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Abstract

Contrastive relations between successive or more distant segments of discourse rank among the most informative semantic relations in both spoken and written English (cf. Kortmann 1991) since they create important cohesive links and thus contribute to the establishing of discourse coherence. The author investigates authentic texts from four different types of speech situations representing academic spoken discourse (MICASE) while searching for discourse markers (DMs) expressing contrastive relations with the aim to describe the ways in which selected markers are used by native speakers of American English to form coherent discourse.[1]

Key words

Academic spoken discourse; coherence; coherent interpretation; cohesion; cohesive device; concession; contrast; contrastive relations; discourse markers

1. Introduction

Cohesion and coherence conceived as two of seven standards of textuality (cf. de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981) are two closely related linguistic notions. Halliday and Hasan (1989: 94) express their relationship by stating that "variation in coherence is the function of variation in the cohesive harmony of a text". In conformity with linguists who draw a stricter line between these two notions (e.g. Stubbs 1983, Widdowson 1979, Mey 2001) it is assumed that cohesion establishes overt relations between syntactic units, while coherence concerns relations obtaining between the meanings expressed by these syntactic units, in other words "cohesion establishes local relations between syntactic items (reference, concord

and the like), whereas coherence has to do with the global meaning involved in what we want to express through our speech activity" (Mey 2001: 154).

Both cohesion and coherence are regarded as important constitutive qualities of text, although it can be claimed that a text can be understood as coherent without any cohesive means and, conversely, can comprise cohesive means without being perceived as coherent (Povolná 2007). I fully agree with Seidlhofer and Widdowson (1997: 207), who state that "one might derive a coherent discourse from a text with no cohesion in it at all. Equally, of course, textual cohesion provides no guarantee of discourse coherence".

According to the *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary*, "coherence is the quality that something has when it makes sense or is pleasing because all the parts or steps fit together well and logically" and something is understood to be coherent if "its parts fit together well so that it is clear and easy to understand" (1987: 264). It necessarily follows that coherence and the quality of being coherent are important in particular when expressing relations within discourse, including spoken discourse used in academic settings, which is at the core of the present paper. Since "the process of creating coherent text involves an indication of relationships between the things one is 'on about'" (Halliday and Hasan 1989: 94), it becomes clear that cohesive means including selected DMs expressing contrastive relations can enhance the perception of a text, either spoken or written, as being coherent.

2. Contrastive discourse markers

Discourse markers[2], viewed here in conformity with Fraser (1990) as a class of commentary pragmatic markers signalling sequential relationships within discourse, necessarily contribute to discourse cohesion. Since they signal how the speaker intends the current basic message that follows to relate to the previous discourse, these language means can foster the establishment of discourse coherence, which is understood here as a context-dependent, hearer-oriented and comprehension-based, interpretative notion (cf. Bublitz 1997).

Successive or more distant discourse segments[3] which are marked with a DM are usually processed faster (cf. Haberlandt 1982). If a DM is absent, the current hearer is left without any overt guiding signal concerning the intended relationship between discourse segments, i.e. without any lexical clue for an interpretation of the speaker's communicative intentions in a given situation; this can even cause a breakdown in communication. However, since the current speaker is aware of the hearer and his/her efforts to arrive at an intended coherent interpretation, he/she uses guiding signals, for example, "cohesive devices (e.g. conjuncts, cross-reference expressions), which organize the discourse and clarify the progress of the [speaker's] argumentation" (Dontcheva-Navratilova 2009: 34).

According to Fraser (1990, 1998, 1999), DMs can be defined as lexical expressions the core meaning of which is procedural rather than conceptual and which

function to "signal a relationship between the interpretation of the segment they introduce, S2, and the prior segment, S1" (Fraser 1999: 931); DMs do not 'display' the relationship between discourse segments, but rather impose "on S2 a certain range of interpretations, given the interpretation(s) of S1 and the meaning of the DM" (Fraser 1999: 942). Thus, the analysis of DMs and in particular the way they express coherence relations (cf. rhetorical relations in Taboaba 2006) can be understood as "part of the more general analysis of discourse coherence – how speakers and hearers jointly integrate forms, meaning, and actions to make overall sense out of what is said" (Schiffrin 1987: 49).

Contrastive relations can be counted among "the most complex of all semantic relations that may hold between parts of a discourse" (Kortmann 1991: 161); for this reason they tend to be marked overtly and typically expressed through subordination (cf. Taboada 2006: 576), particularly in academic discourse, in which presenting and supporting arguments is of great importance (cf. Biber et al. 1999: 880). However, the more specific type of contrast that a given DM signals is negotiated by the context, both linguistic and non-linguistic, since "a text is not coherent in itself but is understood as coherent in an actual context" (Bublitz 1988: 32). The context plays a crucial role in the interpretation of meaning in spoken language in particular, which, as stated in Urbanová (2008: 43), is strongly "contextually bound" and where an adequate knowledge of a given communicative situation and relationships between discourse participants enhances the addressee's understanding.

In forming a text as in forming an utterance, speakers choose between a set of alternatives that establish relations between individual parts of the discourse. Since DMs, including those expressing contrastive relations, perform text-organizing functions above all, they are primarily viewed here as cohesive devices and their relatively high frequency of occurrence in academic discourse such as that under investigation reflects the need of the current speaker to present and support his/her arguments in a straightforward way. These cohesive devices enable the current hearer(s) to arrive at a coherent interpretation and understanding of the message which comes as close as possible to the current speaker's communicative intentions.

The present study is concerned with the relations obtaining at clausal and higher levels of discourse, since it is assumed in harmony with Fraser (1999: 939-940) that at these levels the marker relates two separate messages, functioning as a DM, as in (1) and, below the clausal level, purely as a conjunction within a single message, as in (2).

(1)   that's the only thing that interests me. the the thing that brought me up short a little bit and, I'm not trying to catch you on anything <u>but</u> i wonder if you'd just comment on it was th- th- the date of the quote was sixty-nine, which is quite a bit before, that particular concert
(MICASE, DEF420SF022.3)[4]

(2)   i was fascinated by Ravi Shankar, and bought my first sitar. uh, stay with me
      here, for a second this is uh going to have to do something with, sitar <u>but</u>
      also with, Keith Jarrett indirectly. in order to learn sitar i contacted a German
      who had been recon- recommended to me,
      (MICASE, DEF420SF022.1)

As regards formal realization of the markers analysed, they are, from a morpho-
logical point of view, drawn primarily from conjuctions (e.g. *but, although*), ad-
verbs (e.g. *however, anyway*) and prepositional phrases (e.g. *on the other hand*).
Nevertheless, they "do not play the role in a sentence that their classes would
suggest, but instead, they are separate from the propositional content" (Fraser
1999: 302) and, as noted above, their meaning is procedural rather than concep-
tual. Hence it follows that if a marker is omitted, the propositional content of the
respective discourse segments does not change, as would be the case in example
(3) below without the DM *but*; however, without any marker it could be more
difficult for the hearer(s) to arrive at an interpretation coherent with the current
speaker's communicative intentions.

(3)   yeah, here I'll put up this one this is actually, i thought this was harder to
      read so i changed it to being a, a frequency table <u>but</u>, basically you can see
      here there's, uh, (wait cuz this is the wrong one)
      (MICASE, STP355MG011.5)

From a syntactic point of view, contrastive DMs can be subdivided into DMs
occurring in hypotactic relations and those expressing paratactic relations (cf.
Malá 2006). (For a list of contrastive DMs analysed in the study, see Table 1 be-
low). The reason for this subdivision is above all the expected marked difference
between the two syntactic groups in frequency of occurrence, since hypotactic
relations are usually expressed overtly by certain markers (e.g. *although, even
though*), while paratactic relations, apart from being indicated by certain markers
(e.g. *anyway, however*), can often remain overtly unexpressed; this does not mean
that in the respective discourse segments there will not be semantic clues, such
as nouns, verbs, adjectives (e.g. *contrast, contrasting*; for the latter, see example
(4) below), prepositional phrases (e.g. *in spite of, contrary to*); or some ways of
expressing polarity (e.g. adjectives of opposite meaning *old* vs. *young*). These
possibilities, however, have been excluded from my analysis.

(4)   there're things you can't, control, there're things that lie beyond your ability
      to, to change, uh and, uh then that he he he he's a different man at the end, i
      think he is noble, you know and certainly James is wanting to say, if you're
      <u>contrasting</u> these two societies these two characters, surely surely we would
      agree i think the American emerges as the, the better the nobler, you know the
      the the victory goes in that sen- in the moral sense clearly to the American.
      (MICASE, LES300SUU103.11)

Since the paper deals with academic discourse, in which clear argumentation plays a crucial role, a greater number of explicitly expressed markers can be expected, in particular those occurring in hypotactic relations; on the other hand, since the analysis concerns spoken discourse, in which paratactic rather than hypotactic relations tend to be realized, DMs expressing paratactic relations are supposed to be more common. (For 'loose' coordination discussed as a feature typical of spoken English, see Urbanová 2008: 43.)

Concerning the relationship between contrast and concession, it should be stressed that in this study concession is subsumed under contrastive relations because it is viewed as a special case of contrast, namely that between the expected/usual causal relationship and the actual situation (cf. Dušková et al. 1988, Fraser 1999). Accordingly, contrastive DMs subsume markers expressing contrast as well as concession. Moreover, it is not always possible to distinguish exactly between contrast and concession, "since in some cases, elements of contrast and concession are combined in uses of linking adverbials" (Biber et al. 1999: 878). (For a list of different labels used for linking devices such as contrastive DMs, see Hůlková 2005.)

3. Material

My results are based on the analysis of several texts chosen from the *Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English* (MICASE). As the title of the corpus itself suggests, this corpus represents spoken discourse used in academic settings. The texts are taken from four different types of speech situations, namely students' presentations, defences, small lectures and large lectures, all in the area of the humanities and arts. Each speech situation is represented by 15,500 to 17,300 words, amounting altogether to approximately 65,000 words. (For details concerning the number of words analysed in individual speech situations, see Tables 1 and 2 below.)

Students' presentations are classes in which one or more students speak in front of the class; defences are Ph.D. thesis defences in front of a board of academics; small lectures are lectures given to forty or fewer students; and large lectures are lectures for more than forty students. All the interlocutors in the data are native speakers of American English, and for the most part they are graduate or undergraduate students. However, since the main objective of my inquiry is not a comparison of the four different types of speech situations, but above all ways in which contrastive relations can be expressed by what is called here contrastive DMs, differences between the texts, such as those in the tenor of discourse and the length of the texts, are not considered relevant. Differences between individual speech situations are supposed to be due above all to particular speakers' preferences in their speaking habits rather than to differences in the natures of given speech situations.

4. Results and their exemplification

4.1. Degree of interactivity in different speech situations

As regards the degree of interactivity in different types of speech situations, it is suggested that Ph.D. defences (one student in front of a board of academics) are slightly more interactive than students' presentations (a few students giving their presentations one after another), which in turn are more interactive than small lectures (one main lecturer and fewer than 40 students), which in turn are expected to be slightly more interactive than large lectures, in which one main lecturer and more than forty students participate.

Concerning the total number of contrastive DMs analysed, it is worth noting that the more interactive the speech situation, the higher the number of DMs used to express contrastive relations. Accordingly, it is assumed that speakers of American English use selected DMs slightly more frequently in more interactive speech situations (such as Ph.D. defences and students' presentations) than in speech situations (such as small and large lectures) that are considered in my study to be less interactive. These findings become even more evident when the total number of words under examination in each type of speech situation is taken into consideration: the length of the most interactive type is 15,516 words (Ph.D. defence) and that of the least interactive (large lecture) amounts to as many as 17,348 words. In terms of the frequency of occurrence of contrastive DMs found in the texts the positions are reversed: the shortest text (Ph.D. defence), which is viewed as most interactive in this paper, has the highest number of contrastive DMs (198 occurrences), whereas the longest text (large lecture), regarded as least interactive of all, has the lowest number of selected DMs (109 occurrences). The reason for these findings might be efforts on the part of the current speaker(s) in more interactive speech situations to help their hearer(s) arrive faster at an adequate interpretation of the intended relations between discourse segments, which implies a more frequent use of certain guiding signals such as selected DMs.

4.2. Types of contrastive DMs

As can be seen in Table 1, in accordance with my expectation contrastive relations expressed by hypotactic DMs (50 cases) are considerably less frequent in the data than those occurring in paratactic relations (657 cases), although the former are usually marked overtly in discourse.

The most interesting and striking result recorded in Table 1 is the uneven distribution of the markers analysed, both in terms of types and tokens. Of the 29 contrastive DMs listed in Table 1 only 22 actually appear in the data. Some markers are very frequent, such as *but* (475 occurrences) and *actually* (89 occurrences), or relatively frequent, such as *still* (36 occurrences) and *although* (26 occurrences). Of these, the marker *but* is twice as common as all the other markers together. (Similar results have been found in both spoken and written English by Altenberg

1986.) On the contrary, some other markers selected for the analysis are either very rare, such as *at the same time*, *by contrast*, *in contrast, instead, nevertheless*, and *nonetheless*, each having only one or two occurrences, or totally absent from my data, such as *alternatively, conversely* and *while*, to name just a few. Some markers which are not likely to appear in any corpus of contemporary English (e.g. *albeit, notwithstanding* and *oppositely*; cf. Altenberg 1986) are not even included in Table 1, although they have also been searched for during my analysis.

Table 1. DMs used for hypotactic and paratactic contrastive relations in four different types of speech situations (MICASE)

No. of words	15,516	15,956	16,104	17,348	64,924
Hypotactic DMs	**Defence**	**Students' presentation**	**Small lecture**	**Large lecture**	**All speech situations**
although	3	4	5	14	26
despite the fact	0	0	0	0	0
even if	0	0	4	0	4
even though	5	2	0	3	10
except	1	0	2	0	3
in spite of the fact	0	0	0	0	0
though	0	2	1	1	4
While	0	0	0	0	0
whereas	0	3	0	0	3
All hypot. DMs	**9**	**11**	**12**	**18**	**50**
Paratactic DMs	**Defence**	**Students' presentation**	**Small lecture**	**Large lecture**	**All speech situations**
actually	22	52	4	11	89
after all	0	1	4	0	5
all the same	0	0	0	0	0
alternatively	0	0	0	0	0
anyhow	0	0	0	0	0
anyway	3	1	3	1	8
at the same time	0	0	1	0	1
but	152	118	126	79	475
by contrast	0	0	1	0	1
conversely	0	0	0	0	0
however	3	1	2	2	8
in any case	3	0	1	0	4
in contrast	0	0	0	1	1
instead	1	0	1	0	2
nevertheless	0	0	2	0	2
nonetheless	2	0	0	0	2
on the other hand	1	0	3	2	6
still	6	11	11	8	36
though	2	4	3	0	9
yet	3	1	1	3	8
All parat. DMs	**198**	**189**	**162**	**108**	**657**
All DMs	**207**	**200**	**174**	**126**	**707**

Unlike Table 1, Table 2 below includes only those contrastive DMs that have five or more occurrences in the data; this only concerns two hypotactic DMs, namely *although* (26 occurrences) and *even though* (10 occurrences), out of ten selected for the analysis, and ten paratactic DMs out of 21 searched for in my corpus.

Table 2. More common DMs used for hypotactic and paratactic contrastive relations in four different types of speech situations (MICASE)

No. of words in texts	**15,516**	**15,956**	**16,104**	**17,348**	**64,926**
Hypotactic DMs	**Defence**	**Students' presentation**	**Small lecture**	**Large lecture**	**All speech situations**
although	3	4	5	14	26
even though	5	2	0	3	10
All freq. hyp. DMs	**8**	**6**	**5**	**17**	**36**
Paratactic DMs	**Defence**	**Students' presentation**	**Small lecture**	**Large lecture**	**All speech situations**
actually	22	52	4	11	89
after all	0	1	4	0	5
anyway	3	1	3	1	8
but	152	118	126	79	475
however	3	1	2	2	8
on the other hand	1	0	3	2	6
still	6	11	11	8	36
though	2	4	3	0	9
yet	3	1	1	3	8
All freq. par. DMs	**192**	**189**	**157**	**106**	**644**
All frequent DMs	**200**	**195**	**162**	**123**	**680**

(5)   men and women were not competing, in the work force and so in the Depression <u>although</u> women did lose their jobs, they didn't lose their jobs, in the same ways that m- men did because they were tie- service jobs that were needed in spite of the breakdown of the economy.
      (MICASE, LEL105SU113.11)

(6)   we used to, ask questions like well what did, your father do? what did your mother do? did your mother work? and you know the answer if you were middle class was no. she didn't work. <u>even though</u> my mother did not work for wages outside of the home i was lucky, she she worked, all the time i mean she was, never i never saw her sitting down i never saw her she was facilitating everybody in the world i mean that was, what she did she did a pretty good job of it
      (MICASE, LEL105SU113.5)

Examples (5) and (6) comprise *although* and *even though* respectively, showing that subordinate clauses introduced with a hypotactic contrastive DM precede rather than follow their superordinate clauses; in other words, clauses providing background information come before clauses in which some contradiction is expressed. This tendency in positioning subordinate clauses in relation to their superordinate clauses is in conformity with the natural ordering of discourse segments according to which known information, which has a 'grounding' function in discourse (cf. Altenberg 1986), usually comes before new information or some new aspect within given information; this way of sequencing discourse segments concerns in particular those introduced with the hypotactic DM *although*, since "*although*-clauses tend to be most frequent in initial position" (Altenberg 1986: 22). In addition, it explains "the strong tendency in the spoken material to prefer coordination to subordination" (Altenberg 1986: 21, cf. Leech and Svartvik 1994: 14), which enables the placing of known, background information first, i.e. in the prior discourse segment, and that of new, unexpected information in the subsequent segment which comprises a DM (see *however* in example (7) below). This tendency is evidenced by my results, in which DMs expressing paratactic relations (657 occurrences) and thus occurring in the subsequent segment dominate over DMs used for hypotactic relations (50 occurrences). (For results, see Table 1, and for more exemplifications, see examples (1) and (3) above.)

(7)   uh after all, i- i- i think James later in his career would have been perfectly able and willing to have made a novel out of, nothing more than their forcing Claire to break off the engagement, see, uh, you can get great literature out of, families, getting in the way of love you know Romeo and Juliet all that sort of thing, uh and i think James would have done that. here <u>however</u> he complicates it by wanting to make this in a sense really a kind of melodrama, of good and evil, uh and the Bellegardes then in some way have to be, uh b- i- or transmogrified? okay. that's a big word, for our recording today. (MICASE, LES300SU103.3)

As regards subordination, it should be noted here that the tendency to facilitate the processing of information under conditions of real-time planning often results in 'right-tending' contrastive subordination in spoken discourse, which is shown in example (8) in which the hypotactic DM *whereas* is used in the subsequent discourse segment. In spoken language, the current speaker does not often have sufficient time to plan in advance what to produce next as in the case of written language; therefore it is easier for him/her "to qualify a superordinate idea retrospectively (by postposition) than to anticipate it by means of grounding (pre-position)" (Altenberg 1986: 21). This explains why clauses comprising a contrastive hypotactic DM sometimes come only after those in which new and/or unexpected information is given.

(8)   you can see again there's, a higher distribution for the Spanish speakers than the Hindi speakers for the aggregate score, like all these together, um, (let's)

see and the other interesting things, th- only one person i think said yes they would live in a country where Hindi was spoken basically India right, um, <u>whereas</u>, um several people said yes they would, (live, in) live in a Spanish speaking country, definitely and um, let's see, the other interesting thing is that hardly anybody said that, they would not raise their children bilingually,
(MICASE, STP355MG011.2)

As already stated, among paratactic DMs the marker *but* unambiguously prevails (475 occurrences), although, for instance, in written academic prose, "*however* is uniformly preferred" according to the results of Biber et al. (1999: 889). In my data *however* (see example (7) above) has been found only in eight cases. Similarly to *however*, the paratactic contrastive DMs *anyway* and *though* are not frequently represented (only 8 and 9 occurrences respectively), even though they are usually labelled in grammars and dictionaries as 'informal' linking devices used especially in spoken English (cf. Sinclair et al. 1987, Leech 1989). On the other hand, the paratactic DMs *actually* (89 occurrences) and *still* (36 occurrences) have been found with notable frequency (see examples (9) and (10), respectively), sometimes in cases in which several tokens of the same marker occur in close, even adjacent, clauses, or in combination with another marker, in particular *but*, as in (10); nevertheless, it is assumed that speakers choose a particular marker from a set of alternatives according above all to preferences in their speaking habits; this tendency is exemplified in example (9), in which the current speaker keeps using the marker *actually*, although other paratactic markers are available, while in example (10) another speaker gives preference to the marker *still* when expressing contrast.

(9)   <u>but</u> in terms of the academic stuff, it would seem to me that the class <u>actually</u> encour- encourages the students to look at Spanish in a new domain. [S1: right] encourages very academically based [S1: right] so it would be interesting to <u>actually</u>, perhaps, in another time another [S1: mhm] place, [S3: a new world] <SS: LAUGH> to <u>actually</u> see you know these um language attitudes before the class begins. [S1: right, that would, that would be helpful yeah Jenny mentions] for classes like that and then, see what happens (with it) because um i do know some people who are just totally amazed that, that they can <u>actually</u> feel like they (can) (xx) (their own) Spanish. [S1: mhm] and that they feel validated [S1: okay] in that domain.
(MICASE, STP355MG011.5)

(10) <u>but</u> then you have the situation where people become, dominant and people <u>actually</u>, just, using this Indian English. so um there's been some research there's research on that <u>but</u> <u>still</u> it's ongoing [S3: mhm] because it's <u>still</u> you still have, so many different languages you <u>still</u>, the typology's <u>still</u> not there <u>but</u> uh it's it's a a field that is very very um popular right now.
(MICASE, STP355MG011.20)

5. Conclusion

Drawing on results as presented and discussed within the scope of the present study, it can now be concluded that contrastive relations between discourse segments are frequently expressed overtly in academic spoken discourse, in particular by some paratactic DMs; their use enables the natural ordering of discourse segments, i.e. the placement of discourse segments with a 'grounding function' first and thus before segments which provide new and/or unexpected information. Hypotactic DMs are not so common; however, if hypotactic contrastive relations occur, they are, as a rule, marked by a DM. The position of the discourse segment comprising a guiding signal depends on which marker is used, since there are some differences between individual hypotactic markers. However, the type of contrast a particular DM signals is always dependent not only on the meaning of a given marker, but above all on the entire context. Finally, it must be stated that both paratactic and hypotactic DMs expressing contrastive relations clearly enhance faster and coherent interpretation and understanding of the message, thus contributing to the expression of coherence relations and establishing discourse coherence.

Notes

1   This article is part of the grant project 405/08/0866 *Coherence and Cohesion in English Discourse*, which is supported by the Czech Science Foundation.
2   For a broad discussion on the terms commonly used to refer to DMs, see Povolná 2008 and 2009.
3   In agreement with Fraser (1999: 938) the term 'discourse segment' is used here "as a cover term to refer to 'proposition', 'sentence', 'utterance' and 'message' unless more specificity is required".
4   In the transcription of texts from MICASE, . marks a short pause, and – a long pause.

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