

# A Note on the Pragmatic Force of Sentence-initial 'And'

## —Its Contribution to the Communication Process—

Mariko Udo

### 1. Background

Linguists, as well as logicians, have long been bothered by the question of how we should define the 'meaning' of conjunctions. Various attempts have been made to assign different functional meanings syntactically, semantically, or pragmatically. 'And', the commonest, conjunction, cannot, of course, have evaded their scrutiny.

Based on its syntactic property, being incorporated into the paratactic structure of coordination, the natural language conjunction 'and' is generally identified with a truth-functional connective '&', which simply signals the linking of constituents of the same syntactic value to form a single equivalent complex. In this the members of the coordinate structure are semantically as well as syntactically in a symmetrical relationship, reversible in order without changing the meaning of the whole phrase. This is all very true of the linking of some simple phrasal categories as in 'wine, women, and song'; however, we need to modify or extend the definition of 'and' in order to capture the asymmetrical relationships between constituents at the sentential level or even higher.

It has been observed that there is a wide variety of semantic relations which intra-sentential 'and' can bear, — for example, conditionality, simultaneity, succession, and cause, to name but a few. How we should describe and explain connectedness of these kinds varies depending on what grammatical framework we have in mind: the capacity of semantics/pragmatics determines the load of the task. As Schifffrin (1987) notes, the meaning-minimalists would propose pragmatic principles reminiscent of Grice's maxims which speakers and hearers use to relate conjoined sentences and draw relevant inferences. (See Gazdar (1979), Blakemore(1987).) The meaning-maximalists, on the other hand, would try to construct a rich semantic theory which can assign particular functions to the use of 'and' in each individual case. It is also possible to take an intermediate position, e. g. employing the notion of a cohesive text-forming device while restricting the semantic property of 'and' to a logical connective (see Halliday and Hasan (1976) ).

In addition to previous analyses, this paper attempts to shed light on the

problem of describing the semantic and pragmatic properties of 'and' by pointing out its interesting functions at the supra-sentential level. Although it is not very clear how the pragmatic functions of 'and' are related to its semantic properties, examining various sorts of behaviour would be of some help in elucidating the prototypical characteristics of this conjunction.

## 2. The target

In this paper we look at some cases where sentence-initial 'And' is seemingly quite intentionally used as a kind of strategic device for facilitating comprehension of the structure of the text.

As Halliday and Hasan (1976) notes, "the 'and' relation is felt to be structural and not cohesive, at least by mature speakers", which is why they feel rather uncomfortable to find a sentence beginning with 'And' in written English: native speakers tend not to consider that a child's composition having 'and' as its dominant sentence linker can really be said to form a cohesive whole", and so children are usually taught to discard this 'unnecessary' connector as much as possible. This general tendency, needless to say, reflects the contrast between the unmarked zero form and the marked presence of the connective. It is in this latter sense that we are interested in investigating the pragmatic implications sentence-initial 'And' can carry.

The presence of sentence initial 'And' is, in fact, quite salient in written English; you might have only one or two of them in a whole text, e. g. in a journalistic article of a few pages, if any at all. The fact that it is used so infrequently suggests that the conjunction might be employed with the aim of achieving some dramatic effect or consequence in structuring and presenting contextual information. In the following sections, three cases where this seems to be true are examined. All the data cited in this paper are from various edition of the Sunday Times Magazines (1985 to 1992).

## 3. Introductory additive

The first case of strategic use of 'And' is where it signals shift in topic, i. e. it introduces the next thing to be discussed in the subsequent section of the text—in this use it combines not sentences but rather paragraphs or groups of paragraphs. Consider the text below.

- (1) "It's not just storms that interfere with bodily function, notes Rae. A sudden cold snap can cause coronary spasm. *And* respiratory infections and asthma worsen when a "norther" blows in Dallas.

Elsewhere in the world, other winds make people bleed more easily. Swiss

and south German doctors have postponed operations when the warm, dry, southerly *föhn* blows down from the Alps. The cold, northerly mistral, which can blow for days on end down the Rhone Valley into the Gulf of Lyons, has long been blamed for driving people to distraction. ”

This is a part of report on recent investigations into the causes of weather-sensitivity. The preceding paragraphs discuss effects that can be caused by on-coming storms. In the above extract the reporter goes on to show more instances of weather-sensitivity caused by another phenomenon—‘winds’. Here, ‘And’ functions as a paragraph-coordinator that gives advance notice of the change of topic.

What is peculiar about this type of usage is that the semantic content of the sentence beginning with ‘And’ actually belongs to the following paragraph, and would therefore be expected to be attached to it, to introduce a new topic as the paragraph begins. Moreover, this would be more compatible with the syntactic fact that the conjunction is adjoined to linearly latter constituents. However, in this case ‘And’ fails to meet this expectation, making us suspect that ‘And’ here is not really a simple linking conjunction, but rather acts as a kind of pragmatic initiator that leads the hearer/reader to shift his attention to the next topic. In order to carry this function out efficiently, the sentence with ‘And’ is placed, i. e. at the end of the preceding paragraph.

The text below is another example of this usage. The sentence initiated by ‘And’ introduces a new topic, i.e the effect of sun-light in conditioning certain biological rhythms.

(2) “But why should winter darkness make certain individuals so miserable that they are unable to get on with their daily lives? Dr Stuart Checkley, head of the Institute of Psychiatry at the Maudsley Hospital, south London, says one possible explanation is that the part of the brain affected by depression is close to the part which controls body rhythms. *And* certain body rhythms are controlled by light.

During sleep, for instance, the hormone melatonin is produced. It peaks at around 3am and is suppressed by dawn light. In animals we know that melatonin controls seasonal behaviour such as breeding and hibernation. But its role in human behaviour is unknown.”

Preceding the first paragraph, the focus of attention was on the fact that people seem to suffer depression more in winter than in any other season. The section beginning with the first paragraph above explains that this phenomenon is more

biological in nature and is a natural consequence of humans being animals : one such instance is the relation between body rhythms and light. ‘And’ quite effectively shows up in the former paragraph to announce provisionally that there is something interesting to tell the reader now which is well worth paying attention to. How light influences animals is greater than we expect: even what triggers things like breeding or hibernation seems to be controlled by light. Without ‘And’ or the sentence beginning with it, it would sound too abrupt to talk about something totally new in the following paragraph. It seems as though ‘And’ has been saved to be used most effectively for this purpose.

#### 4. **Emphatic reminder**

The second case we deal with is where a sentence beginning with ‘And’ seems to emphasize what has just been said: it calls our attention to the importance of the information just given. Let us look at a text that exemplifies this point.

- (3) “Julie sits staring at a slice of chocolate cake, willing it to disappear because she doesn’t want to eat it. But sooner or later—later in this case—she will have to capitulate. Left-over food is something Dr Dee Dawson doesn’t tolerate in her house. Everything served up must be eaten. So after an hour of putting off the fateful moment, the cake is duly dispatched.

Julie and six other teenage girls are staying at Dee’s rambling Victorian home to be “fattened up”. After months, they are eating properly. *And* that is an achievement, because these girls are among the worst cases of anorexia to be found in the country.”

During her time as a junior doctor, Dr Dawson discovered that there was little expert help available to an anorexic girl sent to hospital, which is used as a final resort when a girl’s refusal to eat is damaging her health. “I found they frequently went home having put on little or no weight.” In answer to the needs of the growing number of young anorexics, Dee opened the doors of her home in Mill Hill, north London, last year to be the first residential home for young anorexics.”

This is the beginning of an article about a doctor who started treating anorexic girls in her own home, in protest against the situation that hospitals in general do not cater properly for the needs of such patients. The second paragraph talks about those girls sent to the doctor’s home for the treatment, who actually get over their mental as well as physical problem and are able to eat properly again.

Normally, there would be nothing special or surprising when a patient recovers physically from an illness. In the case of anorexia, however, the

possibility of achieving a desirable outcome is quite low, and in serious cases it can lead to death. Although this is well-known among medical professionals but in general rather unexpected. People would not imagine anorexia is so difficult to overcome; after all, it is only a matter of appetite.

Here comes 'And' to claim emphatically that our expectation is wrong and the success of the treatment should be praised. It is as if the sentence beginning with 'And' is saying, "Don't underestimate the achievement as far as anorexia is concerned. Think how difficult it is to get out of it; we mustn't forget about that." The readers are expected here to correct their likely previous premise and consequently obtain more precise contextual implication. For this purpose the presence of 'And' is an appeal to check the stock of our background knowledge.

(4) is another example exhibiting this function of 'And' with slightly different variation.

- (4) "Basically the hospital's solution to getting them to eat was give them double portions of everything. But there is no way a child with eating problems is going to down huge helpings. *And* anyway the food was often wrong: the mashed potato, for instance, was made with water and potato powder, so even double helpings had very little nutritional value.

In the Dawson household the girls are served modest quantities of rich food. "For instance when I serve mashed potatoes I add butter and cream to make sure they get the calories they need." Her own five children, ranging in age from one to 12, eat with the girls to encourage a family atmosphere conducive to eating."

The use of 'And' above somehow reminds us of the introductive use we already discussed before. The sentence with 'And' makes us review our background knowledge and obtain a different perspective more relevant and useful for discussion, but at the same time the introduction of the new perspective leads our discussion in that direction. It emphasizes how stupid and pointless the hospitals' solution is, while introducing some different point that we must know about.

The function of 'And', in this way, can often be multi-folded.

## 5. Amplifying evidence

The last case we shall deal with might be rather on the peripheral side in terms of its contribution to text structuring or the comprehension process; nevertheless it is quite characteristic in text. This kind of 'And' shares the

emphatic property with the second use in the preceding section, but differs in the stance of its emphasis. A sentence with this type of 'And' helps to put stress upon the point presently being discussed, by presenting some extreme case in which the situation is exemplified, whereas with the other use previously presented, emphasis is expressed by giving some persuasive evidence or ground for support. Let us examine a typical example.

- (5) "Since laughter is generally acknowledged to have a positive effect, clowns are being encouraged to come out of the circus and into the community. The Big Apple Circus in New York has a special "clown care unit" which does nothing but visit hospitals. *And* the British clown Salvo, a circus clown who was severely injured in a motorcycle accident, has devoted his life to making sick children laugh. Laughter may merely create a placebo effect," says Dr Weeks, "but it can make a measurable difference in many conditions, both psychological and physical. In my work I have found that those with a great sense of humour who don't take themselves too seriously are far better off. I would see humour as a major contributory factor to health. It's a pity you can't get it on the NHS. "

This is the concluding section of an article on the effect of laughter. The paragraph, which includes the sentence initial 'And', itself is about examples which reflect the powerful effect of laughter on people's health; so effective that people have actually started to put it into practice by organizing professional groups. The Americans took the initiative, and even the reserved British followed! The implication is that it is not surprising that the eccentric Americans (at least in the British people's eyes) take up the idea that we should try curing sick people with the help of laughter, but if even the British started to follow the Americans, then this laughter theory really must be true. The implication borne out by the adverb 'even' is exactly what this 'And' attempts to express in the context. 'And' has an effect of adding reality and the power of persuasion to the example put forward.

We give one more example which illustrates this point.

- (6) "Local GPs are enthusiastic about Thomson's work, especially now that they need to shop around within the NHS for the best value for money. The same operations might cost considerably more if carried out by orthopaedic surgeons and take up beds. *And* if some orthopaedic surgeons have been less than welcoming, others now refer patients to Thomson. "Some were unhappy initially with the idea of chiropodists cutting up feet because they weren't

aware of the training we went through. Chiropodists have to carry out at least 50 operations under the supervision of an orthopaedic surgeon before they can take the qualifying exam. So now we are more generally accepted," he says."

This is from a report on how marvelously qualified chiropodists (a kind of foot surgeons) can help people with foot disorders without having to keep them waiting a year or more, and the report takes up the case of chiropodist Thomson as an example of an outstanding practitioner. The paragraph above talks of the situation where even local doctors find Thomson's practice very helpful. The sentence beginning with 'And' adds the extra supporting evidence that he contributes to both patients and doctors by his energetic, definite acceptance of the people who wish to have foot operations. The sentence emphasizes how much support he can give.

'And' of this kind is used, as we have seen, to supply some information, to the extent what we are talking about is valid .

## 6. Conclusion

We have seen three cases where sentence initial 'And' is used very effectively as a pragmatic device for improving eloquency in written English. The first was the case where a sentence having 'And' gives advance notice to the reader about what significant information is forthcoming. A sentence like this serves as a kind of a very short preview. In the second case, the conjunction warns the reader not to underestimate what has just been said. The sentence beginning with this type of 'And' provides some supporting fact or evidence which can be crucial in persuading the reader to believe what has been said. The third case was when the sentence with 'And' gives an example as additional information. Not all examples are eligible in the third case, however: they should be unexpected and surprising rather than typical and familiar, so that what has been said will sound impressive and appealing.

What we find common in these three uses is that they are all directed towards catching the readers' attention in some way. Needless to say though it may be, these types of effects are possible because of the contrast between the very salient presence of sentence-initial 'And' and its unmarked, almost normal zero form, as already mentioned at the beginning. The contrast is such that it is as if 'And' was saved all the way through until it becomes absolutely necessary to use it and no other conjunctions will work as well. The use of 'And' is like involving a state of emergency.

Considering this situation, it may well be that unlike we do now special status should be given to sentence-initial 'And'. The reality is quite the reverse, though.

Most of us, especially foreign learners of English, tend to neglect the presence of sentence-initial 'And' in interpreting and appreciating text, and take it for granted that it is simply a linking word which accidentally shows up for no reason. It is regrettable that no grammar book mentions this and this could be a very useful thing to know. In linguistic analysis, too, even discourse-oriented studies have not properly and fully taken up the cases as we have seen. The type of sentence-initial 'And' investigated so far in linguistic literature is mostly the conversational one; initiating the speaker's turn-taking utterances, as in Blakemore (1987) and Schiffrin (1987).

In this alienated situation, van Dijk (1981) refers to the kind of 'And' we are interested to know about. His idea about this type of the conjunction is clear in the following paragraph, and fairly similar to our view. He writes, "Still less clear are the systematic conditions for the use of sentence initial 'And', usually followed by a pause (expressed by a comma). One of the more or less 'rhetorical' uses is when the speaker wants to create a certain suspense in the hearer, thus announcing an assertion which is somehow unexpected. Another condition is based on addition, which has a stronger variant in the connective moreover. . . . . it focuses attention on the second fact, either by addition or by asserting an unexpected proposition." What he calls 'rhetorical' uses seems to be correlated with the first preview-like use we listed, and what can be paraphrased as 'moreover' seems to correspond to the second use we introduced, though the two definitions do not quite overlap in either pair.

Finally, it should be noted that this pragmatic use of 'And', as a connector at a level higher than sentences, is somehow analogous to the allegedly semantic function of 'and' which coordinates sentences, in the sense that in either of them the relation of the conjuncts is asymmetrical: either A or B, in the form of 'A and B', should receive semantic focus, i.e. the coordinated mother categories have internal semantic hierarchical structures. For example, the first case of sentence-initial 'And' is B-focus type, and the second and the third A-focus type, respectively. Likewise, the semantic conditional reading of 'and', whether it is sentence-initial or intra-sentential, would be B-focus type, and the adversative reading would be A-focus type.

Although the analysis in this paper is rather crude and informal, explicit explanation of sentence-initial 'And' should be provided in further studies. It is obviously worth bearing in mind that supra-sentential 'And' inherits certain basic functions of sentential 'and'. Similarly, the salience of sentence-initial 'And' seems to reflect the basic linguistic fact about 'and' that it is syntactically and semantically retrospective. It seems, therefore, that the analysis of 'And' is going to be a fuzzy area between semantics and pragmatics, and we probably



should not commit ourselves to a restricted position as a meaning-minimalist or meaning-maximalist but be fairly flexible.

### References

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(兵庫教育大学)