On the Development of *Because*: 
A Corpus-based Study

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*SNU Working Papers in English Linguistics and Language* 6, 91-100. This paper investigates the rise and development of the new causal connective *because* in Middle and Early Modern English. The causal marker of the native Germanic origin, *forpan pe* appeared less and less and ultimately became obsolete by the end of Middle English period. It is logically deducible that the decline in the traditional connective is tied to the introduction of the new form. It is in this light that the paper addresses the rise and decline of certain markers of reason and consequence. *Because*, the one we use today, was originally a French loan, *by cause of* (OF < *par cause de*). By aid of the Helsinki Corpus, the research tracks down on the formation and stabilization of *because* to its present form in a diachronic perspective. This will also be deliberated in terms of grammaticalization, of how the lexical item has become a functional one.

**Keywords:** *because, forpan pe, grammaticalization*

1. Introduction

This paper investigates on the rise and development of the causal connective *because*. The causal linking is a very basic marking of relationship between clauses and sentences. However, *because* have not entered the English lexicon until second half of Middle English period. Old English had native connective *forpan pe*, which has the same meaning and function as *because*. It was seen until the 1250s but the number of its occurrences sharply decreased afterwards (see section 2 below). So unless people suddenly did not have to mark causal relationship in writing, it is natural to assume that another lexical item has replaced the native one. And since *because* is what we use for such purpose, it follows that this word of French origin was adopted after the Norman Conquest along with other influx of vocabularies.

In the following sections I want to throw light on the formation and
stabilization of because as an English vocabulary. The Helsinki Corpus will be used for the diachronic research, along with the Word Smith program. In doing so, I also address the issue of grammaticalization spotted by looking into the word-internal construction of because.

2. The native causal connective forpan pe

Forpan pe was the causal marker used during the Old and the early Middle English period. Its internal construction can be broken down to for followed by various forms of dative pronoun ðan, pan, pi, pam and optional subordinate particle pe/ðat. As spelling was not yet fixed during the early times, there are as many as 82 variant forms of the connective in concern. Its primary meaning is the same as today’s because in that it marks the relationship of reason and consequence. Here are examples from the M1 period (1150-1250) of the Helsinki Corpus (henceforth HC).

(1) þerefter wæx suythe micel uuerre betuyx þe king & Randolf eorl of Cæstre: noht forþi ðat he ne iaf him al ðat he cuthe axen him, alse he dide alle othre; (Thereafter waxed violently much war between the king & Randolph earl of Chester not because he didn’t gave him all that he could demand from him.) (M2/ Peterborough Chronicle)

(2) Mi feader & Mi moder forþi þt ich nule þe forsaken; habbe forsake me. (My father and my mother, because I haven’t forsaken you, have forsaken me…) (M2/ST Juliana)

Table 1 shows the total number of occurrences of forpan pe throughout the history of English. The number decreases in M2 period and is no longer found in the Early Modern period.

| Table 1. Occurrences of forpan pe in HC (per 100,000 words) |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| O1 | O2 | O3 | O4 | M1 | M2 | M3 | M4 |
| 46 | 155 | 126 | 166 | 79 | 2 | 2 | 3 |

The new form because was starting to gain grounds in the 1350s. Table 2 shows the number of occurrences of because from its first appearance
in the M3 period to the end of the Early Modern English.

<Table 2. Occurrences of because in HC (figures per 100,000 words)>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M3</th>
<th>M4</th>
<th>E1</th>
<th>E2</th>
<th>E3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Just as there were many variant forms of forpan pe, because did not emerge fully fixed in form. In the next section, its various forms will be shown and the significance of it will be discussed in terms of grammaticalization.

3. The new causal connective because

3.1 The form of because

The Oxford English dictionary states that because was originally a phrase consisting of preposition by and substantive cause. According to the dictionary, because is followed by the preposition of, or subordinator that or why to express cause or purpose. For cause was equivalent to because thus for because is said to be found as well as an interim form. Middle and EME section of the HC was searched for evidence.

3.1.1 The emergence because (be cause < by cause)

HC rendered ample spelling variants of because and reflected its change in form over the course of time. Evidence for two points is provided in this subsection. First, since because was initially a phrase (by + cause), two word construction was frequent at the earlier period but the statistics leaned toward the dominance in merged form (because) later on. Second, the change that variants beginning with by being dominant but later giving way to the present spelling starting with be- is observed.

Table 3 shows number of merged and separate construction of because. The hyphenated form be-cause that can be regarded as an interim form on the way to the merged one. In M3, preposition + substantive form prevails at 91%. The percentage drops to 42% in the M4 and in the EME period, because is dominantly a one word construction.
Occurrences of merged and separate construction of *because (be cause)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>preposition separated</th>
<th>preposition hyphenated</th>
<th>preposition merged</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>31(91%)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>28(42%)</td>
<td>17(28%)</td>
<td>21(31%)</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>204(95%)</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>222(97%)</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prepositional spelling variants are seen to take a similar step in emerging as the current form. The original preposition by prevails in the earlier periods but increasingly be becomes dominant. Table 4 shows the change.

Spelling variants of *because*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>be</th>
<th>by</th>
<th>bi</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22(65%)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>28(42%)</td>
<td>36(54%)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>111(52%)</td>
<td>71(33%)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>222(97%)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>124</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1.2 The phrase and the subordinator *because of* and *because*

*Because of* is now a prepositional phrase followed by a substantive attributed as the cause. The ratio of prepositional phrase to causal clause is shown in Table 5. The proportion of the phrase gets smaller with time resting at 7% in the E3 period. And the outdated form of *because* followed by *that* appears less and less across time, 50% of the total in the M3 but occurs only once in E3.
3.1.3 The interim form for because

As written in 3.1, the interim form for because was found in the HC. Examples (3) and (4) are from M4 and E1 period respectively. And (5) is from OED.

(3) þus þe lawe dispensyth wyth apon hore concyens. þen for bycause þat Sonday ys no day of fastyng, þerfor þe schull begyn your fast at Aske-Wanysday… (M4/HC)
(4) (As the Geometricians are wonte to brynge in thynges, that they call apparenaunces after they haue shewed their propositions) eue-so wyll I geue the as a correlary or conclusyon, for bycause that men be made blessed by obteyning of blessednes, and that blessednes is the same dyuinitie… (E1/HC)
(5) For because that Satyrme is of so late sterynge.
   (1400/Mandeville/OED)

For because construction was rare, appearing once in M3, 4 times in M4, 7 times in E1 and once in E2 before it was obsolete, nevertheless providing a window to the grammaticalization of because.

3.2 Grammaticalization of because

Fischer et al. defines grammaticalization as "a process whereby a lexical item, with full referential meaning, developments into a grammatical marker (2000: 286)." Hopper and Traugott write "grammaticalization
refers to that part of study of language change that is concerned with such questions as how lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions or how grammatical items develop new grammatical functions (2003: 1)."

My focus of the grammaticalization was on its diachronic perspective. Language having a property of actively changing while being standardized or fixed enough to be recognized and accepted as the same word, such contrast in nature seemed interesting. Grammaticalization, because it is a process and a change, is dynamic in nature. Such characteristics will be reflected in the linguistic item across time.

At first approximation, the prepositional phrase *because of* in itself is said to be a French loan, *par cause de*. But since there is also the subordinator *because or because that*, which was used contemporaneously with the prepositional phrase, and the current French equivalent being *parce que*, which does not seem to bear the word for word resemblance in that sense, the duality offers an opportunity for research. Both (6) and (7) are from M3, (6) with the prepositional phrase and (7) with the causal marker followed by that:

(6) For right as men blamen an avaricious man by *cause of* his scarceetee and hyncherie, in the same wise is he to blame that spendeth over-largely. (M3/HC)

(7) And sithe the tyme that I was resseyued to meynprise by *cause that* I was endited of trespace as an accessorie and not endited as a principal and deluyered out of prison at large by the kynges commandement in strengthening and enhaunsyng of his Rial prerogatif that he grauntepe to me by the auctorite of his parlement. (M3/HC)

The first attested use of the word *cause* is found in M2 of HC. Given that no other use of *because* was found during the M2 period, it was a pure lexical item.

(8) Iugge me, Lord, and defende my *cause* fram folke noust holy, and defende me fram pe wicked man and pe trecherous.  
(M2/Psalms/HC)

In M3 period, *for pe pat* and *because* that exist in parallel.
(9) But forpi pat you schalt not erre in pis worching, and were pat it be ojerwise then it is, I schal telle pee a lityl more per-of, as me pinkep. (M3/HC)

(10) In Egypt pere ben but fewe Forcelettes or castelles be cause pat the contree is so strong of himself. (M3/HC)

But in M4, as (3) and (4) exemplify, for, together with because form an interim construction, thereby giving us for because that. This is to be seen as overgeneralization, although I couldn't find any authoritative text on this issue. There is also for cause of, similar in meaning to because of in M3. Consider (11) below:

(11) By this flexe I understonde al mankynde that cam oute of the erthe, the whiche mankynde is by grace maad white by baptem, where that wickednes is put a-way, but not infirmyte, for in partie we rescuyue clennes in baptem but not fully, for cause of corruptcyon of nature that aboundith in vs. (M3/HC)

Because the cohesion between for and the noun cause is not all that strong, cause also appeared with the definite article in (12).

(12) Thus I sawe howe cryste has compassyon of vs for the cause of synne, and ryght as Iwas before with the passyon of cryste fulfilled with payne and compassion, (M3/HC)

(13) Be be cause pat Dei scholde rise Erly..Vnto her reste went Dei att nihte. (1386/OED)

(14) Thei had in hem no shame nor drede by the cause thei wer so used. (1450/OED)

In terms of variability, because had different spellings and were two words before it was glued together as was given in Table 3 and 4 (see Appendix for complete list of spelling variants). We see that spelling is very much standardized by the end of Early Modern English period, thanks to codification. In E3, because was the only form used.

As a closing remark on grammaticalization, I compare the frequency of because used as clause indicator and prepositional phrase. The frequency per 100,000 words is provided in Table 6 below. Note that the frequency drops during E3 period. I could not find the reason behind
it but compared with the frequency of *because* used nowadays, this is to be considered as a 'modernized' frequency.

<Table 6. Frequency of *because* and *because of*>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><em>because</em></th>
<th><em>because of</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOB</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 The function of *because* and *because of*

The OED provides explanation on function of *because* along with various examples. It states that in the case of *because* followed by the subordinator, it eventually fell into two classes; one expressing reason or cause, and the other purpose. In the former, *that* eventually was dropped off as was noted in section 3.1.2. *That*-dropping is said to be done also in the latter case during the 15th to 17th century, but only *that* remains to express purpose in modern usage. The following is the edited entry from OED with quotes relevant to present study (emphasis added on *because*).

A. adv.
1. Followed by *that*: For the reason that. (Formerly for was sometimes prefixed.) arch.
c1386 Chaucer Frankl. T. 233 *By cause that* he was hire Neighebour.
1541 Copland Galyen's Terap. 2 B iv b, *For bycause that* the sayde indication is nat taken of the same cause, it is euydent, etc.
2. Followed by *of* and subst.:
   a. By reason of, on account of. (For formerly sometimes prefixed.)
a1400 Cov. Myst. 31 *My husbond is lost because of me.*
1578 Timme Calvin on Gen. 173 *Man ought to have excelled all other Creatures, for because of the mind wherewith he was indued."
   † b. For the sake of, for the purpose of. Obs.
1480 Caxton Trevisa's Descr. Brit. 15 *Elidurus was logged atte cite*
Alcluid by cause of solace and hunting.
† c. For the sake of not; for fear of.
1470 Malory Arthur (1817) II. 452 By cause of brekynge of myn avowe, I pray yow all lede me thyder.
† 3. Followed by to with inf. = In order to. Obs.
1523 Ld. Berners Froiss. I. ccxxxix. 346 Bycause to gyue ensample to his subgettes..he caused the..erle of Auser to be putte in prison.
B. conj. [from A 1.]
1. For the reason that; inasmuch as, since.
c1386 Chaucer Frankl. Prol. 8 By cause I am a burel man..Haue me excused of my rude speche.
1477 Paston Lett.794 III. 186 Putt hym away by cause he is daungerous.
† 2. With the purpose that, in order that, so that, that. Obs.
1485 Caxton Paris & V., Told to hys fader..by cause he shold..doo that which he wold requyre hym.
1526 Tindale Matt. xii. 10 They axed him..because [other versions ‘that’] they might acuse hym.

The dagger († ) indicates that such usage is obsolete. As mentioned above, because used to introduce relationship of purpose in the earlier period but this function is said to be largely substituted by that alone thus explains its obsoleteness.

Quirk et al. (1985: 1103-04) lists under reason clauses various relationships marked by diverse casual markers (since, for, as long as etc.). On the note, there is also a mention of the use of prepositional phrase to introduce reason relationship with because of the fact (that) topping the list, although the author disclaims the use of such phrase for stylistic reason due to its length (ibid: 1105). Here’s an edited listing of Quirk’s classification. It is noted that because is the subordinator that most commonly introduces the reason clause (ibid: 1104). I found the examples for each selection from the HC and substituted them for the ones given by Quirk.

◆ Direct and indirect reason relationships
    ■ Cause and effect: inherent objective connection in the real world
      (1) If any man walke in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world.(E2/HC)
    ■ Reason and consequence: speaker’s inference of a connection
(2) And therefore did the Iewes persecute Iesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the Sabbath day. (E2/HC)

Motivation and result: the intention of an animate being that has a subsequent result

(3) Therefore doth my father loue me, because I lay downe my life that I might take it againe. (E2/HC)

4. Conclusion

I have in detail examined the form, function and grammaticalization of because in Middle and Early Modern English. For future studies, I would like to compare the causal subordinate clause with the coordinate structure introduced by for, since as Rissanen writes (1997: 397), the coordinator/subordinator pairs are seen across languages, such comparison will provide some insight into the linguistic construction. Semantic classification of the examples found in the HC is due for future research.

References


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