

Abstract

The present study is a contrastive and empirical investigation of the negative markers *nicht* in contemporary German (CG) and *laysa*, *lam*, *lan*, *lammā*, *lāta*, *lā* and *mā* in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Four aspects are analyzed from a comparative point of view: (i) the morphological fusion of the negative markers with indefinites in CG and with clitic particles/suffixes in MSA, which creates a paradigm of negative markers similar to an auxiliary verb paradigm, (ii) the position of those markers in sentence structures, (iii) the interaction between negative markers and verbal or nominal categories, and (iv) the interactions between negation and information structure. Two novels were chosen as the main sources of sample data: “Sommerstück” (1989) (“Piece of Summer”) by Christa Wolf for CG and “Bayna al-Qasrayn” (1956) (“Palace Walk”) by Nağib Maħfūz for MSA. The goal of the study is to describe and compare the grammatical organization of negation in both languages.

Up to the present, MSA has only been investigated rudimentarily with regard to negation. Most of the attention in negation studies has been focused on European languages, mainly on English, CG and French. Thus, new insights have been generated by the present study. On the basis of modern approaches to morphosyntax, semantics, information structure and pragmatics, the language-specific implementation of negation is analyzed in relation to the questions above. With regard to (i) (morphology), the following is to be stated: *nicht* in CG as well as *mā* in MSA are simple forms which stand for pure negation. In contrast, the *lā*-variants in MSA are fused forms; they encode temporal and modal features, in addition to negation. The forms *lam*, *lan*, *lammā* and *lāta* are combinations of *lā* with clitic particles/suffixes; *laysa* (‘is not’) is a combination of *lā* and the noun *ʿays* (‘thing’). With respect to (ii) (syntax), it can be observed that *nicht* can take its position relatively freely within the sentence, in contrast to the grammatically fixed positions of negative markers in MSA, where the *lā*-variants are immediately pre-verbal and *mā* is always at the beginning of the sentence. With regard to (iii) (morphosyntax and semantics), MSA shows an interaction between the negative markers and the verbal categories aspect and mood as well as the categories person, number, gender, and between the negative markers and the nominal category case in subjects and predicate nominals. In CG, no such interaction can be observed. With regard to (iv) (information structure and pragmatics), it is shown that negation interacts with information structure in both languages. An important part is played by the factor referentiality. Differences are found in the means of expression: information structure is mainly encoded by prosody in CG, whereas in MSA the role of morphosyntactic means is more notable.

The ways in which negation is grammatically implemented in the two languages is partly similar and partly different: both GWD and MSA have morphologically simple negative markers – *nicht* and *mā* – (i) that interact with information structure (iv). The main differences concern the morphological fusion of *nicht* with indefinites and of *lā* with clitic particles/suffixes (i), the syntactic position of the negative markers (ii) as well as the interaction between negative markers and verbal/nominal categories (iii). The results of the study are inserted into a diachronic-typological framework: *nicht* is less grammaticalized than the negative markers of MSA. German *nicht* is a strong negative marker in terms of Jespersen's cycle, while all negative markers of MSA are diachronically in the phase of weakening.