

Reviews

Rafał Molencki. *Causal Conjunctions in Mediaeval English: A Corpus-Based Study of Grammaticalization.* Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski/Oficyna Wydawnicza, 2012, 230 pp., ca. 250 illustr., PLN 20.00.

The linguistic inventory of marking the semantic relations CAUSE/RESULT/INFERENCE – commonly subsumed under ‘causal relation’ – has seen dramatic changes in the history of English until it reached the situation of Present Day English, when *because* (including *cos/coz*) is by far the most common causal connector. The core of Molencki’s study, chapters 4 and 5, provide abundantly illustrated and detailed analyses of these changes, in particular of the “story of Old English *forþon* being reduced to *for* in Middle English and the same *for* gradually giving way to *because* in Late Middle and Early Modern English” (203).

In today’s English, *because* marks over a third of all relations of CAUSE/RESULT and as much as 45 per cent in spoken language (see, for instance, Biber et al. 1999: 836, 887). Moreover, *because* may be employed for all sub-types of causal semantic-pragmatic relation, for ‘external’ reason clauses (cause based in the external reality; e.g. *The flowers are growing so well because I sprayed them*), ‘internal’ explanation clauses (cause based in the speaker’s world of reasoning; e.g. *He must be here because his bicycle is outside*) and also for ‘speech-act’ or ‘rhetorical’ reason clauses (cause based in the speech act; e.g. *Percy must be in Washington because he phoned me from there*).

Although historical linguists have repeatedly observed that *because* has only been attested since the middle/end of the 14th century and, in particular, that it remarkably rapidly replaced the original English causal connectives *forþi that* and *for*, no study has as yet examined the specific paths and conditions of its integration into the English language. In particular, neither the exact history of its constituents – a hybrid formation of Germanic *be* and Romance *cause* – nor its Anglo-French and Central French models nor the development of both the French and the English forms from prepositional phrases to conjunctions have ever been investigated in any detail (other aspects are the focus of Higashiizumi 2006).

In his comprehensive study of causal conjunction in early English, Molencki addresses these questions in what he calls a “corpus-based study”. This use of “corpus-based” in the title might be somewhat misleading, however, since the book is by no means a ‘corpus-linguistic’ study in today’s narrow sense: Molencki takes his data not from digitized, balanced corpora (as common in today’s Corpus Linguistics) but rather provides evidence from all of the surviving Old and Middle English (and some Early Modern English) material, which, in a first step, is retrieved from dictionaries and the comprehensive corpora of Old and Middle

English, such as the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* or the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*. More importantly, however, he also consults a large number of digitalized manuscripts and gives the manuscripts due credit in more than two hundred illustrations (many of them coloured), reproducing text passages or snapshots of single forms such as variants of *for þæm/þon/þy (be) or by/be cause (of)*. This approach makes the book a welcome change to some of today's 'corpus studies', which seem to focus on numbers rather than language, and which sometimes seem to forget that their results are based on highly selective extracts of the surviving evidence, which has also been interfered with by editors. Molencki's concentration on the medieval manuscripts proves to be particularly valuable in comparisons of different manuscript versions of one and the same text (which have commonly not made their way into the corpora). His close inspection of manuscripts also reminds us that medieval spelling is not at all a reliable diagnostic of, for instance, univertation: contrary to what is often stated in grammaticalization studies based on corpora or dictionary information taken from editions, there is much instability and no steady development from, for instance, *for þon* or *by/be cause* spelt first as two and later as one word. The analysis of manuscripts also postpones the first instances of univertation of *because* by at least half a century (in comparison to the dates given, for instance, in the *OED*).

Before presenting his new findings on the history of *because* in chapter 5 ("The rise of *because*"; 139–202), Molencki gives an overview of causal conjunctions in the Germanic languages (ch. 2; 32–51) and of the "minor markers of the causal relationship in mediaeval English", such as asyndesis, participial constructions, demonstratives such as *þæs* or *þy*, etc. (ch. 3; 52–83). Chapter 4 (85–137) is dedicated to a comprehensive description of the variant forms, semantics and different syntactic functions of the central connectors of the respective periods, OE *forþæm/forþon/forþy (be)* and ME *for*. In these chapters Molencki provides ample evidence for forms and functions by a plethora of examples and illustrations. The author generally expects his readers to have a very good command of the languages cited, since – as a rule – the many examples given for a causal connection are accompanied by very little analysis. The excellent translations of all of the passages cited prove to be very helpful indeed; yet, in the case of more disputable cases more discussion of these interpretations or shades of meaning would have been valuable, as, for example, in the use of locative *þær* as a causal connector in a sentence such as *For of þis world he was ful madd þar neuer a dai þar in was gladd* 'He was very upset about this world **because** he was not happy even one day there' in the *Cursor Mundi* (64–65). Generally, more argumentative support would have made some of the examples easier to process, in particular as concerns their intermediate character between causal and other semantic relations.

Many of the basic facts illustrated in chapters 2 to 4 have been discussed in grammar or earlier studies on causal connectives, such as the ambiguous status of OE *forþæm/forþon/forþy* (*þe*) as either an adverb or conjunction and the subsequent problem for interpretation or its use for both the relation of CAUSE (PDE *because*) and of RESULT (PDE *therefore*). Also, the later restriction of ME *for* to the ‘internal’ causal subtype of ‘explanation’ (while ME *forþy that* tends to introduce strict cause) and *for*’s use as a loose connector has been the subject of earlier research (see the survey of literature and discussion in Lenker 2010: 138–167). Yet, Molencki is still able to add some new perspectives, in particular because he does not restrict his analysis to Old English, but considers the Old English material in view of causal connection in other Germanic languages. We see, for example, that there is no single causal conjunction common to all Germanic dialects, but a rich variety of forms which had their origins in different kinds of originally deictic (demonstrative), interrogative and adverbial phrases. Molencki in particular finds that, “curiously enough” (85), Old English has no connectives related to continental West Germanic *hwanta* ‘why, because’, as attested in Old High German, Old Saxon, etc. (38–40). Also, *forþæm/forþon/forþy* (*þe*) appears to be an Anglo-Saxon novelty, since there are no cognates in its closest relatives (except for much later Old Norse *fyrir þvi at*; 34), even though it is already found in the oldest texts and is present in all Old English dialects. Another interesting observation to be gathered from the illustrations is that the much discussed original prepositional phrase *for þæm/þon/þy* (i.e. preposition *for* + distal demonstrative pronoun dative *þæm* or instrumental *þon/þe*) is not at all transparent in those manuscripts using the contractions *fþon, fðon* (91). This shows that some general claims about the development from *forþæm/forþon/forþy* (*þe*) to *for* – among them those on the strong deictic force of *forþæm/forþon/forþy* (*þe*) in Lenker (2010: 147–151) – should be checked in its details against more manuscript evidence.

While the analyses in chapters 2 to 4 mostly support the accounts in earlier research, chapter 5 offers new and challenging findings on the “evolution” (201) of *because* in English. Contrary to what we find in etymological and reference books, Molencki’s study suggests that *because* is not a direct loan from French but appears to have originated among bilingual Anglo-Norman and Middle English speakers in the last quarter of the 14th century. His detailed examination of Middle English and, in particular, Anglo-Norman and French causal connection (146–162) reveals that the preposition and the conjunction *par/a cause de* are first found in Anglo-French texts, two centuries earlier than in Central French. All of the early continental attestations are furthermore attested in texts whose authors had close contacts to England (in particular Jean Froissart; 152–156). This adjusts information found in historical and etymological dictionaries of the French lan-

guage, which record first attestations from the 16th century, ignoring the occurrences of *par cause que* (with some variants *pour/a/sur cause que* and *pour chose que*) in the Anglo-French dialect from the early 14th century onwards.

In English, the first attestations of the phrases *by (the) cause of/that* appear in the 1370s (in, for instance, Chaucer manuscripts), a time when Middle English speakers mostly used the conjunction *forþy (þat)* and, in particular, *for (that)* for both coordinate and subordinate clauses of cause and explanation. French, on the other hand, distinguished between causal coordination marked by *car* and causal subordination marked by *par ce que* (+ novel Anglo-Norman *par cause que*). As one of his central arguments, Molencki surmises that “Middle English bilingual speakers appear to have copied the distinction [made in French] in their English in a code-switching situation” (201) and further suggests that this must have been an innovation which seems to have arisen “among the educated milieu of bilingual speakers in London, but it was rapidly imitated by other social groups in all dialects” (201). While this sounds very convincing at first glance, more research might be needed to explain the choice of the preposition *by* instead of *for*. More importantly, however, one wonders if there were still so many bilingual speakers of Anglo-Norman(!) and Middle English at the end of the 14th century to promote the use of such an innovation.

With respect to more general issues of language change, Molencki rightly discusses whether we deal with two separate parallel grammaticalization processes in French and English or whether English only copied the ready structure from Anglo-Norman as a fixed pattern. His analysis shows that the developments in the two languages are rather different: For French, there is rich evidence for all of the intermediate stages from *pour/par la cause que* and *pour/par la cause de ce que* (where the full noun *cause* is still preceded by the feminine article) down the cline to *pour/par cause que*, which may be interpreted as either a prepositional phrase or as a complex conjunction. Since the complex conjunction neither reached the stage of univerbation nor dropped the subordinating particle *que* (at least in Standard French), this is the final stage for French. Despite its popularity in the classical period, the conjunctive phrase *par cause que* became outdated later and is no longer considered to be good standard French (at least in France). In English, by contrast, the initial stage with the definite article *by the cause that* is only very poorly attested. From the first attestations, we find both the phrasal subordinator *by-cause that* and *by-cause* without the subordinating particle. As early as the mid-15th century, we also witness the first instances of the univerbated form *bycause/because*, which becomes the spelling norm in the 1530s, and, from the late 15th century, even the clipped form *'cause*. Thus, unlike in French where “the process was arrested” in Middle French (202), the “grammaticalization in English is quick and complete”

(206). One wonders therefore whether we can indeed speak of an independent process of grammaticalization in English.

While this question might not be resolved on the basis of our extant evidence, it is obvious that, with the advent of *because*, *for* changed its status toward coordination and was then ousted from this function in Modern English, since *because* in turn replaced *for* in its function of the coordinating conjunction of explanation. In Present Day English, *for* is rare and stylistically marked. The earlier distinction, which might have triggered the coinage of *because*, has thus been blurred. Like *forþon* in Old English and *for* in Middle English, *because* has become a conjunction now used as a marker of both external cause and internal explanation. It is thanks to the many examples provided in the book and the meticulous, theoretically informed investigations that this repetitive pattern yielding one central, multi-functional causal connective in each of the periods of English becomes evident.

Works Cited

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