Conjunctions

Conjunctions are words or functions which link together discourse elements. They tend to form a closed group of terms in a language – new conjunctions are quite rare. However, there is no standard set of conjunctions that occur in all languages – they are not a universal linguistic feature. Conjunctions can operate on three levels:

Level 1: between words of the same class. Every word type (except conjunctions) can be linked by a conjunction with a word of the same type:
- Verbs: *she **[identified] and [solved]** the problem*;
- Adverbs: *he was **[really] and [truly]** sorry*;
- Adpositions: *they travelled **[to] and [from]** the city every day*;
- Pronouns and nouns: ***[The dog] and [the cat]** shared the food; I spoke to **[Mary] and [him]***;
- Adjectives: *She wore the **[red] and [green]** dress*; note the difference in meaning between this and *She wore **[the red dress] and [the green dress]***.

Level 2: between phrases or sentence fragments of the same type:
- *She **[gave nothing] and [took everything]***;
- *She **[took the black wig off] and [tried the blonde wig]***;
- *She was **[out of ideas] and [out of time]***;
- *It was **[the best of times] and [the worst of times]***.

Level 3: between sentences or clauses:
- ***[Joan went to the town] and [Jane went to the beach]***;
- *Joan was happy that [**the road was open] and [the delay was over]***.

Punctuation is also a form of conjunction and can operate at any of the levels.
- *Jane was **shocked, amazed***;
- *Which direction to take: **left, right**?*
- *He knew what he should do: **open the door, say hello***.

There are other ways of dividing up the set of conjunctions: there could be different sets of conjunctions for linking animate or inanimate constructs, gendered forms, caste-based forms – and all of these will require rules to cover for cases where the combined items come from different groups (e.g. *All she had were two dogs and a bad attitude*). There can also be different forms for the three levels of operation given above. (e.g. Latin: at level 1 you can use the separate word "et" for *and*, or the suffix "que". So *dogs and cats* can be "canes et felium" or "canes feliumque"; but at levels 2 and 3, only "et" can be used.)

Conjunctions can be separate words placed before, between, or after the linked constructs. English usually places them in the middle, but there are several double-word constructions where one word is placed before the first construct and the other between the constructs (either/or, neither/nor, both/and, whether/or).

Conjunctions can be affixes to the linked words, at least in level 1 constructs (e.g. Latin: "senatus populus**que**": *senate **and** people*).

Common conjunctions can be grouped as follows:

	Inclusive	Contrastive	Causative
Associative	*And, with, at*	*Or, neither/nor, either/or than, yet, although, but, unless*	*So, therefore, where, so that, as, because, for*
Temporal locative	*As*	*Before, after*	*Then, when*
Temporal processive	*While*	*Until, since*	
Conditional	*If*	*As if*	*Whether*

Each of the groups can have its own rules of usage, should you wish to design for conjunctive complexity.

Pronominalisation and Selfhood

Extract from Martin Edwardes (2019). *The Origins of Self: An anthropological perspective*. UCL Press: London, UK, ch6, 124-126.

One of the biggest effects of social modelling on language is likely to be the existence and nature of pronouns – the words that represent the speaker, the listener and anyone and anything else referenced. Dictionaries tell us that pronouns are substitutes for nouns and have very general reference – they are not direct references to things or people, they refer to the communicative roles undertaken by things and people. But as we saw in Chapter 3, they are not merely a simplification of how we name things: they act as ad hoc labels in a discourse, allowing the interlocutors to reduce the utterance load at the cost of increased cognitive load. For instance, when we hear 'you shouldn't do that', we engage in a fast comparison of the possible members of the group *you*, their current activity, the cultural expectation about that activity, and the intention of the speaker themself. Our reaction will be different depending on whether we are likely to be in or out of the group *you*, whether we feel our current action is or is not culturally acceptable, and whether we accept or reject the approbation of the speaker. The two pronouns *you* and *that* indicate people and actions only indirectly, and their underdeterminacy means that the utterance is not just context-specific, it is also listener-specific: different listeners hearing the same utterance will have different objects in mind as *you* and *that*, and thus react to the utterance differently.

This situation is further complicated by the fact that pronouns are not a stable class across languages. If we look at the French version of the utterance, we find an immediate difference. Both '*tu ne devrais pas faire ça*' and '*vous ne devriez pas faire ça*' are valid translations, but they do not mean the same thing: where English 'you' can refer to a single listener or several, French divides the pronoun into singular and plural forms. In Spanish, a different problem arises: '*no deberías hacer eso*' and '*no deberíais hacer eso*' both retain the singular– plural distinction, but the word for 'you' has disappeared. It is only indicated by the ending of the verb 'should'. Spanish is called a pro-drop language because the pronouns are not obligatory, and are usually used only for emphasis ('*tú no deberías hacer eso*', 'you [as a particular individual] shouldn't do that'). However, as an example of underdeterminacy developing out of familiarity, the construct 'shouldn't do that' is also a fully acceptable English form. The term 'pro-drop' does not so much define a language as a way of using the language.

These two examples explore only a fraction of the differences between second-person reference in English, French and Spanish; and other languages add further complications to pronominal reference. Japanese is considered by some linguists to lack full pronouns, using noun phrases instead. For instance, a man often refers to himself in the first person using the word *boku*, which actually means male servant. This removes reference to the speaker from the utterance, turning it into a third-person reference: 'The servant is sorry' rather than 'I am sorry'. *Watashi* is used by both genders, and means something like 'the private self'. This referencing of the self in the third person is not unknown in English, and it is often done using the person's name. For instance, Donald Trump's first-ever tweet in 2009 was 'Be sure to tune in and watch Donald Trump on Late Night with David Letterman as he presents the Top Ten List tonight!' We even have a word, illeism, to describe self-referencing by name; but we tend to view it as either childish (under-4s commonly refer to themselves by name) or as narcissistic and somehow dishonest. In Japanese, it is seen as polite self-effacement.

Malay is another language in which full pronouns seem to be absent, and others are referred to by their social role. A Malay-speaker has no need for *I* or *you*, because they always have a role they can use. For instance, when speaking with a grandparent, the grandparent is *nenda* to both speaker and listener, and the grandchild is *cucunda*. Pirahã, the language documented by Daniel Everett, 'has the simplest pronoun inventory known, and evidence suggests that its entire pronominal inventory may have been borrowed' (Everett 2005, 622)[1]. Everett describes it as having only three pronouns, for the three persons, and no differentiation between singular or plural. The pronouns act as prefixes to verbs, although they can be used as stand-alone emphatics, too.

To be more accurate when talking about pronouns, therefore, we should refer not to pronouns but to a process of pronominalisation, which can be defined as reference using communicative roles rather than names or titles. The fact that a language has a mechanism for pronominalisation is more important than how that mechanism works. Nonetheless, I will attempt here to describe pronominalisation through the lens of English. It is not a perfect representation, but it is one that all readers of this version of the text should be able to understand.

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[1] **Daniel L. Everett (2005).** Cultural Constraints on Grammar and Cognition in Pirahã: Another Look at the Design Features of Human Language. In *Current Anthropology* 46:4, 621-646.