

Sentential Negation in Libyan Arabic: A Generative Perspective

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Abstract

This paper discusses negation in Libyan Arabic and attempts to put forward an analysis for negation in the language. The paper reveals that Pollock's analysis (1989) of negation cannot account for Libyan Arabic as the language does not display complementary distribution between the second negative marker and indefinite quantifiers. Furthermore, the analysis does not account for the cliticisation of 'ma-' and '-š' on each other forming the free negation morpheme 'miš' used to negate future tense clauses. Building on Benmamoun's analysis (2000), the paper argues that the (dis)continuous morpheme 'ma-' and '-š' heads a NegP that selects a TP complement. The proposed analysis assumes that the verb moves out of the VP to T and then to Neg where it merges with 'ma-š' in affirmative clauses, whereas in yes-no interrogative clauses, verb movement is followed by movement from Neg to C.

Keywords: Negation, Cliticisation, Clitic, Proclitic, Enclitic, Verb movement

1. Negation: A Crosslinguistic Perspective

Languages vary in the way they mark negation. Some languages, for instance, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese employ preverbal negative markers to express sentential negation. Others such as spoken varieties of Valdostian and Piedmontese use post-verbal negation markers only. Finally, there are languages where negation is realised by two negative markers: preverbal and post-verbal. Standard French (Pollock 1989) and West Flemish (Hageman 1995) are examples of these languages. Modern Arabic dialects, e.g. Moroccan and Egyptian Arabic also realise negation via preverbal and post-verbal markers (Mohamed and Ouhalla 1995; Benmamoun 2000; Aoun et. al 2010).

Given these differences, many questions appear on the surface. Where is the location of negation markers in the TP? Is it the same in all languages or at least within the varieties of the same language? Do negation markers have their own projections and/or occupy different syntactic positions? In English, the negation marker ‘not’ heads a projection between T and VP and takes any XP as a complement (Williams, 1994, p.194; Poole, 2002, p. 274). On the other hand, negation markers in Italian are positioned on the left-edge of the TP, preceding verbal inflections and auxiliaries (Ouhalla, 2002, p.300). Thus, where negation selects a VP as a complement in English, it requires a TP in Italian. In this paper, I attempt to provide an overview on the syntax of negation in Libyan Arabic (LA) from a generative perspective in the context of verbal matrix clauses: declarative and interrogative.

The paper consists of four sections followed by a conclusion. The first section introduces Libyan Arabic as a local modern variety of Arabic. The second sheds light on Libyan Arabic verbal morphology and the verbal morphology of negation in the context of past, present and future tense. The third section presents negation in Libyan Arabic, while the fourth critically reviews widely adopted analyses of negation, namely, those proposed by Pollock (1989) and Benmamoun (2000) and attempts to determine whether they can be extended to account for negation in Libyan Arabic. It also proposes an analysis for negation in Libyan Arabic. The fifth section presents the conclusion.

1.1 The Arabic Language and Libyan Arabic

The Arabic language can be regarded as a collection of local spoken varieties and a standard written language referred to as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Both, from a sociolinguistic perspective, exist in a diglossic situation. MSA is the standard variety of Arabic used in all Arabic-speaking countries in written communication in books, journals, newspapers, and official documents and so on, and in formal oral communication such as in radio and television broadcasts, conferences and lectures. MSA, which is based on Classical Arabic, is not the native language of the Arabs in the sense that children do not learn it at home or from their parents but only in schools. The regional varieties which are typically spoken are acquired by Arabs as their first language.

The local varieties differ from each other phonologically, morphologically and syntactically. They also vary according to the geographical area and the sociolinguistic context (i.e. urban, rural, Bedouin). Aoun et al. (2010: 2) points out that ‘the main geographical linguistic

groupings are the Maghreb (mainly North Africa), Egypt, the Levant, and the Gulf.

Libyan Arabic is a variety of Maghrebi Arabic spoken in North Africa. It includes three main dialects spoken in three dialectal areas: (a) the western area (Tripolitania and Fezzan), (b) the eastern area (Cyrenaica) and finally (c) the transitional zone extending from the western city of Misurata in the Tripolitania region and the city of Sebha in the south to Cyrenaica (see Owens 1984; Pereira 2008). The data used in this study represent different varieties of western Libyan Arabic spoken in the region of Tripolitania. The data were collected from and judged by native speakers of Libyan Arabic.

2. Verbal morphology in Libyan Arabic

2.1 Tense and Verbal Morphology

Libyan Arabic patterns with Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and other varieties of Arabic in that verbs occur in two major paradigms: perfective (past) and imperfective (non-past). The perfective vs. the imperfective forms differ with respect to how agreement features are realized on the verb. The agreement features in the perfective forms are realized as a suffix on the verb, whereas in the imperfective forms, they are realized by a prefix displaying number and a suffix carrying person (Benmamoun 2000; Pereira 2008; Aoun et al. 2010). As for tense, this is not encoded morphologically in both perfective and imperfective forms; instead tense is argued to be an abstract morpheme in Arabic (see Fassi Fehri 1993; Benmamoun 2000 for further details).

2.1.1 The Imperfective Form

The imperfective form in Arabic is used to express non-past events in different temporal and aspectual contexts. First, it occurs in clauses with present tense progressive or habitual interpretation, as in (1). In such clauses there are no markers or proclitics that can express the habitual or progressive aspect; the imperfective form of the verb is used in such contexts and the intended interpretation is normally derived from the context and/or the use of temporal adverbs.

(1) Zayed ydəxən.

Zayed smoke.3MS

‘Zayed smokes/is smoking.’

Second, the imperfective form is used in clauses with future tense interpretation, where a future marker is prefixed to the imperfective form, as in (2). Third, it is used in non-finite clauses, as in (3). Finally, the imperfective form is used in the context of modal or basic auxiliaries, as in (4) and (5) respectively; the past tense in the latter can have both progressive and habitual interpretations.

(2) Yasin ha-yəktəb r-risaala.

Yasin FUT-write.3MS the-letter

‘Yasin will write the letter.’

(3) huwwa ḥawəl yəhrob.
 He tried.3MS escape.3MS
 ‘He tried to escape.’

(4) Hasan yəgdər yisafər bukra.
 Hasan can.3MS travel.3MS tomorrow
 ‘Hasan can travel tomorrow.’

(5) Zayed kān ydəxən.
 Zayed was.3MS smoke.3MS
 ‘Zayed used to smoke/was smoking.’

Table (1). Imperfective verbal morphology

Person	Number (S/P)	Gender (F/M)	Affix	Verb+affix
First Person	S	F/M	n-	nəktəb
	P	M/F	n--u	nəktbu
Second Person	S	M	t-	təktəbt
	S	F	t-i	təktəbi
	P	M	t-u	təktbu
	P	F	t-u/ t-n	təktbu/ təktbən
Third Person	S	M	y-	yəktəb
	S	F	t-	təkətəb
	P	M	y-u	yəktbu
	P	F	y-u/ y-ən	yəktbu/ yəktbən

2.1.2 The Perfective Form

The perfective form expresses past tense, as in (6). Despite expressing past tense, there is disagreement with respect to whether or not the agreement features on the perfective form encode tense in addition to agreement. There are two hypotheses: a) the suffix on the verb expresses both tense and agreement; b) the suffix is agreement marking.

(6) lawlad ləʕbu kura ams.
 the-boys played.3MP football yesterday
 ‘The boys played football yesterday.’

The past tense according to hypothesis (b) is an abstract morpheme; the suffix marking on the perfective forms expresses agreement only (Fassi Fehri 1993; Benmamoun 2000). It is worth noting that Benmamoun (2000) observes that in Standard Arabic the agreement suffix on the

perfective forms can occur on negative and aspectual particles in clauses with present tense interpretation, indicating that such a suffix does not encode past tense. This is also the case in Libyan Arabic. The aspectual particle *mazal* ‘still’ exhibits all the suffixes of the perfective form, as shown in (7) and (8), indicating that the suffix marking does not encode tense; it expresses agreement only.

(7) *mazalan* fi l-madersa.
 still.3FP in the-school
 ‘They’re still in the school.’

(8) *mazalna* fi l-hoš.
 still.1M/FP in the-house
 ‘We’re still at home.’

Table 2. Perfective verbal morphology

Person	Number (S/P)	Gender (F/M)	Affix	Verb+affix
First Person	S	F/M	-t	ktəbt
	P	M/F	-na	ktəbna
Second Person	S	M	-t	ktəbt
	S	F	-ti	ktəbti
	P	F	-tu/ -ən	ktəbtu kəbtən
		M	-tu	kəbtu
Third Person	S	M	-	ktəb
	S	F	-t	kəbt
	P	M	-u	kəbtu
	P	F	-u/-ən	kəbtu/ kəbən

2.2 Futurity

The future tense is expressed in Libyan Arabic by the use of the preverbal future markers *b-* and *hā*. The former is used to ‘express the future of intention’, whereas the latter is used to express ‘a close/coming future’ (Pereira 2008: 55), as in (9) and (10) respectively. Futurity can also be expressed by the use of the motion participial predicate *rah* ‘going’, as in (11).

(9) *bənšūfək* ġudwa.
 FUT-see.1MS-you tomorrow
 ‘I will see you tomorrow.’ (Pereira 2008: 55)

(10) ḥā-nastāḥṣ̣ lībya.

FUT-miss.1MS Libya

‘I am going to miss Libya.’ (Pereira 2008: 55)

(11) raḥ tsāfer.

going travel.3FS

‘She’s going to travel.’

3. Negation in Libyan Arabic

The negation of verbal clauses is expressed by the negative markers *ma-* and *-š* being attached to the verb: the former as a proclitic and the latter as an enclitic¹ whether the tensed verb is a main lexical verb or an auxiliary as in (12) and (13). It is worth noting that while the unmarked word order in Libyan Arabic is SVO, word order in yes-no interrogative clauses is VSO whether negative or affirmative.

(12) Hind ma-grat-š r-riwaya.

Hind NEG-read.3FS.-NEG the-novel

‘Hind did not read the novel.’

(13) ma-grat-š Hind r-riwaya?

NEG.read.3FS-NEG Hind r-riwaya

‘Didn’t Hind read the novel?’

The negation of clauses with future tense interpretation is expressed by the negative morpheme *miš* which is normally placed before the main verb to which the future marker *ḥa-* is prefixed, or the motion particle *rah* as in (14) and (15) respectively.

(14) Zayed miš ḥa-yisafər bukra.

Zayed NEG FUT-travel.3MS tomorrow

‘Zayed will not travel tomorrow.’

(15) Zayed miš raḥ yisafər bukra.

Zayed NEG going FUT-travel.3MS tomorrow

‘Zayed will not travel tomorrow.’

To sum up, verbal sentential negation is realised in Libyan Arabic via both preverbal and post-verbal negative markers: the former involves ‘*ma-*’ occurring as a pro-clitic and the latter ‘*-š*’ as an enclitic on the verb. This is often referred in syntactic theory as discontinuous negation (Zanuttini 1997: 17).

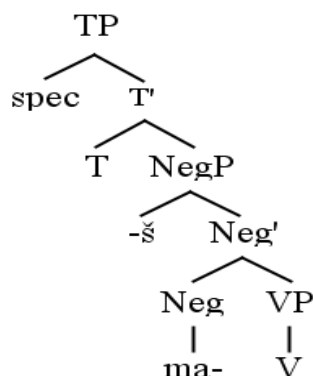
¹ Other modern Arabic dialects such as Moroccan and Egyptian Arabic express sentential negation in the same way (see Benmamoun (2000) for further discussion).

4. Previous Analyses of Negation

This section reviews critically previous analyses used to account for negation in languages where negation is expressed by two negative markers such as French and Moroccan Arabic (MA) in order to determine whether these analyses can be extended to account for the data under study

4.1 '-š' as spec and 'ma-' as head

This analysis is based on Pollock's (1989) analysis of negation in French in which 'ne' heads a NegP and 'pas' is its specifier. It has been adopted to account for some modern Arabic dialects such as MA, which realises negation by 'ma-' and '-š' (Aoun et al. 2010; Mohamed and Ouhalla 1995; Shlonsky 1997). This may be because negation in Arabic dialects is bimorphic in the sense that it resembles that of French in which the verb is surrounded by two negative elements (Shlonsky 1997: 92). Following this analysis, the negative 'ma-' is said to occupy the head of NegP and '-š' the Spec of the negation projection as shown below.



Following Benmamoun (2000: 72), this analysis was extended to account for Moroccan Arabic due to the fact that MA and French share the property of complementary distribution between the second negative and the presence of negative indefinite quantifiers such as 'nobody', 'nothing' ... etc that "must be licensed in the Spec of NegP either overtly or covertly" (Benmamoun 2000: 72).

However, such an analysis proved that it is incapable to account for negation in other Arabic dialects. For instance, there is no complementary distribution between the second negative marker '-š' and indefinite quantifiers in some Arabic dialects such as Egyptian Arabic (EA) (ibid.73) and Libyan Arabic that allow optionality in the distribution of '-š' and indefinite quantifiers as in.

(16) ma-suf-ti- š had. (Egyptian Arabic)

NEG-saw.ls-NEG anyone

'I didn't see anyone.'

(17) ma- šuft-š had. (Libyan Arabic)

NEG-saw.1s-NEG noone

‘I didn’t see anyone.’

Furthermore, the reversed order of the head ‘ma-’ and the Spec ‘-š’ when they cliticise on each other producing the negative ‘miš’ has cast doubts on the efficiency of this analysis (Benmamoun 2000).

4.2 *ma-’ and ‘-š’ as a Complex Head*

Benmamoun (2000, p. 76) argues that ‘ma-’ and ‘-š’ constitute a (dis)continuous complex occupying the head of NegP located between TP and VP. Thus, the verb ‘kteb’ in (18) moves from the VP past the NegP where it merges with ‘ma-’ and ‘-š’ and then this lexical complex moves to T and spelt out as ‘ma-kteb- š’.

(18) Zayed ma-kteb-š r-risaala.

Zayed NEG-wrote.3MS-NEG the-letter

‘Zayed did not write the letter’.

It seems obvious that the merging of the verb with the negative morphemes ‘ma—š’ is necessary for the sentence to be grammatical due to minimality violation. In other words, the head of NegP (i.e. ‘ma-š’) blocks verb movement to T as pointed out by Zanuttini (1997, p. 68). If we assume that the verb moves to T and skips the negative complex ‘ma-š’, the sentence will be ungrammatical as in (19).

(19)*Ali kteb ma—š r-risaala.

Ali wrote.3MS NEG-NEG the-letter

‘Ali did not write the letter.’

Although this analysis seems adequate to account for negation in sentences with past and present tense interpretation, it fails to account for sentences in the future tense. With regard to negation of future tense, let’s recall that negation is mainly realised via the prefix ‘ha-’ as in (20).

(20) Ali mi-š ħa-yi-saafir bukra.

Ali NEG FUT.travel.3MS tomorrow

‘Ali will not travel tomorrow.’

Assuming that the future tense marker (i.e. the prefix ħa-) is base-generated in T, the verb has to move to T to merge with the future tense prefix ‘ħa-’. Since the NegP is said to select a VP in this analysis, the verb is assumed to raise to T through Neg where it picks up ‘miš’ or merges with ‘ma-š’ and then proceeds to T where it merges with the future affix. However, it seems clear from the order of morphemes after spell-out that the verb has to merge with the future tense affix first and then with negation. It is unacceptable to have the verb decomposed

in T in order for the correct morpheme order to be obtained. Moreover, if we assume that the verb moves to T and skips the complex negative ‘ma-š’, the sentence will be ungrammatical as the Head Movement Constraint (HMC) is violated.

It could be assumed that since the future tense prefix cannot be pronounced in isolation, it must move and attach to the verb, lowering onto the verb. This seems to have morphophonological motivations. It also suggests that main verbs do not necessarily undergo movement to T in future tense clauses. However, such an account is contradictory since T-lowering and V-raising are in complementary distribution in the sense that a language has either T-lowering or V-raising but not both (Carnie, 2007, p. 260). In addition, it violates the HMC since the latter “allows a head to be lowered onto the head immediately beneath in the structure” (Radford, 2004, p. 172-3).

4.3 The Proposed Analysis

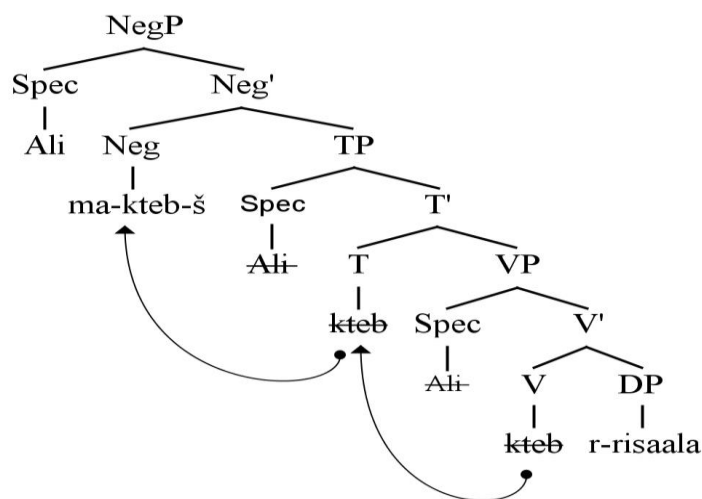
This section attempts to provide a simpler and more adequate and unified analysis for negation in Libyan Arabic. The proposed analysis assumes that ‘ma-’ and ‘-s’ are a (dis)continuous complex negation morpheme (ma-š) heading the NegP that selects a TP. Thus, as argued by Fassi Fehri (1993, p.166), “being heads, they can be attributed the right selectional properties, and their complement is an IP [TP], not a VP”.

Assuming our proposed analysis of ‘ma-š’ as a complex head of the NegP located between the CP and TP, the lexical verb whether in the perfective or in perfective form has to move from V to T which necessitates a verbal host. The verb, then, moves from T to Neg where it merges with ‘ma-š’. The lexical complex is then spelt out as ‘ma-kteb-š’, as in (21). The subject is base-generated in the SpecVP from which it moves to SpecTP and then to SpecNegP, achieving SVO order.

(21) Ali ma- kteb-š r-risaala.

Ali NEG-wrote.3MS -NEG the-letter

‘Ali did not write the letter.’

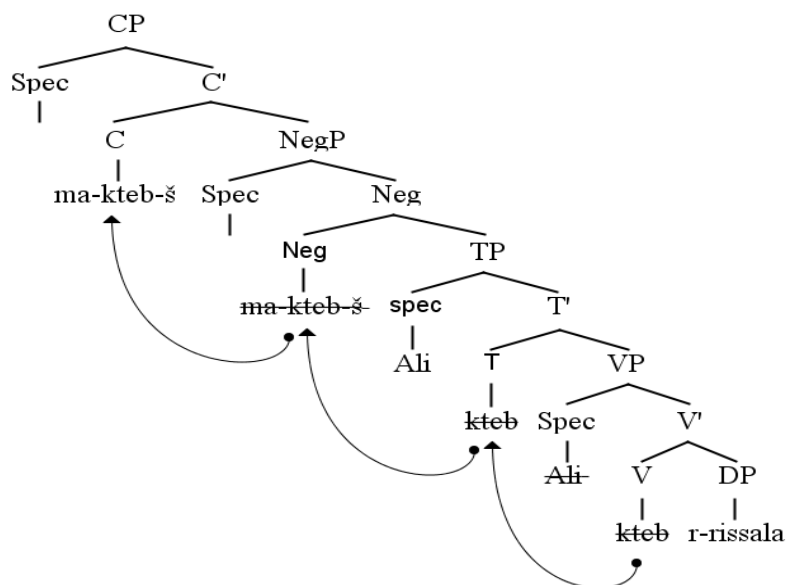


Another case that supports the plausibility of this analysis in which ‘ma-’ and ‘-š’ constitute a discontinuous complex heading the NegP is when ‘ma-’ and/or ‘-š’ merge with a quantifier to derive a negative quantifier as in (22) (Jenlinek 1983; cited in Benmamoun 2000, p. 75). In such a case, adopting the Incorporation Analysis of pronouns in Arabic (Fassi Fehri, 1993, p. 103), the indefinite pronoun ‘hadd’ moves to NegP and incorporates in the governing head: ‘ma-’ or ‘ma-š’.

- (22) ma-hadd-(š) kteb r-risaala
 NEG-someone-(NEG) wrote.3MS the-letter
 ‘Nobody wrote the letter.’

In yes-no questions, the word order is VSO in both affirmative and negative interrogatives. In such instances, it is assumed that the verb moves out of the VP to T where it checks tense and agreement features and then to C. Chomsky (1995) assumes that C is a strong head and has to be filled by an overt appropriate constituent. The C position in main interrogatives is filled by a null question particle (Q) that attracts verbs from T to C to attach with it. Thus, in yes-no negative interrogatives, the verb moves from V to T and then from NegP, where it merges with negation, to C as a final landing-site.

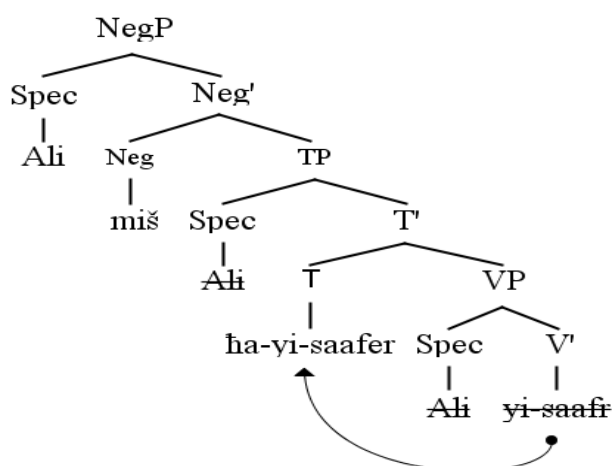
- (23) ma-kteb-š Ali r-risaala?
 NEG-wrote.3MS-NEG Ali the-letter
 ‘Didn’t Ali write the letter?’



As for clauses with future tense interpretation, I argue that the future tense marker ‘ha-’ is base-generated in T and that the main finite verb raises to T and attaches with the future prefix. Thus, the analysis proceeds as follows: the DP subject moves from SpecVP to SpecTP and then to SpecNegP. The verb remains in T. The negative ‘ma-š’, as a discontinuous

complex unit heading the NegP, has to support each other. In other words, since the verb does not merge with the negatives, the latter fuss together into a single morpheme, i.e. ‘miš’ as in (24).

- (24) Ali mi-š ħa-yi-saafer.
 Ali NEG FUT-travel.3MS
 ‘Ali will not travel tomorrow.’



5. Conclusion

The paper provides an overview of the syntax of negation in Libyan Arabic from a generative perspective. The study concludes that the assumption that ‘ma-’ and ‘-š’ constitute a negation morpheme heading the NegP in the left edge of TP seems adequate for accounting for negation in the past, present and future tense clauses. The verb has to move out of the VP to T and then to Neg where it merges with ‘ma-š’ in affirmative clauses. In yes-no interrogative clauses, verb movement is combined with further movement from Neg to C.

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