

THE SEQUENCING OF CONTRASTIVE DISCOURSE MARKERS IN ENGLISH

BRUCE FRASER
University of Boston, USA

Abstract. This paper examines an understudied area of pragmatic research, namely, the sequencing of Discourse Markers (DMs). Looking only at the sequencing of Contrastive Discourse Markers (CDMs), thereby excluding both Elaborative and Inferential Discourse Markers, it is shown that only “but” may occur as the first with all of the other CDMs, e.g., “But, on the other hand...,” with “yet” occurring first with a small subset. The rest of the CDMs are relegated to second place in a sequence with the exception of “however.” The sequencing of CDMs adds support to the claim that “but” has more than a single use, the evidence showing both a direct contrast use and a contradiction and elimination use, depending on which CDM it is paired with.

Key words: discourse markers, contrastive discourse markers, sequence of discourse markers

INTRODUCTION

Discourse Markers (DMs) have received considerable attention in the pragmatics research literature in recent years, both studies dealing with their theoretical status as well as descriptive studies of individual DMs (Fraser, 2010a). What has not appeared in the literature, to date, is a treatment of which DMs co-occur in sequence, for example (see Oates, 2001)

- (1) We could go to Jamaica. **But, on the other hand**, we could stay home and save money.

In this short paper I will begin the discussion of the sequencing of Contrastive Discourse Markers (CDM), focusing on sequences such as those in (2), where the first discourse segment, S1, is followed by two CDMs, which in turn are followed by a second discourse segment, S2.¹

- (2) S1. CDM1 CDM2, S2
- a) Don't study Psychology, **but instead** study computer science.
 - b) I think we should leave. **Yet, on the other hand**, there may be something in waiting.

¹ A comma separating the two CDMs may or may not be present.

Unless special mention is made, the CDM1 is always the Primary CDM, *but*, and the CDM2 is one of the secondary CDMs. Contrastive Discourse Markers include the following:

- (3) (a)though, (this/that point) notwithstanding, alternatively, although, contrariwise, contrary to expectation, contrary to this, conversely, despite (this/that), however, in comparison (with this/that), in contrast (to this/that), in spite of (this/that), instead (of this /that), nevertheless, nonetheless, on/ to the contrary, on the other hand, rather (than this/that), regardless (of this/ that), still, whereas, while, yet,

where the members of the class fall syntactically into conjunctions (e.g., *but*), subordinate con-junctions (e.g., *although, whereas*), adverbs (e.g., *however, nevertheless*) and prepositional phrases (e.g., *in contrast, despite*)

I am not considering here sequences of CDMs which are non-contiguous, in which the second CDM occurs in medial or final position, as in (4).

- (4) Don't study Psychology. **But** study computer science **instead**.

CDMs occur in discourse segment-final position less frequently than in segment-initial position, and even less frequently in medial position, sometime changing their focus, as in (5), where the subject of S1 and S2 are the same.

- (5) We know that the employees cannot make changes to contracts without agreement of management. **On the other hand**, we, (***on the other hand**), realize how difficult it is to invoke the law in these cases.

I am also not considering sequences which involve DMs from the Elaborative Discourse Marker (EDM) class, such as *and, furthermore, in addition*, and *similarly*, or from the Inferential Discourse Marker (IDM) class, such as *so, consequently, thus*, and *in conclusion*. For example,

- (6) a) It was raining and very wet. **Thus, as a result**, we stayed home [IDM-IDM]
 b) The picnic was too crowded. **And, in addition**, it rained. [EDM-EDM]

Nor am I considering sequences, which cut across classes, for example (7).

- (7) a) John got very angry. **And so**, he left the party. [EDM-IDM]
 b) We wanted them to stop. **However, furthermore**, we wanted them to leave. [CDM-EDM]
 c) The water didn't boil. **So, instead**, we had coke. [IDM-CDM]
 d) She walked to town in the rain, **but as a result**, she got a cold. [CDM-IDM]

In addition, I am not considering *pseudo sequences* of two CDMs. This occurs either when the basic form of S2 contains a CDM which is a subordinate conjunction, such as *although, whereas* or *while*, and the subordinate conjunction has been moved forward, as in (7),

- (8) a) He wouldn't talk to me. **However**, I liked him **although** he was so stubborn.
 b) He wouldn't talk to me. **However**, **although** he was so stubborn, I liked him.

or a CDM as a form which permits it to be more forward, as in (9) and (10).

- (9) a) The research treatments were almost the same. **However**, Group A received 20 trials. **In contrast**, Group B received 30 trials.
 b) The research treatments were almost the same. **However, in contrast to** Group B, which received 30 tries, Group A received 20 tries.
- (10) a) He was told to eat it. **But**, he didn't eat it. **Instead** he hid it under the table.
 b) He was told to eat it. **But instead of** eating it, he hid it under the table.

Finally, I am not considering sequences involving DMs and other Pragmatic Marker, as in

- (11) a) Yes, I did it. **But I promise** not to do it anymore. [CDM-Basic Marker]
 b) We knew the roof leaked. **Stupidly, however**, we did nothing. [Com'try Marker-CDM]
 c) Harry is coming. **So, ok**, what do we do now? [IDM-Discourse Management Marker]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

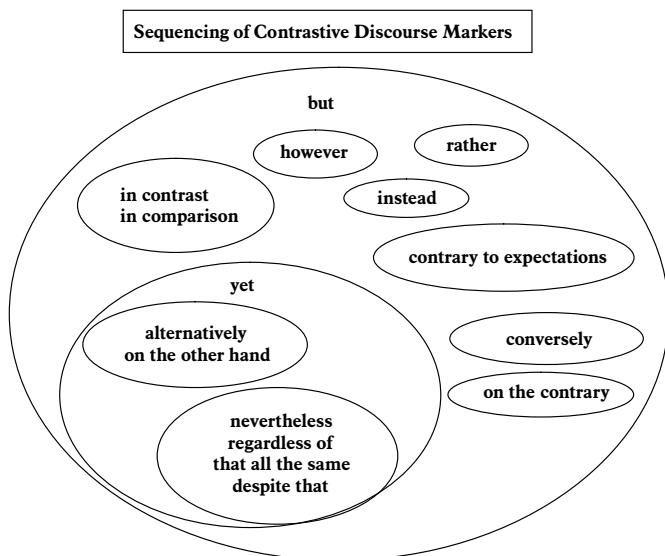
As a result of removing the above constructions from the focus of this paper, we are left with some 15 CDMs, which can occur originally in segment-initial position (e.g., *instead* but not *instead of*)

- (12) *alternatively, but, contrary to expectations, conversely, despite, however, in comparison, in contrast, nevertheless, on the contrary, on the other hand, rather, regardless of that, instead, yet,*²

The following Display depicts acceptable sequences. It should be interpreted as follows: *but* can penetrate any circle (in the case of *on the other hand* more than one circle), and may occur as a first member of a sequence with any of the other 14 CDMs, but only pair-wise, not as a sequence of three or more. Thus, *but* may occur in a sequence with *yet* or *pass that by* and occur in a sequence with *on the other hand* or *alternatively*, for example. Where there is more than one CDM in a circle, e.g. *in contrast* and *in comparison*, I have found their sequencing behavior to be essentially identical.³

² I omit relatively rare CDMs such as *notwithstanding*, *nonetheless*, and *contrariwise*. I also have not included the CDM *still* in this discussion.

³ I recognize that others may differ on the details of the chart (below), as tastes differ widely. I intend this chart to be a framework which may be further differentiated. It is certainly not the last word/



The main result of this study is that the CDM *but* occurs as an initial DM with each of the other CDMs. Simply put, the *but*, whether or not it continues the first discourse segment, S1, or begins the second, S2, signals that the two segments S2 and S1 are in contrast, while the second CDM makes specific the nature of the contrast. For example, over and beyond the interpretation of *but*, in (13),

(13) a) It's rather early, I know. **But, nevertheless**, we have to leave now.

b) All athletes are not scholars. **But, conversely**, all scholars are not athletes.

nevertheless signals both that the speaker of S2 considers the message of S1 to be true and also that the message of S2 contrasts and trumps the implication flowing from S1. In contrast, *conversely* in (13b) signals that S1 and S2 are in a symmetrical contrast.

It is worth noting that the research literature at the moment differs on whether the CDM *but* signals two basic uses: Direct Contrast, where *but* signals a simple contrast between the two segments, S2 and S1, as in (14),

(14) a) The simple fact is that three is a prime number **but** four is not.

b) A: John is brilliant. B: **But** he's not brilliant, he's a jerk.

c) Everyone left on time **but** Sue.

and Indirect Contrast: where *but* signals both contradiction/contrast between S2 and an implication of S1, with the subsequent elimination of the implication, as in (14).⁴

⁴ I am using the term "implication" to encompass the concepts of implication, implicature, entailment and presupposition.

- (15) a) We started late [=>We were going to arrive late.] **But** we arrived on time.
 b) A: Boston used to be a nice city. [=>It's no longer nice] B: **But** it's still nice.
 c) A: John murdered Smith. (Entailment=> Smith is dead) B: **But** Smith is not dead.

In (15) *but* signals both that there is an indirect contrast between S2 and an implication of S1 and that the implication should be considered eliminated. Fraser, 2010b) maintains that there are two uses signaled by *but*, Relevance Theory (Blakemore, 2002) maintains that there is but one use, the latter use. I will not pursue this issue here except to note that the second CDM in the sequence seems to determine quite clearly which of the two uses of *but* is being called upon.

Thus, there turns out to be two types of CDM sequences, one which reflects an S2 in direct contrast with some aspect of S1, as in (16).⁵

- (16) a) Henry is rather tall. **But, in contrast**, Jack is very short.
 b) There was no reliable evidence of his guilt, **but, on the contrary**, considerable proof of innocence.
 c) We could go to Jamaica this holiday. **But, on the other hand**, we could stay home and save money.
 d) He expected to win the election easily. **But instead**, he lost badly.
 e) Writing is easy. **However**, the pen is not held vertically, **but rather** at an angle.

In contrast, in the example in (17),

- (17) a) I don't think he would go that far. [=>His conscience would stop him.] **But, however**, some people believe that when they commit a crime it's much easier to commit it again.⁶
 b) I didn't come here to give a speech. [=>I'm not going to say anything.]. **But, nevertheless**, I will say a few words.
 c) I know what's right from what's wrong. [=>I remember it.] **But yet**, when I get into a situation, I sort of forget.
 d) They all came on time and well groomed. [=>And they came with good manners.] **But, contrary to expectations**, they forgot their manners.

the secondary CDM signals that S2 contrasts with an implication of S1 (marked as =>S) and signals that this implication should be eliminated. Both the *but* and the specific secondary CDM reflect this usage.

⁵ The BNC and COCA do not have examples of some of these (surprising what with 500,000,000 words), but the examples come from other sources such as TV, newspapers, and intuitions. There is also the issue of some of the corpus examples being strange or downright unacceptable. I will not address this here.

⁶ Many CDMs function as a non-CDM, e.g., Many wives aid their husbands more than the public ever realizes. **But, however** great the wife's contribution, the expectations of her should not be out of proportion to her ability.

The inclusion of *on the other hand*, *alternatively*, *nevertheless*.etc. inside the circle that contains *yet* reflects that while *yet* and *however* appear to signal the same relationship, that of indirect contrast, the former but not the latter may occur in a sequence with the CDMs present, while *however* may not, as shown by (18).

- (18) a) I know she wants to help me **Yet/*However, on the other hand**, I think she is angry with me
 b) On the one hand, it appears to denote a change. **Yet/*However, on the other hand**, it really is little change.

A curious aspect of this sequencing involves the CDM *however*. While neither COCA or BNC contains a sequence, *Conversely, however, or Instead, however, we do find sequences with the reverse order.*⁷

- (19) a) Migrants often will pay up to \$ 3,000 each to be smuggled aboard trains or trucks from Guatemala to the U.S. border .[This doesn't usually happen.] **Instead, however**, the smugglers often accept additional payments from Mexican police and then hand over the migrants.
 b) Fans' excitement about the Redskins first-round draft pick was only buoyed by his performance at Saturday's scrimmage. **Conversely, however**, their questions about the team's offense burn as hot as ever just four days before the team's preseason opener at Baltimore.

In addition, we do find sequences like (20) involving *in contrast to* or *in comparison with* where the order is reversed.

- (20) a) Harvey is a talented violinist. **However, in comparison with** Joan, he doesn't stand out.
 b) Harvey is a talented violinist. **In comparison, however, with** Joan, he doesn't stand out.

An interesting aspect of these DM sequences is not just that the sequence of CDMs may occur but where the sequence pair **cannot occur**. For example, consider the CDM *instead*. Looking at the examples in (21) all of which may contain the single CDM *instead*, the sequence *but+instead* may occur only some of the time, presumably because of the segment details. (Fraser, 2010b)

- (21) a) Jack didn't become a rock star. **But instead** he became a priest.
 b) Don't try to be a success as an athlete. **But instead** be like your computer-nerd brother.
 c) I couldn't get through the crowd to the phone. ***But instead** I had to go around.
 d) Nothing from the doctor helped. ***But instead**, we tried a faith-healer.

⁷ We do find S1. However, in contrast to..., However, in comparison with, and However, instead of...but these are derived forms, not basic forms.

- e) Stop thinking about bad things. ***But instead**, think of something happy.
- f) He had hope to be able to talk to Sam. **But instead** he could only talk to Mary.
- g) I could take you to the movies. **But instead** I'm going to take you home.
- h) The government should get out of the banking business. ***But instead** it should leave it to the private sector.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in this brief paper I have tried to indicate an area of Discourse Markers that up to this point has been largely ignored. Not only does each CDM sequence, for example *but+ instead*, require examination to determine the restrictions on their acceptable and unacceptable occurrence, but the sequences involving EDMs and IDMs with CDMs has, to my knowledge, not been touched. These areas wait.

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Bruce Fraser (Dr. philol.) is a professor at the University of Boston (USA). His research interests include pragmatics, discourse analysis and forensic linguistics. Email: bfraser@bu.edu