A Study on the Acquisition of English Causatives by Turkish Learners of English

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Abstract

Causatives are means of expressing an occurrence in which a subject causes a change in state of an event, or makes someone or something else to do something. This study reports findings in relation to the use of causatives by Turkish learners of English in their first language (L1) and second language (L2). The study also aims to identify ambiguities in English causatives for Turkish learners. With this aim in mind, students' use of causatives in L1 and L2 was identified using various tasks as data collection tools. It was found that, regardless their language proficiency level, most of students' use of causatives was influenced by their first language. In addition, the differences between the two languages in terms of the causative structures were found to cause ambiguities for learners.

Key words: Causative, first language interference, periphrastic-lexical causatives

Özet

Dilde kullanılan ettirgen yapılar, öznenin bir olayın durumunu değiştirmesi ya da birisine bir şey yaptırması amacıyla kullanılır. Bu çalışma ikinci dil olarak İngilizce öğrenen Türk öğrencilerin ettirgen yapıları kullanmasıyla ilgili bulguları göstermektedir. Çalışmada Türk öğrencilerin İngilizce' de kullanılan ettirgen yapıları öğrenmede karşılaştıkları anlam belirsizliklerini de göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Değişik veri toplama araçları kullanılan çalışmanın sonucunda öğrencilerin dil seviyeleri ne olursa olsun çoğu öğrencinin ettirgen yapı kullanımında anadillerinden etkilendikleri ortaya çıkmıştır. Buna ek olarak, iki dil arasındaki farklılıklar öğrencilerin bu yapıları kullanmasında karmaşaya yol açtığı bulunmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ettirgen yapı, anadil etkisi, dolaylı-sözcüksel ettirgen yapılar

INTRODUCTION

The grammar of causative constructions has long inspired modern linguistic literature, which is mostly because of the complexities of causatives both within particular languages and cross-linguistically (Kemmer & Ferhagen, 1994). A causative sentence is defined as an expression of an agent causing or forcing a patient to perform an action. All languages have different ways of expressing causation. In some languages, for example, there are morphological devices (such as inflection) that change verbs into their causative forms such as Turkish, or some branches of Indo-European (e.g. The Slavic languages and the Germanic languages with the exception of English and Africans). Some other languages employ periphrasis-sometimes called analytic causatives-, with idiomatic expressions or auxiliary verbs such as English, and also, in many cases, the language simply uses a different lexical item to indicate a causative form. For example, the causative of English *rise* is *raise*, and the causative of *eat* is *feed*.

L1 interference is an important factor in the acquisition and use of causatives in L2. Numerous studies (Houmanfar et al., 2005; Helms-Park, 2001; Cabrera, 2005) have proven the effect of L1 on the use of L2 causatives. The purpose of the present study is twofold: a) to assess whether Turkish learners of English can accurately use causatives both in L1 and L2 and find out the degree they transfer their knowledge of L1 causatives to L2, b) to find out ambiguities in the use of L2 causatives for Turkish learners of English.

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An Overview of Causatives in Turkish and English
Lexical Causatives

Lexical causatives are single-clause expressions that encode the notions of cause and result. In many cases, a language simply uses a different lexical item to indicate a causative form. For instance, the causative of English *rise* is *raise*, and the causative of *eat* is *feed*. English allows a notable freedom in verb valence, resulting in verbs such as *break*, *burn* or *awake*, which may be causative or not. Song and Wolff (2003) argues that lexical causative expressions such as *John broke the window,* and periphrastic expressions such as *John caused the window to break* represents different stages in the derivation of the same primary semantic structure. However, these two causative types differ in that while the former shows directedness, the latter has an indirect meaning and they are not all the time interchangeable.

Richards (2001) argues that ditransitive verbs like *give* include a separate causative component in the syntax:

(1) a. Bob got the key (from Jill). / Jill gave Bob the key.
   b. Susan took a lot of criticism (from John). / John gave Susan a lot of criticism.
   c. I get the creeps (from Harry). / Harry gives me the creeps.

Some transitive verbs have fairly clear non-causative counterparts. For example, the transitive verb kill, 'öldür' (Turkish), is the causative of die 'öl'.

(2) a. The cat die-d.   Kedi öl-dü (past).

   b. Ahmet killed the cat.   Ahmet kediyi (Cat-Accusative) öl-*dür*-dü.(past)

The verb feed,'besle' is the causative of the irregular transitive verb eat, 'ye'.

(3) a. The baby ate the cookies.   Bebek kurabiyeleri (cookies-accusative) ye-di. (past).

   b. Ali fed the baby with cookies.   Ali bebeği (accusative) kurabiyelerle besle-di. (past).

English employs periphrastic causatives with idiomatic expressions or auxiliary verbs, but this type of causatives are not employed in Turkish which uses morphological causativity. Delice (2002) states that some syntactic suffixes-called factitive verbs that express the notion of making something or cause a result- are employed to express the causativity (see 2b). These suffixes-such as, *r-; -t-; -DIr-, -DAr-; -Ar-; -gUr-; -z-,* are added to the end of the verb root; they are tensed by another suffix, and then a personal suffix is added to the verb. For example:

(4) a. Ali kapı-yı (accusative) onar-*t* (causative suffix)-tı (past).
    Ali got the door fixed.

   b. O, Ali'ye kapı-yı (accusative) kapat-*tır* (causatieve suffix) dı (past).
    He made Ali close the door.

Periphrastic Causatives

A periphrastic causative is a two-verb structure that expresses a predicate of causation and a predicate of effect. Hence, English expressions such as *She made him leave, he got someone to paint the walls,* and *we let her come along* are periphrastic causative constructions.

To use such a structure, the speaker must view one predicate, which is called the effected predicate, as causally dependent on some action of the subject of the sentence.

Kemmer and Verhagen (1994) state that considering morphological features, for example, periphrastic causatives (they call it analytic causatives) often consist of two verbs, only one of which has all the formal trappings of a normal verbal element. Hence in English and many other European languages, only one of the two verbs involved in the structure occurs with tense/aspect marking; the other verb is an infinitive.

Causative structures involve a *causer* causing all the event and *causee* carrying out the activity designated by the effected predicate. For example:

(5) a. He made Mary do the cooking.

b. He got Mary to fix the flat tire.

c. He had Mary wash the dishes.

As the examples above show, *he* is causer of all the actions, and *Mary* is the causee of the activity designated by the effected predicate. Kim (2005) argues that a causative subject, the causer, receives a nominative case, and the causee is marked by an accusative case (see 4b).

METHOD

Participants
The participants of this study are 35 sophomore students (30 female and 5 male) enrolled in the English Language Teaching Department at the University of Çukurova. The participants' age ranges from 20 to 22. Their native language is Turkish. Gender was not taken into consideration in the analysis.

Procedure
In the first phase of the study, the Michigan Placement Test was administered with a view to identifying the language level of the participants. Following the administration of the placement test, the students were given three tasks to complete. In the first and second tasks the students were asked to translate 20 causative sentences from English to Turkish (Task 1) and 20 causative sentences from Turkish to English (Task 2). In the third task, they were supposed to decide on the agents of the actions as well as the ultimate consequences of these actions. Table 2 summarizes the tasks used in the study. *The data obtained from the students' responses were analyzed using SPSS.*

Table 2. *Tasks used in the Study*

Stimuli (Task 1)	- 19 Test sentences - 3 Lexical effects (negative; neutral; positive) - 2 verbs for each lexical effect (ridicule and damage for negative; photograph and color for neutral; praise and caress for positive)

Questions	(Q1) Who do you suppose initiated the ___ing?
	  a. Mary b. Either Mary or John c. John
	(Q2) The ultimate consequence for Mary of John's ___ing will be:
	  a. Positive b. Neutral c. Negative

Translation from Turkish to English (Task 2)	Saçını kestirdi. (He had his hair cut)
Translation from English to Turkish (Task 3)	He had someone to paint the walls. Duvarı birine boyattırdı.

FINDINGS

Table 1 demonstrates the participants' level of proficiency under five categories **(**advanced, low advanced, high intermediate, intermediate, low intermediate, and beginner)**.**

Table1. *English Level of the Participants according to the Michigan Placement Test*

	Low Intermediate	Intermediate	High Intermediate	Low Advanced	Advanced	Total
Number of Students	-	-	3	11	21	35

As Table 1 demonstrates, a great majority of the participants have *advanced* or *low-advanced* level of English (21 and 11 students respectively). Only three students' language level was found *high intermediate* according to the test results.

The analysis results of the first task in which the participants translated from English to Turkish are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. *Analysis results of the Translation Task from English to Turkish*

Item Number	Correct		Wrong		Mean	sd
	f	%	f	%		
1	34	100%	0	0%	1,000	,00000
2	33	97.1%	1	2.9%	,9706	,17150
3	32	94.1%	2	5.9%	,9412	,23883
4	32	94.1%	2	5.9%	,9412	,23883
5	32	94.1%	2	5.9%	,9412	,23883
6	33	97.1%	1	2.9%	,9706	,17150
7	29	85.3%	5	14.7%	,8529	,35949
8	34	100%	0	0%	1,000	,00000
9	33	97.1%	1	2.9%	,9706	,17150
10	32	94.1%	2	5.9%	,9412	,23883
11	34	100%	0	0%	1,000	,00000
12	33	97.1%	1	2.9%	,9706	,17150
13	34	100%	0	0%	1,000	,00000
14	32	94.1%	2	5.9%	,9412	,23883
15	34	100%	0	0%	1,000	,00000
16	30	88.2%	4	11.8%	,8824	,32703
17	33	97.1%	1	2.9%	,9706	,17150
18	33	97.1%	1	2.9%	,9706	,17150
19	34	100%	0	0%	1,000	,00000
20	33	97.1%	1	2.9%	,9706	,17150

As seen in Table 3, the participants had no difficulty in translating the six items in the task (Item number 1, 8, 11, 13, 15, 19). The verbs in these items which were translated accurately are "*having a haircut, taking the patient's temperature, having the jacket cleaned, having his wallet stolen, making somebody apologize, making the kids wash the windows*". However, mean scores for two items (Item 7 and 16) are lower than those of others. The sentences in these items are "*I really must get someone to fix the central heating*" and "*did someone make you wear that ugly hat?*" . Considering the wrong answers and lower scores (85.3% and 88.2% respectively), these items were found to be confusing for students. The rest of the items had a few minor mistakes.

Following the translation task 1, the participants were given the second task in which they were asked to translate from Turkish to English. Analysis results of this task are as follows:

Table 4. *Analysis Results of the Translation Task from English to Turkish*

Item Number	Correct		Wrong		Mean	sd
	f	%	f	%		
1	32	94.1%	2	5.9%	,9412	,23883
2	33	97.1%	1	2.9%	,9706	,17150
3	27	79.4%	7	20.6%	,7941	,41043
4	24	70.6%	10	29.4%	,7059	,46250
5	28	82.4%	6	17.6%	,8235	,38695
6	33	97.1%	1	2.9%	,9706	,17150
7	31	91.2%	3	8.8%	,9118	,28790
8	23	67.6%	11	32.4%	,6765	,47486
9	27	79.4%	7	20.6%	,7941	,41043
10	27	79.4%	7	20.6%	,7941	,41043
11	34	100%	0	0%	1,000	,00000
12	28	82.4%	6	17.6%	,8235	,38695
13	29	85.3%	5	14.7%	,8529	,35949
14	30	88.2%	4	11.8%	,8824	,32703
15	24	70.6%	10	29.4%	,7059	,46250
16	26	76.5%	8	23.5%	,7647	,43056
17	27	79.4%	7	20.6%	,7941	,41043
18	29	85.3%	5	14.7%	,8529	,35949
19	32	94.1%	2	5.9%	,9412	,23883
20	27	79.4%	7	20.6%	,7941	,41043

Table 4 displays the question numbers and the percentages for how well the students did in the second task. As seen in the table, the participants answered only one question without any mistakes: the sentence "*I'm going to make him clean the floor*". However, the number of items without any mistakes was 6 in the translation task from English to Turkish (see Table 3).

Mean scores for translation items show that the 8th item is the most problematic one for students: "*I'll make somebody call you*". As it is displayed in Table 4, the mean score for this question is ,6765. The lowest mean in task 1 is ,8529. Another problematic item is the sentence "*we got the wound dressed in the pharmacy*". The problem in this question seemed to be caused by students' effort to build the English sentence by word to word translation.

In the translation task from Turkish to English, some sentences such as *Evi* (accusative) *Ahmet'e yaptırdım,* which may, in English, mean both *I made Ahmet build this house* and *I had this house built for Ahmet*, seem to be ambiguous for the students. Most of them prefer the former sentence English translation for the equivalent of Turkish sentence. This perception might have caused by the difference between Turkish and English in terms of causatives. For example, in Turkish '*için*' is used when we want to state that we had this house built for someone. Since this Turkish adverb (*için*) is not used in the translation task, students preferred the former sentence.

Considering the mean scores and percentages of correct and wrong answers given by the students, it can be concluded that Turkish students can identify the causative structure in

L2 and accurately translate them into L1. However, they have difficulty in finding the correct structure in L2.

Task 3 aims to assess the association between the causative and the positive effect of the sentence. Each item in this task had two questions: the first one tested the interpretation of the sentence by asking participants to determine the person who initiated the action while the second one required finding the effects of the events: positive, negative or neutral. In this task, the same event had two levels, lexical and sentential. For instance, although the action "killing" is negative for the subject who is killed, it can be positive for the agent at the sentential level.

Marry was the agent for all the items in the causative structure task. Table 5 displays the participants' interpretations in relation to the agent of the actions in English causative sentences.

Table 5. Agents of the Actions according to the Participants

Agent	Frequency	%
Marry	420	67%
John	191	30%
Either	16	3%
Total	627	100%

Table 5 demonstrates the frequency and percentages in relation to the participants' response about the agents of the actions. As it can be seen in the table, most of the participants chose *Marry* as the agent in positive sentences (67%). The other responses for *John* and *either* were found 30 % and 3% respectively. No participants missed Marry as the agent of the actions.

The participants were then asked about the ultimate consequence for the actions, which gives clues about lexical effects. Table 6 displays findings regarding the participants' choice on lexical effects.

Table 6. Ultimate Consequence of the Actions according to the Participants

Consequence	Frequency	%
Positive	389	61
Negative	118	19
Neutral	125	20
Total	632	100

The answer for all the items about the lexical structure is *positive*. However, the participants had different perceptions of sentences and their response varied. For 61% of the participants, the consequence of the action is *positive* whereas it is *negative* for 19 % and *neutral* for 20%.

All the items were *positive* in terms of their lexical structure. However, the participants' comments revealed different perceptions in that their response included 61% *positive*, 19% *negative*, and 20% *neutral*.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we presented Turkish students' causative using skills in their native tongue, Turkish, in which morphological devices (such as inflection) are employed, and their second language, English in which periphrastic causatives are generally employed. As shown in data analysis, Turkish students are more capable of translating English causative

sentences to Turkish whereas they make more mistakes when translating the Turkish causative sentences into English. Another finding is that although most of our students are at low-advanced and advanced level, they seem to be transferring some of their L1 properties to L2. This finding is parallel with the studies of Helms-Park (2001) and Houmanfar et al (2005), which prove L1 interference on second language.

This study presents Turkish students' use of causatives in L1 which employs morphological devices such as inflection and in L2 which employs periphrastic causatives. Results show that Turkish students can perform better while translating English causative sentences into Turkish, but they have difficulty in finding the accurate causative structure in the target language. Findings also reveal students' knowledge transfer from L1 to L2 despite their low-advanced or advanced language levels. This finding is parallel with the studies of Helms-Park (2001) and Houmanfar et al. (2005) proving L1 interference on second language.

In conclusion, the differences between Turkish and English in terms of the use of causatives were found to cause ambiguity for learners. Despite their advanced level of English, Turkish learners of English have proven to have difficulty in the accurate use of causatives in English and transfer their knowledge from L1 in the use of causatives in L2.

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Appendix 1

Translate the Sentences into Turkish

- I will get barber to cut my hair.
- Her father got the house built for Ahmet.
- John got his hand caught in the machine.
- I am getting Marry to do the shopping.
- They got him to sell the car.
- He got them arrested.
- I really must get someone to fix the central heating.
- Dr. Smith had his nurse take the patients' temperature.
- I had the mechanic check my brakes.
- Please, have your secretary fax me the information.
- I had my jacket cleaned yesterday.
- Did you have your computer fixed?
- He had his wallet stolen.
- I will have the report prepared by tomorrow.
- My teacher made me apologize for what I had said.
- Did someone make you wear that ugly hat?
- She made her children do their homework.
- Burhan was about to make me sell the car.
- Erol will make the kids wash the windows before going out.
- He made them eat all the food on the desk.

Appendix 2

Translate the Sentences into English

- Evi Ayşe'ye temizlettim.
- Raporu sekretere hazırlattım.
- Sınav sonuçlarını incelettir.
- Bana lastikleri kontrol ettirmemi söyledi.
- Bu evi John'a yaptırdım.
- Öğretmen bize sık sık makaleler yazdırır.
- Komedyen çocukları güldürdü.
- Eve geldiğinde seni arattıracağım.
- Babam lavaboyu tamir ettirdi.
- Teyzem saçını kızıla boyattı.
- Ona yerleri sildireceğiz.
- Bütün elbiseleri yıkattık.
- Bütün tezleri öğrencilere incelettik.
- Dayım kızına ilaç aldırdı.
- Eczanede pansuman yaptırdık.
- Tüm duvarları beyaza boyattık.
- Bardakları annesine yıkattı.
- Bu pastayı Ali'ye aldırdım.
- Tahtayı öğrenciye sildirdim.
- Ameliyatı iyi bir doktora yaptırdık.