Causativity in English and Arabic:
A contrastive study
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Abstract

Lots of studies have been done on the syntactic and semantic structure of causatives in English. However no analytical or contrastive study has been conducted on these constructions in English and Arabic yet. Thus, this paper introduces a description of the syntactic and semantic properties of causatives in English and Arabic contrastively. This is for the purpose of pinpointing the asymmetries between these constructions in both languages. These differences definitely lead users of English as a second or foreign language to commit interlingual errors resulting from negative interference or intralingual errors resulting from the difficulty of the target language itself. This is mainly committed when translating from Arabic to English.
1. Introduction:

All languages have ways to express causation, but they differ in the means. In some languages there are morphological devices (such as inflections) that change verbs into their causative forms like Arabic. Other languages employ periphrasis, with idiomatic expressions, or auxiliary verbs like English. This study touches upon Causativity syntactically and semantically in English and Arabic. The study is done contrastively just to highlight the asymmetries between causatives in English and Arabic which definitely lead to committing negative interference errors. The paper is organized as follows: Section 1 is an introduction. Section 2 tackles the function of causatives and their types in English. Section 3 touches upon the causatives in Arabic. Section 4 focuses on the asymmetries between causatives in both languages and Section 5 is left for summery remarks.

1.2. Definition of causative verbs:

A causative form is, ‘(a) an expression of an agent causing or forcing a subject to perform an action or to be in a certain condition--salient cause, (b) an expression of a subject involved in a non-volitional event that registers the changes of its state--salient effect, (c) an expression of a grammatical modality in perfective (sequential) or subjunctive (hypothetical) or realize (non-hypothetical) state--perceptual salient.’ (From Wikipedia)\(^1\). The causative verb is a common structure in English. It shows that somebody or something is indirectly responsible for an action. "The subject does not perform the action itself, but causes someone or something else to do it instead" (Pinker 1989). Simply, do you cut your own hair? Probably not. Yet you are in control - you go to the stylist and tell him what you want. You do not do it, but you control it, you are the cause.

2. Basic causative structures in English.

There are two basic causative structures. One is like an active, and the other is like a passive.

\(^1\) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causative
2.1. Active causative verbs.
This structure is used when someone causes something to happen, or when a person causes another one to take an action. Consider:

1. Railway station security had everyone show their tickets.
2. The tutor made his students do an oral interpretation.
3. I had Bill fix the van.
4. I had the van fixed.

In these cases, the subject of each sentence (railway station security, the tutor, and I in the next two examples) caused another action to happen (showing tickets and giving an oral interpretation).

2.1.1. Sentence structure of active causatives?
Active causatives use the following structure:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>subject</th>
<th>causative verb</th>
<th>agent</th>
<th>bare infinitive or to-infinitive</th>
<th>object/complement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The judge</td>
<td>had</td>
<td>the lawyer</td>
<td>defend</td>
<td>the suspect.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The English department at the university</td>
<td>made</td>
<td>all staff members</td>
<td>attend</td>
<td>the stylistics seminar.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The agent is the person/thing who is caused to take an action, such as: The judge had the lawyer defend the suspect. Here, the lawyer is the agent of the sentence.

It is also important to note that some causative verbs require the bare infinitive, namely when using have, let, and make. Other common causative actions require the to-infinitive, such as: Convince, allow, encourage, permit, employ, help, get, require, motivate, hire, assist, permit, command, force, order, remind, urge and force. For example:

7. The lawyer convinced the judge to reduce the fine.
8. The teacher encouraged his students to apply for the scholarships.
9. The boss required new employees to attend training sessions twice a week.
10. The magazine encouraged all readers to submit suggestions for future issues.

Modal verbs may also be used with the causative sentence structure, mainly in offering a suggestion, such as: The magazine should encourage all readers to submit suggestions for future issues. The structure is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>subject</th>
<th>modal auxiliary verb</th>
<th>causative verb</th>
<th>agent</th>
<th>object/complement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>teachers</td>
<td>should</td>
<td>ask</td>
<td>students</td>
<td>to make responses for every class they attend.</td>
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</table>
The most very common causative verbs of those mentioned above are: Make, Get, Have, Let, Help. Thus these verbs are to be explained in some detail as follows:

Get (FORM: GET + PERSON + to + VERB)
This construction usually means ‘to convince someone to do something’ or ‘to trick someone into doing something’. Consider:

11. I will get my car maintained before this winter.
12. How can teachers get their students to read more?
13. Al-Aqsa TV commercials are trying to get people to stop smoking.

Have (FORM: HAVE + PERSON + VERB)
This construction means ‘to authorize someone to do something.’
Here are some examples:

14. The doctor had his nurse take the patient's temperature.
15. Please have your secretary forward me the e-mail.
16. I had the technician check the photocopy machine.

Get vs. Have
Sometimes ‘get someone to do something’ is interchangeable with ‘have someone do something,’ but these expressions are not semantically the same thing. For convenience consider the examples below:

17. He got the mechanic to check his brakes.
   (At first the mechanic didn't think it was necessary, but he convinced him to check the brakes.)
18. I had the mechanic check my brakes.
   (I asked the mechanic to check the brakes.)

Make (FORM: MAKE + PERSON + VERB)
This construction means ‘to force someone to do something’.
Here are some examples:

19. My dad made me apologize for what I had done.
20. Did somebody make you wear that ugly pant?
21. She made her kids tidy their beds.
Let (FORM: LET + PERSON + VERB)

This construction means ‘to allow someone to do something’. Consider the following examples:
22. Mary let me use her new laptop.
23. Will your parents let you go to the festival?
24. I don’t know if my boss will let me take the day off.

2.2. The Passive causative structure

This structure is used to talk about having something done by another person/thing. Consider the following examples:

25. Ahmed had his house repaired after the Forgan war on Gaza last year.
26. President Obama had his speech written by a very talented group of writers.

In both cases, the person (Ahmed and President Obama) arranged for something (repairing a house and writing a speech respectively) to be done by a third person.

2.2.1. Passive sentence structure?
The word order of the sentence of passive causatives is as follows:

Subject | causative verb | object | past participle. (Downing and Locke1992).

27. I | had | the van | tuned up.
28. He | had | his home air conditioning system | installed a week ago.
29. Our neighbors | will have | their house | renovated.
30. I got my car washed and waxed at the new service station.
31. Although she hates the dentist, she has had her teeth cleaned regularly.

As seen in the examples above, passive causatives almost always use the verb 'have', and 'get' to a lesser extent. The sentence structure expresses a service you have done, usually by a third person.

In addition, need and want may be used in passive causative sentences. In some cases, the passive causative verb (have / get) may be dropped altogether.

32. I need to have the van tuned up.
33. I need the van tuned up.
Modal auxiliary verbs may also be used with the causative sentence structure to express a suggestion by the speaker, such as: You should have your hair cut. Unlike need and want, though, the causative verb must always accompany the modal verb. Consider the example below:

Subject | modal auxiliary verb | causative verb | object | past participle
He | should | have | his pants | ironed.

2.3. Lexical causativity

In addition to the causative system above, English uses a different lexical item to indicate a causative form. For example, the causative of English verb eat is feed. English allows a notable freedom in verb valency, resulting in verbs like break, burn or awake, which may be causative or not (he burns it = he causes it to burn). Causativeness is therefore zero-marked in many English verbs.

2.4. Causativity construction by Changes of state

Stative verbs in English can be expressed with causatives in the same way as with regular verbs. For example, if there is a stative verb to be large, the causative will simply mean to enlarge or to make grow. The reflexive form of this causative can then be used to mean to enlarge oneself, or even as a middle voice, to grow. (Downing and Locke 1992).

Finally, the derivational suffixes –‘ (i)fy or en’ in English can be thought of as causative. Consider:

- Simple → simplify = "to make simple".
- Object → objectify = "to make into an object".
- Beautiful → beautify = "to make beautiful".
- Flat → flatten = "to make flat".
- Wide → widen = "to make wide".

It is noteworthy that the class of verbs inflected with ‘en’ shows an unaccusative/causative alternation. For example, the English verb flatten can be used both unaccusatively, as in (34a), and accusatively, as in (34b).

34a. The metal flattened.
34b. The smith flattened the metal.
2.5. Meaning patterns:

This section discusses the semantic difference between 'got me to cry' and 'made me cry. Or more broadly; the difference between verbs that require to-infinitive after the object such as get, ask, force, and verbs with bare-infinitive such as make.

After observing the causative verbs above, I have come to an assumption, that:

'Verb somebody to-infinitive' form focuses on the pre-process of the caused action.

'Verb somebody bare-infinitive' form focuses heavily on the whole process of the action, not bothering how the caused action is brought about.

For example, the verb, 'ask' as in 'I asked him to stop smoking' is obviously describing how the action was brought about, which was by asking, while 'I made him stop smoking' is not. Though it can imply it was a forced process, the force influenced the object over the whole process rather than before the process.

Consider another example:

A: Woah, the chock even made you cry?
B: Yeah, you know, I'm a kind of guy who never cries receiving chocks, but this one really got me to cry.

Since it mentions that B is not the kind of guy, the focus is on the pre-process of the crying, which is like the chock grabs him and drags him to the start of the action, as it were. A saying "made you cry" makes sense in this assumption, because the chock exerted an overall influence from the start to the end of the action, causing it to happen and continue till the end of the action.

This could explain why a sentence like "I had a hard time getting myself to cry " is used but not many" and a sentence like; "I had a hard time making myself cry" is of natural use.). Expanding it a little further to 'help sb. bare-infinitive vs. help sb. to-infinitive,' "the teacher, helps me pass the exam" sounds acceptable, while " the teacher helps me to pass the exam" sounds odd.

One might say to his teacher, "would you help me to get a good grade?" but probably not "would you help me get a good grade?"(still possible but in rare situations like asking the teacher to let him cheat or something.)
"Help me lead this class well" is good while "help me to lead this class well" sounds unacceptable.

To sum up, causatives are structurally of two types in English; first, the active causative which is formed from subject | causative verb | agent | bare infinitive -or- to-infinitive | object/complement. Second, passive causative which consists of subject | causative verb | object | past participle. Semantically, causative verb plus somebody to-infinitive' form focuses on the pre-process of the caused action, whereas, causative plus verb somebody bare-infinitive' form' focuses heavily on the whole process of the action, not bothering about how the caused action is brought about. The question which is due now is whether Arabic causatives are identical to English or completely divergent. This is discussed below:

3. Arabic Causativity.
As seen above, English causatives are formed either syntactically or lexically. However, Arabic causatives are constructed only morphologically. To do so, there are three morphological processes. These are: ablaut, gemination, and the prefixation of Hamza ‘ʔ a’ to the root verb. The properties of these alternations are discussed in turn below.

3.1. Ablaut.
Causative verbs may be formed from unaccusatives by changing the stem vowel to /a/ (Fassi Fehri, 1987), illustrated in (35). The stem vowel in the base is one of the three phonemic (short) vowels of Arabic, /i/, /a/ or /u/. The vowel /u/ is quite rare in unaccusative/causative pairs and /i/ is quite common. Note that if the stem vowel in the base is /a/ ablaut2 has no net morphological effect (35a-c).

35a. hadima (fall to ruin) ….. hadama (ruin)
   The stem ḥ adima cannot configure a meaningful sentence unless the genitive case of the second letter is changed into accusative (hadama). Consider:
   b. *Hadima l-ʕ adaw l-manzel-a
      Destroyed the-enemy the-house

2 Ablaut A vowel change that accompanies a change in grammatical function in English; for example, i, a, u in sing, sang, sung. Also called gradation. This is also found in Arabic. It is represented by the short vowels u a i which stand for case assignment as in walad-u, walad-a, walad-i, and in active verbs like kataba which becomes kutiba in Arabic passive voice.
c. Hadama l-ʔ adow al-manzel-a
   Destroyed the-enemy the-house
   ‘The enemy destroyed the house’

The following verbs are identical to the verb ‘hadima’ illustrated above:

d. ḥazina (be sad) …….. ḥazana (make sad)
e. xariba (be destroyed) ….. xaraba (destroy)
f. hazzīʔ a (be ridiculed) …… hazaʔ a (ridicule)
g. naẓ iza (be implemented) …… naẓ aza (implement)
h. xafiya (be hidden) …….. xafā (hide s.t.)
i. falata (be released) ……. falata (release)
j. fāraša (spread out). ……. fāraša (spread s.t. out)
k. ḥaruma (be prohibited) ……. ḥarama (prohibit)

Ablaut is a restricted process. It only applies to unaccusative bases, never to unergative bases.

(36), transitive bases (36), or ditransitive bases (37).
(36) a. Daḥ ika (laugh) …….*Daḥ aka (cause to laugh)
   b. nāma (sleept) …….*nāma (cause to sleep)
   c. ʕ aṭ aSa (sneeze) …….*ʕ aṭ aSa (cause to sneeze)
   d. bakā (cry) …….*bakā (cause to cry)

(37) a. darasa (study) …….*darasa (cause to study)
   b. fāhima (understand) …….*fahama (cause to understand)
   c. ʕ alima (know) …….*ʕ alama (cause to know)
   d. ṣariba (drink) …….*ṣaraba (cause to drink)

(38) a. manaʔa (give) …….*manaʔa (cause to give)
   b. ḥabā (award) ……..*ḥabā (cause to award)
   c. ʔ araḍ a (submit) …….*ʔ araḍ a (cause to submit)
   d. wahaba (donate) …….*wahaba (cause to donate)

3.2. Gemination

Causative verbs may also be formed in Arabic by gemination of the middle radical of the root, commonly described as the template C1aC2C2aC3, as illustrated in (39).

Geminate causative forms are found for many of the same roots that form ablaut causatives, as in (39a-d) (cf. (35a-d)).

(39) a. ḥazina (be sad) …….. ḥazzana (make sad)
   ḥazzan-a foqdan-u l-ʔ bn-iʔ mma-hu
   Sadden loss the son mother-his
   ‘The loss of son sadden his mother’

b. hadima (fall to ruin) …….. haddama (ruin)
   Haddam-a l-ʔ dow l-manzel-a
   ‘the enemy destroyed the house’
The verbs in (c-g) go the same way as the verbs in (a and b)
c. xariba (be destroyed) …… xarraba (destroy)
d. naʒ iza (be implemented) …… naʒ ʒ aza (implement)
e. samina (be fat) ……… sammana (fatten)
f. sarīh a (proceed freely) ……… sarrah a (grant leave)
g. naʃiTa (be lively) ……… naʃsaTa (enliven)

The examples in (h-i) show when a transitive verb is causativized, the resulting construction is ditransitive; both objects bear accusative case.

h. kataba (wrote) …… kattab-a (make someone wrote)
   kattab-a L-moʕ u l-walad-a d-dars-a
   make wrote the-teacher the boy the-lesson
   ‘the teacher made the boy write the lesson’

i. Rakība (rode) …… rakkab-a (persuade someone to ride)
   Rakkab-a l-faresa-ו l-walad-a-ו l-faras-a
   Got rode the-knight son-his the-horse
   ‘The knight has got his son to ride the horse’

But gemination is less restricted than ablaut. Unergative verbs may show a geminate causative counterpart, as in (40) (cf. (36)), as may transitive verbs, as in (41) (cf. (37)).

40a. Daḥi (laugh) …… Daḥhaka (make s.o. laugh)
   b. nāma (sleep) …… nawwama (make s.o. sleep)
   c. ŋ aṭ asa (sneeze) …… ŋ aṭ ṭ asa (make s.o. sneeze)
   d. bakā (cry) ……… bakkā (make s.o. cry)

41a. darasa (study) …… darrasa (teach s.o. s.t.)
   b. fahima (understand) …… fahhama (make s.o. understand s.t.)
   c. ŋ alima (know) …… ŋ allama (inform s.o. of s.t.)
   d. šariba (drink) ……… šarraba (offer s.o. s.t. to drink)
   e. ḫamala (carry) ……… ḫammala (make s.o. carry s.t.)

Although gemination is a freer process than ablaut, it may not apply to a ditransitive base.

42a. manaʕa (give) …… *mannaʕa (cause s.o. to give s.o. s.t.)
   b. ḫ abā (award) …… *ḥ abbā (cause s.o. to award s.o. s.t.)
   c. wahaba (donate) ……… *wahhaba (cause s.o. to donate s.t. to s.o.)

Another category of verbs is represented in the stative verb which changes to a causative form by being prefixed with hamza ‘ʔ a’ e.g: ŋ alima "he knew" → ʔ aʕ lama "he informed". Here the prefix Hamza ʔ a semantically changes the subject of the verb ŋ alima into object Consider:

43a. ŋ alima zayd-un al-xaber.
knew zayd the-news
‘Zayd knew the news’

43b. ʔ aʕlama Ahmed Zayd-an al-xaber.
‘Ahmed informed Zayd the news’

3.3. Meaning Patterns:

There is no overt difference in the general meaning between any one of the three forms of causatives above; the output will mean roughly ‘to cause to X,’ i.e. It shows that somebody or something is indirectly responsible for an action. The subject does not perform the action itself, but causes someone or something else to do it instead. Though precise differences in meaning between different causative forms may occur.

Form II (the geminated verb) and III (the hamza prefixed verb) rules indicate that they may take either an intransitive or transitive verb as their input; the Ablaut may only take intransitive input.

The output, allowing for only one subject, is monoclausal, as is typical of most causative constructions.

Following (Haywood & Nahmad 1965) form II can render multiple meanings; the causative is only one meaning pattern of the form II verb. Two other meaning patterns are the intensive, which renders a stronger connotation to the meaning of the verb, and the estimative, in which the subject’s belief about the truth value of the verb is expressed. Form II has denominal verbs as well, rendering the idea of making, dealing with, or collecting the noun.

This multitude of functions means that one cannot derive a correct meaning from derivational rules alone, at least not for form II. There is no overt way of deducing whether ʕ allama, derived from ʕ alima ‘to know’, would mean A) ‘to inform; to cause to know/learn’; B) ‘to rigorously learn; study’; C) ‘to consider to have learned’, from derivational patterns alone. For more convenience consider the examples in (42) which demonstrate some form II verbs that take the causative sense.

44. qaruba ‘to be near’ → qarraba ‘to bring near; cause s.t. to be near’
   kaθura ‘to be numerous’ → kaθθara ‘to cause s.t. to be numerous’
   ʕ alima ‘to know s.t.’ → ʕ allama ‘to teach; cause s.o. to know s.t.’
   δakara ‘to remember s.t.’ → δakkara ‘remind; cause s.o. to remember s.t.’

‘A form III verb derived from a basic root has a default causative meaning to it. Another, apparently rarer class of verbs is estimative in function, comparable to form II. Form III also contains a large class of denominatives; Form III verbs may be
formed from select nouns, usually with the sense of “becoming” that noun (ibid 1965). The example in (45) gives examples of some form III verbs.

45. haDara ‘to be present’ → ʔ ahDara ‘to bring; cause s.o. to be present’
   ʔ alasa ‘to sit; be seated’ → ʔ aʔ lasa ‘to seat; cause s.o. to be seated’
   ʕ alima ‘to know s.t.’ → ʔ af’ lama ‘to inform s.o. of s.t.’

The meaning patterns of form I has already been largely addressed. The ablaut is a special derived form of a basic intransitive root, which creates a transitive verb and applies a causative sense to the meaning, Hallman (2006).

4. Symmetries and Asymmetries between causatives in English and Arabic:

As can be deduced from the description of causatives in English above, these verbs have the idea that x causes y to do something. This corresponds typically to Arabic. Some exceptions are represented in the verbs ‘make, have, and get’ and their counterparts in Arabic. Consider:

Make gives the idea that x forces y to do something.
Have gives the idea that x requests y to do something.
Get gives the idea that x persuades y to do something.

In Arabic make is commonly translated to ʔajbar-a while have may be translated into ʔaʕa al-a as it is generally construed as being less strong than ʔ ajbar-a. As for get it can be translated into ʔaqnaʕ a in Arabic. Farghal and Shonnaq (1999). The following examples are illustrated:

46. Ahmed made Mona change her opinion
   ʔ aʔ bar-a Ahmed Mona ʕ ala taghyyir raʔ yi-haa
   ‘Ahmed made Mona change her opinion’

47. Ahmed had Mona change her opinion
   ʔ aʕ la ahmed mona toghayyer raʔ ya-haa
   ‘Ahmed had Mona change her opinion’

48. Ahmed got Mona to change her opinion
   Tamakkan-a Ahmed men ʔ qaʔaʕ -i mona bi-taghyiir raʔ yi-haa
   ‘Ahmed got Mona to change her opinion’
Structurally, there is no syntactic symmetry between English and Arabic in forming causative constructions; Arabic causatives are morphologically constructed and this does not correspond to English. That is the causatives are morphological in the former whereas almost lexical and syntactic in the latter. Additionally, English causative verbs allow either bare infinitive or to infinitive after the second subject, and this is not available in Arabic. Such asymmetries cause serious problems to learners of translation, mainly those who translate from Arabic to English. They commit lots of interlingual errors resulting from shifting the Arabic structure into English.

5. Conclusion
The study illustrates that certain English verbs can be used to express a causal relationship between the subject and object in a sentence. Some of them require a "to" while others do not. Accordingly, the word order of the causative sentence can be either $S + V + O + to V \ (O)$ or $S + V + O + V \ (O)$.

Second, the study indicates that causativization in English only applies to unaccusative verbs but not unergatives.

Semantically, the first word order focuses on the pre-process of the caused action. Whereas, the second focuses heavily on the whole process of the action, not bothering how the caused action is brought about.

Third, the system of causative derivations is highly productive and extremely regular in Arabic. The three forms of Arabic causative verbs render causative constructions—or at least render verb meanings that can be interpreted as such.

Fourth, there is no overt difference in meaning between any one of the forms of Arabic causatives; the output will mean roughly \textquoteleft that x causes y to do something. Fifthly, the Ablaut may only take intransitive input. Finally the output, allowing for only one subject, is monoclausal, as is typical of most causative constructions.

The differences between English and Arabic causatives above definitely cause freshman learners of translation to commit negative interference errors. Therefore, language teachers and trainers should pay attention to the syntactic and semantic properties of causatives when explaining language points and give enough translation exercises, particularly translating from Arabic into English exercises. They also should teach causative constructions comparatively highlighting points of divergence and negative interference.
### Appendix

**Symbols used in transcribing Arabic**

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<th>transcription</th>
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