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The Concessive Conjunction *However*

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Abstract *But* is a conjunction, and it cannot be placed except at the beginning of a sentence. But *however*, the concessive conjunction similar in meaning to *but*, is an adverb, and it can be placed anywhere: at the beginning, in the midst, or at the end, of a sentence. Although the placement of *however* largely depends upon contrast or emphasis, it would not be so troublesome for non-native speakers of English to place it at the beginning, or at the end, of a sentence. The most difficult part for them will be where in a sentence to place *however* because its placement is affected by subjects, auxiliaries, verbs, etc. When native speakers place *however* within a sentence, they may possibly be doing so, based on certain tendencies non-native speakers are not aware of. And it is the objective of this article to investigate those tendencies, if any. The results of my survey attained from a large number of examples suggest that while there are some cases in which there may be not so clear-cut tendencies, there are certainly a number of cases in which tendencies are obviously to be seen.

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1. Introduction

Unlike *but*, which is a conjunction and therefore cannot be placed except at the beginning of a sentence, *however*, which is similar in meaning to *but*, is an adverb, and it can be placed freely. It can be used at the beginning of a sentence (1 a), before the subject of a sentence (1 b), within a sentence (1 c), or at the end of a sentence (1 d):

- (1) a. For example, the Hungarians also collaborated in such horror and atrocities. However, far greater practitioners of anti-Semitism were the Slovaks.

(*Washington Post*, Dec. 28, 1997)

(*Washington Post on CD-ROM*)

- b. World Airlines Inc. is one of those small airlines that once was the stuff of legends. Of late, however, World seems to have disappeared from most radar screens.

(*WP*, Dec. 29, 1997) (ibid.)

- c. There was no marriage penalty. There was, however, a penalty for having all a couple's income come from one breadwinner instead of being split between two. (ibid.)

- d. To scratch off all the items on her Christmas gift list, Stacey Sharpe visited dozens of shops over the last three weeks,

comparing products and searching for the lowest prices.

Sharpe wasn't braving the holiday crowds at the area's shopping centers, however. Munching Ho-Hos, swigging Mountain Dew and wearing a sweat suit, she strolled the stores from the comfort of her Fairfax apartment, using her Internet-connected computer to buy compact discs and a coffee-table book for her mother.... (*WP*, Dec. 24, 1997) (ibid.)

When placed at the beginning of a sentence, *however* contrasts what follows it with what precedes it, and when used within, or at the end of, a sentence, *however* adds a degree of emphasis to whatever precedes it (Copperud 1980: 186, Kahn 1985: 274, Burchfield 1996: 367, Garner 1998: 343, etc.). In (1 a), where *However* comes between the first and the second sentences, the second sentence is contrasted with the first one. In this case, the contrast, or comparison, is made clearer by the use of the comparative, *far greater*, in the second sentence. In (1 b), *Of late*, which precedes *however*, is used in contrast with the word *once* in the first sentence. In (1 c), *There was*, which precedes *however*, is contrastingly used with *There was no* in the previous sentence. In (1 d), emphasis is laid on the whole of the sentence

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that precedes *however*, and that will be felt all the more by the sentence that follows *however*.

Thus, the point of importance concerning *however* is where to place this connective. Just placing it at the start of a sentence or at the end of a sentence would pose no problem at all for non-native speakers of English. The most difficult part for non-native speakers will be where within a sentence to place *however*. For example, in (2 a - c) and (3 a - c), which would native speakers of English tend to choose?

- (2) a. If, however, it rains tomorrow, the game will be postponed.
 b. If it, however, rains tomorrow, the game will be postponed.
 c. If it rains, however, tomorrow, the game will be postponed.
- (3) a. It, however, is obvious that he is wrong.
 b. It is, however, obvious that he is wrong.
 c. It is obvious, however, that he is wrong.

Normally, *however* is placed immediately after the words or phrases that are meant to be contrasted or emphasized. Kahn (1985 : 274) says, "*however* is ideally positioned immediately after the word or phrase that is being held up for contrast." But it would be difficult to set down a set of rules as to the placement of *however*. For example, Gilman (1989:515) says, "The only point that needs to be made is that there is no absolute rule for the placement of *however*; each writer must decide each instance on its own merits, and place the word where it best accomplishes its purpose." Burchfield (1996 : 367) says, "it is a matter of judgement, not of exceptionless rules, where the word (i.e. *however*) is to be placed." Thus, with respect to the placement of *however*, the problem of contrast or emphasis is involved, but apart from that, even though a set of rules cannot be established in the way *however* is used, do native speakers not demonstrate a general tendency when using *however*? When native speakers place *however* within a sentence, do they not tend to place it, wittingly or unwittingly, in a certain position more often than in other positions? Hence, it is the objective of this study to clarify whether they show that kind of tendency or not.

2. The Placement of *However* within a Sentence

Of the three positions, at the beginning of a sentence, within a sentence, and at the end of a sentence, it seems to be within a sentence that *however* is

placed most often, followed by at the beginning, and at the end of a sentence. Of the first 300 examples out of more than 10,000 examples of *however* meaning "nevertheless" in the *Washington Post on CD-ROM* (January-December 1997), 160 examples (53.33%) are to be seen within a sentence, 91 examples (30.33%) at the beginning of a sentence, and 49 examples (16.33%) at the end, of a sentence. The examples of *however* placed in initial or final position are not my concern here. My concern here is where within a sentence native speakers tend to place *however*, because it is the most difficult part for foreigners and to examine it would be a big help for them. Hence more than 2,000 examples of *however* in the *COBUILD on CD-ROM* were examined, and all of the examples referred to or quoted in the following are from this CD-ROM.

2.1 Conditionals

In *if*-clauses, *however* is placed immediately after *if*. In all of the 11 examples that have *if*, *however* comes immediately after *if*, and in no other places.

- (4) a. If, however, you do not wish to take part in any of this teaching work it is open to you to refuse....
 b. If, however, you have not taken advantage of this exciting savings opportunity, there is still time to do so.
 c. If, however, you wish to keep costs lower, choose flowers that are in season at the time of your wedding.

The reason for *however* being placed immediately after *if* may be that by doing so the meaning of supposition is intensified.

2.2 Emphasis

2.2.1 Cleft sentences

In cleft sentences, as is to be expected, *however* comes immediately after the words or phrases that are meant to be emphasized (5 a, b), or when *not* and *until* are included, *however* seems to come after these words or after *not* (6 a, b). There are altogether three instances like (5 a, b) and two instances like (6 a, b).

- (5) a. It was on Stones tours, however, that snobbery ran wild.
 b. It was she, however, who asked the most penetrating and informed questions.
- (6) a. It wasn't until 1975, however, after he's graduated from university back in Japan, that Hoshino followed up on his passion....
 b. It was not, however, until late in the

century, that the work of William Pengelly and Boyd Dawkins and their colleagues established that....

2.2.2 Pseudo-cleft sentences

In pseudo-cleft sentences, in most cases *however* comes between *what*-clauses and *be* like (7 a, b). There are nine instances of pseudo-cleft sentences altogether, and in eight instances of them *however* comes between *what*-clauses and *be*.

- (7) a. What surprises me, however, is that I enjoy it.
- b. What is increasingly peculiar to this country, however, is the complacency with which the government treats the matter.

When *however* comes immediately after *what*-clauses, these clauses are stressed. That may be why *however* comes immediately after *what*-clauses, and not after *be*.

2.2.3 Do for emphasis

When *do* is used for emphasis, mostly *however* comes between *do* and the main verb (8 a, b). There are in all 18 instances of this kind. But when the main verbs are followed by *that*-clauses, *however* comes after the main verbs (9 a, b). There are four instances of this kind.

- (8) a. It does, however, examine drama and performance outside the bounds of conventional literary studies.
- b. The case does, however, beg a larger question regarding the use of agro-chemicals near rivers.
- (9) a. He does reveal, however, in rather vague fashion that he uses Nikon and Olympus gear....
- b. It did suggest, however, that she might need longer to grieve for her lost baby.

2.3 Modals + main verbs

In modals + main verbs, *however* seems to come before the modals (10 a, b) a little more often than between modals and the main verbs (11). There are 35 instances in which *however* comes before the modals, and 22 instances in which it comes between modals and the main verbs. If there are two auxiliaries before the main verb, *however* seems to come immediately after the first auxiliary (12).

- (10) a. Some, however, will go to the Anglophone Caribbean.
- b. The most professional restaurateurs/hoteli-ers of all, however, must be Paul and Kay Henderson.

(11) We can, however, sense the man's patient and forging character.

(12) An offer may, however, be made by a Canadian who watched Florida yesterday.

2.4 Negation

When *not* is used, *however* is placed in three ways: before the auxiliaries or before primary verbs + *not* (13 a), immediately after *not* (13 b), and immediately before *not* (13 c).

- (13) a. The works, however, are not abstract.
- b. That may not, however, be enough.
- c. The news is, however, not so bright.

Examples like (13 a) are used almost as often as those like (13 b). In the case of (13 a) there are 19 examples, whereas in the case of (13 b) there are 17 examples. In the case of (13 c) there are only five examples. In (13 a) the negative *not* is not held up for contrast, whereas in (13 b) it is. In (13 c) the degree of negation will be weakened.

2.5 The passive

In the passive, *however* can be placed in three ways: immediately before the passive form (14 a), between *be* and the past participle (14 b), and after the passive form (14 c).

- (14) a. Particular attention, however, is paid to child sexual abuse.
- b. Options are, however, constrained by the structural realities of the system.
- c. The party is fully booked, however, with not even room on the waiting list.

Examples like (14 a) are used as often as those like (14 b). There are eight instances in each of these cases. As regards (14 c), there are three instances.

2.6 Perfect forms

2.6.1 The present perfect

In the present perfect, *however* comes before the present perfect (15 a) almost as often as between *have* and the past participle (15 b). There are nine instances in which *however* comes immediately before the present perfect, and seven instances between *have* and the past participle. There is one example in which *however* comes after the perfect form (15 c), and another example where the perfect form is immediately followed by a *that*-clause (15 d).

- (15) a. Obscenity laws, however, have continued to be used against gay men.
- b. He has, however, denied any role in the World Trade Centre bombing.
- c. Some have been moved, however, to

accommodate a traffic collision avoidance system, mandatory in US skies from next year.

- d. I've discovered, however, that people bringing up children are absolute disasters to cater for.

2.6.2 The past perfect

In the past perfect, the trend is similar to that in the present perfect. That is, there are four instances in which *however* comes before the past perfect (16 a), and three instances in which it comes between *had* and the past participle (16 b).

(16) a. Lind, however, had had other sources of comfort and satisfaction.

- b. He had, however, devised a code, which involved....

2.7 Personal pronouns

When such personal pronouns as *I, you, he, she, it, we, they* are followed by *be*, *however* comes immediately after *be*:

(17) a. I was, however, extremely surprised at the omission of....

- b. You are, however, within your rights to cut away tree roots....

c. We are, however, apologists for peace.

d. He was, however, prepared to concede that both the horses and the sea were very lifelike.

e. They are, however, reluctant to reserve for a large parties on a Friday.

f. It was, however, only a suggestion.

When the personal pronouns are used as subject, in the majority of instances *however* does not come immediately after these personal pronouns. (18 a, b) are the only examples where *however* comes immediately after the personal pronouns:

(18) a. She however, realised that if she attempted this kind of acrobatics on the ledge....

- b. They, however, have yet to view it seriously.

Normally personal pronouns are not stressed per se and this may be why usually *however* is not immediately followed by them.

When personal pronouns are followed by modals or auxiliaries or the negative *not*, generally *however* does not come immediately after the personal pronouns. In cases like these, *however* is postposed:

(19) a. I have no doubt, however, that if the Communist Party lost three elections in a row....

b. You may however return goods or tickets.¹¹

c. She does not, however, see a market for many more....

d. We will not, however, fall into the trap of pedagogic imperialism.

e. ...they will, however, attempt to see the product as is....

2.8 Preparatory *it*

When the preparatory subject *it* and the postponed *to*-clauses or *that*-(or *if*-)clauses are used, usually *however* comes immediately after *be* in the case of *to*-clauses (20 a, b), or immediately before *that* in the case of *that*-clauses (21 a, b). There are also a small number of cases in which *however* comes after *should* or *be* (22 a, b). Three examples of *to*-clauses are used like (20 a, b) and nine examples of *that*-clauses are used like (21 a, b) and there are two instances in which *however* is used like (22 a, b). No examples are found in which it is immediately followed by *however*.

(20) a. It is, however, difficult to separate the two.

- b. It is, however, essential to give careful consideration to such issues as cultural adaptation....

(21) a. It is probable, however, that this union treaty will clearly discourage member states from ruining up one-sided budget deficits....

- b. It cannot be denied however that the examples of good sportsmanship quoted in the chapter shine out like a beacon.

(22) a. It should, however, be remembered that most of these collaborators were acting under dress or out of fear....

- b. It is, however, unclear if the work was commissioned for the church or was placed there at a later date.

It would be because adjectives or verbs tend to be contrasted more easily that there are more instances like (21 a, b).

2.9 The progressive

In progressive forms, *however* comes before *be + -ing* forms (23 a) almost as often as between the two (23 b). In the former case there are five instances, whereas in the latter case three instances.

(23) a. Their wee Kevin, however, was taking some time to become Doncaster's future soccer superstar.

- b. It is, however, reluctantly contributing to the mythology of the loch.

2.10 *There*-structures

There are 20 instances of *there*-structures, and in all of these instances *however* comes immediately after *be* (24a), after the main verb (24b), or after the auxiliary (24c), and not immediately after *there*.

- (24) a. There is, however, absolutely no room for complacency.
 b. There remains, however, one profound difference between the early 1930s and today.
 c. There have, however, been 32 cases around the world where health workers have been infected by patients.

There is merely a grammatical subject and because of it *however* does not seem to come immediately after *there*.

2.11 Verbs

2.11.1 *Be*

When the subjects are nouns or noun phrases and only *be* is used as a verb, in most cases *however* comes immediately before *be* (25 a - c). There are also a few cases in which *however* comes after *be* (26 a, b). All in all, there are 55 instances in which *however* comes immediately before *be*, compared with nine instances in which it comes after *be*.

- (25) a. My mail, however, was above such things.
 b. His comeback, however, was nothing if not spectacular.
 c. The Egyptian dream, however, is more powerful and enduring.
 (26) a. The next stage is, however, uncertain.
 b. The process was, however, gradual and not without setbacks.

Be is but a copular verb in this case and cannot be stressed on its own, which may explain why it is not immediately followed by *however*.

2.11.2 Verbs other than *be*

When the subjects are nouns or noun phrases, and when verbs other than *be* are used, *however* comes immediately before those verbs most of the time (27 a - c) rather than after them (28 a, b). In 61 instances *however* comes immediately before those verbs, and in seven instances after them.

- (27) a. Bravery, however, has quite definite views on his role.
 b. The real test, however, comes when you wake her up next morning.
 c. Webb, however, retains the armband.
 (28) a. Sangster lived, however, to rue their

careless and uncharacteristic generosity.

- b. Debate continues, however, on how fast it will progress....

2.11.3 *Be* + *that*-(or *what*-)clauses

When *be* is followed by *that*-(or *what*-)clauses, *however* comes not immediately before them, but immediately before *be* (29 a - c). There are in all eight instances like this.

- (29) a. The most interesting appointment, however, is that of the man who does not feature : Brian Wilson.
 b. His most telling decision, however, was that none of the exhibits could be loaned or sold.
 c. The real significance of that list of setbacks, however, is what it omits.

Be is a copula, which may be why ordinarily *however* does not come immediately after *be*.

2.11.4 Transitive verbs + *that*-(or *what*-)clauses

When transitive verbs are followed by *that*-(or *what*-)clauses, generally *however* comes immediately before them (30 a - c) rather than before the transitive verbs (31 a, b). There are 30 instances in which *however* comes immediately before *that*-(or *what*-)clauses, as against eight instances in which *however* comes before the transitive verbs.

- (30) a. Karen believes, however, that attitudes are changing towards the female side of football.
 b. Both sides insisted, however, that the talks would go on.
 c. We don't know, however, what passed between them in the morning.
 (31) a. Analysis, however, shows that the springs of love are frozen and their independence is hollow.
 b. Japanese officials, however, made clear that Tokyo does not share Mr Dunkel's optimism....

3. Conclusion

It will be evident from the discussion above that when native speakers place *however* within a sentence, there are times when they show not so clear-cut tendencies and there are also times when they do show almost definite tendencies. They seem to show not so clear tendencies in the following : modals + main verbs, negation, the passive, the present and the past perfect and the progressive. On the other hand, native speakers seem to show relatively clear

tendencies when they use *however* in connection with the following : *if*-clauses, emphasis (cleft sentences, pseudo-cleft sentences, and *do* emphasis), personal pronouns + *be*, preparatory *it*, *there*-structures, nouns or noun phrases + verbs, transitive verbs + *that*-(*what*-)clauses, and *be* + *that*-clauses.

NOTE

1 In (19 b), and in (21 b), *however* is not set off by commas. Moreover, in (18 a), the comma before *however* is dispensed with. These examples are transcribed here just as they are in the *COBUILD on CD-ROM*. It is unclear whether there were no commas in the original sentences or whether commas were deliberately or carelessly omitted in this CD-ROM. But these days there seems to be a growing tendency to omit these commas. Kahn (198 : 274) says, "There is a tendency... to do away with the commas around *however*, in particular the comma before *however*." With respect to *however* that is used within a sentence, there are in all 17 examples like (19 b) in the *COBUILD on CD-ROM*, in which there are no commas around *however*, and seven examples like (18 a), in which there is no comma before *however*. Furthermore there are four examples in which there is no comma after *however* like "Your palette, *however* is much bigger than in painting..." (See also Copperud 1980 : 186.)

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