# The Morpho-Syntax of Sentential Negation in Rural Jordanian Arabic

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, I argue that the Neg particles head their projections, and the negation in a hierarchical representation occurs between TP and VP. In future tense, I argue that the Aux can move to the Neg head just to pick the negation and then the negative particle and the Aux moves to T. I also show that speakers of RJA use different negation constructions depending on the structure and tense of the sentence. For example, the negative particle *ma* is a preverbal particle used with present and past verbs evenly. The negative particle *ma…-ʃ* is a pre and post-verbal particle where *ma* is a proclitic and -ʃ is an enclitic. This particle is used with present verbs and past verbs. However, when used with present tense verbs, the proclitic *ma* becomes optional, whereas with past tense verbs the deletion of the proclitic *ma* results in an ungrammatical sentence. As for copular sentences, the particle *miʃ* is used to negate verbless copular sentences where there is a covert present tense verb. But, when the copular sentence is formed via a past tense verb, *miʃ* is no longer used. Instead, the negative construction *ma…-ʃ* is used.

## Keywords

Arabic Syntax; Rural Jordanian Arabic; negation; Jordanian Arabic

## Academic Discipline And Sub-Disciplines

Linguistics

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Jordanian Arabic is one of the dialects spoken in the Levant. Jordanian Arabic, like its mother, Modern Standard Arabic, belongs to the Semitic languages family. In Jordan, there are three varieties of spoken Arabic distributed according to the geographical areas. These varieties are classified into Urban, Bedouin, and Rural. Urban Jordanian Arabic is mainly spoken in the big cities and by city dwellers. Bedouin Jordanian Arabic is spoken by the desert dwellers. Rural Jordanian Arabic (henceforth RJA) is mainly spoken by villagers who live in the suburbs of north Jordan. This variety is also spoken by city dwellers who are originally from the suburbs but moved to the city. The distinction between these three varieties is primarily phonetic. However, the syntactic and lexical properties cannot be ignored as they sometimes distinguish one variety from another (Al-Deaibes and Rosen, to appear).

Although Classical Arabic or Standard Arabic is the official language by constitution in Jordan and is used in newspapers, radios, government issues, official speeches, regulations, Friday sermons, etc, people speak their own dialects in their everyday life conversations according to their region or place of origin. So, Standard Arabic holds a diglossic situation in Jordan since it is used only in formal settings (Ferguson 1959 and El-Hassan 1977). For example, the word coffee is pronounced as 'gahwa' in Rural and Bedouin varieties, whereas it is pronounced as 'ʔahwa' by the urban variety speakers. Also, the voiceless uvular stop phoneme /q/ is pronounced as [g] in the rural and Bedouin varieties whereas it is pronounce as [ʔ] in the urban variety. The phoneme [k] is pronounced as [tʃ] in rural and Bedouin varieties while it is pronounced as [k] in the urban dialect (Al-Deaibes, to appear).

The word order in RJA is mainly VSO and SVO. The VSO order is largely used with past tenses, while the SVO order is used with present tense. However, these two orders can be used interchangeably without any change in the meaning. So, it is a matter of the speaker's preference whether to use the SVO or VSO word order.

The data presented in this study represent RJA as spoken by the researcher who is from the northern part of Jordan where RJA is largely spoken. The data in this study were tested with native speakers of RJA for the grammaticality or ungrammaticality of the sentences presented in this research. All the native speakers who were consulted assured that the grammatical sentences are used by speakers of RJA and the ungrammatical sentences are not or rarely used by RJA speakers.

## 1.1 Sentence Structure in RJA

As mentioned in the introduction, the word order in RJA is either VSO or SVO. The following examples illustrate the use of these word orders.

(1) Akal     l-walad     l-tofaħa    **VSO**

   ate 3SM   the-boy    the-apple

'The boy ate the apple.'

(2) l-walad     akal     l-tofaħa    **SVO**

   the-boy   ate 3SM   the-apple

'The boy ate the apple.'

This word order is similar to that of Modern Standard Arabic. Other Arabic dialects allow this kind of word order, like Palestinian Arabic (Mohammad, 2000) and Moroccan Arabic (Benmamoun, 2000). It is worth mentioning in this respect that sentence (1) is considered as a verbal sentence since it starts with a verb. Conversely, sentence (2) is considered as a nominal sentence since it begins with a noun or subject. This case is also existent in Standard Arabic as the following two examples illustrate (3) and (4).

(3) Kataba     Ali   qasˤeda.    **(Verbal Sentence)**

   Write-past   Ali   poem

'Ali wrote a poem.'

(4) Ali   kataba   qasˤeda    **(Nominal Sentence)**

   Ali   write-past  peom

'Ali wrote a poem.'

Based on the above examples, we can conclude that Jordanian Arabic's word order and sentence structure are similar to those of Standard Arabic. Standard Arabic as well RJA do not allow other word order alternations, e.g., OSV, OVS or SOV. However, these alternations can be found in other dialects in Jordan, namely, the Bedouin dialect. These alternations take place only when the object is contrastively focused or when resumed by a clitic as the following examples show.

(5)  l-tofaħa       Akal        l-walad            **OVS**

     the-apple     ate 3SM     the-boy

     'The boy ate the apple.'

(6)  l-tofaħa       l-walad      Akal              **OSV**

     the-apple     the-boy     ate 3SM

     'The boy ate the apple.'

(7)  l-walad        l-tofaħa     Akal              **SOV**

     the-boy        the-apple    ate 3SM

     'The boy ate the apple.'

## 2. NEGATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN RJA

Negation is a linguistic phenomenon in all languages. It is one of the natural traits of human beings to say 'no' or deny actions. So, in order to make an affirmative sentence negative, we need to use negative particles. There are different structures or patterns of negation in RJA. These structures can be found in both the SVO and VSO order.

### 2.1 The Negative Particle *ma*

The first pattern of negation is the negative particle ma. This particle is used before verbs only. In other words, it holds a preverbal position. This particle is used to negate clauses with past verbs (perfective) and present verbs (imperfective) as well as imperative sentences as shown in the following examples (8), (9) and (10) respectively.

(8) Ahmad ma     bokil        laħmeh            **(ma+present verb)**

     Ahmad Neg  eat-present 3SM   meat

     'Ahmad does not eat meat.'

(9) Ahmad  ma     akal        laħmeh            **(ma+past verb)**

     Ahmad  Neg  eat-past 3SM   meat

     'Ahmad did not eat meat.'

(10) ma      teshrab            ħaleeb hasa       **(Imparative)**

     Neg   drink-present 3SM   milk     now

     'Do not drink milk now!'

In the above examples, the negative particle precedes the verbs. In this case the negative particle negates the whole constituent, i.e the verb and the object. However, we might find the negative particle at the beginning of the sentences preceding the subject. In this construction, the negative particle negates the whole sentence. This kind of construction is not common in RJA. Rather, it is used in the Bedouin dialect in the south of Jordan as in the following example.

(11). ma  Ahmad       akal         laħmeh

     Neg  Ahmad    eat-past 3SM   meat

     'Ahmad did not eat meat.'

If the negative particle ma is represented in the clausal hierarchy as used in RJA, then we need to refer to the hypothesis adopted by Benmamoun, (2000), Ouhalla ,(2002); Aoun et al., (2010). This hypothesis proposes that the negative phrase projection is placed between the TP and the VP. According to this hypothesis, the negative particle heads the negative projection and then moves to T to be cliticized with the verb. Also this hypothesis is an extension to Pollock's (1989) analysis of negation in French where the negation position is between the TP and the VP. Accordingly, sentence (9) is represented in the following tree diagram using the same hypothesis for illustration.

Based on the tree diagram below (Figure 1), which represents the SVO word order of RJA, the verb moves from V to the head of NegP to merge with the negative particle ma and then picks it and both move to the head of TP. Also, the subject, Ahmad, moves from the Spec of NegP to the Spec of TP to check the nominal feature of T. If we try to represent sentence (8), which follows the VSO word order of RJA, we will end up having the same representation of sentence (9) except for the movement of the subject.
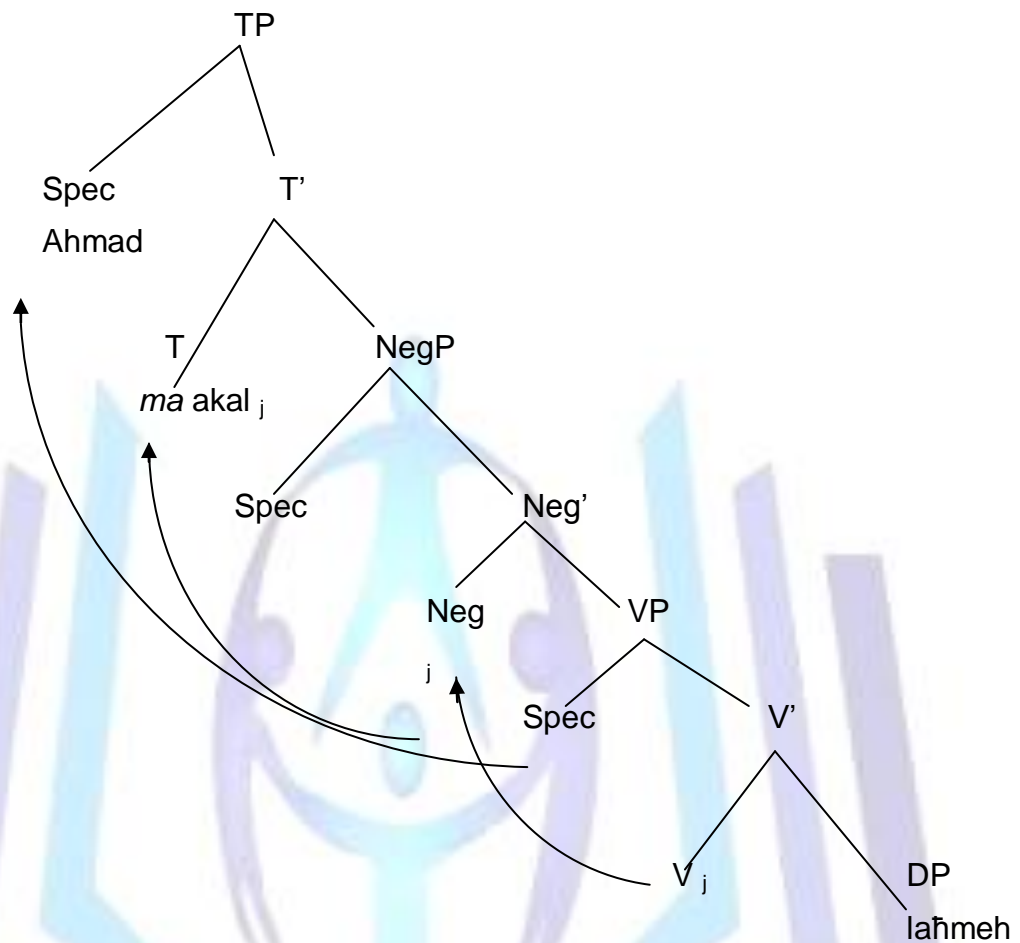
**Fig 1: Negation in SVO**

The subject in sentence (8), if represented in a clausal hierarchy, stays in the Spec of the VP to maintain the VSO word order. Accordingly, this proves that the word order does not change the structure of negation or the position of the negative particle.

## 2.2 The Negative Particles *ma… -ʃ*

The second pattern is the negative particle ma… -ʃ, in which the morpheme ma is used before the verb, and the suffix -ʃ is attached to the end of the same verb. Thus, the occurrence of this construction in a clause is said to be pre-verbal and post-verbal at the same time and for the same verb. Moreover, this type of construction is used with present (Imperfect Aspect) and past verbs (Perfect Aspect). However, when the verb is present, the ma particle becomes optional. If we delete the particle ma and try to negate a past tense sentence using only the suffix -ʃ, the sentence will turn out to be ungrammatical. According to Onizan (2005), the difference between the negative particle ma…-ʃ and the negative particle ma is that the former cannot be used with infinitive mode to express the future tense, whereas the latter can. This is clearly shown in the examples below where sentences (12) and (13) are grammatically used with past and present verbs respectively, whereas sentence (14) is ungrammatical because it is used with the future tense.

(12) l-bint     ma-aklatʃ     laħmeh     **(ma….-ʃ + Past verb)**

     The-girl     NEG eat-past 3SF-NEG     meat

     'The girl did not eat meat.'

(13) l-bint     (ma)     btokilʃ     laħmeh     **((ma)….-ʃ + Present verb)**

     The-girl  (NEG)   eat-present- 3SF-NEG   meat

     'The girl did not eat meat.'

(14)* l-bint    ma- raħ  tokilʃ     laħmeh     **(ma….-ʃ + Future verb)**

The-girl   Neg-will    eat-Neg    meat

'The girl will not to eat meat.'

TP
Spec
I-bint
T'
T
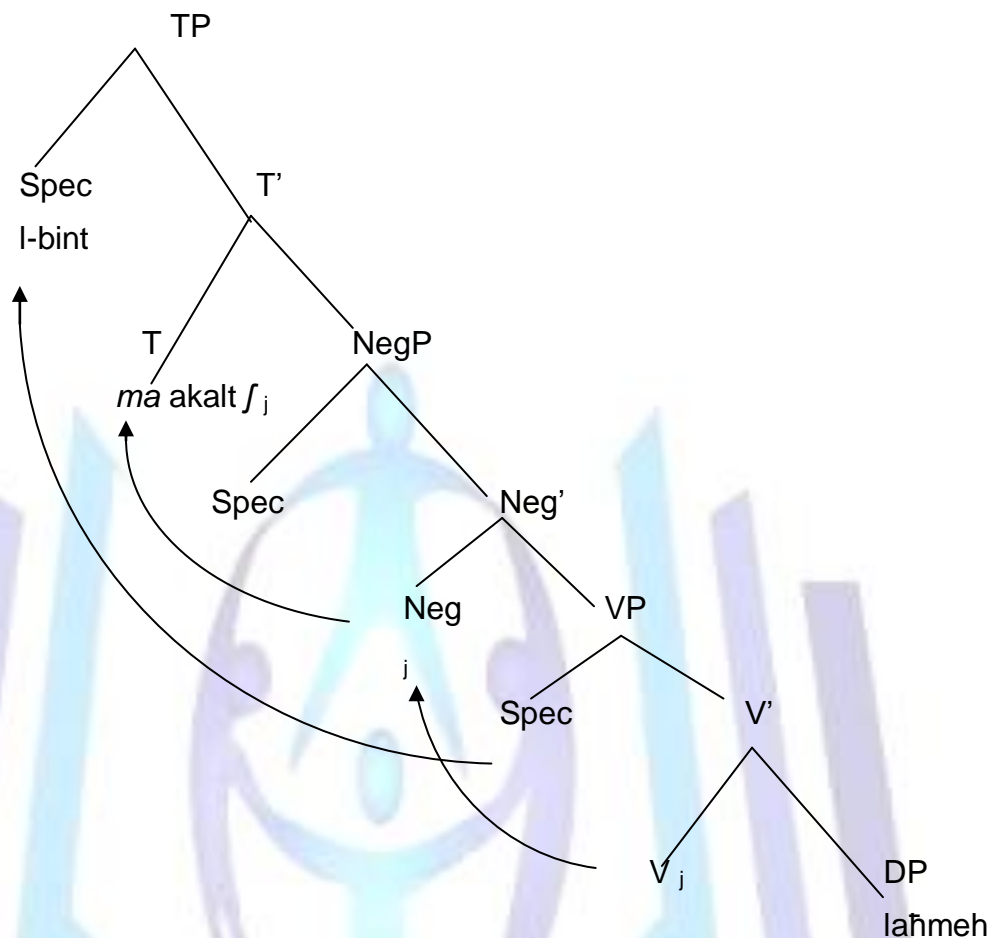*ma* akalt ʃ ᵢ
NegP
Spec
Neg'
Neg
ⱼ
VP
Spec
V'
V ⱼ
DP
laħmeh

**Fig 2: the fusion of the negative particle *ma…-ʃ***

Based on the data in sentences (12) and (13), we can notice that the negative particle ma is optional when used with present verbs only, unlike the urban variety where the two particles are optional; either particle can be used without any change in the meaning. On the contrary, when it comes to the past tense verbs in RJA, the ma particle is not optional anymore, and if we try to get rid of it, this will result in having an ungrammatical sentence as in (15) below.

(15) *I-bint        aklat-ʃ            laħmeh

The-girl       eat-past 3SF-NEG        meat

'The girl did not eat meat.'

This also leads us to the conclusion that the post verbal - ʃ cannot stand by itself with a past tense verb unless the verb is preceded by the pre-verbal negative particle *ma*.

Based on the above-drawn tree diagram (Figure 2), we can notice that the negative particle *ma…-ʃ* is treated exactly the same as the negative particle *ma*. We start by moving the verb from its position in V to the head of the NegP where it gets cliticized with the negative particles, where ma precedes the verb and -ʃ follows the verb. Then, after cliticization, the verb along with the complex negative particle moves to the head of TP. Similarly, the subject, I-bint moves from the Spec of the NegP to the Spec of TP to check the nominal feature of T. If we attempt to use sentence (13), which has a present tense verb in a hierarchical representation, we will have the same representation of sentence (12) with one exception that ma is optional and thus can be deleted. And in this case, the particle -ʃ will suffice in carrying the function and meaning of negation and will be attached to the verb and go through all the movements required in a tree diagram. As mentioned above, in Urban Jordanian Arabic, the ma particle and the *ma…-ʃ* particle are both optional as shown in the following two examples (16) and (17).

(16) Ali       ma      biħib (ʃ)          I-fawakeh

Ali      Neg      like-3SM (Neg)      fruit

'Ali does not like fruit.'

(17)  Ali  (ma)   biħib -ʃ   l-fawakeh

    Ali   (Neg) like Neg   fruit

'Ali does not like fruit.'

It is worth mentioning here that this negative construction is not common in RJA, although it is used by those who have strong connections with city dwellers or with those who work in the big cities.

## 2.3 The Negative Particle *miʃ*

The last negative construction in RJA is the particle miʃ .This particle appears only in predicate phrases or verbless copular sentences as illustrated in examples (18) and (19) respectively.

(18) ana   miʃ      taʕban

    I      NEG    tired

'I am not tired.'

This kind of negation in predicate phrases or copular sentences has no overt verb in the present tense. However, when the sentence is converted to the past tense, there will be an overt copular verb. The root of this verb in Arabic is kana which means "was" or "were". When we negate the predicate phrases that have past tense verbs, we use the second negative construction mentioned above, ma....-ʃ. Therefore, if we use the negative particle miʃ with past tense copular sentences, we will end up having ungrammatical sentence structures as shown in sentences (20) and (21). Having said that, we can now prove the assumption that ma is optional in present tense negative constructions whereas it appears to be obligatory in the past tense constructions.  The following example (19) will show how the past tense changes the negative construction in predicate phrases.

(19) ana       ma kont-ʃ        taʕban

    I       NEG-Copula-past-NEG    tired

'I was not tired.'

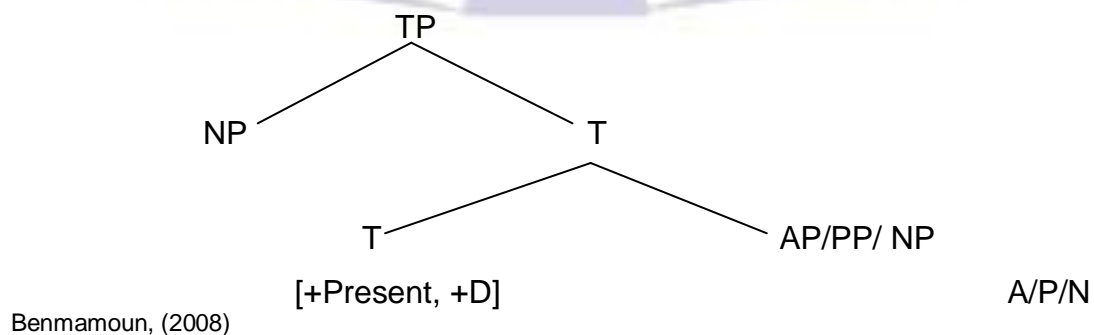(20) *ana       kontʃ            taʕban

    I    Copula-past-NEG      tired

'*I was not tired.'

(21) * ana    miʃ    kont         taʕban

    I        Neg  Copula-past  tired

'I was not tired.'

This construction is controversial as to whether there is a copular verb in the present tense sentences or it is deleted. Some syntacticians propose that the copular verb is lexically existent but it gets deleted during the derivation process (Obeidat et al. 1994 and Baker 1980). However, I here adopt Benmamoun's proposal which refutes the previous proposal. Benmamoun argues that present tense verbless sentences do not have a copular verb to be deleted. Rather, he adds that present tense is specified only for the [+D] feature. So, there is no need to have a copula to host the tense. He provides the following spine for copular sentences without a VP.

```
                TP
              /    \
            NP      T
                   /  \
                  T    AP/PP/ NP
           [+Present, +D]        A/P/N
```

Benmamoun, (2008)

Based on the representation, we can notice the absence of the VP from this structure. However, when it comes to the use of the past tense, we will have the same representation with the addition of VP which shows the force of the verb in the

past as shown in the above examples (19). Also, based on Benmamoun's proposal, which is mainly relied on in this section, sentence (18) will have the following representation.
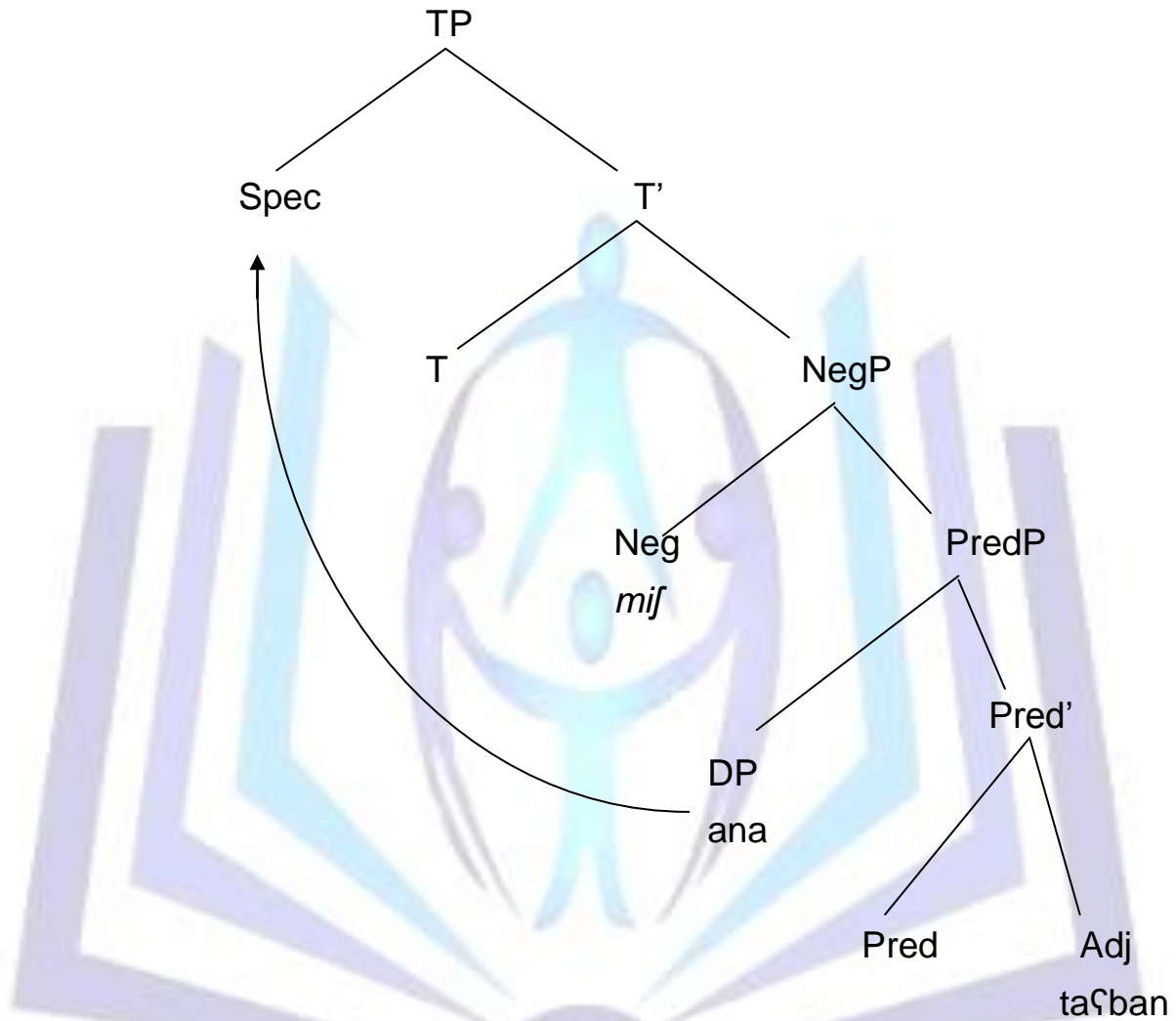


**Figure 3: Negation in verbless sentences**

In copular sentences with the past tense, the word order can be either SVO as in sentence (19) or VSO, and this is attributed to the presence of the verb. This change of word order is not acceptable for copular sentences with present tense due to the absence of the verb. My argument here is in support of Benmamoun's argument that the present tense copular sentences do not have a verb that undergoes deletion. Let's take the following sentence on how a copular sentence is used in VSO word order and represent it in a tree diagram for further illustration.

(22) ana  ma      kont ʃ              taʕban

    I    Neg  Copula-past-NEG    tired

   'I was not tired.'

In this sentence as shown in the tree below (Figure 4), the verb 'kont' moves to Neg. to pick the negation and then gets cliticized with the negative particles ma and -ʃ and then they all move to T head of TP to check the [+V] feature.
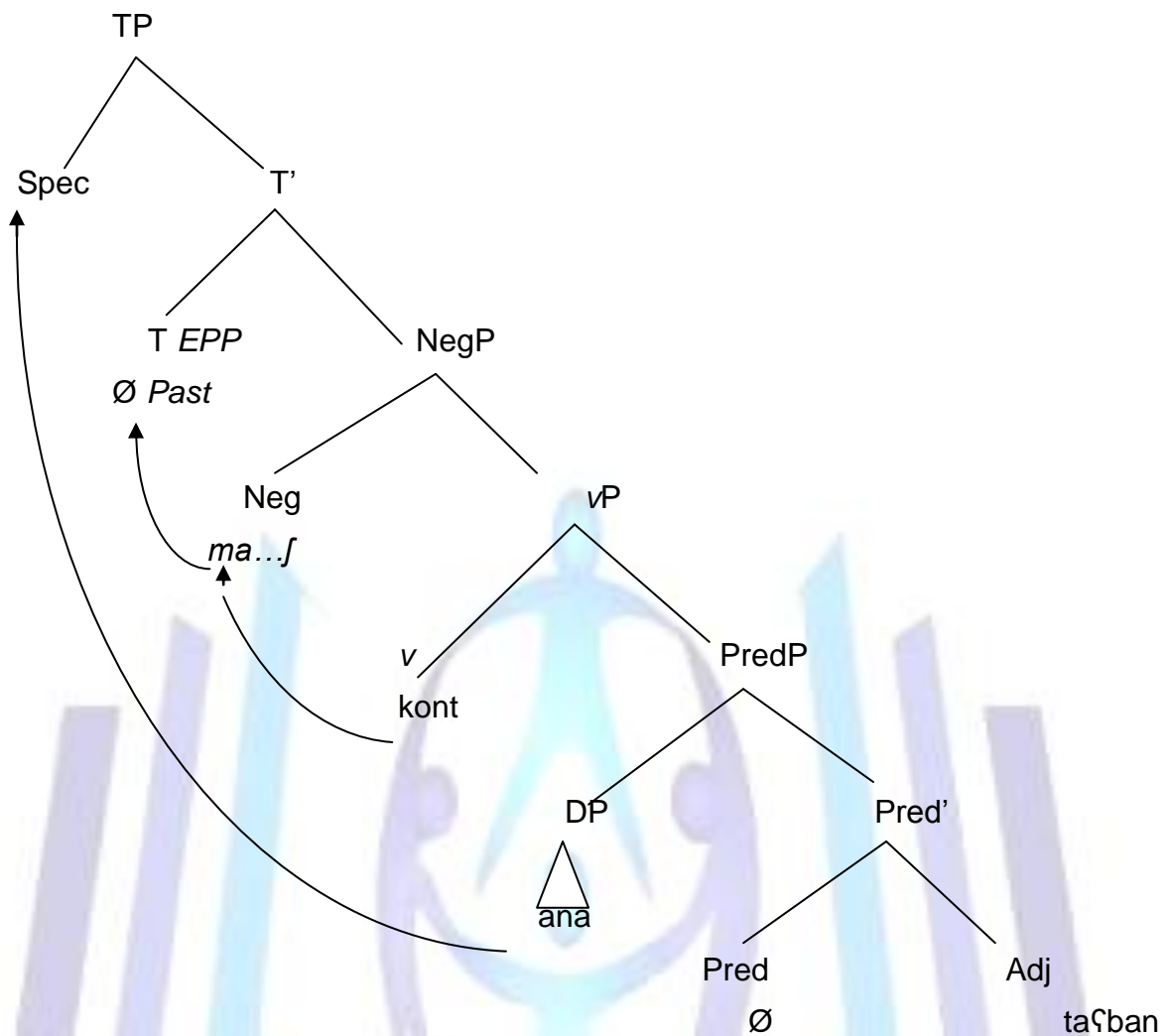
```
                          TP
                     /          \
                  Spec          T'
                   ↑          /      \
                   |      T EPP       NegP
                   |      Ø Past     /      \
                   |         ↑    Neg        vP
                   |         |   ma…ʃ      /    \
                   |         |    ↑       v      PredP
                   |         |    |      kont   /      \
                   |         |    |          DP        Pred'
                   |         |    |          △        /     \
                   |         |    |         ana    Pred      Adj
                   |_____|____|_____  Ø        taʕban
```

**Figure 4: Representation of negation in the past tense predicate clauses**

It is worth mentioning in this respect that the negative particle -ʃ developed from the noun [ʔiʃi] 'thing' in Neo Arabic sentential negation (Aoun, 2010). This word is not used in Standard Arabic though. It is also argued that around the eighth Century to eleventh Century, [ʃ] was introduced as a negative element. Aoun also speculates that this stage started in Egypt or Palestine or Tunisia.

According to Benmamoun (2008), the negation of copular sentences in Egyptian Arabic is structured by using the negative particle miʃ . He also suggests that this particle is originally the two particle constructions that we have seen above, namely, ma and -ʃ. According to him, in verbless copular sentences, these two particles cliticize onto each other forming the negative particles miʃ. Based on this, I argue that Benmamoun's proposal also extends to RJA that in the past tense copular sentences as in sentence (19) the particle ma is a proclitic while the -ʃ particle is an enclitic. However, these two particles cannot cliticize in the same way when used to negate past tense copular sentences or even when used with main verbs as shown in sentence (23) below.

(23) *Ahmad  miʃ  beshrab      laban.

Ahmad  Neg  drink-3SM  yoghurt

"Ahmad does not drink yoghurt.'

When the negative particle miʃ is used with future tense sentences, it takes a position before the future auxiliary verb raħ. This future auxiliary is always followed by a present tense verb as shown in the following example (24).

(24) Kareem  miʃ  raħ  yodros

Kareem    Neg  Aux  study

'Kareem will not study.

TP

Spec　　　　T'

T *EPP*　　　　NegP

Ø *Future*

*miʃ* raħ

Neg　　　　AuxP

Aux　　　　*v*P

DP　　　　*v*'

D　　N　　*v*　　V
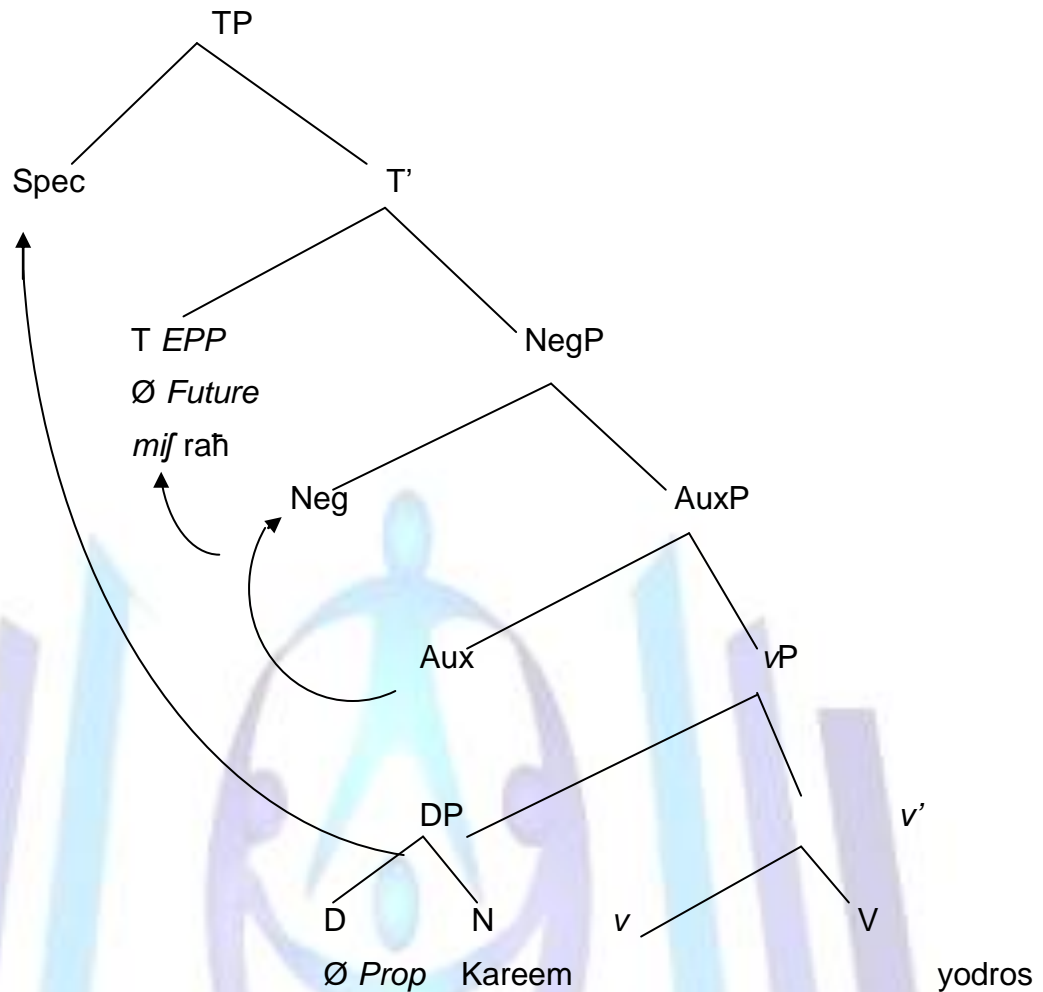
Ø *Prop*　Kareem　　　　yodros

**Figure 5: Negation in future tense**

When this sentence is represented in a tree diagram, as shown above, the auxiliary does not move like in English because this will result in an ungrammatical sentence. To solve this problem, I argue that the Aux moves to the Neg Head to pick the negative particle miʃ and then they both move to T to be checked for tense. The negation in future tense sentences occurs before the auxiliary, not after it. The DP moves to the Spec position to pick the case and to maintain the word order of the sentence, SVO.

The verb raħ in RJA also means 'go'. This means that it can be used as a main verb as well as an auxiliary functioning as a future marker. This auxiliary is not the only way to refer to future tense as there is another auxiliary that can be used in RJA to refer to future event, namely, *bedi*. The auxiliary bedi can be negated using the negative particle *ma* or *ma…-ʃ* equally without any violation in the structure or meaning. However, the difference between bedi and raħ is that the former inflects for agreement whereas the latter does not. The following examples show how *bedi* inflects for agreement in the future tense (Al-Saidat et al. 2010).

ana (I)  bedi

enta (You-masc. sing) bedak

enti (You-fem. sing) bedik

ento (You.PL) bedko

hu (he) bedo

he (she) bedha

Another difference between *bedi* and *raħ* is that the former cannot be negated by miʃ. Rather, it is treated as main verbs when it comes to negation. When we negate a future tense sentence using *bedi*, the agreement is still maintained in the sentence as in the following examples (25).

(25) Ahmad　　ma　　bedo　　　　yoktob　　　　I-dars

Ahamd　　Neg　Aux-FUT.masc. sing　write-masc.sing　def. lesson

'He will not write the lesson.'

## 2.4 The Negation of Imperatives in RJA

In RJA, the negative constructions ma…-ʃ and ma can be used to negate imperatives. They can also be used when the function of the negative is either 'cautioning' as represented by ma or 'prohibition' by using ma…-ʃ. These particular constructions are exclusive to the rural variety in Jordan. Other varieties like the Urban or the Bedouin tend to use the negative constructions la…-ʃ and la, which are very rarely used by rural RJA speakers. Furthermore, in the negative construction ma…-ʃ, the ma particle is optional. This backs up my claim above that the particle ma is optional with present verbs. And this is true in the imperative constructions where the verb is in the present tense. The following examples make a distinction between the constructions.

(26) (ma) -troħi-ʃ                    (prohibition)

   (Neg)  you.go-Neg

   'Don't go away.'

(27) ma   tesreʕ                      (Cautioning)

   Neg  you.speed up

   'Don't speed up."

As mentioned earlier, in sentence (26) the negative particles ma…-ʃ are used to express 'prohibition', and since the proclitic particle ma is optional, this leads us to the conclusion that the enclitic -ʃ is the particles that carries the semantic function of 'prohibition'. However, in sentence (27), the negative particle ma is used to function as a cautioning tool. This proves my claim that the negative particle *ma* in sentence (26) does not carry the function of 'prohibition' and that it is optional because it cannot have two functions at the same time, i.e., to caution and to prohibit. It is worth noting that the negative particle miʃ cannot be used with imperatives sentences because this will result in having ungrammatical sentences as in sentence (28) below.

(28)* miʃ toktob

   Neg-you.write

   'Do not write.'

This proves that the negative construction miʃ is only used with predicate phrases or verbless copular sentences

## 2.5 Existential Constructions

Existential constructions in RJA are formed by using the preposition bi meaning 'there is' or 'there are' followed by a noun phrase. The preposition bi can be negated by using one negative construction, namely, ma…-ʃ, where ma is optional. However, the use of ma is possible and grammatical, but it is not common at all in RJA. Ma is more commonly used in the urban variety, where the existential verb itself is different. In Urban Jordanian Arabic, speakers use the existential form 'fi' to represent 'there is' or 'there are'. Miʃ cannot be used with existential verbs just like the imperative verbs. The following example illustrates how the existential construction is negated.

(29). (ma)  biʃ        ħaleeb

   (Neg) there is-Neg    milk

   'There is no milk.'

According to sentence (29), the enclitic -ʃ is the primary negative particle since it is not optional. This is also indicated in the imperative sentences.

## 3. CONCLUSION

This paper discusses the morph-syntax of sentential negation in RJA. Speakers of RJA use different negation constructions depending on the structure and tense of the sentence. The negative particle ma is a preverbal particle used with present and past verbs evenly. The negative particle ma…-ʃ is a pre and post-verbal particle where ma is a proclitic and -ʃ is an enclitic. This particle is used with present verbs and past verbs. However, when used with present tense verbs, the proclitic ma becomes optional, whereas with past tense verbs the deletion of the proclitic ma results in an ungrammatical sentence. As for copular sentences, the particle miʃ is used to negate verbless copular sentences where there is a covert present tense verb. But, when the copular sentence is formed via a past tense verb, miʃ is no longer used. Instead, the negative construction *ma…-ʃ* is used. When negating the imperative forms and existential constructions, we treat them like the present tense verbs where both ma and -ʃ are used, and the proclitic ma is optional.

Throughout this research, I argue that the Neg particles head their projections, and the negation in a hierarchical representation occurs between TP and VP. In future tense, I argue that the Aux can move to the Neg head just to pick the negation and then the negative particle and the Aux moves to T.

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