The Discoursal Arabic Coordinating Conjunction Wa (And)

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Abstract

The aim of the present study was to determine the main discoursal functions of the most commonly used Arabic coordinating conjunction, *Wa* (the English equivalent of 'and'). In order to do this, the researchers selected ten Jordanian parliamentary speeches to be used as the data of the study. In contrast to what has been heavily stated by Arabic linguists, the study showed that the *Wa* can have many discoursal functions. Upon analyzing the findings of the study in light of advancements made in The Relevance Theory, this research has provided further empirical evidence on how relevance considerations shape collaborative language use.

Keywords: Discourse markers, Coordinating conjunctives, Concession, Ending

1. Introduction

Discourse analysis, which specializes basically in extra-sentential levels, is generally considered a relatively modern branch of linguistics. Upon delving into these extra-sentential levels such as text and context, one finds that new discoursal phenomena have swiftly emerged and occupied a uniquely distinguished position among other existing linguistic phenomena such as discourse markers. For example, being the most commonly used Arabic coordinating conjunction, Wa plays, the argument goes, discoursal and connective roles different from those found in Arabic references.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Discourse Markers

Fuller (2003) examines the use of discourse markers *you know*, *like*, *oh*, *well*, *yeah*, and *I mean* in two speech contexts (interviews and casual conversations) to determine their role in marking and negotiating speakers' roles. One finding of the study is that the discourse markers *oh* and *well* show statistically significant references in use rate between contexts. It is also claimed that *you know*, *like*, *yeah*, and *I mean* were used at similar rates across contexts, indicating that the functions of these presentation markers are more universal.

Couched within the framework of the Relevance Theory (henceforth, RT), Gibbs and Bryant (2008) present the results of four experiments that examined people's real-life answers to questions about time. Their hypothesis is that people strive to make their answers optimally relevant for the addressee, which in many cases allows people to give rounded, and not exact, time responses. Moreover, analyses of the non-numeric words, hesitations, and latencies of people's verbal responses to time questions reveal important insights into the dynamics of speaking to achieve optimal relevance. People include discourse markers, hesitation marks, like ''uh'' and ''um'', and pauses when answering time questions to maximize the cognitive effects listeners can infer while minimizing the cognitive effort required to infer these effects.

In a study highlighting the roles of discourse markers in the text, Borderia (2008) examines discourse connectives (another name for discourse markers) and other related sets of markers within RT. The researcher collected data from colloquial conversations to provide evidence that conceptual and procedural features can coexist within a single marker. The study concludes that the examination of tokens of language use (such as discourse markers) is not merely an optional activity in the process of linguistic theory making.

Olmos and Ahern (2008) revise previous analyses of *but* and *although* formulated within a relevance theoretical framework and offer a new perspective on their functions based on cross-linguistic data. These connectives had been described in terms of effort-saving devices that lead the addressee to suspend or eliminate assumptions. They discuss different uses of these adversative and concessive connectives in both English and Spanish and propose that their meaning consists of indicating that a contrast should be established between an explicitly expressed proposition and possible alternative propositional representations. The study concludes that the discourse markers have procedural content that they encode affects the inferential process of identifying the higher-level explicatures of the utterance.

Al-Kohlani (2010) examines the functions of discourse markers in Arabic newspaper editorials. The main goal of the study is to identify discourse markers which are used in Arabic newspaper editorials and describe their function at two levels of text structure, i.e. the sentence and the paragraph levels. To this effect, the study analyzes 50 texts that form the data in the study, taking a semantic/pragmatic relation-based approach. The analytical model employed in this study consists of three steps. The study concludes that discourse markers are not only connecting words that contribute to the cohesion of text, but they are also crucial tools for achieving communicative acts in the text.

Bell (2010) examines a cluster of three English concessive cancellative discourse markers, namely *yet*, *nevertheless*, and *still*, which share similar pragmatic instructions but differ in their varying semantic and syntactic properties. The study depends on both naturalistic (random and non-random) and introspected sources for data collection. He concludes that the more vague the instruction carried by a concessive marker, the greater its ability to operate globally and conversely, the more detailed the instruction, the less its ability to operate globally.

Lee-Goldman(2011) proposes three senses of no as a discourse marker, on the basis of their pragmatic, semantic, and turn-sequential features. These senses do the work of (i) topic shift, (ii) misunderstanding management, and (iii) turn-taking conflict resolution. While they share very important semantic and pragmatic characteristics with other discourse markers and non-discourse markers senses of no, especially negation and indexicality, they are distinguished from each other and other senses by their position within the utterance and larger discourse. He points out the significance of the existence of these senses for examination of complex discourse markers and for the representation of ongoing discourse.

2.2 Concession

In an attempt to define concession, Karantzola (1995) states that in traditional grammar, the term 'concession' always refers to a class of subordinate clauses introduced by conjunctions considered a priori as concessive. Moreover, Crevels (2000) suggests four different levels of concessive meanings. These potential meanings are shown in the following examples:

a. Although it is raining, we're going for a walk.

b. He's not at home although his car is parked in front of the house.

c. Even though I am calling a bit late, what are your plans for this evening?

d. I speak and write Serbian, Albanian, Turkish and Dutch, but I cannot
suppress my true feelings in any other language than Romani. Although, now that I come to think of it, I have done it many times.

In an explanation to the above sentences and their relation with the notion of concession, Crevels suggests that (a) is an example of content concession which relates phenomena involving the physical world domain. The raining and walking events are physically realized in the real world. On the other hand, (b) shows epistemic relationship that relates the speaker's premise and a conflicting conclusion. Although the two events [his being not at

home] and [his car parking] are real world events, there is a difference between (a) and (b) in the relations of the two sub-events. In (c), the concessive meaning should be assessed at the level of speech acts. On the other hand, in (d) concession can be imagined at the textual level.

Kim (2002) indicates that concession involves three objects: 1- the event depicted by the consequent clause; 2- an event that denotes the least likely condition for the consequent to happen; and 3- the set of alternative events or conditions. The meaning of concession arises when a situation or event happens in spite of the fact that the preconditions for the event are in such a configuration that they are least likely precursors to the event.

Salman (2003) indicates that in concession, one attributes a judgment to a clause, sentence, paragraph, etc. which is contradictory or unexpected to that of another following clause, sentence, paragraph, etc. So, concession is often meant to set an adversative relationship between two textual entities.

However, it is worth mentioning that the division of discourse markers into different types due to the functions they serve in an utterance, sentence, or text is not crystal clear because the same discourse marker can function as a concessive discourse marker in one discourse and as an additive discourse marker in another discourse. Such a notion of different roles and functions served by the same discourse marker is clearly apparent in Arabic. The following verses of the Holy Quran, which is unanimously considered the most perfect Arabic text, explicates this somewhat contentious notion.

{قَالَتْ يَا وَيْلَتَى أَأَلِدُ وَأَنَا عَجُوزٌ وَهَذَا بَعْلِي شَيْخاً إِنَّ هَذَا لَشَيْءٌ عَجِيبٌ} هود72

"Alas for me! shall I bear a child, seeing I am an old woman, and my husband here is an old man? That would indeed be a wonderful thing!"1

Based on the definition of concession stated above, the underlined وَ (wa) in this holy verse is a concessive discourse marker because being old prevents a woman from bearing a child. As a result, وَ (wa) in this verse is not an additive but concessive discourse marker. On the other hand, the same discourse markers (وَ) (wa) is considered as an additive discourse marker in the following holy verse:

{قُلْ هُوَ اللّهُ أَحَدٌ (1) اللّهُ الصّمَدُ (2) لَمْ يَلِدْ ولمْ يُولَدْ (3) ولمْ يَكُنْ لهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ (4)} الإخلاص

"Say: He is Allah, the One and Only (1)Allah, the Eternal, Absolute(2) He begetteth not, nor is He begotten(3) And there is none like unto Him(4)"

As shown in this verse, وَ (wa) is a discourse marker of addition; it only adds information to other already mentioned information in the text without denoting any kind of concession or other semantic relation rather than addition. As a result, وَ (wa) is in this verse is an additive discourse marker not a concessive one. Therefore, it is not unusual to attribute 20 semantic

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1 Translations into English are adapted from the following web page: http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/Qur'an/

functions to (wa) in Arabic (Salman, 2003). Consequently, this richness of functions attributed to only one discourse marker is undoubtedly hard-evidence for the significance of discourse markers in Arabic and is simultaneously a strong indicator to the importance of their investigations in Arabic discourse.

3. Sample of the Study and Data Collection

As this study was a corpus-based investigation, actual data for the purpose of the study had been sought. The sample of the study consisted of ten political texts delivered by representatives in the Jordanian Parliament (December 19, 2010 - December 23, 2010). These texts represented, of course, different vantage points as well as political positions towards voting for or against the formation of the Prime Minister, His Excellency Sameer Al-Rifai's second government. The ten speeches were chosen because they, it is believed, contained many concessive links as the speeches were reviewed by three linguists to determine their suitability for the study.

4. Findings

The concessive discourse markers found in the study sample are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Concessive DMs Found in the Study Sample

NO.	DM	Arabic Transcription	Meaning	Frequency	
				No	Percentage
1.	لكن	*Laakin*	But	32	28%
2.	بل	*Ball*	But	24	21%
3.	و	*Wa*	But	**17**	15%
4.	إلا أن	*?illa ?anna*	But rather	11	9%
5.	لا بل	*laa ball*	But, rather, instead	7	6%
6.	مع أن	*maʕ ?ann*	Although	6	5%
7.	رغم	*ruĠma*	Though	4	3.5%
8.	بالرغم من	*bilraĠmi min*	Although	3	2.6%
9.	غير أن	*Ġayra?ann*	Yet	2	1.8%
10.	في حين	*fiℏiin*	Whereas	2	1.8%
11.	مع العلم أن	*maʕ?alʕilmi ?ann*	Despite the fact that	2	1.8%
12.	على الرغم	*ʕala alruĠmi*	Although	2	1.8%
13.	بينما	*Baynama*	Whereas	1	0.9%
14.	رغم أن	*ruĠma ?ann*	Although	1	0.9%
15.	مع كل الأسف	*maʕkullil?asaf*	But, unluckily,	1	0.9%

Total			115	100%

As Table 1 shows, these fifteen discourse markers are ordered in a descending fashion (32 occurrences for *laakin* versus 1 occurrence *for* **ruĠma ?ann, baynama , and maʕ kullil?asaf**). *The frequency of occurrences is actually of paramount importance for the study purposes becau*s*e it highlights the DMs which need in-depth scrutiny*.

In fact, the most frequent concessive discourse marker is *laakin* with 32 occurrences, directly followed by *ball* with 24 occurrences. To the ***contrary, the least frequent concessive*** discourse markers ***are:*** **ruĠma?ann, baynama, and maʕkullil?asaf** *with only one occurrence for each. It is worth mentioning that* **wa**, *ranking third, is a rather frequent concessive discourse marker with 17 occurrences.* This relatively frequent use of some discourse markers should entail that their usage is far from being accidental, a state of affairs that requires further probing.

4.1 Ending Wa

The point worth noting here is that when discourse markers are investigated based on (con)textual relations, many contextual functions attributed to these discourse markers are recognized. For example, by probing into the (con)textual functions of *wa* in the study data in order to set up an exhaustive understanding of its use as a concessive discourse marker, it is noticed that *wa* serves as an ending marker, that is it marks the end of the speech.

...... نحن معنيون بشئ واحد هو أن لا نخذل البلاد وسيد البلاد في مشروع الاصلاح والتغيير أن لا نخذل الأمل بأن تكون الانتخابات كما أرادها الشعب محطة تحول حقيقي تضع الأردن الغالي على سكة التقدم والأزدهار، <u>والسلام</u> عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته.(6)

*We are mainly concerned to let down neither the country nor the King regarding the programme of reforms and not to let down the hope the people have on the upcoming elections to be a real turning point which help Jordan on the path of progress and prosperity. **And yet,** peace and God's mercy and blessings be upon you.*

It is astonishing to point out that all speeches of the study sample end with the same sentence (السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته)(*peace and God's mercy and blessings be upon you*) initiated by *wa*. This *wa* is hence not accidentally used. It marks the end of the speech, and the ending sentence (السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته) (*peace and God's mercy and blessings be upon you*) cannot serve the function attributed to it as an ending sentence without this *wa* at the beginning of it. This combination, in turn, caters for a strong signal to the underlying significance of this discourse marker in ending expressions.

According to Arabic traditional grammar, this *wa* is called "an introductory discourse marker" In reality, we assume that this *wa* is largely regarded as a marker of a special kind of concession because it connects two different themes: the main theme of the whole topic with the theme of goodbye which is somehow not acknowledged by the audience if the speaker does not pave the road for it by other ending expressions or by changing his/her intonation.

4.2 Concessive Wa

Wa (and) works as a connective at either the intersentential or intrasentential levels. Firstly, it works intrasententially as indicated in the following one-sentence segment:

<div dir="rtl">

لا نريد برامجا لعقود او حتى لعقد قادم و<u>ه</u>ي على كل حال موجودة في الأجندة الوطنية التي تريد الحكومة تحديثها.
</div>

(4)

*We are not after programs that will last for decades or even for the upcoming decade, **given that** these programs already exist in the national agenda which is to be updated by the government.*

In the above example, *w*a connects two linguistic units within the sentence boundaries. These two linguistic units have conflicting themes. So, it is suggested that *wa* here serves as an intrasententially-connecting concessive discourse marker. On the other hand, it works as an intersententially-connecting concessive discourse marker as shown in the segment below:

<div dir="rtl">

إنني من منطلق الحرص على وقتكم الثمين ولإتاحة الفرصة لزملائي النواب فإنني سأنهي مناقشتي لخطاب الحكومة بالقول إنني لن أستطيع أن أحاسب الحكومة على ماض ربما لا يكون لهذه الحكومة دور فيه و<u>أ</u>ن كان لي ملاحظات على أداء رئيسها او بعض أعضائها في الحكومات السابقة.(5)
</div>

*Out of care for your precious time, and in order to leave the floor to my representative colleagues, I will end up the discussion of the government program, by saying I can never hold the government   representative for a past in which it might have had no role, **though** I claim serious reservation about the performance of its head or some of its members in previous governments.*

In this example, *wa* connects two completely contradictory themes delivered by the sentences it connects. To be precise, *wa* connects the notion of inability to ask for some deeds conducted once by other governments with the idea of presence of some negative observations associated with the prime minister's and some present ministers' past performances. It connects two separate sentences with conflicting propositions. For this, it works intersententially.

5. Discussion

When investigating *wa*, monosemy is regarded the ideal outcome of the analysis. Actually, the idea of monosemy is mainly depicted in that secondary meanings are explained, whenever possible, as contextual variants of an invariant meaning given in all of the cases by its procedural instruction (Fretheim, 2000). The main assumption of monosemy is that one invariant meaning would cover all uses of the form involved. On the whole, the aim of a monosemic description of discourse markers is to avoid the proliferation of senses (Pustejovsky, 1995). Because discourse markers have many functions played in the context, monosemy is all in all considered as the best explanation of these multifunctional connectives.

In the monosemic approach, each discourse marker is related to one abstract meaning functioning as the common denominator for the different contextually determined meaning or functions of the marker. Indeed, this link of analysis is oriented towards meaning minimalism rather than meaning maximalism. (Aijmer and Simon-Vandenbergen, 2006)

What is here essential to highlight is that each discourse marker has its own meaning which cannot be narrowed or loosened. The meaning is the same in all of the occurrences of that discourse marker, but the functions attributed to that discourse marker may be different and variant due to the context they occur in. Besides, all of these potential functions are fully derived from that invariant meaning of the discourse marker. More concisely, *wa* has a single meaning of addition despite the fact that it would serve different functions such as concession, continuity, etc. given that all of these functions are derived of its basic meaning as an addition marker. The same understanding is applied to *laakin* and other discourse markers.

Admittedly, this kind of analysis would account for two puzzling findings of the study. Firstly, it provides us with an account of why there are 15 different concessive discourse markers, and why there is not only one concessive discourse marker which can depict the concessive relation between utterances. Actually, we claim that concession has many degrees and facets, that is, one discourse marker can signal a full degree of concession such as *laakin*,

whereas another one can signal a lesser degree of concession such as *maʃ ?alʃilmi ?ann*

(English:although) .

Concession has many facets, that is, some concessive discourse markers connect two fully contrary themes such as *laakin*, whereas, other discourse markers connect one theme with a new but unexpected one such as *ball*. In fact, the analysis of monosemy analysis states that these different degrees and facets of concession are derived from different meanings. So, a discourse marker having one meaning cannot serve all degrees and facets of concession which needs different discourse markers with different basic meanings to depict all of its degrees and facets given the claim that each discourse marker has its own concessive function different from that of other discourse markers.

Secondly, the approach of monosemy has a close affinity with effort-effect relation. We believe that a discourse marker having a single meaning with few functions is more frequent in the context. That is because it needs less effort from both speaker and listener to process and select the most relevant functions of that discourse marker due to the discourse in which it is used. In addition, a discourse marker having a single meaning with more functions is less frequent in the context. That is because it needs more effort from both speaker and listener to process and to select the most relevant functions of the discourse marker due to the discourse in which it is used. The relationship between monosemy and the notion of effort and effect is framed in figure 2 and 3 below. Figure 2 shows this relation taking *laakin* into consideration, whereas figure 3 shows it taking *wa* into consideration.
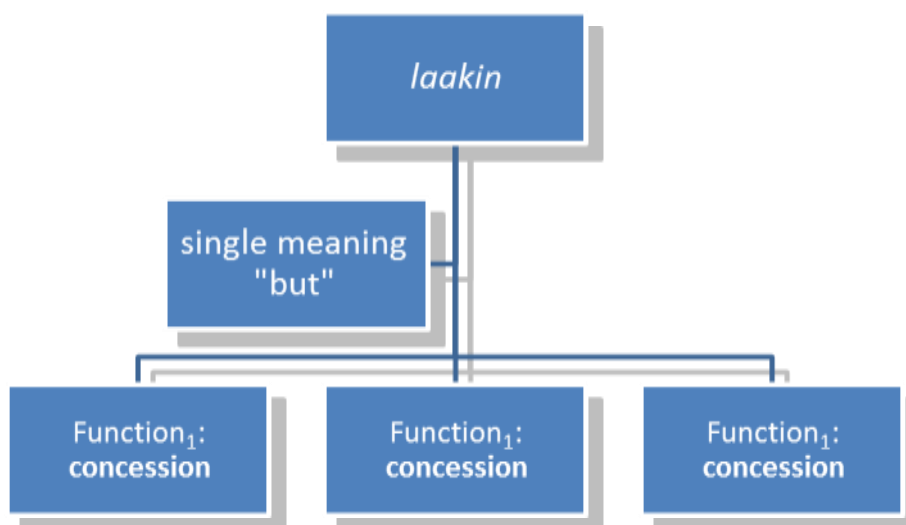
Figure 2. The relationship between monosemy and the notion of effort and effect taking laakin into consideration

As can be seen in figure 2, *laakin* has only one single meaning depicted in the English word "but" and only one function which is depicted in the function of concession. So, it needs less effort to process and has more effect in the discourse. The listener, for example, will not exert much effort to establish the concessive relation between the utterances connected by *laakin*, and thus he/she can decide about the communicative acts intended in the utterances and find the implicature effortlessly and effectively. This basically means that seeking optimal relevance is highly appreciated by using *laakin*.
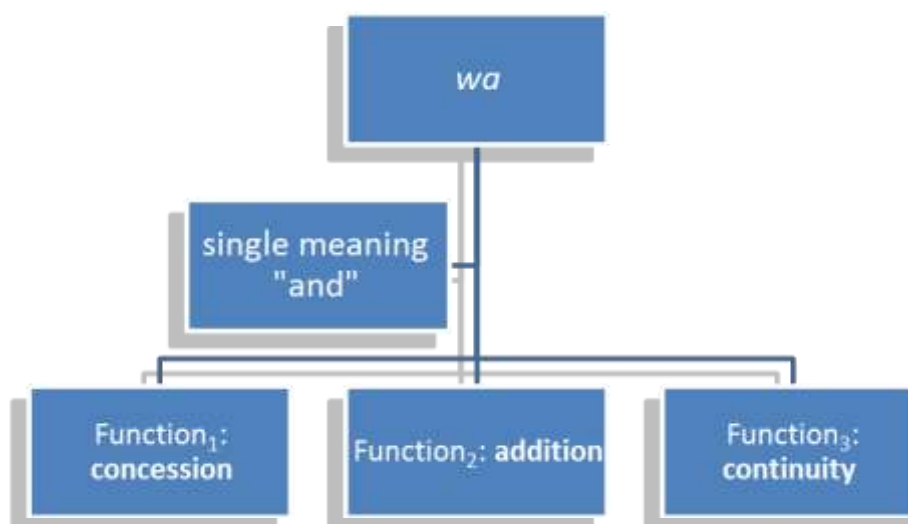

Figure 3. The relationship between monosemy and the notion of effort and effect taking wa into consideration

As can be seen in figure 3, *wa* has only one single meaning depicted in the English word "and" and at least three main functions which are depicted in the functions of concession, addition, and continuity. So, it needs more effort to process and so has less effect in the discourse. The listener will exert a lot of effort to establish the relation between the utterances

connected by *wa*, and thus he/she cannot easily decide about the communicative acts intended in the utterances and find the implicature with more effort as compared to that of *laakin*. That means that seeking for optimal relevance is a rather complicated matter when *wa* is used in the discourse.

This finding is of importance because we can account for the fact why *wa*, for example, is not regarded as a concessive discourse marker in traditional Arabic grammar. That is probably because it has a single meaning of addition but many (reaching 19) functions (Salman, 2003) in the discourse. Therefore, concession is one of these 19 functions. Accordingly, it can be hypothesized that these less-ranked functions of *wa* have been underestimated or ignored.

A proposition	*wa*	an illogical or irrational consequence of the proposition of the independent clause

Concerning *wa*, it should be stated that it connects a proposition with an illogical or irrational consequence of it. This role is clearly shown in all of its occurrences, including the following:

هل يعقل بأن الصرف الصحي لأكثر من مدينة أردنية يصب في محطة تنقية الخربة السمراء وهناك أكثر من 60% من مناطق اللواء بلا صرف صحي. (18)

Is it rational to believe that sewers of more than one Jordanian city end in the station of Khirbat Al-Samraa, __and that__ there about 60% of the same region is without a sewer system.

Concerning the third most frequent concessive discourse marker, *wa,* it is evident that it also plays the same role in reducing the processing effort for the speaker and maximizing the contextual effect for the listener needed to derive implicature, and thus, maximizes its optimal relevance.

وأتساءل هنا لماذا تأخرت حكومتكم، مثلما تأخرت الحكومات التي سبقتكم بتنفيذ إرادة جلالة الملك عبدالله الثاني حفظه الله، حين أمر قبل سنوات بإنشاء منطقة صناعية وكلية زراعية في لواء ذيبان، وانتم تعرفون يا دولة الرئيس أكثر من غيركم أهمية مثل هذه المشاريع ودورها في تخفيف عبء البطالة ومحاربة جيوب الفقر والحد من الحاجة المتفاقمة عند المواطنين(14) .

"I wonder here why your government, like other preceding governments, delayed executing the implementation of initiatives of His Majesty King Abdullah II, may God protect him, when he ordered to establish an industrial area and a College of Agriculture in the District of Theban __although__ you know, your Excellency, more than other people, the importance of such projects in alleviating the burden of unemployment, combating poverty and fulfilling the growing needs of the population there."

The main thrust of argument in this segment is that the government delayed implementing King Abdullah's initiatives for the Theban region (south Amman) although it knew well the importance of such initiatives to alleviate unemployment effects. This concessive relation is framed by *wa*. What is important to highlight here is that this discourse marker is used by the speaker to show higher degrees of concession, a point which will be investigated in more details below. Shielded within the model of RT, it would be elaborated that *wa* is a

procedural expression since it guides the listener when searching for relevance in utterance interpretation by constraining the choice of contextual information and the cognitive effects that can be obtained (Olmos and Ahern, 2008).

In this instance, *wa* consists of instructions about how to manipulate the conceptual representation of the utterance (Fraser, 1999). It makes the listener build a relationship between what was before and what is after, helping him create or derive the implicature the speaker wants to deliver. It introduces the listener with a choice that although the Prime Minister is familiar with the status quo in Theban, he did not undertake the King's initiatives related to this region. This relation leads the listener to the assumption that the speaker is not happy with such a government, and he eventually will vote against giving it the needed confidence vote. Such a marker presents its meaning in this context as a restriction on the inferential processes that will lead to the intended interpretation of the utterances in which it is used.

If such a discourse marker is omitted, the speaker is obliged to exert more effort to deliver his intended message and be more open. As a result, the listener also will exert more effort needed to understand what the speaker wants to tell because there are not linguistic clues which he can depend on to construct such a concessive relation. In addition, the listener is faced with many interpretations with the same or different probability that leads to a less maximized contextual effect.

To sum up, *wa* works as a constraint of the inferential processes that take place at the implicit level and warns the listener to suspend an inference that can lead to a contradiction (Iten, 2005). The function attributed to *wa* in this example is not to add a new proposition to an already existing one. Conversely, the function attributed to it is to construct a contradictory relation between the two propositions and lead the listener to infer that the speaker will not vote for the government because of its negligence of the King's initiatives which are extremely important for people in Theban.

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