

## **One *#a* - many meanings. Syntax, semantics and prosody of the Moroccan modal particle *#a* and its Egyptian Arabic counterparts**

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This paper presents a study of certain modal particles in Moroccan and Egyptian Arabic that can be classified as *enunciatives* as suggested by MAAS (same volume). It is argued that these particles fulfil the double function of signifying modality and marking information structure at the same time. It has long been noted that other types of discourse particles (*even, also, only*) also associate with focus (JACOBS 1983; inter alia). The case of Arabic shows that modal particles also show a high degree of focus sensitivity, as their modal functions (announcing, exclaiming, objecting etc.) are intrinsically tied to focus.

### **0. Introduction**

This paper presents the results of a prosodic and semantic study of various linguistic constructions of Moroccan Arabic (MA) containing the particle *#a*. These are compared to formally and functionally similar constructions of Egyptian Arabic (EA) that make use of the particles *da* and *ma* which have hitherto not received much attention by linguists and students of the Arabic language. The Moroccan data were taken from the large corpus of Moroccan Arabic spontaneous dialogues (cf. MAAS and PROCHÁZKA, this volume) and the EA data are part of my own compilation of spoken EA that has been set up for the investigation of information structure, especially the prosody-information structure interface in EA (EL ZARKA, in progress).

Functionally, these particles may be characterized as *enunciative* as defined by MAAS (this volume). Accordingly, they mainly appear in interactive text genres, such as spontaneous conversations, and are only rarely used in narrative texts. In the EA corpus their appearance is more or less limited to conversations. The only instances found in a kind of monologue are from an utterly vivid narrative, produced spontaneously in a quasi-dialogic form by two sisters. Just as the German modal particles (*ja, eben, schon* etc.), the Arabic particles allow the speaker to

express his/her attitude concerning the proposition he/she expresses and the way it is embedded in in a certain context.

Formally, the investigated particles may occur in different positions. SCHIFFRIN (1987:31) operationally defines discourse markers – a comprehensive category that includes different types of markers, among them what is called *enunciative* particles here – as "**sequentially** dependent elements which bracket units of talk" (emphasis in the orig.). The choice of a vague concept such as 'unit of talk' was deliberately made by SCHIFFRIN in order to avoid the unnecessary limitation to a certain type of markers, as defining markers with respect to a certain type of unit (syntactic, semantic or prosodic) to the exclusion of others might obscure important insights into the phenomenon at hand. It is perhaps more promising to define a particle with respect to a prosodic unit. But again, this would narrow the field of investigation considerably.

Identifying markers in relation to tone units faces the same problems as does identifying them in relation to sentences, propositions, or actions: the words and phrases which I intuitively feel are functioning as markers occur in locations which are not limited by the boundaries of the unit. Although the items that I have listed as markers often do precede units of talk which have the features of tone units, these same items also occur within such units. (SCHIFFRIN 1987:34)

Following SCHIFFRIN, I will therefore start out with a description of syntagmas sequences found in the corpus in terms of lexical classes that may follow, or occasionally precede the particles and in a second step determine their position within prosodic units, such as the prosodic word or phrase. Avoiding the limitations of narrowly defined syntactic units, will make it possible to identify the syntactic positions the particles occur in and subsequently interpret their semantic and pragmatic functions. Based on the results, I will argue in section 4 that all markers, the Moroccan one as well as the Egyptian markers, have an important informational feature in common, which is singling out the informationally most important, i.e. the focused part, of a proposition. In addition to this focus marking property the individual markers have different modal significations.

The present investigation of the Moroccan *ʔa* was carried out on a small sample of 218 occurrences of *ʔa* in the Moroccan corpus. The methodology used is descriptive to begin with, starting out with a listing and rough categorization of all syntactic uses encountered in the texts

(1.1 through 1.4). At the same time, I will comment on the semantico-pragmatic meaning of the examples and try to illustrate the different meanings in the text by a rather free and idiomatic translation. The function and meaning of the constructions was carefully checked with a native informant, Abdelrahman Assini, and against the German translations given in the MAAS corpus.

In section (2) the results of the investigation of the Moroccan particle *ʔa* are compared to an analysis of its Egyptian Arabic counterparts *da*, *ma* (and only cursorily) *huwa*, using the categories established in the Moroccan data as a filter for the investigation of the EA particles. In section (3) the data are analyzed prosodically, referring to the prosodic properties of the particles themselves and their position within a prosodic unit, such as the *accentual phrase* or the *intonation phrase*. Finally, section (4) will be devoted to a general discussion of the data and a cursory comparison with some particles of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) that have been a matter of some interest in the linguistic community, whereas the Moroccan and Egyptian particles have not received much attention so far.

## 1 The Moroccan Arabic *ʔa* and its uses

As the investigation of the small sample indicates, the syntactic position of *ʔa* within a sentence or an utterance is quite variable. We may roughly distinguish two major categories, *ʔa* followed by pronoun and *ʔa* without a pronoun. In, 42,2% (92) out of the 218 instances investigated *ʔa* is proclitic to a pronoun. In the other 126 cases (57,8 %) *ʔa* predominantly introduces the predicate, whether nominal or verbal. Passive participles are considered to be nominal predicates whereas active participles are classed with the verbal predicates. Based on this categorization, the data show a roughly equal distribution of *ʔa* with verbal and nominal predicates. Additionally, the *ʔa* may not infrequently (11 instances) be found together, i.e. in front of, a focus sensitive particle, such as *ʔir* 'only' or *ħt:a* 'also/even', which may have scope over the predicate or an argument. Finally, *ʔa* may also be used in front of adverbials of different kinds. Interestingly, *ʔa* also occurs utterance finally in the corpus, i.e. in front of a prosodic break. Yet, these cases frequently involve hesitation pauses.

### 1.1 *ʔa* plus pronoun

A pronoun following *ʔa* will mostly appear in its suffixed short form (cf. the paradigm below), but full forms such as *ʔa-huma* instead of *ʔa-hum* or *ʔa-huwa* instead of *ʔa-h* are also possible.

- |     |                              |  |               |
|-----|------------------------------|--|---------------|
| (1) | S                            |  | PL            |
|     | <i>ʔa-ni</i>                 |  | <i>ʔa-na</i>  |
|     | <i>ʔa-k, ʔa-ki</i>           |  | <i>ʔa-kum</i> |
|     | <i>ʔa-(h) (m), ʔa-ha (f)</i> |  | <i>ʔa-hum</i> |

In the case of the third person singular masculine it is problematic to distinguish between *ʔa* plus pronoun and *ʔa* without, as the two forms are homophonous (cf. ex. 8). A differentiation is possible, however, if the expected agreement between what could in principle be a pronoun and the verb is missing, i.e. when the form *ʔa(h)* coincides with a plural verb for instance, such as *ʔa(h) mʔaw* 'they have left/ they have/are gone'.

- |     |                                  |               |
|-----|----------------------------------|---------------|
| (2) | A.06.2.190                       |               |
|     | <i>ʔa-ha</i>                     | <i>ʔxis-a</i> |
|     | PRT-3SF                          | billig-SF     |
|     | 'They're cheap (now), after all' |               |

Note that if the particle is left out, the propositional content of the utterance does not change. The use of the particle properly places the utterances in the context it refers to and gives it a certain amount of vividness, expressing personal commitment to the content transferred by the proposition.

## 1.2 *ʔa* plus verb

- |     |  |                  |             |
|-----|--|------------------|-------------|
| (3) | A.03.33                                    |                  |             |
|     | <i>l:a saʔ(i)</i>                          | <i>ʔa-kli-na</i> | <i>hada</i> |
|     | no ok                                      | PRT-eat-PF.1P    | DM.SM       |
|     | 'No, that's it, we had (already) eaten it' |                  |             |

In this specific context the *ʔa* ascertains that the action of eating has already taken place. It thus emphasizes the perfective aspect of the verb. In that specific context it is used to make sure that nothing could be done to avoid the possible result of eating something poisonous, as the eating had already taken place.

A special case in this category is *ʔa* with the active participle of the verb 'to be', *kajn*, which is used as an existential marker with or without agreement with the argument. The following example implies some contradiction to what has been suggested before. The speaker says that although the old *bakahurija* 'A-levels', 'high school certificate' is commonly not accepted anymore, it is still accepted in some places.

- (4) A.04.15.688  
*ʔa-h kajn l:i ka-j-qəbl-u l-bakaturija l-qdam*  
 PRT- be:PTCP.ACT.SM REL IND-3S.IPF- DF-graduation DF-old:P  
 3SM? accept-P  
 ‘But there are some that accept the old high school graduation’

### 1.3 *ʔa plus noun*

When the particle is followed by a noun, this noun is almost always in predicative use. There are a very small number of cases that seem to suggest that *ʔa* may also introduce a subject or topic. A closer look at these examples however reveals that the nouns preceded by the particle are in fact predicates of 'elliptic' utterances.<sup>1</sup>

In the following example the noun *xatar* is in predicative use and *ʔa* steps in between the topic and the comment, introducing the latter - which is in fact a very common use of the particle.

- (5) A.06.01.897  
*ʔi-ti l-misr-i-jin ʔa xatar a saħb-i*  
 see-2S.PF DF-Egypt-NISB-P PRT danger VOC friend-1S  
 ‘Look, the Egyptians are (really) great, my friend’

### 1.4 *ʔa introducing argument focus*

We have seen that *ʔa* is usually connected to the predicate of an utterance. Information structurally spoken, the predicate phrase is most frequently the focus part of a sentence or an utterance. Most cases where the particle is used in front of a lexical subject or topic are those where the argument is in focus. Such is the case when the particle is used together with a focus sensitive particle as in example (6). In (7) the cleft construction indicates that the subject is in fact a (contrastive) focus. Note that in example (6) the subject is a pronoun, but a lexical noun phrase would be equally possible in that syntactic position.

- (6) A.04.15.168  
*ʔa ħət:a ana fi-ja n-nʕas*  
 PRT also/even 1S in-1S DF-sleep  
 ‘I am also sleepy / Even I am sleepy’

- (7) A.06.3.412-413

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<sup>1</sup> It has to be noted that calling such a proposition 'elliptic' is misleading, as it suggests that the norms established for written language are also applicable for spoken language. As a matter of fact, in spoken language, one-word-utterances that form complete propositions are very common.

*jəʕni      safi      s-sij:əd      qtanəʕ      bian:a*  
 that.means ok DF-gentleman be.persuaded:3S.PF that  
 ‘So, finally the gentleman was persuaded that’

*ʔa      bənt-u      hija      li      ...*  
 PRT daughter-3SM 3SF REL ...  
 ‘it was his daughter who ...’

### 1.5 *ʔa* plus adverbial

Finally the particle may appear in front of adverbials, but this use is not all that frequent.

(8) A.06.1.815  
*idan      ʔa-h      f-l-uw:əl      //      ʔa-h      kan-u ...*  
 so PRT-3SM in-DF-first PRT-3SM be:3.PF-P  
 ‘So, in the beginning, they were ...’

## 2 The Egyptian Arabic particles and their uses

The investigation of the EA corpus has revealed three particles that show a similar distribution and fulfil a similar function as the MA *ʔa*. These particles are the particle *da*, which is a grammaticalization of the homophonous demonstrative *da*, and the particle *ma* which is homophonous with the negative marker, as in *ma-fi:-f* (NEG-EXIST-NEG) "there is no" and the subjunctive marker that appears in conjunctions in combination with a preposition, such as *baʕdə-ma* (after-PRT) 'after' or *ʔablə-ma* (before-PRT). The third particle, which I will only cursorily refer to, is the personal pronoun *hu(wa)*.

Like in the case of *ʔa*, we may distinguish between a referential and a non-referential use of the pronoun associated with the particle. The phonological form *da* may not only appear as a particle together with an anaphoric or deictic pronoun (10), but it is also homophonous with the demonstrative pronoun *da* as in (9).

(9) Marwa\_HF\_FG3\_01  
*da      mijf      ra:gil      ʕarʕ-i*  
 DEM.M.S NEG man east-NISB  
 ‘This is not an oriental man’

Both, *da* and *ma*, may be followed by a referential pronoun. The following examples (10 and 11) are from a TV discussion in the youth programme *Shababeek*, broadcast on the Egyptian satellite channel *Dream TV*. In this series a young Egyptian journalist, blogger and university teacher

*Marwa Rakha* is being interviewed by two young female and one male TV presenter, the topic of the day being self confidence and relationships.

In example (10) the interviewee is making a general statement, emphasizing her viewpoint on the topic under discussion. The utterance is the answer to a question by one of the interviewers about the age when the development of a person's personality has been completed. *Marwa's* answer is that there is no such age. She then backs up her judgment saying that 'we learn until we die'. Interestingly, the scope of the particle is not the topical expression 'we', but the whole proposition. On the contrary, if the particle is left out, the topic value of the pronoun is strengthened, and a good paraphrase would be something like 'as for us, we learn until we die'.

- (10) Marwa\_SV\_FG3\_01  
*da-hna li-haddə ma-n-mu:t ...*  
 PRT-1P to-limit SUB-1P.IPF-die  
 'Listen, we [learn] until we die'

In the next example, the use of the particle *ma* is signalling some sort of demurral or objection to what has been said before. In the case at hand, this is also signalled by the discourse marker *bass* 'only, but'. One of the interviewers is making an interjection, objecting to the opinion stated by the interviewee that people who marry at a young age may afterwards change their minds because their ways of thinking are still changing. He says that even if a man gets married at the age of thirty, he could still change his mind at the age of thirty-five.

- (11) Marwa\_SV\_MM5\_06  
*bass tab ma-huwwa lamma ji-ggawwiz ...*  
 but/only ok PRT-3.MS when 3SM.IPF-get.married  
 'Ok, but when he gets married ...'

As we have seen in the investigation of the MA particle, the EA particles do not necessarily precede referential expressions, they may equally well introduce verbs (12) or be combined with other another particle, which in the present example in turn precedes a verb (13).

- (12) Marwa\_SV\_FM4\_14  
*da ka:n-it kida bi-ti-ʕmil so:ʔ*  
 PRT be-3SF.PF so IND-3S.IPF-make voice  
 'It made a kind of voice'

The statement was uttered in response to a question that elicited the description of an egg that had been put into boiling water, namely what it had been like before being put into the water and

afterwards. The speaker had to imagine herself being that egg. She imagines the egg and does not take up the literal topic of the question, which is the addressee herself. The question had been "Describe it to me, before I put you and after I put you [into the water]!" *Da* emphasizes the imagination of the speaker who is trying to give an exact description of a concrete situation. Note that the particle can only be used in a narrative predication. It would not be possible in a qualitative statement about the general state of eggs before being put into boiling water:

(13)

- A: What is an egg like before it is put into boiling water?  
 B: # *da bi-ti-ʕmil kida so:ʔ*  
 PRT IND-3S.IPF-make so voice  
 'It makes a kind of voice'

In the next example, the particle *ma* is combined with *hu*, a reduced *huwa*, originally the personal pronoun of the 3.M.S, used as a question marker (EID 1992). The particle *ma* gives the whole utterance a defiant overtone. In this interview the guest, the same young lady that has been interviewed by the three young presenters in the preceding conversation, is being asked about her attitude towards marriage. The host this time is a respectable elderly gentleman, the famous actor *Hussein Fahmy*. Throughout the whole interview he challenges the young woman, who is well known for her radically modern and feminist ideas, suggesting that she is having severe problems with the conservative society of Egypt. In this part of the discussion, *Marwa* has made the overly self-confident statement that she would be willing to "make her husband a minister" if he wished to become one. Of course, the host did not leave that statement uncommented and *Marwa* tried to defend herself by saying that her only intention was to support her husband. The utterance may be better illustrated, using a German translation, as German is also expressing modality lexically via particles, whereas English relies more heavily on intonation (cf. SCHUBIGER 1972). A pragmatically equivalent German translation would be something like 'Aber wie soll ich ihn denn sonst unterstützen?'

- (14) Marwa\_HF\_FG3\_02  
*ma-hu a-snid-u zza:j*  
 PRT-PRT 1S.IPF-support-3SM how  
 'But, how am I supposed I support  
 him?'

Whenever this particle is used, the utterance is given some sense of mild reproach that the interlocutor or whoever the speaker's words are aimed at should know better or that he or she

should not have said what he had said. Again *ma* is not in place when answering a neutral information question. It inevitably carries some attitudinal meaning as well.

### **3 The prosody of the particle constructions**

Looking at the prosody of the particle constructions I will concentrate on two prosodic aspects in the auditory analysis: pitch and loudness, the acoustic correlates of which are fundamental frequency and amplitude. The analysis is done perceptually and instrumentally with the help of the sound analysis software PRAAT 5.3 (BOERSMA & WEENINK 2012). It is well known that the acoustic analysis of intensity is not reliable if the data have not been recorded under controlled experimental conditions in a sound-proof room. Nevertheless, clear auditory prominences are frequently characterized by major increases in amplitude. The present analysis will thus not make systematic use of intensity cues for the analysis, but where the intensity values give a clear picture, they will occasionally be referred to. Amplitude and fundamental frequency both contribute to the auditory impression of prominence. Clearly pitch is the most important factor in producing prominence, which is typically referred to as (pitch) accent. However, in addition to the prominence function the pitch contour itself conveys other meanings as well. I will deal with both prosodic aspects in turn, firstly I will identify whether the particle is given some prominence, i.e. whether it is accented or not; and secondly I will look at the type of pitch movement that is associated with the whole construction and with the particle itself. A third important cue to prominence is duration. Although *\*a* is also significantly long when it is accented, there are also cases of lengthening a *\*a* that lacks any measure of prominence. Therefore, the factor duration will not be given equal attention as the other two cues. The description is done within the model of intonation I developed for the investigation of information structure in Egyptian Arabic (cf. EL ZARKA 2011), distinguishing three different types of tones and contours, *leading* (rising), *closing* (falling) and *linking* (flat or horizontal) ones. It is assumed that cross-linguistically a *leading* tone or contour may have various communicative functions, ranging from question marking over continuity to topic marking, whereas a *closing* tone marks assertions and focus constituents, under the assumption that focus

is more or less synonymous with rheme.<sup>2</sup> *Linking* tones are considered as characteristic for semantically weak material, most typically function words.

Furthermore, the position of the particle within a prosodic unit will be identified. It has been argued (SCHIFFRIN 1987; HORNE et al. 1999) that discourse markers mark the edges of prosodic speech units, i.e. that they may, for example, be followed or preceded by a pause. In the present analysis, I will investigate the position of the particle with reference to two prosodic units. The first one is the *intonation phrase* which is defined as exhibiting at least one major prominence and being set off by a pause or the felt equivalent of a pause, in case the intonation unit before it sounds "complete".<sup>3</sup> The second prosodic unit is the *accentual phrase* or *accent domain*, also called *prosodic word* in the literature. An accentual phrase is defined as the domain covered by one pitch accent, frequently a rising-falling movement.

Modal particles, belonging to the class of function words, are typically unaccented (SELKIRK 2003; inter alia) and sometimes even said to be unaccentable. On the other hand, discourse particles may often constitute an independent phrase (HIRSCHBERG & LITMAN 1993) and it has been shown that they in fact may also be perceived as prominent – where the prominence may be brought about by mere lengthening or even by accentuation – when introducing a new major discourse topic (Horne et al., 1999). Similarly, ZWICKY (1985:303) claims that discourse particles "are independent words rather than clitics." As noted by ELORDIETA & ROMERA (2002), it is widely accepted in the literature that discourse markers may often "show the prosodic properties of separate intonation units and are also phonologically reduced." This statement importantly hints at the hybrid prosodic nature of such particles as independent (prosodic) words on the one hand, but not usually prominent, on the other hand. In their investigation of the prosodic

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<sup>2</sup> Focus as a choice between alternatives will not be considered here, as this definition of focus is also applicable to contrastive topics that typically involve rising intonation.

<sup>3</sup> This definition is admittedly rather vague. Of course, such pauses do have acoustic correlates, such as segmental lengthening and other quantitative and qualitative features). But I will not go into this subject here as such micro-phonetic analysis is not carried out for the present purpose.

properties of Spanish *entonces* ELORDIETA & ROMERA, however, come to the conclusion that *entonces* neither constitutes a separate prosodic unit<sup>4</sup>, nor does it show phonological reduction.

To begin with, let us have a look at the prosodic properties of MA and EA in general. One striking feature of MA is the lack of proper lexical accents in the sense that the position of word stress is not specified in the lexicon, but a matter of rhythm (MAAS, to appear). The distribution of accents may thus be viewed as a phrase level phenomenon, as has also been suggested for French by some scholars (cf. DI CRISTO 1999 for an overview). Moroccan Arabic prosody may thus be classified as edge-marking. The end of an intonation unit is typically characterized by a significantly high rise, similar to what has been called *upspeak* or *high rising terminal* (HRT) in some dialects of English, especially North American and Antipodean varieties (LADD 1996). In contrast to that, in EA every content word is in principle associated with an accent. Word stress position is completely predictable from the phonological make-up of a word. In addition to the 'lexical' accents there may be accents on function words, too, which give the utterance a particularly strong rhythm (EL ZARKA 2011).

What is immediately striking is the phonological make-up of the particles. The particles investigated here all exhibit the most unmarked form of a short syllable (CV). Moreover, all three particles contain a front consonant plus the most unmarked vowel *a*. Segmentally, the particles thus bear a strong similarity to affixes and are more suited for being a clitic than an independent word. The investigation clearly shows that the particles are frequently cliticized, i.e. they do not carry an accent and enter into a close phonetic relationship with their host. They normally do not form an independent prosodic unit. This is especially true for the EA particles and less so for the MA particle, as we will see in the remainder of this section.

Let us now have a look at the individual particles in turn. MA *#a* is mostly unaccented. Although it may be interpreted as syntactically **proclitic**, for instance, when introducing the predicate phrase as in example (3), repeated as (14) here for convenience, it is frequently phonologically

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<sup>4</sup> What constitutes a separate intonation unit is, of course, a matter of definition. In some definitions any kind of pause, including hesitation pauses, is taken as a basis for segmentation, while in other definitions the internal make-up of the unit is of greater importance, as for example the presence of a major prominence, also called nuclear accent.

**enclitic**, i.e. it continues the preceding falling contour (Figure 1).<sup>5</sup> We also see that the vowel *a* is lengthened and followed by a slight hesitation pause.

- (15) A.03.33  
*l:a saf(i) ʔa-kli-na hada*  
 no ok PRT-eat-1P. PF DM.SM  
 ‘No, that’s it, we had (already) eaten it’

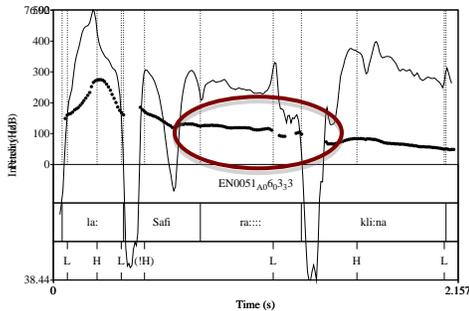


Fig. 1: enclitic particle continuing a closing contour.

Generally, *ʔa* seems to take on the tonal properties of its environment. We frequently find it continuing a closing tone or a high level or low level linking tone (Figure 2 and 3).

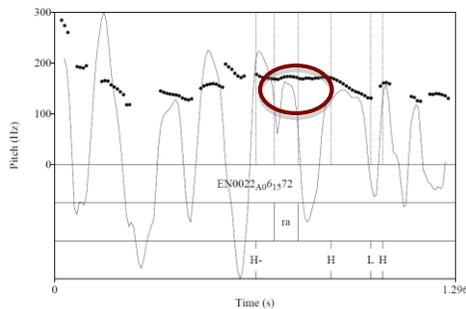


Fig. 2: *ʔa* continuing high level of preceding conditional clause

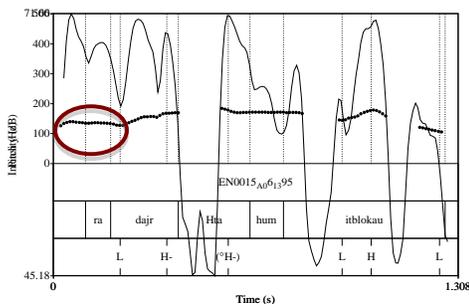


Fig. 3: *ʔa* continuing low level of preceding topic

<sup>5</sup> The bold line represents fundamental frequency which is the acoustic correlate of the pitch contour, whereas the simple line shows the intensity peaks associated with the vowels.

In the three preceding cases the particle itself is not prominent, as can also be seen from the intensity graph which is lower on the vowel part of the particle than on the preceding and following lexical items, a fact that is in line with the auditory impression.

There is however a number of cases where *ʔa* is prominent in the data. These cases may be divided into two categories: a) *ʔa* is followed by a pronoun, whether in its suffixed or independent form and b) *ʔa* constitutes an independent accentual phrase, occasionally also an independent intonation phrase followed by a pause.

In the (a)-cases the position of the particle is almost invariably initial, i.e. at the beginning of an utterance and therefore also at the beginning of an intonation phrase. When the personal pronoun is suffixed, *ʔa* may be accented in its capacity as the syntactic base for the suffix. It may, however also remain without a significant level of prominence as in the example in Figure 4. The rise covering the item *ʔa-hna* (PRT-1P, 'we') where the personal pronoun is leading up to the focused predicate of the proposition *baq-in* (stay.PTCP.ACT-P, 'staying') which clearly is the main, if not the only accent of the phrase. Cases like this show the extreme difficulty determining prominences in spoken Moroccan Arabic which lacks the clear outline of accents marked off by the well-defined starting and endpoints of rises and falls, as they are typical of Egyptian Arabic.

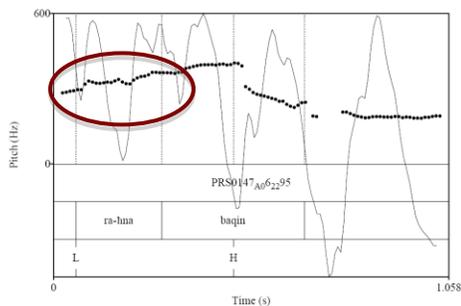


Fig. 4: leading contour on particle plus pronoun at the beginning of an intonation phrase.

A clear accent is associated with the sequence *ʔa* plus pronoun in the following example (16). Here, the utterance also starts with the pronominal subject, but in this case it constitutes an independent intonation phrase with a falling contour, expressing the exclamative property of the utterance. Due its prosodic encoding this utterance is made up of two proposition, the first one pointing to the bunch of people the speaker is referring to and the second one is commenting on how they behave – like 'bosses'.

- (16) A.06.1.284  
*idan*      *ʔa-huma*      *ʔuʔur*  
 so          PRT-3P      frame:P  
 Look at them: bosses!

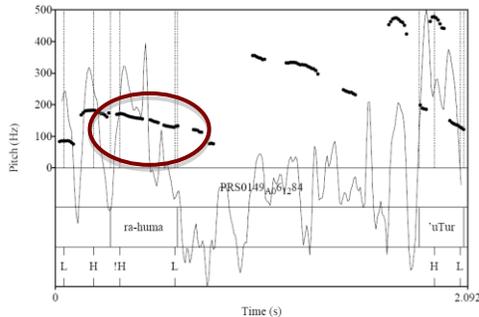


Fig.5: *ʔa* plus pronoun with a closing tone.

Other instances of an accented *ʔa* involve a bare particle without any suffix, also often constituting an independent intonation unit. In these instances the particle behaves like an interjection starting an exclamation. In some sense example (16) is similar to these cases, the difference being in the deictic use of the item preceded by *ʔa*. In example (17), however, *ʔa* is definitely not containing a referential pronoun which would have to be third person plural to agree with the verb. Figure (6) shows a very clear case of accented *ʔa* constituting an independent accentual phrase characterized by a full rise-fall.

- (17) A.06.1.935  
*ʔa*    *ka-i-xərʒ-u*          *n-nas*      *saħb-i*  
 PRT   IND-3SM-go.out-P   DF-people   friend-1S  
 ‘People go out, my friend’

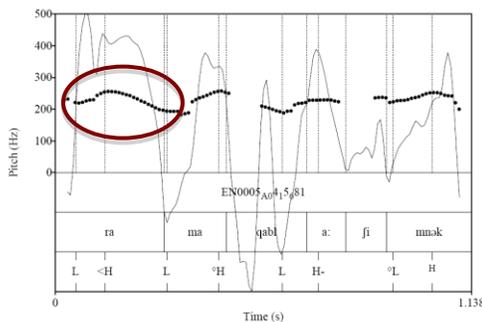


Fig. 6: *ʔa* constituting an independent accentual phrase at the beginning of an utterance.

Without any doubt, there is a clear prominence on these announcing or exclamative *ʔas*. As far as their prosodic independence in terms of phrasing is concerned, it seems more probable that the observed pauses are due to hesitation and not necessarily intended in the first place. Nevertheless it is clear that a pause may occur after the particle. This type of *ʔa* does not normally have a

pronoun suffix. The only such case I encountered in the small corpus was the one given in example (16), depicted in Figure (5). In this case the pause is clearly intentional, as the whole construction constitutes an independent proposition.

A last example from that category is given in Figure (7). The short utterance is expressed by in a single intonation phrase containing two closing accents, which assigns it a particularly strong impact. The sentence again is an exclamation uttered in a quite vivid conversation between a couple of young man who are trying to identify a certain person of whom they had been talking before to one of the men who does not know this person. In the process of guessing, the addressee mentions a young boy who happens to be the son of the described person. This close guess is prompted by the first speaker with the exclamation *ʔa-h b:<sup>w</sup>a-h* (PRT-3SM father-3SM) 'He's [the person to be identified] his [the young boy's] father!', having thus solved the riddle. The two accents rather iconically give weight to both informationally relevant items, the second one being completely new to the discourse and the first one being in focus because it refers to the missing information, namely the person to be identified. As predicted, both constituents carry closing accents to ascertain the information given.

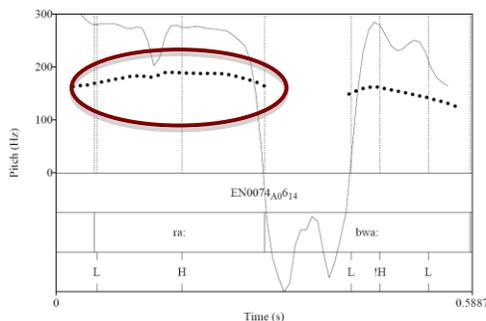


Fig. 7: utterance with two accents, on the particle (plus silent pronoun) and on the lexical noun *b:<sup>w</sup>a* 'father'.

To summarize, the MA particle *ʔa* may occur with or without prominence, depending on its position in the utterance and most notably on the pragmatic weight associated with it or the item to which it is attached. Unaccented particles fit in their tonal environment, continuing or anticipating the preceding or following tonal contour. They typically constitute the final or initial part of an accentual phrase. Such unaccented *ʔas* are frequently characterized by a linking tone, a flat tonal contour whose level is determined by the preceding material. A striking feature of the prosody of *ʔa* is the fact that it may be prosodically encliticized to the preceding constituent, i.e. integrated into the preceding accentual phrase, although it syntactically belongs to the following

constituent. This is not at all surprising, and the MA particle shares this feature with other discourse particles, for instance the connective *and* in English, which frequently terminates a proposition, thus cataphorically pointing to the proposition to come.

The EA data show a similar picture. To begin with, it is important to differentiate between the two lexical classes, the particles *da* and *ma* and the demonstrative *da* with the feminine form *di* and the plural form *dol*.

Whereas the particles are never accented, the demonstrative may be. In contradistinction to the MA particle, the EA particles are never prosodically enclitic. They are mostly without prominence with a low-level linking tone, tonally anacrustic to the following accentual phrase (ex. 18, Figure 8).

- (18) Marwa\_HF\_FG3\_02  
*ma-hu da tabi:ʕi*  
 PRT-PRT DEM.SM natural  
 ‘But that’s only natural’

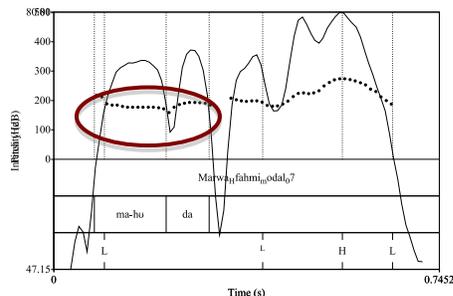


Fig. 8: EA particles *ma-hu* followed by the demonstrative pronoun *da*

Figure 8 shows a linking tone stretching out over four light syllables, two particles plus the demonstrative pronoun and the first syllable of the predicative adjective, thereby constituting a very long tonal anacrusis to the following accent starting on the stressed syllable of *tabi:ʕi* 'natural'. The graph also nicely shows the correlation of the prominent and non-prominent parts with intensity, as the level of the intensity peaks on the sonorant parts of the syllables is clearly lower in the particles and the demonstrative than in the accented content word.

Occasionally, however, the particle is integrated into the accentual phrase, constituting the initial part of the rise, but normally without being prominent. This prosody is only used when the host of the proclitic particle is a referential pronoun.

Finally, the demonstrative *da* may be prominent as shown in Figure (9) - which is the prosodic illustration of example (9) above - or accentless as in Figure (8).

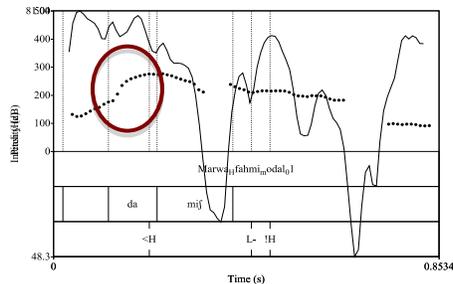


Fig. 9: accented *da* as a demonstrative pronoun associated with a leading contour

#### 4 Discussion

The category 'discourse particles' comprises a large array of particles with heterogeneous meanings and functions such as modality, scaling and cohesion. Especially scalar particles such as *also* and *even* are known for their focus sensitivity. In this paper, I argue that some modal particles also interact with information structure in predictable ways. The MA particle *ʔa* as well as the EA particles *da* and *ma* can be shown to have a focussing function in addition to the modal meanings they signify. They are usually associated with the rhematic part of the proposition. Out of the 218 occurrences of the MA particle I investigated, only 11 instances contain *ʔa* introducing a noun phrase that is the subject of a sentence and thus constitutes a potential topic. But at a closer look, these nouns do not qualify as *aboutness* topics in the conventional sense, being indefinite, generic or unspecific. Some instances involve the name of God as in example (19), where the act of punishing cannot be interpreted as a statement 'about' God, ascribing to him the quality of a prosecutor, but rather the whole phrase has to be taken as an idiomatic reply to some bad or daring deed that is commented on.

- (19) A.06.1.831  
*ʔa*    *rəbb-i*    *ka-i-ʕaqəb*                    *a*    *saħb-i*  
 PRT    lord-1S    IND-3SM.IPF-punish    VOC    friend-1S  
 'God punishes, my friend'

Somewhat ironically, Arabic discourse particles have to date mainly been investigated in Classical Arabic (CA) or Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), a variety that is mainly written. The *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics (EALL)* contains an article on such discourse particles in CA called *Asseverative Particles* (TESTEN 2005) which are said to express a

subjective evaluation of the propositional content on the part of the speaker. The function of the proclitic particle *la*, which is formally reminiscent of the MA and EA particles investigated here, as suggested by TESTEN is to "underscore speaker's commitment to the veracity of his or her utterance" (p. 202). A close equivalent of the use of the MA particle in CA seems to be the frequently used construction *ʔinna* plus a sentence with God as the grammatical subject, as shown in the Quranic example (20).

(20)

<i>ʔinna</i>	<i>ħa:h-a</i>	<i>ʕali:m-un</i>	<i>xabi:r</i>	(Q 49,13)
PRT	God-ACC	knowing-NOM	expert	
'Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware'				(Translation PICKTHALL)

The connection between these particles and information structure has been pointed out by OUHALLA (1997) who considers the MSA/CA particles *qad* and *ʔinna* as *sentence focus* markers and *la* as a *constituent focus* marker. OUHALLA (1997:21) argues that the force the particles add to the propositional content is one of modality, "namely assertion, and therefore certainty." He thus identifies focus marking as the main function of the particles saying that they "assert the truthfulness of the information which makes up the neutral propositional content of the sentences." OUHALLA concludes that "SA [Standard Arabic, called CA/MSA in the present paper] appears to be one of the languages where **both types of information** [focus and modality] are encoded in a single functional category" (emphasis DE). Obviously the Spoken Arabic particles also fulfil these two functions. They all have in common the notion of assertion. On these grounds they are apt to single out the focus in the sense of the rhematic part of a sentence or utterance. Recall that the MA particle, for example, is predominantly placed at the beginning of the predicate phrase. It also frequently occurs in combination with another focus sensitive particles of the scalar type, thereby also introducing a focussed constituent. Finally, *ʔa* may also have a presentative function (MAAS, this volume; CAUBET 1992), introducing a referent into the discourse (20). From an informational point of view, however this presentative function nicely fits in with a focusing function, marking a constituent as 'new' or rhematic. According to MAAS the particle *ʔa* is used to express distal deixis in contradistinction to the particle *ħa* which is used for proximal deixis (21).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Handout of a paper held at the University of Graz in April 2012.

(21)

*hal-məktaba*  
PRT.DF-library/bookstore  
'Here is the bookstore'

*ʔal-məktaba*  
PRT.DF-library/bookstore  
'There is the bookstore'

As noted by CAUBET (1992:143), the deictic instances of *ʔa* are not too numerous, however. CAUBET lists a number of semantico-pragmatic functions besides the presentative function the particle may take on. She divides these into three major categories, those in which the particle either i) has a "valeur de recentrage sur toute la relation prédicative", ii) porte sur le départ de la relation or iii) porte sur le prédicat. The first category is further divided into three types of meanings: "réassertion", "opposition" and "haut degré". Without going into further detail concerning the fine-grained distinctions suggested by CAUBET, one thing becomes evident, when looking at these three categories from the viewpoint of information structure. While in the cases of ii) and iii) the scope of the focus domain is a constituent, such as an argument (the subject) (ii) or the predicate (iii), the scope of the focus in (i) extends over the whole proposition or, if the notion is applicable, to a whole sentence, that means to the relation of topic/comment as a whole. This interpretation of CAUBET's categorization implies an interpretation of her term *centrage* as focus/theme and her term *départ* as topic. If this is correct, the information structural range covered by the *ʔa*-particle coincides with the three major focus types as identified by LAMBRECHT (1994): *argument focus*, *predicate focus* and *sentence focus*. A comparison with OUHALLA's analysis of the CA particles reveals that the MA particle serves the whole range of information structural functions expressed by the three CA particles *ʔinna*, *qad* and *la*, covering their distribution as well.

The different notions alluded to by CAUBET suggest that the MA particle covers a whole range of modal functions, such as for instance *re-assertion* and *opposition*, whose interpretation is completely dependent on the context. Contrary to that, in EA we have the choice between two different markers to express different modalities, *da* signifying assertion/reinforcement/actuality whereas *ma* adds to the assertion a counter-presuppositional or counter-assertive notion, signalling some sense of objection, defiance or even reproach, depending on the context.

As a final point, let us again look at the problematic cases where the particle introduces a whole sentence, being placed in front of the sentence 'topic'. These cases include the infrequent occurrences of full lexical NPs and the frequent cases of particle + pronoun. The claim that in these cases, we are dealing with a subtype of sentence focus as opposed to a bipartite topic-comment structure in the sense of SASSE's (1987) *categorical* statement needs some justification. For one thing, occurrences of *ʔa* followed by a full subject NP are rare. If the particle were typically marking an *aboutness* topic, the instances with a lexical NP in topic function should be more frequent. CAUBET's remark in this respect seems to point in the same direction. With reference to her example (18), quoted here as (22a), she notes that “[d]ans le cas de *ʔā-ni*, il n’y a pas de pause, et la particule vient recentrer sur le sujet, **sans le thématiser**” (CAUBET 1992:147; emphasis DE). She contrasts it to the same proposition with a bare pronoun where the insertion of a pause - indicated by the colon - could readily occur. It is only the second sentence that allows the paraphrase "As far as I am concerned, I wrote to you", making the thematic property of the topic explicit.

(22)

- |    |  |               |              |
|----|--|---------------|--------------|
| a. | <i>ʔa-ni</i>                               | <i>ktəb-t</i> | <i>l-ək!</i> |
|    | PRT-1S                                     | write-1S.PF   | to-2S        |
|    | ‘Look! I wrote to you’                     |               |              |
| b. | <i>ana,</i>                                | <i>ktəb-t</i> | <i>l-ək</i>  |
|    | 1S   | write-1S.PF   | to-2S        |
|    | ‘As far as I am concerned, I wrote to you’ |               |              |
- (after CAUBET 1992:147, transcription, glossing and translation, DE)

Some justification may come from EA as well, where the particles *da* and *ma* are also infelicitous together with an *aboutness* topic. A parallel example from the EA corpus is quoted as ex. (10) above. The following constructed example (23) puts the pronoun into a context that forces an interpretation in terms of *aboutness*, and only B. with a bare pronoun is a felicitous answer to question A.

(23)

- |     |                        |                |               |
|-----|------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| A.  | <i>ʔinti</i>           | <i>ʔajh-a</i>  | <i>fe:n?</i>  |
|     | 2SF                    | go:PTCP.ACT-SF | where         |
|     | ‘Where are you going?’ |                |               |
| B.  | <i>(ʔana)</i>          | <i>ʔajh-a</i>  | <i>l-be:t</i> |
|     | 1S                     | go:PTCP.ACT-SF | DF-house      |
|     | ‘I’m going home’       |                |               |
| B’. | <i># d-ana</i>         | <i>ʔajh-a</i>  | <i>l-be:t</i> |
|     | PRT-1S                 | go:PTCP.ACT-SF | DF-house      |

‘(Listen to the news!) I’m going home!’

B". # *m-ana rajh-a l-be:t*  
 PRT-1S go:PTCP.ACT-SF DF-house  
 ‘I’m going home! (Isn’t that obvious?)’

As a matter of fact, the use of *ra* with a subject NP or pronoun is indeed ambiguous between contrastive subject focus and sentence focus. This ambiguity is not at all uncommon. Consider, for instance, the homophonous prosodic constructions in English and German with an accented subject, such as *My CAR broke down* (capital letters signify accentuation) where the two interpretations involve narrow focus on the subject and wide sentence focus, depending on the context. The same is true for the Japanese equivalent *Kuruma-ga koshoo-shi-ta* (LAMBRECHT 1994:223), where the subject particle *ga* is used in sentence focus as well as in argument focus structures<sup>7</sup>, in contradistinction to the topic marker *wa*.

There is, however, an unambiguous construction involving a cleft to express subject focus as in ex. (7). Some instances in the Moroccan corpus suggest that scope over a whole sentence may also be expressed by a special construction with *ra* introducing subject and predicate individually (24).

(24)  
*ra d-danja ra bi dajz-a*  
 PRT DF-world PRT only turn:PTCP.ACT-SF  
 ‘Look at the world that’s still turning’

This construction is reminiscent of the CA construction involving the particles *inna* and *la* (24), which, according to TESTEN (2005:203), has developed out of a construction with the two particles in initial sentence position, the particle *la* having moved to the beginning of the predicate phrase. The old Arab grammarians refer to this *la* as *lam muzahliqa* ‘the *lam* which slides down’.

(25)  
*inna zajd-an la-kari:m-un* < *\*la-inna zajd-an kari:m-un*  
 PRT Zayd-ACC PRT-noble-NOM PRT-PRT Zayd-ACC noble-NOM  
 ‘Verily, Zayd is noble’  
 (after TESTEN 2005:203, transcription, glossing and translation, DE)

<sup>7</sup> However note that there is a prosodic difference between the two sentences.

## 5 Summary and Implications

In this paper I argue that the *enunciative* particles *ʔa* (MA) and *da* and *ma* (EA) fulfil a double function, namely the expression of a certain modality and information structure marking at the same time. A similar claim has been made by OUHALLA (1997) for the CA/MSA particles *ʔinna*, *qad* and *la* which operate over the whole proposition, expressing the speaker's certainty and assertion and at the same time marking different focus types in terms of the scope of focus, viz. constituent focus and sentence focus. It has been shown in this paper that the MA particle *ʔa* covers all these functions, whereas in EA the existence of two different particles (*da* and *ma*) allows the expression of a more differentiated modality, including defiance and counter-presupposition.

It has long been noted that other types of discourse particles (*even, also, only*) associate with focus (JACOBS 1983; inter alia). The case of Arabic shows that modal particles also show a high degree of focus sensitivity, as their modal functions (announcing, exclaiming, objecting etc.) are intrinsically tied to focus. As noted by OUHALLA (1997:21):

[G]iven that both focus and modality convey extra-propositional information, in the sense that they are both affective operators, it is not surprising that they interact with each other in the way they seem to do [...]

It may thus be expected that this phenomenon will be found in other languages as well. One case in point is Jaminjung, a Northern Australian language that has a clitic particle *biyang* which is used to express sequencing and at same time indicates information structure (SCHULTZE-BERNDT et al. 2012). Anyway, as I have shown in this paper, three Arabic varieties, namely MA, EA and CA/MSA seem to support this assumption.