A conceptual and procedural view of causal connectives:  
the case of Modern Greek γιατί and επίδι

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Abstract: The current analysis takes a relevance-theoretic view of the two most frequently applied mono-lexemic causal connectives in Modern Greek discourse, i.e. γιατί and επίδι. The suggestion is that επίδι-introduced clauses are to be treated conceptually, while γιατί performs either a conceptual or procedural function depending on its use. This treatment follows up on Kitis’s (2006) findings regarding the operation of the connectives under discussion. It will be concluded that the relevance-theoretic based results corroborate Kitis’s account and, further, offer a more refined explication of the constraints on the application of the conjuncts. In fact, it will be illustrated that the theory in application offers the required tools for distinguishing among three types of procedural meaning underlying the interpretation of γιατί.

Key words: causal connectives, relevance, procedural vs. conceptual operation

0. Introduction

The purpose of this discussion is to examine the distinction in meaning between the two most frequently applied mono-lexemic causal connectives in Modern Greek discourse, i.e. γιατί and επίδι implementing the relevance-theoretic model of pragmatic analysis, and, more specifically, Blakemore’s (1987, 2002) account of connectives in terms of a conceptual or procedural approach.

In the current analysis the idea is that επίδι-clauses are to be treated conceptually, while γιατί performs both functions depending on its use. This information is compared to Kitis’s (2006) findings regarding the behaviour of the connectives under discussion. A reanalysis in relevance-theoretic terms of her interpretation of the subordinators will be attempted with a view to checking the claims that γιατί is a broadly functioning discourse connective, rather than a causal connective, as opposed to επίδι warranting causal and explanatory coherence.

Moreover, the line of argumentation employed in this discussion is taken to affect aspects of the procedural method of examining discourse markers, as prescribed by Blakemore. In particular, the supposition is challenged that procedural constraints are meant to operate towards the generation of implicatures only. As will be shown, context selection pertains to a much broader range of derivations of pragmatic effects.

It is surmised that the relevance-theoretic based results corroborate Kitis’s account and, further, offer a more finely grained explication of the constraints on the application of the conjuncts. In fact, it will be illustrated that the theory in application offers the required tools for distinguishing among three types of procedural meaning underlying the interpretation of γιατί. Hence, quite apart from the distinction between conceptual and procedural categories of causal meaning, we may also postulate the operation of the latter category in three distinct types of pragmatic enrichment: one affecting the constituents of the logical form of a sentence, one contributing to the explicitness of the related utterance by making up unencoded constituents, and finally, one pertaining to the higher-order explicatures involved in the determination of the intended meaning of the utterance.
1. Procedural discourse markers: their properties

Our claim in this discussion follows up on Kitis’s suggestion that γiati appears to perform a procedural function, in Blakemore’s (1987, 2002) terms, “orienting the hearer to access the clause it introduces as relevant to what has preceded it” (2006:245).

According to Blakemore, procedural expressions “do not encode a constituent of a conceptual representation (or even indicate a concept), but guide the comprehension process so that the hearer ends up with a conceptual representation” (2002: 90-91). Procedural encodings guide the audience towards an inferential route that results in a conceptual representation. For instance, consider the procedural function of after all in the following example:

(1) (a) Ben can open Tom’s safe. (b) After all, he knows the combination.  
[Blakemore, 2002: 95]

Here, the specific discourse connective is used to guide the addressee to the inference that the proposition in (1b) is a premise for the deduction of the proposition expressed by (1a). Thus, the speaker indicates in this way that segment (b) is relevant by virtue of strengthening an existing assumption.

On her account, the meanings of procedural discourse connectives are linked to cognitive effects that an input may achieve by means of a contextual implication, strengthening or eliminating an assumption (Blakemore, 2002: 95). In this sense, but encodes an inferential route that ends in the elimination of a contextual assumption, while so is linked to the effect of contextual implications. This line of interpretation basically amounts to the generalization that procedural expressions achieve relevance by means of constraining or manipulating the deductive process implemented in deriving an implicature.

However, Blakemore’s account is not taken to exhaust a full investigation of procedural meaning. Specifically, one of the main worries of a relevance-theoretic account of effective comprehension relies on determining the full propositional form of an utterance by virtue of resolving issues of underdeterminacy, a concomitant of verbal communication falling short of encoding the intended meaning of the speaker. The gap between the lexically encoded meaning and maximal propositionality is bridged by pragmatic inference. And procedural cases of connectives are viewed in this discussion as being operative to this end, i.e. that of supplying contextual information as pragmatic input required for determining the interpretation of the main clause utterance.

Hall (2007) discusses but from this angle:

Discourse connectives seem mainly to constrain the recovery of implicatures, but since the function of procedural information is to constrain pragmatic inference, it could be expected to play a role in other pragmatic processes too- for instance, given that linguistic decoding doesn’t produce fully propositional forms, it’s likely that procedural meaning could also constrain the development of logical form into the proposition expressed (156).

The current analysis draws on Hall’s proposal for a redefinition of procedural meaning in examining the operation of γiati-clauses in a wide range of contextual uses. As will be illustrated, the particular conjunct is applied in discourse to make a contribution to the recovery of speaker meaning.

In particular, the suggestion is that the inferential task performed by procedural uses of the conjunct at issue is not contextually invariant. We may distinguish different types of procedural operation of γiati, depending on the kind of contribution that the
conjunction makes to propositionhood in the main clause. The following examples are taken to represent the set of putative categories of procedural γιατί.

1.1 The case of γιατί
The following examples illustrate procedural uses of γιατί, which is rendered in shorthand for because as BC (1) in the English translation\(^1\), whereas επειδή is glossed as BC (2). Interestingly, the use of the latter connective sounds unacceptable and is, thus, marked as such.

\(2\) Και πρέπει να μου δώσεις και τη διατριβή σου, γιατί/ επειδή σιγά να μην τη βροι αλλού.
‘You must also give me your dissertation, BC (1)/ *BC (2) there’s no way I’ll find it elsewhere’.

\(3\) Θα πάω αύριο στην τράπεζα, γιατί/ επειδή μεθαύριο έχουν απεργία.
‘I’ll go to the bank tomorrow, BC (1)/ *BC (2) they’re on strike the day after tomorrow’.

\(4\) A: Να φονάξουμε όλα τα παιδιά να συνεννοηθούμε για τα ψώνια που θα κάνουμε.
‘We should get all the guys here so we can sort out shopping issues’.

B: Εγώ δε θέλω να “συνεννοηθούμε”, γιατί/ επειδή όπου λαλούν πολλοί κοκόροι αργεί να ξημερώσει.
‘I don’t want to “sort out” anything, BC (1)/ *BC (2) too many cooks spoil the broth!’

\(5\) Η γκαντεμιά του το προκάλεσε, γιατί/ επειδή είμαι και λίγο προληπτικός.
‘His bad lack caused it, BC (1)/ *BC (2) I’m a little superstitious!’

\(6\) Ο Γιάννης είναι στο σπίτι, γιατί/ επειδή τα φώτα είναι αναμμένα.
‘John is home, BC (1)/ *BC (2) the lights are on’.

In all example sentences (2-6), the propositional form of the main clause is seen as pragmatically enriched (by means of referent assignment, semantic disambiguation or concept adjustment)\(^2\) to yield the intended interpretation of the utterance. Here, however, we focus on the contribution that the conjunction makes in this direction.

Consider the case in (2). The presence of the γιατί-introduced clause appears to reveal the contextual information that the addressee is the only holder of the dissertation. The recovery of the above-mentioned contextual assumption may initially involve straightening out the intended interpretation of the adverbia l clause. However this may be, this pragmatic input affects the explicit content of the main clause (2’), too, to the extent that it reveals some unarticulated element of the main clause, i.e. εσύ, that the γιατί-utterance used as a coherence device is presumed to link to.

\(2’\) Και πρέπει να μου δώσεις και τη διατριβή σου εσύ (και μόνο εσύ), γιατί σιγά να μην τη βροι αλλού.
‘You and you only must also give me your dissertation, because there’s no way I’ll find it elsewhere’.

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\(^1\) All translations into English throughout the article are mine.

\(^2\) For a discussion of resolving underdeterminacy issues see Carston (2002).
In this sense, the use of the adverbial clause contributes to determining the proposition expressed of the main clause by means of hinting at the retrieval of unencoded constituents, like ἐσύ, the explication of which is taken to justify the explicit use of the specific coherence conjunct.3

In (3) and (4) the γιατί-clause offers again a case of pragmatic embellishment involved in reaching the ultimate interpretation intended by the speaker. But the type of contribution they make to the meaning representation of the corresponding utterances is different to that in (2). Specifically, in (3) the γιατί-utterance seems to guide the hearer to the focal meaning of ‘tomorrow’ in the particular context. While the deictic is temporally grounded in the main clause, the use of the adverbial clause performs the pragmatic function of contrasting the specific lexical concept as designating a working day to that of a non-working day. Similarly, in (4) the verb ἑυρέσθησαμεν ὑπὸ μένου is used ironically to express the opposite of its regular meaning. This is ascribed to the ‘echoic interpretive use’ of the phrase (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/1995, Wilson and Sperber, 1988). Specifically, speaker B attributes a thought to speaker A in order to report it, only in this case expressing at the same time a dissociating attitude to it. Evidently, the echoic use of the verb in question is inferentially supplied by the use of the γιατί-utterance. In the absence of the particular clause framing a proverb, the intended irony is not communicated.

So far in all three cases, the adverbial clause is seen as contributing to determining the proposition expressed of the corresponding sentences. However, unlike (2) offering a case of making up for a missing constituent, the conjunction in (3) and (4) appears to hinge on a lexical concept of the logical form of the main clause regulating its meaning. This type of operation of the connective on the main clause may be viewed in terms of ad hoc concept construction, as discussed by Carston (2002, 2004a, 2004b), a kind of pragmatic adjustment which can either ‘strengthen’ or ‘narrow’ the respective concept.

On the other hand, procedural instances of γιατί are not only thought of as relating to explicatures developing the propositional form in an utterance. Cases (5, 6) suggest that the contribution they make to explicitness pertains to possible higher-order explicatures. For instance, consider (5). Here the subordination is taken to divulge the higher-order explicature that it attaches to. In this case, it assists the hearer in inferring the propositional attitude that the speaker thinks it possible for bad luck to have caused the accident. Under this interpretation, the speaker’s propositional attitude to the main clause is made explicit on account of the application of the adverbial clause. In the same vein, the connective in (6) is used to explicate the assumption schema into which the proposition of the main clause is embedded, i.e. the speaker concludes that John is home.

In summation, so far there seem to be three categories of meaning for γιατί on a relevance-theoretic account, each examined in relation to the type of contribution the connective makes to the explicitness of the utterance. Firstly, it may contribute to

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3 The kind of ‘unencoded constituent’ underdeterminacy proposed here is akin to Kent Bach’s (1994) notion of constituent underdetermination representing a type of impliciture. On this view, a additional propositional constituent is required to complete a proposition. A contrastive explanation in a because-clause of the sort provided below seems to resolve this kind of underdeterminacy:

(12) Bill demoted Mickey [rather than fire him] because he was still needed. [Bach, 1994]

The information in the brackets is inferentially supplied, and although Bach does not say so expressly, the adverbial clause must have a bearing on the making up of the unencoded element of the proposition in the main clause. In this respect, the interpretation of the specific example falls into our class of connective-stimulated resolution of ‘unencoded constituent’ underdeterminacy.
sort out a lexical concept of the logical form of the utterance (3-4), or, secondly, it may expand the proposition of the utterance by supplying an unencoded concept (2). Finally, yiati-clauses can stimulate or indicate higher-order explicature descriptions (5-6).

Before taking up the issue of the Modern Greek conceptual causal connectives, it might be useful at this phase of our analysis to discuss the defining properties of conceptual discourse markers, in general.

2. Conceptual discourse markers: their properties

The view posited in the current analysis is that every use of a causal marker that does not fall into any one of the interpretation types of procedural cause stipulated earlier must perforce be conceptual. Rather than bearing any relation to the explication of an utterance, they are seen as operating truth-conditionally. Although the distinction between conceptual and procedural meaning is not co-extensive with the distinction between truth-conditional and non-truth conditional meaning (Wilson and Sperber, 1993), a concept ordinarily has truth-conditional properties.

In this regard, a conceptual connective contributes to the truth-conditional content of the proposition expressed in an utterance. In this connection, a causal connective is read conceptually when taken to conjoin the propositional contents of \( p \) and \( q \) in a \( q \) because \( p \) sequence. Moreover, the truth-value of the sentence depends on whether the causal connection actually holds. In this respect, interpretations of causally connected segments are viewed in connection to evaluating the validity of the causal relation of the conjoined segments.

For instance, evaluating the causal connection in (7)

\[
(7) \quad \text{John came back because he loved her [Sweetser, 1990]}
\]

may result in its cancellation, say in the context of disagreement. In this connection, it can be negated (8).

\[
(8) \quad \text{John didn’t come back because he loved her but because he didn’t like living abroad.}
\]

Our account of conceptual connectives is compatible with the statement made by Sperber and Wilson (1986/95), Wilson and Sperber (1993) that a concept can be the input to logical inference rules. Here is a potential operation of the deductive process in evaluating (7):

\[
(9) \quad \text{a. Linguistic input: There is an assumption (of causal relation) expressed}
\]

\[
\text{b. Context: John is not the kind of person who would do that.}
\]

\[
\text{c. Contextual effect: It is impossible that this is the case: He came back BECAUSE he loved her.}
\]

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4 Our suggestion follows Kempson’s (1975: 214) observation that the causality marker therefore used in co-ordinate structures (non-parenthetically), as in the following example, can be embedded within the scope of a conditional so that the truth value of the sentence depends on whether the connection holds.

\[
(13) \quad \text{If Bill hit Mary and therefore she was covered in bruises, she will have won her suit for damages.}
\]

On this interpretation, therefore seems to contribute to the truth conditions of the utterance that contains it.
Finally, non-conceptual cause contrasts with conceptual interpretations in that only the latter seem to survive the if...then logical operator test of distinguishing truth-conditional from non-truth-conditional meaning. Thus, while (7) can be embedded into a construction like (10), the same is not true of any one of the examples in (2-6).

(10) If John came back because he loved her, he’s totally crazy.

(*2') Εάν πρέπει να μου δώσεις και τη διατριβή σου, γιατί σηγά να μην τη βρω αλλού, θα πάθω υστερία.
‘If you must also give me your dissertation, because there’s no way I’ll find it elsewhere, I’ll go into hysterics’.

(*3') Εάν πάω αύριο στην τράπεζα, γιατί μεθαύριο έχουν απεργία, θα πάθω υστερία.
‘If I go to the bank tomorrow, because they’re on strike the day after tomorrow, I’ll go into hysterics’.

(*4') Α: Να φωνάξουμε όλα τα παιδιά να συνεννοηθούμε για τα ψώνια που θα κάνουμε.
‘We should get all the guys here so we can sort out shopping issues’.

Β: Εάν δε θέλω να “συνεννοηθούμε”, γιατί όπου λαλούν πολλοί κοκόροι αργεί να ξημερώσει, εσύ να κάνεις δ’τι θέλεις.
‘If I don’t want to “sort out” anything, because too many cooks spoil the broth, you can do anything you want’.

(*5') Εάν η γκαντεμιά του το προκάλεσε, γιατί είμαι και λίγο προληπτικός, δε ξανακάνω παρέα μ’αυτόν.
‘If his bad lack caused it, because I’m a little superstitious, I won’t hang out with him again’.

(*6') Εάν ο Γιάννης είναι στο σπίτι, γιατί τα φώτα είναι αναμμένα, η γυναίκα του λείπει.
‘If John is home, because the lights are on, his wife’s absent’.

2.1 The concept of epiδι and the conceptual use of γιατί
Notice that the conceptually read example in (7) or its negation counterpart in (8) can be readily translated using either epiδι or γιατί:

(11) Ο Γιάννης επέστρεψε επειδή / γιατί την αγαπούσε.

Having illustrated that epiδι cannot encode procedural meaning (2-6), it transpires that it can only be used conceptually. On the other hand, as was suggested, γιατί can perform procedural functions. Nevertheless, this is not a permanent quality of the connective. In a way, then, γιατί, much like because, can incorporate both types of meaning, i.e. conceptual and procedural, depending on its application. In fact, a conceptual causality environment (11), i.e. joining straightforwardly sentences in terms of the propositions expressed, seems to impose a smaller, if not negligible constraint on intersubstitutability.

Kitis (1994, 1996, 2006) indicates the versatility of γιατί and concludes that it is to be described on this basis as a broadly functioning argumentative discourse connective
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Rather than as a causal one (2006:244). In light of evidence derived from their evolutionary course, etymological make-up and versatility of functions of the two connectives, she tends to treat επιδι as a prototypical subordinating causal connective, in that it guarantees causal and explanatory coherence. The explicatory character of the connective is seen as being motivated in connection to επιδι clauses joining straightforwardly sentences in terms of the propositions expressed (Kitis, 2006: endnote 6) and its use is appropriate in explicitly articulated sentences. At the same time, Kitis (2006) notes that γιατί may handle cases originally assigned to επιδι, alluding to possible conceptual uses (250), which assumes that the marker at issue has its share in guaranteeing explanatory coherence. This makes full sense in our analysis of either conjunct as a concept that makes a contribution to the literal, truth-conditional content of the determinate proposition expressed in a q because p sequence as a whole.

On the other hand, in the following minimal pair in (12), γιατί can hardly be replaced by επιδι without a change in meaning. The (a) version is to be explicated procedurally in that it implies the conditional if I don’t go within the conjunction, whereas the επιδι sequence is understood as encompassing the cause-effect relation of the propositions conjoined.

(12) a. Αποφάσισα να πάω στο γιατρό, γιατί δε με βλέπω καλά.
   b. Αποφάσισα να πάω στο γιατρό επειδή δε με βλέπω καλά.

In this light, it transpires that, leaving aside the connective used, the linguistic environment in a causal sequence may be such that it allows for either interpretation, i.e. conceptual or procedural, as in (12). To this extent, the specification of the type of connection between the clauses is taken to relate to the selection of the connective. Hence, επιδι, the connective that has been reserved for expressing conceptual meaning, is used to contribute to a conceptual interpretation (12b). On the other hand, the polyfunctional γιατί is assigned the task of priming the alternative (procedural) interpretation (12a).

3. Concluding remarks
In summation, the results of the current analysis seem to corroborate Kitis’s (2006) suggestion that γιατί can be a procedural causal discourse marker. In fact, as is shown, it contributes to the explicatures of the main clause-utterances of causal sequences in three discreet types of procedure. In addition to this, it is proposed in accord with Kitis, that the specific connective is polyfunctional, in that it may also perform conceptual functions. On the other hand, επιδι offers a constant expression of conceptual causal connections. Finally, in cases allowing the use of either one connective, επιδι fulfils its prescribed role, while γιατί offers an alternative linguistic resource to use procedurally.

References


