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LAN 'NOT THAT' PROJECTION IN ARABIC SYNTAX: MINIMALIST VIEWS

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ABSTRACT

*The objective of this article is to investigate the actual syntactic structure of the conjoint *lan* (*la*-?*an*) 'not - that' in Arabic syntax at all levels of syntax. The conjoint initiates an independent subjunctive clause in which three syntactic problems arise: (i) the subject is in the nominative case but without case assignor in [T, T'] and (ii) the maximal projection [C" i.e., XP"2] constitutes a barrier for V-movement to get correct word - order. Regarding the negative item *la* 'not', (iii) the scope of negation is not as it is obvious at LF. The issues are solved with reference to Chomsky (1995-2005) Minimalist / and Phase Views. The results illustrate that the nominative case is checked by the empty tense [e] in [T] as the case assignor; however, the word order of VSO is achieved by projecting the syntactic node [XP"1] between [XP"2] and [YP"] by adjunction. This node is essential in X-bar syntax at spell out because the clash in V-movement is avoided. The scope of negation is [V"] but not [C"].*

KEYWORDS: LF, Negative, Nominative, Spell Out, V-Movement, Word-Order.

1. INTRODUCTION

As Arabic is an inflectional nominative - accusative language, which belongs to Sematic group; it has two types of subjunctive clauses with specific subjunctive markers at the end of the verb. The first type is the mandative mood subjunctive as an embedded dependent clause because the complementizer? an 'that' is used (not to be discussed in this work) but the other mood part of this type occurs whenever the complementizer? an 'that' is annexed with by the negative polarity item *la* 'not' initiating an independent clause. For instance, if we have the verb *yal'ab* 'play', it must be overtly marked with the subjunctive mood marker [a] as in [*lan* *yal'ab* - *a* (subjunctive) *al-* *waladu* 'the boy does not play' (cf., Maghalsih, 2007, p. 65-77 Rumayathaw, 2005; Abdulrrahim, 2021; Majali, 2021; Hassan, H 1398 / 1978; Al-Misri 2014) for the occurrence of *lan* in Arabic syntax). However, the second type of subjunctive is called jussive mood. This type has different entities which are irrelevant to the first type but mentioned over here because they buildup independent clauses as that of *lan* 'not that'. For instance, the same verb is overtly marked with the subjunctive jussive mood marker [0] because of the entities *lam* / *and* *la* 'not' as in [*lam* / *and* *la* *yal'ab* - **0** *al-* *waladu* 'the boy does not play.' (cf., Maghalsih, 2007, p. 78-94; Wright, 1984 for the occurrence of jussive in Arabic). What makes *lan* 'not that' structure different from other structures of mood impact, in Arabic syntax, is that, it initiates a full independent grammatical sentence at all levels of syntax; whereas, other similar entities of the same type namely, *kai* (?an) 'in order to - that' and *ha?tta* (?an) 'until - that', *thumma* (?an) 'then that', *?aw* (?an) 'or that' and *?an* 'that' initiate dependent clauses in Arabic syntax. (cf., Jalabneh, 2014). In general, if the clause is empty from subjunctive entities of both types, the tense marker [u] of the indicative tensed clause is the dominant morphological marker as in [*yal'ab* - *u* *al-* *waladu* 'the boy plays.' (cf., Maghalsih, 2007, p. 64 Rumayathaw, 2005; Abdulrrahim, 2021; Majali, 2021; Hassan, H 1398 / 1978; Al-Misri 2014).

The various occurrences of mood markers as well as indicative tense markers at the end of the verb *yal'ab* 'play' encouraged the researchers to investigate the actual internal structure of the conjoint *lan* 'not that' but no other. This is because the occurrence of *lan* 'not that' poses several syntactic problems that need to be solved. This syntactic conjoint has two different syntactic functions, namely, subjunctive mood and negation in the same independent phrase which is unique phenomenon in Arabic syntax. To achieve the grammaticality of this

structure, tense, word order and negation need to be checked during derivations. Thus, this study is highly needed to provide suitable solutions for native speakers as well as scholars.

1.1. The Hypotheses

X is a mood subjunctive structure in which *lan* 'not that' performs two different syntactic functions in the syntactic hierarchy.

1.2. Problem of the Study

As the conjoint *lan* 'not that' initiates an independent subjunctive mood structure, there are three syntactic problems, namely, (i) nominative case checking at [T, T'], (ii) word order in which the maximal projection [C"] constitutes a barrier for V-movement and (iii) scope of negation.

1.3. The Objectives and Questions of the Study

The objectives of this article are: (i) to guarantee the assignment of the nominative case to the subject, (ii) to achieve the correct word order [VSO] by applying V-movement at from spell out to LF and (iii) to specify the scope of negation of *la* 'not'; thus, the following questions are proposed:

1. How is the nominative case checked in the absence of case assignor?
2. How does the maximal projection [C] constitute a barrier for V-movement at LF in the syntactic hierarchy?
3. What is exactly the scope of negation of *la* 'not'?

1.4. Significance of Study

The study, based on Chomsky's (1995, 2005) Minimalist/and phase Views, investigates the significance of (i) the empty tense [T] to assign the nominative case to the subject of *lan* 'not that' construction in Arabic syntax and (ii) the role of the mechanism of adjunction, in X-bar syntax, to achieve correct word order for correct interpretation at the logical form (LF). The role of spell out in identifying the scope of negation of annexed negative entity *la*. Therefore, it can safely be argued that this is a new study, and it adds new contributions to verify the actual structures of certain hidden facts in Arabic syntax. The study is also significant because it illustrates the roles of new theoretical perspectives to solve intricate issues in syntax in an optimal manner.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Radford (1988) posited an interdependent relationship between the Complementizer [C] and

the Inflectional head [I], particularly in relation to nominative case assignment and subject-verb agreement. In his analysis, any clause containing [C] must also include a compatible [I], since agreement between these two projections constitutes a universal property of clause structure. This [C]-[I] dependency is more visibly realized in several languages. For instance, in Irish, both [C] and [I] exhibit tense marking (McCloskey, 1979, p. 12). In West Flemish, not only the finite inflection [I], but also the complementizer dat “that” is marked for person and number agreement with the subject (Haegeman, 1983, p. 87). A similar pattern is observed in Lower Bavarian German (Bayer, 1984). In cross linguistic study, it was observed that the agreement between the embedded subject and the complementizer had various aspects. For instance, nonstandard West German languages showed little agreement between the two elements. In Frisian, when the complementizer and the subject were separated by an intervening entity, such intervention led to the ungrammaticality of the sentence. However, in Limburgian, it led to the realization of complementizer agreement between the intervener and the subject in the embedded clause. Both the embedded verb and the complementizer were morphologically reflected in the embedded subject. In contrast to this syntactic logic, Koppen (2008, 2005, 2017); Alem (2025) argued that such agreement between the complementizer and the subject in both languages was a clitic doubling. Thus, the ungrammaticality in Frisian was due to a competition between the clitic and the intervener for the same structural position in the clause. However, in Limburgian, the subject - internal agreement was the result of movement of the clitic below the intervener. Regarding subjunctive clauses, Radford (1988) maintains that [I] must always bear tense—whether overtly realized or covert. When [I] does not appear overtly, an empty [I] category is posited to satisfy syntactic requirements. Accordingly, indicative clauses may contain an overt or covert [I], while subjunctive clauses lack overt tense and are filled with an empty element [e]. This empty [I] ensures nominative case-checking at the Logical Form (LF) level; thus, maintaining grammatical well-formedness (Radford, 1988, pp. 307–308). Carstens (2003) and Van Koppen (2005, 2017) assured that the complementizer agreement took place at the spellout level between the empty complementizer and the subject. However, Ackema and Neeleman (2004) and Weisser (2019) claimed that the complementizer agreement is inserted at the phonetic form.

Chomsky (1995) developed the Spec-Head

framework to explain the mechanism of agreement and structural case assignment. Within this model, nominative case depends on the structural properties of Tense ([T]), which merges with agreement features ([Agr]) to form the complex head [Agr-T]. A finite Complementizer Phrase ([C'']) must select a finite Tense Phrase ([T'']) as its complement, while non-finite phrases cannot be projected in such contexts. The general structure can be represented as: [C'' Spec [C' C [T'' Spec [T' T V'']]]. In this hierarchy, the specifier of [C''] is optional, but the specifier of [T''] is obligatory, serving as the syntactic position where nominative case of the external subject is checked (Ibid, 1995, p. 174). He also emphasized the role of adjunction in syntactic projection, allowing maximal phrases (XP) to be expanded without violating movement constraints. To maintain grammaticality, the Case Filter ensures that every phonetically realized noun phrase within [C''] and [T''] receives an appropriate abstract case in adjacency (pp. 111–115, 359–367).

Building on this, Chomsky (2005) proposed that the Determiner Phrase ([D'']) in a Spec-Head relation with [T] and [Agr] bears both nominative case and agreement features, forming the locus of inflectional morphology. He further argued that [C''] and [T''] are structurally bound. [T] expresses tense and agreement only when it is selected by [C]. If [C] does not select [T], the resulting clause is non-finite—an infinitival structure lacking φ -features and basic tense. In this sense, tense and agreement are derivative properties of [T], inherited from [C], which serves as the ultimate phase head (Chomsky, 2005, p. 10).

Finally, in his Minimalist Program framework, Chomsky (2000) explained that the syntax–semantics interface operates through two interpretive components: Phonetic Form (PF) and Logical Form (LF). These two representations are derived from the same syntactic computation, which splits at a point known as Spell-Out.

After Spell-Out, derivations proceed separately—PF handling phonological realization and LF handling semantic interpretation. Two primary operations drive this derivation:

1. Merge, which combines elements into hierarchical structures.
2. Move, which repositions elements for feature-checking.

Movement may occur overtly (before Spell-Out) or covertly (after Spell-Out). Overt movement targets formal features such as case and agreement, whereas covert movement handles abstract feature-checking processes—such as V-movement, wh-movement,

and anaphor raising. These theoretical insights collectively form the foundation for analyzing Arabic syntax in this study, offering a structural and interpretive account of how grammatical relations are achieved across levels of representation.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. The Approach

The researchers used the theoretical and analytical approach to discuss data from Arabic syntax. The researchers began the discussion with a hypothesis and then proposed research questions. It is followed by a review of literature relating to the content of the article. The researchers expanded and applied the relevant theoretical views of Minimalist Program and Phase Theory to solve the syntactic problems created by the occurrence of the conjoint *lan* 'not that' in independent clause. Therefore, the selected data are tested empirically to see how they can make sense in syntax. The new views serve further investigations not only for *lan* but also for other similar complementizers in Arabic syntax.

3.2. Data Collection

The data has been collected from valid references.

4. DISCUSSIONS AND RESULTS

To elaborate the objectives of the study in an objective manner, we focus merely on answering the three suggested questions above one by one.

4.1. Nominative Case Feature Checking in *Lan* 'Not That' Structure

It is a syntactic fact that the nominative case must be checked at [T, T'] in X-bar syntax. As Arabic is weak morphologically in having overt tense markers for this type of structure, the nominative case poses a problem in syntax. This is because the complementizer? an 'that' of the conjoint *lan* 'not that' imposes the default accusative mood marker [a] at the end of the verb and leaves the tense node without a marker. Relevant to the discussion of the nominative case assignment, syntactically, in Arabic, the subjunctive marker [a] cannot mark the nominative case as in [**kana zaid - a batalun* '*Zaid was a hero']. This is because the nominative case markers of the subject are specific and represented by (i) the markers [u] in [*jaa?a al-walad-u* 'the boy came'], (ii) [un] as in [*kana zaid - un batalun* 'Zaid was a hero'] and (iii) zero as in [*jaa?a musa- 0* 'Moses came'] (cf., Maghsih 2007, p. 35-41). In *lan* construction, the

subjunctive marker [a] marks only the verb as in [*lan ya-l^cab-a* (subjunctive) 'he will not that play'] but not the subject *zaid* 'Zaid' in [**lan ya-l^cab-a zaid- a* (subjunctive) '*Zaid will not that play']. However, it cannot mark the verb in the perfective form as in [**lan la^cib-a* (subjunctive) *zaidun* '*Zaid not that played']. To apply the minimalist views to *lan* structure, we deal with Arabic as SVO at spell-out but VSO at LF for correct nominative case checking relations (cf., Jalabneh, 2014). We may look at (1).

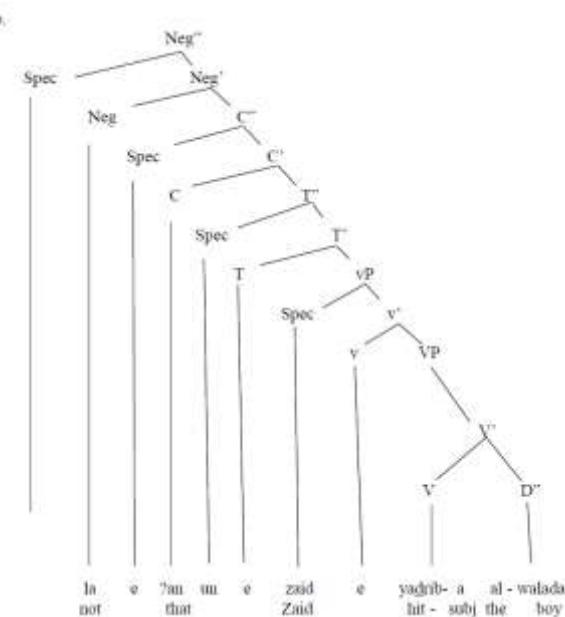
LF

1a. lan yadrib- a zaid - un
 not that hit subj Zaid nom
 al- walad - a.
 det boy Acc

'Zaid do not hit the boy.'

(1b) is the spell-out tree diagram representation for (1a).

Spell-out



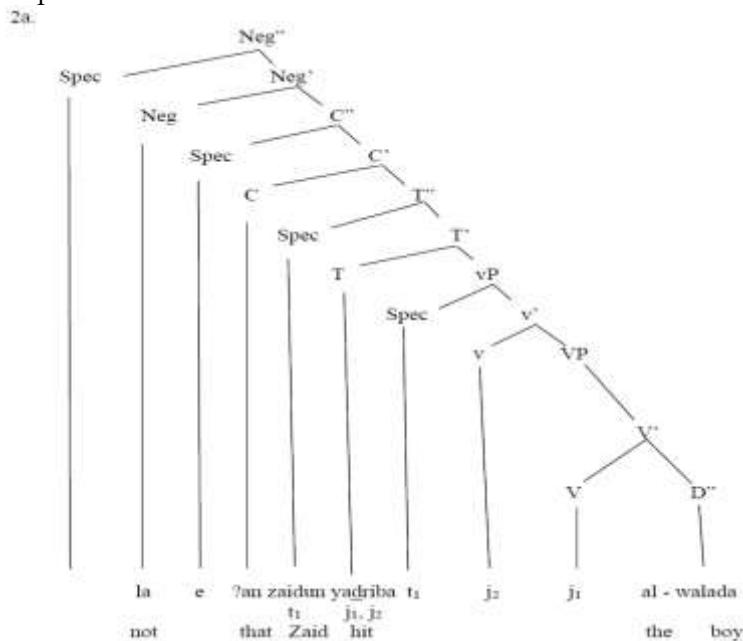
In (3b), the subject *zaid* 'Zaid' occupies the position of [Spec, vP]. As it is a caseless position in the light verb shell [v, vP], it must move to [Spec, T'] to form [Spec - head] relation to check the nominative case by [T, T']. Syntactically, the nominative case cannot be checked in the position of [Spec, vP] because the occurrence of tense is in [T, T'] but not in [v, v']. In other words, the subjunctive accusative marker [a] attached to *yadrib-a* is not meant for case checking because it is the property of nominal featuring. In this situation, in which tense is weak in Arabic syntax, the nominative case is checked by the empty tense feature [e] in [T, T'], which is the head of [T']; this universal mechanism proposal is optimally accepted in minimalist views and produced optimal results (cf., Radford, 1988).

Thus, the empty tense [e] is the only syntactic solution used in syntax to meet both case filter stipulations and adjacency parameter (cf., Chomsky, 1995). If these results were compared with relevant literature, it was noticed that the complementizer *lan* 'not that' does not have any type of agreement with the subject of the sentence in Arabic syntax, its primary syntactic function was to show mood at the end of the verb. This logic was in contrast with nonstandard West German languages, particularly, in Limburgian, in which the complementizer agreement was held between the intervener and the subject in the embedded clause. Both the embedded verb and the complementizer were morphologically reflected in the embedded subject. Also, our logic was in contrast with the agreement held between the complementizer and the subject in Frisian and Limburgian; it was claimed such agreement was due to a clitic doubling (cf., van Koppen (2008, 2005, and 2017); Alem (2025). Thus, the ungrammaticality in Frisian was due to a competition between the clitic

marker and the intervener for the same structural position in the embedded clause. However, in Limburgian, the subject - internal agreement was the result of movement of the clitic below the intervener. Thus, the problem (i) is solved.

4.2. *The Maximal Projection [C] Constitutes a Barrier For V-Movement at Lf in the Syntactic Hierarchy.*

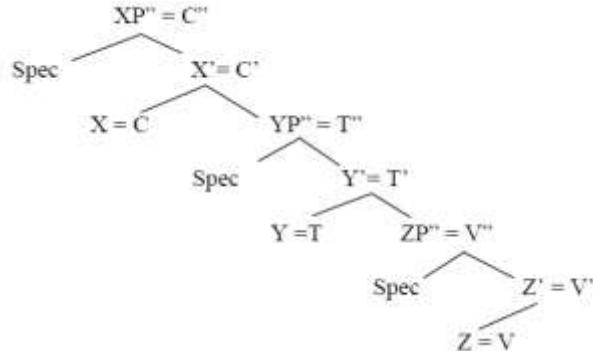
Though the nominative case is checked properly by [T] properties, we cannot get the correct word order for correct semantic interpretation at LF in (1a) above. This is because there are other syntactic processes, namely, adjunction, movement and merge to be applied in the course of derivation; therefore, the verb *yadrib* 'hit', must move from the position of [V, V'] to the light verb position of [v, vP] then to [T, T'], in head-to-head movement, to check the empty tense properties of [e] as it is obvious in (2).



Though the verb *yadrib* 'hit', in (2a), moved to the required position, it is not the actual VSO word-order of Arabic at LF to get correct meaning; this is because the complementizer *?an* 'that' occupies the head position of [C, C'] which constitutes a barrier for the moved verb *yadrib* 'hit' to go to a higher position. To get correct word order, the mechanism adjunction is syntactically required in this construction. Chomsky (1995) assured that adjunction as an essential mechanism which is needed in syntax to project a maximal projection say XP when there is a possible

clash in movement of entities at spell out. Adjunction - a mechanism in syntax - is always restricted to the maximal zero-level projection $X^0 \text{ max}$ at LF, but this projection can never be "internally" one of its constituents (ibid, p. 359-367). The notion of adjunction as a principle of syntax that allows us to generate a new structure in syntax for the verb *yadrib* 'hit' to complete its cyclic movement in the model (2b).

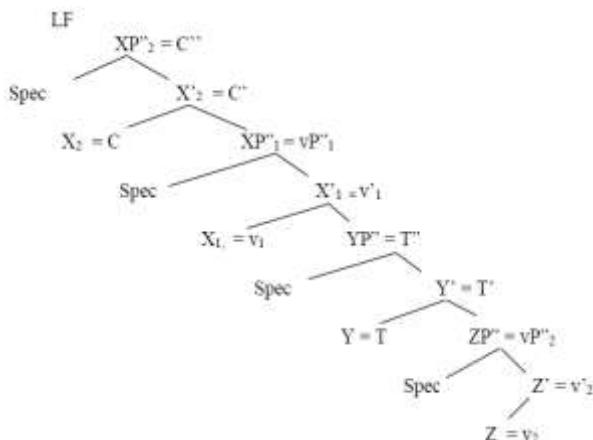
2b.



The node [XP''] functions as the complementizer phrase, [YP''] tense phrase and [ZP''] verb phrase in (2b). The lexical category that is moving is [Z, Z'] which is [V]; it has already moved to [Y]. But it cannot go higher than [X, X'] since it is also occupied by the complementizer? *an 'that'* as in (2a). Thus, a new position for [Z] is to be posited higher than [YP'']. The moved element must not

change its numeration feature in the lexicon. Suppose [Z] moves somewhere in the vicinity of the topmost node of [YP''], we need to create a node for it but in doing so, we must respect the format of X-bar syntax for this phrase structure. Thus, (2c) would be the best option for getting almost correct word order that leads to correct semantic interpretation at LF.

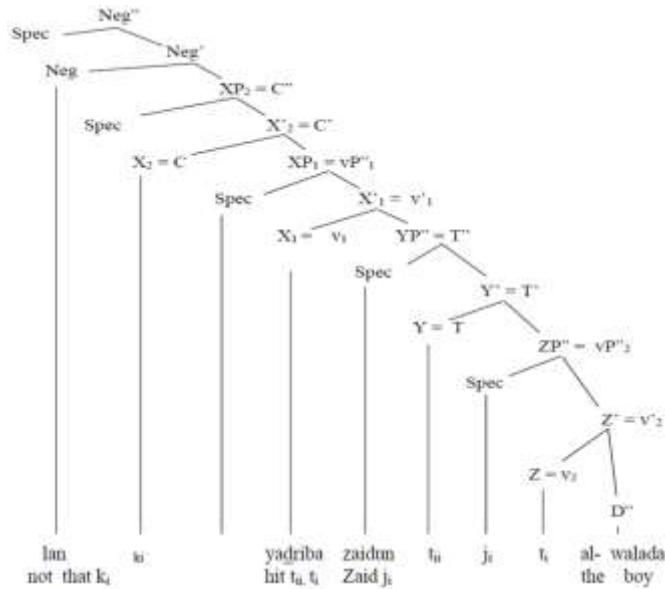
2c.



In (2c), XP''_2 is meant for the complementizer? *an 'that'* and it directly dominates the projected node $[XP''_1]$; however, this projection $[XP''_1]$ is meant for the moved verb $[v_1]$. To achieve adjunction in syntax, let us check very carefully the relation between $[XP''_1]$ and $[ZP'']$. It is evident that $[ZP'']$, from which [Z] moves, is indirectly dominated by $[XP''_1]$. As $[YP'']$ is included in the projection of $[XP''_1]$, $[ZP'']$ is

partly inside the projection of $[XP''_1]$. In principle, $[XP''_1]$ dominates every segment of the maximal projection $[YP'']$. As $[ZP'']$ is a part of $[YP'']$, $[ZP'']$ is automatically dominated by $[XP''_1]$. Thus, $[ZP'']$ is not excluded from $[XP''_1]$ by adjunction in the syntactic hierarchy. These theoretical views lead us to form the final LF in (2d).

2d.



In (2d), to avoid the clash, the verb *yadriba* 'hit' moves to the position of [v₁, v₁] without being changed into any other class of the category maintaining the structure preserving principle of syntax. In a final step, ?*an* 'that' merges with *la* 'not' in [Neg, Neg'] in a process called external Merge as? *an* is not a part of the negative impact (cf., Chomsky, 2005, p. 7 for theoretical views) at PF. Thus, the syntactic hierarchy of *la?an* / i.e., *lan* 'not that' is finally achieved and the problem (ii) is solved in an optimal manner. In short, the highest node is the negative phrase initiated by *la* and then followed by

the complementizer headed by? *an* in phase [C].

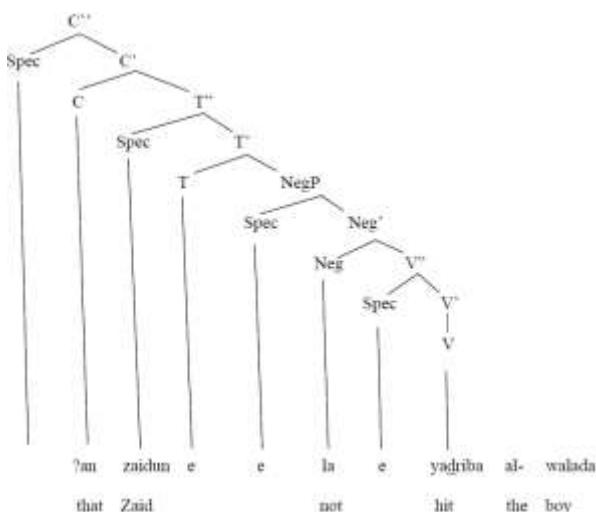
4.3. The Scope of Negation of *La* 'Not' In *lan* 'Not That' Construction

Though the polarity negative marker *la* 'not' is pre-attached to the complementizer? *an* 'that' in the position of [C, C'], in (1), this is not the actual scope of negation in this construction. To solve the problem, we opt for Chomsky (1995, p. 147) model in which the negative phrase heads the [V'']. The spell-out (3) shows the issue.

3a. Spell Out					
[C'' lan	[T' zaidun	[NegP' la	[V'' yadriba	al-	walada.]
that	Zaid	not	hit	det	boy
"That Zaid not hit the boy."					
"Zaid will not hit the boy."					

(3b) is the tree - diagram for (3a).

3b.



In (3b), the [NegP] heads the verb phrase *yadriba al-walada* 'hit the boy'. The polarity negative item *la* 'not' negates this [V''] but nothing else. It denies the act of hitting done by the subject *zaidun* 'Zaid'. Thus, the subject is excluded. To get the PF form in (1a), *la* must move to the position of [C, C'] in a covert movement for feature checking to be pre-merged to the complementizer? an 'that' at LF for correct semantic interpretation by applying move and merge mechanisms in accordance with Chomsky (2005). It is a syntactic fact that *la* cannot move to [Spec, C''] position because movement takes place from head-to-head but not from head to Spec position.

To sum up, the analysis would not be possible for such difficult structures restricted to Arabic without testing the internal syntactic projections of *lan* 'not that'. Though the projection [T''] is dominated by [C''] but it has no tense marker at all; as the subjunctive marker [a] is of no significance for the nominative case, the empty tense mechanism is used to fill [T] with empty tense [e] as an alternative. Thus, *zaidun* 'Zaid' is assigned the nominative case by [e] in (2d). As the maximal projection [C''] constitutes a barrier for V- movement, the projection [XP'1] is projected to void clash. This new projection is meant for the verb *yadriba* 'hit' to occupy and to achieve the correct word order VSO in *lan* 'not that' structure at LF. The scope of negation has been proved to be [V''] but not [C'']. Thus, the hypothesis X is a mood subjunctive structure in which *lan* 'not that' performs two different syntactic functions in the syntactic hierarchy is proved to be correct.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

It was evident that the complementizer *lam* 'not that' initiated an independent jussive mood subjunctive in which the zero [0] marker occurred at the end of the verb (cf., Maghalsih, 2007; Wright, 1984). Also, the complementizer *lan* 'not that'

initiated an independent mood subjunctive in which the accusative marker [a] occurred at the end of the verb (cf., Rumayathaw, 2005; Abdulrrahim, 2021; Majali, 2021; Hassan, H 1398 / 1978; Al-Misri 2014). In case both complementers did not occur in the structure, the indicative marker [u] occurred at the end of the verb (cf., Wright, 1984, third part, p. 22; Al-Jarim and Amin, 2012; Hassan, 2018; Salhah, 2010; Al-Aqil, 2022; Balabki, 1992). The study concluded that Arabic is weak in having case assignor for the nominative case to be assigned in the subjunctive phrase of *lan* 'not that'; therefore, the first problem is solved, in (1b), with the mechanism of empty tense [e] which functions as case - assignor in [T, T']. [T] properties are essential as they fulfill the syntactic requirements of case filter and adjacency parameter. As it is impossible to get a correct VSO word order at LF for correct interpretation, the researchers opted for the universal theoretical solutions. As V-movement faces a clash, the second problem is solved by positing the node [XP'1] lower than [XP'2] by adjunction as in (2c and 2d); thus, the verb *yadriba* 'hit' moves freely and occupies its actual position in (2d) at LF for correct semantic interpretation in this word order. However, if such a node is not posited in Arabic syntax, the PF (1a) will never be formed in this type of structure. As far as the scope of negation is concerned, it is proved, in (3a), to be [V''] that has been negated but not [C''].

In recommendation, this study showed how *lan* 'not that' is aligned with broader Arabic syntax patterns.

5.1. *Lan* and the Broader Negation System

In Arabic, *lan* is a part of a larger system of negation particles (e.g., *laa* 'not', *maa* 'not', *lam* 'not', *lan* 'not that'). Each governs verbs differently and expresses distinct temporal or modal meanings. For instance, *lam* negates the past (jussive verb) in [*lam yadrus - 0* 'he did not study']. However, *lan* 'not that'

negates the future (subjunctive verb) in [*lan yadrus- a* 'he will not study]. Thus, *lan* participates in a consistent morphosyntactic pattern: negation + verb in a specific mood.

This contrast aligns with the broader Arabic pattern where mood marking distinguishes temporal or modal nuances.

5.2. *Lan* as a Mood-Triggering Particle

Arabic syntax treats *lan* as a particle of accusative i.e., *nasb* of subjunctive assignment—a pattern shared by other particles such as [*kai / likai* 'so that', *hattā* 'until', and *li* 'to']. This demonstrates Arabic general rule that certain pre-verbal particles alter the verb inflectional mood. For instance, [*yaktub - u zaidun al- risaalata* 'Zaid writes the letter (indicative / present habitual)] becomes (subjunctive negative future intention) in [*lan yaktub- a zaidun al- risaalata* 'Zaid will not write the letter], and (subjunctive purpose clause) in [*likai yaktub- a zaidun al- risaalata* 'Zaid writes the letter]. So, *lan* fits naturally into this family of mood-governing elements that precede the verb and shift its ending from the nominative marker [-u] to the accusative marker [-a].

5.3. Semantic Alignment with Futurity and

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APPENDIX I

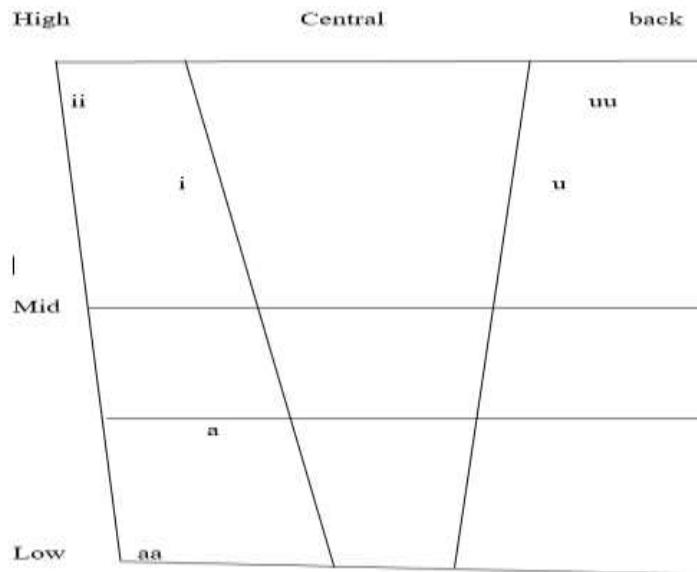
Transliteration Symbols of The Arabic Phonemes of Consonants

Arabic	Transliteration	Arabic	Transliteration
ن	?	خ	d
ب	b	ط	t
ت	t	ظ	z
ث	th	ص	Ic
ج	j	ص	gh
ه	h	ف	f
خ	kh	ق	q
د	d	ك	k
ذ	dh	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
ش	sh	و	w
ص	s	ي	y

Notice : The Researchers Have Referred To The Transliteration Symbols While Writing The Arabic Phonemic Segments In The Text. (Cf. Jalabneh, 2007)

APPENDIX II

Transliteration Symbols of The Arabic Phonemes of Vowels



Notice: [I/Ii] Is A Tense Vowel While [I] Is Lax and The Same Is Applied to The Rest of Vowels in Arabic Phonology. (Cf. Fari, Et Al, 2006, P. 74).

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