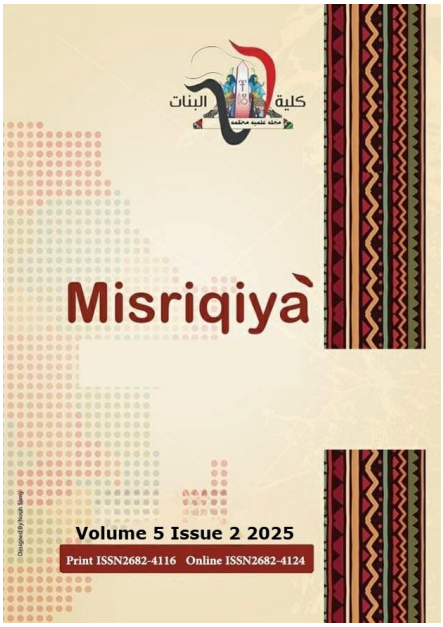

A Minimalist Analysis of Tense Carriers in the Syntax of Standard Arabic

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Abstract

This paper investigates the syntax and semantics of tense in Standard Arabic (SA) within the framework of Chomsky's Minimalist Program (1995). Unlike English, where tense is realized through auxiliaries, modals, or affix lowering, SA encodes tense across various functional categories, including complementizers, negators, and linking verbs. This study examines the syntactic roles of the complementizers *ʔinna* "indeed" and *ʔanna* "that", in contrast with the infinitival *ʔann* "to", and their interaction with clause structure. It also investigates Ibn Hisham's traditional classification of linking verbs *kāna* "was" and its sisters, which he categorizes into (i) unmarked linking verbs, (ii) marked linking verbs that require a c-commanding licenser, and (iii) the conditional linking verb *ma-dāma* "as long as". Special attention is given to *laysa* "is not", which functions as a negative copular verb with inherent tense and agreement properties. This paper further explores the complementary distribution of *kāna* and the complementizer *ʔinna*, as well as the syntactic behavior of five key negators in SA: *lā*, *lam*, *lan*, *lā* functioning like *laysa*, and the generic *lā* (al-nāfiya li-l-jins). Their effects on tense interpretation and clause structure are analyzed in depth. Based on syntactic modules, such as Case Theory, Movement, Feature Valuation, and C-command, this study contributes to the understanding of how tense is encoded in Arabic, offering cross-linguistic insights into the architecture of functional categories in Arabic and English syntax. The findings demonstrate that tense in SA is realized through C, T, and Neg, each contributing to Case, Agreement, and Mood under locality constraints.

Keywords: tense, licensers, case, movement, negation

1. Introduction

The syntactic representation of tense in Standard Arabic (SA) remains a central concern in both traditional Arabic grammar and generative syntax. Although SA is rich in inflectional morphology, the structural encoding and valuation of tense—particularly in cases where tense is not overtly marked on the verb—raise important theoretical questions.

This study examines how tense features are carried by abstract functional heads in SA, drawing on the Minimalist framework (Chomsky, 1995, 2000, 2001). It focuses on three categories of tense carriers: complementizers (*ʔinna*, *ʔanna*), linking verbs (*kāna* and its sisters), and negators (*lā*, *lam*, *lan*, *lā* functioning like *laysa* and the generic *lā*). These elements contribute not only to temporal interpretation but also to Case and mood assignment.

By integrating traditional classifications (e.g., Ibn-Hisham's analysis of linking verbs and Abbas Hasan's analysis of negators) with generative/ minimalist syntax, the study proposes a unified account of how tense interacts with agreement, negation, and different structures in SA. This study draws its data from authoritative Arabic grammar sources, supplemented with generated examples developed throughout the discussion to either corroborate or challenge the original instances.

This paper is organized as follows: Section (1) presents the introduction and research questions; Section (2) outlines the theoretical framework; Section (3) reviews the relevant literature; Section (4) analyzes how tense in SA is realized directly on the verb or mediated through abstract functional heads, such as T(ense), C(omplementizer), and Neg(ator); and Section (5) concludes.

1.1 Research Questions

This paper attempts to answer the following questions:

1) How is tense structurally represented in the syntax of Standard Arabic within the Minimalist framework?

2) What role do functional categories such as T, C and Neg play in the valuation and realization of tense in SA?

3) How do feature-checking and movement operations interact with tense valuation in SA clauses?

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper is conducted within the framework of the Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1995, 2000, 2001), an evolution of the earlier Principles and Parameters (P&P) framework (Chomsky, 1981). The Minimalist approach seeks to explain the core properties of natural language through the most economical and principled syntactic operations. It analyzes how abstract features—such as, tense, agreement, and negation—are structurally encoded and interpreted in natural language.

The central focus of this study is the syntactic representation of tense in Standard Arabic (SA), particularly how tense is carried across various functional heads. This analysis draws on key principles such as Case Theory (Chomsky, 1981, 2000), X-bar Theory (Jackendoff, 1977: Chomsky, 1995), movement operations (Chomsky, 1993, 2000), and feature valuation and checking (Chomsky, 1995, 2001), all of which are crucial to clause structure.

To capture the richness of SA's clause structure, the framework also incorporates the Split INFL and Split CP hypotheses (Pollock, 1989; Rizzi, 1997), which allow for a more articulated structure of the inflectional and complementizer domains. Additionally, insights from traditional Arabic grammar— e.g., Ibn-Hisham, especially regarding copular forms and Abbas Hasan regarding negators — are integrated to provide both theoretical and historical depth. The interaction of tense with negation and agreement is particularly relevant in SA, where tense is not always overtly realized on the verb.

3. Literature Review

The syntactic realization of tense has been a core topic in generative grammar, with early accounts focusing on affix lowering and auxiliary insertion in English (Chomsky, 1957; Emonds, 1970). These early insights laid the groundwork for later developments, particularly within the Principles and Parameters framework and, more recently, the Minimalist Program. Within this tradition, tense is treated as a syntactic feature projected by a functional head (T), which enters into feature-checking relations with other elements in the clause.

SA presents a particularly rich empirical domain for investigating tense, given its morphosyntactic diversity. Unlike English, SA encodes tense through a variety of functional categories, not limited to verbal morphology. Fehri (1993) was among the first to offer a detailed generative account of Arabic clause structure, arguing for a

split INFL system where Tense, Aspect, and Agreement are realized in separate projections. This split is crucial for capturing Arabic-specific properties such as, the interaction between negation, mood, and verbal agreement. Fehri's proposal provides a structural foundation for later minimalist analyses, where such functional projections are assumed to be part of the clause spine across languages.

Within the Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1995, 2000, 2001), tense is treated as an interpretable feature that projects syntactically and interacts with agreement and aspect features through feature checking and movement. Arabic, with its rich verbal morphology and overt functional elements, serves as an ideal testing ground for these theoretical claims. Benmamoun (1989) observes that in Arabic negative clauses, tense is often realized on the negation element, while agreement is marked on the verb. This supports a view where Tense and Agreement may occupy separate heads within the clause structure.

Ouhalla (1991) initially proposed that Negation Phrase (NegP) precedes TP and AgrP in Arabic and Berber, in contrast with languages like English or Turkish. However, he later revised this view in Ouhalla (1993), arguing that certain negators in Arabic—such as *ma* and *lā*—surface below TP and may be associated with focus-related projections. This revised proposal accounts for the low position of negation relative to tense in specific constructions and emphasizes the internal complexity of the inflectional domain in Arabic.

Benmamoun (2000) further examines the interaction between negation, tense, and verb types, particularly in connection with aspect and agreement. While these studies provide crucial insights, less attention has been paid to forms like *lā* when functioning as *laysa*, or the so-called *generic lā* constructions, which this paper analyzes in detail. These constructions challenge existing assumptions about the projectional status of negation and its ability to carry tense or assign case, especially in verbless or non-verbal predicates.

The syntactic behavior of tense in SA also reflects the language's VSO word order, which Ouhalla (1991) attributes to the high position of T within the clause and the movement of the verb to this position. This aligns with Pollock's (1989) Split INFL hypothesis and Rizzi's (1997) Split CP proposal, both of which have been adopted in minimalist analyses to accommodate cross-linguistic variation in clause structure. These models posit multiple functional projections, including TenseP,

MoodP, and NegP, which allow for a layered syntactic architecture consistent with Arabic data.

In addition, the role of complementizers such as, *ʔinna* and *ʔanna* has received attention in descriptive grammars (e.g., Ryding, 2005) and theoretical studies (Soltan, 2007), particularly with regard to clause-typing and agreement. However, their potential role in encoding or interacting with tense features remains underexplored. The syntactic distribution and co-occurrence restrictions between *ʔinna* and auxiliaries like *kāna* suggest a form of complementary distribution, potentially tied to the structural realization of tense or to ForceP occupying the left periphery.

Traditional Arabic grammatical theory also contributes to the understanding of tense and its interactions with negation. In *Awḍaḥ al-Masālik*, Ibn Hishām categorizes verbal forms like *kāna*, *laysa*, and *mā-dāma* in terms of their dependency on licensing, aspectual values, and their status as defaults or conditionals. Abbas Hasan (1994) further highlights the intricate distinctions between negators such as *lam*, *lan*, *ma*, and *laysa*, noting how their usage is conditioned by tense, aspect, and clause type. These observations, while grounded in traditional grammar, resonate with generative assumptions about the role of functional projections and feature licensing.

Recent minimalist studies (e.g., Aoun, Benmamoun, & Choueiri, 2010; Al-Balushi, 2011) build on these foundational insights by examining how tense and related features are distributed across copular, negative, and non-verbal clauses in Arabic. Such works stress that tense in SA is not strictly tied to verbal morphology but is rather a syntactic feature distributed across several heads, including negators, auxiliaries, complementizers, and default copulas.

This literature reveals that the expression of tense in Arabic arises from a constellation of interacting functional heads, not a single tense-bearing element. This paper contributes to the field by offering a minimalist analysis of how tense is distributed in constructions involving *ʔinna*, *kāna*, *laysa*, and the full inventory of SA negators. Special attention is given to cases where *lā* functions as *laysa* or as a generic negator, both of which present challenges to conventional clause-structural assumptions.

4. Tense Carriers in SA: Minimalist Analysis

This paper addresses three sets of functional categories in SA that act as tense carriers: complementizers (*ʔinna* and *ʔanna*), the linking verbs (*kāna wa akhwatuha*), and finally, negators such as, verbal negators *lā* and its variants *lam* and *lan, lā* functioning like *laysa, and* the generic negative marker *lā*. In addition to having the tense feature, these functional categories also assign case/mood markers to the immediately following noun or verb, respectively. Thus, these functional categories collectively illustrate how tense is intricately presented across different syntactic structures in Standard Arabic.

4.1 The Complementizers *ʔinna* and *ʔanna* vs. the Infinitive *ʔann*

In SA, the complementizers *ʔinna, ʔanna*, and the infinitive *ʔan* play essential roles in sentence structure, each introducing different types of clauses with specific syntactic requirements. This section delves into each complementizer, examining its usage, syntactic behavior, and the distinctions among them. In traditional Arabic grammar, there is a set of complementizers known as *ʔinna* and its sisters [1](*ʔinna wa akhwatuha*). These particles—*ʔinna* "indeed", *ʔanna* "that", *lākinna* "but", *kāʾanna* "as if", *layta* "if only", and *laʿalla* "perhaps"—function primarily as complementizers, introducing finite clauses. A distinctive feature of these particles is that they obligatorily assign the accusative case to the immediately following subject in the following tense phrase (TP).

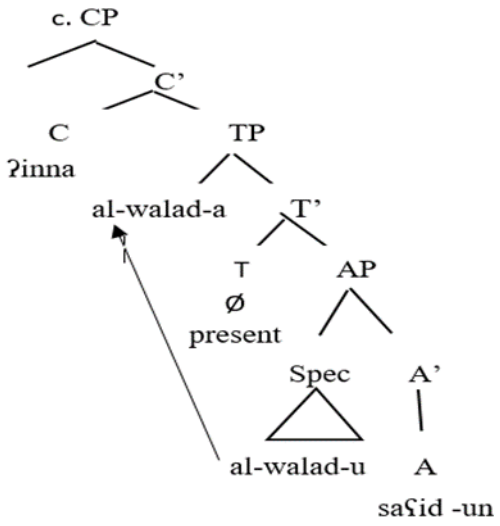
4.1.1 The Complementizer *ʔinna*

In Standard Arabic (SA), the complementizer ʔ*inna* serves multiple functions: it only introduces main/matrix clauses with a subject-predicate word order, adds emphasis, and assigns the accusative case to the immediately c-commanded subject within the clause it precedes. Additionally*, ʔinna* is associated with finiteness, meaning it only introduces finite clauses where the tense is + [Finite].

In addition to the emphatic feature, the complementizer *ʔinna* has the intrinsic features: +[TENSE] and +[CASE]. In other words, it carries the feature of finiteness and it is considered to be an accusative case assigner. In 1(a and b), the tense is abstract on the head T. In example (1b) below, *ʔinna,* which only introduces finite clauses, assigns the accusative case to the immediately c-commanded subject, *al-walad-a* (the boy).

[1] Sisters as they behave syntactically the same way.

(1a) al-walad-u saʕid -un
the-boy-NOM happy-NOM
'The boy is happy.'
(1b) ʔinna al-walad-a saʕid -un
COMP the-boy-ACC happy-NOM
'Indeed, the boy is happy.'



In (1c), the external subject *al-walad-u* originates under the specifier of the predicate (AP), and also theta-marked[2] externally within the predicate phrase. The complementizer *ʔinna*, the probe, assigns the accusative case to the c-commanded subject *al-walad-a*, the goal. In the unmarked case, both the subject and the predicate carry the nominative and the accusative case, respectively, as in example (1a).

To sum up, the complementizer *ʔinna,* in SA, introduces finite clauses, assigns the accusative case to the subject, and emphasizes the statement. Its requirement for a finite clause ensures that the tense is specified (finite), distinguishing it from other particles that may introduce non-finite clauses.

4.1.2 The Complementizer *ʔanna*

The complementizer *ʔanna* is used to introduce embedded declarative clauses, often following verbs of cognition or perception. Like the English complementizer "that", it introduces an argument embedded clause. This sub-section delves into the

[2] According to the Predicate-Internal Theta-Marking Hypothesis introduced by Radford 2009, the argument is theta-marked (i.e. assigned a theta role) via merging with the predicate.

properties of *ʔanna*, highlighting its similarities and distinctions compared to other complementizers like *ʔinna*.

Like *ʔinna*, *ʔanna* requires a subject-predicate word order in the clause it introduces and assigns the accusative case to the immediately c-commanded subject. Moreover, similar to *ʔinna*, *ʔanna*, requires the following clause to be finite. But unlike *ʔinna*, which introduces a matrix clause, i.e., it must be the highest complementizer in the sentence, *ʔanna*, in contrast, must introduce an argument embedded clause. The following sentences illustrate how *ʔanna* introduces an embedded clausal argument:

(2a) ʕalimt-u ʔanna al-walad-a safar-a
knew1SG-IND that the-boy-ACC travel-SBJV
nnn 'I knew that the boy traveled.'

(2b)* ʕalimt-u ʔinna al-walad-a safar-a
knew1SG-IND indeed the-boy-Acc travel-SBJV
'I knew that the boy traveled.'

Here in (2a), *ʔanna* forms with the following embedded clause the internal argument (object) of the matrix verb (knew). The embedded subject *al-walad-a* "the boy" is assigned the accusative case as it is c-commanded by *ʔanna*. Example (2b) is ungrammatical as *ʔinna* must introduce a matrix clause to which it adds emphases.

To summarize, the complementizer *ʔanna* plays a crucial role in SA by introducing embedded declarative clauses, particularly following verbs of cognition or perception. It requires a subject-predicate word order and assigns the accusative case to the immediately following subject within the finite clause it introduces.

4.1.3 The Infinitive *ʔann* as a Tense Carrier

In SA, the particle ʔann plays a pivotal role as an infinitive marker, often corresponding to the English "infinitive to." Unlike the complementizers *ʔinna* and *ʔanna*, which occupy the head C position in syntactic structures, ʔann originates under the head T. This sub-section delves into the properties of *ʔann*, highlighting its similarities and distinctions compared to other complementizers like *ʔinna* and *ʔanna*.

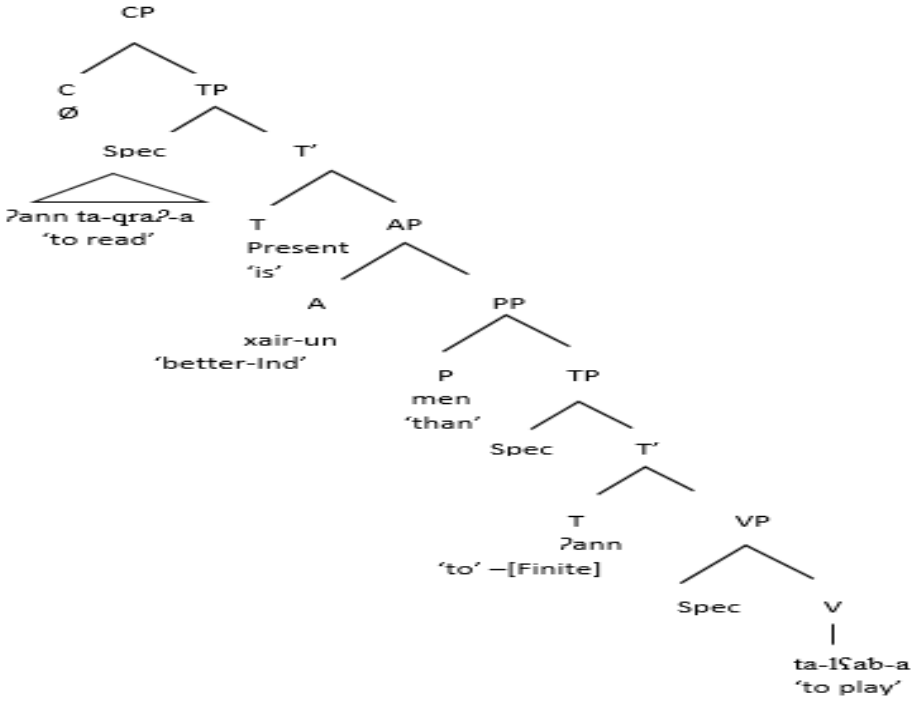
The particle *ʔann* functions as an infinitive marker, equivalent to the English "infinitive to". It introduces non-finite clauses and marks the immediately following

verb in the subjunctive mood[3]. *ʔann* is not a complementizer and as such it originates under the head T in contrast with *ʔinna* and *ʔanna* which originate under head C. It also requires a verb-subject-object (VSO) word order in the clause it introduces, unlike *ʔinna* and *ʔanna*. The following example illustrates how *ʔann* introduces non-finite embedded clauses:

(3a) ʔann ta-qraʔ-a xair-un men ʔann ta-lʕab-a
to 2SG-read-SBJV better-NOM than to 2SG-play-SBJV
'To read is better than to play.'

(3b) *ʔann qaraʔ-a xair-un men ʔann laʕib-a
to read-3SG.M-PST better-IND than to played-3SG.M-PST

(3c)



In the above tree, *ʔann* introduces two non-finite clauses. Both clauses function as arguments in a comparative construction. The first clause 'to read' is the external argument of the predicative adjective 'better'. The second clause 'to play' functions as the internal complement of the preposition 'than' and the entire PP

[3] It does not have a specific reference to time.

serves as the internal complement of the matrix predicate ‘better’. Each verb is in the subjunctive mood, marked by the subjunctive marker, *-a,* assigned by the infinitive ‘to’. The matrix T has the abstract tense finite which assigns the nominative case to the following predicate *xair-un*. Example (3b) is ungrammatical because the verbs ‘read’ and ‘play’ appear in the perfective aspect rather than the subjunctive mood, resulting in a syntactically invalid construction.

In sum, the particle *ʔann* serves as a tense carrier originating under head T, introducing a non-finite clause and marking the immediately following verb in the subjunctive mood. *ʔann, ʔinna* and *ʔanna* mark tense in the clause. *ʔann* must be followed by a non-finite verb to which it assigns the subjunctive mood marker. *ʔinna* and *ʔanna* introduce finite clauses and assign the accusative case marker to the immediately following subject.

Understanding the distinctions among *ʔinna*, *ʔanna*, and *ʔann* is vital for constructing grammatically accurate sentences in SA. While *ʔinna* and *ʔanna* both require a subject-predicate word order and assign the accusative case to the immediately following subject, *ʔinna* is used for main or emphatic clauses, and *ʔanna* for embedded argument clauses. In contrast, *ʔan* introduces subjunctive clauses with a VS word order and marks the following verb in the subjunctive mood.

4.2 Linking Verbs in SA “*Kāna*: be and Its Sisters”

Linking verbs in SA exhibit distinct syntactic diagnostics that differentiate them from other verbs. Primarily, they assign accusative case to the non-verbal predicate, marking their role as tense carriers and mediators between the subject and predicate. Additionally, linking verbs in SA are mobile within the sentence; they can either intervene between the subject and predicate, originating under head T, or initiate the sentence via head-to-head movement. Their interaction with negation also varies depending on tense: *laysa* denotes negation in the present tense, *lam yakən* expresses negation in the past, and *lan yakun-a* marks negation in the future.

The traditional Arabic grammarian Ibn Hisham (n.d.), in *Awḍaḥ al-Masālik ilā Alfiyyat Ibn Mālik*, classified *kāna* and its sisters—a set of thirteen verbs—into three groups based on syntactic and semantic properties. These groups are: (i) the unmarked *kana* and its seven sisters; (ii) four sisters requiring preceding c-commanding licensers; and (iii) the conditional linking verb *mādāma* “as long as”. While each group has distinct syntactic diagnostics, all members share the properties

of case assignment, movement, and core function as tense carriers. The following section explores Ibn Hisham's tripartite classification.

4.2.1 The Unmarked Linking Verbs

The first group forms the unmarked linking verbs (*kana* and its seven sisters). It includes verbs such as *kāna* "to be", *ʔasˁbaḥa* "to become, in the morning", *ʔaḍḥā* "to become, in the afternoon", *ẓalla* "to remain or be, during the day", *ʔamsā* "to become, in the evening", *bāta* "to become, during the night", *sˁa:ra* "to become", and *laysa* "not to be". These verbs exhibit the following key characteristics:

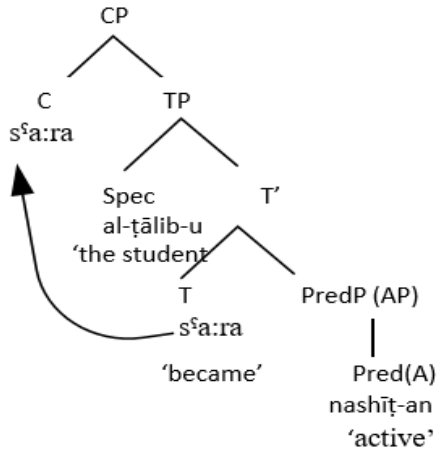
1. They assign accusative case to the non-verbal predicate while maintaining nominative case for the subject, according to Arab grammarians.
2. They function as tense carriers originating under head T, since non-verbal predicates (e.g., nominal, adjectival, prepositional, or adverbial phrases) do not inherently inflect for tense.
3. They demonstrate mobility within the sentence, appearing either at the beginning or between the subject and predicate.
4. They inflect for tense (past, present, future).

For example:

(4a) al-ṭālib-u sˁa:ra nashīṭ-an
the-student-Nom become-Perf-3ms active-ACC
'The student became active.'

(4b) sˁa:ra al-ṭālib-u nashīṭ-an
become-Perf-3ms the-student-Nom active-ACC
'The student became active.'

(4c)



(4d) **sa**-yabi:t al-walad-u mokta?ib-an
Fut-be-IPFV-3ms the-boy-NOM depressed-ACC
'The boy will spend the night feeling sad. (during the whole night)'

(4e) al-walad-u sa-yabi:t mokta?ib-an
the-boy-NOM Fut-be-IPFV-3ms depressed-ACC
'The boy will spend the night feeling sad. (during the whole night)'

In Arabic Linguistic Theory, *sˤa:ra* '*became*' assigns nominative case to the subject (*al-ṭālib-u*) and accusative case to the predicate (*nashīṭ-an*). (Ibn Hisham, n.d.; Wright, 1898). In examples (4b and 4c), the linking verb *sˤa:ra*: 'became' is raised from the head T to the head C to obtain VSO word order through head-to-head movement.

(5a) al-ragul-u muʕallim-un
the-man- Nom teacher-NOM
'The man is a teacher.'

(5b) kāna al-ragul-u muʕallim-an
was-3msg the-man-Nom teacher-ACC
'The man was a teacher.'

(5c) al-ragul-u kāna muʕallim-an
the-man-Nom was-3msg teacher-ACC
'The man was a teacher.'

(5d) *kāna al-ragul-u
was.3msg the-man. Nom

Concerning Tense, the only difference between example (5a and 5b) above is that in the past tense, there is an overt copula while in the present tense, there is a null copula. In sentence (5b), *kāna* serves as a tense carrier, marked for the feature +[Past]. It does not carry lexical meaning itself, as it is semantically void as it cannot stand alone. It functions as a linking verb, originating under the head T. It, also, assigns accusative case to its complement, *muʕallim-an* "teacher-ACC". Here, *kāna*, like lexical verbs that assign accusative case to their internal complement, functions similarly by assigning accusative case as a linking verb. In example (5c), the linking verb *kāna* 'was' moved from the head T to the head C to obtain subject-predicate word order through head-to-head raising. As for example (5d), it is ungrammatical because *kāna* cannot function independently without a predicate, emphasizing its role as an incomplete verb that relies on additional elements to complete the proposition.

4.2.1.1 *Laysa* as a Linking Verb

The negative verb *laysa* occupies a unique position in the grammar of SA, combining negation, tense, and agreement within verbless nominal clauses. Unlike negators such as *lan* or *lā*, *laysa* functions as a fully inflected verb: it overtly expresses present tense, agrees with the subject, and assigns accusative case to the predicate (Aoun et al., 2010). This subsection examines how *laysa* structurally encodes tense and interacts with functional projections like T and Neg, while also participating in feature valuation and movement operations.

In SA, *laysa* appears exclusively in negative nominal clauses in the present tense, suggesting that it occupies T and bears a [+PRESENT] feature (Benmamoun, 2000). The mutual incompatibility of *laysa* with the past-tense auxiliary *kāna* reinforces this analysis:

(6a) laysa al-walad-u marīḍ-an
NEG.be.3MSG the-boy.NOM sick.ACC
'*The boy is not sick.'*

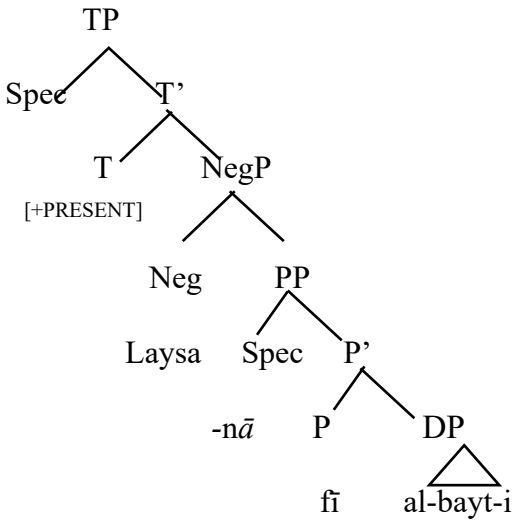
(6b) *kāna al-walad-u laysa marīḍ-an
'The boy was not is-not sick.' (ungrammatical)

The ungrammaticality of (6b) indicates that *laysa* inherently carries present-tense features and cannot co-occur with other tense-bearing elements. Interestingly,

although *laysa* surfaces with perfective morphology, it contributes present-tense interpretation. This supports the view that verbal suffixes in SA primarily reflect agreement rather than tense.

Like other verbs, *laysa* inflects for φ-features and undergoes head movement. For instance, in *naḥnu lasnā fī al-bayt-i* 'We are not at home,' the suffix *-nā* (1PL) reflects full agreement with the subject. Even in null subject constructions, agreement morphology persists, indicating that *laysa* participates in the same Agree operations as finite verbs. Under minimalist assumptions, *laysa* originates in Neg, raises to T, and probes the subject in Spec-TP, valuing its unvalued φ-features through an Agree relation. The structure below illustrates this derivation:

(7)



Once in T, *laysa* hosts agreement morphology e.g., *lasnā* = *laysa* + *-nā*, affirming its role as a tense-bearing head within the inflectional spine.

In contrast to lexical verbs, *laysa* is temporally restricted. For past and future negation, SA uses periphrastic constructions involving the negators *lam* (past) and *lan* (future) with the appropriate mood forms of *yakūn* (jussive and subjunctive, respectively). This periphrastic strategy confirms that *laysa* alone cannot express tense outside the present. Consider the following patterns:

(8a) lam yakən a l-walad-u marīḍ-an
NEG.PST be.3MSG-JUSS the-boy.NOM ill.ACC
'The boy was not ill.'

(8b) al-walad-u **lam** **yakən** marīḍ-an
the-boy.NOM NEG.PST be.3MSG-JUSS ill.ACC
'*The boy was not ill.'*

(8c) al-walad-u **lan** **yakūn-a** marīḍ-an
the-boy.NOM NEG.FUT be.3MSG-SBJV ill.ACC
'The boy will not be ill.'

(8d) ***lam** al-walad-u **yakūn** marīḍ-an
(ungrammatical)

These examples demonstrate that *lam* and *lan* are syntactically bound to the verb *yakūn* and must immediately precede it. They also impose distinct mood requirements—*lam* triggers the jussive, while *lan* triggers the subjunctive—while the copular verb remains responsible for predicate case assignment. The ungrammaticality of (8d) confirms that the negator and verb form an inseparable syntactic unit. By contrast, *laysa* displays greater mobility and independence. It agrees with the subject and can appear in multiple positions relative to it, a flexibility not seen with *lam*/*lan* observed in (8d). As Benmamoun (2000) observes that *laysa* may precede or follow the subject. Al-Horais (2017), similarly, notes the availability of both Neg-Subject and Subject-Neg orders. Consider:

(9a) al-walad-u laysa marīḍ-an
the-boy.NOM is.NEG ill.ACC
'*The boy is not ill.'*

(9b) laysa al-walad-u marīḍ-an
is.NEG the-boy.NOM ill.ACC
'The boy is not ill.'

(9c) laysa marīḍ-an al-walad-u
is.NEG ill.ACC the-boy.NOM
'The boy is not ill.'

In (9a), *laysa* occupies T, producing a standard SVO structure. In (9b), it undergoes head movement to C, yielding VSO order. In (9c), the predicate phrase is fronted, and the subject is postponed. These distributions confirm that *laysa* is syntactically mobile and fully integrated into the clausal architecture.

In sum, *laysa* is a distinct member of *kāna*'s syntactic paradigm. As a tense-bearing verb, it functions within the inflectional domain, carries present tense, establishes agreement, and assigns accusative case to nominal predicates. In contrast

lam/*lan* constructions highlights its dual role as both a negative and a finite verbal element—one that is syntactically flexible, morphologically marked, and structurally licensed within the T domain.

4.2.2 Marked Linking Verbs

Ibn Hisham (n.d.) identifies a distinct subset of *kāna*'s sisters known as marked linking verbs—verbs whose occurrence is syntactically conditioned by the presence of a c-commanding negative operator. This group includes *barīḥa*, *fātia*, *zāla*[4], and *ʔinfakka* "to cease". These verbs exhibit polarity sensitivity: they require licensing by a preceding negator, such as *lam* (NEG.PST) or *mā* (NEG), in order to function as linking verbs. Without such c-commanding operators, they cannot grammatically link a subject to its predicate. This subsection explores the syntactic properties of polarity linking verbs and their relationship with negators.

The defining feature of polarity linking verbs is their dependence on negative operators for grammaticality. This licensing behavior aligns with the Polarity Condition (Klima, 1964; Ladusaw, 1979):

A polarity item must be c-commanded by an affective constituent (e.g., a negative, interrogative, or conditional operator).

Ladusaw (1979) further formalizes this by arguing that polarity items must appear within downward-entailing environments. In the case of Arabic polarity linking verbs, the affective licensor is typically a negator. This syntactic dependency is illustrated in the contrast below:

(10a) *lam yazal al-muʕallim-u sˁa:bir-an*
NEG.PST remain.3MSG the-teacher-NOM patient-ACC
'The teacher has not ceased to be patient.' / 'The teacher remains patient.'

(10b) * *yazal al-muʕallim-u sˁa:bir-an*
remain.3MSG the-teacher-NOM patient-ACC

In (10a), the negator *lam* licenses the use of *yazal* as a linking verb, allowing it to establish a subject-predicate relation. In contrast, (10b) shows that *yazal* is ungrammatical without a c-commanding negator. These polarity verbs thus differ from both the core copular verbs like *kāna*, which are fully inflected and

[4] According to Aoun et al. (2010, p.22), *laazaala* is an "aspectual particle consists of the negative *laa* and the verb *zaal*."

independently grammatical, and from their lexical verb counterparts that can appear without negation.

To summarize, polarity linking verbs form a syntactically distinct subclass within *kāna*'s sisters. Their grammaticality as copular verbs is contingent on the presence of a c-commanding affective element, as required by the Polarity Condition. This interaction between negation and polarity-sensitive verbs exemplifies the tightly regulated syntactic dependencies that characterize Arabic clause structure and supports the broader claim that certain T-related features in Arabic must be licensed by functional projections headed by negation.

4.2.3 Conditional Linking Verb: *Ma-dāma* "As long as"

The third group of linking verbs identified by Ibn Hisham consists of a single item: the conditional verb *ma-dāma* "as long as". This verb uniquely combines temporal duration with conditional dependency, distinguishing it from other *kāna*-type verbs. Syntactically, it requires the presence of the particle *ma*, which in this construction does not function as a negator but as a functional element with temporal or conditional force.

Ibn Hishām (n.d.) describes this construction as dependent on the preposing of *ma*, identifying it as a *masʿdariyah ðʿarfiyah*—a particle that simultaneously conveys a nominal (source) meaning and a temporal adverbial role. He explains that *ma* in *ma-dumta ħayyan* is equivalent to a verbal noun expressing duration (*mudat dawāmī ħayyan*, "the period of my remaining alive"). Thus, *ma* is said to function as a substitute for the adverbial *ðʿarf* (temporal interval) and is interpreted as a duration-denoting nominal.

However, Wright (1898, p. 18) challenges this interpretation, arguing that the construction does more than express duration. He notes that *maa* here carries a "conversive force," contributing a conditional implication: the main clause holds only while the subordinate state persists. Rather than simply meaning "for the duration of being alive," the phrase implies a dependency—*I will keep learning if/while I remain alive*. This analysis positions *maa* closer to the conditional *ma* used in Arabic protases, suggesting that *ma-dāma* embeds both temporal and conditional semantics.

This dual nature of *ma-dāma* is evident in its syntax. It links the subject to its predicate while assigning accusative case, as seen in (11):

(11) sa-ʔataʕallam-u ma-dum-tu ħayy-an
FUT-learn-1SG as.long.as-1SG alive-ACC
'I will keep learning as long as I am alive.'

Here, *ma-dāma* introduces a temporally bounded condition, with *maa* contributing to the licensing of the construction both semantically and syntactically.

In sum, *ma-dāma* stands apart from other copular verbs in SA due to its reliance on a prefixed functional particle that encodes both duration and dependency. While Ibn Hishām emphasizes its nominal and adverbial dimensions, Wright highlights its conditional function. Together, these perspectives reveal the complexity of *ma-dāma*, where temporal and conditional meanings converge to form a structurally and semantically unique linking construction.

4.2.4 *ʔinna* versus *kāna*

The syntactic behavior of *kāna* and *ʔinna* in Standard Arabic reveals important insights into case assignment and movement operations within the Minimalist framework. Both elements occupy distinct structural positions and serve different grammatical functions, particularly in how they assign case and interact with the clause structure.

Within this framework, *kāna* is assumed to originate under the head T, where it assigns accusative case to the predicate e.g., an adjective or noun phrase under the Adjacency Condition (Chomsky, 1995). This condition requires that the case assigner and case assignee be in a direct c-command relationship without intervening elements. After assigning case, *kāna* may undergo head movement from T to C, yielding surface word orders such as VSO. This is illustrated in (13):

(13a) al-walad-u kāna saʕīd-an
the-boy.NOM was.3MSG happy-ACC
'The boy was happy.'

(13b) kāna al-walad-u saʕīd-an
was.3MSG the-boy.NOM happy-ACC
'The boy was happy.'

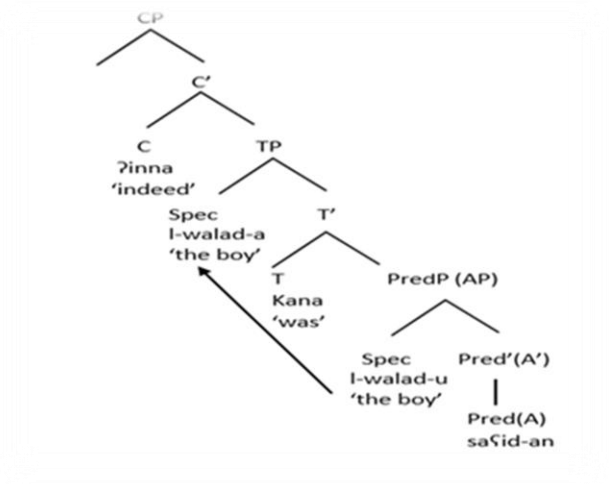
In both examples, *kāna* assigns accusative case to the predicate *saʕīd-an*, while the subject *al-walad-u* remains in the nominative, receiving case from T or the finite clause structure.

In contrast, *ʔinna* is a complementizer that originates in the head C position. Unlike *kāna*, it does not assign case to the predicate but rather assigns accusative

case to the subject of the clause. The predicate remains nominative, as it is not directly governed by *ʔinna*. This behavior is shown in (14):

(14a) ʔinna al-walad-a saʕīd-un
COMP the-boy-ACC happy-NOM
'Indeed, the boy is happy.'

(14b) ʔinna al-walad-a kāna saʕīd-an
COMP the-boy-ACC was.3MSG happy-ACC
'Indeed, the boy was happy.'



(14c)

In (14b), both *ʔinna* and *kāna* co-occur, but they remain structurally distinct: *ʔinna* in C assigns accusative to the subject, and *kāna* in T assigns accusative to the predicate.

However, not all combinations of *ʔinna* and *kāna* are grammatical. Consider the ungrammatical example in (14d):

(14d) * kāna al-walad-u ʔinna saʕīd-un
was.3MSG the-boy.NOM COMP happy-NOM
(Intended: *'The boy was indeed happy.'*)

This sentence is ungrammatical for two reasons. First, the Adjacency Condition is violated: *ʔinna* is separated from its case assignee *al-walad-u* by the intervening verb *kāna*, preventing proper case assignment. Second, *ʔinna* must occupy the highest C position in a finite clause. Since *kāna* has undergone T-to-C movement in (14d), it blocks *ʔinna* from fulfilling this requirement. Additionally,

because both *kāna* and *ʔinna* are C-head candidates, their co-occurrence in the same structural position leads to a conflict, highlighting their complementary distribution.

In summary, *kāna* and *ʔinna* illustrate distinct but interacting mechanisms of movement and case assignment in Arabic syntax. *Kāna* originates under T, assigns accusative case to the predicate, and may raise to C. *ʔinna*, by contrast, originates under C, assigns accusative case to the subject, and governs the entire clause. Their incompatibility in certain configurations results from competition for the same structural head and constraints on case adjacency and finiteness. These interactions underscore the fine-grained architecture of clause structure in SA and the roles that functional heads play in licensing arguments.

4.3 Negators as Tense Carriers

4.3.1 Verbal Negator *lā* and Its Tensed Variants (*lam* and *lan*): Mood Assignment under Negation

Verbal negation in Standard Arabic (SA) exemplifies a systematic interaction between tense, mood, and negation, revealing that negators are functional heads intricately linked to the clausal spine, particularly the Tense and Mood domains. The negators *lā*, *lam*, and *lan* all negate imperfective verbs but differ in the tense values they express and the morphological mood they impose on the verb. This section analyzes their syntactic behavior, emphasizing how negators realize tense features and govern mood morphology.

The negator *lā* expresses present-tense negation, selecting an imperfective verb in the indicative mood, marked by the default suffix *-u*, as illustrated in (15a):

(15a) lā yaktubu al-walad-u al-dars-a
NEG write.IPFV.IND the-boy-NOM the-lesson-ACC
'The boy does not write the lesson.'

By contrast, *lam* encodes past-tense negation and triggers the jussive mood, typically characterized by the absence of the indicative suffix, as shown in (15b):

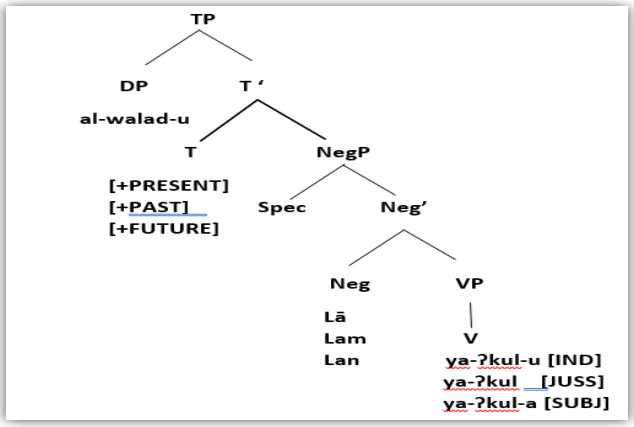
(15b) lam yaktub al-walad-u al-dars-a
NEG.PAST write.IPFV.JUSS the-boy-NOM the-lesson-ACC
'The boy did not write the lesson.'

Similarly, *lan* signals future negation and licenses the subjunctive mood, usually marked by the suffix *-a*, as in (15c):

(15c) lan yaktuba al-walad-u al-dars-a
NEG.FUT write.IPFV.SBJV the-boy-NOM the-lesson-ACC
'The boy will not write the lesson.'

These patterns support a syntactic configuration where T bears abstract tense features ([+PRESENT], [+PAST], [+FUTURE]), but the morphological realization of tense surfaces on Neg, which is occupied by the negators *lā*, *lam*, or *lan*. The verb remains in situ within VP, receiving mood morphology via feature inheritance or checking, constrained by locality. Specifically, under *lā*, the verb surfaces with indicative morphology; under *lam*, it surfaces in the jussive; and under *lan*, in the subjunctive.

(15d)



In sum, the verbal negators *lā*, *lam*, and *lan* function as tense-sensitive heads that govern mood assignment in SA. They realize T's tense features morphologically and condition the verb's mood, demonstrating a tight syntactic interplay between T and Neg. This interaction exemplifies the layered architecture of the clausal spine within the Minimalist framework, where feature valuation and locality constraints determine the distribution and morphological realization of tense and negation.

4.3.2 Negator Particles: *Lā* Functioning Like *Laysa* Versus The Generic *Lā*

4.3.2.1 *Lā* Functioning Like *Laysa*

This section examines the distributional properties of the negative particle *lā* when it functions syntactically like the copula verb *laysa* in Standard Arabic (SA). In this usage, *lā* operates as a lexical case assigner that carries a negative feature,

assigning nominative case to its subject and accusative case to its predicate, thereby expressing present-tense negation akin to *laysa*. The following sentence illustrates this:

(16) lā rajul-un ghāʔib-an (Hasan, 1975, vol. 1, p. 601)
NEG man-NOM.SG absent-ACC.SG
'There is no man who is absent.'

The grammaticality of this construction depends on a set of syntactic conditions described by Hasan (1975, Vol. 1, pp. 602:603). These include the adjacency of *lā* to its subject, the indefiniteness of both subject and predicate, sentence-initial position of *lā*, and the absence of intervening elements. Below, these conditions are presented alongside relevant examples and a detailed minimalist syntactic analysis. Hasan identifies key conditions for *lā* to function like *laysa*:

- **Indefiniteness**: Both subject and predicate must be indefinite; definiteness in either argument results in ungrammaticality and loss of case assignment.
- **Adjacency**: Nothing intervene between the probe *lā* and the goal DP except for specific exception.
- **Sentence-initial Position**: *Lā* must appear clause-initially, immediately c-commanding the entire TP.

Regarding the Indefiniteness Condition, the following paradigm introduced by Hasan (1981, Vol. 1, p. 602):

(17a) lā silāḥ-un maʔmūn-an fī yad-i aṭ-ṭāʔiš-i
NEG weapon-NOM safe-ACC in hand-GEN the-reckless-GEN
'No safe weapon exists in the hand of the reckless.'

(17b)*lā **al**-silāḥ-u maʔmūn-an fī yad-i aṭ-ṭāʔiš-i
NEG **the**-weapon-NOM safe-ACC in hand-GEN the-reckless-GEN
'The weapon is not safe in the hand of the reckless.' (ungrammatical)

(17c)*lā silāḥ-un **al**-maʔmūn-a fī yad-i aṭ-ṭāʔiš-i
NEG weapon-NOM the-safe-ACC in hand-GEN the-reckless-GEN
'No weapon the-safe in the hand of the reckless.' (ungrammatical)

(17d)*lā **al**-silāḥ-u **al**-maʔmūn-a ʔiðā kāna fī yad-i aṭ-ṭāʔiš-i
NEG the-weapon-NOM the-safe-ACC if was in hand-GEN the-reckless
'Not the safe weapon if it is in the hand of the reckless.' (ungrammatical)

Example (17a) meets the indefiniteness requirement, allowing *lā* to assign nominative case to the subject and accusative case to the predicate, thus functioning like *laysa*. In contrast, (17b–d) violate indefiniteness and consequently are ungrammatical, reflecting the failure of case assignment.

Concerning the Adjacency Condition, the following paradigm mentioned by Hasan (1981, Vol. 1, p. 603):

(18a) *lā ḥiṣn-un wāqiyan aẓ-ẓālim-a*
NEG fortress-NOM protecting-ACC the-oppressor-ACC
'No fortress protects the oppressor.'

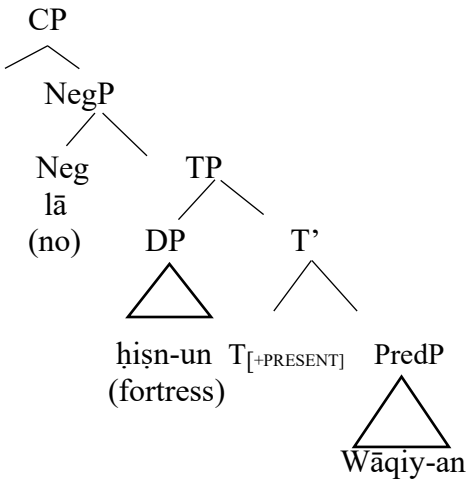
(18b) **lā wāqiyan ḥiṣn-un aẓ-ẓālim-a*

(18c) **lā al-ẓālim-a ḥiṣn-u wāqiʿ-an*

(18d) **lā wāqiʿ-an al-ẓālim-a ḥiṣn-u*

Only (18a) satisfies the strict linear adjacency between *lā* and its subject. Fronting the predicate or internal arguments (18b–d) disrupts case assignment, leading to ungrammaticality.

(18e)



In structures where *lā* functions analogously to *laysa*, it operates as a wide-scope sentential negator and must c-command the entire propositional TP. Syntactically, *lā* heads a NegP that merges directly with a TP complement, and this structural relation underpins its role in both negation and case assignment. Tense is an abstract element under head T. *Lā* is inherently tenseless, contributing no tense features to the clause. Its interpretation is typically present-time by default.

The adjacency requirement is strict: *lā* must immediately precede the subject, and the predicate must remain in situ. This immobility is crucial to maintain the feature-checking relations necessary for grammatical convergence. Within this system, *lā* enters the derivation bearing interpretable [NEG] and [CASE] features, both of which are valued, and an unvalued [IND] feature. The predicate (*wāqiyan*, in example 18a) enters the derivation with its [ϕ]-features and [IND] valued but with unvalued [NEG] and [CASE] features. Under a minimalist probe-goal framework, *lā* functions as a probe that searches downward in its c-command domain for a suitable goal that can value its unvalued [IND] feature. The indefinite predicate satisfies this condition, thus valuing *lā*'s [IND] feature. Conversely, *lā*, having valued [NEG] and [CASE], serves as a probe for the predicate's unvalued features, allowing it to assign accusative case to the internal argument and scope over the predicate domain.

This tightly regulated probe-goal interaction accounts for the immobility of *lā* and the strict requirement that the predicate follow it in situ. For example, in (18a), *ḥiṣn* 'fortress' serves as the nominative subject of *lā*, and *wāqiyan* 'protecting' is the predicate. The internal argument *aẓ-ẓālim-a* is selected by the deverbal adjective *wāqiyan* and receives accusative case via the syntactic head *lā*. The grammaticality of this structure hinges on the successful feature valuation sequence: *lā* as a probe both values the predicate's [NEG] and [CASE] features and has its own [IND] feature valued by the indefinite predicate.

By contrast, the ungrammaticality of (18b) arises when *wāqiyan* is fronted. This disrupts the probe-goal relation, preventing *lā* from accessing the predicate in its c-command domain and thereby halting feature valuation. As a result, accusative case cannot be assigned to *aẓ-ẓālim-a*, and the structure crashes at the interfaces.

With the respect to the exception of the adjacency condition, predicate-internal adjuncts such as prepositional phrases (PPs) or temporal adverbials may undergo focus-driven fronting without ungrammaticality, provided the subject remains adjacent to *lā.* Consider the following examples presented by Hasan (1981, Vol. 1, p. 603):

(19a) lā fī al- ʕamal-i ħāzim-un muhmilan
NEG in the-work-GEN determined-NOM negligent-ACC
'*No one determined at work is negligent.*'

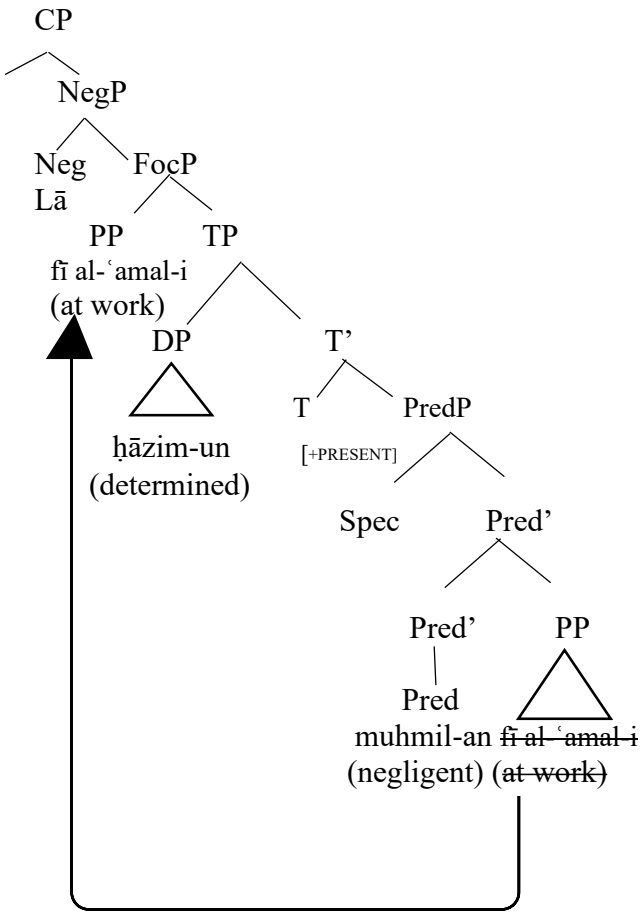
(19b) lā ħāzim-un muhmilan fī al-ʕamal-i
NEG determined-NOM negligent-ACC in the-work-GEN
‘*No one determined at work is negligent.’*

(19c) lā sāʕat-a al-jidd-i ʕāqil-un mutawāniyan
NEG hour-ACC the-seriousness-GEN wise-NOM hesitant-ACC
‘At the time of seriousness, no wise person is hesitant.’

(19d) lā ʿʕāqil-un mutawāniyan sāʕat-a al-jidd-i
NEG wise-NOM hesitant-ACC hour-ACC the-seriousness-GEN
‘No wise person is hesitant at the time of seriousness.’

All the above sentences are grammatical. Sentences (19b) and (19d) are the deep structures of (19a) and (19c). Sentences (19b) and (19d) illustrate a marked word order in which the predicate's internal adjunct—a PP *fī al-ʕamal-i* or a temporal phrase (*shibh jumla*)—is fronted, leaving the subject and remaining predicate in situ. This kind of fronting does not violate the requirement that *lā* be adjacent to its subject, since these complements are not interveners in the relevant syntactic sense. The following tree diagram represents this Focus movement:

(19e)



In constructions where *lā* functions analogously to *laysa*, fronting of non-argumental constituents such as, prepositional phrases (PPs) does not disrupt the structural configuration necessary for case assignment. This is because such constituents do not require structural case and therefore do not interfere with the local relationship between *lā* and the predicate. For instance, in sentences where the predicate e.g., *muhmil-an* 'negligent' remains in its base-generated position following *lā*, accusative case assignment proceeds unimpeded. The fronted PP, in this context, undergoes A′-movement—more specifically, movement to the specifier of FocusP—rather than A-movement, as it is not motivated by case-related requirements. Crucially, case checking is completed prior to any optional A′-movement operations.

By contrast, when an argumental predicate complement or the predicate itself is fronted—as in the ungrammatical structure (18b) *lā wāqiyan ḥiṣnu*—the derivation

fails. This ungrammaticality arises because *lā* assigns nominative case to its subject and accusative case to the predicate or its internal complement directly, under a condition of strict adjacency. Movement of any case-receiving element from its base position disrupts this adjacency, thereby blocking the relevant feature-checking operations.

While c-command is generally a necessary condition for syntactic operations such as case assignment—e.g., T assigning nominative case to the subject it c-commands—it is not sufficient in the case of *lā* functioning as *laysa*. In this configuration, adjacency plays a decisive role in addition to c-command. Specifically, although *lā* may continue to c-command the base position of a fronted predicate (e.g., *wāqiyan*), case assignment fails because the required linear locality between *lā* and the predicate has been broken. Thus, *lā* requires not only structural c-command over its nominal dependents but also a tightly constrained surface configuration in which the subject and predicate are adjacent within the TP domain. This constraint reflects the interaction between structural hierarchy and linear order in the syntax of *lā*-sentences.

Adjuncts, however, can undergo movement freely because they are not involved in the process of case valuation. Unlike arguments, adjuncts do not carry unvalued case features and therefore do not participate in the probe–goal relation necessary for structural case assignment. Their movement typically falls under A′-movement, which is not driven by case-related needs and occurs after case valuation has already taken place. As such, adjuncts do not interfere with the syntactic configuration between *lā*—which functions as the case assigner—and its case-bearing arguments, namely the subject and the predicate. This ensures that both c-command and the required adjacency between *lā* and the predicate remain intact, allowing case assignment to proceed without obstruction.

Regarding the third condition, when *lā* fails to appear in sentence-initial position, it loses its wide scope over TP and is rendered ungrammatical. Consider the following example:

(20) *rajul-un lā ɣāʔib-an

man-NOM NEG absent-ACC

'A man is not absent.'

In this example, *lā* follows the subject *rajul-un* and cannot take scope over the entire propositional content. Since *lā* originally originates under NegP which is

within the CP, its clause-initial position is necessary for licensing sentential negation. Post-subject placement blocks this scope, rendering the sentence ungrammatical.

In sum, *lā* functioning like *laysa* operates as a sentential negator with a wide scope over TP. It occupies a high structural position, typically within the CP layer, and assigns nominative case to the subject and accusative case to the predicate. Unlike generic *lā*, this form of *lā* interacts directly with tense and clause structure.

4.3.2.2 The Generic Lā

This section presents Generic *lā* (lā al-nāfiya li-l-jins) which is a distinct syntactic and semantic phenomenon in Standard Arabic, expressing kind-level or generic negation. It denies the existence of any member of a given class or genus and is typically rendered in English using the determiner *no* in the present tense. For example:

(21a) al-sayyārat-**u** mawjūdat-un
the-car-ACC.SG existing-NOM.SG
'*The car is here*.'

(21b) lā sayyārat-**a** mawjūdat-un
NEG.GEN car-ACC.SG existing-NOM.SG
'*No car is present*.' (Hasan, 1975, vol. 1, p. 686)

In (21b), *lā* functions as a nominal negator that takes an indefinite accusative noun as its complement and requires an indefinite predicate. Fehri describes this *lā* as a "generic negation marker" (1993, p.91), and Aoun et al. (2010, p.27) classify it as a form of "constituent negation" or "negative quantification". Unlike clausal negators such as *laysa*, generic *lā* operates within nominal environments and is subject to strict licensing conditions, detailed in classical Arabic grammar and formalized here within the Minimalist framework.

The grammaticality of this construction depends on a set of syntactic conditions described by Hasan (1975, Vol. 1, p. 688). Below, these conditions are presented alongside relevant examples and a detailed minimalist syntactic analysis. Hasan identifies several core syntactic conditions for the grammaticality of generic *lā*:

1. **Generic Interpretation**: The negated noun must refer to an entire class, not a particular instance.
2. **Indefiniteness**: Both the subject and predicate must be indefinite.

3. **Non-Intervention**: *Lā* must not intervene between a case-assigner e.g., verb or preposition and its case assignee.
4. **Adjacency**: *Lā* must be immediately adjacent to the noun it governs.

These conditions jointly ensure that *lā* functions as a genuine genus-level negator, targeting non-specific entities.

- **Violation of Genericity:**

(22a) lā kitab-u wāḥid-un kāfiyan
NEG book-NOM.SG one-NOM.SG sufficient-ACC.SG
'Not even one book is sufficient.' (Hasan, 1975, vol. 1, p. 688)

(22b) lā kitab-a kāfiyun
NEG book- ACC.SG sufficient-NOM.SG
'No book is sufficient'

At the syntactic level, generic *lā* selects for an indefinite noun within its c-command domain. It bears uninterpretable genus negation [uGEN] and [uINDF] features that must be valued against matching features on the Noun. In (22a), the noun *wāḥid* "one" indicates that the negation is restricted to a single instance rather than extending to the whole class of books. As a result, *lā* fails to function as a true generic negator. The failure of *lā* is thus twofold: (i) semantically, it fails to express genus-level negation; (ii) syntactically, it disrupts the Case and feature-checking dependencies required for a grammatical derivation, as Case assignment and feature valuation depend on successful feature checking (Chomsky, 1995).

- **Violation of Indefiniteness:**

(23) lā ʕliyy-un muqasʿir-un, wa-lā ḥāmid-un
NEG Ali-NOM negligent-NOM, and-NEG Hamid-NOM
'Ali is not negligent, and Hamid is not (negligent) either.'
(Hasan, 1975, vol. 1, p. 690)

Definiteness introduces specificity and individuation, which contradicts the inherent generality of genus negation. According to Hasan, the definiteness of the proper names renders *lā* inoperative as a case-assigning negation particle; consequently, no accusative case is assigned. Instead, *lā* is repeated for rhetorical or stylistic symmetry. This restriction prevents *lā* from occurring in verb-initial sentences or combining with definite nominals, as definiteness introduces

individuation—contradicting the inherent generic feature of *lā*, which functions syntactically and semantically as an internal negator with narrow scope over an entire nominal class.

- **Intervention and Reanalysis:**

(24) ħaḍart-u **bi-lā** taʔxīr
arrive.PST-1SG with-NEG delay
'I arrived without delay.' (Hasan, 1975, vol. 1, p. 689)

When *lā* appears in such a syntactic position(according to Hasan), it no longer functions as a genus-negating determiner assigning case, nor does it participate in clause-level negation but is instead reanalyzed as a noun meaning "lack" or "absence," equivalent in function to the noun ɣ*ayr* "non-" or "lack of" and it is syntactically governed by a preceding preposition such as, *bi* 'with', and forms a prepositional phrase with a following noun *taʔxīr* "delay", and it carries a genitive case. .

- **Adjacency Violation:**

(25) lā li-hazāl-i haybat-un wa-lā tawqīr-un
NEG for-weakness dignity-NOM and-NEG respect-NOM
'There is no dignity nor respect for a weak person.' (Hasan, 1975, vol.1, p. 690)

(26a) lā jundiyy-a tārik-un maydān-a-hu
NEG soldier-ACC abandoning-NOM field-ACC-his
'No soldier is abandoning his field.' (Hasan, 1975, vol.1, p. 690)

(26b) lā maydān-a-hu jundiyy-un tārik-un
NEG field-ACC-his soldier-NOM abandoning-NOM
'His field, no soldier is abandoning.' (Hasan, 1975, vol.1, p. 690)

The adjacency requirement imposes a fixed word order in generic *lā* constructions, whereby the noun governed by *lā* must immediately follow it to be assigned the accusative case. Neither the predicate *li-hazāl-i* in (25) nor any of its internal complements *maydān-a* in (26a) may precede the noun targeted by *lā*. Preposing these elements results in syntactic dislocation that disrupts the case-licensing domain of *lā*, rendering it inoperative as a case-assigning head. As a result, the affected nouns (*haybat-un* and *jundiyy-un*) surface in the nominative case instead of the expected accusative. This disruption necessitates rhetorical repetition of *lā* in subsequent clauses maintain parallel structure.

- **Generic *Lā:* Minimalist Analysis**

Unlike *lā* functioning as *laysa*, the generic negation marker (*lā al-nāfiya li-l-jins*) is structurally confined to the nominal domain. It originates as the head of a NegP and directly selects an indefinite DP as its complement. It does not c-command a TP, nor does it project Tense or function as a clausal negator. Consequently, its scope is narrowly limited to the noun phrase it directly modifies, in contrast to the clausal *lā* i.e., *lā* as *laysa*, which occupies a higher syntactic position—typically within the CP layer—and takes scope over the entire TP.

Generic *lā* exhibits limited syntactic mobility and adjacency sensitivity. It can only assign accusative case to an adjacent indefinite DP within its local domain. Once adjacency is broken—e.g., by fronting or the insertion of intervening material—the DP falls outside the scope of *lā* and must receive case through other syntactic means. This behavior contrasts with *lā* as *laysa*, which is structurally higher and thus allows more flexible case assignment due to its broader scope.

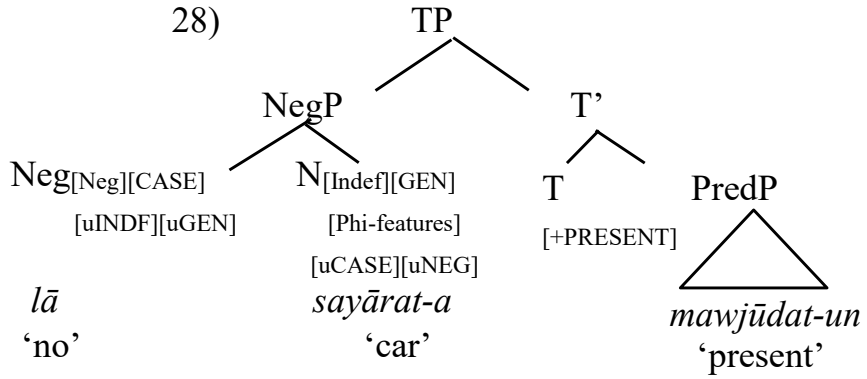
Generic *lā* may co-occur with sentential temporal expressions like ɣ*adan* ‘tomorrow’, as in:

(27) lā rajul-a fī al- ħadīqat-i ɣad-an
NEG man-ACC in the-garden-GEN tomorrow-ACC
‘No man will be in the garden tomorrow.’

However, it does not project tense itself. Rather, it serves as a nominal negator, semantically equivalent to a negative determiner like English *no*. The temporal adverb modifies the overall interpretation but remains structurally outside the scope of *lā*, which targets only the indefinite DP e.g., *rajul* "man". This structural difference mirrors the distinction between sentential adverbs, which have wide scope over the entire clause, and VP adverbs, which have narrow scope. Similarly, *lā as laysa* exhibits clause-wide scope, while *lā al-nāfiya lil-jins* is restricted to the noun phrase it directly modifies. This reinforces the claim that *lā as laysa* is a clausal negator with tense-related properties, while the generic *lā* functions more like a negative determiner with no direct relation to tense projection.

From a minimalist perspective, generic *lā* is merged with interpretable [NEG] and [CASE] features, along with uninterpretable [uINDF] and [uGEN] features. The indefinite DP enters the derivation with valued [INDF], [GEN], and φ-features, but unvalued [CASE] and [NEG]. As a probe, *lā* searches its c-command domain and

establishes an Agree relation with the indefinite noun, resulting in mutual feature checking and valuation: *lā* values its [uINDF] and [uGEN] features, while assigning accusative case and licensing [NEG] on the DP. This syntactic structure can be



visualized as follows:

Here, *lā* acts as a nominal negator whose scope is confined to *sayyārah* ("car"), the complement it directly selects.

To conclude, *lā al-nāfiya li-l-jins* is not a sentential negator like *lā* as *laysa*, but a negative determiner head with narrow scope over a head noun and no interaction with tense projection.

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that tense in SA distributes across different functional categories—complementizers, linking verbs, and negators—within the Minimalist framework. The analysis reveals that tense in SA is not restricted to a single projection but is instead distributed across multiple functional heads, each contributing to clause structure, case valuation, and temporal interpretation. The findings directly address the three research questions posed in this study.

First, with respect to how tense is structurally represented in SA, the analysis shows that tense is encoded not only in T but also in C and Neg, depending on the lexical item involved. Complementizers such as *ʔinna* and ʔ*anna* originate under C and inherently carry tense and accusative case features, while ʔ*ann* functions as a [-Finite] infinitival marker under T. Linking verbs, including *kāna* and its sisters, originate in T as overt tense carriers, inflecting for tense and assigning nominative and accusative case to subjects and predicates respectively. Negators such as *lam* and

lan additionally demonstrate that tense is distributed through the Neg head, where they license past or future tense along with jussive or subjunctive mood. This shows that SA tense is structurally diffuse, challenging models that localize tense solely in T.

Second, concerning the role of functional categories C, T, and Neg, the study establishes that each category interacts with tense in distinctive ways. the study confirms that complementizers, linking verbs, and negators serve as tense carriers, each constrained by syntactic licensing conditions. For example, complementizers license case and encode finiteness distinctions; linking verbs function as mediators between tense and agreement; marked linking verbs require a c-commanding licenser, conditional verbs such as *ma-dāma* introduce temporal dependency, and *laysa* functions as a negator, a defective verb and a tense carrier restricted to present tense, despite its perfective morphology. Verbal negators interact directly with tense and mood, revealing how negative operators participate in tense valuation. Generic *lā* and *lā* functioning like *laysa* further illustrate how the same lexical form can host different tense and case configurations depending on structural position and scope.

Third, regarding feature-checking and movement operations, the data reveal that tense valuation in SA is achieved through local feature interactions and head movement. For instance, linking verbs such as *kāna* and *sˁāra* undergo raising from T to C to derive word-order alternations (SVO vs. VSO), while verbal negators such as *lā*, *lam*, and *lan* enter a local relation with T, which bears abstract tense features, thereby checking the relevant mood features on the verb. Adjacency in *lā* constructions further shows that case assignment and tense valuation are constrained by strict locality. The contrast between generic *lā* and *lā* functioning as *laysa* highlights how scope, case assignment, c-command, and feature valuation differentiate formally similar negators. Taken together, case, adjacency, and scope relations provide strong support for the role of locality in tense realization.

In sum, this study confirms that tense in SA emerges as a distributed property across functional heads, not a verb-internal feature. By incorporating insights from traditional Arabic grammar—particularly Ibn Hishām's classifications and Abbās Hasan's analyses— this study bridges historical and theoretical perspectives. The study thus contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of SA clause structure and highlights the importance of integrating classical grammatical traditions with contemporary syntactic theory.

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List of Phonetic Symbols

A: Consonants[5]

Arabic Letter	Symbol	Description	Arabic Letter	Symbol	Description
أ	ʔ	Voiceless glottal stop	ص	$s^ˤ$	Voiceless pharyngealized alveolar fricative
ب	b	Voiced bilabial stop	ض	$d^ˤ$	Voiced pharyngealized alveolar stop
ت	t	Voiceless denti-alveolar stop	ط	$t^ˤ$	Voiceless pharyngealized alveolar stop
ث	θ	Voiceless interdental fricative	ظ	$ð^ˤ$	Voiced pharyngealized interdental fricative
ج	dʒ	Voiced post-alveolar affricate	ع	ʕ	Voiced pharyngeal fricative
ج	g	Voiced velar stop (dialectal)	غ	ɣ	Voiced uvular fricative
ح	ħ	Voiceless pharyngeal fricative	ف	f	Voiceless labiodental fricative
خ	x	Voiceless uvular fricative	ق	q	Voiceless uvular stop
د	d	Voiced denti-alveolar stop	ك	k	Voiceless velar stop
ذ	ð	Voiced interdental fricative	ل	l	Voiced alveolar lateral approximant

[5] This table is cited from (Shariq, 2015, p148).

Arabic Letter	Symbol	Description	Arabic Letter	Symbol	Description
ر	r	Voiced alveolar trill	م	m	Voiced bilabial nasal
ز	z	Voiced alveolar fricative	ن	n	Voiced alveolar nasal
س	s	Voiceless alveolar fricative	ه	h	Voiceless glottal fricative
ش	ʃ	Voiceless post-alveolar fricative	و	w	Voiced labio-velar glide
			ي	y / j	Voiced palatal glide

B: <u>Arabic Vowel Forms</u>[6]

Short Vowels	Long Vowels
a – Front short open vowel	a: / ā – Front long open vowel
i – Front short close vowel	i: / ī – Front long close vowel
u – Back short close vowel	u: / ū – Back long close vowel

[6] This table is cited from: Ladefoged and Maddieson (1996)

List of Abbreviations[7]

Abbreviation	Meaning	Abbreviation	Meaning
1	First Person	MP	Minimalist Program
2	Second Person	M	Masculine
3	Third Person	NEG	Negation
ACC	Accusative Case	NOM	Nominative Case
AGR	Agreement	NP	Noun Phrase
C / Comp	Complementizer Head	PL	Plural
COMP	Complementizer	PST	Past Tense
CP	Complementizer Phrase	SA	Standard Arabic
DP	Determiner Phrase	SBJV	Subjunctive Mood
F	Feminine	SG	Singular
FocP	Focus Phrase	Spec	Specifier
FUT	Future Tense	SVO	Subject-Verb-Object
GEN	Genitive Case	T	Tense Head
H	Head	TP	Tense Phrase
IND	Indicative Mood	uFeat	Uninterpretable Feature
IPFV	Imperfective	uGEN	Uninterpretable Generic Feature
JUSS	Jussive Mood	uINDF	Uninterpretable Indefiniteness Feature
[INDF]	Indefinite Feature	VP	Verb Phrase
φ-features	Person, Number, Gender Features	VSO	Verb-Subject-Object

[7] Glosses follow the conventions of the *Leipzig Glossing Rules* (Comrie, Haspelmath, & Bickel, 2015).