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PRESIDENTS' POST-DOCTORAL PRIZE

The Presidents' Post-Doctoral Prize is awarded annually to the lecture judged to make the greatest contribution to linguistic knowledge by an author who has completed a doctorate within the preceding ten years but who does not yet have faculty tenure. The judging panel consists of the current LACUS President and Vice President along with all past presidents in attendance at the meeting.

THE ENGLISH SIMULTANEITY NETWORK: 
THE CASE OF AS AND WHILE-CLAUSES

Cristiano Broccias

ENGLISH CAN CODE SIMULTANEITY, i.e. total or partial temporal overlap, between two events by making use of various (simultaneity) markers (or connectors). Among them are as, while and when, as is shown in examples (1)a–b from Biber et al. 1999:

(1) a. An armed robber was mugged of his loot as he made his getaway. (BNC)
   b. She said that the pain was a little better after the pethidine she had been given and she was able to rest quietly while she waited to be taken to theatre. (BNC)
   c. When he was in the air force he flew Tornado jets. (LDCE)

Simultaneous (or temporal) as and while-clauses, in particular, are often compatible with additional interpretations (Biber et al. 1999:846–50). In addition to temporality, as-clauses can express causality, see (2)a, and while-clauses can convey a contrastive interpretation, see (2)b.

(2) a. She kept her head down as she spotted the newsmen. (BNC)
   b. Schools in the north tend to be better equipped, while those in the south are relatively poor. (BNC)

Very little research has been carried out on simultaneity clauses in either English or other languages. Notable exceptions are Edgren 1971, Heinämäki 1978, Silva 1991, Morris 1996, and Declerck 1997 for English; see also Schmiedtová 2004 on the production of Czech simultaneity clauses by German and English learners. This paper aims to contribute to the study of the explicit coding of simultaneity in English by analysing and contrasting in some detail the behaviour of as and while-clauses. It shows that as and while simultaneity clauses tend to be used differently and attempts to account for this finding by postulating that only the connector while is specified as a default temporal marker in our mental lexicon.

1. DYNAMIC AND STATIVE EVENTS. The most detailed treatment of as-clauses so far is also the most recent one, namely Morris (1996). She claims that an as-clause is interpreted temporally if and only if a multiphase event is evoked (see also Silva 1991 for a similar point). In a multiphase event, two successive configurations in time are different from each other. In other words, the term multiphase seems to be a synonym of the more current term dynamic. It follows that example (3), from Morris (1996), is correctly interpreted in temporal fashion since the event of growing implies change.
(3) As she grew older,...

By contrast, when no multiphase event is evoked, i.e. when a monophasic event is depicted, allegedly only causality obtains. Since a monophasic event is such that two successive configurations in time are identical to each other, the term monophasic seems to correspond to the more common term stative. For example, since the events in the *as*-clauses in (4), from Morris (1996), are construed as being stative, causality is expected to obtain.

(4) a. As you are here...
   b. As you know...
   c. As he wore a red sweater...

In fact, it can easily be shown that temporal *as*-clauses do occur with monophasic events. Verbs of posture (see (5)-(7)), verbs of watching (see (8)), verbs of keeping (see (8)) and verbs describing bodily states (see (9)) are all found in temporal *as*-clauses. Even the verb *in* fact, it can easily be shown that temporal *as*-clauses do occur with monophasic events.

(5) The wind whips round us as we stand on the seafront. (Morrall 2003:281)

(6) He says it in a whisper, with his eyes upon her, as she sits at the window bent over her work. (Waters 2002:237)

(7) The company commander then moves in as Iman lies wounded and helpless. (The Guardian, 24 November 2004, p.2)

(8) The bottle of Sylvaner from the cellar was cool and sweet. It reminded him even more of Heidi. [...] Her slow smile as she watched him. The quivering strength of her grip as she held him to her. (Millar 2004:197).

(9) ...a day after eight blingling pieces of jewellery were snatched from his bedroom as he slept with his wife, Sharon, in their Buckinghamshire mansion. (The Guardian, 24 November 2004, p.3)

(10) He pictured her laying (sic) on her bed back then, he sitting beside her, rubbing her belly as she wore panties and a cut off sleep shirt. (http://www.suntimes.com/specialSections/transplant/cst-nws-liverone26.html)

(11) My pager went off as I was on the train. (http://escorp.unizh.ch). The data were retrieved from the BNC Web Query System. Two text types were chosen, namely imaginative written and leisure spoken, so as to collect examples from two (potentially) opposite types along the written-spoken continuum. The leisure subcorpus contained a total of 2.41 instances of *as*-clauses. These facts are explored further in the next two sections.

It is debatable, however, whether (11) contains a truly stative *as*-clause. One could argue that the predicate *be on the train* refers metonymically to a motion event, hence a dynamic event. Admittedly, no unambiguously stative examples with the copular verb *be* have been found in the texts analysed for this paper. The other examples I came across, i.e. (12)–(14), all hint at change. In (12), *less and less* evokes dynamicity; the *as*-event in (13) describes a point along a path which is being traversed; (14) contains the participial *preparing* immediately after the stative predicate *be crouched*, thus pointing at impending change.²

(12) When items are arranged in this way, most of the 15 will appear as a peak at the bottom of the scale and there will be a gradual decrease in frequency as the attributes are less and less possible in human performance. (Hatch & Lazaraton 1991:204)

(13) That made me pause as I was halfway across the building’s front plaza. (Connelly 2003:80)

(14) As I was crouched, preparing myself for a quick raid on the locker, a series of waves got me thinking. (Martel 2002:169)

In sum, monophasic *as*-events are compatible with temporal readings (contra Morris 1996, Silva 1991) although no truly stative *be* examples have been found in *as*-clauses. These facts are explored further in the next two sections.

2. *AS* VS. *WHILE*-CLAUSES. It is a truism that both *as* and *while*-clauses refer to temporary configurations, hence the impossibility of (15)a with a temporal interpretation, since knowledge is usually regarded as a relatively permanent state. Nevertheless, the contrast in (15)b remains to be accounted for.

(15) a. *'As/*'While) you know...
   b. *'As/*'While) you are here...

In order to tackle this problem, it is useful to investigate the behaviour of *as* and *while*-clauses in more detail by relying on authentic data. I first conducted a preliminary investigation using the first 445 of the total 833 pages of Faber’s (2003) novel *The Crimson Petal and the White*. It emerged that temporal *as*-clauses are more frequent than temporal *while*-clauses (255 vs. 64). Further, *while*-clauses occur in contexts where either a (relatively) long action is evoked or states/properties, expressed through the verb *be* (or a modal verb), are profiled. Some representative examples are provided in (16)–(19).

(16) 'Besides, I occupied myself quite usefully while I was waiting'. (p.117)

(17) Instead, he eats his sausage while it’s still warm. (p.133)

(18) 'Because I must do something while I still can.' (p.182)

(19) Nor, while we’re on the subject of her disadvantages, does she consider herself ugly. (p.209)

These findings were later checked against authentic data obtained from the BNC Web (http://escorp.unizh.ch). The data were retrieved using the BNC Web Query System. Two text types were chosen, namely imaginative written and leisure spoken, so as to collect examples from two (potentially) opposite types along the written-spoken continuum. The leisure subcorpus contained a total of 2.41 instances of *while* tagged as a CJS (= subordinating conjunction). An identical number of examples of *while* as a CJS was randomly selected from the imaginative written subcorpus. Similarly, in the case of *as* as a CJS, 2.41 examples were randomly selected from each of the subcorpora. Of course, not all *as* and *while*-clauses thus
obtained were simultaneity clauses, since some examples conveyed causality or contrast only. Therefore, the data had to be inspected manually so as to discard non-temporal examples.

The results can be summarised as follows (see the Appendix for a more detailed breakdown of the data). In the case of *while*-clauses in the 'imaginative written' subcorpus, dynamic verbs par excellence, i.e. verbs of change of position/state, account for only 21% of the data. In more detail, change-of-position verbs are much more frequent than change of state verbs, accounting for 17% of all data (i.e. 84% of all change verb cases). Importantly, only about 14% of change-of-position verbs have a subject which is identical to that of the main clause. This finding represents textual support for Silva's (1991) intuition that the degree of conceptual integration between an *as*-event and its main clause event is stronger than that between a *while*-event and its main clause event. Finally, the main difference between the two text types considered in this analysis is that both *as* and *while*-clauses exhibit less lexical variability in the spoken language.

3. Different Lexical Entries. The greater flexibility of *while*-clauses in comparison to *as*-clauses is illustrated in (20)–(22). Only *while*-clauses seem to be compatible with truly stative *be*, modal verbs and negation:

(20) Instead, he eats his sausage [*while/as* it's still warm. (Faber, p.151)]

(21) 'Because I must do something [*while/as* I still can. [...] ' (Faber, p.182)

(22) Far lot of use I'd be to any girl [*while/as* I don't have a job. (BNC:FRR 572)]

Again, the asterisk indicates that these sentences cannot be understood with a temporal meaning, not that they are ungrammatical per se. I contend that these facts can be accounted for by invoking a lexical semantic solution. The hypothesis I would like to advance here is that the lexical item *while* evokes temporality (i.e. susceptibility to change in the sense of Williams 2002) on its own (cf. also the temporal noun *while* in phrases like in a while). By contrast, the lexical item *as* is unspecified for temporality (since it has a wider inventory of uses than *while*, including comparative, causal and parenthetical uses). In other words, a temporal interpretation is assumed by default in the case of *while*-clauses whereas it is evoked constructionally in the case of *as*-clauses. Since *be* warm, *can* and *not to have a job* do not obviously contribute any temporal exponent to their respective *as*-constructions (i.e. they do not refer to events with a high degree of susceptibility to change), a temporal meaning cannot be retrieved for the *as*-constructions in question. This line of reasoning for the contrast in (20) is represented in the hopefully self-explanatory schema in (23).

An apparent problem for the present analysis is the occurrence of stative verbs (e.g. verbs of posture, see (5)–(7)) in *as*-clauses. Since *as* does not contribute a temporal exponent on its own,
CONCLUSION. This paper has shown that as-clauses code path events, especially change events (i.e. temporality) because temporality could not otherwise be retrieved. By contrast, while-clauses, as defining a simultaneity network. They are not compatible with stative be, as defined in the dictionary.

In sum, we can view as and while-clauses as defining a simultaneity network. They are obviously related to each other in that they both can code simultaneity but they construe simultaneous events differently by focussing on either susceptibility to change (as-clauses) or (relative) permanence (while-clauses).

REFERENCES

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SOURCES OF EXAMPLES


APPENDIX

Only the first verb has been counted in coordination cases. If a verb occurs more than once, this is indicated explicitly (by giving the total number of occurrences in parentheses). Negative cases, for the sake of analytical convenience, have exceptionally been grouped under NOT IN OTHER VERBS.
While-clauses in the written imaginative corpus:

**CHANGE OF POSITION (31 tokens, 17.4%)**
approach, bend, back out, be sent, bring down, carry, collect, crawl, dance, fall, feel my way along, fetch (2), flit, go to + infinitive (2), go try, hurtle off, jump down and open, meander towards him, open and shut, perambulate, put on (2), put the washing out, scout, slip off, step forward, sway back and forth, take out, walk

**CHANGE OF STATE (6 tokens, 3.4%)**
boil dry... burn to a crisp. change, grow up, achieve his deepest wish, secure the devices

**BE (34 tokens, 19.1%)**
be + away, like this, on the Commons, up, a slave to, absent, alive, at it (2), at school, away (3), black, busy provoking each other, free, gone, good, here, hot (2), in bed, in desertion, in hospital, in prison, like that, on, out, out working, there (3), turned, under the same roof

**OTHER VERBS (107 tokens, 50.1%)**
ask (2), await, beam, call, can (2), carry on, cast, clean, cook (2), cope, deal with, decide, discuss, do (6), drink, dwell upon, eat (2), endure, examine, explore, feel for, fight about, give, go ahead making their preparations, go on, go shopping [change of position classification also possible], gorge yourself, grin, haunt, have visions of, help, hold (4), indulge, iron, last, look, look round for, lose herself (in a book), make (2), make the game, NOT (3) (be here, have a job, move), play (5), present oneself as, read, recall, regain, remain (3), rest (1), rub, sing, sit (1), sleep (3), sort (things) out, speak (2), stand (5), stare, stay (3), subdue, swallow, talk (4), tell, trample, translate, try to catch, wait (4), wash, watch (2), weave and prepare food, work (3), write

As-clauses in the written imaginative corpus:

**CHANGE OF PLACE (62 tokens, 62%)**
approach (2), come (2), cross the room and leave, crumble back into the clay, curl, draw (2), drift in and out, drive (1), fetch, get into the car, give the canoe a push, go (3), guide, kneel down and start to dust, lean to retrieve. leave (2), lift (2), move in and out, pace, pass (2), pick it up, pull (2), put down her basket and take off her shawl, raise, reach, return, rise (2), set the glass down, sift through. slide her hands down and smooth them over the... swell of his hips, slip (2), sneak in, snuggle closer to him, spatter, spit out, spread the hake, stop the jeep, take (2), thumb through the ledger and take out, thump into, tilt to catch the sunlight of space, trample behind the horses, tread, turn, unfold, unwrap, walk (2)

**CHANGE OF STATE (10 tokens, 10%)**
become aroused, close (1), end, finish with, get better, go on (1), prepare for, start the car and move away

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The English Simultaneity Network: The Case of As and While-Clauses

**STATIVE (14 tokens, 14%)**
be there standing, clasp, cling tightly, contemplate, have, hold her and kiss her lips, lie in life-support, look (1), sit with a whisky and wait for, smile, stand, stare, watch

**OTHER VERBS (14 tokens, 14%)**
absorb (1), caress (2), clean away the dishes, count, feel the water beneath me slop and gurgle, frisk me for weapons, let herself out into the garden, read, realise, ring off, strike, work

**CHANGE OF PLACE (20 tokens, 15.3%)**
carry him to pit bottom, chase, collect, come, come ashore, cross to safety, fold this net up, follow, get round the chair, go (8), pour, progress, take

**CHANGE OF STATE (6 tokens, 4.6%)**
chop, get it erected, get used to, hot, raise prices, turn off the television

**OTHER VERBS (44 tokens, 33.6%)**
camp in, continue, do (4), eat, enjoy, get a ticket, have (7), lie, look, look after, make, mend, negotiate, promote, protect and preserve, say, seem impotent and indecisive, serve as a detective, set new standards, shoot and kill, sign, talk (5), test, wait, watch, work (6)

As-clauses in the written leisure corpus:

**CHANGE OF STATE (6 tokens, 21.4%)**
be sworn in, become, get older (2), grow older, run out of processing power

**CHANGE OF PLACE (18 tokens, 64.3%)**
come home, enter, go (11), hand, leave Downing Street, move, pop it off, take the big piece out

**OTHER VERBS (4 tokens, 14.3%)**
hit, plough, stay still