

A Socio-Pragmatic Study of Multifunctional Discourse Marker *i:h* in Algerian Spoken Arabic

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Abstract—The present study aims at investigating and describing the pragmatic functions of the discourse marker *i:h* in the Algerian Spoken Arabic, specifically in the eastern south, in the city of Ouargla. This piece of work is unique of its type in the Algerian context because it is the first to be conducted from a pragmatic perspective. Twelve different situations were included in the questionnaire which consists of one hundred items to collect data. The study adapted the pragmatic approach by Fraser (1990), which accounts upon a differentiation between content and pragmatic meaning. The findings revealed that, based on context, the discourse marker *i:h* is multifunctional in Algerian Spoken Arabic, and it conveys at least 12 meanings. Other functions were suggested by the participants. The distinction between the two groups at the level of both variables age and gender was not significantly marked.

Index Terms—*i:h*, discourse marker, ASA, pragmatic functions, context

I. INTRODUCTION

Discourse analysis targets the study of language in use, and it explores the description of linguistic forms and their purposes and functions (Brown & Yule, 1983). Since the use of language is mainly to exchange meanings among the speech community members, it can be concluded that discourse can be understood from the pragmatic perspective. Yule (1996) defined pragmatics as the study of how meaning is communicated by the producer of the utterance, speaker/writer, and how it is interpreted by the receiver, listener/reader.

Discourse markers are linguistic elements that are mainly used in oral conversations in order to bring units of discourse together (Fraser, 1990; Lenk, 1998; Schiffrin, 1987) such as: *however, oh, well, but, still, and, hmm, okay, I mean, so, you know etc.* The importance of discourse markers is in evidence, first, at their contribution to the coherence of spoken discourse (Fraser, 1990; Lenk, 1998) and their fundamental role in the interpretation of a given utterance (Schiffrin, 1987), and, second at the clarification of the interlocutors' communicative intentions.

The study of discourse markers can be traced back to the 1970s. Ever since, they have become an interesting topic in the field of applied linguistics (Wang, 2011). Discourse Markers were first introduced by Labov and Fanshel (1977). They pointed out that discourse markers are considered to be linguistic elements existing in spoken discourse. They proposed that a discourse marker, for example “*well*”, points to a topic that is previously discussed and interlocutors already know. Likewise, it can also imply a topic shift or an interruption.

Discourse markers were later introduced by Levinson in his book entitled “Pragmatics” (1983) where he considered discourse markers a category of linguistic expressions which deserve investigation. Similarly to Labov and Fanshel, Levinson (1983) pointed that “there are many words and phrases in English, and no doubt in most languages, which indicate the relationship between an utterance and the prior discourse” (p. 87). He introduced a list of discourse markers, as follows: “*but, therefore, in conclusion, to the contrary, still, however, anyway, well, besides, actually, all in all, so, after all, etc.*” (Levinson, 1983, p. 87).

It is generally conceded that such words have at least a component of meaning that resists truth-conditional treatment ... what they seem to do is indicate, often in very complex ways, just how the utterance that contains them is a response to, or a continuation of, some portion of the prior discourse”. (Levinson, 1983, pp. 87-88)

Undoubtedly, any linguistic unit is meant to cooperate with another unit to assist the understanding of the meaning of discourse. Linguistic elements help us understand the whole content that interlocutors wish to convey. Clark (1996) illustrated four main pieces of evidence for the fact that participants in talk-in-interaction are able to grasp what is communicated: “the use of presupposition of understanding occurs when interlocutors suitably respond to each other, assertions of understanding takes place when the interlocutors produce backchannels such as *huh, ah...* etc, displaying of understanding, i.e., answers to questions that display how the question was interpreted, and finally, exemplification, i.e., the repetition and paraphrasing also let interlocutors check for an acceptable understanding” (Clark, 1996).

Hockey (1993) mentioned that DMs do not really add to the meaning of the discourse. They are, actually, associated to the structure of the discourse. It is noticed that “interlocutors tend to produce backchannels, short responses usually

of acknowledgement". These responses make each other feel that they understood what was communicated in order to maintain the stream of communication.

The term 'discourse marker' could be seen as a 'fuzzy concept' (Jucker & Ziv, 1998, p. 2) due to the variety of labels applied by scholars, cue phrases (Knott & Dale, 1994), cue words (Horn et al., 2001), discourse connectives (Blakemore, 1987; Blakemore, 1992), discourse operators (Redeker, 1990; Redeker, 1991), discourse particles (Aijmer, 2002; Hansen, 1997; Hansen, 1998; Schourup, 1986), pragmatic connectives (Stubbs, 1983; Van Dijk, 1979), pragmatic markers (Anderson, 2001; Brinton, 1996; Fraser, 1996), and discourse markers (Fraser, 2006; Müller, 2005; Schiffrin, 1987; Algouzi, 2014). As the latter seems to be the term most widely understood and used, it is used in this study.

Andersen (2001) started his definition of discourse markers as 'a class of short, recurrent linguistic items that generally have little lexical import but serve significant pragmatic functions in conversation' (p. 39).

Based on Serper and Wilso's (1986) Relevance Theory Framework, Blackmore (1987) discovered that discourse markers do not have a fixed meaning, but rather there is a procedural meaning that consists of different instructions of how to affect the conceptual meaning of a given utterance. In addition, she contends that conveying information by an utterance can be relevant by some functions, as illustrated below:

- a. it allows generated contextual implication, as by the use of: "also, *therefore, so, too,*
- b. it assists an assumption (e.g., *moreover, furthermore, after all,*
- c. it contrasts a previous assumption (e.g., *nevertheless, however, but, still,*
- d. and it also identifies the function of an utterance in the discourse (e.g., *by the way, finally, incidentally, anyway,*)".

Researchers have always disagreed on how this particular category of linguistic expressions should be defined. Let us consider the following comments of Levinson's treatment of discourse markers in English:

...there are many words and phrases in English, and no doubt most languages, that indicate the relationship between an utterance and the prior discourse. Examples are utterance-initial use of *but, therefore, in conclusion, to the contrary, still, however, anyway, well, besides, actually, all in all, so, after all,* and so on. It is generally conceded that such words have at least a component of meaning that resists truth-conditional treatment [...] what they seem to do is indicate, often in very complex ways, just how the utterance that contains them as a response to, or a continuation of, some portion of the prior discourse". (Levinson, 1983, p. 87 et seq.)

Regardless of the different terms applied to discourse markers, they share some specific defining characteristics. First, discourse markers are one of the features of oral discourse rather than written discourse (Brinton, 1996; Lenk, 1998; Schiffrin, 1987). Secondly, they relate utterances which are adjacent and non-adjacent (Halliday, 2004; Lenk, 1998; Schiffrin, 1987). Thirdly, discourse markers largely contribute to the organization of the coherence of oral discourse (Lenk, 1998; Schiffrin, 1987). Fourthly, they often come in initial positions owing to the fact that they, usually, introduce an upcoming sentence (Aijmer, 2002; Fraser, 1990, 1993; Lenk, 1998; Redeker, 1991; Schiffrin, 2001). However, they can appear as well medially and finally in an utterance (Fraser, 1993; Lenk, 1998). Finally, discourse markers are characterized as multifunctional (Lenk, 1998; Fraser, 1990; Schiffrin, 1987).

Based on the work of many scholars, Brinton (1996) categorized the functions of discourse markers into two groups, viz. textual and interpersonal. The textual category covers different functions such as: claiming the attention of the hearer, initiating discourse, closing discourse, indicating a topic shift, serving as filler or a turn holder, repairing discourse, indicating previous or new information, and highlighting sequential dependence. On the other hand, the interpersonal category involves effecting cooperation such as to confirm shared assumptions, to express understanding, to request confirmation, to express politeness, and to express a response to the preceding discourse.

The discourse marker "*i:h*" (yes) is a segment in Algerian Spoken Arabic which is widely used among people on their everyday life. Pragmatically, it has several meanings depending on the context it is used in. We should mention that we called the above expression as a discourse marker because it met at least one of the features proposed by Schourup (1999). She stated "...the typical DM referred to in the literature is a syntactically optional expression that does not affect the truth-conditions associated with an utterance it introduces and is used to relate this utterance to the immediately preceding utterance" (Schourup, 1999, p. 234). These features are optionality, non-truth-conditionality, connectivity, weak clause association, initiality, orality, and multi-categoriality.

The main goal of this study is to explore the different pragmatic functions of the discourse markers "*i:h*" in Arabic spoken in Algeria. We also aim at examining two variables: age and gender, and see how these variables can have an effect on presenting the pragmatic functions of this discourse marker.

Perspectives on DMs vary in terms of "their basic starting points, their definition of, and their method of analysis" (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 31). From a sociolinguistic perspective, discourse is not only a unit of language but also a process of social interaction. Schiffrin defined discourse markers as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk" that is, non-obligatory utterance-initial items that function in relation to ongoing talk and text (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 31). Discourse markers, from this perspective, are distinguished as word classes such as Conjunctions (e.g., and, but, or), Interjections (e.g., oh), Adverbs (e.g., now, then), lexicalized phrases (e.g., y'know, I mean).

Another perspective is the pragmatic approach by Fraser. His framework depends upon a differentiation between content and pragmatic meaning. Content meaning is referential meaning: "a more or less explicit representation of some state of the world that the speaker intends to bring to the hearer's attention by means of the literal interpretation of the

sentence” (1990, p. 385). Pragmatic meaning concerns the speaker’s communicative intention, the direct (not implied) message the speaker intends to convey when uttering the sentence” (Fraser, 1990, p. 386).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Discourse markers have been a field of many studies. For instance, Kanakri and Al-harashsheh (2013) investigated the pragmatic functions of “ʔa:di” which in Jordanian Spoken Arabic means *normally*. They analyzed twenty video-taped conversations. They used discourse analysis, conversation analysis and translation theory as a theoretical framework. The translation of the meanings of ʔa:di was based on the pragmatic strategy. And the findings revealed that the discourse marker ʔa:di occurred 105 times and served various functions. The pragmatic meaning of each time relies on the context in which it appeared such as; to ask for a permission, to express the meaning of disapproval and so on.

Kanakri and Al-Harashsheh (2013) also conducted a study on discourse markers. Their study was particularly on the Jordanian context. They investigated the pragmatic functions of the Arabic term “*ʔayyib*” and its cognate “*ʔaab*”. Their study is based on a mixed approach. The subjects of the study are thirty-six native speakers of Jordanian Arabic, university students. They found that this discourse marker is functional in Jordanian Spoken Arabic, and they serve ten pragmatic functions. Among which, we can mention: *to show a break of a certain discourse to show objection to what has been said so far, an introduction of a new topic, a challenge or confrontation*, and others.

Highlighting one of the basic features of an interactive spontaneous speech, Naoum (2013) analysed the inferential function of “*I mean*” and its Arabic equivalents in literary discourse, along with translation. The conclusion of their study was:

I mean is another way of saying things. It identifies the process of deducing implicatures from the speaker’s preceding utterances which are (mostly) thought to convey weak and indeterminate implicatures. ‘I mean’ is not always associated with logical consequences (i.e. inferences); therefore, the effect that ‘I mean’ has on an utterance is to make things clear by identifying the intended implicatures of the speaker through making use of the unconscious (and sometimes conscious) shared cognitive environment between the speaker and the hearer”. (Naoum, 2013, p. 25)

Al Rousan (2015) conducted a study on the online conversations of young Saudis, where he investigated the use of the discourse marker “*maʕ nafsak*” in Saudi Arabic, which literally means “with yourself”. The data of the study comprised 262 natural online conversations collected from 17 young Saudi students through user-diaries, and 132 instances of “*maʕ nafsak*” occurred. The data analysis revealed 12 pragmatic functions for the discourse marker *maʕ nafsak* in Saudi Arabic. Al Rousan claims that the discourse marker “*maʕ nafsak*” facilitates producing and understanding processes of a specific oral interaction.

Buysse (2017) examined the pragmatic functions of the discourse marker “*you know*” in native and learners of English. The study aimed at giving a description to the multiple pragmatics interpretations of the discourse marker. The findings of the study revealed that nine pragmatic functions are attested for “*you know*”, among which we mention: introducing a proposition, elaborating on a previous topic, highlighting particular points in the discourse, and so on.

Al-Rawafi and Gunawan (2019) conducted a descriptive qualitative study on the term Insha’Allah in teachers’ talks in daily school activities. Their study was aimed at exploring the illocutionary acts of the conditional pragmatic marker (CPM) Insha’Allah in teachers’ talks. The findings of the study revealed that the CPM Insha’Allah in teachers’ talk performs different illocutionary forces. They are: commissives, assertive, directive, and expressive. They contend “CPM is a multi-purpose expression in different contexts of teachers’ talks and the possibility of the illocutionary force is varying according to the speakers’ faith background and the understanding of the expression itself” (Al-Rawafi & Gunawan, 2019, p. 522). They stated that a misuse of the conditional pragmatic marker Insha’Allah between the interlocutors may result at a face-threatening act; e.g. fail to promise.

Habib (2021) adopted both quantitative and traditional variationist sociolinguistic methods to study the interchangeable Syrian Arabic DMs /yaʕni/ and /ʔinnu/ meaning “I mean”. She analysed the speech of 72 speakers from the village Oyoun Al-Wadi in Syria, 22 adult couples and 50 children. Two factors were taken into consideration in this study, age and gender. Women and children were more likely to use /ʔinnu/. Women used more /ʔinnu/ than men did, while boys used it more than girls.

Helping communicators be aware of pragmatic functions in their communication and preclude any sort of misunderstanding, Alqahtani (2023) investigated the functions of the informal Arabic discourse marker /bʕdɪn/. Because social media provides natural communication contexts, the study analysed one hundred and five tweets containing /bʕdɪn/ by native Arabic speakers from different nationalities. Guided by the relevance theory, the findings revealed that /bʕdɪn/ was semantically used as a temporal adverb similarly meaning “then” and “later.” in English, and pragmatically serving seven pragmatic: “a marker of orientation shift, a marker of result, a conditional marker, a marker of disagreement, a coordination marker meaning “but,” a marker of agreement and a marker of reason” (Alqahtani, 2023, p. 58).

III. METHODOLOGY

A mixed method approach has been used in this study in order to examine the use of pragmatic functions of discourse markers by Algerians. The researcher adopted a qualitative approach in order to find out and review the participants' interpretation regarding the different multi-functional use of the DM "i:h". Also, the quantitative approach helps measure the extent to which the investigated DM is used, and also how often it presents different meanings.

A. Instrument

Data for this study have been collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section was concerned with the information of age and gender. The second section was concerned with the aim of the research. In this section, there are different situations in which the discourse marker "i:h" was used differently from one situation to another. The rationale behind choosing this particular discourse marker is its widespread use. It is important to mention that the situations where different functions appear were prepared by the researcher, and presented for specialized people for validity. The last instruction in the questionnaire is to ask the participant for any other functions that have not been mentioned by the researcher for this discourse marker.

B. Subjects and Variables

The subjects of this study were 100 Algerians, males and females. Two main variables were taken into consideration, gender and age. The sampling strategy for this group of subjects was the convenience sampling. Consider the following:

TABLE 1
SUMMARY FOR THE SAMPLE

	A	B
C	25 females (younger than 30 years old)	25 females (older than years old)
D	25 males (younger than years old)	25 males (older than years old)

A close look at Table 1 shows that four main groups were involved in this study; each two groups address a variable. To begin with, group A consisted of 50 Algerians, males and females, who are younger than 30 years old. Group B consisted of 50 Algerians, males and females, who are older than 30 years old. These two groups covered the investigation of the use of the multifunctional discourse marker *i:h* at the level of the variable of age. On the other hand, there is group C which consists of 50 Algerian females. Group D consists of 50 Algerian males. Group C and D were meant to serve the investigation of the variable of gender.

C. Data Analysis

Launching the analysis of the data, the researcher collected all the answers of the participants, and accounted for the extent to which the participants agreed or disagreed on the pragmatic meanings provided for the DM *i:h*. And then, she examined how frequently participants stated they use it, and each pragmatic meaning. The analysis of the data also took into consideration any pragmatic meanings suggested by the participants.

D. Framework

Discourse markers have been argued from different approaches, among which is the pragmatic approach by Fraser (1990). Fraser highlights that "discourse markers should be analyzed as having distinct pragmatic meaning". Fraser's framework accounts upon a differentiation between content and pragmatic meaning.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After a careful analysis of the collected data, we found that in Algerian spoken Arabic the discourse marker *i:h* serves a group of pragmatic functions. *i:h* is a term which literally means "Yes". It takes two forms, *i:h* and its cognate form *hi:h*. The analysis came out with twelve pragmatic different meanings according to the contexts they appeared in. The following is the representation of the findings of our study along with the discussion.

A. Agreement

Background: a girl asking her friend to go shopping with her. Her friend answers:

[Arabic Text]: إيه نروح معاك

[English Translation]: yes I'll go with you.

The girl wanted her friend to go with her, but she did not know whether or no she will. So, she asked. Her friend signals agreement by the use of the DM *i:h*. In our questionnaire, all the participants chose "agree" for the function provided in this context. And they also chose "Usual" for the frequency of using this pragmatic function. No significance was highlighted at the level of the variables age and gender.

B. Realizing

Background: two friends at university, one telling the second that he will call after he finishes class. The other replies: so!? The first clarifies that after class, he will call to confirm to meet. Then, his friend replies:

[Arabic Text]: إبيه... فهمتك، اوك

[English Translation]: yeah, got you now. Deal!

The friend at first did not understand what the call was for. After clarification, he realized what the friend wanted to say. By employing *i:h*, the speaker tries to express that he understood what was meant. Participants showed total agreement on the pragmatic function provided. And they all said they usually use it. Therefore, the assumption of this pragmatic function of the discourse marker "*i:h*" was proved to be true. The variables were not significant in this situation.

C. Remembering

Background: a girl asking her older sister that they will go out tomorrow to buy the coat they spoke about, which the sister does not remember. When her younger sister tells gives more details. The sister replies:

[Arabic Text]: آيه، تفكرتو. غدوا عندي محاضرة، خلي الخميس ونروحو

[English Translation]: Yeah, I remember now. Tomorrow I have class, what about Thursday.

The sisters have spoken before about a coat they saw and liked in H&M, and the younger sister decided to buy it. When she asks her sister to go together in order to buy it, the older sister could not recall what coat. After her sister mentions the coat they saw in H&M, she signals that she remembered the coat by using the DM *i:h*, then she processed by answering the very first question of going tomorrow. The DM appeared at the beginning of the utterance supporting the following sentence "I remember now". All participants ticked "agree" for the function remembering. And again, all of them ticked "usual" for the frequency of their use to this specific function. No differences appeared at the variables of age and gender.

D. Astonishment

Background: a lady telling her friend that Salma, a neighbor's daughter, is getting married, the friend says:

[Arabic Text]: آيه كبرت سلمى وتزوجت

[English Translation]: yeah, Salma's grown up and got married!!!

When the lady was told about the wedding, she did not know whose wedding it was. After her friend told her, she was clearly astonished how the little daughter has already grown up and got married. Very clearly, the DM was labeled by a new function that is astonishment. The same DM has different meanings which are, undoubtedly, based on a given context. Agreeing on the function expressed in this example, all the participants chose "agree". However, on the scale of use, 80% chose "usual", and 20% said "often". Regarding the variable of gender, 90% of the females said they use this function usually, while 10% said often. On the other hand, 70% males chose "usual". A difference of 20% appeared on the use of this function usually. Regarding age, 86% of the group younger than 30 years old chose "usually", and 14% chose "often". While 74% of the group older than 30 years old chose usually, and 26% chose "often". A difference of 12% appeared between the two groups.

E. Nagging

Background: a student knew that her classmate wants her to help understand a chapter. Annoyed, she says:

[Arabic Text]: آيه، هاذي كل يوم تجي. البارح كانت هنا

[English Translation]: yeah, she comes everyday! She was here yesterday.

In this context, the classmate is always in need of a help regarding lectures. This became very annoying. The speaker chose to employ *i:h* to show some sort nagging, because of being disturbed and annoyed. All the participants have chosen "agree" for the function provided for this context. This confirms that the DM *i:h* is pragmatically multifunctional. In regard to gender, forty four females, that is 88%, said they use this function usually. 12% have ticked "often". Males have shown a percentage of 82% choosing "usual", 14% choosing "often", and 4% choosing "never". The findings came out with a difference of 6%. Concerning age, 94% of the group younger than 30 years old chose "usual", and 6% chose "often". While 74% of group older than 30 years old chose "usual", 20% chose "often", and 4% chose "never". A difference of 20% has appeared.

F. Get Rid of Someone Because of Insisting on Something

Background: a guy asking his friend, again and again, to go with him to a dentist. The friend did not assert going. After insisting from the guy, the friend replies:

[Arabic Text]: آيه آيه اوك

[English Translation]: yeah yeah okay

In the abovementioned example, context played a major role to give the DM *i:h* a new meaning. When the guy first mentioned going with his friend to a dentist, his friend was not into the idea of going and did not assert going with him. After that, the guy kept, for a while, insisting and asking for going together. The friend responded by using *i:h* twice, which make the guy understand that they are going together. It is crucial to mention that also in this context, the DM presents some sort of agreement, which is the first meaning explained above. The guy understood, of course, that his friend is going with him. However, from the perspective of the user of the DM, it is clear in this context that he wanted

to make his friend stop asking, and get rid of his insistence. This example has the privilege of having two meanings in the same context, however, from two different perspectives, which again proves the fundamental impact of context on building a meaning of an utterance. All the participants have agreed on the pragmatic function presented for this situation. This again proves how context uncovers new pragmatic meanings. Tackling the variable of gender, 86% of females chose 86% for “usual” in the scale of use, 8% chose “often” and 6% chose “never”. 84% of males, on the other hand, chose “usual”, 12% chose “often”, and 4% chose “never”. Regarding the variable of age, 92% of the young group has chosen “usual”, and 8% have chosen “often”. In addition, 76% of the old group has gone for “usual”, 20% for “often”, and 4% for “never”. It is worth mentioning that though there is a number of participants who said they never use the DM *i:h* to express this pragmatic function, they have agreed on the pragmatic function. This means that the context has clarified for them the meaning of the situation, and the desired function expressed by this DM.

G. Praising

Background: a guy seeing his friend coming from far well dressed says:

[Arabic Text]: إيه رانا حطة اليوم

[English Translation]: yes, you are looking nice today.

In this simply put example, the guy saw his friend well-dressed and looking nice, so he used the term *i:h* supporting his sentence to express some sort of praising. The meaning of *i:h* as yes was completely absent in this context; another new meaning was highlighted, however. That is praising. All the participants agreed on the pragmatic function employed in this context. Also, all of them have chosen “usual” for the scale of use. On this ground, there is no notable difference concerning age and gender.

H. Request Following Up

Background: a student telling his friend about an accident at university where there was a big noise at the library. His friend says:

[Arabic Text]: إيه [English Translation]: yes

The student adds that there was a girl who fainted. His friend says again

[Arabic Text]: إيه وش صرا مبعد

[English Translation]: yes what happened next?

The friend was not at university, so he does not know about the incident. The student told the story because he knew what happened and he is the one who has the details. When he was telling what he witnessed, his friend interrupted by employing the DM *i:h* to signal a request of following up. The witness precedes giving details about the incident. Again his friend uses the DM at hands to indicate a request of following up. Each time he uses the DM *i:h*, the friend continues telling the story providing more details. This marks that when telling the incident, he could understand that he was asked for following up. In this example, both interlocutors' needs were fulfilled. This proves how context gave the DM a new meaning which helped the piece of discourse go well. 92 participants agreed on the pragmatic function expressed in the abovementioned example. 8% were neutral toward this situation. Still, we can see that this pragmatic function is valid. Regarding the variable of gender, 94% females went for “agree”, and 6% for “neutral”. For the scale of use, 92% said they usually use this DM to express this pragmatic function, and 2% went for “often” and 6% for “never”. Moreover, 90% of males went for “agree”, and 10% went for “neutral”. For the scale of use, 88% of males chose “usually”, 2% chose “often”, and 10 for “never”. Regarding the variable of age, same percentage appeared for both groups at the level agreeing on the provided pragmatic function, that is 92% went for “agree”, and 8% went for “neutral”. 88% of the young group said they usually use this pragmatic function, while 4% said they often use it, and 8% said “never”. The 92% of the old group went for “usually”, and 8% went for “never”.

I. Grief

Background: Two friends at work, one mentions that he passed by the high school they studies at. The second says:

[Arabic Text]: إيه كانوا يامات هايبلين، مايتنساوش

[English Translation]: yes, old days. I cannot forget those memories.

Two boys studied together at high school, and now they work together. One mentioned to the second that he passed by their high school. By employing the DM *i:h*, the speaker tries to express some sort of grief about the past happy times they had in high school. In this situation, all the participants agreed on the pragmatic function of expressing grief. And all of them said that they usually use it. Therefore, no significance appeared at the level of the variables.

J. Encouraging

Background: a ten-month baby trying to walk for the first time, his mother says:

[Arabic Text]: هيا وليدي...أرواح لعندي... إبيه...إبيه

[English Translation]: come on son, come to me, yes yes

A mother sees her son trying to step for the first time. She got excited and wanted to support him so that he can do it. At first, she asks him to go to her, and then she repeats the DM twice to express some sort of encouraging her son to walk. Of course, in such a situation, any mother will be so excited to such experience, and therefore will try to support her son/daughter. In this example, the mother used the DM *i:h* validating another meaning of the DM *i:h* which is

encouraging. 99% of the participants have agreed in the pragmatic function suggested in this context, and 1% went for “neutral”. For the scale of use, 92% went for “usual”, and 8% went for “often”. Clearly, the DM *i:h* is pragmatically multifunctional in accordance with context. Regarding the variables of gender and age, the two groups shared equal percentages of 90% agreeing on the provided pragmatic function, 10% were neutral. Concerning the scale of use, 88% went for “usually”, 2% for “often”, and 10% for “never”.

K. Excitement to an Idea

Background: Two friends feeling bored. One says when exams are over, we go for a trip for a week. The second says:

[Arabic Text]: إيه هذاك وش لازم

[English Translation]: yes, that is what we need.

Two friends have some hectic days studying and preparing for their exams. It's been a while for outdoor activities, so they feel bored. One suggests going for a trip when the exams are over. The second uses the DM *i:h* expressing some sort of excitement to the idea of going on a trip especially after the exams. 99% of the participants have agreed in the pragmatic function suggested in this context. 1% went for “neutral”. For the scale of use, 92% went for “usual”, and 8% went for “often”. Considering the variable of gender, all females agreed on this pragmatic function, 94% of them have chosen “usual” for the scale of use and 6% sent for “often”. For the group of males, 98% went for agree, and 2% for “neutral”. For the scale of use, 98% of the males in this group went for “usual” and 2% went for “never”. Regarding the variable of age, all the participants of the young group agreed on the pragmatic function provided, while 98% of the old group went for “agree” and 2% went for “neutral”. On the scale of use, both groups shared the same percentages of 92% went for “usual”, 8% went for “often”.

L. Gloating at Someone

Background: a guy telling his friend that he saw a man stealing a girl's phone and running, while crossing the street, he fell and people caught him. His friend says:

[Arabic Text]: إيه يستاهل

[English Translation]: yes, he deserves it

The guy saw an incident, and told his friend about it. The friend found that the story of stealing a phone from a girl is unpleasant, and when he knew that the thief was caught, he was happy and expressed that by using the DM *i:h* to gloat at him. The hundred participants agreed in this pragmatic function, and they said they usually use it. Therefore, gender and age are not significant in this context.

The participants have suggested other functions that can be performed by the discourse marker discussed above. They are *boredom*, *mocking*, *confirming*, and *nostalgia*.

V. CONCLUSION

The aim of the present paper was to investigate and describe the different meanings of the DM *i:h* in the Algerian Spoken Arabic from a socio-pragmatic perspective. The findings of our work revealed that the DM *i:h* is pragmatically multifunctional under consideration to perform a variety of functions. At least 12 different meanings and uses were accounted for in the study: *agreement*, *realizing*, *remembering*, *astonishment*, *nagging*, *getting rid of someone*, *praising*, *requesting following up*, *expressing grief*, *encouraging*, *excitement to an idea*, and *gloating*. The meanings have been suggested by the researcher and proved by the findings. It is also found that the most used functions are *agreement*, *realizing*, *remembering*, *praising*, *grief*, and *gloating*. Moreover, in this particular study, age and gender were not significant. Very slight differences appeared. Other meanings have been suggested by the participants; they are: *boredom*, *mocking*, *confirming*, and *nostalgia*.

We hope the study motivates other scholars to tackle such similar linguistic issues in the Algerian context.

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