

The Study of Coordinating Conjunctions in English – A Game Based Approach

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Abstract

Conjunction, also known as a joining word, is one of the eight parts of speech in English. Though conjunctions are a closed class, their functions are important. That is, they are used to combine words, phrases, or clauses (Ed Swick, 2009). The knowledge in conjunctions is essential for a student of English as a Second Language (ESL) in order to demonstrate his mastery of basics in grammar and mechanics with sentence fluency in both verbal and especially in written communication. Thus, conjunctions play a pivotal role in the development of a student's English. Language scholars have divergent views on the types of conjunction. According to Finch (2005), there are two main kinds of conjunction: coordinating, and subordinating. Among these two types, coordinating conjunctions or coordinators are probably the most common ones and they are often used by the students of ESL in their day-to-day communicative and written activities. There are seven coordinating conjunctions in English. It is clear that the ability of using them appropriately will help the students of ESL write and speak in a confident manner. Thus, this paper presents a deep study of coordinating conjunctions based on the idea of a computer game, i.e. a student-friendly innovative learning tool, Coordinator Finder, for the betterment of all the students of ESL in schools, colleges, and universities.

Keywords: conjunction, coordinator, part of speech, ESL, innovative learning tool.

Introduction

The simple, little conjunctions are called coordinating conjunctions or simply 'coordinators' (Kleiser, 2008). A coordinator is a word used to join words, phrases, clauses, or sentences (Aarts et al., 2014). The coordinating conjunctions are used to coordinate, or link, two or more units of the same status (Leech, 2006; Finch, 2005; Aarts et al., 2014). The scholars, Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia (2016), also state that coordination is the process of combining two or more like constituents to produce another larger constituent of the same type. Further, the grammarian Michael Swan (2016), says that coordinate clauses have equal weight. For example, in the adjective phrase *poor but honest*, two adjectives *poor* and *honest* are connected with the coordinator, 'but'. Moreover, in the sentence, *The woods are sprouting, and the dove is cooing*, the coordinating conjunction 'and' (which seems to mean much the same as the 'plus' sign in arithmetic) connects the clauses (*The woods are sprouting* and *The dove is cooing*) which do not depend on each other, and

therefore they are said to be coordinate, which means of equal rank.

Coordination of sentences is a grammatical strategy to communicate that the ideas in two or more independent clauses are equivalent or balanced. Coordination can produce harmony by bringing related elements together. Whenever you use the technique of coordination of sentences, make sure that it works well with the meaning you want to communicate. Coordination in sentences enhances writing style. In a good writing, coordinating conjunctions must be chosen with care in order that they may show the exact relationship between ideas. Often a careless writer will use the other conjunction (in the example below, the subordinating conjunction, *though*) where the relationship of clauses needs to be more accurately expressed, probably by the use of *coordination* (here, *and*). Notice how the emphasis and meaning differ in the following sentences:

1. Though John's father is a surveyor, his mother is a teacher.

2. John's father is a surveyor, and his mother is a teacher.

In the above sentences, the meaning of the sentence 2 is clearer than the sentence 1.

Thus, when clearly written, your sentences show the relations between ideas and stress the more important ideas over the lesser ones. Such clarity can be achieved with the help of the technique, i.e. using *coordination*. In English, there are seven coordinating conjunctions: *For*, *And*, *Nor*, *But*, *Or*, *Yet*, and *So*, known as by an easy mnemonic device, **FANBOYS**. Each coordinating conjunction has its own meaning. That is: **and** means addition; **but** and **yet** reflect contrast; **for** shows reason or choice; **or** displays choice; **nor** expresses negative choice; and **so** means result or effect. When you choose a coordinating conjunction, be sure that its meaning accurately expresses the relationship between the ideas that you want to convey. Coordinating conjunctions are the most commonly used conjunctions in day-to-day spoken and written English. Therefore, a student of ESL can improve the cohesion between the different parts of the text and enable him to construct long sentences without sounding awkward by mastering the coordinating conjunctions deeply, though the concept of them may seem too simple.

The Uses of Coordinating Conjunctions

Kleiser (2008) points out the following features of the seven coordinating conjunctions, i.e. *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *yet*, and *so*:

AND

- To suggest that one idea is chronologically sequential to another.
 - Priya sent in her application, *and* waited by the phone for a response.
- To suggest that one idea is the result of another.
 - Johnson heard the weather report, *and* promptly boarded up his house.
- To suggest an element of surprise (sometimes replaced by *yet* in this usage).
 - Hartford is a rich city, *and* suffers from many symptoms of urban blight.

BUT

- To suggest a contrast that is unexpected in the light of the first clause.
 - Chloroquine is approved by the US Food and Drug Administration for treating malaria, *but* it is not authorised as a medication for Covid-19.
- To connect two ideas with the meaning of 'with the exception of' (and then the second word takes over as subject).
 - Everybody, *but* Trump is trying out for the team.

OR

- To suggest that only one possibility can be realized, excluding one or the other.
 - You have to study hard for this exam, *or* you will fail.
- To suggest the inclusive combination of alternatives.
 - We can broil chicken on the grill tonight, *or* we can just eat leftovers.
- To suggest a restatement or 'correction' of the first part of the sentence.
 - There are no rattlesnakes in this canyon, *or so* our guide tells us.

NOR

Its most common use is as the little brother in the correlative pair (*or* conjunction), *neither-nor*.

- He is *neither* sane *nor* the brilliant.
- But, it is also possible to use 'nor' without a preceding negative element; further, it is unusual and, to an extent, rather stuffy.
- Chomy does not like the mountains, *nor* does she like the ocean.

YET

As the function of a coordinator, it means something like 'nevertheless' or 'but'. The coordinator 'yet' seems to carry an element of distinctiveness that 'but' can seldom register.

- John plays basketball well, *yet* his favourite sport is badminton.

It is to be noted that 'yet' is sometimes combined with other coordinators, 'and' or 'but'.

FOR

The word 'for' serves as a coordinating conjunction on rare occasions. Some people regard the conjunction 'for' as rather highfalutin and literary, and it tends to add a bit of weightiness to the text. Further, the function of 'for' is to introduce the reason for the preceding clause.

- I want to go there again, *for* it was a wonderful trip.

SO

The coordinator, 'so', can connect two independent clauses along with a comma. Care has to be taken while using the conjunction 'so', as two independent clauses can be linked even without the conjunction 'so', but with a semi-colon. Mostly, 'so' is acting like a minor-league 'therefore', the conjunction and the comma are adequate to the task.

- This song has been very popular, *so* I downloaded it.

Points to Ponder

- Always use a comma before a coordinating conjunction that joins two independent clauses.
- It is noted that coordinate sentences do not allow *intrasentential movement*, as the following example shows:
 - Alan paid the rent, *and* Mary paid for the groceries.
**And* Mary paid for the groceries, Alan paid the rent.

The asterisk symbol (*), here, shows the *ungrammaticality*.

- In many coordinate sentences, there are no logical constraints on the order in which the various clauses can appear. For example:

- Sam will wash the dishes, *or* John will.
John will wash the dishes, *or* Sam will.

But, in other coordinate sentences, there are logical constraints on the order in which the various clauses can appear. For instance:

- You have to do it quickly, *or* I'll punch you in the nose.
*I'll punch you in the nose, *or* you have to do it quickly.

Methodology of the Developed Game, 'Coordinator Finder'

The game, Coordinator Finder, is a computer programme. It has been developed with the help of the

computer language, Visual Basic 6. Sixty (60) sentences with seven coordinating conjunctions have been added to the database of the programme. Twelve students in two groups, i.e. six in each group, can participate in this game. First of all, the names of the two groups and the participants in each group have to be entered. This is illustrated by the following screenshot of the game (*Figure 1*):



Figure 1: The names of the two groups and participants

Then, the clicking the button, 'Play 1', will take the groups to the game-playing environment, whose screenshot (*Figure 2*) is shown below:



Figure 2: Game-playing environment

Now, a participant in any group (for example, *Varatha* in the group 'Winners') has to, first of all, click her name and then her name will change into green colour. Clicking the participant's name is important; then only the participant can get the marks for his or her attempt. Now, the student, *Varatha*, is going to play the game by clicking

the 'Sentence' button. When the 'Sentence' button is clicked, all the seven coordinating conjunctions and a compound sentence without coordinator (but with a blank for it) will be displayed. Then, the student has to study the sentence deeply and select the correct coordinating conjunction by clicking it. If her answer is correct, a tick symbol (☑), otherwise a cross one (☒) will be displayed; and further the box for entering the marks will be automatically activated; now the participant can enter the relevant marks. While clicking the 'Marks' button, the marks will be taken to the 'Marks' column against the participant (here, Varatha) in the group (here, 'Winners'). Like this, the students can play this game. If Varatha fails in her attempt, (she will get 0 marks; otherwise, 3 marks), the second chance goes to another participant in her group. If that participant also meets the failure (he or she will get 0 marks; otherwise, 2 marks), then the third chance will go to the next group (there, if the student is successful, 1 mark is given; otherwise, 0 marks). Moreover, if the three participants (two in one group and the other one, from the other group) are unable to find out the correct answer, they can see it by clicking the 'Answer' button in the tool. Further, in this game, each student is given five chances to play as sixty sentences have been included in the database of this programme. At the end of the game, the two groups will come to know who the winner is by the automatic activation of the winner title. This is the mechanism of this game. The following screen shot (Figure 3) clearly illustrates it:



Figure 3: Student's performance in the game

This tool, i.e. the game 'Coordinator Finder', was tested among a group of first year students of Higher National Diploma in English (HNDE) at Advanced

Technological Institute (ATI), Trincomalee, Sri Lanka. The result was successful; especially it was noted that the students had shown a keen interest in working with this tool virtually; and they were happy as the tool has been developed for looking at their immediate feedback regarding their attempts in the game. Further, the students' curiosity was observed by the researcher in improving the knowledge in coordinating conjunctions.

Conclusion

A coordinating conjunction connects parts of equal rank, i.e. coordination shows that two or more elements in a sentence are equally important in meaning (Fowler and Aaron, 2012). For example, two main clauses like *Priya walked and Chomy ran* or two noun phrases, as *little child and her mother*. Some students have problems in creating more than two or three sentences. According to them, they can create single sentence comfortably, whereas framing or connecting more sentences seems to be difficult. This is due to the lack of the knowledge and understanding of conjunctions, especially the simple coordinating conjunctions. When a student of ESL enriches his knowledge in coordinators, he comes to know how the words, phrases, clauses, and sentences are connected meaningfully. As a result, he becomes an independent learner of English. Thus, a good knowledge and understanding of coordinating conjunctions enable the students of ESL to maintain both ways of communication, verbal and written, conveniently. Based on this idea, a user-friendly computer game, *Coordinator Finder*, was developed with the help of the computer language, VB 6. Then, it was tested among some first year students of HNDE at ATI, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka; and the results proved that the game was successful in motivating those students regarding the developmental knowledge of coordinating conjunctions. Further, it is strongly believed that this game will motivate the students of ESL at schools, colleges, and universities to learn about the coordinating conjunctions to great extent.

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