

## Contrastive Topic and Focus with Arabic Negative marker *Laysa*

In this paper, I discuss the information structure imposed by Arabic native marker *laysa* and its influence on the syntactic derivation of the negated remnant in the elliptical clause. I argue that two types of information structure is conveyed by *laysa*: Contrastive Topic and Contrastive Focus. As topic is usually defined as the entity that the utterance is about (Reinhart 1982), Contrastive Topic shows “a combined effect of topicality and focussing” (Molnár 1998: 135). That is, Contrastive Topic “is topical in the sense that it comes from a potential Topic and somewhat focal in the sense that the choice of the particular part is not known to the hearer” (Lee 2003a: 155), and it exclusively highlights the chosen element, ignoring the rest (Lee 2003b). The most important point about Contrastive Topic is that of being preceded by a conjunctive question (see Lee 2003b). This can be evidenced by *laysa* preceded by *wa* in Bare Argument Ellipsis constructions. *Laysa* in such contexts is used as a negative contrastive topic marker. Consider the following example in (1) where (1b), versus (1c), is the right response of (1a):

- (1) a. hal qabal-ta zaid-an        **wa** xalid-an?  
Q    met-you Zaid-Acc        and Khalid-Acc  
“Did you meet Zaid and Khalid?”
- b. qabal-tu        **xalid-an**        wa *laysa* **zaid-an**.  
met-1s        Khalid-Acc        and neg Zaid-Acc  
“I met Khalid but not Zaid.”
- c. # qabal-tu        **xalid-an**        *laysa*        **zaid-an**.  
met-1s        Khalid-Acc neg        Zaid-Acc

in contrast, The contrastive focus with *laysa* is compatible with giving information which is in conflict with questioner’s expectation. This means that contrastive focus with *laysa*, unlike contrastive topic, mainly represents a felicitous answer to disjunctive yes/no questions. In this case *wa* cannot be inserted. This explains why the response in (2b) is acceptable, whereas the response in (2c) is not.

- (2) a. hal qabal-ta        zaid-an?  
Q    met-you        Zaid-Acc  
“Did you meet Zaid?”
- b. qabal-tu        xalid-an        *laysa* zaid-an.  
met-1s        Khalid-Acc        neg        Zaid-Acc  
“I met Khalid not Zaid.”

c. # qabal-tu    xalid-an    wa laysa zaid-an.  
met-1s    Khalid-Acc    and neg    Zaid-Acc

### References

- Lee, C. (2003a). Contrastive Topic and Proposition Structure. In Di Sciullo, A. M. (ed.) *Asymmetry in Grammar Volume 1: Syntax and semantics*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 345–71
- Lee, C. (2003b). Contrastive Topic and/or Contrastive Focus. In McClure, W. (ed.) *Japanese/Korean Linguistics 12*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 267–279.
- Molnár, V. (1998). Topic in Focus. *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* **45**: 89-166.