

# The Use of Discourse Marker “*maʕ nafsak*” in Saudi Arabic: A Pragmatic Perspective

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Received: May 24, 2015

Accepted: June 10, 2015

Published: June 23, 2015

doi:10.5296/ijl.v7i3.7669

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v7i3.7669>

## Abstract

The present study examines the use of the discourse marker *maʕ nafsak* in Saudi Spoken Arabic. Specifically, it explores the pragmatic functions of *maʕ nafsak* in the online conversations of young Saudis. The data, which were collected from 17 young Saudi students through user-diaries, consisted of 262 natural online conversations in which 132 cases of *maʕ nafsak* occurred. The data were analyzed with regard to the pragmatic functions of the discourse marker. The study reveals that *maʕ nafsak* serves 12 different pragmatic functions based on the context in which it is used. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the importance of the context in the interpretation of discourse markers. Future research is recommended in this study.

**Keywords:** discourse marker, saudi arabic, pragmatic perspective

## 1. Introduction

This study is an investigation of the use of the discourse marker (henceforth DM) *maʕ nafsak* (the symbol ʕ represents the voiced pharyngeal consonant in Arabic) in the online conversations of young Saudis. DMs are linguistic elements that are predominantly used in oral conversations to relate units of discourse to each other (Fraser, 1990; Lenk, 1998; Schiffrin, 1987) such as *oh, well, and, but, however, still, hmm, okay, so, you know, I mean, etc.* They are important items that contribute a great deal to the coherence of spoken discourse (Fraser, 1990; Lenk, 1998) and play a fundamental role in its interpretation (Schiffrin, 1987). They are also important in clarifying the communicative intentions of the interlocutors. Discourse markers can be either local, relating immediately adjacent units of talk to each other (Schiffrin, 1987), or global, signaling “relationships between segments that occur further apart in the discourse, or relationships with extra-conversational contexts” (Lenk, 1998, p. 256).

The DM *maʕ nafsak* is a segment of Saudi Spoken Arabic which has come to life relatively recently. This particular DM primarily appears in the oral discourse of young Saudis. It is a characteristic of their register. *Maʕ nafsak* literally means “with yourself”. However, pragmatically, it has several meanings depending on the context in which it is used. *Maʕ nafsak* generally occurs in the beginning of a sentence introducing a new proposition.

The widespread use of the DM *maʕ nafsak* inspired the researcher to work on this specific topic. Kanakri and Al-Harashsheh (2013) point out that spoken Arabic is a field rich with social and linguistic expressions that require immediate and serious study. Al Harashsheh and Kanakri (2013) urge that Arabic DMs be thoroughly explored as they help people better understand the Arab culture. To the researcher’s best knowledge, this study is the first to be conducted on DMs in an online setting and in a Saudi setting, in particular. Specifically, this study attempts to investigate the DM *maʕ nafsak* in the young students’ WhatsApp and BBM conversations. They are both instant messaging applications that allow people to send and receive texts, photos, audios, and videos. They are two of the most common applications used for mobile communication among students nowadays.

This study takes a pragmatic approach to explore the pragmatic meanings of the discourse marker *maʕ nafsak*. According to Lenk (1997, p.14), “one clearly noticeable and very important characteristic of discourse markers is that their use in discourse structuring function constitutes a pragmatic use, i.e., with a pragmatic meaning.” Similarly, Fraser (1990, p 393) emphasizes that “discourse markers should be analyzed as having distinct pragmatic meaning.” Therefore, the present study focuses on the pragmatic meanings of the DM *maʕ nafsak* rather than on its semantic value.

## 2. Definition and Terminology of Discourse Markers

The definition and terminology of DMs is still a debatable issue among scholars. Fraser (1990) mentions that even though most researchers have agreed that DMs join discourse elements together, they are still undecided on their definitions and functions. In other words, linguists are still unsure about giving DMs a universal term and a defined set of functions.

Researchers have provided several definitions for DMs. For example, Schiffrin (1987, p. 31) defines DMs as “sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk that signal relationships between immediately adjacent units of talk, and which have thus a coherence building function on a local coherence level.” DMs are defined as “a class of expressions, each of which signals how the speaker intends the basic message that follows to relate to the prior discourse” (Fraser, 1990, p. 387). Another definition comes from Lenk (1998: 246) who mentions that the “term discourse marker refers only to expressions in spoken discourse that are used pragmatically, with a structuring and organizational function.” Andersen (2001), on the other hand, defines them as a class of short linguistic elements that usually don’t have much lexical meaning in them but carry a pragmatic meaning when used in oral discourse. Although most definitions offered by linguists seem to be close, there are still some slight differences among them.

In addition, discourse markers have been assigned different labels by different researchers such as discourse particles (Aijmer, 2002), discourse formatives (Fraser, 1987), discourse markers (Fraser, 1993), discourse operators (Redeker, 1991), discourse connectives (Blackmore, 1987), pragmatic particles (Östman, 1995), and pragmatic markers (Andersen, 2001), among others. All the aforementioned terms signal a relationship between elements of a discourse. For the purpose of the present study, the term DM will be used to refer to a linguistic expression that is used pragmatically in oral discourse.

### **3. Features of Discourse Markers**

Linguists have been debating about the features of discourse markers. However, there are some common agreed upon features of DM among them. Besides being mainly used to indicate relationships between a current turn and a previously mentioned one in discourse, there are some more common features that are mentioned in the literature. First, DMs are a characteristic of oral discourse rather than written discourse (Brinton, 1996; Lenk, 1998; Schiffrin, 1987). Secondly, they connect adjacent and non-adjacent utterances (Halliday, 2004; Lenk, 1998; Schiffrin, 1987). Thirdly, DMs widely contribute to the coherence of oral discourse (Lenk, 1998, Schiffrin, 1987). Fourthly, since they usually introduce an upcoming sentence, they often occupy an initial position (Aijmer, 2002; Fraser, 1990, 1993; Lenk, 1998; Redeker, 1991; Schiffrin, 2001). However, they may also occur medially and finally in an utterance (Fraser, 1993; Lenk, 1998). Fifthly, they are multifunctional (Lenk, 1998; Fraser, 1990; Schiffrin, 1987).

Furthermore, DMs are optional (Brinton, 1996; Lenk, 1998; Muller, 2005; Schiffrin, 1987), i.e., a sentence would still be grammatical and meaningful without them. However, Fraser (1990, p. 30) states that the absence of DMs may result in a “communicative breakdown.” Lexically, DMs come from lexical words and phrases such as verbs, prepositions, modal words (Yang, 2011). Syntactically, DMs are often separated or loosely attached to the beginning of a sentence (Fraser, 1990; Östman, 1995). They are not part of the syntactic structure of a sentence (Fraser, 1990; Östman, 1995). They also do not have a clear grammatical function. On a semantic level, DMs derive from lexical elements that have clear semantic meanings, which become ambiguous or propositionally empty when used as a DM

(Brinton, 1996; Lenk, 1998; Östman, 1995). They do not add any truth value to the propositional content of the utterance. Finally, on a pragmatic level, DMs have pragmatic, expressive, and textual functions (Lenk, 1998; Schiffrin, 1987).

#### 4. Functions of Discourse Markers

DMs are usually used in languages to serve different functions according to the social context in which they occur (Andersen, 2001; Brinton, 1996; Fraser, 1999; Halliday, 2004; Östman, 1995; Redeker, 1991; schiffrin, 1987). Generally speaking, DMs “signal a relationship between the interpretation of the segment they introduce, S2, and the prior segment, S1” (Fraser, 1999, p. 931). DMs serve functions and carry meaning when used in discourse (Al Harhsheh and Kanakri, 2013) as they help the addressee comprehend the meaning communicated by the speaker’s utterance (Schiffrin, 1987). They also contribute to the coherence of discourse (Schiffrin, 1987; Halliday, 2004).

Al Kohlani (2010) reports that DMs can serve three basic functions at the paragraph boundary, namely: continuity, refocus, and change of topic. Müller (2005) finds out that DMs may be used in discourse to fulfill the following functions: initiating discourse, marking a boundary in discourse, serving as filler or delaying tactic, aiding the speaker in holding the floor, effecting an interaction or sharing between speaker and hearer, and marking previous and current information.

Based on the work of many scholars, Brinton (1996) classifies the functions of DMs into two groups, namely textual and interpersonal. The former includes the following functions: initiating discourse, claiming the attention of the hearer, closing discourse, serving as filler or a turn holder, indicating a topic shift, signaling old or new information, repairing discourse, and marking sequential dependence. On the other hand, the interpersonal category includes effecting cooperation such as confirming shared assumptions, expressing understanding, requesting confirmation, expressing politeness, and expressing a response to the preceding discourse.

#### 5. Review of Literature

The earliest study of DMs dates back to the 1970s. Ever since, DMs have become a significant topic in applied linguistics (Wang, 2011). DMs were first mentioned by Labov and Fanshel (1977) who point out that DMs are linguistic elements found in oral discourse. They suggest that a DM such as *well* point backwards to a topic that is already known to the interlocutors. DMs were then mentioned in Levinson’s book entitled “Pragmatics” (1983) in which he regarded DMs as a class of linguistic expressions worthy of investigation. Like Labov and Fanshel, Levinson (1983, p.87) reveals that “there are many words and phrases in English, and no doubt most languages that indicate the relationship between an utterance and the prior discourse.” He gives the following as examples of DMs: *but, therefore, in conclusion, to the contrary, still, however, anyway, well, besides, actually, all in all, so, after all, etc.*

Guided by Serper and Wilson’s (1986) Relevance Theory Framework, Blackmore (1987) finds that DMs do not have a representational meaning, but a procedural meaning consisting

of instructions of the ways to influence the conceptual meaning of an utterance. She also claims that information conveyed by an utterance may be relevant by allowing the derivation of a contextual implication (e.g., *so, therefore, also, too*), supporting a given assumption (e.g., *moreover, after all, furthermore*), contradicting an existing assumption (e.g., *however, still, nevertheless, but*), and specifying the role of an utterance in discourse (e.g., *anyway, finally, incidentally, by the way*).

One of the most influential studies of DMs was introduced by Schiffrin in 1987. In her investigation of unstructured interviews, interactions and spontaneous speech, Schiffrin (1987) investigated the following DMs: *oh, well* (particles), *and, but, or, so, because* (conjunctions), *now, then* (time deictic), *you know*, and *I mean* (lexicalized clauses). Schiffrin, who may be the most cited scholar in this field, writes that "The analysis of discourse markers is part of the more general analysis of discourse coherence-how speakers and hearers jointly integrate forms, meaning, and actions to make overall sense of what is said"(1987, p.49). In her opinion, discourse markers serve an integrative function that contributes to discourse coherence by connecting what is being said to what has already been said. Her work was very inspiring for many researchers.

Approaching DMs from a grammatical-pragmatic view, Fraser (1987) claims that DMs do not add any value to the propositional meaning of an utterance, but they convey various kinds of meanings and messages. Moreover, Fraser (1999, p.950) maintains that DMs are a "pragmatic class" that "signal a relationship between the segment they introduce, S2, and the prior segment, S1." According to Fraser (1987), DMs comprise two basic types based on the context in which they appear, namely: DMs which relate messages, and DMs which relate topics. The first one includes: contrastive markers (e.g., *in comparison, nevertheless, but, contrary to this, instead*, etc.), elaborative markers (e.g., *furthermore, I mean, well, likewise, namely*, etc.), and inferential markers (e.g., *according to, then, therefore, all things considered, of course*, etc.). On the other hand, the second type contains DMs such as *incidentally, just to update you, with regard to, before I forget, on a different note*, etc. Fraser notes that DMs across languages are relatively similar.

Redeker (1991) shows a desire to assign a clearer and unified definition for DMs and urges for a broader framework that includes all DMs. Redeker (1991) treats DMs as linguistic elements that are used for the purpose of drawing the addressee's attention to a certain kind of connection between the upcoming utterance and the current one in oral discourse.

Lenk (1998) examined the global markers *however* and *still* in two conversational corpora of British English and American English. By global markers, Lenk refers to DMs that relate segments of discourse that are not immediately adjacent, or topically related. Her findings reveal that these two global DMs most often occur at the beginning and at the end of digression. Lenk (1998, p. 256) states that "The discourse marker *however* closes digression that are relevant to the development of the main topic, or that bear interactional significance. *Still*, when used as a discourse marker, closes off subjective comments within a quasi-objective narration or presentation of facts."

Studying the DMS *you know, like, well*, and *I mean* in interviews and casual interactions,

Fuller (2003) shows that the DMs *oh* and *well* were utilized as a reception marker to create coherence in discourse, whereas the DMs *you know*, *like*, *yeah*, and *I mean* were used as a presentation marker.

Tagliamonte (2005) conducted a large scale study in which she investigated the DMs *so*, *just*, and *like* in the speech of young middle-class Canadians. One of her objectives was to explore new rapidly increasing linguistic features reported in Canadian English in the speech of younger generations. She reveals that these features are very common in the conversations of Canadians, concentrated amongst 15-to-16 year old people and female speakers in particular. Tagliamonte (2005) also shows that the DM *like* functions as a focuser, while the DM *just* functions as a verbal marker. Her findings also suggest the influence of peer group, especially in the middle teenage years, on linguistic change.

Wang (2011) investigated the discourse-pragmatic functions of the Japanese DM *ano* and the Mandarin Chinese DM *nage* in interactional discourse. These two DMs are derived from demonstrative adjectives, equivalent to “that” in English. Wang’s, who examined 302 cases of *ano* and 252 cases of *nage* in natural conversations, points out that neither *ano* nor *nage* serves as a verbal “filler” in utterances. However, they both serve similar multiple discourse-pragmatic functions in different social contexts. Their functions include the following: first, introducing a new referent/topic in a highlighted while less imposing way; second, mitigating various Face Threatening Acts; and, third, indicating the speaker’s hesitancy in sharing certain personal information. Furthermore, Wang (2011) argues that the DMs *ano* and *nage* can be used as politeness markers, as well as modality markers.

In an Arab setting, Al Kohlani (2005) studied the functions of Arabic DMs (e.g., *wa* ‘and,’ *fa* ‘then, since,’ *\_aw* ‘or,’ *\_inna* ‘certainly,’ *min tamma* ‘after that,’ *kama* ‘just as,’ *\_hatta* ‘in order to,’ etc.) in Arabic newspaper opinion articles. She analyzed their functions both at the sentence level and the paragraph level. Her findings show that these DMs have the following functions at the sentence level: additive, contrastive, explanatory, inferential, sequential, alternative, exceptive, background, subjective and interactive discourse makers. At the paragraph level, these DMs can serve the following functions: continuity, refocus, and change of topic.

Al Harahsheh and Kanakri (2013) who employed the Relevance Theory as a theoretical framework for their study, investigated the pragmatic functions of the Jordanian Spoken Arabic DM *tayyib* meaning “Okay”, literally “good” and its cognate *tabb*. They argue that these two linguistic terms are functional, and they convey ten different pragmatic functions. According to the authors, *tayyib* and its cognate *tabb* may be used 1) to mark backchannel with what precedes them; 2) to mean stop, or let us understand the matter; 3) to show objection; 4) to introduce a new topic; 5) to mitigating an utterance; 6) to express challenge; 7) to signal the end of discourse; 8) to ask the listener to be patient; 9) to give permission; and, 10) to fill a gap.

In a similar study, Kanakri and Al Harahsheh (2013) examined the pragmatic functions of the DM *?a:di* (Literally meaning “normally, usually”) in the speech of Jordanians. They conclude that *?a:di* serves multiple functions based on the context in which it is used. Specifically, this



particular DM was used to mitigate the effects of bad news, to ask for permission, to express refusal or rebuke, to show disappointment, to express contempt, to express courtesy, to indicate acceptance, to save one's face, to show indifference, and to express indirect criticism.

After reviewing the related literature, the researcher did not come across any single study that tackled the issue of DMs in Saudi Spoken Arabic, particularly in an online context. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap in the literature.

## 6. The Present Study

### 6.1 Objective and Question of the Study

The main objective of this study is to explore the pragmatic functions of the Saudi Arabic discourse marker *maʕ nafsak* as it is used in the online conversations of young Saudis. The study sets out to answer the following straightforward research question: What are the pragmatic meanings of the discourse marker *maʕ nafsak* in Saudi Spoken Arabic?

### 6.2 Methods

The present study draws on qualitative methods to answer its research question. This section presents the research methods used in this study. It includes the participants, the data collection technique, and the data analysis procedures.

#### 6.2.1 The Participants

A convenience sample was used in this study. Seventeen students were recruited by the researchers to participate in this study. They were all undergraduate Saudi students studying in their preparatory year at Yanbu University College and Yanbu Industrial College. They were all between the ages of 18-19. They volunteered to take part in this study after they were approached by the researcher in the hallways and cafeterias of the college. The researcher explained to the students the purpose of his research and asked them if they were willing to take part in the study. It is noteworthy to mention that the researcher approached 40 students, out of whom only seventeen agreed to participate in this study. The very private nature of text messaging may be the reason behind the students' hesitation since they would be sharing a very private part of their personal life. All the participants own a smart phone and used WhatsApp and BBM applications. The participants were asked to provide their names, phone numbers, and email addresses, being assured that all the information they provided for the purpose of this study would be confidential.

#### 6.2.2 Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data for the present research were collected through user diaries. User diaries are documents made by someone who has kept a recent, regular, personal log. They are used as a research instrument to gather comprehensive data about behavior, events and other aspects of a person's daily life (Corti, 1993). Diaries can assist in accessing people who are difficult to reach, and help in obtaining the actual language used by the participants (Creswell, 2009).

The data of the present research were collected in October 2013. Before beginning the data

collection process, the participants were given verbal instructions by the researcher and were invited to keep a log of the conversations they had with their colleagues or family members over a period of one week through WhatsApp or BBM applications. Twelve of the participants were users of the WhatsApp application whereas five of them were users of the BBM application.

The participants were asked to send their conversations to the researcher by the end of each day. To avoid confusion, the participants were provided with the researcher's email for the purpose of sending their conversations. The participants would capture the conversation page from their phones using a special feature that allows them to copy and save the screen on their smart phones. Then, the participants would enter their copied screens on their laptops or desktops and send them via email to the researcher as an attachment, or send them via WhatsApp or BBM to the researcher's phone. The attachments were printed out and each student's log was given a number for reference.

After the completion of the data collection, the researcher sent the students "thank you" messages, expressing his gratitude to them for taking part in the study and reassuring them that their information and identities would be kept strictly confidential. They were also asked if they would allow the researcher to contact them for further clarification, if needed, regarding the data they had provided. All of them agreed to the researcher's request.

Seventeen participants' diaries were used for the analysis of the present study. The data collected were analyzed and used to answer the research question of the study. The diaries contained 262 conversations, which consisted of 1473 turns. A total number of 132 cases of the discourse marker *maʕ nafsak* occurred in the WhatsApp and BBM conversations of the students.

### 6.3 findings

The data analysis yielded 12 pragmatic functions for the Saudi Arabic DM *maʕ nafsak*. They were classified under 12 categories. The following are examples of these categories supported by illustrative examples taken exactly as they appeared in the students' conversations. Translations of these examples are also provided. For clarity, some examples included more turns than others because the researcher believes that the pragmatic functions would be more comprehensible if used in a larger context. The original examples are given in bold, whereas their translations are used between brackets. The two interlocutors in the given examples are assigned the alphabets A (for the speaker) and B (for the listener). The data analysis shows that the DM *maʕ nafsak* serves the following functions.

#### 1. Objection or Refusal

##### Example (1)

A: **لعداد تيجي البيت عندي؟**

(So, do you want to come to my house?)

B: **مع نفسك بيتك طفش**

(No! Your house is boring.)



In this example, the DM *maʕ nafsak* is used to express refusal to an offer. By using the DM marker *maʕ nafsak* in the beginning of his utterance, B expresses his rejection to A's offer; he is telling A that he does not want to go to his house. With a special use of prosody, *maʕ nafsak* can also mean "no way or impossible". Here, the utterance following the DM provides more information about the reason for refusing the offer.

## 2. lack of interest/carelessness/ indifference

### Example (2)

A: اضيفك بالقروب يا محمد:

(Would you like me to add you to the group, Muhammad?)

B: لا شكرا مابغى:

(No, thanks. I do not want to.)

A: تراك تخسر اذا مانضميت ضل مكان لواحد بس:

(It is going to be your loss. We still have a place for only one member)

B: مع نفسك:

(I do not care.)

The discourse marker *maʕ nafsak* is also used to express lack of interest or carelessness. In this interaction, A asks B if he likes to be added to a group he formed. B declined and thanked A for this offer. Then A tries to convince B to join the group by saying that there is still room for one more person. However, B expresses his lack of interest and carelessness. This is clearly shown in the last utterance in which he used the DM *maʕ nafsak* to mean that he does not care, and that he is not really interested in joining the group. The DM *maʕ nafsak* appears alone in this example. Still, it has a complete pragmatic meaning and serves a clear function.

## 3. Annoyance

### Example (3)

A: اشبك علينا اليوم قافلته معك وتهاوش فينا ونفسك عند طرف خشمك:

(What is the matter with you today? You seem to be gloomy and fighting with everyone.)

B: اقول مع نفسك:

(Listen! Leave me alone!)

In the above example, *maʕ nafsak* is used to express annoyance or aggravation. B expresses his annoyance with A. B shows the other interlocutor that he does not want to be bothered, and that he would like to be left alone. With special prosody, it may also mean get off my back, or I am not in the mood to talk. The use of "listen" before the DM may indicate emphasis.

## 4. Reprimanding

### Example (4)

A: يارجل ليه ماترد:

(Why don't you reply to my messages?)

B: ما بدني ارد:

I don't want to.)

A: وشو السبب:

(And why is that?)

B: بكيفي انا حر:

(I am free to do whatever I like)

A: مع نفسك الحق علي مو عليك:

(Get lost! It is not your fault; it is my fault.)

In this example, a longer conversation is needed to better comprehend the meaning of the DM *maʿ nafsak*. This shows the significance of context in the interpretation of any utterance. In this conversation, B is ignoring A's messages without giving a reason. B also insists that he does not want to reply to the messages sent by A simply because he does not want to. After a lengthy argument between the two interlocutors, A gets upset and tells B to get lost. The DM appears in initial position in order to introduce a new idea.

## 5. Doubt

### Example (5)

A: فارس دق عليك الساعة 5 عشان يخبرك انو نازل جده ومارح يستناك:

(Fares called you at 5 o'clock to tell you that he is leaving to Jeddah, and that he will not wait for you.)

B: مع نفسك:

(Stop lying!)

A: والله بتكلم صج:

(I swear I am telling the truth.)

In the above conversation, B expresses his doubts about A's first statement. B openly tells A to stop lying, and that he does not believe what he has said. By swearing to God, A assures B that he is telling the truth. The meaning of *maʿ nafsak* can be construed from the next turn provided by A. Without the last utterance given by A, it may be difficult to understand the pragmatic meaning of this DM.

## 6. Unwillingness

### Example (6)

A: ياخي جيعان. يمديك تروح تجيب اكل:

(I am hungry my brother. Could you go and bring us food?)

B: مع نفسك لانا رايح ولا جاي:

(Get off my back! I am not going anywhere.)

*Maʿ nafsak* in the above example is used to show unwillingness. With special prosody, the term *maʿ nafsak* may mean get off my back or leave me alone. B shows unwillingness about going and bringing some food for A.

## 7. Distancing one's self from others

### Example (7)

A: بالله تخبر ناصر مايتدخل بيني وبين فهد

(Please tell Naser to not intervene between Fahed and I)

B: مع نفسك قله انت بنفسك

(It is none of my business. You tell him yourself!)

Another pragmatic meaning of the DM *maʕ nafsak* is distancing one's self from other people by not interfering with their business. In this interaction the speaker A is requesting B to send a certain message to another person, but B rejects by telling A that is not his business and that A should do so himself. B is trying to stay out of the whole issue. Here, the meaning could be gleaned from the whole context.

## 8. Challenge

### Example (8)

A: اتحداك غير احصل اكثر منك بماده الفيزياء.

(I challenge you to get a higher grade than yours in Physics.)

B: مع نفسك نشوف

(I challenge you. We will see.)

In the above example, the DM *maʕ nafsak* is employed to express challenge. The interlocutors A and B are challenging each other. A begins the challenge by stating that he will get a higher grade than B in Physics. B replies by challenging A that it will not happen, by using the DM *maʕ nafsak* to mean I challenge you, or you are dreaming.

## 9. Scolding

### Example (9)

A: ايش هذا السؤال الغبي

(What kind of a stupid question is this?)

B: اقول مع نفسك انت الغبي

(I say you are the one who is stupid.)

The DM *maʕ nafsak* may also be used by the speaker to scold. B's statement shows that he is swearing at A. It is noteworthy that this particular Arabic DM can be regarded as a taboo term which has a very negative connotation.

## 10. Disappointment

### Example (10)

A: ايوه انا اللي قلت للعيال عن السالفه مو نايف

(Yes, It was I who told the guys about the incident, not Nayef)

B: تمزح

(You are joking.)

A: اي والله

(I swear to God)

B: **وليه سويت كذا**

(And why did you do that?)

A: **حسيت انه لازم يعرف.**

(I felt that he should know about it.)

B: **مع نفسك**

(I am really disappointed. You should not have done it.)

The above conversation clearly shows that the DM *maʿ nafsak* is used to express disappointment or anger. A and B are discussing a personal issue between friends. A admits to B that he was the one who gave a certain secret away. B does not believe him in the beginning. However, when A insists that he is telling the truth, B expresses his disappointment by using *maʿ nafsak* to mean I am disappointed because you have done something wrong. In this particular example, *maʿ nafsak* occurs alone as a full meaningful utterance.

## 11. Choice

### Example (11)

A: **نروح نتعشى بالبيك ولا شاهين:**

(Shall we go to Shaheen restaurant or Al Baik restaurant for dinner?)

B: **مع نفسك اللي تبغاه:**

(It is your choice. Whatever you like.)

Another pragmatic meaning for the DM *maʿ nafsak* is to express choice. In this context, A invites B to dinner and gives B a list of two restaurants to pick from. B shows that he has no preference and that he leaves the choice to A by informing him that it is completely up to A to pick the restaurant.

## 12. Preserving Personal Privacy

### Example (12)

A: **ياخي والله المشكله اللي بينك وبين حامد شكلها بتكبر:**

(Oh brother, the problem between Hamid and you seems to get bigger.)

B: **خلها تكبرم هو البادي:**

(Let it be so. He is the one who started it.)

A: **بس مو حلوه والله لازم نحلها:**

(But it is not nice. We have to solve it.)

B: **مع نفسك من تدخل فيما لايعنيه لقي:**

(Mind your own business. Too much curiosity lost paradise.)

The DM *maʿ nafsak* may also be used to preserve personal privacy. In the above example, A tries to help in solving a problem between B and another person called Hamid. In his first utterance, B shows carelessness and starts to blame Hamid for the problem. However, A insists that the problem should be solved because it is not acceptable between friends. In the last utterance in which he used the DM *maʿ nafsak*, B takes a serious stand and tells A to mind his own business and stay out of it.

#### 6.4 Discussion

The present study reveals that the discourse marker *Maʿ Nafsak* is a linguistic expression that is used not only to connect segments of discourse, but to convey a variation of sentiments in a wide range of circumstances and contexts. The context plays a huge role in the interpretation of *maʿ nafsak*. Its meaning is context-dependent, i.e., it depends heavily on the context in which it is used. This is in line with Aijmer, 2013; Fraser, 1987; Lenk, 1998; and Schiffrin, 1987 who argue that DMs get their meaning in oral discourse from the context.

In addition, the analysis has shown that the Saudi Arabic DM *maʿ nafsak* most often takes an initial position. There were 115 instances in which it occurred initially, 17 instances within an utterance, and zero times in final positions. The location of *maʿ nafsak* in initial positions is functional, that is, it is used to relate the ongoing utterance with an already uttered one (Blackmore, 1987; Fraser, 1990; Lenk, 1998). In initial position, may also indicate that it is used to introduce a new idea. In the present study, the DM under investigation functions both locally to connect immediate adjacent turns and globally to relate turns that are apart.

The data have further shown that *maʿ nafsak* accompanied another utterance in 107 cases and appeared separately as an independent segment of speech in 36 cases. This shows that its meaning can be construed from the subsequent utterance. It can also carry meaning when it occurs on its own. There is usually a pause after the DM *maʿ nafsak*.

Furthermore, the absence of prosodic features made the interpretation of the DM *maʿ nafsak* difficult. Prosody plays a significant role in the interpretation of a DM's function. DMs can be identified by prosody as a 'separate tone unit' (Fung and Carter, 2007, p.413). DMs "can be stressed or separated from their surrounding context, by pauses and/or intonational breaks, just as parenthetical constructs, or they can be pronounced unstressed, without pauses and with possible phonological reduction. Pragmatics is concerned with the meaning intended by the speaker rather than the literal meaning of a sentence. Prosody can change the meaning of a sentence by indicating a speaker's attitude towards what is being communicated. Therefore, it is regarded as a key factor in understanding the meaning of a DM. According to Aijmer (2013), DMs have been considered as 'cue phrases' which along with prosodic and grammatical uses constitute significant information for disambiguating the different meanings and functions of an utterance.

One more point to add is that it is extremely difficult to draw a line of demarcation between the functions served by the DM *maʿ nafsak*. The function of *unwillingness* and the function of *distancing one's self from others* may overlap. They may sometimes cause confusion to the interpreter as their meanings are sometimes very close.

It is important to note that non-Arabic speakers may face difficulty in comprehending the meaning of *maʿ nafsak* because it is culture-specific. This finding is supported by Al Harahsheh and Kanakri (2013) who mention that it is difficult for non-Arabs to understand the meanings communicated by some Arabic DMs. By the same token, it may be difficult even for Non-Saudi Arabic speakers to understand the meaning of *maʿ nafsak* since it is a special feature of Saudi Spoken Arabic, specifically that spoken by younger generations.

Thus, in some particular instances, the researcher had to clarify the meaning of the DM *maʕ nafsak* by asking the participants about its exact meaning as used by them in that context.

## 7. Conclusion

The present research has investigated the pragmatic functions of the DM *maʕ nafsak* in Saudi Spoken Arabic. The analysis of the actual WhatsApp and BBM interactions of the young Saudi students has revealed that the DM *maʕ nafsak* is used to serve the following 12 main pragmatic functions: refusal, lack of interest/indifference, annoyance, reprimanding, doubt, unwillingness, distancing one's self from others, challenging, scolding, disappointment, choice, and preserving personal privacy. The study has also shown that the DM *maʕ nafsak* is an important linguistic expression in the speech of young Saudi people. It helps in the production and comprehension processes of a particular oral interaction. *Maʕ nafsak* is generally used as a linguistic device by the interlocutors to build rapport, to keep the conversation flowing, and to facilitate communication.

Finally, the data collected for the purpose of the present study were collected only from males because the task of collecting data from females is arduous due to the conservative nature of the Saudi culture. However, studying gender differences in the use of this particular DM and other DMs in Saudi Spoken Arabic is highly recommended. Another interesting topic worthy of investigation is the effect of prosodic features on the interpretation of pragmatic functions of DMs.

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