



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in Linguistica
Classe LM-39

Tesi di Laurea

Introducing reason clauses: a linguistic inquiry on the use of different types of conjunctions in Italian

Relatore
Prof. Emanuela Sanfelici

Laureando
Allegra Brasili
n° matr.2004188 / LMLIN

Anno Accademico 2023 / 2024

Abstract

This paper analyses the behaviour of different types of causal conjunctions used in Italian to introduce causal adverbial subordinate clauses. Starting from a short presentation on the typological characteristics of adverbial and causal relations, the properties of three main causal conjunctions used in Italian, namely *perché*, *siccome* and *in quanto*, are explored, looking for plausible differences in the domains of morphosyntax and semantics as well. Whilst clear differences between *perché* and *siccome* are found, *in quanto* shows a borderline behaviour between the two, sharing similarities with both. Although classifying causal conjunctions in two main different blocks is tempting, we needed to assert the underlying complexity of a seemingly simple resolution. Even though some correlates in using different subordinators may prompt for a bipartization into two main groups with associated properties, the in-between position of *in quanto* suggests for caution. Our proposal is then to look more carefully at the three main conjunctions and the shapes of meaning that a clause may acquire shifting from one to the other. Finally, a different perspective is offered that rejects bipartization and categorical distinctions in favor of a continuum solution in which a difference in the positioning unfolds related differences in the clause, possibly suggesting that a bundle of morphosyntactic and semantic correlates is distributed along a continuum.

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References

*Ai miei insegnanti ed ai miei compagni
Conserverò sempre un ricordo prezioso dell'unità che costruimmo animati da
passione, curiosità e affetto*

*Alla mia famiglia,
che ha avuto pazienza e fiducia*

1. Introducing Subordination

Before zooming in on Italian causal subordinates, we need to briefly introduce subordination, both in its traditional conception and in its functional correlates, anchoring our discussion in the ground of linguistic typology. Our intention here is to clarify the domain in which we are moving and how we are going to proceed from that, especially for what concerns the examination of a popular grammatical phenomenon that often partakes in linguistic research but is rarely considered in its semantic substance. This is an essential prior step before embarking on the analysis of any adverbial construction.

First, the notion of subordination adopted in our research differ from the traditional one in that it investigates clausal relations considering the semantic and conceptual motive underlying the association between two clauses before everything else. Here we intend ‘traditional’ as the standard conception which relates subordinative phenomena to specific syntactic constructions and formal criteria of a morphosyntactic nature. These are mainly dependency and embedding. The former concerns the supposed impossibility for a clause to stand in isolation. This is the case of clauses introduced by conjunctions (*that, while, because ... etc.*) or morphosyntactically reduced clauses, that is to say clauses in which distinctive morphosyntactic elements (e.g. morphemes of tense, agreement, aspect, mood, etc.) has been cancelled obtaining a simplified verb, often in an infinitival form. As for the latter criterion, i.e., embedding, the syntactic structure of a clause is called upon. An embedded construction implies that two syntactic objects are in a relation of dominance, so that one of the two, which is considered the “dependent” or dominated element, is inserted into the other, the dominant or independent one. The embedding criterion is often considered the most reliable parameter to capture subordinative phenomena, given that it is based on the syntactic architecture which underlies a sentence, even though there’s no logical reason to argue that structural embedding should necessarily involve some semantic dependence as well.

In order to offer a comprehensive analysis, we needed to broaden the traditional panorama and think of subordination in terms of language functioning. We then found

Cristofaro's approach to the study of subordination (2003) fruitful for our purposes, as well as being a forward-looking proposal in the realm of functional typology. The arguments which call for a redefinition of subordination are mainly based on a crosslinguistic observation of the phenomenon; a number of significant differences are in fact found across world's languages in the constructions used to encode "subordinate" signification, which in many cases diverge from the morphosyntactic standards of grammatical subordination. For example, if we take embedding as a distinctive feature to distinguish between subordination and non-subordination in a given language, we should disregard all the intermediate strategies that languages may adopt to convey the same meaning. A variety of clause linkage subtypes has indeed been attested to generate complex sentences, including juxtaposition of full independent clauses, or of inflected (*verb serialization*) or non-inflected verb forms (*clause-chaining*). Consequently, the same semantic structure may be coded by a subordinative construction in a language and any different, unpredictable construction in another language, as it is often the case in translation. Also, a sentence containing a main clause and a subordinate may be translated using coordination. The work of translating between languages provides useful and unexpected insights into the issue of subordination, enabling scholars to discover how difficult (and questionable) is to point clear boundaries among linguistic constructions. Often, translation is hard, especially when two languages are very far from each other, and the only way to adapt the significance of one onto the linguistic structures of the other is to paraphrase. The cross-linguistic argument then asks for a deeper understanding, prompting more in-depth questions about the logical structure underlying such kind of sentential linkage.

Since subordination is a communicative phenomenon before a linguistic structure, it may also be interesting to wonder about the communicative intent leading a speaker to opt for a subordinative construction, that in turn requires to interrogate about the "cognitive structure" of an utterance. Any given sentence containing a main clause and a subordinate one in fact expresses a (non-conscious) choice on the part of the speaker to convey a complex meaning where two events are arranged in a certain way in his/her cognition. The term "cognitive structure" indeed refers to this conceptualization or imagery that a speaker has in mind about the relation between single events (or State of Affair, a term which will be preferred here). Such cognitive configuration is paired with

the most suitable linguistic form able to mirror speaker's cognition, which may be found in subordination if it is the case. It is easy to guess that, if the configuration changes, then the form of the utterance will change accordingly. With this in mind, we can think of the pairing between form and function as the attempt to realize something of an intrinsic nature, dependent on the speaker's cognition, semantic conceptualization, and pragmatic intention into something of extrinsic, that is linguistic material. The need for a functional theory of subordination, considering the how(s) and why(s) of pragmatic significance, more than a morphosyntactic formalization, is therefore evident.

A 'functional' notion must prioritize the semantic and pragmatic significance of a clause over its syntactic correlates, which are to be considered as a 'consequence' instead of the 'cause' allowing this significance to be expressed. Some proposals have been made in typological research that tries to push the boundaries of traditional definitions, but most of them still fail in setting cross-linguistically strong parameters, arguing for intermediate solutions (consider for example the notion of *cosubordination*¹ by Foley and Van Valin's 1984) or drawing up a list of subordinate-like features to classify clauses as more subordinate-like or coordinative-like. However, such proposals again depend, at least partially, on morphosyntactic structure and are not applicable cross-linguistically, apart from the fact that, as we noted, formal features prevent us from investigating the sheer semantic nature of a subordinate clause and do not provide any explanation of the phenomenon. On her work, Cristofaro (2003) suggests approaching subordination not as a bunch of features, but rather as the conceptual manifestation of the relation intended by the speaker between two 'State of Affairs' (SoAs), a term she uses to refer to what is normally called 'event' in linguistics. Interestingly, she locates the specificity of a subordinative linkage on the asymmetrical status of two SoAs, such that one of the two is functional to the (pragmatic) assertion of the other and is uttered

¹ According to Foley and Van Valin's (1984) clausal linkage can be seen as a continuum divided in three parts: each extreme containing coordination and subordination respectively, and in the middle cosubordination is found, working as a mediator between the two. However, such proposal is functionally weak, since it still equates clausal linkage strategies with formal criteria. In their view, subordination implies embedding and dependency, conversely, coordination implies neither embedding nor dependency; in turn, cosubordination would imply grammatical dependency but not structural embedding. Cosubordination is in fact used to account for most of the nonstandard constructions that do not conform formal definitions of subordinative or coordinative. It is quite clear that Foley and Van Valin's construe their idea on the premise of traditional grammar, so that the continuum is actually a strict tripartition. However, the idea of cosubordination is innovative in that it highlights in-between solutions, calling for a renewal of the conception of formal linkage.

to serve its communicative purposes, and more precisely its illocution. As we know from pragmatics, an utterance is considered a speech act insofar it is not limited to a linguistically meaningful expression but implies an intention on the part of the utterer to perform some kind of action. Given its assertive primacy, the asserted SoA stands as the speech act performed by the speaker whilst the non-asserted SoA is uttered for the sake of the speech act itself. The latter indeed conveys additional content that, despite functioning as the relevant information for the completeness of the other SoA, still lacks the illocutionary force making of a sentence a speech act. The non-asserted content therefore figures a situation of conceptual dependency which prevents its sentential autonomy, so that a sentential anchoring, found in the asserted SoA, is needed. Note that neither of the two parts of a sentence (the main clause and the subordinate one, in traditional terms) feature some autonomy a priori, since normally the semantics underlying a non-asserted SoA might be also conceptualized in an assertive way: dependency and the asymmetrical configuration involved in subordination thus mirror the cognitive interpretation of one particular situation on the part of the speaker, and consequently his/her subjective conceptualization, or the 'cognitive structure' that results from it. Such an approach to subordination, referred to as the 'Asymmetry Assumption', then identifies in non-assertiveness and lack of illocutionary force the hallmarks enabling to distinguish subordinate SoAs from non-subordinate ones, since the dependency of a non-asserted SoA is inherent in its conception and precedes any formalization into verbal content. The criterion which should guide the identification of subordinate constructions both cross-linguistically and inter-linguistically, is then an asymmetry with respect to the assertiveness of the content of a sentence. That means that one should be sufficiently detached from the traditional consideration of the phenomenon to be able to look at sentences with a primary focus on their semantics and conceptual structure, which may not be as easy as it seems, given that when studying linguistic object(s) we are normally first fronted with some morphosyntactic structure. If a sentence appears to contain a gap between its parts, and we can isolate a 'dependent' from an 'independent' content, regardless of the syntactic constructions in which it may have been codified, then a subordinate relation exists. If instead we recognize a sub-division of parts included in a sentence, but those are both found in an

assertive configuration with respect to how they are conceptually manifested, then a non-subordinate relation (coordinative) is linking the two.

Interestingly, Cristofaro suggests some easily-applicable tests to identify the assertiveness status of a clause. By the use of sentential negation or sentential questioning, assertiveness test challenges the content of a clause; since only the assertive content of a sentence may be challenged, assertiveness tests allow to discriminate asserted clauses from non-asserted ones, and consequently to identify subordinative constructions. Consider the following sentences.

- 1) Studying hard I passed the exam
- 2) [[It is not the case that [studying hard I passed the exam]]
- 3) [[Is it the case that [studying hard I passed the exam]?]
- 4) [Studying hard I passed the exam] [isn't it?]

In the examples above we see three different types of assertiveness tests applied to a sentence which presumably contains an assertion and a non-asserted clause. We maintain the order of the original sentence in 1 to preserve testing accuracy and just added a negation (2) or a question (3,4). The examples clearly show that “I passed the exam” is the assertion in 1.1, while “studying hard” lacks the same illocutionary force thus being non-asserted; the phrases used to test assertiveness in fact challenges the illocutionary force of the speech act in 1.1, which affects the state of having passed the exam but not that of having studied hard, again revealing that “I passed the exam” is the asserted, main clause while “studying hard” is the non-asserted subordinate clause.

Assertiveness tests are quite intuitive when applied to languages we know or linguistic structures we are familiar with, but may be very helpful in cross-linguistic research, where disambiguating pragmatic assertion from accessory information is a hard task.

To sum up, as we have seen, subordination implies a specific relation between two State of Affairs, in which one is asserted or “denoted” in the main clause and the other works as some sort of “connotation” condensed into a related subordinate clause. Once discussed the general state of the phenomenon, we now focus more precisely onto the origin of this relation, which may reveal different conceptual configurations between SoAs and, consequently, different ways in which a dependent SoA could be linked to its

anchor. We may also discover that the relation of conceptual dependency can be more finely elaborated than what surfaces in the Asymmetrical proposal.

Traditional grammar often distinguishes between three types of subordination: a subordinate may work as a complement, an adverbial phrase or a relative one. We accept this tripartition and found it accurate enough for our purposes. However, since we reject *a priori* categorization, to capture the difference between the three we must turn back to the logical status of a subordinative construction and try to rethink this categorial tripartition in terms of necessity and sufficiency conditions. In a complex sentence, the coding of the dependent SoA may realize as a complementary, relative or adverbial element.

5) [[I think [you should ask for help]]

In the first case, exemplified in 5, the subordinate *you should ask for help* saturates the predicative value of the main verb *I think*, working as its syntactic complement. Then, it figures both like a necessary and a sufficient condition to ascertain the validity of the main clause.

6) [[I called Gianni [because I needed help for my thesis]]

In the adverbial case, the dependent clause stands as a sufficient but not as a necessary condition. That is to say, the relation between the main clause and the dependent one seems to be more complex with respect to that of a simple circumstantial type. In 6) the significance encoded on the adverbial clause *because I needed help for my thesis* is not necessary to understand the (literal) meaning of the main clause *I called Gianni*, but the interpretation of the latter, likewise, cannot be considered complete if taken in isolation, since the intention of the utterer is to convey a more complex meaning, which can be considered linguistically realized only in the cooccurrence of the main clause with the adverbial one.

- 7) [[The researcher [who has worked in Padua for many years]] won the Nobel Prize]

Finally, the relative clause is not necessary nor sufficient; the subordinate *who has worked in Padua for many years* really works as a circumstantial element applied onto a noun, that is not required for the interpretation of the nominal phrase in which it is inserted. In this case, it is the nominal phrase *The researcher* to acquire the status of “necessary and sufficient condition” with respect to the interpretation of the relative clause. As we can see, differently from the complementary and adverbial linkage, in the relative case both necessity and sufficiency are satisfied into the clause itself, thus the “accessory” status of a subordinate of the relative type is clear.

It is worth noticing how the three different categories construe a hierarchical scale of logical dependency, from the highest level of dependence between the main clause and its complement in the complementary type to the lowest in the relative type, passing through the adverbial type, which describes a relation of *interdependence* between the two clauses. If it is true that the main clause maintains the assertive value whilst the adverbial lacks the same illocutionary force, it is also true that the former is asserted in light of the latter; therefore, interdependence can be depicted as both clauses serving each other for the correct interpretation of the sentence as a whole.

2. The Adverbial Subordinative Clause

As a second step, prior to the analysis of causative relations and Italian causal conjunctions, we now focus on the introduction of the Adverbial type of subordinate, which, accordingly to what stated above, figures a relation of interdependence with the main clause and is therefore here considered as the most suitable example to focus on the semantics of subordination. As we can see, the situation is much more complex with respect to traditional categorization, that labels all the three types of subordinate linkages (complementary, adverbial and relative) as dependent on the main clause. The adverbial clause does not function simply as an adverb, but instead represent the other half of the puzzle of signification encoded in a complex sentence. The adverbial interdependence is grounded on the semantics of the sentence and, in turn, on the way in

which the speaker has cognitively elaborated a relation between two SoAs, prior to uttering the sentence. In what follows, we shortly describe different kind of relations that may prefigure an adverbial linkage, following the proposals made by Givón (1990: 827-37), Kortmann (1997), and Thompson and Longacre (1985).

- i. The Purpose relation
- ii. The Temporal relation(s)
- iii. Reality condition
- iv. The Reason relation

2.1 The Purpose relation

When two SoAs linked by a relation of purpose, the main one is performed with the goal of obtaining the realization of the other one. The shape of meaning that results is similar to what a desiderative predicate conveys, in that it implies an element of will on the part of the utterer toward a certain state of affair. In this case, it is the dependent clause which contains the most important piece of information, corresponding to the result hoped for by the speaker. The purpose adverbials may be considered as the most explicit example of the relation of interdependence that exists in subordination in that the (asserted) content of the main clause may be intended as the preliminary performed with the intention of obtaining the (non-asserted) content of the subordinate. In Purpose relations, two elements should be considered separately: the first is the sharing, or non-sharing, of the same entity in both clauses. That is to say, the performer of the main clause may equal the performer of the purpose adverbial or not. The second is the control on the part of the performer of the main clause onto the realization of the dependent clause. The two are evidently related to each other; if the performer is shared between main and dependent clauses, the realization of purpose has a high degree of success, in that it should be, at least partially, under the direct control of the performer himself. If, on the contrary, the main clause and the subordinate one do not share the same participants, the degree of success for the purpose is lower. However, even in those non-sharing cases, purpose relation always implies that the main performer still has some control on the realization of purpose, in that the intention expressed on the main clause is performed for the sake of obtaining the result expressed in the subordinate. Consider the following examples:

8) I'm going to her in order to apologise

9) I'm going to her in order to be forgiven

In 8 the performer in the main clause equals the performer of the subordinate, in that the act of *going to her* and the act of *apologise* are both performed by a single entity. In 9 the performers are not shared, in that the act of *going to her* is performed by an entity (in the example, the utterer himself), but the act of *be forgiven* implies another entity that should perform the act of forgiving in order to obtain success with respect to the purpose. Note that in 9 the utterance may be completed adding *by her*, which is avoided for redundancy reasons. Note also that these examples are playing with the semantics of the two predicates, but there may be found other examples in which the non-sharing of participants does not follow immediately by the predicate.

Nonetheless, in 9 the main performer has a certain degree of control with respect to the realization of the purpose; first, according to how the two SoAs are arranged, the act of *going to her* is intended as a prerequisite for the act of *be forgiven* to be realized.

Secondly, the utterance itself contemplates the possibility that something occurs, thus even though the main performer can not decide over the realization or non-realization of the purpose, he can influencing the course of action in order to obtain it.

2.2 The Temporal relation(s)

Following the classificational proposals mentioned above, three different kinds of temporal relations should be considered (and classified) separately. These are relations of temporal posteriority (or 'before' relations), temporal anteriority (or 'after relations) and temporal overlap (or 'when' relations). Temporal adverbials works as temporal reference points for the main clause to which they are anchored, thus in this case interdependence also lies on the time sequence which is construed by the arrangement of the two SoAs.

2.2.1 Temporal posteriority ('before' relations)

10) [[I have been hired [before graduating]]

When a temporal posteriority relation links two SoAs, the dependent one (usually introduced by *before-type* conjunction, depending on the language) is expected to occur after the main one, thus following it in the temporal sequence. Given the temporal status of the adverbial, in temporal posteriority relations we can not be sure about its occurrence in the next future, but we normally assume that it will occur.

2.2.2 Temporal anteriority ('after' relations)

11) [[I have been graduated [after being hired]]

When a temporal anteriority relation links two SoAs, the dependent one (in turn usually introduced by *after-type* conjunction) occurs before the main one, preceding its accomplishment in the temporal line.

2.2.3 Temporal overlap ('when' relations)

12) [[When I graduated [they offered me a work]]

When a temporal overlap relation links two SoAs, the dependent one and the main one are intended as occurring simultaneously in the abstract temporal line. Note that simultaneity has not to be taken literally; by contrast, in most of the cases the two SoAs are separated in time. Time latency may range from few minutes to days or years but the exact amount of time separating the two does not really count, as the point is to establish a temporal parallelism between the two SoAs.

2.3 Reality condition

13) [[If I finish the homework for tomorrow [I will come to the cinema]]

Reality condition pertains to the domain of logical *condition relations*, for which the occurrence of an SoA (also called *antecedent*) represents the condition for the other to occur. In reality condition, the dependent SoA is expressed as a possibility, and the main SoA is the necessary consequence which follows from its occurrence, that is to say when the possibility becomes factuality.

2.4 The Reason Relation

We finally turn on the adverbial type which is the object of our investigation here, namely the causal adverbial subordinate. In Reason relations, the two SoAs are arranged in a cause-effect relationship, such that the dependent SoAs represents the ‘cause’ or the reason for the occurrence of the main one, which in turn figures the status of ‘effect’. As noted by Cristofaro (2013), causal adverbials share semantic features with other adverbial types, such as temporal and purpose relations, which is also confirmed by the diachronical development of certain conjunctions as the Greek *hōs*, originally used to code purpose and overlap relations and then extended to coding of the causative meaning, or the Italian *perché* which follows from the evolution of the morphological form *per che*, introducing the purpose of something asserted before. These easy-shift phenomena should not surprise, given that the semantics of reason, purpose and timing does not lie on watertight compartments but is in fact quite blurred, with features overlapping among the three. This may explain why it is often the case that morphological forms used to code one relation may cover the other as well, making of the extralinguistic context a distinctive criterion to distinguish a certain relation. Within causality relation, we can distinguish some different shapes of meaning that can be encoded into the same structural realization, which in turn reveal different “reason why(s)” between the so-called dependent and independent propositions. The three have been identified and described as the Event-causality, the Epistemic-causality and the SpeechAct-causality (Sweetser 1990; for Italian exclusively see: Frenguelli 2002; Dardano 2020). We provide an example of all.

14) La bimba piange, perché è caduta

15) La bimba deve essersi fatta male, perché piange

16) Porto la bimba dal dottore, perché non smette di piangere

Sentence 14 provides an example of Event-causality. The focus is on the reconstruction of the chain of events which causes one fact of the world, usually asserted in the main clause (in the example, *La bimba piange*). Event-causality is therefore ‘cognitively’ based on the attempt to convey a certain content as something that is factually true.

The second kind of causality which is proposed is the Epistemic one, here exemplified in sentence 15. As we can see from the example, the causative meaning is built on a construction which firstly asserts a fact of the world and then provide the cause or the reason why the ‘asserter’ considers his assertion to be true, as a matter of fact. Note that the adjective “epistemic” itself concerns the conditions that lead to the acquisition of some knowledge, as is intended on the causal adverbial in this case.

Finally, sentence 16 has to do with Speech-Act causality. In this kind of causal relation, the speaker’s intention is to convey the motivation for a certain speech act, found in the asserted or main clause, to be performed. In 16 the *Commissive* speech act «*Porto la bimba dal dottore*» engages the speaker in performing some kind of action in the next future, while the causative «*perché non smette di piangere*» immediately provides the reason which has taken him/her to commit to that particular (speech) action.

The cases just described may not exhaust the semantics of all possible causal adverbials, but are a very clear and useful theorization of at least the most common and more plausible examples of how a causative meaning can be differently depicted in the speakers’ mind, according to its cognitive structure depending on individual interpretation and communicative intention(s).

3) Three Causal Subordinators in Italian

We now turn on the analysis of three causal subordinators which may be representatives of different semantic and structural arrangement of a clause. In this work we hypothesize that each of the three takes its specific set of linguistic properties, having to do with different grammatical components, and that the choice of one instead of the other may reveal distinct causative configurations, so that a continuum-sort shape of meaning could be assumed. In the continuum solution we propose a certain positioning (i.e. a certain shade of causative meaning, in turn depending on the speaker's cognitive reading) calls for a set of grammatical properties "sitting on" one ideal point of the continuum and lexically realized or represented by one particular subordinator. Note that moving along a continuum solution implies that there's could not be a 1:1 relation between structural and morphological choices on one side and the semantic content of a causal clause on the other, as the tripartition among causal significations presented above also claimed, so that it would be more helpful for our purpose to speak about different semantic features spread on the continuum and major morphological set(s) matching multiple semantic associations. Therefore, instead of 'points' we can think about 'zones' of signification, with soft and blurred boundaries.

The three causal conjunctions that we will take into consideration in our investigation on the Italian causal adverbial subordinate clause are *Perché*, *Siccome* and *In quanto*. We will set some (5) parameters of comparison to grasp if, how and when clauses introduced by different conjunctions differ among each other.

3.1 The gap between "Perché" and "Siccome"

According to previous research, for which our analysis represents a continuation presenting an insight on the Italian conjunction “*in quanto*”, some differences exist between causal clauses introduced by “*perché*” and those introduced by “*siccome*” (Sanfelici, Rodeghiero 2022). Testing clause meaning shifts by five parameters of observations (the same that will be employed here to test “*in quanto*” clauses) they assume that the differences they detected between the two groups of adverbials derive from different properties specific to each of the two lexical subordinators, hence a difference in the kind of causal relation encoded in the clause exists. This discrepancy would result structurally in the merging of adverbial(s) at different heights in the superordinate clause, an idea which is not so far from our proposal here. If multiple syntactic positions for causal adverbials are supposed, depending on the semantic nature of causality relations and on distinct properties associated (to a certain degree, also specific) to different lexical subordinators, then a continuum solution as the one we presented above, is at least conceivable.

Before embarking on the analysis of “*in quanto*”, which is the focus of our investigation, we illustrate the differences identified between “*perché*” and “*siccome*” according to five parameters of comparison, namely: (1) position with respect to the host clause, (2) focalization/fragment answers, (3) variable binding, (4) scope of negative operators, (5) principle C.

(1) Position with respect to the host clause

17) Non sono venuto a scuola *perché* ero malato

18) Non sono venuto a scuola *siccome* ero malato

19) *Siccome* ero malato, non sono venuto a scuola

20) **Perché* ero malato, non sono venuto a scuola

In 17 and 18 we see an example of a very common solution adopted by speakers to arrange a sentence providing the cause of some fact, asserted in the main clause. Note that both *perché* and *siccome* are equally admitted when the adverbial follows the main

clause, even though in this “double-choice” configuration some tendency to prefer *perché* in everyday language might exist and deserves further investigation. Instead, the gap is evident when the adverbial structurally precedes the main clause, as the examples in 19 and 20 show. In those cases, *perché* is rejected while *siccome* is undoubtedly admitted.

(2) Focalization and fragment answers

21) *Perché* alzi la voce?

22) *Perché* sono arrabbiato

23) **Siccome* sono arrabbiato

Fragment answers as in 22) only admit *perché* as introductory subordinator.

24) **Siccome/poiché/giacché* alzi la voce?

25) Dimmi *perché* alzi la voce

26) Dimmi **siccome/poiché/giacché* alzi la voce

It is worth mentioning that *perché* stands out amongst Italian causal conjunctions, since it also features as the wh-element typically used in interrogative clauses to ask for the cause of some fact, both in the case of direct interrogative clauses (22) and indirect interrogative clauses (25). The agrammaticality of their counterparts, introduced by other causal conjunctions, is strongly evident in direct interrogatives (24) and indirect as well (26). Given the fact that interrogative clauses have different semantic and grammatical features compared to causal adverbials, what just presented may seem obvious; however, the specialty of *perché* as a lexical element able to cover multiple roles is instead noteworthy and should be considered also when studying causal subordination.

In sum, within the domain of causal adverbials and causal conjunctions *perché* suggests for a certain uniqueness, sharing a set of properties which diverge enough to grant it a distinctive place in the realm of causality. Such distinctiveness in part supports the thesis advanced by Sanfelici, Rodeghiero and Garzonio (2023) about different positions for different causal adverbial clauses, especially with respect to the gap between *perché* and *siccome*, the latter behaving as other subordinators as *poiché* and *giacché* exemplified above.

As for focalization, only *perché* clause(s) can be focalized, which is consistent with what stated above since wh-clauses occupy the syntactic position of focalized elements (i.e. FocusP).

27) *PERCHÉ* non hai studiato, ti hanno bocciato (non perché gli fossi antipatico)

28) **SICCOME/POICHÉ/GIACCHÉ* non hai studiato, ti hanno bocciato (non siccome/poiché/giacché gli fossi antipatico)

29) È *perché* non hai studiato che ti hanno bocciato

30) È **siccome/poiché/giacché* non hai studiato che ti hanno bocciato

31) Ti hanno bocciato solo *perché* non hai studiato

32) Ti hanno bocciato solo **siccome/poiché/giacché* non hai studiato

The examples 27-32 show some syntactic and semantic strategies to focalize constituents. We see that *perché* is the only causal conjunction that can be focalized (27), moving the reason clause to the left periphery of the sentence, clefted (29) or preceded by focus particle(s) as *solo* (31). Attempted solutions with *siccome* (and similar *poiché* or *giacché*) do not work in the architecture of the sentence.

(3) Variable binding

Interestingly, variable binding does not present a gap between *perché* and *siccome*, or *perché* and other examples of causal conjunctions like those here considered as similar to *siccome* (i.e. *poiché*, *giacché*). Instead, both *perché* and *siccome* are equally admitted or banned depending on the semantic arrangement of causality. In this case it is important to take into consideration what was yet introduced in chapter 2 (2.4) about three possible shapes of causality, that is Event-causality, Epistemic-causality and SpeechAct-causality.

33) **Ogni_i** studente è triste *perché* il **suo_i** voto è basso 3.1.17

34) **Ogni_i** studente è triste *siccome/poiché/giacché* il **suo_i** voto è basso

35) ***Ogni_i** studente deve essere stato bocciato, *perché* il **suo_i** voto è basso

36) ***Ogni_i** studente deve essere stato bocciato, *siccome/poiché/giacché* il **suo_i** voto è basso

37) ***Ogni_i** studente protesta, *perché* all'esame non **lo_i** hai promosso

38) ***Ogni_i** studente protesta, *siccome/poiché/giacché* non **lo_i** hai promosso

The examples above deal respectively with Event-causality in 33-34, Epistemic-causality in 35-36 and SpeechAct-causality in 37-38. In line with the analysis made by Sanfelici, Rodeghiero and Garzonio (2023), they show that the only case in which a causal construction is compatible with maintenance of binding pronouns is the case of Event-causality.

The difference is clear between the first couple of examples and the two following ones. In Event-causality clauses (33-34), introduced by both *perché* and *siccome*, interpretation of the bounded pronoun *suo* is immediately attributed to the quantified DP *ogni studente*, which dominates it according to rules of co-indexation and binding. On the other hand, the same pronoun *suo* inserted in an epistemic causal construction (35-36), can not be co-indexed with the DP *ogni studente* and has no referent to be assigned for interpretation, thus the sentence is agrammatical. Finally, clauses in 37-38 provide an example of SpeechAct-causality. Also in this case, causal construction are

unavailable for *perché* and *siccome* when a bound variable pronoun is involved. In fact, similarly to what happens for Epistemic causal clauses, interpretation of the pronoun *lo* can not be bounded to the DP *ogni studente* and the sentence makes no sense, resulting agrammatical.

(4) Scope of negative operators

39) **Nessuno** è venuto *perché* c'era la partita₁ (ma perché era obbligatorio)₂

40) **Nessuno** è venuto *siccome/poiché* c'era la partita₁* (ma perché era obbligatorio)₂

In negative construction with negative operators, the scope of negation changes depending on the choice of causal conjunction used to introduce causal adverbials, preventing (or allowing) multiple readings of a sentence.

As we can see above, negative operators as *nessuno* in 39) interact with the causal adverbial introduced by *perché* allowing two interpretations for the sentence. In both cases, two readings are possible, here indexed using subscripts 1 and 2. Reading 1 provides the “true cause” of the assertion in the main negative clause *nessuno é venuto*, whilst in reading 2 the content of the causal adverbial (i.e. there was a football match) is taken as the “false cause” and suggests for an alternative, namely that the reason why nobody came is not that there was a football match but because it was mandatory. To sum up, in *perché* clauses interpretation is opened to two choices. The same mechanism does not work when the causal adverbial is introduced by *siccome/poiché* conjunctions. In 40 only reading 1 is possible. Alternatives are not conceivable, thus reading 2 is prevented and agrammatical.

(5) Principle C

41) *La maestra **li_i** ha puniti *perché/siccome/poiché* **i bambini_i** urlavano in classe

42) *Siccome/poiché* **i bambini_i** urlavano in classe, la maestra **li_i** ha puniti

43) **Perché i bambini* urlavano in classe, la maestra *li* ha puniti

Binding theory concerns syntactic restrictions and structural relations in the deep structure of a sentence. We already mentioned binding in (3), dealing with bound-variable pronouns and quantified Determiner Phrases (DPs) as antecedents. Here we refer to one of the three principles that have been theorized to explain binding relations, namely Principle C, according to which a referential expression must be free in its binding domain, namely the lowest clause containing the referential expression (or R-expression) itself. If an R-expression is free, then it is not c-commanded by any element.

According to what stated by Sportiche (2005), when the adverbial clause precedes the main clause principle C of binding theory is not violated; instead, if the adverbial follows the main clause principle C is violated. The sentence in 41 provides a clear example of violation of principle C, where a causal adverbial is postposed to the main clause containing an R-expression *li*, co-indexed with *i bambini* in the adverbial. The effect of postposing the adverbial with respect to the R-expression is not influenced by the choice of the causal lexical subordinator, thus no difference between *perché* and *siccome/poiché* is found.

The situation gets more complicated when the adverbial precedes the main clause, something that, as we said, should not cause violation of the principle C. In 42 the casual adverbial is introduced by *siccome/poiché* and precedes the R-expression *li* in the main clause. As expected, no violation of principle C occurs. However, in 43 we see that when *perché* is selected as causal conjunction to introduce the adverbial, the sentence results ungrammatical. We may hypothesize that a different syntactic positioning of *perché* clauses in sentence structure is responsible for the misalignment between *perché* and *siccome/poiché* with respect to violation of principle C in cases where violation is not expected. More in-depth analysis are needed to establish if this is the correct reading and how it works. Nonetheless, with respect to cases in which violation of principle C is not expected, that is when the causal adverbial precedes the main clause, some difference exists between *perché* and *siccome/poiché* conjunctions.

As already shown by Sanfelici, Rodeghiero and Garzonio 2023, the five parameters of observation used to test *perché* and *siccome* clauses enable to assume that some difference in fact exists between the two subordinators. They also suggest that 1. *perché* stands out from other causal conjunctions, something that most likely should be attributed to its versatility as a grammatical operator which can play multiple roles that do not exhaust within the realm of causality; 2. at least regarding to the five testing parameters, *siccome* show similarity with other causal conjunctions as *poiché* or *giacché*. Point 1 on the versatility of *perché* highlights the importance of taking into consideration each causal conjunction as a grammatical operator carrying its own “internal organization” or a set of semantical and structural features which makes it suitable or non-suitable for the realization of a certain signification intended by the speaker (in turn encoded on a subjective cognitive interpretation). Point 2 opens up the possibility of a strong bipartization between two “groups” of casual conjunctions and causal adverbials as a consequence; on one side causal adverbials introduced by *perché* and on the other side those introduced by the rest of commonly-used causal conjunctions as *siccome* and *poiché*. However, this possibility is totally rejected here. First, it would be a methodological error to ignore that *siccome*, *poiché* and *giacché* could differ from other causal subordinators which have not been tested, apart from being potentially different from each other respect to alternative parameters of observation, for which they have not been tested. Moreover, the grammatical versatility of *perché* mentioned above does not make it an ideal candidate for comparing differences among causal adverbials conjunctions, since comparison may be distorted by features which do not pertain to the domain of causality, suggesting for an overestimated gap. Here we assume that differences among causal conjunctions exist and are not random, as we explained in 3.1, but a more fine-grained analysis is needed to catch the mechanism of lexical selection in the expression of a causative meaning, rejecting any attempt of simplification to a bipartite solution. With this in mind, we intend to analyse *in quanto*, as we expect it to show a confusing-borderline behaviour that will complicate the picture. If so, our rejection of bipartization and the proposal for a more complex, continuum solution will be strengthened as well.

3.2 Analysis of “In quanto” as causal subordinator

In order to analyse *in quanto* as causal subordinator we adopted the five parameters previously used for comparing *perché* and *siccome* conjunctions, namely: (1) position with respect to the host clause, (2) focalization/fragment answers, (3) variable binding, (4) scope of negative operators and (5) principle C. We consider the latter accurate enough to analyse *in quanto*, at the same time maintaining coherence with previous analysis, which will hopefully provide the clearest possible framework. After, we added a (6) point in which we comment on an interesting feature that makes *in quanto* notably different from other conjunctions and typical grammatical structure used for causation. Finally, we compare our results with those on *perché* and *siccome* in 3.1.

(1) Position with respect to the host clause

44) Non sono venuto a scuola *perché* ero malato

45) Non sono venuto a scuola *siccome* ero malato

46) Non sono venuto a scuola *in quanto* ero malato

47) *Siccome* ero malato, non sono venuto a scuola

48) **Perché* ero malato, non sono venuto a scuola

49) *In quanto* ero malato, non sono venuto a scuola

As we have already seen in 3.1, *perché* and *siccome* are admitted alike when the adverbial follows the main clause, whilst only *siccome* can precede the main clause. In structural positioning, *in quanto* perfectly aligns with *siccome*, being acceptable both when the causal adverbial precedes and when it follows the main clause.

(2) Focalization and fragment answers

50) *Perché* alzi la voce?

51) *Perché* sono arrabbiato

52) **Siccome* sono arrabbiato

53) **In quanto* sono arrabbiato

In fragment answers *in quanto* cannot act as introductory causal conjunction. Thus, in this case as well, it behaves as *siccome* and differently than *perché*.

54) *PERCHÉ* non hai studiato, ti hanno bocciato (non perché gli fossi antipatico)

55) **SICCOME* non hai studiato, ti hanno bocciato (non siccome gli fossi antipatico)

56) **IN QUANTO* non hai studiato, ti hanno bocciato (non in quanto gli fossi antipatico)

57) *IN QUANTO* rappresentante d'istituto, ti hanno promosso (non in quanto te lo meritassi)

In sentences containing contrastive focus, *in quanto* shows a noteworthy two-fold behaviour. It is rejected with ergative verbs in contrastive focalized constructions, but accepted when it immediately precedes a DP, coupled with silent unaccusative verbs (57). Evidently, the causal conjunction here is inserted into a different causative structure which deserves a brief consideration that will be made later. In standard cases, that is when the verb is expressed (54-56), *in quanto* aligns with *siccome*.

58) È *perché* non hai studiato che ti hanno bocciato

59) È **siccome* non hai studiato che ti hanno bocciato

60) È **in quanto* non hai studiato che ti hanno bocciato

61) È *in quanto* studente che sei tenuto a venire a lezione

As for clefting, *in quanto* cannot be clefted, thus again aligning with *siccome*. However, in 61 *in quanto* is followed by the DP *studente* and the sentence is grammatical. As we said above, the issue of silent verbs with *in quanto* will be treated in more details in section (6) of this chapter.

62) Ti hanno bocciato solo *perché* non hai studiato

- 63) Ti hanno bocciato solo **siccome* non hai studiato
- 64) Ti hanno bocciato solo **in quanto* non hai studiato
- 65) Ti hanno promosso solo *in quanto* rappresentante d'istituto

Testing the use of focus particle provides yet another confirmation on the (im)possibility to focalize *in quanto* clauses. The sentences in 63 and 64 are clearly agrammatical.

Summing up, like *siccome*, *in quanto* can not be used in fragment answers, contrastive focus and clefting, neither it seems to be opened for coupling with focus particles. The conclusion is that, as for focalization, *in quanto* aligns with *siccome* and misaligns with *perché*. Nevertheless, at least in a full sentence structure involving contrastive focus, clefting or focus particles, *in quanto* is accepted when preceding a DP with a silent inaccusative verb (57, 61, 65).

(3) Variable binding

- 66) **Ogni_i** studente è triste *perché* il **suoi_i** voto è basso
- 67) **Ogni_i** studente è triste *siccome* il **suoi_i** voto è basso
- 68) **Ogni_i** studente è triste *in quanto* il **suoi_i** voto è basso

- 69) ***Ogni_i** studente deve essere stato bocciato, *perché* il **suoi_i** voto è basso
- 70) ***Ogni_i** studente deve essere stato bocciato, *siccome* il **suoi_i** voto è basso
- 71) ***Ogni_i** studente deve essere stato bocciato, *in quanto* il **suoi_i** voto è basso

- 72) ***Ogni_i** studente protesta, *perché* all'esame non **lo_i** hai promosso
- 73) ***Ogni_i** studente protesta, *siccome* non **lo_i** hai promosso
- 74) ***Ogni_i** studente protesta, *in quanto* non **lo_i** hai promosso

In testing bounded pronouns, we find no difference between the case of *perchè* vs *siccome* and *in quanto* analysis. That is, as we have already seen in section 3.1 with respect to the same parameter at point (3), grammaticality of *in quanto* in sentence structures involving variable binding depends on the semantics of causality itself, and not on the kind of causal operator chosen. As in 3.1 the examples presented above are divided into three blocks. The first (66-68) shows examples of Event-causality, the second (69-71) deals with Epistemic-causality and the third (72-74) concerns SpeechAct-causality. The only case of grammaticality for a causal conjunction is Event-causality, regardless of the lexical operator used to grammaticalize causality. Thus, *in quanto* aligns with *perché* and *siccome* and is acceptable just in 68, whilst the bounded pronouns *suo* in 71 and *lo* in 74 do not find their referent in the quantified DP *ogni studente*, being co-indexing unavailable. Therefore, when causality meets sentence structures in which bounded pronouns are involved, the semantics of causality seems to be prominent compared to the choice of lexical operator, allowing (Event-causality) or blocking (Epistemic/SpeechAct-causality) co-indexing between pronouns and referential DPs. That might suggest for some sort of hierarchical pattern in the Biberauer and Roberts style (2015), where a major feature, in our case semantics of causality, controls the (un)availability of a minor one, here insertion or non-insertion of a lexicalized causal operator, which in turn might be eligible or non-eligible depending on its own intrinsic properties, as advanced by the “continuum” thesis in this work. Further research is needed to investigate a similar proposal, which here will remain just a suggesting starting point for future investigation on the matter.

(4) Scope of negative operators

75) **Nessuno** è venuto *perché* c’era la partita₁ (ma perché era obbligatorio)₂

76) **Nessuno** è venuto *siccome* c’era la partita₁* (ma siccome era obbligatorio)₂

77) **Nessuno** è venuto *in quanto* c’era la partita₁* (ma in quanto era obbligatorio)₂

As for scope of negation, as we have already seen in section 3.1, multiple readings are allowed only for negative clauses coupled with *perché* causal adverbials (75), whilst alternative readings are not available for the negative clause coupled with an adverbial introduced by *siccome*. In fact, in 76 the only possible interpretation, indexed with 1, is that the reason why nobody came is that there was a football match. Instead, reading 2 suggests that the reason why nobody came is not that there was a football match, but because it was mandatory to go (“true cause” and “false cause”; see section 3.1). However, reading 2 is available only in 75. The exact same situation is replicated using *in quanto*, and the same result is obtained (77). Negative clauses followed by *in quanto* causal adverbials do not admit multiple interpretations and rejects reading 2.

(5) Principle C

78) *La maestra **li**_i ha puniti *perché/siccome/in quanto* **i bambini**_i urlavano in classe

79) *Siccome* **i bambini**_i urlavano in classe, la maestra **li**_i ha puniti

80) **Perché* **i bambini**_i urlavano in classe, la maestra **li**_i ha puniti

81) **In quanto* **i bambini**_i urlavano in classe, la maestra **li**_i ha puniti

As we know from section 3.1, violation of principle C occurs when the main clause containing an R-expression precedes an adverbial that in turn contains a co-indexed DP, which is the referent of the R-expression. This is again clearly visible in 78, where we can verify that the sentence is agrammatical regardless of the causal subordinators used to introduce the postponed adverbial. Therefore, *in quanto* coherently makes no exception on violation of principle C, aligning with both *perché* and *siccome*. When comparing *perché* and *siccome* conjunctions with respect to principle C, we noticed that, when violation of principle C is not expected and the main clause follows the adverbial, the use of *perché* in the causal adverbial produces an agrammatical sentence (80). On the other side, *siccome/poiché* conjunctions do not cause agrammaticality, building a perfect grammatical sentence, as expected by the postposition of the main clause to preserve principle C (79). Interestingly, in this

case *in quanto* aligns with *perché* and not with *siccome*; in fact, in 81 the causal adverbial preceding the R-expression **li** in the main clause is introduced by *in quanto* and the sentence results agrammatical as that in 80. In sum, there are differences between *perché* and *siccome* and *siccome* and *in quanto*. It is not clear if the alignment between *perché* and *in quanto* is due to the same underlying mechanism, given that what causes agrammaticality in *perché* clauses is not clear, but as we suggested here, differences are imputable to intrinsic properties of each causal conjunctions, which can be more or less suitable for a given context. As we have seen so far, *in quanto* aligns with *siccome* in certain contexts, but behaves as *perché* in other ones. As well, there are cases in which both *perché*, *siccome* and *in quanto* are equally grammatical and can be used interchangeably. Furthermore, even though the cases of alignment between *siccome* and *in quanto* are higher than those of misalignment here, we should remember that we have analysed causal conjunctions according to a limited set of (5) parameters, thus we cannot ignore that other non-analysed linguistic contexts may reveal differences and/or similarities that have not been intercepted here.

(6) *In quanto* with a silent *be*

The analysis proposed above enable us to deepen our knowledge of *in quanto* as Italian causal conjunction, according to a limited set of parameters which however explore the most common grammatical contexts where it should very plausibly be used. In the introduction to section 3.2 we mentioned an “interesting feature” which seem to differentiate *in quanto* with respect to other causal subordinators. As we showed at point (2) with respect to focalization (57, 61, 65) *in quanto* may be followed by a silent unaccusative verb preceding a DP, something which allows grammaticality of the causal adverbial, shifting from a rejected sentence to an accepted one. There are some points to take into consideration on the issue.

- i. This is not an exclusive of focalization, instead it should be considered as a feature of *in quanto*
- ii. This is not an option for each unaccusative verbs: it is specifically deserved to the unaccusative verb *be*, preceding a DP

82) *In quanto* è- medico, lo hanno fatto entrare

83) **Siccome* è medico, lo hanno fatto entrare

84) ?*Perché* è-medico, lo hanno fatto entrare

- iii. As we can see from the examples above, it may be a feature of *perché* too. Instead, it is not a feature of *siccome*
- iv. This is not a typical causative structure, something that may also explain the grammaticality of sentences like the ones in 57, 61, 65. The use of *in quanto* with a silent *be* reveal a certain relationship between causality and the property of an entity. In fact, it should be noted that this is a very common structure used before adjectives too.

85) *In quanto* intelligente, è stato promosso

86) **Siccome* intelligente, è stato promosso

87) ?*Perché* intelligente, è stato promosso

Coming back to the “cognitive structure” underlying a sentence (chapter 1), the use of *in quanto* with a silent *be* recalls a different organization of the semantic structure, and before of a different arrangement of elements which participate on the cognitive interpretation of an event. That is, here is where causality meets the property of being, thus two domains (causal and attributive) overlap.

4. Conclusion

The continuum solution

The present study allowed us to check similarities and differences between the three Italian causal conjunctions which are the object of analysis here, namely *perché*, *siccome* and *in quanto*. The table below helps us to make a short recap of what shown so far on the basis of the analysis conducted.

	PERCHÉ	SICCOME	IN QUANTO
Main clause-Causal adverbial	✓	✓	✓
Causal adverbial-Main clause	X	✓	✓
Fragment answers	✓	X	X
Focalization	✓	X	X
Binding: Event causality	✓	✓	✓
Binding: Epistemic causality	X	X	X
Binding: Speech-Act causality	X	X	X
Scope of negation	✓	X	X
Principle C	X	✓	X
Silent <i>be</i>	?	X	✓

Tab. 4.1

Testing the use of the three causal conjunctions according to the five parameters chosen at first, provide us with some results which have been discussed throughout chapter 3. Thus, we now know that, in subordinative causal adverbials, *in quanto* aligns with *siccome* in 8/10 cases, and with *perché* in 6/10 cases. Also, *siccome*, *perché* and *in quanto* aligns each other in 4/10 cases, so that if we exclude the interchangeability between the three causal conjunctions, which may be imputable to superordinate grammatical motives that do not pertain to the conjunctions and their properties, *perché* and *in quanto* actually shares 2 cases of similarity out of 10, being apparently more similar to *siccome*.

Apart from numerical matching, we want to recall our intention, cited at the beginning of this work. The present investigation gives us a deeper and more complex image of how causal conjunctions in fact work when a causal semantic picture should be rendered with linguistic material. If we limit ourselves to considering numbers and test results, we should admit that *in quanto* show more similarities with *siccome* than *perché* but we cannot also ignore the fact that 1) in two cases, *in quanto* and *perché* aligns, excluding *siccome* and 2) the set of parameters used is limited and do not cover all the possible linguistic contexts in which they may be used, revealing more similarities, or more differences. In any case, we point out that any attempt to categorize causal conjunction into different “blocks”, imposing strong limits and bipartitions, is useless and dangerous, apart from being methodologically and empirically wrong. Instead, it is more useful to integrate a continuum solution, in which each causal conjunction has its own positioning, according to certain grammatical properties, that in turn match certain semantic requisites. Therefore, in building sentence structure, the speaker has first to create his/her cognitive interpretation of a given SoA, as mentioned in Chapter 1, then a semantic arrangement arise which should be rendered using linguistic, therefore grammatical, material also respecting certain structural requirements. When a causative meaning is rendered through a subordinative causative clause, we may imagine that in choosing the most suitable causal conjunction, the significance of causation plays a major role. In fact, the use of a conjunction instead of another is also semantically responsible and has not to be considered just a grammatical operation which respect and is guided by formal rules, completely unrelated to the semantics of the sentence itself. Instead, we propose that the process of transformation of a semantical structure into a formal grammatical sentence should pass through a step of selection of the best causal conjunction, which is prior to the construction of the rest of the grammatical sentence. That is to say, the causal conjunction used to introduce the causal adverbial has to face the whole semantic background of the sentence and, according to it, be chosen among a set of candidates. As mentioned in the introduction to this work, we hypothesize a continuum in which lexical material (i.e. causal conjunctions) is distributed over the continuum itself, covering different zones of signification in turn defined by different semantic features spread on the continuum and major morphological properties associated to the semantical features covering one ideal zone of the continuum. Note

that we speak about ‘zones’ and not ‘points’, precisely because a continuum can not be defined by strict boundaries, rather features overlap and boundaries are blurred. To conclude, the choice of one lexical operator instead of another may be governed by this underlying mechanism, which is aimed at selecting the most suitable causal conjunction according to the semantical and cognitive arrangement of the whole sentence, prompted by a certain SoA that the speaker has to render linguistically.

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