

Unraveling Negation: A Morphosyntactic Study of Hail Arabic

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Abstract—This paper investigates the morphosyntax of sentential negation in Hail Arabic, a previously unexplored topic. It demonstrates the use of three negators (*maa*, *laa*, and *maa*-pronoun) and their sensitivity to predicate type. It shows that *maa* and *laa* are used in verbal sentences, whereas the inflected negation marker *maa*-pronoun only occurs in verbless sentences. The study argues for a Low-Neg analysis, positioning NegP below the tense node, and utilizes the Minimalist Program to explain the observed patterns. The findings reveal that adjacency is required for verbal negation but not for verbless negation and that the inflected negator *maa*-pronoun agrees in number, gender, and person with the subject. Additionally, the paper utilizes the Split CP Hypothesis to explore the occurrence of *maa* in both SVO and VSO constructions and the contrastive focus reading associated with the Neg-TP pattern. It proposes, based on the syntactic and semantic properties of the clause-initial negation particles, that the negator dominating the subject (i.e., TP) is a focus negation particle heading the Focus Phrase in the CP area. It concludes that the position of NegP in the clausal hierarchy is not only syntactically conditioned but also semantically/pragmatically driven.

Index Terms—Hail Arabic, verbal predicate, prohibitive *laa*, sentential negation, negation particles

I. INTRODUCTION

Negation is a universal concept and is found across all languages. Each language possesses its own system of negation, which is composed of negative particles and negated elements. In the last few decades, a significant amount of research has examined the syntax of negation (see, for example, Zanuttini, 1991; Schapansky, 2002; Harves, 2013; Snyman, 2004; Gianollo, 2016; Wiltschko, 2002, among many others). The significance of negation is largely attributed to the different negation strategies employed by different languages, as well as the linguistic variation in the locus of the negative phrase (NegP) within the clausal structure. Arabic (both Standard Arabic and other varieties) encodes negation in different ways. Generally, Arabic varieties express negation in two ways: the one-pattern negation strategy and the two-pattern negation strategy (also called bipartite negation). First, there are varieties of Arabic that use a single element to mark negation, such as Standard Arabic (1a), Gulf Arabic (1b),¹ Syrian Arabic (1c), Iraqi Arabic (1d), and Sudanese Arabic (1e). Consider the following examples.^{2,3}

- (1) a. ?T-Tullaab-u laa ya-drus-uun
 the-students-NOM NEG IMPERF-study-3PLM
 ‘The students do not study.’ (Benmamoun, 2000, p. 95)
- b. hum maa ya-drus-uun
 They.M NEG IMPERF-study-3PLM
 ‘They are not studying’ (Alsalem, 2012, p. 35)
- c. dʒamaal maa raah yə-saafir il-yuum
 Jamal NEG FUT IMPERF-travel.3SGM the-today
 ‘Jamal is not going to travel today.’ (Alftayeh, 2022, p. 71)
- d. ʕəli ma yu-drus kul yuum
 Ali NEG IMPERF-study.3SGM every day
 ‘Ali does not study every day.’ (Albuarabi, 2021, p. 61)
- e. Omar ma dʒaa
 Omar NEG come.PAST.3SGM
 ‘Omar didn’t come.’ (Benmamoun, 2000, p. 70)

¹ Gulf Arabic refers to a variety of Arabic that is widely spoken in the countries of the Gulf region, which includes Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Oman.

² For the sake of consistency, the examples taken from other sources in this paper are slightly modified in terms of glosses.

³ The following abbreviations appear in the glosses: 1,2,3=first, second, and third person; PL=Plural; SG= Singular; M= Masculine; F= Feminine; IMPERF= Imperfective; IMP= Imperative; ASP= Aspect; NEG= Negation marker; FUT= Future marker; NOM=Nominative; ACC= Accusative.

On the other hand, in other dialects of Arabic, such as Egyptian Arabic (2a), Yemeni Arabic (2b), Levantine Arabic (2c)⁴ – excluding Syrian Arabic – and Maghrebi Arabic (2d),⁵ negation is realized by two negative morphemes. These are the proclitic *maa* and the enclitic *f*, as illustrated below.⁶

- (2) a. xalid ma-bi-yə'-ʔraa-f al-kitaab
Khalid NEG-ASP-IMPERF-read.3SGM-NEG the-book
'Khalid is not reading the book.' (Soltan, 2007, p. 184)
- b. maa katab-f Ali r-risaalah
NEG write.PAST.3SGM -NEG Ali the-letter
'Ali did not write the letter.' (Alqurashi & Abduljali, 2020, p. 332)
- c. l-mʕallim ma-ḍarabi-f l-walad
the-teacher NEG-hit.PAST.3SGM-NEG the-boy
'The teacher did not hit the boy.' (Al-Momani, 2011, p. 487)
- d. Nadia ma-dʒa-t-f
Nadia NEG-come.PAST.3SGF-NEG
'Nadia didn't come.' (Benmamoun, 2000, p. 69)

Hail Arabic (HA), a Saudi Arabian spoken variety of Arabic, expresses sentential negation using a one-pattern negation strategy. It employs three negators: *maa*, *laa*, and the inflected negative particle *maa*-pronoun. The use of these particles is sensitive to the type of predicate being negated. The negators *maa* and *laa* are typically used to negate verbal predicates (3a, b), while the inflected negative particle *maa*-pronoun is exclusively used to express negation in verbless predicates (4).

(3) Verbal predicates

- a. Fahad maa laʕab kurah ʔms
Fahad NEG play.PAST.3SGM football yesterday
'Fahad did not play football yesterday.'
- b. laa telʕab kurah
NEG 2SGM-play.IMPERF football
'Don't play football!'

(4) Verbless Predicates

- Fahad maa-hu bi-l-dʒamʕah
Fahad NEG-3SGM in-the-university
'Fahad is not in the university.'

Swapping these negators – placing *maa* and *laa* in verbless sentences and *maa*-pronoun in verbal sentences – results in ill-formed sentences.

(5) Verbal predicates

- a. *Fahad maa-hu laʕab kurah ʔms
Fahad NEG-3SGM play.PAST.3SGM football yesterday
Intended reading: 'Fahad did not play football yesterday.'
- b. *maa-hu telʕab kurah
NEG-3SGM 2SGM-play.IMPERF football
Intended reading: 'Don't play football!'

(6) Verbless predicate

- *Fahad maa bi-l-dʒamʕah
Fahad NEG in-the-university
Intended reading: 'Fahad is not in the university.'

Note that verbal negators must be adjacent to their predicates. The separation of these particles from their predicates leads to ungrammaticality. Consider the following illustrative examples.⁷

- (7) *a. maa Fahad laʕab kurah ʔms
NEG Fahad play.PAST.3SGM football yesterday
Intended reading: 'Fahad did not play football yesterday.'
- b. *laa kurah telʕab
NEG football 2SGM-play.IMPERF
Intended reading: 'Don't play football.'

⁴ Levantine Arabic (also called Shami) is a cover term that refers to an Arabic variety spoken in the Levantine countries which include Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. Interestingly, Syrian Arabic, unlike other Levantine Arabic, uses one-pattern negative morpheme to express negation (cf. (1c)).

⁵ Maghrebi Arabic refers to a variety of Arabic spoken in North African countries (i.e., Algeria, Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia).

⁶ Bipartite negation (two-pattern negation) is also attested in French as in (i).

(i) Jean ne mange pas.

Jean Neg eats Neg

'Jean does not eat. (Zeijlstra, 2004, p. 64)

⁷ For illustrations, the intervening phrases are underlined.

If the High-Neg approach were correct, the Neg-TP pattern in (10) would be expected to be acceptable, contrary to fact. Second, the High-Neg approach violates the adjacency requirement (see Table 1 above) that prohibits the separation of negators from their predicates. The High-Neg hypothesis predicts that a DP subject/object may intervene between the negative particle and the predicate. However, this prediction is not borne out. Consider (7a, b), repeated in (11a, b).

- (11) *a. maa Fahad laʕab kurah ʔms
 NEG Fahad play.PAST.3SGM football yesterday
 Intended reading: ‘Fahad didn’t play football yesterday.’
 b. *laa kurah telʕab
 NEG football 2SGM-play.IMP
 Intended reading: ‘Don’t play football.’

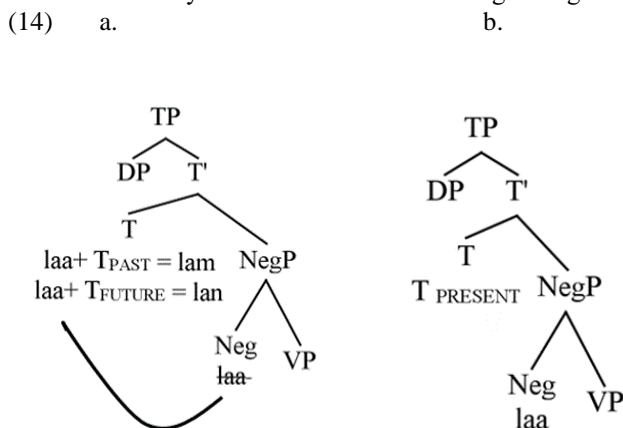
Under the High-Neg hypothesis, (11a) and (11b) would be correct, contrary to fact. The third piece of evidence against the High-Neg analysis comes from Standard Arabic (SA). In SA, *laa* inflects for tense: it is spelled out as *lam* in past tense contexts (12a), *lan* in future tense contexts (12b), and *laa* elsewhere (the default/non-tensed form) (12c). Consider the following data from (Aoun et al., 2010, p. 110).

- (12) a. ʔT-Tullab-u lam ya-drus-uu
 the-students-NOM NEG.PAST IMPERF-study-3PLM
 ‘The students did not study.’
 b. ʔT-Tullab-u lan ya-drus-uu
 the-students-NOM NEG.FUT IMPERF-study-3PLM
 ‘The students will not study.’
 c. ʔT-Tullab-u laa ya-drus-uun
 the-students-NOM NEG IMPERF-study-3PLM
 ‘The students do not study.’

In the High-Neg approach, it is unclear how the negative marker *laa* and its variants *lam* (past) and *lan* (future) interact with the tense head (T), given that negators, under this approach, must be base-merged higher in the clause (cf. (9a)), above the TP. The tense-inflection properties associated with the negative *laa* are better accounted for under the Low-Neg approach, which assumes that the temporal information is carried by the negative markers and not by the verb. There are two supporting arguments for this assumption. First, the verb in (12a–c) always appears in its tenseless imperfective form, irrespective of the tense of the sentence. Second, the sentences in (12a–c) become ungrammatical if the tense surfaces on the verb, as in (13a–c).

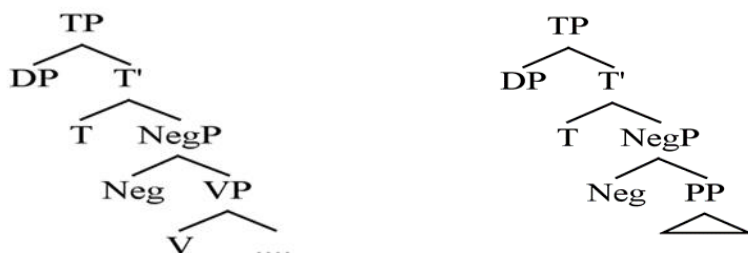
- (13) a. *ʔT-Tullab-u lam drus-uu
 the-students-NOM NEG.PAST study. PAST-3PLM
 ‘The students did not study.’
 b. *ʔT-Tullab-u lan sa-ya-drus-uu
 the-students-NOM NEG.FUT FUT-IMPERF-study-3PLM
 ‘The students will not study.’
 c. *ʔT-Tullab-u laa drus-uu
 the-students-NOM NEG study.PAST-3PLM
 ‘The students did not study.’

The contrast in grammaticality between (12a–c) and (13a–c) strongly suggests that temporal information is not carried by the verb but rather by the negative particles. Given these observations, Benmamoun (2000), utilizing the Low-Neg approach, argues that negative particles, heading the negation projection between TP and VP, bear the temporal information, particularly *lam* (past) and *lan* (future) (cf. (12b, c)). He further argues that the realization of *laa* depends on the tense specification on T. Specifically, *laa* surfaces as *lam* when it merges with T containing a future tense value and as *lan* when it merges with T containing a past tense value; otherwise, the default (tenseless) form surfaces, namely *laa*. Benmamoun’s analysis is shown in the following configuration (irrelevant details are omitted).



In light of the above discussion, it is evident that the High-Neg approach does not adequately capture the facts regarding negation in HA. This paper therefore argues in favor of the Low-Neg hypothesis. It is assumed that the negative phrase (NegP) lies under the tense node (T). Under the Low-Neg hypothesis, verbal and verbless negative sentences in HA will have the abstract representations depicted in (15a) and (15b), respectively.

(15) a. b.



III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper aims to answer the following research questions:

- i. How can the proposed analysis account for the adjacency requirement on negation in verbal sentences and the lack of such a requirement on negation in verbless sentences?
- ii. How can the proposed analysis account for the occurrence of the verbal negative particle *maa* in SVO and VSO constructions?
- iii. Why is the prohibitive *laa* in complementary distribution with the imperative verb?
- iv. What is the nature/status of the pronoun that surfaces on the negative particle *maa* in verbless sentences?

IV. DATA

This section provides data from HA showing the difference between verbal and verbless sentences and how negation works in each sentence type.

A. Verbal vs. Verbless Sentences

(a). Verbal Sentences

Verbal sentences refer to sentences/clauses that contain a verb. In HA, the verb can precede the subject, resulting in a VSO word order (16a), or it can follow the subject, leading to an SVO word order (16b).

- (16) a. laʃab Fahad kurah
 play.PAST.3SGM Fahad football
 Intended: 'Fahad played football.'
- b. Fahad laʃab kurah
 Fahad play.PAST.3SGM football
 'Fahad played football.'

(b). Verbless Sentences

Verbless sentences (also called copular sentences) are clauses that do not contain a copular verb. These types of clauses occur only in present tense contexts and must include a subject followed by a non-verbal predicate, which can be a nominal, adjectival, or prepositional predicate, as seen in (17a–c), respectively.

- (17) a. Fahad mdarris
 Fahad teacher
 'Fahad is a teacher.'
- b. Fahad ḍaki
 Fahad intelligent
 'Fahad is intelligent.'
- c. Fahad bi-l-dʒamʕah
 Fahad in-the-university
 'Fahad is in the university.'

B. Negation of Verbal vs. Verbless Sentences

(a). Negation of Verbal Sentences

HA utilizes *maa* and *laa* (the latter known in the literature as prohibitive *laa*) to express negation in verbal sentences. The particle *maa* differs from *laa* in that it can co-occur with all kinds of verbal predicates: the perfective form (18a), the imperfective form (18b), and the future tense form (18c).

- (18) a. Fahad maa laʃab kurah
 Fahad NEG play.PAST.3SGM football
 ‘Fahad did not play football.’
 b. Fahad maa ya-lʃab kurah
 Fahad NEG IMPERF-play.3SGM football
 ‘Fahad is not playing football.’
 c. Fahad maa raḥ ya-lʃab kurah
 Fahad NEG will IMPERF-play-3SGM football
 ‘Fahad will not play football.’

On the other hand, *laa* only negates verbs in the imperfective aspectual form, as in (19).

- (19) laa talʃab kurah
 NEG play-IMP.2SGM football
 ‘Don’t play football!’
 Intended meaning: ‘Don’t play football!’

Consequently, replacing an imperfective verb with a perfective verb or adding a future tense marker after *laa* results in ungrammaticality, as demonstrated in (20a) and (20b), respectively.

- (20) a. *laa laʃab kurah
 NEG play.PERF.3SGM football
 Intended meaning: ‘Don’t play football!’
 b. *laa raḥ ya-lʃab kurah
 NEG will IMPERF-play.3SGM football
 Intended meaning: ‘Don’t play football!’

Prior to summarizing the previous discussion, it is important to highlight that the negative marker *laa* is in complementary distribution with the imperative verb, as shown by the ungrammaticality of (21b).

- (21) a. iʔ-lʃab kurah
 IMP-play.2SGM football
 Intended meaning: ‘Play football!’
 b. *laa iʔ-lʃab kurah
 NEG IMP-play.2SGM football
 Intended meaning: ‘Don’t play football!’

Table 2 summarizes the morphological interaction of the negative particles with the aspectual forms of the verbal predicate.

TABLE 2
 PARADIGM OF VERBAL NEGATIVE PARTICLES WITH ASPECTUAL FORM OF VERBS IN HA

Negative element	Perfective verb	Imperfective verb	Future
<i>maa</i>	√	√	√
<i>laa</i>	*	√	*

Another distinction between *maa* and *laa* is that while the former can occur in SVO and VSO sentences (22a, b) provided that the negative element is placed before and adjacent to the lexical verb, the latter occurs only in VO constructions (22c). Below are illustrative examples.⁹

- (22) a. Fahad maa laʃab kurah (SVO)
 Fahad NEG play.PERF.3SGM football
 ‘Fahad did not play football.’
 b. **maa** **laʃab** Fahad kurah (VSO)
 Neg play.PERF.3SGM Fahad football
 Intended: ‘Fahad did not play football.’
 c. laa talʃab kurah
 NEG play-IMPERF.2SGM football
 ‘Don’t play football!’

Despite their morphological differences, the two negators are similar in a number of respects. First, both *maa* and *laa* must be adjacent to the verbal predicate: no element may intervene between the negator and the following lexical verb. Below are examples of ill-formed sentences in which *maa* and *laa* have been separated from the lexical verb.

- (23) *a. maa Fahad laʃab kurah
 NEG Fahad play.PERF.3SGM football
 Intended: ‘Fahad did not play football.’

⁹ It should be noted that the negation phrase (bolded) in (22b), *maa laʃab* ‘didn’t play’ is associated with a tonal stress.

*b. laa kurah talaʕab
 NEG football play.IMPERF.2SGM
 Intended: ‘Don’t play football!’

In addition to the requirement that the negative element be adjacent to the verbal predicate, the relative order between them must be respected: the former must precede the latter (i.e., Neg>>verbal predicates). In the following examples, (24a) and (24b) show that placing a negative item after a lexical verb results in ungrammaticality.

(24) *a. Fahad laʕab maa kurah
 Fahad play.PERF.3SGM NEG football
 Intended: ‘Fahad did not play football.’
 b. *ta-lʕab laa kurah
 2SGM-play NEG football
 Intended: ‘Don’t play football.’

Following this examination of the morphosyntactic characteristics of negative particles in verbal sentences, the next section shows how negation operates in verbless sentences.

(b). *Negation of Verbless Sentences*

HA marks negation in verbless sentences utilizing one negative particle, namely the inflected negator, *maa*-pronoun. See (25).

(25) Fahad mahu bi-l-dʒamʕah
 Fahad NEG-3SGM in-the-university
 ‘Fahad is not in the university.’

Similar to *laysa* in SA,¹⁰ the *maa*-pronoun item in HA is a phi-inflecting particle, in that it shows agreement in number, gender, and person with the subject preceding it. The following data are illustrative.

(26) a. ʔana maa-ni bi-l-dʒamʕah
 I NEG.1SG in-the-university
 ‘I am not in the university.’
 b. Sarah maa-hi bi-l-dʒamʕah
 Sarah.F NEG.3SGF in-the-university
 ‘Sarah is not in the university.’
 c. al-ʕyaal maa-hum bi-l-dʒamʕah
 the-boys NEG-3PLM in-the-university
 ‘The boys are not in the university.’

Agreement mismatch between the subject and the pronoun suffixed to the negator *maa* is not permissible, as the ungrammaticality in (27a–c) shows.

(27) a. *Fahad maa-ni bi-l-dʒamʕah
 Fahad.M NEG-1S in-the-university
 Intended: ‘Fahad is not in the university.’
 b. *Fahad maa-hi bi-l-dʒamʕah
 Fahad.M NEG.3SGF in-the-university
 Intended: ‘Fahad is not in the university.’
 c. *Fahad maa-hum bi-l-dʒamʕah
 Fahad NEG-3PLM in-the-university
 ‘Fahad is not in the university.’

The ungrammaticality in (27a–c) results from the agreement asymmetry between the pronoun attached to *maa* and the subject *Fahad*. The pronoun does not agree with the subject in person (27a), in gender (27b), or in number (27c).

Another notable property of the *maa*-pronoun negator is its ability to appear independently from a non-verbal predicate. Put differently, unlike *maa* and *laa*, the inflected negator does not impose an adjacency requirement on negation. Consider (8), reproduced in (28) for convenience.

(28) Fahad mahu halheen bi-l-dʒamʕah
 Fahad NEG-3SGM now in-the-university
 Intended reading: ‘Fahad is not in the university now.’

¹⁰ Unlike other negation particles in Standard Arabic (SA), *laysa* shows full agreement with the subject. Consider the following example from (Soltan, 2007, p. 180).

- (i) a. *laysa* Zayd-un yu-hibb-u al-qiraaat-a
 NEG.3SGM Zayd-NOM IMPER-like.3SGM the-reading-ACC
 ‘Zayd does not like reading.’
 b. *laysa-t* Hind-u tu-hibb-u al-qiraaat-a
 NEG-3SGF Zayd-NOM IMPER-like.3SGF the-reading-ACC
 ‘Hind does not like reading.’
 c. *las-naa nuhibb-u* al-qiraaat-a
 NEG-1PL IMPER-like-1PL the-reading-ACC
 ‘We do not like reading.’

In (28), an intervening adverb (underlined) is inserted between the negator and its prepositional predicate, yet the sentence remains grammatical.

Moreover, unlike negators in verbal sentences, the inflected negator in verbless sentences can occur before the subject, giving rise to a Neg-TP pattern, as (29) indicates.

- (29) **mahu** Fahad bi-l-dʒamʕah
 NEG.3SGLM Fahad in-the-university

Intended reading: 'It's not true that Fahad is in the university.'

Semantically speaking, it is worth noting that the Neg-TP pattern in (29) is only possible if the negative marker bears a tonal stress (i.e., if it is focalized).¹¹

Having discussed the morphosyntactic characteristics of negative particles in verbal and nonverbal sentences, the following section provides a syntactic analysis of the verbal and non-verbal negators based on the Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1995, 2000, 2001) and the Split CP hypothesis (Rizzi, 1997).

V. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

A. Negation in Verbal Sentences

As noted in Section 2, two of the unique properties of the *maa* and *laa* particles in HA are that they must be (i) adjacent to the verbal predicate and (ii) placed before the verbal predicate. These properties are illustrated in (3), repeated in (30) for convenience.

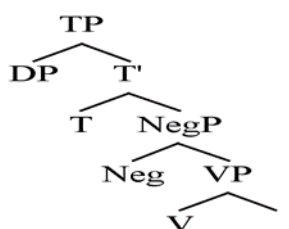
- (30) a. Fahad maa laʕab kurah ʔms
 Fahad NEG play.PAST.3SGM football yesterday
 'Fahad didn't play football yesterday.'
 b. laa telʕab kurah
 NEG 2SGM-play.IMP football
 'Don't play football!'

Violation of these requirements leads to ungrammaticality. Consider (7a–b) and (24a–b), repeated in (31a–b) and (32a–b) for convenience.

- (31) a. *maa Fahad laʕab kurah ʔms
 NEG Fahad play.PAST.3SGM football yesterday
 Intended reading: 'Fahad didn't play football yesterday.'
 b. *laa kurah telʕab
 NEG football 2SGM-play.IMP
 Intended reading: 'Don't play football.'
 (32) a. *Fahad laʕab maa kurah
 Fahad play.PERF.3SGM NEG football
 Intended: 'Fahad did not play football.'
 b. *ta-lʕab laa kurah
 2.IMP-play NEG football
 Intended: 'Don't play football.'

Both (31a–b) and (32a–b) are ill-formed sentences. In (31a–b), there is an intervening phrase between the negative element and the verbal predicate, which violates the adjacency requirement. On the other hand, while (32a–b) respect the adjacency requirement, they are infelicitous for distributional reasons: namely, the negative particle is not positioned before the lexical verb, thereby violating the (Neg>>>V) constraint. At this point, two questions arise: (i) How does the proposed analysis account for the adjacency requirement? and (ii) Why must *maa* be placed before the verbal predicate? Before these questions are answered, two crucial assumptions must be noted. First, as standardly assumed, the pre-verbal subject occupies the Spec, TP, position, and the verb originates in V. This assumption, combined with the data from HA (see Section 2), suggests that NegP is located between TP and VP. The following tree diagram shows the location of NegP in the clause.

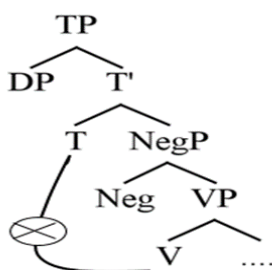
(33)



¹¹ Note that focus phrases such as *mahu* are accompanied by a high-pitch contour that decreases towards the end of the sentence.

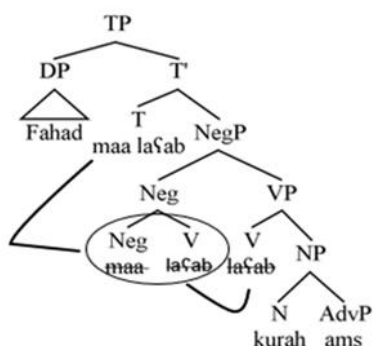
Second, it is assumed that T has a strong tense feature that forces the verb to move from V to T. Under this logic, the derivation of sentences such as (30) will proceed as follows: the verb moves from V to T, crossing over NegP to check the tense feature on T. However, verb movement, due to the Head Movement Constraint (HMC) (Travis, 1984), is blocked by *maa*, an intervening head between V and T.¹²

(34)



In order to overcome the HMC, it can be postulated, following Benmamoun (2000), that the verb needs to merge with the Neg head first, forming a complex head. Then, the complex head raises to T to check the tense feature. The representation in (35) illustrates the derivation of (30).

(35)



Given the structure in (34) and (35), it is now possible to answer the two questions stated earlier in this section. First, the fact that an adjacency requirement is imposed on negation follows from the assumption that the verb has to raise to T through Neg. As such, it merges with the negative particle, forming a complex head and preventing phrases from intervening (cf. (15)). Second, regarding the Neg>>>V constraint – that is, the requirement that the negative particle must precede its verbal predicate – the proposed analysis shows that verb movement to T skipping NegP (i.e., The *V-Neg pattern) is disallowed for minimality considerations, namely the HMC.

Another issue worthy of discussion is the occurrence of *maa* in SVO and VSO constructions. See (22a–b), repeated in (36a–b).

- (36) a. Fahad maa laʃab kurah (SVO)
 Fahad NEG play.PAST.3SGM football
- ‘Fahad did not play football.’
- b. maa laʃab Fahad kurah (VSO)
 NEG play. PAST.3SGM Fahad football
- Intended: ‘Fahad did not play football.’

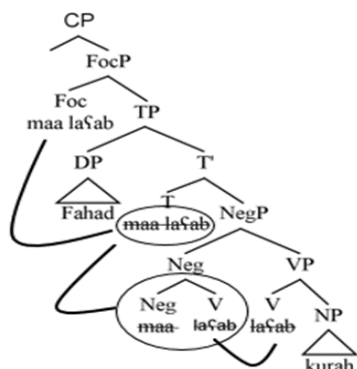
Under the Low-Neg analysis, (36a) has a straightforward explanation: the negative particle *maa* appears between the subject and the verb. By contrast, (36b), which illustrates a pattern that would be expected under the Low-Neg analysis, seems to be problematic for the current proposal, which assumes that NegP is located between TP and VP. At first glance, (36b) appears to favor the High-Neg analysis over the Low-Neg analysis, given that *maa* appears before the subject (i.e., TP). However, this observation is inaccurate. In other words, in the High-Neg analysis, it is assumed that negators are base-generated in the head Neg above TP. Based on this assumption, *maa* is expected to appear independently before the subject. However, this construction is not permissible in HA, as shown by the ungrammaticality in (37).

- (37) *maa Fahad laʃab kurah ?ms
 NEG Fahad play.PAST.3SGM football yesterday
- Intended reading: ‘Fahad did not play football yesterday.’

¹² “An X° may only move into the Y° that properly governs it” (Travis, 1984, p. 131).

The contrast between (36b) and (37) clearly shows that the occurrence of *maa* before the subject results from verb movement to a CP area and not from a base-merged operation of *maa* in the C range. The immediate question that emerges in this respect is what motivates the verb to move to the C domain. The answer to this question follows from the assumption that, in verb-initial clauses in Arabic, the verb undergoes two successive-cyclic movements: from V to T (for tense feature checking) and from T to Foc, the head of the Focus Phrase (FocP) (cf. Alshammari, 2023; Aoun et al., 2010; Ouhalla, 1994). This line of thought, coupled with the fact that the verb is associated with a tonal stress in (36b), is a reason to contend that the Neg-V-TP pattern attested in HA (36b) is a byproduct of the movement of the complex head (i.e., Neg-V) to the Foc head. Based on this contention, the derivation of (36b) will proceed as in (38) (irrelevant details are omitted).

(38)



The tree diagram in (38) shows that the verb merges with *maa*, forming one unit (Neg-V *maa laʕab*). Then, the complex head raises to T to check the PAST tense feature. Subsequently, the verb containing the negative particle *maa* head-moves to the head Foc, leaving the subject in Spec, TP, thereby yielding the Neg-V-TP pattern shown in (36b).

Having discussed the morphosyntactic issues associated with *maa*, attention now shifts to the second negative item utilized in verbal sentences, namely *laa*. As discussed in Section 2, *laa*, similar to *maa*, imposes an adjacency requirement on negation: that is, no element is allowed to intervene between *laa* and its verbal predicate. For an illustration, see (11b), repeated in (39).

- (39) **laa* kurah telʕab
 NEG football 2SGM-play.IMP
 Intended reading: ‘Don’t play football.’

Based on (39), it is possible to extend the analysis proposed for the negator *maa* to account for the impossibility of inserting a phrase between *laa* and the following verb. As in the case of *maa*, it can be argued that the adjacency requirement on *laa* and its verbal predicate is a result of the merger between *laa* and the verb. The verb has to raise to T to check phi features. To avoid violating the HMC, the verb merges with *laa*, forming one morphological unit before it raises to T, thereby preventing the occurrence of any phrase in between.

Another crucial morphosyntactic property of the particle *laa* is that it cannot occur with an imperative verb. See (21), repeated here as (40) for convenience.

- (40) a. *iʔ-lʕab* kurah
 IMP-play.2SGM football
 Intended meaning: ‘Play football!’
 b. **laa* *iʔ-lʕab* kurah
 NEG IMP-play.2SGM football
 Intended meaning: ‘Don’t play football!’

The fact that *laa* is in complementary distribution with imperative verbs follows if it is assumed that *laa* carries an interpretable imperative feature [+IMP]. Given this assumption, the co-occurrence of *laa* with imperative verbs is not tolerated, as shown by the ungrammaticality in (40b).

B. Negation in Verbless Sentences

As shown in Section 2, HA uses only one particle to mark negation in verbless sentences, namely *maa*-pronoun. Unlike *maa* and *laa*, the negative particle *maa*-pronoun does not need to be adjacent to the predicate following it, as shown by the possibility of inserting the adverb between the negator and its PP predicate. See (8), repeated below in (41).

- (41) Fahad *maa*-hu halheen bi-l-dʒamʕah
 Fahad NEG-3SGM now in-the-university
 Intended reading: ‘Fahad is not in the university now.’

The puzzling question that arises here is why the adjacency requirement is imposed on negation in verbal sentences but not in verbless sentences. The answer to this question follows from the fact that the adjacency requirement results

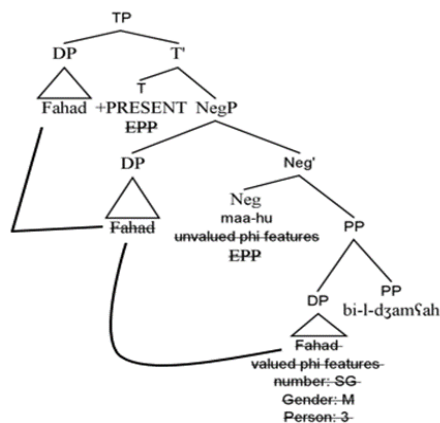
from the merger between negators and their verbal predicates only. The previous subsection demonstrated that the verb following *maa* and *laa* must raise to T. However, such movement is only possible if the verb merges with the negator to avoid violation of the HMC. In verbless negation, the predicate following the inflected negative particle is not verbal, so it does not need to raise to T, and no merger occurs between the two. The fact that no merger occurs between the negator and its non-verbal predicate in verbless clauses explains the possibility of inserting the adverb between the two. As such, the (un)availability of a verbal predicate determines the presence or absence of the adjacency requirement: that is, the (im)possibility of having intervening material between negation markers and their (non)verbal predicates.

Another intriguing characteristic of the phi-inflecting negator *maa*-pronoun is its ability to inflect for phi features (number, gender, and person). See (42a–c).

- (42) a. Fahad maa-hu bi-l-dʒamʕah
 Fahad.M NEG.3SGM in-the-university
 ‘Fahad is not in the university.’
 b. Sarah maa-hi bi-l-dʒamʕah
 Sarah.F NEG.3SGF in-the-university
 ‘Sarah is not in the university.’
 c. al-ʕyaal maa-hum bi-l-dʒamʕah
 the-boys NEG-3PLM in-the-university
 ‘The boys are not in the university.’

The data in (42) clearly show that the negation marker phi-agrees with the subject preceding it. In this respect, the following question is posed: How can the proposed analysis account for the pronoun on the negator, *maa*? The fact that the phi features surfacing on the particle *maa* must match the phi content of the subject suggests that an Agree relation is established between the two. Consequently, it can be proposed that the negative particle *maa* has unvalued phi features that are valued by the subject. To illustrate this proposal with a concrete example, consider the derivation of (42a) in the tree diagram below.

(43)



Utilizing Chomsky's (2001) Agree theory, the agreement relation between the pronoun on the negator *maa* and the subject *Fahad* works as follows: the negator *maa* acts as a probe by virtue of being endowed with unvalued phi features and an Extended Projection Principle (EPP) feature, and the subject in Spec, PP, acts as a goal because it has matching valued features. Given this, the subject values the unvalued phi features on the Neg head; therefore, the phi content of the subject (3SGM) is spelled out on *maa* as *hu*. Furthermore, since *maa* has an EPP feature, it forces the subject to move to its specifier position. Finally, the subject raises to Spec, TP to satisfy the EPP feature on T.

Finally, another notable fact about the negative marker *maa*-pronoun is the Neg-TP pattern, which is a marked order in HA. Consider (23), reproduced in (44) for ease of exposition.¹³

- (44) **maahu** Fahad bi-l-dʒamʕah
 NEG.3SGLM Fahad in-the-university

Intended reading: 'It's not true that Fahad is in the university.'

Looking at the example in (44), two crucial observations can be made. First, syntactically, the negator occurs in clause-initial position. Second, semantically speaking, the negator *maahu* bears contrastive focus stress (boldfaced). Based on

¹³ It is also worth noting that the whole negation phrase (i.e., the negation marker and its PP predicate) can be contrastively focused as shown in (i).

(i) **mahu** **bi-l-dʒamʕah** Fahad
 NEG.3SGLM in-the-university Fahad

Intended reading: 'It's not in the university Fahad.'

Based on the data in (i), it can be claimed that the negation phrase moves to Spec, FocP, as illustrated in the skeletal diagram below, leaving irrelevant details aside.

(ii) [CP FocP **mahu bi-l-dʒamʕah** [TP Fahad [NegP **mahu** bi-l-dʒamʕah]]]

these distributional and interpretive facts, it is reasonable to treat *maahu* as an instance of a contrastive focus element heading the FocP (cf. Rizzi, 1997; Ouhalla, 1993; Aoun et al., 2010). From this, it can be concluded that the occurrence of negative particles in a position above TP is not syntactically conditioned, as suggested in the High-Neg analysis, but rather semantically motivated.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This paper provided a morphosyntactic analysis of sentential negation in HA with reference to Chomsky's (1995, 2001, 2001) Minimalist Program (MP) and Rizzi's (1997) Split CP hypothesis. It showed that HA marks negation in the clause unitizing three negators: *maa*, *laa* (or the prohibitive *laa*, as it is known in the literature), and the phi-inflecting particle *maa*-pronoun. The use of these negators depends on the type of predicate being negated: *maa* and *laa* negate verbal predicates, whereas *maa*-pronoun negates only non-verbal predicates. It was argued, following Benmamoun (2000), that these negators head the negation phrase, which is situated below the tense (T). However, under certain pragmatic/semantic circumstances (i.e., contrastive focus readings), *maa* and *maa*-pronoun may appear before the subject, which is standardly assumed to be in Spec, TP, resulting in the Neg-TP pattern. It was argued, based on the syntactic and semantic properties of these particles, that negators preceding the subject are instances of contrastive focus phrases heading the focus phrase. Based on this argument, it was suggested that the clause-initial occurrence of negators (Neg-TP) is semantically/pragmatically conditioned. This is an issue that deserves additional exploration in future research.

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