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**LEXICAL CAUSATIVE VERBS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE: DIFFICULTIES
FOR UZBEK STUDENTS**

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Abstract. This article outlines how learning English as a foreign or second language, Uzbek students have to encounter a large group of verbs collectively called “causative verbs.” Typologically speaking, English belongs to the family of languages which encode two major semantic components “CAUSE” and “CHANGE OF STATE” in a single lexical unit (i.e. a single word) whereas other languages prefer to express these semantic components separately via multiple separate lexical units.

Keywords. Lexical parameter, causative verbs, alternating verbs, unaccusative/ergative verbs, psychological or psych verbs, locative verbs.

1.Introduction

While the speaker of each language tries to convey his conceptual intentions with words, natural languages can be drastically different from one another in the ways that they put a concept into a word or, in other words, how they lexicalize a concept. A word in one language, therefore, can be morphologically simple while the same concept in another language requires comparatively complex forms, incorporating more than a single semantic component and more than one morpheme. This observation has recently been articulated into a number of theories (for example, Talmy, 1985; Pinker, 1989) [1,2] that explain and predict how different languages follow distinctive lexicalization patterns which are, nevertheless, framed within some natural linguistic constraints. Some of these are thought to belong to a system known as Universal Grammar, a human linguistic endowment whose content was previously elaborated as consisting of primarily syntactic principles and syntactic parameters. The relatively novel concept of lexical parameterization proposed by Juffs (1996) [3], has been applied to English and Chinese and has manifested itself as a valid theoretical-linguistic proposal because of the empirical support it receives from language acquisition research. Based on this “lexical parameter” theory, different languages can actually follow different word-formation patterns that affect both the morphological and the subcategorization properties of the words in the language. In this paper, it will be shown that the lexical parameter operating in a language has a far-reaching effect on how its speakers generate syntactic constructions.

2. Material and Methods

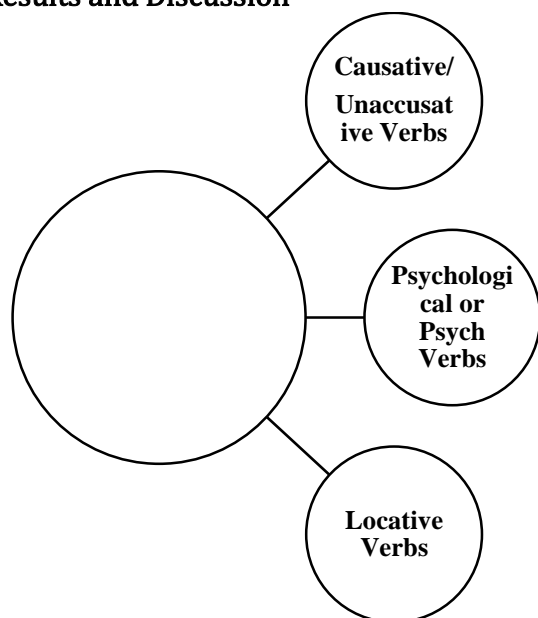
When these speakers learn a second language, their mother tongue's lexical parameter can be transferred to the second language system and can also affect how the second language learners understand and produce certain syntactic constructions in the target language. In some cases learners are disadvantaged rather than aided by the lexical parameter that they transfer from their native language. In order to illustrate the above case, a certain class of verbs namely "causative verbs" in the Uzbek language are pitted against those in the English language, and it will be proved that the lexical parameter that operates in each of the two languages is indeed different. Then, some empirical evidence gained from previous second language acquisition research studies will be presented to show how Uzbek students learning English as a foreign language have considerable difficulty in acquiring this group of verbs. Finally, it will be suggested how the traditional teaching methodology can be improved to facilitate the acquisition of English lexical causatives by Uzbek EFL learners.

3. The Methods and Approaches

Following the definition given by Shibatani (1976) [4] the terms 'causatives' or 'lexical causatives' or 'causative verbs' refers to any verbs that denote in their meanings an eventuality encompassing a causing action and the resulting change of state. In terms of formal lexical semantic components, a causative verb or lexical causative is usually composed of two major semantic components: CAUSE, representing the action which the agent performs on a theme or a patient and CHANGE OF STATE, representing the result or the effect on the theme or the patient brought about by the action of the agent. For example, in the verb "open" as in "John opened the door", the CAUSE component in the meaning of the verb is "to turn a certain thing into a certain state" while the CHANGE OF STATE component is "to be in a state of being uncovered."

Syntactically, causatives are usually transitive or dyadic (i.e. taking two arguments) and hence appear to be transitive on the surface. For instance, the verb "open" is transitive or dyadic in such a structure as "John opened the door" with two arguments including "John" and "the door." In appropriate contextual and pragmatic conditions, some of these causatives may appear in an intransitive frame and appear to be taking only one argument (i.e. monadic). For example, the verb "open" in such a sentence as "the door opened" with only one argument which is "the door" is intransitive or monadic. These verbs are said to be 'alternating' between two different syntactic frames (i.e. transitive and intransitive) and thus called "alternating verbs." With the above definition, a large number of verbs in English can be considered "causative verbs." Traditionally, studies of causative verbs usually include these 3 subclasses.

4.Results and Discussion



1. Causative/ Unaccusative verbs which refer to verbs involving certain causation and the resulting state such as “melt”, “grow”, “change”, “turn”, “open”, “close”, etc. Importantly, many causative verbs in this sub-class can alternate between transitive and intransitive frames. In an intransitive structure, they are called “unaccusative or ergative verbs”. For example, the causative “melt” in “The sun melts the ice” and the unaccusative or ergative “melt” in “The ice melts.”

2. Psychological or Psych verbs which can be divided into Causer-Subject and Causer-Object psych verbs. An example of Causer-Subject psych verbs is “frighten” as in “The tiger frightens the child”, and an example of Causer-Object psych verb is “fear” as in “The child fears the tiger”. Notice that only Causer Subject ones are considered “causative verbs”

3. Locative verbs which refer to verbs denoting relationship between entities (namely, “content” and “container”) in an act of relocation. These verbs can be divided into three sub-classes: alternating locative verbs such as “spread” as in “She spread the bread with butter” or “He spread butter onto the bread”, non-alternating ‘content’ verbs such as “pour” as in “He poured water into the glass” and non-alternating ‘container’ verbs such as “pave” as in “He paved the floor with bricks”.

English lexical causatives seem to present more than a fair share of difficulty compared to other groups of verbs to Uzbek students learning English as a foreign or second language. There are, however, encouraging cases of Uzbek EFL students who could successfully acquire English lexical

causative verbs such as those studying in an input-rich environment which was a country of the native speakers of English (Thepsura, 2005).[5] A number of insights into how English verbs should be learned were gained from these high-achieving English learners. These include exceptional level of motivation to integrate themselves into the target culture or community, regular exposure to standard English-medium materials (e.g. magazines, websites and television), and avoidance of overuse of the mother tongue which is the source of negative transfer (i.e. transfer of knowledge from L1 that cause L2 production or interpretation to be deviant or erroneous). With a large number of EFL students nowadays, these successful students seem to form a small exceptional group of high achievers who could discover the right way to learn a foreign language all by themselves (Thepsura, 1998).[6] Based on personal communication, these successful EFL learners often emphasized the considerable and regularly-supplied input or “primary linguistic data” in their daily lives.

4.Conclusion

What about the rest of EFL Uzbek students, especially the poorly-motivated ones in an input-impoverished environment in Uzbekistan who are struggling with English lexical causative verbs of various classes? The traditional teaching methods which emphasize verbal explanation (in students’ mother tongue), translation and sentence construction practices do not seem to be either sufficient or effective any longer, considering the results from the studies presented above. Perhaps what is lacking in the pedagogical practice in teaching English lexical causative verbs in the Uzbek contexts nowadays is consideration of insights from second language acquisition researchers who, at least, hint at how subtle aspects of grammar such as lexical causative verbs might be or should be taught. Here are some conclusions from language acquisition researchers that might lead to development of teaching innovations. The Lexical Parameter Theory (1996) based on the Theory of Universal Grammar (UG) (Chomsky, 1993) [7] suggests that certain grammatical structures can be acquired without any instructions because human beings with normally functioning brains are pre-programmed to naturally acquire them provided that they are exposed to the relevant input (aka ‘primary linguistic data’) or positive evidence which trigger the setting or re-setting of parameters, the dropping of overgeneralizations and subsequently the shaping of the grammar of a particular language. This means that English teachers might have to pay more attention to the quantity and quality of the relevant input that they give to their students. The environment in which the linguistic input is naturally and regularly supplied is also important (Thepsura, 2005). It must be kept in mind, nevertheless, while the natural and effortless aided acquisition of grammar in first language acquisition is unanimously

confirmed by researchers, there is still controversy as to the accessibility in second language acquisition. This means extra efforts are needed on the part of the teacher to make more accessible. This certainly requires extensive research and experiments as for the cognitive nature of L2 learners. As an example of such an effort, Thepsura & Sriboonyong (2006a,b), [8] after having verified with results from production and grammaticality judgment pre-tests that a sub-class of English causative verbs, namely “Causer-subject” psych verbs (e.g. interest, frighten) posed considerable learning challenges to Uzbek EFL students, have experimented on an innovative pedagogical method which integrated the use of the right hemisphere of the brain with significantly encouraging results which must be built upon in the future.

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