

CONCESSIVE AND CONTRASTIVE STRUCTURES AS A PRAGMATIC STRATEGY IN EVALUATING SUCCESSFUL WOMEN IN MEDIA DISCOURSE: A THEORETICAL-ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. Concessive and contrastive structures, such as those introduced by “although, despite and but” in English or by “garchi … -sa-da, …ga qaramay, and lekin” in Uzbek, allow writers to evaluate indirectly. This paper examines how such structures function as a pragmatic strategy when media texts evaluate women who have achieved success in public life. Drawing on research on concession, implicature and presupposition, as well as on Appraisal theory and feminist pragmatics, it argues that concession can turn praise into conditional praise by presupposing a norm against which the woman’s success appears exceptional. The paper proposes an analytical procedure for identifying and classifying these structures and formulates hypotheses for a comparative English–Uzbek study.

Keywords: concession; contrast; presupposition; pragmatic strategy; evaluation; media discourse; gender; English; Uzbek

Introduction

When media texts describe a successful woman, evaluation is often conveyed not through a single adjective but through the way a sentence is built. A statement such as “despite her demanding schedule, she still finds time for her family” praises the woman, yet it also presupposes that a demanding career and family life are normally in conflict for her. Structures of this kind are pragmatically rich: they evaluate, they suggest expectations, and they do so without stating them openly [1, 2].

Concession and contrast have been studied extensively as grammatical and logical relations, but their role in gendered evaluation has received less attention. This paper therefore focuses on one narrow question: how do concessive and contrastive structures function as a pragmatic strategy in evaluating the image of a successful woman in media discourse? The discussion is theoretical-analytical. It reviews the relevant notions, proposes a procedure for analysing the structures, and formulates hypotheses for comparing English and Uzbek.

Concession and contrast: linguistic and pragmatic nature

In linguistic descriptions, concessive relations are commonly explained as the denial of an expected causal relation: the situation described in the concessive clause would normally lead one to expect the opposite of what is stated in the main clause [3]. In “Although she is a mother of three, she leads the ministry effectively”, the first clause makes the reader expect that leading a ministry will be difficult, and the main clause denies that expectation. Contrast with but is similarly analysed. R. Lakoff distinguished between a use of but that expresses semantic opposition and a use that expresses the denial of an

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expectation [4], and it is the second use that is most relevant to evaluation, since the expectation being denied is not stated in the text and must be recovered by the reader.

This recovery of unstated meaning is the domain of pragmatics. From the perspective of conversational implicature [5], the concessive structure invites the reader to infer the expectation that is being denied. From the perspective of presupposition [6], the concessive clause treats a certain background assumption as shared. Appraisal theory captures a related phenomenon under the heading of Engagement, where counter-expectation markers position the text against a viewpoint that the writer treats as an available alternative [7]. Together these perspectives show that a concessive structure has two layers: an explicit evaluation, which is usually positive, and an implicit assumption about what is normal or expected.

The order of the clauses also matters. In a typical concessive construction the concessive clause is presented as background, while the main clause carries the main assertion. When the concession precedes the achievement, as in the examples discussed here, the reader is guided towards the achievement as the point of the sentence, but only after the assumed obstacle has been introduced. When the order is reversed, so that the achievement is stated first and a qualification follows, the qualification may function as a limitation of the praise. The same propositional content can therefore produce different evaluative effects depending on its arrangement, which is why the analysis of these structures cannot rely on counting markers alone.

Concessive structures and gendered evaluation

Feminist approaches to discourse analysis emphasise that gender ideologies are frequently conveyed through implicit means rather than explicit statements [8]. Concessive and contrastive structures are a good example. If a text concedes a woman's family role, age, appearance or gender itself before asserting her achievement, the implicit assumption is that these attributes would normally limit success. The praise is then conditional: her success is presented as remarkable because it goes against an assumed norm. Research on women in leadership and professional settings has shown that the negotiation of authority and the balancing of work and family are recurring themes in how women in such roles are represented and represent themselves [9, 10].

The politeness framework provides a further perspective. Evaluations affect the public face of the person evaluated, and speakers commonly soften or qualify judgements to manage this [11]. A concessive structure can serve both purposes at once: it appears to protect the woman's face by praising her, while it also qualifies the praise. For a study of media discourse, this means that concessive structures should not be classified simply as positive or negative evaluations; their function depends on what is conceded, what is asserted, and in which order.

The genre and voice of the text add a further complication. News reports typically attribute evaluations to sources, and a concessive structure may appear in the journalist's own narration, in a quotation or in a paraphrase of another speaker. In a profile or an interview, the woman herself may use a concession, for example to present her achievements modestly or to respond to expectations that she knows others hold. Whether the assumed norm belongs to the journalist, to a quoted source or to the woman herself is therefore an analytical question, and it affects the interpretation: a writer who reports someone else's concession may distance himself or herself from the underlying assumption, while a writer who states it in his or her own voice treats it as common ground [1, 7].

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Analytical procedure

The proposed procedure has four steps. First, concessive and contrastive markers are identified in texts that evaluate women in the selected domain. In English these include although, though, while, despite, in spite of, but, yet and however. In Uzbek they include the correlative garchi … -sa ham / -sa-da, the postpositional construction …ga qaramay ("despite"), and the conjunctions lekin, ammo and biroq.

Second, each structure is analysed for what is conceded (for example family role, age, appearance, background or gender), what is asserted (typically an achievement or quality), and the order of the two parts, that is, whether praise is followed by a qualification or a qualification by praise. Third, the assertion is classified using Appraisal categories, for instance Judgement of capacity or tenacity, and the voice of the evaluation is noted, that is, whether it is the journalist's own or attributed to another source. Fourth, the structure is interpreted pragmatically by identifying the expectation it presupposes and considering the effect this has on the image of the woman.

The following constructed examples illustrate the procedure and are to be replaced by authentic corpus examples in the full study. 'Although she is a mother of three, she leads the ministry with remarkable efficiency' concedes a family role and asserts capacity. 'Garchi u uch farzandning onasi bo'lsa-da, vazirlikni muvaffaqiyat bilan boshqarmoqda' has the same structure in Uzbek. 'Band ish jadvaliga qaramay, u oilasi uchun ham vaqt topa oladi' ("despite her busy schedule, she can find time for her family") concedes the demands of work and asserts fulfilment of the family role, so that here the evaluated quality is precisely the balance between the two spheres.

Because the two languages differ in grammar, the structures are compared by function rather than by form: a construction counts as equivalent if it concedes one element and asserts another, whatever its grammatical realisation. This functional criterion avoids treating a postpositional construction in Uzbek and a subordinate clause in English as unrelated simply because their forms differ. For quantitative comparison, the frequencies of the structures should be normalised to a common base, for instance per ten thousand words, so that subcorpora of different lengths remain comparable, while the interpretation of individual examples remains qualitative and sensitive to context.

Comparative dimension and working hypotheses

A comparison of English and Uzbek data is expected to show both shared and language-specific patterns. The following working hypotheses are proposed. (H1) In both languages, concessive and contrastive structures will frequently link professional achievement with family or gender, and will do so more often in the political domain and the family–career domain than in neutral reporting. (H2) The languages will differ in the degree to which the presupposed expectation is made explicit, with some structures in one language marking counter-expectation overtly and their counterparts in the other relying more on context. (H3) Because family roles may carry different cultural values, the balance between career and family may be framed in one language chiefly as an obstacle to be overcome and in the other as a combined virtue, which would affect whether a structure functions as a concession or as a coordinated praise. These hypotheses are to be tested empirically and may be confirmed, revised or rejected.

Conclusion

Concessive and contrastive structures are a compact but powerful means of evaluation in media discourse: they combine explicit praise with implicit assumptions about what is normal for a woman. Analysing them requires a combination of grammatical description, pragmatic interpretation and a critical, gender-sensitive perspective. The procedure proposed here offers a way of identifying and classifying

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such structures in English and Uzbek data and provides a basis for a comparative study of how culturally specific expectations about women shape the language of evaluation in media.

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