

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

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Lee, Ji Won. 2007. *On the Development of Because: A Corpus-based Study*. *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, *forþan þe* 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*, *forþan þe*, 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 *forþan þe*, 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 *forþan þe*

Forþan þe 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, þan, þi, þam* and optional subordinate particle *þe/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 uerre betuyx þe king & Randolf eorl of Cæstre: noht **forþi ðat** he ne iaf him al ðat he cuthe axen him, also 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 *forþan þe* throughout the history of English. The number decreases in M2 period and is no longer found in the Early Modern period.

<Table1. Occurrences of *forþan þe* 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.

<Table2. Occurrences of *because* in HC (figures per 100,000 words)>

M3	M4	E1	E2	E3
19	31	112	121	72

Just as there were many variant forms of *forþan þe*, *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.

<Table3. Occurrences of merged and separate construction of *because* (*be cause*)>

	preposition separated	preposition hyphenated	preposition merged	total
M3	31(91%)	1	2	34
M4	28(42%)	17(28%)	21(31%)	66
E1	10	0	204(95%)	214
E2	8	0	222(97%)	230
E3	0	0	124	124

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. Table4 shows the change.

<Table4. Spelling variants of *because*>

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

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 Table5. 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.

<Table5.Occurrences of because-related grammatical markers (figures per 100,000 words in brackets)>

	<i>because that</i>	<i>because</i>	<i>because of</i>
M3	19(10)	1(1)	14(8)
M4	10(5)	42(23)	14(7)
E1	16(8)	181(95)	17(9)
E2	7(4)	199(105)	24(13)
E3	1(1)	115(68)	8(5)

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 dyspensyth wyth apon hore concyens. þen *for bycause þat* Sondag ys no day of fastyng, þerfor +ge schull begyn your fast at Aske-Wanysday... (M4/HC)
- (4) (As the Geometricians are wonte to brynge in thynges, that they call apparaunces 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 Saturne 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 scarsetee 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 trespase as an accessorie and not endited as a principal and delyuered out of prison at large by the kynges commaundement in strengthyng and enhaunsyng of his Rial prerogatif that he grauntede 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 þe wicked man and þe trecherous.
(M2/Psalm/HC)

In M3 period, *forþi þat* and *because that* exist in parallel.

- (9) But *forþi þat þou schalt not erre in þis worching, and wene þat it be oþerwise þen it is, I schal telle þee a lityl more þer-of, as me þinkeþ.* (M3/HC)
- (10) In Egypt *þere ben but fewe Forcelettes or castelles be cause þat 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 vnderstonde 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 resceyue clenness in baptem but not fully, for cause of corrupcyon 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 I was before with the passyon of cryste fulfilled with payne and compassion, (M3/HC)
- (13) *Be þe cause þat þei scholde rise Erly..Vnto her reste went þei 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.

<Table6. Frequency of *because* and *because of*>

	<i>because</i>	<i>because of</i>
M3	11	8
M4	28	7
E1	103	9
E2	109	13
E3	68	5
LOB	63	14
Brown	67	21

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* brekyng 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..Hawe 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 obsolescence.

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 Jewes 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.

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