

■ Causative and Transitive Verbs

Causative sentences and transitive sentences may become semantically close. Examples: *kodomo o okisaseru* ‘have the child wake up’ vs. *kodomo o okosu* ‘wake the child up’, *jukensei o kyōshitsu ni hairaseru* ‘let the test takers enter the room’ vs. *jukensei o kyōshitsu ni ireru* ‘usher the test takers into the room’. When there is a corresponding pair of intransitive and transitive verbs, as in *okiru/okoru* ‘happen’, *ireru/hairu* ‘let in/enter’, *atsumaru/atsumeru* ‘gather together/collect’, *tōru/tōsu* ‘go through/let [it] go through’, *modoru/modosu* ‘go back/put back’, *oriru/orosu* ‘get off/unload’, the intransitive causative sentence and the corresponding transitive sentence bear similar meaning. This occurs only when the causee is sentient. If the causee is insentient, the causative construction sounds unnatural, as in *shinamono o narabaseru* ‘make the merchandise line up’, *kitte o atsumaraseru* ‘have the postal stamps gather around.’ Only the transitive construction may be used; *shinamono o naraberu* ‘lay out the merchandise’, *kitte o atsumeru* ‘collect stamps’. This is because causative sentences contain the meaning of evoking the willingness in the causee and having her/him act towards the realization of a certain situation.

Strictly speaking, there is a difference between a causative sentence and its counterpart transitive sentence even when both are possible. Take *Kodomo o furo ni hairaseru* ‘have the child take a bath’ and *Kodomo o furo ni ireru* ‘bathe a child’, for instance. In the former sentence the causer orders the child to initiate the act of bathing, while in the latter the speaker gives a bath to a small child. In *jōkyaku o orisaseru* ‘make the passenger get off the vehicle’ vs. *jōkyaku o orosu* ‘let the passenger get off the vehicle’, the causer orders the passenger to get off the vehicle in the former, and the driver or the conductor lets passengers get off the vehicle as part of their routine practice. In a causative sentence, the causer urges the causee to act on the causer’s intent or wish, so that the desired situation will occur. In a transitive sentence, the agent directly affects the other party.

Some transitive causative sentences and transitive sentences that use different transitive verbs may be semantically close. *Kisaseru* (the causative form of the transitive verb *kiru* ‘put on clothes’) vs. *kiseru* ‘put clothes on someone’, and *misaseru* (the causative form of the transitive verb *miru* ‘see’) ‘make someone see’ vs. *miseru* ‘show’ are two examples. The causee is marked by *ni*. Compare *musume ni kimono o kisaseru* ‘have the daughter wear kimono’ vs. *musume ni kimono o kiseru* ‘put the kimono on the daughter,’ and *seito ni nōto o misaseru* ‘have the pupils look at the notes’ vs. *seito ni nōto o miseru* ‘show the pupils the notes.’ The difference between the former and latter sentences in these examples is of the same nature as in the previous examples; the reader can envision that there is the actual touching of “the kimono” and “notes” by the agent in the transitive sentences.

→使役 Causative (2-E), 自動詞と他動詞 Intransitive Verbs and Transitive Verbs (2-B)

● References

Teramura, Hideo (1982) *Nihongo no shintakusu to imi I* (Japanese Syntax and Meaning I). Kurosio Publishers.

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