

Conjunctions

"But" in Uyghur: Are there Differences between *emma*, *biraq* and *lëkin*?

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Literature

The Uyghur grammar *Hazirqi zaman uyghur tili* (= HZUT)¹ lists 15 contrastive conjunctions (*qarimuqarshi baghlighuchisi*), of which *lëkin*, *emma* and *biraq* are the first ones. Apart from example sentences there is virtually no comment given on any of these conjunctions though. To my knowledge, other grammars and textbooks do not discuss any details about the usage of these three conjunctions either.²

Corpus

The following literature was screened for all occurrences of *emma*, *biraq* and *lëkin*:

- the first 150 pages of Abduraxman Qahar's novel "Tozumas gül" (= TG)
- the first three chapters of Abdurëhim Ötkür's novel "Iz" (over 40 pages)
- Memtimin Hoshur's long story "Nozugum" (= N) (over 70 pages)

Some further examples come from other works, which have not been analyzed completely as the above.

Statistics

Abduraxman Qahar uses *emma* and *biraq* equally often, and *lëkin* **more** than either of them (about 1.5 times as much).

Abdurëhim Ötkür also uses *emma* and *biraq* about equally often, but *lëkin* **less** than either of them (only about half as much).

Memtimin Hoshur **does not use *biraq* at all** in this long story³. He uses *lëkin* about twice as much as *emma*.

As an aside, in Memtimin Hoshur's works, the equivalents of "but" are preceded by a period more often than by a comma. In the other authors, the comma is much more common. All *emma*, *biraq* and *lëkin* can occur at the beginning of a whole paragraph (TG 8, 139; Iz 26, 28, 31).

Direct Speech

Regarding the question whether the contrastive conjunctions are used differently in the narrator's words as opposed to in direct speech within the story, the following was observed:

In Abduraxman Qahar, no significant difference could be seen (but the frequency of *lëkin* is **less** outstanding in direct speech).

In the text by Abdurëhim Ötkür, in the few instances where an equivalent of "but" occurs in direct speech, it is always *emma* or a variant thereof.

¹ Vol. III, p. 1967- 1972.

² The word *wehalenki* – "however / but / nevertheless" has not been considered in this treatment.

³ He uses it elsewhere though, e.g. Burut Majirasi, p. 36.

Memtimin Hoshur, in direct speech, uses both *emma* and *lëkin*, whereby *lëkin* dominates a bit **more** than in other parts.

While direct speech in a narrative text is still not the same as spontaneous oral language, one may conclude that all three equivalents of "but" **can** be used in oral language.

Various Kinds of Contrast

While all contrastive conjunctions express some sort of contrast, the nature of contrasts can differ considerably. Before we deal with the question whether *lëkin*, *emma* and *biraq* show any differences in how they are used, let us see what some possible kinds of contrast are. Contrastive conjunctions can be used:

- to state exceptions and other types of limitations or qualifications
- to state a counter-expectation, or hope despite negative general circumstances
- to express that two facts are not fitting together well by their nature
- to express that two things that stand against each other are both true
- to evaluate things in a different way
- to express that, due to some factor or argument, what was said in the preceding main clause is overridden.

In all of the above except the last one, both the content of the main clause and the content of the subordinate clause remain true. In the last one, the first is "cancelled".

Findings

In Abduraxman Qahar, there is a clear **tendency for *biraq* to indicate such contrasts that are strong enough to overrule what was said before**. I.e. a former argument is overruled by a stronger one, an action put on hold because of an interruption, a plan dismissed or a desire given up due to other considerations or more important people etc.

Ex. 1. Uqtuq, biraq az bolup qaldi, yene birnechchini ëytip bëring, – balilar churqiriship turuwaldi. (TG 15)

Ex. 2. Qara at böre mëngishigha chüshti, biraq, jilghigha üsüp kirgen bir tumshuqtin ötüşhi bilenla, qattiq ürküp arqigha shoxshudi. (Iz 1)

Further references: TG 25, 60, 116, 126.

Neither does this mean that *biraq* is **only** used in this way, nor does it mean that the other conjunctions cannot also be used in this way.

In Abdurëhim Ötkür, a distinct usage of *biraq* cannot be shown.

In Memtimin Hoshur, who does not use *biraq*, *lëkin* can cover such cases:

Ex. 3. – Chëpip tashlimaqqhidoq, lëkin leshker bashliqi uni körüp «Pah, nëmidëgen güzel nëme bu! Uni Iligha apirip, Jyangjunning özigila sowgha qilip in'am alimiz» dep qaldi. (N 334)

There are nine cases in the novel "Tozumas gül", where Abduraxman Qahar has the contrastive conjunction be **preceded by the construction -*Simu*** (conditional suffix -sA + -mu) "even if / while". With one exception of *biraq* (139), this always happens with *lëkin* (E.g. 27, 46, 56). Perhaps it is not by chance that *emma* is not used in this

way. *Emma* might be used primarily to describe conflicting sides of an issue, without pointing to how they are reconciled or which will dominate in the end ("on the one side ..., on the other side ..."). If this is true, *emma* raises the tension in a storyline. This same construction -*Simu* is not used in the selected parts of Abdurēhim Ötkür's novel "Iz" and Memtimin Hoshur's story "Nozugum" with any of the three conjunctions under discussion, so some affirmation is lacking.

birag may have a **more prominent role in discourse** in that, if it signals the "cancelling" of some factor or argument in favor of another, this moves the story on; a decision has been made or a new situation emerged.⁴

At least one other factor that can at times decide which of the three conjunctions is used could be the authors desire to avoid repetition, where two or more contrastive clauses follow each other in close proximity.

Combined forms: *emmaze*, *lëkinze* and *emma lëkin*

In the described corpus, there are two examples for the expression *emmaze* (Iz 18, 39; also 237).⁵ An *emma* / *lëkin* with the added *-ze* signals the introduction of some **concern, reservation or constraint**.⁶

Ex. 4. Axunumlar shëhit nede yatsa, jennetning qowuqi shu yerdin ëchilidu deydiken, Ilahim shundaq bolur, emmaze, uning yatqan yërinini qandaqla bolmisun tëpip, qebre qopurup qoyush kërek. (Iz 18)

HZUT⁷ points out, that *emma* and *lëkin* can occur in the combined form *emma lëkin*, and that that intensifies the contrast. There is only one example for this expression in the corpus (Iz 30).

Prototypical contrast

It should be pointed out that, when a contrast is expressed in Uyghur, an equivalent of "but" is not always required. Uyghur shows cases of so-called "prototypical contrast". This occurs when two propositions have one point of similarity and two points of contrast. In some languages, it is not natural to use any countering connective in cases of prototypical contrast. Examples from a procedural texts are given below.

Ex. 5. Hawa issiq bolghanda soghuq su bilen yughursaq bolidu. ø hawa soghuq bolsa ilman su bilen yughurush kërek. (Bread, sent. 2.5+6)

Ex. 6. Xëmir bek bolup ketse nan achchiq bolup qalidu, ø xëmir bolmay qalsa nan pëtir bolup qalidu. (Bread, sent. 4.11)

Appendix: *halbuki*

Halbuki is another contrastive conjunction, but with a distinct usage, it seems. It is contracted from *hal + bu + ki*, and the *Izahliq Lughiti* (= UTIL) explains it as *ehwal*

⁴ This would match the observation from a procedural text not included in our above corpus, where the reader is pointed to a new theme that has not been mentioned before (cataphoric function) (Bread-text).

⁵ Outside the corpus, an example for *lëkinze* is found in Iz 235.

⁶ How this suffix relates to the particle *-ze* would need some further investigation.

⁷ Vol. III, p. 1968.

shundaqki, emeliyet shuki – "the circumstances are like this: / the reality is:". It differs from the other conjunctions, then, in that it describes **a contrast not of facts, but of their evaluation** in the mind of the author or speaker. It signals a differing perspective on things. The below quotes are taken from UTIL and HZUT⁸.

Ex. 7. *Halbuki*, rasttini eytqanda, bu mexpiyetlikte ajayip qorqunchluq weqelikler yoq, iz bäsip qoghlashlar yoq, süyiqest, hiyle-mikirler yoq, xeterlik tosalghularmu yoq. (originally from where?)

Ex. 8. Biraq, alte ming besh yüz esker bilen kelginimizni anglap, Ma Jungyingdek qeyser serkerdimu quyruqini xada qildi. *Halbuki*, uning qoshuni Xojiniyazning tagh-dala we yëza-sehralardin toplangan ademlirige qarighanda hem köp, hem muntizim idi. (originally from where?)

Conclusion

It was not possible to establish clear rules as to when one of the discussed conjunctions has to be used, or cannot be used. *emma*, *biraq* and *lëkin*, their variants and other contrastive conjunctions have a very large overlap in what kind of contrasts they can cover. Still, there is some evidence that suggests that they are not completely interchangeable. At least, *biraq* seems to stand out in that it is used particularly for marking a statement that cancels a former statement.

As for the language learner, one will almost never be wrong when using *lëkin*, or *emma*. As to translation into English, for the sake of simplicity we kept speaking just of "but". Obviously, other words like "however / yet / still / nevertheless / anyhow / though" etc. can and should be used as appropriate; checking which of them works well will, in turn, reveal something about the nature of the contrast in a given sentence.

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⁸ Vol. III, p. 1969.