

# Interaction of negation with tense, modality and information structure in Standard Arabic\*

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## *Abstract*

*The aim of this paper is to consider the interaction of tense, mood and focus with negation in Standard Arabic. This interaction can be observed via marking the tense and mood of the sentence, or via selecting a particular type of tense, or being associated with Information Structure. Building on this fact, the current paper provides a unified analysis, in which negation in Arabic can be accounted for without a NegP projection.*

*Keywords: Negation, Tense, Mood, Information Structure, [+D] feature, NEG Projection.*

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## 1. Introduction

Morphologically, Arabic has six negative markers. These are *laa*, *lam*, *lan*, *lammaa*, *laysa* and *maa* (see, e.g., Sibawayh 8th Century, 1938 edn; Fassi Fehri 1993, Benmamoun 2000). The distribution of these negative markers falls into three broad classes:

- Negative markers restricted to negate verbal sentences (*laa*, *lam*, *lammaa*, *lan*).
- A negative marker restricted to negate nominal sentences (*laysa*).
- A free Negative marker negates both verbal and nominal sentences (*maa*).

The goal of this paper is to provide a typological sketch to the negation system of these three broad classes, focusing on considering the interaction of tense, mood and focus with negation in Arabic. The current paper also aims at providing a unified analysis, in which negation in Arabic can be accounted for without a NegP projection.

## 2. Negation system in Arabic

### 2.1. Negative markers restricted to verbal sentences

The negative markers with verbal sentences are always in a preverbal position. In other words, the strategy is negating the sentence or the clause by employing only a preverbal negative marker. These negative markers are *lam*, *lammaa*, *lan* and *laa*. This strategy is exemplified in the following examples (1-4):

- (1) a. takallama                      r-rijaal-u.  
       talk-3m-past                    the- men-Nom  
       “The men talked”.
- b. lam                      yatakallam-Ø                      r-rijaal-u.  
       neg.past      3m-talk-JUS                    the- men-Nom  
       “The men did not talk.”
- (2) a. kataba                      zaid-un                      l-qiSSat-a.  
       write.3ms      Zaid-Nom                    the- story-Acc  
       “Zaid has written the story.”
- b. lammaa      ya-ktub-Ø                      zaid-un                      l-qiSSat-a.  
       neg.Pf      3m-write-JUS      Zaid-Nom                    the- story-Acc  
       “Zaid has not written the story yet.”

- (3) a. sa-ya-drus-u            T-Tullaab-u            ghadan.  
 fut-3m-study-IND    the- students-Nom    tomorrow  
 “The students will study tomorrow”.
- b. lan            ya-drus-a            T-Tullaab-u            ghadan.  
 neg.fut    3m-study-SUB    the- students-Nom    tomorrow  
 “The students will not study tomorrow”.
- (4) a. ya-ðhabu    T-Taalib-u            ʔila l-madrasat-i    Kula    yawm-in.  
 3m-go-Pres    the-student-Nom    to    the-school-Gen    every-Acc day-Gen  
 “The student goes to school every day.”
- b. laa            ya-ðhab-u    T-Taalib-u            ʔila l-madrasat-i.  
 neg.Pres    3m-go-IND    the-student.Nom    to the-school-Gen  
 Kula    yawm-in  
 every.Acc day.Gen  
 “The student does not go to school every day.”
- As the preceding examples show, the verb after these four negative markers must be in an imperfective form. Otherwise, the derivation crashes:
- (5) ʔar-rjal-u            lam            \*(takalam-uu).  
 the- men-Nom    neg.past    3m-past talk.mp
- (6) laamma \*(kataba)    zaid-un            l-qiSSat-a.  
 neg.pf    wrote.past    Zaid-Nom    the-story-Acc
- (7) ʔaT-Tullaab-u            lan            \*(daraus-uu).  
 the- students-Nom    neg.fut    3m-past study.mp
- (8) laa            \*(ðhahaba)    T-Taalib-u            ʔila l-madrasat-I    kul-a  
 neg.Pres went-Past    the-student    to    the-school-Gen    every.Acc  
 yawm-in.  
 day.Gen

The interaction between tense and negation with these negative markers is highly remarkable. Each negative marker in (1-4) inflects for tense. As a result, we find *lam* and *lamma* make a morphological alternation in the verb form. *Lam* is associated with the past tense interpretation, whereas *laamma* is associated with the perfect tense interpretation. Accordingly, *lamma* in (2b) negates the occurrence of the situation up to a given reference point. Thus, (2b) indicates that ‘*Zaid has not written the story but there was an intention to bring about the situation*’. As for *lan*, it allows only future tense interpretation. Finally, *laa* occurs in sentences with present tense

interpretation. Consequently, each negative collocates with a certain temporal adverb as the following table indicates:

(9)

The negative	ʔalʔaana 'now'	Ghadan 'tomorrow'	ʔamsi 'yesterday'	hata lʔaana 'so far'
Lam	X	X	√	X
Lammaa	X	X	X	√
Lan	X	√	X	X
Laa	√	X	X	X

The reason for these different tense interpretations with these negatives may come from the fact that “tensed verbs are in complementary distribution with tensed negatives. When the negative inflects for tense the verb cannot do so” (Benmamoun 2000: 96).

The last interesting fact to note at this point is that each negative marker in (1-4) occurs with a particular variant of the imperfective form: *lam* and *lammaa* occurs with jussive, *laa* with indicative and *lan* with subjunctive.

The interaction of negation with tense and modality, however, leads Fassi Fehri (1993: 163) to propose that the negatives *lam*, *lammaa*, *lan* and *laa* should be treated syntactically as Modal negatives<sup>1</sup> since they entertain a specific governing relation with (inflected) verbal projections and can assign Mood to the imperfect verb that follow them, and make its function as a carrier of mood, without any particular tense specification as they are inflected for tense as illustrated above in (9). In addition to being inflected for tense and able to assign mood, these negatives behave like modals in that they must be adjacent to the verb that follows them (Fassi Fehri 1993: 163). Accordingly, it is unacceptable to insert any element between the verb and the negative marker:

(10) \*lam            r-rijaal-u            yatakalm-uu.  
neg.past        the- men-Nom 3m-talk.mp

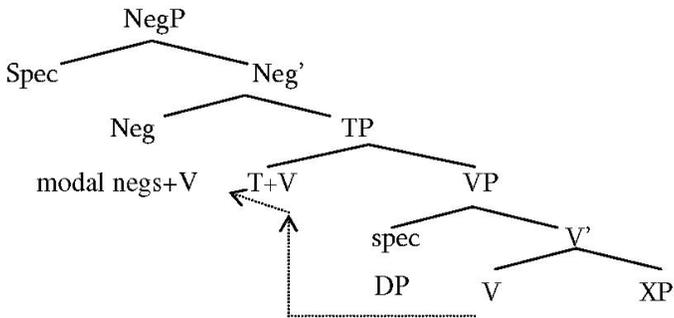
(11) \* lammaa zaid-un        ya-ktub                    l-qiSSat-a.  
neg.Pf        Zaid-Nom 3m-write.JUS the- story-Acc

<sup>1</sup> The stranded definition of Modality is concerned with the status of the proposition that describes the event, and with the ability of assigning mood to the verb that must be adjacent to the modal particle (see Palmer 2001:8).

- (12) \*lan T-Tullaab-u ya-drus-a ghadan.  
 neg.fut the- students-Nom 3m-study-SUB tomorrow
- (13) \* laa T-Taalib-u ya-ðhab-u ʔila l-madrasat-i.  
 neg.Pres the-student-Nom 3m-go-IND to the-school-Gen  
 Kula yawm-in  
 every.Acc day.Gen

This being the case, these tensed modal negatives, as proposed by Fassi Fehri (1993), select a clausal inflectional projection, not a bare VP as in English and French. That is to say, modal negatives are in a head position, and hence they can attribute the right selectional properties, and their complement is TP, not VP (contra Benmamoun 2000, Ouhalla 1994, and Bahloul 1996) as can be shown by the simplified derivation in (14) below:

(14)



Note that the derivation in (14) further illustrates that the verb moves from V to T achieving the VSO order, and then moves further into Neg to become adjacent to the head Neg satisfying requirements of mood assignment.

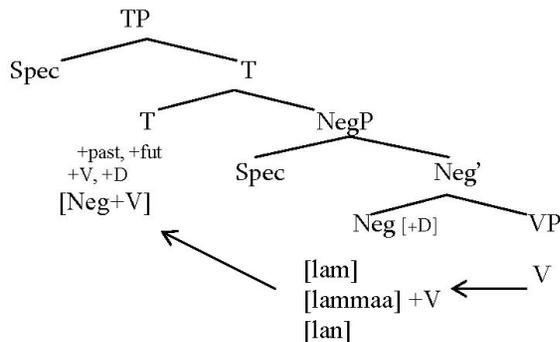
Benmamoun (2000: 99) suggests that there is a formal reason that requires the verb to move to the negative and merge with it other than satisfying requirements of mood assignment. As a starting point, he proposes, in line with Ouhalla (1994) and Bahloul (1996), that NegP in Arabic is always located between TP and VP. Adopting Aoun's (1981) proposal that in Standard Arabic tense is expressed independently of the verb, he proposes that the merger or incorporation between negation and the verb relates to the tense feature carried by the negatives *laa*, *lam*, *lammaa* and *lan*. This feature only forces the presence of the verb. To formally account for the merger between the verb and the negative marker, Benmamoun assumes that T with verbal sentences can be divided into two types. The first type of T is that of past and future verbal sentences. And it is valued with two sorts of features: a

[+V] feature and a [+D] feature (i.e., nominal feature). The second type of T is specified only for a [+D] feature and can be found only in sentences with present tense interpretations.

It is natural that the V feature is satisfied by verbal heads. But the question that should arise now is that since the [+D] feature is a nominal feature, what features on the verb are capable of checking this nominal feature? Following Ritter (1995), Benmamoun notes that one feature on the verb that is able to check [+D] is person agreement, and that in a null subject language such as Arabic, agreement is generally assumed to be a nominal element and therefore it enables the verb to check the [+D] features of functional heads.

Since T with the tensed negatives *lam*, *lammaa* and *lan* is specified for a [+V] feature, then these negatives cannot by themselves check that feature. This is due to the fact that the tensed negatives, by virtue of carrying the temporal features of tense, are specified for [+D] feature, but not for [+V] feature (Benmamoun 2000: 100). Thus, the adjacency and merger between the two lexical heads are straightforwardly explained as follows. To satisfy the [+D] feature of Neg, the verb must merge with Neg, via move (internal merge, in the sense of Chomsky 2001, 2008). Then the whole complex moves into T to have its [+V] and [+D] features checked as represented by the derivation in (15).

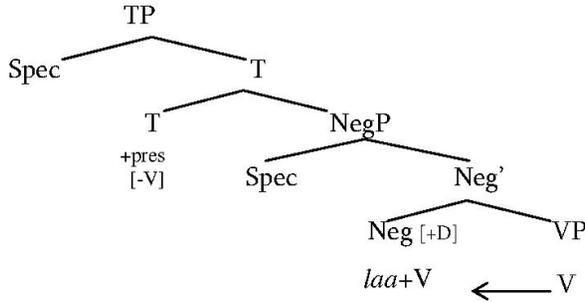
(15)



In the present tense sentences headed by the negative *laa*, the case is slightly different. According to Benmamoun's proposal, T in present tense lacks the [+V] feature and therefore it cannot attract the verb. However, the merger between the negative *laa* and the verb, carrying subject agreement, is justified to satisfy the [+D] feature of Neg. Such a satisfaction requires the verb to move to Neg to have the [+D] feature of Neg checked<sup>2</sup> as shown by (16) below.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, Benmamoun analysis encounters some problems. First it adopts an early checking theory of minimalist (Chomsky 1995) which has been recently replaced

(16)



As evidence for the proposal that the categorical features of the elements in T are not uniform, Benmamoun cites the well-known phenomenon in Arabic of the absence of an overt verbal copula in the present tense vs. its obligatory presence in the past tense (17). This lends, according to him, direct evidence that T in present tense lacks the [+V] feature, and therefore it does not force the presence of the copula.

- (17) a. ʔanaa jundi-un.  
I-Nom soldier-Nom  
“I am a soldier.”
- b. kun-tu jundi-an.  
was-1s soldier-Acc  
“I was a soldier.”

## 2.2. The fundamental role of *Laa*

Following Benmamoun (2000: 95), I assume that *laa* is the default negative marker in Arabic. This is not surprising since *laa* is the original source of all negative markers, apart from *maa*. That is, *lam*, *lammaa*, *lan* and *laysa* are derived from *laa* as indicated in (18) below, taken from Al-khawalda (1997: 253).

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by the Agree theory (Chomsky 2000, 2001). Second and more importantly, it is not clear why the [+D] feature of Neg in verbal sentences can only be checked by the verb not by the subject which is a nominal element and closer to Neg than the verb. Such an analysis leads to a complex derivation by further assuming that the whole complex Neg and V moves into T as illustrated above in (15). Later in section 5, I argue, following Fassi Fehri (1993), that the merger between the verb and the tensed negatives can be convincingly explained if we consider these negatives as modals.

- (18) a. *laa* + *m* = *lam*  
 b. *laa* + *mmaa* = *lammaa*  
 c. *laa* + *ʔan* = *lan*  
 d. *laa* + *ʔysa* = *laysa*

Moreover, two distinguishing features, according to Benmamoun, make *laa* the default negative maker in Arabic. (i) *laa* is the only negative that can be used as the negator in answers to questions with all types of tenses. Consider the following examples (19) is from Benmamoun 2000: 96):

- (19) a. *hal haDara T-Tullaab-u?*  
 Q come.past-3ms the-students  
 “Did the students come?”
- b. *laa, lam ya-hDura-uu-Ø.*  
 No, neg.past 3m-come-mp-JUS  
 “No, they didn’t come.”
- (20) a. *hal ʔanta fii l-bayt-i l-ʔaana?*  
 Q you-2m in the-house-Gen now  
 “Are you in the house now?”
- b. *laa, ʔanaa las-tu fii l-bayt-i l-ʔaana.*  
 No, I-Nom neg-1s in the-house-Gen now  
 “No, I am not in the house now.”
- (21) a. *hal sa-ta-ʔtii ghadan?*  
 Q fut-2m-come tomorrow  
 “Will you come tomorrow?”
- b. *laa, lan ʔa-ʔti-ia ghadan.*  
 No, neg.fut 1s-come-SUB tomorrow  
 “I will not come tomorrow.”

(ii) Unlike the others negative markers; *laa*, like the typical constituent negative *ghayr*, can occur in constituent negation. *Laa* in this case, as the example in (22) shows, is always followed by an indefinite subject in the accusative case without nunation,<sup>3</sup> negating the attribution between the subject and the predicate by denying the existence of the subject.

<sup>3</sup> Nunation, or *tanwiin* as it called in Arabic tradition, is the addition of a final *-n* to a noun or adjective to indicate that it is fully declinable and syntactically unmarked for definiteness.

- (22) a. *laa rajul-a haDir-un.*  
 neg man-Acc present-Nom  
 “(There is) no man is present.”
- b. \**lam rajul-a haDir-un.*  
 neg man-Acc present-Nom
- c. \**lammaa rajul-a haDir-un.*  
 neg man-Acc present-Nom
- d. \**lan rajul-a haDir-un.*  
 neg man-Acc present-Nom
- e. \**laysa rajul-a haDir-un.*  
 neg man-Acc present-Nom

As *laa* specifically negates the existence of the subject, the subject and predicate cannot be reordered (Hasan 1970: 1/688). This can be illustrated by the following ill-formed sentences derived from the example in (23).

- (23) a. \**laa rrajul-a haDir-un.*  
 neg the-man-Acc present-Nom
- b. \**laa haDir-un rajul-a.*  
 neg present-Nom man-Acc
- c. \**rajul-a laa haDir-un.*  
 man-Acc neg present-Nom

One important feature supporting the claim that *laa* is the default negative maker in Arabic, which Benmamoun does not discuss, is that imperative sentences in Arabic are exclusively negated by *laa* as shown by the following example in (24).

- (24) a. *laa ta-ðhab-Ø.*  
 neg 2m-go- IMPR  
 “Do not go.”
- b. \**lam ta-ðhab-Ø*  
 neg 2m-go-IMPR
- c. \**lammaa ta-ðhab-Ø*  
 neg 2m-go-IMPR

- d. \*lan      ta-ðhab-Ø  
neg        2m-go-IMPR
- e. \*maa      ta-ðhab-Ø  
neg        2m-go-IMPR
- f. \*laysa    ta-ðhab-Ø  
neg        2m-go-IMPR

### 3. *Laysa*

*Laysa*, derived from the negative *laa* (al-Khawalda 1997: 265; Benmamoun 2000), occurs with nonverbal predicates and imperfective verbs as in (25) and (26) below, taken from Moutaouakil (1993: 85). Thus, *laysa* is neither compatible with future tense interpretations (27), nor with verbs inflected for past tense (28) (Fassi Fehri, 1993: 208 n25). That is, *laysa* must select present tense as in (25) and (26).

- (25) *lays-at*      *zaynab-u*      *fii* *l-bayt-i*  
neg-3fs      Zeinab-Nom    in    the-house-Gen  
“Zeinab is not in the house.”

- (26) *laysa*      *xalid-un*      *ya-ktubu*      *Ŝ-Ŝ iŕ-a*  
neg.3ms      Khalid-Nom    3m-write-Present    the-poetry-Acc  
“Khalid does not write poetry.”

- (27) *lays-at*      *fatimat-u*      \*(*sa-takoonu*)      *fii l-bayt-i*  
neg-3fs      Fatimah-Nom    will be    in      the-house-Gen  
“Fatimah will not be in the house.”

- (28) *laysa*      *xalid-un*      \*(*kataba*)      *Ŝ-Ŝ iŕ-a*  
neg.3ms      Khalid-Nom      3m-write-past      the-poetry-Acc  
“Khalid did not write poetry.”

From the above examples, it should be noted that *laysa* must select NP. Thus, it is ungrammatical for verbal sentences to be negated by *laysa* as illustrated in (29).

- (29) \* *laysa*      *ya-ktubu*      *xalid-un*      *Ŝ-Ŝ iŕ-a*  
neg.3ms      3m-write      Khalid-Nom    the-poetry-Acc

This NP selected by *laysa* can be a full NP as in (25-28) above or a null pronoun that is incorporated with *laysa* and has a feature bundle (i.e. 3M/F. S/P) indicated by the agreement as in the two following examples:

(30) xalid-un            *laysa*        ya-ktubu    Š iŕ-a  
 Khalid-Nom        neg.3ms    3m-write    poem-Acc  
 “Khalid is not writing a poem.”

(31) lays-at            hulwat-an  
 neg.3fs            beautiful-Acc  
 “She is not beautiful.”

(32) ?T-Tulab-u        laysuu        fii lmadrasat-i  
 the-student-Nom    neg-3mp    in-the-school-Gen  
 “The students are not in the school.”

### 3.1. *Word order on Laysa*

Because *laysa* is a free morpheme, unlike the other Arabic negative particles, it can be located at the beginning of the sentence as in (32) above or directly before the predicate as in (33) or between the predicate and the subject as in (34):

(33) ?T-Taqs-u            *laysa*        jamiil-an  
 the-weather-Nom    neg-3ms    nice-Acc  
 “The weather is not nice.”

(34) Jamiil-an        *laysa*        T-Taqs-u  
 nice-Acc        neg-3ms    the-weather-Nom  
 “The weather is not nice.”

But *laysa* does not permit both the subject and predicate to precede it as illustrated in (35).

(35) \* ?l-walad-u    tawil-an    *laysa*  
 the-boy-Nom    tall-Acc    neg-3ms

The reason for this can be attributed to the fact that Arabic is a head first language in which heads are canonically positioned before their complements. Therefore, Arabic neg morphemes are treated as heads of syntactic Neg phrases. Being heads, they can attribute the right selectional properties, and their headness is strongly supported by its governing and Case/Mood assigning properties. Consequently, they must precede what should be negated.

#### 4. A free negative class: *Maa*

The last negative marker that negates both verbal and verbless sentences is instantiated by *maa*. As for verbal sentences, this negative negates mostly verbal sentences in the context of past tense as in (36) and rarely of the present tense as in (37), but in the context of the future tense, *maa* is ruled out (38).

- (36) *maa*    *jaaʔ-a*                    *zaid-un*.  
 neg    come.past.3ms    Zaid-Nom  
 “Zaid did not come.”

- (37) *maa*    *ʔ-udaxxin-u*.  
 neg    1s-smoke.Pres  
 “I do not smoke.”                    (Onizan 2005: 31)

- (38) \**maa*    *sa-ya-ḏhabu*.  
 neg    fut-3m-go                    (Benmamoun 2000: 109)

This interesting negative marker shares with modal negatives, discussed earlier in section 2.1, in the property of negating verbal sentences, but differs from them in that it is not merged with inflection and hence does not have any Case marking or Mood marking properties (Fassi Fehri 1993: 162). More interestingly, *maa* can be adjacent to the verb it negates as shown in (36) and (37) above and (40a) below, or it might be separated from it by the subject as (39) and (40b) show us.

- (39) *maa*    *zaid-un*            *jaaʔ-a*.  
 neg    Zaid-Nom    came.past.3ms  
 “Zaid did not come.”

- (40) a. *maa*    *qaala*                    *maher-un*            *l-haqiqat-a*.  
 neg    said.past.3ms    Maher-Nom    the-truth-Acc  
 “Maher did not say the truth.”

- b. *maa* *maher-un*    *qaala*                    *l-haqiqat-a*.  
 neg Maher-Nom    said.past.3ms    the-truth-Acc  
 “Maher did not say the truth.”                    (Onizan 2005: 31)

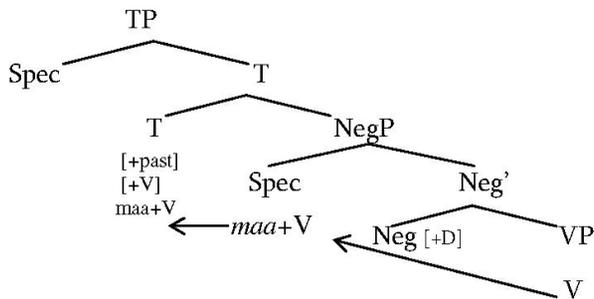
Turning now to its status with nominal sentences, *maa* can negate nominal sentences ‘with non-verbal predicates verbless sentences’, but they must have the following properties: (i) *maa* must precede both the subject

and the predicate; (ii) their subject must be definite; (iii) their subject and predicate can be reordered (Hasan 1970: 1\594).

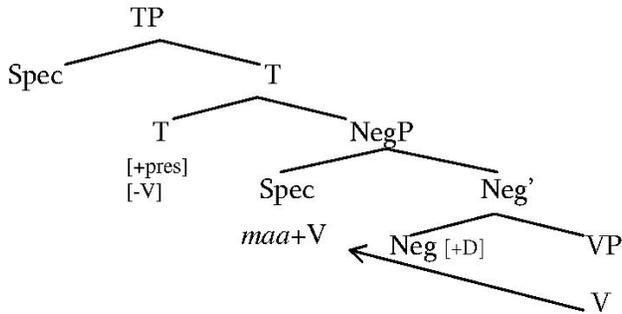
- (41) a. *maa xalid-un mujtahid-un.*  
 neg Khalid-Nom hardworking-Nom  
 “Khalid is not hardworking.”
- b. *maa mujtahid-un xalid-un.*  
 neg hardworking-Nom Khalid-Nom
- c. \**xalid-un maa mujtahid-un.*  
 Khalid-Nom neg mujtahid-un
- d. \**mujtahid-un maa xalid-un.*  
 hardworking-Nom neg Khalid-Nom

Back to Benmamoun’s analysis that negation in Arabic is specified for a [+D] feature and how this feature can be checked with *maa*, Benmamoun assumes first that *maa* is in the spec of NegP since it does not have any Case marking or Mood marking properties. Its [+D] feature can be checked as follows. In the past tense, as in (36) above, the verb must move to T to support tense and check its [+V] feature. Since the verb carries agreement features that can check the [+D] feature of negation, it moves through the negative projection and merges with its Spec. In present tense, as in (37) above, *maa*’s [+D] feature can be checked by the agreement features on the verb without moving the whole complex Neg+V to T (since T lacks V features) or can be checked by an immediate merge between the negative and the subject in case of nominal sentences with non-verbal predicates such as (41a) above. The three different ways to check [+D] feature of the negative *maa* can be represented in the following derivations respectively:

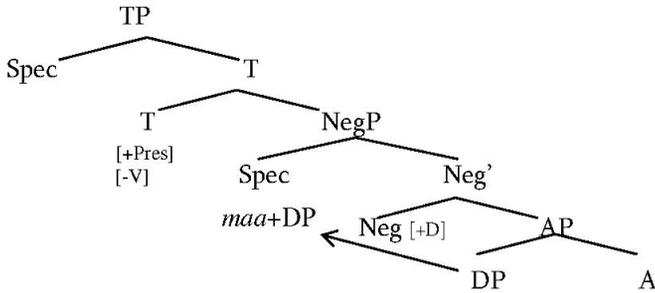
(42) Past tense



(43) Present verbal tense



(44) Present nominal tense ‘verbless sentence’



4.1. Distinguishing features of Maa

*Maa* not being associated with a particular tense and hence co-occurring with all predicate types – leads Fassi Fehri (1993:162) to describe *maa* as neutral negator. The following examples in (45) provide more illustration of this neutralness.

- (45) a. *maa*    *zaid-un*    *kataba*    *Ŝ-Ŝ iŕr-a.*  
 Neg    Zaid-Nom    wrote.past.3ms    the-poetry-Acc  
 “Zaid did not write poetry.”
- b. *maa*    *zaid-un*    *ya-ktubu*    *Ŝ-Ŝ iŕr-a.*  
 Neg    Zaid -Nom    3m-write-Present    the-poetry-Acc  
 “Zaid does not write poetry.”
- c. *maa*    *Zaid-un*    *kaatib-un.*  
 Neg    Zaid-Nom    writer.Acc  
 “Zaid is not a writer.”

- d. maa zaid-un      ʔaxi-ii /                      haDir-an/      fii l-bayt-i.  
 Neg Zaid-Nom    brother-Nom.my-Gen/ present-Nom/ in the-house  
 “Zaid is not my brother/ present/in the house.”

*Maa* is also distinctive in that it differs from other negatives in the extraction properties. *Maa* cannot be preceded by any element. Conversely, extraction over other negatives is possible. This can be seen by the contrast in (46) and (47) below.

- (46) a. \*mohammad-un      maa      ya-drii.  
 Mohammad-Nom    neg      3ms-know-IND  
 “Mohammad does not know.”                      (Fassi Fehri 1993: 167)
- b. mohammad-un      laa      ya-drii.  
 Mohammad-Nom    neg      3ms-know-IND  
 “Mohammad does not know.”
- c. mohammad-un      lam      ya-dri.  
 Mohammad-Nom    neg      3ms-know-JUS  
 “Mohammad did not know.”
- d. mohammad-un      lammaa      ya-dri.  
 Mohammad-Nom    neg      3ms-know-JUS  
 “Mohammad has not known yet.”
- e. mohammad-un      lan      ya-drii-a.  
 Mohammad-Nom    neg      3ms-know-SUB  
 “Mohammad will not not know.”
- f. mohammad-un      laysa      ya-drii.  
 Mohammad-Nom    neg      3ms-know  
 “Mohammad does not know.”                      (Fassi Fehri 1993: 166)
- (47) a. \*zaid-an              maa      ʔ-araa.  
 Zaid-Acc              nge      1s-see  
 “Zaid, I do not see.”
- b. zaid-an      laa      ʔ-araa.  
 Zaid-Acc      nge      1s-see-IND  
 “Zaid, I do not see.”
- c. zaid-an      lam      ʔ-ara.  
 Zaid-Acc      nge.past      1s-see-JUS  
 “Zaid, I did not see.”                      (Fassi Fehri 1993: 167)

d. zaid-an      lammaa    ʔ-ara.  
 Zaid-Acc   nge.Pf    1s-see-JUS  
 “Zaid, I have not seen.”

f. zaid-an      lan            ʔ-araa.  
 Zaid-Acc   nge.past   1s-see-SUB  
 “Zaid, I will not see.”

Relying upon the important insight of Fassi Fehri (2005), the reason why *maa* has this distinguishing feature is that *maa* is selected only by C and therefore it must be adjacent to C, meaning that the negative occupies a position higher in the structure, compared to *laa* or its variants. That is, *maa* “is higher than the subject of predication (or Focus) and can have no Spec, it is not located in TP, but higher, although it is lower than C” (Fassi Fehri 2005: 15). This is evidenced by the occurrence of *maa* before the tensed auxiliary in complex tense structures, and the impossibility of appearing on the lower verb, unlike *laa*. Consider the following examples, taken from Fassi Fehri (2005: 14):

(48) a. maa    kun-tu    ʔ -anwii    haaḏaa  
           neg    was-Is    I-think    this  
           “I was not thinking about this.”

b. \* kun-tu    maa    ʔ-anwii    haaḏaa  
           was-Is    neg    I-think    this

(49) a. kun-tu    laa    ʔ-anwii    haaḏaa  
           was-1s   neg    1s-think    this  
           “I was not thinking about this.

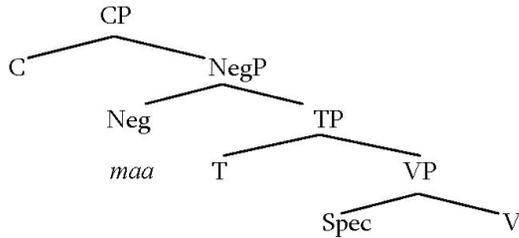
b. \* laa      kun-tu    ʔ-anwii    haaḏaa  
           neg      was-1s    1s-think    this

In what follows, I conclude the discussion about *maa* by providing a suggestive argument indicating that the above features make *maa* different from other negatives not only in terms of its syntactic behavior, but also in its position in the derivation and in its association with Information Structure.

#### 4.2. *The derivational position of maa*

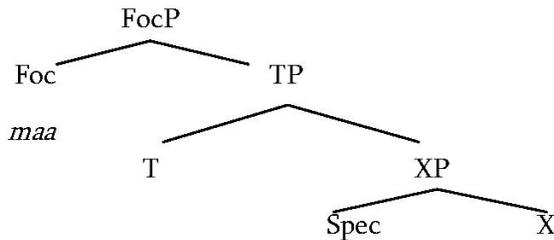
Fassi Fehri (2005) opts for an analysis whereby *maa* projects its own projection NegP located above TP since *maa* is selected only by C, as shown by the simplified representation in (50).

(50)



Although the analysis in (50) is possible, there is another analysis that is more convincing and explains better why *maa* is selected by C. As a starting point, we should recall that *maa* and *laa* are the major negation elements in Arabic. As a result, they should have different functional properties and distribution. As demonstrated in section 2.2, *laa* and its temporal variants interact with tense in the sense that they mark the tense of the sentence. The case with *maa*, by contrast, is completely different. *Maa* does have temporal interpretation. Instead, following Ouhalla (1993, 1997), *maa* differs from the inflected negatives in having a focus feature, in addition to the feature of NEG. This is supported by the fact that *maa* is considered as a stronger denial, acting as morphological marker of negative contrastive focus and hence does not create its own NegP projection as in (51).

(51)



Analyzing *maa* as a mere negative marker is problematic because it fails to explain the semantic difference between *lam* and *maa*. Under the assumption that *maa* is just a negative marker, there is in fact no difference in meaning between the sentences negated by *lam* and those negated by *maa* as illustrated by following two examples (53) is repeated again from (40a):

- (52) a. lam      ya-qul              maher-un              l-haqiqat-a  
 neg.past 3s-say-JUS      Maher-Nom              the-truth-Acc  
 “Maher did not say the truth.”

- (53) *maa*    *qaala*                    *maher-un*            *l-ḥaḥiqat-a*  
 Neg    said.past.3ms    Maher-Nom            the-truth-Acc  
 “Maher did not say the truth.”

The syntactic difference between the two negatives is obvious. *Lam* inflects for tense, which precludes the verb from doing so, while *maa* cannot carry tense, which allows it to be spelled-out on the verb. However, there is no semantic difference as can be seen from the translations in the two examples above. The same situation can be also observed by making the same contrast in (54-57) between *maa* and *laa* on one hand and *maa* and *laysa* on the other. The translations that conclude each example below indicate that there is no semantic difference between the two negatives although the difference in syntactic structure can be noticed (i.e., *laysa* assigns case, but *maa* does not).

- (54) *laa*            ʔ-*udaxxin-u*.  
 neg.pres    1s-smoke.Pres  
 “I do not smoke.”

- (55) *maa*            ʔ-*udaxxin-u*.  
 neg            1s-smoke.Pres  
 “I do not smoke.” (Previously mentioned in (37))

- (56) a. *maa*    *xalid-un*                    *mujtahid-un*.  
 neg    Khalid-Nom            hardworking-Nom  
 “Khalid is not hardworking.” (Previously mentioned in (41a))

- b. *maa*    *Zaid-un*                    *ya-ktubuŖ-ŖiŖ-a*.  
 Neg    Zaid –Nom            3m-write-Present the-poetry-Acc  
 “Zaid does not write poetry.” (Previously mentioned in (45b))

- (57) a. *laysa*    *xalid-un*                    *mujtahid-an*.  
 neg.3ms    Khalid-Nom            hardworking-Acc  
 “Khalid is not hardworking.”

- b. *laysa*            *zaid-un*                    *ya-ktubu*                    *Ŗ-ŖiŖ-a*.  
 Neg.3ms    Zaid –Nom            3m-write-Present    the-poetry-Acc  
 “Zaid does not write poetry.”

The conclusion that can be drawn from the above data is that it is inconceivable that *maa* functions only as a negative marker and optionally can replace the above certain negatives. There must be a reason to force the speaker of the language to use *maa* instead of other negatives. Otherwise, if

*maa* and the inflected negatives *lam*, *laa*, *laysa* convey an identical meaning, *maa* would be redundant in the language.

While accepting Ouhalla's hypothesis that *maa* is singled out from *laa* and its variants by virtue of having a focus feature, I argue contra Ouhalla's (1993) idea that *maa* can occupy the spec position of FocP, forming a constituent with a phrase which is negatively focused.<sup>4</sup> Instead, following Fassi Fehri (2005), I assume that *maa* does not have a Spec since it does not allow any element to occur on its left (see the example in (45)). It is, as first proposed by Fassi Fehri (2005), selected directly by C. From this it follows that occupying the head of FocP, as represented in (51) above, is the only option left to *maa* (whether it is followed directly by a verb or a DP).

## 5. Negation Formation without NegP

Pollock (1989, and much subsequent work) has developed the well-known idea that sentential negation receives its own functional projection, NegP. That is, *neg* is an element which is syntactically encoded as a functional head, on a par with tense, agreement, mood and aspect. Although the NegP approach has been adopted and is widely accepted in most current generative studies, some recent studies have attempted to argue against the universality of this approach for all languages sentential negation (see for instance, Webelhuth 1989, Zimmermann & Stromswold 1999 for German and Kim 2002 for Korean).<sup>5</sup>

Negation in Arabic can add supportive evidence in favor of these studies. As argued in the previous section, negation with the negative *maa* can be

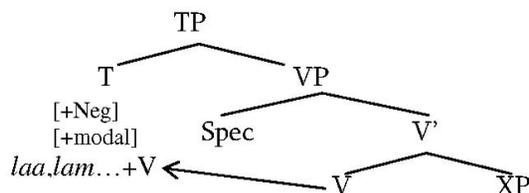
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<sup>4</sup> Briefly, Ouhalla's (1993) analysis can be summarized as follows. *Maa* marks negative contrastive focus, and can either occupy the head position of FocP, or form a constituent with a phrase which is negatively focused. The former happens when *maa* is followed by the verb, and the latter occurs when *maa* precedes the DP, assuming this is an instance of constituent negation.

<sup>5</sup> The main conceptual problem caused by the postulation of a functional phrase NegP is that it does not behave like other phrases in terms of blocking movement across its head as the case with the Arabic tensed negatives, viz, *laa* and its temporal variants. To avoid this problem, others, notably Belletti (1990), suggest that the negator must occupy the Spec of NegP, instead of its head. But such a suggestion, as pointed out by Zimmermann & Stromswold (1999, citing Ernst 1992) assigns to the negator two properties usually reserved for heads: the negator is compulsory, unlike all the other specifiers, and it is the semantic centre of the projection. Furthermore, Zimmermann & Stromswold (1999) provide acquisitional evidence against the NegP hypothesis. They found no evidence of an early stage of neg-initial sentential negation (as predicted if there is a VP internal subject stage), no evidence of correct placement of negation during all stages of acquisition (as predicted under a Full Competence approach), and no evidence that correct placement of negation only occurs once agreement has been acquired (as predicted under an Incrementalist approach).

successfully accounted for without a NegP projection. Here I extend this proposal to the tensed negatives: *laa* and its variants *lam*, *lammaa*, *lan*, and *laysa*. Building on the important insight of Fassi Fehri (1993), previously discussed in section 2.1, that *laa* and its variants are Modal negatives, I argue that these negatives do not project a NegP either. Instead, they are first merged with T since there is co-occurrence restriction between them and both the temporal adverbs and the form of the verb as illustrated in the course of the discussion above (see the table in (9)). In fact, these negatives mark the tense of the sentence. This means that T headed by these negatives has the following features: [+neg] and [+modal]. The latter is satisfied by the adjacency requirement between these negatives and the verb via moving the verb from V to T so that it meets the requirements of mood assignment and gets tensed. This can be represented by the simplified illustrative derivation in (58) below:

(58)



This analysis is less costly than assuming NegP introducing the negative feature (specified for the [+D] feature as argued by Benmamoun (2000)) since the derivation/representation can operate perfectly without that projection. Under the principles of economy, a projection should only be introduced if necessary.<sup>6</sup> More interestingly, if we opt for analysing these negatives as modals, the obligatoriness of the adjacency between the negative markers and the verb can be simply justified because the hallmark property of modals in this language is their adjacency requirement to the verb.

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, general principles of methodology (Occam's Razor) say that we should not use more apparatus than required, but the strive for economy of representation has a special status in the MP, where the rule is only to assume such categories, rules etc., that are conceptually necessary.

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