Non-finite causal constructions in English and beyond

Martin Konvička (Freie Universität Berlin)
martin.konvicka@fu-berlin.de

In order to express causal relations, speakers of English have several constructions at their disposal: subordinate clauses such as (1a), prepositional constructions such as (1b), but also non-finite causal constructions known as *because* X (1c) (see, e.g., Bergs 2018a; Kanetani 2019: 147–172), which will be the focus of attention of this thematic session.

(1)   a. I can't come out tonight because I'll be playing Skyrim.
         b. I can't come out tonight because of Skyrim.
         c. I can't come out tonight because Skyrim. (Bailey 2012)

What formally distinguishes *because* X constructions (1c) from canonical causal subordinate clauses with *because* (1a), is primarily the absence of a finite verb form in the complement slot. While prepositional constructions (1b) only allow nominal complements, non-finite causal constructions are characterised by a wider range of potential complements such as adjectives, adverbs, nouns, emojis or interjections (Bohmann 2016: 160). This distinct complementation pattern also raises the question of the category membership of the connector in these constructions and whether it is best analysed as a conjunction, as a preposition or as something else completely (Konvička 2018; 2023).

Although constructions of the type (1c) can be found both in spoken and written contexts, social media seem to offer a particularly fruitful ground for their use. The context of conceptually spoken language is more tolerant towards deviations from standard norms (Bohmann 2016: 170) and more open to creative language use (Bergs 2018b: 286). For this reason, research on non-finite causal constructions, such as *because* X, has so far focused on social media such as Twitter and, more generally, on computer-mediated communication.

Moreover, constructions formally and functionally equivalent to (1c) are not only found in English but also exist in other languages such as German (Wolfer, Müller-Spitzer & Ribeiro Silveira 2020; Konvička & Stöcker 2022), Dutch (Konvička 2018; 2019; Konvička & Stöcker 2022), Czech (Konvička 2020) or Finnish (Wessman 2017).

Against this backdrop, this thematic session aims at bringing together scholars interested in the study of non-finite causal constructions of the *because* X type from various methodological, empirical, theoretical, and comparative perspectives.

Research questions potentially addressed in this session might include, but are not limited to the following:

- How are *because* X constructions related to other ways of expressing causality and to other non-finite constructions?
- What role do context and register play for the use (and the spread) of *because* X?
- What mechanisms (e.g. ellipses, creativity, extravagance) can best account for the emergence of non-finite *because* X constructions?
- Given the existence of similar constructions in various languages, how can we tease apart the influence of language contact and independent yet parallel developments in languages other than English that also have constructional equivalents of *because* X?
- What methodological approaches are best suited to study these questions?

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