Language in India <u>www.languageinindia.com</u> ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 18:3 March 2018 India's Higher Education Authority UGC Approved List of Journals Serial Number 49042

'Because' Linguistics: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Contemporary Uses of the Novel 'Because Preposition' in Canadian, as opposed to Pakistani, Contexts

Insiya Bhalloo. B.A, Co-op Specialist in Psycholinguistics

Traditional Uses of the Preposition 'Because' in English:

Traditionally, the word "because" is used as a conjunction, in order to join clauses, phrases, utterances or even, complete sentences (Whitman, & Fogarty, 2013). When conventionally applied as a conjunction in the English language, the word "because" can be used in one of the two following manners:

- 1. The word "because" may be used as a subordinating conjunction and thus, introduce a dependent (subordinate) clause (Whitman, & Fogarty, 2013).
 - a. For example: I want to become a speech-language pathologist because my cousin has a specific-language impediment (SLI).

In this sentence, the main clause is before the subordinate clause, which is introduced by the word "because" (Linguist Laura, 2012).

Or

b. For example: Because my cousin has a specific-language impairment (SLI), I want to become a speech-language pathologist.

In this sentence, the main clause follows the subordinate clause, which is introduced by the word "because" (Liberman, 2012).

- The word "because" may be used with the preposition "of" in order to introduce a prepositional phrase, thereby forming a compound preposition (Whitman, & Fogarty, 2013).
 - a. For example: I want to become a speech-language pathologist because of my own childhood experiences.

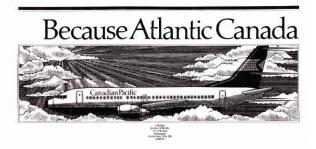
In this sentence, the main clause is before the prepositional phrase, which is introduced by the word "because" + of (Liberman, 2012).

Or

b. For example: Because of my own childhood experiences, I want to become a speech-language pathologist.

In this sentence, the main clause follows the prepositional phrase, which is introduced by the word "because" + of (Linguist Laura, 2012).

Novel Application of the 'Prepositional Because': A Term in Contemporary English with the Same Morpheme Form as the Traditional 'Because' but with Contextual Uses:



The application of the "prepositional because", rather than the conjunction "because" was used, albeit infrequently in the 1900's, as evident by the 1986 Atlantic Canada Ad (Linguist Laura, 2012). The unique use of the "prepositional because",

otherwise known as the "because + noun" form, to introduce various linguistic categories, became frequent during the year of 2013, as reflected by the American Dialect Society's 24th Annual Words of the Year vote, when the word "because" was voted as the 2013 Word of the Year (Zimmer, & Metclaf, 2014). The new, contemporary use of the word "because" has been most commonly to introduce a *bare* noun, whether proper, common or abstract nouns, such as in the sentence, "I love Canada *because* Bieber" (Garber, 2013).

Use of Because

The word "because" may also be used to introduce longer noun phrases that do not contain determiners or adjectives modifying the bare noun, such as complete sentences like "I suppose you love Canada for many reasons, but don't say "because multiculturalism", because that is utterly obvious; give me a unique reason", for example (Garber, 2013). The word "because" may also be used in various contexts, however, and is not limited to only being followed by nouns,

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Examples of the 'Prepositional Because' in Contemporary Online Media:

- "The hashtag was so popular that it completely rewired the way we speak, online and off, because #Twitter, you know? (Linguist Laura, 2012)."
- "Louisiana GOP Bigot Changes Mind on School Vouchers Because Muslims (Whitman, & Fogarty, 2013)."
- International gifted women: Developing a critical human resource. (September 1996)
 "An African woman described her people as highly valuing education as the only passage to success. But motivation alone does not assure success: Because circumstances (McCulloch, n.d.)."
- Gawker: "Fierce Asian Kid Lip Dubs Beyoncé's 'Countdown' While Wearing a Snuggie Because Of Course (Liberman, 2012)."
- 5. The Onion's AV Club: "...producers have dispiritedly announced that they are now developing a TLC reality show about former baseball star Pete Rose, because whatever. (McCulloch, n.d.)."

'Prepositional Because': A Sociolinguistic Study

The unique use of the "prepositional because", otherwise known as the "because + noun" form, to introduce various linguistic categories, became frequent during the year of 2013, as reflected by the American Dialect Society's 24th Annual Words of the Year vote, when the word "because" was voted as the 2013 Word of the Year (ADS, 2014). As a linguistics student at University of Toronto, I seek to analyse the social factors that cause certain demographics to apply the word 'because' as a preposition. I, the researcher, asked, via a survey analysis, whether

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the participants, both young and old as well as of differing economic and geographical backgrounds, found the following test sentences (as indicated below) to be grammatical or likely to be used in daily conversation.

A. Research Questions

- Donate to the Canadian Red Cross because Botswana. Tweet #BecauseHumanLivesMatter, because *seriously*, stop reading this and volunteer, because reasons.
- Gender-based discrimination exists because patriarchy. Malala Yousafzai can eradicate it because Malala Yousafzai.
- 3. Democracy is the best policy, because need.
- 4. Join World Wildlife Fund (WWF) because pandas, because obviously, because YOLO.

B. Research Predictions

Hypothesis A: I believe that the research participants in the early to middle adulthood (21 – 41 years) group and the late adulthood group (42 - 62 years) will have the same amount of responding towards using "because X", while individuals in the early childhood to adolescence (0- 20 years) group will respond at a significantly increased rate, compared to the two older age categories.

Hypothesis B: I believe that the research participants in the middle class (\$41,000- \$ 81,000) and upper class (\$ 82,000 - \$ 122,000) groupings will have the same rate of responding towards using "because X", while individuals in the working class (\$0- \$ 40,000) group will respond at a significantly increased rate, compared to the relatively wealthier groups (Ivanova, 2011).

Hypothesis C: I believe that the research participants currently dwelling in Canada will have an increased rate of responding towards using the "prepositional because", while individuals currently residing in Pakistan will respond at a significantly decreased rate, compared to the relatively more Western groups.

ii. Methods

a. Participants

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In total, I interviewed and received survey responses from 62 research participants. There were three variables that were tested, namely, age, average income level and country of residence.

A. Age Variable

I grouped the research participants into 20-year groupings, namely, a. Early Childhood to Adolescence (0- 20 years), b. Early to Middle adulthood (21–41 years), c. the Late Adulthood stages (42 - 62 years) of the lifespan or d. Other.

B. Income/Financial Status (SES)

I grouped the research participants into one of the three main and most common income groupings, which are equally distributed along \$ 40,000 intervals, namely, a. Working Class (\$0- \$ 40,000), b. Middle Class (\$41,000- \$ 81,000), c. Upper Class (\$ 82,000 - \$ 122,000) or d. Other. (Ivanova, 2011)

C. Country of Current Residence

I grouped the research participants into one of two groups, with the same ethnicity, namely Pakistani, but with a different country of current residence, either a. Canada, b. Pakistan or c. Other.

b. Materials section

Test Questions:

- Donate to the Canadian Red Cross because Botswana. Tweet #BecauseHumanLivesMatter, because *seriously*, stop reading this and volunteer, because reasons.
- Gender-based discrimination exists because patriarchy. Malala Yousafzai can eradicate it because Malala Yousafzai.
- 3. Democracy is the best policy, **because** need.
- 4. Join World Wildlife Fund (WWF) because pandas, because obviously, because YOLO.
- c. Procedure section: The experiment was conducted by first creating an onlinequestionnaire on the website Survey Monkey, in a multiple-choice and comment format, as indicated by the link (<u>https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/NTV35H6</u>). I, the researcher,

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then sent the link to 100 contacts on WhatsApp as well as inserted the online-poll link in my status on WhatsApp. Moreover, the researcher also emailed the link to 15 individuals between the ages of 42-62, thereby ensuring the presence of an older demographic as well, who do not tend to use Facebook as frequently as comparatively younger members. Additionally, the researcher posted the Survey Monkey poll on Facebook, so that potential research participants could easily access the survey. In total, responses from 62 individuals were accumulated, by using a variety of means such as social media sites, emails and texting applications.

iii. Results

A. Age (in 20-year groupings):				
Application of "because X":	Early Childhood - Adolescence: 0 - 20 years	Early to Middle Adulthood: 21- 41 years	Late Adulthood: 42- 62 years	Other:
Yes:	65.22%	21.75%	13.04%	0%
No:	34.78%	78.25%	86.96%	0%

B. Income	e Level/ Status: (in	\$ 40,000 increment ca	ategories)		
Application of "because X":	Working Class: \$ 0 - \$ 40,000	Middle Class: \$ 41,000 - \$ 81,000	Upper Class: \$ 82,000 - \$ 122,000	High Society: \$123, 000 and above	Other:
Yes:	33.48%	28.08%	26.09%	14.35%	0%
No:	66.52%	71.92%	73.91%	85.65%	0%

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C. Country of Current Residence:			
Application of "because	Pakistan:	Canada:	Other:
X":			
Yes:	17.39%	74.26%	8.35%
No:	82.61%	25.74%	91.65%

iv. Discussion

Hypothesis A

The researcher's prediction, regarding the fact that the Early Childhood - Adolescence (0-20 years old) group will have a significantly greater rate of using "because X", was correct. Moreover, the Early- Middle Adulthood (21 - 41 years old) group and the Late Adulthood (42 – 62 years old) age category had relatively similar "prepositional because" usage rates, albeit if not the same rate as I had originally predicted. By analyzing the Pew Research Centre's Internet Project Library Survey, it is evident that the youngest group, aged 0 - 20 years old, may be more likely to use the "prepositional because", due to their increased internet usage, online exposure as well as increased frequency of possessing and using Facebook and Twitter personal accounts, which are social media tools that are affiliated with the use of "because X" (Pew Research Centre, 2014).

Likewise, due to a comparatively reduced frequency and intensity of internet usage amongst older demographic groups, the prepositional use of the word "because" is significantly less common, especially as it is not used in daily conversation, but rather incorporated within weblog posts, Facebook statuses and Twitter tweets. Furthermore, younger demographics, particularly those who are in the prime of their youth, may tend to follow social fads, such as the use of the "because X" trend in order to assert themselves as members of popular adolescent groups. Due to the notion of peer pressure, which increasingly influences adolescents who are

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trying to develop a positive self-identity, the youth are particularly vulnerable and hence, may rapidly adopt social trends that are promoted by the social media, in order to fit in with their social groups.

Hypothesis **B**

The researcher's prediction that individuals in the working class (\$0-\$40,000) group will respond at a significantly increased rate, compared to the relatively wealthier groups, was incorrect, along with the prediction that research participants in the middle class (\$41,000-\$ 81,000) and upper class (\$ 82,000 - \$ 122,000) groupings will have a relatively lower rate of responding towards using "because X" (Ivanova, 2011). According to the online sociolinguistics survey, individuals have a similar rate of using the "prepositional because" (as indicated by the mean response rate of 29.21%), regardless of socio-economic status (SES); the only exception, however, was individuals belonging to the Upper- Society income group, which has a considerably lower usage rate of 14.35%. The reason why one's average income may not be a strong indicator of the use of "because X" would be due to its dominant prevalence on social media sites, a resource that is now easily accessible for all demographics, particularly due to the economically feasibility and ease of access to Wi-Fi and computer facilities; since North Americans typically own 2.1 electronics per individual, the frequency of exposure to social media sites is widespread across all demographics (Pew Research Centre, 2014). Furthermore, individuals from upper class and high society groups may use socially popular language terminology, such as the "prepositional because", in order to attain popularity and publicity from middle-class clientele.

Due to the interaction of individuals from various backgrounds on social media sites, where there is considerably less social stratification and differentiation compared to the real world, language trends, particularly regarding the new application of an already existing word, may spread between income groups, rather than becoming stagnant within one social category. The researcher's hypothesis, however, that research participants in the middle class (\$41,000- \$ 81,000) and upper class (\$ 82,000 - \$ 122,000) groupings will have the same rate of responding,

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towards using "because X", was correct (Ivanova, 2011). Perhaps, this linguistic pattern is due to the concept of linguistic inferiority, by which individuals belonging to the middle-class income category strive to adopt the values and mannerisms of the elite class, in order to attain social mobility and increase their affluence.

Hypothesis C

The researcher's hypothesis that the Pakistani research participants currently dwelling in Canada will have an increased rate of responding towards using the "prepositional because", is correct; moreover, the prediction that the Pakistan-born individuals currently residing in Pakistan will respond at a significantly decreased rate, is also correct. While most research participants dwelling in Canada may significantly use "because X" on the social media at a higher rate, it is astonishing that individuals currently residing in Pakistan do not respond at the similar rate, particularly as the contemporary world is a global village that is interconnected via electronic ties and as a result, individuals living in contemporary society may be exposed to the values and behavioural tendencies of multiple cultures. It is probable, however, that individuals, dwelling in Pakistan - who study at private, English medium schools - endeavour to display their affluence and mastery of the English language, compared to their peers who study at public schools where one learns English as a second language course.

By demonstrating mastery of the "Standard English", such as the Standard Canadian English (SCE) along with its prescriptive rules, individuals residing in nation-states such as Pakistan, where English is not the official language, may seek to assert their social status in front of peers. Therefore, by using social markers of affluence, such as language, as well as refraining from using newer applications of already existing words, such as "because X" and striving to use traditional versions of the language, that were used during colonial times, individuals may strive to differentiate themselves on the social hierarchy. As a result, the increased usage of the "prepositional because" by individuals residing in Canada, does not reflect an innate tendency due to one's particular ethnicity (nature), but rather one's exposure to a particular environment (nurture) along with the reinforcing social norms present.

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Survey Screenshots

Link: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/NTV35H6

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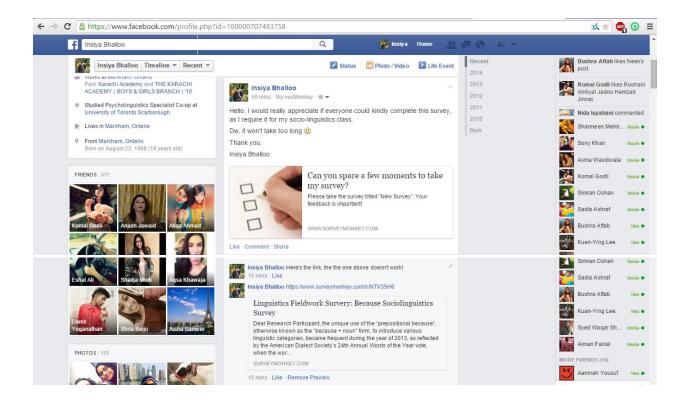
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Screenshots of Sample Survey Responses

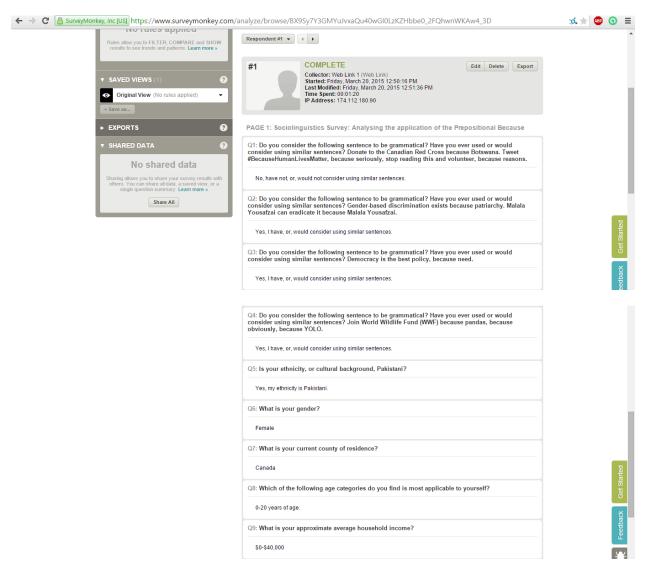
1. Facebook Status Post:

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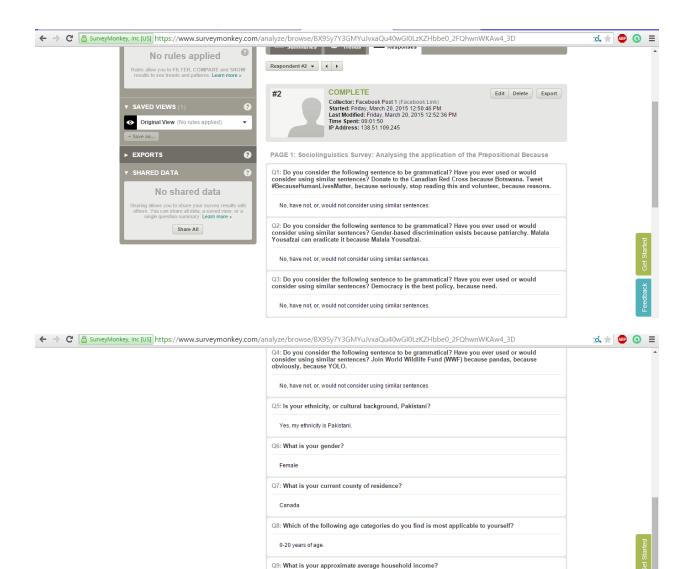
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2. Respondent # 1:



3. Respondent # 2:

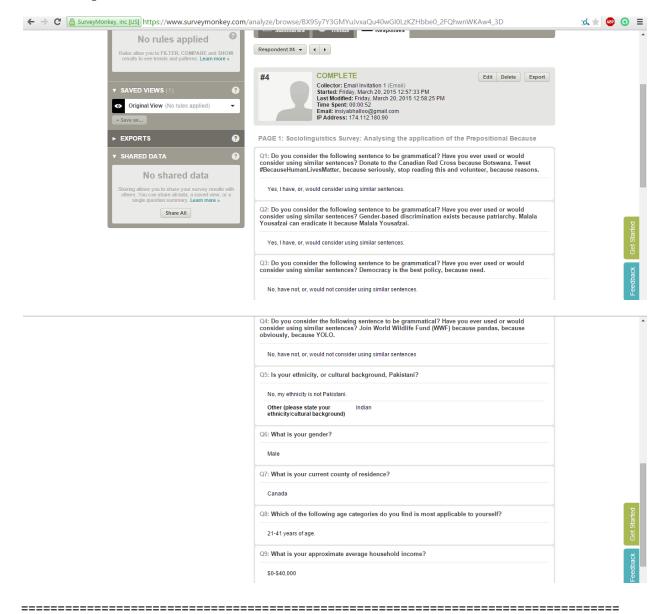
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\$82,000-\$122,000

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4. Respondent # 4:



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