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English Lexical Causatives in L2 Production: A Pilot Study of Syrian Arabic Learners

Abstract

This pilot study investigates how advanced Syrian Arabic learners of English express English lexical causative constructions in a guided production task. While lexical causativization is restricted to a small set of manner-of-motion verbs in English, Syrian Arabic allows a broader range of lexical causatives beyond manner-of-motion verbs. The study pursues two objectives: first, to determine whether Syrian L2 learners of English apply lexical causative patterns from their L1 to English periphrastic causative verbs; and second, to examine the extent to which periphrastic causatives are preferred over lexical causatives. The results of the translation task completed by 32 Syrian Arabic learners of English at advanced and upper-intermediate proficiency levels reveal a strong tendency toward periphrastic causatives, particularly with the verb *make*. These findings offer preliminary observations and methodological insights for future research.
Keywords: lexical causatives, periphrastic causatives, analytic forms, Syrian Arabic, translation task.

1   Introduction

This study explores how advanced Syrian Arabic learners of English express English lexical causatives in guided production tasks. Specifically, it investigates learners' use of lexical causative constructions when translating from Syrian Arabic into English. In such constructions, intransitive agentive verbs transitivize to express a causative event through the addition of an Agent-Causer. Languages vary in the range of verbs allowed in lexical causative constructions. For example, in English, lexical causative verbs are restricted to a small set of manner-of-motion verbs, such as *run, swim, trot, walk, race, march, leap, jump,* and *fly* (Levin 1993). Other agentive verbs are causativized periphrastically in English (e.g., *I spoke to him → He made me speak to him*).

Cross-linguistically, languages differ in the productivity of lexical causatives: some allow a broader range of verbs than English, others are more restricted, and some lack such alternations altogether. These cross-linguistic contrasts often create learnability problems for L2 learners. Studies show that when learners' L1 permits more lexical causatives than their L2, over-generalization may occur, whereas learners from more restrictive L1s tend to undergeneralize (Montrul 2001; Helms-Park 2001; Cabrera & Zubizarreta 2005).

Unlike English, Syrian Arabic allows a wider range of lexical causatives beyond manner-of-motion verbs. This contrast raises the question of how a richer L1 system interacts with the

more limited lexical causative patterns of English and how such broader lexical causativization in Syrian Arabic may influence learners' use of English.

At the same time, previous work in Second Language Acquisition shows that learners, regardless of their L1, often display a universal preference for analytic structures (Giacalone Ramat 1995; Gilquin 2016). Gilquin (2016) found that English learners tend to overuse periphrastic causative constructions (analytic structures) compared with native speakers. Consequently, two opposing tendencies may influence Syrian learners of English: potential L1 transfer encouraging lexical causatives, and a universal analytic bias promoting periphrastic forms.

While earlier studies have primarily relied on grammaticality judgment tasks assessing perception, the current design targets learners' production of lexical causative structures in actual sentence construction by employing a translation task. Furthermore, as all participants are advanced or upper-intermediate learners, the study does not aim to track the developmental stages of L2 lexical causative acquisition. Instead, it provides an exploratory overview of how advanced learners express lexical causation in guided production tasks. The work is thus conceived as a pilot study, intended to generate preliminary evidence and methodological insights for future, larger-scale research.

Building on these considerations, the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do Syrian L2 learners of English rely on lexical causative verbs to express causation when translating from Syrian Arabic to English, including overgeneralizing them to contexts where they are not allowed in English?

2. To what extent do Syrian L2 learners of English rely on periphrastic causative constructions as a general strategy for expressing causation in English?

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of lexical causative verbs in English. Section 3 presents lexical and periphrastic causative constructions in Syrian Arabic. Section 4 reviews previous studies on lexical causatives and analytic forms in second language acquisition. Section 5 outlines the research questions and methodology of the current study. Section 6 presents the results, and section 7 provides a discussion of the results.

2 An overview of lexical causative constructions

Levin (1993) defines causative alternations as those involving verbs with transitive and intransitive uses, where the transitive use can be paraphrased as *cause to V intransitive*. Two major subtypes of causative alternations are identified. The first is the *causative/inchoative alternation,* which mainly features a change-of-state event. The second type, referred to by Levin (1993) as *the induced action alternation*, does not feature a change-of-state but it is characterized by the fact that the causee is typically an animate volitional entity that is induced to act by the causer. In English it occurs with a subset of agentive manner-of-motion verbs (e.g. *dance, fly, jump, leap, march, race, run, swim, trot, walk*) as illustrated in the following example (Levin 1993: 31):

(1) a. Sylvia jumped the horse over the fence.

   b. The horse jumped over the fence.

The main characteristic of this type of causative construction is that it involves two agentive arguments. Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) note that the causer must be a true agent rather than an instrument or natural force as illustrated by the ungrammaticality of sentences like *the downpour marched the soldiers to the tent* or *the tear gas marched the soldiers to the tent* (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995: 112). The causee argument maintains a level of agentivity as well. These causative constructions are present in many languages and are not restricted to manner-of-motion verbs as illustrated in the following examples from Hungarian (2) and Syrian Arabic (3):

(2) a. Meg-tanít-ott-am   a   fi-á-t   autó-t   vezet-ni[1]
     PFV-teach-PST-1SG   DEF   son-POSS.3SG-ACC car-ACC   drive-INF
     'I taught his son to drive.'
  b. János   meg-tanít-tat-ta   velem   a   fi-á-t
     János   PFV-teach-CAUS-PST-3SG with.1SG   DEF   son-POSS.3SG-ACC
     autó-t   vezet-ni
     car-ACC   drive-INF
     'János made me teach his son to drive.' (Horvath & Siloni 2011: 15).

(3) a. dihik   il-walad
     laugh.PST.3SG.M   DEF-boy
     'The boy laughed.'
  b. dahhak-it   Sārā   il-walad
     laugh.CAUS.PST.3SG.F   Sara   DEF-boy
     'Sara made the boy laugh.'

One analysis of these causative constructions was proposed by Horvath and Siloni (2011), whose framework is adopted in this paper. Following their terminology, these constructions are referred to as *lexical causatives*, as they are formed in the lexicon. Horvath and Siloni (2011) argue that lexical causativization causativizes the verb it applies to by adding an Agent to its original θ-grid forming a new verb with a new θ-grid. The new grid is composed of the new Agent and the roles of the input grid. They add that the Agent of the input verb is not semantically interpreted as the added Agent. The input Agent executes the event but does not cause it or bring it out. On the other hand, the added Agent is the argument that is responsible for triggering and causing the event (Horvath & Siloni 2011: 21–23). Therefore, lexical causatives are typically paraphrased as '*α causes β to do the action*.

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[1] The abbreviations used in the gloss are as follows:
    PFV: perfective (verbal particle that encodes telicity in Hungarian)
    CAUS: causative
    PST: past tense
    1SG: 1st person singular
    3SG: 3rd person singular
    DEF: definite
    POSS: possessive
    ACC: accusative case
    INF: infinitive
    M: masculine
    F: feminine

Lexical causatives are found in many languages with varying degrees of productivity. In English, they are restricted to agentive manner-of-motion verbs, while other agentive verbs are mainly causativized periphrastically with the verbs *make, get,* and *have.* Periphrastic causatives allow both direct and indirect causation (Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995), and are more widely applicable than alternating verbs. The verb *make* is more flexible than *have* and *get,* allowing co-occurrence with an agent, instrument, or a causing event (Talmy 2000). Moreover, periphrastic causative constructions with the verb *make* are more frequent than other periphrastic constructions based on data from the British National Corpus (BNC) (Gilquin 2010: 48).

3   Lexical causatives in Syrian Arabic

In Syrian Arabic, lexical causativization applies to a broader set of verbs than in English, including, but not limited to, manner-of-motion verbs. However, not all English manner-of-motion verbs have direct lexical causative counterparts in Syrian Arabic. For instance, the verb *sābāʔ* 'race' can not be lexically causativized, and some English verbs lack straightforward lexical equivalents altogether in Syrian Arabic. For example, *trot* is typically paraphrased as *run lightly*, and *march* as *walk in order*. For this reason, the present analysis includes only those manner-of-motion verbs that can be lexically causativized in Syrian Arabic.

Morphologically speaking, causative verbs in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) can be derived from a basic triliteral verb root, a sequence of three consonants representing a general verb concept. Causatives are created by modifying this root in three primary ways (Hallman 2006; Ford 2009):

- Ablaut (Pattern I): Causation is marked by changing the stem vowel in the second syllable to /a/, e.g., *hazina* 'be sad'→ *hazana* 'sadden (someone)'.
- Gemination (Pattern II): Causation is expressed by doubling the middle root consonant, e.g., *xalā* 'be vacant'→ *xallā* 'vacate'. When the base verb contains a vowel in the medial position, this vowel surfaces as *y* or *w* to permit gemination. Some verbs already show gemination in their base form, such as *waqqaʕ* 'sign', and the causative continues to be morphologically geminate.
- Glottal stop prefix (Pattern IV): Adding a prefix *ʔa-* can derive a causative verb, e.g. *ẓahara* 'appear' → *ʔaẓhara* 'show'.

In Syrian Arabic, lexical causatives are primarily realized through Pattern II, where the verb is morphologically derived from the non-causative counterpart through gemination. These causatives can be formed from both intransitive and transitive verbs, as illustrated in examples (4–5). Pattern II introduces an additional Agent argument into the construction, either transforming an intransitive verb into a transitive one (4) or adding an external Agent role to a transitive verb, yielding a ditransitive structure (5):

(4) a. rakad   il-walad   bi-l-baḥa
    run.PST.3SG.M   DEF-boy   in-DEF-yard
    'The boy ran in the yard.'

   b. rakkad   il-mudarrib   il-walad   bi-l-baḥa
    run.CAUS.PST.3SG.M   DEF-coach   DEF-boy   in-DEF-yard
    'The coach ran the boy in the yard.'

(5) a. katab   il-ṭālib   il-naṣ
     write.PST.3SG.M   DEF-student   DEF-text
     'The student wrote the text.'

   b. kattab   il-ʔistāz   il-ṭālib   il-naṣ
     write.CAUS.PST.3SG.M   DEF-teacher   DEF-student   DEF-text
     'The teacher made the student write the text.'

The tables below present examples of intransitive and transitive verbs in Syrian Arabic that can undergo lexical causativization based on my own data collection. The identification of these verbs as lexical causatives was guided by the analytical framework outlined in Levin (1993), Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995), and Horvath and Siloni (2011) (Section 2). These works provided the basis for determining which verbs in Syrian Arabic display the relevant properties of lexical causativization. Since no comprehensive corpus exists for Syrian Arabic, this list is not necessarily exhaustive. Future research could expand on this by collecting more data across different speakers and regions.

Base verb	Meaning	Causative form	Meaning
ṭār	fly	ṭayyar	cause to fly
rakad	run	rakkad	cause to run
raʔas	dance	raʔʔaṣ	cause to dance
sabaḥ	swim	sabbaḥ	cause to swim
miši	walk	mašša	cause to walk
naṭ	jump	naṭṭat	cause to jump
zaḥaf	crawl	zaḥḥaf	cause to crawl
nām	sleep	nayyam	cause to sleep
ḍiḥik	laugh	ḍaḥḥak	cause to laugh
biki	cry	bakka	cause to cry
naṭar	wait	naṭṭar	cause to wait

Table 1. Intransitive lexical causatives in Syrian Arabic

Base verb	Meaning	Causative form	Meaning
ʔakal	eat	ʔakkal	cause to eat
širib	drink	šarrab	cause to drink
fihim	understand	faham	cause to understand
simiʕ	hear	sammaʕ	cause to hear
waqqaʕ	sign	waqqaʕ	cause to sign
liʕib	play	laʕʕab	cause to play
sāʔ	drive	sawwaʔ	cause to drive
qaraʔ	read	qarraʔ	cause to read
katab	write	kattab	cause to write
šaf	see	šawwaf	cause to see
ḥamal	carry	ḥammal	cause to carry

Table 2. Transitive lexical causatives in Syrian Arabic

Agentive verbs that do not undergo lexical causativization are causativized periphrastically with the verb *xalla* ('to make' or 'to let'). It should be noted that verbs that undergo lexical causativization in Syrian Arabic can also be used in periphrastic causative constructions with the verb *xalla*, with a slightly different interpretation. In general, lexical causatives tend to imply a stronger and more direct sense of control or imposition, while periphrastic causatives can express a wider range of meanings, from permission to obligation, depending on context. For example, the lexical causative in (6a) implies that the teacher forced or compelled the students to write, while in the periphrastic construction (6b), the teacher's role is more about allowing, instructing, and enabling the action rather than imposing it.

(6) a. kattab   il-ʔistāz   il-ṭālib   il-naṣ
     write.CAUS.PST.3SG.M   the-teacher   the-student   the-text
     'The teacher made the student write the text.'

   b. xalla   il-ʔistāz   il-ṭālib   yektub   il-naṣ
     make.PST.3SG.M   the-teacher   the-student   write.INF   the-text
     'The teacher made the student write the text.'

4   Lexical causatives and analytic forms in second language acquisition

4.1 *Lexical causatives*

Most second language acquisition research on causative verbs has primarily focused on the influence of the native language in the L2 acquisition process. One perspective examines this L1 influence in connection with the concept of overgeneralization, which results from L1 transfer. Overgeneralization in L2 acquisition, as described by White (1991), occurs in cases where the L2 grammar represents a subset of the L1 grammar. Learners may assume that the structures that are present in the L1 but absent in the L2 are permitted in the L2. White hypothesizes that this is a form of transfer triggered by partial overlap, causing learners to overgeneralize (White 1991: 194–195). On the other hand, when L1 is a subset of L2 (L2 allows for a broader range of structures), learners may rely on the more restrictive L1 grammar, leading to undergeneralization errors.

Two important studies, Montrul (2001) and Cabrera and Zubizarreta (2005), investigated the acquisition of manner-of-motion verbs in English and Spanish, based on White's Subset Principle. Montrul (2001) examined the acquisition of agentive manner-of-motion verbs and change-of-state verbs in Spanish and English. Both languages allow change-of-state verbs to participate in the causative alternation. However, agentive manner-of-motion verbs undergo a transitivity alternation in English when accompanied by a prepositional phrase (*The captain marched the soldiers to the tents*) but not in Spanish (**El capitán marchó a los soldados hasta el campamento*). Montrul predicted that Spanish learners of English would undergeneralize the transitivity alternation of manner-of-motion verbs, while English learners of Spanish would overgeneralize it. The results supported Montrul's hypothesis: Spanish learners of English undergeneralized transitive manner-of-motion verbs, as predicted. Conversely, English learners of Spanish mistakenly accepted transitive manner-of-motion verbs, highlighting a clear contrast between the two groups.

Similarly, Cabrera and Zubizarreta (2005) explored the L2 acquisition of causative constructions by English learners of Spanish and Spanish learners of English. Their findings mirrored Montrul's results. L1 English learners of Spanish overgeneralized manner-of-motion verbs with prepositional phrases, which are acceptable in English but not in Spanish. Meanwhile, L1 Spanish learners of English undergeneralized these constructions.

A key difference between the two studies lies in participants' level of proficiency. Montrul (2001) focused exclusively on intermediate learners, while Cabrera and Zubizarreta (2005) included beginner, intermediate, and advanced groups. Their results revealed that over-generalization errors decreased as proficiency increased, but undergeneralization errors persisted among advanced L1 Spanish learners of English. Cabrera and Zubizarreta (2005) hypothesize that undergeneralization errors, which depend on positive evidence, are more resistant to change than overgeneralization errors. Advanced L1 Spanish learners of English continued to undergeneralize transitive manner-of-motion verbs, likely due to limited exposure to L2 input.

Two other studies (Helms-Park 2001; Zibin & Altahkhaineh 2016) highlighted the influence of the native language in the English second language acquisition of causative structures, where there exists a mismatch between L1 and L2. Helms-Park (2001) investigated the acquisition of English causative verbs by Vietnamese and Hindi-Urdu speakers, focusing on how the semantic classes of verbs in learners' L1 influence their L2 acquisition. Particularly relevant to this discussion are the findings on what Helms-Park (2001) call *forced motion verbs*, such as *run* (*run a horse past a barn*) and *walk* (*walk a baby to a park*). In English, these verbs form direct causatives with prepositional phrases as discussed earlier, unlike Vietnamese, which uses suppletive constructions, and Hindi-Urdu, which allows direct causatives without prepositional phrases. The grammaticality judgment test showed that Hindi-Urdu learners of English accepted direct causatives for forced motion verbs twice as often as Vietnamese learners and rejected fewer ungrammatical forms. Vietnamese learners, reflecting their L1 constraints, were more conservative, rarely accepting direct causatives. Helms-Park attributed these differences to L1 transfer, showing how structural patterns in learners' native languages shape their L2 acquisition. With similar findings, Zibin and Altahkhaineh (2016) investigated the acquisition of English causative alternations by native speakers of Jordanian Arabic. Results showed that Jordanian learners achieved near target-like accuracy with verbs that alternate in transitivity in both L1 Jordanian Arabic and L2 English which was attributed to positive transfer. More importantly, the same learners showed low accuracy with verbs that alternate in their Jordanian Arabic L1 but not in L2 English. Two of these verbs that are relevant to the discussion are *sleep* and *cry*. Jordanian learners were not confident in rejecting the ungrammatical causative use of these verbs (e.g., **Robert cried Christiana last night*) due to negative transfer as hypothesized by Zibin and Altahkhaineh (2016).

4.2 Analytic forms

The tendency towards overusing analytic forms has first been observed by children acquiring their mother tongues. In his research on first language acquisition, Slobin (1985) noted that children often prefer analytic constructions over synthetic ones, sometimes creating analytic equivalents even when the input language provides only synthetic options. When both analytic and synthetic forms are available in the input, analytic forms tend to be used earlier.

This preference for analytic constructions extends to second language acquisition as well. Giacalone Ramat (1995) highlighted this phenomenon in her research on the acquisition of the Italian imperfect, a synthetic form with tense affixes. Learners often created periphrastic constructions using auxiliary verbs in combination with a basic verb or infinitive. Ramat attributed this tendency to the better transparency of analytic forms vs. synthetic ones. (Giacalone Ramat 1995: 133).

Regarding periphrastic causative constructions, Gilquin (2016) investigated L2 acquisition of periphrastic causative constructions in English. The study examines the use of the English periphrastic causative constructions *make, cause, have,* and *get* in learner corpora by analyzing essays written by English L2 students. The results showed that, in comparison to native speakers, L2 learners significantly overuse periphrastic causative constructions (over 500 occurrences per million words for L2 learners vs. 150 occurrences per million words for native speakers). Additionally, the results revealed that L2 learners of English tend to overuse periphrastic constructions with the verb *make* compared to native speakers. Gilquin (2016) attributes this tendency to the high frequency of the verb *make*, and to the fact that it is widely used in different contexts in English.

5   The study

5.1   Research problem and questions

While English employs a limited set of lexical causatives, Syrian Arabic allows for a broader range of lexical causatives. This contrast raises questions about the potential influence of L1 Syrian Arabic structures on L2 English, as previous research shows that when learners' L1 permits more lexical causatives than their L2, overgeneralization may occur. On the other hand, studies suggest a universal tendency among L2 learners toward analytic language forms, predicting a greater reliance on periphrastic causative constructions. To address this gap, the study aims at answering the following research questions:

1. To what extent do Syrian L2 learners of English rely on lexical causative verbs to express causation when translating from Syrian Arabic to English, including overgeneralizing them to contexts where they are not allowed in English (mismatch condition)?

2. To what extent do Syrian L2 learners of English rely on periphrastic causative constructions as a general strategy for expressing causation in English, regardless of the structural match or mismatch with their L1?

5.2   Participants

This pilot study involved 32 native speakers of Syrian Arabic, all adult L2 learners of English aged between 27 and 40 and holding university degrees. The sample included 30 females and 2 males, reflecting the group that was available during data collection. Since the study is pilot in nature, the focus was on gathering initial data, and gender was not treated as a variable in the analysis.

Participants completed the *Maximilian Quick Placement Test* to assess their English proficiency. Based on the results, 26 participants were classified as advanced learners, while 6 were classified as upper-intermediate learners. This distribution allows for a focus on advanced

learners while also incorporating upper-intermediate learners, providing insights into potential variations in the acquisition of English lexical causative verbs across different proficiency levels.

5.3 Methodology

The study employed a translation task to investigate Syrian Arabic learners' production of English lexical causative constructions. The task consisted of 20 sentences to be translated from Syrian Arabic into English. Ten sentences served as distractors, and ten contained intransitive verbs that undergo lexical causativization in Syrian Arabic. These target items were divided into two types:

- **Type 1 (match with English):** intransitive verbs that can be lexically causativized in both English and Syrian Arabic (*run, swim, walk, jump, dance*).

- **Type 2 (mismatch with English):** intransitive verbs that can be lexically causativized in Syrian Arabic but not in English (*sleep, laugh, cry, wait, crawl*).

By focusing on intransitive verbs, the task ensures that both conditions are comparable and that differences in learners' responses can be attributed to the (mis)match between the lexical causative patterns of English and Syrian Arabic rather than to differences in verb transitivity.

To verify that the lexical causative constructions tested in the translation task are attested in native English, a targeted search was conducted in the British National Corpus (BNC). To capture clear lexical causative uses, each verb was searched in its *lemma* form followed by a personal pronoun (e.g., *walk him, run her*), a configuration that restricts the results to unambiguous lexical causative contexts. Although this search provides only a narrow window into usage, it offers a glimpse of the broader productivity of these constructions in real data. The five manner-of-motion verbs (*walk, run, swim, jump, dance*) correspond to those in the match condition of the translation task, and are among the most common and productive members of this class in English. The search was not intended to estimate overall frequency, since verb+pronoun combinations do not encompass all attested causative patterns (e.g., *walk the dog*), and frequency is not a central variable in this study..

All retrieved occurrences were then manually inspected to confirm that they represented genuine lexical causative uses. Sentences were included only if the subject acted as a cause and the object denoted a causee performing the action (e.g., *I will walk you home*). Non-causative or idiomatic uses were excluded.

Verb	Total
walk	137
run	21
dance	5
swim	2
jump	1

Table 3. BNC results for verb+ pronoun lexical causative constructions

The results show that the agentive manner-of-motion verbs *walk, run, dance, swim*, and *jump* vary in frequency when used in lexical causative contexts. For example, the verb *walk*

frequently occurs in lexical causative constructions such as *I will walk you home.* Similarly but less frequently, the verb *run* can appear in causative constructions like *they took him and ran him to the corner*. In contrast, lexical causative uses of *dance*, *swim* and *jump* are much less common, as in *he danced them all night*, *then swam her in the river, she never jumps the horse*. These findings highlight the varying frequencies and the limited use of some of these verbs in lexical causative contexts in English.

6   Results

The participants' translations were categorized into three types:

1. Lexical causative translations. (e.g., *I grabbed the kid and swam him to the shore*).
2. Periphrastic translations. (e.g., *the man made his horse jump right above our heads*).
3. Other translations where participants shifted from causative use (e.g., *Ali danced with Nora on the stage*, *I grabbed the kid and swam with him to the shore*).

The results indicate an overall preference for periphrastic causative constructions among Syrian Arabic learners. However, the strength of this preference varied across individual verbs and verb types. As shown in Table 4, participants most frequently produced periphrastic causatives with the verbs *run* and *jump*, while other verbs elicited a wider range of responses, including lexical causatives, periphrastic, and other non-causative constructions.

6.1   *Type 1 verbs (match with English)*

For verbs that can be lexically causativized in both English and Syrian Arabic (*run, jump, walk, swim, dance*), participants generally preferred periphrastic causatives with *run* and *jump*. For example, responses such as *the coach made the children run around the school* and *the man made his horse jump above our heads* were frequent and consistent across participants. In contrast, the verbs *walk, swim,* and *dance* showed more variability. While some participants produced periphrastic and lexical causatives, others produced non-causative paraphrases such as *Ali grabbed Nura's hand to have a dance with her on stage, I grabbed the boy and swam with him to the beach,* and *We walked on the beach with our kids*. The verb *dance* elicited the highest number of non-causative translations (21 instances). These findings could suggest that the concept of causativity is not naturally associated with verbs such as *dance* for the participants, possibly due to its semantic properties. Dancing is typically a symmetric social activity that is less likely to be imposed by an external agent constructing causative events. Participants may have interpreted the test sentences as describing voluntary actions rather than externally caused events, which reduced the likelihood of causative expressions. Additionally, the verb *walk* was the most frequently causativized lexically (10 instances), which may be attributed to its higher frequency in English causative contexts, as indicated by the corpus search (Table 3).

	Lexical translation	Periphrastic translation	Other translation	Did not answer
rakad 'run'	2	28	2	0
nat 'jump'	4	22	4	2
ra?as 'dance'	3	7	21	1
sabaḥ 'swim'	6	11	13	2
miši 'walk'	10	13	9	0

Table 4. Distribution of translation types for match verbs

6.2 Type 2 verbs (mismatch with English)

The data in table (5) presents the results of mismatch verbs (*sleep, laugh, cry, wait, crawl*), verbs that are lexically causativized in L1 Syrian Arabic but not in English. The results reveal limited evidence of transfer from Syrian Arabic. Lexical causative translations of mismatch verbs were not prominent compared to periphrastic translations, and those that occur were produced by the upper-intermediate learners. The verb *wait* patterned differently from other verbs; many participants produced a non-causative interpretation of the sentence: (*my brother waited for me until he arrived)* instead of *(my brother made me wait for him until he arrived*). One likely reason is participants' misinterpretation of the test sentence; some participants failed to notice the gemination on the middle consonant of the verb *wait*, thus reading the sentence as describing a *waiting for* event rather than a causative event.

	Lexical translation	Periphrastic translation	Other translation	Did not answer
nām 'sleep'	3	28	1	0
ḍiḥik 'laugh'	1	31	0	0
naṭar 'wait'	2	20	10	0
zahaf 'crawl'	3	27	1	1
biki 'cry'	1	30	1	0

Table 5. Distribution of translation types for mismatch verbs

6.3 Periphrastic translations

Regarding periphrastic translations for both match and mismatch verbs, the results demonstrate a strong preference for the verb *make*. Participants predominantly used *make* to construct causative sentences (see Table 6) likely due to its higher frequency in causative constructions.

Other periphrastic translations were formed with the verbs *have* and *get*. Less typical, less transparent periphrastic forms were also observed, particularly with the verbs *sleep* and *walk*. Likely due to their advanced proficiency, participants produced idiomatic expressions such as *Sarah put her son to sleep* and *We took the children for a walk* instead of producing literal periphrastic translations, which might explain the higher numbers of other-periphrastic utterances with the verbs *sleep* and *walk* in particular.

	The total number of periphrastic translations	*Make-*periphrastic	*Have-*periphrastic	*Get-*periphrastic	**Other** periphrastic
run	<u>**28**</u>	25	1	0	2
jump	<u>**22**</u>	19	2	0	1
dance	<u>**7**</u>	5	2	0	0
swim	<u>**11**</u>	6	1	0	4
walk	<u>**13**</u>	3	1	0	9
sleep	<u>**28**</u>	7	1	2	18
laugh	<u>**31**</u>	31	0	0	0
wait	<u>**20**</u>	14	5	0	1
crawl	<u>**27**</u>	26	1	0	0
cry	<u>**30**</u>	28	1	0	1

Table 6. The distribution of the different types of periphrastic causatives for match and mismatch verbs

6.4 Individual variation

As for individual variation, lexical translations of mismatch verbs (ungrammatical) were produced by three participants in the upper-intermediate group, while none were produced by the advanced group. As for periphrastic causatives, one participant produced eight out of the fourteen *have-periphrastic* instances. The two *get-periphrastic* instances were made with the verb *sleep*.

7 Discussion

One objective of this study is to examine whether native Syrian Arabic speakers, as L2 learners of English, are influenced by their L1 by applying lexical causative patterns to verbs that are lexically causativized in Syrian Arabic but not in English. Additionally, it seeks to explore the tendency observed among L2 learners toward analytic forms by favouring periphrastic causatives over lexical ones.

This study revealed limited influence from L1 Syrian Arabic. Lexical causative translations were not prominent in comparison with periphrastic translations. It is important to mention that the current pilot study employed a translation task requiring learners to actively produce structures; thus, the study does not target the perception of lexical causatives. As all participants were advanced or upper-intermediate learners, the study does not aim to track the developmental stages of L2 lexical causative acquisition, it provides an exploratory overview of how proficient learners express lexical causative meanings in English.

In contrast, previous studies (Montrul 2001; Helms-Park 2001; Cabrera & Zubizarreta 2005; Zibin & Altakhaineh 2016) employed participants of different proficiency levels and included both production and perception tasks, such as grammaticality judgment tasks, which may explain why they concluded that learners overgeneralize L1 lexical causative structures, particularly when their native language exhibits lexical causativization that the L2 does not. While the current study does not confirm such conclusions, the results of the advanced group reflect the findings of Cabrera and Zubizarreta (2005), who observed that overgeneralization errors tend to decrease as learners' proficiency improves. It could be hypothesized that the more advanced learners were better able to avoid overgeneralizing L1 structures that do not align with L2 English.

The results of the current study also indicate a clear tendency among Syrian learners to use periphrastic causatives over lexical causatives, aligning with established patterns.[2] Gilquin (2016) observed that L2 learners of English tend to overuse periphrastic constructions compared to native speakers, supporting the argument of a universal tendency toward analytic forms, which are characterized by greater transparency compared to synthetic ones. This helps explain Syrian learners' reliance on periphrastic causative constructions even when lexical causatives are grammatically licit. Importantly, all participants in the present study were advanced and upper-intermediate learners of English, so their limited use of lexical causatives cannot be attributed to insufficient proficiency or lack of exposure to the non-causative forms. Rather, their preference for periphrastic causatives appears to reflect broader L2 tendencies toward analytically marked constructions.

Regarding variation across verb types, the verb *walk* was lexically causativized the most, likely due to its higher frequency in lexical causative contexts compared to other lexical causative verbs, as evidenced by the corpus search conducted (Table 3). The search in the British National Corpus (BNC) revealed that *walk* appeared more frequently in such constructions than the verbs *run, dance, swim,* or *jump.* It is important to note, however, that *walk* is also more frequent in English because it participates in many idiomatic and metaphoric expressions (e.g., *walk someone through something*), which can increase its overall prominence in learners' input. This broader frequency may contribute to the learners' readiness to produce lexical causatives with *walk*. This aligns with the idea that frequency is a factor in language acquisition, as repeated exposure reinforces learners' mental representation of a linguistic item, enabling quicker recall and processing (Ellis 2002).

Another finding of the study is the overuse of the verb *make* in periphrastic constructions, supporting the findings of Gilquin (2016). This tendency can be attributed to two main factors: the high frequency and general-purpose nature of *make* in English and possible L1 influence. Altenberg and Granger (2001) found that Swedish learners similarly overused *make* due to the close correspondence between English *make* and the Swedish equivalent *göra.* Both languages feature this verb prominently, and *göra* is often used in high-frequency contexts. They add that these L2 learners relied on *make-construction* as it is easy to transfer from their native language. Altenberg and Granger (2001) argue that the verb *make* serves as a *lexico-grammatical teddy bear*. L2 learners, including advanced ones, overuse early learned, widely used words, clinging onto them as lexical teddy bears (Altenberg and Granger 2001: 174).

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2   Although no corpus-based data are available on the distribution of lexical and periphrastic causatives in Syrian Arabic, general observations suggest that periphrastic causatives formed with the verb *xalla* are more frequent and productive than lexical causatives, which may partly explain the learners' preference for analytic constructions observed in this study.

In Syrian Arabic, the causative *make* corresponds to the high-frequency verb *xalla*, which is the only verb used to form periphrastic causatives. Building on the results of Altenberg and Granger (2001), it can be hypothesized that Syrian learners similarly rely on *make* as a convenient and familiar tool, using it as a default option. Their overuse of *make* may also be reinforced by its prominence in English input, both in classroom instruction and everyday communication.

Answers to research questions:

1. To what extent do Syrian L2 learners of English rely on lexical causative verbs to express causation when translating from Syrian Arabic to English, including overgeneralizing them to contexts where they are not allowed in English (mismatch condition)?

The results show that Syrian L2 learners relied minimally on lexical causative verbs overall. In match conditions, learners used them occasionally but still preferred periphrastic alternatives. In mismatch conditions, where overgeneralization of lexical causatives would result in ungrammatical English forms, such overgeneralization was rare. This indicates that L1 influence through lexical causative overuse was limited.

2. To what extent do Syrian L2 learners of English rely on periphrastic causative constructions as a general strategy for expressing causation in English, regardless of the structural match or mismatch with their L1?

The results show that Syrian L2 learners demonstrate a preference for periphrastic causative constructions. This tendency was observed across both match and mismatch verbs, suggesting that learners defaulted to a universal analytic strategy when expressing causation in English in both match and mismatch conditions.

9   Conclusion

The primary aim of this pilot study is to investigate how advanced Syrian Arabic learners of English produce lexical causative structures and whether they transfer patterns from their L1. The findings reveal that learners rely heavily on periphrastic constructions, particularly with the verb *make*, and rarely use lexical causatives in their translations. This preference seems to align with a broader tendency in second language learners to favor analytic constructions, which are often perceived as clearer and easier to use than synthetic ones. The results also show that the frequent use of *make* as a default causative verb could be explained by its high frequency and versatility in English, as well as its similarity to *xalla*, the only periphrastic causative verb in Syrian Arabic. This suggests that learners rely on familiar, general-purpose linguistic tools to express causative meanings, influenced by both the input they encounter and their L1 structures.

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Appendix: Sentences used in the translation task

I.   *Type 1: match with English*

1. rakkad   il-mudarrib   il-wulad   ḥawalen   il-madraseh   nuṣ
   ran.CAUS   the-coach   the-children around   the-school   half
   saʕa
   hour
   'The coach ran the children around the school for half an hour.'

2. naṭṭaṭ   il-zalameh   ḥṣan-u   fuq   rus-na   tamaman
   jump.CAUS   the-man   horse-his   above heads-our   exactly
   'The man jumped his horse right above our heads.'

3. masak   ali   ʔīd   nora   w   raqqas-ha   ʕala
   grabbed   ali   hand   nora   and   danced.CAUS-her   on
   il-masraḥ
   the-stage
   'Ali grabbed Nora's hand and danced her on the stage.'

4. masak-it   il-walad   w   sabbaḥt-u   laʕand   il-
   grabbed.I   the-boy   and   swam.CAUS.I-him   towards   the-
   šaṭ
   shore
   'I grabbed the boy and swam him to the shore.'

5. mašše-na   il-wulad   ʕala   il-šaṭ   baʕden   rḥ-na
   walked.CAUS-we   the-kids   on   the-beach   then   went-we
   nišrab   qahweh
   drink   coffee
   'We walked the kids on the beach, then we went for coffee.'

II.   *Type 2: mismatch with English*

1. nayyamit   sara? ibn-a   bakkir ilyum
   slept.CAUS   sara   son-her   early   today
   'Sarah put her son to sleep early today.'

2. ḍaḥḥak-ni   rfī?-ti   bi   nus   il-?mtiḥan
   laughed.CAUS.me   friend-my   in   middle   the-exam
   'My friend made me laugh in the middle of the exam session.'

3. naṭṭar-ni   ?ax-i   b-il   šariʕ   labin   ma   wasal
   waited.CAUS-me   brother-my   in-the street until   when   arrived.he
   'My brother made me wait in the street until he arrived.'

4. zaḥḥaf-na   il-ḍabib   ʕalaṭul   il-muʕaskar
    crawled.CAUS-us   the-officer   across   the-camp
    'The officer made us crawl across the camp.'

5. bakka-ha   il-mudīr   bi   kalam-u   il-ʔasi
    cried.CAUS-her   the-manager   with   words-his   the-harsh
    'The manager made her cry with his harsh words.'