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Relexification of English *Let's* in Japanese

Abstract

This paper exhibits the ways in which English *let's* is borrowed into contemporary Japanese. It shows that, in addition to the insertion of English phrases containing *let's* into a matrix of Japanese, *let's* alone is borrowed, whose process involves relexification. This relexification, however, diverges from the standard one, because the English word order introduced by *let's* is also borrowed into Japanese. In other words, a verbal element always comes after *let's*, while the Japanese word order is basically SOV. Hortative and volition are expressed in Japanese usually by a sentence final particle *-yoo* or *-oo*, which is attached to verbs. *Let's*, or *rettsu* in Japanese, relexifies this Japanese sentence final particle, when *rettsu* is followed by a verb (e.g. *Rettsu ikou* 'lit. Let's go') or a verbal noun (*Rettsu kukkingu* 'lit. Let's cooking'). When *rettsu* is followed by a simple noun (*Rettsu buraunii* 'lit. Let's brownie'), *rettsu* relexifies a Japanese verbal element as well as the sentence final particle. In cases such as the latter, the simple noun following *rettsu* needs to satisfy the first sister principle of the implicit verb relexified by *rettsu*.

1. Introduction

This paper demonstrates how the English expression *let's* has come to be borrowed and used creatively in Japanese†.¹ Being perceived as a globally used language, English enjoys its predominant status as a foreign language in Japan. English phrases or loanwords deriving from it are ubiquitous in the public sphere, such as commercial advertisements or governmental publications. English is the language that most pre-teens and teenagers learn at school. To a large extent, words and expressions borrowed from English are familiar to Japanese speakers today.

English and Japanese are two distinct and typologically different languages. English is classified as an SVO language, has prepositions and articles, and is written in Latin alphabets. It is usually characterised as an analytic language. Japanese, on the other hand, is basically an SOV language. It does not have

1 † The revised analysis of the borrowing of English *let's* into Japanese is discussed in Nagano (2019) and Wakamatsu (2019).

prepositions or articles, but has postpositions to mark nominal dependent arguments. Its writing system uses a mixture of Chinese characters, *hiragana*, *katakana*—both of which are phonographic writings—and occasionally Latin alphabets, which, however, tend to be employed in some limited registers. Japanese is an agglutinative language.

In the field of language contact, issues involving the borrowings of functional categories of a language into another typologically distinct language have attracted not a few linguists (cf. Chan 2008; Muysken 2000; Muysken 2008; Myser-Scott 1993, among others). The notion of functional categories has been approached variously and is in need of extensive discussion (cf. Muysken 2008), but for the sake of convenience and simplicity here, let us assume that the inventory of functional categories includes determiners, auxiliaries, and adpositions, for they usually signal structural relationships rather than representing semantic content.² The issues of the borrowing of functional categories, therefore, can be rephrased as questions, one of which is, for instance, what happens when a preposition-less language such as Japanese borrows English prepositions.³ One of the early studies that touch on this enterprise is Namiki (2005), which concerns the English preposition *in*. He analyses *rinsu in shanpuu* '(lit.) rinse in shampoo,' which is a commercial product name given to shampoo, as a Japanese compound. He argues that the *in* corresponds with the Japanese deverbal noun *iri* 'containing.' This rescues *rinsu in shanpuu* from being a wrong English phrase, since the phrase "rinse in shampoo" in English should indicate a rinse, not shampoo. Recall that English is a head initial language, and Japanese is a head final language. His argument also buttresses empirical evidence that *in* in NP_1 *in* NP_2 is used productively in contemporary Japanese. Building upon Namiki's (2005) insight, Shimada and Nagano (2014) and Nagano and Shimada (2018) further exhibit borrowings of other English prepositions such as *on*, and convincingly show that they are transformed into Japanese lexemic verbal elements to function as nominal modifiers. Nagano and Shimada (2018) also classify the *in* used in Japanese into three subtypes. The first and the second subtypes of *in* are considered as classifiers with the meaning of 'containing.' They differ from each other in that the first subtype of *in* borrows only the morphological and phonological shape of English *in*; while the second subtype borrows the word-order of English, i.e., a head-initial word order, in addition to *in*'s morphological and phonological shape. The third subtype is the case where *in*, as in English locative *in*-phrase, retains English word-order and selectional properties.

The finding that English functional elements such as prepositions are at times reanalysed as Japanese lexemic elements through borrowing is in line with the borrowing of English definite article *the* into Japanese (Wakamatsu 2018a, 2018b). Observing single-word *the* in Japanese today is not rare at all, and often found in advertising media or day-to-day conversation. For instance, *za gyouza* '(lit.) the dumpling' is interpreted as "genuine dumpling" or "typical dumpling." The word *the* is always placed left of the head and functions as the modifier. There has not been observed anaphoric use of *the* in Japanese.

So far, the findings of the previous studies suggest that the straightforward borrowing of English functional categories is not easy; and when the borrowing of functional categories did take place, some forms of expedients seem to be required. This paper takes up the borrowing of *let's*, which serves as an auxiliary, and is considered to be included in the functional categories of English. The examples shown

2 Muysken (2008) does not include adpositions as constituting functional categories when explaining them in perspective of generative grammar. Baker (2003), on the other hand, argue that they are classified as functional categories.

3 English preposition borrowing into Hong Kong Cantonese is discussed in Chan (2018).

in (1a) and (1b) are expressions containing *let's/rettsu* in Japanese.⁴ The phrase in (1a) is taken from a quoted utterance in a book and that in (1b) is from an article in a blog run by a car company.

- (1) a. *Rettsu kukkingu*
 let's cooking
 'Let's cooking' (Kamebuchi & Doi 2010:4)
- b. *Oita-ken-o rettsu saikuringu*
 Oita-prefecture-ACC let's cycling
 'Let's go bicycle riding in Oita prefecture' (<https://urabus.jp/article/670.html>)

In English, *let's* is always followed by infinitive verbs, while these two examples are cases where *rettsu* is followed by English borrowed verbal nouns.

What follows explicates several types of *let's/rettsu* in Japanese, including the type shown in (1a, b). It argues that *let's/rettsu* in Japanese involves the process of *relexification* defined by Lumsden (1999), which will be explained shortly below. This process of relexification, however, is rather incomplete, at least for the time being. It also shows that *rettsu* is interpretable as a Japanese sentence final particle, *-yoo* or *-oo*, when *rettsu* is followed by a verb or a verbal noun. The sentence final particles *-yoo* and *-oo* mark a hortative mood as well as a volition. When *rettsu* is followed by a simple noun, *rettsu* is interpretable as a combination of a verbal element with the sentence final particle.

The organization of this paper is as follows. Section 2 briefly introduces two technical notions. The first is *relexification*, which seems to be involved in the use of *let's/rettsu* in Japanese. The second is *doubling*, also known as portmanteau or multiple exponence, which is also observed in the borrowing of *let's/rettsu*. Section 3 exhibits attested data obtained from a popular cooking recipe website in Japan and other sources. It shows the types in which (i) *rettsu* appears as a part of a phrase, (ii) *rettsu* is followed by verbal nouns, (iii) *rettsu* is followed by a Japanese verb, and (iv) *rettsu* is followed by a simple noun. Section 4 concludes with a summary of findings and limitations of this paper.

2. Phenomena involving language contact

2.1 Relexification

To a certain extent, relexification is, or perhaps was, often associated with creole (cf. DeGraff 2002 for refuting relexification in creole genesis); however, I use this notion as a technical one to describe the phenomena observed in my analysis. Relexification basically means a vocabulary substitution. It takes place where meaning correspondence is found between the lexicon of a native language and that of a target language. Lumsden (1999:129) notes that “[r]elexification is a mental process that builds new lexical entries by combining new phonological forms with the syntactic and semantic information of

4 The first line translates a Japanese expression in Romanization, the second line contains glosses following the Leipzig abbreviation convention, and the third line is a free translation. For consistency's sake, *let's* written in Latin alphabets in Japanese are also transcribed as *rettsu*.

lexical entries that are already established” [in the lexicon of his native language (added by Winford 2003: 342)].

In this regard, the sentence in (2) in *Media Lengua*, spoken in a town in Cotopaxi province of Ecuador, exemplifies the outcome of relexification. The sentence largely preserves the syntactic structure of Quechua, the native language of the Andean region, but lexicons are derived from Spanish.⁵

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------|------------|
| (2) (Quechua) | yalli-da | tamia-pi-ga, | mana | ri-sha-chu |
| (Media Lengua) | dimas-ta | llubi-pi-ga, | no | i-sha-chu |
| too much | rain-SUB-TO, | not | go-1FU-NEG | |
| (Spanish) | si llueve demás, | no | voy a ir. | |
| ‘If it rains too much, I won’t go.’ | | (Muysken 1981:53) | | |

Lumsden (1999:129) is of the opinion that “relexification apply only to lexical categories (i.e., nouns, verbs, adjectives and prepositions).” His remark is in accord with Winford (2003:191), who regards the term, relexification, as “appropriate for the process of single morpheme insertion into a maintained ML [matrix language] frame.” Muysken (1996:390) notes that “[R]elexification is feasible [...] for lexical items, but it operates in a very incomplete manner for grammatical items.” What follows in this paper will describe this ‘incomplete’ relexification regarding the borrowing of *let’s* into Japanese.

2.2 Doubling

The phenomenon called doubling is not limited to the context of language contact. Using the term, multiple exponence, Harris (2017) exhibits constituents or sentences within which two or more of the overlapping sets of features are observed in one language. At the same time, however, doubling is often observed when two distinct, and perhaps, contrasting head-complement ordered languages are mixed.

In the phrase in (3a), plural markers are repeated in both languages of Lingala, which is a Bantu language spoken in Congo, and French. The sentence in (3b) is the utterance by a bilingual speaker of English and Japanese, in which both English *for* and Japanese *ni* are used to mark dative case.⁶ The phrase in (3c) is a creatively named recipe title by a Japanese speaker. It contains *in* and a Japanese verbal noun *iri*, both of which carry the meaning of ‘containing.’

| | | |
|--------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (3) a. | ... <i>ba-jeune-s</i> | |
| | ... CL2-young-PL | |
| | ‘young people’ | (Lingala/French, Bokamba 1988:37) |

5 The following abbreviations are used in the glosses: FU = future tense, NEG = negation marker, SUB = adverbial subordinator, TO = topic, 1 = first person.

6 Chan (2015) calls this a portmanteau construction, and explains the reason behind it. In addition to portmanteau, the term, resumption is also employed to describe the phenomena discussed here. The overlapping but differentiated delineations indicated by doubling, multiple exponence, portmanteau, and resumption may be in need of explanation. I chose doubling as an umbrella notion to include the rest, at least for the time being, for the sake of convenience and for the limitation of space.

- b. Look at the things she buys *for* Sean *ni*
 Look at the things she buys for Sean for
 ‘Look at the things she buys for Sean.’ (English-Japanese, Nishimura 1986:140)
- c. *guriin karee in shio-koujiiri*
 green curry containing salted rice malt containing
 ‘green curry containing salted rice malt’
 (<https://cookpad.com/recipe/1827835>)

As shown below, one type of the borrowing of *let's* into Japanese which is the one followed by a Japanese verb with a sentence final particle, provides the case of doubling.

3. Classification of attested data

The main data relied on in this paper is taken from a dataset jointly provided by Cookpad Inc. and the National Institute of Informatics, Japan. The dataset comprises text data from the website Cookpad.⁷ The website offers a platform to its visitors who can post their own created recipes with pictures and instructions as well as searching for their recipes and leaving their comments on the recipes with pictures. The site is the biggest of this kind in Japan, compiling 2.97 million recipes as of September 2018. I use this dataset as a corpus, for it reflects ordinary Japanese speakers' spontaneous and creative language use. Additionally, the Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese (BCCWJ) and some blog articles provide the source of data analyzed below.

There are four types of the borrowing of *let's* into Japanese today, as unfolded below.

3.1 *Rettsu as a part of a phrase*

The first type is considered to be a phrasal insertion containing *let's* in the Japanese matrix, as shown in (4). The phrases in (4a) and (4b) are comments made by contributors who posted their recipes.

- (4) a. *mochiyori paatii ni rettsu gou*
 potluck party ALL let's go
 ‘Let's go to a potluck party’ (<https://cookpad.com/recipe/2419743>)
- b. *rettsu enjoyoi haru-no-aji*
 let's enjoy spring-GEN-taste
 ‘Let's enjoy the taste of the spring season’ (Cookpad dataset)

It is likely that *rettsu go* is used as one phrase whose inner structure may be opaque to the speakers. The same may be found in *rettsu enjoyoi*. Note that the expression in (4b) follows the English word order, as the subsequent constituent of *rettsu enjoyoi* is an object, *haru-no-aji* ‘the taste of the spring season.’

⁷ This website is accessed at <https://cookpad.com/>.

3.2 *Rettsu* followed by verbal nouns

There are, however, many cases where *rettsu* is borrowed into Japanese as a single-word. This *rettsu* is grafted onto Japanese verbs or nouns. Let us see the cases where *rettsu* is followed by verbal nouns as in the examples in (5).

- (5) a. *rettsu* *reitou*
 let's freezing
 'Let's freeze (materials).' (<https://cookpad.com/recipe/1849528>)
- b. *rettsu* *henshin!*
 let's transformation
 'I'll transform myself!"
 (shouted by a hero during his transformation into a transhuman in a TV show)
- c. *soto* *kara* *jikkurito rettsu* *kansatu*
 outside from carefully let's observation
 'I encourage you/let's observe (him) carefully from the outside.' (BCCWJ-NT)
- d. *rettsu* *sakana-tsuru*
 let's fishing
 'Let's catch fish' (<https://ameblo.jp/ginokochan/entry-12076291244.html>)
- e. *rettsu* *kukkingu*
 let's cooking
 'Let's cooking' (= (1a))

In all of these examples, *rettsu* functions as a hortative or volitional marker. It is also that the verbal nouns following *rettsu* in (5a), (5b) and (5c) have hidden or implicit arguments, although such arguments are easily reconstructed from the context; that is to say, they are complex event nominals. The verbal nouns, *sakana-tsuru*, 'fishing' in (5d) and *kukkingu*, 'cooking', are also event nominals. The fact that *rettsu* is interpreted as a hortative or volitional marker allows us to consider that it substitutes a native equivalent lexicon, that is, a Japanese sentence final particle '-*you*' or '-*oo*' depending on the type of a verbal stem to which attached. In other words, *rettsu* is the outcome of relexification of '-*you*' or '-*oo*'.

This relexification, however, is incomplete. The expression in (6), which has a contrasting word order of (5d), reveals that when located in the place of Japanese sentence final particle, *let's* is judged to be awkward.

- (6) ? *sakana-tsuru* *rettsu*
 fishing let's

In other words, the English word order involving *let's* is retained, though *rettsu* relexifies a Japanese hortative or volition element.

3.2 *Rettsu* followed by a Japanese verb

Rettsu as a single word is also followed by Japanese verbs as shown in (7). Note, however, that the verbs are always together with the sentence final particles. In (7a), *ikou*, is formulated by a present indicative form of *iku* 'go' with the sentence final particle *-oo*. In (7b), *tanoshimi-mashoo*, is formulated by the fusion of *tanoshimu* 'enjoy,' *masu*, a polite form and *-oo*, the sentence final particle.

- (7) a. *kaki-goori o tabe ni rettsu ikoo*
 shaved.ice ACC eat ALL let's go.SFP
 'Let's go to have shaved ice'
 (https://aho-driver.at.webry.info/201307/article_11.html)
- b. *rettsu tanoshimi-mash-oo*
 let's enjoy-POL.SFP
 'Let's enjoy' (<https://inouereco.exblog.jp/7723379/>)

The example phrase shown in (8) is created from (7a) by removing the sentence final particle.

- (8)? *rettsu iku*
 let's go

The phrase (8) is judged by some native speakers of Japanese as awkward, while a few suggest that the phrase sounds like a soliloquy, if phonological emphasis is placed on *iku*.

Considering that both *let's* and the sentence final particle are hortative markers, the expressions in (7) exhibit the case of doubling. Note also that the location of *let's* is, again, left of the verb, indicating the English word order.

3.4 *Rettsu* followed by a simple noun

Finally, *rettsu* is followed by a simple noun. Let us observe the expressions in (9). All of them lack verbal elements on the surface; however, they can be easily reconstructed from the context.

- (9) a. *rettsu ume-jamu*
 let's plum-jam
 'Let's make plum jam' (<https://cookpad.com/recipe/1147431>)
- b. *saa anata mo rettsu buraunii*
 FILLER you too let's brownie
 'So, I encourage that you, too, make brownies'
 (<https://cookpad.com/recipe/698917>)
- c. *isshoni rettsu yuuenchi*
 together let's amusement park

‘Let’s go to/play in an amusement park’ (<https://369days.net/archives/644>)

For instance, as shown in (9b), *rettsu* together with its right element, *buraunii* ‘brownie’ signifies the expression encouraging hearers to make brownies. In this regard, *rettsu* is considered as the outcome of relexification of Japanese verbal element, *tsukuru* ‘make’, together with its sentence final particle marking hortative. Similarly *rettsu* in the expression in (9c) is interpreted as an amalgamation of ‘go’ and a hortative marker.

The relationships of this implicit verbal element realized by *rettsu* and simple nouns located on the right of *rettsu* remind us of the first sister principle (Roeper and Siegel, 1978). The violation of the first sister principle, as shown in (10a) is judged to be unacceptable.

- (10) a. * *rettsu* koppu
 let’s cup
 ‘Let’s drink with a cup’ (cf. ^{OK} ‘Let’s use a cup.’)
- b. *rettsu* sake
 let’s sake
 ‘Let’s drink sake.’

4. Concluding Remarks

We have seen four types of *let’s* borrowed from English into Japanese. When *rettsu* is followed by a VN as well as a Japanese V, relexification is observed, in that *rettsu* functions as the hortative or volitional marker, which is usually assumed by a Japanese sentence final particle. When *rettsu* is followed by a simple noun, *rettsu* relexifies a Japanese verbal element and a sentence final particle. The relexification, however, is incomplete, in that the word order of English *let’s* is retained, as the verbal element always appear on the right of *rettsu*. In other words, *rettsu* does not appear in the position occupied by the sentence final particle. The summary of the analysis is shown in Fig.1.

| types of <i>let’s/rettsu</i> in Japanese | mechanism of the borrowing |
|---|---|
| <i>let’s/rettsu</i> + English Vs | phrasal insertion |
| <i>let’s/rettsu</i> + Japanese or English VNs | incomplete relexification / <i>let’s</i> = SFP |
| <i>let’s/rettsu</i> + Japanese Vs | incomplete relexification / <i>let’s</i> = SFP |
| <i>let’s/rettsu</i> + simple Ns | incomplete relexification / <i>let’s</i> = verb + SFP |

Fig.1 SFP = sentence final particle

The study of the borrowing of *let’s* into Japanese suggests that the behaviour of the borrowing of functional categories is distinct from lexical categories. This, however, is in need of further empirical evidence and theoretical exploration.

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