FOUR TOPICS IN MODERN HEBREW GRAMMAR*

I. Idem per idem

A relative clause that repeats exactly the content of the main clause is called *idem per idem* in Hebrew grammar because such a clause does not explain anything if interpreted literally.1 Its most famous example is the biblical אָהָדָה אֱלֹהִים אָהָדָה (Exodus 3: 14) ‘You can call me as you want,’ lit. ‘I am who I am.’ The use of *idem per idem* in the Hebrew Bible was studied by Ogden (1992). Some of his conclusions are valid for Modern Hebrew, as I will demonstrate. Peretz (1967: 146–148) ascribes two meanings to *idem per idem* relative sentences: 1. In some contexts they express a general, vague reference, if the speaker does not want to refer more precisely to the content. In the example given by Peretz: לַמָּנוּן נִכְבַּס (הָיָה, ג) ‘he entered the place that he entered,’ the author used *idem per idem* in order not to mention the Holy of Holies, whose name was taboo. 2. In other contexts *idem per idem* sentences express ‘decisiveness,’ according to Peretz, and his example is: מִלְפָּרְשֵׁה — מְפָרְשָׁה את הָבֵא ‘what has been done, has been done and it is impossible to change it.’4

The aim of this paper is to describe the functions of relative sentences of the *idem per idem* type in modern literary Hebrew more closely.

* The paper is based on an earlier lecture presented by the author at the Plenary Session of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Cracow Branch, held on 17 December 2007.

1 The term *idem per idem* is used by Ogden (1992). His definition of the term is insufficient, since it confines the identity of the main and the relative clause to the same verb used in both of them.

2 Lagarde (cf. Ogden 1992: 109) interpreted biblical instances of the *idem per idem* type in the same way.

3 Peretz reads霫קָשַט, my translation follows Blackman who reads לַקָשַט.

1. “It does not matter”

In most instances an idem per idem sentence means ‘It does not matter.’ Examples of this use are given below:

1. Here [...] in the care of these two Turks, nothing bad will happen to him, irrespective of what would be there (ראובני 61). (יהיה שב אולר יהודי, מחוץ.)
2. He will not go to her to make his peace with her, he will not make the first step, irrespective of what will happen (ראה 63). (יהיה אשראי יהודי, מחוץ.)
3. He will not relinquish her, irrespective of what she will be like (ראה 72). (יהיה אשראי יהודי)
4. You cannot get anything out of them, irrespective of how much they put in them (ראה 216). (שיכניסו כמה בהם, נסי)
5. It was enough for him to feel the steps of an approaching person, whoever it was (ראה 126). (שייה מי המתקרב ויהי)
6. Let the evening be wonderful. It does not matter how much it will cost (ראה 216). (שיעלה כמה עולה, באיר)
7. Turn wherever you want (תפנה לאשרפנה – it does not matter. (ראה 119). (תפנה)
8. This tree, the bush, or whatever it is (ראה 216). (שהמה שליה, מ병ינה)
9. Whoever he is (ראה 287). (יהיה מי יהי), even the greatest misbeliever, once he will surely go.
10. [...] irrespective of what his job was (ראה 218). (התספר מה – והיתかけるות ממקום)
11. [...] irrespective of what the thing that I wanted to check was (ראה 200). (שלמה מה – ויתחבר)

In the passages cited above the idem per idem sentences mean that what is stated in them does not affect other events. The יקטול form is used even if the reference is to the past (ex. 5, 10, 11) or to the present (ex. 8–9). The jussive form of the verb can be used (ex. 5, 10).

The idem per idem construction expresses here the condition for other events that is cancelled. The construction can mean ‘it does not matter’ without this conditional sense in the context: מואפת? ... יהי אשראי יהודי... Elias! It does not matter. ‘Everything is indifferent to him, he thinks “Come what may”, he is ready to go anywhere’ (ראה 389). The possible paraphrases of idem per idem sentences of this kind are:

- Whatever you tell her, every time she will tell [...] again and again’ (238). (אתה שא לך, ואaciente לא שלך, קדני)
- ‘Whatever happens, I will try to stay’ (224). (מה שלאは何, אני מאכליה, קדני)
- ‘I will go wherever’ (171). (אתה שא לך, בAnywhere, קדני)
- The former variant (without negation) is better Hebrew than the latter one (with negation), which seems to be influenced by Polish or Russian. Other expressions that convey the same meaning are:

- ‘he is shuffling along, irrespective of how much he hastens’ (9). (שיכניסו מה מה, אפור)
- ‘the feeling of pride is developed in human beings, irrespective of where they are’ (129).

Cf. a similar interpretation of biblical instances of the idem per idem type in Ogden 1992: 110–113.
2. ‘It must be accepted’

*Idem per idem* sentences are used to say that what is stated in them must be accepted because it cannot be changed. This use is illustrated by the following examples:

1. I will come back when I want (אבוא מתי שבאתי) [and you must accept that]. (141)
2. I must accept what happened (כבר Москва וכברתה אירע) (223).
3. You must accept what happened (כבר Москва וברתה אירע) (40).
4. You must accept the fact that you have bought it (כבר Москва ופרקה את шם) (242).
5. Unfortunately, it is impossible to cancel / change / withdraw what he has been done (כבר Москва ופרקה את השם) (381).

This use is defined by Peretz as ‘decisiveness.’

Polish *idem per idem* sentences have a similar meaning: *Jestem, jaki jestem* means ‘you must accept what I am like.’

3. ‘I do not want or I am not able to be more precise’

Another use of *idem per idem* is exemplified by the following passages:

1. He noticed the glance that Hasan Bek gave him when he said something (שאמר והי) to his servants. (219).
2. The officials were sitting inside and doing something (שעשו והי) (377).
3. The policeman reported to somebody (שדווח והי) (117).
4. They sat down just anywhere (ишבו והי) (213).
5. They went somewhere (הלכו והי) (338);
6. It was running somewhere (רצה והי) (33).
7. Bracha returns from somewhere (שחוזרת מה מקום) (276).
8. He returned from such a place (획 הוא מה מקום) (110).
9. If she told it (שסקרה והי) (273).
10. He will do it (שיעשה והי) (8).
11. He said it (אמר והי) (154).
12. It happened (קרה והי) (241);
13. They found it (מצאו והי) (406) [i.e. the corpse].
14. Each one wished me something (איתל לי כל אחד מה שפטרה) uncle Zelig said: [...]. (296)
15. This [that I described above] happened (遑דנה ליה מר הג שפטרה) (398).
16. I asked somebody (שאלתי את מה שפטרה) (398).
17. The Germans finished by doing it (הגנברנה והיתה אלל השפטרה) (21) [i.e. they caused war].
18. I did it (עשיתי והי) (23) [i.e. I hurt my boy friend].
19. They did it (עשו והי) (213) [i.e. they had sexual intercourse].
The *idem per idem* sentence is used:

a. if there is no need or possibility to be more precise, i.e. neither speaker nor hearer knows details (ex. 1–7, 16). The possible paraphrases are משה ויאמר (ex. 1), משהו עשו (ex. 2), דוהי לעזרת (ex. 3), שם אפרים שד dép (ex. 4), ידlef לאמ שזרה (ex. 5),

b. if a more precise formulation appeared in the immediate context and the hearer remembers the details (ex. 8–11, 15), or he will be informed of them in the following passage (ex. 12, 14). The possible paraphrases are כזה ממקום חזר (ex. 8), זאת סיפרה אם (ex. 9),

c. if the speaker does not want to use more precise expressions (in order not to violate the taboo), although the hearer can guess what is meant (ex. 13, 17–19), as in Yoma 5, 3.

It seems that Polish *idem per idem* sentences have the meanings b and c.

II. The absolute infinitive

According to Glinert (2004: 225, 530, 544) the absolute infinitive is used in Modern Hebrew only in a few idioms: ‘he went far,’ ‘he rose early,’ ‘he stressed repeatedly.’ Incidentally, Glinert wrongly considers הלך and קום to be absolute infinitives: these are construct infinitives, and the absolute ones are הלך and קום. So the only correct statement made by Glinert that refers to the absolute infinitive, is that this form is a part of a construction expressing repetitive action. Rosén (1966: 315) suggests that the absolute infinitive exists only in biblical Hebrew. Aronson Berman (1978: 313) points out three functions of this form in Modern Hebrew: modal and intensive, as in ‘she will surely come,’ ‘they went completely away,’ and iterative with the verbחזר (like Glinert). Coffin and Bolozy (2005) claim that the absolute infinitive is not productive in Modern Hebrew, i.e. only a few verbs have this form, for example in the idiom הלך והב (like Glinert). According to these authors, in other uses the absolute infinitive has modal meaning.

Everything that the authors cited above say about the absolute infinitive is right only with regard to spoken Hebrew. In written literary Hebrew the absolute infinitive is productive, i.e. many verbs are used in this form. The use overlooked by the grammarians concerns simultaneous action (cf. Joüon, Muraoka 1996: 425):

‘she walked stamping;’ קיים הלך وهב (53) – ותובחת את חוכה הפרקה בעכית ‘she started to whisper quickly, and while whispering she pricked her sister with her eyes’ (233) – והלך והבישה ‘going very slowly, and at the same time stumbling’ (120) – והלך והבישה ‘someone once again pulled the sheet and at the same time he was humming’ (277) – והלך והבישה ‘the horses were galloping […] and when galloping they were jingling’ (115).

Sometimes the infinitive construct is used in this structure: והלך והבישה ‘and he ploughed her back, beating’ (269) – the infinitive absolute
would be: ‘he is striking his head against the wall, groaning’ (334-335) (the same in biblical Hebrew, cf. Joüon, Muraoka 1996: 426).

In the sentences cited above the main action is expressed by the finite verb (הלכה, לוחשת, התחילת, ומשך) or participle (הלכת, התחילת, ההלך), the simultaneous action is expressed by the absolute infinitive and the simultaneousness of the two is expressed by the repetition of the main verb in the absolute infinitive. One can express a simultaneous action without repetition of the main verb in the absolute infinitive:

would be, as in: ‘it is rotating, going up and down’ (220; מפרשין 1). Rarely the infinitive absolute is used for two simultaneous actions performed by different subjects: ‘and my hands were tearing pieces of the bread off, and at the same time I was eating and chewing’ (221) – here the subject of the verbs ‘my hands,’ while the subject of the verbs ‘I’

The absolute infinitive is used in order to conjoin two verbs expressing two independent simultaneous actions (as above) or two verbs expressing one action and the adverb modifying it (as below):

The special case of this use is the expression mentioned by Glinert (2004). Here חוור is an adverbial verb expressing the iteration of the action expressed by the main verb (הרידה). The construction can be used also with an adjective as the predicate and the adverbial verb הלך expressing gradual intensification:

Other functions of the infinitive absolute in Modern Hebrew are as follows:
1. The infinitive absolute can be used to express an opposition, as in biblical Hebrew (Joüon, Muraoka 1996: 423): ‘he did not see anything, but he heard’ (305).
2. The infinitive absolute is sometimes used instead of an ordinary infinitive construct:
   a. as a complement of a preposition (that is not attached to its complement): ‘without uttering’ (28); ‘without looking’ (72); ‘in order to work and live together’ (91). This use is very rare in biblical Hebrew (Joüon, Muraoka 1996: 421),
   b. as a complement of a modal verb: ‘if he wants to investigate and understand’ (352). This use is common in biblical Hebrew (Joüon, Muraoka 1996: 420).
In spoken Hebrew we would say: להוציא בלי להציץ we surely will be destroyed’ (205) – as in biblical Hebrew (Joüion, Muraoka 1996: 426).

III. A generic or vague subject

1. A verb in the 3rd person plural masculine

Let us define a generic human subject as ‘all / many people,’ and a vague human subject as ‘someone, some unidentified people.’ The distinction exists in the grammar of the Hebrew language, although usually the two kinds of unspecified reference are included under one heading of ‘vagueness, generality’ (cf. Tzadka 1981: 192). In Modern Hebrew both of them can be expressed by the passive voice, which has been already studied by others (Taube 1997; Tzadka 1981: 193; Glinert 2004: 139). Both can be expressed also by the verb in the 3rd person masculine plural form without a subject marked independently (by a noun or pronoun): חפציה את множה占领 ‘her luggage was taken from her’ (vague subject); לצבא להורידו רוסיה נתיני ‘it is said / people say that all Russian citizens in France have been forced to join the army’ (generic subject). There is no noun or pronoun in the context that could be the subject of the verbs לקחו ‘[they] took,’ אומרים ‘[they] say,’ הכריחו ‘[they] force,’ and that is why the forms must be interpreted as having a vague or generic subject. This issue has been studied by others (Glinert 2004: 139). An interesting example is שזוכרים מישהו הוא благод ‘the first male partner is somebody that is remembered’ (בואי 79). Here the masculine form זוכרים expresses the general feminine subject, because only women can here be referred to.

2. The pronoun ‘you’ (singular)

A generic human subject (but not a vague human subject) can be also expressed by forms of the 2nd person singular:הוא שקר לחשוב אתה יכול (ראובני 107) ‘you could think that it was cold’ (cf. Tzadka 1981: 194). There is no participant of the speech act that could be addressed with the pronoun אשה אתה ‘you (singular masculine).’ Such use of the pronoun means ‘everyone who was there, would think that it was cold.’ One may use the 3rd person plural masculine form in this sentence: הם לחשוב אפשר הוא: ‘everyone who was there, would think that it was cold.’ Although this particular verb has a special form expressing a generic subject, which is more often used: הם לחשוב אפשר. In the sentence אחד מאומות בני האדם הוא האנגלי, האנגלית, האנגלית (מגד, פויגלמן 143) ‘this one, which is typical of all members of one nation, and which you / one find in communities of the Britons, the Swedes [...]’ one may use ‘[they] find’ instead of ‘you find.’ The 2nd person singular pronoun with no referent participating in the speech act means ‘everyone would
behave / react similarly in a given situation’ and that is why the 2nd person pronoun expresses a generic subject, but not a vague one. For example, the sentence "לחקה מהם דלי חצויי" cannot be reworded as "לחקים מהם דלי חצויי." Glinert (2004: 139) gives three examples of an unspecified subject / agent and translates them as follows:

‘נתעך אים המשכירה.’

‘One / you called the police’ [lit. ‘They called the police’].

‘אתה העתקת את המשכירה.’

‘One / you called the police’ [lit. ‘You called the police’].

‘המשכירה העתקת את המשכירה.’

The police were called.’

As a rule, Glinert (2004) does not provide in his grammar the context of the sentences, so we can assess his interpretation only on the basis of his gloss translations and comments. I agree that when using the passive voice one can drop “any type of subject” (i.e. both generic and vague). Glinert calls the second example “generic you,” but leaves the first one without any label. So we can infer that for Glinert the two first sentences are synonymous. Morag (1990) pointed out that the sentence ‘אתה העתקת את המשכירה’ is unacceptable if one means, for example, that ‘Yesterday an accident happened and the police were called by somebody.’ Hebrew has the 3rd person plural masculine for a vague or generic subject, and the 2nd person singular for a generic subject. To sum up, Glinert should interpret the first sentence as expressing a vague or generic subject (so the alternative gloss should be added: Somebody called the police, Some people called the police), and the second one as expressing only a generic subject. The grammars by Coffin and Bolozky (2005) and by Aronson Berman (1978) do not mention the Hebrew generic ‘you.’ Tzadka (1981: 194) does not differentiate between a generic and vague subject (both of them are called by him סתםי, and does not explain when the 2nd person singular can be used instead of the 3rd person plural.

Sometimes the generic human reference cannot be expressed by the verb in the 3rd person plural:

אל כל כ נ TreeMap הווה פסבד, להתקל פtaşם בדומח שטרדים בחולם פדור (33) ‘when you are a respectable doctor, it is not a great pleasure to meet suddenly someone who knew you when you were a shoemaker.’ The pronoun ‘you’ has here generic reference, but it cannot be replaced with the verbs in the 3rd person plural, because ‘you’ is the subject of the nominal clause (אתה תמר, מהפדה, the object of the verb (רוכך), and the suffixed modifier of the verbal noun (בהיותך). The 3rd person plural masculine pronoun can express generic (or vague) reference only if it is contained in the finite verbal forms: ‘אתה פלא, it is said,6 or in an adjectival circumstance predicate: 7

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6 The (etymologically participial) form אומרים ‘it is said’ contains the subject ‘they,’ because it alternates with the finite form אומרים ‘it was said.’

7 Glinert (2004: 139) wrote that in order to express vague subject “the subject can simply be left blank, and the verb (or adjective) [...] is put into 3rd person plural.” It would mean that the sentence with a specific subject יפים הם ‘they are beautiful’ can be transformed into יפים ‘some / most people are beautiful,’ as יפים הם ‘some / most people say.’ But יפים cannot function as an independent sentence with a vague subject. The citation from בואי is a better example for an adjective with general reference. Bare adjective in plural masculine form
what is the sense of dying as an ugly person?’ (24) – here the general subject of ‘to die’ is not expressed overtly, but its implied subject is ‘they (of generic reference),’ as it is seen in the form ‘ugly’ (plural masculine), which agrees with the subject of the verb ‘to die.’ One cannot express a generic or vague reference by 3rd person plural masculine pronouns: ‘People tell me,’ but not ‘I say to people / to everyone.’

Another example of the Hebrew generic ‘you:’
‘How does one feel if that is indeed one’s son?’ (152). The example shows that the generic ‘you’ can be combined with the generic ‘they’ in one sentence, and here the use of the generic ‘you’ instead of the generic ‘they’ used in the first clause is due to its syntactic role: the possessive pronoun of generic reference cannot be expressed by the generic ‘they.’

There are Hebrew idioms containing the imperative of generic reference, for example: ‘it is very hard to explain him’ (393), lit. ‘Go [2nd sing. masc.] and explain him!’ or ‘Try to explain him!’ The pronoun ‘you’ contained in the imperative forms has generic reference here.

The grammars suggest that only the masculine form of the pronoun ‘you’ can have generic reference. But let us consider the sentence: ‘When he is looking at you [fem. sing.], you [fem. sing.] feel as at daybreak’ – here a woman is telling a man about her erotic feelings which the interlocutor cannot share with her. The use of ‘you’ with generic reference confines the scope of the generic subject to women and the sentence means: ‘Every woman would feel the same in this situation.’ But the feminine pronoun ‘you’ with generic reference is used by women (talking to men) even if a man can be a referent of the subject: ‘and when one is looking at the fields’ (261).

One may think that the generic ‘you’ was introduced to Modern Hebrew under the influence of English. But this is not so. It is found in Ch. N. Bialik (103), M. Smilensky (128), G. Shofman (216) and other writers active before the era of the domination of English. The pronoun ‘you’ used in biblical law (for example in the Decalogue: ‘and when one is looking at the fields’) (261) has a generic reference...
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(Tzadka 1981: 194). On the other hand, in the story קיסם by Reuveni (56–68) the excessive use of the generic ‘you’ is to characterize the language of Americans.

Only rarely is the 3rd person singular pronoun used with generic reference. 8 ‘Only through self-resignation can one achieve eternal life.’ The subject of the form זוכים ‘[they] achieve’ has generic reference, but this reference cannot be expressed by the 3rd person plural pronoun suffixed to the reflexive noun (i.e. the form זעמכם would not have generic reference), so the singular pronoun (‘he’) is used. Instead of combining two kinds of generic pronoun one can use here the generic ‘you’:

IV. The aspectual function of the form יקטול

As is well known, in biblical Hebrew the form יקטול referring to the past or present expresses an iterative or durative action (Joüon, Muraoka 1996: 366–368). Modern Hebrew grammars do not mention this function of יקטול form, so one may infer that יקטול has lost its aspectual meaning. But this is not the case. If the context points to the past or present time reference, one can use יקטול to express an iterative or durative aspect. In the translation of the examples cited below I mark by [d] and [i] the verbs in the יקטול form that expresses aspect:

1. Durative state or action in the present

Raphael is sitting and writing, and he is writing [d] his Pentateuch day and night’ (424 מָסְפִּירָם)

wind does not blow [d]’ (410 מָסְפִּירָם)

her heart is plotting [d] evil’ (409 מָסְפִּירָם)

an empty space spreads [d] around their house’ (408 מָסְפִּירָם)

why on earth her husband is going [d]’ (495 מָסְפִּירָם)

where do you feel [d] pain?’ (392 מָסְפִּירָם)

‘his heart is throbbing quickly’ (362 מָסְפִּירָם)

does a Hebrew heart throb [d] in their chest?’ (237 מָסְפִּירָם)

‘the test is lasting [d] a few moments’ (347 מָסְפִּירָם)

‘can you hear [d]?’ (249 מָסְפִּירָם)

what are you saying [d], doctor?’ (7 מָסְפִּירָם)

2. Iterative state or action in the present

without this restrained joy which appears [i] on the face of a woman’ (מספרים 474)

there’s no joy that sometimes’ (מספרים 457)

and everything that is done [i] at home’ (מספרים 407)

it happens that according to her advice and taste the problems of clothes are resolved [i]’ (מספרים 354)

sometimes he joins [i] together the tips of his forefinger and thumb’ (מספרים 272)

does it seethe [i] sometimes?’ (מספרים 147)

do you go [i] to the house of the Beinstocks?’ (מספרים 518)

As we can see in the examples,iktul expresses an iterative action, not exclusively a habitual one. In this respect it resembles the construction פעל [i] (Piela 2008).

4. Durative action in the past

her right hand was keeping [d] the hand of Uri’ (הסיפור 91)

The use of ה킨ול to express iteration or durativity is not compulsory: one can always use the ordinary forms כותל (for the past), קטל (for the present), that do not express aspect, and express the aspect in many other ways (Piela 2008). If the context of ה킨ול points to a future time reference, the form does not express any aspect (only a future tense), as in biblical Hebrew (Joüon, Muraoka 1996: 366). The aspectual use of ה킨ול with a present or past time reference declines in modern Hebrew.

List of Hebrew sources:

אלון אלטרס. תﶈה של שארית. תל אביב 1999.
Cztery zagadnienia gramatyki współczesnego języka hebrajskiego

1. zdanie względne, które nie zawiera żadnej nowej informacji o składniku zdania głównego, którego jest określением, wyrzuca następujące znaczenia we współczesnym hebrajskim:
   a. 'jest to nieistotne, nie ma wpływu na inne zdarzenia',
   b. 'musi to być zaakceptowane, bo się nie da tego zmienić',
   c. 'nie chcę albo nie mogę bardziej szczegółowo tego opisać'.
2. Infinitivus absolutus jest formą produktywną w hebrajszczyźnie literackiej i oprócz funkcji wymienianych w opracowaniach pełni też takie, jak: a. służy do wyrażenia czynności jednoczesnej z inną czynnością, b. może być dopełnieniem przyimka lub czasownika.

3. Podmiot ogólny można wyrazić w hebrajskim przez zaimek 'ty' (w obu rodzajach, zależnie od płci mówiącego).

4. Forma יִשָּׁה in odniesieniu do przeszłości lub teraźniejszości wyraża aspekt duratywny lub iteratywny.