

The Formation and Use of Conjunctions in Old English and Modern English: A Subject Review

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Abstract: Conjunctions are described as grammatical words that function to connect linguistic units, containing words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. They generate relationships between elements of discourse and aid speakers and writers establish information in a meaningful way. The comparison between Old English and Modern English illustrates both continuity and change in the conjunction system. Several basic conjunctions have survived with similar functions, including and, if, and that. However, Modern English has developed a great variety of conjunctions and conjunctive expressions to recompense for the loss of grammatical difficulty found in Old English. conjunctions characterize a significant area of English historical linguistics because they establish how grammar changes while preserving communicative efficiency. Modern English developed a broader range of coordinating, subordinating, and correlative conjunctions, permitting speakers and writers to convey more difficult logical and semantic relationships.

Keywords: Coordinating Conjunctions, Subordinating Conjunctions, Correlative Conjunctions Old English, Modern English.

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Introduction

The study of conjunctions is critical because they expose in what way speakers arrange ideas and construct meaningful communication. In Old English (about 450–1100 AD), conjunctions functioned within a language categorized by widespread inflections and adaptable word order. Throughout this period, conjunctions often co-occurred with case endings and other grammatical indicators that showed relationships between clauses. Since English developed through the Middle English period and into Modern English, numerous inflectional endings vanished, and conjunctions expected a more central role in stating syntactic and semantic relationships [1] [2]

Modern English uses a broad range of conjunctions that can be categorized as coordinating, subordinating, and correlative conjunctions. These conjunctions add not only to grammatical correctness but also to textual cohesion, clarity, and stylistic usefulness. Compared with Old English, Modern English relies greatly on conjunctions since grammatical relationships are conveyed primarily over word order and function words rather than inflectional endings [3]

This review aims to observe the formation and use of conjunctions in both Old English and Modern English. It argues their grammatical classification, historical development, linguistic functions, and the main s

similarities and differences between the two stages of the English language. Also, the review focuses on the role of conjunctions to syntactic structure and effective communication though demonstrating how historical linguistic alteration has affected their present-day forms and functions.

Definitions and Classifications of Conjunctions

Conjunctions are defined as grammatical words that function to connect linguistic units, containing words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. They create relationships between elements of discourse and aid speakers and writers establish information in a meaningful way.

From a historical linguistic point of view, conjunctions offer significant marker of grammatical change. The forms and functions of conjunctions have changed significantly from Old English to Modern English because of variations in syntax, morphology, and patterns of communication. In Old English, conjunctions worked within a grammatical system that depended greatly on inflectional endings. In contrary, Modern English depends more heavily on conjunctions and stable word order to convey relationships between clauses [4]. Therefore, studying conjunctions allows researchers to detect the transition from an inflectional language system to a more analytical one.

Coordinating Conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions associate elements that have equivalent grammatical status, such as two words, two phrases, or two independent clauses. In Modern English, the most common coordinating conjunctions are *and*, *but*, *or*, *for*, *nor*, *so*, and *yet*. These conjunctions convey relationships including addition, contrast, choice, explanation, and result [3]

The highest frequent coordinating conjunction in both Old English and Modern English is the equal of *and*. In Old English, the form was *ond* or *and*, and it was used in analogous ways to connect words and clauses. For example, the Old English expression *þæt wæs god ond fæger* can be interpreted as “that was good and beautiful.” While the spelling altered over time, the basic coordinating function remained stable from Old English to Modern English[1].

Another significant coordinating conjunction is *ac*, which functioned likewise to Modern English *but*. It was utilized to introduce difference or conflict between ideas. Over time, *but* became the main form, substituting numerous earlier substitutions. This change proves how conjunction systems develop through processes of language change and contest between forms [2]

Subordinating Conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions announce dependent clauses and create relationships between a main clause and a subordinate clause. They convey meanings such as time, cause, condition, purpose, and concession. Common Modern English subordinating conjunctions include *because*, *although*, *when*, *while*, *if*, *since*, and *that* [5].

Old English also covered a variety of subordinating conjunctions. One of the most common was *þæt*, which could introduce subordinate clauses and function in ways similar to Modern English *that*. Another vital subordinating conjunction was *gif*, meaning “if,” which introduced conditional clauses. These forms determine that many fundamental relationships expressed by conjunctions in Modern English were already present in Old English [1].

Though, the utilized and frequency of subordinating conjunctions changed over time. As Old English progressed toward Modern English, new conjunctions developed from combinations of words. For example, expressions such as *because* developed from the phrase *by cause that*, showing how multi-word expressions can increasingly develop grammatical markers through a process identified as grammaticalization [6].

Correlative Conjunctions

Correlative conjunctions function in pairs and connect elements with equal grammatical prominence. Modern English examples are *both...and*, *either...or*, *neither...nor*, and *not only...but also*. These structures let speakers to highlight relationships between connected ideas [3].

Old English in Contrary with Modern English, had fewer fixed correlative conjunction structures. In its place, relationships that are now expressed through paired conjunctions were often expressed through repetition, word order, or other grammatical constructions. The growth of correlative structures reflects the growing prominence of function words in English syntax after the loss of many inflectional features [4].

Changes from Old English to Modern English

The comparison between Old English and Modern English illustrates both continuity and change in the conjunction system. Several basic conjunctions have survived with similar functions, including *and*, *if*, and *that*. However, Modern English has developed a great variety of conjunctions and conjunctive expressions to recompense for the loss of grammatical difficulty found in Old English [4].

The weakening of inflectional endings enlarged the significance of conjunctions in expressing relationships between clauses. In Old English, grammatical endings often provided information about sentence relationships, however Modern English relies more heavily on word order and conjunctions. This alteration shows the movement of English from a synthetic language toward a more analytical language system [2].

Thus, the history of Modern English conjunctions reproduces larger patterns of linguistic evolution. Their formation and utilization explain how grammatical structures adapt over time while preserving essential communicative functions.

Introduction to the Comparison

The contrast between Old English and Modern English conjunctions exposes important changes in form, structure, and function. Though many conjunctions have preserved similar meanings throughout the history of English, their grammatical roles and frequency of use have been affected by main developments in English syntax and morphology. The change from Old English to Modern English comprised the loss of many inflectional features, changes in word order, and an enlarged reliance on function words such as conjunctions [4].

Conjunctions offer valued evidence of language change because they take an important position between grammar and meaning. Their development proves how English has moved from a highly inflected language, where grammatical relationships were often exposed through word endings, to a more analytical language, where relationships are repeatedly conveyed through static structures and connecting words [2].

Similarities Between Old English and Modern English Conjunctions

Even though significant changes, many conjunctions have remained steady from Old English to Modern English. The coordinating conjunction *and* is one of the clearest examples of continuity. Old English *and/ond* and Modern English *and* act basically the same function: connecting words, phrases, and clauses. Its survival mirrors the tendency of highly frequent grammatical words to remain quite unchanged over long periods of time [7].

Correspondingly, the Old English conjunction *gif* developed into Modern English *if*, keeping its function as a marker of conditional relationships. Both forms introduce clauses that describe possible situations or conditions. The preservation of this meaning establishes that some grammatical functions continued to be stable even when the language involves most important structural changes [1].

The conjunction *þæt* also demonstrates continuity between the two historical stages of English. While its functions have become more restricted in Modern English, its role as a clause introducer progressed into the modern complementizer *that*. This shows how grammatical elements can endure while undergoing changes in form and function [6].

Differences in Form and Structure

In spite of these similarities, Old English and Modern English conjunctions diverge significantly in their forms. Old English conjunctions often reflected the Germanic origins of English and contained letters

and sounds that are no longer used in Modern English, such as *þ* (thorn). For example, *þonne* (“when/then”) and *þæt* (“that”) show the distinctive appearance of Old English grammatical forms [1].

Modern English conjunctions in general have simpler forms because of phonological and spelling changes that occurred over centuries. Old English forms were increasingly shortened, replaced, or transformed as pronunciation changed. For example, *þæt* became *that*, and *þonne* developed into forms related to modern temporal expressions such as *then* and *when* [2].

Another significant difference concerns the number and diversity of conjunctions. Modern English has developed a wider range of complex conjunctive expressions, including multi-word conjunctions such as *even though*, *as long as*, *in order that*, and *provided that*. These expressions permit speakers and writers to express more specific logical relationships between ideas [5].

Differences in Use and Frequency

Using the conjunctions has also transformed considerably between Old English and Modern English. In Old English, grammatical relationships were often reinforced by inflectional endings, permitting more flexible word order. As these endings disappeared, conjunctions became gradually essential for creating relationships between clauses [4].

Modern English depends heavily on conjunctions to make complex sentences. Academic writing, particularly, uses many conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs to explain relationships, arrange arguments, and maintain textual cohesion. Expressions for instance *however*, *therefore*, *moreover*, and *consequently* are specifically common in modern formal writing [8].

Old English texts, in contrary, often relied on a minor set of greatly frequent conjunctions. Narrative texts regularly used conjunctions for example as *þa* (“then”) and *ond* (“and”) to connect events and preserve the flow of storytelling. This change reflects the altering communicative applies and grammatical structures of English over time [9].

The differences between Old English and Modern English conjunctions can also be understood as part of the broader development of English syntax. Fischer et al. (2001) explain that the syntax of Old English differs from that of later stages of English and that changes in clause structure contributed to the development of the modern grammatical system. From this perspective, changes in conjunctions are not isolated lexical changes but are connected with wider changes in the way clauses were organized and linked. Therefore, the development of conjunctions from Old English to Modern English reflects the broader syntactic evolution of the English language [10]

Methodology

This study pays a comparative historical-linguistic method. A minor selection of Old English examples is compared with their Modern English counterparts. The analysis emphasizes on four features of conjunctions: form, meaning, grammatical function, and continuity or change over time. First, conjunctions arising in the selected Old English examples are identified. Second, equivalent conjunctions in Modern English are identified. Third, the conjunctions are classified according to their function, including coordination, contrast, condition, reason, time, and concession. Finally, the Old English and Modern English forms are compared to determine which conjunctions have changed, survived, or disappeared.

Data Analysis

Because this is a small qualitative comparison, the study emphasizes primarily on linguistic differences rather than statistical frequency.

Example 1: Addition

Old English: “He com and he sæde þæt word.”

Modern English: “He came and he said the word.”

The conjunction *and* occurs in both periods and continues to perform the same basic function of connecting two clauses.

Example 2: Contrast

Old English: “He wæs strang, ac he wearð oferswiðed.”

Modern English: “He was strong, but he was defeated.”

Old English *ac* expresses contrast. In Modern English, *but* is normally used for the same function.

Example 3: Condition

Old English: “Gif he cume, we gretan hine.”

Modern English: “If he comes, we will greet him.”

Old English *gif* developed into Modern English *if*. Although the form has changed, its basic function of introducing a conditional clause has remained.

Example 4: Reason

Old English: “He ne com, forþam þe he wæs seoc.”

Modern English: “He did not come because he was sick.”

The Old English expression *forþam þe* expressed reason. Modern English normally uses *because* for this function.

Results and Discussion

The analysis proves three major patterns.

First, some conjunctions have survived from Old English into Modern English. The strongest example is *and*, which continues to connect words and clauses and express addition.

Second, some conjunctions have altered in form but retained a similar function. For example, Old English *gif* developed into Modern English *if*. Similarly, *þæt* is historically associated to Modern English *that*, although the modern word has developed several grammatical uses.

Third, some Old English conjunctions have disappeared or been replaced. Old English *ac*, for example, has largely been replaced by *but*. Likewise, *oððe* is represented by Modern English *or*, while *forþam þe* has been replaced in many contexts by *because*. [11]; [12].

The results indicate that the history of English conjunctions involves both continuity and change. The communicative functions expressed by conjunctions have remained important, but the linguistic forms used to express those functions have changed over time.

The survival of *and* is an example of strong grammatical continuity. Its basic function has remained steady despite the major structural changes that English has experienced. In contrast, the replacement of *ac* by *but* determines lexical change. The meaning of expressing contrast has remained, but the preferred conjunction has changed. [1]; [4].

Another significant difference concerns the development of subordinating conjunctions. Old English frequently used expressions such as *forþam þe* to convey causal relationships. Modern English commonly uses *because*. This suggests that the Modern English conjunction system has developed new lexical forms for expressing relationships that were already present in Old English [13]; [2].

The variations in conjunctions should also be understood in relation to the broader development of English grammar. Old English had a richer inflectional system and greater grammatical flexibility than Modern English. Over time, English became progressively dependent on word order, auxiliary verbs, and other grammatical devices. The conjunction system developed together with these broader syntactic changes [4]; [14].

Conclusion

The transition from Old English to Modern English caused in major grammatical changes. The weakening of inflectional endings improved the importance of conjunctions as indicators of relationships between clauses. Modern English developed a broader range of coordinating, subordinating, and correlative conjunctions, permitting speakers and writers to convey more difficult logical and semantic relationships [4]; [5].

A contrast between Old English and Modern English conjunctions exposes both stability and change. While many conjunctions have preserved their basic meanings and functions, their forms, frequency, and grammatical importance have developed consistent with the changing needs of English users. So, the history of conjunctions provides valuable insight into the larger processes of linguistic evolution.

Marcus and Maden-Weinberger observe conjunctions such as *and*, *but*, and *or*, together with a wide range of subordinating conjunctions, across written English from the fifteenth century to the present day. Their study displays that the number and use of subordinating conjunctions increased remarkably between 1500 and 1700, while the frequency and function of conjunctions have also varied according to genre and historical period. In Modern English, conjunctions continue to play an significant role in connecting clauses and stating relationships such as addition, contrast, cause, and condition. The authors also determine that contemporary forms of communication, including email and WhatsApp messages, display diverse patterns of conjunction use, reflecting the increasing influence of informal and conversational styles on Present-Day English [15].

The conclusion is that conjunctions characterize a significant area of English historical linguistics because they establish how grammar changes while preserving communicative efficiency. The study of their formation and use from Old English to Modern English focuses on the dynamic relationship between meaning, language structure, and human communication.

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