

**From negative cleft to external negator:  
Eastern Aramaic *lāw* and Sicilian (Mussomeli) *neca***

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## 1. Introduction

This paper discusses the syntax and the semantics of the negator *lāw* in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic (henceforth JBA) through the lenses of the diachronic emergence of this negator.

The new negator *lāw* is a sentential external negator, whose syntactic and semantic properties will be discussed alongside a diachronic study concerning its origin. Syntactically, we propose that *lāw*, like negative DPs/PPs in English and Sicilian *neca* (Haegeman 2000; Cruschina 2010; Garzonio and Poletto 2015) is merged in SpecFocP in the extended CP-domain from where it takes wide scope. Semantically, *lāw* takes propositional scope and expresses the meaning of external negation, equivalent to the independent clause: ‘it is not the case’. Diachronically, *lāw*, as a single-morpheme external negation, developed from a cleft whose matrix clause negates the content of the embedded clause. Following work by Bar-Asher Siegel (2015b), we argue that the syntactic reanalysis of *lāw* is triggered by a phonological process of univerbation between the regular negator *lā* in clefts with the agreement on a phonologically null copular verb. This syntactic reanalysis involves a morphological univerbation of *lāw* (Andersen 1987). The main claim of this paper is that the syntactic and the semantic characteristics of this negator can be understood in light of its historical origin. This type of development is not part of Jespersen Cycle or Croft’s cycle, but constitutes the development of a non-standard negator next to the standard negator. It will be demonstrated that a similar development can be observed for the Sicilian negator *neca* as well (cf. Garzonio and Poletto 2015).

In light of this, the structure of the paper is as follows: In section 2 we discuss the historical development of JBA *lāw*. In section 3 we review the properties of *lāw* in the first and second stages of its development, then we move on to an analysis of *lāw* in both stages. Section 4 widens the empirical perspective by discussing the emergence of Sicilian *neca* and the similarity of its properties

to JBA *lāw*. The final section concludes and discusses remaining issues and recommendations for further research.

## 2. JBA *lāw*: historical development

Before embarking upon the evolution of the negative marker in JBA a few words should be said concerning the history of Aramaic more broadly. Aramaic is a member of the Semitic language family and belongs to the Northwest Semitic subfamily. The history of Aramaic is commonly divided into five phases (Fitzmyer 1979):

Old Aramaic (925–700 B.C.E.)

Official Aramaic (700–200 B.C.E.)

Middle Aramaic (200 B.C.E.–200 C.E.)

Late Aramaic (200–700 C.E.)

Neo-Aramaic (700 C.E.–).

Since Late Aramaic, there is an opposition between the eastern and western dialects. Our paper focuses on a development that took place within the eastern dialects of the late periods, a branch which includes three main dialects: JBA, Syriac, and Mandaic. Each of these dialects was spoken by a different ethnic group, Jews, Christians and Mandaeans respectively. JBA is used to refer to the preserved material that was composed by the Jews during the Late Aramaic period, from the third century onwards and is the main focus of the present paper. All examples in this paper will be drawn from the Babylonian Talmud, the larger corpus written in this dialect.

JBA has two negators for sentential negation (Schlesinger 1928: 143-153; Bar-Asher Siegal 2016: 246-253): The unmarked negator *lā*, common to all branches of the Semitic languages, and the marked negator *lāw*, which appears in Aramaic and in Hebrew dialects that were heavily under the influence of Aramaic. As will be demonstrated below, diachronically, the evolution of *lāw* as reflected in the Eastern Aramaic dialects can be characterized as consisting of two stages:

**Stage I:** *lāw* is a contraction of two morphemes. The morphemes *lā* and the enclitic *hu* went through a process of synergism to form *lāw*, due to the elision of the intervocalic consonant /h/. Thus *lā-hu* became *lāhu*, phonetically equivalent to *lāw*. The two morphemes together constitute a complete clause, with the meaning of "it is not the case", always reversing the truth-value of another clause.

This sort of contraction manifests a case of phonological univerbation.

**Stage II:** *lāw* is a single morpheme, functioning as another type of negator, which is semantically and syntactically marked.

From a diachronic point of view, *lāw* underwent a process of morphological univerbation, as the two morphemes which constitute a clause were reanalyzed to become a single morpheme, operating as a sentential external negator.

When considering this development in a broader typological perspective of the origin of negators cross-linguistically, the type of change that JBA *lāw* underwent in terms of the typology of the diachrony of negation proposed by van der Auwera (2010), belongs to type (1c), of the three types of developments illustrated in (1).

- (1) a)  $X \rightarrow \text{NEG}$   
 b)  $\text{NEG}_1 X \rightarrow \text{NEG}_1 \text{NEG}_2 \rightarrow \text{NEG}_2$   
 c)  $\text{NEG}_1 X \rightarrow [\text{NEG}_1\text{-}X]_{\text{NEG}_2}$

The first type illustrates a derivation of a negator from a non-negative category (see Bar-Asher Siegal 2017: 44-46). The second type portrays the type associated with Jespersen's Cycle (inter alia Jespersen 1917, Horn 1989, van der Auwera en Neuckermans 2004, van der Auwera 2009, 2010, Breitbarth and Haegeman 2010, Breitbarth et al 2013, Willis et al 2013, De Clercq 2017) and with Croft's Cycle (Croft 1991, Veselinova 2013). The negator,  $\text{NEG}_1$ , first co-occurs with a new category  $X$ , which then becomes  $\text{NEG}_2$ , in that it needs to co-occur with  $\text{NEG}_1$  to express sentential negation, to finally replace  $\text{NEG}_1$  and become the new negator. In the third type,  $\text{NEG}_1$  and another element ( $X$ ) combine to form a new negator:  $\text{NEG}_2$ . The evolution of JBA *lāw* is a subtype of the third kind of diachronic process. Namely, it develops a  $\text{NEG}_2$  on the basis of  $\text{NEG}_1+X$ , but instead of losing  $\text{NEG}_1$ , it retains the old negator while the new negator  $[\text{NEG}_1\text{-}X]_{\text{NEG}_2}$  is marked for certain functions. More concretely, the agreement marker (*-hu*) that often co-occurs with the standard negative marker (here *lā*), cliticized to that negative marker, with the result of an emergence of the new negative marker, i.e. *lāw*. Notably, the newly created negator *lāw* does not lead to the loss of the negator *lā*, from which it derives. Moreover, *lāw* also retains its previous functions, i.e. it can still be used either as a cleft or as an independent sentence. Crucially, such a diachronic process adds a new type of negator to the language, whose functions were previously expressed by *lā*.



NEG=3MSG                      PN      exist=3FSG    be.PST.3MSG

‘It was not PN (lit. it was not the case that it was PN)’  
(Ephrem, Genesis 64, Pat-El 2006, ex. 18)

b.    *lā=wā*                                      men    ’ūlṣānā=hu

NEG=be.PST.3MSG    men    offence=3MSG

‘It was not out of coercion (lit. it is not the case that it was out  
of coercion) (Ephrem, Genesis 30, Pat-El 2006, ex. 17)

In JBA, *lāw* retained also its original use as two morphemes, in cleft sentences (cf. below (17)), as well as in replies to questions:

(4)	<i>'mar</i>		<i>l-eh</i>		<i>'it</i>		<i>l-āk</i>		<i>nikse</i>
	say.PST.3.M.SG		to-3.M.SG		exist		to-2.M.SG		property
	<i>b-qappuṭqāyā</i>	<i>'mar</i>		<i>l-eh</i>		<i>lā-w</i>			
	in-GN	say.PST.3.M.SG		to-3.M.SG		NEG-3.M.SG			

‘He said to him, “Do you have property in GN?” He replied, “No.”’ (Ber. 56b)

There are rare examples such as (5) with a 3rd feminine singular pronoun (*hi*: *lā+hi* [not+it]> *lāhi* [= *lāy*]), as the gender of complete statements is interchangeable between masculine and feminine (Bar-Asher Siegal 2016: 67–69). The variation between *lāw* and *lāy* clearly indicates that in this function *lāw* consists of two morphemes, as the agreement component can be either masculine or feminine:

(5)	<i>māy</i>	<i>'āmart ..</i>		<i>dilmā ...</i>		<i>lā-y</i>
	what	say.PTCP.2.M.SG		perhaps		NEG-3.F.S

‘What would you say, perhaps... it is not so!’ (Tem. 8b)

## 2.2 Stage II

In most of the appearances of *lāw* in JBA, this conflation can no longer be phonological in nature. *lāw*, which usually occurs in clause-initial position, can co-occur with a copular verb that has pronominal agreement (6a), or with the verb "to be" (6b), or with a feminine copule (6c, cf. (5)), or with the regular negator *lā*, as in (6d).

- (6) a.    *lāw*    *gazzlān-e*    *ninhu*  
          NEG thief-PL            COP.3.M.PL  
  
          ‘They are not thieves.’ (B. Qam. 79b)
- b.    *lāw*    *'isurā*                    *hawya*  
          NEG prohibition                    be.PST.3.F.SG  
  
          ‘It was not a prohibition.’ (Yebam. 13b)
- c.    *lāw*    *miltā*    *hi*  
          NEG thing    3.F.SG  
  
          ‘It is not something (significant)’ (Sanh. 47b).
- d.    *lāw*    *lā*        *šənā*  
          NEG NEG    different.M.SG  
  
          ‘Isn't it the case that it doesn't matter?!’ (Šab 112b)

Thus, as there is another copula in the clause, it must be concluded that at this point in the history of Aramaic, *lāw*, in these contexts, does not consist of an agreement feature. Thus, this stage exhibits a morphological univerbation. *lāw*, accordingly, was reanalyzed as consisting of a single morpheme.

### 2.2.1. Distributional properties

Bar-Asher Siegal (2015b) demonstrates the following syntactic difference between the two negators *lā* and *lāw* in JBA (Stage II): the standard negator *lā* always precedes the main predicate, (7)-(8), whereas *lāw* in most cases does not appear next to the verb, and tends to appear either in sentence-initial position, (9) or following the overt subject (10).

(7) 'nā lā 'mari l-āk  
I NEG say.PST.1.SG to-2.M.SG  
'I didn't tell you.' (Giṭ. 56b)

(8) lā mi'rib šappir  
NEG mix.PTCP.PASS.3.M.SG appropriately  
'It is not mixed up appropriately.' (Šabb. 156a)

(9) lāw 'l-eh qā=sāmk-īnan  
NEG upon-3.M.SG DUR=rely.PTCP-1.PL  
'We do not rely upon it' (Yebam. 25a)

(10) šmuel lāw šappir qā=məšanne l-eh  
PN NEG appropriately DUR=reply.PTCP.3.M.SG to-3.M.SG  
'PN was not answering him appropriately.'  
(B. Meši'a 56a)

Furthermore, Bar-Asher Siegal (2015b) notes that while *lā* is the unmarked negator, *lāw* is marked for the following four functions: 1) negative rhetorical questions, (11)-(12); 2) antecedents of conditional counterfactual sentences, (13); 3) to negate a sentence that had been affirmed earlier, (14) and to reject contextual presuppositions (15).

(11) lāw 'mari l-āk  
NEG say.PST.1.SG to-2.M.SG  
'Didn't I tell you that...'  
(Mo'ed Qaṭ. 18b)

- (12) 'aṭṭu hāhu gabrā lāw yehūdā'-e hu  
 RQM DEM.M.SG man NEG Jewish-PL COP.3.M.SG  
 'Is this one [i.e., am I] not a Jewish man?'  
 ('Abod. Zar. 76b)
- (13) 'i lāw 'at bahad-an lā hwa  
 COND NEG you with-1.PL NEG be.PST.3.M.SG  
 sāleq l-an dinā  
 raise.PTCP.3.M.SG to-1.PL judgment  
 'Had you not been with us, our judgment would not have been conclusive.'  
 (Sanh. 30a)
- (14) d-mar sābar k-karmelit dāmy-ā  
 REL-master think.PTCP.3.M.SG like-karmelit similar-F.SG  
 w-mar sābar lāw k-karmelit dāmy-ā  
 and-master think.PTCP.3.M.SG NEG like-karmelit similar-F.SG  
 'As the one person thought it is like a Carmelite; and the other person thought  
 it is not like a karmelit.' (Šabb. 3b)
- (15) lāw 'akbrā gnab 'ellā ḥorā gnab  
 NEG mouse steal.PST.3.M.SG but hole steal.PST.3.M.SG  
 'It is not the case that the mouse stole, the hole stole.' ('Ar. 30a)

What all these contexts have in common is that the root proposition (what is negated) is presupposed, as the *p* on which the negator operates is in the common ground. This is clear in the case of negation of sentences that were affirmed before (14) and in the contexts of rejection of contextual presupposition (15). Furthermore, in negative rhetorical questions (11-12) the root proposition is assumed to be true ("isn't it *p*?!" presupposes that *p* is true) and similarly a negative marker in the antecedent of a counterfactual (13) also presents the root to be true ("hadn't it been the case that *p*" presupposes that *p* is true).



We would like to add to this list the following observation: while *lāw* co-occurs with the standard negator *lā* in one clause (16), it is never attested with another *lāw* in the same clause, which presumably attests for ungrammaticality.

- (16) *lāw*    *lā*        *šnā*  
 NEG    NEG    different.M.SG  
 ‘Isn't it the case that it doesn't matter?!’ (Šab 112b)

Moreover, as noted earlier, like *lā*, *lāw* can still be used in clefts, (17) and it may appear in negative answers (18).

- (17) ***lāw***    ***d-lā***                    *qnu*    *minn-eh*  
 NEG    REL-NEG    acquire.possession.PST.3.M.PL                    from-3.M.SG  
***lā***        ***d-qnu***    *minn-eh*  
 NEG    REL-acquire.possession.PST.3.M.PL    from-3.M.SG  
 ‘Isn't it the case where it was not purchased from him? No, it was purchased from him.’ (B. Bat. 151b)

- (18) *mar*    *l-eh*                    'it                    *l-āk*    *nikse*                    *b-qappuṭqāyā*,  
 say    PST.3.M.SG    to-3.M.SG    exist    to-2.M.SG    property in-GN  
 'mar                                    *l-eh*                    *lā-w*  
 say.PST.3.M.SG    to-3.M.SG    NEG-3.M.SG  
 ‘He said to him, “Do you have property in GN?” He replied, “No.”’  
 (Ber. 56b)

Although it may seem at first that in replies *lāw* serves as the polarity particle ‘no’ (18) (Holmberg 2017), this is not necessary the case. Since *lāw* can be used as a cleft and as an independent negative clause, it is impossible to know what it is when it occurs in isolation. It is thus equally reasonable to consider it, in such replies, as a full clause, conveying the meaning of “it is not the case/true”.

### 2.2.2. Semantic properties

In what follows we will demonstrate that in the environments in which *lāw* is available, the only available interpretation of the negation in terms of scope, is the widest, i.e. propositional scope.

In negating the root proposition stated in (19a), it is possible to state that (19a) is false. This yields the sentence in (19b) with a wide scope reading of negation. This is a case in which the external

negation is expressed explicitly, in the sense that it is stated with an independent clause that it is not true that a certain number of questions were answered. For the wide scope reading to be true, it must be the case that the number of questions that were **answered** is any number which is not 3, with a preference for its meaning to be less than 3. It is also possible to negate the proposition in (19a) by means of a standard sentential negation, as in (19c). One salient reading of (19c) states how many questions were **not answered**. This sentence is true if at most 7 questions were answered. For (19c), especially when "three" is focused, the negation can also be interpreted as external negation: it will then have the same truth conditions as (19b).

- (19) a. Mike answered three questions (out of ten) (n=3)  
 b. It is not the case that Mike answered three questions (out of ten)  
 (n≠3 preferred: n<3)  
 c. Mike did not answer three questions (out of ten).  
 (preferred: n≤7 or n≠3 [preferred: n<3])

In the relevant environments where *lāw* appears in JBA (7)-(18), the interpretation of the negation is similar to the one that "external negation" has in (19b). Whereas the regular negator *lā* can trigger both the external and internal negation reading, the typical contexts where *lāw* appear, illustrated by means of the English examples in (20)b-c, can only give rise to the external negation reading. They are about whether it is true that 3 questions were answered, and not about how many questions were left unanswered, 7 or less.<sup>2</sup>

- (20) a. Mike didn't answer three questions (out of ten). (n≤7 or n≠3)  
 b. If Mike had not answered three questions (out of ten) he would have failed  
 in the exam. (n>3)  
 c. Didn't he answer three questions (out of ten)?! (n=3)

Accordingly, we may conclude, that the semantics of *lāw* is similar in Stage 1 (negative matrix clause of cleft sentences) and in stage 2 (sentential negation). In both stages *lāw* takes the widest possible scope, with respect to the clause.

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<sup>2</sup> Bar-Asher Siegal (2015a) notes about these environments, that besides the fact that they can only take a wide scope external negation, that also PPIs are rescued in these environments (Ladusaw 1979), and they are also the environments in which German has the so-called "light negation", i.e. the negator *nicht* is in an unusual position (Schwarz and Bhatt 2006).

### 2.3. Overview of the properties of *lāw*

Table 1 summarizes the properties that we discussed for *lāw*.

	<i>lāw</i>
derived from cleft	☑
indicating $\sim p$ , when p is presupposed	☑
in rhetorical question	☑
in antecedent of conditional counterfactual	☑
can co-occur with standard negator	☑
clause-initial position	☑
appears in environments in which negation is always interpreted with wide scope	☑

Table 1: the characteristics of JBA *lāw*

### 3. Analysis

In terms of analysis, we would like to propose that *lā* in JBA expresses regular sentential negation and is base-generated above IP/TP (cf. Belletti 1990, Laka 1994, Zanuttini, 1996, 1997, Cormack and Smith 2002, Holmberg 2003, Holmberg 2013, De Clercq 2013, 2017). Support for this claim comes from the fact that the regular negative marker always takes surface scope over tense and aspect and never follows tense morphology.

- (21) 'anā lā qā=āminā  
 I NEG DUR=say.PTCP.1SG  
 'I don't say' (Pes. 3a)

More support for the position of sentential negation comes from the data in (22)-(23). (22) illustrates existential sentences in JBA. (22)a shows an existential sentence in the present tense with the existential expletive *ika*. In the present tense the copula is not overt or simply not present. In (22)b the existential sentence contains a past tense form of *to be* and the use of *ika* is optional (cf. Bar-Asher Siegal 2016: 114-118):

- (22) a. ika gabra  
 there man  
 'The is a man.'

b. hwa (ika) gabra

was.3PSG there man

‘There is a man.’

In the presence of negation, a suppletive form can be used in the present tense, (23)a. This suppletive form seems the univerbation of the negative marker and the existential expletive. However, in the presence of the past tense this univerbation of the negator and *ika* is not possible, (23)b. The presence of *ika* even becomes ungrammatical, (23)c. The only way to negate the sentence is by means of *lā* preceding the copular verb in the past tense. This suggests two things: 1) that *lā* indeed precedes tense, since it is clearly the tensed copular verb that intervenes in the univerbation process between *la* and *ika* and 2) that *ika* is incompatible with the combination of negation and past tense.<sup>3</sup>

(23) a. layka gabra

NEG.is.3PSG.there man

‘There is no man’

b. la hwa gabra

NEG. be.PAST.3PSG man

‘There was no man.’

c. \*layka hwa

NEG.is.3PSG.there be.PAST.3PSG

d. \*la hwa ika gabra

NEG. be.PAST.3PSG there man

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that with *lāw* there is no contraction of the negator and the existential marker (Bar-Asher Siegal 2016: 254):

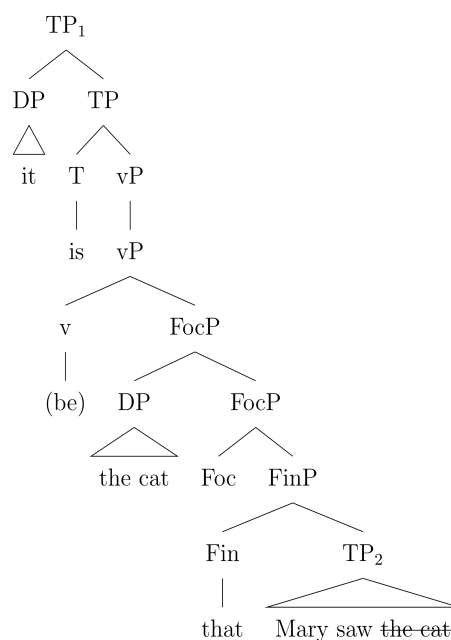
*lāw mi ika RASHBAG d-qay kwat-i*  
NEG RQM there PN REL-stand.PTCP.3.M.SG like-1.C.SG  
Isn't it the case that there is PN who agrees with me? (B. Bay 174b)

As proposed in section 2, in Stage I, *lā* could phonologically contract with the agreement marker on the copula, i.e. *-hu*, in IP/TP. A prerequisite for this contraction to take place is the fact that the copula ‘be’ is phonologically null in clefts.

- (24) *lā=w*                    *Ḥīm*            *ʾitaw=y*                    *wa*  
 NEG=3MSG    PN            exist=3FSG                    be.PST.3MSG  
 ‘It was not PN (lit. it was not the case that it was PN)’

Now before we represent how phonological contraction could take place, we need to take a little detour to how clefts can be derived in syntax. Belletti (2004, 2009, 2011) derives *it*-clefts by phrasal movement of the cleft focus to the specifier of the cleft relative, as illustrated in (25).

(25)



The idea that the cleft focus moves to a position designated to host new information focus, i.e. FocP, is in line with the generative tradition (Rizzi 1997). It has been proposed that the question word in a sentence like (26) is the focus of the question and the presupposed proposition is *Mary saw X*.

- (26) What did Mary see?

Rizzi (1997: 291) argues on the basis of the incompatibility of foci and *wh*-words that they target the same left peripheral focus position, i.e. FocP. The data from Italian illustrate the complementary distribution between foci and *wh*-words:

- (27) a. \*A GIANNIA che cosa hai detto (non a Pierro)?  
To John what have said (not to Peter)  
b. \*Che cosa a GIANNI hai detto (non a Piero)?

Based on these and other data Rizzi argues that CP, the layer of the clause that anchors the clause in discourse and takes care of clause typing, needs to be split up in several layers that all contribute to the mediation between discourse and the propositional content in IP. He argues that the following features or levels of structure are present at the left periphery of the clause, (28). One of these positions is the Focus phrase (FocP), which is targeted by foci and *wh*-question words alike.

- (28) ForceP > TopP\* > FocP > TopP\* > FinP > TP

Rizzi (1997: 285) says the following about Focus in the left periphery:

The preposed element, bearing focal stress, introduces new information, whereas the open sentence expresses contextually given information, knowledge that the speaker presupposes to be shared with the hearer.

Now the same as with question words is true with respect to cleft sentences: for a sentence like (29), it is clear that *the cat* is the focus and *that Mary saw X* is the presupposition (see Haegeman et al 2015: 75).

- (29) It was THE CAT that Mary saw.

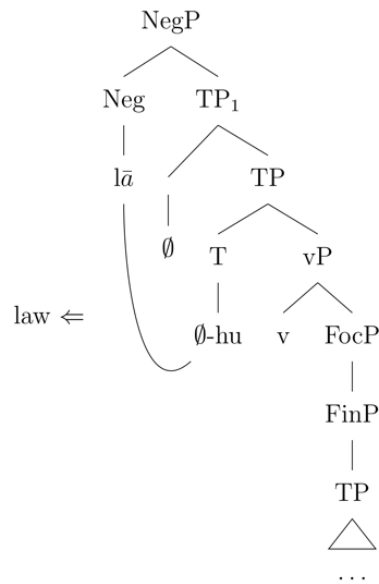
Therefore, no matter which syntactic analysis of *it*-clefts one adheres to, in all of them *the cat* will move to a left peripheral FocP (Belletti 2004, 2009, 2011; Meinunger 1997, 1998; Frascarelli and Ramaglia's 2013, cf. Spector Shirtz 2014 in the context of Semitic languages).<sup>4</sup> Following arguments

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<sup>4</sup> Haegeman et al. (2015) compare biclausal and monoclausal analyses (Meinunger (1997, 1998) and Frascarelli and Ramaglia (2013)) for *it*-clefts and argue in favor of Belletti's biclausal proposal. They do so because *it*-clefts are compatible with negative inversion and *wh*-movement. A monoclausal analysis would involve the

put forward by Haegeman et al (2015), we adopt Belletti’s biclausal analysis for *it*-clefts, with *be* projecting its own TP, i.e. TP<sub>1</sub>, the first clause, and the focus of the cleft moving to the specifier of a Focus phrase in the left periphery of the second clause, i.e. TP<sub>2</sub>. We would like to propose that the original context in which *lāw* came into being was a bi-clausal structure, as illustrated in (30). Due to the absence of an overt subject in SpecTP<sub>1</sub> the two heads, i.e. the Neg<sup>o</sup> head and the agreement *-hu* on the verbal empty head of *to be* could conflate phonologically.

(30)



In Stage II *lāw* was reanalyzed as an external negator. Given its surface appearance below the complementizer in (31)-(32), we deduce that it became a negative element in its own right in a monoclausal structure.

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postulation of extra left peripheral positions (beyond FocP) to host negative DPs and PPs and wh-constituents at the loss of capturing the complementary distribution between these constituents.

(31) w-lāw hamrā hu  
 and-NEG wine COP.3.M.SG  
 ‘Isn’t it a wine?!’ (Yoma 76b)

(32) ’i                      lāw        ’at                      bahad-an        lā  
 COND                      NEG        you                      with-1.PL        NEG  
 hwa                                      sāleq                      l-an                      dinā  
 be.PST.3.M.SG                      raise.PTCP.3.M.SG to-1.PL                      judgment  
 ‘Had you not been with us, our judgment would not have been conclusive.’  
 (Sanh. 30a)

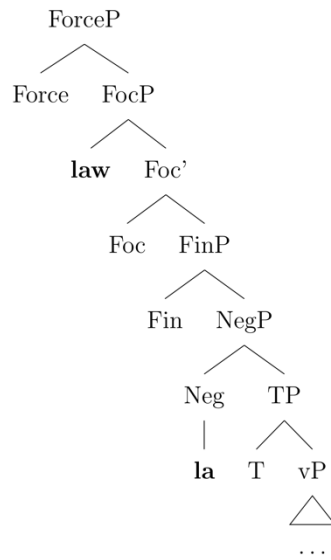
*lāw* is not (only) contributing emphasis on the polarity expressed by another negative or positive element in the clause (cf. Breitbarth et al 2013), as is the case for Hungarian *igen* (Liptak 2013), Latin *quidem* (Danckaert 2014, 2015) or Flemish *en* (Breitbarth and Haegeman 2014),<sup>5</sup> but most importantly, it changes the truth conditions of a sentence and contributes real negation. Moreover, in combination with the regular negator, *lāw* gives rise to double negation, i.e. the negations cancel each other out. Following work by De Clercq (2013, 2017) the latter fact indicates that the two negators must be merged in different positions and both involve a negative feature. Given that *lāw* always precedes *lā*, which – as we argued – is hosted by a NegP above TP - the natural assumption is that it is merged even higher in the structure. Consequently, what we would like to propose is that the newly created negative marker is basegenerated in a left peripheral SpecFocP, the projection which was also targeted by the focus of the cleft in the first stage of the development. As such its scope is always the entire *p*, and accordingly this proposal captures the fact that *lāw* is on the one hand a reverser of a truth conditions (*p* is in its scope) and as such provides new information and on the other hand typically occurs in contexts which are presuppositional, i.e. the root proposition to which it applies is the presupposition, the complement of FocP.

The tree structure in (33) illustrates the two positions for negation, the external negation in SpecFocP on the one hand and the regular sentential negation above TP on the other hand.

<sup>5</sup> But see Breitbarth and Haegeman 2015 for another analysis.



(33)



Further support for this proposal of *lāw* in SpecFocP comes from the interaction of preposed negative constituents and *wh*-constituents in English (Haegeman 2000). Haegeman (2000) argues that preposed negative DPs and PPs with sentential negative scope are in a left peripheral SpecFocP. The idea that preposed negative constituents are focal in nature can be traced back to Rochemont (1978:57), who says that “the affective conditioned inversion construction is indicative of a marked focus assignment, much like the cleft construction.” One of the crucial arguments from Rochemont is that these constituents can function as replies to *wh*-questions, as illustrated by the question-answer pair in (34).

(34) (a) What job would John be happy with?

(b) With *no* job would John be happy. (Rochemont 1978: 79-80)

Haegeman (2000: 27) adopts this argument and provides more support for the claim that negative constituents are focalized by showing that – like foci (cf. Rizzi 1997) - preposed negative constituents are incompatible with preposed *wh*- constituents, (35), again suggesting that they as well are in complementary distribution and hence target the same position.

(35) (a) \*On no account where should I go?

(b) \*Where on no account should I go?

Also in the JBA corpus there are no attestations of *lāw* and a *wh*-constituent co-occurring, (36), but there are attestations of *wh*- and *lā* that co-occur, (37).

(36) (unattested) *amāy lāw ’asqu-h l-šmuel*  
 why NEG bring.PST.3PL-3MSG ACC-Samuel

(37) *amāy lā ’asqu-h l-šmuel*  
 why NEG bring.PST.3PL-3MSG ACC-Samuel

‘Why didn't they bring Samuel with them’ (Ber. 29a)

(38) *kama lā miqqšar*  
 how.long NEG sick.PTCP.3.M.SG

‘How long he will not be sick?’ (B. Qama 91a)

It thus seems that *lāw* targets the same position as the focus of clefts, *wh*-constituents and negative DPs/PPs. We take this position to be SpecFocP in the left periphery, a position for new information focus. Unlike preposed negative constituents, which are merged clause internally and move to the left peripheral FocP, we propose that SpecFocP is the base generated position for *lāw* in Stage II of its development.

More support that *lāw* needs to be in a position outscoping regular sentence negation and regular non-topical subjects, i.e. high in the left periphery, comes from its interaction with universal quantifiers. Preposed negative constituents in English cannot take low scope with respect to the universal quantifier, (39)a, whereas the regular predicate negator allows both scopal patterns, (39)b.

(39) a. Under no circumstances would everyone go to the party.  $\neg > \forall / \forall \not> \neg$

b. Everyone hasn't arrived yet.  $\neg > \forall / \forall > \neg$

Also for JBA, one can demonstrate that *lāw* patterns with the preposed DP and PP and takes widest scope with respect to universal quantifiers, (40)-(41), while *lā* is interpreted as being under the scope of the universal quantification, (42).

(40) *lāw kulle-h `ālmā `bīde*  
 NEG all-3MSG world do.PASS.PTCP.3MPL  
*d-sāyme msan-e*  
 REL-wear.PTCP.3MPL shoe-PL

‘It is not the case that everyone is apt to wear shoes.’ (Mo‘ed Qaṭ. 24a) ( $\neg > \forall$ )

(41) *lāw kulle-h `ālmā ḥazu lsahdūtā*  
 NEG all-3MSG world see-PASS.PTCP.3MPL to-tsetemony

‘It is not the case that everyone is eligible (to give) testimony.’ (Sanh. 89a) ( $\neg > \forall$ )

(42) *R. Ḥanina hu d-ḥakkim kulle-h `ālmā lā ḥakkim-e*  
 PN 3MSG REL-wise all-3MSG world NEG wise-M

‘It’s PN that is wise, everyone (else) is not wise.’ (Nid. 20b) ( $\forall > \neg$ )

Given that overt subjects can precede *lāw* and that, as argued, *lāw* is basegenerated in the left peripheral SpecFocP, overt subjects must target a position in the left periphery above FocP. As illustrated in (28), Rizzi (1997) argued on the basis of Italian, a pro-drop language, that there is a position above FocP for topical constituents. Since JBA is a pro-drop language, we assume – in line

with other proposals for subjects in pro-drop languages – that overt subjects in cases like (43) are topics, merged in a high (topic) position (Frascarelli and Hinterhölz 2007).<sup>6</sup>

(43) šmuel lāw      šappir      qā=mšanne      l-eh  
 PN    NEG    appropriately    DUR=reply.PTCP.3.M.SG    to-3.M.SG

‘PN was not answering him appropriately.’ (B. Meši‘a 56a)

In sum, in this section, we analyzed how the JBA negator *lāw* arose as the consequence of phonological merger of the standard negator *lā* with the agreement marking *-hu* on an elided copula. Later, in a second stage, this negator became an independent negator used to express external negative scope. We argued in this section that its basegenerated position is SpecFocP, a left peripheral position of the clause dedicated to new information focus. Support for this idea comes from its incompatibility with *wh*-question words and its wide scope interpretation over universal quantifiers.

At this point, we would like to emphasize that according to the current analysis, both the syntax (position in the clause, non-occurrence with interrogatives, reading above quantifiers etc.) and the semantic characteristics (widest scope reading) of the negator *lāw* can be understood in light of its historical origin. The main change from Stage I to Stage II is that from a biclausal cleft structure to a monoclausal structure. The regular TP-negator from Stage I gets reanalyzed to become a negator that takes the position the focus of the cleft had in the biclausal cleft structure. The following should be noted about this analysis:

1. In both structures, the TP<sub>(2)</sub>/root clause is presupposed, and the negator takes wide scope with respect to the TP<sub>(2)</sub>. It is because of the fact that the same semantic effect of negation, i.e. widest scope, can be obtained in both configurations, that negative clefts are prone to be reanalyzed as an external negator.
2. The reanalysis of *lāw* from a bimorphemic structure to a single morpheme goes hand in hand with the change from a biclausal structure to a monoclausal structure.

In the following section, we would like to demonstrate that a similar type of development can be identified in another language, by pointing to similarities between our synchronic and diachronic analysis of the Armenian *lāw* and the negator *neca* in the dialect of Mussomeli (Sicilia). This negator also seems to be derived from a cleft (Cruschina 2010) and as Garzonio and Poletto (2015) analyze

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<sup>6</sup> See Bar-Asher Siegal (2015c) for other observations which are related to the consider the subjects in JBA as topics.

its syntax, this negator is also proposed to be generated in a left peripheral FocP. Moreover, we will show that the similarities with JBA *lāw* can be demonstrated at the semantic level as well.

#### 4. Cross-linguistic comparison: Sicilian *neca*

The negator *neca* in the Sicilian dialect of Mussomeli shares the same origin of *lāw*, since as Cruschina (2010:36) argues, it is derived from a cleft. The path of this derivation is illustrated in (44).

(44) *Un jè ca* → *n-è-ca → neca*  
*Not it.is that*

In this section, we will demonstrate other similarities between these two negators. Like the JBA negator, *neca* cancels presuppositions or ‘characterizes the negated proposition as a wrong expectation made by the interlocutor’ (Poletto & Garzonio 2015: 140).

(45) *Sta lezioni neca si capisci.*  
 this lesson not REFL=understands  
 ‘(Contrary to what you think) one does not understand this lesson.’  
 (Garzonio and Poletto 2015: 140)

(46) *Neca t’ à scantari!*  
*neca refl.2sg= have.2sg+ to fear.inf*  
 ‘You don’t have to be afraid!’  
 (from Cruschina 2010:36, glosses p.c Cruschina)

(47) *Sta lezioni neca si capisci.*  
 this lecture neca impers= understand.3sg  
 ‘This lecture, one does not understand it’  
 => ‘One does not understand this lecture.’  
 (from Cruschina 2010:36, glosses p.c Cruschina)

Like *lāw* *neca* can also be used in rhetorical questions (48):

(48) *neca jè vinu?*

*neca* is wine

‘Isn’t it wine?’

The Sicilian negator also has the typical reading of wide scope, external negators, as shown by the example in (49). For the wide scope reading to be true, as explained in section 2.2, it must be the case that the number of questions that were answered is any number which is not 3:

(49) *neca arrispunni a tre dumanni ncapu a deci*

*neca* answered.3psg to three questions on to ten

‘It is not the case that he answered 3 questions out of 10.’ ( $n \neq 3$  preferred:  $n < 3$ )

Garzonio and Poletto (2015:141) propose an analysis for *neca* similarly to the way the negator *lāw* in JBA was analyzed earlier in this paper. According to their proposal, ‘the complex negation-copula-complementizer sequence is re-analyzed as a unique functional projection (we assume it is a Focus projection), with respectively the negative marker and the copula in the specifier and the complementizer in the head; then the whole FP is lexicalized as a single functional word (a well-known development in diachronic morpho-syntax).’ The diachronic derivation they have in mind is in (50).

(50) a. [Spec Focus [*un è*] [Focus<sup>o</sup> *ca*][TP ...]]

b. [FocusP *neca* [TP ...]]

It has been demonstrated that JBA *lāw* is incompatible with wh-question words and this fact supported an analysis of the negator as a left peripheral focal negator. The same can be shown for *neca*. Our informant confirmed that *neca* is incompatible with regular wh-questions (51)-(52). Only clefted wh-questions are compatible with *neca*, (52)-(54):

(51) \**A chi neca arrispunni?*

to what *neca* answered.3sg

(52) \*A cu            neca arrispunni?

to whom        neca answered.3psg

(53) A chi     jè    ca     neca    arrispunni?

to what    is    that    neca    answered

‘What is it that he (surely) didn't answer to?’

(54) A cu     jè    ca     neca    arrispunni?

to whom    is     that    neca    answered.3psg

‘Whom is it that he (surely) didn't answer to?’

When *neca* co-occurs with the standard negator, it can also give rise to double negation, just like *lāw* in JBA and it can license n-words in object position, (56), showing it really contributes negation.

(55) Neca     unn’        arrispunni        a    tre     dumanni    ncapu    a        deci

neca        not            answer.PST.3SG    to three    questions    on        to        ten

‘(Surely) he didn’t not answer three questions out of ten’

(56) Neca     fici        nenti

neca     I-did        nothing

‘I didn’t do anything.’

In light of this we would like to propose the following:

- 1) *neca* reflects a diachronic change from a contraction of three morphemes to a single morpheme (negator), which also involves – in line with what we proposed for JBA - a structural change from a bi-clausal to a mono-clausal construction.
- 2) *neca* can be analyzed as an external negator, a negative marker merged in SpecFocP, in line with our analysis of JBA *lāw* and the proposal made by Garzonio and Poletto (2015).

Table 2 summarizes the properties of *neca* alongside those of *lāw*.<sup>7</sup>

	<i>lāw</i>	<i>neca</i>
derived from cleft	☑	☑
indicating $\sim p$ , when p is presupposed	☑	☑
in rhetorical question	☑	☑
in antecedent of conditional counterfactual	☑	?
can co-occur with standard negator	☑	☑
double negation with standard negator	☑	☑
clause-initial position	☑	☑
Not compatible with wh-questions	☑	☑
appears in environments in which negation is always interpreted with wide scope	☑	☑

Table 2: the characteristics of JBA *lāw* and Sicilian *neca*

*neca* and *lāw* are both derived from clefts and seem to express ‘external negation’ semantically, whereas they are syntactically still within CP, but high up in the left periphery, more specifically in the specifier of a Focus Phrase, capturing the fact that these negators are applied to a proposition that was already part of the common ground, and as such they always have a wide scope reading.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper discussed the development of the negative polarity marker *lāw* from a negative cleft in JBA. It was argued that the trigger for the development was a process of phonological univerbation of the standard negator *lā* with the agreement morphology *-hu* on the phonologically empty copula *be*. The semantics of this negative marker differs from the regular standard negator in that the negation takes wider scope than the scope of a standard negator: it contributes external negation (in fact *lāw* in stage II retains the semantics of Stage I). On the basis of its incompatibility with wh-constituents and its wide scope interpretation with respect to universal quantifiers, it was argued that

<sup>7</sup> There seems to be one difference between *lāw* and *neca*: while the former appears in response to questions (4-5), the latter does not. However, as noted, this may not be a significant difference, as in fact it is more likely that in JBA this is a remnant of Stage 1 (as it is in real cleft-sentences, 17), and should be interpreted as an independent sentence with the meaning "it is not the true". *Neca* could not appear in such a context, since it contains the complementizer *ca*, and therefore it does not fit such contexts.



the grammaticalized negative marker *lāw* gets basegenerated in a left peripheral position FocP of a monoclausal structure. This analysis does not only capture its incompatibility with wh-constituents, but also captures the wide scope external negation reading and its status as a negative focal operator, which gives rise to a presupposition, i.e. the non-negated *p* is already part of the common ground. Moreover, it was proposed that this fact was relevant for the reanalysis, since wide scope negation and the interaction with the presupposed *p*, were already part of what characterized *lāw* in the earlier stage. In addition, we broadened the empirical scope and showed how the properties of *lāw* resemble the properties of the Sicilian Mussomeli *neca* (Cruschina 2010, Garzonio and Poletto 2015), for which Cruschina (2010) argued that it is derived from a cleft and for which Garzonio and Poletto (2015) have argued that it is basegenerated in SpecFocP.

This research predicts that negative clefts may provide the ideal context for the emergence of a new negator. What we do not know at present is how common this pattern is and whether there are languages where this type of negator becomes the standard negator. More research from a crosslinguistic perspective is needed for that.

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