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In certain Arabic dialects of Egypt, the southwestern Levant, Oman (according to Reinhardt 1894), and perhaps sporadically elsewhere, it is possible in at least some contexts to express negation with the enclitic element *-š* alone (henceforth *X-š*), instead of with the more familiar and more widespread bipartite *mā X-š* construction. In a recent paper, Wilmsen (2013) advances a novel hypothesis regarding the development of *X-š*: rather than being an innovation relative to *mā X-š*, achieved by ‘dropping’ *mā*, *X-š* is, according to Wilmsen, at least as old as its bipartite counterpart, having developed independently of the latter from an earlier use of *-š* as a marker of interrogation.

The present paper offers a critical examination of Wilmsen’s proposals, making the following main arguments.

i) Relative to *mā X-š*, the distribution of the dialects in which *X-š* occurs as a negative construction is patchy, and its occurrence is possible only in a subset of grammatical contexts in Palestinian and Cairene (and different contexts in each of these dialects; Lucas 2010). These facts should be explained by positing a handful of independent parallel innovations of negative *X-š* via *mā*-dropping or other mechanisms. Wilmsen’s alternative, which entails positing massively parallel independent losses of negative *X-š* in dialects lacking the construction today, is less parsimonious.

ii) Although non-negative *-š* does seem to have become specialized as a marker of interrogation in many present-day dialects, Arabic-internal and typological evidence suggests that it was originally an adverbial intensifier with a weak-negative-polarity-item distribution, similar to English at all, i.e. not expressing negation itself, but restricted to negative,

interrogative and conditional clauses. To take one example from Maltese: -x (= -š) optionally attaches to qatt '(n)ever' not only in interrogative but also more frequently in conditional clauses.