

STRUCTURAL CONTEXTS AND COMMUNICATIVE CONNOTATIONS OF COORDINATORS IN THE ENGLISH USAGE OF SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MAKURDI

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Abstract

The study assesses the structural contexts and communicative connotations of conjunctive coordinators in the English usage of some secondary school students in Makurdi. The theoretical guide for the study is Error Analysis while the conceptual framework is structural grammar model description of coordinators in modern English usage. A proficiency test, tagged Use of Coordinators in English, was administered to sixty students, purposively sampled from two secondary schools. Using frequency and percentage statistics for data analysis, the results indicate lack of comprehension of structural usage contexts of semi-coordinators, quasi-coordinators and correlative coordinators. Also, there is lack of comprehension of the communicative connotations of all the coordinators in different sentential contexts. The study recommends that teachers should expose and drill students more on usage meanings and contexts of coordinators in English.

Keywords: coordinative constructions, structural contexts, communicative connotations.

Introduction

Conjunctive coordinators link conjoins to communicate diverse meanings and multiple ideas in English. Coordinators are among the elementary grammatical items taught early to the Nigerian learners of the English language purposively to lay foundation for effective communication. Study materials at primary and secondary school levels significantly treat coordinators along with other basic linguistic items (Ayodele, Isiugo-Abanihe, Olafimihan & Adegbile, 1994; Ayodele, Adegbile, Nnamani & Ofoego, 2019). However, research works on the written English of secondary school students list conjunctions among their grammatical difficulties (Ojo, 2016; Badaki, James, Jauro & Adamu, 2015; Aluflohai, 2016); but a more specific linguistic study is warranted to determine students' usage problems with conjunctive coordinators. The objectives of the study are therefore to assess the students' understanding of the communicative connotations of coordinators and the required sentential structural contexts for employment of coordinators in English.

The theoretical guide to the study is Error

Analysis (EA) because of its clear systematic procedure for investigation of language learners' problems that issue from the linguistic nature of the target language (Bloom, 2015; Mackay, 2008; Brown, 2000; Brown, 1988). In other words, problems of Nigerian learners of English as a second language (ESL) are, in addition to interlingual inhibitions, mostly engendered by the inherent difficult nature of English; for example, the grammatical exceptions in noun plural formation due to spelling variations, such as *skies for sky but Germanys for Germany*, could impede effective learning and usage (Foley & Hall, 2008; Hall & Barduhn, 2016; Quirk, Leech, Greenbaum & Svartvik, 2007; Swan & Wallter, 2000)

For conceptual orientations of the structural contexts and usage connotations of coordinators in modern English, the study adopts structural grammar approach because of its suitability as a teaching and learning model in a second language context (Quirk, Leech, Greenbaum & Svartvik, 2007; Huddleston & Pullum, 2016; Biber, Conrad & Leech, 2003; Swan, 2006; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Azar, 2002). In the following sections, a short outline of

the usage contexts and connotations of coordinators are provided as a guide to discriminating standard and nonstandard uses of coordinators in the students' written productions.

Structural Contexts and Communicative Connotations of Coordinators in Modern English

Coordination is a relation between two or more elements with equal syntactic status called *coordinates* or *conjoins*, which are linked by *coordinators* (Huddleston & Pullum, 2016; Hewings, 2013). Coordination therefore connects two or more constituents within a simple or compound sentence structure to facilitate the expressions of multiple ideas.

For effective coordination, prototypical coordinators possess these syntactic properties: coordinators link numberless conjoins as in: She invited *Joan and Susan and Jane and Luz and Mercy and Mary and Janet and Lucy*. OR: She invited *Joan, Susan, Jane, Luz, Mercy, Mary, Janet and Lucy*. Also, coordinates must be syntactically alike: I like *jogging and swimming*. Coordinators link a wide range of syntactic categories (words, phrases and clauses) as in: *Mark and John* have gone on a science excursion; *The headmaster and the teachers* are in a meeting; She *finished the report and went home*. A coordinator and its coordinate cannot be moved to first position: He joined the club *but he had little time to spare*. Coordinators are mutually exclusive: He was extremely bright *and very humble* (But not: *He was extremely bright *and but very humble*). Coordinators must only occupy initial position: It had rained all week *and we're short of food*. To the extent to which coordinators exhibit the syntactic features, they (coordinators) are classified as central coordinators (*and, but, or*), semi-coordinators (*so, yet, nor, for, so that*), quasi-coordinators (*as well as, as much as, not so much as, not to say, if not*) and correlative coordinators (*neither...nor, either...or, both...and, not only...but also*) (Quirk, et al, 2007; Greenbaum, 1996)

Coordinators have semantic connotations. *Connotation* here implies the linguistic variability of a coordinator interpreting different meanings in different communicative contexts. The central coordinators convey various meanings in English

(Quirk, et al, 2007; Hashemi & Thomas, 2006).. The linker *and* is the most popular and frequently used of the coordinators and conveys consequence or result (as in: She heard a gunshot *and* took cover under a palm tree), chronological sequence (John washed his school uniforms *and* ironed them), simultaneous events or states (Mother is cooking in the kitchen *and* father is reading a novel in the sitting room), a contrast (The wife is secretive *and (in contrast)* the husband is frank), a surprise (James studied hard *and (yet)* he failed), a condition (Let me torture him *and* he will confess the crime), a similarity (A scientific cooperation can be reached *and (similarly)* also a training programme can be initiated), an additive (The reggae artist has long dreadlocks *and* always *(also)* puts on jeans), an explanation (John and Joan got married after college – *and* that is not amazing because of their closeness in their college days). Also, *or* has some contextual meanings in communication (Huddleston & Pullum, 2016 & 2007). *Or* indicates alternatives, choices or options. *Or* is primarily exclusive, meaning that it allows for only one possibility (that is, one conjoin to be fulfilled): *You can take a walk or play table tennis*. An inclusive interpretation is possible, particularly where there is a third conjoin: *You can take tea, (or) you can drink mango juice or eat boiled potatoes*. The alternative could be interpolative to the first conjoin: *The damsel is enjoying herself – or she appears to be enjoying herself*. *Or* could also imply negative condition: *Do not come late or you'll miss the flight*. *Or* is also applicable in non-assertive context where it tends to replace *and* as in: *If we protest and request for compensation, we are ignored*.vi. *Or* can express permission or possibility as in: *You can go jogging, swimming or just watch a football match*. *But*, essentially, expresses contrast, that is often unexpected in view of the content of the first conjoin: *The trader is rich but unhappy*. (Dixon, 2005; Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002).

The correlative pairs (*either...or, both...and, nor...neither, neither...nor*) have communicative values (Leech & Svartvik, 2002; Alternberg & Vago, 2010). *Either...or* stresses the exclusive meaning of *or* and mostly implies exclusive choice: *I want to buy either a car or a house*. *Both...and* suggests additive meaning of

and as in: *Both John and Joan cooked the lunch. Neither or .nor* can be used as negative additive adverbs: *The family never forgave the driver for the death of their son neither did he rid himself of the guilt.* The correlative *neither...nor* expresses: *none as in: She was neither happy nor sad. Not (only)... but (also)* is used to emphasize authenticity: *He did not forward the message but discarded it and Not only was she stoned to death but she was also burnt.*

The semi-coordinators (*nor, so, yet, for, so that*) have semantic implications in communication. (Vince, 2003; Quirk, et al, 2007; Aarts, 2011). *Nor* expresses negative additive as in, *She does not like football nor does she enjoy volleyball. For* suggests purpose, or reason; it can also mean *because: He didn't sit for the entrance examination for he was sick Yet* is used to express contrast, *as in: The story was a sorrowful narrative yet inspiring at the same time. So that* implies result and can also mean *in such a way that* as in these examples: *Nothing more was heard from him so that we began to wonder if he was dead. She works hard so that everything would be ready in time. The programme was so organized that none of the talks overlapped. So* expresses result and purpose, as in: *She had bout of fever so she went to see the doctor rand and But I gave a map so you do not get lost.*

The quasi-coordinators (*as well as, as much as, rather than, more than, if not, and not to say*) communicate various meanings in usage contexts (Quirk, et, al, 2007; Thomson & Martinet, 1986; Payne, 2011). *As well as* and *as much as* express addition and sameness, as in: *They sell books as well as newspapers. Kindly help her get the job-you know I can do as much as that for you. Rather than* expresses preference and alternative as shown in: *I think I will have a glass of juice rather than a cup of tea. More than* implies choice

or option as exemplified in: *He earns a lot more than his wife. Not to say* expresses negative additives, as demonstrated in: *Using a small axe to chop that big tree is a difficult, not to say an impossible, task. If...not* expresses an alternative suggestion: *That costs thousands, if not millions, of Naira to buy.*

The above foregrounded description of the structural contexts and communicative connotations of the coordinators is meant to provide a linguistic guide for assessment of the uses of the items in the students' productions.

Method

The survey design was used; the study population was all SS2 students in North Bank school community in Makurdi, Benue state, Nigeria. A purposive sampling technique was adopted because the study sought to ascertain the prototypal communicative competence of the students in the use of coordinators. The study subjects were sixty SS2 students of two famous secondary schools. The competence test instrument, tagged *Use of Coordinators in English* examined the students on the meanings and contexts of four types of coordinators. Data analysis used frequency and percentage statistics. An item in which the subjects scored 100% was taken as proof of mastery but a score from 99% to 60 % demonstrated good competence level. A score from 50% to 59% depicted minimal competence level while abysmal incompetence score ranged from 0% to 49%. Asterisk (*) is used to indicate wrong usage

Results

The focus here is on the students' comprehension of communicative connotations of coordinators as well as the students' use of coordinators in communication. The results of the students' performance in the coordinative tasks are displayed in tables and the discussion on the students' competence follows the tables.

1. Structural Contexts of Coordinators in the Students' Communication.

This section dwells on the students' coordinative constructions so as to establish the extent the structural contexts of the coordinators in their constructions conform to and deviate from standard usage. Table 1 presents the students' performances

Table 1: Structural Contexts of Coordinators in the Student's Usage

S/N	Coordinators	Samples of Students' Constructions	or	Usage Context Rating	
				X	%
I. Central coordinators					
1.	<i>and</i>	<i>Angel and Judith are good girls</i>		33	55
2.	<i>but</i>	<i>He came but didn't teach</i>		29	48
3.	<i>or</i>	<i>You can use the cup or the jug</i>		32	53
II. Semi-coordinators					
1	<i>yet</i>	<i>I am yet to bring it</i>		22	37
2.	<i>so</i>	<i>So what is your father's name</i>		13	22
3.	<i>for</i>	<i>For what reason do you want to punish him</i>		7	12
4.	<i>nor</i>	<i>Nor of you are serious in this class</i>		14	23
5.	<i>so that</i>	<i>So that is what you are saying</i>		27	45
III. Quasi-coordinators					
1	<i>as much as</i>	<i>As much as you hate her</i>		20	33
2.	<i>more than</i>	<i>More than the girls</i>		18	30
3.	<i>as well as</i>	<i>As well as good or bad</i>		16	27
4.	<i>rather than</i>	<i>Rather than the bad news.</i>		20	33
5.	<i>if not</i>	<i>I will not go if not my father</i>		11	18
6.	<i>not to say</i>	<i>Not to say I will do it by forced.</i>		9	15
7.	<i>not so much as</i>	<i>I eat rice but not so much.</i>		3	5
IV. Correlative Coordinators					
1.	<i>both...and</i>	<i>The both boys and girls are girl</i>		11	18
2.	<i>either...or</i>	<i>I said either Joseph or Samuel should go</i>		21	35
3.	<i>neither...nor</i>	<i>I said neither Samuel nor Jacinta were there</i>		17	28
4.	<i>not... but</i>	<i>I am not Emmanuel but Samuel</i>		16	27
5.	<i>Not only...but also</i>	<i>it is not only that but also this</i>		13	5

Table 1 lists four categories of coordinators; there are extracted representative samples of the students' uses of the coordinators in sentences which are meant to reveal their competence or deficiency; the last column shows the rating of the students' skill in the use of coordinators in communication. Except for *and* and *or*, the students cannot use the other coordinators in communication acceptably.

2. The Students' Comprehension of Contextual Connotations of Coordinators

This section examines the students' interpretations of the contextual meanings of coordinators in given speech situations. The tasks cover the four types of coordinators. The students' performances are given in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Students' Comprehension of Communicative Imports of Central Coordinators

S/N	Coordinators	Coordinative constructions	Connotations	Students' comprehension	
				X	%
I. Central coordinators					
1.	<i>and</i>	<i>She saw a story building engulfed in thick</i>	<i>consequence/result</i>	2	3.3
2.	<i>and</i>	<i>John washed his clothes and he ironed them.</i>	<i>Consequence</i>	2	3.3
3.	<i>and</i>	<i>the rich man is stingy and the poor widow is generous.</i>	<i>Contrast</i>	1	1.6
4.	<i>and</i>	<i>Janet studied hard and she failed....</i>	<i>concessive</i>	0	0
5.	<i>and</i>	<i>Give me money and I will buy it for you...</i>	<i>condition</i>	3	5
6.	<i>and</i>	<i>A scholarship agreement can be reached and a fund Transfer could be arranged....</i>	<i>similar</i>	3	5
7.	<i>and</i>	<i>you have only one thing to do and that's to Apologize to the Class Captain.....</i>	<i>explanation</i>	3	5

8.	<i>and</i>	Mark wears traditional Benue attire and he often Puts on cap.	addition	6	10
9.	<i>but</i>	The Best Student's mother won't be there, but his	contrast	0	0
10.	<i>or</i>	Turn it down or it will burn.....	Condition	3	5
11.	<i>or</i>	Give me some money or I will shoot...	condition	13	22
12.	<i>or</i>	is your sister older or younger than you?	alternative	1	1.6
13.	<i>or</i>	He can't read or write.....	negative	1	1.6
14.	<i>or</i>	If we complain or demand compensation, nothing	non-assertive	3	5
15.	<i>or</i>	you can go swimming or simply sit on the beach...	possibility	2	3.3
2. Semi-coordinators					
1.	<i>nor</i>	I didn't see it nor did they....	negative	1	1
2.	<i>not nor</i>	Not a building nor a tree was left standing....	negative additives	0	0
3.	<i>So</i>	It was raining so we did not go out.....	reason	4	2
4.	<i>Yet</i>	The sun is warm yet the air is cool...	contrast	2	3.3
5.	<i>for</i>	He is happy for he enjoys his work....	reason	4	6.6
6.	<i>So that</i>	I am saving money so that I can buy a bicycle...	purpose/reason	4	15
3. Quasi-coordinators					
1.	<i>as well as</i>	He publishes as well as prints his own books...	addition	3	2
2.	<i>as much as</i>	The Principal's speech was addressed to the students	similar	0	0
3.	<i>more than</i>	It was how well more than how loud she sang that	choice	5	1.6
4.	<i>rather than</i>	He is to be helped rather than to be disliked	choice	1	1.6
3.	<i>if not</i>	His manner was unbecoming if not downright rude	negative additives	0	6
4. Correlative Coordinators					
1.	<i>either...nor</i>	Their building is neither big nor small...	negative additives	0	0
2.	<i>Either...or</i>	either he could not come or he did not want to.	choice/option	12	20
3.	<i>not only...but also</i>	The daughter bought not only a designer Purse but	addition	5	8.3
4	<i>both...and</i>	David both loves Joan and wants to marry her.	Addition	3	9.4
5.....	<i>not...but</i>	He did not come to help but to hinder us.	Contrast	4	6.6

Table 2 essentially displays a list of coordinators, examples of standard coordinative constructions, connotations of the coordinators in the constructions and a rating of the students' discernment of the connotations. The performance is clearly poor.

Discussion of Findings

From the interpretations of the student's performances displayed on the two tables, the study establishes two major findings which are namely that the syntactic contexts in which coordinators are employed in communication have not been sufficiently learned by the students and also, the connotations of the coordinators in speech situations are not interpretable to the students. Consequently, the students are unable to deploy coordinative constructions effectively in communication. These findings agree with earlier studies which associate faulty coordinators with the written communication of Nigerian secondary school students (Badaki, James, Jauro and Adamu, 2014; Umar, 2009; Bukar, 2008; Ogunyemi, 2019; Bature, 2020). The specifics of the findings with the proofs are serially detailed in the following sections

1. Structural Contexts of Coordinators in the Students' Usage

Basically, the students are not proficient in using the coordinators in communication. The first finding is that the students are deficient in the use of *and*, *but* and *or* in English. There is no exhibition of mastery in any of these items. Minimal competence exists in the use of *and* and *but*; however, abysmal failure manifests in the use of *or*. Largely, the structural usage contexts of *and*, *but*, and *or* substantially deviate from Standard English (Quirk, et al, 2007). Some representative samples of the students' wrong central coordinative constructions are given below:

Extract 1: And I am not going to do it*

Extract 2; But you can make it in life*

Extract 3: Or you do not trust me*

Extracts 1 to 3 lack two conjoiners. So *and*, *but* and

or do not function as coordinators in the extracts. So, the sentential fragments are not coordinative constructions.

A second finding is the students' inability to use *yet, so, for, nor* and *so that* correctly in English. Their performance, as cast in Table 1, indicates that they are extremely weak in the use of the items. The following sampled semi-coordinative constructions from the students' scripts affirm their incompetence:

Extract 4: *Yet* you went to school today*.

Extract 5: *So* what is your father's name*.

Extract 6: Why do you go *for* the sprite*.

Extract 7: *Nor* of you are serious in this class*.

Extract 8: *So* that is what you are saying*.

The extracts are not coordinative constructions as the italicized coordinators do not link conjoins. *Yet* and *so* are employed as adverbs; *for* is a particle producing the phrasal verb, *go for*. *Nor* is meaningless in the context. It is a phonologically induced intra-lingual difficulty where *nor* is wrongly realized as *none*. *So* is used as an adverb. It shows unambiguously that the students cannot use semi-coordinators to express themselves in English.

Another finding is the students' defective use of quasi-coordinators in communication. Table 1 shows weak score in each linker. The performance interprets that the students do not know the structural contexts in which quasi-coordinators are used in communication. This conclusion is evident from the following extracts from their works:

Extract 9: *As much as* you hate her*.

Extract 10: *more than* the girls*.

Extract 11: *As well as* you are tired, I give you water to drink*.

Extract 12: *Rather than* the bad news*.

Extract 13: I will not go *if not* my father*.

Extract 14: *Not to say* I will do it by forced*.

Extracts 11 and 13 are ungrammatical coordinative constructions; although there are two conjoins, the coordinators are functionally meaningless in the contexts. In other extracts (9-12,14), the coordinators are not used as linkers due to absence of conjoins. The students' performance establishes their incompetence in the use of quasi-coordinators in English.

There is incompetence in the students' use of correlative coordinators in communication. Their

performance in each coordinator, as shown in Table 1, is extremely poor. Their peculiar problems are illustrated in the extracts below:

Extract 15: *Both and* I can go to the competition*.

Extract 16: *Either or* neither you*.

Extract 17: I *neither nor* any of them*.

Extract 18: You *cannot but* you can*.

Extract 19: You can *not only but also* do it*.

The correlative pairs in the above extracts are not used as coordinators for three reasons; firstly, conjoins are lacking but required in Extracts 15-17; secondly, coordinators are mutually exclusive, implying only one coordinator can be used at most in a coordinate but in extract 16, both *either... or* and *neither* are engaged; there is negativization of *can* in Extract 18, so there is no correlative pair in the context. In Extract 19, there is a defective use of *not only... but also* as the two conjoins exhibit unequal syntactic status. The students' performance here shows linguistic poverty in communicating with correlative coordinative constructions. The analysis of the students' coordinative constructions reveals their weak knowledge of the required structural usage contexts of coordinators. This fact corroborates a previous research finding that error of connectives are among grammatical blemishes in the written English of Nigerian ESL students (Ngadda and Nwoke, 2014; Odeleye & Adetuyi, 2018; Abdullahi, 2022).

2. The Students' Comprehension of Contextual Connotations of Coordinators

The students are deficient in deriving the contextual meanings of *and, but* and *or* in the selected communicative situations. Their interpretations contrast with the correct meanings given in Table 2. Again, the students' interpretations of the communicative imports of *nor, so, yet, for, and so...that* in the given speech events further unveils their weak semantic knowledge of coordinators. Their incorrect interpretations are buttressed by the poor score in each item as shown in Table 2. In addition, the students are yet to comprehend the communicative functions of *as well as, as much as, more than, rather than* and *if not*, in contexts of some

sentences, as evident from the rating score on their interpretations of the linkers, as displayed on Table 2. Also, the students are unable to decipher the contextual semantic implications of the correlative pairs as indicated in Table 2.

In summary, Table 2 reveals that the students could not produce the correct interpretation of the semantic import of each coordinator, as indicated in the table. The students' inability to derive the correct meanings of the linkers invariably explain their incapability to use the coordinators in sentence construction as depicted in Table 1. A chief finding here is that the students are unable to express contextual connotations of all the coordinators studied. This fact confirms an earlier research finding that identifies conjunctions as grammatical error in spoken and written English of Nigerian ESL students (Amuseghan, 2016; Okoro, 2017; Adekemi, 2021; Tsakuwa, 2016)

Conclusion

Some conclusions have emerged in this research. The students exhibit minimal competence in the use of *but*, *and*, and *or* in English as they can construct standard sentences with them but they are unable to decipher the semantic imports of the coordinators when used in contexts. Also, the

students are unable to construct Standard English sentences with semi-coordinators; they cannot interpret the contextual connotations of the semi-coordinators in sentences. In addition, both the structural contexts and communicative imports of the quasi-coordinators are problems to the students. Again, the students are deficient in sentence construction with the correlative pairs even as they cannot decode the semantic imports of the coordinators in communication. In conclusion, the students are unable to communicate with conjunctive coordinators in written English as they lack the knowledge of the sentence contexts in which the linkers are used and the connotations of the linkers in communicative situations.

To solve the identified linguistic deficiencies, teachers should expose learners to elementary English grammar topics, such as conjunctions and others, for strong foundation in linguistic competence to achieve effective communicative competence. Students should be subjected to constant grammatical drills. Again, teaching of English language in second language context as in Nigeria should emphasize the forms of grammatical items with their corresponding communicative functions.

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