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Effect of Gender and Language Proficiency on Translation and Judgment of English Contrastive Discourse Markers

Mohammed Nasser Alhuqbani
Department of English, College of Languages and Translation, Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Kholood Salem Alenizy
Department of English, College of Languages and Translation, Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Ameerah Abdulaziz Al-Thunayyan
Department of Translation, College of Languages and Translation, Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

***Abstract*—This paper examined the effect of gender and language proficiency on the translation and judgments of ten contrastive discourse markers: *but, however, nevertheless, instead, rather, in contrast, on the other hand, yet, still, on the contrary*. The participants were 77 Saudi undergraduate males and females majoring in English and Translation. They were given two tasks, with 15 items in each task. Overall, the results showed that the participants were uncertain of the meaning of English contrastive discourse markers when translating them into Arabic, except *but,* which received the highest score. Almost all of the participants translated *but* as *lakin* or *wa'lakin*. However, the majority of them failed to translate those markers in combinations, reflecting their lack of knowledge of such combinations. The results also revealed that the participants were uncertain about their judgments of these markers. Their noticeable inconsistency of what makes a discourse marker suitable in one context, but not in the other, reflects the participants' inability to cope with its core meaning. As for gender, female participants scored better than their male counterparts in just four out of 30 constructions, indicating that gender produced limited effect on the participants' performance. Finally, language proficiency only correlated with three constructions, pointing to the possibility that it has no effect on translating and using contrastive discourse markers. The findings demonstrated the importance of teaching discourse markers to undergraduate English major students to improve their skills of communication, translation and academic writing. The paper also highlighted the need for further research.**

***Index Terms*—discourse markers, Arabic, translation, gender**

I. Introduction

Discourse markers (*DMs*) are significant components of both spoken and written language. In the literature, they are classified as expressions that link segment 2 (S2) to the proposition in segment 1 (S1) (Fraser, 2006). In pragmatics and discourse analysis, two primary theoretical approaches to studying *DMs* are the discourse-coherence approach (e.g., Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1997) and the relevance-theory approach (e.g., Blakemore, 2002). The two approaches differ in what functions these *DMs* signal in discourse. This study focuses on the contributions of Fraser from the coherence group and Blakemore from the relevance group. They are key figures in the literature on *DMs* and represent their respective theoretical approaches.

The coherence group argues that *DMs* lack conceptual (semantic) meaning and instead convey procedural meaning, guiding the listener to understand the relationships between discourse units. For example, Fraser (2006, p. 190) asserts that *DMs* in the following examples indicate the relationship between segment 2 (S2) and segment 1 (S1):

1. "A: Harry is hurrying. B: **But** when do you think he will really get home?"
2. "Donna left late. **However**, she arrived on time."

For Fraser, *but* in (1.a) and *however* in (2) have a core meaning which can be enriched by the context, and hence both of them signal the contrastive relation that the speaker intends to convey. They do not contribute to discourse interpretation. Instead, they direct and guide the hearer to comprehend the relation between S2 and S1. As a result, they can be deleted without altering the meaning of either segments and affecting the hearer's understanding of the relation between the two segments or units of talk. The proponents of the coherence-based account are interested in discourse connectivity to maintain discourse acceptability. Therefore, they claim that *DMs* in general are used to enhance discourse interpretation through relating units of talks (Maschler & Schifrin, 2015).

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Unlike the coherence group, which asserts that *DMs* signal coherence relations between utterance and discourse units, proponents of relevance theory (*RT*) argue that *DMs* function as pragmatic devices that constrain the relevance of discourse relations. They provide clues that help the listener comprehend the intended cognitive effect with minimal processing effort, thus ensuring optimal relevance.

RT, first proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1986) and further developed by Wilson and Sperber (1993), is a framework for interpreting utterances. Simply put, *RT* posits that each utterance conveys relevant information sufficient for the listener to process it. Furthermore, utterances are ostensive—they draw the listener's attention—and inferential, as they lead to contextual effects. For instance, in example (3), the hearer can infer the interpretation in (3.b) from the pragmatic content in (3.a), since Stanley's ability to open Oscar's safe implies he already knows the combinations, which are not accessible to everyone.

3. a. "Stanley can open Oscar's safe. b. He knows the combinations." (Hobbs, 1979; cited by Blakemore, 2006, p. 252)

Blakemore introduced some arguments against the coherence group. First, the classification of *DMs* into categories by the coherence group (e.g., contrastive, inferential) assumes that all *DMs* under each category encode the same meaning (procedural). For example, classifying *but*, *yet* and *however* as encoding contrastive relation hides the implicit differences between *DMs* of the same category. That is, they can encode the coherence relationship encoded by the other members since all of them are considered to encode contrastive relations. Second, the claim that *DMs* signal coherence relations between units of discourse fails to explain why some *DMs* are used in discourse initially. For example,

4. "[The hearer has arrived home laden with parcels]
So you've spent all your money." (Blakemore, 2006, p. 247)

Blakemore argues that in example (4) there is no prior discourse and the discourse marker does not impose constraints on the relevance of the utterance, indicating no connection between the discourse segments. Third, not all *DMs* have procedural functions. Some encode conceptual meaning such as *in other words* and *in contrast*.

To summarize, it follows from the above review of coherence and relevance accounts of *DMs* that each of them aims to provide a solid theory of comprehending *DMs*. But they clearly differ in their account for discourse interpretation. Whereas the *coherence group* argues that discourse interpretation can be derived from coherence relations between topics and units in discourse, the *relevance group* argues that the recognition of discourse relations between discourse topics is unnecessary and inadequate for discourse interpretation. Instead, it is the contextual (cognitive) effect held in that discourse that is required to comprehend it. Each account can be applied to the study of *DMs,* and combining them together will strengthen the quality of any discourse interpretation. Coherence and relevance are two aspects of discourse interpretation which without a discourse would be difficult to interpret sufficiently. We only comprehend discourse that is linguistically coherent and mentally represented in our cognition. Having said that, it seems that the coherence approach should be preferred since it is possible to apply it to the study of *DMs* because their linguistic nature can be tested and retested. *Relevance* seems to be cognitively situated and that, as is the case with other cognitive processes, is hard to measure, especially in relation to the acquisition of *DMs* by EFL/ESL learners and translators. Phrases held by *RT* such as *relevant enough* and *grounded in human cognition* are not clearly tangible, and hence hard to feasibly evaluate. Furthermore, *RT* is reductionist in the sense that it cannot account for a variety of pragmatic cases such as *generalized conversational implicature*, as in *Ali walked into a farm yesterday and saw a cow*. The conversational implicature is generalized, since it is inferable without reference to a special context. The expression implies that the *farm* is not Ali's *farm*.

II. Literature Review

A surge of studies on *DMs* followed the theoretical contributions of researchers such as Schiffrin (1987), Fraser (2012, 2015), and Blakemore (2002, 2006). These studies varied in focus, ranging from investigating *DMs* in English and comparing them to other languages, including Arabic (e.g., Alhuqbani, 2013; Al Kohlani, 2010; Alsager et al., 2020; Majeed & Hmoody, 2019), to examining how EFL/ESL learners acquire and use *DMs* in their writing and speech (e.g., Alenizy et al., 2024; Kapranov, 2020; Pan, 2024). In addition, a few studies investigated the translation of English *DMs* into other languages (e. g., Irmayidh & Izreaji, 2023; Kafipour, 2016). Only the major studies that investigated the English contrastive discourse markers (*ECDMs*) in particular, and the translation of *DMs* in general, were reviewed in this study to suit its focus.

Regarding the use of *ECDMs*, numerous studies have explored how EFL/ESL learners utilize and produce *DMs* in written and spoken discourse (e.g., Aleinzy et al., 2024; Al-Khazraji, 2019; Al-Owayid, 2018; Huneety et al., 2023; Syahabuddin & Zikra, 2018), as well as how non-native English speakers evaluate *ECDMs* in specific constructions (e.g., Alhuqbani et al., in press; Warsi, 2000). Overall, the findings of these studies concluded that EFL/ESL learners face difficulty in employing *ECDMs* in their writing by misusing and overusing them. For example, Al-Owayid (2018) found that her undergraduate students lacked necessary knowledge of the different meanings and functions of *ECDMs*, which affected the quality of their essay writing. In another study, Syahabuddin and Zikra (2018) found that their undergraduate students misused and overused *ECDMs* in their essay writing, which led the researchers to conclude that the participants were incapable of using *ECDMs* due to ignorance of their functions. For instance, they misplaced certain *ECDMs* and hence misunderstood their functions. They further overused *ECDMs* by joining two of them in a single sentence. Similarly, Huneety et al. (2023) noticed that due to their low proficiency in English, Jordanian undergraduate English

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students overused a restricted variety of *DMs*, including the *ECDM but*, at the expense of others, and underused other *DMs* or did not use them at all.

Within the linguistic model (Fraser, 1999), and the translational model (Newmark, 1988), very few studies investigated how English *DMs* are translated into other languages by professional translators and would-be translators. For example, Irmayidh and Izreaji (2023) examined the translation of certain *DMs* in three English texts taken from the CNN website. The two researchers asked ten masters' students to translate these *DMs* to examine how they render the *DMs* into Arabic. Three *DMs* received the attention of the researchers: *but, rather than* and *because*. The results indicated that both English and Arabic employ *DMs* primarily for pragmatic purposes rather than conveying semantic meaning and that *DMs* in English serve various functions that can be translated into Arabic. However, the students relied on the semantic method of translation to convey the function of *DMs* accurately and achieve an appropriate level of equivalence in the texts. This study only focused on three English *DMs* and three texts, which limits its findings. Rozumko (2021) examined the polyfunctional aspect of the *DM indeed* in Polish translation. She analyzed a bilingual English-Polish corpus, claiming that the polyfunctionality of *indeed* causes a challenge to translators. Analysis of the results showed frequent omissions of *indeed*, functional mismatches, generalizations of its semantic meanings and the use of double equivalents. In another study, Kafipour (2016) examined the errors produced by Iranian translators when translating *DMs*, namely *now*, *oh*, *you know*, *you see*, *look*, and *I mean*, from English into Persian in five movie subtitles. The results revealed that omission was the most dominant error made by the translators, followed by literal translation and translating certain *DMs* to another *DM*, implying that they did not know their distinct meanings. In addition to its limited data, there was no clear statement describing the translators in the study, which leaves important questions related to their experience, training and proficiency unanswered. Furkó (2014) compiled a translation corpus to investigate the problems that face Hungarian translators when translating the English reformulation markers, *I mean* and *actually* into Hungarian. He argued that although *DMs* do not "convey conceptual meaning, their omission in the target text may cause unintended conversational implicature, and worse the absence of the naturalness of daily communications" (p. 3). Furkó further argued that translators opt for formal equivalence when translating the source texts into the target text. He suggested that translators should be aware of dynamic equivalence strategies whenever they engage in translation.

In summary, the reviewed studies focused on EFL/ESL learners to find out how they use and cope with *ECDMs* in their academic writing. The overall findings highlight certain weaknesses that revolve around the learners' misuse, overuse and/or underuse of *ECDMs* due to several factors. These include low proficiency in English and lack of class instructions on how to use them (Alhuqbani, 2009). Moreover, the studies that investigated how translators approach *DMs* in the translation of the source text into the target text showed that common problems such as omission of significant *DMs* lead to defects in the pragmatics of the translated content. Overall, it follows from the theoretical and practical review above that more studies are needed on *DMs* in general, and *ECDMs* in particular, to shed light on how they are used in discourse to effectively introduce them to EFL/ESL learners. Thus, the current study aims to contribute to this subject by focusing on Saudi undergraduate students and measuring their ability to translate and judge the acceptability of *ECDMs* in certain contexts. It also aims to provide data on whether gender and language proficiency significantly affect their translations and judgments.

III. Methodology

A. Research Problem

The majority of the studies in the literature have examined how foreign learners of English employ English *DMs* in their essay writing (e.g., Alenizy et al., 2024; Al-khazraji, 2019; Huneety et al., 2023) and how to judge the acceptability of these markers in contexts (e.g., Alhuqbani et al, in press; Warsi, 2000). Translators and would-be translators come across many of these *DMs* as they translate from one language into another. They may face a problem in selecting a target language equivalent due to the conversational function of the *DMs*, since they cannot be translated according to their lexical meaning, i.e., their translation is based on pragmatic rather than semantic analysis. Besides, languages have undergone different conventions on using *DMs*, that is, there may be considerable differences in their range, meaning and frequency of usage. Therefore, the rationale of this study is to bridge this gap in the literature through investigating how would-be Arabic-English translators use and cope with the polysemy of *DMs*, namely *ECDMs* at the utterance level.

B. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was threefold. First, it attempted to bridge the gap in the literature by examining the participants' translation of certain *ECDMs* (*but, however, nevertheless, instead, rather, in contrast, on the other hand, yet, still, on the contrary*) into Arabic; second, it examined the effect of gender and language proficiency on the participants' ability to translate and connect utterances using *ECDMs*; and finally, it attempted to outline the possible areas of difficulty in using and translating *ECDMs* into Arabic and to suggest implications for teaching and researching *ECDMs*.

C. Research Questions

The study addressed the following three research questions:

1. How accurately do Saudi male and female undergraduate students judge and translate *ECDMs* into Arabic?

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2. What is the effect of gender and language proficiency on their translation and judgment of *ECDMs*?

3. What are the areas of difficulty that face Saudi male and female undergraduate students when translating *ECDMs* into Arabic and judging them to connect utterances?

D. Research Design

This study used a mixed research design. It qualitatively focused on the judgments and translation of the *ECDMs* into Arabic by Saudi male and female undergraduate translation students. Furthermore, it attempted to quantitatively analyze the qualitative data as obtained from the participants' responses and tabulated them into statistical figures.

E. Participants

Seventy-seven Saudi male and female undergraduate students participated in this study. They were 45 male and 32 female English major students. They were drawn from two different translation classes in a Saudi university. Both groups of students had completed three or four semesters of study in their English department. They all met the entrance requirement by achieving 50% or higher in *STEP* (Standardized Test of English Proficiency).

F. Instrument

The instruments consisted of two forms. In the first one, the participants were provided with certain *ECDMs* in contexts; namely, *but, however, nevertheless, instead, rather, in contrast, on the other hand, yet, still, on the contrary* and were requested to translate these *ECDMs* into Arabic. There were six utterances in which a combination of *ECDMs* was employed to measure the students' ability to translate such a combination. Second, they were also requested to select one *ECDM* from a set of three to connect S2 with S1. The examples in these two forms (see appendix B and C) were collected from previous studies (e.g., Alhuqbani, 2009; Fraser, 2005, 2008; Warsi, 2000) and proved to be reliable and valid in these studies due to their clarity, simple wordings and directions. However, the principal researcher of this study modified some of the wordings of these utterances to suit the cultural context of this study without altering their pragmatic content and meaning.

G. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The participants were asked to undertake the two tasks on *ECDMs* in the classroom. They were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous, and therefore they were asked to read and sign a consent form (see Appendix A) prior to their participation. The principal researcher carried out the instrument in two of his translation classes in the male campus. The first co-author carried out the same instrument in her class in the female campus. Both researchers clarified the task to the participants and collected the answer sheets from them upon their completion. The data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively using the *SPSS* (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The results were analyzed by totaling the correct and incorrect responses and comparing percentages and frequencies. A t-test procedure was further used to test the effect of gender (male vs. female) on their responses to the two forms of the measurement. A correlation test was executed to see if language proficiency affected the participants' overall performance on the translation and judgment tasks.

IV. Results and Discussion

A. Translation of ECDMs, Effect of Gender and Language Proficiency

Table 1 displays the number and percentages of male and female participants' acceptable responses to the first part of the task, which was to translate certain *ECDMs* (*but, nevertheless, on the other hand, rather, instead, on the contrary, in contrast*) and the effect of gender on their performance. Note that the total number of participants was 77, of which 32 were females (41.6%) and 45 males (58.4%). As shown in Table 1, the participants scored (97%) and (91%) on utterances (1) and (2), respectively, indicating that *but* in English has *lakin* لكن or *wa'lakin* ولكن as its equivalent in Modern Standard Arabic (*MSA*) (Alhuqbani, 2013; Alsager et al., 2020). They translated the *ECDM but* into either *Lakin* or *walakin*, which are both available and acceptable in *MSA*. This indicates that many of the male and female participants know this as equivalent in both languages.

Table 1
The Participants' Translations of ECDMs and Effect of Gender

ECDMs Contexts	N*	%	F	Sig.
1. Ali left late for the party. *But* he got there on time.	75	97	6.378	.014
2. A. It's still cold in here. B. *But* I really shut the window.	71	91	2.235	.139
3. Osama stayed late. *Nevertheless*, he got home on time.	39	50	.254	.616
4. We could leave. *On the other hand*, we could stay.	41	53	.375	.542
5. Nora isn't crazy. *Rather*, she is a little tired.	9	11	3.234	.075
6. He won't take the train. *Instead*, he will take the bus.	41	53	.001	.977
7. A. The USA is a democracy. *In contrast*, Great Britain is a monarchy.	26	33	1.223	.272
8. A. Nasser is tall. B. *On the contrary*, he is really quite short.	23	30	27.056	.001**
9. Ahmed talked at length with the police. *Instead*, he should have kept quiet.	33	43	.986	,314

*N= Participants' total number of translations. ** Significant at the 0.01 level.

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However, a handful of them failed to give the right translation. The participants scored less on the other *ECDMs*, which reflects their inability to cope with their non-conceptual meaning as carrying pragmatic effects. This is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Morozova, 2020) that indicated difficulty in the translation of *DMs*, which results in omission and addition of inappropriate *DMs*. For example, the *ECDM rather* in (5) received the lowest score (9 correct responses). The majority of the participants either produced an incorrect translation or just omitted it. To examine whether gender affected the participants' translation of *ECDMs*, a t-test was conducted. As shown in Table 1 above, gender significantly affected the participants' performance in just one item, (8), at the 0.01 level, with female participants scoring better than male students. Such a limited effect on the participants' performance rules out any role for gender in the translation process of *ECDMs*. No correlation was found between language proficiency and the participants' translation of these single *ECDMs*.

B. ECDMs Combination, Effect of Gender and Language Proficiency

With regard to *ECDMs* in combination, Table 2 below shows the participants' responses and the effect of gender on their choices.

TABLE 2
THE PARTICIPANTS' TRANSLATIONS OF ECDM COMBINATIONS AND EFFECT OF GENDER

ECDMs Contexts	N*	%	F	Sig.
10. We didn't shop. *But, instead*, we went for a walk.	41	53	.624	.431
11. We could go for a walk. *But, on the other hand*, we could stay home and watch TV.	41	53	.375	.542
12. We ought to leave. *On the other hand*, *however*, there's good reason to remain.	16	20	2.264	.137
13. Nader is a great guy, at least to my way of thinking. *In contrast*, *however*, his sister is a real pain.	14	18	1.934	.168
14. **A**: The Park is right around here. **B**: *But, yet*, we can't seem to find it.	16	20	26.590	.001**
15. I don't much like that kind of rice. *However, still*, I wouldn't turn it down.	9	11	11.371	.001**

*N= Participants' total number of acceptable translations. ** Significant at the 0.01 level.

Only 41 out of 77 students (53%) translated the combinations (*but, instead* ولكن بدلا من ذلك) and (*but, on the other hand:* ولكن من ناحية أخرى) in a way that is correct or close to acceptability criterion. The remaining combinations of *ECDMs* received a lower number of responses and hence lower percentages, as shown in Table 2. Combining an *ECDM* with another *ECDM* such as *still* and *however* received the lowest score (9 responses) with a percentage of only 11%. It seems that the participants failed to provide acceptable translations for these *ECDM* combinations, because they are rarely trained in either language (Arabic and English) on how to cope with such combinations. Moreover, the existence of these *ECDM* combinations in daily communications is infrequent, which reduces students' exposure to them. Additionally, those students are still learning English as a foreign language and are generally weak in their mother tongue. To examine whether gender affected the participants' score on this translation task, a t-test was conducted. For constructions 10-13, there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups. For constructions 14-15, there was a statistically significant difference at the level <.001, with female participants performing better than male students. Since this significant difference is inconsistent, it would be premature to claim that gender does have an effect on the participants' performance in relation to *DMs*, which calls for further studies to investigate this matter. As for language proficiency, a correlation test showed a positive correlation between language proficiency and only one construction (13) at the level of 0.01 (<001). However, it is not clear why only one construction correlated with each other, but not the others. This makes it difficult to assume the effect of language proficiency on the participants' translation of *ECDM* combinations.

Many participants in this study tended to omit one of the *ECDMs* when translating them in combinations, or leave a single *ECDM* untranslated, or misuse them in their translation. Omitting one of the *DMs* is the most common error that translators and would-be translators commit (e.g., Kafipour, 2016; Rozumko, 2021). This could be due to the difficulty of translating *DMs* in general and *ECDMs* in particular. That is, they share the contrastive function as their functional class (Fraser, 1999, 2012), with slight variations in meanings that may cause difficulty to non-native speakers of English. This could also explain why many of the participants omitted a single *ECDM* or *ECDMs* in combination. Like the other *DMs*, *ECDMs* do not change the basic meaning of utterances. They only signal a specific type of relation between S2 and S1, and therefore translators and would-be translators tend to omit them in the target language, especially if those languages do not allow exact matching in terms of *DMs* (Furkó, 2014). In addition, it is obvious from the participants' responses that they were caught in what Nida (1964) referred to as *the principle of equivalent effect*. For example, in constructions with *ECDM* combinations the majority of the participants translated only one of the *ECDMs* and ruled out the other due to the difficulty in finding exact correspondences between two discourse markers in two different languages. In the same manner, it is impossible to achieve equivalence effect between two languages due to linguistic and stylistic features particular to each one.

C. Judgments of ECDMs Use, Effect of Gender and Language Proficiency

In order to find out how the participants cope with the connectivity of *ECDMs*, they were given 15 constructions, with each one containing three *ECDMs* to select from. Table 3 below summarizes the number and percentages of the participants' responses to the judgment of *ECDMs* use and the effect of gender on their responses. The statistical analysis of the results revealed variations in the participants' responses, pointing to the possibility that they do not understand the procedural meanings of these *ECDMs* in context.

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TABLE 3
THE PARTICIPANTS' JUDGMENTS OF ECDMS AND EFFECT OF GENDER

ECDMs Contexts	ECDMs	N*	%	F	Sig.
1. I can explain it orally. _____ if you insist, I will put it in writing.	*Nevertheless*	14	18	.787	.370
	Despite that	11	14		
	However	52	67		
2. I hoped he would go early. _____ he stayed till midnight.	*On the other hand*	27	35	9.579	.003
	On the contrary	24	31		
	In contrast	23	29		
3. Hassen doesn't look very happy. _____ Nada seems all right, though.	*But*	39	50	.776	.381
	However	33	43		
	Nevertheless	5	6		
4. He is poor. _____ he is satisfied with his situation.	*Nevertheless*	18	23	.681	.412
	Despite that	54	70		
	Instead	5	5		
5. We don't have to go to the party. _____ I will go.	*Instead*	12	15	.164	.687
	However	43	56		
	Nevertheless	20	26		
6. We left late. _____ we arrived home on time.	*But*	50	65	.462	.499
	However	22	28		
	Instead	4	5		
7. Khalid felt sick. _____ he still went to school.	*In contrast*	9	11	2.194	.143
	Nevertheless	18	23		
	Despite that	50	65		
8. Mahdi runs marathons. _____ Waleed sits home and sleeps.	*But*	20	26	7.759	.007
	Instead	12	15		
	In contrast	45	58		
9. Don't smoke tobacco. _____ chew this stuff.	*On the other hand*	9	11	1.587	.212
	On the contrary	17	22		
	Instead	49	63		
10. Don't stop. ___ keep going until you see the red house.	*On the other hand*	10	13	-363	.610
	On the contrary	37	48		
	However,	28	36		
11. He didn't go to his father's funeral. _____ he wasn't sorry at all.	*Instead*	10	13	878	.352
	However	23	30		
	Despite this	44	57		
12. Ali can't see very well. _____ he can hear perfectly.	*Instead*	20	26	18.07	.001**
	However	46	60		
	In contrast	11	14		
13. I didn't have enough money. ____ I took a vacation and went to Italy for two weeks.	*On the other hand*	18	23	9.538	.003
	On the contrary	12	15		
	Nevertheless	45	58		
14. The shipment of candy has arrived. _____I don't want you to touch it.	*But*	54	70	2.906	.092
	However	20	26		
	On the contrary	3	4		
15. He's good looking. _____ that isn't going to get him a job in this market.	*On the other hand*	13	17	1.599	.210
	But	53	69		
	In contrast	11	14		

*N= Participants' total number of correct judgments. **Significant at the 0.01 level.

However, it seems from the number and percentages of the responses that more than half of the participants correctly judged the most acceptable *ECDMs* in each construction. *But* appeared in five constructions (3, 6, 8, 14 and 15). More than half of the participants selected *but* as the appropriate *ECDM* in these constructions, except in (8). This seems reasonable, since *but* is the only one among the *ECDMs* that can appear in almost all constructions due to its clear sense of contrast (Fraser, 1999). However, it was selected by only (26%) of the participants in (8) as the appropriate *ECDM* due to the availability of *in contrast* which conveys in its form the contrast itself. Nevertheless, that does not mean *but* is inappropriate in this construction. It is suitable, and those who selected it were right in their choice since it fits well in the given construction. Another *ECDM* is *however*, which appeared in eight constructions (1, 3, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 14). More than half of the participants selected *however* as the most appropriate *ECDM* to connect the propositional meaning in S2 with that in S1 in four constructions (1, 3, 5, 11). When it occurred with *but* as in (3, 6, 14), more than half of the participants selected *but* as the most appropriate *ECDM*. According to Fraser (1999), *but* can fit where other *ECDMs* do not since it carries the strongest form of contradiction and contrast among the *ECDMs*. This is also consistent with the findings of previous studies that investigated *but* in other languages, including Arabic (e.g., Alhuqbani, 2013; Alsager et al., 2020). Next is the *ECDM nevertheless*, which appeared in six constructions (1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 13). More than half of the participants (58%) selected it once in (13). When it appeared with *but* and *however*, as in constructions (1, 3, 5), it was selected as the least possible *ECDM* to fit in the given constructions. As for *despite that*, it appeared in four constructions (1, 4, 7, 11). It was selected by more than half of the participants in three constructions (4, 7, 11) as the most appropriate *ECDM* in context, but not in construction (1). As an *ECDM*, *despite that* carries a sense of contrast and a consequence of prior cause. *Instead* was present in six constructions (4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12). It was selected once by more than half of the

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participants (63%) in one construction, (9). It is this construction where it fits, and therefore the participants who selected it were right in their choice. *On the other hand* appeared in five constructions (2, 9, 10, 13, 14). It was selected once by 35% of the participants as the most appropriate one in construction (2). It received less scores in the other constructions. However, it is obvious that the participants found difficulty in construction (2) in differentiating between *on the other hand*, *on the contrary*, and *in contrast* since they allocated a close number of responses to each one of them. It goes without saying that *on the contrary* fits more than the other *ECDMs* in this construction. *On the contrary* appeared in five constructions (2, 9, 10, 13, 14). It was selected once in construction (10) by almost half of the participants (48%). It was more appropriate in construction (2), but it was not selected as the most appropriate *ECDM*. Finally, *in contrast* appeared in five constructions (2, 7, 8, 12, 15). It was selected once in construction (8) by more than half of the participants (58%).

To measure the effect of gender, a t-test was employed to extract Levene's Test for Equality of Variances and the assumed statical significance. As shown in Table 3 above, gender has no significant effect on all constructions, except construction (13). There was a statically significant difference at the level of 0.01 (<001), with female students performing better than male students. It is not clear why only this construction showed significant difference for gender. As a result, it could be generally concluded that gender did not affect the participants' performance on deciding which *ECDM* was appropriate to connect S2 with S1. Finally, a correlation test indicated a positive correlation between language proficiency and two constructions (16) and (25) at the level of 0.01 (<001). It is not obvious why only these two constructions correlated with each other.

V. Conclusion and Implications

To conclude, this study attempted to answer three research questions related to the accuracy of using and translating *ECDMs* into Arabic, the effect of gender and language proficiency on the translation and use of *ECDMs* and the areas of difficulty that face Saudi English major students when translating and using *ECDMs*. The analysis of the results showed that the participants' translation varied greatly from certainty to uncertainty without any significant effect for gender, except in one item. This could be due to coincidence, since it did not represent consistent differences throughout the data. Language proficiency yielded positive correlation with just three constructions. Again, it is not possible to conclude from this limited correlation that language proficiency did affect the participants' performance on both the translation and judgment tasks. Overall, this suggests that the participants did not acquire the necessary knowledge of the core meanings of the *ECDMs*, the restrictions they impose on their occurrences between S2 and S1, and their possible occurrences as single connectors or in combination in English. As a result of this, the participants tended to have recourse to omit, misuse, overuse and underuse many of the given *ECDMs* in the two tasks.

The study stressed the need for more research related to both translation and usage of *DMs* in general and *ECDMs* in particular. First, to complete our understanding of the translation process of *DMs* by Arab translation majors, there is a need to include more subjects and constructions in further research to broaden our knowledge and provide solutions to those translation problems such as omission and incorrect selection. Second, further research is needed to investigate *DMs* in combinations and how ESL/EFL learners cope with them. The findings showed that the participants faced difficulty in translating *ECDMs* in combination, as seen in the variation of their responses. Third, more research is needed to compare Arabic and English in terms of which *DMs* can occur in combination. According to Fraser (2015), not all *DMs* opt for combination in English, and when some of these *DMs* appear in combination, the first is primary and the other is secondary. There is a need to analyze the position of these combinations in MSA and compare them to those found in English, so that they can be introduced and taught to Arab learners of English. Lastly, the accumulative evidence obtained from several studies in the literature over time point to the fact that EFL/ESL learners misuse, overuse and underuse *DMs* in general and *ECDMs* in particular. This could be due to language instructors' focus on a single semantic meaning of a *DM* in the classroom. It is highly recommended that students majoring in English teaching, linguistics or translation be given an introductory course on *DMs* in their undergraduate studies and one advanced course at graduate level to train them how to translate and use them in their academic writing. This course should further help those would-be teachers and translators understand the current theoretical approaches used to account for *DMs* in English, and how to apply them in their English teaching and/or translation career.

Appendix A. Consent Form

Dear student,

This is a small-scale study of your knowledge of English contrastive discourse markers (ECDMs). Your participation is anonymous and voluntary. If you agree to participate, please select (Yes) or (No) if you disagree to participate. The survey consists of two parts. Part One asks you to translate the ECDMs in bold into their equivalent in Modern Standard Arabic. Part Two asks you to connect the two utterances with the most suitable *ECDM* given in the list.

Thank you. Yes. _____ No. ____

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APPENDIX B. TRANSLATION OF CONTRASTIVE DISCOURSE MARKERS

Translate the following contrastive discourse markers in **BOLD** into their equivalent in Arabic. Example: Nader was sick. **So**, he didn't come. لذلك

S1	S2	ECDM translation
1. Ali left late for the party.	**But** he got there on time.	
2. A. It's still cold in here.	B. **But** I really shut the window.	
3. Osama stayed late.	**Nevertheless**, he got home on time.	
4. We could leave.	**On the other hand**, we could stay.	
5. Nora isn't crazy.	**Rather**, she is a little tired.	
6. He won't take the train.	**Instead**, he will take the bus.	
7. A. The USA is a democracy.	**In contrast**, Great Britain is a monarchy.	
8. A. Nasser is tall.	B. **On the contrary**, he is really quite short.	
9. Ahmed talked at length with the police.	**Instead**, he should have kept quiet.	
10. We didn't shop.	**But**, **instead**, we went for a walk.	
11. We could go for a walk.	**But**, **on the other hand**, we could stay home and watch TV.	
12. We ought to leave.	**On the other hand**, **however**, there's good reason to remain.	
13. Nader is a great guy, at least to my way of thinking.	**In contrast**, **however**, his sister is a real pain.	
14. A: The park is right around here.	B: **But**, **yet**, we can't seem to find it.	
15. I don't much like that kind of rice.	**However**, **still**, I wouldn't turn it down.	

APPENDIX C. COMBINING UTTERANCES USING CONTRASTIVE DISCOURSE MARKERS

Choose the right contrastive discourse markers by putting (×) in front of the suitable answer. Look at the following examples.

S1	CDM	S2
John missed the exam.	__×__ Therefore, ____ Instead, ____However,	he didn't pass the course.

Connect the following utterances with the most suitable ECDM.

S1	ECDM	S2
1. I can explain it orally.	___ Nevertheless, ___ Despite that, ___ However,	if you insist, I will put it in writing.
2. I hoped he would go early.	___ On the other hand, ___ On the contrary, ___ In contrast,	he stayed till midnight.
3. Hassen doesn't look very happy	___ But ___ However, ___ Nevertheless	Nada seems all right, though.
4. He is poor.	___ Nevertheless, ___ Despite that, ___ Instead,	he is satisfied with his situation.
5. We don't have to go to the party.	___ Instead, ___ However, ___ Nevertheless,	I will go.
6. We left late.	___ But ___ However, ___ Instead,	we arrived home on time.
7. Khalid felt sick.	__ In contrast, ___ Nevertheless, ___ Despite that,	he still went to school.
8. Mahdi runs marathons.	___ But ___ Instead, ___ In contrast,	Waleed sits home and sleeps.
9. Don't smoke tobacco.	___ On the other hand, ___ On the contrary, ___ Instead,	chew this stuff.
10. Don't stop.	__ On the other hand, ___ On the contrary, ___ However,	keep going until you see the red house.

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11. He didn't go to his father's funeral.	___ Instead, ___ However, ___ Despite this,	he wasn't sorry at all.
12. Ali can't see very well.	___ Instead, ___ However, ___ In contrast,	he can hear perfectly.
13. I didn't have enough money.	___ On the other hand, __ On the contrary, ___ Nevertheless,	I took a vacation and went to Italy for two weeks.
14. The shipment of candy has arrived	___ But ___ However, ___ On the contrary,	I don't want you to touch it.
15. He's good looking.	___ On the other hand, ___ But ___ In contrast,	that isn't going to get him a job in this market.

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Mohammed Nasser Alhuqbani (https://orcid.org/0009-0005-5649-821X) is a professor of Applied Linguistics. He previously served as the founder and head of the Department of Languages and Translation (2007-2016) at King Fahd Security College, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. His current job is a faculty member in the Department of English, the College of Languages and Translation at Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. He received his BS in English language and Literature in 1994 from the College of Education, King Faisal University in Alhasa, Saudi Arabia, his MA in Applied Linguistics in 1999 from Indian State University in Terre Haute, Indiana, USA, and his Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics in 2005 from Boston University, Massachusetts, USA. Dr. Alhuqbani has published five books and several scholarly papers in local and international journals. He actively participated in more than 35 local and international conferences during his career journey. His current research interests include, but are not limited to, ESP, discourse analysis, forensic linguistics, bilingualism, and language program planning and evaluation. Professor Alhuqbani was the academic advisee (1999-2004) of the late professor Bruce Fraser of Boston University. E-Mail: alhuqbani@yahoo.com

Kholood Salem Alenizy (https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5497-5049**)** holds a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics from Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University. She also completed her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Translation. Dr. Alenizy worked as a translator at King Fahd Medical City from 2006 to 2008. She is an assistant professor of Applied Linguistics and a faculty member in the Department of English and Literature at the College of Languages and Translation in Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. E-Mail: kalAnzi@imamu.edu.sa

Ameerah Abdulaziz Al-Thunayyan (https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1216-4948) is an assistant professor of Translation Studies, with a particular interest in cultural translation, creativity in translation and training aspiring translators. With an experience over 12 years in teaching translation, mentoring students and equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge in translation. Dr. Al-Thunayyan is interested in exploring and understanding the translation process which goes beyond the mere linguistic transfer. She held several leadership positions, including Vice Dean of King Abdullah Institute for Translation and Arabization, and currently the Head of Transition Department in the College of Languages and Translation at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU). She is also a member of the Saudi Translation Association (SATA). E-Mail: AAAlthnaiyan@imamu.edu.sa

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