LETTER TO THE EDITOR: FROM SENTENTIAL SYNTAX TO SYNTAX OF INTERACTION. EXISTENTIAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN MODERN HEBREW

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Abstract: *This contribution is part of the Debate section that dialogues with the two-part paper "The Syntax of Existential Constructions" by Shlomo Izre'el from Tel-Aviv University published in Volume 11 in 2022. In this response and rejoinder to Izre'el's paper on existential constructions in spoken Israeli Hebrew, I discuss the opportunities offered by the combination of Izre'el's framework with an interactional dynamic view on syntax and Information Structure. In particular, I propose that a multifactorial approach to Information Structure allows us to avoid the challenges of a uniformly defined notion of a 'predicate'. Disentangling it into various "low-level communicative instructions" opens the way for an "interactionalised" refinement for Izre'el's unipartite analysis of the existential construction.*
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1 Introduction

It is common knowledge that syntax, prosody, and Information Structuring (IS) are intertwined. The choice of a syntactic structure depends on the information structure, and pragmatics affects the prosody of the sentence. However, these areas of study are commonly regarded as dealing with interacting but separate phenomena. In particular, a syntactic analysis of a sentence is often carried out without reference to its information structure or prosody. Following the framework established in his previous work (Izre'el 2012; 2018; 2020), Izre'el proposes in his doublet of papers on existential constructions in Hebrew (Izre'el 2022, henceforth Iz2022) a radical shift away from this paradigm. The proposed framework inherently combines the three areas of study into a unified model of utterance structure. Casting the syntactic analysis into the combined examination of the IS-syntax-prosody cluster, Izre'el's analysis makes traditional – purely syntactic – structural questions obsolete, thus shedding new light on the existential constructions of Modern Hebrew.

The existential structure in Hebrew analysed in Iz2022 and illustrated in (1) involves an existential marker *jeʃ* 'there is' and the "pivot NP", expressing an entity whose existence is asserted ('sailing team' in (1)). In non-present tenses, the existential marker is replaced with the conjugated verb *h.j.j.* 'to be'. This can either have an impersonal (3SGM) form or index the pivot, as determined by yet elusive factors addressed in Iz2022.

(1) *jeʃ*   *niv'χeret*   *'ʃʌjit*

    EXT   team (F)   sailing

    'There is a sailing team.' (C711_0_sp1_226)

    (3a) *haja/hajta*   *niv'χeret*   *'ʃʌjit*

        was.3SGM/3SGF   team (F)   sailing

        'There was (M/F) a sailing team (F).

Iz2022 contributes to the longstanding debate about the syntax of this construction, concerned with the syntactic status of the pivot NP, the existential marker in present tense or the verb 'to be' in other tenses, and the relationship between the two. However, for the purpose of identifying the subject-predicate partition, Izre'el's framework prioritises the Information Structural aspects over the syntactic ones. This choice may appear at first sight as puzzling or paradoxical. Traditionally, the two areas of study – syntax and IS – have been regarded as orthogonal to one another (cf. e.g. von Heusinger 2002 for a historical overview). Consequently, previous syntactic literature dedicated to the existential structure in Hebrew (as surveyed in Iz2022) aimed at identifying its *syntactic* predicate. Izre'el's solution opts instead for the identification of the "*psychological* predicate" (von der Gabelentz 1869) – the Information Structural concept that later became known as the "focus", "rheme", or in some cases as the "*pragmatic* predicate" (Lambrecht 1994: 231, my emphasis). This decision to give a pragmatic answer to the syntactic question may appear as merely conflating the two orthogonal areas of study. In the traditional view, Izre'el answers a very different – pragmatic – question relative to the syntactic questions tackled by the previous research. For example, in (2) (Iz2022, part I:ex. (10)), the traditional view would point out the misalignment between the syntax and the information structure of the sentence. Uttered in the context of family members trying to light a candle, the accented grammatical subject here is the focus.

(2)   Predicate   Subject[2]

   a'NI   *ø-enaʾse*

   1SG   1SG-will.try

   'Let **me** try.' (lit. '***I*** will try.')

Yet, in the framework developed by Izre'el (2018; 2020) for the syntax of spoken language, the syntactic predicate of the entire structure is identified with its pragmatic predicate (cf. Steedman 2000 for an earlier proposal along these lines, but uninformed by the syntax of spontaneous language).

   This perspective is neither a confusion nor a conflation of the two fields of study but stems from the structure of spontaneous language which lays the foundations for Izre'el's framework. It is the everyday multimodal face-to-face interaction that constitutes the most natural ecological niche for language (e.g. Holler and Levinson 2019). It is here that the language evolves, is acquired and is most typically used. The current research on syntax of spontaneous speech has revealed that non-sentential and unipartite structures form a substantial part of the overall data (Izre'el 2020; cf. also Laury et al. 2019 among many others). A sequence of unipartite utterances is illustrated in (3) (from Izre'el 2012: 218): speaker A has mentioned a few minutes earlier a hotel deal in a beach resort but this attempt has been interrupted; at this moment she returns out-of-the-blue to this issue merely providing details of the offer.

(3)   A: *'moruʃ.*

          PN   'Morush.'

      B: *ma*   *'motek.*

          what   sweetie   'What, sweetie.'

      A: *arba'a*   *jaʾmim,*   'four days,'

          four   days

          ʃva   *meʾot*   *'ʃekel*   *le=zug.*   'seven hundred shekels for two.'

          seven hundred   shekel   to=couple

      B: *'bli=kesef.*   'very cheap.'

          without=money

      A: *na'χon?*   'right?'

          right

      B: *ʾefo?*   'where?'

          where

      A: *be=holidej.in*   *ha-χadaʃ.*   'at the new Holiday Inn.'

          in=Holiday.Inn   DEF=new

      B: *daj.*   'wow.'

          enough

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[2] I simplify the representation here, see Izre'el (2022:11) for the multi-layered analysis with an additional Subject-Predicate partition within the conjugated verb.

The integration of unipartite utterances into the core of the syntactic theory makes Izre'el's solution inevitable. These structures consist exclusively of the material used for pursuing the core communicative goal of the speaker ("focus"). Since the "psychological/pragmatic predicate" is the only syntactic constituent of the utterance, pragmatics inherently underlies the syntax of the examined structure and is not an extra-force orthogonal to syntax. This is the main and only syntactic part and thus forms the predicate of the syntactic structure. Additional constituents supplement the predicate only as much as this is needed for contextual disambiguation or for other interaction-structuring reasons. And it is only in such non-unipartite structures that additional syntactic relations between the predicate and the extra-material become relevant. Since the status of information is signalled in Hebrew by intonation, this plays the primary role in the syntactic analysis, as is the case in (2) above. A syntactic analysis orthogonal to Information Structure and prosody would in this case assign the (syntactic) "predicate" role to a constituent, which does not appear at all in the examined structure or could be dispensed with. In other words, such an analysis would relegate the question of the syntactic construal of all structures in (3) to factors orthogonal to syntax. Moreover, such an analysis would awkwardly derive the simpler and in fact more frequent non-sentential structures (Izre'el 2020) illustrated in (3) from more complex and less frequent sentential ones. Furthermore, a complete sentential structure is often grammatically impossible or irrecoverable from the larger discourse, as is again the case in (3). As a result, complex syntactic structures are regarded in interactionally-informed research to be emergent phenomena built upon smaller chunks (Thompson 2019; Pekarek Doehler et al. 2020).

Once unipartite utterances are incorporated into the core of the syntactic theory as full-fledged syntactic structures, Izre'el's analysis of existential constructions becomes straightforward. There is no further need for mapping the NP and the existential marker *jeʃ* onto the purely syntactic subject-predicate dichotomy. As a result, questions addressed by the previous research and concerned with the (purely) syntactic predicate become redundant. Numerous factors suggest that the pivot NP is still a unipartite predicate, as the addition of the existential marker provides this unipartite structure with the expression of modality and assertion. The core function proposed for the construction in Iz2022 is referent introduction. This is a seminal theoretical shift towards interactionally informed combined syntactic and prosodic analysis paired with speakers' communicative goals.

At this point, I think, it is necessary to address the ensuing questions, which in my opinion call for the re-examination and refinement of some further definitions. The topics I would primarily like to address in this contribution are not the syntactic analysis of existential constructions in Iz2022 (with which I concur), but the deeper challenges inherent to the operationalisation of the notion of predicate. In particular, these are the vagueness and empirical inconsistencies of factors assumed in many frameworks to be the primitives on which the definition of a "predicate" rests, namely "an individual piece of information" combined with the classical categories of Information Structure (topic, focus and comment). In my opinion, the exploration of these issues does not cast doubts on the unipartite analysis of the existential construction proposed in Iz2022. Instead, it paves the way for the follow-up research that would "interactionalise" the syntactic-pragmatic perspective of Iz2022, also narrowing down the functional analysis.

2 Pieces of information, predicates, and information structuring

The primary structural constituent in the syntax of spontaneous language in the framework of Iz2022 is the *predicate*, or the predicate domain. Intuitively, this is that part of information by the means of which the speaker tries to achieve the primary communicative goal of the current utterance. It is defined as

> "the constituent carrying an individual piece of information within the discourse context, which by default will include a newly introduced element. As such, a predicate may be seen as the default representation of the comment. The expression of the predicate (or the predicate domain) is the raison d'être for the formation of a new chunk of speech which we term clause. In other words, it is the constituent that carries the informational load of the clause." (Iz2022, part I: 13)

Evidently related to the notion of comment, the concept of focus is also employed for the definition and identification of the predicate (§3.1.1).

Clearly, the operationalisation of this definition is challenging, as the definition combines a range of discourse-pragmatic factors (i) none of which is sufficient or obligatory, (ii) which do not necessarily converge, and (iii) which do not evidently constitute structural or informational primitives. This results in both murky theoretical areas and insufficient delineation of functions. For instance, it is notoriously difficult to identify pieces of information and to quantify them – does an expression of a new action and a new participant in it count as a single piece or as two? The operationalisation of this quantification relies not on properties of information, but is derived from its packaging (Iz2022: 13), namely what is expressed as a single syntactic and prosodic unit. However, typically the packaging is analysed not as a basic factor, but as an expression of the presumably primitive informational properties. For example, one and the same event can be conceptualised as *I have seen a dog across the street* or *I looked across the street. There was a dog.* In both cases a new noun introduces a new referent (a dog) into the discourse, but only in the latter case we count that as an individual piece of information, separate from the process of looking. This is based on counting individual syntactic structures, and not syntactic constituents, let alone independently assessed pieces of information. Information partitioning is a by-product of talk partitioning and not an independently accessible primitive factor that can be used to define linguistic concepts.

Furthermore, communicating information which is not novel at the current stage of discourse is in fact not infrequent in natural conversation, while new referents can be introduced as topics and not comments. Studies of spontaneous speech demonstrate a broad array of discourse moves routinely performed by entirely given information. For example, this is the case with repetitive stance alignments, where emotional bonding is the actual goal of the communicative act even if these emotions are already known and evident to others (Ozerov 2018: 94).[3] Additional recurrent reasons for non-updating utterances are illustrated in (4), where Speaker B has introduced a toponym in his first Intonation Unit and then repeats it in the consecutive two units.

(4)　A:　*lo=ha'ja*　　　*ʃam*　*'eze=ı:ʁ ,*　*'eze=κϝA:ʁ*　　*a'[maʁ-ta]*

　　　　NEG=was.3SG.M　there　INDEF=city　INDEF=village　　said-2SF.M

　　　　'Wasn't there a village, or you said a city…'

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[3] While one could imagine deriving the obtained interpretations from Gricean maxims, this would be a non-parsimonious analysis: the moves and their interpretive effects are highly recurrent and thus are likely to be established conversational strategies rather than ad-hoc implicatures (cf. Davis 2007).

B: [*'zoige*].   *'zoige*.

                                               Zoige.   Zoige.

                                               'Zoige.   **Zoige**.'

         ..0.3..

A: *nu* ?

         So

         'And?'

B: <<laughing voice> **'zoige** > ,   …0.8…   *e- e- 'ale::f,*   *ze*   GAM.*ken,*

                 Zoige   first.thing   it   as.well

         ze   *ha.kol*   *be=oto'BUs-im ,*

         it   everything   in=bus-PL

         '**Zoige**, …0.8…, ehm first thing, it's also a thing, it all is [only travelable] by bus,'

         (OCh_sp2_238-240, OCh_sp1_781-786)

It is hard to account for the first repetition from the available data. There are a number of phenomena that can be relevant here and which are recurrently signalled by redundant repetitions. Although the first introduction is clearly audible, it nonetheless occurs in the overlap. Therefore, the follow up repetition can signal turn-securing (cf. Pekarek-Doehler et al. 2015: 76). It can also (potentially simultaneously) convey epistemic authority and the authority over the discourse – as the speaker does not merely answer questions guided by the interlocutor but defines his own discourse trajectory (cf. Steensig and Heinemann 2012). The repetition can also be motivated by emotional stance. The repetition following A's nu 'and?' belongs to the realm of recycling and resonance (as well as potentially stance-expression). The speaker signals that he maintains the required discourse trajectory despite long hesitations and in spite of the forthcoming apparent deviation into a different issue. Such cases are nonetheless packaged and marked similarly to novel information ("predicates"), suggesting that it is not the novelty that underlies the marking, structure, and interpretation. Instead, the driving factor seems to be the relevance to the communicative goals of the speaker (Sperber and Wilson 1996: 202–17; Sax 2011).

       The primary issue with the definition of a predicate that I would like to address here is the following one. In addition to being non-obligatory, the requirement of carrying an individual piece of information appears also to be insufficient for the definition. This is evident from the additional need for the concept of a "comment". For being considered a predicate, information is expected not merely to be separated and novel but also to constitute the "main message". This is the case in the first appearance of 'Zoige' in (4), where the referent introduction clearly addresses a pending issue raised by Speaker A and as such updates the discourse state. In the case of referent introductions, the definition excludes pieces traditionally analysed as new topics, where novel information does introduce a referent but not as an updating, self-standing move. The "raison d'être" for this introduction is communicating a further comment about this referent (Lambrecht 1994; Krifka 2008). For example, although the NP 'gas' in (5) introduces an entirely new referent into the discourse, it is not the comment of the sentence: it is not the core part that conveys the main idea of the speaker, but a referent about which the main idea is communicated – the topic.

(5)   *bona ,*   **ha-'DElek ha-ze ,**   *ko'ʁEa*   *o'ti ,*   *'omeʁ ,*

hey	DEF-fuel	DEF-this	tears.apart	me	PN

'Hey, **this gas**, makes me go bankrupt, Omer ,' (OCD_1_sp3_013–016)

However, if the goal of the NP 'gas' in (5) is to introduce a referent into a discourse, what makes this function different relative to the function of existential constructions analysed along similar lines? As discussed below, this problem either requires expanding the definition of a "predicate" ad absurdum to include any piece of novel information irrespective of its contextual function, or reveals the problems of defining a predicate coherently, especially in the context of a referent introduction.

Iz2022 addresses indeed the fact that referent introductions can also be performed by stand-alone NPs, leaving the question of the opposition between the two structures for future research (part I, p.19). Yet, in addition to the need for a narrower delineation of the functions of the existential construction, this observation leads to a theoretical question regarding the definition of the "predicate" which forms the foundation for the analysis. One and the same discourse move of a referent introduction can be performed either with an existential construction triggering an unambiguous comment reading and therefore a "predicate" status, or it can represent the classical case of a new topic whereas the "predicate" is the comment subsequently communicated about this referent. It is not the novel informational contribution that triggers the "predicate" status of information, but the elusive discourse status of being locally "the main point"/comment, as opposed to preparatory/topical "aboutness referent". While the topical status of 'gas' in the sentence in (5) would traditionally be uncontroversial, it still does not provide an answer regarding the source of this interpretation.

Moreover, there is a range of referent introductions accomplishing a variety of informational tasks, which do not easily map neither on a local update ("comment") nor on a further-oriented introduction ("topic"). In (6) each toponym merely serves to align joint attention at the referent for its own sake as the interlocutors look at a map of China, probably making it a "comment". It also suggests the relevance of the referent for the overall discussion of the speaker's trip to China. As such, this introduction weakly foreshadows a mention in the upcoming conversation and offers the opportunity to talk about it immediately – as a "topic". The latter option is indeed exploited with the last NP 'Moron'.

(6)   **_Guanʃi,_**   _...3.6..._   _'eze_   _'joʃi._   _ja'ʔalla._   **_'χATgal_**.

    Guanxi   which   beauty   wow   Khatgal

    _…0.7…_   <laughter>   _…1…_   **_'MOʁon,_**   _'hine, mi='po,_   _a'l-inu,_

                                       Mörön   here   from=here   went.up-1PL

    '**Guanxi**, … amazing. wow. **Khatgal**. … <laughter> … **Mörön**, here, from here we went up…'

    (OCh_sp1_031–039)

In (7) the speaker is trying to explain which plant she wants from the nursery to her room.

(7)   _lo=zo'χeʁ-et_   _eχ_   _ko'ʁ-im ,_

    NEG=remember.PRES-F   how   call.PRES-PL

    _ZE_   _ʃe=jeʃ_   _l-aχ_   _be='χedeʁ.ʃe'NA_   _ʃe=no'FEL ?_   _ka.ze_

    this   that=EXT   to-2SG.F   in=bedroom   that=falls   like.that.one

    'I don't remember what it's called, **the one** that you have in your bedroom, that falls? One of these.' (C712_2_sp1_048–050)

The referent introduction in the second IU addresses the discussed issue communicating core information (typically associated with the "comment" status), but the speaker does so while simultaneously negotiating the referent identity with the interlocutor through the response-requesting rising contour (Ozerov 2019). As a result, this structure carries the informational load but without forming a full-fledged contribution and foreshadowing continuation. Similarly to 'gas' in (5), the information load is then transferred to the next unit 'one of these', although this is semantically nearly redundant.

Occasionally, the move performed by the NP accomplishes merely a local attention shift to a referent which is expected to be relevant for the upcoming discourse. It cannot be regarded as a "comment" under the current definitions of this concept. However, this information is also not a "topic", as the subsequent clause is not structured yet, let alone as about it.

(8) A: *Dan.*   'Dan'

     B: *m*   'mhm'

     A: *jeʃ   l-i   ʃee'LA.*   'Can I ask a question?'

          EXT   to-1SG   question

     B: *ken.*   'Yes.'

     …1.7…

     A: **miL'χEmet-leva'NON ‖**   **'The (2006) Lebanon war.'**

          war.of-Lebanon

     B: *nu* ?   'OK?'

     …1.8…

     Continuation:

     A: What do you think, what percentage of the population, somewhere deep inside, …1.7…, thinks tha::t, that it's cool. .. That there is a war. (The Haifa corpus; Winds of War 21.5"–37.1")

In spite of the differences in the information structural status of the NPs in (5)–(8), they all perform the same task of introducing a referent or of aligning attention (O'Madagain and Tomasello 2021) on a previously non-salient referent. In fact, this analysis applies also for the updating NP 'Zoige' in (4), while the inclusion of non-updating repetitions of 'Zoige' suggests an analysis along the lines of centring (shifting or maintaining) attention. Whether this attention shift is interpreted as updating, topical, foreshadowing or a locally detached goal (as in a mere naming of places on the map) is a contextual product. It emerges from the subsequent discourse and does not necessarily form a clearcut and discrete interpretation locally. We end up with referent introducing NPs that do not easily map on the preconceived concept of comment, and therefore cannot be straightforwardly classified relative to the notion of predicate. They fall in-between on what appears as a non-discrete cline between the presumably discrete "topic-comment" notions. This results in a dissimilar and inconsistent classification for linguistically similar items. It also casts doubts on the assumption that the factors wired into the definition of a presumably basic notion of predicate (the "comment"-status) represent linguistic realities relevant for the analysis and the speakers: we most probably orient at the attention centring task performed by a prosodically detached NP, try to identify its relevance, and decide how to respond to it within the ongoing discourse structuring performed by other cues. There is no need

for an additional process of mapping it onto the presumable topic-comment domain. Finally, these observations also make unclear what makes the referent introduction an unambiguous predicate/"comment" in existential constructions, as well as suggest the need for narrowing down the functional analysis of the structure – after all, referent introduction characterises NPs in general (Ariel 1990), and not solely existential constructions.

It would be possible to regard each of the cases above as a predicate, relaxing the restriction on the informational status of information being the comment. This would mean that each piece of information individually presented as novel or relevant through an according marking (such as an accent) is a predicate, irrespective of its successful incorporation into a clause and the role in it as in (5), or of its relationship to the broader discourse as in (4) and (6)–(8). But that would conflate the definition of a predicate with mere novelty, making each separately accented phrase (which as such presents information as separately novel/relevant) into a predicate. We would end up merely equalling "predicates" with "pieces of information" communicated by accentual phrases: each verbal argument and each adjunct would be a predicate within the same clause if separately accented. It would be a rather paradoxical analysis, as (9) would have no subject but two predicates.

(9)   The speaker provides an additional reason for organising transportation for their guest.

ve=ha-ho'ʁ-IM   ʃel-a   j-ih'j-u   ʁegu-'IM   jo'teʁ.

and=DEF-parent-PL   of-3SG.F   3-FUT.be-PL   calm-PL   more

'And her PARENTS will be less WORRIED.' (C712: 222)

Alternatively, (9) could be analysed as having a single predicate, but that would conflate the crucial distinction between thetic statements (informationally unipartite) (Sasse 1995), as opposed to categorical 'topic-comment' statements, where both the topic and the comment happen to be new, such as (9).

These examples may remind one of the analyses of referent introductions as a separate speech act (Endriss 2009: 14) and of Erteschik-Shir's (1997) framework where a new topic is simultaneously a focus (due to being new) and a topic (due to being a preparatory move for additional new information). However, instead of attempting to reconcile the data with existing frameworks of Information Structure through additional theoretical machinery, the "paradoxical" data of spoken language (Garassino and Jacob 2022) suggests – in my view – the need for a larger theoretical shift. The problems originate in the pre-empirical assumption that such concepts as "topicality", "comment", "focus" or "predicate" constitute primitive notions of language and even cognition (e.g. Lambrecht 1994; Zimmermann and Onea 2011 among many others). A growing body of research (which I tentatively call Multifactorial Information Management (MIM)) questions the validity and usefulness of these notions, and of the tenets and methodology of Information Structure (Matić and Wedgwood 2013; Matić 2022; Ozerov 2018; 2021).

In the proposed view, Information Structural concepts such as topic or comment are high-level interpretive effects produced by diverse low-level communicative instructions belonging to the areas of attention-, epistemic, interaction- and content-management. Indeed, there is no single example of a purely information structural language-specific structure or marker that neatly indicates topicality or focus. Dedicated studies of such language-specific devices reveal instead diverse means conveying local communicative instructions, which epiphenomenally create the interpretations of aboutness, novelty, update and more (e.g. Grzech 2020; Yliniemi 2021; Ozerov 2021). Similarly, there is a range of factors taken into account in Iz2022 for identifying the predicate: "relative definiteness,… prosodic features interacting with constituent

order, and … contextual grounds" (p. 9). But instead of converging on a single notion of the predicate, these diverse markers are to be taken separately at their face value. Definiteness operates on the level of epistemic management signalling identifiability. Constituent order creates a range of effects such as discourse cohesion, where the initial constituents are used to link back to the previous discourse and foreshadow relevant continuations (cf. the last 'Zoige' in (4)). Prosodic accent draws attention to phrases due to their contextual relevance, while pitch, pace and pauses partition information into chunks. The identification of the diverse factors that play an immediate role in the message and its syntactic construal renders a more accurate analysis of language and interaction. Moreover, the multifactorial perspective offers a more parsimonious and realistic model of communication and cognition, dispensing with intermediate layers of processing and linguistic analysis (Tomlin 1997). In this view, interlocutors do not structure their contributions or interpret others' speech by identifying topics, comments, foci, or predicates. Instead, they navigate through the interactive discourse relying on local communicative instructions which indicate attention requirements, relevance, local discourse moves, interactionally structured discourse relations, epistemic management, emotive stance and more. Taking instead theoretically preconceived high-level biproducts of the local instructions ("topic", "comment", "predicate") for primitive factors and wiring them into the axiomatic foundations of linguistic theories creates a "procrustean bed" (Matić and Wedgwood 2013) for the study of language and communication.

In my opinion, combining this view with the analysis and findings in Iz2022 can offer us a deeper and richer understanding of the structure and usage of existential constructions. The following section will not add much to Izre'el analysis but will tentatively channel it into this dynamic multifactorial perspective.

3 Dynamic (online) syntax, referent introduction, and discourse management

As analysed in Iz2022 and followed up in Section 2 above, referent introduction can be performed as a separate local move in the discourse by NPs occupying their own Intonation Unit. However, although (4)–(8) are doubtlessly unipartite structures, the informational status of each referent relative to the surrounding discourse is context-dependent and inconsistent. It is the gradually evolving talk that shapes the NP contribution into a self-standing introduction in the first NP of (6), an introduction that sets the background for the vaguely planned continuation in the last NP of (6) as well as (7)–(8), or an introduction smoothly integrated into a larger sentential structure in (5). Although the existential construction is – as demonstrated by Iz2022 – similarly unipartite, the addition of the existential marker makes the single-standing NP in this structure into an unambiguous "predicate". How does the existential marker affect the informational role of the NP? What makes the referent in (1) an unambiguous "comment", unlike the NP contributions in (5)–(8)?

The analysis of *jeʃ* as a modality marker in a unipartite structure proposed by Izre'el captures the discourse function of the construction and explains its internal structure. Importantly, both with and without *jeʃ* the prosodic accent most typically falls on the pivot NP, requesting the interlocutors to shift their attention to the introduced referent. Both structures serve for a referent introduction/attention centring. Yet, the addition of *jeʃ* marks this move explicitly from the onset as the ultimate local communicative goal. In the interactional, MIM perspective, we can see that *jeʃ* signals at the onset of the utterance that a referent introduction constitutes the main local communicative goal of the speaker. The marker *jeʃ* creates momentary local expectations for the forthcoming NP (Auer and Maschler 2013), and resolving

these expectations surmounts to achieving the already foreshadowed local communicative goal. It also makes it unambiguous that the further usage of this referent will be carried out separately, by the means of yet unplanned structures. Simultaneously, *jeʃ* marks that the speaker explicitly commits for the consistence of the referent's existence/availability with other discourse assumptions. This is tantamount to asserting it (Jary 2010), and to being ready for social consequences if this claim turns out to be false (Enfield and Sidnell 2017).

On the contrary, a mere stand-alone NP is underspecified with respect to its contribution from the dynamic syntax perspective. It (re-)introduces a referent into a discourse, as NPs typically do (Ariel 1990), or shifts/maintains attention at a referent. However, it does nothing else explicitly. The speaker is not committed to any action or stance in this regard, nor does this move requests any additional action on the side of the interlocutors, besides centring their attention. The range of continuations of the NP into a more complex structure is immense and underspecified, similarly to the range of respective discourse trajectories. The speaker keeps all the options open, and can indeed proceed into a verbal or nominal update about the referent as in (5) and (9), use the referent's relevance only in a later, structurally disconnected discourse as in (8) and the last 'Zoige' in (4), or restrict its contribution to the mere introduction illustrated in (6) ('Guanxi' and 'Khatgal').

This interactionalisation of the structures linked to discourse- and attention-managing factors allows us to understand how NPs with and without an existential marker perform different kinds of discourse moves and achieve different interpretive effects ("predication"/"comment" for existential constructions, vs. an underspecified, contextually dependent status for stand-alone NPs). It can be the case that the two types of moves potentially correlate with the identifiability of the referent. As discussed in Iz2022, the existential structure is traditionally assumed to be restricted to indefinite referents. As a mirror image thereof, identifiable referents are commonly expected to be used as starting points with no preparatory moves. However, as discussed in Iz2022, there are numerous cases of existential constructions with definite pivots. Separately introduced indefinite NPs are also attested as shown in (10).

(10)   The father (A) has argued that wine can age only for a few years, while his daughter (B) claims that aging is nearly unlimited.

A: *ʃa'loʃ,*   *'aʁba,*   *χameʃ,*   *[lo=m- --]*

      three   four   five   NEG=

      'Three, four, five [years], not-'

B: *[MA.pi'tom]*.

                                                     not.at.all

…1.3…

kabaʁ'ne   ben-aʁba'ɪM   ʃa'na ,

Cabernet   age.old-forty   year

hu   meu'LE.   tsa'ʁiχ   li'jot.

3sg   great   need   to.be

'Not at all. …1.3… **A forty year old Cabernet**, it is great. Should be.' (C711_1_sp1_090-092)

Speaker A was listing the expected number of years a wine can age, as speaker B interrupted him gaining the floor. However, she had no planned contribution yet to follow up on this turn-grabbing. This resulted in a lengthy pause which she had finally to interrupt with an improvised content. She did that by the means of linking the utterance to the immediately previous content – naming a wine and a number of years it ages. It is only at this stage that she could increment a sentential structure upon this turn-keeping, silence-interrupting indefinite NP.

The dynamic view of syntax also potentially offers explanations for deviant structures observed in Iz2022. For instance, examples (64)–(67) therein discuss cases where the existential marker follows the NP instead of preceding it. However, instead of regarding these clauses as realising static syntactic constructions available in the language, we can regard them in a dynamic perspective as gradually evolving, patched-up structures. Examples of online modified structures within the same IU abound in natural speech, as illustrated in (11) where the speaker elaborates the pronoun referent as the utterance unfolds (with no prosodic breaks).

(11) *az*   **hem** *jo'ts-im*   **kol**   **ha-ʒke'n-im**   *im=ha-klu'v-IM,*

so   3PL   go.out-PL   all   DEF-elder-PL   with=DEF-cage-PL

'So **they** go out **all the old people** with their cages' (OCh_sp1_701)

Along the same lines, examples (64)–(66) in Iz2022 can be analysed as modified online, whereas the speakers start with a NP that interacts immediately with the previous discourse and only then improvise the subsequent structure (in (66) there is an evident hesitation within the NP). Similarly, (67) exhibits a shift from one syntactic construction to a different one in the midst of the utterance.[4] Hence, dynamising the syntactic analysis offers a new perspective on the nature of these transient structures which contradict the generalisations and defy a coherent classification.

Finally, it can also be questioned whether the strict identification of *jeʃ* with referent introduction is needed, or whether we should opt for the analysis along the lines of a modal marker asserting existence/availability of a referent. For one thing, Part II of Iz2022 is dedicated to cases where there is no referent introduction at stake. For another thing, the Corpus of Spoken Israeli Hebrew offers examples where the asserted part conveys the spatial or temporal limitations on the existence/availability but the referent is already active. This can be seen in the existential relative clause in (7) above and in (12)–(13).

(12) Discussing a car arrangement that must be documented in advance in writing:

ʃe=ih'je   **be=da'P-IM**   *a'val*.

that=will.be   in=paper-PL   but

'But [it] should be **in the papers**!' (C712: 144)

(13) Discussing working hours of a shop during a holiday, especially in the evening:

u'laj   *jeʃ*   **b=a-'BOker,**   EN   *b=a-'Eʁev*.

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4 These are called "pivot constructions" in Interactional Linguistics (Linell 2013), using the terminology of "pivot" (crucial in the syntax of existential constructions) for an unrelated concept.

maybe   EXT   in=DEF-morming   EXT.NEG   in=DEF-evening

'Maybe there are [working hours] **in the morning**, there are no[ne] in the evening.' (C712: 193)

4 Conclusion

Izre'el's framework of syntactic analysis of spoken language advances the linguistic theory and data analysis by the situation of unipartite structures at the core of the theory. Releasing the syntax from the traditional assumption of a bipartite subject-predicate construal paves the way for understanding the actual structure of natural speech, which is the domain where the language is shaped, acquired and evolves. The analysis of the existential constructions in Modern Hebrew (Iz2022) demonstrates how implementation of the unipartite analysis on presumably full sentential structures allows us to remodel and bypass former research question, providing a new perspective and novel answers.

In this contribution, I have attempted to follow up on this analysis and develop it further in an interactional, dynamic perspective. I have tried to demonstrate how the discussed framework would additionally benefit from dispensing with other traditional models, which similarly originate in the bipartite view of sentence structure. Shifting away from categories of Information Structure and from its partitioning of information into topics vs. comment/focus/(pragmatic) predicate can advance our understanding of language and discourse, while avoiding the pitfalls of problematic and poorly definable concepts. Situating the analysis in the dynamic perspective of online syntax opens the way to a more refined understanding of the data, and further research questions.

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