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Overview

The particle *nā*, which has the stable function of modulating the expression of the *request* speech act, is attested in Hebrew texts ever since Biblical Hebrew, and is still in use in contemporary Modern Hebrew. Yet its syntax has dramatically changed during the various stages of the Hebrew language. I argue that this change reflects a particular sequence of steps of category reanalysis:
Force < Modality < Mood < Aspect

Functional cycle

A linguistic cycle is a sequence of unidirectional grammaticalizations in a language. A functional cycle (Gelderen 2011) is a cycle where each step involves the reanalysis of an element of a given functional category as being of a different functional category which is higher in the structurally defined Cinque (1999) hierarchy. A lexical category is reanalyzed as a functional category in its extended projection. As first demonstrated by Roberts & Roussou (2003), both types of reanalysis (lexical to functional and functional to functional) can be viewed as grammaticalization-type changes, since they simplify derivations by reducing the number of head movement steps up the tree.

Particle *na* in the functional cycle

The Hebrew particle *nā*, was originally part of the **Imperfective Aspect**, and became part of the **Volitive Mood inflection** within Biblical Hebrew. Later it was reanalyzed as a **Modality marker** by writers of Hebrew in the Pre-Modern Period. When Modern Hebrew emerged at the beginning of the 20th century, we find the particle as a marker of **Force**. In each stage, its syntactic position moves up the clausal structure.

Biblical Hebrew

The particle *nā* originates in the Hebrew verbal inflection according to Rainey (1986) and others, as an **Energic Imperfective Form**, whose traces can be found in the Biblical Hebrew, For example:

1. *yāsōḥāḇen-hu* *yāḇōnānē-hu*
encircle.IMPF.3MS-ACC.3MS watch.IMPF.3MS-ACC.3MS
'He encircled him, he instructed him.' (Deut. 32: 10)

Unlike the ancient Energic Imperfective Forms preserved in Biblical Hebrew, the Biblical particle *nā* is not an inflectional affix, but an enclitic particle. Syntactically, this particle is part of the functional head of **Volitive Mood**, to which the Biblical verb raises.

This category of Mood is an established part of the inflection of the Biblical Hebrew verb, encoding the difference between the indicative mood and the volitive mood, which varies according to different grammatical person: cohortative (self-encouragement) in the first person, imperative and jussive in the second person, and jussive in the third person (Joüon & Muraoka). These three moods appear very frequently with the particle *nā* (Fassberg 1994), for example:

First person (Cohortative):

2. *'ēbrā* *nā* *ḥā-'arṣeqā*
cross.COHORT.1S NĀ in-your.country
'Please let me pass through your land.' (Judg. 11:17)

Second person (Imperative):

3. *habbeṭ* *nā* *haš-šāmaym-ā*
look.IMPR.2MS NĀ DEF-sky-ALLATIVE
'Look now toward heaven.' (Gen. 15: 5)

Third person (Jussive):

4. *yāhī* *nā* *ḥōreḇ...*
be.JUS.3MS NĀ dryness...
'Let it now be dry...' (Judg. 6: 39)

Example (6) shows *nā* as a second position clitic within the verbal conjunction of two imperative verbs which have raised to the Mood head:

5. *gāšā* *nā* *ū-šāqā* *lī*
come.IMPR.2MS nā and-kiss.IMPR.2MS to.me
'Come near now and kiss me' (Gen. 27:26)

When the position above the Aspect head is occupied by negation, it is negation which raises to Mood, and is spelled out as the modal negation *'al*. In such a case, *nā* has cliticized to negation, and the verb which has remained in the Aspect head, is usually spelled out as an imperfective form. For example:

6. *'al* *nā* *nēlēk* *kullānu*
NEG.MOOD NĀ go.IMPF.1P all.1P
'Let us not all go now.' (2 Sam. 13: 25)

Pre-Modern Hebrew

In pre-Modern Hebrew *nā* is recategorized as occupying the head of the **Modal** projection. Only modal auxiliaries or negation raise to its position, optionally picking up Mood morphology (mostly imperative morphology, as other volitive morphology is disappearing) and leaving the lexical verb in the infinitival form.

7. *hō'īl* *nā* *lāsappēr...*
consent.AUX. IMPR.1MS NĀ tell.INF...
'Please consent to tell...'
(Mendele Mocher Sforim, Russia, 1868)

Modern Hebrew

nā is a complementizer marking the **Force** of main clauses – imperative. It does not attract any kind of verb, neither a lexical verb as in (8a) nor a modal verb as in (8b).

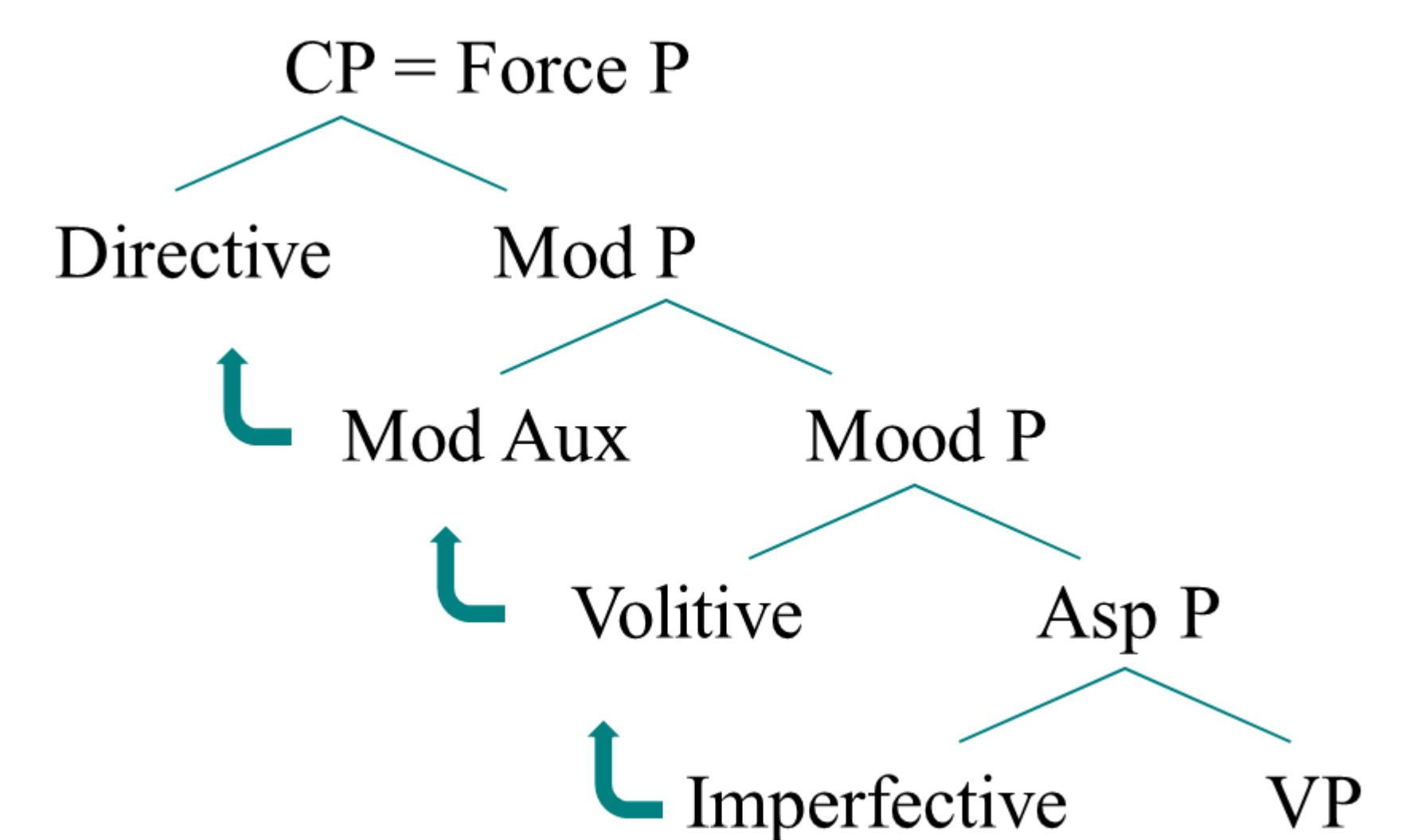
- 8.a *nā* *lifnōt* *'el* *ham-mazkīrūt*
NĀ turn.INF to DEF-secretariat
'Please contact the secretariat.'
(Do'ar HaYom, 1921)

- b. *nā* *lāharšōt* *lī* *lāhōdia'*
NĀ allow.INF to me inform.INF
'Please, let me inform.'
(Do'ar HaYom, 1923)

In addition, *nā* does not attract negation (9):

9. *nā* *lo* *liškōaḥ ...*
NĀ NEG forget.INF
'Please, do not forget.'
(Avraham Zifroni, 1928)

The clausal hierarchy I assume for the examples above is shown below:



References

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