The Syntax of the Negation Marker *Laa* in Najdi Arabic: An HPSG Approach

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Abstract

Negation is considered one of the controversial cross-linguistic areas of research. One of its interesting topics is the syntax of negation markers. This paper aims to contribute to the current linguistic research in negation through exploring one of the negation markers in Najdi Arabic: the negator *laa*. It first categories *laa* into three types according to its meaning and the syntactic constructions in which it occurs: the imperative *laa*, the conjunct particle *laa*, and the clausal *laa*. The syntactic properties of each one of these are described with sufficient examples illustrating them. Where appropriate, these properties are compared to those of the negator *laa* in Standard Arabic and other negators. In addition to the syntactic description of *laa* in its three types or uses, the paper presents a theoretical account for all the relevant syntactic properties of each type of the negator *laa* by using the framework of Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar.

Keywords: *laa*, negation, Najdi Arabic, imperative, HPSG

1. Introduction

Negation is a linguistic phenomenon that exists in all human languages. It can be defined as "an operator that transforms an expression into another expression whose meaning is in some way opposed to the original expression" (Morante & Blanco, 2021, p. 1). It interacts with many linguistic categories in different linguistic areas like morphology, semantics, and syntax.

In Standard Arabic, negation can be expressed by a set of at least five negation markers: *laa*, *lam*, *lan*, *maa*, and *laysa*. The first four negators[i] are linguistically considered particles and the last one is a copular verb.[ii] Najdi Arabic[iii] (NA, henceforth), on the other hand, has only three negators. The first two, which coexist in the two languages, are *laa* and *maa* and the third negator is *mu_* and its morphological forms. It should be noted, however, that the coexistence of the first two negators in SA and NA does not necessarily mean that their linguistic status is the same in both languages. Moreover, each one of the three NA negators has its own syntactic properties which are mostly exclusive (i.e., not shared by the other negators).

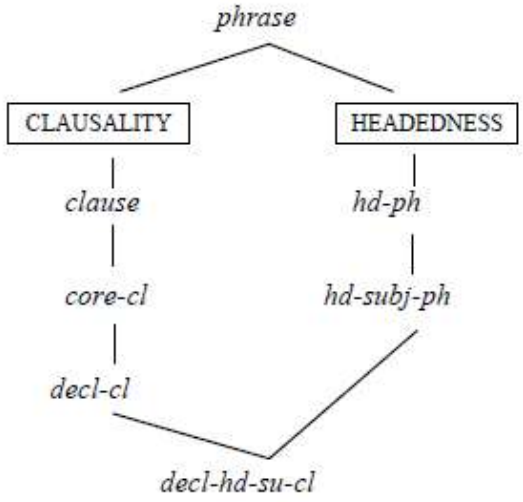
Negation markers and their syntax are among the attention-attracting topics relevant to negation which is, in turn, a fundamental cross-linguistic category or aspect that has always been an interesting and controversial area of linguistic research. The paper here attempts to contribute to the current linguistic research in negation through investigating one of the negation markers in NA: the negator *laa*. The paper will mainly focus on the syntax of *laa* in NA and briefly refer to the relevant morphological and semantic aspects of this negator.

2. Theoretical Background

The theory that will be used here is HPSG: Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar. In brief, HPSG is a non-transformational generative theory that was first developed by Carl Pollard and Ivan Sag in 1994. It is a monostratal surface-oriented theory in which a sentence has just one syntactic structure with no movement operations, invisible items, and underlying structures (Wasow, 2021). More importantly, HPSG, as Abeillé and Borsley (2021) argue, can be described as a constraint-based theory in which a grammar is a set of lexical and phrasal types or sorts and a set of constraints on these types. The types here are organized or classified hierarchically to allow generalization through inheritance (i.e., the maximal type has its own information and constraints plus those

inherited from its supertypes) as exemplified in (1) (Ginzburg & Sag, 2000, p. 42). The constraints, on the other hand, are implication statements which constrain a linguistic expression (i.e., a lexeme/word or a phrase) of the type X to have the structure Y as in (2) (Kim & Sag, 2002, p. 13).

(1)



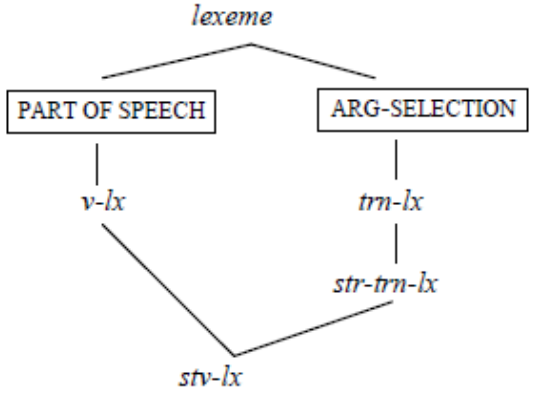
(2) *hd-subj-ph:*

$$\left[\text{SUBJ}\ \langle\ \rangle\right] \rightarrow \left[\text{SS}\ [2]\right],\ \mathbf{H}\left[\begin{array}{l}\textit{phrase}\\ \text{SUBJ}\ \langle [2] \rangle\end{array}\right]$$

The classification in diagram (1), in simple words, says that the maximal type *declarative-head-subject-clause* which has its own information and constraints inherits, by default, the information and constraints of its supertypes: *head-subject-phrase*, *headed-phrase*, *clause*, *declarative clause*, *core clause*, and *phrase*. The constraints of the type *hd-subj-ph* in (2) say that this type, which must have an empty value for the feature SUBJ at the phrasal level, is composed of two daughters. The first is the non-head daughter whose SYNSEM (i.e., syntactico-semantic) value is tagged [2] and the second is the head one. The second must be a phrase whose value of SUBJ is the first non-head daughter.

The HPSG system of types, constraints and inheritance at the phrasal level in (1) and (2) also applies at the lexical or word level as exemplified by the partial classification of the lexical type *strict-transitive-verb* in (3) and its constraints in (4) (Ginzburg and Sag, 2000, p. 20-22).

(3)



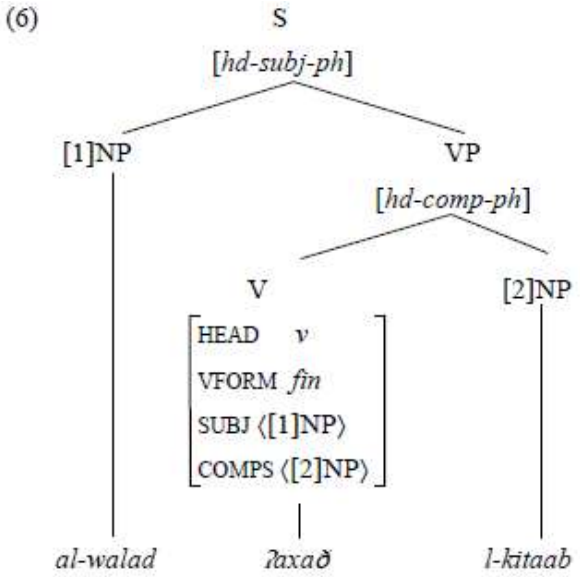
(4)

$$stv\text{-}lx \Rightarrow \begin{bmatrix} \text{SS|LOC|CAT} \begin{bmatrix} \text{HEAD } v \\ \text{SUBJ } \langle \text{XP} \rangle \\ \text{COMPS } \langle \text{NP} \rangle \\ \text{ARG-ST } \langle \text{XP, NP} \rangle \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

Applying what has been discussed in (1) - (4) to the simple sentence given in (5) which is of the type *hd-subj-ph* and headed by a strict-transitive verb will give it the structure briefly shown in (6).

(5) *al-walad ʔaxað l-kitaab*
the-boy took the-book
'The boy took the book.'

(6)



The structure in (6) is an example of how a sentence can be analyzed using the traditional way of tree diagrams in HPSG. It shows the phrasal type of the whole sentence which is a *hd-subj-ph*. This type of phrase is composed of a phrasal head daughter and another non-head daughter functioning as a subject of the head. Here, the VP *ʔaxað l-kitaab* which is of the type *hd-comp-ph* (i.e., a lexical head plus a complement) is the head daughter and the NP *al-walad* is its subject. The finite verb *ʔaxað* heads this VP and takes the NP *l-kitaab* as its complement.

The last point that concludes this brief introduction is that HPSG named head-driven because the head/head daughter plays a vital role in analyzing the structure in HPSG. It has information about its type, its relevant linguistic information, and the relevant constraints. It also contains information about the non-head daughter(s), their constructions, their relationship to the head ...etc.

3. The Negator *laa* in Imperative Constructions

3.1 The Data

The word *laa* in NA has three main types or uses as a negation marker.[iv] The most common one is in imperative constructions. The negator *laa* here can be grammatically classified as a particle and it is traditionally called the prohibitive *laa*. Semantically, it does not negate an action, event, fact …etc. Rather, it denotes a sense of "prohibition" or a request of not doing something as exemplified in (7.a). When *laa* here is used to express negation in general in constructions other than the imperative, the utterance where *laa* is used will sound more like a SA example as in (7.b).

(7) a. *laa tafruun ħalawiyaat*[5]
not buy.2.PL.M candies
'Do not buy candies.'
b. *ʔaħibb man laa yaftarii l-ħalawiyaat*[6]
like who not buy the-candies
'I like those who do not buy candies.'

Syntactically, the imperative *laa* here is used only in verbal clauses where it has to be adjacent to the verb it negates (immediately followed by a verb). Even when the subject of the verb is overt here, it has to either precede *laa* or follow the verb (i.e., it cannot occur in between *laa* and its negated verb). The examples in (8) illustrate this property of *laa*.

(8) a. *ba-lmiṭar, laa tusuug bsurʕih*
in-the-rain not drive.2.SG.M quickly
'When it rains, do not drive quickly.'
b. *laa ba-lmiṭar/ bsurʕih, tusuug* *
not in-the-rain/quickly drive.2.SG.M
'When it rains, do not drive quickly.'
c. *laa yaftaħ al-walad al-baab/ al-walad laa yaftaħ al-baab*
not open.3.SG.M the-boy the-door/ the-boy not open the-door
'Do not let the boy open the door.'
d. *laa l-walad yaftaħ al-baab* *
not the-boy open the-door
'Do not let the boy open the door.'
e. *al-walad laa l-ħiin yaftaħ l-baab* *
the-boy not now open the-door
'Do not let the boy open the door now.'

As the examples in (8) show, the sentence becomes ill-formed when an expression (e.g., a subject, an adverbial) intervenes between *laa* and the verb it negates. It should be noted, however, that there are two expressions which may be seen as expressions that can exceptionally intervene here: the emphatic expression *ʕumr_PRN* (ever) and the impersonal pronoun *ʔaħad* (one). To check this, let us see and discuss the two examples shown in (9).

(9) a. *laa ʕumr-ik tusuug ib-surʕih*
not *life/ever-you* drive.2.SG.M in-speed
'Do not ever drive quickly.'
b. *laa_ʔaħad/ħad yiruuħ ihnaak*
not *anyone* go.3.SG.M there
'No one go there.'

The expression *ʕumr-ik* (ever) in (9.a) asserts the sense of negation expressed by *laa*. Hence, it can be understood that both *laa* and *ʕumr-ik* (ever) function as one unit denoting emphatic imperative negation. The impersonal pronoun *ʔaħad* (one) in (9.b), on the other hand, seems to form a negative impersonal pronoun with *laa* which is *laaħad* (nobody) and we do have the same in English. Given this, we can say that the occurrence of these two is plausibly not a concrete instance of interference.

The above examples in (8 & 9) also show another syntactic property of *laa* which could be understood as a consequence of using *laa* in imperative constructions. This property concerns the form of the negated verb which has to be imperfective as exemplified in (10) below.

(10) *laa tansa/(*nisa) l-miftaaħ*
not forget.IMPF/(*PERF) the-key
'Do not forget the key.'

The last point to be addressed here in regards to *laa* in imperative constructions is that the verb negated by *laa*, as previously exemplified in (8.c) is not restricted to the second person forms as sometimes claimed in the literature (e.g., see Binturki, 2015). The negative imperative in NA is rather flexible in that its verb can be in the typical second person form with a null subject. Or it can be in any other person form depending on its subject which, in turn, can be either null (i.e., understood or determined from the context) or overt (i.e., noun or pronoun). Interestingly, the negated verb can even be in the first-person form which is not possible in SA with the same use or meaning. However, we should note that we do not get exactly the same negative imperative meaning when the negated verb is not in the typical second person form. To elaborate on this, let us see and discuss the examples shown in (11).

(11) a. *laa tanaam ba-ṣ-ṣaalih*
not sleep.2.SG.M in-the-living room
'Do not sleep in the living room.'

b. *laa yanaam al-walad biduun iɣṭa*
not sleep.3.SG.M the-boy without blanket
'Do not let the boy sleep without blanket.'

c. *laa ʔanaam wa-ant maa baʕad giđiit laaʕib*
not sleep.1.SG and-you not yet finished playing
'Do not let me go to bed while you haven't finished playing.'

d. *laa ʔaʃuuf/inʃuuf-kum hinaa marrah θaanyih*
not see.1.SG/PL-you.PL here time second
'Do not let me/us see you here again.' (You must/should not come here again.)

As the examples in (11) show, the verb negated by the imperative *laa* can be in different person forms. The typical second person negative imperative as in (11.a) requires the subject to be the agent or the one responsible for doing what is meant by the negative imperative. However, when the verb is in the third person, the subject may not be the direct agent/doer of the action as in (11.b). If the addressee in (11.b) is, for example, the mother of the boy, the agent who will do what is implied by the imperative will be the mother, not the subject of the imperative. For the negative imperative with the first-person forms, the situation is somewhat different. The subject here will do nothing. Such sentences are used to express a kind of strong advice or warning to the addressee who is responsible for doing what is implied here.

3.2 The Analysis

The description of the imperative *laa* in [3.1] reveals that any attempted account for it should, at least, consider the following properties: a) its occurrence is restricted to imperative constructions only; b) it has to be adjacent to the head of the VP that it negates; c) the head of the negated VP has to be in the imperfective form.

The question that may arise here is how to provide an HPSG account for a negator with such properties. One rather convincing way of doing so is to see and check the possible accounts that may apply to the negator *laa* here. Then, we can decide which one covers the properties in question and sounds more reasonable.

Cross-linguistically, a negator, which is relatively comparable to the imperative *laa* in NA, or even any lexical item with such properties can often be analyzed as one of the following: a) a prefix or clitic attached to the head of the negated VP; b) an (auxiliary) verbal head selecting and negating a VP complement; c) a verbal head that forms a verbal complex with the head of the negated VP. Kim (2000 & 2021) uses these three and adds another possible one to account for negation markers in different languages (e.g., Italian, Korean, Turkish and French).

The first of these analyses shows the negator *laa* as a morphological negative marker that is attached or prefixed to the negated verb. One may think that considering the imperative *laa* a prefix can account for the fact that *laa* has to be immediately followed by the verb it negates. Being a prefix, however, means that *laa* here will morphologically form one word with the negated verb. Hence, nothing at all can occur here between *laa* and the verb. But what we actually have here with *laa* and the negated verb is a kind of strong cohesion and the view that the two together could form a single word goes beyond what we are looking for. One straightforward reason for saying so is that there are contexts where we have an emphatic expression like *ʕumr_PRN* (ever) and *ʔaħad* (one) intervening between *laa* and the verb following it as previously discussed in [3.1]. An example is repeated below in (12) for convenience.

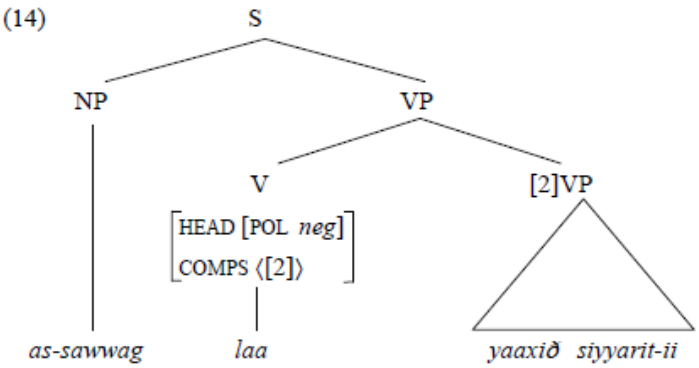
(12) *laa ʕumr-ik tusuug ib-surʕih*
not *life/ever-you* drive.2.SG.M in-speed
'Do not ever drive quickly.'

Having an intervening expression like *ʕumr-ik* in (12) rules out the possibility that *laa* can be a prefix attached to the verb it negates regardless of the linguistic status of such an expression and how often this interference happens. Recall also that we have the same imperative *laa* in SA and other varieties of Arabic as well. In SA, this *laa* – as far as the researcher knows – has always been recognized in the relevant literature as an independent word, not an affix.

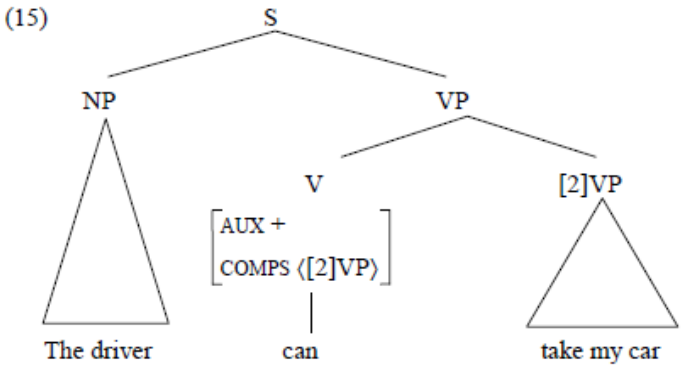
The second analysis avoids the apparent problem of this first one and considers *laa* a word. It also proposes that *laa* here is a head that takes a VP complement which is, in turn, headed by the negated verb following *laa*. In other words, this account assumes that the imperative *laa* behaves rather similarly like verbs that subcategorizes for VP complements as auxiliary verbs in English. Applying this to the sentence in (13) will give it the structure shown in (14) which is similar to the well-formed structure of the English sentence in (15).[v]

(13) *as-sawwag laa yaaxiđ siyyarit-ii!*
the-driver not take car-my
'Do not let the driver take my car!'

(14)



(15)



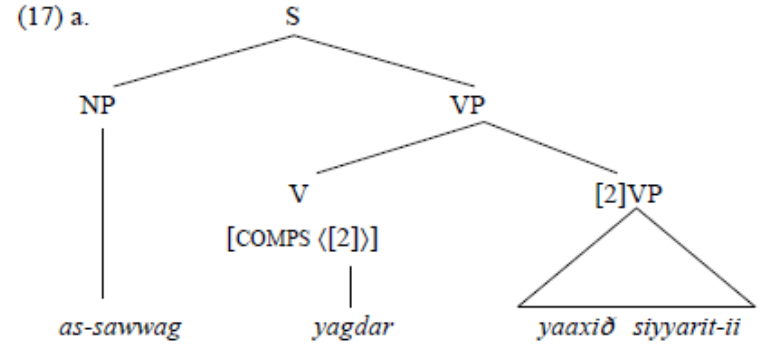
The structure in (14) shows that *laa* heads a VP and takes a VP complement in the same way the English auxiliary *can* does in (15). The question that arises here is whether viewing *laa* as a VP-complement selecting head as exemplified in (15) can account for its properties. Answer this will determine the appropriateness of this view and the structure given in the example (14).

Recall that one of the properties of *laa* is its strong cohesion with the negated verb in that it requires this verb to immediately follow it. We do not know, at this juncture, if there is anything in (14) that can prevent an intervening expression (e.g., an adverbial phrase) between the head *laa* and the VP complement. But we do know that nothing can do this in (15) which has the same structure as (14). We can, for instance, have adverbials (e.g., *certainly*, *always*, *often*, *at anytime*, etc.) intervening between the auxiliary verb *can* and its VP complement. Another argument that does not support this view can be taken from the fact that the structure in (14) can be used to analyze sentences headed by a verb taking a VP complement in NA (i.e., they function similarly like the English *can* in (15)). These sentences can also have adverbial expressions in between the head verb and its VP complement as illustrated in (16) and (17).

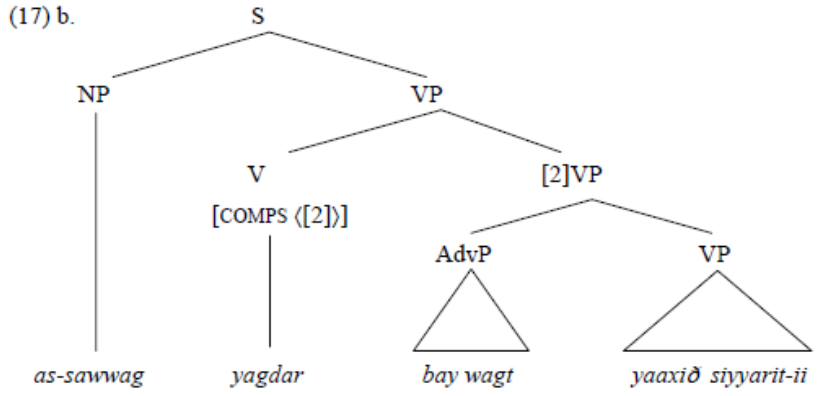
(16) a. *as-sawwag yagdar yaaxiđ siyyarit-ii*
the-driver can take car-my
'The driver can take my car.'

b. *as-sawwag yagdar **bay wagt** yaaxiđ siyyarit-ii*
the-driver can any time take car-my
'The driver can take my car at anytime.'

(17) a.



(17) b.



In addition, verbs that take a VP complement and have structures like (17) can often precede their subjects and, in this case, the subject will occur between the head verb and its VP complement as exemplified in (18-a). As discussed in [3.1], having the subject between *laa* and the negated verb is not allowed as in (18-b).

(18) a. *yagdar as-sawwag yaaxið siyyarit-ii*
can the-driver take car-my
'The driver can take my car.'
b. *laa as-sawwag yaaxið siyyarit-ii!**
not the-driver take car-my
'Do not let the driver take my car!'

To sum up, the analysis which views *laa* as a head taking a VP complement allows expressions to occur in between the head and its complement and this makes it an implausible analysis of the negator *laa* in that it cannot account for its adjacency to the verb it negates.

The third analysis postulates that the imperative negator *laa* takes the verb it negates as its complement. But the two do not form a phrase. Instead, they form a verb complex which is structurally in a level intermediating between a word and a phrase. This analysis was proposed by Kim (2000& 2021) for the Italian negator *non* and one type of Korean negation as well. Although the negators of these two languages differ from *laa* in more than one aspect, they all share the adjacency feature. Kim (2000) argues that only assuming that these negators form a verbal complex with the negated verb or expression can account for their adjacency properly. To license this kind of structure, the verb complex of the negator (i.e., *non* in Italian, *anh-ta* in Korean, and the imperative *laa* in NA) and the negated verb is subject to the constraint in (19) which is adopted with slight changes from Kim (2000, p. 45 & 173).

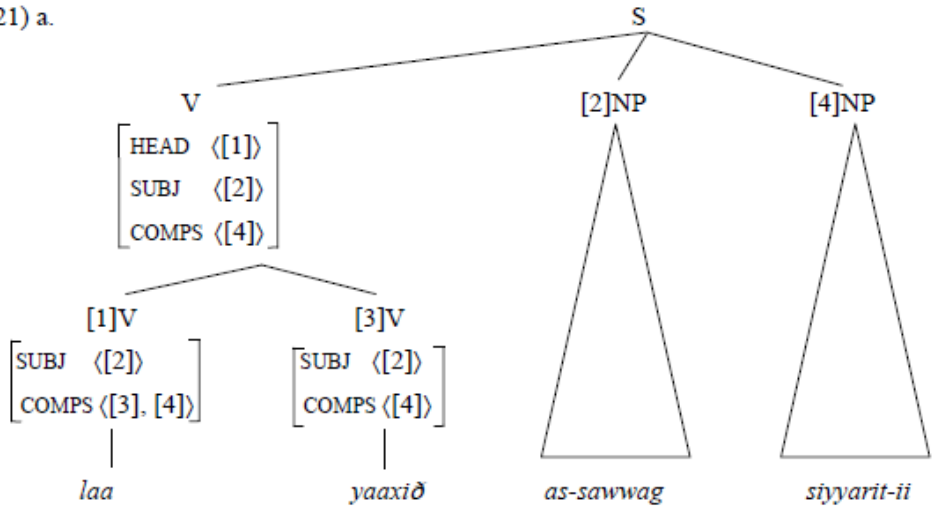
(19) *verb complex* →

$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{SYNSEM [COMPS L]} \\ \text{DTRS} \langle [1] \begin{bmatrix} \textit{verb} \\ \text{COMPS} \langle [2] \rangle \oplus \text{L} \end{bmatrix}, [2] \begin{bmatrix} \textit{verb} \\ \text{COMPS L} \end{bmatrix} \rangle \\ \text{HD-DTR [1]} \end{bmatrix}$$

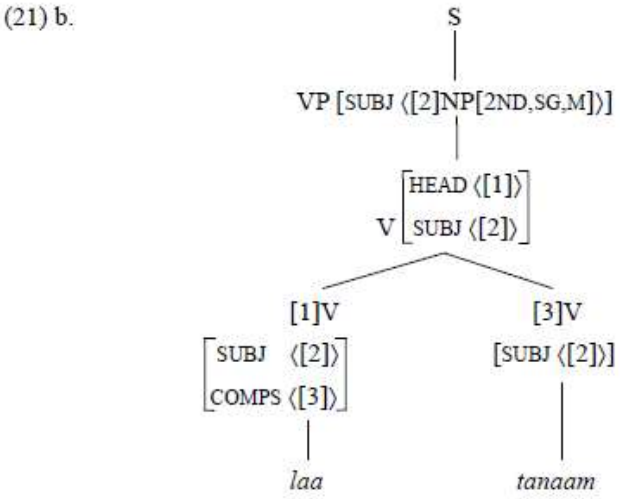
The information in (19) states that the proposed complex has two daughters. The head daughter is the first one and it will be *laa* here. It is of the type *verb* and it takes the non-head daughter as a complement. It also takes L as a complement as indicated by the sum sign. This L is the value of the non-head daughter's COMPS. The non-head daughter is of the type *verb* and its COMPS (i.e., L) could be an empty list (i.e., when it is intransitive), one complement, or more. In addition, the constraint in (19) requires L to be passed up to the complement value of the resulting mother. Given this, the structure of the two sentences in (20) will be as partially shown in (21).

(20) a. *laa yaaxið as-sawwag siyyarit-ii*
not take the-driver car-my
'Do not let the driver take my car!'
b. *laa tanaam*
not sleep.2.SG.M
'Don't sleep.'

(21) a.



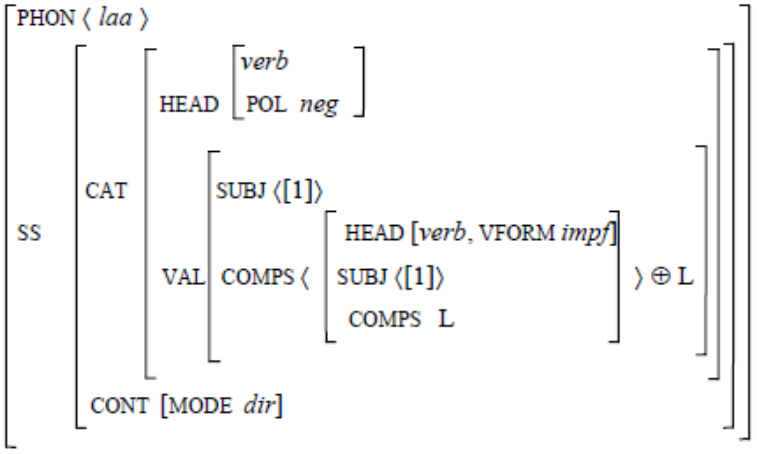
(21) b.



The structure in (21-a) shows that the negator *laa* which is a head of the type *verb* forms a complex with the negated verb. Although it takes both the negated verb and the complement of this verb as its complements, it does not directly merge with the complement of the verb. Instead, this complement is passed up to the complex mother which shares the same subject with its daughters. The same almost applies to (21-b) except that the negated verb here in intransitive and, hence, neither this verb nor the complex mother will have a complement.

The verb complex or V-V treatment here seems to have accounted for the adjacency property and avoided the problem discussed in the previous analysis where the view of a verb selecting a VP complement leaves the door open for expressions such as adverbials and subjects to intervene as discussed above. The current analysis, however, still needs to expand and cover the remaining properties of *laa*. This can be done by incorporating all the relevant properties into the lexical entry of the imperative *laa* as shown in (22).

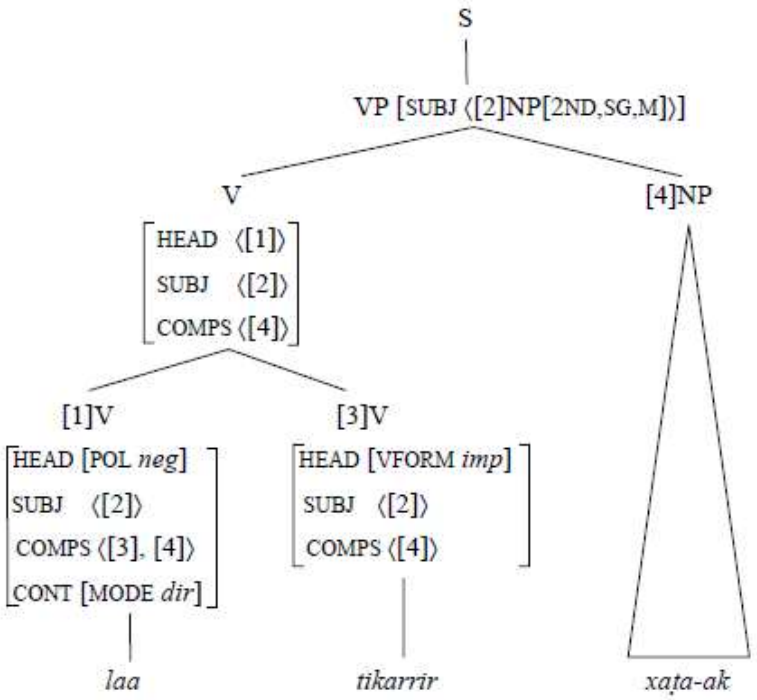
(22) The lexical entry of the imperative negator *laa*.



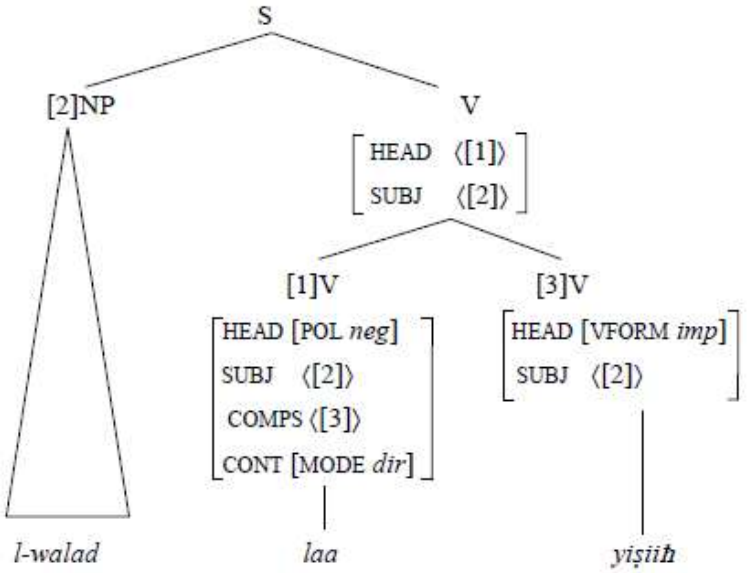
The information encapsulated in (22) states that our negator whose phonological value is *laa* is of the type *verb*. The value it has for the feature POL (polarity) is negative because *laa* is a negator. The POL feature is used here to differentiate between negative and positive heads.[vi] The head *laa* also shares the same subject with its first complement. The entry of *laa* also says that *laa* takes a verb complement as its first complement and whatever complements this verb takes, as indicated by L. In addition, this verb complement has to be in the imperfective form. Last but not least, the semantic feature (CONT) of *laa* restricts its occurrence to contexts where the mode is directive which is exclusive to imperative constructions.[vii]

Combining the information of the entry of *laa* in (22) together with the constraint of the type *verb-complex* discussed above in (19) will give us the structures shown in (23), (24), and (25) which are for different sentence examples of the imperative *laa*.

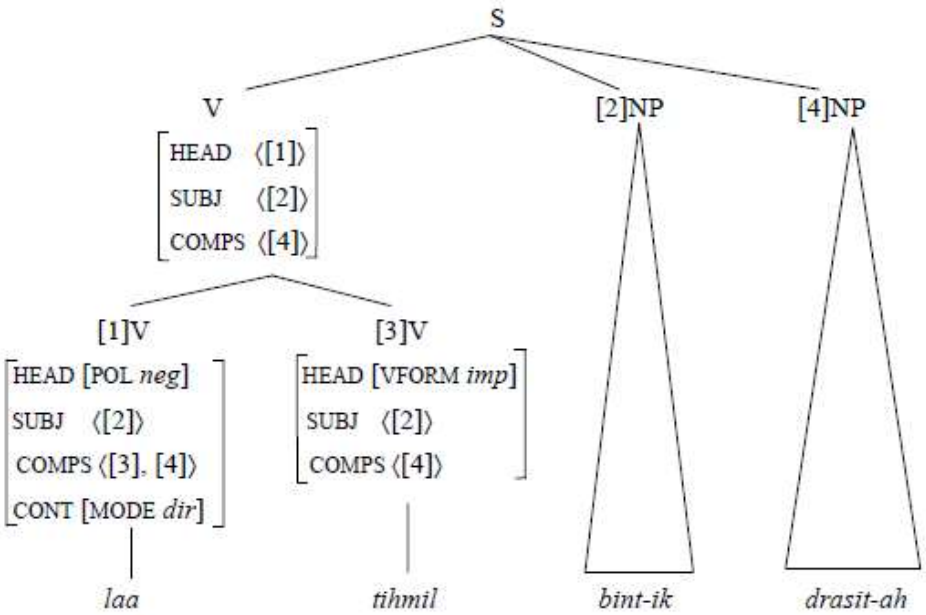
(23) *laa* *tikarrir* *xaṭa-ak*
not repeat.2.SG.M mistake-your
'Do not repeat your mistake.'



(24) *aba-naam. **al-walad laa yiṣiiħ!***
will-sleep. the-child not cry
'I am going to bed. Do not make/let the child cry!'



(25) *laa tihmil bint-ik drasit-ah!*
not neglect daughter-your study-her
'Do not let your daughter neglect her study.'



The three structures given above show how the verb complex analysis reasonably accounts for different types of phrases having the negator *laa*. Besides specifying the grammatical function of *laa* (i.e., it is a head), its structure and arguments, this analysis virtually covers the following key properties of *laa*: its adjacency to the negated verb (verb complex/V-V treatment); requiring the negated verb to be in the imperfective form (the value of its first complement:

V [VFORM *imp*]); and restricting its occurrence to imperative constructions (the value of its semantic/CONT MODE is *directive*). Violating any of these will not result in well-formed negated structures as briefly exemplified in (26-28).

(26) *laa l-walad yintiðir l-baaṣ* *
not the-boy wait the-bus
'Do not let the boy wait for the bus.'

(The negator is not adjacent to the verb: cannot be accounted for as a verb-complex)

(27) *laa nisiit waajib-k*
if forgot homework-your
'If you forgot your homework,…'

(Since the verb here is perfective (i.e., not [VFORM *imp*]), *laa* here becomes a different word (i.e., a conditional, not a negator.)

(28) *ʔagaddir ally laa yihmiluun ʕiyaal-uhm**
appreciate who not neglect children-his
'I appreciate those who don't ignore their children.'

(The sentence is declarative: [MODE proposition] and *laa* here is not the appropriate negator.)

4. The Conjunct *laa*

4.1 The Data

In addition to its use in imperative construction, *laa* can also occur in 'coordinate constructions'. Its use here is a bit weird. Provided that the coordinating conjunction *wa* (and) is used in the same construction, *laa* can occur in different positions (e.g., in the middle of a sentence, sentence-initial) with different categories (e.g., nouns, verbs, NPs, VPs, and sentences) and can express not only sentential negation but also constituent and emphatic negation as exemplified below in (29) – (33).

(29) *ʔanaa taʕbaan wa laa nimt ziin*
I tired and not slept well
'I am tired and I didn't sleep well.'

[S] *wa* [*laa* S]
(sentential negation)

(30) *wlid-ii laa yaakil wa laa yaʃrub*
son-my not eat and not drink
'My son neither eats nor drinks.'

… [*laa* VP] *wa* [*laa* VP]
(neither… nor = "correlative negation")

(31) *wa laa marrih ðibiṭ haðð-ii*
and not once succeeded luck-my
'Never have I been lucky.'

wa [*laa* NP] …
(constituent negation)

(32) *ziin. Saliħ yaṭbax li-naa wa laa ʔaxuu-h*
well Saleh cooks for-us and not brother-his
'Ok! It is better that Saleh cooks for us, not his brother.'

[S] *wa* [S: [*laa* ___NP]]
(sentential negation in elliptical construction)

(33) *maa/laa ʕind-ina laa xubz wa laa riz wa laa mit-na*
not with-us no bread and no rice and not died-we
'We have neither bread nor rice and we didn't die.'

[*laa* PP] [*laa* NP] *wa* [*laa* NP] *wa* [*laa* VP]
(sentential, emphatic, emphatic, sentential)

As the examples (29) – (33) show, it seems that the conjunction *wa* frees the negator *laa* from a number of restrictions. In syntactic terms, we can say that *wa* licenses the negator *laa* to occur with many categories of different forms and express at least three types of negation. Without the conjunction *wa*, all these five examples will turn ill-formed in that the negator *laa* by itself cannot occur in such constructions. What the conjunction *wa* does to the negator *laa* here is a kind of linguistic idiosyncrasy. It changes *laa* from a negator used only in fixed constructions (i.e., imperatives) to a multi-functional negator. This has actually attracted the attention of a number of linguistics researches (e.g., (Alruwaili & Sadler, 2018) and (Bergman, 1996)). However, there is no agreement about the status of *laa* here as it is shown below in [4.2]. What can be agreed upon here and elsewhere is that *laa* can act like this only in coordinate constructions where *wa* exists. In syntax, the lexical item or phrase that is connected to another one by a coordination conjunction whether preceding or following the connector is called a conjunct. Hence, the negator *laa* here will be called the 'conjunct *laa*'.

4.2 The Analysis

The use of *laa* in coordinate constructions, as it is described in [4.1], is a bit odd. It occurs with various types of constructions provided that the coordinate conjunction *wa* (and) exists as the examples repeated in (34-36) show.

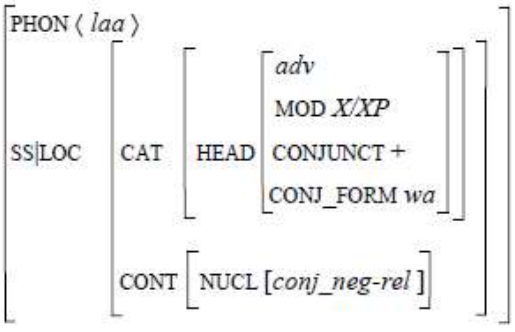
(34) *ʔanaa taʕbaan wa laa nimt ʔams* (… *wa* [*laa* **X/XP**…])
I tired and not slept yesterday
'I am tired and I didn't sleep yesterday.'

(35) *wlid-ii laa yaakil wa laa yaʃrub* ([*laa*…] *wa* [*laa*…])
son-my not eat and not drink
'My son neither eats nor drinks.'

(36) *maa ʕind-ina laa xubz wa laa riz wa laa ħaliib* ([*laa*...] *wa* [*laa*...] *wa* [*laa*...]...)
not with-us no bread and no rice and no milk
'We don't have bread, rice, or milk.'

As shown in (34-36) and the other examples in [4.1] as well, the only plausible condition for this use of *laa* is that the expression including *laa* has to be coordinated with another one using the connector *wa*. In other words, the expression [*laa* X/XP] has to be a conjunct. Although conjuncts in NA are almost always connected by the coordinate conjunction *wa*, it is better to specify that the conjunction used here is *wa* to exclude the possibility of using other conjunctions in such constructions. Other than these two (i.e., being a conjunct and the connector is *wa*), it is rather implausible to add anything specific to the account of this kind of structure. Hence, the proposed entry of conjunct *laa* would be as in (37).

(37) The conjunct *laa*



In words, the entry in (37) indicates that *laa* is an adverbial expression that can modify any lexical item or phrase. It also says that *laa* is a conjunct and the form of the coordinate conjunction is *wa*. Lastly, *laa* expresses both coordination and negation or what we can call it "negative coordination".

5. The Clausal *laa*

5.1 The Data

The third and last type of *laa* is a straightforward one in that it is used here as a 'no' answer to yes/no questions as shown in (38).

(38) a. *ʔagdar ʔaʃuuf l-mariiḍ? laa./laa, laa tadxil l-ɣirfih*
can.1.SG see the-patient? No./ No, not enter.2.SG.M the room
'Can I see the patient? No./ No, do not enter the room.

b. *tawaqaʕ yanajḥ Saleḥ? laa./ laa, wa laa fii-h ʔamal.*
expect.2.SG.M succeed Saleh? No./No, and no in-it hope
'Do you expect that Saleh will succeed? No./ No, and there is no hope for this.

c. *tabi turuuḥ la-lmazraʕih? laa./ laa, maa widdi ʔruuḥ l-yuum*
would go.2.SG.M to-the-farm? No./ No, not like go.1.SG the-today
'Would you go to the farm? No./ No, I don't want to go today'

As shown in (38), the negator *laa*, in this use, stands alone as a 'no' reply to yes/no question. If we want to extend the answer and add a full negative sentence, the use of another negator is needed (e.g., the imperative *laa* in (38.a), the conjunct *laa* in (38.b), or another negator as *maa* in (38.c)). Since this *laa* stands alone meaningfully without taking any arguments or modifying any expressions, it will be called the clausal *laa*. The term 'clausal' here is adopted from Ginzburg and Sag (2001) who used it for expressions in English like *yes* and *no* which can stand alone and have complete meaning.

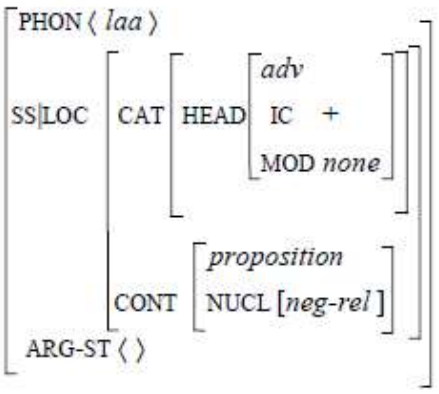
5.2 The Analysis

Recall, as discussed in [5.1], that the negator *laa* is used as a negative answer to yes/no question. In this use, it functions like the English *no* in similar context. It just stands alone without any other expressions. If there is a need to extend or assert the negative answer, the new sentence will not depend on this *laa* and will take another negator as the example in (39) shows.

(39) *tabi txaawii-naa baatsir? laa./ laa, maa widdi ʔruuḥ maʕ-kum*
would join.2.SG.M-us tomorrow? No./ No, not like go.1.SG with-you
'Would you join us tomorrow? No./ No, I don't want to go with you.

As shown in (39), clausal *laa* can stand alone and inseparable from any other lexical items or phrases. Hence, this syntactically means that it modifies nothings and its ARG-ST has to be an empty list (*elist*). Following Ginzburg and Sag (2001), clausal *laa* belongs to "a set of lexemes that have stand-alone uses conveying complete meaning" (p. 302). This set includes, for instance, the English words *yes, no, right, sure*. Given this, the clausal *laa* can be analyzed as in the entry shown in (40).

(40) The clausal *laa*



In brief, the entry (40), which encapsulates the clausal *laa*, says that this *laa* is an adverbial expression that modifies nothing. It also functions as an independent clause [IC +]. Semantically, it expresses negation (the value of its nucleus is *neg-rel*) and its content is propositional. Lastly, the clausal *laa* takes neither a subject nor a complement in that the value of its ARG-ST is an empty list.

6. Conclusion

The syntax of the negator *laa* in NA that has been studied here shows a number of interesting and idiosyncratic facts which can be briefly characterized as follows. The negator *laa* has three types or uses in general. The first and most common one is in imperative constructions and it is the only negation marker that can be used in such constructions. Its occurrence here is restricted in terms of place or position in that it has to be adjacent to the verb it negates. However, it can occur with almost any imperfective verb regardless of its person form (i.e., the negated verb does not have to be in the second person form). In HPSG, this syntactic behavior of the imperative *laa*, which is relatively similar to that of the Italian negator *non* and another Korean negator, can be accounted for by assuming that it forms a verb complex with the negated verb. This view reasonably accounts for the syntactic properties of imperative *laa* and avoids the assumption that *laa* here is a prefix attached to the negated verb, which is sometimes used to account for its adjacency with the verb. The negator *laa* is also used in coordinate constructions negating different categories (e.g., NPs, VPs, and PPs). Here, it seems that its occurrence is licensed by the coordinator *wa* (and). Without *wa*, the use of *laa* becomes ill-formed in such constructions. This use of *laa* is a bit weird in that almost nothing more can be added to the characterization of its occurrence here. Hence, *laa* in this use has been analyzed as a conjunct provided that the coordinator is *wa*. The third and last use of *laa* is when it is used alone as a *no* answer in yes/no question. Here, it can meaningfully stand alone as an independent clause. Therefore, *laa* here has been analyzed as 'clausal' or [IC +] which is cross-linguistically used for single expressions that can stand alone as a meaningful sentence.

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Notes:

[i] The term 'negator' and 'negation marker' are used here as synonyms in that the two refer to the linguistic item expressing or marking negation.

[ii] For more about negation markers in SA, see, for instance, Ryding (2005).

[iii] Najdi Arabic is a variety of Arabic spoken by people of the central region in the Arabian Peninsula. It is called Najdi from Najd which is the name of this region where the Capital of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh, is currently located. For more about NA, see, for instance, Ingham (1994).

[iv] It is worth mentioning here that *laa* can also be used as a conditional in NA with a meaning similar to the English *if*.

[v] It should be noted that the NA example in (13) is in SVO order for comparison purposes with the English one. The VSO order will sound better here.

[vi] Some linguists use the feature [NEG +/-] instead of POL (Kim & Sells, 2008). The value of POL can also be as [+/-] (Sag, Wasow & Bender, 2003). Here, we are combining between the two.

[vii] Sag et al. (2003) use the mode *directive* to refer to the context of imperative constructions. Others, (e.g., (Ginrzbig & Sag, 2000)), use *outcome* as the CONT's value of imperatives.