



HAL
open science

The negation maašii in a Yaafi'i dialect (Yemen)

Martine Vanhove

► **To cite this version:**

Martine Vanhove. The negation maašii in a Yaafi'i dialect (Yemen). Eid, M. et Parkinson, D. (éds.), Perspectives on Arabic Linguistics IX. Papers from the Ninth Annual Symposium on Arabic Linguistics. Georgetown University, 10-12 mars 1995, Washington, Mar 1996, Amsterdam, Philadelpia, Pays-Bas. pp.195-206. halshs-00009763

HAL Id: halshs-00009763

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00009763v1>

Submitted on 24 Mar 2006

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

THE NEGATION *maafii* IN A YAAFISI DIALECT (YEMEN)

Martine Vanhove
C.N.R.S. - LLACAN (Meudon)

1. Introduction

The area of Yaafis is a mountainous territory situated in the governorate of Abyan some 200 km North-East of Aden, the former capital city of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. The k-dialects spoken there, as far as I know, have never been described before I had the opportunity, in 1991, to start a brief survey with speakers settled in Aden, and to do a more thorough fieldwork in February 1994, when I was able to go on the spot.¹

The study of the negative particle *maafii* is based on one idiolect, that of a 70 year old woman born in the hamlet of ten'ara in the district of al-Muflihi, and still living in a nearby isolated house, a 45-minutes' walk away from Tenhara. She is illiterate, has never left her native place, but has had sporadic contact with the prestigious dialect of Aden through her sons and nephews who went to college in Aden. She is also a tireless story-teller, and this work is based on the data of 19 tales that I recorded from her.²

2. The Negative Particles

The dialect of Tenhara, not surprisingly, has a whole set of negative markers. Apart from *maafii*, that will be studied in detail, the most common one is *maa* never associated to the suffix *-f* or *-fii*, in the

¹ See Vanhove 1995a & b.

² This fieldwork was financed by the French Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (Direction de la Coopération scientifique et technique), the Centre français d'études yéménites in Sanaa, the University of Aden, the University of Paris III - Sorbonne Nouvelle, and the C.N.R.S. My gratitude is due to Raziineh, my informant of Tenhara, and to all those who helped me during my stay in Yaafis: MusSid, Humud, Nada, Siif, Ahmed, Fanna and Minna. I am also indebted to Ahmed Abdul Fattah, whose help in Paris to translate the tales I recorded is invaluable.

idiolect of my informant³ except when the non-clitic *öii* means “nothing”:

- (1) maa ʔasook ʃii
 NEG I-found nothing
 “I did not find anything.”

maa is mainly used with verbs (ex. 2), but can also be found in nominal sentences, with active participles (preceded by a pronominal subject, ex. 3) and prepositions (ex. 4 & 5) in attributive and possessive sentences:

- (2) maa xallu sabuula
 NEG they-left ear
 “They did not leave an ear (of grain).”
- (3) maa huma deriin ʔeen el-giθθeh
 NEG they knowing (P) where the-corpse
 “They did not know where the corpse was.”
- (4) maa maʃa alli haaða baa nuwaas ummuh
 NEG with-3MS who this Ba Nuwas mother-3MS
 “And this Ba Nuwas did not have his mother.”
- (5) laa maa ʃaleek
 no NEG on-2MS
 “no, don't worry!”

In verbal sentences, *maa* + *illa* expresses restrictive negation:

- (6) qaa maa yizzewweg illa hariiwe ismahaa ɖaata
 already NEG he-marries except spouse name-3FS Dhata
 “He will not marry a woman but one whose name is Dhata.”

laa + imperfect, a widespread construction among Arabic dialects, is used in prohibitive sentences:

- (7) laa taakuloh
 NEG you-eat(MS)-3MS
 “don't eat it!”

One also finds the negative copula *muf* or *mufii* (< *maa* + *huu* + *ʃii*) and the negative marker of existence *maafii*, but they are far from being frequent in the idiolect of my informant. It is possible that they are borrowings from another dialect. They are mainly used in nominal

³ The discontinuous marker *maa ... -ʃ* is a rare possible alternative among my male informants of the area.

sentences but for each, there is one example in a verbal sentence that will be discussed later on (see § 4.1 and 4.3).

The negation of continuity is expressed by means of *maabaafjii* “not yet” and *maaf aafii* (< *maa faad jii*) or *maa faad* “no longer”, in both verbal and nominal sentences:

- (8) *maabaafjii geeh*
not-yet she-came
“she has not come yet.”
- (9) *maabaafjii maṭar*
not-yet rain
“there is no rain yet.”
- (10) *maafaafjii yiskii yizyar*
no-longer he-is-capable he-sizes
“he is no longer capable of sizing.”

There is also just one example of the classical marker *lam* + imperfect to express negation of the perfect aspect:

- (11) *fa lam yxaaf minnoh*
and NEG he-is-afraid of-3MS
“and he was not afraid of him.”

As for *maafii*, it has four less common variants which are *maaf*, *mfaa*, *maaöaa* and *maafiilaa*. Although generally a nominal negative marker in Arabic dialects where it is available, *maafii* can also be used in verbal sentences in all the dialects of YaafiŒ that I know. This particular use is also possible in the Maghreb, specially in Morocco, although the exact functions are somewhat different (Caubet 1993). In the idiolect studied here, if one compares all the occurrences of *maafii* and those of *maa*, one finds that *maafii* is used in 55 (i.e., 37%) of the 151 verbal sentences of my data and in 88% of the 112 nominal ones. More will be said about these figures.

3. *maafii* in Nominal Sentences and Noun Phrases

In my data, *maafii* is used to deny existence; it is also used in equative, attributive and possessive sentences, and for the purpose of focusing on the subject in verbal sentences. This is a much wider spectrum of usages as compared to *maa*, which is only used, although rarely, in attributive and possessive sentences as shown in examples (3) to (5).

To express the denying of the existence of something, maafii is used in direct connection with the negated term. In the tales I recorded, it is placed just before an indeterminate noun, but just after a determinate noun or a demonstrative pronoun. So far, it is impossible to say whether this is a general syntactic rule, as the examples of the latter all appear in coordinate and dependant clauses:

- (12) *ɣulk maafii ʕaaöe ʔeddookhaa el-masaakin*
 I-said NEG dinner I-gave-3FS the-poor (PL)
 "I said: there is no dinner, I gave it to poor people."
- (13) *wuʕul u r-raas maafii*
 he-arrived and the-head NEG
 "He arrived and there was no head."
- (14) *un ðee maafii*
 and this NEG
 "and there was nothing."

For the negation of equative sentences, all the examples of my data have a pronominal copula referring to the subject of the predicate (so far, only 3rd persons have been recorded) and immediately following maaöii:

- (15) *haqiiqah maafii hii kaðb*
 truth NEG she lie
 "It is the truth, it is not a lie."
- (16) *maafii huu banef*
 NEG he son-2FS
 "he is not your son."
- (17) *maafii ʕaadhaa haqiiqah*
 NEG still-3FS truth
 "It is nothing but the truth."

This last sentence (17) is furthermore an example of restricted negation with the use of ʕaad (see § 2).

In the case of the negation of an attributive sentence, the presence of a pronominal copula is not obligatory:

- (18) *maafii bayyana ʕaleek*
 NEG marked (F) on-2MS
 "It is not marked on you" (= it does not show on your face).
- (19) *fallah boh min yehuudii min ðimmi yehuudii maafii huu*
 she-bore in-3MS of Jew of dimmi jewish NEG he
 [=maafu] haaða islaami

- this islamic
- “She was pregnant from a Jew, a Jewish dimmi, he was not a Muslim that one.”
- (20) maafii kaḏa
NEG so
“It is not like that.”
- (21) maaföii lii
NEG for-1S
“It is not for me.”
- (22) hii maafii qad daarya
she NEG already knowing (F)
“She did not know.”

In Yaafiṣ possession is expressed by means of the preposition maṣa “with” + suffix pronouns. At the negative form, it is preceded by maafii:

- (23) maafii maṣah ṣiyaal
NEG with-3MS children
“He had no children.”
- (24) maafii maṣii siggaadeh
NEG with-1S flying-carpet
“I have no flying carpet.”

In one example of the data, maafii is replaced by laafii. The meaning conveyed by laaöii is to emphasize the lack of something, contrary to maaöii which is felt as a plain negation:

- (25) laafii maṣahom quṭra haleeb behaa
NEG with-3MP drop milk in-3FS
“They had not even a drop of milk in it.”

There is one case in the data, where a pronominal subject preceded by maafii is focused to express a contrastive negation. In this particular example, the verbs of the sentence do not agree in person with their subjects and are frozen in the perfect form in the 3rd pers. m. sg. for expressive purpose. This formal dissociation between the subject and its predicate could be interpreted as a trace of a functional dissociation: when the subject of a verbal sentence is focused, the predicate is only the syntactic center of the sentence and not also its assertive core, the latter function being devoted to the focused subject (see Robert 1993:45):

- (26) maafii ana ṭahhen ṭahhen w enteh laṭaf
 NEG I he-ground he-ground and you (FS) he-licked
 laṭaf
 he-licked
 "It is not me who is going to grind and grind all the time, while you
 are licking and licking."

In this case, the negation does not concern the totality of the predicative relation, but just one element of it.

4. maafii in Verbal Sentences

Several cases have to be studied, depending on the conjugation of the verb: maafii can be used with an imperfect or a perfect form of the verb, directly preceding it (as opposed to a focused subject in a verbal sentence, see ex. 26 above).

Although maafii is not the predominant negative marker with the imperfect aspect, in assertive sentences it is used in 40% of the examples, while maa represents 60%. So, it is not a sporadic usage, but quite a common one. Moreover, these figures have to be balanced by several facts. First 66.5% of the maafis in the tales are used with only one single verb, and that is ʔaftii "I want". So, if one only considers the variety of verbs found with the two negative markers, the percentage rises much in favour of maafii: 70% against 30% for maa. But these figures have to be considered carefully as the number of verbs drastically drops. Second, maa is constructed with the restrictive illa "except" in 16.5% of the examples, a particle not found with maaöii. Elicitation method will be needed in future surveys to confirm this possible incompatibility of maaöii with illa, although the focusing values of maaöii that are discussed below may well account for it. On the other hand, it seems that the nature of the complement of the verb does not interfere with the choice of maafii or maa, for with both, one finds determinate and indeterminate nominals, suffix pronouns and even negative terms such as ḥadd "nobody". Finally, nothing can be said about the nature of the subject; in the data only animate subjects occurred with both markers. Further study is needed.

Still the status of maafii is very different from maa. With maafii, values appear that are linked to the subjectivity of the speaker, i.e., to pragmatic strategies. I shall remind the reader here of the study of negation in Berber by Galand (1994:169) who states "La négation comporte souvent une charge expressive. L'absence étant moins immédiatement perceptible que la présence, on recherche une

formulation plus insistante, plus énergique, plus chargée d'émotion." Such is the case with the Yaafisi dialects. So far, two values were found in the Yaafisi data: contrast between two predicative relations (one affirmative and one negative), and a polemic attitude towards the interlocutor or the situation, with a sense of firm opposition, contradiction, rejection or refutation of a prior utterance on the part of the speaker. Contrast is illustrated below in examples (27) and (28):

- (27) la waqaḥ xaas ba-naḍbaho l-xaas wa ?in
 if he-fell rotten FUT-I-slaughter-3MS the-rotten and if
 waqaḥ tamm maafii naḍbah minneheen
 he-fell good NEG I-slaughter from-3FP
 "If it is rotten, I'll slaughter it, the rotten one, and if it is good I will not slaughter any of them."
- (28) maa hii daariyah man hoo ḍii yirgaḥ man hoo ḍii
 NEG she knowing (F) who he that he-comes-back who he that
 maafii yirgaḥ
 NEG he-comes-back
 "She did not know who had come back and who had not."

The idea of polemical answer, of adversity, of strong opposition is shown in examples (29) and (30):

- (29) qaa hii qosmii ṣaadoh tistukṯuruun ṣaliya ar-
 here-is she share-1S still-3MS you-exaggerate (MP)on-1S the-
 riḥ maafii axalli ḥadd
 wind NEG I-leave nobody
 "Here is still my share, you are exaggerating (offering) me the wind, I shall let nobody (do so)!"
- (30) ḍaruurii aqtal ommi qaal laa mfaa toqtalḥaa
 compulsory I-kill mother-1S he-said no NEG you-kill (MS)-3FS
 "I have to kill my mother. He said: no! you shall not kill her!"

Example (31) shows the use of the negative copula *muf* in the same polemical way as *maafii*:

- (31) qaal xalaṣ ḍaa l-beet muf ?anglis boh, ḍaa
 he-said enough this the-house NEG FUT-we-stay in-3MS, this
 beet el-ginn maaf ?anglisuh
 house the-jinn NEG FUT-we-stay-3MS
 "He said: enough! I won't stay in this house, this is the house of the jinn, I shall not stay in it!"

maafii can also be used with the imperfect preceded by the preverb *bi-* which is a progressive marker. In my data there is one example of this

construction. *maaöii* is not used alone but is reinforced by another negative marker *laa* following it and cliticized to it. There are only three examples of the progressive form at the negative form in my data, the other two being with *maa*, so it is difficult to judge of the real dynamism of this negative marker with the progressive aspect. More investigation is needed. Furthermore, the presence of *laa* after *maafii* may be induced by a syntactic constraint, i.e., the presence of *laa* at the end of the utterance. Still the example with *maaöiilaa* shows at least the same emphatic modality as previously seen with the simple imperfect:

- (32) *qaalah maafiiilaa birqod meñii wa laa*
 she-said NEG bi-he-sleeps with-1S and no
 "She said: he does not sleep with me ever!"

The use of *maafii* with the perfect aspect is scarcer in my data than with the imperfect if one considers the simple conjugation. It represents only 25% of the negative sentences. But altogether there are only 8 negative sentences in the perfect aspect, and possibly one, if the example where *maafii* is replaced by *maafii* is counted. Still, this percentage increases if one considers also the periphrasis made of *kaan* "he was" + an aspectual or temporal marker (either the progressive *bi-* or the future *?a-*) + imperfect. We have then 12 sentences with a perfect aspect, 6 of them being with *maafii* (or *maafii*). But this proportion may not be significant in view of the small number of examples. What is interesting to note however, is that once more the emphatic modality of adversity is associated with the use of *maafii*. Once again the subjectivity of the speaker and expressivity are involved:

- (33) *hii qad maafii daariih (sic) hii maafii fihmeh*
 she already NEG knowing (M) she NEG she-understood
hii ?innoh min bani kelb
 she that-3MS of Bani Kalb
 "She did not know, she had not understood that he was from the Bani Kalb tribe."
- (34) *ʕarrii ʕaleehaa fii al-madiineh kullahaa maafii ?asii*
 he-looked on-3FS in the-town all-3FS NEG he-found
 "He looked for her all around the town but could not find (her)."
- (35) *qaal maafii kunkum bi-tidruun laakaan maafii*
 he-said NEG you-were (MP) bi-you-know (MP) if NEG
mafii naaɗuur kaanah ?a-tmuut u maa tædroon.
 with-1S field-glass she-was FUT-she-dies and NEG you-know (MP).
qaal maafii kunkum ?a-toqdæroon ?a-tsaferuun
 He-said NEG you-were (MP) FUT-you-can (MP) FUT-you-travel (MP)

ila hine laakaan maafii mafii siggaadeh. qaal aθ-θaaliθ
 until here if NEG with-IS flying-carpet. He-said the-third
 laakaan maafii mafii maa Œiin el-hayyah maafii kaanah
 if NEG with-IS water spring the-life NEG she-was
 ʔa-tehyaa
 FUT-she-lives

“He said: you would not have known if I had not had a field-glass, she would have died and you would not have known. He said: you would not have been able to travel to here if I had not had a flying carpet. The third one said: if I had not had the water of the spring of life she would not have lived.”

- (36) baʔdeen fii maa waahed zzewweg bent əʂ-ʂulṭaan. baʔdeen
 then in what one he-married daughter the-sultan. Then
 haaðe bent əʂ-ʂulṭaan maafii giibah lah awlaad
 this daughter the-sultan NEG she-brought to-3MS children
 “Then there was someone who married the sultan's daughter. Then this sultan's daughter could not give him children.”

Again with the perfect aspect, syntax is not a criterion that can bring about the use of maafii instead of maa. The same constructions are used with both markers, specially as regards complements. In view of what is happening in Maltese (see below § 5), it would be worth investigating the semantic value of the verbs (i.e. whether or not they are deponent, as well as their aspectual values: perfect, perfective, present perfective, aorist. It is too early, and the data studied here is too limited, to be able to draw clear conclusions, if there are any. We hope future surveys will shed light on that matter.

5. Conclusion

If one compares with two other Arabic dialects where a negative marker normally used in nominal sentences and in phrases is also used with verbs, and about which we have enough literature, the situation in Yaafi' shows similarities as well as differences. These dialects are the q^altu dialects of Anatolia described by Jastrow (1978:312-4), and Maltese described by myself (1994:159-162).

In Anatolia, the negative marker is moo, a shortening of the negative copula *maw*(we) (<*maa huwwaa). It is the only negative marker used with the imperfect aspect; with the perfect aspect, unlike in YaafiŒ, it is only used in interrogative sentences. The negative marker maa survives with the perfect aspect only in assertive sentences. The constraints on the use of either marker are only syntactical and no values linked to expressivity seem to be involved in these dialects. In the view of what is happening in YaafiŒ, one may

infer that Anatolian dialects have generalized the nominal negative marker in the imperfect as a consequence of a dialectic movement: a loss of expressivity due to a more frequent use of *moo*, and vice versa. The Anatolian dialects show a more advanced degree of grammaticalization than the Yaafiṣi idiolect studied here.

In Maltese, the nominal negative marker is also a negative copula, *muu2* (<**maa huu jii*). It can be conjugated, in agreement with the subject. Like in Yaafiṣ, *muuf* is used with the imperfect for emphatic and focusing purposes, both in oral discourse, and in the written literature. In the perfect aspect, *muuf* is restricted to two uses, and occurs very rarely: with the few deponent verbs whose perfect value is that of a present perfective, a possibility accepted by all speakers of Maltese, and with the verbal periphrasis made of the verb *kiən* 'he was' + imperfect. The latter is only possible in a couple of dialects of Maltese, and is rejected as 'incorrect' by other speakers.

The situation in Maltese seems to be somewhat parallel to that in Yaafiṣ, but not totally identical, as regards the perfect aspect. In Yaafiṣ it seems more widespread with this verbal form, and the dynamism of *maafii* seems important enough to have involved also other negative markers that may be borrowed from other dialects, such as *muf* and *maafii*.

Attention has to be drawn on the particular process of renewal of the negative marker by means of expressivity, and by means of a nominal marker normally used in existential, equative and attributive sentences, and for focusing. In a way, it is not a surprising phenomenon. Focus, as Robert (1993) rightly suggested, is a contrastive comment that dissociates existence and qualitative designation. In the Yaafiṣ idiolect studied here (and also in other Yaafiṣi dialects for which I collected data), the use of *maafii*, originally the negative marker of existence, in verbal sentences shows the same properties. And for Anatolian dialects, the well-known close links, both semantical and formal, of focus and interrogation may account for the use of *moo* in interrogative sentences with the perfect aspect. It would be most interesting to study similar phenomena, so rarely described in detail, in other Arabic dialects. Anatolia, Malta, Yaafiṣ, are not the only areas concerned. Examples are mentioned by Johnstone (1967:157) for *mub* + imperfect for Bahrain, by Marçais (1977:279) for *maafii* + perfect for some Maghribi dialects, by Habtoor (1990:409) for *maafii* + perfect at Zungubar (Yemen). I found one example of *maafii* with the perfect in the dialect of Lahej in the text published by Fodor (1970:43), and personally heard *maafii* + imperfect in Aden and

the Dathînah in the Yemen. Examples are also to be found in this volume for Morocco (Boumans) and the Tihaamah of the Yemen (Simeone-Senelle). Still nothing is known on the dynamism of these markers, there are only examples scattered here and there in the literature on Arabic dialects.

One also will have to try to explain why the use of the negative nominal marker seems more widespread with the imperfect than the perfect, and comparative studies with other dialects might prove helpful.

It is interesting to note that the use of a negative nominal particle for contrast and epistemic values of contradiction is not restricted to Arabic. A similar phenomenon is to be found in other linguistic families, for example in Turkish, where a nominalized form of the verb can be used with a nominal negative particle to "reflect the attitude of the speaker with respect to the truth value of the proposition" (van Schaaik 1994:43).

REFERENCES

- Caubet, Dominique. 1993. *L'Arabe marocain*. Paris-Louvain: Peeters. 2 vol.
- Fodor, I. 1970. "Two Tales in the Dialect of Lahaj". *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orient Forschung* XVI:1.33-74.
- Galand, Lionel. 1994. "La négation en berbère". *Matériaux Arabes et sudarabiques* 6.169-181.
- Habtoor, Mohamed Nasser. 1990. *L'arabe parlé à Ghayl Habbân. Phonologie et morphologie*. Thèse pour le doctorat, Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris III.
- Jastrow, Otto. 1978. *Die mesopotamisch-arabischen Qeltu-Dialekte. Band I: Phonologie und Morphologie*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag.
- Johnstone, Thomas M. 1967. *Eastern Arabian Dialect Studies*. Oxford University Press.
- Marçais, Philippe. 1977. *Esquisse grammaticale de l'arabe maghrébin*. Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve.
- Robert, Stéphane. 1993. "Structure et sémantique de la focalisation". *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris* LXXXVIII:1.25-47.
- van Schaaik, Gerjan. 1994. "Turkish". *Typological Studies in Negation*, ed. by Peter Kahrel & René van den Berg, 35-50. (= *Typological Studies in Language* 29). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Vanhove, Martine. 1994. "Sur le fonctionnement de la négation en maltais". *Matériaux Arabes et Sudarabiques* 6.141-167.
- , 1995a. "A propos du verbe dans les dialectes arabes de Yâfi' (Yémen)". *Dialectologia arabica. A Collection of Articles in Honour of the Sixtieth Birthday of Professor Heikki Palva*, 257-69. (= *Studia Orientalia* 75). Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society.
- , 1995b. "Notes on the Arabic Dialectal Area of Yâfi'". *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 25.141-52.

