A Common Structure for Cross-linguistic Conjunction Patterns

1 Introduction

Goals:

- Investigate the structure of conjoined DP's from a cross-linguistic perspective;
- Focus on structures interpreted with all individuals together in the event;

Caveat Lector. I abstract away from some important issues:

- The linear order of elements in the conjoined expression (e.g., *X and Y*, *X Y and*, etc.);
- The morphological form of the conjunction (e.g., adposition, particle, case, etc.);

Terminological points:

- I use **conjunction** to refer to “and”.
- I use **coordination** as a cover term for both conjunction and disjunction.

2 Basic Data

English (Indo-European) has coordinate structures where two DPs are connected by a coordinating conjunction. This is the most common structure in the world’s languages.

(1) I saw **John and him**.

Tagalog (Austronesian) has a “special coordinate construction” containing a pronoun indicating the person and number of the entire construction, and a DP. (Schachter and Otanes (1972)) Such structures are found in many Austronesian languages, and elsewhere in the world. Following Lichtenberg (2000), I will refer to such plural pronouns as **inclusory pronoun**s.

(2) Nakita ko **sila ni Juan**.

\[ \text{saw I 3pl DET Juan} \]

‘I saw him and Juan.’ (Schachter and Otanes, 1972, p. 116)

Between these extremes lie languages like Pima and Mapuche.

Pima (Uto-Aztecan) is like English, except that Pima coordinated (non-subject) DPs co-occur with a pronominal clitic reflecting the person and number of the entire coordinate phrase.

(3) **John at t- naam 'aani c heg Mary**.

\[ \text{John AUX:PF 1pl- meet 1sg and DET Mary} \]

‘John met me and Mary.’

Mapuche (Araucanian) is like Tagalog in some ways. (Smeets (1989)) This language has inclusory pronouns, but also allows an optional pronoun corresponding to the inclusory pronouns in person (*4a* vs. *4b*).
3 Structural Generalizations

To bring this range of data under a single structural representation, we minimally need structures like (5): the individual arguments are coordinated, and the person/number features of the entire coordinate structure are computed and expressed with the inclusory pronouns as some kind of "summary".

\[
\text{(5)}
\]

Not all components of this structure are necessary in a given language:

- Some languages do not have (overt) inclusory pronouns.
  Do English-type languages lack inclusory pronouns altogether or are they simply covert?

- Some languages lack an overt coordinator.
  The interpretation of juxtaposed DPs is semi-arbitrary. In most languages this indications conjunction, but occasionally it indicates disjunction. (E.g., the Limbu texts in van Driem (1987).) I note this arbitrariness with a null conjunction.

- Some languages can have one missing conjunct.
  Typically, the missing conjunct must be the highest person on the standard person hierarchy (in 6). In Mapuche example (4b), the first person pronoun is the only possible missing conjunct. A similar structure with an overt first person pronoun and null second person pronoun would be impossible. I call the conjunct that is (or can be) missing the primary conjunct.

\[
\text{(6)} \quad 1\text{st} > 2\text{nd} > 3\text{rd}
\]

4 The Primary Conjunct

The primary conjunct must be syntactically distinct from the other conjuncts:

- Only the primary conjunct can be "zero pronominalized".

- Some languages impose ordering restrictions on their conjuncts.
  Ulithian (Austronesian): If a pronoun and noun are coordinated, the first (i.e., primary) conjunct must be the pronoun.

\[
\text{(7)}
\]

a. **Gaag mé Coon** mee xe sa loxo.
   I and John FM PM Perf go
   'I and John went.' (Sohn and Bender, 1973, p. 209)

b. * **Coon mé gaag** mee xe sa loxo.
   John and I FM PM Perf go
   'John and I went.' (*ibid.*)
The Standard English preference to mention the speaker last is curious. It is probably an imposed standard, like the prohibition against splitting infinitives and the preference to avoid passives.

• In some languages, agreement between verb and coordinate structures holds (optionally) with only the primary conjunct. (See also Corbett (1991), Munn (1993), Johannesen (1998), Corbett (2000).)

  Mapuche: Verbal agreement can target either just the (missing) primary conjunct (8a) or the full conjoined expression (8b).

  (8) a. fey inchi nütram -ka -n
      he 1du conversation -FAC -1IND:1sg
      ‘I talked with him.’ ((Smeets, 1989, p. 178))

      b. fey inchi nütram -ka -y -u
      he 1du conversation -FAC -1INS -du
      ‘We talked together.’ (ibid.)

  • In some languages, only the primary conjunct receives the case expected based on the grammatical role of the coordinate phrase. (See also, Kiparsky (1968), Johannesen (1998).)

  Old Irish: The first (i.e., primary) conjunct is appropriately case marked, all other conjuncts can be the default nominative (9a). Notice the primary conjunct can be null (9b).

  (9) a. ri do-rigni æar n-uär ocus tene réil rorúad ocus talam
      king has.made air cold(ACC) and fire clear very.red(NOM) and earth
      bladmar brass
      glorious great(NOM)
      ‘The King has made the cold air, and the clear red fire, and the glorious great earth.’ (Kiparsky, 1968, p. 54)

      b. comrach dúb ocus Chú-Chulainn
      encounter between(2PL) and Chú-Chulainn(NOM)
      ‘an encounter between you (sg) and Chú-Chulainn’ (Thurneysen, 1998, p. 156)

To structurally identify the primary conjunct, I modify the coordinate structure from (5) to (10). The primary conjunct (X) is the head of the structure, and the Coordinate Phrase (CoP) is adjoined to it. (Cf. Munn (1993), MeP'cuk (To appear))

(10)

To identify the primary conjunct, this structure has other benefits:

• Since the primary conjunct is the head of the structure, the exact same selectional requirements can hold for both simple DP’s and coordinated DP’s.

\[\text{For a case of non-overlap of a null conjunct and a conjunct triggering agreement on the verb, see Lichtenberk (2000).}\]
• Cross-linguistically, arguments are zero pronominalized easier than adjuncts. By placing the primary conjunct as the head and all other conjuncts as adjuncts, we can understand why primary conjuncts can zero pronominalize and the others cannot.
• If the primary conjunct is the head and all others are adjuncts, we can understand why agreement processes occasionally only target the primary conjunct.
• The previous point holds for case assignment as well.

5 Conclusion

The construction of Conjunctions follows the general pattern:
• Select an individual as the kernel of the structure;
• Build the conjoined expression by adjoining additional conjuncts;
• Calculate person and number of entire conjoined expression from the individual conjuncts;
• Express the results in a pronominal morpheme (optional).

References

Mel’cuk, Igor, To appear. “Dependency in Linguistic Description”.