NOMINAL OR ELLIPTICAL SENTENCES?

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Abstract: Sentences in Modern Hebrew are traditionally classified into two categories: verbal sentences containing 'an overt verb-form, whether it be some form of the copula h.y.y [italics mine] or any other "full" or non defective verb' (Berman (1968), p.186) and verbless sentences (also called nominal sentences). Verbless or nominal sentences occur only in present tense, as there is no present tense inflexion for the verb 'to be' in Modern Hebrew. Instead of a verbal form, this type of sentence employs either a linking copula (PronH or PronZ) or null (∅), thus forming a sentence with only two constituents. This paper will discuss only two of the three possibilities: PronH, a copula homophonous with the 3rd person personal pronoun, and null (∅).
Nominal sentences have been extensively analyzed in the literature (Berman & Grosu (1976), Doron (1983), Rapoport (1987) Rothstein (2004)) and yet no unified theory has been reached. The aim of this paper is to challenge the classical view by showing that nominal sentences are actually a variant of verbal sentences. I propose that the correct way to analyze the so-called nominal sentences is to assume that they contain VP-ellipsis: a VP-node that is present in the deep structure of the sentence and elliptic or not visible in the surface structure. This theory can lead the way to a unified theory of sentences in Modern Hebrew, without treating present tense sentences as a distinct category, but rather as a variantof verbal sentences.

Keywords: nominal sentence, present tense, Modern Hebrew, ellipsis, verbal sentences

I. Introduction

Dalmi (2016) argues that 'copular sentences without an overt copular predicate do project a VP with a phonologically null head, hence so-called "verbless" copular sentences are illusory' (p.1). She looks at data from Standard Arabic, Spanish, Maltese, Russian, Jamaican Creole, Finnish and Hungarian and concludes that the phenomenon that these languages exhibit cannot be explained by the old approach, that considered them verbless sentences both in the surface and deep structure. She does not provide any examples from Modern Hebrew, but the arguments provided in this paper are meant to defend Dalmi's (2016) position and adduce further evidence for her theory.

Sinclair (1999) proposes a unified analysis for nominal and verbal sentences in Biblical Hebrew. He considers the so-called nominal sentences actually to be a subcategory of the sentences containing the verb the verb *h.y.y* - 'in which the verb can occur but has been omitted, thus creating the so-called nominal clauses' (p.52). He concludes that:

'A single, unified description of the syntax of clauses employing the copula היה [*h.y.y*] and of nominal clauses is clearly preferable, since it will enable us to account for all of the syntactic phenomena they each exhibit together, rather than treating them as if they were completely unrelated grammatical' (p.52).

Berman (1983), following a proposal of Alexander Grosu, strongly suggests that so-called nominal sentences contain a V-node, but without developing her theory into a full analysis.

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1. ata hu he-xašud
you PronH Ø the suspect
'You are the suspect'
[Berman (1983), p.210]

Considering the above theories as a starting point, I propose that the correct way to refer to the so-called nominal sentences in Modern Hebrew is not as verbless sentences, but in fact as *elliptical sentences* - sentences containing a VP in the deep structure and no overt verb in the surface structure. So, as Sinclair (1999) states: 'I am assuming in this discussion that verbless clauses are in fact complete clauses with both subject and predicate, just like any other clause with an overt verb' (p.54).

II. Other approaches

Up until this point, various explanations have been provided for this kind of so-called nominal sentence, but none of them could explain everything. Berman & Grosu (1976) suggest two ways of studying this type of sentence:

'(1) by having a node V immediately dominate a node NP, which would in turn immediately dominate the copula (cf. sentential subjects, which are dominated by a node S immediately dominated by NP), or (2) by assigning pronominal copulas to some nondiscrete category lying between the verbal and nominal poles'. (Berman & Grosu (1976), p.179)

Doron (1983) takes a different approach and considers this type of sentence as lacking not only a VP but retaining an I' node. PronH (which she calls simply Pron) is 'a clitic [original] i.e. the phonological realization of the feature bundle {[person] [number] [gender] [Case]}, which is not an independent NP node' (Doron 1983:85), but part of I'. In the absence of a verb, Doron (1983) considers that PronH assigns θ-role to a referring predicate, as in the following example:

2. [gveret cohen] [[I hi_i] e_i rina]
Ms. Cohen she Rina
'Ms. Cohen is Rina.'

3. [I hi_i] e_i rina
she Rina
'She is Rina.'

Doron (1983) argues that in sentences where the predicate is a referring NP, PronH is an obligatory element. These sentences state the identity between the subject and the predicate and require a θ-role in order to be licensed. This is the case in sentence (3) where a θ-role is assigned by PronH to both the NP arguments. Sentence (4) is a predicational sentence and does not require PronH as an obligatory element; therefore the θ-role is assigned by the predicate. What Doron (1983) fails to explain is how a simple clitic can assign θ-role. Rothstein (2004) points out that her analysis has a few weak points: firstly PronH cannot assign θ-roles, as it is only a clitic and not a lexical head. Secondly, PronH 'would have to be ambiguous between a theta-marking and non-theta marking element' (p.221), since, according to Doron (1983), 'it must θ mark the constituents in identity statements, it does not do so in predicative constructions' (Rothstein (2004), pp. 212-213). Thirdly, Doron (1983) does not explain why PronH is obligatory in some sentences and optional in others.

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Rapoport (1987) divides nominal sentences into three categories: (1) small clauses – sentences without PronH (what she calls H), (2) predicational sentences – sentences with optional PronH, and (3) identity (or equative) sentences – sentences with obligatory PronH. She considers PronH, along with Doron (1983), to be part of AGR, but without absorbing case (what she calls Case), and attributes to PronH the role of case assigner. In small clauses, the case is assigned by the predicate, in predicative sentences case is assigned by PronH to the subject and in identity sentences, case is assigned by PronH to both constituents. She does not provide an explanation for sentences that contain a PP as predicate.

Rothstein (2004) proposes an analysis of PronH (what she calls Pron) in terms of predication relation and not in terms of case assignment or θ-roles. She argues that PronH is optional in small clauses because 'the predicate can be directly predicated on the subject and there is no obligation for I' to be present' (Rothstein (2004), p.214). In identity sentences, PronH 'is obligatory because we cannot form an instance of predication without it' (Rothstein (2004), p. 214). In identity sentences, I' is a mandatory node, without which a predicate node cannot be present, but in equative sentences it is not.

4. $[[\text{dani}]_{DP}\ [\text{nexmad}]_{AP}]_{sc}$

'Nexmad' directly predicates the subject 'Dani' and there is no need for PronH. In the next example (6), 'Mar Yosef' cannot directly predicate the subject 'Dani', so PronH is mandatory in order to identify the I' node:

5. $*[[\text{dani}]_{DP}\ [\text{mar yosef}]_{DP}]$
dani mr yosef

Rothstein (2004) argues that the sentence above constitutes 'a string of two argument DPs between which no syntactic relation holds' (Rothstein (2004), p. 215). I will argue that there is more than one syntactic relation between the two NPs.

Falk (2004) proposes the analysis of PronH (what he calls Pron) as a mixed-category copula, as it has 'a verbal argument structure, but, idiosyncratically, is categorized as a noun' (Falk (2004) p. 4). This means that the copula is 'categorially nominal', as it has a nominal nature and is 'functionally verbal' as its arguments 'are ones that are typical of VP constituents because they *are* [italics mine] VP constituents' (Falk (2004), p. 9). In sentences without an obligatory PronH, Falk (2004), just like Doron (1983), Rapoport (1987) and Rothstein (2004) considers the predication as the direct relation between the subject and what he calls 'the non-verbal element' (p. 9) or what others call the 'predicate'. He considers sentences with obligatory PronH as having a 'to be' predicate in their structure.

III. Analysis

I propose that the correct way to analyze the so-called nominal sentences is to assume that they contain VP-ellipsis: a VP-node that is present in the deep structure of the sentence and elliptic or not visible in the surface structure. In order to demonstrate this, this analysis will be divided into two parts: in the first part I look at sentences without mandatory PronH and in the second part I look at sentences with mandatory PronH, in order to see what triggers this. So, my analysis assumes two types of so-called nominal sentences:

XP V YP where XP is the subject and YP is the argument, under the conditions that:

- XP is a defined NP and YP is an undefined NP/AP/PP
- XP is a PRO and Y is a defined/undefined NP/AP/ PP

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XP PronH V YP where XP is the subject and YP is the argument, under the condition that:

- XP is a defined NP and YP is a defined NP/Q/INF/REL
- XP is an undefined NP and YP is an undefined AP

III.1. Sentences without mandatory PronH

Doron (1983), Rapoport (1987) and Rothstein (2004) consider sentences withou PronH as being predicational. The predicational relation comes from the agreement between the two constituents of the sentence. In my opinion, only the presence of a VP in the deep structure of a nominal sentence can explain why the sentence can be interpreted as predicational, even if it is constituted only of two elements, be they undefined NP, AP or PP:

6. dani rofe
Dani Ø doctor
'Dani is a doctor.'

7. dani nexmad
Dani Ø nexmad
'Dani is nice.'

8. dani ba-xeder
Dani Ø in the room
'Dani is in the room.'

9. hu ecli ba-bayt
he Ø at 1.sg. in the house
'He's at my place.'

The presence of a VP in the deep structure also solves Rapoport's (1987) problem with case assignment for sentences containing a PP argument. She states that under her analysis, sentences like (8) or (9) remain unexplained. But under the current analysis, such cases can be licensed, because the presence of a VP allows the presence of PP. The VP present in the deep structure assigns a θ-role to both constituents, licensing also the presence of a PP. The second constituent becomes the argument of the verb, just as Rapoport (1987) observes.

Following Shlonsky (1997) I assume that *lo* is a clitic left-adjoined to the VP. If there is a VP in the deep structure of the sentence, we can expect to find the same order (S *lo* VP Arg) that we find in sentence (10) in a nominal sentence as well. The output following this structure is grammatical (11).

10. rina lo roca tapuzim
Rina no want pres. f.sg oranges
'Rina doesn't want oranges.'

11. rina (hi) lo mora
Rina (PonH) no Ø teacher f.
'Rina is not a teacher.'

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Hebrew allows two types of order of the constituent in a sentence: VSO and SVO. We can notice that the order VSO (like in sentence (12) is licensed also in elliptical sentences, as we can see in the title of a poem by Alexander Pen (13):

12. lo roca rina tapuzim
not want pres. f.sg rina tapuzim
'Rina doesn't want oranges.'

13. lo ani hu ha-iš
not Ø me PronH the man
'I am not the man.'

Shlonsky (1997) considers *eyn* as a negation head (Neg^0) which left-adjoins to the VP, placed either before the subject and bearing no agreement, or before the VP and agreeing with the subject in number and gender. If the so-called nominal sentences contain a VP in the deep structure, we expect that they exhibit the same behaviour as the verbal sentences. Indeed, we notice the same behaviour of *eyn* in verbal and VP-elliptic sentences:

14. eyn rina ohevet tapuzim
inexistence rina love pres. f.sg oranges
'Rina doesn't like oranges.'

15. eyn harbe yeladim ba-gina
inexistence many children Ø in the garden
'There aren't many children in the garden.' [Shlonsky (1997), p.85]

16. rina eyna ohevet tapuzim
rina inexistence 3.f.sg love pres. f.sg oranges
'Rina doesn't love oranges.'

17. balšanim eynam inteligentim
linguists inexistence 3.m.pl Ø intelligent pl. m.
'Linguists are not intelligent.' [Shlonsky (1997), p.84]

Also the position of other adverbs points to the presence of a VP-ellipsis, as we can see in the examples provided by Berman (1978), p. 202:

18. dina KEN roca baxur nexmad
Dina YES want pres. f.sg nice fellow
'Dina DOES want a nice fellow.'

19. dan KEN haya baxur nexmad
Dan YES be 3.past. m.sg nice fellow
'Dan INDEED was a nice fellow.'

20. dan hu KEN baxur nexmad
Dan PronH YES Ø nice fellow
'Dan IS a nice fellow.'

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III.2. Sentences with mandatory PronH

The most pertinent question that arises under this analysis is why is there a mandatory PronH if there is a V-node in the deep structure. I propose that sentences without PronH but containing as the VP argument a definite NP/REL/Q/INF trigger the phenomenon of *sloppy identity reading*. In order to clarify the meaning of the sentence, we need a supplementary element to give a predicative reading to the sentence. This is the case only when there are two ways of interpreting the structure: either as a full sentence or as a complex NP. This is why Doron (1983) finds sentences like (21) to be grammatical, while Rapoport (1987) and Rothstein (2004) do not:

21. dani ha-more
Dani Ø the teacher
'Dani is the teacher.' [Doron (1983), p.113]

Doron (1983) argues that if the sentence has a predicational interpretation, it can be correct. Under Rapoport (1987) and Rothstein (2004) the sentence can only have an identity interpretation, so the only way the sentence is acceptable is with PronH:

22. dani hu ha-more
dani PronH Ø the teacher
'Dani is the teacher.'

The reason why Rapoport (1987) and Rothstein (2004) consider the sentence unacceptable is that without PronH it looks just like a complex NP, and thus incomplete:

23. dani ha-more (amar et ze)
Dani the teacher (say past.3.m.sg ACC this)
'Dani the teacher (said this).'

The same situation is to be found when a noun is followed by a REL, a INF or Q. The structure without PronH is interpreted as being a complex NP:

24. a) ha-sakana hi še tikašel ba-msima
the danger PronH Ø that fail future 2.m.sg in the task
'The danger is that you'll fail in the task.'

b) ha-sakana še tikašel ba-msima
the danger that fail future 2.m.sg in the task
'The danger that you'll fail in the task (is real)'

25. a) ha-derex ha-yexida hi lefater oto
the way the only f.sg. PronH Ø fire inf. him
'The only way is fire inf. him'

b) ha-derex ha-yexida lefater oto
the way the only f.sg. fire inf. inf. him
'The only way to fire him (would be to ....)'

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26. a) ha-inyan hu ex namamen et ha-mivca
the issue PronH Ø how finance future 1.pl. ACC. the project
'The issue is how we'll finance the project.'

b) ha-inyan ex nemamen et ha-mivca
the issue how finance future 1.pl. ACC. the project
'The issue (of) how we'll finance the project (needs to ...)' [Berman (1978), p.193]

The same situation is found in embedded clauses:

27. hu amar še-ani ha-more
he say past 3.m.sg that I Ø the teacher
'He said that I am the teacher.' [Rapoport (1987), p.112]

28. *hu amar še-david ha-more
he say past 3.m.sg that David the teacher
'He said that David the teacher.'

Under the current approach we can also explain the inconsistencies in Doron (1983) Doron (1983), Rapoport (1987) and Rothstein (1995) theories, that Greenberg (1998) notices. While the three researches argue that PronH is mandatory only in identity sentences, Greenberg (1998) provides examples proving that PronH can also be mandatory in predicative sentences:

29. orvim *(hem) (yecurim) šxorim
ravens PronH Ø creatures black m.pl
'Ravens are black (creatures).' [Greenberg (1998), p.126]

30. rina (*hi) yafa ha-erev
Rina PronH Ø pretty f.sg the night
'Rina is pretty tonight.'

31. cmaxim *(hem) yerukim
plants PronH Ø green m.pl
'Plants are green.' [Greenberg (1998), p.127]

The reason why sentences (29) and (31) are not acceptable without PronH is because they can be interpreted as a NP and AP: *black ravens* and *green plants*. The sentences disambiguate if we replace the indefinite subject NP with a definite subject NP, like in the following examples. This is also the reason why sentence (35) doesn't need PronH as an obligatory element: *Rina* is a proper noun, and by consequence a defined subject NP.

Greenberg (1998) notices that in the so-called nominal sentences, the post copular element makes the difference:

32. ha-cmaxim ha-elu yerukim
the plants the these Ø green m.pl
'These plants are green.' [Greenberg (1998), p.127]

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Based on Greenberg's (1998) observation, we can predict that adding supplementary elements to an elliptical sentence could potentially clarify it and offer a *strict reading*. And indeed, we notice that inserting a negation or an adverb makes PronH optional, giving the sentence a strict verbal reading:

33. dani (hu) **lo** ha-more
Dani (PronH) not Ø the teacher
'Dani is not the teacher.'

34. dani (hu) **KEN** ha-more
dani (PronH) YES Ø the teacher
'Dani IS the teacher.'

35. ha-sakana **eyna** še tikašel ba-msima
the danger inexistence 3.f.sg. Ø that fail 2.m.sg in the task
'The danger is not that you will fail in the task.'

36. hu amar še-David **lo/eyno** ha-more
he say past 3.m.sg that David not/inexistence 3.m.sg Ø the teacher
'He said that David is not the teacher.'

Rapoport (1987) notices that when inserting a superlative, PronH is not needed:

37. ben ha-talmidim, dan ha-more haxi populari
among the pupils, Dan Ø the teacher the most popular m.
'Among the pupils, Dan is the most popular teacher.'

38. dan ha-more haxi muclax po
Dan Ø the teacher the most successful m. here
'Dan is the most successful teacher here.' [Rapoport (1987), p.117]

Above we saw the specific cases that trigger the phenomenon of *sloppy identity reading*, and all of them had as a common element a defined subject NP. A pronominal subject and an argument NP, be it defined or undefined, cannot together form a complex NP, which explains why PronH is optional for sentences with a pronominal subject and a definite NP:

39. ani (hu) ha-iš
I (PronH) Ø the man
'I am the man.'

IV. Conclusion: The nature of PronH

Following the theory by Berman (1978), Doron (1983) and Rapoport (1987) I contend that PronH is the overt realisation of the feature bundle [number][gender], features specific to the present tense verb, part of I', and latent in the deep structure and surfaces only when the *sloppy identity reading* needs to be turned into *strict identity reading*. We noticed that when another element is inserted, PronH becomes optional. Also, Berman (1987) notices that if PronH is replaced by a longer break in speech, the sentence is grammatical. In the framework of this paper, I would say that having PronH replaced by a long pause, the sentence can only

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be interpreted as containing a verb and not containing a complex NP. I assume that PronH is 'forced' to surface by the NP subject, as it expresses agreement only with the subject of the sentence. Also, in the cases when there is a pronoun subject, PronH is optional, which proves again the current approach.

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