

The discourse use of *ʔilʔa:n* ‘now’ in Jordanian Arabic

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This research paper shows that the deictic temporal marker ʔilʔa:n ‘now’ has developed a discourse function of organizing the ongoing discourse. This latter use helps the hearer appreciate the underlying structure of the relevant discourse, hence providing pragmatic clues that maximise the hearer-speaker communication. Additionally, based on a corpus of one million words (which is a part of a larger project), this paper shows that the use of the discourse marker ʔilʔa:n ‘now’ outnumbers its use as a deictic temporal signal in Jordanian Arabic. This is mainly due to the use of other words whose meaning is exclusively temporal, conveying a similar use of temporal ʔilʔa:n ‘now’. We interpret this situation as that the lexical use of words is overridden by their grammaticalized/discourse use, especially in the presence of other words that convey a similar lexical meaning of these words. This correlation is best viewed as a direct effect of language economy which curtails redundancies in language use.

Keywords: *Deictic temporal markers, discourse markers, grammaticalization, hearer-speaker communication, Jordanian Arabic.*

1. Introduction

Discourse markers (or discourse connectives) and the notion of grammaticalization (of discourse markers) have recently become overarching hotly-debated research agendas. These two phenomena are related to how language changes over time (i.e. mutability) and how it interacts with discourse (Newmeyer 2000; Wang 2017; among many others). Additionally, they are important in revealing how the speaker-hearer communication is processed and perceived. These two notions have also been investigated with reference to other pertinent phenomena including pragmatization (e.g., da Silva 2006; Paradis 2011), syntactization (e.g., Haegeman & Hill 2013), and language economy (e.g., Van Gelderen 2011). This manifold significance of discourse markers is evidently the main factor why the study of discourse markers ‘has turned into a growth industry in linguistics, with dozens of articles appearing yearly’ (Fraser 1999: 932).

Discourse markers are also heavily used as empirical evidence in favour of or against the rationale and application of competing theories of discourse analysis and pragmatics. For example, Schourup (2011) argues that the discourse marker *now* in English makes available corroborating evidence for the plausibility and superiority of the relevance-theoretic account over the coherence-based account of utterance production and perception. This current research paper contributes to this line of research, exploring the discourse use of *ʔilʔa:n* ‘now’ in Jordanian Arabic. This word, used as a deictic temporal signal, develops into a discourse marker which helps structure discourse and hence facilitate the speaker-hearer communication. This argument implies that there exists no conflicting implication that a discourse marker is both used as a coherence marker and a facilitator of the speaker-hearer communication, in which case the given discourse marker is vital for ‘the hearer’s search for optimal relevance’ (Blakemore 2002: 170).

The following discussion is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a general overview of Jordanian Arabic (JA), from which the data of the present study comes. This

section also explains our corpus which is part of a larger project. Section 3 discusses the temporal use of *ʔila:n*. Here, we show that JA distinguishes lexically between focused *now* and non-focused *now*. When the notion of *nowness* is the prominent information (i.e. the new information Chafe 1976) that the relevant utterance conveys, the use of *ʔilʔa:n* ‘now’ is promoted. On the other hand, when *nowness* is part of the background information, *hassaʕ/hassaʕat/hassa/halla* (meaning now) is used. Section 4 examines the discourse use of *ʔila:n*, arguing that this marker is used to organize discourse subparts in that it thematically connects the previous discourse with the following discourse, hence strengthening discourse coherence and textuality. *ʔilʔa:n* marks the speaker’s thematic progression whereby subparts of discourse are ordered sequentially, depending on their thematic/informational contribution for the ongoing discourse. Section 5 includes the conclusion of this paper.

2. Preliminaries: Jordanian Arabic and the corpus

In this section, we provide a general background of JA as well as the corpus on which we built our analysis of the discourse marker *ʔilʔa:n*.

2.1 Jordanian Arabic

Jordanian Arabic (JA) is an Arabic dialect that is spoken in Jordan, a country in the Middle East. According to Ethnologue, there are about 9,456,000 JA speakers.¹ JA is subcategorized as a southern Levantine Arabic dialect which includes several sub-dialects (e.g. Bani Hasan Arabic, Urban Jordanian Arabic and Rural Jordanian Arabic) that share the basic syntactic, phonological and morphological properties (see Jastrow & Fischer 1980; Al-Wer 2007). As is the case in other Arabic dialects, JA does not have written records due to the diglossic situation in Jordan. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the variety that is only used in formal settings, newspapers, and news, whereas JA is used as an everyday language (see, mainly, Zughoul 1980).²

The lack of written records of JA makes it difficult for researchers to delineate and investigate any discourse phenomena that are present in this dialect without building a corpus of naturally occurring data. As is broadly known in the relevant literature, discourse uses and functions of words are mainly manifested in the oral form of language (i.e. orality; see Schourup 1999). Dependence exclusively on the written form of the language is not sufficient to examine the actual discourse underpinnings of the language (see Fraser 1990, 1999; Maschler & Schiffrin 2015). Discourse markers vanish in written discourse which is for the most part considered non-spontaneous. In order to secure naturally-occurring data that best mirror the actual use and functions of discourse markers, we compiled a corpus of JA (as a part of a larger project to investigate the use of discourse functions in JA). We used this corpus to investigate the discourse uses of *ʔilʔa:n* ‘now’. In the next subsection, we provide more information about the nature of this corpus.

¹ <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/JO>

² See Bani-Yasin & Owens (1987), Jarrah (2017; 2019a,b), and Jarrah & Al-shamari (2017), among many others, for studies that have discussed different aspects of JA.

2.2 JA corpus

In order to collect naturally-occurring data of JA, we recorded 250 episodes of *Al-Wakeel Radio Show* at Radio Hala from June 2017 to June 2018. This morning show tackles the political and social issues which really matter to the Jordanian public who contact the host from different parts of Jordan in order to voice their concerns using JA. This show is a rich source of JA where callers belong to different social classes, ages, genders and educational backgrounds. This program is evidently a representative sample of JA. Additionally, in order to support our data with conversations of discursive topics, we recorded 100 informal sessions among 10 JA university students, upon their permission. These informal sessions revolved around several everyday topics including education, tax evasion, living abroad, fashion, etc. We listened to all of these episode and informal sessions and extracted all occurrences *ʔilʔa:n* ‘now’ from them. All occurrences are examined with respect to their lexical meaning and/or discourse functions. In the next two sections, we present our analysis of this word which, as we show later, develops a discourse function. This function helps to structure the ongoing discourse, facilitating the process of discourse perception and understanding of the build-up of the idea. It also reduces the effort of the hearer to follow the speaker, achieving as such the optimal relevance (cf. Sperber & Wilson 1986, 1995).

3. *ʔilʔa:n* between temporality and discourse

In this section we first provide evidence that *ʔilʔa:n* ‘now’ is still used in JA as a deictic temporal adverb meaning *now* (*right now; at the moment*); hence JA shares MSA with this use of *ʔilʔa:n* ‘now’. However, *ʔilʔa:n* ‘now’ is used in JA as a deictic temporal adverb when the notion of temporality is emphasised by the speaker. *hassaʕ/ hassaʕat/ hassa/ halla* are others words that are used when the notion of *now* (*nowness*) is not emphasised by the speaker.³ This situation is different from what we find in MSA where *ʔilʔa:n* ‘now’ is used, regardless of whether or not the notion of *now* is emphasised by the speaker.

ʔilʔa:n may be used in JA as a temporal adverb, meaning *now, at the moment, or at present*, as clearly shown in the following occurrences/exchanges.

- | | | | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------|-------------|----------------|------|-----------|
| (1) | la:zim | ʔaya:dir | ʔilʔa:n | | |
| | should | leave | now | | |
| | ‘I need to go right now.’ | | | | |
| (2) | a. we:n | nawa:lʔ | | | |
| | where | Nawal | | | |
| | ‘Where is Nawal?’ | | | | |
| | b. hijjeh | fi-ʃ-fuyul | ʔilʔa:n | | |
| | she | in-the-work | now | | |
| | ‘She is at work now.’ | | | | |
| (3) | ʔilʔa:n | raħ | ʔaħki | maʕ | ʔidukto:r |
| | now | will | talk | with | doctor |
| | ‘I will call the doctor now.’ | | | | |

³ The choice between *hassaʕ/ hassaʕat/ hassa/ halla* depends on the particular region of the JA speaker. *hassaʕ, hassaʕat* and *hassa* are used in rural regions interchangeably, whereas *halla* is much more used in urban centres, especially by girls.

- (4) ka:n biʃtayil fi-markiz ʔitarbija
 was work in-center education
 ʔilxa:sʕa w-huwwa bilimaraat **ʔilʔlaan**
 special and-he in-Emirates now
 ‘He used to work in a center for special education and now he is in the United Arab Emirates.’

The examples (1-4) clearly show that *ʔilʔa:n* ‘now’ is used as a deictic temporal adverb that denotes the notion of *now*. It is worth mentioning that there are other alternatives of the word *ʔilʔa:n* which are frequently used in JA. These include *hassaʕ/ hassaʕat/ hassa/ halla* ‘now’, as evidenced in the following examples:

- (5) baddi halla ʔaru:h ʕa-l-beet
 want now go to-the- home
 ‘I want to go home right now.’
- (6) ʔiz-zalameh hassaʕat sallam ʔil-mablay
 the-man now handed in the-money
 ‘The man has now handed in the money.’
- (7) hassa baji:b-la-k ʔil-iðin
 now bring-to-you the-permission
 ‘I will bring you the permission [slip] now’.
- (8) ma ʕaka-li:-ʃ hassaʕat ʔajʔiʃi
 not told-me-not now anything
 ‘He has not told me anything right now.’

Upon reviewing our data, it appears that there are no preferences related to the tense of the sentence between *hassaʕ/ hassaʕat/ hassa/ halla* and lexical *ʔilʔa:n*. In other words, *hassaʕ/ hassaʕat/ hassa/ halla* and lexical *ʔilʔa:n* are used in combination with all tenses. On the other hand, our corpus reveals that although *hassaʕ/ hassaʕat/ hassa/ halla* and lexical *ʔilʔa:n* express the same deictic reference (i.e. now); they do not express the same informational value relating to the notion of *nowness*. With *ʔilʔa:n* in place, the speaker emphasises the notion of *now* in which case *nowness* is the main message the speaker attempts to deliver, i.e. it is the new information (see Chafe 1976). On the other hand, when *nowness* is not the central information the speaker attempts to express (being here a subpart of the given or background information of the relevant utterance), other temporal adverbs including *hassaʕ/ hassaʕat/ hassa/ halla* are used. The evidence that supports this line of analysis is based on two arguments. The first argument comes from the fact that lexical *ʔilʔa:n* is mainly used either sentence-initially or sentence finally with rising intonation. According to the related literature, sentence peripheral positions are the typical positions for focused or given information (see Ouhalla 1997; Samek-Lodovici 2006).⁴ For instance, in example (1) above,

⁴ Following the distinction between informational focus and contrastive focus (see E Kiss 1998), it can be suggested that when lexical *ʔilʔa:n* occurs sentence-finally. It denotes informational focus, whereas it expresses

when the speaker expresses the idea that he wants to leave right now (not e.g., in two hours) he implies that there is some urgent matter for his departure at this point, which stands for the main information of the utterance. Likewise, example (4) above implies that the person the conversation is about is living nowadays in the UAE. Here the notion of *nowness* is part of the new information the utterance communicates. On the other hand, *hassaʕ/ hassaʕat/ hassa/ halla* are much used sentence-internally without being a locus of any intonational rising.

The second argument comes from the answer of when-questions in JA. According to our data, it appears that *ʔalʔa:n* ‘now’ is the typical answer of when-questions (about 65% of the relevant questions) when the answer is *now*, *at present*, or *at the moment*. As widely confirmed in the relevant literature, the answer of any question should include new information that is focused rather than being topicalized (part of the backgrounded information) (see Rizzi 1997). On the other hand, *hassaʕ/ hassaʕat/ hassa/ halla* occur more in statements which are not answers of the ongoing questions. This situation implies that JA differentiates between focalized *now* and non-focalized *now*, a distinction that is lexically manifested through the use of *ʔilʔa:n* in comparison to *hassaʕ/ hassaʕat/ hassa/ halla*. However, this discussion should not imply that *hassaʕ/ hassaʕat/ hassa/ halla* are not used when *nowness* is focused. Our corpus reveals that such words may be used to express focused *nowness*. On the other hand, *ʔalʔa:n* is exclusively used when focused *nowness* is intended. This state of affairs implicates that *hassaʕ/ hassaʕat/ hassa/ halla* are taking over the notion of *nowness* irrespective of being focused or not. This taking-over process is underway.⁵

MSA involves a similar lexical meaning of this adverb which is classified as a deictic temporal adverb that similarly means *at the moment* or *at the present time*. On the other hand, MSA does lexically manifest the focused/non-focused *now* distinction. *ʔalʔa:n* ‘now’ is used in all settings. Consider the following MSA examples:⁶

- (9) sawfa ʔaðhab ʔalʔa:n ʔila ʔal-ʕamal
will go now to the-work
‘I will go to work now.’
- (10) a. mata ʔatajit
when came
‘When did you come?’
b. ʔalʔa:n.
now
‘Now!’
- (11) ʔalʔa:n sawfa yabdaʔ burnama:dʒ-i ʔal-mufaɖʕal
Now will start program-my the-favorite
‘Now my favorite program will start.’

contrastive focus (as in it is now not two days ahead that ...). This distinction has been advocated for Arabic by Ouhalla (1997), among many others.

⁵ Given that we do not obtain any diachronic data of the use of lexical *ʔilʔa:n* and *hassaʕ/ hassaʕat/ hassa/ halla*, it is hard to figure out the exact nature of this taking-over process, if it really exists. We put this discussion aside, pending further research.

⁶ All MSA examples are taken from newspapers and written media.

- (12) ʔarsaltu ʔalʔa:n al-wasʕil
 sent now the-receipt
 ‘I just sent (you) the receipt.’

This discussion reveals that MSA *ʔalʔa:n* ‘now’ is not a complete equivalent of JA *ʔilʔa:n* ‘now’. The former is used across the board, whereas the latter is limited to a subset of cases; when *nowness* is focused.

In the following subsection, we examine the discourse use of *ʔilʔa:n* ‘now’ whose main function is to structure the going discourse. It marks the speaker’s thematic progression whereby subparts of discourse are ordered sequentially.

4. Discourse *ʔilʔa:n*

According to our corpus, *ʔilʔa:n* ‘now’ has developed a (grammaticalized) discourse function that is quite different from its usual temporal use as a deictic temporal signal. Such function is important in organizing the ongoing discourse and facilitating the speaker-hearer communication. Let us first discuss how discourse *ʔilʔa:n* organizes the ongoing discourse and acts as a connective that connects the stretches of the discourse altogether. Using Schourup’s (1999) terminology, *ʔilʔa:n* is a connecting textual element which is better translated into English as *at this point/given this/ in reference to what has been just said*. Consider the following example (taken from our informal discussion with the students):

- (13)
- | | | | | | | |
|----------------|---------|------------|-------------|-----|----------|-------------|
| lamma | ʔiykoon | ʕind | ʔid-dakto:r | sit | ʔabħa:θ | |
| when | there | for | the-doctor | six | research | |
| wa-xamis | siniin | xibrah, | bigdar | | ʔijqadim | laltarqija. |
| and-five | years | experience | can | | apply | promotion |
| ʔilʔa:n | biqdar | yo:xuð | ʔija:zeh | | bidu:n | ra:tib |
| now | can | take | leave | | without | salary |
| la | mudit | ʔarbaʕ | sniin. | | | |
| for | period | four | years | | | |

‘When a university professor has six research papers and five-year experience. **At this point**, he can apply for unpaid six-year leave.’

In (13), *ʔilʔa:n* ‘now’ does not mean *now*. Rather, it works as a connector of the previous and following subparts of the discourse. We translated it as *at this point* because the following subpart of the utterance is based on the preceding discourse. The speaker in example (13) mentions that when a university professor secures his promotion, he can leave the university. Using *ʔilʔa:n*, the speaker implies that the second part of his utterance depends on the first part of the utterance. The sequential relation between the two subparts is maintained through the use of *ʔilʔa:n*, which is apparently a coherence marker that organizes the parts of the discourse through tying them with each other. Using *ʔilʔa:n*, the speaker refers the hearer to the previous discourse which is important for his/her following argument/question. This entices the hearer to pay more attention to the different parts of the relevant discourse, contributing to the whole discourse perception. This is why connective *ʔilʔa:n* does not occur sentence initially or sentence finally, a position that does not fit its discursual uses (in

comparison to lexical *ʔilʔa:n*). The following instances provide further representative examples on this use of *ʔilʔa:n* as a coherence marker..

(14)

ʔihna	fi-mudʒtamaʕ	minʕi:f	ʕala	ʔifa:ʔʕa:t,
we	in-society	living	on	rumors
ʔilʔa:n	zay ma	ʔitfaðʕalit	fi-bida:jet	ħadi:θak [...]
now	like as	stated	in-beginning	speech.your

‘We are in a community living on rumours. **Given this**, as you just said at the beginning of your speech...’

(15)

ʔihna	lamma	niħki	ʔiirada:t			
we	when	talk	evenues			
mi:t	ʔalf	w-mi:te:n	ʔalf			
hundred	thousand	and-two hundreds	thousands			
ka:n	bi-l-muqa:bil	ʕin-na	bi-nafis	ʔil-waqqit		
was	in-the-exchange	for-us	in-same	the-time		
min	ʔis-sana	ʔarbaʕa	maljo:n	fa-haðʕa		
from	the-year	four	million	in-this		
ʔil-ʕfi	sʕifir	la	ʔiirada:t	ʔil-xazi:ni.		
the-thing	zero	to	revenues	the-treasury		
ʔilʔa:n	ʔihna	taħafuðʕa:tna	ka-mustaθmiri:n			
now	we	reservations	as-investors			
ʕala	ʔil-ħokoma	miʕ	ʔinno	ʔihna	ðʕidd	ʔil-ħuku:ma.
on	the-government	not	that	we	against	the-government

‘When we consider hundred or two hundred thousands in revenues, there was last year, in comparison at the same time, four millions. This is a zero for the treasury. **Given this**, we, as investors, have our reservations for the government [to answer]; we are not against the government, [nonetheless].’

(16)

a. walla muʕkileh ʔiða ma-wafaqu ʕala muʕamalit-ha.
by-God problem if not-approve on application-her
‘I swear to God it would be a problem if they did not approve her application

b. tʕajjib, ʔilʔa:n fu: baddo ʔisʕi:r ʕale:-ha
well now what want happen on-her
ʔiða ma wafaqu ʕala moʕamalit-ha.
if not approve on application-her
‘Well, **given this** what would happen to her if her application was not approved?’

(17)

a. sʕidqan ʔana ma-ʕindi maʕluma:t bas ħa:lama jitaʔakad
honestly I not-have information yet once confirmed
mawʕid ʔin-nata:ʒidʒ into ʔawal nas raħ jiʕrif.
date the-results you first people will know
‘Honestly, I don't have any information. However, once the date of the results is confirmed you will be the first to know.’

b. **ʔilʔa:n** ʔiħna minqaddir ʔil-dzuhu:d ʔilli bitqu:mu
now we appreciate the-efforts that doing
fi:ha w-ʔiħna minqaddir ðʕuru:f-ku
in-it and-we appreciate circumstances-your
‘At this point, we appreciate the efforts that you have put into [this]; we also appreciate your circumstances.’

ʔilʔa:n, as a connective, does not indicate any sense of temporality under this use. Rather, it orchestrates the ongoing discourse in that the background information is mentioned first and then followed by the information that the whole argument revolves around. For instance, in (15) above, the speaker starts his speech stating that local people depend much on rumors (on their relationships). The speaker mentions this to build his following argument that the interlocutor's previous speech is wrong as it depends on such rumors. Note here this is evidence that *ʔilʔa:n* is not a marker that essentially denotes a cause-effect or cause-result relationship. It rather introduces the main argument that is based on background information which appears in the preceding discourse. This background information might be the cause or the effect of the following subpart. The notion that background information is first mentioned in discourse is the normal way of discourse structuring; however, with the use of *ʔilʔa:n*, the speaker emphasizes this structuring in that the background information is necessary for the speaker's argument. *ʔilʔa:n* is thus important for the so-called local discourse coherence (see Schiffrin 1987). Its function is to signal discursal relations between subunits of discourse, hence contributing to discourse coherence. This analysis of discourse *ʔilʔa:n* goes in line with Lewis' (2006) characterizations of discourse markers as a category that essentially relies on the notion of connectivity.

Likewise, the examples (16-17) show that *ʔilʔa:n* is employed as a connector between the stretches. It connects the two parts together thus economizing the number of words used. In sentence (17), Speaker A talked about the results of *tawjihi* ‘the high school results’ stating that he does not have any information concerning the date of the results. Speaker B using *ʔilʔa:n*, touched on the effort done by the ministry in order to end the discussion. The speaker here used *ʔilʔa:n* to help himself gently finalize the discussion without using too many words. Given this, it can be proposed that the function of discursal *ʔilʔa:n* in JA is similar to that of discursal *now* in English, which has been a topic for several coherence-based accounts (Schiffrin 1987; Aijmer 1988). In English, it has been argued that discursial *now* establishes and maintains

textual coherence between parts in the discourse which seem at first sight to lack coherence or where coherence can only be established by means of presuppositions, thematic connections between elements in the text etc. *Now* can be viewed as a signal

to the hearer to reconstruct a discourse structure in which the coherence of the utterances connected by *now* becomes apparent (Aijmer 1988: 16).

and it “can be inserted wherever there is a break in the linear sequencing or coherence of the utterances of a text” (ibid: 16). As we have shown above, *ʔilʔa:n* is used as a connective that maintains the sequential order of the speaker’s themes.⁷

This coherence use of *ʔilʔa:n* should be tied to its role of *ʔilʔa:n* in facilitating the process of discourse perception. With the use of *ʔilʔa:n*, the speaker brings backgrounded information that is important in understanding the speaker’s argument. Additionally, *ʔilʔa:n* enforces the speaker to start with the backgrounded information followed by the speaker’s main argument, the two subparts which are separated by *ʔilʔa:n*. In doing so, the hearer finds it easy to follow the speaker’s argument, given the structuring role of discursial *ʔilʔa:n*. Under the Relevance Theory terms of the effort-effect trade-off (Sperber & Wilson 1986, 1995, 2002, and subsequent work), discursial *ʔilʔa:n* plays an important role in reducing the speaker’s effort to deliver his/her information and the hearer’s effort to follow the speaker’s argument. At the same time, it maximizes the contextual effect of the speaker’s argument, reaching the optimal relevance. As Jucker (1993: 438) mentions “there is a trade-off between processing effort and the information the addressee can get out of a particular utterance.” Discourse *ʔilʔa:n* helps the hearer in his/her ‘search for optimal relevance’ in that it provides an input to the inferential processes which are involved in the utterance comprehension. Without the use of *ʔilʔa:n* the hearer might find it difficult to connect discourse stretches altogether, while the speaker might not succeed in conveying his/her informational message in an elegant way. The use of discursial *ʔilʔa:n* complies with the demands of the Cognitive Principle of Relevance (Sperber & Wilson 1995), which states that human cognition tends to be geared towards the maximization of relevance (see Schourup 2011).

The idea that discourse markers/connectors are essential in maximising the contextual effect of the discourse and minimising the interlocutors’ cognitive effort in processing the discourse is much corroborated in the related literature. For instance, Al-Jarrah et al. (2015) discussing the contextual role of three pragmatic operators (another name of discourse markers; see Fraser 1999) argue that discourse markers in Arabic is important in exerting less effort and hence facilitating discourse processing. They state:

In RT terms, what this means is that if *bal* had not been used there, the hearer would have to exert relatively larger effort to relate the propositional content of the current portion of the text with those explicated and implicated by the other portions. One immediate negative consequence is that the act of communication would slow down. What is also more effort-consuming is that the current portion of the text would be open to more than one type of implicature, not necessarily echoing the speaker’s real intentions, and thus enhancing the vagueness of the instruction (1999: 61).

The next question to raise here relates to the status of *ʔilʔaa:* as a coherence-based marker or a comprehension-facilitating marker that is important for optimal relevance. Schourup (2011) investigates English discourse *now* and argues that coherence-based formulations fail to

⁷ Additionally, the use of discursial *ʔilʔa:n* in Arabic is similar to that of English *now* in that ‘it displays that what is coming next in the discourse is but a subpart of a larger cumulative structure, and thus has to be interpreted as a subordinate unit in relation to a progression of such units. In short, *now* marks the speaker’s orderly progression in discourse time through a sequence of subparts’ (Schiffrin 1987: 237).

account for the actual function of *now*. He instead argues that *now* encodes a procedural constraint on context selection. He states (2011: 2128):

The account of the marker *now* I have suggested, on the other hand, makes no essential reference to local or even global coherence. Rather, it begins from the assumption that comprehension is relevance-based, and that the hearer's goal in processing an utterance is to construct a hypothesis about the speaker's meaning that satisfies the presumption of optimal relevance conveyed by the utterance. From this viewpoint, what it is most important to know about the marker *now* is how it contributes to achieving that goal.

Schourup (2011) follows Blakemore (2002: 5) in that “the object of study is not discourse, but the cognitive processes underlying successful communication, and the expressions which have been labelled discourse markers must be analyzed in terms of their input to those processes.” Although Schourup's (2011) argument is well-based and follows from several pieces of empirical evidence, it does not undermine the role of discourse *now* in English. Even if we submit Blakemore's (2002: 169) assumption that “if a hearer identifies a coherence relation, then it is a result of successful comprehension rather than a prerequisite for it”, the coherence role of *ʔilʔa:n* is important in revealing the underlying role of its context. It alerts the hearer to pay more attention to the preceding segment of the discourse as it is vital for the speaker's statement that follows. Such alerting facilitates the process of the context comprehension.

A point that is worth discussing here is that the use of discourse *ʔilʔa:n* outnumbers the use of lexical *ʔilʔa:n*. According to our corpus, discourse *ʔilʔa:n* occurs 600 times, whereas lexical *ʔilʔa:n* occurs 50 times. This quantitative difference should be expected given the substantial role of discourse *ʔilʔa:n* in discourse comprehension. Additionally, as we have mentioned above, lexical *ʔilʔa:n* has a very limited usage. It appears that JA is deploying *hassaʕ/ hassaʕat/ hassa/ halla* in place of lexical *ʔilʔa:n* which is starting to vanish. This state of affairs is better viewed as a language economy where lexical items are sought to pair to one function or one lexical use.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have provided evidence that JA distinguishes lexically between focused *now* and non-focused *now*. When the notion of *nowness* is the prominent information (i.e. the new information Chafe, 1976) that the given utterance conveys, *ʔilʔa:n* is used. On the other hand, when *nowness* is part of the background information, *hassaʕ/ hassaʕat/ hassa/ halla* is used. This paper has provided evidence that *ʔilʔa:n* may be used as a discourse element to organize discourse subparts in that it thematically connects the previous discourse with the following discourse. This helps strengthen discourse coherence or textuality. *ʔilʔa:n* marks the speaker's thematic progression whereby subparts of discourse are ordered sequentially, depending on their thematic/informational contribution of the ongoing discourse.

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