

If You Know What I Mean: Rendering the Causative in Japanese and Croatian

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Abstract

Japanese causative sentences can oftentimes be ambiguous in their meaning. This especially applies to the *saseru* causative verb form which can be used to convey coercion and permission, amongst other meanings. This research focuses on a survey conducted amongst learners and former learners of Japanese who are native speakers of Croatian, and explores how example *saseru* and *temorau* sentences are translated into Croatian, i.e. how their meaning is expressed in a language that is so vastly different from Japanese. The survey also touches upon the rendition of Croatian sentences into Japanese, and analyses the expressions used by the participants of the survey to express the Japanese causative meaning in Croatian (and *vice versa*). The survey shows the variety of language expressions used in order to transfer a sentence that has a fixed form in Japanese, and what nuances are carried by the individual expressions.

Keywords: Causative, Japanese, Croatian, Survey

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Introduction

Japanese causative morphology, (i.e. the *saseru* causative suffix, and consequently the Japanese causative verb form) can be an obstacle in understanding the meaning of Japanese causative sentences due to its ambiguous nature – the same verb form can be used to express a variety of meanings, the most common being coercion and permission (Fukada, 2010; Kuroda, 1965; Santorini & Heycock, 1988). In English, for example, sentence meaning is unambiguous because coercion can be expressed through the usage of the auxiliary such as ‘make’ (ex. I made my brother fix the fence.) and ‘let’ (ex. I let my sister braid my hair.) (see (Santorini & Heycock, 1988)). Croatian functions in much the same way as English; it does not rely on causative morphology in order to express causation, so a variety of expressions can be used in order to render the causative meaning¹ (Sinčić, 2018; also Glumac, 2015; Kapić, 2020). The problem that arises is the following: as Fukada (2010) discusses, Japanese *saseru* sentences can carry different meanings, so at times there exists an uncertainty regarding the meaning a sentence is used to express. Consequently, how is such a sentence transferred into another language, especially one that uses different grammatical methods to express the same concept?

In general, a causative sentence carries the meaning of somebody of a higher status (causer) either making somebody else of a lower status (causee) perform an action that the causer instigated, or exerting influence over the causee (mental, emotional) (Mauriello, 2017). Causation in Japanese is commonly expressed through the causative verbal form (*saseru* causative verb – *ikasaseru*). This research focuses on the most common way of expressing causation in Japanese, the *saseru* causative sentences, and touches upon sentences employing the *temorau* benefactive construction. Although lexical causation is also one of the ways of expressing causative meaning in Japanese and other languages, it is out of scope of this research. Most commonly, the causative sentence is associated with the coercive meaning (in which the causee does not want to carry out the action) or permissive (in which case the causee is willing to perform the action) (Fukada, 2010:28-29). When talking about coercion, *temorau* sentences can also be used to express coercive meaning, similar to that of *saseru* coercive sentences (Mauriello, 2017; Wu, 2020; 李仙花, 2001). However, in the case of *temorau* coercive sentences, their causer is not necessarily of a higher status than their causee, and expresses milder, “polite coercion” as noted by Mauriello (2017:104). An example of coercive meaning expressed by *saseru* and *temorau* sentences is as follows:

Example

- 1) 母が子どもに部屋を掃除させる。(coercion)

*Haha ga kodomo ni heya o sōji saseru*².

- 2) 母は子どもに部屋を掃除してもらおう。(milder coercion)

Haha wa kodomo ni heya o sōji shitemorau.

The Mum makes the child clean the (their) room.

¹ The factitive is also discussed when talking about causation (Kapić, 2020; Sinčić, 2018).

² Hepburn romanization style is used throughout this paper.

Although the meaning expressed is the same, the nuance in each sentence is different – sentence 1a) is considered more forceful than sentence 1b).

As mentioned above, previous research has already discussed the ambiguity of Japanese *saseru* sentences and the possible meanings they can be used to express, which connects to the aim of this research – how are Japanese causative sentences transferred into another language (in this case Croatian) ?

Unlike Japanese, Croatian uses a variety of means to express causation, since it has no predominant verbal form associated with the causative meaning. Although causative morphology does exist, it is limited, and causation is predominantly expressed lexically or through periphrastic phrases. Since Croatian does not have a causative verbal form in the sense of the Japanese *saseru* causative verbal form, a coercive sentence such as

Example 2

1) 先生が子どもに作文を書かせる。

Sensei ga kodomo ni sakubun o kakaseru.

The teacher makes the children write an essay.

can be rendered into Croatian as both:

1) Učitelj tjera djecu da pišu sastav. (make+write) coercive

The teacher makes the children write an essay.

2) Učitelj dopušta djeci da pišu sastav. (let/allow+write) permissive

The teacher lets the children write an essay.

The reason why both interpretations are acceptable is due to the fixedness of the causative form and its ambiguity; although the sentence is coercive, that is known to the author of the sentence, but not necessarily to the reader, making both interpretations viable. Since interpretations may vary, a single causative sentence can be expressed in different ways in Croatian thanks to the variety of linguistic means available.

Literature on the causative tends to firstly introduce it as coercive, so if a non-native Japanese speaker were to associate the *saseru* causative sentence with the meaning of coercion, this could be considered logical. However, whether that is so, and in which way that meaning is transferred into Croatian is a question that this survey aims to clarify. This research aims to highlight which linguistic methods were preferred by the participants of the survey for the expression of causative sentence meaning, and discusses the meaning of expressions used. Although the main focus is on Japanese example sentences and their Croatian translations, Croatian example sentences and their Japanese translations will also be briefly mentioned. Furthermore, through this survey the difference in the nuance of coercion between *saseru* and *temorau* sentences is tested to see whether there is any difference in expression between the two forms.

1. The Survey

The survey this research is based on is an online survey conducted amongst native Croatian speakers who are either currently studying Japanese or have experience studying the Japanese language (i.e. former students) from two universities in Croatia. The survey was conducted from late December 2020 to mid-January 2021, and had a total of 34 survey participants, ranging from 1st year undergraduate students to master's course students, and students who have completed their Japanese course; 16 participants had experience studying Japanese before enrolling into university/their Japanese course, while 18 participants had no prior Japanese language learning experience. Most participants have not taken an Japanese proficiency exam (JLPT - Japanese-Language Proficiency Test; 6 participants have sat the exam), but the majority of participants (15 participants) judged their Japanese language proficiency level as B1 (Independent user - according to the CEFR³ language proficiency scale).

The survey consisted of 14 example sentences that the participants were asked to translate into Croatian (9 sentences) and Japanese (5 sentences). The survey also included questions about the participants' Japanese language study experience and their proficiency level, as well as some general questions about the Japanese causative and their opinion/understanding of it.

2. Results

The example sentences in the survey are summarised in Table 1 below:

No.	Example sentence	English translation
1	彼女が彼氏に箱を運ばせた。 <i>Kanojo ga kareshi ni hako wo hakobaseta.</i>	The girl had the/her boyfriend carry the box.
2	私は犬を公園につれて行き、走らせた。 <i>Watashi wa inu o kōen ni tsurete iki, hashiraseta.</i>	I took the dog to the park and let him run.
3	父は洗車場(せんしゃじょう)で車を洗車(せんしゃ)させた。 <i>Chichi wa senshajō de kuruma o sensha saseta.</i>	Dad had his/the car washed at the car wash.
4	おいしそうな缶詰(かんづめ)を買って、ねこに食べさせる。 <i>Oishisōna kanzume o katte, neko ni tabe saseru.</i>	I bought a can of food that looked good, and I fed it to the cat.
5	春の暖(あたた)かさが桜を咲かせます。 <i>Haru no atatakasa ga sakura o sakasemasu.</i>	The spring warmth makes the sakura bloom.
6	妹の声がきれいだから、私の好きな	My younger sister has a lovely voice

³ Council of Europe Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions>

	歌を少し歌ってもらった。 <i>Imōto no koe ga kirei dakara, watashi no sukina uta o sukoshi utatte moratta.</i>	so I asked her to sing me a song that I like for a bit.
7	弟は手をケガしているから、私がお昼ご飯を食べさせている。 <i>Otōto wa te o kega shite iru kara, watashi ga ohiru o tabesaseteiru.</i>	My younger brother injured his hand so I'm helping him eat/feeding him lunch.
8	兄に自転車の修理(しゅうり)をしてもらった。 <i>Ani ni jitensha no shuuri o shite moratta.</i>	I asked my brother to fix my/the bike for me.
9	スカートは長すぎるから、短くしてもらった。 <i>Sukāto wa nagasugiru kara, mijikaku shite moratta.</i>	The skirt was too long so I had it shortened.
10	Mama <u>me</u> <u>je</u> <u>poslala</u> u trgovinu <u>po</u> <u>mlijeko</u> .	Mum sent me to the store to get milk.
11	<u>Dala</u> <u>sam</u> <u>psa</u> <u>na</u> <u>šišanje</u> .	I had my dog groomed.
12	Baka <u>me</u> <u>natjerala</u> <u>da</u> <u>pojedem</u> <u>još</u> <u>jednu</u> <u>sarmu</u> . (<i>sarma</i> are cabbage rolls, a traditional Croatian winter dish)	Grandma made me eat another sarma.
13	<u>Prijatelji</u> <u>su</u> <u>me</u> <u>iznenadili</u> <u>za</u> <u>rođendan</u> .	Friends surprised me on my birthday.
14	<u>Rastužila</u> <u>sam</u> <u>prijateljicu</u> <u>jer</u> <u>joj</u> <u>nisam</u> <u>došla</u> <u>na</u> <u>rođendan</u> .	I made my friend sad because I didn't attend her birthday (party).

Table 1: Example Sentences in the Survey

The example sentences in Table 1 were constructed by the author of the survey and were constructed with different causative uses in mind (coercion, permission, manipulation, internal/emotional influence) employing both animate and inanimate causers and causees⁴. During the analysis of results, a sentence which is deemed 'incomprehensible', has a major grammatical mistake pertaining to the causative verb form (wrong verb selection and/or a mistake in the verb form), or the role of the causer/causee, was counted as a mistake (i.e. the role of the causer and causee are reversed, the causer is performing an action when that was not meant by the original sentence). Smaller, stylistic mistakes were not taken into consideration (e.g. in one of the responses, *hako*=box was translated as a "package", or if there were a mistake in the tense but not the verb/causative form itself) since they do not affect the expression used to rely the overall causative meaning of a sentence. Some participants gave more than one answer, and blanks (i.e. lack of response) were not counted as mistakes.

The participant's answers are summarised in Table 2 below, showing the most commonly used expressions for each example sentence.

⁴ The examples in the survey were chosen after conducting a pilot survey.

No.	Answers	Mistakes
1	causee+{njoj/joj+verb}+object natjerati+(...)causee+{da+verb} causer+dati+{da+verb} [preputiti+{da+verb}, prenijeti za+causer, pomoći+joj+verb, etc.]	3
2	verb+gerund/verb/reflexive verb pustiti+(ga+){da+verb}, dati (mu)+{da+verb}	9 (two answers used the verb “walk” instead of “run”)
3	dati+inf./gerund/{da+(ga) verb}/reflexive verb causer+verb/gerund *causer+verb	3 (11* – causer performs the action)
4	dati+(causee)+{da+verb}, dati+causee, etc. nahraniti+causee	2
5	subject: sakura usage of “zbog”	1
6	zamoliti+{da+(mi+)verb} pa+mi+verb (other expressions)	/
7	ga+hraniti+object pomoći /praviti, etc.+verb	1
8	mi+verb dati+{da (+mi)+verb}	9
9	dati+infinitive zamoliti+{da+verb} *causer+ (si+)verb	1 (2* – the causer performs the action)
10	causative <i>saseru</i> form	22*
11	<i>temorau</i> form causative <i>saseru</i> form	12*
12	causative <i>saseru</i> form causative-passive form (<i>saserareru</i>)	9*
13	causative <i>saseru</i> form <i>tekureru</i> form	18*
14	causative <i>saseru</i> form <i>saseteshimau</i> form	11*

Table 2: Participants` Answers (Expressions Used 3 Times or More per Example Sentence)
*sentences with grammatical/stylistic mistakes and/or Japanese particle mistakes not pertaining to the causer/causee are not included

3. Discussion

In this section, the expressions used by the participants of the survey (Table 2) and their meanings will be discussed⁵.

Example 1. was originally constructed with coercive meaning in mind, and with a basic causative sentence structure ([causer+*ga*]+[causee+*ni*]+[object+*o*]+*saseru* verb), although it could be interpreted as permissive due to the aforementioned ambiguity of Japanese causative sentences (the same can be assumed for Ex.2.). In case of Ex.1., survey participants seemed to associate the *saseru* sentence with coercion, expressed in Croatian by the verb “*natjerati*”. In the case of the usage of “*natjerati*”, the causer (the girl) was making the boy (causee) carry the box, with “*natjerati*” marking (strong) coercion followed by the action verb (to carry) in the subordinate clause (*natjerala+da nosi*= (she)made/coerced+(him)to carry).

On the other hand, active sentences that do not carry an embedded meaning of coercion or permission, but describe the state of affairs were used as well. In these sentences the subject (causee) performs the action of carrying the box expressed by the action verb (to carry). However, in a number of these sentences the nuance of helping the girl and doing the action for her benefit was expressed by the personal pronoun “*njoj*” or its shortened form “*joj*”, the dative case of the word “girl” (*djevojka*= *djevojci*), the verb “*prepustiti*” (*prepustila je* = she let him (carry the box)), the expression “*za djevojku*”= for the girl, or a clarification was added by the survey participant in their answer. In all of these instances, “the boy” is the causee but it is also the subject of the sentence.

Lastly, the verb “*dati*” in combination with an action verb (ex.: *dala je+causer+da nosi* = (she) had him carry) was used as well. Although in Croatian the verb “*dati*” means “to give”, the meaning translated into English would be “she had him carry” rather than “she gave to him to carry”. The combination of the verb *dati* (*se*) and the infinitive was discussed by Žagar Szentesi (2011), according to which *dati*+infinitive was used with an unknown causee and indicates that the action is carried out by that unknown causee. In this case, although the verb “*dati*” is used in combination with another verb, it still points to the transfer of the action from the causer to the (known) causee (the verb “*dati*” was also mentioned by Kapić (2020)).

Overall, although Ex.1. was translated as a coercive sentence, other means of expression were seen in the participants’ answers in almost equal measure.

Example 2. can be as ambiguous in its meaning as Ex.1. but was originally constructed with the permissive meaning in mind. It was mostly translated as an active sentence using the verb “to run”, and verbs of a similar meaning (*trčati*, *potrčati*= to run, to start running, *istrčati se*, *rastrčati se*= to run to one’s heart content, to run a lot), and gerund (*trčanje*). These sentences were using the verbs “*odvesti*, *dovesti*, *izvesti*” in the main clause, meaning “to bring/to take” the dog to the park, illustrating a state of affairs, or giving the reason for the causative action (I took the dog to the park so he could run.). Two sentences used the verbs “*istrčati/rastrčati*” (to run a lot) to express the meaning of “to have/make run”. Rather than coercive, the meaning of the sentence read as the causee participating in the action.

Sentences expressing permission did so in two different ways – more commonly by the use of

⁵ In Table 2 and the Discussion section, Croatian verbs will be presented in their infinitive form when discussing their meaning/properties, although in the survey answers they were used in different tenses and persons.

the verb “pustiti” (meaning “to let, to allow”) in combination with an action verb (“trčati”= to run or the reflexive “istrčati se”= to run a lot), or by using the verb “dati” in combination with the verb “trčati”.

No expressly coercive reading was observed.

When an unknown causee carries out the causative action, the “dati (se)+infinitive” combination (Žagar Szentesi, 2011) was expected to be used for Example 3. Although the verb “dati” was indeed used in combination with the infinitive (dati+oprati= have cleaned/washed), it was also used in a series of other combinations, such as with a gerund (dati na čišćenje=to have cleaned), or a verb (dati (...) da ga operu= have them clean it, dati da se opere=have cleaned). Some sentences do not use the verb “dati” but use the verbs “odvesti” meaning “to take” (such as “Dad took the car to the car wash”, which indicate that the Dad didn’t wash the car himself) and are therefore appropriate in this context.

Sentences in which the causer (Dad) is also the one performing the action were observed (11 sentences), such as “Dad went to the car wash and washed the car”. Such sentences, although grammatically correct, are not the ideal way of translating the Japanese example sentence since they do not indicate the transfer of the action to the unknown causee – i.e., they are technically mistakes. Ex. 3. does not mean that the Dad himself washed the car, since that would be expressed with an active sentence with a verb in the *masu* form.

Lastly, a passive, a permissive, and a sentence using “they” in the role of a causee were used as well.

Example 4. and Example 7. carry a similar meaning and employ the same causative verb: *tabesaseru* (食べさせる= to make/have/let eat). Example 7. is a manipulative causative sentence where the (human) causer not only brings about a causative action but due to the inability of the (human) causee to carry it out, the action is carried out by the causer (Fukada, 2010). Example 4. is similar to Ex. 7., except that the causee in Ex. 4. is an animal so it cannot be strictly classified as a manipulative sentence.

The meaning of Ex. 4. is that the cat is being fed, i.e. the causer gives food to the cat, but does not physically feed the animal as it is not indicated that the animal is in any way unable to feed itself (unlike the causee in Ex. 7.). In this case, the majority of sentences used the verb “dati” in different grammatical combinations, for example: “dati+verb”, “dati+causee+{da+verb}”, “dati+ ju (object)+causee”, etc., amongst others. The use of different expressions using the verb “dati” is appropriate since “dati” shows that the causer does not physically feed the causee (rather than “the cat is given food”) and it is logically concluded that the causee performs the action. Verbs meaning “to feed” (“nahraniti” and “hraniti”) were used in some sentences as well, although to a lesser degree; both verbs indicate that the cat is (being) fed, but it is not clear whether the cat performs the action by itself or not.

Example 5. employed an inanimate causer and causee, which is a somewhat less common occurrence in Japanese causative sentences. In Croatian sentences, the example sentence and the causative verb *sakasemasu* (咲かせます) were translated in a variety of ways and depending on the sentence structure and the placement of emphasis, the subject of the sentence was either “sakura” or “spring warmth”. In the case of the subject being “sakura”, the preposition “zbog” (because of, due to) was used in the majority of sentences giving a

reason for sakura`s bloom.

The first of the *temorau* sentences is the sentence in Example 6. which expresses mild coercion or persuasion, in which the causer wants their sister to sing them a song. The most commonly used verb in the participant`s answers is “zamoliti”= to ask, in combination with the unmarked, short form of the personal pronoun in the dative case “meni – mi”⁶= for me. The usage of “mi”, which is the singular form of the 1st person dative case, shows that the beneficiary of the action is the speaker. Some sentences did not use the personal pronoun “mi”, but simply “zamoliti+ verb”, while others used “mi” in combination with an action verb. The usage of the verb “zamoliti” gives the sentence the form of a request rather than a command; for example, the usage of the word “reći”= to say, to tell makes the sentence sound more coercive: “Sestra ima lijep glas pa sam joj rekla da mi malo otpjeva pjesmu koju volim./ My sister has a nice voice so I *told* her to sing me the song I like for a bit.“. One of the answers used the verb “tražiti”= to ask, which still makes the sentence a request, but is somewhat more forceful than the verb “zamoliti“. However, it might be more natural to use “tražiti” when talking to one`s sibling.

There were several other different expressions used, but none were observed to have been used in more than one answer.

Example 7. is an example of a manipulative sentence, with the causee not able to feed themselves so the causer has to carry out the action. In Croatian sentences, the most commonly used expressions used the verb “hraniti” (to feed) in different combinations (for example: hraniti+object, etc.) which, unlike the Ex.4 expressions using the verb “dati”, means that the causee “is being fed”, and does not imply that the causee is physically feeding himself.

Several sentences using the verbs “pomoći”=to help, and “praviti/spravljati/napraviti”= to make in different combinations, showing that the causer is helping or assisting the causee in the act of eating lunch by either (physically) helping them or helping them by making the food themselves. This manipulative example can also read such as the causer helping the causee do the causative action, in which the causer can be understood to take an active role in the caused event, making it sociative, assistive causation as discussed by Shibatani & Chung (2001). In this case, the abovementioned expressions of “helping” can be used.

The following Example 8. and Example 9. are both *temorau* sentence examples, one with a known causee and the other with a causee not mentioned.

The causee in Ex.8 is known (older brother) and is made/asked to perform an action for the causer/subject (“I”). Unlike in Ex.6, in Ex.8 no specific polite wording was observed, and the verb “zamoliti” was used only in one case. However, similar to Ex.6, the short form of the personal pronoun “meni”- “mi” was used once again, marking the speaker as the beneficiary of the action. “Mi” was most commonly used in combination with the action verb “popraviti” (to fix).

The verb “dati” was used as well, such as “dati+ {da(+mi)+verb}”= had [him] fix (for me). In one instance, a sentence using the verb “dati” signals that the brother had somebody else fix the bike, i.e. my brother had the bike fixed, which is not the most appropriate way of

⁶ About the dative in Croatian, see Stanojević & Geld (2008).

translating the example sentence because it could be understood as the brother being the initiator of the causative action.

Overall, no polite expressions were used in the case of Ex.8, but no implicit or explicit coercion was observed either. The reason why expressions such as “zamoliti” (to ask) were not used, although appropriate, could be that the causee is the causer’s close relative, so such expressions might have been deemed unnecessary.

The last Japanese example sentence is Example9., which does not have the causee explicitly expressed and, in accordance with what Žagar Szentesi (2011) discussed, the most common expression seen in this case was the “dati+infinitive” (dati+skratiti= have shortened). There were a few instances of the verb “zamoliti” being used, and two sentences were translated as though the causer themselves shortened the skirt, which is incorrect. However the participants’ answers predominantly implied that it was not the subject of the sentence who performed the causative action, but a third party. No overly polite or “mild” expressions were observed.

Lastly, Examples 10., 11., 12., 13. and 14. were Croatian sentences which were translated into Japanese. Unfortunately, as can be discerned from Table 2, there was a high number of mistakes in the participant’s answers, and therefore definitive claims cannot be made about how the Croatian example sentences were translated into Japanese. Although there was a higher number of mistakes and unanswered questions overall, both the *saseru* causative form and the *temorau* form were observed, as well as the causative-passive *saserareru* form, etc. in some cases⁷.

The example sentence with the least mistakes is Example 12., which is undeniably coercive (the meaning expressed by the use of the verb “natjerati is to make somebody do something against their will”, as defined by the Scholastic Dictionary of the Croatian Language (Školski rječnik hrvatskog jezika)). Most of the survey participants chose the *saseru* causative verb form (*tabesaseru*) in their translations, although there were a few examples using the causative-passive form (*tabesaserareru*) in which the causee is the main focus of the sentence, shifting the original perspective of the example.

Another example with a relatively low mistake ratio was Example 14., although in this case there were a number of mistakes made that were not related to the causative form *per se* but the sentence structure and the other verbs/words in the sentence. In this case the *saseru* form was predominant (*kanashimaseru*=to make somebody sad/to sadden).

Conclusion

The survey answers showed that amongst various ways a causative sentence meaning can be transferred into Croatian, coercive meaning is not necessarily the go-to default. Furthermore, although different expressions were used in regards to different example sentences, the participants’ answers also showed the versatility of expressions that include the verb “dati”, which was employed in the majority of answers concerning Japanese example sentences (although to different extents).

When it came to the difference in expression between the *temorau* and *saseru* sentences, no significant difference in expression was observed amongst the Croatian answers. *Temorau*

⁷ See {*} underneath Table 2.

examples used the “dati” verb as well, and the short form of the personal pronoun form - “mi”, in order to point to the beneficiary of the action.

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Online Resources/Dictionaries

Council of Europe Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions>

Scholastic Dictionary of Croatian Language (Školski rječnik hrvatskog jezika): <http://rjecnik.hr/>

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