method was used to compare and contrast the conjugation patterns of past tense verbs in the two languages. The purpose of using this approach was to highlight key differences and similarities that could help language learners better understand how English and Japanese express past actions. By applying this contrastive approach, the researcher aimed to provide clear insights into the distinct ways in which both languages handled verb conjugation in the past tense.

For data collection, the researcher used library research and reference analysis from various reliable linguistic sources, such as grammar books, dictionaries, and linguistic corpora. The procedure involved reviewing relevant literature and sources to identify and categorize past tense forms in both languages. The data were then analyzed by selecting pertinent verb forms, classifying them as regular or irregular, and comparing their conjugation patterns. To ensure

reliability, the researcher cross-referenced the data and maintained consistency in categorization to produce valid and robust findings.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Definition**

#### ***Analysis of linguistic***

According to David B. Analysis: Ana – Up , through . lysis. a loosening. Break up of any whole into its parts so as to find out their nature, function, etc.. WM Collins states that Analysis: Linguistic, the use of word order together with word function to express syntactic relations in a language, as opposed to the use of inflection. George Ostler Analysis : detailed examination; ascertaining of elements or structure of substance. They made a detailed analysis of the problem

#### ***Contrastive of language***

According to Fisiak (1981:1) Contrastive languages may roughly be defined as sub discipline linguistics concerned with the comparison of two or more languages or subsystems of language in order to determine both the differences and similarities between them.

William T. Mc Leond Contrast: Verb (1) to distinguish or be distinguished by comparison of unlike or opposite qualities. n (2) Distinction by comparison of opposite or dissimilar things, qualities. (3) a person or thing showing differences when compared with another.

David B. Guralnik Contrastive : To compare so as to point out the differences; set off against one other.

Helen Mary Petter (1980:361) Contrast: (v) Set (two things, so as to show their difference on comparison with.

### **Verb**

#### ***English***

The verb is the most complex part of speech. Its varying arrangements with nouns determine the different kinds of sentences – statement, question, commands, exclamations. Like the noun, the verb has the grammatical properties of person and number. So before we go on talking so far about the verb, let us see some definition of verb as below

Worring (1968:14) : A verb is a word that expresses an action or a state of being. There are three kinds of verbs: action verbs, linking verbs, and auxiliary verbs. According to Harry A Green : A verb is that makes statement about persons, things or ideas by showing (a) something does or (b) something exist. And Alan Evison (1989:416) : A verb : Word showing what a persons or thing does or is.

Actually verb simply shows an action or existence and condition. Verbs are often the most important word in the sentence. It will be misunderstood without a verb. The easiest way to recognize verbs are those which show action.

#### ***Japanese***

Nomura (1992 :158) Doushi (verb) is a word that expresses an activity, existence or condition of thing. Doushi can undergo of changing and can become predicate itself .

The basic Japanese word order is Subject Object Verb. Subject and object are usually marked by particles which come after the word. Doushi (verbs) are conjugated to show tenses. Doushi (verb) in Japanese are rigidly constrained to the end of clauses in what is known as the predicate position or verbs always constrained to the sentence – final position, except rhetorical and poetic usage.

## **Past Verb**

### ***English***

There are many definition of past verb according to linguistics experts.

Lavel green (1987 : 290) states that : The past tense show an action or state of being completed in the past

### ***Japanese***

The past tense is used to express the past. It is very similar in conjugation to the ~te form. Most of the past tenses are formed by replacing “te” with “ta” .

Generally, Ta form is used for expressing last fact or the action has done. But sometime means the present, for example : 分(わ)かりました (wakarimashita) means that I understand, 困(こま)った(komatta): it problems, ありました (arimashita) : There is, etc.

Also there is among other things indicate that kinds of verb can be divided into three parts (Shimizu, 2000 : 45). Jidoushi, Tadoushi, Shodoushi.

(a) 自動詞 = じどうし (Jidoushi, Intransitive verbs)

This verb doesn't influence another people or things. For example:

aku 開(あ)く ( intransitive) “something” open

tsuku つ(つ)く ( intransitive) “something” turn on

他動詞 = たどうし (Tadoushi, Transitive verbs)

This verb means that can influence another people or things for example:

akeru 開(あ)ける (transitive) open something

tsukeru つ(つ)ける ( transitive) turn on something

Tadousho and jidoushi : The following is a list of some commonly used tadoushi with their counterpart jidoushi. In using tadoushi, bear in mind that this requires an object as “some action (tadoushi) is done to something or somebody (object). While the jidoushi implies “something happens” (jidoushi)

しよ動詞 (Shodooshi)

This verb considers the speaker, it can not be changed into passive and causative. Include kanou doushi (potencial verb) even, beside kinds of verb above (Jidoushi, tadoushi, kanoo doushi) . Terada Takanao (1984: 81-82) adds fukugo doushi, hasiego toshite no doushi and hojo doushi.

## **Usage Past Verb**

### **English**

#### **a. Regular Verb**

These verb are called regular verb because if we know the basic form of such verbs, we can predict all its other forms by used the rule.

The past verb form of a regular verb in English commonly is formed by simply adding –ed to base form, As the example : ask-asked

When a regular verb ends in –e add only –d after the verb. As the example : provide - provided

When a regular verb ends in –y to –i and add –ed. As the example: Notify - Notified

For regular verb end in –y precede by a vowel, a changing is not made. Add only -ed after the base form, As the example: Betray - Betrayed

When a regular verb ends with a single consonant precede by a single stressed vowel, double the consonant before adding the –ed, As the example : drop - dropped

When the regular verbs end -l preceded by a vowel, double the consonant –l before adding –ed, As the example :propel- propelled.

If the regular verbs ends consonant –l preceded by two vowels, double consonant is not made. Add only ed, As the example sail –sailed.

When two syllables regular verbs end consonant and preceded by a vowel and the stress comes to the second syllable. Double the consonant and adding –ed, As the example: permit – permitted

But if there are two vowels precedes a consonant of the regular verbs, it can not be double although its stress comes to the second syllable, just add –ed only, As the example: repair – repaired.

When two syllables regular verbs end consonant and preceded by a vowel, and its stress at the first syllable the consonant is not change, only adding -ed, As the example: suffer – suffered.

If a regular verb ends consonant –c preceded by a vowel, consonant -c has to be added consonant -k before adding –ed, As the example:picnic - picnicked.

When a verb ending unstressed vowel, followed by m/me, double m/me before adding-ed, As the example: program – programmed.

When a verb ending unstressed vowel, followed by consonant –p double the consonant -p before adding -d, As the example : handicap – handicapped.

The verb ending in an unstressed vowel, followed by –g, double the consonant -g before adding –ed, As the example: zigzag – zigzagged.

#### **b. Irregular**

Green, 1985 : 360. The past tense of other verbs is shown by a change of spelling. These verbs are called irregular verbs.

Irregular verbs are those verbs that fall outside the standard patterns of the conjugation in the language in which they occur.

Irregular past verb are divided into seven classes, according to some criteria, all are : suffixes, variant of vowel, and the voicing. Those classes of verb are.

- (1). Class 1 indicate that the verb uses suffixes but the voicing is variable V-ed1and V-ed2 are identical and three is vowel identity in all parts, e.g. : burn - burnt

- (2). Class 2 has a past suffix –ed in past tense and two alternatives –ed participle suffixes, one alveolar and the nasal. All verb have vowel identity although some verbs also have alternative forms, e.g. : hew – hewed.
- (3). Class 3 the suffix is used but voicing is variable V-ed1 and V-ed2 are identical and there is change of base vowel e.g. : flee- fled
- (4). Class 4, V-ed1 and V-ed2 differ in practically all cases, the letter has a nasal suffix. there is range of base vowel changes, e.g. :steal- stole.
- (5). Class 5, all three parts V, V-ed1 and V-ed2 are identical no suffix or change of the base vowel, e.g. : bet - bet
- (6). Class 6 has identity V-ed1 and V-ed2, has no suffix but has a change of the base vowel, e.g. : hold - held
- (7). Class 7 has no suffix in all principle V, V-ed1 and V-ed2 are different of a base fowl, e.g. : begin – began Japanese

Lexically, nearly every verb in Japanese is a member of exactly one of the following tree regular conjugation groups.

### Japanese

#### a. Regular

#### 五段動詞 = ごだんどうし (Godan Doushi, 5-Row Group)

These verb are called regular Godan Doushi or 5-Row Group verb because if we known the base form of such verbs, we can predict all its other forms by used the rule.

- a) When the infinitive of regular verb ends ~ku (〜く) character, it's changed ~ki (〜き) and add ~mashita (〜ました) is called formal form. If the non formal of past form of verb ends ~ku (〜く), it's changed ~ita (〜いた).

Table 1. Regular Verb Changes

英語 (English)	辞書けい (jisho kei)	-ました形 (-mashita kei)	-た形 (-ta kei) Non formal
Write	書く Kaku	書き ました Ka ki <i>mashita</i>	書いた Ka ita

- b) When the infinitive of regular verb ends ~u (〜う) character, it's changed ~i (〜い) and add ~mashita (〜ました) is called formal form. If the non formal of past form of verb ends ~u (〜う), it's changed ~tta (〜った). As the example of the table below:

Table 2. Regular Verb Changes

英語 (English)	辞書けい (jisho kei)Non formal	-ました形 (-mashita kei)	-た形 (-ta kei) Non formal
Buy	買う ka u	買い ました Ka I <i>mashita</i>	買った Ka tta

- c) When the infinitive of regular verb ends ~ru (〜る) character, it's changed ~ri (〜り) and add ~mashita (〜ました) is called formal form. If the nonformal of past form of verb ends ~ru (〜る), it's changed ~tta (〜った). As the example of the table below :

Table 3. Regular Verb Changes

英語 (English)	辞書けい (jisho kei)Non formal	-ました形 (-mashita kei)	-た形 (-ta kei) Non formal
Run	走る Hashi ru	走り <b>ました</b> Hashi ri <b>mashita</b>	走った Hashi tta

- d) When the infinitive of regular verb ends ~tsu (〜つ) character, it's changed ~chi (〜ち) and add ~mashita (〜ました) is called formal form. If the non formal of past form of verb ends ~tsu (〜つ), it's changed ~tta (〜った). As the example of the table below:

Table 4. Regular Verb Changes

S英語 (English)	辞書けい (jisho kei)Non formal	-ました形 (-mashita kei)	-た形 (-ta kei) Non formal
Wait	待 っ Ma tsu	待 ち <b>ました</b> Ma chi mashita	待 った Ma tta

- e) When the infinitive of regular verb ends ~bu (〜ぶ) character, it's changed ~bi (〜び) and add ~mashita (〜ました) is called formal form. If the non formal of past form of verb ends ~bu (〜ぶ), it's changed ~nda (〜んだ). As the example of the table below:

Table 5. Regular Verb Changes

英語 (English)	辞書けい (jisho kei) Non formal	-ました形 (-mashita kei)	-た形 (-ta kei) Non formal
Fly	飛 ぶ To bu	飛 び <b>ました</b> To bi <b>mashita</b>	飛 んだ To nda

- f) When the infinitive of regular verb ends ~mu (〜む) character, it's changed ~mi (〜み) and add ~mashita (〜ました) is called formal form. If the non formal of past form of verb ends ~mu (〜む), it's changed ~nda (〜んだ). As the example of the table below :

Table 6. Regular Verb Changes

英語 (English)	辞書けい (jisho kei) Non formal	-ました形 (-mashita kei) Formal Past form	-た形 (-ta kei) Non formal
Read	読 む Yo mu	読 み <b>ました</b> Yo mi <b>mashita</b>	読 んだ Yo nda

- g) When the infinitive of regular verb ends ~nu (〜ぬ) character, it's changed ~ni (〜に) and add ~mashita (〜ました) is called formal form. If the non formal of past form of verb ends ~nu (〜ぬ), it's preceded ~nda (〜んだ). As the example of the table below :

Table 7. Regular Verb Changes

英語 (English)	辞書けい (jisho kei)Non formal	-ました形 (-mashita kei) Formal Past form	-た形 (-ta kei) Non formal
Die	死ぬ Shi nu	死に <b>ました</b> Shi ni mashita	死 んだ Shi nda

- h) When the infinitive of regular verb ends ~gu (〜ぐ) character, it's changed ~gi (〜ぎ) and add ~mashita (〜ました) is called formal form. If the non formal of past form of verb ends ~gu (〜ぐ), it's changed ~ida (〜いだ). As the example of the table below :

Table 8. Regular Verb Changes

英語 (English)	辞書けい(jisho kei) Non formal	-ました形 (-mashita kei) Formal Past form	-た形 (-ta kei) Non formal
Swim	泳ぐ Oyo gu	泳ぎました Oyo gi <i>mashita</i>	泳いだ Oyo ida

- i) When the infinitive of regular verb ends ~su (〜す) character, it's changed ~shi (〜し) and add ~mashita (〜ました) is called formal form. If the non formal of past form of verb ends ~su (〜す), it's changed ~shita (〜した). As the example of the table below :

Table 9. Regular Verb Changes

英語 (English)	辞書けい (jisho kei) Non formal	-ました形 (-mashita kei) Formal Past form	-た形 (-ta kei) Non formal
Speak	話す Hana su	話しました Hana shi <i>mashita</i>	話した Hana shita

- j) \*When the infinitive of regular verb ends ~ku (〜く) character, it's changed ~ki (〜き) and add ~mashita (〜ました) is called formal form. The nonformal of past form of verb ends ~ku (〜く), it's preceded ~tta (〜った). As the example of the table below :

Table 10. Regular Verb Changes

英語 (English)	辞書けい jisho kei) Non formal	-ました形 (mashita kei) Formal Past form	-た形 (-ta kei) Non formal
Go	*行く I ku	*行きました (formal) ikimashita	*行った(nonformal) i tta

\*Exceptional iku to make non formal past form. Final character ~ku to ~tta (double consonant ). The rule of this form only for itself .

1. 四一段動詞 =しもいちだんどうし (Shimo ichidan doushi, Lower 1-row group). The carasteristic of these regular verbs end with ~iru sound, so ~ru syllable is changed ~mashita (〜ました) is called formal form. If the non formal of past form of verb just add ~shita (〜した). As the example of the table below :

Table 11. Regular Verb Changes

英語 (English)	辞書けい(jisho kei) Non formal	-ました形 (-mashita kei) Formal Past form	-た形 (-ta kei) Non forma
Get up	起きる Okiru	起きました Okimashita	起きた Okita



## 2. 一段動詞 = かみいちだんどうし (Kami Ichidan doushi, Upper 1- row group)

The carasteristic of these regular verbs end with ~eru sound, so ~ru syllable is changed ~mashita (~ました) is called formal form. If the non formal of past form of verb just add ~shita (した). As the example of the table below :

Table 12. Regular Verb Changes

英語 (English)	辞書けい (jisho kei) Non formal	-ました形 (-mashita kei) Formal Past form	-た形 (-ta kei) Non formal
Eat	食べる Taberu	食べました Tabemashita	食べた Tabeta

**Historical note:** classical Japanese had Upper and Lower 1 group but most of to days becoming ichidan doushi. Since verbs have migrated across groups in the history of the language, conjugation of classical verbs is not predictable from a knowledge of modern Japanese alone.

The researcher takes conclusion that kami/shimo ichidan (classical) or ichidan doushi (modern) majority of verbs which in their dictionary form end in ~ru preceded e or i . It's easy to change ~mashita and ~ta form, just dropping the final ~ru.

**Irregular**

Irregular past verb in Japanese Language only consist of two verb, there is no other accept them.

*Sa-group* which has only one member. In Japanese grammars these words are classified as (sa-hen), an abbreviation of *sa-gyou henkaku katsuyou* (sa-row irregular conjugation). The infinitive or dictionary form of this kind verb has the rule itself, there is no definition to make conjugation of this irregular verb. It has to memorized base on the rule below :

Table 13. Irregular Verb Changes

英語 (English)	辞書けい (jisho kei) Non formal	-ました形 (-mashita kei) Formal Past form	-た形 (-ta kei) Non formal
Come	来る Kuru	来ました Kimashita	来た Kita

*Ka-group* which also has one member. The Japanese name of this class is *ka-gyou henkaku katsuyou* or simply *ka-hen* (ka-row irregular conjugation). The second kind of irregular past form of verb has also rule itself, there is no definition to make conjugation of this irregular verb. This verb can make a noun become a verb by adding it after noun :

Table 14. Irregular Verb Changes

英語 (English)	辞書けい (jisho kei) Non formal	-ました形 (-mashita kei) Formal Past form	-た形 (-ta kei) Non formal
Do	する (Suru)	しました shimashita	した shita
Playing - football	サッカーをする Sakkaa wo suru	サッカーをしました sakkaa wo shimashita	サッカーをした sakkaa wo shita

Sakka (サッカー) means that noun, become a verb by adding ~suru (する) or past form of verb by adding ~shita (~した).

## CONCLUSION

The study concluded that English and Japanese share both similarities and differences in their verb conjugation systems. Both languages have regular and irregular verbs that follow systematic conjugation patterns, such as the use of *-ed* endings in English and *-tta* or *-nda* endings in Japanese for regular past forms. However, differences arise in the number of conjugation types—five in English and eleven in Japanese—and in the treatment of irregular verbs, with English having far more irregular forms than Japanese. While English primarily adds *-ed* to form the past tense, Japanese verbs often require dropping the infinitive ending before conjugation. To deepen understanding, it is recommended that learners of both languages practice comparative analysis during instruction and explore the cultural and historical factors that influence verb development. Future research should further investigate the cognitive and pedagogical effects of teaching contrastive verb conjugation across languages to improve bilingual learning outcomes.

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