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## Discourse-pragmatic functions of *wellah* and *wellahi* in spoken Kurdish

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the discourse-pragmatic functions of the lexical items *wellah* and *wellahi* by twenty-four Iraqi Kurdish-speaking adults (24 first and fourth-year undergraduate students). All the participants studied in the English department at the University of Raparin in Kurdistan. As a qualitative research, Brinton's (1996) binary classification is adopted as a theoretical framework in defining the functions *wellah* and *wellahi* have at the textual and interpersonal levels. Using empirical data, five individual functions related to the use of *wellah* and *wellahi*: including three textual functions (elaboration, filler and; topic shift) and two interpersonal ones (response marker [politeness marker] and confirmation marker) are demonstrated. Throughout, the findings link to those identified in previous Arabic studies. The data analysis demonstrates that the use of *wellahi* in Kurdish is similar to its use in Arabic. In addition, the current study indicates that both *wellah* and *wellahi* function as discourse markers interchangeably in most of the cases. The results suggest that principles of grammaticalisation, such as phonetic-reduction and layering, could explain the development of interchangeability of the discourse markers. This study contributes to our understanding of the pragmatics of Kurdish language, the functions of discourse markers, language variation and grammaticalisation

**Keywords:** discourse markers, pragmatics of Kurdish, *wellah*, *wellahi*

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## الوظيفة النصية والتداولية للفظتي (والله) و(واللهي) في لغة التخاطب في اللغة الكردية

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### المستخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في الوظيفة التداولية للمفردتين المعجميتين (والله) و (واللهي) في لغة التخاطب الكردي على عينة تبلغ 24 متحدث بالغ كردي عراقي ممن يدرسون في قسم اللغة الانجليزية في كلية التربية / جامعة رابرين. ولكون البحث نوعي تمّ الاعتماد على تصنيف دوناي برينتون (1996) لتحديد الوظيفة التداولية للفظتي (والله) و (واللهي) على المستويين النصي والشخصي. وباستعمال البيانات التجريبية تمّ استخراج خمس وظائف فردية باستعمال لفظتي (والله) و(واللهي) ويتضمن ثلاث وظائف نصية هي: (التفصيل، والحشو، وتغيير الموضوع)، ووظيفتان شخصيتان وهما: (علامة الاستجابة، وعلامة التأكيد).

تم مقارنة النتائج التي استخرجت من هذه الدراسة للفظتي (والله) و(واللهي) بنتائج الدراسات العربية السابقة، وتشير النتائج إلى أن وظائف والهي قريبة من الوظائف المستعملة في اللغة العربية إلى يومنا هذا. فضلا عن ذلك فإن هذه الدراسة تبين أن كلا لفظتي (والله) و(واللهي) علامتان خطابيتان تسعمل أحدهما مكان الآخر في أغلب حالات الخطاب في اللغة الكردية. تشير نتائج البحث وبالعودة إلى المبادئ اللغوية مثل الاختزال الصوتي والطبقي يمكنها أن تفسر تطور قابلية التبادل لعلامات الخطاب (والله) و(واللهي) والفرق بين اللغة والقواعد. الكلمات الدالة: علامات الخطاب، التداولية الكردية، والله، واللهي.

### 1. Introduction

The lexical expressions *wellah* and *wellahi* literally by Allah (God), *I swear to God*, are from Arabic. “The Arabic oath phrase *wallaahi* is often used in utterances that do not have the illocutionary force of issuing vows or threats” (Mughazy, 2021, p.3). This linguistic item has been explored in a number of varieties of Arabic studies (Rieschild, 2011, Al-Khawaldeh 2018; Mughazy 2021). These previous studies have revealed that *wellahi* signalled several pragmatic functions (as I discuss below) and suggested that further study, especially of the use of *wellahi* where it has been borrowed, would be fruitful. However, the above studies have not shown the functions of *wellah* as a discourse marker<sup>1</sup> (DM) only Rieschild (2011) considers *wellah* as a DM. In the current study, I explore the dynamic contexts, functions and discourse

<sup>1</sup> Discourse marker(s) and its abbreviation (DM) are used interchangeably in the current study.

structures associated with the use of *wellah* and *wellahi* by adult speakers of Kurdish in Iraq.

This study has several aims. First, through the use of empirical evidence from spoken data, the linguistic functions of *wellah* and *wellahi* in a variety of Kurdish are elucidated. Second, a cross-linguistic scholarly work on *wellah* and *wellahi*, including when borrowed is contributed. 3- Finally, a gap in scholarship on discourse markers more generally, namely, the interchangeability instances of the expressions is addressed, that is, the study shows that both *wellah* and *wellahi* are DMs and used interchangeably to signal the same functions.

The paper consists of six sections. In the next section, I first situate *wellah* and *wellahi* linguistically before explaining the source of, and analytic approach to, the study data. In sections 3 through 5, I describe the functions of *wellah* and *wellahi* in the data, grouping similar kinds of functions together. As I will illustrate below, these functions include three textual functions (elaboration, filler; topic shift) and two interpersonal ones (response marker [politeness marker] and confirmation marker). In the final section, the findings have been summarized and highlight some avenues for future research.

## **2. Literature review**

Discourse markers have been observed and described across languages (see Table 1 for some examples from the last decade). Early work on this linguistic category drew mostly on data from English (e.g. Schiffrin 1987; Fraser 1990) though subsequent analyses were also undertaken with other languages (see Rieschild, 2011). “Despite their diversity within and across languages, discourse markers, as a group, have been observed to have similar characteristics including an optionality of use (the absence of the discourse marker does not change the truth conditions of what is said), an association with spoken rather than written language and a tendency to occur with more than one pragmatic function” (Brinton, 1996).

**Table 1: Examples of discourse markers across languages**

Language	Examples	Source
Arabic	kwayyis, (al)muhim, walla	Rieschild 2011
English	I mean, just, well	Beeching 2016
Japanese	Dakara	Izutsu and Izutsu 2013
Kurdish	êsta, xoî, îtr	self-reference

Previous scholarship has established that DMs generally serve “procedural rather than propositional” functions (Noora & Amouzadeh, 2015, p. 1). Rather than contributing to the grammaticality or semantic content of an utterance, the use of DMs facilitates the process of communication.

Interpretation of a discourse marker, including *DMs*, depends on the context in which it is used (Owens & Rockwood, 2008, p.92). Speakers use discourse markers in concert with the rest of an utterance to achieve communicative goals. Thus, discourse

markers may signal functions to hearers, rather than performing those functions directly.

Al-Khawaldeh (2018) by adopting eclectic analytical method in a study on the use of the DM *wellahi* in Jordanian Arabic, demonstrates that *wellahi* can serve, for example, to tell a listener that the speaker is going to provide more information, intends to continue speaking, or is going to make a polite request.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Mughazy (2021) based on the view of politeness, investigates the pragmatic function of DM *wellahi* in Egyptian Arabic. He displays that *wellahi* is used as politeness marker or face saver “A speaker would calculate the potential effects of his/her up-coming utterance on the addressee and decide whether these effects aid achieving his/her goals or not. If the utterance is viewed as likely to offend the addressee, and consequently hinder achieving these goals, *wellahi* is used as a forewarning that is intended to be interpreted as to mitigate the undesired effects” (Mughazy, 2021,p.7).

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In regards to using both *wellah* and *wellahi*<sup>3</sup> as DMs, based on the studies that conducted by Mughazy (2021) and Al-Khawaldeh (2018), only *wellahi* is a DM and it is a frozen expression. Moreover, Mughazy’ (2021) points out that “the genitive case marking morpheme -i- is optional in oath structures (i.e., *wallaah* instead of *wallaahi*), but it is obligatory in non-oath uses”. Thus, these two above studies state that *wellah* is not a DM in their study data. However, Rieschild (2011) mentions that *wellah* is a DM without showing its function. Nevertheless, even though, for the best I know, *wellah* and *wellahi* have never been studied in Kurdish before. The study data in central Kurdish demonstrate that both *wellah* and *wellahi* are used as DMs. This might explain that when *wellahi* as a DM is borrowed into Kurdish it went through the grammaticalisation process.

## **2.1 Brinton’s Theoretical Framework**

Brinton (1996) established an approach for analysing DMs. Brinton’s two-fold approach, inspired by the Halliday’s (1994) triple metafunctions, categorizes the functions of DMs into a range from textual to interpersonal. At the textual level, DMs signal ‘a sequential relationship between the current basic message and the previous discourse’ (Fraser, 1990, p: 383). According to Brinton (1996) the need to initiate and close discourse, to mark topic shifts, to indicate new and old information and to constrain the relevance of adjoining utterances are part of the textual functions of DMs. However, from the interpersonal perspective, DMs could be used as a response or reaction to the preceding utterance as well. DMs are seen as vehicle contributing to the formation and maintenance of interactions between speaker and listener. They express the speaker’s attitudes, expectations, evaluations, and demands as well as the nature of the social exchange, the role of the speaker and the role assigned to the hearer (Brinton,

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<sup>2</sup> Although studies of this category have also referred to these linguistic items as “pragmatic markers” (Beeching 2016; Brinton 1996), “discourse particles” (Rieschild 2011; Yilmaz 2004) and “discourse-pragmatic features” (Pichler 2013), with some scholars arguing for nuances of distinction between the terms, I adopt the most commonly used term of *discourse marker* for clarity. Nevertheless, in Kurdish, Mukryani (2009) in his book *çêştî Mcêûr* calls DMs (*tekya kelam*).

<sup>3</sup> Although I note the diversity of transliterations, I have adopted *wellah/wellahi* because it follows the transcribing system used in this paper, namely, that given by the Kurdish Academy of Language (2018).

1996). Yilmaz (2004) points out that DMs are used as hedges to express uncertainty and as appeals to the hearer for confirmation.

In order to concentrate on the Kurdish data and the functions of *wellah* and *wellahi* therein, I will not reiterate the extensive discussions regarding core meanings in Arabic and their evolution as a discourse marker (Mughazy, 2021). However, I do adopt the Arabic translations “walla by Allah has an emphatic DP sense glossed with ‘indeed’ and hesitant DP sense glossed with ‘well’ (Rieschild, 2011, p.318). That is, I will use *well* as equivalent for *wellah* and *wellahi* to signal the textual functions (elaboration, topic-shift, and filler) and *indeed* to signal the interpersonal functions (confirmation function). However, I prefer *actually* as equivalent for *wellah* and *wellahi* to mark responding (politeness). “The non-oath wallaahi can be used only with metalinguistic negation, where wallaahi has a meaning similar to the English sentential adverb ‘actually’” Geurts (1998) cited in (Al-Khawaldeh, 2018).

As noted above, one of the defining characteristics of discourse-pragmatic features is their ability to indicate more than one function at a time (Brinton, 1996) and a consideration of this aspect of their use is critical to an effective analysis (self-reference). The multifunctional nature of *wellahi* has been explicitly noted previously (Mughazy, 2021 & Al-Khawaldeh, 2018). It is remarkable, therefore, that previous studies have not found *wellah* as a DM and generally avoided discussing examples where the function is ambiguous or where more than one function appears to be signaled at once. Although presenting a straightforward taxonomy of functions may yield a tidier analysis, it obscures a critical aspect of discourse markers as used by speakers. To address this gap, I present interchangeability instances and cases below that illustrate this more complex functional situation.

Finally, I note that the functions I describe below are those that arose in the set of data; I do not claim they are an exhaustive list of possible functions, or that all individual speakers would use all of them. I hope that future work, especially in other varieties of Kurdish or with other contexts of borrowing, might expand or refine the functions I adumbrate here.

## **2.2 Previous studies on Interchangeability and Grammaticalisation**

In this Sub-section, I will provide a brief literature review of the definition of interchangeability and grammaticalisation and its principles phonetic reduction and layering. Then, I will present some evidence that phonetic reduction and layering are two aspects of grammaticalisation, which can explain the linguistic findings in the current study.

### **2.2.1 Interchangeability**

As far as the interchangeability of DMs is concerned, a very limited amount of literature has been published on the topic. However, some previous research on English DMs (Gray, 2012, p.155 and Oh, 2000, p.260) suggests that interchangeability is possible when one DM can be replaced by another DM with no substantial change to the interpretation of the utterance. I will follow (Gray, 2012) to show the interchangeability of *wellah* and *wellahi*.

### **2.2.2 Grammaticalisation**

The term *grammaticalisation* was defined for the first time by Meillet (1912, p.131 cited in Hopper, 1991, p.17) as "the attribution of a grammatical character to a previously autonomous word." Similarly, Heine and Reh (1984, p.85) define grammaticalisation "as the process whereby items become more grammatical through

time." Bybee et al. (1994, p.4) argue that "grammaticalisation is the creation of new constructions". All these definitions look similar and they generally mean that grammaticalisation is the process that happens to a word or phrase and leads to it becoming more functional.

According to Hopper (1991, p.22) and Bybee et al. (1994, pp.19-22), grammaticalisation involves the following principles: phonetic reduction and layering. Bybee et al. (1994, p.106) argue that phonetic-reduction is "the loss of specific phonetic properties." They add that:

Both vowels and consonants in grammaticizing material are subject to complete loss. The result of these processes is that the grammaticized material will be shorter in terms of the number of segments present (Bybee et al., 1994, p.106).

That is, through phonetic reduction progress in grammaticalisation, both vowels and consonants can be reduced to form shorter items in number of segments than their previous forms. Another kind phonetic reduction is demonstrated by Cheshire (2007). In her study on 'discourse variation', Cheshire (2007, p.167) argues that:

The short forms *and stuff*, *and things*, *and everything* and *or something* derive from the constructions *and stuff/things/everything like that* and *or something like that* (Cheshire 2007, p.167).

That is, the long forms of *and stuff/things/everything like that* and *or something like that*, through the phonetic reduction process, have been reduced to shorter forms such as *and stuff*, *and things*, *and everything* and *or something*.

As far as the process of layering is concerned, Hopper (1991, p.23) argues that "very often more than one technique is available in a language to serve similar or even identical functions." In other words, layering refers to a situation during grammaticalisation when speakers have more than one form to signal the same function. Similarly, Bybee et al. (1994, p.21) state that "a language may have more than one gram<sup>4</sup> as the exponent of a gram-type". That is, there might be more than one layer in a language to signal the same function. They also consider English with its three futures *shall*, *will*, and *be going to* as a good example in this area (ibid). Moreover, Hopper points out that:

This formal diversity comes about because when a form or set of forms emerges in a functional domain, it does not immediately (and may never) replace an already existing set of functionally equivalent forms, but rather two sets of forms co-exist (Hopper, 1991, p.23).

That is, availability of more than one form to signal the same function is because the emerging ones will not replace the existing ones immediately; several forms may remain all together. Bybee et al. (1994) support Hopper's view (1991, p.23) when they state that "the existence of multiple grams depend on the grams' having developed from distinct sources" (Bybee et al., 1994, p.21).

Alshaboul et al. (2010, p.101) apply the mechanism of Bybee et al. in their study data and they (2010, p.102) argue that "in Standard Arabic, futurity is expressed by the prefix *sa-* or the particle *sawfa* meaning will". In other words, they suggest that both *sawfa* and *sa-* can be used to signal the same function and meaning of futurity.

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<sup>4</sup>The term *gram* stands for grammatical morpheme (Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca 1994, p.2).

Alshaboul et al. (2010, p.103) show how the form of *sawfa* has undergone a phonological reduction and a syllable has been reduced from the word *sawfa* 'will' to become *sa*- 'will'. Consequently, the futurity marker *sa*- 'will' has developed from the word *sawfa*- 'will'. Similar to the case of *sawfa*, as I propose (see Section 4), *wella* appear to have originally developed from *wella*hi.

### **3-Methodology**

The data examined in this study are drawn from 24 face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with Kurdish speakers. More specifically, the spoken data were collected in 2020, from speakers of Central Kurdish who use the variety of Qeladizê (Pijder) in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. At the time of data collection, all the participants were students at university of Raparin in the region. Each conversation included a single-gender pair of participants in which both were first and fourth year undergraduate students. Participant pairs were known to each other before the interviews; each conversation lasted approximately 30 minutes. Recordings were subsequently transcribed and translated. Each speaker is identified anonymously by a unique alphanumeric code (e.g. 5S).

Previous work on *wella* and *wella*hi has drawn from a variety of frameworks/approaches, including the view of politeness (Mughazy, 2021), eclectic analytical method (Al-Khawaldeh, 2018), and Conversation Analysis (Rieschild, 2011). As my goal is an elucidation of the functions of *wella* and *wella*hi in the data set, rather than the advocacy of a particular approach to analysis, I have drawn on the Brinton's (1996) theoretical framework and I have attempted a synthesized analysis that I could support with empirical evidence from the linguistic data.

Earlier scholars have proposed a variety of different names for both the individual functions that *wella*hi signals (e.g. to introduce an acceptance, an apology, and to serve as a request softener, a marker of elaboration, a continuer, a marker of confirmation, and a filler marker) (Al-Khawaldeh, 2018), a politeness marker (Mughazy, 2021). To avoid a further proliferation of terminology, I have adopted the existing terms that I found to be the most transparent; I explain the relevant terms in my empirical discussion below. I have followed Brinton (1996) in structuring the functional discussion by dividing similar functions into two categories textual (elaboration, filler; topic shift) and interpersonal (response marker, [politeness marker] and confirmation marker). Moreover, I will follow Bybee et al.'s model of the evolution of grammar (1994) to account for the loss of the genitive case marking morpheme *-i* from *wella*hi through the process of phonetic reduction. In addition, I will argue that other processes of grammaticalisation such as layering (Hopper, 1991) could explain the interchangeability of the DMs *wella* and *wella*hi.

### **4. Discourse-pragmatic functions of *wella* and *wella*hi**

Following the categorization of the functions of DMs used by Brinton (1996) as described in Section 3 above, in the present study, I will demonstrate that *wella* and *wella*hi occur at two levels of functions: textual and interpersonal. In this Section, I will demonstrate the textual (elaboration, topic shift, and filler) and interpersonal functions (responding [politeness marker] and confirmation marker) marked by both *wella* and *wella*hi consecutively. Examples of the occurrences of *wella* and *wella*hi from my data are presented in the extracts in this section to show the participants' practices with *wella* and *wella*hi at each level. These are distinguished in the following Sub-sections. I will demonstrate the functions of textual functions (elaboration, topic

shift, and filler). Then, I will show the interpersonal functions (responding [politeness marker] and confirmation marker).

#### **4.1 Functions of *wellah* and *wellahi* at textual level**

Regarding occurrences of *wellah* and *wellahi* at textual level, *wellah* and *wellahi* occur in three different ways: to signal elaboration of prior talk, to signal topic shift, and as a filler marker. I will present how *wellah* and *wellahi* occur to signal elaboration of the prior talk in Sub-sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2. Then, I will deal with *wellah* and *wellahi* as a topic shift in Sub-sections 4.1.3, 4.1.4 and 4.1.5. This is followed by *wellah* and *wellahi* as a filler marker in 4.1.6, 4.1.7 and 4.1.8.

##### **4.1.1 *Wellah* and *wellahi* to signal elaboration**

The study data show that speakers used *wellah* and *wellahi* to mark elaboration which is adding more information in order to explain the previous talk. As far as elaboration is concerned, this can be defined as expanding a speaker's ideas by adding more information (Gaddafi, 1990, p.182). The use of *wellahi* has previously been observed to act as a signal by a speaker of an imminent expansion or clarification of the content of a previous utterance (Al-Khawaldeh, 2018). Similarly, there was evidence in the study data of the function of *elaboration*, with the structure:

Previous utterance + *wellah/wellahi* + elaboration (i.e. adding more information)

I distinguish the function of elaboration by both *wellah* and *wellahi*. These functions can occur in extracts (1) and (2). Extract (1) shows how *wellah* was used before an elaboration. The extract arose from a question the facilitator asked two students about the university building and having enough study halls. Speaker 1S's response included a use *wellah* in line (3).

##### **Extract (1)**

1. 1S: Ew kate binaman nebû  
At that time we did not have buildings
2. Eû kate kabine hebû, bina nabû  
At that time, there were caravans instead of buildings
3. ***Wellah*** mamostaşman kem bû  
Well, we did not have enough teachers as well
4. Wabzanm 5 mamostaman habû  
I think we had 5 teachers

In this extract (1), *wellah* is used to add more information for the previous talk by saying: *wellah* mamostaşman kam bû (Well, we did not have enough teachers as well). She adds further details with respect to the building's shortage. This additional detail is initiated by the use of DM *wellah*. Even though, *wellah* is used to mark elaboration in the current study, it is not been demonstrated to signal any function in the previous studies.

##### **4.1.2 *Wellahi* to mark elaboration**



Similar to *wellah*, *wellahi* is also found in the data to indicate elaboration to what has been given before. Similarly, the previous Arabic study by Al-Khawaldeh (2018) shows that “One of the well-established functions that *wellahi* serves is to signal the introduction of additional information into the discourse”. That is, *wellahi* is used to indicate the function of elaboration.

In the following extract (2), *wellahi* is used to mark additional information with the below structure:

Previous utterance + *wellah/wellahi* + elaboration (i.e. adding more information)

In this extract, two fourth year students have been asked about their desire to read books. Speaker 7S says that she was interested in reading books when she was at high school.

### **Extract (2)**

1. 7S: La poli 4y amaday ktêbekim xwêndewe, romani Róbinson Crusoe  
When I was at year four in high school
2. Zor zor hazim ley bê ew kate  
I was really interested in it then.....
3. Ke êsta sayri kitebekey dekemewe  
When I am looking at the book now
4. Dalêm  
I say
5. **Wellahi** yeŋni ewe hiç nebûe  
Well, I mean (the book) was not that much that I read
6. Bo min ye3ni arastay kirdim,  
(However) For me I mean it guided me
7. Guidêk bû bo min le rastida  
It was a guide for me actually

In this extract (2), the student talks about her interest in reading books when she was at high school. How she had been affected by reading an English novel (Robison Crusoe). She said that she read the English novel of Robison Crusoe and it seems to be a bulk book for her. After describing the English novel, she elaborates what she says before by prefacing with *wellahi*. She says when I am looking at the book now I say to myself that the book was not that big. *wellahi yeŋni ewe hiç nebûe* ( Well, I mean (the book) was not that much that I read, but it guided me in real). She says however, the book guided (inspired) her (for reading more books). Thus, at the beginning she describes the book and then she uses *wellahi* to add more information about how she was inspired by the book for her upcoming life.

#### **4.1.3 Wellah and wellahi to mark Topic shift**

For the use of *wellah* and *wellahi* to signal shifting, in the data of the present study there are examples for both *wellah* and *wellahi* to indicate a topic change. Topic shift means shifting from one topic to another one.

Previous utterance + *wellah* and *wellahi* + shifting to a different (irrelevant) topic

The questions in extract (3) were about which subject the two fourth year students liked and their views on the teaching style of the lecturers. I will argue that the occurrence of *wellah* in line (2) is to mark a topic change.

#### **4.1.4 *Wellah* to mark Topic shifting**

Two first-year students had been asked a question about being in the university cafeteria. One of the student said, she went there but she had no idea about the food type. So, she at the beginning she replied to the question by saying yes she had been in the café which is the first topic. Then, changed the topic prefaced by *wellah*, by saying that she had no idea about the food offered there.

##### **Extract (3)**

1. 3 F: çum  
I went there (to the café)
2. Belam nazanim *wellah* lerûi xûardinewe çone.  
But I have no idea actually, how the food is like?

In lines (1) in extract (3), Speaker 3F said that she went to the café. Then, in lines (2) she mentioned she has no idea how the food tastes. *belam nazanim wellah lerûi xûardinewe çone.* (but I have no idea actually, how the food is like?) Thus, the speaker finished one topic, which was about going to the café in line (1). She then moved to a different topic in line (2). The topic is about how the speaker has no idea about the food being served in the café. Thus, Speaker 3F signals a different topic in line (2) by *wellah* after finishing the previous topic. Therefore, the use of *wellah* in the above extract (3) is to signal shifting to a different topic from the previous one.

#### **4.1.5 *Wellahi* to mark topic shift**

For the use of *wellahi* to signal shifting, in the data of the present study, the question in extract (4) was about having collaboration among the classmates. I will argue that the occurrence of *wellahi* in line (3) is to mark a topic change.

Previous utterance + *wellahi* +shifting to a different (irrelevant) topic

##### **Extract (4)**

1. 9F: La rûi zanstiûe alugorêki zor heye la nêwanman la nêwan xomanda  
From the scientific perspective, we collaborate a lot
2. Datwanin mûnaqeşey yek bkeyn bes la gel mamostakanda na  
We can have discussion together, but not with the teachers  
(We cannot have discussion with teachers).
3. ***Wellahi*** ew diwarey ew perdai mamostakan dayan nawe  
Well, that wall (or) that curtains the teachers made  
(She means that the teachers are arrogant that they do not want to interact).

The subject was about the relationship of the students among themselves as fourth year students. The speaker starts talking about the collaboration among the

students themselves. She said that they share and discuss topics together. Then, she changes the topic from helping among themselves as students into talking about (gossiping) the teachers. She starts shifting the topic by using *wellahi*. *Wellahi ew diwarey ew perdai mamostakan dayan nawe.* (Well, that wall (or) that curtains the teachers made (she means that the teachers are arrogant that they do not want to interact with u). Therefore, the speakers change her topic prefacing by *wellahi*, from the relationship among the students themselves into the relationship between the students and the teachers.

#### **4.1.6 *Wellah* and *wellahi* as Filler marker**

Filler, hesitation markers like uh, eh, em, well or delaying tactic to hold the floor or keep the discourse. “Fillers marker are words or phrases used to indicate a pause or hesitation in conversation known also as conversational fillers, pause fillers, and gap-fillers such as “um, ah uh, okay like, and you know” in English (Al-Khawaldeh, 2018). They are very commonly used elements in spoken discourse in all languages. They are used for different functions such as to indicate the speaker needs some time to gather and shape his ideas, is engaged in a cognitive process (thinking or remembering), to hold the turn taking floor while thinking, to bridge interactional silence, to plan for the next discourse, or he is hesitant, uncertain, confused, reserved or upset” Al-Khawaldeh (2018).

#### **4.1.7 *Wellah* as Filler marker**

The use of *wellahi* has previously been observed to act as a signal by a speaker of filling a gap Al-Khawaldeh (2018). This is like a politeness marker here but it comes in the middle. However, there is evidence in the current data of the function of *wellah* and *wellahi* as *filler markers*, with the structure:

Hesitation marker + pause + *wellah/ wellahi*

Extract (5) shows how *wellah* was used to signal a gap. The extract arose from a question the researcher asked two students about how they gave feedback regarding lecturers' styles of teaching. Speaker 1S's response included a use *wellah*.

#### **Extract (5)**

(1) S1: *Ah...ah...wellah be pêy mamostake degorê*  
Uh...uh... well, it depends on the teacher.

The extract (5) is related to a question, which I asked the two students, about the teachers' style in giving feedback to the students. Speaker S1 uses *wellah* in line (1) to fill a gap. The Speaker S1 starts responding to the question by saying that it depends on the teachers' style, as can be seen in line (1): *Ah...ah...wellah be pêy mamostake degorê* (uh...uh... indeed, it depends on the teacher). The speaker use *wellah* after using two hesitation markers and two pauses. Thus, Speaker S1 used *wellah* in line (1) to indicate a filling a gap in the utterance.

#### **4.1.8 *Wellahi* as Filler marker**

Similar to *wellah*, extract (5) below shows the use of *wellahi* as *filler marker*, with the structure:

Hesitation marker + pause + *wellahi*

Extract (6) shows how *wella* for signalling a filler marker. The extract arose from a question I asked two students about how they describe their college library. Speaker 5S's response included the use *wella* twice in line (1).

**Extract (6)**

1. 5S: Eh... eh... m balê *wella*... *wella* mamosta gyan  
Am sal libaryekeman zor xoşe  
Uh...uh... ye, well..., well, dear miss this year our library is amazing
2. *Yefni* hast dekam zor la salani pêştr pêşkeûtre  
I mean it is much more developed than the previous years

Here a fourth year student describes and compares the library college with the one in in the previous years as a nice and enjoyable place. The speaker starts to talk with the hesitation marker eh and followed by yes then saying *wella* twice. Here, it seems that the speaker wants to keep some time and hold the floor. So *wella* can be accounted as a filler maker. As it seems that it does not have any other functions such elaboration. Therefore, *wella* is used mainly to fill the speech gap or silence in conversation and simultaneously to keep the floor that the speakers going to speak immediately. The findings display that *wella* is used to play the role of a filler marker when the addressee is trying to think quickly about what to say next before holding her conversational turn.

#### **4.2 Interpersonal functions of *wella* and *wella***

In this section, I will demonstrate the interpersonal functions marked by both *wella* and *wella* consecutively. In the previous section, I demonstrate that both *wella* and *wella* could be used to signal textual functions such as when a speaker was about to expand on a point. In this section, I present instances in which *wella* and *wella* signal utterances that achieve other ends, namely, showing politeness and making a confirmation. Like the functions we discussed at textual level, these two discourse functions also involve a reaction to the preceding utterance. However, these contexts of *wella* and *wella* are different from textual level because their functions are seen as vehicle contributing to the up keeping of interactions between speaker and listener. They express the speaker's attitudes and expectations, evaluations as the nature of the social exchange, the role of the speaker and the role assigned to the hearer Brinton (1996). In regards to the responding function, Al-Khawaldeh (2018) shows that *wella* is used by the speaker to indicate his intention to respond the addressee's request in a way that does not threaten his/her face as an impolite act. Similarly, Mughazy (2021) demonstrates that "A speaker would calculate the potential effects of his/her up-coming utterance on the addressee and decide whether these effects aid achieving his/her goals or not. If the utterance is viewed as likely to offend the addressee, and consequently hinder achieving these goals, *wella* is used as a forewarning that is intended to be interpreted as to mitigate the undesired effects". In addition, Yilmaz (2004) points out that DMs are used as hedges to express uncertainty and as appeals to the hearer for confirmation.

The current study shows that *wella* and *wella* both act as responding (politeness) and confirmation markers. Thus, they sever to connect parts of the discourse and to signal the function of the utterance that follows it as shown below.

##### **4.2.1 *Wella* as a Response and politeness marker**

“According to the findings, *wella*hi is also found to indicate responding positively and cooperatively to a request for particular information.” This interview occurred between the researcher (lecturer) and a first year student. I asked the students why the first year students do not participate in the class.

**Extract (7)**

1. 8F: *Wella*h mamosta be rai min şerma  
Actually, miss, I think it is shyness

The speaker use *wella*h followed by the word of mamosta (teacher or miss) this is used like *wella*h mamosta as a response marker, it seems to be a response marker and the politeness marker at the same time. (Miss, I think) by saying miss and I think. However, if the speaker says *wella*h it is shyness, so here *wella*h can reconsidered as a response and politeness marker at the same time adding the word *wella*h make the response more polite. This is because if the speaker just says it is shyness it is like rude and direct answer. Thus here *wella*h is used as an interpersonal response marker by the speaker.

**4.2.2 *Wella*hi as a Response (politeness marker)**

It is found that this function of *walla*hi is a responsive one to meet the expectation of addressee by telling about the subject being asked for. The occurrence of *walla*hi in the data to comply with a request is observed to come in the form of an answer to a question. In extract (8), I asked two first year students why they prefer to have uniform. One of them responded me by using *wella*hi.

**Extract (8)**

1. 2F: *Wella*hi henê kes le rûi darayewe keşey heyey  
Actually, some people have economic crisis.

At the beginning of the first line, Speaker 2F uttered *wella*hi.

So, the speaker starts her response by saying *wella*hi. The lack of *wella*hi might make the utterance in extract (8) a bit awkward, that is not polite. So, it may make the addressee uncomfortable. The utterance in in this extract is directive, which is toned down by the use of *wella*hi to a polite response.

**4.2.3 *Wella*h/ *wella*hi as a Confirmation Marker**

To serve as a marker of confirmation and affirmation marker *wella*h and *wella*hi are both used to convey the discourse function of confirmation to a statement given in the previous discourse. Prior studies such as Al-Khawaldeh (2018) shows that *wella*hi is used as a confirmation marker. “one of the major functions of the DM *walla*hi in Jordanian spoken discourse is a confirmation marker” Al-Khawaldeh (2018). The study also mentions that the use of expressions such as really” create a sense of reinforcing and strengthening the feeling that his judgment is inaccurate or untrue as it happens that the speaker may think the other speaker or listener could disagree with him. Consequently, these expressions that occur with *wella*hi can be considered as positive emphatic markers and intensifiers.

**4.2.3.1 *Wella*h as a Confirmation Marker**

In this extract (9), I asked two first year students about if they see any difference between high school and university. One of the students says, the teachers at school are always ready to help us. I argue that the use of *wellah* in line 3 is to signal the function of confirmation.

**Extract (9)**

1. 4F: Mamosta amadaey têda her heye ke yermetit bdat  
Teachers (at school) are always ready to help
2. We herweha nazanim hendêk şit heye lere nay bin0m  
Also there are other things (from school) which I cannot see  
them in here
3. **Wellah** school zor xoştre  
Indeed school is much more nicer (than university)

At the beginning he says school teachers are so helpful. I also notice some other things were available at school, but I cannot see them here. Then, he says that school much nicer than university by prefacing *wellah* school zor xoshtra. (Indeed school is much nicer (than university). So he confirms that the school is nice even he used *zor* (much) which is an intensifier which is also used by previous studies such as Al-Khawaldeh (2018). So this function is different from topic shifting as it is not changing the topic. So, it is used to show confirmation that the school is better the university.

**4.2.3.2 Wellahi as a Confirmation Marker**

In this extract, the speaker talking about her lecturer how he wants to take permission from the students to leave the class even though the does not want to miss the class as he loves to tach the lecture so much. So the lecture use *wellahi* to confirm and make the students sure that he wants to teach the lesson but he had to leave as it was urgent. So, the function of *wellahi* here is probably to signal confirmation.

**Extract (10)**

1. 5S: Carêk mamostayek gûti dawai ecazey krid  
Once a teacher said he asked for permission
2. Darskay bdayne nak bman date  
In order not to take the lesson
3. Darsêkay badaynê û brûa  
He wanted to not take the lesson then he can go
4. *Yefnî* awiş gûti  
So, he said
5. **Wellahi** dersekem le hem ştek zytir xoştr dawê  
Indeed I love the lesson more than everything else
6. La hamû ştek balamewe gringtre.  
It (the lecture) is the most important thing to me

Thus, as Table 2 below illustrates, the study data in this section has demonstrated that both *wellah* and *wellahi* signal five pragmatic functions three textual (elaboration, topic shift, and filler) and two interpersonal functions (responding [politeness marker] and confirmation marker).

**Table 2 the functions signalled by *wellah* and *wellahi* in Kurdish**

Functions	<i>Wellah</i>	<i>Wellahi</i>
Textual	Elaboration	Elaboration
	Shifting	Shifting
	Filler	Filler
Interpersonal	Responding and politeness marker	Responding and politeness marker
	Confirmation	Confirmation

### 5. Grammaticalisation in the current study

As mentioned in the Introduction, while the data presented here are synchronic in nature, I will approach the topic from the perspective of grammaticalisation. I will follow Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca's model evolution of grammar (1994) to account for the loss of the morpheme *-i-* in *wellahi* as phonetic reduction. In addition, I will show that the interchangeability of the DMs *wellah* and *wellahi* can be understood as the result of layering, that is, more than one grammatical construction being used to signal the same or similar functions.

I propose that *wellahi* has undergone a process of phonetic reduction and lost the genitive case of *-i-* as borrowed into Kurdish. The form of *wellahi* has undergone a phonetic reduction and a morpheme *-i-* has been reduced from the word *wellahi* to become *wellah*. Consequently, similar to the case of *sawfa* that shown by Alshaboul et al. (2010, p.103), *wellah* has developed from the word *wellahi*. Thus, *wellah* appear to have originally developed from *wellahi*.

Thus, after the DMs undergo the reductive process, as discussed in Section 4 above, the results show that speakers use both *wellah* and *wellahi* both with and without *-i-* interchangeably to signal the functions of elaboration, shifting, fillers, responding and confirmation.

As demonstrated earlier in Section 4, the results show that speakers use *wellah* and *wellahi* interchangeably to signal all the textual and interpersonal functions. Thus, speakers have two options. Second, as the results demonstrated earlier in Sections 4.1 and 4.2 indicate the DM *wellah* is interchangeable with *wellahi* to signal elaboration, shifting, fillers, responding and confirmation. Thus, it seems that speakers have used two different forms, *wellah* and *wellahi* to signal these five functions. That is, there are two layers for the speakers to signal the five functions mentioned above. Based on Hopper's (1991) and Bybee et al.'s (1994, p.21) a principle of grammaticalisation, this situation meets the definition of layering in grammaticalisation: speakers overlapped between the forms to signal the same function.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has explored the functions of the discourse markers *wellah* and *wellahi* using spoken data from 24 face-to-face interviews with Kurdish speakers. Using an empirical approach and evidence from the data, the study has demonstrated the various ways in which those Kurdish speakers use *wellah* and *wellahi*. A summary of these functions is given in Table 2, grouped by type. The findings at textual level, *wellah* and *wellahi* signal that there will be an addition of information to the point being made by a further explanation and by indicating that they want to continue speaking (filling a gap). In addition, the findings also show that at the interpersonal level, speakers use *wellah* and *wellahi* to organize their talk, by responding politely or by giving confirmation to what they say before. Moreover, to presenting the functions of *wellah* and *wellahi*, the study has also demonstrated how *wellah* and *wellahi* used interchangeably through two principles of grammaticalisation: phonetic reduction and layering. Two different principles of grammaticalisation: phonetic reduction and layering are analysed. The study explained how *wellahi* might have undergone a phonetic reduction process and, as a consequence, lost the morpheme-i, resulting in the shorter forms of *wellah*. Moreover, the findings suggest that interchangeability between *wellah* and *wellahi* involves the principle of layering in grammaticalisation.

The findings for Kurdish speakers are generally similar to those observed across the breadth of previous studies of Arabic speakers. However, the use of *wellahi* is similar but *wellah* is not identical cross-linguistically. Most previous studies refer that *wellah* is not a DM. For example, Al-Khawaldeh (2018) and Mughazy (2021) mention that *wellah* is not a DM. However, Rieschild (2011) states that *wellah* is DM.

Interestingly, the functions of *wellahi*, identified previously by Al-Khawaldeh (2018) and Mughazy (2021) for Arabic speakers were also present in my Kurdish data but not described in these terms in the studies of Arabic speakers. This finding suggests that when *wellahi* is borrowed (into Kurdish), it may undergo the grammaticalisation process to become *wellah*.

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