

Assessing the Performance of Iraqi EFL University Students In Using Contrastive Conjunctions

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Abstract

Conjunctions are kind of adverbs that have connective function and they are of different semantic roles. The present study is limited to the **contrastive conjunctions** which are divided in relation to their meaning into:

- i) Reformulatory :used to add another formulation.
- ii) Replative: used when an item is replaced by a more important one.
- iii) Antithetic: used when an idea is contrasting with a preceding one by introducing a direct antithesis.
- iv) Concessive: used to link between two ideas; the first one seems unexpected in the light of the other one.

This research aims at investigating the ability of Iraqi EFL university students in using contrastive conjunctions. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that:

- 1- Iraqi EFL university students are expected to face difficulty in recognizing the correct contrastive conjunction that should be used to join two contrasted sentences in relation to their meaning.
- 2- The same students are expected to face difficulty in joining two contrasted sentences correctly by using contrastive conjunctions

1. Conjunctions

According to Quirk et al. (1985:52), **conjunctions** are kind of adverbs that have connective function. They have a subordinate role in the sentence. They also have reinforcing role and they reinforce the logical relationship between the parts of a sentence. **Conjunctions** express relations between two clauses when one of them is subordinate to the other. Gamley and Patzold (1992:133) call **conjunctions** "connective adverbs"; they are connectors. Martinez(2012:3) says that the "connective words" are used to combine sentences and to express relationships between the ideas. Also, they help in improving writing style by adding maturity and sophistication. It is important to use connectors to impart clarity to writing and to make it easy to be understood. According to Leech (1989: 92), **conjunction** is a "joining word". It is mainly used to link two parts of a sentence. **Conjunctions** are of two types: **coordinating conjunctions** which join two independent clauses into a compound sentence, and **subordinating conjunctions** which join subordinate clause to a main clause in a complex sentence. Swan (2005:497) states that **conjunctions** are words that join clauses into sentences; they also show the meanings of two clauses are related to each other. Leech (ibid) and Swan (ibid) denote that some **conjunctions** are made up of two or more words like: **more accurately, on the contrary, on the other hand.**

Conjunctions, according to Quirk et al. (ibid:634), are of different semantic roles. This study will be limited to the **contrastive conjunctions**.

1.1 Contrastive Conjunctions

Contrastive conjunctions present either contrastive words or contrastive matter in relation to what has preceded (Quirk et al., 1985:634). They are divided by Quirk et al (ibid) into: **i) reformatory, ii) replative, iii) antithetic, and iv) concessive.**

1.1.1 Reformulatory

Quirk et al. (1985: 634) state that **reformulatory conjunctions** are called as such because they are used to add another formulation therefore, they are frequently preceded by **or**. Leech (1992:179) denotes that **reformulation** means putting our ideas in other words to make them clear. **Reformulatory conjunctions**, according to Quirk et al. (1985:634), are: **better, rather, more accurately, more precisely, alias, alternatively, and in other words.** These conjunctions sometimes are preceded by **or**:

- (1) He invited several friends, **or better**, several people that he thought were friends. (ibid)
or better here gives the meaning "it would be better if I were to say" (ibid)
- (2) She has applied for a transfer- she is tired of her present job, **in other words.** (ibid)

The conjunct **rather** in the following example gives the meaning "I should rather say"

- (3) We decided, **or rather** it was decided, to pull the place down.

(Leech,1992:180)

The conjuncts **alias**, according to Quirk et al (1985: 639), precedes only proper nouns.

- (4) He went to Constantinople, **alias** Istanbul. (ibid)

- (5) What many people mean by the word "power" could be **more accurately** described as "control". (www.dictionary-reverso.net,2003)

More precisely, according to (www.englishforums.com, 2005), can be replaced by **in other words** in the following example

- (6) The fact that conflicting positions seem to have the same weight renders the conflict undecidable. **More precisely**, the Pyrrhonist finds an undecidable disagreement among moral doctrines which have differing views about what the good, the bad, and the indifferent are, or about what things these notions apply to. (ibid)

Alternatively, in example (7), also, means **in other words**. (www.wordhippo.com,2013)

- (7) Hardwood floors **alternatively** known as exotic wood floors are popular due to the feeling of warmth the wood gives to any room that is influenced by them. (ibid)

1.1.2 Replacive Conjuncts

According to Quirk et al. (1985:634), **replacive conjuncts** are used when the speaker withdraws an item to replace it by a more important one therefore such conjuncts may be preceded by **or**. **Replacive conjuncts** are: **again, alternatively, rather, better, worse, and on the other hand**. Such conjuncts may be preceded by **or**, or **but**:

- (8) He was opposed by his mother **or, rather**, by both his parents. (ibid)

- (9) Please, suit yourself. You can move in at once; (**or**) **again**, you may prefer to do so next week. (ibid)

- (10) You can write to him about it. **Better** still, write to his father. (ibid)

Swan (2005:122) indicates that **on the other hand** is used to show the other side of a certain idea:

- (11) The job was boring, **but on the other hand** it was well paid.

Swan (ibid) denotes that **alternatively** as a **replacive conjunct** means 'instead'

- (12) You can go by air, **or alternatively**, you could drive there. (ibid)

1.1.3 Antithetic Conjuncts

Antithetic conjuncts are used when an idea is contrasting with a preceding one by introducing a direct antithesis. **Antithetic conjuncts** are: **contrariwise, conversely, instead, oppositely, then, on the contrary, in contrast, by contrast, by way of contrast, in comparison, by comparison, by way of comparison, on the one hand...on the other hand**. (Quirk et al.,1985:639)

- (13) Any normal person is depressed when given proper cause for depression. **Oppositely**, normal people become very excited when, for example, they won a big prize. (ibid:639)

- (14) **On the one hand** he claims to be my friend; **on the other hand** he is always running me down. (Martinez, 2012:31)

Then and **instead** as **antithetic conjuncts** can be preceded by the coordinators **but** or **and**. (Quirk et al., 1985:639)

- (15) You promised to help me (but)**then** you let me down! (ibid)

- (16) He expected to be happy but **instead** he felt miserable. (ibid) Sometimes, ¹**on the contrary**, can be intensified by **quite** (ibid:647):

- (17) I hoped he would go early but, quite **on the contrary**, he stayed till midnight. (ibid)

Both the conjuncts **contrariwise** and **conversely** mean **on the contrary**:

- (18) While the Republicans want to maintain current tax rates, the democrats **contrariwise**, want to raise taxes. (www.uk.answers.yahoo.com,2013)

- (19) The over confident driver may drive too fast. **Conversely**, the under-confident person may also cause problems by driving too slowly. (www.simple.wiktionary.org, 2012)

According to (www.englishforums.com,2009), the conjunct **in contrast** is used for descriptions:

- (20) Joshua was a foolish old man. **In contrast**, his son was thoughtful and hardworking. (ibid)

:The conjunct **by contrast** means **in contrast**

(21) **By contrast** to the first part of the book, the second part is much more interesting.

(www.stackexchange.com, 2012)

¹According to Quirk et al (1985:716), **to the contrary** is another antithetic conjunct used in American English.

To the contrary, what I said was this year, not next.

By way of contrast is another **antithetic conjunct** that has similar meaning to **by contrast** and **in contrast**:

(22) Asia covers a huge area. **By way of contrast** Europe is very small.

(www.forum.wordreference.com, 2012) **By comparison** and **by way of comparison** are rarely used throughout the formation of sentences. In the following sentence **by comparison** and **by way of comparison** are used but **in comparison** is more preferable in such constructions. (www.wiki.answers.com, 2012)

(23) Soccer is a world-wide sport played leisurely or competitively. **By comparison/ by way of comparison/ in comparison**, football can be played purely for entertainment of the sport itself, or for competition between experienced teams in a shot to win a first-place trophy. (ibid)

1.1.4 Concessive Conjuncts

Concessive Conjuncts are used to link between two ideas. The first one seems unexpected in the light of the other one. **Concessive Conjuncts** are: **anyhow, anyway, 'anyways, besides, else, however, nevertheless, nonetheless**[also written **none the less**], **notwithstanding, only, still, though, yet, in any case, in any event, at any rate, at all events, in spite of (the fact) that, in spite of it all, after all, on the other hand, all the same, admittedly, of course, still and all, that said** (Quirk et al., 1985:636). Swan (2005:139) adds the conjunct **mind you**.

Leech and Svartvik (1996:178) denote that **besides**, and **anyway** are sentence adverbials that are used to refer to another point in an argument. They are used to "reinforce an argument in a situation where a preceding argument might not seem sufficient". By the same token, the conjunct **besides** is considered by Quirk et al. (1985:636) as blend of concessive contrasting with reinforcing which is a subtype of additive conjuncts that assesses an item as adding greater weight to a preceding one.

Also, Swan (2005:141) indicates that the conjunct **anyhow** is also used to show concession.

1 According to Quirk et al. (1985:637), the conjunct **anyways** is a colloquial variant of **anyway**. It has casual tone and it is considered out of place in formal writing.

(24) She is intelligent. **Besides**, she is good-looking.

(Quirk et al., 1985: 680)

(25) George's father doesn't know what a sociologist does, but he is proud of his son **anyway**. (ibid)

(26) I'm not sure what time I'll arrive, may be seven or eight. **Anyhow** I'll certainly be there before eight thirty. (Swan, 2005:141).

The conjunct **else** may be preceded by 'or' as in:

(27) Give me some money **or else** I'll shoot. (Quirk et al., 1985:933)

Leech (1989:185) indicates that **however** is used to make contrasts. It links two ideas one of them is positive and the other is negative. By the same token, Swan (2005:139) states that **however, nevertheless, and nonetheless** are used to emphasize the fact that the second point contrasts with the first. While, the conjunct **notwithstanding**, according to Leech and Svartvik (1996:110), is very formal. Martinez (2012:12) mentions that **notwithstanding** is rarely used in modern English. It is written as one word and this has been the standard spelling for many centuries.

(28) We've been advised by the government not to make any further offers to the unions. We have decided, **however**, to carry out a thorough examination of the pay and the conditions of the work force. (Leech, 1989:185)

(29) It was oppressive dictatorship, but **nevertheless** it ensured stability. (Swan, 2005:139)

(30) And so you think that despite her ill health she has **nonetheless** made a good impression at the interview. (Quirk et al., 1985:642)

(31) **Notwithstanding** state aid, the local government are continuing to seek extra revenue. (Leech and Svartvik, 1996:110)

Leech (1989:315) says that **only** expresses contrast between what has been said and what is going to be said and it conveys the meaning of 'but except that'.

- (32) I'd like to stay and help you, **only** I've promised to be at home at 5 o'clock. (ibid)
Thomson and Martinet (2001: 289) indicate that **still** means nevertheless. Swan (2005: 139) denotes that **still** and **mind you** introduce the contrasting point as an afterthought. Leech and Svartvik (1994:110) illustrates that **yet, still, in spite of that/this (in spite of (the fact) that)** can be used to suggest that something is surprising in the light of what has been said before.
- (33) You aren't rich; **still**, you could do something to help.
(Thomson and Martinet, 2001: 289)
- (34) I don't like the job much. **Mind you**, the money's OK.
(Swan, 2005: 139)
- (35) Although, he hadn't eaten for days **yet** he looked strong and healthy.
(Leech and Svartvik, 1994:110)
- (36) **In spite of the fact that** it was snowing, the day was surprisingly warm. (www.wikianswers.com, 2012) The conjunct **though** is used, according to Leech and Svartvik (1994:109), when two circumstances are in contrast and one of them is surprising or unexpected in the view of the other one.
- (37) We are enjoying ourselves, though the weather is bad. (ibid)
According to The Free Dictionary Online (2013), **in any event, at all events** , and **in any case** have the same meaning and they are used to show another point in an argument. **At any rate**, on the other hand, means yet (www.thesaurus.com, 2013). **For all (that)** is expressing the meaning of contrast according to Leech and Svartvik (1994:110) and it means 'in spite of'.
- (38) He may not be getting the raise, but **in any event/at all events/ in any case** his boss thinks highly of him (www.yahooanswers.com, 2007)
- (39) David was very ill, **at any rate** he came first in the mathematics exam. (www.thesaurus.com, 2013)
- (40) **For all** his skill, he has accomplished very little. (Leech and Svartvik, 1994:110)
In spite of it all means, according to www.sensagent.com (2012), nevertheless or yet. Swan (2005:33) states that the conjunct **after all** means "contrary to what was expected" and its usual position is at the end of the clause. **On the other hand** means, according to www.sensagent.com (2012), however. **All the same** also means however (Quirk et al., 1985:636)
- (41) I knew yelling at the coach would get me thrown out of the game, **in spite of it all**, I could not stop from doing so. (www.yahooanswers.com, 2013)
- (42) I expected to fail the exam, but I passed **after all**. (Swan, 2005:33)
- (43) A socialized health system of medical care is available to everyone; **on the other hand**, this system leads to extensive waiting periods of procedures. (www.answers.yahoo.com:2012)
- (44) He worked hard but **all the same** he failed the exam. (Quirk et al., 1985:639)
Quirk et al. (1985:1469) state that **of course** and **admittedly** are used to express concession. The conjunct **still and all** means nevertheless (www.meriam-webster.com, 2012). The conjunct **that said** means nevertheless (www.thebeijinger.com, 2013).
- (45) [My dog is fourteen years old and **of course** he is very frisky] sic (ibid)
- (46) **Admittedly**, this may be a trick question, but I shall endeavor to provide the answer nonetheless. (www.wiki.answers.com, 2013)
- (47) She's not too enthusiastic about the project; **still and all**, she seems willing to cooperate. (www.meriam-webster.com, 2012).
- (48) He's nice. **That said**, he's an idiot. (www.thebeijinger.com, 2013)

2. The Test

2.1. The Test Design

The test consists of two questions. The first one measures the subjects' responses at the recognition level while the second one measures their responses at the production level.

The items of the test have been selected from the references used in the theoretical material.

2.2 The Subjects

The sample to which the test has been administered consists of seventy subjects of the fourth academic year (2012-2013) of the Department of English at the College of Education of Humanities, University of Babylon. The sample represents the whole population. The subjects are Iraqi Arabic native speakers.

2.3 The Results of the Test

2.3.1 Subject's Performance at the Recognition Level

Question One measures the subjects' performance at the recognition level. The results of the recognition level are shown in Table (1)

Table (1) The Frequency and Rate of the Subjects' Performance at the Recognition Level: Question (1)

item	No. of correct responses	%	No. of incorrect responses	%
1	38	54.3	32	45.7
2	37	52.86	33	47.14
3	15	21.43	55	78.57
4	38	54.3	32	45.7
5	39	55.7	31	44.3
6	35	50	35	50
7	38	54.3	32	45.7
8	17	24.3	53	75.7
9	36	51.43	34	48.57
10	35	50	35	50
11	43	61.42	27	38.58
12	41	58.57	29	41.43
13	26	37.14	44	62.86
14	40	57.14	30	42.86
15	26	37.14	44	62.86
16	37	52.86	33	47.14
17	44	62.86	26	37.14
18	25	35.71	45	64.29
19	43	61.42	27	38.58
20	30	42.86	40	57.14
total	683	48.8	717	51.2

The table above illustrates that the total number and percentage of the correct responses at the recognition level are (683, 48.8%) while the total number and percentage of the incorrect ones are (717, 51.2%).

It is hypothesized that the subjects face difficulty in choosing the correct contrastive conjunct to match the context. The high rate of the incorrect responses validates this hypothesis.

2.3.2 Subject's Performance at the Production Level

Question Two measures the subjects' performance at the production level. The results of the production level are illustrated in Table (2)

Table (2) The Frequency and Rate of the Subjects' Performance at the Production Level: Question (2)

item	No. of correct responses	%	No. of incorrect responses	%
1	32	45.7	38	54.3
2	28	40	42	60
3	44	62.85	26	37.15
4	31	44.28	39	55.72
5	36	51.42	34	48.58
6	0	0	70	100
7	26	37.15	44	62.85
8	23	32.85	47	67.15
9	43	61.42	27	38.58
10	32	45.7	38	54.3
11	44	62.85	26	37.15
12	37	52.85	33	47.15
13	24	34.28	46	65.72
14	23	32.85	47	67.15
15	25	35.7	45	64.3
16	25	35.7	45	64.3
17	25	35.7	45	64.3
18	23	32.85	47	67.15

19	11	15.7	59	84.3
20	1	1.4	69	98.6
total	533	38	867	62

The table above shows that the total number and percentage of the correct responses at the production level are (533, 38%) while the total number and percentage of the incorrect ones are (867, 62%).

It is hypothesized that the subjects face difficulty in using contrastive conjuncts to join two sentences correctly. The high rate of the incorrect responses validates this hypothesis.

2.3.3 Subject's Performance in the Whole Test

The results of the whole test are demonstrated in table (3)

Table (3)

Level	No. of correct responses	%	No. of incorrect responses	%
recognition	683	48.8	717	51.2
production	533	38	867	62
total	1216	43.43	1584	56.57

The number and the rate of the incorrect responses (1584, 56.57) reflect that Iraqi EFL university students face difficulty in mastering contrastive conjuncts at both levels.

3. Conclusion

- 1- The results of the test at the recognition level, question one, show that the subjects have failed to recognize the correct contrastive conjuncts that are suitable to the context. The number and rate of the incorrect responses are (717, 51.2%) while those of the correct responses are (683, 48.8%).

The results of the first question validate the first hypothesis which reads:

Iraqi EFL university students are expected to face difficulty in recognizing the correct contrastive conjunct that should be used in joining two contrasted sentences.

- 2- The subjects', performance at the production level denotes that the subjects face difficulty in using the different types of contrastive conjuncts to join two contrasted sentences correctly since the frequency and percentage of the correct responses are (867, 62%) while those of the correct responses constitute (533, 38%).

The results obtained from the second question, the production level, validate the second hypothesis which reads:

Iraqi EFL university students are expected to face difficulty in joining two contrasted sentences correctly by using contrastive conjuncts.

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