

A Syntactic and Discoursal Analysis of *hala?* 'Now' in Jordanian Arabic

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Abstract—This study investigates the syntactic behavior and the discoursal roles of *hala?* in Jordanian Arabic, which corresponds to the English 'now' and is frequently used as a discourse marker. Specifically, the syntactic distribution of this discourse marker in everyday conversations, its function in establishing coherence between discourse units, and its communicative and discoursal meanings are scrutinized. The data necessary for the study was obtained from almost a 15-hour corpus of naturally-occurring conversations recorded by the researchers through 30 interviews with 80 (40 males and 40 females) Jordanian students from Al-Balqa Applied University. The data analysis revealed that *hala?* can be used as an adverb conveying temporal meaning and as a discourse marker conveying coherence-related meanings. Semantically, it is a temporal adverb that has a semantic meaning parallel to that of its English adverbial counterpart 'now'. However, it was found that *hala?* can also serve six pragmatic functions: Changing a topic, introducing a contrast or comparison, marking disagreement, initiating reasons, explanations or clarifications, listing, and marking shifts in participation framework (Marking a change in the speaker's orientation and marking a change of footing). The study concludes with a suggested grammaticalization path for the development of this discourse marker from a lexical source.

Index Terms—discourse marker, grammaticalization, *hala?*, Jordanian Arabic, multi-functionality

I. INTRODUCTION

Discourse markers refer to elements like 'well', 'so', 'okay', 'oh', 'but', 'I mean', 'you know', etc. Such elements were viewed at a certain point as redundant and superfluous expressions by some scholars (e.g., Goddard & Patterson, 2000, p. 98). However, since the late 1980s, the study of discourse markers has been considered a "growth industry in linguistics" (Fraser, 1999, p. 931), which can be taken as evidence for their manifold significance. The definition, functions and characteristics of discourse markers in different languages have been approached by several scholars from different perspectives (see, e.g., Fraser, 1999; Muller, 2005; Schourup, 1999; Aijmer, 2002; Blakemore, 1987; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Schiffrin, 1987; *inter alia*).

A large collection of nomenclatures and definitions can be detected in the literature for this linguistic phenomenon. For example, the following labels have been assigned to these elements in the literature: Pragmatic Markers (Andersen, 2001; Fraser, 1993, 1999; Brinton, 1996), Pragmatic Particles (Östman, 1981), Pragmatic Expressions (Erman, 1987), Discourse Connectives (Blakemore, 1987, 1989), Conjunctions or conjunctive adjuncts/expressions (Halliday & Hasan, 1976), Discourse Operators (Redeker, 1991), and Discourse Particles (Aijmer, 2002).

Also, abundant definitions were devised by different researchers to describe this linguistic phenomenon. Schiffrin (1987, p. 31), for instance, defines discourse markers as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk"

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that are employed by the speakers to show the relationship between the present discourse and the upcoming unit of discourse. Redeker (1991, p. 1168) defines discourse markers as “words or phrases that are uttered with the primary function of bringing to the listener’s attention a particular kind of linkage of the upcoming utterance with the immediate discourse context”. One more quite comprehensive definition of discourse markers is given by Fraser (1999, p. 831) who defines them as “A class of lexical expressions that signal a relationship between the interpretation of the segment they introduce, S2, and the prior segment, S1”.

Albeit the variation in the definitions and terms used to describe such linguistic elements, the term “discourse markers” is the most widely adopted one (Muller, 2005; Aijmer, 2002; Schourup, 1999). This can be partly attributed to the influence of Schiffrin’s (1987) seminal work on this phenomenon which adopted this term. Accordingly, the term discourse markers (DMs, henceforward) is adopted throughout the current paper.

The numerous names given to these linguistic elements can be suggestive of the multiplicity of functions DMs can serve. It is broadly assumed that DMs are multifunctional/polyfunctional in the sense that they can serve more than one function based on the context where they are employed (Muller, 2005; Fraser, 1999; Aijmer, 2002; Lenk, 1998; Schiffrin, 1987).

DMs can have textual and interpersonal functions. Textually, DMs imply “a sequential relationship between the current basic message and the previous discourse” (Brinton, 1996, p. 17). So, DMs function to connect the old information to the new information in a way that enables the hearer to capture the speaker’s intention and hence easing communication. As for their interpersonal functions, DMs shape the participation framework in the sense that the interlocutors are assigned specific roles. For example, DMs help speakers clearly express their attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and judgments. In other words, DMs can add a subjective meaning which mirrors the speaker’s opinion (see Fraser, 1990; Lenk, 1998; Aijmer, 2002). As such, it can be said that DMs play a pivotal role in indexing social relationships and demarcating discourse connections (Bolden, 2008, p. 102).

Another function of DMs is limiting the number of likely interpretations and reducing time and effort to understand the intended message; DMs can restrict the hearer’s inference and remove the potential ambiguity of utterances (Fraser, 1990; Lenk, 1998; Andersen, 2001; Aijmer, 2002; Muller, 2005).

Furthermore, DMs can function to preserve the text’s coherence and cohesion as they link the different discourse units (i.e., clauses, sentences, and paragraphs) (see, e.g., Fraser, 1990, 1999; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Blakemore, 1987; Aijmer, 2002; Lenk, 1998; Schiffrin, 1987; *inter alia*). For example, Schiffrin (1987, p. 41) points out that DMs are “members of a functional class of verbal (and nonverbal) devices which provide contextual coordinates for ongoing talk”. Such coordinates play a vital role in increasing the coherence of the discourse as they integrate different units of talk.

Although DMs have such textual, emotive and pragmatic functions, and although they usually emerge from lexical elements that carry semantic meanings, they are, semantically speaking, propositionally empty in the sense that they do not have a denotative or referential function. They do not carry a semantic content and, consequently, do not contribute to the propositional content of the utterance or influence its truth-condition, a property of DMs known in the literature as “non-truth conditionality” (Schiffrin, 1987; Blakemore, 1987; Brinton, 1996; Lenk, 1998; Schourup, 1999; Fraser, 1993, 1999).

As for their syntactic behavior, DMs usually appear sentence-initially and loosely-attached as if they were separated from the rest of the utterance (Urgelles-Coll, 2010). This actually entails two important properties of DMs referred to in the literature as “initiality” and “weak-clause association” (Fraser, 1990, 1993; Schourup, 1999; Schiffrin, 1987; Redeker, 1991; Brinton, 1996; Lenk, 1998; Aijmer, 2002). This means that they exhibit syntactic independence from their main clause because they do not constitute a constituent in the syntactic structure of the sentence in which they are used. In other words, they do not serve any specific grammatical or syntactic function in the sentence.

“Connectivity” and “optionality” are also defining properties of DMs. Connectivity means that DMs connect the different textual parts of the discourse through demonstrating their correlation with each other (Schourup, 1999). Optionality refers to the observation that DMs are optional and their deletion from the utterances containing them will keep the grammaticality of the utterances intact (Schourup, 1999; Schiffrin, 1987; Brinton, 1996; Lenk, 1998; Muller, 2005).

“Orality” and “multifunctionality” are other properties widely discussed in the literature of DMs. While the former refers to the fact that DMs are a typical property of unwritten discourse (Fraser, 1990; Lenk, 1998; Brinton, 1996; Schiffrin, 1987), the latter means that a DM can have more than one function based on the context in which it is used (Fraser, 1990, 1999; Brinton, 1996; Andersen, 2001; Redeker, 1991; Lenk, 1998; Müller, 2005; Schiffrin, 1987).

The Jordanian *hala?*, which is equivalent to ‘now’ in English, exhibits characteristics typically found with DMs. For example, it occurs clause-initially in oral communications. It is also multifunctional and optional. This study provides evidence that the word *hala?*, which is originally a temporal adverb, has developed into a DM that can perform several discursal functions and, thus, facilitate the speaker-hearer communication.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Different Arabic DMs in different dialects have been recently studied under different approaches. This section sheds light on some of these studies.

Alqahtani (2023) studied the functions of the Arabic DM /bʕdm/ (lit. ‘then’). She collected her data from Twitter and her dataset consisted of (105) tweets containing the word /bʕdm/. Adopting the relevance theory, she found that /bʕdm/ has seven pragmatic functions: to mark orientation shift, disagreement, agreement, reason, result, conditionals and coordination.

Alshammary (2021) studied the possible procedural meanings of the DMs /qSdk/ ‘you mean’ and /yʕny/ ‘this means’ in written Saudi Arabic. Making irony, asking for clarification, and correction were reported as possible meanings of /qSdk/. It was also found that clarification and asking for clarification are performed by /yʕny/.

Abdeljawad and Abu Radwan (2016) investigated the communicative functions of the DM /Inzeen/ ‘okay’ in Arabian Gulf Arabic. They found that this DM can function as an agreement marker, tag marker, topic management marker, challenge/threat marker, structural marker, cohesive marker and interactive marker.

Kanakri and Al Harahsheh (2013) examined the pragmatic functions of the Jordanian DM /ʕa:di/ ‘normally, usually’ and reported the following functions: to ask for permission, to show indifference, to express the meaning of disapproval, to mitigate sad news effects, to show acceptance, to express contempt, to save one’s face, to express courtesy, to show disappointment, and to express indirect criticism.

Building on a corpus of dyadic conversations, Alazzawie (2014) investigated the pragmatic functions of the lexical item /yamawwad/ in Iraqi Arabic. The following functions were reported by the researcher: Marking the opening of a conversation, politeness and courtesy, request and imperative, displeasure and annoyance, solidarity and empathy, pleading, apologizing, surprise and astonishment, warning, refusal, disappointment, hope and expectancy.

Reviewing the above studies on Arabic DMs, it can be said that other DMs in Jordanian Arabic like *halaʔ* are still under-investigated. Accordingly, a study is needed to fill in this apparent gap in the literature.

III. METHOD

The current study aims at specifying the distribution and functions of the DM *halaʔ* in everyday spoken conversational exchanges in Jordanian Arabic. The study is based on almost 15-hour corpus of naturally-occurring conversations recorded by the researchers through 30 interviews with the participants. The participants were 80 (40 males and 40 females) Jordanian students from Al-Balqa Applied University. Their ages ranged between 18 to 22 years. Each interview lasted for 30 minutes and included 2 to 3 participants.

All the participants expressed their willingness to take part in the study after explaining the goals of the study and assuring them that all the recorded interviews will remain confidential and will be only used for academic purposes. The participants were asked to discuss general daily-life topics as well as some personal, social, political, economic and educational topics as such spontaneous conversations of this type form an authentic source of data (Labov, 1984). All occurrences of *halaʔ* (n = 273) were identified alongside their relevant contexts in the recorded conversations. Each token of *halaʔ* was then analyzed in terms of its syntactic position in the hosting utterance, its lexical meaning, and its discursual function. The analysis in general is based upon the frameworks of Schiffrin (1987), Aijmer (2002), and Schourup (1999).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis revealed that the colloquial Jordanian Arabic word *halaʔ* has both semantic and pragmatic meanings. Semantically, it is a temporal adverb parallel to the English adverb ‘now’. Pragmatically, *halaʔ* can function as a DM that achieves coherence of discourse as it infers pragmatic connections between texts.

Quantitatively, *halaʔ* occurred in the corpus (273) times. It was used as a temporal adverb in 32% (n = 87) of the occurrences, and it was used as a DM that performs pragmatic functions to achieve coherence of contexts in 68% (n = 186) of the occurrences.

As for its syntactic distribution, when used as a temporal adverb, *halaʔ* occurred only clause-finally, at the end of its hosting utterance. By contrasts, when used as a DM, *halaʔ* occurred only clause-initially, at the beginning of the utterance that hosts it.

Regarding its potential discursual and pragmatic functions as a DM, it was found that *halaʔ* can serve six functions as a coherence marker based on the context in which it is used. These functions are discussed in detail below.

As for gender differences, the data analysis did not reveal any noticeable difference between male and female students regarding the syntactic distribution or discursual functions of *halaʔ*. The two groups used *halaʔ* as a DM in a similar manner. (However, for more on the possible effects of gender as a variable in different contexts, see Al-Daher & Al-Abed Al-Haq, 2020 and Al-Shboul et al., 2022b).

A. *Halaʔ* ‘Now’ Between Temporality and Discursivity

The form *halaʔ* ‘now’ was perceived as a temporal adverb whose essential meaning is ‘at the present moment’ in 32% of the occurrences. It was found that this adverbial use of *halaʔ* is almost always associated with the present tense of the verb as it signals the time of speaking. Moreover, it was found that such sentential *halaʔ*’s appear most often in non-initial positions in their hosting utterances. The following example illustrates these points.

(1)

A: Wein ?ahmad
Where Ahmad
'Where is Ahmad?'

B: wallahi ?ahmad ridzi? min l-d?am?a ta?ban wu hu najim *hala?*
By-God Ahmad returned from the-university tired and he sleeping now
'Actually, Ahmad came back from the university tired, and he is sleeping now.'

In the above example, *hala?* is a time adverb. Two observations point toward this analysis. First, it co-occurs with the present tense. Second, the discourse involves contrast between two time intervals; there is a clear contrast between the past and the present times (cf. Schiffrin, 1987, p. 231). The deictic relationship between the proposition in the above example and the time of uttering this proposition is termed "reference time" (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 228).

However, our corpus provides abundant evidence that *hala?* is not always unequivocally temporal. This temporal adverb is indeed peculiar as it seems that it has developed a non-temporal use; it can rather perform a number of non-sentential discourse-related functions. Notice, for example, that the temporal meaning of *hala?* in the following dialogue is subdued.

(2)
A: hu bigul ?innuh l-?imti?an kan k?ir sahil
He saying that the-exam was much easy
'He is saying that the exam was very easy.'

B: *hala?* kulu bi?tamid ?ala dirastik fa?i ?a kunti btudrusi ?awwal bi-?awwal
DM all depends on your-study If were studying first in-first

?akid ra? jukun sahil
sure will be easy
'Everything depends on your study. So If you study regularly, it will definitely be easy.'

In the above dialogue, the conventional temporal meaning of *hala?* is superseded by another discourse-related function: *hala?* is used by speaker B to present an elaboration or explanation to speaker A's point.

Another corroborating evidence in support of this line of analysis comes from the fact that our corpus contained a number of cases in which *hala?* co-occurred with other time adverbs like /?imbari?/ 'yesterday' and /bukra/ 'tomorrow'. This indeed further asserts that *hala?* is not a time adverb in such contexts, but a DM. Consider the following:

(3)
A: wein-ak ?imbari? ma ?ad?eit ?ala is-sahrah ya mu?taram
Where-you yesterday not came on the-gathering VOC. Respectful
'Why did not you show up in the gathering yesterday, sir?'

B: *hala?* ?imbari? ?ana kunit mdawim
DM yesterday I was on-job
'I was on duty yesterday.'

hala? bukra mumkin niltagi
DM tomorrow possible meet
'We can get together tomorrow.'

Notice that speaker B in the above dialogue used *hala?* in his two utterances that already contain temporal adverbs. *hala?* co-occurred with /?imbari?/ 'yesterday', which denotes past tense, in his first utterance and with /bukra/ 'tomorrow', which marks futurity, in his second utterance. This indicates that *hala?* cannot be taken as a time adverb in these utterances as it contrasts with these two temporal adverbs.

Our corpus also contained examples where two tokens of *hala?* are used in the same utterance. Along the same line of reasoning, we found that when there are two *hala?*'s in the same utterance, only one of the two tokens can be an adverb. The following is an illustrative example.

(4)
hala? sahi? ?ana mi? musta?id la-l-?imti?an *hala?* bas bukra
DM true I not ready for-the-exam now but tomorrow

ra? ?akun musta?id ?in ?a?a Allah
will be ready if wished God
'It is true that I am not ready for the exam now, but I will be ready tomorrow if God may.'

The above example shows that there are two tokens of *hala?* in the same utterance, so they cannot be both adverbial, suggesting that the initial token of *hala?* is a DM while the second one is adverbial.

The data analysis revealed that all the tokens of *hala?* that were classified as non-temporal elements surfaced utterance-initially. Moreover, it was found that there is no single example in the corpus where two tokens of *hala?* can both convey temporal meaning if they co-exist in the same utterance. Similarly, no single case of temporal *hala?* was identified in the presence of another temporal adverb (e.g., ‘yesterday’ and ‘tomorrow’) in the same utterance. In fact, position and collocation (co-occurrence with a lexical collocater and/or another temporal adverb) are among the major criteria we adopted to identify non-temporal discourse-related uses of *hala?* and to classify it, as a result, as a DM.

What lends further credibility to our analysis of *hala?* as a non-temporal DM is the observation that it exhibits a number of features that are normally characteristic of DMs: (i) *hala?* surfaces utterance-initially, (ii) it is not restricted to any particular tense; rather, it coincides with both past or present tense, (iii) it does not add to the propositional content of the utterance, and (iv) it plays a vital role in organizing the discourse (cf. Aijmer, 2002; see also the references cited in the prelude).

Having highlighted the two possible uses of *hala?*, as a time adverb and as a DM, it is of interest at this moment to uncover its discourse functions and its role in easing communication. The different discourse functions that *hala?* can perform according to our corpus are taken up in the next section.

B. The Discourse Functions of *Hala?*

In this subsection, we delineate the potential discourse functions that the DM *hala?* can perform in different contexts in Jordanian Arabic. Our analysis in general is couched in terms of the frameworks advanced by Aijmer (2002) and Schiffrin (1987) for the English ‘now’, which is the counterpart of the Jordanian *hala?*.

The English ‘now’ can express a number of functions related to textual and discourse-coherence. For instance, it has meanings like contrast and continuation. It is used to signal the orientation of the speaker to an upcoming subtopic (Schiffrin, 1987). Furthermore, ‘now’ stresses the right of the speaker to control the development of the conversation. It signals topic continuation and marks certain related connections such as explanation or justification; it can signal elaboration of a previous topic. It is also used with evaluations and subjective opinions (Aijmer, 2002).

The data analysis revealed that *hala?* as a DM can serve six functions based on the context in which it is used. These functions are: Changing a topic, introducing a contrast or comparison, marking disagreement, initiating reasons, explanations or clarifications, listing, and marking shifts in participation framework (Marking a change in the speaker’s orientation and marking a change of footing). Each function is discussed below with ample exemplification from the corpus.

(a). Changing a Topic

Hala? was found to function as a topic changer similar to its English counterpart (Aijmer, 2002) in the sense that it is used to change a topic. It is used to mark a new topic (or new argument) and to mark transitions to a subtopic.

The discursive behavior of *Hala?* conforms with a DM that is used to mark changes or switches in the argument. In (5), for example, /tajib/ ‘right’ marks the boundary between two topics signaling the end of the first topic, while *Hala?* marks the beginning of a new topic.

(5)

A: la walla l-dzaw kan kθir hami fama ruħna wu ʔadʒalna kul it-talʕa

No by-God the-weather was much hot not went and postponed all the-outgoing

‘Actually no, the weather was too hot, so we didn’t go and we postponed the whole day out.’

B: tajib *hala?* ʕaʕan qararik il-mufadzi? latayir it-taxasus

Right DM for your-decision the-sudden changing the-major

wu it-taħwil la-qisim l-muħasabih ʔihna saraħatan kθir tðajagna

and the-switch to-department the-accounting we frankly much upset

‘Right! About your sudden decision to change the major and transfer to the department of accounting, to be honest, we are quite upset.’

In the above example, *Hala?* marks the change to talking about speaker A’s sudden decision to change her major and move to the department of accounting, which is a new topic. The conversation shows that the original topic was something completely different: a scheduled day out that was cancelled due to the incompatibility of the weather. Thus, it can be said that *Hala?* represents a structural particle that marks a boundary. However, it remains to be pointed out that *Hala?* is not the only strategy used to draw the listener’s attention to the new topic in the above example; left-dislocation, though to a lesser extent, played a role to achieve this goal as well. (For more on left-dislocation, see Al-Daher, 2016).

Moreover, we found that *Hala?* can co-occur with metalinguistic comments to prepare for the new topic or to go back to an earlier topic (cf. Aijmer, 2002). /xallina nirdʒaʕ/ ‘Let’s go back to ...going back to ...’ is such a metalinguistic

phrase. In the following example, it is clear that the speaker controlling the conversation is trying to push it back to a topic discussed earlier in the conversation utilizing *hala?* and the metalinguistic phrase /xallina nirdzaʕ/.

(6)

sarahatan ma bnigdar nihki ʔinnu it-tudzar hummeh
frankly Not can say that the-merchants they

ʔil-masʔulin ʕan raff l-ʔasʕar dajman
the-Responsible for Raising the-prices always
'Honestly, we cannot say that the merchants are always responsible for raising prices.'

fi taʕaxum ʕala mustawa l-ʕalam wu fi ʔirtifaʕ bi ʔasʕar iʕ-ʕaħin kaman
there Inflation on level the-world and there Rise in Prices the-shipping also
'There is inflation worldwide, and there is also a rise in shipping prices.'

hala? xallina nirdzaʕ la muʕkilit it-taʔmin is-siħi
DM lets return to problem the-insurance the-medical

ʔinta tittafiq maʕ naqabit l-ʔattibbaʔ ʔinnuh maʕhum ħag juxðu heik qarar
you agree with syndicate the-doctors that with-them right take such decision
'Going back to the health insurance problem, do you agree with the Medical Association that they have the right to take such a decision?'

In short, *hala?* can be positioned at a certain juncture in the discourse to change the topic: *hala?* functions as a marker that draws the borders between the different subtopics in the discourse and indicates a change to a new topic in the conversation. Changing the topic typically occurs as a result of drawing attention to a new idea; *hala?* serves to label the new topic and move the conversation forward.

(b). *Introducing Contrasts or Comparisons*

Another discursual function of *Hala?* is introducing contrast in the cases of having a main topic branching into subtopics (cf. Shiffrin, 1987). It was found that *hala?* is consistently used in all kinds of comparisons. In (7), speaker A is asking speaker B about the difficulty of the literary criticism course. a comparison is overtly introduced by speaker B who prefigures the comparison using the expression /bjiʕtamid/ 'it depends'. Following the introduction of the comparison, speaker B differentiates two subtopics and uses *hala?* to introduce both subtopics.

(7)

A: jaxi¹ keif madit in-naqd l-ʔadabi
My-brother how course the-criticism the-literary
'Brother, tell me about the literary criticism course.'

B: wallaħi bjiʕtamid min biddu jaʕtiha wu hal hi fasil ʕadi ʔaw fasil seifi
By-God it-depends who wants give-it and is it semester regular or semester summer
'Actually, it depends on who will teach it and whether it is offered during a regular semester or a summer semester.'

hala? ʔana ʔaxa ʔit-ha ʕala ʔis-seifi ʕind id-daktur M wu kanat saʕba kħir kan dayit
DM I took-it on the-summer with the-doctor M (his initial) and was difficult much was pressure
'I took it during a summer semester with Dr. M, and it was too difficult. There was lots of pressure.'

hala? saħbi ʔaxa ʔ-ha fasil ʕadi ʕind id-daktura L wu kanat kħir ʔashal
DM my-friend took-it ssemester regular with the-Doctor L (her initial) and was much easier
'My friend took it during a regular semester with Dr. L, and it was much easier.'

The topic is the difficulty of the literary criticism course. This main topic is developed into two subtopics: Speaker B compares his own experience with the literary criticism course during a summer semester with a particular professor to his friend's experience with the same course but during a regular semester and with a different professor.

(c). *Marking Disagreement*

Another function of *hala?* is marking disagreement. This appears in conversations that involve argument as a result of discussing topics that are debatable, arguable, disputable or controversial (Example 8). It can also appear in conversations that involve personal opinions (Example 9).

¹ The expression /jaxi/, which literally means 'my brother', is an endearment term commonly used by Jordanians in their daily conversations. It can be taken as an in-group identity marker to show politeness and respect to the addressee. Al-Shboul et al. (2022a) ascribe the prevalence of such forms among Jordanians to social values of Arabs in general and Jordanians in particular.

According to Schiffrin (1987, p. 234), the mere introduction of some topics into the conversation can create disagreement, hence such topics are taken as implicitly disputable. Examining our corpus, we found that polygamy and abortion are among such disputable topics for our participants. In (8), for instance, Maha is asking Raghad how she feels about polygamy, and Raghad replies as follows:

(8)

hala? kul waḥad ʔilu raʔj muxtalif bi ha ḥa l-ʔiʔi
DM every one has opinion different in this the-thing
'Everyone has a different opinion about this topic.'

hala? ʔana miʔ kθir miqtanʕa ʔinnu iz-zawadʒ iθ-θani ʔiʔi saji?
DM I not much convinced that the-marriage the-second thing bad

wu ʔinnu raḥ jidamir l-ʔusra
and that will destroy the-family
'I am not very convinced that the second marriage/polygamy is a bad thing and that it will ruin the family.'

fi nas kθir mitdzawzin ʔakθar min waḥdih wu ʔumur-hum maʔijih
There people many married more than one and affairs-their going
'Many men are married to more than one woman, and their affairs are going well.'

tabʕan ha ḥa l-kalam raḥ jizaʕil niswan kθir mini xasatan ʔumi
of-course this statement will distress women many from-me especially my-mother
'Of course, this opinion will make many women mad at me, especially my mother.'

Raghad starts off her position with *hala?* She then asserts that this opinion might bother others, thus asserting that this topic is controversial. The controversy of polygamy for the participants suggests that the mere statement of opinion on the topic equals, albeit implicitly, comparing this opinion to others' opinions.

The above example shows that *hala?* is used when the discourse involves disagreement about a debatable topic. However, it was found that *hala?* is also used to present personal opinions about non-disputable topics. Although such conversations do not involve a disputable issue, the statement of an opinion does sometimes initiate disagreement (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 236). In (9), for example, the two students are talking about the novel "The Great Gatsby". Student A plays down speaker B's ability to fully understand the novel.

(9)

A: *hala?* ʔinta qaraʔt-ha qabil θalaθ snin jaʕni kunit sanih ʔula
DM you read-it before three years means were year first

fama ʔa ḥun ʔinn-ak fihimit l-mayza l-ḥaqiqi ʔaw in-naqdi min-ha
not think that-you understood the-theme the-real or the-critical from-it
'You read it three years ago, which means you were a freshman, so I do not think you understood its real literary theme.'

B: la bilʕaks fihimit-ha wu kθir ʕadʒbatni
No by-the-opposite understood-it and much admire-me
'No, quite the opposite, I understood it, and I liked it a lot.'

A: *hala?* kan lazim tiʕraf ʕwajit xalfijih tarixijih ʔaw ʔiʔi ʕan
DM Was obligatory know little background historical and thing about

il-American dream ḥatta tifham-ha saḥ
the-American dream to understand-it correct
'You should have had a historical background and something about the American dream in order to understand it correctly.'

Student A gives his opinion about student B's ability to understand the novel. Student B disagrees and states that he read and understood the novel. Student A then suggests that student B could not have correctly understood the novel as the latter had not had the necessary historical and literary background. Although this opinion does not involve a disputable issue and represents a personal assessment of a specific topic, it creates a disagreement.

(d). *Initiating Reasons, Explanations or Clarifications*

Hala? is also used to initiate justifications or reasons within explanations. It serves as a background to explain or clarify something; it can also serve to elaborate on something which has already been mentioned.

In (10), *hala?* signals the switch from the chief topic to explanation/justification. It is not clear without some further explanation why the speaker's uncle could not get in a university and studied at a community college instead. Thus, it can be said that *hala?* in such cases is used as a foregrounding element.

(10)

xali maθalan ma gidir judrus bi-l-dzamʕa ʕaʕan heik raħ ʕala kulijih mutawassita
My-uncle for-example not could study in-the-university for such went on college intermediate
'My uncle for example could not study at the university, so he went to a community college.'

hala? raħ ʕala kulijih mutawassita laʔinnuh bi ha ʔk l-ʔajam kan
DM went on college intermediat because at these the-days was

ʔilli bidʒib ʔaqal min θamanin
who get less than eighty

Bi-l-tawdzih ma bingabil bi-l-dzamʕa wu tabʕan ma kan fi dʒamʕat xasah
in-the-secondary-exam not accepted in-the-university and of-course not was in universities private
'He went to a community college because back in those days anyone who scored less than eighty in the second secondary examination could not get in university, and of course there were no private universities back then.'

(e). *Listing*

hala? is also used in lists whereby some new elements/members are added as specific instances of a more general thing/topic (cf. Schiffirin, 1987; Aijmer, 2002). In such cases, *hala?* is used to show that the different elements/members in a list are closely related and represent examples of the major topic. In (11), for example, Mariam is listing the flavors of donuts she has liked.

(11)

ʔana baħib l-farawla wu l-tʕiz keik wu l-nutilla wu l-blue biri
I love the-strawberry and the-cheese cake and the-Nutella and the-blue berry

hala? ʕu kaman ʔana baħib
DM what also I love
'I like strawberries, cheesecake, Nutella, and blueberries. what else do I like?'

In the above example, *hala?* is used to highlight the next potential item in a list (donut flavors). It is worth indicating that lots of participants used English words during their Arabic conversations as appears in this example and example (9) above. Such English terms which are commonly integrated in the daily conversations of Jordanians can be analyzed as cases of code-switching or borrowing. However, the distinction between code-switching and borrowing is beyond the scope of the current study. For more on these two phenomena, see Al-Daħer (2021) and Al-Dala'ien et al. (2022) respectively.

(f). *Marking Shifts in Participation Framework*

1. *Marking a Change in the Speaker's Orientation*

hala? is also used to mark changes or shifts in the orientation of the speaker. In (12), for example, *hala?* marks a frame-shift to evaluation (ha ʔa iʕi kθir faʔiʕ 'That's very awful') in the turn of speaker B. While speaker A is trying to justify abortion among some mothers, speaker B rejects all these justifications and switches into an evaluative mode prefacing his evaluation by *Hala?*.

(12)

A: fi ʔumhat muwaʔafat wu hummih biħmalu bidun taxtit
There mothers employees and they get-pregnant without planning

fa haʔa raħ jisabib l-hum maʕakil
and this will cause to-them problems

ʕala mustawa il-ʕeilih wu ʕala mustawa il-ʕuyul laʔinhum
on level the-family and on level the-work because

ma raħ jigdaru jidabru ʔumur-hum
not will can manage affairs-their
'Some mothers are employees, and they get pregnant without planning, so this will cause them problems at the levels of family and work because they won't be able to manage their affairs.'

B: *hatta walaw haða miş mubarir ?ana ðiq il-?idzhað fuma kan l-sabab*
 Even though this not justification I against abortion whatever was the-reason
 ‘Even though. This is not a justification. I am against abortion no matter the reason.’

hala? haða iñi kθir faðis miş mitxajil keif mumkin tuqtul ruħ
 DM this thing much terrible not imagine how possible kill soul
 ‘This is something very terrible. I cannot imagine how one could take a life.’

In the above example, speaker B switches from a narrative to evaluative mode. He switches to an evaluation signaled by *hala?* He moves from a narrative mode to interpreting his rejection of abortion. This interpretation provides the reasons for his disagreement and presents a frame for the addressee to comprehend what was stated. In this sense, *hala?* becomes a kind of affect intensifier with affective meaning (cf. Aijmer, 2002).

2. Marking a Change of Footing

hala? is also employed to mark a change in footing (i.e., a shift from the perspective of the speaker to that of the hearer, without changing the topic) (cf. Aijmer, 2002; Schiffrin, 1987). In such cases, *hala?* is followed by a question, so a change of turn taking is involved as well. Consider the following illustrative example:

(13)
 A: *?ana saraħatan miş maş qanun l-dzara?im l-?ilikrunijih l-dzadid*
 I frankly not with law the-crimes the-electronic the-new
 ‘Honestly, I do not support the new law of electronic crimes.’

?ana řarifeh ?innu fi nas bistaxdimu l-social media bi-tariqa sa?a
 I know that there people use the-social media in-way bad

wu bitnamaru řala in-nas wu kaman bjixawwaθu řalei-hum
 and bullying on the-people and also mocking on-them
 ‘I know that some people use social media in a bad way, harass people, and also mock them.’

bas haða l-qanun raħ jimnařna nřabir řan ra?jna bi ?ai qarar řukumi ?aw hatta
 but this the-law will prevent-us express about our-opinion in any decision governmental or even

l-mawaðis il-řadjih la?nhum kθir mřadidin saraħatan miş heik kaman
 the-topics the-ordinary because much strict frankly not such also
 ‘But this law will prevent us from expressing our opinions regarding any governmental decision or even ordinary topics because they are very strict regarding that. Honestly, it’s not right.’

hala? ?inta maş ?aw ðiq haða l-qanun
 DM you with or against this law
 ‘Are you with or against this law?’

B: *la? ?ana maş l-qanun*
 No I with the-law
 ‘No, I am in favor of the law.’

Speaker A in the above example expresses his unease concerning the new law of electronic crimes proposed by the Jordanian government. It is not uncommon for Jordanians to criticize governmental decisions and officials on different social media platforms (Al-Daher et al., 2022). However, speaker A is clearly worried as he believes this law will prevent Jordanians from freely expressing their opinions regarding governmental decisions in light of the strictness of the new law. He then invites speaker B to express his opinion regarding this law using *hala?* followed by a question, which indicates a change from the perspective of the speaker to the perspective of the hearer (i.e., a change in footing).

The previous analysis shows that *hala?* can be used as a temporal adverb conveying the semantic meaning ‘now’, and it can be used as a DM performing a coherence function depending on the context in which it appears. However, before we close this study, it appears to be of great interest to delineate how such a typical lexical temporal adverb has developed into a DM in the language.

V. THE GRAMMATICALIZATION OF *HALA?*

In this section, we contend that *hala?* as a DM has evolved from a lexical item derived from the phrase /haða l-waqt/ ‘this time’ through grammaticalization. Building mainly on the conjecture that this phrase has undergone some of the canonical mechanisms of grammaticalization, we will show how such typical lexical items with a semantic content have

developed into a DM. Specifically, we will show that some of the essential grammaticalization processes are pertinent to *halaʔ*.

Grammaticalization in general refers to gradual language change that involves alteration from the lexical domain to the functional one. Grammaticalization incorporates various processes such as morphosyntactic and phonetic reductions as well as semantic shifts; the linguistic elements that undergo grammaticalization usually lose certain aspects related to their semantic complexity, phonological material and syntactic freedom (cf. Traugott, 1982; Heine et al., 1991; Geurts, 2000; Hopper & Traugott, 2003). These shifts may occur either concurrently or in a consecutive path. It is also possible that certain lexical items acquire new grammatical meanings, and their functions are expanded as a result (Ziegeler, 2011).

The major mechanisms of grammaticalization are: decategorialization, phonetic erosion, desemanticization (or semantic bleaching), and extension (cf. Heine, 2003; Hopper & Traugott, 2003; Heine et al., 1991; Traugott, 1982). Decategorialization, also known as morphological reduction/loss, is a process by which a lexical item becomes a functional item (i.e., the lexical item moves from an open category into a closed category) (Hopper & Traugott, 2003; Heine & Kuteva, 2002) and loses its inflectional and syntactic characteristics as a result (Heine, 2003). In other words, this sub-process refers to the loss of the morphosyntactic aspects of the lexical item. Phonetic erosion, or phonetic reduction/attrition, is the reduction of the phonological material of the item as a result of losing a segment, syllable or prosodic feature (Heine, 2003; Traugott, 2002), thus making it phonetically shorter. Desemanticization refers to the reduction or even loss of the concrete meaning of a word (Traugott, 1982; Heine et al., 1991; Heine, 2003), whereas extension refers to the new usages the lexical item develops in different contexts (Heine, 2003).

The phrase /haʔa l-waqt/ is used in Jordanian Arabic to refer to the present moment. Consider the following example:

(14)

kul ʔiʔi tyajar haʔa l-waqt
Every thing changed this time

kunna nudrus kul l-mawad l-halna bidun ʔai mudarris xususi wu nindzaʔ
were study all the-subjects ourselves without any teacher private and succeed

ʃu mal tulab ʔil-jum sajrin heik
what about students today becoming such

‘Everything has changed at this time (i.e., now). We used to study all the subjects by ourselves without the help of any private tutor, and we would succeed. What is wrong with the students these days?’

Similarly, as was shown in section 4.1, *halaʔ* is used adverbially to indicate the notion of nowness. Recall that the analysis revealed that 32% of the occurrences of *halaʔ* were used as a temporal adverb that carries the semantic meaning ‘now’. However, 68% of its occurrences were employed to serve other discursal functions. Accordingly, we contend that /haʔa l-waqt/ is the lexical source from which this DM has developed as a result of undergoing phonological reduction, morphosyntactic loss, desemanticization and extension.

The phrase /haʔa l-waqt/ ‘this time’ consists of the demonstrative /haʔa/ ‘this’ and the noun /l-waqt/ ‘time’. These two elements undergo phonetic erosion and lose some syllables and segments. The demonstrative /haʔa/ loses its final syllable and becomes /ha/; the lexical item /l-waqt/ is phonetically reduced as a result of losing the segments /w/ and /t/ yielding /laq/. The outcome of merging these two reduced items is /halaq/, which is still widely used as a DM in some neighboring Arabic dialects such as the varieties spoken in the coastal areas of Syria and some parts of Lebanon. After that the final consonant /q/ is glottalized producing the current Jordanian form /halaʔ/, which is also decategorized losing its demonstrative and nominal morphosyntactic aspects. This newly-emerged form is semantically bleached losing some of its content meaning and is extended to cover new discursal and pragmatic functions other than the adverbial one.

In fact, this is not an unordinary phenomenon. The English DM ‘well’, for example, has emerged from a typical lexical adverbial item (Schiffrin, 1985). The English modal verb ‘can’, which originally denotes ability, has developed and acquired a new meaning: possibility (Ziegeler, 2011; Narrog, 2012). Likewise, the motion verb /raʔ/ ‘went’ has developed into a future marker through grammaticalization in Jordanian Arabic (Alshboul et al., 2010). The swearing form /wallahi/ (meaning ‘by Allah’) in spoken Arabic is originally a regular lexical item that is used to confirm what somebody is saying; however, it has later developed into a DM covering several discourse functions (Abdeljawad & Abu Radwan, 2016).

In a nutshell, it seems that the Jordanian *halaʔ* has developed into a DM in a similar fashion. This DM is the outcome of undergoing the prototypical grammaticalization subprocesses discussed above.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study was set out to investigate the syntactic distribution and discourse functions of the DM *halaʔ* in Jordanian Arabic. This study is based upon the analysis of almost 15-hour corpus of spontaneous conversations.

It was found that *hala?* fits several defining characteristics of DMs. For example, it appears clause-initially in only oral communications. Also, it is optional as its absence does not affect the grammaticality of the utterance. Furthermore, it was found that it can achieve many functions based on the context in which it occurs. Accordingly, the structural properties and discursal functions of *hala?* point toward characterizing it as a DM. We speculate that it has developed from a typical phrase meaning ‘This time’ into a DM with an array of discourse functions through the process of grammaticalization.

The main discourse (textual, affective and evaluative) functions of *hala?* are discussed. The results show that, similar to its equivalent English form, *hala?* is a multifunctional device that is used to Change a topic, introduce a contrast or comparison, mark disagreement, initiate reasons, explanations or clarifications, list, and mark shifts in participation framework (Mark a change in the speaker’s orientation and mark a change of footing). Thus, at a macro level, it can be said that the Jordanian *hala?* has universal functions shared by its English counterpart.

It is clear that DMs are challenging as they have no fixed meaning/function. Rather, they contribute to the discourse depending on the context in which they are used. Many English DMs have been studied thoroughly (Schiffrin, 1987; Aijmer, 2002; among many others); nonetheless, Arabic DMs have received little syntactic and discursal investigation. Thus, it is recommended that further investigation be dedicated to other Arabic lexical items that qualify to function as DMs. This will inevitably advance our understanding of this linguistic phenomenon in the language in general. Furthermore, a more comprehensive examination of such DMs is recommended in terms of their syntactic distribution, discursal functions and equivalence to their English corresponding DMs. This will certainly provide the fields of language teaching and translation with many significant implications.

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