Verbal Negation in the Lebanese Dialect of Zeitoun, Keserwan

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Introduction

1 The data presented here are part of a larger study of the negation patterns of the Maronite Christian community in the village of Zeitoun, Keserwan, Mount Lebanon (Figure 1), specifically involving variation in negation with the post-positive negative marker -š.

Village of Zeitoun

2 Christians have been settling in Mount Lebanon since at the latest the middle of the 7th century A.D (Harris 2012). By the 11th century, other religious minority communities had settled in the mountains of Lebanon, including Shiites. Starting about 1545, Ottoman administrations encouraged Maronites from the northern regions of Mount Lebanon to settle in the villages of Keserwan as a counterbalance to the turbulent Shiite element in the region (Salibi 1988: 14). Present day Zeitoun continues to host Shiite and Maronite populations.
Field technique

The participants of the study were selected as part of a judgment sample, based on age and amount of time spent in Zeitoun. They included both males and females between the ages of 20-30, 50-65, and 66-85. Fifteen participants were chosen to be representative of the Zeitouni dialect. Of these 15 participants, three were of the age bracket 20-30; five were of the age bracket 50-65; and seven were of the age bracket of 66-85 (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-65</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66-85</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fieldwork was conducted from December 2013 to February 2014. Recordings were mainly conducted in the residences of the participants' homes in Zeitoun, but they also took place in their alternative residences in Beirut. Participants gave their permission for
the recording and linguistic analysis of their conversations. The participants were informed that they would be recorded in order to study their use of negation. Conversations usually lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours, totaling to about 10-12 hours of usable recordings. Recordings were made with the Apple Macintosh garageband program. When needed, due to limited electricity in the mountains, conversations were also recorded using a handheld recording device, which was then inputted into the computer for analysis. The programs Audacity and Pratt were used for isolating sequences and occasionally for the production and examination of spectrographic analysis.

Participants were familiar with the field researcher from her regular family trips to Lebanon, as well as from her past four years as a resident in Lebanon. This imparted to her a significant level of trust. She was, thus, both an insider and outsider as the primary data collector: an outsider since she was not actively part of the conversations; and an insider, because she had become a familiar face in the community. This situation was ideal, as it enabled relatively easy observation of the Zeitouni dialect in its natural settings. Those were group conversations, oftentimes conversations during the preparation of and participation in meals, during television commercial breaks, during games of cards, or while neighbours and friends visited to have coffee throughout the day. They usually included at least two and often more people conversing with each other. The opportunity also arose to record an occasional phone conversation, in which only one party of the conversation was available for recording. The recording technique was simply to leave the computer open and on during these interactions.

Participants

All participants were born and raised in Zeitoun, and all have spent parts of their lives elsewhere: Beirut, Jbeil (Byblos), Ballouneh, and outside Lebanon. All participants continue to live all or part-time in Zeitoun, returning daily as commuters or as summer and weekend visitors. Some aged 60 and over have returned to live as permanent residents. These are characteristic Lebanese living arrangements.

Negation in northern Lebanese Arabic dialects

Descriptions of negation in Levantine dialects as a whole tend to observe an isogloss between the northern and southern varieties, with the boundary line in Lebanon falling around Beirut. Common these and to all Arabic dialects is the negative particle mā ‘not’ that precedes or is perhaps enclitic to the verb. Southern Levantine varieties participate in the well-known split-morpheme negation construction, comprising the preverbal negation element mā as well as the post-verbal enclitic particle -š (Obler 1975: 35–41). Figure 2 is a graphic illustration of its distribution in the Levantine varieties of Arabic. It shows the conventionally understood dialect area of the southern Levant in which negation proceeds with the discontinuous negator mā ... š with an isogloss boundary roughly south of Beirut, inclining slightly northward and eastward toward the Lebanese border with Syria. The northern Levantine dialects and those of Damascus and eastwards negate with mā alone.
The isogloss does not fall along clear boundary lines, however, with some mountain dialects eastward of Beirut participating in the split-morpheme technique, and some from the central to southern and mid-mountainous regions of Lebanon, also exhibiting an alternate split morpheme $a...Ş$, which has been documented as far south as Palestine and central Jordan (Driver 1925: 197; Palva 2004).

What is more, both types have been documented north and east of Beirut. In her study of the dialects of Baskinta, a village in the Metn Governorate about 45 kilometers northeast of Beirut, at 1200 meters above sea level, Abu-Haidar (1979: 109–110) states, "$mā$ cannot occur in a negative context in B without the suffix $-Ş$":

1. **Baskinta**
   
   $ma ^\prime allam-it-ni-Ş$
   
   NEG teach:3FV-3FS-PRO:1S-NEG
   
   ‘She did not teach me’

As for $a...Ş$, she says: “The particle ‘$a + Ş$ negates the imperfective with the prefix bi- and also the particle fi’” (Abu-Haidar 1979: 110), the implication being that it must co-occur with bilabial consonants. Feghali (1919; cf. also Feghali 1928: 221) states that plainly about its use in his native dialect of Kfar ‘Abida, about 50 kilometres up the coast from Beirut: “$m\text{ to} mbe par dissimulation dans le voisinage d’une labiale sonore” (Feghali 1919: 81):
Writing about southern Levantine dialects of Arabic (Palestinian and Jordanian dialects), others (Blau 1960: 193–8; Hoyt 2007: passim; Lucas 2010: passim; Alqassas 2012: passim) have made similar claims regarding the reduction or deletion of the negator ma, most recently Alqassas 2012:

“ma cannot be reduced to ’a or to zero when negating (non)-labial-initial perfect verbs, non-labial-initial imperfect verbs, and non-labial-initial pseudo verbs” (Alqassas 2012: 157)

Against such assertions are those making the opposite claim, Bauer (1926: 121), Driver (1925: 197) and Obler (1975: passim) about Palestinian dialects and Palva (2004: passim) about the dialect of Salt in Jordan.

Negation in The Vernacular Arabic of the Lebanon

Writing about Lebanese dialects, without specifying which region, Thackston (1996) falls into the latter group of observers.

An optional ... negative suffix -š ... may be added to all verbs and quasi-verbs [here pseudo verbs (rsv)] ...that are negated with ma. With the -š suffix, the negative ma is optional. (Thackston 1996: 145)

He presents a paradigm by which pseudo-verbs and imperfective and perfective verbs may all be negated with sole post-positive -š:
Remarking upon prohibitives such as that in (3i) specifically, Palva (2004: 227) observes that a bilabial consonant constraint cannot be absolute, inasmuch prohibitives by definition are in the 2nd person, which are marked with t-, a coronal consonant.

**Negation in the Arabic dialect of Zeitoun**

Our observations of the dialects of Zeitoun confirm those of observers of other Levantine dialects that negation with a...š and sole post-positive -š can proceed without constraint. Specifically, we have found negations with mā, with and without -š; with ūa, with and without post-positive -š; and with post-positive -š alone with any initial consonant.

Examples (4) through (8) demonstrate these various combinations:
We have observed negation with sole post-positive -š with imperfective verbs, which are generally preceded by /y/, /t/ or /n/, that is, not bilabial consonants. Example (9), however, exhibits a peculiarity of some Levantine dialects, wherewith the initial person marker on verbs may optionally go unexpressed:

(9) Negation of non-labials with א...ş

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{hībbī-š} & \quad \text{it-ḥuṭṭ-ʃ} \quad \text{fī-šašl} \quad \text{bi-šʃ?} \\
& \quad \text{like} \cdot \text{Neg} \quad \text{2S-pulipfv} \cdot \text{F} \quad \text{PREP-DET-wash} \quad \text{PREP-thing'} \\
& \quad \text{[Do] you like not [that] you put [Item] in the wash with [any]thing'}
\end{align*}
\]

This particular example is fortuitous in that it begins with two verbs with the initial radical [ḥ], a backmost consonant, providing the opportunity to compare the verb with and without the 2nd-person marker t-. A spectrographic image of the utterance (Figure 3) demonstrates this clearly, wherein the initial word spoken hībbī-š 'you like not' begins without the characteristic vertical spike indicating the release burst of the /t/, whereas that may be seen in the articulation of the /t/ of t-ḥuṭṭ-š 'you put', corresponding to the first blank space on Channel 1.
The elision of the 2nd-person marker /t/ in Levantine dialects has been documented in prohibitives, specifically in the dialects of the Jordanian (Cleveland 1963: 61) and Syrian (Wilmsen 2014: 108) Hawrān. Both of those studies adduce the verb ṣaf ‘to fear’ in the prohibitive: ṣaf-š ‘fear not’. We have found the same in Zeitouni (10a); but it occurs with other prohibitives as well (e.g., [10b]):

\[(10)\] Negation of non-labials with ṣ...š: Prohibitives  
\[a.\] ḥ  af-š  a  morīn  
\[\text{fear.PROH-2PS-NEG PREP name}\]  
‘[Do] not you worry about Maurine!’ (cf. Cleveland 1963: 61ḥ ṣaf-š;)

\[b.\] ṣil-l-š  yā-hon  
\[\text{carry.PROH-DAT-PRO.1S-NEG ACC-PRO.PL}\]  
‘[Do] not carry them for me’

Clearly, such negations will proceed from the initial consonant of the root, regardless of its point of articulation. The same may be said for verbs in the perfective, whose initial consonants could be articulated anywhere. We have found those, too, negated with sole post-positive -š:
Negation with -š: penultimate stress

It bears mentioning, also, that we have noticed that the penultimate stress that Grotzfeld (1980: 186) had noted for some Palestinian dialects often but not always operates in Zeitouni. As a general principle, the consonant cluster or long vowel resulting from the affixation of -š usually obliges the attraction of stress to the ultimate syllable. This is not always so in Zeitouni. In example (5), shown again as (12), with the affixation of -š, the stress remains on the penult, where would occur in the verb in the affirmative. This is shown graphically in Figure 4:

(11) Negation of non-labials with š: Perfective verbs
a. awwal ma ħ akē-na kan-š nāš eh
   first REL talk.PFV-PRO.APL be.PFV-NEG overweight
   ‘When we first talked, he wasn’t overweight’

b. barke was uš-t-š a ṭbayl
   ADV arrive.PFV-PRO.1S-NEG PREP place.name
   ‘Perhaps I [will have] arrived not in Jbeil [Byblos]’

c. māya redd-it-š ‘aley-yi?
   name answer.PFV-PRO.3FS-NEG PREP-PRO.1S
   ‘[Has] Maya answered not me?’

b. ‘aț ā-ti-ni-š
   give.PFV-2FS-PRO.1S-NEG
   ‘You gave me not [a card]’

(12) ăḫ aḥ a-b-a-’ rif-š ana
   EXCLAM NEG-HAB-1S-KNOW.JPFV-NEG PRO.1S
   a-b-a-’ rif-šš ma-b-a-’ rif-š
   NEG-HAB-1S-KNOW.JPFV-NEG NEG-HAB-1S-KNOW.JPFV-NEG
   ‘Ohh, I don’t know; I don’t know; I don’t know’
Observations and conclusions

With its negation with sole post-positive -š and with a...š the Zeitouni dialect shares features with other highland Levantine dialects of Arabic, extending into the Hawrān of southern Syria and northern Jordan, and as far south as Salt, near Amman (Cantineau 1938; Palva 2004; Wilmsen 2014: 105–110). Researchers into the dialect of Salt remark that it is “essentially Ḥōrānī” (Herin 2013: 99). This means that regardless of some regional variations, a more-or-less contiguous dialect area extends from an area to the north of Amman; through the Hawrān Plateau, encompassing northern Jordan, the Golan Heights, and south-western Syria; to the highlands of Lebanon north and east of Beirut. Herin concurs: “The strong homogeneity of Ḥōrānī dialects ... makes it possible to consider them a single variety and thus suitable for comparison for other more localized dialects” (Herin 2013: 100). A closer examination and re-examination is thus warranted of more localized dialects within and adjacent to that single dialect area. Negation with sole post-positive -š and with a...š seems to be a widespread highland Levantine feature, with the designation ‘highland’ including the Hawrān. Generalizations covering southern dialects inside and outside that area should be reconsidered.

A more pressing question is how the Hawrān dialect area came to be in the first place. Worth considering is that these areas include Christian populations that are descendants of communities that were in place before the advent of Islam (Harris 2012). McCarus (personal communication 2013) observes that in the Lebanese highlands, the Christian and Druze dialects are essentially the same. One of the main branches of the Druze, the Bani Tanûhḫ, originally from southern Arabia, were in the Syrian hinterlands at least four centuries before the Muslim era, and were staunch Christians before converting to Islam and eventually responding to the “unification call” to become what they themselves call muwâhhidūn ‘witnesses to God’s oneness’ (Hitti 1928: 51–52; Shahîd 1986: 419 & 422 and passim; Harris 2012: 46–47). The largest populations of speakers of Druze dialects are in the Hawrān and the Lebanese highlands (Hitti 1928). The highland dialect areas may encompass remnants of a Christian Arabic dialect or dialects that had or have been in
place in the Levantine hinterlands before the arrival there of Arabic-speaking Muslims in the seventh century (Wilmsen 2014: 133–137).

BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDICES

Abbreviations
ADV adverbial
CONJ conjunction
DET determiner
EXCLAM exclamative
F feminine
FUT future
HAB habitual
IPFV imperfective
M masculine
NEG negative
PFV perfective
PL plural
PREP preposition
PRO pronoun
PROH prohibitive
PSV pseudo-verb
REL relative
S singular
1 1st person
ABSTRACTS

The dialect of Zeitoun village in the northern Keserwan district of Lebanon exhibits both the split-morpheme negators mā...š of the southern and highland Levant and the pre-verbal negator mā without the post-positive -š of the northern Levant, with the -š of negation optionally appearing in identical contexts. It also exhibits the form a...š of southern and highland Levantine Arabic dialects. Some researchers propose that the negator a- can only appear before labial consonants, such as the b- prefix marking habitual action or imminent futurity. Others note that it may also occur with the prohibitive, usually marked by the 2nd-person prefix t-. Neither of these observations holds for the Zeitouni dialect, in which prohibitives negated with sole -š may be formed without the prefix, the initial consonant being whatever the radical might be. Sole post-positive -š also occurs in negation of an unmarked imperfective verb, there, too, sometimes without an overt proclitic person marker. Another feature that is occasionally noted in the literature is the negation of perfective verbs with sole post-positive -š. This, too, occurs in the Zeitouni dialect. This type of verbal negation is characteristic of dialects from the Lebanese highlands and through the Ḥawrān. Finally, it is noticed that a word-final consonant cluster generated by the enclitic -š does not necessarily attract stress.

INDEX

Keywords: arabic dialects (Levant), Druze, Keserwan, Ḥawrān, Maronite, negation

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