

The Positions of the *Because*-clause: Pedagogical Implications Based on Native Speaker and Learner Corpus Data

Kazuko FUJIMOTO
Department of Human Studies
Soka University
Tokyo, Japan
kazuko@soka.ac.jp

“Is it correct to put the *because*-clause before the main clause?” Every year, I have this question from my Japanese university students. How should teachers answer this question? The survey I conducted with 73 Japanese university students reveals that 45.2% of them were taught at junior or senior high school or even in university that the construction *because S+V, S+V* is not correct. Why did the students learn such a rule? The reason seems to be that teachers try to prevent their students from inappropriately using the sentence fragment *Because S+V* (Garner, 2009:92). English grammar and usage books and a native speaker’s corpus search provided me with the evidence that the construction *because S+V, S+V* is perfectly acceptable, although its frequency is much lower than that of *S+V(,) because S+V*.

The aim of this paper is to lead the corpus research findings to pedagogical implications: what should be taught about the use of *because* and its positions. This paper has three research questions: (1) In which position is the *because*-clause put most often?, (2) Is there any difference in *because*-clause position between Japanese learner’s data and native speaker’s data? and (3) When and why is the *because*-clause used before or after the main clause? The corpora compared in this study are the Longman Learners’ Corpus (restricted query to the Japanese learner’s data) (LLC_J), the BE2006 Corpus (written BrE data) (BE06) and the BNC Sampler Corpus (restricted query to the written language data) (BNC Sampler_W).¹

The corpus research findings show that the Japanese learners are much more likely to use *because* than the native speakers. The chi-square tests indicate that the difference in frequency between LLC_J and the native speaker corpora BE06 and BNC Sampler_W is statistically highly significant ($\alpha_B = .017$, $p < .001$).² The corpus

¹ I used *CQPweb* for these three corpora. Available from: <http://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/> [22 March 2012]. It should be noted that the data of these three corpora match in size but do not in text type.

² According to *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*, 2nd ed. (2007, IW11), the ESL/EFL students use *because* about three times more often than the native speakers. It can be said that the high frequency in the use of *because* is not limited to Japanese learners.

research findings also reveal that the Japanese learners tend to place the *because*-clause in the final position as the native speakers tend to do so. In BE06, the *because*-clause is used in the final position about twelve times as often as in the initial position, and in BNC Sampler_W and LLC_J, about eight times more in the final position. These results can answer the research questions (1) and (2), though it is still doubtful whether the Japanese learners use the *because*-clause with a good understanding of its use and positions.

Since the *because*-clause can be used both in the initial and the final positions, it seems necessary to teach students when and why one structure is more appropriate than the other for effective communication. In the classroom instruction, the key ideas may be the meaning of *because*, the end-focus and end-weight principles (Quirk *et al.*, 1972) and the flow of the information in context (e.g. Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Firbas, 1992; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Rodney & Lock, 2011). These principles and the coherent information flow have been confirmed by the examination of the examples from BE06 and BNC Sampler_W.

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