

estudios de dialectología
norteafricana y andalusí
12 (2008) pp. 83-91

EVOLVING USES IN CAIRENE EGYPTIAN ARABIC NEGATION FORMS

USOS EVOLUCIONADOS DE LAS FORMAS DE NEGACIÓN EN ÁRABE EGIPCIO CAIROTA

MADIHA DOSS*

Abstract

In this short study I would like to point out to some evolving uses of the negative constructions in Cairene Egyptian Arabic (CEA); I shall be mainly concerned with the discussion of the continuous form *miš* (~*muš*) and its distribution with the discontinuous form *ma...š*.

Resumen

En este breve estudio, me gustaría hacer hincapié en algunos usos evolucionados de las construcciones negativas en el árabe egipcio de El Cairo (CEA). Básicamente me referiré a la discusión de la forma continua *miš* (~*muš*) y su distribución en relación con la forma discontinua *ma...š*.

Keywords: Egyptian Arabic, Cairo, morphology, negations forms.

Palabras clave: árabe egipcio, El Cairo, morfología, formas negativas.

In the first part of this study I will present the “standard” use of these negation markers as described in the grammatical literature on CEA; I will then present data representing what I suggest are evolving forms of usage. In the second part, and starting from the observations made on the negation markers, I will discuss some interpretations of the process.

The “standard” use of negation in CEA

Egyptian Arabic possesses two main negative markers¹, the discontinuous *ma...š* and the continuous *miš* ~*muš*²; since the choice between these two markers is

* Madiha Doss: Cairo University, Egypt.

E-mail: madihadoss@gmail.com

* I would like to thank M. Woidich for reading and commenting this research as well as for the discussion which preceded its writing. I wish to express very special thanks to G. Mejdell for her invaluable remarks and patience in commenting this paper.

¹ G. Mejdell, *Mixed Styles in Spoken Arabic in Egypt: somewhere between order and chaos*, p. 240, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2006.

determined by factors of environment, E. Abdel-Massih *et al.* considers them as a single negative particle³.

a) The discontinuous particle *ma...š*.

According to the literature, the discontinuous marker is to a large degree reserved for the negation of verbs. In her analysis of the negation strategies, K. Brustad reserves the discontinuous marker for the verbal negation in its unmarked usage⁴.

The functions of the discontinuous form are the following:

- It combines with the verb in the perfect:
mašuftiš ħadd w-ana gayya⁵
“I did not see anyone on my way coming”

- It combines with the imperfect in its non prefixed form, and in this case it may have a modal function:
mayinfāš titkallim kida
“It doesn’t work you talk this way” (“You shouldn’t talk this way”)
ka:n yišu:f ra?yu biyit?atṭa? hitat ūdda:m ũe:nu we-maš za:lik mayiftaš bu??u⁶
“He would see his opinion torn in pieces in front of his eyes and in spite of that he wouldn’t open his mouth”

- It combines with the *b*-prefixed form of the imperfect, but not with the imperfect preceded by the *ħa* prefix:
mabiygī:š kiti:r
“He doesn’t come often”

- It introduces prohibitions:
matibfidš
“Don’t go far”

- It also negates pseudo verbal expressions consisting of prepositions followed by pronominal suffixes (*li:h, ũandu, fi:h*):
malu:š ħadd
“He doesn’t have anyone”⁷
mašandaha:š wila:d
“She doesn’t have children”

² Of a rare use in present Egyptian Arabic, this form still occurs in songs for example. Appearing in old texts it is sometimes written as *mwaš*, as observed by Woidich in *Das Kairenisch-Arabische. Eine Grammatik*, p. 334, Wiesbaden, 2006.

³ G. Mejdell, p. 241.

⁴ K. Brustad, *The Syntax of Spoken Arabic. A Comparative Study of Moroccan, Egyptian, Syrian and Kuwaiti Dialects*, p. 281, Washington DC, Georgetown University Press.

⁵ Unless otherwise specified the examples are mine.

⁶ Louis Awad, *Mudhakkara:t talib bi, p. 253, Cairo, Dar El Hilal, 2001.*

⁷ K. Brustad, p. 288.

mafi:š ħa:ga titšimil

“There is nothing that can be done”

b) The continuous negative marker *miš* (~*muš*)

The continuous form is usually seen as the negative marker for predicates (see G. Mejdell, K. Brustad and M. Woidich⁸). The predicate can be verbal, nominal or prepositional. The continuous negative marker also serves to negate a whole clause.

Verbal predicates:

- It is used with the imperfect form of the verb prefixed by *ħa*, such as in:

miš ħa?ullak

“I shall not tell you”

Also with the imperfect prefixed by *b-*:

it?axxar fi-l-kala:m, miš biyitkallim lissa

“He is late in talking, he does not talk yet”

It can be observed from the above examples that the *miš* form negates the imperfect verb, with the prefix *b-* as well as *ħa*, contrary to the usage common half a century ago, where this particle only accompanied the *ħa* prefixed imperfect⁹.

Actually, most descriptions still seem to consider the former construction as rare, and the discontinuous marker as prevalent in this context. G. Mejdell acknowledges the *miš-bi*-imperfect form, but sees that *ma...š* is more commonly used in this context¹⁰, whereas M. Salib¹¹ does not acknowledge this construction. M. Woidich mentions the use of *miš-bi*-imperfect in certain cases of contrastive negation¹² so does K. Brustad who gives more than one example of *miš-bi*, which she interprets as a form of marked negation¹³. She quotes A. El-Tonsi who in a personal communication attributed this form more frequently to females than males; K. Brustad adds that “if *miš-b* continues to spread, it may eventually lose its categorical status”¹⁴.

- It is also used with active and passive participles with a verbal function:

miš šayfa ?udda:mi min it-tašab

“I do not see in front of me I am so tired”

ana miš fahma

“I do not understand”

⁸ G. Mejdell, p. 242; K. Brustad, p. 281-282; M. Woidich, *Das Kairenisch-Arabische*, p. 281-282.

⁹ T.F. Mitchell, *Colloquial Arabic*, p. 106-107, Teach yourself books, London, 1962.

¹⁰ G. Mejdell, p. 242.

¹¹ M. B. Salib (Departement of Near Eastern Studies), *Spoken literary Arabic: Oral approximation of Literary Arabic in Egyptian formal discourse*, p. 71. Mimeograph, no date, or place of edition.

¹² M. Woidich, *Das Kairenisch-Arabische*, p. 341.

¹³ K. Brustad, p. 302.

¹⁴ Same reference, p. 303.

ana miš mihta:g anzil in-naharda
 “I do not need to go out today”

From the above two remarks can be advanced. First, in the “standard use” the continuous negative marker does not combine with the non-prefixed imperfect verbal form; forms such as *miš yi?u:l il-ħa?i:ʔa* “He doesn’t say the truth” will be analysed in the evolving usages.

Second, in the “standard usage”, the continuous particle does not precede the perfect form of the verb, which requires the use of the discontinuous form of negation, as seen above.

With nominal predicates:

- Other nominal predicates – including prepositional phrases, adverbs and adverbial phrases:

liħaddi may?u:l innu miš hindi
 “Until he says that he is not Indian”¹⁵

ana miš mabsu:ʔa
 “I am not happy”

di miš muškila
 “This is not a problem”

ana miš diǧǧ il ?iʃla:ħ
 “I am not against reform”

huwwa miš hina
 “He is not here”

miš kida “not like that”

miš dilwa?ti “not now”

miš imba:riħ/innaharda/bukra “not yesterday/ today/ tomorrow”

miš da/di/do:l “not this/ that/ those”

- The *miš* particle may precede a perfect verb when it negates a whole clause in a contrastive function:

*yimkin ʃanduhum taħaffuz binhum wə-bin baʃd, lakin miš binhum wi be:n ir-rigga:la*¹⁶

“Perhaps they have reservations among themselves, but they don’t have reservations with men.”

d-ana miš ittafa?t mʃa:h wə-bas, d-ana maǧǧe:tu ʃala waraʔa

“I have not just agreed with him, I also had him sign a paper”

In this last example the negation concerns the whole clause: *ittafa?t mʃa:h*. We can observe that in this case the continuous negative element *miš* precedes a verb in the perfect form, in what seems to be in contradiction with the standard rules of use of this particle as stated above. However the syntactic difference makes the succession *miš-perfect* possible; the negation does not concern the verb, but the

¹⁵ Louis Awad, *Mudhakkara:t*, p. 110.

¹⁶ Same reference, p. 112.

whole clause. There is no contradiction since the sentence can be understood to say: “It is not the case that I agreed with him etc...”.

d-ana miš (innu) ittafaʔt mʕa:h wə-bas, d-ana maḍde:tu ʕala wara

Another example of clause negation is the following utterance in the collected data:

miš takli nnaharda wa:gi bukra ala:ʔi lʔakl zayy ma huwwa

“Don’t just eat today, and then I find the food as is [uneaten] tomorrow”

In the previous example the negative marker *miš* is immediately followed by an imperfect verbal form; but it is actually the whole clause which is negated and not only the verb, so the rule forbidding negation of an imperfect verb by *miš* is not contradicted.

• Finally there is a *miš* form which is used to express the rhetorical negative interrogative, such as in :

*Mr Chamberlain miš ʔa:l inni l-ʔingili:zi muḥtaram, mine:n mayru:ħ*¹⁷

“Didn’t Mr Chamberlain say that the British meets respect wherever he goes?”

miš ʔutilak innu miš ḥayyi:gi?

“Didn’t I tell you that he won’t come?”

Once again the negation marker *miš* precedes a verb in the perfect, but in the context of a rhetorical negation where it is the whole clause which is negated.

Evolving usages of negation in CEA

For about four months in the spring and summer of 2005, I happened to regularly spend long hours at a Cairene private hospital, attending the illness of a family member. In this environment I first observed the feature studied in this paper, after which I started noting its occurrence in other contexts. At the hospital, the “language community” using this feature was mainly female, middle class nurses whose age ranged from 20 to 40 years, approximately. I do not recall having noticed these evolving forms of negation being used by any of the medical doctors whether male or female; when I later started a more systematic observation, however, I noted that the forms appeared also in the speech of some males, among whom at least one had a PhD. degree. In the following paragraph, I present the cases using the evolving forms, mentioning for each example the source, or the person having used it. The examples are followed by letters designating the users: E is a female house worker (aged about 50); M a semi educated woman working as a house nurse; N 1, 2, 3, hospital nurses. As for the other utterances collected, I mention for each speaker his/her status (university professor, a student in dentistry, etc.).

a) In the new usages, the continuous particle *miš* (*muš*)

• Precedes the non-prefixed form of the imperfect¹⁸, such as in the following examples I have collected during the last two years (March 2005 to March 2007):

¹⁷ Same reference, p. 108.

miš yixalli:ha tištaǧal
 “He doesn’t let her work”
miš yinfāʿ (E)
 “It does not work” or “it can’t go”

- The imperative:
miš tizazʿʿa? fi:na (E)
 “Do not shout at us”
miš tirmi:hom (E)
 “Don’t throw them”
miš tinzili š-šugl ʿala tu:l (E)
 “Don’t go to work immediately”
miš tixa:fi (M)
 “Don’t be afraid”
miš tixxalli fi nifsik ḥa:ga (in a TV series)
 “Don’t deprive yourself from anything”

- Precedes the verb in the perfect form¹⁹:
miš daxalit (N1)
 “She did not enter (the hospital)”
di miš ʿamalit ḥa:ga (N2)
 “She has not done anything”
miš istawa (E)
 “It did not cook”
miš kalit le:h? (E)
 “Why didn’t she eat?”
miš nimt bi:ha (M)
 “I didn’t sleep with it”
miš ka:nit ḥatinḍaf (E)
 “It was not going to become cleaner”
fataḥti:h wala miš fataḥti:h
 “Did you or did you not open it?”

This last utterance was produced by a young colleague at my university department; having teased her for her usage, she answered the joke by systematically producing this kind of construction every time we met and talked together, indicating that she was conscious of the particularity of the feature. Other,

¹⁸ R. Malina, *Zum schriftlichen Gebrauch des Kairinischen Dialekts anhand ausgewählter Texte von Saʿdaddi:in Wahba*, p. 25, Berlin 1987. Malina pointed to one occurrence of *miš*-impf. In the following example: *min šahr waḥid ʿult miš niʿraf baʿd* “A month ago you said we should not know each other”, which could also be read as a case of rhetorical negation, although the edition does not carry an interrogation mark.

¹⁹ R. Malina, p. 25, pointed to this use, in the example: *miš ziʿilt*, however it seems to me it is clearly a case in which *miš* negates a whole clause: *inta ziʿilt?* “Did you get upset?” *miš ziʿilt* “It is not that I got upset”.

more elderly colleagues who attended one of these exchanges expressed surprise and commented by saying this form was increasingly used.

- Precedes pseudo verbal expressions consisting of prepositions followed by pronominal suffixes such as *li:h*, *ʕandu*, and *fi:h*:

miš li:ha manzar (E)

“It does not look good”

miš ʕandi raši:d (E)

“I don’t have credit” (for the mobile phone)

adi n-na:s illi miš ʕandaha ɗami:r (E)

“Here are people who do not have integrity”

miš ʕandi istiʕda:d inn ana ʕaliħħa (male university professor)

“I have no intention of making up with her”

miš ʕandi l-mubayl bitaħħa (female university teaching assistant)

“I don’t have her mobile number”

miš ʕanduhum ʔarqa:m (university professor)

“They don’t carry numbers”

wa:ħid bastirma miš ʕalih gibna, [immediately followed by] *min ġe:r gibna*
(seller at a take away restaurant)

“One with basterma²⁰ with no cheese, without cheese”

ana miš wara:ya ħa:ga bukra (young student at the Faculty of Dentistry)

“I have nothing to do tomorrow”

miš mʕa:ya karru (a working class woman on a TV interview)

“I don’t have a cart”

miš fi:h sabab muħaddad (famous middle aged actress on a T.V. interview)

“There is no special reason”

Tentative explanations

a) One possible explanation could be the expansion of a regional usage of the negative particles, as suggested by M. Woidich in a personal communication. According to this explanation, the extended use of *miš* could have originated in the Sharqiyya province where the form *miš šuʔt* was observed²¹, in which the continuous particle is followed by the perfect verbal form.

b) Another explanation, which does not necessarily contradict the previous one, is that the continuous negative particle is gradually taking over the positions of the discontinuous one²², as is in accordance with the development which occurred in other languages, such as French for example where the double negation is gradually replaced by the use of the single one, mostly, but not only in oral usage: *Je ne sais pas* replaced by: *Je sais pas*.

This explanation is confirmed, or at least reinforced by observations appearing in the literature concerning earlier stages of Cairene. According to these observations,

²⁰ A sort of cold cut.

²¹ M. Woidich, “Zum Dialekt von il-ʕAwâmra in der ostlichen Sharqiyya (Ägypten)”, p. 76-99, in *Zeitschrift für Arabische Linguistik*, vol. 2, 1979.

²² This development has been suggested by Brustad and Al-Tonsi as seen above.

half a century ago (40 or 50 years ago); the continuous negative *miš* had a narrower expansion or had fewer usages than it has in present CA.

In T.F. Mitchell's *Teach yourself* grammar, dated 1962²³, the negative particle *muš* or *miš* is described as being used "with a following imperfect prefixed with *ha-*", but not with a following imperfect prefixed with *bi-*; this last verbal form being negated by the "split" negative. The same rule of use is given in T.F. Mitchell's *Introduction to Egyptian colloquial Arabic*²⁴, where he states that *muš* is generally used with the independent pronoun, in questions such as: *inti miš gayya mša:na* more commonly than the 'split' negative. This would be one more indication of the spread of the continuous particle. The same can be found in N. Tomiche's grammar²⁵.

c) Finally, this extension in the use of *miš* could very well be enhanced by the fact that this particle does come in contact with the perfect form of the verb in different syntactic environments, such as noted above. We have seen that *miš* can be followed by the imperfect form of the verb when the negation concerns the whole clause, as observed in the example given above: *miš takli nnaharda wa:gi bukra ala: ? l?akl zayy ma huwwa*. We also observed *miš* followed by the perfect in the same kind of construction: *d-ana miš ittafa?t mšah wə-bas, d-ana maḍde:tu šala wara?a*.

Finally the same sequence of *miš* followed by a verb in the perfect can be observed in a negative interrogative construction, equally mentioned in the example given above: *miš ?ultilak innu miš ḥayi:gi?*

Since *miš* appears in certain functions followed by the perfect as well as the imperfect verb, this could yield the acceptance of the 'non standard' succession in other cases as well.

Conclusions

Cairene, in the same way as other Arabic dialects, does not have an explicit codification, in the sense that speakers use their dialects unaware of forms and formal rules of use. Could this factor be one of the reasons that changes take place in an easier way than in standardized idioms? Little is known about how norms vary and the degree to which there is a resistance to change, more so in the area of morphology and grammar than in the areas of sounds and meanings. But it is likely that unwritten idioms are more propitious for change in norms (however slow they can be) than written ones. These considerations do not prevent us from noticing that certain forms are highly stigmatized by certain groups of the linguistic community.

I will conclude, by relating the observations made in this paper with the ones made on other evolving substandard features in Cairene. Any observer of the collected data in this short study will have noted that most of the informants were female. In her analyses of gender in relation to linguistic varieties of Cairene, Haeri claims that in cases of "stable variation" women will use "standard" forms "more

²³ T.F. Mitchell, *Colloquial Arabic*, p. 106-107.

²⁴ T.F. Mitchell, *An introduction to Egyptian colloquial Arabic*, p. 46, Oxford, 1978, first published 1956.

²⁵ N. Tomiche, *Le parler arabe du Caire*, p. 205, Paris, La Haye, 1964.

frequently than men in all social classes and educational backgrounds”²⁶, whereas in situations of “change in progress” women will use the “non-standard” forms more frequently than men, in urban environments. In the case of the evolving uses of *miš*, in the same way as for the feature of palatalization analyzed by Haeri, it may seem that we are facing a case of “change in progress”, where women belong to the innovative rather than the conservative part of the linguistic community.

²⁶ N. Haeri, *The sociolinguistic market of Cairo. Gender, class and education*, p.10, London-New York, Kegan Paul International, 1995.