The Pragmatic Functions of Yahummalali in Jordanian Spoken Arabic

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Abstract

This paper aims to identify the pragmatic functions of the discourse marker Yahummalali in Jordanian spoken Arabic (JSA). To this end, the researchers compiled a list of scenarios that include Yahummalali on the basis of their exposure to this expression and familiarity with its contexts in Jordanian society. They then identified the pragmatic function of Yahummalali in each scenario. The identified functions were subjected to a validation process by a panel of jurors who suggested amendments to certain scenarios and functions. The acceptability of the amended version was tested against the intuition of 55 BA Jordanian students at the University of Jordan. The analysis reveals that Yahummalali has nineteen pragmatic functions, viz., expressing dismay and disapproval, fear, condemnation, disappointment, mitigating exaggerated claims, wishing, expressing sadness, regret, dissatisfaction, shock, making threats, ridiculing, expressing anger, jealousy, desperation, surprise, sarcasm, indecisiveness and doubt or uncertainty.

Keywords: Discourse marker, Jordanian spoken Arabic, pragmatic functions, Yahummalali.

1. Introduction

The current study seeks to investigate the pragmatic functions of a widely used discourse marker in Jordanian spoken Arabic (JSA), namely, ya:hummala:li*. As stated in Zamancom website, the Jordanian historian Al-Ozazi claims that Yahummalali consists of three words: the vocative particle ya:, humma ‘a large number of camels’ and la:li ‘make a lot of noise’. It is reported that Yahummalali was used for the first time when a brave man called Obaid Ali recovered 100 stolen camels by himself. Thus, Yahummalali, Obaid Ali meaning ‘we wish there were someone brave like Obaid Ali, who recovered 100 stolen camels by himself’ was originally used to show despair. Furthermore, Yahummalali is used in a number of Jordanian folk songs, TV programs, radio talks, social media and informal conversational contexts. For instance, the Jordanian singer Ziad Saleh performed a song entitled Yahummalali (Arab Song Website). The lyrics read as follows: ya:hummala:li winfiri jhubbi sæ: ille:la ḫala:li 'Yahummalali my love has become all mine tonight'; ya:hummala:li wu hi: yaha ḥaggag illi bi: aḥlam 'Yahummalali my dreams have eventually come true'. Apparently, the two instances of Yahummalali here convey one main function, viz., expressing happiness.

The idea of this paper initially emerged after a former speaker of the lower house of Parliament in Jordan filed a case against a Jordanian woman who commented with Yahummalali on one of his Facebook posts. The plaintiff accused her of insulting and inflicting psychological abuse upon him by using this expression. The woman responded by saying that she had only meant to show dissatisfaction, rather than
The present study specifies the pragmatic functions of *Yahummalali* which include expressing dissatisfaction, among others.

The term discourse analysis was first proposed by Harris (1952) as a method of analyzing spoken and written language beyond the sentence, thus examining the relationship between language and the social and cultural context in which it is used. The associations between language and context, as well as those between linguistic forms and communicative functions are important in discourse analysis and pragmatics. A communicative function of a certain utterance relates to the purpose of an utterance in a particular situation. For example, "the bus was late" might be considered as an apology for being late or a complaint about bus service based on the context in which the sentence is uttered (Paltridge 2012, 37).

Saeed (2003, 219) maintained that "part of the meaning of an utterance is its intended social function". Thus, hearers have to realize whether they have been asked a question, or invited to do something, etc. in order to understand the meaning of the utterance that is produced by the speaker. These functions of language which are known as speech acts were first introduced by Austin in his influential book *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). Austin (1962, 108) claimed that language is used not only to present information but also to perform actions. In particular, each speech act consists of three elements. The first element which is called the locutionary act refers to "uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference". Second, the illocutionary act, pertains to "utterances which have a certain (conventional) force" such as ordering and warning, etc. Thirdly, the perlocutionary act indicates "what we bring about or achieve by saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading".

The present study aims to identify the pragmatic functions of *Yahummalali* based on its assumed illocutionary functions in Jordanian Spoken Arabic.

*Yahummalali* in the study reported here can be referred to as a discourse marker. A very influential definition of discourse markers given by Schiffrin (1987), describes them as "sequentially dependent elements that bracket units of talk" (p. 31). These “units of talk” can be sentences, propositions, speech acts, as well as tone units; “sequentially dependent” means that discourse markers are not dependent on syntactic structures like clauses and sentences, but are “sequentially dependent on the structure of the discourse” (Schiffrin 1987, 40). Schiffrin (1987, 328) identified the conditions that allow an expression to function as a discourse marker: syntactically detachable, initial positions, range of prosodic contours, operate at both local and global levels, operate on different planes of discourse.

Fraser’s (1990, 1998) approach to discourse markers focuses on how the discourse marker in one sentence connects the message expressed in that sentence to the message conveyed by the preceding sentence. Fraser (1990, 387) defines discourse markers as "a class of lexical expressions that signal a relationship between the interpretation of the segment they introduce, S2, and the prior segment, S1. They have a core meaning which is procedural, not conceptual and their more specific interpretation is "negotiated" by the context both linguistic and conceptual".

Maschler and Schiffrin (2015, 54) report that discourse markers 'like', 'well', 'but', 'oh' and 'you know' are "linguistic items that function in cognitive, expressive, social, and textual domains". Discourse markers
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are syntactically independent and they do not influence the propositional meaning of the utterance (Schiffrin 1987). They are also syntactically flexible since they are used at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the utterance (Fuji 2000). They serve many functions and they are associated with the pragmatic aspects of discourse (Fraser 1990). According to Muller (cited in Alami 2015, 8), discourse markers perform many pragmatic functions such as initiating discourse, prefacing a response, etc.

Fraser (1990, 385) differentiates between content meaning and pragmatic meaning. Content meaning, also referred to as referential meaning, is "a more or less explicit representation of some state of the world that the speaker intends to bring to the hearer’s attention by means of the literal interpretation of the sentence”. Pragmatic meaning, which refers to the speaker’s communicative intention, is "the direct message the speaker intends to convey in uttering the sentence” (p. 386). The pragmatic function is expressed through three different kinds of pragmatic markers. Firstly, basic pragmatic markers signal the illocutionary force, e.g. I regret that. Secondly, commentary pragmatic markers encode another message that comments on the basic message, e.g. frankly speaking. Thirdly, parallel pragmatic markers encode another message separate from the basic and/or commentary message, e.g. vocatives. Discourse markers have nothing to do with the content meaning of utterances, but they are associated with their pragmatic meaning (Fraser 1990, 387). Further, Fraser (1996, 179) maintains that commentary pragmatic markers are "lexical expressions which have both a representational meaning specifying an entire message and a procedural meaning signaling that this message is to function as a comment on some aspect of the basic message”.

Crystal (1997, 379) stated that pragmatics "deals only with those aspects of context which are formally encoded in the structure of a language". In addition, he maintained that pragmatics explores the language in relation to its users. In particular, it examines the choices that are available to speakers and how they make their selection to communicate properly. It also investigates the principles that govern their use of language in different social interactions and the influence of the speakers’ use of language on other participants in any communicative act. In the same vein, Saeed (1997) posited that pragmatics highlights how hearers make inferences which go beyond the literal meaning of what was said.

Any linguistic expression may fulfil different pragmatic functions based on the context in which it is used. The pragmatic function of an expression shows how this expression conveys different meanings depending on its context and situation. Paltridge (2012, 3) reported that "contexts are not objective conditions but rather (inter)subjective constructs that are constantly updated by participants in their interactions with each other as members of groups or communities”. Context plays a key role in interpreting the meaning of spoken and written discourse. This involves the physical context, the social context and the role of people engaged in the interaction. All these factors determine what we say and write and how people interpret them. In fact, there are different types of context which are central to the production and interpretation of any discourse. First of all, situational context refers to "what people can see around them”. Secondly, background knowledge context indicates "what people know about each other and about the world”. It includes cultural knowledge and interpersonal knowledge. Thirdly, co-textual context refers to what people "know about what they have been saying” (Paltridge 2012, 39). Moutaouakil (1989) stated that
pragmatic functions are associated with certain situational conditions and they are extremely important for successful communication.

The pragmatic functions of some widely used discourse markers were the focus of many studies (Farghal, 1995; Al-Harahsheh and Kanakri, 2013; Al-Ghoweri, 2016; Al-Khalidy, 2017; Al-Khawaldeh, 2018). Farghal (1995) explored the pragmatic functions of ُينشالله ‘if God wills’ in Jordanian Arabic. The study concluded that ُينشالله can be used as a directive mitigator, a commissive and a commissive mitigator, as well as an expressive and an expressive mitigator. It also showed that "the pragmatic utilizations of ُينشالله should be sought within the speech event rather than the isolated speech formula" (Farghal 1995, 253). In a related study, Nazzal (2005, 271) went further and investigated the pragmatic functions of ُنضل الله ‘if God wills’ as it is used in the Arabic language by Muslims in their oral speech. The findings indicated that the pragmatic functions "range from mitigating one’s commitment for carrying out a future action or failing to honor one’s commitment, to avoiding the effects and adverse consequences of one’s actions on others". Moreover, Muslims used this expression "to exonerate themselves from the responsibility of rejecting directives or turning down offers, or avoiding staking the self-image of their recipients". Further, Hammouri (2017) explored the pragmatic functions of ُلا الله ‘let’ in Jordanian spoken Arabic. The study revealed that this expression had 27 pragmatic functions which included showing approval, drawing attention, calling out, mocking, suggesting, urging, warning, wishing, stimulating, asking for patience, signaling the start of an action, selecting, showing anger, and commanding among others.

Al-Harahsheh and Kanakri (2013) investigated the pragmatic functions of ُمختب ‘okay’ in Jordanian spoken Arabic (JSA). The researchers found that ُمختب and its cognate ُلحب perform a number of pragmatic functions such as a marker of backchannel support, a mitigator of disagreement, a marker of challenge, a marker to mean "stop", to show objection, to introduce a new topic, to signal the end of the discourse, to give permission, to ask the addressee to be patient and to fill the gaps in the conversation. In another study, Kanakri and Al-Harahsheh (2013) examined the pragmatic functions of ُعدي: ‘normally, usually’. The results revealed that this discourse marker is used to save somebody's face, to mitigate the impact of a sad item of news, to ask for permission, to express the meaning of disapproval and to express disappointment, contempt, courtesy, acceptance and an indirect criticism.

Al Rousan (2015) examined online conversations of young Saudis in order to explore the pragmatic functions of the Saudi Arabic discourse marker ُنافس ‘with yourself’. The study suggested twelve pragmatic functions, viz., refusal, lack of interest, annoyance, doubt, unwillingness, disappointment, choice, preserving personal privacy, scolding, challenge, distancing one’s self from others and reprimanding. Al-Ghoweri (2016) investigated the pragmatic functions of ُجلاك الله ‘God elevate you’ in Jordanian Arabic on the basis of data collected from 13 participants from both genders and different age groups. The study concluded that this discourse marker "is associated with animals, impure places, and reprehensible situations" and used to express "indirect politeness" since these topics are taboo in Jordanian society.
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Mahmood (2017) studied humor in some Iraqi newspapers' headlines from a pragmalinguistic perspective. Humor in the reported study was thoroughly examined in relation to a number of theoretical models: Relevance Theory, Speech Acts Theory, Grice's Cooperative Principle and Halliday's Functional Theory. The study showed that the type of humor is chosen based on the extent to which it enhances the credibility of the perlocutionary effects of the intended humorous acts.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 describes the study's methodology while section 3 presents the findings which are discussed in section 4. Conclusions and recommendations are provided in section 5.

2. Method

The researchers who are native speakers of JSA compiled a preliminary list of 50 scenarios that included Yahummalali in JSA on the basis of their exposure to this expression and their knowledge about its contexts in Jordanian society. The researchers identified the pragmatic function that Yahummalali fulfills in each scenario. The identified pragmatic functions were subjected to a validation process by a panel of jurors from the University of Jordan. The jurors were four linguists in the Department of English Language and Literature whose native language is Jordanian Spoken Arabic. They were asked to review the scenarios with a view to determining the validity of the proposed pragmatic function that Yahummalali performs in each scenario. Most of their judgments were compatible with those of the researchers. However, they noted that some functions were not suitable for the contexts, suggesting more appropriate replacements.

The acceptability of these pragmatic functions was tested against the intuition of 55 native speakers of JSA who happened to be first-year BA students at the University of Jordan with a mean age of 18; 6 (35 females and 20 males). The informants completed the task under no time constraints. The task presented the suggested scenarios along with the pragmatic function associated with each scenario. It also included a five-point Likert scale in which the respondents were asked to rate the suggested pragmatic function on a level of agreement (agree, strongly agree, indeterminate, disagree and strongly disagree). The scenarios whose functions were judged acceptable (i.e. agree or strongly agree) by 50 percent or more of the participants were included in the study. These functions were thought to be the ones that fairly represent the use of Yahummalali at this point in time. Remaining scenarios and associated functions were not entertained any further.

3. Results

The table below presents the pragmatic functions of Yahummalali in JSA that were agreed on by more than 50 per cent of the subjects. It also highlights the number and percentage of subjects who accepted each.
The pragmatic functions of *Yahummalali* and their acceptability judgements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Acceptability judgement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Expressing dismay and disapproval</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Expressing fear</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Signaling condemnation</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Expressing disappointment</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mitigating exaggerated claims</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Wishing</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Signaling sadness</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Expressing regret</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Expressing dissatisfaction</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Expressing shock</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Making threat</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ridiculing/Mocking</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Expressing anger</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Expressing jealousy</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Expressing desperation</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Expressing surprise</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Expressing sarcasm</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Expressing indecisiveness</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Expressing doubt/uncertainty</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Below is a presentation of each pragmatic function in its context followed by an illustrative example. For the reader’s convenience, each example will be represented in Arabic, transliteration and an English gloss.

(1) Expressing dismay and disapproval

[Context]: Ahmad has gotten a new job; he needs a car to commute to his workplace. Ahmad meets his friend Samir at the gym and the following conversation takes place.

أحمد: يتقدر تعيرني سيارتك هالشهر؟

Ahmad: btigdar t:i:r ni sayya:rtak hashshahir?

‘Can you lend me your car this month?’

سامر: يا هاملالي، هذا إلي كأن ناقص، تطلب سيارتي ولشهر كامل كمان.


‘*Yahummalali*, it never occurred to me that you would want to borrow my own car and for a whole month’.

*Yahummalali* is employed when a person receives an unreasonable request and he/she wants to highlight how strange and unacceptable the request is. In this example, Samir considers a friend’s request to borrow his car for a whole month as strange and unacceptable. Thus, he used *Yahummalali* to express his dismay and disapproval.
(2) Expressing fear

[Context]: Ali is a school teacher; he is told that his students were making a lot of noise. Thus, once he enters into the classroom, he says:

المعلم: فوراً، حضروا أوراقكم لأخذ امتحان قصير.
Teacher: fawran, ḥadru wra:ɡkum liʔakhdh mtiha:n qaʃi:r.
‘Now prepare yourselves to take a quiz’.

طالب: يا هملالي، والله لتسقط.
‘Yahummalali. I am sure we’ll fail’.

Yahummalali is used to preface fear of something. As can be seen in this scenario, the student uses Yahummalali to express his deep fear of taking a quiz and consequently failing it as he and his classmates were not prepared for such a task.

(3) Signaling condemnation/harsh criticism

[Context]: Fadi reads out a news item to his friend about the government’s decision to impose a new tax on some basic commodities. Consequently, he responds by criticizing the government:

فادي: يا هملالي، نحن نأتي أي إخونا لاقين نوكل.
‘Yahummalali, you are killing us. Actually, we are left with nothing to eat’.

Yahummalali is utilized to express condemnation/harsh criticism over something that is bad or annoying. In this example, Fadi uses Yahummalali to preface criticism against the government for imposing a new tax on some commodities since people can hardly cover their basic living expenses.

(4) Disappointment

[Context]: Mazin asks his mother about what she is going to cook for dinner. She says that her plan is to cook lentils (a Jordanian dish frequently served, particularly in underprivileged households). Once he hears that, he remarks:

مازن: يا هملالي، أي هو العدس مكتوب على جبينا.
‘Yahummalali, is it our fate to have lentils this often?’

Expressing obvious disappointment over something is one of the most common pragmatic functions of Yahummalali. It seems that Mazin’s desire to see his mother cook a dish he likes will not be fulfilled. Thus, he uses Yahummalali to reveal his unhappiness and disappointment about the fact that his mother frequently cooks lentils.
(5) Mitigating exaggerated claims

[Context]: Sara attended Muna’s wedding party. The day after when she sees another friend, Salma, she says:

سارة: لو شفتني منى طلعت زى القمر.

Sara: law shufti muna til-at zay lgamar.

‘I wish you could have seen Muna. She looked like the moon’.

سلمى: يا هملالي، مش لهدرجة.


‘Yahummalali, not to this extent’.

سارة: آه والله إنك صادقة.

Sara:ʔa: walla ðinnik ʔaadga.

‘Yes, you are right’

Yahummalali is used here to mitigate an exaggerated claim. It seems that Salma has a different view and thus felt that Sara has gone too far when she described Muna as the moon, i.e. very pretty. Therefore, she used Yahummalali to mitigate Sara’s exaggerated statement.

(6) Wishing

[Context]: Kamil passes by a grand villa and says:

كامل: يا هملالي، بي لو إنها إلي.


‘Yahummalali, If only it was mine’.

Another pragmatic function that Yahummalali fulfills is expressing wishes. Yahummalali here resembles ya: ʔalla:h! ‘Oh My God’. Kamil admires the villa and wishes he owned it.

(7) Signaling sadness

[Context]: Sami takes a loan from a bank but then is not able to repay it. Thus, the bank decides to seize his properties. Once Sami is notified, he feels sad and says:

سامي: يا هملالي، وين بدي أروح بحالي.


‘Yahummalali, I do not know how I can manage’.
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*Yahummalali* is employed to express sadness and grief at something unpleasant that has taken place. *Yahummalali* here is equivalent to *xirib be:ti* ‘I’ll become homeless’. Sami utilized *Yahummalali* to signal that he is sad about the bank's decision to seize his properties since he is unable to repay the loan.

(8) Expressing regret

[Context]: Laila visits her neighbor, Um Hani against the advice of her husband. Thus, when she knows that he was angry to hear about her visit, she says:

لَيْلَى: يَا هَمَالَّيْ، أَنَا دَارِي شَوْيِ إِلَيْهِ سَافُني عَلِيْكَ يَا أمَّ هَانِي.


‘*Yahummalali*, I do not know what made me visit you Um Hani’.

Another pragmatic function of *Yahummalali* is showing genuine regret over one's own wrongdoing. As can be noted in the above context, Laila expresses her regret for visiting her neighbor, since her husband advised against it.

(9) Expressing dissatisfaction

[Context]: Suha decides to buy some clothes and asks her mother to give her some money. Her mother gives her twenty JD. Once Suha sees the money, she says to her mother:

سَهْى: يَا هَمَالَّيْ، بِسَعْشَرَيْنَ دِينَارٍ، مَامَآ هَدُولَ شُو بَجِيِّيُو!


‘*Yahummalali* only 20 JD? Mom, what can such an amount buy?’

*Yahummalali* is also utilized to express dissatisfaction, when it is felt that something is not as good as it should be. Suha expresses her dissatisfaction about only getting 20 JD from her mother for buying some clothes, since this small amount is not enough to buy what she wants.

(10) Expressing shock

[Context]: When Yasir comes back home, he takes a look at the exceptionally high electricity bill and exclaims:

يَاثِرْ: يَا هَمَالَّيْ، شُو هُالَمِلَّغُ!


‘*Yahummalali*, What a high electricity bill this is!’

*Yahummalali* is used to express shock at a sudden, unexpected, and usually unpleasant event or experience that one witnesses, in this case seeing a high electricity bill.
(11) Making threats

[Context]: Khalid, a child, does not want to obey his mother when they are in the mall. She frowns at him and says:

الأم: يا هملالي على الخضر إلى رح توكله في البيت.


‘Yahummalali, you cannot imagine the punishment waiting for you at home’.

Yahummalali is employed to issue threats against somebody. In this example, Khalid’s mother uses Yahummalali to threaten her son that she will beat him severely at home because he did not follow her orders.

(12) Ridiculing/Mocking

[Context]: Manal and Nada are two colleagues who are working for a smartphone company. Manal tells Nada that their friend, Samar, who is known for her inefficiency, will be appointed in the company. Thus, Nada comments:

ندا: مين؟ سمر، يا هملالي، ما اقروا حدا أشتر منها لحتى يعينوها؟


‘Who? Samar, Yahummalali, didn’t they find a more qualified person to appoint?  

Yahummalali is used to ridicule/mock somebody for something. In the above scenario, Nada utilizes Yahummalali to ridicule her new colleague for being too inefficient to be appointed in the company.

(13) Expressing anger

[Context]: While Khalid is playing football, he breaks the new dinnerware set. As a result, his mother shouts at him:

الأم: يا هملالي، أنا بتشري عشان حضرتك تكسر.


‘Yahummalali, I buy new things and you come and break them easily’.

As is clear, Khalid’s mother uses Yahummalali to show that she is angry with her son for breaking the new dinnerware set while playing.

(14) Expressing jealousy

[Context]: Thamir gets promoted at work. Once his colleague, Qasim, knows about it, he says:

قاسم: يا هملالي.


‘Yahummalali’.
Yahummalali is also employed to express jealousy about something. In the above scenario, Qasim's use of Yahummalali indicates that he is jealous of his colleague's promotion. The larger context in which Yahummalali is used here is not accessible to the reader. Thus, one may speculate that Qasim is jealous because he thinks that his colleague does not deserve this promotion.

(15) Expressing desperation

[Context]: Abu Sami buys a new house and his cousin Tamir comes to visit. The following conversation takes place.

‘Congratulations on the new house, Abu Sami!’

‘Thank you, May Allah bless you, I hope you will also buy a new house’.

‘Yahummalali, Do you think I will buy a new house? Possibly when pigs fly!’

Yahummalali is utilized to express desperation about something. As the context suggests, the speaker used Yahummalali to show that he has no hope in buying a new house.

(16) Expressing surprise

[Context]: Fadwa and Shadia are two close friends who are sitting in a coffee shop. Fadwa asked Shadia the following question:

‘Are you serious about leaving for Kuwait next month?’

‘Yahummalali, who said that I want to travel?’

Shadia uses Yahummalali to express her surprise at hearing that she is going to travel to Kuwait next month since she has no intention to do so.
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(17) Expressing sarcasm

[Context]: Nabil sells his old house. After two months, one of his relatives, Jamal, hears about it. He calls Nabil and says:

جمال: شو صحيح إليك سمعته إنك بعث البيت القديم.


‘Have you really sold your old house?’

نبيل: يا هملالي، متؤكد إنك كان في البلد يا زلما؟


‘Yahummalali, were you in town, man?’

Yahummalali is employed to express sarcasm. As can be noted in this scenario, Nabil uses Yahummalali in a sarcastic way to show Jamal’s tardiness in addressing the news that he has sold his house.

(18) Expressing indecisiveness

[Context]: Sawsan goes to a boutique to buy a new dress and sees a beautiful collection of clothes. She sighs and says:

سوسن: يا هملالي مش عارف شو أختار!


‘Yahummalali, I do not know what to choose’.

Showing indecisiveness is another pragmatic function of Yahummalali. Sawsan used Yahummalali to show her inability to make a decision about which dress to buy.

(19) Expressing doubt/uncertainty

[Context]: Ahmad is a student in the fifth grade whose performance in Math is poor. When he takes the Math exam, he says to his father:

أحمد: زبطت بالامتحان رح أسكرها علامة كاملة.


‘I did very well in the exam. I will get a full mark’.

الآب: يا هملالي معقول يا ناس أوالله نفسي أصدق.


‘Yahummalali, I wish I could believe you’.

In this scenario, Ahmad’s father uses Yahummalali to show that he doubts what his son has said about getting a full mark in the Math exam since he knows this is doubtful.
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4. Discussion

Analysis of the data reveals that the discourse marker Yahummalali is pragmatically multifunctional in JSA since it conveys nineteen different pragmatic functions. The four most frequent pragmatic functions of Yahummalali were expressing dismay and disapproval, showing fear, signaling condemnation, and expressing disappointment. These functions were associated with different daily life contexts. The first situation was at the gym where a person talking to his close friend used Yahummalali to express his dismay and disapproval at his friend's request to borrow his car for one month. The second was at school in which Yahummalali was used as a comment by a student to show his fear upon the teacher's decision to give them a surprise quiz. The third was in the garden where a person sitting next to his friend used Yahummalali to express his condemnation of the government's decision to impose a new tax on some basic commodities. The fourth was at home where Mazin used Yahummalali to express his unease with his mother's frequent cooking of lentils. On the other hand, the four least frequent pragmatic functions of Yahummalali were expressing surprise, expressing sarcasm, expressing indecisiveness, and expressing doubt and uncertainty. These functions were associated with different daily life contexts. The first was in the coffee shop where Shadia used Yahummalali to express her surprise at hearing Fadwa's question about whether she was going to travel to Kuwait next month. The second was at home where Nabil used Yahummalali to express sarcasm over his relative's obviously belated question about whether Nabil had sold his house. The third was in the boutique where Sawsan used Yahummalali to express indecisiveness since she was not able to make a decision about which dress to buy. The fourth was at home where Ahmad's father used Yahummalali to express his doubt about his son getting a full mark in a Math exam since he knows his son is not good at it. The relatively low acceptability rate of these pragmatic functions might be ascribed to the belief that these functions are not currently well recognized in Jordanian Arabic as it is generally used by university students. However, these functions might become more popular in Jordanian society in the future. Further research may show that the pragmatic functions of Yahummalali are age sensitive and thus it may turn out that they are more popular among older generations.

Moreover, the findings show that the discourse marker Yahummalali tends to express rather negative pragmatic functions such as dismay and disapproval, fear, condemnation, disappointment, expressing sadness, regret, dissatisfaction, shock, making threats, ridiculing, expressing anger, jealousy, desperation and sarcasm. The analysis also demonstrated that the use of Yahummalali as a discourse marker intensifies the meaning conveyed by the adjacent linguistic text. Put another way, Yahummalali can be used as an emphasis commentary marker when it is used along with an adjacent text. Such a marker "has the function of emphasizing the force of the basic message" (Fraser 1996: 336). Schiffrin (1987) stated that discourse markers mark the relation between at least two utterances in which the upcoming utterance is related to what comes before it. For instance, in situation four, Mazin's mother's response to his question about what she is going to cook triggers his response which was introduced by Yahummalali. Put another way, when Mazin knew that his mother was going to cook lentils, he disappointingly asked: 'Yahummalali, is it our fate to have lentils this often?' Here Yahummalali puts more emphasis on his basic message, i.e. expressing disappointment which immediately appears after Yahummalali. Another example is illustrated in situation
seven, when Sami heard that the bank decided to seize his properties since he defaulted on the loan, he said: ‘Yahummalali, I do not know how I can manage’. Yahummalali can function as an illocution enhancer (an illocution usually borne by the following utterance) rather than an illocution carrier. Thus, it enhances the meaning conveyed by the adjacent text. In this example, the use of Yahummalali enhances Sami’s expression of sadness over the seizure of his properties.

On the other hand, when Yahummalali is used alone without being associated with any adjacent text, it functions as a lexical inferential marker because the latent meaning of Yahummalali can be inferred from the larger context i.e. who said what, when, how, why and where. For example, in situation 14 when Qasim heard that his colleague, Thamir, got promoted at work, he said only one word, viz., Yahummalali. As the larger context in which Yahummalali is used is not readily accessible to the reader/hearer, one may speculate that Qasim’s jealousy, shown by Yahummalali, was motivated by an earlier exchange between Qasim and some other colleagues in which Thamir’s promotion was brought to the forefront.

Thus, if Yahummalali is used alone without being associated with any adjacent text, it may be difficult to distinguish its exact pragmatic function without taking into account the wider exospheric linguistic and nonlinguistic context. The findings have also indicated that the illocutionary force associated with Yahummalali varies according to context. For example, recall what Nabil said to his relative who asked him whether he sold his house or not as illustrated in (17): ‘Yahummalali, are you sure you were in town, man?’ In this context, Yahummalali is employed to express sarcasm regarding Jamal's belated acknowledgment of Nabil's selling of his old house. Further, in situation (18), the illocutionary force of Yahummalali can express indecisiveness. Here Sawsan went to the boutique to buy a new dress and said: ‘Yahummalali, I do not know what to choose’. The illocutionary force of Yahummalali should be examined in the context in which it is used rather than in an isolated speech interchange. This underscores the crucial importance of context in understanding the intended meaning the speaker is trying to convey by using Yahummalali. This goes in line with Fraser (1990) who asserted that discourse markers serve many functions and they are associated with the pragmatic aspects of discourse.

The results have shown that the use of Yahummalali can also be used by the speaker to bring about a certain desirable illocutionary effect on the hearer. When Sara described Muna as a moon in situation five, Salma perceived this as an exaggerated claim and commented: ‘Yahummalali, not to this extent’. Then Sara replied: ‘Oh, you are right’. Salma used Yahummalali to probably encourage her friend, Sara, to agree that her description is not accurate, which led Sara to mitigate her exaggerated claim. The use of Yahummalali here produces a desirable illocutionary effect on the hearer and made Sara agree with Salma.

Future research may reveal further frequent pragmatic functions which might be associated with other settings. This may be ascribed to the observation that Yahummalali is considered as one of the traditional expressions that Jordanians use in a larger number of settings not examined in the present study such as folk songs, social media, TV programs and satirical news articles.

Finally, it is useful to report here that the defendant who used Yahummalali in the legal case referred to in section (1) was acquitted. The defendant claimed that she used Yahummalali as a spontaneous expression to express her dissatisfaction rather than to insult the plaintiff. In this regard, the researchers believe that in
the absence of the larger sociopragmatic context the defendant's explanation cannot be easily refuted, which may explain why the judge acquitted her. Put another way, the researchers suggest that the term *Yahummalali* cannot be considered as an insulting term in itself as the plaintiff claimed, since its use in this particular case was not associated with any insulting or taboo words against the plaintiff.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The present study has provided a detailed analysis of the pragmatic functions of a discourse marker used in Jordanian spoken Arabic, namely, *Yahummalali*. The analysis revealed that it has nineteen pragmatic functions. The pragmatic functions are as follows: expressing dismay and disapproval, fear, condemnation, disappointment, mitigating exaggerated claims, wishing, expressing sadness, regret, dissatisfaction, shock, making threats, ridiculing, expressing anger, jealousy, desperation, surprise, sarcasm, indecisiveness and doubt or uncertainty. The study concludes that context plays a crucial role in determining the pragmatic function of *Yahummalali*.

Since this discourse marker is not restricted to Jordanian spoken Arabic as it has been attested in the speech of Saudis in Najd as reported in Hawamer website, future research may examine the pragmatic functions of *Yahummalali* in Saudi Spoken Arabic. Thus, one could examine to what extent the pragmatic functions of a certain discourse marker may vary from one regional dialect to another.

The study also recommends that future research may examine the acceptability of these scenarios and functions against the intuition of older generations (40+) with a view to establishing to what extent these functions are recognized by this age group compared to Jordanian youth.
الوظائف البراجماتية لـ "ياهلالي" في اللهجة الأردنية المحكية

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المتخص

تهدف الدراسة إلى تحديد الوظائف البراجماتية لـ "ياهلالي" في اللهجة الأردنية المحكية. لتحقيق هذا الهدف، أعد الباحثان قائمة من السيناريوهات التي تتضمن استخدام "ياهلالي" بناءً على معرفتهم بهذا التعبير والسياقات التي يستخدم فيها في المجتمع الأردي. ومن ثم قاما بتخريج الوظيفة البراجماتية لهذا التعبير في كل سيناريو، وقد عرضت هذه الوظائف البراجماتية على لجنة من المحكمين حيث اقترحوا تعديلات على بعض السيناريوهات والوظائف، وأخذت آراؤهم بين الاعتبار في النسخة المعدلة من أداء جمع البيانات. وجرى فحص مدى قبول 55 طالباً ناطقاً باللهجة الأردنية في الجامعة الأردنية لهذه السيناريوهات والوظائف البراجماتية المعدلة لـ "ياهلالي". وكشفت الدراسة عن وجود تسع ونصف وظيفة براجماتية لـ "ياهلالي"، وهي: التعبير عن الاستياء والرفض، التعبير عن الخوف، والاستكانة، وخشية الآمل، والخفيض من المبالغة، والتذولي، التعبير عن الحزن، والندم، وعدم الرضا، والتعبير عن الصدمة والتهديد، والسرخرية، والتعبير عن الغضب، والغيظ، واليأس، والاستغرب، والتهكم، والتردد، والشك.

الكلمات المفتاحية: علامة الخطاب، اللهجة الأردنية المحكية، الوظائف البراجماتية، ياهلالي.
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References


Hamdan, Abu Rumman


### Appendix

#### Transliteration Conventions

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