

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

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Extended 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-intervent 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.

Key words:

phase-1/phase-2 negators, metalinguistic status, modal negator, aspectual negator, utterer processing strategy, intervent/detached strategy

1 Introduction

This paper claims that the metalinguistic richness of negation in Standard Arabic (abbreviated SA) has not triggered any significant research that distances itself from the traditional account of negation. Rather, traditional approaches to Arabic syntax still dominate the grammatical landscape and continue to exercise absolute authority in pedagogical grammar. Whether approached from a

prescriptive, descriptive, explicative or typological perspective, pre-verbal and pre-nominal negators have been treated essentially as conveying a temporal value that accounts for their working in discourse: negation in the past, in the present, and in the future.

Based on a corpus of utterances collected from different sources, such as the International Arabic Corpus, the Quran, and literary texts, this study questions the chronological treatment of negation in the dominant theoretical and pedagogical grammar. It also shows that negators in SA do not function as time locators of the predicative relation (R) or work in free variation. Rather, they constitute a micro-system of interrelated units governed by an enunciative logic and contextual factors.

2 The Traditional Approach to Negators

The Arabic grammatical tradition should not be understood as a homogeneous school but as an episteme indicative of an autonomous stage in human linguistic thought. It shares with western traditional grammars their prescriptive, semantic, atomistic, taxonomic, context-insensitive, and writing-oriented approach that envisages not language at work but language as an end-product. These epistemic features are detectable in the treatment of negation and other grammatical operations in SA. In spite of its heterogeneity, the traditional approach to negation reflects a consensus on several premises and theoretical presuppositions:

- i. The main linguistic corpus used by all traditional grammarians is collected either from authentic Quranic and poetic texts or made of intuition-based sentences generally constructed with Zeid and 'amr as hypothetical subjects.
- ii. Negation was not researched as an autonomous linguistic category but as a "linguistic style" associated with affirmation, its opposite. Compared with other grammatical operations, negation received scant mentions, often taxonomic and semantic, in the context of non-affirmation and reference to time. The most influential grammarians, such as Sibawaihi [54], Al Mubarrad [12], Al Zamakhshari [23], Ibn Hisham [42], Ibn Al Sarraj [41], Ibn Ya'ish [45], and Ibn Jinni [43], to name a few, touched on "particles of negation" but never elaborated on negation.
- iii. All grammarians, except Al Jurjani [10, p.417-418], a prominent rhetorician, considered affirmation to be the origin of speech, and negation extrinsic to the sentence's basic structure, always affirmative.
- iv. Although some grammarians, Sibawaihi [54, vol.2, p.116] and Al Khaliil, [11, vol.8, p.350] assigned a corroborative 'meaning' to some negators, such as *lam*, and *lan*, Al Zamakhshari, [24, p.407] and Al Suyuti, [14, vol.2, p.287], negators were always associated with extralinguistic temporal (present, past, future) values.
- v. The traditional approach was focused on the all-pervading theory of governance. Negators were described and classified according to their declensional potential or operative force (Versteegh, [56, p.6]. A typical traditional definition of a negator, such as *lan*, generally includes three functional properties: it negates, puts the verb in the accusative, and locates the event in the future.

- vi. Some grammarians, namely Ibn Jinni [43], adopted a morpho-semantic approach exploring forms of verbal and nominal negation other than negative particles. The case of morphological patterns, like /af‘ala/ and /fa‘‘ala/, which, by interlocking with a root, assign negative properties to the new lexical unit. This phenomenon is studied in Al-Sajustaanii [24], Ibn Saiyidih [44], and Al Zajjaaj [22].

Often based on Quranic, poetic, and contextless sentences, negators are associated with temporal "meanings". Thus, the negator *laa* (لا) is said to "negate the event in the future" (Ibn Hisham, [42, vol.1, p.6]). Other grammarians argue that *laa* may negate present states, as well (Al Muraadii, [13, p.296]; *leisa* / ليس negates "future and sometimes present events or states" (Al Istiraabaadi, [9, p.197]; *lammaa* (لَمَّا) is used "to negate past events related to the present time" (Sibaweihi, [54, vol.4, p.223]; *lam* / لم affects verbs in the imperfective and puts them in the past and the jussive mood Ibn Al Sarraaj, [41, vol.2, p.157]; and *lan* / لَنْ is defined as "a particle of negation, futurity and the accusative [mood]" (Ibn Hisham,[42, vol. 1, p.464]. It is noteworthy that Ibn Hisham [42] and other grammarians, like Ibn ‘usfuur (in Al Muraadii, [13, p.274], disagrees with Al-Zamakhshari's [24, p.407] claim that *lan* conveys corroboration and perpetuity of negation; *maa* / مَا is used to negate present states [53,vol.5, p.24]. When it collocates with the so-called expletive *min* / مِنْ, it is said to corroborate negation [41, p.374]. Finally, the archaic negator 'in (إِنْ) works in nominal and verbal past and imperfective sentences to denote a present temporal value. It is defined as *synonymous* to and interchangeable with the negator *maa* / مَا ! [12,vol.1, p.188]. This temporal approach is approximated by Al Mabkhout [18,p.119] in the following visualization:

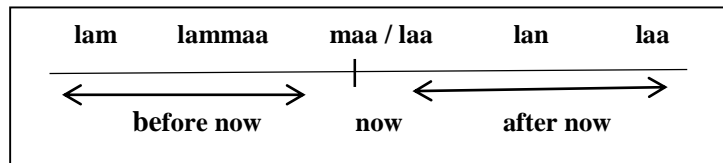


Fig.1. Temporal Values Assigned to Negators

3. Contemporary Research on Negation in SA

The unchallenged prevalence of traditional grammatical views in current pedagogical grammar is indicative of the severe limitations of contemporary linguistic research on SA. The direct assignment of a chronological 'meaning' to formal categories without any referential value in the extralinguistic, such as *lam*, *lan*, *maa*, etc., is largely detectable in contemporary views, from different theoretical frameworks, on negation. Al-Makhzumi [19], though he defined negation as "a linguistic style governed by the contexts of speech" [19, p.244], did not seem to take the context factors into consideration by adhering to the traditional temporality of negators. Amaira's definition pertinently associates negation with the speaker's intentions [25, p.154] but his analysis of negators reiterates the same chronological treatment. Hamasa [38] approaches negation as a category "extrinsic to the structure of the sentence. It denotes the non-validity of the predicative

relation in verbal and nominal sentences" [38, p.280]. His approach does not break with the predominant views on negation; it reduces the working of negators to distinctions of tense [38, p.285-301]. By adopting a pragmatic approach, Al-Mabkhout [18] distances himself from the predominant grammatical orientation. First, he starts from negation not from negators and considers that the non-referentiality – literally " the referential emptiness" [18, p.485] - which specifies negation relates it to the categories of expressive language acts ('al 'ifsaahiyaaat الإفصاحيات.) [18, p.485]; thus, a negative sentence does not necessarily presuppose an affirmative one [18, p.451]. Second, he assumes that the non-referentiality of negation presupposes a complex structure made of two components; the first expressing negation and the second conveying its specification [18, p.421], as exemplified in:

لم يسافر زيد بعد فحقيبتة لاتزال في غرفة النوم.
 [lam yusaafir zeidun ba 'du] [fa haqiibatuhu laa tazaalu fii
 ghorfati-n-nawmi]
 Zeid has **not** gone yet; his bag is still in the bedroom.

According to Al Mabkhout, this binary structure, reminiscent of the structures of the conditional, oath, and the vocative in SA, is based on a semantic link [18, p.421]. The second clause "is understandable only in the context of the negative one" [18, p.423]. It assumes different context-dependent functions, such as resumption, corroboration, justification, specification, or restriction. However, this line of demarcation from predominant grammatical orientations, does not seem sharply drawn when it comes to the working of negators. "The differences between negators are basically temporal" [18, p.484].

Negation in Standard and Dialectal Arabic has also received considerable theoretical attention in the different stages of generative linguistics, notably the Minimalist approach to Universal Grammar, Shlonsky [53]), Benmamoun [26], Ouhalla [51]. This theoretical framework has been associated with a formalist and typological approach which has long stressed the primacy of thought over its external realization in languages. Negation is therefore investigated within a parametric approach to the linguistic differences permitted by the human language faculty. Attention is mainly devoted to the underlying representations of negation, not to how negators work in real contexts of communication. The traditional Past/non-Past temporal distinction has resurfaced in Minimalist literature to account for the differences between negators in Arabic. Fassi-Fehri [37, p.163] proposes that the negators *laa*, *lam*, *lamma* and *lan* should be treated as modal negatives. Section (6) demonstrates that the validity of this claim is restricted to two negators only.

4. The Metaoperational Framework: from Enunciation to Metaoperation

Negation in SA has not to date received any systematic analysis from a Metaoperational perspective that takes into consideration the utterance's context of production and reception. The conceptual framework used in this study is based on the findings of the applications of the Metaoperational theory on different natural languages, such as in Adamczewski [2], [3], [4], [5], [6], and [8], Delmas [31], Delmas & Girard [32], Delechelle [30], Delmas, Adams, Deléchelle, Girard, Lancri & Naudé [33]. Santin-Guettier & Toupin [52], and Toupin [55]. Adamczewski's theory has developed in the wake of the major anti-mentalist shift in linguistics from "langue" (collective intelligence) to "parole" (individual act of language) which dethroned the study of

"langue" as a self-contained system. The shift is initiated essentially by Benveniste [27] and [28], a student of Saussure, who formulated the Enunciation theory. Benveniste claims that the Saussurean Structuralist paradigm, by reducing language study to an over-emphasis on language as a code, eliminated the speaking subject (utterer) and the relationship he/she maintains with his/her interlocutor (co-utterer); two parameters without which utterances cannot be properly decoded. The theory holds that "before enunciation, language is but the possibility of language. After enunciation language is realized in an instance of discourse which has its origins in the speaker" [28, p.80]. Benveniste maintains that every utterance bears on its surface permanent and variable formal traces of its utterer and his/her co-utterer. Such traces are the confirmation that subjectivity and inter-subjectivity are interdependent properties of language and language use [27]. The status of the speaking subject in discourse will later constitute the basis of Culioli's Enunciative Operations theory [29] and Adamczewski's Metaoperational grammar [4].

In his groundbreaking work on "Be+ing" in English, Adamczewski [3] asserts that the direct assignment of meaning to meaningless categories, such as the so-called progressive form, is the main reason for the failure of the descriptive approach to account for the working of language. For him, the linear utterance is the final product of a complex and multi-faceted phonological, lexical and syntactic process [7]. Utterances exhibit on their surface observable traces of an invisible activity and codify the mental operations whose main object is not to enable the speaker to refer to the world, but to indicate how the utterance was processed in a given context, as well as the speaker's position relative to both the propositional content and the co-utterer (co-U).

The significance of surface binary operators, such as (\emptyset / Be+ing), (V-s/do), (nearly/almost), (shall/will), (may/can), (this/ that), (too/ also), etc., to cite just a few English oppositions, is that they constitute a *natural* metalanguage indicative of the working of language itself, hence their metalinguistic status. Adamczewski [8] refers to them as real "portholes" to the underlying language activity. For him, these operation tracers constitute the real subject of languages study. Most, perhaps all, grammatical phenomena are organized in pairs based on the Rhematic (phase 1 / open paradigm) Thematic (phase 2 / closed paradigm) vector. According to Adamczewski [7], "[this] basic principle is repeated cyclically to create different grammatical tools that are necessary to the working of languages". Contrastivity as a systematic intra- and inter-lingual analysis of authentic data collected from languages is a methodological prerequisite.

The following section is restricted to six formal Arabic negators working in verbal and/or nominal utterances: *lam*, *maa*, *lammaa*, *leisa*, *laa*, and *lan*.

5. A Metaoperational analysis of negation in SA

Lam, *maa*, *leisa*, *lammaa*, *laa*, and *lan* constitute the nucleus of the Arabic negation system and behave as a micro-system governed by inter-related binary oppositions. These oppositions are not only intra-operational, i.e. within negation, but also inter-operational, i.e. in symmetry with their functional correspondents in affirmation. Consequently, intra- and inter-contrastivity is the approach adopted to investigate the working of the following pairs: (*lam* vs. *maa*), (*lam* vs. *lammaa*), (*leisa* vs. *maa*), and (*laa* vs. *lan*).

Table (2) and (3) recapitulate the key findings related to the application of the binary *microsystem underlying discourse*:

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...

Negation	vs.	Affirmation
lam	vs.	∅ + V + past
maa	vs.	'inna
lamma	vs.	laqad
laa	vs.	∅ + V + imperf.
lan	vs.	sa-/sawfa
maa...bi...	vs.	'inna...la...
laa	vs.	na'am
'ajal	vs.	kallaa

Table (2): Intra-operation Contrastivity

Table (3): Inter-operation Contrastivity

A Selection of English References

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