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CRISTIANO BROCCIAS

THE AS-COPULAR CONSTRUCTION
IN MIDDLE ENGLISH

This paper aims to investigate the status of an important but neglected subordinator, namely *as*, in Middle English. In Present-Day English, *as* is usually treated as a synonym of *while* and *when*, although important differences exist between them. In particular, *as* is not usually found in copular constructions (e.g. *as you are here for while you are here*). By contrast, the corpus evidence gathered for this study shows that Middle English *as*, including its variants, exhibits more flexibility in that it is found more frequently than its contemporary counterpart in copular constructions with prepositional phrases (e.g. *as he was in the water for while he was in the water*) and even adjectival phrases (e.g. *as she was busy for while she was busy*), especially in close proximity with a temporal noun (e.g. *on a night as he was in his prayers*). It is argued that *as* underwent a process of expansion from an essentially Old English correlative meaning which, however, came to halt because of a variety of reasons, such as the disappearance of the variant with a temporal noun and the replacement of the prepositional progressive construction with a truly progressive construction (e.g. *as he was in waiting with as he was waiting*).

1. Introduction

Within the domain of subordination, an interesting, albeit not much studied, subordinator is the simultaneity subordinator *as* (e.g. *I saw Peter as I was getting off the bus*). In particular, little has been written on its diachronic development, an exception being Broccias and Smith’s study of *as* and its “competitors” *while*,

* This research was supported by a “Progetti di Ricerca di Ateneo (PRA) 2013” grant from the University of Genoa. Special thanks go to my two (British) English informants, Elena Rutherford and Ian Harvey. Of course I am solely responsible for any errors.


* A reviewer objects to the use of the term “competitors” to refer to the other simultaneity subordinators on the grounds that this term may suggest a drive towards uniformity. Since I do not see any such bias in the use of the term and the importance of competition within a systemic view of language has come to the forefront of linguistic research (see, for example, Competing
whilst and when in Late Modern English, which collectively can be regarded as making up a "simultaneity network" of simultaneity subordinators. Broccia and Smith show that, unlike the other subordinators, simultaneity as has undergone an increase in use over the last two centuries but observe no differences in the behaviour of as-clauses over this span of time. In this paper, I will go further back in time, concentrating on as in Middle English (henceforth ME). In particular, for reasons to be outlined in more detail in § 2 below, I will be discussing examples where simultaneity as introduces a copular structure, as in the following examples:

(1) a. At mydryght they sette upon them as they were in theyr pauselyns [...] (Le Marie Darthur)
   b. As Seint Thomas he apostol was in Cesare,oure Lord apperid to hym and seide: [...] (Gilde Legende)

Such copular as-clauses are of great interest because, as will be shown below, they are hard to come by in Present-Day English (henceforth PDE), where while or when would be the obvious candidates as simultaneity subordinators. It is thus important to study whether examples such as (1) reveal any substantive differences in usage between ME and PDE, unlike the lack of change observed by Broccia and Smith in the Late Modern English period. This paper will therefore present a detailed analysis of the construction illustrated in (1), which I refer to as the as-copular construction.

I will start by offering, in § 2, a characterisation of what I mean by ‘simultaneity’ and highlight some of the restrictions PDE as is subject to, in particular with reference to its combination with the copular verb be. Next, in § 3, I will briefly discuss the Old English (henceforth OE) source of as, i.e. (tæll) swil. § 4 will provide data regarding the construction under investigation from the Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse (henceforth CMEPV). and § 5 will contrast the use of the as-copular construction in ME and in PDE. For the sake of completeness, § 6 will provide data for some ME competitors of as, namely while and when. This is because a fuller appreciation of the status of simultaneity as can only be achieved by assessing its place within the simultaneity network made up by some of its obvious competitors. Finally, § 7 will offer some tentative suggestions as to why differences between the as-copular construction in ME and the as-copular construction in PDE are observed.

2. Simultaneity as containment

Dictionaries of PDE usually treat the temporal subordinating conjunction as synonymous with, or define it in terms of, while and when. The online version of the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, for example, glosses temporal as as “while or when” and provides the following illustrative examples:

(2) a. I saw Peter as I was getting off the bus.
   b. As time passed, things seemed to get worse.

For now, it is sufficient to regard the difference as implying, respectively, lack vs presence of a verbal -ing form combining with be.
(2a) and (2b) are both instances of what I will subsume under the label of "simultaneity," i.e. the temporal containment of one event in another. In both examples, the as-clause describes an unfolding background process within which the main clause event is temporally "contained". However, in (2a) the main clause event, 'seeing', is punctual, while in (2b) the main event, 'things getting worse', has an expanded temporal profile. The difference between the two cases is illustrated diagramatically in Figure 1 below. In both instances, the arrow depicts the unfolding as-clause event. In Figure 1 (a), the cross depicts the punctual main event. In Figure 1 (b), the cross has been replaced by a rectangle to capture visually the protracted nature of the main clause event.11

![Figure 1. Simultaneity with punctual (a) and extended (b) main clause events.](image)

Although dictionaries tend to treat as as being equivalent to while or when, learners of English as a foreign language, for example, are made aware that the three temporal subordinators as, while and when are not always interchangeable. For instance, a well-known grammar book for foreign learners of English, Hewings, points out that expressions pertaining to age typically collocate with when rather than as or while, as in "His mother called him Robbie when he was a baby".12

A more theoretically oriented description of the peculiarities of as is offered by Morris.13 She claims that simultaneity as "does not occur when the verbal event in its clause is of a static nature"14 and provides the examples in

---

11 In more detail, the use of the progressive in the as-clause in (2a) has a "stretching" or imperfective function; see Cristiano Broccia, "Imperfectivity and transience: The two sides of the progressive aspect in simultaneity clauses", Journal of English Linguistics 36 (2010), pp. 155-178. It stretches the otherwise relatively short event of getting off the bus so that the punctual perceptual event coded by the main clause, shown as a cross in Figure 1 (a) above, takes place within the "stretched" background process.

12 See Barbara Schmichowz, *At the same Time...: The Expression of Simultaneity in Learner Varieties*, Berlin / New York 2004, p. 9, for a definition of simultaneity in terms of overlap rather than containment. In fact, the two definitions of simultaneity (containment vs overlap) are equivalent if one takes overlap to exclude partial overlap at the boundaries, as in Figure 2 above.


15 Ibid., p. 419.
(3) to illustrate her point (the examples are also incomplete in the original). According to Morris, in none of the examples in (3) can the as-clause be interpreted as a temporal clause.

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

By verbs of a "static nature" Morris means verbs that describe what she calls "monophase" events, that is events made up of identical subparts, which thus do not imply change. Morris contrasts monophase events (such as being in a location, knowing and wearing an item of clothing) with multiphase events, where successive configurations in time are different from one another and thus imply change. This is the case of 'growing older' in (4) below, which points to change and thus allows for a temporal interpretation of the as-clause.24

(4) As she grew older ...

However, as is pointed out by Broccias, it is easy to come up with counter-examples, namely verbs that depict monophase events but are used felicitously with as-clauses.25 An illustrative example is offered in (5), from Broccias.26 The verbal event of standing on the seashore does not imply change and is thus of a static nature (and, hence, monophase) and yet the interpretation of the as-clause is clearly a temporal one.

(5) The wind whips round us as we stand on the seashore. (Morrall)27

The investigations carried out by Broccias28 seem however to confirm that the constraint proposed by Morris is more robust when it comes to the copular verb be, as in (3a) above, see also § 5 below for more details.

24 The example is again from Morris, "Time and cause ...", p. 419, and is incomplete in the original.
26 Ibid., p. 34.
27 Clare Morrall, Astounding Splashes of Colour, Birmingham 2003, p. 81.
in which swā is best taken as either ‘when’ [‘contemporaneous’ meaning] or ‘as soon as’ [‘immediate sequence’ meaning]. It should be clear that the distinction I introduced between the two meanings of as reproduces that of Mitchell. What I call simultaneity (see Figure (1) above) is identical to Mitchell’s contemporaneous meaning and Mitchell’s “immediate sequence” covers the use of as shown in Figure (2). Importantly, if the analysis of the various examples provided in Mitchell is correct, then Mitchell is in fact suggesting that OE swā may have had a more general meaning than PDE as, potentially close to PDE when. In PDE, there is some division of labour between as and when. The former does not only highlight containment but also “an arrow of time” (i.e. the temporal unfolding of a background event, see the arrow in Figure (1) above), whereas the latter does not. In OE, instead, swā may have been closer to the meaning of PDE when, as (7) intends to show:

(7) Wes þu on ofeste, swā þe þe he man lēdan hitte, þet þu líc hræpe onesege sigortte, þir þe swylte hitte, dæð fore dugisce, […]

‘Make haste, when he orders you to be taken out from here, to offer a sacrifice as an obligation to their triumph before destruction seizes you, death in front of the people.’

If swā in (7) is not to be taken to mean ‘as soon as’, an interpretation that Mitchell dismisses also on the evidence of the Latin source cum te de carcere tesserit egregiamente, it is clear that a simultaneous as reading (i.e. as he orders ...) is not felicitous either, whereas a subsequent reading is plausible. This is indeed the option Bradly opted for in this passage. In fact, if the ‘as soon as’ interpretation is discarded, I believe that this example does not necessarily illustrate simultaneity, not even in the more general sense evoked by when (i.e. independently of an “arrow of time”). The action that the hearer is encouraged to take should occur after the order is issued. This example may therefore be viewed as illustrating a meaning of swā that is analogous to the one PDE when is often used for, namely ‘after’, see also §6 below. Whatever the most appropriate interpretation of (7), if the ‘as soon as’ meaning is rejected, the conclusion remains that OE swā may have been more flexible than PDE as so as to also encompass meanings that in PDE are only found for when.

Still, the issue of the most appropriate interpretation of OE examples looms large. One more example is relevant to the present discussion. Mitchell argues that the occurrence of swā in (8), from Beowulf, II. 874–884, does not illustrate the “as soon as” meaning.

(8) […] Waeswylc gewæð þær þefrom Sigemund[e(s)] segen hýrde ællendeð, uncēlæs feal, Welsinges gewin, wīðer fæles. Järja þe gemuna bearn gearwe ne wiston, fāhōe ond fyrena, biten Fitela mid hine, þonne þe swuldæ hwæt segan wolde, êam his nefen, swā þe æ wæron æt niðe gehwæm ðægsealman, heafton eal ealena cynnes swordum gestægðe.

[...] [He] related everything that he had heard said about Sigmund’s fears of courage, a great deal unfamiliar, the struggles of the son of Waels, wide travels, which the offspring of humanity did not really know, fees and suffering, expect for Fitela by his side, when he cared to say anything of such a kind, uncle to his nephew, as they were always companions in need at every difficulty; they had laid low with swords an entire multitude of the race of ogres.

Example (8) is of great interest to the present discussion because swā occurs in a construction with the verb beon ‘be’, which is exactly the pattern this paper set out to investigate in ME. But I would like to argue that swā does not have a temporal interpretation in (8), as Mitchell suggests. The presence of the adverb ðe, in my view, blocks any possible temporal interpretation such as “when he cared to say anything of such a kind […] when they were compan-

ions in need at every difficult" and probably triggers a causal interpretation, which is indeed duly mentioned by Mitchell. All in all, because of the ambiguity of the OE examples, of which admittedly only two were discussed here, and the fact that swi typically has a correlative meaning, it seems likely that the correlative meaning is primary in OE and that the "contemporaneous" meaning, however construed, is a later development.  

4. *As* in Middle English

In order to investigate the occurrence of the *as*-copular construction in ME, the freely available CMEPF was resorted to. The variants of *as* that were used in the searches were *as, adswi, adswiwa, alse, ase, os*, which are all those given as alternative forms for "as (conj.)" in the electronic Middle English Dictionary. To these, I added the forms *eval*, *swi*, where the wild card *+* stands for one or more letters, which are plausible forms similar to the OE source. Table 1 below gives the number of hits or occurrences for each of these variants in the corpus.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>variant</th>
<th>number of occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>as</td>
<td>98534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alswi</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>also</td>
<td>22753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alswa</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>641</td>
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<tr>
<td>als</td>
<td>8856</td>
</tr>
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<td>ase</td>
<td>3379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>os</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eval*</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>eval sw*</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eval sw*</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Variants of *as* investigated in CMEPF

As is immediately apparent, it would have been impossible to check every single occurrence of each subordinate, especially of *as, alswi* and *ase*. Further, at the time of writing, it was not possible to extract automatically examples where, for instance, *as* is separated from forms of the verb *be* by one or more intervening words. Thus, I decided to restrict the searches to those cases where *as* is separated from the copular verb by a personal pronoun and the copular verb is in the past. Obviously, a further problem is that the personal pronouns and the copular verb themselves have variants, so in order to minimize variation and still have a measure of the phenomenon under investigation, I chose to begin with the more common variants for *as*, the personal pronouns and the verb *be*, i.e. those whose spellings are closer to PDE. Also, since the construction under scrutiny is used in narrative, it is unlikely for it to occur with the second personal pronoun "thou / you", so I ignored this pronoun in my searches. Table 2 reports the number of hits for each search and the number of genuine hits, that is instantiations of the *as*-copular con-

---

33 This is indeed the conclusion also reached by Richard Ingham, "Sense extension through English-French language contact in medieval England: The case of *as*," in *Communicative Spaces: Variation, Contact, and Change. Papers in Honour of Ursula Schaefer*, ed. by Claudia Lange et al., Frankfurt am Main 2012, pp. 115-132. He claims that the temporal and causal meanings of *as* emerged during the ME period, probably with the temporal meaning surfacing first. Ingham attributes these changes to Anglo-Norman influence, in particular as far as the causal meaning of *as* is concerned. To be sure, however, the temporal meanings are unlikely to be (solely) due to Anglo-Norman influence because it is also attested for its Old High German (henceforth OHG) cognate *also* and its variants; see e.g. *Alt hochdeutsches Wörterbuch*, aufgrund der von Elias von Steinmeyer hinterlassenen Sammlungen im Auftrag der Südlichen Akad. der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig bearb. u. hg. von Elisabeth Karg-Gastertädte u. a., Berlin 1925; furthermore, the influence of Latin seems not to be neglected. More plausible, perhaps, is the influence of Anglo-Norman on the development of the causal meaning of *as*. Notwithstanding these factors, the example in (7) shows, the causal sense cannot be ruled out for its OE antecedent and it may also have occurred in OHG, see e.g. Rudolf Schiitzteich, *Alt hochdeutsches Wörterbuch*, 7, durchg. u. verb. Aufl., Berlin 2006, vs *Alt hochdeutsches Wörterbuch*, aufgrund ... A detailed investigation of the evidence is much needed for OHG.
35 The same procedure was adopted in Cristiano Broccia, "*as*-simultaneity clauses as complements of perception verbs: The case of *wære*", *Textus* 23 (2010), pp. 383-402.
The numbers in parentheses in the column for the genuine hits specify how many of the genuine hits occur in a more specific as-copular construction, which I will call the time as-copular (sub)construction. This construction is introduced at the end of this section.

Since the as-copular construction is employed in narration, it is not surprising to find that most occurrences involve the third person singular and plural forms of the personal pronouns. Nor is it surprising, perhaps, that in the third person singular form, the majority of instances occurs with the masculine pronoun and none, at least here, with the neuter pronoun. Narration typically involves animate entities, which could explain the notable absence of neuter pronoun examples, and the male-dominant nature of the medieval world may go some way towards accounting for the smaller number of female pronoun occurrences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>string searched for</th>
<th>number of hits</th>
<th>number of genuine hits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>as *I was</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>8 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as he was</td>
<td>719</td>
<td>37 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as she was</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>7 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as heo was</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as *I it was</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as *I were</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as we wer*</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as they were*</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Main search strings used in CMEPV

In what follows, I will list and comment on all the examples from the third person masculine pronoun group since they are representative of the patterns also found in the other cases. If necessary, however, I will add examples from the other groups. The data have been divided according to the syntactic type the subject complement instantiates. In principle, the subject complement can be a prepositional phrase (PP), an adjective phrase (AP) or noun phrase (NP), but the latter phrasal type is not to be found in the as-copular construction.

4.1. Prepositional phrases

Formally, two subtypes can be identified. One subtype involves a preposition, always in the examples obtained from the corpus, followed by an -ing form. This is one of the well-known possible sources of the PDE progressive construction. Since the ME be in -ing construction is “similar to the progressive in form and function”, for the sake of convenience I will refer to it as the “prepositional progressive” construction. This subtype is illustrated in (9)-(11).

(9) And when þis barber come to shafe þis gude man, as he was in weryng of hym be lusty þpon þe raster clouth; […] (Alphabets of tales)

‘And when this barber came to shave this good man, as he was waiting for him he looked at the raster cloth [i.e. shaving cloth]; […]’

(10) And as he was in making of his lamentacion, ther come to hym a wyse man, and salde […] (Early English versions of the Gestes Romanorum)

‘And as he was making lamentation, there came to him a wise man, and said […]’

(11) As he was in slepeynge, An aungell he sende to hym full euyn Hym to cownmfort […] (The romance of Guy of Warwick)

‘As he was sleeping, he sent him an angel outright to comfort him […]’

In semantic terms, the prepositional progressive construction may be construed as designating a process or state because the -ing form may be argued to highlight a process interpretation while the preposition may evoke a state

35 In the case of multiple occurrences of the same example (e.g. because different manuscripts of the same text are included in the corpus), only one occurrence has been counted.

40 For each example, I have given the source text in parentheses. Details about the texts themselves and the exact location of the examples within the texts can be found accessing CMEPV.

interpretation. This semantic ambivalence is also apparent in some of the occurrences of the other subtype, which includes those cases where the preposition occurs before a noun, as in (12)-(22). In these examples, the prepositional phrase refers to a metaphorical location or state that can be interpreted as a process (e.g. "in his thought" for "thinking" and "in his prayers" for "praying").

(12) And as he was in ples thoughtis he was gretil trouble & waxed ferd. (Alphabet of tales)

'And as [i.e. while] he was in these thoughts he was greatly troubled and became afraid.'

(13) And as he was in this thought he beganne to wepe sore for grete pyte that he had [...] (The right pleasant and goodly historie of the foure sonnes of Aymon)

'And as [i.e. while] he was in this thought he began to weep sorely because of the great misfortune that he had [...]'

(14) [...] & thus as he was in this thought he lokyd behynde hym, & saw the Saracenys come hastily after hym. [...] (Leyst of the noble and Cristen prynce, Charles the Grite)

' [...] and thus as [i.e. while] he was in this thought he looked behind him, and saw the Saracens coming hastily after him, [...]'

---

* One reviewer finds this characterization confusing because, in the reviewer's mind, this would mean that the construction is to be interpreted "as being in the state of carrying out a process", which is a rather strange interpretation. However, this is not exactly what I am suggesting. Rather, I contend that the language user can impose two different perspectives upon the same PP, which can be construed as referring either to a state, by virtue of the stative preposition in, or to a process, by virtue of the presence of a verbal form. This duality explains, for example, how stative prepositions may develop into imperfective aspect markers, as in Welsh. In the Welsh progressive construction (for example, mae un ddyg "he is learning") we is originally a stative preposition ("in") and later develops into an imperfective aspect marker; see e.g. Bernard Comrie, "Tense and aspect", in Syntax. Ein internationaler Handbuch zeitgen"ussischer Forschung – An International Handbook of Contemporary Research, ed. by Joachim Jacobs et al., vol. 2, Berlin 1995, pp. 1244-1252, at pp. 1246-1247.

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(15) [...] and as he was in his prayours the herte that hadde ben at Rome com be-fore hym and seide, [...] (Merlin)

'[...] and as [i.e. while] he was in his prayers the heart that had been in Rome came before him and said, [...]'

(16) And as he was in his prayers, he laide his right hand oppen he same place [here] he Godd man was martred [...] (The Brut)

'And as [i.e. while] he was in his prayers, he laid his right hand upon the same place where the good man was martyr'd [...]'

(17) And as he was in his sleepe, he harde a voyse sey thirs, "tak! tak! tak!" [...] (Early English versions of the Gesta Romanorum)

'And as [i.e. while] he was in his sleep, he heard a voice say three times "tak! tak! tak!" [...]'

(18) [...] syr Palomydes cam vpon sir Tristram as he was vpon foot to haue ouer ryden hym (Le Morte Darthur)

'[...] sir Palomides came upon sir Tristram as [i.e. while] he was upon foot to have him ridden over'

(19) [...] he had grete mervale how þer namys happend so sodanly in his mouthe, & &e wiste no þing of þaim. And as he was in his mervall, þer apperid unto hym iij dowffes [...] (Alphabet of tales)

'[...] he was greatly surprised at how their names came to him suddenly in his mouth, and he did not know anything about them. And as [i.e. while] he was in this state of surprise, there appeared to him three doves [...]'

(20) And as he was in such care and sorrow, þer com to him a leech, and saide [...] (Early English versions of the Gesta Romanorum)

'And as [i.e. while] he was in such grief and sorrow, there came to him a leech [i.e. doctor], and said [...]'

---
(21) As he was in sorowe and dud wepe, Vppon hys bedd he felle on slepe.  
(The romance of Guy of Warwick)  
‘As [i.e. while] he was in sorrow and wept, he fell asleep in his bed.’

(22) And, as he was per eyn pyne, He loked vpwarde […] (Robert of Brunne’s  
‘Handlyng symne’)  
‘And, as [i.e. while] he was there in pain, he looked upwards […]’

The examples in (23)-(29) below also belong to the same formal subtype  
but contain a noun that refers to a physical location, rather than a process  
or state.

(23) & Robert Bruys sawe him COMME atte a wyn dow, as he was in his  
chambere, and þe made loye ynow, & comp ðe ynow him, and baised him  
aboute þe nek […] (The Brut)  
‘and Robert Bruce saw him coming to the window, as [i.e. while] he  
was in his chamber, and then rejoiced at once, and came towards him,  
and embraced him round the neck […]’

(24) […] yode in to þe water, and þere did of all his clothing, and kold  
him in þe water. And as he was in the water, þere come a man in his  
owne lynnesse, […] (Early English versions of the Gesta Romanorum)  
‘[…] and walked into the water, and there took off all his clothes, and  
refreshed himself in the water. And as [i.e. while] he was in the water,  
there came a man in his own likeness […]’

(25) As he was aboute þis dich he ne gan nor muehe winne vor he velle an  
alre middel & adrelente þer inne […] (The metrical chronicle of Robert  
Glocester)  
‘As [i.e. while] he was near this ditch, he didn’t have much success for he  
fell into the middle [of the ditch] and drowned in there […]’

(26) His word com to king richard in sirie as he was. (The metrical chronicle  
of Robert of Gloucester)  
‘This news came to King Richard as [i.e. while] he was in Syria.’

(27) and as he was in to the botome of it, he perceveyed some light […]  
(Melusine)  
‘and as [i.e. while/when?] he was at its bottom, he perceived some light […]’

(28) And as he was rilt atte caas, be toþur com in to þe plas […] (Sammlung  
alteüngischer Legenden)  
‘And as [i.e. while] he was right at the case, the other came into the place’

(29) & paynt þare þi lord: as he was on þe croize […] (English prose works of  
Richard Rolle)  
‘and imagine thy lord as [i.e. while] he was on the cross […]’

Still, in a number of cases – see (30)-(32) below – the dividing line between  
a physical location vs processual reading is a fine one. (30) does not simply  
refer to a location but also to the process of mounting the horse. Similarly,  
to be on one’s deathbed in (31) also evokes the process of dying, and “at the  
meat” in (32) evokes simultaneously both a location and the process of eating.

(30) […] thenne sir Breuse ranne vpon hym as he was half vpon his hors  
and smote hym doune hors & man to the erthe […] (Le Morte Darthur)  
‘[…] then Sir Bruce ran at him as [i.e. while] he was half upon his horse  
and smote him down, horse and man to the ground […]’

(31) This Cathon had a sone, and as he was in the bedde of his deth, he callyd  
his sone to hym […] (Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry)  
‘This Cato had a son, and as [i.e. while/when?] he was on his deathbed,  
he called his son to him […]’
(32) and come to him jer with as he was at þe mete. (Early English versions of the Gesta Romanorum)

‘and came to him right away as [i.e. while] he was at the table.’

4.2. Adjective phrases

Only two examples were found where the subject complement is coded by means of an AP:

(33) And tho at the laste, as he was busi to sete and luke vpon his ordynaunce, fort to gete it yf he myght, a fals thyst [...] (The Brut)

‘And then after a while, as [i.e. while] he was busy setting and looking at his ordinances, so as to get it [i.e. the town of Orleans] if he could, a false thief [...]’

(34) The lady rosse vp, and covered hym well with warme clothes, and lefte hym alone, to thede he shold take his reste. And soone after, as he was a lytell warme, he fyle into a slepe, for his sede was ryght pesant and heuy. [...] (Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry)

‘The lady rose up, and covered him well with warm clothes, and left him alone, so that he could rest. And soon afterwards, as [i.e. while when] he was a little warm, he fell asleep, because his head was very heavy, [...]’

Semantically, (33) is similar to those PP cases illustrated above which are ambiguous as to a process vs state reading. The process the referent of the pronoun he was engaged in (i.e. inspecting his ordinances) is obviously a salient part of the state of “being busy”. It may also be worth pointing out that the process someone is busy with needs not be specified but may be retrievable from the context. An example illustrating this point was found with the pronoun she:

(35) But at the laste, whan that thise lords were to siten a doun, he gan to calle Griseld, as she was busi in þe halle. (Cantebury Tales)

‘But after a while, when these lords went to sit down, he called Griselda, as [i.e. while] she was busy in the hall.’

It is also useful to point out that (34) is even more interesting than (33) and (35) because it describes a state that can only be construed as a property of the subject referent, not as a process even in a derivative sense as in (33) or (35), and is clearly improbable in PDEs. Of course, a causal interpretation for as in (34) cannot be excluded, but I regard it as unlikely since the cause for the man falling asleep is provided in the following for-clause (for his sede was ryght pesant and heuy).

Finally, it is worth remarking that one example was found, (36), where various different phrases are combined: a state AP (sick), a concrete locational PP (in his bed) and a metaphorical locational PP (nigh at his last end) evoking a process (i.e. dying).

(36) And yet as he was seke in his bedde, and nyghte at his laste ende, he calld me to hym, [...] (Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry)

‘And yet as [i.e. while/when] he was sick in his bed, and close to his last end, he called me to himself, [...]’

4.3. The time ‘as’-copular subconstruction

So far I have left out a few examples which also belong to the types detailed above but instantiate a more specific construction where the as-clause follows (usually immediately, but see (41) for an exception) a general temporal noun such as time or a more specific temporal one such as night. I will refer to this (sub)construction as the time as-copular (sub)construction.

(37) So on a nyghte as he was in his prayers, hym [ought þat he hard almighti God vnte hym [...] (Alphabet of tales)

‘So on a night as [i.e. while] he was in his prayers, he heard Almighty God say to him [...]’

(38) So on a tymé as he was in batall, he was passand hongrie, & he gatt in his armys anne ox, and [...] (Alphabet of tales)

‘So on a time as [i.e. while/when] he was in battle, he was very hungry and he took an ox in his arms, and [...]’
(39) [...] on a tyme, as he was in his paviljon, he gan to wepe. (Merlin)
‘ [...] on a time as [i.e. while] he was in his pavilion he began to weep.’

(40) So on a tyme, as he was be bys a ne, hym happend to vndyssh ym of his synnyss, [...] (Alphabet of sales)
‘So on a time, as [i.e. while/when] he was by himself, he happened to consider his sins, [...]’

(41) Jacobus de Vetraco tells how on a tyme a holly man, as he was in the quere, he was war of be devull & a hevle saele [...] (Alphabet of sales)
‘Jacobus de Vetraco tells how on a time a holy man, as [i.e. while] he was in the choir, he became aware of the devil and a heavy sack [...]’

(42) They that loved not Merlyn, but by semblance, come to the kyngge on a day as he was at Cardoell, and axedon hym of this voide place, [...] (Merlin)
‘They that did not love Merlin, by pretence, came to the king on a day as [i.e. while/when] he was at Cardwell [?], and asked him about this empty place, [...]’

(43) And fell a tyme, as he was oute, [...] (John Gower’s Confessio amantis)
‘And it happened a time, as [i.e. while] he was out [...]’

(44) Upon a dai as he was merie, As thogh ther mithte him nothing derie, [...] (John Gower’s Confessio amantis)
‘Upon a day as [i.e. while/when] he was merry, as though nothing could harm him, [...]’

Similar examples can be found for the other pronouns in the as-clause and indeed the other variants of as. All in all, the as-copular construction does seem to be possible in ME, especially with Ps, which can refer to processes, states, locations or a mixture thereof. APs, coding states, also occur but appear to be rarer. No NPs, instead, were found. Finally, I remarked above that the as-clause can also be found adjacent or in proximity to a temporal noun. In such cases, the as-clause functions in a way similar to a modifier or relative clause with respect to the temporal noun. I have also highlighted that various examples would be more felicitous with while (or when) in PDE. In PDE, as evokes an ‘arrow of time’, as I showed in Figure 1 above, but some of the ME examples given above, such as (20), (22), (23)-(29), (34), (39)-(42), and (44)-(46), do not require this characterisation. The as-clause simply functions as a temporal container and the temporal unfolding of the event evoked is not salient. It is therefore important, at this juncture, to establish whether there is a genuine difference between ME and PDE in this respect.

5. The ‘as’-copular construction in PDE

As was pointed out in § 2 above, Morris suggests that the as-copular construction is impossible in PDE.41 The availability of large (and freely available)

41 For practical reasons, however, only the pronoun he was searched for in the variants of as. The search strings used were: as he (*he was*), which resulted in 143 hits of which only three were temporal examples; as he (*he was*), which resulted in 88 hits of which only six were temporal examples (and one of them was preceded by the temporal noun don’t; as he was, which resulted in three hits none of which was temporal. Since the examples obtained with these searches are very similar to the ones reported in the text, there is no need to include them here.

42 Morris, “Time and cause ...”, p. 419.
corpora such as the Corpus of Contemporary American English (henceforth COCA),\textsuperscript{7} which comprises 450 million words, proves to be very useful to test this claim in more depth than Broccias did\textsuperscript{d} using the much smaller British National Corpus (190 million words).\textsuperscript{30}

As was shown above, the most representative case for the ME as-copular construction is as he was. It thus makes sense to utilise the same string for investigation in COCA for comparative purposes. Since the as-copular construction is typically found in narration, the literary section of the corpus was chosen as far as the written part of the corpus is concerned. However, as a further check, the spoken section of the corpus was also considered.\textsuperscript{31} A random selection of 1,000 literary matches was made and each match was inspected manually for a possible temporal interpretation. Out of 1,000 potential examples, only nine genuinely temporal hits were identified, eight of which contain the adjective about and the remaining one an adverbial expression. An illustrative example of the former case and the only example of the latter type are given in (47):

(47) a. Then, as he was about to move, Mrs Coulter woke up.
    b. [...] two large men started beating the shit out of him as he was half-
    way out.

In both examples, the as-clauses score highly on dynamicty in that they evoke an ‘arrow of time’ as part of their interpretation. Motion is mentioned explicitly in (47a) by means of the verb move and is alluded to implicitly in (47b) because halfway out requires reference to motion along a path. In other words, it is difficult to interpret the examples in (47) as depicting two “monophasic” or static events in Morris’s sense.

The search in the spoken sub-corpus resulted in 784 hits, which were also all inspected manually so as to identify genuine simultaneity occurrences. As a result, a total of 24 examples were categorised as such, 14 of which contain the adjective about or as (47a) and, hence, none of them is reproduced here. Three examples, instead, are similar to (47b) in that they make reference to a path by making use of the PP on his way to ..., as is shown in (48a) below, and thus also highlight dynamicty in the same way as (47b) does. Three examples contain a PP or adverb followed by an -ing verb and are thus similar, in a sense, to the progressive construction; see (48b) to (48d) below. Finally, the four remaining examples, if truly acceptable,\textsuperscript{32} are better candidates as instances of “monophasic” or static events because of the lack of explicit or implicit reference to either motion or some ongoing process. They are all reproduced in (48e) to (48h).

(48) a. I managed to speak to him as he was on his way to catching that plane to Puerto Rico
    b. He didn’t respond to requests for an interview, so we approached him
        as he was out shopping.
    c. On Friday, just as he was in the elevator being brought to the courtroom, federal
        agents elsewhere found McVeigh’s Social Security number, [...].
    d. And even as he was there, delivering what some people thought might be a peace
        initiative from Saddam Hussein, an announcer – as we’ve just mentioned – in
        Baghdad, read a speech in Saddam Hussein’s name, [...].
    e. [...] a big plume of smoke came out that pretty much engulfed him as he
        was up there.
    f. As he was in the classroom, finally wounded, there were two students
        that came to his aid.

\textsuperscript{7} Note, however, that in (48g) as is preceded by just, which may improve the acceptability of the example. Indeed, the (two) native (British English) speakers consulted found (48e), (48f) and (48g) questionable, which means that truly static cases may be extremely rare in PDE.
g. Just as he was on TV the other night, someone asked him if O.J. was guilty [...] 

h. One blinked torture in Morse code with his eyes as he was in front of the cameras.

For the sake of completeness, the time as-copular subconstruction was also investigated in the whole COCA. The string "a time as" returned 251 hits from the whole corpus, none of which instantiate the copular as-construction. Similarly, no instances of this construction were found in the variant "one time as", which resulted in 27 hits. A similar picture obtains with the general temporal *day*, in the two variants "one day as" and "a day as". Out of the 118 hits for the search string "one day as" and the 133 hits for the search string "a day as", no single copular *as*-construction occurrence was identified.33

Even making allowances for the fact that COCA and CMEPE have not been compiled according to the same principles (e.g. different versions of the same work, such as the Canterbury Tales, may be found in the latter corpus), we may safely conclude that the profile of the copular *as*-construction is different in ME and PDE. Not only are the "prepositional progressive" and the related use of PPs with processual nouns (such as in *in this thought*, in *his prayers, in grief*) absent in the PDE data, but the copular *as*-construction in PDE is typically used with dynamic phrases such as *about to...*, which are not prominent in ME. Admittedly, however, truly locative cases (such as in *as he was up there*), which were deemed impossible by Morris, can also be found in PDE, although they are few in numbers and, if the numbers obtained for ME are statistically significant, this option seems to be more common in ME than PDE.34 Finally, two other remarkable differences are the unlikelihood of the time *as*-subconstruction and of AP instances in PDE: no data were found in the data extracted from COCA.35 The conclusion, therefore,

33 The same holds true for the strings *one night as* (58 hits) and *a night as* (17 hits). No single *as*-copular construction occurrence was identified.

34 The *as*-copular construction (at least in its *as he was* variant) is more than five times more common in CMEPE than in the fiction section of COCA. In fact, if one were to factor in the fact that there are sometimes different versions of the same work in CMEPE, the ratio would even turn out to be higher.

35 In fact, one potential AP instance is (488) above, which contains the AP *fatally wounded*. However, this AP could be analyzed as an apposition rather than a subject complement and the marginal status of this example has already been commented on in fn. 51.

is that if the ME and PDE data are reliable (i.e. representative), a change in types, both in terms of possible types and the frequency of possible types, seems to have taken place.

6. A note on some ME competitors

As was pointed out at the very outset and is remarked in Brocciaes and Smith,36 simultaneity subordinators should not be studied on their own, without any reference to other competing options or strategies. At a minimum, in the case of simultaneity *as*, a look into the behaviour of its obvious competitors such as *while* and *when* is needed in order to gain a better understanding of the place of *as* within the ME simultaneity network. For this reason, the profile of the *when*-copular and *while*-copular constructions was also investigated. As before, in order to minimize the issue concerning variants of both *while* and *while*, only the patterns *when* he was, *while* he was, and *while* he was were taken into account.

The search *while* he was returned 139 hits, 87 of which may have a simultaneous interpretation. The search *while* he was returned 12 hits, five of which may have a simultaneous interpretation. Finally, the search *when* he was returned 597 hits, 168 of which may have a simultaneous interpretation.37 Representative examples of the subject predicates found with *while* and *when* are given, using modern spelling, in Tables 3 and 4, respectively. The semicolon (;) is used to separate phrases while the slash (/) is used to separate phrases that are complements of the same preposition. The rows contain phrases that are related semantically and this may also be true for adjacent rows.

36 Brocciaes / Smith, "Same time, ...", pp. 348-349.

37 It must be stressed that, often, the interpretation of *when* is more akin to 'after' than 'while'. This is not dissimilar from Modern English, Brocciaes and Smith, "Same time, ...", p. 365, point out that in Modern English *when* is used more often with the meaning of 'after' than that of 'while'. 
a child; a young man; young (and nice); old and feeble; deadly (on Earth)
on live; alive
absent (in other lands); present; accursed; exiled; needy; most busy in his game
about his own marriage beyond the sea
again him; toward Egypt
with Anna
here; there(in)
at Orleans / the mass; in Earth / England / prison
In charity / distress / hand / heal / malice / this rest / temporal power
In keeping / the way going / returning / fleeing
king; monk; ruler of ...; the kings steward of France; apprentice; an herd; heathen

Table 3. Subject predicates in the while-copular construction

Phrases specifying somebody’s age (e.g. an hundred year old and five)
in his tender age / his lusty age / ripe of age; of more age; younger; a child; a young child; old; an old man; among us alive / you an earthly man; on live
at death
tender; weary; sick; drunken; blind; hungried; worth; hottest in his ire; mad man; ready; proudest in his gear; not occupied; worth; whole; highest in his pride
out of her sight
at ease
blind; most in majesty
without tribulation
within; out of the door
alone; with me
on horseback / his horse
on foot; a foot
over
before Raynaud; four mile nigh the city; nigh Mountfluscon / the place; there; at home / London / Horton / the entry of the gate; about the water of Jordan; in the city of Liège / that pit / that country / England / Hebron / Sicily / the court / his bain / press of people / his place / his realm / the town / the sphink / this world / the water / that isle / the broad sea / the canon / prison (ground)

Table 4. Subject predicates in the when-copular construction

Table (3) shows that while, alongside PPs referring to locations and states, we also find NPs and APs referring to age as well as APs referring to properties. In other words, more types, in terms of both meaning and form, occur with while than with as. Similar observations can be made for when, which is often found in phrases specifying age, as well NPs indicating one’s function (emperor, duke, hermit, prisoner, etc.), as is shown in Table (4).

7. Conclusion

Overall, as in PDE, both while and when are more flexible than as in ME. Nevertheless, the as-copular construction appears to be more common in ME than in PDE and its ME profile looks different from that of its PDE counterpart. In ME, the as-copular construction is typically found with “prepositional progressives”, PPs containing processual nouns as well as PPs that describe physical locations. The former two subtypes are absent in the PDE data obtained here while the latter subtype is probably more common in ME than in PDE. APs that code states were also found in ME, but not in PDE, although no occurrences of NPs have been identified in either period. Also, the time as-copula sub-construction is relatively frequent in ME but is unlike-
ly in PDE (no instances were identified here). It thus seems that, from OE to ME, as developed into a temporal subordinator with relatively great scope but subsequently underwent changes in terms of contexts of usage. Still, ME as did not run the gamut of all possible structural scenarios like its Present-Day German cognate als. ME as shows a preference for PPs, which can plausibly be motivated on the basis of the typically ‘dynamic’ nature of as. As was sug-
gested in Figure (1), as does not simply evoke containment but also requires
reference to an "arrow of time" and thus combines preferably with phrases that have a processual or dynamic character. The ME "prepositional progressive" construction be in -ing is a case in point since it depicts unfolding states of affairs. It was also remarked above that even (some of) the PPs designating locations or states can be regarded as involving dynamism as a more or less salient part of their characterisation. Nevertheless, there are instances of the as-copular construction in ME where the "arrow of time" no longer features as an important component of its description. The obvious question is therefore why this process of expansion came to an end, unlike what happened with Germ. als, which at least in OHG had not yet acquired the general meaning of "when". Multiple factors may have played a role. Firstly, in ME, when and while were already well-established temporal subordinators within the simultaneity network and thus may have blocked the further development of as into a fully-fledged simultaneity subordinator. Secondly, in the time as-copular sub-construction, as has a "relative" flavour in the sense that the as-clause can, to some extent at least, be interpreted as a modifier of the temporal noun. However, 'relative' as itself has undergone a reduction in usage in the standard language and this may have weakened the time as-copular construction (in the sense that it eventually become less frequent) and, consequently, the as-construction in general. Thirdly, the decline of the "prepositional progressive" be in -ing construction cannot be discounted as another contributing factor. This pattern eventually came to be replaced by the progressive construction proper, thus effectively transforming copular be into an auxiliary. Although scholars such as Payne reject any difference between copular be and auxiliary be, it is obvious that two separate constructions, in the Construction Grammar sense of the word, must be recognised because they differ, at the very least, in form. One, the "copular" construction, is non-verbal in the sense that be does not combine with -ing verbs but with PPs, APs and (potentially) NPs. The other, the "auxiliary" construction, is verbal because it does combine with -ing verbs. This should suffice to distinguish between the two cases, whether or not one subscribes to the labels "copular" and "auxiliary". The suggestion advanced here is therefore that the decline of the in -ing type due to its replacement with a truly verbal -ing form may have weakened the as-copular construction in general and thus contributed to its lack of development into an all-purpose simultaneity subordinator.

To conclude, in this paper I have detailed the profile of the ME as-copular construction, which differs from that of its PDE analogue, and have put forward a few suggestions as to why as did not become a general temporal subordinator. Future research could (should) not only concentrate on gathering and analysing more data, but also embark on a comparative study of the development of both (the cognates of) as and, more generally, the simultaneity network in other Germanic languages.

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