Evolving uses in Cairene Egyptian Arabic negation forms

Usos evolucionados de las formas de negación en árabe egipciocairota

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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 ~muš2; since the choice between these two markers is

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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.

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

a) The discontinuous particle *maš*.

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:
  \[ mašฟft \text{ hadd } w-\text{ana gayyā} \]
  “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:
  \[ mašฟft \text{ titkallim kida} \]
  “It doesn’t work you talk this way” (“You shouldn’t talk this way”)
  \[ ka:n \text{ yīšu:ft } ra\text{yu bīift }\text{ ūna } \text{ūna } \text{we-ma } \text{za:lik } \text{mayiftaš } \text{bu?d} \]
  “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 *ha* prefix:
  \[ mašfibūdš \]
  “He doesn’t come often”

- It introduces prohibitions:
  \[ matibţidš \]
  “Don’t go far”

- It also negates pseudo verbal expressions consisting of prepositions followed by pronominal suffixes (*li:h, šandu, fi:h*):
  \[ mašFalūdš \text{ hadd} \]
  “He doesn’t have anyone”
  \[ mašFalūdš \text{ wila:d} \]
  “She doesn’t have children”

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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 *mwš*, as observed by Woidich in *Das Kairenisch-Arabische. Eine Grammatik*, p. 334, Wiesbaden, 2006.

3 G. Mejdell, p. 241.


5 Unless otherwise specified the examples are mine.


7 K. Brustad, p. 288.
“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 *ha*, such as in:
  
  \[ miš \, haʔu’llak \]

  “I shall not tell you”

Also with the imperfect prefixed by *b*:

\[ itʔxxar \, fi-l-kalːm, \, miš \, biyitkallim \, liʃsa \]

“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 *ha*, contrary to the usage common half a century ago, where this particle only accompanied the *ha* 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:

\[ miš \, šayfa \, ?uddaːmī \, min \, it-taʔab \]

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

\[ ana \, miš \, faʔma \]

“I do not understand”

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¹³ K. Brustad, p. 302.
¹⁴ Same reference, p. 303.
"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 yiʔu:l il-haʔiʔa “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:

  lhaddi mayʔu:l innu miš hindi
  “Until he says that he is not Indian”\textsuperscript{15}

  ana miš mabsuʔa
  “I am not happy”

  di miš muskila
  “This is not a problem”

  ana miš ċiḍḍ il-ʔišla:h
  “I am not against reform”

  huvwa miš hina
  “He is not here”

  miš kida “not like that”

  miš dilmwaʔtu “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 ʕanduhum taħaffüz binhum w-ʔaːd, lakid miš binhum wi be:n ir-rigga:la\textsuperscript{16}
  “Perhaps they have reservations among themselves, but they don’t have reservations with men.”

  d-ana miš ittafaːt mʕaːh w-ʔaːbas, d-ana maddeːtu ʕala 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: ittafaːt mʕaːh. 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

\textsuperscript{15} Louis Awad, Mudhakkaraːt, p. 110.

\textsuperscript{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) itafa’t mwa:b wa-bas, d-ana ma’də:tu ʕala wara

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

miš takli nnaharda wa:gi bukra ala:ʔi ᵱakl 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 Pa:l inni l-ʔingilli:zi muṭtaram, mine:n mayru:thi

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

miš ʔulṭilak innu miš hayyi: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 of 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):

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17 Same reference, p. 108.
miš yixalli:ha tišṭāqal
“He doesn’t let her work”
miš yinfaʕ (E)
“It does not work” or “it can’t go”

• The imperative:
miš tizalʕaʔ fi:nah (E)
“Do not shout at us”
miš tirmi:hom (E)
“Don’t throw them”
miš tinzaʕi li-ṣ-ṣuʕi la:luː (E)
“Don’t go to work immediately”
miš ti:xuʕ (M)
“Don’t be afraid”
miš ti:xualʕi fi nifsik haga (in a TV series)
“Don’t deprive yourself from anything”

• Precedes the verb in the perfect form¹⁹:
miš daxalʕi (N1)
“She did not enter (the hospital)”
di miš ʕa:malʕi haga (N2)
“She has not done anything”
miš istawʕa (E)
“It did not cook”
miš kalit le:ʔ? (E)
“Why didn’t she eat?”
miš ni:mθ bi:ha (M)
“I didn’t sleep with it”
miš ka:nθ ʕatina:θ (E)
“It was not going to become cleaner”
ʕata:tʰiθ waθ waθ miš ʕata:tʰiθ
“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 Sa’daddi:in Wahba, p. 25, Berlin 1987. Malina pointed to one occurrence of miš-impf. In the following example: mi:n ʕaθr waθid ʕuθt miš niθʔaθ baθid “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 ziiθiθ, however it seems to me it is clearly a case in which miš negates a whole clause: inta ziiθiθ? “Did you get upset?” miš ziiθiθ “It is not that I got upset”.

EDNA 12 (2008), pp. 83-91. ISSN 1137-7968
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:ḥ, šandu, and fi:ḥ.
  
  miš li:ḥa manzar (E)
  
  “It does not look good”

  miš šandi raš:ḍ (E)
  
  “I don’t have credit” (for the mobile phone)

  adi n-na:s ilī miš šandaha dami:r (E)
  
  “Here are people who do not have integrity”

  miš šandi istiďa:d inn anā salīḥa (male university professor)
  
  “I have no intention of making up with her”

  miš šandi t-mubayl bitaḥha (female university teaching assistant)
  
  “I don’t have her mobile number”

  miš šandahum ūraq:m (university professor)
  
  “They don’t carry numbers”

  wa:ḥid bastirma miš ūlaḥ gibna, [immediately followed by] min ge:r gibna (seller at a take away restaurant)
  
  “One with basterma20 with no cheese, without cheese”

  ana miš wa:ra:yā ha:ga bukra (young student at the Faculty of Dentistry)
  
  “I have nothing to do tomorrow”

  miš mi:a:yā karra (a working class woman on a TV interview)
  
  “I don’t have a cart”

  miš fi:ḥ sabab muḥaddad (famous middle aged aged 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 šuft 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.


  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 1962\(^{23}\), 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: *ini miš gayya miša: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 grammar\(^{25}\).

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:lä *lakl zayy ma huwwa. We also observed miš followed by the perfect in the same kind of construction: *d-anu miš ittafāt mēh wa-baš, d-anu madde:tu *lā: wara?i.*

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 ḫultilak innu miš bayi: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

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frequently than men in all social classes and educational backgrounds26, 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.