From Grammatical Subordination to Actional Structure of Conversation – the Case of Hebrew *še* 'that'

AIMS

In this presentation patterns of clause combining in spontaneous Israeli Hebrew will be discussed. I will show what can be learned from the phenomenon of clause combining about the processes of formation of syntactic structures from pragmatic ones. The focus on clause combining patterns allows to refine some of the questions that concern the study of spontaneous languages grammar in general: (1) Which units do we take to be the basic processing units in a spoken language? (2) What will be the syntactic principles that lie at the foundations of sentence structure in the spoken language? (3) How can we indicate whether successive clauses belong together or are to be treated as independent? Moreover, I will outline some of the problematic issues in applying the notions of coordination and subordination to conversational data.

METODOLOGY

This presentation is based on ca. three hours of spontaneous speech that were selected from *The Corpus of Spoken Israeli Hebrew (CoSIH)*. All occurrences of the particle *še* (usually translated as 'that') were analyzed and the examples were divided into two categories: (1) the particle *še* precedes embedded sentences; (2) the particle *še* follows the boundary of the sentence. Afterwards, the structures, functions, and semantics of the examples in both categories were examined.

RESULTS

In spontaneously spoken Israeli Hebrew, if an embedded sentence functions as a predicate, an attribute, or an object within the other sentence, it is usually preceded by *še*:

(1) kol   ha=dvar-im   še=ata   šoel   oti | ani   yoda-at ||

       every DEF=thing-PL that=you PTCP\ask[SG.M] me | I   PTCP\know- SG.F ||

       'Everything that you ask me I know.'

In Ex.(1) the clause 'you ask me' has the syntactic function of an attribute to the phrase 'everything'. I propose that *še* indicates a syntactic relation between these two components. I will suggest that Hebrew *še* is not a subordination marker, as seems to

be the consensus in Hebrew studies, but a syntactic relation marker – any of the three basic types of grammatical relations, viz., (1) predicative, (2) attributive, and (3) objective (Goldenberg 1986). One of the questions I will ask is whether there is any advantage to postulating a grammatical category of a subordinate clause? I will show how my approach can explain different uses of this particle in Hebrew spoken discourse that normative grammar finds difficult to explain. For example:

(2) ma   kara   š e=higa-t /

      what   PST\happen[3SG.M]   that=PST\arrive-2SG.F /

      'How comes you (have) arrived?'

There are two grammatically independent sentences in Ex. (2): *ma kara* ('what's happened') and *higat* ('you [have] arrived). Both of them can occur separately. Still, in this context the first sentence needs an 'anchor' in the discourse whereas the second one characterizes the first one semantically or pragmatically (Matthiessen & Thompson 1988). I guess that this kind of relation is common outside sentence boundaries. The question now is what is indicated by the particle *še* between two grammatically independent sentences.

According to Cresti (2014), the clause that is characterized is topic, and the clause that characterizes the other one is comment. I suggest that these pragmatic relations are the basis to form syntactical constructions. In a single sentence topic and comment are generally represented by subject and predicate, so two clauses can be perceived as one complex sentence, where one of them characterizes the other, or one of them is topic and the other one is comment, the relation between them being comparable to the relation between subject and predicate. Although this relation is not usually represented by a morpheme, the particle *še* can occur in this context thus indicating an emerging predicative relation.

In constructions like the one brought as Ex. (2) we see that uses of Hebrew particle *še* have been extended from the domain of the sentence, where it indicates syntactic relation, into discourse, where it signals pragmatic dependency. This development suggests that linguistic structure does not necessarily stop at the sentence.

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