

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

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

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

## I. INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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