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Because, x: A new construction of because in popular culture

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Because, X: A New Construction of Because in Popular Culture

by

Stephanie Walla

Thesis

Submitted to the Department of English Language and Literature

Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

English Linguistics

Thesis Committee:

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Ypsilanti, Michigan

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Abstract

This thesis explores the new language fad, *Because, X*, which originated on the Internet and was named the American Dialect Society's Word of the Year in 2013. Since the construction is relatively recent, there has been little formal research conducted on it beyond Internet articles and discussions. The research presented in this thesis aims to understand this new construction through detailed syntactic, semantic, and quantitative analyses. This includes investigating instances of the *Because, X* construction from its origins in 2011 to recent occurrences as well as gathering participant judgments on the construction from two different studies conducted for this work.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

There are three guarantees to language: 1. Languages have grammar; 2. languages are creative; and 3. languages change over time. Thanks to the Internet, change can be brought about quickly in language fads. Most language fads are in the form of new words (*selfie*, *phish*), disemvoweling (*text* to *txt*), or acronyms (*yolo*). The focus of this thesis is on the influence the Internet has had on the connecting word *because*. More and more *because* is appearing in a new construction called *Because, X*, a construction that has become so popular it was named the American Dialect Society's (ADS) Word of the Year for 2013.

Traditionally, *because* is used in two different syntactic environments. One is as a subordinating conjunction and the other is as a compound preposition with *of*. As a subordinating conjunction, *because* is used to combine two independent clauses, as in sentence (1a). The sentence in (1b) depicts *because* with an *of*-headed prepositional phrase (PP), which in turn takes an NP complement. In the *Because, X* construction, the propositional content of the sentences is conveyed as (1c).

- (1) a. I can't go to the party because I have homework. (subordinating conjunction)
- b. I can't go to the party because of my homework. (*of*-headed PP)
- c. I can't go to the party because, homework. (*Because, X*)

The *X* in the *Because, X* construction can be filled with a noun phrase (NP), verb phrase (VP), adjective phrase (ADJP), or exclamation, as detailed in (2) below. Additionally, the *because* in the construction is usually followed by a comma, but will sometimes appear without it.¹

¹ For consistency, all of the *Because, X* examples in this thesis will appear with a comma unless it is taken from a source that does not include it.

- (2) a. I can't go to the party because, homework. (NP)
b. She's tired because, went to the gym. (VP)
c. Bought the puppy because, adorable. (ADJP)
d. That feeling you get when you finish your homework and you just want to cry because, yay.² (exclamation)

This construction has been tentatively called “prepositional because,” and in 2012 linguists Mark Liberman and Laura Bailey independently titled this language trend as “because NOUN” (Liberman, 2012; Bailey, 2012). However, both of these are misnomers since this new construction does not act in the same way as a preposition and is not always followed by a noun. For these reasons, this work refers to it by the same name as ADS, *Because, X*, which is now the most common name for the construction.

While the popularity of *Because, X* is growing, a similar construction has surfaced in the past. Neal Whitman pointed out in an article on the new use of *because* that it was used similarly as the punchline for one of Jack Handey's Saturday Night Live skits. Whitman (2013) cites one joke from 1987 that went, “If you ever fall off the Sears Tower, just go real limp, because maybe you'll look like a dummy and people will try to catch you because, hey, free dummy.” Here, the “hey” is being used as a set-up for the punchline that follows. As Whitman describes it, the “hey” is used as a verbal shrug, a “Need I say more?” because whatever follows the “hey” does not need to be explained; the speaker assumes that the listener understands exactly and there is no need to elaborate. The “... because, hey, free dummy” seems to be acting as a substitution for a larger idea, something like, “Who wouldn't want a free dummy? Everyone wants one.”

² Originally found in a tweet included in Stan Carey's *Wordpress* article, “‘Because’ has become a preposition, because grammar” (Cary, 2013).

Early uses of *Because, X* that popularized the construction surfaced in the form of two separate memes in 2011. One was a meme that read, “*Because, race car.*” This came about by a Craigslist ad with a typo that read, “Completely stripped inside because, race car.” The typo of abbreviating the explanation, “*because it used to be a race car,*” to, “*because race car*” became a sarcastic reply in memes to any “why” question. The second meme was derived from a Three Word Phrase comic with the phrase “*I want this because of reasons,*” which was later shortened to simply, “*because, reasons*” (McCulloch, 2014). Since 2011, the construction has gained popularity and is frequently found in environments with written character restrictions like Facebook, Twitter, or texting, which is unsurprising since the construction is so succinct.

There exists some controversy around the *Because, X* construction being new. Geoffrey Pullum (2014), for instance, argues that *because* is, and has always been, a preposition, and as such can take as a complement a clause or a prepositional phrase with *of* as its head. Some prepositions can appear with an NP, a clause, a PP, or without a complement at all. Previously, *because* was allowed to appear with an *of*-PP or a clause, but according to Pullum, it has shifted to also allow an NP, which encompasses the new use. Pullum also addresses that *because* can appear without a complement (as in the bare response, “Because!”), which means that, according to Pullum’s analysis, *because* can appear with all four options available to prepositions.

Pullum’s argument is attractive, but the *Because, X* construction does not act like normal prepositional phrases. For one, as shown in (3), it seems to be dispreferred when it is preposed, unlike standard *because* sentences.

- (3) a. *Because homework, I can’t go to the party.
b. Because of my homework, I can’t go to the party.

There has been little work completed on this new construction, but Tyler Schnoebelen has conducted some sociolinguistic research on *Because, X* and its appearances on the Internet, in particular Twitter (Schnoebelen, 2014). He analyzed 23,583 tweets and discovered that the *X* in *Because, X* was most commonly used with nouns (*people, spoilers*) followed by compressed clauses (*ilysm*), adjectives (*ugly, tired*), interjections (*sweg, omg*), agreements (*yeah, no*), and pronouns (*you, me*). Schnoebelen also found what appeared to be verbs and adverbs in the *Because, X* construction, but that the verbs were acting more as nouns and the adverbs as exclamations. While Schnoebelen has provided statistical evidence for what complements the *Because, X* construction is most likely to appear with, we are still left without any information on how the construction is perceived and interpreted, and when it is considered an appropriate response.

The research in this thesis aims to understand this new construction of *because* through detailed syntactic, semantic, and quantitative analyses. The *Because, X* construction is so new that little scholarly work has been done on the phenomenon. This research is innovative in this regard and the aim to better understand this new construction of *because*, and subordinating conjunctions as a whole, will offer insight on the change to the rest of the linguistic world.

In Chapter 2, I will provide a detailed syntactic discussion on the structure of standard sentences using *because* and compare this to the syntax of the *Because, X* construction. The goal of this chapter will be to establish how the *Because, X* construction differs from the standard uses of *because* using a detailed syntactic analysis. This chapter will also attempt to answer questions about the structure of the *Because, X* construction and how it is unlike standard uses of *because*, and present the questions of how the construction can take a

complement of a determiner phrase (DP) without an overt determiner, and if *because* is shifting to appear with an interjectionary complement that other subordinating conjunctions might be able to accept as well.

I will do this by presenting analyses of *because* with an *of*-headed prepositional phrase, *because* as a subordinating conjunction, and the complications that arise when analyzing the *because* in the *Because, X* construction as either of these. This chapter will also explore the complements that can appear with *because* in the construction and any restrictions these complements have. I will then present the three most common theories of the *Because, X* construction as an ellipsis, preposition, or subordinating conjunction, and I will introduce a fourth theory that *because* is appearing with a new complement, α P. The central conclusion is that while it is ideal to extend the existing analyses of *because* as a preposition or as a subordinating conjunction to the *Because, X* construction for the sake of parsimony (i.e., overall scientific simplicity), this new use of *because* appears to be unique in certain respects. The construction does not act in the same way as either of these existing analyses would predict leading to the conclusion that *because* is appearing with a new complement, α P, which allows *because* to be followed by a noun phrase (NP), verb phrase (VP), adjective phrase (ADJP), or exclamation.

In Chapter 3, I will present a semantic analysis of *because* with the goal of determining how the construction is understood and interpreted. This chapter will address questions of whether or not the *because* in the *Because, X* construction is semantically the same or different from other uses of *because* and will provide an explanation for why certain complements are allowed in the construction while others are not. I will present a semantic analysis of *because* considering its denotation and how the *Because, X* construction contrasts

with standard uses of *because*. This analysis is important in determining whether or not the *because* in the *Because, X* construction is the same *because* used elsewhere. I will conclude here that while *Because, X* is different from standard constructions, the *because* in this new construction remains causal at its core.

I will then explore the pragmatics of the *Because, X* construction through the application of Grice's Maxims to determine how the construction is interpreted and is able to convey expressions like humor, criticism, and sarcasm depending on the conversational context. I will then present the details and conclusions from a study that was conducted with the goal of determining which expressions the construction is interpreted to be conveying depending on the context it is appearing in. The conclusions of this research is that the more controversial the context, the more likely the *Because, X* construction will be considered to be conveying sarcasm or criticism, while the more light-hearted the context the more likely it will be considered humorous or witty.

Chapter 4 will begin with a discussion of the rising popularity of the *Because, X* construction, including which complements it is most likely to appear with and who is using it. The central goal of this chapter is to establish the construction's growing popularity and answer questions about which environments the *Because, X* construction is most likely to appear in and which contexts are most conducive to the construction. These questions will be answered primarily through a study involving contexts, and will also gain insight on acceptability judgments of other subordinating conjunctions appearing in the *Because, X* construction. This chapter will conclude with the survey results indicating that the *Because, X* construction is one that is best used in informal written and verbal environments. In terms of use, female students indicated they were more likely to use it, though overall the more

exposure a student had to the construction, the more likely it was for them to be accepting of the construction. The survey also helped to answer syntactic questions about the *Because, X* construction. For instance, the students dispreferred a preposed *Because, X* sentence compared to sentences with the *Because, X* complement at the end. Additionally, they judged *Because, X* sentences using subordinating conjunctions like *but* and *so* at similar rates as the ones using *because*, suggesting that subordinating conjunctions as a class are shifting to allow the *Because, X* construction.

Chapter 5 summarizes and concludes the thesis. This chapter will also explore future research questions on *Because, X* and similar Internet language fads.

Chapter 2: Syntax Analysis

2.1 Introduction

The central goal of this chapter is to determine if the syntax of the *Because, X* construction differs from the standard uses of *because*. It will focus on the properties of *because* in this new construction as compared to properties of *because* as a subordinating conjunction and as a part of a compound preposition with *of*.

The chapter is organized as follows: Section 2.2 will provide background on the *Because, X* construction; Section 2.3 will provide a critical evaluation of the claim that *because* in the *Because, X* construction is a preposition. Further, Section 2.3 will present an analysis of *because* used with an *of*-headed prepositional phrase and the complications that arise with this analysis; in Section 2.4, I will compare the use of *because* in the *Because, X* construction to its use as a subordinating conjunction. I will then present an analysis of *because* as a subordinating conjunction and consider potential problems with this analysis; Section 2.5 will explore what can appear as a complement to *because* in the *Because, X* construction and any restrictions to those complements; Section 2.6 will present the three most common theories of the *Because, X* construction: as ellipsis, preposition, and subordinating conjunction. This will be done by presenting syntactic analyses of these theories and introducing a fourth theory that *because* is appearing with a new complement, αP .

The central conclusion is that while it would be ideal for parsimony to extend the existing analyses of *because* as a preposition or as a subordinating conjunction to the *Because, X* construction, this new use of *because* appears to be unique in certain respects. The construction does not act in the same way as either of these existing analyses would

predict leading to the conclusion that *because* is appearing with a new complement, αP , which allows *because* to be followed by a noun phrase (NP), verb phrase (VP), adjective phrase (ADJP), or exclamation.

2.2 Background

In this section I will briefly review the standard appearances of *because* as a subordinating conjunction and as a preposition. These two uses will be compared to the *because* in the *Because, X* construction in this and the following sections. I will provide a short explanation of the *Because, X* construction and provide a brief comparison of it to standard constructions using *because*. I will then introduce the complements *because* can appear with in the construction as well as preliminary claims on how this construction is acting and what it is conveying to establish a foundation for later analyses discussed throughout this thesis.

Traditionally, *because* is used in two different syntactic environments. One is as a subordinating conjunction and the other is as a compound preposition with *of*. As a subordinating conjunction, *because* is used to combine two independent clauses, as in sentence (1a). The sentence in (1b) depicts *because* with an *of*-headed prepositional phrase (PP), which in turn takes an NP complement.

- (1) a. I can't go to the party because I have homework.
- b. I can't go to the party because of my homework.

Because in (1b) is referred to in Standard English as a part of a compound preposition, *because of*. A compound preposition, syntactically, is a preposition with a PP complement, like *instead of*, *prior to*, or *out of*.

The new use of *because* allows the propositional content of the sentences in (1) to be conveyed as in (2) below.

(2) I can't go to the party because, homework.

The construction has been tentatively called, “prepositional because,” by Megan Garber (2013) and linguists Mark Liberman and Laura Bailey independently titled this language trend “because NOUN” (Liberman, 2012; Bailey, 2012). However, both of these are misnomers, as will be suggested below, since they prove to be too restrictive. The *because* in the *Because, X* construction does not act in the same way as a preposition and is not always followed by a noun. In fact, it can be followed by a noun phrase (NP), verb phrase (VP), adjective phrase (ADJP), or exclamation.

This section has established background information on the *Because, X* construction and how *because* in this form is being used differently than in its standard uses as a subordinating conjunction or a compound preposition with *of*. The following section will explore the analysis of *because* as a preposition further and detail the differences between *because* as a preposition and *because* in the *Because, X* construction.

2.3 *Because* and Prepositions

The *Because, X* construction has been called “prepositional because” by Megan Garber (2013). In this section I will introduce the analysis of *because* as a preposition and compare this to *because* as it appears in the *Because, X* construction. This section will focus on the analysis of *because* as a preposition presented by Geoffrey Pullum (2014), which is claimed to account for the structure of *because* in the *Because, X* construction. First, I will briefly review the relevant properties of prepositions. This will be followed by Pullum's argument that *because* is, and always has been, a preposition. Lastly, I will present the potentially problematic issues with analyzing *because* in the *Because, X* construction as a preposition.

A preposition is defined as “a minor lexical category whose members typically designate relations in space or time” (O’Grady, Archibald, Aronoff, & Rees-Miller, 2009). Prepositions can be followed by, or take as a complement, an NP, or words or clauses acting as nouns such as a gerund (an *-ing* verb acting as a noun), or a *wh*- clause (a clause headed with a *wh*- word³). Some examples of these can be found in (3), below. A preposition can also have another prepositional phrase (PP) as a complement (Carnie, 2013). When a preposition takes a PP complement, this is sometimes referred to as a compound preposition since the two prepositions are appearing together and often function as a single preposition. Some examples of compound prepositions are *according to*, *instead of*, *out of*, *aside from*, and of course, *because of*.

- (3) a. They met at the theater. (NP)
b. We went out for ice cream prior to finishing homework. (gerund)
c. The paper has to be at least 8 pages long according to whoever wrote the requirements. ⁴ (*wh*- clause)
d. He threw the water out of the window. (PP)

There exists some controversy around *Because, X* as being in a new construction. Some linguists like Geoffrey Pullum (2014) argue that *because* in its traditional use is, and has always been, a preposition and is acting as such in the *Because, X* construction. He begins his analysis by stating that *because* is usually categorized as an adverb or as a subordinating conjunction and that *because of* is categorized as a preposition. Pullum sets aside the issue of *because* as an adverb to focus on the more prevalent analysis of *because* as a subordinating conjunction.

³ This is sometimes referred to as a headless relative.

⁴ This sentence also uses compound preposition, *according to*.

He defines a subordinating conjunction as a function word that introduces a subordinate clause, which is typically a complement. Pullum (2014) states that the word *that*⁵ is the “archetypal exemplar” of a subordinating conjunction and argues that if *because* were a subordinating conjunction like *that*, then it would share some of the properties of subordinating conjunctions. One of these properties is introducing subordinate clauses, which he states are almost always complements licensed by the main clause verb. Additionally, he states that subordinating conjunctions hold little semantic content, and subordinate clauses cannot be preposed^{6,7} (a process of shifting the conjunction and the constituent that follows it to the beginning of the sentence). *Because*, in contrast, usually introduces an adjunct phrase,⁸ is not meaningless, and can be preposed, as shown in (4b). Pullum also argues that *because* is not a coordinating conjunction like *and* since it can be preposed while coordinating conjunctions cannot be, as in (4c).

- (4) a. We said that we would go.
 *That we would go, we said.
 b. They are expecting us because we said we were going.
 Because we said we were going, they are expecting us.
 c. *And Bill went to the store, Mary read a book.

Additionally, he explains that switching the positions of two coordinated clauses using *and* yields two sentences with the same meaning, but this is not the case with two sentences joined with *because*. In other words, the sentences in (5a) are the same semantically, but the ones in (5b) are not.

⁵ Pullum uses *that* as a subordinating conjunction; however *that* is traditionally classified as a complementizer, which are considered different from conjunctions. Complementizers connect structures together by embedding one clause inside another (Carnie, 2013).

⁶ Traditional subordinating conjunctions can be preposed: *After Bill arrived, I went to the kitchen.*

⁷ *Preposing* is also called *pseudoclefting*. Andrew Carnie describes this process as one that involves putting the string of words before a *is/are what* or *is/are who* at the front of the sentence (Carnie, 2013).

⁸ An adjunct in X-bar Theory is a XP that is a sister to a head (N, V, A, P) and a daughter of a single bar level (N', V', A', or P').

- (5) a. Bill went to the store and Mary read a book.
= Mary read a book and Bill went to the store.
b. Bill went to the store because Mary read a book
≠ Mary read a book because Bill went to the store.

Traditionally the word *that* is categorized as a complementizer, and not as a subordinating conjunction as Pullum claims. A complementizer is defined by Carnie (2013) as a class of words that connects structures together by embedding one clause inside of another. Other words in this class are *if*, *for*, and *whether*. Taking into consideration this classification of *that*, the presentation of Pullum's arguments above are actually evidence that *because* in the *Because, X* construction is not a complementizer like *that* nor a coordinating conjunction like *and*. This is important for narrowing down a classification of this new use of *because*.

According to Pullum (2014), if traditional *because* is not a subordinating conjunction, then it must be a preposition. Pullum states that some prepositions can appear with a PP with *of* as their head, a clause, an NP, or without a complement at all, as in (6).

- (6) a. They are taking advantage of an opportunity. (NP)
b. Consider all of the options before you leave. (clause)
c. We are going out to dinner instead of making something at home. (*of*-headed PP)
d. The guests are inside. (no complement)

Before the appearance of the *Because, X* construction, *because* was allowed to appear exclusively with an *of*-headed PP or a clause, but according to Pullum (2014), it has shifted to also allow an NP, which encompasses the *Because, X* construction. Pullum also addresses the fact that *because* can appear without a complement, as in the bare response, "*Because!*" in (7d), which means that *because* can appear with all four options available to prepositions.

- (7) a. I can't go to the party because of my homework. (of-headed PP)
 b. I can't go to the party because I have homework. (clause)
 c. I can't go to the party because, homework. (NP)
 d. Because! (no complement)

Pullum's (2014) argument is a desirable one since it attempts to analyze the *Because, X* construction within an explanation of *because* that is already available. This follows the principle of parsimony in science, which calls for simplicity in an explanation. In other words, it would be ideal for the *Because, X* construction to fit into a current analysis since this would be the simplest explanation instead of positing a brand new one. However, the *Because X* construction does not act like standard prepositional phrases, unlike what Pullum suggests. For instance, the *Because, X* proposition does not seem to be able to be preposed like typical prepositional phrases, as in (8).⁹ This actually makes the construction more similar to subordinating conjunctions, according to Pullum's argument and analysis of *that* (as a subordinating conjunction).

- (8) a. Since the war, there have been many changes.
 b. ? Because homework, I can't go to the party.

Additionally, the *X* in *Because, X* is not limited to just an NP or a clause. As (9) shows, this position can be filled by an NP, VP, ADJP, or exclamation. It would be ungrammatical for *because of* to take any of these as a complement (*She's tired because of went to the gym; *Bought the puppy because of adorable).

⁹ From a study conducted and presented in Chapter 4, preposed *Because, X* sentences are certainly dispreferred among the participants. It might perhaps be found on social media given the proper context, but the likelihood is low. Additionally, it should be mentioned that in general acceptability judgments on the *Because, X* construction do seem to be in flux since the expression is continuing to evolve. The observations in this thesis are all based on current instances of the *Because, X* construction being used.

- (9) a. I can't go to the party because, homework. (NP)
 b. She's tired because, went to the gym. (VP)
 c. Bought the puppy because, adorable. (ADJP)
 d. That feeling you get when you finish your homework and you just want to cry because, yay.¹⁰ (exclamation)

When using a traditional preposition like, *on*, with these complements, the resulting sentences are ungrammatical, as in (10).

- (10) a. * I put the book on left the house. (VP)
 b. * I put the book on heavy. (VP)
 c. * I put the book on wow. (exclamation)

Notice further that when *on* is used with an NP that contains a single count noun without a determiner, like in (11a) below, this results in an ungrammatical sentence.

However, NPs containing a single count noun without a determiner is acceptable in the *Because, X* construction, and perhaps is also the most popular complement appearing in the construction. This will be discussed in more detail in Section 2.6 using detailed syntactic representations and analyses.

- (11) * I put the book on table.

In this section I have presented an analysis of *because* as a preposition, as argued by Pullum (2014). This attempt is advantageous since it explains the *Because, X* construction within the current explanations available. However, the construction does not act like other prepositions, or the compound preposition *because of* for that matter. In particular, it appears unable to be preposed and can take more than just NPs as complements (including singular count nouns with non-overt determiners). The following section will analyze *because* as a subordinating conjunction.

¹⁰ Originally found in a tweet included in Stan Carey's *Wordpress* article, "'Because' has become a preposition, because grammar" (Carey, 2013).

2.4 *Because* and Subordinating Conjunctions

In this section I will analyze the *because* in the *Because, X* construction as a subordinating conjunction. Pullum's (2014) argument in 2.3 is that traditional *because* is not a subordinating conjunction and so the *because* in the *Because, X* construction is not a subordinating conjunction, but a preposition. However, Pullum's example of a subordinating conjunction was *that*, which is traditionally classified as a complementizer. This still leaves the question of whether or not *because* in this construction is acting as a subordinating conjunction.

I will first introduce subordinating conjunctions and properties associated with them. Next, I will present the current issues with categorizing subordinating conjunction through an analysis by Dagmar Haumann (1997). The current analyses are either that subordinating conjunctions are complementizers or prepositions. Since an analysis of *because* as a preposition has already been presented, I will focus on subordinating conjunctions being categorized as complementizers. Lastly, I will compare the *Because, X* construction to subordinating conjunctions, and present the issues with this comparison.

Recall from the previous section that Pullum (2014) considered *that* in a sentence like, *We said that we would go*, as a subordinating conjunction and compared it to *because*.¹¹ While *because* does not seem similar to *that*, it might be a bit hasty to rule out the analysis of *because* as a subordinating conjunction altogether as the *because* in the *Because, X* construction does have properties in common with subordinating conjunctions. Primarily, *because* in this construction functions as a connective for two clauses, one that is a main clause and another that is subordinate to, or depends on, the main clause. As discussed by

¹¹ *That* is actually traditionally considered a complementizer, but analyzed as a subordinating conjunction by Pullum.

Haumann (1997), defining, and subsequently categorizing, subordinating conjunctions is difficult. He does mention a definition that he refers to as the “common denominator” between the different characterizations proposed of subordinating conjunctions, which is that they are relation words that introduce sentence-like elements. Though this is broad, this is the definition this thesis will use and refine below. Among the relations expressed by subordinating conjunctions, *cause* is the one related by *because*.

Haumann (1997) begins attempting a categorization of subordinating conjunctions by first providing the characteristics of subordinating conjunctions. He explains that in traditional grammars there is a distinction made between open and closed class subordinators based on morphological properties. Open class subordinators like *who*, *that*, *what*, and *how* are open to morphological processes like inflection and derivation, which means that this class can be enlarged. Closed class subordinators like *because*, *before*, *since* are not open to morphological processes and thus cannot be enlarged. While these two types of subordinators share the property of introducing subordinate clauses, they are not considered part of the same syntactic category. So, while *because* does not seem to be very similar to *that*, it does seem more similar to more traditional subordinating conjunctions with semantic content like *before*, *after*, and *until* to name a few.

As mentioned, the categorization of subordinate conjunctions proves to be problematic as the traditional term, *subordinate conjunction*, is not precise enough and encompasses what are traditionally considered complementizers such as *that*. According to Haumann (1997), subordinators share the ability to introduce subordinate clauses, are characterized as relation words that introduce sentence-like elements, and are not considered to belong to just one syntactic category. In particular, there is categorization overlap between

subordinating conjunctions, prepositions, and adverbs. (12) below demonstrates the polyfunctionality tendency of words in this class.

- (12) a. I cut the grass before the thunderstorm came. (conjunction)
b. I cut the grass before the thunderstorm. (preposition)
c. I cut the grass before. (adverb)

Haumann (1997) notes several linguists who have also discussed the ability for these words to appear in multiple categories.¹² They all agree that categoryhood for these words is hard to distinguish, and present different theories on how this is selected. Haumann cites Allen/Mason, for instance, who suggests that categoryhood is determined by the complement of the relation word (as in (12)). While categorization of these words is fuzzy, specific characterizations remain. At a basic level subordinating conjunctions introduce sentence-like elements, specify particular relationships, and are not assumed to be void of semantic content.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, current analyses of subordinating conjunctions are either that they are categorized as prepositions with a sentential complement (P-S'), or as complementizers.¹³ Since an analysis of prepositions has already been conducted, I will now focus on the analysis of subordinating conjunctions as complementizers.

Complementizers and subordinating conjunctions both function to introduce a clause, and the assumption that sentences are uniform allows all elements that introduce subordinate clauses to be treated alike. Essentially, subordinating conjunctions can be conflated with

¹² These linguists are Jespersen (1924/1992:89), Sweet (1891:133), Deutschbein (1959:250), and Allen/Mason (1939/1965:250). The references are provided by Haumann.

¹³ Haumann admits that both of these analyses are imperfect (1997).

complementizers under the widened definition of *complementizer*,¹⁴ which includes elements that occupy a pre-S position and indicate that the clause they introduce is a subordinate one (Haumann, 1997). Under this analysis, subordinating conjunctions like *unless*, *because*, and *since* could appear in the complementizer (COMP) position of the sentence structure.

- (13) a. Unless I finish this project tomorrow, I'm not going to pass my class.
b. She baked a cake because it was his birthday.
c. Since we weren't home to water them, the flowers died.

This also predicts that instances of *unless that* or *because that* would be ungrammatical since the COMP position can only be filled by one complementizer, which appears to be true.

- (14) a. * Unless that I finish this project tomorrow, I'm not going to pass my class.
b. * She baked a cake because that it was his birthday.

The other arguments Haumann (1997) presents are from Hendrick (1976), who argues that subordinating conjunctions should be categorized as complementizers. Hendrick does so mainly by providing evidence that they are not instances of PPs. His first argument is that adverbial subordinate clauses (introduced by subordinating conjunctions) only function as adjuncts (15a) and not complements (15b) while PPs can be either adjuncts or complements. Haumann uses the examples in (15) below from Hendrick who argues the difference of grammaticality in (15b) and (15c) is not accounted for if the subordinate clauses are analyzed as instances of PP.

- (15) a. John is tired because he went to bed late. (adjunct)
b. * He assumed because he went to bed late. (complement)
c. The plane went from New York to London. (complement)
(adapted from Haumann (1997))

¹⁴ The original definition of complementizers that Haumann uses is from Rosenbaum (1967:25) "[...] are a function of predicate complementation and not the property of any particular sentence or set of sentence" (Haumann, 1997).

Hendrick's (1976) second argument is based on *wh*- movement, which is only possible if the constituents are complements, and not adjuncts. Haumann presents the examples below, provided by Hendrick, to illustrate this. The extraction from the subordinate clause in (16a) is possible because it is a complement to *that*. On the other hand, the extraction in (16b) is not possible because the subordinate clause is an adjunct.¹⁵

- (16) a. It is likely that California will elect Reagan. (complement)
a. Who is it that California will elect __?
b. John is tired because he went to bed late. (adjunct; subordinating conjunction)
b. * What is John tired because he went to __ late?
(Haumann (1997))

There are instances where PPs are adjuncts and the extraction is allowed, however, as in (17) provided by Hendrick and presented by Haumann.

- (17) John visited his aunt in San Francisco on his vacation. (adjunct; PP)
Which vacation did John visit his aunt on__?
(Haumann (1997))

Hendrick (1976) presents a process called, Complement Formation Transformation, to account for the difference in grammaticality for (16b) and the sentences in (17). This Complement Formation Transformation applies to PPs, which are lowered into V' through this process thereby assigning them adjunct status with respect to V. Hendrick proposes that this process of prepositions lowering applies to PPs only, but not subordinate clauses. According to this reasoning then, the examples provided by Haumann (1997) in (18) should be grammatical, but they are not which suggests some underlying issues with this theory.

- (18) a. *What was the hand-over due, in September, was delayed because of__?
b. *When didn't we have to face this problem until__?
(Haumann (1997))

¹⁵ This is further evidence that standard subordinating conjunctions and complementizers like *that* are different. Other evidence of this was provided in Section 2.3 with Pullum's argument concluding *because* is similar to *that*.

His last argument against subordinate phrases as instances of PP is due to Sentence Adverb Fronting, a process of moving the adverb to the front of the proposition. This is only possible if a complementizer is present, as detailed in (19a-c), presented by Hendrick (1976). However, if this were the case then all subordinating conjunctions as complementizers should support Sentence Adverb Fronting, which is not true in (19d), provided by Haumann (1997).

- (19) a. John said that, hopefully, he would arrive tomorrow.
b. John will be in Paris next year, because, hopefully, he'll get a Fullbright.
c. * John said, hopefully, he would arrive tomorrow.
d. * I seemed to know what they were going to say long before while we were driving home they said it.

(adapted from Haumann (1997))

Arguments for subordinating conjunctions being categorized as complementizers have been introduced. Under this analysis, distinctions were made between complementizers and prepositions, which often provided arguments against subordinating conjunctions as prepositions. However, as Haumann also states, the evidence for subordinating conjunctions as complementizers is weak.

Haumann (1997) presents an analysis of subordinating conjunctions as prepositions, but as there is already one provided in Section 2.3 of this work, as well as arguments against subordinating conjunctions as prepositions in this section, I will not present Haumann's detailed analysis.¹⁶ He concludes both of these analyses by stating that while there is evidence for subordinating conjunctions as both complementizers and prepositions, these

¹⁶ Haumann's analysis includes references to work by Edmonds who analyzes complementizers and subordinating conjunctions both as prepositions. Edmonds' variants of prepositions include lexical prepositions (*because, after, until*), grammaticalized prepositions (*that, for, if*), and compound prepositions (*because of, in case of*). Information for this full analysis can be found in Section 3.3 of Haumann's *The Syntax of Subordination*.

analyses are not without complications and that the criteria for categorizing them as either is unreliable.

This thesis recognizes these categorization issues and in the interest of demonstrating the different uses of *because* will separate them as prepositions (P + NP), subordinating conjunctions (SubC + S), and in the *Because, X* construction (*because* + α P). This section has thus far analyzed standard *because* as a subordinating conjunction and the difficulties that arise with this categorization. I will now turn to the *because* in the *Because, X* construction as a possible instance of a subordinating conjunction.

As far as the *because* in the *Because, X* construction is concerned, it is similar to *because* as a subordinating conjunction in that it is formed by joining two syntactic objects joined by a causal relation word. The subordinate “clause” in this case, the *X*, is embedded and relies on the main clause before it for necessary causal information; however, unlike standard subordinating conjunctions, the *X* “clause” does not need to be a sentential complement and usually cannot stand alone. As already noted in Section 2.3, a full clause is perhaps implied and represented by the complements of *because* in *Because, X*, which are NPs, VPs, ADJPs, and exclamations. The *Because, X* construction also behaves similarly to subordinating conjunctions in that it also does not support *wh*- movement, shown in (20).

- (20) He went to bed late because, party.
* What did he go to bed late because__?

While everything discussed in this chapter so far has been about the syntactic structure and categorization of standard *because* and the *Because, X* construction, it is also important to note the differences in semantics of the *Because, X* construction. The sentences in (21) both exhibit the concept of a main and subordinate clause, but they have very

different interpretations. (21a) means exactly what it states while (21b) uses *want* as a stand-in for a whole, possibly vague, idea or train of thought with many different interpretations.

- (21) a. I bought the chocolate bar because I wanted it.
 = I bought the chocolate bar because I wanted it.
 b. I bought the chocolate bar because, want.
 = I bought the chocolate bar because I wanted it.
 = I bought the chocolate bar because I always want chocolate, you know that.
 = ...

So, in using a different complement, the *Because, X* construction produces a different effect semantically from *because* as a standard subordinating conjunction.

In this section I have presented the analysis of *because* as a subordinating conjunction. This focused on properties associated with this class of words, and their issue of categoryhood. The analysis included in this section was that of subordinating conjunctions being categorized as complementizers. Overall, the arguments in favor of this are too weak to conclude this categorization and the category for subordinating conjunctions remains an undetermined issue.

When comparing the *because* in *Because, X* to subordinating conjunctions, there do seem to be more similarities than with *because* as a preposition. First, both constructions include main and subordinate clauses, though, the term “clause” is probably not exactly appropriate for the *Because, X* construction, which tends not to favor sentential complements. Second, neither constructions support *wh*- movement. The problem remains, however, that the two constructions do not convey the same meaning.

Section 2.5 will take a look at the *Because, X* construction further. This will include a detailed explanation of the complements this construction can take and the restrictions on these complements.

2.5 *Because, X* Restrictions

While *Because, X* is a slang, colloquial construction with a wide range of complements that can fill the *X* position, there are restrictions on these complements. When the construction first started being used there were a lot of references to it as, “because NOUN” (Lieberman, 2012; Bailey, 2012), which proves to be too restrictive since *because* is not always followed by a noun. Because it was commonly followed by nouns and NPs, it has also been referred to as “prepositional because,” but this categorization also does not seem to capture the construction since it does not always pattern after prepositions, as explained above. While it might most commonly appear with an NP complement, it can also be followed by an adjective phrase (ADJP), a verb phrase (VP), or an exclamation. In this section I will analyze these different complements and the restrictions each of them have.

These particular complements can be found in example (9), repeated below from Section 2.3.

- (9)
- a. I can’t go to the party because, homework. (noun phrase)
 - b. She’s tired because, went to the gym. (verb phrase)
 - c. Bought the puppy because, adorable. (adjective phrase)
 - d. That feeling you get when you finish your homework and you just want to cry because, yay.¹⁷ (exclamation)

It should be mentioned that in general acceptability judgments on the *Because, X* construction do seem to be in flux since the expression is continuing to develop. The observations in this section are based on current occurrences of the *Because, X* construction, which is to say that currently it does not seem to appear with certain complements and that there appear to be restrictions on others. This is not to say that the restrictions that I discuss cannot at some point appear in the construction, if it has evolved for meaning to be interpreted from such a complement.

¹⁷ Originally found in a tweet included in Stan Carey’s *Wordpress* article, “‘Because’ has become a preposition, because grammar” (Carey, 2013).

2.5.1 Noun phrases. According to data analyzed by Tyler Schnoebelen (2014), the construction appears most frequently with NP complements. Within the NP category, the *X* position can be filled with a mass noun, pronoun, proper name, plural count noun, or full determiner phrase (DP), as illustrated in (22).

- (22) a. Of course evolution is true because, science.¹⁸ (mass noun)
 b. Is it normal to get back from a run & just not be willing to move for at least as long as the run was? Because, me.¹⁹ (pronoun)
 c. They're not much different than kitchen trash bags, though I'm sure they cost \$50,000 because NASA.²⁰ (proper name)
 d. I'm on a low sodium diet because, doctors.²¹ (plural count noun)
 e. Gonna upload some pics from my photoshoot in the summer, because well... because the Internet..²² (DP)

Additionally, the *X* position seems to be able to be filled with a singular count noun like (23a) below. (23a) is contrasted with (23b) where there is a clear grammatically difference when *book* does not have a determiner.

- (23) a. I'm going to the library because, book.
 b. * I'm going to the library to return book.

Example (23b) is ungrammatical because singular count nouns like, *book*, typically cannot appear without a determiner like, *the*, or, *a*. It is possible that (23a) is acceptable because *book*, in this environment, has a non-overtly stated determiner like, *my*, *the*, or is potentially some specific book depending on a larger context between the interlocutors. This

¹⁸ Originally found in Stan Carey's *Wordpress* article, "'Because' has become a preposition, because grammar" (Carey, 2013).

¹⁹ @enterblisstonia. "Is it normal to get back from a run & just not be willing to move for at least as long as the run was? Because, me." *Twitter*, 23 August 2015, 4:15 p.m., <https://twitter.com/enterblisstonia/status/635591163643228160>.

²⁰ Originally found in Chapter 4 of the book, *The Martian*, by Andy Weir self-published as an e-book in 2011.

²¹ Originally found in the Google Group alt.usage.english in a response by Richard Yates, who included the example from the original message from user, Lewis (Yates, 2013).

²² @SydFromThe6. "Gonna upload some pics from my photoshoot in the summer, because well... because the Internet.." *Twitter*, 7 January 2014, 10:58 p.m., <https://twitter.com/SydFromThe6/status/420811811475046400>.

would then mean that *book* in (23a) would belong to a larger DP making it grammatical and preferred in a way that *book* in (23b) is not.

The construction also seems to be able to take more complex NPs as well like gerunds (explored in (26) in Section 2.5.2) and relative clauses, as in (24b). This can get a bit difficult to analyze though because the longer the complement, the less it resembles the *Because, X* construction. (24c) seems like a more detailed version of (24b), but it has lost the succinct *Because, X*-ness making the *because* here a standard subordinating conjunction.

- (24)
- a. I'm taking my homework to the library because, that student.
 - b. I'm taking my homework to the library because, that student who needs it.
 - c. I'm taking my homework to the library because that student who needs it is waiting for me there.²³

In summary, it appears as if most NPs can appear as a complement in the *Because, X* construction, even, uniquely, singular count nouns without an overt determiner. Complex NPs can appear here as well, though the more complex it is the less it might resemble *Because, X*; the construction seems to prefer shorter complements to allow for more variation in how it can be interpreted.

2.5.2 Verb phrases. Beyond NPs, the construction can also appear with VPs; however, certain VPs require more information, which makes some sentences more acceptable than others. For instance, *put* in (25) requires a location, so it is less acceptable to not include one, as in (25b). Even though the *Because, X* construction requires a level of brevity, it appears that VP properties are still required to a certain degree while determiners in NPs, for instance, are not.

- (25)
- a. The book is on the table because, put there.
 - b. ? The book is on the table because, put.

²³ Section 2.6.5 will explore whether or not the *Because, X* construction can appear with a TP complement, which would conflate instances of standard *because* as a subordination and *because* in the *Because, X* construction.

Some VPs may also look more like nouns, and as such they may be analyzed as either nouns or verbs in a larger context, as in the two analyses of (26a) and (26b).

- (26) a. Eating ice cream because, want. = Eating ice cream because I want to.
a. Eating ice cream because, want. = Eating ice cream because of my want for it.
b. He won't answer the phone because, napping. = He won't answer the phone because napping is preoccupying him.
b. He won't answer the phone because, napping. = He won't answer the phone because he is napping right now.

However, overall, VPs do seem to be able to appear in the *X* position even when forced into their most verb-like state.

- (27) a. She's tired because, went to the gym.
b. Are you trying to convince me? Because, stop.

2.5.3 Adjective phrases. ADJPs can also appear in the *Because, X* construction. It seems to be preferable, though not required, that ADJP complements directly reference whatever is in the main clause before *because*. For example, *I bought the puppy because, adorable*, is easier for a listener to parse meaning, *I bought the puppy because it's adorable*, while it is harder to get the interpretation, *I bought the puppy because the dress I was wearing at the time was adorable*, though, provided with the correct context this might be possible. Similarly, the sentence, *I bought this dress because, adorable*, is easiest to understand as *because the dress is adorable* and not, *because the puppy I just bought is adorable*.

Example (28) contains the target sentence, *I bought the puppy because it was a sunny day*, and some suggestions of this sentence in the *Because, X* construction. I would argue that (28a) is the response that is easiest to understand since *sunny* is directly referencing *day*, providing the desired target interpretation.

- (28) I bought the puppy because it was a sunny day.
- a. I bought the puppy because, sunny day.
= the puppy was bought because it was a sunny day.
 - b. I bought the puppy because, sunny. (pause)
= speaker bought the puppy because it was a sunny day and the listener knows s/he was waiting for a sunny day to do so.
= the speaker notoriously buys puppies on sunny days.
= the puppy has sunny disposition.
= ...

However, (28b) is still a possible *Because, X* example of the target sentence, but the ambiguity of what *sunny* is referring to is widened to multiple possible interpretations, including the desired one. The understanding of this example could change based on a larger context, prior understanding between the interlocutors, observations, etc.

The judgments on this might be easier to understand if (28c) is contrasted with standard *because* followed by an ADJP. (29) demonstrates this contrast and how the pause and intonation of the *Because, X* construction in (29a) offers a wide range of interpretations while (29b) remains ungrammatical.

- (29) a. I bought the puppy because, sunny.
b. *I bought the puppy because sunny. (no pause, standard intonation)

2.5.4 Exclamations and adverb phrases. Lastly, *Because, X* can appear with exclamations, as in (30). Example (30a) is often cited as an instance of an adverb, but this is not a case of a true adverb (Carey, 2013). Instead is more similar to an exclamation with much the same understanding as, “*Because, [obviously, truly, really, etc].*”

- (30) a. Because, honestly!
b. Alexander resisted bedtime for an hour then finally fell asleep snuggling the bulb syringe/snot sucker. Because obviously.
c. That feeling you get when you finish an essay and you just want to cry because, yay.²⁴

²⁴ Originally found in a tweet included in Stan Carey’s *Wordpress* article, “‘Because’ has become a preposition, because grammar” (Carey, 2013).

Like ADJPs, it also seems as if examples like (30a) relate to a clause before it or a larger context of some sort. It does not seem as if it can be used alone without this larger context. This might be a property of exclamations in general since they tend to depend on a cause or a reason to be exclaiming something. Due to the nature of the construction being found often on social media, this larger context might be an image or a referenced news article, to name a few.

It is not clear whether or not the *Because, X* construction can appear with adverbs at all. Instances like in (31a) and (31b) are actually larger adjective phrases. It is certainly possible that as the *Because, X* construction is used more and continues to change that adverbs might become acceptable. For the time being it remains unclear whether or not they do not appear in the *Because, X* construction because they are not allowed syntactically, or semantically. In other words, syntactically it might not be possible for *Because, X* to take an adverb phrase as its complement, and so there are no instances of it. Alternatively, it might be syntactically possible for an adverb to appear in the *Because, X* construction, but it is not allowed semantically, and so there are no instances of it occurring.

- (31) a. Ate a lot because, very hungry.
b. Our popsicle stick project fell apart because, poorly constructed.
c. ? Our popsicle stick project fell apart because, poorly.

2.5.5 Function words. Lastly, there are no instances of *Because, X* appearing with function words, as in (32). As with the other restrictions on the construction, this is probably because a function word by itself is not semantically relevant enough for it to appear alone in such a succinct construction.

- (32) a. ? We aren't going because, a.
b. ? It's not a problem because, if.

2.5.6 Complement conclusions. The *Because, X* construction conveys a different meaning than phrases using subordinating conjunctions or prepositions, as shown above with the analyses of its complements. This suggests that it is not simply a reduction of either a subordinating conjunction or preposition. Additionally, the construction acts in a way that is different from both prepositions and subordinating conjunction. While it shares similar properties to the other uses of *because*, it is unique since *because* in this construction can appear with NPs, ADJPs, VPs, and exclamations as complements.

In Section 2.6, I will analyze the structure of the *Because X* construction, which has been suggested to be an ellipsis, a reduction of the compound preposition *because of*, or a subordinating conjunction appearing with a new complement. I will establish the Case Filter and Theta Criterion and use these to discuss the issue of DPs appearing as a complement to *because* in this construction without a way of seemingly acquiring case or a theta role, as required in syntactic theory.

2.6 *Because, X* Analyses

So far in this work I have presented two attempts to analyze how the *because* in the *Because, X* construction should be categorized: as a preposition or a subordinating conjunction. Approaching this new construction so that it can be reduced to something that is known and has already been established in grammar is methodologically sound. This would result in an explanation of *because* that is already available, which would be optimal since parsimony in science calls for simplicity in an explanation; it would be better to fit this construction into a current explanation than positing a new one. While the analyses discussed in this thesis thus far have tried to examine this new use of *because* within the current grammatical classifications of *because*, there are remaining issues. These issues center on the

wide range of complements that the *Because, X* construction can take, which makes it different from prepositions and subordinating conjunctions. Alternative analyses for the *Because, X* construction such as “because NOUN” and “prepositional because” have also been addressed. As previously mentioned, the construction does not act in the same manner as typical prepositional phrases, and the *because* in the construction can be followed by more than NPs, making both of these proposals problematic.

There have been a few attempts to analyze the structure of *Because, X*. These have mostly taken place through blogs, online articles, and comments added to these articles by readers and the three main theories circulating are either the *Because, X* construction is simply a subordinating conjunction (Pullum, 2014), a type of ellipsis (McHenry, 2013), or reduction of the compound preposition *because of*. This last one is theorized to have started due to character limitations on social media or texting. Carey (2013) said he used the construction himself on Twitter for this very reason. For these analyses I will introduce the Case Filter and Theta Criterion, which will be critical for the understanding of these analyses. As shown in Section 2.5.1, the *Because, X* construction can take DP complements. According to the Case Filter and Theta Criterion, DPs with lexical content require case and a theta role; however, *because* is not licensed to give these. The proposals presented in this section will all attempt to solve this issue.

In the following section, I will first provide an explanation of the Case Filter and Theta Criterion as an important basis for the proposals explored here. I will then analyze the *Because, X* construction as a reduction of the compound preposition *because of*, as ellipsis, and as a subordinating conjunction as well as present any issues with these analyses. I will conclude by introducing the theory of *because* appearing with a new complement, αP .

2.6.1 The Case Filter and Theta Criterion. Before exploring the theories of the *Because, X* construction as ellipsis or a reduction of the compound preposition because of, it is necessary to discuss the Case Filter and Theta Criterion as background information since they will be used in both of these analyses. The representations and analyses in the sections below depict the two important principals of the subcomponents of the grammar in current syntactic theory: the Case Filter and the Theta Criterion.

The Case Filter, the central principle in Case Theory, states that all DPs with lexical content must have case. Case is given to DPs by transitive-active verbs, which assigns accusative case (ACC) to its complement; transitive prepositions, which assigns ACC case to its complement; or the +tns element of T, which assigns nominative case to its specifier (Carnie, 2013).

The Theta Criterion is a constraint on the relationship between theta roles and arguments. It states that each argument in a sentence is assigned one, and only one, theta role, and each theta role is assigned to one, and only one, argument (Carnie, 2013).

- Case Filter: All DPs with lexical content must have case. Case is provided by:
- Transitive-active verbs (ACC case to complement)
 - Transitive prepositions (ACC case to complement)
 - +tns element of T (NOM case to specifier)
- Theta Criterion: Each argument in a sentence is assigned one, and only one, theta role, and each theta role is assigned to one, and only one, argument.

2.6.2 *Because, X*: Preposition analysis. I will start with the analysis of the *Because, X* construction as a reduction of the compound preposition, *because of*. This analysis relies on the proposal that the *because* in this construction is acting as a preposition (Whitman, 2014; Pullum, 2014; Love, 2013; Joe, 2013). As discussed in Section 2.3, there are several arguments that traditional *because* has always been a preposition, and that the *Because, X*

construction is simply an expansion on the preposition to allow NP complements. However, as already argued, *because* in the *Because, X* construction does not act as a standard preposition in that the prepositional phrase does not appear to be able to be preposed and it can take more than just NPs as its complement. As described in Section 2.5, *because* in this construction can have as a complement, NPs, VPs, ADJPs, and exclamations.

There is evidence that the *because* in the *Because, X* construction is not a preposition, but the theory that the construction is a reduction of the *because of* compound preposition, while related, has not been explored. This theory deserves some attention since it could potentially explain how the DP complements acquire case since a preposition like *of* is licensed to provide this.

The *Because, X* construction as a prepositional construction would explain syntactically how the following arguments (DPs with semantic context and embedded CPs) acquire case since prepositions can give this thereby satisfying the Case Filter. The grammaticality difference between DP with lexical content having case assigned and not having case assigned is illustrated in (33). The argument DP[final grade] requires case and can be given it by the preposition *of*. By inserting *of*, the Case Filter is no longer violated and the sentence becomes grammatical.

- (33) a. * I am proud my final grade.
b. I am proud of my final grade.

Under this analysis, *because* as it appears in the *Because, X* construction would be a simplified version of the compound preposition, *because of*. This is detailed in Figure 2.1 below.

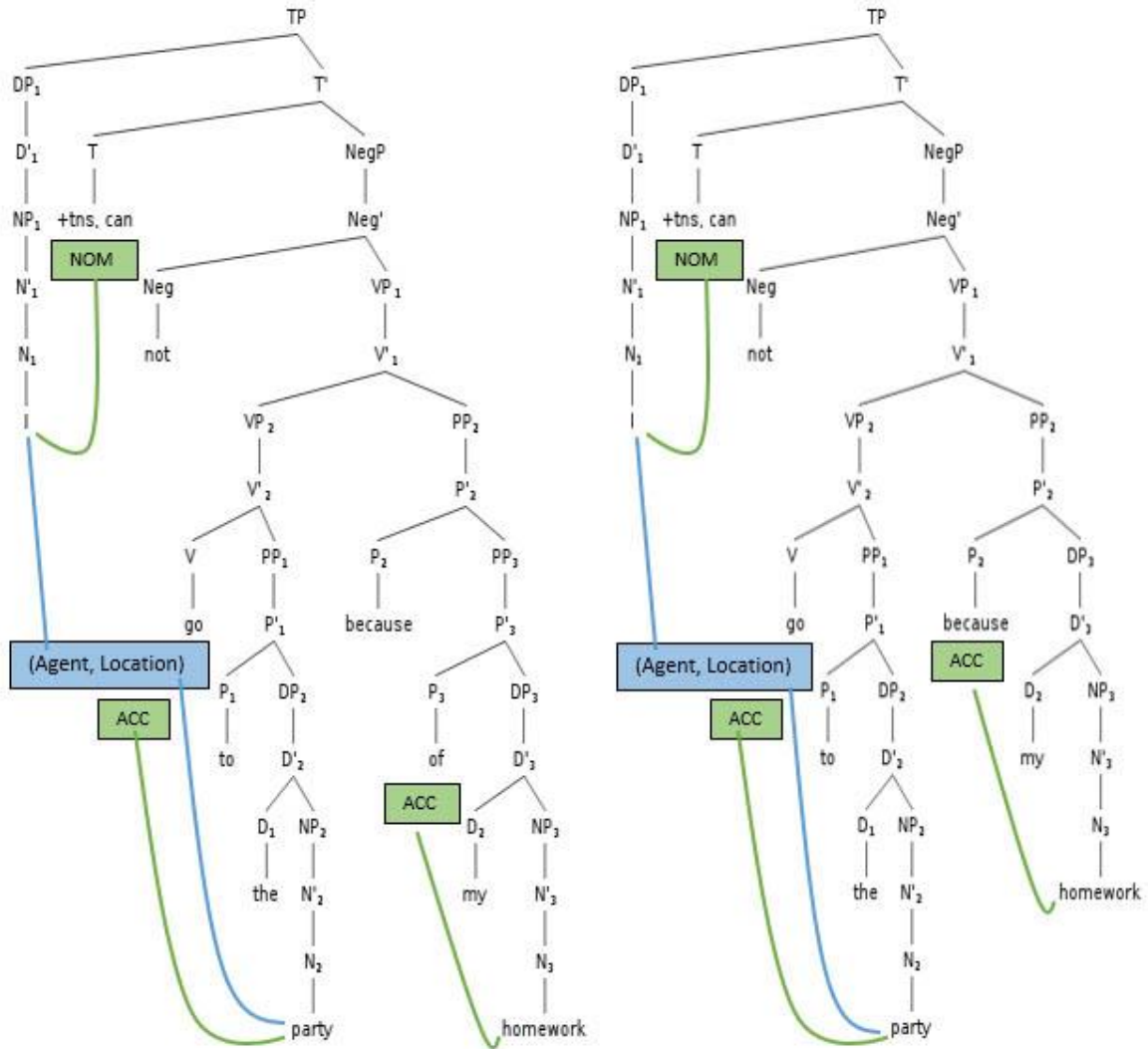


Figure 2.1. I can't go to the party because (of) my homework.

Typically, *of* would assign case to the DP thereby satisfying Case Filter, but once it is deleted, this falls to *because*. This deletion is not completely unprecedented. Consider the dropping of *of* in other compound prepositions in the sentences in (34).

- (34) a. I threw the water out (of) the window.
 b. I brought the dog inside (of) the house.

It would appear then, as a whole, some compound prepositions are changing so that the *of* is no longer required. However, as already mentioned, in multiple ways the *Because, X* construction does not appear to be prepositional. It patterns after prepositions when it is

followed by NPs (*because, homework; because, the dog; because, you*), but this new construction allows more than just NPs. As shown in Section 2.5, it can also take VPs, ADJPs, and exclamations. The only complements it does not seem to take at the moment are functional categories and ADVPs.

- (9) a. I can't go to the party because, homework. (NP; singular count noun, no determiner)
b. She's tired because, went to the gym. (VP)
c. Bought the puppy because, adorable. (ADJP)
d. That feeling you get when you finish your homework and you just want to cry because, yay.²⁵ (exclamation)

Furthermore, when traditional prepositions are given these complements, as in (35), the sentence becomes ungrammatical.

- (35) a. *The store is over hill. (NP; singular count noun, no determiner)
b. *The store is over sells. (VP)
c. *The store is over²⁶ expensive. (ADJP)
d. *The store is over wow. (exclamation)

Additionally, prepositional phrases can move in the sentence by being preposed. This does not appear to be possible with the *Because, X* construction and is certainly dispreferred, according to a study presented in Chapter 3. Examples of this can be found in (8), repeated below.

- (8) a. Since the war, there have been many changes.
b. ? Because homework, I can't go to the party. (*Because, X*)

In the next section I will present the syntactic analysis of the *Because, X* construction as ellipsis.

²⁵ Originally found in a tweet included in Stan Carey's *Wordpress* article, "'Because' has become a preposition, because grammar" (Carey, 2013).

²⁶ Meant as the preposition *over* not to be confused with the adjective *over*, as in *excessive* so that it reads *over expensive* and not *over-expensive*.

2.6.3 *Because, X*: Ellipsis analysis. It has been proposed by Robert McHenry (2013) as well as by several commenters from online blog posts that the *Because X* construction is an instance of ellipsis. Traditionally, ellipsis is used to eliminate already uttered parts of the sentence that would be repeated word for word. Carnie (2013) describes several different types of ellipsis. First, there is VP ellipsis that targets the entire VP, typically in environments with coordination of two clauses where there is an identical VP in each of the clauses.

(36) Brandon will read a book but Mary won't [VP read a book]. (VP ellipsis)

Next, he describes antecedent-contained (ACP) deletion, which is a specialized VP deletion that does not use coordination. Instead, it elides a VP that is dominated by another VP.

(37) Brandon read every book that Mary did [VP read]. (ACP deletion)

There is also pseudo-gapping which targets only parts of the VP usually in comparative sentences. Similar to pseudo-gapping is gapping that has three different subtypes all involving the elimination of non-constituents: comparative deleting, stripping, and N-ellipsis.

- (38)
1. Brandon has been reading more novels than he has [been reading] short stories. (pseudo-gapping)
 2. Brandon read more books than Mary [read books]. (comparative deleting)
 3. Brandon is reading a book, not [reading] a magazine. (stripping)
 4. Brandon is only reading one book, not two [books]. (N-ellipsis)

The last type of ellipsis that Carnie presents is sluicing, which involves the elision of a TP, including subject DPs or auxiliaries but not complementizer phrases (CPs) since it requires a remaining *wh*-phrase.

(39) Brandon is reading and Mary doesn't know why [Brandon is reading]. (sluicing)

Overarching all of these types of ellipsis are two major restrictions. The first is that the elided constituent must contain all of the material in the antecedent, and the second is that the elided string must be a complement of some licenser, which is either a tensed auxiliary or a modal (in VP, ACP, pseudo-gapping, and gapping), or it is a complementizer with the [+WH] feature (in sluicing).

The representation in Figure 2.2 below underlies the sentence found in (40a), which uses ACP ellipsis for *he reads* to result in the sentence in (40b).

- (40) a. Brandon reads more novels than he reads short stories.
 b. Brandon reads more novels than ___ short stories.

Figure 2.2 for (40) is depicted below. The circled section is elided away to read, *Brandon reads more novels than ___ short stories.*

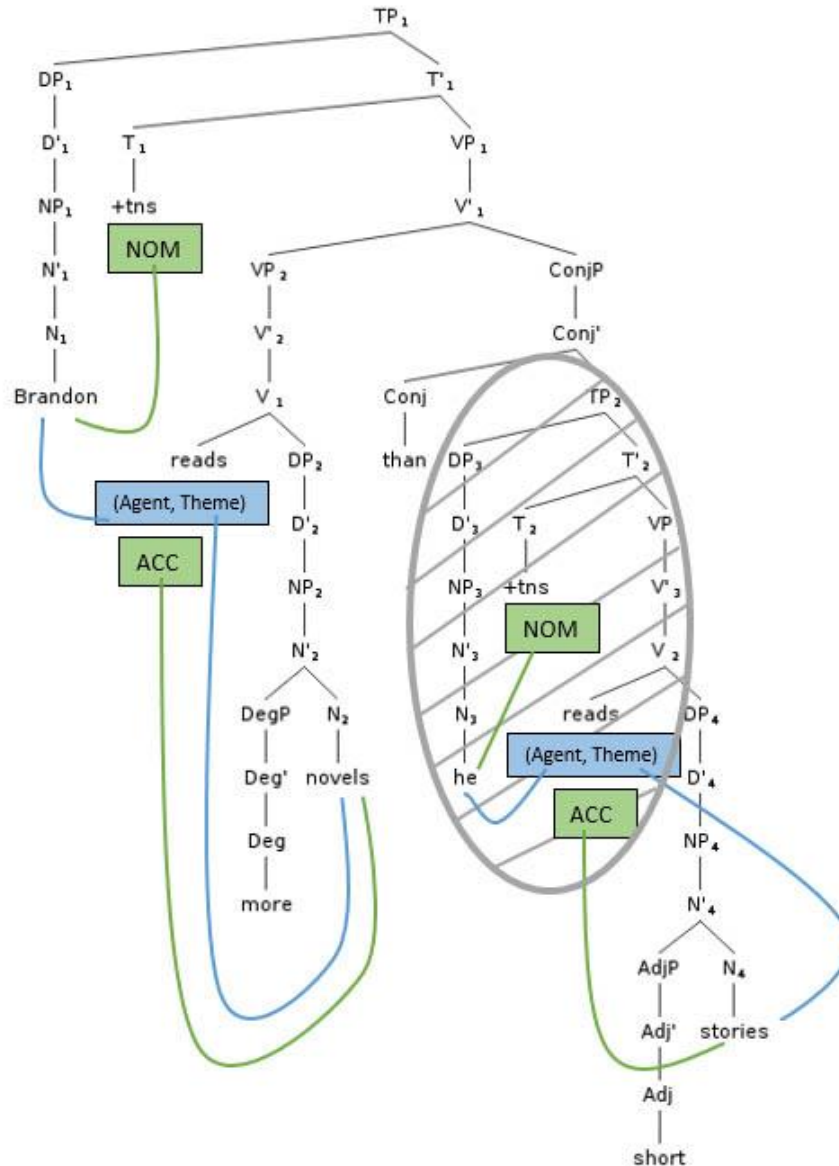


Figure 2.2. Brandon reads more novels than ___ short stories.

As depicted in Figure 2.2, each argument has a strict one-to-one relationship with theta roles and each argument has been assigned case, thereby satisfying the Case Filter and Theta Criterion; DP[stories] and DP[he] receive Theme and Agent roles respectively from the VP[reads], which also gives accusative case to DP[short stories]. Additionally, DP[he] receives nominative case from T. All of the arguments retain their properties, even if they are elided away since these parts of the sentence still exist underlyingly.

With the *Because, X* construction, the issue of case assignment is important since *because* in the construction can take as a complement DPs with overt lexical content, an issue that has been mentioned in the previous section. However, according to the rules established in Case Theory, *because* is not licensed to assign case because it is not a transitive-active verb, or (traditionally) a transitive preposition. This means that the instances of *X* being filled with a DP case assignment since these DPs contain overt lexical content. An ellipsis explanation would be advantageous for the *Because, X* construction then since theoretically whatever has been elided away could provide case and theta roles to the arguments after *because*. This analysis would explain how DPs occupying the *X* position after *because* obtain a theta role and case to satisfy the Theta Criterion and Case Filter.

The representation in Figure 2.3 below diagrams the sentence, *I can't go to the party because I have homework*. To recreate it in the *Because, X* construction under the ellipsis interpretation, *I have* would be elided away. This elision is demonstrated in the gray circle in the representation. With this approach, all arguments have been given theta roles and case appropriately to satisfy the Theta Criterion and Case Filter to yield a grammatical sentence.

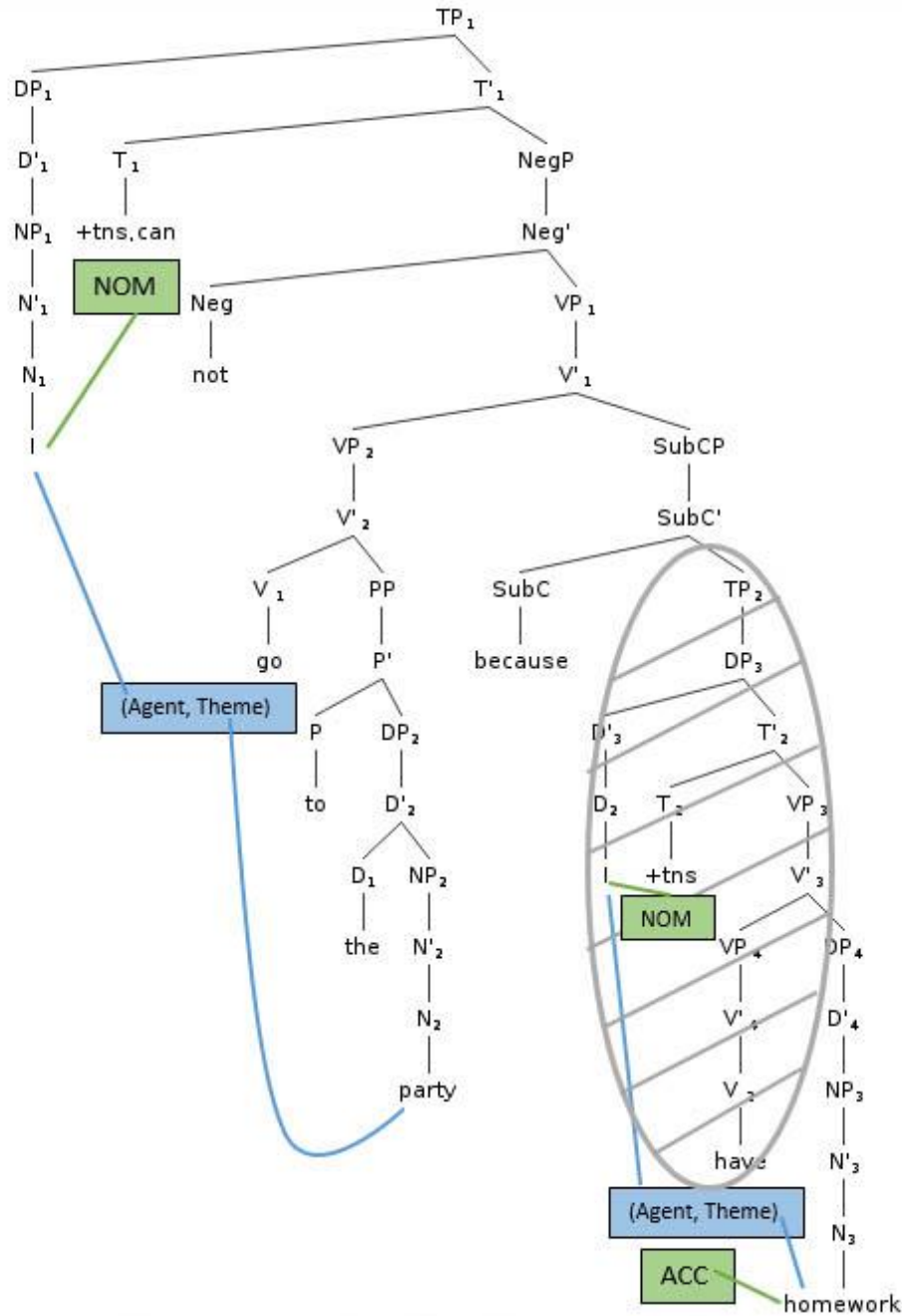


Figure 2.3. I can't go to the party because ___ homework.

The problems with the ellipsis analysis for the *Because, X* construction is that this construction at its core is not elliptical because it is not eliding particular words; instead it seems to be substituting for a whole idea. In other words, the underlying sentence is not simply, *I can't go to the party because I have homework*. Following this argument, in

choosing the *Because, X* construction the speaker is trying to convey something that can not be conveyed in standard *because* sentences. While this is an external issue, which departs for the internal analysis above, it is important to note that the *Because, X* construction seems to have as part of its properties the ability to impart different feelings when it is used. These feelings include a sense of humor, wit, or sarcasm, to name a few. Importantly, these different tones are not conveyed as a property of standard *because* sentences. So, in choosing to use the *Because, X* construction a speaker is choosing to convey a sense of humor, sarcasm, etc., into what they are saying, which is not possible in standard sentences.²⁷ (41) is a great example of the feelings that *Because, X* is able to convey. Here, *yay* is not an elision of specific underlying words but seems to be acting as a stand-in to convey feelings as well as a rough train of thought.

(41) The feeling you get when you finish an essay and you just want to cry because, yay.

Crucially, the *Because, X* construction does not maintain either of two major restrictions on ellipses. The constituents that would be considered elided under this analysis are not repeated and are not introduced by a tensed auxiliary, modal, or *wh-* complementizer. Both of these are required of typical ellipses. In representation (3) above, the sentence using *Because, X, I can't go to the party because [I have] homework* is diagramed under the ellipsis analysis; however, the elided *I have* is not repeated and is not introduced by a tensed auxiliary, modal, or *wh-* complementizer. It should be mentioned that it is entirely possible that the elided *I have* might not exist at all underlyingly, because it is possible that there is not just one underlying sentence, though perhaps one is implied. *I can't go to the party because, homework*, could mean, “because I have homework,” “because the homework we

²⁷ For a detailed analysis of this, please refer to Chapter 3, Section 3.4.

were assigned is really difficult and I haven't finished it," "because, homework. You know how that goes," or even all of these options simultaneously. In contrast, true ellipsis does not allow this semantic variability, as demonstrated in (42).

- (42) a. I can't go to the party because, homework
= I can't go to the party because I have homework.
= I can't go to the party because the homework we were assigned is really difficult and I haven't finished it.
= I can't go to the party because, homework. You know how that goes.
= ...
- b. Brandon reads more novels than short stories.
= Brandon reads more novels than he reads short stories.
≠ Brandon reads more novels than he writes short stories.

On the other hand, if true elision is forced in a sentence to form the *Because, X* construction, the sentence conveys something different. (43) shows how the meaning of the sentence can be expanded beyond the original sentence, *I like cats because I like cats*.

- (43) a. I like cats because I like cats.
= I like cats because I like cats.
- b. I like cats because, cats.
= I like cats because I do.
= I like cats because, who doesn't like them?
=

The elision in (43) appears to work except that the *Because, X* construction has altered what the sentence is conveying from the original intention. As stated above, this construction in being non-canonical is conveying something that is not possible to convey in a canonical construction. *I like cats because, cats* can mean anything listed in (43b) and more depending on the context or the relationship between the interlocutors. The word *cats* has taken on the substitution qualities indicative of the *Because, X* construction and now stands for a whole range of ideas associated with cats, which is far from the original sentence.

Robert McHenry (2013) argues that what is occurring is still elision, but an elision "not of words but of the orderly thought that is the precondition of orderly expression,"

which has been influenced by the current texting and tweeting environments of today. This is a different definition than the standard one associated with ellipsis from Carnie (2013), but even if this “elision of thought” were true, it still does not meet the two restrictions inherent to true ellipsis. If it is an ellipsis of a thought, then how is this thought conveyed when it is deleted and not repeated? And more importantly, how can this be captured syntactically, if at all? How does a speaker decide which part of the thought is elided? While the *Because, X* construction can take a wide range of complements, it seems that if what is occurring is elision, then only certain parts of the sentence can be elided, as explained in (44). (44a), *I asked because, question*, cannot mean the same thing under the interpretation that the original sentence is *I asked because it was a question of morals*. Instead, more preferred answers would be either (44b) or, more simply, (44c). Clearly, what can be deleted from the sentence is dependent upon saliency; the most salient parts of the sentence must remain in order to retain the same semantic interpretation.²⁸

- (44) I asked because it was a question of morals.
- a. ? I asked because, question
 - b. I asked because, question of morals.
 - c. I asked because, morals.

This section has presented the argument of the *Because, X* construction as ellipsis. While this argument attempts to analyze the construction within an explanation of *because* that is already established in grammar, there are issues with this analysis. First, the *Because, X* construction does not adhere to the two restrictions placed on typical ellipsis. The first of these restrictions is that the constituents considered to be elided are not repeated elsewhere in the sentence and are not introduced by either a tensed auxiliary, modal, or *wh*-

²⁸ For a more detailed explanation of relevance and saliency, please refer to Chapter 3, Section 3.5.

complementizer. Additionally, when a true elision is forced using the *Because, X* construction the meaning of the sentence is changed, as shown in (43). Lastly, there was the argument from McHenry suggesting that the construction is an elision of thoughts. There are many questions that come up with this analysis with perhaps the largest ones being how this is done and represented syntactically.

The *Because, X* construction appears to have similar attributes to ellipsis and prepositions but does not quite fit into either category. Ellipsis would explain syntactically how the sentence would gain Case and Theta roles; however, the elided part of the sentence is not repeated in the main clause, and the ellipsis is not a complement of a typical licensor. Similarly, *because* as a preposition does not act like normal prepositions since it can be followed with more than just NPs and is in a fixed position in the sentence. In the next sections I will analyze the *because* in the *Because, X* construction as a subordinating conjunction and with a new complement, αP .

2.6.4 *Because, X*: Subordinating conjunction analysis. As already argued, the *Because, X* construction imparts a sense of humor, wit, or sarcasm (to name a few) as an ability of the construction. These feelings are not usually possible for standard *because* to convey due to the different context of use. However, the *because* in the *Because, X* construction does act like a subordinating conjunction in one very important way: it combines a main clause with a reduced, less important one.

There seems to be a class of subordinating conjunctions that pattern similarly to *because*. As Gretchen McCulloch (2014) points out, other subordinating conjunctions like *but, since, thus, so, which,* and *ergo* are somewhat synonymous with *because* in mimicking the *Because, X* construction.

- (44) a. I was going to go to the party but, homework.
b. She bought a pound of chocolate since, love.
c. Played with puppies today thus, want.
d. Skipping lunch today so, sleep.

McCulloch (2014) suggests these subordinating conjunctions as a class seem to be appearing as a new type of construction with, what she calls, “interjectionary complements.” In fact, the real-life example below has already been found on the Internet.



Figure 2.4. *Until* being used in the *Because, X* construction, from themetapicture.com.

Under this theory, the subordinating conjunction is able to give accusative case to the DP following it, like a preposition. As already noted, a DP with lexical content following the *Because, X* construction is a stand-alone substitution for something larger and not an ellipsis, and it would need to acquire case to satisfy the Case Filter. One suggestion would be that DPs acquire this from the subordinating conjunction, as demonstrated below in the syntax tree in Figure 2.5. This, however, diverges from Case Theory, which states that case can only be given by active transitive verbs or prepositions.

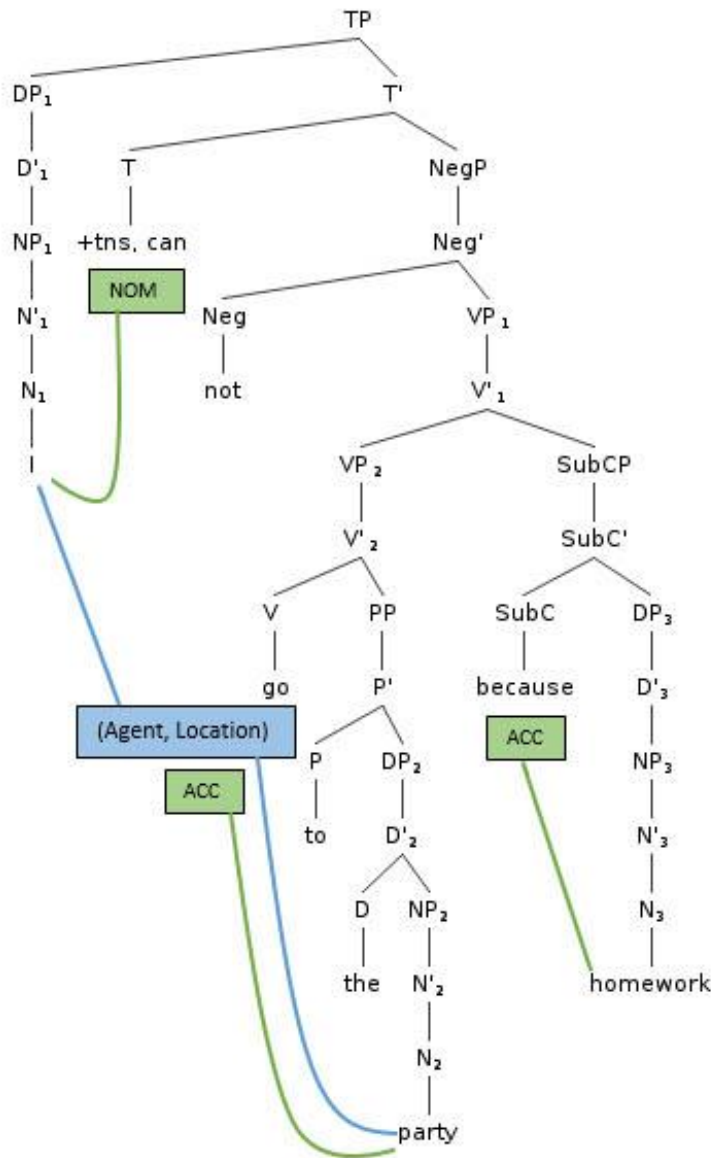


Figure 2.5. I can't go to the party because homework.

2.6.5 Because with an interjectionary complement. To satisfy the current parameters of Case Theory, I propose that in the *Because, X* construction *because* is allowed to appear with a new complement, αP , which either provides case required for DPs with lexical content in *X* or allows another way around this as a property of αP . This could potentially mean that *because*, and similar words that appear in the same class, could then appear as part of a compound preposition, as a subordinating conjunction, and with the αP

complement. In this section I will explore α P and provide possible explanations and information about it through coordination examples.

In analyzing α P, we know that NPs, VPs, ADJPs, and exclamations can fill this complement. This suggests two scenarios: either α P can take a TP, or it can take all of these complements individually. If a TP is the complement, then it is a possibility that the TP is filled with empty categories with the exception of the phonologically realized content. This means that in an example like *I'm leaving because, want pizza* could be analyzed as a case of pro drop where the unrealized DP in the complement, *I*, can be dropped since the reference can be recovered from the main proposition. If the complement of α P is a TP, it would be rare to find a fully realized TP in the complement, if at all, due to the naturally pithy and jocular feel of the *Because, X* construction. I was able to find what appears to be one example of a TP as a complement. The example is in (45a) below and was part of a posting on social media in a caption to a picture.

- (45) a. Because it's Nurses week.²⁹
b. Because, Nurses week.

This example seems to lose the essence of what the construction attempts to convey, and it could be argued that a proper *Because, X* version of this would be (45b). Instead, the full TP example in (45a) reads similarly to a response to a non-overt question like *Why am I posting this picture? Because it's Nurses week*. Arguably, *because* with the full TP complement appears identical to a standard subordinating conjunction, thus giving it the different feel from atypical *Because, X* sentences.

If *Because, X* takes the complement α P, then it is worthwhile to explore more possibilities of what can occur in the complement, like whether or not the complement can

²⁹ Originally from personal communication on Facebook. May 8, 2015.

take conjoined, or coordinated, constituents. If αP can be coordinated, this could provide insight to the construction as a whole. According to the rules of coordination, elements can only be coordinated if they are within identical categories (Carnie, 2013). So, NPs can be coordinated with NPs (*dogs and cats*), VPs with VPs (*run and walk*), and, theoretically, αP s with αP s.

Using the target sentence in (46), it should be possible to convert this sentence into two conjoined *Because, X* sentences, like in (46a). (46a) is a clear joining of two of the same categories, which allows the retention of the underlying target sentence. Importantly, the second *because* can be elided away for an even simpler sentence in (46b), *I want to go to the party because, Mary and, free shirt*. These sentences are detailed in Figures 2.6 and 2.7, respectively.

- (46) I want to go to the party because I am dating Mary and because I want the free shirt that is promised to me if I go.
- a. I want to go to the party because, Mary and because, free shirt.
 - b. I want to go to the party because, Mary and, free shirt.

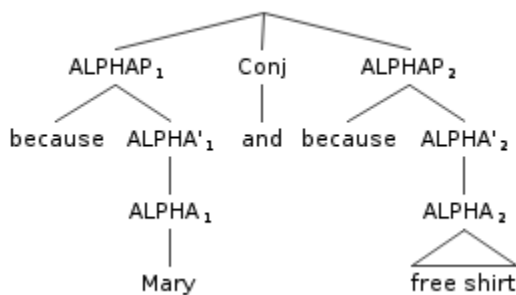


Figure 2.6. I want to go to the party because, Mary and because, free shirt.

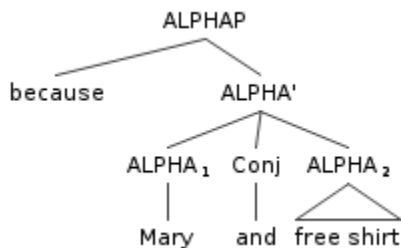


Figure 2.7. I want to go to the part because, Mary and, free shirt.

So, joining two *Because, X* sentences appears to work. Next, setting aside whether or not *Because, X* can take a TP complement at all, consider the *Because, X* response with a TP conjoined with an NP as α categories in the α P complement. Using the same target sentence above, reiterated in (47), this utterance would be as in (47a) and detailed in Figure 2.8 below.

- (47) I want to go to the party because I am dating Mary and because I want the free shirt that is promised to me if I go.
 a. I want to go to the party because, I am dating Mary and free shirt.
 = ? I want to go to the party because I am dating Mary and I am dating the free shirt that is being given away.

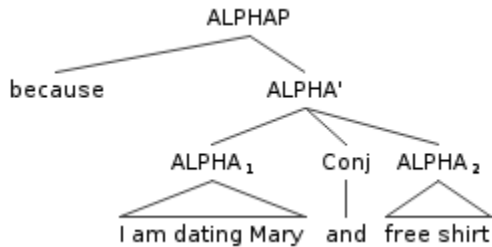


Figure 2.8. I want to go to the party because, I am dating Mary and free shirt.

Here, it is not clear that this sentence conveys the two separate concepts of the target interpretation that the speaker is dating Mary and also wants the free shirt that goes along with an appearance at the party. Instead, this interpretation seems more similar to (47a), *? I want to go to the party because I am dating Mary and I am dating the free shirt that is being given away*. If α [I am dating Mary] is changed to α [dating Mary] to form, [...] *because dating Mary and free shirt*, this seems to be more acceptable. This suggests that while elements of α P like VPs and NPs can be coordinated, TPs as elements cannot be coordinated and thus cannot appear overall as a complement to *because* in this construction.

Finally, consider joining a standard subordinating conjunction with the *Because, X* construction. Using the same underlying target sentence, repeated in (48), an example of this conjunction might be as in (48a), represented in Figure 2.9.

- (48) I want to go to the party because I am dating Mary and because I want the free shirt that is promised to me if I go.
 a. I want to go to the party because I am dating Mary and because, free shirt.

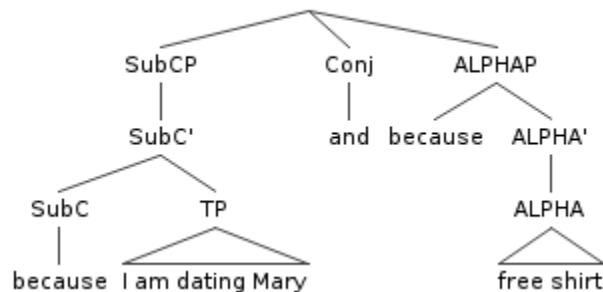


Figure 2.9. I want to go to the party because I am dating Mary and because, free shirt.

This option also appears to retain the same underlying sentence. Since like categories can be conjoined this suggests that the *because* in αP is also acting as a subordinating conjunction. If subordinating conjunctions as a whole are shifting to accept this complement, then I would also expect a sentence like *I want to go to the party because I am dating Mary but, homework* to be accepted and understood to have an underlying meaning of something similar to *I want to go to the party because I am dating Mary, but I still have homework to finish so I have to stay home.*

2.7 Conclusion and Future Research

In this chapter I have provided a syntactic analysis of the *Because, X* construction. I introduced the construction and provided a brief background on how this language trend has formed from the Internet and explained how it differs from the two standard uses of *because*: as a subordinating conjunction and as a compound preposition with *of*. It has been called before “because NOUN” and “prepositional because,” two names that prove to be too restrictive for the construction since it does not pattern after prepositions and can appear with more than just noun phrase complements.

Section 2.3 and 2.4 compared examples of the *Because, X* construction to properties of prepositions and subordinating conjunctions, respectively. In 2.3 an analysis of *because* as a preposition was introduced, and that the *Because, X* construction is shifting of *because* to appear with noun phrase complements. However, the *Because, X* construction does not seem to be able to be preposed as is typical of prepositional phrases and also takes more than noun phrases as complements. In fact, it can appear with verb phrase, adjective phrase, and exclamation complements as well.

In 2.4, *because* was analyzed as a subordinating conjunction. There are issues surrounding the categorization of subordinating conjunctions, but this section centered on the analysis of subordinating conjunctions categorized as complementizers. While the *because* in the *Because, X* construction acts similarly to the *because* in subordinating conjunctions by being a subordinator that introduces a subordinate clause, the resulting sentences do not convey the same meaning. This issue of the *Because, X* construction conveying different senses of humor, wit, or sarcasm is something that is not available for both of the standard uses of *because*.

These two analyses to this use *because* are good methods of attempting to reduce a new construction to an explanation that is already available. This would result in a simpler theory, which is ultimately a better theory. However, both of the analyses of the *because* in the *Because, X* construction as either a preposition or a subordinating conjunction have remaining issues.

These issues were further highlighted when these analyses were applied to *Because, X* in syntax trees. Additionally, the *Because, X* construction was analyzed as an instance of ellipsis and with a new interjectionary complement, αP . Ultimately, the *Because, X*

construction does not seem to be an instance of true ellipsis, preposition, or subordinating conjunction. Mostly this is due to issues with assigning the required case and theta roles to the determiner phrases filling the *X* position in the construction. This leaves the proposition of *because* appearing with the α P, which either provides case and theta role required for DPs with lexical content in *X* or allows another way around this as a property of α P. This could potentially mean that *because*, and similar words that appear in the same class, could then appear as part of a compound preposition, as a subordinating conjunction, and with the α P complement.

This language trend is new and changing the more that it is used. While it may seem similar to ellipses and prepositions, I feel a stronger case is made for *because* appearing with a new interjectional complement, α P. This would account for its structural basis of main and subordinate propositions, for the emerging of other subordinate clauses in the construction, and for the ability to coordinate subordinating conjunctions with the construction. Of course, the construction is most popularly used with *because*, but it would not be surprising if other subordinating conjunctions started appearing more and more in the same form.

Future research should continue to monitor this construction as it is used more and more and continues to evolve. In particular, more research should be done on the apparent bare singular count nouns that can fill the complement position in the construction. I have presented the argument that these singular count nouns are actually a part of a larger DP with a phonologically unrealized determiner. It is possible that these determiners are not overt due to the inherent succinctness that is a part of the *Because, X* construction, but this issue should be explored further. Additionally, the α P complement will need to be explored further with

detailed analysis. Ideally, the more this theory is explored the more it will resemble other structures already explained in the grammar and the less unique it will seem.

Chapter 3: Semantics and Discourse Analysis

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore how the *Because, X* construction is understood through analyzing the semantics of the *because* in the construction and through analyzing how it is interpreted in conversation. Early uses that popularized the construction surfaced in the form of two separate memes in 2011. It has been described as a “yadda, yadda” (Yates, 2013), a “verbal shrug” (Whitman, 2013), or a “wave of the hand” when the unstated meaning is so obvious that no elaboration is needed (Carey, 2013). Garber describes it as “announcing the situation and commenting on it at the same time [...] an explanation and rolling [the] eyes” (Garber, 2013). Liberman presents the idea that the construction implies that an argument’s “reference line of reasoning is weak” (Liberman, 2012). By this I believe he means that the construction seems to be associated with a method of challenging an argument while simultaneously indicating that the reasoning for the argument is weak, as in (1) below adapted from Liberman.

- (1) Now, I'm sure kneejerk anti-feminist dickwads think that the eradication of men is *exactly* what we women mean by "plz can we have equal rights now thx." Because logic.³⁰
(adapted from (Liberman, 2012))

The condensed, vague nature of the construction seems to impart a sense of humor in a blunt punchline, which relies on the interlocutors understanding what the other is implying so that there is no need to elaborate further. Depending on the context and situation, the construction is used to convey a range of emotions from humor and wit to sarcasm and criticism. Additionally, the *X* in the construction serves as a substitution for a whole idea or a vague train of thought that does not necessarily convey a singular meaning but is a stand-in

³⁰ Example is originally from the article, “Are Men Going Extinct?” written by Lindy West and published in *Jezebel*. July 7, 2012.

for a larger idea (Carey, 2013). The construction can be used to convey humor by using an explanation in a way that maximizes efficiency while being pithy.

While these views explain how the construction can be interpreted, they ultimately do not provide a semantic explanation of the *Because, X* construction. This chapter will begin by providing a brief background on traditional *because* and *because* in *Because, X*. In Section 3.3, I will present a semantic analysis of *because* considering its denotation and how the *Because, X* construction contrasts with standard uses of *because*. This analysis is important in determining whether or not the *because* in the *Because, X* construction is the same *because* used elsewhere. I will conclude here that while *Because, X* is different from standard constructions, the *because* in this new construction remains at its core causal. In Section 3.4, I will investigate the pragmatics of the *Because, X* construction using Grice's Maxims to explore the construction how it is interpreted. In Section 3.5, I will introduce a survey that was distributed to determine what expressions the participants interpret the construction to be conveying depending on the context it appears in. I will present the results and discussion from this research and summarize the conclusions in Section 3.6.

3.2 Background

This section provides a brief background on *because* and an explanation on how the *because* in the *Because, X* construction differs from traditional uses of *because*. As detailed fully in Chapter 2 on the syntax of *because*, traditionally, *because* is used in two different linguistic environments: one is as a subordinating conjunction, where *because* is utilized to combine two independent clauses, and the other is as a part of a compound preposition with *of*. The *Because, X* construction combines a main proposition with a dependent complement,

which has the effect of being succinct and jocular. These three environments for *because* are presented in (2).

- (2) a. I can't go to the party because I have homework. (subordinating conjunction)
- b. I can't go to the party because of my homework. (compound preposition)
- c. I can't go to the party because, homework. (*Because, X*)

The complements that *because* can take in the *Because, X* construction are noun phrases (NPs), verb phrases (VPs), adjective phrases (ADJPs), and exclamations.³¹ The examples in (3), repeated from Chapter 2, provide instances of each of these complements in the *Because, X* construction.

- (3) a. I can't go to the party because, homework. (NP)
- b. She's tired because, went to the gym. (VP)
- c. Bought the puppy because, adorable. (ADJP)
- d. That feeling you get when you finish your homework and you just want to cry because, yay.³² (exclamation)

Additionally, the *because* in the construction is usually followed by a comma when written but does not have to be. Similarly, when spoken the *because* is sometimes followed with a pause, though this is not always necessary. It has also appeared with insertions of *well* or *hey* as in (4) below.

- (4) a. Sharing this, because, well, Autism³³.
- b. Which I totally get because hey, I don't blame you, guys are animals, we're disgusting³⁴.

Section 3.3 will focus on the truth-functionality of *because* as a sentential connective through propositional logic. This analysis will compare the *because* in the *Because, X*

³¹ For a full analysis of these complements and their restrictions, see Chapter 2, Section 2.5.

³² Originally found in a tweet included in Stan Carey's *Wordpress* article, "'Because' has become a preposition, because grammar" (Carey, 2013).

³³ Originally from personnel communication on Facebook. April 8, 2015.

³⁴ Originally from the article, "What It's Like As a Bartender to Watch Your Awkward Tinder Date," written by Anonymous and published on the website, *Munchies*. November 5, 2014.

construction to *because* as it is found in standard uses to determine whether or not it has the same meaning.

3.3 Semantics of *Because*

In this section I will conduct a semantic analysis of *because* by considering its contribution to the truth conditions of the sentence it occurs in. I will also examine the *Because, X* construction and explore the differences between the semantics of the *because* used in this construction and standard *because*. To do this, I will introduce the concept of truth-functional connectives in propositional logic. In providing a detailed analysis of the semantic properties of *because* in this section, a conclusion can be drawn to determine whether *because* in the *Because, X* construction has the same or different meaning.

In order to understand the relationship between the semantics of standard uses of *because* and the *because* in the *Because, X* construction, I will start by analyzing it based on its truth-functionality. One, and only one, truth-value is assigned to every declarative sentence. A sentence that is true has a “true” truth-value, often abbreviated as *t*, and a false sentence has a “false” truth-value, often abbreviated as *f* (Allwood, 1977). The sentences in (5) can be given one, and only one, truth-value, and both can be either “true” or “false” depending on the situation they appear in.

- (5) a. Bill left.
b. Mary left.

A simple sentence, like the ones found in (5) above, can be made into parts of a compound sentence, which are joined using sentential connectives. According to Allwood (1977), a sentential connective is a word or phrase usually belonging to the traditional grammatical category of “conjunction.” Further, each connective combines sentences in

distinct ways, which results in different effects on the compound sentence, as demonstrated in (6).

- (6) a. Bill left and Mary left.
- b. Bill left or Mary left.
- c. Bill left because Mary left.

However, not all connectives are truth-functional, which can affect the outcomes of the truth-functionality of compound sentences. In (6a) and (6b) above, the connectives are truth-functional. This means that if *Bill left* is true and *Mary left* is true, then *Bill left and Mary left* is necessarily true, meaning that the truth of the compound sentence can be determined from the truth value of its simple sentences. Similarly, if both of the simple sentences are false, then the compound sentence is also false.

- (7) S1: Bill left = t S1: Bill left = f
- S2: Mary left = t S2: Bill left = f
- S3: Bill left and Mary left = t S3: Bill left and Mary left = f

Because, as used in (6c), is not truth-functional. In (6c), if *Bill left* is true and if *Mary left* is also true, then *Bill left because Mary left* may or may not be true depending on the circumstances. It is possible that Bill's leaving was not caused by Mary but maybe by something else, like John's arrival. (8) below details the compound sentence, S3, as either true or false, even if the simple sentences, S1 and S2, are both true.

- (8) S1: Bill left
 - S2: Mary left
 - S3: Bill left because Mary left.
- ```
graph TD; A[t] --- B[t]; C[t] --- B; B --- D[f]
```

As represented in (8) above, knowing the truth-value of the parts does not guarantee the truth-value of the compound sentence, S3. In order to analyze S3, additional information on *because* is required. *Because* implies a causal relationship. Causality is a complex concept

that is clearly involved with the meaning of *because*, which implies a cause and effect relationship between propositions.<sup>35</sup> If this causal relationship is taken into consideration then *because* can be analyzed with the simple sentences as sentential variables, *p* and *q*, with the condition that *q* causes *p*. So, if *p* and *q* in (9) are true, and *p* is caused by *q*, then S1 is true.

- (9) p = Bill left  
q = Mary left  
S1: Bill left because Mary left

It does not seem that *because* requires a temporal element; that is, as long as *p* is true, *q* is true, and *p* causes *q*, it is not the case that *q* has to occur temporally before *p* in order for “*p* because *q*” to be true. The sentences in (10), for instance, are all true provided that *p* is still caused by *q*.

- (10) a. Bill left because Mary left.  
b. Bill has left because Mary will leave.  
c. Bill will leave because Mary left.

So far, I have considered semantic properties of standard *because* and established that a causal relationship exists between the sentential elements, *p* and *q*, which *because* links. As long as the *q* causes *p*, “*p* because *q*” will remain true, regardless of different temporal elements.

I will now analyze the *because* in the *Because, X* construction using these same semantic properties. It seems that the same causal relationship exists between *p* and *q* in the *Because, X* construction, and that if *q* causes *p* then “*p* because *q*” is true.

- (11) p = Bill left  
q = Mary  
S1: Bill left because, Mary.

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<sup>35</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the deeper nature of causality.

Furthermore, as (12) shows, temporal elements also do not seem to affect the truth of the *Because, X* construction, as long as “*p* because *q*” is true. In other words, (12c) would be acceptable and reasonably judged as true if Bill’s future leaving is believed to be caused by Mary.

- (12) a. Bill left because, Mary.  
b. Bill has left because, Mary.  
c. Bill will leave because, Mary.

This suggests that the *because* in the *Because, X* construction is acting in the same manner as the *because* in standard sentences. It should be mentioned, in contrast to standard sentences, in the *Because, X* construction the sentential variable *q* may be understood in multiple ways. This is shown in example (13).

- (13) Bill left because Mary left.  
    *q* = Mary left.  
Bill left because, Mary.  
    *q*<sub>1</sub> = Mary left.  
    *q*<sub>2</sub> = Mary was ignoring him.  
    *q*<sub>3</sub> = Mary stayed.  
    *q*<sub>4</sub> = Mary arrived.  
    *q*<sub>*n*</sub> = ...

However, no matter how *q* is interpreted it is still being asserted as the cause of *p*. So, while *because* is appearing in a new construction, it is ultimately still causal in this new form.

So far in this section I have conducted a semantic analysis of *because* by considering its truth value and how the *because* in the *Because, X* construction compares semantically to standard uses of *because*. I have introduced truth-functional connectives in propositional logic. While *because* is not truth-functional, the semantic value of *because* was written as: “*p* because *q*” is true if *p* and *q* are true, and if *q* causes *p*. I then applied this semantic value to the *because* in the *Because, X* construction to determine that it does appear to have the same

meaning as the standard uses of *because*. While this is a new construction, *because* remains causal at its core.

There are some instances where the *Because, X* construction appears without an overt *p*. This non-overt *p* is present in standard uses of *because* as well. Examples of these are found (14).

- (14) a. Are you trying to convince me? Because you should stop.
- b. Are you trying to convince me? Because, stop.

The non-overt *p* in the examples in (14) could prove to be a potential problem in the future for the semantics as I have defined and detailed in this chapter so far. For now, I am considering this a non-overt *p* that if overt might be represented as “*I’m asking because you should stop.*” Alternatively, a speaker might post an image on a social media platform, like Figure 3.1 below of a video that was posted on Facebook with the caption, “because cats.” The non-overt *p* here might be something like “*I’m posting this because, cats.*”

because cats.



Figure 3.1. *Because, X* caption on a Facebook post without an overt *p*.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Originally from personal communication on Facebook. November 7, 2014.

Even though the *because* in this construction appears to be the same one that is used elsewhere in standard ways, it is clear that the *Because, X* construction can convey meanings in discourse that are not always possible for the standard structures using *because*. For instance, it tends to convey feelings of humor, sarcasm, or criticism. Additionally, there are the remaining questions of what can fill the *X* position, how this is determined, and why certain complements do not seem acceptable. These issues of interpretation as well as questions concerning the complements of *because* will be discussed in the next section.

### **3.4 Discourse Analysis of *Because, X***

This section will focus on the discourse effects of the *Because, X* construction. While *because* in this construction is still causal, it is clear that the construction is non-standard, and in being so it can convey meanings that are not available in standard constructions using *because*. To provide a framework to discuss the embedded feelings of humor, sarcasm, and criticism, to name a few, that this construction conveys in discourse, the *Because, X* construction will be analyzed using Grice's Maxims (Grice, 1989).

The interpretations of the construction that are conveyed rely heavily on the complements in the *X* position and what complements can appear here. Much of what was discovered in Chapter 2, Section 2.5, will be summarized here since the complements seem to have restrictions, possibly for semantic reasons. For instance, certain complements may not be relevant enough to stand-alone in a construction that is so brief. In 3.4.2, I will present Grice's Maxims and how these relate to the *Because, X* construction.

**3.4.1 The issue of relevance and complements.** In this section I will review the possible complements that *because* can take in the *Because, X* construction. The restrictions on these complements may be attributable to semantic considerations, so a review of the



complements is necessary for understanding the discussion in Section 3.4.2. For further details on the information presented here, see Chapter 2 Section 2.5.

One important question for the *Because, X* construction is related to what can be in the *X* position. As shown in (3), repeated from Section 3.2, the construction can appear with NPs, VPs, ADJPs, and exclamations.

- (3) a. I can't go to the party because, homework. (NP)  
b. She's tired because, went to the gym. (VP)  
c. Bought the puppy because, adorable. (ADJP)  
d. That feeling you get when you finish your homework and you just want to cry because, yay.<sup>37</sup> (exclamation)

As mentioned in Chapter 2, according to the data analyzed by Tyler Schnoebelen (2014), the construction does appear most frequently with NPs, including mass nouns, pronouns, proper names, plural count nouns, and full determiner phrases (DP). Complex NPs can appear here as well, though the more complex the complement is the less it tends to resemble a typical *Because, X* construction, which seems to prefer shorter complements to allow for more variation in how it can be interpreted. It also seems that the *Because, X* construction can take a singular count noun as a complement, as in (15a), repeated from Chapter 2. (15a) is contrasted with (15b) where there is a clear grammatical difference when *book* does not have a determiner.

- (15) a. I'm going to the library because, book.  
b. \* I'm going to the library to return book.

Example (15b) is ungrammatical because singular count nouns like *book* typically cannot appear without a determiner like *the* or *a*. It is possible that (15a) is acceptable because *book*, in this environment, has a non-overtly stated determiner like *my*, *the*, or

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<sup>37</sup> Originally found in a tweet included in Stan Carey's *Wordpress* article, "'Because' has become a preposition, because grammar" (Carey, 2013).

potentially some other specific book depending on a larger context. This would then mean that *book* in (15a) would belong to a larger DP, making it grammatical and preferred in a way that *book* in (15b) is not. However, this still leaves the question of why the empty determiner is allowed in (15a) and not in (15b).

Beyond NPs, the construction can also appear with VPs. As already mentioned in the syntax discussion, there are limits to VPs, which make some sentences more acceptable than others. For instance, in (16), which uses the target sentence *Bill left because Mary left*, (16a) does not seem to work at all when the VP is selected as the complement, while (16b) seems to provide the desired interpretation.

- (16) Bill left because Mary left.  
a. ? Bill left because, left.  
b. Bill left because, Mary.

Clearly, there are instances in which it is more acceptable to select a VP to fill the *X* position and others where it is not acceptable at all. However, overall, VPs do seem to be able to appear as a complement in this construction even when forced into a state that is clearly a VP and not, for instance, a noun or adjective. (17), originally from Chapter 2, provides examples of this.

- (17) a. She's tired because, went to the gym.  
b. Are you trying to convince me? Because, stop.

ADJPs can also appear as a complement in this construction. Like VPs, ADJPs have restrictions. To summarize what has already been discussed in Chapter 2, it is preferable, but not required, for the adjective filling the *X* position to reference something that has appeared before the *because* when no prior context has been provided, as in *I bought the puppy because, adorable*. Without being given any prior context, the preferred representation of the example sentence in (18) is (18a) because the reasoning that the puppy was purchased

because it was a sunny day is easiest to understand, or certainly less ambiguous than it would be if (18b) were used instead. However, the sentence in (18b) can be interpreted correctly given a larger context (based on prior understanding between the interlocutors, observations, etc.) as the target interpretation. It could additionally have other interpretations like that the puppy has a sunny disposition, that the speaker notoriously buys puppies when it is sunny outside, as well as many other possibilities.

- (18) I bought the puppy because it was a sunny day.  
a. I bought the puppy because, sunny day.  
= the puppy was bought because it was a sunny day.  
b. ? I bought the puppy because, sunny.  
= the puppy has sunny disposition.  
OR = speaker buys puppies when it is sunny and the listener knows this.

Lastly, *Because, X* can appear with exclamations, as in (19). Example (19a) is often cited as an instance of an adverb; however, *honestly* here is not acting as an adverb, but as an interjection (Carey, 2013). Instead it is more similar to an exclamation with much the same understanding as “*Because, [obviously, truly, really].*”

- (19) a. Because, honestly!  
b. That feeling you get when you finish an essay and you just want to cry because, yay.<sup>38</sup>

It is not clear whether or not the *Because, X* construction can appear with adverbs at all. Instances like in (20a) and (20b) are actually larger ADJPs and VPs, respectively.

- (20) a. Ate a lot because, very hungry.  
b. I’m not hungry because, already ate.  
c. ? I’m not hungry because, already.

It is certainly possible that, as the *Because, X* construction is used more and continues to change, adverbs might become acceptable. For the time being it remains unclear whether

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<sup>38</sup> Originally found in a tweet included in Stan Carey’s *Wordpress* article, “‘Because’ has become a preposition, because grammar” (Carey, 2013).

or not they are (apparently) excluded from the *Because, X* construction because they are not allowed syntactically, or semantically. In other words, syntactically it might not be possible for *Because, X* to take an adverb phrase as its complement, and so there are no instances of it. Alternatively, it might be syntactically possible for an adverb to appear in the *Because, X* construction, but it is not felicitous semantically and so there are no instances of it occurring. This will be discussed more in Sections 3.4.2.

It seems that whatever *X* is, it has to be able to convey concisely (with the help of context) the most salient, or currently relevant, part of the proposition that *X* embodies. In the case of the VP example found in (16b), it is not salient enough to simply state *because, left* since *left* alone is insufficient at conveying the heart of the matter. For this reason, using *Mary*, as in (16b), is much more effective since it is able to convey the intended meaning, *Bill left because Mary left*.

Where adjectives are concerned, it seems that without any prior context it is hard to make sense of (18b) if the intended meaning is that the speaker bought the puppy because it was a sunny day and the listener has no prior knowledge of the speaker or the puppy. Once more context is provided, however, it becomes more acceptable. The same issue of semantic pertinence and saliency is detailed in (20c). (20c) may be unacceptable for a syntax-related issue that is, as of yet, undiscovered; however, it could also be a semantic issue. It may be possible syntactically for adverbs to appear as a complement, but it is not semantically relevant enough and so no instances of them occur. It may be that unlike ADJP complements, which can be interpreted given more information, this is not possible for ADVPs. A component to the *Because, X* construction that makes it interesting is that it has the ability to summarize multiple ideas with one succinct complement following *because*. It could be that

perhaps there are just too many options for a listener to narrow down an intended meaning when using ADVP complements, even if more context is provided, because the ADVP alone is not relevant enough.

Similarly, function words, as established in Chapter 2, never appear in the *Because, X* construction. In the examples in (21), repeated from Chapter 2, function words simply do not provide enough semantically relevant information to appear alone in such a succinct construction.

- (21) a. ? We aren't going because, a.  
b. ? It's not a problem because, if.

As discussed in Section 3.3, the *X* complement in the construction is meant to identify a cause. Beyond the notions of relevance and saliency, it would be more difficult to derive a cause in the *Because, X* complement if it were represented by a function word alone than a complement like an NP.

It should be mentioned that in general acceptability judgments on the *Because, X* construction do seem to be in flux since the expression is continuing to evolve. The observations in this section are all based on how the *Because, X* construction is currently being used, which is to say that it does not seem to appear with certain complements and that there are restrictions on others. This is not to say that the construction cannot ever take these complements or restrictions; it is possible for the construction to evolve to include such examples as long as they can be understood. For the time being, adverbs and function words appear to not be acceptable as complements.

Now that the complements of *because* in the *Because, X* construction have been established and discussed, I will discuss Grice's Maxims, which will provide a deeper understanding of how the *Because, X* construction is interpreted when used in conversation.

**3.4.2 Grice's Maxims and *Because, X*.** While it was started in written form on the Internet, the *Because, X* construction has become so popular that it would not be unusual to hear it in verbal conversation. Whether it is written or spoken, there are expectations that interlocutors assume in conversation, and when these expectations are not met, hearers may draw certain inferences. Conversational implicature is when a speaker conveys meaning that does not logically follow from the conventional meaning of the words and sentences that are actually used, and which depends on context and the assumption that the speaker is being conversationally cooperative (Grice, 1989).

Grice identifies several expectations that are assumed in a conversation. He starts by defining the Cooperative Principle, which is the assumption that what the speaker is adding to the conversation is appropriate for the discourse. He then identifies four maxims which are relevant to conversation: Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. Briefly, these are defined as “be informative,” “be truthful,” “be relevant,” and “be concise.” However, a speaker may be willing to violate certain maxims depending on different contexts and situations. For instance, under oath in court a speaker may feel a stronger urge not to violate the maxim of Quality (be truthful), but if asked by a friend if their outfit looks good, violating Quality is not so grievous.

- Quantity:
  1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
  2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
- Quality:
  1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
  2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
- Relation:
  1. Be relevant.
- Manner:
  1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
  2. Avoid ambiguity.
  3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary wordiness).
  4. Be orderly.

(Grice, 1989)

Grice provides example (22) where a maxim is violated in conversation to avoid violating another maxim that the speaker considers more important.

- (22) A. Where does C live?  
B. Somewhere in the South of France.

(Grice, 1989)

In (22), speaker B wants to provide an answer, but she does not know the specific town where C lives. In order to provide a response, B gives an answer that is less informative than is required since A presumably wants a specific town name, thereby violating Quantity. However, this is a violation that can be explained because B more importantly wants to provide a truthful response in order to follow the maxim of Quality. In her response, B cooperates in the conversation to the extent that she can and at the same time implicates that she does not know which town C lives in.

By not adhering to certain maxims, a speaker is able to achieve different intentions in communication. Since *Because, X* is non-standard, it is likely to convey additional meaning beyond its conventional content, and this sets *Because, X* apart from standard alternatives using *because*. The additional conveyed meaning is dependent on context. For instance, it has been observed that the *Because, X* construction is perceived to convey humor, criticism, or sarcasm (among other things). Analyzing the *Because, X* construction using these maxims can provide a deeper explanation on how this construction is understood and interpreted. Where this construction is concerned, it seems that certain maxims are followed while others are violated. For instance, it seems to be a requirement that Manner be violated; if the *X* is not markedly brief, then the utterance does not resemble the *Because, X* construction. This can also be understood as a violation of Quantity since, in being so brief, the construction is under-informative. Since it is so brief, whatever is occupying the *X* position must be pertinent to the conversation, and if it is not, then it results in an uninterpretable utterance. The

construction is a convenient way to avoid violating Quality; in being so brief the speaker can provide an ambiguous response to avoid saying something false on a topic they may not know much about.

First, I will analyze the construction according to the maxim of Manner. Manner states that a speaker should be concise without obscuring the intention of the utterance. The *Because, X* construction is certainly brief; however, it seems to push this boundary too far, and in being too brief it becomes ambiguous or underspecified, and speakers may even want to have these multiple interpretations as layers in what they are saying. In (23) below, both (23a) and (23b) are versions of the target sentence in the *Because, X* construction, but (23b) is more brief, which allows more possible interpretations.

- (23) I asked because it was a question of morals.  
a. I asked because, question of morals.  
b. I asked because, morals.

This ambiguity is what makes the construction unique from standard uses of *because*. However, the fact remains that the construction obscures what is being said in its brevity, which might be a purposeful effect by the speaker. In fact, this ambiguity is normally the main complaint newcomers to the construction have or is often cited as the reason someone does not use the construction themselves. So, in using the *Because, X* construction, a speaker is being overly-brief, violating Manner, to create ambiguity and allow for more interpretations. This could be a desirable effect for the speaker since, in being so brief, the construction can impart various meanings into the utterance. Depending on the context, a *Because, X* utterance, since it lacks specificity, can convey that the *X* is so obvious it is not necessary to explain it explicitly, or that the speaker does not believe that it is worth the effort to explain *X* in detail, or even that the speaker wishes to establish a sense of shared



perspective with the listener, and since the listener understands exactly where the conversation is going, a fully detailed *X* is not necessary.

Next, the *Because, X* construction also violates Quantity since it is arguably under-informative, especially when compared to sentences using *because* in a standard way. The structure is meant to be brief. As already discussed above, a property of the construction is that the utterance be as concise as possible. In providing no more information than is perceived to be required, the construction allows for a greater number of possible interpretations, though there might be an intended one. The construction could be considered under-informative in a similar way to the conversation between speaker A and B in (24) below.

- (24) A. Can you pass the salt?  
B. Yes.

Speaker B is cooperating in the conversation and provides a terse response to A's question without necessarily completing the intended action of passing the salt. B's response could be viewed on a sliding range of humorous to rude depending on his relationship with A and the context of the conversation. For people who have not encountered the *Because, X* construction before, they tend to view the construction as under-informative or evasive. Certainly, there are subtle differences and a fine line separating "pithy" and "impolite," and possibly both of these interpretations are meant at once, as they might be in the examples in (25).

- (25) a. Would a perfume ban violate the First Amendment? Is that expression? Because want.<sup>39</sup>  
b. And though she hoped he understood the sacrifice she was making by letting her education slide, she knew he didn't. Because men.<sup>40</sup>

Importantly, the violation of Quantity seems to allow these utterances more opportunities for interpretations beyond the spoken content. Speaker B's response in (24) could be viewed as humorous or sarcastic in the same way that the *Because, X* construction in (25) could be. The violation of Quantity has the resulting implicature that saying as little as possible allows for more of these meanings to be conveyed with the utterance, and how the nuances are interpreted are dependent upon the interlocutors and context.

Next, due to the construction's brevity, whatever is occupying the *X* position must be pertinent to the content before *because*, making Relation a requirement. In fact, if it is not appropriately related, either because of the context in the main proposition before *because* or from prior understanding between the interlocutors, then the interpretation becomes lost or confused. This might best be observed with the example (18) from Section 3.4.1, repeated here. If the target interpretation is that the puppy was bought because it was a sunny day, then the clearest way to state this is (18a). If (18b) is used, and the listener has more interpretations of the utterance available because it is more ambiguous, though, with the proper context, the listener might arrive at the desired interpretation. Assuming that the speaker is following the Cooperating Principle and adding appropriately to the discourse, the listener could understand (18b) as the puppy having a nice disposition, or that the speaker

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<sup>39</sup> Originally found in a tweet included in Stan Carey's *Wordpress* article, "'Because' has become a preposition, because grammar" (Carey, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Originally found in the *Buzzfeed* article, "If Hermione Were the Main Character in 'Harry Potter'" by Daniel Dalton. January 16, 2015.

must buy things when it is sunny outside, without necessarily arriving at the desired interpretation that the speaker bought the puppy because it was a sunny day.

- (18) I bought the puppy because it was a sunny day.
- a. I bought the puppy because, sunny day.  
= the puppy was bought because it was a sunny day.
  - b. ? I bought the puppy because, sunny.  
= the puppy has sunny disposition.
- OR = speaker buys puppies when it is sunny and the listener knows this.

Similarly, this applies to (26), originally found in Chapter 2. It seems that the most appropriate information following *because* is *morals*, since the speaker is trying to communicate that moral issues were why they asked something. Forming the *Because, X* construction using *question* does not, then, lead to the targeted interpretation because the required information to communicate the concept of moral issues is not provided; *morals* has to be at least partially communicated to arrive at the desired interpretation. For this reason, either (26b) or (26c) are the preferred responses.

- (26) I asked because it was a question of morals.
- a. ? I asked because, question.
  - b. I asked because, question of morals.
  - c. I asked because, morals.

The *X* in the construction should provide the most pertinent information, and no more, if it can be helped. The less there is occupying the *X* position, the more possible interpretations there are concerning both the content that is conveyed as well as the feelings behind it. The more the complement is elaborated, the more the construction starts to resemble standard uses of *because* and fewer interpretations are available. Additionally, it starts to lose the jocular feel that the construction imbues. In (27) some possible ways of expressing the target sentence in the *Because, X* construction are compared. (27b) is the more typical *Because, X* response, while (27a) seems to lose a bit of this component by being more detailed.

- (27) I stayed up all night because of interesting people on the Internet.
- a. I stayed up all night because, interesting people on the Internet.
  - b. I stayed up all night because, interesting people.
  - c. I stayed up all night because, Internet.

The last maxim to analyze with respect to the *Because, X* construction is Quality.

Quality is the maxim that states that a speaker should not say what they believe to be false and should not say something for which they lack adequate evidence. As already mentioned elsewhere, the construction has the ability to convey things like humor, criticism, or sarcasm. The humor might come more from what is not being said based off of the presumed shared experience between the interlocutors. This tends to create either a feeling of togetherness, or that providing an explanation is not worth the effort because of this shared perspective. Additionally, the *Because, X* construction can be useful in avoiding violating the maxim of Quality. The construction creates an environment for the speaker to provide an answer on a topic while saying very little on a subject they may not know much about. This allows the speaker to contribute to a conversation while avoiding possibly saying something false. This can be seen in (28) below. By explaining global warming by simply saying *because, science*, the speaker avoids discussing technical evidence while providing the idea that there is scientific evidence behind their claim. At the same time, the speaker still invokes humor by avoiding a potentially complicated explanation in using just one word.

- (28) Of course evolution is true because, science.<sup>41</sup>

*Because, X* is a non-canonical structure, and in being so it imparts different qualities into the utterance that would not be possible in canonical structures. In choosing to use a *Because, X* sentence over a standard *because* sentence, a speaker is deliberately choosing to

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<sup>41</sup> Originally found in Stan Carey's *Wordpress* article, "'Because' has become a preposition, because grammar" (Carey, 2013).

deviate from standard perceptions of conversations; alternative expressions opposing the expectations of an appropriate utterance lead to inferences beyond the literal context. By using this construction, a speaker is being concise and brief at the risk of being under-informative and unclear. Since there are other options available to a speaker, and assuming the speaker is being cooperative, choosing a *Because, X* response to a question serves other purposes. Responding in a way that is brief and seemingly under-informative could be due to the speaker's impression that an explanation is not needed, that a summation of thought is all that is necessary because there is a shared perceived perspective between the interlocutors. This shared perspective imparts a sense of mutual understanding or layers of humor, sarcasm, or criticism depending on the context. To answer, "*Why are you on a low sodium diet?*" with "*I'm on a low sodium diet because, doctors*" implies that the reasoning is a rote talking point, a "yadda, yadda" response, or "you know what I mean."

This section has provided a detailed analysis of the *Because, X* construction in conversation. The analysis began by revisiting the complements that seem to be accepted in the *Because, X* construction. I suggested that certain *X* complements may be dispreferred because they are insufficient at getting to the heart of what is being discussed. Since *because* in the *Because, X* construction is still causal, the complements still need to be able to identify a cause. For this reason, a function word as a complement is not an effective substitute for a detailed explanation, while property denoting complements are more sufficient. Section 3.4.2 introduce Grice's Maxims and explained that by violating certain maxims, the *Because, X* construction is able to convey certain contextual nuances and feelings based on a perception of a shared perspective between the interlocutors, which tends to indicate either togetherness or that a potentially complicated explanation is not worth the effort. Additionally, in being so

brief and non-canonical, certain maxims are flouted which allows the utterance to convey meaning that would not be possible for standard structures. The exact nature of the conveyed meaning is dependent on the larger conversational context, but include humor, sarcasm, and criticism.

Section 3.5 introduces research that was conducted on participants' interpretations of 10 sentences using the *Because, X* construction. Participants were able to choose from a list which sentiments they felt were conveyed by the construction. These sentiments have been suggested by various commenters on the construction and were *humor, wit, criticism, sarcasm, summation of thought, rationale, and dismissiveness*. This study was conducted to determine how the construction is most commonly interpreted and whether or not this interpretation changes according to the context the construction it is used in. I will provide the research methodology first, followed by the results and data discussion, before ending with the conclusions from the research.

### **3.5 Experimental Research on *Because, X***

This research was designed to determine whether or not the *Because, X* construction conveys different interpretations depending on the context it is used in. The construction has been claimed in different online articles by several authors to convey many things. Whitman (2013) claimed it was humorous in a similar way to Jack Handey's "because, hey" jokes on *SNL* and mentioned a blogger, David Weinberger, who stated that the construction used in the example, "We invaded Iraq because freedom," had a mocking edge. It has been described as a "tersely worded rationale" (Solomon, 2014) but also as a pithy way to sum up a situation (Love, 2013). Garber (2013) notes it is sometimes used as an explanation that maximizes efficiency and irony, and sometimes to criticize and sensationalize. McCulloch (2012) says it

conveys a dismissive sentiment like, “I’m so busy being totally absorbed by X that I don’t need to explain further, and you should know about this because it’s a completely valid incredibly important thing to be doing,” while Liberman (2012) observes that the implication of the construction is that the “referenced line of reasoning is weak.” Carey (2013) touches on this as well explaining that no elaboration of *X* is needed because the speaker considers the causal factor to be obvious, or that they are giddy, distracted, or wanting to save time.

The research conducted in this chapter asked participants to judge what the *Because, X* construction conveys based on these claims. The hypothesized meanings of the construction analyzed in this chapter are as follows: *humor, wit, criticism, sarcasm, summation of thought, rationale, and dismissiveness*. In the following sections I describe the survey I used to gather data on the *Because, X* construction from participants found on social media. I will then discuss the results from the data gathered and my interpretation of the data.

**3.5.1 Research methodology.** The survey was created using Google Forms and distributed online using social media. Anyone was welcome to participate in the research, and could leave the study at any time. The survey was designed with approval from the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee and followed the study protocol.

The survey was divided into three sections with a total of 20 questions. The first section of the survey focused on background information asking participants to identify their age, gender, first language spoken, and average amount of time spent daily on social media. This was followed by Section 2, which was comprised of 10 sentences requiring participant judgments on what the construction was conveying. The last section was designed to gather

data on the participants' familiarity with the *Because, X* construction and consisted of six questions. The survey took about 15 minutes to complete.

Section 2 of the survey involved the participants assessing 10 sentences using the *Because, X* construction and judging each sentence based on eight options of what they felt the sentence was conveying. The options were *humor, wit, summation of thought, criticism, sarcasm, rationale, dismissiveness, and formality*. The first seven of these options have all been claimed to be conveyed by the *Because, X* construction by various authors. The last option, *formality*, was included as a control since the construction has widely been considered an informal one and has never been claimed to be acceptable in formal situations; I expected this option to be chosen least often, if at all. The sentences, as well as the order of the eight options per sentence, were shuffled randomly for each participant. Since the construction has been claimed to convey multiple meanings at once, participants were told to choose at least one, and up to three, of the options per sentence. The 10 sentences in this section are listed below in (29).



- (29)
1. Studying because, school.<sup>42</sup>
  2. List of hot chocolate recipes because, winter.<sup>43</sup>
  3. Don't even try working from home with cats because, cats.<sup>44</sup>
  4. Heavily altered Miss World Philippines photos are causing a stir because, Photoshop.<sup>45</sup>
  5. DOW closes at record high for 35th time this year because, Obama.<sup>46</sup>
  6. Of course evolution is true because, science.<sup>47</sup>
  7. There is no precise male equivalent of 'feminist' because, patriarchy.<sup>48</sup>
  8. Set an alarm for 8 so I could get up and be productive early. Reset an alarm for 9:30 because, sleep.<sup>49</sup>
  9. That feeling you get when you finish an essay and you just want to cry because, yay.<sup>50</sup>
  10. Here's my advice again --- advice I often give--- because, sensible.<sup>51</sup>

In Section 3.4.2, I presented Grice's Maxims and how these pertain to the *Because, X* construction. I concluded this section suggesting that the construction presumes a shared perspective between the interlocutors, which imparts layers of humor, sarcasm, or criticism depending on the content being discussed. Since the construction imparts a sense of a shared perspective or a sense of not wanting to provide a long explanation, I hypothesized that participants would consider the construction one that, in general, is acting as a summation of thought or highlighting the rationale so that a more detailed explanation is not needed.

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<sup>42</sup> Adapted from a tweet originally found in Stan Carey's *Wordpress* article, "'Because' has become a preposition, because grammar" (Carey, 2013).

<sup>43</sup> Adapted from the *Bustle* article, "9 Classic Hot Chocolate Recipes Paired with Booze, Because Winter," written by Marion Bernstein (2014).

<sup>44</sup> Example originally found in the *Huffington Post* from the article, "Don't even try working from home with cats because, cats," written by Avery Stone (2014).

<sup>45</sup> Example originally found in the the *Huffinton Post* from the article, "Heavily altered Miss World Philippines photos are causing a stir because, Photoshop," written by Jamie Feldman (2014).

<sup>46</sup> Originally found in a tweet included in Stan Carey's *Wordpress* article, "'Because' has become a preposition, because grammar" (Carey, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> Originally found in Stan Carey's *Wordpress* article, "'Because' has become a preposition, because grammar" (Carey, 2013).

<sup>48</sup> Originally found in a tweet included in Stan Carey's *Wordpress* article, "'Because' has become a preposition, because grammar" (Carey, 2013).

<sup>49</sup> Originally found in Tyler Schnoebelen's *Ibidon* article, "Innovating because innovation" (Schnoebelen, 2014).

<sup>50</sup> Originally found in a tweet included in Stan Carey's *Wordpress* article, "'Because' has become a preposition, because grammar" (Carey, 2013).

<sup>51</sup> Originally found in a comment thread by user Bob Ladd (2014) on Mark Liberman's *Language Log* post, "ADS WOTY: 'Because'" (2014).

However, I hypothesized that when the construction is used in contexts that are more political and controversial the participants would consider it to be conveying more *sarcasm*, *criticism*, or *dismissiveness*. I expect this because while the construction seems to impart humor in being so brief and under-informative, I expect the humor to be considered more negative in controversial contexts. Conversely, in contexts with less serious content I expect participants to consider the construction to be wittier or funnier.

- Hypothesis 1: The *Because, X* construction will be judged most frequently as a summation of thought, or rationale.
- Hypothesis 2: When used in more controversial and political contexts, the *Because, X* construction will be judged as conveying more *sarcasm*, *criticism*, or *dismissiveness*.
- Hypothesis 3: When used in less controversial and light-hearted contexts, the *Because, X* construction will be judged as conveying more *humor* and *wit*.

Section 3 of the survey was designed to gather information on the participants' familiarity with the *Because, X* construction. Participants were first asked whether or not they had seen or heard the *Because, X* construction. If they responded that they had seen or heard the construction, then they were asked the follow-up question of where they had seen or heard it. They were provided with the list of environments found in (31) and asked to check all of the environments they had seen or heard it used in. Next, participants were asked if they use the construction themselves. If they answered that they use it, then they were asked the same follow-up question of where they have used it, and were provided with the same list of environments. If participants indicated that they do not use the construction, they were asked if they would ever consider using the construction. They were then directed to a short answer question to answer why they would or why they would not consider using the construction. The list of questions about the participants' familiarity are found below in (30).

- (30)
1. Have you ever seen/heard the *Because, X* construction?
    - a. If answer is *yes*: Where have you seen/heard the *Because, X* construction?
      - i. Participant moves on to Question 2
    - b. If answer is *no*: participant moves on to Question 2
  2. Do you use the *Because, X* construction yourself?
    - a. If answer is *yes*: Where have you used the *Because, X* construction?
      - i. Participant has finished with the survey and is routed out of the study.
    - b. If answer is *no*: participant moves on to Question 3
  3. Would you ever consider using the *Because, X* construction yourself?
  4. Why would you or why would you not use the construction?

If the participants had seen or heard the construction or use the construction themselves, they were directed to the environment list found in (31) and were asked to select in which environments<sup>52</sup> they had encountered or used the construction.

- (31) Environments for 1a and 2a in (30):
- a. Facebook
  - b. Twitter
  - c. Conversations with friends
  - d. Blogs
  - e. Online newspaper articles
  - f. Emails
  - g. Other

**3.5.2 Research results and discussion.** The survey was posted online for a week and was taken by 166 participants at which point it was taken offline. Of the 166 participants, 16 indicated that English was not their first language. Only the 150 participants who identified English as their first language were analyzed in the data. I chose to analyze the data this way because the *Because, X* construction is based on a strong understanding of nuances in English. To ensure the most accurate answers concerning this, the responses from any possible non-native speakers were not considered. Of these 150 participants, 102 identified as female and 48 as male, and they ranged in age from 14 to 80 years old.

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<sup>52</sup> A general environment like “the web” or “the Internet” was avoided to gather specific information on the environments where the *Because, X* construction is used or seen/heard.

**3.5.2.1 Participant familiarity with the Because, X construction.** Section 3 of the survey focused on participants' familiarity with the *Because, X* construction. They were asked three questions on whether or not they have seen the construction, if they use the construction, and if not then whether or not they would ever consider using it. Additionally, if they had seen the construction they were asked where they had seen it, and if they indicated that they use the construction, they were asked where they use it. These questions on familiarity can be found in (30) above. From these questions, participants were separated into five familiarity cohorts identified in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1

*The Familiarity and Acceptability Cohorts and Definitions.*

| Familiarity | Definition                                                                                                     |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Yes-Yes     | The participant has seen the construction and uses the construction.                                           |
| Yes-No-Yes  | The participant has seen the construction, does not use the construction, but would consider using it.         |
| No-No-Yes   | The participant has not seen the construction, does not use the construction, but would consider using it.     |
| Yes-No-No   | The participant has seen the construction, does not use the construction, and would not consider using it.     |
| No-No-No    | The participant has not seen the construction, does not use the construction, and would not consider using it. |

First, I will analyze the participants based on their familiarity with the *Because, X* construction. The data from this analysis is provided in Table 3.2, below. Overall, 51.3% of the participants indicated that they do use the construction or would consider using it (Yes-Yes, Yes-No-Yes, and No-No-Yes groups), compared to 48.6% who do not use it and would not consider using it (Yes-No-No and No-No-No groups). Overall, 70.0% of the participants had seen or heard the construction being used before their involvement in the study.

Table 3.2

*Percentage of Participant Familiarity and Acceptance of the Because, X Construction by Gender.*

| Gender  | Yes-Yes | Yes-No-Yes | No-No-Yes | Yes-No-No | No-No-No | Total |
|---------|---------|------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-------|
| Female  | 34.3%   | 15.7%      | 4.9%      | 24.5%     | 20.6%    | 68.0% |
| Male    | 16.7%   | 22.9%      | 4.2%      | 20.8%     | 35.4%    | 32.0% |
| Overall | 28.7%   | 18.0%      | 4.7%      | 23.3%     | 25.3%    |       |

As also detailed in Table 3.2, 68.0% of the 150 participants were female and 32.0% were male. Comparing the genders, the female participants were more accepting of the construction with 54.9% of these participants indicating that they do use the construction or would consider using it. Of the male participants, 43.7% responded that they do use the construction or would consider using it. Female participants were also more familiar with the construction with 75.5% responding that they had seen or heard the construction being used before. In comparison, 60.4% of the male participants had seen or heard the construction being used before. So, women are leading this linguistic trend, which is unsurprising since, sociolinguistically, women tend to incorporate linguistic change faster than men (Van Herk, 2012).

Participant familiarity with the *Because, X* construction was also analyzed according to how much time the participants indicated they spend on social media daily. In general, the participants in the lowest time cohort of 0–2 hours a day were less likely to have seen or heard the construction being used before, as well as less likely to use it themselves. The more time the participant indicated that they spend online, the more likely they were to not only have seen or heard the construction before, but to also use it themselves.

Table 3.3

*Percentage of Participant Familiarity and Acceptance of the Because, X Construction Based on the Number of Hours Spent Online.*

| Hours      | Yes-Yes | Yes-No-Yes | No-No-Yes | Yes-No-No | No-No-No |
|------------|---------|------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| 0-2 hours  | 24.4%   | 19.5%      | 2.4%      | 23.2%     | 30.5%    |
| 3-5 hours  | 30.9%   | 14.5%      | 9.1%      | 21.8%     | 23.6%    |
| 6-8 hours  | 40.0%   | 20.0%      | 0.0%      | 40.0%     | 0.0%     |
| 9-11 hours | 66.7%   | 33.3%      | 0.0%      | 0.0%      | 0.0%     |
| Overall    | 28.7%   | 18.0%      | 4.7%      | 23.3%     | 25.3%    |

Lastly, participant familiarity was analyzed according to age. The participants in the study ranged in age from 14–80 and were separated into six age cohorts, shown below in Table 3.4. The largest cohort was 21- to 30-years-old with 59.3% of the participants in this group. This cohort was also the most accepting of the *Because, X* construction with 57.3%, indicating that they do or would use it themselves. The cohort most familiar with the construction was the 31- to 40-year-olds with 83.3% having seen or heard it before. In general, the older the participant was the less likely they were familiar with and accepting of the construction. This is not surprising as younger speakers tend to adopt non-standard features into their language more than older speakers (Van Herk, 2012).

Table 3.4

*Percentage of Participant Familiarity and Acceptance of the Because, X Construction Based on Age.*

| Age         | Yes-Yes | Yes-No-Yes | No-No-Yes | Yes-No-No | No-No-No | Total |
|-------------|---------|------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-------|
| 11-20 years | 27.8%   | 5.6%       | 5.6%      | 27.8%     | 33.3%    | 12.0% |
| 21-30 years | 37.1%   | 18.0%      | 2.2%      | 23.6%     | 19.1%    | 59.3% |
| 31-40 years | 25.0%   | 16.7%      | 8.3%      | 41.7%     | 8.3%     | 8.0%  |
| 41-50 years | 8.3%    | 41.7%      | 0.0%      | 8.3%      | 41.7%    | 8.0%  |
| 51-60 years | 10.0%   | 20.0%      | 10.0%     | 30.0%     | 30.0%    | 6.7%  |
| 61+ years   | 0.0%    | 11.1%      | 22.2%     | 0.0%      | 66.7%    | 6.0%  |
| Overall     | 28.7%   | 18.0%      | 4.7%      | 23.3%     | 25.3%    |       |

If the participants responded that they have seen or heard the construction before, they were asked to select where they have encountered it from a provided list of environments. The full list of environments that were provided can be found in (31) from Section 3.5.1. The environment that was chosen the most was Facebook (28.8%), followed by conversations with friends (23.2%), blogs (16.8%), and Twitter (15.4%). The 43 participants who responded they already use the construction were asked in which environments they use it. The most common environments these participants indicated they use the *Because, X* construction in were conversations with friends (41.2%), followed by Facebook (20.6%), and online newspaper articles (16.5%).

The participants were also asked why they would or would not consider using the construction, if they do not already use it. Many responses in the Yes-No-Yes cohort were similar in that the participants in this group find the construction useful and funny, but that they are not quite comfortable using it themselves or have not incorporated into their own speech just yet. The participants in the No-No-Yes cohort enjoyed the construction, finding it

funny and useful, and had just never heard of it before. The responses in the Yes-No-No and No-No-No cohorts expressed the same sentiments against using it. Participants in these cohorts indicated that they found the construction to be failed attempts at humor and thought it was lazy. They often considered the construction to be slang and “fad” language that was ungrammatical and they did not want to use the construction for those reasons.

**3.5.2.2 Participant judgments of the Because, X construction.** Next, the data will be analyzed according to the questions in Section 1 and the list of hypothesized meanings the *Because, X* construction is said to convey. Participants were asked to judge 10 sentences, located in (29) in 3.5.1, according to the eight expressive meanings also listed in 3.5.1. Participants could choose at least one and up to three of the options per question since the construction has been claimed to convey multiple meanings at once.

In total, over the 10 sentences in this section, the participants chose 2,854 responses. Of these, *humor* was chosen the most frequently at 22.4%. The list of how often each option was chosen is detailed in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5

*The Percentage Each Response Was Chosen over All of the Questions in the Survey, from Highest to Lowest.*

|                      |       |
|----------------------|-------|
| Humor                | 22.4% |
| Rationale            | 19.7% |
| Summation of thought | 17.8% |
| Wit                  | 12.4% |
| Sarcasm              | 11.6% |
| Criticism            | 7.4%  |
| Dismissiveness       | 5.8%  |
| Formality            | 2.9%  |

Hypothesis 1: The *Because, X* construction will be judged more frequently as a summation of thought or highlighting the rationale.



I had originally hypothesized (Hypothesis 1, repeated above) that the *Because, X* construction would be considered by participants to, in general, act as terse rationale or a summation of thought. *Rationale* and *summation of thought* were chosen, combined, at 37.5%, which is how participants most frequently interpreted the construction. This supports Hypothesis 1; however, *humor* alone was chosen most frequently at 22.4%. This means that according to the sentences used in this study, the participants considered the construction to generally convey *rationale* or *summation of thought*, but considered it to most often convey *humor*.

Next, each conveyed feeling was analyzed per sentence. Table 3.6 below indicates the percentage each nuance was chosen for each sentence. The percentages in bold indicate which sentence each nuance was chosen most frequently. The sentence numbers in this table coincide with the sentence numbers found in (31).

Table 3.6

*The Percentages Each Nuance Was Chosen out of the Total Number of Times It Was Selected; Percentages in Bold Indicate When It Was Chosen the Most.*

|    | Humor        | Wit          | Criticism    | Summation of thought | Rationale    | Sarcasm      | Dismissiveness | Formality    |
|----|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|
| 1  | 5.6%         | 5.6%         | 4.7%         | <b>14.2%</b>         | 13.0%        | 10.3%        | 9.6%           | 15.7%        |
| 2  | 9.9%         | 10.4%        | 1.9%         | 11.0%                | <b>14.2%</b> | 0.0%         | 3.0%           | 14.5%        |
| 3  | <b>19.6%</b> | <b>17.2%</b> | 2.8%         | 5.9%                 | 5.5%         | 12.1%        | 7.8%           | 2.4%         |
| 4  | 5.6%         | 5.9%         | 24.1%        | 10.5%                | 10.9%        | 8.2%         | 8.4%           | 10.8%        |
| 5  | 7.7%         | 8.7%         | 17.5%        | 9.5%                 | 9.4%         | <b>16.4%</b> | 7.2%           | 9.6%         |
| 6  | 7.4%         | 10.7%        | 11.3%        | 9.5%                 | 13.5%        | 11.8%        | <b>17.5%</b>   | <b>16.9%</b> |
| 7  | 5.3%         | 9.3%         | <b>27.4%</b> | 9.1%                 | 9.6%         | <b>16.4%</b> | <b>17.5%</b>   | 7.2%         |
| 8  | 16.1%        | 13.2%        | 0.9%         | 6.9%                 | 10.7%        | 6.4%         | 9.0%           | 3.6%         |
| 9  | 16.6%        | 10.4%        | 0.9%         | <b>14.2%</b>         | 3.2%         | 7.9%         | 6.0%           | 6.0%         |
| 10 | 6.3%         | 8.5%         | 8.5%         | 9.3%                 | 10.0%        | 10.6%        | 13.9%          | 13.3%        |

Hypothesis 2: When used in more controversial and political contexts, the *Because, X* construction will be judged as conveying more sarcasm, criticism, or dismissiveness.

Hypothesis 3: When used in less controversial and light-hearted contexts, the *Because, X* construction will be judged as conveying more humor and wit.

Table 3.6 helps shed light on Hypotheses 2 and 3, repeated above. In these I had hypothesized that when a sentence had less controversial content and was more light-hearted it would be judged as conveying more humor and wit, and conversely, when the sentence is more controversial in content, it would be judged as conveying more sarcasm, criticism, or come off as being dismissive. Both *humor* and *wit* were found most frequently in Sentence 3, *Don't even try working from home with cats because, cats*, a sentence that is arguably more lighthearted in nature, especially compared to sentences like 5 and 7. For these more political and controversial sentences, *sarcasm*, *criticism*, and *dismissiveness* were chosen most frequently; *sarcasm* for Sentences 5 and 7, *criticism* for Sentence 7, and *dismissiveness* for Sentences 6 and 7.

Lastly, I will analyze the data according to what was chosen in each sentence. This data is found in Table 3.7 below. The sentences with more light-hearted content like 3, 8, and 9 were all judged to be conveying *humor* the most out of all the responses for those sentences. In contrast, sentences like 5 and 7, which have more controversial, political, and opinionated content, were judged as conveying more *criticism* and *sarcasm*. While out of all of the responses for all 10 sentences, *humor* was chosen the most (detailed in Table 3.5 above), 5 sentences were individually considered to convey *rationale* the most, as shown in Table 3.7. These sentences were 1, 2, 4, 6, and 10. So, while a sentence using the *Because, X* construction may likely be judged as conveying *rationale*, as a whole the construction is considered to convey *humor*.

Table 3.7

*The Percentages Each Nuance Was Chosen out of the Total Responses for Each Sentence.*

|                | 1                | 2                | 3                | 4                | 5                | 6                | 7                | 8                | 9                | 10               |
|----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Humor          | 13.1<br>%        | 24.5<br>%        | <b>40.6</b><br>% | 13.2<br>%        | 16.8<br>%        | 14.9<br>%        | 10.8<br>%        | <b>36.0</b><br>% | <b>38.4</b><br>% | 15.4<br>%        |
| Wit            | 7.3%             | 14.4<br>%        | 19.8<br>%        | 7.7%             | 10.6<br>%        | 12.1<br>%        | 10.5<br>%        | 16.4<br>%        | 13.4<br>%        | 11.5<br>%        |
| Criticism      | 3.6%             | 1.6%             | 1.9%             | 18.8<br>%        | 12.7<br>%        | 7.6%             | <b>18.5</b><br>% | 0.7%             | 0.7%             | 6.9%             |
| Sum of thought | 26.3<br>%        | 21.8<br>%        | 9.7%             | 19.5<br>%        | 16.4<br>%        | 15.2<br>%        | 14.6<br>%        | 12.2<br>%        | 26.1<br>%        | 18.1<br>%        |
| Rationale      | <b>26.6</b><br>% | <b>31.1</b><br>% | 10.1<br>%        | <b>22.4</b><br>% | 18.2<br>%        | <b>24.1</b><br>% | 17.2<br>%        | 21.0<br>%        | 6.5%             | <b>21.5</b><br>% |
| Sarcasm        | 12.4<br>%        | 0.0%             | 13.0<br>%        | 9.9%             | <b>18.5</b><br>% | 12.4<br>%        | 17.2<br>%        | 7.3%             | 9.4%             | 13.5<br>%        |
| Dismissiveness | 5.8%             | 1.9%             | 4.2%             | 5.1%             | 4.1%             | 9.2%             | 9.2%             | 5.2%             | 3.6%             | 8.8%             |
| Formality      | 4.7%             | 4.7%             | 0.6%             | 3.3%             | 2.7%             | 4.4%             | 1.9%             | 1.0%             | 1.8%             | 4.2%             |

**3.5.3 Research conclusions.** According to the background information gathered on the participants, the female participants were more likely than the male ones to be familiar with and accepting of the *Because, X* construction. Overall, the majority of the participants were familiar with the construction with 70.0% indicating that they had seen or heard of it before their involvement in the study. Additionally, the majority of the participants at 53.0% indicated that they do use the construction or would consider used it, compared to 48.6% who indicated that they do not use it and would not consider using it. In terms of the time spent online, the more time a participant indicated that they spent online, the more likely they had seen the construction and the more likely they were to use the construction, or consider using it. This is not surprising since the construction was popularized by the Internet, and is most frequently seen or heard by the participants on Facebook.

When participant familiarity and acceptability was analyzed according to age, the 21- to 30-year-old cohort was most accepting of the construction with 57.3% indicating that they already use the construction, or would consider using it. The age cohort that was the most familiar with the construction was the 31- to 40-year-olds with 83.3% of them having seen or heard it before. The data suggests that, in general, the older the speaker is, the less likely they will be familiar with and accepting of the *Because, X* construction. This follows typical trends in language since it is a more common linguistically for younger generations to incorporate new language trends into their speech.

My hypotheses considering the participant judgments of the suggested feelings that are claimed to be conveyed by the construction were largely proven correct. My first hypothesis stated that in general the construction would be judged primarily as a *summation of thought* or highlighting the rationale for the main proposition before *because*. This was true according to the percentages in Table 3.6 calculated based on the number of times each feeling was chosen out of the number of total responses for each sentence. In this table, 5 of the 10 sentences had chosen *rationale* at the highest frequency. However, out of the total number of responses for all of the sentences shown in Table 3.4, *humor* was chosen the most at 22.4%, followed by *rationale* and *summation of thought*. So, while in general the construction, as it appeared in this study, was judged to be highlighting the rationale of the propositions before *because*, overall the construction was considered to be humorous.

My second hypothesis stated that the construction, when used in contexts that were more political and controversial, would be considered to be conveying more *sarcasm*, *criticism*, or *dismissiveness* than less controversial contexts. Conversely, my third hypothesis stated that the construction, when used in less controversial contexts would be judged more

as conveying *humor* or *wit*. Both of these hypotheses were proven to be true as the sentences with more controversial content were considered by the participants to be conveying *criticism*, *sarcasm*, and, to a lesser degree, *dismissiveness*. On the other hand, the sentences with less controversial and more light-hearted content were considered to be conveying more *humor* and *wit*.

### **3.6 Conclusion and Future Research**

In articles and on blogs, the *Because, X* construction has been discussed at length for what it means, how it is constructed, and what can appear as a complement in the *X* position. The work in this chapter has been an exploration into the semantics behind this new construction in an attempt to understand the meaning behind the construction as well as the restrictions placed on the complements it can take. A semantic analysis on the truth-conditional meaning of *because* using propositional logic was conducted in Section 3.3. This section concluded that while the *because* used in standard ways is a connective between two propositions and the *because* in the *Because, X* construction is a connective between a proposition and a complement, *because* in both environments appears to be acting in the same way. Mainly, at its core *because*, even in the *Because, X* construction, remains a connective indicating a causal relationship.

Section 3.4 discussed on how the construction is interpreted and the restrictions placed on the complements found in the *X* position. To do this, the construction was analyzed using Grice's Maxims. The section provided an explanation for how the meanings and interpretations, like, humor, sarcasm, criticism, of the *Because, X* construction are possible. Through describing this theory, it also provided possible explanations on why only certain complements are acceptable in this construction. This section ended with the

conclusion that the construction is so brief that the information being conveyed in the *X* position must be maximally pertinent to the conversation, or larger communicative context, to convey the intended understanding while also providing an explanation, fulfilling the causal relationship of *because*. In being so brief and non-canonical, certain maxims are flouted when it is used, which allows the utterance to convey additional meaning like, humor, criticism, and sarcasm, in a way that would not be possible for standard structures.

Next, a study was presented on a survey that was conducted to try to determine how the *Because, X* is most commonly interpreted, and whether or not certain contexts lead to different interpretations. The results from the survey indicate that the more controversial and opinionated the content in the sentence using the *Because, X* construction, the more it was judged as conveying *criticism, sarcasm, and dismissiveness*. On the other hand, the more light-hearted the content, the more it was judged as conveying *humor and wit*. Over all of the responses for the whole survey, the construction was acting primarily to convey *humor*, followed by *rationale and summation of thought*.

Information was also gathered on the participants' familiarity and acceptability of the *Because, X* construction. From analyzing this data, it was determined that the female participants were more likely than the male ones to be familiar with, and accepting of, the *Because, X* construction, but the majority of the participants indicated that they were both familiar with the construction (70.0%) and accepting of it (53.0%). There was a positive correlation between time spent online and participant familiarity and acceptability; the more time a participant indicated that they spent online, the more likely they had seen the construction and the more likely they were to use the construction, or consider using it. Lastly, the data were analyzed according to age, and the 21- to 30-years-old cohort was

found to be the most accepting of the construction. The data illustrate that, in general, the older the participant was, the less likely they would be familiar with and accepting of the *Because, X* construction.

Future research will want to explore the complements in the *Because, X* construction more. A study should be conducted to investigate the construction to try to determine how a speaker chooses to fill the *X* position. I would hypothesize that filling the *X* position involves selecting the most relevant causal element that encompasses what proposition, or propositions, that the user is trying to convey. Participants could then be presented with standard sentences using *because* and be asked to choose from three multiple-choice options the best representation of the sentence in the *Because, X* construction. Example (27) found in Section 3.4.2, repeated below, would be a good example of a potential prompt with possible *Because, X* responses. This study would be designed to target any intuitions that might lead participants to converge on a best option based on the relevance of what was appearing in the *X* position.

- (27) I stayed up all night because of interesting people on the Internet.
- a. I stayed up all night because, interesting people on the Internet.
  - b. I stayed up all night because, interesting people.
  - c. I stayed up all night because, Internet.

The next chapter will focus on the sociolinguistic aspects of the *Because, X* construction. This will include a deeper look into the prevalence of the construction since the 2011 memes that made it popular. Data from a study involving high school students will also be presented in chapter. This study was conducted to determine which environments the *Because, X* construction is appropriate in and which contexts are the most conducive to this new form. It also explored subordinating conjunctions as a whole and whether or not conjunctions like *but, since, thus, and so* could also appear in the *Because, X* construction.

## Chapter 4: *Because, X*: A Quantitative Approach

### 4.1 Introduction

The *Because, X* construction started as a language fad encouraged through its appearance in pop culture references and then further popularized on the Internet in 2011. Traditionally, *because* is used in two different language environments. One is as a subordinating conjunction, where *because* is utilized to combine two independent clauses, and the other is heading a compound preposition with *of*. With the *Because, X* construction the sentences in (1a) and (1b) might simply be stated as in (1c), *I can't go to the party because, homework*.

- (1) a. I can't go to the party because I have homework. (subordinating conjunction)
- b. I can't go to the party because of my homework. (compound preposition)
- c. I can't go to the party because, homework. (*Because, X*)

It is no surprise that this succinct construction is most commonly found in environments with written character restrictions like Facebook, Twitter, or texting. It became so popular that it was named the American Dialect Society's (ADS) Word of the Year for 2013. The construction has been tentatively called "prepositional because," and in 2012 linguists Mark Liberman and Laura Bailey independently titled this language trend "because NOUN" (Liberman, 2012; Bailey, 2012). However, both of these are misnomers since they prove to be too restrictive. The *because* in the *Because, X* construction does not act in the same way as prepositions and is not always followed by a noun. In fact, as explored in Chapters 2 and 3, it can be followed by a noun phrase (NP), verb phrase (VP), adjective phrase (ADJP), or exclamation.

The popularity of *Because, X* is new, but a similar construction has surfaced in the past. Neal Whitman pointed out in an article on the construction that it was used similarly as



the punchline for one of Jack Handey's *Saturday Night Live* "Deep Thoughts" skits.

Whitman cites one joke from 1987 that went, "If you ever fall off the Sears Tower, just go real limp, because maybe you'll look like a dummy and people will try to catch you because, hey, free dummy" (Whitman, 2013). Here, the "because, hey" is being used as a set-up for the punchline that follows, which imparts a sense of humor from its condensed structure. As Whitman describes it, the "because, hey" is used a verbal shrug, a "Need I say more?"; the speaker assumes that the listener understands the intended message and there is no need to elaborate. The "... hey, free dummy" seems to be a substitution for a larger idea, something like, "Who wouldn't want a free dummy? Everyone wants one."

As of yet, no one has collected grammaticality judgments and commentary on the environments most conducive to the *Because, X* construction. This chapter will begin with a detailed background of the *Because, X* construction in Section 4.2, including tracking instances of the construction's popularity before and after it was named the ADS Word of the Year. Section 4.3 will contain a brief summary from Chapters 2 and 3 on the complements that can appear with *because* in the construction, and the restrictions these complements have. In Section 4.4 I will present several analyses of the construction, including one by Tyler Schnoebelen (2014), who analyzed tweets using the *Because, X* construction and provided demographics on the people employing it. In Section 4.5, I will introduce a study involving high school students which was designed to determine which environments the *Because, X* construction is most likely to appear in and which contexts are the most conducive to it. The study also explores subordinating conjunctions as a whole and whether or not other conjunctions can also appear in the *Because, X* construction. The sections following present the results, a detailed analysis of the data, and the research conclusions.

## 4.2 Popularity of *Because, X*

Before being named ADS Word of the Year there were stray appearances of the *Because, X* construction on television shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. For instance, in Season 5 Episode 11 (2001) the character Willow says, “I don’t even get how we made that guy, because, wow, advanced!” (Carey, 2013). Another early appearance was in the meme “Why? Because, fuck you,” whose origins can be traced to a 2001 message board post. Other TV shows also picked up on the linguistic trend with it surfacing in 2006 on *How I Met Your Mother*, Season 1 Episode 19, “Because, gross,” and in 2007 on *Supernatural*, Season 3 Episode 3, “Because demons, that’s why.” In 2011 this new use of *because* became more widely popularized in the form of two separate memes. One was a meme that read “Because, racecar.” This came about by a Craigslist ad with a typo that read “Completely stripped inside because, racecar.” The abbreviation of the explanation “because it used to be a racecar” to “because racecar” became a sarcastic reply in memes to any “why” question.



Figure 4.1. 2011 Because, racecar meme from knowyourmeme.com.

The second meme was derived from a *Three Word Phrase* comic with the phrase “I want this because of reasons,” which was later shortened to simply “because, reasons” (McCulloch, 2013).

**I LIKE THIS**



**BECAUSE REASONS**

Figure 4.2. 2011 Because, reasons meme.<sup>53</sup>

As the construction has gained popularity, it has started appearing in advertisements like in Hardee’s nationally broadcasted commercial in 2015 for the Most American Thickburger, “Why did we put a hot dog and potato chips on this burger? BECAUSE, AMERICA.” Oscar Mayer has also incorporated the trend in 2015 into the advertising on their website homepage, “Because... Meat.” Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, started using the Twitter handle #BecauseCampus, which is advertised on the sides of their campus buses. Additionally, rapper Childish Gambino’s 2013 album, *Because the Internet*, was nominated for a Grammy in 2015, and the construction has appeared printed on clothing during this year as well.

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<sup>53</sup> Image originally found in Megan Garber’s article in *The Atlantic*, “English Has a New Preposition, Because Internet” (Garber, 2013).



*Figure 4.3. 2015 Straight Outta Money Because, My Jeep sweatshirt from viralstyle.com.*

The reach of the *Because, X* construction has been extended even to printed material as it appeared in the book *The Martian*, by Andy Weir, which started as a serial that was published on a blog. The book was originally self-published as an e-book in 2011 and was made into a hardcover under Crown Publishing in 2014 with a movie adaptation to be released in October 2015. The *Because, X* construction appears in Chapter 4 of the book: "One thing I have in abundance here is bags. They're not much different than kitchen trash bags, though I'm sure they cost \$50,000 because NASA."

Early analyses of the construction included that the *X* in the construction is assumed to be self-evident, that the absence of a more detailed explanation evokes a humorous effect, or that it is a method the speaker can use to not provide an explanation at all (as with, "Because fuck you."<sup>54</sup>). As explored in Chapter 3 on the semantics of the *Because, X* construction, it has been noted to convey an array of feelings like humor, wit, criticism, or sarcasm. The *X* is a stand-in for a proposition acting as a summation of thought, or highlights

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<sup>54</sup> Originally found in a comment from user, erik i (Lieberman, 2012).

the rationale of the proposition before the *because*. A study was conducted and presented in Chapter 3 with the overall findings that, among the participants in the study, the construction was most commonly interpreted as conveying humor, followed by rationale, and summation of thought.<sup>55</sup>

As the *Because, X* construction continues to be used, it continues to develop. It seems to pattern similarly to exclamations like “omg, want,” or “omg need” (McCulloch, 2014) and could be encouraging more linguistic change in other constructions. For instance, there seems to be a class of subordinating conjunctions that pattern similarly to *because*. As Gretchen McCulloch points out, other subordinating conjunctions like *but, since, thus, so, which,* and *ergo* are somewhat synonymous with *because* in mimicking the *Because, X* construction (McCulloch, 2014). As discussed in Chapter 2, the sentences in (2), which include the use of the *Because, X* construction with subordinating conjunctions other than *because*, seem to work well in this form.

- (2) a. I was going to go to the party but, homework.  
b. She bought a pound of chocolate since, love.  
c. Played with puppies today thus, want.  
d. Skipping lunch today so, sleep.

As McCulloch (2014) points out, these subordinating conjunctions as a class seem to be appearing with, what she calls, “interjectionary complements” as a new type of construction. As concluded in Chapter 2, these other subordinating conjunctions in the *Because, X* construction seem to be able to be used in the same manner as *because* and be interpreted in the same way. In fact, an example of other subordinating conjunctions

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<sup>55</sup> For a more detailed analysis of all of the data from the survey, as well as more specific findings, please refer to Chapter 3, Section 3.5.

appearing in the construction has already surfaced on the Internet and is included in Figure 4.4.



Figure 4.4. Example of the *Because, X* construction using *until* instead of *because* from themetapicture.com.

In this past section I have presented the background of the *Because, X* construction including the origins of its popularity and how its popularity has extended into popular culture, televised media, and even published text. In the next section I will present a summary on the complements *because* can take in this construction.

### 4.3 How is *Because, X* Formed?

In this section I will review the possible complements that *because* can take in the *Because, X* construction. These complements have been discussed in detail syntactically and semantically in Chapters 2 and 3. However, a brief summary of the complements presented here is necessary for the overall understanding of the construction and the study presented in Section 4.5. As already mentioned in Chapter 3, Section 3.4.1, but should be repeated, in general acceptability judgments on the *Because, X* construction do seem to be in flux since the expression is continuing to evolve. The observations in this section are all based on instances of the *Because, X* construction being used. This is not to say that the construction

will never be able to take the complements or restrictions that have been marked here as unacceptable. It is possible for the construction to evolve in the future for meaning to be interpreted from such examples. For the time being, it appears that certain complements do not occur in this construction and that there are restrictions to other complements.

By far, the construction does appear most frequently with NPs. Within the NP category, the *X* position can be filled with a mass noun, pronoun, proper name, plural count noun, or full determiner phrase (DP), as in (3). It can also appear with a singular count noun, like in (3d). As explained in earlier chapters, this is unusual since typically singular count nouns cannot appear without a determiner like, *the*, or *a*. These previous analyses have explored the concept that these singular count nouns have a non-overt determiner or are understood to be specific depending on a larger context. So, *book*, in (3d) could have a non-over determiner like, *my*, or is understood to be a specific book between the interlocutors.

- (3) a. Of course evolution is true because, science.<sup>56</sup> (mass noun)  
b. Is it normal to get back from a run & just not be willing to move for at least as long as the run was? Because, me.<sup>57</sup> (pronoun)  
c. They're not much different than kitchen trash bags, though I'm sure they cost \$50,000 because NASA.<sup>58</sup> (proper name)  
d. Going to the library because, book. (singular count noun)  
e. I'm on a low sodium diet because, doctors.<sup>59</sup> (plural count noun)  
f. Straight outta money because, my jeep.<sup>60</sup> (DP)

Beyond NPs, the construction can also appear with VPs. As already discussed in Chapter 2 on the syntax of the *Because, X* construction, there are semantic limits to verb

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<sup>56</sup> Originally found in Stan Carey's *Wordpress* article, "'Because' has become a preposition, because grammar" (Carey, 2013).

<sup>57</sup> @enterblisstonia. "Is it normal to get back from a run & just not be willing to move for at least as long as the run was? Because, me." *Twitter*, 23 August 2015, 4:15 p.m., <https://twitter.com/enterblisstonia/status/635591163643228160>.

<sup>58</sup> Originally found in Chapter 4 of the book, *The Martian*, by Andy Weir self-published as an e-book in 2011.

<sup>59</sup> Originally found in the Google Group alt.usage.english in a response by Richard Yates, who included the example from the original message from user, Lewis (Yates, 2013).

<sup>60</sup> Originally found printed on a 2015 sweatshirt from viralstyle.com.

phrases which makes some sentences more acceptable than others. For instance, in (4), originally (22) from Chapter 2, (4a) appears to be more acceptable than (4b).

- (4) a. The book is on the table because, put there.  
b. ? The book is on the table because, put.

Some verb phrases may also look more like nouns, and as such they may be analyzed as either nouns or verbs in a larger context, as in the two analyses of (5a) and (5b) (originally (23) from Chapter 2).

- (5) a. Eating ice cream because, want. = Eating ice cream because I want to.  
Eating ice cream because, want. = Eating ice cream because of my want for it.  
b. He won't answer the phone because, napping. = He won't answer the phone because napping is preoccupying him.  
He won't answer the phone because, napping. = He won't answer the phone because he is napping right now.

However, overall, verbs do seem to be able to appear in the *X* position even when forced into their most verb-like state.

- (6) a. She's tired because, went to the gym.  
b. His girlfriend had him leave the house because, cheated.

Adjective phrases can also appear in the *Because, X* construction. To summarize earlier discussions, it is preferable, but not required, that the adjective filling the *X* position is in reference to something that has appeared in the context before the *because*, as in, *I bought the puppy because, adorable*. Using an adjective that does not seem to directly reference the proposition before *because*, as in (7b) below, can still result in the desired interpretation but this is easier to understand when a larger context is given. This context can be based on prior understanding between the interlocutors, observations, etc.; a listener without this context may have a more difficult understanding the speaker's intended meaning.



- (7) I bought the puppy because it was a sunny day.
- a. I bought the puppy because, sunny day.  
= the puppy was bought because it was a sunny day.
  - b. I bought the puppy because, sunny.  
= speaker bought the puppy because it was a sunny day and the listener knows s/he was waiting for a sunny day to do so.  
= the speaker notoriously buys puppies on sunny days.  
= the puppy has sunny disposition.  
= ...

Lastly, the *Because, X* construction can appear with exclamations, as in (8), originally example (23) from Chapter 3. Example (8a) is often cited as an instance of an adverb, but this is not a case of a real adverb, but an interjection (Carey, 2013). Instead it is more similar to an exclamation with much the same understanding as “*Because, [obviously, truly, really, etc.]*.”

- (8) a. Because, honestly!  
b. That feeling you get when you finish an essay and you just want to cry because, yay.

From Chapters 2 and 3, it is undetermined whether or not the *Because, X* construction can appear with adverbs at all. For now, it remains unclear if ADVPs do not appear in this construction due to syntactic reasons or semantic reasons.<sup>61</sup> In other words, syntactically it might not be possible for *Because, X* to take an adverb phrase as its complement, and so there are no instances of it. Alternatively, it might be syntactically possible for an adverb to appear in the *Because, X* construction, but it is not allowed semantically and so there are no instances of it occurring.

Additionally, there are no instances of the construction appearing with function words, as in (9) (originally (28) from Chapter 2). This is because a function word by itself is not semantically relevant enough to appear alone in such a succinct construction.

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<sup>61</sup> Please refer back to Chapter 2, Section 2.5.4 and Chapter 3, Section 3.4.1, respectively, for more detailed analyses.

- (9) a. ? We aren't going because, a.  
b. ? It's not a problem because, if.

#### 4.4 Other Analyses of the Construction

As already mentioned elsewhere in this work, there exists some controversy around the *because* in the *Because, X* construction as being used in a new way. For instance, Geoffrey Pullum (2014) argues that *because* in general is, and has always been, a preposition. He states that prepositions can appear with a prepositional phrase, a clause, an NP, or without a complement at all.

- (10) a. We are going out to dinner instead of making something at home. (prepositional phrase)  
b. Consider all of the options before you leave. (clause)  
c. They are taking advantage of an opportunity. (NP)  
d. The guests are inside. (no complement)

Previously, *because* was allowed to appear exclusively with a clause or an *of*-headed prepositional phrase (PP), but according to Pullum it has shifted to also allow an NP, which accounts for the appearance of the NP following *because* in the *Because, X* construction.

Pullum also addresses the fact that *because* can appear without a complement, as in the bare response, "*Because!*", which means that *because* can appear with all four options available to prepositions. Example (7) from Chapter 2, repeated below as (11) details these options.

- (11) a. I can't go to the party because of my homework. (*of*-headed PP)  
b. I can't go to the party because I have homework (clause)  
c. I can't go to the party because, homework. (NP)  
d. Because! (no complement)

As explained in Chapter 2, the analysis of *because* as a preposition would be convenient since this would account for the *Because, X* construction within current syntactic theories concerning *because*. However, the *Because, X* construction does not act like

standard prepositional phrases in that they do not seem to be able to be preposed, as in (12).<sup>62</sup> Additionally, as already explained above, more than just NPs can appear as a complement to *because* in this construction.

- (12) a. Because of my homework, I can't go to the party.  
b. ? Because homework, I can't go to the party.

Whitman in a later article takes a similar opinion as Pullum conceding that *because* is a preposition, but not on account of the new construction. He points out that the *Because, X* construction can take adjective phrases and exclamations, which are not allowed as complements for standard prepositions, and hypothesizes that the construction itself is shifting into two different forms: one that will become more exclamative and used to convey feeling, like, *Because, yum!*, and another that will be more commonplace where the *X* is filled by an NP or ADJP. According to Whitman (2014), “This version of *because* will mean the same thing as *because of*, and might well come to replace it, because shorter.” I believe what Whitman is referring to is the reduction of other compound prepositions which use *of*, as in (13a) and (13b). The reduction in these two sets of examples do not result in different understandings between the two sentences.

- (13) a. He threw the water out of the window.  
He threw the water out the window.  
b. They heard a mouse inside of the walls.  
They heard a mouse inside the walls.  
c. I'm going to the library because of my thesis.  
I'm going to the library because, my thesis.

The set of sentences in (13c) however do have different understandings. The first sentence means exactly what is written, but the second sentence encompasses a wider range of possible interpretations including, but not limited to, “because of my thesis,” “because I'm

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<sup>62</sup> It remains unclear why preposing the *Because, X* construction is dispreferred. This may be a syntactic constraint, or may be for contextual reasons.

working on my thesis and it's quiet in the library," "because theses take a lot of research, you know how working on one is," "because Bill needs help with his thesis," and "because I'm participating in the thesis research panel at the library." Part of the popularity of the *Because, X* construction is that it can convey many of these sentiments, possibly many at once, which makes this use of *because* not a reduction of standard uses, but completely unique. When a speaker chooses to use the *Because, X* construction, they are doing so because it can convey information that may not be possible to communicate in standard *because* sentences.<sup>63</sup>

Additionally, as discussed in Section 4.2, the *Because, X* construction can appear with complements other than NPs. If this construction will eventually mean the same thing, and possibly replace *because of*, it does not account for these other complements. There are no grammatical sentences using *because of* + ADJP, for instance, that could be reduced to *because, ADJP* as Whitman suggests.

- (14) a. \*I read the first article and not the second because of shorter.  
b. I read the first article and not the second because, shorter.

John McWhorter (2014) has taken a deeper look at the *Because, X* construction and suggests that it has taken on the nuances of a politeness marker. McWhorter says that this would not be unusual as other new forms of politeness have also appeared that have been encouraged through texting and social media environments. He mentions that words like *lol* and *totally* seem to indicate a sort of politeness in either providing enthusiasm in a situation that may seem unlikely, as in (14a), or channeling a sense of camaraderie to take a harsh edge off, as in (14b).

- (14) a. S/he's totally going to call you!  
b. I stayed up studying all night too lol

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<sup>63</sup> Please see Chapter 3, Section 3.4.3 for a more detailed explanation.

The *Because, X* construction is used in such a way that the *X* is (sometimes intentionally) vague, which allows the listener to choose from any of the interpretations that *X* could have. This has the effect of naturally implying a sense of “togetherness” almost like saying, “you know what I’m talking about so I don’t need to explain further” (McWhorter, 2014). It connects the interlocutors, creating intimacy or establishing an inside-joke type of feel. Additionally, McWhorter explains that the brevity of the response allows the speaker to give an explanation encompassing multiple ideas without having to delve into minute details.

It might be more accurate to suggest that instead of the *Because, X* construction being used as a politeness marker, this resulting feeling of “togetherness” comes from a sense of shared perspective that seems to be embedded into the structure of the construction. For instance, depending on the context, a response that is formed in the *Because, X* construction could possibly be construed as overly simplistic. As mentioned earlier, the construction has been noted to impart several different feelings into it like humor, wit, and pithiness, but also sarcasm, criticism, and cynicism. Considering this then, the construction might not always be viewed as polite when it is used. Answering the question “Why are you on a low sodium diet?” with “Because, doctors,” might impart a sense of shared perspective, but could be considered too brief to be polite.

- (15) Why are you on a low sodium diet?
  - a. Because, doctors.
  - b. Because doctors prescribed it. They always seem to be doing that.

Tyler Schnoebelen (2014) has conducted some sociolinguistic research on the *Because, X* construction and its appearances on the Internet, particularly on Twitter. He starts his analysis of the construction by discussing its relation to efficiency. Shortening words for efficiency is not unusual, especially for the Internet where communication is often typed in a

limited character environment. For instance, other words have been shortened like *obviously* to *obvs* (Schnoebelen, 2014). However, this particular change is unusual since multiple words are being shortened to the most salient part of the sentence, or most central concept in an idea. Schnoebelen says that the construction is interpersonal, citing that 36% of tweets using the *Because, X* construction are tweets that tag other people in them. This may explain how the innovation has spread. The tagging feature of tweets allows one interaction to involve multiple people, which can then be iterated, allowing the innovation to disseminate throughout the social network. As Schnoebelen points out, even individuals who may be originally against the construction on account of its slanginess may begin to use it to make fun of the people that use it all the time, which ironically can filter into their everyday speech and further perpetuate the construction.

Schnoebelen (2014) analyzed 23,583 tweets from the first few weeks of January 2014. He analyzed the people writing tweets containing the *Because, X* construction and came up with some broad interests and demographics of these “*because-X*’ers” in comparison to other people tweeting at the same time. According to Schnoebelen, these users are less likely to tweet about software, basketball, NASCAR, business, or use words associated with African-American Vernacular English. They tended to tweet about pop culture musicians (Justin Bieber, Ariana Grande), bands (One Direction), television shows (*Sherlock*), and Internet sites like YouTube and Tumblr. People who were using the *Because, X* construction from this time were mostly from the US, though many Londoners were also using it, and young women in particular are using it more (Schnoebelen, 2014).

He then tracked occurrences of the construction limiting the data to tweets that were 125 characters or less to eliminate users who were simply truncating a standard *because* form

to fit the Twitter 140 character restriction and thus perhaps not actively employing the *Because, X* construction. He also filtered out users so that the tweets he analyzed were from average users, eliminating tweets from new users and what he refers to as “super users”- users with masses of followers and a tendency to be retweeted. Through all of this data he discovered that the *X* in *Because, X* was being used according to the statistics in Table 4.1, below.

Table 4.1

*Items of 50 or More Occurrences in ‘X’ Position (Schnoebelen, 2014).*

| Part of speech                           | Word counts $\geq$ 50 |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Noun ( <i>people, spoilers</i> )         | 32.02%                |
| Compressed clause ( <i>ilysm, yolo</i> ) | 21.78%                |
| Adjective ( <i>ugly, tired</i> )         | 16.04%                |
| Interjection ( <i>sweg, omg</i> )        | 14.71%                |
| Agreement ( <i>yeah, no</i> )            | 12.97%                |
| Pronoun ( <i>you, me</i> )               | 2.45%                 |

Schnoebelen also mentioned that he found what appeared to be verbs and adverbs in the *Because, X* construction, but that the verbs were sometimes acting more as nouns and the adverbs as exclamations. A few of the examples he found are listed in (16).

- (16) a. Set an alarm for 8 so I could get up and be productive early. Reset an alarm for 930 because sleep.  
 b. Moms who tell non-moms pregnancy/child birth horror stories are the G damn WORST. With capital letters. Because seriously.  
 c. Alexander resisted bedtime for an hour then finally fell asleep snuggling the bulb syringe/snot sucker. Because obviously.

In these past four sections, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4, I have discussed the Internet origins of the *Because, X* construction as well as different occurrences of it in popular culture until it became popularized in 2011. I have analyzed the construction listing what can appear as complements of *because* in this construction and the restrictions on those complements. I have discussed other analyses of the construction, including arguments that it is simply an

instance of *because* as a preposition, or as a reduction of a compound preposition. I have also introduced Schnoebelen's (2014) data from Twitter in early 2014 on what is appearing most commonly in the *X of Because, X* and some demographic information on the users.

While previous research has provided valuable insights into the construction and how it is functioning, there are still existing questions on the construction and how it is being used and interpreted. In the next section I will present and discuss a survey that was administered to high school students and the results from this study. The research presented in this chapter aims to discover more about the environments the *Because, X* construction is most likely to appear in, possible changes concerning the construction, and why a speaker would choose to use the *Because, X* construction instead of a standard *because* sentence.

#### **4.5 Study: High School Student Responses to *Because, X***

The research conducted in this chapter was designed to determine which environments the *Because, X* construction is most likely to appear in and which contexts are the most conducive to this new form. It also explores subordinating conjunctions as a whole and whether or not they can also appear in the *Because, X* construction. If they are judged similarly then this could have significance for subordinating conjunctions like *but, since, thus, so, which, and ergo* which may be shifting as a class to accept the complements that appear in the *Because, X* construction.

In the following sections I describe the survey I used to gather data on the *Because, X* construction from high school students. I will discuss the results from the data gathered and my interpretation of the data.

**4.5.1 Research methodology.** The *Because, X* construction is trendy and was popularized through the Internet, particularly on social media outlets, including Twitter and



Facebook. In general, the adoption of non-standard features into a person's speech peaks in adolescence. Additionally, as a speaker gets older they tend to use others their own age as modals and adopt their peers' speech (Van Herk, 2012). Considering this, I chose to use high school students for this research since I suspected they would have had the most exposure to this slangy construction through social media and thus have the best intuitions about it.

The survey was distributed to high school students in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade from Saline High School in Saline, Michigan, and was administered at the beginning of class during the students' World History or U.S. History class period. The survey was designed with approval from the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee and followed the study protocol.

The survey began with a section on background information asking participants to identify their age, gender, first language spoken, and average amount of time spent daily on social media. This was followed by three sections focused on the *Because, X* construction. These sections were comprised of 18 total questions separated into participant judgments on likelihood, short answers based on sentence comparison, and familiarity with the *Because, X* construction. The survey took about 15 minutes to complete.

**4.5.1.1 Survey Section 1.** Section 1 of the survey consisted of 10 questions and involved the students assessing sentences and judging how likely each sentence was to appear in four different contexts: written on social media, spoken with a friend, spoken with a teacher, and written in an essay. Students were asked to judge each sentence on a scale of 1–5 (5 being the greatest) the likelihood that they or their friends would use or find the sentence, or a sentence similar to it, in each of the provided contexts. The sentences consisted of a mixture of standard sentences using because, sentences using the *Because, X*

construction, and sentences that used the *Because, X* construction but with subordinating conjunctions other than *because*. Additionally, there was one sentence meant to be anomalous in all contexts that included a preposed *Because, X* proposition.<sup>64</sup> (17) below includes the list of the 10 stimuli in Section 1 of the survey.

- (17) 1. Overall it was well-written and interesting, but a little stereotypical and cliché. (control- subordinating *but*)  
2. It's that feeling you get when you finish your homework and you just want to cry because, yay. (*Because, X* with exclamation)  
3. It was too cold to go outside so, video games. (*Because, X* using *so*)  
4. He left because he was frustrated. (control- subordinating *because*)  
5. A great deal of knowledge and experience has accrued as a result of these influential projects. (control- essay target)  
6. I am making hot cocoa because, want. (*Because, X* with VP)  
7. She missed the bus because of the rain. (control- *because* with *of*-head PP)  
8. I was going to go to the party but, homework. (*Because, X* using *but*)  
9. Because reading, I can never get to bed on time. (control- anomalous with preposed *Because, X*)  
10. He stayed up all night because, Internet. (*Because, X* with NP)

My hypotheses for this section were as follows:

- Hypothesis 1: Participants will judge the informal written environment of social media to be most likely where they would use or expect the *Because, X* construction to be used.
- Hypothesis 2: Participants will judge non-*because* subordinating conjunctions appearing in the *Because, X* construction with similar likelihood as the *Because, X* sentences using *because*.
- Hypothesis 3: Sentence 9, which includes a preposed *Because, X* sentence, will be considered less likely to be used than non-preposed sentences using the *Because, X* construction.

For Hypothesis 1, I expected participants to consider the environment of social media to be where they would most likely use or expect the *Because, X* construction to be used because it is where the construction was popularized. For my second hypothesis, I suspected

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<sup>64</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the *Because, X* construction not being able to be preposed, please refer back to Chapter 2.

that subordinating conjunctions as a whole are shifting to accept the *Because, X* construction, like how *until* is used in Figure 4.4 in Section 4.2.

Since I suspect these subordinating conjunctions are shifting to accept this new construction, I expected participants to judge non-*because* subordinating conjunctions appearing in the *Because, X* construction with similar likelihood ratings as the standard *Because, X* sentences.

For my third hypothesis, I expect Sentence 9, the sentence with the preposed *Because, X* construction, to be considered less likely to be used in all environments compared to the other sentences when the construction is not preposed. I expect this because the construction tends to act like a punchline to a joke or a summary of thoughts, relying on the information before it to produce this effect. I have not been able to find an example of the construction being preposed, which suggests that if the construction is preposed it would lose this effect and would be harder to understand.

**4.5.1.2 Survey Section 2.** Section 2 of the survey asked the students to compare two sentences, A and B, and write a short answer response on what they observed in the differences between the two. Sentence A used *because* in a standard construction while Sentence B was the same sentence, but written in the *Because, X* construction. The students were provided with a short explanation of the *Because, X* construction and informed that sentences using this new form of *because* have been described as conveying rationale, humor, wit, criticism, sarcasm, or a summation of thoughts. The students were asked to write a short response to explain why and when they would use Sentence B, the one using *Because, X*, over Sentence A, the standard sentence, and whether or not the sentences conveyed

different meanings. (18) below includes the list of the five comparative questions asked in Section 2.

- (18)
1. A. Set the alarm for 8:00 so I could get up and be productive early. Reset the alarm for 9:30 because I needed more sleep.  
B. Set the alarm for 8:00 so I could get up and be productive early. Reset the alarm for 9:30 because, sleep.
  2. A. Of course global warming is a fact because science provides evidence for it.  
B. Of course global warming is a fact because, science.
  3. A. Cooking breakfast at 1:00pm because I just bought bacon.  
B. Cooking breakfast at 1:00pm because, bacon.
  4. A. Even though it can't always be seen, cyber-bullying is just as harmful as other forms of bullying because it is still just as hurtful.  
B. Even though it can't always be seen, cyber-bullying is just as harmful as other forms of bullying because, hurtful.
  5. A. Don't even try working from home with cats because cats tend to get in the way.  
B. Don't even try working from home with cats because, cats.

Section 2 was designed for students to think critically about how the sentences using the *Because, X* construction are being used and to consider the differences in meaning, if any, between these sentences and standard sentences using *because*. I hypothesized that the students would consider the sentences using the *Because X* construction to be more informal than their standard counterparts. I expected that the non-canonical structure of this construction would be viewed as a slangy-type of expression, which would set it apart from the traditionally-grammatical, standard uses that would be considered more formal in comparison. For this reason, I hypothesized that the sentences using the *Because, X* construction would be considered to be more informal than the standard versions of the same sentence.

Hypothesis 4: Students will judge the sentences utilizing the *Because, X* construction as more informal than the standard counterparts.

**4.5.1.3 Survey Section 3.** Section 3 of the survey gathered information on students' familiarity with the *Because, X* construction and consisted of three questions all with Yes/No responses. The first question asked whether or not the student had ever seen because being used in the *Because, X* construction. The second question asked whether or not the student uses the *Because, X* construction. The third question was only answered by students who had answered "No" to the second question and asked whether or not the student would consider using the *Because, X* construction in the future. The questions in Section 3 are listed in (19) below.

- (19) 1. Have you ever seen *because* being used in the *Because, X* construction before this survey?  
2. Do you use this construction yourself?  
3. If you answer "No" to Question 2, would you ever consider using this construction?

Section 3 was designed to gather data on the overall familiarity of high school students with this construction. I hypothesized that there would be more students who were familiar with the construction than students who had never heard of it. My rationale for this hypothesis was because younger speakers are more likely to incorporate more slang into their speech. Since this construction is a form of slang, I expected that they would be familiar with the construction either because they use it themselves, or they have friends who use it. Lastly, I hypothesized that there would be more students either using the construction or would consider using the construction than students who do not use it and would not consider using it. Again, my rationale for this was because younger speakers are more likely to incorporate new linguistic innovations into their language, and since this construction is popular and a form of slang, I expected them to be most willing to either use or consider using the construction.

- Hypothesis 5: More students will indicate that they are familiar with the *Because, X* construction than students who are not familiar with it.
- Hypothesis 6: More students will indicate that they use the construction or would consider using the construction than students who do not use it and would not consider using it.

**4.5.2 Research results and discussion.** The survey was offered to 120 students who all agreed to participate. The students ranged in ages from 14–17 with 55 of them identifying as female and 65 as male. Most of the students identified English as their first language with the exception of 6 who either did not identify a first language (3), or identified another language (Spanish (2); Tagalog (1)). For the data analysis I only used the 114 English-identified speakers. The data were analyzed this way because the construction is based on a strong understanding of nuances within English.

**4.5.2.1 Results and discussion from Section 1.** Section 1 was designed to determine the likelihood ratings of the sentences in different contexts using a gradable scale, as judged by the participants. This section included sentences that used *because* as a subordinating conjunction, as part of a compound preposition with *of*, and in the *Because, X* construction. This section also incorporated *Because, X* sentences using other subordinating conjunctions to determine whether or not the students judged these sentences similarly to the *Because, X* sentences using *because*. These judgments were based on not only the syntax and semantics, but also the contextual words in each sentence. For instance, in Table 4.2, which presents data on the control sentences used in the survey, words like *stereotypical* and *cliché* were used, which likely influenced the sentences containing these words to be judged as most likely used in an essay. Similarly, using school-related words like *bus* in *She missed the bus because of the rain* likely influenced this sentence to be considered most likely to be spoken to a teacher. Below are individual tables (Tables 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5) with the percentages

from the students' judgments. The last column in each table includes a calculation for the overall likelihood of use of the sentence in each context. Overall likelihood was determined from the total number of responses from the 4 and 5 ratings.

First, I will discuss the control sentences which were a mixture of sentences using *but*, *because*, and *because of* in standard constructions. Additionally, there was one sentence that was used with a target context of being written in an essay. In general, none of these four sentences were judged by the students as being most likely to be used within the context of social media. Instead they were found to be most likely used in speaking contexts or found written in an essay.

Table 4.2

Overall It Was Well-Written and Interesting, but a Little Stereotypical and Cliché. *Control Sentence; Considered Most Likely Written in an Essay.*

| Sentence: Overall it was well-written and interesting, but a little stereotypical and cliché. | blank | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | Likelihood (4-5) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|
| Social Media                                                                                  |       | 47.4% | 18.4% | 21.1% | 9.6%  | 3.5%  | 13.2%            |
| Speaking with a friend                                                                        |       | 21.1% | 16.7% | 34.2% | 20.2% | 7.9%  | 28.1%            |
| Speaking with a teacher                                                                       | 0.9%  | 11.4% | 12.3% | 23.7% | 36.8% | 14.9% | 51.8%            |
| In an essay                                                                                   |       | 11.4% | 7.9%  | 15.8% | 18.4% | 46.5% | 64.9%            |

Table 4.3

He Left Because He Was Frustrated. *Control Sentence; Considered Most Likely Speaking with a Friend.*

| Sentence: He left because he was frustrated. | blank | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | Likelihood (4-5) |
|----------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|
| Social Media                                 |       | 26.3% | 21.9% | 25.4% | 13.2% | 13.2% | 26.3%            |
| Speaking with a friend                       | 0.9%  | 4.4%  | 7.9%  | 22.8% | 30.7% | 33.3% | 64.0%            |
| Speaking with a teacher                      |       | 11.4% | 13.2% | 19.3% | 30.7% | 25.4% | 56.1%            |
| In an essay                                  |       | 28.1% | 14.9% | 19.3% | 21.1% | 16.7% | 37.7%            |

Table 4.4

She Missed the Bus Because of the Rain. *Control Sentence; Considered Most Likely Speaking with a Friend.*

| Sentence: She missed the bus because of the rain. | blank | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | Likelihood (4-5) |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|
| Social Media                                      |       | 23.7% | 28.1% | 22.8% | 17.5% | 7.9%  | 25.4%            |
| Speaking with a friend                            |       | 8.8%  | 8.8%  | 28.9% | 29.8% | 23.7% | 53.5%            |
| Speaking with a teacher                           |       | 13.2% | 5.3%  | 28.1% | 34.2% | 19.3% | 53.5%            |
| In an essay                                       |       | 31.6% | 12.3% | 24.6% | 15.8% | 15.8% | 31.6%            |

Table 4.5

A Great Deal of Knowledge and Experience Has Accrued as a Result of These Influential Projects. *Control Sentence; Considered Most Likely Written in an Essay.*

| Sentence: A great deal of knowledge and experience has accrued as a result of these influential projects. | blank | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | Likelihood (4-5) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|
| Social Media                                                                                              |       | 66.7% | 16.7% | 9.6%  | 7.0%  | 0.0%  | 7.0%             |
| Speaking with a friend                                                                                    | 0.9%  | 43.9% | 29.8% | 18.4% | 7.0%  | 0.0%  | 7.0%             |
| Speaking with a teacher                                                                                   | 0.9%  | 14.9% | 8.8%  | 25.4% | 28.1% | 21.9% | 50.0%            |
| In an essay                                                                                               |       | 13.2% | 1.8%  | 8.8%  | 23.7% | 52.6% | 76.3%            |

Table 4.6 compares the overall likelihood ratings of the four control sentences analyzed above. All of these sentences were judged as most likely to be used in environments that might be considered more formal for high school students (speaking with a teacher and written in an essay) with the exception of two sentences, one which was considered most likely to be used speaking with a friend and another that was tied between speaking with a friend and speaking with a teacher. As already mentioned, judgments on these sentences



included sentence content, which probably influenced the students to consider *She missed the bus because of the rain* to be likely to be spoken to a teacher since that is who they might be more likely to talk to about this subject.

Table 4.6

*The Overall Likelihood Ratings of Use for the Four Control Sentences.*

| Sentence                                                                                                                 | On social media | Speaking with a friend | Speaking with a teacher | In an essay |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| Overall it was well-written and interesting, but a little stereotypical and cliché. (control- subordinating <i>but</i> ) | 13.2%           | 28.1%                  | 51.8%                   | 64.9%       |
| He left because he was frustrated. (control- subordinating <i>because</i> )                                              | 26.3%           | 64.0%                  | 56.1%                   | 37.7%       |
| She missed the bus because of the rain. (control- <i>because of</i> )                                                    | 25.4%           | 53.5%                  | 53.5%                   | 31.6%       |
| A great deal of knowledge and experience has accrued as a result of these influential projects. (control- essay target)  | 7.0%            | 7.0%                   | 50.0%                   | 76.3%       |

Next, in tables 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 4.10, and 4.11 I will analyze the sentences that used the *Because, X* construction with *because* as well as other subordinating conjunctions. Half of these sentences were found more likely to be used speaking with a friend than written on social media, but only by a narrow margin. This was surprising because I had hypothesized that since the construction was popularized via the Internet these constructions would have higher likelihood ratings in social media environments. While there was a higher likelihood rating for speaking with a friend than written on social media for three of these sentences, the difference in percentages between these two environments only ranged from 3.5%–5.2%. It should be noted that in terms of likelihood ratings, the *Because, X* sentence in Table 4.7 was judged at the same likelihood rating for speaking with a friend as the compound *because*

sentence analyzed in the control sentences above, which suggests that students would use these two sentences similarly.

There were two sentences that used the *Because, X* construction with the conjunctions *but* and *so* instead of *because*. Confirming Hypothesis 2, both of these sentences were judged similarly to the other *Because, X* sentences, and actually received higher likelihood ratings than the *Because, X* sentence that took a VP as a complement. This suggests that subordinating conjunctions like *but, since, thus, so, which, and ergo* are adaptable to the *Because, X* construction. I would expect then as the construction grows more popular that these other subordinating conjunctions would start appearing in similar ways more and more. Where the *Because, X* sentence with a VP complement is concerned, this sentence using was considered least likely of the *Because, X* sentences to be used overall, which suggests that the *Because, X* construction with a VP complement is dispreferred to complements like NPs or exclamations.

Table 4.7

It's That Feeling You Get When You Finish Your Homework and You Just Want to Cry Because, Yay. *Because, X with an Exclamation; Considered Most Likely Speaking with a Friend.*

| Sentence: It's that feeling you get when you finish your homework and you just want to cry because, yay. | blank | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | Likelihood (4-5) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|
| Social Media                                                                                             | 1.8%  | 21.9% | 14.9% | 11.4% | 22.8% | 27.2% | 50.0%            |
| Speaking with a friend                                                                                   | 1.8%  | 18.4% | 14.0% | 12.3% | 32.5% | 21.1% | 53.5%            |
| Speaking with a teacher                                                                                  | 0.9%  | 45.6% | 35.1% | 8.8%  | 4.4%  | 5.3%  | 9.6%             |
| In an essay                                                                                              | 2.6%  | 78.9% | 8.8%  | 5.3%  | 2.6%  | 1.8%  | 4.4%             |

Table 4.8

He Stayed up All Night Because, Internet. Because, X with an NP; Considered Most Likely Written on Social Media.

| Sentence: He stayed up all night because, Internet. | blank | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | Likelihood (4-5) |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|
| Social Media                                        |       | 27.2% | 12.3% | 14.9% | 16.7% | 28.9% | 45.6%            |
| Speaking with a friend                              |       | 28.1% | 16.7% | 18.4% | 22.8% | 14.0% | 36.8%            |
| Speaking with a teacher                             |       | 63.2% | 27.2% | 5.3%  | 2.6%  | 1.8%  | 4.4%             |
| In an essay                                         |       | 85.1% | 9.6%  | 2.6%  | 0.9%  | 1.8%  | 2.6%             |

Table 4.9

I Am Making Hot Cocoa Because, Want. Because, X with a VP; Considered Most Likely Written on Social Media

| Sentence: I am making hot cocoa because, want. | blank | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | Likelihood (4-5) |
|------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|
| Social Media                                   |       | 40.4% | 7.9%  | 14.0% | 21.1% | 16.7% | 37.7%            |
| Speaking with a friend                         |       | 39.5% | 15.8% | 13.2% | 21.1% | 10.5% | 31.6%            |
| Speaking with a teacher                        | 0.9%  | 72.8% | 15.8% | 7.0%  | 1.8%  | 1.8%  | 3.5%             |
| In an essay                                    | 0.9%  | 89.5% | 5.3%  | 2.6%  | 0.9%  | 0.9%  | 1.8%             |

Table 4.10

It Was Too Cold to Go Outside So, Video Games. Because, X with So; Considered Most Likely Spoken with a Friend.

| Sentence: It was too cold to go outside so, video games. | blank | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | Likelihood (4-5) |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|
| Social Media                                             |       | 25.4% | 8.8%  | 17.5% | 22.8% | 25.4% | 48.2%            |
| Speaking with a friend                                   |       | 15.8% | 17.5% | 14.0% | 23.7% | 28.9% | 52.6%            |
| Speaking with a teacher                                  | 0.9%  | 60.5% | 21.9% | 11.4% | 3.5%  | 1.8%  | 5.3%             |
| In an essay                                              | 0.9%  | 85.1% | 8.8%  | 4.4%  | 0.0%  | 0.9%  | 0.9%             |

Table 4.11

I Was Going to Go to the Party But, Homework. Because, X *with* But; *Considered Most Likely Spoken with a Friend.*

| Sentence: I was going to go to the party but, homework. | blank | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | Likelihood (4-5) |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|
| Social Media                                            |       | 26.3% | 13.2% | 16.7% | 20.2% | 23.7% | 43.9%            |
| Speaking with a friend                                  |       | 20.2% | 10.5% | 20.2% | 29.8% | 19.3% | 49.1%            |
| Speaking with a teacher                                 |       | 53.5% | 25.4% | 10.5% | 7.0%  | 3.5%  | 10.5%            |
| In an essay                                             |       | 79.8% | 9.6%  | 4.4%  | 2.6%  | 3.5%  | 6.1%             |

The likelihood ratings for the *Because, X* sentences how a clear divide between the first two, informal, contexts and the last two, formal, contexts. This suggests that students do, as per Hypothesis 4, consider the *Because, X* construction to be an informal one that would not be appropriate in formal environments.

The last type of sentence that was found in this section was the sentence containing a preposed proposition using the *Because, X* construction. This sentence was designed with the hypothesis that it would be considered anomalous. Overall, it was judged as most likely to be written on social media, but at only a rate of 28.1%. Of all the sentences in the survey, this was the one with the lowest percentage of likelihood ratings, confirming Hypothesis 3. In each context, the preposed *Because, X* sentence was overwhelmingly judged to not be likely used. This low likelihood rating leads to the conclusion that this sentence is certainly generally dispreferred, though perhaps might be found on social media given the proper context.

Table 4.12

Because Reading, I Can Never Get to Bed on Time. *Preposed* Because, X.

| Sentence: Because reading, I can never get to bed on time. | blank | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | Likelihood (4-5) |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|
| Social Media                                               |       | 45.6% | 12.3% | 14.0% | 15.8% | 12.3% | 28.1%            |
| Speaking with a friend                                     |       | 43.0% | 19.3% | 17.5% | 11.4% | 8.8%  | 20.2%            |
| Speaking with a teacher                                    | 0.9%  | 57.0% | 18.4% | 12.3% | 7.9%  | 3.5%  | 11.4%            |
| In an essay                                                | 0.9%  | 74.6% | 12.3% | 7.9%  | 0.9%  | 3.5%  | 4.4%             |

Table 4.13 compares the overall likelihood ratings of the six sentences using the *Because, X* construction analyzed above. All of these sentences were considered most likely to be used in more informal spoken and written environments. This was surprising since I had hypothesized that these sentences would be considered most likely in environments like social media since the popularity of this construction started on the Internet in written environments. It could be that the construction is becoming more acceptable to be used spoken in conversation, or that students considered texting in the environment of speaking with a friend. The sentence with the preposed *Because, X* proposition was largely dispreferred, confirming Hypothesis 3. It was designed as an anomalous sentence and it received the lowest likelihood ratings, with the exception of the environment of speaking with a teacher. The highest likelihood rating for the environment of speaking with a teacher was actually for this sentence, suggesting that the content concerning “reading” had an effect on the likelihood judgments.

Table 4.13

*The Overall Likelihood Ratings of the Five Sentences Using the Because, X Construction.*

| Sentence                                                                                                                              | On social media | Speaking with a friend | Speaking with a teacher | In an essay |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| It's that feeling you get when you finish your homework and you just want to cry because, yay. ( <i>Because, X with exclamation</i> ) | 50.0%           | 53.5%                  | 9.6%                    | 4.4%        |
| He stayed up all night because, Internet. ( <i>Because, X with NP</i> )                                                               | 45.6%           | 36.8%                  | 4.4%                    | 2.6%        |
| I am making hot cocoa because, want. ( <i>Because, X with VP</i> )                                                                    | 37.7%           | 31.6%                  | 3.5%                    | 1.8%        |
| It was too cold to go outside so, video games. ( <i>Because, X using so</i> )                                                         | 48.2%           | 52.6%                  | 5.3%                    | 0.9%        |
| I was going to go to the party but, homework. ( <i>Because, X using but</i> )                                                         | 43.9%           | 49.1%                  | 10.5%                   | 6.1%        |
| Because reading, I can never get to bed on time. ( <i>Because, X preposed</i> )                                                       | 28.1%           | 20.2%                  | 11.4%                   | 4.4%        |

The sentences using the *Because, X* construction had the highest likelihood ratings for the “social media” and “speaking with a friend” contexts. The judgments between these two contexts might have occurred due to the content in the sentences. For instance, the sentence, *He stayed up all night because, Internet* which uses an NP complement was considered most likely to be used on social media. However, the sentence, *I was going to go to the party but, homework* which uses the *Because, X* structure with *but* and also uses an NP complement was considered more likely to be used speaking with a friend. It could be that specifically mentioning the Internet caused a higher likelihood for social media while homework might be a topic mostly spoken about between friends in conversation.

The students’ responses for these sentences suggest that this construction is considered relatively likely to be used in spoken contexts between friends, and in some cases as much or more so than on social media. Contrary to my first hypothesis, which stated that

the environment of “social media” would have the highest likelihood ratings for the sentences using the *Because, X* construction, half of these sentences had higher likelihood ratings for “speaking with a friend,” though this was by only a small percentage.

Alternatively, it could be that the students considered methods of written communication, like texting, to be within the environment of “speaking with a friend.” Considering texting is a written mode of communication, many people might consider using a construction like *Because, X* since it reduces the words needed for conversing. The sentence using the *Because, X* construction with an exclamation as its complement was judged as likely to be said to a friend as the standard sentence using *because of* was. This suggests that, at least among the population surveyed, the *Because, X* construction is becoming popular enough to not only be accepted in conversation (texting or spoken) but, in some cases, to be considered as likely to be used as standard sentences using *because*. Finally, the findings are consistent with the claim that the *Because, X* construction with a VP complement is dispreferred to the other options that appeared in this survey (with an NP or with an exclamation).

**4.5.2.2 Results and Discussion from Section 2.** Section 2 of the survey asked the students to compare two sentences, A and B, and write a short answer response on what they observed in the differences between the two. Sentence A used *because* in a standard construction while Sentence B was the same sentence, but written in the *Because, X* construction. The students were asked to write a short response to explain why and when they would use Sentence B, the one using the *Because, X* construction, over Sentence A, the standard sentence, and whether or not the sentences conveyed different meanings. Below is (18), repeated from Section 4.5.1, containing the 5 sets of sentences.

- (18)
1. A. Set the alarm for 8:00 so I could get up and be productive early. Reset the alarm for 9:30 because I needed more sleep.  
B. Set the alarm for 8:00 so I could get up and be productive early. Reset the alarm for 9:30 because, sleep.
  2. A. Of course global warming is a fact because science provides evidence for it.  
B. Of course global warming is a fact because, science.
  3. A. Cooking breakfast at 1:00pm because I just bought bacon.  
B. Cooking breakfast at 1:00pm because, bacon.
  4. A. Even though it can't always be seen, cyber-bullying is just as harmful as other forms of bullying because it is still just as hurtful.  
B. Even though it can't always be seen, cyber-bullying is just as harmful as other forms of bullying because, hurtful.
  5. A. Don't even try working from home with cats because cats tend to get in the way.  
B. Don't even try working from home with cats because, cats.

In general, all students agreed that if that the *Because, X* construction were to be used, it worked best in informal environments like texting, tweets (on Twitter), conversations with friends, or online. This confirms Hypothesis 4 which stated that the students would judge the sentences utilizing the *Because, X* construction as more informal than the standard counterparts.

From the total responses from this section, 5.4% stated that the construction did not make sense and that more explanation was needed. 12.9% of the responses from the students were that they would not use the construction because it was simply bad grammar, unprofessional, inappropriate and conveyed a laziness, or lack of knowledge and intelligence. Many students felt that the two sentences conveyed the same thing, but 12.5% thought that Sentence B did so in a shorter way that “gets to the point” faster. There were also many students who felt that Sentence B incorporated other “attitudes” like humor (16.0%) and sarcasm (3.0%). Some felt that the construction was being used to avoid discussing a topic



further, especially if the speaker was not as informed about the topic. This particular reasoning was cited in the responses for Sentence Set 2 at 7.3%. Students also felt that the *Because, X* construction in general was a convenient way to summarize the argument using only one word (3.2%). Additionally, students mentioned that in order for Sentence B to be understood it seemed important for the interlocutors to have a shared context about the subject, particularly for Set 3 and 5, which rely on the listener knowing that the speaker likes bacon and finds cats bothersome, respectively. One student responded to Set 5 saying, “[This could be used] if we had cats/other pets that were bothersome and there was a mutual understanding.”

Students were least likely to use the sentence with the *Because, X* construction for Set 4 because they considered the topic that was being discussed as serious. Considering that 16% of the responses indicated a sense of *humor* in the construction, it is understandable that they felt it was inappropriate to use it in this context. Most students felt that the construction here made the speaker seem less informed, or that the construction down-graded the importance of the subject. 13.1% of the responses for this sentence set stated that the student would not use the construction because it was about a serious topic. On the other hand, other students felt that the *Because, X* construction for this sentence got to the point quicker and that it had a way of highlighting the point to make it sink in more (12.1%). These students felt that the use of the construction had a way of elevating the importance of the *X*, *hurtful*. One student responded, “It’s used to make it seem like they only need to use the one word for people to understand.” Another said, “[This could be used] when writing a slogan for cyber-bullying. [It] conveys more feeling.”

For Sentence Set 1 the *Because, X* construction was considered mostly to be a method of explaining the reasoning quicker to get to the point (20.0%), followed by humor (16.4%). For Sentence Set 2, the construction was considered humorous (17.4%), but also one that the students would not use (17.4%). I think this was due to the content, which was more studious in nature. As already mentioned for Sentence Set 2, 7.3% of the students felt that the *Because, X* construction conveyed a sense that the speaker did not know much about the topic. It was also rated as conveying a lack of intelligence and knowledge at 6.4%, which might have influenced the students' overall responses for this set in saying that they found it humorous, but that they would not use it.

For Sentence Set 3, the construction was primarily considered humorous at 20.6%; however, they also responded that they would not use it (15.9%), citing reasons against it as improper grammar, that it does not provide all of the reasoning from Sentence A, or that it changes the reasoning altogether. One student responded, "I would never use sentence B. Sentence B conveys desire as opposed to proper justification." For Sentence Set 5, the most common response was that the students would not use Sentence B (30.1%) because it did not make sense, was improper grammar, was repetitive, and did not provide enough information. In total, 14.6% of the responses were that Sentence B did not make sense, while another 14.6% considered it humorous. One student responded, "I would use it if I was being funny or witty to make it sound like I was less annoyed with cats getting in the way!"

In conclusion, the construction was considered primarily one that is used to add humor into what is being said (16.0%). Of the total responses, 12.9% indicated that the students would not use the construction for reasons beyond simply not liking it. These reasons included that they felt it conveyed the same thing as Sentence A but without as much

detail, which they thought was sometimes necessary. On the other hand, 12.5% overall thought that the construction was a faster way of getting to the point, and in doing so sometimes highlighted the importance of whatever was in the *X* position. In addition to the construction being considered humorous and sarcastic, students felt that Sentence B would be used if the speaker wanted to be “trendy” or “modern” since this is a popular type of slang at the moment. One student very aptly reflected on the *Because, X* sentences saying, “It sounds better than A because words.”

**4.5.2.3 Results and Discussion from Section 3.** Section 3 of the survey asked students about their familiarity with the *Because, X* construction. They were asked three questions on whether or not they have seen the construction, if they use the construction, and if not then whether or not they would ever consider using it. Based on their responses to these questions, students were separated into five familiarity cohorts identified in Table 4.14 below.

Table 4.14

*The Familiarity and Acceptability Cohorts and Definitions.*

| Familiarity | Definition                                                                                                     |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Yes-Yes     | The participant has seen the construction and uses the construction.                                           |
| Yes-No-Yes  | The participant has seen the construction, does not use the construction, but would consider using it.         |
| No-No-Yes   | The participant has not seen the construction, does not use the construction, but would consider using it.     |
| Yes-No-No   | The participant has seen the construction, does not use the construction, and would not consider using it.     |
| No-No-No    | The participant has not seen the construction, does not use the construction, and would not consider using it. |

Of the 114 English-speaking users whose answers were analyzed above, the female students appear to be more accepting of the construction, which coincides with Schnoebelen’s observations that young women were leading the trend (Schnoebelen, 2014).

Additionally, the students overall indicated that they were familiar with the construction at 57.1%, confirming Hypothesis 5, which stated that more students would be familiar with the construction than not.

Table 4.15

*The Percentage of Students Based on Gender and Familiarity Cohort.*

|         | Not Selected | Yes-Yes | Yes-No-Yes | No-No-Yes | Yes-No-No | No-No-No |
|---------|--------------|---------|------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Female  | 1.9%         | 35.8%   | 5.7%       | 5.7%      | 26.4%     | 24.5%    |
| Male    | 3.3%         | 21.3%   | 9.8%       | 8.2%      | 16.4%     | 41.0%    |
| Overall | 2.6%         | 28.1%   | 7.9%       | 7.0%      | 21.1%     | 33.3%    |

I had expected that high school students would have had the most exposure to this construction since it is slang and most prevalent on social media environments, which are arguably more geared towards a younger population. Considering this, I had expected the familiarity and acceptability of the construction to be much higher. In total, the percentage of students who do or would consider using the construction was only 43.0% in comparison to the 54.4% who would not consider using it. This goes against Hypothesis 6, which stated that more students would indicate that they use the construction or would consider using the construction than students who do not use it and would not consider using it. As mentioned, the students who identified as female were more accepting of the construction with 47.2% identifying that they do or would consider using the construction, and 67.9% of them indicating that they had seen or heard the construction before. In contrast, 39.4% of the male students do or would consider using the construction, and less than half of them, at 47.6%, indicated that they had seen or heard the construction before the survey.

There did seem to be a correlation between students' familiarity and acceptance of the *Because, X* construction and their estimated time spent on social media every day. The

students who were less inclined to use the construction indicated that they spend less time on social media daily.

Table 4.16

*Percentage of Total Students in Each Acceptability and Familiarity Cohort According to Approximate Daily Time Spent on Social Media.*

|            | (NONE) | Yes-Yes | Yes-No-Yes | No-No-Yes | Yes-No-No | No-No-No |
|------------|--------|---------|------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| blank      | 0.0%   | 6.3%    | 0.0%       | 0.0%      | 4.2%      | 0.0%     |
| 0-2 hours  | 0.0%   | 34.4%   | 33.3%      | 50.0%     | 62.5%     | 65.8%    |
| 3-5 hours  | 33.3%  | 31.3%   | 55.6%      | 37.5%     | 25.0%     | 26.3%    |
| 6-8 hours  | 66.7%  | 18.8%   | 11.1%      | 12.5%     | 4.2%      | 5.3%     |
| 9-11 hours | 0.0%   | 9.4%    | 0.0%       | 0.0%      | 0.0%      | 2.6%     |
| 12+ hours  | 0.0%   | 0.0%    | 0.0%       | 0.0%      | 4.2%      | 0.0%     |

Of the students who indicated that they spend 0–2 hours on social media, 69.0% indicated that they would not consider using the construction and 31.0% indicated that they do use or would consider using the construction (Table 4.17). In contrast, the students who were more accepting of, and familiar with, the construction indicated that they spend more time online. For instance, of the students in the 9–11 hour time bracket, 75.0% indicated that they had seen and do use the construction, and 25.0% indicated that they had not seen the construction and would not consider using it. Further supporting the findings that increased time on social media leads to more familiarity and acceptability of the *Because, X* construction are the students who were part of the most accepting familiarity cohort, the Yes-Yes group. Participants in this group in general spent the most time on social media in comparison to members of other groups. Overall, 50.9% of the students indicated that they spend 0-2 hours on social media daily. Of these, 50.1% had seen or heard the construction before, and 31.1% indicated that they do or would consider using it.

Table 4.17

*Percentage of Total Students in Each Time Cohort According to Acceptability and Familiarity Cohorts.*

|            | blank | 0-2 hours | 3-5 hours | 6-8 hours | 9-11 hours | 12+ hours |
|------------|-------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| (NONE)     | 0.0%  | 0.0%      | 2.9%      | 15.4%     | 0.0%       | 0.0%      |
| Yes-Yes    | 66.7% | 19.0%     | 28.6%     | 46.2%     | 75.0%      | 0.0%      |
| Yes-No-Yes | 0.0%  | 5.2%      | 14.3%     | 7.7%      | 0.0%       | 0.0%      |
| No-No-Yes  | 0.0%  | 6.9%      | 8.6%      | 7.7%      | 0.0%       | 0.0%      |
| Yes-No-No  | 33.3% | 25.9%     | 17.1%     | 7.7%      | 0.0%       | 100%      |
| No-No-No   | 0.0%  | 43.1%     | 28.6%     | 15.4%     | 25.0%      | 0.0%      |

So, while spending more time online might increase the chance that a person might use the *Because, X* construction themselves, the students did not have to spend much time online to find an example of the construction being used.

Lastly, I analyzed the data per question according to familiarity cohorts to determine whether or not the students who were least familiar and least accepting of the construction had judged it differently from the students who were familiar and more accepting of it. Table 4.18 details, by familiarity cohort, the percentage of likelihood per context for each question in Section 1. The percentage of likelihood was determined by the combination of 4 and 5 ratings on the gradable scale.

Table 4.18

*Each Sentence in Section 1 of the Survey Analyzed According to Familiarity Cohort. The Highest Percentage for Each Familiarity Cohort Is in Bold.*

| Sentence                                                                                        | Hypothesized Preference                          | Familiarity | Percent Likelihood (4-5) in Contexts |                        |                         |              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
|                                                                                                 |                                                  |             | Social Media                         | Speaking with a Friend | Speaking with a Teacher | Essay        |
| Overall it was well-written and interesting, but a little stereotypical and cliché.             | All (control)                                    | No-No-No    | 10.5%                                | 18.4%                  | 52.6%                   | <b>60.5%</b> |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | Yes-No-No   | 20.8%                                | 37.5%                  | 52.2%                   | <b>58.3%</b> |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | No-No-Yes   | 12.5%                                | 25.0%                  | 37.5%                   | <b>62.5%</b> |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | Yes-No-Yes  | 11.1%                                | 44.4%                  | 22.2%                   | <b>66.7%</b> |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | Yes-Yes     | 6.3%                                 | 31.3%                  | 65.6%                   | <b>78.1%</b> |
| It's that feeling you get when you finish your homework and you just want to cry because, yay.  | Social Media<br>(Because, X with an exclamation) | No-No-No    | 36.8%                                | <b>44.7%</b>           | 13.2%                   | 5.3%         |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | Yes-No-No   | <b>52.2%</b>                         | 47.8%                  | 8.7%                    | 0.0%         |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | No-No-Yes   | 50.0%                                | <b>75.0%</b>           | 0.0%                    | 0.0%         |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | Yes-No-Yes  | 50.0%                                | <b>77.8%</b>           | 22.2%                   | 22.2%        |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | Yes-Yes     | <b>65.6%</b>                         | 56.3%                  | 6.3%                    | 3.3%         |
| It was too cold to go outside so, video games.                                                  | Social Media<br>(Because, X using so)            | No-No-No    | 34.2%                                | <b>42.1%</b>           | 5.3%                    | 2.6%         |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | Yes-No-No   | 45.8%                                | <b>50.0%</b>           | 4.3%                    | 0.0%         |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | No-No-Yes   | <b>62.5%</b>                         | <b>62.5%</b>           | 0.0%                    | 0.0%         |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | Yes-No-Yes  | 66.7%                                | <b>77.8%</b>           | 0.0%                    | 0.0%         |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | Yes-Yes     | <b>56.3%</b>                         | <b>56.3%</b>           | 6.3%                    | 0.0%         |
| He left because he was frustrated.                                                              | All (control)                                    | No-No-No    | 21.1%                                | <b>60.5%</b>           | 50.0%                   | 39.5%        |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | Yes-No-No   | 25.0%                                | <b>70.8%</b>           | 50.0%                   | 29.2%        |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | No-No-Yes   | 25.0%                                | <b>75.0%</b>           | 62.5%                   | 50.0%        |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | Yes-No-Yes  | 22.2%                                | <b>33.3%</b>           | <b>33.3%</b>            | 11.1%        |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | Yes-Yes     | 31.3%                                | 68.8%                  | <b>75.0%</b>            | 46.9%        |
| A great deal of knowledge and experience has accrued as a result of these influential projects. | Essay                                            | No-No-No    | 10.5%                                | 5.3%                   | 42.1%                   | <b>65.8%</b> |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | Yes-No-No   | 4.2%                                 | 8.7%                   | 60.9%                   | <b>79.2%</b> |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | No-No-Yes   | 12.5%                                | 12.5%                  | 62.5%                   | <b>75.0%</b> |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | Yes-No-Yes  | 11.1%                                | 11.1%                  | <b>66.7%</b>            | <b>66.7%</b> |
|                                                                                                 |                                                  | Yes-Yes     | 3.1%                                 | 6.3%                   | 46.9%                   | <b>90.6%</b> |

Table 4.18 continued

Each Sentence in Section 1 of the Survey Analyzed According to Familiarity Cohort. The Highest Percentage for Each Familiarity Cohort Is in Bold.

| Sentence                                         | Hypothesized Preference                | Familiarity | Percent Likelihood (4-5) in Contexts |                        |                         |       |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
|                                                  |                                        |             | Social Media                         | Speaking with a friend | Speaking with a teacher | Essay |
| I am making hot cocoa because, want.             | Social Media<br>(Because, X with VP)   | No-No-No    | <b>29.0%</b>                         | 26.3%                  | 2.7%                    | 2.7%  |
|                                                  |                                        | Yes-No-No   | <b>45.8%</b>                         | 29.2%                  | 0.0%                    | 0.0%  |
|                                                  |                                        | No-No-Yes   | <b>37.5%</b>                         | <b>37.5%</b>           | 0.0%                    | 0.0%  |
|                                                  |                                        | Yes-No-Yes  | <b>22.2%</b>                         | <b>22.2%</b>           | 0.0%                    | 11.1% |
|                                                  |                                        | Yes-Yes     | <b>43.8%</b>                         | 37.5%                  | 9.4%                    | 0.0%  |
| She missed the bus because of the rain.          | All (control)                          | No-No-No    | 23.7%                                | <b>42.1%</b>           | <b>42.1%</b>            | 36.8% |
|                                                  |                                        | Yes-No-No   | 16.7%                                | <b>54.2%</b>           | 45.8%                   | 8.3%  |
|                                                  |                                        | No-No-Yes   | 25.0%                                | <b>50.0%</b>           | 37.5%                   | 25.0% |
|                                                  |                                        | Yes-No-Yes  | 33.3%                                | <b>66.7%</b>           | 55.6%                   | 33.3% |
|                                                  |                                        | Yes-Yes     | 34.4%                                | 65.6%                  | <b>75.0%</b>            | 40.6% |
| I was going to go to the party but, homework.    | Social Media<br>(Because, X using but) | No-No-No    | 28.9%                                | <b>34.2%</b>           | 7.9%                    | 13.2% |
|                                                  |                                        | Yes-No-No   | <b>50.0%</b>                         | 45.8%                  | 4.2%                    | 0.0%  |
|                                                  |                                        | No-No-Yes   | 37.5%                                | <b>62.5%</b>           | 0.0%                    | 0.0%  |
|                                                  |                                        | Yes-No-Yes  | <b>55.6%</b>                         | <b>55.6%</b>           | 22.2%                   | 11.1% |
|                                                  |                                        | Yes-Yes     | 53.1%                                | <b>62.5%</b>           | 15.6%                   | 0.0%  |
| Because reading, I can never get to bed on time. | None                                   | No-No-No    | <b>15.8%</b>                         | <b>15.8%</b>           | 8.1%                    | 7.9%  |
|                                                  |                                        | Yes-No-No   | <b>37.5%</b>                         | 8.3%                   | 12.5%                   | 4.3%  |
|                                                  |                                        | No-No-Yes   | <b>12.5%</b>                         | <b>12.5%</b>           | 0.0%                    | 0.0%  |
|                                                  |                                        | Yes-No-Yes  | <b>44.4%</b>                         | <b>44.4%</b>           | 0.0%                    | 11.1% |
|                                                  |                                        | Yes-Yes     | <b>34.4%</b>                         | 28.1%                  | 21.9%                   | 0.0%  |
| He stayed up all night because, Internet.        | Social Media<br>(Because, X with NP)   | No-No-No    | <b>36.8%</b>                         | 23.7%                  | 2.6%                    | 5.3%  |
|                                                  |                                        | Yes-No-No   | <b>41.7%</b>                         | 12.5%                  | 4.2%                    | 0.0%  |
|                                                  |                                        | No-No-Yes   | <b>50.0%</b>                         | <b>50.0%</b>           | 0.0%                    | 0.0%  |
|                                                  |                                        | Yes-No-Yes  | <b>66.7%</b>                         | <b>66.7%</b>           | 0.0%                    | 11.1% |
|                                                  |                                        | Yes-Yes     | 53.1%                                | <b>59.4%</b>           | 9.4%                    | 0.0%  |

In general, the different familiarity cohorts all judged the sentences similarly with the highest likelihood ratings (bolded in Table 4.18) in either the same environment or split



between two environments. This suggests that regardless of exposure to the construction, all of the students were able to converge on appropriate contexts for the sentences. I analyzed the highest percentages for the cohorts and calculated the differences between the highest and lowest of these bolded percentages for each sentence. The highest difference for a *Because, X* sentence was Sentence 3 at 35%, while the highest difference for the control sentences was Sentence 4 at 41.7%. The difference between these percentages is only 6.0%. On the other end, the lowest difference of the bolded percentages for the *Because, X* sentences was Sentence 6 at 23.6% and for the control sentences was Sentence 1 at 19.8%, resulting in a difference of 3.8%.

I then analyzed the bolded percentages in Table 4.18 according to each cohort to determine the range of each cohorts' responses for the *Because, X* sentences and the control sentences. To do this, I found the difference between the highest and lowest of these bolded percentages for each cohort for the *Because, X* sentences, and then again for the control sentences (with the exception of Sentence 9, which was meant to be anomalous). The result from these differences are below in Table 4.19.

Table 4.19

*Range of the Highest Likelihood Ratings for the Because, X Sentences and Control Sentences per Familiarity Cohort.*

| Familiarity | Range for <i>Because, X</i> sentences | Range for control sentences | Difference between ranges |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| No-No-No    | 15.7%                                 | 23.7%                       | 8%                        |
| Yes-No-No   | 10.5%                                 | 25%                         | 14.5%                     |
| No-No-Yes   | 37.5%                                 | 25%                         | 12.5%                     |
| Yes-No-Yes  | 55.6%                                 | 33.4%                       | 22.2%                     |
| Yes-Yes     | 21.8%                                 | 15%                         | 6.8%                      |

As shown in Table 4.19, the differences in ranges between the *Because, X* sentences and control sentences for the cohorts is 5.7%, with the exception of the Yes-No-Yes cohort

which had the highest range of likelihood for both the *Because, X* and control sentences. It could be that this cohort had difficulty establishing which environments were more conducive to the sentences they were analyzing. For instance, Sentence 9, which was designed to be anomalous, received 11.1% likelihood from this cohort to appear in an essay, while three *Because, X* sentences received 11.1% likelihood to be found in an essay, and another one received 22.2% likelihood to be found in this environment. Perhaps what is more likely is that this cohort, which has seen the construction before and, though does not use it, would consider using it are less sure than the other groups of where this language would be most appropriate. The cohorts that would not consider using the construction are aware of where it would most likely appear, because of its non-standard and informal nature. Similarly, the cohort that uses the construction knows where to use it for its desired effect and where it would be inappropriate to use it. This leaves the Yes-No-Yes cohort which might still be refining the construction's use and effect.

This brings up the question of how reliably a participant can estimate the likelihood of something being said if they have never seen it before. The two cohorts that had never seen the construction before the survey still judged the sentences similarly to the cohorts who were familiar with it. It could be that they were using intuition and relying on the content in the sentences to make their judgments, though the same could be said for the control sentences; using words like *stereotypical* and *cliché* no doubt influenced the “essay” likelihood rating in Sentence 1. Perhaps also the non-standard structure indicated to them that it was a type of slang, or a shorter way of communicating, that would be conducive to limited character environments on social media. One student said this about the construction from

Section 2, “We would use [Sentence B] while texting because it’s short. Also, some of my friends don’t want to sound smart when they talk.”

**4.5.3 Summary of findings.** Concerning the background information on the students, female students were in general more likely to have seen the construction and use it themselves, while male students were less accepting of the construction. This coincides with the data that Tyler Schnoebelen analyzed in 2014 and suggests that females are leading this particular language innovation. This also follows the linguistic trend for young, female speakers to lead sound changes (Van Herk, 2012). However, students were overall less accepting of the construction with 54.4% in total indicating that they would not use it themselves, which was surprising. There were correlations in the data between the number of hours the students selected that they spent on social media every day and their acceptance of and familiarity with the *Because, X* construction. Students who were most accepting of the construction and used it themselves indicated that they are on social media on average more than the students who do not use the construction. However, 50.1% of students in the 0-2 hours time cohort had encountered instances of the *Because, X* construction by only spending 0-2 hours on social media every day. So, while it appears that, generally, the more time a user spends online, the more likely they are to use the *Because, X* construction, they do not need to spend very much time online at all in order to be exposed to it.

Revisiting the hypotheses identified at the beginning of this section, Hypothesis 1, stating that the *Because, X* construction would be judged as most likely to be used in the environment of being “written on social media” was not necessarily confirmed since half of these sentences had higher likelihood ratings for “speaking with a friend.” This is surprising because the construction was popularized via the Internet, especially on social media, but the

responses suggest that this construction is becoming more acceptable to use in everyday speech with friends. One student even indicated that she has not seen the construction written, but has heard it being spoken. Alternatively, students might have considered texting as included under the context of “speaking with a friend.” This would not be surprising since texting is a popular method of communication, and would lend itself well to the *Because, X* construction since many people try to limit what the amount of words they have to type. This construction was considered most likely to be used on social media twice, and spoken with a friend three times. For all of these occurrences, the informal contexts of it being written on social media or spoken with a friend were highest and well above the other formal contexts of written on an essay or spoken with a teacher.

The construction itself seems to be open to accepting other conjunctions beyond *because* based off of the sentences using *but* and *so* in this study. These two sentences were judged similarly to the other *Because, X* sentences even by the students who were most familiar with the construction and used it themselves, confirming Hypothesis 2. Additionally, the one preposed sentence using the *Because, X* construction that was hypothesized in Hypothesis 3 to be considered less likely to be used, had the lowest likelihood rates of all the sentences included on the survey. Overall, it was considered most likely to be used on social media, but by only 28.1%. Even the Yes-Yes familiarity cohort, who is most familiar with the *Because, X* construction, only considered the preposed sentence at a likelihood of 34.4%, which was the lowest of all of the sentences for this cohort.

In general, the sentences using the *Because, X* construction in the comparison sets in Section 2 were considered to be informal, confirming Hypothesis 4. While some students interpreted this informality to convey a lack of intelligence, knowledge, and professionalism,

other students considered these sentences as more humorous, witty, and sarcastic. Most students considered the *Because, X* version in the pair (Sentence B) to be especially inappropriate when the context is more formal or serious, though some students felt that the construction highlighted the importance of the *X* in these instances making the subject stronger and more compelling.

Hypothesis 5 stated that more students would be more familiar with the *Because, X* construction than not, which was confirmed; 57.1% of the students indicated that they had seen the construction compared to the 41.2% who said they had never seen it before. However, Hypothesis 6, stating that more students would indicate that they use the construction or would consider using the construction than not, was not confirmed; 43.0% of the students indicated that they do use or would consider using the construction, compared to 54.4% who indicated that they do not use the construction and would not consider it. I had expected a higher percentage of students indicating that they would consider using the construction since it is a colloquial, slangy expression that is prevalent across social media. It is possible that since the survey was administered at school in a classroom that students were more concerned with indicating that they would not use a construction considered ungrammatical.

All of the familiarity cohorts were able to converge on similar environments (written on social media, spoken with a friend) for overall likelihood of use of the *Because, X* sentences. This suggests that while there are students who have not seen the construction and others who would not use it themselves, they are all still able to judge it similarly on where and with whom it is most likely to be used.

## 4.6 Conclusion and Future Research

Since the popularization of the construction in the 2011 memes, the *Because, X* construction has made its way into many areas of popular culture. The construction has been incorporated into television shows, published in books, and broadcasted nationally in advertisements. The construction was originally called “because NOUN” or “prepositional because”; however, these both prove to be too restrictive; the *Because, X* construction can appear with many complements beyond NPs, including VPs, ADJPs, and exclamations, and the construction does not share the same characteristics of a preposition. For instance, according to the research conducted in this work, the construction is largely dispreferred when the *Because, X* proposition is preposed. As judged by the high school students who participated in this study, the *Because, X* construction is considered more likely to be used in informal contexts like on social media or being spoken with a friend. There seems to be a slight tendency for the construction to be considered more likely to be used in informal conversational environments. This could mean that the prevalence of the construction is causing it to be considered more common to be spoken in everyday conversations. One of the students did mention that they had never seen the construction written, but instead had heard it being used. Alternatively, the students may have considered texting to be included within what was originally considered a strictly verbal environment of “speaking with a friend.” Since texting is an informal written environment, it would be conducive for the *Because, X* construction, which reduces the amount of words written.

Overall, it seems as if young female speakers are leading the innovation, according to the research conducted by Tyler Schnoebelen in 2014, which is also reflected in the research in this work. It also appears that while a person does not have to spend much time on social

media to encounter an instance of the *Because, X* construction, the more time a person spends online the more likely they are to start using the construction. The majority of students in the study indicated that they do not use the construction and would not consider using it, which was surprising since the construction is trendy and prevalent on social media, which is mostly used by younger generations. However, the survey was administered in an academic environment which could have made them hyperaware that the construction is considered ungrammatical in standard English, and could have thus influenced their responses. Additionally, from the study conducted in Chapter 3, the age cohort for 21- to 30-year-olds was both more accepting of and familiar with the *Because, X* construction than the 11- to 20-year-olds. This suggests that the construction is more associated and popular with 20-somethings than with high school students.

In general, students considered the *Because, X* construction to be informal when asked to compare a *Because, X* sentence to a standard sentence using *because*. While some students interpreted this informality to convey a lack of intelligence, knowledge, and professionalism, other students considered these sentences as more humorous, witty, and sarcastic. Most students thought the *Because, X* version in the pair to be especially inappropriate when the context was more formal or serious. On the other hand, there were other students who felt that the construction highlighted the importance of whatever was in the *X* position in these instances.

Future research will want to continue monitoring instances of the *Because, X* construction as it continues to spread through popular culture. Other phrases also influenced by the Internet like, “omg need,” and, “hashtag,” should also be explored as it seems they are being used in similar ways as the *Because, X* construction. The use of the pound sign (#), or

more colloquially, “hashtag,” is a trend that was started by Twitter. This sign was originally used to identify messages on a specific topic, typically current trends, popular events, or movements as in #blacklivesmatter (the ADS Word of the Year for 2014).<sup>65</sup> It seems to be able to be used as a summation of thoughts like *Because, X*, or even can be used as a type of aside to add additional reasoning, humor, or sarcasm. The examples in (20) include the use of a hashtag.

- (20) a. Obama completing the eulogy for the Charleston shooting victims by singing "Amazing Grace" brought me to tears. BlacksLivesMatter<sup>66</sup>  
b. But I implore the court of public opinion to keep up the fight, as gay marriage was equally maligned not even twenty years ago. #YesAllFamilies<sup>67</sup>  
c. Andddd here comes Louisiana into the mix! #PopcornReady<sup>68</sup>

According to the research conducted, it appears as if the *Because, X* construction is expanding to other conjunctions like *but, since, thus, so, which,* and *ergo* which seem somewhat synonymous with *because* in mimicking the *Because, X* construction. The students who participated in the survey judged the *Because, X* construction using *but* and *so* at similar likelihood rates as when the construction used *because*. This suggests that this class of words are shifting to appear with the complements accepted in a *Because, X* construction. As the influence of this construction continues to expand, instances of it occurring with other conjunctions should be monitored. Additional research should also be extended to other languages and whether or not they have a construction similar to *Because, X* or if they are being influenced at all by this new English slang.

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<sup>65</sup> This is often also written as #BlackLivesMatter, but ADS listed it as #blacklivesmatter which is how it appears here.

<sup>66</sup> Originally from personal communication on Facebook. June 26, 2015.

<sup>67</sup> Originally from personal communication on Facebook. June 26, 2015.

<sup>68</sup> Originally from personal communication on Facebook. June 26, 2015.



## Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have presented detailed syntactic, semantic, and quantitative analyses on the *Because, X* construction with the goal to better understand this new use of *because*. Through these analyses I was able to establish the similarities and differences between the *because* in the *Because, X* construction and the *because* in its standard uses.

In Chapter 2, I provided a detailed syntactic discussion on the syntactic structure of standard sentences using *because* and compared this to the syntax of the *Because, X* construction. I first presented the argument presented by Pullum that the *Because, X* construction was *because* being used as a preposition since it takes an NP complement in this new construction. However, the *because* in the *Because, X* construction does not act as other prepositions in that it is dispreferred when it is preposed (confirmed in the study conducted in Chapter 4), and it can take more than NPs as complements, including singular count nouns with non-overt determiners. I used analyses of the syntactic structure of both prepositions and subordinating conjunctions to further detail the differences between these and the *Because, X* construction. I also used syntactic trees to analyze the construction as an instance of ellipsis, which would explain syntactically how the sentence would gain case and theta roles. Ultimately though, the *Because, X* construction does not fit in this category either as the supposed elided part of the sentence is not repeated in the main clause (as in true ellipsis), and it is not a complement of a typical ellipsis licenser (tensed auxiliary, modal, or *wh*-complementizer). I concluded by suggesting that *because* in the *Because, X* construction was appearing with a new, interjectionary complement, temporarily titled,  $\alpha P$ , which either provides case required for DP complements with lexical content, or allows another way around this as a property of  $\alpha P$ . This could potentially mean that *because*, and similar words

that appear in the same class, could then appear as part of a compound preposition, as a subordinating conjunction, and with the  $\alpha$ P complement.

Future syntactic research should be conducted on the apparent bare singular count nouns that can fill the complement position in the *Because, X* construction. I have presented the argument that these singular count nouns are actually a part of a larger DP with a phonologically unrealized determiner. It is possible that these determiners are not overt due to the inherent succinctness that is a part of the *Because, X* construction, but this issue should be explored further. Additionally, the  $\alpha$ P complement will need to be explored further under a more detailed analysis. Ideally, the more the  $\alpha$ P complement is explored, the more it will resemble other structures already explained in the grammar and the less unique it will seem.

In Chapter 3, I presented a semantic analysis of *because* and determined that the *because* in the *Because, X* construction is semantically the same as other uses of *because*. This is to say, at its core, *because* remains causal in the *Because, X* construction. Since it is causal, I suggested that the reason certain complements are dispreferred in the *Because, X* construction is because it might be more difficult to derive a cause in the *Because, X* complement if *X* is represented with an ADVP or function word than if it were represented with an NP. Grice's Maxims were then introduced and I explained that by violating certain maxims, the *Because, X* construction is able to convey certain contextual nuances based on a perception of a shared perspective between the interlocutors, which tends to indicate either togetherness or that a potentially complicated explanation is not worth the effort. Additionally, in being so brief and non-canonical, certain maxims are flouted which allows the utterance to convey meaning that would not be possible for standard structures. The exact

nature of the conveyed meaning is dependent on the larger conversational context, but include humor, sarcasm, and criticism.

Next, a study was presented on a survey that was conducted to try to determine how the *Because, X* construction is most commonly interpreted, and whether or not certain contexts lead to different interpretations. The results from the survey indicated that the more controversial and opinionated the content was, the more it was judged as conveying *criticism*, *sarcasm*, and *dismissiveness* while the more light-hearted the content, the more it was judged as conveying *humor* and *wit*. Over all of the responses for the whole survey, the construction was judged to be functioning primarily to convey *humor*, followed by *rationale*, and *summation of thought*. From the information gathered on the familiarity and acceptability of the *Because, X* construction of this study's participants, it was determined that the female participants were more likely than the male ones to be familiar with, and accepting of, the *Because, X* construction, but the majority of the participants indicated that they were both familiar with the construction and accepting of it. Additionally, the more time a participant indicated that they spent online, the more likely they had seen the construction and the more likely they were to use the construction, or consider using it. The data illustrate that, in general, the older the participant was, the less likely they would be familiar with and accepting of the *Because, X* construction.

Chapter 4 opened by establishing the construction's growing prominence with a discussion of the rising popularity of the *Because, X* construction. This began by citing the first instances of the construction in 2011, followed by uses of it in popular television shows, advertisements, and even printed on apparel. This chapter also answered questions on which environments the *Because, X* construction is most likely to appear in and which contexts are

most conducive to the construction through a study involving high school students. The study results indicated that the *Because, X* construction is one that is best used in informal written and verbal environments. Similar to the results of the study conducted in Chapter 3, the female students indicated they were more likely to use it, though overall the more exposure a student had to the construction, the more likely it was for them to be accepting of the construction. The survey also helped to answer syntactic questions about the *Because, X* construction. For instance, the students dispreferred a preposed *Because, X* sentence compared to sentences with the *Because, X* complement at the end. Additionally, they judged *Because, X* sentences using subordinating conjunctions like *but* and *so* at similar rates as the ones using *because*, suggesting that subordinating conjunctions as a class are shifting to allow the *Because, X* construction, or  $\alpha$ P complement.

Future research will want to explore other phrases also influenced by the Internet like, in particular, the use of the pound sign (#), or “hashtag.” Similar to the *Because, X* construction, it seems to be used as a succinct summation of thought or to indicate a type of aside to add additional reasoning, humor, or sarcasm. Other subordinating conjunctions in the same category as *because* should also be monitored for any instances of them appearing in the *Because, X* construction, or taking similar complements as those in the *Because, X* construction. The expansion of this construction to other subordinating conjunctions seems to have already started as instances of this have been mentioned in this thesis. If instances of this expansion continue, it could have significant, and exciting, consequences for words in this class and the complements they can take.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Chapter 3 Study Online Consent Form and Survey

### Because, X

This survey is one part of larger exploration on language change and language fads. Most language fads are in the form of new words, vowel removal ('text' becomes 'tɪt'), or acronyms, but recently the Internet has influenced a new way of using an old connecting word: because. This new use is called 'Because, X' and it has become so popular it was named the American Dialect Society's word of the year for 2013. An example of 'Because, X' would be the sentence, "I can't go to the party because, homework" instead of either, "I can't go to the party because I have homework," or "I can't go to the party because of my homework".

The 'Because, X' form is new, but a similar construction has surfaced in the past. For example, a Jack Handey Saturday Night Live skit from 1987 went, "If you ever fall off the Sears Tower, just go real limp, because maybe you'll look like a dummy and people will try to catch you because, hey, free dummy." In 2011 the 'Because, X' construction became popularized by two separate memes with the phrases, "Because, race car" and "Because, reasons" which were used as descriptions and replies to questions. Now the construction has expanded to be used in all kinds of various ways because, creativity. Because, language change.

This survey is aimed at exploring what the 'Because, X' construction is trying to convey and how it is interpreted.

### Consent Form

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research study is aimed at exploring what the Because, X construction is trying to convey and how it is interpreted.

**Funding:** This research is unfunded.

**Study Procedures:** Participation in this study involves completing an online survey. It should take between 10-15 minutes to complete the survey.

**Risks:** The primary risk of participation in this study is a potential loss of confidentiality. If at any time you are uncomfortable and do not wish to answer a questions or would like to leave the survey you may do so and your answers will not be counted towards the overall data.

**Benefits:** You will not directly benefit from participating in this research. Benefits to society include a larger understanding of language as a whole and how the Internet is shaping language.

**Confidentiality:** All responses will be collected independently of the survey and stored in a password-protected computer file. Your name will not be collected as part of the survey. We may share your information with other researchers outside of Eastern Michigan University. The results of this research may be published or used for teaching.

**Compensation:** You will not be compensated for your participation.

**Contact Information:** If you have any questions about the research, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Stephanie Walla at swalla@emich.edu or by phone at 586.850.5157. You can also contact Stephanie's adviser, Dr. T. Daniel Seely, at tseely@emich.edu or by phone at 734.487.0145.

For questions about your rights as a research subject, you can contact the Eastern Michigan University Office of Research Compliance at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

Voluntary participation: Participation in this research study is your choice. You may refuse to participate at any time, even after signing this form, with no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may choose to leave the study at any time with no loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you leave the study, the information you provided will be kept confidential.

Statement of Consent: I have read this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the answers I received. I click "continue" below to indicate my consent to participate in this research study.

**"Clicking 'I agree' below indicates that I have read the description of the study, understand the risks involved, and I agree to participate in the study".\***

This is a declaration of participant consent. In clicking 'I agree' you are consenting to the above statement. In clicking 'I do not agree' you will be routed out of the survey.

- I agree
- I do not agree

## Participant Information

Please answer these few questions about yourself.

What is your age?\*

What is your gender?\*

What is your first language?\*

i.e. the first language you started speaking.

On average how much time do you spend on social media every day?\*

- 0-2 hours
- 3-5 hours
- 6-8 hours
- 9-11 hours
- 12+ hours

## Because, X

The sentences below all use the "Because, X" construction. Please evaluate each of the sentences and choose up to 3 different meanings from the provided lists for what you think the construction is conveying. There are no right or wrong answers.

### Studying because, school.\*

What does this construction convey the most to you? Choose at least 1 and no more than 3.

- Humor
- Criticism
- Sarcasm
- Summation of thoughts
- Rationale
- Wit
- Dismissiveness
- Formality

### List of hot chocolate recipes because, winter.\*

What does this construction convey the most to you? Choose at least 1 and no more than 3.

- Humor
- Criticism
- Summation of thoughts
- Rationale
- Wit
- Dismissiveness
- Formality

### Don't even try working from home with cats because, cats.\*

What does this construction convey the most to you? Choose at least 1 and no more than 3.

- Humor
- Criticism
- Sarcasm
- Summation of thoughts
- Rationale
- Wit
- Dismissiveness
- Formality

**Heavily altered Miss World Philippines photos are causing a stir because, Photoshop.\***

What does this construction convey the most to you? Choose at least 1 and no more than 3.

- Humor
- Criticism
- Sarcasm
- Summation of thoughts
- Rationale
- Wit
- Dismissiveness
- Formality

**DOW closes at record high for 35th time this year because, Obama.\***

What does this construction convey the most to you? Choose at least 1 and no more than 3.

- Humor
- Criticism
- Sarcasm
- Summation of thoughts
- Rationale
- Wit
- Dismissiveness
- Formality

**Of course evolution is true because, science.\***

What does this construction convey the most to you? Choose at least 1 and no more than 3..

- Humor
- Criticism
- Sarcasm
- Summation of thoughts
- Rationale
- Wit
- Dismissiveness
- Formality

**There is no precise male equivalent of 'feminist' because, patriarchy.\***

What does this construction convey the most to you? Choose at least 1 and no more than 3.

- Humor
- Criticism
- Sarcasm
- Summation of thoughts
- Rationale
- Wit
- Dismissiveness
- Formality

**Set an alarm for 8 so I could get up and be productive early. Reset an alarm for 9:30 because, sleep.\***

What does this construction convey the most to you? Choose at least 1 and no more than 3.

- Humor
- Criticism
- Sarcasm
- Summation of thoughts
- Rationale
- Wit
- Dismissiveness
- Formality

**That feeling you get when you finish an essay and you just want to cry because, yay.\***

What does this construction convey the most to you? Choose at least 1 and no more than 3.

- Humor
- Criticism
- Sarcasm
- Summation of thoughts
- Rationale
- Wit
- Dismissiveness
- Formality

**Here's my advice again – advice I often give- because, sensible.\***

What does this construction convey the most to you? Choose at least 1 and no more than 3.

- Humor
- Criticism
- Sarcasm
- Summation of thoughts
- Rationale
- Wit
- Dismissiveness
- Formality

## **Familiarity with "Because, X"**

**Have you ever seen/heard 'because' being used in the "Because, X" construction before this survey?\***

- Yes
- No

**Where have you seen/heard 'Because, X'?\***

Check all that apply.

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Conversations with friends
- Blogs
- Online newspaper articles
- Emails
- Other:

**Do you use 'Because, X' yourself?\***

- Yes
- No

**Where have you used 'Because, X'?**\*

Check all that apply

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Blogs
- Conversations with friends
- Emails
- Online newspaper articles
- Other:

**If not, would you ever consider using this construction?\***

- Yes
- No

**Why or why not?\***



## Appendix B: Chapter 4 Study Principal Permission Letter

Stephanie,

Thank you for your email. Congratulations on the near completion of your program. Beth informed me of your survey and I have reviewed it. I give permission for Beth to administer the survey, however, we will need to have a parent permission form for them to take part. Surveys that are administered by an outside entity must follow this policy.

I would suggest that Ms. Bodiya explain the survey and have a very simple form that allows parents to give permission. You will want to provide them a brief explanation of the survey and an approximate time it will take to administer.

Best of luck,  
Julie Helber

--

Dr. Julie D. Helber  
Principal - Saline High School  
1300 Campus Parkway  
Saline, MI 48176  
[734-429-8030](tel:734-429-8030)  
*The Pursuit of Excellence*

## RESEARCH @ EMU

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### Parental Consent Form

The person in charge of this study is Stephanie Walla, a MA student in Linguistics at Eastern Michigan University. Her faculty advisers are Dr. Eric Acton and Dr. T. Daniel Seely. Throughout this form, this person will be referred to as the “investigator.”

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this research study is to explore how connectives are being influenced by the Internet, in particular social media. This study centers on a language fad called, *Because, X*, which is an alternate way of using *because*.

#### **What will happen if my child participates in this study?**

Participation in this study involves completing a survey consisting of 15 questions. The first 10 questions involves the student assessing connectives and how appropriate their use is in certain contexts (on social media, speaking with a friend, speaking with a teacher, and written in an essay). The last 5 questions compares two sentences- one that is standard, and another which conveys the same concepts but uses the *Because, X* construction. The student will explain why they would choose to use one of the sentences over the other, in what contexts, and whether or not they convey different meanings.

The survey should take 10-15 minutes to complete and will administered in class.

#### **What are the anticipated risks for participation?**

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks to participation.

#### **Are there any benefits to participating?**

You and your child will not directly benefit from participating in this research. Benefits to society include a larger understanding of connectives as a whole and how the Internet is shaping language.

#### **What are the alternatives to participation?**

The alternative is not to participate.

#### **How will my information be kept confidential?**

We will follow state confidentiality measure to ensure your child’s information is kept confidential. The only personally identifiable information collected will be in regards to age, gender, language, and estimated amount of time the student spends on social media. Your child’s name will not be collected as part of this survey. The data from this study will be transferred to a password-protected computer and the paper survey will be kept in a secured cabinet until the research period has ended when it will be shredded. We will make every effort to keep your child’s information confidential, however, we

cannot guarantee confidentiality. There may be instances where federal or state law requires disclosure of your child's records.

Other groups may have access to your child's research information for quality control or safety purposes. These groups include the University Human Subjects Review Committee, the Office of Research Development, the sponsor of the research, or federal and state agencies that oversee the review of research. The University Human Subjects Review Committee is responsible for the safety and protection of people who participate in research studies.

The results of this research may be published or used for teaching. Identifiable information will not be used for these purposes.

#### **Storing study information for future use**

We would like to store your child's information from this study for future use related to *Because, X*. We will not be collecting your child's name in this survey. The responses your child gives will be stored in a password-protected file and this information may be shared with researchers outside of Eastern Michigan University.

#### **Are there any costs to participation?**

Participation will not cost you or your child anything.

#### **Will my child be paid for participation?**

Your child will not be paid to participate in this research study.

#### **Study contact information**

If you or your child has any questions about the research, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Stephanie Walla, at [swalla@emich.edu](mailto:swalla@emich.edu) or by phone at 586.850.5157. You can also contact Stephanie's adviser, Dr. T. Daniel Seely at [tseely@emich.edu](mailto:tseely@emich.edu) or by phone at 734.487.0145.

For questions about your child's rights as a research subject, contact the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee at [human.subjects@emich.edu](mailto:human.subjects@emich.edu) or by phone at 734-487-3090.

#### **Voluntary participation**

Participation in this research study is your and your child's choice. Your child will be asked independently for assent and his or her dissent will be respected. You and your child may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time, even after signing this form, with no penalty or loss of benefits to which you and your child are otherwise entitled. If you and your child leave the study, the information your child provided will be kept confidential. We cannot destroy any information that has already been published.

#### **Statement of Consent**

I have read this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the answers I received. Unless I contact the investigator otherwise, my child will participate in this study.

**If you would do not agree to let your child participate in this study, notify your child they are not to participate, and contact the investigator at 586.850.5157 or [swalla@emich.edu](mailto:swalla@emich.edu) by May 31, 2015. If you do not contact the investigator by May 31, 2015 your consent will be assumed.**

## Appendix D: Chapter 4 Study Student Assent Form

### RESEARCH @ EMU

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## Assent Form

### Introduction

- You are being asked to participate in a research study. Research studies are conducted by scientists or other researchers to answer questions and learn new things. The researcher conducting this study is Stephanie Walla, a student. Her advisors are Dr. Eric Acton and Dr. T. Daniel Seely. In this form Stephanie will be referred to as the investigator.
- The purpose of this study is to explore how language is being influenced by the Internet. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you have before deciding to participate in this study.

### Study Procedures

- If you agree to participate in this study, we will ask you to complete a survey of 15 questions.
- The survey should take 10-15 minutes to complete and will be given once in class.

### Risks

- There are minimal risks to this survey.
- You might feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions in the interview/survey. You do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. If any questions make you feel uncomfortable, you can also talk to the investigator about this, take a break, or stop the study.

### Benefits

- You will not benefit from participating in this study. Benefits to society include a larger understanding of connectives as a whole and how the Internet is shaping language.

### Confidentiality

- No personally identifiable information will be gathered beyond your age, gender, language, and estimated hours spent on social media. Your name will not be collected in this survey.
- The investigator will do everything she can to protect your information. However, the investigator cannot guarantee complete confidentiality.
- The data from this study will be transferred to a password-protected computer and the paper survey will be kept in a secured cabinet until the research period has ended when it will be shredded.

### Payments

- You will not be paid for your participation.

### **Voluntary Participation**

- The decision to participate is up to you. You can refuse to participate in this study now or at any time. You can choose to participate and then, at any time during the study, choose to stop participating.
- Your parents will also be asked to give permission for you to participate. If you are not given parental permission to participate, you may not take this survey. Your teacher and the researcher will have been notified if you are not allow to participate in this survey. Even if your parents let you participate, you can still refuse to participate.
- If you choose to participate and change your mind, you can ask the investigator to destroy all of your information collected. Please be aware that any published information cannot be destroyed.

### **Contact Information**

- If you have questions about this study at any time, you can contact the investigator, Stephanie Walla at 586.50.5157 or [swalla@emich.edu](mailto:swalla@emich.edu). You can also contact her advisor, Dr. T. Daniel Seely, at 734.487.0145 or [tseely@emich.edu](mailto:tseely@emich.edu) with any questions.
- If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee (UHSRC) at 734-487-3090 or [human.subjects@emich.edu](mailto:human.subjects@emich.edu). The UHSRC reviews and monitors research studies to make sure that participants' rights are respected.

### **Assent Statement**

- By signing below, you indicate that you have read this form, that all of your questions have been answered to your satisfaction, and that you agree to participate in this research study.

### **Signatures**

Name of Participant (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Chapter 4 Study Survey

# Language in Daily Life

## Background Information

Please answer the following questions about yourself.

What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ What is your first language? \_\_\_\_\_ What is your gender?  Male  Female

On average how much time do you spend on social media every day? Choose one.

0-2 hours     3-5 hours     6-8 hours     9-11 hours     12+ hours

### Section I: Connectives

A *connective* is a word that joins two sentences, often conjunctions or prepositions. Circle on a scale of 1-5 the likelihood of you or your friends using the sentences below in the provided contexts. There are no right or wrong answers.

Overall it was well-written and interesting, but a little stereotypical and cliché.

|                          |              |   |   |   |   |   |               |
|--------------------------|--------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------|
| On Facebook or Twitter:  | (not likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a friend:  | (not likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a teacher: | (not likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Written in an essay:     | (not likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |

It's that feeling you get when you finish your homework and you just want to cry because, yay.

|                          |              |   |   |   |   |   |               |
|--------------------------|--------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------|
| On Facebook or Twitter:  | (not likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a friend:  | (not likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a teacher: | (not likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Written in an essay:     | (not likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |

It was too cold to go outside so, video games.

|                          |              |   |   |   |   |   |               |
|--------------------------|--------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------|
| On Facebook or Twitter:  | (not likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a friend:  | (not likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a teacher: | (not likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Written in an essay:     | (not likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |

He left because he was frustrated.

|                             |                 |   |   |   |   |   |               |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------|
| On Facebook or<br>Twitter:  | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a friend:     | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a<br>teacher: | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Written in an essay:        | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |

A great deal of knowledge and experience has accrued as a result of these influential projects.

|                             |                 |   |   |   |   |   |               |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------|
| On Facebook or<br>Twitter:  | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a friend:     | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a<br>teacher: | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Written in an essay:        | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |

I am making hot cocoa because, want.

|                             |                 |   |   |   |   |   |               |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------|
| On Facebook or<br>Twitter:  | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a friend:     | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a<br>teacher: | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Written in an essay:        | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |

She missed the bus because of the rain.

|                             |                 |   |   |   |   |   |               |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------|
| On Facebook or<br>Twitter:  | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a friend:     | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a<br>teacher: | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Written in an essay:        | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |

I was going to go to the party but, homework.

|                             |                 |   |   |   |   |   |               |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------|
| On Facebook or<br>Twitter:  | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a friend:     | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a<br>teacher: | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Written in an essay:        | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |

Because reading, I can never get to bed on time.

|                                           |                 |   |   |   |   |   |               |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---------------|
| On Facebook or<br>Twitter:                | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a friend:                   | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a<br>teacher:               | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Written in an essay:                      | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| He stayed up all night because, Internet. |                 |   |   |   |   |   |               |
| On Facebook or<br>Twitter:                | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a friend:                   | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Speaking with a<br>teacher:               | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |
| Written in an essay:                      | (not<br>likely) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | (very likely) |

## Section II: A ‘New’ Connective

Internet has influenced a new form of an old connecting word: because. This new form is a construction called ‘Because, X’ that has become so popular it was named the American Dialect Society’s word of the year for 2013. An example of ‘Because, X’ would be saying, “I can’t go to the party because, homework” instead of saying either, “I can’t go to the party because I have homework” or “I can’t go to the party because of my homework”. Sentences using ‘Because, X’ have been described as conveying dismissal, rationale, humor, wit, criticism, sarcasm, or a summation of thoughts- and sometimes multiple of these all at once! Below are pairs of sentences where one of the sentences uses the ‘Because, X’ construction. Please answer the questions below and remember there are no right or wrong answers.

- A. Set the alarm for 8:00 so I could get up and be productive early. Reset the alarm for 9:30 because I needed more sleep.
- B. Set the alarm for 8:00 so I could get up and be productive early. Reset the alarm for 9:30 because, sleep.

Why and when would you or your friends consider using sentence B instead of sentence A? Does it convey something different?

- A. Of course global warming is a fact because science provides evidence for it.
- B. Of course global warming is a fact because, science.

Why and when would you or your friends consider using sentence B instead of sentence A? Does it convey something different?



- C. Cooking breakfast at 1:00pm because I just bought bacon.
- D. Cooking breakfast at 1:00pm because, bacon.

Why and when would you or your friends consider using sentence B instead of sentence A? Does it convey something different?

- A. Even though it can't always be seen, cyber-bullying is just as harmful as other forms of bullying because it is still just as hurtful.
- B. Even though it can't always be seen, cyber-bullying is just as harmful as other forms of bullying because, hurtful.

Why and when would you or your friends consider using sentence B instead of sentence A? Does it convey something different?

- C. Don't even try working from home with cats because cats tend to get in the way.
- D. Don't even try working from home with cats because, cats.

Why and when would you or your friends consider using sentence B instead of sentence A? Does it convey something different?

---

### Section III: Familiarity

1. Have you ever seen 'because' being used in the 'Because, X' construction before this survey?  
 Yes       No
2. Do you use this construction yourself?  
 Yes       No
3. If you answer 'No' to question 2, would you ever consider using this construction?  
 Yes       No

## Appendix F: IRB Study Approval Letter



Stephanie Walla <swalla@emich.edu>

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### IRBNet Board Action

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Sonia Chawla <no-reply@irbnet.org >

Thu, May 28, 2015 at 12:49

Reply-To: Sonia Chawla <schawlaw@emich.edu>

To: Eric Acton <eacton1@emich.edu>, Stephanie Walla <swalla@emich.edu>

Please note that Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee (UHSRC) has taken the following action on IRBNet:

Project Title: [705091-1] Because, X  
Principal Investigator: Stephanie Walla

Submission Type: New Project  
Date Submitted: March 29, 2015

Action: APPROVED  
Effective Date: May 28, 2015  
Review Type: Expedited Review

Should you have any questions you may contact Sonia Chawla at [schawlaw@emich.edu](mailto:schawlaw@emich.edu).

Thank you,  
The IRBNet Support Team

[www.irbnet.org](http://www.irbnet.org) St

