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Documenting the Discourse Particle *ʔaδʕaahir* in Najdi Arabic

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the Najdi Arabic discourse particle *ʔaδʕaahir* (roughly: ‘evidently’, ‘obviously’, ‘clearly’) as an evidential marker. The primary goal of this paper is to provide a descriptively adequate account of this particle in Najdi Arabic. The paper first discusses the particle *ʔaδʕaahir* from a semantic point of view, showing that it does not contribute directly to the propositional content of an utterance since it does not provide an additional meaning. Rather, the presence of *ʔaδʕaahir* pragmatically provides a certain degree of epistemic certainty about the propositional content of the clause in which it occurs, thus expressing the speaker’s certainty in relation to the utterance. Since *ʔaδʕaahir* has not been investigated before and deserves to be given special recognition by means of a proper description, the paper provides a theory-neutral syntactic analysis of this particle. The paper discusses several syntactic facts and observations regarding the syntactic position of *ʔaδʕaahir* within the clause, casting doubt on the view that it occupies a position in the verbal domain. It also discusses the observable distributional restrictions on the use of *ʔaδʕaahir* with regard to the complementizer *ʔinn* both in main and embedded clauses, supporting the assumption that *ʔaδʕaahir* must be located in a higher position syntactically.

Keywords: Najdi Arabic; Discourse Particles; *ʔaδʕaahir*; Semantic and Pragmatic Functions; Clause Structure; Evidentiality

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 10 August 2025 | Revised: 25 August 2025 | Accepted: 28 August 2025 | Published Online: 17 October 2025
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i11.11569>

CITATION

Alrasheedi, E.S., 2025. Documenting the Discourse Particle *ʔaδʕaahir* in Najdi Arabic. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 7(11): 1–12.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i11.11569>

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1. Introduction

Discourse markers, as important linguistic devices, have been abundantly studied by various scholars across languages including English (see, e.g., Schourup^[1,2], Schifffrin^[3], Fraser^[4,5], van Kemenade & Links^[6]), Arabic (e.g., Al-Batal^[7], Alkhalil^[8], Al Kohlani^[9], Bidaoui^[10], Al-shamari^[11,12], Habib^[13], Almossa^[14], Altamimi^[15]), Mandarin Chinese^[16,17], Swahili^[18,19], Italian^[20], West Flemish^[21], and Swedish^[22,23], among many others. As pointed out by Blakemore^[24], discourse markers are a heterogeneous syntactic class of expressions distinguished by their functions in discourse. These expressions can originate from different sources of lexical or functional items such as conjunctions, adverbs or prepositions^[1,25]. Some of the key distinguishing features of discourse markers discussed in the literature are that (i) they typically occur in clause-initial positions, (ii) they have little or no propositional content and therefore do not contribute to the content meaning of an utterance, and (iii) they have grammatical optionality, viz. they are optional and can be deleted without affecting the grammaticality of the structure^[2,3,5,24,26,27].

Najdi Arabic (henceforth, NA) exhibits plenty of speaker-oriented particles that mostly appear clause-initially and contribute to the pragmatic function of the sentence where they occur^[11,12,14]. The focus of the present paper is on the expression of the discourse particle *ʔaδʕaahir* (plainly الظاهر in Arabic), which has to date not been studied in the literature on NA. Its use as a discourse marker is important because although it has no semantic content, as is the case with other discourse particles, it plays a significant role in structuring discourse, signalling the speaker's view on the utterance being said, and facilitating the flow of the conversation. As will become clear, *ʔaδʕaahir* is indicative of the speaker's attitude towards his/her utterance to the extent that it expresses the speaker's certainty about the truth of the propositional content of his/her utterance. A significant aspect of the paper is that the discourse particle *ʔaδʕaahir* has not been subject to any research within Arabic literature. To the best of my knowledge, no previous work has offered a descriptive analysis of this topic in the clause structure of NA or any other spoken varieties. This study aims, therefore, to provide an adequate description of *ʔaδʕaahir*. In so doing, it constitutes a step towards attempting to figure out the role of discourse-related particles in sentence building^[28–30]. It

is hoped that the study will contribute to the ongoing discussion on the mapping between the semantic, pragmatic and syntactic analyses of discourse particles.

Following this section, which introduces the paper, section 2.1 gives a brief overview of the extensive literature on discourse markers, discussing the various proposals and definitions used. Next, since the syntax of discourse particles is not sufficiently documented in this variety of Arabic, section 2.2 presents a summary of previous studies on discourse particles, showing that *ʔaδʕaahir* has received no attention in the literature on NA. In section 3, I address some basic semantic and pragmatic assumptions of the discourse particle *ʔaδʕaahir*, pointing out that it has no propositional content and hence does not contribute to the proposition expressed by the utterance. In this section, I also discuss the assumption that *ʔaδʕaahir* is an evidential marker, which expresses the speakers' view or attitude towards certainty of their utterance. Section 4 provides a descriptive syntactic analysis of *ʔaδʕaahir* and explores its distributional properties. The remainder of this section goes on to discuss several syntactic facts and observations regarding the syntactic position of *ʔaδʕaahir* within the clause, rejecting the view that it occupies a higher position within the IP-domain of the respective sentence. Section 5 offers the paper's conclusions and briefly discusses an issue left open for further research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Background

Discourse particles have played a central role in contemporary syntactic theory because they are interestingly distinct from other grammatical categories such as nouns, verbs and adjectives. Cross-linguistically, they have been considered crucial for understanding the information structure of a sentence, explaining word order (ir)regularities in the world's languages and analysing the role that the information structure plays in discourse (see Lambrecht^[28], Zimmermann^[31,32], van Kemenade^[33], Karagjosova^[34], among many others). As pointed out above, an important aspect of the paper is that *ʔaδʕaahir* has not been subject to any research within Arabic literature. As far as I know, there is not a single work which has discussed this particle in the literature on clause structure in NA (cf. Section 2.2 below).

A key question that arises at this point is – what are

discourse markers, anyway? It should be noted that the notion of discourse markers has been a hotly debated topic and that there is no single agreed-upon definition in the literature. Discourse markers, in the broader sense, have been assigned various definitions and terms. Zienkowski et al.^[35] state that discourse particles are “most commonly used as a general or umbrella term covering forms with a wide variety of functions both on the interpersonal and textual levels” (p. 227). According to Fraser^[5], discourse particles are defined as follows: “a class of lexical expressions drawn primarily from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases which signal a relationship between the interpretations of the segment they produce” (p. 931). In their seminal work on English, Halliday & Hasan^[36] point out that discourse markers are useful cohesive devices which, in effect, serve as linkers between discourse units. In a similar vein, Schiffrin^[3] advocates for the coherence approach to these linguistic elements, pointing out that they are “sequentially dependent elements which brackets the units of talk” (p. 31). She goes further to describe them as a “discourse glue”, which basically provides the structure and coherence of the respective utterance. On the other hand, Sperber & Wilson^[37] and Blakemore^[24,38] have discussed discourse particles within the framework of Relevance Theory, which is one of the main theories in pragmatics. They all focus on the cognitive effects of discourse particles on discourse. For example, Blakemore^[38] identifies discourse particles as “expressions that constrain the interpretation of the utterances that contain them by virtue of the inferential connections that they express” (p. 105).

Before moving on to the next subsection, one remark regarding the terminology of discourse markers is in order. Looking at the extensive literature on discourse markers, one can observe that the terminology is inconsistent as they have been referred to interchangeably as sentence connectives, discourse markers, discourse operators, discourse connectives, discourse particles or just particles. Various other terms and phrases have also been used, including pragmatic particles, pragmatic markers, pragmatic expressions, utterance particles, discourse signalling devices, fillers and discourse devices. Throughout this paper, I use the term discourse particles. Given that the cited data from other works is inconsistent, I will maintain the original glosses as found in cited sources in what follows.

2.2. Previous Studies on Discourse Particles in NA

As mentioned above (Section 1), the literature on discourse particles is relatively speaking well-established across languages. However, the relevant literature on discourse particles in (Najdi) Arabic is still largely under-researched. In the following paragraphs, I present in detail the existing studies that have discussed discourse particles in this Arabic variety.

Alsufayan^[39] has investigated the use of several discourse particles in oral narratives in the dialect of Najdi Arabic (NA). This is a corpus driven study, which particularly examines the use of the discourse particles *wa* ‘and’, *fa* ‘so’, *yani* ‘I mean’, *baden* ‘then’, and *thomen* ‘after that’ in this variety of Arabic. She analyses their pragmatic/semantic functions as well as their frequencies, applying Labov’s^[40] model of narrative syntax and showing how these particles align with this model in NA personal experience spoken narratives.

In his pursuit to document the various discourse particles spoken in NA, Alshamari^[11] has descriptively discussed a number of discourse particles primarily used in the North Hail dialect of NA. The author has provided a wide range of sentence particles, namely, *ʕid*, *zad*, *ʔadʒal*, *ʕumr*, *ʔisim*, *sʕaid*, *kumma*, *dʒeli*, *tsan*, *jamaar*, *maar*, *ʔaθari*, *sʕahi:h*, *xaʔi:r*, *tsaif*, *ʕankin* and *fin*, that encode various sentence-types, where the information structure of the sentence plays a crucial role in explaining word order variation. He further suggested that in this variety of Arabic these particles can be classified into four groups: (a) speaker-positive, (b) speaker-negative, (c) evidentiality, and (d) discourse coherence.

Another significant study is the one conducted by Alshamari^[12], which has extensively discussed a number of discourse particles in the North Hail dialect of NA including *mar*, *ʕad*, *tara*, *ʔaktin*, *ʔedi*, *tsin*, *ʔefwa* and *tigil*, pointing out that they are all topic markers located in the CP domain of the clause, i.e., in the left periphery. This study adopts Rizzi’s^[41] split CP hypothesis and Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl’s^[42] typology of topics and assumes a bottom-up Minimalist derivational theory^[43–45].

Alshammari & Alshammari^[46] have studied the particle *qid* in NA, arguing that it is an evidentiality head which functions as a certainty marker in natural spoken discourse. They analyse this discourse marker within the Minimalist Program^[43] specifically proposing that *qid* is the head of FP projection, which is sandwiched between TP and CP, thus oc-

cupying a fixed syntactic position. Their analysis considers only one particle, i.e., the particle *qid*, which they contrast briefly with the uncertainty marker *qad* in Modern Standard Arabic.

Al-Rojaie's^[47] study looks at the pragmatic functions of religious expressions in NA, applying both speech act theory and the politeness theory, pointing out that religious expressions are used in NA in various forms in both formal and informal settings. Al-Rojaie argues that the semantic content of religious expressions has nothing to do with the speaker's intended meaning. According to Al-Rojaie, religious expressions are used pragmatically to convey multiple meanings and uses.

Almossa^[48] has examined the discourse-pragmatic interface in NA through the use of the marker *yaʕni*. The study highlights the frequency of this particle and its pragmatic function as exhibited in natural discourse. In a related vein, Almossa^[14] has also investigated three discourse-related particles in NA from a sociolinguistic perspective. She explores three types of particles (a) *madri*, (b) *tayyib* and (c) intensifiers such as *jiddan* and *marrah*, using a quantitative variationist approach together with qualitative methods in order to capture their discourse-pragmatic functions.

Closely related to the study at hand, Altamimi^[15] studies the pragmatic role of three discourse particles in NA, viz., *tayib*, *ago:l*, and *alhi:n*, which mean 'okay', 'I say' and 'now', respectively. The author attempts to analyse NA native speakers' using a relevance-theoretic approach (Sperber & Wilson^[37], and subsequent work).

Reviewing the relevant literature, one can safely state that the discourse particle *ʔaδʕaahir* in NA has not been studied at all and is worth investigating since it provides new insights that have not been mentioned before. It is indeed surprising that this discourse particle has gone unnoticed up until now.

3. The Discourse Particle *ʔaδʕaahir*: Basic Semantic and Pragmatic Assumptions

This section addresses the semantic and pragmatic status of *ʔaδʕaahir*. As outlined in the preceding sections, ex-

tensive research carried out on discourse particles in many languages has shown that they are typically used in a clause-initial position, in an intermediate position or even towards the end, occupying a final position in the accompanying utterance (see, for instance, Schiffrin^[3], Müller^[49], Schiffrin et al.^[50]). To illustrate, let us consider the examples shown in (1a–c):

- | | | | | |
|-----|----|----------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| (1) | a. | <i>ʔaδʕaahir</i> | Talal | naam |
| | | PRT | Talal | slept.3SG.M |
| | | 'Evidently, Talal slept.' | | |
| | b. | Talal | <i>ʔaδʕaahir</i> | naam |
| | | Talal | PRT | slept.3SG.M |
| | | 'Talal, evidently, slept.' | | |
| | c. | Talal | naam | <i>ʔaδʕaahir</i> |
| | | Talal | slept.3SG.M | PRT |
| | | 'Talal slept, evidently.' | | |

As clearly shown in (1), the particle *ʔaδʕaahir* can be flexibly inserted in an initial, intermediate, or final position. However, it typically appears clause-initially; taking scope over the whole clause (1a), internally (1b), but rarely shows up in utterance-final position (1c). In terms of semantics, *ʔaδʕaahir* has little or no propositional content and does not contribute to the informational content of the utterance. This assumption goes in harmony with various proposals, which point out that discourse particles are semantically independent linguistic entities given that they do not impinge on the listeners' ability to comprehend the intended meaning of the utterance or its truth conditional (see Schiffrin^[3], Fraser^[5], Schourup^[2], Müller^[49], Hanks^[51], Choi^[27], inter alia). Schiffrin^[3] argues, for instance, that discourse particles do not possess inherent semantic meaning in the same way as other content words. According to Schourup^[2] and Müller^[49], the presence or absence of discourse particles can neither affect the grammaticality nor the propositional content of a given sentence. Schourup^[2] further contends that discourse particles essentially "display", "reinforce", or offer "clues" to the intended interpretation instead of "creating" a surplus meaning (p. 232). By way of example, consider the following utterances to examine whether the propositional content of the utterance containing *ʔaδʕaahir* (2a) is different from that without (2b):

- (2) a. $\lambda a\delta^{\delta}aahir$ $\lambda al-walad$ ma $raa\hbar$ $li-l-madrasah$
 PRT DEF-boy NEG went.3SG.M to-DEF-school
 ‘Evidently, the boy did not go to school.’
- b. $\lambda al-walad$ ma $raa\hbar$ $li-l-madrasah$
 DEF-boy NEG went.3SG.M to-DEF-school
 ‘The boy did not go to school.’

Comparing utterance (2a) with utterance (2b), it is quite clear that the particle $\lambda a\delta^{\delta}aahir$ does not have a semantic meaning/content that would contribute to the propositional content of the respective utterance. Both sentences (2a and 2b) have the same meaning with no noticeable difference to the sentence propositional content when the particle is added or deleted. Put differently, the presence or absence of this particle does not affect the propositional content of the utterance (cf. Schourup^[2], Carston^[52], among many others). With this in mind, it is quite clear that the contribution of the particle $\lambda a\delta^{\delta}aahir$ to the sentence cannot be captured in semantics. The question that promptly arises is why the particle $\lambda a\delta^{\delta}aahir$ is used in (2a) at all?

In response, the sole difference between the utterances in (2) is that the speaker in utterance (2a) expresses his or her attitude towards the utterance, whereas utterance (2b) is simply reporting the event. $\lambda a\delta^{\delta}aahir$ is a speaker-oriented particle in the sense that it signals the speaker’s view towards his/her utterance. By uttering this particle, the speaker expresses his/her assumption that the boy has not gone to school at the time of speech, expressing therefore his/her certainty or belief, as well as a conviction that the addressee should adopt the same belief based on the evidence available to the speaker. When the particle $\lambda a\delta^{\delta}aahir$ is employed in an utterance, the hearer grasps that the speaker has direct evidence, which makes him/her believe that his/her utterance is true. By ‘direct’ evidence, I mean evidence that builds not on speculation but on a solid piece of information of which the speaker is very certain. The most approximate translation of the utterance (2a) should thus be read as: ‘the boy did not go to the school, to the best knowledge of the speaker who has direct evidence of the truth of the utterance’. The whole of this utterance is condensed into the particle $\lambda a\delta^{\delta}aahir$. On the other hand, utterance (2b) denotes the same propositional content, without expressing the speaker’s attitude or his/her certainty with respect to the utterance.

This line of reasoning is consistent with the widely

adopted view in the literature that capitalises on the argument that discourse particles are crucially important, given their role in the information structure of the sentence in the grammar (see, e.g., van Kemenade^[33], Zimmermann^[32]). For instance, while examining discourse particles from a grammatical-pragmatic perspective, Fraser^[5] hypothesises that their function is not only to contribute to the coherence of the utterance but also to indicate the speaker’s intention for the upcoming turn. Pragmatically speaking, they are employed to communicate various functions. Frank-Job^[53], among others) views discourse particles as a developmental process of pragmaticalisation, which underlies their multi-functionality in meta-communication. This applies equally to the particle $\lambda a\delta^{\delta}aahir$, given the argument that discourse particles in general serve as a link between syntax and discourse (see, for instance, Zimmermann^[32], Biberauer et al.^[54], Alshamari^[12], Papafragou^[55], to list just a few).

In relation to this, Fraser^[5] (p. 946) develops four types of discourse particles in English, identifying the second type as “commentary markers”, which comprise a subtype labelled “evidential markers”, adding that the latter include: assuredly, certainly, clearly, conceivably, decidedly. Extending this idea to $\lambda a\delta^{\delta}aahir$, this discourse particle would fall into Fraser’s^[5] classification given that it reveals the speaker’s certainty in relation to the utterance based on his/her knowledge or the available evidence. As regards evidentiality, several works have concentrated on definitions of evidentiality in the literature (see, e.g., Chafe^[56], Dendale & Tasmowski^[57], Aikhenvald^[58,59]). For the purposes of the current paper, a simplified version of evidentiality advanced by Aikhenvald^[58] is adopted, to account for the use of the particle $\lambda a\delta^{\delta}aahir$ in NA. Aikhenvald^[58] states that evidentiality is properly understood as expressing the existence of a source of evidence for some information found in the utterance. Put another way, evidentiality is closely defined as the “grammatical marking of information source” (Aikhenvald^[59], p. 1). On this view, $\lambda a\delta^{\delta}aahir$ includes both

stating that there is some evidence and showing what type of evidence is there.

Along this line of reasoning, when the speaker uses the particle *ʔaðʕaahir*, he/she expresses the existence of a source of evidence for the content of the clause. This source is first-hand, rendering the speaker confident of the

truth of this/her utterance. In line with Chafe's^[56] concept of "degree of reliability", the speaker uttering the particle *ʔaðʕaahir* implies that the content of an utterance should be perceived as most reliable, given the source of the information he/she has access to. Consider the following dialogue, for concreteness:

(3) CONTEXT: Co-workers are discussing whether or not their fellow worker is in the workplace

- Speaker A: ween Salman? ma ʔaʕuf-uh ʔib-maktab-ah.
Where Salman NEG see.3SG.M-him in-office-his
'Where is Salman? I do not see him in his office.'
- Speaker B: talga-ah bi-l-maktab ʔiθ-θaani.
find.3SG.M-him in-DEF-offices DEF-second
'You can find him in the other office.'
- Speaker A: ma hu mawdʒood, hata sijjaart-ah ma hi bi-l-mawwagif
NEG he present even car-his NEG it in-DEF-parking
'He is not there! Even his car is not in the car park!'
- Speaker B: kariibah!
strange!
'(It's) strange!'
- Speaker A: ʔaðʕaahir ʔinn-uh ma dʒaa l-yoom li-l-dawwam
PRT that-3SG.M NEG come.3SG.M DEF-day to-DEF-work
'Evidently, he did not come to work today.'

In speaker's A last utterance, the interlocutor uses the particle *ʔaðʕaahir* as he becomes certain about the proposition that *Salman* is not present in the workplace on that day. This certainty comes from the fact that *Salman* is not in his office nor in any other office, as well as that his car is not in the car park, which can only be the case because he is absent from work. As the translation in (3) shows, *ʔaðʕaahir* is best translated into English as 'evidently', which is an evidential particle with similar reliability^[60]. In view of all this, we are led to the assumption that *ʔaðʕaahir* is an evidential marker.

4. Discussion

Having discussed the analysis of the discourse particle *ʔaðʕaahir* from semantic and pragmatic perspectives in the

preceding section, this section adds to the discussion, largely by bringing into focus a descriptive account of this particle within the clause it occurs in. The section also highlights a number of syntactic facts and observations pertaining to *ʔaðʕaahir* within the NA clause structure.

Syntactically speaking, as stated above, the particle *ʔaðʕaahir* appears, in most cases, sentence-initially, as shown in (4) below. This is not surprising given the fact that *ʔaðʕaahir* signals the upcoming information (cf. Othman^[61]).

A significant observation is that *ʔaðʕaahir* precedes both the subject and the negative marker *ma*, which is an indication of its higher position in the structure, relevant to TP and NegP, which are components of the IP-related area, as given in (5).

- (4) ʔaðʕaahir ʔal-walad raah li-l-madrasah
PRT DEF-boy went.3SG.M to-DEF-school
'Evidently, the boy went to school.'

- (5) $\text{ʔa}\delta^{\text{f}}\text{aahir}$ ʔal-walad ma raah li-l-madrasah
 PRT DEF-boy NEG went.3SG.M to-DEF-school
 ‘Evidently, the boy did not go to school.’

In line with Fraser’s^[5] study of discourse particles, which pinpoints a number of evidential markers including assuredly, certainly, clearly, conceivably and decidedly, it can be assumed that $\text{ʔa}\delta^{\text{f}}\text{aahir}$ is an evidentiality particle. As a first approximation, and in the light of Cinque^[60], we can tentatively suggest that the particle $\text{ʔa}\delta^{\text{f}}\text{aahir}$ occupies a Modal Phrase projection^[60], which is sandwiched between CP and TP; i.e., CP > $\text{ʔa}\delta^{\text{f}}\text{aahir}$ > TP. Cinque^[60] hypothesises that there is a fixed universal hierarchy or order of functional projections for adverbs in clause structure. Cinque argues further that evidential markers such as adverbials occupy Mood_{evidential} Phrase or ‘MoodP_{evidential}’ as Cinque^[60]

(p. 106) puts it.

Under this assumption, it can be postulated that $\text{ʔa}\delta^{\text{f}}\text{aahir}$ is located in the functional projection Mood_{evidential} Phrase since it is an evidential marker and shows up in a higher position preceding the IP-related area (cf. 5) in a structure like the representation shown in (6).

- (6) [CP C [MoodP Mood $\text{ʔa}\delta^{\text{f}}\text{aahir}$ [TP T]]]

However, closer inspection reveals that this should not be the case. There is some evidence which corroborates the contention that $\text{ʔa}\delta^{\text{f}}\text{aahir}$ occupies a higher position in the left periphery as a result of the behaviour of this particle in embedded clauses, as in (7–8).

- (7) Salman gaal $\text{ʔa}\delta^{\text{f}}\text{aahir}$ ʔinn ʔal-walad ma raah li-l-madrasah
 Salman said PRT that DEF-boy NEG went.3SG.M to-DEF-school
 ‘Salman said that evidently the boy did not go to school.’
- (8) Salman gaal $\text{ʔa}\delta^{\text{f}}\text{aahir}$ ʔinn Sarah safarat
 Salman said PRT that Sarah travelled.3SG.F
 ‘Salman said that evidently Sarah travelled.’

As shown by the sentences in (7–8), in embedded contexts, the particle $\text{ʔa}\delta^{\text{f}}\text{aahir}$ must precede the complementizer ʔinn . If we force the particle $\text{ʔa}\delta^{\text{f}}\text{aahir}$ to appear in

a position which follows the complementizer, the sentence becomes ungrammatical, as illustrated in the following examples:

- (9) *Salman gaal ʔinn $\text{ʔa}\delta^{\text{f}}\text{aahir}$ ʔal-walad ma raah li-l-madrasah
 Salman said that PRT DEF-boy NEG went.3SG.M to-DEF-school
 Intended meaning: ‘Salman said that evidently the boy did not go to school.’
- (10) *Salman gaal ʔinn $\text{ʔa}\delta^{\text{f}}\text{aahir}$ Sarah safarat
 Salman said that PRT Sarah travelled.3SG.F
 Intended meaning: ‘Salman said that evidently Sarah travelled.’

The ill-formedness of sentences (9–10) strongly suggests that the particle $\text{ʔa}\delta^{\text{f}}\text{aahir}$ must be located in a higher position within the CP domain, which is headed by the complementizer ʔinn . It also reveals that there are certain restrictions concerning the linear order between the complementizer

ʔinn and the particle $\text{ʔa}\delta^{\text{f}}\text{aahir}$ which must be respected in embedded contexts.

It should be noted that the particle $\text{ʔa}\delta^{\text{f}}\text{aahir}$ does not follow the complementizer ʔinn in main clauses, as well. Consider the following ill-formed sentence:

- (11) * ʔinn $\text{ʔa}\delta^{\text{f}}\text{aahir}$ ʔal-walad ma raah li-l-madrasah
 that PRT DEF-boy NEG went.3SG.M to-DEF-school
 Intended meaning: ‘Evidently, the boy did not go to school.’

The ungrammaticality of sentence (11) shows that there is a distributional restriction on the use of the particle *ʔaδ^faahir* with respect to the complementizer *ʔinn* in main clauses. When the complementizer *ʔinn* appears in main clauses in NA, it is prohibited from showing up before *ʔaδ^faahir*; the particle must appear first, then be followed by the complementizer *ʔinn* (*ʔaδ^faahir* > *ʔinn*). Crucially, the fact that this particle obligatorily shows up in a higher position preceding the complementizer *ʔinn* militates against the assumption represented in (6), whereby *ʔaδ^faahir* is assumed to be contained in the Mood_{evidential} Phrase, which is flanked between CP and TP, in the sense of Cinque^[60]. If the complementizer *ʔinn* is in C, and given the fact that the particle *ʔaδ^faahir* precedes all the IP-related formation together

with the complementizer, it follows that *ʔaδ^faahir* cannot be part of the TP but rather must be located in a higher peripheral position syntactically. This means that it must be within the syntax of the expanded left periphery of the clause, i.e., Rizzi's^[41] split CP Hypothesis, thus occupying a peripheral position, something I leave for future research (see section 5; cf. Alrasheedi (forthcoming)).

One essential point to consider is the fact that the particle *ʔaδ^faahir* is insensitive to morphological agreement. While analysing discourse particles in North Hail Dialect, Alshamari^[12] points out that some discourse particles show agreement in phi-features in this sub-variety of NA. Interestingly, Alshamari^[12] (p. 25) reports that the particle *ʔedi* agrees with the subject, as illustrated in (12).

- | | | | | |
|------|--------------------|-----|---------------|-------------------|
| (12) | <i>ʔedi-h</i> | Ali | <i>jaf</i> | <i>as-sayarah</i> |
| | PRT-3SG.M | Ali | see.PST.3SG.M | DEF-car |
| | 'Ali saw the car.' | | | |

One might ask why *ʔaδ^faahir* does not show a similar agreement relation in phi-features with the DP. In this respect, it can be hypothesised that *ʔaδ^faahir* is a non-agreeing marker and hence does not have phi-features. It should be mentioned that the non-agreeing property of *ʔaδ^faahir* goes hand in hand with the widely accepted assumption that discourse particles are typically non-agreeing elements, i.e.,

they do not usually show agreement inflections across languages (see, for example, Ouhalla^[62], Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl^[42], Alshamari^[12]).

A final point to be made concerns the observation that the subject of the sentence containing *ʔaδ^faahir* must be definite, as shown in (13–16).

- | | | | | |
|------|--|-----------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| (13) | <i>ʔal-walad</i> | <i>ʔaδ^faahir</i> | <i>safar</i> | <i>ʔams</i> |
| | DEF-boy | PRT | travelled.3SG.M | yesterday |
| | 'The boy, evidently, travelled yesterday.' | | | |
| (14) | <i>ʔaδ^faahir</i> | <i>ʔal-walad</i> | <i>safar</i> | <i>ʔams</i> |
| | PRT | DEF-boy | travelled.3SG.M | yesterday |
| | 'Evidently, the boy travelled yesterday.' | | | |
| (15) | <i>ʔaδ^faahir</i> | Salman | <i>safar</i> | <i>ʔams</i> |
| | PRT | Salman | travelled.3SG.M | yesterday |
| | 'Evidently, Salman travelled yesterday.' | | | |
| (16) | <i>ʔaδ^faahir</i> | Sarah | <i>safarat</i> | <i>ʔams</i> |
| | PRT | Sarah | travelled.3SG.F | yesterday |
| | 'Evidently, Sarah travelled yesterday.' | | | |

The examples above indicate that the subjects of utterances containing *ʔaδ^faahir* are definite. It should be noted

that if the subject is indefinite, the sentence becomes ill-formed, as shown in (17–20).

- (17) *walad ʔaðʕaahir safar ʔams
 boy PRT travelled.3SG.M yesterday
 Intended meaning: ‘A boy, evidently, travelled yesterday.’
- (18) *ʔaðʕaahir walad safar ʔams
 PRT boy travelled.3SG.M yesterday
 Intended meaning: ‘Evidently, a boy travelled yesterday.’
- (19) *bint ʔaðʕaahir safarat ʔams
 girl PRT travelled.3SG.F yesterday
 Intended meaning: ‘A girl, evidently, travelled yesterday.’
- (20) *ʔaðʕaahir bint safarat ʔams
 PRT girl travelled.3SG.F yesterday
 Intended meaning: ‘Evidently, a girl travelled yesterday.’

The ungrammaticality of sentences (17–20) follows from the fact that the subject is indefinite. This means that the well-formedness of the sentence is affected by the definiteness of the subject DP. The basic rule put forward in the context shown in (13–16) and (17–20) is completely compat-

ible with the hypothesis that topics must be definite, which is a general characteristic feature of Arabic^[63–67].

By way of summing up, the descriptive observations concerning the distribution of the discourse particle *ʔaðʕaahir* can be stated as follows:

- (21) Syntactic properties of the discourse particle *ʔaðʕaahir* in Najdi Arabic:
- The particle *ʔaðʕaahir* introduces its sentence. i.e., typically appears in utterance-initial position.
 - The complementizer *ʔinn* must be preceded by *ʔaðʕaahir* in both main and embedded clauses.
 - The particle *ʔaðʕaahir* is a non-agreeing particle (i.e., having no phi-content).
 - The subject of the particle *ʔaðʕaahir* must be definite; otherwise, the sentence would be ill-formed.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, I have presented a documentation of the discourse particle *ʔaðʕaahir* in NA based on semantic, pragmatic and syntactic grounds. The descriptive analysis presented has pointed out that *ʔaðʕaahir* is a semantically independent linguistic entity given that it does not affect the addressee’s ability to understand the propositional meaning of an utterance. Pragmatically speaking, *ʔaðʕaahir* indicates the speaker’s state of mind regarding the utterance being said. The paper has also discussed that *ʔaðʕaahir* is an evidential marker, which expresses certainty on the part of the speaker. Hence, *ʔaðʕaahir* has a pragmatic function rather than a semantic one. I have also shown that *ʔaðʕaahir* has received no attention in the literature on Arabic syntax. As this particle has not been investigated before, the paper offers a description, showing that *ʔaðʕaahir* essentially marks the speaker’s intended pragmatic meaning of an utterance. However, to the extent that the speaker’s pragmatic meaning of an utterance is usually not concerned with what is literally

said, it is hypothesised that *ʔaðʕaahir* is a means of spelling out such pragmatic meaning in discourse structure. Someone hearing this particle would consequently benefit greatly from the speaker’s state of mind on the certainty of the utterance (i.e., they would be capable of interpreting the degree of speaker certainty).

It should be noted that this paper is intended to be a theory-neutral study of this particle in NA, which aims to provide the reader with an adequate descriptive overview of this discourse particle. In this paper, I do not take a stand on which of the syntactic structures of *ʔaðʕaahir* is most accurate as the aim of this paper is to present an account of this particle in NA in a relatively theory-neutral fashion. The paper has also discussed the distributional properties of this particle as well as the observable restrictions on the use of *ʔaðʕaahir* with regard to the complementizer in main and embedded contexts. One question left unanswered concerns the exact position of the particle in the left periphery of the clause. Ideally, there should be a thorough discussion of the left-peripheral position of *ʔaðʕaahir*, providing

a minimalist approach to it. However, this issue is beyond the scope of this paper and awaits further research (see, though, Alrasheedi^[68], who proposes a minimalist analysis of *ʔað^faahir* in this variety of Arabic). To conclude, it is hoped that the findings and the arguments presented in this paper will add to the large body of research on discourse particles.

Funding

The author declares that he has received no funding for this research.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable. This study did not involve human participants.

Data Availability Statement

All the data are present in the manuscript itself. No additional data are available.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Abbreviation

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

NA	Najdi Arabic
PRT	Particle
DEF	Definite Marker
CP	Complementizer
TP	Tense Phrase
DP	Determiner Phrase
FP	Functional Phrase
3	Third Person
SG	Singular
M	Masculine

F	Feminine
PL	Plural
NEG	Negative Marker
NegP	Negation Phrase

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