

COMPARATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN 'ISRAELI HEBREW'

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ABSTRACT

'Hebrew' is one of the official languages – with Arabic and English – of the State of Israel, established in 1948 on 20,770 km² in the 'Middle' East. Israeli emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Its *symbolic* first native speaker, Itamar Ben-Yehuda, began speaking in 1886. Israeli is a fusional synthetic language, with non-concatenative discontinuous morphemes realised by vowel infixation. This typological paper demonstrates that the typical Israeli comparative construction involves a copula or verbless clause construction, with the 'Parameter' as copula complement (CC) or as a verbless clause complement (VCC). However, there is another mono-clausal comparative construction, in which the 'Index' of comparison is the main verb in an extended intransitive clause. Future research would demonstrate that Israeli comparatives correspond with Yiddish and 'Standard Average European', although the forms used are Hebrew.

Keywords: Hebrew, Israel, Basic Linguistic Theory, linguistics, Jewish language and culture, typology, superlative, comparative, extended intransitive, grammar, forms versus patterns, Israeli, Yiddish, Standard Average European, fusional, synthetic, discontinuous morphemes, infixation, complementation, clauses, analyticization, allative case, construct-state, ambiguity

1. INTRODUCTION

'Hebrew' is legally one of the official languages of the State of Israel. Arabic and English also are official languages, and this reflects, for Arabic, demographic realities, and for English, the State of Israel being the successor state of British-ruled Palestine, itself one out of several successor polities of the Ottoman empire. Yet, the statement that 'Hebrew' is the official language, as well as the main spoken language, in Israel, is misleading, in that the language spoken and written is 'Israeli Hebrew'. In fact, I usually refer to it as 'Israeli' (*tout court*) (Zuckermann 1999, 2003), because it has very distinctive features with respect to earlier historical strata of Hebrew.

Israeli (henceforth 'Israeli' or 'Israeli Hebrew') emerged prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Its symbolic first native speaker, Itamar Ben-Yehuda, the revivalist Eliezer Ben-Yehuda's son, began speaking in approx. 1886.

This Basic Linguistic Theory typological paper demonstrates that the typical Israeli comparative construction involves a copula or verbless clause construction, with the 'Parameter' (see below) as copula complement (CC) or as a verbless clause complement (VCC). All of these terms will be explained below. However, there is another mono-clausal comparative construction, in which the 'Index' (see below) of comparison is the main verb in an extended intransitive clause.

• Bernard Comrie and Ephraim Nissan read a draft of this paper and provided invaluable suggestions for improvement. A note on the transcription: whereas *á* is primary stress, *à* is secondary stress. If a stress is not mentioned in a bisyllabic word, it means that there are two possible stresses

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2. GRAMMATICAL PROFILE

Israeli (a.k.a. 'Israeli Hebrew') – just like Hebrew (e.g. Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew) – is a fusional synthetic language. It is a fusional language since it has morphemes which simultaneously encode several meanings – cf. Latin *dominus* ('lord'), whose suffix *-us* 'fuses' the meanings of masculine, singular and nominative. It is a synthetic language as it has a high morpheme-per-word ratio and it uses non-concatenative discontinuous morphemes realised by vowel infixation. Consider *yoháv* 'love:3msgFUT', i.e. '(he) will love'; *mitahévet* 'fall.in.love:fsgPRES', i.e. '(she) is falling in love'. (A list of abbreviations used in this paper can be found after the bibliography.)

However, Israeli is much more analytic than (Biblical/Mishnaic) Hebrew. Whereas the Hebrew phrase for 'my grandfather' was *sav-í* 'grandfather-1POSS', in Israeli it is *sába shel-ì* 'grandfather GEN-1sg'. Still, Israeli sometimes uses the Semitic feature known as 'construct-state' (Israeli *smikhút*), in which two nouns are combined, the first being modified or possessed by the second. For example, *repúblika-t banánot*, lit. 'Republic bananas', refers to 'banana Republic'. However, unlike in Hebrew, the construct-state is not highly productive in Israeli. Compare the Hebrew construct-state '*em ha-yéled* 'mother DEF-child' with the more analytic Israeli phrase *ha-íma shel ha-yéled* 'DEF-mother GEN DEF-child', both meaning 'the mother of the child', i.e. 'the child's mother'.

Israeli is a head-marking language. It is nominative-accusative at the syntactic level and partially also at the morphological level. As opposed to Biblical Hebrew – whose constituent order is VAO / VS(E) – but like Standard European¹ and English, the usual constituent order of Israeli is AVO / SV(E). Thus, if there is no case marking, one can resort to the constituent order. Israeli is characterized by an asymmetry between definite Os and indefinite Os. There is an accusative marker, *et*, only before a definite O (mostly a definite noun or personal name). *Et-ha* is currently undergoing fusion and reduction to become *ta*. Consider *taví l-i et ha-séfer* 'give:2msgIMP (puristically FUT) DAT-1sg ACC DEF-book' (i.e. 'Give me the book!'), where *et*, albeit syntactically a case-marker, is a preposition, and *ha* is a definite article. This sentence is realised phonetically as *taví li ta-séfer*.

2.1 Nouns

Israeli nouns show number, normally only singular and plural. Each noun is either m(asculine) or f(eminine), the latter often being created by adding a suffix to the unmarked masculine. For instance, whereas *mazkír* is 'male secretary', *mazkirá* is 'female secretary' (note the addition of *-a*). Similarly, whilst *profésor* is 'male professor', *profesorít* is 'female professor'. Pronouns have 'case forms' consisting of a preposition plus a suffix: nominative (e.g. *aní* 'I'), accusative (*otí* 'me'), dative (*li* 'to me') and genitive (*shelí* 'my'). However, NPs which are not pronouns do not bear case marking. The only exceptions are the above-mentioned accusative marker *et* (or *ta*), and the lexicalized allative ('to/towards') case (which, serendipitously, is based on the historical accusative case, see Weingreen 1959), e.g. *báit* 'house' > *ha-báyt-a* 'to the house'; *yerushaláim* 'Jerusalem' > *yerushaláym-a* 'to Jerusalem'; *tsafón* 'north' > *tsafón-a* 'to the north'. New allative phrases, e.g. *tel avív-a* 'to Tel Aviv', are not used unless one is trying to sound flowery or jocular.

Adjectives agree in number, gender and definiteness with the nouns they modify, e.g. *ha-yéled ha-gadól*, lit. 'DEF-boy DEF-big', i.e. 'the big boy'; *yelad-ím gdol-ím*, lit. 'boy-mpl big-mpl', i.e. 'big boys'.

¹ The term 'Standard Average European', a.k.a. SAE, was first introduced by Whorf (1941: 25) and recently received more attention by Haspelmath (1998, 2001) and Bernini and Ramat (1996) – cf. 'European Sprachbund' in Kuteva (1998).

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2.2 Verbs

As opposed to Biblical Hebrew, which had only a perfect-imperfect distinction, Israeli has three tenses: past, present and future. In the past and future, verbal forms differ according to gender, number and 1st, 2nd and 3rd person. However, in the present tense, verbs are only conjugated according to gender and number and there is no person distinction. The historical reason is that the forms of the Israeli present can be traced back to the Hebrew participle, which is less complex than the historical perfect and imperfect forms.

Verbs are transitive, intransitive or ambitransitive (labile). Ambitransitivity is usually of the S=A type. Whereas S is an intransitive subject, i.e. the subject of an intransitive verb, A is a transitive subject. For example, in the Israeli sentence *dzhúlyo shatá etmòl* ‘Giulio_s drank yesterday’ (cf. *dzhúlyo shatá etmòl bíra* ‘Giulio_s drank yesterday beer_o’), the object of ‘drinking’ is not mentioned. However, owing to Americanization, there are more and more ambitransitive verbs of the S=O type (O being the object of a transitive verb), e.g. *ha-séfer mokhér tov* ‘The-book_s sells well’ (cf. *grísham mókher et ha-séfer tov* ‘Grisham_s sells ACC the-book_o well’); *yésh po máshehu she-meríakh ra* ‘There.is here something_s that-smells bad’ (cf. *aní meríakh po máshehu ra* ‘I_s smell here something_o bad’).

2.3 Clauses

The main clause in Israeli consists of (a) clause-initial peripheral markers, e.g. discourse markers, e.g. ‘In my opinion [...]’; (b) NP(s) (i.e. noun-phrases such as ‘the king of Spain’) or complement clause(s); (c) a predicate – either verbal, copular or verbless; (d) clause-final peripheral elements, e.g. discourse markers. The only obligatory element is the predicate, e.g. *higáti* ‘arrive:1sgPAST’, i.e. ‘I arrived’. Sentences (1), (2) and (3) are examples of a verbal, copular and verbless clause, respectively. The notation [ester]_A means that Esther is the subject of a transitive verb, [akhlá]_V means that *akhlá* ‘[she] ate’ is a verb, and so forth. (A list of abbreviations can be found after the bibliography.)

(1) אסתר אכלה תפוח.

[ester]_A {[akhlá]_V [tapúakh]_O}
[Esther]_A {[eat:3fsgPAST]_V [apple]_O}
‘Esther ate an apple.’

(2) אסתר היא אחות שלי.

[ester]_{CS} {[hi]_{COP} [akhót shel-ì]_{CC}}
[Esther]_{CS} {[COP:fsg]_{COP} [sister GEN-1sg]_{CC}}
‘Esther is my sister.’

(3) אסתר חכמה.

[ester]_{VCS} {[khakham-á]_{VCC}}
[Esther]_{VCS} {[clever-f]_{VCC}}
‘Esther is clever.’

There are many types of subordinate clause, e.g. adverbial (denoting comparison, time, place, condition, concession, reason, result, goal, state), adjectival/relative, nominal/complement. For a detailed discussion of complementation clauses in Israeli, see Zuckermann (2006b). On reported speech in Israeli, see Zuckermann (2006c).

3. COMPARATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

3.1 Type A1

This type of comparative construction involves a copula or verbless clause construction, with the Parameter as copula complement (CC) or as a verbless clause complement (VCC) – see Dixon (2004: 4-8).

3.1.1 'More'

The following is the unmarked, most common comparative construction:

- (4) דני יותר גדול מיוסי.

[dáni] _{VCS}	[yotér	gadól] _{VCC}	[mi-yósi] _{PERI}
[Danny] _{VCS}	[more	big] _{VCC}	[from-Yossi] _{PERI}
[COMPAREE] _{VCS}	[INDEX	PARAMETER] _{VCC}	[MARK-STANDARD] _{PERI}

 'Danny is older/bigger than Yossi.'

The Comparee (*dáni* 'Danny') is a Verbless Clause Subject (VCS). The Parameter (*gadól* 'big') and the Index (*yotér* 'more'), which modifies the Parameter, constitute the Verbless Clause Complement (VCC). The Standard (*yósi* 'Yossi') is a Peripheral Argument (PERI), the grammatical function of which is marked by the Mark *mi-* 'from'.

It is possible to have zero in the Index slot, as follows, but this is literary and sounds high register:

- (5) דני גדול מיוסי.

[dáni] _{VCS}	[gadól] _{VCC}	[mi-yósi] _{PERI}
[Danny] _{VCS}	[big] _{VCC}	[from-Yossi] _{PERI}
[COMPAREE] _{VCS}	[PARAMETER] _{VCC}	[MARK-STANDARD] _{PERI}

 'Danny is older/bigger than Yossi.'

The Mark can also be *me-ashér*, lit. 'from that' (*ashér* is usually a relativizer), as follows:

- (6) דני יותר גדול מאשר יוסי.

[dáni] _{VCS}	[yotér	gadól] _{VCC}	[me-ashér	yósi] _{PERI}
[Danny] _{VCS}	[more	big] _{VCC}	[from-REL	Yossi] _{PERI}
[COMPAREE] _{VCS}	[INDEX	PARAMETER] _{VCC}	[MARK	STANDARD] _{PERI}

 'Danny is older/bigger than Yossi.'

It is, in fact, possible to have a copular clause, as follows, but this is not common:

- (7) דני הוא יותר גדול מאשר יוסי.

[dáni] _{CS}	[hu] _{COP}	[yotér	gadól] _{CC}	[me-ashér yósi] _{PERI}	
[Danny] _{CS}	[COP:msg] _{COP}	[more	big] _{CC}	[from-REL Yossi] _{PERI}	
[COMPAREE] _{CS}		[INDEX	PARAMETER] _{CC}	[MARK	STANDARD] _{PERI}

 'Danny is older/bigger than Yossi.'

In formal speech, the Index and the Parameter can switch places in Sentences (4), (6) and (7), for example:

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(8) דני גדול יותר מיוסי.

[dáni] _{VCS}	[gadól	yotér] _{VCC}	[mi-yósi] _{PERI}
[Danny] _{VCS}	[big	more] _{VCC}	[from-Yossi] _{PERI}
[COMPAREE] _{VCS}	[PARAMETER	INDEX] _{VCC}	[MARK-STANDARD] _{PERI}

'Danny is older/bigger than Yossi.'

Negation appears before the Index or the Parameter, whichever comes first:

(9) דני לא יותר גדול מיוסי.

[dáni] _{VCS}	[lo	yotér	gadól] _{VCC}	[mi-yósi] _{PERI}
[Danny] _{VCS}	[NEG	more	big] _{VCC}	[from-Yossi] _{PERI}
[COMPAREE] _{VCS}	[INDEX	PARAMETER] _{VCC}	[MARK-STANDARD] _{PERI}

'Danny is not older/bigger than Yossi.'

(10) דני לא יותר מיוסי.

[dáni] _{VCS}	[lo	gadól	yotér] _{VCC}	[mi-yósi] _{PERI}
[Danny] _{VCS}	[NEG	big	more] _{VCC}	[from-Yossi] _{PERI}
[COMPAREE] _{VCS}	[PARAMETER	INDEX] _{VCC}	[MARK-STANDARD] _{PERI}

'Danny is not older/bigger than Yossi.'

The following matrix summarizes the possibilities:

(11)	COMPAREE	(COP)	(NEG)	INDEX	PARAMETER	INDEX	MARK	STANDARD
	dáni	(hu)	(lo)	yotér	gadól		mi-/meashér	yósi
	dáni	(hu)	(lo)		gadól	yotér	mi-	yósi
	dáni	(hu)	(lo)		gadól		mi-	yósi

'Danny is (not) older/bigger than Yossi.'

The Comparee and Standard are usually expressed by NPs, mostly a definite noun or personal name, and sometimes a pronoun or without an explicit mention, as follows:

(12) תפסיק להיות יותר צדיק מהאפיפיור!

tafsík	[[li-yót] _{COP}	[yotér tsadík] _{CC}	[me-ha-apifyór] _{PERI}] _{COMP CLAUSE}
stop:2msgIMP	[[INF-be] _{COP}	[more righteous] _{CC}	[from-DEF-pope] _{PERI}] _{COMP CLAUSE}
	COMPAREE	[INDEX PARAM.] _{CC}	[MARK-STANDARD] _{PERI}

'Stop being more righteous than the pope!'

But they can also be an abstract noun, as in the following verbal clause, where the Parameter is an extended intransitive verb (rather than an adjective):

(13) אינטליגנציה רגשית עוזרת הרבה יותר מאיי קיי.

[inteligéntsya rigshí-t] _S	[ozér-et	harbé yotér] _{VP}	[me-ày kyú] _{PERI}
[intelligence:f emotional-f] _S	[help:PRES-fsg much more] _{VP}		[from-I. Q.] _{PERI}
[COMPAREE] _S	[PARAMETER	INDEX] _{VP}	[MARK-STAND.] _{PERI}

'Emotional intelligence is much more helpful than I.Q.'

In the above sentence the Index (modified by *harbé* 'much') follows the Parameter. In such a case, negation will precede the Parameter. Consider the following sentence, with the Parameter being an adverb ('fast') of an intransitive verb ('run'):

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(14) קרל לואיס לא ירוץ יותר מהר מפייטרו מנאה.

karl	lúis	lo	yarúts	yotér	mahér	mi-pyétro	menéa
Carl	Lewis	NEG	run:3msgFUT	more	fast	from-Pietro	Mennea
-----COMPAREE-----				INDEX	PARAMETER	MARK-STANDARD	

‘Carl Lewis will not run faster than Pietro Mennea [an Italian former sprinter, b. 1952, who held the 200m world record in the 1980s].’

That said, in colloquial speech the negator can come just before the Index, i.e. between *yarúts* ‘will run’ and *yotér* ‘more’. In the following sentence – where there is no flexibility with regards to the location of the Index – the transitive verb *ohév* ‘like’ can be analysed either as part of the Comparee or as the Parameter:

(15) אני אוהב שווארמה יותר מפלאפל.

aní	ohév	shawárma	yotér	mi-	falafel
I	love:msgPRES	shawarma	more	from-	falafel
COMPAREE			INDEX	MARK-STANDARD	

‘I like shawarma [Middle-eastern döner kebab] more than falafel [ground spiced chickpeas shaped into balls and fried].’

Occasionally, the Parameter can be a noun:

(16) דני הוא יותר בן-אדם ממוטי.

dáni	hu	yotér	ben--adám	mi-	móti
Danny	COP:msg	more	person	from-	Motti
COMPAREE		INDEX	PARAMETER	MARK-STANDARD	

‘Danny is more of a ‘mentsh’ [humane, gentlemanly, honest...] than Motti.’

In speech, the Index and Parameter often precede the Comparee:

(17) יותר טוב שיפוצניק עצבני מחנטריש.

yotér	tov	shipúts-nik	atsbaní	mi-	khantarísh
more	good	repair-nik	crusty	from-	crummy
INDEX	PARAMETER	-----COMPAREE-----		MARK-STANDARD	

‘Better a ‘crusty’/nervous builder than a ‘crummy’/mediocre one.’

Note the ellipsis: *shipúts-nik* ‘builder’ does not appear in the Standard.

3.1.2 ‘Less’

Israeli ‘less’ constructions are very similar to ‘more’ ones. Just as in the case of *yotér* ‘more’, it is possible for the Mark to be *me-ashér*. The Index *pakhót* ‘less’ can occur after the Parameter but it is not common.

(18) דני פחות מוכשר מ-מאשר יוסי.

[dáni] _{VCS}	[pakhót	mukhshár] _{VCC}	[mi- / me-ashér	yósi] _{PERI}
[Danny] _{VCS}	[less	talented] _{VCC}	[from / from-REL	Yossi] _{PERI}
[COMPAREE] _{VCS}	[INDEX	PARAMETER] _{VCC}	[-----MARK-----	STANDARD] _{PERI}

‘Danny is less talented than Yossi.’

The Parameter can be a noun, as in the following existential copular clause (Note the ellipsis: the Parameter and part of the Standard do not reappear after the Mark):

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(19) בפיגוע ההתאבדות אתמול במוסקווה היו פחות הרוגים מאשר בבאר שבע.

[be-[pigúa	ha-hitabdút]	CONSTR	etmól	be-moskvá]	PERI	
[in-[terror.attack	DEF-suicide]	CONSTR	yesterday	in-MOSCOW]	PERI	
[-----COMPAREE-----]					PERI	
[hayú]	COP	[pakhót harug-ím]	CS	[me-ashér	be-ber shéva]	PERI
[EXIS.COP:plPAST]	COP	[less killed-impl]	CS	[from-REL	in-Beer Sheva]	PERI
		[INDEX PARAMETER]	CS	[MARK	STANDARD]	PERI

‘In yesterday’s suicide terror attack in Moscow there were fewer killed than in Beer Sheva.’

The Parameter can consist of a transitive verb:

(20) המלך עבדאללה מדבר ערבית פחות טוב מאנגלית.

ha-mélekh abdála	medabér	aravít	pakhót tov	me-anglít	
DEF-king	Abdullah	speak:msgPRES	Arabic	less good	from-English
		PARAMETER→	COMPAREE	INDEX	←PARAM. MARK-STAND.

‘King Abdullah speaks Arabic less well than English.’

Obviously, the Comparee here is ‘Arabic’ rather than ‘King Abdullah’. Note the ellipsis: *medabér* ‘speaks’ does not reappear after the Mark.

3.1.3 ‘The same as’

Israeli ‘the same as’ constructions are structurally different from ‘more’ or ‘less’ constructions. They lack an Index, the sameness being expressed by the Mark *kmo*, lit. ‘as, like’.

(21) דני מוכשר כמו יוסי.

[dáni]	[mukhshár]	[kmo	yósi]	PERI
[Danny]	[talented]	[as	Yossi]	PERI
[COMPAREE]	[PARAMETER]	[MARK	STANDARD]	PERI

‘Danny is as talented as Yossi.’

The Mark can be followed by a modifier such as *be-érekh* ‘approximately’ (lit. ‘in-value’), *kimát* ‘almost’ or *pakhót o yotér* ‘more or less’ (lit. ‘less or more’); or by augmentative adverbs such as *bi-dyúk* (puristically *be-diyúk*) ‘exactly’ (lit. ‘in exactness’) and *mamásh* ‘exactly’ (‘substantially’):

(22) דני מוכשר ממש\בדיוק כמו יוסי.

[dáni]	[mukhshár]	[mamásh/bidyúk	kmo	yósi]	PERI
[Danny]	[talented]	[exactly	as	Yossi]	PERI
[COMPAREE]	[PARAMETER]	[MARK	STANDARD]	PERI

‘Danny is exactly as talented as Yossi.’

Instead of using the Mark *kmo* ‘as’, an Israeli formal writer could use the rare *ke-* ‘as’:

(23) דני מוכשר כיוסי.

[dáni]	[mukhshár]	[ke-yósi]	PERI
[Danny]	[talented]	[as-Yossi]	PERI
[COMPAREE]	[PARAMETER]	[MARK-STANDARD]	PERI

‘Danny is as talented as Yossi.’

When the Parameter is a noun, the inflectable Index *ot-ó*, lit. 'ACC-msg', meaning 'the same', can be used:

(24) לברק אובאמה יש אותו סיכוי לנצח כמו להילארי קלינטון.

le-barák	obáma	yesh	ot-ó	sikúy	le-natséakh
to-Barack	Obama	EXIS.COP	ACC-msg	chance:msg	INF-win

kmo	le-híleri	klínton
as	to-Hillary	Clinton

'Barack Obama has the same chance of winning as Hillary Clinton.'

The expression *be-ot-á midá*, lit. 'in-ACC-fsg measure:fsg', i.e. 'in the same measure', is often used the 'the same as' constructions.

3.2 Type A1-si

In an appropriate discourse context the Standard can be omitted in 'more' and 'less' constructions (but obviously not in 'the same as' constructions). Dixon (2004: 8-9) calls this 'Type-A1-si' since the Standard is implicit. Consider the following sentence:

(25) זה יותר יפה.

ze	yotér	yafè
DEM	more	beautiful
COMPAREE	INDEX	PARAMETER

'This is more beautiful.'

The Standard is implicit but understood from context.

3.3 Extended Intransitive 'Type C'

As opposed to Type A, where the Index is a modifier to the Parameter, Israeli uses – albeit significantly less frequently – a comparative construction in which the Index is the main extended intransitive verb in a clause, with Comparee and Standard being its subject and indirect object arguments. This can be categorized under Dixon's 'Type C' (2004: 15-17) with one modification: in Israeli the Comparee and Standard are not A and O arguments but rather S and E arguments. The Parameter is usually expressed immediately after the verb, as following:

(26) לארי פרנקלין עולה ברשלנותו על ג'ונת'ן פולארד.

[lári fránklin]	olé	be-rashlanut-ó	al	[dzhónatan pólard]
[Larry Franklin]	exceed:msgPRES	in-negligence-3msg	on	[Jonathan Pollard]
---COMPAREE-----	INDEX	PARAMETER	MARK	-----STANDARD-----

'Larry Franklin [U.S. Air Force Reserve colonel who has pleaded guilty to passing information about U.S. policy towards Iran to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC)] exceeds Jonathan Pollard [convicted Israeli spy and former U. S. Naval civilian intelligence analyst] in his negligence.'

Besides the preposition requirement (*al* 'on'), the indirect object in such comparative construction cannot be the target of passivization.

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Punningly comparing the Yarkon River (south of Ramat Aviv, lit. ‘plateau of spring’, a suburb of Tel Aviv) and Benny Begin, the son of Menachem Begin, former Israeli Prime Minister, an Israeli could say the following:

- (27) אף אחד מהם לא מגיע לרמת אביב/אביו.
 af ekhád me-hèm lo megía le-[ramát avív]_{CONSTR}
 NEG one from-they NEG arrive:msgPRES to-[Ramat/level Aviv/his.father]_{CONSTR}
 ‘None of them arrives at Ramat Aviv / at the level of his father.’

Note that the Israeli words for ‘spring’ (*avív* as in Ramat Aviv, modelled upon Tel Aviv, the latter being Nahum Sokolov’s witty translation of Herzl’s *Altneuland* (the ancient *tel* ‘hill’ with the new *avív* ‘spring’) – see Yadin and Zuckermann forthcoming, as well as Ezekiel 3:15) and ‘his father’ are homophonous.

4. SUPERLATIVE

Although the Parameters used in both are similar, Israeli comparative and superlative constructions behave in a different way syntactically. As seen above, a comparative adjective typically makes up the whole of a verbless clause complement argument, and relates two participants of equal status. A superlative adjective, on the other hand, modifies a head noun within an NP which includes a definite article. It effectively identifies a unique individual, as in the following sentence:

- (28) הייתי הילד הכי גבוה בכיתה.
 hayítí ha-yéled hakhí gavóa b-a-kitá
 be:1mpAST DEF-boy most tall in-DEF-class
 COMPAREE INDEX PARAMETER MARK STANDARD
 ‘I was the tallest child in the class.’

The Mark and the Standard are optional, see the following sentence which lacks them:

- (29) פנחס הוא הכנר הכי טוב.
 pinkhas hu ha-kanár **hakhí** **tov**
 Pinchas COP:msg DEF-violinist **most** **good**
 COMPAREE PARAMETER→ INDEX ←PARAMETER
 ‘Pinchas is the best violinist.’

Whilst *hakhí* ‘(the) most’ (historically, ‘DEF-REL’, i.e. ‘the that’) is the most common Index, in high register one can use *be-yotér*, lit. ‘in more’, as well. Note that *yotér* is the common Index in the ‘more’ constructions (see above). However, whereas *hakhí* has to come before the Parameter (which has to have an indefinite adjective), *be-yotér* has to follow the Parameter (which has to have a definite adjective), as follows:

- (30) פנחס הוא הכנר הטוב ביותר (בעולם).
 pinkhas hu ha-kanár **ha-tóv** **be-yotér** (b-a-olám)
 Pinchas COP:msg DEF-violinist **DEF-good** **in-more** (in-DEF-world)
 COMPAREE -----PARAMETER----- INDEX (MARK STANDARD)
 ‘Pinchas is the best violinist (in the world).’

Elsewhere, i.e. not when modifying the adjective of a definite Parameter in a superlative construction, *be-yotér* functions as an augmentative adverb and means simply ‘very’ – see the following non-superlative/comparative sentence:

- (31) פנחס הוא כנר טוב ביותר.
 pinkhas hu kanár tóv **be-yotér**
 Pinchas COP:msg violinist good **in-more**
 'Pinchas is a very good violinist.'

As opposed to the most common augmentative adverb *meód* 'very' which can either precede or follow the adjective, *be-yotér* can only occur after the adjective it modifies.

Coming back to the superlative, it is, in fact, possible to omit the Index *be-yotér*. However, in such a case the Mark and the Standard must appear (and obviously the adjective of the Parameter must be definite):

- (32) פנחס הוא הכנר הטוב בעולם.
 pinkhas hu ha-kanár ha-tóv b-a-olám
 Pinchas COP:msg DEF-violinist DEF-good in-DEF-world
 COMPAREE -----PARAMETER----- MARK STANDARD
 'Pinchas is the best violinist in the world.'

The copula is usually required unless it follows a pronoun. However, superlative constructions appear in verbal sentences too, in which case the Index has to be *hakhí* '(the) most'. Consider the following sentence, with an intransitive verb:

- (33) פנחס מנגן הכי טוב בעולם.
 pinkhas menagén hakhí tóv b-a-olám
 Pinchas play:msgPRES most good in-DEF-world
 COMPAREE PARAMETER→ INDEX ←PARAMETER MARK STANDARD
 'Pinchas plays the best in the world.'

5. INHERENTLY COMPARATIVE LEXEMES

There are several Israeli adjectives, verbs and nouns which are inherently, *ipso facto*, comparative. In structural terms, they involve a fusion of Parameter and Index.

5.1 'More'

The adjective *adíf* 'preferable, better' is very often used in comparison (more than *muadáf* 'preferred, favoured'):

- (34) עדיף מאוחר מאשר אף פעם.
 adíf meukhár me-ashér af páam
 better late from-REL NEG time (cf. German *niemal* 'never')
 INDEX+PARAMETER COMPAREE MARK STANDARD
 'Better late than never.'

In colloquial speech, one can often hear 'tautological', double comparatives:

- (35) זה יותר עדיף.
 ze yotér adíf
 DEM:msg more better
 'This is more better.'
 i.e. 'This is better.'

5.3 'The same as'

The adjective *shavé* means 'equal', but when accompanied by *yotér* 'more', it means 'worth more'. Consider the following sentence from George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945):

- (41) כל החיות שוות, אך ישנן כאלה ששוות יותר.
 kol ha-khay-ót shav-ót, akh yesh-nán kaéle she-shav-ót yotér
 all DEF-animal-fpl equal-fpl, but EXIS.COP-fpl DEM:pl REL-equal-fpl more
 'All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others.'

Consider also the adjective *zehé* 'identical', as opposed to *shoné* 'different':

- (42) המהירות של פרארי לא זהה לזאת של למבורגיני.
 ha-mehirút shel ferári lo zehá le-zót shel lamborgíni
 DEF-speed GEN Ferrari NEG identical to-DEM GEN Lamborghini
 'The speed of a Ferrari is not equal to that of a Lamborghini.'

5.4 Superlative

Consider the adjective *ultimatívi*, 'ultimate', as well as *muadáf* 'preferred', as in the following sentences in which the Mark and the Standard are not mentioned explicitly:

- (43) זאת החווייה האולטימטיבית!
 zot ha-khavayá ha-ultimatívi-t
 DEM:fsg DEF-experience:fsg DEF-ultimate-fsg
 INDEX+PARAMETER
 'This is the ultimate experience!'

- (44) היא הבת המועדפת.
 hi ha-bát ha-muadéfet
 she DEF-daughterDEF-preferred:fsg
 INDEX+PARAMETER
 'She is the favourite daughter.'

6. OTHER SCHEMES OF COMPARISON

6.1 Comparing two distinct properties/clauses

- (45) בכביש יותר חשוב להיות חכם מאשר צודק.
 b-a-kvísh yotér khashúv li-yót khakhám me-ashér tsodék
 in-DEF-road more important INF-be clever from-REL right
 INDEX PARAMETER COMPAREE MARK STANDARD
 'On the road, it is more important to be clever than right.'

- (46) מי שמתאבד הוא יותר טיפש מאמיץ.
 mi she-mitabéd hu yotér tipésh me-amíts
 who REL-commit.suicide:msgPRES COP more stupid from-courageous
 INDEX COMPAREE MARK-STANDARD
 'The one who commits suicide is more stupid than courageous.'

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The compared properties can also be shown by verbs:

- (47) הנודניק הזה מדבר יותר מאשר עושה.
 ha-núdnik ha-zé medabér yotér me-ashér osé
 DEF-pest DEF-DEM speak:msgPRES more from-REL do:msgPRES
 COMPAREE INDEX MARK STANDARD
 ‘This pest speaks more than he acts.’

Rather than comparing two participants (as in the prototypical comparative construction), or two properties (as here), in Israeli – like English – one can compare whole clauses, resulting in a complex sentence:

- (48) נתניהו רע ליהודים פחות מאשר קלינטון טוב ליהודיות.
 netanyáhu ra l-a-yehudí-m pakhót me-ashér
 Netnyahu bad to-DEF-jew-mpl less from-REL
 -----COMPAREE----- INDEX MARK
 klínton tov l-a-yehudi-ót
 Clinton good to-DEF-jew-fpl
 -----STANDARD-----
 ‘Netanyahu is less bad for the Jews than Clinton is good for the Jewesses.’

- (49) הוא קורא יותר לאט מאשר היא מקלידה.
 hu koré yotér leát me-ashér hi maklid-á
 he read:msgPRES more slowly from-REL she type:PRES-fsg
 -----COMPAREE----- INDEX PARAMETER MARK -----STANDARD-----
 ‘He reads more slowly than she types.’

6.2 Ellipsis (and ambiguity)

Comparative constructions often include ellipsis, which could result in ambiguity:

- (50) הרמפרודיטים אוהבים גברים יותר מנשים.
 hermafrodít-im ohavím gvarím yotér mi-nashím
 hermaphrodite-pl love:mplPRES men more from-women
 PARAMETER COMPAREE INDEX MARK-STANDARD
 ‘Hermaphrodites love men more than they like women.’
 COMPAREE -----PARAMETER----- INDEX MARK-STANDARD
 ‘Hermaphrodites love men more than women love men.’

However, such an ambiguity is blocked when the object is definite, the reason being that in Israeli, as previously mentioned, there is an accusative marker, *et*, (only) before a definite O. Consider the following minimal pair:

(51) אני אוהב את רותי יותר מאחות שלה.
 aní ohév et rúti yotér me-akhót shel-à
 I love:msgPRES ACC Ruthie more from-sister GEN-3fsg
 COMPAREE -----PARAMETER----- INDEX MARK-----STANDARD-----
 'I love Ruthie more than her sister loves her.'

(52) אני אוהב את רותי יותר מאת אחות שלה.
 aní ohév et rúti yotér me-et akhót shel-à
 I love:msgPRES ACC Ruthie more from-ACC sister GEN-3fsg
 PARAMETER COMPAREE INDEX MARK -----STANDARD-----
 'I love Ruthie more than I love her sister.'

The fact that 'her sister' is the one who loves in (51) but the one who is loved in (52) results from the existence of the accusative marker *et*.

6.3 Correlative comparatives

Unlike most world languages, but just like Indo-European languages, Israeli has 'correlative comparatives', in which two comparative clauses are juxtaposed:

(53) ככל שלומדים יותר שפות, (כך) רוצים יותר ללמוד בלשנות.
 ke-khól she-lomd-ím yotér safót, (kakh) rots-ím
 'as-all' REL-study:PRES-impl more languages (thus) want:PRES-impl
 yotér li-lmód balshanút
 more INF-study linguistics

'The more languages one studies, the more one wants to study linguistics.'

Whereas *ke-khól she-*, lit. 'as all that-', usually means 'as long as' or 'as much as', the optional *kakh* is an adverb meaning 'thus, so'.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The prototypical Israeli comparative construction is Type A1 (e.g. *dáni yotér gadól mi-yósi* 'Danny is older/bigger than Yossi'). However, there is another mono-clausal comparative construction: extended intransitive 'Type C', in which the Index of comparison is the main verb in an extended intransitive clause (e.g. *lári fránklin olé be-rashlanut-ó al dzhónatan pólard* 'Larry Franklin exceeds Jonathan Pollard in his negligence').

Further research should compare comparatives in Israeli to those of Yiddish, 'Standard Average European'², Polish and Russian, as well as to those of Judaeo-Spanish and other non-Ashkenazic Jewish languages. My hypothesis is that Israeli, a 'semi-engineered' multi-layered language, resurrects Hebrew comparative lexical items but adapts them to European patterns. In other words, Israeli comparatives correspond with Yiddish and Standard Average European, although the forms used are Hebrew. Such findings would strengthen my hybridic model of the genesis of fascinating and multifaceted Israeli (e.g. Zuckermann 2006a, forthcoming).

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ABBREVIATIONS

1	1st person
2	2nd person
3	3rd person
A	transitive subject
ACC	accusative
CC	copula complement
COMP	complement(izer)
CONSTR	construct state
COP	copula
CS	copula subject
DAT	dative
DEF	definite
DEM	demonstrative

E	extended intransitive
EXIS	existential
f	feminine
FUT	future
GEN	genitive
IMP	imperative
INF	infinitive
m	masculine
NEG	negator
NP	noun phrase
O	transitive object
PARTIC	participle
PASS	passive
PAST	past
pl	plural
POSS	possessive
PERI	peripheral argument
REL	relativizer
S	intransitive subject
sg	singular
V	verb
VCC	verbless clause complement
VCS	verbless clause subject
VP	verbal phrase