

# A diachronic corpus-based analysis: The rise and fall of conjunctions for, as, and because

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## 1. Introduction

With the interest of the unique function of “for” as a casual coordinating conjunction and its survival in English as its usage has decreased dramatically, the study of the frequency of conjunctions “for, as, and because,” as well as “for” as a preposition has been conducted. Previous works examine conjunctions in terms of grammaticalization, pragmaticalization, and subjectification based on their historical semantic development. This study introduces the use of the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) to analyze how the conjunctions in question have risen or declined and proposes the possible causes by examining the sources of data collection in the corpus. Based on the frequency in a corpus, “for” as a coordinating conjunction and “as” as a subordinating conjunction have fallen in its usage while “for” as a preposition and “because” have been used more. “For” has gone through the process of reanalysis (Harris & Campbell. 1995, Hopper & Traugott. 2003) and pragmaticalization (Traugott. 1999, Traugott & Dasher. 2002, Detges & Waltereit 2009). The sources of the collection show that the first two conjunctions “for” and “as” are found mainly in fiction and academia, but “because” is found most often in a spoken language. “For” as a preposition is found in many sources, so it does not show any implications. This gives an explanation to why the conjunctions “for” and “as” have declined in their usage. It is because they are mostly used in fiction and academia which account for only a small proportion of a language usage in general when compared to a spoken language. The limitation of this study is the mis-annotations of a preposition “for” as a coordinating conjunction in the corpus.

### 1.1. Motivation and Research Questions

There is a not-to-overlook significance that makes “for” a very unique word in English. Apart from its usual function as a preposition linking noun and pronoun, little has known or familiarized that “for” is also a coordinating conjunction that links two main clauses. “For” is the only causal conjunction among all other six coordinating conjunctions: and, nor, but, or, yet, so. “For” as a causal coordinating conjunction has become less popular in everyday language use, leaving it only in literary works.

Due to the indispensable role of “for” as a causal coordinating conjunction, yet an obsolete attitude towards its usage, it is interesting to examine “for” in a corpus to answer to the following research questions:

- I. How does “for” as a causal coordinating conjunction reflect its decline in usage in a corpus?
- II. What are the contributions to the decline considering other words with similar meaning like “because” or “as”?
- III. What is the trend of “for” as a preposition in a corpus?

The hypothesis is that “for” as a coordinating conjunction would decline in its usage as reflected in the decrease of frequency in the corpus. On the other hand, “because” and “as” would be used more because they are more casual and easier to use (the ease of effort). In the discussion section, “for” as a coordinating conjunction will be compared with its twin subordinating conjunctions “because” and “as” in terms of the sources in the corpus to see if their sources agree with the trend of usage in the corpus and the hypotheses set.

## 1.2. Theoretical Background

In order to understand how “for” as a coordinating conjunction is crucial in building sentences, some background information about the types of conjunctions and sentences needs to be introduced.

### 1.2.1. Types of Conjunctions

**1.2.1.1. Subordinating conjunction** makes constituents that follow an dependent or subordinating clause. For example, “When the weather is good, we will go on a picnic.” In this case, *when the weather is good* is a subordinating clause.

**1.2.1.2. Coordinating conjunction** links 2 dependent or main clauses. For example, “I like ice-cream, but I do not like candy.” Both *I like ice-cream* and *I do not like candy* are a main clause. A book called Ultimate Grammar (2009) by Enconcept, a famous English language tutorial school in Thailand, categorizes “for” as a coordinating conjunction. There are 7 coordinating conjunctions in English. They are usually referred to as FANBOYS: For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So.

As the name suggests, a dependent or subordinating clause needs a dependent or main clause to form a complete sentence.

In the COHA corpus, however, “for” is annotated as a subordinating conjunction. Therefore, according to UCREL CLAWS7 Tagset (<https://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/claws7tags.html>), in order to form a regular expression to match “for” that links 2 main clauses, part of speech needs to be indicated as CS (subordinating conjunction), not CC (coordinating conjunction).

### 1.2.2. Types of Sentences

- 1.2.2.1. **Simple sentence** is a sentence with 1 independent or main clause.
- 1.2.2.2. **Compound sentence** is a sentence with 2 independent of main clauses.
- 1.2.2.3. **Complex sentence** is a sentence with 1 independent or main clause and 1 dependent or subordinating clause
- 1.2.2.4. **Compound-complex sentence** is a sentence with 2 independent of main clauses and at least 1 dependent or subordinating clause

### 1.2.3. The Significance of “for”

Although many people consider “for” as a causal conjunction old-fashioned or literary (Oxford Learners Dictionaries), “for” in this function is indispensable in forming a compound-complex sentence where an additional causal subordinating conjunction – like because, since, or as – is not allowed by grammatical rules. Take the following compound-complex sentence as an example.

(1) “Although it is a festive moment, I hate winter, for it is cold.”

In this sentence, the adversative subordinating conjunction “although” makes the constituents “...it is a festive moment” a subordinating clause followed by the main clause “I hate winter”. Both the subordinating clause and the main clause make a complex sentence. Therefore, the sentence “Although it is a festive moment, I hate winter, because it is cold.” is not grammatically correct. “...because it is cold.” is a dependent clause or subordinating clause which needs an independent clause or a main clause to form a complete sentence. It cannot take the main clause “I hate winter” because “I hate winter” is already binded with the first dependent clause “Although it is a festive moment,...”. The only word which can replace “because” while keeping the same meaning and satisfying grammatical rules is “for” because it is a coordinating conjunction. “I hate winter, for it is cold.” is, therefore, a compound

sentence because it consists of 2 main clauses. Putting together the 3 clauses, they make a compound-complex sentence.

Grammatical rules allow the formulation of compound-complex sentences with a maximum of 2 main clauses and 2 subordinating clauses, but they have to be in the order where a coordinating conjunction is in the middle. The possible structures are, therefore, as follow:

- Subordinating clause + main clause + (coordinating conjunction) + main clause + subordinating clause  
 (2) as in “*Although it is a festive moment, I hate winter, for it makes me cold when I am outside.*”
- Subordinating clause + main clause + (coordinating conjunction) + subordinating clause + main clause  
 (3) as in “*Although it is a festive moment, I hate winter, for when I am outside, it makes me cold.*”

This is why “for” as a coordinating conjunction plays a crucial role in sentence formulation.

### 1.3. Relevant Work

There has been little research in the past on the usage trend of conjunctions. Most works are conducted on the topic of a semantic change caused by grammaticalization, pragmaticalization, or subjectivity.

Erika Jasionyte-Mikučionienė (2019) examined Lithuanian conjunctions *kad* ‘that’ and *net* ‘until, even’ using a corpus and found out that they were later also used as a discourse marker. In her work, she also mentioned the development of the German conjunction *weil* ‘because’ (Keller. 1995), Dutch *dus* ‘so’ and other conjunctions analyzed in terms of subjectification.

The work of Erika Jasionyte-Mikučionienė (2019) refers to the extension of function of Lithuanian conjunctions *kad* ‘that’ and *net* ‘until, even’ as the process of grammaticalization (Brinton. 1996, 2008, Degand & Simon-Vandenberg. 2011) or pragmaticalization (Traugott. 1999, Traugott & Dasher. 2002, Detges & Waltereit 2009).

Rudi Keller (1995) compared two sentences in German and found out that language users prefer a simpler structure (2) to a complex one (1) even though the simpler one is not grammatically correct.

(1) *Er ist nach Hause gegangen, weil er Kopfweh hatte.*

(2) *Er ist nach Hause gegangen, weil er hatte Kopfweh.*

The researcher tried to explain the cause of such preference of language users by looking beyond “the decay of morals” and ending up with “subjectification, or, more precisely, epistemification.”

## **2. Data and Methods**

### **2.1. Oxford English Dictionary (OED)**

The meaning of “for” as a coordinating conjunction and a preposition is based on the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). The dictionary is available online <https://www.oed.com/>. The dictionary provides the definitive record of “for” from the past until recently.

According to OED, “for” as a conjunction has two meanings as follow:

- Introducing the cause of a fact, the statement of which precedes or follows: because.
- Introducing a new clause or series of clauses stating the ground or reason for something previously said: seeing that, since.

The first meaning was found in Old English until 1872, and now it was obsolete. The second meaning was found in Old English until 2012. Now, the second meaning is somewhat literary.

“For” as a preposition was used in Old English in the meaning similar to “before” and expanded to convey the sense of appropriateness, purpose, and the object to which a faculty or feeling is directed as we are familiar in the present time.

### **2.2. COHA Corpus**

Since the study aims to examine “for” as a coordinating conjunction through time, the database is collected from the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA), the 475-million-word corpus

which has the language data from 1820s to 2010s. The words in the COHA corpus are tagged with their part of speech.

### 2.3. Regular Expressions

To be able to better analyze the usage trend of “for” as a coordinating conjunction and explain the change through time, similar words are taken into account. Frequency of the words “as” as a subordinating conjunction, “for” as a preposition, and “because” are also collected from the COHA corpus.

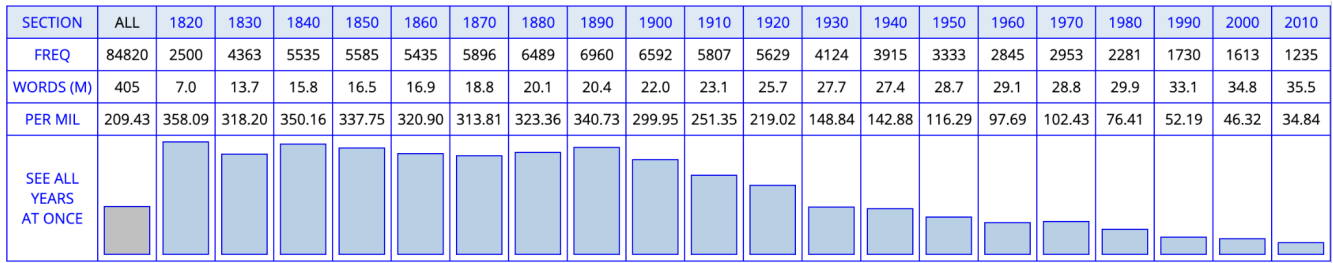
Based on part of speech tagging conventions UCREL CLAWS7 Tagset (<https://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/claws7tags.html>) utilized in the COHA corpus, the regular expressions used to extract and filter the data are as follow:

- **for.[CS\*]** is used to match “for” as a coordinating conjunction.
- **as.[CS\*]** is used to match “as” as a subordinating conjunction.
- **for.[IF\*]** is used to match “for” as a proposition.
- **because.[CS\*]** is used to match “because”.

### 3. Results

Choosing “Chart” above the search box with the regular expressions, the result of the frequency in each decade is illustrated in a table with bar charts. The bar charts represent a normalized frequency or a proportion of an occurrence per million words which is calculated by comparing the frequency of an occurrence with the size of a corpus in a particular decade that the frequency is counted.

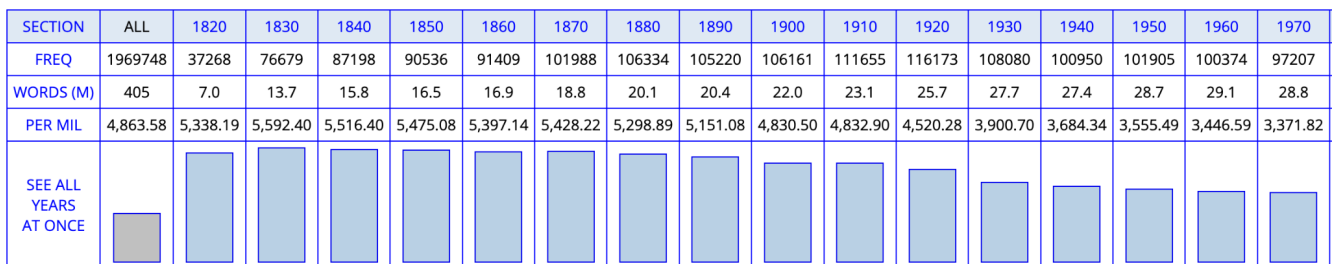
### 3.1. For (Coordinating Conjunction)

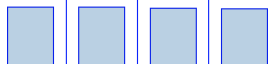


(Picture 1: “for” as a coordinating conjunction)

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “for” as a coordinating conjunction was found in the corpus at around 300-360 words per million before its usage began to fall significantly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From 1890 to 1990, it fell at 12% from 340.73 to 299.95 words per million. Then, in the following decades, it fell again to 251.35 words per million in 1910 and 219.02 words per million in 1920 which is a 17% and 13% decrease respectively. The year 1930 saw the largest decrease of 32% from 219.02 in 1920 to 148.84 words per million and became stable at 142.88 words per million in the following decade. Then, its usage fell and stuck to around 100 words per million between 1950 and 1970 before losing its hold and sinking to 76.41, 52.19, and 46.32 words per million in the following decades. “For” as a coordinating conjunction remained in the corpus at only 34.84 words per million in 2010. The total decrease from its peak in 1820 is 90.27%.

### 3.2. As (Subordinating Conjunction)

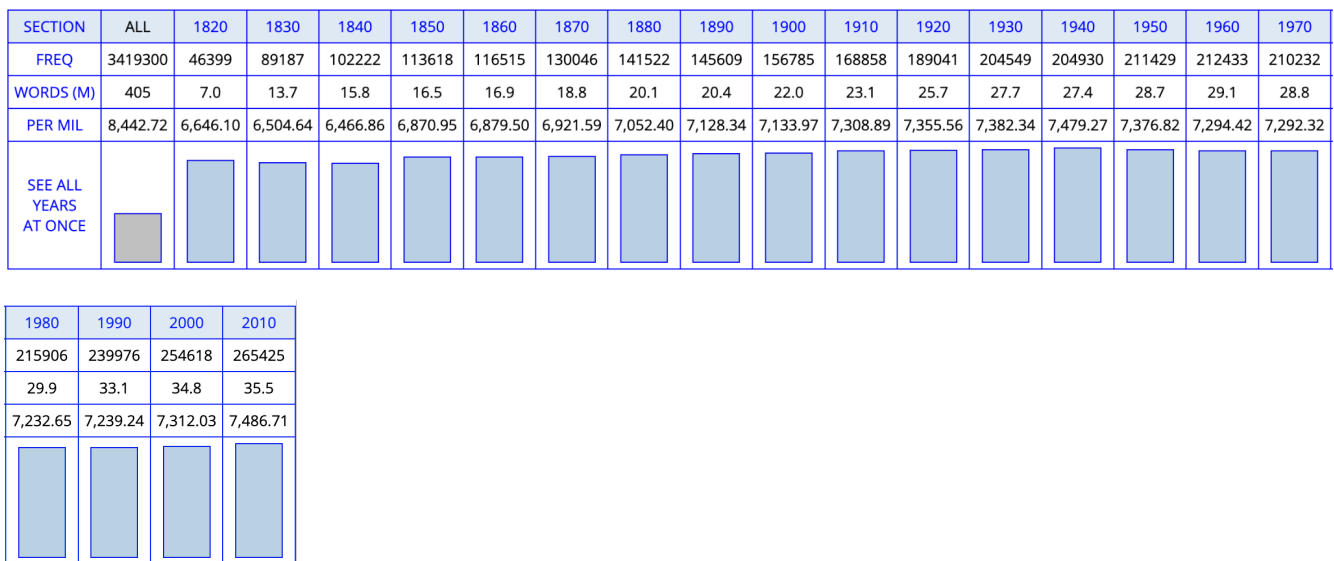


1980	1990	2000	2010
97721	108174	111805	112911
29.9	33.1	34.8	35.5
3,273.56	3,263.23	3,210.77	3,184.83
			

(Picture 2: “as” as a subordinating conjunction)

“As” as a subordinating conjunction was found in the corpus at around 5,400 words per million during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and began to gradually decrease in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the year 1900 and 1910, its frequency fell at 10% to around 4,830 words per million and another 6% to 4,520 words per million in 1920. The year 1930 saw the biggest decrease of 13% from 4,520 to 3,900 words per million. The usage continued to fall to around 3,200 words per million between 1940 and 2000 before ending up at only 3,184 words per million in 2010. The total fall of “as” as a subordinating conjunction is at 40.33%.


### 3.3. For (Preposition)



(Picture 3: “for” as a preposition)

“For” as a preposition has been used more frequently over the past two centuries. It started at 6,646 words per million in the corpus in 1820 and began to increase until it surpassed 7,000 in 1880. The use continued to rise steadily from 7,052 words per million in 1880 to 7,479 in 1940. Then, it started to fall little by little to 7,232 words per million in 1980 before rising to its peak at 7,486 words per million in 2010. Despite a slight fall between 1950 and 2020, the preposition “for” remained in use at a relatively high rate according to the corpus. The total increase of the preposition “for” is at 12.64%.

### 3.4. Because

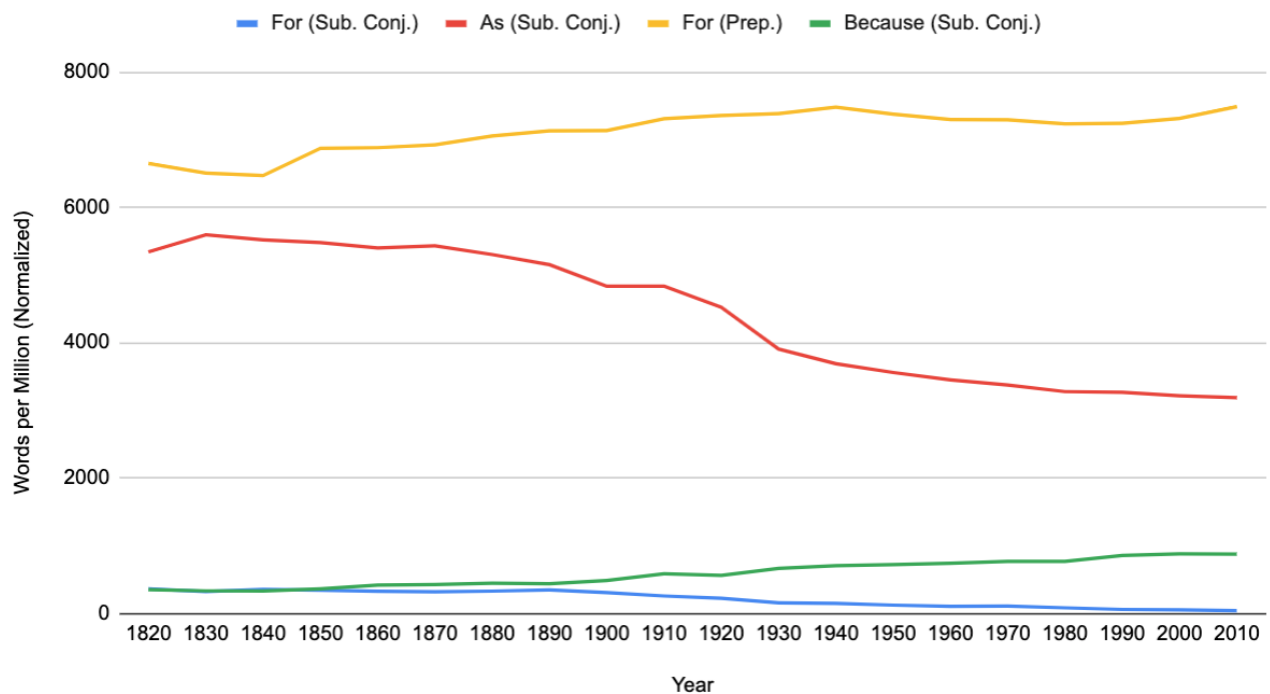
SECTION	ALL	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
FREQ	302475	2418	4487	5145	5908	7007	7880	8844	8824	10573	13363	14304	18247	19170	20474	21459	22024	22773	28212	30488	30875
WORDS (M)	405	7.0	13.7	15.8	16.5	16.9	18.8	20.1	20.4	22.0	23.1	25.7	27.7	27.4	28.7	29.1	28.8	29.9	33.1	34.8	35.5
PER MIL	746.85	346.35	327.25	325.49	357.28	413.72	419.41	440.72	431.98	481.09	578.41	556.57	658.55	699.64	714.34	736.85	763.95	762.87	851.06	875.54	870.88
SEE ALL YEARS AT ONCE																					

(Picture 4: “because”)

“Because” has seen a sharp increase in its frequency in the corpus. During the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was found in the corpus at only around 340 words per million, and it started to rise above 400 in the latter half. By 1910, “because” was found in the corpus at 578 words per million before continuing to increase to its peak at 875 words per million in 2000, and it started to fall slightly to 870 words per million in 2010. The total increase of “because” is 151.44%.

## 4. Summary and Discussion

### The rise and fall of subordinating conjunction






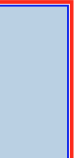















(Picture 5: The rise and fall of conjunctions)

In summary, from the picture 5, over the past two centuries, “for” as a coordinating conjunction and “as” as a subordinating conjunction saw a huge decrease of 90.27% and 40.33% respectively while “because” gained more popularity as its frequency rose 151.44%. “For” as a preposition has been used slightly more with an increase in frequency at 12.64%.

“For” as a coordinating conjunction and a preposition in this study can be put under the framework of pragmaticalization (Traugott. 1999, Traugott & Dasher. 2002, Detges & Waltereit 2009) or subjectivity (Keller. 1995) as their usage progresses in an opposite trend over time. Moreover, when looking at “for” as a coordinating conjunction and as a preposition, the trend suggests a possibility of reanalysis (Harris & Campbell. 1995, Hopper & Traugott. 2003) because “for” as a coordinating conjunction that was used more in the past declined in its frequency, but “for” as a preposition gained more usage.




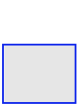


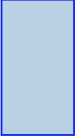


The results also show an interesting phenomena because “for” as a coordinating conjunction and “as” as a subordinating conjunction lost their popularity, but “because” became much more popular over the past 200 years. The assumption is that the first two conjunctions are used more in a formal or a literal sense while “because” is more common in spoken language. This assumption is confirmed with the same search (the same regular expressions) in the COCA corpus (Corpus of Contemporary American English) on the tab “Chart” since the COHA corpus does provide this demonstration.











SECTION	ALL	BLOG	WEB	TV/M	SPOK	FIC	MAG	NEWS	ACAD
FREQ	39452	5397	9224	4389	2702	7190	4017	2756	3777
WORDS (M)	993	128.6	124.3	128.1	126.1	118.3	126.1	121.7	119.8
PER MIL	39.73	41.96	74.24	34.27	21.42	60.77	31.86	22.64	31.53
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE									

SECTION	Acad	Arg	Fic	Info	Instr	Legal	News	Pers	Revw	Misc
FREQ	74	3486	3317	87	252	262	337	335	359	715
WORDS (M)	2.9	55.0	10.9	3.0	7.5	3.7	13.4	5.6	10.5	16.2
PER MIL	25.88	63.42	303.12	28.90	33.39	71.14	25.21	60.03	34.29	44.18
CLICK FOR CONTEXT										

(Picture 6 above and 7 below: The sources of “for” as a coordinating conjunction in the COCA corpus)










From the two pictures above, we can see that “for” as a coordinating conjunction is found most frequently in fiction from both physical books (picture 6) and online sources (picture 6 and 7).

SECTION	ALL	BLOG	WEB	TV/M	SPOK	FIC	MAG	NEWS	ACAD
FREQ	2946548	407694	437476	165622	311861	479837	386498	317615	439945
WORDS (M)	993	128.6	124.3	128.1	126.1	118.3	126.1	121.7	119.8
PER MIL	2,967.25	3,169.92	3,520.83	1,293.17	2,472.43	4,055.35	3,065.23	2,608.92	3,672.62
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE									

SECTION	Acad	Arg	Fic	Info	Instr	Legal	News	Pers	Revw	Misc
FREQ	9183	190434	50521	9521	21717	15396	38285	16608	36149	49665
WORDS (M)	2.9	55.0	10.9	3.0	7.5	3.7	13.4	5.6	10.5	16.2
PER MIL	3,212.16	3,464.30	4,616.88	3,163.01	2,877.83	4,180.20	2,863.91	2,976.16	3,452.64	3,068.87
CLICK FOR CONTEXT										






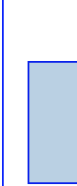
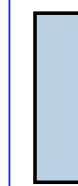

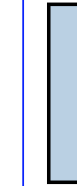
(Picture 8 above and 9 below: The sources of “as” as a subordinating conjunction in the COCA corpus)

From the picture 8, “as” as a subordinating conjunction is found in a similar context of fictions with an additional high usage in academic texts. On websites, “as” as a subordinating conjunction is also used most frequently in fictions (picture 9).

SECTION	ALL	BLOG	WEB	TV/M	SPOK	FIC	MAG	NEWS	ACAD
FREQ	1167046	191021	161339	139677	259657	92366	115701	107671	99614
WORDS (M)	993	128.6	124.3	128.1	126.1	118.3	126.1	121.7	119.8
PER MIL	1,175.25	1,485.24	1,298.46	1,090.59	2,058.55	780.63	917.60	884.42	831.57
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE									

(Picture 10: The sources of “because” in the COCA corpus)

On the other hand, as assumed, “because” is used more commonly in a spoken language (picture 10). That is the reason why the usage of “because” has increased significantly in the COHA corpus. It is worth examining further if a spoken language has been collected more among all the tokens in the corpus in each decade. It makes sense that with all the digital technologies and the communicative devices like smartphones and tablets which have become more popular recently, more spoken language would occupy more space in the corpus, and thus, a higher usage of “because”. In addition, the analysis would be more thorough if the sources of the word can be provided for each decade. This observation resonates with the language usage and the frequency as Joan Bybee (2006) emphasizes how an actual usage can feed into the creation of grammar. It is routinized and entrenched by repetition.

SECTION	ALL	BLOG	WEB	TV/M	SPOK	FIC	MAG	NEWS	ACAD
FREQ	8096097	1147997	1147641	832570	931134	738877	1090336	1119992	1087550
WORDS (M)	993	128.6	124.3	128.1	126.1	118.3	126.1	121.7	119.8
PER MIL	8,152.98	8,925.96	9,236.27	6,500.67	7,382.01	6,244.62	8,647.21	9,199.72	9,078.77
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE									

(Picture 11: The sources of a proposition “for” in the COCA corpus)

“For” as a preposition does not have any prominent sources of collection as it has been found across multiple sources, i.e. blogs, websites, magazines, news, and academic works (picture 11).

For future work, it would be interesting to examine the types of sentences, to compare compound-complex sentences and compound sentences where “for” is used as a coordinating conjunction, and to see the trend through time. As an extension of the current study, the framework of subjectification could be employed to analyze the preference of “for” as a causal conjunction over other conjunctions with similar meanings, such as because.

Last but not least, it is worth noting that when searching for “for” as a coordinating conjunction, there are numerous mis-annotations “for” as a preposition found in the result data (picture 12). However, despite many wrong annotations which increase the word hits in recent years, the occurrence of for as a coordinating conjunction “for” is still on a decline.

CLICK FOR MORE CONTEXT				HELP		SAVE	TRANSLATE	ANALYZE
84601	2010	NEWS	NYTimes	Q	to drive up prices. And if they have paid hundreds of thousands of dollars <b>for a work of art</b> the collectors ask, why should they necessarily be required			
84602	2010	NEWS	NYTimes	Q	adding that she would soon unveil the company's plans for the Gourmet brand and <b>for Bon Appetit</b> . # In the first quarter of the year, Bon Appetit's adve			
84603	2010	NEWS	Denver	Q	'm always amazed at how good they are, and sometimes you pay 50 cents <b>for</b> a draft beer. " # SHIP TO SHORE # Just say no: Some			
84604	2010	NEWS	Denver	Q	, Romero sets up a store for her students who earn " scholar dollars " <b>for</b> turning in homework and doing good deeds. # The store is packed with items			
84605	2010	NEWS	Houston	Q	since 1993: # July 31, 1994 # Traded RHP Tom Edens to Phillies <b>for</b> OF Milt Thompson. # July 27, 1996 # Traded C Rick Wilkins and			
84606	2010	NEWS	Houston	Q	sports fan's best friend. And, oh yeah, I'm a sucker <b>for</b> Cajun/Creole cuisine. # It doesn't hurt that Rouxpour serves two of my favorite			
84607	2010	NEWS	CSMonitor	Q	" There's an expression, when you ask a jobless guy who he works <b>for</b> he will say I work with my uncle. " # Last year, decisions			
84608	2010	NEWS	CSMonitor	Q	here of having connections to the Taliban and forced him to pay 700,000 Pakistani Rupees <b>for his freedom</b> . " That is about \$8,000, a huge sum for most			
84609	2011	NEWS	CSMonitor	Q	of federal power that could be checked neither by the states nor the people, <b>for</b> there was no Bill of Rights in the original Constitution. This fear was pal			
84610	2011	NEWS	CSMonitor	Q	for a candidate to accept private dollars would prevent financial quid pro quo: dollars <b>for political favors</b> . " Barton said in his brief. # Opponents dispute			
84611	2011	NEWS	USAToday	Q	an \$800-a-month duplex. # Then this year, after the car dealership he worked <b>for</b> went bankrupt and he lost his job, they had to leave that apartment a			
84612	2011	NEWS	USAToday	Q	Kentucky International, have joined the Thanks Again program, which awards fliers airline miles <b>for parking</b> , shopping or dining at the airports. More tha			
84613	2011	NEWS	USAToday	Q	high latitude away from city lights, clear, moonless skies, and a forecast <b>for lots of solar action</b> -- the northern lights " are totally unpredictable, " says			
84614	2011	NEWS	USAToday	Q	" Ingram says. # Some people simply loathe the holiday. A Facebook search <b>for</b> " I hate Christmas " turns up dozens of results, including pages and posts			
84615	2011	NEWS	Atlanta	Q	in Afghanistan and military spending slated for deep cuts, Georgia could see fewer dollars <b>for military contractors</b> , fewer soldiers stationed here and po			
84616	2012	NEWS	NYTimes	Q	another state prison. # " The only possible thing that you could use this <b>for</b> would be for government or military," said Fred Macchia, a commercial real-e			
84617	2012	NEWS	SanFranChron	Q	longest hole in U.S. Open history. It's also one of only two par-5s <b>for this year's tournament</b> with the other coming next at No. 17. # Davis			
84618	2012	NEWS	Denver	Q	perfectly and last a lifetime, the old adage that you get what you pay <b>for</b> can be true. Craig Taylor, an automotive designer who turned his attention to			
84619	2012	NEWS	Denver	Q	fare. # Travel tips: Cuba imposes a high tax on exchanging U.S. dollars <b>for the convertible peso (CUC)</b> . There is no tax on exchanging euros or			
84620	2012	NEWS	Denver	Q	peso (CUC). There is no tax on exchanging euros or Canadian dollars <b>for</b> CUC, or exchanging CUC back to U.S. dollars. (To avoid the surcharge			

(Picture 12: Mis-annotations of “for” as a preposition when looking for “for” as a coordinating conjunction)

## 5. References

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