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PERCEPTION AND THE CHOICE OF LANGUAGE IN ORAL NARRATIVE: 
THE CASE OF THE CO-TEMPORAL CONNECTIVES

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Everyone who speaks English knows what conjunctions like *when*, *while* and *as*
mean. Recent studies of the acquisition of conjunction have relied on this implicit
knowledge in investigating the ontogeny of these forms and the relations they mark[2].
This lack of rigor was in part due to the paucity of theoretical linguistic research on the
connectives. But even had there been wide-scale investigation into this area, we would
not have an accurate model of adult usage with which to compare early utterances.
Since theoretical linguistics generally assumes as its focus the study of artificially con-
structed, isolated sentences, it does not provide a suitable framework for the study of
language in use.

With English subordinate clauses, as with many other linguistic structures,
artificial data give a distorted picture of adult oral use. First of all, this kind of data
implicitly exemplifies the written rather than the spoken language[3]. Moreover, stu-
dies based on artificial data can give no information about the frequency[4] of a given
form, or about a speaker's preference for one form over another in a given referential
and discourse situation. These studies, then, cannot take into account the role of con-
text in this preference, particularly the context provided by the entire linguistic frame
of which a given sentence is a part. Thus, assumptions that, e.g., subordinate clauses
are freely positionable[5] within the sentence, or that co-temporality has a more or less
unified underlying semantics, have not been tested against the backdrop of the
speaker's consciousness at the time of utterance.

These kinds of assumptions are questionable, particularly with regard to oral nar-
rative. Bowditch (1976:61-2) has pointed out the importance of

investigating the belief systems of the participants in the narrative situation in order to
understand why the surface structure of the text is as it is ... An analysis which is sim-
ply syntactic or even "semantic" will never be able to explain the *choices* which speak-
ers make between seemingly indistinguishable alternatives and will necessarily consign
much real-world linguistic behavior to a garbage can marked "stylistics" and glossed
"random".

The data we are about to examine demonstrate that real-world linguistic behavior is far
from random, but is guided by situation-bound rules for choice.

The data for the present study come from adult narratives collected as comparison
data in a larger work on the development of conjunction in children's language (Silva
1981). Twenty-six adults[6], were asked to "tell a story" about three sets of story pic-
tures, series of interrelated illustrations which develop a common theme (see fig. 1).
The results were startling. Not only did the adults attribute the same content to the
pictures, but they also tended to use the same or similar language to describe this con-
tent. Moreover, they tended as a group to choose one connective over another in
describing particular relationships between events. These narratives provide clues to
the way perception structures language, particularly with respect to time.

The Story Pictures: Rationale

The story picture narrative task was chosen as an elicitation technique in order to
eliminate memory factors[7] and to provide the experimenter with exact knowledge of
the referential situation. The pictures (see fig. 1) portray common themes familiar to
children: a mother in a frenzy of cleaning prior to the arrival of company, children teas-
ing each other, and girls playing "dress-up".
Figure 1: The Story Pictures
More importantly, the sets of story pictures have differing temporal and spatial structures. The story for set I begins in daylight, ends at night and occurs in a single location. The story for set II lasts no longer than a conversational turn or two. For set III, the events occur over the course of a day, but the location shifts from place to place. Moreover, for I and III in particular, certain frames depict simultaneous relations. As we shall see, this temporal structuring has an important effect on the choice of temporal constructions found in the narratives.

Narratives resulting from the interpretation of story pictures better lend themselves to analysis than do naturally occurring narratives. Since each illustration indicates only the highlights of a potential story, subjects must themselves supply background information. Individual frames thus serve as the experimental equivalent to the the perceptual peaks of experience—those parts of any situation that emerge out of the stream of perception because of their cognitive or affective salience\[8].

Although the story picture narrative task is somewhat artificial in that the referential situation is visible to both story-teller and listener alike, the fact that children and adults often “read” story books together somewhat attenuates this potential drawback. In these book-sharing situations, the adult reads the text while the child looks at the vivid illustrations. Furthermore, the story picture task requires the subject to create a story about somewhat ambiguous circumstances; although the experimenter can see the pictures, she cannot have advance knowledge of the subjects’ interpretation of those pictures. The resulting narratives are thus fairly comparable to those occurring in real contexts.

In general, the adults followed order of presentation and expressed depicted material in main clauses, while often expressing interpolated material through subordination. This strategy should not be confused with backgrounding and foregrounding per se; although temporal clauses commonly background information, they may also be used to highlight it, as in the case of \textit{when}.

\textbf{When: the Postposed Cases}

Our first clue to how language reflects consciousness lies in the \textit{when} clauses that subjects produced. Although \textit{when} can occur with a variety of aspects\[9], the most common predicates occurring with \textit{when} in the adult narratives expressed punctual aspect in the subordinate clause (see table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASPECT</th>
<th>PREPOSED</th>
<th>POSTPOSED</th>
<th>TOTALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>punctual</td>
<td>19 (54.3%)</td>
<td>8 (22.9%)</td>
<td>27 (77.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stative</td>
<td>5 (14.3%)</td>
<td>1 (2.9%)</td>
<td>6 (17.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>durative</td>
<td>1 (2.9%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (2.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>habitual</td>
<td>1 (2.9%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (2.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td>26 (74.3%)</td>
<td>9 (25.7%)</td>
<td>35 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of these \textit{when} clauses are indeterminate as to whether they indicate co-temporality or sequence. In fact, \textit{when} seems to be indifferent to this distinction, highlighting instead the contingency of events, a function which leads to causal or adversative readings of \textit{when} clauses in certain cases\[10]..

More surprising, however, is the finding that there are certain constraints on the positional freedom of \textit{when} clauses. That is, although several speakers chose to use a \textit{when} clause to convey certain information, it was almost always the case that these clauses occupied the same position in their respective sentences. Thus we find nearly identical clauses in two or more narratives of the same set of pictures, but we do not find that in one instance the \textit{when} clause is postposed and in another, preposed. Instead, postposed and preposed clauses always relate different information. For
example, we never find the *when* clauses of (1) and (2) preposed:

(1a) One day, Johnny and Susie were playing in the living room with all their toys *when* their mother came and told them that she was having guests that evening and she didn’t want to clean up their mess (Ia&b).

(1b) A little girl and boy were playing in their family room *when* their mother came in and noticed the big mess all over the floor (Ia&b).

(2a) One day Freddie was playing in the mud and was getting very dirty *when* his two friends came along (IIa).

(2b) There was a boy playing in the mud having a great time making a mess of himself and not having anything to worry about *when* two of his friends came by who were dressed nicely and clean (IIa).

The *when* clauses in (1) and (2) mark a middle ground between "sequence" and "simultaneity"; that is, the action of the main clause is perceived to be ongoing before the action of the *when* clause, but it is not the case that the main clause action must cease immediately upon the onset of the *when* clause action. There were no preposed cases of this type of *when* clause. Let us see why this is so.

The relevant parameter is the structure of perception itself. In the four cases of (1) and (2) above, the clause order follows the perceived or presented order of events. This strategy is also evident in sentences produced by other subjects who used coordination, as in (3), or juxtaposition, as in (4), to maintain presented order, thereby achieving the same effect:

(3) In the morning, these two children were playing. They made a rather great mess, and their mother came in and said that she was gonna have a party later in the evening and she didn’t want the mess.

(4) Two children, a girl and a boy, are playing in a living room with toys scattered all over the floor. Their mother comes along and bawls ‘em out.

One subject apparently ignored the first frame altogether:

(5) Mom went out to go shopping, and she came home and the kids had made a mess in the living room and she was furious, so she told them to get out.

It is theoretically possible for the subject to have said something like "*After* Mom came home from shopping, she discovered that the kids had made a mess in the living room," but this general strategy never appeared in the data. *After* constructions were relatively rare and, with one exception, occurred only with participles or predicative nouns, not with fully specified clauses, an indication that the main function of *after* in narrative discourse is to restate old information in abbreviated form in order to relate it temporally to a second event. The full clause *after* strategy may be too difficult for spontaneous oral production due to the degree of preplanning it requires. Notice that in (5) the subject specified a context for Ia ("Mom went out to go shopping", an explanation for why the mother is nowhere to be found) and moves immediately to Ib, an illustration which demonstrates the "mess" just as accurately as does Ia. Thus this subject, like all the others, uses a perceptual basis for the choice of language and narrates the frames as they are presented.

In (1)-(2), the *when* clauses introduce the complicating action, logically following the main clauses. In each case, the *when* clause allows the subject to make a smooth transition to the next frame. A reversal of clause order would not permit this shift. In the narrative context, therefore, reversal of this kind of clause is disallowed.

Another dimension of perception is hidden behind these postponed *when* clauses. In each case the time lapse between the two frames which the subject connects is perceived as brief. That is, the subject describes an ongoing activity which is more or less
disrupted by the sudden appearance of other individuals who criticize the activity. As we shall see, the apprehension of this kind of circumstance was never expressed through preposed when clauses.

**Preposed When**

The narratives exhibit a preponderance of preposed over postposed when clauses (see table 1), and provide strong evidence that subjects tend to use preposed when clauses to introduce a new frame. For example, fourteen subjects (53.8%) responded to IIIc by using a when-clause-initial utterance of the form “when they got home,” as typified by (6):

(6) And so when they got home, they got their mother to get out some of her old clothes and they dressed up in them.

Only one subject chose to postpone this clause, with somewhat awkward, albeit not ungrammatical, results[11]:

(7) So, she opened the trunk in the attic when they got home and took out her false eyelashes and all her old jewelry and feathered hats and long dresses.

Four subjects used a when-clause-initial structure to describe Ib as in (8a-d):

(8a) When her mother came home from work she found the toys scattered all over the room.

(8b) And when their sister Julie came home she was just so upset because she had planned to have the living room nice.

(8c) When their mother came down, she really panicked because all these toys were covering her nice clean floor.

(8d) When the mother came home, she discovered the mess and became very angry and scolded the children.

The when clauses of (6) and (8a-d) are informationally similar, follow the perceived order of events and, like the postposed sentences of (1)-(2), cannot be moved to the alternate position without destroying narrative cohesion[12], primarily because they introduce the adult female who is the subject of the main clause. In all the utterances having a preposed when clause with a punctual predicate, the main clause also has a punctual predicate ([8b] is a possible exception; the subject, however, intends “got upset”).

These utterances indicate greater temporal distance between the events of frames (a) and (b) than do (1)-(2). For (8a-d), the preceding utterance was marked by sentence final intonation. Thus each of (8a-d) introduces a new “thought” distinct from the previous one in a way that (1)-(2) cannot. Subjects varied as to how they perceived the time lapse between (a) and (b). The subjects who produced (1) and (2), saw the events as closely related in time. Subjects who produced (8a-d) perceived a greater temporal distance. The when clauses of (1) and (2) tie frames (a) and (b) together; those of (8) keep them apart. Both kinds of sentences, however, maintain presented order.

In both types of sentences, the when clauses, having punctual predicates, create episodic shift. In postposed cases, they set the stage for the next frame. In preposed instances, they provide the context for interpreting the present frame, thus filling the episodic gap. This phenomenon holds only for strictly temporal uses of when clauses in the narrative context. When clauses having punctual aspect and causal readings may be freely positionable, but there are insufficient data to confirm or disconfirm this hypothesis. When clauses with stative or habitual aspect also seem freely positionable, for obvious reasons: a state holds throughout the main clause action; recurrence cannot create episodic shift.
In Merleau-Ponty’s (1963) sense of perception, we can say then that the preposing or postponing of a when clause depends in the last analysis upon the structure of perception (or consciousness) itself. Perception is not an isolable experience; if the focus is visual, it is never solely visual, but always set against the ground of experience. A speaker tends to maintain in narration the perceptual order of events for reasons which are interconnected and inseparable: his own visual processing organized against the ground of time and experience, and his implicit knowledge of the requirements of communication, set against the ground of his status as a member of a community. The linear presentation of events is a preferred mode for narration, not only because it is simpler for the speaker to produce, but also simpler for the hearer to comprehend. The clausal structures we have thus far examined demonstrate an advance over simple chaining in that they serve explicitly to highlight or background certain elements of the discourse.

The next clue to how perception structures narrative language lies in the hitherto unexplored distinction between while and as, the “simultaneous” connectives.

**While and As**

Another surprising finding with regard to temporal connectives involves the use of the “simultaneous” connectives while and as. Although the semantics of while have been examined in depth (Heinämäki 1974), no one to my knowledge has investigated the use of as as a temporal connective. Thus the high frequency of temporal as in the narratives was unexpected since as has not been addressed in linguistic research and is sometimes excluded in lists of English connectives[13].

At first glance, as seems to be synonymous with while. Not only does The Oxford English Dictionary define temporal as “while”[14], but some examples from the narratives indicate synonymy:

(9a) Well she ends up cleaning up the living room as the kids watch through the window outside (Ic).

(9b) She’s got a vacuum cleaner and is just tidying up very quickly while the little boy and girl are sort of watching her through the window (Ic).

(10a) and in a panic [the mother] takes out the vacuum cleaner, cleans up the toys and quickly cleans the room as the children look from outside (Ic).

(10b) So she vacuumed up the living room while the children looked in the window (Ic).

Since subjects freely varied between as and while to mark the simultaneous relation in Ic, we are initially at a loss to explain why this free variation does not hold for the simultaneous relation in frame IIIb. An analysis of the data yields three categories of responses to IIIb (see table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Responses to IIIb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TEMPORAL MARKING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on all the way home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nonspecific in aspect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quantifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>progressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>progressive &amp; quantifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>simultaneous relation unmarked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first category includes all the cases in which the subject chose a temporal clause marked by as. There were eleven responses (42.3%) in this category, as typified by (11):
(11) so as the mother and the two daughters walk home, the two daughters are constantly thinking of the two women in the picture.

The second category of response to the simultaneous relation illustrated in IIIb involved the use of the somewhat idiomatic adverbial phrase, on all the way home, as exemplified by (12a&b):

(12a) Well, on the way home that's ALL they could think about was .. how dressed up these two ladies were.

(12b) And all the way home, they kept on looking at each other and they knew they were both thinking about the same thing.

Of the eleven responses in this category, only three were nonspecific as to aspect (see table 2); the eight other responses marked continuity either through use of a quantifier, as in (12a&b) above, or used the progressive verb form. The third category of response excluded any reference to simultaneity whatsoever. Only four subjects fit into this category.

Why is it that subjects felt free to select either while or as for Ic, but never once selected while for IIIb? The answer lies in the differing perceptions of the two illustrations.

Looking at table 2, we find that 84.6% of the subjects chose to describe IIIb in temporal terms, with one-half of these subjects choosing the as clause construction, and the other half choosing the adverbial phrase construction. Of those subjects choosing the adverbial phrase, 72.7% marked the events of "going home" and "thinking" as not only contemporaneous, but also continuous or uninterrupted by using the progressive aspect, or a quantifier indicating duration, or both. Some of the subjects who used as clauses also used progressive aspect and quantifiers, as exemplified by the use of the word constantly and the progressive in (11) above. But in all cases in which subjects produce an as clause in response to IIIc, we find that they seem to cognize the events as strictly contemporaneous. That is, these subjects perceive that the activities share more or less the same interval and that the performance of one activity does not interfere with the performance of the other. The clauses have the same subject who carries out both processes in the same time period; one can think and walk at the same time. We are thus led to suspect that the perception of uninterrupted simultaneity leads to the choice of as to mark subordinate clause constructions.

It would be easy to assume that as clauses must share the subject with the main clause, but (9) and (10) indicate the opposite. To account for the free variation in (9) and (10), we must examine more closely the illustrations to which they are a response. We then find that although the mother's cleaning is contemporaneous with the children's peering, we are not certain that either event continues uninterruptedly during the same period. That is, "cleaning" and "peeking" can be cognized either as continuous or non-continuous. Cleaning may involve many discrete actions; one can peek, stop peeking, and peek again. If the subject conceives the events as strictly contemporaneous, she chooses as; if she conceives that one of the events may be interrupted while the other continues, she chooses while. Having different subjects in the main and subordinate clauses increases the chance of the latter possibility. One example demonstrates that it may be enough for one event to be absolutely uninterruptible:

(13) As that night arrived, the guests commented on how well-kept her house was (1d).

Nightfall, sunset and other natural processes are definitely beyond the bounds of human intervention. Notice that if we substitute while for as in (13), the result is unacceptable.
There is yet another category of clauses taking temporal as:

(14a) As they were walking home, two girls and their mother passed a poster showing two beautiful women in hat and costumes with make-up on (IIIa).

(14b) As a mother and her two little girls were passing down the street they happened to come upon a poster for a movie (IIIa).

(14c) One day as two little girls went shopping with their mom, they were walking by the movie house and they noticed an advertisement for a movie that was now showing (IIIa).

In (14a-c), the events are not strictly co-temporal in the same sense as (11). Yet, like (11), there were no cases of while appearing in the data in this instance[15]. As in (11), the main and subordinate clauses of all three cases of (14) have the same subject. But unlike (11), the verbs of the two clauses are also closely related. That is, the verbs share a semantic category. In (14), “passed” is accomplished through the “walking” of the as clause. Since walking as the means of locomotion has been established, passing entails walking. In (14b), the verbs operate in the same way: locomotion = walking, therefore, “happened to come upon” entails walking. The same holds true for (14c). In English, “go shopping” is an idiomatically verb implying locomotion of some sort. Here, the “walking” of the main clause implies that locomotion was necessarily on foot; once again, the verbs refer to the same physical activity, although in each case the activity of the main clause is a subset of the activity of the subordinate clause. Thus the predicates cannot interrupt each other; they are instances of the same ongoing activity. Since the predicates of the main clauses are punctual, we must assume non-interruptibility to be a more important criterion for the choice of as than is sharing an interval.

In all cases of subordination using while and as, the subordinate clause never refers to the central focus of the pictures. The main clause is reserved for this function instead. Thus, like when clauses, while and as clauses are never used to describe perceptual peaks.

A final remark about as is in order. That it is related to German als, there can be no doubt. They have the same Germanic root and more or less the same meaning. Lederer (1969) tells us that als can only occur with the past tenses or with the narrative present, which actually refers to the past. We may find that temporal as has the same restriction on use, and that it too is a narrative connective, possibly because two events have to be in the past before we can decide definitively about interruptedness. John Davis (personal communication) points out that there is an exception: a news correspondent holding a microphone and facing a TV camera says, “As I am speaking to you right now, a fire is raging across the street.” Of course in this instance, the correspondent knows that he is not going to stop speaking until the director cuts to another scene or to a commercial break. Needless to say, the newsworthy fire is not about to go out.

Summary and Conclusions

We have found evidence in the adult narratives that choice of clause position in the case of when and choice of connective in the case of simultaneous relations are by no means arbitrary, but are structured in part by perception. That is, there is a strong tendency for speakers to remain faithful to the presented order of events, regardless of the syntactic options open to them, in order to produce a cohesive passage interpretable by others. In the case of as and while, we find that speakers are unconsciously sensitive to the fine temporal details of events, although it is equally true that having devices in the language allowing such precision facilitates this discrimination.
Two levels of perception—the individual and the cultural—are involved, dynamically interwoven and inseparable. Thus in narrative sentences, clause order and choice of connective in certain instances are more restricted than they are in the case of isolated sentences. To those who argue that any of the when clauses we claim to be immobile can be moved given the appropriate context, we answer that changing the context changes the rules. The complexity of language is even greater than we had imagined.

In an article entitled “Grammar and Meaning”, Richard Ohmann contends that a drawing put before twenty-five individuals will elicit twenty-five idiosyncratic but equally adequate responses. It is true that the responses will not match each other word for word. It may also be true that a single drawing may lack sufficient contextual depth for a uniform interpretation across subjects. But if we take a set of pictures and place them before twenty-six individuals, as we have done in this study, we find that the interpretations are more than similar; clause order and choice of connective are identical among many of the subjects. This interpersonal similarity is fostered in part by the consciousness of the speakers, by the conventions of the language, by the cultural familiarity of the story theme, and by the level of description we choose as a basis for analysis. Language structure viewed against the ground of the referential situation and narrative strategies provides a window into perception itself, especially in the case of the perception of time.

NOTES

[1] This paper has profited from discussions with Dan Alford, Wally Chafe, Pat Clancy, John Davis, and Larry Morgan. I also thank Orin Gensler and Eve Sweetser, who commented on an earlier version of this paper. All errors are, needless to say, my own. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Christine Yamate who drew and helped design the story pictures used in this study.

[2] Bloom, Lahey, Hood, Lifter, and Fiess (1980:244), e.g., describe the temporal relation as a single category of early conjunction, defining it as “a dependency between events and/or states which involved temporal sequence or simultaneity.” Clancy, Jacobsen and Silva (1976) used a more refined temporal category, but their characterization of when is not rigorous, and they do not clearly distinguish between the various simultaneous relations which are marked by different connective particles.


[4] The lack of frequency data may have invalidated the findings of Bloom et al. (1980) and Clancy et al. (1976). Adult frequency counts of connectives from Wally Chafe’s peer stories and from the adult narratives reported in this paper reveal an order of descending frequency (when, as [temporal], after [rarely clausal], while, before, and until) matching the proposed order of acquisition which Bloom et al. and Clancy et al. posit for English (I am indebted to Pat Clancy for this observation). The cognitive complexity argument put forward by these investigators seems to be vitiated by the adult frequency findings. Although one may wish to argue that even among adults, low frequency may be due to cognitive complexity, acquisition data from Polish (Smocznyska) and Japanese (Clancy 1980) are not quite comparable to the data from the Western European languages and Turkish. It may be that cognitive complexity is not a matter of what the underlying semantics of a particular connective is, but how the use of a particular connective reflects cognitive organization, not on the sentence level, but in the interaction between sentences (cf. Halliday and Hasan, 1976). It may be impossible to
choose between cognitive complexity, frequency and appropriateness of use in any given language as the determinant of the observed order. We may also need to rethink our notions about translatability; e.g., the word translated from another language into English as after may have semantics similar to English on the lexical level, but may serve very different functions on the discourse level. It may be difficult, if not impossible, then, to determine a valid universal order of acquisition.

[5] An exception to this assumption is found in Sopher (1974), who contends on the basis of sentences occurring in English fiction that classifications of clauses by connectives are erroneous and that clauses fall into categories of movable and non-movable types, regardless of the connective.

[6] These subjects were students in psychology or linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley. All were native speakers of English, and none were told in advance the object of the study.

[7] This is essential, particularly with regard to children. Silva (1976) found that since children apparently lack organizational skills, their memory of complex events is often limited.

[8] Experience does in fact work this way. Take, e.g., the case of jokes. In each retelling, speakers change background details but retain those highpoints of the story that are crucial for making the punchline work.

[9] The aspectual constraints on the use of when have been examined in detail elsewhere (Heinämäki 1974). We are using a slightly different categorization of aspect in this study because it is more suitable to the observed data.

[10] For example: “And the little girls were just really pleased when they saw all the stuff to play with (causal reading, my data)”, or “And what could I possibly do then, but say that I was enjoying myself—when I wasn’t (adversative reading, Sopher 1974: from Charles Dickens).”

[11] The sentence would be better if the subject had intonationally marked the clause as an afterthought by pausing slightly after “home”, but she does not and the result is the oral equivalent of a run-on sentence.

[12] One could, of course, think of a context in which postposition of these clauses would be the unmarked case, perhaps in answer to a question or in some other non-narrative situation. Nevertheless, that finding does not vitiate the argument that preposition is preferred for this type of clause in narrative. The evidence indicates a need for an appeal to factors beyond the isolated sentence in order to account for the high degree of inter-speaker agreement.

[13] See, e.g., Jordan (1974) who gives a fairly comprehensive list of English conjunctions to aid in a practical purpose—technical writing. Absent from the list of simultaneous sentence subordinators is as, although the particle is included in its causal sense.

[14] The OED entry for temporal as is as follows: “at or during the time that; when, while; at any time that, whenever. Introducing a contemporaneous event or action.”

[15] A possible exception to this rule is the case of while + present participle. Although there were only two cases of this construction in the data, one of them directly breaks our “rule”: “One day while walking home from school with their mother, Sue and Jill walked by a theatre and saw a poster for a movie.” However, the -ing form may already signal continuity. Furthermore, *as + present participle is ungrammatical, so while may not have any contenders for its slot. There is of course the case of present participle constructions without an introductory connective, but on close examination, we find that many instances of these constructions cannot be replaced by a fully clausal construction introduced by a connective. An examination of these forms is beyond the scope of this paper, although they did abound in the data.
REFERENCES


Silva, M.N. (1976). I don’t know the rules; I just know how to play. Ms.
