THETICITY AND SUBJECT INVERSION: A MISCONCEPTION? WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM COLLOQUIAL ISRAELI HEBREW?

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Abstract: *Thetic constructions are generally perceived as presenting a split between semantic and syntactic predication. Studies in theticity maintain that inverse order of subject and predicate is a prominent criterion for the identification of thetic sentences, with an added factor being the lack of agreement between the constituent perceived as subject and the constituent perceived as predicate. Another criterion for identifying a sentence as thetic is the so-called "sentence focus" as opposed to focus of a single sentence constituent. The purpose of this article is to present a syntactic analysis of thetic sentences that have been commonly analyzed as verb-initial ones or, in short, VS constructions, as manifested in Colloquial Israeli Hebrew. The analysis offered here is based on previous research on IH sentence structure, which demonstrated that many sentences in IH are unipartite, containing only a predicate domain. The syntactic approach underlying this analysis is functional, communicative, discourse-based, and grounded in information structure. For the study of spoken language, an analysis of segmental elements must be combined with prosodic analysis. The study of thetic constructions presented here draws on research into existential-presentative constructions in colloquial IH, viewing them as unipartite sentences. It will be proposed that what appears to be a VS structure should not be analyzed as a bipartite sentence where a verb (or predicate) is followed by a subject, but rather as a sentence consisting only of a predicate domain, which includes an essential predicative core in second position and an embedded initial component.*

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For Heliana, with much appreciation and friendship

1 What is a thetic sentence? From philosophy to linguistics

The study of thetic sentences had its beginnings in philosophy. The philosophical category used in discussing theticity is j*udgment* (German: *Urteil*). Unlike the abstract notion of *proposition*, the notion of *judgment*, in its primary sense, refers to a cognitive or mental act, an event occurring in the mind/brain, which in this sense it is a concrete concept. A sentence that expresses a speech act conveys this cognitive event (cf., e.g., Kuroda, 1972;, 2005; Ladusaw, 1994; Abraham, Leiss & Fujinawa, 2020). The traditional expression of judgment, inspired by Greek philosophy—Plato and especially Aristotle—is in the semantic relationship between subject and predicate, i.e. predication. This type of judgment is termed *categorical* judgment (Sasse, 1987: 512; 2006: 259).

The philosophical interest in the concept of theticity probably stems from the work of the great philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). In his discussion of existential (henceforth: EXT) constructions, he wrote:

> Being is obviously not a real predicate, i.e., a concept of something that could add to concept of a thing. It is merely the positioning of a thing or of certain determinations in themselves. In the logical use it is merely the copula of a judgment. The proposition *God is omnipotent* contains two concepts that have their objects: God and omnipotence; the little word "*is*" is not a predicate in it, but only that which posits the predicate *in relation* to the subject. Now if I take the subject (God) together with all his predicates (among which omnipotence belongs), and say *God is*, or there is a God, then I add no new predicate to the concept of God, but only posit the subject in itself with all its predicates, and indeed posit the *object* in relation to my *concept*. Both must contain exactly the same, hence when I think this object as given absolutely (through the expression, "it is"), nothing is thereby added to the concept, expresses merely its possibility. (Kant, 1919: 516-517 [627]; translation by Guyer & Wood in Kant, 1998: 567; emphases in the original).

The term *thetic*[1] *judgment* was proposed by the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), who saw the need to expand Kant's set of EXT judgments, a development that need not be detailed here (see Martin, 2010; a brief overview is offered by García Macías, 2016: §2.1). Here it must be emphasized that EXT sentences are considered to date as a prototypical subset of the broader group of thetic sentences (García Macías: *ibid.*; for Hebrew cf. Halevy, 2016).

Kant, from his philosophical perspective, viewed the NP in EXT sentences as subject, probably influenced by the Aristotelian approach, which regarded the predicate (using the notion of ῥῆμα 'that which is said or spoken') as an attribute or characteristic of an entity (expressed in language by ὄνομα 'name'), later realized in linguistics in the concept of *subject* (cf. further below; also Izre'el, 2018[49]: §1). As we shall see, this analysis has had a paramount impact on the formal analysis of EXT sentences in particular and of thetic sentences in general up to our present day. Thus, despite the fact that as early as the beginning of the 18th century, the philosopher Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) saw the need for a reinterpretation of these constructions:

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[1] < Greek θετικός 'fit for placing', 'positive', 'affirmative'.

Everything changes in the representation of these judgments, where there is no subject for the predicate. There arises in this way an existential proposition, which one misinterprets if one treats the concept of being as the original predicate. (Herbart, 1813: 111; translation by Martin, 2006: 57)

According to Herbart, the concept of thetic judgment includes not only those expressed by EXT sentences, but by other sentences as well, e.g., expressions of weather phenomena like *es regnet* 'it rains'. These constructions include what is now commonly called a dummy subject or an expletive subject. From a philosophical or semantic viewpoint, the subject in such sentences is seen as absent (Herbart, 1837: 31; see Martin, 2006: 57–58; 2010: 387).

Two scholars frequently mentioned in the history of research on theticity are Franz Brentano (1838–1917) and Anton Marty (1847–1914). These two philosophers rejected the interpretation of the thetic sentence as one including predication or as a bipartite assertion. For Brentano,

The basis for a thetic judgment is a presentation of an object: an entity or eventuality. An affirmation of such a presentation commits the judger to the existence of something which satisfies the presentation; a denial by contrast expresses a negative existence judgment.
The basis for a categorical judgment is compound: first a presentation which is clarified into a particular object satisfying the description, and then a property to be affirmed or denied of the object. (Ladusaw, 1994: [4])

In contrast to Brentano (1973 [1874]), whose interest lay in pure philosophy, Marty was also interested in the structure of language. In this context, he argued that

[a]nother instance of a linguistic fiction would be suggested by the subject-predicate form, which of course is hardly to be dispelled from language, but frequently misleads philosophers into thinking that there is a substance-accident relation in cases where there is in fact none. (Rollinger, 2010: 79)

Marty's perspective would later appear in the writings of scholars from the Prague linguistic school, who defined thetic sentences as consisting of one part, i.e., a simple presentation of an event or action, and predicative sentences which consist of two parts, subject and predicate, for them embodied the syntactic realization of the relation between *theme* and *rheme* (Mathesius, 1983 [1929]: 124–125). However, the linguistic interest in theticity arose only after the publication of an article by the Japanese-born American linguist S.-Y. Kuroda on the difference in formal marking of NPs in Japanese sentences, which he compared to the difference between thetic and categorical sentences in European languages (Kuroda, 1972). We will not delve further into this issue, which is significantly different in details from sentence structure in either European languages or Hebrew. As García Macías insightfully noted, "It is not surprising that this formulation attracted the attention of a student of Chomsky, S. Y. Kuroda, who attempted to apply Marty's ideas to linguistic analysis" (García Macías, 2016: 26). In this respect, we should recall Chomsky's theory of sentence structure, which was no more than a re-representation of Aristotle's logical sentence structure as consisting of two parts: subject as the basis of the proposition, and predicate, denoting some characteristic of it.

Indeed, the shift from the Aristotelian tradition relating to a bipartite proposition by applying it to syntax and reinforcing it within generative syntax further solidified the perception of the sentence—any sentence—as a bipartite unit by assigning the role of subject to the NP (for

Aristotle: ὄνομα 'name') and the role of the predicate to the VP (for Aristotle: ῥῆμα). (For a discussion of this conversion and Aristotle's influence on linguistics, see Izre'el, 2018[49]: §1; for the continuity of Aristotle's theory in generative linguistics, see Goldenberg, 1998[31]: 152-153.) At this juncture, it is worth noting again that we must distinguish between semantic predication and syntactic predication. While syntactic predication is the relation between subject and predicate at the level of form, semantic predication is the relation between an attribute or a characteristic and the entity to which it is attributed, or the relationship between an argument and a (verbal) predicate. Certainly, syntactic predication can be a formal representation of semantic predication; however, this is not necessarily the case in every sentence. In other words, semantic predication and syntactic representation belong to different domains of inquiry (Cornish, 2008: 121). As will become clear from the unfolding of the analysis below, the issue of this study will concentrate on syntax, being the formal manifestation of semantics and information structure.

Hans-Jürgen Sasse (1987; 1995; 2006) offered an extensive, in-depth examination of theticity. Sasse argued, that due to the structural and functional diversity among sentence types regarded as thetic, theticity cannot be perceived as a single coherent category. Following Mathesius (1983 [1929]), Sasse views thetic sentences as assertions without predication. In contrast to thetic judgment, categorical judgment presents a predicative assertion, and sentences expressing it include a topical subject.

> Thetic utterances, on the other hand, are **monomial** predications (called "simple assertions" in Sasse, 1987): no argument is picked out as a predication base: the entire situation, including all of its participants, is asserted as a unitary whole. (Sasse, 1995: 4-5; emphasis in the original)

Thus, thetic utterances may include bipartite syntactic constructions that introduce into the discourse new information by both constituents, viz., (syntactic) subject and (syntactic) predicate. In such sentences, the subject is not topical, hence they do not reflect semantic predication.

A similar approach to theticity is taken by Lambrecht (1987; 1994; 2000; Lambrecht and Polinsky, 1997), who prefers to use the term "Sentence Focus". This terminological preference stems from Lambrecht's approach, based on information structure:

> Sentence construction formally marked as expressing a pragmatically structured proposition in which both the subject and the predicate are in focus. The focus domain is the sentence, minus any topical non-subject arguments. (Lambrecht, 2000: 617)

The multifaceted approaches to theticity, which, among other things, allow bipartite sentences to be categorized as thetic, is not free from criticism and questions regarding both configuration and—especially—meaning (e.g., Sasse, 1987; 1995; Sornicola, 1995; Ozerov, 2018: §4.2.2; see García Macías, 2016: §2.1 for an overview). Moreover, issues arise regarding the conception of theticity as a single phenomenon or even as a category in itself (Sasse, 2006: §5; Ozerov, 2018; Wilson, 2020). In the introduction to a recent collection of studies on thethics and categoricals, Werner Abraham summarized the state of the art as follows:

> What are categorical and thetic judgements? Going by the most explicit conclusions in the present book (...), there is one negative, yet strong restriction: a thetic sentence is not a predication in the Kantian sense (i.e., predicating a property or eventuality of an object or person). Beyond this negative constraint, the most explicit conceptualization of thetics expressed in the present volume is "a not necessarily truth-functionally operable, yet syntactically well-structured sentence with speech act status, formally

occurring with subject inversion or broad sentential focus". (Abraham, 2020[2]: 1; cf. also Abraham, 2020[3])

This conception takes cognizance of the formal characteristics of thetic sentences, among which the first is subject inversion. Indeed, many studies on theticity have claimed that subject inversion is a strong diagnostic of thetic sentences, unto which one should add lack of agreement between what is regarded as subject and what is regarded as verb (see, among others, Sasse, 1995; 2006: §2.1; García Macías, 2016: §2.1.2). As mentioned by Abraham, one other diagnostic of thetics is broad sentence focus (Lambrecht, 1987; 1994; Lambrecht & Polinsky, 1997; and others), which introduces prosody and information structure into the analysis of thetic sentences.

2 The purpose and structure of this study

In this paper, I do not intend to take part in the debate on theticity, whether it concerns meaning, functions or configurations cross-linguistically. Neither it is my aim to cover the entire range of thetic expressions in Hebrew in general or in colloquial Israeli Hebrew (henceforth: IH) in particular. Furthermore, this paper will not deal comprehensively with the range of verb-initial and related constructions. What will be presented below is a syntactic analysis of the structure commonly referred to as VS in some prominent types of thetic sentences as proposed in the study of colloquial IH (Givón, 1976; Berman, 1980; Melnik, 2002; 2006; 2020; Kuzar, 2012; Halevy, 2016; Becker, 2023; among others).[2]

The main database for this study is The Corpus of Spoken Israeli Hebrew (*CoSIH*) (<cosih.com>). Due to its relatively small scale, data from various sources have been also taken into account, including random observations of linguistic forms encountered in speech, as well as forms occurring in spontaneous or otherwise everyday writing.[3] Following are several examples providing a preliminary illustration of the data supporting this research: sentences beginning with a particle (exx. 1-3); sentences beginning with forms containing non-referential person, gender or

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[2] As noted in the literature on thetic (or sentence focus) constructions, languages like English employ alternative constructions, where the prosodic accent falls on the subject and functions to mark focus on the whole sentence (Lambrecht, 1994; 2000; among others). As Bolinger (1954) has shown, this construction in English is counterpart to what is typically described as VS constructions in Spanish. As it is, Hebrew is similar to Spanish in this respect. In English, structures with inverse predicate-subject order require an expletive pronoun to precede the predicate (Kuzar, 2012: §3.2; for Hebrew cf. §6.1 below). While constructions similar to the English sentence focus ones have also been mentioned as existing in Hebrew (Melnik, 2006: 179), the data-set used for this study does not enable any confirmation or any serious discussion of such constructions in IH.

[3] The recordings were analyzed by ELAN <https://archive.mpi.nl/tla/elan> and by Praat <https://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/>. References follow the system used in *CoSIH*: text notation (e.g., C612_4); speaker (e.g., sp1); and numbers of the cited prosodic units. Other examples are referred to in accordance with their original source. Only rarely are invented examples given, and then, of course, no reference is indicated.

number indexes (exx. 4,5);[4] and one sentence representing constructions beginning with forms containing referential indexes (ex. 6).[5]

(1) ˈhine   ˈnatan //
     PRES   Nathan
     'Here is Nathan.' (P311_2_sp1_136)

(2) jeʃ   ˈdʒukim /
     EXT   cockroaches
     'There are cockroaches.' (C612_4_sp2_065)

(3) en[6]   maˈkor baˈsar //
     NEG.EXT   source   meat
     'There is no source for meat.' (C612_2_sp1_057)

(4) niˈʃar-ø   od   ˈtʃips-im   /
     remained-3SGM.PRED   more   chip-PL
     'Are there any more (potato-)chips left?' (C714_sp5_080; also 081)

(5) nimˈtsa-ø   ˈʃama jelaˈdim   tseiˈrim   //
     was.found-3SGM.PRED   there   children.PL young.PL
     'Young children were found there.' (Paramedic interviewed about a fatal car accident; TV channel 13 news, June 6, 2019)

(6) baˈχelek hadroˈmi   nimˈts-et   ˈχatgal   //
     in.the.part the.southern is.found-SGF   Hatgal(F)[7]
     'In the southern part there is Hatgal.' (OCh_sp1_228)

It is worth noting, that the very notion of subject inversion—along with the abbreviation VS—takes for granted that where NP and VP are present in a sentence, the first is to be analyzed

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[4] The term *index* (cf. Haspelmath, 2013) should be preferred in this context over *person marker* or its like, as it encompasses both the markers of person, gender and number included in verbs, and the gender-number markers included in adjectival and participial forms, which do not mark person. As noted by Goldenberg, "The form 'adjective' (including participles; SI) is recognized as an attributive complex with pronominal reference and attribute as distinguishable components, the former represented by the inflexional markers and the latter given in the lexeme involved" (Goldenberg, 1998[30]: 53).

[5] Transcription is usually broad phonetic, with some attention to the phonological system. Phonological input is added mainly in the representation of /h/, which is elided in most environments in contemporary spoken IH, and in the representation of some occurrences of /j/, which may also elide in certain environments. Epenthetic vowels (usually *e* [ɛ]) following prepositions and the conjunction (/v/ 'and') are not consistently transcribed. Similarly, fast speech contractions are not followed. For typographic and reading convenience, the rhotic phoneme, which is uvular in standard IH, is represented as *r*; the mid vowels are represented as *e* and *o*, although their prototypical respective pronunciations are lower. Two successive vowels are separated by a syllabic boundary, e.g., ˈbait 'house', is to be read ˈba.it; diphthongs are indicated by vowel+semi-vowel (in both directions), e.g., *aj, ja*.

Prosodic notation: | minor boundary; ‖ major boundary; / major boundary with "appeal" tone (for this term see Du Bois et al. 1993: §3.3);—fragmentary unit; - truncated word. Accented words are marked by boldface characters.

Glossing follows, mutatis mutandis, the Leipzig Glossing Rules <http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php>. Additional glossing and abbreviations: EXT existential (marker); PRES presentative; PRED predicational constituent. It should be noted, that *predicational* should be differentiated from *predicative*: whereas *predicative* relates to the notion of predicate, *predicational* relates to predication, thus referring to each of the constituents forming part of a (syntactic) predication, viz., either subject or predicate.

[6] There are two main variants of the surface structure of this negation: [en] and [ejn]. The underlying form depends on the phonological interpretation of the initial segment, whether a diphthong or a plain vowel. Without taking side in the debate, I have decided to follow the prevalent pronunciation of this particle in the investigated corpus and transcribe it invariably as *en*.

[7] The gender of city names follows the gender of the noun *ir* 'city' in Hebrew.

as subject, the second as predicate. I will argue below, that the constituent traditionally analyzed as subject, albeit a non-canonical one (for Hebrew see, among others, Halevy, 2016), is better construed as predicate; that a verb (V) is not a necessary component in these sentences and, in any case, it does not function as predicate; and, consequently, that one should not interpret such cases as exhibiting lack of agreement between subject and predicate (as commonly claimed for sentences like exx. 4-5). My main goal in this study is to propose a syntactic analysis that aligns with the perception of thetic sentence as a more holistic configuration than the conventional description and to demonstrate that the proposed analysis offers an accurate syntactic representation of the meaning, information structure, and function of these sentences.

First, however, I would like to briefly examine the functional proximity that can nevertheless be observed in types of sentences that align with the latest observations of thetic sentences (§3). It will be suggested, that the relationships among the various constructions recognized as thetic are close not only in form but can also fall under a single functional or pragmatic umbrella, though not necessarily a semantic one. A brief overview of the theoretical framework upon which the proposed formal analysis is based (§4). A new view of the syntactic notion of *predicate* will be offered, one that makes it the necessary and sufficient constituent forming a sentence. As such the types of sentences can be recognized: unipartite, consisting of only a predicate (or an expended predicateive domain), and bipartite, consisting of both subject and predicate. Then I will return to discuss the syntactic structure of thetic constructions (§§5–6), which are suggested to consist only of unipartite sentences. Thus, the constituent which has hitherto been regards as predicates will be viewed as a(n embedded) constituent within the predicative domain, which precedes the predicative core, the very constituent which has hitherto been regarded as an (inverted) subject of the thetic sentence. What follows is a suggestion regarding the cognitive basis of the constructional type presented in this study (§7). The final section (§8) will present a summary of the findings.

3 Some observations on the functional proximity of thetic sentences

As indicated above (§1), the most recent research has been reluctant in listing functional criteria within the definitions of thetic sentences (Abraham, 2020[2] cited above). While this difficulty is only implied from the proposed definition (*loc. cit.*), it is sometimes stated explicitly; e.g.:

> Is theticity a category? The answer is clearly no. It is a conglomeration of similar presuppositional/assertional conditions prevailing in similar semantic areas, which are frequently expressed by comparable constructions in different languages. (Sasse, 2006: 300)
> Thetic analyses … lump together an array of distinct language-specific discourse-interactional functions. (Ozerov, 2018: 87)

Still, preliminary studies in this field, alongside perceptive observation on colloquial IH data, can at least bring these seemingly disparate functions closer and into a single, albeit loose, overarching category. Let us consider the following examples, the first four of them have already been cited above (exx. 1-4; §2):

(7)   ʾhine **ˈnatan** ||
         PRES   Nathan
         'Here is Nathan.' (P311_2_sp1_136)

(8) *jeʃ ˈdʒukim* /
EXT cockroaches
'There are cockroaches.' (C612_4_sp2_065)

(9) *en maˈkor baˈsar* //
NEG.EXT source meat
'There is no source for meat.' (C612_2_sp1_057)

(10) *niˈʃar-ø od ˈtʃips-im* /
remained-3SGM.PRED more chip-PL
'Are there any more (potato-)chips left?' (C714_sp5_080; also 081)

(11) *m̩ˈgia tidˈruχ* /
arriving[SGM] briefing
'Briefing is on its way.' (P311_2_sp1_182)

(12) *ve af-ø plag mehamaˈnoa* |
and flew-3SGM.PRED plug from.the.engine
'And a plug was disentangled from the engine,' (OCh_sp1_160)

(13) *aˈfilu χaseˈr-a aruˈχ-a* //
even missing-SGF meal-SGF
'There is even a missing meal.' (D142_sp1_080)

(14) *joˈred ˈgeʃem* //
going.down[SGM] rain
'It is raining.' (Firsthand data; recurrent; cf. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xE4jVVnm344>; uploaded on December 19, 2019; accessed June 15, 2024)

(15) *aˈdif klum* /
preferred [SGM] nothing
'It is preferable not to have anything at all.' (C842_sp2_027)

(16) *jaˈveʃ=li ha=jaˈd-aim* ||
dry[SGM]=to.me the=hand-DU
'My hands are dry.' (Firsthand data; June 9, 2019)

(17) *akˈts-a=oti nemaˈl-a* ||
stung-3SGF.PRED=me ant-SGF
'An ant stung me.' (Firsthand data; July 21, 2024)

A preliminary classification of exx. 7-17 according to discourse functions will come up with the following types: evidentiality (ex. 7); affirmative or negative existence (exx. 8-9); situations similar to existence or non-existence: appearance or disappearance, etc. (exx. 10-13); weather statements (ex. 14); evaluative expressions (ex. 15) (cf. Kuzar, 2012: §3.3.3 and ch. 6; Becker, 2023); physical sensation statements (exx. 16-17) (García Macías, 2016: §2.1).

It seems that these are not entirely distinct categories and that links can be identified between the different types. There is clearly close proximity among the types exemplified in sentences 7-9: all three are used to present entities or events or introduce them into the discourse, and therefore they are called presentative constructions (Sasse, 1987; Izre'el, 2022[50], with previous references; Izre'el, 2023; Shor & Inbar, forthcoming; among many others). As already shown in §1 above, this was already recognized by the first scholars that dealt with thetic constructions. In addition, verbs (or other forms) that are semantically related to (affirmative or negative) existence (notably in a location), such as coming, arriving, staying, entering, leaving, lacking, etc.), termed by Halevy (2016) "existential-like" verbs, as well as unaccusative verbs (see, e.g., Melnik, 2006: §2.3.3), can also be included within this scope (for other aspects of constructions containing similar verbs see Maschler, 2015). Other researchers have similarly

highlighted the proximity of these functions also for other languages, and have claimed proximity also for other functions as exemplified above. Thus, García Macías has claimed, that

> existentials, weather and physical sensation statements share formal as well as functional similarities. At the structural level, we can find languages that use closely related constructions to convey these functions. At the functional level, these functions have the ability to appear in background descriptions as well as in out of the blue or presentative statements. All these facts imply that these functions are delimited by the same conceptual boundaries (García Macías, 2016: 175)

García Macías further argued, that

> presentatives and hot news are functionally similar because, in order to be felicitous, both require the unawareness of the addressee with respect to the event or entity that is introduced as new information. (García Macías, 2016: 179)

Thus, it appears that the relationships among the various constructions recognized as thetic are close not only in form but can also fall under a single functional or pragmatic umbrella, though not necessarily a semantic one. In order to elucidate this proximity and for terminological consistency, I will use the following terminological dyad to indicate the two main constituent of thetic sentences as follows: The constituent whose nucleus is a NP—referencing an object, entity or being[8]—will be referred to as *entity*; the other constituent—typically located in sentence-initial position and referencing existence, presentation, occurrence or situation—will be hereafter referred to as *occurrence*.

Further research into the question of meanings, uses, and functions must remain a desideratum and must wait until an extensive database of colloquial IH and the whole gamut of varieties of IH, spoken and written alike, is compiled. Therefore, the present study will focus on the issue of configuration.

4 Theoretical framework, premises, and methodological comments

The syntactic approach underlying the analysis of thetic sentences elaborated below is functional, communicational, discourse-based, and grounded in information structure. The main premise guiding the framework behind the syntactic analysis presented below is that for spoken language,[9] (morpho)syntax and prosody are the formal manifestations of semantics and information structure. It will be noticed at this juncture, that for the hearer, prosody is the default indication for a constituent functioning as predicate.

According to this approach and a close observation of colloquial IH, the predicate is the only necessary constituent—and a sufficient one—constituting a sentence. Looking at this assertion from an opposite perspective, a sentence can be viewed as a syntactic unit consisting of minimally of a predicate.[10] Therefore, a subject needs a predicate for being determined as such in a sentence and cannot be—against many descriptions of thetic and other constructions—a sole constituent in a sentence, as most or even all theories imply (e.g., Kuzar, 2012: §12.3). A sentence

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[8] Including referents representing actions in forms like infinitives (see, e.g., Table 1 in §5, lines 5-7).

[9] To be extended also to silent reading; cf., e.g., Gross *et al.*, 2014.

[10] *Sentence* is taken here to be the reference unit of syntax, standing also for *clause* (although some exceptions may be encountered).

consisting of only a predicate (or a predicate domain)[11] has been termed *unipartite sentence* (Izre'el, 2018[48]; 2018[48]). The *predicate* is viewed as the constituent carrying an individual piece of information within the discourse context, which by default will include a newly introduced element. As such, the predicate may be seen as the default representation of the *comment*. The predicate carries the modality of the sentence, where modality is seen as an essential component of the sentence, the one that transforms a proposition into a sentence (Izre'el, 2018[49]: §5 with previous references). By default, the focus of a sentence will be found within the predicate domain. Focus is usually conveyed by prosodic accent (examples 18, 19 with figures 1, 2).

(18)   ˈʃnehem **gdoˈlim** //
          both   big.PLM
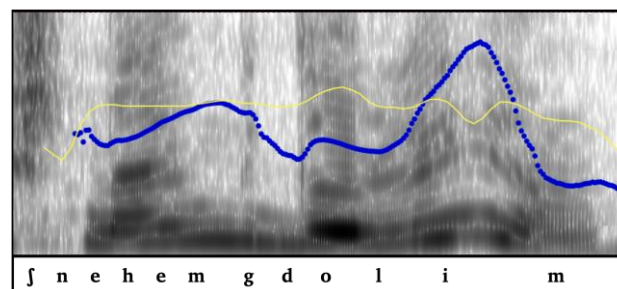   'Both are big.' (C514_2_sp1_151)

Figure 1: *ʃnehem gdolim* (ex. 18)

(19)   hamiˈfal   **ʃam** //
          the.factory there
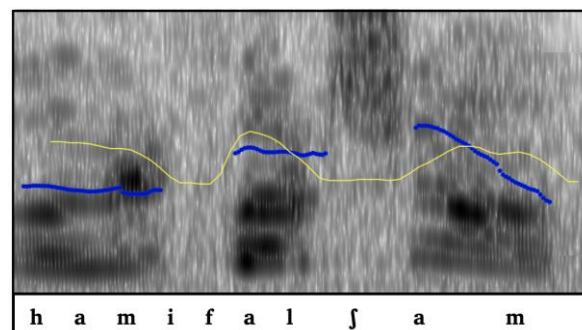   'The factory is there.' (OCD)

Figure 2: *hamifal ʃam* (ex. 19)

        Attention should be drawn to the fact, that — as can be seen in the examples above — any part of speech (save bare prepositions and conjunctions, except for some special cases) can constitute either a predicate or a subject in Hebrew: nominal, pronominal, adverbial phrases; particles (including modal particles; see Izre'el, 2022[50]: §3); as well as larger phrases, sentences and other syntactic complexes (Izre'el, 2012: §3; 2018[49]: §3). The syntactic function of the respective constituents in any individual sentence, whether subject or predicate, will be determined according to their respective part-of-speech, relative definiteness, according to prosodic features interacting with constituent order, and contextual grounds, all of which may be interdependent. It should further be noted, that the Hebrew verb is not a predicate per se, but

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[11] Below, the terms *predicate* and *subject*, whenever they include other elements in addition to their respective nuclei, may stand also for *predicate domain* or for *subject domain* respectively

constitutes a complete bipartite sentence, consisting of both a bound person index, which by default constitutes its subject,[12] and a verbal stem, by default constituting its predicate. This is demonstrated by ex. 20.

(20) *j-ihˈje*
      3SGM.PRED-will.be
      'He will be' (P311_2_sp5_033)

For further details see Izre'el, 2012; 2018[48]; 2018[49]; 2022[50]: §2.

5 Configuration: Is It Really VS?

Even a quick glance at exx. 7-17 (§3 above) suffices to realize that the commonly employed VS designation, representing an initial verb in the sentence, does not hold in practice: only three of the initial constituents in these examples are verbs: *niʃar* {remained-3SGM.PRED} 'it remained' (ex. 10); *af* {flew-3SGM.PRED} '(lit.) it flew' (ex. 12); *aktsa* {stung-3SGF.PRED} 'it stung' (ex. 17). In addition, there are two participial forms: *jored* {going.down[SGM]} 'it falls' (ex. 14); *mgia* {arriving[SGM]} 'arrives' (ex. 11); and three adjectives: *χasera* {missing-SGF} 'missing' (ex. 13); *adif* {preferred[SGM]}preferable' (ex. 15); *javeʃ* {dry[SGM]} 'dry' (ex. 16). The first three examples (exx. 7-9) are usually referred to as particles in Hebrew linguistic tradition: *hine* {PRES} 'here is' (ex. 7); *jeʃ* {EXT} 'there is' (ex. 8); *en* {NEG.EXT}'there is not' (ex. 9). Even without a quantitative examination of sentence functions for these construction types (the database being too small to justify a quantitative analysis for this purpose), at this stage of research one must acknowledge the fact that generalizations implied by the abbreviation VS are inappropriate.

So, perhaps one should rather refer to a predicate of any type, rather than verb? (Cf., e.g., Kuzar, 2012: ch. 3). To address this question, I would like to begin by analyzing sentences that begin with a particle, starting with *hine* 'here is' (ex. 7). *hine* is usually defined as a presentative particle, best characterized as modal-evidential (Izre'el, 2022[50]: §3.1.2; 2023; further Shor & Inbar, forthcoming). Scholars differ in their interpretation and analysis of this particle: Kogut (1986: §3) considers *hine* a predicate and the following constituent as its subject; Sadka (2001) considers it an interjection that is not syntactically integrated with the sentence. In the framework sketched above (§4), where predicate is the only necessary and sufficient constituent in a sentence, it will be clear that the constituent following the PRES particle *hine* functions as predicate rather than subject. Accordingly, in such sentences *hine* occurs within the predicate domain, just preceding the predicative core, adding to it presentative-evidential modality.[13]

As I have shown in the aforementioned articles, *hine* is found in paradigmatic relation with the EXT and NEG.EXT particles *jeʃ* and *en* when occurring in EXT-PRES sentences (exx. 8-9). The conventional analysis of Hebrew EXT-PRES sentences takes the representation of the entity as subject and the EXT marker (affirmative or negative) as predicate (e.g., Coffin & Bolotsky, 2005: 303; Baruch, 2009).[14] Sometimes, the EXT marker is analyzed as a copula (e.g., Schwarzwald, 2001: 67; Francez, 2007: 72), presumably due to its paradigmatic interchangeability with forms

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[12] For this view—as against the common view, that takes the person index in the Hebrew verb to be an agreement marker,—see Izre'el, 2012; Shor, 2022; for related views see Mithun, 2003; Kibrik, 2011: §3.3.2; Kibrik, 2019.

[13] *hine* can also function as predicate in other sentence formations, clearly so when it constitutes a sentence in itself (Izre'el, 2023).

[14] Rosén (1965: 84-81; 1977: 108-107), followed by Halevy (2013: §§4,13), referred to the EXT marker as verboid.

of the verb *haja*[15] 'be' (cf. below, §6; cf. also the corresponding philosophical interpretation by Kant as mentioned in §1 above). These traditions are not unique to Hebrew and are common in the general linguistic analysis of EXT sentences (McNally, 2016: §2.1). As noted above, when *jeʃ* and *en* convey a PRES function, they stand in paradigmatic relationship with *hine*, and it is clear that they are to be analyzed as the initial constituents of a predicate domain, where the following constituent will be analyzed as the predicative core. Accordingly, the focus of the sentence will be found on the predicative core. Ex. 21 (with figure 3) shows the similarity in prosodic structure between an EXT-PRES unipartite sentence and a categorical, bipartite one, where in both structures the prosodic accent is carried by an element within the predicative core, irrespective of the existence or non-existence of a subject in the structure.

(21) *aˈval haˈja **χavaˈja** ||* *haˈjom haˈze haˈja **maˈmaʃ χavaˈja** ||*
   but was experience the.day the.this was really experience
   'But it was an experience. That day was really an experience.' (OCh_sp1_879-880)
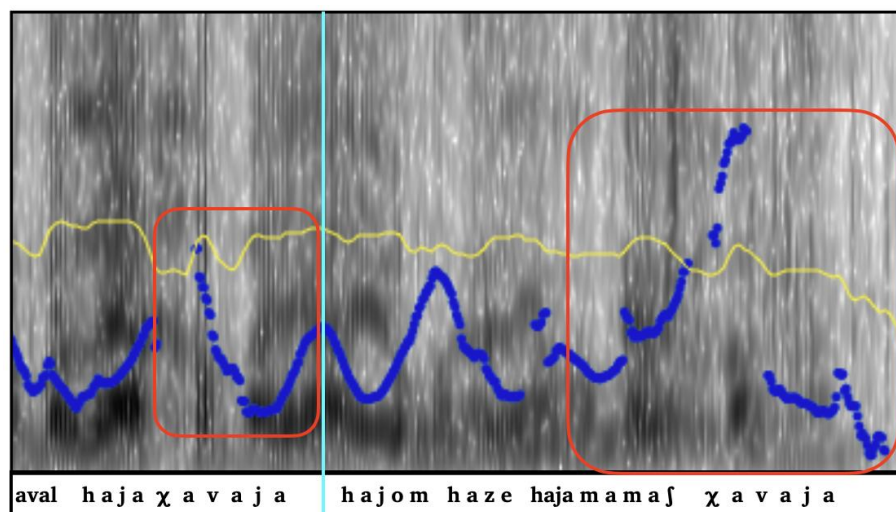
Figure 3: Prosodic accent within a unipartite and bipartite sentences

  As mentioned above, both the EXT and the NEG.EXT particles, as well as the PRES particle, carry each a modal meaning (Izre'el, 2022[50]: §3.1.2; 2023: §3). The following paradigm exhibit this paradigmatic relations between PRES, EXT, NEG.EXT and other modal sentence constituents:

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[15] *haja* {was-3SGM.PRED} 'he was' is a traditional practice of representing the 'be' lexeme in Hebrew, following the standard representation of verbal lexemes in Hebrew dictionaries.

Table 1: The paradigmatic relationship between *jeʃ*, *en*, *hine*, and some other modal sentence constituents in the formation of unipartite sentences

	Modal constituent	Predicative core		
	1 *ˈhine*	*kaˈfe //*	{PRES coffee}	'Here is (some) coffee.'
	2 *jeʃ*	*kaˈfe //*	{EXT coffee}	'There is (some) coffee.'
	3 *jeʃ*	*kaˈfe /*	{EXT coffee}	'Is there (any) coffee?'
	4 *en*	*kaˈfe //*	{NEG.EXT coffee}	'There is no coffee.'
	5 *jeʃ*	*letsaˈjen //*	{EXT to.note}	'It should be noted.'
	6 *en*	*letsaˈjen //*	{NEG.EXT to.note}	'It should not be noted.'
Cf.	7 *aˈsur*	*letsaˈjen //*	{forbidden to.note}	'It must not be noted.'
	8 *tsaˈrix*	*kaˈfe //*	{need coffee}	'There is need for (some) coffee.'
	9 *efˈʃar*	*kaˈfe //*	{possible coffee}	'It is possible to have coffee.'
	10 *efˈʃar*	*kaˈfe /*	{possible coffee}	'Can (we) get (some) coffee?'
Further:	11 —	*kaˈfe //*	{coffee}	'Coffee (please).'
	12 —	*kaˈfe /*	{coffee}	'Coffee?'

Thus, there is no subject inversion in thetic sentences beginning with a particle—certainly not subject inversion with a virtual verb. From the discussion above it will become clear, that such constructions are unipartite sentences, viz., sentences consisting of only a predicate domain, where the initial constituent is a modal particle and the second, main constituent forms the predicative core (see further the appendix , §6.2.1 below). Such configurations occur also in interrogative sentences, as illustrated by exx. 3 and 10 (cf. also ex. 12) in table 1. The last two examples in the table (exx. 11 and 12) show, that—as one can frequently observe in various contexts—unipartite sentences can consist of only a predicative core.

6 Extending the view: Sentences with an inflected initial constituent

6.1 Non-referential index

As already mentioned above (§5), there are suppletive relations between the EXT particle *jeʃ* and forms of the verb *haja* 'be' (Izre'el, 2022[50]: §§1, 3.2; for the notation see note 14 above). As such, the suppletive verbal forms convey the same meaning as *jeʃ*, viz., existence. Since the following NP is analyzed as the predicative core, the suppletive verbal forms obviously cannot assume the same function. It should further be emphasized, that in EXT-PRES constructions, the prosodic accent is never carried by the verb. Therefore, the verb, in spite of any expectations resulting from tradition (see §1 above), must not be interpreted as predicate of the EXT-PRES sentence, neither can it be interpreted as its subject. Having said that, can we nevertheless interpret the person index in the verbal complex (cf. §4 with ex. 18) as subject of the predicative core?

We have already pointed above (§1), that analyzing the entity constituent in EXT sentences as predicate rather than subject was already proposed by Herbart at the beginning of the 19th century. This construal re-emerged only in the second half of the 20th century (Jenkins, 1975; cf. McNally, 2016: §2.2.2 for other similar attempts). Following the Anglo-American bias in contemporary linguistics, this analysis was introduced for English. Surprisingly, the only language aside English for which a similar analysis has been proposed is Hebrew (McNally, *ibid*., referring to Hazout, 2004 and Francez, 2007; for details see Izre'el, 2022[50]: §§3.1, 3.2.3).

Following some analyses of English EXT sentences, and on the basis of the tradition that requires that every sentence must consist of both subject and predicate, Hazout proposed to see the index of the verb *haja* 'be' as subject of the predicative core (for details see Izre'el, *ibid*.). However, Hazout based his insights solely on verbal forms with coreferential indexes. These cases, representing only a small portion of the verb's occurrences in EXT-PRES constructions in colloquial IH, will be discussed below (§6.2). The predominant configuration in these constructions, however, involves verbal forms with non-referential indexes (Izre'el, 2022[50]: §3.2.2).

As previously explained (§1), this configuration is not limited to EXT-PRES sentences and is commonly found in other types of thetic sentences cross-linguistically. The expression of weather (a category later expanded to include expressions of atmospheric and environmental conditions generally; see, e.g., Kuzar, 2012) was the first category added to the discussion of EXT sentences in philosophical-linguistic research (§1 above; for further research on the expression of meteorological phenomena, see, e.g., Mettouchi & Tosco, 2011; Eriksen, Kittilä & Leena Kolehmainen, 2015). Table 2 illustrates ways of expressing weather in colloquial IH.

Table 2: Weather statements in colloquial IH

		Presentative constituent	**Predicative core**
Present time reference: 'It's raining.'	a	—	*ˈgeʃem ‖* rain
	b	*jeʃ* EXT	*ˈgeʃem ‖* rain
	c	*joˈred* going.down[SGM]	*ˈgeʃem ‖* rain
Past time reference: 'It was raining.'	d	*haja-ø* was-3SGM.PRED	*ˈgeʃem ‖* rain
	e	*jaˈrad-ø* went.down-3SGM.PRED	*ˈgeʃem ‖* rain
Future time reference: 'It will be raining.'	f	*j-ihˈje* 3SGM.PRED-will.be	*ˈgeʃem ‖* rain
	g	*j-eˈred* 3SGM.PRED-will.go.down	*ˈgeʃem ‖* rain
Proximate future time reference: 'It's going to rain.'	h	*hoˈleχ la-ˈredet* going[SGM] INF-go.down	*ˈgeʃem ‖* rain

In terms of the content conveyed, there is no difference between any of the statements in each of the three first paradigms (a-c, d-e, f-g). Exx. a-c express a situation at the time of speaking; exx. d-g convey the same content in the past (perhaps after the speaker had noticed that the ground outside is wet) or in the future. Regarding the examples that include a verb (exx. d-g), the only

apparent difference between these sentences and categorical ones is word order.[16] It will be recalled, that word order is usually perceived as a prominent diagnostic of thetic sentences (§1). To this characteristic, we have also mentioned the lack of agreement between subject and verb (or other inflected forms as illustrated in exx. c and h above). In line with the theoretical approach presented above (§4), the predicative core in all the sentences in Table 2 is the NP *geʃem* 'rain', whereas the function of all respective constituents preceding the predicative core is to introduce it to the discourse. In each of these thetic sentences, the two adjacent constituents, viz., the predicative core and the preceding constituent, are to be analyzed together as a unipartite sentence.

   Geʃem 'rain', the predicative core in these examples, represents a singular masculine referent, which in categorical sentences would require coreferentiality with the relevant morphemes of the related constituent. On the face of it, one would interpret the 3SGM index in the verbal forms *haja-ø* {was-3SGM.PRED} (d), *jarad-ø* {went.down-3SGM.PRED} (e) *j-ihje* {3SGM.PRED-will.be} (f) and *j-ered* {3SGM.PRED-will.go.down} (g), as well as the SGM indication of the participial forms *jored* {going.down[SGM]} (c) and *holeχ* {going[SGM]} (h) as coreferential with the NP *geʃem* 'rain'. To clarify the status of indexes in inflected constituents in pre-core position, one is required to examine cases where the predicative core is a F or PL NP. The following examples are illustrative of such NPs.

(22)   *od   lo   jaˈrad-ø*   *ha=ˈʃemeʃ* //
       yet   NEG   went.down-3SGM.PRED   the=sun(F)
       'The sun hasn't gone down yet.' (Firsthand data; October 9, 2019)

(23)   *ʃe=lo   j-ihˈje*   *ˈruaχ* //
       that=NEG   3SGM.PRED-will.be   wind(F)
       'So that there be no wind.' (OCh_sp1_325)

(24)   *halvay   ʃe=j-ihje*   *hafta-a*   *ve   j-aχmir*   *ha=suf-a*[17]
       hopefully   that-3SGM.PRED-will.be   surprise-SGF   and   3SGM.PRED-will.worsen   the=storm-SGF
       'Hopefully there will be a surprise and the storm will get stronger.' (Talkback to a forecast in an internet weather forum; <http://forums.walla.co.il/viewtopic.php?f=1760&t=14768011>; link no longer available)

(25)   *aˈval   haˈja-ø*   *χavaˈj-a* ||
       but   was-3SGM.PRED   experience-SGF
       'But it was an experience.' (OCh_sp1_879)

(26)   *ʃe=ˈlo   j-aˈuf*   *ha=χaˈk-ot* //
       that=NEG   3SGM.PRED-will.fly   the=fishing.rod-PLF
       'Let the fishing-rods not fall away.' (Child to his father, who was carrying fishing rods in a baby carriage; Jaffa harbor, August 13, 2017)

   In all verbs representing occurrences in exx. 21-26 (*jarad* 'it went down', *jihje* 'it will be', *jaχmir* 'it will get worse', *haja* 'was', *jauf* 'will fly'), the indexes are non-referential, as they do not agree with the gender or number of the NP constituting the respective predicative core constituents (*ʃemeʃ* 'sun', *ruaχ* 'wind', *haftaa* "surprise", *sufa*, 'storm', *χavaja* 'experience', *χakot*

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[16] The position of the sentence accent is the same in categorical sentences, where, in its unmarked position, the predicate follows the subject. The relationships between the constituents, their order in the sentence and the prosodic accent as a marker of focus are complex, yet there is no room to elaborate on these issues here.

[17] This is the standard, most common IH reading pronunciation of the written string

'fishing rods'). This is a standard configuration for thetic sentences in colloquial IH, and we have already seen three examples of similar configurations, where the respective NPs are PL, in previous sections (ex. 5 in §2, exx. 10 and 16 in §3).

The non-referential index in all of these inflected forms verbs can hardly be regarded as subject of the respective NPs constituting their predicative core. In a way, these constructions are somewhat analogous to impersonal constructions (cf. Berman, 1980; Halevy, 2020). As we shall see below (§6.2), even in cases where this constituent has referential marking, its role is not that of a subject of the predicative NP, but a segmental focus marker. In either case, the index in all the above constructions is inherent to the Hebrew verb (Goldenberg, 1998[31]) and thus it is part and parcel of the occurrence constituent. Anton Marty has already recognized a similar complexity in thetic constructions in other languages (cf. above, §1), explaining it as follows:

> [T]he appearance of the category arises only when a fully meaningful finite verb in the third person singular creates the illusion that it involves both a pronominal subject and a verbal predicate (with or without the placeholder word "it"), while in reality it *merely includes the name of an occurrence* along with a marker of affirmation or rejection (as in: "it rains," "it thunders," pluit, tonat, etc.) ... (Marty, 1918: 272; emphasis in the original)

The same applies to sentences where the inflected occurrence constituent is non-verbal, viz., a participle or an adjective, where the index indicates gender and number, but not person. This is illustrated in exx. 27-29:

(27) *od.meˈat   joˈred   ha=ˈʃemeʃ* //
      soon   going.down[SGM] the=sun(F)
      'The sun will go down soon.' (Firsthand data; November 11, 2019)

(28) *od.meˈat   nisˈgar   ha=ˈdel-et* ||
      soon   being.shut[SGM] the=door-SGF
      'The door will be closed soon.' (Mother hurries her son to get off the train at the station; Afula, May 3, 2024)

(29) *aˈnaχnu ovˈrim   laʃaˈvua   haˈba   ʃe   ʃam ʦaˈfuj=lanu   harˈbe hafta-ˈot*[18]
      we   move.PL   to.the.week the.next   that there expected[SGM]=to.us many surprise-PLF
      'We (now) move to next week, where many surprises are to be expected.'
      (<https://www.seasonet.co.il/foruminside.asp?postid=6385>; Uploaded December 6, 2019; accessed June 13, 2024)

Ex. 30 may help elucidating this issue.

(30) *ˈbo.hena* | *tiˈre ˈeze   magˈniv   ha=ˈmaim   haˈele* ||
      come.on   look which   awesome[SGM]   the=water[PL] the.these
      'Come on, look how awesome this water is.' (P311_2_sp3_074-075)

It is as if one were saying, "Come on, look: there is something really awesome here; it is this water." In this utterance, there is no prosodic accent on the NP but rather on the expression of amazement *eze* 'how', which is by default diagnostic of a component within the predicate domain. Still, we would not analyze *hamaim haele* {the=water[PL] the.these} 'this water' as subject of an allegedly predicate *eze magniv* {which awesome[SGM]} 'how awesome', because

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[18] This is the standard, most common IH reading pronunciation of the written string.

the two constituents are not coreferential. In any case, as is also evident from the initial exclamation *bo hena* 'come on', the entire sentence draws attention to an entity, viz., *hamaim haele* 'this water', introducing it into the discourse.[19] It will be noted, that the structure of this sentence is similar to the structure of thetic sentences both in its word order and in function. As for the prosodic accent, although not carried by the NP as expected for thetic sentences, is still within the predicate domain which follows the stance expression *tire* 'look', an expression equivalent to the PRES particle *hine* (ex. 7 above). Functionally, it seems that we can classify this sentence as an exclamatory or mirative sentence, categories that are, in both role and form, close to theticity (García Macías, 2016; for IH see Givón, 1976: §4 and Sridhar, 1988: §7.2; cf. also Miller-Node & van der Merwe, 2011 for Biblical Hebrew). Note that although the NP in this example is definite, it is introduced into the discourse for the first time, albeit the presence of the referent in the extralinguistic context. The same applies to exx. 26-28 and others.

For further clarification, we can compare the constructions presented in exx. 25–29 and the one in ex. 30 to sentences that fall within the continuum of cleft constructions[20] (Boumfeld, 2018;[21] cf. Kuzar, 2012: §9.3); e.g.,

(31) *ze*   *no'ra*   **a'mus**   *ha=ma'p-a*   *ha='zot* //
      DEM.SGM   very   loaded[SGM]   the=map-SGF   the=DEM.SGF
      'It is very detailed, this map.' (OCh_sp1_671)

(32) *ze*   **me'gia**   **le'minus   arba'im   maa'lot** /   *ha=kfa'r-im*   *ha'ele* ||
      DEM.SGM   reaching[SGM]   to.minus   forty   degrees   DEF =village-PL   the.these
      'It gets to minus forty degrees, these villages.' (OCh_sp1_247)

In these constructions and similar ones, the pronoun *ze* {DEM.SGM} 'it' precedes the predicative phrase *nora amus* {very loaded[SGM]} 'very detailed' or *megia leminus arbaim maalot* 'gets to minus forty degrees' respectively, functioning as its subject. Both predicative nuclei (*amus* {loaded[SGM]} 'loaded' and *megia* {reaching[SGM]} 'reaching' respectively) appear in their non-referential SGM forms, while the respective referents corresponding to these occurrences— *hamapa hazot* 'this map' and *hakfarim haele* 'these villages'—indicate F and PL respectively. It will be noted, that both NPs are effectively interpretable as adverbial phrase. This insight can be supported by comparing ex. 33 (already cited above as ex. 16, §3) with ex. 34.

(33) *ja've∫=li*   **ha=ja'da-im** ||
      dry[SGM]=to.me   the=hand-PLM
      'My hands are dry.' (Firsthand data; June 9, 2019)

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[19] We do not know what does the phrase 'this water' refer to. It may refer to a pool or a fountain, or just anything that has water as its prominent component. This conversation took place in a shopping mall in the Tel-Aviv area.

[20] An interesting proposal to consider similar constructions in Russian as thetic sentences has been proposed by Zimmerling (2016: §5). Zimmerling distinguishes between sentences whose function is to present an entity (entity-central) and sentences whose function is to present an event (event-central). According to Zimmerling's findings, Russian allows the use of an additional expletive subject mainly in sentences of the first type. As we have seen, the focus in exx. 28-29 (as is the case with ex. 27) is marked on the occurrence constituent rather than on the entity, so that they do not fit the finding in Russian. In any case, the findings in *CoSIH* are too scanty to enable any conclusions regarding this question.

[21] Boumfeld proposes that these constructions be termed (following Wertheimer, 2001; 2013) *pseudo-cleft sentences*, although she regards the pronoun *ze* and the NP as interrelated, defining them as a split subject, where content and syntactic position are separated. As it will be seen below, I interpret the pronoun *ze* in similar constructions as a non-referential subject.

(34)   *javeʃ=li*   *b=a=pe*[22]
        dry[SGM]=to.me   in=the=mouth(M)
        'My mouth is dry.' (<https://www.yoledet.co.il/forum/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=95840>;
        uploaded November 7, 2017; accessed June 14, 2024)

The message communicated in ex. 34 seems to be: 'I am (=feel) dry in the mouth' (lit. 'it is dry to me in the mouth'). Very much the same, the speaker in ex. 30 is saying something like 'I am (=feel) dry in the hands' (lit. 'it is dry to me, in the hands.'). Thus, the syntactic status of the constituent following the occurrence is that of an adverbial phrase. It should be emphasized, that in all these constructions, the prosodic accent is found within the predicative core, and its exact location depends on the type of sentence, whether bipartite or unipartite, or rather whether the predicative nucleus is an occurrence (exx. 31-32) or an entity (ex. 33).[23]

The extent to which this type of thetic constructions is established in the linguistic system of IH speakers can be illustrated by the following two extracts, taken from a conversation between a soldier and his commanding officer, with whom he shares some personal challenges that led him to request attentiveness from military authorities. The first extract (ex. 35) is a possessive-like construction, similar in form and function to the EXT-possessive sentences (Izre'el, 2022[50]: §1 with previous references). In this example, the soldier shares with his interlocutor some thoughts he had when he was trying to calm down his anxiety by reminding himself that his release from military service was coming soon:[24]

(35)   *niˈʃar-ø=leχa*   *od*   *ˈkama*   ***χodaˈʃ-im*** /
        remained-3SGM.PRED=to.you more   several month-PL
        'You've got a few months left,' (P931_1_sp1_064)

The soldier, returning to this point after a short while, says:

(36)   *az   az   raˈtsiti* / *kiˈilu ˈkama   ʃe   niʃaˈr-u* /
        then then I.wanted like   several that remained-3PL.PRED

        et=ha=χodaˈʃ-im   ʃe   niˈʃar-ø /
        et=the=month-PL   that   remained-3SGM.PRED
        'So so I wanted, as many as have remained, the remaining months, (to do it right.)'
            (P931_1_sp1_146-147)

In ex. 35, the soldier introduces into the discourse the reference *kama χodaʃim* 'several months', duly using a thetic, EXT-like construction. This is not the case in ex. 36, however. Here, 'several ... months' is already a given reference, which would be expected to be resumed by a coreferential index on a predicative verb, since the NP 'the months' now functions as a topical subject. This configuration is indeed manifested in the second prosodic unit (*kama ʃe niʃaˈru* 'as many as have remained'; note that the quantifier *kama* is used in both instances). However, the speaker feels the need to use a different configuration, therefore replacing it immediately by a non-referential form, albeit in an embedded, relative clause. For this speaker, using a non-referential form of this verb seemed to better fit his communicative goals. Should we learn from this case that non-referentiality makes a stronger diagnostic of thetic constructions?

One other example in support of this tentative conclusion is ex. 37, where two soldiers are talking about a hitchhiking stop which used to be located near their base yet was removed at some point.

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[22] This is the standard, most common IH reading pronunciation of the written string.

[23] Ex. 34 is a written extract.

[24] Verbalized in the 2nd person, although addressed to himself.

(37) sp1: *aχˈʃav* **jeʃ** *trempiˈjad-a* //
 now EXT hitchhiking.stop-SGF
 'There is a hitchhiking stop now.'

 sp2: **mehaˈʃaar /** *aχˈʃav* **jeʃ /** *χaˈzar-ø /*
 from.the.gate now EXT returned-3SGM.PRED
 'From the gate? Is there one now? Has it been restored?'

 (P423_1_sp1_124; sp2_097-099)

In the two occurrences in this example, the EXT marker *jeʃ* functions as predicate (Izre'el, 2022[51]: §3). What is interesting, though, is that the verb *χazar* 'it has been restored' (lit. 'it returned'), which prima facie is semantically predicated to the F noun *trempijada* 'hitchhiking stop', has a non-referential index as its syntactic subject, which should thus be interpreted as an impersonal verb (cf. Berman, 1980; Halevy, 2020). Again, this brings further support to the significance of non-referentiality in thetic-like contexts. Thus, non-referentiality in such cases is not a matter of disagreement between subject and predicate, but indicates an entirely different conceptual structure. This, however, needs further investigation.

To summarize, all thetic sentences discussed so far follow the same model: an initial constituent, which I have classified above under the umbrella term *occurrence*, followed by the constituent I have referred to above as entity, functioning as the predicative core. Thus, these sentences consist only of a predicate domain, i.e., they should be construed as unipartite sentences.

So far, we have discussed occurrences constituted by inflected forms that include a non-referential index. Aside these, we have seen above (ex. 6 in §2 and exx. 13 and 17 in §3) similar constructions where the occurrence constituent includes a referential index. In the following section, we will examine such sentences and see that we can analyze them as unipartite sentences as well.

6.2 Referential index

Aside thetic sentences with non-referential expressions, IH has a variety of conceptual semantic-pragmatic categories of constructions of which the initial constituent includes an index exhibiting coreferentiality with the following NP (Givón, 1976; Berman, 1980; Melnik, 2002; 2006; 2020; Kuzar, 2012; Maschler, 2015; Halevy, 2016; 2022). Limiting ourselves to thetic statements, let us look into constructions where a referent is introduced into the discourse.

In a previous study (Izre'el, 2022[50]: §3.2.3), I demonstrated that in EXT-PRES sentences, a complementary distribution of focus marking is evident between prosodic accent and segmental marking. The segmental marking is manifested as coreferentiality between the index of an inflected occurrence constituent and the NP in the nucleus of the predicative core. The complementary distribution is operative as follows: when the predicative core introduces a new referent or one reintroduced into the discourse, the occurrence occurs with a non-referential index and the focus is marked by a prosodic accent carried by the predicative core. This is also the case when the introduced referent is known, expected, and definite. However, when the predicative core mentions a given, known, expected, or specific referent which appears as an indefinite NP, the index of the occurrence constituent will be coreferential with the nominal nucleus of the predicative core, and no prosodic accent will be added to the predicative core. This index will thus function as the focus marker of this sentence. We have already seen above the prosodic structure of an EXT-PRES sentence in the first sentence of ex. 21 and figure 3 above. In that case, the prosodic accent is carried by an indefinite NP, being a newly introduced reference into the

discourse. In ex. 38 (with figure 4), the prosodically accented NP is definite,[25] still representing a newly introduced referent in the discourse, which fits the criteria for complementary distribution as describe above. In contrast, ex. 39 (with figure 5) exhibits segmental focus marking of the predicative core, which in this case is specific yet referenced by an indefinite NP.[26]

(38)   *od.meˈat j-ihˈje*   *et=ha=jejˈnot   ʃel=ha=ˈʃaj //*
       soon   3SGM.PRED-will.be *et*=DEF=wine-PL of=DEF=gift
       ''The gift wines will be available soon.' (C711_1_sp1_077)
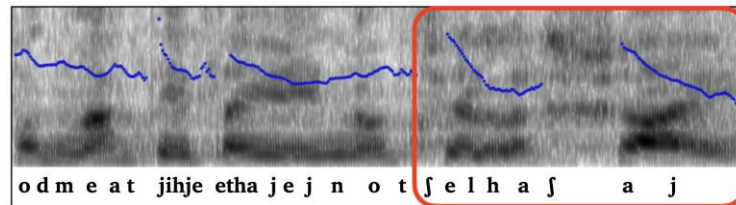

Figure 4: *od meat jihje ethajejnot ʃelhaʃaj*

(39)   *hajˈt-a*   *haʃkaˈa*   *noˈsef-et /*
       be\PFV-3SGF.PRED investment-F additional-F
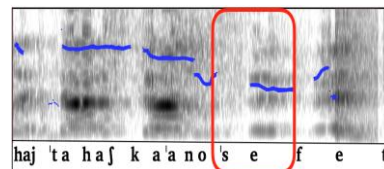   'There was an additional investment.'   (D933_sp2_033)

Figure 5: *hajta haʃkaa nosefet (ex. 39)*

The following examples show how this complementary distribution extends across a broader range of thetic sentences beyond its functioning in EXT-PRES sentences.

Ex. 40 is a short account about the birth of twins. The conversation is taking place over the phone, where only one speaker can be heard.

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[25] The definite article is preceded by the particle *et*, usually defined in the literature as a DOM (i.e., differential object marker). For a discussion of this particle in ext sentences see Izre'el, 2022[50]: §3.4 with previous references.

[26] The rising pitch on the ultimate syllable [fet] in ex. 39 (figure 5) indicates a minor (continuing) prosodic boundary. The same applies to the rising pitch on the consonant [m] at the end of line 1 of ex. 40 (figure 6) below.

(40)   'Rinat told me about someone (...)'

1   *ʃe   haˈj-u=lo*   *ʃne baˈn-im |*
    that were-3PL.PRED=to.him two son-PL
    'who had two sons,'

2   *ve noˈra raˈʦu   bat |*
    and very   they.wanted daughter
    'and they really wanted a daughter,'

3   *niχneˈsu   ˈod.paam leheraˈjon |*
    they.entered again   to.pregnancy
    'they got pregnant again,'

4   *ve jaˈʦ-u=lahem   teoˈm-im baˈn-im ||*
    and went.out-3PL.PRED=to.them twin-PL   son-PL
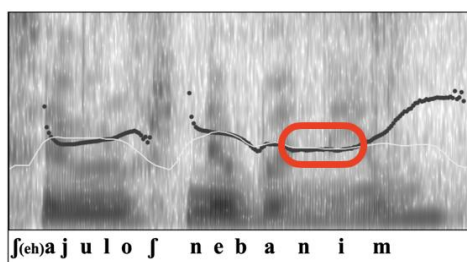   'but they got twin boys.' (C514_2_sp1_183-188)

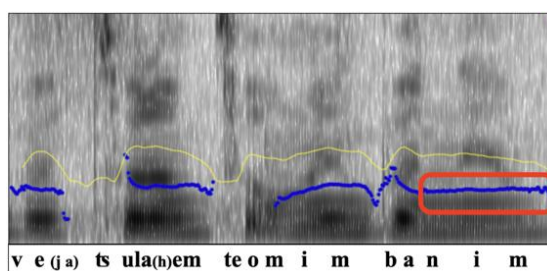**Figure 6**: *ʃe haju=lo ʃne banim* (ex. 40, line 1)

Figure 7: *ve jaʦu=lahem teomim banim* (ex. 40, line 4)

In ex. 40, the speaker constructs a possessive sentence beginning with the verb *haju* {were-3PL.PRED} 'they were' (line 1)[27] and a thetic sentence beginning with an EXT-like verb: *jaʦu* {went.out-3PL.PRED} 'they came out' (line 4). In both sentences, the focus is marked by thewcoreferential index of the occurrence constituent. Consequently, the predicative core does not carry a prosodic accent (figures 6 and 7, respectively). The interlocutor on the other side of the phone now takes the turn, and she seems to be telling a similar story of her own. About 7" later, in response to her interlocutor, the speaker utters the following statement:

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[27] As already mentioned above (§6.1 for ex. 35), possessive sentences share the same configuration as EXT sentences.

(41) *az   haˈja-ø=lo   ben ve **bat** ||*
    then was-3SGM.PRED=to.him son and daughter
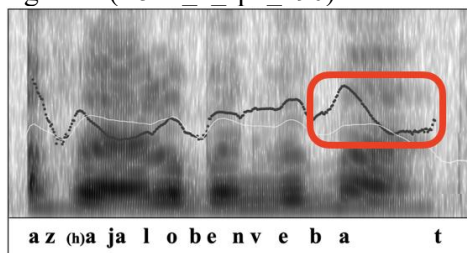   'So, he had a son and a daughter.' (C514_2_sp1_190)

Figure 8: *az haja=lo ben ve **bat*** (ex. 39)

Our inability to hear what preceded ex. 41 allows us only to assume that the speaker here tries to fill the data provided by her interlocutor with a conclusion of her own about the status of the mentioned person. Thus, the predicative core in this sentence is marked—as is common in EXT-PRES sentences of this type—by prosodic accent (Figure 8), while the index in the verb included in the occurrence constituent, viz., the EXT marker *haja-ø* {was-3SGM.PRED} 'there was', is non-referential. Indeed, the information conveyed in the predicative core here seems to be entirely new to the discourse. In ex. 42, the same speaker describes a similar case to another interlocutor, this time in face-to-face interaction:

(42)   1 sp1: *ˈmiʃehu   mi=<works name> |*
                someone from=<works name>
                'Someone from <works name>'
                ...
   2   *haˈja —   haˈju=lo   ʃne baˈnim |*
                was-3SGM.PRED were-3PL.PRED=to.him two sons
                'He had (lit. there was) ... he had (lit. there were to him) two sons,'
   3 sp2: *ken ||*
                yes
                'Yes.'
   4 sp1: *ve   az   iʃˈto   niχneˈsa le=heraˈjon   im=teoˈmim |*
                and then his.wife entered   to=pregnancy with=twins
                'and then his wife got pregnant with twins,'
   5 sp2: *ve   jaˈts-u   ʃte baˈnot /*
                and went.out-3PL.PRED two daughters
                'And they got two daughters?'
   6 sp1: *jaˈts-u   ben   ve   bat ||*
                went.out-3PL.PRED son and daughter
                'They got two sons.' (C514_2_sp1_327-332; sp2_004-005)

In contrast to the repair we saw in ex. 36 above, here the speaker feels it necessary to correct the index from non-referential to a referential one (line 2). On the face of it, this repair seems unnecessary, since the NP introduced into the discourse (*ʃne banim* 'two sons') is new. However, this NP was mentioned several times in a previous conversation (cf. above ex. 40 and ex. 42), which—although held with another interlocutor over the phone—was probably heard by the current interlocutor, who seems to have been present in the same room during the phone conversation. It may further be assumed, that the context prompted the speaker to use a configuration appropriate for an indefinite expected referent. This may also explain the similar configuration in line 5. However, the phrase 'boy and girl' (line 6) is probably unexpected, as it contrasts the interlocutor's expectation ('two girls', line 5). Thus, as in ex. 41, we would expect

focus marking by prosodic accent rather than by coreferentiality. The use of segmental marking can perhaps be explained by dialogic resonance between this utterance and the previous one (cf. Du Bois, 2014). Coreferentiality in this case may also be explained by the fact that 'boy and girl' is a specific pair, rather than a general one, i.e., it refers to specific individuals, viz., the specific boy and girl who were born to the mentioned person. The same applies to ex. 43:

(43) ˈjeʃ=lo   ʃne   baˈnim //
      EXT=to.him   two   sons
      'He has (lit. there is to him) two sons,' (C514_2_sp1_113)

In this case, segmental marking is impossible, as the occurrence constituent in this case is a particle, viz., *jeʃ*, but the lack of accent on the predicative core suggests specificity also in this case.

As I have noted in my study on EXT-PRES sentences (Izre'el, 2022[50]: §3.2.3), a similar phenomenon has been observed by Hoyt (2002) in rural Palestinian Arabic. In this dialect, coreferentiality of verb indexes indicates that the referred NP is more "specific" than when the index non-referential; e.g.,[28]

(44) čill   yowm   **b-iiǰi**   la-l-ṣaff   **ulaad**
      every day   INDIC-come3MS   to-the-class   boysMP
      'Every day, boys (some or another) come to class.'

(45) čill   yowm   **b-iiǰu**   la-l-ṣaff   **ulaad**
      every day   INDIC-come3MP   to-the-class   boysMP
      'Every day, (some particular) boys come to the class.' (Hoyt, 2002: 112, ex. 2a-b)

In ex. 44, the non-referential index indicates the arrival of unspecified children. In contrast, ex. 45 implies that the same children arrive. In both cases, the word *ulaad* 'boys' is indefinite. Whether the referent is specific or generic is indicated by the referential status of the index indicates.

I believe that a similar approach can apply also to ex. 17 (above, §3), repeated below as ex. 46:

(46) akˈts-a=oti   nemaˈl-a ||
      stung-3SGF=me   ant-SGF
      'An ant stung me.' (Firsthand data; July 21, 2024)

As the ant referred to is one specific ant rather than reference to the species, the speaker uses a configuration employing a referential index.[29] While quite rare, a non-referential configuration of a similar utterance has been found on the internet:

(47) aˈkats-ø=oti   tsirˈʔ-a[30]
      stung-3SGM=me   wasp-SGF
      'I got stung by a wasp.' ([https://stips.co.il/ask/13154678/באותו-שרף-וזה-צרעה-אותי-עקץ](https://stips.co.il/ask/13154678/)-
      רגע; uploaded August 2, 2022; accessed April 21, 2025)

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[28] Transcription and glossing are Hoyt's (a confusion in referring to the enumeration of the two examples have been corrected, though — S.I.). Hoyt's syntactic approach is different from the one proposed here (cf. also Hoyt, 2011: §5). For the concept of specificity see further Hoyt, 2011; Von Huisinger, 2019; Espinal & Sirino, 2022. Von Huisinger suggests determining specificity as "referential anchoring".

[29] For different analyses of a similar construction see Melnik, 2006; Kuzar, 2012: 193.

[30] This is the standard, most common IH reading pronunciation of the written string.

Thus, as is the case in the subset of EXT-PRES sentences, we can observe also in other thetic sentences a complementary distribution between two focus markers, viz., prosodic accent vs. coreferentiality of the index in the occurrence constituent and the referent represented in the predicative core. Segmental focus marking is employed when the predicative core represents a given, known, expected, or specific referent taking shape as an indefinite NP.

Thus, in all the above constructions, the NP—or, in the terminology used here, the *entity* constituent—has a similar syntactic function, viz., the sentence's *predicative core* (or its nucleus) The preceding constituent, the *occurrence*, be it a particle or an inflected form, non-referential or referential, is embedded in the predicate domain, thus forming together with the predicative core a unipartite sentence. The structural affinities of such constructions enables us to support the view that the occurrence constituent located in sentence initial position have much in common with modal elements and stance constructions, a point I shall briefly discuss in the Appendix (§6.2.1) below.

6.2.1 Appendix: Using Finite Verbs as Modal Constituents in Sentence Initial Position

Referring to the initial constituents in thetic sentences as modal (§5 above) and their relations to inflected constituents offer us an opportunity to point briefly at other constructions where a finite verb serves as a modal constituent at sentence initial position. This is not unexpected, as modal verbs (and related constructions) are well known and their role introducing sentences is rather common. This is illustrated by the following examples:

(48)   *ra ˈʦiti   ʦma ˈχim le=ba ˈχuʦ*   /
      I.wanted   plants   to=outside
      'I want plants for outside,' (C712_2_sp1_034)

(49)   *χa ˈʃavti   mi=**bad*** ||
      I.thought from=cloth ||
      'I though (they should be made) of cloth.' (OCh_sp2_143)

(50)   *a ˈni   ʃo ˈel   al=ha= ˈir   **aʦa ˈma***   //
      I   asking   on=the=city itself
      'I am asking about the city itself.' (OCh_sp2_030)

(51)   (*ha= ˈben=ʃelo*) *ra ˈʦa* **liv ˈdok** /   *im   hu   ja ˈχol ˈkaχa ve   ˈkaχa*   /
      (his.son) wanted   to.check   if   he   can   so   and so
      'His son wanted to check whether he can (do) this and that.' (P423_1_sp7_101-
102)

(52)   *χa ˈʃavti   u ˈlaj   **na ˈfal**=lahem*   //
      I.thought perhaps   it.fell=to.them
      'I thought maybe they dropped it.'(C711_4_sp3_037)

(53)   *ra ˈʦiti   ʃe   tik ˈχi   **po**   je ˈmina*   //
      I.wanted that   you_F.will.take here   rightward
      'I wanted you to take a right turn here.' (OCD_1_sp2_001)

(54)   *χa ˈʃavti   ʃe   ze   **ga ˈnav***   //
      I.thought that   this   thief
      'I thought it was a thief.' (P311_2_sp2_005)

In exx. 48-51, the modal verbs or participial clauses are followed by NPs, conventionally analyzed as their respective complements. In ex. 52, the modal verb is followed by a clause, in

itself beginning with the modal adverb *ulaj* 'perhaps'. In exx. 53-54, the modal verb is followed by the particle *ʃe*, usually interpreted as a subordinating or nominalizing particle, enabling the following clause to function as a NP in a matrix clause (Glinert, 1989: 309; Kuzar, 2013; Coffin & Bolozky, 2005: 11; on the various uses of *ʃe* in Modern Hebrew, see Inbar, 2016; 2019: ch. 5). Indeed, the conventional approach to analyzing the last three sentences places the verb at the initial position of a matrix clause, and what follows is interpreted as its complement (Bolozky & Berman, 2020: 306). This is equivalent to the phrasal complements in exx. 38-50 and in the second sentence of ex. 51, as well as with the infinitive form in the first sentence of ex. 51, a nominal form that inherently functions as a noun (cf. Berman, 2020: §4) here perceived as the object of a sentence. It will be noted, that exx. 52-54 may be compared to the representation of direct and indirect speech respectively, distinguished by the fact that indirect speech tends to be marked by the particle *ʃe* (Inbar, 2019: §5.2).[31] This difference is illustrated by exx. 55 (indirect speech) and 56 (direct speech).

(55)   *ve hu aˈmar ʃe **ze** saˈlon //*
       and he said   that this living.room
       'And he said that the living room was this (room).' (C842_sp1_077)

(56)   *ki   aˈmarti ze   jafˈria=la ||*
       because I.said   this   will.disturb=her
       'Because I said: this will bother her.' (P423_2_sp2_045)

However, a different analysis of similar constructions was suggested by Thompson (2002), who argued that

> the standard view of complements as subordinate clauses in a grammatical relation with a complement-taking predicate is not supported by the data. Rather, what has been described under the heading of complementation can be understood in terms of epistemic/evidential/evaluative formulaic fragments expressing speaker stance toward the content of a clause. (Thompson, 2002: 125)

Similar analyses were proposed for Hebrew by Ziv (2016), who actually referred to the initial clause as a "stance clause", and by Maschler and Nir (2014), who analyzed the phenomenon from the perspective of emergent grammar and grammaticalization. For an innovative semantic analysis of these constructions in colloquial IH, see Inbar, 2019: §§5.3, 5.5.

Now, when dealing with stance expressions, it is worth mentioning that there is significant semantic proximity between stance and modality, to the extent that, in a broader framework, the stance category could encompass (or even replace) the category of modality, in itself quite broad and varied (Keisanen & Kärkkäinen, 2014).[32] This enables us to compare the constructional proximity between sentence formation within the super-category of stance or modality to that within the category of theticity, particularly with respect to the initial occurrence constituent and its scope (cf. Ziv, 2016). It should further be noticed, that in both categories it is the second constituent that is marked as focal by prosodic accent. The framework and analysis proposed herewith suggests that the occurrence constituent, be it a particle or an inflected form, is integral to the predicate domain, thus embedded within a unipartite sentence. The comparison in Table 3

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[31] This conventional description is simplistic, as shown by Goldenberg in his discussion of corresponding constructions in Biblical Hebrew (Goldenberg, 1998[32]).

[32] Suggested with regard to the narrower, more commonly used definition of modality than the one held here (as mentioned in §4 above; see Izre'el, 2018[49]: §5 with previous references).

below clearly illustrates this point of view, along with the structural parallelism of modal or stance constituents with other inflected forms:

Table 3: Embedding of the occurrence constituent into a unipartite sentence

Occurrence	Predicative core		ex. #
hine	*ˈnatan* //		
PRES	Nathan	'Here is Nathan.'	7
jeʃ	*ˈdʒukim*		
EXT	cockroaches	'There are cockroaches.'	8
haˈja-ø	*χavaˈj-a*		
was-3SGM.PRED	experience-SGF	'it was an experience.'	21/1; 25
jaˈʦ-u	*ben ve bat*		
went.out-3PL.PRED	son and daughter	'They got a son and a daughter.'	42(6)
χaˈʃavti	*mi=**bad***		
I.thought	from=cloth	'I though (they should be made) of cloth.'	49
hu jaˈχol	*ˈkaχa ve ˈ**kaχa***		
he can	so and so	'whether he can (do) this and that.'	51/2
χaˈʃavti	*ʃe ze **gaˈnav***		
I.thought	that this thief	'I thought it was a thief.'	54

According to this view, we may gain the insight—which may appear as an oxymoron—that each of the constituents, the occurrence and predicative core, can be constructed as a bipartite sentence, each comprising a predicate and a subject, all embedded as constituents in a unipartite sentence, thus:

Occurrence		Predicative core		
Predicate-subject		**Subject**	**predicate**	
χaˈʃav-ti	*ʃe*	*ze*	*gaˈnav*	
thought-1SG.PRED	that	this	thief	'I thought it was a thief.' (ex. 54)

However, this is not truly an oxymoron: once we become aware of the fact that a verb—like any other clause—can be embedded within a matrix clause in various roles (see above, §4; Izre'el, 2003), it should not surprise us that it can function either as a predicative core or as an occurrence constituent—or both—, as the above analysis illustrates. For a verb as a PRES constituent see also ex. 27 (§6.1) above.

In the minority of sentences where the particle *ʃe* is present, it may be regarded as modal, primarily marking *de dicto* modality in various functions, framing the following constituent as a proposition closely linked to the previous one (Inbar, 2019: Ch. 6; cf. Frajzyngier, 1991; Frajzyngier & Jasperson, 1991).

6.2.2 Some exceptions: constructions including both referential index and prosodic accent

In §6.2, we discussed constructions where the occurrence constituent contains a referential index. As we have seen, thetic sentences exhibit complementary distribution between coreferential indexing and prosodic accent as focus markers. Alongside these constructions, *CoSIH* attests to two cases where the occurrence constituent contains a coreferential marker, yet the predicative core exhibits prosodic prominence as well. These atypical constructions are cited as exx. 57-58.

(57) *az aχˈʃav hi mefaˈχedet ʃe   j-ihˈj-u=la   ʃne **baˈnim** ||*
      so   now   she fears   that 3PL-will.be-3PL=to.her two boys
      'So now she is afraid that she will have two boys.' (C514_2_sp1_179)

(58) *aˈfilu χaseˈr-a   **aruˈχa** ||*
      even   missing-SGF   meal-SGF
      'There is even a missing meal.' (D142_sp1_080 = ex. 13, §3 above)

Ex. 57 had been uttered before the conversations about the birth of twins cited above (§6.2, exx. 41–44) took place. This sentence concludes a narrative about a couple with two boys, who discovered at a very late stage of yet another pregnancy, that they were going to have twins. It seems that the prosodic accent on *banim* 'boys' is not structural but pragmatic (cf. Bolinger, 1989: 74-76; Hirschberg, 2004), aiming to highlight the gender of the children, i.e., the possibility of having two more boys in the family rather than girls. The same applies to ex. 58, where the conversation revolves around guesthouses in ski areas, and the speaker highlights the comparison between different types of guesthouses as follows:

(58a) sp1 *aval ze   garˈni //*
          but DEM.SGM garni
          'But it is a garni.'

      ze   rak aruˈχat   ˈboker||
          it   only meal.of morning
          'It (includes) only breakfast.'

      ...

      aˈfilu lo   aruˈχat   ˈboker||
          even NEG meal.of morning
          'Even not breakfast.'

      aˈni l-   aˈfilu   lo χoˈʃev   ʃe   ze aruˈχat ˈboker||
          I   n- even NEG thinking that it meal.of morning
          'I don'... don't think it (includes) even breakfast.'

      ...

      sp3 *ze bli   klum||*
          it   without anything
          'It includes nothing.'

      sp1 *ze bli   klum||*
          it   without anything
          'It includes nothing.'

      zot.oˈmeret ze||
          that.is it
          'That is, it ...'

(58)   *aˈˈfilu χaseˈr-a*   **aruˈχa** ||
        even   missing-SGF   meal-SGF
        'There is even a missing meal.'

        leuˈmat   *ha=ˈklab* ||
        in.contrast.to   the=club
        'Comparing to the club.'
    (D142_sp1_016-019; 078-081; sp3_040)

The sentence in ex. 58 appears to be thetic, both in segmental form (word order) and in content. The NP *aruχa* 'meal' represents a given referent, as it has already been mentioned three times in this discourse segment. Therefore, focus marking is expected to be realized by the coreferential index of the adjective *χasera* 'missing' and no prosodic accent is expected to be perceived. Yet, as in ex. 57, the role of the prosodic accent is not structural but pragmatic, highlighting the referent *aruχa* 'meal' that is not included in the guesthouse under discussion as against other places, such as the club mentioned in the next utterance. Therefore, structural focus marking in both cases is carried out only by coreferentiality.

7 The cognitive basis of occurrence-initial thetic constructions

In thetic constructions of the type dealt with in this study, the message conveyed by the entire sentence is first expressed in relation to the situation—or occurrence, as I have termed it—, then by the entity which is to be found at the focal point of the situation, conveyed by the predicative core. Kuroda (cf. §1 above) illustrates this state of affairs by a statement about a dog running, or, rather, the running of a dog:

> One notices an event of running; an act of running necessarily involves the actor of the action, and this actor being recognized as a dog is referred to by the word *dog*. (Kuroda, 1972: 162)

In their works on negation in EXT sentences in Russian (Borschev & Partee, 2002; Partee & Borschev, 2004; 2007; Partee *et al.*, 2012), Borschev and Partee proposed the concept of *perspectival structure*:[33]

> Perspectival structure is basically a structuring at the model-theoretic level, like the telic/atelic distinction, or the distinction between Agents and Experiencers. These properties reflect cognitive structuring of the domains that we use language to talk about, and are not simply "given" by the nature of the external world. (Partee & Borschev, 2004: 219)

Borschev and Partee used the concept of perspectival structure to analyze the morphosyntactic differences between categorical and EXT sentences and the relation of the latter to existence in a location. In this context, they defined what they termed *perspectival center* as follows:

> An "existence/location situation" BE(THING, LOC) may be structured from the perspective of the THING or of the LOCation. We use the term *Perspectival Center*

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[33] Despite some overlap between Borshev & Partee's concept of perspectival structure and the concept of perspective (or perspectivization) in cognitive linguistics (especially Talmy, 2000: Ch. 1; for an overview see, e.g., Verhagen, 2007), these two concepts should not be equated.

for the participant chosen as point of departure for structuring the situation. (Partee & Borschev, 2004: 217)

Elsewhere, they addressed the thetic characteristics of an EXT sentence when it lacks reference to location as follows:

In the unmarked structure, the THING is chosen as "Perspectival Center"; this is a Predicational sentence. In an Existential sentence, the LOC is chosen as "Perspectival Center"; in some sense it turns the predication around: saying of the LOC that it has THING in it. If the LOC is implicit, this is a "thetic judgment". (Partee & Borschev, 2007: 156)

In a note regarding the mention of "location" in this context, the authors commented thus:

This is oversimplified; the term "LOCation" must be construed broadly, and the sentences are not only about existence but also 'coming into existence', 'being present', occurring, being in one's perceptual field, etc. (*Loc. cit.*, note 7)

Borschev and Partee used the metaphor of a movie camera in this regard, emphasizing that the perspectival center is not analogous to Bühler's *origo*:[34] The *origo* would correspond to the eye of the cameraman, while the perspectival center corresponds to the element the camera follows. Paraphrasing their description (Borschev & Partee, 2002: 221), we can envision the virtual camera following an entity, in which case the entity becomes the perspectival center, or focusing on the background, in which case the background becomes the perspectival center.

The aforementioned proposal is grounded in visual perception, and rightly so, as cognition underpins linguistic structures, including all their components (see, among others, Talmy, 2000: chs. 1–3; further—briefly—Kwiatkowska, 1997). To a certain degree, this approach can be compared to the Gestalt psychological theory. In harmony with this theory, Navon demonstrated that perceiving global structures precedes the perception of its details ("global precedence"; Navon, 1977; 1981). Kwiatkowska explains:

Global precedence may be motivated biologically. The global structure of stimuli tends to be more unique, and thus more suggestive of the identity of the stimulus than local features. Therefore, when there is only sufficient time for a partial perceptual analysis, it may be more valuable if one first obtains information about the general structure of an object, so that it can be identified and perceived with minimal delay. Seeing a long thin moving shape in the grass, most people instinctively take some definite action immediately rather than stoop to take another look to determine whether the shape is really a snake and whether it is the harmless kind or otherwise. (Kwiatkowska, 1997: 180).

Global precedence is not limited to visual perception but applies to the perception of linguistic units as well (Kwiatkowska, 1997 and references therein). Furthermore, it is not confined to perception but also determines the way a speaker choses to convey an account of a scene (Kwiatkowska, 1997: 187ff.).

While Gestalt theory directs the global precedence hypothesis toward linguistic constructions in general, I believe that thetic sentence structure fits particularly well with this line of thinking, as the purpose of a thetic sentence is both to convey all-new statements and to

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[34] "*Origo* (Latin "origin, source" – what is meant is the actual speech situation) ... is at the bottom of all deictic processes and ... is the point of departure for all deixis." (Abraham, 2011: §2.1; Bühler, 2011[1934]).

introduce (or reintroduce) a referent into the discourse. As we have seen, in thetic sentences the entity is typically introduced after presenting the occurrence.

Furthermore, in conformity with the visual foundations of the Gestalt theory, we can identify in thetic sentences *ground* and *figure* relations. As Talmy conceptualizes these constituents, the *figure*—be it an entity or an occurrence—is situated and defined relative to another entity or occurrence, which functions as its ground. Both figure and ground can be defined either in spatial or in temporal terms (Talmy, 2003: 17–20; Talmy 2025: §4; see also Talmy, 2000: Vol. I, Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion). Talmy provides the following examples:

Spatial relations: *The bike is near the house.*

Temporal relations: *He exploded after he touched the button.*

For our needs, we can perceive ground and figure with respect to the relations between entity and occurrence. This perspective resembles the theme-rheme relations established by members of the Prague Linguistic Circle (see, among others, Mathesius, 1983 [1929]). While the relationship between theme and rheme is usually interpreted as represented by the relationship between subject and predicate, this is not so in thetic sentences, definitely not within the framework presented here, i.e., analyzing them as unipartite sentences, where the occurrence and the entity are treated as constituting together a predicate domain.[35]

However, this comparison is not entirely groundless. Just as the theme, being the ground constituent, usually appears initially and the rheme, being the figure constituent, carries the sentence's prominence, so is constituent order in thetic sentence: the entity constituent, carrying the sentence's prominence, follows the occurrence constituent. The entity will thus be regarded as figure, whereas the occurrence will be interpreted as ground. Positioning of constituents at the beginning of a sentence may reflect, among other things, the principle of laying the foundations first as proposed by Gernsbacher & Hargreaves (1992),[36] thus making an analogy between sentence construction and constructing physical structures. The difference between assigning ground and figure functions for constituents in categorical and thetic sentences is that in the latter we account for constituents located *within* the predicate domain.

Luis Filipe Lima e Silva has kindly made the following observation concerning the relationship between the Gestalt Theory and thetic sentences inIH:

For the visual field, K. Koffka says that "the contours which shape the figure do not shape its ground; if the latter has a shape, it owes this to other forces than those which produce the figure upon it." (Koffka 1935: 184). This statement suits unipartite sentences very well since the entity (the figure) is the predicative core and the occurrence (the ground) is an embedded constituent, meaning the two constituents are different in nature. In other words, "the contours" (the grammatical, discursive, and informational properties) that "shape" (give rise to) the entity do not "shape" (constitute) its respective ground.[37]

At this juncture, it will also be useful to draw attention to Talmy's insights, who observed that in complex sentences, the subordinate clause usually precedes the main clause, with the former serving as ground and the latter as figure (Talmy, 2000: 327 and ch. 5 in its entirety). Thus,

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[35] Partee and Borshev (2004; 2007) distinguish between theme and perspectival center, discussing with some detail Babby's contribution to this issue. It will further be noticed, that theme and rheme are different concepts than topic and comment and should not be equated (LaPolla, 2019)

[36] See also other articles in the collection where this article has been published (Payne, 1992), along with Payne's introduction (*ibid*.: 1-13).

[37] I kindly thank Luis Filipe Lima e Silva for this contribution.

subordination—or rather embedding—of an inflected occurrence constituent,[38] indicates that this constituent functions as the ground element, thus placing the predicative core in the figure position, as indicated also by making it the focal constituent of the construction.

8 Conclusions

Linguistic tradition, having its roots in the interpretation to Aristotle's philosophy, has established rigid conventions regarding linguistic structure, both because it relied on the logical aspect of Aristotle's work and because Greek, particularly its written varieties, served as a model for analyzing language in general. The view of sentences as units that must contain both subject and predicate, and the depiction of the subject as a primary and therefore obligatory constituent in a sentence where the predicate functions as its attribute, is not based on solid principles derived from observation of language structure but rather on a fixation rooted in this European linguistic tradition. This tradition also underpins the exposition of thetic sentences, placing obstacles in the endeavors to bridge the division between syntax and meaning or function in this type of constructions. In these pages, I have sought to demonstrate that an in-depth observation of linguistic structure—one based on data, mainly using a corpus-driven approach (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001), rather than on a pre-existing theory—can promote a syntactic analysis suitable to the understanding of thetic sentences as manifesting holistic information better than the conventional analyses.

The core concept underlying the proposed analysis is the notion of unipartite sentence. This type of sentence suits well the understanding of thetic sentences, if we accept that its primary use lies in presenting or introducing a new referent into the discourse, as well as in conveying an all-new statement. Defining the predicate as the constituent representing a newly introduced information fits this perception well. Moreover, defining the predicate as a sufficient constituent in the sentence—viewing its ability to constitute itself a unipartite sentence—enables us to establish a perception of thetic sentences not only as a functional or pragmatic complete unit but also as a syntactic one. In the proposed analysis, if two constituents are identified in a unipartite thetic sentence: they should be construed not—as in the conventional analysis—a subject and a predicate in inverted positions, but rather as two constituents contained within a single predicate domain: a representation of an occurrence followed by a representation of an entity. Breaking out of the common box of clichés, one might say that if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it's not because it's a duck, but because tradition has conditioned us to recognize it as such.

Attention to the inflected forms in embedded constituents within a unipartite sentence further illuminates the interpretation of a thetic sentence as a syntactic whole. When the occurrence constituent contains an inflected form, it is perceived as embedded within the predicate domain. We noticed a complementary distribution between coreferentiality vs. non-referentiality accompanied by prosodic accent within the predicative core, both sharing the function of focus marking, in itself one of the defining features of predicate. Segmental marking occurs when the referent represented in the predicative core is given, known, expected, or specific yet indefinite.

It has been proposed that analyzing a thetic sentence as a semantic, functional and structural whole—word order and prosody being salient features in its configuration—can be anchored in

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[38] Embedding a verb, as we will recall (see §4 above,), is, in fact, embedding a complete sentence.

cognition, wherein the predicative core is perceived as the figure constituent, saliently projected by the ground constituent, viz., the occurrence in whatever form it may take.

As noted, the study presented here is primarily based on data from the Corpus of Spoken Israeli Hebrew (*CoSIH*), a corpus that enables us to examine trends in usage patterns of colloquial IH and to propose constructional schemes and rules. However, *CoSIH* is insufficient for drawing definitive conclusions regarding structural alternatives that may emerge in a large-scale corpus.[39] Using a corpus-driven approach, it has not been feasible to encompass the entire range of alternatives—linguistic, social, cultural, and individual—so as to come to solid conclusions as regards their impact on colloquial IH. Special attention must be given to this observation, since all-embracing coreferentiality is the standard prescription for both written and spoken Hebrew in all its varieties and in all constructions, including thetic sentences (for alternations between writing and speaking in EXT-PRES constructions, see Izre'el, 2020: §8). Therefore, this study has had a rather limited scope, discussing only thetic sentences showing a configuration of the construction commonly referred to as VS (or P1), which I hope to have now brought convincing arguments showing that such constructions should be referred to not as VS or "subject inversion" constructions, but as unipartite sentences.

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[39] Moreover, as already commented above (§6.1), in order to find out the status of indexes in the occurrence constituent, only F and PL PNs in the predicative core are effective for this research, since SGM indexes are ambiguous as regards referentiality. This requirement drastically reduces the number of occurrences relevant to this research topic, all the more so of the number of exceptions.

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