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## **Negation in Standard Arabic Revisited: A Metaoperational Approach**

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# Metalinguistic Richness of Negation in Arabic

## Negation

### Explicit

1. **five formal markers** (*lam, maa, lammaa, laa, lan*)
2. **neg. verbs** (*leisa*)
3. **nouns** (*gheiru*)
4. **Prepositions** (*duuna* / without)
5. **neg. prefixes** (*laa-*)  
*laa-'iraadii* / involuntary
6. **neg. phrases** (*laa-mḥaalata* / inevitably)

### Implicit

1. **exceptives** (*maa >adaa, siwaa*) except, unless...
2. **disassociatives** (*ḥaashaa*)
3. **semantically neg. verbs, nouns, adj.** (*'ankara /rafadha*)
4. **neg. maximizers** (*'abadan*)
5. **quantifiers** *dharratun* / not a bit / a jot / a scrap / a sniff)
6. **morpho. patterns** (*'af >ala / 'aqdhaa* / remove eye discharge)
7. **concession markers** *laakinna*
8. **non-factuals** (*kamaa law*)
9. **Strong wish** (*leita* / if only)

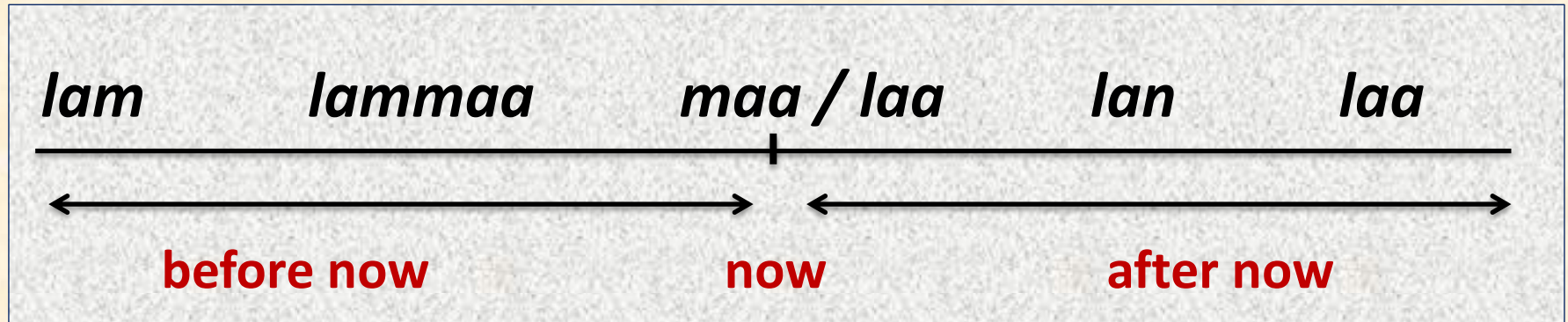
### Approximate

1. **verbs** (*kaada, 'awshaka*)
2. **adverbs** (*qallamaa, naadiran, limaaman* / rarely)

## **Formal Negators: the Traditional Temporal Approach**

- The **metalinguistic richness** of negation in SA has not triggered any significant research that distances itself from the traditional account of negation.
- **Traditional grammatical approaches** still dominate the grammatical landscape and continue to exercise absolute authority in pedagogical grammar.
- **Verbal** and **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**.

- This temporal approach is approximated by Al Mabkhout (2006:119) in the following visualization:



- The traditional direct assignment of chronological meanings to formal categories without any referential value in the **extralinguistic** has resurfaced in contemporary views, from different theoretical frameworks, on negation:
- Al-Makhzumi (1986), Hamaasa (2003), Al-Mabkhout (2006), T. Hassan (1994), Makhzumi (1986). Benmamoun (2000), Fassi-Fehri (1993), and others.

# Formal Negators: an utterer-centered approach

- Based on a **corpus** of utterances collected from different sources, this study **questions** the chronological treatment of negation and attempts to **show** that negators in SA neither function as **time locators of the predicative relation (R)** nor do they work in free variation.
- *lam, maa, lammaa, laa*, and *lan* constitute a **micro-system** of interrelated units governed by an **enunciative logic**, and in **symmetry** with the affirmative pole markers **Ø, 'inna, laqad**, and **sa-/sawfa**

- For Adamczewski (1982-2005), 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 is processed in a given context, as well as the speaker's position relative to the propositional content and the co-utterer (co-U).
- By codifying the **processing activity** of the utterer, and not referring to an **extralinguistic** value, these formal markers acquire a **metalinguistic status**.
- They work in **binary** oppositions and constitute a ***natural metalanguage*** indicative of the working of language itself.
- **Ex. From English:** (Ø/ Be+ing), (V-s/do), (nearly/almost), (shall/will), (may/can), (this/ that), (too/ also), etc.
- **Ex. From Arabic:** (Ø/ 'inna), (lam/maa), (laa/lan), ('aidhan/ kadhalika), (laa/kallaa), (na'am/'ajal), ('inna...la-.../maa...bi...) etc.



- *lam, maa, leisa, lammaa, laa*, and *lan* constitute the nucleus of the Arabic negation system and function as a micro-system governed by inter-related oppositions.
- In **negation**, these oppositions are not only **intra-operational**, 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*).
- As I have little time, my analysis will be extremely **selective**. You will find more details and examples in the paper.

# 1. Lam vs. maa

(1) حين وصلت الى بيتنا ، أحسست شيئاً غير عادي ، فخشيت قليلاً عندما لم أر أمي تسرع لتفتح لي الباب.

Hiina wasaltu 'ilaa beitina, 'aḥsastu shei'an gheira  
`aadiyyin, fa-khashiitu qaliilan `indamaa **lam** 'ara  
'ummii tusri`u li-faṭḥi-l-baabi.

(1) *When I arrived home, a feeling of apprehension came over me. Thus, I was slightly worried when I did **not** see my mother rushing to open me the door.*



**Lam 'ara** vs. **maa ra'aitu** / **ما رأيت** vs. **لم أر**

- Although both negators work in the context of **the past**, **maa** would be impossible in the context of (1). This is because the temporal adverb **'indamaa / when** announces **an open paradigm** "*when I did not see [my father/ sister/ mother (v), etc.]*", i.e. a new piece of information selected by the linguistic subject (**L<sub>s</sub>**) from a set of choices in a specific context.
- The fact that the predicative relation (R) is **posed**, not **presupposed**, invalidates the possibility of **maa** because of its **presupposing virtualities**.

- In Adamczewski's terms, compared with *maa*, *lam* is a **phase 1** negator. It encodes the non-validity of the predicative relation in the context of the past, and is governed by a speaker's informative strategy.
- A possible context for *maa* is when the utterer does not negate to address an **informational deficit**, but to deny a claim or refute a wrong view held by **the co-utterer**.

## Example 2 with **maa**:

هي تدّعي أنها تغيّرت و**ما** تغيّرت بل ازدادت تعصّبا. (2)

- Hiyya tadda`ii 'annahaa tagheiyarat wa **maa** tagheiyarat bal izdaadat ta`aṣṣuban.
- *She claims she has changed; she **did not!** She has just become more intolerant.*

- (2) sheds more light on the working of the phase 2 negator **maa**.
- The negative clause (ما تغيّرت / *She **did not!** (change)*) is preceded and governed by the affirmative clause (هي تدّعي بأنها تغيّرت / *She **claims** she has changed.*) which conveys the utterer's judgment that 'her change for the better is only **pretence**'.
- The verb (ادّعى / 'idda'aa / claim), in the 1<sup>st</sup> clause, is the trigger of the Arabic modal operator أن / 'anna / which conveys **a corroborative value** comparable to the emphatic **do** in English. The speaker's conviction that '*change* is a mere **claim**' is the co-textual factor which justifies the use of **maa** instead of **lam**.

- **Lam**, a phase 1 negator, is not compatible with the context of (2) where the linguistic subject ( $L_s$ ) is passing a **judgement**, not providing **information**, about the grammatical subject ( $G_s$ )
- **Lam** & **maa** are not in free variation, and do not work as time locators.

Compare the following pair (both in the past): ما كان. لم يكن  
 لم تكن لتتدخل في النقاش. (ولذلك ارتبكت قليلا)

*She was **not** to intervene in the debate. (That's why she got a bit flustered.)*

→  $L_s$  informs about  $G_s$  (Phase 1)

She **shouldn't** have intervened! ما كان لها أن تتدخل في النقاش !

→  $L_s$  passes a judgement about  $G_s$  (Phase 2)

## 2.

## Lam vs. lammaa

(3) استوفيت الكتاب **ولمّا** يتنفس الفجر.

- Istawfeitu-l-kitaaba wa **lammaa** yatanaffasi-l-fajru.
- *Dawn had **not** come up (exhaled) **yet**, when I ended the book.*



**Lam** and **lammaa** are approached in opposition because they share the following properties:

1. They are verbal negators.
  2. They affect a verb morphologically in the mudhaari' (imperfective) and grammatically in or in relation to a past event.
  3. They both have a Phase-1 status
- However, if **lam**, as seen above, encodes the non-validity of the predicative relation in the context of the past and introduces an aspectually finished act; **lammaa**, often an inter-verbal negator, as in:

حلّ الضيف ولَمَّا يصل المضيف !

*Ḥalla-ḍ-ḍaifu wa **lammaa** yaṣil almuḍhayyifu.*

*The guest arrived but the host had not shown up yet!*

(**lamma**) emerges in contexts always implying a **prospective validation** of the predicative relation.

- **Lammaa** also presupposes the aspectual adverb **بَعْدُ** / ba'du / yet.

ما / لم ... قَطَّ

لَمَّا ... بَعْدُ

لا / لن ... أَبَدًا

- In (3), *lammaa* is a phase-1 **aspectual negator**.
- The working of **lamma** is in symmetry with that of **laqad** in the affirmative pole. They are both incompatible with conditional markers, such as **إِنْ** / 'in and **إِذَا** / 'idaa (if), and **لَئِنْ**.

(4) لا تدور الشمس حول الأرض.

- **laa** taduru-sh-shamsu ḥawla-l-'ardhi.
- *The sun does **not** revolve around the earth.*

(5) أراك لا تبالي حتى بما يجري من حولك .

*I see that you **don't** even care what's going on around you.*

- If in verbal negation **lan** works always with a **mudaari'** (imperfective) commonly associated with reference to futurity - 'al 'istiqbaalu / الاستقبال,  
- **laa** works in four temporal contexts:
  - timeless events (4),
  - the present - 'al-ḥaalu / الحال
  - the future
  - and not often in the past when it joins alternatives, such as in: **فلا** صدّق ولا صلى.  
( Fa-**laa** ṣaddaqa wa **laa** ṣallaa.  
*For he **neither** believed, **nor** prayed.)*

- In nominal negation, the use of **laa** is associated with the time of speech, such as in:

5. لا حاجة لي بكل هذه الأدوات لأفكّ برغيا!

**laa** ḥaajata lii bi-kulli heḍihi-l-'adawaati li 'afukka  
burghiyyan

*I **don't** need all these tools to unscrew a screw.*

- Whatever its context of use, *laa* conveys a **core grammatical value**: it signals that the non-validity of R is a new piece of information not endorsed by the linguistic subject/ the utterer (U)
- A comparison with *lan* is expected to elucidate the working of both negators.
- A yes/no question is a possible **context** for *laa* in (4). The questioner seeks information that is provided by the questioned person. An answer with *lan* would be **ungrammatical**, even though structurally well-formed.

Why?



- **Lan** is a **modalizing negator** typical of contexts conveying a guarantee of the linguistic subject that R will not take place, such as in:

لن أدع ما حصل يفسد طموحي وآمالي... لن أفعل. لن أستسلم، سأقاوم!

- *I **won't** let what happened ruin my hopes... I **will not**. I **will not** surrender. I **will** resist!*

Here, where *it* is used three times, **lan** is a **phase-2** negator which encodes the speaker's sheer determination 'to achieve her goals', thus conveying a **deontic modality**.

- **Laa**, though structurally possible, is not compatible with such a modalizing context.

- In English, the negator ***not*** and the modal marker (**will**) are always discrete, but in Arabic the distinction is between modalizing and non-modalizing **negators**.

# Conclusion

- The paper has proposed an utterer-centered analysis of the major verbal and nominal negators in SA, and has demonstrated that the metalinguistic richness of negation in SA, compared with the single formal negator (*not*) in English, is governed by an underlying binary microsystem (**phase 1 → phase 2 vector**) that accounts for this diversity.
- *Lam, maa, leisa, lammaa, laa, lan*, and *kallaa* are in fact more effectively **understood, taught, learned, and translated** when they are approached from the perspective of **the language user** and **the processing strategy** at work in discourse.

- The diversity of negation markers in Arabic provides a highly significant case of operators which convey **referential**, **metalinguistic**, **modal**, and **aspectual** values.
- The interaction of operations, such as **reference to time**, **aspect**, and **modality** with negation is still to be investigated from a corpus-based explicative perspective.
- Tables (1) and (2) recapitulate the key **findings** related to the application of the binary *microsystem underlying discourse*:

**Table 1****Negation**

<b>Phase 1</b>	VS.	<b>Phase 2</b>
<b>lam</b> <sub>yaktub</sub>	VS.	<b>maa</b> <sub>kataba</sub>
<b>lammaa</b>	VS.	No equivalent in Phase 2
<b>leisa</b>	VS.	<b>maa</b>
<b>Laa / (not)</b>	VS.	<b>lan</b>
<b>Laa / (no)</b>	VS.	<b>kallaa</b>
<b>leisa...bi</b>	VS.	<b>maa...bi</b>

**Table 2**

<b>Negation</b>	VS.	<b>Affirmation</b>
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<b>lam</b> <sub>yaktub</sub>	VS.	<b>Ø + v</b> <sub>+ past</sub>
<b>maa</b> <sub>kataba</sub>	VS.	<b>'inna</b>
<b>lamma</b>	VS.	<b>laqad</b>
<b>laa</b>	VS.	<b>Ø + v</b> <sub>+ imperf.</sub>
<b>lan</b>	VS.	<b>sa-/sawfa</b>
<b>maa...bi</b>	VS.	<b>'inna...la...</b>
<b>laa</b>	VS.	<b>na'am</b>
<b>kallaa</b>	VS.	<b>'ajal</b>

I hope this approach to negation allows theoretical computational linguists to gain a better understanding of the underlying structures at work in the production and reception of negators in Standard Arabic.

**Thank you!**