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A DIACHRONIC PERSPECTIVE ON CONCESSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS WITH *JUST BECAUSE*

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THIS PAPER EXPLORES the grammaticization of the English phrase *just because* into a concessive connector, which a corpus analysis shows is a recent development. The construction is unusual, because causality is not usually recognized as a source for concessivity (Heine & Kuteva 2002:329). English concessive connectors have been observed to develop out of conditional connectors (König 1986) or markers of co-temporality (Traugott & König 1991), as exemplified in (1) and (2) respectively:

(1)   This is an interesting, if complicated, solution.
(2)   While he is very talented, he needs a lot more practice.

Concessivity in this study is defined as the juxtaposition of two propositions that the speaker judges as incongruent. In (1), the speaker concedes that a particular solution is complicated, but points to the fact that it is still interesting. The speaker of (2) concedes that someone has talent, but makes clear that talent alone does not suffice. Concessivity is a more complex notion than just contrast, because the incongruence of the propositions in a concessive construction is usually unexpected (cf. Trask 1993:54).

   While prior analyses (Hirose 1991, Bender & Kathol to appear) have investigated the semantic and syntactic properties of *just because* from a synchronic perspective, the present study assumes a diachronic perspective. The study adopts a usage-based approach (Barlow & Kemmer 1999, Bybee & Hopper 2001) that acknowledges the importance of frequency in the development of grammatical constructions. Examples of concessive usages of *just because* appear in (3)–(5):

(3)   Just because you play guitars it doesn't mean you've got soul.
(4)   Just because the data satisfy expectations does not mean they're correct.
(5)   You can't leave your parents just because you want to.

The examples above mean roughly the following:

(3)'   Although you play guitars, that does not mean you've got soul.
(4)'   Although the data satisfy expectations, they need not be correct.
(5)'   You can't leave your parents, although you might want to.

Whereas *just because* in the above examples has concessive meaning, this is not always the case. (6) illustrates a causal usage of *just because*.

(6)   Utopias lead to disappointment just because they are utopias.

This study investigates the relative frequencies of construction types with *just because* over the past 350 years. A basic finding is that concessive usages of *just because*, as in (3) and (4), gain in relative frequency only after 1950.

The outline of the paper is as follows: section one describes the database used for this study. Four corpora are combined into a 650 million word database, which is grouped into four diachronic periods. Section two summarizes prior work on the semantics of *just because* (Bender *&* Kathol, to appear), which involves the denial of an invalid inference. Section three outlines different construction types that are found with *just because*. Concessive *just because* is shown to occur most frequently in sentence-initial position. Section five tracks the diachronic development of different constructions with *just because* over the past 350 years. The first concessive usages occur around 1850 in sentences where a negative matrix clause is followed by *just because*.

1. DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY. The database consists of 2043 instances of *just because*, taken from four corpora which cover partially overlapping time spans.

Of the examples, 1038 are from the written component of the British National Corpus (Leech 1993). The texts in the BNC consist of about 75% informative and 25% imaginative prose; all examples are post-1960, ranging up to newspaper texts dated 1993. The corpus that spans the longest period is the Literature On-line resource (LION), which is made up of 350,000 works of English prose, poetry and drama from the 12th century to the year 2000 (ProQuest Information *&* Learning Company 1996-2004). The LION corpus contains 641 instances of *just because*.

Another on-line resource, the Modern English Text Collection at the University of Michigan (METC), contains poetry and prose from the 19th and 20th century (University of Michigan 2004). The works do not overlap with those of the LION resource. METC contains 84 instances of *just because*.

Finally, the London Times Digital Archive (TIMES) provides electronically searchable text (Thomson Gale 2004). The 'Feature' subset in the time from 1900–50 contains 279 instances of *just because*.

Table 1 gives an overview of the sizes, genres and covered time spans of the corpora. The sizes of LION, METC and TIMES are calculated on the basis of the absolute frequencies of twenty high-frequent function words such as *and*, *of*, *the*, *to*, and others.

It is assumed that these texts are broadly comparable in style and genre. However, the corpora will not be compared against each other. To track down the development of *just because*, each example was assigned the year of its usage and the complete database was divided into four periods. **Table 2** shows this organization of the examples.

The table shows the distribution to be uneven in two respects. First, the subcorpora are not of the same size, and there are many more examples for the latest period

	BNC-written	**LION**	**METC**	**TIMES**
Words	90 million	420 million	22 million	121 million
Examples	1038	641	84	279
Period	post-1960	1100–2000	1800–2000	1900–1950
Genres	informative prose imaginative prose	prose, poetry drama	imaginative prose	informative prose

Table 1. *The corpora.*

	1651–1850	**1850–1900**	**1900–1950**	**1950–2000**
BNC	—	—	—	1038
LION	90	364	55	132
METC	—	44	29	11
TIMES	—	—	279	—
Total	90	408	363	1181

Table 2. *Four periods.*

than for the first. Second, the corpora are not equally represented in the four periods. BNC and TIMES each cover only one period.

The database is analyzed in the following way. Each example is categorized into one of twelve construction types. The semantics of each construction types are described and the relative frequencies of the construction types are tracked over the four periods.

2. THE SEMANTICS OF *JUST BECAUSE*. Examples like (3) have been shown to serve the discourse function of *inference denial* (Hirose 1991, Bender & Kathol to appear). Sentences of the form *just because X it does not mean Y* state that Y is not a valid inference from the fact X. This relates *just because* to a distinction made by Jespersen (1940, vol. 5:399), who distinguishes uses of *because* that point out a causal relationship, and uses of because that describe an inference from effect to cause. Consider (7) and (8).

(7)   Mary loves John because he typed her thesis.
(8)   John loves Mary because he typed her thesis.

Whereas (7) states that John's typing caused Mary to love him, nothing analogous can be said of (8). Here *John loves Mary* is an inference that is drawn from the observation *he typed her thesis*. Note that this inference can be cancelled by way of *just because*. This can be seen as evidence that the *because* in *just because* instantiates Jespersen's *inferential because*:

(7)'   Just because John typed Mary's thesis doesn't mean he loves her.

Verb	Tokens	Percentage
mean	182	63.86%
make	14	4.91%
assume	8	2.81%
follow (logically)	4	1.40%
give somebody the right to do sth	4	1.40%
think	4	1.40%
be a reason	4	1.40%
be	3	1.05%
expect	2	0.70%
have to	2	0.70%
imagine	2	0.70%
stop	2	0.70%

Table 3. *Matrix clause verbs of* just because… not VERB.

Collocational evidence confirms that concessive *just because* typically is about inference denial. A concordance of all examples with sentence-initial *just because* with a negative matrix clause brings to light that most verbs in these matrix clauses are semantically related to inferencing. **Table 3** lists the main verbs in the database that occur in all strings of the form *just because… not VERB*.

First of all, **Table 3** shows the high entrenchment of the formula *just because X (it) doesn't mean Y*, which accounts for about 64% of the data. Bender and Kathol (to appear) report 85% for *mean* and 6% for *make* in their study. The verbs in italics, which all relate to inferencing, augment the percentage of inferencing verbs in the present study to 72.3%. The figures show that the construction is most frequently used to cancel out a possible but invalid inference.

This empirically corroborates conclusions drawn by Hirose (1991:16) and Bender and Kathol (to appear). However, there are instances of the *just because* construction that do not seem to convey the sense of inference denial.

(9)   Just because I happen to be the CEO I don't play the Great White Chief.
(10)   Just because you're cutting down on time, you don't have to cut down on performance.
(11)   Courts should not exclude evidence just because it is not accepted wisdom.
(12)   Wouldn't it be helpful to have a bank that wasn't shut just because it's closed?

(12) stems from an advertisement for on-line banking. As far as their general semantics, it is probably inaccurate to restrict these sentences to the meaning of inference denial. Compare (9) to (4), repeated here for convenience.

(4)   Just because the data satisfy expectations does not mean they're correct.

Whereas the correctness of the data is a straight-forward inference from their expect-edness, *playing the Great White Chief* is a more peripheral component in the concept of a CEO. Despite this peripherality, (9) makes sense because bossy behavior can easily be construed as a property of a CEO. Examples like (9) and (10), which involve propositions that are less clearly related than the ones in (4), provide evidence that the meaning of *just because* generalizes from inference denial to concessivity.

Examples like (11) and (12) deviate not only semantically but also formally from the more frequent types. Here, *just because* occupies a sentence-medial position.

Bender and Kathol (to appear) suggest several semantic subtypes of the general theme of inference denial. Besides predicates of *inference*, they attest predicates of *evidence*, *justification* and *making* besides some residual cases. While their discussion is cogent at all times, the data in this study are suggestive of generalization rather than specification into coherent subtypes.

3. SYNTACTIC ENVIRONMENTS OF *JUST BECAUSE*. The phrase *just because* occurs in a number of syntactic environments which are associated with different semantic functions. **Table 4** (overleaf) presents twelve construction types that can be extrapolated from the data. This study conceives of grammatical constructions in the sense intended by Goldberg (1995). Constructions are viewed as form-meaning pairs such that some aspect of either meaning or form is not predictable from its component parts.

A broad distinction can be drawn between sentence-initial *just because* (types 1–7) and sentence-medial *just because* (8–13).Concessive meaning correlates with sentence-initial *just because*. Most construction types with sentence-initial *just because* code concessive meaning. However, consider type 5, in which the matrix clause is positive. Here the reading is causal. Likewise, the exclamative construction in type 7 does not always convey concessive meaning.

Conversely, most construction types with sentence-medial just because allow only a causal interpretation. However, type 8 comprises both causal and concessive examples.

3.1. TYPE 1: *JUST BECAUSE X IT DOESN'T MEAN Y*. For several reasons types 1 and 2 are of particular interest. First, they instantiate the central discourse function of inference denial. Second, they show that a negated form of the verb *mean* is by far the most frequent collocate of *just because*. The formulaic gloss *doesn't mean* is meant to include plural and past forms, as well as non-contracted forms, throughout this paper.

3.2. TYPE 2: *JUST BECAUSE X DOESN'T MEAN Y*. While types 1 and 2 are identical in meaning, type 2 drops the dummy subject *it* of the matrix clause, which gives it a different syntactic structure. Instead of two coordinated clauses, there is now just one matrix clause with a sentential subject. Today, type 2 outranks type 1 in terms of frequency.

3.3. TYPE 3: *JUST BECAUSE X NEG-CLAUSE*. Most examples of this construction type have the meaning of inference denial, but some are better characterized as being mere concessives. The negative matrix clauses of type 3 contain a diverse set of verbs. The

	Structure	Example	Tokens
1	Just because X it doesn't mean Y.	Just because you play guitars it doesn't mean you've got soul.	62
2	Just because X doesn't mean Y.	Just because data satisfy expectations does not mean that they are correct.	120
3	Just because X NEG-CLAUSE.	Just because you donate an egg, that does not make you a parent.	82
4	Just because X NEG-VP.	Just because it's a Number One doesn't make it a better record.	21
5	Just because X POS-CLAUSE.	'Just because he won a few stupid car races', she went on, 'he seems to think he rules the world!'	192
6	Just because X POS-VP.	Just because he's got a black belt means nothing.	2
7	Just because X!	Just because she's never had a proper job.	95
8	NEG-CLAUSE just because X.	You cannot leave your parents just because you want to.	356
9	POS-CLAUSE just because X.	Utopias lead to disappointment just because they are utopias.	937
10	POS-CLAUSE not just because X.	'We had a very good season', Walsh reflects, 'not just because we've won something, but because you learn in the process'.	75
11	POS-CLAUSE just because of X.	A total of 37 in every 100 women believe that bankers treat them differently just because of their sex.	42
12	POS-CLAUSE not just because of X.	Clients were also causing headaches, and not just because of fees.	34

Table 4. *Syntactic environments of* just because.

81 examples in the data occur with 48 different verbs. The top collocates are *assume* (7), *make* (5), *follow* (4), and *think* (4). While three of these are semantically related to inferencing, the diversity in this type provides evidence for the generalization of *just because* into a concessive marker.

3.4. TYPE 4: *JUST BECAUSE X NEG-VP*. Much like type 2, this type integrates a sub-ject clause into the matrix clause. The type is quite infrequent. Again, the verb *make* shows up, this time as the top collocate. Nine examples out of the total 21 are of the form *just because X doesn't make Y Z*. Another three are of the form *just because X doesn't give Y the right to Z*. So contrary to type 3, usages of type 4 center around a few central collocates.

3.5. TYPE 5: *JUST BECAUSE X POS-CLAUSE*. Type 5 is the only construction with sentence-initial *just because* that does not normally allow for a concessive interpretation. An interesting if infrequent exception of this type is found with matrix clauses that are questions. These are interpreted as rhetorical questions. In (13), *just because* indicates that a given cause to do something is less well-founded than it should be.

(13)   Just because the SAS drive everywhere, must we always copy them?

3.6. TYPE 6: *JUST BECAUSE X POS-VP*. This type is highly infrequent and could in fact be regarded as a systematic gap in the paradigm of possible constructions with *just because*. The only two examples in the whole database are given below. Note that in both cases, even though it is formally positive, the meaning of the VP is essentially negative.

(14)   But just because I didn't learn to sail as a kid seemed a poor reason for not having a go now.
(15)   Just because you had the good fortune to pay nothing for your very expensive university education does little to justify a system of higher education which, at the same time, excludes 85 per cent of your age group from the privileged position you evidently enjoyed.

3.7. TYPE 7: *JUST BECAUSE X!* Type 7 is a heterogeneous category, because it contains exclamatives (16), cut-off sentences (17), and answers to questions (18) that look alike formally. While all exclamatives in the database have causal meaning, it is possible to construct concessive examples such as (19).

(16)   Nutty fetched the cloth and mopped up the table. 'It's not fair. Just because it's me—'
(17)   Sally felt that it was useless to tell why, and so said—Oh! just because—
(18)   And why? Just because she was playing with a feather she found on the floor.
(19)   Just because he's got a black belt!

3.8. TYPE 8 *NEG-CLAUSE JUST BECAUSE X*. Type 8 comes in two semantic variants. See example (20) and the analogously constructed example (21). Whereas (20) is concessive, (21) has only a causal interpretation.

(20)   You cannot leave your parents just because you want to.
(21)   You cannot leave your parents just because you are only five years old.

The contrast arises through a difference in negation scope. In (20), the negator scope ranges over matrix clause and subordinate clause. In (21), the negator has only the matrix clause within its scope. The subordinate clause gives a reason why the matrix clause is negated. In other words, (20) conveys '*That's not a good reason!*' whereas (21) conveys '*That's why!*'

(20)'   ¬[You can leave your parents just because you want to.]
         That's not a good reason!
(21)'   ¬ [You can leave your parents] just because you are only five years old.
         That's why!

3.9. TYPE 9: *POS-CLAUSE JUST BECAUSE X*. Type 9 always expresses a causal relation
between matrix clause and subordinate clause. There are no examples in the data that
convey concessive meaning.

3.10. TYPE 10: *POS-CLAUSE NOT JUST BECAUSE X*. This type is isomorphic to type 9 with
the difference that *just because* is preceded by *not*. However, much like type 8, where
just because is in the scope of a negator, this construction type is used to downplay
the validity of an invoked reason. Often a more important reason is given later in the
sentence in a subordinate clause with *but*, as in (22)

(22)   I think she's glad to see me, not just because I give her food, but because she's
        lonely.

3.11. TYPE 11: *POS-CLAUSE JUST BECAUSE OF X*. Even this type is similar to type 9, except
for the fact that *just because* is followed by *of*. Like type 9, the construction is used to
convey a causal relation between two clauses.

3.12. TYPE 12: *POS-CLAUSE NOT JUST BECAUSE OF X*. Analogous to types 8 and 10, the
negated counterpart to type 11 expresses that some causal relation does not hold
between two propositions. As in type 10, examples with an ensuing subordinate
clause with *but* are very frequent.
    Taking these constructions as a starting point, we can now assess their develop-
ment in terms of relative frequency.

4. THE HISTORY OF *JUST BECAUSE*. **Figure 1** shows how the relative frequencies of the
twelve construction types developed from the earliest examples in 1651 to the year
2000. Before we address the most decisive construction types in turn, it should be
noted that sentence-initial *just because* is substantially less frequent than sentence-
medial *just because*. However, it has gained momentum. From 11% in period I, it has
reached 35% in period IV.

4.1. *JUST BECAUSE X (IT) DOESN'T MEAN Y*. The most recent development is the one of
types 1 and 2. These types appear only after 1950, occupying 5% and 10% respectively.
The variant without the subject pronoun thus clearly outranks its companion.

4.2. *JUST BECAUSE X NEG-CLAUSE*. This type has steadily increased in frequency, going
from 2.4% to 5.2%. This tendency turns into a success story if one considers types
1, 2 and 4 subtypes or derivatives of it. But even the development as is achieves a
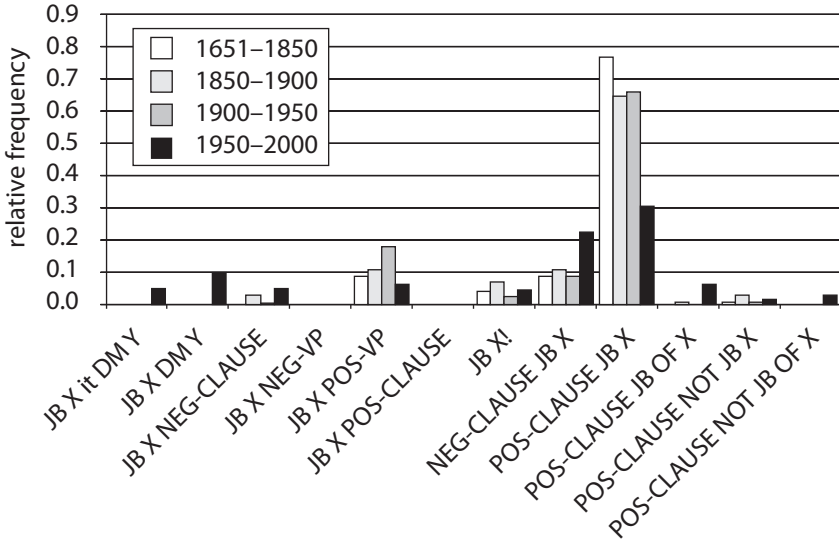
Figure 1. *Construction Types with* just because.

chi-square value of p < 0.01. Some of the oldest concessive usages of *just because* are found in this category. Example (23) is from 1854.

(23)   Just because I said you were the prettiest girl in town, and the wittiest—that's not flattery.

4.3 *just because x neg-vp*. Along with types 1 and 2, type 4 only occurs in period IV. Even then, it is very infrequent at 1.8%. The top collocates *make* and *give somebody the right* suggest that this type has a more general concessive function than mere inference denial.

4.4. *just because x pos-clause*. The development of type 5 in terms of frequency is startling. We observe a rise over periods one to three, followed by a sharp decline to period four. Chi-square judges the distribution to be significant (p<0.01). A first approximation to this phenomenon is the analysis of top collocating verbs in the matrix clause.

Table 5 (overleaf) shows that while ordinary predications with *be* remain constant, the fourth period shows an increase of epistemic verbs. Besides *think*, which gains about 9%, *assume* and *know* enter the scene. These examples have matrix clauses that are formally positive, but carry negative meaning. Their discourse function is to denounce a given cause to do something as wrong, as in (24).

1651-1950				1950-2000			
be	36.84%	hear	1.75%	be	32.88%	know	2.74%
give	3.51%	run	1.75%	think	12.33%	arise	1.37%
think	3.51%	speak	1.75%	become	8.22%	ask	1.37%
call	1.75%			assume	2.74%		

Table 5. *Collocating verbs of type 5.*

	1850-1900	1900-1950	1950-2000
That's not a good reason!	27 (58.7%)	23 (74.2%)	257 (95.9%)
That's why!	19 (41.3%)	8 (25.8%)	11 (4.1%)

Table 6. That's not a good reason! *vs.* That's why!

(24)   Just because she owns the house I'm living in, she thinks she can patronize
        me.

4.5. *just because x!* Type 7 is semantically too heterogeneous a category to show any
coherent development. Even though there appear to be fluctuations in the relative
frequency, the distribution over the four periods is not significant (p > 0.05).

4.6. *neg-clause just because x*. In the distribution of type 8 we observe a rise from
period one to period four. Period three does not follow this trend, but since it stays
on the same level as period two, it does not disrupt the trend either. The distribution
is significant (p < 0.01). The relative frequency starts out with 7.5% in period one and
goes up to 24% in period four.
    In section 3.8 it was argued for the distinction of two semantic subtypes, one being
causal, and the other the rebuttal of a possible reason. **Table 6** shows the distribution
of these two meaning types over periods two to four.
    The development indicates that the second meaning is becoming rarer and rarer,
relative to the first one. In the fourth date period, '*That's not a good reason!*' provides
96% of all examples. This suggests that construction type 8 is no longer just ambigu-
ous, but that the construction as such is associated with the discourse function of
discrediting something as an insufficient reason. Chi-square judges this distribution
to be significant (p < 0.01).

4.7 *pos-clause just because x*. In all four periods, this type is the most frequent one.
However, whereas the percentage exceeds 64% over the first three periods, we see it
drop below 30% in the fourth period.
    On the initial hypothesis that *just because* grammaticizes into a concessive marker,
we would even expect constructions that cannot conform to this shift in meaning to
disappear gradually. For two reasons the decline of this construction type cannot be
easily dismissed as a sampling effect of the corpus. First, the subcorpora partially cut

across the periods and should thus balance sampling effects to a certain degree. Second, we observe regularities in development over the four periods in types 3, 5, 7, and 8. These regularities suggest that the database is not too subject to sampling error. To discredit the development in type 9 as accidental would entail that these regularities be artifactual as well. So whereas types 3, 5, and 8 undergo internal changes in meaning or collocation, type 9 stays the same, at the cost of a decline.

5. CONCLUSIONS. Diachronic corpus analysis suggests that *just because* currently grammaticizes into a concessiver marker by way of the discourse function of inference denial. Construction types that code concessive meaning gain in relative frequency, while in ambiguous construction types the concessive variant wins out over the causal variant. The most frequent causal construction type remained very frequent until 1950, only to decline to half of its relative frequency after that. These shifts over short periods of time suggest that the pace of grammaticization can be fairly rapid. New grammatical constructions may evolve over the course of a generation or two.

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