

On the rise of truncated causal adjuncts in English

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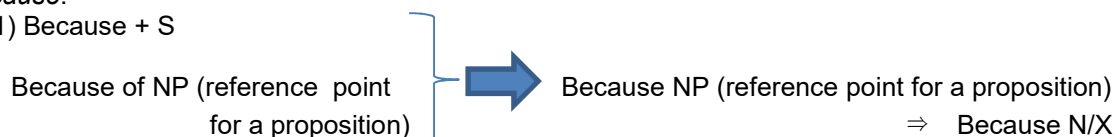
Because X is a recent development in informal registers like conversations and blogs. *Because* is now used to introduce not only nouns but also adjectives and other parts of speech (Schnoebelen 2014, Kanetani 2015). However, this is not the only innovative formation attested in web corpora like GloWbE and NOW. *In case X* appears to follow suit. It is interesting that the same kind of innovative formation does not seem obtainable with other causal adjuncts like *as a result of*, *in spite of*, *by virtue of*, *owing to*, or *on account of*.

If frequency of use is the driving force for the omission of *of* and is the key factor for the innovation, the new structure observed with *because X* should be analogically attested with *as a result X* or *in spite X*, since these causal adjuncts (*as a result of*, *in spite of*) are used more frequently than the adjunct phrase *in case of*. In this presentation, I would like to delve into the reason for the rise of these new constructions.

As Kehler (2002) observed, cause-effect is a coherence relation that should be maintained between propositions. In line with this coherence restriction, many complements of *because of* are noun phrases with different modifications that correspond to some propositional contents. However, there are also simple noun phrases employed in the complement position, like proper names or pronouns. In these cases, noun phrases work as conceptual reference points (Langacker 1993) for the contextually recoverable propositional contents.

In the formation of *because X*, we have two input structures: *because S* and *because of NP*. This NP can be conceptually expanded to a proposition. The new structure resulting from the unification of the two structures—namely, *because NP*—is feasible since NP is conceptually equivalent to S, as in (1). Importantly, NP is a reference point designating a proposition. Now that the preposition *of* is missing, the category restriction on the complement (NP) is lost, and any element can fill this slot as long as it can work as a reference point for the contextually relevant proposition. These can include adjectives, verbs, polarity expressions (yes/no), and adverbs, in addition to nouns, in the complement of *because*.

(1) Because + S



In case X also has two input structures: *in case S* and *in case of NP*. The new construction *in case X* is generated through the unification of these two structures, as in the case of *because X*, though the new structure is still developing into a construction.

As for other causal adjuncts, I picked the five phrases listed in the first paragraph and checked the usages of their truncated versions in GloWbE and NOW. I used the search strings *in spite [n*](noun)*, *in spite [j*](adjective)*, *in spite [v*](verb)*, and *in spite [r*](adverb)* for the phrase *in spite of*. I did the same survey with the other phrases, and all of them have truncated versions attested in these web corpora, but their complements are basically restricted to NP and gerunds (there are sporadic exceptions, but those are also grammatically deviant in many other respects). So, they do not seem to go beyond the border of a simple truncation of prepositions.

From the observations presented above, we can claim that although frequency of use is an important factor in the emergence of new structures (Hopper & Traugott 2003), other factors may control how far the change can proceed, and underlying input structures are also crucial for analogical extensions, at least in some cases.

References

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