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## Another Croft cycle in Arabic: The *laysa* negative existential cycle

### Abstract

The negative existential cycle, a typological model that Croft first proposed in 1991, is often acknowledged in the literature, but has not been developed until recently. Work with Arabic indicates that it must have operated with an obscure existential particle *šī*, analogous to the more familiar *fi*. One of the characteristics of the cycle is that an erstwhile negative existential, for example *miš/muš*, can begin to negate verbs in some sub-domains of verbal negation, such as, for example, futurity. An examination of verbal negation with *laysa* and its reflexes in the Arabic of classical and pre-classical writing, the vernacular writing from Arabophone Iberia, and a spoken vernacular Arabic of the southern Arabian Peninsula provide evidence that the negative existential cycle has operated upon reflexes of *laysa*.

### Keywords

Andalusi Arabic, Croft cycle, existentials, linguistic cycles, negative existentials, negative existential cycle, peninsular Arabic dialects.

### 1. Introduction

Addressing Arabic verbal negation with reflexes of the nominal predicate negator *miš* in Egyptian Arabic, Håland (2011: 75–77) and Wilmsen (2014: 173–176) have broached the possibility of a negative existential cycle (Croft 1991) operating in that variety, and Wilmsen (forthcoming) examines in detail its operation in the familial branch of the Arabic family tree to which Egyptian Arabic belongs, suggesting that the cycle may have operated on existential particles in other branches. Our purpose here will be to examine the cycle in one of those branches: Arabic varieties that use the negator *laysa* and its reflexes.

Negative existentials deny predications analogous to the English “there is/are”. In Arabic, especially with its numerous existential particles of the spoken dialects of Arabic (Eid 2008: 84; Wilmsen forthcoming), such predications are usually non-verbal, functioning without the mediation of a stative verb ‘is’ or ‘are’. One such particle, prevalent in some eastern varieties of spoken Arabic, is *fī*, deriving from the preposition meaning ‘in’. According to the negative existential cycle as Croft outlines it, in the first stage of the cycle (Stage A, *infra*), “the negation of the existential predicate is performed by the verbal negator” (Croft 1991: 6), in spoken Arabic, usually *mā*. To illustrate this, he adduces an example from the Syrian Arabic of Damascus (Croft 1991: 7):

(1) *mā*      *ba-‘raf*  
 NEG      1S-know.IPFV  
 ‘I don’t know’ (Cowell 2005 [1964]: 383)

(2) *šu*      *mā*      *fī*      *ḥada*      *bə-l-bēt*  
 INT      NEG      EX      one      PREP-DET-house  
 ‘What? [Is] there no one in the house?’ (Cowell 2005 [1964]: 384)<sup>1</sup>

So, too, in the Arabic of writing is existential predication often non-verbal, there the existential particles being the far-deixis elements *hunāka* or *tamma*, both meaning ‘there’. A verbal predication is also possible, involving the verb ‘to find’ *wağada/yağid* (lit. ‘he found/he finds’) in the passive voice *yūğad* ‘he/it is found’ figuratively meaning ‘there is/are.’ This latter is negated with the usual verbal negators of writing *lā*, *lam*, and *lan* thus: *lā/lan/lam yūğad* ‘he/it is not/was not/will not be found (= ‘in existence’).’ That is, in writing, the negation of verbs is usually with a reflex of *lā* (3a). Non-verbal existential predications may likewise be negated by *lā*, in what is called *lā al-nāfiyya li-l-ğins* ‘the *lā* of absolute negation’, as in the emblematic Muslim expression of faith (3b):

(3) a. *lā*                      *a-‘raf*  
 NEG                      1S-know.IPFV  
 ‘I know not’ (Adwan 2000: 144)

b. *lā*      *ilāha*      *illā*      *llāh*  
 NEG      god      except      Allah  
 ‘[There is] no god but Allah’ (Holes 2004: 243)

<sup>1</sup> Croft, after Cowell, glosses this ‘Isn’t there anyone home?’ But the interrogative *šu* is not initiating the polar question, which as such does not require an overtly expressed interrogative (Cowell 2005 [1964]: 378). Instead, it is here an exclamative, of a type that appears often in Syro-Lebanese Arabic (Cowell 2005 [1964]: 570) as a sentence initiator.

Existential negation is also performed by the negative existential particle *laysa* (4), which is largely but not entirely restricted to all types of non-verb negations:

(4) a. *laysa hunāka aḥad fī l-bayt*  
 NEX EX one PREP DET-house  
 ‘There [is] not [any]one in the house’ (Adwan 2000: 307)

b. *laysa ṭamma mā yu-qāl*  
 NEX EX REL 3-say.IPFV.PASS  
 ‘There is nothing that [might] be said’ (Kanafani 2006: 75)

Consistent with the negative existential cycle model, *laysa* exhibits a defining property of a transitional stage in the cycle that Croft labels A > B (*infra*), in which, “a special existential negative form, usually but not always a contraction or fusion of the verbal negator and the positive existential form, is found in addition to the regular existential negative form” (Croft 1991: 7). As such, *laysa* does, indeed, appear to be the product of a fusion of the regular verbal negator *lā* and something else (Holes 2004: 242). According to the model, that something else should be an existential particle, and there is reason to believe that that is precisely what it is, or rather was. Măcelaru (2003; 2004) proposes that the other element of the word, *-ys*, ultimately derives from an Afroasiatic deictic particle and an oblique case marker, together meaning ‘there’, drawing correspondences between Egyptian *js* and *jsk* and other Afroasiatic and Semitic forms (2003: 235; 2004: 443–451):

As far as Semitic is concerned, I think that the locational construction of a deictic *\*yV* + case marker *s* was inherited from the Pre-Semitic stage. It fulfills the role of an existential predicate, which in some Semitic languages was extended to cover the function of a copula, too: Hebrew *yēš*, Arabic *laysa*, etc. [...]. Afroasiatic *\*yV-s* might have meant ‘at/to/with-that’. Moreover, it is very plausible that Afroasiatic *\*yV-s* ‘at/to/with-that’ might also have had an adverbial reading ‘there’. (Măcelaru 2004: 450–451)

Măcelaru (2003: 233, 238; 2004: 451) further posits an Arabic existential particle *’ays-*, concluding that the Arabic *laysa* derives from an original form *\*lā yis-a* (2003: 238). He takes as his authority the 1860 edition of Kazimirski’s *Dictionnaire arabe-français*, which attests the existence of the particle: *أيس* *Il y a, verbe d’un emploi tres-rare; [...] On dit: atāni min ḥayt ’aysa wa laysa ‘Il est venu chez moi je ne sais d’où’*” (Kazimirski 1846: 74).

For his part, Kazimirski appears without attribution to be referencing one of the earliest works of Arabic lexicography, *Kitāb al-’Ayn* (The Book of [the

sound/letter] *ʿAyn*), commonly attributed to al-Ḥalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī (d. 170 AH/786 AD):<sup>2</sup>

ʿys : a word that may have gone extinct [...] The Arabs say *ʿatni bh mn hyt ʿys w lys* [He brought me him/it from wherever; lit. where there and not there], and *ʿys* is not used except in this, but its meaning is like the meaning of *mn hyt* [from where], and it is a state of being and existence [*fī hāl ʿl-kynwna w ʿl-wǧd*]. And ... *laysa* means *lā ʿys* [not there], that is, nonexistence [*lā wǧd*]. (*Kitāb al-ʿAyn* 2003: 105)

A century and a half after al-Ḥalīl, Ibn Duraid (d. 321/933), in his lexicographical work *Jamharat al-Luǧa* (The Compendium of Language), crediting al-Ḥalīl, in his entry on *laysa* explains, “*ʿys* is existent [*mwǧwd*] and *lā ʿys* is nonexistent [*m ʿdwm*]” (*Jamhara* 2005: 212). He also adduces rare variants (*nwādr* ‘rarities’) *ʿyšk* (عَيْشِك) and *ʿyšk* (إَيْشِك), among others (*infra*): “*tqūl al-ʿrb ǧī ʿ bh mn ʿyšk wa ʿyšk* [...] *ʿyy ǧī ʿ bh mn hyt kān* ‘The Arabs say, “He brought him/it to me from there and there [...], that is, he brought him/it from wherever he/it was”” (*Jamhara* 2005: 475). In his authoritative work *Lisān al-ʿArab* (Tongue of the Arabs), Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311) compiles the earlier statements on the matter, including one of Ibn Duraid’s rarities: *ʿyṣ: ǧī ʿ bh mn ʿyšk ʿayy ǧī ʿ bh mn hyt kān* (*Lisān* 2011: I, 211).

These variants compare with Măcelaru’s Egyptian *jsk* (2003: 235; 2004: 443–451), the enclitic (-k), itself likely being a deictic element (Hasselbach 2007: 22). Măcelaru (2003: 239, n 2) even hazards the guess that the more familiar Arabic term *ḥaytu* ‘where’ that all three of these classical lexicographers use in elucidating the meaning of an existential *ʿys* and its allomorphs might derive from the same Proto-Semitic root as *ʿys* itself, which, for its part, he proposes was *\*yṭ* and ultimately *\*yš* (2003: 234, 238; cf. Blau 1972: 58–62). Lipiński (2001) is of the same opinion: “As for *laysa*, it is the negative *lā* followed by the Semitic particle of existence *\*yṭ*” (2001: 465). The rare allomorphs that Ibn Duraid (*Jamhara* 2005: 475) attests permit that possibility, too: *ǧntk*, *ǧnsk*, *qnsk*, *ḥssk* and *bssk*.

If some of the sound correspondences in these allomorphs are attested in varieties of Arabic (*ṭ/s*, *q/ǧ*), others are unexpected: *ʿ/ǧ/h/b* and *n/y*. Indeed, an entire range of existential particles in the Semitic languages, as Măcelaru (2003: 233) puts it, “defy the accepted phonetic correspondences valid for Semitic” without sharing a similarity of form. Among these are Ugaritic *ʿit*, Aramaic *ʿyt(y)*, Hebrew *yēš* (see more in Lipiński 2001: 488–489), Modern

<sup>2</sup> Kazimirski must be quoting *Lisān al-ʿArab* (*infra*), or another lexicographical work that references *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, rather than that work itself, which was not rediscovered in modern times until 1914 (Haywood 1960: 23).

South Arabian *š*i, and, if the classical lexicographers are to be credited, Arabic *ʔ*ys. Măcelaru devotes two studies (2003, 2004) to the matter. His explanations for the irregularities in sound correspondences (2003: 235) need not concern us further except to note that if the parent form *\*yVʔs* is inherited from an Afroasiatic ancestor, it would already have been thoroughly grammaticalized by the time it reached Proto-Semitic. In a work devoted to grammaticalization in Semitic, Rubin (2005: 56), wrestling with another phonological peculiarity, reminds us that such things are “difficult to explain; but then grammaticalization often causes irregular and bizarre sound changes.” Disagreeing with Rubin on that point (2007: 188, n. 61), Holmstedt nevertheless acknowledges that precisely such sound correspondences – or rather lack of them – as those that Măcelaru is addressing, “could have happened, since *ad hoc* sound changes do exist (for example, the Akkadian relative *ša* must reflect an *ad hoc* change to the postalveolar fricative /ʃ/ from the dental fricative /ð/ or /θ/ of the Proto-Semitic determinative-relative *\*du/tu*)” (Holmstedt 2007: 190). He concludes:

Two centuries of historical and comparative linguistic investigation should have taught us by now that our desire for symmetry within language families and dialect geography must often take a back seat to the messy and asymmetry-producing realities of language contact, competing dialects, social registers, and the use of dialectal variation for reasons of style and rhetoric in literary compositions. (Holmstedt 2007: 191)

Respecting *laysa*, Lipiński surmises language contact: “The Arabic forms *laysa* and *lāta* [cf. example (34)] seem to imply borrowing .... At least *lāta*, ‘not to be’, appears to be borrowed from late Aramaic” (2001: 489). In reply, Măcelaru (2003: 234) contends, “at least in the case of *laysa* ... this solution [is] unsuitable given that the Arabic form contains *s* and such a form has no parallel in the other possible donor sources.” Regardless, whether an existential *ʔ*ys in Arabic was inherited from a Proto-Semitic ancestor or borrowed from a Semitic sister is immaterial to its operation in the language.

Accordingly, on the spare testimony of the classical lexicographers, we may suppose that an existential particle *ʔ*ys did operate in an early form of Arabic.<sup>3</sup> Its negation with the usual Semitic negator *lā* (Lipiński 2001: 464) is consistent with Stage A of a negative existential cycle. A fused form like *laysa* is postulated to appear in the intermediate stages after Stage A and should become the sole existential negator of a Stage B. Further movement through the cycle should see *laysa* beginning to negate verbs in another transitional stage,

<sup>3</sup> My forthcoming examination of the negative existential cycle in spoken Arabic varieties negating with a post-positive *-š* also begins with a reconstruction of an initial Stage A, involving relatively sparse attestations of an existential particle *š*ī in southern Peninsular varieties of Arabic, it being withal more widely attested than an existential *ʔ*ys (cf. Holes 2016: 23–28).

B > C, “in which a special negative existential form begins to be used for ordinary verbal negation” (Croft 1991: 9). Indeed, the working of the cycle in Arabic as hypothesized provides corroboration of the testimony of the classical lexicographers. The model proposes that it could happen, and the attestations of the lexicographers together with the rich attestations of the negative form in the language suggest that it has.

Hence, section 2 examines the stages of the cycle as Croft originally outlined them before continuing to an application of his model to those varieties of Arabic that possess reflexes of *laysa*, illustrating the operation of the cycle with examples from works of modern Arabic literature and some dialect attestations, including attestations from the colloquial literature of Arabophone Iberia (*al-Andalus*), the latter exhibiting the furthest extent of the negative existential cycle with reflexes of *laysa*. Section 3 analyses the progress of the *laysa* negative existential cycle from the earliest extended Arabic writing, drawing upon several works of prophetic traditions (*ḥādīṭ*); data from two electronically searchable corpora of ancient, medieval, and modern Arabic; and from a reading of two Andalusi sources. Further discussion ensues in Section 4.

### 1.1. Data sources

The data come from the 174,600,000 word arabiCorpus of Brigham Young University, curated by Dil Parkinson; the Quranic Arabic Corpus of the University of Leeds, curated by Kais Dukes; the *diwān* of the 6<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century Andalusi poet Ibn Quzmān (d. 555/1160); and the 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century collection of Andalusi proverbs of al-Zajjālī (d. 694/1295). For its part, the arabiCorpus covers a time span from the earliest era of lengthy Arabic text production (1<sup>st</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century) through the modern era. Its pre-modern literature subcorpus incorporates 9,127,331 words from the entire text of the Qur’ān, through several eras of classical Arabic writing, to a late edition of the *1001 Nights* from 1835. The arabiCorpus thus provides a representative range of classical Arabic writing. In addition to that, the Quranic corpus gives more detailed usage information, including, of course, about the negation idioms of interest.

Meanwhile, the arabiCorpus includes another 164,332,435 words of modern writing, most of that taken up by the newspaper subcorpus of 135,360,804 words, which incorporates entire years of publication of newspapers from Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Kuwait (the Moroccan and Kuwaiti newspapers amounting to half a year each). Finally a modern literature section of about one and a quarter million words and a small corpus of about half a million words of other non-fiction writing complete the modern writing subcorpora.

Before analysing these data sources, it remains first to illustrate the operation of the negative existential cycle with reflexes of *laysa*.

## 2. The negative existential cycle

As proposed by Croft (1991), the six stages to the negative existential cycle run as follows:

Stage A: Negation of the existential predicate performed by the verbal negator

Stage A ~ B: Contraction or fusion of the existential particle and the negator

Stage B: A negative existential distinct from the verbal negator

Stage B ~ C: The negative existential begins to be used for verbal negation

Stage C: The negative existential is identical to the verbal negator

Stage C ~ A: The erstwhile negative existential begins negating existential particles

The operation of these stages will become clear as the discussion of cycle as it applies to reflexes of *laysa* progresses, but those interested may gain further insight by consulting Croft (1991) and the works of the few researchers who have investigated the operation of his model. Veselinova (2013, 2014, 2015, 2016) has examined in detail the operation of the cycle in various languages. Håland (2011: 75–77) considers its operation in spoken Cairene Arabic. Wilmsen (forthcoming) explicates the full operation of the negative existential cycle in that entire familial branch of Arabic dialects to which Egyptian Arabic belongs: the southern Peninsular; southern Levantine; and littoral North African dialects, including Maltese.

### 2.1. Stage A: Negation of the existential predicate performed by the verbal negator

We are fortunate to have in the testimony of the early Arabic lexicographers record of an existential *'ys* of an earlier variety of Arabic, which was apparently already a relic by the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD, when al-Ḥalīl attested it. Consistent with the initial stage of the cycle, its negation was with the regular verbal negator *lā*:

(5) <i>lā</i>	<i>'ys</i>
NEG	EX
‘Not there [is]’ ( <i>Kitāb al-‘Ayn</i> 2003: 105)	

### 2.2. Stage A ~ B: Contraction or fusion of the existential particle and the negator

In a transitional stage between A and B a newer negative existential particle *laysa* exists alongside the older regular verbal negator *lā*, which itself may continue to negate existential predications. Croft (1991) describes it, “a special existential negative form, usually but not always a contraction or fusion of the

verbal negator and the positive existential form” (1991: 7), providing an easily accessible example from Balinese:

- (6) a. *ten hana wong*  
 NEG EX person  
 ‘There was not [one] person’
- b. *tennana seraya*  
 NEX substitute  
 ‘There was no substitute’ (Croft 1991: 7)

The negative existential *laysa* has apparently come about by the same sort of fusion between the verbal negator *lā* and the existential particle *ʾys*. This, indeed, is how it is presented in *Lisān* (2011: IV, 221): “the glottal stop is elided and the *l* adheres to the *y*.”

Consistent with an intermediate stage  $A > B$ , Arabic alternatives to the usual non-verbal existential predications with *laysa* (7a) do occur, as, for example, those involving the *lā* of absolute negation (cf. [3b]):

- (7) a. *laysa aḥad a-kḏab*  
 NEX one more-mendacious  
 ‘There [is] no one more mendacious’ (Mahfouz 1976: 174)
- b. *lā aḥad hunā*  
 NEG one here  
 ‘[There is] no one here’ (Mostaghanemi 2010: 306)

### 2.3. Stage B: A negative existential distinct from the verbal negator

A Stage B would see “only a special negative existential form” (Croft 1991: 9). That is, the negative existential operates exclusively upon existential predications, its competing negator(s) continuing to negate verbs. Accordingly, *laysa* can stand by itself in denying the existence of something, to the extent that the thing denied need not be mentioned:

- (8) *laysa fī l-maktab illā anā w anta*  
 NEX PREP DET-office except PRON.1S CONJ PRON.2MS  
 ‘There [is] not in the office except you an I’ (Adwan 2000: 273)

What is more, this sort of negation with *laysa* is not limited to existential predication alone, but encompasses the negation of all manner of non-verbal predications, including locative, possessive, and copular. All of these are similar in

structure to existential predications (Eid 2008: 81), to the extent that possessives especially may be construed as either copular or existential. Standard expressions of possession in Arabic are usually accomplished non-verbally with locatives ‘*ind*’ ‘at’, *l-* ‘to’, or *ma*’ ‘with’ (Naïm 2008: 674–675):

(9) a. *laysa ma ‘-i aġrād*  
 NEX PREP-PRON.1S things  
 ‘There [are] not with me things’ (= ‘I have nothing with me’) (Adwan 2000: 451)

b. *laysa l-ī aḥad*  
 NEX DAT-PRON.1S one  
 ‘There [is] not to me one’ (= ‘I have no one’) (Mostaghanemi 2010: 303)

Meanwhile, *laysa* can negate copular constructions in what Li and Thompson (1977: 497) in a discussion of such predications in Arabic and Hebrew call “equational sentences”:

(10) a. *laysa hāḏā min ša ‘n-ak*  
 NEX DEM PREP concern-PRON.2MS  
 ‘That [is] not your concern’ (Adwan 2000: 244)

b. *laysa fī bayrūt*  
 NEX PREP Beirut  
 ‘He [is] not in Beirut’ (Adwan 2000: 49)

About *laysa* in particular, Măcelaru remarks “a semantic change from the original existential meaning ... to a new equative value” (2003: 237). In their brief treatment of the negative existential cycle in general, Willis, Lucas, and Breitbarth (2013: 24–5) observe, “special forms of ‘be’ are often found in the negative, irrespective of whether ‘be’ expresses existential or copula meaning.” In her extensive work on the cycle, Veselinova (2014: 1338–1339; 2016: 172–173) emphasizes repeatedly that lexicalizations of other negation types often intrude into the cycle.

#### 2.4. Stage B ~ C: The negative existential begins to be used for verbal negation

Another synchronically variable stage is that intermediate between B and C, which Croft regards as the most important in the model:

The most important step in support of our hypothesis is the intermediate stage B > C, in which a special negative existential form begins to be used for



Peninsula (section 2.6), reflected in vernacular writings of 11<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century Muslim Spain, where they are *lis* or *las*.

Al-Azraqi provides more analysis and richer documentation of usage in a southern Arabic dialect of than those researchers attesting them from other modern peninsular dialects: “*lis* ... is used commonly among people who are originally from the Tihāmah and ‘Asīr in particular. This particle has many variants in the region of the Tihāmah and al-Hijāz mountains. It ... is mainly used before a noun or pronoun” (Al-Azraqi 1998: 141–142):

- (12) *lis*      *ḥālīd*      *hina*  
 NEX      name      here  
 ‘Khalid [is] not here’ (Al-Azraqi 1998: 142)

Yet, Al-Azraqi’s specification of the dialect(s) of ‘Asīr is too general, in that the dialect that she is describing is the dialect of Abha, the capital city of the ‘Asīr region of Saudi Arabia (see her maps on pp. 302–304 and her more detailed map in Al-Azraqi 2010: 67). That dialect incorporates features from the surrounding regions, which would be expected of a regional capital. The southern Tihāma plain, coastal regions stretching between what are now Saudi Arabia and Yemen, is one of those. In her few mentions of Tihāma dialect features, she usually remarks that they are “used by old people from ‘Asīr and the Tihāma” (1998: 103), in the study, identifying three usages peculiar to old (or older) people from that region (1998: 103, 145, 166). Indeed, only when discussing the negators *lis* and *lim* as features of the Tihāma dialects does she not indicate the age group of their users. She does, however, mention an alternate form, *lays*, as a feature uncommon in Abha that “some old people use” (1998: 142, fn. 1), without naming their dialect origins. It seems, therefore, that negation with *lis* and *lays* is a feature of an old dialect originating in the Tihāma.

In Al-Azraqi’s data, verbal negations with *lis* do occur, especially in negating futurity. In some of these, a pronoun intervenes between the negator and the imperfective verb:

- (13) *lis*      *hī*      *bi-t-ǧī*  
 NEX      PRON.3FS      FUT-3FS-come.IPFV  
 ‘She will not come’ (Al-Azraqi 1998: 142)

But it may also precede the verb directly:

- (14) *lis*      *yī-swī-h*  
 NEX      3M-do-PRON.3M  
 ‘He will not do it’ (Al-Azraqi 1998: 142)

And it is not always confined to the negation of futurity:

- (15) *lays-u*                      *ya-dri*  
 NEX-PRON.3MS      3MS-know.IPFV  
 ‘He knows not’ (Al-Azraqi 1998: 142, n. 1)

Nevertheless, its common usage as a negator of futurity appears to be an instantiation of Croft’s third manner of the negative existential beginning to be used for verbal negation: “gradual substitution of the negative existential for the verbal negator in only part of the verbal grammatical system” (1991: 10). It shares this quality with the non-verbal negator *miš* of some Arabic dialects that negates verbal expressions of futurity (Wilmsen forthcoming and references), negation of futurity appearing to provide the entry point for the negative existential to begin operating on verbs, thence permitting further progress along the B > C arc of the cycle, culminating in a Stage C.

## 2.6. Stage C: The negative existential is identical to the verbal negator: Andalusī Arabic

Croft defines Stage C as that “in which the negative existential form is the same as the ordinary verbal negator” (1991: 11). The extinct pre-modern Arabic variety of the Iberian Peninsula, Andalusī Arabic, exhibits this. In a statistical survey of three works of the colloquial literature of Andalusī Arabic, Tchobanova (2005) finds *las/lis* to be the “most commonly used particle in nominative as well as verbal negation” (2005: 510). Specifically, she finds *lis* and its alternate *las* negating verbs expressing the present and the future in the *xarjāt*, a vernacular genre of poetry spanning the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries AD (2005: 508). In the 12<sup>th</sup>-century *zajal* collection of Ibn Quzmān, another genre of vernacular Arabic poetry, she finds it used for negation of the past indefinite, the conditional, the present, and the future (2005: 508–509). In the 13<sup>th</sup> century folk proverb compendium of al- Zajjālī, she finds “the growing use of *las/lis* a particle for the negation of the imperfective verb, the uses ... predominantly with the present absolute tense” (2005: 509). In all three of her sources, *las/lis* negating a verb accounts for more than 60% of its uses. In the remaining negations of nominal predicates, “the meaning most often encountered” and the “predominant meaning is ‘there isn’t/aren’t’” (2005: 506 & 509).

For his part, the dean of Andalusī Arabic studies Federico Corriente (2013), upon whose extensive work Tchobanova’s relies, in his latest statement on the matter says that *las/lis* is “an almost universal negator of the perfective, ... imperfective, and nominal sentences” (2003: 126), providing examples of each type:

(16) a. *las kān dara-yt-uh*  
 NEX be.PFV.3S know.PFV-1S-PRON.3M  
 ‘I had not known it’ (Corriente 2013: 126)

b. *las ni-sammī aḥad*  
 NEX 1S-name.IPFV one  
 ‘I [do] not mention anyone’ (Corriente 2013: 126)

c. *las niḥun ṣibyān*  
 NEX PRON.1pl children  
 ‘We [are] not children’ (Corriente 2013: 126)

Tchobanova’s figures and Corriente’s description of *las/lis* as “almost universal” imply that the regular verbal negators *mā* and *lā* may be in use in vernacular Andalusī Arabic texts, and indeed they are, but, as Corriente states, *mā* is rare and *lā* is “drastically curtailed” (2013: 124). Meanwhile, Croft qualifies his definition of Stage C saying, “The sequencing is not absolute: it is not the case that one diachronic process is completed before the next process in the sequence begins ... and in fact [it] may not even include completion of the process” (Croft 1991: 22). For Arabic, this means that the negators *lā* and *mā* need not have fallen into disuse to be entirely replaced by the negative existential. By those lights, Andalusī Arabic exhibits a solid Stage C of the cycle.

### 2.7. Stage C ~ A: The erstwhile negative existential begins negating existential particles

In its final stage, “the negative-existential-cum-verbal-negator begins to be reanalysed as only a negator, and a regular positive existential ... comes to be used with it in the negative existential construction” (Croft 1991: 13). This does occur in constructions such as those in (4), repeated here as (17 a & b):

(17) a. *laysa hunāka aḥad fī l-bayt*  
 NEX EX one PREP DET-house  
 ‘There [is] not there [any]one in the house’ (Adwan 2000: 307)

b. *laysa tamma mā yu-qāl*  
 NEX EX REL 3-say.IPFV.PASS  
 ‘There [is] not there that [might be] said’ (Kanafani 2006: 75)

Existential expressions with the particle *tamma* are also attested in Andalusī Arabic (cf. Corriente 2013: 126):

- (18) *las*     *tamma*     *illā*     *l-ḥayr*  
 NEX    EX                except    DET-good  
 ‘There [is] not there except good’ (Ibn Quzmān 1999: 245)

### 3. Analysis

With that, readers may have noticed that all stages of a negative existential with *laysa* exist coterporally in Arabic writing. This overlap of stages is, in fact, characteristic of the cycle as Croft initially outlined it:

In the diachronic cycle we have proposed here, fusion of negative and existential occurs first, then the use of the negative existential as a verbal negator, and finally the analogical use of the positive existential predicate in negative existential constructions. First, we must note that the sequencing is not absolute: it is not the case that one diachronic process is completed before the next process in the sequence begins ... Thus, sequencing of diachronic processes must allow for temporal overlap in the execution of the processes, and in fact may not even include completion of the process. (Croft 1991: 22)

Yet, the overlap of stages in the Arabic of writing is extreme, with all stages but A fully present and piled one atop the other. This might be expected in the conservative medium of Arabic writing, which has changed little since the 8<sup>th</sup> century, when the enterprise began of describing and codifying the dialect or assemblage of dialects that became the vehicle of writing. In his *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, Wehr (1980) encapsulates the matter:

Arab authors, steeped in classical tradition, can and do frequently draw upon words which were already archaic in the Middle Ages ... Authors tend to weave in ancient Arabic and classical idioms ... [With the result that] Modern Arabic [is] a written language powerfully influenced by traditional norms ... Arabic phonology, morphology, and syntax have remained relatively unchanged from earliest times. Here traditional adherence to ancient linguistic norms and the models of classical literature, especially the Koran, has had the effect of preserving the language intact over the centuries. (1980: ix)

This adherence to and revival of the oldest forms of Arabic writing is both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, it truly does preserve remnants of the developmental stages of the language intact; on the other, it renders almost impossible the determination of the sequence of stages by means of an examination of classical writing alone. For that, it is necessary to compare the evidence from classical writing with that from the dialects, including vernacular writing, by which is may be possibly to reconstruct a probable sequence.

### 3.1. Inflections of *lays*

The presentation of the stages of the cycle so far has neglected the inflections of *laysa*. The most prominent of these are to be seen in the extraordinary property of *laysa* in written Arabic, whereby the non-verbal existential particle *'ys* negated becomes reanalysed as a perfective verb, withal negating a present-time predication. As a verb, it is inflected for all persons and numbers, when it means ‘I/you/he/she/it/we/they am/is/are not’:

- (19) a. *las-tu*                    *mağnūnan*  
 NEX.PFV-1S            crazy  
 ‘I [am] not crazy’ (Mostaghanemi 2010: 165)
- b. *las-ti*                    *ḥabīb-at-ī*  
 NEX.PFV-2FS            lover-f-PRON.1S  
 ‘You [are] not my sweetheart’ (Mostaghanemi 2010: 280)
- c. *lays-at*                    *madīn-at-ī*  
 NEX.PFV-3FS            city-f-PRON.1S  
 ‘[It is] not my city’ (Mostaghanemi 2010: 165)

Against the assumption that *laysa*, as a perfective verb, must derive from an ancestral form that included the imperfective (e.g., Lipiński 2001: 488), Măcelaru counters, “The reflexes of \**yš* in the large majority of Semitic languages are not verbs but something that we might call a particle. Even in those languages where it is a verb, there are traces indicating that originally that was not the case” (2003: 236; cf. Holes 2004: 240–241), adducing as examples of this the Akkadian verb *išû(m)*, which exists only in the preterit, infinitive, and stative, with no imperative, predicative, and derived forms, and the Arabic *laysa* itself, “which has no meaning of perfectivity or past time ... [but] describes an actual state of affairs from the point of view of the speaker or writer” (2003: 237). He takes this as evidence of its non-verbal origins. Supporting his case is that little or no evidence exists for an earlier imperfective verb (Măcelaru 2003: 236), certainly none in Arabic.

### 3.2. Suffixes of *lays*

If the conjugational suffixes of *laysa* as a verb are viewed as originating in personal pronouns (Lipiński 2001: 367–374), that is, as subject pronouns that have become grammaticalized as person markers in the conjugation of the perfective verb, other pronominal forms affix to reflexes of *laysa*, too, there appearing as *object* pronouns. These are generally dialect features in southern Arabian varieties, but they find early analogues in the vernacular writing from

al-Andalus, and, indeed, some mention of them appears in a later lexicographical work addressing the formal Arabic of writing, *Tāğ al-‘Arūs* (Crown of the bride) of al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1790), there perhaps also alluding to dialect usage: “*laysa-nī wa laysa-ki ġā’ iz illā ’ an al-munfašil ağwad*” (‘*laysani* and *laysaki* are possible, except that the detached [object pronoun] is better’) (*Tāğ* 2004: 491). Al-Zabīdī contrasts those forms with the other – as he sees it, more preferable – option: *laysa* and the so-called “free object pronoun” *īyyā-* (cf. Badawi, Carter and Gully, 2004: 145, 239, 291, 373–5, and 447 for discussion and examples of usage): *laysa īyyā-ya* and *laysa īyyā-ka* ‘not me’ and ‘not you’.

Comparing the use of the *laysa* of written Arabic with *lis* in the ‘Asīr and Tihāma dialect elements of Abha Arabic, Azraqī observes, “*laysa ... takes bound subject pronouns*, whereas *lis ... takes bound object pronouns or free subject pronouns*” (1998: 143, her emphasis), providing a comparative paradigm of pronominal inflections in a table.<sup>4</sup>

Table 1. Suffixes in written Arabic *laysa* and spoken Abha Arabic *lis*

	Written Arabic	Abha Arabic	
	<i>lis</i> + bound subject pronoun	<i>lis</i> + free subject pronoun	<i>lis</i> + bound object pronoun
1s	<i>lastu</i>	<i>lis anā</i>	<i>lisnī</i>
1pl	<i>lasnā</i>	<i>lis ħin</i>	<i>lisnā</i>
2ms	<i>lasta</i>	<i>lis ant / int</i>	<i>lisik</i>
2mpl	<i>lastum</i>	<i>lis antū / antum / intū</i>	<i>liskum</i>
2fs	<i>lasti</i>	<i>lis antī / intī</i>	<i>lisiš</i>
3fpl	<i>laysat</i>	<i>lis hī / lissī</i>	<i>lishā</i>
3ms	<i>laysa</i>	<i>lis hu / lissū</i>	<i>lisah</i>
3mpl	<i>laysū</i>	<i>lis hum</i>	<i>lissum</i>

Adapted from Al-Azraqī 1998: 142–143.

She also gives three alternate forms, commenting, “some old people use forms of *lis* not common in Abha” (Azraqī 1998: 142, n. 1):

(20) a. *lis-tuwa*                      *a-dri*  
 NEX-PRON.1S                      1S-know.IPFV  
 ‘I do not know’

b. *lays-u*                                *ya-dri*  
 NEX-PRON.3MS                      3ms-know.IPFV  
 ‘He does not know’

<sup>4</sup> Al-Azraqī does not list the written Arabic dual and feminine plural conjugations of *laysa*, which do not appear in the dialect; for the complete paradigm, see Ryding (2005: 642).

- c. *lays-atu*                    *ta-dri*  
 NEX-PRON.3FS            3FS-know.IPFV  
 ‘She does not know’

Analogues to the suffixed forms in Table 1 are attested in Andalusī Arabic, which exhibits “invariable *la/īs* at times extended with pronominal suffixes” (Corriente 2013: 125):

- (21) *lass-um*                    *an-nisā*                    *‘alā*                    *šay’*  
 NEX-PRON.3PL    DET-women            PREP                    thing  
 ‘Women [are] not onto [any]thing’ (Ibn Quzmān 1999: 398)

### 3.3. Analogues of *lays* inflections

The usual assumption seems to be that *laysa* was originally a fully functioning verb whose imperfective was subsequently lost in the dialects that use them, including the Arabic of writing, the dialect forms deriving from them being necessarily younger: al-Azraqī (1998: 141) “*lis* may be considered as derived from the classical *laysa*”; Blau (1967: 305 and 308) “*laysa* has become as a rule invariable” and “conjugated *laysa* has disappeared from living speech”. According to the negative existential cycle model, however, an uninflected form of *lays* must have preceded in time inflected ones of any variety. Pronominal suffixes are later developments.

Nor are the affixation of pronominal suffixes onto a negator and the alternation between subject pronouns and object pronouns unique to reflexes of *laysa*. The pan-dialectal negator *mā* (Holes 2004: 240 & 243–244), can, depending upon the dialect, take either subject or object pronoun suffixes in what Woidich (2006: 336), writing about Egyptian Arabic, calls “non-predicate” negation, so-called because the negation falls on the subject pronoun, even though it is the predicate that is denied. In Egyptian Arabic, it is the subject pronouns that become affixed to *mā* (Table 2):

- (22) a. *ma-nī-š*                    *‘arf-ak*  
 NEG-PRON.1S-NEG            know.PROG-PRON.2MS  
 ‘I don’t know you’
- b. *ma-huwwā-š*                    *mawġūd*  
 NEG-PRON.3MS-NEG            present  
 ‘He [is] not here’
- c. *ma-hiyyā-š*                    *sahla*  
 NEG-PRON.3FS-NEG            easy  
 ‘She/it [is] not easy’ (Woidich 2006: 336)

Egyptian Arabic plural non-predicate negators are constructed likewise: *iḥna* ‘we’ > *maḥnāš* ‘we [are] not’, *intū* ‘you (p)’ > *mantūš* ‘you [are] not’, *humma* ‘they/them’ > *mahummāš* ‘they [are] not’ (Table 2). Moroccan dialects also function in this manner (Caubet 1996: 83). Not so the other North African varieties, for example the Libyan (Owens 1984: 157) and Tunisian (Chaâbane 1998: 125), which affix the object pronoun to the negator. Likewise the Levantine dialects. Table 2 illustrates the various forms, with Egyptian and Lebanese Arabic varieties as the model.

Table 2. Suffixed subject and object pronouns  
in Egyptian and Lebanese Arabic non-predicate negation

	subject pronouns	Egyptian Arabic: subject pronouns	object pronouns	Lebanese Arabic: object pronouns
1s	anā	ma-nī-š	-nī	man-nī
2ms	inta/e	ma-ntā-š	-ak	mann-ak
2fs	inti/e	ma-ntī-š	-ik	mann-ik
3ms	huwwā/e	ma-huwwā-š	-u	mann-u
3fs	hiyya/e	ma-hiyyā-š	-(h)ā	mann-ā
1pl	iḥna/naḥna	ma-ḥnā-š	-nā	man-nā
2pl	intu	ma-ntū-š	-kum/-kon	mann-kon
3pl	humma/hinne	ma-hummā-š	-hum/-on	mann-on

The [n] of the Lebanese forms also find analogues in the negator *lis/las* of Andalusī Arabic, “with pronominal suffixes optionally preceded by +an+” (Corriente 2013: 125):

- (23) *al-lāhu*      *lasan-u*      *ġāfil*  
 DET-god      NEX-PRON.3MS      unmindful  
 ‘Allah [is] not [he] unmindful’ (Ibn Quzmān 1999: 141)

What is more, variability obtains within and between varieties. Driver (1925: 198) reports both the affixation of subject pronouns and of object pronouns in Palestinian Arabic, for example, *mantāš* and *mannakš* ‘you are not’ and *mahūš* and *mannūš* ‘he is not’ (Table 3). About Syrian varieties, among which are the Lebanese, Cowell remarks:

The form *mal-* is typically Damascene; the most usual Lebanese form ... is *mann-*: *mannak šāyif* ‘Don’t you see?’ (There are other variants, e.g. *maynak*, *mənak*.) In some areas this type of form is not used in the third person at all, for which *mā-hu* and *mā-hi*, etc. are used. (Cowell 2005 [1964]: 388)

The 3<sup>rd</sup> person forms that Cowell speaks of derive from the subject pronouns *huwa* and *hiya* and not the object pronouns *-ū* and *-ā* (Table 2). So, too, are

third person forms anomalous in Libyan Arabic, which affixes object pronouns in 1<sup>st</sup> persons: *manīš* (singular) and *manāš* (plural); likewise the 2<sup>nd</sup> persons, retaining the [n]: *manakš*, *manikš* (masculine and feminine singular), *mankamš*, and *mankanš* (masculine and feminine plural); but it attaches subject pronouns in the 3<sup>rd</sup> persons (Owens 1984: 157):

(24) a. *hādi m-ey-š šagt-i*  
 DEM NEG-PRON.3FS-NEG flat-PRON.1S  
 ‘This is not my flat’ (Owens 1984: 158)

b. *ma-hum fi saga-š*  
 NEG-PRON.3PL PREP flat-NEG  
 ‘They are not in a flat’ (Owens 1984: 158)

A similar phenomenon is evident in the non-predicate negators of Tunisian Arabic (Stumme 1896: 145; Chaâbane 1998: 127), which affixes object pronouns to the negator *mā*: *māk(š)* and *makum(š)* ‘you are not’ but subject pronouns to the 3<sup>rd</sup> persons: *mahū(š)* and *mahi(yāš)* ‘he is not’ and ‘she is not’ and *mahum(š)*. Table 3 sets out the paradigms of non-predicate negation in those dialects, as it happens, all situated around the Mediterranean Basin, but likely descended from southern Arabian varieties of Arabic, where the same feature is attested in Yemeni (Watson 1993: 256–257) and Omani (Reinhardt 1894: 21–22) Arabics.<sup>5</sup>

Table 3. Suffixed pronouns in non-predicate negation  
 in spoken Mediterranean Arabic varieties

	Moroccan	Tunisian	Libyan	Egyptian	Palestinian	
1s	ma-ni-š	ma-ni-(š)	ma-ni-š	ma-ni-š	ma-ni-š	‘I am not’
2ms	ma-nta-š	ma-k-(š)	man-ak-š	ma-ntā-š	ma-ntā-š/mann-ak-iš	‘You are not’
2fs	ma-nti-š	man-ik-(š)	man-ik-š	ma-ntī-š	ma-ntī-s/mann-ik-iš	‘You are not’
3ms	ma-huwa-š	ma-hu-(š)	m-o-š	ma-huwwā-š	ma-hūš/mann-ūš	‘He is not’
3fs	ma-hiya-š	ma-hi(yā)-(š)	m-ey-š	ma-hiyyā-š	ma-hī-š/manna-hā-š	‘She is not’
1pl	ma-ḥna-š	ma-nā-(š)	ma-na-š	ma-ḥna-š	ma-ḥna-š	‘We are not’
2pl	ma-ntuma-š	ma-kum-(š)	man-kam-š	ma-ntū-š	ma-ntū-š/man-kū-š	‘You are not’
3pl	ma-huma-š	ma-hum-(š)	ma-hum-š	ma-humma-š	ma-hunn-iš/man-hum-š	‘They are not’

NB: Libyan Arabic possesses feminine plural forms not shown here (for which, see Owens 1984: 157).

<sup>5</sup> In these dialects the negator *mā* is often (and in many of them obligatorily) augmented with a post-positive *-š*: “Thus *mā ba’reḥ* [cf. example (1)] = *mā ba’reḥš*” (Cowell 2005 [1964]: 383). Those generally perform non-verbal predicate negation with a reflex of *mūš* (*infra*), which functions in a manner similar to *laysa*. For its part, the *-š* of verbal negation and of *mūš* and its reflexes itself derives from an existential particle *ši* (Wilmsen forthcoming), probably related etymologically to the *’ys* of *laysa* (Măcelaru 2013; Blau 1972).

Thus, a general tendency obtains, by which the original negators *mā* and *lays* attract pronominal affixes, either subject or object. The grammaticalized subject pronouns of the written Arabic pseudo verb *laysa* are thus neither exceptional nor unique. Even the short vowel /a/ in the bare form *laysa*, as the marker of the 3rd-person pronoun *huwa*, would be a later accretion, an analogue of the 3rd-person singular masculine form of the perfective verb. The earlier form was an uninflected *lays*, a fusion of *lā* 'ys characteristic of a Stage A > B.

### 3.4. Early attestations of uninflected *lays*

Relics of an uninflected *lays* appear in early classical Arabic writings. Reckendorf (1921: 47), for example, cites the following, associated with an independent plural subject pronoun:

- (25) *laysa hum fī 'amr 'alī miṭla-nā*  
 NEX PRON.3MPL PREP matter name like-PRON.1PL  
 'They [are] not [involved] in the matter of Ali as we [are]' (Reckendorf 1921: 47)

He draws this example from *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* (The Book of Major Classes) of Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845), wherein instances of verbal negations with *laysa* also appear:

- (26) a. *fa-laysa ya-ḡrī fawqa-hum šay'*  
 CONJ-NEX 3-run PREP-PRON.3MPL thing  
 'And nothing runs above them' (*Ṭabaqāt* I: 28)
- b. *laysa ya-'araf ahl al-'ilm*  
 NEX 3ms-know.IPFV people DET-knowledge  
 'The people of knowledge [do] not know' (*Ṭabaqāt* I: 161–162)

Reckendorf cites several examples of what he calls 'the loss of subject' (1921: 40) in *laysa*, most of those gleaned from the writings of other researchers, notably, Wright and Brockelmann (1921: 300 & 362), themselves drawing from the compendia of prophetic traditions ('*aḥādīṭ*, sing. *ḥadīṭ*) of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and of al-Buḥārī (d. 256/870), *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī* (The Authentic of Buḥārī), the latter of which exhibits more than a score of verbal negations with *laysa*:

- (27) *laysa ya-riṭ-u-ni illā ibnat-i*  
 NEX 3M-inherit.IPFV-IND-PRON.1S except daughter-PRON.1S  
 'No one inherits [from] me except my daughter' (*Ṣaḥīḥ* VIII: 151)

In the earliest extant compilation of the prophetic traditions, *al-Muwattā'* (The Approved) of Mālik b. Anas (d. 93/712) verbal negation with *laysa* also occurs rarely:<sup>6</sup>

(28) a. *laysa* *yu-ğzī-nī* *fī -hā* *illā* *mušāfahat-uh*  
 NEX 3MS-satisfy-PRON.1S PREP-PRON.3FS except orality-PRON.3MS  
 'It satisfies me not except [by] his saying [it]' (*Muwattā'*: 108)

b. *laysa* *ya-bqā* *ba' d-ī* *min* *al-nubūwa*  
 NEX 3MS-remain.IPFV after-PRON.1S PREP DET-prophethood  
*illā* *al-ru'yā* *al-ṣāliḥa*  
 except DET-vision DET-valid  
 'There remains not after me of prophethood except of the true vision'  
 (*Muwattā'*: 509)

### 3.5. Mechanisms for verbal negation with *lays*

As Mālik's *ḥadīṭ* in (28b) shows, these are actually existential predications, a phrasal rendition of that in (28a) being, "There is not [that] satisfies me in it except his pronouncing [it]". Similarly, al-Buḥārī's in (27) looks to be saying 'there [is] not [who] inherits'. Likewise, that of Ibn Sa'd in (26a): 'there [is] not [a] thing [that] runs'. As such, they constitute instantiations of Stage B and not true negations of the verb. They nevertheless appear to provide a mechanism for entrance onto the true verbal negations of a Stage B > C, whereby there is a, "gradual substitution of the negative existential for the verbal negator in only part of the verbal grammatical system" (Croft 1991: 10). Not an existential predication, example (26b) of Ibn Sa'd looks to betoken movement along that arc.

Håland (2011: 28–33) documents several mechanisms for such a gradual substitution as they apply to the non-verbal predicate negator *miš* or *muš* of the spoken Arabic dialects of Egypt. These themselves derive from the non-predicate negations *mā hūš* and *mā hīš* (cf. Table 3). Håland (2011) identifies several manners by which verbs Egyptian Arabic verbs may be negated with *miš*. Al-Sayyed and Wilmsen (2015) and Wilmsen (2016) demonstrate that the same, variously *miš*, *muš*, *mūš*, or *mhūš*, applies to Arabic varieties of the eastern Mediterranean in general. Prominent among them is contrastive negation, whereby "one negated and one positive fact stand in contrast to each other" (Håland 2011: 30). Wilmsen (2016) provides an example:

<sup>6</sup> Fischer (2006: 153) is not quite accurate in stating that verbal negation with uninflected *laysa* is non-classical usage, however he means his term *nichtklass.* – either later canonical written usage or the non-canonical usage found in some medieval writings in what has somewhat misleadingly been called "Middle Arabic" (cf. Blau 2006; Blau 1967: 305–309).

- (29) *miš b-a-kallim 'alā l-fulūs*  
 NEX HAB-1S-speak.IPFV PREP DET-money  
*b-a-kallim 'ann-ik inti*  
 HAB -I-speak PREP- PRON.2FS PRON.2FS  
 'I'm not talking about money; I'm talking about you' (Wilmsen 2016: 141)

Another is rhetorical negation, involving questions that solicit not new information but an affirmative reply from interlocutors, thereby asserting a (presumably) known fact (for more on this, see Mughazy 2008):

- (30) *miš bi-y-qūl-ū alla yi-žīr-nā min*  
 NEX HAB-3-say.IPFV-PL Allah 3-protect.IPFV-PRON.1PL PREP  
*il-īda'āt issa 'aġa-t*  
 DET-harm now come.PVF-3FS  
 'Don't they say, "Allah protect us from harm? Now it's come"' (Wilmsen 2016: 141)

These two of Håland's types are manifest in *al-Muwaṭṭā'*. Those in (28) do set off a contrast, if not in exactly the same manner as that in (29): each negation is countered by a positive assertion preceded by the conjunction *illā* 'but, except'. In those contexts, *laysa* remains a clear negative existential. Meanwhile, a few instances of rhetorical negation with *laysa* also appear in *al-Muwaṭṭā'*, marked as polar interrogatives soliciting with an answer of 'yes' or 'no' by the interrogative /'a/. The implied answer to either of these, rendered unnecessary by the mere posing of the question, is 'yes':

- (31) a. 'a *laysa ya-hlif*  
 INT NEX 3MS-swear.IPFV  
 '[Whoever borrows money] Does he not swear [an oath]?' (*Muwaṭṭā'*: 370)
- b. 'a *las-tu a-riṭu-hu*  
 INT NEX-PRON.1S 1S-inherit-PRON.3MS  
 '[If my brother died,] would I not inherit [from] him?' (*Muwaṭṭā'*: 402)
- c. 'a *laysa aḥbar-ta-nā*  
 INT NEX inform.PFV-PRON.2MS-PRON.1P  
 'Have you not informed us [that it is best to refrain]?' (*Muwaṭṭā'*: 538)

The last of these (31c) involves uninflected *laysa*, the expected form being *las-ta* 'not you' analogous to that in (31b) *las-tu* 'not I'. In these, the negator does not express an existential predication 'there is', or in the context of a question

‘is there,’ so much as a copular predication ‘it is not’ or as a question ‘is it not?’ in what has been called “metalinguistic” negation (Mughazy 2003). The extension of an original existential negation ‘there is not’ to incorporate the negation of copular predications ‘I/you/he/she/it is not’ and ‘we/you/they are not’ is also evident in Stage A > B of the negative existential cycle as it operates in Arabic varieties possessing the negator *miš/muš* or its reflexes. There, too, an original existential negation *mā šī* ‘not there [is]’ comes to be applied to copular predications as *miš/muš* (Wilmsen forthcoming).

### 3.6. Earliest record of the *laysa* negative existential cycle

Manifestations of a Stages A > B, B, and B > C of the negative existential cycle thus occur in some of the earliest extended writings in the Arabic dating to the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. Earlier records of extended Arabic discourses are to be had only in the Qur’ān, the earliest manuscript of which dates to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and in the pre-Islamic poetry of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The latter, however, is an unreliable witness for its method of transmission, having been transcribed during the Islamic era, which began in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the texts of which may have been subjected to some or some considerable editing in succeeding centuries. In any case, reflexes of *laysa* occur but infrequently in the quintessential pre-Islamic odes of the so-called *Mu‘allqāt* (The Suspended), in six of its seven instances meaning ‘he/it/is not’ or ‘you are not’ but once in a verbal negation of the rhetorical type meaning ‘do you not’:

- (32) *’a las-ta ta-rā*  
 INT NEX-PRON.2MS 2-see.IPFV  
 ‘Do you not see?’ (*Mu‘allqāt* 1974: 67)

For its part, *laysa* and its inflections appear eighty-seven times in the Qur’ān. Of those, forty-five, slightly more than half, carry the meaning ‘there is not’ or ‘is there not?’:<sup>7</sup>

- (33) a. *laysa ka-miṭli-hi šay’*  
 NEX like-likeness-PRON.3MS thing  
 ‘There [is] not [a] thing like His likeness’ (Qur’ān 42: 11)

<sup>7</sup> The Qur’ānic Arabic corpus marks only seven of them as expressing existential meaning, interpreting the others as ‘not’ or ‘am/are/is not’. An examination of the verses in which the negator appears, however, reveals that many that the corpus interprets to mean simply ‘not’ are negations of possessives of the typical Semitic prepositional dative type ‘there is at/for/in/on/to/with the possessor the possessed’ (Bar-Asher 2011: 50; Creissels 2014: 60). In a large number of cases, the translators whose renderings the corpus provides have, indeed, interpreted such phrases as existential predications.

- b. *'a laysa min-kum rağul rašīd*  
 INT NEX PREP-PRON.2MP man reasonable  
 '[Is] there not amongst you [a] reasonable man?' (Qur'ān 11: 78)

A single instance of *lāta* also occurs, usually interpreted to mean 'it is not' but in context here better seen as 'there is not', in either case, rendered into past time by the preceding perfective verb:

- (34) *fa-nād-ū wa lāta ḥīna manāšin*  
 CON-cry.PFV-3MPL CON NEX time escape  
 'Whereupon they cried out, but there [was] not time [for] escape' (Qur'ān 38: 3)

The remainder of the *laysa* negations in the Qur'ān involve copular negations:

- (35) *wa laysa d-dakaru ka-l-unfā*  
 CONJ NEX DET-male like-DET-female  
 'And the male [is] not like the female' (Qur'ān 3: 36)

Stages of the cycle beyond B are not evident, as no verbal negations with *laysa* occur in the Qur'ān. What is more, the spatial demonstrative *hunāka* does not occur at all, although a variant, *hunālika*, does appear nine times. It is, however, never used as an existential particle. Its counterpart *tamma* appears once in an existential predication:

- (36) *fa-'ayna-mā tu-wall-ū fa-tamma wağhu l-lāh*  
 CONJ-DEM-REL 2-turn.IPFV-3MPL CONJ-EX face DET-god  
 'So, wherever you turn, there [is] the face of Allah' (Qur'ān 2: 115)

### 3.7. Diachrony of the *laysa* negative existential cycle

From this, it becomes clear that by the seventh century AD varieties of Arabic possessing reflexes of *lays* had reached Stage B, in which the negative existential alone negates existential predications, without the mediation of a positive existential particle. By the following century, they show signs of moving into a Stage B > C, with reflexes of *lays* negating verbal predications. The extent to which they had can be glimpsed by a search of *laysa* and its inflections in the early books of the prophetic *aḥādīth* in the arabiCorpus. Comprising a collection of the so-called "six books" of *ḥadīth*, considered the most authoritative works of the genre, these incorporate, among other things, records of conversations between

the prophet of Islam and others in his retinue.<sup>8</sup> As such, they provide a glimpse of the Arabic speech of the day. Nevertheless, they, too, have probably undergone some editing, perhaps even in their composition, rather after current practices, whereby interviews are conducted in a spoken dialect of Arabic, but before publishing, they are edited to conform to prescribed written diction. Regardless, the recorded conversations of the *ḥadīṭ* will reflect usages, whether spoken or written, that were acceptable in their day.

### 3.7.1. Stage B > C: Verbal negations of *laysa* in the prophetic *ḥadīṭ*

The arabiCorpus is what is called an “untagged” corpus, that is to say, parts of speech are not marked (“tagged”) with electronically recognizable morphological markers. Consequently, searching it for *laysa* produces considerable noise, yielding all 3,816 instances of *laysa* and its inflected forms in the 3,624,346 words of the *ḥadīṭ* subcorpus.<sup>9</sup> The vast majority of those are in the usual non-verbal negations to which *laysa* is put, with the greatest numbers of those being negations of prepositional phrases beginning with *fī* ‘in’, *min* ‘from’, *la-* ‘to/for’, and *‘alā* ‘on’, together amounting to 1824 instances. That figure exceeds 2,000 when other less frequently occurring prepositions (such as *‘ind* ‘at’ – 120 hits – and *bayna* ‘between’ – 86 hits) are counted. As such, most of those are, in fact, existential predications of the type shown in section 2.3 above. That is, they are of a Stage B.

Nevertheless, verbal negations do occur, and those are easily detectable in the welter of hits. Because Arabic imperfective verbal conjugations begin with prefixed person markers, either *أ* /a/, *ت* /t/, *ن* /n/, or *ي* /y/, and the Corpus permits listing results by the words following the search term, imperfective verbs negated with *laysa* thus cluster together alphabetically in the long lists of results. Consequently, verbal negations with *laysa* appear in the *ḥadīṭ* literature subcorpus 145 times. This figure is reduced by about a third when duplicates are eliminated. Many of the *‘ahādīṭ* are repeated more or less verbatim between the various books. For example, that in (26) appears in five of the six books in the corpus. Eliminating duplicates from the count by reckoning every repeated *ḥadīṭ* as a single instance brings the number of verbal negations with *laysa* in the six books of *ḥadīṭ* that are represented in the Corpus to 95, or roughly 2.4% of all negations with *laysa*. The small ratio is to be expected with a negator that usually marks non-verbal predications and is perceived by its users as properly behaving as such.

<sup>8</sup> According to the traditional classificatory scheme, the sixth of these is either *Sunan ibn Mājah* (Traditions of Ibn Mājah) of Abū ‘Abdillāh Muḥammad ibn Yazīd ibn Mājah al-Rab‘ī al-Qazwīnī (d. 273/886–887) or *al-Muwattā’* (*supra*). In the collection represented in the Corpus, it is that of *Ibn Mājah*.

<sup>9</sup> By comparison, the negator *lā* appears 27,824 times.

Of these, 34 are rhetorical negations of the type shown in example (31), asking the question, ‘is it not [the case that]?’ Another 35 are in constructions in which a contrast is posed, either of the type “not this or that” or “it is not other than”:

(37) a. *laysa ya-xtalif fī l-ḥarām wa lā*  
 NEX 3-differ.IPFV PREP DET-forbidden CONJ NEG  
*l-ḥalāl*  
 DET-permitted

‘He does not disagree about the forbidden or the permitted’

b. *laysa yu-ṣību-hu illā mā’ ul-maṭar*  
 NEX 3-strike.IPFV-PRON.3MS except water DET-rain  
 ‘Naught strikes him but the water of rain’ = ‘It is not but rain that strikes him’

c. *laysa yu- ‘fī-ni mā yu-kaffī-ni wa*  
 NEX 3-give.IPFV-PRON.1S REL 3-suffice.IPFV-PRON.1S CONJ  
*walad-i illa mā ‘axadt min-hu*  
 son-PRON.1S except REL take.PFV PREP-PRON.3MS

‘He does not give me what suffices me and my son except what I take from him’

It may be noticed that all of these, too, may be interpreted as existential predications: ‘there is not [that which] he disagrees about’; ‘there is not [that which] strikes him’; ‘there is not [that which] he gives me’. In that case, these remain constructions of a stage B. Not so the 26 remaining negations, which are neither contrastive nor rhetorical but, instead, look like negations of verbal predications. Some of these are admittedly hard to interpret, but others are unambiguous, marked by clear discourse boundaries, such as ‘he said’:

(38) A: *qāl hal tu-ḡālis-ūn*  
 say.PFV INT 2-sit.IPFV-2MP  
 ‘He said: “[Will] you sit?”’

B: *qāl-ū las-nā na-truk dāka*  
 say.PFV-3MP NEX-1P 1P-leave.IPFV DEM  
 ‘They said: “We [do] not leave [i.e. refuse] that”’

A: *qāl fa-hal tu-zāwir-ūn*  
 say.PFV CONJ-INT 2-visit.IPFV-2MP  
 ‘He said: “[Are] you visiting?”’

B: qāl-ū                    na ‘m  
 say.PFV-3MP            yes  
 ‘They said: “Yes”’

The negation here cannot be an existential predication. It could be construed as a metalinguistic negation meaning ‘it is not [that] we refuse’, or it might also be seen to be negating an immediate futurity: ‘We will not refuse’. If it were the latter, it would be behaving as does its analogue *lis* in the Tihāma element of the dialect of Abha (Azraqi 1998: 142; examples [13] and [14]). An analogue is again also found in the negator *miš/muš*, which is involved in a separate negative existential cycle and is also used for negating futurity (Wilmsen 2014: 175; Wilmsen forthcoming: section 4.4). As such, they would all be manifestations of the principle that Croft outlines for Stage B > C: “gradual substitution of the negative existential for the verbal negator in only part of the verbal grammatical system” (Croft 1991: 9–10).

Finally, a few instances of uninflected *laysa* appear in the six books of *ḥadīṭ*, as in (39), in which an imperfective verb agreeing with its feminine antecedent in the form of a feminine demonstrative pronoun is, nevertheless, negated with what would otherwise be construed as the masculine singular conjugation of *laysa* but which must rather be its uninflected form:

(39) *ammā    ḥādī-hi    fa-laysa    ta-kūn    bi-’arḍi-nā*  
 as.for    DEM-FS    CONJ-NEX    3FS-be.IPFV    PREP-land-PRON.1P  
 ‘As for her, she is not of our land’

### 3.7.2. Stage B > C and C > A: Classical Arabic and later writings

Between the late 9<sup>th</sup> century, when the six books of the *ḥadīṭ* had been compiled and the modern era, but little change has occurred in usage. The reason for this must surely be that the enterprise of describing and codifying the Arabic language, which also began about the same time as the first of the six books of *ḥadīṭ* was being compiled, proceeding for the succeeding two centuries, set the conventions of writing in place.<sup>10</sup> Once that was accomplished, the many gatekeepers guarding propriety of expression would not and still do not countenance deviations from prescribed usage in formal writing except for

<sup>10</sup> The medieval grammarians of Arabic are curiously silent on the matter of verbal negation with *laysa*, even while occasionally using it themselves. The earliest of them, Sībawayhi (d. 180/796), the student of al-Ḥalīl, uses the construction more often than the others in the corpus (28 times), almost always with metalinguistic usage, meaning ‘it is not [that]’, for example: *wa laysa yu-rīd bi-qawlih ṣabāḥan wāḥidan wa masā’an wāḥidan* ‘It is not [that] he wishes with his statement [to say] a single morning and a single evening’. The next most early of them, al-Mubarrad (d. 286/899), uses it next most often (16 times), its usage falling off dramatically after that, with others using it five times or fewer if at all.

poetic necessity. Instead, modern writers preserve medieval models of writing (cf. Wehr 1980 in section 3). Verbal negations with *laysa*, while not Quranic, are nevertheless sanctioned by their appearance in the prophetic *hadīṭ* and as such constitute models of acceptable usage through all subsequent eras of Arabic letters.

Nevertheless, later medieval authors in the arabiCorpus innovate upon the pattern. For example, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) appears to be reversing the order of an existential predication in one of his negations with *laysa* in his *tahāfut al-falāsifa* (Incoherence of the Philosophers):

- (40) *wa qiyās al-‘aql laysa yu-dill ‘alay-h*  
 CONJ measure DET-mind NEX 3-prove PREP-PRON.3MS  
 ‘And the measure of the mind [i.e. rationality] does not prove it’

Had *laysa* begun the phrase, as it might have been expected to do in the usual, unmarked VSO word order of written Arabic (*laysa* being viewed as a verb), it had posed an existential predication: ‘There is no rationality to prove it.’ As written, however, it looks as if *laysa* is to negate the verb. The writer would have been justified in such usage because earlier models of writing sanctioned it. This appears to be the position of writers since then. It is allowable because classical writers used it, none more authoritative than the compilers of the prophetic Hadith, second only to the Qur’ān in authority as a model of propriety of expression.

Notably, later writers begin to use *laysa* in negating verbs less often, such that by the 14<sup>th</sup> century, in the text of the famous *al-muqaddima* (The Prolegomenon) of Ibn Khaldūn (d. 809/1406), such usage appears only thrice, once in a contrastive construction of the type ‘neither this nor that’ and the other two appear in existential predications involving the passive voice of the verb ‘to find’ *yūğad* (*supra*), also posing a contrast of the sort ‘there is not but’:

- (41) *laysa yū-ğad dālīka illā fī luğat al-‘arab*  
 NEX 3-find.IPFV.PASS DEM CONJ PREP language DET-Arabs  
 ‘That [does] not exist, except in the language of the Arabs’

This illustrates a change that does appear to have occurred in existential predication itself, whether negated or not. Recall that the demonstrative *hunāka* ‘there’ does not occur in the Qur’ān; that an alternate form *hunālika* ‘there’ does, but it is not used existentially; and that *tamma* ‘there’ does occur once, used existentially (example [36]).<sup>11</sup> Neither does the passive of the verb *wağada* ‘to

<sup>11</sup> It is used demonstratively in one other place (26: 64).

find (lit. ‘he found’) appear in the imperfective as an existential or otherwise.<sup>12</sup> Within a century and a half of the collation of the authoritative text of the Qur’ān (c. 20 AH/640 AD), however, writers have begun using *yūğad* ‘it is found’ to mean ‘there is’. Sībawayhi (d. 180/796) uses it 6 times in his compendious description of Arabic grammar; his contemporary and tutor al-Ḥalīl (d. 170 AH/786 AD) uses it four times in his *kitāb al-‘ayn*, twice negating it with the usual negator *lā*. It appears seventy-two times in the six books of *ḥadīṭ*, 30 of them negated with the usual verbal negator *lā*, twice with *mā* and once with *laysa*. Belletrist al-Jāhīz (d. 255/868) uses it 34 times in his most famous work, *kitāb al-ḥayawānāt* (Book of Animals) negating it nine times with *lā* and once with *laysa*.

He and other writers are now using *laysa hunāka*, none of them very often, but with the frequency increasing as the era of classical Arabic writing progresses. Because the pre-modern texts in the arabiCorpus are of different lengths, frequencies are more meaningful than absolute numbers. For example, al-Jāhīz uses *laysa hunāka* seven times in two texts.<sup>13</sup> The classical-era polymath Ibn Sīnā (d. 429/1037) also uses it seven times in a single text. But his frequency of use is 7.71 times in 100,000 words, whereas the usage of al-Jāhīz is the much rarer 1.5 times per 100,000, averaged between the two texts. Other writers’ frequencies are all below  $1/10^{x5}$ , including 2 instances in the compendious 9<sup>th</sup> century Hadith collection *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (The Authentic of Muslim), the only occurrences in the six books.

For its part, *laysa tamma* is hardly used at all until al-Ghazālī, who uses it 9 times in his *tahāfut*, that is  $19.02/10^{x5}$ . The only other authors in texts of the premodern subcorpus who use it with frequencies above  $1/10^{x5}$  were, like al-Ghazālī, writing in later eras. It is not totally absent in earlier writing; it appears once apiece in three of the six books of *ḥadīṭ*, those of al-Buḥārī (d. 256/870), Ibn Māja (d. 273/887), and al-Tirmidī (d. 279/892), again providing a model of acceptable usage to later writers. Nevertheless, it has apparently never gained currency until modern times, when it appears in the modern literature subcorpus at a frequency of  $2.05/10^{x5}$ . Apparently it is viewed as a particularly literary device, because it remains rare in the much larger newspaper subcorpus, where it appears 962 times in a subcorpus of 135,360,804 words, again at a frequency of less than  $1/10^{x5}$ .

Not so *laysa hunāka*, which appears 6,810 times in the newspaper subcorpus, at 5.03 times per hundred thousand words, and at about half that frequency in the modern literature subcorpus:  $2.63/10^{x5}$ . Remaining faithful to older

<sup>12</sup> It does appear in the perfective once in the Joseph story (12: 75), there meaning ‘[in whose saddlebag] it was found’.

<sup>13</sup> He is also one of only two writers in the premodern subcorpus to use *laysa hunāka*, the other being al-Ghazālī, each using it only once.

models of composition, modern writers tend to negate verbs with *laysa* either in metalinguistic ‘it is not that’ negations or in neither/nor constructions. They may, however, occasionally negate a verb with *laysa* for other reasons. Even then, they do not permit themselves the same license with the language as the writers of the classical and medieval eras did. Writers represented in the premodern subcorpus of 9,127,331 words exercise verbal negation with *laysa* with forty-nine different verbs; modern writers with only 22 in a much larger corpus of 164,852,457 words of the three modern subcorpora. Formal writing in Arabic has, therefore, remained in stage B > C since the earliest era of classical Arabic. But it also had by the medieval era progressed to stage C > A in its use of *laysa* to negate existential predications, with modern writers exercising that option more frequently than their medieval counterparts.

### 3.7.3. Stage C: The vernacular Arabic of al-Andalus

The Arabic of formal writing has skipped Stage C entirely. Recall that it is Stage C “in which the negative existential form is the same as the ordinary verbal negator” (Croft 1991: 11). This has clearly never occurred in the Arabic of formal writing. It is only the attestations of the dialects of al-Andalus, which begin to appear in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Corriente 2006: 102), that see a fully developed stage C. True, those attestations are also written – anyone who spoke any Andalusi vernacular of Arabic having been dead these many long years – but some of the writing to come out of al-Andalus was written in a colloquializing style that by all appearances looks to represent a fairly faithful rendering of the spoken vernaculars of the day. Certainly not all Andalusi writing in Arabic attests directly to the dialects; two of the authors represented in the arabiCorpus, Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and Ibn Maimūn (Maimonides) were Andalusians who produced their works in the formal Arabic of writing. What is more, Corriente (2013) characterizes the vernacular Andalusi Arabic texts that survive as “scarce” consisting in, “poems and proverb collections, some hundreds of low-yield legal deeds, a few personal letters, a few hundred items in Lt. [Latin] transcription, both personal and geographical names, and some transcribed AA [Andalusi Arabic] phrases culled from Rm. [Romance] literatures” (2013: xii). Even so, they are the best documented of the early Arabic dialects (Corriente 2006: 102), and negation techniques are sufficiently attested to give a clear understanding about how it proceeded.

As Corriente (2013: 126) has observed, negation with *lis* in vernacular Andalusi Arabic texts is everywhere present in non-verbal and verbal predications alike. This is quite unlike negation in any other variety of Arabic, in which verbal negation either proceeds with *lā*, the usual negator in the Arabic of writing and under some conditions in some spoken Arabic dialects, or with *mā*, which, for its part, is used under restricted conditions in the Arabic of writing and is almost universal as a verbal negator amongst spoken dialects of Arabic.

Corriente comments: “Its relative scarcity vs. the frequency of reflexes of *laysa* in AA is a bit surprising, considering that it is the most widespread negation in NA [i.e., neo-Arabic, a term used to indicate the spoken dialects] which, in turn, ignores *laysa*, with the conspicuous exception of Modern Yemenite” (2013: 124, fn. 273).<sup>14</sup>

Corriente (2013: 124–125) gives a few examples of negations with *mā* and *lā* from Ibn Quzmān, noting that *lā* as a sentence substitute answering a polar question in the negative retains its usage but that it is “drastically curtailed as a marker of negation within sentences” (ibid). A reading of Ibn Quzmān reveals that its most common usage within sentences is in neither/nor predications, either verbal or non-verbal, occasionally co-occurring with reflexes of *lis*:

- (42) a. *lā na-lqā-h wa lā na-dri ʿayn-uh*  
 NEG 1S-find.IPFV-PRO.3MS conj neg 1S-know.IPFV DEM-PRO.3MS  
 ‘I neither find him nor know where he [is]’ (Ibn Quzmān 1999: 148)
- b. *las ki-nu-ḥraq wa lā nu-štam*  
 NEX HAB-1S-burn.IPFV.PASS CONJ NEG 1S-insult.IPFV.PASS  
 ‘I [am] neither stung nor insulted’ (Ibn Quzmān 1999: 221)
- c. *lassan-uh lā ġaddār wa lā munāfiq*  
 NEX-PRO.3MS NEG perfidious CONJ NEG hypocritical  
 ‘He [is] neither perfidious nor hypocritical’ (Ibn Quzmān 1999: 143)

Meanwhile, if the usual negator *mā* of the Arabic dialects is rare in Ibn Quzmān, it is more common in the proverb collection of al-Zajjālī (ed. Bencherifa 1971), compiled a century later. In that work, the proverbs are grouped together in separate chapters according to the first letter of the first word, rendering simple the task of counting and comparing instances of negation.

Accordingly, of the 86 proverbs beginning with the letter {l}, arranged over eighteen pages (269–287), most of each page being taken up by the modern-era editor’s footnotes, not all represent negations. Some of them, as conditionals, begin with *law* ‘if’, others begin with the preposition *la-* ‘to’. What is more, not all of the negations with *lis* are verbal negations; some are the type of non-verbal predications that reflexes of *laysa* are usually put to. Only thirty-five are verbal negations. Likewise the much more numerous proverbs beginning with the letter {m} (pp. 289–352): a full 222 of those begin with the pronoun *man* ‘whoever’. Of the negations, thirty-two beginning with *mā*

<sup>14</sup> We should include the ‘Asīr and Tihāma dialect elements of Abha Arabic, now falling within the borders of the modern state of Saudi Arabia but, as southern peninsular dialects situated south of the Ḥijāz, properly considered Yemeni.

are verbal negations. Of the separate, ten-page (pp. 455–465) chapter for *lā*, all 59 proverbs therein would obviously involve negations, but only seventeen of those embody negations of verbal phrases, and then most of them prohibitives (43a). The rest are existential negations (43b) of the type introduced in (3b):

(43) a. *lā ta-qul ḥasana ḥattā ta-timm as-sana*  
 NEG 2S-say.PROH good until 2S-complete DET-year  
 ‘[Do] not say “good” until the year ends’ (al-Zajjāli 1973: 455)

b. *lā malīḥ-a wa lā dār ma ‘a-hā*  
 NEG salty-F CONJ NEG house PREP-PRO.3FS  
 ‘[There is] no lover and no house [to go] with her’ (al-Zajjāli 1973: 455)

About verbal negations with *mā*, Corriente (2013: 124) says that they are frequent in the writings of the 16<sup>th</sup> century priest Pedro de Alcalá, who produced treatises in Arabic transcribed into Latin script aimed at converting crypto-Muslims who had remained in Iberia after the Reconquista.

With verbal negations with *lis* being the most frequent in the 12<sup>th</sup> century *diwān* of Ibn Quzmān, their being effectively just as frequent as verbal negations with *mā* in al-Zajjāli’s 13<sup>th</sup> century proverb collection (35:32), the latter also being frequent in the tracts of Alcalá of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, several possibilities presents themselves. It could be that Ibn Quzmān’s dialect had advanced to a full Stage C while other Arabic dialects of al-Andalus had not. Contrariwise, it could be that, with constant contact with other varieties of Arabic, the 12<sup>th</sup> century Stage C dialects of Andalusī Arabic were by the 13<sup>th</sup> undergoing a levelling toward negation with the standard verbal negator *mā*. Finally, it could be that the negator *mā* was present all along and that Ibn Quzmān for whatever reason did not find occasion to use it often in his poetry. Attestations of analogous usage in modern spoken vernaculars of the southern Arabian Peninsula (al-Azraqi 1998: 140–141), where both *mā* and reflexes of *lays* operate, could support any of these. So, too, would the negative existential cycle model itself.

#### 4. Discussion

Early writers’ verbal negations with *laysa* likely reflect spoken usage. Significantly, al-Jāhiz’s single negation of the existential *yūḡad* with *laysa* is a quote:

(44) *qāl laysa yū-ḡad li-zill iṣ-ṣaḥṣ nihāya*  
 say.IPFV NEX 3-find.IPFV.PASS DAT-shadow DET-person end

*ma*´      *ṭulū*´      *iš-šams*  
 PREP    rising      DET-sun  
 ‘He said, “There is no end to the shadow of a person with the rising of  
 the sun”’

Likewise, the verbal negations with *laysa* in the books of prophetic *ḥadīṭ*, which works purport to record speech, the records in which are, in fact, almost always preceded with a reflex of the verb *qāl* ‘he said’. The early compilers of the *ḥadīṭ* were all writing at a time when the strictures of formal Arabic writing had not been put firmly into place, as was al-Jāḥiz.

His other negations of the existential *yūḡad* are with the far more common written Arabic verbal negator *lā*. What is more, in his work in which verbal negations with *laysa* appear most often, *kitāb al-ḥayawānāt* (Book of Animals), the verb that he negates most often with any negator is *ya-kūn* ‘he/it be’, negating it 132 times with the usual verbal negator *lā* (*lā ya-kūn*), 243 times with *lam* (*lam ya-kun*), and only 8 times with *laysa*. The second most common are *ta-rā* ‘you see’, which he negates fifty-five times with *lā*, and *ya-ḡūz* ‘it is possible’, fifty-three times, and only once apiece with *laysa*. Even more telling is that of his 2174 negations with *laysa* in all three of his books that are represented in the corpus, only 73, amounting to 3.36% of them, are verbal negations. His contemporary Ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855) negates a verb with *laysa* at about the same frequency: only seven of all of his 228 negations with *laysa* (3.07%) are verbal, and in at least two of those, he is quoting *ḥadīṭ*. As for later writers, Ibn Khaldūn’s usage is a miniscule 0.71% of his 421 negations with *laysa*.

Curious exceptions are the two Andalusian authors Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198) and Ibn Maimūn (d. 610/1204). Both of their works represented in the corpus are small by comparison to some of the other writers. For example, al-Jāḥiz’s three works amount to more than half a million words, and the two by al-Ghazālī exceed one million. For their part, Ibn Maimūn’s two works weigh in at 17,904 and 81,581 words. Only the latter, his Medical Aphorisms, contains any verbal negations with *laysa*. There, however, they account for 48 of his 265 negations with *laysa*, or 18.1% of the total. Those of Ibn Rushd are even more dramatic: in his relatively short (33,004 words) commentary on Aristotle, his 128 verbal negations with *laysa* account for 38.1% of his 336 uses. For his part, Ibn Rushd’s rival and interlocutor al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) negates verbs with *laysa* at a rate closer to that of earlier writers (102 of 2322, or 4.39% of all *laysa* negations).

Even more telling is that the two Andalusian authors employ uninflected *laysa* in a few negations of verbs, once with a 1<sup>st</sup> person plural, *na-‘nī* ‘we mean’, and thrice with a 3<sup>rd</sup> person feminine singular verb *ta-taḥarrak* ‘she/it moves’:

- (45) a. *fa-laysa*      *na- 'nī*      *hīna 'idīn*      *bi-qawli-nā*  
 CONJ-NEX      1P-mean.IPFV      DEM      PREP-saying-PRO.1P  
*al-damm*      *murakkab*      *min*      *ġami*<sup>c</sup>      *al-aḥlāt*  
 DET-blood      constituted      CONJ      all      DET-mixtures  
 'We [do] not mean here to say blood is constituted of all mixtures'
- b. *laysa*      *ta-taḥarrak*      *min*      *dāti-hā*  
 NEX      3FS-move.IPFV      CONJ      self-PRO.3FS  
 'She/it [does] not move by her/itself'

Had these been inflected as usual, they would have been *lasnā* (1<sup>st</sup> person plural) and *laysat* (3<sup>rd</sup> person feminine singular) respectively. Instead, they are the bare, uninflected 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine form, analogues of which appear frequently in Andalusī Arabic texts. Blau (1965: 87 & 132; 1967: 305 & 308) considers uninflected *laysa* to be a feature of Middle Arabic, a style that does not adhere scrupulously to the strictures of classical Arabic writing, incorporating spoken vernacular elements into the diction. The writings of Ibn Ruṣhd and Ibn Maimūn, however, are not usually classed as being exemplars of the genre. To the contrary, they, and especially the writings of Ibn Ruṣhd, are considered paragons of high literary style. It seems rather that these two writers were applying the model available to them of occasional verbal negation with reflexes of *laysa*. Their frequent use of it may also have been reinforced by their hearing it daily in the spoken Arabic around them and, no doubt, their using it themselves in speech.<sup>15</sup>

Another writer who uses verbal negation in percentages greater than 3 or 4% is Ibn Sīnā (d. 427/1037), who negates a verb with *laysa* 105 times out of a total of 926. That is, 11.34% of his negations with *laysa* are verbal negations. Ibn Sīnā was from the province of Khorasan, in what is now Iran, where Arabic speakers penetrated early in the expansion of Islam out of the Arabian Peninsula, in the year 51 of the Islamic era or 671 or 672 AD (Agha 1999: 215). Very little is known about the variety or varieties of Arabic that those early migrants spoke, and, indeed, the few Arabic dialects that remain in place in Khorasan are not well studied today. It could be that the Arabic speakers who first emigrated to the area retained in their speech the uninflected *la 'ys* that al-Ḥalīl identified about a century later as being nearly extinct and that, as a consequence, Ibn Sīnā, who did have the model of occasional verbal negations with *laysa* in the formal Arabic of writing, was also reproducing patterns familiar to him from the local spoken varieties of Arabic of Khorasan.

<sup>15</sup> Wilmsen (2010) shows that usage in their local spoken varieties influences modern writers' use or avoidance of sanctioned features in their formal writing.

## Conclusion

A question or series of questions is implicit in this speculation about an early spoken variety of Arabic that eventually became isolated from the Arabophone world as a peripheral variety preserving older features of the language that other more centrally located varieties have lost, a quality it shares with Andalusí Arabic: Where and when did the cycle begin and when did the varieties in which it operates advance to succeeding stages? The evidence is sparse. Fortunately, recent comparative studies can assist in forming the broad outlines of an answer, if not in arriving at a definitive one. This is precisely the utility of applying the negative existential cycle model to languages that Croft himself has identified as, “languages for which philological evidence is not available and internal reconstruction may be difficult due to lack of a sufficient range of data” (Croft 1991: 25). To be sure, the philological evidence of *laysa* itself is not lacking, but it remains insufficient because it only hints at spoken usage, concealing as much as it reveals. Indeed, it appears from the evidence that much development of existential predications upon which *laysa* is built had occurred in the spoken language before Arabic writing appeared in large quantities. What is more, its use in the spoken language as such is only documented in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Fortunately, some philological evidence is also available in vernacular Andalusí Arabic literature, which for its part attests to the penultimate Stage C of the cycle and some trending toward C > A.

A full two decades after Croft’s initial statement of the matter in 1991, during which time his model has been acknowledged but never explored, Håland (2011: 75–77) raises the possibility of a cycle involving the negator *miš/muš* and its antecedents operating in Egyptian dialects of Arabic. Wilmsen (2014: 173–176 & forthcoming) places those dialects into a broader diachronic and synchronic framework in which the cycle operates, beginning with an existential particle *šī* in southern peninsular Arabic dialects.

This recent work with Arabic notwithstanding, by far the greatest effort in explicating the operation of the negative existential cycle is embodied in Veselinova’s series of richly detailed typological studies (2013, 2014, 2015, 2016) with Uralic, Slavonic, and Polynesian languages, incorporating her own data with other researchers’ attestations of existential predications from a wide range of languages and language families (but not Arabic). In her work, Veselinova documents details of the cycle that Croft either mentions only in passing or does not treat at all. Among other things, she observes that entire stages can be skipped, even while the language moves along to another stage (2014: 1338; 2016: 153). This has clearly occurred in the Arabic of formal writing, in which the existential negator *laysa* has never become the predominant verbal negator but in which it nevertheless comes to be used in negating other existential particles. That is, the Arabic of formal writing has progressed from a Stage B > C to a Stage C > A, skipping stage C entirely. Indeed, Veselinova finds the intermediate stages of the cycle, in which

negation of existentials to be more important for the operation of the cycle than are the stages with little or no variability. And, indeed, verbal negation is variable in the intermediate stages of the cycle in Arabic. About  $B > C$  specifically, she observes that languages with, “stages where the negative existential is used for specific [or delimited or clearly-defined] sub-domains in the negation of verbs” are common (Veselinova 2016: 141, 154, 171). Arabic is one of those languages: in its writing and at least one spoken dialect of Arabic from southern Arabia, verbs can be negated with reflexes of *lays*, often for the expression of specific functionalities such as contrasting negative and affirmative assertions, metalinguistic negations, or the negation of futurity. What is more, she finds, “it is also very common to observe overlaps of different, non-sequential types/stages of the NEC within one and the same languages” (2016: 154). This, too, is true of Arabic, in which in which the intermediate stages  $A > B$ ,  $B > C$ , and  $C > A$  are present. Finally, Veselinova augments with numerical data an observation that Croft does make: “Types A and B are far more common than type C” (1991: 18). To this she adds, “type  $C > A$  will be extremely rare” (2016: 150). Specifically, type C languages constitute only 8 of her worldwide sample of 95 languages, amounting to 7.9%, and a type  $C > A$  language appears just once in the sample (ibid). Arabic is, thus, a rare example of a language that has in its Andalusī dialects reached a full-on stage C, commonly negating verbs with a reflex of *las*, and both Andalusī and formal written Arabic have moved beyond Stage C to negating existential particles *hunāka* and *tamma* (cf. examples [17] and [18]) with reflexes of *laysa*.

Finally, Veselinova’s comparative data also provide a time dimension: the intermediate stages are “not only synchronically frequent but also diachronically stable as they can be demonstrated to last for very long periods of time” (Veselinova 2016: 158). Regrettably, this may be as close as possible to the origins of the cycle in Arabic or any language, as it is possible to come. She concludes: “the cycle is rarely completed within the timespan of observable reconstruction” (2016: 171), identifying “observable time to be about 2,000 years” (Veselinova 2014: 1373). It is certainly thus in Arabic, in which intermediate stages have been present in the language since the 8<sup>th</sup> century, that is, over an observable time period exceeding 1,300 years. The origin of the *laysa* cycle must have begun some time in the prehistory of the language, and it may have begun in southern peninsular varieties. The only attestations of an original stage A are found in the writings of the Omani lexicographers al-Ḥalīl and Ibn Durayd, and the only attested manifestations of a living penultimate Stage C are from the southern Tihāma, the Red-Sea coastal plain of the Arabian Peninsula (al-Azraqī 1998), with the full stage only manifest in the vernacular writings of Andalusī Arabic.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> This adds a syntactic feature to Corriente’s (2014: 25) single “syntactic oddity” in his list of features shared between southern peninsular and Andalusī Arabics, in what he calls “the Yemenite connection” (cf. Corriente 2013: 124, n. 273; 124, n. 276).

The designation “*laysa* cycle” is meant as an analogue to the *šī* negative existential cycle, or simply the *šī* cycle (Wilmsen forthcoming), also having its origins in the southern Peninsula, where an existential *šī* is present from Bahrain to the Yemen, usually negated *mā šī* in Stage A of the cycle. Subsequent stages involve a fusion of the verbal negator *mā* a copular 3rd-person pronoun *hu* or *hi* and the existential particle *šī*: *mhūš* > *mūš* > *muš*. The negative existential cycle thus appears to operate on more than one existential particle in Arabic. The *laysa* cycle is another of those. Yet a third is glimpsed in an element of negation with *laysa* that we have not yet considered: instead of a simple predication ‘it [is] not x’ (*laysa ġayyid*), the predicate can itself be embedded in a prepositional phrase following the preposition *bi* (*laysa bi ġayyid*), either one meaning ‘It is not good.’ The circumstances for the emergence of this prepositional construction are obscure. It is intriguing, however, that, analogous to the existential function of the preposition *fī* in (1a), reflexes of the preposition *bī* may also function as an existential particle in some spoken dialects of Arabic, notably some Yemeni and Syrian spoken vernaculars (Behnstedt 1985: 172–173, map 119; Behnstedt 1997: 732–733, map 336). Negated, it is *mā bī*, with many variations on that theme in Yemeni Arabic. The *bī* cycle appears to proceed along a pathway analogous to that of the *šī* cycle, from *mā bi* through *mā hu bi* > *mhub*, culminating in a negator *mūb*, found especially in the dialects of Najd and the Arabian Gulf (Ingham 1994: 45; Holes 1990: 64, 116, and *passim*). This remains to be explored.

Nevertheless, it would thus appear that a negative existential cycle has operated at least thrice amongst the many existential particles of Arabic: in the *šī* cycle, the *bi* cycle, and the *laysa* cycle.

### Abbreviations

CONJ	conjunction
DAT	pronoun indicating a dative relationship, usually equivalent to ‘to’ or ‘for’
DET	determiner
DEM	demonstrative
EX	existential particle
FUT	particle prefixed to verbs, indicating anticipated future action
HAB	particle prefixed to verbs, indicating ongoing/habitual action
IND	indicative
INT	interrogative
IPFV	imperfective verb
NEG	negator
NEX	negative existential
PASS	passive
PFV	perfective verb
PREP	preposition
PROG	particle prefixed to the verb, indicating progressive action

PROH	prohibitive
REL	relative pronoun
f	feminine
m	masculine
pl	plural
s	singular
1	1 <sup>st</sup> person
2	2 <sup>nd</sup> person
3	3 <sup>rd</sup> person

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