Discourse-Pragmatic Functions of *Ya3ni* in Najdi Arabic Interaction

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Abstract—**The Arabic discourse-pragmatic feature *ya3ni*[1] occurs frequently in natural interactional settings. Several studies have reported that *ya3ni* (lit. 'I mean/it means') has developed a wide range of discourse-pragmatic functions in many spoken Arabic varieties such as Egyptian Arabic (Elshimi, 1992; 1993; Marmorstein, 2016, 2021a), Gulf Arabic (Owens & Rockwood, 2008), Libyan Arabic (Gaddafi, 1990), and Syrian Arabic (Alkhalil, 2005; Habib, 2021). Although the formal and functional variability of *ya3ni* has been documented in the literature, *ya3ni* has not been studied in the context of spoken Najdi Arabic. This paper examines discourse-pragmatic uses of ya3ni in Najdi Arabic (NA) in the interactional situation and how the functional variation is constrained by its turn position. A total of 376 *ya3ni* tokens were extracted from a corpus of five hours of audio-recorded dyadic natural conversations with twelve native speakers of NA. Drawing on the conversation analytic approach within a variationist framework, multiple discourse-pragmatic functions of *ya3ni* are attested. For interpersonal meaning, speakers recruit *ya3ni* to introduce assessment and minimise the effect of disagreement, whereas recipients use it to check their understanding. For the textual meaning, it can be used by speakers to introduce expansion and elaboration, explain intention, change the topic, sum up, and hold the floor.**

Index Terms—**discourse markers, discourse-pragmatic functions, Najdi Arabic, conversation analysis**

I. INTRODUCTION

Discourse markers (DMs, henceforth) are defined by Fraser (1999, p. 950) as "a class of lexical expressions drawn primarily from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbs and prepositional phrases. With certain exceptions, they signal a relationship between the interpretations of the segment they introduce." DMs are essential tools for achieving the communicative goals of language producers and receivers because DMs signal the listeners and show their intentions, plans and attitudes. Although discourse markers are considered to be syntactically optional and semantically empty, they are pragmatically obligatory. Omitting DMs from a text could be considered grammatically acceptable but pragmatically would be regarded as unnatural, awkward or impolite (Brinton, 1996, pp. 35-36). According to Schiffrin (2001, p. 54), DMs – expressions like well, but and you know – are one set of linguistic items that "function in cognitive, expressive, social and textual domains." Traditionally, DMs have been viewed as linguistic elements that have minimal contribution to either the truth-conditional meaning of a text or its syntactic and semantic constructions. Seemingly, this resulted in scattered studies of discourse markers until the 1980s. However, the last three decades have witnessed a surge of interest in investigating DMs and their study has enhanced in various branches of linguistics. Fraser (1998, p. 301) commented that it is "a growth market in linguistics." This recent interest is mainly linked to the shift in linguistic research from focusing exclusively on the sentence as a higher component of analysis to studying the text as a whole. DMs have attracted considerable attention from scholars examining their use in a variety of genres and communicative contexts such as narratives (Norrick, 2001) and classrooms (Fung & Carter, 2007; O'keeffe et al., 2007), as well as in language contact situations (Matras, 2020) and first language acquisition (Andersen et al., 1999). Moreover, DMs have been studied in various languages such as French (Beeching, 2009; Pekarek Doehler, 2016, 2022), Indonesian (Wouk, 1998), Italian (Menichetti et al., 2021), Japanese (Onodera, 2004; Onodera, 1995), Spanish (De Fina, 1997; Posio, 2014; Vizca ño & Mart ñez-Cabeza, 2005), and Hebrew (Maschler, 2009, 2012; Maschler & Miller Shapiro, 2016).

With regards to Arabic, there is a growing need to investigate DMs due to the diglossic characteristic of Arabic. Ferguson (1959, p. 325) describes that as "the use of two different varieties in the same speech community." Many scholars such as Versteegh (1984, p. 21), Holes (Holes, 2015), Owens et al. (Owens et al., 2009) and Ingham (1994); Ingham (2008); Ingham (2013) have stated that these two varieties are divergent in their function and form at all linguistic levels: syntactic, morphological, lexical and pragmatic. There is the high standard variety H [Classical Arabic CA/Modern Standard Arabic MSA] and the low variety L [Dialectical Arabic DA]. As a result of the complexity of this diglossic nature of Arabic, the use of DMs in Arabic reflects variation and overlap between MSA and DA in their

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[1] The symbol /3/ represents the voiced pharyngeal fricative in Arabic as in IV Ar transcription convention

lexical and functional levels, as has been reported by Al-Batal (1994) in Lebanese Arabic, Kammensjö (2006) in Jordanian, Lebanese, Syrian and Sudanese Arabic, and Bidaoui (2015, 2016) in Egyptian and Maghrebi Arabic.

Literature review

Ya3ni is one of the most frequent DMs in spoken Arabic as found in the literature. Due to its high frequency and functional variability, *ya3ni* has been studied in several Arabic varieties and other languages that are in contact with Arabic as a borrowed DM, for example, in Kurdish (Berot, 2019), and in Hebrew (Marmorstein, 2021b; Marmorstein & Maschler, 2020). As for Arabic spoken varieties, Gaddafi (1990) examined the functional roles of *ya3ni* in Libyan spoken Arabic adopting Schiffrin's (1987) coherence approach and conversation analysis as the analytical frameworks. The analysis concludes that *ya3ni* 'I mean,' whether the utterance occurs either initially or medially, serves as a marker of explanation of intention and expansion of ideas, whereas in the medial of the turn-constructional unit (TCU), *ya3ni* is frequently used as a floor-holding device to indicate that the speaker is searching for a word. Additionally, it has various interactional effects such as marking a shift from the general to the specific in information presentation and mitigation. In the final utterance position, *ya3ni* promotes turn transitions and formulates exchange structure. In this position, *ya3ni* also appears to mark the speakers' commitment to their saying and showing mutual agreement between the interlocutors. Furthermore, speakers use *ya3ni* as a repair method when errors occur or when conversational coherence needs to be re-established.

In Egyptian Arabic, Elshimi (1992) examined the discourse and pragmatic functions of *ya3ni* 'it means' based on a corpus of 20,000 words gathered from radio and television interviews with educated Egyptian Arabic speakers. The study also investigated the effects of speakers' gender or topics of conversation on the type of functions that are more widely used. Applying the technique of direct observation of conversational analysis, Elshimi identified seven functions of *ya3ni* as follows: 'extension marker' to single out the referential relationship of the discourse such as explaining and exemplifying; 'subordination marker' to introduce subordinate expressions that deviate from the main point of discussion; 'broad interpretation marker' to introduce a transition from a lexical description level to a boarder characterising level such as 'thing like that;' 'inner-negotiation marker' to modify or repair a speaker's stutter, false start or pause; 'deictic-centre marker' to modify the certainty of a proposition that is not an extension of the previous talk; 'degree of intensity marker' to introduce emphasis; and 'indirect intention marker' to mark disagreement, euphemism and sarcasm. In terms of the influence of external factors (speakers' gender and the topic of conversation), Elshimi finds that females use *ya3ni* more than males to mark extension, subordination, inner-negotiation and deictic-centre. Furthermore, speakers on entertainment topics frequently produced *ya3ni* to mark subordination. It appears that the researcher arrived at these results by a simple statistical comparison without applying any particular theoretical framework.

In the same vein, Ghobrial (1993) investigated *ya3ni* in Egyptian Arabic by adopting Grice's (1975) cooperative principles. He claimed that *ya3ni* serves the maxims of quality, relevance and manner of the current interaction or the prior talk in which it reflects a speaker's orientation towards the meaning of the talk and demonstrates their awareness of the requirement of interaction and the addresses. Marmorstein (2016) also examined *ya3ni* and its uses and attempted to identify the cognitive processes and communicative functions it performs in Egyptian. Marmorstein highlighted that *ya3ni* has one core pragmatic function common to all of its uses and three other functions. In this core function, *ya3ni* is a 'point marker' which marks the main point that a speaker wants to make related to the local or the global topic of discourse. That is, a speaker makes a contribution to the topic previously established by expanding or developing it. The use of *ya3ni* facilitates a speaker's mental efforts to reach their intended point to produce the most satisfying utterance that conveys a message. The other procedural functions of *ya3ni* are as: a 'stating point' marker to introduce information that has not previously been mentioned in the discourse; an 'elaborating on the point' marker to introduce or conclude a section of information based on the generic knowledge shared by the interlocutors that is frequently presented with reference to some pre-stated information; and a 'stressing the point' marker to introduce or conclude utterances by repeating information that has been mentioned before to stress and emphasise this information.

Applying conversation analysis, Alkhalil (2005) studied *ya3ni* in Syrian Arabic. The data shows that *ya3ni* occurs in three positions: TCU-initially to serve intention explanation, idea expansion, mitigation and summing up; TCU-finally to express assessment and to check on understanding; and TCU-internally to retain the floor and search for a word. Owens and Rockwood (2008) analysed *ya3ni* in Gulf Arabic. They suggested that *ya3ni* is polysemous, having a core meaning of elaboration. They developed their argument of the core meaning of elaboration by dividing it into three sub-functions: continuation, specification and generalisation. For the former, it introduces new information that shares the same status with what precedes it; it might be a paraphrase or in some cases a simple synonym. Specification is the most frequent sub-function; it means giving specific details of what has been said before, in contrast to the generalisation function. Recently, Alshammary (2021) examines the meanings of *ya3ni* and *qaSdk* "lit. do you mean?" based on the analysis of two written corpora in Saudi Arabic. These two DMs are found to serve different pragmatic and procedural meanings, while the former mainly is used to introduce and for clarification, the latter is used to request for clarification, correction and signal irony.

It is apparent that *ya3ni* has a wide range of discourse-pragmatic meanings to serve interpersonal and textual functions in several varieties of Arabic. However, no previous attempt has been made to investigate *ya3ni* in the context of spoken Najdi Arabic. Therefore, the current study examines the use of *ya3ni* as a DM and its discourse-pragmatic

functions in order to achieve a better understanding of DMs in NA and to test whether the pragmatic uses of *ya3ni* are universal cross Arabic varieties. The study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) What are the discourse-pragmatic functions performed by *ya3ni* in NA interactions? (2) What is the overall distribution of *ya3ni* tokens across the discourse-pragmatic functional domains? The inductive bottom-up approach will be applied to establish the functional classification of discourse-pragmatic features. This will give priority to the discourse-pragmatic features identified in the data, thereby yielding a comprehensive understanding. Conversation analysis will be adopted to analyse discourse-pragmatic features in their full international, sequential and linguistic context. This paper will be structured as follows: section 2 explains the methodological procedures for data collecting and sampling. This is followed by the findings of the qualitative and quantitative analyses (sections 3.1 and 3.2 respectively), which are then concluded in sections 4.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Data Collection

Natural conversations of native speakers of NA were recorded. Speakers engaged in casual dyadic conversation with their selected same sex friend in a place of their choosing. The participants were not guided to talk about specific topics, but they were asked to record their naturally occurring conversations without the researcher being present. They were asked to complete questionnaires detailing their background information such as their age and level of education. After they had signed the consent forms, the researcher gave the participants instructions detailing how to set up the recording device. A total of six conversations were recorded. The durations of the recorded conversations varied between 45 minutes and one-hour. Each conversation was segmented into turns and transcribed using ELAN software. The corpus of this study consists of approximately 5 hours and 30 minutes of recorded speech. For romanisation, Intonational Variation in Arabic (IV Ar) convention developed by Hellmuth and Almbark (2019) was followed (see appendix A).

B. Sampling and Participants

The population of the study comprises native speakers of Najdi Arabic living in the city of York in the UK, who were born and lived in Najd before coming to York. By applying networking sampling, the participants were selected based on the researcher's network of friends, acquaintances and colleagues. They were requested to ask their friends if they would be interested in participating in the study (Milroy & Gordon, 2008). The number of native Najdi speakers who participated in the current study was twelve: six females and six males. They were aged between 21 and 35 years and represent highly educated speakers. Eight of them had a master's degree and were soon to undertake or had already started their PhD studies (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
SAMPLE OF SPEAKERS

Group No.	Speaker's ID	Speaker's age	Speaker's gender	Education level	English proficiency
	S001	30	Female	Master's	Intermediate
G-1	S002	25	Female	Bachelor	Intermediate
	S003	31	Female	PhD student	Advanced
G-2	S004	29	Female	Bachelor	Intermediate
	S005	31	Female	PhD student	Advanced
G-3	S006	34	Female	PhD student	Advanced
	S007	35	Male	Bachelor	Intermediate
G-4	S008	22	Male	Bachelor	Elementary
	S009	28	Male	PhD student	Advanced
G-5	S010	34	Male	PhD student	Advanced
	S011	27	Male	Master's	Advanced
G-6	S012	34	Male	PhD student	Advanced

In the following section, the results of the analysis of the discourse-pragmatic functions of *ya3ni* in NA are reviewed.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUTTION

Ya3ni 'I mean' occurred 376 times in the current corpus. It is attested in three turn positions (initial, medial and final) and performs a variety of pragmatic and discourse functions. Table 2 below shows the total number of *ya3ni* occurrences, and the total number of words produced per speaker.

TABLE 2
THE NUMBER OF *YA3NI* OCCURRENCES PER SPEAKER

Speaker ID	Gender	N of tokens	Normalised frequency per 10,000 words
S001	Female	72	28.1
S002	Female	33	19.2
S003	Female	73	28.2
S004	Female	15	7.6
S005	Female	33	17
S006	Female	33	22.6
S007	Male	28	10.1
S008	Male	10	5.8
S009	Male	16	11.3
S010	Male	40	24.6
S011	Male	11	7
S012	Male	12	7.2
Total		**376**	**16**

A. Qualitative Analysis

When analysing and coding discourse-pragmatic functions, careful attention has been paid to the interactional setting and sequence organisation that influenced the use of *ya3ni* is required. The contribution of linguistic and non-linguistic features, such as turn position, interaction structure, prosodic and intonational features, and the co-occurrence of other linguistic and non-linguistic features, were taken into account in order to interpret the intended function. The present analysis reveals that *ya3ni* is used in NA to serve wide variety of meanings in two main functional domains: (a) interpersonal, and (b) textual. Following is a detailed explanation with examples of each function.

(a). Ya3ni to Perform Interpersonal Functions

It is common for *ya3ni* in NA to perform an interpersonal function, either for subjective meaning, which conveys the speaker's opinions and stance toward what is said, or for intersubjective meaning, which draws attention to the addressee's social identities and cognitive stances (Traugott, 2003, p. 124). For subjective meaning, speakers recruit *ye3ni* to express their assessment and stance, viewpoints and position regarding what is being said, as exemplified in Extract 1. Furthermore, *ya3ni* is commonly used for intersubjective meanings: to mitigate the force of disagreement (extract 2); and to check the address's understanding (extracts 3 and 4).

1. Ya3ni for Assessment

Extract 1: Learning English
1 S004   2i:h wi riHit fi [Place name] il-li: b-is-sintar
           Yes, I went to St John's University located in the city centre
2   (0.21)
3 S003   2i:h
           Yeah
4   (0.08)
5 S004   Msawwi:n klasat 2ingili:si: maja:nan
           They are providing free English classes
6 S003   Hilo: wallah
           Good, wallah
7 S004   riHit lohom HaDHart ga:lat li: gabil ma 2adxil ga:l li wish mostawa:k gilt yimkin mitwasiT
8   ga:lat li 2ig3idi: 2intaDHri: il-Hi:n yiji: il-2osta:dh yixtabrik gilt Tayyib
           When I went there, he asked me what is your level? I said it could be intermediate. He said take
           a seat and wait for the teacher to test you. I said OKAY.
9 S004   2ilmohim ja: waHid shayib w ga3ad yiso:lif ma3a:i yiso:lif yiso:lif yom xalaSt ga:m ga:l li: la
10   ro:Hi lil-
           The gist, an old man came and talked with me for a while. After that, he said go to-
11   (0.86)
12 S004   2il-mostawa
            Level
13 S003   [f-English-advance]
            Advance
14 S004   2i:h
            Yes
15 S003   2iwah Hilo: wallah bass masha: allah 3alik mijtahdah **ya3ni**
            Yes, that very good masha: allah. You are hard-working **ya3ni**

Prior to this talk, speaker S004 was telling her conversation partner about her frequent efforts to develop her English language skills, all of which were based on self-learning methods such as reading, studying and chatting with native

English friends. In line 1, she told S003 about her experience at St John's University when she went to take an English test in order to register for the free English courses at the university. After she was examined by the English teacher, she was assigned to the advanced level. Speaker S003 described this achievement as very good and expressed her happiness at hearing this news. This description was followed by an assessment of all of the efforts the speaker had made to improve her English that led her to reach this advanced level, saying that: 'you are hard-working *ya3ni.*' Using *ya3ni* at the final-utterance position provides an assessment of the situation, giving the other speaker the opportunity to give a second assessment of whether to agree or disagree. However, *ya3ni* in this position does not initiate a repair by the other speaker and was produced with no rising intonation, as in previous example (Alkhalil, 2005, p.174).

2. Ya3ni for Mitigation

Extract 2: Online course subscription

1	S002	2ana tSadgi-:nkin-t mfakra-h nafse-k xams Ta3ashar dgi:ga-h
		You know I have been thinking like you fifteen minutes
2		(0.4)
3	S001	madri: 2aHis 2ino 2idh Sa:r 3indik mawDo:3
		I do not know I feel that if you have a topic
4		(0.68)
5	S001	**Ya3ni** shuf-i: rasli:-ha gabl
		Ya3ni look message her before
6		(0.42)
7	S002	Mm
8		(0.09)
9	S001	shifti kaif 2inti rasli-ha la titrk-i:n-ah rasli-ha w gul-i: 2ana b-tkalam ma3ats uh- fi el-mawDo:3
10		ketha
		You see how, give her a message do not let her and tell her I want to talk with you uh- in the topic kedha

This extract followed Extract 2 in the same sequence, coming after speaker S001) talked about her subscription to Cambly and how fifteen minutes was not enough to practise her English. Speaker S002, at the beginning of this extract, said that she had been thinking about subscribing to Cambly for the same amount of time – fifteen minutes per day. In the next turn, speaker S001 expressed her opinion based on her experience, saying *I do not know; it would be better if you have a specific topic in your mind prior to the session*. This opinion was followed by a proposal to maximise the benefits of the session. In line 5, S001 suggested contacting the tutor before the session to tell her which topic to discuss. This suggestion was prefaced by *ya3ni* as a mitigator to make it open for discussion and to play down the force of disagreement (Alkhalil, 2005, p.157).

3. Ya3ni to Check on Understanding

Extract 3: Kobe Bryant's death

1	S003	Sheft-i Kobe la3ef kura-t essalla-h elli axadh benta-h w Tar b-el=[hulikubter
		Did you know that Kobe the basketball player who took his daughter and flew by the=[helicopter
2	S002	=[eywah]
		=[yeah]
3	S001	TaHa-t eTTeyyar-h benta-h 3umra-ha sabe3 Ta3ash sana-h marrah galbi ye3awwern-i 3ali-h
		The helicopter fell and his daughter aged seventeen years, my heart has broken
4	S002	Ya 2allah meta hadha Sayer
		Oh my god, when did this happen?
5		(0.56)
6	S001	Gabel 2esbu3 taqriba-n
		About a week ago
7	S002	Wallah tawn-i 2adr-i
		Wallah, I have just known
8	S001	Tala3 hw w benta-h w Sadiga-t benta-h w 2abu w 2um el- Sadiga-t el-bent taqriba-n tese3 2ashxaS
9		kanu: be-TTeyyara-h [ghayr eTT]aqam
		He went with his daughter and her friend with her mum and dad, there were roughly nine persons in the helicopter [in addition] to the crew
10		[mm]
11		(1.38)
12	S002	Yo:h, Tayyar-h xahS-ah **ya3ni**
		Oh, a private airplane **ya3ni**
13	S001	Eywah
		Yes, yes.

This extract directly precedes Extract 6. In this extract, speaker S001 tells her friend S002 a sad story about Kobe Bryant's death in a helicopter crash with his daughter and other passengers. Speaker S002, as the information recipient, wants to check her understanding inferences about Kobe Bryant's helicopter in line 12 ('a private helicopter, *ya3ni*?') based on her guess. She uses *ya3ni* at TCU-finally and utters it with a rising intonation to perform it as a question that represents the first pair part of an adjacency pair that requires a second pair part that answers the question with a correction or denial. In the next turn, S001 provides an affirmative response *Eywah* 'yes' to S002's guess, which represents the preferred action produced with no delay. Placing *ya3ni* at the end of the TCU is used to initiate a repair by the other speaker and invite the addressee to focus on her utterance in response. Gaddafi (1990, p.196) claims that using *ya3ni* in this position contributes substantially to promoting turn transitions which leads to formulating an exchange structure. The use of *ya3ni* as a repair to initiate a question at this position of the TCU is found in Syrian Arabic by both Alkhalil (2005) and Kurdi (2008). *Ya3ni* also used turn-initially to check on understanding, as in Extract 4. Speaker S004 in line 1 told her friend that she had visited England many times before with her family. In line 3, S003 prefaced her turn with *ya3ni* to check on her understanding and requested confirmation from her partner.

Extract 4: Visiting England

1 S004   2e:h la Henna neji dayem ma3 3ahali hena
           Yes, we always come here with my family
2   (0.02)
3 S003   **ya3ni** dayma-n
           ya3ni always
4   (0.12)
5 S004   2e:h bass neji landan
           Yes, bass we visit London
6   (0.39)
7 S003   2e:h
           Yes
8   (0.04)
9 S004   Neg3ed b-landan
           We stay in London

(b). Ya3ni to Perform Textual Functions

It is common to use *ya3ni* for textual function whereby *ya3ni* is employed to mark the relationships between the discourse units and organisational device in turn-taking sequences. Speakers use this DM to explain their intention (as in Extract 5), for expanding on their ideas (as in Extract 6), as a device of topic change (as in Extract 7), to sum up (as in Extract 8), and to turn-internally for floor holding (see Extract 9).

1. Ya3ni for Explanation of Intention

Extract 5: financial guarantee

1 S010   Tayyib ok 2ent rasl-ha 3an Tari:g-ha 3an Tari:g bawwabat-ha
           Well OK, correspond with her supervisor via her portal
2 S009   2eyh 3ali-ha
           Yes, through
3   (0.48)
4 S010   [f-English-ok]
           Okay
5 S009   La bawwabat-ha ghayr ja 2abw <name-M>   (…) el- yako:n el- el-murafeq elddares
           No, her portal is different Abu<name-M>   (…) the- is the- the dependent who is student
6   (1.4)
7 S010   [f-English-ok]
           Okay
8 S009   El-murafeq el-ddares Slo:b dares hw 2asasa-n
           The dependent who is student he is not basically independent student
9   (1.0)
10 S010   Kayf?
           How?
11 S009   **ya3ni** mub Tier [four]
           ya3ni he does not have Tier [four visa]
12 S010   [2eyh Tayyib]
                                 [yeah, okay]
13 S009   **ya3ni** zay Hagat ellughah w ma ellughah elwajhah Hagat safi:r yaxtelf 3an
           ya3ni like English language student, the portal interface of safeer differs from us

In this extract, S009 is talking about his communications with the scholarship sponsor to apply for a financial guarantee for his wife to study English course. He discusses this with S010, who has similar experience, to try to establish the easiest and quickest way to contact the scholarship supervisor via the provided portal which is managed by the sponsor. Speaker S010 tries to suggest solutions based on his experience to help S009 to overcome this communication difficulty. However, S009 attempts to explain to his interlocutor that his suggestions cannot be applied due to the fact that, because his wife is a dependent partner, her interface with Safeer does not have all of the functions that his portal interface does because he is an independent student on a full scholarship. In line 5, S009 tries to explain the reasons for the differences in the portal interface, saying that all dependents who are students have minimised interfaces, whereas independent students have access to all of the functions in their portal interface. S009's complicated response seems to be the source of trouble for speaker S010. Therefore, he initiates a repair (line 8) by asking for an explanation of what S009 means by this unclear response. In lines 11 and 13, S009 reformulates the trouble source by defining what he means by dependent students in his previous turn and explains his intentions by using *ya3ni* which prefaces his self-repair saying that they do not have a Tier four visa. To summarise, *ya3ni* can be used to explain the speaker's intentions that represent a source of trouble for his conversation partner. This function of *ya3ni* has been found in Libyan Arabic by Gaddafi (1990) and in Syrian Arabic by Alkahil (2005). Similarly, Elshimi (1992) suggests that *ya3ni* in Egyptian Arabic can be used as an 'extension marker' to single out the referential relationship of the discourse such as explaining and exemplifying.

2. Ya3ni for Expansion of Ideas

Extract 6: Online course subscription
1 S001   2ana tedr-i:n 2ini: 2eshtarak-t fi cambli: w bass
             You know I subscribed to Cambly bass
2 S002   Zayn wallah
             Good for you
3 S001   2ino ma 2a3Taw-ni: 2illa xams Ta3ashar dgi:ga-h taxayyal-i:
             They just gave me a fifteen-minute subscription; imagine!
4   (0.82)
5 S001   **ya3ni** thalath 2ayyam fi el-2sbu:3 w kel yu:m xams Ta3ashar dgi:ga-h
             ya3ni three days in a week and each day fifteen minutes

The speakers in this extract are friends and English students at English school. Prior to this extract, speaker S001 was talking about the importance of English self-learning using a variety of the available methods. At the beginning of this extract, she told S002 about their colleague who considerably improved his fluency in English after taking out a one-year subscription to Cambly (a website that provides access to native English speakers by video call to practise conversation). In line 1, speaker S001 told her friend that she had subscribed to Cambly. She expressed dissatisfaction with the short time she was given, saying "Imagine! They gave me just fifteen minutes." Then she continued her description of the subscription online (line 5) and explained what she meant, saying that it was for fifteen minutes for three days per week. She used *ya3ni* to preface her expansion of the idea to elaborate and provide more details. These two functions of *ya3ni* (i.e., an explanation of intention and expansion on idea) are both for clarification but the first one is to clarify the meaning in relation to the hearer misunderstanding the speaker, mainly to clear a problem or source of trouble, whereas the second one is the speaker clarifying their own point. The use of *ya3ni* to expand the speaker's idea to elaborate, exemplify or clarify the prior talk has been found in all previous studies that examine *ya3ni* in Arabic varieties, including those of Gaddafi (1990), Elshimi (1992), Ghobrial (1993), Owens and Rockwood (2008), Alkhalil (2005), Bidaoui (2015) and Marmorstein (2016).

3. Ya3ni for Changing Topic

Extract 7: Najdi idiom
1 S001   3indina: mathal yigo:l madri: 3andkum ya: 2ahl ir-rya:D wi 2illa: la ma 3ala: 2l-2aqda:m 2axta:m
2   Ya3ni ma 3ala: il-qada:m xatim yiHtadhha: fahamti: kaif
             We have an idiom, I don't know if you have it in RiyaD or not, saying that: there are no stamps
             on the feet, ya3ni to save them. Do you understand how?
3 S002   la wallah 2wwal marrah 2sma3 bah bass fi3lan SaHi:H
             No, wallah. This is the first time I heard it. Bass it is defiantly correct.
4   (0.89)
5 S001   2iwah kul nafs timot 3al:a jerratha: ya3ni 3ala: 2a:tharik 2aqdamik wain ma tro:Hi:n hadhi
6   hi: niha:ytic
             Every soul dies after its last footstep meaning your trace your feet wherever you may go it's your end
7 S002   sobHa:n allah, allah yiHsin xatmatna Glorified be Allah
8   (0.70)
9 S001   **ya3ni** 2aqul lik marrah il-2sbo:3 kan Hafil jiddan bin-nisbah lina
             ya3ni I am saying this week was very busy for us
10 S002   [laughter]

Prior to this topic, the speakers were talking about Kobe Bryant (the American professional basketball player killed in a helicopter crash) and how his death was unexpected. Speaker S001 in line 1 told her conversation partner a famous idiom in her local culture about how people cannot anticipate the place and the means of their death. In the next turn, on lines 5–6, the speakers discuss and comment on this idiom. In line 9, speaker S001 moved to talk about what had happened to her this week and how it was very busy. This topic change was prefaced with *ya3ni*, where this discourse marker is used as a boundary marker to indicate this shift. So, *ya3ni* here plays a structural function to mark the change from one topic to another to ensure the continuity of the interaction and enhance the conversation flow. In previous studies, Marmorstein (2016) found that *ya3ni* is used by Egyptian speakers to introduce new information that has not previously been mentioned as a discourse 'stating the point' marker. To some extent, this function of *ya3ni* was reported by Gaddafi (1990) who suggested that speakers of Libyan Arabic used *ya3ni* to shift the focus from the general to the specific or from one topic to another, which is normally accompanied by the word *lakin* 'but.' However, in the current data there is no occurrence of contrastive words used with *ya3ni* to introduce a change of topic.

4. Ya3ni for Summing Up

Extract 8: 'Kobe Bryant's death'
1 S002   Wa 2l-Hi:n ya3ni bigat 2z-zoja
                   And now, ya3ni his wife is remaining alive?
2 S001   2iwah, w thalath [banat]
                   Yes, and three [girls]
3 S002   [thalath] banat
                          [Three] girls
4 S001   2iwah, waHdah kibi:rah w wahdah wasaT w wahdah Sighi:rah tawaha mawlodah
                    Yes, one is young, the second is a child and the third is still a baby
5   (0.64)
6 S002   Wi 2illi kanat ma3ah bintah ba3ad 2r-rab3ah
                    And the one was with him is his fourth girl?
7 S001   2i:h, 2i:h bintah
                   Yes, yes, his girl
8   (0.87)
9 S001   Xamsah hum
                   They are five
10   (0.77)
11 S002   um
12   (1.44)
13 S001   **ya3ni** 2l-waDH kan marrah moHzin
                   ya3ni the situation was very sad
14   (1.18)

Following Extract 3, 'Kobe Bryant's death,' this extract occurred directly in the same sequence. Speaker S002, as an information recipient, wants to check her understanding of inferences about Kobe's family members who had been affected by the accident, asking in line 1 "And now, *ya3ni* his wife is still alive?" She uses *ya3ni* in the internal position of the TCU to check understanding and initiates a repair. In the next turn, speaker S002 continues asking about details of the accident and S001 answers her questions. In line 13, S001 tries to summarise her own argument, saying "it was a very sad situation" to mark the boundary of storytelling. She introduces her summary with *ya3ni* to indicate the transition from the details to the end of the narrative. Similar meaning was found in Syrian Arabic by Alkhalil (2005).

5. Ya3ni as a Floor Holding Device

Ya3ni occurs TCU-internally to hold the floor and search for a word, as in Extract 9.

Extract 9: Football stadium
1 S012   Wesh esma-h 2ana wesh ken-t b-gu:l um el-mal3ab Hag il-hilal
                   What is its name? what I will say, um- AlHilal's studium
2   (0.69)
3 S011   Tayyib wesh b-ysaw-u:n
                   Well, what will they do?
4 S012   b-yxaleS 3aged el-helal la3 fi ja- jam3a-t el-malek Se3u:d el-san-h hadhi
                   Alhilal's contract with King Saud University will end this year
5   (2.73)
6 S011   Yest2jer-u:n-ah l-man
                   To whom will they rent it?
7 S012   illi gahar-ni en hay2a-t el-reyaDa-h tibi: tirdxil ba3ad 3ala el-xaT w yesta2jer-u:n-ah
                   What makes me angry is that the national sport organisation also wants to rent it
8 S012   ye3T-u:n yexal-u:n yel3ab-u:n fi-ha el-helal el-naSer 2ay na:di yesta:jer-u:n-ah um **ya2ni** luhum

They give, they let, they let Alhilal and Alnaser play in, or any team rent it for themselves, um **ya3ni**
to make it available for rent to any team

9   (0.94)
10 S011   w- w yeSi:r el-2andeya-h hadhi testa:jra-h men el-
          and- and any team will be able to rent it from the-
11 S012   La ei:h yeSi:r el-ha2a-t elreyaDa-h hi elli teshteri:-h te- testajra-h
           No, yes, the national sport organisation is the one who will buy it, rent it

In this extract, speaker S012 is talking about a football stadium that was rented by Alhilal (a famous local football team). Speaker S012, in lines 1-4, told S011 that the lease will end this year and the team want to renew it, but the national sport organisation has rejected their request. It appears that the speaker in line 8 hesitates, as indicated by the occurrence of multiple verbs ("give, let, play and rent"), trying to search for the right word to explain his idea clearly and accurately. He uses *ya3ni* within the TCU as a floor-holding device to signal to his addressee that his turn has not yet finished. This use of *ya3ni* within the TCU primarily acts as a marker for holding the floor, as has been found in several previous Arabic studies such as those by Gaddafi (1990), Alkhalil (2005) and Kurdi (2008).

B. Distributional Analysis

As revealed by the qualitative analysis, the discourse-pragmatic feature *ya3ni* is used in a wide range of functions. Figure 1 illustrates the interactions between the placement of *ya3ni* and the performed discourse-pragmatic functions.
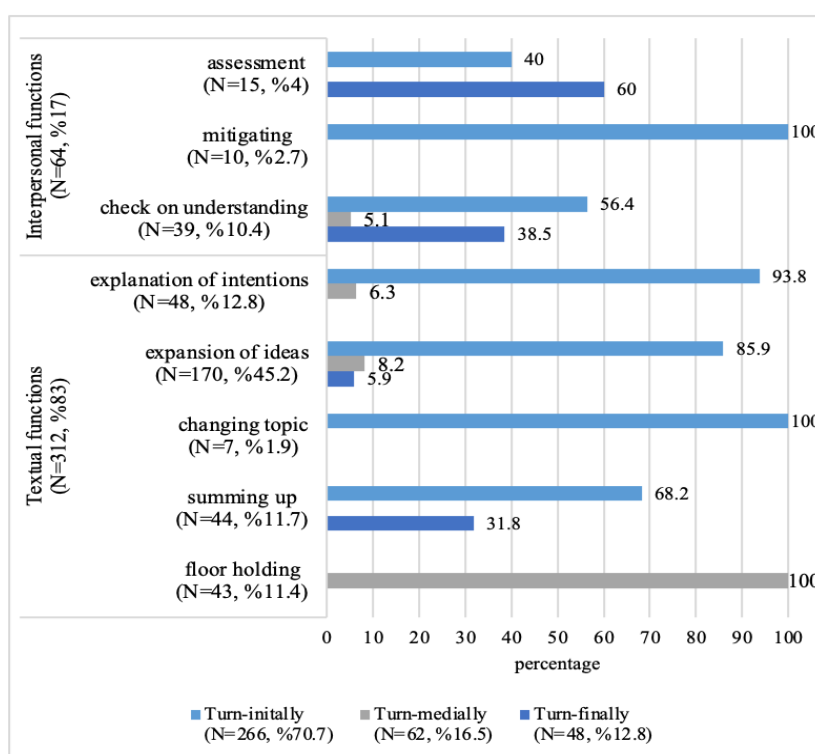

Figure 1: Distribution of *ya3ni* across discourse-pragmatic function and turn-position (numbers in rounded brackets: N indicates raw frequencies, % indicates percentage of all functions/positions)

It is apparent that *ya3ni* is more likely to be used with textual functions to structure the discourse and indicate text relationships. Recruiting *ya3ni* to expand on the speaker's speech and clarify their opinion is the most common function, accounting for 45% of the total tokens (N=170). It appears that providing elaboration and expansion of the idea is the core discourse function for ya3ni, taking into account the propositional meaning of the lexical item *ya3ni* which is used to introduce definition to what has been said. This function is followed by an explanation of intention and summing up where they make up approximately 12.8% and 11.7%, respectively. Using *ya3ni* to hold the floor while searching for a word is also common, accounting for approximately 11.4% of the total, while using *ya3ni* as a topic changing device is rare in the corpus, with only 1.9% of the total tokens. As for the interpersonal function, recipients commonly utilise *ya3ni* to check on their understanding and to show that they are following what is being said by the speakers, with this function accounting for approximately 10% of total use. Using *ya3ni* to introduce an assessment and to minimise the force of disagreement is relatively infrequent, accounting for approximately 4% and 2.7%, respectively. In terms of the turn position, *ya3ni* occurs in three turn positions: initially, internally and finally. According to several studies, discourse-pragmatic features can serve a variety of pragmatic purposes when they appear in various positions (Aijmer, 2009; Alkhalil, 2005; Maschler, 2017; Maschler & Dori-Hacohen, 2018; Pichler, 2013). The discourse-pragmatic function in the textual domain and their turn positions are strongly correlated, as shown in Figure 1. The turn-initial

position is the most favoured placement of all textual meanings, except for the floor holding, where it shows absolute invariability and is only used turn-medially. Furthermore, the initial position is the most frequent for interpersonal meanings, followed by the final position. This finding is in accordance with that of Habib (2021) who reported that both male and female Syrian Arabic speakers use *ya3ni* more frequently in the initial position. A similar finding is found in Egyptian Arabic with Ghobrial (1993) reporting that *ya3ni* is preferred in the initial position because of its stronger associations with pragmatic functions such as expanding or introducing an elaboration, clarification or explanation. The reason for its preference in the final position is also related to its stronger associations with evaluating, commenting on, or summing up.

IV. CONCLOSION

The discourse-pragmatic functions of *ya3ni* were examined in this study while applying CA. The results show that *ya3ni* in NA is used in a variety of functions in the interpersonal and textual domains and occurs in three turn positions: initial, medial and final positions. *Ya3ni* performs eight discourse-pragmatic functions. Speakers use *ya3ni* to introduce assessment and reduce the impact of disagreement for interpersonal meaning, while listeners use it to confirm their understanding. F or the textual meaning, can be used by speakers to introduce clarification and elaboration, to explain their intentions, to change the subject, to sum up, or to hold the floor. The current research provides insight into Arabic pragmatics, particularly in DM studies. The findings indicate that use of *ya3ni* in NA reflects a great deal of similarities with other Arabic varieties which suggests that *ya3ni* may acquire similar discourse-pragmatic meanings across Arabic dialects in the present day.

APPENDIX

Intonational Variation in Arabic (IV Ar) convention (Hellmuth & Almbark, 2019)

Arabic	IPA symbol	IVAr symbols		Arabic	IPA symbol	IVAr symbols
Consonants				**Vowels**		
أ - الهمزة	ʔ	2		١	aː	aː
ب	b	b		ي	iː, eː	iː, eː
ت	t	t		و	uː, oː	uː, oː
ث	θ	th		ة فتحة	a	a
ج	ʒ	j [g in some dialects]		ِ كسرة	i	i
ح	ħ	H		ُ ضمة	u	u
خ	x	x				
د	d	d				
ذ	ð	dh				
ر	r	r				
ز	z	z				
س	s	s				
ش	ʃ	sh				
ش	tʃ	ch				
ص	sˤ	S				
ط	tˤ	T				
ض	dˤ	D				
ظ	ðˤ, zˤ	DH, Z				
ع	ʕ	3				
غ	ɣ	gh				
ف	f	f				
ق	q	q [g/2 in some dialects]				
ك	k	k				
ل	l	l				
م	m	m				
ن	n	n				
ه	h	h				
و	w	w				
ي	j	y				
v	v	v				

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