Double negative markers in Modern Greek[*]

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1.   Introduction

The topic of this paper is the co-occurrence of the two sentential negators of Modern Greek (henceforth MG), *dhen* and *min*[1]. According to most descriptions of MG (see among many others Philippaki-Warburton 1994, 1998; Rivero 1994, Giannakidou 1998 and subsequent work, Tsimpli & Roussou 1996, Roussou 2000), the two negators are in complementary distribution, and mood determines which of the two occurs: *dhen* negates clauses in indicative, as in (1), and *min* negates clauses in non-indicative, in particular subjunctives, introduced by *na*, see (2) (as well as gerund clauses, which I do not discuss here).

(1)   a.   Dhen grafis.

        NEG write.2SG

        'You are not writing./'You do not write.'

        b.   Ipa oti den grafis.

        said.1SG that NEG write.2SG

        'I said that you are not writing.'/'I said that you do not write.'

[1] Throughout the paper I refer to these elements as *dhen* and *min* and gloss them as NEG. The form of these elements varies on the basis of the phonological environment that immediately follows them: the segment *n* is obligatorily retained only when followed by a vowel or a plosive consonant. Some non-verbal categories (such as nouns and adjectives) may be negated by *mi*, an element whose relation to *min* is not clear to me. See Veloudis (1982), Joseph & Janda (1999) and Roussou (2015) for relevant discussion.

(2) a.   Na mi grafis.

          SUBJ NEG write.2SG

          'You should not be writing.'/'You should not write.'

     b.   Elpizo na mi grafis.

          hope.1SG SUBJ NEG write.2SG

          'I hope that you are not writing.'/ 'I hope that you do not write.'

Descriptively speaking, then, clauses in indicative are negated by *dhen*, and clauses in subjunctive are negated by *min*. While there has been disagreement on which elements contribute mood information in MG, and in particular on the status of *na* (see presently), what is uncontroversial is that the indicative-subjunctive distinction is not expressed morphologically – witness the identical verbal forms in (1) and (2). The realization of subjunctive is syntactic/analytic in MG: it relies on the combination of any finite verb with the subjunctive marker *na*. The only mood-related distinction encoded in verbal morphology in MG is the distinction between imperative and non-imperative.[2]

The received wisdom is thus that *dhen* and *min* are in complementary distribution and may each head the single NegP available in MG, which is situated above TP (see Poletto 2020 for an overview of the cross-linguistically available positions for clausal negation). Where exactly is this NegP situated? The answer depends crucially on how we characterize *na*. This has been a topic of much controversy: some authors (most notably Rivero 1994, Philippaki-Warburton 1994, 1998) analyze it as an inflectional mood marker, whereas others (e.g. Agouraki 1991, Tsoulas 1993) argue that it is a complementizer. Roussou's (2000) proposal on the left periphery of MG reconciles these two views. According to Roussou, the CP field in MG is split into three C-positions (cf. Rizzi's 1997 influential split of the CP into C_{Force} and $C_{Finiteness}$). The highest C-position, C, is occupied by *pu* (a complementizer heading factive complements and relative clauses). This position optionally hosts the declarative complementizer *oti*, which is first-merged in the intermediate C_{Op} (Op for operator). Finally,

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[2] True negative imperatives are ungrammatical in MG (Rivero 1994; Rivero & Terzi 1995; Zanuttini 1997; Zeijlstra 2013; Oikonomou 2017), as shown in (ib). What MG resorts to, in order to express prohibitions, negative warnings and the like, are negated subjunctives (so-called surrogate negative imperatives), as in (2a).

(i) a.   Grafe!
           write-IMP.2SG
           'Write!'
     b.   *Mi/Dhen grafe!
           NEG NEG write-IMPER.2SG

na is first-merged in C_M (a position bearing features relating to modality) and moves to C_{Op}. The system is meant to capture the relative distribution of the elements in question: *pu* may co-occur with *na*, while *oti* is in complementary distribution with *na* (and with *pu*). *Na* is also in complementary distribution with the 'future' particle *tha* (which I do not discuss; see Tsangalidis 1999, and also Roussou 2000 for a synopsis of the complications that *tha* brings into the picture). The proposal is schematized in (3) from Roussou (2000:79).

(3)   [$_C$ *pu* [Topic/Focus [C_{Op} *oti/an/na/as* [$_{Neg}$ *dhen/min* [C_M *tha/t_{na}/as*[$_I$ cl + V...]]]]]]]

On Roussou's approach, the single NegP of MG occurs between C_{Op} and C_M. On the conception of *na* as a mood marker, NegP is situated above MoodP (headed by *na*) and below CP (which is headed by a null element, see e.g. Philippaki-Warburton 1998, Giannakidou 2009).

2.   Double negative markers

Given the mood-related distribution of *dhen* and *min*, and since each clause bears a single mood specification, we do not expect *dhen* and *min* to co-occur. There is, however, a substantial range of data which have thus far not been greatly discussed, in which *dhen* and *min* do co-occur. In my presentation, I will rely on the most comprehensive description of the relevant facts which I am aware of, namely Manta (2020).[3] Basing myself on Manta's observations, I will present the data in a way that highlights what I take to be two crucial factors: (a) which of *min* or *dhen* semantically contributes sentential negation and (b) the likelihood that *min*, especially, performs a function unrelated to expressing sentential negation. In all the cases I will review, the co-occurrence of *dhen* and *min* does not lead to double negation readings: it is never the case that they cancel each other out.

Quite generally, there seem to be two kinds of environments which license double negation. In one type of environment, we are dealing with clausal subordination, i.e. with a dependency between a matrix and an embedded clause. In the second type of environment, *min* and *dhen* co-occur in matrix contexts. Before we examine each environment in turn, let me offer two generalizations that hold over all the data: (a) word order is fixed, in that *min* always precedes *dhen*; and (b) *dhen* is parasitic on *min*. Thus, although *dhen* is generally ungrammatical in *na*-clauses, we will see that it can occur in a subset of them, as long as *min*

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[3] Previous work has generally focused on subsets of the data reviewed by Manta, discussed in the context of expletive negation (see Yoon 2003, 2011) or of so-called non-negative *min* (see Makri 2013, Roussou 2015, Tsiakmakis et al. 2022).

is also present. Somewhat paradoxically, then, *dhen* is parasitic on *min*. I will return to these generalizations in section 3.

2.1. *Double negation within a subordinate clause*

A first clear case of *min dhen* co-occurrence is inside complements to verbs denoting fear (*verba timendi*, Chatzopoulou 2018; see also Makri 2013, Roussou 2015, Tsiakmakis et al. 2022). In these instances, *mipos*, a bona fide complementizer, can replace *min*, as shown in (4). *Min* or *mipos* can, in addition, introduce matrix or embedded polar questions, as in (6) (from Tsiakmakis et al. 2022) and (7).

(4)   Fovame mi/mipos dhen erthi.
        fear.1SG NEG/COMP NEG comes
        'I fear s/he may not come.'

(5)   Prosekse   min/mipos se   gelasun.
        be.careful-IMP.2SG NEG/COMP you.ACC-CL trick.3PL
        'Beware lest they trick you. [Take care so that they do not trick you.]'

(6)   Min/mipos tros pola glika?
        NEG/COMP eats.2SG many sweets
        'Could it be the case that you eat many sweets?'

(7)   Anarotieme min/mipos efije.
        wonder.1SG NEG/COMP left.3SG
        'I wonder whether s/he left.'

Cross-linguistically, verba timendi are notorious for creating an environment where so-called expletive negation appears. See, for instance, the French example in (8) from Jin & Koenig (2021:40), where despite the appearance of *ne* in the embedded clause what the speaker fears is the positive polarity of the complement:

(8)   J'ai peur qu'il ne pleuve demain.
        I have fear that it NEG rain.SUBJ tomorrow
         'I fear that it will rain tomorrow.'

Indeed, in MG too, the complement clauses of these verbs seem special, as they constitute one environment where *dhen* can co-occur with *min*. As the interpretations of (9a) and (9b) show, semantic negation in the complement clause is contributed by *dhen*.

(9) a. Fovame min erthi.

    fear.1SG NEG comes

    'I fear s/he may come.'

  b. Fovame mi dhen erthi.

    fear.1SG NEG NEG comes

    'I fear s/he may not come.'

A second case of *min dhen* co-occurrence is within the complement of (syntactically or lexically) negated modals.[4] Given the lack of infinitives in MG, when modals take sentential complements, they only take *na*-clauses.

(10) Apokliete na mi dhen erthi.

   is.ruled.out SUBJ NEG NEG come.3SG

   'No way s/he will not come.'

(11) Dhe ginete na mi dhen erthi.

   NEG happens SUBJ NEG NEG come.3SG

   'It's not possible that s/he won't come.'

Focusing on the lexically negative modal *apokliete* 'it is ruled out/impossible', let us look more closely at the versions without (double) negation in the complement clause. Sentence (12) with

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[4] I will continue to refer to this category as "complements to negated modals", but I should note that *dhen* is acceptable in the absence of matrix negation, as long as there is a question operator:
 (i) Dhe jinete na mi dhen erthi.
    NEG happens SUBJ NEG NEG come.3SG
    'It's not possible that s/he won't come.'
 (ii) *Jinete na mi dhen erthi.
     happens SUBJ NEG NEG come.3SG
 (iii) Jinete na mi dhen erthi?
    NEG happens SUBJ NEG NEG come.3SG
    'Is it possible that s/he won't come?'
These data strongly recall the case of polarity subjunctive, i.e. subjunctive that is not selected, but licensed by a non-veridical operator. I tentatively return to this point at the end of section 3.

no negation in the complement clause conveys that the embedded event is highly unlikely to occur: it is unlikely that she will come. To negate the complement clause, *min* needs to occur, as in (13); in that case, it is unlikely that she will not come, i.e. what is likely is that she will come. The version with double negation (*min dhen*), namely (14), is truth-conditionally equivalent to the version with the single (*min*) negation. In other words, here *dhen* seems redundant, or 'expletive', in that it does not contribute to the truth-conditional content of the clause.

(12)   Apokliete na erthi.
       is.ruled.out SUBJ come.3SG
       'No way s/he will come.'

(13)   Apokliete na min erthi.
       is.ruled.out SUBJ NEG come.3SG
       'No way s/he won't come.'

(14)   Apokliete na mi dhen erthi.
       is.ruled.out SUBJ NEG NEG come.3SG
       'No way s/he won't come.'

Summing up, with verba timendi, *min* is a bona fide complementizer and *dhen* is contributing semantic negation, whereas under negated modals *min* is contributing semantic negation and *dhen* is expletive. A tentative conclusion over these facts would be the following: *dhen* can express negation when *min* is busy doing other (C-related) work; when *min* takes on its negative function, *dhen* is expletive.

2.2.   *Double negation in unembedded contexts*

Moving on to the second type of *min dhen* environment, *min* seems to be able to happily co-exist with *dhen* even in the absence of clausal subordination. A most pertinent case is in the clause that follows the adverb *siga*. When used as a manner adverb, *siga* denotes low velocity or volume. In the case at hand, *siga* conveys speaker attitude, in particular speaker's incredulousness towards the content of the proposition that follows, see (15). On this guise,

siga contributes evaluative/expressive meaning.[5] When *dhen* also occurs in the clause, as in (16), the speaker expresses her incredulousness towards the negation of the corresponding proposition.

(15) Siga min erthi.
      PART NEG comes
      'I seriously doubt she will come.'/'Like hell she'll come.'

(16) Siga mi dhen erthi.
      PART NEG NEG comes
      'I seriously doubt she will not come.'/ 'Like hell she won't come.'

In this case too, as in the complement to verba timendi, *min* is not expressing negation, but *dhen* is. In fact, it can be argued that *min* is here too a complementizer (even though there is no indication that we are dealing with subordination under a matrix verb). Note that *na* is optionally present in these cases; however, regardless of whether *na* is present or not, *min* can never be absent.

(17) Siga (na) *(min) erthi.
      PART SUBJ NEG come-3SG
      'I seriously doubt she will come.'/'Like hell she'll come.'

(18) Siga (na) *(mi) den erthi.
      PART SUBJ NEG NEG come-3SG
      'I seriously doubt she will not come.'/ 'Like hell she won't come.'

A second case of *min dhen* co-occurrence in the absence of clausal embedding is instantiated in contexts such as the following, which have the force of a negative warning or threat.

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[5] In fact, *siga* can constitute an utterance in itself, conveying speaker attitude (irony/incredulousness) towards a contextually available proposition:
  (i)   Siga!
         PART
         'Yeah, right!'
Given its function as an evaluative adverb or discourse particle, I gloss it as PART (for particle) in the relevant examples. As suggested by my translation of (i) as well as of the relevant examples in the main text, I take *siga* to express metalinguistic negation, which, following Martins (2020), negates the assertability or appropriateness of a given proposition.

(19)   Mi (tixon/tixi) ke dhen erthis!

NEG possibly/happens and NEG come.2SG

'Don't you dare not come!'

Although there is no indication of clausal embedding in (19), what seems likely is that we are dealing with clausal co-ordination with ellipsis inside the first conjunct (which contains *min*). *Dhen* is the negation in the second conjunct, corresponding to true semantic negation. The unnegated variant is perfectly possible:

(20)   Mi (tixon/tixi) ke erthis!

NEG possibly/happens and come.2SG

'Don't you dare come!'

The construction in (19) seems similar to the *siga min dhen*, in that it conveys speaker attitude. Moreover, it is a clear pointer to the fact that *min* crucially contributes to the illocutionary force of the utterance. However, in the absence of any evidence concerning its underlying syntax, I will set it aside for the remainder of this paper.[6]

3.   Towards a syntactic analysis

The data reviewed in section 2 robustly establish that the two sentential negators can co-occur. How can we reconcile this fact with the postulation of a single NegP in MG? I propose that the postulation of a single NegP can be upheld, and in fact must be upheld. One of the things the doubling data highlight is that *min* may lexicalize a C-head. In this section I explore the possibility that *min* systematically occurs in a position other than Neg, and higher than Neg, e.g. some C-position. NegP is exclusively headed by *dhen*.

        First, this is consistent with word order; recall that when *dhen* and *min* co-occur, they do so in a fixed order, such that *min* precedes *dhen*. This follows, if *min* is located higher than

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[6] It seems to me that the data in (19)-(20) also involve *mi* and not *min* (cf. footnote 1). If this is true, the data in (19)-(20) should be related to the fact that *mi* (but not *min*, and certainly not *dhen*, as noted by Veloudis 1982 and Joseph & Janda 1999) can constitute an utterance in itself, expressing prohibition.

(i)   Mi!

NEG

'Don't!'

dhen. Furthermore, in all the doubling cases, the co-occurrence of *dhen* and *min* does not lead to affirmation: the two negators do not cancel each other out. This suggests that *dhen* and *min* do not each head a different NegP. Finally, allowing only *dhen* to head NegP is consistent with the view that *dhen* is the default negator in MG (Chatzopoulou 2018:40). Before I explore what the exact position of *min* may be, I will relate the doubling data to the argumentation above.

The data that most forcefully suggest that *min* occurs in a C position (in that it performs C-related functions) involve verba timendi and the *siga*-construction. For convenience, I repeat the first case below. In (21), *min* is not a clausal negator, but rather lexicalizes a C head (whence its interchangeability with *mipos*; see also Roussou 2015).

(21)   Fovame mi/mipos dhen erthi.

       fear.1SG NEG/COMP NEG come.3SG

       'I fear s/he may not come.'

In her diachronic investigation, Chatzopoulou (2018) shows that *min* has been available as a 'non-negative complementizer', as she characterizes it, in complements to verba timendi since Homeric times. In precisely these cases, where *min* occupies a C-position, *dhen*, whenever present, contributes sentential negation.[7]

A potential objection to characterizing *min* as systematically heading a CP may come from the occurrence of *min dhen* in unembedded contexts. Is it likely that we have a complementizer in matrix clauses? I suggest that this may indeed be so.[8] A variant of the *siga*-construction employs *pu*, as shown in (22). Similarly to when *siga* takes a *min*-clause, as in our familiar (23), *pu* cannot be absent:

(22)   Siga *(pu) tha erthi.

       PART COMP FUT come.3SG

       'I seriously doubt s/he will come.'/'Like hell s/he'll come.'

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[7] In their recent exploration of the semantics of non-negative *min*, (i.e. *min* occurring in complements to verba timendi and as a question particle) Tsiakmakis et al. (2022) propose that this element is an epistemic modal (see also Makri 2013 for a similar treatment). The authors assume that negative *min* and non-negative *min* are two distinct lexical elements. I have not made this assumption in this paper.

[8] This echoes objections raised by Philippaki-Warburton (1998) to *na* occupying C (as opposed to Mood); see Agouraki (1991) for a response to this criticism. See also more recently Corr (2018) for a treatment of Romance *que* in unembedded clauses.

(23)   Siga *(min) erthi.
         PART NEG comes
         'I seriously doubt s/he will come.'/'Like hell s/he'll come.'

The status of *pu* as a complementizer seems incontestable. Interestingly, even *pu* may occur unembedded, namely in curses, as in (24) (cf. Roussou 2000:91; see Makri 2017 for relevant discussion):

(24)   (Mba) pu na fas ti glosa su!
         PART COMP SUBJ eat.2SG the tongue your
         'May you swallow your tongue!'

If *pu* is treated as a C-head in (22) and (24), why not *min* in (23)?

    If *min* does not head NegP but is somewhere in the C-domain, where is it situated exactly? Recall that on Roussou's (2000) proposal, the CP in MG is split into three positions, and NegP is situated between the lower two. I repeat Roussou's proposed structure in (25):

(25)   [C *pu* [Topic/Focus [COp *oti/an/na/as* [Neg *dhen/min* [CM *tha/tna/as*[I cl + V...]]]]]]

If we reserve *dhen* for Neg, the closest C position consistent with word order in double negation is COp. (In fact, for prohibitions as in (2a), Roussou (2000:85) suggests that *min* moves to COp, whenever *na* is absent.) Although this is certainly an option as a position for *min*, it will necessitate relocating *na*: on Roussou's proposal COp is the position targeted by moved *na*, and, as we have already seen, the sequence *na mi dhen* is possible. The only available position for *na* now is C, which Roussou reserves for *pu*. A serious problem with allowing *na* to occupy C is that this leads to the wrong predictions with respect to the relative order of *na* and topicalized or focused elements. Additionally, *pu* may also occur on top of *na mi dhen*. The following example was found on the internet (https://www.insomnia.gr/forums/topic/750798-μειωση-ενοικιου/page/9/, accessed on 23 October 2022) and seems fine to a number of speakers consulted:

(26)   Dhen iparxi anthropos pu na mi dhen exi kani lathos.
         NEG exists man COMP SUBJ NEG NEG has made mistake
         'There is no-one who has not made a mistake.'

In sum, even on the abundance of C positions yielded on the basis of Roussou's proposal, C is not a general enough solution. It could be that *min* occupies some C head when it introduces complements to verba timendi or (matrix/embedded) polar questions, but in cases such as (26) it arguably occurs in some other position.

The answer that addresses (26) will be relevant also for (27), which we saw earlier in section 2, namely *mi dhen* in complements to negated modals:

(27)   Apokliete na mi dhen erthi.

        is.ruled.out SUBJ NEG NEG come.3SG

        'No way s/he won't come.'

A property shared by examples (27) and (26) is that *dhen* does not contribute to the truth-conditional meaning. With these examples we are, therefore, uncontroversially within the realm of expletive negation, a phenomenon whose proper treatment has a very long and rich literature.[9] The data discussed in this paper highlight the fact that both *min* and *dhen* may be interpreted as expletive (or non-negative), each in different environments.

There are two options I see regarding the nature of this new position for *min*, which occurs below *na* and above Neg. One option underscores the relevance of non-veridicality. For instance, on the basis of its distribution and, crucially, of the fact that it does not always have negative import, Roussou (2015) proposes that *min* is a polarity item, situated somewhere in the clausal left periphery. Similarly, Chatzopoulou (2018) suggests for non-negative *min* that it may move to a C-position, having first merged as the head of Mood Irrealis, which is, following Giannakidou (1998), associated with nonveridicality. On the assumption, endorsed by many, that subjunctive mood corresponds semantically to non-veridicality, this kind of approach is consistent with the fact that, in all co-occurrences of *min dhen*, *na* is either optionally or obligatorily present (cf. Yoon 2010, 2013, who treats expletive negation as a species of subjunctive marking).

A different option would be to relate the position of *min* to the speech act layer, i.e. to a layer of syntactic structure which has in recent years been postulated in the left periphery above CP, as a means of encoding properties of clauses pertaining to the syntax-pragmatics

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[9] Depending on how it is defined, more data discussed in this paper – and possibly all – are instances of expletive negation. For instance, it is extremely common to treat negation in the complement to verba timendi as an instance of expletive negation. In this environment, in MG it is *min* that is interpreted as expletive.

interface (e.g. Speas & Tenny 2003); for a recent comprehensive overview see Wiltschko 2021). Indeed, in all the data reviewed in this paper, the attitude of the speaker towards some propositional content is a common denominator (recall the signature property of the *siga-*construction, and also observations on unembedded *pu* in (22) and (24)). A recent proposal along these lines is offered for non-negative *min* by Tsiakmakis & Espinal (2022). Working within the framework of Krifka (2020), these authors propose that non-negative *min* is merged in the head of Judgement Phrase, which encodes epistemic modality and evidentiality. Within this framework, the following projections, pertaining to speech act information, occur above CP: Judgement phrase (JP) encodes subjective epistemic and evidential attitudes; Commitment Phrase (ComP) relates to the social commitment related to assertion; Act Phrase (ActP) represents the relation to the common ground of the conversation. See (27) for a schematic representation:

(27)   [ActP [ComP [JP [CP [TP]]]]]

I leave to future research the choice between these two alternatives.

4.   Concluding remarks

In the course of this paper, we have seen a wide range of data in which *min* and *dhen* co-occur. I have argued that the data can be reconciled with a single NegP, which is exclusively headed by *dhen*. The element *min* is in some cases a complementizer, and in others the head of a different projection. Crucially, it is never the head of NegP (cf. Roussou 2015).

A number of new questions arise in light of the data discussed here. For instance, how is the dependency of *dhen* on *min* encoded in the grammar of MG? In other words, how do we syntactically express that *dhen* is parasitic on *min* in the context of *min dhen* sequences? Related to this question is the question of the featural make-up of *dhen* and *min*. In the doubling data, *dhen* systematically survives in non-veridical contexts – something which is completely unexpected on the received wisdom of the mood-related distribution of *dhen* and *min*. A tentative partial answer to both questions would be that *dhen* is, in fact, unmarked with respect to grammatical mood/(non)veridicality, whereas *min* is marked for modality/non-veridicality.[10]

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[10] What of their status as negators, i.e. their potential to negate simple clauses? It would be profitable to explore to what extent the data discussed in this paper can be dealt with within the proposal of Zeijlstra (2004), according to whom *dhen* does not encode semantic negation: it bears an uninterpretable negation feature ([uNeg]) and agrees with a phonologically null negative operator bearing [iNeg]. See Barouni (2018) for an elaboration of Zeijlstra's approach to (Greek) negation. On the basis of her diachronic study, Chatzopoulou (2018) has also concluded for

As I hope the discussion has shown, in virtue of constituting an instance of doubling, the co-occurrence of *min* and *dhen* has the potential of offering crucial new light on the 'canonical' case, namely non-doubling.[11]

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min that it bears [uNeg], having started life as an [iNeg] element. An interesting case of the co-occurrence of the two sentential negators in Ancient Greek (though in the opposite order from the one occurring in Modern Greek) is discussed in Denizot (2009).

[11] See Barbiers (2008) for an early overview of doubling in this light, as well as the contributions in Barbiers et al. (2008) for doubling phenomena in a wide range of empirical domains – nominal, verbal and clausal.

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