A matter of time: tense, mood and aspect in spontaneous Spoken Israeli Hebrew
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1. Introduction

1.1. General

This study is aimed at the investigation of tense, mood and aspect (TMA) in the spontaneous Spoken Israeli Hebrew verb system. In most of the traditional literature (Berman 1978:142, Schwarzwald 2001:38, Azar 1995:4-27, Coffin-Amir and Bolozy 2005:35-36) and in textbooks (Blau 1967, 1975) the Modern Hebrew verb system is perceived as a tense-based system. In this research I will try to draw an outline of the Israeli Hebrew verb system as it is used in the everyday spontaneous spoken language.

I will focus in particular on temporal, aspectual and modal properties of the Israeli Hebrew verb system. It will be shown that this system is aspect-oriented rather than tense-oriented and that it also contains some modal structures.

For convenience, Spoken Israeli Hebrew will be subsequently referred to as SIH.

1.2. Research questions

The following questions are addressed in this research, after which their parallel assumptions will be presented.

- **The existence of tense, aspect and mood categories in SIH**

This research first investigates the possible existence of TMA categories in the verb system of SIH and attempts to answer the following questions: Do TMA categories exist at all in the verb system of SIH? If yes, is TMA associated with all or only a fraction of the categories? If TMA exists in only a fraction of the categories in the SIH verb system, which of these categories are relevant and which are not?
• The means with which TMA categories are expressed in SIH

The next goal is to investigate the linguistic means which are used to express TMA categories in SIH: If TMA categories are found in SIH, how are they expressed in the verb system? What linguistic strategies are used to express them, e.g. Morphological? Syntactic?

• Differences in linguistic realization of tense, aspect and mood in SIH

The next step is to see whether there are any differences in the linguistic methods for realization of each of the TMA categories in SIH? For example, is tense differently realized than aspect, or is aspect expressed morphologically, whereas mood is expressed syntactically? Further, what are the means to express each of them, and what are the differences between them?

• Relations between semantic categories and linguistic structures

This issue addresses the correlation between form and meaning. For TMA categories that exist in SIH, does a specific linguistic structure always express a specific semantic category, or is it possible that the discussed structure expresses more than one semantic category? In the latter case, is there any consistency in this division?

• Interaction between semantic categories

This point focuses on the relations and interaction between the TMA categories and is mainly relevant to structures which are inflected for more than one TMA category. What are the relations between the various TMA categories in SIH, and how do they interact? For example, if a verbal construction contains more than one TMA category, which part of the construction carries with it which TMA meaning?
• **Differences between populations**

This is a sociolinguistic issue, which discerns differences between populations. Do different populations of Hebrew speakers use TMA categories in different ways?

1.3. **Research assumptions**

The research assumptions that are presented were determined not only according to the available TMA literature in Hebrew and other languages, but also on the basis of the results of a pilot study carried out on a random sample of SIH speakers (see Dekel 2009a). The study served as a basis for the design of the current research. Each assumption is based on the parallel research question described in Section 1.2 above.

• **TMA categories in SIH**

The pilot study (see Dekel 2009a) suggests that TMA categories fully exist in SIH, i.e. all three categories were observed in the pilot study, and thus are expected to be found in the full study. The most widespread structures that express TMA categories denote aspect and mood. There are tense-expressing structures in SIH, yet, these are very rare.

• **TMA expressions in SIH**

According to the pilot study, TMA categories are linguistically realized both by morphological patterns and by syntactical verbal structures in the SIH verb system. Lexical means are also used to express TMA in SIH. Thus, it is assumed that linguistic realization of TMA semantic categories is achieved by all possible linguistic means: morphology, syntax and lexicon.

• **Differences between linguistic realization of tense, aspect and mood in SIH**

From the pilot study it is apparent that Mood in SIH is expressed mainly by morphological means, for example prefixed verb patterns. It can also be
expressed by syntactic structures, but there are much fewer available. Aspect is linguistically realized by morphological means in the verb system exclusively. Tense is mainly realized lexically, sometimes also syntactically.

- **Relations between semantic categories and linguistic structures**

Evidence from the pilot study suggests that there is a direct correlation between form and meaning of TMA categories. Therefore, it is assumed that the trend is that a specific linguistic structure in SIH would express a parallel semantic category. For example, according to the pilot study prefixed verb patterns in SIH always express mood. Yet, there are cases whereby a linguistic category expresses more than one semantic category. In such instances, it is assumed that the speakers are guided by linguistic criteria, and that the decision whether to choose apparently identical forms is not arbitrary. On the other hand, from the pilot study it appears as if the same semantic category would not always be expressed by the same linguistic structure.

- **Interaction between semantic categories**

On the basis of the pilot study it is pre-supposed that the roles of verbal constituents in relation to TMA categories are strictly defined and clear. It is assumed that in the case of multiple TMA categories in a verbal construction, each constituent would bear only a single TMA meaning, where the same type of constituent will always bear the same TMA meaning.

- **Differences between populations**

Relying on the pilot study, it is assumed that no significant differences exist between different populations of Hebrew speakers, such as males and females or people from different origins and education levels. Differences between age groups are not referred to in this research, since there were insufficient informants to represent all age groups.
1.4. **Research methodology**

- **General**

This study is corpus-based. All the analyses are based on a corpus of spontaneous Hebrew spoken in Israel, which was specifically designed for this study (see later in this dissertation). Details of the corpus are presented in 2.1 below.

- **Analyses and presentation of examples**

All the analyses are illustrated with examples. A text sample of the transcriptions is attached in Appendix 1. The examples and text sample are presented using Sampa transcription\(^1\). Please note that the sound \(h\) exists in some Hebrew patterns, but is usually not pronounced in speech. Since transcription is phonetic, all occurrences of \(h\) were omitted, unless they were actually uttered. The same holds true for the glottal stop symbol \(\mathbf{?}\). Morphological glosses of the examples and translation into English are provided with each of the examples.

All the examples presented in this thesis are taken from the corpus, unless otherwise noted; all examples represent real spoken data.

1.5. **Thesis structure**

This thesis provides a detailed description of the research performed and the results thereof. To start with, methodological strategies used in this research are presented in Section 2. Next, various theoretical views on TMA systems are reviewed and discussed in Section 3. A detailed background on Spoken Israeli Hebrew, which includes a description of its verbal system is presented in Section 4. Based on the results of the study, the relations between the morphological verb system of Israeli Hebrew

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\(^1\) See Sampa transcription home page (Hebrew): [http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/sampa/hebrew.htm](http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/sampa/hebrew.htm); note that although a central short vowel (schwa) exists in speech, it has no representation in Sampa. Therefore, the pronunciation of *schwa* is represented by a phonetically similar vowel, usually *e*. 
and its TMA meanings are presented in a two-way perspective in Section 5: from form to meaning and from meaning to form. Also in this section, the morphological forms of SIH verb system and their TMA meanings are discussed – each one separately. Finally, TMA meanings and their correlation to morphological forms in the Israeli Hebrew verb system are presented. Next, in Section 6, TMA in IH is reviewed in this study vs. previous studies, and is compared with other Semitic languages. Differences between populations, which were observed in the study, are presented in Section 7. A summary of the conclusions and recommendations are presented in Section 8.