

Bénédicte GUILLAUME — *A Corpus-Based Study of Since Clauses in Contemporary English*. Toulouse : PU du Mirail, 2014, 195 pages.

**Electronic version**

URL: <http://corpus.revues.org/2723>
ISSN: 1765-3126

Publisher

Bases ; corpus et langage - UMR 6039

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 January 2015
ISBN: 1 638-9808
ISSN: 1638-9808

Electronic reference

« Bénédicte GUILLAUME — *A Corpus-Based Study of Since Clauses in Contemporary English*. Toulouse : PU du Mirail, 2014, 195 pages. », *Corpus* [Online], 14 | 2015, Online since 29 August 2017, connection on 29 August 2017. URL : <http://corpus.revues.org/2723>

This text was automatically generated on 29 August 2017.

© Tous droits réservés

Bénédicte GUILLAUME — *A Corpus-Based Study of Since Clauses in Contemporary English*. Toulouse : PU du Mirail, 2014, 195 pages.

- 1 This book proposes an analysis of the properties of *since* clauses in contemporary English, based on a sample of 526 occurrences, most of them from the British National Corpus. It is usually considered that *since* (Old English *siþþan*) used to have strictly temporal meanings and that, like a number of adverbial subordinators (cf. Traugott 1989), it acquired a causal value later on, in this case in Middle English; the aim of the study is to establish whether *since* should still be regarded as a single marker today (as for Lapaire & Rotgé 1991, for instance, for whom both values relate to the notion of origin), or whether the properties of temporal vs. causal *since* clauses are so different that there are now two homonymous subordinators (e.g. Deléchelle 1989). The author's framework is mainly the French TOE theory (Théorie des Opérations Enonciatives), but rather than propose a full account of underlying operations and theoretical implications, she chooses to use some TOE tools to highlight certain phenomena. She also follows Lecercle (1990)'s notion of 'remainder': whatever theoretical model linguists devise, they will never account for all occurrences. There is always a remainder, that is, unclear or unstable instances, which are in fact a revealing and constitutive part of language. After detailing her data collection procedure, the author analyses causal *since* clauses (chapter 1), temporal ones (chapter 2), then the 'remainder', that is, ambiguous and hybrid cases (chapter 3).
- 2 For her corpus, the author used the tagging function of the BNC to select the uses of *since* as a subordinator (vs. preposition or adverb). Out of the resulting 25,988 hits, she randomly selected 500, which 'seemed to [her] the right size for [her] corpus to be varied enough yet manageable' (p. 12). When an extract contained several occurrences of *since*, she included them all, hence the final total of 526. A manual review enabled her to correct a number of tagging errors and a certain lack of consistency in the tags, possibly due to different conceptions of 'subordinators' or 'adverbs'. To her, *since* is a subordinator if and only if it introduces a clause that contains a finite verb phrase. For each occurrence, she

entered the type of clause (temporal, causal or hybrid); its location relative to the main clause; tenses, aspects and modality in the *since* clause and in the main clause; the presence of negation; coordination; and any other element that might seem noteworthy.

- 3 A major finding is that the two types of *since* clauses (causal and temporal) show diverging trends as regards their syntactic properties, but that they do not differ systematically. For instance, when a *since* clause is placed after the main clause, it is typically isolated by a comma if it has a causal value, and has no punctuation if it is temporal; but there are instances of postponed temporal *since* clauses preceded by commas. Simple tenses are particularly common in the main clause when the *since* clause has a causal value, whereas they are very rare when it has a temporal value (about 90% of the time, the main clause then has a perfect aspect); but again, there are instances with a simple tense in the main clause and a temporal *since* clause. Finally, causal *since* clauses are more often placed after the main clause than before (contrary to what might have been expected), and this is also the case for temporal *since* clauses, although postponing is even more frequent in the latter case.
- 4 The author concludes from this that the syntactic properties noted in the corpus are not determined by the value of the *since* clause (temporal or causal), but by other factors. For causal *since* clauses, the place of the clause relative to the main clause depends on speaker attitudes. Postponing has a backgrounding effect, so that when a *since* clause is postponed, what is highlighted is the contents of the main clause. A fronted *since* clause, on the other hand, highlights the cause-effect relationship between the subordinate clause and the main clause (rather than the contents of the *since* clause). The author notes that the difference, however, is often 'subtle'. Temporal *since* clauses are typically postponed because their function is then to provide an aspectual locator, but they have to be fronted when the main clause describes a situation that has evolved since the temporal landmark expressed in the *since* clause.
- 5 Another finding of is that in a small number of cases, it is impossible to determine whether *since* has a purely temporal, or a purely causal, value. The context often allows for disambiguation, but sometimes it does not, as in, *The Catholic religion has marginalised women, in part, one might say, since it was decided that God was male* (p. 181). To the author, such 'hybrid' instances are evidence that *since* should still be regarded as a single marker in contemporary English.
- 6 This book will be of interest to all those, whether students, the general public or scholars, who are interested in the notion of core value in grammar and in the evolution of grammatical words. It is very accessible and provides many examples and micro-analyses. A more explicit, broader state of the art would have helped situate the author's research within the existing literature on the topic, base some intuitions on facts, and show how the tools of the TOE framework allowed for improved analyses compared to other approaches. The reader might also have liked to read more about the stages in the shift from temporal to causal value in subordinators – this might have helped to define more clearly the notion of 'single morpheme' that the author retains for *since*. But the general conclusions make very convincing reading and will be of value to researchers.
- 7 Laure GARDELLE,
Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon