**Abstract**

***Topic and Purpose of the Study***

The purpose of this study is to present the changing valency of the semantic field of goal verbs—a subgroup of motive verbs—in the modern Hebrew press between 1900 and 2000. Motion verbs are acquired at an early stage by children and are among the most common and dominant in the language. Consequently, studies that deal with them are immensely important. This study focuses on goal verbs harvested from the Hebrew press: *ba* (come), *higi'a* (arrive), *niḵnas* (enter), and *šav* and *ḥazar* (return).

Two main questions underlie the study. First, did these verbs undergo semantic changes, such as narrowing and extension, that revised the valency of their field over the years (i.e., narrower diffusion of one verb and broader diffusion of another)? To answer this question, the denotations of the verbs in Hebrew dictionaries, reflecting the various strata of the Hebrew language, are examined, as are semantic and syntactic components of the verbs: selectional restrictions of the entity in motion of each verb and its target complements; its semantic and syntactic valancy; its lexical aspect, intentions, deixis, and so on.

Second, what sources inspired the changes that occurred in the use of these goal verbs? The main sources examined are Biblical Hebrew, the language of the Sages, and the speakers’ background languages, particularly Russian, Yiddish, or a combination of both.

**Historical background**

It is standard practice to divide Modern Hebrew into three periods: 1881/82–1917, 1917–1948, and 1948 to the present. These periods overlap historical events that occurred in the Land of Israel and the language typically used in each period, including that of the press, has specific syntactic, lexical, and morphological characteristics. At the end of the first period, Hebrew began to be spoken; therefore, 1900 is chosen as the starting year of the current study.

In the first years for which the corpus is examined, only a few people spoke Hebrew and even they were not native speakers. Given that Modern Hebrew crystallized during these years, it underwent frequent changes. By the middle of the period, Hebrew jelled steadily and already had many native speakers who wrote for the press.

When Modern Hebrew experienced its inception in the so-called “language revival” period, those who spoke the language, foremost Eliezer Ben-Yehuda and the members of the Hebrew Language Committee, considered Biblical Hebrew a preferential source of linguistic innovation. Naturally, however, the background languages of those who carried out these innovations, foremost Russian, also influenced Hebrew usage. As the years passed, Hebrew speakers and those involved in the Academy of the Hebrew Language were increasingly willing to regard other strata of Hebrew, such as the language of the Sages, as legitimate sources for the modern tongue.

**Aspects for discussion of motion verbs**

To identify changes that occurred in the use of the goal verbs, semantic and syntactic analysis of the verbs is needed. Such an analysis includes components such as the valency of the verb and selectional restrictions that are common to motion verbs in general, and more specific components, such as deixis, that are relevant for only some motion verbs— particularly *ba*, which stands at the center of this study. Verbal valency is divided into three classes: formal, semantic, and syntactic. Formal valency takes account of the number of arguments that participate in the verb. In motion verbs, there are three participants: entity in motion, source, and goal. In accordance with the Götz-Vettoler (2007) approach, my discussion of the semantic valency of the goal verbs includes a description of the semantic units that can be emplaced in each syntactic position. The discussion of syntactic valancy includes a description of surface complements, including the syntactic (not the pragmatic) conditions under which they may be omitted. Pursuant to Fillmore (2007), cases of poor fit between the semantic valency and syntactic valency are also discussed in this study and various semantic components of the goal verbs that brought these cases about are examined.

An important component discussed in this context is selectional restriction, i.e., the conditions under which lexemes may connect with each other additively. This concept is grounded in Chomsky’s (1957) theory, which formulates the rules of selection from the syntactic standpoint. On the basis of this theory, Katz and Fodor (1963) developed the semantic-component theory, from which the research occupation with selectional restrictions eventually evolved.

Another component discussed due to its impact on syntactic valency is deixis—the direction in which the verb points. This component, central in the importance of the verb *ba*, is discussed at length in Fillmore (1966, 1971a, 1975a, 1975b) in respect to the English verb *come*, and by Levinson (2008) and Oshima (2006a) in regard to corresponding verbs in other languages.

Pursuant to Vendler (1957), verbs are sorted in terms of their lexical aspect into “achievement” verbs, “accomplishment” verbs, “activity” verbs, and “stative” verbs. This taxonomy is based on the time patterns encoded in them: moment-verbs versus ongoing verbs, endpoint verbs as against non-endpoint verbs, and static verbs versus dynamic verbs. Over the years, various tests that may be used to categorize verbs have been proposed. (In regard to Hebrew, see Yitzhaki, 2004, and Boneh, 2013.)

Talmy (1985) distinguishes between languages that encode components such as deixis or mode of motion in the verb itself (verb-framed languages) and those that encode them in satellites (satellite-framed languages). Rappaport shows that in Modern Hebrew, in contrast to Biblical Hebrew—a classical verb-framed language—one can find behavior befitting a satellite-framed language such as English. In my discussion of verb complements, I take up the question of the adoption by Modern Hebrew of patterns from satellite-framed languages.

As the study proceeds, the approach of Professor Yael Reshef (2012), a researcher of the onset of Modern Hebrew, is adopted. Accordingly, the discussion of the inception of Modern Hebrew also includes a diachronic examination that, in its essence, involves comparison with previous Hebrew linguistic strata, Biblical Hebrew in particular. This is because Biblical Hebrew constituted the linguistic infrastructure of Hebrew speakers at the time and was the stratum of the language that they aspired to resurrect.

**The research corpus and the course of the discussion**

An initial sample of the Hebrew press between 1900 and 2000 reveals variance in the diffusion of goal verbs during the century-long evolution of the Hebrew language; it was pursuant to this model that the research corpus was constructed. Per recommendation of Professor Yael Reshef, I examine newspapers at ten-year intervals at the onset of Modern Hebrew and at twenty-five-year intervals farther on. Consequently, the corpus comprises 800 points in time across the century of Modern Hebrew. Given that no newspaper appeared throughout the entire research period, the most widely distributed non-sectorial newspapers at each point in time—*Ha-Tsefira, Yedioth Ahronoth, Ma’ariv,* and again *Yedioth Ahronoth*—are included in the corpus.

Following the guidelines of the former Ben-Gurion University statistician Mrs. Tsipi Parnassa, I gathered approximately thirty occurrences of the verb *ba* at each point in time as well as other goal verbs that appeared on the same pages. The verbs were gathered manually because digital collection was not feasible. Overall, 689 instances of goal verbs were collected.

To assess the changes that occurred in the semantic field of the motion verbs generally, and those in the goal-verb category particularly, I discuss each verb separately. First, I examine its diffusion over the years and discuss its semantic and syntactic components at each point in time. In view of the outcome, the changes and tendencies typical of the various verbs over the years, in accordance with the points in time tested, are presented, and possible influences that induced the changes that were found (particularly those earlier strata and of other languages, as stated) are described.

**Findings**

It was found in the study that the diffusion of the verbs in the semantic field of the goal verbs changed over the years—wider diffusion of some verbs and less diffusion of others. In the diffusion of the verb *higi'a,* a statistically significant difference during the years investigated is detected. In the diffusion of *ba*, in contrast, a tendency toward reduced use is detected but it falls short of statistical significance. Use of the verbs *niḵnas, šav,* and *ḥazar* trended upward in 2000, in a process first observed in 1975.

To explain the changes in the diffusion of these verbs, selectional restrictions of the entity for which the verb describes motion are examined. The statistical tests point to a significant decrease in the use of *ba* in cases where the motion is abstract (e.g., *shemu’a,* hearing). Namely, *ba* underwentsemantic restriction over the years such that by 2000 it appeared only in cases where the entity in motion was human (e.g., *adam,* person) or tangible (e.g., *kadur,* ball). In regard to the other verbs, no statistically significant changes associated with situational restrictions are found: The verb *higi'a* is not semantically restricted to an entity in motion that emerges a specific semantic category. As for the other goal verbs, there were too few occurrences to allow statistical testing of their diffusion. Notably, however, throughout the research period, the entity in motion in the verbs *niḵnas* and *šav* was human only, whereas in *ḥazar* it was tangible or human.

**Conclusions**

The diffusion of the selected verbs in the semantic field of goal verbs proves to have been affected by several processes, foremost semantic and syntactic changes that occurred in the verbs, *ba* in particular.

The selectional restrictions to the entity in motion of *ba* have changed over the years. When Modern Hebrew was in its inception phase, the entity could have been human, tangible, or abstract. Over time, however, selectional restrictions limited its use to human or tangible entities only. Furthermore, it was found in the discussion of subcategories that, in the case of *ba*, the semantic content of a tangible entity in motion also changed over the years. At the onset of Modern Hebrew, it accommodated a component of motion in its denotation. This category included objects such as a suitcase or a letter, to which, as the speakers knew, movement from place to place is inherent. In subsequent years, however, the tangible entity in motion included, mainly, objects that do not include a component of motion in their denotation, such as rifles.

Another change associated with the verb *ba* occurred in its deixis, i.e., the direction of motion to which it points (relative to the zero point of the communication). In recent Modern Hebrew, *ba* is used in contexts in which the zero point of communication is the speaker or the party spoken to, and also in contexts where the gaze is redirected to the subject of the discourse or to a central place in the discourse, constituting a narrative zero point. At the outset of Modern Hebrew, *ba* is used not only in these contexts but also in contexts where movement away from the speaker is observed and a point of view leading toward the goal of the action is not constructed. No such use is found in later Hebrew; the narrow deictic component, solely toward “the speaker or the party spoken to,” appears to have gathered strength over time. This change reduced the valency of the verb *ba* because a deictic *ba,* in the narrow sense, includes the information that the motion took place toward the communication zero point, making it unnecessary to specify the destination of the motion.

As for the lexical aspects of the goal verbs *ba* and *higi'a*, both are achievement verbs but only *ba* also passes one of the tests of an “activity verb”; apparently, it is the deictic component in carrying out the motion that establishes this from the semantic standpoint.

The diffusion of the verb *higi'a* accelerated significantly over time—an interesting finding given that the various components of the verb underwent no semantic changes over the years. In fact, this very fact appears to have facilitated the transition away from *ba,* which suffered a contraction in its denotation, to *higi'a.* In chronological terms, it is evident that the increase in the use of *higi'a* coincided with the changes that occurred in *ba,* with 1940 as the watershed year in both cases.

As for the other verbs examined, the discussion of *niḵnas* and *ḥazar* is limited due to the paucity of occurrences in the corpus, as stated. It is found, however, that they came into greater use toward the year 2000, concurrent with the declining use of *ba,* particularly in the specific denotations of these verbs.

Tracing the Hebrew speakers’ sources of inspiration, I find that whereas the use of goal verbs largely overlapped their use in Biblical Hebrew at the dawn of Modern Hebrew, distancing from the Biblical tongue took place over the years and the influence of the Hebrew revivers’ background languages (mainly Russian and Yiddish) and later on, English as well, increased. If so, it appears that where the goal verbs are concerned, Hebrew at the outset of its revival was close to Biblical Hebrew and evolved in different directions with the passage of time as it metamorphosed from a language undergoing “revival” into a living tongue.