Semantic Requirements for on the Contrary
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Abstract
This paper discusses semantic requirements for on the contrary from the perspective of Relevance Theory. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English (8th Edition) says that on the contrary is “used to introduce a statement that says the opposite of the last one” (s.v. contrary). This suggests that it shows an opposite or contrastive relation between the two segments anterior and posterior to it. The aims of this paper are (i) to demonstrate that on the contrary semantically requires an opposite relation to be made between the two segments, (ii) to clarify why on the contrary does not make any direct contribution to the function of correction, which Fraser (2009) claims on the contrary has, and (iii) to show that the distinction of attribution is crucial for the acceptability of a sequence including on the contrary.

Keyword: opposition, contradiction, attribution, Relevance Theory
1. Introduction

On the contrary (henceforth, OTC), as Fraser points out, is normally used in a sequence “S1. On the contrary, S2.” It works to connect two discourse segments S1 and S2. The sequence can be used in the one-speaker case (i.e. a speech by one speaker) and in the two-speaker case (i.e. a conversation), as in (1) and (2) respectively:

(1) Mary didn’t make a trivial mistake. **On the contrary**, she made a horrendous error. (Fraser 2009: 90)

(2) A: I suppose the job was boring?  
   B: **On the contrary**, it was really exciting. (Swan 2005: 122)

Fraser also claims that OTC normally occurs initially, that is, it precedes the second segment S2. According to *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English (8th Edition)*, OTC is generally “used to introduce a statement that says the opposite of the last one” (s.v. contrary). In (2), for example, B’s statement that the job was exciting means the opposite of A’s statement that the job was boring. OTC introduces the second discourse segment S2 which is opposite in meaning to the first one S1. Quirk *et al.* (1985) and Swan (2005) basically put forward the same view in their descriptive grammar books. Quirk *et al.* state that OTC is an antithetic conjunct which introduces an item contrasted with a preceding one. Swan holds that OTC is a discourse marker for contradiction — a contradiction to be made between two different utterances in the two-speaker case and a contradiction between the host clause and what has been said or suggested in the one-speaker case. This suggests that a sequence will be unacceptable if S2 is not contrasted with S1:

(3) I didn’t take the letter. *On the contrary*, I left it lying on the table. (Fraser 2009: 94)

In (3), S2 has no special relationship with the positive version of S1: they simply represent two independent states of affairs, resulting in a non-contrast. Consequently, a sequence “S1. OTC, S2.” must contain a contrastive or opposite relation between S1 and S2. However, we need to make the relation between them clearer, taking into account the fact that Quirk *et al.* call it “contrastive” or “antithetic” and Swan “contradiction”.

Fraser (1998, 2009) claims that the speaker uses OTC to signal that S2 represents a corrected version of S1. In (1), the second segment S2 represents correcting the positive version of S1, while in (2), B’s utterance corrects A’s view about the job. In general, it seems that the function of OTC is that the host clause (i.e. S2) corrects a preceding one (i.e. S1). But there are cases in which S2 does not function to correct S1:

(4) Unfortunately, he broke a leg. **On the contrary**, fortunately, he didn’t have to go to war.

(5) If you don’t take this medicine, you won’t feel better. **On the contrary**, if you take it, you will get better soon.

Correcting the content of S1 presupposes rejecting it. In each case, S1 is neither corrected nor rejected by S2: S1 and S2 are both asserted. In (4), the speaker makes two assertions that she is unfortunate that he broke a leg and that she is fortunate that he didn’t have to go to war. In (5), on the other, two possible alternatives are asserted: S2 conveys the situation that the hearer will take the medicine while S1 conveys the opposite situation. Nevertheless, it is no doubt that S2 contributes to correcting S1 in (1) and (2). We shall provide a plausible explanation of what causes S2 to correct S1 in section 4.

In the next section, we would like to survey two descriptive grammar books, Quirk *et al.* (1985) and Swan (2005) for the basics of OTC. The section 3 gives a brief review of Fraser (1998, 2009), a comprehensive analysis of OTC. It is also devoted to pointing out some problems about his approach by presenting counter-examples. We will introduce the defined notion of “opposition” to clarify semantic requirements for OTC in the fourth section. Also, we aim to give a universal account of the interpretation of a sequence “S1. OTC, S2.”

2. Basics of on the contrary

In this section I would like to make a brief review of on the contrary (henceforth, OTC) by introducing two descriptive grammar books, Quirk *et al.* (1985) and Swan (2005). Quirk *et al.* (1985) classify OTC as an antithetic conjunct which indicates that an item may be
in contrast to a preceding one by introducing a direct antithesis. Swan (2005), on the other hand, treats OTC as a discourse marker for contradiction. Putting aside the taxonomic debate over whether OTC is a conjunct or a discourse marker, we should notice the remarkable feature two books have in common: OTC marks a direct opposition or contradiction. This seems to be intuitively true probably because OTC is ascribed, at least partially, to the literal meaning of *contrary*. This suggests that the notion of a direct opposition or contradiction would be the key to the use (including the meaning and function) of OTC.

### 2.1 Quirk et al. (1985)

Quirk *et al.* (1985) regard OTC as an antithetic conjunct which is a subcategory of contrastive conjuncts. They define contrastive conjuncts as conjuncts presenting “either contrastive words or contrastive matters in relation to what has preceded”, which are subcategorised into four types: (i) reformatory (e.g. *rather*, *more precisely*, etc.), (ii) replacive (e.g. *again*, *on the other hand*, etc.), (iii) antithetic (e.g. *conversely*, *on the contrary*, etc.) and (iv) concessive (e.g. *however*, *nevertheless*, etc.). According to Quirk *et al.*, antithetic conjuncts make the hearer aware that “an item may be contrasted with a preceding one by introducing a direct antithesis” (p.639). This suggests that OTC functions to generate a contrastive relation between two items (including constituents or clauses) anterior and posterior to OTC. For example, (6) shows that OTC makes clear the contrastive relation between *trivial* and *horrendous*.

(6) Mary didn’t make a trivial mistake. **On the contrary**, she made a horrendous error. (≈(1))

We can regard *horrendous*, which means the opposite of *trivial*, as what Quirk *et al.* calls a “direct antithesis”[2]. However, as (7) shows below, it is not clear what type of opposition “direct antithesis” can cover.

(7) He did not make things easy for his parents. **On the contrary**, he did everything he could to annoy and worry them. (Swan 2005: 122)

In defence of Quirk *et al.*, we would treat annoy and worry as a direct antithesis of *easy* (meaning not feeling worried or anxious), ignoring their distinction in parts of speech. This account is not so bad, yet still not convincing enough. They need to give a clear definition of a “direct antithesis”. It would be enough to say that OTC makes some contribution to creating opposition, but not “direct” opposition.

### 2.2 Swan (2005)

According to Swan (2005), OTC is a discourse marker for contradiction. It is used to contradict, that is, “to say that what has been said or suggested is not true” (p.120).

(8) A: I suppose the job was boring?  
   **B: On the contrary**, it was really exciting. (≈(2))

In the exchange (8), OTC is used to communicate A’s utterance about the job is not true: it indicates B’s utterance contradicts A’s utterance or, more precisely, it introduces B’s thought that the job was exciting which contradicts A’s comment about the job, *boring*. OTC is also used to contradict a suggestion derived from another speaker’s utterance:

(9) A: Interesting lecture?  
   **B: On the contrary**, it was a complete waste of time. (Swan 2005: 140)

The example (9) shows that OTC can contradict not only an utterance but also a suggestion (i.e. an explicature and an implicature in relevance-theoretic terms) by another speaker. A might suggest that it is worth her time if she receives the affirmative answer when asking B whether the lecture is interesting. Thus A’s suggestion contradicts B’s utterance (i.e. *a complete waste of time*). This suggests that a contradiction can be made implicitly as well as explicitly. Furthermore, OTC can also be used “when a speaker/writer strengthens a negative statement which he/she has just made” (Swan 2005: 140):

(10) She did not allow the accident to discourage her. **On the contrary**, she began to work twice as hard. (Swan 2005: 140)

OTC introduces its host clause which does not contradict
but strengthens (or emphasises) the preceding negative clause. In (10), the increase in her workload, which is expressed by the host clause, would strengthen the statement that she was not so discouraged by the accident or the suggestion from it that she was reluctant to work or possibly would quit.

To summarise, Swan assumes that OTC has two functions: in the two-speaker case like (8) and (9) OTC can contradict an utterance or a suggestion by another speaker, and in the one-speaker case like (10) it is used to strengthen a preceding negative statement. The common function OTC fulfils in the one- and two-speaker cases is to contradict or “to say that what has been said or suggested is not true”. The function of strengthening a negative statement which the speaker has just made prior to OTC applies only to the one-speaker case, not the two-speaker case. There is a point we should look at very carefully which Swan overlooks intentionally or unintentionally: in the one-speaker case, such as (10), OTC does not contradict the actual utterance, “she did not allow the accident to discourage her” but the positive version of it, “she allowed the accident to discourage her”. We should pay more attention to what OTC contradicts — the whole utterance or its affirmative counterpart.

The criticism against Quirk et.al.’s view about the definition of “contradict” applies to Swan’s. What Swan means by “contradict” seems to be problematic or misleading. Contradiction normally means if something is true, its opposite (e.g. the negative counterpart of it) must be false. As for (9), for example, it would be difficult to regard a complete waste of time as the contradiction of interesting (or its suggestion “worth time-consuming”). Even if a lecture was uninteresting, it would not be necessarily a waste of time: the lecture could be worth attending in that it is likely to be the bad example from which we should learn many don’ts (instead of dos). Thus it would be better for us to use “contradiction” more loosely than Quirk et.al. and Swan did.

Swan would answer this question raised by his view: What makes OTC function to strengthen a preceding negative statement though it is not ascribed to any constituents (especially the main one contrary, which intrinsically or literally has nothing to do with the function)? Regrettably, Swan does not give a specific account of where the function of OTC comes from. In addition, Swan, as mentioned above, ignores what the host sentence of OTC contradicts: it contradicts the affirmative counterpart of the preceding sentence in the one-speaker case such as (10) whereas it contradicts the whole statement by another speaker in the two-speaker case such as (8) and (9). The examples (11) and (12) below would be more troublesome:

(11) A: He hasn’t arrived.
B: On the contrary, he got here 15 minutes ago.
(Fraser 2009: 89)
(12) If you don’t take this medicine, you won’t feel better. On the contrary, if you take it, you will get better soon. (=5))

In (11) OTC indicates that A’s utterance contradicts B’s: A’s statement that he is not with A or B (though A does not notice that at the time of utterance) contradicts B’s statement that he is with B (and A as well). In other words, OTC contradicts A’s whole statement, but not its affirmative counterpart. The same holds true for (12) though it is an example of the one-speaker case: a contradiction is made between two if-clauses in the first and the second sentences. To put it in another way, the if-clause in the second sentence does not contradict the affirmative version of the if-clause in the first sentence. On top of that, it is not that the second sentence strengthens the first one. These facts encourage us to pay more attention to what the host sentence contradicts.

In summary, Quirk et.al. and Swan show that OTC has much to do with contradictory relation, or rather “loose” contradiction or “loose” oppositeness. They also illustrate that OTC works to connect its host utterance with the preceding one. We can call OTC, which is classified as a conjunct by Quirk et.al. and a discourse marker by Swan, a contrastive connector.

This section gives a brief review of Fraser (1998, 2009), which is, as far as I know, one of the few previous comprehensive analyses of OTC. Fraser has been studying pragmatic markers (including (contrastive) discourse markers such as OTC) since the late 1990s.3)
According to Fraser (2009: 87), discourse markers “are generally held to refer to a functional (as opposed to a grammatical) class of expressions. They do not contribute to the semantic meaning of the discourse segment (S2) which hosts them, but signal the speaker’s intended relationship between this segment and the preceding one (S1)”.

Fraser holds that OTC is a contrastive discourse marker for correction: “In a sequence of discourse segments “S1. On the contrary, S2,” on the contrary signals that the speaker of S2 considers S1 to be an incorrect representation of some action, state, or property attributed to an aspect of that segment, and offers S2 as the correct representation”. (Fraser 2009: 87-88)

(13) A: I don’t suppose you remember where they are, do you?
B: On the contrary, my dear Watson, I know exactly where they are. (Fraser 2009: 88)

(14) Mary didn’t make a trivial mistake. On the contrary, she made a horrendous error. (= (1))

In (13), by using OTC, the speaker of S2 signals that S2 represents a correction of A’s thought that B does not remember where they are. In (14), on the other hand, OTC signals that the representation by S2 is more adequate than the positive version of S1, that is, OTC introduces S2 as a representation correcting the positive counterpart of S1. (13) and (14) suggest that there is a true-or-false (or correct-or-wrong) contrast between two segments S1 and S2.

Fraser mentions the features of S1 and S2: S1 and S2 must be members of a contrastable set, or rather a collection of linguistic expressions which are normally contrasted along a cline. Note that OTC does not require a contrastive pair of expressions to be antonymous pairs (e.g. fat/thin) but to be two points (typically two extremes) along a cline. This suggests that if a contrast is not made between the two segments S1 and S2, the sequence will sound odd or infelicitous.

(15) #A: I don’t agree with you.
B: On the contrary, you understand me completely. (Fraser 2009: 88)

As for the exchange (15), for example, we cannot recognise any contrastive relation between agree in S1 and understand in S2, or any set which covers both of them.

As the examples above show, there are two variations of the usage of OTC: the two-speaker case, as in (13) and (14), and the one-speaker case, as in (14). We will look at the two cases in turn.

In the two-speaker case, there is no restriction on S1. S1 permits any type of sentences: an affirmative, a negative, an interrogative, and an imperative, as in (16a) – (16d), which are all cited from Fraser (2009: 89):

(16) a. A: He’s arrived.
   B: On the contrary, he won’t be here for an hour.

b. A: He hasn’t arrived.
   B: On the contrary, he got here 15 minutes ago.

c. A: Did you say that Mary made a trivial mistake?
   B: On the contrary, I said she made a horrendous error.

d. A: Don’t touch anything on the table.
   B: On the contrary, you may touch anything you like.

In contrast, S2 can be either a declarative or an imperative, but not an interrogative. The non-occurrence of an interrogative in S2 can be naturally concluded from Fraser’s claim that S2 plays the role of correcting S1: an interrogative is normally not suitable to correct another thought because it is not used for assertion.

Another characteristic of the use of OTC is that the sequence of S1 and S2 in the two-speaker case can represent explicit illocutionary acts. In (16d), the two illocutionary acts are contrasted: the speaker A produces an utterance to forbid the hearer B from touching anything on the table, and B’s utterance gives A the permission of touching anything on it. We should note that what is essential for the use of OTC in the two-speaker case is that there is a contrast to be made between the utterances by two different speakers.

Finally, in the two-speaker case, no matter what type of sentence S1 may be, OTC “can introduce the contrary to S1 as S2, an explanatory comment, or both” (Fraser 1998: 321).
(17) a. A: Harry is not tall.
   B: **On the contrary**, (he is tall). He is over 7 feet. (Fraser 1998: 321)
b. A: Harry is tall.
   B: **On the contrary**, (he is not tall). He is quite short. (Fraser 1998: 321)

In (17a), OTC introduces the contrary to S1 as *he is tall* or an explanatory comment on it as *he is over 7 feet*. The same holds true for S1 being a positive, as in (17b). In both examples, the contrary to S1 signifies a direct contrast (e.g. a positive vs. a negative) and an explanatory comment signifies an indirect contrast (i.e. S1 vs. S2 as a proof of the contrary to S1). A sequence of linguistic expressions for direct and indirect contrasts (e.g. *he is tall* and *he is over 7 feet* in (17a)) can be realised because they are consistent with each other.

Fraser (2009) demonstrates that the one-speaker case has two variations: (i) other-attribution, in which the contents of S1 and S2 are attributed to different speakers, as in (18), and (ii) self-attribution, in which the sequence of S1 and S2 is attributed to one and the same speaker, as in (19):5)

(18) a. (You ask) Is Sam dishonest? **On the contrary**, he’s incredibly honest. (Fraser 2009: 90)
b. (You think) She is gorgeous. **On the contrary**, I find her rather ordinary looking.

(19) a. Mary didn’t make a trivial mistake. **On the contrary**, she made a horrendous error. (= (1))
b. I don’t object to Pete’s manners. **On the contrary**, it’s his morals I object to.

Though (18a) or (18b) is an utterance made by one speaker, the thought represented by S1 is attributed to the hearer and S2 to its speaker. (19a) and (19b), on the other hand, are the examples where both S1 and S2 are attributed to one and the same speaker. The case of other-attribution shares the features with the two-speaker case which is a typical case of other-attribution: “there is no polarity constraint on S1, and S2 must be a declarative” (Fraser 2009: 90). In contrast, the case of self-attribution requires S1 to be explicitly negated and S2 to be a declarative. These requirements are supported by (19a) and (19b), and reinforced by (20a) and (20b):

(20) a. Harry is not happy. **On the contrary**, he is extremely depressed. (Fraser 1998: 322)
b. Harry is unhappy. *On the contrary*, he is extremely depressed. (Fraser 1998: 322)

As for (19a), (19b) and (20a), Fraser (1998: 322) states that “what is rejected is the accuracy of S1, and the message of S2 is designed to convey a more extreme message”. For example, (19a) means that the speaker’s description of Mary’s mistake as a trivial one is wrong or inappropriate whereas her description of it as a horrendous one is right or appropriate. Likewise, (20a) means that the speaker believes Harry’s state of mind is not happy but its opposite, that is, extremely depressed. (20b) is not acceptable, opposed to (20a), because *unhappy*, which has a negative incorporation, neither negates happiness nor rejects the accuracy of ‘happy’ but asserts unhappiness. It follows that OTC functions to offer the message of S2 as the correct replacement of S1.

Fraser’s analysis contains some empirical problems and a methodological problem. First, his generalised meaning (or function) of OTC cannot explain the one-speaker case: though he claims OTC is a contrastive discourse marker which signals the hearer to interpret S1 as an incorrect representation and S2 as the correct one, he fails to notice that S2 in the one-speaker case is strictly not the contrary to S1 but the contrary to the positive version of S1 (i.e. S1 without *not*). Moreover, his claim that the one-speaker case, especially the self-attribution case, requires S1 to be explicitly negated cannot account for the example below in which S1 is an affirmative:

(21) a. Unfortunately, he broke a leg. **On the contrary**, fortunately, he didn’t have to go to war. (= (4))
b. Fortunately, he won five million dollars in the lottery. **On the contrary**, he, unfortunately, lost his close friends.

Both S1 and S2 in (21a) and (21b) are attributed to one and the same speaker. These examples are acceptable though S1 is not explicitly negated. This suggests that Fraser’s restrictions on S1 is too strong and therefore should be modified or relaxed.

Second, does OTC signal a correction or modification
of S1 by S2? If Fraser’s view is right, it would be predicted that as long as S1 is a negative, it should always be acceptable. It is because a negative is a sentence which rejects its affirmative counterpart. But this prediction is confirmed to be wrong by the example (3) (repeated as (22)) Fraser himself offers in his 2009 paper:

(22) I didn’t take the letter. *On the contrary, I left it lying on the table. (=3))

What is meant by (22) seems to reject the speaker’s action of taking the letter, which is represented by S1, and offer S2 (i.e. her actual action of lying the letter on the table) as the correction of S1, but (22) is not acceptable. This suggests the possibility that the function of OTC is not to introduce S2 as the correction of S1. This possibility is supported by (23), whose S2 obviously does not correct S1:

(23) If you don’t take this medicine, you won’t feel better. On the contrary, if you take it, you will get better soon. (=5))

In (23) the accuracy of S1 (i.e. the complex sentence preceding OTC) is not rejected, nor is the positive version of S1, which roughly corresponds to S2. S1 and S2 just express the two situations the hearer can choose: one situation where he takes the medicine and the other where he does not. S1 is neither corrected by S2 nor is a false representation, but both S1 and S2 are asserted.

Finally, I would like to point out a methodological problem about Fraser’s approach to OTC. He starts an analysis of OTC in terms of the one- and two-speaker cases in his 1998 paper, and develops it by dividing the one-speaker case into the other- and self-attribution cases in his 2009 paper. If I were him, I would adopt an analysis based on the distinction of attribution (or attributors). That analysis would be more rational, and much more elegant because the distinction of attribution deals with the one-speaker case as well as the two-speaker case, which refers to a sequence of two utterances by different attributors. This entails that the distinction of the number of speakers in a sequence “S1. OTC, S2.” is not essential for providing a universal account of OTC.

The next section aims to present solutions to the problems of Fraser’s explanation by clarifying semantic requirements for OTC and their characteristics.

4. Semantic requirements for on the contrary
This section discusses semantic requirements for on the contrary (henceforth OTC). OTC, as mentioned in the sections 2 and 3, is a contrastive connector of two discourse segments (i.e. the segments anterior and posterior to OTC, which correspond to what Fraser calls S1 and S2 respectively). Swan and Fraser have drawn attention to the function of OTC and the relationship between two discourse segments S1 and S2. Their approaches are both taken with respect to the speaker(s) involved in an utterance or a dialogue. In this paper we would like to make a relevance-theoretic analysis of OTC in terms of the relationship between two discourse segments. The aim of this section is to propose semantic requirements for OTC, which impose on the hearer a search for an “opposite” relation between S1 and S2, and to reject Fraser’s view that OTC can function to correct S1 with the help of S2.

The literature on OTC treats its function on the basis of the relationship between two discourse segments S1 and S2. Quirk et.al. (1985) claim that the function of OTC is to introduce a “direct antithesis” which establishes some contrastive relation between two items in S1 and S2. Swan (2005) regards OTC as a discourse marker for contradiction: OTC is used to contradict what has been said or suggested, and can also be used to strengthen a preceding negative statement (i.e. S1) in the one-speaker case only. OTC, as Quirk et.al. and Swan show, seems to offer a contradiction between two items in S1 and S2, but they do not necessarily have a contradictory relation.

(24) Mary didn’t make a trivial mistake. On the contrary, she made a horrendous error. (=1))
(25) Harry is not happy. On the contrary, he is extremely depressed. (=20a))
(26) Fred is not a gentleman. On the contrary, he is a rogue. (Fraser 1998: 309)

In (24) the term trivial in S1 is generally taken to be
the opposite (i.e. a contradictory term) of horrendous in S2, and the two terms are in a contradictory relation. But a contradiction between S1 and S2 is not found out in (25) and (26). The opposite of happy is normally unhappy, but not depressed, which designates not only unhappiness but also hopelessness. The relation between happy and depressed is not “strictly” but “roughly” or “loosely” contradictory. This holds true for the relation between gentleman and rogue in (26): almost nobody has an antonymous counterpart of gentleman or rogue in their mental lexicon. These two words, however, would be recognised to be “loosely” contradictory because they are contrastive with respect to behaviour, especially politeness, educatedness, and manners. It follows that the notion of “contradiction” used by Quirk et al. and Swan should be loosened.

Taking the examples (24)–(26) into account, we should replace “contradiction” with another term for “loose contradiction” in order to deal with the relation introduced by OTC. There are two possible candidates: “opposition” or “contrast”. I would rather choose “opposition” than “contrast” on the basis of Lyon’s (1977) distinction between these terms. As Lyons (1977: 279) points out, contrast carries “no implications as to the number of elements in the set of paradigmatically contrasting elements” whereas opposition is “restricted to dichotomous, or binary, contrasts”. In short, a contrast can refer to a one-to-many relation (i.e. a relation in which an item can be contrasted with some items) whereas opposition is restricted to a one-to-one relation (i.e. a relation in which an item is contrasted with another one). In a sequence of “S1. OTC, S2”, a relation indicated by OTC signifies a binary contrast which is always maintained between two discourse segments S1 and S2. This is why “opposition” is more suitable for a contrastive relation in that sequence. Also, following Lyons, opposites (i.e. terms for opposition) cover both gradable expressions (e.g. long: short) and ungradable ones (e.g. dead: alive). This is consistent with the fact that OTC, as mentioned in section 2.2, can be used in the cases where S1 and S2 are merely opposite (or dichotomously contrastive) and where they are strictly contradictory.

Before giving a definition of “opposition”, we need to look closely at the characteristics of opposition, or how we recognise an opposite relation between two elements. We can speculate that we cannot perceive opposition between two arbitrary elements because we need to recognise one or two differences between them. A man and a tiger, for example, might be difficult to judge opposite without any context because they are totally different from each other. In contrast, we would easily accept that a man and a woman are in an opposite relation because they have a distinction in gender and at the same time similarities, such as almost all parts except genitals. When two elements are in an opposite relation, they should have one or some outstanding different features and many similar ones. This view is supported by Lyons (1977: 286): “When we compare and contrast two objects with respect to their possession or lack of one or more properties, we do so generally on the basis of their similarity in other respects. … Oppositions are drawn along some dimension of similarity” (Italics mine).

As Lyons points out, an opposite relation between two elements is established in a cline or dimension they have in common. This suggests that two elements will not be judged opposite if they are in different clines or dimensions. Consider the following simple utterance (27):

(27) Tom: Mary is good/bad.
(28) a. [Tom eats the meal Mary cooks.] MARY IS GOOD*/BAD*.
   b. [Tom hears Mary playing the piano.] MARY IS GOOD**/BAD**.

When the speaker Tom utters (27) in a situation where he has eaten the meal Mary cooked, the hearer might interpret (and mentally represent) it as MARY IS GOOD*/BAD*, as in (28a), which roughly means that she is good or bad with respect to cooking skills. On the other, in the situation where Tom has heard Mary playing the piano the hearer might interpret (27) as MARY IS GOOD**/BAD**, as in (28b), which roughly means she is good or bad with respect to her piano performance. Even though the lexical items good and bad are normally stored as an antonymous pair (i.e. opposite terms) in the mental lexicon, two communicated concepts GOOD* in (28a) and BAD** in (28b) would not be recognised to be opposite
because they are in different clines or dimensions. A cline or dimension on which two elements are based is essential to building up an opposition. Thus I will define the notion of “opposition” introduced by OTC as follows:

(29) Opposition is a binary contrast between S1 and S2 which the hearer recognises as one or some outstanding different properties given the existence of many similar ones along a cline or dimension.

It follows that OTC functions to introduce opposition (which I define in (29)) rather than contradiction as Quirk et al. and Swan have assumed.

According to Fraser (1998, 2009), OTC is a contrastive discourse marker for correction which signals the hearer to interpret S1 as an incorrect representation and S2 as the correct one and to replace S1 with S2 for correction. In a nutshell, the function of OTC is to correct S1 with S2. This view is problematic, as mentioned in section 3: if it was right, it would wrongly predict that all the sequences (i.e. “S1. OTC, S2”) would be acceptable as long as S1 is a negative, on the grounds that a correction of S1 with S2 means that S1 is false and S2 is true. A negative segment (i.e. S1) can be corrected by all types of statements because it can logically mean all states of affairs except that expressed by its affirmative counterpart. However, there are cases where a sequence is unacceptable though S1 is a negative, as in (30):

(30) I didn’t take the letter. *(On the contrary, I left it lying on the table. (=22))

(31) If you don’t take this medicine, you won’t feel better. **On the contrary, if you take it, you will get better soon. (=23))

As I have shown in section 3, (30) is not acceptable though S1 is a negative. This might suggest that OTC does not contribute to making the hearer interpret S1 as an incorrect representation and S2 as the correct one. This suggestion is supported by the example (31): though (31), whose S1 is a negative, is acceptable, S1 in (31) is not corrected or rejected by S2. S1 and S2 are asserted, just signifying two alternative choices of taking medicine and not taking medicine. These examples would demonstrate that S2 does not always correct S1.

To be more specific, it is doubtful whether the function of correction is ascribed to OTC in itself. The example (32) is acceptable with or without OTC:

(32) Mary didn’t make a trivial mistake. *(On the contrary,) she made a horrendous error.

Could (32) be interpreted as a correction of S1 with S2? The answer would be yes: S2 can correct S1 with or without OTC. This fact would encourage us to accept the possibility that the function of correction is not an intrinsic property of OTC. Thus it is natural that a correction of S1 with S2 should be made on the basis of the relationship between those two segments. In (32) the hearer would understand S2 as a correction of S1 because the message of S2 has a reasonable ground for rejecting and correcting the message of the positive version of S1. In addition, the negative marker not in S1 makes a direct contribution to rejecting S1. If this view is right, the acceptability of (31) can also be accounted for: S2 does not correct S1 on the basis of the relation in which S1 and S2, which represent two logically possible situations, are consistent with each other. It is also because the negative marker not does not reject the positive version of S1, which roughly corresponds to S2 itself in meaning. Consequently, correction in a sequence “S1. OTC, S2” is not ascribed to OTC but to the relationship between the two segments S1 and S2.

What is common in all examples is that there is an opposition between two items or elements in S1 and S2. This suggests that OTC is a marker for opposition. OTC would make contributions to signaling to or making the hearer aware of an opposition between S1 and S2. In (24), for example, OTC would help the hearer to bear in mind that there is an opposition between trivial and horrendous. In (32) (i.e. an utterance without OTC), on the other, the hearer might or might not be conscious of an opposition: whether an opposition is mentally represented or not would totally depend on the hearer himself. In (31) an opposition between two conditionals would be accessible to the hearer: he would recognise the two if-clauses in S1 and S2 as an opposition between fulfillment and nonfulfillment of a condition. If the view that OTC introduces opposition is right, it can account
for the unacceptability of (30). The hearer is unlikely to recognise an opposition between S1 and S2 (i.e. taking the letter vs. leaving it lying on the table) because he has difficulty finding out one or some differences and many similarities between the two. Thus OTC offers S2 as a representation which contains an opposition with an item or element in S1.

This view that OTC functions to introduce opposition would not require the restriction on S1 Fraser (2009) assumes, that is, S1 must be a negative. A sequence which is acceptable when S1 is an affirmative can be a counter-example against Fraser’s view. Let us consider (33):

(33) (You think) She is gorgeous. **On the contrary**, I find her rather ordinary looking. (= (18b))

Fraser’s view would predict that (33), whose S1 is not a negative, is unacceptable, but he accounts for it in terms of the distinction in attribution between S1 and S2: “there is no polarity constraint on S1” in the cases where “the content of S1 is attributed to another speaker.” (Fraser 2009: 90) Recall that, as we have mentioned in section 3, he treats OTC in terms of the one- and two-speaker cases (the former of which is subcategorised into the cases of self-attribution and other-attribution). In short, there is no restriction on S1 in the case of other-attribution. In (33), the message of S1 is attributed to a different speaker from that of S2. This suggests that the distinction of attribution (or attributors) is crucial for the acceptability of OTC. The distinction of attribution can deal with the two-speaker case, which is a typical example of other-attribute: the two-speaker case permits S1 to be an affirmative, a negative, an interrogative and an imperative, as Fraser (2009: 89) points out. Thus the attributor of a thought (or a representation of it) can affect the acceptability of a sequence including OTC.

However, there are cases where a sequence like (21a) and (21b) (repeated below as (34a) and (34b)) is acceptable though S1 and S2 are attributed to one and the same speaker.

(34) a. Unfortunately, he broke a leg. **On the contrary**, he, unfortunately, lost his close friends. (= (21a))

b. Fortunately, he won five million dollars in the lottery. **On the contrary**, he, unfortunately, lost his close friends. (= (21b))

(34a) and (34b) are counter-examples against Fraser’s analysis of OTC based on the distinction of attribution: they are acceptable though they are examples of the self-attribution case where S1 and S2 can account for the acceptability of (34a) and (34b): OTC makes contributions to making the hearer bear in mind that there is an opposition in propositional attitude between S1 and S2. Moreover, (34b) illustrates that the negative term for propositional attitude (i.e. *unfortunately*) does not have to occur in S1 or prior to the positive term (i.e. *fortunately*). There is no constraint on the order of the terms for propositional attitude in S1 and S2. These examples suggest that an opposition can be made in propositional attitude as well as in proposition. In terms of Relevance Theory, the hearer recognises the opposite relation on the level of higher-level explicature as an opposition marked by OTC in the interpretation of a sequence “S1. OTC, S2”:12) The explicatures of S1 and S2 in (34a), for example, are shown in (35a) and (35b) respectively:

(35) a. **THE SPEAKER** believes that it is unfortunate that he broke a leg.13)

b. **THE SPEAKER** believes that it is fortunate that he didn’t have to go to war.

Compare (34a) with (36), in which the terms for propositional attitude in S1 and S2 are removed from (34a):

(36) *He broke a leg. **On the contrary**, he didn’t have to go to war.

(37) a. **THE SPEAKER** believes that (it is true that) he broke a leg.

b. **THE SPEAKER** believes that (it is true that) he didn’t have to go to war.

The unacceptability of (36) would be due to the absence of an opposition between S1 and S2. This is illustrated by the explicatures of S1 and S2 as in (37a) and (37b) respectively: S1 and S2 share the same high-level explicature whilst they do not contain any items or
constituents in the base-level explicatures which should have an opposite relation expressed by OTC. S1 and S2 in (36) represent two different states of affairs which have no specific relationship. In other words, the hearer would judge (36) as unacceptable because he finds out neither one or more outstanding different features nor many similar ones and cannot therefore recognise an opposition between (parts of) the base-level explicatures of S1 and S2. This would predict that a sequence will be acceptable if an opposition is established between the base-level explicatures of S1 and S2. This is why (38) is acceptable.

(38) Airdrie [a football team — NK] produced an instant counter-offensive, however, Smith sprawling twice to save from Kirkwood. As the play blundered on into the second half, the Airdrie strategy was clear — to ignore any pretence of building attacks from the back of the team through to the midfield. On the contrary, it was to hammer long balls into the Hearts penalty area at every opportunity on the grounds that such pressure would produce defensive mistakes. (BNC)

In (38), OTC shows that (part of) the base-level explicature of S1 (i.e. BUILDING ATTACKS FROM THE BACK OF THE TEAM THROUGH TO THE MIDFIELD) is remarkably different from (or opposite to) that of S2 (i.e. TO HAMMER LONG BALLS): there is an opposition between an attack by way of the midfielder (which might imply a slow, steady attack) and an attack skipping the midfielder (which might imply a rapid, hit-or-miss attack).

It could be possible to criticise our view by asking this question: Can our view deal with the unacceptability of a sequence whose S1 and S2 appear to be opposite, as in (39)?

(39) Mary made a trivial mistake. *On the contrary, she made a horrendous error.

It is true that this unacceptable sequence contains an opposition between trivial in S1 and horrendous in S2, but because the two segments describe one and the same state of affairs, not distinct ones, they would contradict each other when they are attributed to one speaker. Even though the hearer understands that OTC introduces an opposition between two items in S1 and S2, he would not judge (39) acceptable because an interpretation of it as contradictory is obviously not so relevant that it puts him to unjustifiable processing effort. Recall that (24), whose S1 is the negative version of S1 in (39), is acceptable. The negative marker not is helpful in avoiding contradiction and guaranteeing some consistency between two segments attributed to one speaker. Thus the assertion of two conflicting (or contradictory) thoughts attributed to one speaker is likely to be recognised as a contradiction.

It is natural that if a sequence “S1. OTC, S2” is consistent, it should be unacceptable when it does not contain an opposition between S1 and S2. Our view can deal with another unacceptable sequence, as in (20b) (repeated as (40)):

(40) Harry is unhappy. *On the contrary, he is extremely depressed. (=20b)

In this sequence, S1 is consistent with S2, or more precisely, they are almost equivalent in meaning: both unhappy and depressed have the notion of “not-happy” in common. However, the two segments have no opposite relationship. This fact would not meet the semantic requirements for OTC. The sequence without OTC, as in (41), is acceptable because it does not have to satisfy the requirements:

(41) Harry is unhappy. He is extremely depressed.

Comparing the unacceptable sequence (40) with the acceptable one (41), we should notice that the semantic requirements for OTC is responsible for the acceptability. Thus our view that OTC introduces opposition is more convincing than Fraser’s view that there is polarity constraint on S1 in the self-attribution case and no such constraint in the other-attribution case.

Fraser seems to notice that the acceptability of a sequence “S1. OTC, S2” depends largely upon the distinction of attributors, but he has decided to adopt the distinction of the number of speakers in a sequence. As we have suggested above, we should treat OTC with respect to the distinction of attributors to give a universal
account of it. Recall the example (33) (repeated as (42)) to reconfirm that the distinction of attribution is the key to the acceptability of OTC:

(42) (You think) She is gorgeous. **On the contrary**, I find her rather ordinary looking. (= (33))

As for (42), S1 and S2 would be contradictory if they were attributed to one speaker: it would not be rational for one attributor to bear in mind two conflicting thoughts of “her” as gorgeous and ordinary looking. In short, opposition made by one attributor would lead to a contradiction whereas opposition by different attributors would not. This is supported by the examples (43a) and (43b), which are only distinct in attributors:

(43) a. A: Fred is a nice guy. *On the contrary, he is a boor. (Fraser 2006a: 197)
   b. A: Fred is a nice guy.
   B: **On the contrary**, he is a boor.

The unacceptability of (43a) is due to the inconsistency between the two thoughts of Fred as a nice guy in S1 and a boor in S2 which are attributed to one speaker. In contrast, (43b) is acceptable because S1 and S2, which are attributed to different speakers, do not sound contradictory. Different attributors should be allowed to have any type of thoughts, including conflicting ones. The distinction of attribution can also explain the cases where it reflects the parts of the base-level explicature, as in (44). The explicatures of S1 and S2 are shown in (45a) and (45b) respectively:

(44) People would expect his performance to earn him several awards from some organizations. **On the contrary**, he has earned nothing but severe criticism. (BNC)

(45) a. THE SPEAKER, BELIEVES THAT (IT IS TRUE THAT) PEOPLE WOULD EXPECT THAT HE, WOULD EARN SEVERAL AWARDS FROM SOME ORGANIZATIONS.16)
   b. THE SPEAKER, BELIEVES THAT (IT IS TRUE THAT) HE HAS EARNED NOTHING BUT SEVERE CRITICISM.

There seems to be a contradiction between the embedded clause of the base-level explicature in (45a) (i.e. he would earn several awards from some organizations) and the whole base-level explicature in (45b) (i.e. he has earned nothing but severe criticism): the former represents that he has earned several awards whereas the latter represents that he has earned severe criticism. It may be logically possible to receive some awards from some organizations and some criticism from other ones at one time. In this sense, S1 and S2 (especially, awards and criticism) are strictly not contradictory but apparently conflicting. Such an apparent confliction would be cancelled by the distinction of attribution: the proposition expressed by the embedded clauses in (45a) belongs to ordinary people whereas the base-level explicature is the speaker’s own representation of what has actually happened to the person referred to by he. In short, two seemingly contradictory propositions are attributed to different attributors, that is, ordinary people in the former and the actual fact (or the speaker representing it) in the latter. It would be concluded that the distinction of attribution is crucial for maintaining the consistency between S1 and S2 and avoiding a contradiction in every aspect.

5. Concluding remarks

This paper has shown that OTC introduces “loose” contradiction rather than “strict” contradiction in a sequence “S1. OTC, S2”. We call it “opposition”, which is defined as (29). OTC just contributes to making the hearer aware that S2 has an opposition with S1. It seems that OTC functions to make S2 correct S1 in some sequences. But a correction of S1 with S2 is not caused by OTC itself (or its function) but the relation between S1 and S2. In short, OTC does not make any direct contribution to S2 correcting S1. Furthermore, when S2 corrects S1, there seems to be polarity constraint on S1 — S1 must be explicitly negated, as Fraser claims. But as the examples (34a), (34b) and (38) show, no such constraint is required: S1 does not have to be a negative. It is true that an affirmative statement S1 seems to be contradictory to S2 in some cases, especially in the one-speaker case, but a sequence is acceptable as long as S1 and S2 are attributed to different speakers. This supports Fraser’s view that there is no polarity constraint on S1 in the two-speaker case in which S1 and S2 are different in attribution. The distinction of attributors is one of the
key factors for dealing with the one- and two-speaker cases. What is common in all the cases of a sequence “S1. OTC, S2” (including the one- and two-speaker cases) is an opposition to be recognised between S1 and S2. OTC, therefore, only contributes to introducing an opposition between its host clause (i.e. S2) and a preceding one (i.e. S1).

Notes
1) According to Fraser (2009: 91), “on the contrary occurs rarely in medial or final position”.

2) Unfortunately, we do not find any examples of OTC in Quirk et.al. (1985) nor can we tell in detail what they mean by a “direct antithesis”.

3) For the details of what Fraser calls pragmatic markers, see Fraser (1996).

4) Fraser’s view about discourse markers is similar to what relevance theorists call “procedural meaning”: discourse markers do not contribute to the proposition expressed by its host utterance but offer the hearer particular interpretive procedures. (For the relevance-theoretic analysis of so and but, see Blakemore (1987, 1992).) I put aside whether OTC is procedural or not, just because this matter needs more investigation and it is too early to draw any conclusions.

5) Fraser calls the first variation “other-attribution” and I name the second one “self-attribution” after the first.

6) As mentioned in 2.2, the two-speaker case permits S2 to be an imperative. But Fraser claims that S2 must be a declarative in the case of other-attribution. His claim seems to need a modification, taking into account the example he offers, as in (i) below. The content of S2 (i.e. the hell with you) may not be a genuine imperative but seems to me to be, at least, difficult to categorise into a declarative. It is similar to an imperative in that it is kind of an interjection. This would need further investigation regarding the restriction on S2.

   (i) (You are suggesting that I) Throw the game? On the contrary, the hell with you. (Fraser 2009: 90)

7) I will use his terminology for my analysis.

8) Some might admit that the two lexical items gentleman and rogue in (26) are antonymous or opposite, but they are generally not so, at least, as lexical items. Note that concepts or conceptual representations which are accessible in mind through lexical items would be sufficiently contrastive. Nevertheless, two concepts Gentleman and Rogue are contrastive in terms of information in the encyclopaedic entry, not in the logical entry. (Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995: 86) assume that a concept consists of three entries: the logical, the lexical, and the encyclopaedic entry.)

9) It might not be impossible that a man and a tiger could be judged opposite in a context in which they are compared with respect to ferocity.

10) More precisely, (28a) might mean Mary’s cooking skills are good to the extent that Tom wants her to cook more, that he wants to eat her meals every day, or that he wants to marry her, and so on. Note that it is not necessarily that good* merely means to be good in cooking skills.

11) I have just described OTC as a “marker” rather than a discourse marker or a contrastive conjunct because I am not sure about what it should be categorised into. Moreover, I still do not have a clue to decide whether it is conceptual or procedural, though Fraser seems to take it to have a procedural meaning. (According to Fraser (1996: 186), for example, “discourse markers do not contribute to the representative sentence meaning, but only to the procedural meaning: They provide instructions to the addressee on how the utterance to which the discourse marker is attached is to be interpreted”.) These questions need more investigation on OTC. I will put them aside in this paper.

12) A higher-level explicature is “a particular kind of explicature … which involves embedding the propositional form of the utterance or one of its constituent propositional forms under a higher-level description such as a speech-act description, a propositional attitude description or some other comment on the embedded proposition” (Carston 2002: 377). On higher-level explicature, see also Wilson and Sperber (1993), Wilson and Sperber (2002).

13) The underlined propositional content refers to the base-level explicature, and the rest corresponds to...
14) A causal relation may be made between S1 and S2 in (36), but it has nothing special to do with an opposite relation.

15) If S1 and S2 are used to describe different situations, they will not be inconsistent with each other. But (39) is not suitable for representing such situations.

16) I have adapted (45a) from S1 in (44) in order to illustrate the contrast between the explications of S1 and S2 clearly.

References