Semantic Roles of Reason Clauses Introduced by the Central Conjunctions Because, Since, As and For

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Abstract
The subject of the present paper is an analysis of semantic roles of reason clauses introduced by the central causal conjunctions because, since, as and for. 200 reason clauses have been classified according to their semantic role — either as direct reason clauses or indirect reason clauses. Direct reason clauses have been further subclassified into four subgroups. Consequently, it was found that CGEL does not cover all semantic relationships in practice, since quite a large number of examples do not fit into this classification. Therefore we set up a separate group called 'Reason and Evaluation/Attitude'. Furthermore, it was demonstrated that the semantic role of a reason clause is closely related to its syntactic function.

I. Introduction
The aim of the present paper is to examine the semantic roles of reason clauses introduced by the central causal conjunctions because, since, as and for. The problem arose from a more extensive study that concerned reason clauses introduced by the conjunctions because, since, as and for in general (Naidrova 2003). The theoretical part presents concepts of the semantic roles of reason clauses based on representative British grammars and various British, Czech and German studies. The analysis discusses the concepts presented in the theoretical part on the basis of 200 examples of reason clauses from contemporary British literature: two novels and two samples of academic prose. From each text sample 50 examples have been excerpted. These 200 reason clauses are subsequently classified according to their semantic role.

II. Theoretical background
We will now attempt to present an overall outline of reason clauses according to the meaning they convey. Our semantic classification of reason clauses is predominantly based on A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language (Quirk et al. 1985, CGEL henceforth). However, it will be illustrated that CGEL does not provide a complete classification of semantic roles of reason clauses. Before we deal with the detailed classification of the semantic roles presented in CGEL we would like to mention Altenberg’s (1984: 20) concept of the semantics of reason clauses. First of all, what is a causal relation for him? A causal relation exists between “two events or states of affairs if one is understood as the cause of or reason for the other” (Altenberg 1984: 20). He adopts the terms ‘cause’ and ‘result’ for the two members of this relation. We can say that Altenberg understands the semantic roles more generally than CGEL: he does not provide a further classification of the semantic roles. Yet, he admits and even emphasizes that “the notion of causality embraces a number of rather subtle semantic distinctions including not only physical causes and their effects but also reasons for actions, explanations of facts,
and inferences or conclusions drawn from premises" (Altenberg 1984: 20). It is important to realize that the causal relation means more than the cause-result relation, and that will be demonstrated in the following sections.

CGEL, providing a more detailed classification of reason clauses, distinguishes two main semantic types of reason clauses: those that convey a direct reason and those that convey an indirect reason. Direct reason clauses express a direct reason relationship between the subordinate clause and the matrix clause. On the other hand, the reason in indirect reason clauses is not related to the situation in the matrix clause but it is a motivation for the implicit speech act of the utterance. We will first deal with direct reason clauses and then with the more peripheral use of reason clauses, i.e. indirect reason clauses.

1. Direct reason clauses

CGEL further classifies direct reason clauses into four subtypes on the basis of the mutual relationship between the subordinate clause and its matrix clause. In all types we may observe a temporal sequence, i.e. the situation of the subordinate clause precedes in time the situation of the matrix clause. CGEL uses the term 'reason' as a superordinate term for all types, which will be indicated by the paraphrases:

a) **Cause and effect** — the construction expresses the perception of an inherent objective connection in the real world:

The flowers are growing so well because I sprayed them.

paraphrase: “The cause for the flowers growing so well/The reason that the flowers are growing so well is that she sprayed them.”

b) **Reason and consequence** — the construction expresses the speaker’s inference of a connection:

She watered the flowers because they were dry.

paraphrase: “The reason that she watered the flowers was that they were dry.”

c) **Motivation and result** — the construction expresses the intention of an animate being that has a subsequent result:

I watered the flowers because my parents told me to do so.

paraphrase: “My motivation for watering the flowers/The reason that I watered the flowers was that my parents told me to do so.”

d) **Circumstances and consequence** — the construction expresses a relationship between a premise in the subordinate clause and the conclusion in the matrix clause:

Since the weather has improved, the game will be held as planned.

paraphrase: “The reason that the game will be held as planned is that the weather has improved.” or “In view of the fact that the weather has improved, the game will be held as planned.”

Direct reason clauses introduced by *because* function as adjuncts, whereas direct reason clauses introduced by other subordinators operate as content disjuncts, i.e. they refer to the content of the matrix clause.
2. Indirect reason clauses

As was already mentioned above, the reason in indirect reason clauses is not related to the situation in the matrix clause but is a motivation for the implicit speech act of the utterance. As the clauses expressing an indirect cause are peripheral to their matrix clause, they operate as style disjuncts. They refer to the circumstances of the speech act and they usually imply a verb of speaking and the subject *I*, which is indicated by the paraphrases:

*Percy is in Washington, for he phoned me from there.*

paraphrase: “Since he phoned me from there, I can tell you that Percy is in Washington.”

III. Analysis

The analysis of the semantic roles of reason clauses is predominantly based on the *CGEL* classification introduced above. The 200 reason clauses that compose the corpus of my material have been classified according to their semantic role. It was determined whether the reason clauses express a direct or indirect reason. Direct reason clauses were then further subclassified into four subgroups: 1. Cause and Effect, 2. Reason and Consequence, 3. Motivation and Result, 4. Circumstances and Consequence.

As shown in Table 1, the occurrence of indirect reason clauses is much less frequent (12 instances) than the occurrence of direct reason clauses (188 instances). Out of the 188 instances by far the most frequent semantic relationship is ‘Reason and Consequence’ (101 instances). ‘Cause and Effect’ and ‘Motivation and Result’ are much less frequent: 33 instances and 15 instances, respectively. There is only one example of the ‘Circumstances and Consequence’ relationship. Analysing the excerpted material it was found out that quite a large number of examples (38 instances) do not fit into this classification. That leads us to the conclusion that the semantic subtypes in *CGEL* (p. 1103ff.) do not cover all semantic relationships in practice. On the basis of the similarities among these 38 examples we have classified them into a separate group which we have called ‘Reason and Evaluation/Attitude’. It is also worth pointing out that the semantic role of a reason clause is closely related to its syntactic function: direct reason clauses function as adjuncts (*because*-clauses) or as content disjuncts (*since*, *as*- and *for*-clauses), whereas indirect reason clauses (being peripheral to their matrix clause) operate only as style disjuncts (for detailed analysis of syntactic functions of reason clauses see Naidrová 2003: 44–52; *CGEL*: 1070ff.).
Table 1: Semantic roles of reason clauses
(texts A1 and A2 are samples of fiction, B1 and B2 of academic prose)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Academic prose</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIRECT REASON</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>94,0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause and effect</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16,5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason and consequence</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>50,5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation and result</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7,5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circumstances and consequence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0,5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason and evaluation/ attitude</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>19,0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIRECT REASON</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. Semantic classification of direct reason clauses

It should be pointed out that the definition of each semantic relationship in CGEL (p. 1103ff.) is rather vague and often unclear. In some instances it is not apparent what kind of semantic relationship a sentence conveys. This is especially the case of ‘Cause and Effect’ and ‘Reason and Consequence’. ‘Cause and Effect’ is defined as the construction that “expresses the perception of an inherent objective connection in the real world” (ibid: 1103) and ‘Reason and Consequence’ is defined as the construction that “expresses the speaker’s inference of a connection” (ibid: 1104). Sometimes it seems impossible to determine the semantic relationship and it is up to the intuition of an individual reader to decide whether a sentence conveys ‘objective connection’ or ‘speaker’s inference of a connection’. Let us now illustrate each semantic relationship with a few (clear) examples and provide a more detailed characterization of the semantic relationship ‘Reason and Evaluation/Attitude’.

a) Cause and Effect

There are 33 instances of this semantic relationship in our corpus:

*The four of us and the dogs, who have accompanied us to the viewing, all gaze at it respectfully but with difficulty, because we’re far too close to it.* (A1: 21)

*Because language is primarily a social mechanism, languages are learned in social contexts.* (B1: 48)

b) Reason and Consequence

There are 101 instances of this semantic relationship in our corpus:
It takes me most of the day to puzzle it out, because my halting German is such an inadequate guide to the amazing convolutions of Austrian academic style. [A1: 44]

They came, in whatever state, to contemplate the past, since there was so little future to contemplate. (A2: 9)

c) Motivation and Result
There are 15 instances of this semantic relationship in our corpus:
So now the following morning Kate's working at one end of the kitchen table and I've got all my books concealed as best I can behind my open laptop at the other end, stacked almost as awkwardly as they were on my lap on the train, because I'm trying not to let her see their titles, or any telltale illustrations. (A1: 35)

She'd choose caviar not because she liked it but because of what it cost. (A2: 12)

d) Circumstances and Consequence
There is only one instance of this semantic relationship:
How old he was when this cryptic story ended no one knows, because no one knows when it started.

e) Reason and Evaluation/Attitude
A reason clause that expresses 'Reason and Evaluation/Attitude' relationship can be defined as a construction that conveys evaluation or attitude in the matrix clause and the reason for the statement (made in the matrix clause) in the subordinate clause. As it obviously expresses a relationship between the reason clause and the matrix clause—similarly to the other subtypes of direct reason clauses, it is suitable to view the subtype 'Reason and Evaluation/Attitude' as a fifth type of direct reason clauses. This relationship might be also regarded as a subtype of 'Reason and Consequence' relationship, as the subordinate clause may be viewed as a reason that produces an evaluating statement as a consequence. However, we would suggest regarding this relationship as a separate subtype of direct reason clauses. The reason for this assumption is that there is a significant difference between 'Reason and Evaluation/Attitude' and 'Reason and Consequence'. The difference is that in the 'Reason and Evaluation/Attitude' type there is no temporal sequence such that the situation in the subordinate clause precedes in time the situation in the matrix clause, whereas there is such temporal sequence in 'Reason and Consequence' as well as in the other types (cf. CGEL: 1103).

On what basis have these 38 examples been classified as a separate subtype? A separate group for these examples has been set up as they show similarities in their superordinate clause. Namely, in all instances the superordinate clause contains an evaluating adjective e.g. important, wrong, correct, doubtful etc.:

It's historically important because it's a step in Europe's emergence from the mediaeval world. (A1: 14)

In much the same way, it is often difficult to evaluate and compare theoretical claims, and the theoretical claims, and the empirical studies that are intended
to validate them, because their proponents use completely different criteria as measures of success. (B1: 9)
The idea is particularly valuable in setting a wider goal for the second language learner, for it suggests that he or she be required to develop all the communicative skills of a native speaker and not just control of the basic grammar of the sentence. (B1: 21)

Cook points out that Chomsky (1980: 230) finds the term communicative competence wrong, for there are many purposes of language beyond communication. (B1: 36)

2. Indirect reason clauses

There are 12 instances of the indirect reason relationship:

I was a little apprehensive that Tony Churt – or Tony, as I would call him now ’ve met him if he were anybody else – or Mr Churt, since he’s at least fifteen years older than me, or Sir Tony, or Lord Churt – no, Tony Churt, why not? – that Tony Churt might have put on a suit for the occasion. (A1: 6)

Tony Churt – no, come on, Tony, Tony – is wearing a tie, it’s true – and in a festive shade of burnt ochre, now that I look more closely, which means he must have dressed up a little, because I’m pretty sure it was more like burnt sienna before – whereas my collar is as defiantly open as Shelley’s. (A1: 9)

The stroke must have had some effect on Felicity for since my mother Angel’s death she had scarcely mentioned her name in my presence. (A2: 3)

IV. Semantic ambiguity

In all reason clauses we may observe a temporal sequence, i.e. the situation of the subordinate clause precedes in time the situation of the matrix clause. The close and obvious connection between time and reason is also supported by the fact that the subordinators as and since introduce both reason and time clauses. An interesting point is that the semantic role of the clause (whether it is causal or temporal) is also closely connected with the syntactic function of the subordinate clause: whereas the reason as- and since-clauses operate as disjuncts, the temporal as- and since-clauses operate as adjuncts (CGEL: 1070):

The policeman stopped them as they were about to enter.
(temporal as – adjunct clause)

I went to the bank, as I had run out of cash.
(causal as – content disjunct clause)

I have been relaxing since the children went away on vacation.
(temporal since – adjunct clause)

He took his coat, since it was raining
(causal since – content disjunct clause)
CGEL (p. 1105) points out that “this dual function can give rise to ambiguity”, i.e. there are sentences in which it cannot be decided whether we deal with temporal or causal clauses:

As he was standing near the door, he could hear the conversation in the kitchen.

The sentence is ambiguous in that the subordinate clause can be paraphrased as a reason clause “since he was standing near the door...” or as a temporal clause “while he was standing near the door...”. The ambiguity can be resolved if we replace as by because, which would make the relationship between the two clauses purely causal. If the intended relationship were temporal, while would make the meaning clear.

A similar situation arises with since:

[...] all the mushrooms had disappeared from his ‘home’ field since he had treated the grass with a chemical fertilizer.

Breul (1997: 13)

Here, to avoid the ambiguity, since can be replaced by because to make it a pure reason clause or by ever since to make the relationship temporal. According to Breul (1997: 12) this kind of ambiguity can be intended if the speaker/writer does not want to commit himself to one or the other meaning:


V. Conclusions

The subject of the present work was an analysis of semantic roles of reason clauses introduced by the central causal conjunctions because, since, as and for. The 200 reason clauses that compose the corpus of my material have been classified according to their semantic role. It was first determined to which of the two main semantic subtypes the reason clauses belong—whether to direct reason or indirect reason clauses. The direct reason clauses were further analysed and classified into four semantic subtypes. It was pointed out that the definition of each semantic relationship in CGEL (p. 1103ff.) was often vague and unclear. In many instances it was problematic to determine what kind of a semantic relationship a sentence conveys. This was especially the case of ‘Cause and Effect’ and ‘Reason and Consequence’. Consequently, it was found that CGEL (ibid.) does not cover all semantic relationships in practice, since quite a large number
of examples (38 instances) do not fit into this classification. We noticed similarities among these examples and therefore we set up a separate group called 'Reason and Evaluation/Attitude', which we defined as a construction that conveys evaluation or attitude in the matrix clause and the reason for the statement (made in the matrix clause) in the subordinate clause.

Furthermore, it was stated that the semantic role of a reason clause is closely related to its syntactic function: direct reason clauses function as adjuncts (because-clauses) or as content disjuncts (since-, as- and for-clauses), whereas indirect reason clauses operate only as style disjuncts.

Finally, we have pointed out that the dual function of two causal subordinators as and since (i.e. they may introduce both reason and time clauses) demonstrates the close and obvious connection between time and reason, which can give rise to semantic ambiguity.
References

Sources