Syntax and Information Structure: The case for Unipartite clauses
A View from Spoken Israeli Hebrew

Shlomo Izre'el

The canonical view of *clause* (or *sentence*) requires that it include predication (e.g., Biber *et al.* 1999: §3.2). Utterances that do not fit into this view because they lack a subject, when not excluded from the syntactic analysis altogether (cf., e.g., Carter and McCarthy 2006: 490), are usually regarded as if a virtual subject is represented in the clause as a zero component or as if an allegedly missing subject has gone through a process of ellipsis. This perception goes back at least to Apollonius Dyscolus (Lallot 1997: 373; see, among many others, Benayoun 2003; Spenader and Hendriks 2005; Winkler 2006). However, this type of structure is so frequent among the world's languages (Givón 1983) that one wonders whether clauses without subjects are indeed to be viewed as elliptical. The study of spoken languages intensifies this perplexity to a point where some basic notions of grammar may be questioned.

Adopting a framework of an integrative approach to the structure of spoken language that includes prosody, information structure and syntax, I try to look at clause structure rather differently. Whereas the originally-Aristotelian concept that a subject is a necessary component in language, and specifically in a clause, a conception that arose from ontological and logical needs, I do not see predication as a necessary structural element in a clause, suggesting that the only necessary and sufficient component comprising a clause is a predicate. The clause will thus be defined as a unit consisting minimally of a predicate. A predicate can be either nuclear or extended; in other words, it can consist of either a single element (phrase, word or part of a word) or be seen as a domain. The predicate (or the predicate domain) will be viewed as the component that carries the informational load of the clause within the discourse context, which by default will be a newly introduced element. Also, and no less significantly, the predicate (or the predicate domain) is the component that carries the modality of the clause (cf. Lefeuvre 1999: ch.1), where *modality* is viewed in a broad perspective.

Two main classes of clauses have been identified: (1) *Unipartite*, consisting of only a (nuclear or extended) predicate; (2) *Bipartite*, where a clause consists – in its minimal manifestation – of a predicate and a subject (Izre'el 2012).

In my presentation, I will look ay unipartite clauses, being the minimal disposition of a clause, i.e., one that consists of only a predicate domain, where a subject does not form part of the clause. A broad classification of unipartite clauses in spoken Israeli Hebrew will also be presented, based on anchoring points within a discourse context (intra- or extra-linguistic) and types of anchors.

The research has been based on data taken from *The Corpus of Spoken Israeli Hebrew (CoSIH)*, a corpus of spontaneous Hebrew conversations, segmented into *prosodic modules* (aka *intonation units*), transcribed in its bulk in Hebrew orthography and annotated for (functionally perceived) final boundary tones. See the attached textual samples.

References:

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Textual samples

In the following two samples, quite typical for Hebrew casual talk, none of the units conforms to the common view of *clause* (or *sentence*) as a unit consisting of both subject and predicate.

Transcription is broad phonetic with some morphophonological input. Segmentation is into *information modules* (IMs; aka *intonation units*). Transcription notation: each IM is transcribed in a separate line; final tones: || major, | minor, / appeal (cf. Izre'el 2002, following in essence Du Bois *et al.* 1992).

(1)   Planning a weekend in a hotel (OCD2_sp2_057-061; sp1_026-030)

    sp2:   mɔʁuʃ[1] ||
           Morush   'Morush,'

    sp1:   ma   mɔtɛk ||
           what   sweetie   'What, sweetie?'

    sp2:   aʁbaa jamim |
           four   days   '(For) four days – '

           ʃva   mɛɔt   ʃɛkɛl   lɛ=zug ||
           seven hundreds shekel to=couple   '(the cost is) seven hundred shekels[2] for a couple.'

    sp1:   bli   kɛsɛf ||
           without money   '(This is) very cheap.'

    sp2:   naχɔn /
           right   'Isn't that so?'

    sp1:   ɛjfɔ /
           where   'Where?'

    sp2:   bɛ=hɔlidɛj_in   ha=χadaʃ ||
           in=Holiday_Inn the=new   'In the new Holiday Inn.'

    sp1:   daj ||
           enough   'Wow!'

(2) Speaking of Mongolian horses (OCh_sp2_091; sp1_086-088)

    sp2:   sus   mamaʃ /
           horse real   '(Is it) a real horse?'

    sp1:   sus   sus |
           horse   horse   '(It's) a real horse,'

           ʁak jotɛʁ namuχ ||
           only more short   'but shorter.'

           ʁaglaim mɛkut͡saʁɔr kaɛlɛ ||
           legs   shortened   sort_of   '(It has) sort of shortened legs.'

References:

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[1] Personal names (in this case, a nickname) have been changed or eliminated in *CoSIH* for privacy.
[2] The basic monitary unit of Israel.

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