

## On Conjunctions of Reason

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Reason clauses introduced by *because*, *since*, and *for* are classified into two types according to their functions:

- (1)
  - a. John came back because he loved her.
  - b. Since John wasn't there, we decided to leave a note for him.
  - c. John came back, for he loved her.
- (2)
  - a. What are you doing tonight, because there's a good movie on.
  - b. Since you are so smart, when was George Washington born?
  - c. What are you doing tonight, for there's a good movie on.

The reason clauses in (1) each expresses the cause of the event denoted by the main clause, while those in (2) the reason for inferring or saying what the main clause denotes. Following Nakau (1994), we refer to the former as the propositional reading and the latter as the modal reading. As the acceptability of (1a-c) and (2a-c) shows, clauses introduced by the three conjunctions can in principle have either of these two readings.

Clauses introduced by the three conjunctions are, however, not simply polysemous between the two readings. In this connection, it is worthwhile to note that the propositional reading is classified into two types according to whether the causal relation described is direct or indirect. With this in mind, observe the following examples:

- (3) He avoided her at the party {because/since/, for} she had snubbed him twice and he didn't want to risk a third time.

Each of the examples in (3) describes an indirect causal relation and in this case the use of each of the three conjunctions is equally possible. Interestingly, the three conjunctions behave differently when a more direct causal relation is expressed:

- (4) John died {because/?since/?for} a bullet hit him in the head.

The event of the bullet hitting him in the head is supposed to be the direct cause of his death. The causal relation expressed in (4) is therefore more direct than that in (3). In such cases, *since* and *for* are, though not completely impossible to use, less preferred to *because*. *Because*-clauses are thus more compatible with propositional use than *since*- and *for*-clauses in the sense that the former can readily express either direct or indirect causal relations. Put differently, with the exclusion of *because*, *since* and *for* semantically constitute a natural class, and clauses they introduce have a strong bias toward the modal reading. By contrast, *because*-clauses have a strong tendency toward the propositional reading. This semantic classification is further supported by the following examples:

- (5) To be frank with you, you are to blame, {because/since} you ask me.

These are equally grammatical, but there is a semantic gulf between them. The *because*-clause receives the propositional reading by default and describes the reason for the hearer's fault; the sentence conveys "You are to blame because you asked me." By contrast, the *since*-clause receives the modal reading by default and expresses the reason for the speaker's speech act of assertion; the sentence means "I'm telling you because you asked me."

Our semantic classification predicts that *for* behaves in the same way as *since* does. However, this is not borne out:

- (6) \* To be frank with you, you are to blame, for you ask me.

One might take this fact as a counterexample to the classification. But the unacceptability of (6) is, we argue, not semantic but syntactic in nature. Quirk et al. (1985:922) point out that *because* and *since* are subordinators, while *for* is a "semi-coordinator," which is confirmed by the following fact:

- (7) a. \* For he was unhappy, he asked to be transferred.  
 b. Because he was unhappy, he asked to be transferred.  
 c. Since the ground is wet, it must have rained.

Generally, clauses beginning with a coordinator cannot be preposed, as in \**Or they are spending a vacation there, they are living in England*. Similarly, *for*-clauses cannot be preposed, either, as (7a) illustrates. In contrast, *because*- and *since*-clauses, like subordinate clauses in general (cf. *Although Mary wanted it, John gave it away*.), can be fronted, as seen in (7b-c). The following contrast further illustrates the categorial difference in question:

- (8) a. Do it yourself, for who else can?  
 b. \* Do it yourself, {because/since} who else can?

*For*, unlike *because* and *since*, can connect an imperative clause and a rhetorical question, which are both main clause phenomena. This fact strongly suggests that *for*-clauses count as a main clause, while *because*- and *since*-clauses do not. Thus, the contrast in (8) also supports the view that *for* is a semi-coordinator, while *because* and *since* are subordinators. Put differently, *because* and *since* syntactically constitute a natural class with the exclusion of *for*. Taking the categorial status of *for* into consideration, we can straightforwardly account for the ungrammaticality of (6). In (6), the first conjunct involves the discourse modality marker *to be frank with you*, while the second does not: the two clauses are different in their functional make-up, which conflicts with the general tendency for coordinated conjuncts to be of the same semantic type. Hence the ungrammaticality. Viewed in this way, the ungrammaticality of (6) does not constitute a counterexample to our semantic classification at all. Rather, it offers an important insight into the syntactic nature of *for*.

As we have seen, *since* and *for* semantically constitute a natural class, while *because* and *since* syntactically constitute a natural class. Thus, the syntactic and semantic classifications of the three conjunctions do not overlap.