



# *Corpus, Cognition and Causative Constructions*

Gaëtanelle Gilquin

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**39**

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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)

## List of tables

Table 1.	English periphrastic causative constructions	20
Table 2.	Composition of BNC-10	34
Table 3.	Proportion of periphrastic causative constructions in SUB_ARTS	37
Table 4.	Examples of mistagged non-finite complements with causative <i>make</i> in SUB_ARTS	40
Table 5.	Queries used and their recall/precision rates	42
Table 6.	Comparison of recall and precision rates with and without repair mechanisms	43
Table 7.	Number of hits, number of causative constructions and precision rate	46
Table 8.	Absolute frequency and relative frequency per million words of periphrastic causative constructions	48
Table 9.	Hypotheses underlying exercise A of the elicitation test	50
Table 10.	Types of problems involved in exercise D of the elicitation test	53
Table 11.	Types of interpretations possible in exercise F of the elicitation test	53
Table 12.	Length of the action chain (percentages)	72
Table 13.	Number of participants profiled (percentages)	73
Table 14.	Profiling and gapping of the causing event (percentages)	80
Table 15.	Relation between CAUSER and CAUSEE (percentages)	87
Table 16.	Relation between PATIENT and CAUSER/CAUSEE (percentages)	91
Table 17.	Parameters of causative constructions investigated	100
Table 18.	Contingency table and adjusted residuals of the EFFECT type	103
Table 19.	Status of the causative verb (distinctiveness and percentages)	105
Table 20.	Tense of the causative verb (distinctiveness and percentages)	107
Table 21.	Form of the CAUSER (distinctiveness and percentages)	109
Table 22.	Grammatical person of the CAUSER (distinctiveness and percentages)	110
Table 23.	Definiteness of the CAUSER (distinctiveness and percentages)	110
Table 24.	Specificity of the CAUSER (distinctiveness and percentages)	110
Table 25.	Animacy of the CAUSER (distinctiveness and percentages)	112
Table 26.	Semantic nature of the CAUSER (distinctiveness and percentages)	114
Table 27.	Form of the CAUSEE (distinctiveness and percentages)	116
Table 28.	Grammatical person of the CAUSEE (distinctiveness and percentages)	116
Table 29.	Definiteness of the CAUSEE (distinctiveness and percentages)	116
Table 30.	Specificity of the CAUSEE (distinctiveness and percentages)	118
Table 31.	Animacy of the CAUSEE (distinctiveness and percentages)	118
Table 32.	Types of causation (distinctiveness and percentages)	120

## List of figures

- Figure 1.** Domains in the BNC (Lee 2001a: 50) 32
- Figure 2.** The Corpus-Cognition Integrated model 58
- Figure 3.** Action chain (Langacker 1991: 283) 61
- Figure 4.** Linguistic realisation of different action chains 62
- Figure 5.** Effect of causativisation on the action chain 64
- Figure 6.** Action chain of *Jealousy caused the Queen to kill Snow White* 65
- Figure 7.** Schematic action chain of a periphrastic causative construction with a PATIENT 66
- Figure 8.** Schematic action chain of a periphrastic causative construction with no PATIENT 66
- Figure 9.** Action chains with *kill* and *cause to die* 67
- Figure 10.** Relative frequency per million words of causative constructions according to medium 226
- Figure 11.** Relative frequency per million words of causative constructions according to genre (speech) 227
- Figure 12.** Relative frequency per million words of causative constructions according to genre (writing) 231
- Figure 13.** Proportion (%) of [X *GET* Y *done*] in native writing, native speech and learner writing 266
- Figure 14.** Grammatical unit on causative constructions 272



Table 33.	Semantic nature of the CAUSEE (distinctiveness and percentages)	122
Table 34.	Transitivity of the EFFECT (distinctiveness and percentages)	124
Table 35.	Dynamicity of the EFFECT (distinctiveness and percentages)	125
Table 36.	Functional category of the EFFECT (distinctiveness and percentages)	127
Table 37.	Volitionality of the EFFECT (distinctiveness and percentages)	128
Table 38.	Volitionality of the EFFECT and animacy of the CAUSER and CAUSEE (distinctiveness and percentages)	130
Table 39.	Form of the PATIENT (distinctiveness and percentages)	132
Table 40.	Definiteness of the PATIENT (distinctiveness and percentages)	132
Table 41.	Specificity of the PATIENT (distinctiveness and percentages)	132
Table 42.	Semantic nature of the PATIENT (distinctiveness and percentages)	133
Table 43.	Number of distinctive features in common and in opposition (grey shading)	135
Table 44.	Number of most frequent features in common	136
Table 45.	Results of hierarchical feature selection	139
Table 46.	Parameters of transitivity (Hopper & Thompson 1980: 252)	147
Table 47.	Parameters of the models of prototypical causation	154
Table 48.	Frequency of the models of prototypical causation	154
Table 49.	Frequency of the parameters of the billiard-ball model	159
Table 50.	Frequency of the parameters of the model of direct manipulation	159
Table 51.	Salience of the models of prototypical causation	161
Table 52.	[X CAUSE Y V <sub>to-inf</sub> ] and the semantic prosody of technical and scientific terminology	174
Table 53.	[X GET Y V <sub>pp</sub> ] and the semantic prosody of difficulty	176
Table 54.	[X HAVE Y V <sub>pp</sub> ] and the semantic prosody of service	180
Table 55.	[X HAVE Y V <sub>prp</sub> ] and the semantic prosody of machinery	182
Table 56.	[X GET Y V <sub>prp</sub> ] and the semantic prosody of machinery	183
Table 57.	[X MAKE Y V <sub>inf</sub> ] and the semantic prosody of bodily and inner sensations	184
Table 58.	Frequent noun phrases and verbs in [X GET Y V <sub>pp</sub> ] and [X HAVE Y V <sub>pp</sub> ] (Francis et al. 1996: 306)	194
Table 59.	Observed frequency, expected frequency and distinctiveness value for <i>look_SEEM</i>	200
Table 60.	Distinctiveness value of verb senses with SumAbsDev larger than fifty	201
Table 61.	Distinctive colllexemes for [X MAKE Y V <sub>pp</sub> ]	203
Table 62.	Distinctive colllexemes for [X MAKE Y V <sub>inf</sub> ]	205
Table 63.	Distinctive colllexemes for [X <i>be made</i> V <sub>to-inf</sub> ]	207
Table 64.	Distinctive colllexemes for [X GET Y V <sub>pp</sub> ]	209
Table 65.	Distinctive colllexemes for [X HAVE Y V <sub>pp</sub> ]	211
Table 66.	Distinctive colllexemes for [X GET Y V <sub>prp</sub> ]	212
Table 67.	Distinctive colllexemes for [X HAVE Y V <sub>prp</sub> ]	212
Table 68.	Distinctive colllexemes for [X GET Y V <sub>to-inf</sub> ]	214
Table 69.	Distinctive colllexemes for [X HAVE Y V <sub>inf</sub> ]	214

Table 70.	Distinctive collexemes for [X CAUSE Y V <sub>to-inf</sub> ]	215
Table 71.	Meanings distinctively associated with periphrastic causative constructions	220
Table 72.	Main semantic and syntactic differences between speech and writing	234
Table 73.	More semantic and syntactic differences between speech and writing	237
Table 74.	Semantic prosody of technical and scientific terminology with [X CAUSE Y V <sub>to-inf</sub> ] in speech and writing	240
Table 75.	Semantic prosody of difficulty with [X GET Y V <sub>to-inf</sub> ] in speech and writing	240
Table 76.	Semantic prosody of service with [X HAVE Y V <sub>pp</sub> ] in speech and writing	241
Table 77.	Semantic prosody of bodily and inner sensations with [X MAKE Y V <sub>inf</sub> ] in speech and writing	241
Table 78.	Some idioms in speech and writing	243
Table 79.	Type/token ratio of the EFFECT in speech and writing	244
Table 80.	Absolute and cumulative frequency of the most frequent EFFECTS in speech and writing	245
Table 81.	Proportion of shared collexemes in speech and writing	247
Table 82.	Distinctive collexemes in speech and writing (with collocation strength)	248
Table 83.	Composition of ICLEv2	253
Table 84.	Relative frequency per million words of causative constructions in native and learner writing	255
Table 85.	Frequency of non-standard patterns in learner writing	257
Table 86.	Proportion of syntactic errors in learner writing	259
Table 87.	Proportion of shared collexemes in the EFFECT slot of native and learner writing	261
Table 88.	Some distinctive collocations in native and learner writing	261
Table 89.	Distinctive collexemes of [X MAKE Y V <sub>inf</sub> ] in native and learner writing (significant values only)	262
Table 90.	Distinctive collexemes of [X MAKE Y V <sub>pp</sub> ] in native and learner writing (all values)	265
Table 91.	Distinctiveness of [X MAKE Y <i>feel</i> ] in learner writing vs. native writing and in learner writing vs. native speech	267
Table 92.	Proportion of dynamic and stative verbs in the EFFECT slot of the <i>make/faire</i> causative constructions in native American English (US), learner English (ICLE) and native French (FR) (Gilquin 2000/2001: 110)	267

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# Table of contents

List of tables	XIII
List of figures	XVI
Acknowledgements	XVII
CHAPTER 1	
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
CHAPTER 2	
<b>Corpus linguistics and theory</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 Corpus linguistics: Theory or methodology?	5
2.2 The place of theory: Bottom-up vs. top-down	7
2.2.1 From data to theory	7
2.2.2 From theory to data	8
2.2.3 To-ing and fro-ing between data and theory	10
2.3 Combining corpus linguistics and cognitive linguistics	11
2.3.1 "Computer-aided armchair linguistics"	11
2.3.2 The theoretical framework of cognitive linguistics	12
2.3.3 Compatibility of cognitive linguistics with corpus linguistics	14
2.3.4 Corpus linguistics and cognitive linguistics: Added value	16
2.3.5 Illustrations	17
2.3.6 The case of English periphrastic causative constructions	19
2.4 Summary	23
CHAPTER 3	
<b>English causative constructions: Collecting the data</b>	<b>25</b>
3.1 Corpus data: A semi-automatic method	25
3.1.1 Two problems with the extraction of the data	25
3.1.1.1 The retrieval of syntactic structures	25
3.1.1.2 Periphrastic causative construction: An ambiguous structure	29
3.1.2 Semi-automatic method	30
3.1.2.1 The corpus	30
3.1.2.2 The text retrieval software	34
3.1.2.3 Pilot study	36

3.1.2.4	Automatic stage: Using BNCweb to query BNC-10	43
3.1.2.5	Manual stage: Post-editing the concordances	44
3.1.2.6	Semi-automatic search of BNC-10	45
3.2	Experimental data: Elicitation test	48
3.2.1	Designing the questionnaire	48
3.2.2	Data collection	54
3.3	Combining corpus and experimental data	55
3.4	Summary	59
CHAPTER 4		
	<b>Causative constructions in action: The realisation of the action chain</b>	<b>61</b>
4.1	The notion of action chain	61
4.2	The action chain of periphrastic causative constructions	63
4.3	Action chains in the corpus data	68
4.3.1	Different types of action chains	69
4.3.1.1	Literal vs. symbolic energy flow	69
4.3.1.2	Caused motion vs. caused rest	69
4.3.2	Length of the action chain	70
4.3.3	Linguistic realisation of the action chain	72
4.3.4	The causing event	77
4.3.5	Identity between participants	84
4.4	Action chains in the elicitation data	91
4.5	Summary	95
CHAPTER 5		
	<b>The syntax and semantics of causative constructions:</b>	
	<b>The Principle of No Synonymy</b>	<b>97</b>
5.1	No (more) synonymy	97
5.2	From data to database	99
5.3	Individual approach: Chi-square analysis	102
5.3.1	Methodology: Chi-square test with adjusted residuals	102
5.3.2	The causative verb	104
5.3.3	The CAUSER	108
5.3.4	The CAUSEE	115
5.3.5	The EFFECT	123
5.3.6	The PATIENT	131
5.3.7	Interim summary: Distinctiveness and frequency	134
5.4	Global approach: Hierarchical feature selection	137
5.5	Syntactic and semantic features in the elicitation data	139
5.6	Summary	142

## CHAPTER 6

**Defining the causative prototype** 145

- 6.1 Prototypicality in cognitive linguistics 145
- 6.2 Prototypical causation 149
  - 6.2.1 Ordering of the participants 149
  - 6.2.2 Nature of the participants 151
    - 6.2.2.1 Billiard-ball causation 151
    - 6.2.2.2 Direct manipulation 151
  - 6.2.3 The three models 153
- 6.3 Linguistic validation of the models of prototypical causation 153
  - 6.3.1 Strict validation 155
  - 6.3.2 Loose validation 157
- 6.4 Cognitive validation of the models of prototypical causation 160
- 6.5 Explaining the discrepancies 162
  - 6.5.1 Theoretical constructs and language data 162
  - 6.5.2 Corpus and elicitation data 164
- 6.6 Summary 166

## CHAPTER 7

**Lexical co-occurrence in causative constructions** 169

- 7.1 The co-textual approach 169
- 7.2 Methodology 171
- 7.3 Collocational profiles in the corpus data 172
  - 7.3.1 [X CAUSE Y V<sub>to-inf</sub>] 172
  - 7.3.2 *Get* and *have* constructions 175
  - 7.3.3 *Make* constructions 183
- 7.4 Word clusters in the corpus data 185
- 7.5 The co-textual approach in the elicitation data 189
- 7.6 Summary 190

## CHAPTER 8

**Collexemes in the EFFECT slot** 193

- 8.1 Periphrastic causative constructions: Always safe? 193
- 8.2 Collostructional analysis and the technique of multiple distinctive collexeme analysis 195
- 8.3 Lemma-based vs. sense-based approach 196
- 8.4 Methodology 198
- 8.5 Results of the sense-based multiple distinctive collexeme analysis and discussion 200
  - 8.5.1 Deviation from expected frequency 200

8.5.2	[X MAKE Y V <sub>pp</sub> ]	202
8.5.3	[X MAKE Y V <sub>inf</sub> ] and [X BE <i>made</i> V <sub>to-inf</sub> ]	204
8.5.4	[X GET Y V <sub>pp</sub> ] and [X HAVE Y V <sub>pp</sub> ]	208
8.5.5	[X GET Y V <sub>pp</sub> ] and [X HAVE Y V <sub>pp</sub> ]	211
8.5.6	[X GET Y V <sub>to-inf</sub> ] and [X HAVE Y V <sub>inf</sub> ]	213
8.5.7	[X CAUSE Y V <sub>to-inf</sub> ]	215
8.6	The EFFECT slot in the elicitation data	216
8.7	Summary	219
CHAPTER 9		
	The influence of register on causative constructions	223
9.1	Studying variation	223
9.2	Frequency according to register	225
9.2.1	Medium	225
9.2.2	Genres	227
9.3	Semantic and syntactic features in speech vs. writing	231
9.3.1	Shared differences	232
9.3.2	Specific differences	233
9.4	Lexical features in speech vs. writing	239
9.4.1	Collocation and semantic prosody	239
9.4.2	Word clusters	242
9.4.3	Collexemes in the EFFECT slot	243
9.5	Summary	249
CHAPTER 10		
	Causative constructions and foreign language teaching	251
10.1	Foreign learners: Lost in causative constructions	251
10.1.1	Data and methodology	252
10.1.2	Under- and overuse of causative constructions	254
10.1.3	Syntactic misuse of causative constructions	256
10.1.4	Idiomatcity of causative constructions:	
	Collexemes in the EFFECT slot	259
10.2	Lost in pedagogical tools	268
10.3	Grammatical unit	272
10.4	Summary	276
CHAPTER 11		
	Conclusion	277
	References	285

<b>APPENDIX 1</b>	
<b>Elicitation test</b>	<b>305</b>
<b>APPENDIX 2</b>	
<b>Distinctive syntactic and semantic features of causative constructions</b>	<b>311</b>
<b>APPENDIX 3</b>	
<b>Most frequent syntactic and semantic features of causative constructions</b>	<b>315</b>
Author index	317
Subject index	321



## 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*.<sup>1</sup>

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

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