



THE SYNTAX OF NEGATION IN ALGERIAN ARABIC: DISCONTINUOUS MORPHOLOGY, SCOPE, AND CLAUSAL ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract

This paper presents a formal syntactic analysis of negation in Algerian Arabic (AA), a variety that has attracted growing scholarly attention yet remains inadequately theorized in formal syntactic terms. The study centres on the discontinuous negation construction *mā...š*, in which the preverbal particle *mā* and the postverbal clitic *-š* together constitute the canonical sentential negation strategy of the variety. Drawing on naturally occurring conversational data collected through ethnographic fieldwork in the Tiaret region of western Algeria and supplemented by structured elicitation from native speaker consultants, the analysis is developed within the Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1995, 2001) and the cartographic framework (Rizzi, 1997; Cinque, 1999). The central proposal is that *mā* and *-š* head distinct functional projections, NegP2 and NegP1 respectively, in the clausal functional sequence, with NegP2 projecting above TP and NegP1 embedded within the inflectional domain above vP. This bipartite structure accounts for word order asymmetries, the scope of negation over temporal and aspectual operators, and the positioning of *-š* outside the object clitic cluster. The paper further identifies three principal environments in which *-š* is obligatorily suppressed: the presence of negative polarity items such as *ḥatta wāḥed*, *wālu*, and *šomr*; oath-prefaced utterances introduced by *wallāh*; and the lexically restricted case of the stative verb *šaraf*. These environments are unified under a feature-economy account in which an uninterpretable negative feature borne by another clause-internal element enters into an Agree relation with NegP2, rendering the lower NegP1 head redundant at PF. The analysis situates AA within the broader typology of discontinuous negation and contributes to ongoing debates on Jespersen's Cycle, the internal geometry of NegP, and the syntax of negative polarity licensing.

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Introduction

Negation is among the most studied yet theoretically contentious phenomena in generative syntax. From early X-bar accounts through the Neg Criterion of Haegeman and Zanuttini (1991) to contemporary cartographic and phase-theoretic treatments, the question of how and where negation is represented in clausal structure has generated a productive body of literature. Within Semitic linguistics, however, the Arabic varieties, despite their typological richness and the scale of their speaker communities, remain relatively underrepresented in formal syntactic work, particularly at the dialectal level. Algerian Arabic (hereafter AA), the primary spoken vernacular of approximately 45 million speakers across Algeria, constitutes a particularly rewarding case: it combines inherited Classical Arabic morphosyntax with features attributable to centuries of contact with French, producing a negation system whose properties cannot be fully captured by accounts designed for Modern Standard Arabic or even other Maghrebi varieties such as Moroccan or Tunisian Arabic.

The central empirical puzzle motivating this study is the discontinuous negation construction in AA, realized as the bipartite marker *mā...š*, where *mā* appears to the left of the verbal complex and *-š* cliticizes to its right edge. This structural configuration raises a battery of theoretical questions: Are *mā* and *-š* generated in the same syntactic projection, or do they head distinct functional categories? What constrains the scope of negation relative to aspect, tense, and modal operators? How should the variable omission of *-š* in specific environments (when a negative polarity item is present, when the utterance is prefaced by a swear word, or with certain lexically specified verbs) be analyzed? These are not merely descriptive questions; they bear directly on the architecture of the functional sequence in the Rizian cartographic tradition and on the crosslinguistic typology of Jespersen's Cycle.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides typological and historical background on AA and its negation system. Section 3 surveys previous theoretical treatments of Arabic negation. Section 4 presents the

data collection methodology. Section 5 lays out the theoretical framework. Section 6 presents the empirical data and the proposed syntactic analysis. Section 7 addresses the semantics of scope and polarity. Section 8 examines contact-induced variation involving French. Section 9 addresses broader theoretical implications, and Section 10 concludes.

Algerian Arabic: Typological and Historical Context

The Linguistic Profile of Algerian Arabic

Algerian Arabic belongs to the Maghrebi subbranch of the Arabic dialect continuum. It descends historically from the Arabic brought to North Africa during migrations beginning in the seventh century CE, but it has undergone substantial restructuring through contact with Ottoman Turkish, Andalusí Arabic, and, from the mid-nineteenth century onward, French. The result is a variety that differs from Eastern Arabic dialects in phonology, morphology, and, crucially for present purposes, syntax.

In morphological terms, AA preserves the Semitic root-and-pattern system for verbal derivation but has innovated extensively in the domain of the aspectual and tense system. The imperfective aspect is typically conveyed by the bare imperfective stem without a dedicated aspect prefix, making the verbal cluster leaner and the interaction with negation morphology more transparent. In the domain of the noun phrase, the genitive construction is generally realized analytically through the particle *ntāʃ* rather than through the Classical construct state, bringing AA closer to colloquial French in its DP architecture.

The Historical Development of the Negation System

The negation system of AA cannot be understood without situating it within the diachronic trajectory of Jespersen's Cycle as it has played out in the Maghreb. In Classical Arabic (CA), sentential negation is expressed by the preverbal particles *lā* (imperfective clauses), *laysa* (negative copula), *lam* (with jussive mood), and *lan* (future negation). These forms are essentially monomorphemic and consistently preverbal. In AA, by contrast, the dominant negation strategy for verbal sentences is the discontinuous *mā...š*, which has no direct equivalent in CA.

The preverbal component *mā* is cognate with CA *mā*, used in Classical Arabic for nominal and adverbial negation as well as for certain verbal

negation patterns in pre-Classical stages of the language. The postverbal component *-š*, however, derives from the indefinite noun *šay'* ('thing', 'anything'), following the same grammaticalization pathway attested in French *ne...pas*, where *pas* derives from Latin *passus* ('step'), and in a range of other languages. This parallel development, whereby a preverbal negation marker is reinforced by a postverbal existential or minimizer element, is the defining feature of Jespersen's Cycle (van der Auwera, 2009; Willis, Lucas, & Breitbarth, 2013). In Moroccan Arabic, the same cycle has proceeded further: *-š* alone (without *mā*) is now the predominant negator in many urban varieties among younger speakers (Benmamoun, 2000; Ouhalla, 1993). AA occupies an intermediate stage, with both *mā...š* and variable *-š*-suppression attested, and their distribution governed by syntactic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic factors that the present analysis seeks to specify formally.

Previous Analyses of Arabic Negation

Early Generative Treatments

The generative treatment of Arabic negation begins in earnest with Fassi Fehri (1993), whose account of Modern Standard Arabic posits a NegP dominating TP, with the negation marker *lā/lam* occupying the head of NegP. This approach captures the complementary distribution of different negation markers in terms of the verbal moods they license (jussive with *lam*, subjunctive with *lan*, indicative with *mā*), but it is not designed to handle discontinuous marking.

Benmamoun (2000) represents a major advance in the formal analysis of Moroccan and Egyptian Arabic negation. He argues that the postverbal *-š* is not a simple clitic but rather a Negative Polarity Element in the scope of the higher negation head, and that the bipartite structure results from verb movement past the postverbal marker. His analysis has been influential, but it faces challenges when extended to AA: the distribution of *mā...š* versus contexts in which *-š* is obligatorily absent suggests a more complex functional geometry than a single NegP can accommodate. Ouhalla (1993) takes a different approach, treating the postverbal *-š* as a functional head in its own right (the head of a lower NegP) and the preverbal *mā* as occupying the specifier of a higher NegP. This biclausal NegP analysis anticipates later cartographic approaches but does not fully specify the movement

operations involved, nor does it predict the environments in which -š is systematically suppressed.

Cartographic and Phase-Theoretic Approaches

The cartographic framework (Cinque, 1999; Cinque & Rizzi, 2008; Rizzi, 1997) offers a principled account of the internal structure of the functional sequence, positing a hierarchy of universally ordered functional projections between CP and vP. Within this framework, negation is located at a specific position in the hierarchy: above AspP and below TP in Cinque's (1999) ordering, though the exact position is a matter of ongoing debate. For discontinuous negation systems, a key insight is that the two components of the bipartite marker may occupy distinct positions in this hierarchy.

Zeijlstra (2004) provides a sophisticated phase-theoretic account, arguing that abstract negative features drive Agree relations across the clause. In his system, a single abstract negative operator [uNeg] can license multiple morphological exponents phonologically realized at different clause positions. Ouali (2011) applies similar reasoning to Moroccan Arabic, arguing that mā and -š are co-exponents of a single abstract Neg feature. The present analysis incorporates insights from both traditions while departing from them in ways motivated by the AA data, arguing that the asymmetry between mā and -š reveals a bipartite NegP structure with distinct syntactic properties and that the suppression of -š is governed by a licensing interaction with specific clause-internal elements rather than by free phonological deletion.

Data Collection and Methodology

Data Sources

The empirical foundation of this study rests on two complementary data sources: naturally occurring conversational data collected through ethnographic fieldwork and a structured elicitation component. Together, they provide both the ecological validity of spontaneous speech and the analytical control of targeted grammaticality judgements.

The conversational corpus was assembled by the author, a native speaker of the dialect of Algerian Arabic spoken in the Tiaret region of western Algeria. The Tiaret dialect belongs to the broader western Algerian Arabic continuum and shares the core morphosyntactic features of the mā...š

negation system described in this paper, while exhibiting lexical and phonological properties specific to the region. The first author recorded spontaneous conversational exchanges in domestic and semi-public settings in Tiaret over a period of approximately eight months between 2022 and 2023. Participants included family members, neighbours, and acquaintances, all of whom were informed that informal speech was being recorded for linguistic research purposes. No compensation was offered, participation was voluntary, and all identifying information has been removed from the published examples. The total recorded corpus amounts to approximately 12 hours of audio, of which approximately 3.5 hours have been transcribed in full, yielding a working corpus of roughly 28,000 words. Negation-bearing clauses were extracted from this corpus and catalogued by construction type: *mā...š*, *mā* alone (no *-š*), *wālu*-initial, *ḥatta wāḥed*-containing, *wallāh*-prefaced, and *šomr*-containing constructions.

Elicitation Procedure

The conversational data were complemented by structured elicitation sessions conducted with fourteen additional native speakers of Tiaret Arabic, all adults between the ages of 24 and 58 at the time of the sessions. None of the fourteen had received formal training in linguistics. Elicitation sessions were conducted in informal interview format: the author presented constructed sentence frames and asked participants to render them in natural spoken AA, to judge the acceptability of proposed forms, and to offer alternatives where a proposed form struck them as unnatural or marginal. Where judgements diverged between participants, this is noted in the analysis and the range of attested responses is described. The targeted elicitation focused specifically on (a) the distribution of *-š* relative to negative polarity items, (b) the grammatical status of *-š* in oath-prefaced constructions, and (c) the acceptability of *mā našraf* without *-š*.

Transcription and Glossing Conventions

The phonological transcription employed throughout follows a modified version of the International Phonetic Alphabet as adapted for Arabic dialectology, representing pharyngeal and uvular consonants with their standard IPA symbols. Interlinear glosses follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules (Bickel, Comrie, & Haspelmath, 2008). Grammatical sentences are presented without marking; ungrammatical sentences are preceded by an

asterisk (*); and forms judged as dispreferred, marginal, or contextually restricted are preceded by a question mark (?).

Theoretical Framework

The analysis developed here operates within the Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1995, 2000, 2001, 2008) supplemented by the cartographic approach to clausal structure (Cinque, 1999; Rizzi, 1997). Following standard minimalist assumptions, syntactic derivations are driven by the need to value uninterpretable features through Agree (Chomsky, 2000, 2001). Merge is the basic operation combining syntactic objects, and movement (internal Merge) is triggered by edge features on functional heads. The derivation proceeds phase by phase, with the vP and CP constituting the main phases; the phase impenetrability condition ensures that only the phase edge is accessible to higher probes after the phase is completed.

In line with the cartographic tradition, a richly articulated functional sequence between CP and vP is assumed. The relevant projections for present purposes are, from bottom to top: vP, NegP1 (lower negation), AspP, TP, NegP2 (higher negation), and the CP layer. Following Haegeman (1995) and Zanuttini (1997, 2001), NegP is assumed to be multiply instantiated in the functional sequence, with the relative ordering of the two negative projections having syntactic and interpretive consequences. For the syntax of clitics, a head-movement analysis is adopted in which verbal agreement clitics and negation clitics adjoin to the verbal complex through successive head movement (Roberts, 1994, 2010; Travis, 1984). The postverbal -š is treated as a phrasal clitic that docks onto the right edge of the verbal complex as a result of reanalysis at PF (Embick & Noyer, 2001; Kayne, 1994; Poletto & Zanuttini, 2003).

Empirical Data and Syntactic Analysis

The Basic Negation Construction: mā...š

The canonical sentential negation construction in AA is illustrated in (1)–(3). Several features of these examples are immediately noteworthy. First, mā consistently precedes the verbal complex, including all preverbal agreement morphology, while -š follows the lexical verb and any object clitics. This distribution reflects the hierarchical position of the two markers in the clause. Second, the verbal complex in (1) and (2) bears person-number

agreement morphology that precedes -š, indicating that -š is more peripheral than agreement morphology in the postverbal domain. Third, example (3) shows that the construction extends to non-verbal predicative clauses, where the predicate complement follows -š.

(1) *mā ktebt-š l-ko:r.*

NEG write.PST.1SG-NEG the-lesson

‘I did not write the lesson.’

(2) *mā y-aktab-š.*

NEG IMPV.3SG-write-NEG

‘He is not writing.’

(3) *mā hu-š zāy.*

NEG he-NEG coming

‘He is not coming. [non-verbal predicate clause]’

The Structural Position of *mā*

I propose that *mā* is merged as the head of a higher NegP (henceforth NegP2) in the clausal functional sequence. Evidence for a structurally high position of *mā* comes from its invariant placement before all agreement and aspect morphology. In example (2), *mā* precedes the prefixed agreement marker *y-*, confirming that it is external to the agreement domain. A further diagnostic concerns the negative imperative. In AA, the negative imperative is formed productively by *mā* + imperfective stem + -š:

(4) *mā trūḥ-š!*

NEG go.IMPV.2SG-NEG

‘Don't go!’

This contrasts with Classical Arabic, which deploys *lā* plus the jussive for the negative imperative. In AA, the *lā* + jussive form is at most a formal or liturgical register feature; the native spoken negative imperative consistently employs the *mā...š* construction, confirming that NegP2 headed by *mā* is fully compatible with the imperative clausal environment in this variety.

The Structural Position of -š

The postverbal component -š behaves synchronically as a morphological clitic that docks onto the right edge of the verbal cluster. Its position relative to object clitics is diagnostically informative, as the contrast between (5) and (6) illustrates:

(5) *mā ʕtāh-š d-drāhem.*

NEG gave.3SG.him-NEG the-money

‘He didn’t give him the money.’

(6) **mā ʕtā-š-u d-drāhem.*

NEG gave.3SG-NEG-OBJ.3SG the-money

‘[Ungrammatical]’

The ungrammaticality of (6) establishes that -š must follow all object clitics. I propose that -š is the head of NegP1, merged above the vP shell. The verb raises from V through v, and -š attaches to the verb complex as a late clitic at the PF interface (Embick & Noyer, 2001). The proposed bipartite structure is given schematically below and illustrated in Figure 1:

[NegP2 mā [TP T° [NegP1 V+Agr-š [vP ...]]]]

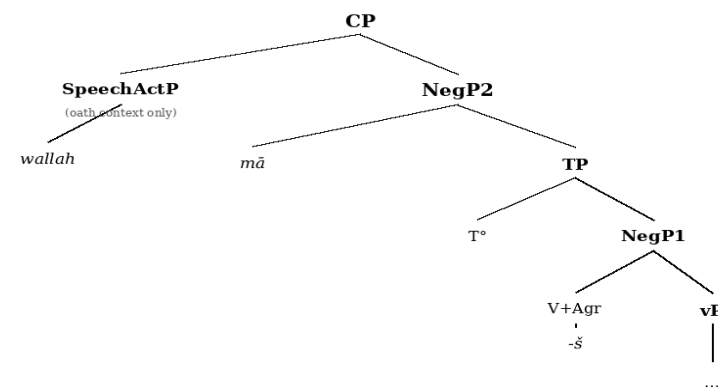


Figure 1. Bipartite NegP structure in Algerian Arabic
 mā heads NegP2 (above TP); postverbal -š heads NegP1 (above vP, below TP)
 SpeechActP (wallah) is present only in oath-prefaced clauses and blocks NegP1 spell-out

Figure 1. Bipartite NegP structure in Algerian Arabic. mā heads NegP2 (above TP); postverbal -š heads NegP1 (above vP, below TP). Verb movement proceeds from V through v to the right edge of NegP1, where -š adjoins at PF. The SpeechActP projection (wallah) is present only in oath-prefaced clauses and, when active, blocks NegP1 spell-out.

Environments of -š Suppression

A particularly significant empirical contribution of the present study is the identification of syntactic and pragmatic environments in which -š is obligatorily absent despite the retention of mā. These environments are not governed by a single phonological rule; they reveal a structured grammatical pattern with theoretical implications that a unified feature-economy account can capture.

The negative polarity item environment. When the clause contains a negative polarity item (NPI) such as ḥatta wāḥed ('anyone, not even one'), wālu ('nothing'), or ʕomr ('never'), the postverbal -š is regularly (and, in the judgements of all five consultants, obligatorily) suppressed:

(7) mā šuft ḥatta wāḥed.

NEG saw.1SG even one

'I didn't see anyone.'

(8) *mā šuft-š ḥatta wāḥed.

NEG saw.1SG-NEG even one

'[Ungrammatical: -š is incompatible with ḥatta wāḥed]'

(9) mā klit ḥatta ḥaʕa.

NEG eat.1SG anything

'I did not eat anything.'

The contrast between (7) and (8) is theoretically revealing. I analyze this as a case of negative concord licensing: ḥatta wāḥed is a negative concord item bearing an uninterpretable [Neg] feature that must Agree with the [Neg] head in NegP2 (mā). Once this Agree relation is established, the lower NegP1 head -š is rendered redundant by a principle of feature economy at PF and is suppressed. This is directly parallel to the suppression of n-words in certain Romance negative concord systems when a sentential negation marker is already present (Zeijlstra, 2004). Critically, -š suppression in these NPI contexts is not a sign of diachronic advancement toward a mā-only negation stage; it is a synchronic, conditioned alternation that co-exists with the productive mā...š construction.

The oath-prefaced utterance environment. When *mā* is immediately preceded by the performative oath marker *wallāh* ('by God'), the postverbal *-š* becomes categorically ungrammatical for all consultants:

(10) *wallāh mā trūḥ.*

by.God NEG go.IMPV.2SG

'By God, don't go! / I swear you won't go.'

(11) **wallāh mā trūḥ-š.*

by.God NEG go.IMPV.2SG-NEG

'[Ungrammatical in oath-prefaced context]'

I propose that the oath particle *wallāh* occupies a position in the higher left periphery, specifically a speech-act projection in the sense of Speas and Tenny (2003), and introduces a [+performative] feature that projects into the semantic interpretation of the clause. Under this configuration, the clause is anchored directly to the illocutionary act, and the [+performative] feature is itself sufficient to license the [Neg] interpretation without the redundant morphological marking in NegP1. The lower NegP1 head *-š* is therefore inaccessible for PF spell-out when the speech-act layer introduces its own licensing configuration.

The lexically restricted environment. With the stative verb *ʕaraf* ('to know'), both forms of negation are attested and both are judged as natural in ordinary speech:

(12) *mā naʕraf-š.*

NEG know.IMPV.1SG-NEG

'I don't know.'

(13) *mā naʕraf.*

NEG know.IMPV.1SG

'I don't know.'

Crucially, *mā naʕraf* without *-š* is not available as a productive option with other verbs in ordinary affirmative-negated declaratives; it is essentially restricted to *ʕaraf* and a small class of stative predicates. This lexical restriction suggests that *naʕraf* has undergone a degree of

grammaticalization toward a discourse-pragmatic marker akin to evidential and epistemic expressions cross-linguistically (Thompson & Mulac, 1991). The phonological reduction accompanying the loss of -š in this case is a symptom of this grammaticalization trajectory and does not license the omission of -š with other verbal roots.

Scope, Polarity, and the Semantics-Syntax Interface

Negation and Quantifier Scope

A central prediction of the bipartite NegP analysis is that the scope of negation should be determined by the structural position of NegP2, which dominates TP. This predicts that sentential negation in AA takes wide scope over temporal and aspectual operators, a prediction that is borne out:

(14) *mā bgāt-š taktab.*

NEG wanted.3SG.F-NEG write.IMPV.3SG

‘She didn’t want to write. [NEG > want; want > NEG reading unavailable]’

The unavailability of the want > NEG reading in (14), which would yield ‘She wanted not to write’, follows from the structural dominance of NegP2 over the aspectual and modal domain. In English, want-class predicates readily allow neg-raising, producing the embedded-negation interpretation. The absence of systematic neg-raising in AA correlates with the overt morphosyntactic position of *mā*, which is unambiguously in the matrix functional domain with no possibility of reanalysis as a lower negation head.

Negative Polarity Items and the Neg Criterion

Following Haegeman and Zanuttini (1991), a Neg Criterion is adopted under which a negative operator must be in a Spec-Head relation with a [Neg] head at LF. In AA, this criterion is satisfied by the Spec-Head configuration at NegP2, where *mā* occupies the head position. Negative polarity items such as *ḥatta wāḥed* (‘anyone’), *wālu* (‘nothing’), and *šomr* (‘never’) must be licensed by a c-commanding [Neg] operator. The NPI *šomr* is pronounced [šomr] in the Tiaret variety of AA; throughout this paper, the Tiaret pronunciation *šomr* is used consistently. Critically, and as established in Section 6 above, the presence of these items also triggers the suppression of -š, which I take as evidence that they bear a [uNeg] feature

participating in the Agree relation with NegP2 and thereby rendering NegP1 redundant.

The following paradigm demonstrates the full range of grammatical and ungrammatical patterns with *Ǝomr* in the Tiaret dialect:

(15) **mā Ǝa Ǝomro*.

NEG came.3SG never

‘[Ungrammatical: *Ǝomr* cannot appear postverbally in any context]’

(16) **Ǝomro Ǝa*.

never came.3SG

‘[Ungrammatical: *Ǝomr* cannot appear without negation]’

(17) *Ǝomro mā Ǝa*.

never NEG came.3SG

‘He never came. [*Ǝomr* fronted; *mā* present; -š absent]’

(18) **Ǝomro mā Ǝa-š*.

never NEG came.3SG-NEG

‘[Ungrammatical: -š cannot co-occur with *Ǝomr*]’

(19) **Ǝomr mā Ǝa-š*.

never NEG came.3SG-NEG

‘[Ungrammatical: bare *Ǝomr* without suffix -o cannot appear with -š]’

The paradigm in (15)–(19) presents a tightly constrained distribution that is theoretically revealing in several respects. The first and most fundamental point established by the paradigm is that *Ǝomr* is categorically excluded from postverbal position in all conditions: example (15), in which *Ǝomr* follows the verb under the scope of *mā* without -š, is ungrammatical, and no repair strategy makes it acceptable. This immediately distinguishes *Ǝomr* from the NPIs *ħatta wāħed* and *wālu*, which are compatible with the standard postverbal position inside the VP. Example (16) confirms that *Ǝomr* is a genuine NPI rather than a free-choice item: it is equally ungrammatical in a simple affirmative clause without any negation operator, ruling out any analysis on which *Ǝomr* could function as an

autonomous negative element. The only grammatical configuration in the paradigm is (17), where ζomr has been fronted to a preverbal position in the left periphery, most plausibly a Topic or Focus position above NegP2, and $m\bar{a}$ is present without $-\check{s}$. This configuration yields the well-formed sentence $\zeta\text{omro } m\bar{a} \text{ } \zeta a$, ‘he never came.’ The grammaticality of (17) therefore establishes two simultaneous requirements for ζomr : it must be displaced to a left-peripheral position, and the construction must contain $m\bar{a}$ without $-\check{s}$. Example (18) confirms that even with left-peripheral fronting, the co-occurrence of ζomr and $-\check{s}$ is categorically ungrammatical, ruling out any analysis that would allow $-\check{s}$ to be licensed when ζomr is in the left periphery. The suppression of $-\check{s}$ is thus not a consequence of local adjacency with ζomr in the postverbal domain; it follows from the Agree relation between the [uNeg] feature on $\zeta\text{omr-o}$ and the [Neg] head of NegP2, which renders NegP1 redundant regardless of where ζomr surfaces. Example (19) establishes an additional morphophonological condition on this Agree relation: ζomr must appear in its suffixed form $\zeta\text{omr-o}$, carrying the third-person singular pronominal suffix $-o$, to activate the [uNeg] feature. The bare form ζomr without the suffix cannot enter into the Agree relation with NegP2 and is in any case marginal across the paradigm. Taken together, (15)–(19) show that ζomr is a structurally exacting NPI whose licensing requires left-peripheral displacement, agreement with NegP2 via its [uNeg] feature, and obligatory suppression of NegP1, with the morphological specificity of the triggering form adding a further layer of constraint that is absent from the other NPIs in the AA system.

The fact that ζomr has no grammatical postverbal configuration (neither with nor without $-\check{s}$, neither with $m\bar{a}$ present nor absent) is itself significant for the theory of NPI licensing in AA. It indicates that ζomr is subject to a positional licensing requirement that goes beyond the mere c-command requirement imposed by the Neg Criterion: it must raise to a dedicated left-peripheral projection in order for the Agree relation with NegP2 to be established and for the overall construction to be interpretable at the interfaces. This raises the question of whether the left-peripheral displacement of ζomr is driven by an edge feature on the target projection or by an independent requirement on NPI licensing in AA, a question that a dedicated investigation of the left periphery and focus-licensing in this variety would be well placed to address. What the paradigm makes unambiguously clear, however, is that the feature-economy account of $-\check{s}$

suppression is correct in its core claim: once $\zeta\text{omr-o}$ bears the [uNeg] feature and has established the Agree relation with NegP2, NegP1 is structurally redundant and $-\text{\textcircled{S}}$ is suppressed at PF, regardless of the syntactic configuration in which the Agree relation is established.

Contact-Induced Variation: French Temporal Negation

The influence of French on AA is pervasive and well-documented across phonology, the lexicon, and aspects of discourse structure. In the domain of negation, however, the contact effects are more selective than the degree of bilingualism in urban Algeria might lead one to expect. Rather than wholesale integration of the French negative structure *ne...pas*, what is attested in AA-French contact speech is the borrowing of the French temporal negation adverb *jamais* ('never') as a lexical item that slots directly into the AA negative frame:

(20) *ana jami ruħt.*

I never went.1SG

'I never went. [lit. I *jamais* went]'

In (20), *jamais* functions as a temporal NPI that takes scope under the $\text{m}\bar{\text{a}}$ -headed NegP2, exactly as the native AA item ζomr would. Tellingly, when *jamais* is present, the postverbal $-\text{\textcircled{S}}$ is again suppressed, for the same reason that ζomr triggers $-\text{\textcircled{S}}$ suppression: *jamais* carries a [uNeg] feature that Agrees with NegP2, satisfying the Neg Criterion and rendering NegP1 redundant at PF. This parallelism confirms that the $-\text{\textcircled{S}}$ suppression phenomenon is not idiosyncratically tied to native AA vocabulary but is a syntactic phenomenon that operates on any element bearing the appropriate feature specification, regardless of its lexical origin.

Crucially, what is not attested in AA is the doubling construction $\text{m}\bar{\text{a}}\dots\text{\textcircled{S}}\text{pas}$. Speakers do not combine $-\text{\textcircled{S}}$ and *pas*; rather, *jamais* replaces the function of ζomr wholesale. This selective borrowing pattern is consistent with the typological generalization that languages tend to borrow adverbial-scope items more readily than functional morphology (van der Auwera, 2009), and it argues against an analysis in which the French negation system has directly influenced the morphosyntax of AA NegP1.

Implications for Broader Theoretical Debates

The analysis developed here has implications for several ongoing theoretical debates. First, with respect to the geometry of NegP, the AA data provide crosslinguistic support for the view that negation is not a monolithic functional category but rather a structured domain with at least two distinct projection layers (Haegeman, 1995; Zanuttini, 1997). The bipartite *mā...š* construction is not an anomaly confined to the Maghreb but a transparent instantiation of this general structural architecture, observable also in Welsh (Willis et al., 2013) and northern Italian dialects (Zanuttini, 1997).

Second, the analysis bears on the syntax of Jespersen's Cycle. The AA data show that *-š* suppression is not uniformly a sign of Cycle advancement toward a *mā*-only or postverbal-only stage. Instead, it is a synchronic, conditioned alternation governed by the presence of negative concord items, performative oath prefixes, and lexical specifications on individual verbs. This is consistent with Willis et al. (2013) and van der Auwera (2009), who emphasise the heterogeneity of Cycle paths across languages and underscore the necessity of carefully distinguishing diachronic and synchronic variation in Cycle-based accounts.

Third, the analysis of *wallāh*-conditioned *-š* suppression contributes to the syntax of speech-act projections and their interaction with the lower functional sequence. If a [+performative] feature introduced in the speech-act domain can block the PF spell-out of a head as low as NegP1, then the CP domain must have access to phase-internal information in a way that standard phase impenetrability would not straightforwardly predict. This connects the AA data to debates on the activity of the left periphery (Rizzi, 1997) and on how illocutionary features percolate through the clause.

Fourth, the lexical restriction of *-š*-less negation to *šaraf* and a small class of stative predicates raises questions about the interface between lexical semantics and functional morphology. The partial grammaticalization of *mā našraf* as a discourse marker suggests that stative predicates may be particularly prone to *-š* suppression because they already carry epistemic features that interact with the negative operator. A more comprehensive inventory of lexically conditioned negation patterns in AA and in Maghrebi Arabic more broadly would enrich this line of inquiry considerably.

Conclusion

This paper has presented a formal syntactic analysis of negation in Algerian Arabic within the Minimalist Program and cartographic framework. The core proposal is that AA negation involves a bipartite NegP structure in which the preverbal particle *mā* heads a high NegP2 projecting above TP, while the postverbal clitic *-š* heads a lower NegP1 embedded within the inflectional domain above vP. This architecture, illustrated in Figure 1, accounts for the distributional facts regarding word order, the scope of negation relative to quantifiers and modal operators, and the positioning of *-š* outside the object clitic cluster.

Beyond this basic structural proposal, the analysis has documented and formalized three principal environments of *-š* suppression that are specific to AA and that have not previously been subjected to formal syntactic treatment: the presence of negative concord items (*ḥatta wāḥed*, *wālu*, *šomr*, and the borrowed *jamais*), oath-prefaced utterances introduced by *wallāh*, and the lexically restricted case of the verb *šaraf*. These environments are unified under a feature-economy account in which an uninterpretable [Neg] feature borne by another clause-internal element Agrees with NegP2, making NegP1 morphologically redundant and triggering its suppression at PF.

The analysis situates AA within the typological space defined by the crosslinguistic pattern of discontinuous negation and the diachronic trajectory of Jespersen's Cycle, while drawing attention to the selective integration of French *jamais* into the AA polarity system. The data are directly relevant not only to Arabic linguistics and Semitic syntax but to broader debates on the architecture of the functional sequence, the conditions on PF suppression of functional heads, and the morphosyntactic consequences of language contact.

Several issues remain for future research. The *wallāh*-conditioned *-š* suppression requires a more fine-grained investigation of the speech-act projection in AA and its interaction with the lower functional sequence. A variationist corpus study of *-š* presence and absence across speaker age, region, and formality register would complement the present theoretical analysis and allow the relative weighting of the conditioning environments to be quantified. The crosslinguistic comparison of *-š* suppression with

formally similar phenomena in Welsh (Willis et al., 2013) and northern Italian dialects (Zanuttini, 1997) merits a dedicated comparative investigation. The present paper provides a theoretical foundation on which such work can build.

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