



A relevance-theoretic approach to the discourse marker *hasa* ‘now’ in Jordanian Arabic

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Abstract

The study aims at investigating the discourse marker *hasa* ‘now’ in Jordanian Arabic using relevance theory. The study also examined the grammaticalization of *hasa* and how it developed to be a discourse marker. The study also explored the functions of *hasa* in Jordanian Arabic. The data, which consisted of 500 tokens of *hasa* ‘now,’ were collected from Jordanian radio programs, personal communications, and interviews with native speakers of Jordanian Arabic. The study found out that *hasa* ‘now’ was developed from the phrase *hay ilsaʕah* ‘this hour’ by the process of grammaticalization. The study also found out that the lexical meaning of *hasa* as an adverb meaning ‘now’ developed to be a discourse marker serving different functions. The study also showed that *hasa* limits the hearer to a possible interpretation of utterances, which helps the hearer to reach the optimal relevance.

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Keywords: discourse markers; grammaticalization; relevance theory; *hasa*; Jordanian Arabic

1. Introduction

Discourse markers (DMs) are considered one of the main concerns of pragmatics, which refer to “sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk” (Schiffrin 1987, 31). Fraser (1999, p. 950) also defined DMs as “a class of lexical expressions drawn primarily from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases. With certain exceptions, they signal a relationship between the interpretations of the segment they introduce and the prior segment.”

Many approaches, like coherence and relevance theory, investigated discourse markers. The coherence approach supposes that DMs create a coherent text. Schiffrin (1987, p. 49) argued that the study of DMs is part of coherence and “how speakers and hearers jointly integrate forms, meanings, and actions to make overall sense out of what is said.” For Schiffrin (1987), DMs are “bracket units of talk. Sometimes those units are sentences, but sometimes they are prepositions, speech acts, tone units.” (p. 37). In other words, DMs are devices used to create coherent texts.

On the other hand, RT viewed DMs as a tool to maximize relevance in communication. Wilson and Sperber developed RT in 1986. RT claims that cognitive processes in human beings aimed at obtaining

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as significant “cognitive effect” as possible while using as little “processing effort” as possible (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, p. 7). Blakemore (2002, 2006) suggested that DMs give instructions to the hearer on how to interpret utterances. According to Blakemore, the role of DMS is to constrain “the interpretation of the utterances that contain them by virtue of the inferential connections they express” (1987, p. 105). In any given conversation, hearers attempted to interpret the utterances as relevant to the context of these utterances. However, these utterances may have a different interpretation. Thus, the speaker may use DMS to limit the hearer to a possible understanding. In other words, DMS are used as a guideline for hearers to reach to the intended interpretation/ optimal relevance.

A few studies investigated discourse markers using relevance theory. Zhao (2015) investigated the functions of DMs using relevance theory. The study found out that DMs give the hearer instructions to reach for optimal relevance. Alshamari (2015) explored the functions of three words in North Hail Arabic: *maar*, *jamaar*, and *almuhim* using a relevance theory. The study used Schourup (1999)’s characteristics of discourse markers to prove that these words are discourse markers. The study found out that these expressions minimize the processing effort needed by the hearer to interpret speakers’ utterances.

In another study, Thuy (2019) explored the uses of the DM *yeah* from a relevance-theoretic approach. The findings of the study showed that the speaker uses *yeah* to constraint the hearers’ search for the interpretation of utterances in different contexts. Alrajhi (2019) investigated the meanings of *ʔlhin* in Saudi Arabic using relevance theory. The study revealed that *ʔlhin* guides the hearers to reach to the most relevant pragmatic interpretation. Schourup (2011) used a relevance-theoretic perspective to explore the discourse marker ‘now’. He suggested that that ‘now’ limits the interpretations of the hearers.

After reviewing the previous literature, it is clear that more studies need to be conducted on DMs in Arabic dialects, especially in Jordanian Arabic, using relevance theory. Moreover, to the best knowledge of the author, the DM *hasa* in JA was not investigated by other studies. Thus, the present study aimed at first to prove that *hasa* is a DM in JA. It also examines the uses of *hasa* ‘now’ in Jordanian Arabic from the relevance perspective. The study also sheds light on the grammaticalization of *hasa* ‘now’ in JA.

2. Method

The researcher collected the data from Jordanian radio programs, personal communications, and interviews with native speakers of Jordanian Arabic. The data consisted of 500 tokens of *hasa* ‘now.’ After collecting the data, the researcher investigated the grammaticalization of *hasa* ‘now’ in Jordanian Arabic. Then he explores the feature of *hasa* as a discourse marker following Schourup (1999). The researcher investigated the meanings and functions of *hasa* as discourse markers that contribute to discourse coherence and textuality. Finally, the researcher examined *hasa* from a relevance theory perspective.

3. Results

3.1. Grammaticalization of *hasa* ‘now’

Grammaticalization refers to a gradual process where a lexical item gradually changes from being a content word to serve a grammatical function (Geurts, 2000). Heine & Reh (1984, p. 15) also defined grammaticalization “as an evolution whereby linguistic units lose in semantic complexity, pragmatic significance, syntactic freedom, and phonetic substance, respectively.” The process of shifting a lexical item into a grammatical marker includes one or more of four rather overlapping stages, including

semantic bleaching, extension, decategorization, and phonetic reduction (Hopper & Traugott, 2003). Semantic bleaching occurs when the linguistic item loses its content meaning and start developing new meanings. Extension is the process by which the linguistic item is used in new contexts. Decategorization refers to the loss of some of the morphosyntactic features of the lexical item. Phonetic reduction refers to the loss in the phonetic substance of the lexical item (Heine 2003: 579).

The researcher proposed that *hasa* ‘now’ was developed from the phrase *hay ilsaʕah* ‘this hour’ by the process of grammaticalization. The phrase /hay ilsaʕah/ used to refer to the present time in Jordanian Arabic, as shown in the following example:

- (1) ibʕad ʕan-i hay il-saʕah
 Go. IMP from-me this ART-hour
 ‘Go away from me at this moment.’

The study proposed that the phrase *hay ilsaʕah* ‘this hour’ undergoes the process of phonological reduction, and it became ‘*hasa*’. In Jordanian Arabic, *hasa* is used as a temporal adverb meaning ‘now’. The analysis of the data showed that 30% of tokens were used as a temporal adverb. The following examples illustrate the semantic meaning of *hasa*:

- (2) ana hasa maʕyul aʕuf-ak bokrah
 I now busy see. FUT-you tomorrow
 ‘I am busy now. I will see you tomorrow.’

- (3) ʕu rah tiʕmal hasa?
 What will do now?
 ‘What will you do now?’

Furthermore, the lexical word *hasa* undergoes the process of semantic bleaching and extension. Additional to the lexical meaning of *hasa* as an adverb meaning ‘now’, it is developed to be a discourse marker serving different functions and meanings in different contexts. (See section 3.3.)

3.2. *Hasa as a discourse marker*

To prove that *hasa* is a discourse marker Schourup (1999) features were adopted. They include initiality, connectivity, orality, non-truth conditionality, optionality, and weak clause association (Schourup, 1999, p.230).

3.2.1. *Connectivity*

According to Schourup (1999), DMs are used to connect units of discourse. The data showed that *hasa* links some discursal groups with each other, as shown in the following example:

- (4) Kul ili: ʕmilt-uh maʕ-ah, hasa ana: mo mni:h
 Every which do. 1PST-you with-him. Now I NEG good
 ‘Everything I did to him, and now he thinks I am not good.’

Hasa is used to connect the utterances.

3.2.2. *Non-Truth-Conditionality*

This propriety refers to the assumption that DMs do not contribute to the propositional content of the utterances. The analysis of the data showed that *hasa* as a discourse marker does not show any semantic content which can affect the propositional content of the utterances. Consider the following example:

(5) A: ana: baḥki kθi:r?
I talk. PRG much?
'Am I talking too much?'

B: Hasa inti: bis^ʕarahah lisa:n-ik ma yudxul bθum-ik.
Now you. F honestly tongue-you NEG enter mouth-you.F
'Honestly, you are a talkative person.'

In the previous example, *hasa* 'now' does not have a semantic meaning that effected the meaning of the utterance. The deletion of *hasa* 'now' does not alter the propositional content of the utterance.

3.2.3. Weak-Clause Association

According to Schourup (1999), DMs occur outside the grammatical structure of the. DMs are "grammatically peripheral, in the sense that they do not enter into constructions with the sentence content" (Fraser, 1990, p.391).

(6) A: imbarah ka:nt riḥlah ḥilwah
Yesterday was journey nice
'It was a nice journey.'

B: Ah. hasa, iḥki-li: jo s^ʕar ma^ʕ ax-uk bi-l-dzam^ʕah?
Yes, now tell-me what happen.PST with brother-your in –ART-university
'Yes, tell me what happened with your brother at university.'

In the previous example, *hasa* is located outside the structure of the utterance /iḥki-li: jo s^ʕar ma^ʕ ax-u:k bi-l-dzam^ʕah/ 'tell me what happened with your brother at university'.

3.2.4. Initiality

DMs tend to occur clause-initially (Fraser, 1996; Schourup, 1999 and Schiffrin, 2001). Indeed, *hasa* as a discourse marker occurs clause-initially. The analysis of the data showed that 80% of *hasa* 'now' tokens occur initially.

3.2.5. Optionality

Another feature of DMs is optionality, which suggests that DMS is optional rather than obligatory. They can be deleted and the truth-conditionality of the utterance will not be affected. Consider the following example:

(7) A: kaif-ik il-youm?
How-you. F ART-today?
'How are you?'

B: alḥamdu lilah, bxi:r. Hasa wein bed-na nruḥ?
Thank God, good. Now where want-we go?
'Good, anyway, where do we want to go?'

If *hasa* is omitted, the content meaning of the utterance is not affected. *Hasa* is used to indicate that speaker B shifts to another topic.

3.3. Functions of *hasa*

The findings of the study revealed that *hasa* ‘now’ has many uses that contribute to discourse coherence and textuality, including openings markers, orientation shifts, ideational shifting, showing disagreement, and marking of a reason.

3.3.1. Ideational shifting

Native speakers of Jordanian Arabic used *hasa* ‘now’ as a discourse marker to change the topic, as shown in the following example:

- (8) A: keif inbasatʔit bi-l-film?
 How enjoy.2SG in-ART-movie?
 ‘Did you enjoy the movie?’
- B: ah kθi:r. Film a:kʃin
 Yes very much. Movie action
 ‘Yes, very much. It was an action movie.’
- A: kwais. Hasa gu:l-i syart-ak bidak tbi:ʃ-ha ?
 Good! Now tell-me car-your want sell-it?
 ‘Good! [DM] Tell me! Do you want to sell your car?’

In the previous example, speaker A and B were talking about a movie. Then speaker A uses *hasa* ‘now’ to indicate that he wants to change a topic (Speaker A asked B whether he wants to sell his car).

3.3.2. Showing disagreement

Native speakers of Jordanian Arabic used *hasa* ‘now’ as a discourse marker to indicate disagreement, as shown in the following example:

- (9) A: law n-ʃi:sh bla: tilifonat ahsan
 If we-live without phones better
 ‘It would be better if we live without phones.’
- B: Hasa ana: ma: battafig maʃ-ak. sʔaʃab inna:s tʃi:ʃ bla: tiliphona:t
 Now I NEG agree with-you hard people live without telephones
 ‘I do not agree with you. People cannot live without phones’

Speaker B uses *hasa* to indicate that he disagrees with Speaker A.

3.3.3. Indicate a reason

Native speakers of Jordanian Arabic used *hasa* ‘now’ as a discourse marker to indicate a reason. Consider the following example:

- (10) A: bidd-ik tidʒ-i ʃla: il-ilyoum maftu:h?
 Want-you.F came-you to ART-day open
 ‘Do you want to come to the open day?’
- B: la. Hasa Tula:b kθi:rah ma: raħ tidʒi:
 No. Now students many NEG will come,
 ‘No, many students will not come.’

Speaker A asked speaker B whether she wants to come to the open day. Speaker A does not want to attend the open-day by providing a reason that many students will not come. The speaker uses *hasa* ‘now’ at the beginning of the utterance to indicate a reason.

3.3.4. Orientation shift

Native speakers of Jordanian Arabic use *hasa* ‘now’ to make a shift from one mood to another. Consider the following example:

- (11) Hasa hay is-sayarah bmi:t alaf
 Now this Art-car hundred thousand
 ‘This car worthies one hundred thousand!’

The speaker uses *hasa* to transfer from a narrative to an evaluative mood ‘now.’ He disvalues the price of the car. He thinks that the vehicle does not worth this amount of money.

3.3.5. Opening markers

Speakers of Jordanian Arabic used *hasa* to start their speech, as shown in the following examples:

- (12) A: ana: baḥki: kḥi:r?
 I talk. PRG much?
 ‘Am I talking too much?’
 B: Hasa inti: bisʿaraḥah lisa:n-ik ma yudxul bḥum-ik.
 Now you. F honestly tongue-you NEG enter mouth-you.F
 ‘Honestly, you are a talkative person.’

In the previous example, A asked B whether she talks very much, and B responds that he thinks that she is a talkative person. Speaker B knows that his speech may be harsh, so he uses *hasa* to prepare the hearer to his criticism.

3.4. Hasa from a relevance-theoretic approach

Based on the relevance theory, the function of DMs is to limit the hearer to a possible interpretation of utterances, which helps the hearer to reach the optimal relevance (Blakemore, 2002, 2004). *Hasa*, as a DM, is used to constraint the possible interpretations of utterance which guide the hearers to find the optimal relevant interpretation. Consider the following examples:

- (13) A: imbarah ka:nt riḥlah ḥilwah
 Yesterday was journey nice
 ‘It was a nice journey.’
 B: Ah. hasa, iḥki-li: jo sʿa:r maḥ ax-uk bi-l-dʒamʿah?
 Yes, now tell-me what happen with brother-your in –ART-university
 ‘Yes, tell me what happened with your brother at university.’

In this example, *hasa* ‘now’ functions as an ideational shift. The speaker uses *hasa* to attract the attention of speaker A to what he is going to say. *Hasa* constrains the possible interpretation of the utterance. The use of *hasa* makes it clear for speaker A that speaker B shifts to another topic.

- (14) A: law n-ḥi:sh bla: tilifonat aḥsan
 If we-live without phones better
 ‘It would be better if we live without phones.’

B: Hasa ana: ma: batafig maʕ-ak. sʕaʕab inna:s tʕi:f bla: tiliphona:t
 Now I NEG agree with-you hard people live without telephones
 ‘I do not agree with you. People cannot live without phones’

In the previous example, speaker A believes that it would be better if people live without phones. Speaker B uses *hasa* to indicate that he disagrees with A. The use of *hasa* constrains the interpretation of B’s utterance. Once speaker A hears the DM *hasa*, he understands that what comes next is a disagreement with his opinion.

(15) A: bidd-ik tidʒ-i ʕla: il-ilyoum maftu:h?
 Want-you.F came-you to ART-day open
 ‘Do you want to come to the open day?’
 B: la. Hasa tʕulla:b kthi:rah ma: rah tidʒi:
 No. Now students many NEG will come
 ‘No, many students will not come.’

In the previous example, Speaker B refuses to come to the open day, and she provides a reason why she does not want to come. The use of *hasa* as a marker of reason leads the hearer to the optimal interpretation. When speaker A hears the DM *hasa*, she realized that what follows is a reason.

4. Conclusions

The present study examined the discourse marker *hasa* ‘now’ from a relevance-theoretic perspective. It also investigates how *hasa* developed from the adverb of time by process of grammaticalization to function as a DM. The sample of the study consisted of 500 tokens *hasa* collected from Jordanian radio programs, personal communications, and interviews with native speakers of Jordanian Arabic. The study found out that *hasa* underwent the process of grammaticalization. It underwent the process of phonological reduction and derived from the phrase *hay ilsa ʕah* ‘this hour’. The study also found out that *hasa* as an adverb of time developed by the process of extension and semantic bleaching to serve as a discourse marker. The study found out 70% of the examples of *hasa* were used as a discourse marker. Additionally, the study proved that *hasa* is a discourse marker using Schourup (1999) features. These features include connectivity, weak clause association, optionality, non-truth conditionality, orality, and initiality. The results also showed that the discourse marker *hasa* serves many functions, including openings markers, marking of a reason, orientation shifts, ideational shifting, and showing disagreement. The study also examined based on the relevance theory. The study found out that *hasa* was used to limit the hearer to a possible interpretation of utterances, which helps the hearer to reach the optimal relevance.

5. Ethics Committee Approval

The author(s) confirm(s) that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country (Date of Confirmation: 21.01.2021).

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Ürdün Arapçasındaki Söylem İşareti ‘Şimdi’ ye Alaka-teorik Yaklaşımı

Bu çalışma Ürdün Arapçasında bulunan söylem işareti *hasa* ‘şimdi’ yi görecelik teorisi kullanarak incelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Çalışma *hasa*’nın dilbilgiselleştirmesini ve bunun nasıl söylem işareti olarak geliştiğini de incelemektedir. Çalışma Ürdün Arapçasında bulunan söylem işareti *hasa* ‘şimdi’ nin işlevlerini irdedelemektedir. *hasa* ‘şimdi’ ye ait 500 örnekten oluşan veriler Ürdün radio programları, kişisel iletişimler ve Ürdün Arapçasını anadili gibi konuşanlarla yapılan mülakatlarda elde edilmiştir. Çalışma *hasa* ‘şimdi’ nin *hay ılsaḥ* ‘bu saat’ sözcük öbeğinden dilbilgiselleştirme süreciyle geliştiğini ortaya koymuştur. Çalışmada *hasa* ’nın sözcük anlamı zarf olan ‘şimdi’ farklı işlevleri olan söylem işareti olarak gelişmiştir. Çalışma aynı zamanda *hasa* ’nın dinleyicinin optimal düzeye gelmesini sağlayan olası sözcüklerin yorumunda sınırlı kaldığını da göstermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: söylem işaretleri; dilbilgiselleştirme; alaka teorisi; *hasa*; Ürdün Arapçası

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