APPLYING CONSTRUCTION GRAMMAR TO TEACHING ENGLISH PERIPHRASTIC CAUSATIVE CONSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

English periphrastic causative constructions are complex constructions that convey the notion of causation through causative verbs (i.e. have, make, get, and cause) and complements (i.e. to infinitive, present participle, and bare infinitive). Corpus research has revealed that even advanced learners experience considerable difficulty in using these constructions as they are highly complex (Gilquin, 2010). One major problem is the lack of precise descriptions of the semantic and pragmatic aspects in most ELT grammar books. In these books, the descriptions of the constructions are limited to syntactic issues, ignoring the semantic and pragmatic distinctions among the constructions. A Construction Grammar analysis of the constructions, based on the Cognitive Linguistics theories of action chain, causation, and interpersonal relations, reveals that the causative verbs are different from each other in terms of semantic aspects and pragmatic contexts. Have, for instance, expresses a hierarchical relationship between the causer and the cause, and therefore usually refers to a professional service (e.g. have one's hair cut). As a solution, a grammatical unit based on this analysis could be very helpful for English learners. In this paper, a pedagogical treatment that consists of such grammatical unit and some pedagogic tasks were devised. The instruction made use of visual aids to instruct learners about the concept of action chain, along with the meanings, forms, and contextual uses of the constructions. The tasks comprised an input-based, consciousness-raising task that required participants to connect the form to its function and two output-based tasks that provided contexts for learners to practice the constructions meaningfully. To examine the effectiveness of the treatment, an experimental study was conducted with 31 high school students aged 16 to 18. A controlled production task was administered as pre-, immediate post-, and delayed post-tests to measure learning. The results show that the participants significantly improved in the immediate post-test, and the effect was durable to two weeks after treatment. The findings of this study indicate a strong pedagogical value of combining insights from construction grammar and pedagogic tasks to teach the constructions.

Keywords: *English periphrastic constructions, Construction grammar, task-supported language teaching, Indonesian EFL learners*

INTRODUCTION

An English periphrastic causative construction is a construction comprising a causative verb (i.e. have, make, get, and cause) and a non-finite complement (Gilquin, 2016). It conveys the notion of an agent exercising actions on another participant to trigger an effect. Several studies (Gilquin, 2010, 2016) found that these constructions appear to be quite problematic for EFL learners.

Periphrastic causative constructions are exceptionally difficult for their vast array of causative verbs. Gilquin (2010) mentions that there are ten possible patterns for periphrastic causative constructions which vary in semantics, registers, collocational preferences, and usage contexts. She found that learners tend to produce misuses, such as overuses and underuses.

Gilquin (2010) states two major factors of why periphrastic causative constructions are difficult. The first cause is the mother-tongue interference. For instance, learners with Romance languages as their mother-tongue tend to put CAUSEE after EFFECT as in their first language. The second cause is students' limited knowledge of lexical preferences and registers. They hold the false assumption that all causative patterns hold one identical notion of causation. For instance, learners are found to overuse the collocation of [X MAKE Y V_{pp}]. In addition to semantic misconceptions, learners also appear to be unaware of the usage contexts. As an instance, EFL learners often use [X GET Y V_{pp}], a pattern commonly used in speaking, in writing.

Gilquin (2010) argues that the misconception might be due to incomplete current pedagogical tools. Common teaching approaches mainly focus on syntactical aspects while ignoring semantic and lexical aspects. As the result, learners do not possess enough explicit knowledge to differentiate meanings among causative constructions. Gilquin then proposes novel teaching tools based on a construction grammar approach, an approach under cognitive linguistic which holds a general notion that grammar, lexicon and semantics are inseparable. However, they is still in the form of a rigid explanation and therefore, there is a

necessity to combine them with other meaningful teaching approaches. Moreover, there has not been any empirical study yet that proves the materials' effectiveness.

Therefore, this study is conducted with two aims in mind. Firstly, it is to apply Gilquin's proposed materials in classrooms by combining them with other methods to make them more meaningful. Secondly, it is to investigate the effectiveness of this instruction on teaching periphrastic causative constructions.

In the practice, this study combined Gilquin's materials with pedagogical tasks. The explanation itself was delivered through explicit instruction, following suggestions from other experts (e.g. Norris & Ortega, 2000; de la Fuente, 2006; Dolgova, 2016). Explicit instruction has been solidly proven to give benefits for students in comprehending target forms. Moreover, Dolgova found that it is highly suitable with cognitive linguistic approaches.

Tasks are chosen to complement Gilquin's materials considering both tasks and the construction grammar approach shares similar nature, which is focusing on meaning. The effectiveness of the integration between tasks and cognitive linguistics itself has been proven by several studies, such as Cadierno and Robinson (2009), Tyler, Ho and Mueller (2011 as mentioned in Tyler, 2012) and Dolgova (2016). While tasks can be categorized into several types, this study itself focused on the use of consciousness-raising tasks, tasks designed to allow students to be aware of a target feature explicitly. Studies done by Fotos (1994) and Eckerts (2008) found that these tasks give equivalent effectiveness in grammatical form learnings as formal instructions. As consciousness-raising tasks may cover the syntactical aspect, they complement construction grammar approaches which focus mainly on semantics well.

This study is then conducted by attempting to answer this following question: Does the performance of the experimental group improve significantly in the immediate post-test and still hold in the delayed post-test?

METHODOLOGY

The participants of this study were 31 XII-grade secondary high school students ranging from 16 – 18 year old from two intact classes of a high school in Jakarta. Most students were EFL learners who had learned English for more than 10 years.

The instruments used in this study were a set of tests (i.e. pre-, immediate post- and delayed post-tests), power point slides developed from Gilquin's construction grammar-based explanations, and six pedagogical tasks. All the three tests employed controlled production model as it can investigate both students' awareness of lexical and syntactic aspects. Sentences appeared in the tests were adapted from COCA in order to ensure their authenticity.

In presenting explanations of periphrastic causative constructions, power point slides developed by the researchers were utilized. In order to help students comprehend the concept of causation more easily, the concept of action chain was transformed into animations. All the semantics of each causative construction was presented in the form of meaning cards, followed by several sentence examples delivered in animations.

To complement the lesson, six pedagogical tasks mainly designed based on the notion of consciousness-raising were administered to students. Two tasks (multiple choice and free production) were given after the discussion of causatives *make* on the first day of treatment. Other two tasks (meaning-focused consciousness-raising and to-do list) were provided after the discussion of causatives *get* and *have* on the second day. The last two tasks (meaning-focused consciousness-raising and text-repair) were administered to review all constructions on the third day.

ANALYSIS

Students' answers in all three tests were scored. Then, a normality test was administered. As the data found to be normally distributed, paired t-tests were utilized to analyze the data further. The data was analyzed in two steps. For the first analysis, students' overall scores in all three tests were compared with two objectives: 1) to see whether students made significant improvement in the immediate post-test compared to the pre-test and 2) to see whether students could still hold the improvement in the delayed post-test. The findings of the analysis are as followed:

Table 1: Paired Samples Test of pre- and immediate post-tests

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	pre-test - immediate post-test	-2.258	4.575	.822	-3.936	-.580	-2.748	30	.010

For the second analysis, students' answers in each test were separated into two types: choices of causative verbs (make, get and have) and choices of complement forms (bare infinitive, to-infinitive, and past participle). Students' answers in all three tests in each aspect were compared to investigate further whether the task-supported construction grammar approach had different effectiveness between these two aspects. The findings are as followed:

Table 2: Table 2: Paired Samples Test of pre- and delayed post-tests

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 2	pre-test - delayed -test	-3.226	3.783	.680	-4.614	-1.838	-4.747	30	.000

CONCLUSION

The findings show that students improved significantly in the immediate post-test, implying that the construction grammar approach combined with tasks is effective in facilitating periphrastic causative construction acquisition. Moreover, as students could still hold the improvement in the delayed post-test, it implies that the approach also provides durability.

The results also show that students demonstrated significant improvement in both syntactical and semantic aspects. While the effectiveness of the construction grammar approach on the semantic aspects are expected, considering its nature which focuses on meanings, the improvement in the syntactical aspect suggests that consciousness-raising tasks complement the approach very well.

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