Psych-verbs and Subjecthood in Modern Hebrew

Nurit Melnik
The Open University of Israel
nuritme@openu.ac.il

OUTLINE

Psych-verbs

- Psych-verbs are well-known for their variable linking patterns

Experiencer-subject

| Experiencer | | Stimulus |
| Subject | | Object |

Stimulus-subject
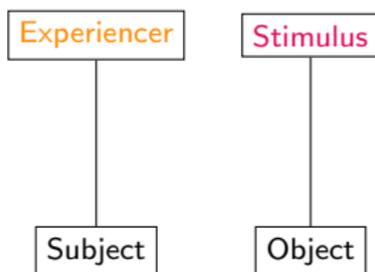
| Experiencer | | Stimulus |
| Subject | | Object |
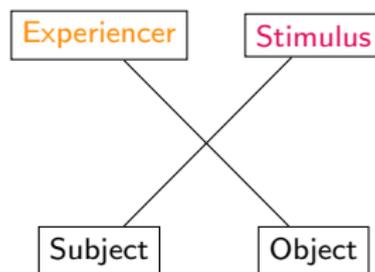
Syntax–semantics–pragmatics

- Experiencers are necessarily human (or, at least, sentient) and typically more prominent than the stimuli.
- The experiencer–object mapping often produces a marked syntax–semantics–pragmatics correspondence; the semantically and pragmatically prominent argument is not realized as subject.
- Languages provide different mechanisms for dealing with such misalignments.

Quasi-synonymous verbs in English

(1) The children fear dogs. — Experiencer-subject

(2) Dogs frighten the children. — Stimulus-subject

Alternating predicates in Icelandic
(Barðdal et al., 2014)

- Some psych-verbs can alternate between a dative-experiencer subject and a nominative-stimulus subject:

  (3) Mér   fellur þessi   bók   vel í geð
       me.DAT falls this.NOM book.NOM well in liking
       'I like this book.'

  (4) þessi   bók   fellur mér   vel í geð
       this.NOM book.NOM falls me.DAT well in liking
       'This book pleases me.'

- The choice between the two argument structures depends on which argument is foregrounded: the dative experiencer or the nominative stimulus.

Argument alternations in German
(Engelberg, To appear)

- Some German psych-verbs alternate between experiencer-subject and stimulus-subject

  (5) a. Seine dumme Bemerkung ärgerte sie
          his   stupid   remark.NOM angered her.acc
          'His stupid remark made her angry.'

       b. Sie   ärgerte sich   über seine dumme Bemerkung
          She.NOM angered REFL over his   stupid   remark
          'She got angry at his stupid remark.'

- Other psych-verbs do not alternate

  (6) a. Seine dumme Bemerkung überraschte sie
          his   stupid   remark.NOM surprised   her.acc
          'His stupid remark surprised her.'

       b. *Sie   überraschte sich   über seine dumme Bemerkung
          She.NOM surprised   REFL over his   stupid   remark

Argument alternations in German
(Engelberg, To appear)

- Alternating predicates are rarely passivized

  (7) a. Sie   ärgerte sich   über seine dumme Bemerkung
          She.NOM angered REFL   over his   stupid remark
          'She got angry at his stupid remark.'

       b. Sie   wurde/war (von/durch etwas) geärgert
          She.NOM AUX.pass   by something   anger.ptcp
          'She was angered (by something).' ◁── Rare

- Passive is a frequent option for non-alternating stimulus-subject verbs

  (8) a. *Sie   überraschte sich   über seine dumme Bemerkung
          She.NOM surprised   REFL   over his   stupid remark

       b. Sie   wurde/war (von/durch etwas) überrascht
          She.NOM AUX.pass   by something   surprise.ptcp
          'She was surprised (by something).' ◁── Frequent

Dative experiencers
A diachronic perspective

- Dative experiencers are one construction which is especially susceptible to language change in many of the world's languages (Serzant & Kulikov, 2013)
- Cole et al. (1980) identify a 3-stage process:
    - arguments which begin as non-subjects (Stage A)
    - subsequently acquire subject behavior properties (Stage B)
    - ultimately acquire all subject properties, including nominative case (Stage C)
- Dative experiencer subjects in Icelandic reflect Stage B.
- Modern Swedish reflects Stage C; Historically non-nominative experiencers now exhibit nominative case and control verb agreement.

Research question

How does Modern Hebrew reconcile
the syntax–semantics–pragmatics misalignment
that generally occurs with stimulus-subject verbs?

Modern Hebrew (MH)
Basic facts

- The unmarked word order of main and subordinate clauses is SV(O).
- In general, finite verbs agree with their subjects in number, person, and gender.
- Subjects in Hebrew are marked with nominative case, which is realized overtly only on pronominal forms.
- The accusative case marker *'et* appears before definite object NPs. Indefinite objects do not have overt case marking.

Verb-initial constructions
Existentials & possessives

While the unmarked word order of main and subordinate clauses is SV(O) the existentials and possessives appear in a V1 construction.

(9) a. hayta   mesiba   be-shabat
           was.3sf party.3sf on-Saturday

     b. *mesiba hayta   be-shabat
           party.3sf was.3sf on-Saturday
           'There was a party on Saturday.'

(10) a. hayta   le-dan mesiba   be-shabat
           was.3sf to-Dan party.3sf on-Saturday

     b. *mesiba hayta   le-dan be-shabat
           party.3sf was.3sf to-Dan on-Saturday
           'Dan had a party on Saturday.'

> The existential predicate exhibits full agreement with *mesiba* '*party*' the theme/possessee.

Existentials & possessives
(Melnik, 2006, 2014)

- In colloquial unmonitored speech the existential predicate *haya* ('was') can appear with impersonal 3SM agreement.

  (11) ˜haya   mesiba   be-shabat
       was.3sm party.3sf on-Saturday
       'There was a party on Saturday.'

- Definite themes/possessees are often marked with ACC case.

  (12) ˜lo haya   li   et   ha-kelim   ha-mat'imim
       no was.3sm to.me **ACC** the-tools.pm the-appropriate.pm
       'I didn't have the appropriate tools.'

- Themes/possessees which do not trigger agreement (i) do not antecede reflexives, (ii) do not delete under co-reference, and (iii) appear as accusative resumptive pronouns.

"Free Inversion"

"Free inversion" of intransitive verbs and their subjects is licensed by information-structure constraints.

(13) a. (ha-)mayim   nishpexu
          (the) water.3PM   spilled.3PM

      b. nishpexu   mayim
          spilled.3PM   water.3PM
          '(The) water spilled.'

(14) a. tlunot   rabot   higi'u   eleinu
          complaints.FM   many.FM   arrived.P   to.us

      b. higi'u   eleinu tlunot   rabot
          arrived.P   to.us   complaints.FM   many.FM
          'Many complaints reached us.'

Psych-verbs in MH: Alternations

- Some predicate in MH alternate by using different verbal templates which share a similar root

(15) a. ha-yeladim paxadu me-ha-kelev ← CaCaC
           the-children feared from-the-dog

           'The children feared the dog.'

      b. ha-kelev hifxid   et   ha-yeladim ← hiCCiC
           the-dog cause.fear ACC the-children

           'The dog frightened the children.'

- Some predicates have an active–passive alternation, which is expressed morphologically

(16) a. ha-še'elot   hivixu   et   ha-mištatfot ← hiCCiC
           the-questions embarrassed ACC the-participants

           'The questions embarrassed the participants.'

      b. ha-mištatfot   huvxu   me-ha-še'elot ← huCCaC
           the-participants embarrassed.pass by-the-questions

           'The participants were embarrassed by the questions.'

Constraints on passivization

- There are many verbs which do not have a passive form, although it is morphologically possible
    - E.g., *sime'ax* 'make.happy', but **sumax* 'was.made.happy'
- MH only allows passives with direct objects; obliques cannot passivize.
- Passive in general is disfavored in MH
    - It is relatively rare in written texts (Jisa et al., 2002)
    - and practically non-existent in spoken language (Dekel, 2014)

    With such limitations, how does MH reconcile
    the syntax–semantics–pragmatics misalignment
    with stimulus-subject verbs?

Method

- Usage-based, bottom-up approach
- Corpus data: *heTenTen 2014*, a 1.1 billion token web-crawled Hebrew corpus (Baroni et al., 2009)
- Ideally - a collostructional analysis (Gries & Stefanowitsch, 2004)
- But due to a lack of large high-quality syntactically parsed Hebrew corpora – corpus searches of specific 2-place predicates with NP subjects

Subject-stimulus psych-verbs

Potential constructions

1. SVO
2. VOS, Agr+
3. VOS, Agr−
4. VOS, Agr−, ACC
5. OVS

Agreement can only be determined with plural and/or feminine S arguments.

Accusative/nominative case can only be determined with definite S arguments.

hifri'a 'disturb'

(17) ciniyut   kazu   eina   mafri'a   la-adam   lixyot xayim
      cynicism.SF like.this   NEG.3SF   disturb.SF   to.the-person to.live life
      poriyim ⟵ SVO
      productive

      'This kind of cynicism does not disturb a person's ability to live a
      productive life.'

(18) lo   hifri'a   li   ha-ciniyut   ba-tadrix ⟵ VOS, Agr+
      NEG   disturbed.3SF to.me   the-cynicism.SF in.the-briefing

      'The cynicism in the briefing didn't disturb me.'

(19) kmo xen hifri'a   li   ha-ciniyut   šelxa ⟵ VOS, Agr−
      like so   disturbed.3SM to.me   the-cynicism.SF your

      'Likewise, your cynicism disturbed me.'

hifri'a 'disturb'

Distribution across constructions

Construction	Status
SVO	√
VOS, Agr+	√
VOS, Agr−	√
VOS, ACC	⋆

hiṭrid 'annoy'
Distribution across constructions

- The distribution of *hiṭrid* '*annoy*' & *(ha-)maxšava* '*the/a thought*'

Construction	Pron. O	Lex. O	Total
SVO	28	60	88
VOS, Agr+	92	4	96
VOS, Agr−	1	0	1
VOS, ACC	0	0	0
OVS	1	0	1

- The experiencer of *hiṭrid* '*annoy*' is a direct object.
- The passive form exists (*huṭrad* '*was.annoyed*') but is rarely used.

Stimulus	*'al yedei* '*by*'	6
	me '*from*'	17

hitxašeq 'feel like'

(20) **'ugiyot ka'ele mamaš mitxašqot.PF li 'axšav*   ←── $\boxed{\text{*SVO}}$
cookies.PF like.these really feel.like.PF to.me now

(21) *mamaš mitxašeq li 'ugiyot ka'ele 'axšav*   ←── $\boxed{\text{VOS, Agr−}}$
really feel.like.SM to.me cookies.PF like.these now
'I really feel like cookies like these now.'

(22) *lo be'emet mitxašqim li ha-reixot ha-mugzamim*
no really feel.like.PM to.me the-smells.PM the-exaggerated.PM
še-yemal'u et ha-bayit ←── $\boxed{\text{VOS, Agr+}}$
that-will.fill.3SM ACC the-house
'I don't really feel like the overpowering smells that will fill the house.'

(23) *hitxašeq li et ha-firma ha-zot – adidas* ←── $\boxed{\text{VOS, ACC}}$
felt.like.SM to.me ACC the-firm.SF the-this – Adidas
'I felt like this brand – Adidas.'

hitxašeq 'feel like'

Distribution across constructions

Construction	Status	
SVO	$\star$	
VOS, Agr+, NOM/ACC	$\sqrt{}$	(rare)
VOS, Agr−, ACC	$\sqrt{}$	(frequent)

ba ('*feel like*', LITERALLY '*come*')

(24) a. ba   li   et   ha-muziqa   šelax ⟵ VOS, Agr−
          come.SM to.me ACC the-music.SF yours

          'I feel like (hearing) your music.'

      b. *ba'a   li   et   ha-muziqa   šelax ⟵ VOS, Agr+
          come.SF to.me ACC the-music.SF yours

          Intended: 'I feel like (hearing) your music.'

Construction	Status
SVO	⋆
VOS, Agr+	⋆
VOS, Agr−, ACC	√

STIMULUS-SUBJECT PSYCH-VERBS
DISTRIBUTION ACROSS CONSTRUCTIONS

- Verbs vary with respect to their distribution across constructions
    1. Only SVO
    2. SVO & VOS, Agr+ (e.g., *hiṭrid* '*annoy*')
    3. SVO & VOS, Agr+/− (e.g., *hifri'a* '*disturb*')
    4. Only VOS, Agr+/−, ACC (e.g., *hitχašeq* '*feel like*')
    5. Only VOS, Agr−, ACC (e.g., *ba* '*feel like*' literal: '*come*')
- Not found:
    - SVO & VOS, ACC
- Hypothesis: Verbs which can (still?) appear in SVO do not mark their S argument with ACC when they appear in VOS.

Stimulus-subject

- The stimulus subject is losing subject properties:
    - Clause-initial position
    - Agreement triggering
    - Nominative case

- When the stimulus argument does not trigger agreement it does not exhibit subject behavior properties:

    (25) a. ra'iti simla   še-mamaš hitxašeq   li   *(ota)
              I.saw dress.sf that-really felt.like.sm to.me ACC.sf

              'I saw a dress which I really felt like (having).'

          b. ha-simla   hayta me'od yeqara   aval mamaš hitxašeq
              the.dress.sf was.3sf very   expensive but really   felt.like.sm
              li   *(ota)
              to.me ACC.sf

              'The dress was very expensive but I really felt like (having) it.'
              (Constructed examples)

EXPERIENCER-OBJECT

- Experiencer objects are overwhelmingly pronominal
- For *hitxašeq* '*feel like*' Almost 90% of the dative experiencers are pronominal (half of them refer to the speaker)
- The OVS construction, with O in subject position, is a marked option.
- O arguments in OVS are even less subject-like than O arguments in VOS; They are focal.

   (26)   gam li   hifriʻa   ha-merirut
          also to.me disturbed.3SF the-bitterness.SF
          'The bitterness disturbed me too.'

CONCLUSIONS

- Similarly to many of the world's languages stimulus-subject predicates in MH are an unstable category due to the the syntax-semantics-pragmatics misalignment.
- The mechanism that speakers employ in order to reconcile this misalignment targets the stimulus argument.
- Instead of promoting the experiencer argument to a canonical subject by way of passivization or to a non-canonical subject as is the case in Icelandic, Hebrew demotes the stimulus.
- The stimulus is stripped of its subject coding and behavior properties.
- The experiencer does not gain syntactic subject properties.
- The VOS structure is gradually becoming subjectless.

THANK YOU

Bibliography

Baroni, Marco, Silvia Bernardini, Adriano Ferraresi & Eros Zanchetta. 2009. The WaCky wide web: A collection of very large linguistically processed web-crawled corpora. **Language Resources And Evaluation** 43(3). 209–226.

Barðdal, Johanna, Thorhallur Eythorsson & Tonya Kim Dewey. 2014. Alternating predicates in Icelandic and German: a sign-based construction grammar account. **Working papers in Scandinavian syntax** 93. 50–101.

Cole, Peter, Wayne Harbert, Gabriella Hermon & Shikaripur N Sridhar. 1980. The acquisition of subjecthood. **Language** 719–743.

Dekel, Nurit. 2014. **Colloquial israeli hebrew: A corpus-based survey**, vol. 279. Berlin/Boston: Mouton de Gruyter.

Engelberg, Stefan. To appear. The argument structure of psych-verbs: A quantitative corpus study on cognitive entrenchment. In Hans Boas & Alexander Ziem (eds.), **Constructional approaches to argument structure in german**, Boston, Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Gries, Stefan Th. & Anatol Stefanowitsch. 2004. Extending collostructional analysis: A corpus-based perspective on 'alternations'. **International Journal of Corpus Linguistics** 9(1). 97–129.

Jisa, Harriet, Judy S Reilly, Ludo Verhoeven, Elisheva Baruch & Elisa Rosado. 2002. Passive voice constructions in written texts:: A cross-linguistic developmental study. **Written Language & Literacy** 5(2). 163–181.

Melnik, Nurit. 2006. A constructional approach to verb-initial constructions in Modern Hebrew. **Cognitive Linguistics** 17(2). 153–198.

Melnik, Nurit. 2014. Language change in spoken Hebrew: existence and possession. **Hebrew Linguistics** 68. 67–82.

Serzant, Ilja A & Leonid Kulikov. 2013. **The diachronic typology of non-canonical subjects**, vol. 140. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing.