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The Structural Grammaticalization of the Biblical Hebrew Ethical Dative

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Abstract

This paper offers a structural analysis of the evolution of a grammatical phenomenon in Biblical Hebrew known as the Ethical Dative (ED). My analysis is rooted in the grammaticalization chain proposed by Talmy Givón wherein the Ethical Dative evolves incrementally from other dative forms, accounting for its lopsided distribution across the Bible. Via its similarity to the Personal Dative in Appalachian English, I propose a derivation for the ED whose locus is the specifier of a high Applicative Phrase, allowing us to account for Givón’s progression through the gradual reduction of merge-operations and feature-valuation at that node. My analysis bolsters the notion that the uneven distribution of EDs is indicative of diachronic evolution and not synchronic variation. Moreover, this paper enhances our understanding of a potential grammatical fingerprint within the Hebrew Bible that may aid in discerning authors, time periods, and the broader history of the Bible’s composition and redaction.

INTRODUCTION

This essay takes up the so-called Ethical Dative (ED) construction in Biblical Hebrew (BH) which, according to Givón (2013) increases in prevalence across the diachronic continuum. Givón’s essay provides us with a concrete grammaticalization pathway by which this form comes about from other related dative arguments. Using analyses of a parallel phenomenon in Appalachian dialects of English, I will propose a syntactic derivation for the phenomenon in question as well as its diachronic precursors. It turns out that precisely the grammatical pathway presented in Givón (2013) can be modeled as the reduction of the ApplSpec from a full PP through a DP down to a ϕ P bearing only a set of unvalued ϕ -features.

I want to add that this type of “modeling” does not neatly align with what a functionalist like Givón would consider an “explanation”, nor is it necessarily meant to. A paper like

Givón’s describes a pathway by which one linguistic form could evolve into another by virtue of their analogous communicative functions (i.e. an “analogic” pathway). This evolution necessarily recapitulates, reflects, and indeed *is* a biological evolution, in which the frequency of a particular linguistic “allele” (so to speak) modulates within a population by virtue of the advantage or similarity that it presents with respect to another allele. The extent to which one considers my analysis consonant or dissonant with this functionalist framework depends largely on the extent to which one sees the descriptive paradigm of Generative Grammar as actually reflecting the cognitive and neurobiological processes of a speaker. Certainly, I can think of few generative grammarians who would say that it totally doesn’t, though the same cannot

be said for Givón.¹ Ultimately, however, the meta-purpose of this paper is to think outside of the functional-historical and generative-synchronic binary and imagine a way in which generative syntax—an approach often utilized for synchronic description—might reinforce or elaborate upon Givón’s approach by extending the domain of “explanation” into a different way of illustrating a speaker’s language faculty than frequency-data and a chimerical sense of “function.”

I conclude that each of Givón’s phenomena, in addition to being attested quantitatively, have clear structural pathways by which they are likely to have emerged only in the direction that they did. This work further bolsters the notion that our sense of the timeline along which the Hebrew Bible’s composition occurs is indeed reflected in the language and, more specifically, the syntax.

In Section 1, I present the phenomenon and Givón’s grammaticalization chain and also remark on the terminological ambiguity around “ethical datives.” In Section 2 I take up a parallel phenomenon in Appalachian English, the Personal Dative (PD) and some current work on this topic. Section 3 contains my structural proposal for Givón’s grammaticalization chain as derived in the light of our investigation of English PDs and Section 4 concludes.

1. GIVÓN (2013): THE PROGRESSION IN QUESTION

The secondary theoretical task of Givón’s 2013 paper on the diachrony of Ethical Datives is to call into question the notion of “grammaticalization chains” in favor of a series of independent and locally-unidirectional shifts, so to call the grammaticalization of Hebrew ethical datives a “progression” is, in light of Givón’s paper, somewhat ironic. Nonetheless, Givón’s counterexample to the ostensibly universal

“grammaticalization chain” derived from studying Hebrew and Spanish is Tamil, meaning that the evolution established for BH still holds for our purposes.

The phenomenon in question is the appearance of an apparently optional and non-argumental pronoun adjacent to the matrix verb of a clause that is co-referent with the subject and has dative case via the affixation of the *l-* prepositional marker. A few illustrative examples of this phenomenon follow below:

(1)

- (a) *lex l-xa me-arts-exa u-mi-moladet-xa*
 go to-2MSG from-land-yours and-from-birthplace-yours
 ‘Go forth from your native land’
 (Genesis 12:1)
- (b) *elex l-i el har ha-mor*
 I-go.IRR to-1SG unto mount the-myrrh
 ‘I will betake me to the mount of myrrh’
 (Song of Songs 4:6)
- (c) *va-telex va-teshev l-a mi-neged harxek*
 and-went and-sat 3FSG.DAT from-across far
 ‘and [she] went and sat down at a distance’
 (Genesis 21:24)

Although the most obvious conjecture for an immediate precursor of the ED is simply the dative argument, Givón argues that the ED actually derives most immediately from what he calls an “optional benefactive” argument, which is a specific type of dative that is not obligatorily selected to fill the theta roles of a given verb, but to reflect the effect of the verb on some party. The resultant grammaticalization chain is:

(2)

ALLATIVE → DATIVE → OPTIONAL BENEFACTIVE → ED

We will delve into these steps more deeply shortly, but first, a note on the terminology “ethical dative.”

¹ Personal correspondence

1.1 A Note on Terminology

The phenomenon under discussion in this section has held many names over the years including *dativus ethicus* (/ED), *dativus commodi/ incommodi*, personal dative and, perhaps most descriptively by Halevy (2015), the “Verb+Non-Lexical Subject-Coreferential L-Pronoun” construction. Givón (2013) refers to this construction as the Ethical Dative, and this is the term of choice for many other authors as well; however, it requires a disambiguation from the “ethical datives” we may recognize from Romance languages such as French or Italian. Although both phenomena involve a non-argumental/non-theta (pleonastic) pronoun in the dative case, there are substantial distributional/syntactic and pragmatic differences between, say, the French construction in (3) and the BH one under investigation in this section.

(3)

Je (te (me)) vais (te (me (vous))) lui faire passer un sale
 1SG.NOM (2SG (1SG)) go (2SG (1SG (1PL))) 3SG.DAT make pass a dirty
quart d'heure...
 quarter hour...

'I'm gonna make him spend a lousy quarter-hour...(+ED)'

(Jouitteau and Rezac, 2007, 99)

Some significant differences include:

1. French EDs *a la* Jouitteau and Rezac (2007) are restricted to first and second person whereas BH EDs can be first, second or third.
2. French EDs can appear in clusters like in (3) while BH can only have one per clause
3. French EDs need not be subject coreferential while BH EDs must be.
4. French EDs have an established discourse/pragmatic function of implicating the ED's referent in the action of the sentence where it may not have been obvious

before (e.g. as an indirect benefactive or co-conspirator) whereas the BH ED, since it is already obligatorily subject coreferent, does not have this effect. Its pragmatic effect is understood less.

1.2 EDs across Early Biblical Hebrew (EBH) and Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH)

The underlying observation which grounds Givón's intuition that the ED is derived from a prior grammatical construction is the disparity in distribution of the ED between Genesis (a favored hallmark of EBH for Givón) and Song of Songs (a likewise favored exemplar of LBH). Nowhere in Givón (2013) do we have the numerical data we've seen in other papers, but Givón notes that the short 8 chapters of Song of Songs far outnumber the substantially longer 21 chapters of Genesis in terms of ED instantiations. The first stage in Givón's progression is the notion that the dative-marker *l-* derives initially from the allative particles *el* and *al*:

(4)

ALLATIVE

- (a) *va-yitsav YHWH elohim al ha-adam l-emor*
 and-commanded YHWH God on the-man to-say
 'And the LORD God commanded the man, saying'
 (Genesis 2:16)
- (b) *va-yave el ha-adam li-r'ot ma yikra l-o*
 and-brought ALL the-man to-see what will-call it.DAT
 'and brought them to the man to see what he would call them'
 (Genesis 2:19)

If there is a stage of Ancient Hebrew wherein there is no *l-* derivative of *el* and *al* then it predates the Bible, but we can see in the examples above how the allative particles are used to introduce verbal arguments much like a dative prefix.

(5)

Ditransitive

- (a) *sham eten et-dod-i I-ax*
 there give.1.IRR ACC-love-mine DAT-you
 ‘There I will give my love to you’
 (Song of Songs 7:13)
- (b) *va-yomar I-o*
 and-said [God] DAT-him
 ‘and [God] said to him...’
 (Genesis 3:9)
- Transitive**
- (c) *Xaverim makshivim I-kol-ex*
 Friends listen DAT-voice-yours
 ‘A lover is listening’
 (Song of Songs 8:13)
- (d) *ki anoxi magen I-xa*
 for I protect DAT-you
 ‘I am a shield to you’
 (Genesis 15:1)

(6)

- (a) *va-ya?asu la-hem hagurot*
 and-made REFL/BEN-themselves loincloths
 ‘and [they] made themselves loincloths’
 (Genesis 3:7)
- (b) *va-yivhar I-o lot et-kol kihar ha-yarden*
 and-chose REFL/BEN-himself Lot ACC-all plain the-Jordan
 ‘So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan’
 (Genesis 13:11)
- (c) *tor-ey zahav na?ase I-ax*
 wreaths-of gold make.1PL.IRR BEN-you
 ‘We will add wreaths of gold [to you]’
 (Song of Songs 1:11)
- (d) *apiryon asa I-o ha-melex shlomo*
 canopy made REFL/BEN-himself the-king Solomon
 ‘King Solomon made [himself] a palanquin’
 (Song of Songs 3:0)
- (e) *pitx-i I-i axot-i*
 open-IMP BEN-me sister-mine
 ‘Let me in, my [sister]’
 (Song of Songs 5:2)

Next is what might be called the standard dative form for ditransitive verbs wherein an indirect object or overt benefactive is built into the verb argument structure (e.g. ‘give’ or ‘say’) or transitives where the direct object is marked dative (e.g. ‘listen’ or, in BH, ‘protect’):

The next stage in the progression is the optional benefactive, wherein an additional benefactive/dative party is appended to the verb structure of a transitive verb where it is not required. Many of these are what Givón calls reflexive benefactives which Givón interprets to have an anaphoric interpretation as indexed by the subject. One observes that many of these examples involve transitive verbs of creation or acquisition:

I should point out that, morphologically, these reflexive benefactives do not look any different than EDs (unlike English where a *-self/-selves* is affixed to the pronoun). Givón interprets them differently because there is an obvious semantic role for a subject-coindexed/reflexive pronoun to play in these cases—i.e. a benefactive—which is not necessarily the case for our EDs:

(7)

ED

Intransitive

- (a) *va-telex va-teshev l-a mi-neged ha-rxek*
and-went and-sat [she] **ED-her** from-across the-distance
'and [she] went and sat down at a distance'
(Genesis 21:16)
- (b) *kum-i l-ax ra?aya-ti yafa-ti u-lex-i l-ax*
rise-IMP **ED-you** darling-mine beauty-mine and-go-IMP **ED-you**
'Arise, my darling; My fair one, come away!'
(Song of Songs 2:10)

Transitive

- (c) *hish-shamer le-xa pen tashiv et-bn-i shama*
REFL-watch.IMP **ED-you** lest return ACC-son-mine there
'On no account must you take my son back there!'
(Genesis 24:6)
- (d) *im lo ted?i l-ax ha-yafa b-nashim...*
If NEG will-know **ED-you** the-beauty.VOC among-women...
'If you do not know, O fairest of women...'
(Song of Songs 1:8)

Although I have attempted to show a diverse array of examples, Intransitive verbs of sudden motion or decisive change dominate examples of what Givón dubs ED-constructions. Givón points out that this is also the case in Modern Hebrew and Spanish with their ED analogs:

(8)

Modern Hebrew

sipar-ti l-o ex hi tasa l-a levada
told-I to-him how she flew **ED-her** alone
'I told him how she flew off all alone'
(Givón, 2013, 57)

Spanish

se-fue
REFL/ED-went.3SG
's/he went away/took off'
(Givón, 2013, 45)

Thus, the progression from allative/dative to ED also exists atop a verb gradient shifting from ditransitive/transitive to intransitive. It is this entire progression from (1) allative/dative arguments of ditransitive/transitive verbs through (2) optional benefactive arguments in transitive/intransitive verbs to (3)

ethical dative pronouns with intransitive verbs that we hope to encapsulate structurally in this section. First, however, we turn to a comparable phenomenon which has drawn some attention in recent years in order to elucidate the construction at play in BH, namely, Personal Datives in Appalachian English.

2. PERSONAL DATIVES IN APPALACHIAN ENGLISH

(9)

- (a) He_i loves **him**_i some baseball.
(b) I_d go out and cut **me**_i a limb off of a tree, get **me**_i a good straight one.
(c) Did you_i sing **you**_i some songs at youth group last night?
(Hutchinson and Armstrong, 2014, 178)

Appalachian Personal Datives (PD) share many of the defining properties of BH Ethical Datives: they are obligatorily subject coreferential, they are adjacent to the verb, they can be any person gender or number, they assume dative argument morphology and position but do not bear a theta-role, and they are accordingly non-argumental and non-truth-conditional. I would not be the first one to point out the similarity between these constructions, as Horn places the BH ED and English PD in direct comparison in his 2008 cross-linguistic survey of non-argument datives.

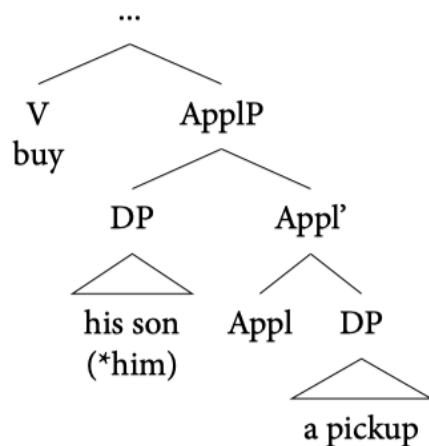
Hutchinson and Armstrong propose that PDs operate within the same syntactic architecture as English dative arguments in the applicative position since the two are in complementary distribution:

(10)

- (a) John's_i gonna buy him_i a pickup.
 (b) John's_i gonna buy (*him_i) his son a pickup
 (c) John's_i gonna buy (him_i) a pickup for his son
 (adapted from Hutchinson and Armstrong 2014, 185)

The authors' syntactic proposal is accordingly intuitive, with the PD occupying the specifier of a low ApplP as English double-object datives do:

(Fig. 1)



The remainder of Hutchinson and Armstrong's paper focuses on deriving the semantic/pragmatic effects of the personal dative, which the authors describe as the attribution of some degree of satisfaction to the subject through the completion of the verb. This flavor of satisfaction is lexically imprinted upon the Appl head (accordingly denoted as Appl sat) which introduces a satisfied-through predicate into the semantic derivation. This notion of "satisfaction" is not altogether dissimilar from Givón's proposal for the effect of the BH ED as "perfectivity" in that they both seem to carry a degree of

telicity and decisiveness in the completion of an action. The explanation for why the PD has to be co-referent with the subject hinges on this semantic component of the analysis. Hutchinson and Armstrong define satisfaction in such a way that it must be interpreted reflexively. Similarly to how the *se*-marker marks the verb as intrinsically reflexive without the need for reflexive morphology on an argument, the *satisfied-through* predicate is intrinsically marked in such a way that it is only compatible with a subject-coreferent pronoun. Since this essay takes a constructionist and syntactic (as opposed to lexical-semantic) approach, this explanation for the subject-coreference of PDs is the one idea of Hutchinson and Armstrong's that I will push back against, instead deriving our explanation from syntactic agreement and feature valuation.

3. PROPOSAL: REDUCTION OF SPEC-APPLP

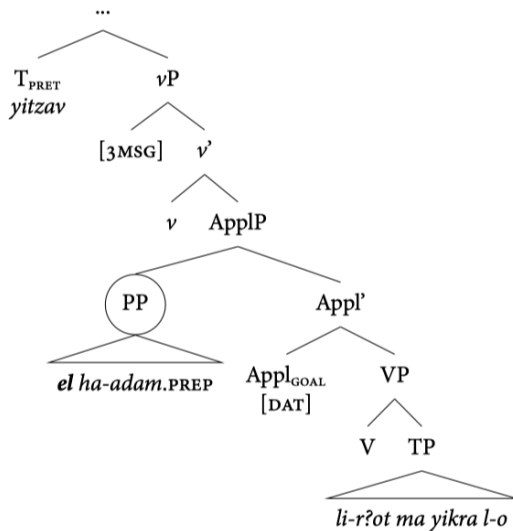
In accounting for Givón's progression as described at the beginning of the section, a useful starting is the kind of derivation attested in Baker (2013) where a prepositional-goal argument is introduced in the Spec of a high ApplP:

(11)

ALLATIVE

va-yave el ha-adam li-?rot ma yikra l-o
 and-brought [3MSG] ALL the-man to-see what will-call it.DAT
 'and brought them to the man to see what he would call them'

(Fig. 2)



(Genesis 2:19)

If we assume that Appl is the assigner of Dative Case—which will be helpful in accounting for the subsequent stages in the progression—then here, the PP intervenes and assigns its own prepositional case to *ha-adam*. The resultant grammaticalization chain can take place across this same syntactic architecture via a gradual reduction of structure of the Spec ApplP constituent allowing Dative Case to be assigned in all ensuing phases. This notion of “reduction” of structure is reminiscent of Cardinaletti and Starke’s 1994 analysis of the three classes of pronouns wherein these different classes of different strengths are characterized by having more or less “structural deficiency”. Over time, the Spec ApplP constituent will come to possess less structure and fewer features, and that is the basis of this grammaticalization chain. Structural reduction as the basis of syntactic grammaticalization also came into the spotlight with Ely Van Gelderen’s (2004) book *Grammaticalization as Economy*. A number of the principles of grammaticalization which Van Gelderen identifies are deemed “economical” because they require fewer fundamental

operations to produce. In the progression we examine here, the lessening of phrasal structure at ApplP is *motivated* by the inherent tendency toward using fewer merge-operations (i.e. merging heads into phrases and features onto heads).

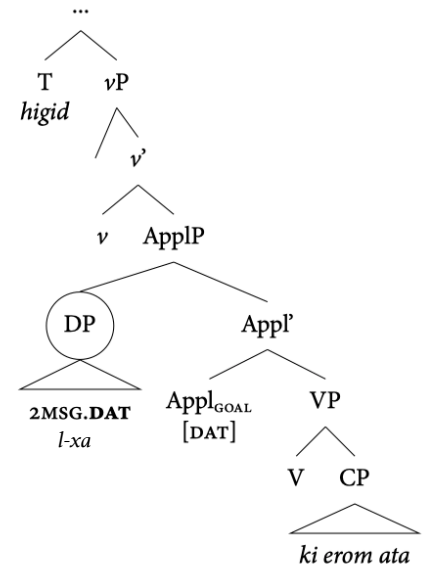
The relationship between a PP and the Dative head Appl 0 provides the structural proximity necessary to facilitate the morphophonological reduction of these prepositions *el* and *al* to the dative *l-* morpheme, and the next phase in the progression are dative arguments with precisely that morphology. The structural representation here is most pertinent in ditransitive/double-object/dat+comp constructions, since with transitive verbs that take a singular dative argument, it matters less where that argument is situated for our purposes. At this point the dative argument is semantically equivalent to an allative prepositional argument representing a goal.

(12)

DATIVE

mi higid l-xa ki erom ata
 who told DAT-2MSG COMP naked you
 ‘Who told you that you were naked?’

(Fig. 3)



(Genesis 3:11)

This is perhaps the most “textbook” application of an ApplP; the projection serves as the structural mechanism whereby a complement or direct object (e.g. what is being told) is applied to another participant in the event (e.g. to whom it is being told). The development into the next phase of the progression, the optional benefactive, then requires no actual structural evolution, only the innovation of a slightly different flavor of Appl, which, instead of introducing a goal, can introduce a benefactive in verbs of creation or acquisition. Needless to say, this is an easy logical jump to make. A speaker who uses the previous ApplP to introduce goals or recipients of actions might easily innovate on the same construction in order to introduce a party for whose benefit an action was undertaken. Since the optional benefactive is, by definition, optional, the speaker can choose whether or not to implement this already-established High ApplP architecture on transitive verbs of creation. Indeed, the fact that this same High Appl slot is used for the optional benefactive makes it incompatible with double-object constructions, much like the PD is in English:

(13)

va-ya?asu (*l-o) *la-hem* (*l-o) *hagurot*
 and-made (*him.DAT) BEN-them (*him.DAT) loincloths
 ‘(intended interpretation) And they made him loincloths for their benefit’

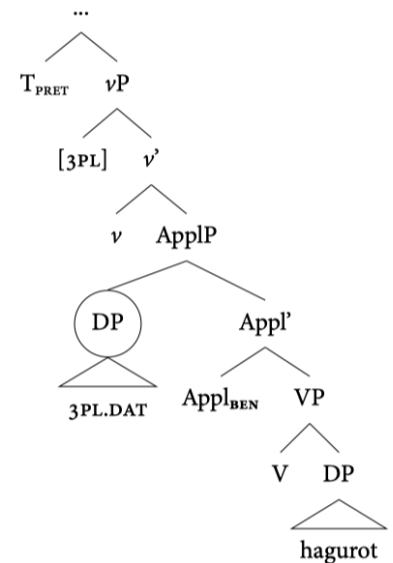
Thus our resultant construction looks something like:

(14)

OPTIONAL BENEFACTIVE

va-ya?asu *la-hem* *hagurot*
 and-made BEN-them loincloths
 ‘and [they] made themselves loincloths’

(Fig. 4)



(Genesis 3:7)

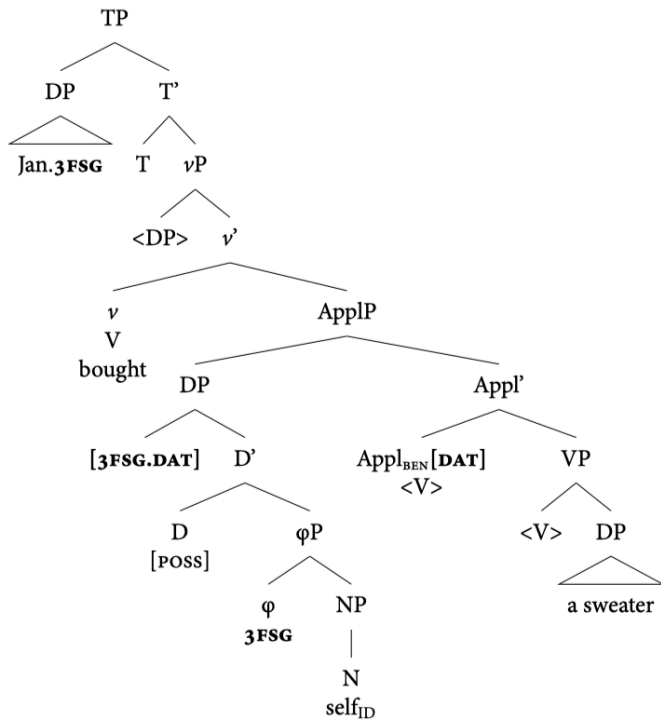
The one hint of structural evolution in this phase is that, as Givón points out, many of these optional benefactives seem to have a reflexive interpretation—even though there is no distinct reflexive morphology in Hebrew—and this is reflected in the glossing and translation of (6). Since this essay is taking a syntactic rather than a semantic approach, we can account for this reflexive property if we propose that this Spec Appl constituent is able to be—or somehow needs to be—bound by the subject. One possibility here is that it is a DP whose ϕ -features are unvalued and which probes upward for valuation from the grammatical subject. An analog for English *-self* forms would be that *-self* enters the derivation as an NP representing an identity function and the ϕ P gets its feature valuation from the subject. The tree below is based on the analysis of English *-self* reflexives as possessive DP’s wherein SpecDP is just a set of ϕ -features anaphorically valued by the grammatical subject and getting morphological dative case from Appl resulting in *her+[poss]+-self*.

(15)

REFL/BEN

Jan bought herself a sweater.

(Fig. 5)



The reason I emphasize the elaborated structure of the DP in an anaphoric applicative and its feature valuation is that this is the crucial bridge between a reflexive benefactive and an ethical dative. The idea that Spec-AppIP can enter the derivation undervalued means it will be obligatorily bound by its closest C-Commander. The difference between the construction above and an ED (or PD for that matter), is that whereas the former has a complex DP with a pro-[poss]-self structure, the latter is comprised of only an undervalued φP. The φP likewise probes upward for valuation and agrees with the grammatical subject and is subsequently spelled out as this

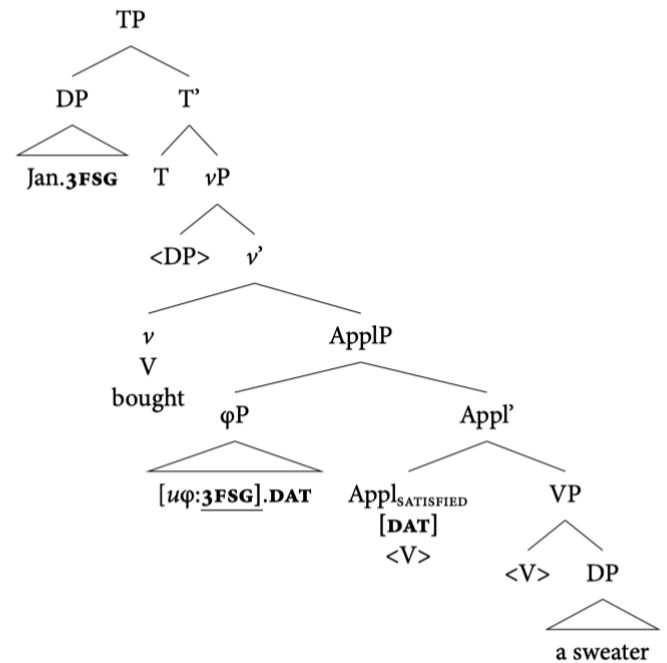
new set of φ-features with the Dative case morphology as assigned to it by the Appl head:

(16)

PD

Jan bought her a sweater.

(Fig. 6)



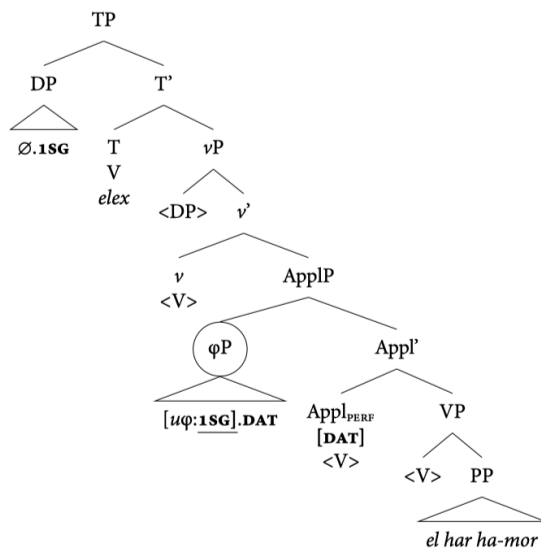
This derivation transfers seamlessly to the Hebrew:

(17)

ED

elex l-i el har ha-mor
 I-go.IRR ED-1SG unto mount the-myrrh
 'I will betake me to the mount of myrrh'

(Fig. 7)



(Song of Songs 4:6)

The one additional change that I have notated between a benefactive argument and a PD/ED is that the ApplP changes its flavor slightly once more. For English PDs, we end up with a satisfied-through ApplP *a la* Hutchinson and Armstrong, and, for the Hebrew ED, we get a “perfective” Appl *a la* Givón. To review, the progression in question can be encapsulated thus:

(Tab. 1)

Sequence	Spec-AppIP	AppI-flavor
ALLATIVE	PP	GOAL
DATIVE	DP	GOAL
OPTIONAL BENEFACTIVE	DP	BEN
REFLEXIVE BENEFACTIVE	DP [<i>uφ</i>]	BEN
ETHICAL DATIVE	φP	PERF

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this essay, I have presented a structural derivation for the grammaticalization chain of the BH ethical dative as presented in Givón (2013). Ultimately, Givón’s progression is due to the sequential reduction of the substructure in the specifier of an Applicative Phrase, and the reduction in fundamental operations required to produce the resultant syntactic form at each stage is what motivated this grammaticalization (i.e. economy). Although Givón ultimately uses cross-linguistic data to undermine the notion of multi-step grammaticalization chains, this analysis remains consistent with the phenomena he describes as each of the stages in this progression is isolable and unidirectional (in that they involve the reduction of structural complexity and feature valuation) unto itself. The fact that many of the stages in the evolution of ethical datives co-occur in a given text or time-frame is also consistent with Krochian model of grammatical evolution whereby the reanalysis of an existing phenomenon or the innovation of a new one does not necessarily surface as the outright or linear displacement of a previous form. The invention of the ethical dative utilized the same grammatical architecture as many existing constructions and did not entirely usurp them, but rather introduced a new pragmatic flavor to that slot in the syntax. One area of inquiry ripe for further pursuit would be investigating how this model of ED evolution maps onto the other crosslinguistic examples of ethical datives or non-argument datives described in the literature including Tamil and those in Horn (2008). If the same principles of structural/featural reduction in Spec AppIP hold, it would further bolster this analysis and Givón’s account of the grammaticalization chain more generally. My work here has established a set of concrete grammatical parameters against which to assess BH writing when trying to distinguish time-period and author, even within a given text. Since our model of syntactic evolution is based on the idea of a given language

population having multiple contemporaneous grammars, having an idea behind the mechanics of particular innovations and variants gives us a basic starting point to help uncover the grammatical fingerprint of a given text or author.

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