



# Misriqiya

**Volume 5 Issue 2 2025**

**Print ISSN2682-4116 Online ISSN2682-4124**

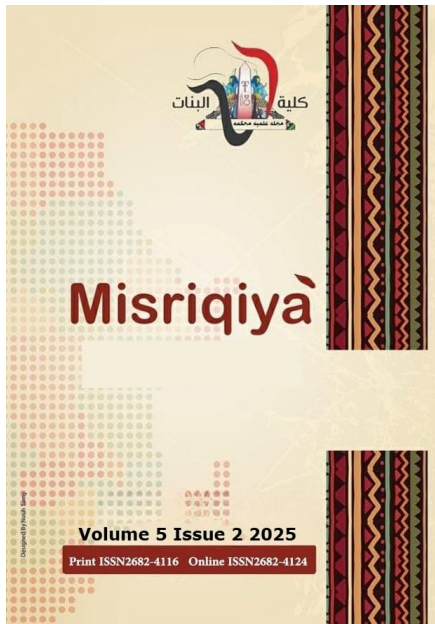


Misriqiya

## Table of Contents

Vol. 5 No. 2, 2025

|                                                                                                                                                                                                            |       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Postcolonial Re-reading of Wole Soyinka's <i>The Lion and the Jewel</i><br><b>Sobola, Oluwaseun T.</b>                                                                                                     | 1-12  |
| Reclaiming the Self: Gender, Performance, and Resistance in<br>Latifa al Zayyat's <i>The Open Door</i><br><b>Rna Essam Hamza, Nahla Saad Abdel Fattah Imam, Rania<br/>Reda Nasr, Shaden Adel Nasser</b>    | 13-31 |
| A Minimalist Analysis of Tense Carriers in the Syntax of<br>Standard Arabic<br><b>Sara Alaa Mohamed, Wafaa Abd al-Faheem Batran Wahba,<br/>Rania Galal Hamed</b>                                           | 32-70 |
| Split CP, Functional Categories, and Logical Form (LF) in<br>Standard Arabic (SA): A Minimalist Approach<br><b>Basma Ashraf Abd El-Kader Diab, Wafaa Abd al-Faheem<br/>Batran Wahba, Rania Galal Hamed</b> | 71-97 |



## Postcolonial Re-reading of Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*

Sobola, Oluwaseun T.

Department of English and Counselling Services, Kansas State University, Manhattan, United States of America.

Corresponding author: [sobola@ksu.edu](mailto:sobola@ksu.edu)

DOI: 10.21608/MISJ.2025.427160.1074

Received: 1-7-2025

Accepted: 28-9-2025

Published: 30-10-2025

[https://misj.journals.ekb.eg/article\\_463118.html](https://misj.journals.ekb.eg/article_463118.html)

Citation: Sobola, O. (2025). Postcolonial Re-reading of Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. *Mişriqiya*, 5(2), 1-12. doi: 10.21608/misj.2025.427160.1074

### Abstract

This study provides a postcolonial re-reading of Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, emphasizing the ideological tensions between traditional African values and imposed Western modernity. Using a library-based methodology, the research critically analyzed the primary text through the lens of postcolonial theory, with emphasis on concepts such as hybridity, cultural identity, subalternity, and resistance. Set in the Yoruba village of Ilujinle, the play stages a symbolic conflict between Baroka, who embodies traditional African leadership, and Lakunle, a Western-educated teacher who rejects indigenous customs as primitive. Sidi, the titular "jewel," becomes a contested figure, representing the struggle of postcolonial subjects, particularly women, for autonomy and identity within a culture disrupted by colonialism. Soyinka uses satire, indigenous performance elements, and cultural symbolism to critique the uncritical adoption of Western ideals and to valorize African traditions. The analysis showed how the rejection of bride price, the conflict over railway construction, and the characters' differing views on gender roles illustrate broader postcolonial concerns about cultural displacement, power dynamics, and identity formation. The study found that neither culture should dominate; rather, a nuanced integration of both is necessary, a position aligned with Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity. Soyinka's portrayal of cultural conflict, resistance to imperialism, and the search for identity reinforced the role of African literature in challenging colonial narratives and reconstructing authentic voices. It was concluded that *The Lion and the Jewel* is not merely a satire of modernity but a profound commentary on the complexities of cultural negotiation in postcolonial Africa.

**Keywords:** Cultural Identity, Hybridity, Resistance

## Introduction

Records abound that the intellectual foundation for postcolonial theory and criticism was first shaped by the Negritude movement, led by Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Frantz Fanon, whose ideas were later articulated in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). However, other evidence suggests that the colonial experience, when viewed from the perspective of the colonized, can be traced as far back as the Elizabethan era. Hence, scholars have critically examined issues of slavery, racial identity, and gender equity in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, interpreting them as reflections of early colonial encounters and social hierarchies. The twentieth century has nonetheless ushered in a new intellectual and artistic awakening aimed at dismantling the systems of oppression imposed on colonized nations. It is within this context that the present study undertakes a postcolonial reading of Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, offering an in-depth analysis of the text through the lens of postcolonial theory. It explores how Soyinka's characters confront and resist colonial ideologies, embodying struggles for autonomy, self-determination, and empowerment, thus reflecting the broader postcolonial quest for identity and liberation.

## Theoretical Review

Broadly, postcolonialism concerns itself with the experiences, consequences, and cultural expressions that arise from colonization. It encompasses literature produced by writers from Britain's former colonies in regions such as the Caribbean, Africa, and India. According to Lye (1998), postcolonial writers often use the English language to explore shared themes like the struggle for independence, migration, national identity, allegiance, and the complexities of cultural memory. Postcolonial theory, therefore, examines artistic works created by both colonized and colonizing nations, seeking to reposition African identity against Western-imposed belief systems. Historically, colonizers constructed distorted representations of the colonized, portraying them as inferior or lacking intellect, as reflected in Western works like Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Cary's *The African Witch* and *Mister Johnson*, and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Such depictions contributed to the intellectual and cultural degradation of Africa. In response, African writers like Chinua Achebe, through his seminal essay, *An Image*

of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, challenged these stereotypes, reclaiming African dignity and redefining their own narratives.

Postcolonial theory revolves around the interconnected ideas of otherness and resistance. Gaining prominence in the 1970s, it was largely shaped by Edward Said's influential work *Orientalism*, which argued that the West ("the Occident") constructed the East ("the Orient") through a process of "Othering" that relied on language and representation to enforce cultural and racial hierarchies. Othering served to position Africans and other colonized peoples as alien, primitive, and inferior, reinforcing Western dominance and legitimizing imperial control. Said (1995) contends that the relationship between the Occident and Orient is sustained through systems of power, hegemony, and ideological control that transcend mere geography, extending into political, academic, moral, and cultural spheres. For Said, Orientalism is not only a discourse of domination but also an enduring framework that distorts how the West perceives and interacts with non-Western societies. His critique exposes the persistence of Eurocentric worldviews and underscores the need for postcolonial voices to challenge and redefine the narratives that have historically marginalized them.

Another postcolonial practitioner, an Indian-born, Homi Bhabha, identifies what is called Hybridity in his book, *The Location of Culture* (1994). He derives his conceptual ideas from cultural and literary theories. He used the "Hybridity" to clarify the cultural differences between the colonised and the coloniser. To him, Hybridity means mixture which implies the positive consequences of having two or more forms for cultures coming together. The use of Hybridity was to completely reject the Western superiority and its hegemonic inclination. This means that, although he accepts the reality of the cultural identities and differences of the Western and African worlds, he do not allow a particular culture to override another. Homi Bhabha creates a synergy that negates the ironical notion marked by superiority and separation as previously noted in Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Lastly, an Indian critic, Spivak, in his essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" enumerates the issues of race, gender and class in the construction of the postcolonial literature and how this may necessarily be used to categorised individuals. The methodology employed for this study is a library-based activity. The research data is collected through a literature review of the theoretical framework and analysis of the primary text, *Lion and the Jewel* by Wole Soyinka.

Panwar's (2024) study meaningfully advances postcolonial scholarship by reaffirming literature's enduring role as a site of resistance, identity reconstruction, and cultural reclamation. Building upon foundational theories by Said, Bhabha, and Spivak, who interrogate Orientalism, hybridity, and subalternity. Panwar extends this intellectual lineage by illustrating how postcolonial texts serve as counter-narratives that critique imperial ideologies while reclaiming indigenous voices. Through her analysis of narrative strategies, symbolism, and linguistic reclamation, she demonstrates literature's capacity not merely to reflect colonized experiences but to actively participate in decolonization, emphasizing themes of displacement, hybridity, and the negotiation between Western and native traditions. Similarly, Vindya's (2024) research explores the intersections of gender and identity in postcolonial English novels from Africa, South Asia, and the Caribbean, showing how these narratives deconstruct colonial power while reconstructing selfhood within intersecting structures of race, class, and gender. Drawing on Fanon's insights into colonial trauma and Spivak's critique of the silencing of colonized women, Vindya foregrounds intersectionality as central to understanding postcolonial identity formation and resistance, reaffirming the genre's continued relevance in global gender and identity politics. Complementing these perspectives, Kwofie and Daniels (2023) provide a postcolonial reading of Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, interpreting the play as a metaphorical critique of imperialism that simultaneously celebrates African traditions and advocates cultural coexistence. Their analysis situates Soyinka's dramatic techniques, setting, characterization, and linguistic style, within broader postcolonial discourse, highlighting the tension between adaptation and resistance. However, the present study diverges from their interpretive scope by offering a more focused close reading of Soyinka's text through the lens of postcolonial resistance, centering on the characters' direct acts of defiance, assertions of autonomy, and expressions of indigenous agency, thereby deepening the understanding of literature as a transformative and resistive force in postcolonial identity formation.

### **Critical Analysis**

This section is devoted to the analysis of Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. It focuses on various ideological underpinnings of postcolonialism, such as the instruments of subversion and the reversal of imperialistic values; race, ethnicity, class, language, and cultural identity; the representation of colonialism

and its consequences; the role of the writer in resisting the European view of Africa and reconstructing the continent's image; and the interpretation of Othering, Hybridity, and Subalternity as integral parts of the drama text *The Lion and the Jewel* by Wole Soyinka.

Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* is set in a typical Yoruba village called Ilunjinle and revolves around four major characters who represent the dichotomy between European and African cultures. These characters, Sidi (the Jewel), Lakunle (a young teacher), Baroka (the Bale of the village), and his wife Sadiku, play important roles in presenting the issues of colonialism and its consequent effects on countries, particularly Nigeria.

The play reveals that Baroka, who is referred to as a "fox" by Lakunle, is the current village head of Ilunjinle. He is known for his self-centered interests and rejects the proposal for a railway to be built in the village. He marries many wives and considers it acceptable to do so since the traditions of the town permit it. Although he is impotent, he manages to prevent his wife from revealing this secret to anyone.

The first instrument of subversion in the play occurs when plans are made to construct a railway in the town. Baroka, who symbolizes the typical traditional village authority, finds a way to bribe the white surveyor who came to measure the land to be used. Many consider his actions selfish, as the railway could have brought prospects such as trade, travel, and tourism to modernize the town. Lakunle and Sidi condemn Baroka, accusing him of hindering their progress by preventing the construction of the railway:

**LAKUNLE:** His wiliness is known even in the larger towns. Did you never hear Of how he foiled the Public Works attempt To build the railway through Ilujinle.

**SADIKU:** Nobody knows the truth of that. It is all hearsay.

**SIDI:** I love hearsays. Lakunle, tell me all.

**LAKUNLE:** Did you not know it? Well sit down and listen. My father told me, before he died. And few men know of this trick -- oh he's a die-hard rogue Sworn against our progress... yes... it was...somewhere here The track should have been laid just along The outskirts. Well, the workers came, in fact It was prisoners who were brought to do The harder part... to break the jungle's back... (p. 23-24)

The construction of the railway may lead to the demoralization of the values and beliefs of the people living in Ilunjinle. Therefore, Baroka bribes the builders to move the railroad to another location, in order to safeguard traditional values and ensure their unabashed continuity. The introduction of the railway might expose Ilunjinle to external influences, potentially resulting in the erosion of their cultural practices. Baroka embodies the resistance of postcolonial society toward the acceptance of imperialistic values. The preservation of the village's traditions necessitates the rejection of Western ideas and concepts.

A closer examination of *The Lion and the Jewel* shows that the tenets of the postcolonial era are clearly identifiable in the text. Race and ethnicity, for example, are evident as characters represent different cultures and belief systems. It is widely accepted that culture represents the shared values, beliefs, symbols, and behaviors of a people. Culture guides decisions and actions and serves as a tool that unites people and facilitates effective communication. Moawad (2016:181) cites Madzingira (2001), who describes culture as the totality of human endeavors in a given time and place. Furthermore, culture encompasses a society's religion, habits, norms, and other practices.

Having established that culture is a tool for dignity and identity, it is evident that Wole Soyinka intentionally juxtaposes African and European cultures in the play. The conflict between traditional and Western values points to the ambivalence that distinguishes these cultures. Traditional poetry, music, and dance are used by Soyinka to emphasize the beauty of African customs in contrast to European ways, creating a powerful impression of cultural conflict. Lakunle, a young schoolteacher educated in Lagos at a British school, does not appreciate the traditions of the people of Ilunjinle. Although he desires to marry Sidi, his Western sensibilities often dominate his perspective. He views village life and customs as primitive and even instructs Sidi not to overexert herself:

**LAKUNLE:** No. I have told you not to carry loads On your head. But you are as stubborn As an illiterate goat. It is bad for the spine. And it shortens your neck, so that very soon. You will have no neck at all. Do you wish to look Squashed like my pupils' drawings? (p. 2)

**LAKUNLE:** You could wear something. Most modest women do. But you, no. You must run about naked in the streets. Does it not worry you the bad

names, The lewd jokes, the tongue-licking noises Which girls, uncovered like you, Draw after them?

**SIDI:** This is too much. Is it you, LAKUNLE, Telling me that I make myself common talk? When the whole world knows of the madman Of Ilunjinle, who calls himself a teacher! Is it SIDI who makes the men choke In their cups, or you, with your big loud words And no meaning? You and your ragged books Dragging your feet to every threshold And rushing them out again as curses Greet you instead of welcome. Is it Sidi They call a fool -- even the children -Or you with your fine airs and little sense!

**LAKUNLE:** For that, what is a jewel to pigs? If now I am misunderstood by you And your race of savages, I rise above taunts And remain unruffled. (p. 3)

As mentioned previously, Lakunle wishes to marry Sidi, yet he is unwilling to conform to the practices of Ilunjinle. His choice of expressions, such as “sit on the table,” “eat with knives, forks and breakable plates” (p. 8), underscores his desire for a wife grounded in Western lifestyles. Being educated, he is attracted to the idea of “walking side by side with her, arm in arm just like the Lagos couples,” “to have put on high-heeled shoes, red paint on her lips,” and “her hair stretched like a magazine photo” (p. 9). This highlights Lakunle as a representative of modernization, advocating a vision of marriage in which husband and wife are equal partners. In contrast, Baroka, Sidi, and Sadiku adhere to traditional values. Their understanding of gender roles, marriage, and social conduct differs markedly from Lakunle’s Westernized perspective, reflecting a functional and nostalgic attachment to cultural norms. From the standpoint of gender, Lakunle’s worldview promotes equality, seeking to free his wife from traditional burdens. Yet in Ilunjinle, gender roles remain rigid: women handle domestic duties, while men occupy positions of authority. Sidi herself acknowledges male supremacy within the traditional hierarchy: “If that is true, then I am more esteemed / Than Bale Baroka, The Lion of Ilunjinle / This means that I am greater than The Fox of the Undergrowth, The living god among men” (p. 11). This societal structure explains why Baroka, at sixty-two, has married numerous wives and maintained a host of concubines. His authoritative power, coupled with the status it confers, positions

him to claim Sidi as his latest “favourite,” thereby compelling her acceptance of his proposal.

The tension between tradition and modernity further manifests in Sidi’s insistence that Lakunle pay her bride price, a cultural requirement. Despite his affection for Sidi, Lakunle refuses, deeming the custom “a savage custom, barbaric, outdated, rejected, denounced, accursed, excommunicated, archaic, degrading, humiliating, unspeakable, redundant, retrogressive, remarkable, unpalatable” (p. 7). The extensive list of synonyms demonstrates his linguistic precision and underscores his educated perspective. Language, however, is not merely expressive; it signals social identity. Speech patterns reveal class, age, gender, and sometimes ethnicity. For instance, in Nigerian vernacular, the pronunciation of plosive /p/ as fricative /f/ (e.g., ‘people’ pronounced as /fi:fl/) marks regional identity. Similarly, Baroka’s greeting “Guru morin guru morin” instead of “Good morning” reinforces his embodiment of traditional values.

### **Self-identity and Control as Postcolonial Legacy**

Struggle for self-identity, autonomy, and control is central to postcolonial literature. In the play, Sidi navigates a dilemma between Lakunle, representing modernization, and Baroka, embodying tradition. Her pride in a photograph taken by an unknown Western man, featured in an international magazine, hints at a latent alignment with Western ideals. Yet Sidi is ultimately traditional: she refuses Lakunle’s help with her burdens, arguing that culturally, women are expected to carry their loads and might be mocked otherwise.

Sidi’s decision to marry Baroka can be read through multiple interpretive lenses, revealing tensions between agency, tradition, and modernity. On one hand, her choice appears to illustrate a form of hybridity, as theorized by Homi Bhabha. Hybridity involves the negotiation and blending of differing cultural logics to create a space that is neither entirely traditional nor fully modern. By consenting to marry Baroka, Sidi navigates between the strictures of Yoruba patriarchal norms and the emerging values of modernity represented by Lakunle. She exercises a subtle form of agency by negotiating the terms of her social identity within these frameworks, using her intelligence and charm to carve a position of influence even within an ostensibly constraining arrangement. In this sense, her marriage can be viewed as a strategic alignment that balances individual desire, societal expectation, and cultural continuity.

Yet, the hybridity reading is complicated by the deeply patriarchal context of Ilunjinle. Baroka's overt demonstration of power—symbolized by presenting Sidi with the stamp maker—asserts his dominance and underscores her constrained agency. Here, Sidi's decision risks being interpreted as a capitulation to patriarchal cunning. She is objectified as the village “jewel,” and her apparent choice is orchestrated by the male figures around her, particularly Baroka, who manipulates her admiration and curiosity. While Sidi may exert some degree of influence within this relationship, the structural imbalance remains undeniable: her ultimate compliance with Baroka's proposal can be seen as acquiescence to a system that privileges male authority under the guise of charm and benevolence.

The duality of Sidi's position highlights the broader postcolonial tension between preserving cultural identity and embracing social transformation. Lakunle represents a modernizing force that challenges tradition, emphasizing education and romantic ideals, whereas Baroka embodies continuity with indigenous structures and values. Sidi's decision thus becomes emblematic of the negotiation that postcolonial societies undergo, retaining essential cultural elements while adapting selectively to modern pressures. By marrying Baroka, Sidi does not entirely reject modernity; rather, she synthesizes elements of both worlds, suggesting that hybridity does not necessarily imply complete emancipation but a pragmatic accommodation to reality.

Sidi's choice shows the ambivalence inherent in female agency within patriarchal structures. While she navigates complex social expectations and personal desires, her autonomy is circumscribed by the ingenuity of male power and societal norms. Whether her decision is read as an act of resistance through hybrid negotiation or a surrender to patriarchal cunning depends largely on the interpretive emphasis: the former emphasizes her adaptive intelligence, the latter her structural vulnerability. In either reading, Sidi's character remains a poignant exploration of the intersection between gender, power, and cultural negotiation in postcolonial African literature. However, Baroka exemplifies Homi Bhabha's concept of Hybridity, merging traditional authority with subtle concessions to modern influence, illustrating the complex negotiation between continuity and change in postcolonial societies:

**BAROKA:** The old must flow into the new, Sidi, Not blind itself or stand foolishly Apart. A girl like you must inherit Miracles which age alone reveals. Is this not so?

**SIDI:** Everything you say, Bale, Seems wise to me. (p. 54)

In light of the above, Baroka rejects Western superiority and its hegemonic tendencies, demonstrating that the old and new generations must learn from each other. Similarly, Sidi returns the book of photographs to Lakunle, admitting that she had tried to destroy it but her fingers were too weak. This gesture signifies that no culture is inherently superior to another, reflecting the concept of Hybridity. In other words, we must acknowledge the reality of cultural identities and differences between the Western and African worlds, without allowing one to dominate the other. The message of the playwright, Wole Soyinka, is clear. That the characters ultimately do not embrace Lakunle's Westernized lifestyle in matters of love and marriage underscores Soyinka's affirmation of Yoruba culture as ethical, enduring, and deeply rooted. The play offers an alternative perspective to Western claims of superiority over Africans, celebrating the aesthetics, values, and wisdom embedded in African traditions. Its purpose is both to highlight the consequences of colonialism and to promote a respectful appreciation of indigenous culture.

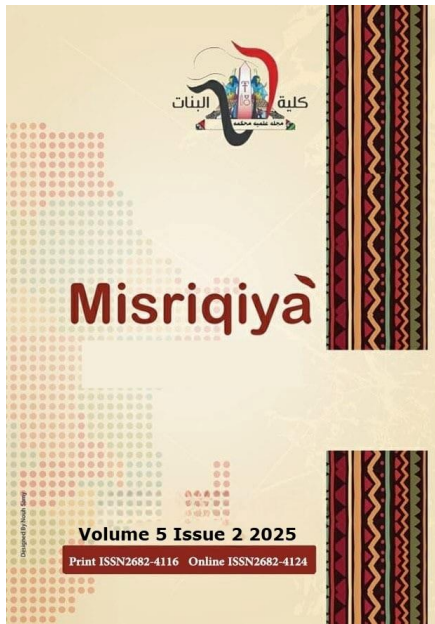
## Conclusion

*The Lion and the Jewel* by Wole Soyinka vividly portrays the clash of cultures between European and African values. Termed an amusing play, it employs satire to reveal the follies and idiosyncrasies of its characters, while offering keen insight into modern life. The work reflects Soyinka's profound understanding and reverence for Yoruba traditions, emphasizing that true progress or modernity need not entail abandoning one's roots. Rather, genuine growth arises from a careful negotiation between tradition and innovation, where cultural heritage informs contemporary life without being overshadowed. Through the interplay of characters and their choices, Soyinka underscores that African traditions are not obstacles but vital foundations for identity, dignity, and social cohesion. The play thus stands as a celebration of cultural authenticity, a critique of colonial influence, and a timeless reminder of the value of remaining connected to one's heritage while engaging with the broader world.

## References

- Achebe, Chinua. (2010). *An Image of Africa: The Trouble with Nigeria*. New York: Penguin.
- Achebe, Chinua. (1977). *An Image of Africa Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness*. Massachusetts Review. 18, <https://polonistyka.amu.edu>
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2007). *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Routledge.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (1989). *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge
- Barry, P. (1995). *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1990). *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Cary, Joyce. (1939). *Mister Johnson*. London: Michael Joseph.
- Fanon, Frantz, (1968). *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Kwofie, D., & Daniels, J. (2023). The Stage as a Canvas: A Postcolonial Analysis of Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and The Jewel*. *International Journal of Literature and Arts*, 11(4), 193–200. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijla.20231104.15>
- Lye, John. (1998). *Some Issues in Postcolonial Theory*. Canada: Brock University.
- Madzingira N (PhD) (2001). "Culture, Communication and Development in Africa", A Paper Prepared for the African Itinerant College for Culture and Development African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP), Institute of Development Studies University of Zimbabwe October.
- Moawad, Ibrahim. (2006). A Study of Wole Soyinka's play *The Lion and the Jewel* in the light of cultures in conflict. *International journal of English and Literature*.
- Morrissey, L. (2005). T.S. Eliot (1888–1965) "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *The Sacred Wood* (1919). In Morrissey, L. (eds) *Debating the Canon: A Reader from Addison to Nafisi*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

- Panwar, R. (2024). Voices of Resistance: Exploring Postcolonial Literature's Impact on Identity, Culture, and History. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)*, 12(8) 678-684. ISSN: 2320-2882. [www.ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2408073.pdf](http://www.ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2408073.pdf).
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon.
- Said, E. W. (1993). *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf.
- Said, Edward. (1995.). *Orientalism*. In Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (Eds.) *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, 87-91. London: Routledge.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. (1987). *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (Eds.). *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, 24-28. London: Routledge, Print.
- Vindya, K. (2024). Gender and Identity in Post-Colonial English Novels: A Comparative Study. *London Journal of Research in Humanities & Social Science*, 24(16), 5784-5792.



## Reclaiming the Self: Gender, Performance, and Resistance in Latifa al Zayyat's *The Open Door*

Rna Essam Hamza<sup>1</sup>, Nahla Saad Abdel Fattah Imam<sup>2</sup>,

Rania Reda Nasr<sup>1</sup>, Shaden Adel Nasser<sup>1</sup>

1. English Department, Faculty of Women, Ain Shams University, Egypt

2. Faculty of Human Studies, Al-Azhar University, Egypt

Corresponding author: [rna.essam@women.asu.edu.eg](mailto:rna.essam@women.asu.edu.eg)

DOI: 10.21608/MISJ.2025.403656.1071

Received: 14-7-2025

Accepted: 29-9-2025

Published: 30-10-2025

[https://misj.journals.ekb.eg/article\\_463117.html](https://misj.journals.ekb.eg/article_463117.html)

Citation: Hamza, R., Abdel Fattah Imam, N., Reda, R., & Nasser, S.

(2025). Reclaiming the Self: Gender, Performance, and Resistance

in Latifa al Zayyat's *The Open Door*. *Mişriqiya*, 5(2), 13-31. doi: 10.21608/misj.2025.403656.1071

## Abstract

This paper examines *The Open Door*, a 1960 novel by Egyptian writer Latifa al-Zayyat. It is a book that explores a middle-class girl's coming of age against the background of struggling with societal expectations, gender norms, and oppression. Al Zayyat, who was a forward-thinking writer, used her works to challenge patriarchal societies and give voice to the voiceless women. This is what continued to influence other Arab writers, while tackling the same feminine issue. Accordingly, through this bildungsroman, the paper traces Layla's journey toward self-actualization, highlighting her defiance of patriarchal structures, stereotyping, and marginalization. Through her resistance, Layla challenges restrictive social norms, ultimately asserting women's agency in the public sphere. Employing Judith Butler's concept of performativity, alongside with Josephine Donovan's *Images of Women* approach, the analysis reveals how Layla's experiences reflect the multifaceted oppression that women endure and their capacity for resistance, showing how her transformation challenges traditional depictions of women as passive and submissive, asserting the power of female self-determination.

**Keywords:** Latifa al Zayyat, *The Open Door*, patriarchy, gender and performance theory, female emancipation

## Introduction

Latifa Abdelsalam al Zayyat was born in Damietta on August 8, 1923, to an upper-middle-class family and died in 1996 at the age of 73. She is a well-known Egyptian activist, professor, and writer who wrote many literary works, including short stories and novels, such as *The Search: Personal Papers* (1996), *The Owner of the House* (1994), and *The Open Door* (1960). She earned her Bachelor's degree in 1946 and her Doctoral degree in 1957 from Cairo University. She is considered one of the pioneers of the novel in Egypt and the Arab world. Al Zayyat influenced the Arabic literature and authors both personally and professionally.

*The Open Door* by al Zayyat was translated into English by Marilyn Booth in 2000. It is perceived as "al-Zayyat's magnum opus"(Booth, 2017) and was awarded the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature in 1996. It is a semi-autobiographical novel that explores the underestimation of women in Egypt and portrays it as a patriarchal society, and introduces her as a feminist who intended to support women and empower them. Al Zayyat is a major example of the writers who presented the reality of women as powerful and active. This literary work was filmed in 1963 and was considered a distinguished story for self-realization, political, and sexual awakening. This novel was "strikingly modern for its time, not only in its depiction of the central character's political and sexual development, but also in its use of dialogue and colloquial language, a stylistic choice that is still considered politically, culturally, and religiously divisive"(Johnson-Davies,2006, p. 462). It follows a non-linear form of narration as it goes back and forth between the personal and the social and between different periods of time. It is a first-person narrative that helps the reader to be connected with the protagonist's thoughts and feelings. The author of the novel also used symbolism throughout her writing. For example, she symbolized Layla's relationship with her fiancé, Ramzi, as a fly drowning in a cup of tea to explain her struggle with him and her inability around him. This image further illustrates Layla's belief that she is a free spirit meant to fly, while her fiancé suppresses her to the point of paralysis (Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 268). Moreover, the title itself is a symbol for the protagonist's conflicts and her yearning for freedom. Oppressed, Layla symbolizes the occupied nation, and her freedom later on symbolizes the nation's liberation. Al Zayyat also portrayed a range of characters with diverse personalities, depicting both passive and active females. *The Open Door* tells the story of the protagonist Layla, her family and

friends, including her brother, Mahmoud, their aunt and cousins, as well as her friends, Adila and Sanaa; Husayn, Mahmoud's friend, and Layla's professor Ramzi.

## Literature Review

The once avant-garde novel, *The Open Door* introduces a number of considerable themes like gender, women's roles, power, morals, fundamentals, resistance, and revolution. It has consequently attracted significant scholarly attention. Previous studies of *The Open Door* discussed many aspects related to the protagonist's emancipation and relating it to the Egyptian political context. A study by Zamil, Nasser, and Hashem tackled the female protagonist from a post-colonial lens and focused on her psychological and moral growth from childhood to adulthood. Additionally, regarding the struggles Layla faced in her society as a woman, and how she managed to unite with her true self. However, the research did not fully explore how Layla's freedom mirrors Egypt's liberation. Khaled Afifi's focused on the cultural challenges Marilyn Booth faces while translating from Arabic to English. Here, the author raised a debate about whether Booth succeeded in conveying the relation between Layla's emancipation and Egypt's independence or not. Similarly, Viola Shafik examines the film adaptation of the novel, highlighting how the film downplays the role of female resistance and struggle in favor of focusing on the national struggle. Also published in 2011, two studies offering distinct criticisms of the novel are worth noting. The first, by Tahoun et al., aims to highlight the important role of women alongside men in freeing their nation, highlighting how al Zayyat portrayed women as active participants for a better future. She introduced Layla to the readers as a strong Egyptian woman who struggled to free her nation and emancipate herself. The second study, a comparative study with Daneshvar's Suvashun, demonstrates to what extent Layla's character mirrors al Zayyat's own character. Faten Morsy showed that Layla suffered from oppression as an Egyptian girl in her society and how nationalism was a huge part of her life, but the main focus of the research was university. Morsy wanted to explore a certain point or phase in the protagonist's life in which she believed that university was the space for her to be free and be heard. However, it turned out to be a jail-like place because of her professor, Ramzi. All the above research dealt with *The Open Door* novel from different perspectives, yet this paper attempts to show the marginalization, stereotyping,

oppression and the degradation of women, their role in the society, and how the protagonist overcame them and reached self-actualization. Latifa al Zayyat was pioneering and ahead of her time, addressing all of these struggles.

During the 1960s, Egyptian women faced many struggles, including the responsibilities forced upon them domestically and the call to contribute to the national struggle. In Egyptian society, women suffered from hardships as compared to their male counterparts. They were treated unequally, stereotyped as weak, emotive, brainless, and passive. Men always underestimated and expected submissiveness from them. Those who did not obey the rules and followed the society's fundamentals agonized: "If she were to show the slightest rebelliousness or excitability, her mother would scold her by the hour. Her father would yank her from bed to deliver a lesson in morals"(Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 31). They were expected to be good wives, mothers, and daughters, besides being active in the liberation movements. They were given controlled employment and educational opportunities. That is to say, they were given the right to work and be educated, but expected the same level of obedience and focus on their home and family. They were confined by social traditions and expectations. That is how they interlinked the fight for independence for themselves and their nation, and this is what, in fact, fueled the feminist movement. Accordingly, the publication of *The Open Door* was a literary landmark of unquestionable importance for self-expression in Egyptian society, paralleling national liberation with women's emancipation. It also crystallizes the essential role of women in society.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Guided by Josephine Donovan's "Images of Women", bell hooks' insistent call to end all forms of interlocking oppression, and Judith Butler's concept of performativity, this paper offers a multifaceted analysis of the patriarchal structures, forms of oppression, and the subversion of gender norms depicted in the novel. Both Josephine Donovan, and Judith Butler addressed the female struggle, though they approached it from different angles. Donovan, from a literary feminist theory and social perspective, showed how women suffered from men's control in patriarchal societies and that they were given limited opportunities. She rejected the stereotypes of women and emphasized the importance of their role in society. In contrast, Butler adopted a gender theory from a performative perspective. In other words, she wanted to prove that the way women act is something forced upon

them, and they subconsciously follow. She reinforced challenging these repetitive acts to reach freedom and equality.

Josephine Donovan (1941- ), an American scholar of comparative literature and a professor of English, considered feminist criticism as moral criticism; she stated: "Feminist criticism is moral because it sees that one of the central problems of Western literature is that in much of it women are not human beings, seats of consciousness. They are objects, who are not to facilitate, explain away, or redeem the projects of men" (Donovan, 1989, p. 267). She concentrated on the 'images of women' approach and how men perceived women in literature. They stereotyped them and considered them as creatures who exist only to serve the interests of men. Donovan rejected these stereotypes and challenged those views that uphold women as Others. Furthermore, by adopting the 'images of women' approach Donovan exposed how alienating literature can be for the female reader, considering women as others and defining them just as related to how they serve the interests of men. Women who serve any male figure were categorized as good women (good-woman stereotypes), and those who refuse to do so were categorized as bad or evil women. They were portrayed as old maids, career women, witches, and even lesbians. Similarly, Cynthia Griffin Wolff (1972), argues in her article on women stereotypes that: "...the relationship between women and men is treated as if it were the only meaningful relationship that a woman has; thus her relationships with other women, with children, and with society in general are significantly diminished" (p. 207). Furthermore, women were often portrayed as merely emotional creatures who cannot think or create.

To understand the mechanism of emancipation, we turn to the work of bell hooks and Judith Butler. bell hooks, pseudonym of Gloria Jean Watkins (1952-2021), is an American scholar who argued that it is not only about equality between women and men but also about ending all forms of oppression (hooks, 1984, p. 31). She believes that feminism should encompass all people who are exploited, discriminated against, and/or oppressed. hooks in her book *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* stated that Feminism started off as a movement to end sexist oppression, but it would be better defined as "the movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (p. viii). This definition maintains that the movement is not about being "anti-male". It makes clear "that the problem is sexism, and that clarity helps us remember that all of us, female and male, have

been socialized from birth on to accept sexist thought and action" (p. viii). Feminism joins a larger fight against all "systems of domination," including those that influence males, if it is defined as a fight against sexist oppression.

This phenomenon of being reduced to an object or a stereotype is precisely what Layla experiences. Layla was oppressed through being marginalized, stereotyped and silenced. Her oppression is a testament to the condition bell hooks describes in *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*. hooks (1984) argues that, "To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body" (Preface). Women used to be marginalized and deprived of their rights as human beings. Men considered them as owning no importance. They were women who, in Friedan's (2013) words, were "told by the most advanced thinkers of our time to go back and live their lives as if they were Noras, restricted to the doll's house by Victorian prejudices" ("The Sexual Solipsism of Sigmund Freud"). Marginalized women do not have the freedom to choose. They are oppressed and subjugated unable to speak, to write and to work.

That is why feminist critics like Josephine Donovan, bell hooks, and Judith Butler worked to give voice to the voiceless. They challenged the enforced gender norms that oppress, marginalize, and restrict women in the domestic spheres. Thus, feminist criticism was established as a major field of literary studies to argue these norms and reflect the political goals of feminism. Consequently, women were not only suppressed within their homes or through literature, but they were also violated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by scientists who wanted to prove that women have inferior distinctions that cannot be changed and that is inherent. This paper proves the strength of women and their importance in society.

## **Gender and Performance Theory**

Judith Pamela Butler (1956- ), an American feminist philosopher and a theorist of power, sexuality, and identity, considers that sex is nature and gender is culture. Butler sees that gender is not determined by being male or female but by acquired behavior, a performance that is socially shared, historically constituted, and performative. In other words, gender is not what we are but what we do through a continuous, "stylized repetition of acts through time" (Butler, 1988, p.520). She coined the term "gender performativity" in her book *Gender Trouble* in 1990, stating that gender is an act that is performed, "broadly construed" (Butler, "1988, p.528). In this framework, gender is a set of forced images upon the

two sexes. Butler argues that women, in particular, have been historically prevented from shaping their own identities. The solution, she suggests, is to redefine gender by revealing the hidden mechanisms of the social structure (Singh, 2022). Butler believes that social performances must be repeated for human life to function as ritual social drama. However, Butler's main concern is the experience of women; she emphasizes the idea of the diverse and different experiences of women rather than their common femaleness. Building on thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir (1973)—who argued “one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one” (p. 301)—and anthropologist Victor Turner's concept of social drama, Butler sees gender as a ritualistic performance that must be constantly repeated to maintain its illusion of naturalness. While her main concern is the experience of women, she emphasizes their varied experiences rather than showing common aims.

## **The Oppressive Societal Structures**

### **Patriarchy**

The first part of the analysis deals with the oppressive societal structure and the different forms of oppression that Layla struggled with, whilst the second part tackles the overcoming of oppression and Layla's journey towards self-fulfillment. Patriarchy is a systemic oppression, as theorized by Donovan and hooks, that is vividly dramatized in the life of Layla, from early girlhood to the point when she became a mature woman. She lived under a patriarchy, a type of society in which men are viewed as superior and having more value than women, which is evident in how she was treated as an inferior thing compared to her brother Mahmoud, whose father used to look at as a miracle (Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 27). Here lies the importance of a feminist worldview; it will help men and women break free from patriarchal ideas and behaviors, ultimately creating a truly human world devoid of hierarchy and dominance (Lerner, 1986, p. 229). This parallels the concept of ending all forms of oppression, as noted by hooks. She did not focus on the equality between women and men, but on creating a world free from injustice towards both.

*The Open Door* represents Egyptian society and its core beliefs that women are less important than men; however, it proves by its end that they possess innate power that helps them overcome oppression. This is how al Zayyat decided to join the debate: "Female writing is not simply a passive reflection of patriarchy; women do not assume the image created by men" (Al Zayyat, 1994a, p. 184). In addition,

Layla was surrounded by social limitations because she is a female. Sometimes, she forced herself to act in a certain way in front of her father, "She worked her mouth into a polite smile"(Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 13). Her father, as a male figure, had the upper hand and gave himself the right to subject her to physical and psychological violence. She did not have the free will to speak or to explain herself or her feelings. She is afraid of her father, Sulayman Effendi, who considered her a weak and helpless girl, says, "Lord, give me strength! She's just a helpless girl"(Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 21). When her father saw her demonstrating with other females, he violated her physically "he brings out the slipper concealed behind his back. He tried to throw her to the floor, but her mother slipped between them"(Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 49). After this, Layla locked herself in her room, refrained from eating or drinking, and she suddenly remembered something that her family thought of as a joke, but according to Layla she remained psychologically bullied:

Layla isn't really our daughter. We found her at the entrance to the mosque. Look, Mahmud, even our skin—you and I are light, and so is Mama, but Layla—only Layla has such dark skin." She had stared at her mother, who had laughed. "We found her in a little bundle, poor miserable thing," her mother had chuckled. "Let's raise her, we said, and get our reward in heaven. (Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 51)

The above quotation also shows that stereotypical images of women are pervasive, demonstrating that even within Egyptian society, light-skinned women were more privileged than dark-skinned women. This incident illustrates a colorist hierarchy where dark-skinned women were stereotyped as less beautiful and desirable.

While her father's abuse was overtly physical, Layla also underwent psychological abuse because of her fiancé, Ramzi, to an extent that she felt occupied, not engaged to him: "Layla spread her fingers, staring astonished at her engagement ring, as if she had forgotten that it occupied her hand"(Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 353). He constantly demeaned her and described her as a child. He is a major example for those who believed that females belong to a certain sphere: "When will we grow up? Outgrow these childish ideas? When will we understand that everyone has his own sphere?"(Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 248). Ramzi, like her father, always focused on folding Layla's eyes to underestimate her and to suppress her desire to gain self-awareness. Reflecting on Butler's gender and performance

theory, Ramzi is an example of her concept of performativity. He consistently acts like a patriarch who controls and dominates Layla, just as a series of repeated acts that his society implanted in his mind. Patriarchy means control and Ramzi intended to marry Layla because he believed that she was obedient and submissive so that he could control her. When she asked him if he wanted to marry her because her personality worked with his, she waited for a certain answer. She wanted him to say that he loves her. But instead, he said: "Of course. Because you are compliant and quiet, and you listen to me, and you do what I say." (Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 268). Ramzi, as an oppressor in a patriarchal society, just wanted to maintain authority, thereby mirroring the broader Egyptian society at that time.

### **Stereotyping**

Different forms of oppression intersect to oppress the female characters in the novel. They were oppressed by men just for being women, by the society, its restrictions and expectations, and by the roles imposed upon them as women and housewives. Women were not even respected, and they were stereotyped by their exaggerated reactions. For example, when Mahmoud got shot, his mother felt worried, although the father assured her that "the doctor said it was a simple wound, no more than a scratch" (Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 6). This incident directly engages with Josephine Donovan's feminist project by challenging the stereotypical image of the "hysterical" or irrational woman. Through Layla's journey, al Zayyat systematically works to break down these false images, employing her protagonist not just to fight but to uproot such patriarchal stereotypes.

Layla always felt under pressure because of what people would say about her actions. Her mother, Saniya, gave high importance to the people around her and to what society would think and say about her daughter. She could be described as the "guarantor of a desired social order" (Lawler, 2000, p. 56). She believed that rejecting the morals and traditions is something "improper" and "inappropriate," she told her daughter: "There's something dear, called the fundamentals----the rules, the right way to behave" (Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 23). Saniya's beliefs correspond to the concept of good women stereotypes by Josephine Donovan who fought the patriarchal concept that men are "Selves" and women are "Others" or shadow of the self as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) described (p. 24). She believed that according to the male dominated societies, women who agreed to suppression were appraised as good and those who fought against it were deemed as bad. Layla's

mother is considered a great example, highlighting the good woman stereotype. She was a passive housewife who obeyed her husband's orders without thinking, as she believed he is wiser and more intelligent than her ." For Sulayman Effendi was smarter and wiser, Saniya thought in relief, more able to resolve such a situation, the like of which her family had never witnessed"(Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 96).

Women were presumed to be housewives even if they were given the chance to be educated. Marriage was viewed as their priority. This pressure is vividly portrayed in Layla's internal monologue about marriage, where, while acknowledging her own fears, she stated:

Marry whom? Any old person; after all, "the only thing that can shame a man is his pocket." So she'd put on that white veil, and she would move to the husband's residence, "because that's the way the world works." And everything was just so easy and straightforward and understood by all. But . . . but she would have to be very careful indeed. She must not have feelings or emotions; she must not use her mind, or fall in love. Or else—or else they would kill her, as they had killed Safaa. (Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 39)

This oppressive system is further clarified in a conversation between Layla and her cousin Isam: "You mean, Gamila won't go to university?" asked Layla. Isam smiled. "And you will" "Why wouldn't I go?" "What use would it be? Every girl's future is marriage"(Al Zayyat, 2017, p.80). This echoes what Donovan challenged, the concept of the 'good women stereotypes' that limits women's place to their home and their importance to fulfilling the needs of men. Women were seen as future wives not doctors, teachers or engineers. Those who want to have career or participate in the public life were placed in the 'bad women' stereotypes category and this is what Donovan criticized in the patriarchal societies. Stereotyping women is evident in the novel through another conversation between Isam and Layla. He said: "I'm sick of this. I want to love a regular girl, who thinks like girls think, and feels like they do. I'm sick of you, and of your philosophizing, and your moods." (Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 119). He reduced Layla or women in general to a fixed set of thoughts and qualities. He imprisoned them within specific gender roles that avoids any critical thinking.

In direct opposition to this prescribed fate, Layla emerges as an active character who believes that she is an educated person who is not supposed to surrender, arguing, "Even animals choose their mates!" (Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 75). Al

Zayyat also strategically represents weak female characters like Adila, Layla's friend, and Gamila, her cousin, who conform to the rules forced on them. They serve as foils to Layla because they obeyed the social constraints without fighting for change: "You've been back-and-forthing about things that are already decided for us anyway"(Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 77). Adila is a passive woman who believes in the traditional way of getting married and her priority is to find a husband and be a good wife for him. In addition to her, there is Gamila. She is not as weak as Adila but she is tied to the fundamentals of her society that believes a woman just has to get married to a rich husband and that is what she, in fact, did. They adopted what Butler referred to as the repetitive acts that their society forced them to follow.

### **Marginalization**

Upon reaching adulthood, her parents banned her from going out alone. Her father said: "Layla, you must realize that you have grown up. From now on, you are absolutely not to go out by yourself. No visits. Straight home from school" (Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 22) as if it is a sin that she grew up. They did not await an answer from her, they expected submissiveness. "Layla said nothing. No one expected any word from her"(Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 22). Layla's father agreed to her engagement to Ramzi without asking for her opinion "Congratulations, Layla! We read the sacred Fatiha together---the word of God in the sight of God."(Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 250). Equivalent to bell hooks' (1984) definition of oppression as a lack of choices (p. 5), Layla was oppressed as she did not have an opportunity to choose whether to accept or reject their decision. Layla also struggled to feel accepted from both her family and society and her struggle with her mother's never-ending role kept her feeling disempowered. Being the shadow is being marginalized and kept away from the public sphere of life. In this regard, Jane Freedman (2001) further explained women's exclusion and oppression:

Women were judged to be less reasonable than men, more ruled by emotion, and thus incapable of political decision-making, for example. These types of assertions by philosophers and political theorists were supported by anatomists and biologists who, as scientific knowledge of the human body advanced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, began to use data such as measurements of brain size to establish a difference in intelligence between men and women. (p. 12)

So, this illustrates how women's abilities were denied to validate their exclusion from public domain. As observed above, the issue of women's feelings was not given proper consideration. Thus, having patriarchy, gender oppression, stereotyping, and marginalization as major themes, al Zayyat portrayed women's struggles as paving the way for them to find their identity and to establish their individuality. So, Layla never gave up on demonstrations and fighting for liberation, as if she were fighting for her own freedom, not only her nation's.

It was through this very struggle that Layla became aware of her strength and abilities. This reflects Butler's main concern about the importance of women to be aware that they matter and why they matter in order to shape their own experiences, so that they can reach their own self.

### **Overcoming Oppression and Discovering the True Self**

Layla started her journey to find her true self through overcoming the oppression she suffered from. She did not just undergo external conflicts like those with her father and fiancé, but also internal conflicts with herself. She succeeded through her determination, mind and strength and with the help of her friends and her lover Husayn liberate herself. Once Layla realized that she is following certain gender roles forced upon her, she exerted her utmost effort to fight them and challenged the stereotypical images and roles assigned to her under the name of fundamentals. Oppressing and stereotyping women forced them to act upon a certain frame of dogmatic rules under the name of fundamentals and societal traditions, and this is how females become women. According to Judith Butler, gender is performative in this way, as it is something socially constructed. As observed from the novel, Sanyia, Layla's mother, performed according to the socially constructed identity of a woman so she became a good example for the image of woman who is passive and submissive. She always tried to shape her daughter as she believed all females should be "obedient participants in the hierarchy, transmitting values of the dominant culture and perpetuat[ing] hierarchical societal arrangements" (Trebilcot, 1983, p. 1). On the contrary, Layla, who fought following these performative acts, she succeeded in freeing herself and reaching self-realization by the end of the novel because "Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" (Butler, 1990, p. 27).

Layla tried to overcome oppression and the rules that her family forced her to act upon "the *usul* is a recurrent idea that underlines the narrative and becomes a key target in Layla's fight against middle-class morality. Rules of propriety are the instruments of Layla's oppression and the target of her rebellion" (Elsadda, 2012, p. 102-03). Layla started questioning what is right and what is wrong, and this is when she realized that she needs to think and find out for herself "What's right? What's wrong? I don't know whom to believe. Or whom not to believe. Or what to believe, or what not to believe. What should I believe? Who's right?" (Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 54). By doing so, the protagonist is addressing what Butler identified as a problem that females did not have the opportunity to experience and shape their own personalities. Through following the drawn path of masculine-oriented societies, females become women. One of the things that empowered her was her friend Sanaa. Sanaa is more like Layla, a strong female who believes that they should marry out of love and that each one of them has her own ideas and personality:

The whole mentality has changed," said Sanaa. "There's no doubt about that. For our mothers, marriage was a fate written on their foreheads from the day they were born. No one could change it in the slightest or escape it. You had to accept it as it was. For us the situation is so different, because the harem mentality has changed. Today's girl doesn't accept what her mother took as a given. (Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 76)

She is a good example of a newer perspective of feminism and females who started to apprehend the world around them and act according to their own mindset. Sanaa also opposed Layla's marriage from Ramzi and described the female who would marry him as: "Whoever marries him will be put in the deep freeze and locked up" (Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 269). She never stopped supporting her friend, and she clearly symbolizes women solidarity in the novel. bell hooks believed that women's bonding and sisterhood is like a path that helps females to overcome oppression and to be empowered. As an example of female empowerment in the novel and having it as one of the novel themes, the reader finds how Sanaa helped Layla in her emancipation process. Her teacher, for example, was her role model. She wished to be like her not like her mother: "To grow older. To become like her mother. No! To become like . . . like the history supervisor who helped their teachers, the woman with the broad, pale forehead, who held her head so erect," (Al

Zayyat, 2017, p. 20) her teacher's strong personality pushed her to fight silence and passivity. Nevertheless, there were male characters that served as a catalyst for Layla's transformation, for example, Husayn. He empowered and opened her eyes to the fact that she needed to find her authentic self. He believed that she needed someone to awaken her: "You need someone to shake you hard until you wake up" (Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 178). In fact, he decided to be this person. "To reach the shore," Husayn said with deliberation, "we have to face the waves and the open ocean." "You'll find what it is that you've lost, you'll find yourself, you'll find the true Layla"(Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 188-89). Husayn is an example for hooks' concept that feminism is not here to eliminate men but rather to establish a life devoid of oppression for women and men. Unlike Isam, Layla's cousin who was a coward and a lustful person who followed the society's fundamentals and Ramzi, her fiancé who belittled, marginalized and oppressed her "his very presence oppressive, constricting every breathe she took"(Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 227), and her father whom she used to fear and struggle with, Husayn was someone who forced Layla to confront her fears, limits and internal dilemma and helped her to reach her own genuine self. He encouraged her to open the door for her feelings and thoughts. "She saw herself walking steadily to a closed door and giving it a push"(Al Zayyat, 2017, p.217). This mirrors Donovan and Butler's concept about the importance of women's personal experiences. They asserted that women have to know their worth in order to be able to overcome their subjugated life. Once Layla understood her emotions and needs, she had the power to overcome her struggles and strive for change.

However, it was challenging to reach her true identity. Layla underwent internal conflicts and faced a lot of struggles. At a certain time, Layla felt defeated, and she doubted her journey. She felt that maybe Gamila, her cousin is right: "She had listened to her mother and she had followed sanctioned practice. She had followed those fundamentals and therefore life had been good to her. Life had offered its bounty, its contentment, its security" (Al Zayyat, 2017, p.155). Layla, desired freedom, but she had to face the passivity of her mother, which disempowered her, the oppressive father, the cowardly cousin, the narcissist fiancé, and all of the societal expectations and gender roles. Isam was not just Layla's cousin; he is one of the male characters with whom Layla struggled. As Donovan states about the stereotypical images of women, he used to treat her as a thing that

he owns, and he resorted to violence and aggression towards her when they quarreled: "You belong to me! You're mine! My property! Understand?" (Al Zayyat, 2017, p.133). She thought at first that he loved her, but then she discovered that he had an affair with his servant. He cheated on Layla, and he did not have the courage to announce their love to their families. Isam even sexually exploited both Layla and the servant, Sayyida. This is one of the main issues that hooks(2000) wanted to end: the sexist exploitation that women face in their societies. She believed that feminism is a movement to end it (p. viii).

Layla got engaged to Dr Ramzi, who was her former professor at college. He never let Layla express her mind without disdaining her: "DR. RAMZI'S CAMPAIGN TO DISTRESS Layla continued in class and outside the lecture hall as well. He pressed so hard that, alone with her friends, she would cry out in desperation, "What does that man want from me?" (Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 227). He humiliated and mocked her believing that she is just a woman whose place is her home and that she does not have to work her mind: "You're philosophizing, but philosophy isn't a pot of stew on the stove, Miss." "Do you know what it is you need? You need brakes—brakes on your imagination"(Al Zayyat, 2017, p. 228). He dismisses her thoughts and feelings because he is afraid of her. As an Egyptian man, he cannot stand facing a woman whom he feels as intellectually aware and voiced. Ultimately, Layla went to Port Said to work as a teacher. Against her fiancé's will she went there, and this increased her confidence, and she started to actually be politically active. She challenged her performative identity and all of the imposed restrictions put on her by leaving her family and her fiancé to start her journey of awareness and finally reach independence and freedom. Layla's journey of self-realization is connected with her determination and resistance against the restrictions forced upon her as a woman in the 20th-century Egyptian society. Her determination helped her to overcome her father's control, to refuse her domestic role in society, and to seek education by which she became able to speak her mind in school and college and also to reject the relationships that failed to correspond with her personal growth. Layla joined the nationalist movement through which she proved her active role in society and in her nation's liberation struggle not just hers. In this way Layla gained her freedom and discovered herself.

To conclude, the paper has explored a multilayered analysis of the patriarchal structures, systemic marginalization, and subverted gender norms by

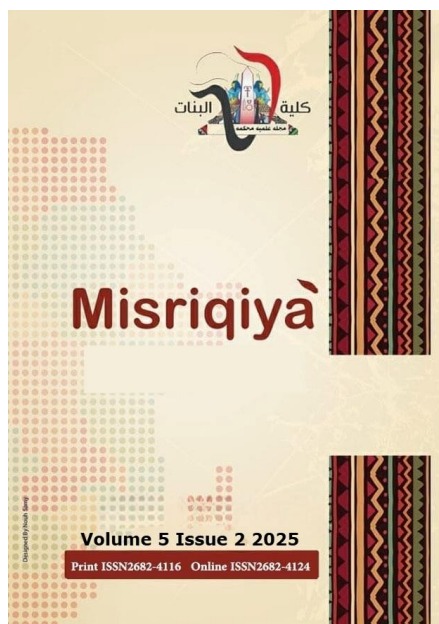
employing Josephine Donovan's images of women approach, bell hooks' concept of oppression, and Judith Butler's gender and performance theory. Layla's journey towards self-realization and awareness obliged her to oppose her family, who marginalized her, her fiancé, who belittled her, and her society, together with the unstable political life at that time, which Layla was part of. Layla also went through internal conflicts as well as external conflicts that helped her to shape her identity. By doing so, Layla deconstructed the performative identity that was imposed over her and she proved the falsity of the stereotypical images of women in her society. Through Layla's journey, al Zayyat challenged the traditional notions of womanhood and got over all patterns of injustices from which women suffered. Moreover, al Zayyat succeeded in intervening in the debate, empowering and voicing women and presenting herself as one of the main writers who wisely represented the reality of women as strong and assertive through her prominent novel.

## References

- Abbas, M. M. (2011). Out of place: Re-claiming the self in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Latifa Al-Zayyat's *The Open Door* (Master's thesis, The American University in Cairo). AUC Knowledge Fountain. <https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/914>
- Afifi, K. (2019). The problem of cultural identity in translating Latifa al-Zayyat's *The Open Door*. *Arab World English Journal for Translation & Literary Studies*, 3(1), 70–85. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol3no1.6>
- Al-Zayyat, L. (2017). *The Open Door* (M. Booth, Trans.). Hoopoe.
- Al-Zayyat, L. (1994). On political commitment and feminist writing. In F. J. Ghazoul & B. Harlow (Eds.), *The View from Within: Writers and Critics on Contemporary Arabic Literature* (p. 184). The American University in Cairo Press.
- Al-Zayyat, L. (1994). *The House Owner*. Dar Al-Hilal.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre Journal*, 40(4), 519–531. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>
- de Beauvoir, S. (1973). *The Second Sex* (E. M. Parshley, Trans.). Vintage. (Original work published [see original publication date if you want it included])
- Donovan, J. (1989). Beyond the net: Feminist criticism as a moral criticism. In K. M. Newton (Ed.), *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader*. Macmillan Education Ltd.
- Elsadda, H. (2012). *Gender, nation, and the Arabic novel*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Freedman, J. (2001). *Feminism*. Open University Press.
- Friedan, B. (2013). *The feminine mystique*. W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1963)

- hooks, b. (2000). *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. Pluto Press.
- hooks, b. (1984). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. South End Press.
- Johnson-Davies, D. (2006). *The Anchor Book of Modern Arabic Fiction*. Anchor Books.
- Lawler, S. (2000). *Mothering the Self: Mothers, Daughters, Subjects*. Routledge.
- Lerner, G. (1986). *The Creation of Patriarchy*. Oxford University Press.
- Moore, S. (2011, January 15). All this polite and smiley feminism is getting us nowhere. *The Guardian*.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/jan/15/suzanne-moore-time-to-get-angry>
- Morsy, F. (2009). The university in *The Open Door* and Atyaf. *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, (29), 139–152.
- Sajjadi, M., & Sajjadi, S. Y. (2020). A comparative study of the objectification in female characters in two novels by Simin Daneshvar and Michel Butor. *Comparative Literature Research*, 8(1), 88–109.
- Shafik, V. (2017). Women and national melodrama in Egyptian cinema: *The Open Door* (1963). *Feminist Media Histories*, 3(3), 33–56.  
<https://doi.org/10.1525/fmh.2017.3.3.33>
- Singh, M. (2022). Judith Butler's theory of performativity. *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, 3(Aug.), 1981–1984.  
<https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.2022>
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp. 271–313). Macmillan.
- Tahoun, M., et al. (2011). The image of the Egyptian girl in Latifa al-Zayyat's *The Open Door*. *Journal of the Faculty of Arts, Ain Shams University*, 39(1), 201–224.
- Trebilcot, J. (Ed.). (1983). *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Rowman & Allenheld.

- Wolff, C. G. (1972). A mirror for men: Stereotypes of women in literature. *The Massachusetts Review*, 13(1/2), 205–218.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25088222>
- Zamil, A., Naser, K., & Hashem, H. (2022). The ugly bildungsromans: A feminist study of Latifa al-Zayyat's *The Open Door* and Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 12(6), 1129–1135.



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

Sara Alaa Mohamed, Wafaa Abd al-Faheem Batran  
Wahba, Rania Galal Hamed

English Department, Faculty of Women, Ain Shams  
University, Egypt

Corresponding author: [sarah.alaa@women.asu.edu.eg](mailto:sarah.alaa@women.asu.edu.eg)

DOI: 10.21608/MISJ.2025.399375.1069

Received: 2-7-2025

Accepted: 1-9-2025

Published: 30-10-2025

[https://misj.journals.ekb.eg/article\\_450609.html](https://misj.journals.ekb.eg/article_450609.html)

Citation: Mohammed, S., Batran, W., & Hamed, R. (2025). A Minimalist Analysis of Tense Carriers in the Syntax of Standard Arabic. *Misriqiya*, 5(2), 32-70. doi: 10.21608/misj.2025.399375.1069

### 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 *ʔan*

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 <sup>1</sup>(*ʔinna wa akhwatuha*). These particles—*ʔinna* “indeed”, *ʔanna* “that”, *lākinna* “but”, *kā’anna* “as if”, *layta* “if only”, and *la’alla* “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*

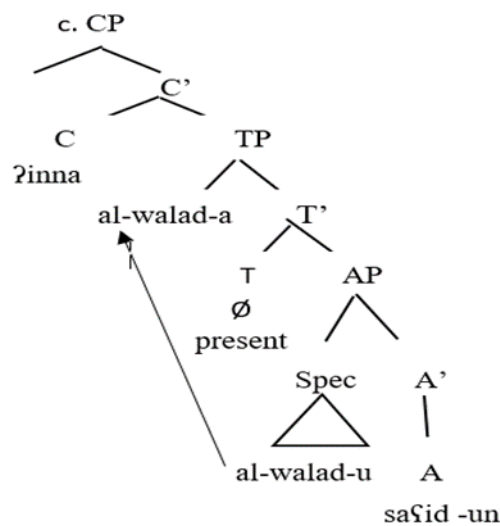
In Standard Arabic (SA), the complementizer *ʔinna* serves multiple functions: it only introduces main/matrix clauses with a subject-predicate word order, adds emphasis, and assigns the accusative case to the immediately c-commanded subject within the clause it precedes. Additionally, *ʔinna* is associated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

<sup>1</sup> 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<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>2</sup> 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*.

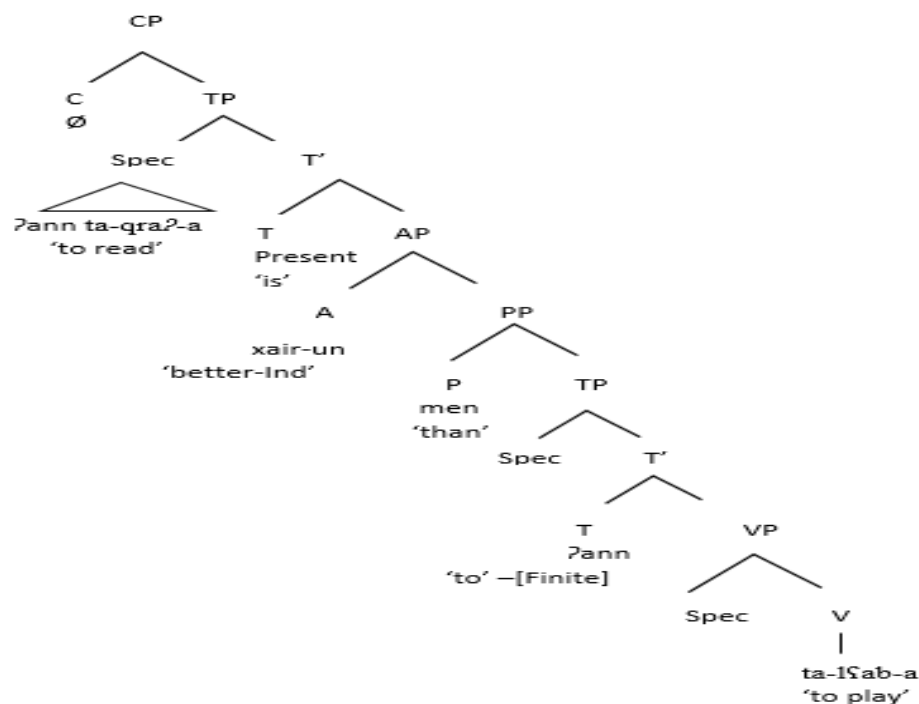
The particle *ʔann* functions as an infinitive marker, equivalent to the English "infinitive to". It introduces non-finite clauses and marks the immediately following

verb in the subjunctive mood<sup>3</sup>. *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

<sup>3</sup> 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 Alfīyyat 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 licensors; 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

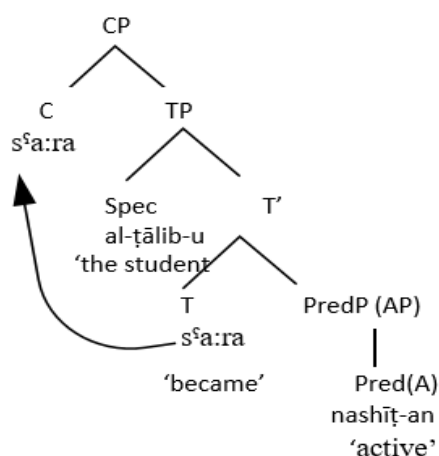
The first group forms the unmarked linking verbs (*kana* and its seven sisters). It includes verbs such as *kāna* "to be", *ʔasʕbaḥa* "to become, in the morning", *ʔaḍḥā* "to become, in the afternoon", *ẓalla* "to remain or be, during the day", *ʔamsā* "to become, in the evening", *bāta* "to become, during the night", *sʕa: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                      sʕa:ra                      nashīṭ-an  
 the-student-Nom    become-Perf-3ms    active-ACC  
*'The student became active.'*
- (4b) sʕa: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      moktaʔib-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                      moktaʔib-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, *sʿa: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 *sʿa: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              muṣallim-un  
      the-man- Nom          teacher-NOM  
      ‘The man is a teacher.’

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

(5c) al-ragul-u              kāna                      muṣallim-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, *muḥallim-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.’

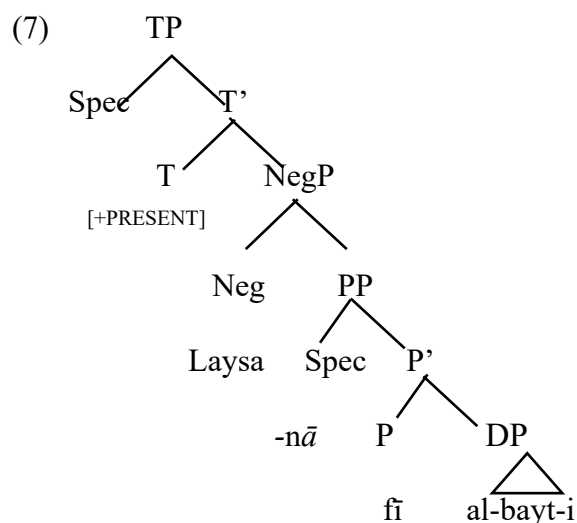
(6b) \**kāna* al-walad-u *laysa* marīḍ-an

‘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  $\phi$ -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  $\phi$ -features through an Agree relation. The structure below illustrates this derivation:



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 marīḏ-an*  
 NEG.PST be.3MSG-JUSS the-boy.NOM ill.ACC  
 ‘The boy was not ill.’

(8b) al-walad-u **lam** **yakən** marīḏ-an  
 the-boy.NOM NEG.PST be.3MSG-JUSS ill.ACC

*'The boy was not ill.'*

(8c) al-walad-u **lan** **yakūn-a** marīḏ-an  
 the-boy.NOM NEG.FUT be.3MSG-SBJV ill.ACC

*'The boy will not be ill.'*

(8d) \***lam** al-walad-u **yakūn** marīḏ-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* marīḏ-an  
 the-boy.NOM is.NEG ill.ACC

*'The boy is not ill.'*

(9b) *laysa* al-walad-u marīḏ-an  
 is.NEG the-boy.NOM ill.ACC

*'The boy is not ill.'*

(9c) *laysa* marīḏ-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*<sup>4</sup>, 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 licenser is typically a negator. This syntactic dependency is illustrated in the contrast below:

(10a) *lam yazal al-muṣallim-u sʕa: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-muṣallim-u sʕa: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

<sup>4</sup> 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 ḍʿarfīyah*—a particle that simultaneously conveys a nominal (source) meaning and a temporal adverbial role. He explains that *ma* in *ma-dumta hayyan* is equivalent to a verbal noun expressing duration (*mudat dawāmī hayyan*, “the period of my remaining alive”). Thus, *ma* is said to function as a substitute for the adverbial *ḍʿarf* (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-ʔataʔallam-u ma-dum-tu ʔayy-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 saʔīd-an  
 the-boy.NOM was.3MSG happy-ACC  
*'The boy was happy.'*
- (13b) kāna al-walad-u saʔīd-an  
 was.3MSG the-boy.NOM happy-ACC  
*'The boy was happy.'*

In both examples, *kāna* assigns accusative case to the predicate *saʔīd-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

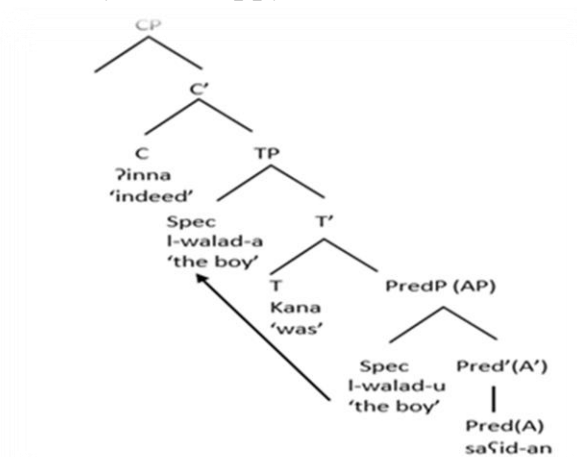
COMP the-boy-ACC happy-NOM

*'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

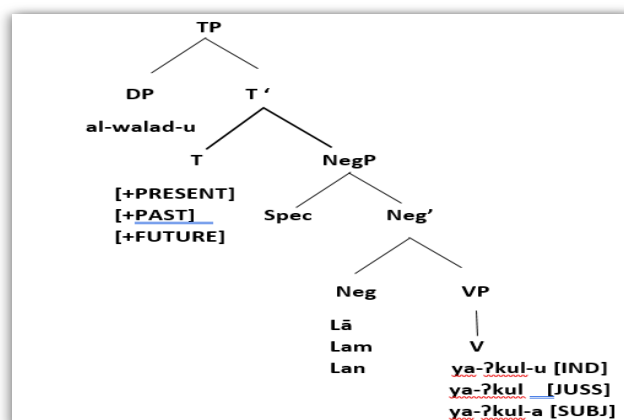
‘*The boy did not write the lesson.*’

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 ʔiḏā 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 az-ẓālim-a*

NEG fortress-NOM protecting-ACC the-oppressor-ACC

*‘No fortress protects the oppressor.’*

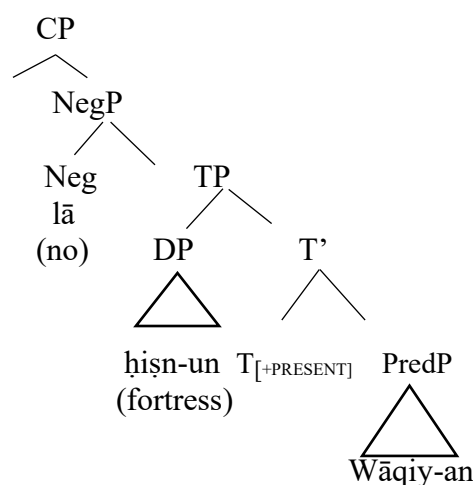
(18b) *\*lā wāqiyan ḥiṣn-un az-ẓālim-a*

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

(18d) *\*lā wāqi -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 (*wāqīyan*, in example 18a) enters the derivation with its [ $\phi$ ]-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 *wāqīyan* 'protecting' is the predicate. The internal argument *aḏ-ḏālim-a* is selected by the deverbal adjective *wāqīyan* 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 *wāqīyan* 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 *aḏ-ḏālim-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-ṣamal-i ḥāzim-un muḥmilan*  
 NEG in-the-work-GEN determined-NOM negligent-ACC  
 'No one determined at work is negligent.'

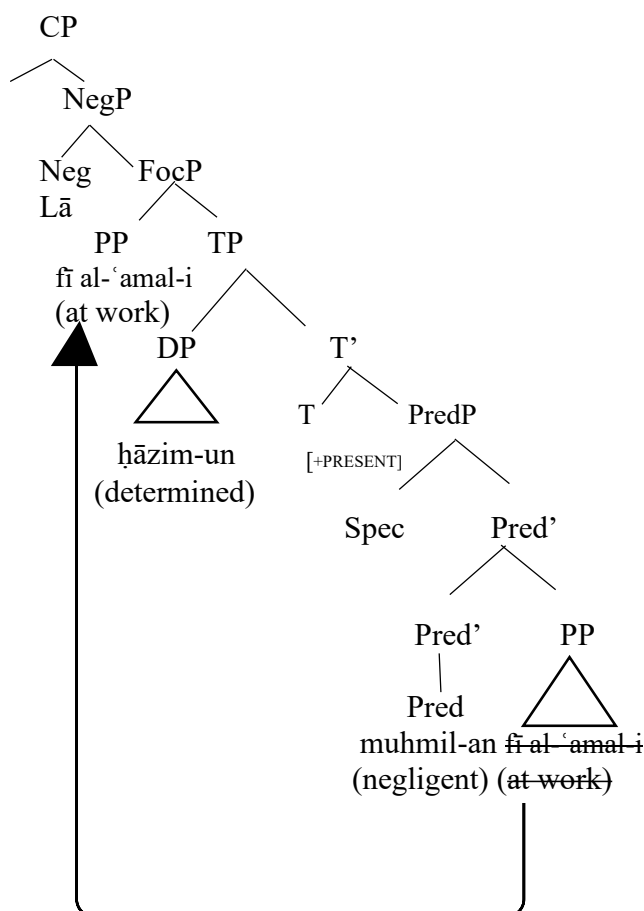
(19b) lā ḥāzim-un muhmilan fī al-ʿamal-i  
 NEG determined-NOM negligent-ACC in the-work-GEN  
*‘No one determined at work is negligent.’*

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

(19d) lā ʿāqil-un mutawāniyan sāʿat-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-ʿamal-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 wāqīyan 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., *wāqiyān*), 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 yāʔib-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**      mawjūdāt-un  
the-car-ACC.SG   existing-NOM.SG  
'The car is here.'

(21b) *lā*            sayyārat-**a**      mawjūdāt-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* *muqasʕir-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) ḥaḍart-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 *yayr* “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.

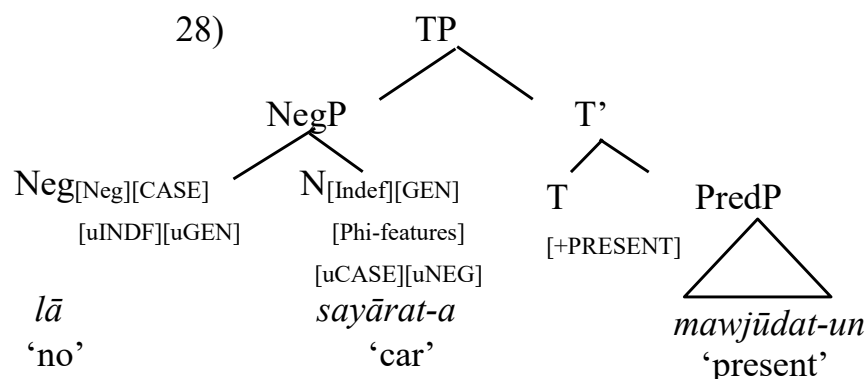
Generic *lā* may co-occur with sentential temporal expressions like *ṡadan* ‘tomorrow’, as in:

- (27) *lā rajul-a fī al- ḥadīqat-i ṡad-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 li-l-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  $\phi$ -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 *Pinna* and *ʔanna* originate under C and inherently carry tense and accusative case features, while *ʔann* 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 *s'āra* 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.

## References

- Al-Balushi, R. (2011). *Case in Standard Arabic: The Untrigued Nominal* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto).
- Al-Horais, N. (2017). On negation and focus in Standard Arabic: An interface-based approach. *Journal of Universal Language*, 18(1), 1–34.
- Aoun, J., Benmamoun, E., & Choueiri, L. (2010). *The syntax of Arabic*. Cambridge University Press.
- Benmamoun, E. (1989). Negation and the Functional Structure of Arabic. In *Proceedings of WCCFL 8* (pp. 21–32). Stanford Linguistics Association.
- Benmamoun, E. (2000). *The feature structure of functional categories: A comparative study of Arabic dialects*. Oxford University Press.
- Chomsky, N. (1957). *Syntactic structures*. Mouton.
- Chomsky, N. (1981). *Lectures on Government and Binding*. Dordrecht: Foris.
- Chomsky, N. (1993). A minimalist program for linguistic theory. In K. Hale & S. J. Keyser (Eds.), *The View from Building 20* (pp. 1–52). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Chomsky, N. (1995). *The minimalist program*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Chomsky, N. (2000). *Minimalist inquiries: The framework*. In R. Martin, D. Michaels, & J. Uriagereka (Eds.), *Step by step: Essays on minimalist syntax in honor of Howard Lasnik* (pp. 89–155). MIT Press.
- Chomsky, N. (2000). *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chomsky, N. (2001). Derivation by phase. In M. Kenstowicz (Ed.), *Ken Hale: A Life in Language* (pp. 1–52). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Comrie, B., Haspelmath, M., & Bickel, B. (2015). *The Leipzig glossing rules: Conventions for interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme glosses*. Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. Retrieved from <https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php>
- Emonds, J. E. (1970). *Root and structure-preserving transformations* (Doctoral dissertation, MIT).
- Fassi Fehri, A. (1993). *Issues in the structure of Arabic clauses and words*. Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Hasan, A. (1975). *Al-Nahw al-wafī* (3rd ed., Vol. 1). Dar al-Ma'arif.
- Ibn Hisham, 'A. b. Y. (n.d.). *Awḍaḥ al-Masālik ilā Alfīyyat Ibn Mālik* (M. M. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, Ed., Vol. 1). Şaydā: Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-'Aşriyyah.
- Jackendoff, R. (1977). *X' Syntax: A Study of Phrase Structure*. Cambridge, MIT Press.
- Klima, E. S. (1964). *Negation in English*. In J. A. Fodor & J. J. Katz (Eds.), *The structure of language: Readings in the philosophy of language* (pp. 246–323). Prentice-Hall.
- Ladefoged, P. & Maddieson, I. (1996). *The sounds of the world's languages*. Blackwell Publishers: Oxford.
- Ladusaw, W. A. (1979). *Polarity sensitivity as inherent scope relations* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Texas at Austin.
- Ouhalla, J. (1991). *Functional categories and parametric variation*. Routledge.
- Ouhalla, J. (1993). Negation, focus and tense: The Arabic *maa* and *laa*. *Rivista di Linguistica*, 5(1), 275–300.
- Pollock, J.-Y. (1989). Verb movement, Universal Grammar, and the structure of IP. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 20(3), 365–424.

- Rizzi, L. (1997). The fine structure of the left periphery. In L. Haegeman (Ed.), *Elements of Grammar* (pp. 281–337). Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Ryding, K. C. (2005). *A reference grammar of Modern Standard Arabic*. Cambridge University Press.
- Shariq, M. (2015). Arabic and English Consonants: A Phonetic and Phonological Investigation. *Advances in Language and literary Studies*, 6(6), 146-152
- Soltan, U. (2007). *On formal feature licensing in minimalism: Aspects of standard Arabic morphosyntax* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park).
- Wright, W., Smith, W. R., & de Goeje, M. J. (1898). *A grammar of the Arabic language: Translated from the German of Caspari and edited with numerous additions and corrections* (Vols. 1–2). Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from [https://archive.org/details/AGrammarOfTheArabicLanguageV1/Gram\\_Wright\\_2/page/n9/mode/2up?view=theater](https://archive.org/details/AGrammarOfTheArabicLanguageV1/Gram_Wright_2/page/n9/mode/2up?view=theater)

## List of Phonetic Symbols

### A: Consonants<sup>5</sup>

| Arabic Letter | Symbol | Description                     | Arabic Letter | Symbol         | Description                                 |
|---------------|--------|---------------------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------------------------------------|
| أ             | ʔ      | Voiceless glottal stop          | ص             | s <sup>ʕ</sup> | Voiceless pharyngealized alveolar fricative |
| ب             | b      | Voiced bilabial stop            | ض             | d <sup>ʕ</sup> | Voiced pharyngealized alveolar stop         |
| ت             | t      | Voiceless denti-alveolar stop   | ط             | t <sup>ʕ</sup> | Voiceless pharyngealized alveolar stop      |
| ث             | θ      | Voiceless interdental fricative | ظ             | ð <sup>ʕ</sup> | 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         |

<sup>5</sup> 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: Arabic Vowel Forms<sup>6</sup>

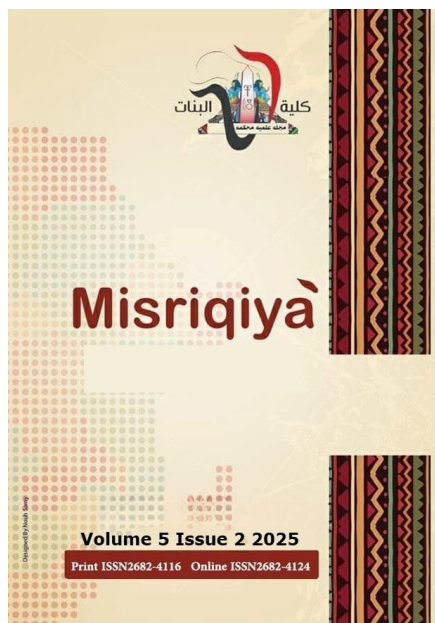
| Short Vowels                | Long Vowels                     |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| a – Front short open vowel  | a: / ā – Front long open vowel  |
| i – Front short close vowel | i: / ī – Front long close vowel |
| u – Back short close vowel  | u: /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

<sup>6</sup> This table is cited from: Ladefoged and Maddieson (1996)  
Mişriqiyā

**List of Abbreviations<sup>7</sup>**

| 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                    |

<sup>7</sup> Glosses follow the conventions of the *Leipzig Glossing Rules* (Comrie, Haspelmath, & Bickel, 2015).



## Split CP, Functional Categories, and Logical Form (LF) in Standard Arabic (SA): A Minimalist Approach

Basma Ashraf Abd El-Kader Diab<sup>1</sup>, Wafaa Abd al-Faheem Batran Wahba<sup>2</sup>, Rania Galal Hamed<sup>2</sup>

1. English Department, Faculty of Arts, Damanhour University, Egypt

2. English Department, Faculty of Women, Ain Shams University, Egypt

Corresponding author: [basma.ashraf@art.dmu.edu.eg](mailto:basma.ashraf@art.dmu.edu.eg)

DOI: 10.21608/MISJ.2025.398932.1068

Received: 30-6-2025

Accepted: 22-9-2025

Published: 30-10-2025

[https://misj.journals.ekb.eg/article\\_455289.html](https://misj.journals.ekb.eg/article_455289.html)

Citation: Diab, B., Wahba, W., & Hamed, R. (2025). Split CP,

Functional Categories, and Logical Form (LF) in Standard Arabic (SA): A Minimalist Approach. *Mişriqiya*, 5(2), 71-97. doi: 10.21608/misj.2025.398932.1068

### Abstract

This research paper aims to explore the hierarchy of functional and lexical categories that occur under the complementizer phrase (CP) in the syntax of Standard Arabic (SA) according to Chomsky's (1981, 1986a) Principles and Parameters (P&P) theory along with his Minimalist Program (MP) (1995, 2000a, 2004). Rizzi (1997) proposes a strict hierarchy of phrases under a split CP according to which the Force phrase comes as the highest, the Focus phrase as the lowest, and the Topic phrase comes in the middle. The Arabic data provides concrete evidence that this strict hierarchical structure doesn't hold in the syntax of SA. This paper presents two pieces of evidence against the strict hierarchy in Rizzi (1997). The first counterargument derives from conditional sentences where a topicalized expression moves higher than the Force phrase. The second argument derives from the interaction between free relatives and conditionals. A moved wh-operator in a free relative may move higher in the projection. It is assumed to have the role of a conditional particle that mimics conditionals in assigning the jussive mood marker to both verbs in the conditional sentence. The universal constraint on barring multiple complementizers that serve the same semantic function in English is also observed in SA concerning affirmative complementizers.

**Keywords:** Split CP, Conditionals, Functional categories, Free relatives, Standard Arabic (SA)

## 1.0. Introduction

This research is conducted within the framework of the Minimalist Program (MP) (Chomsky 1995, 2000a, 2004) to the CP domain in Standard Arabic (SA), drawing on the cartographic model proposed by Rizzi (1997), which splits CP into hierarchically ordered functional projections, such as ForceP, TopicP, and FocusP. The analysis examines the distribution and interpretive roles of functional elements like *ʔinna*, *lam ʔal-ʔibtida:ʔ* “the Initiation [I]”, henceforth, *IL*, interrogative markers, conditional particles, free relatives, and exceptive constructions. These elements are evaluated concerning the cross-linguistic predictions of the Split CP hypothesis and their interpretive scope at LF. This paper is organized as follows: the first section presents the introduction. It is divided into two subsections: the first section explores research objectives, and the second investigates data collection and methodology. The second section presents the theoretical framework, whereas the third section represents the literature review. The fourth section analyzes the data and the last one concludes the findings of the study.

### 1.1 Research objectives:

This research aims to:

- i. investigate how Force, Topic, and Focus elements are distributed in SA within the Split CP framework, and what constraints govern their positioning.
- ii. examine how interrogative structures, multiple operators, and free relatives reflect the hierarchical organization proposed by Rizzi’s Split CP Hypothesis.
- iii. explore how exceptive and negative constructions in SA interact with the scope hierarchy in the left periphery.
- iv. analyze how functional heads such as *ʔinna* “indeed” and *lam ʔal-ʔibtida:ʔ* encode logical and discourse relations within the CP domain.
- v. compare the CP structure of SA with English to identify cross-linguistic insights into clause structure and left-peripheral architecture.

### 1.2 Data Collection and Methodology

This dissertation focuses on SA and English. SA is used in literature, academia, print and mass media, and law. Its word order is VSO and is a pro-drop language, i.e., the subject can be dropped because of the richness of inflectional morphology in Arabic. The methodology adopted in the study is a qualitative comparative between SA and English within Chomsky’s (1995)

Minimalist approach concerning Rizzi's (1997) Split CP hypothesis. In addition, the study uses a cartographic approach to explore the structure of the CP domain in SA. The data collected in this work relies on well-established Arab grammarians' books on SA such as, Hassan (1975) and Ibn Jinni (1988) and adds new examples to support or question the original ones. In some cases, similar constructions in English are used for comparison. All Arabic examples are presented with interlinear glosses to clarify their morphological and syntactic properties. Moreover, syntactic tree diagrams are provided to show the structure clearly.

## **2.0 Theoretical Framework**

This section presents the theoretical background of the paper. The Minimalist Program (MP) builds on the Principles and Parameters (P&P) model, as investigated by Chomsky (1981, 1986a), and aims at deriving syntactic structure through minimal steps, linking syntactic computation directly to interface levels, such as Logical Form (LF) and Phonetic Form (PF). This study adopts the (MP) as its core theoretical framework. MP (Chomsky 1993, and 1995) assumes that only linguistically necessary elements should be retained in syntactic analysis. Chomsky (1993) argues for eliminating non-essential theoretical constructs such as, Deep Structure and Surface Structure (Chomsky 1992). Minimalism assumes that language arises from simple operations like Merge, which builds structure, and Agree and Move, which handles feature valuation and movement. This structure interfaces with meaning in Logical Form (LF). Hence, The Minimalist approach is about eliminating steps as minimal as possible and reducing redundancy while still accounting for the richness of syntactic variation across languages.

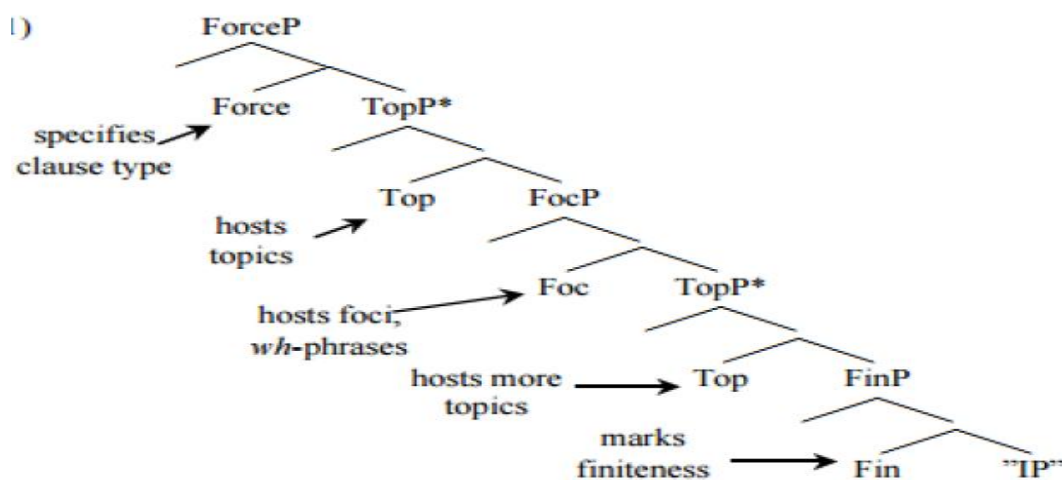
The study adopts the cartographic approach to clause structure, particularly the Split CP hypothesis proposed by Rizzi (1997). Instead of viewing CP as a single projection, the Split CP model decomposes it into multiple, hierarchically ordered functional projections, as illustrated in the following section. In this study, the Minimalist approach is applied to investigate the structure of the layered CP domain in SA, the behavior of those functional projections in Arabic syntax, and whether their order and function align with or diverge from cross-linguistic hierarchies.

### 3.0 Literature Review

The research paper presents The Split CP hypothesis, as presented by Rizzi (1997, 2004 a&b). He suggests that the CP in a sentence can be divided into multiple distinct functional projections, each serving different roles in the syntactic structure of a sentence. The CP layer of clause structure should be split into several different projections: Force Phrase (ForceP) projection, Topic Phrase (TopP) projection, and Focus Phrase (FocP) projection. The Foc node is dominated by another Top node which is in turn dominated by the Force node heading the entire clausal structure. During the last decade, E. Hoekstra (1993), and Cinque (1999), have suggested a more expanded functional projection to accommodate the complementizer and other elements appearing on the left edge of the sentence. For example, topics and sentence adverbs, in McCloskey (1991) and Lasnik and Saito (1991), are considered as adjoined to the main clause. Adjunction can be eliminated from the grammar because it is not very restrained. One way to accommodate the "adjoined" elements is to occupy separate functional categories, as part of an expanded or split CP, as follows:

- ... *Force* ... (*Topic*) ... (*Focus*) ... *Fin IP* (Rizzi 1997, P.288)

The split of CP into several projections is diagrammed, as follows:



**Figure 1:** The Split CP projections proposed in (Rizzi, 1997, p. 297)

Source: Paul Hagstrom 2001, CAS LX 523 Syntax II

In addition, Alazzawie & Abdelaal (2022) support the split-CP hypothesis in SA, demonstrating that object cliticization and object displacement are

realized through movement to the Focus projection. They investigate that MSA has both in-situ FocuP below the TP and a high FocP outside the TP. This proves that object Focus is flexible in MSA. Furthermore, they use tests, such as Binding theory, conjunction, and substitution to prove that the pronominal objects behave syntactically and functionally like lexical objects. Both can be moved outside the TP triggered by the EF on the head Foc. Hence, it is consistent with the hierarchical Split CP hypothesis in Rizzi's (1997) framework.

Furthermore, Alatawi (2016) analyzes the left periphery in Standard Arabic and Tabuki Arabic within the Minimalist Program. He argues that Rizzi's (1997) Split-CP hypothesis is necessary to account for the distribution of Topics, Focus, and complementizers. His findings show that Topics and Focus occupy distinct projections, and that dialectal variation in agreement, word order, and complementizers supports the existence of multiple projections in the CP domain. Overall, his study provides strong support for the Split-CP model in Arabic.

On the contrary, Bakir (2011) challenges Rizzi's (1997) Split-CP hypothesis, proposing instead a more economical left periphery in Arabic. He argues that projections such as ForceP, TopP, and FocP are unnecessary because Topic and Focus can be explained as discourse-pragmatic phenomena rather than as distinct syntactic positions. Hence, his conclusions argue against Rizzi's layered CP model. In contrast, the present study adopts Rizzi's framework and analyzes left-dislocation structures in Standard Arabic within the Split-CP hypothesis.

#### **4. Data Analysis**

This section analyzes the data from SA concerning Rizzi's (1997) Split CP Hypothesis. It is divided into five main sections. The first section investigates Yes/ NO (Y/N) Questions and the second demonstrates multiple affirmative complementizers and universal grammar (UG) in SA. The third section explores conditionals and the Split CP hypothesis in SA, and the fourth one discusses free relatives, conditionals, and Split CP. The final section analyzes the exceptive construction in SA within Split CP.

##### **4.1 Y/N Questions and Focus**

This section aims to illustrate how the Split CP Hypothesis offers a comprehensive account of interrogative constructions in SA. The phenomenon

of focus through fronting and inversion is discussed, as shown in (1), adapted from Al-Jurjani (2000, P.106):

1. a. dʿarba      zaid-un      ʕamr-an      (VSO)  
hit-3Sg    Zaid-Nom    Amr-Acc  
              *“Zaid hit Amr.”*
- b. dʿarba      ʕamr-an      zaid-un      (VOS)  
hit-3Sg    Amr-Acc    Zaid-Nom  
              *“Zaid hit Amr.”*

Sentence (1b) is derived from the unmarked word order in sentence (1a). Sentence (1a) represents the VSO word order, i.e, *dʿarba* “hit” represents the verb (V), *zaid-un* “Zaid” represents the subject (S), and *ʕamr-an* “Amr” represents the object (O). The object *ʕamr-an* “Amr”, in (1b), is fronted for focus. However, the meaning did not change because SA has rich inflectional morphology.

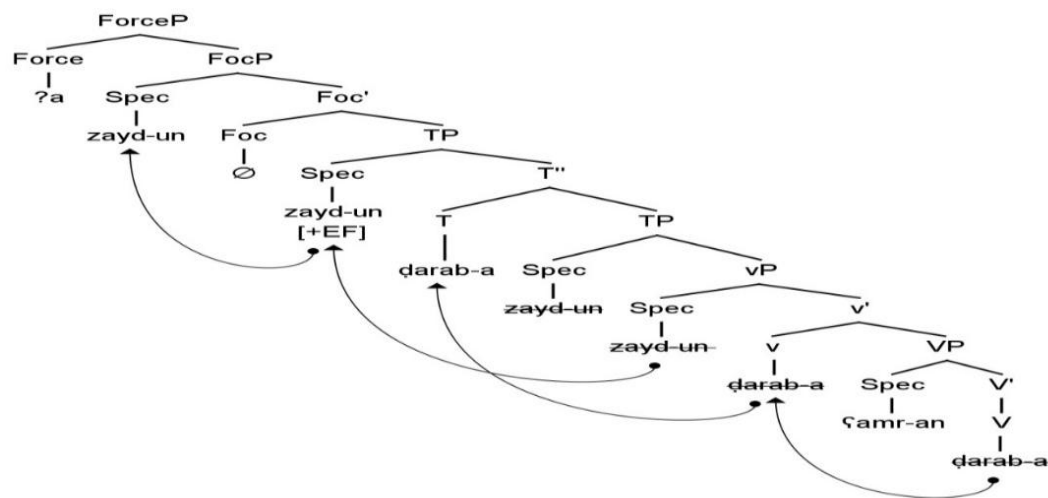
Formatting Y/N questions in SA employs two particles: *ʔa* “Be” and *hal* “Be”. There is a correlation between marked and unmarked word order concerning Y/N question formation in both English and SA. To form a question, the copular “Do” is used. Focus can be included within Y/N questions in SA concerning Rizzi’s (1997, 2004) split CP hypothesis. The following paradigm, derived from (1b), analyzes the Focus phrase dominated by *ʔa* “Be” as a Y/N question particle. According to the Split CP analysis, the Y/N question occupies the Force of the sentence that precedes the Focus phrase like in English. However, Arabic is stronger because the focused element carries along with it its case marker, as shown in the following examples derived from (1):

- 2) a. ʔa-dʿarb- a      zaid-un      ʕamr-an?      (VSO)  
Q-hit-3Sg-past    Zaid-Nom    Amr-Acc  
                      *“Did Zaid hit Amr?”*      (Unmarked word order)
- b. ʔa-zaid-un      dʿarb- a      ʕamr-an?      (SVO)  
Q-Zaid-Nom    hit-3Sg-past    Amr-Acc  
                      *“Was it Zaid who hit Amr?”*
- c. ʔa-ʕamr-an      dʿarb-a      zaid-un?      (SOV)  
Q-Amr-Acc    hit-3Sg-past    Zaid-Nom  
                      *“Was it Amr whom zaid hit?”*

Sentence (2a) represents an unmarked word order, VSO, in the sense that it has no focused elements or movement. The English translation reflects this fact by using the dummy do “*did*”. However, there are focused elements,

in (2b&c), and this is reflected in the English translation by using the clefting transformation which focuses on the fronted element. According to Rizzi (1997, 2004), the focus constituent occupies the specifier position of the focus phrase. The question particle *ʔa* “Be”, which determines the Force phrase as an interrogative, has a wider scope than the Focus phrase. The focus can be *Amr*, as in (2c) or *Zaid*, as in (2b). Sentence (2a) represents the VSO word order. However, (2b) represents SVO word order, as follows:

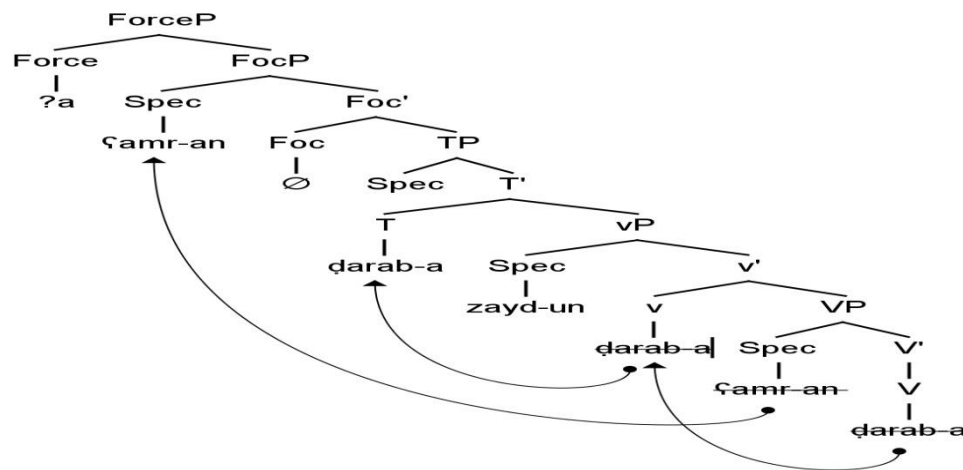
3) a.



The DP *zajd-un* “Zaid”, in (3a), moves along with its valued nominative case. It indicates that under the focused element, there is movement and the evidence is that the moved element carries the nominative case. The head T assigns the nominative case to the c-commanded *zajd-un* “Zaid”. According to Pesetsky's (1989) Earliness Principle, operations apply as early as possible in a derivation. In addition, according to Chomsky's (1981) Locality Principle, the head T, within the TP, assigns the nominative case to the c-commanded subjects. Case assignment is always local within the TP. Hence, before *zajd-un* “Zaid” gets moved, it has to carry its case which is crucial evidence that there is focus in Arabic. In addition, before moving the verb *dʿarb-a* “hit”, it has to assign the accusative case to *ɣamr-an* “Amr”. Therefore, the timing of operations and adjacency are very crucial. After the valuation of the subject's *zajd-un* “Zaid” nominative case, it gets moved to the specifier of the focus phrase, as shown in (3a). The Y/N question particle *ʔa* “Be”, as argued by Alazzawie (2018, P.123), being a force marker, occupies the head of the Force

phrase to satisfy the function of the sentence. This is explained also in (2c) which represents a SOV order. Whereas the subject is focused in (2b), the object is focused in (2c), as illustrated in (3b).

3) b.



The question particle *ʔa* “Be” has a wider scope than the focus phrase. The force of the sentence is the Y/N question and the Focus movement is within the scope of the higher *ʔa* “Be”. In (3b), there is a split CP with a Y/N question operator and a focused DP. Sentence (3b) has a marked word order (OVS). The verb *dʕarb-a* “hit” gets moved from the lexical V to the light v with agent external argument *zajd-un* “Zaid” dominated by the head T to get the nominative case. The DP *zajd-un* “Zaid” stays in situ. When the verb *dʕarb-a* “hit” gets raised, it assigns the accusative case to the nearest c-commanded DP *ʕamr-an* “Amr” and agrees with it in phi features ( $\phi$  features). Then, the verb *dʕarb-a* “hit” gets raised to the head T because it has a strong tense feature in Arabic. According to the (VP + vP) split projection, the verb *dʕarb-a* “hit” merges with the DP *ʕamr-an* “Amr” to form *dʕarb-a ʕamr-an* “hit Amr”. The resulting VP, in turn, merges with a light affixal v forming the intermediate projection v’. The probe “T” finds its goal *zajd-un* “Zaid” in its c-commanding domain to assign the nominative case. After the DP *ʕamr-an* “Amr” gets its accusative case; it is triggered to the specifier of the Focus phrase. This focus operation is reflected in the English translation through clefting.

In addition, the Split CP hypothesis can account for multiple elements under the same CP in SA. There are multiple functional categories in the

following example. Each particle has its scope and function. The domain of the Y/N question is the entire sentence, as shown below:

4) *ʔa-lam* tula:ħið<sup>s</sup>-u: ma: qi:l? *ʔa-fa-la:* tafham-u:n?  
Q-Neg notice-2<sup>nd</sup> Pl what was said? Q-Coord- Neg understand-2<sup>nd</sup> Pl?

*"Didn't you notice what was said? Don't you understand?"*

In (4) there are two questions. Both are headed by the Y/N question particle *ʔa* “Be”. However, in the first question, there are only two functional categories, whereas there are three functional categories in the second one. On the one hand, the first sentence includes the question particle *ʔa* “Be” and the Neg operator *lam*. On the other hand, the second sentence introduces three functional categories: the rhetorical question particle *ʔa* “Be”, the coordinator particle *fa:*, and the Neg operator *la:*. The coordinator particle *fa:* relates two sentences, i.e., the first one expresses a fact that provides an answer to the second sentence or an incentive to the second statement. In other words, the coordinator particle *fa:* is preceded by an explanatory sentence. The Y/N question particle “*ʔa* “Be” operates at the Force head, determining the force of the sentence as interrogative. However, it is a rhetorical question that denotes denial.

Thus, the Split CP Hypothesis offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the syntactic behavior of Y/N questions focus constructions in SA, and the interaction of multiple functional heads: Force, Foc, and Neg within the CP domain in SA. This layered CP structure successfully confirms the applicability of the Split CP Hypothesis to Arabic syntax.

## 4.2 Multiple Affirmative complementizers & Universal Grammar (UG) in SA

This section is divided into three subsections. The first section investigates the distribution of the complementizer *ʔinna*. The second section examines the distribution of *lam ʔal-ʔibtida:ʔ* “IL”. The third section illustrates the distribution of the two affirmative complementizers *ʔinna* “IL” in the same clause.

### 4.2.1 The distribution of the complementizer *ʔinna* “indeed”

Ibn Jinni (1988) investigates *ʔinna* “indeed” as *Harf tawkiid* “a confirmation particle”. It represents the class of particles *ʔinna wa akhawa:tuha:* “*ʔinna* and its sisters”. He argues that the Complementizer *ʔinna* “indeed” is a case assigner as it assigns the accusative case to its subject and the nominative case to its predicate. However, *ʔal-kufa*’s school of grammar refutes this

hypothesis. They suggest that *ʔinna wa akhawa:tuha*: “*ʔinna* and its sisters” assigns only the accusative case to its subject and the predicate is assigned the nominative case by default, as shown in the following examples:

- 5) a. Zajd-un            qa: ʔim-un  
       Zayd.NOM        standing.M.NOM  
       “*Zayd is standing.*”  
   b. **ʔinna** Zajd-an        qa:ʔim-un  
       indeed Zayd.ACC     standing.M.NOM  
       “*Indeed, Zayd is standing.*”

(Ibn Jinni, (1988, P.40)

The subject Zajd-un “Zayd”, in (5a), is assigned the nominative case by default because it is not preceded by any case assigner. However, the subject Zajd-an “Zayd”, in (5b), is assigned the accusative case because it is preceded by the complementizer *ʔinna* “indeed” as a case assigner.

In addition, the complementizer *ʔinna* “indeed” cannot be preceded by its subject or the predicate. It must dominate the whole sentence. Hence, sentences (6a&b) are ungrammatical.

- 6) a.\* Zajd-an    **ʔinna**            qa:ʔim-un  
       Zayd-Acc    indeed            standing-Nom.  
       “*Indeed, it is Zayd who is standing.*”  
   b.\* qa:ʔim-un        **ʔinna**        Zajd-an  
       standing-Nom    indeed        Zayd-Acc .  
       “*Indeed, it is Zayd who is standing.*”

Both sentences are ungrammatical because *ʔinna* “indeed” as a complementizer has to c-command the entire proposition underlying the nominal sentence. The subject *Zajd-an* “Zayd”, in (6a), is fronted to precede the complementizer *ʔinna*. The predicate *qa:ʔim-un* “standing”, in (6b), is fronted to precede the complementizer *ʔinna*. Both sentences are not acceptable.

To conclude, this section demonstrates the complementizer *ʔinna* “indeed” as a particle of affirmation that has some structural constraints. It represents the class of particles *ʔinna wa akhawa:tuha*: “*ʔinna* and its sisters”. Hence, the particle *ʔinna* “indeed” consistently assigns an accusative case to its subject while leaving the predicate in a nominative case, either through direct assignment, as suggested by ʔal-kufa’s school of grammar or by default, as proposed by Ibn Jinni (1988). The data reveal that *ʔinna* “indeed” must occupy the initial position of the clause, c-commanding both the subject and predicate.

The following subsection considers the internal structure of both *ʔinna* “indeed” and *IL* in relation to the Split CP analysis.

#### 4.2.2 The distribution of *lam ʔal-ʔibtida:ʔ* “the (IL)”

The concept of *lam ʔal-ʔibtida:ʔ* “IL”, is presented by Hassan (1975), as a crucial element in Arabic grammar. This particle is used at the beginning of nominal sentences to introduce a topic or highlight its significance. It emphasizes the most important information, enabling speakers and writers to convey their ideas more effectively. Both *ʔinna* “indeed” and *la* “IL” are complementizers, both are functional and both have the same meaning, and both complementizers c-command the entire TP, as follows:

7) a. **ʔinna** Zajd-an qa:ʔim-un

Indeed Zayd-Acc standing.

“Indeed, it is Zayd who is standing.”

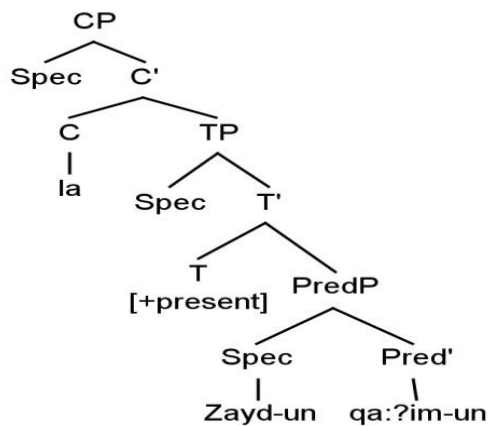
(Al-Uthaymeen, 2013, Vol.2, P.5)

b. **la-** Zajd-un qa:ʔim-un

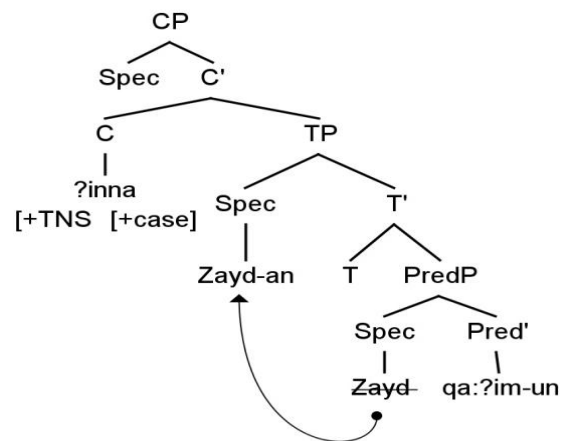
IL- Zayd-Nom standing-Nom.

“Indeed, it is Zayd who is standing.”

The complementizers *ʔinna* “indeed” and the *IL* in (7a&b) serve the same emphatic function. They originate under the matrix CP. *ʔinna* “indeed” enters the derivation with two-valued features: case and tense. Sentence (7a) is illustrated in (8a) and (7b) is illustrated in (8b), as follows:



8) a.



b.

The *IL* is an emphatic particle that has to c-command the entire TP because it emphasizes the entire proposition. The *IL* doesn't affect the case in (8a). The *IL* is a non-case assigner. However, *ʔinna* “indeed” is a case assigner,

as in (8b). Unlike, the affirmative complementizer *ʔinna*, the IL can be followed by a subject, as in (9a), or a predicate as long as it is fronted, as in (9b). Both (9a&b) are adapted from Hassan (1975, Vol.1, P.659), as follows:

- 9) a. **L-jadd-un** ka:sibat-un xajr-un min jadd-in ʕa:ʕilat-in  
 IL- hand-Nom working-Nom better than-Nom hand oblique-obli.  
*“Indeed, it is surely a working hand that is better than an oblique one”*

- b. **L-sadi:d-un** raʔj-u-ka  
 IL- sound-Nom opinion-nom-your  
*“Indeed, it is your opinion that is sound.”*

- c. \*raʔj-u-ka **L-sadi:d-un**  
 opinion-nom-your IL- sound-Nom  
*“Indeed, it is your opinion that is sound.”*

The affirmative complementizer *IL*, in (9a), has a wide scope over the whole clause because it c-commands the entire TP. However, the affirmative complementizer *IL*, in (9b), has a narrow scope because it c-commands the predicate. The fronting of the predicate, in (9b), is obligatory. Hence, (9c) is ungrammatical because the predicate is in situ, and it cannot be preceded by the *IL*.

#### 4.2.3 The distribution of the two affirmative complementizers *ʔinna* “Indeed” & the “IL” in the same clause

This section investigates the logical relation between the two affirmative complementizers *ʔinna* “indeed” & *IL*. Both *IL* and *ʔinna* “indeed” serve as emphatic particles that originate under the matrix CP, as illustrated in the previous section. However, Arab grammarians assert that both emphatic particles cannot co-occur in the same sentence because they serve the same function, as illustrated in the following paradigm:

- 10) a. **ʔinna** Zajd-an qa:ʔim-un  
 indeed Zayd-Acc standing-Nom.  
*“Indeed, it is Zayd who is standing.”*

(Al-Uthaymeen, 2013, Vol.2, P.5)

- b. **la-** Zajd-un qa:ʔim-un  
 IL- Zayd-Nom standing-Nom.  
*“Indeed, it is Zayd who is standing.”*

- c. \***ʔinna** **la-**Zajdan qa:ʔim-un

indeed, IL-Zaid-Acc standing-Nom.

*"Indeed, it is Zayd who is standing."*

(Al-Uthaymeen, 2013, Vol.2, P.41)

- d. \*ʔinna la- qa:ʔim-un Zajd-an  
indeed IL-standing-NOM Zayd-Acc  
*"Indeed, it is Zayd who is standing."*

- e. ʔinna Zajdan la- qa:ʔim- un  
indeed, Zayd-Acc surely- standing-Nom.  
*"Indeed, it is surely Zayd who is standing."*

(Al-Uthaymeen, 2013, Vol.2, P.41)

According to Hassan (1975) and Al-Uthaymeen (2013), it is not acceptable to have two separate phrases that serve the same semantic function under the same CP. Both affirmative complementizers *ʔinna* "indeed" and *IL*, in (10a&b), initiate the sentence. In contrast, sentences (10c&d) are ungrammatical because they cannot be initiated by two separate phrases that serve the same emphatic function. However, once the *IL* is lowered further to c-command the predicate phrase, as in (10e), the sentence is fully grammatical.

This semantic constraint is universal. In English, interrogative wh-expressions in main-clause questions move to the specifier position in a Focus Phrase. There is a universal constraint on barring multiple complementizers, as follows:

- 11) a. \**whom where* did you meet?  
b. Whom did you meet and where did you meet them?

Sentence (11a) is ruled out because using multiple Wh- words in the same clause is barred. Both the interrogative particles *whom* and *where* should occupy the Spec of the Focus phrase which is barred. In contrast, as long as multiple Wh-words are used in different clauses, the sentence is acceptable, as in (11b). Hence, this constraint is universal. However, the scope of both the *IL* and the lowered *L* is different. On the one hand, the scope of *IL* has a wide scope in the sense that it c-commands the entire clause. On the other hand, the lowered [L] has a narrow scope because it c-commands the predicate phrase in the presence of the affirmative complementizer *ʔinna* "indeed". In addition, the affirmative complementizer *ʔinna* "indeed" is a base-generated complementizer in the sense it cannot be moved. Hence, *ʔinna* "indeed" is genuine, whereas *IL* is mobile because it can be moved to head the predicate phrase in the presence of *ʔinna*.

Unlike *ʔinna* “indeed” which occurs under the CP only, the affirmative complementizer *IL* may occur under the CP or the TP.

To conclude, this section argues that both complementizers *IL* and *ʔinna* “indeed” are affirmative, that occurs under the matrix CP, and occur initially. However, they are in complementary distribution. i.e., they cannot co-occur under the same CP because they serve the same semantic function which is affirmation.

### 4.3 Conditionals and the Split CP Hypothesis in SA

Although, the Force phrase in English is higher than the Focus phrase according to Rizzi’s Split CP Hypothesis, the order can be different in SA, as illustrated in the following example:

- 12) a. *ʔin* lam tafʔal *ʔn-nafs-a* bi- lhaqq- i, ʔayalat-ka  
 if Neg occupy the-self-Acc with-the truth-Obl, occupy -you  
 bi- lba:tʔil-i  
 with-falsehood-Obl.

*“If you do not occupy yourself with the truth, it will occupy you with falsehood.”*

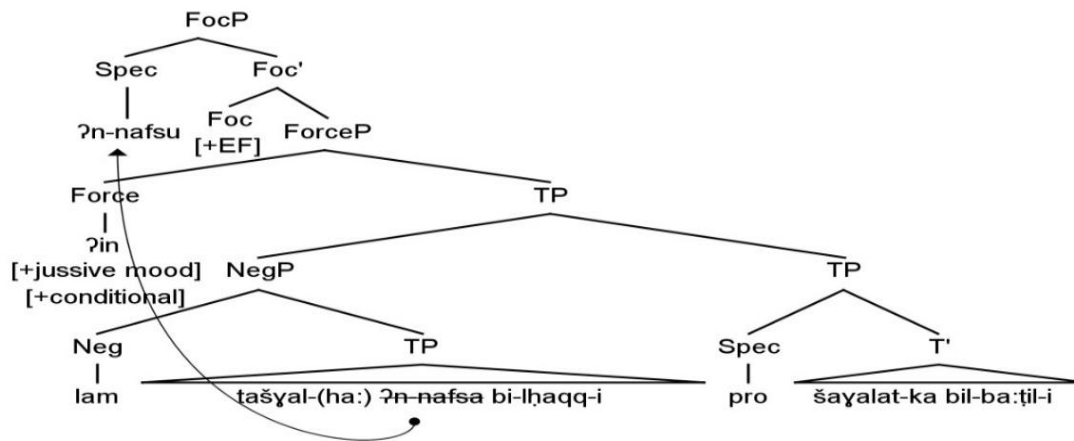
- b. *ʔn-nafs-u* *ʔin* lam tafʔal-ha: bi- lhaqq- i ʔayalat-ka  
 the-self-Nom, if Neg occupy- it with the truth-Obl, occupy -you  
 bi- lba:tʔil- i  
 with falsehood-Obl.

*“It is yourself that, if you do not occupy it with the truth, will occupy you with falsehood.”*

(Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, 1990, P.82)

Sentence (12a) expresses the unmarked order without movement. The conditional particle *ʔin* “if”, which determines the force of the sentence, has to c-command the entire sentence to assign the jussive mood to both verbs *tafʔal* “occupy” and *ʔayala* “occupied”. The anaphor *ʔn-nafsa* gets the accusative case because it is the object of the verb *tafʔal* “occupy”. However, it gets focused in (12b) to precede the conditional particle *ʔin* “if” that occupies the force of the sentence. Hence, the anaphor *ʔn-nafsu* “yourself” will c-command the conditional particle *ʔin* “if”, as shown in the following diagram:

13)



The anaphor *?n-nafsa* “yourself” is the internal complement of the verb *tašyal* “occupy” and the subject of the verb *šayalat* “occupy”. The anaphor *?n-nafsu* “yourself” is not base generated because has to be c-commanded by its antecedent according to Principle A of Chomsky’s (1981, 1982) Binding Theory (BT). It gets moved from the complement of the verb *šayalat* “occupy” to the Spec of the Focus phrase. However, the focus phrase, in (13), is higher than the Force phrase. However, this order violates the strict hierarchical order of Rizzi’s (1997) CP hypothesis which asserts that the Force phrase must be the highest projection, whereas, the Force phrase can be dominated by the Focus phrase in SA. Hence, the Split CP hypothesis should be modified to account for this phenomenon in SA.

#### 4.4 Free Relatives and conditionals in SA

This section examines how free relative clauses are analyzed within the framework of the Split CP Hypothesis. It first introduces the concept of free relatives in English, highlighting their syntactic behavior and how they differ from interrogatives. It then explores the structure of free relatives in SA, with a particular focus on their function in conditional sentences. Special attention is given to the role of free relative pronouns like *man* “whoever” and their interaction with mood and case features in the derivation. Finally, a comparison between free relatives and conditional particles, such as *?in* “if”, is provided to illustrate the distinct syntactic and semantic properties involved.

##### 4.4.1 Free Relatives in English

A free relative clause is a kind of relative clause. Standard relative pronouns refer to antecedents. In contrast, a free relative pronoun is not co-



conditional particle. Then, it gets raised to the Spec of the TP. After that, it gets moved from the Spec of TP to the relative clause. The edge feature (EF) on the head C requires the Spec of CP to be filled with a maximal projection. Thus, the EF on the head C triggers the movement of the free relative pronoun, *man* “whoever” to the Spec of CP. Once the relative pronoun gets raised to the Spec of CP, It requires an extra semantic function and that is of being a conditional particle that has an internal feature. Hence, it represents the force of the sentence. There is a further movement inside the CP because *man* “whoever” acquires the feature of the jussive mood marker. Therefore, it can assign the jussive mood to the two verbs *ja-qum* “he stand” and the verb *ʔa-qum* “I stand” of the conditional sentence.

However, the particle *ʔin* “if”, in (16b), is only a mood marker and a conditional particle. The particle *ʔin* “if” enters the derivation with its features valued. It is base generated under the head Force phrase, whereas; *man* “whoever” is moved. While *man* “whoever” represents a conditional particle, a free relative pronoun, and a mood marker, the particle *ʔin* “if” functions as a conditional particle and a mood marker. The particle *ʔin* “if” assigns the jussive mood to the two verbs *ta-qum* “you stand” and the verb *ʔa-qum* “I stand” of the conditional sentence. It represents the higher maximal projection in the derivation that determines the force of the sentence as conditional.

In summary, this section has shown that while free relatives in English and SA share the basic property of lacking an overt antecedent, their syntactic behavior differs within the Split CP Hypothesis. Free relatives like *man* “whoever” acts as conditional particles and mood markers. The movement of *man* to the Spec of the CP, driven by the edge feature (EF), demonstrates how Arabic free relatives can simultaneously fulfil multiple grammatical functions.

#### 4.5 The Exceptive Construction in SA

This section investigates the semantic, logical, and syntactic structure of the exception particle *ʔilla:* “except” in SA. Hassan (1975, Vol.1, P.315) compares the concept *ʔistiθna:ʔ* “exception”, in SA, to the process of subtraction in mathematics. He explains that using tools like “*ʔilla:*” (except) means removing an element from an antecedent, just as subtracting a number from a total. The exception structure consists of three main constituents. The First constituent is the antecedent or the subtraction domain, as discussed by Saeed (2023). The second constituent is the exception particle *ʔilla:*. The third one is the excepted element, whereas Postdam & Polinsky (2017) and Al-Bataineh

17) a. ma: takallam-a                      ?illa: wa:hid-un  
NEG speak-3SG.MASC.PAST except one.MASC-Nom  
*“No one spoke except one”*

(Hassan, 1975, Vol.2, P.316-317)

In addition, the kind of the exception structure differs if the subtraction domain exists or not. In (17a), the excepted element *wa:hid-un* ‘one’ exists after the exceptive particle *?illa:* ‘except’, whereas the antecedent/subtraction domain that exists before the particle is covert. The excepted element *wa:hid-un* ‘one’, in (17a), is outside the domain of the negation. The semantic domain of the Neg particle *ma:* is the TP. Although the construction in English is full, it is incomplete in SA because the antecedent is null, and null categories are not allowed in English. Hence, the exceptive construction is called *mufray* ‘empty/incomplete’ if the antecedent is implicit. On the contrary, if the antecedent/ subtraction domain is overt, the exceptive construction is called *ta:m*

“full”, as in (17b). In (17b), the extraction domain/ antecedent is represented by *ʔan-na:s-u* “people” from which *wa:hid-un* “one” is subtracted or excepted. Hence, (17a) is a negative incomplete/empty exceptive construction, but (17b) is a negative full exceptive construction.

Moreover, Hassan (1975, V.2, P.119) discusses that exceptive elements can be assigned different cases restricted by the type of exception construction. The excepted element, in full negative exceptive constructions, as in (17b), can be assigned either the accusative case or the nominative case. On the one hand, the excepted element *wa:hid-an* “one”, in (17b), can be assigned the accusative case by the c-commanding exceptive particle *ʔilla:* “except”. On the other hand, *wa:hid-un* “one”, in (17b), can be assigned the nominative case as *badl* “an apposition”. The apposition inherits the nominative case of the antecedent *ʔan-na:s-u* “people” because it is the subject. However, the excepted element *wa:hid-un* “one”, in (17a), is assigned the nominative case because it exists in an empty incomplete negative exceptive construction.

In brief, the Arabic exceptive particle *ʔilla* “except” demonstrates a rich and complex behavior both syntactically and semantically. It interacts with the antecedent, the excepted element, and the broader sentence structure. The classification of exceptive constructions reflects the importance of the presence, nature, and case assignment of the antecedent and the excepted element.

## 5.0 Conclusion

This study has examined functional categories in SA concerning Rizzi’s (1997) Split CP Hypothesis within Chomsky’s Minimalist Program. The analysis reveals that SA exhibits a richly articulated left periphery, but it is also different from the strict hierarchy proposed by Rizzi, i.e., Focus phrases may precede Force heads in SA. The findings highlight several key points: first, functional heads such as the completizers *ʔinna* “indeed” and *IL* are in complementary distribution. Second, free relatives in Arabic do not only fulfill syntactic roles but also act as conditional and mood markers, further supporting the Split CP structure. Third, Y/N questions show that interrogative particles occupy the Force position, while focused constituents move to the Spec of the Focus phrase. Lastly, the behavior of the exceptive particle *ʔilla:* “except” supports how exception particles are syntactically integrated and how case marking is observed based on the structure’s polarity, i.e., negative or positive, and completeness. Overall, this research confirms the applicability of the Split CP framework to SA but also suggests some conditions and constraints to

account for its specific syntactic phenomena. Rizzi's strict hierarchy of the Split CP has to be modified to account for the data in SA. Future research could extend this analysis to other varieties of Arabic or explore the interaction between CP structure and information structure more deeply.

## References

- Alatawi, S. (2016). *The syntax of left periphery in Arabic: A minimalist perspective* (Doctoral dissertation, University of York). University of York eTheses Online. <https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/19098/>
- Alazzawie, A. (2018). Splitting the CP domain of Standard Arabic clausal structure. *European Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics Studies*, 2(3), 111-134.
- Alazzawie, A., & Abdelaal, N. M. (2022). *Focus position below TP in Standard Arabic*. *Saudi Journal of Language Studies*, 2(3), 129–152. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SJLS-03-2022-0042>
- Al-Bataineh, Hussein. (2021). The morphosyntax of Arabic exceptives: A minimalist approach. *Journal of Semitic Studies* 66(2). 441–482.
- Al-Uthaymeen, M. Ibn S. (2013). *Sharh Alfīyyat Ibn Malik* (Vol.2). Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd.
- Badawi, Elsaid, Michael G. Carter and Adrian Gully. 2016. *Modern written Arabic: A comprehensive grammar*, 2nd edn. London: Routledge.
- Bakir, M. J. (2011). *Against the split-CP hypothesis: Evidence from Iraqi Arabic*. In E. Broselow & H. Ouali (Eds.), *Perspectives on Arabic Linguistics* (pp. 187–202). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Bresnan, J., and Grimshaw, J. (1978). The syntax of free relatives in English. *Linguistic Inquiry* 9, 331-391.
- Chomsky, N. (1980). *On binding*. Cambridge: MIT.
- Chomsky, N. (1981). *Lectures on Government and Binding*. Dordrecht: Foris.
- Chomsky, N. (1982). Some Concepts and Consequences of the Theory of Government and Binding. *Linguistic Inquiry Monograph* 4. MIT Press.
- Chomsky, N. (1986a) *Knowledge of Language, its Nature, Origin, and Use*, New York: Praeger
- Chomsky, N. (1993). *Lectures on government and binding the Pisa lectures*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Chomsky, N. (1995). *The Minimalist program*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

- Chomsky, N. (2000a). *Minimalist inquiries: The framework*. In R. Martin, D. Michaels, & J. Uriagereka (Eds.), *Step by step: Essays on minimalist syntax in honor of Howard Lasnik* (pp. 89–155). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Chomsky, N. (2004). Beyond explanatory adequacy. In A. Belletti (Ed.), *The cartography of syntactic structures* (Vol. 3, pp. 104–131). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cinque, G. (1999). *Adverbs and Functional Heads: A Crosslinguistic Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ezzat, A. (1973). *Aspects of Language-Study*. Beirut: Beirut Arab University.
- Hassan, A. (1975). *ʔal Naħw ʔal Wa:fi*: (third, Vol. 1). Da:r ʔal Maça:rif, Egypt.
- Hassan, A. (1975). *ʔal Naħw ʔal Wa:fi*: (third, Vol. 2). Da:r ʔal Maça:rif, Egypt.
- Hoekstra, E. (1991) *Licensing Conditions on Phrase Structure*, PhD Diss., University of Groningen.
- Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah. (1991). *Al-Wa: bil al-Sʿayyib min al-Kalim al-Tʿayyib* (S. Ibrahim, Ed.). Cairo: Da:r al-Ḥadi:th.
- Ibn Jinni, A. U. (1988). *Al-Luma ʿ fi al- ʿArabiyya* (S. Abu Mughli, Ed.). Amman: Dar Majdalawi.
- Lasnik, H. and M. Saito. (1991). ‘On the subject of infinitives’, in L. Dobrin, L. Nichols and R. Rodriguez (eds.), *Papers from the 27th Regional Meeting of the Chicago linguistics Society*, pp. 324–343. Reprint 1999 in H. Lasnik, *Minimalist Analysis*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- McCloskey, J. (1991). Clause Structure, Ellipsis and Proper Government in Irish“. In *The syntax of Verb Initial Languages*. *Lingua* 85, 259-302.
- Pesetsky, D. (1989) *Language-particular Processes and the Earliness Principle*, ms. MIT.
- Potsdam, Eric and Maria Polinsky. 2017. A preliminary look at exceptives in Tahitian. In J. Ostrove, R. Kramer and J. Sabbagh (eds.) *Asking the right questions: Essays in honor of Sandra Chung*. Santa Cruz, CA: University of California, Santa Cruz. 28–36.
- Rizzi, L. (1997). The fine structure of the left periphery. In *Elements of Grammar*, ed. by Liliane Haegeman, 281-337. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

- Rizzi, L. (ed.). (2004a). *The Structure of CP and IP, The Cartography of Syntactic Structures*, vol.2. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rizzi, L. (2004b). Locality and the left periphery. In *Structures and Beyond: The Cartography of Syntactic Structure*, Vol. 3, ed. by Belletti Adriana, 223-251. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Saeed, S. T. (2023). The Syntax of Exceptive Constructions in Arabic. *Acta Linguistica Academica*. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2062.2022.00520>
- Shariq, M. (2015). *Arabic and English consonants: A phonetic and phonological investigation*. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 6(6), 146–152.

## Appendix A: List of Abbreviations

Below is a list of abbreviations and symbols used throughout this paper:

| Abbreviation          | Definition                |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>1<sup>st</sup></b> | First Person              |
| <b>2<sup>nd</sup></b> | Second Person             |
| <b>3<sup>rd</sup></b> | Third Person              |
| <b>Acc</b>            | Accusative                |
| <b>BT</b>             | Binding Theory            |
| <b>C</b>              | Complementizer            |
| <b>C-command</b>      | Constituent Command       |
| <b>CP</b>             | Complementizer Phrase     |
| <b>Coord</b>          | Coordinator               |
| <b>EF</b>             | Edge Feature              |
| <b>FinP</b>           | Finiteness phrase         |
| <b>Foc</b>            | Focus                     |
| <b>FocP</b>           | Focus phrase              |
| <b>IL</b>             | Initiation [I]            |
| <b>LF</b>             | Logical Form              |
| <b>MP</b>             | The Minimalist Program    |
| <b>Nom</b>            | Nominative                |
| <b>Neg</b>            | Negator                   |
| <b>N</b>              | No                        |
| <b>NP</b>             | Noun Phrase               |
| <b>O</b>              | Object                    |
| <b>Obl</b>            | Oblique                   |
| <b>P&amp;P</b>        | Principles and Parameters |
| <b>Pers</b>           | Person                    |
| <b>S</b>              | Subject                   |
| <b>SA</b>             | Standard Arabic           |
| <b>Spec</b>           | Specifier                 |
| <b>T</b>              | Tense                     |
| <b>Top</b>            | Topic                     |
| <b>TopP</b>           | Topic phrase              |
| <b>TP</b>             | Tense Phrase              |
| <b>UG</b>             | Universal Grammar         |

---

|                   |              |
|-------------------|--------------|
| <b>V</b>          | Verb         |
| <b>VP</b>         | Verb Phrase  |
| <b>Y</b>          | Yes          |
| <b>X</b>          | Head         |
| <b>X'</b>         | X Bar        |
| <b>φ features</b> | Phi Features |

## Appendix B: List of Consonants in Arabic

The following table is a chart of the IPA symbols of consonants with their corresponding Arabic letters used in this paper:

| Manner<br>↓ |           | Point → | Labial | Pain     |          | Emphatic |          | Palatal | Velar   | Uvular | Pha. |
|-------------|-----------|---------|--------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|--------|------|
|             |           |         |        | Dental   | Alveolar | Dental   | Alveolar |         |         |        |      |
| Nasal       |           |         | م m    | ن n      |          |          |          |         |         |        |      |
| Stop        | Voiceless |         |        | ت t      |          | ط tʕ     |          |         | ك k     | ق q    |      |
|             | Voiced    |         | ب b    | د d      |          | ض dʕ     |          | ج g     |         |        |      |
| Fricative   | Voiceless |         | ف f    | ث θ      | س S      |          | ص sʕ     | ش       | خ x ~ X |        | ح h  |
|             | Voiced    |         |        | ذ ð      | ز z      | ظ ðʕ     |          |         | غ ɣ     |        | ع ʕ  |
| Trill       |           |         |        |          | ر r      |          |          |         |         |        |      |
| Approximant |           |         |        | ل l ~ l̥ |          |          |          | ي j     | و W     |        |      |

The following symbols do not exist in the chart because of space considerations:

- The symbol for the glottal voiceless fricative (h) (ه).
- The symbol for the glottal voiceless stop (?) (ء).
- The symbol for the voiceless post-alveolar affricate (č) (چ).

(Shariq, 2015, P.148, Figure.2)

### Appendix C: Vowels in Arabic

| Vowels | Description                       | Examples   | Trans.         |
|--------|-----------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| /i/    | short high unrounded vowel        | ʔinna      | Indeed         |
| /i:/   | long high front unrounded vowel   | sadi:d     | Sound          |
| /u/    | short high back rounded vowel     | ʔa-qom     | I stand        |
| /u:/   | back close rounded vowel          | tafham-u:n | You understand |
| /a/    | short mid unrounded vowel         | ʔan-nafs   | The self       |
| /a:/   | long mid unrounded vowel          | qa: ʔim-un | Standing       |
| /o/    | mid half close back rounded vowel | Hoda:      | Proper name    |

(Ezzat, 1973, pp. XI-XIII)

- Vowel length is indicated by a colon (:), e.g., *sadi:d* “sound”
- Germination is represented by doubling the consonant, e.g., *ʔan-nafs* “the self”