Abstract: Israeli is currently one of the official languages of the State of Israel. It is a fusional synthetic language, with non-concatenative discontinuous morphemes realised by vowel infixation. This typological paper demonstrates that there is a clear distinction in Israeli between direct and indirect speech. The indirect speech report, which is a subset of complement clauses, is characterized by a shift in person, spatial and temporal deixis. However, unlike in English, the verbs usually do not undergo a tense shift. Israeli has various lexicalized direct speech reports. By and large, Israeli reported speech constructions reflect Yiddish and Standard Average European patterns, often enhancing a suitable pre-existent Hebrew construction.

Keywords: Hebrew, reported speech, Yiddish, lexical derivation, Congruence Principle

1. Introduction

1.1. General information

Israeli (Zuckermann 1999; 2006b, a.k.a. “Modern Hebrew”) is currently one of the official languages—with Arabic and English—of the State of Israel, established in 1948 on 20,770 km² (0.22 of Hungary) in the Middle East. It is spoken to varying degrees of fluency by its 7,026,000 citizens (as of May 2006)—as a mother tongue by most Jews (whose total number exceeds 5.6 million), and as a second language by Muslims.
(Arabic-speakers), Christians (e.g., Russian- and Arabic-speakers), Druze (Arabic-speakers) and others.

1.2. Grammatical profile

Israeli is a fusional synthetic language, with non-concatenative discontinuous morphemes realised by vowel infixation. Compare (1) and (2), both formed from the root *p.t.r.*, but fitted into two distinct verb-templates:

(1) נפטר
nifáár
pass.away:3msg.past
‘(he) passed away’

(2) התпутרנו
hitputárnü
resign:1pl.past:“coercive”
‘We “resigned” (implying that we were encouraged to do so; had we not done so, we would have been fired anyway).’

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(E)/VS(E) — but like Standard Average European and English, the usual constituent order of Israeli is AVO(E)/SV(E). Thus, where there is no case marking, one can resort to the constituent order.

The main clause in Israeli consists of (a) clause-initial peripheral markers, e.g., discourse markers; (b) NP(s) 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:1sg.past’.

Sentences (3), (4) and (5) are examples of a verbal, copular and verbless clause, respectively:

def-girlA eat:3past-fsgV appleO
‘The girl ate an apple.’

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There are various types of subordinate clause, e.g., adverbial (denoting comparison, time, place, condition, concession, reason, result, goal, state), adjectival/relative, and nominal/complement. By and large, these follow the Standard Average European profile. Indirect speech report fits into the overall system of complement clauses—see section 3.1.

2. Speech report constructions

2.1. The DSR/ISR distinction

Due to *(inter alia)* the lack of evidentials in the language, Israeli does not possess any monoclusal speech report construction. It has a clear distinction between multiclausal direct speech report (henceforth, DSR) and multiclausal indirect speech report (henceforth, ISR), the ISR generally being more common than DSR.

Distinguishing features characterizing ISR:

(i) Shift in person deixis, e.g., 2 > 1
(ii) Shift in spatial and temporal deixis, e.g., ‘today’ > ‘that day’, also spatial demonstratives, e.g., ‘this’ > ‘that’
(iii) Obligatory presence of a complementizer immediately before the speech report, unless the speech report is of the ‘infinitive’ (iv) or interrogative type (v)
(iv) In report of commands: imperative/future verb > “infinitive” (tense-less verb, commonly referred to in Israeli grammar as “infinitive”, thus, henceforth, inf)
(v) In report of questions: interrogative-less yes/no question > *im* (lit. ‘if’) or *ha-im* (lit. ‘INTER-if’) ‘whether’ immediately before the indirect question
Unlike in English, verbs do not undergo a tense shift. The future tense in a speech act in the past does not become future-in-the-past in ISR (see (16)); unlike English (cf. would), Israeli does not have a form of future-in-the-past. Similarly, present tense in a speech act in the past usually does not become past in ISR (see (9)).

Like in English, in indirect “wh-questions”, the interrogative remains the same. Unlike in English, there is no change in constituent order (see (15)–(16)).

Distinguishing features characterizing DSR:

(i) Special intonation contour, tending to be mimetic
(ii) Possible intonational break before the DSR
(iii) Possible absence of a reporting verb
(iv) Possible discontinuity of the DSR
(v) Possible use of a vocative particle
(vi) In writing: presence of quotation marks, as well as exclamation/question mark

Sentences (6) and (7) demonstrate the shift in person deixis:

(6) 'They told us: “We have no money!”'

7pl say:3past-pl dat-1pl [exis.cop:neg dat-1pl money]

(7) 'They told us that they had no money.'

hem amr-ú l-anú ⟨she-hím l-ahèm késef⟩ISR
3mpl say:3past-pl dat-1pl ⟨comp-exis.cop:neg dat-3mpl money⟩

Sentences (8) and (9) demonstrate the lack of tense shift in verbs:

(8) ‘Tali whispered: “I want ice cream!”’

Tali whisper:3past-fsg [1sg want:fsg, pres ice.cream]

(9) ‘Tali whispered that she wanted ice cream.’

Tali whisper:3past-fsg [comp-3sg want:fsg, pres ice.cream]
Note that—in contrast to the English translation—the verb ‘want’ is in the present tense in both sentences.

### 2.2. Exclamative and vocative DSR

Obviously, not every DSR is transformable into an ISR:

(10) **"אוי וויי: "היא צווחה, למדלן אולברייט שהיא יהודייה" גילו"כש**
    
    k-she-“gil-á” le-mádlen ólbrayt (she-hí yehudi-yá)ISR
    when-comp-“reveal”:past-3pl to-Madeleine Albright (comp-3fsg Jewish-fsg)
    hi tsavkh-á [óy véy!]DSR
    3fsg scream:3past-fsg [Oy vey]

‘When it was “revealed” to Madeleine Albright that she was Jewish, she screamed: “Oy vey!”’

ISR cannot convey the associations accompanying a DSR vocative particle:

(11) "**יא נודניקית, תפסיקי לנדנד: "הוא צעק עליה**
    
    hu tsaák al-èa:
    3msg shout:3msg.past on-3fsg
    [tafsík-i le-nadnéd, ya núdnik-it!]DSR
    [stop:2fut/imp-fsg inf-bother voc:derog pest-fsg]

‘He shouted at her: “Stop bothering, ya pest!”’

The vocative particle *ya* (cf. archaic English *O*, as well as contemporary colloquial (Antipodean) English *ya*, or *y*, from *you*) is currently derogatory in the sense that it only precedes derogatory NPs. This particle can be traced back to the vocative exclamatory Arabic particle *อา* [yaː]. Initially, Israeli *ya*—just like in Arabic—was not derogatory—see the Israeli songs *ya mishlati* ‘O my fortified cliff’ and *ya khabibi* ‘O my dear’. However, native Israeli-speakers are aware of the Arabic etymology and—perhaps due to the negative (e.g., terrorist) associations of Arabic among Israelis—*ya* underwent semantic—or rather pragmatic—narrowing: pejoration.

### 2.3. ISR complementizer

As shown in (7) and (9), ISR usually uses the common Israeli complementizer *she* [ʃe] ‘that’, which—just like English *that*—also acts as a
relativizer. *She-* ‘that’ can be traced back to the Hebrew complementizer *she-* ‘that’, which derives from the Hebrew relativizer *she-* ‘that’. One etymological analysis is that *she-* is a shortened form of the Hebrew relativizer *asher* ‘that’, which is related to Akkadian *ashru* ‘place’ (cf. Semitic *'athar*).

Instead of using the *she*-complementizer, a more formal Israeli writer could use the rare complementizer *ki* ‘that’, which derives from the Hebrew complementizer *ki* ‘that’, from *ki* ‘because’. Consider the following minimal pair:

(12) הנאשם הצהיר כי הוא חף מפשע

ha-neeshám hitsír

def-accused:msg declare:3msg.past (comp 3msg clean from-crime)

‘The accused declared that he was innocent.’

(13) הנאשם זוכה כי הוא חף מפשע

ha-neeshám zuká

def-accused:msg acquit:3msg.past:pass [caus 3msg clean from-crime]

‘The accused was acquitted because he was innocent.’

Whereas in (12) *ki* introduces an ISR, in (13) it introduces a causal clause. But such versatility can easily result in ambiguity:

(14) כי כבר הסבירו את זה ליסיפרולה

hen lo sipr-ú l-i

3fpl neg tell:3past-pl dat-1sg

(ki kvar hisbír-u et ze)ISR/CAUS

(comp/caus already explain:3past-pl acc prox.msg)

‘They (f) did not tell me that it had already been explained.’

or ‘They (f) did not tell me (about it) because it had already been explained.’

Thus, *ki* is often avoided even by Israelis attempting to write in a high-flown manner. As opposed to *she-* , I categorize *ki* as a prescriptive complementizer tout court. That said, some French-speaking immigrants to Israel use the complementizer *ki* less rarely than other Israelis because of the serendipitous phonetic similarity to the French complementizer *que* ‘that’—cf. Zuckermann (2006b).
2.4. Direct and indirect questions

Unlike in English, Israeli indirect questions do not demonstrate a shift in verb tense nor a change in constituent order. Thus, besides the distinct intonation, the only difference between (15) and (16) is the pronominal suffix used with the genitive *shel* ‘of’ (i.e., the only shift is in person):

(15) "He asked her: ‘When will your parents arrive?’"

(16) ‘He asked her when her parents would arrive.’

Thus, one may regard the indirect question as a semi-direct speech report.

Although Standard Average European (often via Yiddish) is undoubtedly an important source for Israeli reported speech, this indirect question construction seems to have already existed in Hebrew too. Consider, for example, Biblical Hebrew *lo noda* ‘it be not known’ (who hath slain him)’ (Deuteronomy 21:1). Such multiple causation corresponds with the Congruence Principle: if a feature exists in more than one contributor, it is more likely to persist in the target language (see Zuckermann 2003).

2.5. Direct and indirect commands: infinitive ISR

ISR can lack a complementizer and instead begin with a tenseless verb, commonly referred to as “infinitive”.

(17) ‘The commander (f) ordered: ‘Be here within seven minutes!’’

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DSR has the capacity to be more nuanced than ISR. Thus, one ISR can be parallel to several distinct DSRs. For example, (18) can be the ISR not only of (17) but also of (19), which includes a semantic future perfect, realised morphologically in colloquial Israeli by the past:

(19) "The commander (f) ordered: ‘Within seven minutes, you will have arrived back here!'"

3. Syntactic role of speech report content

3.1. ISR versus complement clause

Israeli ISR conforms to complement clause structure. The following three sentences, which constitute a continuum, demonstrate that ISR is a sub-set of complementation:

(20) ani yodéa (she-hì yaf-á)COMP
1sg know:msg.pres (comp-3fsg beautiful-fsg)
‘I know that she is beautiful.’

(21) shamá-ti (she-hì yaf-á)COMP/ISR
hear:past-1sg (comp-3fsg beautiful-fsg)
‘I heard that she is beautiful.’ (a general hearsay, not referring to a specific speech act) or ‘I heard that she was beautiful.’ (a specific speech act)

(22) amár-ti l-a (she-hì yaf-á)ISR
say:past-1sg dat-3fsg (comp-3fsg beautiful-fsg)
‘I told her that she was beautiful.’

A speech report can be referred to en bloc using the proximal demonstrative ze ‘this’. Thus, (23) could be a retort to (22):

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3.2. Reporting verbs

The reporting verb usually appears before the speech report, although in literary style, it can follow the speech report either immediately or after the A, i.e., either ‘Go away!, said the child or ‘Go away!, the child said, the former being of a higher register.

The most common verb used in both DSRs and ISRs is the transitive amár ‘say:3msg.past’. This verb has suppletive future and infinitive forms: yagíd ‘say:3msg.fut’ and le-hagíd ‘inf-say’ respectively. That said, the future and infinitive forms yomár and t-omár exist but, unlike in Hebrew, they are not normally used in Israeli.

As previously seen, Israeli has a plethora of other reporting verbs (see Table 1, overleaf).

Moreover, colloquial Israeli often employs asá, lit. ‘do:3msg.past’, as a reporting verb:

(24)

אauses ha-mahabul-a ha-zot osa l-i
so def-fool-fsg def-prox.fsg do:fsgpsres dat-1sg
[chuma kéta, ani má ze be-dawn][DSR
[hear:2msgimp fragment 1sg what prox.msg in-down]
az asiti l-a [lama má karà? mi met?]
so do:1sgpast dat-3fsg why what happen:3msg past who die:3msg past
boi l-a-séret, tom omér
come:2fsg.imp to-def-film Tom say:msg.pres
⟨she-ze ptsats-ót l-a-gab-ót⟩ISR[DSR
⟨comp-proxmsg bomb-fpl to-def-eyebrow-fpl⟩]

‘So that idiot (f) goes: “Listen, I’m really down”. So I was like: “What the hell? What’s your deal? Come to the film, Tom says it’s wicked.”’

Literally: ‘So this idiot (f) does to me: “Hear a fragment, I’m what in a down!”’. So I did to her: “Why, what happened? Who died? Come to the film, Tom says that this is bombs to the eyebrows!”.’
### Table 1: Classification of Reporting Verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Transitivity</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Semantic Class</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>amář</td>
<td>tr</td>
<td>say</td>
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<td>sipér</td>
<td>tr</td>
<td>tell, recount (cf. safár ‘count’)</td>
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<td>hodia</td>
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<td>announce, notify</td>
<td>saying</td>
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<td>intr</td>
<td>complain</td>
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<td>kitér</td>
<td>intr</td>
<td>whine, whinge (cf. Polish Yiddish kätor ‘male cat, whiner’)</td>
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<td>kavál al</td>
<td>intr</td>
<td>complain about (high register)</td>
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<td>shamá</td>
<td>tr</td>
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</table>

3.3. DSR without a reporting verb

Whereas a reporting verb is obligatory in ISR, it is possible to have a DSR without it:

(25) "Why did your friend leave?"

next to the questioner: ‘if they had not asked, they would ask about clothes and clothes of clothes.’

khokr-éy ha-mishtará l-a-náar ha-arav-i:
investigator-mpl:constr def-police dat-def-teenager def-Arab-msg
[lámá ha-evár mín shel-khà atáf be-bàd laván?DSR] [why def-organ sex gen-2msg wrap:msg:pres:pass in-cloth white]
ha-náar l-a-khokr-im:
def-teenager dat-def-investigator-mpl

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4. Direct speech report as a basis for lexical derivations

Israeli has many NPs which are lexicalized DSRs, usually couched in the first person:

(26) "אני מאמין" המלחמה: של מבקר המדינה הנכנס. עיקשת בשחיתות

ha-\[ani \ maamín\]NP shel mevakér ha-mdiná ha-nikhnás:

def-\[1sg \ believe:msg.pres\] gen comptroller def-state def-enter:msg.pres

milkhamá ikésh-et b-a-shkhitút

war:msg stubborn-fsg in-def-corruption

'The incoming State Comptroller’s credo: unrelenting war on corruption.'

(27) "אני מאשים" ייצא בכ ‘ה

ha-khá-k yatsá

def-M(ember)-K(nesset) come.out:3msg.past

be-\[ani \ maashím\]NP néged ha-m(e)mshalá

in-\[1sg \ accuse:msg.pres\] against def-government

'The MK (Member of Knesset (Israeli Parliament)) came out with a J’accuse against the government.'

1 Seventy-two [hur] are promised to the faithful martyrs in Suras 44:54 and 52:20 of the Koran. Muslims believe that these are “dark, wide-eyed (maiden)”, virgins. However, Luxenberg (2000) suggests that hur [hun] are actually “white (grapes), jewels (of crystal)”. In other words, Muslim martyrs will not get virgins but sultanas(!), the latter with the meaning of white raisins/grapes. Syriac [hur] ‘white (fpl)’ is associated with ‘raisin’—cf. Zuckermann (2006a). If this alternative interpretation is true, or rather, if one can convince fundamentalist Muslims that it is true, it has the potential to change the course of history, at least in cases like the above true story of a Palestinian teenager caught in Israel just before attempting a suicide-bombing.
Consider also the following:

(28)

The “she’ll be right” attitude and the “trust me!” phenomenon may destroy the IDF (Israel Defence Forces).

5. Functional, stylistic and discourse preferences

DSR is common in Israeli in informal speech or story-telling, and is often employed in jokes; in-your-face Israelis often use (sometimes macabre) self-deprecating humour:

(29)

The American tells his wife: “Would you pass the sugar, sugar!” The Briton tells his wife: “Would you pass the honey, honey!” The Israeli tells his wife: “Pass the steak, ya cow!”.

2 Acronym of tsvá ha-haganá le-israél ‘Israel Defence Forces’.

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The following passage employs both DSR and ISR. DSR is employed for immediacy and engaging effect, including a couple of serendipitous *ex post facto* puns. ISR conveys important new information but since the specific form of the speech act is not crucial, it is backgrounded:

(30)

The Moldavian prostitute asked the Palestinian youth: “Do you feel like getting off?” (lit. “Does it come to you to disassemble?”). He replied: “I’m not in the mood!” (lit. “I don’t have a head for it!”). Only later did the policemen tell her that he actually was the suicide bomber.

6. Concluding remarks

There is a clear distinction in Israeli between direct and indirect speech. The indirect speech report, which is a subset of complement clauses, is characterized by a shift in person, spatial and temporal deixis. However, unlike in English, the verbs usually do not undergo a tense shift. Israeli has various lexicalized direct speech reports. By and large, Israeli reported speech constructions reflect Yiddish and Standard Average European patterns, often enhancing a suitable pre-existent Hebrew construction.

Abbreviations

1 = 1st person; 2 = 2nd person; 3 = 3rd person; A = transitive subject; acc = accusative; amb = ambitransitive; CAUS/caus = causal; CC = copula complement;
References


Zuckermann, Ghil'ad 2006a. haivrít kemítos [Hebrew as myth]. Am Oved, Tel Aviv.