Negative Concord in Modern Hebrew

The Hebrew negative quantifiers *meʔuma*, *klum*, and *šum-davar* appear to have changed their distribution and meaning between Classical Hebrew and Modern Hebrew. These items function as Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) in Biblical and Rabbinic texts, and are translated as 'anything'. However, following the modern revival of Hebrew, these items appear to function as Negative Concord Items (NCIs) and are better translated today as 'nothing.' The modern distribution of these items appears to parallel NCIs in Polish, Russian, and Yiddish, leading to the proposal that the shift is due largely to the influence of Slavic languages.

NCIs and Modern Hebrew

Languages differ in how they use NCIs. Some languages are Strict Negative Concord languages: the verb must be negated, regardless of the NCI's function (subject, object, or adjunct) or its position (before or after the verb). Modern Hebrew is such a language. The negative items *meʔuma*, *klum*, and *šum-davar* function as strict NCIs in combination with obligatory sentential negation *lo*, and yield the reading of a single logical negation, as seen in (1-3). The sentence is ungrammatical without this negation.

(1) *(lo)   raʔ'iti   meʔuma/klum/šum davar
NEG   see.PAST.1S   nothing
'I didn't see anything.'/ 'I saw nothing.'

(2) meʔuma   lo   yešane   ʔet   daʕatam   ʕal   ha-ħisun
nothing   NEG   change.SM   ACC   opinion.GEN   about   the-vaccination
'…Nothing can change their opinion about the vaccination.' (y-net, health+(Briut), http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4457560,00.html, accessed December 4, 2014)

In Modern Hebrew, a preverbal NCI, such as the quantifier *ʔaf ʔeħad* in (3), cannot license the post-verbal NCIs *meʔuma*, *klum*, and *šum davar*. Sentential negation is obligatory just as in the previous examples.

(3) ʔaf ʔeħad   *(lo)   ʔamar   meʔuma/klum/šum davar
Nobody   NEG   said.3MS   nothing
'Nobody said anything.'

Other languages, such as many Romance languages, are what Giannakidou (1997) calls "Non-Strict Negative Concord" languages. These languages require negation when an NCI appears post-verbally; however, when the NCI appears pre-verbally, negation is not required or may be incompatible with it (Zeijlstra 2004).

NPIs and Classical Hebrew

Negative polarity items (NPIs) are only licensed in certain semantic and syntactic environments. The most common environment for them is within the scope of negation. NPIs can also be found in environments that do not include negation, such as questions (4) and conditionals (6). Note that NCIs are disallowed in these contexts (5, 7)

(4) *hayita   šam   ʔei paʕam?*
     be.PAST.2SM   there   NPI time
     'Have you ever been there?'

(5) **hayita   šam   ʔaf paʕam?*
     be.PAST.2SM   there   NEG time
     'Have you never been there?'

(6) *ʔim   ʔei paʕam   tagiaʕ   le-šam   tavi   li   mazkeret*
     if   NPI time   arrive.FUT.2SM to-there   bring.FUT.2SM me   souvenir.F
     'If you ever get there, bring me a souvenir.'

(7) **ʔim ʔaf paʕam   tagiaʕ   le-šam,   ze   yihiye   ħaval*
     if   NEG time   arrive.FUT.2SM to-there   it   be.FUT.3SM   shame
     'If you never get there, it will be a shame.'

According to these distributional properties, in Classical Hebrew texts, *meʔuma*, *klum*, and *šum-davar* appear to function as NPIs and are found in contexts in which NCIs are ungrammatical, such as questions and the antecedents of conditionals. This will be exemplified in what follows.

meʔuma

meʔuma appears in Biblical Hebrew with negation (8) as well as questions (9) and conditionals (10):

(8) וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב לֹא תִתֶּן לִי מְאוּמָה
     va-yyomer   yaʕakoḇ   lo   titten   li   mǝʔūmā
     and-say.3SM   Jacob   NEG   give.FUT.2SM DAT.1S nothing/anything
     'And Jacob said, "Pay me nothing!"' (Genesis 30:31)

(9) הִנֵּה בָאתִי אֵלֶיךָ עַתָּה הֲיָכוֹל אוּכַל דַּבֵּר מְאוּמָה
     hinnē bātī   ʔēlɛykā   ʕattā hă-yākōl   ʔūkal   dabbēr
     here   come.PAST.1S   to.you.2SM   now   Q-can.INF   can.FUT.1S talk.INF
     mǝʔūmā
     anything
     'And now that I have come to you, have I the power to speak freely?' (Numbers 22:38)

(10) כִּי תַשֶּׁה בְרֵעֲךָ מַשַּׁאת מְאוּמָה לֹא תָבֹא אֶל בֵּיתוֹ לַעֲבֹט עֲבֹטוֹ

kī	*ṯaššε*	*bə-rēʿăḵā*	*maššat*	*məʾūmā*	*lō*
if	lend.FUT.2SM	in-friend.GEN.2SM	thing	anything	NEG

ṯāḇōṯ		*ʾεl-*	*bēyṯō*		*laʿăḇoṭ*	*ʿaḇoṭō*
come.FUT.2SM		to	house.GEN.3SM		take.INF	pledge.GEN.3SM

'When you make a loan of any sort to your countryman, you must not enter his house to seize his pledge.' (Deuteronomy 24:10)

klum

klum first appears in early Rabbinic Hebrew (*Mishnah*) and is primarily used in combination with negation (11). Like *meʔuma*, it is also found in questions (12) and in conditionals (13):

(11) כָּל זְמָן שֶׁהַטֶּבֶל מְרוּבֶּה לֹא הִיפסִיד כְּלוּם

kol	*zman*	*šε-ha-ṭṭεḇεl*	*mərūbbe*	*lō*	*hīp̄sīḏ*
all	time.M	that-the-untithed	great.M	NEG	lost.PAST.3SM

kəlūm
nothing/anything

'[W]hen the greater part is untithed produce naught is lost.' (*Mishnah*, Zera'im, Demai 7:7, MS Kaufmann A 50)

(12) רוֹאִים אַתֶם כְּלוּם בְּאֶחָד מִן הֶהָרִים הַלָלוּ

rōʾīm	*ʾaṯεm*	*kəlūm*	*bə-εḥāḏ*	*min*	*hε-hārīm*
see.PRES.PM	you.PLM	anything	in-one.M	of	the-mountains

hallālū?
those?

'Do ye see anything upon one of those mountains?' (Pirke De-Rabbi Eliezer, chapter 31; taken from the 2005 edition, Zichron Aharon: Jerusalem)

(13) אם יאמר לך יתרו כלום מן השבועה

ʾim	*yōmar*	*ləḵā*	*yiṯrō*	*kəlūm*	*min*	*ha-ššḇūʿā*
if	say.FUT.3SM	DAT.2S	Jethro	anything	from	the-oath.F

'Should Jethro at all remind you of your oath…' (Exodus Rabbah 4:4; Hebrew: Friedlander 1981; English: Lehrman 1961)

šum-davar

The individual words *šum* and *davar* are both found in Biblical Hebrew while the compound *šum-davar* is considered either Rabbinic or Medieval in origin. *šum-davar* is used in the antecedent of a conditional in (14) below:

(14) וְאֶחד הַשׁוֹאֵל אֶת הַבְּעָלִים...לְאוֹתָה הַמְּלָאכָה אוֹ...אוֹ לְשׁום דָבר בָּעוֹלָם...הֲרֵי זוֹ שְׁאִילָה בַבְּעָלִים וּפָטוּר

w-ʾεḥad	*ha-šōʾēl*		*ʾεt*	*ha-bə-ʿālim…*	*lə-ʾōtah*	*ha-mməlāḵā*
and-one.M	that-borrow.PRES.SM		ACC	the-owners	for-ACC.SF	the-work.F

ʾō…ʾō	*lə-šum davar*	*b-ā-ʿōlām…*		*hărei*	*zō*	*šəʾīla*
or or	for-anything	in-the-world…		EMPHATIC	it.F	borrowing.F

ḇ-a-bəʿalīm	*u-p̄āṭūr*
in-the-owners	and-quit.PASS.3SM

'whether the commodatary borrowed the services of the owner or…whether he borrowed the services for the same work, or…or for anything in the world…it is a case of borrowing with the owner and the commodatary is quit.' (Borrowing and Depositing, 2

1(6), *The Book of Civil Laws*, *Mishneh-Torah [The Code of Maimonides]*; Hebrew: Kook 1987; English: Rabinowitz 1949)

To recall, in contrast to the above examples from Biblical and Rabbinic or Medieval texts, speakers of Modern Hebrew most likely judge *meʔuma*, *klum*, and *šum-davar* as ungrammatical when presented in questions or the antecedents of conditions without negation.

(15) ** raʔita   šam   meʔuma /klum/šum davar?*
      see.PAST.2MS there   nothing
      'Did you see anything there?'

(16) **'im   tirʔe   šama   meʔuma/klum/šum davar….*
      if   see.FUT.2MS   there   nothing
      'If you see anything there . . .'

Influence from Contact Languages

The shift in the distribution from NPIs in Classical Hebrew to NCIs in Modern Hebrew appears to be rooted in the contact languages Polish, Russian, and Yiddish, all which exhibit Negative Concord (as seen in 17-19). These languages have NCIs with the meaning 'nothing' which have a similar distribution to Modern Hebrew's *meʔuma*, *klum*, and *šum-davar*. Polish and Russian are Strict Negative Concord languages (Zeijlstra 2004). Polish *niczego* is not licensed in NPI contexts (Przepiórkowski & Kupść 1998), and similarly, Russian *ničego* is also an NCI (Pereltsvaig 2006).

(17) Polish:
      jan   *(nie) chciał   niczego   kupować
      John   not   wanted   nothing-GEN   buy-INF
      "John didn't want to buy anything." (Przepiórkowski & Kupść 1998:250)

(18) Russian:
      ivan   ne   znaet   ničego
      Ivan   not   knows n.what
      'Ivan does not know anything.' (Fitzgibbons 2008:51)

(19) Yiddish:
      hot   men   gegrobn   un   gegrobn,   un   hot   gornisht
      has   one   dug   and   dug   and   has   nothing
      nit   gefunen
      not   found
      'One continued digging and one found nothing.' (Olsvanger 1947: 110, as quoted in Van der Auwera & Gybels 2014:211)

Although Yiddish has been cited as a major influence on the syntax of Modern Hebrew (Wexler 1990), the distribution of *gornisht* is different from NCIs in Strict Negative Concord languages in that they can appear without sentential negation. Van der Auwera & Gybels (2014) note that the Yiddish NCI *gornisht* can be used without negation. However, according to Moshe Taube (personal communication), Yiddish has other NCIs, such as *keiner* (person-negation), *keyn-mol* (time-

negation), and *in ergets* (place-negation) with a syntactic distribution that which requires negation, similar to *meʔuma*, *klum*, and *šum-davar* in Modern Hebrew.

Conclusion

This entry investigated the similarity of Modern Hebrew's NCIs *meʔuma*, *klum*, and *šum-davar* to that of Polish *niczego* and Russian *ničego*. The paper posits that the Modern Hebrew distribution differs from Classical Hebrew due to influence with these Slavic languages, whereby native speakers misinterpreted the Classical Hebrew NPIs *meʔuma*, *klum*, and *šum-davar* as NCIs. Although the distribution of Yiddish NCI *gornisht* is not entirely parallel to that of its strict NCI counterparts in Polish, Russian and Modern Hebrew, Yiddish has other NCIs which require Strict Negative Concord. As such, the paper suggests that it is probable that all three languages contributed to the reanalysis of *meʔuma*, *klum*, and *šum-davar* from NPIs to NCIs in Modern Hebrew.

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