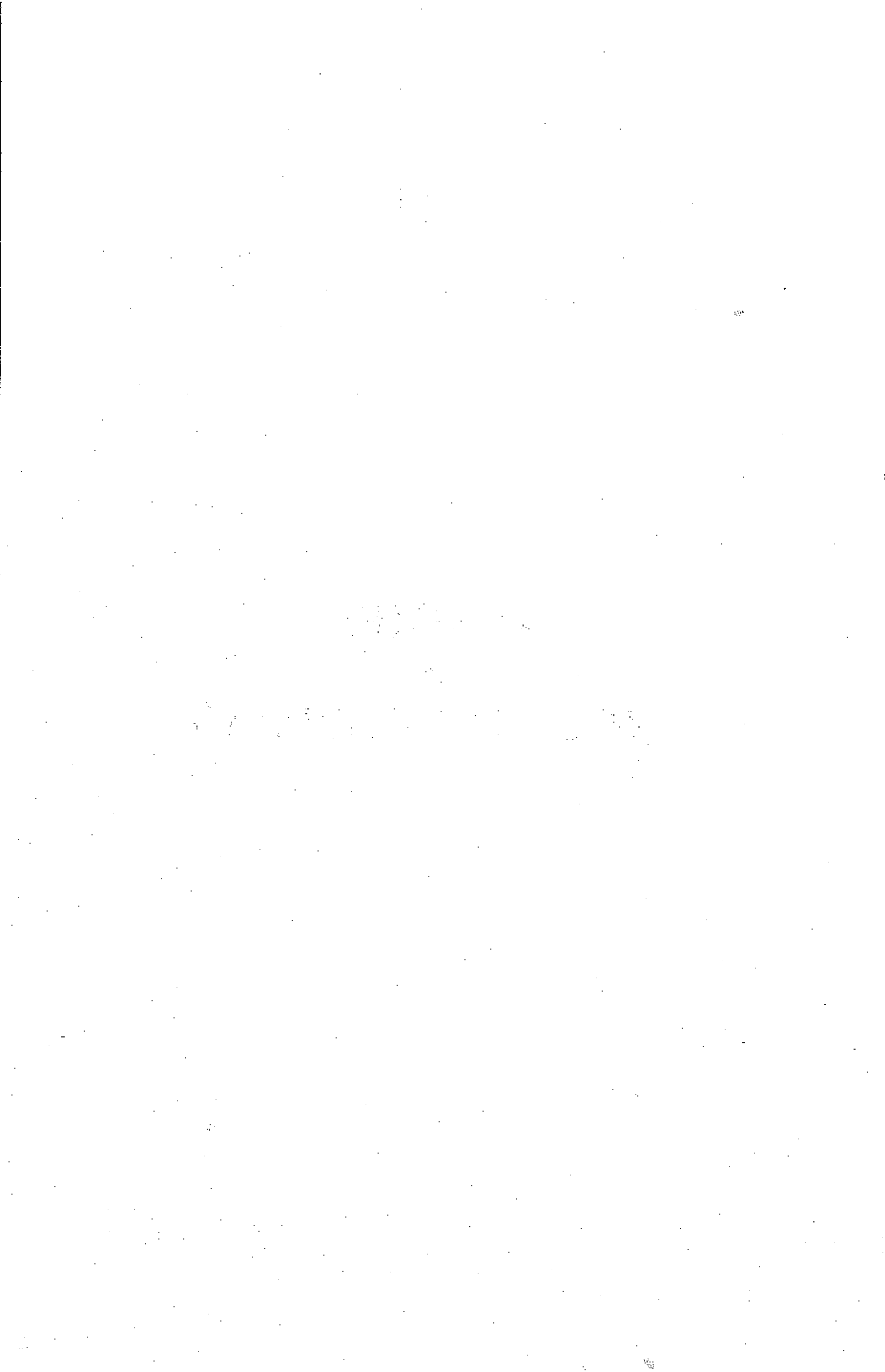


**STUDIES
IN
ENGLISH GRAMMAR**



*CENTRE INTERDISCIPLINAIRE DE RECHERCHES
EN LINGUISTIQUE*

Paul Bacquet, André Crépin, Georges Garnier, John Hewson,
Walter H. Hirtle, Catherine Rihoit, Michel Viel, Simone Wyss.

STUDIES IN ENGLISH GRAMMAR

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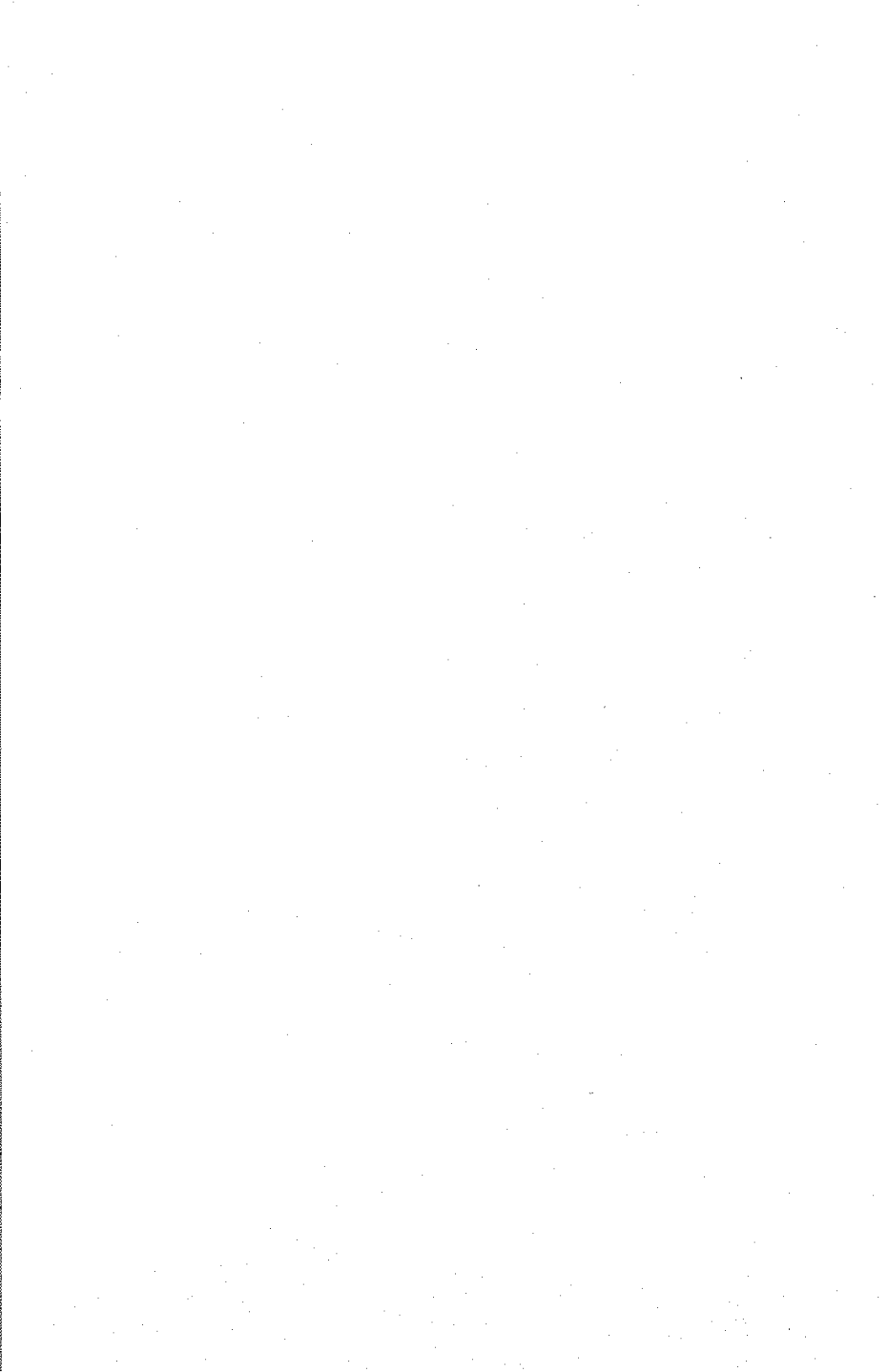
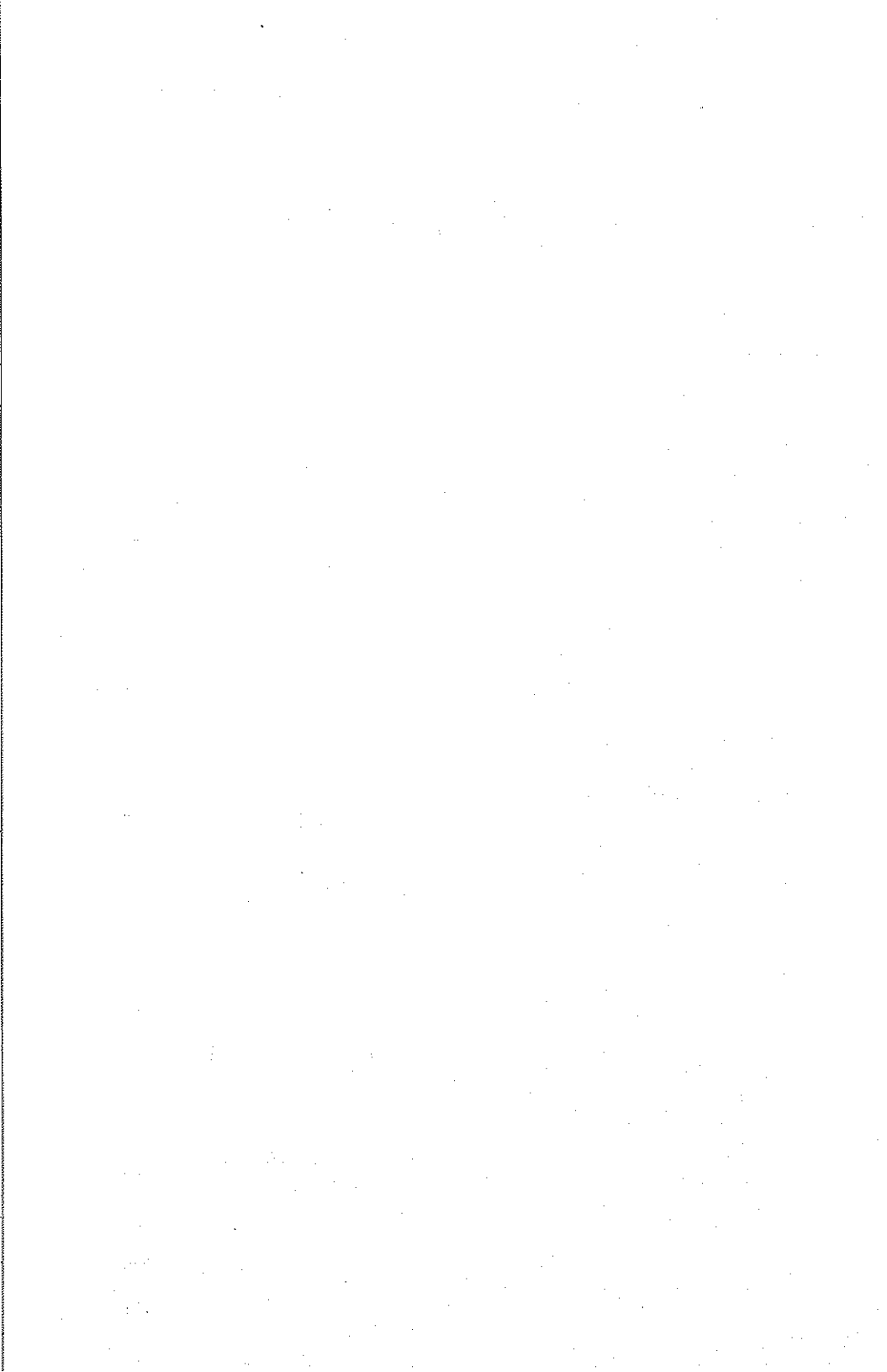


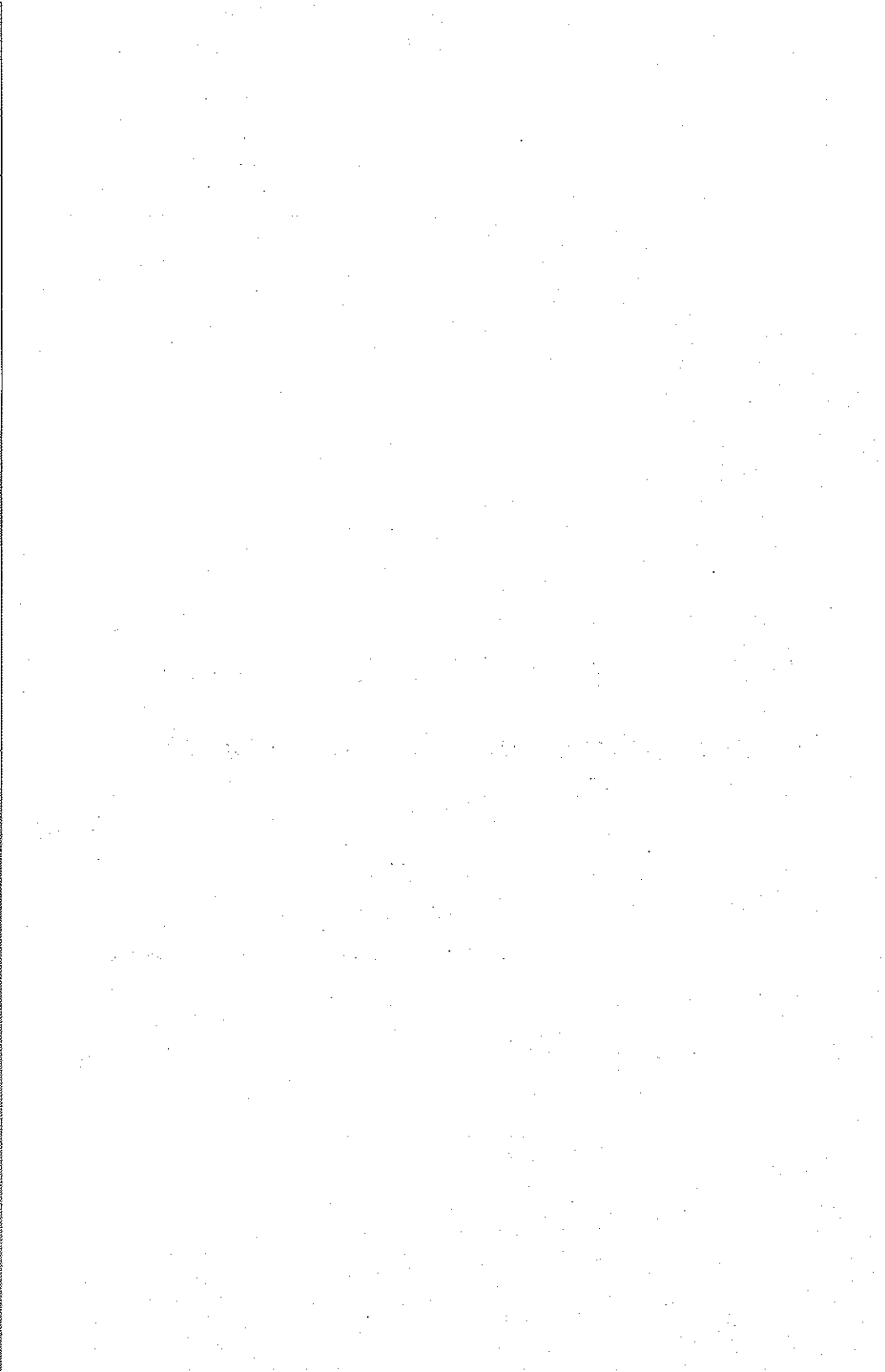
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FOR AND DURING A WORKING PAPER

Walter H. Hirtle, Université Laval, Québec



A common problem in the teaching of English to French-speaking students is that of distinguishing between *for* as a temporal preposition and *during*. Errors like **He stayed here during three days* often receive only *ad hoc* « explanations » to indicate why *for* must be used. Grammars for the most part have little or nothing to say on the question ; those which do attempt to characterize the two prepositions either beg the question¹ or else, restricting their view to discourse, present only part of the picture and make no attempt to reach the root of the distinction on the level of tongue. One student of the problem frankly recognizes the difficulty in the following terms :

During is often used in about the same sense as *for* in the present chapter, but the two prepositions are very seldom interchangeable. It is difficult, indeed, to define the boundary between the fields covered by *for* and *during* respectively, especially in view of the fact that they very often overlap and blend in such varied ways as to render hard and fast classification totally misleading. (Sandhagen, 1956, 166)

Taking these remarks as an expression of our own ignorance rather than as a reflection of a basic disorder in the reality of language, we shall here try to get beyond these surface impressions to discern the distinction underlying and conditioning the varying and, in themselves, confusing uses of discourse. Only thus can we hope to understand the problem and so provide our students with an adequate explanation.

Certain remarks based on the observation of usage will be valuable to put us on the track of a solution. First it has been noted that « ordinarily the *for*-phrase does not tell us *when* but *how long* something exists or happens » (Sandhagen, 1956, 166)², the prepositional phrase with *during*, on the other hand, « answering the question *when ?* ».³ Thus when we say *He stayed here for three days* we are making explicit, by means of the *for*-phrase, how long the event *stayed* lasted. And the sentence *He stayed here during the summer* tells us, not the length of the stay, but when the stay took place. In short, *for* measures, *during* dates. However, the fact that we can say *He stayed here for the last three days* indicates that *for* can, under certain circumstances, be used with expressions which date, which tell « when », so that this trait of usage cannot serve by itself as a criterion to distinguish between the two prepositions.

A second remark arising from the observation of discourse is that « *for* is not normally used with qualifiers other than numerals or their equivalents »⁴ whereas the use of *during* is « almost restricted... to cases where no numeral qualifies the head-word » (Sandhagen, 1956, 167). Though this remark remains for the most part true, as is witnessed by the erroneous sentence given in the first paragraph, the presence or absence of a numeral cannot serve as a touchstone of usage since examples like the following are quite acceptable : *He stayed here during the last three days*.

A third characteristic of usage has been described as follows :

When *for* is used, the whole space of time denoted by the head-word is occupied continuously (unless prolonged repetition is meant) and is conceived as a whole, whereas *during* does not necessarily indicate that the whole space of time is occupied, but only part of it. (Sandhagen, 1956, 166)

That is to say, in the examples already given we are told by *for* that the event stretched over a three-day period. *During*, however, does not tell us how much of the period was occupied by the stay, perhaps only part of it, but perhaps also the whole of it⁵. One cannot, then, take the event's extension in time as a criterion to determine when to use the one or the other. Thus it seems clear that none of these characteristics provides a wholly adequate means of discriminating between the two prepositions.

We are confronted with the very common situation where the various *ad hoc* rules, based solely on an observation of discourse, fail to account for all possibilities of use and in particular fail to discriminate between nuances of meaning where both prepositions are possible, as in *He stayed here for/during the last three days*. Though the grammarian often tries to sidestep difficult examples by appealing to « usage » or « idiom » or polysemy, he should realize that such appeals smack of the arbitrary and are really a confession of ignorance rather than an explanation. If language is fundamentally systematic, orderly,⁶ it behoves the grammarian to go beyond the conflicting particularities of usage in discourse to seek something more general : the hidden condition in tongue giving rise to the various observable uses of each preposition. A first step in this direction is the following description of the meaning of *for*, summarizing the three points of usage already mentioned :

For indicates the *continuous duration* of, or the *prolonged repetition* of an action or an event, the head-word denoting the *actual or intended length* of time through which something lasts or is intended to last. (Sandhagen, 1956, 165)

In other words, *for* introduces an expression which seems to provide a measure of the event's duration, of the time contained within the event. That is to say, *for*, as a preposition, relates its stretch of time to the event as contents to that which contains. A diagram will help to make this clear :

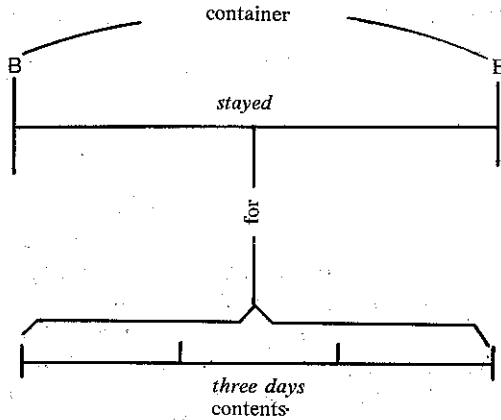


Figure 1.

The role of *for* is to make explicit the duration of the event *stayed*, that is, the time contained between its beginning (B) and its end (E).

A *during*-phrase, on the other hand, gives no indication of the duration of an event but rather evokes a period of time within which the event is represented as taking place. That is to say, *during*, as a preposition, relates its stretch of time to the event as a container to what it contains. A diagram will help to illustrate this relationship :

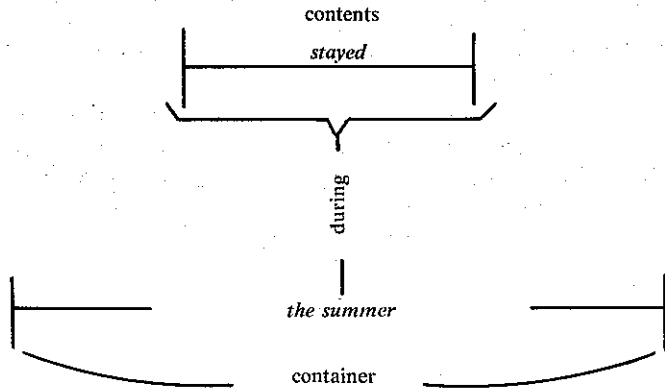


Figure 2

The role of *during* is to make explicit the temporal setting of the event *stayed*, that is, the time containing it.

These remarks lead us to the underlying distinction between *for* and *during*. As temporal prepositions, both name a relationship between a substantive expressing a period of time and some other element in the sentence, generally a verb. But each evokes a different relationship : *for* relates its period to the verb as contents to a container ; *during* relates its period to the verb (or other sentence element) as a container to its contents. Thus the two prepositions express complementary relationships, the one being the converse of the other. Furthermore, they evoke relationships which, in one sense, are necessary : to evoke something as contained necessarily implies the existence, virtual or actual, of a container ; and conversely to represent something as a container inevitably entails the existence of its contents.

However, to say of *during* that its role is to present its period of time as a container and so to bring it into relationship with that which is implied by any container, namely its contents, does not suffice as an explanation because the manner in which this underlying condition gives rise to the different senses in dis-

course is not made explicit. These various expressive effects range all the way from « at some point in the course of » to « throughout the continuance or course of » (*Webster's Third*) so that it would appear necessary to view *during*; not as having a fixed and unvarying value in discourse, but rather as somehow providing different versions of the container/contents relationship. This suggests that *during* makes available to the speaker a mechanism of representation in tongue which permits a variation of sense depending on the portion of the container-period occupied by the event contained. This portion may give the impression of being so small as to suggest the minimal extension of a point, for example, *He died during the summer* ; or the event may be felt to occupy a certain portion somewhere between a point and the whole of the period, as in *There was a rainy spell during the summer* ; or it may give the impression of stretching from beginning to end of the period, as in *The sun gives us light during the day* (Hornby *et al.*). An example which is ambiguous for the listener (unless provided with some contextual or situational clues to suggest what the speaker had in mind) may serve to illustrate the possible variation : *He was sick during the summer* could mean anything from « at some point in » to « throughout » the period.

To account for these different expressive effects (actual significates), we shall attempt to describe the potential significate underlying *during* in terms of a mechanism which brings into relation a container and its contents. This relationship can be represented as existing the moment some event, no matter how short, can be seen within the confines of the period. In other words, to be represented as a container, a stretch of time must be seen to contain at least some momentary event (just as a bucket can be said to function as a container provided there is at least one drop of water in it). But under these minimal requirements, the contents occupy very little of the container, most of which remains a potential container. This situation might be represented schematically as follows :

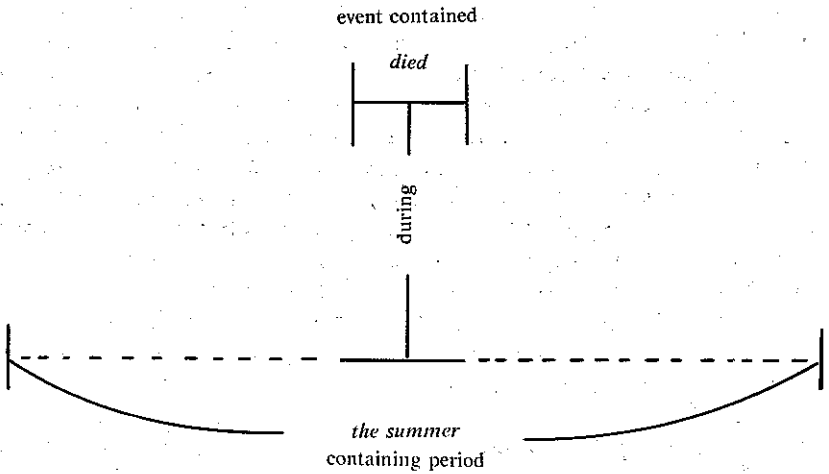


Figure 3

Our second expressive effect involves an event which occupies an appreciable portion (but not all) of the containing period. Here the period's existence as a container is confirmed in that it satisfies more than the minimal requirements ; in other words, its containing capacity is exploited more. However it still remains, in part, a potential container. This version of the same underlying relationship may be represented as follows :

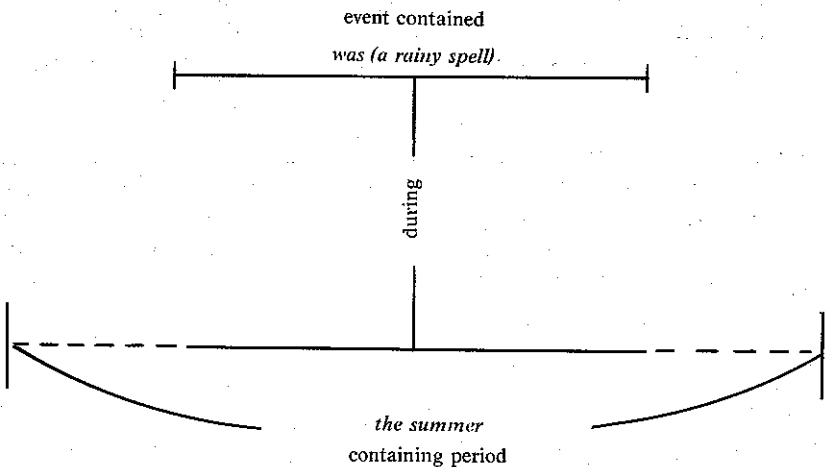


Figure 4

Finally, when the container is seen to be totally occupied by the contained event, its capacity is fully exploited (just like that of a bucket filled to the brim). That is to say, in this version of the relationship we have a wholly actualized container, as the following schema tries to suggest :

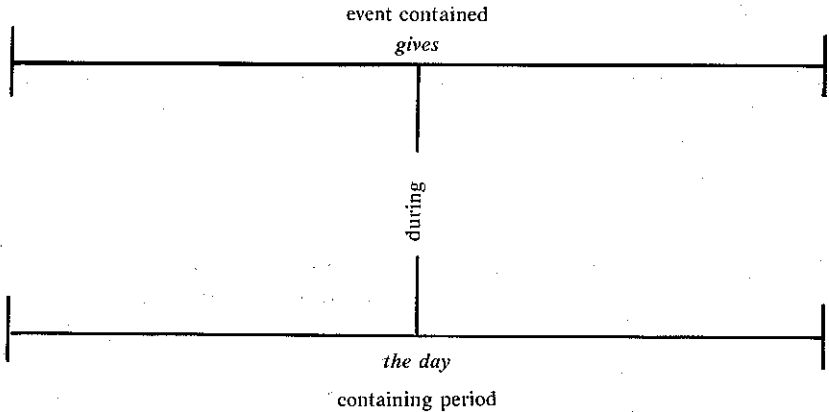


Figure 5

However, if language is dynamic, if it involves movement, we cannot be satisfied with the above three static representations of the resulting container/contents relationship. That is to say, such static schemas cannot bring out the generative operation underlying *during*, the mental mechanism whereby the representation of a temporal container is generated. This operation of « containerizing » a stretch of time, of mentally apprehending it as a container, appears to be part of the potential significate underlying *during*. This operation unrolls between limits which are by no means accidental, but rather imposed by the very notion of a container. Its initial limit is determined by the need to see something no matter how small as contained ; without a minimal content, be it real or virtual, there is no representation of a container. The final limit is imposed by the fact that the contents can never be greater than their container ; to go beyond this point would destroy the container/contents relationship. Like other systematic operations in tongue, this one can be held up early or late in its course, to give rise to the image of a container whose capacity is exploited to a greater or less degree.

Intercepted at its earliest instant, as soon as it starts, so that all the rest is seen as merely a possibility of movement, the operation provides as a result the image of a stretch of time minimally actualized as a container, the remaining portion being felt as a potential container. In a diagram :

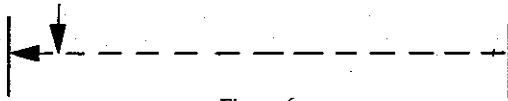


Figure 6

The operation may be intercepted at any intermediate instant between its beginning and its end, as depicted in the following schema :

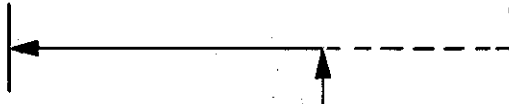


Figure 7

It will then give rise to the representation of a period which is partly exploited as a container. The only other possibility is to intercept the operation at its final instant :

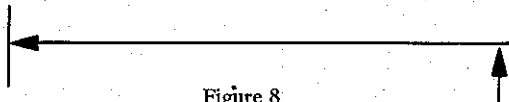


Figure 8

In this case the resulting image will be that of a stretch of time wholly actualized as a container.

This mechanism for actualizing to a greater or less extent the containing capacity implicit in a stretch of time goes to make up the material significate of *during*, which, like that of the other non-predicative parts of speech, is highly dematerialized and formalized. Since a container necessarily implies something

contained, *during* must also provide for a relationship between its own substantive-container and what it contains. This role is filled by the formal significate of *during*, which makes of it a preposition; that is to say, a word whose role is precisely that of establishing a relationship of incidence in the sentence for its own substantive.

To view *during* in this way is suggestive when we consider its etymology. Originating as the present participle of the obsolete verb *to dure* (Fr. *durer*), it first expressed lexically the notion of stretching out in time, of lasting. Through its position in the grammatical system of the verb, as expressed by the *-ing* ending of the participle, it was used to evoke the actualized portion of its event, leaving the rest in abeyance. This same role, evoking the actualized portion be it small or large, is still filled by *during* as a preposition. However, having become a non-predicative part of speech, *during* no longer fills this role with regard to that of another part of the sentence, the substantive it governs. Thus it appears that, because of its particular significate, the *-ing* ending was a most appropriate means for forming this new preposition, since both it and the present participle express variations on the same form, schematized as follows :

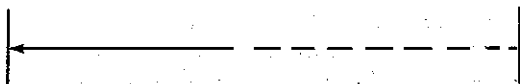


Figure 9

Let us now turn to *for*, which, as we have already seen, expresses its time stretch, not as a container, but as time contained in the event to which it is made incident. Here again, thanks to certain variations of expressive effect observable within the general framework of expressing a period of time as contained, it is possible to arrive at a view of what underlies *for* as a temporal preposition. The most striking contrast of nuance in discourse is the fact that *for* can present its substantive as « denoting *the actual or intended length* of time through which something lasts or is intended to last » (Sandhagen, 1956, 165).

An example of *for* expressing a period as the actual duration of an event would be : *He stayed for three days*. Here the container *stayed* is evoked in its entirety so that the time it contains is seen as real. This could be schematized as follows :

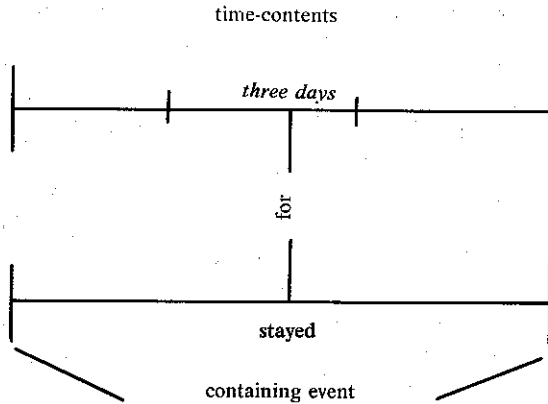


Figure 10

Whether or not the event itself has been actualized is immaterial ; once the event container is predicated, as a temporal whole, its duration can be seen as real. For example, in *He will stay for three days* we have the duration, represented as real, of a prospective event.

In contrast with this expression of actual duration, « the intended duration indicated by the prepositional phrase does *not coincide* in time with the activity expressed in the same sentence by a verb or its equivalent » (Sandhagen, 1956, 183). That is to say, in an example like *She just left town for the week-end* the period evoked does not make explicit the duration of the event *left*, but rather the intended duration of its consequence : the absence from town. Only the initial limit of the absence, coinciding with the final limit of the event *left*, is evoked by implication. This relationship can be represented in a diagram as follows :

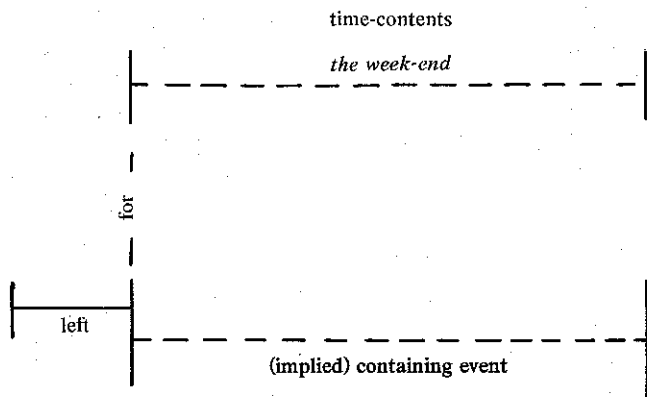


Figure 11

In such cases, the time-contents can only appear as non-actual, as virtual, because their time-container is not actualized in the sentence.

Between these two extremes of wholly actualized and wholly virtual duration, there are cases where the time-contents expressed by a *for*-phrase are only partly actualized and so partly intended or virtual. A sentence like *He is here for three days* spoken during the subject's stay evokes the stay as already partly actualized and as intended to last until the third day is up. In a diagram :

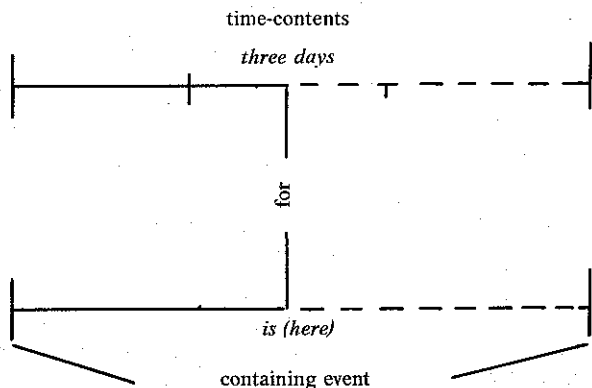


Figure 12

Once again, it is the contents/container relationship which conditions this particular expressive effect : the event-container being represented only in the present of speech, the remaining portion of the event is merely implied as possible ; the time-contents can therefore be represented as only partly actual.

From this cursory examination of expressive effects it appears that *for* can present its time stretch as a virtual or intended duration, as a partly actual and partly virtual duration or as a wholly actual duration of time contained in an event. Furthermore, the degree of actualization of the duration corresponds to the extent to which the containing event is represented elsewhere in the sentence. And so, in order to account for all these possibilities of representing the temporal contents of an event, we are led to propose that underlying *for* there is a mechanism of representation not unlike that proposed for *during*, namely, a mental operation offering the possibility of interceptions at various instants along its course : at the beginning instant, somewhere in the middle or at the final instant. These three possibilities can be depicted in the following manner :

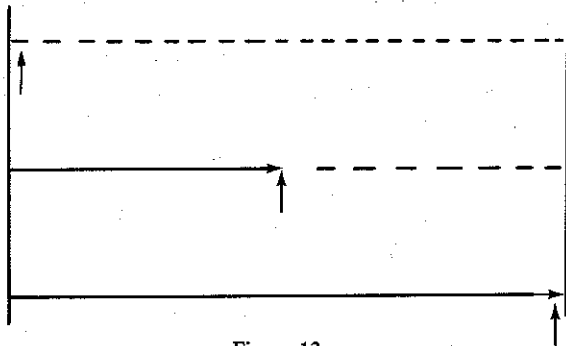


Figure 13

Each of these interceptive possibilities produces a different nuance in discourse, as mentioned above.

It is hoped that this description of the underlying mechanism will provide a better understanding of what it means to characterize *for* as expressing time as contents and *during* as expressing time as a container. However, in case the reader has got the impression that this mechanism is a sort of stop-gap, invented for the needs of the moment, it will be useful to situate what we have said so far in a wider theoretical context.

In the first place, the distinction between time contained in an event and time containing an event is by no means a new one. First made by Gustave Guillaume in 1929, this distinction served as one of the cornerstones of his theory of the verb. A representation of the time within the event, later called *event time*, was seen to be a necessary part of the time image involved in any verb because the very existence of an event implies some duration. By the same token any event takes place in time ; time outside the event is called *universe time* because, like the spatial universe, it can contain anything but cannot be contained. And so any verb involves a representation of both event time and of universe time. What is worth remarking here is the parallel between the grammatical and the lexical. Where the verb provides a grammatical expression, and so an expression in the most general terms, of the event time, a *for*-phrase can provide a lexical expression of event time with all the particularity required by the context and situation. Similarly for universe time : it is expressed in all its generality through the grammatical significate of the verb (e.g. as past time-sphere in the indicative) and can also be expressed lexically by means of a *during*-phrase in as particular and detailed a way as one wishes. And so the explanation offered here for *for* and *during* finds its plausibility enhanced because the very distinction on which it is based - that between time contained and time containing - is similar to that which lies at the basis of the grammatical representation of time in any verb.

From an even more general point of view, the mechanism described here as underlying and giving rise to the various expressive effects of the two prepositions is essentially the same as that underlying other grammatical items, such as the articles, the system of number in the substantive and the system of mood in the verb. In each of these cases the observation of discourse and reflection on what it implies reveals that there is an underlying mental operation liable to be intercepted at different points along its course. What differentiates these operations is the particular substance discussed by means of the mechanism : the relationship of container and contents in the case of *for* and *during*. In fact, Guillaume (1973, 94-95) poses this mechanism as a general principle for the systematics of language : that the systems of our tongue reflect the capacity of our mind to lay

hold of, and so provide a representation of, what is going on within itself. Since our brief examination of *for* and *during* leads us to conclusions that not only reflect a distinction already made in another field, that of the verb, but also presuppose a mechanism like that proposed for other grammatical systems, it illustrates a general aspect of language and so should offer something for the linguist's consideration.

Be this as it may, this problem remains one of English grammar. To offer some grist for the grammarian's mill, it behooves us to turn from these more general considerations to glance briefly at some uses in the light of our analysis. First of all, the characteristics of usage enumerated above appear as necessary consequences of the underlying conditions proposed. Thus, if the *for*-phrase actually does present its stretch of time as contained in the event, then it should tell us not only how long the event lasted, and so require some expression of quantity, but also that the event occupied the whole of the period, the whole of its own duration. A common example of this is : *They walked for a fortnight, averaging about fifteen miles a day* (Sandhagen, 1965, 168). Similarly, a *during*-phrase, as the expression of time containing, will necessarily tell us when, within what period of time, the event took place, but in order to do so requires no expression of quantity to indicate how much of the period is occupied by the event. The following sentence illustrates this : *We went to the cinema yesterday and bought some ice-cream during the interval* (Hill, 1968, 59).

The difference between the two prepositions is brought out with particular clarity in sentences containing both prepositions. In *been away for a couple of weeks during the summer* (*Webster's Third*, s. v. *during*) the event and its time contents expressed by the *for*-phrase are situated within the wider period by means of *during*. In some cases the speaker represents the same stretch of time in two different ways : *I was ill for a week and during that week I ate nothing* (Thomson and Martinet, 1963, 61). *For* here presents the week as the time included in the event *was (ill)* ; *during* presents the same week as the temporal setting for the event *ate (nothing)*. Similarly, in the following example a single span of time (from the point of view of extra-linguistic experience) is represented first as contained in (*for*) and then as containing (*during*) an event :

...who was then in hospital for nine months, during which time visiting by his parents was forbidden (Sandhagen, 1956, 177).

In some contexts *for* and *during* are « interchangeable » : either preposition can be used, but not without a shift in sense, the consequence in discourse of the underlying meaning in tongue. In *For the last three mornings he had been with her* (Sandhagen, 1956, 171), the suggestion is that he spent the mornings with her because *for* presents the period as the duration of the event. With *during*, however, the period would be seen as a container, and so there is the possible nuance that he had been with her only at a given moment within the mornings.

Again in the example already given, *He stayed here for/during the last three days*, the use of *for* would suggest that the stay lasted three days. The use of *during* might suggest either that his stay occurred at some point within the three days, or else that it extended throughout the period. Even if *during* expresses this second effect, the nuance between the two prepositions is real, though very slight because each one expresses a case of plenitude, where the contents are seen as filling the whole of the container.

In *He was here for the winter* either one of two expressive effects discussed above are possible : that he actually spent the whole winter here, or that he was here and intended to spend the whole winter. These effects arise respectively from the representation of the time-contents as totally actualized and as partially actualized with the rest left as a virtual duration. If we substitute *during*, *He was here during the winter*, we again make it possible to have two interpretations : that his being here occupied either some portion or the whole of the winter. Again it is a distinction arising from different interceptions of the underlying operation, which give representations of the container either as partly or as wholly actualized. The possibility in cases like these of using either *for* or *during*, with the consequent expressive possibilities on the level of discourse, can be understood only if one has some idea of the underlying generative operations in tongue.

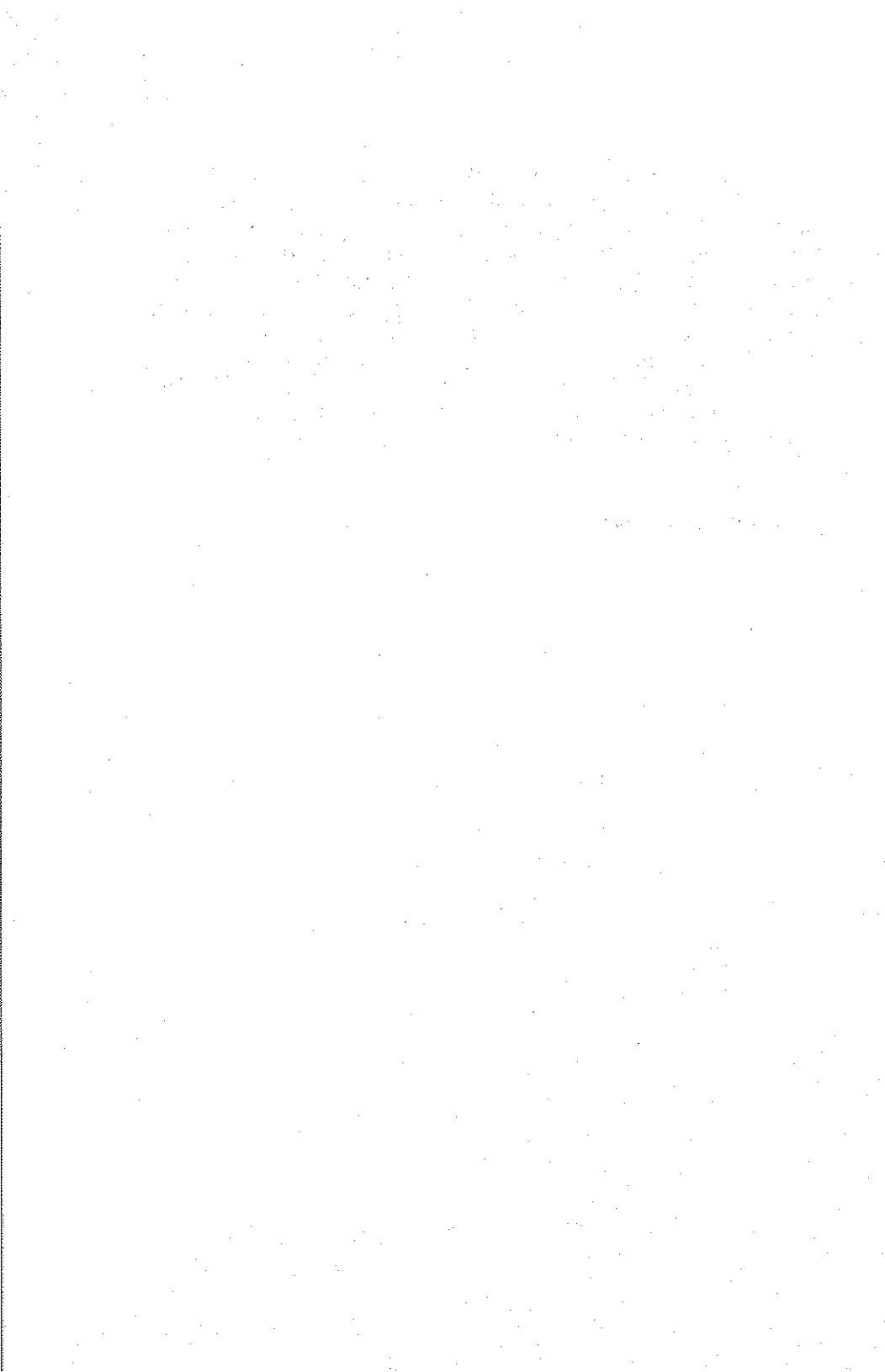
Finally, an example with *during* where we would, at first glance, expect to find *for*: *During many years Sir Henry Head carried out systematic observations on the nature and functions of afferent sensibility...* (Bartlett, 1939, 198). The suggestion here is that the recurrent event occupied only a small portion of each year, whereas *for* would evoke the impression of something continuous. And what permits an expression like « many years » to situate the event is the assumption that Sir Henry Head's place in time is known to the reader. We are here dealing with very subtle impressions which the *for/during* pair permit speakers to render with considerable ease.

At the end of this brief glance at different uses, we should mention other problems of discourse which can be profitably viewed in the light of our analysis. One of the most intriguing is the optional omission of *for* in certain contexts, namely those where the time-contents are represented as fully actualized, e.g. *He stayed here (for) three days*. It would appear that this option arises from the possibility of intercepting the operation underlying *for* at its last instant, either at the internal limit, or at the external limit. However since the same question arises with spatial *for*, it can only be examined in detail in a wider context than the present one. Indeed, all that has been said of temporal *for* in the present paper remains to be integrated into a study of this preposition as a whole.

Another such problem concerns the sort of substantive that *during* can govern. As might be expected, it would appear that *during* can « containerize » only those which imply a stretch of time: *during my class* but not **during my classroom*; *during my visit* but not **during my visitor*. More subtle are the reasons why *He stayed here during the last week (summer, year, etc.)* is quite acceptable whereas (?) *He stayed here during last week (summer, year, etc.)* is doubtful. Or again, why do we say *during the whole evening* but not **during all the evening*? The solution to such problems will not only give us some understanding of the lexical content of the substantival expressions involved but will also provide a test of the explanation presented here. In any case, the grammarian of English can profitably approach such problems only with the assumption that language is systematic, at least insofar as the meanings of its grammatical items are concerned, so that by clarifying one of them he will throw a partial light on others.

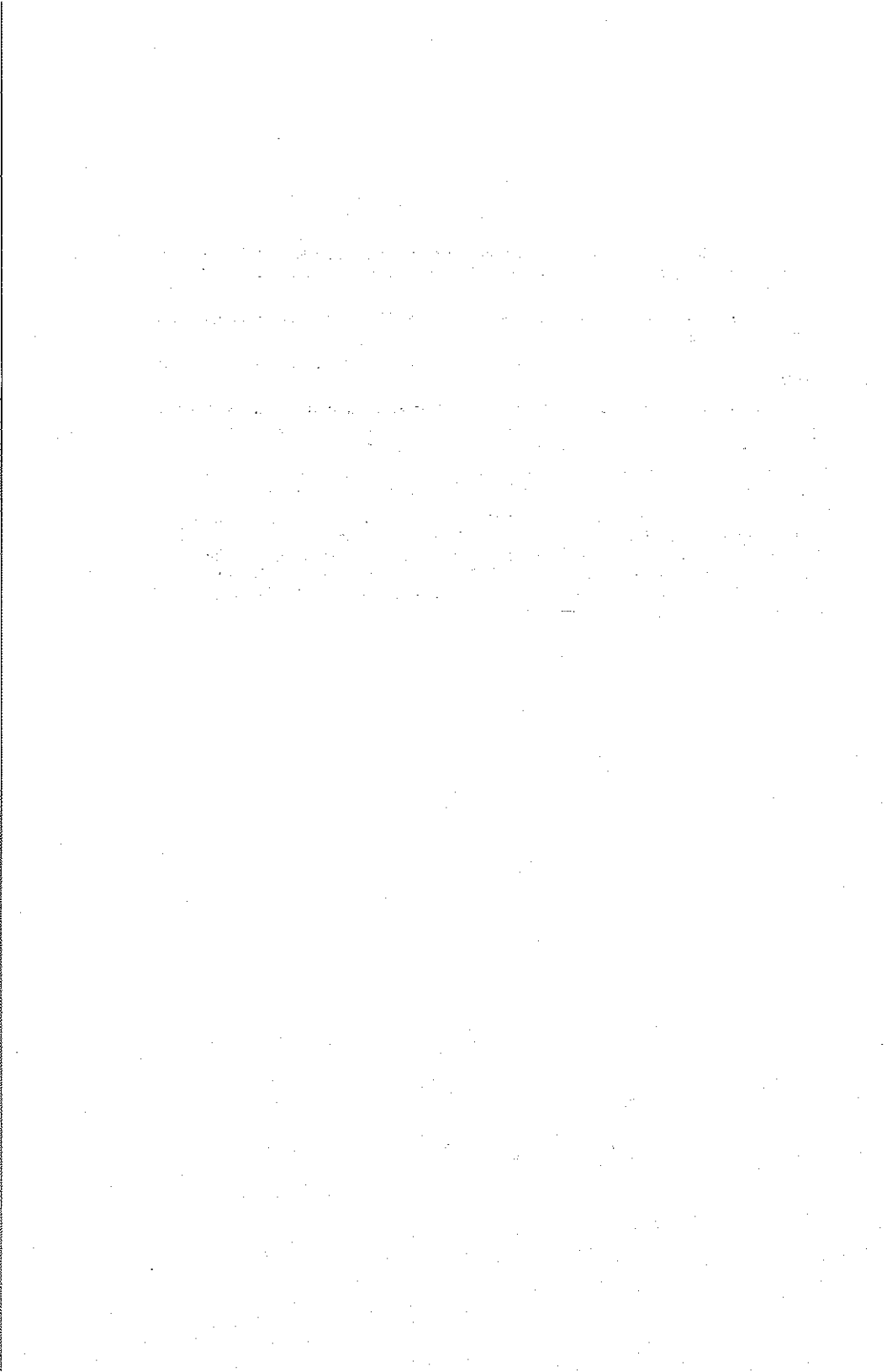
Last, but certainly not least, there is the teacher of English whose recent plea, understandable in present circumstances, for a « teachable » rather than a « scientific » grammar, suggests that grammatical theory has lost touch with the reality of language and so has lost its right to be called scientific. It is hoped that the present explanation, by showing that *for* and *during* can each be traced back to a notion arising from common experience, does provide a practical basis for teaching which, because it is consistent with other areas of English grammar and rooted in a general theory of language, can also lay a claim to being scientific.

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NOTES

1. As when *for* is paraphrased as « for the period of » (Clark, 1947, 115) or *during* is said to be one of « those prepositions of time whose meaning is quite clear » (Corder, 1960, 102).
2. Cf. also, « *For* is used with periods of time to show how long an action lasts » (Corder, 1960, 102).
3. Cf. also, « *During* is placed before known periods of time... » (Thomson and Martinet, 1963, 61).
4. More explicitly : « *for* is used for a period of time, definite in length but otherwise indefinite. It is usually followed by a singular noun preceded by *a*, a plural noun, an adjective of quantity, or *ever* » (Thomson and Martinet, 1963, 61).
5. In Hornby *et al.*, two meanings are given for *during* : « throughout » and « at some point of time in ». Wood (1967, 30) and Hill (1968, 58-59) give similar meanings.
6. To consider certain uses as essentially arbitrary insofar as the given form is concerned is to imply that language is not fundamentally orderly, a position which sets language off as a rare, and perhaps unique, phenomenon in what appears to the man of science to be an otherwise orderly universe. The position adopted in this paper is that there is order underlying language usage and so does not exclude the possibility of viewing language as an object of science.



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