

Discourse Markers of Causality in Maghrebi and Egyptian Arabic: A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis

Discourse Markers (DMs) have traditionally been downplayed because they are viewed as elements which do not contribute to the truth-conditional meaning of an utterance, or to the syntax and semantics of a sentence. Contrary to approaches that downplayed DMs, other researchers have been interested in the study of these expressions. Grice (1989) considered DMs such as *therefore* to carry a conventional implicature as they allow “a speaker to indicate though not to say that a certain consequence holds” (Grice 1967/1989: 121). Building on the Gricean view and working with a Relevance Theory framework (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995; Blakemore 1987), the present paper posits that DMs signal pragmatic inferences that are performed by the addressee. This paper uses data from three varieties of Arabic to explore three questions: What are the pragmatic variants realizing the procedural meaning of causality? What are the (social) factors that determine the choice of the variants? How does the study of DMs contribute to research in pragmatics and sociolinguistics?

This paper is based on two complementary studies: the main and supplementary study. The main study consists of data collected during face-to-face interactions, while the supplementary study consists of online data taken from the news outlet *Al Jazeera*. Twenty four participants representing three dialects of Arabic, Moroccan, Algerian, and Egyptian dialect, took part in the main study. The data from *Al Jazeera* is based on interviews with three participants representing the three dialects under study. While the main study is intended to pinpoint the DMs expressing the procedural meaning of causality in an informal setting, the supplementary study is meant to identify the causality DMs that are selected in a formal setting. While seeing DMs as locomotives of procedural meaning, this paper examines how social factors account for the variation observed in their use.

The results indicate that the meanings of causality as a pragmatic variable (Schneider & Barron 2008) may be realized by means of pragmatic variants. For the main study, causality is expressed by *li?anna*, *li?annu*, *hit*, *lahqaf*, *ʕafan*, *parce que*, and *because*. As to *Al Jazeera*, one DM, *li?anna*, was selected by the Maghrebi participants and both *li?anna* and *ʕafan* were selected by the Egyptian participant. The common feature between these pragmatic variants is their procedural meaning: causality. The results show that the realization of the DMs is shaped by social factors such as nationality, education, type of interaction, and by individual choices. In order to account for the mapping between variants and social factors, a socially motivated procedural meaning (Terkourafi 2011) is used.

At a theoretical level, the findings of the paper highlight the need to study variation not only in the light of the correlation of the linguistic behavior with broad social categories but also in light of socio-psychological choices made by the individual (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, 1985). The paper also reinforces the need to extend variation from phonetics/morphology to pragmatics by using procedural meaning (Terkourafi, 2011) as a shared element among the variants instead of semantic equivalence (Labov, 1966/1972). On this view, “linguistic variants are considered equivalent if they can be used interchangeably in order to achieve similar perlocutionary effects in discourse” (Terkourafi, 2011, p. 355).