

## THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH CAUSATIVES BY VIETNAMESE LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

During five years of my teaching English to Vietnamese learners, I have found that acquiring the meaning and syntactic behavior of English causative verb classes poses a learnability puzzle for Vietnamese learners. For example, whereas periphrastic constructions (i.e., *The enemies made the ship sink* or *The dog made the boy frightened*) pose no problem for Vietnamese learners, lexical causatives (i.e., *The enemies sank the ship* or *The dog frightened the boy*) are known to be problematic for Vietnamese students. This difficulty may be attributable to the fact that some lexical causatives do not exist in Vietnamese and the assumption that, when acquiring new lexical items, the learner would search for a possible equivalent in the L1- for example, a translation equivalent or a corresponding rule. In the case of causative verbs, for instance, Vietnamese learners may adopt the English *make* causative, which can be construed as a translation equivalent of the *làm* construction in Vietnamese, to express the meaning of *causation* in English on the mistaken assumption that the uses of *làm* and *make* constructions overlap completely. In other words, in certain cases, Vietnamese may be unable to perceive the L2 data as they actually are and are misled into imposing L1 lexical properties on the L2 input.

This cross-linguistic study set out to investigate the effects of the native language (Vietnamese) on the second language (English) acquisition of argument structure. The linguistic focus is on causative verbs in Vietnamese and English. The results showed clear evidence of L1 transfer effects (positive and negative transfer), the avoidance of structures which differ from the mother tongue, incomplete learning of lexical entries, misleading input from the L2, and the failure of the grammar-translation method in Vietnam.

I have had to re-examine the failure of the method of teaching English in Vietnam as a consequence of the results of my PhD thesis, as well as through my journal process in order to become a critically reflective teacher. This paper, I consider, is a sharing of my experience as well as an invitation for Vietnamese teachers to engage in my critical journey .