

Colloquial Modern Hebrew Doubly-Marked Interrogatives and Contact with Arabic and Neo-Aramaic Dialects

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Abstract

This article describes the innovative DMI construction—doubly-marked interrogative—of colloquial Modern Hebrew, in which a question is doubly marked as interrogative. A DMI consists of two parts: (i) an ordinary question, which we call the *content question*, and (ii) an additional *wh*-phrase, the *attitude marker*, which embeds the content question, and whose function is to assign it additional illocutionary force, typically that of rejecting a presupposition salient in the discourse. The article suggests that the DMI was (re-)innovated in Modern Hebrew as a result of contact with Modern Arabic and Neo-Aramaic dialects. It may have been previously innovated in an earlier stage of Hebrew due to its contact with Aramaic.

Keywords

doubly-marked interrogative (DMI), attitude marker, rhetorical question, presupposition, question under discussion (QUD), Hebrew, Arabic, Neo-Aramaic

Introduction

Modern Hebrew has been in contact with Modern Arabic dialects since the early stages of its revival, first Palestinian Arabic and later the Jewish Arabic dialects spoken by immigrants to Israel (see Mar'i 2013:119-162 and Henshke 2013 respectively, and references cited therein). Modern Hebrew has also been in contact with Neo-Aramaic dialects of the immigrants to Israel from the Kurdish areas of northern Mesopotamia (Khan 2011; Mutzafi 2014). Common to the Modern Arabic and Neo-Aramaic dialects,

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and now also to Modern Hebrew, is a doubly-marked interrogative construction (DMI), not previously discussed in the linguistic literature, and not mentioned in the grammars of Classical Arabic, Syriac, or Classical Hebrew. The DMI construction is interesting both in its special syntax and in the intricate relation between its semantics and its distinct pragmatic function.

The article is structured as follows. We first present Hebrew examples and explain the function of DMI. Second, we discuss possible sources of the DMI in Modern Hebrew. We argue that the Modern Hebrew DMI emerged due to contact with Arabic and Aramaic dialects. However, Modern Hebrew also contains frozen vestiges of an older DMI construction originating from Aramaic. We conjecture that at some point, the DMI might have existed as a common feature of the Classical Central Semitic languages, preserved mostly in the Arabic and Aramaic dialects.

The DMI in Colloquial Modern Hebrew

Like many languages of the world, Modern Hebrew forms a constituent question both by rising intonation and by placing a *wh*-phrase in front of the clause. Yes-no questions, on the other hand, are typically formed by rising intonation only, and do not have a special syntax distinguishing them from declarative sentences.

In recent years, a new construction—the DMI—has emerged in colloquial Modern Hebrew, expressing a novel type of complex question. The construction consists of a *wh*-phrase (which we call the *attitude marker*) embedding an ordinary question (which we call the *content question*), the latter either a constituent question or a yes-no question. The attitude marker and the content question form an amalgamated interrogative clause—the DMI, pronounced with the intonation contour of a single question. Thus, though a DMI is often introduced by two *wh*-phrases, it forms a single interrogative clause. In the DMI in (1a), for example, the content question *what happened* and the attitude marker *why* form together a single interrogative clause, pronounced with continuous rising intonation into a single peak. This is very different from the intonation contour of the corresponding sequence of two separate interrogative clauses shown in (1b). The latter consists of two separate stretches of rising intonation into two high intonation peaks:

- (1) a. DMI
למה מה קרה?
lama ma kara? ‘**Why what** happened?’
- b. Sequence of interrogatives
למה? מה קרה?
lama? ma kara? ‘Why? What happened?’

Semantically, too, the DMI is very different from a sequence of interrogatives. We illustrate this by examining both (1a) and (1b) in a context in which they are preceded by the echo question, “She should clear the table?”:

- (2a) DMI
 שתפנה מהשולחן? למה מה קרה?
še-tefane me-ha-šulhan? lama ma kara?
 ‘that-will.clear.3FS from-the-table? **why what** happened?
 ‘She should clear the table? What happened? (and why assume that what happened would be reason enough to induce her to clear the table?)’
 (<http://saloon.co.il/inout/2014/07/keren-arest/>, accessed December 10, 2014)

- (2b) Sequence of interrogatives
 שתפנה מהשולחן? למה? מה קרה?
še-tefane me-ha-šulhan? lama? ma kara?
 ‘that-will.clear.3FS from-the-table? why what happened?
 ‘She should clear the table? Why? What happened?’

In the DMI in (2a), the attitude marker *why* introduces a rhetorical question that expresses rejection of the obligation to clear the table. In (2b), the independent question *Why?* simply queries the reason for the obligation. It is true that asking for a reason often conversationally implies rejection, but in (2a) the rejection is conventionalized, having become part of the conventional meaning of the construction.

The DMI is mostly found in colloquial oral speech, including informal web chats and blogs. It has very recently also found its way into journalistic writing, and even into literary works—though still typically confined to direct speech in these contexts (the earliest printed examples that we have seen are from the 1990s).

We informally sketch the semantics/pragmatics of the DMI as follows:

- The content question is either a genuine quest for information or a rhetorical question.
- Irrespective of whether the content question is originally genuine or rhetorical, the attitude marker assigns it the (additional) function of a rhetorical question. Similarly to rhetorical questions in general, the DMI has a strong speaker-oriented force and typically denotes a sense of negation (Sadock 1971, 1974; Krifka 1995; Han 1998, 2002). The disapproving function of some *wh*-phrases has also been noted for Chinese by Yang (2007).
- In many examples, the attitude marker is *why*. Its function is to endow the content question with additional illocutionary force, that of rejecting either a salient presupposition that had been added to the common ground by the addressee, or the QUD (question under discussion) currently in the discourse. It does so by asking the addressee the rhetorical question, “Why assume the presupposition/QUD?”¹

The following is an example from a blogger’s discussion of a driver’s rude behavior. The content question *Who are you?* attributed to the driver is rhetorical, and implies that the addressee (a pedestrian trying to cross the street at a crosswalk) is not a noteworthy individual. The attitude marker *why* endows the content question with the

¹On the notion of QUD (question under discussion), see Ginzburg (2012). For an additional type of speech act performed by the use of a rhetorical *why* in Modern Hebrew see Francez (2015, this issue).

additional function of rejecting the implicit presupposition that she should stop at the crosswalk for a mere pedestrian.

- (3) נהגת הגיפ שלא עוצרת במעבר חצייה, ברך מורמת על המושב, משקפי שמש
 וסיגרייה, למה מי אתה...
naheget ha-jip še-lo šoceret be-mašavar
 driver.F.CS the-Jeep that-NEG stops at-passage.CS
ħaciya berex muremet šal ha-mošav
 crossing knee raised on the-seat
miškefey šemeš ve-sigarya lama mi ʔata...
 glasses.CS sun and-cigarette **why who** you.M ...
 ‘the Jeep driver who doesn’t stop for you at a crosswalk, her
 knee raised on the seat, with sun glasses and cigarette. Who are
 you? (and why do you assume the driver would stop for you?)’
 (<http://uriyoeli.com/2014/07/03/%D7%A7%D7%A6%D7%AA-%D7%9E%D7%A4%D7%97%D7%99%D7%93/>, accessed October
 17, 2014)

Another example is from the writer Sayed Kashua’s weekly column in the Israeli daily newspaper *Haaretz*:

- (4) למה מתי הוא ידע להנות מההצלחה זה?
lama matay hu yadaš le-henot
why when he knew to-enjoy
me-ha-ħaclaħa ze
 from-the-success this.one
 ‘When did this one know how to enjoy success? (and why
 expect he would this time?)’
 (*Haaretz*, October 5, 2014)

Kashua is a novelist, a bilingual speaker of Palestinian Arabic and Hebrew. In this particular example, he reports the (fictional) words of his mother, a speaker of Palestinian Arabic. As in the previous example, the content question is a rhetorical question. It implies that ‘this one’ (her son Kashua) never knew how to enjoy success. The attitude marker implies that there is no reason why the addressee, Kashua’s father, should presuppose that Kashua would enjoy his success on the occasion at hand.

The next example is from the novel *Dead Fish in Jaffa*, in which the writer Dan-Benaya Seri reports a dialogue with a woman of the “Old Yishuv,” the Jewish community in Palestine, which lived in close contact with speakers of Palestinian Arabic in the days of the Ottoman Empire. In this example, the QUD *Where?* is explicitly put forward in the discourse, and the DMI rejects its being a valid issue by turning it into a rhetorical question with an obvious answer.

- (5) לקחו את המנוול שלי מהבית והלכו. לאן? למה איפה יקחו את החמור הזה?
 בית-משוגעים
laqħu ʔet ha-menuval šeli me-ha-bayit
 took.3MPL ACC the-bastard mine from-the-house

ve-halxu *leʔan* **lama ʔeyfo** *yikhu*
 and-left.3MPL where **why where** would.take.3MPL
ʔet *ha-ħamor* *ha-ze* *bet-mešugaʕim*
 ACC the-ass the-this house-lunatics
 ‘They took that bastard of mine from the house, and left. /
 Where? / Where would they take this ass? To the loony bin (and
 why assume there might be another option?)’
 (Dan-Benaya Seri, *Dead Fish in Jaffa*, 2003:87)

What is interesting about the next example is that the content question is not a rhetorical question but an ordinary informative *where*-question, querying about the whereabouts of the addressee (both the author and the addressee are schoolchildren); indeed, the next move in the dialogue is the addressee’s answer. Only when embedded under the attitude marker *why* does the question acquire a rhetorical dimension; it expresses rejection of the criticism implied in the previous question.

(6) אז איפה אתה? שאלתי. בכיתה, החזיר. בכיתה ומתכתב? שלחתי עם סמיילי
 מזועזע למה איפה את? בכיתה... אז שבי בשקט
ʔaz *ʔeyfo* *ʔata* *šaʔalti* *b-a-kita*
 then where you.MSG asked.1SG in-the-class
heħzir *b-a-kita* *ve-mitkatev* *šalaħti*
 replied.3MSG in-the-class and-corresponding sent.1SG
ʕim smayli *mezuʕazaʕ* **lama ʔeyfo** *ʔat*
 with smiley shocked **why where** you.FSG
b-a-kita *ʔaz švi* *be.šeket*
 in-the-class then sit.2FSG quietly
 ‘So where are you? I asked./ In class, he responded./ You are
 corresponding while in class? I sent with a shocked smiley./
 Where are you? (and why assume that your location is more
 appropriate for SMSing than mine?)/ In class . . . / Then shut
 up.’ (<http://www.tale.co.il> סיפורי אהבה ‘Love stories,’ accessed
 September 17, 2014)²

So far, we have seen that the content question can be headed by a variety of *wh*-words such as *what*, *who*, *when*, and *where* (*which* and *how* are attested as well). It can also be a *yes-no* question:

(7)	בברזיל הקים בית חרושת לטקסטיק "וגם הייתי מברייח סחורות. למה נראה לך שמעבודה אפשר לחיות?"				
	in Brazil	established.3MSG	factory	for-textile	
	<i>be-brazil</i>	<i>heki:m</i>	<i>bet.xarošet</i>	<i>le-tekstil</i>	
	" <i>ve-gam</i>	<i>hayiti</i>	<i>mavriyah</i>	<i>šhorot</i>	lama nirʔa
	and-also	was.1SG	smuggling	goods	why seems
	<i>l-ax</i>	<i>še-me-ʕavoda</i>	<i>ʔeʕsar</i>	<i>li-ħyot?"</i>	
	to-you	that-from-work	possible	to-live	
	‘In Brazil, he established a textile factory, and I also used to smuggle goods. Does it seem to you that it is possible to make a				

²Unfortunately, as of November 2014, the text is no longer available at this site.

living by working? (and why assume that smuggling goods is not an acceptable way to make a living?) (Haaretz, September 5, 2014, p. 20 of the Galeria section)

This example is interesting for two reasons:

1. The *why*-marker is ambiguous. One reading, the one given above, is the DMI reading with a yes-no content question. But since a yes-no question has the same syntax as a declarative clause, there is an additional reading, one in which *why* is understood as embedding a declarative rather than an interrogative clause. According to the latter reading, the *why*-question is an ordinary question querying why the addressee believes that it is possible to make a living by working. The latter reading is disfavored in this particular example.
2. The author of the article switches mid-sentence from reported to direct speech (as witnessed by the switch from third to first person). This facilitates the use of the colloquial DMI construction. The colloquial nature of DMI is also attested by the impossibility of replacing the colloquial *why*-word *lama* with *maduaʕ*, which is the formal-register *why*-word.

There are also literary examples in which the DMI is not within direct speech but is part of the writer's prose. In such examples, the construction is used sarcastically. The rejection expressed by the attitude marker is facetious: The writer actually shares the presupposition / the QUD, and only pretends not to. This is interesting from a sociolinguistic perspective, since it is the colloquial nature of the construction that indicates to the reader that the writer's words should actually not be taken at face value.

One sarcastic example is from a restaurant review criticizing a particular restaurant for its Khraime (traditional fish dish in a rich tomato sauce). The content question *What did you think?*, addressed to the readers, challenges, when embedded under the attitude marker, the readers' assumption that Khraime would be a rich sauce rather than a mere cumin-spiced tomato paste. The use of the construction is clearly facetious, as the critic obviously shares the readers' assumptions about Khraime.

- (8) החריימה הבהירה מה קורה כשמשדכים רסק עגבניות לכמון.
 מקבלים רסק עגבניות עם כמון. למה מה חשבתם?
ha- ħrayme hivhira ma kore kše-mešadxim
 the-Khraime demonstrated what happens when-combine.3MPL
resek řagvaniyot le-kamun mekablīm resek
 paste tomatoes to-cumin get.3MPL paste
řagvaniyot řim kamun lama ma řařavtem?
 tomatoes with cumin **why what** think.2MPL?
 'The Khraime demonstrated what happens when one combines tomato paste with cumin. One gets tomato paste with cumin. What did you think? (and why expect anything else?)'
 (Haaretz, October 10, 2014, Restaurant Review, p. 18 of the Galeria section)

An additional sarcastic example is found in the title of a *Haaretz* article by the novelist David Grossman:

- (9) למה מי מת?
lama mi met?
why who died
 ‘Who died? (and why assume this is of consequence?)’
 (*Haaretz*, February 24, 2012)

The rhetorical content question implies that nobody (of consequence) died. The attitude marker rejects the concern that some of the readers were bound to be having at the time about the death a few days earlier of a Palestinian detainee, Omar Abu Jariban, while in Israeli custody. Grossman’s use of the construction is clearly facetious, as the whole point of his article is to enhance the public concern.³

Since the DMI affects the speech-act performed by the content question, it is typically found in main clauses, where it can directly relate to the speech situation and access the discourse presuppositions and QUDs. In this respect, it differs both from multiple questions and from conjoined questions, which are easily embeddable. Another difference is that the various *wh*-phrases in multiple and conjoined questions are all part of the content question. A third difference is that in a multiple question, the *wh*-phrases are not stacked at the beginning of the clause (cf. [10a] below); and in a conjoined question (cf. [10b]), though the *wh*-phrases are all clause-initial, they are conjoined rather than stacked.⁴

- (10a) האתר הזה יאפשר לנו לדעת מי אוכל מה איפה
ha-ʔatar ha-ze yeʔafšer la-nu
 the-site the-this will-make-possible to-us
la-daʕat mi ʔoxel ma ʔeyfo
 to-know who eats what where
 ‘This site will permit us to know who eats what where.’
 (<http://www.food101.co.il/about>, accessed October 17, 2014)

- (10b) איך ולמה זה קורה להם?
ʔex ve-lama ze kore la-hem
 how and-why this happens to-them
 ‘How and why does this happen to them?’
 (*Haaretz*, theater review, October 10, 2014, p. 1 of the
 Galeria section)

³ The article was translated to Arabic: <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=297561> in March 3, 2012 (accessed July 26, 2014). Although, naturally, the translation is to Modern Standard Arabic, the title is translated to Palestinian Arabic *le:š mi:n ma:t* ‘Why who died?’, since DMI is a construction found in Arabic dialects, but not in the standard language.

⁴ English has multiple questions and conjoined questions, but not the DMI construction. Superficially, one may find two non-conjoined clause-initial *wh*-phrases in English, too, but the second one only scopes over part of the clause, e.g., in the title of Dov Seidman’s book *Why How We Do Anything Means Everything*.

The DMI in Modern Arabic Dialects

The DMI is a general feature of Modern Arabic dialects:

(11) Palestinian Arabic

le:š šu: štare:t

why what bought.2MS

‘What did you buy? (and why assume it was nothing?)’

ʔami:š blu:ze w-baṅʔalo:n

shirt blouse and-trousers

‘A shirt, a blouse, and trousers.’

(http://karamnto._.ask.fm/Mohannad32/answer/114974671705,
accessed July 26, 2014)

(12) Syrian Arabic

A: *ana ra:yih baddak ši:*

I going want.2MS thing

‘I am going. Do you want anything?’

B: *šu: we:n ra:yih*

what where going

A: *le:š inti šu: daxal-ek*

why you **what** concern-your

‘How does this concern you? (and why bother?)’

(<http://www.daoer.m5zn.com/showthread-170645.html>,
accessed January 12, 2012)

(13) Lebanese Arabic

le:š mi:n fi d-dunya bašd habi:b-i

why who said other.than that lover-my

‘Who said anything different than that? (and why do you assume such an option?)’

(<http://www.trella.org/966>, accessed April 11, 2010)

(14) Egyptian Arabic

ana le: mi:n fi d-dunya bašd habi:b-i

I **why who** in the-world after lover-my

‘Who do I have in the world other than my lover? (and why assume I would?)’

(<http://www.sudanradio.info/php/vb.353/archive/index.php/t-17325.html>, accessed July 29, 2009)

Of the various dialects, Palestinian Arabic is the most accessible to us. It is the native language of the first author, who still remembers the words of his deceased mother when she would hear one of her children complaining:

(15) Palestinian Arabic

le:š šu: sa:yer ʕal-e:k?

why what is.happening on-you

‘**What** is happening to you? (and why assume that complaining would help?)’

We also rely on the testimony of native speakers of Jewish Arabic dialects. There are scarcely any recordings of these dialects, and none that are available to us. Nevertheless, it is possible to elicit the DMI construction in Jewish Arabic dialects. Native speakers who were given the context of example (8) above were happy to produce the following DMIs in their dialects:

- (16) Moroccan Arabic, Casablanca Jewish dialect
ʕalas ʔas dhələkom
why what thought.2M.PL
 ‘What did you think? (and why expect anything else?)’⁵

- (17) Tunisian Arabic, Jewish dialect
las sa fi-bal-kom
why what in-mind-2M.PL
 ‘What did you think? (and why expect anything else?)’⁶

Since DMIs are not known as such in previous stages of Hebrew, nor in its European contact languages, we conclude that Arabic is probably a source of the Modern Hebrew DMI. Speakers of Hebrew whose native language was a dialect of Arabic may have been instrumental in introducing the DMI to Hebrew.

Indeed, we find that Arabic allows a wider range of DMI types than Hebrew, both with respect to lexical options and structure. For example, Palestinian Arabic allows *how* as an attitude marker, which is not attested in Modern Hebrew:⁷

- (18) *ki:f ʔe:š rašid ištara*
 how **what** Rashid bought
 ‘What did Rashid buy?’⁸

Structurally, we find content questions in Palestinian Arabic DMIs which are multiple questions, a construction not attested in Hebrew:

- (19) A: *ka:n fi: mufa:jaʔa:t ha:y l-le:li*
 was there surprises this the-night
 ‘There were surprises tonight.’
 B: *le:š mi:n ʔalab mi:n*
why who defeated **who**
 ‘Who defeated whom? (and why assume that there is anything unexpected here?)’⁹

⁵We are grateful to Eli Ohayon for this example.

⁶We are grateful to Yehudit Henshke for this example.

⁷Palestinian Arabic also allows *what* as an attitude marker, and so does Modern Hebrew:

(i) *מה ממת'י את אוהדת הפועל?*
ma mi-matay ʔat ʔohedet ha-poʕel
what from-when you.F.SG fan.CS.F.SG Ha-Poʕel
 ‘Since when are you an Ha-Poʕel fan?’
<http://www.4everblue.co.il/forum/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=25035&start=25> (accessed December 10, 2014).

⁸This example was constructed by the first author.

We also find imperative clauses replacing content questions within DMIs in Palestinian Arabic, for which Hebrew has no counterpart:¹⁰

- (20) *le:š ʔu:m taʕa:l taʕa:l*
 why stand.IMP.2M.SG come.IMP.2MSG hit.IMP.2M.SG-me
 ‘Stand up, come hit me!’¹¹

We thus see that the distribution of DMI is wider in Arabic, a fact compatible with the direction of borrowing from Arabic to Hebrew. The existing recorded data does not allow us to determine whether it was Palestinian Arabic or the Jewish Arabic dialects that were most influential. It is possible that all of them contributed to some extent. Had we found attested Hebrew DMI examples prior to the 1950s, we would have concluded that their origin must be Palestinian Arabic. Since we have not found such examples, but they may well exist, we leave it to future research to produce conclusive evidence relevant to this issue. In the next section, we consider an additional possible source for the DMI in Modern Hebrew.

The DMI in Neo-Aramaic

The DMI is also found in Neo-Aramaic dialects, both in Christian communities that immigrated to Europe, North America, and Australia (e.g., Christian Barwar) and in communities that immigrated to Israel (e.g., the Jewish dialect of Zakho):

- (21a) Christian Barwar
námu ʔáyya bárke d-eni-la t.it-ʔáti sxáya gàwa
 why this pool of-who-COP that-you swim in.it
 ‘Whose is this pool in which you are swimming? (= surely it is mine not yours)’
 (Khan 2008:906)

- (21b) *námu la-t-ðàʔə-lli*
 why no-that-know.2MS-me
 ‘Don’t you know me anymore? (= surely you remember me)’
 (Khan 2008, 1596:65)

- (22a) Jewish Zakho¹²
qay- mà bré-le?!
 why what happen.PRF-3MS
 ‘What happened?!’

⁹This example was constructed by the first author.

¹⁰This example also illustrates the serial verb construction, discussed in Mar’i & Gamliel (2015, this issue). For further analysis of serial verb construction in Palestinian Arabic, see Khalaily (1997:238-242).

¹¹This example was constructed by the first author.

¹²We are grateful to Oz Aloni for these examples, which he kindly transcribed from his recordings of the speech of Zakho native speakers.

(22b) *qay- mǎ ʾuz-li*
 why what do.PRF-1S
ʾóto k-šárx-ət ʾáll-i?!
 like.that IND-shout.IMPRF-2SM on-1S
 ‘What did I do that you are shouting at me like that?!’

(22c) *qay- kmǎ k-táql-an dǎd-*
 why how-much IND-weigh.IMPRF-1FS COMP
g-ám̄r-et šamànta- wan?!
 IND-say.IMPRF-2MS fat.FS COP.FS
 ‘How much do I weigh that you are saying I am fat?!’

We therefore conclude that the Jewish Neo-Aramaic dialects are a possible source for the DMI in Modern Hebrew.¹³

As pointed out to us by Geoffrey Khan, the DMI can actually be reconstructed as a general syntactic trait of the Semitic languages of the area. As such, it may in fact have had its origins in the special distribution of the Classical Aramaic particle *lema*, originally *le-ma* ‘for what,’ etymologically related to the Classical Hebrew *lamma* ‘why.’

Classical Syriac uses a construction in which *lema* embeds a question. Our analysis of the DMI may be applicable to this Classical Syriac construction. Perhaps one could view the question embedded by *lema* as a content question, and *lema* itself as an attitude marker that denies the presupposition of doubt in the content question, e.g., *lema emma w-atta ṭavan li men alaha* ‘Are mother and wife better to me than God? (And why assume this may be true, of course God is better),’ quoted by Nöldeke (1904, §373).¹⁴

In Biblical Aramaic and other dialects of pre-modern Aramaic, the phrase *d-lema/di-lema* is used in the sense of ‘lest,’ e.g., Ezra 7:23 על מלכות מלכא די למה להוא קצרף די למה להוא קצרף על מלכות מלכא ‘Lest there be wrath against the kingdom of the king.’ Perhaps the background of such constructions is: ‘For there will be wrath (But why assume this is inevitable?).’

Rabbinic Hebrew has the particle שמא/שמה *šemma* used in purpose clauses with the meaning of ‘lest.’ This particle is structurally equivalent to the Biblical Aramaic *di-lema*, since *šemma* < *še-l-ma*. The particle שמא/שמה in Rabbinic Hebrew is, in fact, also used in yes-no questions, apparently as an attitude marker, to deny the presupposition of the question, as in the following example from Mishnah Eduyyot 5.7: שמה עוולה מצאתה בי *šemma šawla mašata bi* ‘Did you find wrong in me?’ (= surely not), quoted in Stadel (2014:314).

If the reconstruction of the ancient *why*+question as a DMI is on the right track, then it may be that Modern Hebrew is regaining a lost Semitic construction through contact with Modern Arabic and Neo-Aramaic dialects, and that this development parallels the contact between ancient stages of Hebrew and Aramaic. On the one hand, the ancient etymology may shed light on the restriction we have found in Modern

¹³ Neither Barwar nor Zakho had been in contact with Arabic, therefore the DMI in Neo-Aramaic does not itself originate in the Modern Arabic dialects.

¹⁴The translation is actually not Nöldeke’s, but is the re-adaptation suggested by Geoffrey Khan in view of our analysis of the DMI. All the translations of the classical examples in the present section have likewise been re-adapted. Our re-adaptation assigns *why* in the relevant examples its ordinary lexical meaning, and, crucially, the special DMI function of an attitude marker conventionalizing the rhetorical question interpretation of ordinary *why*. This is different from the received translations of these classical examples, which postulate a special ad-hoc lexical meaning of *why*.

Hebrew of the attitude marker to *lama* ‘why’ (and perhaps *ma* ‘what’). On the other hand, the modern development may cast light on the earlier constructions, since we can observe their development in embryonic stages and get direct access to their pragmatic function.

Conclusion

The DMI construction of colloquial Modern Hebrew is a complex interrogative construction consisting of an extra *wh*-phrase (usually *why*) that embeds an ordinary question typically introduced by its own *wh*-phrase. Though the latter *wh*-phrase may be a genuine quest for information, the former *wh*-phrase endows the question with the very distinctive illocutionary force of rejecting a salient presupposition present in the discourse.

The DMI is also found both in dialects of Modern Arabic and in dialects of Neo-Aramaic, including those with which Modern Hebrew has been in contact. Accordingly, we conjecture that the Hebrew DMI was imposed by contact with these dialects. It is very improbable that such a marked construction would emerge in Hebrew independently of its contact languages. Yet the imposition may have been facilitated by the historical vestiges of an ancient DMI construction that had been borrowed by Rabbinic Hebrew from its contemporary Aramaic.

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