Revisiting Negation in Standard Arabic:
an intra- and interlingual Enunciative approach

Abstract

There is ample cross-linguistic evidence that negation is a universal grammatical category which natural languages codify in various linguistic forms. In distant languages like English and Standard Arabic (SA) where negation is expressed in at least six formal operators in SA and only one in English, such marked variation often becomes a recurring nightmare for translation trainees and learners of English and Arabic as foreign languages, and creates challenges for teachers and computational linguists. What induces confusion about how negation works in SA, compared with English, is that traditional approaches to language, which continue to exercise unquestioned authority in pedagogical grammar, have reduced the function of negators to an extralinguistic chronological value: negation in the past, the present and the future.

The aim of this study is to revisit negation in SA from an Enunciative intra- and interlingual perspective that takes into consideration the role of the speaker/writer and the contextual factors intervening in the production and reception of negative utterances. The approach draws on the assumption that the speaker's processing strategy in discourse is the key to understanding the logic of negating in natural languages. Compared with English, and in spite of its metalinguistic richness, Arabic negation has not triggered any significant research that accounts for the working of the six formal negators *lam, leisa, maa, laa, lan* and *lammaa*. Whether approached from a prescriptive, descriptive, functional or typological perspective, negators have been assigned the function of time locators of the predicative relation.

The study fits within the larger Metaoperational framework (Adamczewski 1982, 1991 and 2002) where contrastivity is envisaged as a domain of linguistic investigation, rather than a mere methodological procedure.

Findings suggest that the working of the six negators is governed by an underlying binary microsystem: phase-1 negators, codifying a speaker-detached strategy, and phase-2 negators which have a metalinguistic status and work to codify a speaker-intervenient strategy in discourse. This opposition is not only intra-operational, i.e. within negation, but also inter-operational, i.e. between negation and affirmation as its polar correspondent (Phase 1 vs. Phase 2 affirmators). The following tables recapitulate the key findings of the study.

Negation		
Phase 1	vs.	**Phase 2**
lam	vs.	maa
lamma	vs.	no equivalent
leisa	vs.	maa
laa	vs.	lan
laa	vs.	kallaa
leisa…bi…	vs.	maa…bi…

Table (1)**:** Intra-operation Contrastivity

Negation	vs.	Affirmation
lam	vs.	$\emptyset + v_{+\text{ past}}$
maa	vs.	'inna
lamma	vs.	laqad
laa	vs.	$\emptyset + v_{+\text{ imperf.}}$
lan	vs.	sa-/sawfa
maa…bi…	vs.	'inna…la…
laa	vs.	na'am
kallaa	vs.	'ajal

Table (2): Inter-operation Contrastivity

Key words:
phase-1/phase-2 negators, metalinguistic status, modal negator, aspectual negator, utterer processing strategy**,** intervenient/detached strategy

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