

Overestimating the formal and functional specifics of the expressions UND (*and*) and ABER (*but*)

Reconstructing the meaning of expressions which are traditionally considered to be members of the so-called minor word classes (without ‘referential’ meaning) generally has to contend with the difficulty of being able to clearly distinguish which aspects of meaning can really be ascribed to the expression itself and which aspects are due to the co-text and context (cf. Schiffrin 1986).

The present paper explores this question in relation to UND (*and*) and ABER (*but*), which are generally regarded as coordinating conjunctions (for a cross-linguistic perspective see Haspelmath 2007), within the framework of an action-theoretical notion of language. This is juxtaposed with a linguistic perspective which is quite different in nature, namely the relevant analyses in the *Handbuch der deutschen Konnektoren Band 1 & 2* (volumes 1 & 2 of the *Handbook of German sentence connectors*) (Pasch et al. 2003; Breindl et al. 2014). The perspective which serves as the theoretical background for this paper is that of functional pragmatics (cf. Redder 2008), which systematically regards linguistic units as the means with which to pursue communicative purposes.

The aim is to critically examine existing action-theoretical reconstructions of UND and ABER in order to determine whether they adequately capture the formal and functional specifics of both expressions. To address the above-mentioned difficulty of methodically reconstructing the meaning, the article systematically explores which minimal formal conditions must be given when using either expression so that they can fulfil their characteristic communicative functionality. Despite the obvious differences between the elements connected in the examples and evidence given below, it is possible to determine a consistent basic meaning for each expression: both expressions contribute in their own characteristic way to the interactional process of mutual understanding.

- (1) AM: e[s war echt t]oll **und** dann ham wir °h (.) immer von dort aus (0.35) die insel erkundet oder warn am strand oder (0.44) ähm (0.66) sind geklettert wasserfälle angeguckt (.) °hh **und** dann sind wir eine insel weitergefahren¹
- (2) *Ich – **und** Probleme? Daß ich nicht lache.* (Berliner Zeitung, 25.2.1995, DWDS-Korpus)²
- (3) [A zu B nach einer Prüfung:] **Und?**³
- (4) LP: ja als wir warn ähm (.) drei tag in athen (0.52) **und** dann vier tage auf (.) santorini **und** vier tage auf naxos (0.39) **und** den rest dann war ich im dorf (.) bei meinem (.) opa (1.02) °h **und** in athen war_s schön is **aber** halt_ne laute stadt (.) **und** (0.75) ja also (0.25) äh h° (.) ja halt nich so schöne st[adt]⁴

¹ Lines 0053 to 0063 from the transcript with the ID FOLK_E_00048_SE_01_T_01 in the *Datenbank für gesprochenes Deutsch (Database of spoken German)*: <https://dgd.ids-mannheim.de>; simplified version as one overlapping response from the hearer (“[hm_hm]”) was deleted.

² This example was taken from Selmani (2011, p. 238 f.).

³ This example was taken from Selmani (2012, p. 152 f.).

⁴ Lines 0564 to 0574 from the DGD transcript with the ID FOLK_E_00048_SE_01_T_01 (see FN 1); simplified version as one overlapping response from the hearer (“[hm_hm]”) was deleted.

- (5) TH: Ja, em mir würde es am besten passen in der eh ersten Dezemberhälfte bis zum sechzehnten einschließlich.

KA: Ich habe in der Mitte dieser Dezemberhälfte einen Kongreß in München, könnte **aber** vom ersten bis sechsten **und** vom vierzehnten bis sechzehnten.⁵

- (6) Scene: getting ready in the morning in a household with a school-age child who has been repeatedly asked to pack his/her schoolbag. Five minutes before father and child have to leave the house, the father goes into the child's bedroom, sees the school books still lying all over the floor, and says:

Aber los jetzt!

By analysing these and other examples/pieces of evidence, when reconstructing a consistent basic meaning, it is worth noting that UND and ABER are extremely underspecified with regard to the formal structure of their conjuncts and are essentially determined by their specific contribution to expectation management.

For the action-theoretical reconstruction of the functionality of a series of linguistic devices, the expectations of speaker(s) and hearer(s) have to be considered as mental structures which develop simultaneously in the linear communication process and such devices have to be processed continuously. From the perspective of functional pragmatics these can be considered means with which to realize an operative procedure. UND and ABER serve to realize such an operative procedure, whereby UND prompts a *continuation of expectations* in the hearer and ABER, in contrast, a *change in expectations*.

The syntactic and semantic phenomena which typically accompany this management of expectations can, therefore, not be understood as being part of the communicative purposes of these expressions but rather as the effects of their being used. Consequently, this article advocates that the two expressions are not to be regarded as conjunctions but, rather, primarily as connectors.

Paradoxically, with respect to the formal and functional specifics of UND and ABER, one would have to conclude that the hearer's identification of the material they connect is not accomplished by the connectors themselves but is primarily extrapolated by the hearer from the co-text/context in which the connector is to be found. This is, of course, in line with the fact that neither UND nor ABER makes use of case government or agreement in relation to other linguistic devices, which would simplify the hearer's identification of what is being connected.

Further analyses must examine whether the perspective suggested here could be successfully applied to other expressions (such as ODER (*or*)) which are typically regarded as coordinating conjunctions. Such studies would contribute to a more precise description of the inventory of German connectors both in terms of their formal and functional characteristics and their inner structure.

References

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⁵ This example was taken from Rehbein (2012, p. 243).

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