A causative construction, denoting a complex event, is defined as a structure that is derived from a simple active sentence by adding a new argument to indicate the role of CAUSER (Palmer 1994). While some languages employ a special causative affix which derives a transitive verb from an intransitive verb (Dixon 2005), others like English use MAKING verbs such as have, make, let, and get to play the role of causative markers in English causative constructions. Similar causative markers like rang4 (讓) ‘let’ or ling4 (令) ‘let’ observed in Mandarin can illustrate causative meanings as well.

In Hakka, the two words lau1 (老) (verbal meaning: ‘mix’) and bun1 (分) (verbal meaning: ‘give’) play the role of causative markers as in the typical causative structure NP1 + LAU (老)/ BUN (分) + NP2 + VP. However, it is observed that in LAU (老) causative constructions, both NP1 and NP2 participate in the activity designated by VP while only NP2 involves in the activity designated by VP in BUN (分) constructions. Though both of them represent causative meanings, the sub-events perform diversely.

On the other hand, some constructions without overt causative markers in Hakka can still be detected carrying causative meanings. For example, in the sentence shui2 zai1 da2 zeu2 liong1 sa5 ngin5 (水災打走兩儕人) ‘The flood flushed away two people’, the prototypical causative marker lau1 (老) or bun1 (分) does not emerge. However, the causal representation is observed explicitly since the flood which plays the role of effector causes the patient to be flushed away. Another example is gai1 zii2 da2 zoi3 lon2 hok4 (雞子打嘴卵殼) ‘The chicken breaks the eggshell by its beak’ in which the chicken causes the eggshell to be broken. Intriguingly, the post-predicate element in the former sentence is an intransitive verb zeu2 (走) ‘to go, to run’ while in the latter, a noun zoi3 (嘴) ‘the mouth’. In addition, the transfer of energy in the first example is transparent and the causation from NP1 to NP2 is overt. However, the transfer of energy in the second example is opaque. Furthermore, the result of the causation is implicit. There is no clue to denote the broken status of the patient lon2 hok4 (卵殼) ‘eggshell’. Therefore, the causation from NP1 to NP2 is covert. In any event, the grammatical device to express the meaning of causing someone to perform the relevant action is absent in these cases. Without causative markers, the responsibility of offering the causative representation will be ascribed to the construction itself consequently.

This paper hence attempts to provide an analysis of the syntactic variations and semantic features of causative constructions in Hakka encompassing specific issues such as the integration of the constituent elements of the structures. Emphasizing on the relationship between forms and semantic or discourse functions, constructionist approaches, in the stream of thought of Goldberg and Jackendoff (2004), Goldberg (2006), among others, propose the constructional view in an overall vision of grammar. Following this line of argument, this study will provide a framework to account for both the generalizations and the particularities of Hakka causative constructions syntactically and semantically.