〔論　　文〕

A Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis of Japanese EFL Learners' Use of Let-Causatives

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Abstract

This study presents a qualitative contrastive analysis of let-causatives produced by native English speakers and Japanese EFL learners using the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English（ICNALE）to identify signs of first-language（L１）interference. It classifies the constructions into nine semantic and pragmatic categories. The study found that native speakers use this construction more frequently than learners. The results suggest that while let-causatives describing permission and the construction "let's do Z" as an invitation are acquired readily by learners, it is more challenging for them to acquire constructions that express tolerance and idiomatic expressions（e.g., "let live"）. Learners also prefer to use "let" as a means to sequence written language（e.g., "let me start"）, are reluctant to use let-causatives as hesitation markers（e.g., "let me see"）, and appear to internalise some of these constructions as parallel with the Japanese *(s) ase* morpheme and the hortative. Several instances of the pragmatic category of *assertion*（e.g. "let's be honest"）were found in the native-speaker corpus but none in the learner corpus. The study suggests future research on hesitation markers in Japanese EFL English and English expressions of assertion produced by L１ speakers of other languages.

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Introduction

Constructions such as causatives can be influenced by the learner's first language（L１）during new language acquisition. Differences in the use of make-causatives observed in previous research（Teshome, 2024）have prompted research on let-causatives. This current study compares Japanese EFL learners' use of these constructions with that of native speakers using the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English（ICNALE）to identify any signs of L１ interference. It mainly uses the semantic categories defined by Wierzbicka（2006）and compares the frequency and context of each category in the Japanese learner（JPN）and English native speaker（ENS）corpora of the ICNALE. It also discusses possible similarities and underlying semantic restrictions of parallel Japanese constructions with similar meanings, such as the *(s) ase* morpheme and hortative.

The paper will first introduce the semantic and pragmatic framework and previous research. It will then present the data and method, followed by an overview of the results while discussing their possible interpretations. It will finish with concluding remarks. First, I would like to present the framework used in this current study.

Theoretical framework and previous research

A framework for the let-causative categorisation has been developed by Wierzbicka (2006). Wierzbicka argues that the English "let" has a wide range of meaning due to its grammaticalisation as a means of avoiding giving orders (Wierzbicka, 2006, p. 174). She points to the cultural significance of the construction's function to express "the ideas of 'refraining from doing something.'" She ties this idea to modern values in the English-speaking world of "noninterference," "nonimposition," and "negative freedom" (Berlin, 1969; Wierzbicka, 1997, chapter 3; Wierzbicka, 2006, pp. 186–7).

Wierzbicka divides the common function of all let-causative subconstructions (i.e., categories) as follows:

X let Y do Z. =
a. X knew that if X didn't do (say) something to Y
Y would do Z
b. at the same time X knew that if X did(said) something to Y
Y would not do Z
c. X didn't do (say) anything to Y

(Wierzbicka, 2006, pp. 183–4)

She then divides let-causatives into the following categories (Wierzbicka, 2006, pp. 187–98):

a) Let of *permission*
This subconstruction is used with verbs that describe an intentional act, such as, "Let him go to the party."
b) Let of *tolerance*
This category can be used with "frozen expressions" such as "let her be" and "let her live" and is typically used in the imperative. It differs from category a) in that it implies some possible disapproval or disagreement by the listener.
c) Let of *shared information*
This subconstruction includes phrases such as "let me know."
d) *Let me do Z for you* (offering to perform a service)
e) *Let's do Z*
This is the only category involving the form "let's," as laid out by Wierzbicka, who describes it as a reflection of "an ethos valuing voluntary cooperation of free and equal individuals" (Wierzbicka, 2006, p. 195).
f) Let of *cooperative dialogue*
Examples such as "let me explain" or "let me start with" demonstrate that it is usually used with a verb of speech or sequence.
g) Let of *cooperative interaction*
This subconstruction expresses the intention of talking to a third party of concern to both the speaker and the listener, such as in "let me talk to him."
h) Let of *cooperative thinking*
Constructions such as "let me see" can be used to interrupt an interaction and pause for a moment.

Examining the data, I have found that constructions such as "let's be honest" and "let's not forget" would fall into the "let's do Z" category within this framework. However, they do not seem to have that function as they do not represent an invitation involving the listener. A possible solution can be found in a pragmatic framework. Washino (2023, p. 205) points to the "assertive function" of "let," resembling that of a sentential adverb. She gives the following example from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA):

(1) Let's be frank, Lindsey Graham is one of the top five or 10 senators.
(SPOK: NBC Meet the Press 2014)

Referring to De Clerck (2004), Washino describes the "assertive function" of "let's" with expressions such as "let's be real" as a way to comment on the listener's previous utterance and aim at modifying it (Washino,

2023, p. 206).

This current study, therefore, adds the following category to its analysis:

i) Let of *assertion*

Washino also argues that "let's face it" and "let's be honest" differ from "let's say" due to the function of the last expression as a hesitation marker (Washino, 2023, p. 206). This function of "let's say" makes it fit the (h) category.

Ikegami (1981, p. 189) describes let-causatives as a negative causative relation W NOT CAUSE [NOT S]. He gives a Japanese example with the *(s) ase* morpheme, which can also express a make-causative. In (2), the construction means "not do it so that they cannot play":

(2) *Asob-ase-te-oku*
Play-CAUSE-GER-OKU.NPST
"Let (someone) play."

Kuroda (1979) and Shibatani (1976, 1973) distinguish between two types of causatives, Shibatani labelling them as "regular" and "permissive." They can be distinguished by the use of the *o-* particle and *ni-* particle, respectively, as shown in (3):

(3)

(a) *Tarō-ga Jirō-wo ik-ase-ta.*
Taro-NOM Jiro-ACC go-CAUSE-PST
"Taro caused Jiro to go."

(b) *Tarō-ga Jirō-ni ik-ase-ta.*
Taro-NOM Jiro-DAT go-CAUSE-PST
"Taro caused Jiro to go."

Both examples are translated into English as "caused to." Shigemori Bučar (2015, p. 194) sheds some light on the possible ambiguity of the "permissive" construction in (3b) with the example in (4):

(4) *Haha-ga Tarō-ni ringo-wo tabe-sase-ta.*
mother-NOM Taro-DAT apple-ACC eat-CAUSE-PST
"Mother made Taro eat an apple. (=Mother fed Taro with an apple.)/Mother let Taro eat an apple."

This implies that the Japanese *(s) ase* morpheme operates on a spectrum which can be expressed by both make-causatives (i.e., "regular") and let-causatives (i.e., "permissive") in English. If any signs of language interference are found in the data, such ambiguity may account for an overlap between these two construction types in Japanese EFL learner English production.

A different feature of Japanese, semantically similar to the English "let's do Z" constructions, is the hortative, formed with the *-ō* suffix and shown in the following example given by Irwin and Zisk (2019, p. 59):

(5) tai-ni ik-*ō*
Thailand-DIR go-HOR
"Let's go to Thailand."

Previous research has shown differences in passivisation and causativisation between L1 English speakers and Japanese EFL learners (Teshome, 2023, 2024). The research indicated that Japanese EFL learners use the passive causative "made" in a broader range of contexts, possibly due to structures in their L1 and a different conceptualisation of causativity (Teshome, 2023). It was also suggested that the make-causative overall may be conceptualised as having a wider range of uses (Teshome, 2023, 2024). This study examines the range of let-causatives used by learners and compares it with that of native speakers, posing the following research question:

What are the indications that differences in the use of let-causatives by Japanese EFL learners from native speakers are due to L1 interference?

Data and Method

This current study uses the JPN and ENS corpora from the ICNALE developed by Ishikawa (2023). The corpora are made from texts and speeches on the topics, "It is important for college students to have a part-time job" and "Smoking should be completely banned at all the restaurants in the country." They also contain spoken dialogues. The ENS and JPN corpora contain 230, 082 and 368, 590 tokens and 7, 739 and 7, 097 types, respectively, meaning token-type ratios of 0. 0336 and 0. 0196. The size of the corpora led to a relatively small

number of occurrences of let-causatives, calling for a qualitative rather than quantitative examination.

The data was examined using the AntConc application developed by Anthony (2022). All occurrences of all forms of let-causatives in each corpus were separated into their respective semantic/pragmatic categories and examined in context using the "File view" function.

Results

There were 91 occurrences of "let" in the ENS corpus and 33 in the JPN corpus. There was one occurrence of the form "lets" and none in JPN. The form "letting" appeared six times in ENS and twice in JPN. The higher number in the smaller ENS corpus indicates an overall preference for the form by native speakers.

The occurrences of all forms of "let" in the ENS and JPN corpora are shown in Tables 1 a and 1 b, and their distribution is visually represented in Figures 1 a and 1 b, respectively. There were no instances of "let me do Z for you" in either corpus, presumably due to this construction's practical application, to which written texts and spoken monologues were not conducive and for which none of the role-play situations created the need.

Therefore, this category is not shown in the tables and graphs.

Furthermore, idiomatic expressions with a function different from the let-causative were found in both corpora. There were four occurrences of the phrase "let alone" in the ENS corpus and one in the JPN corpus. There was also a total of four occurrences of the idiomatic expressions "let go of," "let out," "let off", and the phrase "let the jobs to people" found in the ENS corpus. These expressions were excluded from the analysis.

Turning to each category of let-causatives, let of permission constituted 46.88% of let-causatives in the JPN and 39.53% in the ENS corpus. One example from each corpus is shown in (6)a and (6)b. After each example, file information will be given. The meanings of the abbreviations will be explained when relevant.

Table 1 a

"Let" Occurrences in ENS

Permission	30
Tolerance	3
Shared information	3
Let's do Z	11
Cooperative dialogue	9
Cooperative interaction	1
Cooperative thinking	27
Assertion	4

Table 1 b

"Let" Occurrences in JPN

Permission	11
Tolerance	0
Shared information	3
Let's do Z	6
Cooperative dialogue	6
Cooperative interaction	0
Cooperative thinking	2
Assertion	0

(6)

(a) Let both smokers and non smokers enjoy their meals.
(W_ENS_SMK_XX 1 .txt)

(b) So if restaurants surely think so, they must ban smoking to let customers enjoy its delicious food.
(W_JPN_SMK_B 2 _ 0 .txt)

These two examples resemble due to the common topic of smoking in restaurants (hence the "SMK" in the file name). Both speaker groups used the construction similarly in other situations, too, indicating little or no L 1 interference when using it. Nevertheless, one noticeable occurrence was a self-correction by a learner shown in (7):

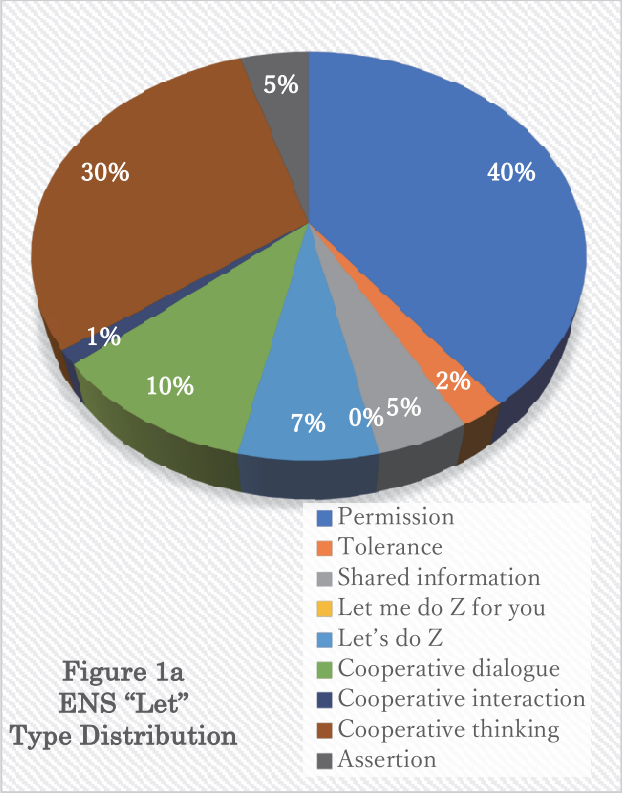

Figure 1a
ENS "Let"
Type Distribution

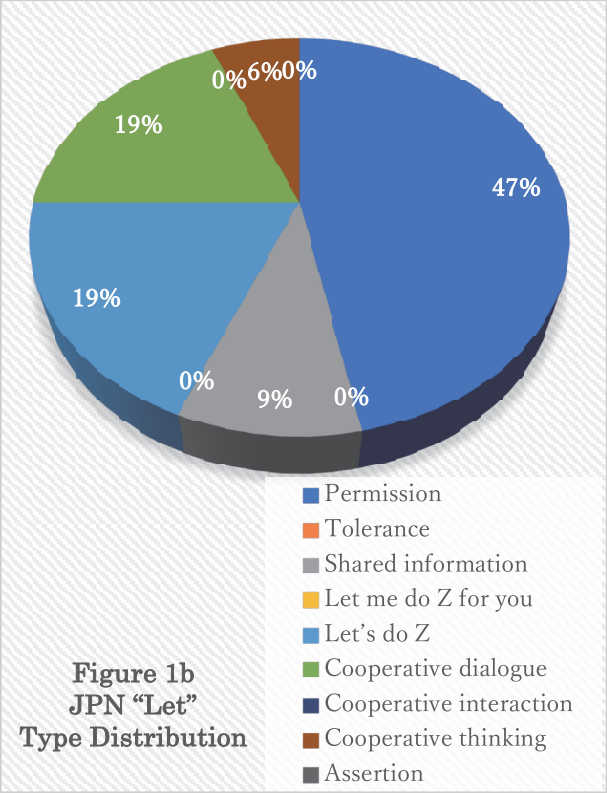

Figure 1b
JPN "Let"
Type Distribution

(7) I think uh when we - - - we became worker, we have to make a PowerPoint and we have use Excel and Words to make some sentence, so we - - - we have to be used to using a computer.
Uh. Uh. For example uh making uh letting uh students to uh make some reports more often and more longer report.
(A20_JPN_PTJ_PD_QA_merge.txt)

The self-correction in this example may indicate that the speaker wanted to use a make-causative but, to avoid repetition chose a let-causative instead. This may reflect on a wider range of make-causatives used by Japanese L1 EFL learners observed in previous research (Teshome, 2024). In other words, the speaker may not have been sure which expression to use and, at first, opted for the conceptually more readily accessible make-causative before becoming aware of the repetitiveness of "making students make" and switching to the let-causative. While neither construction is necessarily unnatural, this self-correction and possible interchangeability of these two constructions evoke the Japanese *(s) ase* morpheme's ambiguity.

There were two occurrences of let of tolerance in the ENS corpus and none in the JPN corpus. One example in the ENS corpus was the frozen expression "let live." The other one is also an imperative: "Let that sort itself out." While two examples are too few to draw any conclusions, the fact that no learners used the expression may be a sign of a different perception of phrases such as "let live" consistent with Wierzbicka's observations on its typical social use in anglophone societies to avoid the semblance of imposition. However, it may also be a sign that learners simply have not acquired these idiomatic expressions at that stage to use them as readily as native speakers.

As for let of shared information, the ENS corpus contained the combinations "let them understand," "let the bureau know," "lets students know," and "letting both employees and customers know." The JPN corpus contained the phrase "let us know" twice and "let students know" once. All these utterances were made by students at B1 level or higher, suggesting that this category may be somewhat challenging to internalise but still approachable as a means of expression. However, a closer look reveals an unnatural use of the phrase, as seen in (8):

(8) For example, greeting, keeping on time and having good manners are necessary for all jobs. Part time jobs let students know these things.
(W_JPN_PTJ_B 1 _ 1 .txt)

In this example, the phrase does not describe sharing information but attaining skills and habits, which is a shift from its typical use. Furthermore, the two instances of "let us know" are reiterations of the phrase during spoken dialogue. These findings imply that learners are more reluctant to use this construction than native speakers.

The subconstruction "let's do Z" was used eight times in the ENS corpus (9. 3%) and six times in the JPN corpus (18. 75%). Of the three instances of "let's go" in the ENS corpus, two were means to continue the conversation rather than an invitation to move. They are, therefore, included in the cooperative dialogue category. Other examples included calls to collective action such as "let's have equality," "let's make the world a safer place," and "let us make them available." Another example is the idiomatic "let's go," meaning "let's do an internship." Only in one example does the speaker invite the listener to do something in the real world: "Let's get naked and go skinny dipping."

This contrasts with how learners used "let's do Z." One phrase used with a speech act, "let's discuss," is in a closing sentence and does not have the discourse function that would make it fit the description of cooperative dialogue. All the expressions are used in the typical way, suggesting an invitation similar to the Japanese hortative, such as "let's enjoy" or "let's try." This use suits Wierzbicka's description of this group better than its common use in the ENS corpus. Perhaps rather than interference, this may be a sign of an ease of acquiring this structure in its typical way, possibly due to its similarity to the Japanese hortative.

In the ENS corpus, nine occurrences (10. 34%) of "let" fall into the cooperative dialogue category. There are six occurrences (18. 75%) in the JPN corpus. Five of the instances in JPN occur in the written section of the corpus, and one in a role-play, where the speaker was about to describe their studies abroad. This indicates that learners use this construction to sequence longer stretches of text and disprefer using it in spontaneous dialogue.

All of the occurrences in JPN were used with the singular "me." Conversely, the ENS corpus contained six instances with the contracted "us" and three with "me." As described above, I laid out my rationale for including some "let's" constructions in this category, and I would like to elaborate with a few examples:

(9)

(a) Let's ask ourselves, what is the ultimate purpose: To make money?
(W_ENS_PTJ_XX 2 .txt)

(b) Uhm − let's refer back to this − this photo here.
(XX 0 _ENS_SMK_PD_QA_merge.txt)

The example in (9)b is from a spoken dialogue, PD in the file name meaning "picture description."

Conversely to JPN, only two occurrences in ENS were found in the written section, indicating that native speakers may use these expressions in a wider range of situations. It can introduce rhetorical questions, such as in (9)a. The utterance in (9)b is an example of expressing the speaker's intention to talk about something or move on to a different topic. The construction has a similar function but is less direct than saying, "I will talk about." The speaker is avoiding overtly imposing their will on the listener.

The only example of the cooperative interaction category in ENS is shown in (10). No examples were found in JPN.

(10) Well that − I guess that could be an option too. Let me go see the counselor about that too.
(XX 0 _ENS_PTJ_RP_Main_merge.txt)

The utterance was made during a role-play (RP). Corpora, which consists largely of monologues and written essays, may have a limited number of examples of this subconstruction because it is typically used in real-world interactions with potential third parties involved. The only opportunities to mimic these would arise in role-plays.

There were 26 occurrences (32. 23%) of cooperative thinking use in the ENS corpus and two (6. 25%) in the

JPN corpus. Both occurrences in JPN are from spoken dialogue sections and are "let's see" used as hesitation markers. At eight and 12 occurrences, respectively, "let's see" and "let me see" are the most common wordings in the ENS corpus. The five occurrences of "let's say" are used as hesitation markers, and one of "let me figure this out." The last one is used as a way for the speaker in a picture description dialogue to organise their thoughts, as seen in (11):

(11) A young man, okay. Well, let me figure this out. A few weeks ago, a man was surfing and he lost his wallet of money, so he – he went to look for a job and he saw a sign which says, staff wanted.
(XX 0 _ENS_PTJ_PD_Main_merge.txt)

This example may shed light on why learners use this category less frequently. The phrasal verb "figure out" needs mental processing to retrieve from the learner's mental lexicon than other hesitation markers. Its very use implies that the speaker is in the middle of a mental process. For a learner, the additional strain of coming up with vocabulary while organising their thoughts can pose an obstacle they prefer to avoid, opting either for simpler lexical items, such as "so" or "well," or non-lexical hesitation markers, such as "um" or "uh." Hesitation markers may be another helpful area for more detailed research.

The final category, let of assertion, only occurred in the ENS corpus. While sentential adverbs may be too complex for learners at this stage, it is also worth considering whether the function of modifying the listener's previous utterance, as suggested by Washino (2023, p. 206), or, more generally, presenting a counter-argument in this "assertive" way is a reflection of a cultural or cognitive difference. Phrases such as "let's be honest" and "let's not forget" found in ENS are used to present either a counter-argument or criticism. It may be useful to compare these constructions across ICNALE corpora other than ENS and JPN to examine whether their use by L 1 speakers of other languages differs from native-speaker use in ways similar to that of Japanese learners. For instance, its infrequent use by L 1 speakers of other languages would indicate it is a characteristic feature of English, rather than L 1 interference, that makes its acquisition difficult. Conversely, if its use is more similar to that of native speakers in corpora other than JPN and ENS, this may suggest that there are semantic, cognitive, or cultural features of Japanese that influence their lack of production by Japanese EFL learners.

Conclusion

This paper examined let-causatives in a native English speaker and Japanese EFL learner corpus. Overall, it appears that possible overlap with the *(s) ase* morpheme or hortative may make it easier for Japanese EFL learners to acquire some types of let-causatives more easily than other ones. Let of permission, "let's do Z," and let of cooperative dialogue represent such constructions. Conversely, learners use expressions of cooperative thinking less, possibly opting for less complex hesitation markers, and appear more reluctant to use expressions of tolerance and assertion, which conceptually stray further from these constructions in their L 1 . However, it is also worth considering the influence of cultural factors in the Anglosphere such as the avoidance of imposition, possibly also reflected by the more frequent use by native speakers than by learners (as opposed to make-causatives). This can be done by examining English produced by L 1 speakers of other languages.

Abbreviation list

ABL – ablative
ACC – accusative
CAUSE – causative
DAT – dative
DIR – direction particle
GER – gerund
HOR – hortative
NOM – nominative
NPST – non-past
OKU – *oku* auxiliary verb
PST – past

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