

Binyanim (form and function). (iii) Modern Hebrew

Edit Doron (to appear in the Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics)

Verb, noun and adjective stems in Semitic languages are derived from (tri-) consonantal roots by different intercalations, called *templates*, of consonantal patterns, vowel sequences and affixes (cross reference: Derivation). While there are scores of templates which derive nouns from roots, the number of verbal templates, traditionally called *binyanim* in Hebrew grammatical tradition, is extremely limited. In Modern Hebrew, setting aside voice variation, each active verb-stem is derived by one of exactly three *binyanim*. These active *binyanim*, also found in Classical Hebrew and the other ancient Semitic languages (Akkadian, Aramaic, Arabic), are traditionally known as (a) the simple *binyan* (פעל *pa'al*), (b) the intensive *binyan* (פעיל *pi'el*), and (c) the causative *binyan* (הפעיל *hif'il*) (Gesenius 1910, Waltke and O'Connor 1990, Joüon and Morauka 2006).

Some scholars deny the semantic contribution of *binyanim* (Ornan 1971). But since each and every active-voice verb in Hebrew is derived by one of exactly three *binyanim*, it is natural to suspect that the choice of *binyan* is not arbitrary, but that it indicates some factor of the meaning of the derived verb. This indeed is the traditional view concerning *binyanim* (as expressed in the modern literature by Ben-Asher 1972, Berman 1978, Rosén 1977, Schwarzwald 1996, 2001:31-33). Though not every verb in the causative *binyan* is causative, it is nevertheless the case that in every alternating pair of equi-rooted verbs, it is the causative-*binyan* verb which is the causative counterpart of the simple-*binyan* verb, and this is never reversed for any such pair in the language. Equally, every intensive-*binyan* verb alternating with an equi-rooted simple-*binyan* verb is agentive, and this is never reversed. Thus, the *binyan* system expresses meaning where there is contrast (Doron 2003, 2008). The marked *binyanim*, the causative and the intensive, express the thematic role of the verb's subject: cause and agent respectively. The simple *binyan* functions as default and is neutral as to the subject's role. But there are many roots which derive singleton verbs, verbs which do not contrast with an equi-rooted verb in another *binyan* or with an equi-rooted noun/adjective. There is no contrast associated with such roots, thus no meaning emerges; the *binyan* is sometimes arbitrary, and often dictated by phonological considerations.

The system is illustrated by the following example, where the different active *binyanim* are shown in their citation form intertwined with the root  $\sqrt{btx}$  'secure, confident'. To give a rough sketch of the morphology, the simple *binyan* basically consist of the vowel *a*, the intensive *binyan* consists of the vowels *i-e*, together with a lack of spirantization of the root's middle consonant (optional additional prefixes are - $\text{ʔ}$  -/ - $\text{t}$  - $\text{š}$   $\text{š}$ - (Goldenberg 1994, 1998)), and the causative *binyan* consists of the vowel *i* together with the prefix - $\text{h}$  *h*-. These morphemes are shown in boldface in the table below. In actual examples, verb stems are additionally inflected for tense and subject-agreement features (cross reference: Verbal System)

(1)  $\sqrt{btx}$  'secure, confident'

	Simple	Intensive	Causative
Active Voice	<b><i>batax</i></b> 'have confidence'	<b><i>biteax</i></b> 'insure' <b><i>ivteax</i></b> 'secure'	<b><i>hivtiax</i></b> 'guarantee, promise'

The following sentences serve to demonstrate the agentive nature of the subject of the intensive verbs in (2a-b): a verb with no additional prefixes in (2a), and one with the prefix -א ' in (2a), versus the causative nature of the subject of the causative verb in (4). (3a-b) is ungrammatical since abstract facts, such as 'his careful driving', are not agentive; (4) is grammatical since abstract facts can be causes.

(2)a. הסוכנת ביטחה את המכונית

*ha-soxenet     biṭx-a                             'et ha-mexonit*  
the agent.F     insure.INTNS-PAST.F     ACC the-car

'The agent insured the car'.

b. הסוכנת איבטחה את המכונית

*ha-soxenet     ivṭex-a                             'et ha-mexonit*  
the agent.F     secure.INTNS-PAST.F     ACC the-car

'The agent secured the car'.

(3)a. \*נהיגתו הזהירה את המכונית

\* *nehigat-o     ha-zehira     biṭx-a                             'et ha-mexonit*  
driving.F-his     DEF-careful     insure.INTNS-PAST.F     ACC the-car

b. \*נהיגתו הזהירה איבטחה את המכונית

\* *nehigat-o     ha-zehira     ivṭex-a                             'et ha-mexonit*  
driving.F-his     DEF-careful     secure.INTNS-PAST.F     ACC the-car

(4) נהיגתו הזהירה הבטיחה שהוא יחזור חי

*nehigat-o     ha-zehira     hivṭix-a                             še-hu yaxazor     xay*  
driving.F-his     DEF-careful     promise.CAUS-PAST.F     that-he will-return alive

'His careful driving guaranteed that he would return alive'.

An additional example is constructed with the root יָשַׁב *yšv* 'sit, inhabit' in (5), together with the sentences in (6) which demonstrate the agentive nature of the subject of the intensive verb and the causative nature of the subject of the causative verb:

(5) *yšv* 'sit, inhabit'

	Simple	Intensive	Causative
Active Voice	<i>yašav</i> 'sit, inhabit'	<i>yišev</i> 'settle, populate'	<i>hošiv</i> 'seat(tr.), make inhabit'

(6)a. השלטונות יישבו אותם בנגב

*ha-šilṭonot     yišv-u                             'ot-am     b-a-negev*  
the-authorities     settle.INTNS-PAST.PL     ACC-them     in-the-Negev

'The authorities settled them in the Negev'.

b. \*סיבות כלכליות יישבו אותם בנגב

\* *sibot kalkaliyot yišv-u* 'ot-am b-a-negev  
 reasons economic settle.INTNS-PAST.PL ACC-them in-the-Negev

c. סיבות כלכליות הושיבו אותם בנגב

*sibot kalkaliyot hošiv-u* 'ot-am b-a-negev  
 reasons economic seat.CAUS-PAST.PL ACC-them in-the-Negev

'Economic reasons made them inhabit the Negev'.

Verbs derived from bi-consonantal (rather than tri-consonantal) roots often have special forms in the various *binyanim*. For example, the intensive *binyan* derives verbs with a particular form from some bi-consonantal roots, through the insertion of a glide augment replacing the root's missing consonant (realized as the vowel *o*), together with the reduplication of the second root consonant. Examples include כּוּפֵף *kofef* 'bend (tr)', derived from the bi-consonantal root כּפּ כּפּ *kp*, פּוּצֵץ *pošeš* 'explode (tr)' – from the root פּצּ פּצּ *ps*, חוּלֵל *xolet* 'create' – from the root חּלּ חּלּ *xl* (cross reference: Defective Verbs). The latter verb seems to present a counterexample to the agentive interpretation of intensive verbs, since the verb 'create' is causative (a homonymous verb חוּלֵל *xolel* 'dance' exists as well, which is indeed agentive, as expected). In actuality, the verb חוּלֵל *xolel* 'create' can serve to illustrate the historical processes which have brought about the assimilation of homonymous roots, thus rendering opaque the semantic contribution of the *binyanim* in some cases. Diachronically, this verb is derived from the root חּלּ חּלּ *xl* 'give birth', unrelated to the homonymous root חּלּ חּלּ *xl* 'happen' which derives the simple verb חָלַל *xal* 'apply (intr)' and its causative counterpart הֵחִיל *hexil* 'apply (tr)'. Synchronically, these three verbs are sometimes reanalyzed as deriving from the same root, which makes the intensive חוּלֵל *xolel* 'create' seem like a counterexample to the agentive interpretation of intensive verbs. But the counterexample is only apparent, since this verb is actually a singleton verb, and thus not in contrast to the other two verbs (Schwarzwald 1984, Izre'el 2009).

Verbs in Modern Hebrew are not exclusively derived from bare roots, but are sometimes derived from categorized roots (Arad 2003). An example is the intensive verb within the table (7) below, which, though derived from the root שִׁלַּט *šlṭ* 'control, govern' like the simple and causative verbs in the same table, is not derived like the latter from the bare root, but rather indirectly, after the root has been categorized as a noun. The intensive verb is thus in fact derived from the noun שִׁלַּט *šleṭ* 'sign post':

(7) שִׁלַּט *šlṭ* 'control, govern'

	Simple	Intensive	Causative
Active Voice	<i>šalaṭ</i> 'control'	<i>šileṭ</i> 'fit with sign posts'	<i>hišliṭ</i> 'impose'

The agentive nature of the subject of the intensive verb is illustrated by (8c), in contrast with the non agentive nature of the subject of the simple verb in (8a) (which is a stative verb, hence non agentive) and of the causative verb in (8b):

(8) a. חוּסֵר סֵדֵר שִׁלַּט בְּרֵחוּבוֹת

*xoser seder šalaṭ* b-a-reḥovot  
 lack order control.SIMPL-PAST in-the-streets

'Disorder ruled the streets.'

b. חוסר סדר השליט פחד ברחובות

*xoser seder hišliṭ paḥad b-a-reḥovot*  
 lack order impose.CAUS-PAST fear in-the-streets

'Disorder imposed fear in the streets.'

c. \*חוסר סדר שילט את הרחובות

\* *xoser seder šileṭ 'et ha-reḥovot*  
 disorder fit-with-sign-posts.INTNS-PAST ACC the-streets

'\*Disorder fitted the streets with sign posts'.

The agentivity of שילט *šileṭ* 'fit with sign posts' follows from its derivation from the noun שלט *šelet* 'sign post'. In general, a transitive intensive verb derived from the noun N is interpreted as denoting the most basic di-transitive action involving both N and the verb's direct object (Obj): putting N in Obj (or removing N from Obj). These verbs are illustrated in (9) (Doron 2003).

(9) שילט *šileṭ* 'fit with sign posts', שימן *šimen* 'oil', ייער *ye'er* 'forest', זיפת *zipet* 'tar', אייש *iyesh* 'man', קווקוו *qivqev* 'make lined', עימלן *imlen* 'starch', איבק *ibeq* 'dust', קירקף *qirqef* 'scalp'...

Causative verbs as well may be derived from a root categorized as a noun N. Such verbs describe their subjects as being the source of N. Examples are given in (10):

(10) הזיע *hizia* 'sweat', הקיא *heqi* 'vomit', השתין *hištin* 'urinate', האיר *he'ir* 'light', הרעים *hir'im* 'thunder', הרעיש *hir'iš* 'make noise', הפציץ *hifsiš* 'bomb'...

Other causative verbs may be derived from a root categorized as an adjective A. Such verbs have both transitive and intransitive readings, describing their subjects as (the cause of) becoming A. Examples are given in (11):

(11) השמין *hišmin* 'fatten', החמיר *hexmir* 'worsen', האט *he'eṭ* 'slow', החמיץ *hexmiš* 'sour', האדים *he'edim* 'reddden', הלבין *hilbin* 'whiten'...

Beyond the basic three active *binyanim*, the rest of the *binyan* system expresses alternations of voice (diathesis). To each active *binyan* there correspond in principle two non-active *binyanim*: a passive *binyan* and a middle *binyan*. In practice, some of the active *binyanim* only have a single non-active corresponding *binyan*, which accounts for the fact that the total number of Modern Hebrew *binyanim* is limited to seven. Below is a table presenting the morphology of the seven *binyanim*, and their traditional Hebrew-grammar appellations:

(12)

VOICE	Simple	Intensive	Causative
Active	a <i>pa'al</i>	i-e <i>pi'el</i>	h+ i <i>hif'il</i>
Passive	--	u-a <i>pu'al</i>	h+ u-a <i>huf'al</i>
Middle	n+ i-a <i>nif'al</i>	t+ i-a <i>hitpa'el</i>	--



(15)a חברתו/סקרנותו הביאה אותו למסיבה

*xavert-o / saqranut-o hevi'-a 'oto l-a-mesiba*  
friend.F-his / curiosity.F-his bring.CAUS.ACT-PAST.F him to-the-party  
'His friend/ his curiosity brought him to the party'.

b הוא הובא למסיבה על ידי חברתו / \*סקרנותו

*hu huva l-a-mesiba 'al-yede xavert-o/ \*saqranut-o*  
he bring.CAUS.PASS-PAST to-the-party by friend-his/ \*curiosity-his  
'He was brought to the party by his friend/ \*his curiosity'.

(16)a המנהלת / הטכנולוגיה החדשה הורידה את המחירים

*ha-menahelit/ha-technologya ha-xadaša horid-a*  
the-director.F /the-technology.F DEF-new.F lower.CAUS.ACT-PAST.F  
*'et ha-mexirim*  
ACC the-prices  
'The director/ the new technology lowered the prices'.

b המחירים הורדו על ידי המנהלת / \*הטכנולוגיה החדשה

*ha-mexirim hurd-u 'al-yede ha-menahelit /*  
the prices lower.CAUS.PASS-PAST.PL by the-director/  
*/\*ha-technologya ha-xadaša*  
*/\*the-technology the-new*

'The prices were lowered by the director/ \*the new technology'.

Turning to middle-voice verbs, the subject of the corresponding active-voice verbs may be implicit here too, but it may also be totally missing. This optionality gives rise to a variety of interpretations for the middle voice. It is well known from the typological literature (Klaiman 1991, Kemmer 1993) that the middle voice is found cross-linguistically with a number of different interpretations. These interpretations are the ones found for the Modern Hebrew middle *binyanim* as well, as illustrated below both for the simple middle *binyan* and the intensive middle *binyan*:

A. The anticausative interpretation (where the event is described as spontaneous)

(17) **simple binyan**

השיעור נגמר

a. *ha-ši'ur nigmar*  
the-lesson end.SIMPL.MID-PAST

'The lesson ended'.

b. **intensive binyan**

השיעור הסתיים

*ha-ši'ur histayem*  
the-lesson end.INTNS.MID-PAST

'The lesson ended'.

The anticausative interpretation only allows the expression of implicit causes, such as *the heat*, and not the expression of implicit agents, such as *the workers* in (18):



C. The medio-passive interpretation, often informally referred to in the literature as "passive" *tout-court* (where the subject of the corresponding active verb is implicit, and can be expressed by an על ידי 'al-yede-phrase). The medio-passive interpretation of the middle-voice is different from the passive voice illustrated in (14) – (16) above, since the implicit subject here is not necessarily agentive:

(21)a **simple binyan**

הוא נענש על ידי עצם פציעתו ותוצאותיה

*hu ne'enaš 'al-yede 'ešem pši'at-o ve-toš'ote-ha*  
 he punish.SIMPL.MID-PAST by essence accident.F-his and-effects-her

'He was punished by his very accident and its effects'.

b **intensive binyan**

המהלך התאפשר על ידי שיתוף פעולה בין גורמים רבים

*ha-mahalax hit'afšer 'al-yede šituf-pe'ula*  
 the process enable.INTNS.MID-PAST by cooperation

*ben gormim rabim*  
 between factors many

'The process was made possible by cooperation between many factors'.

Some middle verbs allow both anticausative and medio-passive interpretations, as seen by the variation in prepositions in the following examples:

(22)a. **simple binyan**

צריח הכנסייה נשרף מ-/על ידי ברק שפגע בו

*šriax ha-knesiya nisraf mi-/ 'al-yede baraq še-paga' b-o*  
 tower the-church burn.SIMPL.MID-PAST from/by lightning that-hit at-it

'The tower of the church burnt from / was burned by lightning that hit it'.

b. **intensive binyan**

המרחב הבין-אישי התמלא ב-/על ידי צורות תרבותיות חדשות

*ha-merxav ha-ben- 'iši hitmale*  
 the-space DEF-inter-personal fill.INTNS.MID-PAST

*be-/ 'al-yede šurot tarbutiyot xadašot*  
 with/ by forms cultural new

'Interpersonal space was filled with/by new cultural forms'.

D. The dispositional interpretation (where the subject of the corresponding active verb is implicit, and may be expressed by an agentive ל- *l*-phrase) This is again different from the passive voice, since the interpretation is not actual but dispositional (cf. Borer and Grodzinsky 1986, Siloni 2008).

(23)a. **simple binyan**

החמאה לא נמרחת לו

*ha-xem'a lo nimrex-a l-o*  
 the-butter.F not spread.SIMPL.MID-PAST.F to-him

'The butter wouldn't spread for him'.

b. **intensive *binyan***

החולצה לא התגהצה לו

*ha-xulša lo hitgahaš-a l-o*  
the-shirt.F not iron.INTNS.MID-PAST.F to-him

'The shirt wouldn't iron for him'.

E. The simulative interpretation (which denotes agentive behaviour simulating a state)

(24) **intensive *binyan* only**

הילד התחלה

*ha-yeled hitxala*  
the-boy ill.INTNS.MID-PAST

'The boy behaved as if he were ill'.

In sum, the *binyan* system expresses the concepts of action and causality. The active *binyanim* expresses both concepts equally. They do so by marking the thematic role of the (explicit) subject of the intensive *binyan* as agent, and that of the causative *binyan* as cause. The non-active *binyanim* are biased in that they express agentivity but not causality. The implicit subject is agent in the passive *binyanim*, not cause. The explicit subject may be agent in the middle *binyanim*, but not cause.

The agentivity of middle verbs is sometimes morphologically marked in Modern Hebrew. In fact, the subject of the simple middle verb is rarely agentive. Reflexive and reciprocal interpretations, though they exist in the simple middle *binyan*, are rare in comparison to the intensive middle *binyan*. Simulative interpretations are not found at all in the simple middle *binyan*. Accordingly, the *n-* prefix of the simple middle *binyan* has become associated with lack of agentivity, and is sometimes used as an additional prefix to mark non-agentivity in intensive middle verbs, which are otherwise often agentive. An example is the contrast between the ordinary middle intensive form התרחק *hitraxeq* 'get-distant.INTNS.MID', which can be interpreted agentively, i.e. 'distance oneself', and the middle intensive form with the extra *n-* prefix נתרחק *nitraxeq* 'get-distant.INTNS.MID+N', which cannot be interpreted agentively, i.e., does not mean 'distance oneself' (Siloni 2008, Shatil 2009, Bolozky 2010).

One additional issue is the question of whether the *binyan* system marks aspectuality. It has been noted that in many cases, middle *binyanim* verbs are the inchoative (punctual) counterpart of unbounded (atelic) active verbs, e.g. התישב *hityašev* 'sit-down.MID' vs. ישב *yašav* 'sit.ACT' (Arad 2005, Schwarzwald 2008). But this aspectual contrast is reversed in other cases, where it is the active verb which is punctual, and the middle verb – atelic, e.g., הלך *halax* 'leave.ACT' (also 'walk') vs. התהלך *hithalex* 'walk-around.MID', חלה *xala* 'fall-ill.ACT' vs. התחלה *hitxala* 'pretend-to-be-ill.MID', יבש *yavaš* 'turn-dry.ACT' vs. התיבש *hityabeš* 'be-in-the process-of-drying.MID' (also 'turn-dry'), אחר *exer* 'arrive-late.ACT' (also 'be-late') vs. התאחר *hit'axer* 'be-late.MID'. Thus, aspectual contrasts vary in their direction, and are reducible to contrasts in agentivity, and in general to the thematic distinctions expressed by the *binyan* system.

Finally, some contemporary theories of phonology categorically deny the existence of abstract morphemes such as roots and *binyanim*, for theoretical considerations. Within this theoretical framework, an alternative view of Modern Hebrew verbal morphology has been developed, whereby verbs are not derived from abstract roots by

intercalation with *binyanim*, but only through the application of vowel transformation and resyllabification to existing stems of other verbs, nouns and adjectives (Bat-El 1994, 2003, Ussishkin 1999, 2000, 2003; cross reference: Roots). A critique of this view is found in Faust and Hever (in press).

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