

*The Inferential Function of 'I mean' and its  
Arabic Equivalents in Literary Discourse  
with Reference to Translation  
Prof.Dr. Anis Behnam Naoum\**

تأريخ القبول: ٢٠١١/٥/٢٩

تأريخ التقديم: ٢٠١١/٢/٨

### 1. Introduction

Building on the fact that 'I mean' is one of the basic features of an interactive spontaneous speech, it is hypothesized that the function and meaning of 'I mean' should be interpreted in light of pragmatic (and contextual) aspects of the interaction. However, failure to communicate/translate 'I mean' is likely to take place when it introduces an utterance that does not actually refer backwards to something (and) not shared by the participants in the interaction. Consequently, lack of this pragmatic competence may result in communicative / translation failure. It is also hypothesized that intimacy of the participants in an interaction and its degree of formality determines the use and meaning of 'I mean'. Moreover, due to the fact that our student-translators have no actual exposure to the English language use, they are likely to have inappropriate use of discourse markers in general and 'I mean' in particular. Again failure to translate them into Arabic is most likely.

To investigate the inferential role of 'I mean' in literary discourse and how it is realized in the translation process, the functional and inferential meanings (Section 3 and 4) are surveyed and supported by English examples from Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1908) and Richard Price's *Samaritan* (2004); and Arabic examples from the novelists:

---

\* Dept. of Translation / College of Arts / University of Mosul

Abdul-Quddus' *La Tutfi'iShams* (1960), Jabra's *As-Safina* (1989), Mahfuz's *Qasru-Shawq* ( 1957 ) ,and Al-Mani's *Tamaasul-Mudun* (1979); and then eight English excerpts of monologue and dialogue-type from Price's *Samaritan* (2004) have been carefully selected and analyzed by the researcher, and instances of 'I mean' in each extract has been rendered into Arabic according to a well-specified set of criteria including: what is semantically inherited in the meaning of 'I mean'; what is contextually induced; and what is stylistically appropriate to the situation.

## **2. Discourse Markers (DMs)**

The discourse markers (DMs) function, as Waltereit (2006: 64) states, "lies outside the ideational realm of language; and they belong to both textual and interpersonal language functions". Consequently, the interpretation of what follows DMs depends on the shared knowledge the participants have about a previous topic in the interaction. In other words, DMs link ideas (for example, by paraphrasing) and never create or elaborate on them (cf. Schourup, 1985: 14). A DM like 'I mean', for instance, "focuses on the speakers paraphrases of the meanings (whether referential or speaker meaning) of propositions" (Schiffrin, 1987: 316-17). That is, the speaker paraphrases the first proposition by means of 'I mean' to present another proposition of the same content of the first.

### **2.1 General view of DMs**

Van Dijk (1977: 209 and 213) differentiates between semantic connectives and pragmatic connectives. The former introduce inferences (hence their basic function is inferential), the latter do not. That is, pragmatic connectives are used to indicate "propositional attitude and unstated intention" rather than indicating relations between facts presented by utterances. Similarly, Levinson (1983:87) states that connectives have certain pragmatic functions in discourse: they resist any semantic treatment; they are non-truth conditional devices.

Similarly, Redeker (1990, cited in Lee and Hsieh 2004:183) divides DMs into two categories: those that mark ideational structure, such as connectives and temporal adverbials (e.g. and, meanwhile, or now) and those which mark pragmatic structure (e.g. oh, alright or well). Since DMs are not part of the core syntactic structure of utterances in which they occur, their removal will not affect the truth value of the utterances which precede or follow them, but the interactional meaning (i.e. the pragmaticity of the interaction (cf. Travis,2006:220).

Fraser (1987:186) refers to 'I mean' to which the current study is narrowed down (and other terms and expressions) as discourse markers or particles "that are one type of commentary pragmatic formatives". These are "expressions which serve to signal a comment by the speaker about the primary act. That is, they do not contribute to the propositional content of the utterance but they may "signal that the speaker believes the primary message of the utterance to be unexpected by the hearer". Therefore, their "sole function is to signal more or less specifically the speaker's communicative intentions" (ibid: 179).

'I mean', being without propositional content, can be also considered a commentary pragmatic marker, to use Fraser's (1990:386) term: it signals how the intended message (and its force) that follows it is a related conclusion which follows from the prior discourse (Fraser, 1996:188). Eventually, it constrains the interpretations of the proposition it comments on without contributing to its content or elaborating on it.

To be noted, An extra basic function of DMs, as Fraser (1988, cited in Stenstrom 1998:133) states, is to display how the text is put together rather than its content, i.e. a meta-textual function.

## **2.2 The DM: 'I mean'**

In this study, the English 'I mean' and its Arabic equivalents are considered "words or phrases whose function is to show some logical relationship between two or more basic sentences..." (Cela-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1983:323). These logical connectors, as Halliday

(1976: 244) points out, “have primarily a semantic, cohesive function, which holds within or between surface structure sentences”. Moreover, they are regarded as interactional devices (Stubbs,1983) which have a procedural pragmatic function or meaning in the process of interpretation; and they are always associated with the discourse flow, speaker's attitude, and coherence relations of the communicative situation including participants, roles, and settings ( cf. Traugott, 1995; Risselada and Spooren, 1998:132; Lee and Hsieh, 2004:179).

‘I mean’, according to the functional classification of logical connectors, can be said to express:

- (I) the function of clarification in the text by means of rephrasing the preceding utterance(s);
- (II) the function of identifying an item more precisely and accurately to an extent that no further interpretations are acceptable ;
- (III) the function of summing something up or saying it briefly.

In such cases, ' I mean' is similar to words or expressions like: ‘that is (to say)’, ‘namely’, ‘that means’, ‘(to) put (it) another way’; ‘in a word’, ‘in other words’, ‘briefly’, etc (cf. Geddie 1971:711; Hornby 1998:1471). However, though these items seem to be similar, they are not completely synonymous\_ (I) and (II) above show the additive quality of the connectors, whereas (III) has the sequential role to fulfill. The three roles mentioned above are given enough attention and space in this paper (section3). However, the main concern of this paper is to investigate the inferential role ' I mean' and its Arabic equivalents have in discourse and how they are realized in a translation task. This role, taking into account the context and / or background assumptions, combines both processes of implication (in English and Arabic equally), i.e. the speaker’s intended implicatures and the hearer’s interpretations ( section 4).

### **3. The Functional Meaning of ' I mean'\***

DMs (including 'I mean'), as Travis (2006:3) points out, are multifunctional. For instance, ‘I mean’ can be used to mitigate,

highlight, and reformulate an utterance as in the following English and Arabic excerpts, respectively:

**(1.a)**

*Mr. Rochester continued, hardly and recklessly: "Bigamy is an ugly word! – I mean, however, to be a bigamist: but fate has out-manuevered me... (Jane Eyre)*

**(1.b)**

ونظرت فيفي إليها وقالت وهي تحاول أن تحتفظ بمظهر السخط فوق وجهها:  
-ايه لزوم العياط دلوقت..يعني هو العياط حايرجع ليلى..

(Abdul-Quddus: 441)

**Fifi looked at her while trying to keep a resentful appearance and said:**

**- What is your crying for now... I mean, will it make Layla here again... \*\***

In both examples the speakers try, by means of the DM 'I mean' to mitigate the negative impact of being bigamist and

its serious consequences on the stability and secrecy of the family (1.a), and the psychological impact of death on the speaker who is trying to pacify her friend (1.b). In both cases, mitigation is semantically inherited in the meaning of 'I mean'. That is, it is part and parcel of the main proposition of the preceding utterance.

---

\* See Tanaka (1997) who neatly subdivides the meaning of the pragmatic particle

"In Other Words" into three functional meanings: prototypical, derivational and conceptual.

\*\*All the renderings are the researcher's.

**(2.a)**

*...Morton, when I came to it two years ago, had no school... I established one for boys: I mean now to open a second school for girls... (Jane Eyre: 356)*

(2.b)

أنت لك الحق يا نبيله.. الواحد لما بيقرقز اللب في الشارع بيبقى شكله وحش!  
قالت وهي تضع حبة أخرى بين شفيتها:  
- يعني انا دلوقت شكلي وحش.

(Abdul-Quddus: 460)

-You've the right, Nabila.. When one eats nuts in the street, one seems ugly

Indeed!

While taking another nut into her mouth, Nabila replied:

- I mean, I seem ugly now...

In (2.a), the speaker refers to the importance of having a second school in the town, and highlights by using 'I mean' the progress so far achieved at the educational level. Similarly, in the Arabic extract (2.b) the hearer highlights the speaker's utterance 'eating nuts in the street' which is socially unacceptable by introducing her utterance 'I seem ugly now' with 'I mean'. Again in both cases, the function of highlighting is semantically inherited in the meaning and use of 'I mean'.

(3.a)

- "You see now, my queenly Blanche," began Lady Ingram, "she encroaches. Be advised, my angel girl – and" –

- "Show her into the library, of course, "cut in the "angel girl"."It is not my mission to listen to her before the vulgar herd either: **I mean** to have her all to myself. Is there a fire in the library?" (Jane Eyre: 189)

(3.b)

...أولاد الفقرا يانبيله مش زينة الحياة الدنيا.. ما هماش بالنسبة لابائهم وامهاتهم زينه.. دول مشاريع منتجه.. يعني بدل ما يزرع الفلاح قيراط ارض، يقوم يخلف عيل.. القيراط بيجيب جنيه ولا اتنين في الشهر. والعيل لمن بيشتغل بيجيب اكثر من اتنين جنيه.  
(Abdul-Quddus: 461)

The poor's children, Nabila, are not the ornaments of this life to their parents. These are production projects... **That is**, the farmer, instead of cultivating a span of ground, he begets a child... A span of ground may get one or two pounds, whereas a child, when starts working, gets more.

In (3.a), the speaker (Lady Ingram) reformulates what she has already stated in details in a few indicative words introduced by 'I

mean'. The few words that follow 'I mean' are but the gist of what the speaker tried in her first utterance to explicate. In (3.b), the speaker did the opposite; she elaborated on what she has already mentioned concisely, reformulating her previous utterance, supporting it by means of an example, and drawing a comparison between having a number of children and cultivating the land. Therefore, "in order to recognize whether a marker is being used with the same meaning in different contexts we need to be able to distinguish between what is inherent in the meaning of the marker and what is contextually induced, and thereby identify the semantic core of the marker".

'I mean' may also be used for face-saving. In this regard, Lee and Hsieh (2004:189) state that "face-saving may be achieved by positive politeness (i.e. to express shared understanding) or negative politeness (i.e. to show speaker imprecision), allowing addressees more room to express their opinions as in the following English and Arabic examples:

**(4.a)**

- "... and now what did you learn at Lowood? Can you play?
- "A little".
- "Of course: that is the established answer. Go into the library – **I mean**, if you please. – (Excuse my tone of command; I am used to say 'do this', and it is done: I cannot alter my customary habits for one new inmate.) – Go then into the library; take a candle with you; leave the door open; sit down to the piano; and play a tune." (Jane Eyre: 119)

**(4.b)**

- أمرك منته
  - ماذا تعني ؟
  - اعني، عليك أن تأكل هواء وتسكت.
- (Jabra: 84)

- It is all over with you.
- What do you mean?
- **I mean**, you've to gulp down air and keep silent.

Swan (1997, cited in Imo 2005:4) points out that 'I mean' is used informally as a DM to introduce or mark **explanations** (or justifications of something one has just said), **corrections** (or modification of what the speaker had mentioned in a prior discourse), or **additional details** as in the following English and Arabic excerpts, respectively:

**(5 a)**

... For when I say that I am of this kind, I do not mean that I have this force to influence, and his spell to attract: **I mean** only that I have certain tastes and feelings in common with him... (Jane Eyre: 171)

**(5.b)**

فقلت وأنا اشتهيك نرجسيا ايضا، ولكن كمرآة لك اعني، يلذ لي أن اعكس شهوتك، فاشتهيك، أو اشتهيك فاعكس لك الشهوة التي تترقرق على جسدي.

(Jabra: 32)

I said I have lust for you; I'm a narcissist but as a mirror reflecting you. **I mean**, I desire to reflect your lust in order to lust after you, or to reflect the lust which brims over your body.

The speaker in (5.a) tries to further justify his negative attitude towards the person he is addressing by introducing his second utterance by 'I mean'. In (5.b), on the other hand, the speaker attempts to explicate his emotional attitude that he philosophically stated in the first utterance: "I said I have lust for you; I'm a narcissist but as a mirror reflecting you".

**(6.a)**

- "I was the late Mr. Rochester's butler," he added.

*The late! I seemed to have received with full force, the blow I had been trying to evade.*

- "The late!" I gasped. "Is he dead?"

- "**I mean** the present gentleman, Mr. Edward's father,"  
he explained.

*I breathed again: my blood resumed its flow...*

(Jane Eyre: 429)



## (6.b)

- يعني تفكر أسيب المشروع ده؟

...  
 - مش قصدي.. إنما يعني لازمته إيه تشتغل سواق، تقدر تلم شويه  
 سواقين من اللي مالاقيين شغل، وتفتح مكتب صغير يتلقى الطلبات..  
 - وقال ممدوح وقد بدا أمسه يخيب في مشروع:  
 يعني أبقى مخدم سواقين..  
 (Abdul-Quddus: 253)

**Do you think I'm going to give up this project?**

- ...

- I don't mean it...But what makes you work as a chauffeur..You can contract with some unemployed chauffeurs and manage a small office for receiving demands...

- Realizing that his project will not meet his uncle's support, Mamdooh Said: **You mean**, I'll become a contractor..

The hearer in (6.a) seems to have received a shock due to the speaker's utterance "I was the late Mr. Rochester's butler". Noticing the severe impact of his words on the hearer, the speaker modified his first utterance by marking it with 'I mean', and hence managed to pacify the harm his first utterance did to the hearer. In (6.b), the speaker Mamdooh, inferred from his uncle's utterance that he is not willing to lend him money and start his new project. Therefore, he introduced his reply by 'I mean' to show his resentment and to let his uncle know that he is no longer a kid to be convinced by solutions that are not his.

## (7.a)

"Go to your room, and put on your bonnet, He replied." **I mean** you to accompany me to Milleote this morning; and while you prepare for the drive, I will enlighten the old lady's understanding. (Jane Eyre: 262)

## (7.b)

أتذكر ذلك النداء الذي نزل على غير انتظار؟ اعني أتذكر النعمة الطبيعية التي تجسمها؟.. لم يكن قولاً؛ ولكن نغماً وسحراً استقر في الأعماق (Mahfuz: 22)

Do you remember that unexpected call? **I mean**, do you remember that neutral tone it embodies? It wasn't a mere saying, but a melody, a charm that anchored deeply.

The speakers in both extracts above add further details to their first utterance. In (7.a) “Go to your room, and put on your bonnet” does not seem to have enough force to make the hearer adequately interpret it and react accordingly. Therefore the speaker, relying probably on certain contextual effects, states his first utterance in other words with some details and marks it with ‘I mean’. Similarly, the speaker in (7.b) reminds the hearer of the past sweet event that both share. However, the speaker tries to remind the hearer about certain details and implications of that event by introducing his second utterance with ‘I mean’.

The common ground for all the functions mentioned above is to summarize, to propose or to provide other words for what have been said; that is, to reduce an argument to its simplest terms, making points very clear. However, summarization of the content of the first utterance does not always mean to reduce an argument to its simplest terms. For instance, excerpts (8.a and b) below, though provide ‘other words’ for the first utterance, they bear deep philosophical insights which have the function of reinforcing or furthering the meaning of the first utterance.

**(8.a)**

- *"I was going to say, impassioned: but perhaps you would have misunderstood the word, and been displeased. I mean that human affections and sympathies have a most powerful hold on you..." (Jane Eyre: 257)*

**(8.b)**

ولكن المسألة ليست بهذه البساطة. لقد أصبحت المسألة معي قضية حياتية، ضرورة من ضرورات البقاء. اعني، بعد أن يزعم المرء ما شاء له الزعم، يبقى الوهم أمرا لا محيد له عنه. (Jabra: 80)

This issue is not so simple; it is a matter of life, a necessity for survival. **In other words**, having claimed what someone wanted to claim, the illusion remains an inevitable matter.

The summarized meaning in such cases denotes as well the extra-ability of the hearer (or the second speaker) of decoding the previous utterance(s) which encodes something indirectly or hinting at something, as in (9.a & b) and (10.a & b), respectively:

## (9.a)

- "The best things the world has!" I interrupted.
- "No, Jane, no: this world is not the scene of fruition: do not attempt to make it so: nor of rest: do not turn slothful."
- "**I mean**, on the contrary, to be busy".
- "Jane, I excuse you for the present..."

(Jane Eyre: 393)

## (9.b)

- والله انا طول عمري غاوي ميكانيكا... ولي واحد صاحبي اسمه الاسطى عفيفي عنده ورشه - صغيره، وبيكسب منها خمسين جنيه في الشهر.. اتفقت معاه اني اشاركه، وتكبر الورشه، ونشتري مخارط والات.. ودرست المشروع كويس..
- ابنتسم الخال ابنتسامة ساخرة وقال:
- **يعني** المساله مساله فلوس.. يعني لو اديتك ميت جنيه في الشهر، تعقل، وتبطل جنان، وتلتقت لدروسك..

(Abdul-Quddus: 626)

I'm, indeed fond of mechanics.. A friend of mine, Mr. Afifi, has a small workshop. He gets 50 pounds monthly... We've agreed to be partners, to enlarge the workshop, to buy lathes and equipment... I've studied the project very well..

His uncle smiled ironically and said: "**That means**, it is a matter of money ... **I mean**, if I give you 100 pounds per month, will you be more reasonable, give up foolery and mind your study?"

## (10.a)

- "Well, Sir?"
- "When you are inquisitive, Jane, you are always making me smile..."
- "**I mean** – what next? How did you proceed? What came of such an event?"

(Jane Eyre: 310)

## (10.b)

- وقالت فيفي والسخط بين شفتيها: إنما أمين لسه ما بقاش واحد من العيله.. ومش ضروري تلموا كل من هب ودب علشان يستقبل جنباه..
- وقالت ليلي: **يعني خطيبي يبقى كل من هب ودب..**

(Abdul-Quddus: 461)

Fifi said in resentment: He hasn't become one of the family yet.. It is not justifiable to let this or that receive his Excellency...

Layla replied: **You mean**, my fiancé is 'Tom, Dick and Jerry'..

The role of 'I mean' in (9.a & b) and (10.a & b) above is to show that the hearers agree with what the speakers have said, but that their agreement is only partial and sarcastic about the speakers' attitude to the message content.

Though the use of 'I mean' is usually to give an easier alternative equivalent of the word or expression of the first speaker's utterance, the derived meaning is frequently attained through analysis. This conforms with Blakemore's theory of 'higher-level-explicature'(1996; cited in Tanaka,1997:368-372) which assumes that the meaning of an item does not contribute to the truth-conditions but to the propositional (or conceptual) representation of an utterance headed by a DM. Implicatures, on the other hand, are procedural and non-truth-conditional; that is, they encode "procedures or constraints on interpretation" (ibid:370). 'I mean', then, according to Blakemore's theory and Tanaka's comments, is a 'reformulation marker'; that is, it expresses "the idea that the speaker summarizes/reformulates what the other has said and believes the summarization to be true" (ibid.) as in (3.a and b) above and the following examples stated in (11.a and b) below:

(11.a)

A: We will have to let her go.

B: In other words/in short/ [**you mean**] , she's fired  
(Tanaka, 1997:370)

(11.b)

وقال خاله في صوت وقور هادئ  
- اختك خرجت من الصبح ولسه مارجعتش.. خرجت من غير ماتقول لحد، وماحدثش عارف  
هي راحت فين...  
- يعني ايه؟  
وقال الخال وهو يتأفف من غباء ابن اخته: يعني هربت.

(ibid: 450)

-“Your sister went out in the morning and she hasn’t come back yet; she went outside without telling anybody; no one knows where she is”. His uncle said calmly.

- What does that mean?

Getting bored of his nephew's foolishness, the uncle said:

- **“That is to say, she’s escaped”**.

The functions of 'I mean' illustrated so far in this section are either cited from monologue-type-utterances where no implicatures are drawn from the utterance that precedes it or from dialogue-type-utterances where more than one person is involved. Tanaka (1997:368) states that in both cases it is appropriate to say that the speaker who uses such a DM summarizes the previous utterance or utters the implicature the other person wanted to suggest. However, the inferential use of this DM, though it may summarize the previous utterance, it may not utter the implicature the other person intended to convey or suggest. Moreover, the inferential function, unlike functional meanings can be deduced only from a dialogue-type of utterances.

#### 4. The Inferential Function of 'I mean'

Quirk et al. (1985: 634) point out that the **“inferential conjuncts indicate a conclusion based on logic and supposition”**. That is, the hearer, being not sure of the speaker’s intended meaning, tries to explain (and then concludes) that meaning in other words depending on the context and the shared (or probably non-shared) background assumptions as in (12.a & b) below:

(12.a)

**“... Jesse was nowhere around, but it was his people. He became a priority, and within a year he was standin’ before His Honor receivin’ his twenty-eight years, no parole.”**

**“Twenty-eight years,” Neely repeated.**

**“Yep. I was in the courtroom, and I actually felt sorry for the scumbag. I mean, here’s a guy who had the tools to play in the NFL. Size, speed, mean as hell, plus Rake had drilled him from the time he was fourteen...” (Grisham: 116-117)**

(12.b)

- انا عارفه من زمان يا فتحي.. وكنت ساكته.. واحب اقولك مابدورش وراك

...

وقاوم فتحي ضعفه امام زوجته، وقال وهو يحاول ان يبدو ساخرا:

- كويس.. يعني أنت مايهمكيش أني امشي مع واحده تانيه، كل اللي يهملك انك ما تعرفيش..

(Abdul-Quddus: 313)

**-I have realized this fact since long ago, Fathi; but I kept silent..  
I'd like to tell you that I don't interfere in your own affairs...**

Fathi tried to overcome his weakness in front of his wife, and said while trying to be humorous:

-Well...**As if you're saying** you don't mind whether I accompany another female; all that you're interested in is that you don't want to know..

In (12.b), Awatif (Fathi's wife) knows that her husband betrays (or about to betray) her with another woman called Layla depending on several evidences: receiving calls from ladies, discovering ladies hair on his jacket shoulders, rouge on his shirts, women perfumes, etc. She only wants her husband not be a reason behind her misery! However Fathi, building on the context and shared background assumptions, intentionally directs the conversation to satisfy his ends, though this apparently is an instance of communication failure. Awatif's intention is to shock him not to do things behind her back and to stop betraying her. His answer introduced by 'I mean' is a comment of an inferential nature that confirms the opposite and at the same time facilitates the coherence of the conversation.

#### 4.1 The Implicature-Interpretation Process

**The inferential role of 'I mean', as a whole, depends on the implicature-interpretation process. This process, to be noted, does not necessarily (as we have mentioned above) depend on the shared assumptions between the speaker and the hearer. Most frequently, the use of 'I mean' is an indicator that the hearer, commenting on the speaker's utterance, does not commit him/herself to what the speaker really intends to convey. Rather, he/she "declares a conclusion" (Tanaka, 1997: 373). This conclusion is mainly drawn to satisfy a need, or an interest on the part of the hearer. In excerpt**

(13.b), for instance, the hearer presents her utterance in other words implying the speaker's utterance into her knowledge:

(13.a)

Paul pointed down to the left. "Sure. The bank owns a whole block of seats."

"You need a whole block with your family."

"Mona is very fertile."

"Evidently. How does she look?"

"She looks pregnant."

"I mean, you know, is she in shape?"

"Other words, is she fat?"

"That's it." (Grisham: 12)

(13.b)

وقالت ليلي وهي تحبس دموعها تحت جفنيها:  
- يعني مش ناوي تديني الدرس.. يعني أنا ما بقتش نافعه؟  
(Abdul-  
Quddus: 292)

Layla said while trying to hide her tears in her eye-lids:

- **Why don't you say it frankly that** you're not intending to give me lectures anymore..., I've become useless. **Haven't I?**

This, in fact, differs from the 'logical inference' where shared assumptions have no place, or play no actual role in the process of interpretation. Moreover, the context, the knowledge of the world, the psychological impact, etc. may have different consequences on the inferential process on the part of the hearer. The hearer, for instance, may infer and utter something (due to the factors mentioned above) that makes the shared situations between the speaker and the hearer critical as in (14. A & b) below, or tones down the utterance of the speaker as in (1.a & b) mentioned above:

(14.a)

Neely looked around quickly then returned to his breakfast.

"I've never understood it," he said.

"These are nice folks – mechanics, truck drivers... solid small-town citizens, but not exactly earth shakers. I mean, nobody here is making a million bucks. But they're entitled to a state championship every year, right?"

**“Right.”**

**“I don’t get it.”**

**“Bragging rights, what else can they brag about?”**

**“No wonder they worship Rake. He put the town on the map.”**

**(Grisham: 48-40)**

**(14.b)**

بالمناسبة، أما زلت تشرب في محله ومع من؟ اعني هل وجدت أحدا غيري يحتمل سو -  
داويته \_\_\_\_\_؟

**(Al-Mani’: 126)**

- **By the way, are you still his customer; whom do you drink with? For God’s sake, have you found anyone (other than me) to tolerate your melancholic behavior?**

#### 4.2 'I mean' and the Implicature Deduction Process

Similar to other DMs like ‘In other words’, ‘I mean’ “is a device that identifies the speaker’s weak, indeterminate, ambiguous or not explicitly given implicature and indicates an explicit implicature in the same cognitive environment both speaker and hearer share”(Tanaka, 1997: 376). In (13.b), for instance, the hearer has the implicated conclusion even before hearing the speaker’s hesitant words. But how the hearer came to such conclusion (even without any implicated premises). What happens in (13.b) is this: the speaker, for certain hidden personal, social, etc. reasons, utters his words concealing some reality; however, the hearer reacts unexpectedly to the speaker’s utterance, i.e. inferring the real intention of the speaker. In fact, what made the hearer correctly infer the speaker’s intention was neither the context nor the psychological factors interfering in the conversation (though these may have a certain influence sometimes); it was the deductive process unconsciously implemented that made the hearer predict the real intention of the speaker. This process surely depends on the hearer’s own cognitive environment shared with that of the speaker. The lack of such shared cognitive environment would undoubtedly lead the hearer to ask directly the speaker to reveal his real intention as in (15.a & b):



(15.a)

“You went straight from your house to County and back. No detours, no doglegs?”

“What, you mean like to Little Venice?”

Freddy flinched as soon as he’d said it; too clever by half.

“Why would Little Venice come into this?” she asked, seeing the self-disgust in Freddy’s face. (Price; 293)

(15.b)

قالت وقد هدأت:  
 قصدك ايه..مش فاهمه..  
 قال وهو ينظر إلى بوز حدانه:  
 - قصدي أنا لسه عندي أمل.. لسه قدامنا محاولات وتجارب كتير  
 (ibid: 117)

When she calmed down, she said: what do you mean.. I couldn’t get you..

He replied while looking at his boot:

- I mean, I still have hope.. We still have a lot to do.

Thus, one can claim that whenever there is the possibility of inferencing by the hearer or deducing implicatures from the speaker’s utterance on the basis of certain variables, the inferential process works smoothly.

## 5. Data Analysis

### Extract 1.

“Dad?” Ruby said in a soft high voice. “When you were a child, did Grandma and Grandpa like living here?”

“When I was a child?” Ray touched by her formality. “I guess. **I mean**, here was here, you know what I’m saying? People lived where they lived. At least, back then they did.”

In extract 1, ‘I mean’ is used to reinforce (and argue for) the meaning/idea already held by the speaker (Ray). The preceding ‘I guess’, which means ‘I suppose it to be true’ or ‘I consider it likely’, is an attempt by Ray to reinforce his daughter’s (Ruby) belief that her grandma and grandpa liked living here not by means of yes/no answer but by logic and supposition.

This indirect answer is an instance of the inferential function of the pragmatic particle 'I mean' which makes Ruby infer from her father's uncertain utterances that follow 'I mean' the answer to her question. The key utterance which enables Ruby to infer what her father intended is the last one 'At least, back then they did' which implies that her grand parents liked living there. Therefore, the best Arabic equivalent for 'I mean' (together with the preceding 'I guess') in this situation is:

- على أغلب الظن. أقصد (Lit. **My intention is...**) ، إن المكان هو هو لم يتغير...  
أتعلمين ما يعنيه ذلك؟ أينما يعيش المرء فإنه في النهاية يعود إلى أول منزل ألفه.

### Extract 2.

*"What happened to Tweetie?"*

*"I'm not sure. Something not good, I think...And, I remember, that day, being on the basketball courts, all of a sudden everybody's running to the fence and there's Tweetie between these two cops..., a whole bunch of kids kind of following them, making jokes and whatever. **I mean**, I hate to say this, Ruby, but kids can be real shits."*

*"Did you make any jokes?"*

*"I don't remember. I hope not"*.

In extract 2, no shared background assumptions seem to exist between the interlocutors. Ruby asks Ray about Tweetie. The use of 'I mean' by Ray is an indication that he wants ruby to infer that Tweetie was ridiculed by the kids. The utterance that follow 'I mean' enables the hearer conclude something on Tweetie which might satisfy her need and/or interest.

What follows 'I mean' also tries to mitigate the effect of Tweetie's harsh experience with the cops and kids; this can be easily inferred from the utterance 'I hate to say this, Ruby, but kids can be real shits'.

The most appropriate rendering for 'I mean' in this extract is:

حقا (Lit. **Indeed**) يحزنني أن أقول ذلك يا روبي، إلا أن الأطفال قد يكونون مقرفين للغاية.

### Extract 3.

*"No I hear you," Nerese said softly, thinking, Not my table.*

*"**I mean**, I feel like I owe this guy for what he did for the kids here, you know?"*

*"You think it was any of them?"*

*His students? Nah. I mean who the hell knows these days, but no. Not really. Anyways, I'm just wondering if I could impose on you, you know, see if you could look into it, light a fire under somebody's ass, because...*

*"I'll look into it," Nerese said, just to say something, as she cautiously rose from her seat.*

In this extract two instances of 'I mean' are used. The speaker (Egan) in the first instance shows his sympathy towards the victim Ray Mitchell and recalls certain features that characterize him, especially the good things he did to the kids. "I feel like I owe this guy ..." introduced by 'I mean' shows that the interlocutors share the same cognitive background. This understanding is supported by another pragmatic particle 'you know' used here to invite the hearer to react positively and infer what the speaker wants him to infer. However, the hearer reacts unexpectedly and inferred something beyond the speaker's intention "you think it was any of them?"

The second instance identifies Egan's utterance as explicit implicature "His students?" Egan introduces his indeterminate implicature by negation "Nah" and a question "Who the hell knows..." followed by two negative particles "Noh" and "not". Egan's words that follow 'I mean' can be considered also as reformulation/correction function of 'I mean', i.e. its pragmatic function.

The most adequate translation of the first instance of 'I mean' could be:

إنني مدين لهذا الرجل لما قدمه لهؤلاء الصبية هنا. (Lit. I want to say... أود أن أقول

The second instance, on the other hand, could be translated into:

لا، لم أقصد ذلك، لا أحد يدري ما يجري هذه الأيام.. إن الذي أفكر به و أقصده هو... (Lit

**What I'm thinking of and mean it is...)**

since it better reflects the evident hesitation which dominates Egan's utterances

#### **Extract 4.**

*"You don't want to get deeper into TV work yourself?"*

*"As what, a second receptionist?" Danielle said with a twist of the lips.*

*"Well, actually what I do is more interesting than it sounds. Like, three days after I got hired, OK? My boss Krauss, he buzzes me, says to come into his office, bring a notepad... Krauss says, 'would you fuck him?'*

*lowering her voice on the f-word. "And I'm, in my mind, I'm, 'How dare you'. **I mean** I was shaking I was so insulted, but scared too, because I needed that job. But all I say is, 'I don't know. Would you?'*

*"And at first he's like, his face is, 'Who the hell are you to..." But the other guy starts laughing like, 'Hey, good one Hal,' and I guess that broke the tension. He never actually apologized to me but he's been kind of, I don't know, tasteful about tings ever since."*

*"Tasteful."*

*"**I mean** he still calls me in every time he's auditioning actors, you know, 'Take notes', but after they leave, all he says to me is, 'So what do you think?'" and all I give him is thumbs up, thumbs down...*

*"Jesus, Krauss has this wife? Two weeks into the job she comes in, slips me a hundred-dollar bill and her cell phone number, says to me, 'Any woman goes in that office, the door's closed more than fifteen minutes, you call me.'*

*"I'll take the money, but screw you, bitch, I'm not playing pussy police for her and I know he's layin' carpet with two of the office staff plus about every third or four actress goes in for a part, but she's not getting shit out of me. **I mean** the presumptuousness of asking me to do that."*

*"He ever put the moves on you"*

*"Me? I don't know, kind of. **I mean**, right from the jump I can tell he is sizing me up, sees the tattoo, figures anything goes, right? Like, day two he comes out of his office, sits on my desk, says, 'Hey, good news. I just bought the film rights to five of the Ten Commandments...' You know, it was a joke, but I believed him..."*

In this interaction, Ray asks indirectly Danielle not to get deeper into TV works: knowing his intention, Danielle started telling him what bitter things she experienced with her boss Krauss who once asked her to fuck his friend, the second producer. In order to save her face she resorted to the use of 'I mean' followed by a hesitant speech to explicate how much she was insulted, and at the same time to justify being passive in that she needed a job. Therefore, the function of the first instance of 'I mean' in this extract is to ease tension through adding further information that explicate the negative feelings towards what happened to her. **أتعلم** (Lit. You know) could therefore be a better equivalent which suits the situation. However, when she elaborated her speech and said that her boss was a kind of "tasteful" about things, Ray

got astonished (i.e. How come that he first insulted her and then concluded that he was tasteful). Danielle realizing the confusion she caused to Ray, she furthered the meaning she intended by further elaborations introduced by 'I mean'. This second instance of 'I mean' differs from the first one in that the latter has an inferential role rather than a functional role of whatever kind. Her utterance introduced by 'I mean' is inferred by Ray's comment "tasteful" which reflects surprise.

The best equivalent of 'I mean' and what follows it is therefore to show that her boss was "tasteful" only in that he used to call her in every time he used to audition actors. Therefore, ... إنه ذواق بمعنى أنه... (Lit. **He is tasteful, in the sense that...**) which restricts being 'tasteful' only in one instance of positive behavior.

Similarly, the third instance of 'I mean' is a kind of face saving and summarizing since no further meaning has been added. Therefore, يا للعار (Lit. **What a shame!**) or (Lit. **What impudent she is to ask me doing so!**) could be better equivalents.

In the fourth instance, understanding what Ray meant by his comment "He ever put the moves on you", Danielle explicated her inference by means of what follows 'I mean' which could better stand for حقيقة الأمر... إنه... (Lit. **Actually, it is...**) or واقعا أنه... (Lit. **In fact...**) since she tried to reinforce what she had mentioned earlier on her boss' behavior but in other words.

#### **Extract 5.**

*"What do you mean, what am I..." She lay on her side, her head propped on a cupped palm. Since the sex ended she hadn't looked at his body once.*

*"I mean, you know, ethnically." He wanted to say "racially", but thought "ethnically" a softer word.*

*"Well, that's an interesting question." ...*

Having ended sex with Danielle, Ray asked her "What are you?" Being surprised to hear this question, Danielle wanted to know what he meant. He explicitly said "I mean, you know, 'ethnically'". The use of 'I mean' is an indication that Ray's comment on Danielle utterance does not commit himself to what Danielle really intended to convey/know but he declares a conclusion; this conclusion is mainly drawn to satisfy

an interest on the part of Danielle. Moreover, the general context of this interaction facilitates the inferential process on the part of the hearer and the speaker. In this case, the shared context (and situation) between the speaker and the hearer tones down the utterance of the speaker.

Therefore, this instance of 'I mean' could be better rendered explicitly into ...أقصد... (Lit. **I mean...**) which literally means 'my intention behind asking you this question is...'

**Extract 6.**

*"Do you know in eight years of marriage I never fucked around once?" he semi announced in an ass-backwards effort to get her to talk about her husband...*

*"I don't know about that," Danielle said mildly, rattling him.*

*"No, **I mean**, the sex was fine, I'm not saying... It's just, for me, you start screwing around..."*

*"Because money's only money and it was a good way for me to come home".*

*"Home, you still think of Hopewell as your home?" [Danielle] squinting with skepticism.*

Expressing part of his sexual history, Ray had the intention that Danielle would talk about her husband Freddy. Danielle's answer, building on the fact that they had already sex together and being under the influence of a unique psychological factor, inferred something related to sex. This failure to deduce and predict the real intention of Ray could be attributed partly to lack of shared cognitive environment between them, and partly to the effect of sex they had together, i.e. the interfering psychological factor in the context of having sex. This led Danielle to ask directly Ray to reveal his real intention "I don't know about that".

Danielle's failure to infer what Ray intended (viz. Hopewell is still his home) is evident in Ray's answer introduced by a negative particle 'No' and the pragmatic particle 'I mean' followed by an explicit reference that he didn't mean sex "No, I mean, the sex was fine, I'm not saying...". Therefore, it is naïve to render 'I mean' into (...يعني...); since it is part and parcel of the negated utterance. 'I mean' should better be rendered into:

(Lit. You've misunderstood me, my relation...) لا، لقد أسأت فهمي، فعلاقتي الجنسية معها كانت جيدة.

After partly explicating his intention "Because money's only money and it was good way for me to come home", Danielle realized that Ray was talking about something unexpected to her (viz. Ray paid for her brother's funeral at least in part to impress his daughter and to have Hopewell again). This is more explicating by the second instance of 'I mean' where Ray spoke explicitly about Hopewell, lending money, etc. Therefore 'I mean' here could be simply translated into يعني.. (Lit. That's, or that's to say, or I mean) since nothing is left to be inferred, predicted or interpreted.

#### Extract 7.

"See, that's why I'm so pissed at his father..."

"Freddy?"... Ray said quickly, all thoughts of Nelson gone like smoke into a vacuum.

"Yeah," Danielle responded, looking at him, Nelson fading a little for her, too. "About Freddy, what did you want to know?"

"Be me," Ray said. "What do I want to know?"

"You have to be more specific," she said, loving this.

"C'mon, give me a break."

"Shit, I'll tell you all of it." She shrugged. "I don't owe that bastard anything... **I mean**, you talk about marriage and faithfulness and sex and all that? Do you know I have been with my husband for exactly half my life? Since tenth, grade. **I mean**, it's not like I haven't been out in the world

Ray tries once more to know about Danielle's husband who deserted her and their son Nelson. However, he does not specify what he actually wants to know. Her answer introduced twice by 'I mean' is a comment of an inferential nature that stands for the opposite of what Ray has in mind concerning Danielle and Ray's private life. Moreover, though the context in which this interaction took place (e.g. her son Nelson called to tell her he failed a test) might have a psychological impact on Danielle. She was able to collect her ideas and answer Ray's implicitly given implicature and give an explicit implicature that can easily help Ray draw his own conclusion(s).

Both instances of 'I mean' in this extract are used to introduce utterances that concisely reformulate earlier experienced events by

Danielle and conclude that she does not owe her ex-husband anything and that she continued her life peacefully. Therefore, the first instance of 'I mean' could be rendered into:

(Lit. In other words) و ما شابه.....و بكلام آخر، أنت تحدثت عن الزواج

and the second one can be translated into:

بإختصار، لم أكن كمن يأس من الحياة (Lit. In short, I was not as without hope) since it represents the final conclusion.

#### Extract 8.

*"...When I was very little, we were all placed in a foster home. I mean, I have no memory of this, I was three, four... But my mother, she didn't deserve that kind of punishment because she didn't do anything except put all her time..."*

*"Why didn't she just take the kids and leave?"*

*Ray regretting the question the moment it came out of his mouth.*

*"To where," Danielle rightly snapped. "She had no money. Three kids and no money. Where she was supposed to move to, back to her prick father's house? Life is not about 'why didn't she just do this, just do that'... I mean I read these, these textbooks, you know, Urban Studies, sociology, Public Policy..."*

*"Anyways, when my father gets locked up, in the two years it took for my mother to get us back from foster care? ... She couldn't continue with her education or go find a job because she couldn't afford a baby-sitter, and wouldn't drop us off at our grandparents' apartment because of her father."*

*I mean, a few years later, two seconds after the bastard died, we moved right back in with my grandmother so my mom could finally look for a job..."*

In this extract, Danielle flashbacked what happened to her father, how miserable life her mother experienced, and how she and her brothers were placed in a foster home. And then she reformulates her words by means of 'I mean' to highlight the great sacrifice of her mother. However, Ray failure to imply Danielle's utterances into his knowledge "Why didn't she just take the kids and leave?" Danielle surprised to hear from Ray such a naïve question; she continued revealing more about the secret history of her mother, again by introducing her utterances by 'I mean'. Therefore, since Danielle was very keen to reveal (and defend) her



mother's history, the utterances introduced by the two instances of 'I mean' should reflect this detailed and charged with emotions explanation. Hence **لأكن أكثر وضوحا ودقة** (Lit. **Let me be more accurate and precise...**) and **و بـكلام آخر** (Lit. **In other words**) are the best Arabic equivalents, respectively.

## 6. Conclusions

**This study concludes that 'I mean' is another way of saying things. It identifies the process of deducing implicatures from the speaker's preceding utterances which are (mostly) thought to convey weak and indeterminate implicatures. 'I mean' is not always associated with logical consequences (i.e. inferences); therefore, the effect that 'I mean' has on an utterance is to make things clear by identifying the intended implicatures of the speaker through making use of the unconscious (and sometimes conscious) shared cognitive environment between the speaker and the hearer. Therefore, the shared world of the participants in the interaction can be a key to the interpretation of what the speaker has in mind and what the hearer expects the speaker to intend.**

The study also concludes that while the lexical/functional meaning of 'I mean' poses no actual difficulties in the student translators' performance, its inferential function does. Student translators should therefore develop a pragmatic competence whereby they might manage this problematic function and be able to detect and translate the inferential meaning this marker evokes in literary discourse.

**Finally, though written discourse is an embodiment of spoken conversation; one might expect spontaneous speech (with different intonation contour of the utterances) to yield different interpretations of 'I mean' and what follow it. Such future investigation and research might contribute positively to discourse markers in college conversation classrooms and (student) translators training centers.**

References:

- Abdul-Quddus I.(1960).** Don't Put the Sun off,(in Arabic) "La Tutfi'ishams". Cairo: Ash-Sharikal-Arabiyya lit-Ttiba'a.
- Blakemore, D. (1987).** Semantic Constraints on Relevance. Oxford: Blackwell.

**Cela-Murcia, M. and Larsen-Freeman, D. (1983).** The Grammar Book. Rowly, Mass: Newberry House Publishers, INC.

**Fraser, B. (1987).** Pragmatic Formatives. In: **J. Verschueren and M. Bertucceli-Papi (Eds.)**.The Pragmatic Perspective: Selected Papers from the 1985 International Pragmatic Conference. **Amsterdam: Benjamins Publishing Company. Pp. 179-194.**

----- (1990). "An Approach to Discourse Markers". Journal of Pragmatics, 14, pp. 383-95.

----- (1996). "Pragmatic Markers". Pragmatics, 6 (2), pp. 167-90.

**Geddie, W. (1971).**Chamber's Twentieth Century Dictionary (Revised Edition).London: W. &R. Chambers, LTD.

**Gutt, E-a (1996).** Implicit Information in Literary Translation: A Relevance-Theoretic Perspective. Target, 8:2, 239-256.

**Halliday, M. and Hasan, R.(1985).** Cohesion in English. **London: Longman.**

**Imo, w. (2005).** "A Contraction Grammar Approach to the Phrase 'I Mean' in Spoken English". In: interaction and Linguistic Structures. Walter de Gruyter (42), pp.1-37.

File:\\ E:\8 THESIS SOURCE\DISCOURSE MARKERS 2\  
CONSTRUCTIONS with I mean...

**Jabra, J. (1989).** The Ship,(in Arabic) "As-Safina". **Baghdad: Bayt Seen Lilkutub.**

**.Lee, B. and Hsieh, C-J. (2004).** Discourse Markers Teaching in College Conversation Classroom: Focus on WELL, YOU KNOW, I MEAN. [www.pdfactory.com](http://www.pdfactory.com)

**Mahfuz, N. (1957).** The Palace of Eagerness, (in Arabic) "Qasru-Shawq". **Cairo: Dar Masr lit-Tiba'a.**

**Al-Mani', N. (1979).** The Contact of Towns, (in Arabic) "Tamaasul-Mudun". **Baghdad: Darul-Hurriyya Lit-Tiba'a.**

**Quirk, R. et al. (1985).** A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language. **London: Longman.**

**Risselada, R. and Spooren, W. (1998).** "Introduction, Discourse markers and Coherence relations". Journal of Pragmatics, 30 (2), pp. 131-133.

**Schiffrin, D. (1987).** Discourse Markers: Studies on Interactional Sociolinguistics. **Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.**

- Schourup, L. (1985).** Common Discourse Particles in English Conversation. **New York: garland Publishing, Inc.**
- Stenstrom, A. (1998).** From Sentence to discourse: Cos "because" in Teenage Talk. In: **A. Jucker and Y. Zic (Eds.).** Pragmatics and Beyond New Series, **Vol. 57.** **Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.** 127-146.
- Stubbs, M. (1983).** Discourse Analysis: the Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Language. **Chicago: University of Chicago Press.**
- Tanaka, K. (1997).** 'In Other Words' and conversational Implicatures. *Pragmatics*, 7:3. 367-387.
- Traugott, E. (1995).** "The Role of the Development of discourse Markers in a Theory of Grammaticalization". *ICHL XII*, pp. 1-23. **Manchester: Stanford University.**
- Travis, C (2006).** "The Natural Semantic Metalanguage Approach to Discourse Markers". In: **K. Fisher (Ed.).** Approaches to Discourse Particles: Studies in Pragmatics. **Oxford: Elsevier, vol. 1, pp.219-242.**
- Van Dijk, T. (1977).** Text and context: Explorations in the Semantics and Pragmatics of discourse. **New York: Longman Inc.**
- Waltereit, R. (2006).** "The Rise of Discourse Particles in Italian: A Specific Type of Language Change". In: **K. fisher (Ed.).** Approaches to Discourse Particles: Studies in Pragmatics: **Elsevier, vol.1, pp. 61-76.**

الوظيفة الاستدلالية لعبارة "اعني/يعني" الإنكليزية ومكافآتها العربية في الخطاب

الأدبي بالإشارة إلى الترجمة

أ.د. أنيس بهنام نعووم

المستخلص

يتناول البحث وظائف دالة الخطاب (I mean) الانكليزية ومكافآتها العربية، وإبراز أهمية الوظيفة الاستدلالية لدالة الخطاب هذه في النصوص الأدبية، واحتمالات إخفاق المترجمين في نقلها إلى العربية. يميل الباحث إلى الاعتقاد أن سوء فهم المترجم للوظيفة اللغوية لهذه الدالة لا يؤدي بالضرورة إلى فشل في أدائه، في حين أن عدم قدرته على تشخيص وظيفتها الاستدلالية يفضي إلى فشل في التواصل. لذا يتوجب على المتخصصين في ميدان الترجمة والطلبة منهم على وجه الخصوص اكتساب مقدرة براغماتية تؤهلهم للتعامل مع المعنى الاستدلالي لهذه الدالة وترجمته في الخطاب الأدبي .