

Negation in Arabic

A Study in Linguistic History

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Foreword

Since Otto Jespersen's famous monograph *Negation in English and Other Languages* (1917), there has been a common understanding that negation is a fascinating chapter in the history of many languages.

This also holds true for Arabic, and the present monograph is devoted to what is probably the most interesting development in the history of negation in Arabic. This development, which began in Classical Arabic and continued in the post-classical period of Arabic, consists of the combination of the inherited preverbal particles of negation and a newly developed postverbal element. It will be shown how this postverbal negative element developed from an adverbial expression meaning “a bit”, which in Classical Arabic originally was confined to certain verbs marked +[quantifiable], and how this emphasising negation was gradually generalised for any verbs and, subsequently, other word classes until it finally became the normal, unmarked negation. Further developments consisting in the weakening or deletion of the first element, which is the old inherited negation, will also be treated.

Certain details of this development resemble the development of the circumfixal negations of the type *ne . . . pas* in French, and therefore the history of negation in French will be referred to where this is helpful in order to understand the specific Arabic development. Theoretical approaches concerning the development and function of negative polarity items (NPI) will also be taken into consideration.

Unlike Romance philology, there are in Arabic philology, unfortunately, no comprehensive lexical or grammatical reference works for the post-classical language, and even the grammars of Classical Arabic do not give a complete picture of the language. Thus, whoever is interested in the history of Arabic and, especially, the post-classical period is first obliged to read the relevant sources and collect evidence of the phenomena he is interested in, which enables him to develop theories about the phenomena in question. This is how, in the course of many years of reading and collecting, I conceived of the idea of the adverbial origin of the circumfixal negation of Arabic.

It was, however, not until I was invited by Shabo Talay to an AIDA meeting which was to take place in Bergen (Norway) in October 2013 that I decided to write down the evidence I had collected and my theoretical deliberations in the form of a paper. Subsequently, while the paper I had originally intended was being developed into the present monograph, I became acquainted with various theories, some of which are more or less similar to my own theoretical approach. It was with a mixture of astonishment and admiration that I found out that as early as 1886 the Egyptian scholar Ḥifnī Nāṣif (d. 1918) put forward an explanation which, even if in traditional, scholastic form, anticipated at least partially my own approach (for details, see below 2.3.).

I not only enjoyed writing this monograph from the first to the last line, but it also gives me much pleasure to thank some colleagues. Manfred Woidich patiently as ever answered questions about Cairene Arabic and drew my attention to some recent contributions by Christopher Lucas (Lucas 2009 and 2010). He will, I am sure, pardon my disagreeing with him in certain theoretical matters connected with the topic of this study. When I wrote to Lutz Edzard about my project, he spontaneously sent me the database of the contribution by Eva Marie Håland (Håland 2011). Michael Carter was good enough to read through this book and suggest some stylistic improvements. And without Shabo Talay's kind invitation to the AIDA meeting in Bergen, this book would not have been written. To all of them I extend my sincere thanks.