

Chapter 6: Coordination and Ellipsis

Coordination

Conjunctions

The coordinators or coordinating conjunctions are a closed class with four members: *and*, *or*, *nor*, *but*. If two items are coordinated then the coordinator or coordinating conjunction must come between the two conjuncts.¹ If there are more than two conjuncts in the coordination, then the coordinator must appear between the last two conjuncts² or between all the conjuncts.³

If the coordination contains only two conjuncts, you can use correlatives: a coordinating conjunction between the two conjuncts and an endorsing item before the first conjunct. Correlatives consist of an endorsing item before the first conjunct and a coordinating conjunction between the two conjuncts. There are three correlative sets: *either...or*, *both...and*, *neither...nor*

What can be coordinated?

First we need to separate two kinds of coordination. We can coordinate two or more complete constituents. That kind of coordination we can call *simple coordination*. In that kind of coordination we can coordinate just about any two (or more) constituents of the same kind, so we can coordinate, among other things,

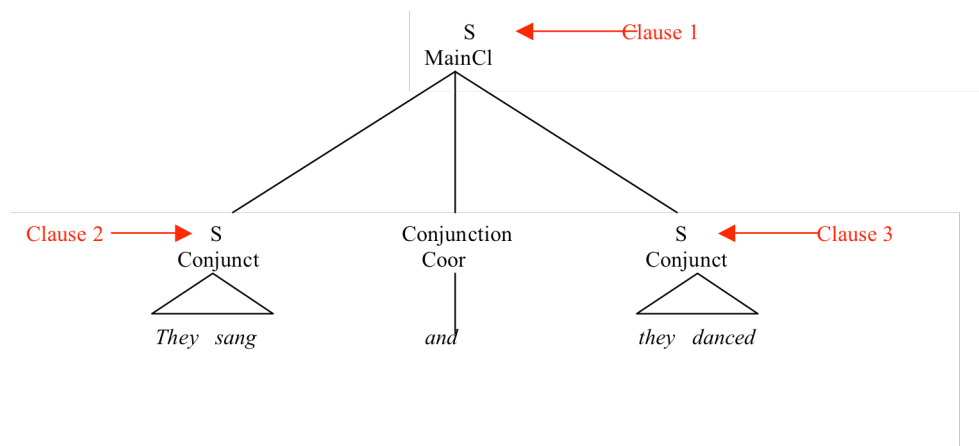
- **complete clauses:**
 - *They sang and they danced.*⁴
 - After you arrive and when I get the signal, I'll introduce you.
- **complete predicates:** *Mary has left and should be arriving soon.*

¹ A conjunct is an item which is coordinated with another item. For example, in *I sang and danced*, *sang* is one conjunct and *danced* is another.

² So there must be a coordinator between the last two conjuncts in something like *I like Mary, Bill, Susan and John*, not *I like Mary, Bill, Susan, John*.

³ As in *I like Mary and Bill and Susan and John*

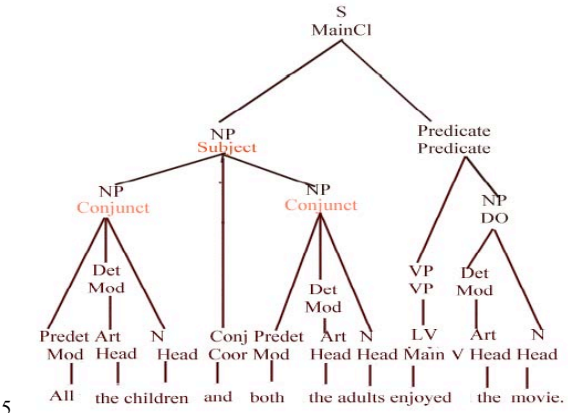
⁴



- **complete NPs:** All the children and both the adults enjoyed the movie.⁵
- **complete VPs:** Mary might read, but won't enjoy that book.
- **complete AdjPs**
 - **N-Modifiers:** Old and very valuable stuff is sometimes fragile.
 - **Predicate:** Mary is fond of cats, but afraid of dogs.
- **N heads:** My father and mother live in California.
- **Adjective heads:** A very strange and confused person wandered in.
- **Vs**
 - **Auxiliaries:** I can and will help you.
 - **Lexical/main verbs:** George can study and learn any language in the world.
- **AdvPs:** Bill worked long and very hard.
- **PPs:** Mary is fond of cats and of dogs.
- **Ps:** I ran into and out of the house.
- **Subordinating Conjunctions:** When and if he comes, I'll see him.

This is not a complete list of all the possible kinds of simple conjunction, but they should serve to give you the idea. In all of these examples constituents of the same type are coordinated to make a bigger constituent of that same type. The function of each underlined item is *conjunct*. So, in the NP example above, All the children is a noun phrase functioning as a conjunct; both the adults is a noun phrase functioning as a conjunct; and All the children and both the adults is a noun phrase functioning as the subject of the whole clause.

If you think about it, you will realize that *but* acts differently from the other coordinators. First, it doesn't appear as part of a correlative conjunction. Second, it can only be used to conjoin two constituents. Third, it is more limited in what it can conjoin. It is easy to use *but* to conjoin two clauses, as in *I wanted a raise, but I didn't get one*, or two predicates, as in *That guy works out a*



lot, but still looks wimpy or two adjective phrases, as in *He is big, but weak*, or two adverb phrases, as in *She works fast, but carefully*. As a coordinator of other kinds of constituents, *but* has a highly limited distribution. To coordinate NPs with *but*, for example, one (and only one) of the NPs must contain *not*, so

Mary, but not Bill, should get the Nobel Peace Prize.
Not Mary, but Bill should get the Nobel Peace Prize.

are okay, but *Mary, but Bill, should get the Nobel Peace Prize* is not grammatical. PPs work the same way -- *Charley went into the house, but not into the garage* is okay; *Charley went not into the house, but into the garage* is okay; *Charley went into the house, but into the garage* is no good. *But* can be used to coordinate adverb phrases, but can't be used to coordinate adverbs, so *She works very fast, but carefully* does not include the meaning *She works very fast, but very carefully* -- that is, *very* only modifies *fast*, and not *carefully*. *But* can't be used to coordinate nouns, so **The man, but not woman, left early* is ungrammatical.

Now let's consider some other sentences. Try to locate the coordinating conjunctions in the sentence below and to identify each of the conjuncts and the structure of the constituent that is made up of the conjoined material. If there is an endorsing item, you should identify that as well.

Example: *That guy wants a new car or a new truck.*

The coordinating conjunction is *or*: *That guy wants a new car or a new truck*. The first conjunct is *a new car* and the second conjunct is *a new truck*: *That guy wants a new car or a new truck*. Each of the conjuncts is a noun phrase and the whole conjoined structure is also a noun phrase, in this case the direct object of *want*.

Practice Analyzing Coordination: What are the coordinating conjunctions in the sentences below? What constituents are being conjoined? What kind of constituents are they? What is the role of each of the whole constituents containing the conjunction?

1. Each and every one of the children has done something horrendous or rather foolish.
2. Oscar and Mary want barbecued ribs, tacos or hamburgers for dinner tonight.
3. He is neither tall nor very strong.
4. Sixteen or seventeen deranged professors attacked the apathetic students.
5. She likes onion bagels, but can't abide blueberry muffins.

In some coordinations, one or more of the conjuncts is not a complete constituent -- there is something missing. This kind of coordinations is called *complex coordination*. This looks like coordination with [ellipsis](#); in each of these conjoined structures, you can identify what piece of structure is missing and what word or phrase would fill that empty slot.

For example, in *Harvey was reading the book and Bill ___ the magazine*, the verb phrase is missing from the otherwise complete clause that makes up the second conjunct. In this sentence we not only know what that the VP is missing, but we also know what it should be -- *was*

reading. You can also conjoin other material-- so *I showed Mary a book and ___ John a t.v. and ___ the children a new set of Legos*. In this example, the last two conjuncts consist of just an indirect object and a direct object -- which does not form any kind of a constituent (phrase). However, we interpret them as though there is a VP in the each conjunct and that VP is *showed*. Similarly *I called Sue a genius and ___ Hal a hero* is grammatical, though the second conjunct is just a DO and an OC -- not any kind of complete phrase. If the VP appeared in the second conjunct, it would have to be *called* and the two conjuncts would both be predicates. Another kind of complex coordination can be found in *I enjoy, but he hates, syntactic analysis*. This construction is odd because it appears that the gap is in the first conjunct, where in all the other cases we've looked at so far the gap has been in later conjuncts. Note that the subject and the VP, without the DO, does not form a constituent.

Ellipsis

Ellipsis is a technical term for a hole or omission. When the grammatical structure would seem to call for a particular structure, but it's not there AND you could unambiguously tell what should fill that hole, that's an ellipsis. As Quirk and Greenbaum (*A concise grammar of contemporary English*, Harcourt, Brace, Javanovich, Pubs. 1973: 261) note "Ellipsis is most commonly used to avoid repetition, and in this respect it is like substitution." So we can avoid repeating *happy* by saying *I'm happy if you are*, instead of *I'm happy if you are happy* or by omitting the first *come along* by saying *Those who want to can come along*, instead of *Those who want to come along can come along* or the second *come along* by saying *Those who want to come along can*. Ellipsis as noted above is common in coordination. Some other examples of ellipsis include elliptical NPs, such as

The tallest girl in the class is as smart as the shortest ___. If you want some of that fruit, I can give you plenty ___. Mary wanted the red dress and I gave her the blue ___.

and elliptical clauses and predicates, as in

ellipsis of the lexical verb and its objects or complements: *I'll finish the work when I can ___.* **medial ellipsis:** *Charley will guard the children and Bill ___ the animals.* **ellipsis of clause:** *He can go if he wants ___.*

Summary of Discussion

Coordination allows two or more items to be joined to make a larger item of the same type. In simple coordination the complete constituents (of almost any kind) are coordinated to constituents of the same type to make larger constituents of the same type. In complex coordination, one or more of the conjuncts does not form a constituent because something is missing (ellipted) from that material which is required for the conjunct to be a constituent.

More Practice Analyzing Coordination: Identify the coordinating conjunction, what is being coordinated, and whether the coordination is simple or complex:

1. I made off with his money and he chased me down the street.
2. He was enraged and practically apoplectic, but his rage slowed him down.

3. I ran down First St. and up Main Avenue and then ducked into an open door.
4. He stopped on the corner of First and Main.
5. He looked up and down the street, but couldn't see me anywhere.
6. Suddenly a large man and tiny dog appeared behind me.
7. The man began shouting and the dog barking.