

Coordinating conjunctions in Uralic

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Coordinating conjunctions are identified as one of the most ‘persistent’ functional categories over time, neither admitting nor changing members much (Muysken 2008). They sometime show similarity across languages in a family — English *and*, German *und*, Dutch *en* — as is expected. But they sometimes show striking variety, as in Uralic. This survey looked at Uralic languages and their coordinating strategies in order to describe the landscape of coordination in Uralic. These data lead to three conclusions: (a) there is likely no reconstructable proto-Uralic coordinating conjunction or strategy, (b) the Uralic languages support Mauri’s (2008) criteria for coordination strategies in European languages (contrasted with non-European), and (c) the languages that borrow Russian conjunctions confirm Mithun’s (1988) borrowing hierarchy.

No Proto-Uralic coordination strategy. The Uralic languages show a diverse range of coordination strategies (See Table 1). The more well-documented European languages, like Finnish, have well-developed systems of conjunctions — *ja* ‘and’, *tai/vai* ‘or’, *mutta/vaan* ‘but’. The Finnic languages, Finnish, Estonian, Saami, all have very similar conjunctions: Fin. Est. Saa. *ja* ‘and’, and Fin. Saa. *vai* Est. *või* ‘or’. Compare this to the irregularity of the Non-European languages: Mari *den*, Mansi *os*, and Komi *da/daj/nji* ‘and’ (Abondolo 1998). From this variety it is clear no unified conjunction can easily be reconstructed.

European Uralic languages differ qualitatively from non-European in their coordination strategies. Mauri’s (2008) large survey of coordination in European languages presents some general tendencies. For example, ‘All European languages have at least one overt, syndetic marker to express combination.’ The Uralic languages confirm this tendency: it is true for the European languages, which have many such ‘combination markers’, but false for many of the non-European languages. Selkup and Nenets are on record as having no conjunctions at all (Abondolo 1998:544). Nganasan and Mari have one or two conjunctions (ibid:512), while Mansi and Komi have a few, but of Russian origin (ibid:421). Other criteria are explored and generally confirmed.

Borrowing conjunctions. Mithun (1988) highlights a tendency of borrowing conjunctions: if *and* is borrowed, then *or* and *but* must be as well. One of the clearest case studies of this comes from Mansi. The typical coordination strategy is simple juxtaposition (1). Mansi has two native conjunctions *os* ‘and’, *man* ‘or’, but the majority in use are the ones borrowed from Russian *i* ‘and’, *a* ‘but’ (Riese 2001; 2-3). Karelian also features a wealth of Russian conjunctions, including: *da*, *i*, *a*, *ili*, *potomu što*, *što*, *bitto*, *že* (‘and, and, and, or, because, what, as if, ‘emphasis’ ’). The frequency of use of these conjunctions is even subject to regional variation — subvarieties of Karelian closer to Russia show higher frequency of Russian conjunctions (Pugh 1994).

I conclude by presenting new corpus data of a novel coordinator in Finnish *ja/tai* ‘and/or’. This survey is the first pass in the literature at systematically studying conjunctions in Uralic languages and it bears out the established predictions for innovation and borrowing in the coordinating conjunctions category.

Non-European	AND	OR	BUT
Selkup	*		
Nganasan	*		təʔ
Nenets	*		
Mari	den		
Mansi	*, os, i	man	a
Komi	i, da, daj, nji		-a
European			
Saami	ja	vai, -ge	muhto
Finnish	ja	tai, vai	mutta, vaan
Estonian	ja, ning	ehk, vōi	aga, vaid, ent, kuid
Hungarian	és, pedig	vagy	de, mégis, viszont, hanem

Table 1. Some coordinating conjunctions in Uralic languages. The star “*” indicates parataxis (juxtaposition) is an available strategy.

Examples of coordination in Mansi:

- (1) laayl-e waaytal, kaat-e waaytal
legs.his weak hands.his weak
‘His legs are weak and his hands are weak.’ [Rombandeeva 1979:122-34]
- (2) χotal χosat noχ-neyles, a kon in aširmay oles
sun.NOM long appear.PAST3SG **but** outside still cold.TRANSL be.PAST3SG
‘The sun had been up for a long time, but outside it was still cold.’ [Riese 2001]
- (3) usχuli wiyer pos pelamlas i avtomobilit jol-pojtset
street.NOM red light.NOM light_{up}.PAST3SG **and** car.PL stop.PAST3PL
‘On the street the red light went on and the cars stopped.’

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