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On the Morpho-Syntactic Peculiarities of "Laysa" A Minimalist Program Approach

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الخصائص النحوية و الصرفية لأداة النفي "ليس" على ضوء "برنامج الحد الأدنى" لتشومسكي

محمد الغازي

كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية

جامعة ابن زهر، أكادير

تتناول هذه الدراسة بالبحث والتحليل الخصائص النحوية والصرفية لأداة النفي العربية "ليس". وقد ركزنا خصوصا على الاختلافات الملحوظة بين هذه الأداة وباقي أدوات النفي الأخرى. وقد اعتمدنا على الإطار النظري التوليدي المعروف ببرنامج الحد الأدنى الذي انطلق وتطور مع تشومسكي (1995).

في المبحث الأول من هذا المقال عرضنا الخصائص الصرفية والتوزيعية لأداة النفي ليس، و كيفية تفاعلها مع المقولات الكبرى: الأفعال و الأسماء. هذه الخصائص التي تجعلها مرة تعمل عمل الفعل ومرة أخرى تعمل عمل "ما" النافية .

فخلافًا لباقي أدوات النفي في العربية وفي مجموعة من اللغات تحمل فإن ليس من الناحية الصرفية تتفاعل بشكل كبير مع لواصق التطابق ولواصق الزمن. وهذا يعني أنها مختلفة إلى حد ما عن ما أسميناه بالمقولات الوظيفية الرابطة كالتطابق والزمن والجهة. وتدرج ضمن ما أسميناه بالمقولات الوظيفية المستقلة أو المنفصلة

هذه الاختلافات تدل على أن الدراسة النحوية لأداة النفي ليس ذات اللواصق الصرفية تختلف عن أدوات النفي العارية عن اللواصق. و لدعم هذه الفكرة برهنا على أنها تتميز بمصفوفات سماتية مختلفة. فأدوات النفي ذات اللواصق تميزها المصفوفة المعبر عنها ب[+ فعل،+ مضارع] أما أداة النفي العارية عن اللواصق فتميزها المصفوفة المعبر عنها ب[+ فعل،+ توكيد] هذه المصفوفات تعكس

أما الخصائص الشاذة التي تميز أداة النفي "ليس"، فتجعلها مرة كالفعل ومرة أخرى كالأداة فقد اقترحنا اعتبار هذه الكلمة مركبة تتكون من جزأين الجزء الأول منها هو أداة النفي "لا" و الجزء الثاني هو الفعل الناقص "أيس". استنادا إلى هذا التقسيم يمكن أن نفهم السبب الذي يجعل ليس خلافا لباقي أدوات النفي ذوات اللواصق ترد في الجمل الاسمية كما يتضح لنا السبب الذي يجعلها تقبل لواصق التطابق.

On the Morpho-Syntactic Peculiarities of "Laysa" A Minimalist Program Approach

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Introduction

The inventory of the negation system in Standard Arabic consists of five commonly used negation elements, (viz. *laa*, *lam*, *lan*, *maa*, and *laysa*), (Abbas, H. 1975). They have different distributional and/or temporal properties. However, the properties of *laysa* are the most peculiar of all the others (Benmamoun 1992). For instance, at the morphological level, it behaves like an auxiliary: it is associated with a present tense specification and it inflects for agreement morphology. At the distributional level, and contrary to the other negation elements, it seems independent of its predicate.

In this study, conducted within the minimalist framework as developed by Chomsky (1995) and followers in subsequent literature, we propose an analysis which accounts for the peculiarities of *laysa* and allows its unification with *laa* and its other variants (viz *lam*, *lan*). The essence of the proposed analysis is to consider *laysa* a complex word composed of a Neg element and a copular verb.

The presented conception of *laysa* based on certain historical facts must have a repercussion on the nature of some elements in the lexicon. Thus, among the ideas discussed in this paper is that some functional categories (viz. Neg.) are not "atomic" in the lexicon i.e. they are decomposable stems, which subsequently undergo derivational or inflectional affixation processes. This entails that Chomsky's (1995) view to remove word formation processes from the lexicon must be taken with a little caution.

Concerning SA clause structure, it is worth pointing out at this level that the analysis abides by the following assumptions:

- Word order is relevant in analysing the phenomenon of negation in SA: the distribution of Negs in this language is sensitive to whether the sentence has a VSO or an SVO structure. Thus, two options of word order are recognised: the "unmarked" word order VSO and the "marked" SVO, (Shlonsky 1997).
- Functional categories such as Neg, Aspect, and Tense do project, although they differ as to their hierarchical position
- SA Negs are invariably specified for a [+V] feature. Further evidence in support of this view will be provided on the basis of the behaviour of *laysa*.

The paper is organised as follows: it comprises five main sections: in the first section, we present some distributional and morphological peculiarities of *laysa*. The second section is about the Complex Status of *laysa*. In the third section, we provide a configurational representation for *laysa*. Section four presents the feature structure of *laysa*. In the last section, we discuss the derivation of *laysa* in various contexts. We close the paper with a conclusion.

1. Some Peculiarities of *Laysa*

1.1. The Distributional Peculiarities of *Laysa*

Laysa and *maa* have at least three common distributional properties (Moutaouakil 1991): In addition to their occurrence with verbal constructions, *maa* and *laysa* also occur in two other contexts: in SVO constructions as in (1) and in verbless sentences as in (2):

1-a/ *maa* Zayd-un ya-quul-u šīṣr-an
Neg Zayd-nom 3ms-say-ind poetry-acc

b/ *laysa* Zayd-un ya-quul-u šīṣr-an
Neg Zayd-nom 3ms-say-ind poetry-acc

2-a/ *maa* Zayd-un šāṣir-un
Neg Zayd-nom poet-nom

b/ *laysa* Zayd-un šāṣir-an
Neg Zayd-nom poet-acc

Notice that SVO constructions in (1) reveal that a nominal element can intervene between the verb and the so-called independent Negs *laysa* and *maa*. The question that should be addressed now is how to account for the interaction of *laysa* with verbal and nominal predicates?

laa and its temporal variants require strict adjacency with the imperfective, (Ouhalla 1993). However, though it is an inflected Neg element, *Laysa* is different from *laa* and its temporal variants (*lam* and *lan*) in two distributional aspects:

First, it seems to behave like an independent negative as it can be separated from the verb by an adjunct (3), while *laa* and its other variants must be strictly adjacent to the verb.

3-a/ **laa* kulla maratin yumkinu ?an ta-fuuza
Neg all time possible that you-win

b/ *laysa* kulla maratin yumkinu ?an ta-fuuza
Neg all time possible that you-win
“It is not possible that you win all the time”

Second, unlike *laa* and its other variants, *laysa* occurs in verbless constructions:

- 4- a/ **laa* t-taalib-u marid-an
Neg the- student-nom sick-acc
- b/ *laysa* t-taalib-u marid-an
Neg-3ms the-student-nom sick-acc
"The (male) student is not sick"

These two characteristics of *laysa* suggest that it is completely independent of its predicate, be it verbal or nominal. However, a deep analysis of the internal structure of *laysa* reveals that its behaviour is not as peculiar as it seems.

1.2. The Morphological Peculiarities of *Laysa*

The morphological peculiarities of *laysa* have attracted the attention of early Arab grammarians as well as modern ones. Ibn Hisham⁽¹⁾, for instance, defines *laysa* as "a verb" which negates the "present state". His view is based on the fact that *laysa* takes agreement inflection and assigns accusative case to its nominal and adjectival predicates. On the contrary, Ibn S-Sarraj⁽²⁾, another Arab grammarian, considers *laysa* "a negative particle", even though it takes agreement inflection. He argues that *laysa* cannot be conjugated like the other copular verbs. Rather, it is a "frozen particle" like Neg particles in Arabic.

Recently, within functional grammar, *laysa* is categorially classified as "hybrid" word: it behaves both like a copular verb and like a negative morpheme. (Moutaouakil 1986). This means that the division of words into two types (lexical and functional) must also be reconsidered so that hybrid categories can be accommodated by the theory of grammar. In this section, we discuss the categorial identity of *laysa*. The problem is whether *laysa* may be identified as an auxiliary/copular verb or a negation particle.

1.2.1. The Verbal Status of *laysa*

Three morphological characteristics favour the treatment of *laysa* as a verb, and not as a Neg element. The first one is related to its inflection for agreement. Benmamoun (1992) argued that the suffixes which are usually associated with temporal interpretation in SA also carry subject agreement. Consider these examples:

- 5- a/ *laysa*-a mas?uul-an
Not 3ms responsible-acc
"He is not responsible".
- b/ *laysa*-at mas?uul-at-an
not-3fs responsible-3f-s-acc
"She is not responsible".

(1) Ibn Hisham Jamal D-Dine is a traditional Arab grammarian. He died in 761 A. H.

(2) Ibn S-Sarraj Mohammad Ibn Sahl is another traditional Arab grammarian. He died in 316 A. H.

c/ *lays-uu masʔuulii-na*
 not -3pl.m responsible
 “They are not responsible”.

According to Benmamoun (ibid: 85), the temporal value is neutral in these sentences. This means that the suffixes (-a, -at, -un) do not denote a specific tense but they stand for agreement inflection.

What is of direct relevance to our argumentation here is not whether the temporal inflecti on and the agreement inflection are realised in one single suffix or separately, but the fact that *laysa* carries agreement inflection. The other Negs do not take agreement inflection at all.

A second characteristic of *laysa* which makes it behave like a copular verb is its sensitivity to case inflection. *Laysa* occurs only with a nominal and adjectival predicate which has an accusative case inflection. The constructions in (6) illustrate the point, respectively:

6- a/ *kaan-at Hind-un ʔustaa at-an/*ʔustaaḍat-un*
 was-3fs Hind-nom teacher-acc/* teacher-nom
 “Hind was a teacher”.

b/ *lays-at Hind-un ʔustaaḍat-an/*ʔustaaḍat-un*
 Not 3fs Hind-un teacher-acc/* teacher-nom
 “Hind is not a teacher”.

In (6), both *laysa* and *kaana* are sensitive to the case inflection associated with their arguments: subject case inflection must be nominative whereas that of the complement must be accusative.

Third, like copular verbs, *laysa* is also defective; i.e. it does not denote a “state of affairs”. Therefore, it cannot stand as a sentence predicate:

7-a/*kaan-at Hind-un ʔustaaḍat-an*
 was-3fs Hind-nom teacher-acc
 “Hind was a teacher”.

b/**Kaan-at Hind-un*
 was-3fs Hind-nom

8-a/*lays-at Hind-un ʔustaaḍat-an*
 Not-3fs Hind-nom teacher-acc
 “Hind was not a teacher”.

b/ **lays-at Hind-un*
 not-3fs Hind-nom.

Finally, if the above argument is on the right track, then *laysa* is expected to behave like copular verbs. In fact, like the other defective verbs, *laysa* is used to express the temporal and aspectual features of verbal as well as non-verbal sentences as illustrated in (9-a) and (9-b), respectively:

9-a/ *laysa* Zayd-un yaçrif-u l-ħaqiiqat-a
not-present Zayd-nom knows-ind the-truth
"Zayd does not know the truth".

b/ *laysa* Zayd-un saaçir-an
Not-pre Zayd-nom Poet-acc.
"Zayd is not a poet"

As can be observed *laysa* expresses the imperfective Aspect and the Present Tense with both verbal and non-verbal predicates, as is illustrated in (9-a) and (9-b), respectively. Thus, it can be used either as an auxiliary verb in verbal sentences or as a copular verb when the predicate is non-verbal.

However, there are many pieces of evidence, which show that *laysa* is not a genuine verbal element. In fact, it has other characteristics which also favour its treatment as a negative element. This point is tackled in the following subsection.

1.2.2. Negative Status of *laysa*

In this subsection, pieces of evidence are provided to show the negative status of *laysa*. In this respect, we present the characteristics that differentiate it from copular verbs. The argumentation is based on two points, (a) morphological derivation from stems in SA, and (b) the illicit fronting of the predicate complement of *laysa*:

First, unlike copular verbs (or any other full verb in Arabic), the stem *laysa* cannot undergo morphological derivation:

10) a- <i>kaana</i>	b- <i>sa-ya-kuun-u</i>	c- <i>kaaʔin-un</i>
was	will-be-ind	being-nom
aʻ- <i>laysa</i>	bʻ- <i>*sa-ya-luusu</i>	cʻ- <i>*laayis-un</i>
Neg-pres	*will-Neg	*Neg-being

The above paradigm shows that the derivation of various forms of *kaana* is possible, whereas *laysa* does not allow this kind of derivation, except the one based on suffixation. This is why *laysa* is often referred to as "fiçlun _aamid" (=frozen verb).

Second, in verbless constructions the subject can safely be pre-posed to the left of either *kaana* or *laysa*. This is illustrated below in (11).

11-a/ Hind-un kaan-at šaaçirat-an
hind-nom was-3fs Poet-acc
"Hind-nom was a poet".

b/ Hind-un *laysa*-at šaaçirat-an
Hind-nom Not-3fs Poet-acc
"Hind is not a poet".

However, predicate focusing is allowed only with *kaana* (12-a) but not with *laysa* (12-b). This means that *laysa* cannot be considered a genuine copular verb.

12-a/ šaaçirat-an Kaan-at Hind-un
 poet-acc was-3fs Hind-nom
 “a poet, hind was”.

b/*šaaçirat-an lays-at Hind-un
 poet-acc Not-3fs Hind-nom
 “a poet Hind is not”.

Summarising, in the above subsections we investigated the categorial status of *laysa*. Various arguments have been presented for and against the views that *laysa* is an auxiliary verb or a negation element. In the following sub-section, an alternative characterisation of *laysa* is proposed.

2. The Complex Status of *laysa*

There are two possible ways to solve the problem of the categorial status of *laysa*. First, to consider it a “hybrid” word, following Moutaouakil (1986). However, it seems inadequate from a generative perspective to treat *laysa* as a lexical element having a “hybrid” status. From a conceptual point of view, the principles and the conditions that regulate the relationship between the lexicon and the X-bar schema do not recognise “hybrid” categories. Any category if it is to project must have a specific identity. Otherwise, it will be blind to computational operations. Thus, *laysa* must be specified either as a Neg element or a copular verb. Contrary to traditional grammarians, F.Fehri (1993) and Benmamoun (1989) have chosen to treat it as a copular verb.

The alternative proposal we defend in this paper is to consider *laysa* a complex negative element which can be decomposed into two distinct items: a Neg element, “*la*” and a copular verb “-*ysa*”. This decomposition provides an explanation of all the above seen peculiar behaviour of *laysa*.

One argument in support of the view that *laysa* is a complex item is found in its diachronic etymology. One of the outstanding traditional lexicologists Al-Fayrouz Abaady⁽³⁾ states that in its origin, *laysa* is made up of two words: “*laa*” and “*?aysa*”. The first one is a negative particle. The second one is a copular verb. The latter (i.e. *?aysa*) means “*wužida*” (= exist). Accordingly, “*laa ?aysa*” roughly means “*laa wužida*” (=does not exist)⁽⁴⁾.

The phonological process whereby “*la+?aysa*” has changed into “*laysa*” can hypothetically be reconstructed⁽⁵⁾ as follows: at a certain period of the development of SA, there may have occurred a deletion of the glottal stop followed by an assimilation of the two neighbouring identical vowels into one. Thus, the steps that seem to have led to present day “*laysa*” can be hypothesised as follows:

(3) Al-Fayrouz Abaady: an Arab lexicologist born at the beginning of the XIIth century.

(4) C.f. Al-Fayrouz Abaady (1991 :364).

(5) This reconstruction is due to Al-khalil. A traditional Arab grammarian - XIIth century.

13-	step0	initial state	<i>la + ?aysa</i>
	step1	glottal stop deletion	<i>la + aysa</i>
	step2	vowel assimilation	<i>la+ysa</i>
	step3	current state	<i>laysa</i>

Another argument which shows that *laysa* is a complex word is provided by its two sided behaviour. We have seen above that like *kaana*, *laysa* occurs only with nominal and adjectival predicates which have accusative case inflection, (cf. section 2.1 above).

However, in another context *laysa* seems to behave differently from *kaan*. Witness these constructions:

14-a/ *šaaçirat-an Kaan-at Hind-un*
 poet-acc was-3fs Hind-nom
 "a poet, hind was".

b/* *šaaçirat-an lays-at Hind-un*
 poet-acc Not-3fs Hind-nom
 "a poet Hind is not".

(14) shows that the predicate focussing is allowed with *kaana* (14-a) but not with *laysa* (14-b). Notice that with respect to this point *laysa* exhibits the same behaviour as the Neg element *maa*. Consider this example in which *maa* -like *laysa*- prevents predicate focusing:

15/* *šaaçirat-un maa Hind-un*
 poet-acc Not-3fs Hind-nom
 "a poet Hind is not".

This means that part of the behaviour of *laysa* (predicate case assignment) is like a copular verb and part of its behaviour (blocking focus fronting) is like a Neg element.

Further evidence in support of this claim can be adduced from negation in Hebrew. In this language, two different negative particles are recognised: "eyn" and "lo", (cf. Laka 1989). What makes this cross-linguistic argumentation relevant to the idea we are discussing here, is the distributional similarities exhibited by the negation system in SA and Hebrew⁽⁶⁾:

16-a/ *maa Zayd-un yaçrifu l-çibriyata*
 Neg Zayd-nom knows the-Hebrew
 'Zayd does not know Hebrew'

b/ *eyn dani yoda ivrit*
 Neg Dani know hebrew
 'Dani does not know Hebrew'

(6) Hebrew constructions are taken from Ritter (1988), cited in Laka (1989).

17-a/ Zayd-un *laa* yaçrifu l-çibriyata
 Zayd-nom Neg knows Hebrew
 ‘Zayd does not know Hebrew’

b- dani lo yoda ivrit
 dani neg know Hebrew
 ‘Dani does not know Hebrew’

As can be witnessed, *maa* and *eyn* occur in a Neg +N(oun) context; whereas, *laa* and *lo* occur only in a Neg +V(erb) context. The contrast in (18) shows that *laa* and *lo* do not occur in a Neg +N(oun) context:

18-a/ **laa* Zayd-un yaçrifu l-çibriyata
 Neg Zayd-nom knows the-Hebrew

b/ **lo* dani yoda ivrit
 Neg dani know Hebrew

Notice that “*lo*” in Hebrew and “*laa*” in Arabic are approximate homophones. This is one of the reasons, though superficial as it may appear, to think that “*lo*” and “*laa*” are counterparts in Hebrew and Arabic, respectively. By analogy, it can also be said that “*maa*” is somehow the counterpart of “*eyn*”. Likewise, in North African Arabic dialects⁽⁷⁾, the expression of negation is limited to two negative particles only: *maa* and *laa*. All this amounts to saying that in these languages, the negation systems comprise only two Neg elements.

Thus, the Neg element *laysa* is just a variant of *laa*. The fact that it takes agreement inflection is an indication that it is concatenated with a verbal element, namely *-ysa*. On this assumption, the seemingly peculiar behaviour of *laysa* can readily be explained.

Concluding, the presented conception of *laysa* based on certain historical facts is not in total harmony with of Chomsky’s (1995) conception of checking theory. Chomsky (ibid.) argued that inflectional morphemes are lexically generated on the verb thus, removing word formation, in the sense of merging elements that make up words, from the lexicon.

(7) In North African Arabic dialects for instance, the expression of negation is limited to two negative particles only: *maa* and *laa*. Here are examples from Moroccan Arabic.

i- la-t-xrēz hētta n-tjēç
 Neg-go out until we-come back
 “Don’t go out until we come back”

ii- ma-t-mši hētta- fin
 Neg-go any-where
 “don’t go anywhere”

The same situation is observed in other regional dialects in the Arab world. (cf. Bahloul, R. 1995, Benmamoun 2000).

Our suggestion to decompose *laysa* can be legitimized by allowing for certain exceptions in the theory. In other words, to assume that some functional categories (viz. Neg.) are not "atomic" in the lexicon i.e. they are decomposable stems, which subsequently undergo derivational or inflectional affixation processes. Another possibility is to assume that the decomposition does not pose any problem since "y_sa" is not an inflectional morpheme. It is a verb having its own inflection. Thus, the separation of *y_sa* from the Neg element *laa* does not contradict the minimalist assumption that words are generated with their inflection

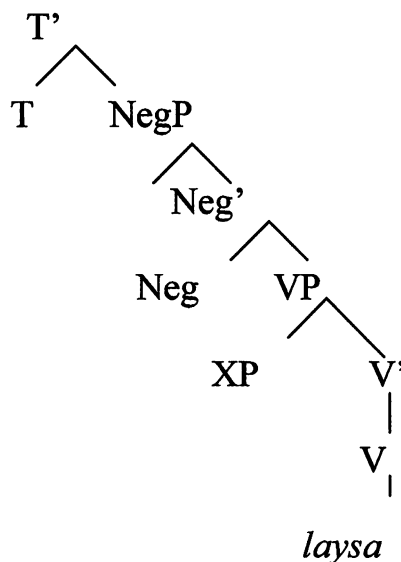
3. The Representation of *Laysa*

The representation of *laysa* is one of the problematic issues. It is difficult to provide a suitable configurational representation for *laysa* since its categorial identity is not defined. On the one hand, *laysa* is treated as a verb. On the other hand, it is considered as a Neg element. Each of these views has implications for the projection and representation of *laysa*. Let us begin with the first one.

2.2.1. *Laysa*: head of VP

Recall that three morphological characteristics have been presented to favour the verbal status of *laysa*: first, it inflects for agreement. Second, it affects the case inflection of its predicate. Third, it does not denote a state of affairs, which fact favours its classification as a defective verb exactly like copular verbs. These properties have led F.Fehri (1989) to treat *laysa* as an auxiliary projecting into VP not NegP.

(19) *laysa* : head of VP



To check its morphological features, *laysa* in (19) is assumed to move upwards to the head position of NegP after having checked its Agr and T features (see F. Fehri (1989)).

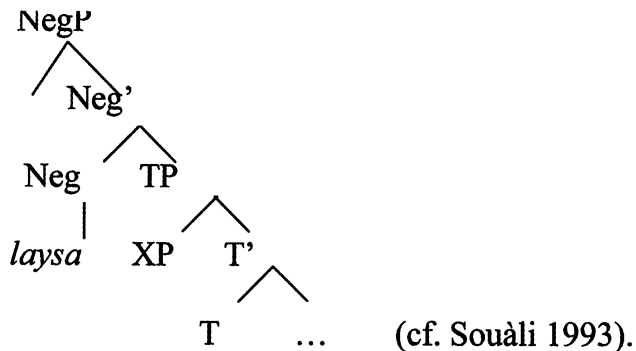
However, the assumption that *laysa* is an auxiliary verb poses at least two problems: first from a conceptual viewpoint, the bundle of features that make up *laysa* do not match those of a verbal category. The second problem is related to the morphological nature of *laysa*, as explained below.

2.2.2. *Laysa*: head of NegP

The morphological characteristics of this word differ from those of verbs. For example, we explained above that *laysa* cannot undergo morphological derivation like any other verb. Besides, it is incompatible with complement focusing structures. This shows that *laysa* cannot be treated as a copular verb as such.

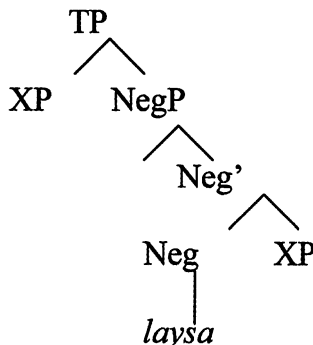
On the basis of these facts, it is plausible to assume that *laysa* is a Neg element which can be subject to two potential representations. In the first one, *laysa* can be represented in a position higher than TP; in other words, with an order in which NegP dominates TP, as in (20).

(20) *Laysa* dominates TP



The potential derivational process of *laysa* shows that (20) is not adequate. If *laysa* originates in a position above TP, then it will not be able to check its morphological inflection especially that the framework within which this work was carried out bans lowering movements. To overcome this weakness, another proposal in which TP dominates *laysa* has been made:

(21) TP dominates *laysa*



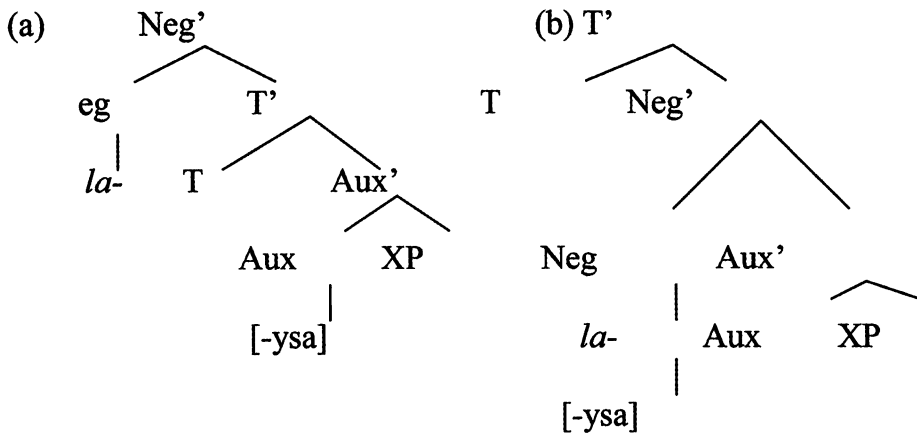
In this case, *laysa* can easily check its features by moving upwards. However, it is theoretically hard to perceive how the requirements of Selection can accommodate the insertion of a "lexical verbal" element *-laysa-* under a functional head position Neg.

Concluding, the syntactic status of *laysa* creates a delicate situation with respect to representation. On the one hand, it is not appropriate to represent it as a verbal element as it manifests some characteristics of a Neg element. On the other hand, it cannot be considered a genuine Neg element as it exhibits some characteristics of verbal categories. Nevertheless an alternative proposal is made below.

2.2.3. An Alternative Representation

The above defended decomposition of *laysa* into a Neg element "*la*" and an auxiliary "*-ysa*" allows the unification of the above representations and overcomes the witnessed weaknesses. Thus, since *-ysa* is a temporal auxiliary invariably specified for present tense, and since it inflects for agreement morphology, we assume that it is generated as head of AuxP. The schemas below are potential simplified representations for the two elements of *laysa*.

(22) The Representation of *laysa*



The rationale behind inserting *-ysa* under Aux is twofold: first, it can easily move and check its temporal feature, especially if we take into consideration that *-ysa* is specified for present tense. Second, this positioning solves the problem of the identity of *laysa*, and explains why it takes agreement inflection. The derivational operations that this auxiliary undergoes will be presented in subsequent sections in more details. Notice finally that the Neg element may occupy two different positions in relation to T.

4. The Feature Structure of *laysa*

Laysa has some peculiar distributional and morphological properties that may require a distinct treatment with respect to representation and derivation. Does this mean that it is also associated with a different categorial feature? For Benmamoun, these properties imply that the agreeing head associated with *laysa* carries a [+D]

feature that is checked by the subject. This explains why in SA *laysa* agrees with the subject, as illustrated in (23):

23-a/ *laysa* t-taalib-u mariidan
 Neg-3ms the student-nom sick
 “The (male) student is not sick”

b/ *lays-at* t-taalibat-u maridatan
 Neg-3fs the student-nom sick
 “The (female) student is not sick”

In this subsection, we provide an argument to show the inadequacy of this proposal⁽⁸⁾. We also show that our previous proposal to decompose *laysa* allows the unification of this Neg element with the other Negs with respect to their feature structure.

Recall that in the previous section, we argued for the fact that *laysa* is a complex word composed of the Neg “*la-*” and the auxiliary “*-ysa*”. This decomposition paves the way to account for the agreement inflection associated with *laysa*. It is now possible to say that it is the auxiliary “*-ysa*” associated with the Neg element which hosts the suffix of agreement inflection. This auxiliary is also responsible for the occurrence of this Neg element in verbless constructions.

We conclude then that it is not Neg which agrees with the subject in (24). In fact, it is the suffixed verbal element. Thus, the agreement of *laysa* with the subject cannot be taken as an argument to posit that Neg elements in Arabic are specified for a [+D] feature. Actually, the merger of the auxiliary “*-ysa*” with the Neg element supports our claim that SA Neg elements are specified for a [+V] categorial feature. It also provides a straightforward account for the reason why *laysa* safely negates verbless constructions: the grammaticality of constructions such as (24) is due to the fact that the verbal element *-ysa* intervenes between *la* and the nominal predicate. Finally, notice that this proposal has another advantage: it permits a total unification of *laysa* with the other inflected Negs.

(8) Another argument advanced by Benmamoun (2000) is based on the interaction of sentential negation with nominal predicates. In addition to its occurrence in verbal sentences, *maa* also occurs in two other contexts: first, in SVO constructions, as in .

a/ *maa* Zayd-un ya-quul-u šīṣr-an
 Neg Zayd-nom 3ms-say-juss poetry-acc
 “Zayd does not recite any poetry”

Second, in verbless sentences, as in (b):

b/ *maa* Zayd-un šāṣir-un
 Neg Zayd-nom poet-nom
 “Zayd is not a poet”

Notice that in SVO constructions a nominal element can intervene between the verb and the non-inflected Neg *maa*. In verbless constructions, it appears that this Neg merges with nominal predicates.

5. Derivation of *laysa*

5.1. *Laysa* in the Context of Verbal Constructions

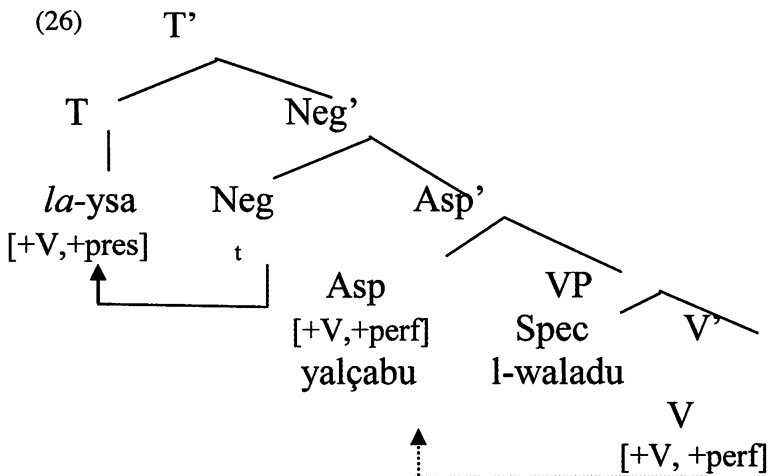
We argued above that *laysa* is a complex element composed of a Neg element and an auxiliary. The proposed decomposition of this word paves the way to understanding its peculiar behaviour. In addition to its adequacy in solving the problem of representation, it also allows the unification of this Neg element with the other inflected Negs at the level of feature checking processes. In other words, the apparent independent distributional and morphological properties of *laysa* can be readily explained in accordance with the treatment devised for the other inflected Negs.

Let us start by the derivation of *laysa* in VSO sentences. In the context of these constructions, two analyses are possible:

5.1.1. Analysis 1

Consider (26) as a possible structural representation of (25):

25/ *laysa ya-lçabu l-waladu l-kurat-a*
 Neg imp-play the-boy the-ball
 "The boy is not playing football"



Since *la-* is associated with a categorial [+V] feature, then, its movement upwards is motivated by the need to check this feature and to support the suffixal verbal element -ysa. Thus, the ultimate landing site of *la-* is T where it merges with -ysa and checks its [+V] feature⁽⁹⁾. The fact that this operation is carried out before Spell out is evident.

(9) Notice that even if we assume that -ysa is generated in an Aux position lower than T, the result of our analysis will not be affected. In such a configuration, we will assume that the auxiliary element -ysa cyclically moves to Asp then it raises to merge with Neg. the complex *la+ysa* does not need to move to tense since it denotes a generic present tense. This also explains the reason why *laysa* takes an agreement inflection of the perfective though it refers to a present tense.

The verb in this case must not necessarily be adjacent to the negative element *laysa*, which means that *laysa* can also negate structures with an SVO order as illustrated below.

27- *laysa* Zayd-un ya-quul-u šīḥr-an ?abadan
 Neg Zayd-nom 3ms-say-ind poetry-acc never
 ‘Zayd is not reciting any poetry now’

Since it is specified for generic present tense and is accordingly timeless, the verb *yaquulu* in (27) does not need to check its tense feature. In other words, it is not attracted by T. Its ultimate landing site is Asp.

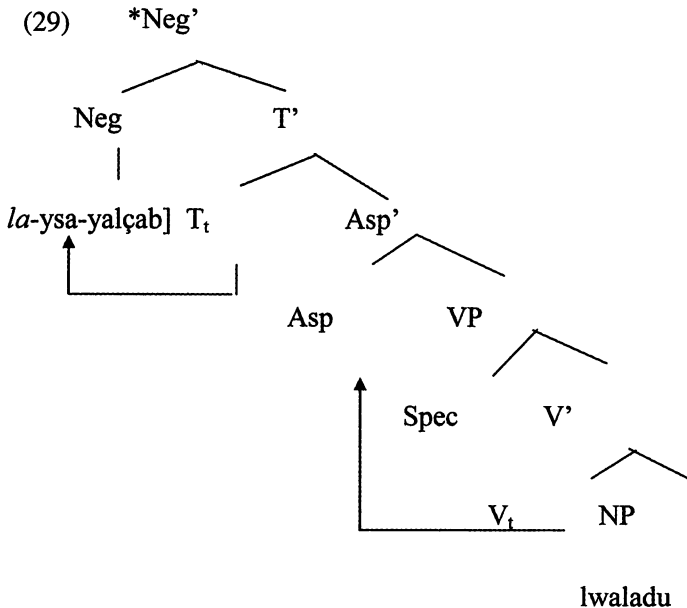
5.1.2. Analysis 2

Supposing that the matrix verb *yaquulu* is inherently associated with a [+V] feature, it is a potential checker and nothing prevents it from moving upward to check the [+V] feature of the Neg element *la-*. In this case, the verb merges with Neg and the resulting structure is as follows:

28- **ysa* la-yaquul-u Zayd-un šīḥr-an ?abadan
 aux Neg say-ind Zayd-nom poetry-acc never

This construction cannot converge as it violates one of the principles of full interpretation: in (28), there is an element (viz. *-ysa*) which is not phonetically interpreted. Thus, the ultimate landing site of the matrix verb can only be Asp.

Suppose further that Neg dominates T. Then the same question should also be addressed here: what prevents the verb from moving to Neg above TP?



In (29), the verb can cyclically move and merge with *-ysa* and then the complex *[-ysa+V]* subsequently moves to merge with *la-* to form the complex *[la-ysa+V]*.

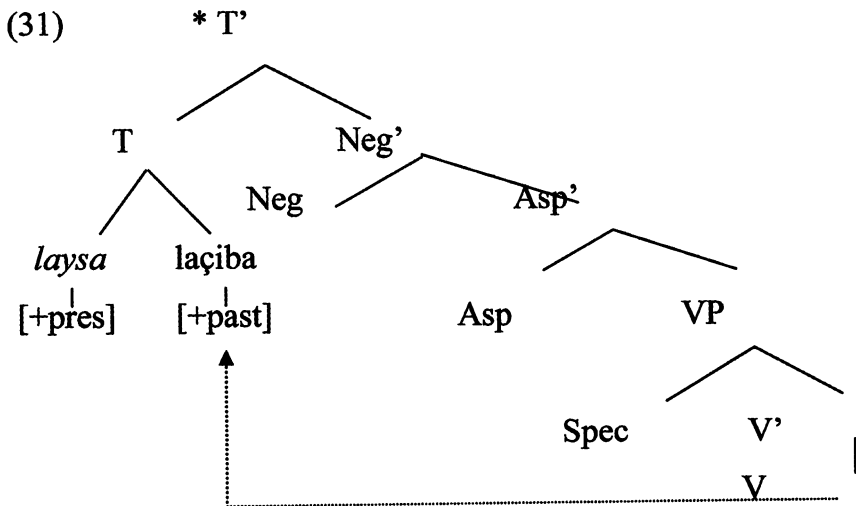
This analysis predicts that in all instances, this merger should be obligatory. However, the merger of *laysa* and V does not invariably take place as is shown by the constructions where certain elements can intervene between Neg and V. Thus, Asp is the ultimate landing site of the verb in both situations; i.e, whether T dominates Neg or Neg dominates T.

5.2. Laysa in the Context of the Perfective

laysa is compatible only with verbs in the imperfective but not with verbs in the perfective. Witness the following contrast:

- 30-a/ *lastu* ?a-drii maa hasala
 Neg we-know what happened
 "we do not know what happened"
- b/ **laysa* laçiba Zaydun l-kurata
 Neg-aux played Zayd the-football

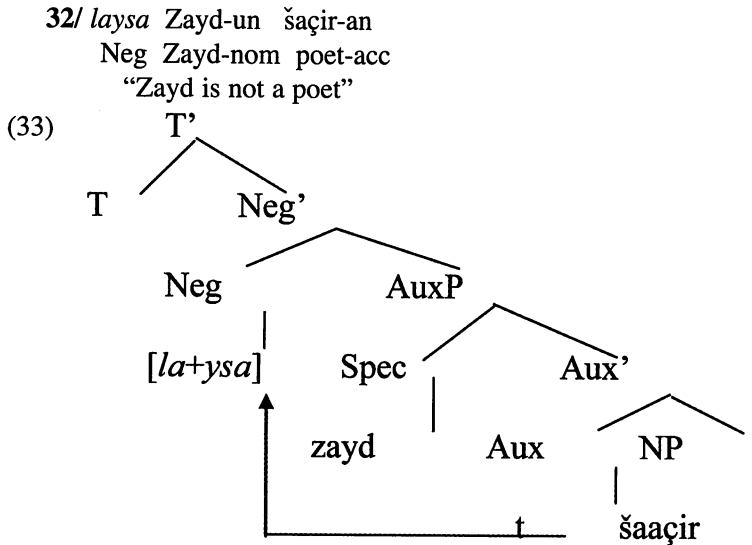
The ungrammaticality of (30-b) is due to the fact that the verb *laçiba* cannot move and adjoin to *laysa* in T for the following reasons: being an auxiliary with present tense specification in T, *laysa* cannot share one and the same head position with the verb *laçiba*. Their co-occurrence in T results in a mismatch of their tense specifications.



In other words, the output after Spell-out is an ill-formed construction where the present tense specification of *laysa* mismatches with the past tense of "*laçiba*". Hence, the ungrammaticality of (30-b) schematized in (31).

5.3. *Laysa* in Verbless Constructions

As exemplified above *laysa* is compatible with verbless constructions. This distributional property makes it closer to *maa* than to the other inflected Negs. However, with the assumption that it is a compound word, we can straightforwardly account for this behaviour. The derivation of a construction such as (32) can be carried out as is schematised in (33):



As (33) shows, the negation-verb adjacency requirement is observed in these constructions. It results from the movement of the auxiliary “-ysa” adjoining to Neg. The verbal category movement is induced by the need to check a [+V] feature associated with the Neg element *laa*.

6. Conclusion

The objective of the proposed analysis is to reduce the surface idiosyncratic properties which exist between inflected SA Negs. More specifically, the presented analysis attempts to systematise the differences that exist between *laysa* and the other negation elements. The suggested decomposition of *laysa*, has at least three merits:

- (a) first, it obeys the requirements of selection and merger: in this analysis the Neg Morpheme “*laa*” heads its NegP and the copular verb *?aysa* heads its maximal projection VP.
- (b) Second, it integrates “*laysa*” with the other Negs with respect to the configurational representation.
- (c) Third, it solves the problem of the reason why *laysa*, contrary to the other Negs, takes an Agr inflection. We postulated that this Neg element is combined with an auxiliary. Therefore, it is the suffixed auxiliary which in fact takes the Agr inflection, not the Neg morpheme.

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