

Causation as Perceived by Iraqi EFL University Undergraduates

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This paper looks over the functions of causative verbs as an expression of causation in both writing and speech. Its aim is to present the characteristics of these verbs, and find out the extent to which they can be used by Iraqi university students in marking the causes of the students' errors and their sources. Hypothetically, most of these students cannot avoid vagueness in using them and may be unable to differentiate them from other types of verbs. To address these concerns, a questionnaire was issued to a sample of 50 fourth-year students at the Department of English, College of Basic Education, University of Babylon. Collecting and analysing the subjects' performance may explain the factual difficulty the students face in utilising them. This outcome emerges from the general assessment of the students' responses.

Key words: *Causation, Discrimination, Vagueness, Conjugate.*

Introduction

Knowing causal relations is of importance in our everyday life. It indicates when people induce causal relationships and what they mean when they use causal language. Most languages, including the English language, have multiple meanings to express causation but they differ in manner. The English language has specific lexical causative forms with partially different behaviour to show the idea of causality. These forms, which are sometimes called periphrastic causative verbs, are of special interest to linguists as they represent a universal concept in grammar. These causative constructions are used to talk about actions that we do not perform ourselves but instead cause the action to be performed by another person. It means that the



subject persuades or asks someone to do it. They include get, have, let, make and help, terms which the study will be concerned with.

What the study cares about is that students of Iraqi EFL cannot manage the difficulty in using those causative constructions. They may have misapprehended the behaviour of these constructions as they do not recognise of what element should follow them, i.e., base, to-infinitive or past participle. Furthermore, they may be incapable of appropriately discriminating causatives from other types of verbs.

Review of Literature

Causative Verbs

Leech et al. (1989: 78) state that, in their simplified terms, causative verbs, as the name implies, express the meaning of causality which means that someone or something makes something else to happen or occur. In the English language, there are important and essential causative verbs such as make, get, have, open, skill, and start. Consider the following different examples:

1. His awful jokes made us all laugh.
2. How do you get your kids to behave so well?

Stocker (1990: 61) maintains that causative verbs are auxiliary words, i.e., not inflected forms, and are "always safe." Subsequently, they can come together with any verb to denote causation; such verbs include cause, get, have or make.

Another definition is expressed by Greenbaum and Nelson (2002: 60) who confirm that causative is a verb expressing cause, causation or reason. This term is especially used in connection with verbs. For instance, in classic semantic theory, the verb *kill* is a causative verb meaning 'cause to die'. Other causative verbs include *get* and *have* as in:

3. Get your hair cut.
4. We had the house painted.

For Croft (2003:34), causative verbs are verbs that are used to signal that one person causes a second person to do something for the first person, for example, *have*, *get* and *make*. They cause a change of state.

Similarly, Hurford et al. (2007: 232) confirm Croft's idea that "a causative form denotes an action which causes something to happen." They clearly say that causative verbs show activity that causes something to occur.



In linguistics, causatives have the high ground. The idea of cause and effect, which lies at their centre, is thought to be a crucial factor in the whole of human cognition and knowledge. Lako and Johnson (1980), for example, claim that it is a basic human concept, as cited by Gilquin (2010: 1).

Basic Causative Structures

These structures can be categorised into two classes to deduct and understand certain qualities and features which they share as a class:

Active Causative Structures

Active: *Subject+ have/get + something + base form of the verb*

The structure means 'cause someone to do something'. *Have* is followed by a base and *get* by an infinitive with "to".

5. I had the garage service my car.
6. I got the garage to service my car (Eastwood, 2002:140).

This active pattern with *have is* more common in American English than in British English, where it is rather formal. *Get* is informal.

Passive Causative Structures

The word order of the sentence of passive causatives is as follows:

Subject + have/get + object + past participle

This pattern means that the action is done to the subject by someone:

7. I had the roof repaired.
8. I got the roof repaired.

According to the examples above, I arranged for somebody else to repair the roof; I did not repair it myself. This structure is used mainly to talk about professional services to a customer (Eastwood, 2002: 136).

Causative versus the Active and Passive Voices

1-The active voice is used for the description of jobs that people do themselves when



we know who is performing the job. That is when a subject is present and does an action to an object.

9. Antony is servicing the bike.

2- The passive is used when we say that a certain job is being performed for us, but we do not know or do not want to say who is performing it:

10. The bike is being serviced (The focus is on the bike).

3- A causative verb is used to emphasise the fact that the subject is 'causing' somebody to perform a job for us:

11. I'm going to have my coat cleaned.

Note: *I'm going to clean my coat* which means "I'm going to clean it myself". The causative is frequently used with verbs that have to do with service: e.g., build, clean, develop, press, print, service (Alexander, 1990:168).

Types of Causative Verbs in English

In English grammar, the most common causal verbs or simply causatives include (*have, get, help, let and make*).

Causative "Have"

Causative use of "have" is a common structure in the English language because of its grammatical use in sentences. The causative structures with the verb "Have" are generally used in the three following cases:

A) When someone is arranged to do something for us. The causer either pays the causee for performing the professional service or simply uses his or her power position or authority to have the action done by someone else. This means that someone does something for you because you pay or ask them to do it, but you don't say who this person is. Causative 'have' can be paraphrased to put it in the following causative construction:

have (conjugated) + direct object (noun or pronoun) + past participle

12. My friends are having their flat renovated.

13. I hope I will have my fridge repaired tomorrow. (Thomson & Martinet, 1992)

B) When one wishes to designate the agent of the action, i.e., the person who has carried out the action. In this case, there are two possibilities:

i. have (conjugated) + direct object (noun or pronoun) + past participle) + 'by' +

'agent' (usually a noun)

Examples are:

14. He always has his homework done by his elder sister.

15. President Obama had his speech written by a very professional writer.

ii. *have (conjugated) + agent (noun or direct object pronoun) + main verb + the object (in the form of a noun or direct object pronoun)*

This means that someone does something for you because you pay or ask them to do it, but you say who this person is. Examples are:

16. I had my younger brother clean the children's room.

17. I had him do that.

This last construction frequently suggests that it may be or may have been difficult to produce a certain action on the part of the agent (Thomson & Martinet, 1992, p: 122). Swan (2005: 209) adds that 'have' can be followed by (-ing):

have + object + verb (-ing)

Using the above structure means cause somebody to be doing something as in:

18. He had us laughing all through the meal.

Causative / Experiential Versus Perfect "Have"

Radford (2004:119) asserts that there are clear differences between the perfect "have" and "have" as causative (experience). He adds that the perfect 'have' is an auxiliary and it can undergo inversion:

19. She has gone to Paris. (auxiliary)

20. Has she gone to Paris? (inversion)

Whereas causative / experienced "have" acts as a main verb and cannot undergo inversion:

21. They have their car serviced regularly. (Causative)

22. They have students walk out on them sometimes. (Experience)



For his part, Eastwood (2002:140) supports Radford's opinion by saying that "have" can act as a main verb meaning 'experience something' but it frequently expresses something disagreeable or not pleasant. The subject is the person to whom something occurs.

23. We had the roof damaged in the storm.
24. My brother has had some cash stolen.

Causative "Get"

It has been reported by Azar (2002:339) that the verb "get" as a causal verb is used in many ways. It means to persuade/ encourage someone to do something they may not want to do. In this phase, "get" is followed by an infinitive with 'to'. Its grammatical structure is:
get + person + to + verb

25. The students got the professor to finish the lecture early.
26. The driver got the mechanic to check my brakes. (At first, the mechanic did not think it was necessary, but the driver convinced him to check the brakes.)

For the get- passive, the following grammatical structure is used:

get + past participle

At this point of passivation, "get" shares with "have" the same common feature and there is usually little or no difference in meaning between *them*. Example:

27. I had/ got my laptop fixed (by someone). (I caused my laptop to be fixed by someone).

The structure (get + object + past participle) could be used to give a passive meaning and could also sometimes be used in the sense of experience. This has the same meaning as "have" but it is less formal. Examples are:

28. I must get my watch repaired. (Passive)
29. We got the roof damaged in the hurricane yesterday. (Experience) (Azar, 2002:339).

For their part, Quirk et al. (1985: 161) argue that the get- passive is not used in formal styles, and even in informal English it is far less frequent than the *be-* passive.

30. The house is getting rebuilt.
30. This novel eventually got translated into Arabic.



Hence, the effect of "get" passive is to emphasise the subject rather than the agent, and on what happens to the subject as a result of the event:

32. She was/ got taught a new lesson on the relative clauses (by our new teacher).

Quirk et al. (1985: 161) make a distinction between the notion of animate *get*, the first *get* tends to be limited to structures without an expressed animate agent. Examples are:

33. The dog got run over (by a car).

34. John got beaten last week.

The second *get* is with an animate agent, it is not, however; unknown:

35. John got arrested (by the police).

To conclude, as the case for 'have', Swan (2005: 200) shows that "get" could be followed by (-ing) forms. The grammatical structure form:

get + object + (verb-ing)

It is sometimes used to mean "make somebody/something start doing something".

36. Once he got the heater going, the van started to warm up.

37. Do not get him talking about his sickness.

Causative "Help"

The causative verb "help" is used to show that someone assists someone else in completing a task. There are two patterns for the causative verb "help".

Structure 1:

subject + help (any tense) + object (person) + base verb +

Examples are:

38. Robert helped me escape the prison.

39. The teacher had helped the students understand a complex theory.

Structure 2:

subject + help (any tense) + object (person) + to + verb

40. He helped me to carry the boxes.

41. Reading before bed helps me to relax.

It is noticed that after "help," **to** may or may not be used – both ways are correct. Both of these sentences are grammatically correct, but most people would agree that the first structure of the sentence sounds more natural (<https://www.learngrammar.net>).



Causative verbs are used to explain that someone or something causes an action to happen. Any form of the verb could be used, but the sentence should be organised correctly.

Causative "Let"

"Let" is the weakest causative verb. It means to give someone permission to do something, i.e., permit something to happen.

(A) Causative "let" with a verb

"Let" is followed by the base form of the verb, not an infinitive with *to*. The grammatical structure:

let + thing + verb (base form)

Consider the following examples:

42. I let the food burn.

43. Don't let the advertising expenses surpass \$1000.

let + person + verb (base form)

44. I don't let my kids watch violent movies.

45. Mary's father won't let her adopt a puppy. (<http://www.learngrammar.net>)

(B) Causative "let" with a preposition

remarkably, "let" could be used with the prepositions "in" and "out":

46. It's so cold outside! Let the dog in, would you?

47. The manager didn't let us out of the session until we'd reached a consensus.

The same with the prepositions "off" and "on" — usually to talk about transportation:

48. could you let me off at the bank, please?

49. Let me on! There is loads of space! (<https://www.clarkandmiller.com/causative-verbs-let-have-get-make-force/>)

Causative "Make"

"Make" as a causative verb is used to express the idea that someone has forced or required someone else to do something. With "make", the following structure is used:

Subject + make + person + base form of verb

50. I made my brother carry my suitcase (My brother had no choice).

51. Sad movies make me cry.



"Make" is followed by the simple form of a verb that must follow an object, not an infinitive (Azar, 2002:339).

Another structure can be used with "make" and the grammatical structure is:
Subject + make + thing + base form of verb

Consider the following examples:

52. You make your hips sway.

53. The government made the company pay a large fine because it did something illegal (<http://www.euenglish.hu/2016/01/causative/>).

Swan (2005:14) illustrates that in passive the to-infinitive is used:

54. She was made to repeat the whole story.

In some cases, "make" can be followed by reflexive pronouns "myself", "yourself", etc...., and a past participle. The construction is common with *understood* and *heard*,

55. She does not speak good German, but she can make herself understood. (Not "understand").

56. She had to shout to make herself heard. <http://www.euenglish.hu/2016/01/causative/>

Factitive Verbs and Causative Verbs

In this respect, Crystal (2003:175) postulates that factitive verbs refer to constructions or forms, usually verbs, betokening an action in which a cause produces a result such as *make*, *kill*, *choose*, *build* and *elect*. Lyons (1977:488) views the action which these verbs express is on the object when an agentive subject causes a change in the patient object. A factitive verb usually needs a supplement in addition to its direct object. Gibbs (2009:69) announces that the types of words that follow the factitive verbs have two relations with the factitive verbs. The first one is called an objective relation:

57. He makes his tent a place (Objective relation).

The second one is called an adjective relation in which the factitive object is followed by an adjective to show the effect of the factitive verb:

58. Avarice makes men hard-hearted (Adjective relation).

Fowler (1994:60) espouses that some factitive verbs require not only an object but also something further to describe that object, as in:



59. It drove me frantic.

In the example above, not only is the word *frantic* an object to the factitive verb, but it is also an obligatory element to complete the meaning or to convey its intended message. This means that a factitive verb does not make complete sense by mentioning its object, but it requires some complement to be added after the object, i.e., object complement to the factitive verb (drove). Factitive verbs are given such names for their unique grammatical behaviour and their common attribute. They have the power of attaching a complement to the object if they are active, as in 60 or to any other noun if they are passive, as in 61:

60. Many do call me fool.

61. The people made rich by him.

Avants and Benahnia (2003:68) make a distinction between a causative verb, which usually reflects a clear causative situation, and the two elements which a causative situation consists of, that is, the external agent and the basic non-causative situation. The agent is either a person or a thing, but it is typically human who may have control over the action which is denoted by the action of the verb.

Rather than using passive verbs, the causative verbs are used to illustrate that the subject causes the action to be performed:

62. He doesn't know how to repair cars, so he's having his repaired at the garage in downtown (Have something done).

63. I really must *get my ears tested*. *I'm sure I need a hearing aid* (Get something done).

There are connotative differences between the expressions *have something done* and *get something done*. Either expression is correct, however; "have" is somewhat more formal than "get", and the latter is more common than "have" in the imperative form.

"Have" and "get" are also used to denote happenings that occurred to someone. This means that the subject is doing nothing; he/she is having someone to do something for him/ her:

64. When being late for work every day for fifteen days, Jenny had her salary reduced.

65. I sat so close to the fireplace that I got my legs burnt.



Research Questions

This study tries to answer the following questions:

- 1- Can Iraqi EFL students perceive what the causative function is?
- 2- Can Iraqi EFL students discriminate between causatives and other types of verbs?

Methods

Participants

The participants involved are fifty Iraqi EFL college students from the Department of English at the College of Education for Human Sciences, University of Babylon. Those participants include one group only. They are counted as advanced takers. Supposedly, they are all seniors and are of the same qualifications. There were 27 males and 23 females. Their age ranges from 21 to 24. All of them were chosen without past arrangements.

Instrument

One of the most appropriate methods to carry out a study is a questionnaire. For Brown (2001: 6), a questionnaire is "any written document that presents respondents with a series of written questions or statements for which they have to provide answers either by writing out or selecting from among existing answers." Hence, a questionnaire is fundamentally a technique for gathering primary data. Correspondence with what is touched on, and a multiple-choice questionnaire is designed by the researchers to measure the participants' perception of causative verbs. It consists of one part with a total of 25 items that sought to discern the students' talent in utilising causatives. For each item, a predetermined set of five choices which represent five possible answers from which the students are queried to pick only one answer that suits the situation in question (See Appendix 1).

Procedure

The questionnaire is printed out and handed to the sample of the study who take part in the questionnaire. One session is held for the questionnaire at Babylon University. Firstly, the subjects are orally given a summary of the nature of the questionnaire and how to reply to the items. Then, they are kindly requested to provide their answers. The answer time ranged from 25-35 minutes. Randomly, three formats of the questionnaire are prepared with the same 25 items but with different orders. Those versions are randomly handed out to the subjects.

For the study results to be considered, two major concepts associated with data quality are required, which are **reliability and validity**. Lacking the development of these two features, the



results of the study would be uncertain. As it is the second aspect of a good research tool, Dörnyei (2010: 93) asserts that “validity is the extent to which a psychometric instrument measures what it has been designed to measure.” Typically, testers perceive two base types of validity: content validity and face validity. Fulcher and Davidson (2007:6) reveal that “content validity is defined as any attempt to show that the content of the test is a representative sample from the domain that is to be tested.” The questionnaire of the study has been approved by experts to appraise its validity. Boyle and Fisher (2007:65) remark that face validity is a type of validity mainly referring to the degree that the designed document “measures what it appears to measure”. The face validity of this technique is warranted by exposing the questionnaire to a group of experts and the method embraced to evaluate the internal consistency of reliability of the present study is Kurder-Richardson.

Findings and Discussion

This subsection is devoted to present the statistical results of the students' responses to see whether the results are significant or not. These results reflect the scope to which the students can recognise different certain causatives. Besides, they are important to verify or refute the research questions stated in Section 3.

Students' Responses to the Questionnaire

This subsection will be allocated to discuss the results of the questionnaire which reflect the learners' level of understanding causatives. These results are indispensable to uphold or discount the research questions of the current study. After the experience, each paper was scored out of 100 marks by assigning four marks for each correct response and zero marks for the incorrect ones. Blank items are also given zero marks as they were considered incorrect responses and revealed that the students failed to give the required response. It was found that only (17) of the total students of (50) managed to get at the pass mark of (50) out of (100), with a low pass-rate of (34%). Being less than (50%) means a quite low performance mean. The mean of the questionnaire scores for the students of the study who pass the exam stands at 63.1 out of 100. Further analysis is set out in Table (1) below.

Table 1: Percentage of the Questionnaire Items

<i>No. of Items</i>	<i>No. of Correct Responses</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No. of Incorrect Responses</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No. of Avoided Items</i>	<i>%</i>
1	20	40	28	56	2	4
2	32	64	18	36		
3	14	28	36	72		
4	29	58	20	40	1	2
5	22	44	28	56		
6	8	16	42	84		
7	15	30	33	66	2	4
8	27	54	21	42	2	4
9	35	70	14	28	1	2
10	43	86	7	14		
11	28	56	21	42	1	2
12	34	68	16	32		
13	20	40	29	58	1	2
14	22	44	27	54	1	2
15	29	58	21	42		
16	32	64	18	36		
17	15	30	35	70		
18	27	54	23	46		
19	25	50	21	42	4	8
20	29	58	20	40	1	2
21	16	32	34	68		
22	18	36	29	58	3	6
23	13	26	35	70	2	4
24	13	26	36	72	1	2
25	25	50	24	48	1	2
Total	591	118.2	636	127.2	23	4.6

One relevant remark is that the order, based upon statistical evidence of causatives expressed using frequency, seems to reflect the acquisition of causative verbs by Iraqi EFL learners. For item 10, the highest percentage of the correct responses is 86%. This result reveals that the learners know a lot about the structure of this item. The lowest percentage of the correct responses is 16% for item 6. Apparently, most subjects have failed to give the correct response for this item. From this rate, we infer that the students do not have the necessary skills to answer it. The students' general performance in the questionnaire reveals that the highest rate of the

students' correct responses has stood at 591 (118.2%), which is a lower performance rate than that of their incorrect ones (*including the avoided items*), which stood at 659 (131.8 %). This suggests that the students did not do well in this aspect. Thusly, Research Question 1 is answered.

The second relevant observation is related to Research Question 1. It reveals that the students do not adequately understand the specificity of causative constructions syntactically. The first sign was seen in items 4, 13, and 14:

Item (4), the possible answer is (B) which is (go).

* You let this thing **goes to** hell.

Item (13), the possible answer is (A) which is (run).

* The car got **ran** out.

Item (14), the possible answer is (C) which is (listening).

* They have him **to listen** all the lecture.

Some of these errors are attributed to the negative transfer that may occur through *overgeneralisation* (Richard & Schmidt, 2002:185). The student generalises the rules he/she knows to the situation, sometimes it is applicable and sometimes it is not. Or they may take place through guessing.

The second sign which indicates that the students were unable to single out causative verbs from other types of verbs was seen in responses 3, 5, and 6:

Item (3), The possible answer is the option (B) which is (repaired).

* I always have my car **repair** at that garage.

Item (5), the possible answer is the option (A) which is (open).

* She helps the cat **opening** the door.

Item (6), the possible answer is the option (B) which is (burn).

* I let the kitchen **to burn** in the oven.

These errors could be attributed to an *ignorance of the rules* as students apply them to contexts where they do not apply.

To sum up, all these unsatisfactory answers offer evidence that the students cannot yet reliably discriminate between causatives and other types of verbs.



Conclusion

The study has supplied proof that Iraqi EFL university students are unable to reliably perceive causative verbs. This is clear from the low rate of correct responses in the whole questionnaire, 591 (118.2%), which is lower than the incorrect ones, 659 (131.8 %). This result provides an answer to Research Question 1 presented in section 3. Consequently, it is difficult for them to differentiate between these verbs and other types of verbs that have different senses that express various ideas. This means that their awareness of the factors that govern causatives is questionable. This is an answer to Research Question 2. The analysis of the students' errors has shown that the source of error may be an intralingual transfer by which the learners rely on their earlier knowledge of the second language to recognise causatives through overgeneralisation, fostering ignorance of rules restrictions and an incomplete application of rules.

Value

This study is one of the investigations to focus on an important issue in English grammar, namely causatives. It is hoped that it helps students understand correct usage and style. It is also valuable for grammar syllabus designers and teachers who are involved in the domain of teaching and learning.



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Appendix 1

The Questionnaire

Encircle the right option of the following:

- 1- They get their children ----- well.
A) behave B) behaved C) to behave D) none E) other (specify)
- 2- I ----- my house broken into last night. I'm so upset!
A) let B) help C) had D) none E) other (specify)
- 3- I always have my car ----- at that garage.
A) repair B) repaired C) was repaired D) none E) other (specify)
- 4- You let this thing ----- hell.
A) to go B) go to C) goes to D) none E) other (specify)
- 5- She helps the cat ----- the door.
A) open B) opens C) opening D) none E) other (specify)
- 6- I let the kitchen ----- in the oven.
A) to burn B) burn C) burned D) none E) other (specify)
- 7- I'll ----- John to do it when he arrives.
A) get B) have C) let D) none E) other (specify)
- 8- He gets her ----- about her story.
A) spoke B) was spoken C) speaking D) none E) other (specify)
- 9- She had to read to make herself -----.
A) understands B) understood C) was understood D) none E) other (specify)
- 10- The dictionary helped him -----.
A) understood B) was understood C) to understand D) none E) other (specify)
- 11- Did his boss make him ----- late again last night?
A) to work B) work C) works D) none E) other (specify)
- 12- Why did he let this -----?
A) happening B) happens C) happen D) none E) other (specify)
- 13- The car got ----- out.
A) run B) ran C) runs D) none E) other (specify)
- 14- They have him ----- all the lecture.
A) to listen B) was listened C) listening D) none E) other (specify)
- 15- My parents didn't make me -----with housework when I was young.
A) help B) helped C) was helped D) none E) other (specify)
- 16- Will you please ----- drive your car?
A) lets me B) me let C) let me D) none E) other (specify)
- 17- He made himself ----- sad.
A) feel B) to feel C) felt D) none E) other (specify)



- 18- Can you help me ----- my living room next weekend?
A) painting B) to paint C) paints D) none E) other (specify)
- 19- Does your tooth still hurt? Yes, I have to get a dentist ----- soon.
A) look at it B) to look at it C) to get it looked at D) none E) other (specify)
- 20- He had his hair ----- yesterday.
A) to cut B) to be cut C) cut D) none E) other (specify)
- 21- Let him ----- his own decision.
A) make B) makes C) making D) none E) other (specify)
- 22- How can you get the employee ----- on time?
A) arrive B) to arrive C) arrived D) none E) other (specify)
- 23- Reading before bed helps her -----.
A) relax B) relaxes C) relaxing D) none E) other (specify)
- 24- She had her daughter ----- the food.
A) cook B) cooks C) to cook D) none E) other (specify)
- 25- The supervisor made the worker ----- working to meet the deadline.
A) continues B) continue C) continued D) none E) other (specify)

The questionnaire answers

- 1- C 2- C 3- B 4- B 5- A 6- B 7- A 8- C 9- B
10- C 11- B 12- C 13- A 14- C 15- A 16- C 17- C
18- B 19- B 20- C 21- A 22- B 23- A 24- A 25- B