

## Gender Differences in Using Discourse Markers in Spoken Jordanian Arabic

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### Abstract:

The present study aimed to investigate gender differences in using discourse markers (DMs) in spoken Jordanian Arabic. A quantitative-qualitative analysis of natural everyday conversations was employed, utilizing Brinton's (1996) binary categorization as a theoretical framework to define the textual and interpersonal functions of Jordanian DMs. In total, (39) tokens of Jordanian DMs were designated, with *ʔah/* (yes/yeah) occupying the highest rank in the frequency list, and their functions were distinguished. The findings indicated insignificant differences in the frequency of DMs used by Jordanian male/female speakers. Gender discrepancies were observed at the functional levels. While Jordanian female speakers tend to use DMs for textual purposes, male speakers prefer using DMs for interpersonal functions. In sum, the difference between Jordanian male and female usage of DMs lies at the functional level rather than quantity.

**Keywords:** discourse markers, gender, discourse, textual functions, interpersonal functions.

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## الفروق بين الجنسين في استخدام علامات الخطاب في اللهجة الأردنية المحكية

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### ملخص:

تسعى هذه الدراسة الى بحث الفروق بين الجنسين في استخدام علامات الخطاب في اللهجة الأردنية المحكية. تم استخدام تحليل كمي- نوعي للمحادثات اليومية لفحص استخدام علامات الخطاب، باعتماد التصنيف الثنائي لبرينتون (1996) كإطار نظري لتحديد الوظائف النصية والشخصية لعلامات الخطاب المستخدمة في اللهجة المحكية الأردنية. تم تصنيف 39 مفردة كعلامة خطاب في مجمل المحادثات التي تم تحليلها. كما تم تحديد وظائف علامات الخطاب المستخدمة من قبل المتحدثين الأردنيين. أشارت النتائج الى عدم وجود فروق ذات أهمية في تكرارات علامات الخطاب الموجودة في حديث الذكور والإناث. إلا أن الفروق كانت واضحة بين الجنسين في علامات الخطاب على المستوى الوظيفي؛ في حين تميل المتحدثات الأردنيات الى استخدام علامات الخطاب لأغراض نصية، يفضّل الذكور استخدامها لأغراض شخصية. في الختام، يكمن الفرق بين استخدام الذكور والإناث الأردنيين لعلامات الخطاب في الأحاديث اليومية على المستوى الوظيفي وليس على الكم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: علامات الخطاب، الجندر، الخطاب، وظائف نصية، وظائف شخصية.

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## 1. Introduction

Gender is so ingrained in our daily lives that we often overlook its presence and perceive it as an inherent aspect of our lives. We take it for granted as a natural part of life when it is a social construct. Gender manifests in even the most subtle and trivial aspects of social interactions. Language is a powerful tool that can be used to express and reinforce gender identity and roles. Coates (1998) demonstrated that acquiring gender identity involves not only learning certain behaviors but also learning to use gender-appropriate language. In examining gender, it is crucial to explore the entangled ways in which language and communication contribute to the construction and continuation of gendered norms.

Gender has received great attention in the literature. Lakoff's (1975, 2004) portrayal of women's language and Tannen's (1990) categorization of gendered language have been the leading frameworks used in the study of gendered language. According to Lakoff (2004), certain features distinguish women's speech. These features include the use of lexical hedges, such as '*sort of*' or '*kind of*', tag questions, and rising intonation on declarative statements, where the pitch of the voice rises towards the end of the sentence. Using empty adjectives, such as '*nice*' or '*lovely*', is another characteristic of women's speech. Additionally, precise color terms, super polite forms of expression, avoidance of strong swear words, and the use of emphatic stress are recognized as outstanding characteristics of women's language.

Tannen's (1990) analysis of gendered language presented six primary contrasts. First, there is a distinction between status and support; where men tend to emphasize power in their language, women express mutual support. Second, the dichotomy of independence versus intimacy reveals that men's language leans towards independence while women's language reflects closeness. Third, in situations involving problems, men often offer advice while women tend to exhibit more empathy and understanding. Fourth, there is a contrast between information and feelings, with men's language being more focused on facts and women's language being more emotionally expressive. Fifth, the comparison of orders and proposals illustrates that men's language is more directive while women's language implies proposals, often using implicit cues. Finally, conflict versus compromise reveals that men tend to engage in arguments while women tend to avoid conflict and seek compromise by finding common grounds. Tannen's analysis highlighted these distinctions in gendered language,

shedding light on the nuanced ways in which communication styles differ between men and women.

The emphasis on spoken language in real life contexts has increased recently. As a result, some linguistic units that used to be characterized as empty, superfluous, and redundant; are now considered as a crucial aspect of interpersonal communication. Discourse markers (DMs) are among these units; they serve in making any speech more cohesive and richer (Alami, 2012). Expressions that are considered to be DMs have been given several labels, such as discourse connectives (Blakemore, 1987), discourse operators (Redeker, 1991), discourse particles (Schourup, 1999), pragmatic connectives (Van Dijk, 1979), and discourse markers (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1999).

Researchers have offered various definitions to describe these linguistic expressions. Schiffrin (1987: 31) defined DMs as “sequentially dependent elements that bracket units of talk”. She also stated that DMs could be of different word classes, such as conjunctions *but, and, or*, adverbs *now, then*, lexicalized phrases *you know, I mean*, interjections *oh*. Redeker (1991: 1168) preferred the term ‘discourse operator’ instead of a discourse marker. For her, a discourse operator could be a conjunction, interjection, comment clause, or an adverbial that is used to bring a particular kind of linkage of the upcoming utterance with the current discourse context. Another definition is proposed by Fraser (1999: 931), who defined DMs as “a class of lexical expressions drawn primarily from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases”. Fraser argues that DMs indicate a relationship between discourse segments; she maintains that “a DM has a core meaning which can be enriched by the context and signals the relationship that the speaker intends between the utterance the DM introduces and the foregoing utterance” (Fraser, 1999: 936).

This study is driven by the fact that investigating discourse markers usage in relation to other social factors is an area that has been overlooked in Jordanian language research. Thus, the primary goal of this study is to address this gap and investigate the impact of the social factor of gender on the usage of DMs in Spoken Jordanian Arabic. Since all languages have DMs or similar linguistic forms, the primary concern of this study is to address two key inquiries. First, it aims to identify the specific linguistic items employed as DMs in Spoken Jordanian Arabic. Second, it tries to investigate the usage and functions of DMs in the discourse of Jordanian men and women. The researchers attempt to handle these inquiries through

answering the following questions:

1. What are the main lexical items that function as DMs in Spoken Jordanian Arabic?
2. Are there significant differences in the frequency of used DMs by male and female speakers of Spoken Jordanian Arabic?
3. What are the main functions of DMs that have been manifested in the speech of male and female casual discourse?

## 2. Literature review

Understanding gender differences in using DMs sheds light on the dynamics of communication within society, providing insights into how gender influences language use. By investigating these differences, societal norms, power dynamics, and cultural differences embedded within language can be better understood.

According to Ostman's earlier study (1983), women tend to utilize the pragmatic particle *you know* more than men. On the other hand, Holmes (1986), stated that there is no significant difference in the overall distribution of the pragmatic marker *you know* in both genders' speech. She stated that males and females have used this DM to communicate different functions; while women employed *you know* in their speech to express the speaker's certainty of the information being conveyed and of the addressee's background knowledge, men have used it more frequently to express uncertainty and to notify that the message has not been conveyed properly. She also argued that the gender of the addressee affects the occurrence of *you know* in the interaction, so there was some increase in the frequency of occurrence of *you know* in same-sex interaction compared to mixed-sex interaction, males used it in same-sex interactions more than females. Erman (1992) suggested that the use of the discourse marker *you know* varies significantly based on the gender of the speakers and the type of interaction. In same-sex conversations, *you know* is used more frequently than in mixed-sex conversations. Additionally, females predominantly use the phrase *you know* to structure conversations and express hesitation, while males employ it more frequently for decoding information, regulating turns, and indicating the need for repair or appeal. In general, Erman demonstrates that males utilize *you know* for rhetorical purposes and between incomplete propositions, while females use it more often to maintain their turn in a conversation and between complete propositions.

Croucher (2004) examined the frequency of occurrence of the DMs

*uh*, *um*, *you know*, and *like* in males and females spontaneous speech. The analysis showed that the markers *uh*, and *um* were used equally by both genders, while *you know* and *like* occurred much more in the females' speeches. The results also showed that *like* was more frequent in spontaneous speech than in casual speech. Schlee (2005) explored the influence of gender on using the English discourse markers *you know*, *like*, *okay*, and *right* in the academic speech of different disciplines in lecturing and in seminar contexts. He reports that *okay* and *right* are used more frequently by male speakers, while *like* and *you know* are used more frequently by female speakers. The analysis also revealed that the usage of these discourse markers varies depending on the power dynamics of the discourse, with higher-status speakers using *right* more frequently than lower-status speakers. Additionally, the study found differences in the usage of these discourse markers across different academic disciplines and contexts.

Trihartani and Fadilah (2020) found that Indonesian female students use more hedges and DMs to convey their hesitations than male students. Laaboudi (2022) examined how gender influences using DMs in Jebli Moroccan Arabic. She finds that females use more DMs in their speech, and she demonstrates that DMs are gender specific, which indicates that females tend to use specific sets of DMs, and this holds for males. Trihartani and Fadilah (2022) demonstrated that male and female Indonesian students have different preferences in selecting DMs to communicate their attitudes and feelings, especially when conveying their hesitations. Female students utilize '*hmm..*', and '*I think..*' to express doubt when they do not know how to anticipate it, while male students use '*well...*, and *I think...*'. However, female students show more politeness when conveying their ideas. Ebrahimi and Xodabande (2023) investigated the frequencies and functions of English discourse markers used by non-native male and female Iranian speakers. Samples were collected from (30) EFL teachers and (30) EFL learners in the classroom context. The results show no significant difference in terms of the frequency of using DMs with different functions between male and female EFL teachers and learners as well.

Research on how male and female Jordanian speakers use DMs in spoken Jordanian Arabic is limited, leaving a considerable gap in the understanding of how gender influences the use of these linguistic units. This study attempts to address this gap by conducting a comprehensive analysis of DMs in spoken Jordanian Arabic, focusing specifically on

gender differences. The current research tries to provide a better understanding of gendered language practices in Jordanian society.

### **3. Methodology**

To achieve the goals of the study, a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis methods were employed. A comparative analysis was conducted to examine the differences and similarities in the usage of DMs between the two genders.

A total of (13) participants, aged between (24) and (67) years, participated in this study. The sample consisted of (8) females and (5) males, selected through a random sampling technique. All the participants were native speakers of Jordanian Arabic.

The conversations were natural, real-life interactions collected by recording Jordanian speakers in informal situations. Data collection involved capturing natural conversations between participants. The researchers informed the participants that their conversations would be recorded. In some cases, the participants were asked to record themselves at their convenience to ensure their comfort. The conversations were informal and reflected everyday discussions. To capture genuine, unprompted conversations, the participants were not given specific topics, tasks, or time restrictions. The corpus consisted of (3720) words by males and (3722) words by females, resulting in a total data pool of (7442) words.

The researchers transcribed the collected data and manually coded the identified DMs. The targeted linguistic items were transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The frequencies of DMs utilized by female and male Jordanian speakers were calculated and compared relative to the number of words produced by each group. Additionally, a cross-gender analysis was conducted to explore the functional differences of DMs used by Jordanians.

#### **3.1. Identification of (DMs) in Jordanian Arabic**

Since there is no pre-defined list of DMs used in Jordanian Arabic, it was crucial for the researcher to first signal out the DMs utilized by Jordanians in their natural speech and conversations. The researchers used the diagnostic criteria proposed by Brinton (1996) and Schourup (1999) to differentiate DMs from other lexical expressions. According to Brinton (1996), (DMs) lack propositional meaning and grammatical necessity. Jucker and Ziv (1998:3) have recorded the features of DMs collected by Brinton (1996) as follows:

- Phonological and lexical features:
  - a. They are short and phonologically reduced.
  - b. They are from a separate tone group.
  - c. They are marginal forms and hence difficult to place within a traditional word class.
- Syntactic features:
  - a. They are restricted to the sentence-initial position.
  - b. They occur outside the syntactic structure or they are only loosely attached to it.
  - c. They are optional.
- Semantic feature:
  - a. They have little or no propositional meaning.
- Functional feature:
  - a. They are multifunctional, operating on several linguistic levels simultaneously.
- Sociolinguistic and stylistic features:
  - a. They are a feature of oral rather than written discourse and are associated with informality.
  - b. They appear with high frequency.
  - c. They are stylistically stigmatized.
  - d. They are gender specific and more typical of women's speech.

In the same vein, Schourup (1999) introduced a thorough perception of DMs by emphasizing three key features: connectivity, optionality, and non-truth-conditionality. He stated that a DM is an optional element in syntax that does not affect the truth conditions of the introduced utterance. Its main function is to set a connection between adjacent utterances. According to Schourup, the most important aspect asserted in defining DMs, is their function in connecting utterances or other segments of discourse. Additionally, Schourup (1999) demonstrated that DMs, in general, are believed to have no impact on the truth conditions of the proposition conveyed by a specific utterance. This characteristic sets DMs apart from 'content' words. As non-truth conditions, DMs are not considered to be part of the propositional meaning conveyed by an utterance or a sentence.

To detect DMs, the data was carefully read and the focus was on linguistic items that could be omitted without changing the propositional content of the utterance or the conversation.

#### 4. Data analysis

The present study aims to investigate previously unexamined aspects of the Jordanian Spoken Arabic, and it explores the functions employed by DMs in real-life conversations, particularly in male/female discourse.

##### 4.1. Distribution of Jordanian Discourse Markers

In order to consider the functional range of Jordanian DMs, a descriptive qualitative method was employed. However, through the qualitative analysis of the data, the researchers manually counted the occurrence of DMs. The resulting inventory of Jordanian DMs is presented in Table (1), and arranged in a descending manner of occurrence.

**Table 1: Jordanian (DMs) according to the frequency of occurrence**

No.	DM	Transcription	English Gloss	Frequency	Ratio
1	اه	?ah	Yes/ yeah	130	26.5%
2	يعني	jaʕni:	I mean / It means	104	21.2%
3	والله	wallah	Indeed / I swear by God	54	11.04%
4	بس	bas	But	46	9.4%
5	أفألك	?agullak	Let me tell you	18	3.68%
6	طيب	tajjeb	Ok	17	3.4%
7	أبوة	?ajwa	Alright / Right	14	2.8%
8	هسا	hassa	Now	12	2.4%
9	قال	ga:l	He said	9	1.8%
10	بتعرفي / بتعرف	bteʕrafi:	You know	7	1.4%
11	شوفي / شوف	ʕu:f / ʕu: fi:	See /you see	6	1.2%
12	اسمعي / اسمع	?ismaʕ	Listen	6	1.2%
13	يا زلمة	ja: zalameh	Hey man	6	1.2%
14	وكذا	wu kaða:	Sort of / And so	5	1.02%
15	شو اسمه	ʕu: ?ismuh	What is its name?/What to say	5	1.02%
16	عاد	ʕa:d	Yet/ but	5	1.02%
17	يختي	jaʕti:	Sister	4	0.81%
18	خيو / يا أخي	ja: ?axi: / ʕajjo:h	Brother	4	0.81%
19	خالوه / خالي	ʕa: li: / ʕa: lo:h	Uncle (maternal uncle)	4	0.81%
20	بعدين	baʕde:n	Then	4	0.81%

No.	DM	Transcription	English Gloss	Frequency	Ratio
21	ايش	ʔe:ʃ	What	3	0.61%
22	هاظ	ha:ð	This/ that	2	0.4%
23	بدك الصحيح	biddak ʔilsaħi:h	You know	2	0.4%
24	خن نقول	χan ngu:l	Let's say	2	0.4%
25	قصدي	Gas di:	I mean	2	0.4%
26	يا سلام	ja: sala:m	Great/ wow	2	0.4%
27	لا	la:	No	2	0.4%
28	يا ستي /يا سيدي	ja: si: di: / ja: sit.ti:	Mr. / Mrs	2	0.4%
29	ف	fa	And	2	0.4%
30	صحيح	saħi:h	Right	1	0.2%
31	كمان	kama:n	And	1	0.2%
32	طبعًا	tabʕan	Of course	1	0.2%
33	شو بدي أقلك	ʃu: biddi: ʔagullak	What I want to say	1	0.2%
34	حلو	ħilu:	Nice	1	0.2%
35	وإشي	wo ʔiʃi:	And so	1	0.2%
36	تعال	taʕa: li:	Come here	1	0.2%
37	عن جد	ʕan dʒad	Seriously	1	0.2%
38	صدق	saddig	Believe /you know	1	0.2%
39	بالفعل	bilfiʕil	Indeed	1	0.2%

The number of produced lexemes, the total number of DMs in each gender group, and the ratio of employed DMs are presented in Table (2).

**Table 2: Total number of words and (DMs) used by Jordanian speakers**

Gender	No. of words	No. of (DMs)	Ratio
Female	3722	231	6.20 %
Male	3723	258	6.92 %
Total	7445	489	6.56 %

The numbers in the table suggest that Jordanian male speakers used more DMs than female speakers. The mean considered for males is (6.92%), compared to (6.20%) for females, indicating a slight convergence. This result suggests that the gender of the speaker does not significantly affect the frequency of DMs. In other words, the use of DMs appears to be independent of the speaker's gender. These findings align with the analyses conducted by Holmes (1986) and Erman (1992), which

demonstrate that there is no considerable difference in the overall distribution of the DM *you know* between male and female speakers.

#### 4.2. Functions of Jordanian (DMs)

The investigated corpus demonstrated that Jordanian DMs performed six main functions at the textual level and seven ones at the interpersonal level in everyday spoken discourse. These functions are discussed below:

##### 4.2.1. Functions of Jordanian discourse markers at the textual level

The analysis revealed that Jordanian speakers have used DMs to achieve the following textual functions:

1. Elaboration: it includes rephrasing/ reformulation of the previous message, as well as self-correction or self-editing, and clarification through exemplification or explanation.

e.g. A: يقولوا البنت لازم تاخذ واحد اللي تدل عنه أمها، يعني أمها تعرف إنه منيح، أو أبوها.

[ bej.gu:.lu: ?il.bint la:.zem ta: .xuð wa: .had ?it.dil ?a.nuh ?u.mha: , jaʕ.ni: ?u.mha: teʕ.rif ?in.nuh mni:h, ?aw ?a.bo:.ha:]

‘It is believed that a girl should marry someone that her mother recommends, *I mean*, her mother knows that he is a good guy or her father.’

In this proposition, the speaker used the DM *jaʕ.ni: ‘I mean’* to introduce an explanation of the preceding statement to enhance the proposition.

2. To denote either new or old information.

e.g. حدثت مع زميل بتعرف... في بريطانيا القطاع الصحي بيغطي كل شي إلا الأسنان، إلنا،

[had.θat maʕ za.mi:l ?il.na: , biteʕ.ref fi: bri:.ta.nja: ?il.qi.ta:ʕ ?il.seh.hi: bej.ʕa.ti: kul ʃi: ?il.la: ?al.ʔas.na:n ]

‘It happened to our fellow, *you know*, in Britain, the health sector covers everything except teeth.’

Here, the DM *you know* is used to denote new information amid the narrative to serve the message conveyed by the speaker.

3. Topic management: here a DM indicates new topic, partial shift in the topic, or resumption of an earlier topic.

e.g. هاي السنة صعبة بكل شي، هسا براجب موسم ايش بيكون هاي الأيام؟ بيحوز الرمان  
[ ha:j. ?il.sa.neh saʕ.ba:h bi.kul ʃi:, hs.sa bi.ra:.dʒeb maw.sem ?e:ʃ bej.ku:n ha:j ?il.ʔaj.jam? bej.dʒu:z alrum.ma:n]

‘This year is difficult in every way, *Now* in Rajeb (an agricultural area in Jordan), what are the seasonal fruits these days? Pomegranate may be?’

In this conversation, the interlocutors were talking about the weather conditions in the current year, then the speaker changed the topic of conversation to talk about the seasonal fruits at the time in Rajeb. However, he used the DM ‘*hs.sa, now*’ to shift the topic cohesively, so the transition between the two topics would not seem odd.

4. Contrast: a DM denotes that the subsequent proposition opposes the preceding one, and/ or demonstrates a different content.

e.g A: خمسة وثمانين سنة عمره.

[χam.seh wo θa.ma:.ni:n om.ruh]

‘He is eighty-five years old.’

B: بس ما شاء الله مش مبين عليه

[bas ma: ʃa:l.la:h miʃ mbaj.jen ʃa.le:h]

‘but he does not look that old.’

Speaker B used the DM *bas* ‘but’ to introduce a statement that contradicts what has been mentioned by speaker A in the preceding proposition.

5. Gap filler: here a DM serves as a filler or a delaying tactic used to recall information, and to sustain discourse or hold the floor.

e.g. ما أنا بحكي لك مقابل الحديقة الكبيرة، يم بيتي، طيب وين مدارس الصرح للبنات؟

عرفتها؟

[ma: ʔa.na: baħ.ki: lik mu.qa:.bil ʔil.ħa.di:.ga ʔil.kbi:.reh, jam be:.ti:, taj.jeeb, we:n ma.da:.res ʔil.ʃa.reh lil.ba.na:t ? ʔiʃ.ref.ti:.ha:]

‘I am telling you, in front of the big park, near my house, *okay*, where is Al Sarh School for girls? Do you know it?’

In this example, the speaker was describing the location of her house, she used the DM *taj.jeeb* ‘okay’ as a gap filler to recall certain information that will help her in depicting the exact location.

6. Attracting the attention of the speaker: DMs are used to attract the attention of the hearer to accentuate some elements in the discourse.

e.g. يعني/سمع، الفكرة انه لو في شغل، المشكلة انه الطبيب ما يكون رحمه عنده

للمرضى، كلام فاضي.

[jaʃ.ni: ʔis.maʃ, ʔil.fek.rah ʔin.nuh law fi: ʃu.yul, ʔil.muʃ.ke.leh ʔin.nuh ʔil.ʔa.bi:b ma: jku:n raħ.mah ʃen.duh lil.mar.ða:, ka.la:m fa:.di:]

'I mean, *listen*, the main idea is that, if there is a work, the problem when the doctor isn't sympathetic to the patients, then it is all bullshit.'

The DM *ʔis.maf* '*listen*' is used by the speaker to claim the attention of the partner to emphasize the idea presented in the proposition that follows the DM.

The employed Jordanian DMs for textual purposes will be considered below by comparing them across genders. The comparison will reveal whether Jordanian males use DMs differently from females, specifically in terms of their textual functions, and it will identify the predominant functions that are present in Jordanian speakers' discourse. Table (3) introduces the distributions of textual functions employed in the discourse of male / female Jordanian speakers.

**Table 3: Textual functions employed by both genders**

Function	Male		Female		Total
	Count	Ratio	Count	Ratio	
Topic management	10	58.8%	7	41.1%	17
Elaboration	55	50.9%	53	49%	108
To denote new or old information	23	57.5%	17	42.5%	40
Indicating the attention of the hearer	12	57.1%	9	42.8%	21
Contrast	6	37.5%	10	62.5%	16
Gap filler	25	45.4%	30	54.5%	55

As Table (3) displays, the greatest discrepancy in the use of DMs at the textual level was clear in utilizing DMs to demonstrate contrast between two discourse segments, with rates of (62.5%) for female speakers and (37.5%) for male speakers. The other textual function that was employed by female speakers more than males is a gap filler or a delaying tactic to recall information (54.5% vs. 45.4%). However, Jordanian male speakers preferred to use DMs in topic management (58.8% vs. 41.1% for females), as well as to add new or old information (57.5% vs. 42.5%). The only function in which Jordanian female and male speakers' usage of DMs in the textual domain corresponds is 'elaboration'. Simply put, there is variation in other functions, but in most instances, men exceed women except for the use of DMs to denote contrast and as a gap filler.

#### **4.2.2. Functions of Jordanian discourse markers at the interpersonal level**

The interpersonal functions that Jordanian DMs fulfill in male/female discourse are presented below:

1. Backchannel: DMs are used to signal the hearer's understanding, comprehension, interest, continued attention, and following of what the

speaker is saying.

e.g. A: عندي هون، والله فعلا، الشجرات اللي معرضات بوجه الشمس.

[ʕen.di: ho:n, wal.lah feʕ.lan, ʔil.ʃa.dʒa.ra:t ʔil.li: mʕa.ra.da:t  
bi.we.dʒeh ʔil.ʃams]

‘Yes indeed, here, the trees that are facing the sun.’

B: أيوه

[ʔaj.wa]

‘yeah.’

A: مع انك بتسقيهن كل يومين مرة، بس بتيجي عليهن ذابلات.

[maʕ ʔin.nak be.tes.ge:hen kul jo:me:n mar.rah, bas bti:dʒi:  
ʕa.le:hen bet.la:gej:hen ʔa:bla:t]

‘Although I water them once every two days, but they are withered.’

In this example, while speaker A was discussing the conditions of his lemon trees, speaker B used the DM *ʔaj.wa* ‘yeah/yes’ to signal that he was following the explanation.

2. Showing intimacy: DMs are used to display intimacy between the speaker and the hearer.

e.g. A: بحكيلها استخيري، يختي بتقول لي بستخير، مش مرتاحة.

[baħ.ki:l.ha: ʔis.ta.ħi:.ri:, jaħ.ti: bit.gu:l li: bas.ta.ħi:r, miʃ  
mir.ta.ħa:]

‘I told her to pray and seek help. *Sisters/dear*, she said: I prayed, but I am not feeling good.’

The word *jaħ.ti:* ‘*sister/dear*’ is used by the speaker here to indicate intimacy and sincerity with the hearer.

3. Agreement: a DM is used to communicate the speaker’s agreement on shared knowledge.

e.g. A: نزل وصار بدينارين، وبثلاث ونص.

[ni.zil wo ʃa:r, bi.di:.na.re:n, wo bi ʔa.la:ʔ wo nus]

‘Its price has dropped to become two JDs and three and a half JD.’

B: ورح يرد ينزل

[wo raħ jrud jen.zel]

‘And it will drop further.’

A: آه

[ʔaħ]

‘Yes.’

Speaker A agreed with what Speaker B said about the decrease in

avocado prices, using the discourse marker *ʔah* 'yes' to express affirmation or agreement with the statement.

4. To express attitudes, evaluations, judgments, demands, expectations, and differences.

e.g. A: يعني شوف انت، هسا براجب مثلاً، انت لما يكون لك 12 ساعة مثلاً بالثمن أيام.

أفلك يا زلمة، هذول نعمة. يعني مرتاح. يعني عندكو المي ماشاءالله هناك بيجوز 4 إنش.

- A: jaʕ.ni: fu:f ʔin.teh, has.sa: bi.ra:dʒeb ma.θa.lan, ʔin.teh lam.ma: jku:n lak 12 sa:ʕa ma.θa.lan bil.θa.man ʔaj.jam. ʔa.gul.lak ja: za.la.meh, ha.ðo:l neʕ.meh. jaʕ.ni: mir.ta:h. jaʕ.ni: ʕen.dku: ʔil.maj ma.ʕa:ʔ ʔal.la:h hi.nak bej.dʒu:z ʔar.ba.ʕa ʔinʃ.

- A: I mean, you see, now in Rajeb for instance, when your turn is 12 hours every eight days. *You know man...* it's a blessing. I mean you are pleased (with this amount of water). The water there may be 4 inches.

In this example, speaker A used the DMs *ʔa.gul.lak ja: za.la.meh* 'You know man' to indicate his contentment regarding the amount of water his partner gets from the spring.

5. Tentativeness: DMs are utilized to express the speaker's hesitancy, doubtfulness, and lack of confidence in what he/she is saying.

e.g. A: هسا احنا قبل قديش عملنا حجامه؟ الحجامه بتتشط الجسم.

[has.sa ʔiħ.na: ga.bel gad.de:ʃ ʔiʕ.mel.na: ħu.dʒa:mah? ʔil. ħu.dʒa:mah bit.na.ʃeʔ ʔil.dʒe.sem]

'Now, how long have we done cupping? Cupping refreshes the body.'

B: والله بيجوز ... بالأشهر.

[wal.lah bej.dʒu:z ... bel.ʔaʃ.hur]

'I swear... may be before months.'

Speaker B used the oath *Walla* 'I swear' to express her uncertainty of the exact date that they have done cupping.

6. Emphasis: a DM is used to indicate the speaker's tendency to emphasize or a specific segment in the discourse.

e.g. A: يوم امتحان أبو خديجة وهذا العميد وهذول ما رضيوش يعطوهم في الثلجة.

والله ما رضيووا، ومرضت.

[jo:m ʔim.te.ħa:n ʔa.bu: ʕa.de:.dʒeh wo ha.ða ʔil.ʕa.mi:d wo ha.ðo:l ma:red.djo:ʃ jʕaʔ.lu:hum fi: ʔil.θal.dʒeh. wallah ma red.ju:. wo mer.dat]

'In the day of Abu Khadeja's exam, the college dean refused to postpone the exam because of the snow. *I swear*, they refused, and she

became ill.’

In this example, the speaker used a strong oath to emphasize and confirm the information mentioned in the previous statement: that the dean refused to postpone the exam due to the challenging weather conditions.

7. Hedges: DMs help the speaker to save the face of his/her partner in the face-threatening speech acts.

e.g. A: بالله يا أم فارس تحطي الشرشف ع رجلين الدكتور.

[*bal.lah* ja: um fa:.res thu.ti: ?il.far.faf ʕa.la redʒ.le:n ?il.dok.to:.rah]

‘Excuse *me* Um Fares, could you please put the blanket on the Doctor’s legs.’

In this example, the speaker asked the addressee to perform a particular action, and she used the DM *bal.lah* which can be interpreted here as ‘*excuse me*’ to avoid any sense of imposition and face-threatening.

Table (4) introduces the functions at the interpersonal level that Jordanian DMs fulfill in the male/female speakers discourse.

**Table 4: Interpersonal functions employed by both genders**

Gender Function	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage	Total
Agreement	40	60.6%	26	39.9%	66
Showing intimacy	7	77.7%	2	22.3%	9
Backchannel	38	61.2%	24	38.7%	62
Emphasis	16	40%	24	60%	40
Expressing attitude	12	41.3%	17	58.6%	29
Tentativeness	14	63.6%	8	36.3%	22
Hedge/ Mitigator	0	0 %	3	100%	3

As Table (4) shows, Jordanian female speakers show a preference for using DMs as hedge devices with a percentage of (100%) for females vs. (0%) for males, emphasis (60%) for females vs.(40%) for males, and expressing attitudes (58%) vs. (41%) for males. The findings also suggest that Jordanian male speakers surpass female speakers in using DMs to meet their interpersonal needs in most cases. They have used DMs more frequently to show intimacy with their partner (77.6%) for males vs. (22.4%) for females, as well as to show tentativeness (63.6% vs. 36%).

#### **4.2.3. Cross-gender comparison of Jordanian (DMs) at the textual and interpersonal levels**

Once a comparative analysis of the utilization of DMs in Jordanian discourse by males and females was performed across both the textual and interpersonal domains, a comparison was conducted to assess the disparity

in DM usage between the two genders in relation to the total number of DMs produced by each gender group. Table (5) provides an overview of the overall count of DMs used by each gender group, it contains both textual and interpersonal functions used by both genders.

**Table 5: Cross-gender comparison of (DMs) functions at the textual/interpersonal level**

Gender	Textual functions	Ratio	Interpersonal functions	Ratio	Total
Male	131	50.7%	127	49.2%	258
Female	127	54.9%	104	45.02%	231

An analysis of Table (5) reveals disparities in discourse marker usage between Jordanian male and female speakers. Males exhibited a higher frequency of using DMs at the interpersonal level, whereas female speakers tended to use DMs more for serving textual functions. This result contradicts the conclusions reached by Alami et al. (2011), who suggested that female speakers prefer to use Persian DMs for performing more interpersonal functions.

## 5. Discussion

Jordanian speakers easily incorporate a wide range of lexical items that serve as DMs into their daily conversations to maintain the coherence of the discourse, such as *ʔah* (yes/yeah), *jaʕ.ni*: (I mean, it means), *wal.lah* (I swear by God/ indeed), *bas* (but), and *ʔa.gul.lak* (let me tell you). The current analysis of Jordanian DMs primarily centers on their functional role in informal everyday conversations, providing an analytical description of the process. The findings are based on analyzing a corpus consisting of (7442) words. The corpus was analyzed with a specific emphasis on discourse markers DMs, with a total of (489) occurrences identified in the data. Among these DMs, *ʔah* (yes/yeah) was found to be the most frequent, appearing (130) times (26.5% of the total occurrences).

The quantitative analysis also revealed a notable finding regarding the usage of DMs among different genders. The results indicate that Jordanian male speakers have a higher tendency to employ DMs compared to their female counterparts, with rates of 6.92% and 6.20% respectively. The absence of a significant difference (0.62%) in the frequency of DMs usage among Jordanian male and female speakers indicates that the speaker's gender does not influence the use of DMs. These findings are consistent with those of Ebrahimi and Xodabande (2023), Alami et al. (2012), Erman (1992), and Holmes (1986), who likewise found no significant association between the overall frequency of DMs usage and the speaker's gender, although they did identify certain functional distinctions. Similarly,

Schleef (2005) found no significant association between the frequency of DMs use and speaker gender. He hypothesizes that the variations observed in DM usage across genders might be explained by textual factors influencing their usage. Supporting the findings of the current study, Koczogh (2011) also observed no substantial quantitative disparities in DM use between genders.

The findings of the present study contradict Brinton's (1996) perspective that DMs are gendered linguistic tools related to the traditional features of female speech. Similarly, the results of the current study challenge Croucher's (2004) conclusions, where he argued for a correlation between the frequency of DMs usage and gender, suggesting that females tend to use DMs more frequently than males. Moreover, Matei (2011) proposed a direct influence of gender on DMs usage, suggesting a higher frequency of DM usage by women compared to men.

To investigate the functional roles of DMs and find if there are remarkable differences in their usage between Jordanian male and female speakers at the interpersonal and textual levels, a cross-gender comparison was conducted across both domains. The analysis revealed subtle distinctions in DMs use between male and female Jordanian speakers at both interpersonal and textual levels. While female speakers showed a slightly higher tendency to use DMs for textual functions (54.9% vs. 50.7% for males), males exhibited a tendency towards interpersonal functions (49.2% vs. 45.02% for females). Female speakers have used DMs at the textual level mainly to indicate contrast or to serve as a gap filler or as a delaying tactic to recall information. Whilst, male speakers employed DMs to make topic shifts and denote new or previously mentioned information. However, at the interpersonal level, Jordanian male speakers surpassed females in using DMs to show intimacy, tentativeness, backchannel, and agreement. At the same time, Jordanian DMs were used more by females to express their attitude, to indicate emphasis and as hedge devices. However, these findings challenge some of the stereotypical features proposed by many researchers regarding male and female speech. For instance, women generally prefer to express tentativeness by using fillers, tag questions, or empty adjectives, or by creating an impression of less authority. They also employ lexical hedges to reduce the force of their utterances (Lakoff, 1975). On the other hand, male language is generally described as more assertive, certain, direct, and authoritative. Men mostly use minimal responses or backchanneling. These language features are used by men to assert dominance in

conversation (Coats & Pichler, 1998). Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that while these generalizations hold true in many cases, individual variations and cultural considerations can significantly affect language use, resulting in divergent communication styles within and across genders.

## 6. Conclusion

This study departs from the assumption that social variables, such as gender, influence the usage of DMs. The primary focus of this study was to investigate the effect of gender on using DMs in spoken Jordanian Arabic. To meet the study objectives, a quantitative-qualitative analysis was employed. The findings of the study contribute to the knowledge of how DMs work across genders in general. Discussions of the results concluded that gender does not significantly affect the frequency of DMs. They also reveal a minor influence of gender on the functions that DMs fulfill in discourse. While Jordanian females tend to perform more textual functions, male speakers are inclined to employ interpersonal functions. These slight discrepancies could be attributed to individual differences, the degree of closeness between speakers, topics of discussion, and cultural variances.

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