

The Meaning of Hebrew *vε* ‘and’:

Evidence from Asyndetic Clause Linkage

The Hebrew particle *vε* (usually translated as ‘and’) is commonly regarded as a prototypical coordination marker. Coordination is one of the most studied fields in linguistics, but despite decades of intensive examination, theoretical accounts differ significantly and there is no consensus on the best analysis. In this paper I will show that revealing the range of relations between states of affairs that cannot be communicated by conjoining two sentences with *vε*, could shed light on the meaning of this word, and contribute to current debates on the notion of coordination in grammar.

Herb Clark (as noted by Gazdar 1979: 44) was, probably, the first person to point out that there are relations that can be communicated by the use of juxtaposed sentences but which do not seem to be communicated when these same sentences are conjoined by ‘and’. Since then, several semantic, pragmatic, and cognitive explanations for why ‘and’ appears not to allow certain sorts of connections between its conjuncts were proposed (e.g., Ariel 2012; Bar-Lev & Palacas 1980; Carston 2002). In the present paper I will suggest a different account which is based on Sperber & Wilson’s (1995) term of *interpretive resemblance*.

This work is based on the analysis of the juxtaposed clauses which were selected from *The Corpus of Spoken Israeli Hebrew (CoSIH)*. The examples were firstly divided into two categories: (1) the examples in which the insertion of *vε* as a linking element is optional; (2) the examples in which the insertion of *vε* is impossible or could cause the meaning change. This division was based on the judgment tests. Afterwards, the classification of the examples from the second category based on their discourse functions and semantics was suggested.

This corpus-based study reveals a range of relations between two juxtaposed sentences which are precluded when they are conjoined with *vε* in Modern Hebrew, e.g., reformulation, correction, summary, exemplification, and specification. Analyzing such juxtaposed sentences in terms of *interpretive resemblance* between propositional, or conceptual, representations leads to the conclusion that the relationship between them must be one which holds at the level of communicated thought. In other words, there is a sense in which they can be interpreted as sharing

the same set of contextual implications. I would say that, in the most general level, both of them refer to the same thought.

In the following example the second utterance should be understood as a correction of the first one:

vε axfav jεf lanu zεhut isbaelit ||
and now there_is to_us identity Israeli ||

nixpeta alejnu zεhut isbaelit ||
forced on_us identity Israeli ||

‘And now we have the Israeli identity. We were forced into Israeli identity.’

The speaker communicates not two distinct thoughts, but one, and the reformulation in the second utterance is simply the more accurate or more explicit representation of that thought. It will be suggested that the particle *vε* cannot occur between two utterances that share the same referent or the same thought because *vε* indicates the existence of plural referents or plural thoughts. Furthermore, it will be shown how different functions of the particle *vε* in discourse are connected to this meaning.

References

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