

Framing public debate with concessive adverbs.
Yet, however and *nevertheless* in the Brexit
debate: a corpus-based, enunciative study.

Présentation Atelier ALAES 5 juin 2021

Yet, however, and nevertheless...

Plan

- Introduction
- Modelisation and case studies: *yet, however, nevertheless*
- Concluding discussion

Introduction

Concessive markers: *yet*

"Get Brexit done" was the election slogan, **yet** the government focuses its attention, and the country's, on Christmas, when it's crucial to get a deal with the EU. (G20201126)

Introduction

Concessive markers: *however*

"Like many organisations, we face an uncertain economic landscape in the wake of Brexit and Covid-19. **However**, we can't allow that to prevent us tackling climate change, which is now recognised as a global issue which requires immediate action and investment," Clark added. (G20201018)

Introduction

Concessive markers: *nevertheless*

Another sticking point is the French insistence on a permanent or long-term deal rather than annual talks to set hauls as the UK government wants.

Nevertheless, Mr Macron is showing signs of moving towards an agreement. (T20201025)

Introduction

Concessive markers

p: "Get Brexit done" was the election slogan,

concessive marker: yet

q: the government focuses its attention, and the country's, on Christmas [...]. (G20201126)

Introduction

Concessive markers

"Get Brexit done" was the election slogan,

yet / however / nevertheless

the government focuses its attention, and the country's, on Christmas [...]

Introduction

Near equivalence between markers.

Concessive. Clause-initial.

Aim: to describe the differences in meaning and use between the three markers, in formal and practical terms.

Introduction

The differences between the three markers are closely linked to their properties with respect to their collocational profile, position and distribution.

Introduction

In an earlier, so far unpublished study, I looked at 1000 examples of each connective, extracted randomly from the BNC and analysed in terms of position, collocations and distribution by text-type.

Introduction

Examples in the present study come from two corpora, extracted using the Europresse database search engine, and including articles referring to Brexit, in British daily broadsheets, *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*, published in the last three months of 2020, i.e. before the final date for British withdrawal from the EU.

Introduction

html boilerplate was removed from each corpus.

Although the time-window is fairly narrow and the sources limited to two newspapers, the corpora are nonetheless fairly consequential.

Guardian: 1,438,820 tokens, 37790 types.

Telegraph: 2,643,223 tokens, 43051 types.

Introduction

The hypothesis is that the divisive nature of the Brexit process might provide an interesting background to explore the expression of concessive relationships.

Introduction

Modelisation and case studies:

- *yet*
- *however*
- *nevertheless*

yet

Yet is the most polyvalent of the three connectives and hence the hardest to extract from a corpus.

not yet, as yet, yet again, yet more, yet to V, may yet, best yet...

yet

This polyvalence means that the positional factor is paramount in interpretation.

Concessive connective *yet* is always in pivot position between the related clauses, either sentence initial “*p. yet q*” or sentence medial “*p yet q*”. In both positions it frequently collocates with *and*.

yet

p (punct) (and) *yet* *q*

In addition to these positional properties, *yet* collocates with adverbs of incongruity,

e.g. *yet somehow* / *strangely* / *oddly*, etc.

yet

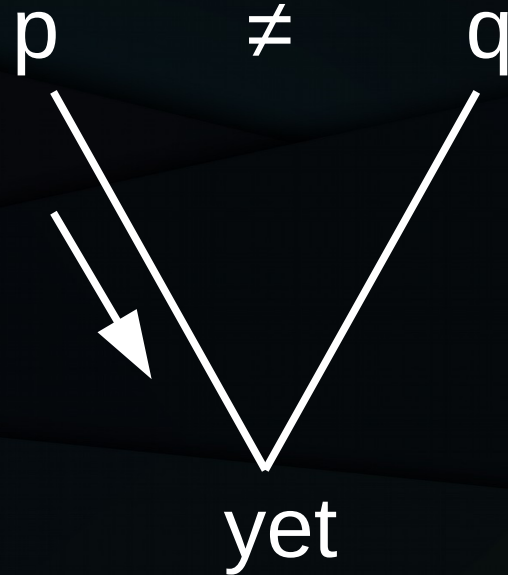
Description:

In concessive connective uses, I posit that *yet* reopens access to q in contradiction with a preconstructed occurrence of p .

In this way *yet* presents the coexistence of counter-oriented propositions p and q as an antagonistic opposition that requires resolution.

yet

The assertion of p would normally mean non- q . In p *yet* q , *yet* tells us that q remains accessible.



yet

The paradox of entertaining counter-oriented propositions can be resolved in various ways.

yet

Past promises versus present reality, i.e. a difference both temporal and subjective.

"Get Brexit done" **was** the election **slogan**, yet the government **focuses** its **attention**, and the country's, on Christmas, when it's crucial to get a deal with the EU. (G20201126)

yet

Subjective opposition with the seeds of refutation.

Senior Conservative MPs have signalled they could accept maintaining current EU standards as the price of a trade deal, as a minister said the issue remained the "most difficult" part of the negotiations. **Yet sources in the EU have accused** Britain of throwing late night talks into disarray with a "last-minute demand" on fishing boats.

(T20201208)

Some inherently paradoxical property

For an island nation, Britain's relationship with its ports seems **oddly ambivalent**. About 95pc of UK trade in goods moves by sea. Every year the nation's ports handle 500m tonnes of freight and 60m passengers. **Yet**, as any recent visitor to Dover can attest, our ports are often viewed as little more than an afterthought – neglected and ignored.
(T20201210)

Some inherently paradoxical property... note how the text continues.

[...] **Yet**, as any recent visitor to Dover can attest, our ports are often viewed as little more than an afterthought – neglected and ignored. **Either way**, years of under-investment are coming home to roost for Britain's ports at just the wrong time-as Britain prepares to launch itself into a bold new future outside the EU despite scant preparation for what this will physically entail.

(T20201210)

Some inherently paradoxical property. This is especially the case with non-connective uses of *yet*, i.e. between adjectives.

The good news is that Mr Johnson, even shorn of Mr Cummings, knows this perfectly well. He must reassert his own control and roll out a **radical, reformist, yet conservative** agenda. (T20201114)

yet

p yet q ? in the interrogative form may serve to undermine an opposing line of argument. This is not possible with the other connectives under consideration.

According to every representative of the government who has honked on to the airwaves over the past fortnight, the EU has not been negotiating "seriously". **And yet**, has a country ever acted less seriously than the UK has spent the past four years doing over Brexit ? (G20201020)

yet

p yet q ? may serve to undermine an opposing line of argument.

For all Bower's eagerness to put a kind gloss on Johnson's actions, he doesn't flinch from the man's record. **And yet, isn't that what leadership is about?** (G20201013)

yet

... sometimes in association with the repetition of *and yet*.

And there is no guarantee that, even had enough Labour MPs supported the May deal to get it over the line, that would have enabled the creation of the kind of stable parliamentary majority to get Brexit done (to coin a phrase) along these lines.

And yet and yet, what was the alternative? What we are left with is a Brexit that pleases next to no one. (G20201206)

however

However is less polyvalent than *yet*, functioning as a concessive connective, more rarely as an indefinite degree adverb, and sometimes, erroneously for “How ever...?”, as an interrogative.

however

Indefinite degree adverb

However hard he bluffs and fibs to disguise the inconvenient truth, Johnson will sign a deal that agrees to align with EU standards on working rights, animal welfare, the environment and much else. (G20201130)

however

Concessive connective

"Like many organisations, we face an uncertain economic landscape in the wake of Brexit and Covid-19. **However**, we can't allow that to prevent us tackling climate change, which is now recognised as a global issue which requires immediate action and investment," Clark added. (G20201018)

however

Description:

Unlike *yet* which presents a polar alternative, an incompatible association, *however*, in *p however q*, recognises the validity of *p*, and maintains *q* as a non-typical instance.

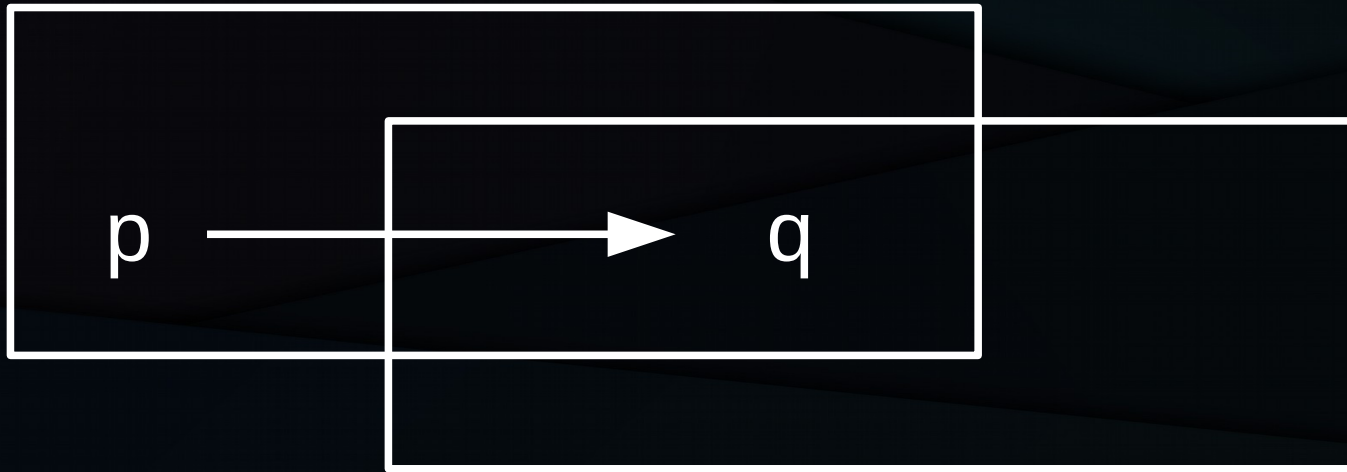
however

[...] we face an uncertain economic landscape in the wake of Brexit and Covid-19. **However**, we can't allow that to prevent us tackling climate change [...] which requires immediate action and investment," Clark added. (G20201018)

A non-typical instance of investment in “an uncertain economic landscape”.

however

... uncertain economic landscape



A boundary area which accommodates both p and q while recognising that these are non-typical instances.

... immediate action and investment

however

Both sides are **still struggling to bridge fundamental fault lines** in talks concerning EU resistance to losing fishing rights in British waters and state aid. **However, trade talks were temporarily suspended** on 19 November after the news that a negotiator from Michel Barnier's team had tested positive for Covid-19. (T20201127)

however

however is more mobile than *yet*. In the BNC corpus slightly less than half of the thousand occurrences were non-initial.

Generally these are post-initial cases serving to topicalise some element which is the source of the exception highlighted by *however*.

however

Post-initial *however* topicalises an exceptional case
The deal is expected to be voted through on
Tuesday as Brexit hardliners are expected to support
it, and Keir Starmer has also ordered Labour MPs to
back it. **The DUP, however, confirmed its MPs will
vote against the deal** because it did "not undo the
detrimental aspects of the Protocol". (T20201228)

however

Post-initial *however* topicalises an exceptional case

A joint intelligence cell (JIC) opened in July has helped secure around 140 arrests and prevent about 1,100 crossings, according to the Home Office. **The French, however**, are still resisting British pleas to take back migrants caught anywhere in the Channel or on UK soil, or to mount operations at sea to intercept and return the illegal small boats to France, which the UK believes would be legal under maritime law. (T20201128)

nevertheless

Nevertheless or *nonetheless* (which I here consider a variant form) are unambiguously concessive connectives. Their extraction from a corpus is therefore unproblematical.

nevertheless

[...] Another sticking point is the French insistence on a permanent or long-term deal rather than annual talks to set hauls as the UK government wants. **Nevertheless**, Mr Macron is showing signs of moving towards an agreement. (T20201025)

nevertheless

Description:

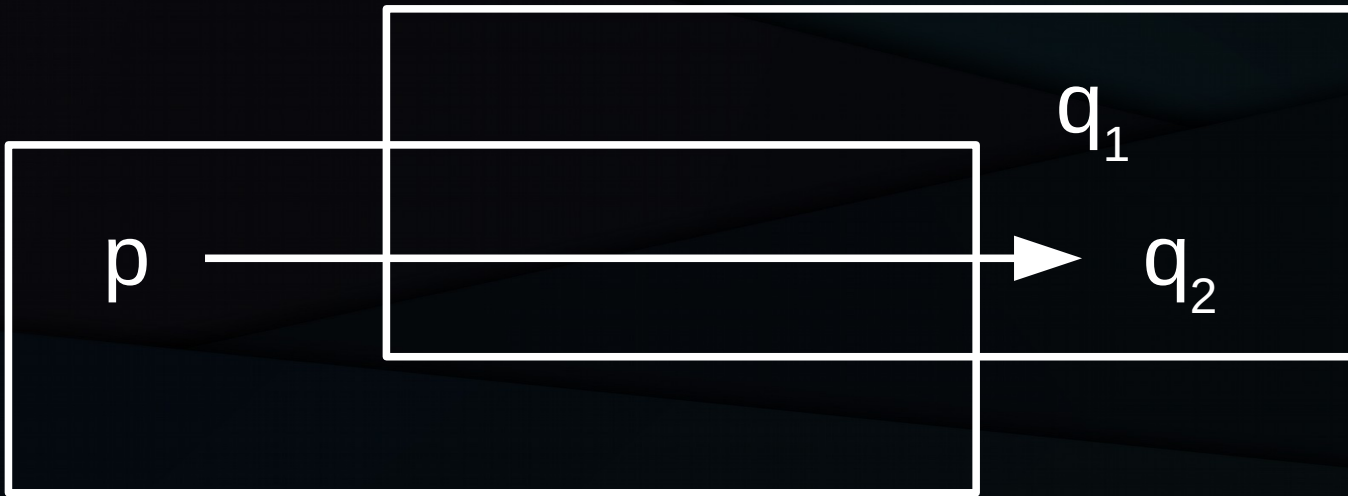
Unlike *yet* and *however*, which can be modelled in terms of p and q , *nevertheless* requires us to take into account a previous occurrence of q , to which the speaker returns, in the face of a potentially counter-oriented proposition, p .

nevertheless

At an EU summit last week, **Mr Macron signalled some willingness** to negotiate, saying he was looking for “a good compromise” on fisheries. But the details could prove tricky to agree. Any reduction in catches that Britain is likely to offer could be **hard for Mr Macron to swallow**. Another sticking point is the French insistence on a permanent or long-term deal rather than annual talks to set hauls as the UK government wants. **Nevertheless, Mr Macron is showing signs of moving towards an agreement.** (T20201025)

nevertheless

q_1 : willingness to negotiate



p : [...] hard for Mr Macron to swallow

q_2 : signs of moving towards an agreement

nevertheless

The prime minister outlined our **clear commitment to trying to reach an agreement**, underlining that a deal was better for both sides. He also underlined that, **nevertheless**, the **UK was prepared to end the transition period on Australia-style terms** if an agreement could not be found. (G20201025)

nevertheless

In the previous example, q_1 is not explicit, but the passage quoted is from the day's live-feed and follows a tough interview between the EU's negotiator Charles Michel and the British PM, suggesting a move towards no-deal.

nevertheless

Previous context...

EU tells UK to 'put its cards on table' in trade talks

This is what Charles Michel, president of the European council, tweeted after his call with Boris Johnson earlier. (See 5.55pm.)

Charles Michel (@eucopresident)

The EU prefers a deal, but not at any cost.

Time for the UK to put its cards on the table. #EUCO #15-16October (G20201007)

Concluding discussion

In the course of this presentation I have tried to describe *yet*, *however* and *nevertheless* in enunciative terms, looking in particular at how they construct occurrences of p and q .

Concluding discussion

yet constructs p and q as mutually exclusive notions, in such a way that their coexistence is presented as a paradox.

This can be exploited to undermine the arguments of the speakers of either p or q , or to highlight some inherent paradox.

Concluding discussion

however recognises the validity of p and constructs q accordingly as a non-typical case, which might be represented as a position on the boundary area of a notional domain.

Concluding discussion

nevertheless presents q as a second occurrence of a notion, identified with some previous occurrence, and maintained in the face of a potentially counter-oriented proposition p .

In this way p is presented as irrelevant, in the circumstance, to q .

Concluding discussion

While all three markers can be qualified as concessives, they frame the debate very differently.

- *yet* polarises and demands clarification.
- *however* rationalises and accepts nuances.
- *nevertheless* sidelines p in reaffirming q .

Concluding discussion

In this light, we might look again at the purported synonymy of our earlier opposition.

Concluding discussion

"Get Brexit done" was the election slogan, **yet / however / nevertheless** the government focuses its attention, and the country's, on Christmas [...]

yet : denunciation of diversion tactics

however : a non-typical way of getting Brexit done

nevertheless : affirmation of singlemindedness

Selective bibliography

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