



Morpho-thematic mismatches in Hebrew: What happens when morphological and thematic criteria collide?[☆]

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Abstract

This study addresses the transitive–intransitive alternation in verb formation based on both thematic and morphological relations between words. I examine cases of puzzling mismatch between the thematic derivation of predicates via valence changing operations and the morphological form they exhibit. These are cases, where the thematic relation between two verbal instances shows that A is derived from B, while the morphological relation between them indicates that B is formed on the basis of A. To resolve this conflict, I rely on the notion of frozen lexical entries and on the historical relations between the relevant forms. I argue that while form A is indeed thematically derived from B, B existed in the lexicon as a frozen entry. Further, form A entered the actual vocabulary first and was used for the morphological formation of B.

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1. Introduction

Transitive–intransitive alternations within verbal systems have been an object of linguistic research. It is commonly assumed that different thematic realizations of the same concept are not accidental and that there are some sort of derivational relations between verbs that participate in transitivity alternations (see for example Williams, 1981; Berman, 1982; Haspelmath, 1987; Borer, 1991; Levin and Rappaport-Hovav, 1994; Reinhart, 1996; Wunderlich, 1997; Doron, 1999; Siloni, 2002; Koontz-Garboden and Levin, 2005; Alexiadou et al., 2006; Horvath and Siloni, 2008; Pykkänen, 2008; Rappaport-Hovav and Levin, 2007, 2012, among many others). These alternations have been addressed by syntactic, semantic, and morphological theories, attempting to shed light on both the morphological and the syntactic and semantic–thematic characteristics of such derivations. This paper examines cases of transitivity alternations that demonstrate an apparent mismatch between the thematic and the morphological relations between the alternates. The study is based on evidence from the verbal system of Modern Hebrew (hereafter MH) where such alternations almost always have a morphological manifestation, as demonstrated in the following alternations.

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(1) MH transitivity alternations

Transitive verb		Intransitive verb	
a. yiʔef	'make desperate'	hityaʔef	'become desperate'
b. hitsis	'make agitated'	tasas	'become agitated'

In addition to the morphological manifestation of the transitivity alternation in (1), the two pairs of verbs demonstrate a puzzling mismatch between the thematic and morphological relation between the verbs in each pair; both transitive verbs denote some change of mood in the object, while both intransitive verbs denote the change of mood that somebody undergoes. The thematic relation between the two verbs in each pair is the same. However, the morphological relations between them are different. In (1a) the intransitive verb is marked with a prefix */hit-/*, while in (1b) it is the transitive verb that is morphologically marked by a prefix */hi-/*. I label this contrast 'morpho-thematic mismatch'. Why does the mismatch emerge and how can it be accounted for?

The morphology of transitive–intransitive alternations has been accounted for by various approaches in different studies (see for example [Haspelmath, 1987, 1993](#); [Borer, 1991](#); [Reinhart, 1996](#); [Rappaport-Hovav and Levin, 1998, 2007](#); [Doron, 2003a, 2003b, 2008, 2013](#); [Embick, 2004](#); [Reinhart and Siloni, 2005](#); [Marantz, 2000](#); [Alexiadou et al., 2006](#); [Faust, 2008](#), among many others). In this paper I account for the morpho-thematic mismatch in MH from a point of view that assumes that both alternations in (1) are the result of a one valence changing operation. In general, valence changing operations are defined as operations that add or reduce thematic roles and changes the syntactic valence of verbs. Specifically, the operation in (1) is labeled 'decausativization' ([Reinhart, 2002, in press](#)), and it is assumed to derive the intransitive verb from the transitive one by reducing a thematic role of cause. This is in contrast to the operation of causativization that increases the syntactic valence of verbs by adding a thematic role to their thematic grid, as will be discussed in section 2. The study offers a solution to this kind of morpho-thematic mismatch by drawing on (i) the presumed existence of frozen lexical entries in the lexicon and (ii) information about the diachronic development of the particular alternates. I argue that, in cases where the thematic relation between verbs suggests that verb A is derived from verb B, while the morphology indicates the reverse, it is in fact the case that verb A entered the language first, derived from a frozen lexical entry. Later on the frozen entry, namely verb B, received a morphological shape based on the form of A, and was inserted into the actual vocabulary of the language lexicon.¹ Specifically, I propose a mechanism of morphological defrosting and filling that operates according to systematic guidelines.

It is important to distinguish between the two facets of derivational operations: the semantic–thematic derivation and the morphological formation. The **semantic–thematic derivation** (hereafter 'thematic derivation') is related to the organization of items in the mental lexicon, independently from their morphology. Such a derivation involves manipulation of the thematic grids of verbs by adding, reducing or modifying thematic roles. **Morphological formation** involves formation of one word based on another word, applying different morphological processes like affixation, compounding, ablaut, clipping, and many others. The semantic–thematic derivation in many languages is manifested by morphological formation. This study aims to resolve cases of apparent mismatches between these two facets. It is crucial to note that I assume all the examples like (1) throughout the paper, share semantic properties, and therefore should be regarded as manifesting the same operation, regardless of morphology. Moreover, any analysis that would assume a single derivation with a different direction, namely an addition of thematic role, will run into a problem with accounting for cases of mismatch. An analysis which assumes that valence changing operations goes hand-in-hand with morphological manifestation, i.e. that the direction of derivation is different between the examples in (1) cannot account for the thematic differences between them, to be discussed in section 2.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the two types of thematic operations that I assume for the transitivity alternations to be discussed. It defines the input for each alternation and provides the thematic criteria that distinguish between them, based on previous studies that are independent of morphological relations. The section also provides the basic assumptions of this paper with regard to the lexicon as an active component of the grammar, with respect to both valence changing and morphological processes. Section 3 begins by examining the morphological manifestation of thematic relations between MH verbs, leading to the puzzling morpho-thematic mismatch, where a case of decausativization demonstrates a morphological manifestation of causativization. In order to account for this mismatch, I use the notion of frozen lexical entries in the lexicon and propose a mechanism that allows such entries to 'defrost'

¹ I use the term 'the actual vocabulary' not refer to actual list of words that exist in a given language. This should be distinguished from the term 'vocabulary' that denotes a post-syntactic component of the Distributed Morphology (DM) model (see, for examples, [Halle and Marantz, 1993](#); [Marantz, 1997](#), among others).

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