

# Constructional Effects of *Just Because ... Doesn't Mean ...*

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## 1 Introduction

This paper is concerned with the construction illustrated in (1), which we will refer to as the “JB-X DM-Y construction”.

- (1) Just because we live in Berkeley doesn't mean we're left wing radicals.

We will argue that this construction combines semantic and syntactic quirks that necessitate a constructional analysis. Further, we will show that specifying the pragmatic properties of the construction (and in particular the presuppositions that introduces) allows for a particularly elegant account of the construction's distribution. This, in turn, provides further support for the sign-based view of grammar in which syntactic constraints interact on an equal footing with semantic and pragmatic information.

## 2 Semantics of *just because* sentences

As is well-known (cf. Jespersen 1949:399), *because*-clauses in English are in principle ambiguous between a causal and an inferential reading, as illustrated in the contrasting pair of sentences in (2):

- (2) a. The ground is wet **because**<sub>causal</sub> it has rained.  
b. It has rained (= must have rained) **because**<sub>inferential</sub> the ground is wet.

In (2a) the rain is understood as causally responsible for the wetness of the ground. In (2b), the wet ground is taken to license the abductive inference that there presumably has been rain that caused the wet ground to come about. Following Hirose 1991 we will refer to the two construals as the *causal* and *inferential* readings of *because*-clauses, respectively.

On the causal interpretation, reason clauses introduced by *just because* denote sufficient reasons for why a certain state of affairs holds. Thus, in (3), living in Berkeley is understood as causally responsible for becoming left-wing radicals, either potentially among others (3a) or as the single sufficient reason (3b):

- (3) a. We've turned into left-wing radicals **because** we have lived in Berkeley (for a year).  
b. We've turned into left-wing radicals **just because** we have lived in Berkeley (for a year).

When the main clause of such sentences occurs negated, as in (4), an ambiguity arises. This ambiguity is based on the scope of the negation on the one hand and the cause/inference ambiguity of *because* on the other. If the negation takes narrow scope, only the main clause is negated and only the causal reading appears possible. This is shown in (4a). When the negation takes wide scope, the ambiguity seen earlier with *because* gives rise to two readings. First, the causal connection may be denied, for instance if an alternative cause for the main clause is assumed. For example, something other than our residing in Berkeley caused us to become left-wing radicals. We will call this the “cause denial” as in (4bi). Alternatively, the existence of an inferential connection between reason and main clause may be negated, as shown in (4bii). This reading, which we call “inference denial” also strongly implicates that the main clause does not hold in the first place. These various readings are usually disambiguated via intonation.

- (4) We **haven’t** turned into left-wing radicals **because** we have lived in Berkeley for a year.

	P (main clause)		Q (reason clause)
<b>not</b>	we’ve turned into l-w. r’s.	<b>because</b>	we have lived in B.

- |     |  |                             |
|-----|--|-----------------------------|
| a.  | <b>Narrow scope negation:</b><br>(not P) because <sub>caus</sub> Q | <b>“Main clause denial”</b> |
| b.  | <b>Wide scope negation:</b> not (P because Q)                      |                             |
| i.  | not (P because <sub>caus</sub> Q)                                  | <b>“Cause denial”</b>       |
| ii. | not (P because <sub>inf</sub> Q)                                   | <b>“Inference denial”</b>   |

The same ambiguity seems to also exist for *just because* reason clauses illustrated in (5), again notwithstanding intonational differences.

- (5) We **haven’t** turned into left-wing radicals(.) **just because** we have lived in Berkeley for a year.

- |     |   |                           |
|-----|---|---------------------------|
| a.  | <b>Narrow scope negation:</b><br>(not P) just because <sub>caus</sub> Q | <b>Main clause denial</b> |
| b.  | <b>Wide scope negation:</b> not (P just because Q)                      |                           |
| i.  | not (P just-because <sub>caus</sub> Q)                                  | <b>Cause denial</b>       |
| ii. | not (P just-because <sub>inf</sub> Q)                                   | <b>Inference denial</b>   |

The order between reason and negated main clause may also be reversed. With simple *because* clauses, this order only allows a narrow scope reading of the negation. No wide scope reading under either the causal or the inferential reading of *because* appears to be possible, as illustrated in (6):

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- (6) **Because** we have lived in Berkeley for a year we **haven't** turned into left-wing radicals.

$$\text{because } \overbrace{\text{we have lived in B.}}^{\text{Q (reason clause)}} \text{ not } \overbrace{\text{we have turned into l-w. r's.}}^{\text{P (main clause)}}$$

- a. **Narrow scope negation:** (not P)  $\text{because}_{\text{caus}}$  Q  
 b. **No wide scope negation**

If an adverbial clause in initial position is structurally higher than the main clause, then the difference in negation scope for either order is predicted.

In contrast, preposed *just because* clauses continue to allow for both a narrow and a wide scope construal of the negation. However, now the wide scope negation only allows for the inference denial interpretation.

- (7) **Just because** we have lived in Berkeley for a year we **haven't** turned into left-wing radicals.

- a. **Narrow scope negation:** (not P)  $\text{just-because}_{\text{caus}}$  Q **Main clause denial**  
 b. **Wide scope negation:** not (P  $\text{just-because}$  Q)  
     i. **No cause denial**  
         i.e., **not** available: not (P  $\text{just-because}_{\text{caus}}$  Q)  
     ii. not (P  $\text{just-because}_{\text{inf}}$  Q) **Inference denial**

A wide scope reading of the negation with cause denial construal no longer seems available. That is, by saying (7), a speaker either asserts (main clause denial) or strongly implicates (inference denial) that he/she is not a left-wing radical. With the main clause denial reading, living in Berkeley is claimed to be sufficient for this to come about, whereas in the inference denial reading, the speakers reject the idea that their residence should license conclusions about their political opinions.

Given the fact that initial simple *because* clauses do not allow wide scope negation (cf. McCawley 1988), one may expect initial *just because* clauses to behave similarly. The fact that the latter do allow for wide scope negation is therefore unexpected—the ‘ordinary’ mechanisms of grammar do not provide for this reading. In order to account for the reading, we posit a construction (in particular, a specialized subtype of head-modifier constructions) which calls for a *just because* adjunct preceding a negated main clause, and specifies that the negation in the main clause should take scope over the adjunct.

Examples such as (1) are licensed by a further subtype of this construction, as discussed in the next section.

### 3 Lexicalizing inference denial

The inference denial reading of sentences of the form (8) can be broken down into the components in (9):

- (8) Just because Q, not P.
- (9)
  - P cannot be inferred from Q.
  - not P (implicature)

Furthermore, sentences of the form in (8) carry at least two presuppositions: that Q holds,<sup>1</sup> and that someone (by default the addressee) believes that P can be inferred from Q.

In the subclass of *just because* constructions which we will focus on in this paper, the first component of the meaning (that P cannot be inferred from Q) is lexicalized in a negated verb such as *mean*. In such sentences, only the inference denial reading appears to be possible.<sup>2</sup> As is illustrated in (10), the choice of main clause subject in such cases is rather restricted. Demonstrative *that*, understood as referring to the propositional core of the *just because* clause, appears best, followed by *it*. Other choices seem relatively degraded, as is illustrated in (10c,d):

- (10) a. Just because we live in Berkeley **that** doesn't mean that we're left-wing radicals.  
 b. Just because we live in Berkeley, **it** doesn't mean that we're left-wing radicals.  
 c. ?Just because we live in Berkeley, **this** doesn't mean that we're left-wing radicals.  
 d. ?Just because we live in Berkeley, **that fact** doesn't mean that we're left-wing radicals.

Another possibility involves simply juxtaposing the *just because* clause and the *doesn't mean* VP, as seen earlier in (1), repeated below:

- (11) 
$$\overbrace{\text{Just because we live in Berkeley}}^{\text{JB-X}} \quad \overbrace{\text{doesn't mean we're left-wing radicals.}}^{\text{DM-Y}}$$

It is natural to think of such expressions as one further step in the grammaticalization of the inference denial interpretation and therefore as being licensed by a

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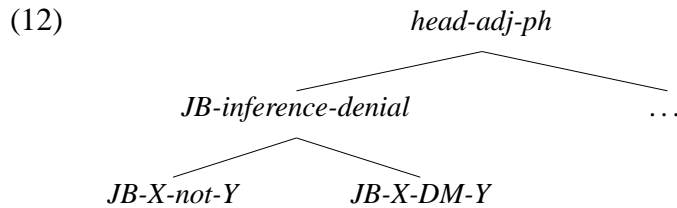
<sup>1</sup>As Hirose 1991:31 points out, this presupposition seems to be a general property of preposed *because* clauses.

<sup>2</sup>The main clause denial reading is possible in superficially similar examples where the demonstrative subject, which must be overt in these cases, refers to a proposition other than that expressed by JB-X:

- (i) a. [We inherited \$500,000]<sub>i</sub>.  
 b. [Just because we live in Berkeley]<sub>j</sub>, that<sub>i</sub> doesn't mean that we can afford a nice house. 'Living in Berkeley is sufficient reason for the idea that inheriting \$500,000 does not imply being able to afford a nice house.'

particular subconstruction of a more general inference denial construction. Examples of this type will constitute the focus of the remainder of this paper, and we will refer to them as JB-X DM-Y sentences.

We have noted above that the preservation of the inference denial reading despite the preposing of JB-X argues for a constructional analysis of JB-X DM-Y. On this analysis, a particular construction licenses this pairing of form and meaning which is not predicted by the rest of the grammar of English. The cases discussed in this section above would seem to call for a more specialized subconstruction. This small hierarchy of constructions can be conceptualized as in (12):



*JB-inference-denial* is a subtype of *head-adj-ph* and it encodes what is common to both subtypes: the preposing of the *just because*-clause and the inference denial semantics. *JB-X-not-Y* need not add any further constraints. In particular the *just because* clause acts as a modifier that combines with a regular clause that does not contain a predicate of inference. It contrasts with *JB-X-DM-Y* which licenses sentences with a full main clause part like (10) (which we will call “clausal JB-X DM-Y”) and those in which *just because* is juxtaposed with a surface VP, as in (11) (which we will “predicate JB-X DM-Y”). It may seem surprising at first for predicate JB-X DM-Y sentences to be licensed by an eventual subtype of *head-adj-ph*. However, as we briefly discuss below, we believe that JB-X retains its modifier status even in these cases.

#### 4 Constructional properties of JB-X DM-Y

The discussion of JB-X DM-Y sentences in the literature literature (specifically Hirose 1991 and Holmes and Hudson 2000) either implicitly or explicitly assumes that there are (at least) three properties that need to be specified in the description of this construction. First, in the case of predicate JB-X DM-Y constructions, it is the JB-X part that constitutes the subject. Second, the predicate in the DM-Y part has to occur negated. Third, the only type of predicate that can head the DM-Y part is *mean*, or at least a very small set of predicates. We find that a closer examination of the data provides evidence against all three of these assumptions.

##### 4.1 Subject of DM-Y

Both Hirose 1991 and Holmes and Hudson 2000 explicitly adopt the idea that in predicate JB-X DM-Y cases like (11), the *just because* clause itself constitutes the subject of the following predicate. Such an analysis entails that JB-X DM-Y constructions have to be considered a syntactically heterogeneous class. If the main clause contains a pronominal subject, the *just because* clause is an adjunct, otherwise it is a subject.

An alternative possibility is for the *just because* clause to always be an adjunct. In predicate JB-X DM-Y cases, the construal of the *just because* clause as the subject of *mean* is not the result of an ordinary subject-predicate structure, but instead is mediated by some other (construction-specific) means. We believe that this issue is in principle subject to empirical study by comparing the behavior of *just because* clauses to other clausal subjects in a number of environments that are reserved for subjects. While native speaker judgments in this area are notoriously difficult to evaluate, we have presented preliminary experimental evidence elsewhere (Bender and Kathol 2001) that indeed argues against the subject status of *just because* clauses. If further study confirms these results, our proposed analysis would constitute independent evidence for the idea of constructionally licensed unexpressed subjects in English finite clauses, as recently proposed for a subtype of tag questions by Kay (2000).

#### 4.2 Negated predicate in DM-Y

At first glance, it would seem that the *JB-X-DM-Y* construction should also specify that *mean* in the head daughter be negated. Thus, it is hard to imagine a context that would make an example without negation, such as (13), sound acceptable:

(13) \*Just because we live in Berkeley means we're left-wing radicals.

However, on closer examination it turns out that the lexicalization of inference denial does not require explicit negation of the *mean* predicate in the form of *doesn't mean*. Consider first the following corpus examples in which the negation takes another form:<sup>3</sup>

(14) @Yet, just because some people cannot distinguish between serious and hypothetical risks **hardly means** that knowledgeable Republicans cannot muster the courage to speak out for health.

(15) @“Just because someone has a black belt **means nothing**,” said Jones.

(16) @“You **haven't said** - and I'm not saying - that just because a person makes that kind of money **means** there is waste, fraud and abuse,” Bilirakis said.

In fact, JB-X DM-Y sentences appear to have roughly the same distribution as negative polarity items (NPIs): They are licensed in polar questions (17),<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>The symbol @ before an example sentence indicates that it is an attested example. All such examples here are from the North American News Text Corpus, available from the Linguistic Data Consortium: <http://www ldc.upenn.edu>

<sup>4</sup>Note that in polar questions, the subject of the *mean* predicate must be overt, thus the following is impossible:

(i) \*... **does mean** he's a surfer?

It may be thought that a subject-less approach to predicate JB-X DM-Y of the kind briefly discussed in section 4.1 falsely predicts (i) to be grammatical. However, this is not so if subject-auxiliary (SAI) constructions are generally required to contain a phonologically expressed subject. See also Fillmore 1999 on SAI constructions.

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antecedents of conditionals (18), and complements of implicit negative predicates (19).

- (17) @“Just because a guy has bleached hair, winter tan, speaks slowly and is pleasant to the point of being vacuous,” asks a pointed essay in the magazine, “**does that mean** he’s a surfer?”
- (18) **If** just because we live in Berkeley **means** we’re left-wing radicals, you have some serious misconceptions about our city.
- (19) **I doubt** that just because they live in Berkeley **means** they’re left-wing radicals.

Like NPIs, the negation for JB-X DM-Y sentences can be supplied by sentence-initial *like*, which functions to express irony and hence indirectly negates the contents of what follows.<sup>5</sup>

- (20) a. **Like** just because we live in Berkeley **means** we’re left-wing radicals!  
b. Bill Gates received a huge tax return this year. **Like** he needs any more money!

However, on closer inspection, the parallelism between JB-X DM-Y sentences and NPIs breaks down. First, if there is no lexical indicator of irony and the negation of the literal content is entirely a pragmatic effect (possibly aided by intonation), regular NPIs are no longer licensed, as shown in (21a). In contrast, JB-X DM-Y still appears to be possible, as illustrated in (21b):

- (21) a. (So, let me get this straight, )  
just because we live in Berkeley **means** we’re left-wing radicals.  
b. (So, let me get this straight, )  
\*he needs any more money.

More tellingly, JB-X DM-Y sentences appear to be licensed by any environment that distances the speaker from the belief that X in fact implies Y.<sup>6</sup>

- (22) a. Kim **seems to believe** that just because we live in Berkeley **means** we’re left wing radicals.  
b.\*Kim **knows** that just because we live in Berkeley **means** we’re left wing radicals.

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<sup>5</sup>Thanks to Chuck Fillmore for this particular example and to Michael Israel and Paul Kay for general discussion of JB-X DM-Y and NPI-licensing.

<sup>6</sup>Thanks to Abby Wright for pointing out this type of example to us.

The proper generalization behind the above examples appears to be that the *JB-X-DM-Y* construction contributes the information that the speaker believes that Y cannot be inferred from X. This contribution interacts with the lexical content of the sentences and the way in which they are used to license the pattern of judgments discussed above:

In sentences like (11), ‘Y can’t be inferred from X’ is directly encoded by the lexical expressions (*doesn’t mean*). Furthermore, this is understood to be consistent with the speaker’s beliefs, since the speaker is asserting it. In sentences like (13), the surface string expresses ‘Y can be inferred from X’ and, since the speaker asserts this, this must be what the speaker believes. The resulting conflict between this assertion and inference denial effect of the *JB-X-DM-Y* construction as a whole makes such sentences infelicitous. On the other hand, in sentences like (21a), the surface string expresses ‘Y can be inferred from X’, but this negated by the sarcastic use. The sarcasm thus indicates that the speaker believes that Y can’t be inferred from X, and *JB-X-DM-Y* is felicitous. In sentences like (22), the speaker is attributing the belief that ‘Y can be inferred from X’ to Kim. By using *JB-X-DM-Y* to express this information, the speaker is also conveying that s/he believes that Y cannot be inferred from X. Note that when the matrix verb is changed to a factive verb like *know*, the sentence becomes unacceptable. Interestingly, the exact opposite behavior arises if the embedded clause is negated, as in (23). Here, the possibilities for the matrix verb are the mirror image of what they were in (22). *Seems to believe* distances the speaker from the content of the complement of *believe*. Since this would mean that the speaker believes ‘Y can be inferred from X’, this use of *JB-X-DM-Y* is infelicitous. In contrast, factive *know* is fine here, as shown in (23b):

- (23) a. \*Kim seems to believe that just because we live in Berkeley **doesn’t mean** we’re left wing radicals.  
b. Kim knows that just because we live in Berkeley **doesn’t mean** we’re left wing radicals.

Finally, this analysis predicts that the polar question examples like (17) above should have the flavor of a rhetorical question, that is, a question in which the speaker already knows the negative answer. We believe that this is indeed the case and that *JB-X-DM-Y* cannot be used if the speaker intends for the polar question to resolve a genuine issue.

Thus the apparent need for negation is actually due to a semantic/pragmatic contribution of the construction. However, this contribution interacts with the rest of the meaning of *JB-X-DM-Y* sentences in what strikes us as unusual ways. In the most common case (sentences such as (11)), the constructional contribution (‘The speaker believes that Y can’t be inferred from X’) appears redundant because this is exactly the meaning one would get from the meaning of the words and the way they are used. In other cases (such as (22)), the construction appears to be providing information beyond what is expressed in the words. In still other cases (such as (13)), the construction appears to be infelicitous because the construction contribution is incompatible with other aspects of the utterance meaning.

It is unclear to us at the moment exactly what kind of meaning this constructional contribution is. It is unlike presuppositions in that it is not backgrounded but



rather asserted. It is unlike conversational implicatures in that it does not appear to be defeasible:

- (24) #Kim seems to believe that just because we live in Berkeley means we're left wing radicals, and I think I might just think so, too.

It may be a type of conventional implicature, if there exist conventional implicatures that are not backgrounded like presuppositions (cf. Karttunen and Peters 1979).

### **4.3 Lexical variability/constructional stability**

Previous work on the JB-X DM-Y construction has either described the construction in terms of the selectional properties of a specific lexical element, i.e., *mean* (Holmes and Hudson 2000), or has allowed for very limited degree of lexical variation. Thus, Hirose (1991:18–19) mentions that in addition to inference predicates such as *mean* and *is no reason*, one can also find examples with *doesn't make*.

An initial informal survey of corpus examples drawn from North American News Text Corpus has revealed that the focus on *doesn't mean* is to some extent justified by the sheer numerical predominance of this item (about 85% of the surveyed subcorpus). Prototypical constructions of this kind occur about 14 times more often than the second most frequent predicate (*doesn't make* with about 6% of occurrences).

At the same time, however, the degree of lexical variation is far greater than Hirose's discussion would lead one to expect. It also appears that by and large the type of predicates admitted into this construction is roughly the same as the range of meanings of either *mean* or *make*.

#### **4.3.1 Variation on *mean***

The range of predicates that appear to be related to senses of *mean* fall into three broad classes: predicates of inference (25)–(28), predicates of evidence (29)–(32), and predicates of (moral) justification (33)–(35). Notice that some of these predicates take non-clausal complements.

#### **Predicates of inference**

- (25) @“There are some issues that need to be resolved,” Mr. Blumenthal said, “but just because there is an investigation **by no means should be taken to infer** that any wrongdoing has occurred.”
- (26) @Just because a guy knocks out a hamburger in the first round **doesn't establish the fact** he's back.
- (27) @Ito said that just because the source had access to the less advanced tests **did not prove** that the source had access to the sock.
- (28) @So just because you meet with the “rep” in the cafeteria, union office or faculty room **doesn't imply** that your employer endorses the investments.

### Predicates of evidence

- (29) @“Just because a person has very high grades and looks like a model citizen **does not** always **indicate** that they are a fine human being,” he said.
- (30) @“Just because other areas are doing okay, **is not a sign that** we in New England are doing badly,” said Gaal.
- (31) @“Just because he’s adopting a Republican agenda in a timely fashion **doesn’t reflect** growing in the job,” said Gary Koops, deputy campaign director for Clinton’s Republican challenger, Bob Dole.
- (32) @Just because there is profanity in a book **doesn’t say** you condone or endorse that.

### Predicates of justification

- (33) @They emphasize that culture can and often must supersede instinct: that just because apes commit rape **in no way justifies** similar behavior in humans.
- (34) @Just because an officer sees a bulge **doesn’t give him the right** to grab a student and search that student.
- (35) @“Just because we did a lousy job in fee-for-service **is not an excuse** to do a lousy job with HMOs,” Ms. Dallek said.

#### 4.3.2 Variation on *make*

In contrast to *mean* and its various related replacements, which focus on the way that a cognitive agent may establish an inference relation between two states of affairs, the sentences containing (*doesn’t*) *make* emphasize a different kind of connection between the two states of affairs. Two examples from the corpus are given in (36) and (37):

- (36) @“Just because the doctor can’t find out what’s wrong with me **doesn’t make** my back hurt any less,” Dr. Reed said.
- (37) @Just because McCamant or any analyst says a company is ripe to be acquired **doesn’t make** it true.

In these examples, as well as the variations that follow below, the relation in question is more closely connected to a notion of causation according to conventions of society or natural law.

- (38) @I mean, just because we beat Phoenix **doesn’t move** us into the Top 25 of the AP poll.
- (39) @Seifert said Monday that just because the doctor stamped Young’s ticket **doesn’t** necessarily **admit** him to the dance.

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- (40) @“Just because the driver was a different race **does not qualify** it as a hate crime,” Pigott said.
- (41) @Just because Rosenthal was able to cope with reality on the job and acted normal in a video taken two days before the murder with his four-month-old daughter **does not mitigate** the diagnosis, Whaley said.
- (42) @Just because it has some setbacks and challenges this year **doesn't affect** that at all.
- (43) @Just because employees dislike each other **is not an automatic cause** for alarm.

Interestingly, in the following examples, the predicate (*preclude, negate*) is normally used to express the *lack* of a relation between two entities. Thus, the JB-X DM-Y construction is used to convey that contrary to conventional wisdom, a relevant connection does exist.

- (44) @Just because some land deal is being made **does not negate** the need for affordable housing in San Francisco.
- (45) @Just because I'm 65 **doesn't stop** me setting the target.
- (46) @Just because someone is involved in civic affairs and supports candidates **should not** automatically **exclude** them from conducting a business.

### 4.3.3 Residual cases

Finally, in the following, we list additional examples, which do not seem to be related to any sense of *mean* or *make* in an obvious way.

- (47) @“And just because a place is a party school **is not a bad thing**,” Custard said.
- (48) @Just because the data scavengers have scraped it together and started to sell it doesn't **begin to answer** the question whether they own it—or whether it's right.
- (49) @Just because your parents are in the business **is not enough**, unless you have the desire.
- (50) @Just because the recogniser has little confidence in a particular character **need bear no resemblance** to whether or not that is the incorrect character in a misspelled word.

## 5 Conclusion

Makkai (1972:57) distinguishes two kinds of idioms:

IDIOMS OF ENCODING: “[Constructions] whose existence is justified by constant use by the majority of speakers ... [and which] compel the speaker to ENCODE in a certain way.”

IDIOMS OF DECODING: Constructions which “force the hearer to DECODE in a certain way”.

*JB-X-DM-Y* appears to have aspects of both. The constructional contribution to the meaning of *JB-X-DM-Y* sentences makes it an idiom of decoding. Makkai states that all idioms of decoding are also idioms of encoding, in that the special semantics is always attached to some form. In the case of *JB-X-DM-Y*, that form is somewhat underspecified. The construction stipulates the order of the two clauses, restricts the choice of subject for the second clause (to *it*, *that* or unexpressed), and restricts the choice of verbs in the second clause to some extent. The strong preference for *mean* in the second clause constitutes an overlaid idiom of encoding: that is, the knowledge that this is the way we usually say it.

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