

Martine Sekali. Counter-subordinative coordination versus co-subordinative coordination, In D. Hornsby (ed.) *Interfaces in Language 2*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011.

## **Counter-subordinative coordination versus co -subordinative coordination: a syntax / semantics / pragmatics interface study of AND, BUT and FOR**

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The objective of this paper is to challenge two kinds of linguistic boundary. Firstly, it challenges the notion that boundaries separate syntax, semantics and pragmatics as discreet components of language which can only be analysed separately, within distinct theoretical frameworks, and with well distinguished meta-linguistic tools. Secondly, the boundary between coordination and subordination is discussed by means of a unified study of AND, BUT and FOR<sup>1</sup> as grammatical markers which prescribe syntactic, semantic and pragmatic instructions.

Over time, the boundaries between coordination and subordination have been defined on the three main levels of linguistic analysis. Although different terminology has been used, the same basic opposition is considered, namely:

- On the clause level (in syntax): subordination is described in generative grammar and other theories of syntax as a headed construction resulting from an embedding process wherein the subordinate clause is embedded, i.e. is a constituent of the matrix clause. This is opposed to coordination, which is defined as a non-headed, non-embedded construction joining two or more independent constituents of equal syntactic status.

- On the semantic level the same basic difference between the two linking processes is considered conceptually: an asymmetric link is opposed to a symmetric link, the former

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<sup>1</sup> For lack of space, I will not consider OR in this paper, for a comparison of all coordinators, see Sekali 2010.

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expressing a hierarchy of conceptual domains. In cognitive and functional theories (Langacker 1991, Cristofaro 2003, Fabricius-Hansen 2008, Blühdorn 2008), subordination is defined as marking hierarchical semantic connections (asymmetry of conceptual domains), where the relata have different relational thematic roles (landmark/trajector; ground/figure etc.). In contrast, coordination defines non-hierarchical semantic connections of conceptual entities -such as events and propositions- : the relata have equal semantic functions and equal semantic weight (symmetry of conceptual domains).

- Finally, on the discourse level (Polanyi 1988, Asher & Vieu 2005), hierarchy is also opposed to non-hierarchy, but in the linking of discourse units with regards to a common dominant, or previous, unit. Coordination here marks a shared linking of discourse units to a common dominant constituent, while subordination marks hierarchy through the specification or disruption of a previous discourse constituent.

It appears that on the three levels of linguistic analysis, (clause, concept, discourse unit), despite different terminology, the two linking processes are identified, defined and opposed in the same way, i.e. in terms of hierarchy and dependence. It is interesting to note that, as emphasized by Blühdorn 2008, there is no necessary parallelism between the three levels of description, so that for example a coordinative structure in syntax can be asymmetric -i.e. subordinative- in semantics, and vice-versa. Such “mixed” structures have been described as “semantic subordination with syntactic coordination (Delechelle 1994) or as “conceptual subordination” by Culicover & Jackendoff 1997. The following two examples illustrate non-parallelism with the syntactic coordinator AND:

- (1) Play it smart, and you'll have money. (S. Kubrick, *The Killing*, 1956)
- (2) The system is under intolerable pressure and something has to give. (*The Guardian*, July 16, 1988.)

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In (1), the linking is coordinative on the syntactic level, but asymmetric and subordinative on the semantic level, marking a conditional type of relation which can be paraphrased as “if you play it smart, you’ll have the money”. The same phenomenon appears in (2), where AND yields a cause to consequence type of link (“the system is under intolerable pressure so that / therefore something has to give”).

This non-necessary parallelism leads Blühdorn 2008 to suggest that the three levels should be analysed separately. Yet in production as well as interpretation, the three dimensions -syntax, semantics, discourse- are stacked to create linguistic representations. Although it is extremely difficult to make simultaneous analyses of the three levels, it is very rewarding to consider the points of interaction between these levels in the analysis of linguistic forms. Thus, in cases when parallelism between syntactic and semantic levels of coordination is only optional, as with AND, one may wonder for example when and why the syntactic coordinator marks symmetric or asymmetric relations in semantics.

One way of considering the points of interaction between the various dimensions of linking processes is to take the morphemes (linguistic markers) as the starting point for the analysis rather than structures. The three afore-mentioned levels of analysis can then be taken into account simultaneously in the investigation of each marker as prescribing specific syntactic, semantic and pragmatic instructions. Antoine Culioli’s *Locative Theory*<sup>2</sup> (*Théorie des opérations énonciatives*) is, in that respect, a productive framework for interface analyses of the schematic forms of grammatical markers and their relation to broad and narrow context in the process of the construction of meaning. My research on English clause-combiners<sup>3</sup> has thus shown me quite clearly that clause-combiners not only combine clauses, or even concepts, but can also combine linguistic operations such as coordination and

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<sup>2</sup> See, in particular, Culioli 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Sekali 1991, 1992, 2007.

subordination in one single marker, and sometimes even do so systematically, as it is the case with coordinators BUT and FOR.

## I. AND

The specificity of the coordinator AND (its core operation) is that it refers back to the predicative relation in the first coordinate (P) in order to re-invest it in the second coordinate (Q), with an iconic predicative movement forwards: Q is set as a predicative and modal add-on to P. In example (3):

(3) I see books, Harry, don't you? I see hundreds of books.  
And not just any books, but first editions, even signed first editions. (P. Auster, *The Brooklyn Follies*, p. 207)

The clause combiner AND comes after a full stop corresponding to the closure of a tone sequence. Here AND contradicts this closure, takes up P to insert it into a macro-utterance, where P becomes the basis for a forward movement in Q. In this example, AND moves forward from the simple assertion of the existence of “books” to the predication of a qualitative amplification in Q, through the negation of a restriction with the structure “not just any books but”. Thus, AND marks the assertion of a linear predicative progression, resulting in a value of intensification, which could be paraphrased as “there is more to say about P, things are even better...” Indeed this use of AND can be glossed as *further-more*, which paraphrases the double movement forward of a progression which is both discursive (further) and modal (more). The same linear predicative movement with AND is exemplified in (4):

(4) I'm here to see my father, and I want to see him right now! (P. Auster, *The Brooklyn Follies*, p.35)

Where the coordinator AND takes up the speaker's goal (to see my father) for modal reinforcement and specification. This process of inter-clausal assertion is always achieved on the basis of a target taken up from P for further qualification. In this respect, AND can be described as an assertive modality, since it sets the assertion of a correlative link in what becomes a ‘macro predicative relation’ (Fig1).

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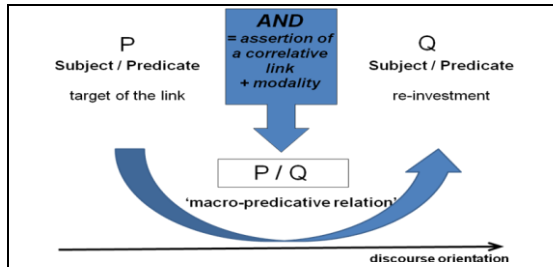


Fig. 1

The reference point in P -the anaphora target- which is the scope and stake of the clause-combining process, is generally specified in the second coordinate by anaphoric markers. In examples (3) and (4) above, nominal notions are taken up (books, my father), the pronoun “him” in (4) overtly reveals this anaphoric process. The anaphora targets in these examples are notions that are taken up for further qualification<sup>4</sup>.

However the anaphora target is not necessarily a semantic notion. I argue that the combining process can also target the assertion within P itself, or more precisely, one of the two coordinates of the speech situation (T or S), which either locates in time, or modalizes the assertion in P. In that case, the temporal location of P, or its subjective endorsement (its modality), will serve as the reference point and basis for a temporal or a modal progression in Q (Fig.2).

<sup>4</sup> The choice of the anaphora target in the coordination process is very important in the construction of semantic values for the link in the macro-utterance. The observation of a large corpus shows that this choice is marked mainly by nominal and verbal determination within the connected clauses, see Sekali 2009: [http://www.uni-frankfurt.de/fb/fb10/KogLi/Lehrstuhl\\_Weiss/Organisation\\_von\\_Tagungen/DGfS\\_\\_AG1/Programm/index.html](http://www.uni-frankfurt.de/fb/fb10/KogLi/Lehrstuhl_Weiss/Organisation_von_Tagungen/DGfS__AG1/Programm/index.html)

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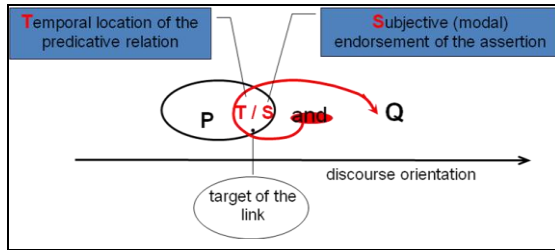


Fig. 2

This is the case in examples (5), (2) and (6):

(5) I set the jars [of poisoned sausages] by the sink and looked down into the garbage disposal. I was perplexed and nervous, as if I were holding live explosives. Gingerly, I twisted off the rings and pried off the caps. A strong sour odor of vinegar bellied out. (Jane SMILEY, *A Thousand Acres*, US, 1991: 395)

(2) The system is under intolerable pressure and something has to give. (*The Guardian*, July 16, 1988.)

(6) Miss Byrd treats her pupils as if they were adults and the girls simply rise to meet her expectations. (B. Trapido, *Frankie & Stankie*, Bloomsbury, 2004, p.172)

In (5) the temporal location of P serves as the basis for a temporal progression in Q, yielding an interpretation of temporal sequence. In (2) and (6), it is the subjective endorsement of P (its modality) which is targeted, so that the modality of the assertion in P becomes the basis for the endorsement of Q as true, in what is in fact an exporting movement, or transfer of modality, from one clause to the other, a movement which is retrievable in its common paraphrase with ‘there-fore’: from point P and forwards.

With the coordinator AND, I argue that there is a process of semantic subordination (or asymmetry) every time the target of the link is the core of the assertion in the first clause, i.e. its temporal location (T) and/or its subjective endorsement (here called S as

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subjective modality). This process of semantic subordination creates relational meanings of temporal sequence or argumentative consequence.

On a more general basis, I propose here to define ‘semantic subordination’ - whatever the clause combiner used - as a linguistically marked clause-combining operation by which a speaker asserts the existence of an inter-clausal location process, where the assertion of a clause is taken up as a basis either to modalize another one, or to locate another one in time. In this process, the locating clause is the semantic matrix, which serves as the anchoring point for the assertion, temporal location or modalization of the other, here called the located clause (Fig. 3). The relation between the locating clause and the located clause is one of semantic dependence, even when the syntactic structure is non-headed<sup>5</sup>.

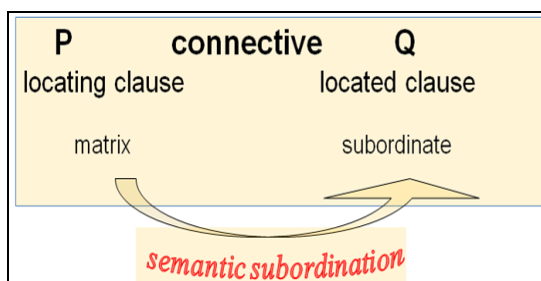


Fig. 3

## II. AND vs. BUT

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<sup>5</sup> I believe this ‘enunciative’ definition to be quite close to what Langacker calls ‘landmark/trajector’ in cognitive grammar, the landmark being the locating clause and the trajector the located clause, although his terminology relates to other theoretical aims .

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The discursive level of analysis also proves essential in order to distinguish and compare the way coordinators actually contribute to the construction of meaning. Coordinates will be oriented differently depending on whether the coordinator asserts a link which follows or disrupts the linear dynamics of discourse.

As mentioned above, the coordinator AND asserts an iconic predicative movement, which follows the linear dynamics of discourse. The coordinates joined by AND are therefore *co-oriented*. On the other hand, the coordinator BUT is a chain disrupter, the link which it predicates between the coordinated units effectively disconnects them from the linear flow of discourse and imposes another orientation. So, in contrast to what happens with AND, the coordinates joined by BUT are *counter-oriented*, (rather like a GPS recalculating a route). I believe that these discursive orientation phenomena are linguistic constructs which depend on the coordinator chosen (consciously or unconsciously) by the speaker. In addition to that, these particular orientation processes have an effect on the semantic evaluation of the first coordinate. In example (7), for example:

(7) She was thirty and she had never been more attractive. (D. Lessing, *Between Men. A Man and Two Women*, 1956; Jonathan Clowes Ltd.)

for the lady to be thirty and to be attractive are properties that are co-oriented by the use of AND. The two properties are set by the coordinator as correlated and inseparable: being thirty is defined as the reference point for a qualitative comparison, and represents the ultimate degree of attractiveness. The same coordinates linked with BUT instead of AND, as in (7'), yield a very different representation:

(7') She was thirty but she had never been more attractive.

Being thirty suddenly has a negative ring to it: it is young with AND, and the beginning of old age with BUT, and one may wonder how the coordinator can have such an influence on the evaluation of the very same predication. As described above, BUT asserts a link which disrupts the linear discursive flow, or rather,

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diverts its course: the two properties (to be thirty and to be attractive) are thus defined, not as opposites - there is no semantic or logical opposition between the two - but as counter-oriented, so that the age is endowed with a negative value that it did not have prior to the coordination process. BUT is therefore a coordinator which asserts a very different predicative movement from that marked by AND: it is not a *prospective* but a *retrospective* movement, as we can observe in the progression of the narrative in example (8):

(8) I sat down and thought, but thinking got me nowhere.  
 And so I did it, I did the best I could. (Jane SMILEY, *A Thousand Acres*, US, 1991: 395)

What appears in this example is that, contrary to AND the connection marked by *but* defines a three-term relation rather than a binary one: BUT takes up the predicate ‘thought’ to associate it to a clause that is different from the continuation that was implicitly expected. This implicit potential continuation -(i) as in implicit- can be considered the result of an implicit form of semantic subordination from P to i; from ‘I thought’, set as a semantic matrix, to the modal endorsement of an *intermediate* representation (‘I found a idea, thinking got me somewhere’). This intermediate implicit reference is then the target of a qualification, (or rather, with BUT, of a *disqualification*) through the coordinated utterance (Q): ‘thinking got me nowhere’ (Fig.4)

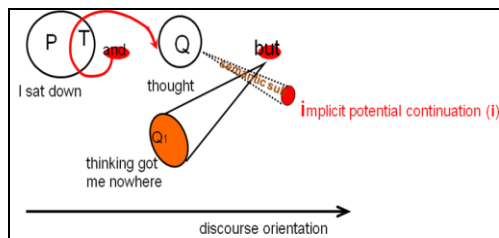


Fig.4

The coordinator BUT thus disrupts the linear dynamics of discourse and directs us back to an implicit semantic subordination

from p to i, which it counters and disqualifies with Q. The second coordinator AND in example (8) then moves on to another semantic subordination process, this time explicit. In this case, 'thinking got me nowhere' is the matrix for the assertion and endorsement of a consecutive event (I did it). Here the argumentative value of the semantic subordination is emphasized by 'so'. The discursive movement here first goes forwards with AND, then backwards with BUT, and highlights the complex, three-term operation instructed by BUT: syntactic coordination with BUT is associated with a process of implicit semantic subordination, which is both constructed and disqualified by the coordinator.

This particular linking process is also illustrated in example (9): which reveals a certain type of inter-subjective relations with BUT. In this example, Dinah, a young girl, writes a letter masquerading as her mother to ask to have her muddy driveway paved:

(9) Dinah writes what she considers to be a completely spoofy letter. But, incredibly, her mum seems happy with the letter and posts it right away. (B. Trapido, *Frankie & Stankie*, Bloomsbury, 2004, p.148)

Due to the use of present tenses on the predicates, the reader is led to adopt the girl's point of view. The adjective 'spoofy', which qualifies the letter, is clearly endorsed by Dinah, as confirmed by the relative clause 'what she considers'. The coordinator BUT establishes a subjective discordance between Dinah's and her mother's points of view, which is paraphrased by the adverb 'incredibly'. Here again, BUT directs us back to an implicit semantic subordination from P to i ('her mother won't like it'), and simultaneously disqualifies this semantic subordination by means of Q<sub>1</sub> 'her mum seems happy with the letter'. This process of *counter-subordination* is then combined in the example with another clause Q<sub>2</sub> ('posts it') by the coordinator AND, this time marking explicit semantic subordination from Q<sub>1</sub> to Q<sub>2</sub>, yielding sequence and consequence values.

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It therefore appears that both AND and BUT can combine syntactic coordination and semantic subordination in one marker, yet while the process of semantic subordination is optional with AND, it is systematic with BUT, and it is explicit with AND while implicit with BUT.

I argue that some coordinators - in particular BUT and FOR - *systematically* combine syntactic coordination and semantic subordination in one marker, so that their analysis challenges traditional boundaries: the two coordinators do not simply combine clauses, or even concepts, they combine linguistic operations, and can therefore only be analysed at the interface between syntax, semantics and pragmatics. To summarize the double operation marked by BUT:

- BUT asserts the existence of an implicit semantic subordination, from P to an intermediate representation *i*.
- BUT coordinates this semantic subordination process with a third term (Q), which disqualifies it, on the basis of inter-subjective discordance between speaker and addressee.

In an interface study, these two operations in a single marker can be accounted for as a process of *counter-subordinative coordination*. More than a coordinator, BUT can thus be considered as a counter-subordinator, by the use of which the speaker both suggests a continuation to P, attributes its endorsement to a potential addressee, and disqualifies it to assert and endorse another one.

It follows that processes of drawing inference and the construction of indirect meaning can be analysed at the linguistic level, provided the linguist works at the syntax/semantics interface. Processes of implicit semantic subordination must then be considered as linguistic constructs even though they are not overtly expressed. Indirect referential values are constructed as intermediate representations which are taken up for qualification or disqualification in the inter-subjective and inter-clausal linking process. The exact semantic and grammatical structure of the implicit predication is not always retrievable, but the very presence

of such secondary indirect meanings is definitely made obvious by the use of the connective.

I would like to add that the operation of counter-subordination seems to be the linguistic origin of what is called in pragmatics the ‘argumentative force’ of an utterance. Through the operations marked by BUT, utterance Q is endowed with stronger argumentative force precisely because it introduces an element which disqualifies and overpowers a former relation, and also because it defines an inter-subjective relation of discordance on the endorsement of this former relation. In fact, the status of stronger argument which is ascribed by BUT to utterance Q is quite often explicitly paraphrased in the utterance itself, as in example (10):

(10) People are still hurting in the state of Michigan. I know that. I travelled here a lot, I heard the stories. **But the fundamental question is**, which candidate can continue to grow this economy? And that's George W. Bush. (President Bush's Radio Address, 10/30/2004)

In this example, G. Bush is campaigning for a second term of office. In the first clause, G. Bush asserts rather strongly, and personally endorses, the fact that people are still in distress in some states of the United States. Yet, quite skillfully, he then uses BUT to counter the obvious inferences that his audience could be led to draw from that statement: i.e. that it was high time they changed presidents. The counter-subordinative coordination performed by BUT enables him to disqualify these inferences, as well as his potential detractors. In the process, the Q clause is set by BUT as a stronger argument than P, as is paraphrased by ‘the fundamental question is’. Interestingly enough, G. Bush’s utterance is actually rather contradictory: ‘the American economy is *still very bad* under my presidency, but who can *continue to grow* this economy? Well, me of course!’ This shows that the coordinator BUT overpowers logic and replaces it with a set of subjective relations. G. Bush, by using BUT, short-circuits the issue of economy to put the question of the identity of the next president in the foreground.

### III. FOR

Many grammarians have also noted that BUT and FOR are traditionally included among the category of coordinators, but are much less ‘central’ than AND and OR, because they seldom obey defining rules such as endocentricity<sup>6</sup> and symmetry. FOR is sometimes even described in syntax as half coordinator/half subordinator. I argue here that one of the reasons for this particular behaviour is that both BUT and FOR mark non-binary relations and may be regarded as coordinating operations rather than clauses.

The coordinator FOR is subject to specific syntactic and grammatical constraints:

- FOR almost always comes after a comma (or a pause when it’s oral), sometimes even after a full stop.
- It cannot be preposed in a structure such as \*For Q, P, contrary to *because*.
- It cannot be modified by any adverb: (\*particularly, \*especially, \*only for) and cannot answer the question « why? ».

Also noticeable is the fact that the clauses P and Q which it combines often bear strong modalization, (such as emphatic cleft structures, pragmatic adverbs, modal auxiliaries etc.), which marks a strong modal endorsement of the speaker’s assertions. I argue that these constraints and recurrences can be explained by the fact that, like BUT, FOR systematically combines syntactic coordination and semantic subordination in a ternary movement, as exemplified in (11):

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<sup>6</sup> In *Syntactic Structures* (1957), N. Chomsky (taking up Bloomfield’s principle) defines coordination as an “endocentric coordinative structure”, meaning that in such a structure, the whole belongs to the same class as its parts, the compound structure belongs to the same category as its coordinated parts.

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(11) At first I feared I might not be accepted, for I had not had any training at all, but two ladies from the supermarket's human resources department took me in hand. (*The Times*, August 13, 2008)

In this structure (P, for Q), the speaker first asserts and modalizes P as an independent clause. Only subsequently is the first clause P linked to another clause Q which confirms the assertion of P, and is co-oriented with P: the fear of not being accepted is asserted first, and then coordinated to her lack of training, but the argument is given as additional and subsequent, and induces an implicit semantic subordination, where Q is the semantic matrix and anchoring point for the re-endorsement of P (so I couldn't do the job). Interestingly enough, in this example, it is this secondary implicit semantic subordination from Q to P (leading to the reinforcement of P, here the anticipation of difficulties) which is then disqualified by the coordinator BUT: BUT counters the semantic subordination implicitly expressed by *for*, breaks with the consensual endorsement of Q, and introduces a new argument which, as a result, gains a priority status.

I have observed quite frequently in my data that the implicit semantic subordination established by FOR is made explicit immediately afterwards with the use of AND, as is the case in example (12):

(12) What the passage demonstrates is a superb use of simple images, all closely related. For the images in themselves really are simple, and there is no attempt at complex development of any one of them. (Coombes, H. *Literature and criticism*, Penguin Books 1953, p.60)

This example, as is often the case with FOR, displays a strong modalization of P, here with the pseudo-cleft sentence in P which sets an end-focus on the complement of the verb 'demonstrate'. The first coordinate P holds alone, and does not need the second coordinate to be endorsed as true. Here again it is only in a second movement, hence the pause after P, that FOR adds another clause, which, quite clearly in this example, takes up an element of P for

reinforcement: ‘the images in themselves really are simple’. The subordinative value of this Q clause is here made explicit in the subsequent coordination with AND, which is no less than a reformulation of P (see Fig. 5).

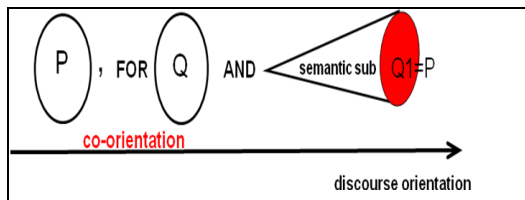


Fig. 5

In addition, on the level of inter-subjective relations, FOR marks the semantic subordination as non-polemical, taken for granted and endorsed by any potential addressee. The particularity of this connection is that even though the locating clause (Q) is new, and introduced by the speaker himself, its subordinative power is represented as consensual. Argumentation introduced by FOR is thus *added to* P but is not necessary to P. In that respect, I would say that FOR coordinates P with a semantic subordination that is *appositive* rather than *determinative*, to use terms commonly applied to describe relative clauses: ‘I assert P, and I remind you, if need be, that Q locates P’. This type of semantic subordination is different from the one marked by BECAUSE, where Q sets the validation and subjective endorsement of P as determinative i.e. necessary for the endorsement of P. Thus, contrary to FOR (and SINCE, for that matter), BECAUSE builds an argumentative link which is not granted in advance, but can still be discussed.

#### IV. Conclusions

Just like BUT, the coordinator FOR mixes syntactic coordination and implicit semantic subordination in one linguistic marker, which probably accounts for their non-central situation in the category of coordinators as defined in single-leveled linguistic

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analyses. Yet the two markers prescribe different syntactic, semantic and pragmatic instructions:

- With FOR, the subordination process defines Q as the matrix for the modal re-endorsement of P, while BUT sets P as the matrix for the endorsement of an implicit reference i.
- The arguments are co-oriented with FOR while they are counter-oriented with BUT.
- On the level of inter-subjective relations, there is subjective discordance on the subordinative link with BUT, and subjective concordance with FOR.

At the syntax / semantics / pragmatics interface, the complex three-term relations marked by BUT and FOR can be described as *counter-subordinative coordination* versus *co-subordinative coordination*.

Clause-combiners thus regularly cross the boundaries of the syntactic opposition between coordination and subordination, and urge the linguist to go beyond theoretical boundaries as well. In this paper I have proposed the definition of new theoretical tools in an attempt to grasp the complexity of clause-combining processes. It proposes a definition of semantic subordination in terms of inter-clausal location on the basis of a temporal/subjective anaphora target, considers traditional coordinators AND, (OR), BUT and FOR as marking the assertive modality in a macro-predicative relation, and attempts a unified interface study of the specific syntactic, semantic and pragmatic instructions which distinguish the three operators. The issue raised here is also the question of the definition of categories. Is there such a thing as a category of coordinators? What appears to bind these markers into one category is a common macro-assertive operation and a specific dependence to discourse linearization, each marker keeping differential instructions on the three level of linguistic analysis.

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