

Cross-Linguistic Influence on English Causative Constructions: Evidence from Japanese and Russian Learners

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Background: Cross-linguistic influence (CLI) plays an important role in second language acquisition by shaping learners' structural preferences. English causative constructions, such as make somebody do something or get somebody to do something, provide an ideal domain for investigating CLI because they differ both syntactically and semantically, particularly in expressing direct versus indirect causation. Previous research has shown that L2 learners often experience difficulties with English causatives [1,2]. Japanese and Russian differ substantially in how they encode causation: Japanese uses a single causative morphology for direct, indirect, and permissive causation, whereas Russian relies more on direct and lexical causative expressions [1,5]. This study asks whether these typological differences influence learners' choice of English causative constructions.

Method: We plan to conduct a production experiment in which native speakers of Japanese and Russian will produce English sentences describing causative events. The study will include 100 adult participants (50 Japanese speakers and 50 Russian speakers) with English proficiency of B1 or higher according to the CEFR. The stimulus set will consist of 60 generated images, including 30 fillers and 30 target images depicting different causative event types. The experiment will be implemented in PsychoPy. Participants will view an image and describe the depicted event in one English sentence by typing their response on a keyboard. Responses will be coded according to the type of construction produced.

Expected results: Data preprocessing and statistical analyses will be conducted in RStudio using generalized linear mixed-effects models. Fixed effects will include the type of the stimulus and participants' native language, while participants and items will be included as random effects. We hypothesize that learners' first language will significantly influence their choice of English causative constructions. Specifically, due to the broad semantic range of the Japanese morphological causative, Japanese learners may overgeneralize English analytic causative constructions such as make or let. Russian learners, whose L1 more frequently encodes causation lexically, may show greater diversity in lexical causative choices. Overall, the findings are expected to provide further evidence that typological differences between learners' first languages shape constructional preferences during L2 sentence production and contribute to our understanding of cross-linguistic influence in constructional acquisition.

References

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