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Syntax of Discourse Particles in English Spoken in the Middle East

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The study of Discourse Particles in last two decades or so has brought syntax and pragmatics closely enough towards formulating a non-modular, substantive approach to linguistic analysis. However, its potential in definitive understanding of the issue of syntactic variation and generality in spoken language has not been explored sufficiently. This paper makes an attempt to treat the use of Discourse Particles as one of the factors that distinguishes the local Asian variety of English spoken in Oman from other native varieties of English in the world. It also proposes to extend the application of syntactic theories to analyse the structure of spoken language, where the syntactic products (utterances) are impromptu and are originated in authentic interactions as opposed to conventional syntactic analysis of using the ideal sentences imagined by the linguist. The structure of the paper is divided into three distinct parts. The first part gives an orientation into the literature of syntax of Discourse Particles in some Asian languages such as Hindi/Urdu, Bengali, Malayalam, Tamil and Arabic. The common criterion for selecting these languages is that the Asian speakers of English in Oman and the Middle East are mostly bilinguals who speak one of these as the first language and English as a second language. The second part builds up the hypothesis that the Discourse Particles in English spoken by Asian bilinguals in the Middle East are imported as translation equivalents from these languages. It shows how certain discourse particles are sensitive to types of sentences and are restricted to certain speech acts. The third part presents a justifiable classification of the syntactic environments in which Discourse Particles are used. This classification is based on linguistic observation of different syntactic constituents and their corresponding speech acts. The findings are strongly supported by an empirical investigation.

Key words: discourse particles, speech acts, sentence types, syntactic variation, translation equivalents