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## Can we define a category of conjunctive elements?

Eliza Kitis  
Department of English  
Aristotle University

In this paper we will examine the notion of category in relation to conjunction and try to define it. What is of interest is that we can look at the notion of category from different angles. Looking at it from different angles, though, need not entail any variation of the concept. The set and its members each time should remain constant or relatively stable.

However, as is well known, this is not the case. The angle from which you try to define categories bears on the identity of it and, as a consequence, on the elements comprising it. One way to look at the notion of 'category', therefore, is from the point of view of the part of speech. In this case a category can be defined as a set or class of elements which have the same formal and functional characteristics.

Quirk et al (1985:74), for instance, base their characterization of parts of speech on grammatical form and function, rather than on semantic properties for reasons which are well understood and need not be mentioned here. The 'notional' approach to word classes leads to unfounded generalizations. More specifically, we are here dealing with grammatical categories which can be identified by means of relationships of choice (substitution). A unit then is classified on the basis of its form (its internal structure), or of its function (subject, object of a clause).

Quirk et al (1985) place the word class of conjuncts within the broader class of Adverbials. However, following this approach, they identify a class of coordinators, as they call certain conjunctive elements, on the basis of certain syntactic features characterizing them all:

### Syntactic features of coordinators:

- (a) clause-initial position
- (b) coordinated clauses sequentially fixed
- (c) coordinators not preceded by conjunction
- (d) coordinators can link clause constituents
- (e) coordinators can link subordinate clauses
- (f) coordinators can link more than two clauses.

## Coordination-conjunct-subordination gradient:

		(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)
coordinators	and, or, but	+	+	+	+	+	+
	but	+	+	+	+	+-	-
conjuncts	yet, so, nor	+	+	x	+	-	-
	however, therefore	-	+	-	-	-	-
subordinators	for, so that,	+	+	+	-	-	-
	if, because	+	+-	-	-	-	-

As is clear from this table and as is acknowledged by Quirk et al (1985), there is no clear divide between coordinators and other linking items. They add that "*yet, so, neither, and nor* are best treated as conjuncts which are nevertheless more coordinator-like than more typical conjuncts, such as, *however* and *therefore*. These words which share some of the distinguishing features of coordinators may be called SEMI-COORDINATORS"(p.928).

So all the above criteria set out by Quirk et al cannot act as criterial properties, i.e., as either necessary or sufficient conditions for the applicability of a theoretical term to a class of items which would lead to a sound definition of the term. These syntactic features can at best be regarded as terms of tendencies (Zwicky and Pullum, 1983), or as "*characteristic symptoms* of a linguistic state of affairs" rather than "invariant concomitants" of it (Zwicky, 1985:285). We can hardly, therefore, delimit a clear category on such a basis.

In fairness to Quirk et al (1985), it must be noted that they are anxious to acknowledge the problem of the partial 'indeterminacy' of grammatical categories, as they put it, which is engendered by their classification of disjuncts and conjuncts within the broader category of adverbials. They write:

Grammar is to some extent an indeterminate system. Categories and structures, for example, often do not have neat boundaries. Grammarians are tempted to overlook such uncertainties, or to pretend that they do not exist. Our guiding principle in this grammar, however, will be to acknowledge them, and where appropriate to explore them through the study of GRADIENCE. A gradient is a scale which relates two categories of description (for example two word classes) in terms of degrees of similarity and contrast. At the ends of the scale are items which belong clearly to one category or to another; intermediate positions on the scale are

taken by 'in-between' cases-items which fail, in different degrees, to satisfy the criteria for one or the other category (p.90).

However, it must be pointed out that despite their claim that categorization will be based on grammatical form and function rather than on semantic properties (p.74), the criteria employed for their classification of conjuncts in terms of adverbials are primarily determined by semantic considerations. They distinguish seven main categories of semantic role, i.e., the categories of space, time, process, respect, contingency, modality and degree. It must be noted that looking at categorization from this angle involves what we might call extralinguistic domains, as Russell would say. This approach to categorization is basically Aristotelian. According to Aristotle there are ten categories: substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, state, action and affection. These categories are signified by any word whose meaning is not compounded of the meanings of other words.

However, he lays primary importance on 'substance', which is "what is not predicable of a subject nor present in a subject" (Russell, 1946:223). As Russell put it:

A thing is said to be 'present in a subject' when, though not a part of the subject, it cannot exist without the subject. The instances given are a piece of grammatical knowledge which is present in a mind, and a certain whiteness which may be present in a body. A substance in the above primary sense is an individual thing or person or animal. But in a secondary sense a species or a genus-eg. 'man' or 'animal'-may be called a substance. This secondary sense seems indefensible, and opened the door, in later writers, to much bad metaphysics (p.223).

According to Russell (1946:224) "the conception of *substance*, like that of *essence*, is a transference to metaphysics of what is only a linguistic convenience".

What is significant to note is that the other Aristotelian categories gave rise to a determination of categories in terms of common properties evidenced in individuals, and hence in members of the parts of speech. These are person, tense, mood, aspect, etc. This categorization, however, need not concern us here as it does not seem to bear on conjunction.

The elements of language, therefore, were analysed as *substances* and classified into categories (parts of speech) according to their *mode of signifying* the individuals, properties or relation to which they referred. Consequently, the categories of *existence*, *signifying* and *understanding* were set up and associated with philosophy, grammar and logic respectively (Lyons, 1968:271).

Quirk et al (1985), following this practice, group adverbials into classes according to their *mode of signifying* the things, properties and relations to which they refer. In other words adverbials, and hence conjuncts, are treated as operative *signs* or as instruments for the signification and apprehension of *reality*. Conjuncts are said to have semantic roles that are conjunct-specific. That is, they have the function of conjoining independent units rather than one of contributing another facet of information to a single integrated unit (ibid.:631).

As far as the semantics of conjuncts are concerned, Quirk et al (1985:634) distinguish seven conjunctive roles, although they note that "the conjunct function entails a conjunct-specific set of semantic relations". These roles are the following:

#### Conjuncts: Semantic roles

- (a) listing:
  - (i) enumerative
  - (ii) additive: equative  
reinforcing
- (b) summative
- (c) appositional
- (d) resultive
- (e) inferential
- (f) contrastive:
  - (i) reformulatory
  - (ii) replacive
  - (iii) antithetic
  - (iv) concessive
- (g) transitional:
  - (i) discorsal
  - (ii) temporal

They go on to explain what they mean by these semantic roles. What is of interest, however, is to note that these semantic roles are focused on some ideational, as Halliday and Hasan (1976) would say, relationship between the propositions of the two clauses or sentences thus linked (with the exception of 'somehow').

More specifically, one might say that conjuncts signify or rather denote the mode of the relation holding between propositional contents. So, one might talk of a grammatical category whose elements will be characterized by certain syntactic specifications. This grammatical category will be partially defined by semantic characteristics or, more specifically, will correspond to a semantic category which will include items(?) whose semantic role can be defined as denoting relations

between propositions. That is, at the grammatical level linguistic items, members of the category, will link sentences. At the semantic level these linguistic items will relate in a specific mode the propositions of the sentences linked.

Since semantics reveals the logical structure of language, we might argue that at the logical level conjuncts designate the relation holding between two ideas. However, one might here recall Russell (1940:41) who wrote that:

Parts of speech, as they appear in grammar, have no very intimate relation to logical syntax. 'Before' is a preposition and 'precedes' is a verb, but they mean the same thing.

Bearing in mind that language is transparent, as Russell once said, we should be very cautious about categorizing on the basis of semantic criteria. Moreover, it should be noticed that what have been traditionally regarded as logical connectors are not included in the class of adverbial conjuncts, which are defined in terms of semantic roles. Instead, logical connectors, or rather what have been traditionally regarded as the counterparts of logical connectors in natural language, i.e., *and, or, but* are called conjunctions (Quirk et al, 1985), and are listed as coordinators. By contrast, they are not categorized in terms of any semantic roles, and their sole function is that of coordinating. Instead of any semantic content attributed to them, Quirk et al talk of the uses of coordinators (13.22). This is a remarkable shift of position from their earlier Grammar (1972), in which logical connectors were said to epitomize semantic roles, although this term had not appeared yet in 1972. This is shown clearly in the following table:

Logical connectors

and:	listing:	enumeration
	addition:	reinforcement equation
	transition	
	summation	
	apposition	
	result	
	inference	
or:	reformulation	
	replacement	
but:	contrast	
	concession	

for: cause (restricted use)

(Quirk et al, 1972)

This move was a wise one, because it took into account the difficulty involved in specifying or determining the meaning of these items, on the one hand, and, on the other, it allows for the possibility of a correspondence between logical syntax and grammatical structure by leaving out the semantics altogether, or, more precisely, by reducing semantics to truth-conditions. As Russell(1940:41) wrote:

The most complete part of logic is the theory of conjunctions. These, as they occur in logic, come only between whole sentences; they give rise to molecular sentences, of which the atoms are separated by the conjunctions.

However, it is worthy of note, to trace one common feature, implicitly acknowledged by Quirk et al (1985), as characterizing both the classes of conjuncts and conjunctions, or coordinating conjunctions, as they call logical connectors. This characteristic is their potential to link sentences. They write under the heading of *the semantics of conjuncts* (p.634):

The conjunct function entails a conjunct-specific set of semantic relations. They are connected with, but are frequently rather remote from, the adverbial relation we must assume in the speaker-related clause to which they correspond. It is necessary, therefore, to set out the conjunctive meanings concerned, although.....they can be seen in the wider context of inter-sentence relations and discourse structure.

They add:

Conjuncts thus *both* indicate the relation *and* are demonstrably outside the syntactically integrated clause structure which admits adjuncts.

Conjunctions, therefore, exhibit only the latter feature and can be categorized according to this property.

This shift of position in describing and categorizing conjunctive elements in Quirk et al reveals change of approach from a rich semantics, where *uses* of conjunctive elements are incorporated within the domain of semantics, to a meaning-minimalist approach, where truth-conditional aspect of meaning are of primary significance and all other aspects of meaning are relegated to condition of use of these meanings, i.e., to conversational principles.

As far as categorization is concerned, therefore, in keeping with the traditional view of the notion of 'category', coordinating conjunctions will form a distinct and discrete category characterized by the criterial property of conjunctivity. Leaving aside linguistic categorization which may be seen as a reflection of cognitive categorization, we can posit the following questions. What will the texture of such a category be? What will its semantic/cognitive/functional space be? Within the Platonic tradition categories are domains of apprehension, they are 'discrete, absolute and pristine'. In other words, what is the nature of the criterial property of conjunctivity?

Aristotle maintained Plato's distinction between the two classes of *onoma* and *rhema* but also added a third one *syndesmoi*, although other elements than just conjunctions were included in this class. Dionysus Thrax (100BC) defined the class of *syndesmos* (conjunction) as follows: Conjunction is a part of speech binding together the discourse (by linking ideas) and filling gaps in its interpretation.

In his *Essay On human nature and the understanding*, Hume writes that "a production without a design would resemble more the ravings of a madman than the sober efforts of genius and learning"; and he adds (p. 40):

As this rule admits of no exception, it follows that in narrative compositions the events or actions which the writer relates must be connected together by some bond or tie: They must be related to each other in the imagination and form a kind of *unity* which may bring them under one plan or view, and which may be the object or end of the writer in his first undertaking.

Hume distinguishes three major relations: of resemblance, contiguity and causation, which materialize as connecting principles. Many operations of the human mind depend on this very connection or association of ideas. We might claim, therefore, that the texture of conjunctivity may be found in the essence of this connection of ideas/events/actions. Looking at the category thus delineated, we might for a moment claim that we have solved our problem. On the one hand, a semantic/cognitive category of conjunctivity, which can be further specified and elaborated in logical terms. On the other, a linguistic category fleshing it out.

However, we can instantly identify two problems:

(a) A semantic or cognitive category of conjunctivity would definitely include *all* modes of connecting and, consequently, cannot be fleshed out by just those linguistic items which have been called coordinating conjunctions. Of necessity, all forms of connection

must be included within this broad, general category, a necessity which would bring in picture all conjuncts, which, however, have been specified in terms of not just their potential conjunctivity, but also in terms of semantic roles.

(b) The second problem that can be also identified as a consequence of a broad categorization is that even if the linguistic subcategory of coordinating conjunctions is specified as realising a very general mode of connection, as this was described in logic, we are left with the well-known concomitant problems of the underspecification of their meaning.

In other words, whether we choose to include both conjuncts and conjunctions within the category or subcategorize the latter only, we are still faced with the same sort of problem. In cases we adopt a reductionistic approach to language by leaving aspects of the meaning function of linguistic items unaccounted for.

There are two routes to be taken at this impasse: One would be to opt for the other extreme path concerning categoriality, the non-Platonic view, in which "non-discreteness, fuzzy-edges, contingent and contingent definitions" (Givon, 1984:14) are in order. In this case, we disregard cognate important facet of language, in favour of the use of language. Taking this position we acknowledge that

semantic/grammatical categories and *rules of grammar* might exhibit only *partial* categoriality (Givon:14),

and that a fully categorial, formal system cannot account for natural language, although it can provide a possible *grammar*. However, it can be pointed out that categoriality need not be abandoned, as it would, if one opted for this route, because there is indeed a *great measure* of categoriality in human language.

The other alternative that is then open to us is to subscribe to a "hybrid solution" (Givon 1984:14) which is a compromise between the two extremist positions. However, in either case, i.e., whether the extreme position is taken or whether a middle course is steered, the consequences will be the same. Firstly, the membership of the linguistic category will be greatly enlarged to the extent that all members may have to be called *particles*. Secondly, the semantic/cognitive space allotted to the category can only be -if any-that of conjunctivity.

Indeed, Locke includes conjunctions as a subdivision within the category of particles, although he writes that

what is meant by them, is commonly as hard to be understood in one, as another language. They are all marks of some action, or intimation of the mind (ch. VII, Book III, Of words).

However, it is well known that the term particle has been used "to label items, which, in contrast to those in established word classes of a language, have (a) peculiar semantics and (b) idiosyncratic distributions. Thus 'particle' is a cover term for items that do not fit easily into syntactic and semantic generalizations about the language" (Zwicky: 290 )

In one word, the class of 'particles' has been defined rather negatively in the sense that it is the rag-bag to receive all left-overs after an assignment of words to categories. As a consequence, the major question that can be raised is whether it is worth dealing with categorial notions at all at the more realistic level of investigating language structure-cum-use.

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