

Negative Displacement in Palestinian Arabic

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0. Talk objective

The syntax of negation and the negative concord phenomenon in natural languages constitute fascinating objects of theorization by many linguists in the tradition of generative grammar (see the selected references). In this talk, I present the Palestinian Arabic (henceforth, PA) facts to bear on the analysis of negative indefinites in negative concord languages and the proper syntactic treatment of negation. More specifically, I argue that any syntactic theory of natural language negation must account for the novel phenomenon of negative displacement in Palestinian Arabic (henceforth, PA) in which the negative (quantificational) marker *wala* 'no' is *obligatorily* raised from a postverbal (subject/object) position to the pre-(finite) verbal position (and stranding the bare noun) to attain its sentential scope in narrow syntax.

1. Main data

Necessity of *wala*-movement from postverbal position to preverbal position

- (1) a.* *zeenab* *baas-at* ***wala*** *walad/hada*
 Zenab kiss-Pst-3FS NEG boy/one
 'Zenab kissed no boy/no one.'
- b. *zeenab* ***wala*** *baas-at* *walad/hada*
 Zenab NEG kiss-Pst-3FS boy/one
 'Zenab kissed no boy/no one.'
- c.* *naam* ***wala*** *walad/hada* (PA allows VS word order)
 sleep-Pst-3MSNEG boy/one
- d. ***wala*** *naam* *walad/hada*
 NEG sleep-Pst-3MS boy/one
 'No one slept.'

PA *wala* 'no' contrasts with its Germanic counterparts *no*, *geen* and *keine* in that the latter cannot be independently displaced or raised in narrow syntax. However, in *emphatic* negatives, *wala* is forced to stay *in situ* when the preverbal position is already lexically filled by another negative (sentential) marker, as shown in (2).

- (2) a. *zeenab* ***ma-bas-at-iš*** ***wala*** *walad/hada*
 Zenab NEG-kiss-Pst-3FS-NEG NEG boy/one
 'Zenab kissed no boy/no one.'

- c. *wala/maa* *ḥada* *baas* *rašiid*
 NEG/NEG one kiss-Pst-3MS Rashid
 ‘No one kissed Rashid.’
- d. *wala/maa* *baas-at* *zeenab* *rašiid*
 NEG/NEG kiss-Pst-3FS Zenab Rashid
 ‘Zenab did not kiss Rashid.’

PA displaying double-negation reading phenomenon

- (5) a. *wala* *walad/ḥada* *zeenab* *ma-bas-at-iš*
 NEG boy/one Zenab NEG-kiss-Pst-3FS-NEG
 ‘No boy/no one Zenab did not kissed.’
- b. *wala* *walad/ḥada* *zeenab* *maa-baas-at*
 NEG boy/one Zenab NEG-kiss-Pst-3FS
 ‘No boy/No one Zenab did not.’

2. Salient characteristics of *wala*

- *Wala* exclusively selects count nominals:

- (6) a. *wala* *ḥabit* *tuffaḥ* */tuffaḥ-a*
 No Classifier apple-Mass /apple-SG
- b. * *wala* *tuffaḥ*
 No apple-Mass

- *Wala* can license the distribution of the exceptive *illa* ‘but/except’:

- (7) a. *zeenab bašd-a* *wala* *baays-i* *illa* *rašiid*
 Zenab yet-CL-3FS NEG kiss Prtl-3FS but Rašid
 ‘Zenab has only kissed Rashid yet.’

- *Wala* licenses sentences featuring minimizers or negative polarity verbs:

- (8) a. *zeenab* *wala* *bi-t-swa* *basal-i*
 Zebab NEG PRES-3FS-worth onion-Classifier
 ‘Zenab does not worth a thing.’
- b. *zeenab wala* *šann-at* *t-²uul* *marḥaba*
 Zenab NEG bother-3FS 3FS-nonFin-say hello
 ‘Zenab didn’t bother to say hello.’

- PA displays the peculiar sequence *kull ši/kull-u wala...*, where the addressee expresses a strong objection/refusal to the content of the previous assertion:

- (9) a. *zeenab jaay-i* *ša* *l-ḥafli*
 Zenab come-Prtl-3FS Prep th-party
 ‘Zenab is coming to the party.’
- b. *kull ši/* *kull-u* *wala* *zeenab* *t-iiji*
 every thing/ every-CL-it NEG Zenab 3FS-nonFin-come
 ‘Everything/Everyone but Zenab come!’

- PA negatives may feature the negative indefinite *wala iši* ‘nothing’ in addition to the sentential negative marker *wala* ‘no’:

(10) a. *bi-t-ħibb* *zeenab*
 PRES-2MS-love Zenab
 ‘Do you love Zenab?’

b. *wala ba-ħibb-a* *wala iši*
 NEG PRES-1S-CL-her NEG thing
 ‘I absolutely don’t love her at all.’
- Negative verb such as *baṭṭal* (‘quit’) can license *wala* in its complement, as in (11).

(11) a. *baṭṭal-at* *zeenab t-buus* *wala hada*
 quit-Pst-3FS Zenab 3FS-nonFin-kiss NEG one
 ‘Zenab quitted kissing anyone.’

3. Main Claim and its evidence

Wala being a universally negative determiner, it must target the Negative polarity-head position which is structurally higher than T-head of the syntactic structure of PA such as (1b, d) above in narrow syntax. Moreover, Negative *wala*-displacement is necessarily *interpretation*-driven: sentential negation interpretation cannot be attained unless the negation *scope* position is *lexicalized*. Negative *wala*-displacement satisfies locality condition.

3.1. Independent evidence for determiner-raising in PA

Independent evidence for the existences of determiner movement in NPA comes from interrogatives and exclamatives, as exemplified in (12). Notice that the same string in (12) may express a question or exclamation, differentiated only by intonational contour. The left branch extraction of the *wh*-determiner *ʔadeeš* ‘how much’ leaves the mass noun *tuffaaḥ* ‘apples’ in situ.

- (12) a. *ʔadeeš* *zeenab* *ʔakl-at* *tuffaaḥ*
 How much Zenab eat-Pst-3FS apple-Mass
 ‘How much apples did Zenab eat?/ How much apples Zenab ate!’

3.2. PA *wala* featuring cardinal expressions

One piece of evidence for the claim that sentential negation interpretation cannot be obtained from syntactic positions other than the negative polarity-head position comes from the non-sentential negative meaning of *wala* when attached to a cardinal expression, as in (13).

- (13) a. *zeenab* *ʔakal-at* *wala xamis bakita:t* *šukala:ṭa*
 Zenab eat-Pst-3FS NEG five buckets chocolate
 ‘Zenab ate more than/no less than five buckets of chocolate.’
- b. *wala miit* *zalami* *ḥadar-u* *l-ḥaḥfli*
 No hundred man attend-Pst-3MPL the-party
 ‘More than/No less than hundred people attended the party.’

Despite its negativity, *wala* in (13) does not yield a sentential semantic negation but at most a constituent negation with the approximate reading of ‘no less than/more than’. One support for such an analysis comes from the lack of double-negation reading of negatives with the negative cardinal expression in pre-negative verbal position, as in (14). (14a) cannot express or convey the proposition that a hundred men attended the party. Neither can the negative *wala* license the NPI

?*ayya* ‘any’ in (14b), since the c-command relation cannot be maintained, thus ensuing its ill-formedness.

- (14) a. *wala miit zalami maa ḥadar-u l-afli*
 No hudred man NEG attend-Pst-3MPL the-party
 ‘More than/No less than hundred people did not attend the party.’
- b. **wala miit zalami ḥadar-u ?ayya ḥafli*
 No hundred man attend-Pst-3MPL any party

3.3 PA *wala* lacking the quantificational force when occurring in a postverbal position

- (15) a. *zeenab ṣiml-at masa:ri min wala iṣi*
 Zenab make-Pst-3FS money from NEG thing-minimizer
 ‘Zenab made money out of nothing.’
- b. *zeenab b-t-xaaf min wala iṣi*
 Zenab PRES-3FS-fear Prep NEG thin-minimizer
 ‘Zenab is afraid of nothing.’

Despite the licit distribution of *wala iṣi* ‘nothing’ in the prepositional phrase in the postverbal position, it lacks the sentential scope force, since it does not occupy the relevant syntactic position from which its semantic negation is yielded. As a matter of fact, even if the PP-complement is fronted into sentence-initial position in (15), we still do not get the sentential negation. Such lack of quantificational force has presumably to do with the *qualitative* sense or use of the minimizer nominal *iṣi* ‘thing’. The grammaticality contrast in (16) seems to lend clear support for such an analysis.

- (16) a. *zeenab hii wala isi b-n-nisbi il-i*
 Zenab she NEG thing in-relation Prep-CL-me
 ‘Zenab is nothing to me.’
- b.* *zeenab hii wala ḥada b-n-nisbi il-i*
 Zenab she NEG one in-the-relation Prep-Cl-me
 ‘Zenab is everyone to me.’

3.4. PA *wala* moving across the head of PP-complements in emphatic negatives

Remarkably, *wala* ‘no’ must move across the prepositional head of PP-complements in emphatic negatives, as shown in (17).

- (17) a.* *zeenab maa ḥak-at ṣan wala ?ayya ktaab*
 Zenab NEG talk-Pst-3FS about NEG any book
 ‘Zenab talked about no book.’
- b. *zeenab maa ḥak-at wala ṣan ?ayya ktaab*
 Zenab NEG talk-Pst-3FS NEG about any book
 ‘Zenab talked about no book.’

We have seen above that PA in principle does not exclude prepositions talking complements headed by *wala*, as exemplified in (15). *Wala* in (17b) functions as a negative reinforcer in the scope of the sentential negative marker *maa* ‘not’. It evokes a widening of the quantification domain. It indicates that the set of options under consideration has been widened. It can be used

appropriately when widening has informational impact (cf. Kadmon & Landman’s analysis of *any*, 1993). The stronger declarative in (18b) for example entails the ‘neutral’ declarative (18a).

- (18) a. *zeenab ma-bas-at-iš həda*
 Zenab NEG-kiss-Pst-3FS-NEG one
 ‘Zenab didn’t kiss anyone.’
- b. *zeenab ma-bas-at-iš wala həda*
 Zenab NEG-kiss-Pst-3FS-NEG NEG one
 ‘Zenab didn’t kiss any single one.’

We take the movement of *wala* around the preposition *ʕan* ‘about’ in (17b) to be NEG-movement to a Foc(us)-head, given the intonational prominence when *wala* is added in negatives, thus creating the following (simplified) relevant structure:

- (19) ...[FocP **wala** [PP [P *ʕan*] [NegP [Neg<~~wala~~>] [DP [D^ʔ*ayya*] [NP *ktaab*]]]]]...

Interestingly enough, when the negated PP-complement in (17b) undergoes fronting into sentence-initial position, a *double*-negation reading is yielded, namely, the proposition that every single book Zenab talked about. Remarkably, the focused negative PP-complement can *wh*-move into the SpecCP in *wh*-questions, as shown in (20).

- (20) a. **wala** *ʕan ʔayya ktaab zeenab maa hək-at*
 NEG about which book Zenab NEG talk-Pst-3FS
 ‘Which book did Zenab not talk about?’

The determiner *ʔayya*, functioning as NPI within the scope of the sentential negative marker *maa* ‘not’, acts as a *wh*-determiner in the SpecCP. One potential answer to (20a) is: *ʕan ktaab darwiš* ‘about Darwish’s book’. The sentential negative force of *wala* in the SpecCP seems to be neutralized or mitigated, given the overriding prominence of the *wh*-quantifier *ʔayya ktaab* ‘which book’.

3.5. Evidence from the structure of the negative counterfactual complementizer *loola* ‘if not’

The complex *loola* consists of two functional heads: the counterfactual conditional complementizer *law* ‘if_{irrealis}’ and the sentential negative marker *laa* ‘not/no’. Its phonological makeup is a product of a phonological change that renders the diphthong /aw/ to /oo/ and consequently a shortening of /aa/. *law* ‘if_{irrealis}’ selects an antecedent that contains only an overt DP and a sentential consequence headed by the (modal) *kaan* ‘was’, as exemplified in (21).

- (21) a. **loola** *zidaan kaan faransa maa xisr-at la iṭaalya*
 If-not Zidane was-MOD France NEG lose-Pst-3FS to Italy
 ‘Had Zidan not been sent off, France wouldn’t have lost to Italy.’
- b. **loomaa** *amerika (maa d-daxa-lat) kaan issa fii salaam*
 if-not America (NEG interfer-Pst-3FS) was-MOD now Prep peace
 ‘Had America not interfered, there would’ve been peace now.’

We take (21) to provide an argument in favor of NEG-displacement into the *irrealis* C-head *law* and the amalgam C-NEG results in *loola* or *loomaa* at PF, where *la* and *ma* are *prima facia* sentential negative markers in Arabic. The obligatory elided constituent, which can be recovered from context and world knowledge, is a TP-complement selected by the (higher) NEG-head *ma/la* ‘not’. The DP *zidaan/amerika* in (21) occupies a position external to TP.

Interestingly enough, the English scalar modifier *almost* is expressed by the ‘reduced’ counterfactual conditional phrase featuring the complex *loola/loomaa* and the minimizer *nitfi* ‘bit’ or *šwayy* ‘little’ in its antecedent, and the *irrealis* modality encoded by the past tense copular *kaan* in the consequence, as shown in (22).

- (22) a. *loomaa/loola nitfi/šwayy kaan zeenab maat-at*
 If-NEG bit/little was-MOD Zenab die-Pst-3FS
 ‘Zenab almost died.’
- b. *loomaa/loola nitfi/šwayy kaan zeenab maa maat-at*
 If-NEG bit/little was-MOD Zenab NEG die-Pst-3FS
 ‘Zenab almost didn’t die.’

It is worth noting that the past tense form *kaan* shows *no* agreement in gender with the subject *zeenab*, giving rise to modality interpretation rather than temporality, in contrast to the full agreement on the main verb *maat-at* ‘died’.

3.6. *Wala*-raising across sentences featuring the complex *ka’in* ‘as-if’

One further support that motivates our *wala*-raising analysis comes from the fact that *wala* ‘no’ can undergo raising to the pre-complex head *ka’in* ‘as-if’, as shown in (23).

- (23) a. *zeenab b-ti-tSarrf ka’in-ha wala b-ti-šrif-ni*
 Zenab PRES-3FS-behave as-if-Cl-3FS NEG PRES-3FS-know-CL-me
 ‘Zenab behaves as if she doesn’t know me.’
- b. *zeenab b-ti-tSarrf wala ka’in-ha b-ti-šrif-ni*
 Zenab PRES-3FS-behave NEG as-if-Cl-3FS PRES-3FS-know-CL-me
 ‘Zenab behaves as if she doesn’t know me.’

3.7. *Wala*-raising subject to locality condition

Negative *wala*-displacement in PA is subject to locality condition. Although *wala* can move from a postverbal position into a higher preverbal position and stranding the (bare) nominal (restrictor) in the embedded clause whose verb doesn’t inflect for tense, it is illicit to move the negative determiner *wala* from a finite CP-complement to a matrix verb, as shown in (24).

- (24) a. *b-ti-fakkir zeenab wala t-buus hada šili*
 PRES-3FS-think Zenab NEG 3FS-nonFin-kiss one at-all
 ‘Zenab thinks to not kiss anyone at all.’
- b. *wala b-ti-fakkir zeenab t-buus hada šili*
 NEG PRES-3FS-think Zenab 3FS-nonFin-kiss one at-all
 ‘Zenab doesn’t think to kiss anyone at all.’

- c. *zeenab b-tiʕrif* *innu hiba wala baas-at* *hada šiili*
 Zenazb PRES-3FS-know that Hiba NEG kissed-3FS one at-all
 ‘Zenab doesn’t know that Hiba kissed anyone at all.’
- d. * *zeenab wala b-tiʕrif* *innu hiba baas-at* *hada šiili*
 Zenazb NEG PRES-3FS-know that Hiba kissed-3FS one at-all
 ‘Zenab doesn’t know that Hiba kissed anyone at all.’

3.8. Other senses of *wala*

PA *wala* can convey the “better than” sense once it is followed by a clause or followed by a proper name, as shown in (25).

- (25) a. *inn-ak* *t-ʔaawim* *wala* *inn-ak* *t-ʕiiš* *muhaan*
 that-you 2MS-nonFin-resist NEG that-you 2MS-live humiliated
 ‘To resist is better than to live humiliated.’
- b. *meesi wala Maradona b-zaman-u*
 Messi NEG Maradona in-time-his
 ‘Messi is better than Maradona in his time.’

It may express the ‘even’ reading in a sentential context in which sentential negation is optional:

- (26) a. *wala š-šayaṭiin (maa) bi-ṭiiʔ rašiid*
 NEG the-devils NEG PRES-stand Rashid
 ‘Even the devils don’t stand Rashid.’
- b. *wala hiṭṭa š-šayaṭiin (maa) bi-ṭiiʔ rašiid*
 NEG even the-devils NEG PRES-stand Rashid
 ‘Not even the devils stand Rashid.’

It is not clear to me why the presence of two sentential negative markers do not cancel each other out in such a context.

4. Some conclusions

- Universal Grammar must permit negative determiner-raising to account for the PA facts.
- UG must allow *interpretation*-driven movement.
- Negation is projected higher than tense *universally*.
- Syntactic structure *fully* determines the exact identity of *wala*-expressions. The different senses of *wala* in the data substantiate this claim. These senses are still members of the same semantic field of negativity context.
- Natural language semantic negation is mainly read off the scope position of the syntactic structure of the sentence, which is projected in the Negative Polarity phrase and can be realized by the morphosyntactic negative markers such as *wala*. Double negation in natural languages is available when there is a negative quantifier adjoined (by movement) to the syntactic structure specified for semantic negation.
- Parametric variation across languages boils down to the idiosyncratic lexical properties of the negative markers and their internal structure.
- Negative concord is not a *uniform* phenomenon across natural languages. For PA, it is a misnomer.

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