Agents, Paths, and States in the Hebrew Middle Templates

This essay will investigate the phenomenon of agentive readings in the Hebrew middle templates, both simple *niCCaC* and intensive *hitCaCeC*. Such readings present a probem to our understanding of the syntax-morphology interface in Hebrew, in that middle morphology is often understood to correspond to a Voice head that *cannot* introduce an external argument (Doron, 2003; Alexiadou & Doron, 2012). Clauses featuring these agentive middles are all of the same basic form, each featuring a PP.

(1)   *ha-iš*   *nidxaf*   *le-qidmat*   *ha-tor*
      the-man   pushed.MID.SIMPL   to-front   the-line
      'The man pushed his way to the front of the line.'

The analysis to be presented will build upon the proposal of Kastner (2016) who labels these verbs *figure reflexives.* These constructions can be labelled 'reflexive' because the same DP appears to saturate two θ-roles – that of the Figure introduced by the functional head p (Svenonius, 2007) and that of the Agent introduced by Voice. I will argue that these should be understood by analogy to naturally reflexive verbs that take middle morphology in Hebrew and Greek (Alexiadou & Schäfer, 2014): in both phenomena, the middle Voice head cannot introduce a DP but can assign an Agent θ-role to a DP already in the derivation.

The present account will also make finer distinctions between the classes of verbs found in the middle templates.

(2)   *ha-yeled*   *hištoqeq*   *le-glida*
      the-child   craved.MID.INT   to-ice cream
      'The child craved ice cream.'

Although (1) and (2) appear similar in their syntax, they actually contrast in that the former features an activity verb implicating a Path, while the latter features a stative verb taking a PP complement, where the preposition simply plays some (debated) role in licensing the DP (Neeleman, 1997). Only (1) involves a true Figure argument.

With respect to clauses like (2), this essay will argue that stative clauses feature a unique structural configuration, with the subject merging below SpecVoiceP. This structural distinction can account for the conspicuous presence of psych and speech-act verbs in the middle templates in all periods of Hebrew (as well as other Semitic languages).

In regard to activity predicates like (1), only those which implicate a Path can take middle morphology. It will be shown that once the notion of Path-implication is appreciated, explanations for several other sets of problematic middle verbs fall out naturally: agentive middles which can take infinitive complements (3), inchoative posture verbs (4), and perambulatives (5).

(3)   *Dani*   *hitganev*   *laqaxat*   *oxel*   *me-ha-mitbax*
      Dani   snuck in.MID.INT   take.INF   food   from-the-kitchen
      'Dani snuck in to take food from the kitchen.'

(4)   *Rina*   *ne'emda*   *me-ha-kise*
      Rina   stood up.MID.SIMPL   from-the-chair

(5)   *Gil*   *hitrocec*   *ba-xacer*
       Gil   ran around.MID.INT   in the-yard

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