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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Pragmatic Functions of *Bass* in Jordanian Spoken Arabic: A Function-Based Translation Model

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| ABSTRACT
This study investigates the multifunctional discourse marker bass in Jordanian Spoken Arabic (JSA), proposing a function-based translation model grounded in systematic corpus analysis. Building on the foundational taxonomy established by Al Rousan, Al Harahsheh, and Huwari (2020), who identified sixteen pragmatic functions of bass in JSA, the present study extends this work by examining how these functions map onto optimal English translation equivalents. Through analyzing 109 annotated instances drawn from 96 minutes of natural conversations in Roya TV's Caravan program, the research confirms and refines the existing functional taxonomy while establishing explicit links between discourse function and translation strategy. The methodology employs dual validation: linguistic experts classified each occurrence with contextualized analysis, while professional translators verified functional accuracy to ensure reliable identification of pragmatic functions and their optimal English equivalents. Findings reveal that the choice of English translation—whether 'but,' 'just,' 'only,' 'so,' 'well,' or phrasal equivalents—is determined not by lexical substitution but by the specific pragmatic role bass plays in context. This study makes three primary contributions: (1) validation and refinement of Al Rousan et al.'s (2020) functional taxonomy through independent corpus analysis; (2) development of a systematic framework linking each discourse function to optimal translation strategies; and (3) practical guidelines for Arabic-English translation of multifunctional particles.

| KEYWORDS
Discourse markers, Jordanian Arabic, Pragmatics, Translation equivalence, Corpus linguistics, *Bass*

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1. Introduction

Discourse markers (DMs) are grammatically optional and semantically non-truth-conditional items that perform important pragmatic functions at the textual, interpersonal, and cognitive levels of discourse (cf. Fraser, 1999; Schiffrin, 1987; Schourup, 1999). Textually, they signal relations between discourse units and manage openings, transitions, and closures. Interpersonally, they encode speaker stance, agreement, mitigation, and interactional alignment. Cognitively, they may indicate reformulation, hesitation, or processing. Despite variation in form and function, DMs are commonly characterized by optionality, connectivity, and non-truth-conditionality (Schourup, 1999). However, as Lam (2007) argues, they form a functional continuum ranging from prototypical to peripheral members.

Within the Arabic-speaking world, discourse marking operates in a diglossic context (Ferguson, 1959), where Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) serves as the high (H) variety and regional vernaculars function as low (L) varieties used in everyday interaction. One discourse marker characteristic of colloquial Arabic varieties is *bass*, which does not belong to the lexicon of formal MSA. The present study investigates the pragmatic functions of *bass* in Jordanian Spoken Arabic (JSA) and examines how these functions map onto English translation equivalents.

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Earlier research has identified several meanings of *bass*, including 'but,' 'only,' and 'enough' (Al-Batal, 1994). In its contrastive use ('but'), *bass* typically satisfies the core diagnostic criteria of DMs: it is optional, does not affect truth conditions, and signals an adversative relationship between clauses. In its restrictive sense ('only'), its status as a DM has been debated, particularly given disagreements over whether connectivity is a necessary condition for DM classification (Fraser, 1990; Fung, 2003). When used to mean 'enough,' *bass* is generally excluded from the DM class because it is neither optional nor non-truth-conditional.

Cross-dialectal studies confirm the prominence of the contrastive function. Al-Batal (1994) documents its adversative use in Lebanese Arabic, while Watson (1993) shows that in Ṣanʿānī Arabic it signals various types of contrastive and limiting relations and may have developed diachronically from an adverbial meaning ('only') to a conjunctive one. By contrast, the MSA counterpart *laakin* has been widely analyzed as a contrastive marker conveying concession in formal texts (e.g., Al Kohlani, 2010; Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2014). Translation-oriented studies further demonstrate that English *but* may correspond to several Arabic markers (*laakin*, *bal*, *bainama*, and *laakina*) depending on whether the function involves cancellation, correction, contrast, or denial (Hussein, 2009; Alhuqbani, 2013).

While these foundational studies establish the contrastive role of *bass* and clarify its relationship to MSA counterparts, they largely limit their focus to connective functions. More recent research, however, has demonstrated that its functional range extends far beyond simple adversativity. Al Rousan et al. (2020) provide the most comprehensive account to date, identifying sixteen distinct pragmatic functions of *bass* in JSA, including topic management, turn regulation, mitigation, hesitation, and stance marking. Their corpus-based analysis offers a systematic framework for understanding the particle's remarkable polyfunctionality and its central role in structuring spoken interaction.

Despite this significant contribution, a crucial gap remains: Al Rousan et al. (2020) document what *bass* does pragmatically but do not address how these diverse functions should be rendered in English translation. This gap is consequential for both translation theory and practice, as translators encountering *bass* in natural discourse currently lack systematic guidance for selecting appropriate English equivalents based on pragmatic function.

The present study therefore pursues a dual objective. It first validates and builds upon Al Rousan et al.'s (2020) functional taxonomy through independent corpus analysis of *bass* in naturally occurring JSA discourse. It then develops a function-based translation model in which English equivalents are determined by the specific pragmatic role *bass* performs in context. By extending pragmatic description into the domain of translation, this study contributes both to the documentation of Arabic vernacular discourse markers and to practical frameworks for cross-linguistic equivalence—a question that has attracted increasing attention in pragmatics and translation studies (e.g., Aijmer & Simon-Vandenbergen, 2011; Fischer, 2006; House, 2015).

2. Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What pragmatic functions does the discourse marker *bass* serve in Jordanian Spoken Arabic, and how do these align with existing functional taxonomies?
2. What English translation equivalents most appropriately convey each pragmatic function of *bass*, as determined by expert-validated functional analysis?

3. Methodology

This section reviews methodological issues related to the data collection and data analysis processes employed in the current study. A description of the corpus, participants, transcription conventions, theoretical framework, and data analysis procedure is provided.

3.1 Corpus

The analyzed data comprise 96 minutes of conversations (15,369 words) selected from a live talk show broadcast on the Jordanian TV channel Roya Channel. Six live conversations from the *Caravan* talk show constitute the corpus investigated in the present study. *Caravan* was selected because it features spontaneous, unscripted conversations on diverse topics among native speakers of Jordanian Spoken Arabic (JSA) in their late teens, twenties, and thirties. This demographic was targeted to ensure access to naturally occurring, contemporary colloquial speech representative of everyday JSA usage.

While the corpus is modest in size (96 minutes), it provides a sufficiently rich dataset for qualitative functional analysis of a frequent discourse marker. As Lam (2007) demonstrates in her corpus-driven study of discourse markers, detailed qualitative analysis of manageable datasets can yield robust functional taxonomies when grounded in rigorous contextual interpretation. This approach is consistent with established practices in corpus-pragmatic research, where functional annotation requires intensive manual analysis that precludes very large corpora.

Table 1 presents the topics discussed in each conversation, the participants involved, and the durations of the conversations.

Table 1: Topics, participants, and durations of the analyzed conversations

Conversation	Topic	Participants	Duration
First	Interviewing a chef	1 female, 2 males	6 minutes
Second	Playing a game from childhood	2 females, 2 males	32 minutes
Third	Interviewing a blogger	2 females, 2 males	18 minutes
Fourth	Conversing with university students about problems they face	1 female, 4 males	12 minutes
Fifth	Exchanging views on preparation for the General Secondary Education Certificate Examination	2 females, 5 males	18 minutes
Sixth	Talking about autism	2 females, 2 males	10 minutes
Total		**10 females, 17 males**	**96 minutes**

As shown in Table 1, the corpus includes a total of 27 participants (10 females, 17 males), providing diverse interactional contexts and participant configurations. The topics range from casual games and personal interviews to discussions of education and social issues, ensuring variability in discourse types and pragmatic contexts.

3.2 Transcription

Three levels of transcription are employed in the present study to ensure accessibility and analytical precision.

Level 1: Arabic Script. The conversations were transcribed using Arabic script, representing words according to their pronunciation in JSA rather than their standard Modern Standard Arabic spelling. This captures the authentic colloquial forms used by speakers.

Level 2: Transliteration. A transliteration system using Latin script with diacritics and special symbols was employed, following standard conventions for Arabic dialect transcription. Table 2 presents the symbols used for sounds that lack direct equivalents in English orthography.

Table 2: Transliteration symbols for Arabic sounds

Arabic Script	Sound Description	Transliteration Symbol
ء	voiceless glottal stop	ʔ
ث	voiceless dental fricative	θ
ج	voiced palatal affricate	ʤ
ح	voiceless pharyngeal fricative	ħ
خ	voiceless velar fricative	x
ذ	voiced dental fricative	ð
ش	voiceless palatal fricative	ʃ
ص	voiceless emphatic fricative	sˤ

Arabic Script	Sound Description	Transliteration Symbol
ض	voiced emphatic stop	dˤ
ط	voiceless emphatic stop	tˤ
ع	voiced pharyngeal fricative	ʕ
غ	voiced velar fricative	ɣ
ق	voiceless uvular stop	q
و	voiced labiovelar glide	w
ي	voiced palatal glide	j
ـَ	low back vowel (fatha)	a
ـُ	high back vowel (damma)	u
ـِ	high front vowel (kasra)	i
ـ	mid front vowel (imāla)*	e

*The mid front vowel /e/ in JSA represents an allophonic variation or dialectal realization not indicated by a standard Arabic diacritic; it is transcribed based on pronunciation.

Level 3: English Gloss. A literal English gloss was provided for each utterance to ensure the linguistic context in which *bass* occurs is accessible to non-Arabic readers. These glosses prioritize word-by-word transparency over natural English style to preserve structural information.

All transcripts were independently reviewed by both researchers to ensure accuracy. Discrepancies in transcription were resolved through joint re-listening and discussion until consensus was achieved.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

Discourse markers have been analyzed using various theoretical approaches, including coherence-based frameworks (e.g., Schiffrin, 1987), relevance theory (e.g., Jucker & Smith, 1998), functional approaches (e.g., Fung, 2003), and corpus-driven methodologies (e.g., Lam, 2007). The present study adopts a corpus-informed, functionally oriented approach that integrates elements from several traditions while maintaining a clear focus on pragmatic function and translation equivalence.

Following Biber (2009: 196), who asserts that the main goal of the corpus-driven approach is to "uncover new linguistic constructs through inductive analysis of corpora," the present study prioritizes examination of authentic language use. However, rather than claiming a purely atheoretical stance, the study explicitly builds upon and seeks to validate the functional taxonomy established by Al Rousan et al. (2020), who identified sixteen pragmatic functions of *bass* in JSA. This approach might best be characterized as corpus-based validation—using new corpus data to test, refine, and extend existing functional classifications while remaining open to emergent functions not captured in prior frameworks.

For the translation component of the study, the analysis is guided by Nida's (1964) principle of dynamic equivalence, which prioritizes conveying the intended meaning and communicative effect of the source text over literal, word-for-word correspondence (Nida, 1964; Panou, 2013). This framework is particularly appropriate for analyzing discourse markers, whose pragmatic functions often lack direct lexical equivalents across languages. Dynamic equivalence requires the translator to consider not merely what words mean, but what speakers do with them in context—an orientation that aligns closely with the pragmatic focus of this study.

The integration of these two frameworks—a corpus-informed functional taxonomy for source language analysis and dynamic equivalence for target language rendering—provides a coherent theoretical foundation for addressing the study's research questions.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis procedure comprised four main stages: (1) identification of DM instances, (2) functional classification, (3) translation equivalence determination, and (4) validation.

3.4.1 Identification of DM Instances

The first step in analyzing the data was identifying instances of *bass* that serve as discourse markers in the conversations under study. Two characteristics—semantic and syntactic optionality and non-truth-conditionality—were utilized for distinguishing DM uses from non-DM counterparts. This decision follows Schourup's (1999: 232) argument that optionality and non-truth-conditionality "are all frequently taken together to be necessary attributes of DMs." Connectivity was not treated as a necessary criterion, as many DMs serve functions other than signaling textual connections (e.g., marking shared knowledge, signaling attitudes, showing active listenership).

Accordingly, an instance was classified as a DM if:

- It could be removed from the utterance without rendering it grammatically unacceptable
- Its removal did not alter the truth-conditional content of the proposition
- It contributed pragmatic meaning related to discourse structure, speaker stance, or interpersonal alignment

Instances where *bass* functioned as a content word meaning 'enough' (non-optional, truth-conditional) were excluded from analysis. A total of 109 DM tokens were identified for analysis.

3.4.2 Functional Classification

Following identification of all DM tokens (N=109), each instance was subjected to functional classification. This analysis was conducted with explicit reference to the taxonomy established by Al Rousan et al. (2020), which identifies sixteen pragmatic functions of *bass* in JSA. Each instance was assigned to functional categories based on systematic examination of contextual cues including:

- The surrounding linguistic context (preceding and following turns)
- The interactional situation and participant roles
- Prosodic and paralinguistic features (where relevant to function)
- The apparent communicative intention of the speaker as inferred from sequential context

The analysis remained open to identifying functions not captured in Al Rousan et al.'s (2020) taxonomy, consistent with the corpus-informed commitment to allowing patterns to emerge from the data. This stage directly addresses Research Question 1: *What pragmatic functions does the discourse marker bass serve in Jordanian Spoken Arabic, and how do these align with existing functional taxonomies?*

3.4.3 Translation Equivalence Determination

For each functionally classified instance, the researchers determined the most appropriate English translation equivalent guided by Nida's (1964) principle of dynamic equivalence. This involved:

- Assessing the pragmatic function identified in the previous stage
- Considering the range of possible English renderings that could convey this function
- Selecting the equivalent that most naturally and accurately reproduced the communicative effect of the original utterance in context
- Documenting the rationale for each translation choice

The goal was not to produce a single "correct" translation for each token but to identify the optimal equivalent given the specific discourse context and pragmatic function. This stage directly addresses Research Question 2: *What English translation equivalents most appropriately convey each pragmatic function of bass, as determined by expert-validated functional analysis?*

3.4.4 Validation Process

To ensure analytical rigor and minimize individual bias, a two-phase validation process was adopted.

Phase one: The two researchers conducted functional classification and translation analysis independently, recording their choices and justifications in separate databases. Each researcher documented:

- The assigned pragmatic function(s)
- The proposed English translation equivalent
- Contextual justification for the decision

Phase two: The researchers convened to compare preliminary findings. Cases of agreement and disagreement were identified through systematic comparison of the independent analyses. Disagreements were analyzed to identify their sources—whether they stemmed from ambiguous contextual cues, differences in theoretical interpretation, or oversight of relevant features.

Cases of disagreement were resolved through the following procedure:

1. Each researcher presented their rationale with specific reference to contextual evidence
2. The discourse segment was re-examined collaboratively, with repeated listening to audio where necessary
3. Discussion continued until consensus was reached
4. For cases where initial classifications diverged significantly and consensus could not be reached immediately, a third review was conducted after a 48-hour interval to allow for reflexive reconsideration

This consensus-based approach, while not yielding quantitative inter-rater reliability scores, ensured that all final classifications and translations represented the joint, carefully considered judgment of both researchers. The process prioritizes qualitative depth and interpretive rigor over statistical measurement of agreement, consistent with the study's qualitative, corpus-informed orientation.

The final, agreed-upon classifications and translations for each instance were compiled into a master database linking each token of *bass* to: (1) its pragmatic function(s), (2) its English translation equivalent, (3) contextual notes justifying the choice, and (4) the conversational context (transcript excerpt). This database constitutes the primary dataset for the analysis presented in Section 4.

4. Results and discussion

This section presents the findings of the study, organized according to the three functional domains identified in the analysis: contrastive/adversative, restrictive, and discourse management/pragmatic softening. For each domain, the analysis establishes both the pragmatic sub-functions and their optimal English translation equivalents, demonstrating how context determines translation choice. The discussion integrates interpretation of findings with reference to the existing literature throughout.

4.1 Overview of Findings

Analysis of the 109 instances of *bass* in the corpus reveals a rich functional spectrum that extends far beyond simple contrastive use. The findings both corroborate and refine the comprehensive taxonomy established by Al Rousan et al. (2020), who identified sixteen pragmatic functions of *bass* in JSA. While their seminal work successfully mapped the extensive functional territory of this discourse marker, the present study demonstrates that this very multifunctionality necessitates a nuanced translation approach that moves beyond the frequent gloss of *bass* as *but*.

The analysis indicates that translational strategies for *bass* can be categorized into three primary pathways, each corresponding to a core functional domain: contrastive/adversative, restrictive, and discourse management/pragmatic softening. Within each domain, specific sub-functions emerge that require distinct English equivalents to preserve the speaker's intended pragmatic meaning.

4.2 Contrastive/Adversative Functions

The analysis of the corpus reveals that the primary and most frequent function of *bass* is to signal a contrastive or adversative relationship between propositions. This function consistently translates to the English conjunction *but*. However, closer examination shows that this contrastive role encompasses a nuanced spectrum of specific sub-functions, each tailoring the nature of the contrast to its discursive context. Table 3 synthesizes these key contrastive sub-functions identified in the data, demonstrating the systematic variability within this core category.

Table 3: Contrastive/Adversative Functions of *bass*

Function	English Equivalent	Example & Context
Core contrast/qualification	but	"...but today we'll play it differently." Here, *bass* marks a contrast between the familiar game and the new way of playing it.
Boundary/limitation	but	"...aim for 85%, but not 95%." The speaker affirms a clear, contrastive boundary for the goal.
Preference/corrective	but	"...but I tend to prefer local food." Expresses personal preference through mild contrast.
Emphasis/highlight	but	"...but in the end, what matters is that I stick to the plan." *bass* functions as a pivot marking emphasis by contrasting prior details with the core focus.
Corrective/disbelief	but	"But this talk is the reality; now our influencers are building hospitals." The speaker expresses skepticism or corrective stance regarding the preceding claim.

Function	English Equivalent	Example & Context
Objection/correction	but	"But 'burdayeh' is 'Jalala.'" Signals the speaker's objection to a previous implicit assumption while maintaining politeness.
Conditional restriction	but	"But if you don't know the word, it shouldn't be counted." Introduces a condition that qualifies the general statement about game rules.
Reiteration/return	but	"...but I say again that it is possible that the broadcaster's role helped him." Revisits a prior argument for reinforcement.

The prevalence of contrastive functions in the corpus aligns with earlier research by Al-Batal (1994) and Watson (1993), who identified adversative uses as central to the meaning of *bass* across Arabic dialects. However, the range of contrastive sub-functions documented here—from simple qualification to corrective disbelief to conditional restriction—extends previous descriptions by demonstrating that even within the contrastive domain, *bass* performs diverse pragmatic work that is unified by the English equivalent *but* but distinguished by interactional context.

This is illustrated in Example 1, where *bass* limits aspiration within a realistic boundary:

Example 1

Arabic: انت في الرياضيات مستواك ممكن تجيب 70 بالمية. خلينا يكون عندي طموح اجيب 85 بالمية بس مش اجيب 95

Transcription: *ʔɪnta fiː ʔarˈiyaːdˤijjaːt mustawaːk mumkin tiˈʒiːb sabʕiːn bɪlˈmiːjeh xalliːna jikuːn ʕindi tˤumuːh ʔaʒiːb xamsah wa tamaːniːn bɪlˈmiːjeh bass mɪʃ ʔaʒiːb xamsah wa tisʕiːn*

English: In math, your current level might be around 70%. So let's set a realistic goal to aim for 85%, but not 95%.

The teacher guides the student to be ambitious but within achievable limits. Using *but* in English effectively conveys the boundary, making it clear that aiming for 95% would be beyond the student's expected capacity. The contrast is not between two contradictory ideas but between the proposed achievable target and the unrealistic one. This use corresponds to what Al Rousan et al. (2020) classify as a boundary-marking function, though their analysis does not explicitly link this function to translation choices.

Similarly, in Example 2, *bass* serves a corrective function, marking a speaker's reaction to a previously stated assumption:

Example 2

Arabic: جود: بس هالحكي هاده هو الواقع هلأ الانفلونسرز تبعوتّا عم يبنوا مستشفيات

Transcription: *Joud: bass hal-ħaki haːdah huwwa al-waaqiʕ, hallaʔ ʔal-ʔinfluwansarz tabaʕnaː ʕam yibnu mustaffajaːt*

English: Joud: But this talk is the reality; now our influencers are building hospitals.

From a pragmatic standpoint, this use of *bass* illustrates its flexibility beyond simple contrast. While it does introduce opposition in the sense of correcting a misperception, it is not adversative in the sense of personal confrontation; rather, it functions to maintain conversational harmony while signaling factual truth. This aligns with the broader pattern observed in the contrastive/adversative category, where *bass* can mark corrective information, highlight unexpected outcomes, or reinforce factual accuracy in interaction. Watson (1993) documented similar uses in Ṣanʿānī Arabic, noting that conjunctive *bass* could signal unexpected consequences—a function closely related to the corrective use observed here.

Moreover, this example underscores the importance of function-based translation. A literal substitution with another marker (e.g., *just* or *so*) would fail to capture the corrective and disbelief nuances, potentially rendering the statement flat or misrepresenting Joud's intended reaction. Using *but* preserves both the interpersonal subtlety and the informational emphasis, ensuring the English version accurately reflects the speaker's stance within the social and factual context. These uses confirm Watson (1993) and Al-Batal's (1994) core classification and align with the "contrastive" and "corrective" functions detailed by Al Rousan et al. (2020). In these contexts, *but* is the unambiguous and appropriate equivalent, as any other marker would misrepresent the adversative intent.

4.3 Restrictive Functions

A distinct yet prevalent function is the restrictive one, where *bass* operates to limit, specify, or minimize the scope of an action, intention, or object. In these contexts, the particle narrows the focus rather than setting up a contrast, necessitating a shift in translation from the adversative *but* to the limiting terms *just* or *only*. The specific sub-functions within this restrictive domain are systematized in Table 4.

Table 4: Restrictive Functions of *bass*

Function	English Equivalent	Example & Context
Focusing/minimizing	just	"I just want to see what girl's name is there." Restricts intention to a single, limited goal, suggesting modest curiosity.
Specification/manner	just	"Find the people you want to see just like that." Clarifies the manner or simplicity of an action.
Exclusive/restricting	only	"I got it, only 'Ta.'" Limits response or object to one item, highlighting exclusivity.
Limiting action	just	"I just wrote the boy's name and the plant tomato." Constrains the scope of what has been achieved.
Narrow purpose/minimizing seriousness	just	"These tests are just for fun." Restricts activity's intent, signaling casual, playful tone.
Negative correlative	not only / but also	"It's not only the influencer who affects buying decisions, but also whether they change your opinion." Expands inclusion while retaining restriction.

As shown, the restrictive function applies to a variety of discursive actions, from focusing attention to defining purpose. These instances emphasize that translating restrictive uses with *but* would impose an unintended adversative meaning, thereby distorting the speaker's goal of simple limitation. Here, the most appropriate translations are *just* or *only*. This finding addresses a gap in Al Rousan et al.'s (2020) taxonomy, which, while thoroughly documenting the pragmatic functions of *bass*, does not specify how these functions should be rendered in English translation. Their analysis frequently relies on *but* as a default gloss, yet the present data demonstrate that such a strategy would be pragmatically inaccurate for restrictive functions.
As shown in Example 3, from a playful classroom interaction:

Example 3
Arabic: آية: بس بدي اشوف ايش في اسم بنت.
Transcription: *ʔaːja bass biddi ʔaʃuːf ʔeːʃ fiː ʔism bint*
English: Aya: I just want to see what girl's name is there.
Aya interrupts to express her singular concern: identifying a girl's name. The DM *bass* minimizes her interest, signaling that she is not concerned with anything else in the discussion at this moment. It is not adversative or contrastive; it simply narrows her focus. In English, *just* conveys this limitation effectively, keeping the reader aware that her scope of interest is intentionally minimal. Contextually, it also reflects her polite and concise interjection within a dynamic classroom-like conversation. This use corresponds to what Al Rousan et al. (2020) term a "minimizing" function, though they do not propose a translation equivalent.
In Example 4, a psychologist asks about social behavior:

Example 4
Arabic: أشرف: طيب لمّن نكون بحفله أو إجتماع ولاء كيف بتدخلي على هاي الحفلة بتلائي إنّاس اللّي بدك تشوفيهم بدك تعرفيهم بس هيك عالهدا ولاّ الكلّ حيعرف إنه ولاء دخلت؟
Transcription: *ʔaʃraf: tˁajjib lammaːn nkuːn biħafleh ʔaw ʔidʒtimaːʕ walaːʔ keːf btidxuli ʕala haːj il-ħafleh bitlaːʔi ʔinnaːs ʔilli biddik tʃuːfiːhum biddik tʕarifiːhum bass heːk ʕal-hada willa ʔil-kull ħajʃraf ʔinno walaːʔ daxalt*
English: Ashraf: Okay, when we're at a party or a gathering, how do you enter the event? Do you quietly find the people you want to see just like that, or will everyone know that Walaa has arrived?
In this example, *bass* functions as a restrictive marker that specifies the manner in which Walaa acts. The psychologist, analyzing social behavior, asks whether she would enter a party discreetly, approaching only the people she knows, or if her arrival would be noticeable to everyone. Translating *bass* as *just* effectively captures the intended restriction on behavior without implying contrast or limitation. The phrase *just like that* mirrors the nuance of simplicity and directness in Walaa's possible actions, highlighting the expected discretion in her social conduct. This use aligns with what Al Rousan et al. (2020) categorize as a "manner specification" function, though again, translation implications are not addressed in their work.

In summary, the restrictive function of *bass* constitutes a primary category distinct from contrast, systematically requiring translations such as *just* and *only* to accurately convey meanings of limitation, minimization, and specification. The analysis of specific examples confirms and refines the classifications proposed by Al-Batal (1994) and Al Rousan et al. (2020), demonstrating that a failure to recognize this function—and a consequent default to *but*—results in a pragmatic distortion of the speaker's intent. This firmly establishes that accurate translation is contingent upon prior, accurate functional classification.

4.4 Discourse Management and Pragmatic Softening Functions

Finally, *bass* is instrumental in discourse management, including turn-taking, hedging, temporal sequencing, and signaling positive evaluation. Literal translations with *but* are often pragmatically inaccurate in these contexts. The diverse English equivalents required for this functional domain are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Discourse Management and Pragmatic Softening Functions of *bass*

Function	English Equivalent	Example & Context
Prefacing request/turn-taking	so	"So, may I answer?" Opens a polite attempt to speak, signaling respect for turn order.
Prefacing uncertainty/hedging	okay, so	"Okay, so, to calm down — maybe." Softens tentative statements, adding reflective tone.
Turn-yielding/discourse softener	well	"...well, I mean..." Eases transition or reduces assertiveness, yielding the floor.
Topic shift/transition	so now	"...so now let's move on to the artist Lateef Al-Fityani." Smoothly moves to a new topic.
Temporal sequencing	when / once	"...when you finish it independently, you can return to the book." Establishes timing or dependency.
Transition to positive evaluation	and honestly / I have to say	"...and honestly, well done!" Introduces unanticipated praise, shifting from neutral discussion to positive assessment.

As illustrated, *bass* is a versatile tool for structuring interaction. These functions operate primarily on the interpersonal and cognitive levels of discourse (Schiffrin, 1987; Fung, 2003), managing the relationship between speakers and the flow of conversation rather than signaling propositional relationships. This dimension of *bass* is extensively documented by Al Rousan et al. (2020), who identify multiple functions related to turn management, hedging, and stance marking. The present study extends their work by demonstrating how these functions map onto specific English equivalents.

In Example 5, Yazeed discusses how he might calm down using caffeinated drinks:

Example 5

Arabic:

أشرف: حلو طيب يزيد بتحب المشروبات اللي فيها كافيين عشان تهدا

[ضحك]

يزيد: إييه أنا بحبها بشكل عام

اشرف: آه

يزيد: بس عشان اهدا يعني ممكن

Transcription:

ʔaʃraf: ħilu tˤajjib jaziːd btħibb ʔal-maʃruːbaːt ʔalli fiːha kaːfjiːn ʕaʃaːn tihda

[laughter]

jaziːd: ʔiːh ʔana baħibbha bi-ʃakl ʕaːm

ʔaʃraf: ʔaːh

jaziːd: bass ʕaʃaːn ʔahda jaʃni mumkin

English:
Ashraf: Nice—okay, Yazeed, do you like drinks that have caffeine—to calm down?
[laughter]
Yazeed: Yeah, I like them in general.
Ashraf: Ah.
Yazeed: Okay, so, to calm down—maybe.
The DM *bass* here does not signal opposition or contrast; instead, it softens the statement and prefaces tentative reasoning. Yazeed introduces a possibility in a polite and non-assertive way, leaving room for negotiation or agreement from the interlocutor. The broader context is playful and interactive: Ashraf asks about Yazeed's preferences, laughter and light banter occur, and Yazeed wants to suggest an action without seeming overly directive. Translating *bass* as *okay, so* effectively conveys this hedging and turn-yielding nuance in natural English. Using *but* here would misleadingly imply adversative contrast, suggesting Yazeed is contradicting a previous statement—which is not intended. This example illustrates how *bass* can function as a discourse softener or hedging device, distinct from its more common restrictive or contrastive uses. Al Rousan et al. (2020) classify this as a "hesitation" or "softening" function, though they do not propose a translation strategy.
A pivotal example that underscores the necessity of the functional approach is the host's statement in Example 6:

Example 6
Arabic: أشرف: بياخدوا هذا الاختبار على اساس يشوفوا وين نقاط الضعف الموجودة ويحسنوا منها يحاولوا انهم يتجاوزوها بس ما شاء الله عنكم.
Transcription: *ʔaʃraf: bjaːxdu haːðа ʔal-ʔixtibaːr ʕala ʔasaːs jiʃuːfu weːn nuqaːtˤ al-dˤaʕf al-mawʒuːda wi jħassinu minhaː jħaːwlu ʔinːhum jitdʒaːwzuːha bass maː ʃaːʔ ʔallaːh ʕankum*
English: They take this test to identify their weaknesses, work on them, and try to overcome them… and honestly, well done!
A mechanistic translation using "but, well done" would create a false contrast, suggesting the praise occurs despite the test's purpose. The accurate, functional translation "and honestly, well done!" reveals the true additive and commendatory relationship. This case exemplifies the core argument of this paper: that a function-based analysis is essential to prevent the distortion of speaker intent that can arise from a default reliance on *but*. This use of *bass* corresponds to what Al Rousan et al. (2020) might classify as a "positive evaluation" or "praise" function, though their taxonomy does not explicitly include this category, suggesting a potential refinement to their framework based on the present data.

4.5 Synthesis: Toward a Function-Based Translation Model

The findings presented above yield several important insights for both pragmatic theory and translation practice.
First, the analysis confirms and extends Al Rousan et al.'s (2020) functional taxonomy by demonstrating that each pragmatic function maps onto a specific set of translation equivalents. The contrastive functions uniformly require *but* in English, suggesting that this represents the core, unmarked use of *bass*. However, the restrictive and discourse management functions reveal that *bass* operates in domains where English requires entirely different lexical items—*just*, *only*, *so*, *well*, and phrasal equivalents—none of which share an etymological or semantic relationship with *but*. This demonstrates that *bass* is not simply an Arabic equivalent of English *but* but a broader pragmatic operator whose translation must be determined by function rather than form.
Second, the analysis supports Nida's (1964) principle of dynamic equivalence as an appropriate framework for DM translation. In Example 6, translating *bass* as *and honestly* rather than *but* preserves the speaker's intended meaning—praise following neutral observation—while a literal translation would have created a false contrast. This confirms that optimal DM translation prioritizes communicative effect over lexical correspondence.
Third, the taxonomy reveals systematic patterns in how pragmatic functions cluster. The restrictive functions all involve limiting scope and map onto *just* or *only* in English, suggesting a coherent semantic sub-domain. Similarly, the discourse management functions all involve structuring interaction and map onto English items that serve parallel functions (*so*, *well*, *okay*). This suggests that the proposed taxonomy captures genuine cognitive and functional categories rather than ad hoc classifications. Table 6 summarizes the relationship between functional domain and translation strategy:

Table 6: Summary of Functional Domains and Translation Strategies

Functional Domain	Primary Translation Strategy	Key English Equivalents
Contrastive/Adversative	Adversative conjunction	but
Restrictive	Limiting modifiers	just, only, not only/but also

Functional Domain	Primary Translation Strategy	Key English Equivalents
Discourse Management/Pragmatic Softening	Discourse particles and phrasal expressions	so, well, okay, when/once, and honestly

These findings have practical implications for translator training and Arabic-English translation practice. Translators encountering *bass* should be trained to first identify its discourse function—asking "is this contrastive, restrictive, or managing discourse?"—before selecting an English equivalent. This function-first approach reduces the risk of defaulting to *but* in contexts where it would misrepresent speaker intent. For pedagogical purposes, the taxonomy presented in Tables 3-5 can serve as a reference guide for translators working with JSA material.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the pragmatic functions of the discourse marker *bass* in Jordanian Spoken Arabic and examined how these functions map onto English translation equivalents. Through analysis of 109 instances from naturally occurring conversations, a function-based translation model was developed that moves beyond lexical substitution to prioritize communicative effect.

The study confirms and extends Al Rousan et al.'s (2020) taxonomy, demonstrating that the pragmatic functions of *bass* cluster into three primary domains: contrastive/adversative, restrictive, and discourse management/pragmatic softening. Contrastive functions uniformly translate as *but*, restrictive functions require *just* or *only*, and discourse management functions demand equivalents such as *so*, *well*, *okay*, and *and honestly*. A default reliance on *but* across all contexts results in pragmatic distortion of speaker intent, revealing that *bass* is not simply an Arabic equivalent of English *but* but a broader pragmatic operator whose translation must be determined by function rather than form. The analysis supports Nida's (1964) principle of dynamic equivalence, confirming that optimal translation preserves communicative effect over literal correspondence.

The study makes three primary contributions: (1) validation and refinement of Al Rousan et al.'s (2020) functional taxonomy through independent corpus analysis; (2) development of a function-based translation model linking each pragmatic function to specific English equivalents; and (3) practical guidance for translators encountering this multifunctional marker.

Limitations include the modest corpus size and single genre. Future research should examine *bass* across broader contexts, investigate other Arabic discourse markers (*yaʃni*, *ʃu*, *ṭayyib*), develop pedagogical materials for translator training, and conduct reception studies to assess translation naturalness.

In conclusion, translating *bass* requires function-based interpretation. The choice between *but*, *just*, *only*, *so*, *well*, and phrasal equivalents is determined not by dictionary equivalence but by the specific pragmatic role *bass* performs in context—a finding that contributes both to Arabic pragmatic description and to cross-linguistic translation practice.

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