

## Negation in Contemporary German and Modern Standard Arabic: Its interaction with verbal categories and information structure

In Contemporary German (CG) and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), negation interacts with several subsystems of grammar. This article provides an overview of the interactions between negation and the verbal categories of aspect and mood as well as between negation and information structure. The focus of the study is on the negation particles *nicht* for CG and *lā*, *lam*, *lan* and *mā* for MSA.

With respect to aspect and mood, only marginal interaction with negation can be observed in CG whereas in MSA the particles *lā*, *lam* and *lan* are highly sensitive to these verbal categories. The same holds for *mā*, although to a lesser degree.

In relation to form, *lā* is the simplest negation particle in MSA. It can be used in a wide range of functions and contexts. With the exception of imperatives, which do not allow for immediate negation in MSA, it combines with finite verb forms of all categories, namely with modally neutral apocopate forms (for negative commands), with indicative forms (in order to negate sentences describing present or future states of affairs) and with subjunctive forms required for syntactic reasons.

The particles *lam* and *lan* encode additional semantic features alongside negation. They are specialized for temporal distinctions. In addition to negation, *lam* expresses a semantic feature that can be interpreted as ‘past’ or ‘conditional’ (in a similar way to the English verbal category *past tense*). It can only be combined with apocopate forms. *Lan* indicates ‘future’ and is combined with subjunctive forms.

*Lā*, *lam* and *lan* are restricted to imperfective aspect (cf. Ryding 2005; Badawi/Carter/Gully 2016). They combine almost exclusively with the imperfective verb forms of the apocopate, indicative and subjunctive (cf. Qaddioui 2020, pp. 270–292, 324–330). *Lā* also allows for combinations with perfective forms, whose aspectual feature must then be reinterpreted modally (in the sense of optativity) (cf. Fassi Fehri 1993, p. 171; Qaddioui 2020, p. 311).

The restriction to the imperfective aspect does not hold for the particle *mā*. It interacts only weakly with the grammatical categories of the verb (cf. Fassi Fehri 1993, pp. 163–166). As the only one of the particles examined, *mā* can be readily combined with perfective forms to negate sentences that describe past situations. In this function, *mā* + perfective is an alternative to *lam* + apocopate. Negation with *mā* is more emphatic. Among the imperfective verb forms, *mā* only accepts the indicative mood. It is incompatible with both the apocopate and the subjunctive.

Negation with *lā*, *lam* and *lan* is closely linked to the verb. These particles immediately precede the finite verb form. Benmamoun (2000, pp. 94 ff.) interprets them as being heads of a negation or polarity phrase. In contrast, *mā* is placed at the beginning of the sentence. It can take scope over the entire sentence, with the possibility of influencing its modality, illocution type and information structure. Ouhalla (1993, pp. 276 f., 287–289; 1997, p. 32–34) interprets it as the head or specifier of the highest-ranked phrase projection, which he calls the focus phrase. Alternatively, *mā* can be interpreted as an adjunct to the

left periphery of the sentence. According to Ouhalla, *mā* is a focus operator, i. e. it marks its reference constituent informationally as focus.

Interactions between negation and information structure can be observed in both MSA and CG. The present article limits itself to a consideration of the focus-background structure in the sense of Jacobs (1984, 1988), Buring (1997, 2006) and Blühdorn (2012a, b).

In CG, the focus-background structure is indicated primarily by prosodic means, namely the distribution of accents and tones within the utterance unit. The arrangement of constituents in the hierarchical and linear syntactic structure plays an additional role in that topic constituents are often moved to the left. They must always antecede the focus. Informational marking by focus-sensitive adverbials and particles is of subsidiary importance in CG (cf. Moroni 2010; Blühdorn 2012a).

The German negation particle *nicht* can be placed relatively freely within the sentence. It can be adjoined to the left of most classes of syntactic constituents. Its host constituent will become the operand of the negation operator, thus being marked as de-selected.

Negation imposes certain restrictions on the informational design of the utterance. For example, referential constituents de-selected by negation must be accentuated. The same applies if negation is intended to mark a constituent as being an unsuitable wording option. If negation is meant to de-select only part of the host constituent, this subconstituent must also be accentuated. Apart from these special rules, negating expressions and negated constituents fit into the general system of focus-background marking. They can be accentuated as a focus or topic according to the speaker's communicative intentions or remain unaccented in the information background.

In MSA, information structure is indicated by three inventories of formal means, which are partly independent of each other: the prosodic means of accentuation (primarily for marking a "new information focus"), the morphological means of focus-marking particles and the syntactic means of placing the focus constituent in the specifier position of the focus phrase (both for marking a "contrastive focus"). Topic constituents are typically marked by moving them to an adjunct position at the left periphery of the sentence (Moutaouakil 1989; Ouhalla 1993, 1997).

Negation with *mā* is accompanied by focusing the negated constituent. The majority of constituent classes are capable of being negated in this way (cf. Moutaouakil 1991, pp. 276–279). Since *mā* is fixed in its position at the beginning of the sentence, constituents to be de-selected must typically be placed immediately to its right by movement. Indefinites can optionally remain in their original places in the sentence to be de-selected by *mā* at a distance.

*Lā*, *lam* and *lan* typically negate the verb phrase (VP) or inflection phrase (IP) of the sentence. Individual constituents can be moved to the beginning of the sentence, being placed to the left of these particles, outside the scope of negation, as a topic or focus. The de-selected rest of the sentence can then exclusively consist of background material. This kind of negation is not possible with *mā*. Constituents marked as "new information focus" by accent can also be de-selected with *lā*, *lam* or *lan* at a distance, without being removed from their original places (cf. Ouhalla 1993, pp. 294–296; 1997, pp. 32–34).

According to Al-Azzawi/Al-Mahjoob (2013), the negation particles *lā*, *lam*, *lan* and *mā* are, themselves, often marked as the focus by accentuation. The negation focus is functionally opposed to the so-called “verum focus” in both MSA and CG.

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