From Habitual to Subjunctive: Grammaticalisation and Reanalysis in Hebrew

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This study discusses the cross-linguistic grammaticalisation paths of the polysemous Modern Hebrew construction '*was + participle*'. In the following example, (1a) conveys a **past habitual** (an action understood to occur customarily in the past) (Comrie 1976), (1b) a **counterfactual condition** (a conditional sentence which describes what would have happened under certain unfulfilled conditions) and (1c) is ambiguous between a past habitual and the **subjunctive** (the speaker's preferences or certainty regarding what occurs) (Givón 1994).

(1)   a. *hayiti mesaxek   tenis be-ceirut-i*
           was.1S play.PART.M tennis in-youth-GEN
           'I would/used to play tennis in my youth'

        b. *im hayiti   mesaxek   tenis,   hayiti be-koʃer*
           if was.1S   play.PART.M tennis, was.1S in-fitness
           'if I played tennis, I would be in shape'

        c. *hayiti   mesaxek   tenis*
           was.1S play.PART.M tennis
           'I would/used to play tennis'

I show that the three senses of the construction are attributable to the three main historical stages of spoken Hebrew. The habitual developed in Biblical Hebrew, which evolved into the counterfactual conditional in Mishnaic Hebrew and emerged as the subjunctive in Modern Hebrew.

From a modality perspective, each grammaticalisation stage is characterizable by the expansion of the irrealis mood (situations that are not known to exist) and narrowing of the realis mood (situations that are known/claimed/inferred to exist).

In Biblical Hebrew, a realis past marker *haya* ('was') modifies a participle which together yield a novel meaning not included in its parts – the irrealis (2a). Although the habitual is strongly asserted (like realis), it does not refer to any particular event that occurred at any specific time, which makes it a swing modal category between realis and irrealis (Givón 1994). Moreover, I show that the habitual is imperfective (contra Boneh & Doron 2008).

Later, in Mishnaic Hebrew, a new way of conveying counterfactual conditionals developed. It included two clauses: the first contained the habitual, and the second deontic obligation. The conventionalisation of this discursive conditional motivated the insertion of an if-particle ('im/'illu) to the beginning of the clause to solve the sense ambiguity of the *haya* construction (habitual/counterfactual conditional) (2b). Hence, the newly formed counterfactual conditional

developed through the extension of the irrealis (i.e. it denotes an action that did not take place), yet it states a narrower realis meaning (i.e. what did not occur).

Finally, in Modern Hebrew, the main clause of the conditional began to be used independently in direct speech acts, leaving the conditions to pragmatic inference. Consequently, the subjunctive emerged in simple sentences, stripping away its realis meaning by conveying either low epistemic certainty (2c) or deontic preference (2d), both of which are irrealis.

(2) a. *josef ben ʃəva 'esre ʃana* **haya** **ro'e** *et ehaw*
        Joseph son seven teen year **was.3S.M shephard.PART.M** with brothers.GEN
        'Josef, being seventeen years old, was shepherding with his brothers' (Gen. 37.2)

     b. *'im* **haya** **meʃamər-an,** *tehor-im*
        if **was.3P guard.PART-ACC.PL.F,** pure.PL
        'if he was guarding them, they are pure' (Mishna Tahorot 8.3)

     c. **hayiti xoʃevet** *ʃe-ze mexuvan kodem kol neged ha-xaver ʃela*
        was.1s think.PART.F that-it aim.PART.PASS.M first-of-all against DEF-boyfriend her
        'I would think that it is aimed first of all against her boyfriend' (Betipul 'In Treatment': s01e16)

     d. *lo amart li,* **hayiti xofefet** *et ha-sear al ha-boker*
        no tell.2S.F DAT.1S, was.1S wash.PART.F ACC DEF-hair on DEF-morning
        'you didn't tell me, I would have washed my hair first thing in the morning' (C514_1aND: 12-13)

This process exhibits a pattern attested **cross-linguistically**, e.g. in English, Swahili, Spanish, Uto-Aztecan languages, and Creole languages (Givón 1994). Moreover, I demonstrate that the grammaticalisation of the *haya* construction is a case study for **gradualness through reanalysis** (e.g. from habitual to a counterfactual conditional in Mishnaic Hebrew) **and analogy** (made by broadening and narrowing of meaning, e.g. realis/irrealis) (Hopper & Traugott 1993, Traugott & Trousdale 2010). Furthermore, I show how gradualness is reflected in the **retention** (Bybee and Pagliuca 1987) or **persistence** (Hopper & Traugott 1993) of old and new forms in one synchronic stage (Modern Hebrew) and of old concepts in new uses (e.g. the persistence of irrealis in all stages).

SELECTED REFERENCES

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