

Conjunction function: How grammatical categories are organized in language

Dr. Ariana Bancu
Department of Linguistics

The purpose of my talk is to discuss how conjunctions function in different languages and to show how they contribute to a better understanding of the implicit knowledge we have as speakers of a language. In English, coordinating conjunctions such as ‘and’ can link a diverse range of grammatical categories: noun phrases (NP), verb phrases (VP), adjective and adverb phrases (AP), clauses, etc. Cross-linguistically, however, there are many languages that have category specific coordinating conjunctions, and such languages show that the function of coordinating conjunctions extends beyond organizing discourse. Matras (1996:178), for example, points out that “(...) coordinating conjunctions assume functions which have to do with the *categorization* of pieces of knowledge in discourse.”

I present data from languages such as Turkish, Korean, and Cape Verdean Creole to show that conjunctions will most commonly differentiate between nominal and verbal (or clausal) conjunctions, i.e. between nouns and verbs. Evidence from such languages, shows that speakers discriminate between different types of grammatical categories in their mental grammar without being explicitly taught how to do so. This is reinforced with evidence from non-standardized languages, that lack prescriptive grammars and an orthography. I present data from my own research on Transylvanian Saxon (TrSax), an endangered Germanic language spoken in Romania. TrSax is a minority language that has been transmitted orally over 8 centuries and is used along German and Romanian, both socially dominant languages. The analyzed data come from a corpus of TrSax dialects from 120 localities in Romania, and recordings I conducted with 14 TrSax native speakers from Viscri, Romania (ages 30-78).

TrSax has two coordinating conjunctions, *end* and *och*; both fulfill the grammatical function of ‘and’ in TrSax. The corpus data and the recordings show that variation in conjunction choice is conditioned by linguistic factors, i.e. *end* is used to conjoin (main) clauses with finite verbs, as in example (1) below, *och* is used to conjoin phrases such as NPs (as in 2), APs, modal verbs, and clauses.

- (1) et waus uständig **end** kanntj niet moihr wunni gehn]
it wasinconvenient and could not more when go
‘It was inconvenient and one could not go (there) all the time.’
- (2) det Auto **och** de Bizikler hatte mer meat
the car and the bikes had we with
‘We had the car and the bikes with us.’

However, TrSax displays patterns that have not been described in the literature before. For example, *och* is used with subordinate clauses, while *end* is used with main clauses. Overall, the results of the TrSax data analysis give insight into how grammatical categories are organized in our mental grammar and into the implicit knowledge we have as speakers of a language.