Subject to Change

Nofar Rimon[a] & Tal Siloni[b]

[a]Harvard University, [b]Tel Aviv University

Introduction In colloquial Hebrew, unaccusatives may fail to exhibit φ-agreement with the internal argument in V(erb)S(ubject) order, but not in SV. This has been analyzed as agreement failure, resulting from the structural intervention of a possessive dative (PD) (Preminger, 2009). This paper presents novel data and experimental results that challenge this analysis, showing that lack of agreement is possible without intervention. We provide evidence that lack of agreement in this configuration results from the reanalysis of the postverbal subject as caseless. This reanalysis is liable to occur in languages that don't morphologically mark nominative, such as Hebrew.

Background In colloquial Hebrew, VS unaccusatives may fail to exhibit φ-agreement: the verb shows default agreement (3M.SG) although its subject is feminine or plural (or both) (1). This lack of φ-agreement is impossible in SV (2).

(1) nafal   le-dina   ha-maftexot
    fell-**3M.SG** DAT-Dina the-key-**M.PL**
    'Dina's keys fell'

(2) *ha-maftexot   nafal   (le-dina)
     the-key-**M.PL** fell-**3M.SG** (DAT-Dina)

Preminger (2009) is the only theoretical study addressing this seemingly optional φ-agreement. He analyzes this as agreement failure, caused by a φ-feature bearing intervener, a possessive dative, which blocks agreement between the verb and its postverbal subject (1). This supports Preminger's view that sentences involving attempted-but-failed agreement are grammatical. However, examples from everyday speech show that unaccusative verbs fail to establish φ-agreement with their internal arguments even when a PD is absent (3).

(3) nigmar   ha-tutim
    ended-**3M.SG** the-strawberry-**M.PL**
    'There are no more strawberries'

Main Claims We advance and provide evidence for the following claims: (i) Lack of agreement in Hebrew VS does not support Preminger's 'agreement failure' approach. (ii) What seems to be agreement optionality in Hebrew VS is the availability of two competing analyses. (iii) Nominative is instable in the internal subject position and may be lost in languages that don't mark it. This may lead to loss of φ-agreement in unaccusative VS.

Experiments We report 3 acceptability judgment experiments examining the acceptability of lack of agreement with/without intervention, and the effect of different types of intervention. The results reveal that lack of agreement is possible in colloquial Hebrew with and without intervention. Intervention improves, but is not required for, lack of agreement to occur. Moreover, not only PDs but also adverbs (with no φ-features) improve lack of agreement.

Proposal As the presence of an intervening PD does not license lack of agreement, Preminger's agreement failure approach cannot be maintained. We propose that what surfaces as agreement optionality is two competing analyses available to speakers in unaccusative VS configurations: (i) a nominative-bearing postverbal argument (subject) triggering φ-agreement; (ii) a caseless postverbal argument failing to trigger φ-agreement. On both analyses, the EPP feature is satisfied by external MERGE with a null expletive. On analysis (i) AGREE between $T_{[u\varphi]}$ and the postverbal nominative argument results in φ-agreement. On analysis (ii), the postverbal argument, lacking nominative case, is no longer

visible for T$_{[u\varphi]}$'s probing. Unable to find a relevant goal in its search domain, T$_{[u\varphi]}$ gets valued by the externally merged null expletive (3M.SG). Similarly, when the EPP feature is satisfied by internal MERGE, T's features get valued by the internal argument. This is unattested with unergatives which disallow VS, as V-to-T activates internal MERGE of the subject as SpecTP.

We argue that in Modern Hebrew the loss of nominative in the internal argument position is triggered due to lack of morphological marking and enhanced by the loss of nominative postverbal subject pronouns. While in earlier stages pronominal nominative subjects could appear postverbally, nowadays pronouns appear almost always preverbally, and in internal argument position they no longer bear nominative (4).

(4) *nišar   le-xa   hu
    remained-3M.SG DAT-you-M.SG he
    'You had this remained'

Additional evidence for the loss of nominative comes from instances of unaccusatives whose postverbal arguments appear with the direct object marker (OM) *et* (5), which also introduces caseless NPs in adjectival constructions (see Siloni, 1997).

(5) hofi'a   li   et ha-mila   ha-zot   ba-milon
    appeared-3M.SG DAT-me OM the-word-F.SG the-this-F.SG in-the-dictionary
    'This word appeared in the dictionary'

Finally, we argue, Hebrew existential and possessive constructions had undergone a parallel process in the 20th century. During the revival of Hebrew, these VS constructions began to exhibit lack of agreement, and the postverbal argument began appearing with the object marker (Berman, 1980; Melnik, 2006; Taube, 2015; Ziv, 1976). Nowadays, this lack of agreement has become dominant and the lack of object marking is odd and even impossible (6-7).

(6) haya   sfarim/otam/*hem   ba-sifriya
    was-3M.SG book-M.PL/them/*they in-the-library
    'There were books in the library'

(7) haya   #(et) ha-sefer ha-ze ba-sifriya
    was-3M.SG (OM) the-book the-this in-the-library

In Sum We present evidence against Preminger's agreement failure approach. Discussing unaccusative, existential and possessive constructions, we argue that lack of φ-agreement with a postverbal internal subject is developing in colloquial Hebrew due to loss of nominative, which is liable to occur in languages that don't morphologically mark it.

References Berman (1980) The case of an (S)VO language: Subjectless constructions in Modern Hebrew. *Language*. **Melnik** (2006) A constructional approach to verb-initial constructions in Modern Hebrew. *Cognitive Linguistics*. **Preminger** (2009) Failure to agree is not a failure: φ-agreement with post-verbal subjects in Hebrew. *Linguistic Variation Yearbook*. **Siloni** (1997) Noun phrases and nominalizations: The syntax of DPs. *Springer Science & Business Media*. **Taube** (2015) The usual suspects: Slavic, Yiddish, and the accusative existentials and possessives in modern Hebrew. *Journal of Jewish Languages*. **Ziv** (1976) On the reanalysis of grammatical terms in Hebrew possessive constructions. *Studies in Modern Hebrew Syntax and Semantics: The Transformational-Generative Approach*. Amsterdam: North Holland.

.