

Factors Analysis Of Causative Verbs Acquisition In Chinese EFL Learners

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Abstract – As one of the most important relations in human affairs, the causal connections between two events are described by different structures in different languages because of different understanding of the world. The acquisition of causative structures is a difficult grammar point in Chinese EFL learners. This research examines the various forms of causative structures in Chinese and English, and analyzes the errors in using causative verbs by college students and the causes of these errors and the difficulties in their learning. Based on the causative verbs features collected in Spoken Corpus of English Learners (SCLE) and writing corpus in Ten-thousand English Compositions of Chinese Learners (TECCL), this study applies corpus method and experimental research method to select 30 college students' written and spoken data to compare the commonalities and differences in the use of causative verbs in Chinese English learners, in order to discover the developmental characteristics of Chinese English learners' causative verbs acquisition and explore its acquisition factors. The common errors made by Chinese EFL learners include the overuse of the verb make and low-frequency use of other causative verbs, and the high-frequency use of active form instead of using passive form. The main factors affecting these acquisition are differences in English-Chinese language, cognition methods, and language learning strategies.

Keywords – Factors analysis, Causative verbs, EFL Learners

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, English learners' acquisition of grammar is not only satisfied with the stage of mechanical memorization of grammar rules, but further explores the reasons behind grammar phenomena. In order to be able to make a reasonable descriptive explanation of the language phenomenon, in-depth analysis of the grammatical structure is required. In cognitive grammar, "language structure arises from language use" (Tomasello, M, 2003). Based on this idea, grammar teaching should follow the cognitive laws of learners and explain in language use, which can not only improve the interpretation of grammatical phenomena, but also improve the enthusiasm of learners (Qiu Wei, 2021).

Causative structure is a universal phenomenon of human language, and it is one of the linguistic representations of people's cognition of the causal relationship of things. People often want to express one action or event which must precede another action or event, and the causal relationship between two events occurs due to

the occurrence of the previous action or event. There are many kinds of forms reflected causative semantics in many languages, and the expressions of causal semantics between languages have both similarities and differences. For learners, it has been a long-standing learning difficulty to choose the appropriate language forms to express the meaning of causative structure in a specific context (Xingjun, 2019).

This paper first sorts out the forms and classifications of English and Chinese causative structures, then analyzes several common mistakes in the use of English causative verbs by college students and the main difficulties in the acquisition of causative verbs, then countermeasures for these errors and difficulties are to be proposed.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

In China, English teaching plays an important role in vocational education.

Firstly of all, in 2020, the "Quality Improvement Action Plan for 2020-2023" is announced by Chinese Ministry of Education which require to deepen the reform of the teaching system and the reform of the education mechanism. Also, Chinese State Council proposed a national policy in 2019 named "Vocational Education Reform Plan".

Secondly, we are in a high-speed development social reality. The convenience brought by Internet development makes it easier for people to obtain numerous learning resources, and people pay more attention to explaining why, rather than just staying at what stage.

Thirdly, from the actuality of English and grammar teaching in teaching practice aspect, higher vocational English is an important subject of vocational education, which is of great significance for promoting students' language development and improving students' comprehensive abilities. Besides, grammar teaching is the basis for cultivating the application of language ability and the basis for English teaching. (Zhan,2021).

Fourthly, for student learning status, there are many types of difficulties faced by students and teachers with regard to grammar instruction in an ESL/EFL context. The usage of causative structures is one of the biggest obstacles. However, students taught by traditional method are required to memorize them in the form of fixed collocations of phrases, without seeking the detailed explanation, which make them confused about such structures. Although they can remember them temporarily, they dare not use them in daily communication and written expressions because they are afraid of making mistakes.

From the learning status, this structure severely restricts the enthusiasm of second language learners to learn English, and the mere memory is not conducive to the cultivation of their thinking ability. The shortcomings of traditional

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grammar teaching are increasingly apparent with the improvement of the second language learners level. Thus, its negativeness has affected the learning interest and learning motivation of second language learners.

In summary, the society lacks compound talents and innovative talents. Although national vocational education has achieved considerable development, it does not meet the needs of social and economic development, and vocational education is experiencing a period of transformation and reform. English teaching in vocational education is a short slab, and grammar teaching is even more difficult. Therefore, the research of causative structures need more amplification. And the research of grammar teaching need to be systematic. All of those continue to promote researches on language phenomena in-depth and the innovation in teaching models.

In theory, grammar teaching is faced with the embarrassing situation of whether it is worth teaching. For decades, the value of grammar in foreign language teaching and learning has been a focus of debate. Perhaps there will never be a solution to the debate whether grammar should be taught or not and to what extent grammar is supposed to be taught. (Chunyi Ji & Qi'ang Liu, 2021). It is believed that teaching grammar is less significant for children than adults and it plays a less important part in listening and reading than writing (Celce-Murcia, 1991).

In practice, grammar teaching and learning is difficult for both teachers and students respectively. For teachers, although Chinese classroom teaching is constantly changing, the main focus transfers from "teaching" to "learning", and grammar teaching has changed from the traditional mechanical rule memory teaching mode to the communicative teaching method. However, due to the teachers' language interpretation ability limitation, the grammar teaching mode is single, and the cognitive thinking reflected in Chinese and English is quite different (Zhong Ping & Yu Kaidi, 2018), grammar teaching is still a teaching difficulty.

For students, the learning difficulties faced by students are mainly due to fear of grammar learning and the reduced enthusiasm day by day. Therefore, grammar teaching has become increasingly marginalized in English learning. Throughout the past 20 years, only 9.7% of grammar research articles published in top 10 foreign language core journals. It can be seen that "researchers pay more attention to grammar than teachers' pay attention to grammar. attention". It involves more research on grammar, but less grammar teaching practice. But it is more urgent to propose an operational teaching plan (how) than to discuss various phenomena of grammar teaching (what) based on a certain theory. (Dai Weidong, Chen Liping, 2005)

This research attempts to take the second language acquisition as the theoretical basis and take the acquisition of the causative structure as an example to explore the factors that English learners faced in the process of grammar learning and the factors affected the acquisition of the causative structure in order to better guide English grammar teaching.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Review on Related Grammar Theory

Since the 1990s, scholars at home and abroad have made great progress in their understanding of grammar, and different scholars have expounded the essence of grammar from different perspectives.

In the 1950s, Chomsky (1987) put forward transformation-generative grammar. This theory believes that grammar mainly includes two parts: basic and transformation. Widdowson (1999) thinks that grammar is a series of lexical changes and rules of sentence structure. Since entering the new century, people's understanding of grammar has been further deepened. Hu Zhuanglin (2000) believes that the purpose of language education includes teaching students how to use grammatical structures accurately, meaningfully and appropriately, so we should regard grammar as a dynamic rather than a static system.

When the user has mastered the structure of grammar, when analyzing grammar, form, meaning and usage become three inseparable aspects. From the perspective of the development of grammar definitions, people's understanding of the nature of grammar has been deepened. As the main carrier of information and culture and the main tool of communication, language is not only a social phenomenon, but also a social behavior. Grammar is not only a static form, but also carries a dynamic function. Grammar is the matching of form, meaning and usage, so when we teach grammar, we should pay attention to language function as well as language form.

At present, Chinese grammar teaching mode is diversified, teaching methods are diversified, such as sentence pattern practice method, conversion method, communicative method, explicit teaching method, implicit teaching method, inductive method, deductive method, embedded teaching method, task-based teaching method, situational teaching, contextual teaching, discourse teaching, content-based instruction, "three P" teaching method (presentation, practice and provision), etc. These methods are numerous and can be roughly grouped into two categories: traditional pedagogy and communicative methods (Niu Baoyi, 2016).

There are so many researches on grammar teaching, so what is the actual teaching situation? There existed a research indicated that students' grasp of grammar knowledge was not systematic, and many areas were half-understood, or even follow their feelings. Sometimes it was simply worse than not knowing any grammatical concept. The importance of college English grammar teaching is self-evident, and its task can be described as a long way to go.

Review on Causative Verbs

The research on causative verbs mainly focuses on analyzing causative verbs from various linguistic theories, cross-language research, and research on the characteristics of second language acquisition.

Firstly, different scholars own different opinions on the definition of causative verbs. Causative structures are the linguistic expressions represented complex situations consisting of two constituent events (Comrie, 1989:165). The causative structure mainly consists three elements, (i) the causing event, in which the causer does or initiates something; (ii) the causing event, in which the causal person

performs an action, or causes the action of the causer changed. The causative structure meaning is usually expressed through lexical means or sentence structure, in which the causative verbs play a very important role. Lyons (1977: 491) defines causative structure as "a double verb appearing in a transitive structure, denoting a process or event in which a cause produces an effect or effect, derived from an intransitive verb, or historically derived from a corresponding intransitive verb. Transitive or intransitive "adjective" verbs, more or less producing morphological processes". Talmy (1976) studies causative structure by focusing on causative verbs, arguing that causative structure refers to the relationship between participant events and outcome events. Montrul (2001) shares a similar idea of causality with Tamly, arguing that "a causal situation involves two events: the causing event and the caused event (consequence)". In addition, some scholars have tried to define causative structure in terms of construction grammar. For example, Langacker (2004) argues that "a causal structure extends the concept of a spontaneous event to encompass the inciting force and the actors from which it arises. It is usually used in situations where the agent causes the execution of an action or a change in state."

Regarding the classification of causative verbs, Comrie's classification is widely recognized in the field of second language studies, and many studies are based on this classification. Comrie (1989) classifies causative structures into three types, including peripheral (analytical) operatives, morphological operatives, and lexical operatives. The common use of words such as "make/have/let" in English are peripheral causative verbs, which are the causative verbs that English learners acquired first and used the most frequently.

To sum up, most of the research on causative verbs focuses on the interpretation of the definition of causative verbs and the interpretation of causative verbs in different linguistic theories.

Causative Verbs Acquisition

In practice, the acquisition of causative verbs is the focus of researchers. Usually focus on the following aspects.

First of all, in the international area, different scholars have adopted different methods for the study of causative verb acquisition, to test the learners' acquisition dilemma and acquisition effect in causative verbs. Figueira (1984) studied the development of causal lexical expressions in a child learning Portuguese as her first language by providing longitudinal data and found that the child took into account the syntactic structure in which causative verbs appear. Montrul (2001) conducted three experiments on the acquisition of two types of causative verbs, including physical inflection of state verbs with active subjects and psychological changes of state verbs with experiential objects in English, Spanish, and Turkish as second languages. Empirical results show that morphological errors in the three languages are constrained by the morphological patterns of the learner's first language.

Montrul (2001a) explored Spanish and Turkish learners' acquisition of verbs involved in English causative/initial alternation. Zibin and Altakhaineh (2016) used a grammatical judgment task to test whether advanced

Jordanian EFL learners acquired English-task alternation and found that the learner's difficulties can be attributed to differences in the semantic-based constraints that govern the two languages in English and Jordanian Arabic Alternate between missions - initial period. Marcotte (2005) proposes a theory of knowledge acquisition and learning underlying causal alternation errors in children, reducing assumptions about innate grammatical knowledge. He claims that children's debate knowledge realization rules take the form of structural paradigms, which explicitly connect verbs and structures in possible pairs.

Secondly, in China, the focus of research on causative verbs is the study of psychological causative verbs. Mainly focused on Chinese learners' learning of causative verbs is largely influenced by Chinese, and different learners have different effects on the acquisition of causal structures. Generally speaking, high-level learners use causative mental causative structure more frequently than low-level learners. Verb + Experiencer (V + E) structure. To a certain extent, morphology has no effect on learners' use of English psych causative verbs, while word meaning and frequency have no effect. In addition, there are many studies on the acquisition factors of excessive use of make. Su Pan (2017) conducted a comparative analysis of the high-frequency use of "make" based on the native language corpus and the Chinese learner corpus. This suggests that Chinese learners use "make" more frequently than native speakers, and they tend to overuse and misuse it. Huang Xiaoping (2013) pointed out that the misuse and acquisition difficulties of causative verbs can be attributed to the differences between Chinese and English, the confusion of transitive and intransitive, and the compressibility of English.

It can be seen from the above research that causative verbs are hot topics in linguistic research and second language acquisition research at home and abroad. Most of the research focuses on the theoretical research of causative verbs ontology, while practical teaching and acquisition research are less. Based on this, this study takes the spoken and written texts output by higher vocational English students as the data base, analyzes the problems and difficulties existing in the acquisition of causative verbs by vocational English students, and explores the factors that affect the acquisition of causative verbs to provide some inspirations and suggestions for English grammar teaching and to improve the teaching and learning of causative structure.

IV. METHOD

This study selects the spoken and written texts of sophomore students in a vocational college for data analysis, aiming to answer the following two questions: (1) What are the common mistakes learners made in acquiring causative verbs? (2) What are the factors that influence the acquisition of causative verbs? The research method adopted in this study is a combination of quantitative research and qualitative research. The oral and written texts of 30 students were randomly selected, and the basic personal information including the subjects, name, place of birth, grade and class, gender, age, English study time, English proficiency and

their most recent English test scores, were investigated at the same time.

The background of the application of the research is the English grammar course, which is divided into two parts: English grammar one and English grammar two. They are the sophomore elective courses of the International Education College of a vocational college. Each course has 2 credits and a total of 4 credits. The teaching is arranged in the third and fourth semesters respectively.

The English grammar course has conducted two quarters a week with 45 minutes of each class, which has a total of 18 weeks and 36 class hours. The course of English Grammar II will be taught about 14 weeks, 28 class hours in total with two sessions per week. More than 720 students took these courses in the 2020-2021 academic year (2 semesters in total), and the teaching faculty for each teaching class remains the same for two semesters during the academic year.

The participants of this research are sophomores from NYMC (Nanyang Medical College). The ages of them range from 16 to 19 years old. This research will select 30 students from clinical major. They are the typical major in a medical school which owns almost half of the whole number in NYMC.

This is beneficial for the data can reflect the fact more exactly. As requested in an experimental study, the number of samples should be not less than 15 and the proper number is more than 30, so the sample numbers fit the scientific request. In terms of their knowledge proficiency, they all pass the national entrance examination. Besides, they share the same English teacher, indicating that they are under the same instruction and guidance in learning English. Furthermore, since they spend almost the same learning time during the experiment, the author intends to carry out a questionnaire on the 30 students before the test to ensure that there is no significant differences of the students in their English level.

The basic information of the scores in national entrance examination of the 30 students is as following:

TABLE I: NATIONAL ENTRANCE EXAMINATION OF SAMPLES

Number	Gender	Scores	Number	Gender	Scores	Number	Gender	Scores
1	Female	116	11	Female	89	21	Female	79
2	Female	107	12	Female	88	22	Male	79
3	Female	103	13	Male	87	23	Male	78
4	Female	102	14	Male	87	24	Female	78
5	Female	98	15	Female	87	25	Female	77
6	Male	96	16	Male	86	26	Male	77
7	Female	95	17	Male	81	27	Female	77
8	Female	94	18	Male	81	28	Male	77
9	Male	93	19	Male	81	29	Male	76
10	Female	92	20	Male	80	30	Female	75

Before the experiment, the author conducted interviews with three English teachers selected from the college and 10 students. In order to investigate some basic information in detail. The outline and content of the interviews with teachers and students has been drawn up.

Next is training on the use of questionnaire scales. The questionnaire evaluation index system is a multi-subject evaluation system. The judging level consists of five scales: strongly agree, agree, general, disagree, and completely disagree. In addition, the author guides teachers and students

participating in the experiment to familiarize themselves with the use process, informing methods and precautions. The specific indicators of the index system for all students in the experimental class enable students to clarify which behaviors will be evaluated, and to consciously self-restrain their individual learning behaviors. This achieves the regulatory role of evaluation to a certain extent.

Based on the above results, a classroom test is conducted for all students. In order to fully understand the students' acquisition of causative verbs and ensure the reliability of the test questions, this test selects both of the oral practice questions and the writing questions from the English textbooks. These questions are in line with the higher vocational students' cognitive level and English level.

In order to eliminate the interference of questions and textbooks, 30 students were asked the same questions from the textbooks learned in this semester. The spoken texts are recorded by audio recording. A total of 30 valid texts (including 30 oral and 30 written) were collected.

After the test, the method of questionnaire will be conducted according to the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) which is widely implemented in higher education assessment in Australia. The CEQ is a standardized system-wide survey that focuses on graduates' understanding of all courses they have taken and is intended to be an alternative means of examining student learning outcomes (Richard James, 2004). The adapted CEQ (Gu Kexin, 2019) can be divided into three dimensions and 32 items to test whether EFL learners are satisfied with their acquisition effect.

The main contents of adapted questionnaire is as following:

(1) Features of Traditional Grammar Teaching:

In my previous English grammar classes, my teacher explains the grammar rules directly, then lets us repeat and do the practice.

When I study grammar, I meet some difficulties, it is because The grammar rules are complicated.

In my previous English grammar classes, my teacher explains the grammar rules depending on the texts in the textbooks.

In my previous English grammar classes, my teacher follows the order of what textbooks show to choose what they will teach for each class.

In my previous English grammar classes, my teacher puts the same series of grammar rules in consecutive classes to teach us.

(2) The Reasons of Learning Difficulties:

When I study grammar, I meet some difficulties, it is because teacher does not explain the grammar rules clearly and accurately in the class.

When I study grammar, I meet some difficulties, it is because I didn't do much exercises.

(3) The Teaching Ways that I Prefer More:

In the English grammar classes, I prefer the teacher to explain the grammar rules, and let us repeat it mechanically.

In the English grammar classes, I prefer the teacher to explain the linguistic phenomenon from daily life, and then I will understand it in a natural way.

During the research whole process, the following tools are used: a Likert five-point scale questionnaire are

developed for students and teachers to evaluate the errors and influential factors on causative verbs acquisition, and the experimental teachers are interviewed after the test.

V. FINDINGS

Because the English level of higher vocational English students is generally low, the use of causative verbs mainly focuses on the usage of *make/have* and *let*. The search results show that the frequencies of these three terms are as follows:

TABLE II: USAGE FREQUENCY OF CAUSATIVE VERBS IN SPEAKING AND WRITING

Causative Verbs	Make	Let	Have
Usage Frequency in Speaking	43	20	80 (6/72)
Usage Frequency in Writing	49	13	78 (9/69)

As can be seen from the above table, the frequency of use of these three words varies greatly, with *have* being the most common. Among them, due to the richness of parts of speech, *have* owns the meaning of the actual verb as Chinese *you*, and it can also be featured as the auxiliary verb and the causal verb in the present perfect tense and causative structure. However, with high-frequency usage of *have*, the *have* as causative verb is used less by the EFL learners.

The reason for the high frequency of using *make* is that the acquisition is at a early stage, and Chinese has corresponding meaning vocabulary like “*shi*”, which is positive affected by the transfer of the mother tongue. Chinese English learners first learned the use of *make* from junior high school, from the original meaning of “*make*” to the causative meaning of “*make, let*”. Chinese learners have formed a mindset, thinking that *make* is equal to “*shi*” in Chinese. It is relatively difficult to add *have* later. With the extension of English study time, senior high school students are exposed to a lot of causal use of “*make*”, which makes them more familiar with this use and often use it verbally. Influenced by Chinese, Chinese students show excessive use of *make*-like causal linking verbs, and are more likely to accept a sentence like: “He made me disappointed. It made us puzzle”. Not good at using “I am disappointed.” or “He disappointed me. It puzzled me.” (Huang Xiaoping, 2013). As for why *make* is equivalent to Chinese *shi*, the traditional teaching method only gives sentence pattern recitation instead of exploring the deep reason. In this way, students become more cautious when using *make*, only have limited expressions, and do not dare to try other causative structures.

The second reason for the overuse of *make* is mainly due to native language transfer. The similarity between Chinese and English is that there are a lot of usages of “*shi*” in Chinese. In order to facilitate understanding during the teaching process, the teacher equates the Chinese “*shi*” with the English “*make*”. As well as the phenomenon of using familiar language structures and avoiding the use of unfamiliar structures embody the language learning strategy of novice learners in avoiding oral and writing errors.

It should be pointed out that there are many notional verb usages and auxiliary verb usages of “*have*”, but very few causal usages in EFL learners’ text. Adopted by beginner oral English learners, although the total is much larger than the other two words. The frequency of causative verb *has* been the lowest among the three verbs at each stage. Beginners prefer to use “*have*” to mean “*own*”, “*include*”,

“*eat*”, “*experience*”, etc. Specific examples such as “*have a healthy body*”, “*have a basketball*”, “*have a bad influence*”, “*please have a meal*” are extremely common in beginner oral English.

Secondly, the second common mistake in the acquisition of causative verbs is the use of voice. English learners frequently use active structures and avoid passive structures. After the learner learns *have sb do sth* and *have sth done*, students basically do not use *have sth done* in their writing texts. The structures students use in their compositions are not idiomatic, and the accuracy and appropriateness of these structures can be improved. In some contexts, the causal meaning can be simply expressed with a transitive verb, and students are more inclined to use the “*make*” causal structure. This language phenomenon is mainly due to the language transfer and lack of input in the process of the beginner's native English vocabulary usage in English learning.

On the one hand, the formal English learning of Chinese beginners starts relatively late, and their native language expression habits are deeply ingrained in their minds. Since their exposure time to English is rather limited, they tend to seek native language help to express themselves in English, especially since the two languages have many similarities in some respects. It is very difficult for students to learn this kind of usage from the verb-object form to expressing the state, because there are many mistakes.

Among all the influencing factors, the reasons why learners tend to use “*make*” frequently and avoid passive usage are that English teachers' traditional expression habits, textbook contents and learner's practices.

VI. DISCUSSION

The research results of causative structures in linguistic are relatively mature, but the acquisition and teaching process are relatively difficulty for both Chinese students and teachers. Besides, when students enter into college, the courses of English are still very significant in vocational education. Students are no longer simply satisfied with the communicative English teaching that focuses on listening and speaking. They also have to improve their English level efficiently on the basis of grammar acquisition which create huge obstacles for English learners.

More importantly, this kind of language phenomenon is often encountered in English learning, but there is no systematic explanation for the analysis of causative structures and the corresponding teaching model. If a sufficient explanation is not given, the negative impact on the second language learner is self-evident.

Based on the above statement, we believe that the following countermeasures can be taken in teaching. First, based on students' cognitive laws and acquisition ability to explain the reasons for the synthesis of English causative verbs, and explain the linguistic phenomenon from cognitive aspect to make the students know the difference between English and Chinese usage of causative verbs.

Second, help students distinguish between the causative and non-causative usage contexts of English verbs. Use a large number of examples and sentence patterns to guide the distinction between the two. At the same time, the cognitive

schema can be used to distinguish the confusing points, which helps the learners better acquire the difference.

Third, as for the guidance of the passive structure of causative verbs, we should first show the more acceptable verb-object relationship of active usage, and then explain the corresponding usage of state. The typical causative expressions both presented in English and Chinese are most acceptable to students. However, it should point out that this verb tends to be overused and teachers should guide students to pay more attention to that at the same time.

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper firstly sorts out the current situation of causative research in English and Chinese, and thinks that English grammar is a difficulty for Chinese learners, while causative verbs are a difficulty in grammar learning due to their inherent particularity and universal use. This difficulty is reflected in the excessive learning of learners. Use make and avoid using passive voice. The reason for this phenomenon is the influence of mother tongue transfer and traditional teaching mode. On this basis, it is proposed that the future research and teaching should be based on the differences between English and Chinese and the factors of students' cognitive mode, try to change the teaching mode, and improve the English acquisition effect of Chinese learners.

This article believes that in the process of acquiring causative structures in the second language (English), the similarities and differences between the mother tongue and the target language will directly affect the learner's difficulty in acquisition. Such similarities and differences are not only reflected in language differences, but also in the cognitive process of human beings.

Furthermore, It is benefit to apply the cognitive theory to guide the learning and teaching. According to the viewpoint of cognitive linguistics, language is an important part of human cognitive ability, and the language world and the world outside language cannot be completely separated. The basic function of language is symbolism. Various types of grammatical structures can be regarded as types of symbolic structures, and grammatical structures can be regarded as abstract structural schemas, which reflect similarity (also called imitation). To be specifically, it can be categorization, metaphor, image and schema.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the main errors faced by EFL learners and the reasons of these errors so as to better explain the specific process and corresponding characteristics of Chinese learners in acquiring English causative structures, which is an effective guide for English grammar teaching.

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