

The Pragmatics of *Baseeta* in Jordanian Spoken Arabic

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Abstract: The present paper investigates the pragmatics of the discourse marker *baseeta* in Jordanian Spoken Arabic. Discourse markers play a crucial role in Arabic, as they do in other languages, by helping organizing and structuring speech or writing. They serve various functions, including indicating relationships between ideas, highlighting important points, expressing attitudes, and guiding the listener through the spoken discourse to achieve the speaker's communicative goals. This study is mainly directed towards non-native learners of Arabic of who might be interested in exploring the various contextual and cultural aspects of the word by analyzing specific examples from Jordanian Spoken Arabic occurrences. The study seeks to closely examine the different context-dependent meanings and functions of *baseeta* as a multipurpose expression. The data analyzed showed that the discourse marker *baseeta* indeed is functional and conveys at least eight culturally meaningful functions.

Keywords: *Baseeta*, Discourse analysis, Discourse markers, Pragmatics, Jordanian Spoken Arabic.

1 Introduction

Each language has its own rich repertoire of words and expressions by which people not only communicate but also make their communication possible and easier. They are also used to express opinions, feelings and attitudes and negative or positive associations. They may also increase politeness and solidarity among users or spark hostile environments dependent on the social context. Whether labeled pragmatic marker, discourse marker, pragmatic particle, interactional signal, small word may affect the truth conditions of utterances (Andersen, 2001). Fraser considers 'discourse marker' as a subtype of pragmatic markers (Fraser, 1996). Being labeled as pragmatic, such expressions like *baseeta* are characterized as pragmatic because they possess not only a significant lexical meaning but also a heightened sensitivity to the surrounding context where the cultural aspects play an imperative also a role in the understanding of such expressions. (Andersen, 2001) also states that the term 'pragmatic marker' was introduced to describe a class of short, recurrent linguistic items that generally have little lexical import but serve significant pragmatic functions in conversation. Sentence meaning can be divided up into two separate parts: a proposition which represents a state of the world. This aspect of sentence meaning is generally referred to as the propositional content. On the other hand, there are Mood markers. The non-propositional part of sentence meaning can be analyzed into different types of signals, what is called Pragmatic Markers (Fraser, 1996). Every word has a message potential, especially pragmatically.

Discourse markers, therefore, possess a factual representation. Individuals who adopt a pragmatic approach or hold a pragmatic viewpoint typically exhibit a preference for a practical and realistic method rather than a purely theoretical one, particularly in social situations or contexts. This is precisely why conversational participants opt for such pragmatic markers to convey their messages, as they aim to be pragmatic and direct while simultaneously conveying the underlying message and objectives. The manner in which a speaker delivers a message and the way it is articulated hold significance, depending on the cultural norms and the individuals involved in the interaction. Bublitz & Norrick (2011) believe that within the pragmatic perspective, the primary focus lies on language use and language users in interaction, as opposed to perceiving language solely as a system of signs or a set of rules. The pragmatic perspective examines not only individual words, sentences, or isolated texts, but rather encompasses entire speech events or language games within authentic social contexts, taking into account both the current state of affairs and its interconnectedness with preceding and subsequent actions.

In the Jordanian culture and linguistic environment, being precise and right to the point is, in most of the times, being appreciated although at certain points it may be considered impolite. The beauty of discourse or pragmatic markers is that they may combine both preciseness and face saving at the same time and when needed. An interlocutor may change intentions through intonation, for example to save face or enforce a face threatening act depending on context and the listener or addressee. In the Jordanian culture as well, being earnest is sometimes an indication of endearment, intimate

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and strong relationships.

The rich data of such discourse markers is found in Jordanian Spoken Arabic (JSA) and not in Standard Arabic. The definitions, meanings and uses for a word like *baseeta* are found in a standard Arabic dictionary but the richness of content and functionality is found in JSA simply because it is the language variant people are using on daily basis and at different social and emotional levels. This is why the pragmatic function of *baseeta* was examined in this research in JSA. The study thus aims to answer the following question: what are the pragmatic functions of the word *baseeta* in Jordanian Spoken Arabic?

2 Literature Review

Arabic is rich with such markers that are social dependent and context dependent as well. Different studies talked different discourse or pragmatic markers in Jordanian Arabic. The results of many of these studies revealed that these markers actually have a social function within given contexts relating the current utterance with a larger discourse. This paper will examine the various functions of the pragmatic marker *baseeta* in Jordanian Spoken Arabic and how those functions may vary depending on the context on which they are used. To the author's knowledge, no research has been conducted on the pragmatic functions of *baseeta* especially in Jordanian Arabic although this marker is used widely in different context. Different studies examined different pragmatic and discourse markers in Jordanian Arabic. Al-Khalidy (2017) for example, investigated the discourse analysis and pragmatic meanings of *ta:lʕ* (طلع) in Jordanian Spoken Arabic as used in TV comedy series from YouTube. Several YouTube videos were analyzed; each lasting approximately 45 minutes, while some lasted nearly 15 minutes. The study concluded that *ta:lʕ* has the following pragmatic meanings: *going, going out, hearable, appear, looks like, share, ascending and from now on*. The author supported his findings by illustrative examples taken exactly as they appeared in the Jordanian comedy series.

Kanakri & Al-Harashseh (2013) examined the discourse marker “ʔa:di”. Their study, consisting of 20 video-taped conversations in Jordanian Arabic, revealed that the adjective “ʔa:di” has many discursal functions, its pragmatic meaning relies on the context of situation and its translatability is cultural specific. The study used conversation analysis and translation theory as a theoretical framework because, according to the author, when translating, one has to take three-stratum level analysis into consideration: semantic analysis, textual analysis and pragmatic analysis. The translation of the meanings of ʔa:di depends on pragmatic strategy. The study concluded that Arabic adjective ʔa:di serves various functions in different contexts and situations: to express the meaning of consolation, to ask for a permission to do something, to express the meaning of disapproval or rebuke, to show disappointment regarding a certain action, to express the meaning of contempt, disdain, or scorn, to express courtesy, to express or show acceptance of what happened without bearing any responsibility, to save one's face in speech or in front of other people and to express an indirect criticism or questioning about a certain behavior or deed.

Kanakri & Al-Harashseh (2013) also examined the pragmatic functions of the word “tayyib”. The authors employed discourse analysis, conversation analysis, and relevance theory to their data as a theoretical framework for their analysis. The study concludes that the discourse marker *tayyib* and its cognate *tabb* are functional and convey ten pragmatic functions in Jordanian Spoken Arabic. The theoretical framework of their study draws discourse analysis, conversation analysis and relevance theory. This theory deals with spoken discourse as a process where the interlocutors in a conversation attempt to make their utterances relevant to what they intend. The listener searches for the meaning in any given situation, as he/she looks for the meaning that is suitable for context. The study concluded that *tayyib* and its cognate *tabb* are functional in JSA, and they convey ten pragmatic meanings and functions. The study also showed that everyday talk is a rich source of data, and, of terms and expressions, that are clearly full of cultural meanings.

Al-Khawaldeh (2018) examined the pragmatic use of “wallahi” in Jordanian spoken Arabic. The data has been collected through face-to-face as well as cell phones conversations. The study employs 26 participants, varied in gender, age, education, and job. His study is exploratory and functional, attempting to provide a corpus –based description and analysis of the findings utilizing direct observation technique for analyzing the discourse marker “wallahi” in the corpus under investigation. The results of the study show that the discourse marker “wallahi” is multifunctional, serving ten functions which are: to introduce an acceptance, an apology, a threat, and a compliment, and to serve as a request softener, a marker of elaboration, a continuer, a marker of confirmation, a marker of complying with a request, and a filler marker. The study also reveals that that “wallahi” tends to occur initially more than medially and finally.

3 Methodologies

The research is qualitative in nature as it aims to investigate direct face to face interaction with the sample of the study. The present study utilizes conversation analysis and analysis of exchange structure of spoken discourse as a theoretical framework and a tool to analyze the data. The Exchange Structure Analysis is a sequence of communication that can be used to analyze spoken conversations. The model of analysis exchange consists of three parts: a question or a statement,

an answer, and a comment. Each sequence is labeled as a move, consisting of Initiation (I) from the speaker and a Response (R) from the hearer, and a Follow Up (F) which is the speaker's comment on hearer's answer or statement (Egins, 1990).

The linguistic and pragmatic features were examined and situated within a wider discourse context. It is true that the data collected is unique to the Jordanian context, yet it may be shared with other cultural contexts close or far from the Jordanian contexts geographically or culturally. How the marker is translated and conveyed to non-native speakers of Arabic might be problematic as well since it is culture specific. That is why this paper might be crucial to students of Arabic who are non-native speakers of the language as learning Arabic means indulging and immersing oneself in the various standard and spoken aspects of the language. Understanding such key cultural functions in JSA is an eye opener, a facilitator and a motivator to learn and understand Jordanian Standard Arabic.

Since this research is qualitative in nature, it aims to find the different functions of the marker *baseeta* and why people use in in certain contexts and situations and at point prefer it to other discourse markers that might give the same functional values. The different pragmatic meanings of *baseeta* were transcribed and translated into English.

4 Data Collection

The data was collected through face-to-face structured conversations and topic starters with 100 university students from The University of Jordan who are native speakers of Arabic representing various geographical locations in Jordan mainly but not limited to the cities of Amman, Irbid, Karak, Tafieleh and Aqaba. The researcher started a situational topic citing proper introductory pre-prepared contexts by the author where the sample of the study provided their responses to each situation. The students were not guided throughout the process to provide any specific answers. The spontaneous responses were voice-recorded and relevant data containing the pragmatic marker *baseeta* were noted and transcribed for further analysis.

5 Results and Discussions

A pragmatic marker needs to be relevant in any given context or situation for it to be effective and deliver the optimal functionality. Pragmatic markers in general contribute to relevance by operating as signals which tell the hearer how an utterance is to be understood, thus reducing the processing effort that the hearer must employ in utterance comprehension (Jucker & Ziv, 1998). The aim of the *baseeta* marker is then to reduce the amount of time and effort both interlocutors use to deliver and comprehend an utterance. These markers are declarative and performative in nature expressing an exact message with exact force.

After a thorough investigation and analysis of the data collected, the researcher found that the Arabic discourse marker *baseeta* serves the following pragmatic functions:

First, it can be employed to express the meaning of easiness. It simply indicates that something is easy either to comprehend or do as in the following example taken from one of the responses:

Background: A professor is asking students to express themselves about the questions in a test that was below their level specifically designed to serve the purpose of this study.

[Arabic Text]

الحافز: كيف كانت الأسئلة؟

الإجابة: كانت بسيطة كثير.

[English Translation]

Move: Professor: How were the questions?

Response: Student: They were too easy.

Usually the plain direct word easy '*sahl*' is used to express easiness. Out of the 100 responses the author collected, 45% of them used '*baseeta*' to express that the questions were easy. Other responses include 'normal' and 'ok'.

Second, the discourse marker *baseeta* can be used to express the meaning of normal asking the articulator not to worry about something showing an incident or action as having little or no effect on the speaker or sequence of events and action that follow as shown in the following example:

Background: Two friends arrive late at the bus station. One friend is telling the other that they have missed the bus.

[Arabic Text]

[English Translation]

Move: We are late and missed the bus.

Response: That is OK, buses here are many.

In this example, the response came to ease a difficult or problematic situation. 40% of responses used the marker *baseeta* while the rest of responses used 'normal' '?adi' or 'no problem' 'mish mushkilah'.

Third: *baseeta* can be used pragmatically to show or express threat to someone. The threat act is usually accompanied by threatening facial expressions, tone of voice or body gesture. This pragmatic use of the word is culture specific and only members of the community or those who have prior knowledge will understand it especially if not accompanied by anybody gestures or facial expressions.

Background: A worker knew that one of his co-workers snitched on him.

[Arabic Text]

الحافز: عرفت أنه اسفنتك عند المدير

الإجابة: ايه عرفت، بسيطة أنا بورجيه

[English Translation]

Move: Did you know that he snitched on you to the manager?

Response: Yes, I knew. It's OK. I will show him.

This is probably one the most uses for the pragmatic marker *baseeta* in spoken Arabic. It was used in 70% of the responses accompanied by head nodding and changes in facial expressions.

Another function for the word *baseeta* is to indicate a humble physical look or psychological state. Usually, people say it when they feel pity for someone or when they want to show sympathy or take side with someone. This can be further exemplified by the following example:

Background: One is pointing at an old, disheveled woman.

[Arabic Text]

الحافز: شوف شوف كيف شكلها

الإجابة: حرام عليك هاي وحدة بسيطة و عالبركة

[English Translation]

Move: Hey, look how that woman looks like.

Response: Don't say that. She is just a simple poor old woman.

Baseeta is used here as an equivalent to the English words 'poor' and 'humble' as in she is a poor humble lady. 50% of responses used the word *baseeta* while most of the other responses came in favor of the word 'miskeen' or 'poor' in English.

Baseeta can also be used to mean small or trivial. In this sense the word can be associated with a person's mental state of mind. For example, when referring to how people cannot think pragmatically or how they cannot think straight. This can be seen in the following example.

Background: An employee is telling his co-worker about the decisions the administration made during their last meeting.

[Arabic Text]

الحافز: شفنت شو عملوا باجتماع مبارح

الإجابة: يا رجل هدول جماعة عقولهم بسيطة

[English Translation]

Move: Did you know what they did in yesterday's meeting?

Response: Oh man these people have simple minds.

The response in this example is not implying that the people referred to have lost their minds completely but rather that their level of thinking is simple and does not elevate to the thinking abilities of the speaker or hearer. The purpose of the use of *baseeta* here is to inflict an insult on others accompanied by self-praise and compliment.

It is also used to express modest financial situation. It is used as a kind of euphemism to a socially taboo word in Jordan of addressing someone or a group of people as poor. The aim is to show social solidarity and compassion. The following example illustrates the usage of this marker.

Background: A man is asking his wife about their new neighbors.

[Arabic Text]

الحافظ: كيف شفتي جيرانا الجداد؟
الإجابة: مساكين والله أوضاعهم بسيطة.

[English Translation]

Move: How did you find our new neighbors?

Response: Oh, poor people. They are not doing well.

The pragmatic marker *baseeta* also means not complicated, not complex or simple or even something that can relate to materialistic objects or financial status. This definition has some connection with other meanings of the marker especially the first, second and third meanings stated in this paper. The following example further illustrates this usage.

[Arabic Text]

المعلمة: بدي تعملولي اشكال بسيطة؟

[English Translation]

Teacher: I want you to make me simple formations.

This pragmatic marker also means that something is okay, never mind or do not worry. Repetition plays an important role in conveying and emphasizing this meaning. Usually this is accompanied by a facial expression showing that the affected is forgiving. This is clear from the following example.

Background: After a small accident, a driver is telling another.

[Arabic Text]

الحافظ: آسف ما كنت منتبه
الإجابة: بسيطة بسيطة

[English Translation]

Move: Sorry I was not paying attention.

Response: It's okay, do not worry.

In all usages of *baseeta* illustrated in the examples above, context is of great importance. It determines which function of *baseeta* to use. The relationship between the interlocutors is also important in setting the tone and intonation of the word marking the designated meaning. Non-verbal gestures also play a role in conveying the exact intention of the meaning.

An important issue here is the translatability of this pragmatic marker especially in the domain of second language acquisition. Learners of Arabic will have a serious problem understanding the different meanings of the word unless they possess the necessary cultural competence as these meanings are more related to cultural and social competence rather than linguistic competence. The researcher asked the students of levels six and seven of Arabic (24 students in total) who are studying at the Language Center of The University of Jordan who spent one semester there about the meanings of the word *baseeta* and its functions. Only four provided three two functions explained in this paper. Most students only provided one which is 'easy'. It is true that students are studying standard Arabic, but spoken Arabic is also incorporated into the program and students spend their days and nights in a native speakers' environment. This proposes an important issue especially in second language acquisition. Do textbooks and curricula take into account students' pragmatic competence development? Or do they just focus on the purely linguistic aspects of language teaching? Whether in an immersion program or a study abroad program, this pragmatic use and mastery is what put

learners a step ahead of other traditional learners of the language and it is what they are actually looking for. Teaching pragmatics in classrooms is a must. It complements the role of native language society of language proficiency and competence.

Native speakers of Arabic use this pragmatic marker to convey certain functions that are short but fully loaded with meaning that mark a social or linguistic distance. It is their own way of showing compassion, anger, solidarity or understanding with others in their community. The standard Arabic word actually means a flat, wide-open land (SARL, 2018). This common feature of no complication and openness is shared with the different pragmatic functions of *baseeta*.

6 Conclusions

This research cites eight functions of *baseeta* are used in Jordanian spoken Arabic contexts. This marker is widely used among interlocutors of Arabic. This research is particularly important to learners of Arabic who are non-native speakers of the language giving broader insights on how to use this marker as discourse markers play a vital role in the immersion process especially in a native environment of the language. This is the first research on the word that explored its various functions expressing the importance of raising awareness to pragmatic proficiency in second language teaching classrooms especially in Jordan.

7 Recommendations

Further research might be done to measure the effect of this study on non-native speakers of Arabic who are learning the language, especially in its native environment.

Conflicts of Interest Statement

The authors certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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