CONJUNCTS VERSUS DISJUNCTS: WHAT EXACTLY DISTINGUISHES THE TWO?[1]

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Abstract

Based on Quirk et al.'s terminology and classification (1985), we can distinguish between four grammatical functions adverbials perform within a sentence: 'adjuncts', 'subjuncts', 'conjuncts', and 'disjuncts'. The main purpose of the present paper is to look into the latter two in considerable detail, and debate differences as well as possible similarities that may exist between these two functions. For better illustration and a profound understanding of the issue, the above classification is compared with several labels applied in other linguistic sources, namely in *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* by Huddleston and Pullum (2002) and *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* by Biber et al. (1999). The key question arising here is what exactly it is that makes 'conjuncts' conjunctive and 'disjuncts' disjunctive.

1   Introduction

Before looking at the subcategories of 'conjuncts' and 'disjuncts' in detail, it may be convenient to start off with a brief introduction to the general concept of adverbials.

According to *Merriam-Webster's Concise Dictionary of English Usage* (2002), the term 'adverbial' denotes "a noun, noun phrase, prepositional phrase, verbal phrase, or clause that functions in a sentence in the same way an adverb would" (ibid.: 28). This may further raise the question of what an 'adverb' is, and what distinguishes an adverb from an adverbial. As should be clear from the foregoing, 'adverb' is a form whereas 'adverbial' is a function. Also, in other words, 'adverb' is a label for one of the traditional 'parts of speech', or 'word classes' – a term used by Greenbaum & Quirk (1990), while 'adverbial' refers to one of the 'sentence elements' (the others being 'verb', 'subject', 'object', and 'complement').

In terms of 'conjuncts' and 'disjuncts', which are under investigation here, they denote grammatical functions of adverbials. Besides these, Quirk et al. (1985) make a further distinction between 'adjuncts' and 'subjuncts', offering four subcategories, each of which provides different grammatical properties. The difference in these properties mainly consists in the way they compare to sentence elements like subject, object, and complement. Thus, 'adjuncts' are regarded as being the most similar to sentence elements in terms of the function they fulfil within a sentence, while 'subjuncts', for instance, are said to "lack the grammatical parity with other sentence elements" (Greenbaum & Quirk 1990: 176), and in comparison with adjuncts they "have a subordinate and parenthetic role" (ibid.).

'Disjuncts' is another category of adverbials, which is seen as being rather detached from and superordinate to sentence elements. As to 'conjuncts', their cardinal attribute resides in the capacity to connect parts of a discourse (two or more sentences, whole paragraphs, or even larger parts of an utterance), and this is achieved by "expressing at the same time the semantic relationship obtaining between them" (Greenbaum & Quirk 1990: 184).

The primary goal of the present paper is to present, describe, and analyse the two categories above in more detail (in terms of their grammatical qualities), and attempt to debate what exactly distinguishes the two, and/or what they have in common. In addition, the label 'disjunct' is discussed in itself and it is argued to what extent this term corresponds to the real grammatical properties of this category.

The main source used for the detailed investigation of conjuncts and disjuncts below is Greenbaum's *Studies in English Adverbial Usage* (1969), which offers a descriptive account of these two categories of adverbials based on corpus analysis, analysis of experiments with native informants, and analysis of data created on the basis of the author's introspection and experience as a linguist as well as a native speaker. As a matter of interest, it should be pointed out that Greenbaum (ibid.) differentiated between only three grammatical functions of adverbials: 'conjuncts', 'disjuncts', and 'adjuncts'.

2   Conjuncts

As already mentioned, 'conjuncts' represent one of the grammatical functions of adverbials. Before going any further, it may be useful to make clear what is meant by the term 'function'. Greenbaum (1969) explains that the 'function' of an item is "the sum of its syntactic features" (ibid.: 3). He further specifies that syntactic features include those that are present for an item in the clause which is being analysed as well as those that are potential; by 'potential' he means both positive and negative features (ibid.).

The syntactic features of 'conjuncts' can be summed up in the following way (based on ibid.: 37-44):

1. General properties:
a) no premodification or postmodification:
'Conjuncts' cannot usually be premodified or postmodified; hence, *<u>really</u> however*, or *moreover <u>enough</u>* are not acceptable.

2. Occurrence in clause types:
a) *yes-no* and *wh-* questions, and indirect questions:

Most 'conjuncts' are able to appear with both direct and indirect questions. As for direct questions, they can be found with *yes-no* as well as *wh-* questions, and most 'mobile conjuncts' (as opposed to 'immobile' ones, which are restricted to initial position and are unacceptable in indirect questions) can also occur in indirect questions. It should, however, be pointed out that there may be certain exceptions to this rule, depending either on a semantic category as a whole, or on an individual 'conjunct'. Thus, for instance, concessive *however* cannot be used within an indirect question, whereas concessive *nevertheless* can. In the same way, it is possible to contrast the acceptability of resultive *therefore* with the unacceptability of resultive *thus*. Let us look at the following example:

*All of us wonder whether <u>nevertheless</u> / *<u>however</u> she will tell the truth.*

*They asked if I should <u>therefore</u> / *<u>thus</u> disagree with it.*

It should be mentioned at this stage that all the examples in this and the next chapter are created ad hoc in order to illustrate aptly both positive and negative features of the adverbials in question.

b) imperative and optative clauses:

Most 'conjuncts' can occur in both imperative and optative clauses, e.g.:

<u>Therefore</u>, don't ever go there.

If only, <u>finally</u>, we could prove it.

c) verbless clauses:

'Conjuncts' may appear in verbless clauses, such as:

<u>If possible then</u>, let's meet up tonight.

d) the copular verb *be* and other verbs:

'Conjuncts' can appear in clauses with the most common copular verb *be*, and, generally speaking, freely co-occur with any verb.

3. Function within a clause:

The following syntactic features of 'conjuncts' can be divided into positive and negative:

Positive:

a) acceptability in initial position of the clause:

<u>Consequently</u>, they signed the contract.

It should be mentioned that certain 'conjuncts' are restricted to initial position; in Greenbaum's terminology (1969: 25) these are labelled as 'immobile'. The only representatives he enumerates are *yet*, *so*, *besides*, and *hence*. Also, in terms of initial position in general, it is worth quoting Biber et al. (1999), who claim that this position can be regarded as "the unmarked position for linking adverbials" (ibid.: 891).

b) acceptability in initial position even if the clause is negated:

<u>Therefore</u>, they didn't sign the contract.

Negative:

c) unacceptability to be focused by *only* in initial position and allow Subject-Verb inversion:

*Only therefore did she join us.

Generally speaking, 'conjuncts' cannot be focused by *only* even if occurring elsewhere.

d) unacceptability to be the focus of clause negation:

**She did not join us therefore*.

e) unacceptability to be the focus of clause interrogation:

**Did she join us therefore or did she join us anyway?*

f) unacceptability to be the focus of clause comparison:

**She joined us more therefore than he did.*

g) unacceptability to be the sole focus of a cleft sentence:

**It was therefore that she joined us.*

h) unacceptability to be a response to *yes-no* as well as *wh-* questions (and questions introduced by *How*):

A: *She therefore joined us.* B: *Did she join you?* A: **Yes, therefore.*

A: *She therefore joined us.* B: *Why did she join you?* A: **Therefore.*

When dealing with 'conjuncts' in general terms and comparing them to other grammatical functions of adverbials, they are usually described as having a 'superior' and rather peripheral or detached relationship with other clause elements, and above all as serving a connective role. This is also reflected in the terminology used in most sources. Thus, Biber et al. (1999: 763) call the category of 'conjuncts' 'linking adverbials', Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 775) use the term 'connective adjuncts', and Halliday and Hasan (1976: 228) apply the labels 'conjunctives', 'conjunctive adjuncts', and 'discourse adjuncts'.

Before moving on to the category of 'disjuncts', it should also be emphasised that 'conjuncts' are regarded as important means of cohesion, which is closely related to their connective function. As Biber et al. (1999: 875) point out they are crucial elements for building up textual cohesion because they explicitly indicate relations between parts of a discourse. Other relevant sources, too, highlight their cohesive role; Leech and Svartvik (2002: 187), for instance, liken sentence adverbials to "signposts on a journey", and they claim that these words or phrases are used to help readers or listeners understand "how one idea leads on from another".

3 Disjuncts

Within the grammatical function of 'disjuncts', Greenbaum (1969) and subsequently also Quirk et al. (1985) distinguish between two subcategories: 'content' and 'style' disjuncts. The former provides the speaker's comment on/or attitude to the content of

an utterance, whereas the latter expresses the way the author of an utterance is speaking. 'Content disjuncts' can also be called 'attitudinal' (in fact, Greenbaum in 1969 only used the label 'attitudinal', whereas Quirk et al. in 1985 prefer to use the term 'content disjuncts'), and they represent by far the larger subclass of 'disjuncts'. To illustrate these two subcategories, let me supply the following examples:

'Content disjunct': *Obviously, they love each other.* – by using the 'content disjunct' *obviously*, the speaker expresses his/her attitude to the content of the sentence and its truth conditions, which he/she finds obvious.

'Style disjunct': *Honestly, I've never seen him before.* – by using the style disjunct *honestly*, the speaker wants to say (or emphasise) that he or she is speaking in an honest way/ honestly. As Hoye (1997) points out, 'style disjuncts' "not only draw attention to what is being said, but how it is being said, thereby incorporating metalinguistic comment into the sentences in which they occur" (ibid.: 180). Often, the 'style disjunct' can be seen as a shortened form of a clause with the subject *I*, the verb *say* or *tell*, and the 'manner adjunct' of the same form and meaning as the current 'disjunct'. Thus, the 'disjunct' *honestly* actually means: *I tell you/say honestly.*

In terms of disjuncts' function, i.e. their syntactic features (of both 'content'/ 'attitudinal' and 'style' disjuncts), Greenbaum (1969: 81-127) sums them up as follows:

1. General properties
a) possible premodification or postmodification:
Unlike 'conjuncts', which usually cannot be premodified or postmodified at all, most 'disjuncts' do accept premodification by *very*, *quite*, *more*, *most*, *less*, *rather,* and other premodifiers, and they may also be postmodified by *enough* (the postmodification particularly applies to 'content disjuncts' evaluating the message as strange), for example:
Quite frankly, she is the only person he knows here. – style disjunct
Very likely/Most likely, she's not coming tonight. – attitudinal/content disjunct
Funnily enough, her husband didn't join her. – attitudinal/content disjunct

2. Occurrence in clause types
a) *yes-no* and *wh-* questions, and indirect questions:
Generally speaking, most 'attitudinal disjuncts' cannot occur with any type of questions, no matter whether *yes-no*, *wh-*, or indirect (unlike 'conjuncts'). This restriction especially applies to the initial position:
*Fortunately, has she passed the exam?
*John'd like to know whether fortunately she's passed the exam.
'Style disjuncts' are different in this respect: they normally appear in front of questions (like 'conjuncts'), e.g.

Briefly, what do you think about this book?

b) imperative and optative clauses:

Whereas 'attitudinal disjuncts' cannot occur in imperative or optative clauses (unlike 'conjuncts'), most 'style disjuncts' can commonly appear there (even if the clause is negated):

Luckily, don't ever go there.

Foolishly, if only he never came back.

Frankly, don't ever go there.

Seriously, if only he never came back.

Of course, there are always certain exceptions to a rule; in this case, for example, the 'style disjuncts' *truly* and *logically* would be unacceptable (Greenbaum 1969: 85).

c) the copular verb *be* and other verbs:

Most 'disjuncts' in general can occur with any verb:

Frankly, she's the best teacher I've ever met.

3. Function within a clause:

As with 'conjuncts', functions of 'disjuncts' in a clause may also be divided into positive and negative features.

Positive:

a) acceptability in initial position of the clause:

Honestly, I really hate him. – style disjunct

Luckily, she arrived on time. – attitudinal/content disjunct

b) acceptability in initial position even if the clause is negated:

Simply, she can't stand him. – style disjunct

Obviously, he can't stand her either. – attitudinal/content disjunct

Negative:

c) unacceptability to be focused by restrictives such as *only*, *particularly*, and additives like *also*, *equally*, or by the clausal negative particle *not* in initial position and allow subject – operator inversion:

Only generally do people like animals. – style disjunct

Not apparently does she like him. – attitudinal/content disjunct

d) unacceptability to be the focus of clause negation:

She doesn't like him generally. – style disjunct

It's not going to rain quite likely. – attitudinal/content disjunct

e) unacceptability to be the focus of clause interrogation:

Did she join us frankly or did she join us probably? – style disjunct *frankly* and attitudinal/content disjunct *probably*

As for 'style disjuncts', most of them have a homonym in the form of a 'manner adjunct'. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between these two grammatical

functions ('disjunct' and 'adjunct'). If we regard the adverb *frankly* in the above example as a 'manner adjunct' (*In what way/How did she join us? -> Frankly.*), its occurrence in a question is fully acceptable (in terms of grammatical correctness).

f) unacceptability to be the focus of clause comparison:

*She joined us <u>more generally</u> than he did. – style disjunct

*He came as <u>possibly</u> as she did. – attitudinal/content disjunct

g) unacceptability to be the sole focus of a cleft sentence:

*<u>It was frankly that</u> she joined us. – style disjunct

*<u>It was funnily enough that</u> she joined us. – attitudinal/content disjunct

h) unacceptability to be a response to *wh-* questions (and questions introduced by *How*):

A: *<u>Briefly</u>, she joined us.* B: *How did she join you?* A: **<u>Briefly</u>.*

The 'style disjunct' *briefly* cannot serve as a response to the question above. However, if the adverb *briefly* were used as a 'manner adjunct' in the same sentence, the question would make sense and the 'manner adjunct' *briefly* could be used in reply:

A: *She joined us <u>briefly</u>.* B: *How did she join you?* A: *<u>Briefly</u>.*

With reference to *yes-no* questions, 'disjuncts' can be used in reply to them, although some need to be accompanied by *yes* or *no*:

A: *Do you like Rick?* B: *<u>Honestly, no.</u>*

By contrast, 'conjuncts' cannot serve as an answer to a *yes-no* question even if accompanied by *yes* or *no*.

When defining general features of 'disjuncts' and contrasting them with other grammatical functions of adverbials, it is commonly emphasised that they have a superordinate role in relation to the other sentence elements, and that in terms of syntax they are more separated (Quirk et al. 1985). This syntactical detachment results in the fact that disjuncts "seem to have a scope that extends over the sentence as a whole" (ibid.: 613).

Other possible labels for 'disjuncts' occurring in contemporary linguistic sources follow:

Biber et al. (1999: 764) use the term 'stance adverbials' and they distinguish between three subcategories: 'epistemic', 'attitude', and 'style'. 'Epistemic stance adverbials' correspond to Quirk et al.'s content disjuncts, in particular to the type expressing 'degree of truth'. 'Attitude stance adverbials' can be likened to another subclass of content disjuncts conveying 'value judgment', and finally, 'style stance adverbials' have the same properties as Quirk et al.'s style disjuncts (1985: 615-623).

Huddleston and Pullum's terminology (2002: 767-773) can be summarized in the following way: 'modal adjuncts' roughly correspond to content disjuncts expressing degree of truth, 'evaluative adjuncts' are another term for Quirk et al.'s content disjuncts commenting on value judgment, and lastly, 'speech act-related adjuncts' are in fact style disjuncts.

4   Conjuncts versus disjuncts

Greenbaum (1969: 24) sets up three diagnostic criteria to distinguish 'adjuncts' from 'conjuncts' and 'disjuncts'. These are as follows:

1. 'Adjuncts' do not normally occur in initial position when this is an independent tone unit and when the clause is negated; both 'conjuncts' and 'disjuncts', in contrast, can appear in initial position under these circumstances.

2. 'Adjuncts' are able to function as the focus of clause interrogation, whereas neither 'conjuncts' nor 'disjuncts' can serve this function.

3. 'Adjuncts' are able to be the focus of clause negation, while 'conjuncts' and 'disjuncts' are not.

Having separated 'conjuncts' and 'disjuncts' from 'adjuncts', Greenbaum (ibid.) creates one more crucial criterion in order to differentiate between 'conjuncts' and 'disjuncts'. This criterion is based on the ability of an adverbial to be a response to a *yes-no* question along with *yes* or *no*. Whereas 'conjuncts' are unable to fulfil this function, 'disjuncts' can serve as a reply to *yes-no* questions. Other differences between the two categories in question are the following:

1. Conjuncts' inability but disjuncts' ability to be pre- or postmodified.

2. Conjuncts' and style disjuncts' ability to occur in direct (both *yes-no* and *wh*-questions) as well as indirect questions as opposed to attitudinal/content disjuncts' inability to do so.

3. Conjuncts' and style disjuncts' ability to appear in imperative or optative clauses as opposed to attitudinal/content disjuncts' inability to do so.

Further distinction between 'conjuncts' and 'disjuncts' can be drawn in terms of their semantic roles. Whereas 'conjuncts' have 'conjunct-specific' semantic functions (such as 'contrastive', 'resulitive', 'listing', 'summative', 'appositive', or 'transitional'), 'disjuncts' normally adopt semantic roles typical of 'adjuncts' (expressing, for example, 'modality and manner', 'respect', 'truth condition', or 'value judgment') (Quirk et al. 1985: 631). Thus, 'disjuncts' in particular tend to have homonyms (e.g. in the form of 'manner adjuncts' or 'intensifiers'), and there can be such ambiguous instances that even properties of position or punctuation and intonation will not be able to distinguish between them. It is then up to the context to solve the possible ambiguity between the grammatical functions of 'disjunct' and 'adjunct'.

As for 'conjuncts', it is necessary to see their function as being in the linking of independent parts of a discourse rather than in the adding of another aspect of information to a single separated part (which is characteristic of 'disjuncts') (Quirk et al. 1985: 631). It may also be interesting to contrast 'conjuncts' (traditionally called 'half-conjunctions') to 'conjunctions' using Sweet's description (1891: 143): "The difference

between half- and full conjunctions is that half-conjunctions connect logically only, not formally also, as full conjunctions do" (Greenbaum 1969: 231).

As already mentioned, 'conjuncts' are seen as an important means of cohesion, which is closely related to their connective function. Their cohesive function subsequently contributes to the overall coherence of a discourse and thus to a smooth communication between a text producer and receiver. Halliday and Hasan (1976) claim, for instance, that 'conjuncts' are "cohesive not in themselves but indirectly, by virtue of their specific meanings" (ibid.: 226).

The question arising here is what other functions 'disjuncts' have apart from expressing the speaker's attitude to the content of an utterance or the way he/she is speaking. Biber et al. (1999: 874-875) state that 'stance adverbials', i.e. 'disjuncts', "can be multi-functional in discourse" in that they may also have a cohesive role, some of them are necessary to the interactiveness of the conversation, and the class of 'content disjuncts' may be used for emphasis. Even though their cohesive function is not as emphatic as in the case of 'conjuncts', I believe it should not be underestimated. 'Disjuncts' may not have a direct connective function as such, but by stating explicitly how the speaker views the content of what he/she is saying or the way he/she is talking, they help the receiver decode the message appropriately and thus, in my view, also contribute to the coherence of discourse.

The above paragraph may lead to a debate on the appropriateness of the term 'disjunct'. It can be rather misleading, in my view: the word suggests properties this group of adverbials does not actually possess. Definitions for the adjective 'disjunctive' in the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* include "having the property of disjoining or disconnecting; characterized by or involving disjunction or separation", and "opposed to joining or uniting" (http://dictionary.oed.com/). The form 'disjunct' used to be used as an adjective describing something "disjoined, disconnected, separated, separate, distinct; distant"; this use is rare now except in technical senses (ibid.).

Another possible interpretation of the word 'disjunctive' is in the way logicians use it. They distinguish between 'conjunction' and 'disjunction', the former dealing with the relations expressed by 'and', the latter applying to the truth value of a proposition joined by 'or' and expressing an alternative, when "the composite proposition is true if and only if either simple proposition is true" (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1293).

Bearing the above information in mind, later terms such as 'stance adverbials' (introduced by Biber et al. 1999) or the labels applied by Huddleston and Pullum (2002; see above) are, in my opinion, more appropriate, for they do not exclude the cohesive function of these adverbials, whereas the term 'disjuncts' may be rather contradictory in this respect.

5   Conclusion

In the present paper, two grammatical functions of adverbials, namely 'conjuncts' and 'disjuncts' (terminology used by Greenbaum 1969 and Quirk et al. 1985), are compared in terms of their syntactic properties. Relevant sections outline these features with regard to their general characteristics, occurrence in clause types, and function within a clause. The paper further provides terminology and categorization of these adverbial functions as applied by Biber et al. (1999) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002). Finally, it briefly discusses a cohesive function of 'conjuncts', and it also suggests that 'disjuncts', too, are cohesive in certain contexts, and thus contribute to the overall coherence of discourse. In connection with this, the appropriateness of the term 'disjunct' is briefly debated.

To conclude, both categories would, in my view, deserve further attention and possible comparison in terms of their role as pragmatic markers and covert meanings they may transmit.

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