

# **Sentential Negation in Berber: A comparative study**

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## **1. Introduction**

In this paper I offer a micro-comparative study of sentential negation in the Berber dialects. Part of my analysis is based on the “optional” negation markers *sha* (Tamazight)/ *ara* (Taqbaylit)/ *kra* (Tarifit), which have to my knowledge, not been analyzed by Berber Generative linguists. I argue that these negation markers shouldn’t be ignored in any syntactic analysis of Berber negation and show that they have serious implications concerning the structure of this language.

Berber has two different strategies to express sentential negation. It is expressed by means of a pre-verbal negative marker as shown in examples 1 and 2. The negative marker *ur* can be described as the head of NegP, given the standard theory where negation elements occupy the head or the specifier position of NegP. The Tamazight negative marker *ur* is similar in this respect to the French negative marker *ne*.

1. *ur iddi wrba gher-skeela*  
not 3s.went boy to-school  
“The kid didn’t go to school”

2. *ur iswi wmush lhlib*  
not 3s-drink cat milk  
“The cut didn’t drink milk”

Sentential negation is also expressed by means of two negative markers; one always preceding the verb and the other either preceding the verb or following it. Example 3 is a case where the negative marker *ur* precedes the verb and the other negative element.

3. *ur ughax sha lktaab*  
neg1 1s-bought-1s neg2 book  
“I did not buy the book”

Taqbaylit, Chaoui and Tarifit also have the pattern in (3).

4. *ur* *kcimegh* *ara* (Taqbaylit)  
neg1 enter.past.1s neg2  
“I didn’t enter” Nait-Zerrad (1994: 32)

5. *ud* *yusi-ca* (Chaoui)  
neg1 come.3sm-neg2  
“He didn’t come” Nait-Zerrad (1994: 34)

6. *ur* *izri* *shi* *immas* (Tarifit)  
neg1 see.past.3s neg2 mother-his  
“He didn’t see his mother”

The negation element cannot occur after the verb as shown in 7 and 8.

7. \**thdda* *ur* *yemma* *gher souq*  
go.past.3sf neg mother-my to market  
“My mother didn’t go to the market”

8. \**thdda* *shaur* *yemma* *gher souq*  
go.past.1sf neg-neg mother-my to market

Ouhalla (1990), in his discussion of Berber sentential structure, argues the structural position of the negation element *ur* in Tarifit Berber is high in the functional domain selecting TP. What has not received much attention is the second negation element *sha*. This second negation element does not occur only in Tamazight Berber but it is attested in other Berber varieties as well, as reported in Nait-Zerrad (1994) and Chaker (1996) and as illustrated in the examples above.<sup>1</sup>

Tamazight, Taqbaylit, and Tarifit in this respect are similar to French, which employs two negative elements *ne* and *pas*. In this paper I analyze the Tamazight negative element *ur* as a Neg<sup>0</sup>head and *sha* as a specifier of NegP. I will assume following the standard approach, first proposed by Plollock (1989), that the negation head projects a full phrase according to the X-bar schemata. The specifier position of NegP is the position where negative polarity items are licensed in Berber. I argue, following Ouhalla (1990), that

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<sup>1</sup> Nait-Zerrad (1994) provides a list of variants of the negative element *ur* from other Berber varieties:

*u* : Kabyle, Chaoui  
*ul* : Kabyle, Mzab, Ouargla  
*ud* : Chaoui  
*wel* : Mzab, Ouargla  
*wer* : Touareg

He states that for certain dialects like Tashlhit, Touareg, Mzabit, “*ur*” is sufficient in negative constructions. It is not clear then whether these dialects used the second negative element “*sha*” optionally and it was dropped as a result of some kind of syntactic change or whether it never existed. He does however mention without providing any examples that Tarifit, the dialect described in Ouhalla (1990), employs two negative elements *ur--cra*.

NegP is structurally higher than TP. I also argue, extending Zanuttini's (1995) approach that there are two projections for negation; one selecting VP (NegP) and one selecting TP.

## 2. First negation elements

One thing that all Berber dialects have in common is that the first negation element, i.e. **ur**, is obligatory and must be preverbal.

9. ur th?lix (\*ur) assa Tamazight  
 neg see.past.1s (\*neg) day-this  
 "I haven't seen him today"

10. ur i?lim (\*ur) Taqbaylit  
 neg know.past.3s (\*neg)  
 "He didn't know"

11. ur isha (\*ur) imkli wehdu Tashlhit  
 neg eat.past.3s (\*neg) lunch alone  
 "He didn't have lunch alone"

12. war inwi (\*war) sha Tarifit  
 neg think.past.3s (\*neg) neg  
 "He didn't think"

## 3. Second negation element

When it comes to the second negation element, these dialects show some variation. In Touareg, as reported in Nait-Zerrad (1994), as well as in Tashlhit it is nonexistent (13, 14). In Tamzight, Taqbaylit, and Tarifit it is used optionally as shown in 15, 16 and 17.

13. ur ssex (sha) Tamazight  
 neg drink-Perf.1s (neg)  
 "I don't drink"

14. ur kshimegh (ara) Taqbaylit  
 neg entered.past.1s (neg)  
 "I didn't enter"

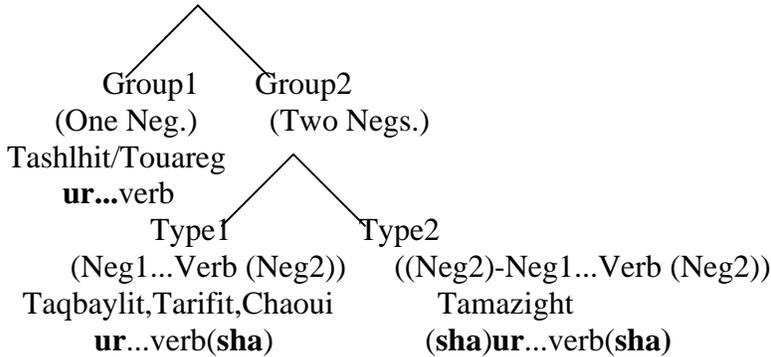
15. u-sn twshi (sha) arbi Tarifit  
 neg-them give.Past.3s (neg) grass  
 "She didn't give them grass"

Unlike in Taqbaylit and Tarifit, in Tamazight the second negation element can appear pre-verbally as shown in 16 below:

16. shaur      dix                      gher-s                      Tamazight  
 neg-neg go.past.1s to-him  
 “I didn’t go to him/ I didn’t visit him”

The following summarizes negation patterns in the different dialects mentioned above.

17. Summary



**4. “ur” and other negative polarity items**

*ur* can co-occur with a number of negative polarity items. It can occur with *walu* “nothing” as in 18, with *agidge* “no one” as in 19, with *urigin* and *ursar* “never” as in 20 and 21.

18. *ur* as-wshi.x walu  
 neg him-give.Per.3s nothing  
 “I didn’t give him anything”

19. *ur* iddi agidge gher skuella  
 neg go.Perf.3s no one school  
 “Nobody went to school”

20. *urigin* (ur) dix gher Frans  
 never go.Per.1s to France  
 “I’ve never been to France”

21. *ursar* (ur) t-ughex  
 never neg it-buy.Per.1s  
 “I will never buy it”

The negative adverbials *urigin* and *ursar* cannot occur in a post-verbal position:

22. \*ur dix                      *urigin* gher frans  
 neg go.Perf.1s never to France  
 “I’ve never been to France/I never went to France”

23. \*ur t-ughex *usar*  
 neg it-buy.Pef.1s never  
 “I will never buy it”

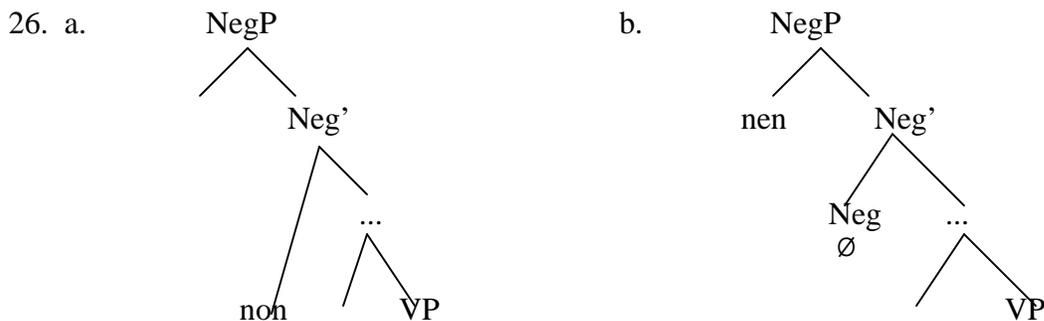
### 5. Zanuttini and Benmamoun

Zanuttini (1995) argues that Romance has two syntactic projections, which play a role in the expression of sentential negation: one is the projection NegP in which the negative markers are generated and the other is the projection PolP, in which they are uniformly interpreted. Zanuttini’s analysis accounts for the different patterns of negation distribution across Romance languages, which are separated into two groups when it comes to the position of negation in the clause. Languages that employ preverbal negative markers as illustrated in 24 and those which have post-verbal Neg. elements as shown in 25.

24. Gianni non ha telefonato a sua madre. (Italian)  
 “John hasn’t called his mother”

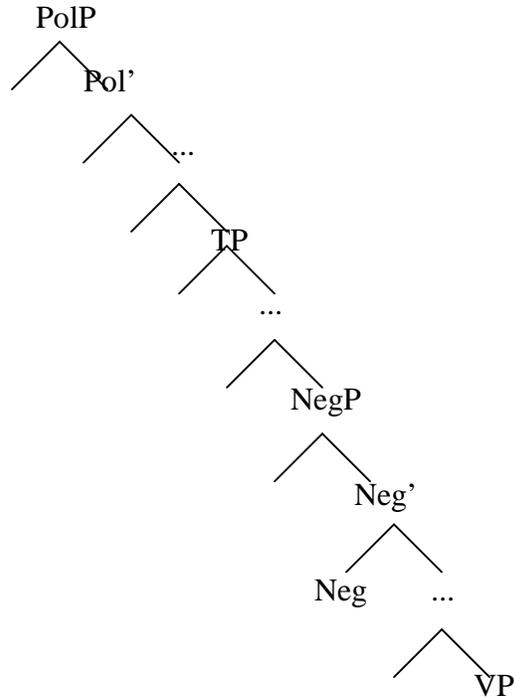
25. Maria a mangia *nen*. (Piedmontese)  
 Mary cl(subj) eats neg  
 “Mary doesn’t eat.”

In her analysis negative markers are either X elements heading a functional category NegP, or XP elements, which occupy the Spec position of NegP. This is illustrated in the following two diagrams below from Zanuttini (1995: 446):



Besides the projection in which the negative markers are base generated, Zanuttini assumes another projection where these negative elements move for interpretative reasons. This projection she calls PolP and it is higher than TP. All negative markers occupy PolP at some point in the derivation. In languages like Italian, the negative markers, which have strong negative features, move to PolP before spell out. This, according to her, explains why they always occur pre-verbally in Italian like languages. On the other hand, in languages like Piedmontese negative markers have weak negative features, thus they do not move to PolP until LF. The following illustrates the structure proposed by Zanuttini for Romance languages:

27.



(Zanuttini 1995: 447)

There is at least one main reason for not wanting to extend Zanuttini's analysis to Berber. Given her approach we will have to assume that in all Berber dialects Neg moves overtly to its surface position. The overt movement of negative elements is driven by strong negative features. However, this does not tell us anything about what drives the overt movement of the second negative element. If *Sha-Ur* is a type of spec head agreement, which I will argue is, then why isn't this satisfied when they are both in the lower NegP. In other words why is it that 29 is bad although presumably both negation elements are in Spec-head relation in the lower whereas 28 is grammatical and both elements are in PolP according to Zanuttini's theory.

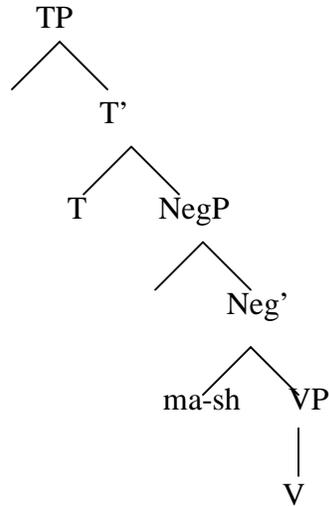
28. shaur thddi yemma gher souq  
 neg-neg go.past.3sf mother-my to market  
 "My mother didn't go to the market"

29. \*thdda shaur yemma gher souq  
 go.past.1sf neg-neg mother-my to market

## 6. Benmamoun (2000)

In his analysis of sentential negation in Modern Arabic dialects, Benmamoun (2000) argues that the negative elements *ma* and *sh* are a complex negative head as shown below:

30.



31. Omar ma-taykteb-sh Moroccan Arabic  
 Omar ma-asp-3m-write-neg  
 “Omar doesn’t write”

Benmamoun argues that the surface distribution of sentential negation in these dialects depends on whether some lexical head has moved to or through the negative projection. In 31 for example the verb moves through the negative head to T. It is not clear, however, how the negative heads merge with the verb. If on the other hand, no lexical head moves to or through the negative projection, the complex negative head surfaces on its own with *ma* and *sh* supporting each other, as is the case in 32.

32. Omar mish yikteb Egyptian Arabic  
 Omar neg-neg asp-3m-write  
 “Omar is not writing/does not write”

It is not clear how the negation elements merge with the verb and how *ma* becomes a proclitic and *sh* an enclitic. These two elements can be separated from each other not only by the verb alone but by the verb and an auxiliary or a modal element like the motion predicate *gha*.

33. ma-gha nsafer-sh  
 neg-will asp-1s-travel-neg  
 “I will not travel”

One of the main reasons why an approach like Benmamoun’s cannot be extended to Berber is that the negative elements *ur* and *sha* in Tamazight can be intervened by more than two elements like the Aspectual/Tense particles, clitics and verbs. This is illustrated below:

34. **ur** wshix **sha** lketaab i-werba  
 neg give-Perf-1s neg book to-boy  
 “I didn’t give the book to the boy”

35. **ur-as-t wshix sha**  
**neg-him-it give-Perf-1s neg**  
 “I didn’t give it to him”
36. **ur-d-as-t wshex sha**  
**neg-will-him-it give-Aor-1s neg**  
 “I will not give it to him”

In 35 the first negation element is separated from the second negation element by two object pronominal clitics and the verb and in 36, they are separated by the auxiliary, the clitics and the verb.

Another reason not to extend Benamamoun’s proposal is that assuming that *sha* and *ur* are a complex head does not explain why this complex never co-occurs with negative polarity items like *ag-idge* “no one”. In other words, suppose that *ur-sha* both occupy Neg-head and that somehow the verb and the clitics in 35 or the auxiliary, the clitics and the verb in 36 are a complex of heads adjoined to each other by movement and then this head is adjoined at the end to the negation complex head. This means that there would be no reason why we would not get sentences like 37 and 38 where presumably the negative polarity items are in Spec of NegP.<sup>2</sup>

37. \**agidge ur-as-t iwshan sha*  
 no one neg-him-it give-Ire-3s neg  
 “No one gave it to him”
38. \**uridgin ur-as-t wshix sha*  
 never neg-him-it give-1s neg  
 “I never gave it to him”

Even if the negation elements are adjacent to each other they still cannot co-occur with these negative polarity items as in 39:

39. \**agidge shaur-as-t iwshan*  
 no one neg-neg-him-it give-Perf-3s  
 “No one gave it to him”

## 7. Analysis

I assume that the first negative element *ur* is base generated in the Pol-head. PolP is higher than TP. The second is base generated in spec of NegP which selects VP. The

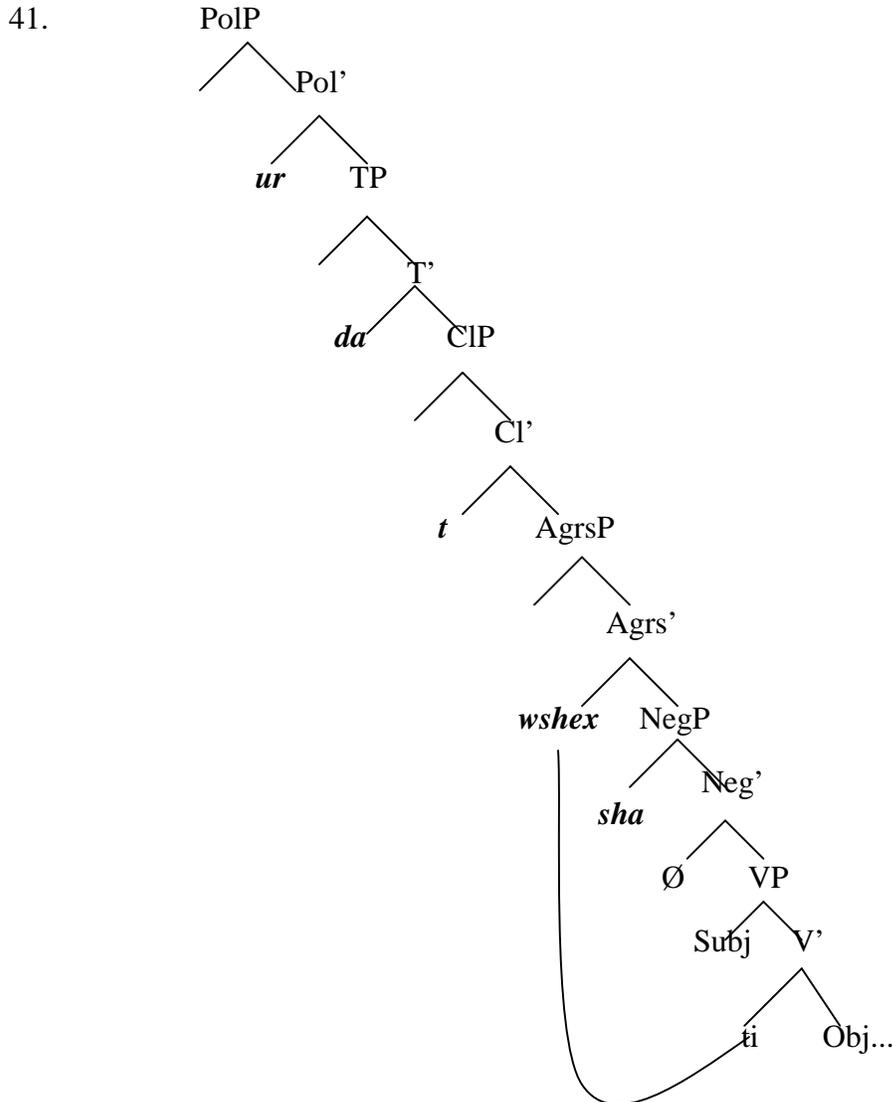
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<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact similar cases are not allowed in Moroccan Arabic:

- i. \**hetta wahed ma-ja-sh*  
 even one neg-come-past-3s  
 “No one came”
- ii. *hetta wahed ma-ja*  
 even one neg-come-past-3s  
 “No one came”

main advantage of this analysis is that it accounts for the preverbal position of *ur* in all Berber dialects without appealing to movement from a lower NegP projection. I will also assume following Sportiche (1992) and Ouali (1999)(for Berber) that clitics head their own maximal projections in the functional domain. The tree structure in 41 is the one I am assuming in this work. Notice that that tree spells out the sentence in 40.

40 . *ur-da-t*            *wshex*            *sha*  
       Neg1-Aux-ClAcc give.1ps    Neg2  
       “I will not give it”



I will show some motivations for the analysis just proposed, mainly for the tree structure in 41. I will argue that the verb moves overtly to AgrS-head in Berber and that the position the pre-verbal negation element occupies has to be higher than the position where the verb moves. It is also higher than T because negation always precedes tense

elements, which are presumably base generated in T. And finally it is higher than all (pronominal) Clitic-heads.

### 7.1. Direct and Indirect Objects

Given the VP-internal subject hypothesis proposed by people like Koopman and Sportiche (1991) and adopted by Chomsky (1995), looking at a sentence like 42 where the verb precedes both the subject and the object, we can tell that the verb has moved out of VP.

42. twsha Meriam lekthaab i Ali (Tamazight)  
 gave.1s book Meriam the book to Ali  
 “Meriam gave the book to Ali”

Now following the same logic, 43 tells us that the preverbal negation is either adjoined to the verb under a functional head or it occupies its own functional head which must be higher than the head where the verb appears at the surface structure.

43. ur wshix sha lekthaab i Ali  
 neg1 gave.1s neg2 book to Ali  
 “I didn’t give the book to Ali”

Notice that the post-verbal negation element, as shown in 44 and 45, cannot occur after the objects which means that the objects cannot move overtly or that the post-verbal negation is not inside VP (if we suppose that the objects haven’t moved).

44. \*ur wshix lekthaab sha i Ali  
 neg1 gave book neg2 to Ali
45. \*ur wshix lekthaab i Ali sha  
 neg1 gave book to Ali neg2

The question now is what position does the preverbal negation occupy?

### 7.2. Auxiliaries

I assume that auxiliaries are base generated under T as was proposed for English and French. Under this assumption the examples 46 and 47 show that the preverbal negation, since it precedes these elements, must either be adjoined to them within the same molecular head, or head its own projection higher than T.

46. ur-la tqrax (sha) lekthaab (Tamazight)  
 neg1 Aux read.1s (neg2)  
 “I’m not reading the book”
47. ur-da tqrax lekthaab  
 neg-will read book  
 “I will not read the book”

The evidence that the preverbal negation occupies its own head which is higher than T comes from the distribution of Object Pronominal Clitics in Berber.

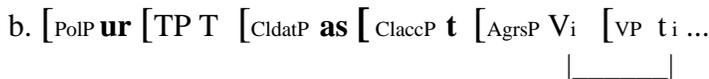
### 7.3. Object Pronominal Clitics

The distribution of object pronominal clitics in Berber is very systematic (see Ouali (1999)). Clitics require that they be preceded by some element, be it a verb, a negation element, an auxiliary or a complementizer. In this paper as mentioned above, it is assumed that clitics head their own projections in the functional domain. There is widespread theoretical and empirical motivation for this type of analysis. Discussing these reasons however is beyond the scope of this paper (see Sportiche 1992-1996, Manzini 1999 and references cited therein). Consider the following examples:

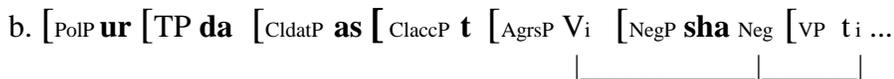
48. a. **wshix-as-t** **Verb+CL** (Tamazight)  
 gave.1s-Him-It  
 “I gave it to him”



49. a. **ur-as-t wshix** (sha) **Neg+CL+Verb**  
 neg1-Him-It gave.1s (neg2)  
 “I didn’t give it to him”



50. a. **ur-da-as-t wshex sha** **Neg+Aux+CL+Verb**  
 neg1-will-Him-It give (neg2)  
 “I will not give it to him”



Having established that the verb moves overtly in Berber, and having assumed that that clitics occupy clitic heads (CL<sub>dat</sub> and Cl<sub>acc</sub> respectively) leads us to say that the verb in 48 moves out VP up to AgrS and then moves in one swoop to T skipping over clitic heads.<sup>3</sup> In 49 the verb moves up to AgrS, through the lower Neg head, and does not move up to T at least overtly because this time clitics can be supported by the negation element. The same thing happens in 51, except than we have an auxiliary available in T, which phonologically supports the clitics. As we can see this analysis explains the motivations for using the tree structure 41 and accounts for the distribution of the clitics with regard

<sup>3</sup> I assume that verb movement to T is PF movement, which goes along the lines of what Chomsky (1998 and recent works) has been saying about Head-movement, which he considers to be a PF movement. One reason is that it seems to have no semantic effects. The verb, in Berber, only moves to T to support the clitics. This movement does violate HMC (Head Movement Constraint) but allowed by the Minimal Link Condition. Another way to look at this is that the verb does move through the clitic heads, the only problem with an assumption like this is that we don’t get the right order unless we allow right-adjunction.

to other elements. Negation I believe has to be base generated in Pol-head otherwise deriving the sentences above would require far more operations, hence economically non-attractive.

## 8. Negative Polarity Items

### 8.1. Agidge “no one” and walu “nothing”

Negative Polarity items occur in all the Berber dialects even those that do not allow a second negation element like Tashlhit as shown in 51-52.

51. ur izra htta yan (Tashlhit)  
neg see-Perf-3sm no one  
“He didn’t see anyone”

52. ur ah ixssa yat  
neg us miss nothing  
“We’re not missing/we don’t need anything”

I assume that the negative polarity items (NPI’s) in 51 and 52 move to Spec of PolP to get licensed. In 36 the NPI *no one* has moved overtly to that position.

53. agidge ur iddin (Tamazight)  
no one neg go-Perf-3s  
“No one left”

The examples we have in 53-56 show that NPI’s can either precede the pre-verbal negation element or occur in a post-verbal position. This reminds us of the second negation element *sha*, which exhibits the same pattern.

54. ur iddi agidge  
neg go-Perf-3s  
“No one left”

55. walu ur 3lix  
nothing neg see-Perf-1s  
“Nothing did I see.”

56. ur 3lix walu  
neg see-Pef-1s nothing  
“I didn’t see anything”

## 8.2. Urdgin and Ursar “never”

The use of urdgin or ursar depends on whether the verb conveys past or present information. Urdgin is used only with verbs in the imperfective form as in 57 and ursar is used with verbs in the perfective form to convey the future as on 58.

57. urdgin dix gher frans  
never went-Perf-3s to France  
“I have never been to France”

58. ursar i-th3lith  
never me-see-Imp-3s  
“You will never see me”

In both 57 and 58 we can insert the negative element *ur* between the negative adverbials and the verbs, without affecting the meaning of the sentence.

59. urdgin ur dix gher frans  
“I’ve never been to France”

60. ursar ur i-th3lith  
“You will never see me”

The interesting but not surprising fact is that the second negation element *sha* cannot co-occur with other negative polarity items as shown in examples 61-64.

61. \*urdgin ur dix sha gher frans  
“I’ve never been to France”

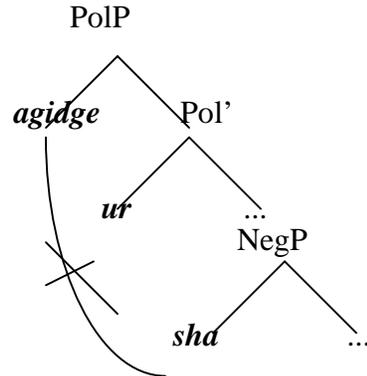
62. \*agidge ur-as-t iwshan sha  
no one neg-him-it give-Ire-3s neg  
“No one gave it to him”

63. \*uridgin shaur-as-t wshix  
never neg1neg2-him-it give-1s  
“I never gave it to him”

64. \*agidge shaur-as-t iwshan  
no one neg-neg-him-it give-Perf-3s  
“No one gave it to him”

What this shows is that *sha* is a negative concord that it competes for the same position with other NPI’s and that position has to be higher in the functional domain.

65.



This is also a strong evidence that *ur* is base generated under the higher negation head (Pol). This explains the typological variation among Berber dialects. The fact that the first Neg element is always pre-verbal is straightforward from the analysis. The ones that do not allow the second negation element do however allow NPI's and these are licensed in Spec-PolP.

## Conclusion

One of the main points argued for here is that the distribution of *sha* has serious implications about the sentential structure in Berber. Its complementary distribution with other negative polarity items is an indication that they are competing for the same position. Another point that my analysis implicitly shows is that *Sha-ur* is a type of Spec-Head agreement and that it is a negative concord.

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