

English Contrastive Discourse Markers: Judgment of Use by Saudi Graduate Students

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Abstract—This paper examined the judgments of four contrastive discourse markers: *on the contrary*, *but*, *rather*, *instead* by 24 Saudi graduate students at the master's and doctoral levels. The participants were directed to select the suitable one or select neither of them if the four discourse markers were inappropriate in the given context and provide a suitable one. Overall, the results showed that the participants were uncertain of their judgments of these markers or some of them. They demonstrated incorrect and inconsistent use of the four contrastive discourse markers in the given contexts, reflecting their inability to understand their discourse meanings. There was no statistically significant effect of the participants' current degree level (MA vs. Ph.D.) on their overall judgments of contrastive discourse markers, except for one item which may have resulted from coincidence. The findings bear significance to language teaching and research. There is a growing need to focus more on teaching discourse markers and their various types (contrastive, elaborative, inferential) to graduate students to improve their academic writing skills. In addition, the study stressed the need to investigate the use of discourse markers by graduate students.

Index Terms—discourse markers, pragmatic markers, coherence, relevance, Saudi graduate students

I. INTRODUCTION

Discourse markers are single words (e.g., *but*, *thus*, *so*) or expressions made of two words or more (e.g., *on the contrary*, *as a result*, *in contrast*) that cannot stand in spoken or written contexts by themselves (Fraser, 1996). Their sole function is to specify the relation between the prior utterance (U1) and the subsequent one (U2) (Fraser, 1999). Research on English discourse markers has flourished since the 1970s and the 1980s under a variety of names, including *sentence connectives* (Halliday & Hasan, 1976), *cue markers* (Knot, 2000), *pragmatic markers* (Fraser, 1996), *discourse connectives* (Blakemore, 2002), and *discourse markers* (Blakemore, 2006; Fraser, 2005; Maschler & Schiffrin, 2015; Schiffrin, 1987). Today, there seems to be a consensus among researchers to label these expressions as *discourse markers* (henceforth DMs). DM is used throughout this paper for consistency.

Since the 1990s researchers have begun to theoretically study how DMs are used across languages, including Arabic (Alhuqbani, 2013), English (Fraser, 1990), French (Roze et al., 2012), Japanese (Matsui, 2002), Spanish (Cornillie, 2015), Hebrew (Maschler, 2009), among others to document similarities and differences between these languages. The theoretical findings encouraged language educators to investigate how DMs are used by EFL/ESL learners and how far or close they are to native English speakers in their use and judgments of DMs.

In Arabic-speaking countries, where this study was conducted, research on DMs is relatively new, and only a few scattered studies were conducted. DMs are usually overlooked in EFL/ESL curricula (Alhuqbani, 2009). This could be attributed to the fact that research interests in DMs among ESL/EFL researchers have recently begun, approximately in the last two decades or so. This study attempted to investigate how Saudi graduate students at the master's and doctoral levels judge the use of contrastive discourse markers (henceforth CDMs) in contexts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Coherence vs. Relevance

DMs are usually approached in the literature from two main theoretical perspectives: coherence and relevance. The former is represented by the pioneering work of Schiffrin (1987) and Fraser's series of studies on English DMs (1988, 1990, 1993, 1996, 1997, 1998). The latter group is best represented by the work of Blackmore (1987). Both groups differ from each other in how these DMs function in discourse. The coherence theorists claim that discourse relations are essential to utterance interpretation and DMs are necessary to carry this task, whereas relevance theorists argue that relevance suffices to derive discourse coherence even without the use of DMs to signal the relation between U1 and U2 (Blakemore, 2006).

Schiffrin (1987) employed conversational analysis to study a small number of DMs. She defined DMs as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk" (1987, p. 31). That is, DMs merely relate units of talk to each other to create and maintain coherence between discourse elements. In her book "Discourse Markers (1987)", Schiffrin treated conjunctions (e.g., *but*), interjections (e.g., *oh*), adverbs (e.g., *now*), and lexicalized phrases (e.g., *I mean*) as DMs. She argued that DMs link utterances to the adjacent discourse and the speaker/hearer, and they also connect utterances to different planes of talk within a larger discourse. For example, she treated *but* as taking a speaker to an earlier point of discourse and elaborate on it. So, she maintained that *but* strengthens coherence through the integration of certain structural planes of talks, including contrasting ideas, speech acts, and continuing a turn in speech. Schiffrin's treatment of DMs was a turning point in the study of DMs, but it was criticized for its narrow focus on a small number of DMs in certain daily dialogues by a few Jewish speakers in Philadelphia, USA. English was not their language of heritage. Moreover, they appeared to be influenced by their Jewish background which limited their use of DMs to the type of conversations they engaged in (Alhuqban, 2009, 2013).

Unlike Schiffrin, Fraser, who has conducted several consecutive studies on DMs since 1988, examined various DMs in English (e.g., 1990, 1993, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2012) and other languages (e.g., Fraser, 2005, 2008; Fraser & Malamud-Makowski, 1996), and classified them into three main categories: contrastive (e.g., *but*), elaborative (e.g., *and*) and inferential (e.g., *so*). He described DMs as expressions that speakers use to signal a relation between the message in U1 and U2. Therefore, Fraser argued that every DM signals the relationship that a speaker wants to relate between U1 and U2. In other words, Fraser repeatedly argued that although a DM has a core meaning, it does not contribute to the propositional content of either U1 or U2 because it has a procedural function rather than a conceptual one, and hence it can be deleted. As a result, Fraser treated all types of DMs as expressions that do not contribute to truth-conditional sentence meaning. For example, *but* in the utterance "*John is tall. But Sam is short*" (Fraser, 1997, p. 8) signals a simple contrast and its truth condition depends only on the truth of the proposition that both U1 and U2 convey, hence Fraser argued that *but* can be deleted without changing the meaning of the utterance as in *John is tall. Sam is short*. Despite Fraser's thorough analysis and classification of DMs into different categories, he limited his discussion of these DMs to the utterance level and did not account for them in longer discourse. It seems that Fraser was more interested in the pragmatic functions of DMs.

Within the framework of the *Relevance Theory*, as advanced by Wilson and Sperber (1993), Blakemore (1989) argued that DMs are discourse connectives that a speaker may use to constrain the hearer's interpretation of a given utterance. Like Fraser, she maintained that DMs do not affect the meaning of an utterance, but they provide the interactants with certain contextual information accessible to the hearer under the *Principle of Relevance*, which is guided by human cognition to ensure that all communicated information comes with a guarantee of optimal relevance (Blakemore, 2006). Based on this view, she rejected Grice's (1975) notion of *conversational implicature* that propositions are implicit in the sense that they are not part of what is said. For example, she argued that DMs such as *therefore* do not give rise to conventional implicature, but rather encode procedural meaning. Furthermore, Blakemore (2006) argued that the interpretation of U2 in some cases is not necessarily derived from the interpretation of U1 and the surrounding contextual assumptions. For her, discourse coherence is one in which the assumptions made accessible by U1 are used in the interpretation of U2. Furthermore, Blackmore (2006) argued that the occurrence of DMs in initial positions points to DMs as encoding constraints on the relevance of the utterances rather than on the connections between discourse units. Blakemore's emphasis on optimal relevance as a cognitive principle to guarantee the hearer's interpretation of the speaker's utterance seems inadequate without the obvious and right use of DMs. Moreover, she did not elaborate on how the *Principle of Relevance* is grounded in human cognition taking into account that human communication is context sensitive.

To sum up, both the coherence and relevance theorists view the role of DMs as devices constraining the relation between U1 and U2 and facilitating discourse interpretation (Martinez, 2004). That is, the coherence theorists treat DMs as encoding cohesive relationships between U1 and U2, and the relevance theorists treat them as encoding cognitive information that controls the relations between these discourse units by limiting the hearer's choice to what is relevant to the speaker's utterance.

B. Studies Related to CDMs

Following the first publications of Fraser in the 1990s, a growing number of DM studies have appeared in English and across several languages. As early as the 1990s, the bulk of these studies focused on how English and other languages share the same DM categories as suggested by Fraser (e.g., Alhuqbani, 2013; Fraser, 2005, 2008; Fraser & Malamud-Makowski, 1996). Moreover, these studies prompted ESL/EFL researchers and educators to investigate how language learners acquire these DMs and how they manage their polysemy (e.g., Alhuqbani, 2009; Hunteey et al., 2023;

Warsi, 2000). Due to space and focus, only some of the studies that investigated CDMs and bear resemblance to the nature of this study were reviewed to situate it within the current line of literature.

Warsi (2000) investigated the use of CDMs by ten Russian advanced learners, and how they differed in their judgments from those given by ten native speakers of English. Each group received a judgment test, consisting of 30 multiple-choice questions, including eight CDMs: *but*, *however*, *in contrast*, *instead*, *on the contrary*, *on the other hand*, *nevertheless*, and *despite* (this/that). The results indicated that the two groups differed in their judgments in terms of the possible occurrence of CDMs in the given utterances and the restrictions imposed on their core meaning. Moreover, the Russian participants demonstrated variations in their judgments, pointing to the possibility that their low English proficiency might be the cause of their inconsistent judgments.

Sitthirak (2013) examined the use of CDMs by 79 Thai University Students and 28 English native speakers. He used a set of questionnaires to qualitatively and quantitatively analyze the data. Overall, Thai participants were able to distinguish the contrast and non-contrast relations between the two utterances more than the English native speakers. Furthermore, Thai students developed a set of rules to handle the suitable answers, whereas English native speakers relied on accuracy rather than meaning to judge the use of CDMs. The English native speakers employed their native intuition to locate the contrast and non-contrast between the two utterances, while Thai students relied on some self-rules to cope with any arising ambiguity between the two utterances.

Syahabuddin and Zikra (2018) examined how 26 Indonesian English major undergraduate students employ CDMs in their English essay writing. The result showed that they commonly used certain English CDMs in their essays: *but*, *however*, *although*, *even though*, *on the other hand*, *still*, *not only... but also*, and *while/whereas*. They misused and overused these CDMs in their essay writing. For example, the participants misplaced certain CDMs and hence misunderstood their functions. The students also overused CDMs by joining two of them in one sentence. The two researchers concluded that the participants were incompetent in applying CDMs in their essay writing because they were incapable and ignorant of their functions.

Within the Saudi context, a small number of studies were conducted to study DMs, including CDMs. The earliest study was conducted by Alhuqbani (2009) who investigated the Arabic-English speakers' acquisition rate of certain CDMs: *but*, *however*, *nevertheless*, *despite that/this*, *in contrast*, *instead*, *on the contrary*, and *on the other hand*. The participants were 26 Arabic-English speakers and 25 English native speakers. They were assigned a judgment test consisting of 30 multiple-choice items. The results showed that Arabic-English speakers were far behind their English native counterparts in their correct scores on the CDM judgment test. Unlike native speakers of English, Arabic-English speakers missed the core meanings of CDMs, the restrictions CDMs impose on their occurrence between the two utterances they relate, and their possible occurrences.

In another study in the Saudi context, Al-Owayid (2018) examined the use of CDMs by 100 Saudi female English major undergraduates in Levels 6 and 8, with 50 participants in each level. Al-Owayid used a pre-and post-test to collect data about the participants' ability to use CDMs in their essay writing. In addition, she used a questionnaire to obtain some data from instructions about the factors that may affect the participants' use of CDMs in their writing. The results indicated a significant impact of instructions on the mean scores of the group under treatment. The participants' levels did not statistically have a significant impact on their performance. The writing instructors reported that the participant's ignorance of the different meanings and functions of CDMs lowers the quality of their writing.

To summarize this section, these reviewed studies and other similar studies in the literature focused on EFL/ESL learners who were still in the acquisition process of English. In addition, these studies, except that of Alhuqbani (2009) and Warsi (2000), investigated the use of CDMs in EFL/ESL essays without telling them that their ability to use CDMs was under scrutiny. Overall, it follows from the theoretical and practical literature review above that CDMs require more studies to reveal their multiple functions in contexts and to help foreign learners employ them successfully in their speech and writing. Thus, the present study is an attempt to focus on Saudi graduate students, who are in the process of completing either their master's or doctoral degree in English, to measure their ability to judge the acceptability of CDMs usage in certain utterances.

III. RESEARCH PROBLEM, QUESTIONS AND PURPOSE

A. Statement of the Problem

Since DMs facilitate communication, it makes sense to suppose that the lack of DMs or their inappropriate use in written and spoken discourse could hinder successful communication or lead to confusion. Theoretical research findings in DM studies have shown that DMs are polysemic and have different interpretations on both the sentence and text level (e.g., Fraser, 2008; Maschler & Schiffrin, 2015; Schiffrin, 1987). Despite this, teaching English DMs to EFL/ESL learners fails to provide them with their multiple uses and functions, which means that learners may lack the necessary knowledge of the actual discourse and pragmatic uses of DMs. This is very much attributable to the absence of solid and coherent research on the acquisition of English DMs by EFL/ESL learners because L2 research has focused on the development of learners' acquisition of linguistic forms (e.g., phonology, syntax, morphology, semantics), making these linguistic components the explicit focus of attention in the language classroom (Hellermann & Vergun, 2007; Warsi, 2000). In addition, the few studies that attempted to investigate the acquisition of DMs by EFL/ESL learners focused on learners who were in the process of acquiring English (e.g., Albeshir et al., 2018; Al-Owayid, 2018), and hence had

limited English proficiency, which may not have yielded a full picture of their knowledge of DMs. Moreover, these studies dealt with learners' writing essays without informing them that their knowledge and use of DMs are under assessment (e.g., Alkhazraji, 2019; Huntey et al., 2023). Therefore, the rationale of this study derived its importance from the need to bridge this gap in the literature by investigating Saudi graduate students' judgment of certain CDMs in context. Unlike previous studies, this study employed advanced English major students at the master's and doctoral levels, assuming that they have reached adequate academic knowledge and high language proficiency. Moreover, this study made its goal and focus clear to the participants through directing their attention to its purpose in that it is designed to measure their judgments of the use of four CDMs in English, namely *on the contrary*, *but*, *rather* and *instead*.

B. Research Questions

The study addressed the following three research questions:

1. What are the differences and similarities between Saudi English graduate students' judgments of the use of CDMs?
2. What are the other alternative CDMs that Saudi English graduate students offer to fit in the given contexts?
3. What is the effect of Saudi graduate students' current degree level (MA vs. Ph.D.) on their judgments of the use of CDMs?

C. Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was twofold. First, it bridged the gap in foreign language research at the graduate level by investigating Saudi English graduate students' judgments of the use of certain CDMs in contexts, and whether they misused or overused CDMs in their overall judgments; and second how the participants' current degree level (MA vs. Ph.D.) affected their overall judgments of English CDMs.

IV. METHOD

A. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design that focused on the judgment of certain CDMs in contexts by Saudi graduate students at the master's and doctoral levels. Furthermore, it quantitatively tabulated the data into statistical figures to pinpoint any significant differences between the participants.

B. Participants

Twenty-four Saudi male and female English graduate students at the master's and doctoral levels participated in this study at a local university. Some of the participants are lecturers at some local colleges. As part of the entrance requirements to these graduate programs, students are required to submit official evidence showing the required scores on standardized tests such as *IELTS* and *TOEFL*. Students, who obtained their prior degrees (bachelor's and master's) from English-speaking countries, were exempted from such tests. In addition, the doctoral group as well as some of the students in the master's program have already completed the coursework. This implied that the participants have reached high proficiency in English and academic achievement to qualify them to participate in this study.

C. Instrument

A ready-made judgment test, consisting of 33 multiple-choice questions, was presented to the participants. They were asked to select from four CDMs: *on the contrary*, *but*, *rather*, *instead*. The participants were further requested to supply a suitable one if none of the four CDMs was unsuitable. These 33 examples (see the appendix) were adapted from previous studies within larger data including more CDMs (e.g., Alhuqbani, 2009; Alhuqbani et al., 2025; Fraser, 2005; Warsi, 2000) and proved to be valid due to their clarity and simple directions. The authors of this paper made some modifications, whenever necessary, to their wording to suit the purpose and context of this study.

D. Taxonomy of Data Analysis

The study employed the taxonomy of CDMs suggested by Fraser (1997) to analyze the participants' responses to the utterances in the judgment test. According to him, the four CDMs (*but*, *instead*, *rather*, and *on the contrary*) can be divided into three different classes. The first and largest class of CDMs includes *but*, among other CDMs such as *however*, *nevertheless*, which carries the speaker's intention to contrast explicitly or indirectly the message in U2 with the one already conveyed in U1. The second class includes the two CDMs *instead* and *rather*, which signals that the speaker utters the explicit message in U2 to correct the message conveyed by U1. The third class includes a single CDM *on the contrary* which indicates that the speaker's explicit message in U2 is a correction of the message in U1. These three classes vary in the restrictions they impose on the relationship between U1 and U2. Fraser (1997, p. 9) maintained that "The restrictions imposed by *but* are different from those imposed by *instead/rather* and *on the contrary*, such that where one of these classes can occur, the other one cannot." The following utterances supplied by Fraser (1997, p. 9) illustrate his taxonomy of *but*, *rather/instead*, *on the contrary*. The authors of this paper used this taxonomy to analyze the obtained data based on the assumption that native speakers of English make their choice on this taxonomy or at least close to it, and hence can be used to verify EFL/ESL learners' implementation of this taxonomy.

U1	CDM	U2
a) John didn't walk to school. b) We didn't leave late.	On the contrary/*But, But/*On the contrary,	he rode in a limo. we arrived late.
a) Sue didn't get out of bed this morning. b) John is not fat.	Instead/*But, But/*Instead,	she went back to sleep. Jim is thin.
a) Fred is not a gentleman. b) He should have picked it up.	On the contrary/*Instead, Instead/*On the contrary,	he is a rogue. he just left it lying there.

E. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The participants answered the thirty-three items in the judgment test via *Google form* and returned it electronically. They were informed via the *What's Up* group that their participation in the judgment test is voluntary and anonymous. The principal researcher and his co-authors collected and analyzed the data employing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to obtain the frequency distributions and percentages of the participants' correct and incorrect responses. Furthermore, to identify any statistically significant differences, A *t*-test was used to compare the performance of the two groups (MA group vs. Ph.D. group) on the CDMs judgment test.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Judgments of CDMs: Similarities, Differences, and Alternatives

The study focused on four CDMs (*on the contrary, but, rather, instead*) and the participants were also requested to provide other possible CDMs if none of them was suitable in the context. Table 1 below summarizes the participants' responses. The participants showed obvious variations in their responses, with a strong inclination to employ certain CDMs in some sequences with high certainty and others with less certainty or no certainty at all.

TABLE 1
PERCENTAGES OF THE PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES TO THE FOUR CDMs

Item No.	Given CDMs %					Item No.	Given CDMs %				
	On the contrary	But	Rather	Instead	None		On the Contrary	But	rather	instead	None
1	4	8	16	72	0	18	32	12	20	12	20
2	0	52	4	4	20	19	12	56	4	12	12
3	8	24	48	4	12	20	12	12	24	40	4
4	48	4	12	8	12	21	0	28	8	4	48
5	0	16	12	64	4	22	4	28	4	64	0
6	16	8	12	52	4	23	48	20	0	4	20
7	40	36	0	0	12	24	4	80	0	0	16
8	8	68	4	0	8	25	0	24	52	8	8
9	8	76	0	0	16	26	0	56	0	0	44
10	0	8	36	52	4	27	0	60	0	0	40
11	24	4	12	52	8	28	0	8	0	72	4
12	16	4	48	16	8	29	0	32	0	4	48
13	16	16	20	12	24	30	12	64	0	0	12
14	44	20	8	4	8	31	44	36	0	8	0
15	4	12	24	60	0	32	32	20	20	16	12
16	28	12	16	24	8	33	4	20	8	4	32
17	8	36	12	40	0						

B. The CDM on the Contrary

To begin with, the CDM *on the contrary* received a percentage ranging from 32% to 48% in a few sequences (8 sequences) as Table 1 above shows. The participants seemed to underuse the CDM as shown in the number of zero responses (9 sequences) and the lowest percentages it received (4% to 28%) in the majority of the remaining sequences, which allow the use of *on the contrary*. This variation in the participants' responses indicated that they were unaware of its discourse function in English, which implies that they did not study CDMs. According to Fraser (1997, 2012), *on the contrary* signals that the speaker's intention from uttering the explicit message in U2 to be true, whereas the message in U1 to be false. He claimed that there are two cases of *on the contrary* depending on the number of interactants. First, when U2 and U1 are uttered by two speakers, there is no restriction on U1 because *on the contrary* can introduce U2 either positively or negatively negating the content in U1, or merely an explanation, or both. On the other hand, with only one speaker, the message in U1 must be an explicitly negative one and there may be no contrary expressed in U1. In both cases, *on the contrary* introduces a proposition in U2 that explicitly denies the content in U1 as incorrect (Fraser, 1997, 2012).

To demonstrate how the participants underused this *CDM*, let's look at the following examples in Table 2 below where some participants preferred not to use it despite its suitability in these contexts. The examples (4, 14, 18, 23, 33) are illustrative of the striking variations in the participants' responses to the judgment of CDMs. However, they tended to select *on the contrary* in (4) as the most desirable one. They did the same with the example in (18), but with a lower percentage despite that *on the contrary* is the most desirable and accepted one in this context. A sizable number of the participants (20%) selected none of them without supplying any alternative CDM to fit in the context. In (23, 33), *on the contrary* is used to introduce the contrary to U1 as U2, an explanatory comment, or both because there is no restriction on U1, in either positive or negative case. This meets Fraser's (2012) criterion for using *on the contrary* when there are two speakers engaged in the discourse. However, only 4% of the participants selected it to relate U2 with U1 as in (33). In contrast, 32% of the participants selected none of them giving alternatives to DMs other than CDMs such as *also*, *and*, and *likewise*, which go beyond the scope of the CDMs judgment test used in this study, indicating the participants' inability to use the right DM.

TABLE 2
ILLUSTRATIVE USE OF THE CDM ON THE CONTRARY BY THE PARTICIPANTS

U1	CDM %	U2
4) I assure you that Jack will not be late.	On the contrary, (48%) But, (4%) Rather, (12%) Instead, (8%) None of them (12%)	he will be early.
14) She's not a painter.	On the contrary, (44%) But, (20%) Rather, (8%) Instead, (4%) None of them (8%)	she is extremely awkward at painting.
18) Nicole didn't like green beans.	On the contrary, (32%) But, (12%) Rather, (20%) Instead, (12%) None of them (20%)	she detested them.
23) A. Dan stopped beating his wife a long time ago. B.	On the contrary, (48%) But, (20%) Rather, (0%) Instead, (4%) None of them (20%)	he has never beaten her.
33) A. The King of England is bald. B.	On the contrary, (4%) But, (20%) Rather, (8%) Instead, (4%) None of them (32%)	the king of your country is bald.

C. The CDM *But*

As Table 1 above shows, the participants used *but* in just 9 sequences with percentages ranging from 36% to 80% indicating varied degrees of certainty. It was also used by other participants with lower percentages ranging from 4% to 36%, indicating less certainty among some of them in these sequences. Nevertheless, compared to the other three CDMs, *but* was the only marker used consistently by the participants in all the 33 sequences. The reason is that, unlike the other CDMs, *but* can fit in most contexts where the other CDMs may or may not fit (Fraser, 1997). Fraser (1997, 2005) argued that the core meaning of *but* is to signal simple contrast, and the speaker uses it when intending to stress a contrast between U1 and U2. The task of the hearer is to find which of the messages associated with U1 is intended by the speaker. However, there are few clues to guide language users in cases where the direct U1 message is the target of the contrast. The analysis of the results showed that some of the participants were unaware of this simple contrast and replaced *but* with *on the contrary* as in (7) or with none of them as in Table 3 below. The participants were ignorant of the fact that in English the order of U2 and U1 in (7) is irrelevant and can be reversed with no change in interpretation, at least when U1 and U2 are coordinated into a single sentence. According to Fraser (1997), contrasts carried by *but* could be explicit one as in height, weight, or could be of implicit contrasts that cannot be found between U1 and U2 directly. In this case, the message conveyed by *but* may be contrasted in one of several other ways. First, there may be only one area of contrast *but* as in (13) or at least implied as in (9). Second, U2 may be the negative of U1, with emphatic stress on one U2 constituent as in (26). Third, U2 may consist of only the reason or justification for an assertion that had been deleted. If an explicit contrast cannot be found, the hearer is forced to look further for a target U1 message. One option is to see if U2 contrasts with the presupposed message of U1. Finally, the target of *but* may be implied, an indirect message of U1. Although the majority of participants selected *but* in (7, 8, 9, 13, 19, 24, 26), it is clear that other participants were uncertain about which one fits as the suitable CDM. For example, in (13) the participants distributed their responses to the five choices given to them, indicating variation in their knowledge of English CDMs. Almost all the participants work as English instructors at the college level, making one wonder if they

were aware of the core meanings of these CDMs since ruling out the possibility of using them in these contexts is not the right choice. All the given sequences allow one or more CDMs to fit in the context. Unlike the other CDMs, *but* and *on the contrary* seem to go together in some of the given contexts since the participants assigned high percentages to them in four contexts. This may be due to the simple contrast they carry when connecting U2 with U1 (Fraser, 1997).

TABLE 3
ILLUSTRATIVE USE OF THE CDM BUT BY THE PARTICIPANTS

U1	CDM %	U2
7) Sami is very fat.	On the contrary, (40%) But, (36%) Rather, (0%) Instead, (0%) None of them (12%)	Nora is very thin.
8) Nasser generally rides his bike to work.	On the contrary, (8%) But, (68%) Rather, (4%) Instead, (0%) None of them (8%)	when it rains or snows, he prefers the bus.
9) I am sorry.	On the contrary, (8%) But, (76%) Rather, (0%) Instead, (0%) None of them (16%)	I think you're wrong when you say she did it.
13) She is not a painter.	On the contrary, (16%) But, (16%) Rather, (20%) Instead, (12%) None of them (24%)	she is a writer.
19) Nicole likes her carrot.	On the contrary, (12%) But, (56%) Rather, (4%) Instead, (12%) None of them (12%)	she detests green beans.
24) A. It's cold here. B.	On the contrary, (4%) But, (80%) Rather, (0%) Instead, (0%) None of them (16%)	the window is open.
26) A. Open the window, please. B.	On the contrary, (0%) But, (56%) Rather, (0%) Instead, (0%) None of them (44%)	I don't want to close the window.

D. The CDM *Rather*

Rather was found to be the least used among the four CDMs. The participants used it only five times with relatively moderate certainty ranging from 36% to 52%. It is this uncertainty that made the participants prefer not to use it in 10 sequences (zero use) and with extremely low percentages in the other 18 sequences ranging from 4% to 24%. According to Fraser and Malamud-Makowski (1996) and Fraser (1997), the CDM *rather* indicates that the proposition in U2 is a contrast with the explicit proposition in U1, and as constituting a possible corrective alternative. The first U1 must be negative. The analysis of the participants' responses indicated that they were unaware of these rules governing the use of *rather*. To demonstrate this, let us look at the participants' judgment of the examples in Table 4 below. The participants' variation of the uses of the four CDMs in (1) indicated that they were unaware of the corrective role of *rather* and *instead* and their contrastive role with the explicit proposition of U1. Fraser further argued that when the models *might*, *should*, and *could* followed by *have* are in the first utterance, *rather* is excluded from being used. It was found that the participants, who are advanced foreign speakers of English pursuing a graduate degree, were unaware of this because some of them insisted on judging the use of *rather* in these sequences as acceptable. Although the structure of the examples in (5, 17, 22) are the same in that U1 started with the model *should* followed by *have*, the participants showed variations in their responses, indicating that they were unaware of these subtle differences in the use of CDMs when preceded by models such as *might*, *should* and *could* and followed by *have* in U1. The participants' judgment of the acceptability of the four CDMs in example (22) is an indicative of their inability to apply Fraser's taxonomy of the four CDMs under consideration. Almost half of the participants (48%) selected that none of the four CDMs is appropriate in this sequence. This further emphasized that the participants were unaware of the use of CDMs in English when U1 includes models such as *should* or *could* followed by *have*.

TABLE 4
ILLUSTRATIVE USE OF THE CDM RATHER BY THE PARTICIPANTS

U2	CDM %	U1
1) He didn't walk to school.	On the contrary, (16%) But, (4%) Rather, (72%) Instead, (8%) None of them, (0%)	he rode a limo.
5) He should have picked it up.	On the contrary, (0%) But, (12%) Rather, (16%) Instead, (64%) None of them, (4%)	he threw another one to the ground
17) Lamia should have left her parents' apt yesterday.	On the contrary, (8%) But, (36%) Rather, (12%) Instead, (40%) None of them, (0%)	She stayed there the whole night.
22) He should have paid for another.	On the contrary, (4%) But, (28%) Rather, (8%) Instead, (64%) None of them, (48%)	he just walked out of the restaurant.

E. The CDM *Instead*

The CDM *instead* came next *but* in terms of certainty, with 10 times of use with percentages ranging from 40% to 72%. However, it was the second after *rather* to be left out by the participants in certain sequences (n=7). Fraser (1997) argued that *instead* is different from *but* and is similar to *rather* in that it signals U2 as contrasting with the explicit proposition of U1, and as constituting a possible corrective alternative. Fraser argued that *instead* differs in an important way from other CDMs in that U1 is usually negative and points to the absence or lack of meeting certain information, either directly or indirectly. The function of *instead* is to signal acceptance of U1 message but hiring U2 to set the record straight about what happened or should have happened. Fraser (1997) stated some restrictions on the use of *instead*. First, he argued that if the message in U1 is negative, it must be explicitly negative. An implied negative reading of U1 for *instead* can also be accomplished by the modal combinations, *could have*, *should have*, *might have* (as in the above examples 5, 17, 22 in Table 4), or was going to which implies negation. On the other hand, when these modal combinations occur in the U2 message, the U1 message need not be negated. The following sequences showed how the participants responded to the examples (1, 15, 28) in which *instead* is more appropriate. As shown in Table 5 below, the majority of the participants used *instead* in the contexts where it was appropriate, indicating their understanding of its use as a CDM. However, there are still some participants who were uncertain about whether this CDM fits in these contexts or not, and this could be seen clearly in the participants' use of other CDMs to link the proposition in U2 with the one in U1.

TABLE 5
ILLUSTRATIVE USE OF THE CDM *INSTEAD* BY THE PARTICIPANTS

U1	CDM %	U2
1) Ali didn't walk to school.	On the contrary, (4%) But (8%) Rather, (16%) Instead, (72%) None of them (0%)	he rode a limo.
15) We must not complain about the problem.	On the contrary, (4%) But (12%) Rather, (24%) Instead, (60%) None of them (0%)	we must help to put it right.
28) There was no chicken.	On the contrary, (0%) But, (8%) Rather, (0%) Instead, (72%) None of them (4%)	I got some fish.

The participants were allowed to provide a suitable CDM if the supplied four CDMs were inappropriate in the context. Four of the contexts (21, 26, 29, 33) received moderate certainty (48%, 44%, 48%, 32%) that none of the four CDMs were suitable. Overall, only five contexts were assigned 0% indicating that one of the CDMs was inappropriate but the participants showed disagreement about which alternative was more appropriate. From the participants' suggestions of some DMs (*e.g.*, *and*, *so*, *also*, *likewise*, *because*) to fit in the contexts rather than one or more of the given four CDMs, it was clear that their suggestions were merely based on speculation rather than firm knowledge and native-like intuition. This conclusion can be further proven to be true by the fact that all 33 contexts allow one or more

of the given four CDMs to fit in, but the participants misused this fact. The DMs given by some participants bear no contrast at all to replace the four CDMs, which reflects their lack of knowledge of English CDMs in particular and English DMs in general. This finding is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Syahabuddin & Zikra, 2018; Warsi, 2000) which concluded that misusing CDMs reflected the participants' misunderstanding of their use, which could be due to their lack of knowledge about how to use CDMs or just a matter of their low proficiency in English.

F. The Effect of Graduate Program Degree Level on the CDMs Judgment

To answer the third research question, the effect of graduate program degree level on the participants' judgment of the use of CDMs: *on the contrary*, *but*, *rather* and *instead*, a t-test was conducted to compare the judgments of the two groups (MA. and Ph.D.). This question was developed based on the assumption that doctoral students have better academic writing as compared to master's students because they have already completed two degrees (bachelor's and master's), and met the entrance requirements to the Ph.D. program, including high scores on standardized tests such as IELTS, and completed their coursework in their doctorate programs. The independent t-test showed no statistical differences between the two groups, except in item no. 9 where all doctoral students, except one, selected *but* to connect U1 and U2. In contrast, the master's students varied in their responses with four of them selecting that none of the four CDMs could fit in that context. While eight master's students selected *but* to relate U2 with U1, only one student chose *on the contrary*. The two groups were statistically different in this item at the $p < .001$ level. This difference may be due to coincidence rather than systematic since the analysis of the data revealed noticeable variations among the participants' performance in the thirty-three contexts without any significant differences at the $p < .001$ or $p < .005$ level.

VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The primary concern of this study was to investigate Saudi graduate students' judgment of four English CDMs: *on the contrary*, *but*, *rather*, and *instead*. Furthermore, the study examined the effect of the participants' degree program (MA vs. Ph.D.) on their judgment of these four CDMs. The participants' judgments varied greatly from certainty to uncertainty without any significant statistical differences between the participants in two graduate programs, except in one item which could be the result of chance rather than a systematic difference. As a result, it could be concluded that despite their advanced level in English the participants have not yet acquired the necessary knowledge of the multiple and core meanings of these four English CDMs, the restrictions that regulate their occurrences in discourse, and their possible occurrences in certain contexts.

Finally, the study has some important implications for research and language teaching. To complete our understanding of the acquisition of DMs by Arab learners of English, the following topics await further research. First, DMs are usually overlooked in the language materials and taught as part of the English grammar in classrooms, with the focus being more on their grammatical occurrence on the sentence and text level. The majority of students who completed their English programs, as found in this study and previous studies (e.g., Syahabuddin & Zikra, 2018; Warsi, 2000), lacked an accurate understanding of the polysemic nature of these DMs and how they are used in English. Further Research is needed to investigate the Arab learners' acquisition and judgment of DMs in general and CDMs in particular. Further research is therefore needed to investigate the available range of DMs and their function in the writing and speech of Arab learners of English, especially those who are majoring in English. Second, more research is needed to investigate whether the similarities or differences between Arabic and English in terms of DMs facilitate or hinder the acquisition and judgment of DMs by Arab learners of English, especially those who are at the graduate level. Finally, introducing DMs in the classroom needs to be tailored to the teaching of their multiple discourse functions and applying the current research findings about DMs in teaching to strengthen the students' comprehension of them. Therefore, it is highly recommended that students at the graduate level be given a whole course on DMs to help them understand the current theoretical approaches used to account for DMs in English, and apply them in their English teaching and/or translation career.

APPENDIX

Contrastive Discourse Markers Judgment Test

Please fill in the form with *on the contrary*, *but*, *rather* and *instead*. Your participation in this study is voluntary and anonymous.

Name (Optional): _____ Major: _____ Current degree: _____ Master _____ Doctorate _____
 Gender: M _____ F _____

Choose the best CDM from the following four CDMs to connect the two sentences: *On the contrary* - *But* - *Rather* - *Instead*. If none of them is suitable, provide an alternative one.

1. Ali didn't walk to school. _____, he rode a limo.
2. I don't like this mess. _____, I understand how it occurred
3. I am not a scientist. _____, I am an impresario of scientists.
4. I assure you Jack will not be late. _____, he will be early.

5. He should have picked it up. _____, he just left it lying there.
6. He didn't pick up the book. _____, he threw another one to the ground.
7. Sami is very fat. _____, Nora is very thin.
8. Nasser generally rides his bike to work. _____, when it rains or snows, he prefers the bus.
9. I am sorry. _____, I think you're wrong when you say she did it deliberately.
10. Do not worry about scarcity. _____, worry about equal distribution.
11. Sarah didn't go to the concert. _____, she stayed at home that night.
12. She didn't want to go to the concert. _____, she would like to stay at home.
13. She's not a painter. _____, she's a writer.
14. She's not a painter. _____, she is extremely awkward at painting.
15. We must not complain about the problem. _____, we must help to put it right.
16. Lina didn't leave her parents' apt yesterday. _____, she stayed there the whole night.
17. Lamia should have left her parents' apt yesterday. _____, she stayed there the whole night.
18. Nicole didn't like green beans. _____, she detested them.
19. Nicole likes her carrots. _____, she detests green beans.
20. Samirah didn't receive 1 medal. _____, she received 5.
21. Hasen was always tall as a boy. _____, he became even taller as a teenager.
22. He should have paid for dinner. _____, he just walked out of the restaurant.
23. A: Dan stopped beating his wife a long time ago. B: _____, he has never beaten her.
24. A: It's cold here. B: _____, I don't want to close the window.
25. He is not the only leader. _____, he is one of the most important.
26. A: Open the window please. B: _____, the window is open.
27. A: We had a very nice lunch. I had an excellent lobster. B: _____, did you get to ask him about the money?
28. There was no chicken. _____, I got some fish.
29. Sara is a Republican. _____, she is honest.
30. A: Tell me your impression about him. B: His son is very smart. _____, I don't mean to imply that he himself is not smart.
31. John counts from top down. _____, Mary counts from bottom up.
32. I didn't hit him. _____, he hit me.
33. A. The King of England is bald. B. _____, the King in your country is bald.

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