

**THE USE OF DISCOURSE MARKERS BY SYRIAN ARABIC  
LEARNERS OF ENGLISH**

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of  
Ph.D.  
in the Faculty of Humanities

2008

**HEVEEN ALI KURDI**

**SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES, LINGUISTICS AND CULTURES**

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## List of abbreviation

COMP	complementiser
DEF	definite article
DM	discourse marker
F	feminine
FUT	future
M	masculine
NEG	negation
PART	particle
PL	plural
REL	relative pronoun
SG	singular

## Glossary of the Arabic Transcription Symbols

The symbol used in this study	The Arabic letter
b	ب
d	د
ḍ	ض
f	ف
h	هـ
ḥ	ح
ž	ج
k	ك
l	ل
m	م
n	ن
q	ق
r	ر
s	س
š	ش
ṣ	ص
t	ت
ṭ	ط
w	و
x	خ
y	ي
z	ز
ẓ	ظ
ʔ	ء
ʕ	ع
ȝ	غ

### The Arabic vowels

Vowel	Example
a	ṣaḥ
ā	kān
ə	šəkil
ē	hēk
i	min
ī	ktīr
o	ʔinno
ō	hōn
u	mu
ū	šaffl

## Transcription Conventions

The transcription conventions used in this thesis are adapted from Ochs et al (1996) and from Schiffrin (1987).

.	a dot indicates a falling intonation but not necessarily the end of a sentence.
?	a question mark indicates rising intonation but not all the time a question.
,	a comma indicates continuing intonation.
!	exclamation mark indicates animated tone.
...	dots indicate noticeable pause or break.
(.)	a micropause, less than 2/10 of a second.
-	a hyphen indicates interrupted word, self-interruption.
:	colons indicate lengthened syllable.
<i>italics</i>	italicized words indicate they are emphatically stressed.
CAPS	capitalized words indicate they are very emphatically stressed.
<b>Bold type</b>	is used in the examples to highlight those discourse markers being discussed in the text
[ ]	overlap
mhm, uh huh	agreement/ backchannel
er, uh	filled pauses
(word)	when words or utterances appear in parentheses this means that the transcriber was not sure of the transcription but included the likely possibility.
'='	When lack of space prevents continuous speech from A being

printed on a single line of text, then '=' at the end of A1 and '=' at the beginning of A2 shows the continuity.

- (---) hyphens in parentheses indicate unclear words that could not be transcribed each hyphen indicates one word .
- ↑↓ the up and down arrows mark emphatic rises or falls in pitch.
- Word underlining is to indicate stress.
- (*coughs*) non-linguistic aspect of the utterance such as whispers, coughing or laughter.
- £word£ word articulated with an audible smiling voice.
- °word° is softer than the talk around it.
- = equal signs one at the end of a line and another at the start of the next line when the lines are by different speakers, indicate that the second followed with no noticeable silence or was latched to it.
- WOrd loud talk is indicated by upper case.
- (0.6) numbers in brackets represent the duration of a silence measured in tenth of a second; (0.6) indicates 6/10 seconds in silence. Silence is measured either within the same turn or between turns.

## THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTR

### ABSTRACT OF THESIS submitted by Heveen Ali Kurdi

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and entitled The use of Discourse Markers by Syrian Arabic learners of English 2008

Research on a set of words known as ‘discourse markers’, like the English expressions *you know*, *I mean*, *like*, *so*, *well* has flourished during that last two decades, with many studies of English discourse markers having been undertaken. However, studies of discourse markers in other languages are relatively few in comparison, and research into discourse markers of foreign language learners has received even less attention. Hence, this dissertation offers an investigation of the use of English discourse markers in a foreign language learning situation. Specifically, the study deals with the use of the three English discourse markers *so*, *you know* and *I mean* by Syrian Arabic learners of English as a foreign language

The informants of this study are Syrian Arabic speakers who have learnt English as a foreign language at school. The data on which this study rests consists of recorded interviews with 18 Syrian Arabic learners of English in both languages English and Arabic. The purpose of conducting the Arabic interviews was to see if the first language has influence on the production of discourse markers in the English discourse of the learners.

The results show that the learners used the three markers for a variety of functions, with no apparent influence from Arabic. However, instances of the marker *so* functioning as a marker of transitions were identified. Examination of these instances shows that this is the result of the influence of the Arabic marker *fa* which has a similar function. The learners are here regarded as using their linguistic repertoires creatively.

## **Declaration**

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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**DEDICATION**

*To my mother and father  
with all my love*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.*

First and foremost, my gratitude and thank will always be to God for giving me the strength, energy and patience throughout the difficult time of this research.

My deepest thank-you goes to my parents for their endless love and support for enduring me being away from them and for believing in me all the time! Without their understanding and prayers I would have never been able to complete this thesis and to them I will always be indebted.

I would also like to express my gratitude and appreciation to my brother Jwan and my sister Helen for all the support and encouragement they gave me. My thanks also go to my nephew Alan and my niece Lilan who helped me without even realizing by simply bringing the joy to my heart and putting a smile on my face during whenever I spoke to them or thought about them. To all my family I will always be indebted.

I am much indebted to my friend Shuruq Naguib and her family for all the love and support they have given me in the last few years. Their true friendship, honest and sincere advice, help, kindness and warmth will always be appreciated. Shuruq has always been a great friend who has never hesitated or stopped giving me personal and academic support, and for this I will always be grateful! Thank you Shuruq, Mohammad and Maryam for all your support, the delicious dinners and simply for your love!

Very special thanks to my dear friends in Manchester who have supported me in different ways. Thank-you to Claire Chen for her great friendship, encouragement and for listening to my worries all the time! to Manuela Di Baise, for supporting me whenever I felt discouraged, for her stimulating positive attitude, for her invaluable help especially during the last stages of this thesis and for all the dinners she cooked for me. Grazie my friend! Ahmad Tahoun who has always made me laugh even during the most difficult times! I am also grateful and much indebted to Tim Green for his tireless support and encouragement, for all the long conversations about doing a PhD and for his constant positive attitude. His academic advice and personal kindness were everything one would dream of during the stressful time of conducting research. Thank you for always being there for me! Without you studying and living in Manchester would have never been the same.

My heartfelt thanks also go to my friend Maha Sarkis for volunteering her time and effort in a quite hot Damascene summer to conduct the interviews for my English data and for proofreading parts of this thesis. Her help and support are much appreciated.

I would like to thank Damascus University and The Ministry of Higher Education in Syria for funding me and making the completion of this project possible.

My thanks also goes to the Welfare Team in Opal Gardens for their understanding and help. Thanks are also to Sandy Lo and Maryam Shabibi for their encouragement and support.

Finally, I would like to thank my informants who will remain anonymous but without whom this work would have never existed.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The last two decades have witnessed a rapid increase in the number of studies which deal with a set of linguistic items, generally referred to as ‘discourse markers’. Research on discourse markers (expressions such as *you know*, *I mean*, *like*, *so*, *well*, *kind of*) has in particular flourished in English, but has also been expanding in other languages (see 2.1) though to a lesser degree. Discourse markers have been analysed from various linguistic approaches and in different contexts (see chapter 2). Some studies have looked at discourse markers in monolingual contexts (cf. Schiffrin 1987, Hansen 1997; 1998) while others focused on bilingual speakers’ use of these items in contact situations (cf. Salmons 1990; Maschler 2000). There are also some studies that deal with discourse markers in second language acquisition contexts (cf. Demirci et al 1997) as well as foreign language contexts (cf. Müller). However, they are still very few compared to the research that has been done on discourse marker in monolingual speech communities.

This dissertation offers an investigation of the use of English discourse markers in a foreign language learning situation. Specifically, the study deals with the use of the three English discourse markers *so*, *you know* and *I mean* by Syrian Arabic learners of English as a foreign language. Syria is a monolingual country with Arabic being the only official language spoken by its people. Some minority languages are also spoken in the country but have no official status. As for foreign languages, English and French are the most popular languages learnt by the

Syrians with English being the preferred one. The speakers in this study are students who learnt English as a subject at school and were doing some English private courses to improve their performance. Their use of English is restricted to specific context like the classroom and sometimes the working places. In other words, they do not use English in their everyday interactions.

The data of the present study rests on a corpus of recorded interviews with the Syrian learners, which took place in a centre for learning foreign languages in Damascus University. The informants were interviewed twice, first in English and then in Arabic. The English interviews were conducted by a native speaker of English, while the Arabic ones were done by a native speaker of Arabic (the researcher). The total number of the informants is 18 students. The Arabic data is collected to check if there is any influence from Arabic on the usage of the English discourse markers by the learners.

Three markers *so*, *you know* and *I mean* were selected from the data for the analysis. The selection of these markers was determined by their occurrence in the data. Only these three markers were used by the informants, although the marker *well* appeared a few times in the speech of two speakers only, therefore, it was not justifiable to include it in the study. This study is by no means a quantitative research. Rather it is a qualitative study which aims at investigating the Syrian Arabic speakers' use of discourse markers in English.

Although there are a few studies which focused on how Arabic native speakers use discourse markers in different dialects (cf. Gaddafi 1990 on Libyan discourse

markers; Ghobrial 1993 on Egyptian discourse markers; Al-khalil 2005 on Syrian discourse markers) no attempt, to my knowledge, has been made to investigate whether Arabic learners of English as a foreign language use discourse markers at all, and for what purposes. Hence, the present study attempts to fill this gap by making an initial endeavour to examine English discourse markers in the speech of Syrian Arabic learners of English.

Most studies of discourse markers in foreign language situations focus on the comparison between learners' performance with that of native speakers' (cf. Nikula 1996; Lee 2004; Müller 2005). However, the current study focus on how Syrian Arabic speakers use discourse markers in English regardless of whether or not they achieve native-like performance. The research was guided by the following questions. (1) Do Syrian Arabic learners of English use discourse markers at all in their English performance? and if yes which markers? (2) What discourse functions do the English discourse markers fulfil in the discourse of the Syrian learners of English? (3) Have the learners acquired those discourse markers which have equivalents in their first language? (4) Is there an influence of the discourse markers of first language on the production of the discourse markers of foreign language?

The organization of the thesis is as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on discourse markers, their terminology, characteristic and the some of the approaches that were used to study them. It also reviews some of the studies that have been done in bilingual and language learning situations. Chapter 3 describes the sociolinguistic situation of Syria and the methodology adopted for the data

collection and related issues. Chapter 4 presents analysis of some examples of the three Syrian discourse markers *fa*, *yaʕnī* and *btalʕfī* and its variants, which can be conventionally translated as *so*, *I mean* and *you know* respectively, to see if there is any influence of Arabic on the way discourse markers are used in English. Chapter 5 presents the analysis of the discourse marker *so* in the speech of the Syrian learners. Chapter 6 focuses on the marker *you know* in the discourse of the Syrian learners. Chapter 7 deals with the last marker in this study which is *I mean* and its functions in the data of the learners. Finally, chapter 8 presents a number of conclusions, the limitations of this study as well as some suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 2

### Discourse markers in the literature

#### 2.0 Introduction

Particles - little words like *well*, *why* or *even* - are what distinguishes human language from the languages of robots. Well, perhaps not just particles - there are also interjections, swearwords, and a number of other 'irrational' devices, lexical as well as grammatical, which make human speech distinctly human. But there can be no doubt that small words and expressions such as *well*, *just*, *also*, *as well* and *but*, to mention only those used in this paragraph (with *only* and *very* - and *of course* - belonging of course to the same family) pertain to the very essence of human communication. (Wierzbicka 1986: 519)

The aim of this chapter is to review some of the innumerable studies of the small words and expressions which Wierzbicka referred to. The chapter is organised into two parts: the first part reviews the previous studies that have focused on the analysis of discourse markers from different linguistic approaches, mainly in English, while the second part reviews the work that has been done in the area of discourse markers in bilingual and foreign language contexts. This part is intended to relate the current study to previous research which focuses on the use of discourse markers by foreign language learners. The chapter starts by shedding light on the studies that have addressed the topic of discourse markers at its early stages. The issue of terminology is then addressed and the characteristics of discourse markers are also discussed.

## 2.1 The beginning of discourse markers research

Research on discourse markers (and their variant labels: discourse connectives, discourse particles, pragmatic markers, discourse operators, etc) has flourished during the last three decades bringing these items into the centre of pragmatics research. Earlier views on discourse markers have viewed these items as meaningless and functionless and nothing more than crutches for those who have speech disfluencies. For example, markers like *you know* and *I mean* have been negatively evaluated by English teachers who considered them as ‘verbal garbage’ (Schourup, 1985:94). Crystal describes this negative assessment of discourse markers as follows:

“These phrases are widely criticised as being markers of unclear thinking, lack of confidence, inadequate social skills, and a range of other undesirable characteristics” (1988:47).

Nevertheless, there have been many attempts by linguists to understand the use patterns and functions of these expressions. The beginning of research on discourse markers could probably be traced back to the early 1970s when Lakoff (1973) investigated the meaning of *well* and *why* as interjections that occur at the beginning of answers. Following this, Crystal and Davy (1975) analysed informal English conversations and suggested that the category of connectives included ‘connecting phrases’ such as: *you know, you see, I mean, mind you, sort of, kind of* and *well* which function as ‘softening connectives’ since they “alter the stylistic force of a sentence, so as to express the attitude of the speaker to his listener” (1975: 91-92).

Still at the early stage of research on discourse markers, Halliday and Hasan (1976) were concerned, in their work *Cohesion in English*, with the resources that

make a text in English a unified whole as opposed to a collection of unrelated sentences. They call these resources ‘cohesive ties’ and claim that they are meaning relations that exist in a text. They suggested that English has the following cohesive ties: *reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction* and *lexical cohesion* (1976:4). Items that are today referred to as discourse markers were considered in their work as conjunctive elements which provide cohesion in text. They distinguish between items like: *and, so, but* which they call ‘conjunctives’ and other items like: *after all, now, of course, well, surely* which they label ‘continuatives’ (1976:267). In all cases, these conjunctive elements were considered by the authors as devices that help creating a coherent text.

Without mentioning the term ‘discourse markers’, Levinson (1983) was one of the first scholars to point out their importance in his book *Pragmatics* (1983) when he discussed discourse deixis. He states that:

‘... 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 usages 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 is a response to, or a continuation of, some portion of the prior discourse. We still await proper studies of these terms’ (1983: 87-88).

Although Levinson’s treatment of these words did not exceed this brief remark, he with no doubt highlighted the fundamental function of discourse markers as connecting and structuring devices in discourse. Luckily, we did not need to wait for a long time for proper studies on discourse markers, as innumerable papers and books have been published since Levinson’s comments on the wide range of

functions which discourse markers perform in discourse. There are many studies of English discourse markers such as Schourup 1985; Schiffrin 1987; and Blakemore 1987 to mention but a few, as well as in other languages (Bazzanella 1990 on Italian; Fareh 1998 on Arabic; Montes 1999, Schwenter 1996 on Spanish; Argiris 2001 on Greek; Chen 2001 on Chinese; Horn et al 2001 on Swedish; Wouk 2001 on Indonesian; Matsui 2002 on Japanese; Tchizmarova 2005 on Bulgarian; Da Silva 2006 on Portuguese).

Since the focus of this study is on three English discourse markers (*so, you know* and *I mean*) only studies on English discourse markers will be reviewed, but first a discussion of the terminology and characteristics of discourse markers will be presented in the following two sections.

## **2.2 Terminology**

There is no doubt the literature on pragmatics is nowadays rich with studies on discourse markers which look at these items from various perspectives and analyse them within different frameworks. Despite the existing wide research body on these expressions and the growing interest in them, there is no consensus on the terminology of these linguistic expressions or even on their characteristics (cf. 2.3). A survey of the relevant literature reveals the diversity in terminology which reflects two things: the wide number of linguistic approaches that have been used in studying discourse markers, and the various functions which these items can fulfil (Jucker and Ziv, 1998: 1).

many labels have been given to discourse markers such as: cue phrases (Knott and Dale, 1994) , cue words (Horn et al 2001), discourse connectives (Blakemore

1987; 1992), discourse operators (Redeker 1990; 1991; 2006), discourse particles (Schourup 1985; Wierzbicka 1986; Hansen 1998; Fischer 1998; Aijmer 2002), discourse signalling devices (Polanyi and Scha 1983), phatic connectives (Bazanella 1990), pragmatic connectives (Van Dijk 1979; Stubbs,1983), pragmatic expressions (Erman 1987;1992), pragmatic formatives (Fraser 1987), pragmatic markers (Fraser 1996; Andersen 2001; González 2004), pragmatic operators (Ariel 1994), sentence connectives (Halliday and Hasan, 1976), discourse markers (Schiffrin,1987; Ariel 1998; Andersen et al 1999; Norrick 2001; Müller 2005; Fraser 2006), interactional signals (Stenström 1994), gambits (Keller 1979).

In the present study the term ‘discourse markers’ will be used throughout to refer to the three items under examination (*so*, *you know*, and *I mean*). I use this term because it is the most popular one as it has been noticed by Schourup who mentions that “the term DM used in this review is merely the most popular of a host of competing terms used with partially overlapping reference” (1999:228).

As well as the disagreement on terminology, researchers have not reached an agreement on what items the class discourse markers should include. Schiffrin (1987), for example, includes lexical phrases such as *I mean* and *y’know*, while Fraser (1990) excludes these phrases from his inventory and includes *however* which Schiffrin does not. However, despite of the disagreement about issues like terminology, features and which items should be included in the class of discourse markers, most of researchers seem to agree on a single property of these items

which is their function of connecting units of discourse. This property and other ones will be elaborated below.

### **2.3 Characteristics of Discourse Markers**

Discourse markers have been described as having many features which define them. For example, Schiffrin (1987) argues that for an expression to be a discourse marker it should display: syntactic independence from the sentence structure, initial position within the sentence, phonological reduction, and vague or no meaning (1987:328). Brinton (1996: 33-35) list of the characteristics of what she calls ‘pragmatic markers’ is much longer than that of Schiffrin and contains almost all of the features discussed by other researchers. According to Brinton’s pragmatic markers:

- are often associated with oral discourse rather than written discourse.
- are stigmatized and negatively evaluated in written discourse.
- are phonologically reduced.
- form a separate tone unit.
- often appear in sentence-initial position.
- have little or no propositional meaning.
- have no grammatical function since they are syntactically detached from the sentence.
- are optional.
- are difficult to place within a traditional grammatical word class.
- are multifunctional.
- appear more often in women’s speech than of men’s speech.

(adapted from Brinton 1996:33-35).

In what follows we will have a look at each individual feature of discourse markers as they have been discussed in the literature.

### 2.3.1 Connectivity

This is the most prominent property of discourse markers. Discourse markers are believed to play an important role in connecting discourse units, i.e. in indicating relations among units of discourse thus creating a coherent discourse. Fraser (1988), for example, believes that a discourse marker is an expression which signals the relationship of the current utterance (which contains the discourse marker) to the prior discourse, and similarly Schiffrin (1987) defines discourse markers as elements that relate discourse units to each other.

More explicitly, Hansen (1997) argues that discourse markers are “linguistic items of variable scope, and whose primary function is connective” (1997: 160) and Blakemore (1987) considers the principal function of discourse markers (or discourse connectives as she calls them) is to express inferential connections between the utterances. Connectivity, thus distinguishes discourse markers from other discourse indicators such as *frankly*, *sadly* whose function is to express the attitudes of the speaker (Schourup, 1999:231). In fact Blakemore (2002) points to the importance of connectivity in differentiating discourse markers from other items that might also work as indicators in discourse. She states that:

“If the term ‘discourse markers’ does in deed refer to a particular class of expressions, then they must have a property which distinguishes them from other discourse indicators. This property is generally considered to be their function of marking relationships or connections among units of discourse” (2002:2).

As much as it is important, connectivity alone is not enough to define discourse markers and therefore other features should be taken into account before an element qualifies as a discourse marker.

### **2.3.2 Syntactically optional**

Syntactic detachability is an essential defining property of a discourse marker. It is what distinguishes it from its non-discourse marker homonyms (Müller, 2005:6). Syntactic independence seems to be a widely agreed on feature of discourse markers. Fraser (1988) states that discourse markers are 'lexical adjuncts' whose absence "does not render a sentence ungrammatical and/or unintelligible" (1988:22). As mentioned above (cf. 2.3) Schiffrin (1987) and Brinton (1996) include syntactic detachability among other properties of discourse markers. That is, discourse markers are "loosely attached" to a sentence (Jucker and Ziv, 1998: 3) or, in other words, they don't enter the syntactic construction of the sentence (Sankoff et al 1997: 195).

### **2.3.3 Little semantic meaning**

Discourse markers are not only syntactically optional, but they are also semantically optional (Schourup, 1999:231). In other words, they do not add to the propositional meaning of the sentences that contain them. As far as the meaning of a marker itself is concerned, some scholars believe that discourse markers are completely desemanticized after being gone a semantic bleaching (Sankoff et al, 1997:197), but others talk about little or no propositional meaning (Schiffrin,1987:328; Brinton, 1996:33; Jucker and Ziv 1998:3-4; Erman, 2001:1339). Yet, there are a few authors who claim that discourse markers are not entirely void of semantic meaning and that although they have undergone a process of grammaticalisation, whereby they lost most of their semantic meaning, there is still some retention of their conceptual meanings (Andersen, 2001:40-41).

Even though discourse markers are grammatically and semantically optional, they are definitely pragmatically important. They help and guide the hearer toward a particular interpretation by blocking the unintended interpretations (Schourup, 1999:232; Andersen, 2001:41). Thus, although discourse markers do not create meaning between discourse segments nor do they affect the grammaticality of a sentence, their absence removes a ‘powerful clue’ about the relationship between an utterance and the prior discourse (Fraser, 1988:22).

Just like researchers do not agree on a single term for discourse markers, they also seem to be in disagreement on what features a discourse marker might display. For example, Redeker (2006) argues that a ‘discourse operator’ might not be optional, might not be syntactically and intonationally independent, and might add to the truth-conditional of a sentence (2006: 342). Thus, she seems to be in a complete disagreement with the other scholars mentioned above.

As for this study, with Schourup (1999: 232) I agree that syntactic detachability, lack of semantic meaning and connectivity are the most necessary features in defining discourse markers.

#### **2.3.4 Other characteristics**

Although less important than the aforementioned three characteristics, discourse marker have other features (cf. Brinton’s list in 2.3). Discourse markers are heterogeneous expressions which are drawn from different grammatical categories, thus they do not form one traditional word class (cf. Schiffrin 1987; Fraser 1988, 1990, 1999; Schourup 1999; Stenström 1994). They can be: adverbs (*now, then*), phrases (*I mean*) interjections (*well*) or subordinate conjunctions (*and, but, so, however*).

As for their position within the sentence, it is often said that discourse markers occur sentence-initially (Schiffrin 1987: 328; Fraser 1990:389). However, other positions (sentence medial and sentence final) have been also discussed (cf. Brinton 1996; Fox Tree and Schrock 2002).

Discourse markers have mostly been associated with oral discourse rather than written discourse. Many studies of discourse markers used speech data (cf. Schiffrin 1987; Andersen 2001; Aijmer 2002; Travis 2005; Müller 2005). Moreover, phonological reduction is another discussed feature of discourse markers (Schiffrin 1987: 328; Brinton 1996: 33; Jucker and Ziv 1998:3). Sankoff et al say that markers “undergo greater phonological reduction than their source forms” (1997:197).

Having reviewed the features of discourse markers, I now turn to discuss some of the approaches used to analyse them. The literature on discourse markers reflects the diversity of the approaches taken to study these items. While some researchers took Coherence-based approach as the main approach to study them (cf. Risselada and Spooren 1998; Hansen 1998; Lee-Wong 2001), others considered the Relevance Theory a more appropriate framework for the analysis of discourse markers (cf. Jucker 1988; Blass 1990; Ariel 1998). Below I will present a few studies that represent each approach.

#### **2.4 Discourse markers in the coherence framework**

Under this approach, discourse markers are seen as items that help creating textual coherence (cf. Lenk 1998a, 1998b; Aijmer 2002). Let us have a look at some of

the studies that have been undertaken within this coherence, namely that of Schiffrin and Redeker.

### **2.4.1 Schiffrin**

Schiffrin's (1987) seminal study of English discourse markers is considered to be one of the most important detailed studies of these linguistics items. Her analysis focuses on eleven English discourse markers which fall in different parts of speech like: particles (*oh, well*); conjunctions (*and, because, but, or, so*); time deictics (*now, then,*) and lexicalized clauses (*I mean, y'know*) as they appeared in a corpus of sociolinguistic interviews with Jewish Americans in which Schiffrin herself was a participant.

Schiffrin suggests a definition of discourse markers as “sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk” (1987, 31). Two important aspects of discourse markers are presented in this definition; the sequential dependence of markers, and their function in units of talk. The first feature refers to the fact that discourse markers are elements which work on the discourse level and therefore are dependant on the sequence of discourse. In other words, it is not possible to capture their discursive function if they were looked at as part of a phrase or sentence. In stead, a more comprehensive approach is needed which considers markers as devices working in the discourse as a whole. Thus, they cannot be explained from a sentence grammar point of view. This sequential dependence, Schiffrin argues, can be evidenced by instances where discourse markers combine two units which do not belong to the same syntactical category like a statement and a question or when they co-occur in a single unite. Such combinations and co-

occurrences can be only justified if these elements are considered as part of discourse and not looked at from a purely syntactic perspective that would fail to explain such “irregularities”.

As for bracketing units of talk, Schiffrin claims that she deliberately chooses the term ‘units of talk’ to avoid excluding cases where markers appear in untraditionally defined units like ideas, turns, speech acts or tone unit. In this regard she states that:

“a unit which focuses on how linguistic structure, meaning, and act are phonologically realized in speech might seem to be a more promising basis for our definition of markers” (Schiffrin, 1987: 33).

In order to understand the distribution of discourse markers in discourse and the motivation behind using them, Schiffrin proposes that discourse has several underlying components or planes and developed a model of discourse coherence which consists of these components<sup>1</sup>. Central to this model is the idea of coherence which is the outcome of integrating the different components that Schiffrin suggested, or to put it in her words coherence is ‘the outcome of joint efforts from interactants to *integrate* knowledge, meaning, saying and doing ’ (p.29). Discourse markers’ role in the coherence process is to index utterances to one or more of the discourse underlying levels thus rendering a coherent discourse.

The underlying components of discourse fall into linguistic structures and non-linguistic structures, Schiffrin claims. The linguistic structure is what Schiffrin

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<sup>1</sup> Schiffrin stresses that the discourse model she came up with was an outcome of her analysis rather than having initially guided it (pp.313).

calls *ideational structure*. It represents the idea units, which are linguistic units that a discourse consists because they are “propositions with semantic meaning” (1987:26). The rest of the planes in this discourse model are all pragmatic because of the key role played by speakers and hearers in them. They are: *exchange structure*; *action structure*; *participation framework*; and *information state*.

The *exchange structure* refers to the mechanism by which participants alter their sequential roles in a conversation and to the rules that constraint this alternation. Turn-taking system is a good manifestation of the exchange structure.

The second non-linguistic structure in this discourse model is the *action structure*. This structure reflects the order of speech acts in discourse which are ‘constrained linear sequences’ (p.25) this means that a speech act is constrained by what act precedes it in discourse and what act is meant to follow.

The next component of the model is the *participation framework*. This plane is highly pragmatic due to the central role of the speaker and the hearer in taking part in interaction and having shared responsibilities in talk. It shows how participants relate to each other as well as to their talk.

While speakers and hearers exchanging turns, performing actions, expressing ideas and relating to each other during the course of interaction, they are constantly organising and managing their knowledge and meta-knowledge. This is done in their cognitive abilities; what they know about the world (knowledge), and what they expect each other to know (meta-knowledge). The organisation of

information constitutes the last plane in Schiffrin's model which she calls the *information state* of discourse.

Schiffrin claims that discourse markers have a number of functions. First, they select then display a meaning relation between two segments of discourse. Second, they index the location of an utterance to participation or textual contexts and finally, they work as contextual coordinates of talk. However, it is always achieving coherence in discourse that is desired when using discourse markers (whether by linking two segments with a meaning relation, indexing utterances to a particular context or acting as contextual coordinates).

Schiffrin postulates that it is not discourse markers *per se* that create a meaning relation between utterances. Rather they only select and then display a pre-existing meaning relationship between units of talk. We are saying here pre-existing relation because a meaning relationship between utterances is usually constrained by the context in which these utterances appear. Another way of saying this is that the role of a discourse marker is only to select and display, not to create, one relation out of many potential relations available in a particular context.

As for their 'indexical' function, discourse markers index utterances to a context, which could be participants or text or both. They have a similar function to that of deictics in that they either look toward the deictic centre of the utterance, in which case they are said to be 'proximal', or they point away from that centre and are referred to as 'distal'.

A marker can index an utterance to the speaker or the hearer (participants), when it shows a focus on the speaker then it is 'proximal' but when it focuses on the hearer it is said to be 'distal'. It is possible that a marker focuses on both the speaker and the hearer as in '*well*' whereas '*Oh*' is a speaker-centred marker. On the textual level, discourse markers index the utterance they appear in to a previous text (proximal) or to an upcoming text (distal). To put it differently, they either point forward in the text (as in *Oh*) or backward, and sometimes in both directions as '*well*' does.

The function of markers as contextual coordinates means that 'they index an utterance to the local contexts in which utterances are produced and in which they are to be interpreted' (p. 326). It is out of their indexical function that markers acquire the role of contextual coordinates.

As mentioned above, Schiffrin proposed a model of discourse coherence and tried to show how markers play a role in integrating the different components that this discourse model consists of. In this sense, markers have an integrative function. They integrate more than one level of talk simultaneously by locating an utterance on more than one plane of talk at once. In other words, the more planes a marker can operate on and locate an utterance within, the more integrative function it has and the greater coherence is. Schiffrin concludes her study remarking that:

'...markers allow speakers to construct and integrate multiple planes and dimensions of an emergent reality: it is out of such process that coherent discourse results' (1987:330).

Similar to Schiffrin, Redeker, as we will see below, is another scholar who looked at discourse markers from a coherence perspective.

#### **2.4.2 Redeker**

Redeker (1990) proposes an integrative approach to discourse coherence. According to this approach, she argues that discourse coherence arises from two types of relationships between utterances; *semantic relations* and *pragmatic relations* (Redeker, 1990: 368). By *semantic relations* Redeker refers to the relations that hold between the ideas expressed in the utterances and in this sense they are roughly identical with Schiffrin's 'ideational plane' (see 2.1.1). *Pragmatic relations* on the other hand represent the attitudes and intentions of the speakers as conveyed in their utterances and are further divided into two types of relations; *rhetorical relations* and *sequential relations*. Redeker claims that two utterances are rhetorically related when the relationship between them is between the intentions and the beliefs that motivate them, and not between the ideas described in them. If utterances are not linked by a semantic or a rhetorical relation and they are still believed to belong to the same discourse, then they are *sequentially* related, Redeker argues. These sequential relations can be either paratactic or hypotactic (1990: 369)

The main hypothesis of Redeker is that content (or ideational) structures and pragmatic structures are complementary aspects of discourse coherence. If so, she believes, then pragmatic markers and ideational markers are also in a complementary relationship. In other words, a speaker who uses many pragmatic markers will tend to use less content (ideational) markers and vice versa. To test this hypothesis she designed an experiment where 16 subjects were shown a silent

movie and were asked to retell the movie to a friend or a stranger who had not seen it. It was found that when the subjects talked to a friend they used an informal personal register while they used a more formal register when they spoke to strangers.

The difference in the register used by the subjects (informal style vs. formal style) was reflected in the type of the discourse marker used. Statistically, pragmatic markers outnumbered ideational markers in informal contexts. i.e. when the subjects interacted with friends, while ideational markers prevailed in the more formal and strict context of the subject-stranger interactions. In both cases, the informants used one type of markers instead of the other and not in addition to. This confirms the complementarity hypothesis of pragmatic and ideational structuring devices which Redeker proposes. She claims that the trade-off between pragmatic and ideational markers occurred not only in the speech of the two groups (the friends and the strangers), but also in the individual speakers' discourse.

In a review article, Redeker (1991) criticizes Schiffrin's (1987) study of discourse markers pointing several shortcomings of Schiffrin's coherence model and proposing an alternative one. First, she disagrees with Schiffrin's conclusion that only two discourse markers, or what she calls *discourse operators*, (*so, well*) can work on all planes of Schiffrin's model of talk (see 2.1.1) and argues that if the model is applied on a wider range of data such as narratives and spontaneous talk (in fact Redeker used examples from Schiffrin's data (1987), from her own data (1986) and from the literature on DMs), then nine out of the eleven markers that

Schiffrin analyzed can actually function at all five planes of discourse (she provides a table with the added functions of each marker on the five planes). From this study Redeker concludes that the coherence model proposed by Schiffrin fails to distinguish among the markers. She writes:

“This model of discourse coherence is intended to link the discourse markers’ inherent lexico-grammatical contribution to their contextualized interpretation. I will argue that DS’s [Schiffrin’s] minimalist approach to the semantics of discourse markers places too heavy a burden on the syntactic and contextual determination of marker meanings. If the coherence model is applied consistently to a slightly wider range of talk, the model ceases to discriminate between the markers” (Redeker 1991: 1139).

Redeker also discusses some methodological problems in Schiffrin’s study, for example, she complains about the ‘vagueness and inconsistencies’ of Schiffrin’s terminology and definitions. In addition, she argues that Schiffrin failed to provide clear and reliable quantitative information about the markers investigated (Redeker 1991: 1160-1161).

The second important point of Redeker’s criticism to Schiffrin, concerns the pragmatic planes of talk in the latter’s model. Redeker believes that Schiffrin’s *information structure* and *participation framework* do not affect and/or contribute to discourse coherence directly. She states that:

“...the components *information structure* and *participation framework* are clearly not on a par with the other three planes. The cognitions and attitudes composing these two components concern individual utterances, while the building blocks at the other three planes are relational concepts” (Redeker 1991: 1162).

Following this assessment of Schiffrin’s model, Redeker proposed a revised model of discourse coherence in which she distinguished three components: *ideational structure*, which is to some extent an equivalent to Schiffrin’s

*ideational plane*, *rhetorical structure* which is roughly equivalent to Schiffrin's *actions structures*, and finally *sequential structure* which is "an extended variant" of Schiffrin's *exchange structure*. Redeker's *sequential structure* is different form Schiffrin's *exchange structure* in that it can account for sequential transitions in monologic talk as well as dialogic discourse. Another difference between the two models, as Redeker claims, is that Schiffrin defines the planes of her coherence model in relation to the markers' functions and does not provide an independent definition to each plane (Redeker 1991: 1167-1168) while Redeker defines the components of her model irrespective of the discourse markers functioning on them.

In her recent investigation of discourse markers, Redeker (2006) distinguished between those markers that change the interpretation of an utterance (*discourse particles*) and those that help in the structuring of discourse (*discourse operators*).

She provides a definition of a discourse operator as:

"... any expression that is used with the primary function of bringing to the listener's attention a particular kind of relation between the discourse unit it introduces and the immediate discourse context" (Redeker 2006: 431).

There are three types of *discourse operators* as Redeker claims; ideational, rhetorical and markers of transitions between discourse segments. She argues that a discourse marker at a transition point in the discourse, functions as a cue which directs and guides the listener's attention as to what kind of transition is taking place; paratactic transition or hypotactic one. Using a priming effect psycholinguistic experiment, Redeker tested how discourse markers facilitate the activation of a previously activated focus space.

As mentioned above transitions in discourse (or sequential relations) can be either paratactic or hypotactic. Paratactic transitions are those that marked by juxtaposing utterances or sentences that follow each other without any interruption and without using any connecting expression (e.g. topics, agenda items). In contrast, hypotactic transitions are those that involve interrupting or suspending the current discourse unit with parenthetical units. (Redeker 2006: 344). Examples of parenthetical discourse units are: digressions, interruptions, repairs, paraphrasing, comments, clarifications, to mention but a few. Discourse markers' function is then, as Redeker suggests, is to provide the listener with a cue as to what kind of transition is present in the discourse; paratactic transition or hypotactic transition (embedding, return). If discourse markers indicate a paratactic discourse transition, they can do that by looking ahead and marking a new segment and are called *next-segment markers* or by looking back and closing off the current discourse segment and in this case they are called *end-of-segment markers* (Redeker 2006: 344).

## **2.5 Discourse markers from the Relevance Theory perspective**

The second main approach that has been used to study discourse markers is the Relevance theory (cf. Sperber and Wilson 1986). Unlike the coherence approach, which focuses on the textual functions of discourse markers in creating a coherent discourse, the Relevance Theory stresses the cognitive processes involved in utterance interpretations, and discourse markers' role is to constraint these interpretations. Blakemore (1987) is one of the pioneering scholars who analyses discourse markers within the Relevance Theory framework (cf. Blass 1990; Jucker 1988; Andersen 2001).

### **2.5.1 Blakemore**

While Schiffrin and those writers who believe the function of discourse markers is to mark coherence in discourse (Schiffrin 1987), Blakemore (in a series of publications) analyses discourse markers within the Relevance Theory framework claiming that they provide instructions to the hearer on how to interpret an utterance. Blakemore (1987, 1992, 1998, 2002, 2004) argues that the role of discourse markers (she calls them discourse connectives in her (1987) and (1992) work, and discourse marker/connectives in her later publications) is to constrain “the interpretation of the utterances that contain them by virtue of the inferential connections they express” (1987: 105). When speakers produce utterances, hearers try to interpret them as relevant in some way to the context in which they are said. However, utterances’ linguistic forms might give rise to many interpretations, and the hearer’s task is to choose the most relevant one in a given context. Now if the speaker does not want the hearer to recover the unintended interpretation, he or she must constrain the hearer’s choice of interpretation by using a particular discourse marker or discourse connective. In this sense discourse markers “encode instructions for processing propositional representations” (1992:151).

Blakemore argues that discourse connectives can constrain the interpretation of an utterance even though when this utterance is not preceded by a linguistic antecedent (1992: 138-139). Moreover, Blakemore (2004) claims that discourse coherence can be derived from the notion of relevance. In other words, hearers have to assume that a particular utterance is optimally relevant to the current discourse in order to see discourse as a coherent whole.

## **2.6 Communicative approach to the study of discourse markers**

Within this approach discourse markers have been considered as linguistic items which signal the communicative intention of the speaker as will see in the work of Fraser and Schourup below.

### **2.6.1 Fraser**

Unlike Schiffrin who is primarily concerned in her work *Discourse markers* with how markers contribute to discourse coherence, and Blakemore who focuses on the role of discourse connectives in constraining meaning within the Relevance Theory framework, Fraser's aim is to classify the general properties of discourse markers and show that they constitute an entire class in any language linguistic system and their function is to signal the communicative intention of the speaker.

Fraser (1988) analyses discourse markers within a sentence meaning framework. According to this framework sentence meaning can be divided into: content meaning (propositional content) and pragmatic meaning. Content meaning, as Fraser sees it, is the basic message that a speaker intends the hearer to understand by virtue of what it literally means, while pragmatic meaning is the communicative message of the sentence. Pragmatic meaning can be signalled by three types of pragmatic markers: basic pragmatic markers 'which signal the speaker's basic communicative intention' (p.21), commentary pragmatic markers which signals a separate message commenting on the basic message, and parallel



He differentiates between ‘discourse markers’ and ‘pragmatic commentary markers’. The former signals a relationship between two utterances, how they relate to each other (cause, result, inference etc) while the latter indicate the attitude of the speaker towards the message of the sentence (frankly, honestly,) the manner in which the speaker wishes the hearer to see the sentence thus is more like an adverb in this sense. He defines discourse markers as:

“lexical expressions which are syntactically independent of the basic sentence, and which have a general core meaning which signals the relationship of the current utterance to the prior discourse” (1988: 27).

Central to this definition is the characteristic of discourse markers as expressions that impose a relationship between the utterance they appear in S2, and a prior discourse segment(s) S1. This can be presented as follows: < S1 DM+S2> (Fraser 1999: 938). In this respect, Fraser, who shares this view with Blakemore (1992), postulates that a discourse marker does not display a relationship as Schiffrin proposed (1987) rather it imposes a certain interpretation on S2 depending on the meaning of S1 and the meaning of the DM. (1999: 942).

Interjections, vocatives, phrases like *I mean* and *y’ know* and pauses markers or fillers, are excluded from the category of discourse markers according to Fraser (1988) as they do not signal a sequential discourse relationship.

### **2.6.2 Schourup**

Schourup’s (1985) study of ‘discourse particles’ (like, well, you know) is motivated by his belief that the undisputed or hidden thoughts of speakers are as important to communication as what they are actually saying. His main hypothesis is that discourse particles play an important role in bridging the gap between the

displayed and the undisplayed or, in other words, in solving the disclosure problem in conversation which means that:

“...unexpressed thinking engaged in by conversants concurrent with their participation in a conversation may be communicatively relevant to their displayed verbal and other actions” (Schourup, 1985: 3).

Unexpressed thinking implies that in conversations speakers do not usually reveal all that comes to their minds rather they select what is appropriate to the conversation at hand. In other words, speakers are engaged in ‘covert thinking’ (and sometimes in mental processes as well like: drawing inferences, understanding implicatures) and the act of talking simultaneously. Not all of these mental activities are verbalized in a conversation or shared with the other conversants. That speakers hide some thoughts from their conversation partners, led Schourup to suggest a tripartite model of talk. The model consists of three worlds: The private world<sup>3</sup> which refers to what the speaker is currently thinking of, but has not disclosed to his hearer (covert thinking); the shared world which refers to what has been verbalized and thus is available to both speakers and hearers; and finally the other world which refers to the covert thinking of other conversants and which is not accessible to the speaker<sup>4</sup> (Schourup, 1985:7). The relationship between the disclosure problem and this tripartite model can be expressed as follows:

“The Disclosure Problem: Current undisclosed material in the private and other worlds may be communicatively relevant to what the speaker is now doing, or has just done, or will just now be doing, in the shared world.” (Schourup, 1985:8)

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<sup>3</sup> The definitions are underlined as in the original text.

<sup>4</sup> Schourup claims that these three world apply to all participants in a conversation so what is a private world to one speaker is the other word to another one and visa versa.

Discourse particles function is then to mediate between the undisclosed thinking (the private world and the other world) of conversants and what they are openly and currently saying and doing in talk (the shared world). Schourup also referred to some discourse particles (*oh* and *well*) as ‘evincive’ and argues that they are characterized with the ability to indicate that at the moment of uttering them the speaker is thinking or has just been thinking of something; the role of the evincive is to signal the occurrence of this thinking but does not necessarily clarify its content (Schourup, 1985:18). It is also important to note that discourse particles serve a variety of discourse functions based on their ‘core use’ that is the basic interpretation they have. For example, well has the core use of indicating that the speaker is consulting his private world and thinking of what to bring out to the shared world. Other discourse functions (introduce questions or answers, direct quotations, topic shifts) of well are a product of applying its core evincive function to the particular context this item appear in (Schourup, 1985: 91).

## **2.7 Discourse markers in bilingual discourse and foreign language discourse**

So far I have reviewed the research that has been done on discourse markers in general in monolingual situations, i.e. the studies which focused on discourse markers in the speech of speakers of a monolingual society. In what follows the emphasis will be on the usage of discourse markers in bilingual situations. The topic of discourse markers has occupied a considerable space in the literature of bilingualism and language contact. Some studies dealt with the issue of borrowing discourse markers in a contact situation (Fuller 2001; Zavala 2001; Torres 2002). Most of these studies focused on the switched discourse markers in bilingual

speech (cf. De Rooij 1996; Sankof et al 1997; Salmons 1990, Maschler 1997, 2000; Moyer 2000, Hlavac 2006). Below I will discuss some of the most important studies of language alternation around the area of discourse markers.

### **2.7.1 Discourse markers in bilingual conversation**

Maschler (1994) investigates the use of switched discourse markers in the conversation of Israeli-English bilinguals. She proposes that bilinguals employ switched discourse markers in their conversation as a discourse strategy of language alternation that marks boundaries of continuous discourse. In other words, Israeli-English bilinguals used Hebrew discourse markers in their English discourse to metalanguage, (defined as the use of language to communicate information about languaging), the frame of discourse. Thus, she claims that discourse markers are ‘metalingual expressions’ that occur at verbal activity boundaries. This verbal activity is highlighted not only by using a discourse marker but also by switching to another language in uttering this marker. On this point Maschler writes:

“Discourse markers are often highlighted by a language switch: the discourse they frame takes place mostly in one language, while the framing itself take place mostly in another. Furthermore, the frame often consists of clusters of switched discourse markers at these boundaries.”  
(1994: 329)

Sankoff et al. (1997) have also investigated the use of discourse markers by speakers of Anglophone Montreal French in a contact situation. The result of their analysis showed great variation in individual repertoires and frequency of use of discourse markers. Moreover, the frequency of use of discourse markers had a correlation only with the speakers’ knowledge of French grammar. In other words, the use of discourse markers in a second language is associated with the speakers’

fluency in that second language and, therefore, “a higher frequency of discourse marker use is the hallmark of the fluent speaker.” (1997: 191). That is, the least fluent, least competent L2 speakers made very low or no use of discourse markers and “the more successful L2 speakers were those who could control native like discourse markers in a native like fashion.” (1997: 213).

Clyne’s (2003) study of language contact between immigrants’ languages and English language in Australia, devoted a chapter for explaining how cultural values play a role in speakers’ transference of English discourse markers to reflect their cultural integration in the Australian society. He argues that some speakers combined discourse markers from their mother language with English ones, while others dropped their native discourse markers and adopted the English ones only. The use of English discourse markers by the immigrants, Clyne claims, “reflects their communicative needs or their attempt to behave communicatively in an ‘Australian’ way” (2003: 233).

Matras (1998, 2000) discusses the motivation of bilinguals to switch languages in the area of discourse markers in language contact situations. He argues that bilingual speakers’ motivation for switching at discourse markers is cognitive rather than strategic or intentional. In other words, the ‘cognitive pressure’ of having two linguistic systems at the disposal of bilinguals, leads to the automaticizing nonseparation of the systems of discourse marking. During interaction, bilinguals try to reduce the mental load of monitoring and directing their hearers by non-separating the two linguistic systems they have access to, choosing discourse markers from the ‘pragmatically dominant language’ the language that speakers direct maximum mental effort at a given point during conversation. This nonseparation of the two languages is called ‘fusion’ (Matras,

2000: 511). Fusion of discourse markers can be seen as a continuum, starting from local switches such as slips, to switches that are licensed by participants in a particular interaction, then further to form individual habits, and finally to replace a whole set of markers at the level of speech community (2000:526).

In intense contact situations, some languages, or dialects, may lose their entire discourse marking system and replace it with that of the donor language. For example, Goss and Salmons (2000) trace the historical change process that led to the complete replacement of the German discourse markers with English ones in German-American dialects spoken in the U.S. Their findings revealed that English discourse markers have entered the German dialects first as emblematic switches, then they became established borrowings before they finally replaced the whole set of German discourse markers. In this sense, the role of codeswitching in contact-induced changes was seen as an “important mechanism for explaining how structural interference comes about” (2000:471).

We have seen how discourse markers are used by bilinguals in contact situations, i.e. when both languages exist one next to the other. But how do speakers use discourse markers of a foreign language which they usually learn in their native country? The answer to this will hopefully be provided in the following review of the work carried out on discourse markers in foreign language contexts.

### 2.7.2 The Discourse markers in foreign language discourse

The importance of discourse markers in second language and foreign language learning is not disputed. In fact, the ability to use discourse markers properly is a sign of how competent the learners are in the second/foreign language they learn. Therefore, there has been an increased interest in researching discourse markers of language learners. The following will be a review of some of the work that has been done on discourse marker in second or foreign language contexts.

Applying Schiffrin's (1987) framework, Hays (1992) examined the use of discourse markers by Japanese foreign language learners of English. The results of the analysis showed that the Japanese learners achieve coherence in their English discourse following two strategies. First, they overwhelmingly used markers like *so*, *and*, and *or* which work on the ideational level. Hays concludes from this that students usually acquire markers which create coherence on the ideational plane earlier than those which work on other planes such as *you know* and *well*. The reason, according to him, is that ideational markers are overtly taught while other pragmatic markers are related to dialects and can be acquired only through being exposed to the speech community. Second, Japanese students abandon sometimes using any discourse marker and just depend on juxtaposing two propositions to connect them in a coherent way. On the participation level, Hays found that Japanese learners inserted the Japanese discourse marker *n* into their English conversations, as "a powerful pragmatic to control a conversation and become an active participant" (1992: 33).

There are studies that compared the use of discourse markers by native speakers and non native speakers. Nikula (1996) examined what she calls “pragmatic modifiers” in the discourse of Finish speakers as well as British speakers. She found that these expressions were used to diminish or intensify the pragmatic force of an utterance.

In an attempt to explain the over use of *so* by Chinese learners in their writing, Anping (2002) investigates the use of this marker in the writing of Chinese learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). She examines different spoken and written corpora, native and non native English, and native Chinese. Her analysis reveals that English speakers use *so* as an intra-sentential connector while Chinese learners use *so* as an inter-sentential connector. The study concludes that the inappropriate use of *so* in written English by Chinese EFL learners may be due to their unawareness of the different “stylistic impact of *so*” in written and spoken English, lack of exposure to English, as well as to a negative transfer from Chinese (L1). Chinese students seem to use *so* in a similar way of its Chinese equivalent (*gum*).

Trillo (2002) talk about “pragmatic fossilization” which means that if they do not receive explicit teaching of pragmatic markers, non native speakers of English will reach a point where they will be deprived of the pragmatic values of these markers which will be fossilized.

Fuller (2003b) analysed the use of discourse markers by native speakers and non native speakers of English in two different contexts: interviews and conversations.

The results indicate that although non native speakers use discourse markers in both contexts, they generally use them less than native speakers. In addition, non native speakers are not aware of the differences in discourse marker use in different speech contexts.

Lee (2004) investigated the use of English discourse markers by Korean immigrants to the U.S. taking into consideration two sociolinguistic variables: immigrant generation and sex. The speakers were divided into three generation groups depending on the time of their arrival to the U.S., thus speakers from the 1<sup>st</sup> generation and 1.5 generation were considered non-native speakers of English, while 2<sup>nd</sup> generation speakers were seen as native speakers. The results of the study reveal that all of the speakers, native and non-native, showed that they can use discourse markers. This is expected in the speech of the second generation speakers who are considered native speakers. However, for the non native speakers it has significance. It seems that non native speakers are aware of the fact that using discourse markers “render them as being one step closer to sounding like a native speaker” (2004:126) and that these items facilitate the flow of their conversation.

Müller (2004; 2005) examined the use of English discourse markers by German non native speakers of English and American English native speakers. In her book *Discourse Markers in Native and Non-native English Discourse*, she provides both qualitative and quantitative analysis of the four markers *so*, *well*, *like*, and *you know* as they appear in the interaction between the German and American speakers. The analysis showed that both the German speakers and the American

speakers employ the four markers in their talk. However, they differ with regard to which functions they use each individual marker for. Some functions were completely unknown to the Germans, but were found in the Americans speech, and some functions were used by the German speakers only (2005:242).

From the studies above, it is obvious that the current study relates to the previous research in that it investigates the usage of discourse markers by foreign language learners (Syrian Arabic learners of English). However, while most of these studies compare the performance of the learners to that of the native speakers, the current study does not attempt such a comparison. Rather, it focuses on answering the question whether the learners use discourse markers and for what purposes.

The following chapter will explain the methodology which was applied in collecting the data of the current study as well as a brief description of the sociolinguistic context and the position of foreign languages in Syria the country of the informants of this study.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Data collection methodology and the sociolinguistic context**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter will deal with the issue of collecting the data on which the current research is based and will also provide the sociolinguistic background of the country where the data was collected namely Syria. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part introduces the sociolinguistic context of Syria as well as the language situation. It also explains the foreign language position in the country with a particular emphasis on the English language status in Syria.

The second part deals with the method employed to collect the data, which is the interview, and related issues. The reasons behind choosing interviews as a way of collecting the analysis material for this study are also addressed. A description of both data sets (the English and the Arabic) is provided so that the reader has a clear idea about the corpus of this study. Some problems that arose from using the interview as a data collection tool are also presented. Finally, the data transcription method is explained.

#### **3.1 The sociolinguistic situation in Syria**

Syria is part of the Arab world and is geographically considered a Middle Eastern country. It has a population of 19,043,000 as of July 2005<sup>5</sup> estimate, and contains a diverse mix of racial and ethnic groups including Kurds, Armenians and

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<sup>5</sup> source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria>

Assyrians, and of different religious groups like Alawite, Christian, Druze Shia and, as well as the Arab Sunnis who make up the majority of the Muslim population. Ethnically, the Arabs constitute the largest portion of the Syrian population (90.3%) while the Kurds, Armenians and other groups make up the remaining 9.7% of the population. Historically, Syria was inhabited by several Semitic groups (Canaanites, Hebrews, Aramaens, Assyrians, Babylonians, to name but a few) who, over time, mixed with the arriving Arabs. Today, Syrians identify themselves as Arabic citizens by virtue of speaking the Arabic language and having bonds with the Arab history and culture. This affiliation with the Arab world has made Arabic the only official and national language of the country, as well as the language of the majority of the population despite the existence of other linguistic groups.

The officially monolingual context of Syria can be understood in the light of the strong feeling of Arabic nationalism that Syrians have. Syrians, like many other Arabic nationalities, view language and identity as two faces of the same coin. It is not surprising then to find the phenomenon of *taʿrīb* (Arabicization or Arabization) in Syria, which can be broadly defined as:

“...the promotion of Arabic as the primary language of communication in all spheres of life in the Arabic speaking countries” (Suleiman, 1999: 106).

Nevertheless there are a number of minority languages in Syria that are still spoken by their ethnic groups. The largest minority language is the Kurdish language which has approximately 1.5 million speakers who live mainly in the northern part of Syria. Kurdish has no official or educational status in the country

and its use is limited to personal and family contexts. Other ethnic group languages include Turkmen, Azeri (the Azerbaijani language), Circassian, and Domari the language that is spoken by the Nawar (Gypsies) living in Syria. There are also three languages spoken by a large part of the Christian community who live in Syria and these are: Armenian in Aleppo, Assyrian in the Al-Jazira region in the north of the country, and Aramaic, the language of Christ, which is still spoken in the village of Mafloula and two neighbouring villages north of Damascus. (Battenburg, 2006). None of the above languages is official within the country.

In Syria, like in most of other Arabic countries, Arabic diglossia is obvious. High varieties like Modern Standard Arabic and Classical Arabic<sup>6</sup> exist along colloquial lower varieties. Colloquial varieties include the dialect spoken in Damascus referred to as North Levantine Arabic; Mesopotamian Arabic spoken in the Eastern part of Syria; and Najdi Arabic which is spoken in the Syrian Desert. (Battenburg, 2006: 438). (See figure 3.1 below).

Arabic is the only language used in the media. All television and radio broadcasting is in Arabic. Usually, news and documentaries are presented in Standard Arabic while entertainment programmes, social dramas, programmes that discuss local and national issues are delivered in Syrian colloquial Arabic.

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<sup>6</sup> Modern Standard Arabic is both the official and national language in most of the Arabic countries but not all. For example, in Mauritania Arabic and French are official languages but only Arabic is the national language and in Somalia Arabic is the second official language after Somali. (Suleiman, Y: 1999 concise Encyclopedia of Educational Linguistics). Classical Arabic is the term usually used to refer to the language of the Holy Quran and the Arabic literature.

There is, however, a television channel (Channel two) that broadcasts in English and allocates a couple of hours daily to broadcasting news in, French and Hebrew.

Most Syrians are literate thanks to the government compulsory and free primary education policy for children of the age 6-11. The literacy rate in Syria is 86.0 percent for men and 73.6 percent for women; 79.8 percent in total<sup>7</sup>. The educational system is divided into four stages, six years for compulsory elementary education, three years for preparatory level, and three years for secondary education followed by university education, the period of which depends on the field in which the student wishes to specialize, but ranges from four to six years. Syria has made education free at all levels except the higher education where a very small fee is required. Arabic is the sole instruction language used throughout the education process with the exception of foreign language departments at university level.

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<sup>7</sup> Rate is as of 2006. Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education\\_in\\_Syria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Syria)



**Figure 3.1.** Languages of Jordan and Syria

source: [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_map.asp?name=SY](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_map.asp?name=SY)

### 3.2 Foreign languages in Syria

The promotion of Arabic as the language of all life spheres in the Syrian context, as mentioned above, has with no doubt influenced the attention given to the teaching and learning of foreign languages. A few foreign languages are nevertheless taught and learnt in Syria with French and English as the two most widely learnt languages (Battenburg 2006). As a former French colony<sup>8</sup>, Syria still offers courses in French in both state schools and private institutes. However, the use of French is decreasing unlike English which is witnessing an increase in the percentage of those interested in learning it due to its position today as the world language, and learning it is becoming essential for professional development and enhanced job opportunities.

Until about seven years ago, learning a foreign language at schools in Syria started at the preparatory level. This policy of foreign language learning has recently changed and now foreign language courses are introduced to the elementary curriculum at the fifth grade and sometimes as early as the fourth grade. As mentioned above, English and French are the two languages taught in Syrian schools as foreign languages. The students' choice of which language they will learn is determined by a draw in which usually English classes outnumber French ones.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> After the fall of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, the League of Nations put Syria under the French mandate. It stayed under occupation until it gained independence in 1946.

<sup>9</sup> Students who get the French option are considered unlucky. This is due to the fact that people are aware of the status of English as a more useful language than French (in the sense that it might help them develop their careers and get better employment chances).

### **3.2.1 English language in Syria**

English, if it is chosen over French, is taught as a foreign language in both public and private Syrian schools. Whereas private schools offer English language at an early stage (as early as the nursery level) state schools start teaching it at the preparatory levels and recently at elementary levels (see 3.2). In both types of schools, English is not taught interactively; i.e. in a way that enables students to communicate effectively when using it. Rather the emphasis is placed mainly on grammar among the other skills (reading, listening, and speaking). Speaking in particular suffers from negligence by teachers as English is regarded as a subject that has to be passed in a written exam, making speaking less important from this perspective. The time allocated to English classes is approximately between two hours at elementary and preparatory levels and four hours at secondary levels. Once at university, students studying in different fields continue receiving some English language lessons, usually one class per week.

In general, the use of English is restricted to specific contexts, like the work place where it is needed for correspondence and communicating with the outside world; school lessons; English language teaching centres; private business companies etc. It has never been the language of instruction in Syrian state schools and universities with the exception of the departments of English language and literature where it is obviously the language of delivering lectures and students-teacher interaction.

The processes of globalization, modernisation and the spread of the internet and the associated technological revolution have undoubtedly spread into Syrian

society. The influence of these processes is manifested by many aspects with English language teaching and learning being one of them. There is a growing awareness about the importance of English in getting a better education, receiving better employment opportunities, having better contact with the outside world and so having an improved life in general. Young people in particular are keener than before to learn, or improve their English as they regard it as a bridge that will connect them to the rest of the world and the key that will open many doors to them in professional life.

As a result of the awareness of the importance of English there has been a remarkable increase in the number of private centres for teaching English, private schools which instruct in English and private universities that offer education in English. Moreover, efforts are being exerted on a governmental level to meet the growing demand on learning English especially from the young generation, and to catch up with the globalization process in which English plays a major role. For example, many governmental websites include Arabic and English so visitors can choose either language to browse, while in the past the same websites used to be exclusively in Arabic. In addition, the government founded in (2002) The Syrian Virtual University (SVU) which is the first virtual university in the country and in the Arab World. It enables those joining it to study foreign programmes online in foreign universities (twenty American and European universities). These foreign programmes are often provided in English and European languages and taught by the universities that offer them.

### 3.3 Date collection method

Interviews were the method employed to collect English and Arabic conversational samples of Syrian-Arabic speaking students. Interviews are considered an effective method for collecting information and genuine data for research in various fields; sociolinguistics is definitely one of them. Labov states that:

“No matter what other methods may be used to obtain sample of speech (group sessions, anonymous observation), the only way to obtain sufficient good data on the speech of any one person is through an individual, tape-recorded interview: that is through the most obvious kind of systematic observation” (Labov, 1972: 209).

Studies which have investigated the usage patterns and functions of discourse markers followed various methods for data collection depending on the questions of the research and its specific context. For examples, some researchers used sociolinguistic interviews (Schiffrin 1987), some found other techniques like natural spontaneous conversations (Al-khalil 2005), or what is called the participant observation (Ghaddafi 1990) as good methods for obtaining a corpus of natural spoken language. Other researchers used experiments that involved two participants; like showing a silent movie to participant A who has to retell the story of the movie to participant B (Redeker 1990, Müller 2005). Recorded interviews have also been utilized by researchers to collect speech samples for the analysis of discourse markers. For example, Sankoff et al (1997) used individual interviews to record the speech of their English-French bilingual informants, for the purpose of analysing their usage of discourse markers. In the same manner, Nairn (2000) based her analysis of the two discourse markers *like* and *you know*

on the speech of English native speakers which was collected using the interview method. In the same manner, Hlavac (2006) analysed Croatian and English discourse markers as they occur in recorded interviews with Croatian-Australian bilingual speakers. Moreover, some researchers have specifically used the interview method to test its influence on the occurrence and functions of a particular discourse marker. Fuller (2003a; 2003b) for example, analysed the discourse marker *like* in speech samples collected through interviews and informal talk. Her findings suggested that *like* occurred in interviews more than in informal conversations.

In the present study the choice of interviews rather than other data collection methods, which are used in some of the previous studies on discourse markers, was determined by the very nature of this research and its aims. The objectives of this study were to analyse the discourse marking system of English (a foreign language) as spoken by learners who are members of an officially monolingual society (Syria which is an Arabic speaking country). Thus, in this situation English is spoken in very limited environments. In other words, the study focuses on the analysis of English discourse markers as used by Arabic speakers who have learned English as a foreign language, and, thus, who would use it only in very restricted contexts. These contexts might be school lessons, some work places where English is needed, private tuition, private learning institutes etc. English is never used as the language of interaction in everyday life or outside formal institutes. For example, it is not normal to find English spoken among family members, a group of friends or in shops etc. as Arabic is the only language of communication and interaction in all life domains and is also the only official

language of the country (See 3.1 above). Therefore, in order to obtain a body of conversational data in English language we had to resort to the interview method. Before elaborating on the interview technique which was adopted in collecting my data, I will discuss other methods of data collection and show why those were not appropriate to the current study.

Techniques like questionnaires and participant observation are well recognised methods for obtaining data on the pattern of language use. However, they were excluded in the current study for several reasons. As for questionnaires, they have been avoided in the present study because of the following reasons. First, it was not the written form of the informants' English language that was sought after; rather it was their spoken language in general and their use of discourse markers in particular that was the interest of the researcher. Second, since discourse markers are features of oral language, they are less likely to occur in written questionnaires but crop up in spoken discourse.

Conversational data can be also gathered by the participant observation method which requires the researcher to immerse him/herself in the speech community and become an observer while recording interactional situations. One advantage of this method is that it gives the participants the freedom to choose their topics and does not dictate the turn-taking process like in an interview, thus avoiding the potential speakers' role imbalance that an interview could create (See 3.4). However, in the current study participant observation method was ruled out as a means of gathering English data because in the case of foreign language learners

the corpus of data has to be elicited. Such elicitation was best achieved through an interview conducted by a native speaker of the language of English.

In what follows I will explain each set of the interviews in detail but before this I will elaborate on the interviews in general.

### **3.3.1 The interviews**

The data used in the current study was collected in May 2004 using the interview method. It consists of two sets of interviews which were tape-recorded; the first set was carried out in the English language (18 interviews) while the second set was done in Syrian Arabic language (18 interviews). The total number is thus 36 interviews. The purpose of carrying out interviews in Arabic was to see if Arabic language has any influence on the English performance of the learners.

All interviews were with Syrian Arabic natives who were studying English language courses at the time of the interviews at the Language Institute (LI) in Damascus University. The institute forms part of Damascus University and offers courses in various foreign languages, English is among these languages. Since the focus of this thesis is the linguistic behaviour of Syrian students learning English, the institute was the perfect place to find students to participate in this research. I was introduced to the students by the administrator of the institute.

I explained to the informants that the study was about analyzing English language in a foreign context, but they were not told that their use of discourse markers in particular was monitored. After that, I asked them if it was possible to record their conversations with a native speaker of English. At the beginning they were

hesitant because fieldwork was not something they were familiar with. In fact, research and fieldwork are still at their early stages in Syria, so Syrian people are not familiar with the idea of data collection for research purposes. For example, Nelson et al (1996) faced a problem in recording interviews with Syrian speakers for their comparative study of Arabic and English compliment/compliment responses. Their Syrian interviewers informed them that “tape recorders were likely to make the interviewees feel uncomfortable; that, in general, Syrians are not familiar with the practice of conducting sociological or sociolinguistic studies about themselves; and that the tape recording would be culturally inappropriate” (1996:417). Fortunately, I did not face the problem of interviewees’ rejection to be recorded and managed to get their consent. As a student myself, the informants sympathised with me and were willing to help me in my research.

Each interview took between 15 to 30 minutes depending on how much the speaker wanted to carry on speaking, how confident he or she felt about speaking in English to a native speaker etc. A tape-recorder and an MP3 player were both used to record the conversations and were at all times overt. I was present in the room where the interviews took place (a language lab in the Language Institute<sup>10</sup>) to take notes of anything that occurred during the interview and which I thought would be important to the analysis later as well as to deal with any technical problems<sup>11</sup> during the recording. In no case did I participate in the conversation.

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<sup>10</sup> The Language lab was chosen as a place for recording the interviews upon the interviewees request. It was easier to do the interviews there than other places since they were going there for their classes.

<sup>11</sup> During the interviews I was present to change the type when it ran out so that to insure continuity of the recording.

The interviews were more formal speech events compared to a discussion among friends or an argument within a family would be, for example. However, they were less formal than a job interview or a public speech. Therefore, they can be said to be semi-formal. Although a list of questions was prepared before the interviews, not all of them were used and they were not strictly followed by the interviewer. This is because the content of the interviewees' speech was not in particular important. At many times both the interviewer and the interviewee deviated from the prearranged questions and talked about other topics that emerged during the conversation. This made the interviews semi-structured as well as semi-formal.

### **3.3.1.1 The English interviews**

The first group of the interviews (which consists of 18 interviews) were conducted in English by a native speaker of English to whom I was introduced by the administrator of the Language Institute at Damascus University. The choice of a native speaker of English to conduct the interviews had two reasons: I am myself an Arabic native speaker and a learner of English as a foreign language, and I had some idea in mind of what I was looking for. So, I was not in a position to carry out the English interviews and decided that they should be conducted by a native speaker of English to ensure neutrality and to avoid any conscious or unconscious influence I might have on the informants' linguistic behaviour.

All the interviews took place in the language Institute and a list of questions and topics was prepared beforehand and was given to the interviewer. I explained to

the interviewer that the aim of the interview was to get as much conversational material from the students as possible. I also mentioned that she (the interviewer) try to encourage the student to talk more and to leave to them the space to talk about any topic they might be interested in, and not to necessarily stick to the questions list.

### **3.3.1.2 The Arabic interview**

The Arabic interviews were matchable with the English ones in: the length (15 to 30 minutes each interview), topics that were talked about, the setting (the Language Institute), and the informants. The only difference was that they were conducted in Arabic. Moreover, the Arabic interviews were carried out by myself as the potential problem of influencing the informants' linguistic performance was not a concern since I share with the them the same language i.e. Arabic. I translated the questions of the English interviews into Arabic and used them in the Arabic interviews. Like in the English interviews, there was no attempt to follow the questions strictly, but to use them as possible topics to trigger conversations.

### **3.3.2 The questions**

A list of questions was prepared prior to the interview. The questions focused mainly on the English language background of the informants. These questions were suitable for the interviews of the current study for various reasons. They enabled the researcher to know the English background of the speakers (when they start learning English, how, factors that might influence their English level

etc), something which is important for the analysis of their linguistic behaviour. Moreover, the questions were not intrusive as they did not involve revealing any personal information of the speaker (the only personal question was about their name and this was not revealed in the transcripts). This type of question was welcomed by the informants who were not familiar with the interviewer and who were reluctant to give away personal information to be tape-recorded. As well as serving the previous purposes, the questions aimed at generating conversational material for analysis of discourse markers which is the main purpose of the interviews. The complete list of the question can be seen in Appendix 1.

To expand the conversation as much as possible and to get more material for analysis, another set of questions was introduced at the end of each interview and they were imagination questions. They were adopted from an oral examination at the British Council in Damascus<sup>12</sup>. However, after completing a few interviews, it was noticed that the answers to the imagination questions were sometimes very short and failed to elicit more conversational pieces from the informants, as had been hoped. So, I decided to add another question of a different nature. The question was about what the speakers thought of the relationship between parents and children in Syria. It was thought that this question would get speakers emotionally engaged as it is something they all have experienced. In this sense it has a similar effect to Labov's 'danger of death' which made people get emotionally engaged in talking about situations when their life was in danger (Labov, 1972: 92). It was also hoped that speakers will be keen on expressing

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<sup>12</sup> I met an English teacher at the British council who promised to act as the interviewer. He gave me a few questions samples that the Council uses during their oral examination. In the end he could not conduct the interviews. I included in the interview one set of the imagination question he suggested.

their view about the issue of the parent-child relationship thus crossing their fear or embarrassment of talking in English. The questions succeeded in eliciting longer responses than those to the imagination questions.

### **3.3.3 The informants**

The informants who participated in this research were all Syrian Arabic native speakers who had learnt English as a foreign language in a classroom setting. At the time of the recordings, most of them were university graduates while some were still doing their undergraduate degrees. However, all of them were taking English language courses at the Language Institute and were in different stages in the intermediate level but mainly in the upper-intermediate level (see table 3.1).

Males and females were welcomed to take part in the study making no preference of either gender; the total number of the participants was 18 (11 females and 8 males). Age was not taken as a variable, however all speakers were between 20 and 40 years. Table (3.1) below provides information about the informants' educational and English backgrounds as well as some personal information about each individual. Names of the interviewee were abbreviated and only the first two letters of each informant's name were given in the examples used for the analysis (see table 3.1 for the abbreviation of the informants' names). The interviewers' names were also abbreviated to 'M' in the case of the English interviewer and 'H' for the Arabic interviewer. These abbreviations are used throughout the thesis in the examples under scrutiny to insure confidentiality as promised to the subjects.

<i>Informant</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>English language background</i>		
			<i>Start learning English</i>	<i>Level at the ESP centre</i>	<i>Additional information</i>
AH	male	Final year university student	Elementary school 5 <sup>th</sup> grade	Upper-intermediate	
AG	male	University	A year before prior to the recording	Upper-intermediate	Learnt French at school as a FL. English is very new for him.
AS	male	University	Preparatory school	Upper-intermediate	Private courses at British Council
AN	male	University	Preparatory school	Upper-intermediate	
D	female	University	Nursery	Upper-intermediate	Born & lived in Kuwait before coming to Syria
GA	female	University	Elementary school	intermediate	Starts English at elementary Private school
GY	female	University	Preparatory school	Upper-intermediate	Lived in Saudi Arabia- had contact with natives of English
GS	male	University	Preparatory school	Upper-intermediate	
I	female	University	Elementary school 6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Lower-intermediate	
J	female	Final year University student	Elementary school	Upper intermediate	
K	female	Institute	Preparatory school	Upper-intermediate	Worked in Saudi Arabia & used English there.
L	female	University	Preparatory school	Upper intermediate	
MZ	male	University	Preparatory school	Higher intermediate	
MU	male	University	Preparatory school	Higher intermediate	
N	female	University	Preparatory school	Lower-intermediate	
RN	female	University	Nursery	Upper-intermediate	Studied in Dubai till secondary school. Studying translation.
RU	female	University (English literature)	11-12 years old	Upper-intermediate	private courses- sister lives in the UK- Lived in Kuwait.
SU	female	Higher Institute	Elementary	Upper-intermediate	Born & lived in Kuwait before Syria

**Table 3.1.** Informants' social and educational characteristics

### **3.4 Interviews' problems**

Despite being a traditional method of data collection in sociolinguistics, interviews pose some methodological problems. One of the most obvious problems in an interview situation is what Labov calls the 'observer's paradox' (1972: 61), which is the difficulty of observing the linguistic behaviour of people while they are not being observed. The problems related to the 'observer's paradox' in the current study are as follows.

The informants were concerned about being tape-recorded since fieldwork based research is not common in Syria thus people feel uneasy about being the subjects of a study (see 3.3.1 above). This problem was eased when I was introduced to the informants by the administrator of the Language Institute who was trusted by the informants. I explained to the informants that it was their linguistic performance that I was interested in and not the content of their talk and that they can talk about any topic of their choice. I also assured them that their identities will remain anonymous at all times.

Another problem related to the interviews was that informants were very nervous at the beginning due to the fact that the interviewer was a native speaker of English and they were afraid that she would be judgmental about their English language level. To solve this problem, I stressed to the informants that in no way the interviewer or myself were judgmental and that we were highly appreciative and grateful for their contribution and help in this study.

Third, the interviewer and I were strangers to the informants. This was the easiest problem to deal with. Before the interviews I made contact with the informants and explained to them the objective of the study. As people in general in Syria are warm and sociable, the ice was quickly and easily broken between me and the interviewer on one side and the informants on the other. In addition, my presence during the English recordings made the informants feel more relaxed.

Another disadvantage of the interview method is the possible asymmetrical participant roles which could put the interviewer in a dominant position, thus creating a problem of power relations within the interview (Milroy, 1987: 41-42). This problem was further complicated in this study by the fact that the interviewer was “superior” to the informants due to her linguistic level (She was a native speaker of English, while they were not). However, this problem was smoothed due to two factors. The interviewer was born to Syrian parents and this immediately mitigates the effect of her “superior stranger” position as the informants regarded her as one of their “people”. In addition, she herself was learning Arabic as a foreign language and informants were aware of this which created a feeling of being equal since they were sharing a similar learning experience. As mentioned above, the informants were given the freedom to talk at anytime during the interview and to talk about whatever they feel comfortable about. The interviewer was also reminded before the interviews to try creating an atmosphere as relaxed as possible and not to worry about following a strict question/answer sequence during the interactions. In the Arabic interviews, the problem of power imbalance was diminished, since the informants regarded me as their friend and were willing to help as well as the equality in the linguistic code.

Despite these problems the interview technique appeared to be the most appropriate tool to gather conversational data for the purpose of the current study for reasons discussed above (see 3.3).

### **3.5 Data transcription**

After collecting the interviews, the process of transcription began. All English interviews were transcribed in their entirety following several scholars' transcriptions systems (for a complete list of the transcription symbols see the transcription conventions table at the beginning of the thesis) However, due to the large amount of the interviews (36 between English and Arabic) that had to be transcribed only selected parts that contained Arabic discourse markers in the Arabic interviews were transcribed. The focus of the study is not on Arabic discourse markers, but instances of certain markers were analysed to see if the learners were influenced by L1 (Arabic) in the production of the discourse markers of their L2 (English).

Throughout the process of transcription, no special attention was given to phonetic, phonemic or prosody features. On the other hand, emphasis was placed on other aspects of the text like overlaps, interruptions, laughs, silence gaps and pauses since they proved to be essential in the process of analysis. For example, noting pauses and gaps is very important (as will be seen) in understanding what function a particular marker is performing (such as repair or topic change). These fine details of the conversations are important aspects of the text when the

Conversation Analysis (CA) approach is used<sup>13</sup>. Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) claim that:

“The process of transcribing a data tape is not simply one of writing down the words that people exchanged. Rather, it is a process of writing down in as close detail as possible such features of the recorded interaction as the precise beginning and end points of turns, the duration of pauses, audible sounds which are not words.... Because CA is concerned with how people manage and accomplish the sequential order of talk-in-interaction, transcription is, first of all, an attempt to capture talk as it actually occurs in all its apparent messiness” (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998: 75). #

Several studies used the CA approach for the analysis of discourse markers to see their role in the interactional process of conversing (cf. Clift 2001; Al-khalil 2005). The current study follows a similar path, in that it touches on the CA approach during the analysis of the data.

As for the Arabic examples, they were transcribed using the same transcription system of the English ones, and transliterated following the system usually used in the Arabic linguistics (the list of the symbols can be found in the glossary). They were then glossed and finally translated into English. (The glossing symbols can be found in the list of abbreviations at the beginning of the thesis and a complete list of the transcription symbols used can be found in the glossary).

### **3.6 Conclusions**

The aim of this chapter was to introduce the current sociolinguistic context in Syria. After examining the status of foreign languages in Syria, a description of the English language learning and teaching was provided.

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<sup>13</sup> For details on the CA approach see Levinson (1983); Hutchby and Wooffitt (1988); Sacks (1995); Psathas (1995).

The second part of this chapter concerns the fieldwork undertaken to collect the corpus of this study. Both sets of data the English and the Arabic interviews were explained as well as the questions of the interviews and the informants who participated in this research. The main problems encountered during the process of data collection were highlighted with the ways they were dealt with. A brief description of the transcription was also presented.

The next chapter will focus on the Syrian Arabic discourse markers *fa*, *yaʕnī* and *btāʕrft* and its variants.

## Chapter 4

### Discourse markers in Syrian Arabic

#### 4.0 Introduction

In this chapter the focus will be on the three Syrian Arabic discourse markers *fa*, *yaʕnī* and *btaʕrfī* and its variants, which can be conventionally translated as *so*, *I mean* and *you know* respectively. During the data analysis process it was noticed that the discourse marker *so* was used in ways that differ from native-like uses and it was suspected that influence from the mother language of the learners (Arabic) might have been the reason. So, some extracts from the Arabic interviews were analysed to identify the functions of the three Arabic discourse markers *fa*, *yaʕnī* and *btaʕrfī* and its variants, to see if they influenced the learners' use of discourse markers in English. The chapter is divided into three parts, one for each marker.

#### 4.1 *Fa* in the literature

Perhaps the earliest mentioning of the Arabic marker *fa* is in Cowell's (1964) study of the Colloquial spoken Arabic of Damascus. The study is descriptive in nature and aims at explaining the grammar of Damascene Arabic. Cowell suggests that in Damascene Arabic, *fa* is used as a conjunction that can be translated into English as *so* or *and* and it implies a meaning of sequence, conclusion, or summary (1964: 397). He did not take these brief comments any further.

Sarig (1995) discusses the role and function of what she calls ‘coordinating functionals’ (words such as *wa-qad*, *la-qad*, *wa*, *fa-qad* and *fa*) in contemporary written Arabic<sup>14</sup>. She considers these words as discourse markers “whose deictic function is to point out the text’s rhetorical structure” (1995: 8). In particular, she claims that *fa* appears usually at the beginning of a new sentence which clarifies or confirms a prior proposition. *Fa* also has an explanatory function when it introduces an elaboration of the prior sentence, according to Sarig.

Matras (1997) discusses *fa* as one of two expressions for *and* in Arabic. Matras suggests that Arabic has two expressions for the additive coordination conjunction *and* these being: *fa* and *wa* (Matras, 1997:180). They differ in the way they are used for categorization of pieces of knowledge in discourse. While *wa* links two pieces of information which belong to one single category of knowledge, *fa* appears after such a category has been closed. It re-opens the closed category and marks it as a point of departure for the next unit or category of knowledge (Matras, 1997:180-181). Matras believes that both *wa* and *fa* are combinatory conjunctions however:

“*Fa* admits that a previous category has been concluded successfully, and is re-opened merely to make an established point of departure more explicit. It therefore tends to lack a counterpart in English *and*, which stresses recurrent treatment of the same category before its conclusion, much more like Arabic *wa*” (Matras, 1997: 182).

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<sup>14</sup> The examples used by Sarig (1995) for analysing the functions of discourse markers in written Arabic were taken from the press, specifically the Egyptian press.

Gaddafi (1999) discusses the marker *fa* along with other markers of cause and result in Libyan spoken Arabic<sup>15</sup>. Following Schiffrin's (1987) model, he argues that *fa* works on the ideas level to introduce a result clause which is also the main clause. In this sense, *fa* links two propositions with a fact-based causal relationship. Moreover, Gaddafi argues that *fa* can play a role in the exchange structure where it might be a marker of potential turn transitions where speakers alternate sequential roles.

Saeed and Fareh (2006) discuss the problems encountered by Arab learners of English and translators when translating the Arabic discourse marker *fa* into English. Relying on examples of *fa* which are taken from several texts in Arabic newspapers and Arabic grammar references, they identified five functions of this marker in Modern Standard Arabic: sequential *fa*; resultative *fa*; explanatory *fa*; causal *fa*; and adversative *fa*. Once the functions of *fa* were identified a translation task was designed which consisted of Arabic sentences that included the marker *fa* with its five aforementioned functions. The subjects were then asked to translate those Arabic sentences into English. The analysis showed that the explanatory and sequential *fa* were more difficult to translate than the other types of *fa*. Moreover, *so* was mainly used to translate the resultative *fa*, and *but* to translate the adversative *fa*.

## **4.2 The functions of *fa* in the present study**

### **4.2.1 *Fa* marking a result**

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<sup>15</sup> Gaddafi discusses the functions of: *lianna* (because), *min ajil* (because of), *idan* (so) *fa* (so) and *lihada* (so) as markers of cause and result respectively in Libyan spoken Arabic.



- 5 (0.6) laʔ bithiṭṭī əl-kasēt bitsmaʔi uyniyyē  
no put.2SG.F DEF-cassette listen.2SG.F song  
bitsmaʔi (0.7) šʕər bitsmaʔi ir-rayting  
listen.2SG.F poetry listen.2SG.F DEF-writing  
killō  
everything
- 6 (0.8) killšī mufradāt ždydē bnismaʔā min  
every vocabularies new listen 1PL from  
l-kasēt  
DEF-cassette
- 7 (0.7) **fa** minlʔoʔ əl-lafəz šaḥ  
so catch 1PL DEF-pronunciation correct  
hatta kitb-nā ū l-kasēt killā min  
even books-our and DEF-cassette all.F from  
university oksford min (-)  
žamʕēt Oxford from (-)
- H 8 ʔmm  
mm
- Su 9 **fa** nəsməʔ əl-lafəz british tamāma:n ū  
so hear 1PL DEF-pronunciation British exactly and  
šaḥiḥ yaʔni  
correct I mean
- H 10 ʔmm  
mm
- Su 11 laʔinno btaʔrfī masalan ʔansē suriyyē  
because you.know for.example teacher.F Syrian.F  
bikōn lafzā šəkil (0.9) mašriyyē  
be.FUT pronunciation different Egyptian.F  
lafzā šəkil  
pronunciation different
- 12 ʔmm  
mm
- Su 13 yaʔni kill waḥed binaʔan ʔala lahžto (0.5)  
I mean every one depending on dialect  
yaʔni illa mā yitʔayyar lafzā  
I mean must PART change pronunciation  
la-l-kilmē=  
of-DEF-word
- H 14 =ṭabʔan  
of course
- Su 15 **fa** hēk kinna  
so like.this were 1PL
- Su 1 no no a studied subject but they cared about it  
(0.4)  
Their teaching method: was not to rely on the  
teacher, what her(0.7) pronunciation or what her

teaching method is. No they used to hand us the book with the cassette

2 and:: you take your pronunciation from the cassette not from the teacher

H 3 mm

Su 4 that is she comes she puts for us (.) you listen to the reading it is not her who teaches us the reading, not her who reads

5 (0.6) no you put the cassette you listen to a song, you listen to poetry, you listen to the writing.

6 (0.8) everything all new vocabularies we listen to from the cassette

7 **fa** we catch the correct pronunciation even our books and the cassettes are all from Oxford university from (-)

H 8 mm

Su 9 **fa** we hear the pronunciation exa:ctly British and correct I mean

H 10 mm

Su 11 because YOU KNOW for example a Syrian teacher her pronunciation will be one way (0.9) an Egyptian her pronunciation is another

H 12 mm

Su 13 I mean every one depending on his dialect (0.5) for sure I mean the pronunciation of the word would change

H 14 of course

Su 15 **fa** this how we were.

The background of this example is the following: speaker Su and speaker H are talking about the education system in Kuwait where speaker Su used to live. Before this example speaker H asked if English was taught in Kuwait as a subject or if it was the language of instruction at schools. Speaker Su's answer appears in line (1) in which she stated that in Kuwait, English used to be taught as a subject. However, English was an important subject and the system there used to pay a lot of attention to the way it was taught. To support her claim, speaker Su provided some examples that showed how schools in Kuwait cared about teaching English. Schools did not rely on the individual teacher's pronunciation of English or his or her method in teaching English. Rather they depended on the books and the cassettes which come from Oxford University as mentioned later in the conversation (segment 7). So, students learn the pronunciation of words from the

cassettes and not from the teacher (segment 2). In segment (3) speaker Su explains how the teacher used to play the cassette for the student during the reading section. Also, students were listening to everything that was new (vocabulary, songs, poetry) from the cassette and not from the teacher (segments 5 and 6). Depending on the tapes which came from Oxford University and which were obviously recorded by native speakers of English, for the listening skills during classes led to the result that students in Kuwaiti schools caught the correct pronunciation of English (segment 7). This result is marked by *fa*.

The second occurrence of *fa* in this example is in line (8) where it again marks a cause-result relationship between segment (7) and segment (8). Because the books and the cassettes were from Oxford University, and our world knowledge includes the knowledge that Oxford is in Britain, we can safely infer a resultative relationship between “books and cassettes are from Oxford University” and “students learning a British accent”.

After justifying why relying on tapes in teaching English was good (because Arabic teachers will have an accent which is affected by their native accent) in segments (11) and (13), speaker Su summarized and concluded her talk by saying “*so this is how we were*”, signalling to her hearer the end of her description of the method of teaching English Language in Kuwait. The concluding summary in line (15) was introduced by *fa*.

#### 4.2.2 Sequential *fa*

This type of *fa* is used to connect two pieces of discourse with temporal sequencing i.e. when the event of the first piece occurred before the event of the second piece as in the following example from Written Standard Arabic:

ḏahabtu ʿila baġdād fa l-baṣra  
I went to Baghdad then to Basra (Saeed and Fareh, 2006:23)

The sentence implies that the speaker went to Baghdad first and then to Basra.

This *fa* appears also in dialectical Arabic e.g. Syrian Arabic as in the following example of Cowell (1964):

ṭ-ṭayyāra tāhet *fa*-ṭṭaṭamet bəl-barriyye  
‘The plane got lost and crashed in the desert’ (Cowell, 1964:397).

in which the first event occurred first (the plane got lost) and was followed by the second event (it crashed in the desert). *Fa* connects these two events with a sequence relation.

In the current study, there were instances where *fa* was used to indicate the ordering of events. Consider the following example:

(2)  
(English Level)

H	1	ṭabb ʔanū ṣaf hallaʔ ʔinti Rana hōn bi-l-markaz?= DM which level now you.F Rana here in-DEF-centre
Rn	2	= bi-l ʔm bi-l:: (0.8) bi-l-markaz ṣaf rabēf in-DEF mm in-DEF in-DEF-centre level four
H	3	ballaš-tī min l-ʔawwal kaman?= start-2SG.F from DEF-first also
Rn	4	=laʔ ḥaʔiʔa ʔana l-mafrud kū:n mxalṣa no truth I DEF-should be 1SG finished əs- sadēs min xams snīn bi-l British council DEF-six from five years in-DEF British council
H	5	ʔmm mm
Rn	6	bass: (0.6) ʔa l-grammar ʔandi kān šwai

but er DEF-grammar have 1SG was a bit  
 ʔandi məšklē fī nasyant-o fa ʔam  
 have 1SG problem in.it forgot 1SG-it so PART  
 xarbəʔ  
 make mistakes 1SG

7 (0.7) **fa** ʔižit ʔamalt hōn ʔimtiħan  
 so came 1SG did 1SG here test  
 ʔʔam xaffasū-li l-grammar bilʔarḏē kān  
 but put down 3PL-1SG DEF-grammar in-DEF-floor was  
 ʔalāmti ktīr ʔalilē  
 mark very low

8 (0.5) **fa** haʔṭū-ni:: şaf talət:: bī  
 so put 3PL-1SG level three B

H 9 ʔmm  
 mm

Rn 10 **fa** ʔilt ok yaʔnī ʔana biħimnī ʔini zabbəʔ  
 so said 1SG ok I mean I care 1SG COMP fix 1SG  
 l-grammar biyadd  
 DEF-grammar regardless  
 [in-naʒar=  
 DEF-sight

H 11 [ʔmm  
 =ʔan ʔinno muħadasti kwaysē ʔaw ʔay ši tanī  
 from COPM conversation good or any thing else

H 1 so what level are you now in Rana here in the  
 centre?

Rn 2 in the er in the:: (0.8) in the centre level four  
 H 3 you started from the beginning also?  
 Rn 4 no the truth is I should have finished level six  
 five years ago in the British council

H 5 mm  
 Rn 6 but (0.6) er I my grammar was a little I had a  
 problem in it I have forgotten it **fa** I am making  
 mistakes

7 (0.7) **fa** I came here and took an exam but they put  
 my grammar down on the floor, my mark was very low

8 **fa** they put me in level three B

H 9 mm

Rn 10 **fa** I said ok I mean I care that I fix my grammar  
 [regardless=

H 11 [mm  
 = whether my conversation is good or anything else.

In this extract speaker Rn was answering speaker H's questions about her level of English. She mentioned that she was in the fourth grade in the Language Institute where the interview took place. She also added that she should had finished level

six in the British Council five years ago, but was not able to do so because she had forgotten some of the English grammar, thus she was making mistakes (lines 4 and 6). At that point (line 7), speaker Rn moved to talk about her experience in the Language Institute at which she was enrolled at the time of the conversation. After realizing her weakness in grammar, she went to the Language Institute to take some language classes in an attempt to improve her grammar. There is a temporal order of events which is marked by *fa*. First speaker Rn took classes in the British council and then she moved to the Language Institute where she took a replacement exam and started new courses there. The *fa* in line (10) is another example that illustrates the sequential function it has. After being placed in level three (B) in the Language Institute, speaker Rn told herself that it was ok to be in a low level because improving her grammar was her aim.

#### **4.2.3 Transitional *fa***

This type of *fa* has not been mentioned in the literature to the best of my knowledge. While sequential *fa* indicates an ordering of events in a chronological manner, transitional *fa* does not indicate a temporal sequence rather it just signals that a transition in discourse has occurred. In this sense, it can be paraphrased as “the next point of this discourse is”. The discourse segment which is introduced by *fa* is not in a direct relation with the preceding discourse (a result of it, a summary etc) but at the same time it is not completely new from it. It is a continuation of the previous discourse.

Consider example (3) below where *fa* in lines (5) and (7) functions as a marker of transition. Prior to this extract speaker H was asking speaker L if she usually

listens to English radio. Speaker L answers that there was a period in the past where she used to listen to songs but it was only a very short period (line 1) because her family house where she lived was very noisy and so she could not listen to music all the time (line 3). In line (5) there is a transition in the discourse where speaker L moved to describing her work place. So, we have a transition in the scenes from the house to the workplace. The transition is preceded by *fa*. At work, speaker L used to get some free time every morning for about half an hour (line 5) and she was using this free time to listen to songs. The *fa* in line (7) introduces the second transition in the discourse of speaker L. After telling her hearer that she had free time every morning at work, she moved to mention that she used that time for listening to music.

(3)

(Listening to the radio)

- |   |   |                |               |               |             |           |           |
|---|---|----------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| L | 1 | marʔit         | fatra         | kint          | ʔsmaʔ       | (0.8)     |           |
|   |   | passed 3SG.F   | period        | was 1SG       | listen 1SG  |           |           |
|   |   | ʔaʔāni         | bass: (0.5)   | ktīr          | kānit       | ʔaʔyrē    |           |
|   |   | songs          | but           | a lot         | was 3SG.F   | short     |           |
| H | 2 | ʔmm            |               |               |             |           |           |
|   |   | mm             |               |               |             |           |           |
| L | 3 | laʔinno        | bi-l-bēt      | ʔana          | mā          | fīni      | bētna     |
|   |   | because in-DEF | home          | I             | NEG         | can 1SG   | house.1PL |
|   |   | ktīr           | ḍažē          |               |             |           |           |
|   |   | a lot          | noisy         |               |             |           |           |
| H | 4 | ʔmm            |               |               |             |           |           |
|   |   | mm             |               |               |             |           |           |
| L | 5 | <b>fa</b>      | b-iš-šəyil    | ʔaḥyānan      | ʔifḍā       | iš-šəbh   | (1.3)     |
|   |   | so in-DEF-work | sometimes     | get.free 1SG  | DEF-morning |           |           |
|   |   | šī             | niš           | sāfa          | taʔriban    | ʔandī     | farāy     |
|   |   | about half     | hour          | approximately | have1SG     | free.time |           |
|   |   | ʔana           | kill          | yōm           |             |           |           |
|   |   | I              | every         | day           |             |           |           |
| H | 6 | ʔmm            |               |               |             |           |           |
|   |   | mm             |               |               |             |           |           |
| L | 7 | <b>fa</b>      | kint          | ʔismaʔ        | fi-yyā      | bass      | baʔdēn    |
|   |   | so was 1SG     | listen 1SG    | in-RES.3SG.F  | but         | later     |           |
|   |   | tʔayyar        | l-waḍeʔ       | māʔad         | (0.4)       | sməʔət    |           |
|   |   | changed 3SG. M | DEF-situation | NEG           |             | listen    |           |

L 1 there was a period when I used to listen (0.8) to  
songs but it was very short

H 2 mhm

L 3 because at our house I cannot, our house is very  
noisy

H 4 mhm

L 5 **fa** at work sometimes I get free in the morning  
(1.3)  
I have approximately half an hour of free time  
every day

H 6 mhm

7 **fa** I used to listen during it but later the  
situation changed I stopped listening

The following example (telling a joke) contains another instance of *fa* when it functions as a marker of transition in discourse. The extract was preceded by a question from speaker H if speaker Mz's had siblings. Speaker Mz replied saying that he had five brothers and two sisters. This answer surprised speaker H who told speaker Mz that his family was big. In line (1) in the passage below speaker Mz agreed (*ēh*) with speaker H that his family was big and stated that peasants were usually like this (they usually have a big family). After this, speaker H asked where speaker Mz was from (line 4) and he satisfied her query in line (5).

It is after line (6) that speaker Mz made a transition in his discourse, introducing a new point to the conversation that is not directly related to the previous talk. Speaker Mz starts telling a joke (line 7) about a man who was very poor yet who had ten children. This man was interviewed and when he was asked why he had so many children even though he was poor, he told them "because you are cutting off the electricity". The content of the joke is not directly related to the previous exchange between speaker Mz and speaker H, but it was motivated by it. It might be that speaker Mz remembered the joke, when he was talking about his big family. The transition from talking about himself and his family to telling a joke is marked with *fa*. In the same manner the transition between the description of the

person in the joke (*he was very poor*) and the next piece of the narrative (*they interviewed him*) was introduced by *fa*.

(4)  
(Telling a joke)

- Mz 1 ēh niħna hadōl l-falaħin hēk yaḥnī  
yes we those DEF-peasants like.this that.is  
šū bidon yisawu  
what want 3PL do 3PL
- H 2 lā kill l-ʿālam hēkē  
no all DEF-people like.this
- Mz 3 lā=  
no
- H 4 =min wēn lēš ʔintē Mazen  
from where why you.M Mazen
- Mz 5 ʔana min Iddlib  
I from Iddlib
- H 6 ʔā  
Aha
- Mz 7 **fa** fī wahed ʃandō ʃašr wwlād mantū::f  
so there.is one have 3SG ten kids featherless  
mšaħħar  
poor
- 8 (0.7) **fa** ʃmlū maʃ-o muqābalē ʃabiūlū-lō ʔinno  
so did 3PL with-him interview told.him COMP  
lēš ʔintē mxallēf kill hadōl mā māʃak  
why you. M procreate all these NEG have  
maššarī ittaʃami-yyon ʔall-ōn sīdī ʔinntū  
money feed-them said.to-them sir you 3PL  
ʃam tēʔaʃūllna l-kahrabā  
PART cut.off DEF-electricity
- H 9 (laughs) ok.
- Mz 1 yes we the peasants are like this I mean what can  
they do
- H 2 no all people are like this
- Mz 3 no=
- H 4 =from where are you Mazen?
- Mz 5 I am from Iddlib.
- h 6 aha
- Mz 7 **fa** there is one man who has ten kids, very poor  
8 (0.7) **fa** they interviewed him, told him did you get  
all these and you have no money to feed them, he  
replied sir you are cutting off the electricity
- H 9 (laughs) ok.

#### 4.2.4 *Fa* as a summary marker

In addition to the aforementioned functions of *fa*, Syrian Arabic speakers in this study have also used this marker to mark the summing up of their previous talk. This function of *fa*, to the best of my knowledge, has not been mentioned in previous research on this marker.

In the following example (5), speaker L marked the sentence that summed up and concluded her previous opinion with *fa*. Before this extract speaker L had been talking about the breakup of the family in modern society. When asked by speaker H in line (1) about the possible reason behind this breakup, speaker L thought that it was the difficulties of life and also the modern progression that were the possible reasons behind the breakdown of family life. She mentioned that progressing, like everything else in life, has negative as well as positive effects. She also thought that progression had a tax or a price; this price, we can infer, is the loss of family life. She summarized her opinion in segment (7) stating that everything in life (including progression) might have a price to pay. This summary and conclusion is marked with *fa*.

(5)  
(Family breakup)

- |   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
| H | 1 | šū s-sabab ya tarā bi-raʔi-yk?                  |  |
|   |   | what DEF-reason PART wonder in-opinion-your     |  |
| L | 2 | mā baʔrəf yimkən ʒurūf l-ħayyā: yimkən:         |  |
|   |   | NEG know 1SG maybe circumstances DEF-life maybe |  |
|   |   | iṭ-ṭaṭaūr ʔillo ʔasar                           |  |
|   |   | DEF-development has effects                     |  |
|   | 3 | (0.7) yaʔnī hwwue daʔiman iṭ-ṭaṭaūr ʔē kill     |  |
|   |   | I mean he always development er every           |  |
|   |   | shaylē ʔilla: ʔiʒab u salb yaʔnī                |  |
|   |   | thing has.F positive and negative I mean        |  |
| H | 4 | ʔē tabbʔan                                      |  |
|   |   | yes of course                                   |  |
|   | 5 | (0.8)   |  |

L 6 **fa** yimkən iṭ-ṭataūr ʔillo Kamaə ʔillo ɖarībē  
so maybe development has.M also has.M tax

7 (1.2) **fa** kill shaylē yimkən ʔilla ɖarībē  
so every thing maybe has.F tax

H 8 ʔakīd  
sure

L 9 °bi-l-ḥayyāt°  
in-DEF-life

10 (1.0)

H 11 šukran ktīr L  
thank a lot L

H 1 what is the reason, I wonder, in your opinion?

L 2 I do not know maybe the circumstances of life maybe  
development has effects

3 I mean development always has er everything has  
positive sides and negative sides

H 4 yeah of course

5 (0.8)

L 6 **fa** maybe development has also has a tax

7 **fa** everything maybe has a tax

H 8 for sure

L 9 in life.

10 (1.0)

H 11 Thanks a lot L.

*fa* was found to mark a result, to link two segments of discourse with a temporal sequencing, to mark a summary and to mark transitions in discourse.

The first part of this chapter presents examples from the Arabic data of the Arabic discourse marker *fa*. Syrian Arabic speakers used *fa* was to mark a particular segment ad a result of previous talk, to link two segments of discourse with a temporal sequencing, to mark a summary and to mark transitions in discourse.

Now, I turn to the next section where the Syrian Arabic marker *yaʕnī* is examined to see how it was used by the Syrian Arabic speakers of this study but before let us have a look at the previous studies on *yaʕnī*.

### 4.3 *Yaʕnī* in the literature

The use of the Arabic discourses marker *yaʕnī* has been analysed in a number of Arabic dialects<sup>16</sup>. Gaddafi (1990) examines the functions of the discourse marker *yaʕnī* in spoken Libyan Arabic. Following Schiffrrin's (1987) framework and applying her model on the Libyan Arabic discourse, Gaddafi found that *yaʕnī* works mainly in the participation framework because it shows a relationship between the speaker and his or her talk (speakers' modification of their utterance) as well as a relationship between the speaker and the hearer (in this sense *yaʕnī* has an interactional role). *Yaʕnī* may mark speaker's expansion of ideas and explanation of his or her intentions. Moreover, Gaddafi suggests that when *yaʕnī* occurs within the TCU (Turn Constructional Unit) it is used as a floor holding device or as an indication that the speaker is searching for a word thus it has an interactional effect as it contributes to the development of the conversation. *Yaʕnī* has other interactional effects like marking a shift from the general to the specific in information presentation in discourse, inviting the hearer to focus on a particular piece of information. In addition, *yaʕnī* can be used to express a lack of commitment to a particular idea in order to avoid imposing bald statements on the hearer. In all these cases *yaʕnī* has an interactional relevance because it always

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<sup>16</sup> The marker *yaʕnī* is transliterated differently in the studies that focused on them: Gaddafi's (1990) transliterates it as (yaGni), in Ghobrial's (1993) work it is written as (ya9ni), and in Al-khalil's (2005) as (yaǰē). In this study I use the form *yaʕnī* to refer to all the aforementioned transliteration of the item.

modifies discourse for the purpose of maintaining successful communication between speakers and hearers.

Moreover, Gaddafi argues that when *yaʕnī* appears in utterance-final position it works on the exchange structure because “it contributes substantially to promoting turn transitions, which lead to formulating exchange structures” (1990: 196). This type of *yaʕnī* may mark the speaker’s commitment to his or her contribution or it may be used to elicit a mutual agreement between speakers and hearers. In both cases it can lead to a turn transition, thus facilitating the exchange structure of discourse.

The final function of *yaʕnī* identified by Gaddafi was that of prefacing replacement repairs, in particular self-initiated repairs. In this function *yaʕnī* also works in the participation framework as it is related to speaker orientation to his or her utterance (modification of his or her prior discourse).

In his study of Egyptian Arabic discourse markers, Ghobrial (1993) argues that *yaʕnī* (like *I mean*) has a core referential meaning derived from the Arabic root (*maʕna* ‘meaning’) which makes it suitable to be used by speakers to assess and qualify their prior talk. So, when the function of *yaʕnī* is directly related to its propositional meaning, it is considered as a marker of speaker’s orientation to aspects of meaning and to the process of qualifying his or her previous contribution. For example, in narratives speakers may use *yaʕnī* to qualify a

previous statement by expanding, modifying or adding to it. However, Ghobrial insisted that reducing the functions of *yaʕnī* to “these signalled by its propositional meaning would substantially obscure the pragmatic nuances the item is used for in a variety of contexts” (1990: 46). He claimed that in certain contexts *yaʕnī* served some pragmatic functions that were different to those suggested by its basic propositional meaning. Thus, the study stresses on revealing the pragmatic functions of certain Cairene discourse markers (*yaʕnī* among them) which seem grammatically redundant but are essential for maintaining a smooth interaction. These pragmatic functions relates to Grice’s Cooperative Principle and its maxims which are highly pragmatic, Ghobrial argues.

In some question-answer sequences *yaʕnī* may preface answers because respondents may wish to diverge from the questions posed by speakers as they identify them as defective questions (irrelevant or unacceptable) and they attempt to mitigate their response. *Yaʕnī* in such cases is used as a marker of politeness and mitigation. In this sense it is used primarily as a device that signals speakers’ conformity to Grice’s maxims of manner and quality. *Yaʕnī* may also appear in answers when respondents are not certain about their response (approximation) or in arguments when speakers need to qualify their positions and attitudes.

Not very different from Gaddafi (1990) and Ghobrial (1993), Al-Khalil (2005) argues that *yaʕnī* in Syrian Arabic have the primary function of qualifying

speakers' prior talk. Applying the Conversation Analysis method, he claims that the functions of *yaşnī* differ depending on where it occurs within a TCU. When *yaşnī* occurs TCU initially it prefaces utterances that are employed by speakers to explain their intentions, utterances that constitute an expansion of speaker's previous ideas, utterances that are to be seen as mitigation of speech, and utterances that sum up the whole discourse. If *yaşnī* occurs TCU finally it is used by speakers to check on their understanding of a previous utterance, or it may signal speaker's readiness to give up the floor to other conversants in an attempt to appeal for mutual agreement. Finally, Al-khalil suggests that in TCU medial position, *yaşnī* is used mainly by speakers to hold the conversation floor or to search for a word.

*Yaşnī* is also a discourse marker in Turkish and a few studies have dealt with it to determine its functions in Turkish discourse. In Özbek's (1995) study, where she compares English discourse markers with their Turkish counterparts, she identifies the following functions of *yaşnī*<sup>17</sup>: addressee-involvement, argument support, assumed shared knowledge, emphatic, exemplification/expansion, turn-exit, focus/highlighter, inference and self repair.

Furman and Özyürek (2007) examine the development of three discourse markers (*şey*, *yani*, *işte*) in the oral narrative of Turkish children. They found, as in

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<sup>17</sup> Written in the original study as 'yani'.

Özbek's (1995) study, that this marker is used by the children to expand or elaborate on previous utterances.

In the present study *yaʕnī* appeared in the speech of the informants fulfilling a range of functions which are not different from the functions discussed in previous research. The following section will present a few examples of *yaʕnī* from the data of the current study.

### **4.3 *Yaʕnī* in the present study**

This section focuses on exploring the functions and roles of the discourse marker *yaʕnī* as it is used by the Syrian Arabic learners of English whose English discourse is examined in this study. The data shows that *yaʕnī*'s functions include: speaker's expanding ideas of a prior utterance, speaker's repairing a preceding utterance and speaker's maintaining the floor of a conversation, i.e. using *yaʕnī* as a floor holding device. Before presenting a few examples of the functions of *yaʕnī* and as *yaʕnī* can conventionally be translated into English as *I mean*, I present briefly the similarities and differences between the two markers.

Both *yaʕnī* and *I mean* contains an element of meaning. In *I mean* it is the verb 'mean' and in *yaʕnī* it is the verb '*ʕanā*'. When functioning as discourse markers, *yaʕnī* and *I mean* play a significant role in connecting discourse units and in

upgrading the informational state of discourse, since they are used by speakers to add new information, modify previous discourse or expand it. This upgrading of discourse information affects both speakers and hearers; therefore, the two markers have an interactional role. However, these two markers are not fully identical. They differ morphologically as well as syntactically different<sup>18</sup>.

#### **4.4 The functions of *yaʕn*□ in the present study**

Not very different from the previous findings about the discourse marker *yaʕnī*, the data of this study identified various roles of this marker in conversation.

##### **4.4.1 *Yaʕn*□ as a floor holding device**

*Yaʕn*□ may function as a floor holding device indicating two activities: an interruption in the utterance that the speaker has started, and at the same time his or her wish to preserve his or her turn in the turn-taking process (Sacks et al, 1974). This shows that *yaʕnī* has a twofold property. On the one hand, it occurs when a speaker indicates a willingness to keep the position of the current speaker and to maintain the floor of the conversation, signalling that speaker's turn has not finished yet. On the other hand, it alerts the hearer to an interruption in the course of the current event and forewarns him to upcoming addition to the previous discourse.

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<sup>18</sup> *I mean* is a clause that consists of two parts: the first person singular pronoun (I) and the verb (mean in the infinitive) which makes it a speaker-centred marker. *Yaʕn*□, on the other hand is a verb. In standard Arabic it means 'he means' or 'this/that means' in the simple present tense. As for syntax, the prototypical position of *I mean* is at the beginning of speaker's sentence, even though it can occur in the middle of a sentence while *yaʕn*□ shows more flexibility in its position within the sentence. It can occupy initial, medial or final positions.

Consider the following excerpt in which the first *yaʕn* in segment (4) functions

as a floor holding marker:

- (6)
- (Relationship with the lectures)
- |    |    |               |                      |                   |               |          |             |       |
|----|----|---------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------|----------|-------------|-------|
| H  | 1  | fiabb         | ˘mt                  | halla?            | ʕandak        | f        | ʕaʕp        | t?    |
|    |    | well          | when                 | now               | have-2SG      |          | exams       |       |
| Mz | 2  | bš-šahir      | tm                   | nē.               |               |          |             |       |
|    |    | in-month      |                      | eight             |               |          |             |       |
| H  | 3  | k             | f                    | ml                | ʕ             | tam      | m?          |       |
|    |    | how           | find-2SG.M           |                   | alright       |          |             |       |
|    |    | (1.0)         |                      |                   |               |          |             |       |
| Mz | 4  | ʕana          | al                   | ū-t               | lamm          | bfft     | ʕala        |       |
|    |    | I             | beautiful-3SG.F      | when              | enter 1SG     |          | on          |       |
|    |    | mak           | n                    | <b>yaʕn</b>       | m             | bəʕod    | mitl        | l-fi  |
|    |    | place         |                      | I mean            | not sit 1SG   | like     | the-student |       |
| H  | 5  | ʕmm           |                      |                   |               |          |             |       |
|    |    | hmm           |                      |                   |               |          |             |       |
| Mz | 6  | ok            | bəʕod                | mitl              | l-fi          | lib      | bass        | lamm  |
|    |    | ok            | sit.1SG              | like              | the-student   | but      | when        |       |
|    |    | leave.3SG.M   |                      |                   |               |          |             |       |
|    |    | id-daktör     | (1.3)                | bzabbēfi          | ʕlaq          | t-       |             |       |
|    |    | the-doctor    |                      | fix 1SG           | relations-1SG |          |             |       |
| H  | 7  | ʕmm           |                      |                   |               |          |             |       |
|    |    | Hmm           |                      |                   |               |          |             |       |
| Mz | 8  | maw           | ʕinnō                |                   |               |          |             |       |
|    |    | Not           | PART                 |                   |               |          |             |       |
| H  | 9  | ʕmm           | ʕmm                  |                   |               |          |             |       |
| Mz | 10 | laʕinnō       | halla?               | (-).              |               |          |             |       |
|    |    | because       | now                  |                   |               |          |             |       |
|    |    | <b>YAʕNĪ</b>  | b                    | ʕ                 | ʕ             | əbōn=    |             |       |
|    |    | I mean        | make friend with 1SG |                   |               |          |             |       |
|    |    | =tʕallamit    | ʕ                    | ōn                | k             | ʕ        | ʕinnō       | t     |
|    |    | k             | ʕ                    | ʕ                 | ʕ             | biyyōn   |             |       |
|    |    | learnt 1SG    | here how PART        | make friend 2SG.F | how           |          |             |       |
|    |    | tfft          | f                    | ʕ                 | yyon          | ʕ        | ʕ           | tkfn  |
|    |    |               |                      |                   |               |          |             | (0.9) |
|    |    | enter 2Sg.F   | in 3PL               | right             | how           | be 2SG.F |             |       |
|    |    | ʕirkē         | šwai                 |                   |               |          |             |       |
|    | 11 | (0.9)         | <b>yaʕn</b>          | a                 | ʕ             | ʕ        | yy          | nan   |
|    |    | active.F      | little               | I mean            | sometimes     | a lot    |             |       |
|    |    | bwa           | ʕ                    | ʕ                 | ʕ             | ʕ        | ʕ           | ʕ     |
|    |    | walk 1SG -him | to-the-car           | so-he             |               |          |             |       |
|    |    | bil           | ʕ                    | (0.3)             | <b>yaʕn</b>   | bi       | ʕ           | ʕ     |
|    |    | find 3SG.M    | I mean               | say 3SG.M         |               |          |             |       |
|    |    | fil           | ʕ                    | ʕ                 | ʕ             | ʕ        | ʕ           | ʕ     |
|    |    | get in.IMP    | get in 1SG           | go 1SG            | come 1SG      |          |             |       |

H 1 well when do you have exams then?  
Mz 2 in August  
H 3 how do you find it? Alright?  
Mz 4 I the good thing is that when I enter a place  
**yafn**□ I  
5 do not sit like a student  
H 5 Hmm  
Mz 6 ok I behave like a student but when the lecturer  
leaves the classroom I sort out my relations  
H 7 hmm  
Mz 8 not that/  
9 because now/  
10 **yafn**□ I make friends with them. I have now learnt  
how to make friends with them how to get close to  
them  
in the right way, how to be active  
11 **yafni** very often I walk him to the car and he  
finds-**yafn**□ he says to me jump in, I get in, I get  
around

Speaker Mz is a graduate student of Mechanical Engineering who was undertaking a postgraduate Diploma at the time when the interview took place. The interviewer is inquiring about speaker's Mz preparation for the forthcoming exams (line 3). Speaker Mz does not answer the question directly, instead he gives a series of episodes that when put all together they constitute the answer. In other words, he implicitly gives his response relying on the hearer to work out the implicated meaning (that he tries to make friendly relationships with the lectures so, presumably, he will be ok in the exams).

The response to the question asked by the researcher starts in segment (4) which consists of two clauses 'when I enter a place' (*lamm// bffit sal// mak//n*) and 'I do not sit like a student' (*m// buṣōd mitl l-ṭ-ṭ//lib*). *Yafni* intervenes between these two clauses and acts a floor holding device. Speaker Mz is stalling for some time to complete his sentence (cf. Fox Tree and Schrock, 2002 discussing *I mean* as a filler)

It is a common feature among fillers that they are employed by speakers to stall for some time throughout the process of speech production. They give the hearer a sign that there is still more to come but that at a particular moment in discourse some time is needed.

*Yaʕn*□ in this instance does not give a meaning of repairing or modification of speaker's previous utterance. What follows *yaʕn*□ does not invalidate what precedes it; on the contrary it adds to it and thus complete the sentence.

There are two proofs that *yaʕn*□ does function as a floor holding device marker in this particular example. First, the intonation contour of the sentence provides an essential piece of evidence that the speaker has no intention of repairing or upgrading previous discourse . There is no pause before *yaʕn*□ which might indicate a possible self-correction. Thus, it will be safe to exclude the possibility that *yaʕn*□ is a correction marker. Secondly, it can be deleted without affecting the meaning or the grammaticality of the sentence. In other words, its presence is optional and if deleted the sentence will remain intact.

However, being a floor holding device marker does not mean that it is a redundant device or a piece of “verbal garbage” (Schourup, 1985: 94). It is a pragmatically functional device. It is true that *yaʕn*□ has been semantically bleached in this particular context, but it certainly does have a great significance on the interactional level of the conversational exchange (Matras, 2000: 515). It is used by speaker Mz to assert his authority and to protect his right in maintaining his

turn even when he has nothing to say for a second or so. In fact, what *yaʕn* does is only signalling to the hearer that the rest of the sentence is yet to come and it implicitly asking for his patience.

In the following example, Speaker Ru switches from Arabic to English (*sometime*) and then to Arabic (*yaʕn*), then back again to English (*they make fun of my English at first*) before finally she switches back to Arabic for the rest of the sentence.

(7)  
(Nieces)

- |    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| H  | 1 | fa ʔint□ wiaʔ-hom bass bttfaham-ū ʔa□?   |
|    |   | so you with-3PL but communicat-2PL right?  |
| Ru | 2 | ʔmm<br>Hmm   |
| H  | 3 | m   f□ mškalē bi-1..   |
|    |   | NEG there.is problem in-DEF  |
| Ru | 4 | ʔeh laʔ ʔil□amdəll   |
|    |   | Yeah no thanks God   |
| H  | 5 | Yaʕn□ ʔaʔʔd-□ lam  ..  |
|    |   | It means intension-1SG when  |
| Ru | 6 | bass hənən k  nū <i>sometimes</i> <b>yaʕn□</b> <i>they make fun of my</i><br>but they were I mean<br><i>English (laughs) at first</i>                                      |
|    | 7 | <b>yaʕni</b> šaffi ʔinno ʔana ʔadm   □awalit   |
|    |   | I mean saw-3PL PART I PART try-1SG I mean<br>ʔadm   k  n m  <br>PART was PART<br>□akfn mitl ʔil-ʔingl□z□ tabaʕon <b>yaʕn□</b><br>be-1SG.FUT like the-English theirs I mean |
| H  | 1 | so you communicate with them right?  |
| Ru | 2 | hmm  |
| H  | 3 | you have no problem with the (interrupts)  |
| Ru | 4 | yeah there is no problem thank God   |
| H  | 5 | I mean when (interrupts)   |
| Ru | 6 | but they were <i>sometimes</i> <b>yaʕni</b> <i>they make fun of my</i><br><i>English (laughs) at first</i>   |
|    | 7 | <b>yaʕni</b> they saw that no matter how much I try no   |

matter what my English is not like theirs **yafni**.

The interviewer asked speaker Ru if she can communicate with her two nieces, who live in England and whose first language is English. The question of the interviewer reflects the problem which she thought, namely the absence of communication between speaker Ru (being a native speaker of Arabic) and her nieces (speakers of English). Speaker Ru answers the interviewer's question by saying (Yes thank God) confirming that there was no communication problem between her and her nieces. She then changes her mind and starts a new turn by saying: *but they were sometimes yaʕn□ they make fun of my English at first.* *Yaʕn□* appears between (sometimes) and (make fun of my English) functioning as a filler. The need to stall for time for completing the sentence motivates switching back to Arabic after she has planned the sentence in English (the introduction of *sometime*).

The switching to Arabic can be explained as the following. Being a bilingual, she has two linguistic repertoires at her disposal on which she can draw. The cognitive motivation here was so strong that it ignored the situational constrain (that the interview should be in Arabic and speakers are not expected to speak in English) for communicative purposes, as Arabic appeared to be the pragmatically dominant language at that instance (Matras. Y, 2000).

#### 4.4.2 *Yaʕn* marking expanding units in discourse

As mentioned above, Schiffrin (1987) as well as other scholars (Östman, 1981; Fox Tree and Schrock, 2002) identify one of the functions of the English discourse marker *I mean* as a marker of signalling and forewarning an upcoming adjustment, be it an expansion of ideas, a repair of previous utterance or a justification of previous materials in the discourse that might be thought by speakers as potential communicative problems.

*Yaʕn* may help achieving similar goals in colloquial Arabic. It expands the ideas of the speaker but at the same time it introduces new units and sub units in the discourse. Going back to example (6) we find that *yaʕn* functions differently when it is situated in different discourse slots. In (10) it expands a previous theme, in (11) the expansion is exemplified and in (12) it works as a self-correction marker. One common thread, however, among the three occurrences of *yaʕn* is that in every case it introduces a new piece of information.

After establishing his position in (6) as being like other students but having an advantage over them (his attempt to make relationships with the lecturers), speaker M moves on to the next piece in the discourse (line 10). The purpose of this piece is to offer an example of how he ‘tries to establish relations with the lectures’.

Thus, in (10), *yaʕn* prefaces a chunk of discourse which serves as an expansion of the prior talk (Schiffrin 1978) but at the same time provides the hearer with a new piece of knowledge that will enable him or her to interpret correctly the speaker's position in (6). The expansion is motivated by the speaker's evaluation of his previous statement as confusing and in need of clarification. *Yaʕn* introduces the utterance: “*bɓɓ||əbōn tʕallamat əōn kɔf ʔinnū tɓɓ||biyyōn*” (I make friends with them, I learnt here how you can be their friend) which elaborates on the preceding statement in (6).

There is a gap between the statement in (6) and the supporting example in (10). Lines (8-9) are turns which are not completed by the speaker and where he self-interrupts before he finally starts a new turn in (10) with *yaʕn*. This emphasizes his attempt to clarify his previous position. A further expansion on the idea presented in segment (4) occurs in line (11) when the speaker mentions walking with the lecture to his car as an example of how to make friends with lectures. By expanding the ideas of discourse, *yaʕn* marks the opening of smaller more specific statement than the one in the main unite (4).

#### **4.4.3 Moving from the general to the specific**

In the example discussed above, I inquired about the informant's feelings about his approaching exams. The informant did not answer the question by a simple straightforward statement like “it is good” or “it is not going well”, instead, his reply was implied in a whole complicated narrative; a complex speech act. This

act, however, moves from general statements in (4 and 6) to more specific ones in (6, 8, 9, 10, and 11). There are two general controlling topics in this speech act. The first is (when he enters a place, he does not sit like a student) and the second is (he differs from his fellow students in his attempts to be a friend of the lectures). What follows them is a constellation of specific incidents that the speaker finds relevantly supportive of these topics.

*Yaşın□* marks each of these specific incidents and simultaneously introduces a new piece of information to the hearer. Segment (10) is more specific than (4 or 6) in that it narrows down the generality of the content expressed in these two segments. It expresses a specific action (I make friends with them) that can be seen as a sub-action under a previous bigger action (I sort out my relations with the lecturers). The content of segment (11) is in its turn even more specific than that of (10) in that it is a further narrowing of segment (11) through mentioning one particular incident (I walk him to his car) that the speaker considers as a way of creating friendships with the lecturers.

It is worth noting that *yaşın□* in this sense does not only move the discourse from generality to specificity, it also coordinates the discourse segments and makes it flow smoothly. It guides the hearer through the narrative and moves him from one argument to the next. The arguments offered by the speaker are motivated by the status of the issue in (4) as unusual. He, therefore, is under the pressure of justifying his position mentioned in (4). Since the hearer do not make any comment on the speaker's statement, the speaker feels challenged by the hearer,

and therefore, he goes on giving examples of how he behaves like a student but unlike other students he tries his best to make friendships with the lectures.

Example (8) shows another instance of using *yafn* as a marker that signals a transition from the main topic of the discourse to a more specific sub-topic. In this conversation speaker Rn is asked to comment on the education system in Dubai where she used to live before moving back to Syria:

(8)  
(education in Dubai)

- |    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| H  | 1 | kɔf it-taʃlɔm Rana bi Dubai?<br>How DEF-education Rana in Dubai?  |
| Rn | 2 | bi Dubai ʔaʔʔab min Suriyyɔ<br>in Dubai more difficult from Syria<br>ka-ʒamʔa<br>as-university                              |
| H  | 3 | ʔmm<br>hmm  |
| Rn | 4 | ka-luɟɟ ka-tarʒamē<br>as- language as-translation   |
|    | 5 | <b>yafn</b> bəzkor ʔawwal sinē ktɔr<br>ittʔazabit<br>I mean remember 1SG first year a lot suffered                          |
| H  | 6 | ʔmm<br>mhm  |
| Rn | 7 | eh eh əl-kutub mkasafē ʔaktar kallm<br>syɔr<br>uh uh DEF-books intensive more words small<br>ktɔr ū dəsmē<br>a lot and rich |
| H  | 8 | ʔmm<br>Hmm  |
| Rn | 9 | baynama hōn laʔ hōn msahlīnā šwai<br>whereas here no here make it easy 3PL a bit<br><b>yafn</b><br>I mean                   |
| H  | 1 | how is the education in Dubai, Rana?  |
| Rn | 2 | in Dubai it is more difficult than in Syria, as a   |

university  
 H 3 hmm  
 Rn 4 as a language, as translation  
**yaʕn** I remember that I struggled a lot in my  
 first  
 year  
 H 5 hmm  
 Rn 6 uh uh the books are denser, the words are small and  
 rich  
 H 7 hmm  
 Rn 8 while here, no, here they make it a little bit  
 easy,  
**yaʕnī**

After introducing her opinion about the level of Education in Dubai as a higher and more difficult education system than the one in Syria, speaker Rn shifts her discourse in (5) to a more specific incident which supports her point in (2). She remembers that in her first year at university in Dubai she had a difficult time trying to cope with the new system. This movement from a general statement to a specific personal event is highlighted by the presence of *yaʕn*.

#### 4.4.4 Replacement repair

*Yaʕn* can be used when speakers want to repair a previous utterance. It therefore, signals that the utterance it marks is a replacement of the preceding one. But at the same time, this replacement elaborate on the previous discourse In example (9) below, speaker Rn begins her substitution (segment 4) of the clause *bəddō jəhid* (it needs efforts) for the clause *bəddō dars* (it needs studying) with *Yaʕn*:

(9)  
(It needs studying)

H 1 kɔf mlʔitʔ?  
 how find 2SG  
 Rn 2 ɔilfl ktɔr mabʔūfil fɔ  
 beautiful a lot happy 1SG in.it  
 H 3 ʔm

hmm

Rn 4 miš ʔaʕib bass bəddō bəddō žəhid  
not difficult but it needs it needs efforts

**yaʕn** bəddō dars  
**that.is** it needs studying

H 1 how do you find it?

Rn 2 it is very nice, I am very happy in it.

H 3 hmm

Rn 4 it is not difficult but it needs it needs efforts  
**yaʕn** it needs studying.

*Yaʕnī* here introduces a replacing of the word *žəhid* (efforts) with the word *dars* (studying), but as well as marking a replacement of words, the speaker is explaining and elaborating on what she meant by what precedes *yaʕnī*.

Having presented some examples of the functions of *yaʕnī* in the data of the present study, I will now turn to discuss the third discourse marker *btaʕrfī* and its variants.

#### 4.5 *ʕrafī*, *btaʕrfī*, and *ʕrafī kīf* in the literature

The marker *you know* translates differently in different Arabic dialects. For example, in Syrian Arabic (as my data shows), *you know* is realized in three different expressions: *ʕrafī*, *btaʕrfī*, and *ʕrafī kīf*. Similarly Libyan Arabic has three forms for *you know*: *Garaft*, *Garaft Keif*, and *taGrif* (Gaddafi, 1990), while Egyptian Arabic has only one expression: *inta-ʕareef* (Ghobrial, 1993).

In Libyan and Syrian Arabic, the markers consist of a second person singular pronoun and the verb ‘ʕarafa’, which are inflected for person, gender and number.

While in Egyptian Arabic, *inta-ʕareef* is made up of: *inta* a masculine pronoun,

and *ḡareef* an adjective which means ‘familiar with’. In the current data the markers *ṣraḡfī* and *ṣraḡfī kif* contains the verb “ṣərəḡ” with the second person singular pronoun suffix (t), the feminine suffix (ī), because the interviewer was a female. While the marker *btaṣraḡfi* has the same inflections plus the simple present prefix (b).

There are to the best of my knowledge, only two studies on the marker *you know* in Arabic dialects, namely Libyan Arabic and Egyptian Arabic. Gaddafi (1990) described the functions of the three Libyan markers *Garaḡft* (*you knew*), *Garaḡft Keif* (*you knew how*), and *taGrif* (*you know*) in colloquial Libyan discourse using Schiffrin’s (1987) discourse model. He argued that these markers, although are independent, exhibit similar functions in some conversational situations. They were all used by speakers to check the knowledge of their hearers and to draw their attention to a particular part of discourse. The markers contributed to the transitions in the information state, played a role in the participation frameworks. In addition, they worked in the exchange structure by triggering turn transitions.

In the information state, *Garaḡft*, and *Garaḡft Keif* marked information transition in discourse in situations where speakers did not know if their hearers shared knowledge with them or not . In some interactional situations *Garaḡft Keif* performed a different function than the one mentioned above. It marked “information transition in situations where the speaker knows for certain that the hearer does not share knowledge with him” (1990:107).

Moreover, Gaddafi discussed the role of the markers, *Garaft Keif*, and *taGrif* in the participation frameworks. While *taGrif*'s interactional role was to relate between speakers and hearers, *Garaft Keif*'s function was to relate between speakers and hearers and to relate between the speaker and what he or she says.

Finally, the three Libyan markers were found to have a role in creating the exchange structure of discourse. They do so when they are used by speakers to focus on a specific piece of their talk and drawing the hearers' attention to it which in turn promotes a transition in discourse. Gaddafi argued that when the markers draw the hearers' attention to a particular part of discourse, they help in eliciting a response from the hearer so they contribute to the creation of exchange structures.

He concluded that:

“*Garaft Keif*, and *Garaft* can help to promote turn-transition either by directing the hearer's attention to an upcoming piece of information or to a prior one in the speaker's utterance. Meanwhile the marker *taGrif* helps to promote the transition only by pointing forward in discourse” (1990:141).

Looking at discourse markers from a pragmatic perspective, Ghobrial (1993) argued that in colloquial Cairene discourse, the Cairene Egyptian marker *inta-9areef*, which translates literally as “you are familiar with/ have the knowledge of”, was not used by speakers as a filler that indicated their inability to find proper words, rather it was pragmatically functional. Its pragmatic functions were derived from its propositional meaning. The marker is a plea for agreement from the speakers towards the hearers. Since conversants might come to the conversation with different background information, negotiating knowledge throughout the conversation is necessary for smooth communication. *Inta-9areef*

serves this by creating an alignment in the speaker-hearer knowledge. The marker expresses “the speaker’s willingness that some message be taken as mutual background knowledge” (1993:178).

Ghobrial distinguished between *inta-9areef* when it functions as a discourse marker and *inta-9areef* as an interrogative marker. As an interrogative marker, it has the force of the genuine question ‘do you know’ and it seeks a yes/no answer from the hearer. While as a discourse marker, *inta-9areef* does not trigger a response similar to that evoked by interrogatives. Moreover, when *inta-9areef* acts as a discourse marker it has the following characteristics: it is syntactically redundant therefore its omission does not affect the grammaticality of the sentence or its propositional meaning; it is uttered as a separate tone-unit from the rest of the sentence; it does not stand on its own as a single utterance; it has a flexible position within the sentence, and finally it appears with particular speech parts like statements, threats, and promises.

As for the pragmatic functions that *inta-9areef* performs in colloquial Cairene Arabic, Ghobrial identified three functions of this marker. First, it works as a neutralizing marker of the different perspectives, attitudes and knowledge that speakers have at the beginning of a conversation. When speakers begin a conversation they usually have no expectation about their interlocutor’s knowledge, so they try to coordinate and negotiate mutual understanding and *inta-9areef*, Ghobrial argued, neutralizes the different perspectives of interlocutors by calling for shared knowledge and common ground between them (1993: 191).

In addition, *inta-9areef* can be used to express either speaker's certainty or his or her uncertainty about the knowledge and information he or she shares with his or her addressee. If it is uttered with emphatic intonation, *inta-9areef* signals the speaker's confidence that the content of his or her talk is familiar to the addressee either because they have mutual knowledge and understanding of the subject of talk, or because it is a common experience that more or less all people had gone through. In both cases, the speaker appeals to his or her hearer to accept what is said as unquestionable. If that happens, then *inta-9areef* elicits positive acknowledgment from the hearer, Ghobrial claimed.

The same marker can be used to reflect a lack of confidence and an uncertainty of speakers about "the likely response their propositions may produce in their addressees or the speaker's own awareness of some linguistic deficiency or inaccuracy" (1993:207). Ghobrial argued that there were various reasons for the speaker's uncertainty about his or her proposition and these are: the truth of the proposition cannot be verified by the addressee; the proposition is an indirect request or seeking for commitment; the proposition of the speaker is opposite to that of the hearer (in this sense *inta-9areef* functions as a mitigation device and as an apology marker). *Inta-9areef* appeared in these situations reflecting the speaker's uncertainty about the hearer's reaction to his or her talk. Still related to the speaker's uncertainty, *inta-9areef* marked the speaker's awareness of linguistic deficiency or inaccuracy in presenting a proposition. In this regard, it can be used at repair positions where repair is not very obvious or it be used when speakers are searching for the right word.

The last pragmatic function that was discussed by Ghobrial of the marker *inta-ṣareef* was its use by Egyptian speakers to mark the beginning or the end of a narrative. Under this function, the marker does not elicit direct answers from the hearers but rather it seeks to attract their attention to what will come up after it or to what had been said before.

#### 4.6 The functions of *ʕrəftī*, *btaʕrəftī*, and *ʕrəftī kif* in Syrian Arabic

##### 4.6.1 *ʕrəftī*

This marker translates literally as ‘did you know’ and can be paraphrased as “do you understand”. It was used by the speakers of the current study to check on the hearer’s understanding and make sure that she has been able to process and accept what has been said. In this sense, it signals the speaker’s uncertainty about the hearer’s knowledge. The examples below illustrate the function of *ʕrəftī* in the Syrian discourse of the learners:

(10)  
(Writing skills)

As	1	ʔaʕadət dawra sabiqan b-r-rayting bə-l-markaz sat course before in-the-writing in-DEF-council l-briṭani DEF-British
H	2	ʔm mmm
As	3	bass ʔilʕət ʔakadəmik rayting but tuned-3SG.F academic writing
	4	bət-ʕaliʕ ʔslüb l-kitabē mu s-skilz deal.3SG.F style the-writng NEG the-skills b-r-rayting in-DEF-writing
H	5	ʔā Ah
As	6	<b>ʕrəftī</b> yaʕni ʔana biddi skilz b-r-rayting knew-2SG.F that.is I want skills in-DEF-writing mu ʔslüb l-kitabē

		NEG style DEF-writing
H	7	ʔē yes
As	8	ʔana b-aʔrəf šlōn ʔktub baħəs jamifī I know how write research university
H	9	ʔā Ah
As	10	šlōn lāzəm nasəq l-ʔafkār šlōn lāzəm həʔ how must arrange DEF-ideas how must put l-marājəf DEF-references
H	11	ʔaywa yeah
As	12	nažəm l-marājəf ʔqtəbəs organise DEF-references quote
As	1	I did previously a writing course at the British council
H	2	hmm
As	3	but it turned out to be an academic writing
	4	it deals with the writing style not with writing skills
H	5	aha
As	6	you know I mean I want writing skills and not writing style
H	7	yes
As	8	I know how to write a university research
H	9	aha
As	10	how I should arrange the ideas how I should put the references
H	11	I see
As	12	organise the references, quote

In this example, speaker As is telling the interviewer about a writing course that he has done in the British Council. The course according to speaker As, focused on teaching students how to write academically, rather than teaching them writing skills in general (segments 3 and 4). Although, the interviewer has expressed her realization of the difference (between the courses) by uttering *ah* in line (5), speaker As wants to make sure that she has understood what he has said earlier so he utters *ʔrəʔtī* in line (6).

Example (11) shows another example of *ʔrəʔtī*:

(11)  
(English language book)

- N 1 bass id-dars il-h`k bikūn  
but DEF-lesson which-like.this be.3SG.M  
inno bass mujarad dars  
REL only mere lesson
- 2 yaʔn□ mətəl inno ykūn ʔan madd` mufayyan`  
I mean like REL is about subject particular  
ʔaw ʔan š□ mətīl dars ij-juʔrafyā  
or about thing like lesson the-geography
- H 3 ʔm  
hmm
- N 4 ʔ` inno hadā kt□r kan mumil bənnəsbe  
yeah REL this a lot was boring in. relation  
ʔili  
me
- H 5 ʔm  
Hmm
- N 6 ʔass`t mā  
felt.1SG NEG
- 7 inno xalaš izā mā ʔand□ ʔana maʔlumāt  
REL finish if NEG have I information  
bə-l-madd` hāy mā-laḥ-ʔaʔdar ʔanaqiš  
in-DEF-subject this.SG.F NEG-will-can discuss  
ʔaw ʔaḥk□ ʔaw  
or speake.1SG or
- 8 yaʔn□ ʔaʔaww□ luyā-t□ fihā  
I mean strengthen.1SG language.1SG in.it  
**ʔrəf-t□**  
knew-2SG.F
- H 9 ʔm ʔm  
Hmm
- N 1 but the lesson that is just a lesson  
2 I mean for example it is about a particular subject  
like geography
- H 3 hmm
- N 4 yeah this was very boring to me
- H 5 hmm
- N 6 I felt no  
7 that ok if I have no information about this subject  
I will not be able to  
discuss or talk or  
9 I mean to strengthen my language in it you know
- H 10 hmm hmm

In this example, speaker N is explaining to the interviewer about the content of an English book that she was using. She thinks that the book has some lessons about

a particular subject which she did not have knowledge about, which made her bored and unable to discuss and participate in the classroom. At the end of segment (8) she uses the marker *ʕrəfī* to check on the interviewer's understanding and acceptance of her proposition. The interviewer's *hmm hmm* is an evidence that she has in deed endorsed what speaker N has said.

Now I move to discuss *btaʕrfī*, the second variant of the Syrian discourse marker *you know*.

#### 4.6.2 *btaʕrfī*

Unlike *ʕrəfī* which seeks confirmation and acceptance from the hearer, *btaʕrfī* is used to express certainty on the part of the speaker that what she or he is talking about is shared knowledge with the hearer. In other words, the speaker, by uttering *btaʕrfī* assumes that the hearer is familiar with what she or he is referring to. The learners use *btaʕrfī* to signal certainty about what they are talking about either because they think the interviewer shares views with them by virtue of being Syrian (example 12), or because they think what they are talking about is a common experience that people have (example 13).

(12)

(Learning English)

H	1	ēmtā balašət tətʕalam inkliz ʕawwal ʕawwal When start-2SG.M learn English first first mā balaš-ət? PART start-2SG.M
Gs	2	huww` niħnā minbaləš ʕad b-š-šaf he we start normal in-DEF-grade s-sabəf DEF-seventh
H	3	ʕm mmm

Gs 4 bass **b-taʔrf-** yaʔn bik  
but PRES-know-2SG.F I mean PRES-be  
yaʔn- ʔ  
I mean yeah

5 yaʔn finā nʔūl ʔinno balaš-nā taʔl min  
I mean can can.1PL REL started learning from  
s-sabəʔ  
the-seventh

H 6 ʔm  
mmm

Gs 7 bass ʂ-ʂaraḥā žad žad mā balaš-nā  
but DEF-truth serious serious NEG started-1PL  
lal ʔana fin ʔūl  
till I can say  
la-s-sads˘ la-baʔd s-sads˘ ḥatā  
till-DEF-sixth till-after DEF-sixth even

H 1 when did you start learning English first first  
when you start?

Gs 2 it is we start normal in the seventh grade

H 3 hmm

Gs 4 but you know I mean it is I mean- yeah  
5 I mean we can say that we started learning from  
the seventh grade

H 6 hmm

Gs 7 but honestly seriously seriously we didn't start  
until I can say until the sixth year after the  
sixth year even

In this extract speaker Gs is answering the question about the time he started to learn English. In segment (2) he mentions that students in Syrian normally start learning English at the seventh grade. However, in line (4) he says that learning English is not usually serious at the early stages. He addresses the hearer with *btaʔrfi* assuming that she knows that as a native of Syria who learnt English there. Example (13) *btaʔrfi* marks the speaker's certainty that the hearer knows what is being talked about because it a common knowledge.

(13)

(English teaching method in Syria)

- Ku 1 laḥad ilʔān yaʔnī iʔhnā mā fī hal mustawā  
till now I mean we NEG there.is this level  
l l-mənīḥ min l-taʔsis min taʔsis  
DEF DEF-good from DEF-foundation from foundation
- 2 yaʔnī waʔtəl li yəbalšū yəʔasəsū ʔ-ʔaləb  
I mean time REL start.3PL found.3PL DEF-student  
bəyaʔtū luḡa tanyə mā ʔam naʔtī  
give.3PL language second NEG PART give.1PL  
lā madā ʔahamyet l-luḡa inno lāzəm  
no extent importance DEF-language REL must  
yətʔalamā wala ʔam nlaʔi wasilē silsē  
learn.3SG.M nor PART find.1PL mean interesting  
saḥlē trayb-ək bə-l-ši  
easy interest-2.SG in-DEF-thing
- H 2 ʔm  
mmm
- Ku 3 u l-ʔstaz ktīr ʔlo dōr laʔinno  
and DEF-teacher a.lot have role because  
**btaʔrfi** killayatna iza l-ʔstaz mā  
you.know all.of.us if DEF-teacher NEG  
bi-ḥabəbək bi-maddē fa inti bətkraḥi l-maddē  
make.like in-subject so you hate DEF-subject  
killā  
all
- H 4 ʔē mazbūʔ  
yeah true
- Ku 5 bətətʔaʔadi mən-ā  
get.complex.2SG.F from-it
- H 6 laʔ mazbūʔ  
no true
- Ku 1 till now I mean we still do not have that good  
level from the foundation from the foundation I  
mean, when they start to found the student they  
give him a second language we are not covering  
neither the importance of the language  
that is he should learn it nor we are finding an  
interesting easy way that makes  
you interested in the thing
- H 2 mmm
- Ku 3 and the teacher has a big role because you know all  
of us if the teacher dose not make us like a  
subject you will hate the subject all together
- H 4 yeah it is true
- Ku 5 you will have a complex from it
- H 6 no it is true

Speaker Ku is talking about the English teaching status in Syria. She believes that teaching English in Syria is not good and that the problem starts from the foundation period. Speaker Ku gives reasons for this in line (2): which are the lack of attention that is usually given to the teaching of English in Syria, and the absence of interesting teaching methods. She also believes that the teacher has a very important in making learning English easier or more difficult (line 3) and she signals her certainty that the hearer knows this by *btaʕrfī*. Here, she uses *btaʕrfī* as she presupposes shared knowledge between her and the interviewer because she thinks what she is talking about (teacher' role) is a common experience among students, thus the interviewer should know. In line (4) the interviewer agrees with speaker Ku's proposition that is marked with *btaʕrfī*.

#### 4.6.3 *ʕrafī kīf*

Similar to *ʕrafī*, the marker *ʕrafī kīf* literally translated to 'you knew how' is used by Syrian speakers to check on the understanding of the hearer of what is being said and an appeal to accept it. The presence of the *kīf* (how) makes the marker stronger than *ʕrafī* because it reinforces the message. Example (14) illustrates:

(14)

(Most difficult part in learning English)

H	1	šū	ʔaʕʕab	šī	bin-n-nəsbē	ʔilak
		what	most.difficult	thing	in-the-relation	you
		yaʕnī ?				
		that.is				
Gs	2	ʔē				
		mm				
	3	ʕaʕəb				
		difficult				
	4	yaʕnī	ʔil	kīf	tʕabrī	bə-l-inklizi

that.is the how express.2SG.F in-the-English  
yaʕnī kif təfasri  
that.is how explain.2SG.F

H 5 ʔm  
mmm

Gs 6 yaʕnī ʔē **ʔrəfti** **kif** bass twaʕlī  
That.is yeah knew-2SG.F how but PRES-reach.2SG.F  
la-mistawa muʕayyan bi-l-inklizi bəʕʕyyer  
to- level particular in-DEF-English become.3SG.F  
baʔā bəddək tfakri kif bəddək yaʕnī  
PART want.2SG think.2SG.F how want.2SG.F that.is  
kif bəddək tfakri u tħki bi-l-inklizi  
how want.2SG.F think.2SG.F and talk in-DEF-English  
bi-ʕakəl l  
in-way DEF

H 7 ʔm  
mmm

Gs 8 **ʔrəfti kif** yaʕnī māfād  
knew-2SG.F how I mean no. longer  
fiki wallā təstaxdmi yaʕnī taʕābīrək  
can by God use.2SG.F I mean expressions  
ʔaw hatta tafkīrək bə-l-ʕarabī  
or even thinking in-the-Arabic

H 9 ʕaħ  
true

H 1 what is the most difficult thing for you?  
Gs 2 yeah ..  
3 difficult ..  
4 I mean the how you express in English I mean how  
you explain

H 5 mm  
Gs 6 I mean yeah you knew how when you reach to a  
particular level in English it becomes that you  
want to think how to I mean how you want to think  
and speak in English in a way the

H 7 mm  
Gs 8 you know I mean you cannot use your expressions  
anymore or even to think in Arabic

H 9 true

*ʔrəfti kif* is used twice in this extract by speaker Gs who is explaining to the interviewer what he finds the most difficult part in learning English. In his opinion the most difficult thing is to express one self's in English and to be able to explain things in English (segment 4). The interviewer agrees with this view in line (5). Speaker Gs repeats his opinion in lines (6) and (8) both of which contains *ʔrəfti kif*

as a marker of checking on the hearer's understanding and acceptance of the information presented. In fact, the hearer provides her approval and agreement with speaker Gs's ideas in lines (7) and (9).

#### **4.7 Concluding remarks**

The present chapter presented some examples of the three Syrian discourse markers *fa*, *yaʕnī* and *btaʕrfī* and its variants, which were used in the Arabic interviews with the informants of the present study. The analysis reveals the *fa* was used to mark a sentence which is a result of previous discourse, a temporal sequence in discourse, a summary of what has been said before or finally a transition in discourse.

*Yaʕnī* was employed by speakers to stall for time while they are thinking of what to say, to expand on previous discourse, to narrow the space of discourse from the general to the specific and finally to repair previous discourse. *btaʕrfī* and its variants were basically used to check on the understanding of the hearer of what has been presented and to appeal to her to accept it. In this sense, it is used as a solidarity marker.

Having described the functions of the three Arabic markers which are the equivalents of the English markers investigated in this study, we shall now move to the analysis of the markers *so*, *you know* and *I mean* to see how they function in the discourse of the Syrian Arabic learners and whether the Arabic markers influence their use.

## Chapter 5

### *So* in the discourse of Syrian Arabic English learners

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter will focus on the discourse marker *so* and how it is used by Syrian students in their English discourse. The chapter consists of two main parts. The first part, looks at how this marker has been reported in the literature and the second part, which is the main focus of this chapter, displays the presentation of the data analysis of instances of the discourse marker *so* as employed by the Syrian learners of English.

Dictionaries of English classify *so* as an adverb, a conjunction, an adjective and a pronoun among many other functions (cf. for example *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2008*) with most of these dictionaries like (*The Oxford English dictionary 1989; Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 1997; Oxford Advanced learner's dictionary 2007; Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2008*) agreeing on two uses of *so* which are: *so* as an adverb of degree or manner, and *so* as a conjunction that connects two clauses with logical resultative relationship. But, no reference is usually made to the fact that *so* has functions on the level of discourse. However, the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2008) did mention a specific use of *so* as a 'sentence beginning *so*' which connects that sentence with something that has been mentioned or happened before, and the Oxford English Dictionary (1989) refers to *so* as an 'introductory particle, without a preceding statement'. Perhaps these are the only two discourse

functions of *so* (despite not relating them to discourse) mentioned in dictionaries, but surely are not the only ones of *so* as a discourse marker as we will see below in the literature on this marker.

### 5.1 *So* in the literature

Surveying the literature on discourse markers, I agree with Müller (2005) that the functions of *so* have not received much attention by researchers compared with other markers such as *but*, *I mean*, *like*, *well* and *you know*. Müller argues that the lack of research on *so* is because it is considered a peripheral discourse marker rather than a prototypical one, thus it is neglected by researchers for this reason. She bases her opinion on the fact that *so* does not exhibit all the features of a discourse marker which are mentioned by Brinton (1996) and rearranged by Jucker and Ziv (1998) into five categories:

- Phonological and lexical features → they are short, they form a separate tone group and they are hard to place within a word group.
- Syntactic features → restricted to sentence initial position, they are loosely attached to the syntactic structure and they are optional.
- Semantic features → they have little or no meaning
- Functional features → they are multifunctional.
- Sociolinguistic and stylistic features → informal, stigmatised, gender specific.

*So* does not constitute a separate tone, and it is not too hard to assign it to a grammatical word class (Müller 2005). However, unlike what Müller suggests, *so* is not restricted to sentence initial position. It occurs sometimes in a final position with falling intonation signalling the end of a speaker's turn and marking a transition relevance place, or marking an implied meaning, or in some cases marking both. In this respect *so* can be seen as a multifunctional marker. As for

formality, *so* is more associated (but not exclusively) with spoken discourse than with written discourse, and it is not obvious that gender has an influence on the use of *so*.

Another reason behind overlooking *so* might be the difficulty of deciding whether *so* belongs to either transparent markers or opaque markers despite the tendency to classify it under transparent markers. The concept of transparency/opaqueness was introduced by Ariel (1994) who suggests that transparent markers (like *and*, *but*, *so*, and *or*) have mainly a semantic function unlike opaque markers which do not refer to their semantic meaning and so are purely pragmatic such as *well*.

Regardless of the reasons for neglecting *so*, and despite the overall scarcity of research on this discourse marker, a number of studies concerning it have been published. In what follows I present a brief review of those studies that dealt with *so*.

In Schiffrin's influential work *Discourse Markers* (1987), she dedicates a chapter for *so* and *because*. On the structural level of discourse, she distinguishes between the role played by *so* and that by *because*. *So* signals the main clauses while *because* signals the subordinate ones. This grammatical difference affects their role in discourse that is, *so* prefaces the main units of discourse (a position in an explanation or narrative) while *because* marks the subordinate units (supports and reasons). Explanations are good examples where *so* appears as a marker of the main units and *because* as a marker of the subordinating units. In addition, in narratives, for examples, *because* introduces an entry to a story as opposed to *so*

which marks the return to the main point of that story. Schiffrin claims that ‘subordinate’ and ‘main’ are two relative terms that is:

“units of talk may be defined as subordinate or main in more than one structure at once. What this means is that what is subordinate in one structure may or may not be subordinate in another” (1987: 196-197).

Moreover, Schiffrin suggests that the discourse marker *so* may function on the ideational level marking a fact-based result relationship between idea units; it may also preface an inference by relying on pieces of information (warrants) that are important for deducing these inferences. As these pieces of information might be provided during the conversation, they bring about a change in the information state.

Moreover, Schiffrin proposes that the discourse marker *so* may function on the *ideational level* marking a fact-based result relationship between idea units. This function, Schiffrin suggests, is derived from its semantic meaning of a ‘result’. On the *information state*, *so* marks knowledge-based relations (warrant-inference) that is: some pieces of information are used as a warrant for an inference. As these pieces of information might be provided during the conversation, they bring about a change in the information state.

In addition, *so* may work in the *action structures* to mark action-based relations when speakers present an action that was motivated by the preceding talk. These three functions of *so* are illustrated by the following examples adopted from Schiffrin (her numbering and bolding):

(15) (Fact-based result) (1987: 204)

- Zelda:
- a. well we were going up t'see uh ... my-our son tonight,
  - b. but we're not
  - c. **cause** the younger one's gonna come for dinner
  - d. **cause** he's working in the neighbourhood.
  - e. **So** that's out.

The result in (e) is based on the facts reported by the speaker in (c, d).

(16) (Knowledge-based inference) (1987: 206)

- Freda:
- a. I don't even know them t'talk to them.
  - b. And they scrub.
  - c. I mean they're scrubbin', and rubbin' and polishing...
  - d. **so** that they really mean business.

The activities in (b, c) do not in themselves cause Freda's neighbours to *mean business* but she uses them as a warrant to arrive at her inference in (d).

(17) (Marking an action motivated by the previous talk) (1987: 208)

- Zelda: **so** who would A1 vote for?

On the interactional level, Schiffrin claims that *so* occurs at potential transitions in the discourse thus marking potential shifts in the participation framework. In other words, it can preface a change in the turn-taking system by showing the speaker's readiness to give her turn to the hearer or to attempt to elicit a reply/comment from the hearer. It can be also used to complete the second part of an adjacency pair i.e. commenting on or answering a question that has already been asked, or to organize and maintain topics (coming back to the point in an interaction after a digression).

Fraser (1990, 1999a) approaches discourse markers from a grammatical-pragmatic framework and defines them as “pragmatic markers, usually lexical expressions,

do not contribute to the propositional content of the sentence but signal different types of messages” (1999a: 936). Fraser argues that each marker has a core meaning and that other meanings arise in (different contexts) from this core meaning. He elaborated this point by mentioning that the core meaning of *so* is to signal that what follows this marker is to be interpreted as a conclusion from the prior discourse (1990:393; 1999a:945). For example, *so*, as Fraser claims, has more complex meaning than the “narrow ‘result’ sense associated with the content meaning of *so*” (1990:393) and this complex meaning can be best understood by looking at the discourse context in which it appears. Consider his following set of examples (1990: 393):

(16)<sup>19</sup>

- (11d) Son: my clothes are still wet.  
 Mother: *so* put the drier on for 30 minutes more.
- (11f) [A student upon encountering her professor for the first time in two weeks]  
 Hi.  
*so* when are you leaving for Hawaii?
- (11g) [Spoken by a grandmother to a granddaughter] *So* tell me about the young man you are seeing.

It is obvious that *so* in these examples indicates that what follows it has a relation with the prior discourse but this relations is certainly not restricted to the result meaning of *so*. In (11d) *so* has a meaning of a directive speech act “you should do that”, in (11f) it indicates that the previous information does not need to be immediate and finally in (11g) no context of the previous discourse is provided but Fraser claims that when the grandmother used *so*, she meant to get her granddaughter ‘to continue’ talking (1990: 394). Apart from providing some

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<sup>19</sup> All sets of cited examples are serially numbered in this thesis. However, where relevant original numbering was kept for individual examples in a set.

examples and comment on them briefly, Fraser did not discuss the functions of *so* at length.

However in another paper, Fraser (1999b) argues that the particle *so* in English has six functions illustrated in his following set of examples (1999b: 397-398, his bolding and numbering):

(17)

Denotative *so* as in: (1a) He has said things that simply are not **so**.

Anaphoric *so* as in: (1e) if he is a criminal, it's his parents who have made him **so**.

Emphatic *so* as in: (1g) you are **SO** vain.

Discourse marker *so* as in: (1h) he left early **so** (that) he could avoid traffic.

Combined *so* as in: (1j) she moved the handle **like so** before it broke.

Idiomatic *so* as in: (1k) I am feeling just **so-so** today.

As a discourse marker, Fraser argues in this paper that *so* has three functions: it connects semantic entities; it relates sentences on the cognitive level and finally it connects sentences on speech act level.

In her work within the Relevance Theory framework, Blakemore (1988) treats *so* as a marker that has a 'constraint on relevance'. She, however, does not call *so* a discourse marker but labels it as an 'inferential connective'. This connective according to her establishes an inferential connection between two propositions.

Blakemore suggests that inferential *so* does not influence the proposition of the utterance that contains it, but rather it constrains the relevance of this utterance.

(1988: 184) her example illustrates this function of *so*:

(18) “There is \$5 in my wallet. So I didn’t spend all the money then.” (1988: 188)

*So* here does mark the proposition it prefaces as a contextual implication of the first proposition. However, Blakemore recognizes that *so* is not always used to express inferential meaning. She identifies a causal-consequence function of *so* which can be seen in her example:

(19) “Tom ate the condemned meat. So he fell ill.” (1988:190)

The event in the second utterance is a causal consequence of the event in the first utterance. In both cases, Blakemore argues that *so* does not dictate an inferential or causal relationship on the propositions it connects, but it simply helps the hearer in his/her interpretation process “by imposing a constraint on the inferential (or pragmatic) computations a proposition may enter to” (1988: 185).

Rendle-Short (2003) discusses the role and function of the discourse marker *so* in monologic discourse. In particular, she presents the analysis of *so* as used by English native speakers while presenting their research work during computer science seminars. She suggests that talk in seminars is not continuous and can be divided into bits or what she refers to as sections which are characterized by a number of discourse and prosodic features (like pause, falling/rising pitch, shift in the speed of delivery etc) as well as non verbal actions (such as the presenter changing a slide). Discourse markers are used in monologic discourse (like seminars) as signposts to indicate the structure of talk. According to Rendle-Short, *so* occurs in three positions within a section: at the beginning, in the

middle, or at the end of that section. At the beginning of a section, *so* is used by presenters to orient the audience to the point of the next section indicating to them that the speaker is about to move on to a new idea/topic. In the middle of a section *so* marks a digression (which could be giving an example, an aside or pointing to the overhead screen etc) from the main topic of that section. At the end of a section *so* marks the resolution (which could be a summary or an assessment) of the idea/topic discussed in that section.

Tagliamonte (2005) carried out a quantitative analysis of a number of discourse markers (like *just* and *like*) and intensifiers (like *so*) in the speech of young Canadians as part of investigating new features in Canadian English which are spreading rapidly into the young generation's language. Her analysis revealed that *so* was mostly used by the 15- to 16 year olds, and that males started to use it after it used to be associated with females (2005: 1911). Tagliamonte concludes that her findings suggest that the intensifier *so* "represent(s) *bona fide* in progress" (2005:1911).

Bolden (2006) adopts the point of view that everyday talk plays an important role in the construction of interpersonal relationships. She focuses on social interactions between close friends highlighting the role of two discursive particles *so* and *oh* in launching new conversational topics. The result of the analysis shows that *so* is mainly used to preface other-attentive topics, that is, topics that are related to the other conversational partner.

There are also some studies which investigate the discourse marker *so* in second language acquisition/learning situation. Hays (1992), examines the usage of English discourse markers by Japanese university students. Following Schiffrin's (1987) model of discourse coherence for the analysis of his data, he concluded that Japanese second language learners of English acquired ideational markers such as *so*, *and*, and *or* earlier than markers on other planes such as *you know* and *well* which are related to dialects and can be acquired only through being exposed to the speech community.

In a different context, Anping (2002) investigates the use of *so* in written English of Chinese learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The study is motivated by the overuse of *so* by Chinese university students in their English writing. The author compares the Chinese corpus with native and non-native English corpus and with native Chinese corpus. It was observed that English speakers use *so* as an intra-sentential connector while Chinese learners use *so* as an inter-sentential connector. The study concludes that the inappropriate use of *so* in written English by Chinese EFL learners may be due to their unawareness of the difference between written and spoken English as well as to a negative transfer from Chinese (L1). Chinese students seem to use *so* in a similar way of its Chinese equivalent (*gum*).

Müller (2005) examined four English discourse markers (*so*, *well*, *like*, and *you know*) as used by German non-native speakers of English and American English native speakers. In her book *Discourse Markers in Native and Non-native English*

*Discourse*, she dedicates a chapter for *so* where she discussed its functional categories and also presented a quantitative analysis of *so*.

Müller's analysis of *so* as a discourse marker shows that she distinguishes between two levels that *so* works at: the textual level and the interactional level. On the textual level, *so* marks a result/consequence between two propositions, the first of which is a fact and the second is a result which is based on that fact. *So* may also mark the main idea in the discourse after a digression. Moreover, it can summarize a previously mentioned topic or reword a previous idea or give an example on what is being talked about. In addition to these functions of *so*, Müller argues that her data reveals two other textual functions of *so* which have not been mentioned before by other researchers: *so* as a sequential marker and *so* as a boundary marker. As for the sequential function of *so*, Müller claims the marker appeared when informants wanted to introduce (in their narrative) a new scene to their partners which is completely unrelated to the scene before the mentioning of *so* and which constitutes the next part of the narrative (2005:78-79). Functioning as a boundary marker, *so* was used by informants to start their narrative to their co-partner in the experiment designed for this study<sup>20</sup>. On the interactional level, *so* marks a speech act (a question, a request, and an opinion). It also prefaces an implied result. Finally, it marks the transition relevance places in conversation.

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<sup>20</sup> The data on which Müller's study rests is collected by showing informants a silent movie of Charlie Chaplin. One student is shown the first part of the movie while the second student is shown the whole movie. Both students were then asked to meet and the second student is asked to tell his/her partner what had happened in the second part that he/she did not watch (2005:34-35).

After this review of how *so* was analysed in previous research, I will now move on to see how the Syrian Arabic learners of English used this marker in their talk.

## 5.2 Functions of *so* in the current study

In this section the analysis of the discourse marker *so* will be presented as it appeared in the English discourse of the Syrian Arabic learners.

### 5.2.1 Marker of a result/consequence

*So* may<sup>21</sup> function as a marker of a result or consequence when it appears between a cause proposition and a result one. This function of *so* has been mentioned in most of the previous studies on this marker (Schiffrin 1987; Blakemore 1988; Fraser 1990, 1999a, 1999b; Anping 2002; Müller 2005). Fraser (1999b) provides examples of *so* when it works on the semantic level and says that it “signals the speaker’s belief that the state of affairs expressed in S2 follows from the state of affairs expressed in S1” (Fraser, 1999b: 407). Some of the examples he provides of this *so* are (his numbering):

(29)

c) He left early, so I didn’t have time to talk to him.

f) The water didn’t boil, so we can’t have tea.

The cause result relationship in the previous examples is a fact-based one where the reason in (S1) *he left early; the water didn’t boil* leads to the result in (S2) *I didn’t have time to talk to him; we can’t have tea* respectively. Schiffrin (1987), as mentioned above, also deals with *so* when it marks a cause result relationship between utterances.

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<sup>21</sup> We are saying here ‘may’ because one might use another marker like *consequently*, *therefore* etc or not use any marker since the propositional meaning is not affected by the presences of the marker.

In my data, this function of *so* is the most common function used by my informants. Almost all the speakers used *so* to mark a consequence at least once during their conversation. Example (21) below illustrates this kind of *so*. Prior to segment (1), the interviewer (speaker M) asked the interviewee (speaker D) about her English language background and whether or not she studied it as part of her undergraduate course. The answer to this question was not satisfactory to the interviewer who reiterated her question in segment (1).

(21)  
(English in Architecture faculty)

M	1	but I mean before when you were studying Architecture was there an English section?
D	2	er in our college?
M	3	mhm
D	4	no it was: (0.7) very: low advanced (1.9) English.
M	5	mm hmm.
D	6	<i>so</i> you have to improve your English alone.
M	7	mm hmm.

Speaker D states that due to the very low level of English language (reason) at the Architecture Faculty where she studied her undergraduate degree, one had to improve his or her English on his or her own (result). This cause result relationship is highlighted by *so* in segment (6).

Similarly, in extract (22) *so* expresses a resultative relationship between the state of affairs in segment (6) and the state of affairs in segment (7). After being asked if she watched English TV, speaker Ga said she did not watch any programme in particular. However she liked a programme about business which was shown at the times when she was at her work, therefore, she could not watch it. Here, *so*

marks (*I can't see it*) as a consequence of the programme being aired at the same time of speaker's Ga working hours.

(22)  
(Business programme)

M 1 Do you watch any English television program?  
 Ga 2 (1.7) I I watch but not special thing  
 3 (1.8) I don't er (1.5) [choose=  
 M 4 [mhm]  
 Ga 5 =program and (1.4) watch it.  
 6 sometimes if I have enough time there is er er  
 program  
 about business and administration I like to see it  
 but it is °on the times I be at my job°  
 7 (0.8) **so** I can't see it.

As in the above examples, the resultative function of *so* can be seen in two instances in extract (23) below. Earlier in the conversation speaker Ru mentioned that she had a sister who was living with her husband and daughters in England. Accordingly, one would expect the nieces to be bilinguals; being children for Arabic parents and living in England for a long time. However, speaker Ru told speaker M that her nieces' Arabic was not good compared to their English. She attributed this to the fact that they had been living in an English-speaking country for fifteen years which resulted in their English being better than their Arabic. *So* displays a cause result relationship between the proposition in line (6) and that in line (7).

(23)  
(Nieces and Nigerian friend)

M 1 so do you have English-speaking friends?  
 Ru 2 yeah.  
 M 3 and how often do you see them?  
 Ru 4 er my niece my nieces th they both speak er English  
 they don't speak Arabic (.) [both of them  
 M 5 [ah  
 Ru 6 er coz they've been there for now fourteen fifteen  
 years in England.  
 7 (1.0) **so** their English is better than: their  
 Arabic.

M 8 yeah I know this I know the story.  
*(both laugh softly)*  
M 9 and what about here do you have any English  
speaking friends here?  
Ru 10 here hmm, er one friend er she's Arabic but she was  
er er she she was living in(-) Nigeria  
M 11 mm hum=  
Ru 12 = and she has to study in American school when she  
came here she came er to university fo- the first  
time to Syria to study here in English literature  
13 er when I met er she didn't speak or write Arabic  
er good  
14 (0.7) **so** we spoke in English (1.2) and her English  
is American

In the same manner, *so* marks a resultative relationship in line (14). Speaker Ru was an Arabic-English bilingual. She had a Nigerian friend who could not speak or write Arabic well when they first met in Syria. The Nigerian friend was educated in English and went to American schools therefore she could communicate with speaker Ru only in English. Thus, we can see a resultative relationship between the Nigerian girl's lack of competence in Arabic (line 13) and the two girls having to speak in English (line 14). This relationship is marked with *so*.

Extract (24) is another example of *so* as a result marker. Consider:

(24)  
(Compact vs. Headway)

M 1 so what year are you in what level are you?  
Su 2 er Compact.  
M 3 mhm.  
Su 4 this is higher intermediate.  
M 5 yeah, and what book are you studying?  
Su 6 compact (0.5) the name of our book is compact.  
M 7 oh right!  
Su 8 I: have it here if you want:  
M 9 no it's ok=  
Su 10 =you know it.  
M 11 Do do you like it?  
Su 12 yeah I this is the most that I like it now.  
M 13 coz you were using Headway before.  
Su 14 yeah a Headway but er I think Headway is easier  
than Compact and  
15 (1.0) it's good it's nice I never minded  
it.  
16 (0.6) but Compact makes me interesting more in

language.  
M 17 mhm.  
Su 18 I can discover myself in English exactly where is  
my we-er weaks points and I improve it.  
19 (1.0) **so** I I feel interesting in it more than  
before.  
M 20 oh that's interesting  
Su 21 yeah that's very interesting.

In this example, speaker Su is answering the interviewer's questions about her English language course books. She gives in line (16) the reason of her preference of the '*Compact*' book, which she was using for the English course at the time of the interview, rather than the '*Headway*' book which she had previously used. After a brief comparison between the two books, speaker Su highlighted the advantages of the '*Compact*' book: first, it makes her more interested<sup>22</sup> in English and second it helps her to identify her weaknesses and improve them. The pronoun 'it' in "*so I I feel interesting in it more than before*" refers to the English language. The advantages mentioned above (in line 16 and 18) of the '*Compact*' book, were responsible facts for the result that speaker Su felt more '*interested*' in English than before. This result is prefaced by *so*.

Example (25) contains two occurrences of *so* as a marker of consequence. In line (2) speaker Mu mentioned that he was good in the basic subjects (chemistry, physics, etc) at the last grade of high school; therefore he got high marks in his exams (line 3). This led speaker Mu's father to decide that he study medicine. Note that the result in line (3) (*my marks were high*) became the reason for the result in line (4) (*my father decided that I should study medicine*).

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<sup>22</sup> It is clear from the context of this extract that speaker Su meant to say *interested* instead of *interesting*.

(25)  
(Electrical engineering)

- M 1 and what (.) do you like about electrical  
engineering?
- Mu 2 Well er I don't know but I was very good in (0.9)  
physics, chemistry (1.4) arithmetic (or something)  
3 (1.1)er **so** when I: had my baccalaureate  
certificate my marks were (1.2) high  
4 (1.2) **so** my father decided that I should study  
medicine  
5 (1.4)I don't know why (*laughs*)bu but I like (1.1)  
physics.

Schiffrin (1987), Blakemore (1988,1992) and Müller (2005) argue that when *so* functions as a resultative marker, it is syntactically and semantically optional. In other words, it does not create this resultative relationship between the two propositions it links, rather it selects and displays a relationship from “whatever potential meanings are provided through the content of talk” (Schiffrin 1987: 318). It is clear from the above examples that *so* indeed displays an already existing cause-result relationship between the propositions before and after it rather than creating it. In all these examples *so* can be omitted and the cause-result relationship would still hold between the propositions before and after it. What it does then is to facilitate the hearer's task to select this resultative relationship.

### 5.2.2 Marker of inferences

Schiffrin suggests that *so* can sometimes select and display an inferential meaning of the utterance it prefaces (1987: 205). Inferences are conclusions that have been arrived at through using our culturally world knowledge. Thus, to infer something we need to have background information about that thing. In the following example, *so* marks speaker's Mu inference ‘the lady is from India or

Pakistan' which he arrived at with the help of several pieces of information or warrants, like: 'being a Muslim', 'having a dark skin', 'and living in England'.

The extract illustrates:

- (26)  
(Origin of the English teacher)
- M 1 and where is she from originally?  
Mu 2 ah (2.0) well she's Muslim she's: she wears  
al-hijab so she's not (1.0) er she's she has a dark  
skin **so** I think India Pakistan something like this.  
M 3 mm hmm. yeah there's quite (a lot of) Pakistani  
[in England]  
Mu 4 [I think so].

The background information of this example is the following: earlier in the conversation speaker M had asked speaker Mu if he had English speaking contacts. Speaker Mu informed speaker M that he had participated in organizing a conference about languages at the language Institute (ESP) where the interview took place, and that during that period of time he had met people from different foreign countries. After that, he started to list the names of the people he had met at the conference. One of those people was a lady called Imtiyaz who, as described by speaker Mu, was an English teacher and lived in London. When asked by speaker M about the origin of that lady (segment 1), speaker Mu started a process of inferring. He did not have exact knowledge about her origin. He only had bits and pieces of information that he used to construct his inference about her origin. These pieces of information are based on his world knowledge which enables him to safely assume that a woman with al-hijab (a head scarf usually worn by Muslim women) is a Muslim. Furthermore, there are quite a lot of Asians living in England and knowing that Asians are usually dark-skinned and a lot of them are Muslims, he infers that she is an Indian or Pakistani. This inference is further supported by speaker's M response in segment 3. Note that speaker Mu

was about to complete the process of inferring the origin of the lady after the segment “*she wears al-hijab*”. *So* appears here but is followed by a negative incomplete utterance. One might think that speaker Mu was about to conclude that the lady was not British based on the two pieces of evidence that she was Muslim and that she wore Al-hijab. However, he hesitated and possibly thought it was not a strong argument as a woman can be a Muslim and a British citizen at the same time. He then added one more proof of what origin he thought the woman had (the woman is Indian or Pakistani) which made his inference more authentic and that was the colour of the woman’s skin. Now the several pieces of evidence put together (she lives in London, she is a Muslim, she wears Al-hijab, she has a dark skin) form the inference that the lady is Asian, possibly from India or Pakistan. This inference is marked by *so*.

### **5.2.3 Marker of restating a main idea/ opinion/summarizing**

Under this category *so* functions as a marker that speakers employ to restate an opinion or main idea that they have mentioned before. After stating an opinion, speakers sometimes give an example to support this opinion, explain in more details what they have meant by what they have said, and then they go back to restate this same opinion. Their return to their main idea or opinion is marked by the marker *so*. Schiffrin (1987) discusses this function of *so* as a marker of returning to the main idea of discourse after inserting a narrative as a warrant to this idea (Schiffrin, 1987: 195). Müller (2005) also mentions this function of *so* in her treatment of the marker, however, under two different labels: *so* as a main idea marker and *so* as a marker of summary. Müller claims that no occurrences of *so* as a summary marker have been identified in Schiffrin’s. However, I will argue that

Schiffirin actually deals with *so* as a summary marker but under a different name (returning to the main point) as mentioned above. Müller herself admits that “summarizing means that an idea originally expressed in more than one intonation unit is summarized in one intonation unit” (Müller: 2005: 78). In fact there is an overlapping between ‘summarizing’ and ‘returning to a main idea/point/opinion’ as summarizing would require returning to a previously mentioned idea/point/opinion in order to summarize it. It is clear in the following example from Müller’s data (her transcription and numbering) that in fact *so* not only summarizes the previous discourse but also it restates a previous point:

(27)

```
51    ... so then he continues eating <@beans@>,
52    <@and @> um,
53    so obviously he is eating them with his knife.
54    <SV he just keeps them with his knife and puts &
55    & them in his mouth instead of using his &
55a   & fork or his spoon SV>,
56    (H) so he keeps u=m .. eating
```

(Müller, 2005: 76-77)

The following example (relationship with parents) shows how *so* (in line 16) can be used as a marker of summary and restating a previously mentioned opinion. Prior to this example the speakers (M and Ru) were talking about the parent-child relationship in Syria. Speaker Ru mentioned that she had a strong, trusting, and friends-like relationship with her mother. This made speaker M ask if Ru’s friends had relationships with their mothers similar to the one she had with her mother. Speaker Ru’s opinion and answer were that not everyone of her friends had a relationship to their mothers like the one she had with her mother. Therefore, mother-child relationship is different from one person to another. This answer appeared in lines (6) and (8) and was the main opinion and idea of speaker Ru on

relationships with parents. What followed in lines (9-13) was indeed a series of examples about speaker's Ru friends and their relationship to their parents, which she provided as supporting evidence to her previously stated opinion in lines (6) and (8). After stating an opinion and supporting it with examples from her friends' experiences with their parents, speaker Ru repeated her opinion on the issue (children-parents relationship) in line (16) where *so* appeared to mark the summary and restatement of a previously mentioned idea.

(28)

(Relationship with parents)

M	1	so I mean (but) looking at your friends do you notice (0.6)generally speaking if they have similar relationship to their mothers
	2	(0.8) Is it very different?
	3	GGenerally?
Ru	4	er (0.9) er generally er my friends as for my friends?
M	5	hmm.
Ru	6	er everyone have a different::
M	7	hmm.
Ru	8	(0.8) different thing.
	9	(0.6) My be-er my friend my best friend: who came from Nigeria
	10	(0.8) er she she with her family she's like like American you know she goes she goes in (-) she travels she With her brother or with her friends it doesn't matter with them
	11	but another friend I hav:e of the group
	12	er she can't go and to many places, her parents won't let her go (.) for example
	13	(0.7) but she only come to the university or to a er the nearest restaurant she can come to she can't go to (0.6)er the restaurant we <u>usually go</u> (.) to (.) er so far.
M	14	hmm.
Ru	15	yeah.
	16	<b>so</b> it's different from one to another.
M	17	hmm interesting.

Example (29) is another instance of *so* marking a summary and a return to a previous position in discourse. The extract is a question-answer adjacency pair. Speaker D answers the question posed to her by the interviewer fulfills the task

given to her by the interviewer by answering (learners of English should not make a distance with the language and should keep in contact with the language) the question is answered immediately in the first part of segment (2). Following this, speaker D gave suggestions and recommendations to new learners of English (read, listen, and communicate with people) about how they can improve their English language. Finally, in segment (4) she returned to the point at which she began her advice in segment (2). She marked this return by *so*.

(29)  
(Don't stop learning English)

M	1	and what would you what would be your advice to a new learner?
D	2	er (1.2)er I advice them to: (0.9) er not to: (1.0) make er distance when they learning English always learn English not to stop,
	3	(0.6)er read listen er communicate with people if if they can.
	4	(0.6) <b>so</b> don't stop learning English.
M	5	mm hmm.

In extract (30) we can observe another instance of *so* marking a return to the main topic under discussion (segment 25). In this example, speaker Su was comparing the education system in Syria to that in Kuwait (where she used to live) with a particular reference to English language teaching in Kuwait. The deictic word (*here*) in line (7) refers to Syria where the speaker lived at the time of the interview, and the deictic word (*it*) refers to English Language teaching. The structure of this piece of discourse matches that described by Schiffrin (1987) as a model of an explanatory structure where *so* marks main levels and *because* marks subordinate levels. Segment (7) represented a main position of the speaker, which was her opinion that (English language teaching in Kuwait was better than in Syria). This position was supported by the reason (English education there is

stronger) in segment (9) which is marked with *because* and a supporting example (they teach pronunciation from cassettes) for that reason is presented in (11). Speaker Su used then *because* in line (13) to embed a reason for why they relied on cassettes in teaching English in Kuwait (a reason for the reason in 11). Because teachers were usually Arabic and their English pronunciation would be affected by their Arabic accent (lines 13 and 15), depending on the cassettes made students' pronunciation better. After the digression from this opinion (lines 20-24), speaker Su returns in line (25) to the main point that learning English pronunciation from the cassettes is better than learning it from a teacher who is not a native speaker of English.

(30)

**(Learning from a teacher vs. a cassette)**

M	1	and have you ever travelled abroad to study English?
Su	2	to study English no but I have-
	3	yes I lived in Kuwait for fifteen years
M	4	mm
Su	5	since I born I lived there and <u>THERE</u> I study English from my first class
M	6	mm.
Su	7	and it was very good (0.8) compa:re with here.
M	8	mm.
Su	9	because education there especially about English (0.7) is more stronger than here.
M	10	mm.
Su	11	they gave us cassettes with with our books (0.8) and you the learn propa- pronunciation from the cassette and not form the teacher
M	12	mm
Su	13	because the teacher is an Arabic teacher
M	14	mm.
Su	15	so each teacher will give you a different pronun- pronunciation er in a hmm (1.1) according he::r (0.8) nationality or something like this
Su	16	so
M	17	mm
	18	we depend on the cassettes and this is make our pronunciation better
M	19	mm
Su	20	and the cassettes and our course are from Oxford
	21	(1.6)
M	22	they are from what sorry?
Su	23	er Oxford university
M	24	aha

Su 25 **so** I: (0.8) I think it's better than to learn it  
 from a teacher (0.7) not from an er England (0.8)  
 er (-) or °something like that°.  
 M 26 yeah yeah.

#### 5.2.4 *So* as a completed idea /transition relevance place marker

During a verbal interaction, speaker might change allocation of responsibilities at some point and shift responsibilities to hearer creating a transition in the participation system. *So* can function as a device that helps in “the organization of transitions in participation framework” (Schiffrin, 1987: 217). Schiffrin argues that when *so* appears at a transition relevance place it acts as a “turn-transition device which marks a speaker’s readiness to relinquish a turn” (1987:218) because it signals the end of the turn of a speaker and at the same time his or her willingness to turn the floor over to another conversant. *So* also marks the completion of an adjacency pair as in answering a question. In such cases it works as a marker that both signals a completion of a conversational task and a readiness to pass on the floor to the other speaker. Since the data of the current study consists solely of interviews which consist basically of a series of adjacency pairs of the question-answer type, it is not surprising to find many instances of *so* as a marker of turn transition.

Although *so* may appear at the end of the speaker’s contribution signalling a possible transition of turns, other speakers might not take up the floor from current speaker. In such a case current speaker may self-select him or herself for another turn of talk. Example (31) below illustrates:

(31)  
(Brothers)

- Mz 1 and the other he: er didn't finished his studying  
he left the school at secondary school(0.6) cant  
take it the: gra- couldn't graduate  
2 (1.7)when you sometimes er have bad company you (-)  
like that  
M 3 mhm mhm  
Mz 4 **so** he he spent one year two years three years so my  
father come come come to work (*laughs*) **so**  
(0.9)  
Mz 5 now he has have been: living there he has been  
living there for eleven eleventh years, eleven  
year  
M 6 hmm hum  
Mz 7 and gather some money ok better than the people  
M 8 hmm  
Mz 9 ok: when I graduated previous year they told me ok  
come and work with us ok I'd like to er to continue  
my study all my (1.3) ex-friends they were  
remarkable people.  
10 five years five years, £they (completed) their£  
studying they done Majesteer some of them travel  
abroad to: France (0.8) or (1.0) I guess two of  
them er studying now in Japan (0.6) **so**  
M 11 hmm

Prior to this example speaker Ma was describing his eldest brother and in this extract (line 1) he was talking about his second brother who could not finish his studies after trying for a few years. *So* appeared in line (4) where it marked a consequence. When speaker's Ma brother did not succeed in his studies (cause) his father asked him to start working (consequence). In the same line speaker Ma used *so* at the end of his turn signalling the completion of his talk. *So* was followed by a (0.9) second pause during which the interviewer did not take the floor, so speaker Ma selected himself for the next turn. But *so* at the end of line (10) marked an end of turn as speaker M took over the floor in line (11).

In the same manner, example (32) shows how *so* marks a completion of a turn and the readiness of the speaker to pass over the floor to the next speaker. However, in this case the next speaker took up the floor after a pause of (1.1) second.

(32)  
(Arabic programmes)

M 1 and do you watch English programs or:=  
Mz 2 =of course Arabic programs is (2.2) the:: fifteen  
century I guess (-) (laughs) **so**.  
3 (1.1)  
M 4 and what sort of English programs do u watch?

In line (2), speaker Ma accomplished a conversational task, i.e. answering the question posed by the interviewer. The completion of his turn is marked by uttering *so* with a falling intonation followed by a pause. During this pause the floor was open to both conversants who equally had the right to take the next turn.

Examples (33) and (34) are similar cases of *so* indicating the end of one's contribution. In extract (33), speaker Ma answered the question posed by his interviewer and ended his answer with *so* which was followed by a long pause of (2.3) second. It seems that at that point speaker Ma did not wish to add to his answer. Speaker M realized this and took the floor after the pause, requesting speaker Ma to elaborate on his previous answer.

(33)  
(Living in Japan)

M 1 so if you chose to settle in another country which  
country would it be?  
Mz 2 Japan because there is no Arabian people there (2.2)  
**so**  
3 (2.3)  
M 4 £but why£?

In (34), the same thing happened. Speaker D was asked about her future plans and she mentioned that she did not like to think about the future. Her answer appeared in lines (2) and (4) where she finished her answer with *so* and a pause. After this, speaker M selected herself for the next turn and moved to ask another question.

(34)  
(Future plans)

D	1	you know eh we can't er
	2	for me I don't like to think for eh future, I like to live the moment
M	3	mhm
D	4	then I decided what to do, maybe the circumstances will be against me or I don't know (0.9) <b>so</b> . (1.9)
M	5	so what's your plan at the moment?

Schiffrin (1987) and Müller (2005) argue that in some cases *so* does not only indicate a possible transition relevance place, but it also conveys an implied result meaning. In example (35), *so* does not have an implied result meaning but it has an implication. Speaker Ag was talking about the meetings he used to have with some friends to practise their English. When asked by speaker M if they were committed to speaking in English all the time, speaker Ag confirms that they did because the meetings were not taking place that often so there was no place for being lenient with those who were not serious. *So* signals this implication and an end to a turn in line (11). There was a pause of a (1.8) seconds during which speaker M might had been giving speaker Ag the chance to add to his response. When speaker Ag did not, she picked up the turn and moved on to the next question.

(35)

(Friends' meeting to practice English)

M 1 and everyone stay speaking in English they don't  
2 start speaking Arabic after ten minutes.  
Ag 3 no we: we make a very: er difficult: condition when  
anyone of er of us speak a word in in Arabic they  
er (1.0) we will let let him: er [(-)  
M 4 [you kick him out.  
Ag 5 no no.  
M 6 you throw him out.  
Ag 7 yes yes no we because: we can't er we can't make a  
fun in this topic  
8 (1.1) coz one: monthly it's er  
M 9 (1.7)  
M 10 it's quite little.  
Ag 11 yes **so**.  
12 (1.8)  
M 13 ok. †and when did you start learning English?

### 5.2.5 Transitional *so*

Similar to transitional *fa*, in my data there were instances where *so* appeared to mark transitions in discourse. Under this category, *so* precedes sentences that are not in a direct relation with the previous discourse (a result, summary etc) but they are seen as continuation of it. Müller (2005) discussed some instances of *so* in her data when her informants used it to introduce a new scene in their narrative of the silent movie. In this regard, *so* is a sequential marker that introduces a discourse unit that is completely unrelated to what have been mentioned before. However, as I mentioned above transitional *so* here introduces a sentence which is not entirely unrelated to what have been said before. Consider the following example:

(36)

(English speaking friends)

M 1 how do you..  
2 so do your family speak English?  
Ag 3 no.  
M 4 and do any of your friends speak English?  
Ag 5 yes a lot I have a lot of friends that's: speak  
English

6 (1.0) at work (0.4) here the university and: my  
 friend (0.6) in my town (0.9) not: speak fluently  
 English (0.7) but they get to use er English for er  
 (1.6) something like: er studying like er program  
 of computer  
 7 (1.8) **so** I I learn something I I learn something  
 and sometimes we: we meet (0.6) and discuss er a  
 topic in English=  
 M 8 = oh that's good!

In this extract, speaker M is asking speaker Ag if he has friends who speak English. Speaker Ag complies with the query of speaker M and provides a detailed answer; he has friends at work, in the university and in his home town who all speak English. He also adds that the level of their English is not very high (*not speak fluently English*) but they use it in their study. After completing his description of his friends' English background, speaker Ag moves to a slightly different topic than that he was talking about (the English of his friends). The new topic (that he learns something new and then meets with his friends to discuss) is prefaced by *so*. Unlike the other discussed functions of *so*, this *so* does not relate two ideas as a cause and result, main idea versus subordinate, or signalling end of speaker's contribution. Rather, it introduces a sentence that bears a new idea. The speaker resumes talking after an idea has been completed and starts a new idea. The new idea, however, is not directly related to the idea preceding it but at the same time it is motivated by it i.e. speaker Ag talks about learning something new in English and meeting with his friends to discuss a topic because he was talking about his friends and about speaking in English. I propose that this transition function of *so* has been transferred by the learners from the Arabic *fa*. There is no mentioning of such a function of *so* in the literature.

(37)  
(UN voluntary courses)

M 1 so what do you think are your particular strengths  
or weaknesses in English?  
Mz 2 in fact here we face one problem (.) speaking.  
3 (1.1) grammar we can study from books er writing  
you need tutors or private teacher to (0.7)to (-)  
you  
4 but speaking some people always have problem they  
don't have people foreigners to speak with them.  
5 but as for me I attend some courses in UNRWA  
(as) volunteer.  
M 6 where?  
Mz 7 er UNRWA.  
(1.2)  
Mz 8 ↑United Nations.  
M 9 ah ah  
Mz 10 we have many centres here especially in my area,  
Yarmouk Mukhayyam El-Yarmouk  
M 11 mm hmm  
Mz 12 the- all- the Majority of the people Palestinian  
M 13 mm hmm  
Mz 14 **so** there is a lot of centres here for UNRWA (.) I  
attended as volunteer I attend two course::s (0.8)  
the first one for: down syndrome?  
M 15 mm hmm  
Mz 16 **so** the second one for dealing with the: deaf and  
blind.  
M 17 mm hmm  
Mz 18 er you know we always have foner- foreigners there  
[I] speak with them some of them make a courses for  
M 19 [mm hmm]  
Mz 20 for the others **so** I always have (.) foreigners  
M 21 that's right.

Prior to the extract above, speaker M had asked speaker Mz about his strengths and weaknesses in English. Speaker Mz identified then 'grammar' as a good skill he had and 'speaking' as a potential weakness for all learners of English since not all of them would have the opportunity to speak to foreigners to improve their speaking. However, this was not a problem for him because he attended some courses as a volunteer in the UNRWA and got to know a lot of foreigners and speak to them. There are three occurrences of *so* in this example: in line 14 line 16, and line 20.

*So* in line (14) functions as a marker of a reason-result relationship between the segment ‘*the majority of the people Palestinian*’ and the segment ‘*there is a lot of centres here for UNRWA*’. The deictic *here* in line (14) refers to Mukhyyam El-Yarmouk (a Palestinian refugees’ camp in Damascus) where Mz lived. The fact that UNRWA<sup>23</sup> is an organization for helping Palestinian refugees makes it no surprise to find a lot of its centres in El-Yarmouk camp.

In line (20), *so* represents an example of this marker when it prefaces a summary of a narrative. After the digression from the main line of the story that was presented earlier in the conversation (*some people always have problem they don’t have people- foreigners to speak with them*), speaker Mz comes back to the point he wanted to make about himself that he ‘*always have foreigners*’ to whom he could speak and improve his English. This return to the story’s main line and summary is marked by *so*.

Finally, the *so* in line (16) is in particular an interesting one. Speaker Mz is listing the courses he attended in UNRWA in lines (14) and (16). The first course was about ‘*down syndrome*’ and the second was about ‘*dealing with the deaf and blind*<sup>24</sup>’. The second item of the list, so to speak, is prefaced by *so* which seems to be out of place.

*So* as mentioned before has a lot of functions in discourse. It could be a marker of: a result; a main idea; a summary, boundary marker; marker of potential TRP among other functions. However, *so* in line (16) does not seem to be performing

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<sup>23</sup> UNRWA is the abbreviation for: United Nations Relief and Works Agency which is a human agency that provides education, health and social services to the Palestinian refugees living in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

<sup>24</sup> The informants pronounced deaf and blind as: ‘deef and blinded’. However, it is clear that he meant deaf and blind.

any of those functions. Unlike *so* in line (14) when it marks a causal relationship between the utterance preceding it and the one following it, there is no such cause-result between the proposition in line (14) and that in line (16), therefore the use of *so* is not appropriate in line (16). *And* and *but* are more possible candidates here. It is used here by speaker Ma to indicate a transition to the subsequent piece of his discourse and at the same time a continuation of his discourse. This function is similar to that of Arabic transitional *fa*.

In what follows I present more examples of this function of *so* in my corpus. Lets see example (38) below.

(38)  
(Japanese courses)

- M 1 how how you manage to find the time... you work you  
have a full-time job I mean how do you manage to  
find the time to study with your full-time job?
- Mz 2 you can't imagine now I am facing this problem now  
because in my manager in the ministry now  
(0.7) ok you are you aren't allowed to attend the  
course of Diploma, you aren't allowed to (0.7) go  
for: (0.5) Japanese language.  
3 (*sighs*) our ti/work time from eight o'clock to  
three:: thi:rty.  
4 (0.4) **so** my Japanese course start at three o'clock  
I need about half hou-half an hour to reach here  
the centre.  
5 so everything is bad now.

This Example displays another instance of *so* when it marks a transition in discourse. Speaker M was inquiring how speaker Ma could manage to do English language courses and have a full time job at the same time. Speaker Ma explained to her that it was very difficult for him especially with a strict boss who was not understanding of his or her employees' circumstances. The difficulty arose from the fact that speaker's Ma work time was from eight in the morning till three thirty in the afternoon while his Japanese course started at three in the afternoon.

There is definitely no resultative relationship between line (3) and line (4). Speaker Ma just moves to the next piece in his talk. The same happens in extract (39) below:

(39)  
(Pastor)

M	1	and apart from Dubai have you travelled anywhere else (.)and spoken English?
Rn	2	hmm yes er
	3	I AM a pastor
M	4	mhm
Rn	5	<b>so:</b> we go to many countries and we speak there and we attend conferences (0.5) so we need to talk with foreigner.
M	6	mhm
Rn	7	people, that's why I went to Lebanon, to Malta, er Egypt, Jordan.
	8	and there is er English speakers come to us
M	9	mm hmm
Rn	10	to our church and sometimes I am the one who translate so I have to talk to them that's why I am studying [actually.
M	11	[ oh right interesting yeah.

The extract is another example where *so* is being used by Syrian Arabic learners of English as a marker of transition. There is no direct relationship between being a pastor (segment 2) and between travelling to many countries (segment 4). Pastors do not have to, necessarily, travel to many countries. Therefore, *so* in line (4) cannot be a marker of a cause result relationship. It does not also mark a summary of a previous discourse, main idea, a request or a question. What is said before *so* and what is mentioned after it are not directly. It seems that speaker Rn moves in her discourse in line (4) with a proposition that has no connection with that in line (2).

In the example below, *so* is used by speaker Su as a transition marker three times as we will see.

(40)  
(Cracked building)

M 1 have you done any of the work on the old houses?  
Su 2 on the old houses?  
M 3 er do you mean build it or drop it or  
M 4 building the:m or restoring the::m or:  
Su 5 yeah let me=  
M 6 =or even small project.  
Su 7 ok.  
8 er in Muhafazet Damascus in my work in the morning  
(0.9) er my: (1.2) my er what do we call this(3.0)  
9 (laughs) I want to explain it for you the place  
which I work in (0.5) ↑my group er are responsible  
about  
10 (1.4) which is some er some pers/anyone have a  
problem in his structure er he send to us his:  
(0.7) copy (1.2)ok?  
11 **so** he says that I have a crack on my building I am  
afraid [is it dangerous or not.  
M 12 [mhm]  
M 13 [and is it] only people who rent them or people who  
own them?  
Su 14 [so]  
15 um I don't know this  
M 16 who who send you the [paper  
Su 17 [people anyone=  
M 18 = people who own their house=  
Su 19 =yeah who own [the house] or who work in it  
M 20 [and not rent them]  
M 21 aha  
Su 22 both of them.  
M 23 Yeah.  
Su 24 er **so** sometimes er some complements<sup>25</sup> come to us  
from (0.6) the old houses this is old Damascus.  
25 **so** (0.8) a group of us go to this place take a look  
of it (0.9) er check it.  
M 26 mhm.  
Su 27 er by an engineering eye (0.9) what is case is this  
danger is it not is it (0.7)um (0.7) something not  
dangerous at all.  
28 (1.0) **so** sometimes we get pictures or make some  
experience (0.9) to to know er exactly what is  
(0.7) the case and then we make a: report about the  
case.

Speaker Su works as an architecture drafting assistant in Muhafazet Damascus<sup>26</sup>

which is responsible for the architecture planning, construction, and maintenance

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<sup>25</sup> It is most likely that the informant meant to say the word 'complaints' as we can understand from the context. It might be that she either pronounced it wrongly or just mixed it with the word 'complement'.

projects in the city. In the example above she is explaining to the interviewer the nature of her job. She works in a group responsible for the maintenance of buildings in Damascus. In line (10) she starts describing her work; anyone can send a copy of his or her plans when there is a problem with the structure. At the end of this segment she uses *ok* with a rising intonation as a mean to check on her hearer's reception of information and as an indicator of finishing that segment. Then, in line (11) speaker Su describes the content of the request sent by the person who has a problem in his or her structure (the person who sends a copy of the plans seeks a professional opinion about a crack in his or her building and asks how dangerous it is) marked by *so*.

*So* here works as an indicator of moving to the next point in the description. The same happens in line (24), *so* marks the moving to a new point in speaker Su's narrative, that is to the complaints she receives in her work from the owners of old houses in Damascus. *So* appears again in line (25) and in line (28) performing the same function: moving with discourse by introducing new pieces of information. In all the instances of *so*, what comes before it and what follows it are not in a direct relationship.

Example (borrowing books) below shows yet another instance of *so* being used as a marker of transition in discourse by the learners.

(41)  
(Borrowing books)

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<sup>26</sup> The Arabic word Muhafazaa means 'governorate'. In this context the speaker uses the word Muhafazaa to refer to a governmental body which is responsible for managing the affairs of Damascus city.

M 1 what do you think of the English books that you  
studied or you're studying now?

Mz 2 now I haven't study anything I always gathering the  
books ok I'll read them tomorrow but in fact I  
don't do anything.

3 (1.2) I alwa- I have many friends who study in the  
English lai: literatures.

4 (0.9) I always meet with the:m all of them study  
about Shakespe:are Hamlet something like tha:t  
(it's ok) it's old langu:age if you read it you  
can't understand [it you need

M 5 [like fusha

Mz 6 (*laughs*) fyou need interpreter to read itf (*laughs*)  
7 **so** sometimes I start er started to borrow from  
this: library here

M 8 mm hmm

Mz 9 stories books or stories stages stage one stage two  
stage three some of them have the cassette yeah  
°it's amazing°

The interviewer is asking speaker Mz's opinion about the books he was using for his English courses. Speaker Mz misunderstood her question and thought she was asking him about studying English books in general, hence his reply in line (2) in which he states that he collects books, presumably from a library, but never has the chance to study them. After this, he moves on to start a small narrative about his friends who study old English in their English literature degree. Having finished the narrative, speaker Mz makes a transition in his discourse in line (7) which is marked with *so*. In other words, his discourse moves from the story about his friends to a new piece of information: that he started borrowing books from the library of the Language Institute where he was studying at the time of the interview.

Using *so* to move in discourse to a new point can also be seen in the following example.

(42)  
(Work in Muhafazet Damascus)

M 1 So is it a very big company that you're working in?  
 Su 2 um in fact I work with er (0.9) Muhafazet Damascus  
 3 (0.8)  
 M 4 mm hmm.  
 Su 5 in the morning.  
 6 and in the evening yes I work in er office in an  
 office.  
 M 7 mm hmm.  
 S 8 **so** in er in Muhafazet Damascus I have er you can  
 say (1.5)not very wide work (1.2) because this is  
 the nature of my work.  
 9 but in the office yes I have very va:rious kind of  
 work which company and I have to work all of it.  
 M 10 mm hmm =  
 Su 11 =**so** this is make it (0.5) wide (0.7) wider.

Again, in this example we can see *so* behaving as a marker of transition. After mentioning her two jobs, speaker Su moves on in segment (8) to describe the nature of her morning job. The transition from the mentioning of the two jobs (lines 2, 5, 6) to the detailed description of the morning job is marked by *so*.

The final example under this functional category of *so* is example (43) below.

(43)  
(Child-parent relationship)

M 1 and one last question what do you think of the  
 child-parent relationship in Syria today?  
 (2.1)  
 Rn 2 ah (1.5) I'm teaching about that too.  
 M 3 mm hmm  
 Rn 4 er actually I can't say (0.7) it's good but I feel  
 it's better than before  
 M 5 [hmm  
 Rn 6 [little bit better(.) they begin er to beg-yaʕni  
 they begin to have open mind  
 7 (0.8) and: to TRY to deal with children better than  
 before  
 8 but up till now they are not (dealing) the right  
 way they are not giving the child er his: right er  
 (0.6) freedom in the right way not in the wrong way

M 9 hmm  
Rn 10 er they don't let him have his er own decision or  
at least to share (1.2) with his (parents)  
to have his own idea his own decision at least in  
how to wear in how to: how to think what does he  
want (.) they don't let him talk.  
11 there's a big problem in Syria  
M 12 hmm  
Rn 13 they don't let the child talk to express his  
feelings (1.4)orders.  
M 14 hmm  
Rn 15 **so:** now yaʕni it's one of my dream that we could  
make something for parents for people to teach them  
how to deal with children  
M 16 hmm  
Rn 17 yeah it's very encouraging actually

In the example under examination, speaker Rn is giving her personal opinion about the child-parent relationship in Syria. She believes that this relationship is better at the present than it used to be in the past (segments 4, 6, and 7). However, she acknowledges that there are still many problems in the way Syrian parents treat their kids and this is represented in lines (10, 11, and 13). In line (15) she moves from giving an opinion to expressing a personal wish, and this transition in her discourse is marked with *so*. As in the examples above (36-42) *so* here marks a transition in discourse.

Before moving to the concluding remarks of this chapter, I will present below some example of *so* when it is used as non-discourse marker to show all the functions of the item as it occurred in the data.

### 5.3 *So* as a non-discourse marker

There were instances where *so* appeared in the corpus as a non-discourse marker. In these cases, contrary to the cases in which *so* works as a discourse marker, the removal of *so* affects the grammaticality and the semantic meaning of the sentence in which it appears. For example, there were cases where *so* was used as

an adverb of extent or degree which is a widely agreed on function of *so* in English (see 4.3). Consider example (44) below where *so* is an adverb in lines (1 and 3):

(44)

Mz	1	ok I am lazy student in my faculty so I spent eleven year it takes usually five years but I spent eleven years I was <b>so</b> lazy
M	2	( <i>laughs</i> )
Mz	3	<b>so</b> lazy <b>so</b> naughty

Sometimes the learners used *so* as a substitute for a receding clause (Webster's 1997) as it is shown in example (45) below where *so* in line (2) substitutes for the whole question in segment (1):

(45)

M	1	and what about your parents do they speak English?
Mu	2	I don't think <b>so</b> , my father er learnt French I think.

In some other cases, *so* appeared in fixed expressions in English like in (46)

below:

(46)

GS	you should listen to radio you should watch TV and <b>so</b> on.
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#### 5.4 Discussion and Concluding remarks

In the previous sections, I have presented the analysis of instances of the discourse marker *so* which I found in the data of the Syria Arabic learners of English in Damascus. The examples show that these learners employ the marker *so* for a variety of functions.

Mainly, *so* was used at the textual level marking a particular relationship between the segment which contains it and the prior discourse: it marks an utterance as a result of previously mentioned discourse. It also was used to mark an inference which can be deduced from pieces of previous discourse. Sometimes *so* functions as a marker of restating and/or summarising a previously mentioned idea or opinion. Moreover, *so* was used by the learners in this study in a quite the same way as the Arabic marker *fa* which is marking transitions in discourse. Rather than considering the cases where *so* was used as a marker of transitions as ‘deviations’ from its uses in the target language (English), I view them as creative instances where the learners use whatever they have at their disposal. In this sense, learners are bilinguals who exploit the linguistic repertoire at their disposal to achieve coherence in their discourse. In fact, resorting to L1 as an interlanguage strategy has been reported in previous studies. Hays (1992) argues that Japanese learners of English use the Japanese particular *n* in their English conversation as a marker of approval of information reception. While in Hays’s case it was the form and the function of *n* that was transferred from Japanese to English, in the current study it was only the function of the marker *fa* that has been replicated in the English discourse with the form *so*.

On the interpersonal level, *so* was used to highlight that an idea has been completed, to mark a potential transition relevance place and finally to mark transitions in discourse.

Finally, *so* appeared in some contexts where it is considered to have no-discourse marker functions, since it cannot be omitted without affecting the grammaticality of the sentence as well as its meaning.

The next chapter will be devoted to the second discourse marker to be investigated in this study, the marker *you know*.

## Chapter 6

### *You know* in the discourse of Syrian Arabic English learners

#### 6.0 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the marker *so* and its functions in the discourse of Syrian learners of English. In this chapter the focus will be on the English discourse marker *you know* as used by the same learners. In the first part of the chapter I will review the most important studies which focused on *you know* in English, while the second part will present the analysis of the examples that contain the English marker *you know* as it appeared in the Syrian students' discourse.

#### 6.1 *You know* in the literature

The discourse marker *you know* has received considerable attention in the literature on discourse markers (Crystal and Davy 1975; 1981, Östman 1981, Schourup 1985, Holmes 1986; 1990, Schiffrin 1987, Erman 1987, Jucker and Ziv 1997, Müller 2005) and like other discourse markers has been given different names by different scholars as we will see below.

Based on the linguistic analysis of informal English conversations, Crystal and Davy (1975) concluded that *you know* belonged to a class of connecting phrases that have 'additional stylistic function'. The primary role of these phrases is to express the speaker's attitude to his or her hearer or to signal the informality of the

conversation. This is why Crystal and Davy call them ‘softening connectives’ or ‘softeners’ (1975: 91-92). The functions of *you know* are classified by Crystal and Davy according to the intonation used in uttering it as well as its position in the sentence. Sentence-initial *you know* uttered with a rising intonation maybe followed by a pause to mark the speaker’s wish to gain some time for thinking, or maybe uttered without a pause indicating the speaker’s wish to attract his hearer’s attention or to politely softens what follows avoiding imposing it on his or her hearer (1975: 93). In a later paper, Crystal claimed that when *you know* occurs in the middle of a sentence it is used to clarify what has been said earlier, while at end of a sentence it is used as a tag question to check on the hearer’s understanding (1988: 47).

Within a system of moves which she developed, Goldberg (1980) discussed the role of *you know* in relations to these moves. As the name suggests, the system consists of moves which are: introducing or opening moves where speakers introduce new referents; holding moves where speakers drop some referents but no new ones can be added; progressive holding moves where speakers use old referents as well as adding new ones; and finally re-introducing moves where speakers re-introduce referents from prior locution. Goldberg’s analysis revealed that *you know* appeared with all types of moves with different percentage. The most frequent use of *you know* (61%) was associated with the introducing moves which suggests that speakers may use *you know* to introduce new information. She also argued that *you know* may serve a ‘topic tracking’ function in that it keeps a track of which items are significant to the topical core and which are not. Goldberg also discussed the repair function of *you know*.

Östman (1981) takes the position that *you know* performs different functions in different contexts. However, to him *you know* has a prototypical meaning: the speaker strives to get the hearer's cooperation to accept the content of his or her utterance as shared knowledge (1981: 17). In other words, when speakers utter *you know*, it functions as a plea for cooperation which shows that the hearer does not actually 'know'. The speaker's strive to get the addressee's cooperation and eventually acceptance of his or her utterance implies that the speaker wants to give the hearer a feeling of power. In this sense, *you know* acts as a politeness marker that expresses deference but at the same time it shows the speaker's attempt to establish a close relationship with the hearer. That is why, Östman argues, a conversation between family members would have fewer instances of *you know* compared with their conversation with guests, since a close relationship is already in place and therefore there is no need for speakers to use *you know* to express politeness overtly (1981: 19,20).

Östman differentiated between two kinds of subfunctions of *you know* depending on the intonation the marker is uttered with as well as its position in the utterance. When *you know* appears in an utterance-initial position it tends to have a declarative intonation. But if it appears in an utterance-final position it can have either declarative or interrogative intonation. Declarative *you know* can be paraphrasable as "as you know" while interrogative *you know* conveys a "don't you know" meaning. Utterance-initial declarative *you know* shows the speaker's confidence and certainty of the information he or she is providing thus it acts as a face-saving marker as it indicates the speaker's wish that his or her hearer does

not argue against him or her. On the other hand, utterance-final interrogative *you know* reveals the speaker's uncertainty and his or her appeal for the hearer's agreement.

Moreover, Östman identified a turn-switching functions of *you know* which do not conflict with the 'as you know' and 'don't you know' functions. Rather the turn-transition role of *you know* blends into one of those two functions ,depending on the context, thus "they can be simultaneously operative within one and the same occurrence of *you know*" (1981:24-25). In this respect, he classified two types of *you know*: utterance-initial *you know* as a turn-taking marker, and utterance-final *you know* a floor-yielding function (1981: 24, 27).

Schourup's (1985) main claim was that the various functions of *you know* were related to its core meaning which in relation to his proposed disclosure problem (see chapter 2 for a detailed explanation of the problem) signals that:

“...the speaker expects that there is no communicatively significant discrepancy between what is now in the private world and what is now in the other world, with respect to what is now in the shared world” (1985:102).

In other words, by using *you know* speakers assume that there is a match between what they know (private world) and what their hearers know (other world) in relation to what they are talking about (the shared world). Schourup claimed that this core or basic meaning of *you know* makes it appropriate to appear with certain functions in discourse rather than 'marking' them (1985:139). *You know* may also be associated with situations of uncertainty either because speakers are aware of

the ‘awkwardness of an expression’ or because they want to highlight the ‘sequential relevance’ of the utterance in which *you know* appears. (1985:104).

Schourup agrees with Goldberg (1980) that *you know* may be used as a ‘disjunct marker’ which introduces a new topic and “serves to alleviate the face-threatening potential of an obvious and abrupt topic change” (1985:108). However, he disagrees with her that *you know* has a topic tracking function. Schourup also argued that utterance-initial *you know* assumes a common ground between speakers and hearers even before speakers produce the utterance, therefore, it acts as an ‘intimacy ploy’ (1985:109). Like several researchers (Goldberg 1980, Schiffrin 1987, Fox tree and Schrock 2002) Schourup considered the repair function of *you know* but he criticized Goldberg’s distinctions between ‘topic tracker’ *you know* and ‘repair’ *you know*, arguing that when it appears at repair sites *you know* is not substantially different from its other uses (1985:121). In other words, when *you know* surfaces at repair positions its core meaning “invites addressee to go along with the discontinuity” (1985:124) between the private world and the other world. If such discontinuity persists then other particles like *I mean* become more relevant for a repair (1985:124-125). Finally, Schourup dismissed the idea that utterance-final *you know* is a turn-transition marker in itself and argued that this function of *you know* depended on “its placement at a point of possible utterance termination” (1985:130). In this sense, utterance-final *you know* does not per se trigger “a full change of turn” (1985:135) but rather it elicits brief backchannels.

Similar to Schourup (1985), Holmes (1986) argues that *you know* is a complex ‘pragmatic particle’ with two wide functions: to express speaker’s confidence or certainty and to express speaker’s uncertainty of various kinds. Each of these two functions was divided into further sub-functions. On the certainty level, *you know* maybe used to express speaker’s confidence about the hearer’s background knowledge and experiences or as an emphatic device to reassure the hearer about the validity of the proposition of the utterance that contains *you know*. While on the uncertainty level, *you know* expresses speaker’s lack of confidence about his or her hearer’s attitudes or about the linguistic encoding of his or her message.

In a later paper, Holmes (1990) discussed the correlation between gender and the use of *you know* and other pragmatic particles. She challenged the finding of Lakoff’s (1975) who claimed that women use ‘hedges’ more than men. Holmes’s data showed that women did not use pragmatic devices such as *you know* significantly more than men, nor did they use them to signal uncertainty as it was claimed by Lakoff. Holmes concluded that “men use both *sort of* and *you know* to express uncertainty more often than women do” (1990: 202). Holmes and Stubbe (1995) arrive at a similar conclusion about the role of gender and age in the frequency of *you know* and other “exasperating expressions” in that these two variables did not seem to have any apparent influence on the frequency of *you know*. However, they found that social class plays a role in the frequency of *you know*, with young working class males using it more than their female counterparts.

Under the term discourse marker, Schiffrin (1987) treats *you know* as a marker which functions in the information state<sup>27</sup>. Its main role in talk is to mark transitions in informational status as speakers negotiate their knowledge about the world during their talk (1987:267). She argues that the discourse' functions of *you know* in the information state are directly related to its literal meaning. According to her, *you know* can have two meanings from which two discourse functions are be derived. These meanings and functions are summarised in table 6.1 as follows<sup>28</sup>:

<b>literal meanings of <i>you know</i></b>	<b>Discourse functions of <i>you know</i></b>
Information X is known by hearer	Marker of meta-knowledge about participants' shared knowledge
Information X is generally known	Marker of meta-knowledge of general knowledge

**Table 6.1** Meanings and functions of *you know* as described by Schiffrin, 1987: 267-268

Furthermore, Schiffrin suggests that when speakers and hearers are engaged in talk their knowledge about the topic of talk can be one of the following four possibilities shown in figure 6.1 below.

Does speaker know of hearer's knowledge?			
		Yes	No
Does hearer know of X?	Yes	(a)	(b)
	No	(c)	(d)

**Figure 6.1** Schiffrin's model of Meta-knowledge about speaker/hearer shared knowledge.

As shown in this figure, situation (a) is where the hearer knows a particular piece of information and the speaker knows that the hearer knows. In the other three situations (b, c, and d) there is a discrepancy between the knowledge of the

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed discussion of the discourse planes proposed by Schiffrin see chapter two.

<sup>28</sup> Table 5.1 is created by me and does not appear in Schiffrin's work.

speaker about a particular topic and that of the hearer. *You know*, as Schifffrin claims, is used to reach situation (a) in which both the speaker and the hearer share knowledge about what is being talked about. Moreover, Schifffrin shows that *you know* also marks consensual truths; that is truths about the world that are shared by participants due to their “co-membership in the same culture, society or group” (1987: 274).

In addition to the functions of *you know* in the information state, Schifffrin identifies interactional functions of this marker in the participation framework particularly in arguments and narratives. In arguments, *you know* appears after presenting reasons to support the speaker’s position and is uttered to appeal for shared knowledge in an attempt to bring the opponent to the speaker’s side (1987:279). As for narratives, *you know* serves a dual function: it transfers information to the hearer and it creates an interactional effect as it involves the hearer in the interaction not only as a recipient but also as an audience (1987: 281).

Jucker and Smith’s (1998) main argument is that discourse markers are cues used to “negotiate common ground” (1998:172) between conversationalists. As for *you know*, an addressee-centered presentation marker which modifies the speaker’s information (1998:172), Jucker and Smith suggest that *you know*’s function is not solely to mark shared knowledge, rather its main role is to highlight the relevance of certain information at a particular point in discourse and the implications it carries which the speakers wishes the hearer to draw because he or she thinks that they are important to the argument at hand (1998:195). In other words, *you know*

invites the hearer to “recognize both the relevance and the implications of the utterance marked with *you know*” (1998:194). In this sense, *you know* involves both speakers and hearers in the construction of an argument by inviting the addressee to draw the implications of the utterance that comes after it.

Nairn (2000) carried out an analysis of *you know* in informal conversations of three English native speakers. Her results revealed several functions of this marker on both levels: textual and interpersonal. On the interpersonal level, *you know* was used a marker to appeal to the hearer to accept what is being said as shared knowledge and to show intimacy at the same time. It was also useful to mark politeness in situations where speakers wanted to avoid a problematic topic, thus it worked as a lexical hedge or a softener that played the role of a downtoner of speaker’s criticism.

On the textual level, Nairn found out that *you know* was used by her interviewees in narratives as an evaluation marker. Moreover, there were situations where speakers resorted to *you know* to mark some organization processes in discourse such as turn-transition, topic shift, and self-repair. *You know* was also useful when speakers wanted to stall for some time searching for a word thus it acted as a filler. Finally, when some speakers had difficulty expressing a certain meaning they had in mind, they used *you know* as a lexical prompt to “appeal to the hearer to grasp the speaker’s intended meaning... or as a request for the hearer to offer a word himself” (2000:39).

Erman (2001) considers pragmatic markers to be “monitors” as they monitor verbal communication on three levels: textual, social and metalinguistic. The use of *you know* by adults and adolescent was examined to determine if there was a difference in relation to the previously mentioned three levels. Erman found that in deed there was a discrepancy in the way adults employed the marker in their speech compared to adolescent. While adults used *you know* as a textual monitor i.e. to organize their talk in a coherent way, adolescent tend to use this marker as a social and metalinguistic monitor i.e. as an interactional marker. That is, in adolescent discourse *you know* “is more oriented towards the activity of communicating” (2001: 1356) than to building textual coherence as adults do. Young speakers used *you know* to ask for a confirmation from their hearers that their message had been understood. On the metalinguistic level, Erman suggested that *you know* might function as a hedge and approximator.

Another difference between the two groups is that young speakers tend to use *you know* as part of “formulaic chunks” which was not present in the adults’ talk. Erman’s finding that *you know* was used as a social monitor in the sense that it indicates speaker’s attitude rather than his or her organization of discourse, led her to suggest that the marker is being further pragmaticalized , appearing in more varied contexts, and might be going through a process of changing or reanalysis as she describe it. She, however, admitted that further studies were needed before drawing this conclusion.

Fox Tree and Schrock (2002) discussed the functions of the discourse marker *you know* in terms of its basic meaning. They claim that this marker is multifunctional

deriving its various functions from its core meaning. Fully agreeing with Jucker and Smith (1998), Fox Tree and Schrock claim that *you know*'s basic meaning is to invite the hearers' inferences. They identified other roles of *you know* all of them revolve around its basic meaning of encouraging addressees' inferences. For example, at the interpersonal level *you know* plays a role in conveying politeness by leaving certain ideas incomplete, thus speakers can distance themselves from face-threatening acts by inviting hearers' inferences and interpretations (2002:737). Moreover, *you know* may trigger a turn-transition because speakers might invite addressees interpretations at any time in the conversation. *You know* might also appear in repair positions because it helps speakers repairing trouble sources by inviting hearers to infer their intentions (2002: 738). In addition, *you know* has some organizational functions in discourse such as: topic shifts, emphasising particular points in discourse, and reference. *You know* in these cases expresses "speakers' desires for addressees to infer something rather than presaging particular organizational events" (2002:740).

Like Nairn (2000), Müller (2005) identified the functions of *you know* on two levels: the textual level and the interactional level. On the textual level, *you know* was used by German learners of English as well as American speakers to signal speakers' search for a particular word or for the content of what they want to say. *You know* also appeared in Müller's data in situations where speakers were having troubles in their talk. In some cases speakers interrupted their sentences then uttered *you know* and then they restarted by repeating what was said before *you know*. Situations like these were called 'false start' (2005:160-161). Like other researchers (Erman 2001, Fox tree and Schrock 2002 to mention a few) Müller

also discussed the repair function of *you know*. In addition, speakers in Müller's study used *you know* to indicate the lack of words' exactness. In other words, *you know* was used to mark 'approximation' of the linguistic message either because speakers could not find the appropriate words to express what they have in mind or because precision was thought to be unimportant (2005:162). Moreover, *you know* was used to introduce an explanation of a previous idea or opinion, expressing it in different words "to make it plain what s/he meant" (2005:166).

The last function of *you know* on the textual level, Müller argues, is to introduce quoted speech, acting as an 'enquoting device' (2005:168). In particular, speakers used *you know* before quoting one of the movie's characters<sup>29</sup>.

On the interactional level, *you know* also have many functions. It marked instances where speakers were appealing to their hearers to imagine a scene in the silent movie they were describing. In this sense, speakers needed assurance and in some cases a response to their interrogative *you know*. Similarly, some of Müller's informants used *you know* to appeal to their hearers to see the implication of what they have just described in their narrative. In the last two categories, Müller argues that when speakers use *you know* they are asking their hearers for an involvement and participation in the narrative (2005:175). Still involving the hearer, Müller found that *you know* marked speakers' appeal to shared knowledge between them and their hearer. However, in her case 'shared' "means that both participants knew the character or scene, either because they had both seen it, or because partner B had told partner A about it" (2005:178).

Moreover, Müller discussed other functions of *you know* that involve the hearer

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<sup>29</sup> Müller's data consisted of conversations between pairs of students (German learners of English and American English native speakers). The students were asked to tell parts of a silent movie to that they have seen to their conversational partner who had not see these parts.

and these were: appeal for understanding when speakers cannot find the right word, or they feel there is a ‘deficiency in their argument’ or they are asking for the sympathy of the hearer. One last role of *you know* on the interactional level is marking speakers’ confidence about their opinions in a way that they were almost asking the hearers to agree with them. In this sense, *you know* asks the hearer to acknowledge that the speaker is right.

Not all researchers, however, identify eliciting agreement or appealing for shared knowledge as a basic function of *you know*. For example, Sebba and Tate (1986) found out that in London Jamaican and Bradford Jamaican, both are Jamaican Creole, speakers use the discourse markers *you know* and *you know what I mean* to ‘perform’ rather than ‘elicit’ an agreement. Macaulay (2002) also argued that *you know* does not appear to mark “assumptions of shared knowledge, but rather to form part of the speaker’s discourse style and the rhythmic organization of utterances” (2002:765).

As it is apparent from the previous research on the discourse marker *you know*, it plays important roles in verbal interaction on different levels: informational, textual and interpersonal. But how do learners of English, and in particular Syrian Arabic learners of English, make use of *you know* in their foreign language discourse? This is what we are going to explore in the following section.

## 6.2 Functions of *you know* in the present data

In what follows the categories of the functions of *you know* in the speech of Syrian Arabic learners will be presented along with some examples from the data.

### 6.2.1 Marker of certainty

In some cases *you know* appeared in the data of the current study to signal the learners' certainty that the interviewer knows what they are talking about. Certainty about the existence of shared knowledge between the interviewer and the learners was due to two reasons: either because knowledge about a particular topic was thought to be general knowledge which most people have (examples 47 and 48) or because particular knowledge about the English language was thought to be known by the interviewer by virtue of her being a native speaker of English. Several researchers acknowledge this function of *you know* in expressing "presumed certainty" (Östman, 1981:22), general knowledge (Schiffrin 1987; Jucker and Smith 1998) consensual truths (Schiffrin 1987) which all assume that the speaker is sure the hearer knows the content of his or her talk.

Despite the fact that the interviewees and the interviewer are not familiar with each other, and thus invoking shared knowledge would not be expected in such a context, some learners found *you know* useful to invite the interviewer to accept particular information as general or common knowledge that most people share.

Consider the following example:

- (47)  
(We do not use English at home)
- M 1 mhm so to tell me a little bit more about yourself,  
er do any of your family speak in English?
- D 2 er my family, er my parents, my brothers, er (know)  
speak English they know English er but **you know** at

		the home we don't speak in English.
M	3	hmm of course [yeah]
D	4	[yeah]
	5	But they know.

In this extract speaker M, is asking speaker D about herself and about her family. Since the conversationalists in this interaction are not familiar with each other, the personal background of each one of them is not known to the other and thus not accessible to the other. Speaker D answers speaker M's inquiry (*do any of your family speak in English*) in line (2) saying that all her family members know English but they do not use it to communicate among each other at home. Here, *you know* in segment (2) is part of a declarative intonation unit and is used as an equivalent to "as you know" sentence (Östman, 1981:22). Speaker D assumes that speaker M shares with her the knowledge that normally monolingual people do not use foreign languages that they learn among the family. In fact, speaker M (in line 3) response (*hmm of course yeah*) provides an endorsement of speaker D's proposition in line (2).

The example below is another instance where the learner uses *you know* to invite the interviewer's endorsement on a particular claim because she thinks it is common knowledge among most people.

(48)  
(Work takes all our time)

M	1	do you have any English speaking friends?
	2	(1.2)
Ku	3	<u>yes</u> (0.8) °I have°.
M	4	how often do you see them?
Ku	5	er they are ok ( <i>laughs</i> ).
M	6	do you see them every week every month?
Ku	7	er (2.4) actually there is no regular time
M	8	mm hmm.
Ku	9	it's according to: er free her free time.
M	10	mm hmm.

Ku	11	<b>you know</b> (0.6) the work takes er all our time ( <i>laughs</i> ) [nowadays].
M	12	[hmm yeah
Ku	13	yeah.

Like in example (47), *you know* here is uttered with a declarative intonation rendering the meaning of ‘as you know’. When asked by the interviewer how often she meets with her friends, speaker Ku mentions that there is no fixed time when she and her friends meet, rather they meet whenever they have free time. Speaker Ku justifies the lack of regular meetings with her friends by being busy at work all the time. She prefaces this justification, in line (11), with *you know* expecting the interviewer to share this view with her as general knowledge. Living an increasingly fast-paced and busy life make most of us busy with our jobs all the time. Note that speaker Ku uses the pronoun ‘us’ which indicates her inclusion of the hearer in a general experience i.e. being very busy with work nowadays. The interviewer signals her acceptance of speaker Ku’s generalization in line (12) by her backchannel (*hmm yeah*) implying that she actually understands and possibly agrees.

*You know* sometimes marked certainty that arose not from the learners’ assumption that general knowledge existed between them and the interviewer but from their assumption that the interviewer, being a native speaker of English, knows what they were talking about with reference to the English language in particular. Let us see the example below:

(49)  
(English in chat rooms)

M	1	and do you correspond with anybody in English?
Ru	2	yeah
M	3	your niece?

Ru 4 yeah (*laughs*)  
 M 5 anyone else (*laughs*)  
 Ru 6 er sometimes [I go to chat rooms]  
 M 7 [sorry sounds nose]y  
 Ru 8 sometimes I enter chat rooms  
 M 9 aha  
 Ru 10 yeah  
 M 11 but **you know** their English on in chat rooms their  
 English is so bad or **you know** they (0.8)y- er they  
 write different English °it's not English°  
 M 12 it's a living language  
 Ru 13 fyeahf

Here, speaker Ru is obviously using *you know* (line 11) to signal her certainty that the interviewer knows that the English language used in the chat rooms is not the same as the language people use elsewhere. Even though speaker M does not provide an explicit endorsement of speaker Ru's claim, she implicitly agrees with her by saying (*it's a living language*) acknowledging that the English used in chat rooms is indeed different from the one used in other contexts, and signalling that she actually 'knew' that as speaker Ru assumed.

Similarly, speaker Ra in example (50) uses *you know* to mark a content which she is certain that the interviewer knows by virtue of being a native speaker of English.

(50)  
 (Special sentences in English)

M 1 So what about back to English what do you think  
 are your particular strengths and weaknesses in  
 English?  
 Rn 2 hmm (0.6) what (way) you mean, um (1.2) vocabulary  
 er (0.9)usual I know this it's normal  
 M 3 hmm  
 Rn 4 er because I'm not native speaker er I miss  
 vocabularies er sometimes I make mistakes in in the  
 grammar how to how to er to make the sentence in  
 the correct way  
 5 and there is one thing even I know vocabulary or  
 grammar (.) how how English people talk.  
 6 **you know** there is special (1.0) sentences they say

		it in some way you don't say it like this in Arabic
M	7	( <i>laughs</i> )
Rn	8	so [that's why]
M	9	[this is what I'll do I'll listen]
Rn	10	( <i>laughs</i> ) you need to listen a lot to them to know how they talk.

In this extract speaker Ra is answering the question about her strengths and weaknesses in English. She mentions that being a non-native speaker of English, she experiences difficulties in the areas of grammar and vocabulary (lines 2 and 4). She also identifies not being able to use English in a native-like way as another weakness point she has (line 5). In line (6) speaker Ra expresses her certainty that the interviewer knows that one says things in English in a different way than that he or she would say them in Arabic. *You know* prefaces this proposition because speaker Ra is sure that speaker M understands and knows by virtue of being a native speaker of English that in English things are said differently than in Arabic. Speaker M's laugh (in 7) and comment (in line 9 which suggests that one should listen to the language he or she is learning to learn how speakers of that language says things) confirm that speaker Ra is right in her certainty about speaker's M knowledge of the proposition in line (6).

### **6.2.2 Reminding the hearer of information presented earlier**

This is a function of *you know* which I found useful for explaining some cases where some learners used this marker to reintroduce some information that has been mentioned earlier in the conversation. In this sense, *you know* acts as a reminder to the interviewer of a previously mentioned piece of information which she actually knows because it was said at some point before. This *you know*

renders the following reading: 'as you know because I told you earlier'. Example (51) below illustrates:

- (51)  
(You know I had a master)
- M 1 and (0.8) if you were sixteen again and you could choose your life or your career path what would you do differently?  
2 (1.2)
- D 3 um I don't think I'll do anything different because er: (1.0) I did many good things in my life.  
4 (0.7) **you know** I: I had a master and er (2.3) I ~~didn't~~ do anything different °so°.
- M 5 ok that's good so you like what you did.  
D 6 yeah  
M 7 which is very important.

This extract occurs in the final part of the interview after speaker D and speaker M had talked for about 13 minutes. At the beginning of the interview and when asked about her education, speaker D informs speaker M that she has obtained a Master degree. In this example, and as part of answering a different question, speaker D reintroduces the information that she had already obtained a Master degree, reminding her interviewer of this information and safely assuming she knows. In example (52) *you know* also works as a marker of information presented earlier in the conversation.

- (52)  
(X-rays)
- M 1 and you see in England dentists they're always asking you to take an x-ray every year. do you consider that safe?  
Gs 2 dentists (.)
- M 3 when [you go for your teeth  
Gs 4 [for:  
M 5 they always like to have an x-ray of [your teeth  
Gs 6 [yeah  
M 7 even if you don't have a problem.  
Gs 8 mhm  
M 9 every year my dentist asks me to and I [always tell him  
Gs 10 [yes

M 11 fbut he insisted [saying£ he's.  
Gs 12 [(I always) **so** you feel afraid of  
x-rays?  
M 13 I don't want to expose myself to them  
unnecessarily.  
Gs 14 yeah, but I think as I told you before, er er if  
(clears his throat) the the times are apart  
M 15 mm hmm  
Gs 16 **you know** there is no danger because er the the the  
important thing that you er when you are in  
continuous attack er contact with them er so the x-  
ray may er maybe in er goes in your bone  
M 17 [so it's a matter of build-up]  
Gs 18 [and and stored may be stored  
M 19 right  
Gs 20 in your bone, and here is, here comes the problem,  
other than that I don't think there is a problem er  
if you(clears his throat) if you do this yearly,  
it's not a problem.  
M 21 no wonder he gets so annoyed with me (laughs)

Prior to this extract speaker Gs, who was a post graduate student specializing in radiology, and the interviewer were talking about whether getting exposed to x-rays was dangerous. Speaker Gs told his interviewer that practitioners were at a higher risk of being affected by x-rays than their patients, because they are usually exposed to them more often than the patients. In this extract, the interviewer is asking about the risks of taking x-rays for the teeth every year. Speaker Gs, starts responding in line (14) by reminding his hearer (*as I told you before*) of what he had told her earlier about the potential danger of being exposed to x-rays. *You know* appears in line (16) where speaker Gs repeats information (taking x-rays with time gaps in between, is not dangerous for patients) which he is certain that his interviewer knows because he mentioned it earlier during the conversation. In this sense, you know work as a reminder to the hearer of information that has been provided previously.

### 6.2.3 *You know* as marker of intimacy

The Syrian Arabic speakers in this study use *you know* as a marker of presenting new information to their interviewer; that is when it is clear the interviewer does not know what they are talking about. In fact, this is not surprising if we keep in mind that the speakers were not familiar with the interviewer and thus they did not have mutual knowledge about personal information, experiences or views. Therefore, there are many instances where the speakers are aware that what they are talking about is new to their hearer but they still mark it with *you know*. In such cases, there appear to be a clear contradiction between the literal meaning of *you know* which indicates that the hearer knows what the speaker is talking about, and the reality which is that the hearer actually does not know what is being talked about. So, how can we solve such a contradiction? The answer is: when speakers use *you know* to present new information which they are sure their hearers do not share they do so either because they want to create greater intimacy between them and the hearer as in examples (53) or to create intimacy as well as to appeal for the hearer's sympathy as in examples (54) and (55). Östman (1981) describes the function of *you know* as an intimacy marker when shared knowledge does not matter, but when the "pretence" of common knowledge is what achieves this intimacy and facilitates interaction (Östman, 1981:19). Schourup (1985) also acknowledges this function of *you know* as an 'intimacy ploy' (1985:109).

In the following example speaker Mz employs *you know* as a marker of intimacy.

(53)

(Money to father)

M	1	so what would you do casino, car, flat or study abroad?= abroad?= =you know my father likes a lot of money so I'll
Mz	2	

M 3 give him the 'money' it's better=  
=that's nice of you.

Prior to this extract speaker Mz was talking about the possible ways he would spend one million USA dollars if he won it. His plans include going to casinos, buying a new flat and a car, and studying abroad. The interviewer in this example is asking him to be more specific about what he would do with the money. Speaker Mz's reply in line (2) that he would give the money to his father because he likes money is preceded with *you know*. The relationship between the speaker and the interviewer is not close to warrant that the interviewer knows that speaker Mz's father likes money. So, speaker Mz is pretending that his hearer knows to create more rapport between them.

In example (54) below this function of *you know* as a marker of intimacy and appealing for sympathy is illustrated.

(54)  
(Eldest sister)

M 1 what do you think of the parent-child relationship  
in Syria today?  
Ru 2 er I don't know I can tell you about my  
relationship with my parents (1.0) we are friends  
M 3 mm hmm.  
Ru 4 now we er I speak with my mother for example as if  
she is my friend I tell her we went there we we  
had:  
er fun we yaʔ- er er as if she is one of my friends.  
M 5 mm hmm.  
Ru 6 er as for my er ol-eldest sister now I feel she is  
she is my mother not my sister **you know** I speak  
with her with more respect I **you know** I'm I'm I  
fear she's she gets angry I I can't speak with her  
like I speak with my mother.  
M 7 (coughs) is there a big age gap between you?  
Ru 8 yeah about twenty years.  
M 9 oh right!  
Ru 10 fyeahf.

*You know* occurred twice in this extract in line (6) where speaker Ru was talking about her relationship with her eldest sister. Since speaker Ru and the interviewer do not have any previous relationship with each other, the personal information that speaker Ru is presenting here (that she respects and fears her sister more than her mother) is completely new to the interviewer. Speaker M has no idea that speaker Ru's relationship with her eldest sister is more of a parent-child relationship than a sibling relationship. Here, not only *you know* precedes new information, but it also appeals for the sympathy of the hearer. Speaker Ru is aware that the topic she is talking about could be problematic because it could be seen as complaining about her sister being strict. Therefore, she appeals to the interviewer to be understanding and sympathetic. Similarly, example (55) shows how *you know* was used by the speaker to show intimacy with her interviewer and to appeal for her sympathy at the same time:

(55)  
(Marrying early)

M	1	and if you were sixteen again and could choose your life or career path (0.8) what would you do differently?
Rn	2	yes (0.9) I will not married every early like I did ( <i>laughs</i> )
	3	er nobody advised me and I was young but I would finish my studying because I'm tired <b>you know</b> children, house, church, and studying always like that.
M	4	( <i>laughs softly</i> )
Rn	5	so I will finish my education and: I will have a new: er PRAY er what do you call pray list

We can see that in line (3) speaker Rn is revealing to the interviewer some information about her private life the thing that can be embarrassing. She says that none advised her that getting married early is hard since it involves handling a lot of responsibilities. It seems that speaker Rn at this point is appealing to the hearer's sympathy for a possibility problematic topic (maybe she does not want to

be understood as if she is complaining about her marriage) by uttering *you know*, thus pretending that the latter should know that doing many things (studying, looking after the kids and the house, religious commitments) simultaneously is very difficult. *You know* in this example is said with a declarative intonation which indicates that the speaker is assuming the hearer knows.

#### 6.2.4 Topic change

In the data for the present study, there are cases where the learners use *you know* before introducing a topic change. The function of *you know* as a topic change marker has been noticed by Goldberg (1980) and Schouorp (1985) who believe that when *you know* occur before a topic change it act as a politeness marker that reduce potential face threats involved in abrupt changes. Nairn (2000) also reported this function of *you know* as well as Fox Tree and Schrock (2002). The examples below demonstrate the function of *you know* in changing topics:

(56)  
(IELTS exam)

M	1	and what do you think of the books that you are studying from?
Gs	2	well: er I think they are good
M	3	mm hmm you like your books
Gs	4	yes I like them
	5	(1.5) er (1.1) <b>you know</b> er my intention was to take the IELTS again
m	6	hmm
Gs	7	and I was er=
M	8	=so it was IELTS that you took?
Gs	9	yes I took it once er twice actually

In this extract, speaker Gs uses *you know* (line 5) to initiate a new topic. Prior to segment (5) speaker Gs and the interviewer were talking about the books that speaker Gs was using for the English language course he was attending at the time

of the interview. After two considerably long pauses in line (5), speaker Gs shifts the talk from discussing the books of his course to talking about the IELTS exam which he was planning to take. This shift was marked with *you know*. Example (57) below is another case where *you know* clearly marks a topic change:

(57)  
(Physician brother)

M	1	and if you were sixteen again
Mz	2	yes
M	3	and you could choose your life or your career path, what would it what would you do differently?
	4	(1.5)
M	5	what would you change?
Mz	6	all of f- all of my friends, friends told me you shouldn't study mechanical engineers.
	7	when I kid I'd like to: be archaeologist (1.7) later o:n °when°
	8	<b>you know</b> I: have (0.5) we have a brother he was study medicine (0.8) but he is ( <i>click his fingers</i> ) ok (2.6) he's (doing nothing) now ( <i>laughs</i> ) so all my family I was intelligent when I was kid but now (1.4) finito.
M	9	so what would you change what would you do differently?

In answering the interviewer's question about what he would have done differently if he had the chance to change his life path, Speaker Mz gave an indirect answer (line 7) that he would become an archaeologist because this was his childhood dream which he could not pursue (as he became a mechanical engineer). At the end of segment (7) speaker Mz utters the word 'when' very quietly and with a falling intonation. *You know* follows this in line (8) and is uttered with a rising intonation signalling a topic change and a shift in speaker Mz's discourse from talking about himself to talking about his brother.

### 6.2.5 Final position *you know* eliciting hearer endorsement

When *you know* appear at the end of a sentence, it was used to indicate the end of the speaker's proposition and at the same time seeking approval from the hearer because the speaker might be in doubt about his or her claim. As we have seen above, Östman (1981) discussed this function of *you know* as a marker of appealing for agreement when the speaker is not sure. Let us examine the following two examples with *you know* in a final position.

(58)  
(Designing a course)

M 1 and (1.8) if if you were designing a course what  
would you like it to focus on?  
2 (3.8)  
Rn 3 aha for me or for others?  
M 4 if you↑ you know if a head of department here said  
I'd like you to design the course.  
Rn 5 er I I don't think I will I will concentrate on  
one thing (1.0) many things.  
Rn 6 yeah=  
M 7 =hmm.  
Rn 8 I mean er all the the er sections of the (-) er of  
English because (0.5) if I need grammar you might  
need something else **you know**  
M 9 yeah so of course it has to be all rounded but is  
there anything=  
Rn 10 =maybe speaking will be be will be the most thing  
we have to concentrate on

In response to the question posed by the interviewer, speaker Rn is giving her opinion about what an English course should concentrate on. She proposes that an English course should focus not only on a single aspect of the language but on several ones. She justifies this in line (8) by saying that different people have different needs and so a good course should take into consideration a wide range of learners' need. The segment is ended with *you know*, signalling a possible transition relevance place and appealing to the hearer's endorsement on what has

been said. In fact, *you know* triggered a turn change and the interviewer took the floor in line (9) in which she signals her agreement with speaker Rn about the need to have a comprehensive course, but at the same time she reiterates her initial request (what the speaker would focus on).

In example (59) below is another example of *you know* in a sentence final position.

(59)

M	1	what do you think of the relationship between parents and children (1.0) in Syria Today?
	2	(2.5)
L	3	hmm
M	4	has it changed? changed for the better for the worse?
L	5	I think changed for the worst (laughs)
M	6	really?
L	7	yeah I think.
	8	because the parents today er is <u>not</u>
	9	very: (2.2) very aware (.) aware <b>you know</b>
M	10	hmm hmm

Similar to the previous example, *you know* in this example occur at the end of speaker L's proposition in line (9) and is followed with a change in the turn taking. However, it differs from the previous example in that *you know* here seems to be seeking approval of the hearer on the lexical selection of the word 'aware'. It is obvious that speaker L was having trouble in finding the correct word she had in mind. Speaker L's attempt to find the right word is signalled by the prolonging of the sound of (i) in the word 'very' and a quite long pause (2.2 second). When she finally finds the word she wants 'aware', she seeks approval from the hearer on her selection of the word. Speaker M seems to signal her approval of the word 'aware' in her backchannel in line (10).

### 6.2.6 Inviting hearer to see the implication

Müller (2005) discussed this function of *you know* in her data, where it marked the speaker's appeal to the hearer to see the implication of what he or she said. In the current study some learners used *you know* to invite the hearer to work out the implied meaning that they have in mind. In the examples below, both of the speakers cannot find the suitable word they want to say and when they fail to do so they utter *you know* as if saying "can you see what I mean". Let us see example (60).

- (60)  
(Oscar-winning movies)
- M 1 and do you watch English movies, do you go to the  
cinema?  
2 (1.6)
- D 3 yes I: watch films
- M 4 mm hmm
- D 5 in cinema: er but not always when when the film is:  
er ha- have Oscar or er
- M 6 hmm
- D 7 **you know** I watch it.  
(both laugh)
- M 8 which is your favourite one?

Speaker D is trying to explain to the interviewer why she does not go to the cinema very often. In line (5) she says that she only goes to the cinema to watch movies that have won the Oscar. After the word Oscar, it seems that speaker D is trying to find a word (an adjective probably) to add to the previous description of the movies that she usually watch. Perhaps she was looking for words like (special, unique) but she failed for some reason to find the word she had in mind. In line (7) she uses *you know* to invite the hearer to read the implied meaning she has in mind, that only when the movie is very special she will watch it.

Example (61) contains another instance of *you know* when it functions as a marker that appeal to the hearer to see the implication.

- (61)  
(Full of vocabulary)
- M 1 and what books are you studying?  
 L 2 er Matters °it's series°  
 M 3 is that the same as Compact?  
 L 4 no it's er er  
 M 5 separate, further  
 L 6 higher than er Compact.  
 M 7 right right.  
 M 8 do you like it more than Compact?  
 L 9 er (1.1) Compact is-was very short  
 10 (1.2) so I like th- er this class now er more than  
 the Compact.  
 M 11 mm hmm.  
 L 12 because it was very short and very (0.8) it's er  
 full of vocabulary new vocabulary **you know**  
 13 (1.4) and this is more relaxing or er..

Although this *you know* occurs in a final position, it differs from the ones we saw in examples (58 and 59) above where speakers used it to appeal to the hearer's approval of their talk or lexical choice. In this example, *you know* invites the hearer to see the implied unverballed meaning. In line (12) speaker L is describing one of the books that she had studies (Compact) as one that is very short and intensive. She however, does not use the word 'intensive' but we understand this from her description of the book as full of vocabulary. It seems that she is trying to say that the book is difficult because it was full of vocabulary and that this is what makes it worse than the other book (Matters) in her opinion. When she utters *you know* she seems to be appealing to the hearer to see the implied meaning she has in mind but after a (1.4) second pause she realized the hearer was going to give any backchannel so she carried on talking.

I have presented the functions of *you know* in the current data and before I turn to the discussion and concluding remarks I will show cases where *you know* was used as a non-discourse marker.

### 6.3 Other uses of *you know*

There are instances in the data that show the learners using the lexical sequence *you know* as a genuine question and not as a discourse marker. In these cases, the sequence *you know* differs in many aspects from the discourse marker *you know*. One of the most obvious differences is that when *you know* functions as a genuine question it requires a direct answer about the content of talk from the hearer like in the following two examples. In addition, *you know* here cannot be deleted because it is part of the syntactic structure of the sentence. Schiffrin (1987) include examples of *you know* when it is used a real question in her treatment of *you know* as a discourse marker. However, it is clear that such cases should not be grouped with uses of *you know* as a discourse marker.

(62)  
(ELTC centre)

M	1	so the only course you've taken have been - where have they been ? here?
L	2	here (-) yeah I tried a course in ELTC
M	3	mhm
l	4	<b>you know?</b> English Language er ELTC <b>you know?</b>
M	5	I thought is that the one
L	6	in Al-Fardous street <b>you know?</b>
M	7	ah no no no I don't know that one.
L	8	yeah it's er it's very good.
M	9	mhm

(63)  
(Pakistani people)

Mz	1	and you must have your chance I need a good chance not to spend my life like working in-
	2	<b>you know</b> about Pakistanian people who wrok in er Gulf?
M	3	yeah I know.
Mz	4	they earn a lot.

M 5 do they?  
Mz 6 no no I'm- opposite of a lot.

#### **6.4 Discussion and concluding remarks**

In this chapter the emphasis was on the discourse marker *you know* as it is used by Syrian Arabic learners of English. Examples from the data reveal that the learners show ability to use *you know* for a quite wide range of functions in their English discourse. Mainly, the marker was employed for interpersonal functions, but it was also used for textual purposes as well.

On the level of the text, *you know* was used to signal a shift in the discourse topic, attracting the hearer attention to a change in discourse, thus it also serves interpersonal function.

Learners also made use of *you know* in their discourse for interactional purposes. It was used to mark certainty that knowledge about a particular topic was shared with the interviewer, either because it was common knowledge that most people know, or because it was about the English language and the interviewer knows it by virtue of being a native speaker of English. *You know* was also useful for the learners to remind the interviewer of something that they have mentioned earlier during the conversation and in this sense its discourse function is very close to its literal meaning. Despite the lack of familiarity between the interviewer and the interviewees, the latter tried sometimes to create intimacy with the interviewer by marking some propositions with *you know*. In some cases, not only *you know* marked intimacy but it also appealed to the hearer to sympathise with the speaker. Along similar lines, Syrian Arabic learners used *you know* in a sentence final

position appealing to the interviewer's endorsement on their proposition or lexical choice. In addition, *you know* was used to invite the interviewer to see an implied meaning that the learner could not communicate. As a non-discourse marker *you know* appeared occasionally as a genuine question that requires a direct answer from the speaker.

The next chapter will deal with the last discourse marker to be examined in this study that is the marker *I mean*.

## Chapter 7

### *I mean* in the discourse of Syrian Arabic English learners

#### 7.0 Introduction

In the previous two chapters I dealt with the markers *so* and *you know* and the functions they serve in the discourse of Syrian Arabic English learners. The main concern in this chapter is to identify the various functional roles of the discourse marker *I mean* in the talk of the same students. The chapter is divided into two main parts: the first part reviews previous work undertaken on the English marker *I mean*. The second part, which is the main focus of this chapter, focuses on the analysis of the English discourse marker *I mean* in the data of the present study.

#### 7.1 *I mean* in the literature

Several studies have focused on the discourse marker *I mean* looking at it from various perspectives. From a social-class distinction point of view, Bernstein (1962) suggests that *I mean* is used as a pause filler and is usually associated with the speech of lower-class speakers more than those of the middle classes.

From a conversational approach, Crystal and Davy (1975) classify *I mean* under the category of “connecting phrases” that have a stylistic function. They argue that *I mean* is one of the connectives which have a ‘diminishing force’ (1975: 90) since it retracts the meaning of the whole or part of the discourse that precedes it. They claim that when *I mean* is used as a discourse marker, it can be paraphrased

with the expression ‘in other words’. Crystal and Davy acknowledge the difficulty of identifying the meaning of this phrase, however they argue that “its main function is to indicate that the speaker wishes to clarify the meaning of his immediately preceding expression. This clarification may stem from a number of reasons and take a number of forms” (Crystal and Davy, 1975: 97).

Goldberg (1980) includes *I mean* in her study of discourse particles within a system of moves that she proposes. Within this system *I mean* may appear in three types of moves those being: a progressive holding or expanding move where speakers use referents from prior utterance but may add new referents; a re-introducing move where speakers re-introduce referents from the previous locution; and a holding move where speakers drop referents but cannot add new ones. As well as prefacing the move, *I mean* works as a repairing marker by upgrading the information presented in the previous discourse so that it matches the intended meaning that the speaker has in mind. Goldberg explains this repairing function as follows:

“The I mean<sup>30</sup> indicates that the repairable will undergo a greater degree of upgrading than a y’know marked repair. The restatement or replacement involves a change in emphasis, direction, or meaning in order to align the conveyed information with the speaker intended contribution” (Goldberg, 1980: 215).

Although *I mean* is not the focus of Östman’s (1981) study, he includes it as a member of what he calls ‘pragmatic particles’. He proposes that *I mean* is used for self-correction and clarification of one’s own views. In this sense it is a speaker-related marker but at the same time a hearer-related marker because when

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<sup>30</sup> The underlying is as in the original source.

speakers clarify their views, they do so for the benefit of their hearers (1981:35). Similarly, Schourup (1985) also does not deal with *I mean* in details but mentions it briefly in his study of ‘discourse particles’. *I mean* in his tripartite model (see Chapter 2 for details on the model) is an evincive with a disclosure function. In other words, it indicates the nonequivalence of what the speaker has said (the shared world) and what he has in mind (the private world).

Schiffrin (1987) argues that *I mean* works mainly on the participation framework of her discourse model (see chapter 2 for a detailed description of Schiffrin’s model). It marks the speaker’s orientation to two aspects of the meaning of prior discourse: ideas and intentions. To put it differently, *I mean* marks the upcoming modification of the speaker’s prior ideas and intentions. Schiffrin argues that whether *I mean* marks expansion of ideas, or explanation of intentions depends on which sense the predicate ‘mean’ has. If it has an ideational meaning, *I mean* prefaces expansion of ideas, but if it has a sense of speaker intention<sup>31</sup>, then *I mean* marks explanations of intentions, i.e. how the speaker intends a particular message to be interpreted.

Moreover, like other researchers (Goldberg 1980, Östman 1981) Schiffrin discusses the repair function of *I mean*. In her data, *I mean* prefaces replacement repairs which “lead forward to the ideas of the upcoming discourse on the basis of the material in the repair itself” (1987: 301). In addition, *I mean* has, according to Schiffrin, interactional relevance because it displays speaker orientations, such as commitment to an idea, or the key of the talk which in turn affects the hearer. So,

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<sup>31</sup> Schiffrin gives an example of the verb ‘mean’ when it has the sense of a speaker intention in the following sentence: *He didn’t mean to insult you.* (1987: 296).

if a speaker uses *I mean* to show commitment to an idea this would create a speaker-hearer alignment different from that of which would occur if the speaker did not show such a commitment (1987: 305). In the same manner, if the speaker intends his talk to have a serious key then the hearer is expected to comply with this key the speaker has chosen.

Furthermore, Schiffrin claims that not only does *I mean* work on the participation framework, but it also affects the information state of discourse by marking two aspects of the information state: certainty and saliency. By certainty she suggests that when the speaker uses *I mean* he or she might be showing commitment to a position which indicates his or her certainty of knowledge. Also if *I mean* marks an upcoming modification then it instructs the hearer to keep attending to what has been said before it to see how it will be changed. Thus, it marks the material mentioned after it as salient information since it is important to the understanding of the overall message of the speaker (1987: 309).

Fox Tree and Schrock (2002) argue that *I mean* is multifunctional due to its basic meaning which is warning the hearer of an upcoming modification to discourse. By basic meaning they refer to the *underlying* conventional meaning (2002: 728, original emphasis). It is from the basic meaning of this marker that we can understand its apparent uses in conversation. There are four categories of functions that *I mean* can fall into namely: interpersonal functions; repair functions; monitoring functions; and organization functions. On the interpersonal level, Fox Tree and Schrock (2002) argue, contrary to Schiffrin (1987) who as mentioned above believes that *I mean* may mark the speaker's commitment to

what he or she said, that *I mean* helps the speaker distancing him or herself from what he or she said, thus it is linked to negative politeness as it reduces face threatening. In addition, it also can be related to positive politeness because it signals to the hearer the casual style of the conversation. Moreover, *I mean* has a role in turn management and may occur turn-initially; turn-medially; or turn-finally. This is because speakers may want to indicate an upcoming modification at any point during their turn. As for its repairing function, Fox Tree and Schrock believe that *I mean*'s basic meaning of offering a forewarning of an upcoming adjustment can be best seen in its function as a repair marker. In addition, when speakers mark an upcoming modification by *I mean*, they are most likely to be inclined to check the hearer's reaction to this modification. Thus, *I mean* has a monitoring role in the speaker-hearer interaction. Finally, *I mean* can have an organizational role in talk since it may mark topic shifts such as comments and justifications (2002: 742). In what follows is the discussion of the analysis of *I mean* in the data.

## **7.2 Functions of *I mean* in the present study**

The analysis of the discourse marker *I mean* in the data of the Syrian Arabic learners reveals that learners use this phrase to mark different functions in discourse. Below is the categorization of the functions of *I mean* along some examples that illustrate the function under examination.

### 7.2.1 Verbalizing an inner thought

By this function, *I mean* does not forewarn an upcoming adjustment, repair, or expand and explain the prior discourse. Rather it marks the verbalizing of an inner thought that the speaker had been thinking about. This *I mean* is used by speaker Gs in the following example:

(64)  
(Speaking skill)

M 1 and if you were designing an English course what  
would you like it to focus on?  
Gs 2 mhm (1.4) if I am des- designing?  
M 3 yeah.  
Gs 4 I would like to: (1.3) to focus more on speaking  
(1.5) and: (1.1) [(-)  
M 5 [how how would you arrange it  
Gs 6 er  
M 7 how would you [arrange it if you had a class and  
Gs 8 [(-)  
M 8 you want [to focus  
Gs 9 [the class (2.2)  
Gs 10 mm hmm (1.5) er could you: explain more?  
M 11 sure how how would you arrange it the course if to  
focus more on speaking if you had a class=  
Gs 12 =yes.  
M 13 how would you arrange speaking?  
Gs 14 ah yeah (1.7) er: I would like to: er (1.4)er to  
raise arguments and discussions.  
M 15 mm hmm.  
Gs 16 er for example er give topic er I I give a topic to  
students and ask them to er discuss this between  
them: between them for a- for a while and then  
speak for a public.  
M 17 mm hmm.  
Gs 18 for public er in public sorry.  
M 19 mm hmm.  
Gs 20 speak in public, and (0.7) in this:  
21 (1.4)er this will help them in- a lot in (1.0) er  
improving their: skills  
22 (0.6) coz er as you know the (1.0) er (1.4) the  
(0.6)  
er **yafni I mean** English or any (1.3) er any language  
needs er communic- it's lik- it means er  
communication so you need to be skilled more in  
speaking more than (.) other parts (.) or other  
skills.  
M 23 did you have any English speaking friends or  
contacts?

In this extract, speaker M asks speaker Gs what he would focus on if he had to design an English course. After a pause of (1.4) seconds, speaker Gs seeks a confirmation from his interviewer of his understanding of the question, which he got in line (3). Following the confirmation, speaker Gs still needed some time to think of his answer (he pauses for 1.3 seconds) before he finally states that he would focus on *speaking* if he were to design an English course.

The interviewer then posed another question about how speaker Gs would arrange the course in a way that it would focus on *speaking*. However, speaker Gs fails to understand the question and produced a request for clarification which he received in lines (11) and (13). Having understood the question, speaker Gs starts attempting to answer it in line (14). We are saying here ‘attempting’ because it is obvious that speaker Gs is engaged in internal thinking in his private world (Schourup, 1985) before answering the question. In other words, the answer is not available in speaker Gs’s mind. The internal thinking is reflected in his pause for (1.7) seconds, then in his attempt to stall for time by uttering (er) before he finally starts verbalizing his inner thought by saying (*I would like to*) signalling to his hearer the beginning of an answer. But even at that point the answer is still not ready to be presented in the shared world (Schourup, 1985) and speaker Gs displays his need for more time symbolized by his second (er) and a second pause for (1.4) seconds which are followed by a further (er) before he finally pulls his idea (*to raise arguments and discussions*) out of his private world to present it in the shared world. In segments (16, 18, 20, 21), speaker Gs explains how he would raise *discussions*, and in lines (21) he states a personal opinion about the benefit of *discussions* for learners to improve their speaking skills. At this point speaker Gs

fulfilled the conversational tasks given to him by the interviewer (answering the questions in line (1) and line (7)) which is indicated by the falling intonation of his sentence.

The new turn in line (22) can be seen as offering a reason/explanation (*English or any language means communication so you need to be skilled more in speaking*) for speaker Gs's answer in line (4) (*I would like to focus on speaking*). He starts in line (22) by *coz* which is a shortened form of 'because'. Schifffrin (1987) argues that 'because' prefaces subordinate units in discourse while 'so' marks main ideas. In this sense segment (22) is a subordinate unit of the answer and an explanation at the same time.

This explanation however, is being planned on the spot and has not been premeditated and this is clear from the use of filled pauses (er) and unfilled pauses of (1.0) and (0.6) seconds. After that the Arabic discourse marker *yaʕnī* appears and a self-repair immediately follows with the English marker *I mean*. *Yaʕnī* and *I mean* appear after a series of pauses filled and unfilled. These pauses indicate the mental preoccupations of the speaker and his attempt to gather his thoughts before rendering them. In this sense *yaʕnī* and *I mean* are used as devices to indicate the end of an internal process of thinking and planning discourse. Speaker Gs realizes that he deviates from the code of the interview, i.e. English, and he immediately switches back to English. When he translates *yaʕnī* into *I mean* he equates them in function. *Yaʕnī* and *I mean* in the above example do not repair a previous phonological or grammatical error nor do they mark an

upcoming adjustment of the prior talk. Rather they signal to the hearer that the speaker has just stepped out of his private world of thinking to the shared world. The constellation of pauses before the two markers is a sign of such an inner thinking.

### 7.2.2 Floor holding device

*I mean* appeared in the corpus as a floor holding device by the speaker to stall for some time while thinking. In the example below *I mean* works as a floor holding device. Let's have a look at example (65):

(65)  
(Working in a hospital)

Mu	1	I'm studying pharmacology.
M	2	mm hmm
	3	(1.8)
M	4	and how long does pharmacology take?
Mu	5	five years.
M	6	right. and does it entail any practical work?
Mu	7	yes (0.8) er I have three practical lessons a week.
M	8	and what do you do during these lessons?
Mu	9	we: er (2.0) we make some er medications.
M	10	oh you actually make them.
Mu	11	yes we make them=
M	12	=and you give them £to people£ (laughs)
Mu	13	no (laughs) we don't want to kill people.
M	14	(laughs)
M	15	so is there any practical work in hospitals?
Mu	16	no (1.5) not in pharmacology er pharmacology not in pharmacology
M	17	and are there pharmacies in hospitals in Syria?
Mu	18	<u>yes</u> there are pharma:- er (1.7) yes there are
M	19	mhm
	20	(1.6)
Mu	21	<b>I mean</b> (3.8) I-am not planning to work in a hospital
M	22	mm hmm
Mu	23	[so] it [(counts)]
M	24	[mhm] [mhm ] sure and to what extent you think you'll need English in in er your work?

The interviewer, speaker M, is trying to get some information about speaker Mu's studies. The dialogue above contains several question-answer adjacency pairs<sup>32</sup>: lines (4 and 5) are about the duration of Mu's course, lines (6 and 7) are about practical work in the course, lines (8 and 9) are about the content of the practical work, lines (10, 11, 12, 13) are about whether the medicine made during the practical work is given to patients or not, lines (15-16) are about whether pharmacology students have practical work in hospitals or not, and finally lines (17-18) are about the existence of pharmacies in hospitals in Syria. All these pairs have been produced and completed successfully by the conversants; i.e. the speaker produced a first part (question) and the hearer managed to provide the preferred second part (answer). So, the conversants, through adhering to the sequence of an adjacency pair, show that "mutual understanding is accomplished and displayed in talk" (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1989: 41). After the last question-answer pair has been completed in line (18), and speaker M signals her reception of speaker Mu's answer, a pause of (1.6) seconds follows during which both speakers are equally eligible to take the next turn, so speaker Mu takes the turn in line (21) starting it with *I mean*. Let us have a look at what function *I mean* is serving here, but first we need to look at what precedes it and what follows it. As mentioned above, there is a question-answer sequence (lines 17 and 18) and a confirmation of receiving an answer by speaker M line (19) before line (21) in which *I mean* appears. The content of the last question in line (17) (whether there are pharmacies in hospitals in Syria or not) is not related to the series of questions before it which were about the study of the interviewee. Rather it aims at

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<sup>32</sup> Schegloff and Sacks suggests that any two utterances constitute an adjacency pair if they are: adjacent, produced by two different speakers, ordered in the sequence of a first part and a second part and finally they are typed; i.e. the type of the first part constrains the type of the second part so for example if the first part is an invitation then the second has to be an acceptance or a refusal. (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973).

obtaining information about a different topic; i.e. the information sought from the questions (*are there pharmacies in hospitals in Syria*) is not directly related to speaker Mu's studies. This question led speaker Mu to assume that speaker M has implied in her question whether he is considering working as a pharmacist in a hospital or not. It seems that *I mean* at the beginning of line (21) prefaces a proposition which is said in response to the implication that speaker M made and which speaker Mu assumed. *I mean* is followed by a long pause (3 seconds) which indicates that thinking is in progress and thus acts as a floor holding device. In this sense *I mean* does not preface an expansion of a previous idea, a replacement of any preceding discourse or a rephrasing of the prior contribution of speaker Mu, which are some of the functions that have been identified in previous studies on *I mean* (Schiffrin 1978, Goldberg 1980, Fox Tree and Schrock 2002). What *I mean* appears to do here is stalling for time while thinking of the subsequent idea.

### **7.2.3 Replacement repairs**

As mentioned above (see 6.2), Schiffrin (1987) discusses the role of *I mean* in replacement repairs. Replacement repairs are, according to her, those pieces of discourse that replace a previous discourse and move it forward. While background repairs are subordinate units of discourse that interrupts current discourse to provide extra information. Once this information is provided the speaker goes back to the point where the discourse was interrupted by the background repair. In the present study *I mean* appeared only in replacement repairs for different purposes as will be shown below.

### 7.3.3.1 Replacement repairs for expanding and elaboration

Under this function speakers employ *I mean* in their discourse to replace what they have said for the purpose of expanding and elaborating their previous discourse. Goldberg (1980) suggests that when *I mean* prefaces a repair it does so either by adding new relevant information or by introducing a paraphrase of the previous discourse which contains the trouble source. (1980: 242). She states that:

“repairs upgrade the preceding repairable contribution by adding some additional information which will clarify or re-assess the speaker’s position”  
(1980: 218).

Consider the function of *I mean* in the following examples as a marker of replacement and elaboration simultaneously.

(66)  
(New learner)

M 1 a:nd what would be your advice to a new learner?  
Gs 2 mm hmm. (0.9) if they are they: are starting to  
learn:English?  
M 3 mm hmm.  
Gs 4 mm hmm.  
5 (1.7)  
M 6 from zero.  
Gs 7 from zero °yes° here the criteria differs actually.  
M 8 mm hmm.  
9 (1.2)  
Gs 10 coz you know (1.2) you should (*clears his throat*)  
er someone should start from er the zero he should  
have clear idea about er the er the grammar and  
the k- structure and something like that  
11 (1.2) and er **I mean** he should concentrate someone  
should con-constr- er concentrate more (1.4) on er  
on er grammar more than the speaking or listening.  
M 12 and what do you think are your particular  
strengths in English?

The pronoun ‘*He*’ in lines (10 and 11) refers to ‘a new learner’ of English mentioned in line (1). In this extract, *I mean* is used by speaker Gs as a marker of self-initiated repair to elaborate and clarify on the previous contribution. Speaker

M asks speaker Gs what his advice to a new learner of English would be. Her question is not clear enough for speaker Gs who despite signalling his reception (and possibly understanding) of the query represented in his (*mm hmm*) in line (2), requests a clarification on the question. Speaker M confirms to speaker Gs that he understood the question correctly but he still has trouble in answering. At this point, after a pause on the part of speaker Gs which indicates the persistence of the understanding problem, speaker M offers a piece of information in line (6) (*from zero*) to help speaker Gs answering the question. The answer appears in line (7) (*the criteria are different*) followed by speaker M's backchannel and a pause of (1.2) seconds. After that speaker Gs self-selects and starts to explain the answer he provided in line (10). He started by appealing to speaker's M solidarity and agreement by saying (*coz you know*) and then states that anyone who is starting to learn English from zero (*should have a clear idea about grammar and structure*). This, in fact, represents an elaboration on the answer in line (8). So, speaker Gs thinks that at this point he fulfilled his duty in the conversation and shows this by the falling intonation of his utterance. However, his utterance fails to elicit a response from speaker M. The absence of response from speaker M after the (1.2) seconds silence might have been identified by speaker Gs as a trouble source and was followed by a self-initiated repair. Schegloff and Sacks (1977, 364) distinguished between self-repair and other-repair which can be arrived at either by other-initiation of repair (by any speaker other than the speaker of the trouble source) or self-initiation of repair (by the speaker of the trouble source). *I mean* in line (11) prefaces a self-initiated repair which clarifies the immediately preceding statement. The repair includes an expansion of the previous discourse to explain what the speaker meant, or paraphrasing what have been said earlier. There is a

replacement of (*have a clear idea*) with the verb (*concentrate*), and at the same time the addition of new information that grammar is more important than (*speaking or listening*).

Similarly, *I mean* occurs turn-initially and is used by speaker Rn in the following example (that was used in the previous chapter) to mark a replacement repair of her previous discourse. After being asked about what she would focus on if she was designing an English course, speaker Rn states that she would not concentrate on one thing, rather she would concentrate on (*many things*) (line 5). She then (in line 8) prefaces a substitution of (*many things*) with (*all the the er sections of English*) by *I mean* and at the same time introduces an expansion of what she meant in her previous discourse presented in line (5). It is because individual learners might have different needs that an English course should focus on all the skills equally.

(67)  
(Designing a course<sup>33</sup>)

M	1	and (1.8) if if you were designing a course what would you like it to focus on?
	2	(3.8)
Rn	3	aha for me or for others?
M	4	if you↑ you know if a head of department here said I'd like you to design the course.
Rn	5	er I I don't think I will I will concentrate on one thing (1.0) many things.
Rn	6	yeah=
M	7	=hmm.
Rn	8	<b>I mean</b> er all the the er sections of the (-) er of English because (0.5) if I need grammar you might need something else you know.
M	9	yeah so of course it has to be all rounded but is there anything=
Rn	10	=maybe speaking will be be will be the most thing we have to concentrate on

---

<sup>33</sup> This example was previously used in chapter 6 for the analysis of you know.

We have seen in the last two examples how *I mean* can preface a replacement repair by substituting the previous discourse with a different new discourse. In (new learner) the utterance *should have a clear idea* is replaced by *should concentrate* and in (designing a course) *many things* is replaced by *all the sections*.

The following example (ALC book) is another example of *I mean* marking a replacement repair which specifies the meaning that the speaker intended. Let us have a look at it.

(68)  
(ALC book)

M	1	and what about the books you used at the ALC?
Ru	2	er very interesting.
M	3	ha ha
Ru	4	er we had fun eve- every er every class (0.5) we had to do something e- <b>I mean</b> every ea- each student had to do something to act something to to present something
	5	(0.5) yeah er er and we had like now we discussed all all the students discuss together.
M	6	hmm.
Ru	7	er a story or something er but er we had fun.
M	8	yeah

The ALC is The American Language Centre in Damascus for English language teaching where speaker Ru took a course of English some time before the interview. Speaker M's questions about the books that speaker Ru used at the ALC triggered a positive response (*very interesting*) as well as an explanation of this response i.e. why the books at the ALC were interesting. They were interesting books because students had fun when studying them, according to speaker Ru. She explains why the books were fun in lines (4-5): all students, including speaker Ru, were active in the class and had to do something every

class. More specifically, each student had to do some tasks (*acting, presenting*) in the class which made learning an enjoyable experience. When speaker Ru specified that each student had to do something, she initiates a repair replacement: she replaces (in line 4) the pronoun (*we*) with (*every, each student*) and marked this by *I mean*. In addition, *I mean* helps the speaker to expand and explain what she meant by (*we had to do something*) by providing details about the activities the students were involved in.

In example (69) *I mean* occurred twice, in the first instance (line 5) it marks a replacement repair and elaboration, while in the second time (line 6) introduces a further elaboration.

(69)  
(Speaking English)

M	1	do you think it is useless to ask
Mu	2	mhm.
M	3	Arabic students of English to speak in English with their fellow students (0.8) because you think they just wont?
Mu	4	They wont do it.
	5	(0.8) <b>I mean</b> if if they do (1.3) er: this wont last for for quite (1.4) enough time
	6	(0.9) <b>I mean</b> this wont be: (0.7) they wont speak English for a long time
	7	(1.4)er whenever someone says a word in Arabic they will
M	8	mhm.
Mu	9	(1.3) continue speaking in Arabic.
M	10	so did your brother he [tried to speak to you
Mu	11	[they don't have this this discipline
M	12	mhm.
Mu	13	°yeah°.

*I mean* occurs twice utterance-initially in line (5) and line (6). The first *I mean* is another example of this marker introducing a replacement repair i.e. when the speaker substitutes a negative sentence (*they wont do it*) with a positive one (*if they do*) and switches the emphasis from the prior discourse to the upcoming

substitution. In other words, *I mean* cancels the previous discourse and presents new statement that became the focus of the subsequent discourse. The second occurrence of *I mean* presents an example of this marker when it is used to elaborate and expand on what have been said before. After stating his opinion at the beginning of line (5), speaker Mu elaborates on his previous statement (*this wont last for quite enough time*) by adding that students will not speak in English for long time and they will soon switch back to Arabic. This elaboration is marked by *I mean*.

### **7.2.3.2 Replacement repairs for exactness**

Under this function, *I mean* was used by the learners to replace part of prior talk with other material for the purpose of being more accurate and specific in the meaning that they intended. The data shows that some speakers find it sometimes necessary to provide the exact word(s) which conveys more specific meaning than what they provided before *I mean*. In the example below (Volunteers), *I mean* occurs twice (line 5 and line 16) and in both cases the speaker adjusts his discourse by specifying what he exactly meant by what precedes *I mean*. Hence, in line (5) the substitution of (*my class*) with (*my friends and me*) is an indication of the speaker's wish to highlight to his hearer that when he said (*my class*) he meant to include himself. The specification is introduced by *I mean*. In the same manner *I mean* helps the speaker specifies what he exactly meant by living outside Damascus in line (16).

(70)  
(Volunteers)

M 1 and (0.9) do you have any English-speaking contacts  
abroad that maybe you contact by internet?  
Mu 2 I: have and (2.2) er (1.1) there were or there was  
an a conference here in this institute a year ago I  
think (1.1) and we were volunteers.  
M 3 mm hmm.  
Mu 4 my c- our my class.  
5 (1.6) **I mean** my friends and me.  
6 (2.9) er we were acquainted to some foreigners  
M 7 mm hmm.  
Mu 8 and they: gave us their: email (0.6) their  
addresses  
9 (1.4) **so** (0.8) some of my friends are emailing them  
(1.2) but not me because I don't have er (1.5) er a  
landline? or  
M 10 hmm.  
Mu 11 [a phone line] in order to to gain access to the=  
M 12 [mm hmm]  
Mu 13 =[internet] I don't this (type)=  
M 14 [hmm]  
M 15 =and you don't go to an internet café?  
Mu 16 I don't because I live outside Damascus **I mean** in  
th- the countryside **so=**  
M 17 =mm hmm.  
Mu 18 er it took it takes me a lot of time to (get) to  
Damascus.  
M 19 mhm.

Similarly, speaker J uses *I mean* in (speaking with natives) to replace what she  
said earlier with a more specific description.

(71)  
(Speaking with natives)

M 1 what is your personal strength (1.7) or weakness in  
English?  
J 2 for me?=  
M 3 =mhm.  
J 4 er conversation.  
M 5 which one strength or weakness?  
J 6 no it's weakness (0.6) [for me]  
M 7 [ha]  
J 8 I think I have er fo- for for me it's conversa-  
conversation is the most important thing  
M 9 mhm  
J 10 and I think I am weakness in conversation but in  
reading and grammar and er (1.1) yes I think I am:  
somehow good  
M 11 mhm.  
J 12 somehow.  
M 13 and how do you think you can improve?

J 14 er by reading (1.0) the only way is by reading.  
M 15 but your conversation you think is your weakness.  
J 16 er: (0.8) let me then tell you something  
17 if you want to er (0.8) to improve your  
conversation you must speak with strangers er I  
think **yafnī** er (0.5) **I mean:** for er (0.5) English  
people (0.8) er er native speaker  
18 (0.7) er it's the way to improve your conversation.  
19 and if you want to er to learn English er you can  
learn it by er read. read a lot of boo:k read er  
more and more ↑and to see er some TV programmes and  
er (0.5)er (0.7) films  
20 (0.9) but er the only way to improve your: er  
conversation is to speak with er native speakers.  
M 21 so do you have any native speakers who're [friends  
of you ?  
J 22 [no no I  
hope but £I have no (0.4) friends£ (0.6)  
native speakers.  
M 23 mhm.  
J 24 really I hope

Upon the interviewer's request, speaker J is expressing her opinion (line 17) about how to improve conversing in English. She believes that one needs to speak to English-speaking people to improve one's English conversational skills. She first referred to the native speakers of English as (*strangers*) but later realized that this word did not serve the exact meaning she had in mind. It is worth mentioning here that the word 'stranger' in Arabic has two meanings: an 'outsider' and a 'foreigner'. Speaker J had the later meaning (foreigner) in mind when she uttered the word 'strangers'. However, she realizes that her use of the English word 'strangers' with the Arabic semantic meaning 'foreigners' was not accurate and substitutes (*strangers*) with (*English people*). For this correcting substitution, she uses the Arabic discourse marker *yafnī* in line (17). The choice of *yafnī* is subconscious and the speaker becomes aware of her deviation from the conversation code (English) and starts a self-initiated repair within the same turn (Schegloff and Sacks 1977: 367) which is signalled by a metalinguistic marker (*er*) or what Schegloff and Sacks (1977) call a 'non-lexical speech perturbation'

(1977:367). Even though *I mean* replaces *yaʕnī* in this example both of them function as a replacement marker which the speaker uses to seek the exact meaning she intends. So, when speaker J slipped to *yaʕnī* she has already chosen the correct pragmatic function for substituting her previous discourse with a more specific one. She, however, uses the wrong word which we can call a production error.

Extract (Teaching child) includes another instance of *I mean* being used by speaker Ru to highlight an upcoming modification of her previous discourse which can be seen as a replacement repair to provide the exact meaning she intends. In line (5) the utterance (*not not in a school*) is replaced by the utterance (*teaching child*) with the latter being prefaced by *I mean*.

(72)  
(Teaching child)

M	1	so do you have any (firm) idea of what you want to do
		when you get a job?
	2	(1.0)
Ru	3	°I know I don't know°. but everything but not £teaching£ (0.6) £I don't like teaching£
M	4	you tried it?
Ru	5	er yeah (0.8) not not in a school <b>I mean</b> teaching: child (0.4) something yeah (0.8) (and) I couldn't bear it (both laugh)
M	6	so its good you know that <u>now</u> .

To summarize, it seems that while speakers introduce an upcoming substitution of a previous discourse marked by *I mean*, they also explain and elaborate on what they meant in the previous discourse. So, in (New learner) line (8) the speaker elaborates on what he meant that a learner (*should have a clear idea*) about

grammar, in (Designing a course) the speaker explains what she meant by (*many things*), in (ALC) the speaker specify what she meant by *we*, and similarly in (teaching a child) she clarifies what she meant by (*teaching*). Schiffrin suggests that when *I mean* introduces replacement repairs, what follows it leads forward and cancels the discourse before it, and when it prefaces expansion it elaborates on the previous discourse. It seems here that the learners are replacing the previous discourse with new material which also expands and elaborates on the previous discourse rather than cancelling it. This might be a strategy that learners resort to when trying to express their thoughts as clear as possible in a foreign language.

### 7.2.3.3 Replacement repairs for syntactic adjustments

There are cases in my data where *I mean* prefaces a syntactic repair. What is meant by syntactic repair is that the speaker uses a different syntactic structure from the one mentioned before *I mean*. It has been mentioned in the relevant literature that *I mean* may indicate the speaker's wish to restate his/her previous utterance because it is syntactically awkward (Crystal and Davy 1975).

In the following extract (extract 73) *I mean* was used to indicate a syntactic adjustment.

(73)  
(Benefit)

M	1	and do <u>you</u> have any English friends?
Mu	2	me? now <u>yes</u> I had (-) not English actually °Americans°=
M	3	=yeah.
Mu	4	°hmm°.
M	5	and do you see them regularly?
Mu	6	<u>yes</u> one of them <u>yes</u> .
M	7	so you speak in English together?

Mu 8 er:  
 M 9 or they're studying Arabic [and want to=  
 Mu 10 [yes  
 M 11 = speak in Arabic?  
 Mu 12 they they are studying Arabic but they can't speak  
 Arabic well=  
 M 13 =yeah.  
 Mu 14 so I am the most er **I mean** I have the most benefit  
 of the er=  
 M 15 =you have the edge=  
 Mu 16 =fyeah£

Speaker Mu is trying to express that when he talks to native speakers of English (who are learning Arabic) he gets more benefit than them, since their Arabic is not that good to use it with him. In line (14), he starts his sentence with the subject *I* and the verb to be *am* that should be followed by either an adjective or a noun phrase. So, if one starts a sentence with *I am*, one can add to it an adjective like *tired* or a noun phrase like *a student*. However, instead of finishing his sentence with the form SVA or SVNP, speaker Mu chooses to change to SVN where the verb used is the verb 'have'. The verb 'have' allows a noun after it so the speaker can use the noun 'benefit' instead of an adjective. One might claim that the learner in this instance lacks the lexical entry for the adjective 'beneficiary' (which he was most likely thinking to use after *I am the most*) and this provoked a modification in the syntactic structure of his sentence to help him solve the problem of the missing word (beneficiary) from his English repertoire. This syntactic adjustment is prefaced by *I mean*. The same happens in example (74):

(74)  
 (English Level)

M 1 and is the standard of English amongst most of the  
 first year students (0.7)is it about the same or  
 does it vary a lot?  
 Mu 2 it's not the same.  
 3 (1.5) er it differs a lot.  
 4 (1.6)  
 M 5 so [how-  
 Mu 6 [some some of them er (1.3) just er past er the

exam er for the er Baccalaureate certificate and  
 that's it.  
 7 (0.8) some of them er are good (1.1) and (0.4) and  
 this is **I mean** you you can see this even in (0.9)  
 my friends er the same age.  
 M 8 mm hmm.

Prior to this interaction, both speakers were discussing if first year pharmacology students would need English for their study. Speaker Mu mentions that students usually have to look up certain chemical substances in English references and read about them thus confirming their need of English during their study. Following this, in lines (1) the interviewer asks speaker Mu whether all the first year students have a standard level of English and in lines (2 and 3) speaker Mu complies informationally with the query of the interviewer by saying (*it's not the same*). After an incomplete question from the interviewer about how the level of English differs among the students, speaker Mu provides an explanation in lines (6 and 7). Some of the students, according to him, do not care much about English and treat it as a subject which have to taken in the high school which they have to pass and, while others are generally good at it. Speaker Mu then moves on to support his position by giving an example from his own experience; the level of English is different even among his friends who are the same age as him. His attempt to give the example starts by uttering *and* followed by a pause and then (*and this is*), *I mean* appears at this point in line (7) to indicate that the speaker has change his linguistic plan. In line (7) he reformulates his whole utterance by adding after *I mean*. In this sense *I mean* is used to syntactically repair the structure that occurred before it.

## 7.2.4 Introducing Justification

Under this function, *I mean* was used to introduce a justification of what was said before it, in other words, to give a reason for what the speaker has said before *I mean*. See example (75) below:

(75)  
(English level)

M 1 so so (0.9) do the ones who know English speak English together at all?  
Mu 2 no (0.9) they speak in Arabic.  
3 (1.4)  
M 4 so even when you discuss the chemicals in your (1.2) in your la:b.  
Mu 5 even when we discuss the chemicals er substances the chemical substances (0.8) we: we don't discuss this in English we discuss it in er (1.2) Arabic (1.6) we just er study before the exam  
M 6 hmm.  
Mu 7 and the teacher or er the doctor asks us in English (0.6) maybe (0.4) and then we have to respond (1.1) or to answer in English.  
M 8 and what happens to your friends (0.9) who are in your year in pharmacology whose English is very weak?  
Mu 9 °hmm°.  
M 10 Although you said you don't need to look up all the (1.2) er medications=  
Mu 11 =yes  
M 12 too much now (0.5) what happens to them when they (0.7) look them up because medical terminology is quite=  
Mu 13 =they they just er (0.8) don't do it and depend on us  
(laughs)  
M 14 I see you help them.  
Mu 15 fer I I try (0.7) my bestf  
M 16 but then in the exam?  
Mu 17 °hmm° well they fail=  
M 18 =they fail  
(speaker Mu laughs)  
Mu 19 I don't know **I mean** this is my first exam er (0.7) the coming one=  
M 20 [=oh right  
Mu 21 [yes  
M 22 when is it coming up?  
Mu 23 er (3.3)°I think in June°?

In this extract, speaker M and speaker Mu are discussing the topic of using English among the pharmacology students. *I mean* is used by speaker Mu in line (19) where it appears utterance-medial to introduce a justification to a previous contribution. Speaker M asks how the students who are weak in English would cope in their study in line (12) and speaker Mu says that they would depend on the help of their fellow students who are good in English. However, speaker M wonders how they would manage in the exam and speaker Mu answers jokingly that they would fail. This is indicated by the laugh. But Speaker M took the answer as a serious answer and repeats it in line (18). Speaker Mu then switches to a serious key saying that he does not know the fate of those who are weak in English because the coming exam will be his first. Note that I used the word ‘because’ which indicate that *I mean* can be replaced by *because* which render a similar interpretation. In this sense *I mean* is used to introduce a justification to a previous utterance. *I mean* introduces an upcoming modification in that it explains why the speaker does not ‘know’ the fate of his fellow students. It is because he has not been through the experience of sitting exams to be able to tell what would happen to the students who are weak at English. This justification is prefaced by *I mean*.

As in the previous two chapters and before moving to the concluding remarks of this chapter, I will present below an example of *I mean* when it is used as non-discourse marker to show all the instances of the item as it occurred in the data.

### 7.3 *I mean* as a non-discourse marker

Just like *so* and *you know* were used by the learners as non-discourse markers, there are a few cases in the data where the lexical sequence *I mean* was not used as a discourse marker, but rather as a sequence which is part of the syntax and the semantic content of the sentence in which it appears, therefore, it cannot be omitted. Schiffrin (1987) mentions that *I mean* sometimes can specify the key (seriousness) of the speaker. However, she unfortunately confuses this usage of *I mean* as a non-discourse marker with its discourse marker usage. The example she presents include *I mean* as part of the sentence, thus it is not syntactically optional. She considers '*I mean*' in instances like "No I mean it" (1987: 297) a discourse marker when in reality *I mean* cannot be taken out of the sentence in this example. The following extract from my data illustrates *I mean* as part of the syntactic structure and the semantic content of the sentence in line (2) and line (10).

(76)  
(Age gap)

J 1 yeah but (1.2) but I think: but now (0.8) the the  
 father d- (1.4) don't care about the children  
 2 (1.2)the only must the only thing they care about  
 is how they feed them how they er th- they make  
 them: (1.7) need any (1.4) don't need anything but  
 they they they don't er considered the the the  
 other side th- wh- which **I mean** the: spiritual  
 [side I think.  
 M 3 [mhm mhm]  
 J 4 there's a very:(1.5)er it's: (2.5) it's: (0.6)  
 maʔsāt (laughs)  
 M 5 I don't know what that means. (1.1) so do you think  
 that because of the age gap?  
 J 6 yes and:=  
 M 7 =are there a lot of [fathers  
 8 [A-AND the business is ver- er  
 the father er so care about his business so they he  
 he neglects his: childre:n and (1.3) he he doesn't  
 he **yaʔnī** it's it doesn't matter for him how is is  
 he happy or sad or=

M 9 =mhm  
J 10 that's what **I mean**.  
M 11 ok well that's interesting.

#### 7.4 Discussion and concluding remarks

I have presented in this chapter the analysis of the discourse marker *I mean* in the talk of the Syrian Arabic learners of English. Although this study is not by any means a quantitative research, it is worth mentioning that the learners used *I mean* significantly less than the other two discourse markers *so*, and *you know*.

Nevertheless, *I mean* was employed by some learners in their speech to fulfill various functions. It was used to verbalize an inner thought, to hold the floor of the conversation, to introduce replacement repairs which at the same time serve different purposes: expanding the prior discourse, achieving accuracy in meaning, and syntactically adjusting sentences. *I mean* was also useful for the learners to introduce a justification of a previous proposition.

Looking at the results of the analysis, we can see that the learners have shown ability to use *I mean* in ways (which are identified in the literature) similar to native speakers of English. However, in some cases they have extended the functions of *I mean* to suit their specific needs to better express themselves. For example, in introducing replacement repairs they also introduced expansions of their previous discourse, or repairs that rendered more accurate meaning, or in some cases repairs that allowed them to syntactically change their sentences. In this sense, replacement repairs did not cancel the previous discourse but rather it modified it.

Some learners have also used *I mean* to verbalize an inner thought that they were struggling to express. When uttering *I mean*, speaker Gs in example (64) signalled the transition of his idea from his ‘private world’ to the ‘shared world’. Also, *I mean* was used to hold the floor while thinking of what to say next.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusions

This dissertation has presented an analysis of the three discourse markers *so*, *you know* and *I mean* in the English discourse of Syrian Arabic learners. The data showed that Syrian Arabic learners of English use these markers in their English discourse for various functions.

Although this is not a quantitative research, the data revealed that *so* was the most used marker in the learners' discourse. This marker proved to be useful for the learners to indicate textual relationship between parts of their discourse. In this sense, it was used as a marker that indicates a cause-result relationship between two utterances, a marker of inference, and a marker of restating and/or summarising a previously mentioned idea or opinion. *So* was also found in sentence-final position marking potential transition relevance places.

Interestingly, *so* was used as a marker of transitions in discourse. That is, in some cases *so* precedes sentences that are not in a direct relation with the previous discourse (i.e. neither a result nor a summary of it) but are seen as a continuation of it. In this sense, it moves the discourse forward and allows the speaker to present the next part of his or her talk. This function was found also in the Arabic marker *fa*. Since the speakers are native speakers of Arabic, one might find an explanation for the use of the *so* as a marker of transition in that the learners are influenced by their first language use of *fa*. In fact, Sankoff et al (1997) found that Anglophobes were influenced by the English *like* for their heavy use of the French

discourse marker *comme*. Syrian Arabic learners seem to be influenced as well by their Arabic *fa* in their use of *so* as transition marker. It is very important to note here that rather than considering *so* when it functions as a transition marker a ‘deviation’ or negative transfer (cf. Ellis 1994) from the target language (English), it is viewed as the learners’ creative way of using the two linguistic repertoires at their disposal (English and Arabic), even if it means the form is from one language (English) and the function is from the other (Arabic).

The second discourse marker that was analysed in this study was *you know*. Syrian Arabic learners used *you know* on the textual level as a marker of topic change. Interactionally, *you know* was used for 1) signalling certainty about the hearer’s knowledge, 2) reminding the interviewer with information presented earlier, 3) a marker of intimacy and appealing for sympathy, and 4) a marker of inviting the hearer to read an implied meaning. In general, the learners use *you know* to create a rapport with the interviewer. The marker *btaʕrfi* and its variants were used mainly for checking on the hearer’s understanding of what is being said. No apparent influence of the Arabic markers is seen on how *you know* was used by the learners.

*I mean* was the last marker to be examined in this study. It was found that some learners used *I mean* to verbalize an inner thought, to hold the floor of the conversation, and to introduce replacement repairs. The replacement repairs introduced by *I mean* were for different purposes: expanding the prior discourse, achieving accuracy in meaning, and syntactically adjusting sentences. *I mean* was also useful for the learners to introduce a justification of a previous proposition.

Like *you know*, there was no apparent influence of the Arabic marker *yaʕnī* on the use of the marker *I mean*.

Apart from these three markers, no other markers were used by the learners in the current data, with the exception of the marker *well* which was found in the speech of two speakers only (speaker Mu and speaker Gs) where it was used for a few times only. Possible explanations for the absence of other markers are:

First, examination of the Syrian Arabic markers shows it has equivalents to the English discourse markers *so*, *I mean* and *you know*, (*fa*, *yaʕnī* and *baʕrfī* respectively) but no direct equivalents of other markers like *well*, *like* are available which might explain the absence of such markers in the discourse of the speakers.

Second, limited interaction with the target language community might also offer an explanation for the lack of other markers. Language socialization theory argues that there is a correlation between the linguistic development of children or learners of a second/foreign language and the socio-cultural norms of the speech community of that language (Ochs 1988, 1990, cited in Yoshimi, 1999; Hellermann 2007). This means that learning how to use language is a social process, through which children/second language learners, acquire the ability to know how to use language through social interaction. Thus, it might be that Syrian Arabic learners do not use other discourse markers like (*like*, *sort of*, *kind of*, *well*, etc) because they have not acquired them through language socialization. The sample of this study is

too small to draw any generalizations on this issue and further research is needed.

This is the first study that investigates the use of English discourse markers' by Syrian Arab learners of English in an Arabic monolingual society. Some of the limitations to this study are due to the following:

First, it was almost impossible to obtain spoken English data without conducting prearranged interviews which might have caused some problems; interviews are not free conversations and despite all the efforts to minimise their formal and strict format, the speakers might have felt intimidated by the presence of the recorder and might have monitored their speech production.

Second, due to the particular setting of this research (Syria where the learning and speaking of English are still at a relatively early stage) it was very difficult to get a larger set of data in order to carry out a quantitative analysis along with the qualitative study. Quantitative analysis may enable us to make generalizations about the patterns and functions of discourse markers in the conversation of Syrian learners.

Further potential research could involve: (1) an investigation of discourse markers and their functions in the speech of students at different proficiency levels. In the present study, only those who were in the intermediate level of English agreed to be interviewed, perhaps because they felt more confident than those in lower levels; (2) obtaining English data from group interaction among Syrian students

and comparing it to the current study's data to see if there is any variation in the use of discourse markers; (3) a comparison between the English performance of the Syrian learners and learners from other Arabic countries (e.g. Jordan and Egypt) where English is spoken on a wider scale than in Syria, to examine possible similarities and differences in the usage of English discourse markers; (4) an analysis of the English language performance of both the learners and the teacher in a classroom setting in Syria to determine if there is a correlation between the input of the teacher (if any) and the students' use of discourse markers; (5) a thorough examination of the English teaching materials in the Syrian schools and universities in order to investigate if they deal with the topic of discourse markers or contain any explicit instructions on how to use them.

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## **Appendix**

### **The Interviews' Questions**

#### **Aim of the interview**

*To collect conversational data by engaging the participants in a conversation, allowing them to talk as freely as possible and giving them the chance to talk as much as they want.*

#### **Questions types**

##### **1. Biographical information**

- *What's your name?*
- *Tell me more about yourself (What are you studying at the university which year are you in? etc)*
- *How would you describe your family?*
- *How do you think your friends would describe you?*

##### **2. English acquisition**

- *When did you start learning English?*
- *How did you start learning English? School? Travel abroad? Private courses?*
- *What English level are you studying now in the ESP centre?*
- *Do you have English-speaking friends/contacts? How often do you see these English friends and speak with them in English?*
- *Do any of your family speak English?*
- *What do you think are your particular strengths and weaknesses in English?*
- *What is the most difficult part you find in learning English? Why?*

- *What do you think of the English books you have studied / are studying now?*
- *What would you like an English course to focus on?*
- *Do you watch English Television? English movies/news?*
- *Do you listen to English radio?*
- *How do you think you can improve your English?*
- *What would be your advice to a new learner of English?*

### **3. Imaginary questions**

- *If you won a million USA dollars what would you do with it? why?*
- *If you were sixteen again and could choose your life or career path what would you do differently?*
- *If you chose to settle in another country which one would it be? Why?*
- *Where do you see yourself in twenty years time?*

### **4. Narrative elicitation question**

- *What do you think of the child-parent relationship in Syria today?*

