

Indonesian causal conjunctions: grammaticalization without change of form¹

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Indonesian (Malayo-Polynesian < Austronesian) has a number of causal conjunctions. The present study is focused on *karena* and *sebab*, since both of them are largely used in spoken and written discourse. Both conjunctions can select for clause or a noun (1, 4-5).

- (1) *banyak orang mati karena / sebab penyakit itu*
many human die because because illness that
'Many people died because of the disease.'
(Sneddon 1996: 226)

karena and *sebab* are unusual in that they are not only causal conjunctions, but also lexical words, meaning 'cause' or 'reason' (Stevens & Schmidgall-Tellings 2010). This is exemplified in (2-3).

- (2) *Itu=lah sebab-nya!*
that=EMPH because-3SG
'That was the reason! That's why!'
(Stevens & Schmidgall-Tellings 2010)
- (3) *Apa karena-nya maka begitu?*
what because-3SG and that.way
'Why did it turn out that way?'
(Stevens & Schmidgall-Tellings 2010)

That is why they may be combined with yet another conjunction, *oleh* 'by'.

- (4) *Oleh karena tiket telah habis terjual, beberapa orang telah mencoba menempuh masuk ke dalam stadion.*
by becauseticket PST expire sold some human PST
try rush enter to inside stadium
'Because the tickets were sold out, some people tried to force their way into the stadium.'
(Stevens & Schmidgall-Tellings 2010)
- (5) *Oleh sebab itu, di-butuh-kan pengemudi bus yang sudah berpengalaman.*
by because that PASS-need-APPLdriver bus REL
already experienced
'Therefore (=for that reason), the experienced bus drivers are needed.'
<https://www.republika.co.id/berita/nasional/jabodetabek-nasional/17/05/15/opzr4s366-sopir-senior-akan-kemudikan-transjakarta-koridor-13>

I suggest that *karena* and *sebab*, when used as conjunctions (1), are **grammaticalized items**. Their meaning has changed. I assume that, when used as conjunctions, *karena* and *sebab* are in fact two-place operators – just like the English conjunction *because*:

- (6) *CAUSE(p,q)* is true iff *p* is true, *q* is true, and *p* being true causes *q* to be true.
(Kroeger (2018: 331) after Johnston 1994)

Still, no change of form has occurred, since the causal conjunctions are formally identical with lexical words meaning 'cause/reason'. This supports Berndt Heine's (2018) meaning-first hypothesis: according to him, the meaning changes first in grammaticalization. Further, as (Ansaldo et al. 2018) show, grammaticalization without change of form is characteristic of South-East Asian languages, which tend to

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have little morphology. Hence, the grammaticalization of *karena* and *sebab* may be qualified as an areal phenomenon.

References

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