



## The Arabic Negative Cycle: An Example of Historical Changes in the Arabic Language

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## دورة النفي في العربية: مثالاً على التغيرات التاريخية التي طرأت على اللغة العربية

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### ABSTRACT

This study considers negation in 47 modern Arabic varieties. The types of negation investigated are standard negation and non-verbal negation. The study reveals that negation in Arabic is undergoing a cycle in addition to the Jespersen's Cycle, which has already been identified by several studies. In the first stage of this additional cycle, a single negator is used to negate both verbal and non-verbal clauses. In the second stage, this negator is attached to a personal pronoun to negate non-verbal clauses only. In the third stage, a new single morpheme is coined and generalised to negate any non-verbal clause. In the fourth stage, this new morpheme is used to negate certain types of verbal clauses. In the last stage, verbal and non-verbal clauses return to be negated similarly, and this newly coined morpheme can negate both of them. In the study, this cycle is referred to as the Arabic negative cycle.

### المخلص

لاحظ جيسرسن بدراسته لتاريخ النفي في اللغة الإنجليزية ولغات أخرى ما عُرف فيما بعد بدورة جيسرسن. وهي أن أداة النفي تضعف دلالتها بعد حين (المرحلة الأولى)، فيشُد المتكلمون باللغة أزرها بأداة جديدة (المرحلة الثانية)، تستعمل وحدها فيما بعد أداة نفي بدلا من الأداة الأصلية (المرحلة الثالثة). وُسميت هذه المراحل الثلاث دورة؛ لدورانها. فيرى جيسرسن أن أداة النفي الجديدة تمر بتلك المراحل بعد زمن. وتوالت الدراسات بعد ذلك على تاريخ النفي في عدة لغات لمعرفة مبلغ دقة هذه النظرية. وفيها هنا ما كُتب عن اللغة العربية. فقد رأى عدة باحثين أن النفي في العربية مر بهذه المراحل أيضا. ويأخذ هذا البحث بعين الاعتبار ما يعد عند كثير من اللغويين -لا سيما الغربيين منهم- لغة. وهي أن اللغة ما تواصل به الناس نُطقا، دون الكتابة لأنها مهارة لغوية متقدمة ربما لا يجيدها كل من في المجتمع -كالمؤمنين. وعليه فإن غاية هذا البحث إلى تطبيق منهج علم اللغة التقابلي على اللهجات العربية المعاصرة لتبين حقيقة النفي: هل يتطور ويتغير في العربية مع الزمن باختلاف المكان. إذ اختلاف المكان يعني الاتصال بلغات أخرى، وهذا قد يساعد على تغيير اللغة المنطوقة (انظر مثلا ما أحدثته الفرنسية في عربية بعض أهل المغرب العربي).

### KEYWORDS

الكلمات المفتاحية

Arabic dialects, contrastive linguistics, Arabic negation, historical linguistic, standard negation, synchronic linguistics

اللهجات العربية، النفي في العربية، علم اللغة التقابلي، علم اللغة التاريخي، علم اللغة التزامني، النفي الأساسي

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## 1. Introduction

Negation is universal; every language in the world, with no known exceptions, can express the notion of negation (Dahl, 1979). In logic, negation serves to invert the true value of the proposition in which it occurs. In natural language, it serves a similar function but can operate either at the sentential level or at the level of smaller constituents. In sentential negation, the entire clause is within the scope of negation as in 'John did not come', whereas in constituent negation, only a particular constituent in the clause is negated as in 'John wants milk, not water', where the notion of negation is applied to the word 'water' only.

Sentential negation can be divided further into two different types: standard and non-standard negation. The division is made based on the type of negated clause. If the negated clause is a declarative verbal main clause, 'He did not go to school', the sentential negation is standard; otherwise, it is identified as a non-standard negation, such as the negation of embedded or imperative clauses.

In this paper, two types of negation are considered: standard negation and non-verbal negation. By standard negation, we refer to the negation of Arabic declarative verbal main clauses, and by non-verbal negation, we refer to negating clauses that lack verbal predicates. The verbal clauses are those which contain an overt verb as in the following example from Madinah Arabic (see below):<sup>1</sup>

### Example 1: Madinah Arabic

ʔaḥmad	katab	risālah
Ahmad	write.PRF.3MSG	letter
'Ahmad wrote a letter.'	(Personal knowledge)	

The non-verbal clauses are those which do not contain an overt verb; they are formed by juxtaposing a nominal and its predicate, such as:<sup>2</sup>

### Example 2: Cairene Arabic

tamīm	mudarris
Tameem	teacher
'Tameem is a teacher.'	(Personal knowledge)

As can be seen in the English translation of the above example, non-verbal sentences in Arabic are copular clauses in the present tense. Copular verbs in Arabic are omitted in the present and appear if the clause is changed to the past or future tense. The following corresponds to the above example. Note that the Arabic copular verb *kāna* or 'be' is used as this clause occurs in the past tense.

### Example 3: Cairene Arabic

Tamīm	kāna	mudarris
Tameem	be.PRF.3MSG	teacher
'Tameem was a teacher.'	(Personal knowledge)	

It is important to stress that clauses, such as example (3), are not considered to be non-verbal as they contain an overt verb, namely

<sup>1</sup> Shortly, we will explain what we mean by Madinah Arabic.

<sup>2</sup> They are also called verbless or nominal sentences.

*kāna*, in this case. Verbal clauses, even if the verb is the copular *kān*, are negated by a different strategy. Moreover, the focus of this paper will be on direct negation.

It is also important to note that, for the purposes of this study, Arabic varieties are divided into two categories: *š*-varieties and non-*š*-varieties. *š*-varieties are those which use *-š* as a negative morpheme, or at least as part of it, in standard negation, and non-*š*-varieties are those which do not.

## 2. Literature Review

In several studies, attempts to compare negation in a few Arabic varieties have been made (Diem, 2014; Hoyt, 2005; Lucas, 2009; Wilmsen, 2014). However, this paper differs from all of these works in an important respect. In these studies, only a relatively small number of Arabic varieties are discussed. For instance, Hoyt (2005) only considers the similarities and differences in standard negation between Moroccan and Palestinian Arabic. Diem (2014) also discusses the same aspects but between Cairene and Moroccan. That is simply because, unlike this paper, a systematic comparison between most, if not all, modern Arabic varieties has not been the focus of any of the previous works.

The history of negation in Arabic has also been discussed in several works (Diem, 2014; Lucas, 2009; Wilmsen, 2014). Several studies have shown that Arabic has gone through what has been known since Dahl (1979) as Jespersen's Cycle (Diem, 2014; Lucas, 2009). In his study of negation in various Indo-European languages, Jespersen notes that:

*The history of negative expressions in various languages makes us witness the following curious fluctuation: the original negative adverb is first weakened, then found insufficient and therefore strengthened, generally through some additional word, and this in its turn may be felt as the negative proper and may then in course of time be subject to the same development as the original word* (Jespersen, 1917: 4).

The cycle can be summarised by the following three stages: in stage I, negation is expressed by a pre-verbal negative marker that weakens over time; in stage II, the original negator is supported by another morpheme placed post-verbally in order to strengthen the notion of negation; and in stage III, the original negator is omitted, and negation is achieved through the use of the new morpheme only, which will presumably go through the same cycle again. This cycle can be observed in Arabic (Diem, 2014; Lucas, 2009):<sup>3</sup>

### Example 1: Arabic

- a. Standard Arabic  
 wa-mā                      ʕallam-nā-hu                      š-šifra  
 and-NEG                      teach.PRF-1PL-3MSG                      DEF-poetry  
 'We did not teach him poetry.'                      (Qur'an 36: 69)
- b. Palestinian Arabic  
 (ana)                      mā-akalt'-š                      il-fūl  
 I                      NEG-eat.PRF.1SG-NEG                      DEF-fava beans  
 'I did not eat fava beans.'                      (Lucas, 2010: 173)
- c. Palestinian Arabic  
 (ana)                      baḥibb'-š                      il-fūl  
 I                      like.impf.1sg-neg                      def-fava beans  
 'I do not like fava beans.'                      (Lucas, 2010: 173)

Although the development of negation in Palestinian Arabic presents

a good example of Jespersen's Cycle in the way Dahl (1979) explains it (pre-verbal > bipartite > post-verbal), the development in Cairene Arabic may be 'more cyclic in the strict sense of the word because negation in Cairene Arabic is not only undergoing the third of three stages consisting of one particle > two particles > one particle but will also potentially end with exactly the same pre-verbal position that it had when the development started: 1. *ma verb*. 2. *ma-verb-š*. 3. *miš verb*.' (Diem, 2014: 99–100). An example of negation with *miš* placed pre-verbally in Cairene Arabic can be seen in the following clause:

### Example 2: Cairene Arabic

di	miš	ʕamalit	hāga
DEM.FSG	neg	do.prf.3fsg	thing
'She has not done anything.'			

(Diem, 2014: 96)

An alternative analysis is offered by Wilmsen (2014). In this vein, Wilmsen argues that it is the morpheme *šay?* 'thing' that is derived from *...-š*, not vice versa. That is, 'grammatical *š* was always grammatical; the substan- tive *šay?* is a later development. Its original function as an existential particle, itself derived from a Proto-Semitic presentative/demonstrative/3rd person pronoun, remains within the language, giving rise to its other functions' (Wilmsen, 2014: 209). Consequently, according to Wilmsen, the development in Arabic negation should not be explained by Jespersen's Cycle but by the one proposed by Croft. In his study, Croft found that languages negate existential clauses according to three different strategies:

- Type (A): In the same way, they form standard negation.
- Type (B): By using a specific negative existential item.
- Type (C): By the use of a specific negative existential item that is identical to the ordinary verbal negator. In other words, the negator used in standard negation also functions as a negative existential item.

Eastern Libyan Arabic (Example 3) is an example of type (A), as the same negator *mā...-š* is used in standard negation as in (a) and to negate existential clauses, compare (b) and (c).

### Example 3: Eastern Libyan Arabic

- a. ma                      šifna-k-š  
 NEG                      see.prf.1pl-2msg-neg  
 'We did not see you.'                      (Owens, 1984: 157)
- b. fiḥ                      šubāya  
 EX                      woman.pl  
 'There are women.'                      (Owens, 1984: 97)
- c. ma                      fi-š                      sayyāra                      inrīd-ha                      yādi  
 NEG EX-NEG                      car                      want.prf.1sg-3fsg                      there  
 'There is no car which I want there.'                      (Owens, 1984: 97)

Turkish (Example 4), on the other hand, is a language of type (B) because here there is a special negative existential item *yok* (c), which is different from the negative verbal marker *-me* (a) and the positive existential item *var* (b).

### Example 4: Turkish (Turkic)

- a. gel-me-yecek  
 come-NEG-FUT  
 '(S) he WILL not come.'
- b. su                      var  
 water                      EX  
 'There is water'
- c. su                      yok

imperfect verbs only. *zin* and *mā* can be used with both perfect and imperfect verbs. *laysa* in Standard Arabic is mostly used with non-verbal clauses, but it can also be used rarely to negate imperfect clauses only.

<sup>3</sup> In Standard Arabic, standard negation can be expressed by ten different morphemes: *lam*, *lammā*, *lan*, *lā*, *zin*, *mā*, *lām ul- dʕuḥūd*, *lāta*, *ḡayranā laysa*. *lam* and *lammā* can only be used to negate perfect aspect, but the use of *lammā* implies that the negated proposition is expected to occur in the future. *lan* can be only used to negate future clauses. *lā* is typically used with

water EX.NEG  
 'There is no water.' (Schaaik, 1996: 22–25)

Finally, Tongan (Example 5) is an example of type (C); it has a special negative existential item (c) that is identical to the ordinary negator (a):

**Example 5: Tongan (Malayo-Polynesian, Austronesian)**

- a. na'e 'ikai ke kata 'a pita  
 PST NEG SUB laugh ABS Pita  
 'Pita did not laugh.'
- b. 'oku 'i ai ha me 'a  
 pres LOC EX NSP thing  
 'There is something/someone.'
- c. 'oku 'ikai ha me 'a  
 pres EX.NEG NSP thing  
 'There is not anything.' (Veselinova, 2014: 1342)

Wilmsen (2014, 2015) suggests that the aforementioned cycle can be observed in Arabic. That is, the verbal negator in most Arabic varieties is the marker *ma*, which may negate existential clauses, as in Omani Arabic (type A):

**Example 6: Omani Arabic (Semitic, Afro-Asiatic)**

- a. lō šē šaḥḥa al-ḥamdu li-llāh  
 if EX health DEF-praise to-God  
 'If there is health, thank God.'
- b. mā šē ḥmīr maḥ-nā  
 neg EX donkeys with-us  
 'There are no donkeys with us.' (Wilmsen, 2015: 1)

Wilmsen suggests that evidence of Type B can be found in Arabic in the shape of *miš*, which he argues functions as a negative existential, and whose form is a result of a contraction or a fusion of the verbal negator *ma* and the positive existential *šē*. However, several studies have argued against Wilmsen's proposal and favoured the commonly held analysis based on Jespersen's Cycle. In addition, the synchronic point of view of this study shows that what Wilmsen considers to be a result of a contraction or a fusion of the verbal negator *ma* and the positive existential *šē* (*miš*) seems, in fact, to be the result of an attachment between the verbal negator *ma* and a personal pronoun. In this vein, *miš* and similar items found among *š*-varieties, such as *muš*, are probably a contraction of the NEG+PRO construction *ma-hu-š* 'he is not'. As we will see, this construction is parallel to the one found among the non-*š*-varieties. In these varieties, *mū* corresponds to *miš* (or *muš*) in the *š*-varieties and is also formed from the similar NEG+PRO construction, *ma-hu* 'he is not'. In the following section, we will explain where the data used in this study originated from. Then, we will discuss the results of this study.

### 3. Data Collection

#### 3.1. Published Sources:

The data in the study were collected from published sources, except for negation in Saudi Arabia, where fieldwork was conducted, a point which I will return to below. I attempted to include every source available that held sufficient information on negation. Mainly, the considered sources are either English or Arabic sources. However, the sample also includes several sources in other languages, such as those from Reinhardt (1894) and Seeger (1996).

The 47 considered Arabic varieties are listed with their sources below

<sup>4</sup> This name refers to a dialect, not a country. That is, this dialect is spoken across a few areas: Mauritania, Western Sahara and part of Algeria.

<sup>5</sup> I am a native speaker of this dialect.

in Table 1. In this table, varieties are represented by countries, and these countries are organised alphabetically, except for Ḥassāniyya.<sup>4</sup> This representation is used only for the sake of simplification and to give an approximate impression of where each variety may be found. Generally speaking, I attempted to name every variety after the place where it is spoken. In certain cases, however, a different name is proposed, as the variety might be spoken by a specific group of people or in more than one place within the same region, as in the case of Sinai. In this region, Arabic varieties are mostly named after the people who speak it. For example, Smēṇī and ṢĠēlī Arabic is the variety of Smēṇī and ṢĠēlī tribes.

**Table 1: List of varieties and their sources**

Country	No.	Arabic variety	Sources
Algeria		Annaba Arabic	(Meftouh et al., 2012)
		Dellys Arabic	(Souag, 2005)
Chad		Largeau Arabic	(Abu Absi, 1966)
		al-Ṣaris Arabic	(de Jong, 2000)
Egypt		Egyptian Western Desert Arabic	(Matar, 1981)
		Cairene Arabic	(Diem, 2014; Gary and Gamal-Eldin, 1982)
		Northwestern Sinai Arabic	(de Jong, 2000)
		Ṣāḫīdi Arabic	(Khalafallah, 1969)
		Smēṇī and ṢĠēlī Arabic	(de Jong, 2000)
Ḥassāniyya Region		Ḥassāniyya Arabic	(Francis, 1979; Heath, 2004)
		Malian Ḥassāniyya Arabic	(Heath, 2004)
Iraq		Christian Baghdadi Arabic	(Abu-Haidar, 1991)
		Muslim Baghdadi Arabic	(Al-Khalesi, 2006)
		Sirqāt (Assur) Arabic	(Salonen, 1980)
Jordan		al-Karak Arabic	(Alsarayreh, 2012)
		Northern Jordanian Arabic	(Ḥaija, 1985)
		as-Salt Arabic	(Herin, 2011)
Kuwait		Kuwaiti Arabic	(Alsaleem, 2012)
Lebanon		Aley Arabic	(Bishr, 1956)
Libya		Baskinta Arabic	(Abu-Haidar, 1979)
		Eastern Libyan Arabic	(Owens, 1984)
Malta		Western Libyan Arabic	(Krer, 2013)
		Standard Maltese	(Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander, 1997; Lucas, 2009)
Morocco		Moroccan Arabic	(Chatar-Moummi, 2012; Hoyt, 2005; Lucas, 2009)
		Eastern Nigeria Arabic	(Owens, 1993)
Nigeria		Western Nigeria Arabic	(Owens, 1993)
Oman		Coastal Dhofārī Arabic	(Davey, 2013)
Palestine		Palestinian Arabic	(Hoyt, 2005; Lucas, 2009, 2010; Rosenhouse, 2011; Seeger, 1996)
		al-Bāḥa Arabic	Fieldwork
Saudi Arabia		al-Ṭāḥāṭ Arabic	Fieldwork
		Ḥagīl Arabic	Fieldwork
		Madinah Arabic	Personal knowledge <sup>5</sup>
		Urban Hijazi Arabic	(Siény, 1978)
		Yanbuʿ Arabic	Fieldwork
		Ṭāḥā Arabic	(Al-Azraqi, 1998)
Sudan		ṢUnayzah Arabic	Fieldwork
Sudan		Sudanese Arabic	(Bergman, 2002)
Syria		Damascus Arabic	(Cowell, 2005)
The United Arab Emirates		Abu Dhabi Arabic	(Qalishah, 1977)
		Dubai Arabic	(Hofiz, 1995)
Tunisia		Sahel/Tunis Arabic <sup>6</sup>	(Halila, 1992)
		Sousse Arabic	(Talmoudi, 1980)
Yemen		Adeni Arabic	(Ahmed, 2012)
		Ḥadhrami Arabic	(Ahmed, 2012)
		Ṣāna a Arabic	(Watson, 1993)
		Taiz Arabic	(Ahmed, 2012)
		Zingībār Arabic	(Ahmed, 2012)

Finally, I reproduce every example faithfully from its original source, but the gloss and the transcription symbols are changed where necessary for the sake of consistency.

In the following sub-section, we turn to the fieldwork point mentioned above. We will attempt to answer three questions under this point: where the fieldwork was conducted, why this area was chosen and which techniques were used to collect the data.

#### 3.2. Fieldwork:

According to the General Authority for Statistics in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia is a relatively large country, approximately 2,000,000 km<sup>2</sup>. In this area, many forms of Arabic can be found. However, we do not have a great deal of information about the Arabic dialectological situation, especially regarding negation in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, fieldwork was conducted in this area during several trips in 2017 and 2018. During these trips, five areas were visited: north, south,

<sup>6</sup> The name Sahel/Tunis Arabic is proposed because this is a mixed variety. As Halila puts, 'the data used in this dissertation is drawn primarily from the dialect of the author, a mixed dialect between that of the general area of the central coastal region known as the Sahel and the dialect of the city of Tunis' (Halila, 1992: 27–28).

east, west and the centre of Saudi Arabia. In each area, only one city was considered. However, big cities were avoided because of the problem of *koineisation* whereby a new dialect of a language may arise due to the mix of many other dialects. In contrast, extremely isolated settlements would be ideal, but these were difficult to find or hard to reach. A good compromise, then, seemed to be medium-sized cities where there is little inward migration from other parts of the country; thus, speakers in these places are not expected to be strongly influenced by other varieties of the region. In this vein, the following cities have been chosen: Ḥagil in the north, al-Bāḥa in the south, al-ʿAḥsāʾ in the east, Yanbuʿ in the west and ʿUnayzah in the centre (see Map 1 below).



The total number of participants was approximately 70. All of them were males over 18 years old. That is, it is culturally inappropriate for a woman to sit with a male stranger and discuss anything except in extraordinary circumstances. It might be possible, though, to collect data from female subjects accompanied by male chaperones, or by recruiting female assistants to collect data. However, since it is not anticipated that there will be major differences between males and females in the use of the negative structures investigated here, it is judged preferable to collect more data in less time from a narrower range of subjects (males only), than less data in more time from a wider range of subjects (both males and females).

Data was collected in the fieldwork by two main direct methods as well as informal observations. First, a recording session was held once in each city where at least three participants were asked to discuss neutral topics, such as the different cultural traditions in Saudi Arabia, whether smartphones have a positive or negative impact on our lives, whether education is essential to be successful in life, and so on. Each session took about 30 minutes. This method was used not only to record as much natural speech as possible but also to allow for the discovery of any unanticipated local particularities in the expression of negation in the variety under investigation.

The second method involved a questionnaire. In each city, at least ten speakers were asked to fill out a questionnaire. This was to ensure the needed information regarding negation was captured.

In the third part, informants were given some negative Arabic sentences, and they were asked to reproduce them in their local variety. In this part, participants were almost fully aware of the main purpose of the study (negation). Yet, this was important as it operated as a backup plan. If the necessary information about the different types of negative constructions was not obtained in the first or the second method, it was always obtained in the third.

In the following section, I discuss the results of this study and explain how negation in Arabic might be undergoing a cycle other than the one

proposed by Jespersen.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1. Jespersen's Cycle:

As mentioned above, modern Arabic varieties can be divided into two main categories: *š*-varieties and non-*š*-varieties. *š*-varieties are those which use *-š* as a negative morpheme, or at least as part of it, in standard negation, and non-*š*-varieties are those that do not. Also, as we have seen above, the use of *-š* negatively is a result of being affected by Jespersen's Cycle. However, it seems important to note here that the result of being affected by Jespersen's Cycle does not always mean the variety underwent an internal change; it could be due to being in contact with other *š*-varieties.

With this in mind, let us now recall Diem's suggestion above, on the position of Cairene Arabic in the cycle. According to Diem, negation in Palestinian Arabic is a good example of Jespersen's Cycle as explained by Dahl (1979) (pre-verbal > bipartite > post-verbal), whereas negation in Cairene Arabic may be 'more cyclic in the strict sense of the word....' (Diem, 2014: 99–100). That is, in Cairene Arabic, the cycle results in a new negator, *miš*, which is used pre-verbally. According to Diem, stage II in the cycle can go in two directions: strictly pre-verbal negation or strictly post-verbal negation. However, in some varieties, such as Palestinian Arabic, we can find both: the post-verbal negation and the pre-verbal *miš*. Therefore, the pre-verbal negation (*miš*) could be considered as a further development in Palestinian Arabic. For now, let us call it stage IV. In other words, the cycle would be pre-verbal > bipartite > post-verbal > pre-verbal. In this sense, the negator in stage I would be the pre-verbal *mā*; in stage II, the bipartite *mā...-š* in stage III, the post-verbal *...-š*; and finally, in stage IV, the pre-verbal *miš*. Note that the negators in stage I and stage IV are different, but their position is the same (pre-verbal). In stage I, the negator is the original Arabic negator *mā*, but in stage IV, it is *miš*.<sup>7</sup> In this paper, however, we adopt a different analysis from the one proposed by Diem to explain the use of *miš*, but let us first explore which Arabic varieties use it.

In Table 2, all of the Arabic varieties in which stage IV appears to have been reached are listed. As mentioned above, the phonological shape of the negator used in stage IV differs from one variety to another; thus, the negator used in each variety is given as well as the type of clauses this negator can operate with. However, the available data for Northern Jordanian Arabic shows the use of *miš* with future clauses only but not with progressive aspect clauses. In contrast, the available data for Aley Arabic and Baskinta Arabic shows the use of the same negator with progressive aspect clauses but not with future clauses. However, these three varieties are spoken in relatively adjacent areas, and their negative patterns seem to be similar. Thus, it is assumed that the progressive aspect and future clauses in these three varieties are negated by *miš*, even though there is no available data to show the use of *miš* with progressive aspect clauses in Northern Jordanian Arabic nor is there available data to show the use of this negator with future clauses in Aley Arabic and Baskinta Arabic.

Table 2: Stage IV varieties

No.	Arabic variety	Stage IV negator	Type of negated clause
1	Zingibār Arabic	<i>miš</i> (or <i>miš</i> and <i>māš</i> )	The only morpheme to negate for all types of clauses
2	al-ʿArīs Arabic	<i>miš</i>	Negates future clauses only
3	Cairene Arabic	<i>miš</i>	Always negates future clauses and optionally may be used instead of <i>mā...-š</i> to negate non-future clauses
4	Northern Jordanian Arabic	<i>miš</i>	Negates future and progressive clauses only
5	Aley Arabic	<i>miš</i>	Negates future and progressive clauses only
6	Baskinta Arabic	<i>miš</i>	Negates future and progressive clauses only
7	Western Libyan Arabic	<i>miš</i>	Negates future clauses only
8	Standard Maltese	<i>mħux</i>	Negates future clauses only
9	Palestinian Arabic	<i>muš</i>	Negates future and progressive clauses only
10	Sahel/Tunis Arabic	<i>miš</i>	Negates future and progressive clauses only

<sup>7</sup> As will be explained shortly, the phonological shape of this *miš* could be different depending on the variety.

In this table, the stage IV negator seems to be able to negate all types of clauses in Zinjibar Arabic and in Cairene Arabic only. However, while in Zinjibar Arabic, this negator is the only one used for all types of clauses. In Cairene Arabic, it is used beside *ma...-š*. In the latter, future clauses are only negated by this stage IV negator, whereas other types of clauses can be negated either by this negator or by *ma...-š*. Accordingly, Cairene Arabic may not have reached stage IV completely, whereas Zinjibar Arabic has. This means Zinjibar Arabic is more advanced than Cairene Arabic. In fact, it is more advanced than any documented Arabic variety in this regard. Among the other stage IV varieties, the negator in question is not even used with every clause, only with future or progressive aspect clauses.

In the following sub-section, we explain the cycle we meant to address in this paper.

**4.2. The Negative Arabic Cycle:**

The previous analysis is one way of approaching the use of *miš*. Another way, which could be more accurate, is to view what has been called a stage IV negator as a result of separate development in negation. To explain this, consider the following non-verbal clauses from Yanbuŕ Arabic, where Jespersen’s Cycle is not observed, and from Sahel/Tunis Arabic,<sup>8</sup> where the cycle is observed:

**Example 1: Yanbuŕ Arabic**

mā-hu	đaki	
NEG.3MSG	smart.MSG	
‘He is not smart.’		(Fieldwork data)

**Example 2: Sahel/Tunis Arabic**

nawāl	ma-hyā-š	firhāna
Nawal	neg-she-neg	happy
‘Nawal is not happy.’		(Halila, 1992: 42)

As shown by the previous example, non-verbal negation in these two varieties is expressed by attaching the verbal negator to the relevant personal pronoun. In Yanbuŕ Arabic, the verbal negator is *mā*, and the relevant personal pronoun is the third-person singular masculine pronoun (*hu*) as the subject of this clause is masculine and third-person singular. In Sahel/Tunis Arabic, the verbal negator is *mā...-š*, and the relevant personal pronoun in this clause is *hyā*, as it is feminine and in the third-person singular.

This is one way to express non-verbal negation in these two varieties. Another way is to coin a single morpheme and use it to negate any non-verbal clause. This morpheme is usually coined by fusing the third-person singular masculine pronoun (*hu* or ‘he’) with the verbal negator in the variety in question. However, as can be expected, the morpheme that results from this fusion differs considerably depending on whether the variety undergoes Jespersen’s Cycle. In Yanbuŕ Arabic, for example, Jespersen’s Cycle was not observed; thus, when the verbal negator *mā* is fused with *hu* or ‘he’, the result is *mū* or *mu*. On the other hand, in Sahel/Tunis Arabic, Jespersen’s Cycle is observed; thus, when the verbal negator *mā...-š* is fused with *hu*, the result is *miš*. Both cases are exemplified below:

**Example 3: Yanbuŕ Arabic**

MU	đaki	
NEG	smart.msg	
‘He is not smart.’		(Fieldwork data)

**Example 4: Sahel/Tunis Arabic**

nawāl	miš	firhāna
Nawal	NEG	happy
‘Nawal is not happy.’		(Halila, 1992: 42)

The same fusion occurs in many Arabic varieties. The morpheme resulting from this fusion spreads into standard negation. Damascus Arabic, shown below, is an example of a variety in which Jespersen’s Cycle is not observed; hence, the newly coined morpheme is *mū*, which can negate future or progressive aspect clauses. In contrast, Northern Jordanian Arabic is a variety in which Jespersen’s Cycle has occurred; therefore, the coined morpheme is *miš*, which can also negate future clauses. In the following, the use of this new morpheme in each variety is exemplified, once with a non-verbal clause and once with a verbal one.

**Example 5: Damascus Arabic**

a. hal	ħaki	hāda	mū	ħəlu
that	talk	this	NEG	nice
‘That (kind of) talk is not nice.’				(Cowell, 2005: 386)
b. mū		ħam-yəštəy		halla?
NEG		prg-work.impf.3msg		now
‘He is not working now.’				(Cowell, 2005: 387)

**Example 6: Northern Jordanian Arabic**

a. ʔana	miš	ħaddām-ak	
I	NEG	servant-your	
‘I am not your servant.’			
b. miš	ħa-yisāfir		
NEG	fut-travel.impf.3msg		
‘He will not make the journey.’			
			(Haija, 1985: 10)

The extension of the use of this new morpheme into standard negation may start with future or progressive aspect clauses. In other words, when this new morpheme is used in standard negation, it is probably first used to negate future or progressive aspect clauses. To explain this, let us first recall the stage IV varieties in Table 2, where this new morpheme is found. From this table, we see that in 8 out of these 10 stage IV varieties, the new morpheme is only used with future or progressive aspect clauses.<sup>9</sup> In Zinjibar Arabic and Cairene Arabic, the new morpheme can negate any type of clause. However, in Zinjibar Arabic, this new negator is the only one used, but, in Cairene Arabic, it is the only one with the capability to negate future clauses while other types of clauses can be negated by either this new morpheme or by *ma...-š*. Therefore, because of the tendency in the use of this new morpheme in negating future and progressive clauses in 8 out of the 10 varieties, it is assumed that this morpheme tends to be used with such clauses first. And because of the case in Cairene Arabic in which future clauses are only negated by this morpheme, whereas other clauses are possibly negated in the same way, it is assumed that this morpheme is gradually generalised in standard negation. Finally, because this new morpheme is used to negate all types of clauses in Zinjibar Arabic, it is assumed that the generalisation of the use of this morpheme in standard negation is a direction that modern Arabic varieties are potentially moving towards. Note that this analysis is only based on ten varieties, and the varieties we use to consider the above as varieties of stage IV in Jespersen’s Cycle Table 2). However, if we consider other varieties where Jespersen’s Cycle is not observed, we find the same tendency of using the new negative morpheme with future or progressive clauses exclusively. In Damascus Arabic, for example, the new morpheme resulting from the fusion of the personal pronoun and the verbal negator is *mū*. This morpheme is used with non-verbal clauses in Damascus, for example:

**Example 7: Damascus Arabic**

hal	ħaki	hāda	mū	ħəlu
that	talk	this	NEG	nice

<sup>8</sup> See footnote No. 6 for why this variety is called Sahel/Tunis Arabic.

<sup>9</sup> These eight varieties are al-ʔArīš Arabic, Northern Jordanian Arabic, Aley Arabic, Baskinta Arabic, Western Libyan Arabic, Standard Maltese, Palestinian Arabic and Sahel/Tunis Arabic.



No.	Region	Arabic variety	The reached stage
		Egyptian western desert Arabic	Stage II
		Cairene Arabic	Stage V
		al-ʿAris Arabic	Stage IV
	Sudanic	Eastern Nigeria Arabic	Stage III
		Western Nigeria Arabic	Stage III
		Sudanese Arabic	Stage I
	Levantine	Largeau Arabic	Stage I
		al-Karak Arabic	Stage II
		Damascus Arabic	Stage IV
		Northern Jordanian Arabic	Stage III
		as-Salt Arabic	Stage II
		ʿAley Arabic	Stage IV
		Baskinta Arabic	Stage IV
	Mesopotamian	Palestinian Arabic	Stage IV
		Christian Baghdadi Arabic	Stage III
		Muslim Baghdadi Arabic	Stage III
	Arabian Peninsula	Sirqāt (Assur) Arabic	Stage III
		Kuwaiti Arabic	Stage III
		Coastal Dhofari Arabic	Stage II
		al-Bāha Arabic	Stage II
		al-ʿAḥṣāʾ Arabic	Stage III
		Haḡil Arabic	Stage III
		Madinah Arabic	Stage III
		Urban Hijazi Arabic	Stage II
		Yanbuʿ Arabic	Stage III
		ʿAbha Arabic	Stage I
		ʿUnayzah Arabic	Stage III
		Abu Dhabi Arabic	Stage III
		Dubai Arabic	Stage III
	Yemeni	Hadhrami Arabic	Stage II
		Zinḡibār Arabic	Stage V
		Adeni Arabic	Stage III
		Taiz Arabic	Stage II
		Sānāʾa Arabic	Stage III

In the table, the geographical place of a variety does not seem to have an influence on the progress of that variety in the cycle. As can be seen, three Arabic varieties are in stage I, as their verbal and non-verbal clauses are negated by *mā*. Sudanese Arabic is an example of this, as well as ʿAbha Arabic, shown below:

**Example 11: ʿAbha Arabic**

- a. mā tiʿrif ḥatta tuslug bēḡah  
 NEG know.IMP.F.3MSG even boil.IMP.F.3MSG egg  
 ‘She does not even know how to boil an egg.’  
 (Al-Azraqi, 1998: 123)
- b. mā l-ʿurfa-k l-ik l-ḡal-ik  
 NEG DEF-room-you for-you DEF-alone-you  
 ‘The room is not for you alone.’ (Al-Azraqi, 1998: 140)

In the table also, seven of the modern Arabic varieties are in stage II. That is, non-verbal negation in these varieties is rendered by adding the verbal negator to a personal pronoun that agrees with the subject of the non-verbal clause. Consider the following and note that the verbal negator that is attached to the personal pronoun in the first example is *mā* and, in the second one, is *mā...-š*:

**Example 12: Urban Hijazi Arabic**

HADA AL-BĀB MA-HU XAŠAB  
 THIS DEF-DOOR NEG-3MSG WOOD  
 ‘This door is not made from wood’ (Lit. ‘This door is not wood.’)  
 (Sieny, 1978: 168)

**Example 13: Taiz Arabic**

ma-na-š RĀYIH AL-YŪM  
 NEG-1SG-NEG GO.PTCP DEF-TODAY  
 ‘I am not going today.’ (Ahmed, 2012: 61)

The table also shows that most of the varieties are in stage III; 24 of them are in this stage, where a newly coined morpheme (*mū~miš*) is generalised in non-verbal negation. This number is based on the available data; however, as explained above, even when there is no available data to show the use of a *mū~miš* morpheme in a variety, it can be expected that this morpheme exists, though perhaps rarely used, in that variety. Thus, the number of varieties in this stage (III) is likely more than 24. In any case, this morpheme is mostly, but not always, *mū* among the non-š-varieties and *miš* among the š-varieties. Both are exemplified below:

**Example 14: Muslim Baghdadi Arabic**

INTA MŪ ʿIRĀQI  
 YOU.MSG NEG Iraqi  
 ‘You are not an Iraqi.’ (Al-Khalesi, 2006: 36)

**Example 15: Aley Arabic**

bayy-u miš ḡakīm  
 father-his NEG doctor  
 ‘His father is not a doctor.’ (Bishr, 1956: 39)

From the table, 11 varieties are at stage IV in which the *mū~miš* negator can negate future and progressive aspect clauses, as in the following:

**Example 16: Damascus Arabic**

mū ʿam-yəštyəi hallaʿ<sup>?</sup>  
 NEG prg-work.IMP.F.3MSG now  
 ‘He is not working now.’ (Cowell, 2005: 387)

**Example 17: Standard Maltese**

Mhux se jmur id-dar  
 NEG FUT go.IMP.F.3MSG DEF-home  
 ‘He is not going to go home.’ (Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander, 1997: 88)

Only two varieties, according to the table, are in stage V (Cairene Arabic and Zinḡibār Arabic). This is because the *mū~miš* morpheme in both varieties can occur in standard negation (main declarative verbal clauses) with non-future as well as non-progressive clauses, for example:

**Example 18: Cairene Arabic**

miš biyḡibb il-ḡaflāt  
 NEG like.IMP.F.3MSG DEF-party.PL  
 ‘He does not like parties.’ (Gary and Gamal-Eldin, 1982: 39)

**Example 19: Zinḡibār Arabic**

miš idina-hum as-siyārah ḡaqqā-na  
 NEG give.PRF.1PL -them DEF-car POSS-our  
 ‘We did not give them our car.’ (Ahmed, 2012: 34)

It should be pointed out that previously, we claimed that the viewing of Jespersen’s Cycle as four, rather than three, stages would be problematic. That is, the four-stages approach would entail considering the third stage as a stage that has been skipped in many Arabic varieties. This skipping, however, can be found here. Ḥassāniyya Arabic and Malian Ḥassāniyya Arabic are classified as stage IV in the Arabic negative cycle. This means the *mū~miš* morpheme is used to negate future clauses. However, in these two varieties, there is no available data that indicates the existence of a *mū~miš* morpheme, and future clauses are negated here by the NEG+PRO construction, for instance:

**Example 20: Ḥassāniyya Arabic**

mā-ni lahi nimši  
 NEG-me FUT go.IMP.F.1SG  
 ‘I will not go.’ (Francis, 1979: 99)

This means that stage III in these varieties has been skipped where the *mū~miš* is coined and generalised in non-verbal negation. However, if we adopt the approach where Jespersen’s Cycle is considered to be four stages, we find that the third stage of Jespersen’s Cycle has been skipped in 6 out of the 10 considered varieties in Table. In contrast, if we adopt the Arabic negative cycle advocated here, the skipping of a stage is found in only 2 varieties out of 47, meaning this approach seems to capture this situation much more neatly. Another point that

favours the adoption of the Arabic negative cycle over the four-stage analysis of Jespersen's Cycle is that the latter would only explain the use of the newly coined morpheme (*miš* or *muš*) in the *š*-varieties though not the use of the similar morpheme (*mū* or *mu*) in the non-*š*-varieties. The Arabic negative cycle approach, thus, applies to more data, and captures it more neatly, than the four-stage Jespersen's Cycle approach.

## 5. Conclusion

In this study, standard negation and non-verbal negation are considered in 47 modern Arabic varieties. The study reveals that negation in Arabic is undergoing a cycle other than the one proposed by Jespersen (1917) and identified by several studies (Lucas, 2009; Diem, 2014). In this Arabic negative cycle, negation goes through five different stages in which verbal negation (standard negation) and non-verbal negation start from being similarly expressed by the same morpheme and return to being also similarly expressed though by a morpheme that is different from the one they had begun with. The change occurs first in non-verbal negation in which this type of negation would first entail an attachment of a personal pronoun to the verbal negator. The personal pronoun here must agree with the subject of the negated non-verbal clause in number, person and gender. Then, a new morpheme is coined, containing a frozen form of the 3MSG pronoun, and used to negate any non-verbal clause regardless of the type of the subject in that clause. This newly coined morpheme will, in turn, be used initially in standard negation with future and progressive clauses only, and finally, generalised to negate any verbal clause.

In this study, we have seen that negation in Arabic is undergoing a unique cycle that may not be observed elsewhere. We know to be certain that languages evolve over time, and typological or contrastive studies could be an effective way to investigate their evolution. The evolution could be a cross-linguistic tendency among many human languages, or an individual aspect found only in a specific group of languages or language varieties. Future research could also be conducted in the same vein of this study. For example, other aspects, such as the phonological variations in phonemic consonants in all the modern varieties of Arabic, could be studied from a contrastive point of view.

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