

**MASTER RESEARCH PROJECT:** Markers in Urban Hijazi Discourse

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Discourse markers are lexical units that are grammatically independent and carry a procedural meaning (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1999). The semantic function of discourse markers in the context of personal narratives has attracted a number of scholars in the field (Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Ferrara, 1997; Torres, 2002). Discourse markers have been investigated in oral personal narratives in two different dialects in Saudi Arabic; Jizani Arabic (Mobarki, 2014) and Najdi Arabic (Alsufayan, 2014; Alasmari, 2013). However, the previous studies restricted their participants to one gender, either male or female. This study investigates the function of discourse markers in another variety of Saudi Arabic, Urban Hijazi in both males' and females' speech with the variables of age and educational level controlled.

The study examines the discourse markers *Yaani* 'meaning', *fa* 'so', *wallah* 'by God' and *Ya rajel* 'O man'. The narratives were collected from two female and two male Urban Hijazi Arabic native speakers. The conversations were recorded during casual conversation sessions with the participants in a natural, informal setting with tea and snacks. Two separate sessions were held, one for males and the other for females, according to Saudi cultural norms.

Three research questions are addressed: (1) what are the semantic and discourse functions of the markers that are found in the narratives? (2) What syntactic positions will all markers fall

into within tone-units? (3) What is the frequency of occurrence of the markers in their conversation?

Only three different markers were observed in 99 minutes of conversation, namely; *Yaani* 'meaning', *fa* 'so', *wallah* 'by God' for a total of 384 instances. All markers performed a variety of functions. In terms of position, *Yaani* 'meaning', *wallah* 'by God' occurred in all three syntactic positions within tone-unit. While *fa* 'so' occupied only the tone-unit initial position. Finally, discourse markers were more frequent in the females' session compared to the males'. They occurred with a frequency of 1 marker per 20.30 words for females, with *yaani* 'meaning' as the most frequently used marker. In contrast, males used one marker per 42.62 words, with *wallah* 'by God' as the most frequent marker.