

A syntactic analysis of *because x* in English... because linguistics!

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In 2013 the American Dialect Society voted *because* the word of the year, based on a new construction that was gaining popularity: *because x*. In this paper I argue for a case theoretic analysis of this construction, focusing on the types of complements that are licit versus constrained as *x*. The most common complements in this construction are one-word phrase, which are usually nouns (1), though adjectives (2), exclamations/discourse particles (e.g. *yay*, *err*), and a limited set of verbs (3) (McCulloch, 2014) are also acceptable. At least with noun complements, the *because x* construction looks similar to the standard *because of DP* construction, though obviously with the *of* missing. Some examples are provided below.

1. I can't post a link **because rules**, but you may want to check comic 3556 published last week. – leafar, XKCD forum, 2014
2. The ""only function of government per se "" is to govern - a claim that is empty, **because tautologous**. – Widmerpool, XKCD forum, 2012
3. Hot cocoa **because need**. – Jo West, Tweet, 2013 (Taken from Carey, 2013)

In the noun cases, there does not seem to be any constraint as to the type of noun possible in terms of abstract/concrete, count/mass, or proper/common features. There are constraints, however, as to how the noun can be modified. That is, nouns in this construction do not seem able to appear with any sort of determiner (4), unless the determiner is part of a proper name (5)

4. I haven't gotten any work done this week **because kittens/*my kittens**
5. Are you against gay marriage **because: the Bible?** – Scott Batemen, The NIB, 2015

With regard to meaning, Bland, Raess, & Baclawski (2016) showed that this construction has a style element, such that usage increases in more informal contexts. It has also been noted (e.g. Bailey, 2012; Carey, 2013) that *because x* often has a humorous, “duh” connotation; that no other information than one word is needed to explain oneself. Thus it appears that there is a unique semantics and pragmatics to *because x*, separate from traditional *because* phrases.

I propose that *because* has not changed at all, and instead the core novelty of this construction stems from what appears to be non-CP elements, that lack a case feature, appearing as the direct complement of *because*. This contrasts with much of the discussion around *because x* which has focused on what change *because* has undergone that it can now take noun complements, and its potential status as a preposition (Carey 2013; Garber 2013; McCulloch, 2014; Pullum, 2014; Whitman 2013). By focusing on the features of *x* instead of *because*, my analysis is able to account for why *x* can be words other than nouns, and explain the constraints on *x* when it is a noun. Based on the view that it is DPs that need to be licensed by case (e.g. Chomsky, 1986), in exploring my hypothesis, two possible options are suggested, 1) *x* is smaller than a DP (i.e. NumP or NP) or 2) *x* is larger than a DP and contains elided material. This paper argues for the first option, showing how all noun complements in *because x* can be analyzed as smaller than a DP and how the unique semantics and pragmatics associated with construction can be explained as a result of the complement size, which causes the noun complements to have a weaker referential force than they would if DPs. Following from work such as Chomsky (1986) and Svenonius (2007) who treat *of* as a case checker, this analysis also accounts for the lack of *of*

with noun complements as the noun simply has no case feature to check, and is in contrast to arguments that *of* has disappeared due to *because* gaining the ability to check case.

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