Clausal Architecture and Standard Arabic Negation

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The literature on the syntax of negation has two views for the position of negation in the clause structure. The first view is the parametric view where a certain language has NegP selects either a vP or a TP but not both (Benmamoun 1992, 2000, Ouhalla 1992; Mohammad 2000, Hoyt 2007, Soltan 2007, among others). Under the second view, a certain language may opt for any position of negation with the low position (selecting a vP) being the default and the higher position having special semantic and syntactic effects (Ramchand 2001, Zeijlstra 2004). I argue for the second view giving evidence from Standard Arabic negation. I argue that maa and lam in Standard Arabic (SA) differ in their location in the clause structure. Specifically lam occupies the head position of a NegP below TP, while maa is the head of a NegP above TP.

I give semantic evidence for the different positions of these negatives. The negative marker maa (1), as opposed to lam (2), has a special pragmatic effect in Standard Arabic. In the Quranic verse in (1), the use of maa denies the truth value of a presupposed proposition that God has taken a son (al-Zamakhshari). While the negative marker lam in (2) denies a proposition that is not presupposed. So sentence (2) is simply informative and does not negate any presupposition (al-Zamakhshari). Appealing to a proposal by Ramchand (2001), I propose that this special pragmatic effect results from having the negative marker maa on top of TP. This marker then can bind the time variable of tense (and the event variable of the verb) resulting in the semantic interpretation of negation as absolute/ emphatic negation, as in (3) (Ouahalla 1993; Moutaouakil 1993). Other evidence like (4). Such examples are very frequent in SA and they negate a presupposed proposition, hence the need for an emphatic negation.

(1) maa ?ittaixa Allah min waladan (al-Mu’munin, Ch. 23: Verse 91)
   Neg take.perf. Allah any child
   ‘Allah has not taken any son’

(2) wa lam yattaxiΔ-O waladan (al-Furqan, Ch. 25: Verse 2)
   and Neg.past take.imperf.-jussive child
   ‘And who has not taken a son’

(3) a. No t:t< t* and t in Allah] ∃e:[t∈ T(e) = t] [taking(e) & Θ1(e, ‘Allah’)]
   b. ∃t:t< t* and t in Allah]No e:[t∈ T(e) = t] [taking(e) & Θ1(e, ‘Allah’)]
   Other cases of absolute/ emphatic negation can be found where maa negates the imperfect in examples like (4). Such examples are very frequent in SA and they negate a presupposed proposition, hence the need for an emphatic negation.

(4) yuxadID-uuna Allahah wa allahΔina ?aamanuu wa-maa (al-Baqarah, Ch. 1: Verse 9)
   deceive-3mp Allah and-those believe.perf.3mp and-Neg
   yaxdaN-uuna ?Illa ?anfusahum wa-maa yasNur-uun
   deceive.imperf.3mp except themselves and-Neg feel.imperf.3mp
   ‘They [think to] deceive Allah and those who believe, but they deceive not except themselves and perceive [it] not.’

   Other evidence for the different position of each negative comes from the fact that lam operates on the verb while maa does not. lam assigns jussive case/mood to the verb, as in (2), while maa does not change the default case of the verb. I extend the analysis of maa as a head in a NegP above TP to cases where maa precedes a verbless sentence (Aoun et al 2010: 116-7)

(5) maa Muhammad-un kaatib-un
   Neg Mohammad-Nom writer-Nom
   ‘Mohammad is not a writer’

   I restrict Ouahalla’s (1993) analysis of maa as focused negation in FocP to the special use of maa with a contrastive reading like when maa negates preposed NPs and PPs (Ouahalla 1993; Moutaouakil 1993). I treat this use of maa as Meta-Linguistic negation. So the difference between maa in Standard and dialectal Arabic in this context is that some dialects have developed a different negative marker for Meta-linguistic negation, such as mish in Egyptian and Jordanian (Mughazy 2003, Author 2012).

(6) maa riwaayat-an ?allafat Zaynabu (bal qasidat-an) (Ouahalla 1993: 227)
   Neg novel-Acc write.perf.3fs Zaynab (but poem-Acc)
   ‘It is not a novel that Zaynab has written (but a poem).’