

The Teaching of Correlative Conjunctions

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Introduction:

Undoubtedly, certain grammatical points in English language pose problems to non-native speakers of English. My experience as a teacher of English and as supervisor of student's teachers has revealed that the area of correlative conjunctions is one of these problematic areas. As a teacher of English, it was always hard for me to find a single grammar book or a textbook that deals with this point clearly and systematically .there was always a dearth of information as well as insufficient exercises on this point. Observing students teachers over a numbers of years has shown a certain patterns of mistakes in their speaking which reflects their lack of knowledge of the rules of using correlative conjunctions particularly when join elements in the subject noun phrase . it is worth noting that this lack of knowledge is also reflected in their writing i.e., errors of faulty ,parallelism.

The purpose of this study is to satisfy the needs of both teachers of English and students teachers by providing adequate information on the area of correlative conjunctions coupled with suggestions on how to teach it.

The problem:

This study is an attempt to answer the following questions:

1. How the area of correlative conjunctions has been treated by the various schools of grammar?
2. How this specific grammar point explained and drilled by ESL/EFL textbook writers?
3. How can a teacher of English present this grammar point to his/ her students?

Procedure:

To answer the above questions, the following steps are as follows:

1. A comprehensive review of literature with the aim of pointing out how the area of correlative conjunctions has been treated in:

- a. traditional grammar .
- b. structural grammar .
- c. transformational grammar.
- d. post-transformational grammar.

2- A survey of how this area has been presented explained and drilled by ESL/EFL textbook writers, of a view of highlighting their adequacy as well as their sufficiency in meeting problems students may encounter in this area .

3- Suggestions as to how a complete lesson together with more correlative conjunctions can be presented and practice.

Definitions of terms:

Correlative conjunctions: when the conjunctions both is paired with and, either with neither with nor only with but also, the special term for then is correlative conjunctions (thereafter will be referred to as C.C).

Post-transformational grammar: this term is used to describe two trends in grammar. The first is systematic grammar introduced by Holiday (1996), while the second stresses the communicative aspect of grammar (Quirk and Svartvik, 1985).

Limitation of the study:

Suggestions on how to teach C.C will focus only on two pairs i.e. either or, and, both, and.

1. Review of literature:

a. Traditional grammar: In Otto Jespersen's' A Modern English Grammar part II syntax (1992:p 197-190), there is no mention or C.C under words referring to two alternatives. Likewise, he states that while both means two, the conjunction both is very often placed before more than two members. Curme(1993 :161-4) Grammar of English language :syntax divided C.C. into two classes of their meaning.

Copulative: connecting two members and their meaning, the second member indicating an addition of equal importance.

Examples: he can both sing and dance. Either John or Mary saw him.

Disjunctive: connecting two members but disconnecting their meaning. In other words, the meaning in the second member excludes that in the first.

Example: Either he Roberts in or I must go.

Pence and Emery (1993:131) in their books, A grammar of present Day English stress the fact that C.C. may be used as coordinating conjunctions i.e. to coordinate items that are grammatically parallel (two words or two phrases).

This idea of parallelism is further elaborated by Roberts in Modern grammar (1998,:373). He is of the opinion that when two unlike structures are joined by conjunctions or C.C. the error is one of faulty parallelism. Either John is lazy or careless.

Faulty parallelism in the above sentence is due to the fact that either is followed by a sentence 'John is lazy' and or by an adjective 'careless'.

Besides stressing the fact that C.C. can join any two parallel structures.

Zandvoort in A Handbook of English Grammar (1996: 173) claims that both and either

can be used adverbially in the following:

-She is both dead and buried.

Both is used adverbially in the sense of: equal truth in both cases.

-He is either drunk or mad.

Either here is used adverbially to introduce an alternative. To sum up, subject verb agreement when C.C join elements in the subject is not dealt with by traditional grammarians. Furthermore, not all of them point to the fact that C.C is link words between equivalent structures. However, this is not the case with structural grammarians.

b. Structural Grammar:

Faris(1992 :95) in the Structure of English labels two units with the some structural function i.e. ,the same parts of speech. He refers to correlative conjunctions when he said that ' certain others words may appear before the first members of structure joined by Group E'.

Examples: interesting or profitable /either interesting or profitable

Barbara Srang , in modern English Structure (1992:173) stress the coordinating functions in linking pairs and are placed one before each of the coordinated structures.

Besides underscoring the coordinating function of C.C. W.N.Francis in the structure of American English (1978:366) adds that something the second part of the correlative may be repeated producing a structure of coordination with more than two constituents .He calls this structure ' a correlative series ' .

In general, we can say that structural grammarians are of the opinion that same rule that applies to C.C. also, applies to simple coordinating conjunctions i.e. ,the elements joined must have the same structure.

c. Transformational Grammar:

Transformational grammarians focus on the rules by which surface structures sentences are derived through join two deep structure sentences.

Stockwell et al.(ibid) in the Major Syntactic Structures of English (1993:325-405) believe that sentences with C.C. present 'a kind of fusion of constituents of conjoined sentences' .

Both insertions Rule (optional).

Stockwell make it clear that for the application of the both insertion rule three conditions have to be met. The first condition prevents the insertion of both in cases where there are more than two conjunctions:

-Both John and Mary and Bill sang.

The second condition prevents both when the two conjunctions are dominating by:

-Both John sang and Mary danced.

The last condition prevents both insertions if the sentence includes the quantifier respectively or respective:

-Both John and Mary sang and danced respectively .To them ,there is also another optional rule 'quantifier movement ' which move both from its initial position to medial or final position in the sentence.

Either insertion rule (optional):

Stockwell et.al (ibid) state that the either insertion rule is similar to the both insertion rule, but has fewer conditions on it. Unlike both, either is limited conjoined structures with only two conjunctions:

Either John or Bill or Halen sang.

It worth mentioning that Stockwell et al (ibid) distinguished between the two meanings of conjunctions or in addition to the alternative use of or ,there is an ultimatum use of this conjunction :

a- John will play or I will (play).

b- John had better play or I will (play).

It is only the alternative or (in a) that permits the correlative addition:

Either John or I will play.

Langendoen, in the study of syntax (1999:88) points out a transformational rule 'conjunction reduction 'which is needed to 'reduce all but one of the shared constituents in conjoined sentences'.

However, one of the two grammar books that provide adequate explanation as to the ordering of transformation rule to conjoined sentences is Larsen Freemans' An English Grammar For teachers of ESL(1988:142-143). Like Stockwell et.al (1993) they note that movement of the correlative both is optional if the VP'S are identical .Moreover, they say that this movement is obligatory if both is added to identical subject NP'S .they cite the following examples :

John studies law John studies political science

-conjunction addition, John studies law and John studies political science.

-Identical constituent deletion and structuring: John studies political science.

-Correlative addition: Both John studies law and political science.

-Correlative movement (obligatory): John studies both law and political science.

Although the topic of C.C. is adequately treated by transformational grammarians, the book reviewed like those of a structural grammarians –miss one important aspect of the topic , namely ,subject-verb agreement when the correlative join elements in the subject NP.

d- Post-transform ational Grammar:

As the 1990's progressed, the star of transformational grammar began to wane and two related trends began to appear. Proponents of the first trend are active in extending their

work to embrace stylistics and textual studies, while advocates of the second stress the functioning of language in its social, cultural and interpersonal contexts.

Holliday and Hassan (1996:4 -44) in *Cohesion in English* highlight three main functional –semantic components in the linguistic system. The identical, the interpersonal, and the textual. The first component is concerned with the expression of 'content ', the second with social, expressive and cognitive functions of language, while the last one is the text forming component in the linguistic system. They draw the attention to a relatively neglected area of the linguistic system i.e., its resources for text construction, to the range of the meanings that are specifically associated with relating what is being said or written to its semantic environment . The principle component of these resources is that of cohesion. The cohesive elements of the language are reference, substitution ellipsis and conjunctions .However, the conjunctions and, nor, or are cohesive not in themselves but indirectly by virtue of their specific meanings i.e. , additive, negative additive, and alternative meaning respectively. As to correlative pairs both, and, either, or etc.

Holliday and Hassan (1996) state that "they do not in general occur with cohesive function; they are restricted to structural coordination within the sentence".

Under the heading "concord" advocates of the second trends, Quirk and Greenbaum(1985, p:178-179) in *A concise Grammar of Contemporary English*, explain concord involving either or .They point to a new area, not touched upon by other grammarians , which is idiomatic speech by native speakers .They present the fourth following examples:

1.Either the mayor or his deputy is bound to come.

2. Either the strikers or the bosses have misunderstood .

3. Either your brakes or your eyesight is at fault.

4. Either your eyesight or your brakes are at fault.

They emphasize that sentences 1 and 2 do not pose any problems. However, this is not the case with number 3, where there is divided usage- neither singular nor plural seeming right. They also cite a similar example: He asked whether one lecture ?was ? were to be given.

As sentence number 4, the principle of proximity plays a role here since the plural phrase determines the number of the verb.

They also emphasize that the negative correlatives neither nor, although disjunctive in meaning behave in colloquial speech more like and then like or as regards concord.

Neither he or his wife have arrived, is more natural in spoken idiom than the form preferred by some: Neither he or his wife has arrived .

Quirk and Greenbaum (1985 :259-260) discuss the three common C.C. pairs either, or, both, and, and neither nor. They point to the semantic implication of anticipating an alternative, an addition, or additional negative with three above C.C. pairs respectively

.Then their discussion centers on the possible position of C.C. In sentences. No mention is made as to grammatical parallelism. However, highlighting native speakers' acceptance of both a single and plural verb in sentences like number 3 an addition that emphasizes the possible changes made in informal English. This particular point is further elaborated by Leech and Svarvik (1985).

Based on Grammar of Contemporary English (Leech and Svarvik, 1985, p:385-539-547) A communicative Grammar of English relate grammatical structures to meanings, uses and situations. In this way they hope " to improve and extend the range of the students communicative skill in language". They point to the semantic implication of C.C. and stress the fact that the addition of both, neither, or either at the beginning of the coordinated structures makes them more emphatic.

They too, discuss the prolixity rule (the number of the verb is determined by number of the last NP in the following examples :

Either your brakes or your eyesight is at fault. Nevertheless, they emphasize that it is felt to be awkward by some native speakers. They suggest a solution to avoid this awkwardness i.e., to use an auxiliary verb which has the same form in the singular and plural :

Either your brakes or your eyesight must be at fault.

11. Review of ESL/EFL Texts:

Rutherford in *Modern English* (1985:112-113) explains that English uses sets of words to join elements of a sentence. He stresses the fact that period elements must be of the same grammatical form. He provides sentences of faulty parallelism:

Promptness is important both in America and England. His explanation is adequate in this respect. In the incorrect example and must be followed by an adverb of place i.e. in England .Another choice for the learner would be to delete in after both so that we are left with two NP's .However, Rutherford's explanation is incomplete as there is no mention of the problem of subject-verb agreement when correlatives link elements in the subject.

Considering the adequacy of the exercises, as far as this problem is concerned, this text provides a variety of exercises. For example, one exercise requires making comments using correlatives. Another exercise requires the student to distinguish between correct and faulty constructions and then provide corrections to faulty ones. A third exercise is on completion, while a fourth one asks students to rewrite sentences using correlative between brackets.

Danielson and Hayden(1983:142) in *Using English: Your second language* stress the importance of subject-verb agreement when correlative join two phrases used as subjects. They point out that in careful writing the verb is arranged to the second noun in the either or ...sentences are not enough. It is appropriate to note that Danielson and Hayden do not mention the grammatical problems of faulty parallelism as is dealt by Rutherford(1985).

In J.Alegeos' exercises in *Contemporary English* (1984,p:139). There is only one exercise comprising six pairs of sentences to be joined by what the writer terms as "correlative expressions". Evidently, one exercise is not enough to tackle all aspects of this grammatical point. Besides, the nature of the

exercise itself is very mechanical. It is worth mentioning that the exercise in this text have been designed to accompany (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1985).

The fourth textbook reviewed is Sheila. Y. Grahams' Harborage College Workbook Form 8(1987 :217).

The writer explains that in addition to coordinating conjunctions, "connective " like both, and, either , or, neither , nor, not only ,but also are used to connect parallel structures. Then one exercise follows requiring students to outline the parallel parts of the sentence as well as the connectives that signal the parallel structure. If this book succeeds in focusing students 'attention on one aspects of C.C., it fails to provides explanation and/or exercises on subject-verb agreement.

In A Practical English Grammar, Thomson and Martine (1980,p:85-86) explain that we can express a combination of two things emphatically by using both, and , alternatively by either or , or negatively, by neither nor .Close investigation of the accompanying two exercise books no exercises on this point at all.

The last textbook reviewed is Donald W. Emery et al. English fundamentals (1982,p:48-53). In lesson 7 "coordination the compound sentences " , Emery et al, explains that a sentence may contain two or more subjects, verbs, compliments, or modifiers joined by a coordinating conjunction. The three common coordinating conjunctions for this use are and, but, and or : other coordinators are nor, for, and yet. They state that sometimes the equal grammatical relationship is pointed out by the use of pairs of words called correlative. They cite all the common correlative pairs except one, namely, both, and. Only one exercise follows comparing twenty five sentences and requiring student to supply the necessary punctuation.

Hence, the student will not supply any punctuation mark if the sentence is simple with the subject having two verbs joined by a coordinating conjunction. They will put a comma before the conjunction of the sentence is compound with two independent clauses, or put a semicolon if the sentence is compound without one of the coordinating conjunctions joining the independent clauses. It must be stated that this textbook adequately treated the area of coordinating conjunctions; however, the area of C.C. did not take enough emphasis from authors. As a matter of fact , it was only

mentioned in one sentence pointing to grammatical parallelism, but ignoring subject-verb agreement.

Results:

The following results could be gleaned from reviewing grammar books and textbooks:

-There are two angles to the grammatical point of correlative conjunctions. The first dealt with the fact that correlatives must joint elements having the same structure (grammatical

parallelism) while the second focuses on subject –verb agreement when correlatives join elements in the subject noun phrase.

-The first idea –that of parallelism seem to have attracted the attention of most grammarians belonging to traditional, structural, and transformational schools.

-The second angle of this grammatical point that of subject verb agreement –is underscored by post transformational grammarians.

-Close investigation of ESL/EFL textbooks, reflecting various affiliations, has shown serve inadequacy of exercises as well as insufficient explanation.

Discussion:

The above results indicate that the area of C.C. has not been fully talked by grammarians from the traditional, structural, and transformational schools have looked only at strict grammatical rules dealing with C.C. as link words between equivalent structures.

From the mid 1980's onwards, a new shift in emphasis is detected i.e., how can a student use grammar to communicate? Hence, the emphasis has become on the uses of grammar rather than on grammatical structures. That is why the aspect of subject verb agreement when correlatives joint elements in the subject NP has become prominent. In particular, idiomatic speech by native speakers – with their divided usage – is highlighted. This is a new prospective on the subject which relates grammatical structures to meanings, uses, and situations.

Only textbooks, though each tackling the area of C.C. from one angle, are found to be adequate in explanation. Rutherford's Modern English provides adequate explanation and exercises of faulty parallelism while Danielson and Hayden, in using English: your second language takes the other view

–that of subject-verb agreement. Although their explanation in this respect is adequate, the exercises are nor.

To sum up, we can safely say that the teacher of English will to be able to find full explanation or adequate exercises on the area of C.C. He will need to be able to draw upon all available books and materials and prepare his own. In the following section an attempt is made to present this grammatical point in a complete lesson as well as in a mini-lesson.

Suggestions:

-A lesson on Correlative Conjunctions:

An adequate treatment, the researcher think of the topic of C.C. would entail a combination of the findings in the previously cited ESL/EFL textbooks. The teacher should present coordinating conjunctions first and wait for a couple of weeks before introducing C.C. A systematic coverage of the topic you'd include the following:

- Review of conjunctions.
- Functions of C.C.
- Grammatical parallelism.
- Subject-verb agreement when C.C. join NP'S used as subjects.

-When we have to be concerned about agreement?

The following description including this information:

1.Coordinating conjunctions are used to coordinate items that are grammatically parallel i.e., two nouns, two adjectives, etc.

The common coordinating conjunctions are : and, or, nor, for, but.

2.When the conjunction both is paired with and, either with or, the special term for them is C.C. Usually the meaning is the same where the correlative or the conjunction is used. The principal effect of the correlative is to intensify the coordination .The correlative both emphasize the fact that two ideas are involved, while either indicates a choice:

-Heba both sang and danced.

3. Constructions joined by correlatives must be of the same type:

They spent their vocation either in England or France. In the above sentence, either or, are joining two unparallelled structures, namely an adverbial and a noun.

We can rewrite it as follows:

-They spent their vocation either in England or France.

4. Sometimes the correlatives both and, either or, join elements in the subject. Compound subjects joined by both, and, always have a plural verb.

-Both Heba and Iman are sleeping

When either or join two elements in the subject, but with the element immediately preceding it:

-Either the teacher or the students erase the blackboard.

5-Explain that we have to be concerned about subject-verb agreement with simple present. We can ignore this rule with modals and past tense verbs other than verb to be.

Suggested exercises for the above point:

Drill for 1: Show pictures. Get students to describe them:

Ali is running .Nada is running.

T: What are Ali and Nada doing?

S: Ali and Nada are running?

To drill or sentences. Show pictures of a mother with her daughter, Mah, at different places e.g., a department store, a grocery store, etc.

T: What's Maha holding in her bag?

S: Two dresses.

T: What does her mother say ?

S: She says Maha can only buy one.

T: Which one?

S: She can buy their edoneor the blue one.

(long/ short- floral /striped).

Drill for 2: Use the same drill as in 1. Point out that we make sentences more emphatic when we add the correlatives e.g., both Nada and Ali are running.

She can buy either the long dress or the short one.

Both, and ,could be drilled using pictures.

T: Are cars and trains the same?

S: No, they aren't .

T: but they are similar. Can you tell me in what way they are similar, Ali?

S:Both cars and trains are means of transportation.

Sentence completion drill could be used:

Germany /France, in Europe, apples /grapes ,fruit lemons/ oranges , citrus.

Drill for 3: Teacher could write sentences with faulty parallelism on the board and ask the students to correct them. This could be done orally and then in writing.

-The film was both interesting and it was enjoyable.

-Get two students to understand why it is in correct (both , and) are joining two unlike structures i.e., an adjective and a sentence).

Drill for 4: Using questions and answers, the teacher could help the students note the change in verbs in order to agree with compound subject:

T: Who else was absent yesterday besides Mona?

S: Magda was.

T: Both Mona and Magda were absent yesterday.

S: Someone broke my ruler.

S: Who is to blame, Heba or Hoda?

S: Either Heba or Hoda is to blame.

Drill for 5: Teacher would elicit sentences with modals and the past tense other than be. Get the students to notice that the subject-verb agreement can be ignored in such cases:

Either Heba or Hoda broke Ali's ruler.

Both Nada and her mother went shopping yesterday.

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