

The Relatives *When*, *Where*, and Their Antecedents

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Abstract Normally the relative *where* takes as antecedent locative expressions and the relative *when* temporal expressions. But there are times *where* takes as antecedent temporal expressions and *when* locative expressions. These latter uses of *when* and *where* are not of recent origin: for centuries they have been used like this. This paper explores how and why in present-day English locative expressions are followed by the relative *when* and temporal expressions by the relative *where*.

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1. Introduction

Nouns such as *case*, *circumstance*, *condition*, *instance* and *situation* are spatial expressions. It means that the relative adverb *where* takes these nouns as antecedent:

- (1) a. This is a case where innocent family photographs have been completely misconstrued.
(WordbanksOnline, hereafter WBO)
- b. I remember a very amusing circumstance where we were under very strict orders not to pick the bananas. (WBO)
- c. The fire should be reduced to a condition where it could not recur, within eight to ten minutes from ignition.
(BNC Online, hereafter BNC)
- d. I mean, tell me one instance where you've seen a display like this. (WBO)
- e. You're in a situation where you can't escape. (WBO)

However, there are cases in which these nouns are followed by the relative *when*, although they are comparatively few.

Likewise, such nouns as *age*, *day*, *occasion*, *period* and *time* are temporal expressions, which means that the relative adverb *when* takes these nouns as antecedent:

- (2) a. We live in an age when people want things to happen in an instant. (BNC)
- b. Oh those happy days when ignorance was bliss. (BNC)

- c. It happened to me on one occasion when I was about ten. (BNC)
- d. There are periods when we feel totally inconsolable. (BNC)
- e. There was a time when British checks were supreme throughout the world. (BNC)

Yet, there are cases in which these words are followed by the relative *where*, although fewer in number.

The instances in which, for example, *case*, *condition*, *instance* and *situation* are followed by the relative *when* are not new. In fact, *when* has been used for a long time with these nouns relating to spatial expressions:

- (3) a. 1622 Malynes Anc. Law-Merch. 136 In such a case, when goods by stormes are cast ouerboard, it shal not be made good by contribution or aueridge, but by... (OED2)
- b. 1896 Allbutt's Syst. Med. 1127 The development of ulcerous conditions when the process affects free surfaces. (OED2)
- c. 1873 Leland Egyptian Sk. Bk. 88. I only remember one instance when a man who made locomotion his business was unwilling to locomove. (OED2)
- d. 1836 Art of Duelling 47 Sometimes a man is placed in a situation when he considers it his duty to delope, (or fire in the air). (OED2)

In the same way, *where* has long taken as antecedent such nouns as *age*, *occasion*, *period* and *time*, all

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of which are time expressions:

- (4) a. 1616 Breton Good & Badde. Of this age,
Where The Best may see their Graces, and
the Worst discern their Basenesse.

(OED2)

- b. 1704 Swift T. Tub Concl., A temptation of
being witty, upon occasions where I would
be neither wise, nor sound, nor anything to
the matter in hand.

(OED2)

- c. 1851 Turner Dom. Archit. 1.1.3 One of the pe-
riods where an overlapping of styles must be
looked for.

(OED2)

- d. 1592 Kyd Sp. Trag. iii. vi. O monstrous times,
where murders set so light.

(OED2)

The objectives of this article are, first, to explore how and why the relative *when* is used now after such nouns as *case*, *circumstance*, *condition*, *event*, *example*, *instance* and *situation*, all of which primarily refer to place, and, second, to explore how and why the relative *where* is used after such nouns as *age*, *day*, *era*, *moment*, *occasion*, *opportunity*, *period* and *time*, all of which are chiefly connected to time. In most cases, to look up the lexical meanings of these words would help clarify why *when* takes as antecedent such words as primarily connected to place, and why *where* takes as antecedent such words as primarily connected to time.

2. The Relatives *When*, *Where*, and Their Antecedents

2.1 Case, Circumstance, Condition, Event, Example, Instance, Situation

2.1.1 Case

Mostly, *case* is followed by *where*, but there are times when *case* is followed by the relative *when*:

- (5) a. Wasn't there a case when it was right?
(BNC)
- b. He recalls one case when a graduate student
in physics applied for patent for something.
(WBO)
- c. There are cases when backwards search is no
use. (BNC)
- d. ... there were two cases when two words re-
ferring to the same thing had different gen-
der. (BNC)

Case here means "a particular situation" (OALD6). "Situation" is a key word here and in the following sections. "Situation" means "all the circumstances and things that are happening at a particular time and in a particular place" (OALD6). It is connected to place, but at the same time it bears relation to time as well,

as noted in this definition. This definition also suggests that *case* has to do with time. Thus, it may be said that, although *case* is mostly used as a noun connected to place, if an idea of time first crosses the speaker's mind, *when* may be chosen.

It should be added here that, today, *case* seems to be often followed by *when* even in formal writings. Biber et al. (1999 : 628) say that in academic prose *case* is used with *when* as well as with *where*.

2.1.2 Circumstance

When *circumstance* is followed by *when*, it seems to be most often used in the plural form. In both the BNC and WBO, the instances in which *where* takes *circumstances* as antecedent outnumber those in which *when* takes it as antecedent. (6a-d) are the instances in which *when* takes *circumstances* as antecedent:

- (6) a. Even so, there are some specific circumstances
when dietary habits may arise. (WBO)
- b. There are circumstances when it pays to use
an expressive language. (BNC)
- c. Describe the circumstances when fixed costs
are relevant to future decisions. (BNC)
- d. Well, why would it be used in circumstances
when it was not needed otherwise? (BNC)

Circumstances is "the conditions and facts that are connected with and affect a situation, an event or an action" (OALD6). As noted in § 2.1.1, "situation" has also to do with time, which means that an idea of time is implicit in *circumstances*. When this noun is used in connection with time, the relative *when* may be used.

2.1.3 Condition

When *condition* is followed by *when*, this noun seems to be most often used in the plural form.

- (7) a. Are there conditions when such additives
should be avoided? (BNC)
- b. Motorists are doing in dreadful conditions
when you can barely see in front of your
nose. (BNC)
- c. ...one in ten vines was killed by winter condi-
tions when the temperature dropped as low
as and minus 23°C. (BNC)
- d. The best time to visit is in stormy conditions
when the birds are on the wing ... (BNC)

Conditions is "the circumstances or situation in which people live, work or do things" (OALD6). Thus, *condition* is primarily a spatial expression, which means that this noun is more often followed by *where*. However, as can be seen from this definition, this noun has also to do with "situation." "Situation" suggests an idea of time as well, as can be seen from the

definition of *case* above. When an idea of time is predominant in the speaker's mind, *condition* may be followed by *when*.

2.1.4 Event

Corpora in the BNC and WBO show that the examples in which *where* takes *event* as antecedent are slightly larger in number than those in which *when* takes it as antecedent. (8a-d) are the examples in which *when* takes *event* as antecedent:

- (8) a. It is a national event when I get measured. (BNC)
- b. I look forward to next year's event when Alan can be with us. (WBO)
- c. Fortunately the pair went off to different events when they stepped out in the identical £420 jackets. (BNC)
- d. But all that changed with a confluence of events when first the Catholic church in the 15th and 16th centuries and then the English Puritans came over as well. (WBO)

Event means "a planned and organized occasion" (COBUILD3) (8a-c). *Events* is "all the things that are happening in a particular situation" (COBUILD3) (8d). "Occasion" has to do with time and so does "situation." It may sometimes lead one to choose *when*.

2.1.5 Example

Example can be followed by *when*:

- (9) a. ... our structural ambivalence can be illustrated by one example when one of the squad created a blazer badge in heraldic style. (BNC)
- b. This can be seen as an example when the Whigs compromised one party principle in pursuit of another. (BNC)
- c. This is another example when safety bars be put outside the school entrance. (BNC)
- d. Can you think of one example when for example perhaps the initial time you went to the GP? (WBO)

Example is "a particular situation, object, or person that illustrates a point you are making" (COBUILD3). It shows that *example* is a spatial expression, but an idea of time is also implicit in this noun, as can be seen from the word "situation" of this definition. That may be why *when* is used here.

2.1.6 Instance

The LDOCE4 defines instance as "an example of a particular kind of situation," and states that it can be used like "instance where/when." This definition

illustrates the very fact that instance can be followed by *when*.

- (10) a. ... your readers may be interested in a recent instance when Mrs Thatcher was equated with the Queen. (BNC)
- b. Manuel Goliath recalls an instance when a village was attacked. (BNC)
- c. Haig was not in the habit of describing instances when he was humiliated. (WBO)
- d. There may have been some instances when it has been misused. (BNC)

As can be seen from the definition above, *instance* is first of all related to space, and it is in a case like this that the relative *where* is more often used. But "situation" has within itself an idea of time, and when this is at the forefront of the speaker's mind, *when* may be used.

2.1.7 Situation

When can take *situation* as antecedent:

- (11) a. You've never been in a situation when you've wandered the streets with your collar up. (WBO)
- b. This, then, was the situation when Mary succeeded to the throne. (BNC)
- c. There are many situations when the order is of no great consequence. (BNC)
- d. We must be careful, particularly in situations when there is no apparent danger. (WBO)

As noted above, situation is "all the circumstances and things that are happening at a particular time and in a particular place" (OALD6). Thus, an idea of time coexists with an idea of place in this noun. When an idea of place is dominant in the speaker's mind, *where* will be chosen, while an idea of time is predominant, *when* may be chosen.

2.2 Age, Day, Era, Moment, Occasion, Opportunity, Period, Time, Year

2.2.1 Age

Age is usually followed by the relative *when*, but at times it is also followed by *where*. When *age* is followed by *where*, the plural form is seldom used.

- (12) a. You are at an age where many things are difficult for you. (WBO)
- b. One is that the baby boomers' parents are now at the ages where they're beginning to retire. (WBO)
- c. Nato leaders will gather later this week to rework the Alliance's posture for an age where it's hard to spot the enemy. (WBO)

- d. In an age where commercial profit and gain are predominant, the purpose of archeology is often called into question. (BNC)

When *where* takes *age* as antecedent, *age* has two meanings. In (12a, b), *age* means "a particular period of a person's life" (*OALD6*), whereas in (12c, d), it means "a particular period of history" (*OALD6*). A particular period of a person's life is, as it were, a stage in one's development. In general, a stage is related to place. On the other hand, "history" also has to do with place. The *OALD6* defines "history" as "the past events concerned in the development of a particular place, subject, etc." These may explain why at times *where* takes *age* as antecedent.

2.2.2 Day

When *where* takes *day* as antecedent, the singular form and the plural form are equally used:

- (13) a. It isn't a primary school sports day where everybody gets a prize and pat on the back. (WBO)
 b. I have these eight days where I was going to do the labels. (BNC)
 c. It wasn't like old days where you travelled round the world on a cruise ship. (WBO)
 d. Long gone are the days where grannies sat in the rocking chair by the fire knitting. (BNC)

In (13a), *day* is associated with primary school sports, in which an idea of place is present as well as an idea of time. In (13b), *day* means "the part of a day spent working" (*COBUILD3*). The word "part" in this definition would remind one of space. In (13c, d), "days" means "a particular period of time or history" (*OALD6*). "History" bears relation to space, which may also lead to the choice of *where*.

2.2.3 Era

Era can be followed by *where*. In this case the plural form does not seem to be used.

- (14) a. I'm a survivor of an era where music really drove us. (WBO)
 b. We live in an era where overhead cabling is being phased out. (WBO)
 c. Clift had been brought up in an era where homosexuality was considered a form of mental illness. (BNC)
 d. I was brought up in a different era where you had to entertain yourself. (BNC)

Era means "a period of time, usually in history" (*OALD6*). "History" is associated with place, which may explain why *where* takes this noun as antecedent.

2.2.4 Moment

Moment can be followed by *where*:

- (15) a. I must have shouted out at that precise moment where exultation turns to disgust.... (WBO)
 b. What I'm interested in is that moment where the two things came together. (WBO)
 c. And this is a moment where they do that. (WBO)
 d. There are moments where you feel as though it's referring to the emotional world. (WBO)

When *moment* is used as antecedent of *where*, it means "a particular point in time" (*LDOCE4*). "Point" is related to place, and that may be why *where* is used here.

2.2.5 Occasion

Occasion can be followed by *where*. In this case, the singular form is used almost as often as the plural form:

- (16) a. I've been here four years and I've had occasion where people have tried the shoes on. (WBO)
 b. These are exchanged on every occasion where one businessman meets another. (BNC)
 c. This is perhaps one of those rare occasions where I almost agree with Mr Cunnane. (BNC)
 d. ... there are occasions where two subjects occur in the same clause. (WBO)

When used like this, *occasion* means "a time when something happens, or a case of it happening" (*COBUILD3*). Thus, first of all, *occasion* has to do with time, but as the word "case" in the definition indicates, it is also related to place.

2.2.6 Opportunity

Although there are not so many examples, there are cases in which *where* can take *opportunity* as antecedent:

- (17) a. I think if you gave Wests that sort of opportunity where they could market their product, they would have been successful. (WBO)
 b. If you are positive you find opportunities where others might not. (BNC)
 c. Doubtless there will be many highly strategic opportunities where this humiliation will be fully exploited. (BNC)
 d. ... a place of equal opportunities where each

student was valued and encouraged.

(BNC)

The *OALD6* defines *opportunity* used like this as "a time when a particular situation makes it possible to do or achieve sth." Thus, to begin with, *opportunity* is a time expression, but as the word "situation" in this definition suggests, it is also a locative expression.

2.2.7 Period

Period is primarily a time expression, and it is often followed by *when*, but there are times when it is followed by *where*. The singular form is more often used than the plural form in this case:

- (18) a. That is the long period where people are re-manded. (BNC)
- b. Well, those of us ... had two periods where we could relax. (WBO)
- c. I guess he went through a period where he felt frustrated with himself. (BNC)
- d. One has only to think of the Romantic period where poets became their own heroes.... (BNC)

When *period* is followed by *where*, roughly it has two meanings: "a particular length of time" (*LDOCE4*) (18a, b), and "a length of time in the life of a particular person or in the history of a particular country" (*LDOCE4*) (18c, d). In this definition, the nouns "life" and "history" are used. The life of a particular person or history has to do with place. Those may explain why *period* is used as antecedent of *where*.

2.2.8 Time

Even there are times when *where* can take *time* as antecedent.

- (19) a. It's advisable to pick a time where you can feel relaxed.... (WBO)
- b. I've got to give myself some time where nothing's gonna bother me. (BNC)
- c. I think it's about time where we now have cross party consensus that we move positively forward. (BNC)
- d. ... we are now living in times where stronger deterrents are needed to stop the despicable crimes we hear about almost every day. (WBO)

When followed by *where*, roughly *time* has four meanings: "an occasion" (*LDOCE4*) (19a-c), and "period in history" (*LDOCE4*) (19d). The words "occasion," "point," and "history," in this definition have also to do with space, and that may be why *where* is used after *time*.

3. Conclusion

In this paper I have given instances of locative words that are followed by the relative *when* and of temporal words that are followed by the relative *where*. The locative and temporal words dealt with here are not exhaustive, and there will be other words besides those given here. As to why *when* and *where* are used like this, I have pointed out that in most cases, to look at the lexical meanings of these words may be helpful. That is, their lexical meanings suggest that temporal meanings are hidden in locative words and locative meanings are hidden in temporal words. It would not be correct to use *when* and *where* like this, but judging from the copious examples in the BNC and WBO, I suspect this kind of use might be fairly being practised now.

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