



# What functions discourse markers manifest in Freidanian and Istanbuli varieties of Turkish: a comparative study

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## ABSTRACT

A discourse marker (henceforth DM) is defined as a word or phrase that does not change the meaning of the sentence and has a somehow zero meaning. DMs are a set of linguistic items which create cohesiveness, coherence and meaning in discourse. An extensive body of research has examined DMs and their functions in different languages. Having considered the significance of this area of language and the fact that few studies have focused on DMs in local languages of Iran, the present study intended to target the different functions of Freidanian variety of Azeri Turkish DMs – *şey*, *yani*, and *da* – in an interview situation to compare them with those of Istanbuli Turkish corresponding DMs as the standard variety. To this aim, 12 native speakers of Freidanian Turkish were selected and their speeches were recorded for further analysis. Detailed analysis of the data revealed that *şey* primarily functions to signal the speaker's need for a pause to plan and organize his/her next message. *yani* mostly functions to illustrate the speaker's elaboration of previous utterances, and *da* can serve a discourse connective function with an additive or adversative sense. A preliminary comparison revealed that the functions manifested by these DMs in Freidanian Turkish are not so far from their corresponding DMs in the Istanbuli Turkish. However, compared to the Istanbuli variety, *şey* in our variety marked an additional function of derogation. In the case of *da*, other functions aside, this DM can serve to emphasize the action of the verb which is absent in Istanbuli Turkish.

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## Introduction

With the increasing interest in discourse analysis, a host of pragmatic and linguistic studies (e.g., Andersen, 2001; Blakemore, 2002; Chaume, 2004; Jalilifar & Hashemian, 2010) have been devoted to a group of lexical expressions collectively referred to as discourse markers (DMs), known in the literature also by a variety of competing terms, such as pragmatic markers (Schiffrin, 1987), discourse particles or discourse operators (Schourup, 1999), and discourse connectives (Blackmore, 2002). DMs or “vocal hiccups” are considered as a set of linguistic elements in the cognitive, social, expressive, and textual domains (Bright, 1992). Following Chaume (2004), DMs are mostly used for the production of coherent conversation, especially for making clear the speakers' intentions and showing what they intend to do with words. A DM can be either a particle (such as *oh*, *well*, *now*, *then*, *you know*, and *I mean*) or a connective (such as *so*, *because*, *and*, *but*, and *or*) that is used in conversation to make discourse more coherent, but it hardly changes the meaning of the linguistic context. In fact, speakers, especially in conversational encounters, tend to use DMs as a means of demonstrating orientation to what is occurring in the conversation. Therefore, discourse markers are devoid of semantic meaning, but have many definite functions.

A myriad of the studies of DMs have focused on one or more lexical items to clarify the functions they manifest in various situations. The present study is an attempt to highlight the different functions of Freidanian variety of Azeri Turkish DMs to compare them with those of Istanbuli variety corresponding DMs. The main motivation that led the

researchers to conduct such an investigation was to appreciate the local variety of Turkish that is spoken in Freidan to highlight the linguistic and functional features associated with three of the most frequent DMs in daily spoken discourse.

## Review of Literature

Turkish as a member of Ural-Altaic languages family with the approximate number of 400,000,000 speakers spread over a large geographical area (especially from Eastern Europe to Western and Middle Asia to the Western parts of China) and some significant dialects with many varieties has been the subject of an extensive body of studies. A great number of these studies have been dedicated to examine linguistic and functional features of the Turkish most of which focusing on the Istanbuli Turkish as the standard variety and little have focused on other dialects. One of the areas which has been of high prominence in these studies is discourse markers and their various functions in Turkish daily speech. DMs play an important role in Turkish conversations because Turks, like speakers of many other languages, use a lot of DMs in their speech in order to make best linkage between the utterances so that be more clear and better understood consequently. In Turkish a conversation which is devoid of sufficient DMs appears to be less lively and less personal.

Özbek (1995) conducted a comparative study of Turkish and English discourse markers. Analysis of the data indicated both points of similarities and differences in terms of discourse marker use between English and Turkish. The results revealed that discourse markers are highly interactional particles in discourse and that they have several functions, and that their

primary function is to contribute the communication flow smoothly and make it more organized by managing a complex set of activities including all elements of discourse. Özbek concluded that, Turkish and English discourse markers are among the language universals and they seem to operate at similar levels of discourse.

Özbek (2000) probed how Turkish adults use DMs such as *şey*, *yani* and *işte* in spontaneous conversations and gave functional accounts of the use of each DM. Firstly, for the use of *şey*, she illustrated that its primary use is to indicate that the speaker requires a pause to plan his/her next message. Apart from its planning function, the researcher found that *şey* also occurs turn-initially in conversation and is used as a topic-introducing marker, displaying the speaker's intention of starting a new discourse unit. Finally, *şey* as a planning marker signals that the speaker's turn continues despite his/her hesitation. As a topic-introducing marker, its function is to illustrate that the speaker's turn has started. In addition to its uses as a DM, *şey* (literally 'thing') also functions as a nominal filler for a new referent, thus allowing the new information to happen in the post-verbal position in the sentence.

The other DM, *yani*, in most cases functions to mark the speaker's expansion of previous utterances (Özbek, 2000). *Yani* can also be used as an emphatic marker, to indicate self-repair, to mark boundaries within topics, and to signal the speaker's introduction of a new point to the discourse.

The final DM, *işte*, is mainly an information state marker which primarily indexes shared knowledge between the discourse participants (Özbek, 2000). The less frequent functions of *işte* indicated are topic boundary marking by indicating the end of discourse units, topic resumption (i.e. continuation of a topic after some digression), and emphasis of the speaker's point.

Furman & Özyürek (2007) examined the development of three DMs (*şey* 'uhh', *yani* 'I mean', *işte* 'you know') that mark interactional levels of discourse in oral Turkish narratives in 60 Turkish children (3-, 5- and 9-year-olds) and 20 Turkish-speaking adults. The results indicated that the frequency and functions of DMs change with age. Children learn *şey*, which mainly marks exchange level structures, earliest. However, *yani* and *işte* have multi-functions such as marking both information states and participation frameworks and are consequently learned later. Children also use DMs with different functions than adults. Overall, the study revealed that learning to use interactional DMs in narratives is complex and goes beyond age 9, especially for multi-functional DMs that index an interplay of discourse coherence at different levels.

Dönük (2008) carried out an investigation entitled "Additive enclitic suffix *da* in Turkish as a cohesive device. The data gathered verified the functional grouping Kerslake (1992) makes in the area of the enclitic *-da*. According to this grouping, there are two major areas of classification as focusing and continuative *-da* in the additive sense. It has been illustrated that the morpheme is used as the continuative particle for addition function. It combines two independent sentences with a relation to a previous discourse with time expressions and with numerical entities. On the other hand, when it functions as the focusing particle, it follows pronouns meaning *and*, or *as for*, it follows nouns focusing on causality comparison and personal reactions such as surprise, bewilderment, etc.

Ruhi (2009) examined the function of parenthetical *yani* ('that is' or 'in other words') in written Turkish discourse

aiming at exploring its assistance to the 'what is said' and the 'what is inferable' in discourse. This study reveals that parenthetical *yani* serves to limit the met representation of referents and helps to the derivation of implied meaning at the intentional level of the discourse, thereby often producing rhetorical, emotive effects. To sum up, the study concludes that *yani* appears in discourse processing at both the conceptual and the procedural level and that a strict classification of discourse markers as falling into the conceptual or the procedural class is not possible.

Unfortunately, Azeri Turkish as an important dialect of Turkish spoken mainly in Azerbaijan and with considerable number of speakers in Iran, Armenia, Georgia, Turkey and Iraq with several varieties has not reached its respectable position in Turkish language studies. Therefore, the present study tried to identify important DMs in the establishment of the coherence in the Freidanian Turkish spoken discourse. To best accomplish this, three of the most frequent Freidanian Turkish DMs- *şey*, *yani*, and *da* - were specified and investigated. Freidan is a region located in the west of Isfahan province with the approximate population of 100,000. The dominant language of this people is a variety of Azeri Turkish. The Turkish residents in Freidan are Azeri originally, but they migrated to this region during the Safavid period to benefit from rich water recourses and fertile lands.

### Research Questions

An extensive body of Turkish studies has focused on the Istanbul Turkish DMs as the standard one and very little is done on Azeri. Lack of studies associated with Azeri dialect DMs prompted us to carry out this investigation on three of the most frequent DMs used in the Freidanian variety of Azeri Turkish in order to answer the following questions.

1. What functions *şey*, *yani*, and *da* do manifest in the Freidanian variety of Azeri Turkish?
2. Is there any difference between Freidanian variety of Azeri Turkish and Istanbul Turkish in terms of functions manifested by these DMs?

### Methodology

#### Participants

The purpose of the study was to discover different functions of DMs in Freidanian Turkish. Therefore, 12 old Freidanian Turkish people were selected randomly to participate in the study. The age of the participants ranged between 58 and 84. Out of these participants, six were male and six were female. The logic behind the selection of old people to participate in the study primarily was the purity of their Turkish. On the one hand, the Turkish spoken by younger people in Freidan is highly influenced by Persian, the single official and prestigious language of Iran. Hence, we decided to choose the old participants whose Turkish is less influenced by Persian. On the other hand, old Turkish participants are believed to be more fluent than younger generation in the Freidan area, so their language can more effectively represent Freidanian Turkish.

#### Instruments

Three instruments were used to gather the data for this study. The first instrument was an oral interview consisting of six questions about problems and difficulties they experienced in their lives in Freidanian Turkish (appendix 1). We made use of a personal hi-tech audio recorder with an external microphone settled on the participants' collar to maximize the quality of the tapes. The reason for choosing oral interview was to enhance the authenticity of the research because we were in direct interaction

with the participants whose Turkish was pure and less influenced by Persian. In addition to oral interview, we also used direct observation to scrutinize DMs in participants' natural conversations. This provided the opportunity to compare participants' use of language in natural and controlled settings.

### Procedures

The speeches were audio-recorded in a number of tournaments. The researcher granted individual permission for this study before audio taping took place. The interviewees were notified before being interviewed that they were being recorded for a linguistic study, but specific information about DMs was not presented before the round so that speakers would not consciously or unconsciously shift their usual linguistic habits. Anonymity was also of high significance in the present study. Thus, interviewees' names were not mentioned in the cassette tapes and only tournament dates, and events were cited. The data were collected by recording the participants in the interview situation. The duration of the interviews was 118 minutes (about two hours) and the data consisted of 12 different interviews. Since it was not possible to control the time variable, the duration of the interviews varied between 7 and 12 minutes. For instance, the third interviewee we were interviewing was an old man of 59 who talked for 8 minutes.

The participants were also observed directly in their homes without being informed and their conversations with others, among them the researcher, were recorded privately. The duration of the data gathered in this stage was 123 minutes (slightly over two hours).

### Results and discussion

First of all, the total number of words articulated by the participants in the oral interview was calculated. To this aim, the speeches were transcribed and then the total number of words was reckoned. Calculation revealed the total number of 14873. Then, the total number of words pronounced by the speakers in the observation stage was counted 15377. In order to narrow down the study, one of the researchers, as a member of this community who can identify DMs and their different functions, traced only *şey*, *yani*, and *da* in the study. Other things aside, the greater frequency of these DMs in interactions was the main reason for selecting them.

For the second step, the total number of occurrences of the three DMs and also frequency of each DM for each speaker both in interview and observation stages were calculated separately, as shown in Tables 1 and 2. In order to maximize the reliability of the calculation of DMs, one of the researchers listened to the corpus in two separate stages to conduct intra-rater reliability and reached agreement accordingly.

Finally, the interviews and recording of observations were carefully listened for the use of DMs, and different functions of the three DMs were extracted and explained accompanied by some genuine examples taken from the corpora.

Table 1 shows the total frequency of the three DMs and also the number of occurrence of these DMs for each participant separately in the interview situation. Results indicated that proportion of the DMs to the total data was 242. Interestingly, the distribution of the DMs across the interviews was very approximate, insinuating that the three DMs selected to be investigated are among the most frequent DMs in the Freidanian variety of Azeri Turkish.

Table 2 shows the total frequency of the three DMs and also the number of occurrence of these DMs for each participant separately in the observation stage. It was interesting to see little

variation in the quantitative use of DMs across the native speakers in the observation stage. That is, native speakers tended to exploit these DMs in approximately the same way.

Comparison of the results obtained both from interviews and observations revealed that there was a very marginal difference between controlled and natural situations in terms of frequency of the three DMs and the obtained results were comparable.

#### Şey (thing, uhh)

For the use of *şey*, its primary function is to signal that the speaker needs a pause to plan and organize his/her subsequent message. The researchers found that the best equivalent of *şey* in English is *uhh*. Although *uhh* is not a lexical DM, the planning/hesitation marker function of *şey* is somehow identical to *uhh*'s pause-filling function.

In example (1), this function of *şey* can be observed. Here, as the speaker states a chain of events, he fills a pause with *şey* and thereby informs the listener that he is planning the rest of his message.

Example (1): Ondan sora ... *şey* ....mən gettim ish üstünə. / (Male)

Translation: Then....uhh.....I went to work.

In the example above, we saw that the speaker, by using a *şey* in the middle of the sentence, tries to have some more time so that make mental effort to plan the rest of his/her message.

In addition to its planning function, *şey* is used as a topic-introducing marker that indicates the speaker's purpose of beginning a new discourse unit.

Example (2): *Şey* .....bir yol da mənə saldılar bir böyük zindana. / (Male)

Translation: Uhh.....Once they took me to a big prison.

In this example, *şey* is used to start a new topic. Here, its use indicates that the speaker was about to begin his/her utterance, but was still organizing and planning his/her speech. Although this use of *şey* has a similar function as in example (1), we place it into a distinct classification because it specifically comes to introduce or initiate a new topic.

Further, *şey* functions as nominal 'filler' for a specific word that the speaker could not remember it. The equivalent of *şey* in English would be "thing" in this context.

Example (3): Bū *şey* .....Tilvizyün bize bir birdən ayürde. / (Female)

Translation: This (thing) ..... TV created a gap between us.

In this case, the speaker could not recall the word TV for a while, so she inserts *şey* so that she remembers the term TV.

And finally, *şey* has a derogatory function in Freidani Turkish. In this sense, the *şey* is used to convey some offensive meaning and it is easy for hearer to understand speaker's intention because of cultural affinity.

Example (4): Satünge çokh *şey* varüde. / (Female)

Translation: The peddler was so fool.

In example (4), since she has spoken about some foolish behaviors of the peddler, in her subsequent speeches the speaker tries to avoid the term "fool" and instead uses *şey* to convey the intended offensive meaning.

Functions manifested by *şey* had much in common with those of its Istanbuli corresponding DM-*şey*. However, compared to the Istanbuli variety, *şey* in our Turkish served an additional function of derogation. In our culture *şey* is used

under certain situations instead of an offensive word which is considered impolite to indirectly convey a bad meaning.

#### **Yani (I mean, that is)**

*Yani* mostly functions to show the speaker's elaboration or expansion of his/her earlier statements, either to support his/her own idea and understanding of the phenomena or to assist the listener's comprehension, in conversations. Therefore, the main use of *yani* is on the participation framework level as a marker of speaker orientation. It indicates the speaker's explanation and elaboration of his/her own earlier ideas. In example (5), *yani* illustrates that the speaker intends to elaborate further on his bravery.

Example (5): *Mən* ordan addüldüm ashağə *yani* ğorkhe yoxhümüde. / (Male)

Translation: I sprung from there. I mean I was so brave.

In this example, *yani* is used before the utterance 'I was so brave'. This utterance confirms the fact that, the speaker is talking about his bravely springing from a high place without any fear. In this manner in the narrative, the speaker has already informed about his action and by using *yani* he is referring to the listener's previous knowledge of the fact that he has sprung from a high place.

A further use of *yani* was found to mark self-repairs in discourse. It indicates to the listener that the word or phrase following *yani* is the repaired one, as can be seen in the following example.

Example (6): O kishe ..... *yani* dəmirçi galde. / (Male)

Translation: That man..... I mean the blacksmith came.

In example (6), the second part of the sentence is the speaker's self repair of the first part. Here, speaker has forgotten the job of the person he is speaking of and when remembers his job tries to repair his speech by adding a *yani* to the beginning of the second part of the sentence. Although this function seems to be similar to the planning function of *şey*, the difference between the two uses is that when *yani* is used to mark self-repairs; it is almost always followed by novel information. In contrast, *şey* mainly fills pauses and is not followed by an expansion and elaboration of the presented knowledge in previous utterances.

*Yani* further functions to make an emotive effect. In other words, it functions as an empathic marker. In the example below the speaker intends to stimulate the listeners' emotion.

Example (7): Ağbet o pis adam *yani* mənim arım öldə. / (Female)

Translation: Finally, that bad man, I mean my husband died.

In example (7), *yani* is used to signify the speaker's feeling towards a person she hates him. In this case, the woman is speaking of the death of a husband who has divorced her. Therefore, she is referring to him as a bad person to show his hatred. In this way, she wants to stimulate others' feelings so that they would sympathize with her.

In the case of *yani* no difference was discovered in terms of functions in these two varieties of Turkish language.

#### **Da (and, never)**

*Da* can serve a discourse connective function with an additive or adversative sense. Since *da* connects two clauses of the same syntactic structure or words of the same part of speech, we refer to it as a simple coordinating conjunction. In the Example (8), it acts as "and" in English to combine words of the same category.

Example (8): Babam Cəkh zadlar alde məsala Cərak.....*da*.....düge.....*da*.....at./ (Female).

Translation: My father bought many things such as bread...and ....rice....and.....meat.

In the example above *da* meaning "and" functions as a coordinator that connects some words of the same part of speech. Here *da* functions with an additive sense.

*Da* further functions with an adversative sense (contrary to expectation) as we can see in example below.

Example (9): O günlərə görməg *da*. / (Female)

Translation: We will never have those days any more.

In the example (9), the speaker talks about the days he has experienced and believes that those days will never be back. He uses "*da*" to express yearn for those happy days which contrary to her expectation are not due to be back. In this case, *da* acts in an adversative manner.

A further function of *da* was to emphasize the action of the verb. In this case the "*da*" occurs after the verb to emphasize the action of the verb.

Example (10): Üja böyle mamur biza dede: gedin *da*.

Translation: the tall officer ordered us to go. / (Male)

In example (10), the speaker, by articulating *da* intends to highlight and emphasize the verb "go". Therefore, we see that in Freidani Turkish by adding *da* to the end of the sentence after the verb, the action of the verb is stressed.

Concerning *da*, other functions aside, this DM in our Turkish can additionally function to emphasize the action of the verb which is not present in Istanbuli Turkish.

#### **Conclusions**

The aim of conducting this study was to address the various uses and functions of three frequent DMs *şey*, *yani*, and *da* in Turkish in general and Freidani Turkish in particular to compare them with those of Istanbuli Turkish as the standard variety. To do so, a group of 12 old native speakers were selected and recorded in an interview situation. Then, tapes were listened in order to extract the different functions of the selected DMs. The detailed analysis of speeches revealed several functions for each of three.

*Şey* primary functions to signal the speaker's need for a pause to plan and organize his/her next message. It is also used as a topic-introducing marker that indicates the speaker's intention of beginning a new topic. Further, *şey* functions as nominal 'filler' for a specific word that the speaker could not remember it. The equivalent of *şey* in English would be "thing" in this context. And as the last one, *şey* has a derogatory function in Freidani Turkish. In this sense, the *şey* is used to convey some offensive meanings.

*Yani* in most cases functions to indicate the speaker's elaboration of previous utterances, either to support his/her own idea and understanding of the event or to aid the listener's comprehension, in conversations. A further function of *yani* was found to illustrate self-repairs in discourse. It indicates to the listener that the noun following *yani* is the repaired case. It further functions to make an emotive effect. In other words, it functions as an empathic marker.

*Da* can serve a discourse connective function with an additive or adversative sense. Another function of *da* was to emphasize something. In this case the *da* occurs after the verb to emphasize the action of the verb.

A preliminary comparison revealed that the functions manifested by these DMs in Freidani variety of Azeri Turkish are not so far from their corresponding DMs in Istanbuli as the standard variety. *Şey* can function as pause filler, topic introducer, nominal filler (Özbek, 2000; Furman & Özyürek,

2007). *Yani* can be used as indicator of elaboration of previous utterances, self repair and clarification, and making emotive effect (Özbek, 2000; Furman & Özyürek, 2007; Ruhi, 2009). And *da* can function as discourse connective with an additive or adversative sense (Dönük, 2008; Zeyrek & Webber, 2008). However, compared to the Istanbul variety, *şey* in our variety marked an additional function of derogation.

(11): Oğlum *şey* takin yeyir amma heç iş görmir.

Translation: My son eats like a cow, but does nothing.

In this example, a father is talking about his lazy son who eats a lot, but does nothing. Here, by inserting *şey*, the father intends to apply an offensive word and hearer can identify his intention because of cultural affinity.

In the case of *da*, other functions aside, this DM can serve to emphasize the action of the verb which is absent in Istanbul Turkish.

(12): Mashin süranda deġat eyla *da*.

Translation: Be careful when driving a car, please.

In this case, *da* functions to emphasize the action of the verb which is being careful.

Carrying out the present research was not without its limitations and the researchers encountered some problems on the way of conducting this study. Firstly, convincing some of the native speakers to participate in the investigation was a difficult job. The other problem we faced was assuring the participants' anonymity, because some of them were very sensitive not to be revealed. Finally, the bad quality of some of tapes forced us to listen to them for several times in order to transcribe the content and extract the different functions of the three intended DMs.

The present study has explored different functions of the three frequent DMs in the Freidanian variety of Azeri Turkish. There are also other DMs in Turkish which demand more investigations. Therefore, those Turkish speaking researchers working in this field can conduct their studies around this issue. To sum up, we are convinced of the need to target more DMs of Turkish language so that we will have a comprehensive glossary of Turkish DMs studies.

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## Appendix 1

The Turkish questions posed in the oral interview are as follows:

- 1) Aġrterin müşġül ke ömrizda görmişiz namadır?
- 2) Ne sizalar çakdiz ta töyiz baş tuta?
- 3) İranünan Araġ savaşı ne asarlar zindeganlüġiza ġöyde?
- 4) Pisterin khatera ke ömrizda görmişiz namadır?
- 5) Ne müşġüller varizude ta yengi naslanan bir bin yanünda zindeganlüġ eliyaz?
- 6) Ne iġtesade müşġüller siz gördiz ta üşġlarize böyük olalar?

English translations of the questions of the oral interview are as follows:

- 1) What is the most serious problem you have faced in your life?
- 2) What were the problems on the way of your marriage?
- 3) What was the influence of the imposed war on your life?
- 4) What is the bitterest memory of your life?
- 5) What difficulties you have faced in dealing with the new generation?
- 6) What were the economic problems you have faced in growing your children?

Table.1. The frequency of DMs in interviews

	<i>Şey</i>	<i>Yani</i>	<i>Da</i>
	F		
Speaker 1	5	5	6
Speaker 2	7	5	6
Speaker 3	8	5	7
Speaker 4	9	7	8
Speaker 5	6	6	7
Speaker 6	6	7	3
Speaker 7	5	9	8
Speaker 8	7	5	9
Speaker 9	6	6	4
Speaker 10	8	9	7
Speaker 11	10	8	9
Speaker 12	4	7	8
Total Number	81	79	82

**Table.2.The frequency of DMs in observations**

	<i>Şey</i>	<i>Yani</i>	<i>Da</i>
	F		
Speaker 1	5	6	4
Speaker 2	6	6	4
Speaker 3	8	6	6
Speaker 4	7	7	9
Speaker 5	8	5	6
Speaker 6	7	9	6
Speaker 7	5	10	7
Speaker 8	6	6	9
Speaker 9	7	5	6
Speaker 10	8	8	9
Speaker 11	11	7	8
Speaker 12	7	8	8
Total Number	85	84	82