

Corpus, Cognition and Causative Constructions

Gaëtanelle Gilquin

udies in Corpus Linguistics

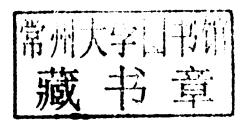
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Corpus, Cognition and Causative Constructions

Gaëtanelle Gilquin

Université catholique de Louvain



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Volume 39

Corpus, Cognition and Causative Constructions by Gaëtanelle Gilquin

In memory of Joséphine Gilquin (1911–2005), my guardian angel, and Louis Brasseur (1920–2005), who taught me the importance of a job well done and the value of hard work Nobody trips over mountains. It is the small pebble that causes you to stumble. Pass all the pebbles in your path and you will find you have crossed the mountain.

(Author unknown)

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The notion of causation is a fundamental one. Lakoff & Johnson (1980:69) see it as a "basic human concept", one which is used by people to "organize their physical and cultural realities", and Baron (1974:340) notes "the importance of causation to the underlying structure of human language". This book looks into causation as it is expressed in English, and more precisely, causation as encoded by so-called periphrastic causative constructions (also referred to as analytic causative constructions), i.e. two-part configurations such as *He makes me laugh* or *I had my hair cut*, where a causative verb controls a non-finite complement clause and which express a causal relation in which the occurrence of the effect is entailed (see Wolff & Song 2003). In total, ten different periphrastic causative constructions will be examined, centring around the verbs *cause*, *get*, *have* and *make*.¹

Kemmer & Verhagen (1994:115) note that "[t]he grammar of causative constructions has inspired what is probably one of the most extensive literatures in modern Linguistics", and one may wonder what yet another study such as this one has to offer. Its contribution is threefold – descriptive, methodological and theoretical.

The first aim is to provide an exhaustive and reliable description of the behavioural profile of causative constructions in British English. It is a functional and cognitive assumption that the availability of alternative expressions to describe one and the same situation implies a difference in meaning and conceptualisation (cf. the "one form, one meaning" principle in functional grammar and the "Principle of No Synonymy" in cognitive linguistics). The existence of several causative constructions therefore raises the question of what distinguishes them. The literature does not provide any satisfactory answer to this question. The constructions are often presented as interchangeable beyond the obvious differences in complementation. In addition, the existing descriptions of English periphrastic causative constructions tend to suffer from a lack of comprehensiveness, with aspects such as style or lexis being largely ignored, and present contradictions which underline their unreliable character. As a starting point for a more adequate description, use will be made of corpus data. Since they represent

^{1.} See Wolff & Song (2003: 286) for an exhaustive list of periphrastic causative verbs.