Pragmatic Analysis of the Particle *ʁadı* in Najdi Arabic

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Abstract

The ultimate goal of this paper is to investigate the pragmatic use of the particle *ʁadı* in Najdi Arabic. To do just this, both Grice's Theory of Conversation and the Relevance Theory (RT) are used. In addition to indicating the speaker's personal certainty of his/her utterance, *ʁadı* is assumed to encode the speaker's lack of positive evidence to confirm the propositional content of his/her utterance, nonetheless. For Grice, *ʁadı* generates an implicature due to flouting the maxim of Quality *'Try to make your contribution one that is true'*. As a result, the hearer does not repose the speaker's confidence of his/her utterance. Differently, for RT, *ʁadı* manifests a procedural meaning. This type of meaning guides the hearer not to rely heavily on the speaker's own certainty which is, in principle, driven by anecdotal (nor conclusive) evidence. Additionally, this paper concludes that *ʁadı* fares better within the general framework of RT which provides a more robust account of its semantic import and pragmatic usage.

Keywords: *ʁadı*, Grice's theory of conversation, Relevance Theory, procedural meaning, Najdi Arabic

1. Introduction

This research paper introduces a pragmatic proposal for the function of the particle *ʁadɪ* in Najdi Arabic (henceforth, NA) spoken in Najd[1] region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Ingham 1994). Needless to say, *ʁadɪ* (as parallel to other highly colloquially-used words) has been parenthetically addressed in the related literature in spite of its importance in a given sentence. This importance is mainly grounded within the assumption that such particles might reveal underlying aspects of language change, i.e., synchronic vs diachronic (cf. Goss & Salmons 2000 and Brinton & Traugott 2005, among many others). In a related vein, the study of such particles is a salient source in order to understand grammaticalization (Ocampo 2006). Furthermore, several research papers maintain that such particles, including discourse particles, can be a diagnostics for the C-domain exhibited by a given language (Roussou 2002, Zimmermann 2004). Reasoning along such assumptions, this research introduces a pragmatic account of this particle which cues several pragmatic characteristics worthy to analyze.

The whole discussion below is organized as follows. Section (2) provides an overview of the particle *ʁadɪ* and how it is used in discourse. Section (3) introduces pragmatic analysis of *ʁadɪ* within Grice's theory of conversation. It argues that this particle endorses a conversational implicature. Section (4) works out in detail this particle within RT, postulating that *ʁadɪ* has a procedural meaning (rather than conceptual meaning) and does not contribute to the propositional content of the utterance where it shows up. Here, *ʁadɪ* guides the hearer not to trust the speaker's utterance. This systematic instruction minimizes the hearer's effort exerted to process the speaker's utterance and maximizes concurrently the contextual effect needed to seek for optimal relevance. Section (5) concludes the paper.

2. ʁadɪ as a discourse particle[2]:

ʁadɪ, as a particle, is used to report a specific piece of information of which a speaker is certain but lacks the needed evidence to corroborate. Hence, when using *ʁadɪ*, the speaker casts doubt on the whole content of his/her utterance. Following Aikhenvald (2003) and Alhaisoni, *et al.* (2011), among many others, it can be suggested that this particle is an evidential particle. Consider the difference in meaning between sentence (1) (without *ʁadɪ*) and sentence (2) (with *ʁadɪ*).

(1) safar-u ʔalbaːriħ

  travell.PST-3PL.M yesterday

  'They travelled yesterday.'

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[1] Najd is the middle region of the desert part of Arabia constituting today's Saudi Arabia. There is no scientific geographical limitation for it, but usually (locally) it is used to refer to the area lying from Yemen to the south to the borders of Jordan to the north, and from Ahsa Oasis to the east to the mountains of Hijaz and the plains of Asiir to the west (Al-Sweel 1987: 71).

[2] In Standard Arabic, *ʁadɪ* is used as a verb, meaning literally 'become' or 'start to be'. It describes a change (for example, appearance, place, etc.) happening to a state of affair of a person, object, etc. Consider sentence (A).

  A) ʁada ʔal-walad-u y-aʕdu

  become.PST.3SG.M Def-boy-NOM 3SG.M-move.PRS

  'The boy has become moving.'

Since the ultimate goal of this research is to investigate this lexeme when used as a discourse particle, its lexical use would not pursue here.

(2) ʁadɪ-hum safar-u ʔalba:riħ ʁadɪ-them travel.PST-3PL.M yesterday

≈ 'It is a definite maybe that they travelled yesterday.'

In sentence (1), the speaker does not use *ʁadɪ* because he is quite sure of the truth of the propositional content of his utterance; namely, that *'they travelled'*; his certainty is supported by a set of authentic indications, he believes, adequate to conclude his statement. By contrast, in sentence (2), the speaker uses *ʁadɪ* because he is not quite sure of his statement by virtue of lack of sufficient trustworthy indications. The speaker in (2) is totally certain of his utterance in person but is cognizant of the fact that the indications on which he relies are not sufficient for the hearers to believe or grant. Thus, *ʁadɪ* is used when the speaker reports a certain piece of information but casts little doubt on his utterance.

In addition, *ʁadɪ* can be used when the speaker knows the truth exactly but holds back deliberately and purposefully not to expose it (e.g., in order to orchestrate the situation or for politeness reasons). When using *ʁadɪ* in this case, the speaker informs the hearer directly that the content of his statement is right to the best of his knowledge with the existence of clear indications, motivating him to say it, but without any solid and conclusive evidence for it. Consider the following dialogue between a son and his mother, utilizing the particle *ʁadɪ*:

(3) Son: ʔa-tilfizyoan ma yiʃtiʁil!

Def-TV Neg work.PRS

'The TV does not work!'

Mother: ʁadɪ-h xarbaan.

ʁadɪ-it broken

'It is a definite maybe it might be broken.'

In (3), the mother has undoubtedly further indications for her assumption that the TV is (hypothetically) broken. However, she does not obtain (hard) evidence supporting her stand against her son's exclamation. Thus, the son understands that the TV might be really broken or makes sure of his mother's proposition. Pragmatically speaking, the speaker does not commit himself to the content of his utterance even if he is certain about it. This being so, *ʁadɪ*'s non-co-occurrence with expressions of certainty or modal auxiliaries of necessity and obligation, including *la:zim* (must), is straightforwardly justified.

(4) ʁadɪ ʔa-tilfizyoan (*la:zim) jkoon xarba:n ʁadɪ Def-TV must be broken

Intended meaning: 'It is a definite maybe that TV is broken.'

Sentence (4) is best counted as a contradiction since the selectional restrictions imposed by *ʁadɪ* are violated therein. Both sheer certainty encoded by *la:zim* and uncertainty encoded by *ʁadɪ* are incorporated in one single proposition.

Accordingly, it can be posited that *ʁadɪ* is not used in occasions which require a cut-and-dried answer or stand, for example in courts or in decisive political speeches where certainty is

highly recommended. ʁadɪ is rather frequent in social settings which are laden with less-decisive nature. Figure (1) instantiates the relationship held between ʁadɪ and formality, taken for granted that formality requires the speaker to be considerably certain of his utterance in pursuit with authentic evidence rather than with any anecdotal assumptions. The further the formality is, the lesser ʁadɪ is used.
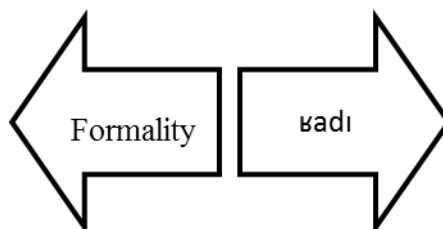

Figure 1. Formality and the use of *ʁadɪ*

However, to make the argument more concrete, ʁadɪ is not used in situations in which the speaker is extremely uncertain of his proposition. Put another way, although ʁadɪ is associated, to some extent, with uncertainty (in that its usage is associated with lack of solid evidence of the truth of the proposition), it is mainly worked out in less uncertain cases. It is merely an indication that although the speaker does not endorse what he utters in order to leave him a margin of freedom to manoeuvre, he is completely sure of his utterance to the best of his knowledge related. This usage gives rise to the assumption that ʁadɪ is demarcated between certainty and uncertainty, where ʁadɪ is neither a word for both as illustrated in the dialogue in (5) in which this particle is incompatible with certainty and non-certainty adverbs.

(5)

A: ʔal-walad yaʔis min ʔanadʒaħ.

  Def-boy desparate.3SG.M from success

  'The boy is desperate for success.'

  B: nisaħt-uh.

  Advise.INTRG-him

  'Did you advise him?'

A: naʕam gilt luh qisah ʕan ʔal-kifah wa ʔa-nadʒaħ

  Yes told.1SG to-him story about Def-dedication and Def-success

  'Yes, I told him a story about dedication and success.'

B: tamam! ʁadɪ hal-qisah taʕti:-h dars (*ʔaki:d/*mu-aki:d)

  Perfect! ʁadɪ this-story give.3SG.F-him lesson (surely/ Neg-surely)

  Intended meaning: 'It is definite maybe that this story gives him a lesson.'

3. Grice's Theory of conversations:

3.1 An overview

For Grice (1975 and 1989), implicatures are derived by either observing (abiding by) or flouting (exploiting or breaching) one or more of the four maxims of conversations which are in turn derived by the Cooperative Principle (CP) (Levinson 1983: 104). In detail, Grice introduces CP (as shown in 6) as a systematic way to construe how the speaker's meaning is formed.

(6)The Cooperative Principle

'Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged' (Grice 1975).

In conversational interactions, speakers and hearers work on a certain set of rules which are in operation unless they receive indications to the contrary. These rules are depicted in four maxims which when observed or flouted, a particular implicature is yielded. These maxims are as follows:

(7) The Maxims

- *The maxim of Quality*: Try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically.

- *The maxim of Quantity*: Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.

- *The maxim of Relevance*: Make your contributions relevant.

- *The maxim of Manner*: Be perspicuous.

For Grice, there are two main types of implicatures: Conversational Implicatures (drawn only with reference to the maxims) and Conventional implicatures (not drawn with reference to the maxims, but, instead, to what is linguistically encoded) [3]as seen in Figure (2) (adapted from Levinson 1983: 131):
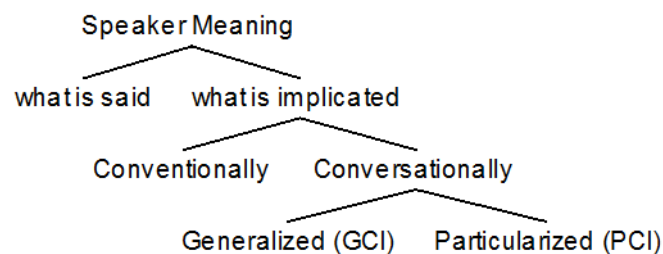

Figure (2): The Gricean typology of speaker meaning

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[3] Indeed, there are other kinds of implicatures, including implicature of politeness or style that are neither conventional nor conversational (Brown and Levinson 1987).

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Conversational implicatures are, in turn, subdivided into two categories: the Particularized Conversational Implicature (PCI) (highly context-dependent) and the Generalized Conversational Implicature (GCI) (less context-dependent).

3.2 ʁadɪ: Conversational Implicature or Conventional Implicature Endorser

When using ʁadɪ, the speaker flouts the maxim of Quality (Try to make your contribution one that is true). He does not have credible evidence to completely attest his statement. The speaker says what he believes to be false. Furthermore, the speaker says his utterance although he lacks adequate evidence for his statement in spite of the fact that he is personally certain of. The maxim of Quality and its sub-maxims are consequently breached; thus, a particular implicature is directly yielded by the hearer. This implicature is strongly related to the putative notion that the hearer does not have to trust the speaker's proposition. For example, the implicature the son can yield from sentence (5) is the following:

(8) 'Although my mother is personally certain of her utterance, she is not quite sure that the TV is really broken, and I do not have to trust her proposition.'

Being generated by flouting the maxim of Quality, implicatures yielded by ʁadɪ are a conversational implicature. However, let's examine this pretention against what Grice dubs as five properties of conversational implicature (Levinson 1983: 114-24):

- Calculability,

- Non-detachability,

- Non-conventionality,

- Variability,

- Defeasibility

Firstly, implicatures yielded by *ʁadɪ* are calculable in nature; they are strongly attached to one of the maxims of conversations, i.e., the maxim of Quality and its pertinent sub-maxims as expounded above. Secondly, *ʁadɪ*-derived implicatures are not-detachable owing to attachment to the semantic content of what-is-said apart from the linguistic form. Consider the following examples:

(9) *ʁadɪ* ʔal-walad kaan hina   *ʁadɪ* Def-boy was here

  'It is a definite maybe that the boy was here.'

The implicature: the speaker is personally sure that the boy was here; however, I do not have to repose his certainty.

(10) ʔal-zˤahir ʔal-walad kaan hina

  Presumably Def-boy was here

  'It is a definite maybe the boy was here.'

The implicature: the speaker is personally sure that the boy was here; however, I do not

have to repose his certainty.

Both sentences (9) and (10) yield the same implicature although sentence (9) uses ʁadɪ, whilst sentence (10) does not. Indeed, all expressions (including: *ʔiħtima:l Kabi:r,* literally: considerable probability) which deliver the notion that the speaker is certain of his utterance but lacks adequate evidence do generate the same implicatures. Moreover, ʁadɪ-derived implicatures are not conventional because of not being part of the conventional meaning of linguistic expressions (e.g. utterances). What is said (what is linguistically encoded) does not entail the lack of adequate evidence available for the speaker and the call of not trusting him. This, in turn, maintains that the implicatures derived by ʁadɪ are non-conventional.

However, ʁadɪ does not fine-tune other characteristics of conversational implicature; namely, variability and defeasibility. Firstly, ʁadɪ yields the same implicature regardless of the context of the utterance containing it; ʁadɪ-derived implicatures are not variable. Levinson (1983) explains this point via positing the following sentence (1983: 118).

(11) John is a machine.

Levinson states that sentence (11) *could convey a wide variety of possible implicatures* including:

- John is cold,

- John is efficient

- John never stops working

- John puffs and blows

- John has little in the way of grey matter

- Or indeed any and all of these' (p.118).

ʁadɪ in place, only one single implicature can be however yielded (lack of the adequate evidence available for the speaker and thus not trust his proposition). ʁadɪ does not give rise to different implicatures on different occasions. Secondly, implicatures generated by ʁadɪ cannot be cancellable without contradicting what is said. ʁadɪ-derived implicatures are not defeasible.

In reality, when the speaker cancels the ʁadɪ-derived implicature, he contradicts himself.

(12)

A) ʔal-mudi:r mawdʒu:d? Def-manager present

'Is the manager here?'

B) * ʁadɪ ʔal-mudi:r ma-hu hina. bus fi:-h ʔadilah kiθi:rah

 ʁadɪ Def-manager Neg-he here. but in-it evidence much

 Intended meaning: 'It is a definite maybe that manager is not here. But, there is much

evidence for that!'

(12b) is sheer contradictions due to palpable cancellation. The contradiction arises since what is added in the 2nd clause goes in contrary with what is said in the first clause in (12). Reasoning behind these lines, we are in position to hypothesize that the notion that ʁadɪ-derived implicature is non-conventional but uncancellable is applied to the conventional implicatures. Conventional implicatures are non-truth-conditional inferences neither derived from superordinate pragmatic principles like the maxims. They are simply attached by convention to particular lexical items or expressions (Levinson 1983: 127). As stated by Grice (1989), the conventional implicatures are generated by the conventional meanings of certain locutions such as *but, still, even,* and *therefore*. These locutions do not contribute to what is said or affect the truth or falsity of what is said (Bach 1999: 329).

In connection to this, any implicature derived by ʁadɪ is not conversational in nature but rather conventional. The speaker's highly-less uncertainty is conventionally encoded in ʁadɪ, but the lack of adequate evidence available for him is conventionally implicated by ʁadɪ, resulting in the assumption that the hearer does not have to repose speaker's confidence. Summing up, although the highly-less uncertainty attached to ʁadɪ is detected via flouting the maxim of Quality, the attachment to the maxim of Quality is built-in as far as ʁadɪ is concerned.

As a result, the assumption that ʁadɪ is wholly analyzed as part of what is said is not borne out. ʁadɪ encodes highly-less uncertainty on one hand and implicates the speaker's non-commitment of his avowed proposition and the hearer's untenable trust of the speaker's proposition on the other. ʁadɪ does not display any conventional meaning but only pragmatic use whose presence is totally captured when used in combination with other words. ʁadɪ in isolation (without a particular context) is only interpreted on the basis of its lexical meaning 'start to be/become', a suggestion supported by the fact that there is no any ambiguity, related to its meaning, emerging when ʁadɪ is taken out of the context contra polysemous items which encode more than one conceptual meaning such as '*BANK*'[4].

On the other hand, conventional implicatures have not passed unchallenged; their overall premises have, for many, proved baffling and misleading. Many proposals, as a result, have recently emerged to abandon them thanks to multitude reasons (see Bach 1999). One of these reasons is that conventional implicatures and what is said are not well-delineated within Grice's theory of conversation. What supports such an assumption is that there is no satisfactory justification within Grice's theory of conversation for why the conventional implicature yielded by ʁadɪ is rendered context-independent, stable, non-cancellable, but unconventionally-encoded. Along these lines, it is rational to investigate the pragmatic implications of ʁadɪ within the Relevance Theory, which provides, the argument goes, a better categorization for ʁadɪ.

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[4] In intertextuality-driven approaches, a single indexical item (not deictic) exhibits one meaning in its extended discourse (cf. Orr 2003, Hammouri, *et al.* 2013, Altakhaineh *et al.*, 2014, *inter alia*)

4. Relevance Theory

4.1 An overview

Working out in detail Grice's maxim of relevance, the Relevance Theory (RT) (Sperber & Wilson 1986 and 1987) has been widely reckoned as a viable approach to deal with various pressing pragmatic issues and concerns. In RT, there are two over-arching sets of assumptions. Assumptions relating to cognition subsume essentially the definition of relevance as a trade-off between effort and effect, and the claim that cognition tends to maximize relevance. In addition, assumptions about communication include the claims that understanding an utterance is basically grounded by inference and the pertinent speaker's communicative and informative intentions. The second assumptions revolve around the communicative principle of relevance and the presumption of optimal relevance which mandate the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure in order to pinpoint or guide the search for the intended interpretation of utterances (Allott 2013: 57-8). The trade-off between effort and effect is moulded in (13A) and (13B), respectively (adapted from Wilson & Sperber 2002: 253-254):

(13)Other things being equal, the greater the positive cognitive effects achieved by processing an input, the greater the relevance of the input to the individual at that time. Other things being equal, the greater the processing effort expended, the lower the relevance of the input to the individual at that time.

Both the cognitive principle of relevance and the communicative principle of relevance are mentioned in (14) and (15), respectively.

(14) Cognitive Principle of Relevance:

Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance.

(15) Communicative Principle of Relevance:

Every ostensive stimulus conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance.

Indeed, the latter principle of Relevance and the notion of Optimal Relevance (as shown 16) are of paramount importance for relevance-theoretic pragmatics.

The notion of optimal relevance is meant to spell out what the audience of an act of ostensive communication is entitled to expect in terms of effort and effect (ibid):

(16) Optimal relevance:

An ostensive stimulus is optimally relevant to an audience iff (if and only if):

- It is relevant enough to be worth the audience's processing effort;

- It is the most relevant one compatible with communicator's abilities and preferences.

4.2 ʁadɪ as a Procedural Not Conceptual Meaning

In RT, all conventional implicatures are treated as part of the truth-conditional value of an utterance, and the items carry either conceptual or procedural meaning (Blakemore 1987).

Items which encode a concept, i.e., give access to encyclopaedic knowledge, are dubbed as *conceptual words*. To the contrary, the items which encode an instruction concerning how to process a concept and signal computational features are labelled as *procedural words* (Blakemore 2002). Procedural items are held to encode information which acts as instruction to hearers about how to take the mental representations encoded by other words, what context to process them in, and what conclusions to draw from them (Rouchota 1998: 98).

In relation to this, ʁadı, as a functor, is deemed to encode a procedural meaning rather than conceptual meaning. It directly guides hearers not to fully trust the speaker's utterance. It also directs the hearers that the speaker's utterance might be strongly true due to specific unbacked pieces of evidence, enticing the speaker to state his proposition. This observation validates the assumption that ʁadı is used as a functor whose presence is totally captured when used with other items; it does not celebrate any conceptual meaning that can be grasped away from other items. Moreover, ʁadı's meaning can be neither loosened nor narrowed contra conceptual words whose meaning could be (Wilson 1999). In RT, ʁadı as a functor is different from ʁadı as a lexical conceptual item in that the former has a procedural meaning, whilst the latter conceptual meaning[5]. Consider figure (3):
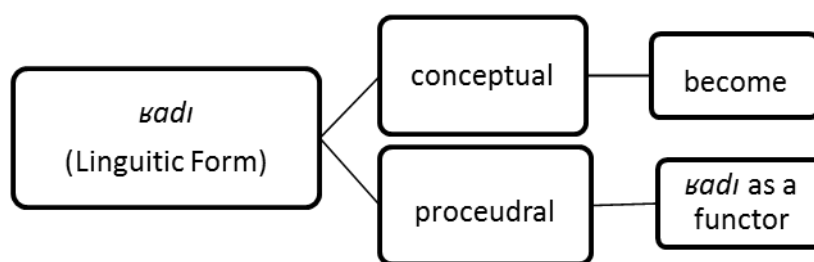

Figure 3. ʁadı: Conceptual vs procedural meaning

So, ʁadı guides the listener to optimize relevance. It plays a significant role in reducing the processing effort needed to determine whether the speaker is certain of his utterance or not and in maximizing the contextual effect needed to interpret the speaker's utterances. It directs the hearers to go beyond the speaker's utterance to search for their encyclopaedic knowledge and constrains the inferential phase of the hearer's comprehension to specific arrays away from the speaker's certainty. This unequivocal facilitation task of text processing when using ʁadı is evident as it reduces the effort needed for utterance creation on the part of the speaker and concurrently maximizes the contextual effect on the part of the hearer. ʁadı provides instructions to the hearer about the inferential process he should engage in to determine an utterance's optimally relevant interpretation (Gibbs and Bryant 2008). Additionally, as seen above, ʁadı as a functor exhibits monosemic meaning unvaried due to context, which ultimately has a close affinity with the effort-effect trade-off (Risselada 1998, Jarrah and

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[5] The assumption that ʁadı, as a linguistic form, has two discrete meanings contravenes Bolinger's assumption (1977) that one meaning corresponds to one form.

Bader 2012, Taha, *et al*. 2014). *ʁadı,* having a single function, requires less effort to process by all interlocutors. Such monosemic attachment to a single function/meaning wards off any proliferation of senses of *ʁadı,* the reason for its omnipresence in both NA.

5. Conclusion

The discussion of the word *ʁadı* in NA presented in this study concludes that *ʁadı* is categorized as a functor indicating speaker's shaky certainty towards his own proposition. I show in the main body of this paper how *ʁadı* proves a fecund ground for hypotheses with regard to the boundary between pragmatics and semantics. The forgoing discussion corroborates that, following the RT, *ʁadı* is an effort-saving device guiding the hearer not to repose the speaker's dubious certainty. Its main role is to guarantee weeding out any misunderstanding which might appear as a response towards the speaker's utterance. Contra Grice's theory of conversation, RT proves successful to underpin *ʁadı*'s pragmatic behaviour.

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