

Conversational Coherence: The Role of *Inzeen* (*Okay*) In Arabian Gulf Spoken Arabic

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ملخص

إن مهمة بناء الترابط والتماسك في المحادثات هي نتاج جهد مشترك يتفاعل فيه كل المتحاورين والمتخاطبين من أجل بناء المحادثة والحفاظ على استمراريتها. ويستخدم المتحاورون مجموعة متنوعة من أدوات ربط الخطاب لتحقيق هذا الغرض. وتبحث هذه الدراسة في الاستخدامات الوظيفية لإحدى هذه الأدوات وهي كلمة "انزين"، والتي تعد أكثر أدوات الترابط في المحادثات شيوعاً في منطقة الخليج العربي. وتتناول الدراسة على وجه الخصوص دور هذه الأداة في الحفاظ على تماسك بنية المحادثات على مستوى الجملة والنص وفي خلق ترابط بين مكونات المحادثة المختلفة. ويظهر تحليل البيانات التي قمنا بجمعها من محادثات عديدة جرت بشكل طبيعي أن هذه الأداة تساعد طرفي المحادثة على تحديد موقعهم من المحادثة ودورهم فيها، كما أنها تؤدي مجموعة متنوعة من الوظائف التواصلية المتنوعة، ومنها خلق التماسك عند التواصل في المحادثات، وتحديد الإطار المناسب لبنية المعلومات المتبادلة في المحادثة. وهي في ذلك تتطابق مع الوظائف التي تؤديها كلمة "okay" في اللغة الانجليزية المحكية، غير أنها تتميز عنها ببعض الوظائف الخاصة بها.

Abstract

Conversational coherence is a joint effort in which interactants cooperate to construct discourse and sustain a conversation. Interlocutors use a variety of conversational markers to establish and facilitate the flow of conversation. This study examines a frequently used discourse marker in Arabian Gulf spoken variety of Arabic, *Inzeen*, which corresponds to *Okay* in spoken English. In particular, the study examines the position of this marker in conversational exchanges, its role in local and global conversational coherence (Van Dijk, 1985a, b), how it serves to establish coherence between units of discourse in conversational exchanges, and the discourse and communicative functions it serves. *Inzeen* is used by both sides of an interactional encounter to help speakers locate themselves and their utterances in the conversation. Analysis of naturally occurring conversations and exchanges in different contexts shows that this marker has a variety of discourse functions, mainly to establish coherence in the communicative exchange and create a framework for information structure.

Keywords: Discourse markers, conversational coherence, interactive marker, structural marker, agreement marker

1. Introduction

Participants in a conversation often cooperate to establish conversational coherence (Schiffrin, 1985). Typically, a speaker is expected to make a comprehensible and accessible utterance/proposition, honoring Grice's Maxims (Grice, 1975), and the hearer in return is supposed to show that he is attending to what has been said. Beside propositions, acts, turns, moves and other components of an interaction, interlocutors manipulate a variety of conversational devices to help them establish and facilitate the flow of conversation/discourse. For instance, these multifunctional markers are commonly utilized by the speakers to ensure that their points are attended to by the recipients. On the other hand, the recipients use these markers/devices to show their reaction/response (agreement, disagreement, acknowledgment, refusal, lack of interest, interest, acceptance, approval, challenge, etc.) to what has been said. These devices are commonly referred to as discourse markers.

2. Theoretical Framework

Schiffrin (1987: 41) indicates that discourse markers are "members of a functional class of verbal (and nonverbal) devices which provide contextual coordinates for ongoing talk." She defines them as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk" that are used by the speakers to signal how the upcoming unit of speech (speech act) or text relates to the current discourse stage" (p. 41). Fraser (1990:387) defines them as "a class of expressions, each of which signals how the speaker intends the basic message that follows to relate to the prior discourse." More recently, focusing on the semantic and structural characteristics of discourse markers, Fraser (2006) emphasizes that these markers are expressions which occur as part of a discourse segment but are not part of the propositional content of the message conveyed, and thus they do not contribute to the meaning of the proposition *per se*.

Holker (1991, cited in Jucker, 1993) identifies four characteristics of discourse markers: (1) they do not affect the truth condition of an utterance, (2) they do not add to the propositional content of an utterance, (3) they are related to the speech situation but not to the situation talked about, and (4) they have an emotive and expressive function rather than a referential, denotative or cognitive function. Fraser (2006) indicates that members of this class typically have the following properties: they are free morphemes, are discourse-segment initials, signal a specific message, and are classified not syntactically but in terms of their semantic/pragmatic functions.

Researchers agree that discourse markers are multifunctional and are frequently used in different contexts in spoken language to serve a wide range of structural, communicative and pragmatic functions. Emphasizing their transitional and coherence functions, Schiffrin (1987) indicates that discourse markers provide coordinates to the discourse contexts in which participants produce and interpret meaning. These contextual coordinates integrate different components of talk and contribute to discourse coherence. Similarly, Stenstrom (1994, 1998) indicates that discourse markers create discourse boundaries throughout spoken interaction. Holker (1991) claims that discourse markers are related to the speech situation, and thus have an expressive rather than a referential function. Fraser (1993) explains that discourse markers serve different pragmatic functions and do not impart any propositional content to an utterance. Taguchi (2002) elaborates on these different functions and points out that these markers serve as interactive devices among participants to maintain the flow of interaction, establish coherence, and engage participants in the discourse. They also “allow speakers to highlight important elements in a conversation and convey their emotive and attitudinal stance toward the message,” and they also “help hearers to follow a speaker’s trains of thought that assist in the interpretation of the utterance” (Taguchi, 2002:4).

One of the most widely studied markers in English speaking countries is *Okay* (Beach, 1993, Condon, 2001; Heisler, 1996; Merrit, 1984; Schlee, 2005; Schiffrin, 1987). According to Heisler (1996), *Okay* performs three major discourse functions: agreement marker, interactive marker, and structural marker. As an agreement marker, it functions at the level of exchange (initiation and response) and is mainly used by the respondent to perform an act requested by the speaker and/or to mark his acceptance of what has been said. According to Vincent (1992:46), as an interactive marker, *Okay* helps in “establishing, maintaining, prolonging, or breaking the punctual relationship between interlocutors.” As a structural marker, *Okay* contributes to the organization of the text.

Heisler (1996) identifies four different ways in which *Okay* functions as an interactive marker: (1) an attention getter used by the speaker to build interactional relationships with the audience to get their attention and ensure they follow the discourse; (2) a backchannel signal used by the recipient within the speech turn of the speaker to indicate to him/her that s/he is following the interaction and that the speaker can continue with his/her conversation; (3) a command softener used mainly by the speaker to mitigate a command and give it the form of a request; and

(4) a progression check used mainly by the speaker to check the progression of his/her own discourse. Heilser (1996:297) explains that “as a command softener, *Okay* is characterized by the interrogative intonation and is uttered by the speaker after s/he makes a command, which lessens the force of the act”. In summary, Heilser states that:

the uttering of these markers helps to avoid possible interactional problems that may arise. The *Ok* attention getter assures that the interlocutor will recognize the discourse to follow as being directed toward him-or herself. As a back-channel signal, *Ok* indicates that the interlocutor is listening to the speaker’s discourse ... As a command softener, *Ok* lessens the force of the command ... [and] as a progression check, *Ok* favors the correct interpretation of the information marked with respect to its status within the discourse of the speaker (p. 298).

Schleef (2005) identifies similar functions of *Okay*, including a transition marker, a modal question tag, a progression check question tag, and a backchannel signal.

While *Okay* serves several universal functions, it also has some context-specific (e.g., professor-student encounters, medical encounters, service encounters) functions. In these contexts, Beach (1993), Codon (2001) and Merritt (1984) emphasize the use of *Okay* as a reception marker, indicating that the recipient understands a message, and as a transition marker, signaling a shift in the direction of the discourse/interaction. According to Biber *et al.* (1999), in professor-student encounters, *Okay* serves as a “compliant response” to several types of speech acts such as directives, offers, suggestions, and permission-giving.

Overall, in most studies of the use of *Okay*, it was found that it always functions as a discourse marker either, local, between two adjacent utterances, or global at the discourse level. It typically has the function of linking previous acts with upcoming ones, establishing different kinds of relations between them. The present study explores the different functions of the form equivalent to *Okay* in Arabian Gulf spoken Arabic, which is *Inzeen*. As a discourse marker, *Inzeen* has developed from a lexical item derived from the root *zeen* (meaning good, well, handsome, fine). Similarly, all equivalent forms in other varieties of spoken Arabic (e.g. *Ṭayib*, in the Levant, *bahi* in North Africa) have originally developed from lexical items meaning ‘good, well, fine’. In fact, the corresponding item in Standard Arabic is *hasanan*, also meaning ‘well, good, fine.’ So, how did such words develop from regular lexical items with a semantic component into discourse markers? In reality, this is not an uncommon phenomenon. The discourse marker *well*

in English has developed from a regular lexical item (an adverb, as in “*he plays chess very well*”) into a discourse marker (Schiffrin, 1985). The same is true for *wallhi* in spoken Arabic which was originally a swearing form, meaning *by Allah*, used by interlocutors to confirm what somebody is saying or stating. Later, the term has expanded to cover many discourse functions, thus changing the word into a discourse marker. *Inzeen* and other equivalent forms seem to have developed in the same way.

3. Methodology

The present study examines the discourse marker *Inzeen* to identify its functions and distribution in everyday spoken conversational interactions in a wide range of contexts. It seeks to fill an apparent gap in the literature, as this marker has never, to the best of our knowledge, been investigated in Arabic discourse studies. This study is based on naturally occurring data collected over a span of three years from different sources. A major source of data was spontaneous every day spoken interactions. The authors and their assistants recorded on index cards every occurrence of *Inzeen* uttered in their presence with full contextual information. For instance, when a student would visit the authors’ offices, attention was paid to cases where *Inzeen* was used, and, later, these utterances were recorded in writing. Similarly, when the assistants would come across this marker, they would immediately record the instances with full contextual information. The researchers and their assistants collected hundreds of tokens of this marker in a variety of contexts.

The other major source of data was recordings of classroom interactions. One of the authors was conducting research on the characteristics of classroom discourse when he made full tape recordings of several Arabic-medium classes at different levels in various schools. These recordings were later transcribed, and all occurrences of *Inzeen* were identified with their context, which gave the authors a huge body of data. This study, thus, is more comprehensive in its scope of data coverage than many other similar studies (e.g., Al-Harahesheh & Kanakri, 2013, examining *Ṭayīb*, equivalent to *Inzeen* in Jordanian spoken Arabic; Maschler, 2004, examining *Tov* in Hebrew). All instances containing the marker were analyzed qualitatively to identify the function(s) served by each occurrence of the marker. The authors opted not to use quantitative analysis of the distribution of the functions because the paper is mainly concerned with identifying the communicative and pragmatic functions of the marker without consideration for

their weight. Accordingly, a qualitative description of the data would better serve the purpose of the current investigation.

4. Results

All occurrences of *Inzeen* in the data were identified and analyzed for the functions they served. These functions were then classified into major categories, partly following Heisler's (1996) classification and adding new categories and subcategories to it. The following sets of the functions of this marker were identified: an agreement (acceptance) marker, a challenge/threat marker, a topic management marker, an interactive marker, a tag marker, a structural marker and a cohesive marker. It has to be emphasized that in most, if not all, of its functions *Inzeen* comprises a discourse marker (cf. Maschler, 2004, for the equivalent marker *Tov* in Hebrew).

4.1. Agreement/Acceptance Marker

The discourse marker *Inzeen* acts as an agreement (compliance/acceptance) marker used by the recipient (listener) in an interaction/exchange as a response marker to previous requests, directives, suggestions, offers, and permissions made by the speaker. In this case, it expresses the recipient's agreement to perform an act. Thus, it acts like *Okay* as an interpersonal marker in an interaction (cf. Condon, 2001; Maschler, 2004). In some cases, it signals the recipient's acceptance of a proposition, offer or suggestion made by the speaker. The following examples illustrate this function:

1. A is asking B: "Please observe family conversations and collect samples of *Inzeen*." B: "*Inzeen*." (Here, the marker expresses the recipient's agreement to do the act of collecting the cases).
2. A: "Let's go to the bookstore." B: "*Inzeen*." (meaning 'Okay let's go') (It indicates the willingness of B to accept a suggestion/proposition)
3. A: "Can you wait for me till I come back from the library." B: "*Inzeen*." (B here uses the marker as a response indicating his agreement to wait).
4. A (mother): "I will go to phone the family and will be back soon." B (daughter): "*Inzeen*." (accepting a proposition).
5. A group of friends wanted to have dinner together. A: "Would you like to join us for dinner?" B: "*Inzeen*." (accepting invitation/agreement to do something).

The above examples show that *Inzeen* is mostly used by the speaker in response to a request, suggestion, etc. from the speaker, which gives it an interpersonal function only.

In these examples, the marker is used as a minimal token of agreement/acceptance and in these cases it is followed by nothing. However, if used to mark non-compliance/acceptance or concession, it is used to preface justification, counter proposition or request for information, or to indicate reception of the message, as seen in the following examples:

6. A: "Can you please help me with my homework." B (his sister): "*Inzeen*, don't you see I am busy."

7. A: "Can you please open the door?" B: "*Inzeen*, but I am afraid wind will blow in."

In (6) above, the listener indicates that she received the message and at the same time introduces her justification for not being able to comply with the request. As for example (7), the listener uses *Inzeen* to indicate that she received the message but hesitates to perform the request for the reason given.

In some cases, the recipient intends to perform an act or accept a proposition, but he lacks information or needs more clarification to help him perform the act. Thus, he may use *Inzeen* as an agreement/acceptance marker and at the same time request for more information or clarification. The following examples illustrate this function:

8. A: "Can you make me a cup of tea?" B: "*Inzeen*, how do you like it?" (agreeing to perform the act but needs more information/clarification).

9. A: "Can you please make me a copy of the paper." B: "*Inzeen*, where can I find a copying machine?"

These examples show that the recipient agrees to do the act, but he needs more information/clarification on how to do it. Furthermore, this marker may be used by the recipient to acknowledge reception of information and at the same time introduce another topic in the form of a question based on the given information. In the following example, A is giving information to B, who acknowledges reception of the information and introduces a new topic in the form of a question based on the information given to him.

10. A: "The teacher came today and talked about absent students." B: "*Inzeen*, what did he say about the homework?" (I got your information, but I need to know what he said about something else.)

In academic circles, *Inzeen* usually serves as a compliant response to directives, suggestions, offers, and permission-giving. For example, in professor-student interactions, the professor may give advice, suggestions, proposals to students about the courses they should register in or about the assignments they have to work on. By using *Inzeen*, the students can signal to the professor that his/her advice or suggestion is attended to and accepted. Consider the following example:

11. A (professor): "You have to register for these courses next semester." B (student): "*Inzeen*."

In other cases, *Inzeen* may be used by the recipient as a response marker to a previous utterance in order to preface objection/non-acceptance to comply with a suggestion, request, proposition or offer made by the speaker, as shown in the following examples:

12. A (child): "Give me this apple." B (Mom): "*Inzeen*, you just had one." (Here, mom uses *Inzeen* to preface non-acceptance/objection by presenting a counter argument).

13. A (boy): "Can you get me a glass of water?" B (sister): "*Inzeen*, why don't you go and get it yourself?" (The use of the marker indicates objection and prefaces an alternative)

It is noticed that *Inzeen* in most of the above instances generally prefaces either a positive response to do something or a negative response, marking objection and prefaces a challenging alternative or argument. This result concurs with findings obtained by Heisler (1996), Condon (2001), Maschler (2004), Schleeff (2005), and Al-Harabsheh & Kanakri (2013), studying *Okay* in English, *Tov* in Hebrew and *Ṭayib* in Arabic, respectively. This specific function overlaps with another function which is prefaces challenges or threats as discussed below.

4.2. Challenge/Threat Marker

Data analysis shows that *Inzeen* may also be used by one of the participants in a conversation to challenge the information, suggestions, propositions given by the other interlocutor, or to give an alternative. Thus, it constitutes a form of defiance to the other

interlocutor and may rise in certain contexts to a threatening level, especially if produced with a prolonged and stressed falling/rising tone. The following examples illustrate this function:

14. A: "I am sure you can't talk to her." B: "*Inzeen*, you will see."
15. A & B are in a professor's office. A: "B does not like this course." B: "*Inzeen*, I will show you when we go back to the hostel."
16. A (mother angry at her son): "*Inzeen*, when your father comes back, I will ask him to punish you" (preface a threat).

In 14 above, the speaker is making a claim about the listener's ability to do something, but the listener uses *Inzeen* to preface a challenge to this claim. On the other hand, in example 15, the speaker is making a claim about the listener in front of his professor, for which the listener uses *Inzeen* to threaten him.

In a classroom setting, this marker is commonly used by teachers during question/answer sessions, especially when they receive wrong answers to their questions. In this case, the teacher uses *Inzeen* to introduce an indirect challenge to the information given by the student, with the intention of correcting/repairing the answer. This is similar to results obtained by Iluster (2011) showing that *Okay* functions as a marker to preface correction when a wrong answer is given as can be seen in example 17 below.

17. A (teacher): "What is the most populated country in the world?" B (student): "India." A: "*Inzeen*, what about China?" (Challenge of the information given indirectly, thus acting as a repair).

In some cases, *Inzeen* is used by the speaker without anything following it, thus implying a threat. Consider the following examples:

18. A: "So, you do not want to tell me the truth? *Inzeen*."
19. A (mother): "Can you buy me a can of soda from your money." B: "No! A: *Inzeen*."

This use of *Inzeen* is quite frequent in argumentation where a speaker is giving a list of points or propositions, but the other participants may interrupt him to give their responses in the form of counter points. In this case, they use *Inzeen* to preface their attempt to interrupt the speaker and assume the turn. In such cases, it functions as a marker for negotiating turns. This is illustrated in the following example where the listeners keep interrupting the speaker by using

Inzeen to acknowledge reception of information and at the same time to introduce a counter argument.

20. A and a group of friends are discussing objective vs. essay questions. A is giving his points in favor of objective questions. As he is speaking, the other participants keep interrupting him using: *Inzeen*, what about ... and *Inzeen*, ... and they start giving their points.

4.3. Topic Management

In some contexts, *Inzeen* functions as a textual marker. This function is evident when the speaker uses it within an interaction for topic management to initiate, change, end, or resume a topic. This is in line with Maschler (2004) who showed that the textual *Tov* is used to mark transitions to a new topic, a return to an old topic and the end of a topic. It is also similar to *Okay*, which, according to Condon (2001:496), “marks the transition across [the] boundary as a default or expected one.” The following examples illustrate these functions:

21. On television, the host asked an old man a series of questions about Oman in the past. The man gave a detailed description. The host then said: “*Inzeen*, tell us about Sohar now.”
22. In a classroom, the teacher was talking to his students: “Last time we talked about ‘x topic’, *Inzeen*. Our topic today is” (topic initiation)
23. A group of ladies were chatting during lunch at a restaurant. One of them interrupted the conversation and started making jokes. When she stopped, another woman said: “*Inzeen*, what happened next?” (resuming a topic).
24. A teacher was discussing a topic. After explaining some points in the middle of his turn, he said: “*Inzeen*, let’s go back to our topic.’ (resuming a topic)
25. A female teenager was telling her friend about a problem when suddenly a stranger came in and they stopped. When he left, her friend said: “*Inzeen*.” (requesting to continue her talk).
26. A was talking to her friend about a specific topic for some time. Then she paused. Later, she said: “*Inzeen*,” and started talking about a new topic.” (initiating a new topic to terminate an old one).
27. A to B: “*Inzeen*, that’s it. Enough, zip it.” (terminate a topic)

In 21 above, *Inzeen* is used to indicate that the host accepted/received the information and was moving to a new topic, topic initiation. In addition, while *Inzeen* is used to resume a topic in examples 23 and 24, it is used to terminate a topic in examples 26 and 27.

4.4. Interactive Marker

According to Vincent (1992:42), one of the major joint (speaker/hearer) functions of these markers is “establishing, maintaining, prolonging, or breaking the punctual relationship between interlocutors”. Heisler (1996:296) clarifies this by saying that “uttering of these *Okays* links the interlocutor to the discourse of the speaker and, in doing so, favors the success of the communication between the participants and thus the linear progression of the conversation”. He identifies four different ways in which *Okay* functions as an interactive marker: an attention getter, a backchannel signal, a command softener, and a progression check, which are mostly used by the speaker. As an attention getter, it is usually used by the speaker to establish interactional relations with the recipients to draw their attention to the interaction and ensure they are following the conversation. Analysis of data shows that *Inzeen* is used by the participants in an exchange/conversation to perform similar functions. The following examples illustrate these functions:

28. A: “I went to visit her, *inzeen*, and she said to me ...” (attention getter/progression check)
29. Student A to her friend: “Here is a list of medical terms. *Inzeen*, my dear friend, can you translate them for me?” (attention getter and request)
30. A (Teacher): “The lesson today is about Oman’s history. *Inzeen*, you can tell me when ...”

In examples 28 and 29, *Inzeen* is used as an attention getter/progression check. In 30, the speaker gives some background information; then he uses *Inzeen* to get the students’ attention, so they can answer a question based on what he says.

As a backchannel signal (feedback), it is often used by the recipient within the speaker’s speech turn to indicate to him that he is following the interaction, getting the information, and asking him to continue with his utterance (i.e., Go ahead I am listening). This is shown in the following examples:

31. A is telling a story. In the process, the recipient keeps saying *Inzeen*, and the speaker continues talking. (The listener is telling the speaker to go ahead with his story, and that he is listening).

32. A: “Yesterday, I went to the market...” B: “*Inzeen*.” A: “to buy some clothes.” (Ok I am listening to you go ahead)

This marker can also be used as a command softener at the end of an utterance by either the speaker or recipient to mitigate the impact of a command or a request. In examples 33 and 34 below, the speaker uses *Inzeen* as a mitigating device to lessen the impact of a request/order:

33. A to B: “Can you bring me a book from the library, *inzeen* dear?” (It is used here as a mitigating tag)

34. A is talking to her roommate: “Can you bring me my dinner with you when you come back, *inzeen*. *Inzeen* dear.”

As a progression check, *Okay* has an interrogative nature, functioning like *y’know* according to Shiffrin (1987:281). Similarly, *Inzeen* is used by the speaker repeatedly within his speech turn to check on the progression of his own speech. The following examples illustrate this function:

35. A is explaining to her roommates the process of making a dish. While she is doing this, she keeps using *Inzeen* after every step (e.g., cut the onions, *Inzeen*. Then fry them, *inzeen* and then add*inzeen*).

36. A teacher is explaining a lesson to his students: “If clause type one, *Inzeen* may be used to talk about possible actions *inzeen* and it must be in...*inzeen*.”

In addition to the functions specified by Heisler (1996), our data show another function not included in his model which is repair. Repair is defined as “linguistic devices used to achieve information transition anaphorically – forcing speakers to adjust their orientation to what has been said before they respond to it in upcoming talk” (Schiffrin, 1987:74). ‘*Inzeen*’ is used to maintain the topic, apologize, correct a previous wrong claim or response, and re-orient an interaction, i.e., it functions as an alignment marker. It is very frequent in classroom situations and group discussions/conversations, as shown in the following examples:

37. A: “*Inzeen*, let’s go back to our topic.” (The speaker is trying to repair the digression from the topic using *Inzeen* to introduce this repair.)

38. A: "*Inzeen* let's not get out of the topic. Let's stay in the topic.."(introducing a repair/request to stay in the ...).

39. A group of students were discussing arrangement for an open day. Some members started digressing by talking about different topics (tangential ones). One of them said: "*Inzeen* guys! When are we going back to our topic?"

40. A (teacher): "What is the capital of France?" B (student): "London." A: "*Inzeen*, then what is the capital of England?"

41. A: "*Inzeen* dear friend! Forget it and pardon me!" (Acknowledging a previous wrong act and prefacing an apology).

42. A: "*Inzeen*, man, to err is human and to forgive is divine. *Inzeen!* Forgive me this time and take it easy."

In example 40, instead of telling the student his answer is wrong, the teacher uses *Inzeen* to indirectly redirect him to the right answer. In 41, *Inzeen* is used to acknowledge a wrong act and to preface an apology. Similarly in 42, it marks acceptance/acknowledgment of a previous wrong act and asking for forgiveness based on the recipient's noble character.

Another function not reported in literature is requesting/offering an alternative. In such cases, there may be a proposition or a request on the floor which may not be available, and thus the other participant either requests or offers alternative. The following examples clarify this:

43. A: "I want to print the report if the hostel lab is open." B: "*Inzeen*, do it in the college lab tomorrow."

44. A is asking B to go to see X about something. B: "*Inzeen*, what if I do not find him."

In example 43 above, A is planning to print a report if the hostel lab is open, which leaves the possibility that it may not be open, so B uses *Inzeen* to preface the offering of an alternative. In the other example, A is asking B to do something, and B uses *Inzeen* to agree to do what is requested, but, at the same time, requests an alternative in case the plan A does not go through.

4.5. Tag marker

Data analysis shows that *Inzeen* is often used by the speaker at the end of his turn as a tag, checking if the recipient is following, and, at the same time, asking for confirmation. This

function, to the best of our knowledge, has not been reported in previous literature. The following examples illustrate this function:

45. A to B (waiter): “Can you put some more hot sauce, *inzeen*?” (Can you?)
46. A (teacher) to his students: “Next class we will have an exam, *inzeen*?”
47. A young lady is answering a phone call intended for her brother. The caller says: “Please tell him that Hamid had called him, *inzeen*?” (Will you?). The lady responded: “*Inzeen.*” (agreement to act).
48. A: “Wait for me till I come back from the library, *inzeen*?”(Will you?)B: “*Inzeen.*” (agreement to wait)

4.6. Structural/Cohesive Marker

Heisler (1996) explains that *Okay* as a structural marker is used to mark referential relations between two or more pieces of discourse (what follows and what precedes it). He says that it is often used to mark “either the onset of a structural problem within the discourse or the return to a normal situation from such a problem. The problem is determined by the level of discourse at which it occurs, be it the *act*, the *move*, or the *exchange*” (p. 298). Data analysis reveals that *Inzeen* functions in a similar way. In some cases, a speaker may have trouble in the course of an utterance and is unable to continue for lack of appropriate words. S/He may hesitate and use *Inzeen* to preface a continuation of his/her turn. In such cases, there is a linear progression in the speech/discourse and *Inzeen* occurs inside the utterance as a filler to mark *moves*, *acts*, or continuation of the flow of the previous discourse). *Inzeen* may be used to signal:

a) a return to the linear state (acting as repair, see above), as in the following examples:

49. A is discussing an issue but keeps digressing. After every digression, he uses *Inzeen* to preface a return to the original line of argument.
50. A (teacher) is talking about a topic but keeps referring to other points. He then uses *Inzeen* to return to the original topic.

b) a concession (cf. Maschler, 2004), defined by Heisler(1996:300) as “a case of prolepsis, the anticipation of an objection by the listener which is then answered by the speaker himself”. This function is demonstrated in the following examples.

51. A teacher wants to give an exam the following week. He says: “Next week we will have an exam which will cover the first 4 chapters, *inzeen*.Let's make it 3 chapters because we

have not finished Chapter 4 yet.”(The teacher here expects objection by the students, so he modifies his instructions).

52. A to her friend: “Can you lend me 50 Riyals? *Inzeen*, make it 30. This should be enough.”

In 51, the teacher expects an objection to a proposal which he made, so he modifies his instructions, prefacing the modification using *Inzeen*. In 52, the speaker feels that her friend may not have enough money to lend her, or that the sum is too large for a student; thus, she modifies the amount to make it easier for her friend to lend her money. It serves as a negative politeness strategy.

Inzeen may also be employed by the recipient to pay lip service to accepting what the speaker has stated or proposed. In such cases, it is often followed immediately by a contrastive/concession response such as *but* (cf. Maschler, 2004). The following example illustrates this function:

53. Mother to her son: “It is getting late. You have to go to bed now.” Son: “*Inzeen*, but I am very hungry.”

54. A student to her roommate: “You need to put off the lights. I am trying to sleep.” B (roommate): “*Inzeen*, but I have to finish my assignment. It is due tomorrow”

In some cases, concessive *Inzeen* may not be followed by *but*, yet it still has the same concessive function as in:

55. A: “You should know that smoking is dangerous to your health. You have to quit.” B: “*Inzeen*, I won't stop it.”

As pointed out by Heisler (1996:301) in his discussion of this function of ‘*okay*’, *Inzeen*, like *Okay*, neither denies the existence nor avoids the potential existence of a problem; instead, it indicates the onset or the end of a real structural problem within the discourse of the speaker, a problem determined by the level of discourse that characterizes the context. By marking this problem, the interviewee favors the linear progression of the conversation.

In addition to the above functions, *Inzeen* also functions as a cohesive device, establishing contrastive, additive, sequential, informative relations between the previous utterances and upcoming ones, as shown in the following examples:

56. A Mother is talking to her son about a young lady he wants to marry: “She is not beautiful.”The son responded: “*Inzeen*. I like her.” (I know but, I like her) (contrastive).

57. A: "She left with him." B: "*Inzeen*." (So what?). A: "*Inzeen*,(but) he is not her brother."(contrastive)
58. A: "I saw Ali." B:"*Inzeen*."(So what?).A: "and I told him, *inzeen* and made an agreement with him." (additive)
59. A: "I told him about this." B: "*Inzeen*." (So, what was the result?) A: "He got very angry." (sequential)
60. A (student): "My report will be about the use of articles in English." B: "*Inzeen*, why don't you go to Dr. X and ask him about this topic?" (sequential)
61. A: "I saw the car which caused the accident." B: "*Inzeen*, what color was it?" (requesting more information)

5. Conclusion

This paper aimed to examine the distribution and functions (interpersonal and textual) of '*Inzeen*' in Arabian Gulf spoken Arabic. The results show that *Inzeen*, similar to *Okay* and other equivalent forms in other languages, is a multifunctional device which is used to show agreement/acceptance, express challenge/threat, manage topic, tag and repair, and connect different parts of discourse (i.e., a structural and cohesive marker). In some contexts its functions overlap, as it may indicate acceptance of what has been said and, at the same time, introduces a new topic, asks for information, prefaces a challenge, or closes a topic. The analysis above also shows that *Inzeen* functions as a response marker, establishing discourse coherence, where what is said by the recipient is heard as a response to what has been said/initiated by the speaker.

In addition, the analysis reveals that the type of functions *Inzeen* serves depends on both the preceding act and the upcoming response. It also indicates that *Inzeen* may be speaker-specific (used mainly by the speaker) having a set of functions, recipient-specific (used mainly by the recipient) or common to both of them. It may be used by the listener as a response to the speaker's utterance, establishing different patterns of conversational coherence relationships, such as receipt of information, request for more information, showing interest and waiting for the upcoming utterance, etc. When a response does not satisfy the particular need for information underlying a question or a request, the speaker may make a new request or question, the main function of which is to redirect (acting as a repair) the orientation of information prefaceing this with *Inzeen*. At a more global level of conversational organization, *Inzeen* is used as a "pre-

closing device, offering its recipients a chance to reinstate an earlier or unexpanded topic, or to open another round of talk, prior to conversational closure" (Schiffrin, 1987:102).

It can be concluded that *Inzeen* has universal functions (agreement, acceptance, concession, topic management, etc.), which are shared by similar markers in different languages such as *Okay* in English, *Tov* in Hebrew and *Ṭayib* in Jordanian Arabic. It has developed from a mere lexical item with a dictionary meaning of "good, fine" into a discourse marker with a multitude of discourse functions.

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