

"False friends": Grammaticalization and (inter)subjectification as independent processes producing two variants of the same construction

An interesting example of what is often referred to as 'false friends'/'faux amis' is exhibited in two Semitic language-groups: North-Eastern-Neo-Aramaic (NENA) and Modern Hebrew (MH). Both language-groups have a construction featuring a dative element *l-* that agrees with the verb-incorporated Subject but does not signify a dative-marked argument but merely an "extra" marking of the agent. In both language-groups, this Subject-Coreferential Dative (henceforth SCD) is diachronically derived from the same historical dative marker, though in MH the SCD takes the form of a pronoun, and in NENA it takes the form of a verbal suffix.

The NENA and MH constructions – which have been misleadingly referred to as *dativus ethicus* – evolved independently via different mechanisms of language change. In NENA, the process ended in *grammaticalization*, while in MH it ended in *(inter)subjectification*.

NENA: **Grammaticalization:** *less grammatical sign* (dative-possessive) > *more grammatical sign* (inflectional affix, i.e. suffix of the verb-incorporated Subject). Mechanism: *Renovation* = *new* form of an old category, i.e. 'x is replaced by y': Old Semitic perfective replaced by a past participle verb form + SCD suffix agreeing with the agent (with transitive verbs it yields an ergative construction).

MH: **(inter) subjectification:** *meaning₁* (reflexive-benefactive) > *meaning₁ + meaning_{2sub}* (speaker's comment on the action perpetrated by the S-entity).

Evidence shows that the construction in MH is not patterned on the SCD construction found on a limited scale in Biblical Hebrew. Nor can it be regarded as an "innovation" or "renovation", i.e. a new construction

that replaces the Biblical one, taking a function and form similar to that of the original construction. Rather, I will argue that, although the MH construction is formally similar to the Biblical one, its function is completely different; it was a *reinvention* by the first generation of Israeli Hebrew speakers under the influence of similar constructions found in Russian and Yiddish. I will also show that, unlike the SCD of the NENA language-group, which belongs to the level of the sentence (grammar), the MH construction evolved through a process of *(inter)subjectification* independent of grammar and grammaticalization, and thus belongs to the suprasentential level, (illocution, pragmatics).

The purpose of this paper is twofold:

- a) To outline the mechanism responsible for the interesting evolvement of the SCD in MH;
- b) To show that in grammaticalization "chains", two local pathways may diverge independently from one point of origin.

References

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