AN INTERPRETATION OF THE *BECAUSE* CONSTRUCTION IN MIDDLE ENGLISH

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The interpretation which will be suggested is a tentative attempt at finding some formal solutions within the framework of transformational grammar to complicated, though intuitively felt, linguistic differences and similarities in the relations of cause and effect. This exposition is based not only on ME material but also on ModE to make the presentation of the argument clearer. Besides, such an approach to the problem is also justified on other grounds, namely, that the results of a transformational analysis of Chaucer's *Astrolabe* [1] strongly support general observations on the syntactic component of Modern English. Thus, Chomsky's (1966 : 57) statement about the phonological component that 'the underlying forms are extremely resistant to historical change' holds true, and seems hardly disputable, for English syntax in general.

As far as I know, not all types of subordinate clause have been thoroughly investigated by the transformational theory. The relations expressed by nominalizations of various kind, adjectivalizations, or pronominalizations have been the subject of most extensive and fruitful research. In these analyses the constructions in question are derived from basic strings to be further embedded in matrix sentences. In other words, all grammatical relations whose surface structures are not interpretable within the framework of strings generated straight by the base component have been accounted for by embedding transformations. On this assumption the constructions with *because* would also be traceable back to the basic strings through the embedding transformation. The transformational subcomponent would generate first the string consisting of the following elements:

$$\widehat{NP\ VP}\ Adverbial$$

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[1] These observations are based on the author's analysis of the syntactic component of Chaucer's Treatise on the Astrolabe.

that is, a noun-phrase which functions as the subject of a sentence, a verb-phrase which functions as the predicate of a sentence and finally, an adverbial phrase which functions as a complement associated with the full predicate-phrase. It is the adverbial that is utilized to express causal relations. In the deep structure this adverbial may stand for some hypothetical cause realized by such lexical formatives (or some PRO-forms) as: *for some reason, by reason of, on account of*. It will follow, then that through a series of various operations the adverbial will be transformed into a causal construction with *because*. This is the interpretation suggested by Thomas (1965 : 199) of the following sentence:

(1) I know he was there because I saw him.

Leaving aside all details concerning particular grammatical operations it is assumed that *I know he was there for some reason* is a matrix sentence, while *some reason is something* and *I saw him* are constituent sentences, which are subsequently embedded in the matrix. This makes it possible to generate the output sentence (1) which is clearly illustrated by the following derivational history with all necessary grammatical transformations being taken into account:

I know he was there for SOME REASON (+S). (matrix)
SOME REASON is SOMETHING (+S) (first constituent)
I saw him. (second constituent)
SOME REASON is (that I saw him) (new first constituent)
I know he was there for SOME REASON (SOME REASON is that I saw him) (new matrix)
I know he was there because I saw him. (derived sentence).

One could suggest another interpretation, very close to the one quoted above by making use of the modifications introduced by Chomsky in *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Owing to the fact that the rules of the base component of a grammar permit the introduction of the initial symbol S, a causal construction may be derived through the realization of the following string:

$$X - by\ some \left\{ \begin{array}{l} reason \\ cause \end{array} \right\} that\widehat{\ }S'$$

In this string *by some reason (cause)*, being an adverbial, has the grammatical function of the predicate-phrase complement, *that*⁀*S'* is a sentential complement to the formatives *reason* or *cause*. This modification is possible because *reason* and *cause* belong to the category of nouns characterized by the strict subcategorization feature [Det — S']. Other examples cited by Chomsky (1965 : 100) of the same category are 'the *idea* that he might succeed, the *habit* of working hard, the *fact* that he was guilty.' This suggestion slightly modifies the deep structure: the

position of a transform of a new sentence is already indicated, its causal notions announced, nevertheless its grammatical function will not go beyond the limits of the adverbial phrase. No matter how simpler or clearer this procedure may be in comparison with the one postulated by Thomas, and causal relations more explicitly expressed — no essential differences between these two proposals are noticed as is shown in the following branching tree diagrams:

(2)

(3)
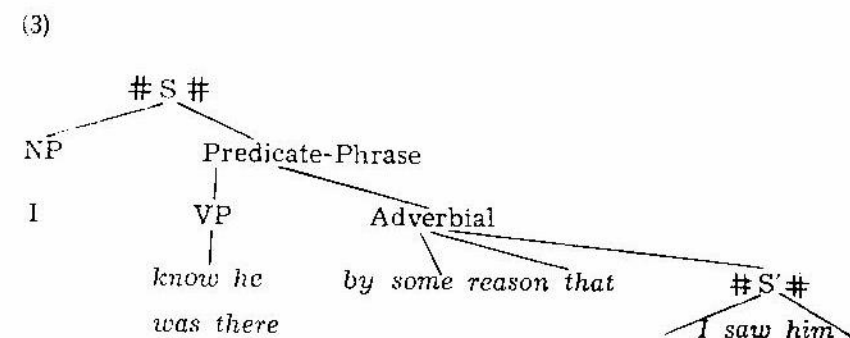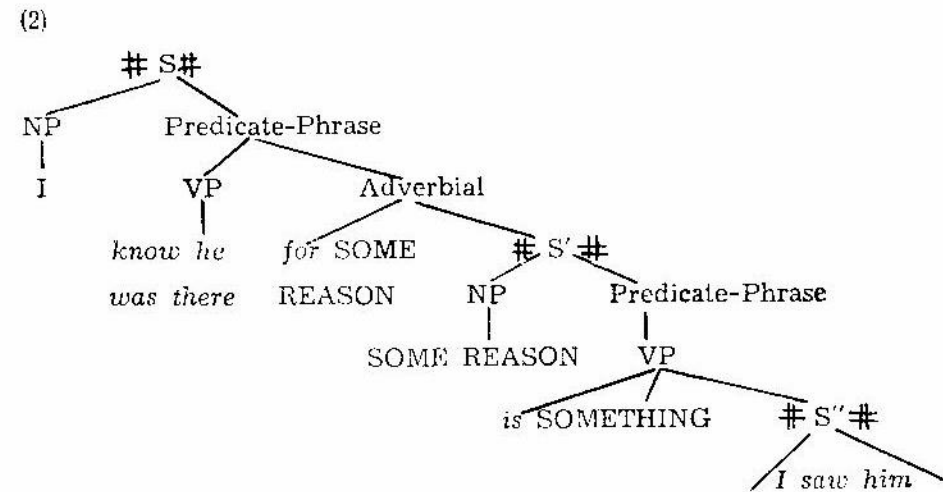
The diagrams (2) and (3) are informal schematic representations, I have left out details not relevant to this discussion.

Even a cursory analysis of these derivational histories invites some criticism of the proposed interpretations. The fact that the causal sentence is derived basically from two strings generated by the base is

hardly questionable. (Thomas postulated still one more string, in a sense intermediate, with PRO forms. Obviously I ignore the nominalization *he was there* in the illustrative example.) On the other hand, the interpretation of the relation between these two strings need not be dogmatically accepted as the only one. So, I should like to ask the first question: what is actually the relation between sentences which are conjoined by *because*?, in other words, is the *because* construction subordinately introduced into the main sentence as an adverbial complement in relation to S, or as something else?

The next problem concerns the interpretation of the notion of the cause itself. As far as I know in grammatical analyses this aspect has been disregarded; neither of the suggested interpretations accounts for the differences which are found in certain paraphrases of *because* constructions. Consider, for instance, the following sentences which in their surface structures seem nearly identical with regard to their grammatical constructions:

(4) He is not going for a holiday because he has no money.
(5) He is not going for a holiday because he wants to finish writing his book.

Only (5) can be paraphrased with an *(in order)* to construction:

(5a) He is not going for a holiday (in order) to finish writing his book.

It would be nonsensical to use the same type of paraphrase to (4):

(4a)* He is not going for a holiday in order to have no money.

The same difference is noticed when answering the question: why? Why isn't he going for a holiday?

(4b) because he has no money
(5b) because he wants to finish writing his book OR (in order) to finish writing his book.

In (5) there exists some syntactic surplus and consequently some semantic surplus which is intuitively felt. Thus the grammarian is faced with the second question: are the *because* constructions based on two different hypothetical deep structures, or are they based on one deep structure only?

In an attempt to answer the two questions posited and to provide some explanation the arguments will be illustrated by ME material. It is not too foolhardy, I assume, to search for solutions in logical considerations on the relations of cause and effect. The starting point in such considerations is the logical proposition: 'q because p', where 'q' and 'p' are particular propositions, and the whole proposition 'q because p' expresses the assertion that 'p' is some cause, or a part of a cause, of 'q'. This assertion is not, however, interpreted as a logical consequence concerning the relation between 'q' and 'p'. Furthermore, to make 'p' function as a cause in an assertion and 'q' as an effect, 'p' and 'q'. have to be subject to certain temporal, or spatio-temporal, restrictions. It has been observed in paraphrased sentences that, on the one hand, the cause is a certain fact, or a particular event (*because he has no money*), while on the other, the cause is an intention (*because he wants to finish writing his book*). Both causes are prior or simultaneous in relation to the effect, the latter being interpreted either as the consequence of a cause, or as a means to the attainment of a goal. Moreover, in the case of an intentional cause there is still an additional goal-directed activity with a future reference [2]. Let us now consider how the proposition 'q because p' is linguistically realized.

The simplest relation between cause and effect can be expressed by the following string:

$NP_1 - V - NP_2$

where NP_1 is a cause, NP_2 an effect, in other words it means that

$NP_1 - causes - NP_2.$

In surface structures these simple causal relations are similarly expressed, e.g.

(6) That whel wol cause another whel   Chaucer HF 794
    bothe these thinges may causen errour   Chaucer Astr. 2,5
    This prison caused me nat for to crye   Chaucer CT Kn A 1095
    thise been causes two that causen moost a gentil herte wo   Chaucer CT Sq F 451

Ignoring all details not relevant to the discussion, the above sentences are traceable back to the deep structure whose Phrase-marker is represented as follows:

(7)
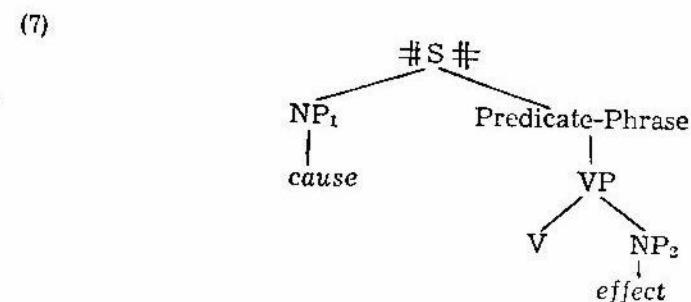
Comparing this tree diagram to the trees (2) and (3) previously postulated one can clearly see the differences: in (2) and (3) *cause* was dom-

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[2] For the discussion on causal explanations see Braithwaite's (1960) relevant chapters.

inated by the adverbial node in relation to S, while in (7) by a nominal node which functions as the subject in relation to S. It is obvious, that the relation of cause and effect need not be expressed only by the verb *cause*; it can be substituted by *make, produce, bring into existence,* or any other causative verb. This is how the relation of cause and effect is represented in the deep structure, and this is how it is realized in surface structures. If, however, the relation is reversed with the effect considered from the viewpoint of its cause, then the relation in question can be expressed only by the passive construction, or its equivalent, in other words, by the transformation of the basic string with the marker for passivization. Since transformations do not introduce any semantic change the relation between cause and effect is retained; the only element added is the passive morpheme, optionally postulated already in the deep structure. This can be illustrated by the following ME examples:[3]

(8) the akþ ... is caused of many causes   Chauliac (2) 97a/b

   Chekes ded and pale, caused of wacche and long abstinence   Lydgate DM (1) 346

   Al his disese and gret aduersite icaused was ... bi his fadris froward cruelte   Lydgate FP 9.1675

Some passive constructions can be optionally replaced by prepositional phrases, e.g. *is caused by = by cause, is based on = on the basis, is requested by = by request,* and the like. Assuming that this interpretation is correct the construction *by cause* is a transform of the passive. Incidentally, *because* occurs in Chaucer and other writers of that period most frequently as the prepositional construction *by cause*. It is observed that X — *by cause* — Y is used when in the deep structure the cause or the effect, most often both, have a resursive element S, which is developed into a factive nominal. But if the cause is expressed by a nominal phrase, not a whole sentence the construction X — *by cause of* — Y is used, e.g.

(9) yf a planete be cold, than amenusith his coldnesse by cause of the hoote sykne   Chaucer Astr. 1,21

   lest in this town that folkes me despise because of hym   Chaucer TC 4.1340

   I wende ... that he hadde yeve it me bycause of yow   Chaucer CT Sh B 1596

In (9) the factive nominals stand for the cause in the deep structure and constitute the condition of the use of *by cause of*. By means of

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[3] The cited examples are from Middle English Dictionary, ed. by Hans Kurath and Sherman M. Kuhn. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.

a paraphrase of such a sentence the grammarian comes back to the abstract string: NP_1 (cause) — *causes* — NP_2 (effect), e.g.

   that folkes me despise because of hym — he caused that folkes me despise.

If, on the other hand, both the cause and the effect are expressed by factive nominals, then the construction *by cause (that)* appears, e.g.

(10) than sette I the point of F dounward in the same signe by cause that the latitude was south 2 degres   Chaucer Astr. 2,40

   of whiche the leest is clepid the cercle of Cancre by cause that the heved of Cancre turnith evermo consentrik upon the same cercle   Chaucer Astr. 1,17

   she ... thoghte noght but good, by cause that the cradel by it stood   Chaucer CT Rv A 4223

   bycause he nolde payen hem here hire, the town of Troie shal ben set on-fire   Chaucer TC 4.125

The occurrence of *that* after *by cause* should not be explained only as the reenforcement of the conjunction which has been suggested by Mossé (1952 : 118); clearly, it belongs to the factive nominal and can be optionally deleted as in Modern English, e.g. *I know that he was there, I know he was there*. The deletion of *that* after *by cause* should most probably be explained by the verse rhythm. In Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe* where this construction is encountered several times *that* is never deleted. In poetry, however, *by cause* is found with or without *that*.

To summarize, according to the interpretation proposed in this paper the sentences with *because* constructions are represented in the deep structure as a nominal phrase with S', whose function is that of the subject of S. This is the answer to the first question and also partly to the second question. Since it is assumed that there exists one deep structure for the relations of cause and effect, the former being expressed by *because^S'*, or by *(in order) to^X* (i.e. by the *because* construction with some syntactic and semantic surplus, cf. (5)), is not differentiated on this level. The solution has to be sought for somewhere else. It is observed that the sentences with such a surplus have either a modal, or a verb expressing intention, wish, desire, etc. e.g.

(11) be cause that he wolde winne he bad his fela ferst beginne   Gower CA 2.343

   bycause she wolde nat hit were knowyn oute, she kepte countenance   Malory Wks 150/8

In the sentences cited above the verb-phrases consist either of Modal^V

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[4] *wolde winne* could also be interpreted as V^Infinitive.

(*wolde winne* [4]) or V^*that*^S' (*wolde nat hit were knowyn oute*). Such verbs are characterized by syntactic features which include among other things strict subcategorization features: $[+V, +-NP, +-that^S]$, and a selectional feature $[+N, +Animate-]$. The differentiation of the two types of the *because* construction is made on the level of syntactic features (strict subcategorization features and selectional features of concrete formatives of the string which is to express the cause) not violating the relation between the cause and the effect in the deepest structure.

To conclude these rather tentative remarks on the *because* construction, as the problem has been put and presented in this paper there exists one deep structure which postulates an abstract relation between the cause and the effect, by virtue of which all sentences with *because* are understood similarly. The fact that the sentences may differ in the type of the cause is the consequence of different syntactic features of the categorial context. If the interpretation thus suggested is correct it would confirm the assumption of the transformational theory that the syntactic component is the basis for semantic interpretation and would also support the observations made on wider ME material, that in its deep structure the English language hardly underwent any substantial changes during the past centuries.

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