

Research Project: EMODHEBREW

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NP-Strategy for Expressing Reciprocity

Modern Hebrew has two major NP-strategies for expressing reciprocity, both consisting of two pronominal expressions: the numeral construction and the demonstrative construction. In the numeral-construction (1), the regular components of this construction are the cardinal number *exad*, ‘one,’ and a definite form of the ordinal number *šeni*, ‘second.’ *Prima facie*, this is an odd combination, consisting of a pair of cardinal and ordinal numbers. The demonstrative-construction (2) consists of a repetition of demonstrative pronouns.

(1) Numeral construction:

הילדים שיחקו אחד עם השני

ha-yelad-im *sixku* *exad* *im* *ha-šeni*
DEF-child-PL play.PST.3.PL one.M with DEF-second.M

‘The kids played with each other.’

(http://www.yoledet.co.il/forum/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=209343#, accessed December 5, 2010)

(2) Demonstrative construction:

הילדים שיחקו זה עם זה

ha-yelad-im *sixku* *ze* *im* *ze*
DEF-child-PL play.PST.3.PL DEM.SG.M with DEM-SG.M

‘The kids played with each other.’

(http://www.beofen-tv.co.il/cgi-bin/chiq.pl?%E1%E3%E9%E3%E5%FA_%E0%E7%F8%E9_%E4%F6%E4%F8%E9%ED, accessed February 16, 2003)

These constructions are used at different registers. The demonstrative construction is marked for the written language and other higher register contexts; the numeral-construction is generally restricted to more informal, mostly spoken, language or informal written contexts, such as the internet.

Origins

The modern reciprocal demonstrative-construction is an older construction inherited from Mishnaic Hebrew, where it was the standard NP-strategy for expressing reciprocity found in the Middle-Period corpora, the time when Hebrew ceased to be spoken.

The numeral-construction appears to be a foreign introduction of a construction common in many Indo-European languages, but is peculiar in that its first component is a cardinal number and the second is an ordinal number. The most relevant constructions found in Indo-European are “one” and “another” (*inter alia*, *einander* in German, *l’un l’altro* in Italian, and *yek* and *din* in Kurdish). However, it is not immediately clear how the European “another” became “second” in Modern Hebrew. This path of change was likely facilitated due to the fact that the ordinary use of “another/other” is expressed in Hebrew as “second.” For example, if we consider the following sentence, “I met two people, one was tall and the other was short,” then the equivalent sentence in Hebrew, from all periods, would most likely be expressed with “one” and “second.”

- (3) שֵׁם הָאֶחָד בְּעֵנָה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִי רֶקֶב
šem ha-’eḥād ba’āna we-šem ha-šēni rēkāv
 name.of DEF-one.M Baanah and-name DEF-second.M Rekab
 ‘One was named Baanah and the other Rekab.’

(2 Samuel 4:2)

- (4) וּמִשֵּׂאֵם הָאֶחָד דַּעְתּוֹ אִם אָמַר הַשֵּׁנִי כְמוֹתוֹ
u-miše-’āmar ha-’eḥād da’t-o ’īm
 and-as-say.3.PST.M.SG DEF-one.M opinion-POSS.3.M.SG COND
’āmar ha-šēni kmot-o
 say.3.PST.M.SG DEF-second.M like-3.M.SG
 As one of them expressed his opinion, if the other one expressed a similar opinion, ...’
 (Geonic Responas, *Ša’arey Sedeq*, 4:36, from around the 8th century CE)

- (5) מְכִי מִשֶּׁךְ הָאֶחָד דִּינָרֵי זָהָב, קָנָה הַשֵּׁנִי דִּינָרֵי כֶסֶף
mākī māšaḳ ha-’eḥād dīnār-ē zāhāb
 As pull.PST.3.M.SG DEF-one.M dinar-PL.of gold
qānā ha-šēni dīnār-ē keseḅ
 purchase.PST.3.M.SG DEF-second.M dinar-PL.of silver
 As soon as the one pulled golden dinars, the other purchased silver dinars.’
 (Obadiah ben Abraham of Bertinoro 1440-1510, *Mishnah*, B. Meši’ a 4: 1)

An alternative, or additional, possibility is that the construction developed in the vicinity of Lithuanian speakers. In Lithuanian, the word for “other” is *antra*, which developed into the expression for the ordinal number “second”. This numeral construction is attested to in citations from rabbis from this area of Belarus, which historically belongs to Lithuania. This supports the hypothesis that the construction could have been calqued from Lithuanian into Modern Hebrew.

- (6) בִּטְלָהּ אֶחָד אֶת הַשֵּׁנִי
bittēl eḥād et-ha-šēni
 cancel.3.PST.M.SG one.M ACC-DEF-second.M
 ‘They cancelled each other.’

(Respona Divrey Malkiel 1:84, Malkiel Tenenbaum, lived in Gardinas at the end of the 19th century)

- (7) כְּשֵׁשְׁנֵי נְבִיאִים מְכַחֲשִׁים בְּנִבְוָתָם אֶחָד אֶת הַשֵּׁנִי

<i>kəše-ššney</i>	<i>nəbī' -īm</i>	<i>makhīš-īm</i>	<i>b-nəbu 'at-ām</i>
when-two	prophet-PL	contradict.PTCP-M.PL	in-prophecy-POSS.3.PL
<i>eḥād</i>	<i>et-ha-šēni</i>		
one.M	ACC-DEF-second.M		

‘When two prophets contradict each other in their prophecy...’

(Hiddušey hagriz 103, Isaak Zeev Soloveitchic, who grew up in Valozhyn at the end of the 19th century)

Two Unit Construction

These two constructions can be further subdivided into one- and two-unit constructions. In one-unit-constructions the subcomponents of the reciprocal expression form one unit within the clause, as seen in the examples to this point. Alternatively, the subcomponents are distributed over two separate units (Bar-Asher Siegal 2014b).

- I. One-unit constructions: constructions with one-unit expression, which co-refers with another plural NP in the clause and never occupies the nonembedded subject but all other positions as required by the predicate
- II. Two-unit constructions: constructions with two components, each filling a different argument position of the predicate

The components of the numeral-construction can appear in both the one-unit construction, (1), and the two-unit construction (9). Although the one-unit numeral-construction is generally affiliated with the lower register, the two-unit variant has the flavor of a higher style, usually in writing.

- (9) יוסי ודני - האחד שיחק עם השני
- | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------|
| <i>yosi</i> | <i>ve-dani</i> | <i>ha-exad</i> | <i>sixek</i> | <i>im</i> |
| Yosi(M) | and-Danny(M) | DEF-one.M | play.PST.3.M.SG | with |
| <i>ha-šeni</i> | | | | |
| DEF-second.M | | | | |
- ‘Yosi and Danny played with each other.’

The two-unit variant almost never appears in earlier periods of Hebrew (Bar-Asher Siegal 2012), though it is well attested in other Semitic languages (Bar-Asher Siegal 2011, 2014b). Only the numeral-construction is compatible with the two-unit construction. No example of the demonstrative in a two-unit type prior to Modern Hebrew has been attested. Furthermore, any such examples in Modern Hebrew are rare and sound marginal in acceptability. In other languages, such as Italian (Vezzosi 2010, Bar-Asher Siegal 2014b), Akkadian (Bar-Asher Siegal 2011), and Arabic (Bar-Asher Siegal 2011), when both the two-unit and one-unit construction are grammatically possible, we find that only the two-unit construction existed in an earlier stage of the history of that specific language. However, this is not the case in Modern Hebrew as the components *eḥād-šēni* ‘one-second’ were never parts of a reciprocal construction in the past.

It is likely that once the numeral-construction was adopted into Modern Hebrew, that it was easily accepted by speakers. Other languages with similar constructions to those of Modern Hebrew permit co-occurrences of both variants. For example, in the Judeo-Arabic dialect of Tafilalt:

- (10) a. *ya 'ku u-musi si wkkel si*
 Jacob and-Moses someone feed.PST.M.SG someone
- b. *ya 'ku u-musi wkkelaw si l-si*
 Jacob and-Moses feed.PST.PL someone DEF-someone
 'Jacob and Moses fed each other.'

As long as the two elements of the reciprocal construction are phonologically separated, both the one-unit and two-unit constructions may co-exist.

That a similar analogy did not occur with the demonstrative-constructions is likely due to two possible reasons. The first being that the demonstrative-constructions historically appeared in high-register literary contexts, where only the one-unit version is attested; the second is that the components of this construction still function as demonstratives, that is deictic expressions which are interpreted as referring to only one individual in a non-reciprocal manner.

Agreement Phenomena and the Demonstrative Construction

In the one-unit variant of both the numeral and demonstrative constructions in Modern Hebrew the pronominal expressions agree in gender with the subject. When the participants of the reciprocal relation are not of the same gender, then both constructions have two variants, with either the two pronominal expressions both being masculine, or one is masculine and the other is feminine.

- (11) a. יעל ורבקה שיחקו אחת עם השנייה
yael ve-rivka sixku axat im ha-šniya
 Yael(F) and-Rivka(F) play.PST.3.PL one.F with DEF-second.F
 'Yael and Rivka played with each other.'
- b. יוסי ויעל שיחקו אחד עם השנייה (ה)
yosi ve-yael sixku exad im
 Yosi(M) and-Yael(F) play.PST.3.PL one.M with
ha-šeni/ha-šniya
 DEF-second.M/F
 'Yosi and Yael played with each other.'
- (12) a. יעל ורבקה שיחקו זו עם זו
yael ve-rivka sixku zo im zo
 Yael(F) and-Rivka(F) play.PST.3.PL DEM.SG.F with DEM.SG.F
 'Yael and Rivka played with each other.'
- b. יוסי ויעל שיחקו זה עם זה/זו

yosi *ve-yael* *sixku* *ze* *im* *ze/zo*
 Yosi(M) and-Yael(F) play.PST.3.PL DEM.SG.M/F with DEM.SG.M/F
 ‘Yosi and Yael played with each other.’

The explanation for this variation is that if strong reciprocity is held between the participants, it would not follow to represent either the masculine or feminine demonstrative alone in a certain position, as each should appear in both positions. On the other hand, the attempt to have agreement causes the change of gender in the pronouns in order to match both members of the set represented by the subject. Although normativists attribute the change of gender to a hyper-correction, similar “mistakes” have been found throughout the history of Hebrew literature.

(13) מְזוּוֹגֵן זֶה לְזוֹ
mezawwəg-ān *ze* *lā-zo*
 couple.PTCP.M.SG-ACC.PL DEM.M.SG to-DEM.F.SG
 ‘He couples them (a male and a female) with each other.’ (Leviticus Rabbah, Paraša 8, Piska 1)

(14) הַזֹּוג יִשָּׂא זֶה אֶת זֶה
ha-zug *yissā* *ze* *’et* *zo*
 DEF-couple marry.FUT.M.SG DEM.M.SG ACC DEM.F.SG
 ‘The couple will get married.’
 (Responsa Harama, Poland 1525)

The second phenomenon is the semantic agreement of plural subjects: the pronominal subject expression can only be plural in the demonstrative construction. The target of the agreement is controlled by the actual number of members within each set that participate in the reciprocal relation. For example, example (15a) signifies that among the children various individuals played with each other; and with plural demonstratives, then example (15b) indicates that the children were divided into groups, each group consisting of at least more than one child, and that these groups played with each other (Glinert 1989; Heine & Miyashita 2008).

(15) a. הַיְלָדִים שִׁחֲקוּ אֶחָד עִם הַשְּׁנִי
ha-ylad-im *sixku* *exad* *im* *ha-šeni*
 DEF-boys-PL play.PST.3.PL one.M with DEF-second.M
 ‘The boys played with each other.’
 b. הַיְלָדִים שִׁחֲקוּ זֶה עִם זֶה/אֶלוּ עִם אֶלוּ
ha-ylad-im *sixku* *ze* *im* *ze/*
 DEF-boys-PL play.PST.3.PL DEM.M.SG with DEM.M.SG
elu *im* *elu*
 DEM.PL with DEM.PL
 ‘The boys played with each other.’

Languages rarely use existing pronouns such as demonstratives to express reciprocity, nor do they generally make the distinction as to whether a reciprocal relation holds between singular

individuals or between sub-pluralities due to a lack of nominal declension in the reciprocal expressions. However, in Hebrew, demonstrative pronouns allow number declensions and the relevant semantic distinction can be developed. It is possible that the common morphology of Mishnaic Hebrew and Modern Hebrew allowed the independent development of the same distinction. It is likely that the agreement between plural subjects and the reciprocal is due to a natural development in Hebrew, rather than modern exposure by speakers to examples from Mishnaic Hebrew or modern speakers having learned the grammar rules from books and forced implementation.

Conclusions

Hebrew added a new construction to express reciprocity, due to a calque of an existing construction in Indo-European languages. Instead of replacing the older construction, the demonstrative construction which was inherited from Mishnaic Hebrew, it provided a means to distinguish between registers. Although there is a syntactic similarity between both constructions, they are two independent constructions with different grammatical properties and semantic nuances. It is possible that the tension existing today between the two options was also present for speakers of previous periods of Hebrew.

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