

■ Conjunctions

● What are Conjunctions?

Conjunctions are the form that shows the semantic relationship of the content of what has been presented and what follows.

(1) *Honpin wa tenkabutsu o shiyō shite orimasen. Desukara, anshin shite o-meshigari-kudasai.*
'There are no additives in this product. Therefore, you can eat it with peace of mind.'

(2) *Kodomo ga geemu o suru jikan wa zenkai chōsa yori fueta. Shōgakusei danshi dewa 39.7% ga ichinichi 2 jikan ijō geemu o shite iru. Ippō, hogosha wa kodomo to geemu no sesshoku jikan o jūbun ninshiki shite inai. Kodomo ga geemu o 2 jikan ijō shite iru to kotaeta shōgakusei danshi no hogosha wa 14.2% ni suginai.*

'The amount of time children spend on games has increased since the last survey. Thirty nine point seven percent of male elementary school children spend more than 2 hours per day on games. On the other hand, their parents do not have a good grasp of their children's contact hours with games. Only 14.2% of the parents of male elementary school children answered that their children spent more than 2 hours on games.'

The conjunction, *desukara*, in (1) shows that the content of what comes after it can be surmised from the immediately preceding content, 'no additives are added'. The conjunction, *ippō*, in (2) shows that there is a contrast between the content in the latter part, 'parents not having a good grasp of their children's contact hours with games' and what directly precedes the conjunctive, 'the amount of time children spend on games increasing.'

Conjunctions are used to express the relationship between one sentence and another, as in (1), and also express the semantic relationship surmised from more than one sentence, as in (2). Some conjunctions express the relationship between words (e.g., *kuro matawa kon* 'black or navy'), between phrases (e.g., *gakkō de soshite shokuba de* 'at school and at workplaces'), between clauses (e.g., *kaze o hiite aruiwa netsu o dashite* 'catch a cold or run a fever'). There are instances, as shown in (3), where the conjunction is used to relate an utterance to a situation that is not verbalized.

(3) *Kyōshitsu de gakusei ga sorotteiru no o kakunin shite*
"Dewa, jugyō o hajimemashō."

'Having made sure that the students were all there,
Well then, let's begin the class.'

Conjunctions are words that signal the start of a new semantic unit, and they show the relationship between the new semantic unit and the content that has been understood by the speaker and listener up to that point.

● Problems for Learners

Among the many usages of conjunctions, it is relatively easy to understand usages shown in the examples in (1) and (2), where the semantic relationship between the preceding and succeeding parts is clear. However, when the semantic relationship, either resultative or adversative, before and after *shikashi* and *dakara*, is not readily obvious, as in (4) and (5) below, it is not only hard to understand but also hard to learn to use such conjunctions.

(4) *Shikashi, kyō wa atsuidesu ne.*

'Anyway, it's hot, isn't it?'

(5) A: *Atarashii buchō tte ittai dare?* 'Who in the world is the new director?'

B: *Minna ga shitte iru hito.* 'It's someone whom everybody knows.'

A: *Dakara, dare?* 'So, who is it?'

Example (4) introduces a change of subject. Example (5) expresses irritation the speaker feels toward the interlocutor's non-understanding of the speaker's utterance. Attention must be paid to such functions of conjunctions that express subtle nuances in conversation.

The function of conjunctions in discourse is also important.

(6) *Sorede, jitsu wa, chotto onegai ga aru n desu ga.*

‘Well, to tell you the truth, I have a small favor to ask.’

(7) *Nihongo wa hatsuon ga yasashii. Mata, bunpō mo tanjyun dearu. Hanasu dake nara muzukashikunai.*

‘The pronunciation of Japanese is easy. Also, the grammar is simple. Just speaking it is not difficult.’

Sorede in (6) is used to preface the presentation of the main business. *Mata* in (7) is used to juxtapose two points of discussion. This shows that conjunctions can be used effectively in structuring discourse.

To use conjunctions of similar meanings properly, one must pay attention to the difference in speech style first. In formal greeting, *desukara* tends to be more appropriate than *dakara*; in relaxed conversation it does not sound right if one uses *daga* instead of *demo*.

We must also pay attention that, depending on the conjunction, there is a limitation to the type of expressions that can come in the sentence-final position in the succeeding part of the sentence.

(8) *Satō san wa mada shigoto ga nokotteiru sōda.*

{*Dakara*/**Sorede*} *sakini kaerō.*

‘I hear Ms Sato still has work to do. So, let’s go home before she does.’

→ 接続詞・接続表現 Conjunctions, Conjunctive Expressions (2-K), 接続表現とスタイル
Conjunctive Expressions and Style (2-M)

● References

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