

Chapter 1

The negative existential cycle in Ancient Hebrew

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Evidence of diachronic change as opposed to synchronic variation in Ancient (Pre-Modern) Hebrew is currently disputed, as is the relationship of Biblical Hebrew to later varieties of Hebrew as found in Qumran Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew. Recent work in historical linguistics, particularly the study of cyclical change in individual constructions, has provided a means to use stages of synchronic variation within a diachronic trajectory for analyzing how languages change. Such a diachronic trajectory includes synchronic variation, transitional stages and overlapping constructions. One cycle which manifests synchronic variation within a diachronic trajectory is the Negative Existential Cycle as introduced by Croft (1991). This cycle is evident in the ancient varieties of Hebrew and adds evidence to the claim that diachronic change is discernible in Ancient Hebrew. One additional change that is observed is a shift in subject agreement from more synthetic to more analytic in certain constructions, which is consistent with the Subject Agreement Cycle in van Gelderen (2011).

Keywords: Biblical Hebrew, Qumran Hebrew, Mishnaic Hebrew, Negative Existential Cycle, Subject Agreement Cycle

1 Introduction

Current research in the historical linguistics of Ancient Hebrew is engaged in a controversy concerning the evidence of diachronic change as opposed to synchronic variation in Biblical Hebrew and in the relationship of the language of

the Bible to later varieties of Hebrew as found in Qumran Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew.¹

Traditionally, the Hebrew of the Bible was understood to exhibit at least two, if not three, diachronic stages – archaic Biblical Hebrew, classical Biblical Hebrew (of the monarchic period) and late Biblical Hebrew (of the post-exilic period).² Recently, however, the diachronic model has been challenged, by inter alia, [Young et al. \(2008\)](#) and [Rezetko & Young \(2014\)](#) who claim that Biblical Hebrew exhibits only synchronic variation and no clear trajectory can be made between Biblical Hebrew and the much later varieties of Pre-Modern Hebrew.³ The issue is complicated by the oral-written context within which the Bible was written, by scribal redaction of the text, and by scribal transmission over more than a millennium. In this paper, we present an overview of the evidence for the negative existential cycle in Ancient Hebrew, including Biblical Hebrew and epigraphic Hebrew, and describe how this cycle demonstrates a trajectory from Biblical Hebrew to Qumran Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew.

After we introduce the syntactic indications of negative scope in Hebrew, we will describe the negative existential constructions. Then we will demonstrate the stages of [Croft's](#) (1991) Negative Existential Cycle which are present in Biblical Hebrew and how they persist or change in later varieties of Hebrew. Finally, we will demonstrate some syntactic changes in one specific construction which diffuse into post-biblical Hebrew, providing further evidence for a diachronic trajectory.

¹Biblical Hebrew refers to the Hebrew as found in the Hebrew Bible, which is based on the medieval manuscript tradition of the Masoretes but “reflects to a large extent varieties of Hebrew spoken in Israel from the beginning of the Iron Age (about 1200 BCE) to the Hellenistic era (about 165 BCE)” ([van der Merwe, Naudé & Kroeze \(2017: 1\)](#), see also pp. 2–6 for an overview of the development of Ancient [Pre-Modern] Hebrew). Qumran Hebrew reflects the Hebrew of the texts found in the eleven caves around Khirbet Qumran (ca. 200 BCE to 70 CE) (see [Naudé 2003](#), [Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2016b](#)). Mishnaic Hebrew reflects the Hebrew of the sages, the Tannaim and Amoraim, in Palestine and Babylonia. Literature written in Mishnaic Hebrew covers the period of 70 CE to 500 CE, although Mishnaic Hebrew as a living language was spoken in Palestine only until about 200 CE ([Bar-Asher 1999: 116](#), see also [van der Merwe et al. 2017: 5](#), [Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2016b](#)).

²See [van der Merwe, Naudé & Kroeze \(2017: 1–6\)](#) for an overview of the development of ancient Hebrew. Archaic Biblical Hebrew (ca. 1200–1000 BCE) reflects the oldest stratum of Hebrew in the Bible, as found especially in the ancient poems. Classical Biblical Hebrew of the monarchic period (ca. 1000–586/7 BCE) includes both the Israelian dialect and the standard Judean scribal dialect and is the language of the pre-exilic prose sections of the Hebrew Bible. Late Biblical Hebrew (ca. 539–165 BCE) is the language of the post-exilic sections of the Hebrew Bible.

³The arguments are summarized in [Naudé & Miller-Naudé \(2016a,b\)](#).

As preliminary to the following discussion, we describe the syntactic features of negative scope, which relates to standard verbal negation (as illustrated in 1a and 1b) as well as the negative existential (as illustrated in 2a and 2b). There are two kinds of negative scope in Biblical Hebrew (Snyman & Naudé 2003, Snyman 2004, Naudé & Rendsburg 2013). Sentential negation occurs when the negative marker immediately precedes the verb, which is regularly in initial position in the sentence (1a). By contrast, constituent negation occurs when the negative marker precedes a non-verbal constituent (1b):

- (1) a. lōʾ=šālaḥtî ʾet=han-nəḇīʾim
NEG=send.PFV.1SG OBJ=ART-prophets
‘I did not send the prophets.’ [BHS Jeremiah 23:21]
- b. wə-ʿattâ lōʾ=ʾattem šālaḥtem ʾōtî hēnnâ kî hā-ʾēlōhîm
and-now NEG=M.2PL send.PFV.M.2PL OBJ.1SG here COMP ART-God
‘And not you sent me here, but rather God.’ [BHS Genesis 45:8]

The scope of the negative modifies the semantic interpretation of the sentence. In (1a) above, the sentence indicates that God did not send the prophets; whereas in (1b), the sentence does not deny that Joseph was sent, but only that it is not his addressees, his brothers, who effected the sending.

Negative existential constructions usually involve sentential negation, as illustrated in (2a). Less frequently negative existential constructions may involve constituent negation.⁴ In (2b) the negative existential negates a bare noun and the negative existential followed by the noun are the object of the preposition.

- (2) a. ʾēn ʿēseḇ
NEG.EX vegetation
‘There is no vegetation.’ [BHS Jeremiah 14:6]
- b. tiḇʾaš dəgāt-ām mē-ʾēn mayim
stink.IPFV.F.3SG fish-M.3PL from-NEG.EX water
‘Their fish stink from no water.’ [BHS Isaiah 50:2]

Possession is regularly expressed in Hebrew using an existential construction with a prepositional phrase headed by the preposition *l-* (‘to’). With this construction, sentential and constituent negation occurs with the negative existential marker, as illustrated in (3a) and (3b), respectively, in present time:⁵

⁴See also the examples discussed in Naudé & Rendsburg (2013: 803, §2.5) as closely related to constituent negation.

⁵The positive possessive construction uses the positive existential marker *yēš* for present time reference and a form of the copular verb *hyh* for past time, future time or non-indicative modality.

- (3) a. 'ên melek lā-nû
NEG.EX king to-1PL
'We have no king (lit. there is no king for us).' [BHS Hosea 10:3]
- b. 'ên lî bēn
NEG.EX to-1SG son
'Not I have a son (lit. there is not to me a son).' [BHS 2 Samuel 18:18]

Possession can also be expressed in Hebrew using the copula with the same prepositional phrase to indicate past time, future time or non-indicative modality. The possessive construction may involve sentential negation, as in (4a), or constituent negation, as in (4b):

- (4) a. lō' yihyeh lākem
NEG COP.M.3SG.IPFV to.M.3PL
'It will not belong to you (lit. it will not be to you).' [BHS Jeremiah 35:7]
- b. lō' lô yihyeh haz-zāra'
NEG to.M.3SG COP.M.3SG.IPFV ART-seed
'Not belonging to him would be the offspring (lit. not to him will be the offspring).' [BHS Genesis 38:9]

2 Constructions with the negative existential marker

In Biblical Hebrew, the marker of standard negation in finite, indicative verbal sentences is *lō'*, as illustrated in (1a) above (see also Sjörns 2018: 143–172). There is also a negative existential marker, *'ayin* (usually vocalized as the “construct form” *'ên*)⁶ and a positive existential marker, *yēš* (5):

- (5) ên=lehem ḥōl 'el=taḥat yādî kî= 'im=lehem qōdeš yēš
NEG.EX=bread common to=under hand.1SG COMP= if=bread holy EX
'There is no common bread on hand, but holy bread there is.' [BHS 1 Samuel 21:5]

The two existential markers do not index tense or aspect; they default for present time. As a result, the verbal copula *hyh* is used for existential sentences that

⁶The historical origin of the negative existential marker has been connected to the interrogative adverb and homonym *'ayin* ‘where’ (see, e.g. Joüon & Muraoka 2009: 569). The two vocalizations of the negative existential relate to the syntactic contexts in which they occur; see Naudé et al. 2018, 2019.

specify perfective aspect (6a), or imperfective aspect with a future sense (6b). The verbal copula is never used to express existence that is linked to the moment of speaking.

- (6) a. *lō'=hāyâ* *gešem bā-'āreš*
 NEG=COP.PFV.M.3SG rain in.ART-land
 'There was no rain in the land.' [BHS 1 Kings 17:7]
- b. *wə-lō'=yihyeh* 'ôḏ *mabbûl lə-šahēt* *hā-'āreš*
 and-NEG=COP.IPFV.M.3SG again flood to-destroy.INF ART-land
 'And there will not again be a flood to destroy the land.'
 [BHS Genesis 9:11]

The copula is also used for existential sentences which express non-indicative modality. In (7a), the positive construction is illustrated and in (7b), the negative construction illustrates the fact that the negative marker *'al* is used with non-indicative finite verbs rather than the indicative negative marker *lō'*:

- (7) a. *wîhî* *bə-kā* *kōaḥ* *kî* *tēlēk* *bad-dāreḵ*
 and.COP.JUS.M.3SG in-M.2SG strength COMP go.IPFV.M.2SG in.ART-way
 'So that there may be strength in you when you go on your way.'
 [BHS 1 Samuel 28:22]
- b. *'al=nā'* *təhî* *mərîbâ bēn-î*
 NEG.NIND=please COP.JUS.M.2SG dispute between-1s
û-bēnê-kā
 and-between-M.2SG
 'Please may there not be a dispute between me and you.'
 [BHS Genesis 13:18]

This picture of the distribution of the standard negator and the negative existential marker becomes more complex, because the negative existential marker is also used to negate some verbal predications, most prominently participial predications (see *Miller-Naudé & Naudé 2015*), as illustrated in (8):

- (8) *'ên=ham-meleḵ* *nôšā'* *bə-roḇ=ḥāyil*
 NEG.EX=ART-king save.PASS.PTCP⁷ in-abundance.GEN=army
 'The king is not saved by the greatness of his army.' [BHS Psalm 33:16]

⁷The verbal form is in the Niphal stem, which is used for passive or reflexive meanings; see *van der Merwe, Naudé & Kroeze (2017: 78–79)*.

As indicated below, the negative existential marker expands its use so that it is used to negate verbal sentences. At the same time, the participle expands its use as the main predication in a sentence.

In this section we listed the various constructions in Biblical Hebrew which utilize the negative existential markers. In the following section we examine aspects of the negative existential cycle in ancient Hebrew.

3 The negative existential cycle in Ancient Hebrew

Before demonstrating the stages of the negative existential cycle in Ancient Hebrew, a word is necessary on what constitutes a “stage” in historical linguistics. This matter is important and is connected to the debated issue of synchrony vs. diachrony, which has received increasing scrutiny in recent decades. [Lass \(1997: 12\)](#) poses the following question:

How much of what looks like (synchronic) structure really is, and how much is rather detritus left behind by historical processes, that even if they leave notable residues have no particular present relevance? ... In this sense a language-state as an object of academic scrutiny is no different in principle from a kidney, a mountain range, or an art style.

Certain formulations such as $A > B$ are commonly used to represent stages of linguistic change. Another, more appropriate formulation $A > A \sim B > B$ has been used by [Croft \(1991\)](#) in his seminal work on the negative existential cycle. [Brinton & Traugott](#) critique this formulation saying, “Even this is misleading, since often, especially in domains that involve meaning, earlier patterns only become restricted or fossilized, not entirely lost” ([Brinton & Traugott 2005: 6](#)). They propose an alternate formulation:

$$(9) \quad A > \left\{ \begin{array}{c} A \\ B \end{array} \right\} > (B)$$

This formulation states that the emergence of B as a distinct stage may or may not occur. Any theory of a stage in historical linguistics must, therefore, acknowledge the mixture of older and newer forms existing contemporaneously while also acknowledging that some stages will not evolve (see also [Croft 1991: 22–25](#), [Veselinova 2016](#)). Additionally, newer forms may emerge yet not diffuse throughout the language, but be subsumed by other forms.

In his theory of language change and diffusion, Naudé (2012) lays out four dimensions that are relevant for the analysis of ancient texts in historical linguistics. The first dimension is the idiolect that develops when the grammar of an individual differs from the input source (e.g. child and his parents). This is called the individual dimension and is the source of language change.

The second dimension is the sociological dimension. This relates to the diffusion of the change throughout the language community. Ringe & Eska (2013: 214) describe this process as follows:

Yet, should it be the case that a syntactic parameter changes its setting from one generation to the next via imperfect learning in the acquisition process, we have to ask why we find that change takes place only gradually in the documentary record. This seeming paradox has been solved by Kroch (1989), who points out that a parameter for which only a small amount of data is present in the primary linguistic data heard during the process of acquisition can lead two learners to acquire two different grammars. This has given rise to Kroch's Grammars in Competition Hypothesis, in which parameter settings, not entire grammars, compete; it is manifested in the variation found in the documentary record as the reflex of an innovative parametric setting competes with and eventually supplants the reflex of the older parametric setting.

Naudé adds that this sociological diffusion occurs in the shape of an S-shaped curve with the new option beginning slowly, accelerating, and finally leveling off once the competition is resolved.

The third dimension is the chronological dimension. In this dimension, newer forms exist and change side-by-side with older forms called "stylistic fossils". Naudé says, "These stylistic fossils are in competition – at certain stages they are dominant and at other stages they are dominated – and they may be present in the speech community for centuries" (Naudé 2012: 73). As older forms erode and become limited in their use, newer forms pick up the slack and represent a renewal, a "diachronic cycle". This cycle is not a reversal of directionality, but a termination of one unidirectional process and the restarting of another in the same general direction (Naudé 2012: 73).

Naudé's fourth dimension acknowledges that analyzing ancient texts involves working with written language. All historical linguistic studies that span more than a few generations must interact with written text.⁸ This point is important

⁸Historical linguistics involving languages which have only a very recent written tradition (or no written tradition) can only be accomplished by comparative historical analysis of related languages or dialects for which a written tradition exists.

for our definition of a stage. The written dimension preserves a picture of the status of diffusion at the time of writing. If written texts comprise our data, then each text which gives evidence that a change has diffused represents a stage. This stage may only reflect change in a single construction, but it still should be considered a stage. For this reason, syntactic structures in different corpora reflect different stages insofar as they have qualitative differences. A stage in diachronic syntax, then, is construction-specific and is discerned by observing the degree of diffusion between written texts. These stages are part of a cycle which is constantly being renewed.

In terms of Croft's diachronic typology of the negative existential cycle, Biblical Hebrew exhibits a variable stage A ~ B in that there is a dedicated negative existential form (*'ên*) but it is used in specific contexts in which past or future time do not need to be specified but can be inferred from the surrounding context. For those contexts which specify past or future time, the *lō'* + verbal copula construction is used. While it might be possible to posit that *lō'* + verbal copula represents a pre-biblical stage A in which the standard verbal negator is used to negate existential sentences, this stage cannot be clearly discerned in the Hebrew Bible.⁹ Furthermore, the use of *'ên* is far more prominent than *lō'* + verbal copula in expressing negative existential sentences in Biblical Hebrew.¹⁰ In post-biblical Hebrew, the *lō'* + copula form of the negative existential decreases in use in Qumran, though it does still occur:

- (10) w-plṥh l' thyh
and-survivor NEG COP.IPFV.F.3SG
'There will be no survivor.' [DSSR 1QM 1:6]

In Mishnaic Hebrew there are very few examples of a genuine negative existential with the construction *lō'* + copula:

- (11) lō' hāyētā ḥāṣēr bîrûšālayim še-'ên-āh
NEG COP.PFV.F.3SG courtyard in.Jerusalem REL-NEG.EX-F.3SG
mā'îrā mē-'ôr bêt haššō'êbā
illuminated.PTCP from-light.GEN house.GEN hashshoebah
'And there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that was not illuminated by
the light of the house of Hashshoebah.' [M Sukkah 5:3]

⁹An anonymous reviewer suggested that Job 38:26 provides an example of the standard verbal negator *lō'* without a copula: *'ereṣ lō' 'îš* 'a land [which] no man (is).' We argue instead that if *lō' 'îš* (lit. not man) was a verbless sentence with a null (implicit) copula, it would have a pronominal clitic for disambiguation (see Naudé 1996). We understand the phrase in Job 38:26 as a noun (*land*) modified by a noun phrase with constituent negation (*no man*); the phrase means 'an uninhabited (lit. no human) land.'

¹⁰We have identified only 61 examples of the negative existential *lō'* + verbal copula in Biblical Hebrew as compared to 383 examples of the dedicated negative existential *'ên*.

An alternative strategy for Stage A is attested in Biblical Hebrew in a single example:

- (12) *lō' yēš=bênênû mōkīah*
 NEG EX=between.1PL arbiter.PTCP
 'There does not exist between us an arbiter.' [BHS Job 9:33]

This construction uses the standard verbal negator before the positive existential marker (*yēš*). This strategy does not seem to be attested in later stages of Hebrew.¹¹ However, this strategy occurs in Biblical Aramaic, a related Northwest Semitic language, in which the positive existential particle *ʾīṭay* is negated by the standard verbal negative *lā'* (e.g. Daniel 2:10, 3:29, 4:32). In later Targumic Aramaic, the standard verbal negative and the positive existential became fused into a new existential marker *layiṭ*, an illustration of Stage B. The sole example in Biblical Hebrew may thus be an Aramaism (see Driver & Gray 1921: xlvi–xlvii) or it may reflect a change which did not diffuse or develop in Hebrew as it did in Aramaic.

In addition to the stage A~B in which both the dedicated negative existential *ʾēn* and *lō' + copula* occur, it is also clear that the dedicated negative existential marker *ʾēn* is expanding its domain of use from existential sentences to verbal sentences – Croft's variable stage B ~ C – and this is the most dominant pattern in the Hebrew Bible.¹² The extension of the negative existential marker *ʾēn* to verbal sentences occurs only when the verbal predicate is a non-finite verb and especially a participle. The fact that the participle has both nominal and verbal characteristics (Andersen & Forbes 2007, 2012: 33–35) undoubtedly facilitates the expansion of the negative existential from purely nominal predicates to participial predicates. Veselinova (2016: 157) has found that non-finite verbal forms cross-linguistically are often the first to allow negation with a negative existential marker. The stage B ~ C which is observed in Biblical Hebrew can be seen in Epigraphic Hebrew, the non-biblical materials from the time of the Bible, which can be dated paleographically. In a few examples, *ʾēn* negates both verbless existential sentences (13) and verbal predicates with participles (14).

¹¹In the Mishnah, there is a single example of *lō'* preceding *yēš* but this construction is unique because of its connection with the interrogative marker, meaning 'is it not the case that there exist' (with the pragmatic sense 'it is certainly the case that there are') *wahālō' yēš še'ēnān mōsəqīn [zītēhn] 'ellā' lā'āhar rəbē'ā šəniyyā*. 'But is it not the case that there are not those who pick the olives only after the second rain [falls]?' (M Pe'ah 8.1).

¹²For cross-linguistic data illustrating that a contextually restricted negator expands into the domain of verbal negation, see also Veselinova (2014) for data from Hawai'ian (Polynesian) and Veselinova (2015) for data from Zyryan Komi (Uralic).

- (13) ʾyn [p]h ksp
NEG.EX here silver
‘There is no silver here.’ [HAE Jer(7):2 line 1]¹³

- (14) ʾyn[n]y šlh
NEG.EX.1SG send.PTCP.M.SG
‘I am not sending.’ [HAE Lak(6):1.4 lines 7–8]¹⁴

For an example of how these constructions expand their use, in Qumran Hebrew it is possible for ʾên to negate an infinitival clause:

- (15) b-htʿwpp kwl ḥsy šḥt l-ʾyn ḥšb
when-fly.INF all.GEN arrows.GEN pit to-NEG.EX return.INF
‘when the arrows of the pit fly off without returning’ [DSSR 1QH^a 11.28]

In Mishnaic texts the plural participle may be used with ʾên to express an impersonal and permanent prohibition.

- (16) nāšīm wa-ʿāḇāḏīm ū-kəṭannīm ʾên məzammənīm ʿālê-hem
women and-slaves and-minors NEG.EX invite.PTCP.PL on-3MP
‘Women, slaves, or minors may not invite others.’ [M Berakot 7.2]

The use of yēš with the plural participle similarly expresses a general, impersonal, positive statement (Pérez Fernández 1997: 134):

- (17) yēš məḇīʾīm bikkurīm
EX bring.PTCP.M.PL firstfruits
‘There are those who bring the firstfruits.’ [M Bikkurim 1.1]

Examples (15–17) thus demonstrate that in post-Biblical Hebrew, there is further expansion of the use of the negative existential marker for the negation of verbal constructions as part of the B ~ C cycle. Although this change began in post-exilic Biblical Hebrew with a few examples, it becomes very common in Qumran Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew (Hurvitz 2014: 36–39).

An additional environment where ʾên functions similarly to a simple negator is in a verbless locative sentence, as in example (18).¹⁵

- (18) wə-hinnê ʾên=yôšēp bab-bôr
and-behold NEG.EX=Joseph in.ART-pit
‘Behold, Joseph was not in the pit.’ [BHS Genesis 37:29]

¹³See also the example in HAE Lak(6):1.4 line 5.

¹⁴See also HAE Arad(8):40 lines 13–14.

¹⁵See also BHS Exodus 17:7, 1 Samuel 9:11, 14:39.

In example (18), *Joseph* cannot serve as the pivot of an existential because it is a proper name. Proper names cannot function as the pivots of existentials due to the *definiteness effect* (or *definiteness restriction*) (Milsark 1974: 195, Leonetti 2008). The definiteness effect is a cross-linguistic phenomenon of existentials whereby definite NPs are prohibited from serving as the pivot, as in the English example (19).

- (19) * There is it/the dog/that dog/Fido (Leonetti 2008: 132)

The proper noun *Joseph* in (18), instead, is the subject of a simple predication. Example (18) demonstrates that 'ên may be used in locative predication. This is especially significant in light of the semantics of existential sentences. Existentials have been compared to locatives—the main difference between them being the reorientation of the figure-ground relationship. Creissels compares existentials to locatives saying,

What distinguishes existential clauses from plain locational clauses is a different perspectivization of figure-ground relationships whose most obvious manifestation is that, contrary to plain locational clauses, existential clauses are not adequate answers to questions about the location of an entity, but can be used to identify an entity present at a certain location (Creissels 2014: 2).

Partee & Borschev (2004) introduce the notion of Perspective Centre to compare existentials to locatives. In a locative sentence, the THING is chosen as the perspectival centre while the LOCATION is chosen in an existential sentence. The difference is represented in (20), with the Perspectival Centre underlined:

- (20) a. Existential
 “There is a glass on the table.”
 b. Locative
 “The glass is on the table.”

It is significant that in Biblical Hebrew, the negative existential particle may be used in both existential and locative sentences. Other languages which allow this have been identified in Veselinova (2013).

There is a second variable stage B ~ C in which the *lō'* + copula construction negates a participle. Just as the negative existential particle 'ên enters the verbal domain by negating the participle, *lō'* + copula does as well. Biblical Hebrew has only 5 examples of this construction (21).¹⁶

¹⁶See also the Biblical Hebrew examples in BHS Exodus 23:26; Isaiah 10:14; Jeremiah 50:3; Ezekiel 41:6; Daniel 8:7.

- (21) wə-lō'=yihyû ʾăḥûzîm bə-qîr hab-bāyit
and-NEG=COP.IPFV.M.3PL fasten.PTCP.M.PL in-wall.GEN ART-house
'They were not fastened to the wall of the house.' [BHS Ezekiel 41:6]

In Qumran Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew, the use of construction *lō'* + copula + participle is used in additional contexts in which Biblical Hebrew generally use the negator *lō'* plus a perfective or imperfective verb. The Qumran Hebrew example in (22b) uses a *lō'* + copula + participle in contrast with the Biblical Hebrew example in (22a) which uses *lō'* + imperfective verb.

- (22) a. lō' yābô' bêt YHWH
NEG enter.IPFV.M.3SG house.GEN YHWH
'It will not enter the house of YHWH.' [BHS Hosea 9:4]
- b. w-lw' yhyw b'ym bl' 'l twk
and-NEG COP.IPFV.M.3PL enter.PTCP.M.PL suddenly into midst.GEN
mqdšy
temple.1SG
'So that they will not enter suddenly into the midst of my temple.'
[DSSR 11Q19 46:10–11]

Example (23b) illustrates that the *lō'* + copula + participle construction persists in Mishnaic Hebrew where Biblical Hebrew would use a *lō'* + finite verb (23a).

- (23) a. wə-'ābîw wə-'immô lō' yādə'û kî
and-father.M.3SG and-mother.M.3SG NEG know.PFV.M.3PL COMP
mē-YHWH hî'
from-YHWH F.3SG
'His father and his mother did not know that it was from YHWH.'
[BHS Judges 14:4]
- b. lō' hāyâ yôdēa' šey-yeš lô rə'āyâ
NEG COP.PFV.M.3SG know.PTCP.M.SG REL-EX to.M.3SG proof
û-māšā' rə'āyâ
and-find.PFV.M.3SG proof
'He did not know that he had proof but he found proof.'
[M Sanhedrin 3:8]

This construction provides yet another example of the expansion of forms into post-biblical Hebrew.

There may also be evidence for the variable stage C ~ A in which the negative existential is used not only for verbal predications, but also to negate the

affirmative existential. There is only one example in Biblical Hebrew which may possibly point to this stage:

- (24) ʾoznayim lā-hem wə-lōʾ yaʾāzînu ʾap ʾên=yeš=rûaḥ
 ears to-M.3PL and-NEG hear.IPFV.M.3PL indeed NEG.EX=EX=breath
 bə-pîhem
 in-mouth.M.3PL
 ‘They have ears, but they cannot hear; nor is there breath in their mouth
 (lit. there does not exist the existence of breath in their mouth).’
 [BHS Psalm 135:17]

In (24), a sentence is predicated with the positive existential *yēš* but preceded by the negative existential *ʾên*.¹⁷ It is possible that this example reflects poetic license or that the sentence reflects a change in the language resembling the last stage of the negative existential cycle which was not successfully diffused through the language (see Naudé 2012). With only one example, we cannot be certain about the status of a variable $C \sim A$ stage.

We have seen extensive evidence for stages $A \sim B$ and $B \sim C$ of the negative existential cycle, including further expansions of the use of the negative existential marker to negate various kinds of verbal constructions in post-biblical Hebrew.

The negative existential cycle provides a means to use stages of synchronic variation within a diachronic trajectory for analyzing these Ancient Hebrew constructions. Such a diachronic trajectory acknowledges synchronic variation, transitional stages and overlapping constructions, all of which reflect the ways in which languages change over time.

4 The shift from synthetic to analytic pronominal subjects of negative existentials

In this section we revisit the question of diachronic change exhibited in the negation of the participle with special reference to constructions involving left dislocation (Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2016b). In this section we provide additional evidence that seemingly small changes involving left dislocation constructions reflect change in syntactic structures. Furthermore, some constructions which

¹⁷In BHS 1 Samuel 21:9, a positive existential sentence is preceded by *ʾîn*, whose identification is uncertain. It might be an alternate spelling of the negative existential marker (the reading of some manuscripts) or it might be a mistaken vocalization of the interrogative marker *ʾên* ‘where?’.

seem to be synchronic variants in terms of the negative cycle can be shown to be diachronically rather than synchronically related on the basis of syntax.

This section demonstrates that in addition to the expanding domains of various existential forms, the forms themselves are subject to change based on other factors. Van Gelderen (2016: 7) reviews the treatment of analytic and synthetic languages and demonstrates how macro-cycles can be discerned in addition to cycles such as the ones demonstrated in §3. In macro-cycles, languages can move from being more analytic, in which they are closer to having a one-to-one relationship between word and morpheme, to more synthetic in which isolated forms move to become more agglutinative and separate words are reanalysed morphologically as part of another word (e.g. English *going to* > *gonna*) (see van Gelderen 2016: 6–8 for a description of the development of this notion). As the cycle continues, eventually the synthetic forms move toward being more analytic and reproduce isolated forms again. Analytic and synthetic stages can occur simultaneously in different systems of a language. A language can be in one stage for agreement and in another for negation (van Gelderen 2016: 7). In this section, we demonstrate that the pronominal subject of participial predicates negated with the negative existential marker is manifesting a shift in agreement from a synthetic inflectional stage where the subject is a pronominal suffix into an analytic isolating stage where the subject is an independent personal pronoun.

There are three types of constructions in which the participle is negated with *ʔên* in Biblical Hebrew (see Miller-Naudé & Naudé 2015 for additional details). In the first type, a pronominal suffix is joined to the negative existential marker which is followed by a participle with its object and adjuncts:

- (25) ʔim=ʔênkā mēšīb daʕ kī=môṭ
 if=NEG.EX.M.2SG return.PTCP know.IMP.M.SG that=die.INF.ABSL
 tāmûṭ ʔattâ wə-ḵol=ʔāšer=lāk
 die.IPFV.M.2SG M.2SG and-all=REL=to.M.2SG
 ‘If you do not return, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.’ [BHS Genesis 20:7]

This construction can be modified through left dislocation, in which a constituent appears outside the initial boundary of the sentence and is resumed within the sentence as a pronominal suffix on the negative existential marker:

- (26) kī ha-ḥayyîm yôḏaʕîm šey-yāmûṭû wə-ham-mēṭîm
 for ART-living.PL know.PTCP.PL rel-die.IPFV.M.3PL and-ART-die.PTCP
 ʔên-ām yôḏaʕîm məʔûmâ
 NEG.EX-M.3PL know.PTCP.PL anything
 ‘For the living know that they will die, but the dead, they do not know anything.’ [BHS Qohelet 9:5]

The subject constituent (*the dead*) is left dislocated, and a resumptive subject pronoun is suffixed to the negative existential. (For the syntactic and semantic features of topicalization and left dislocation in Biblical Hebrew, see Naudé 1990, Holmstedt 2014, Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2017). The same construction occurs in Qumran Hebrew:

- (27) [wə]-ʾp ʾmy ʾynnh mʾmnt ʾšr
[and]-even mother.1SG NEG.EX.F.3SG believe.PTCP.F.SG REL
trʾn[y] ʾwd
see.IPFV.F.3SG.1SG again
‘Even my mother, she does not believe that she will see me again.’
[DSSR 4Q200 f4:4]

The construction is also found in Mishnaic Hebrew:

- (28) haš-šum wə-hab-bəšālīm ʾên-ān mištārpîn
ART-garlic and-ART-onion.PL NEG.EX-M.3PL join.PTCP.M.PL
‘Garlic and onions, they do not join together.’ [M Peah 6:9]

In Qumran Hebrew an independent personal pronoun can be used for the subject instead of a pronominal suffix on the negative existential marker:

- (29) w-ʾm ʾyn hwʾ bḥwn b-kl ʾlh
and-if NEG.EX M.3SG distinguish.PTCP.PASS.M.SG in-all.GEN these
‘if he is not qualified in these (rules)’ [DSSR CD 13:3]

This innovation has diffused and is also found in Mishnaic Hebrew:

- (30) [wə]-ʾên ʾat yākol lə-panəšô
[and]-NEG.EX M.2SG be.able.PTCP to-help.INF.M.3SG
‘And you are not able to help him.’ [M Nedarim 9:4]

In Qumran Hebrew, a left dislocated pronoun may be resumed with an independent personal pronoun following the negative existential, rather than with a pronominal suffix (contrast example 26)¹⁸:

- (31) w-hwʾ ʾyn hwʾ lbwš b-g[dy
and-M.3SG NEG.EX M.3SG dressed.PASS.PTCP in-garments.GEN
h-qwdš
ART-holiness
‘and he, he is not dressed with the sacred vestments’
[DSSR 11Q19 35:6 (= 11QT)]

¹⁸In citations of manuscripts or epigraphic texts (e.g. from DSSR or HAE), opening and/or closing brackets are used to indicate broken texts which are reconstructed.

What is important is that the constructions found in Biblical Hebrew in which pronominal subjects of the negative existential marker are realized as pronominal suffixes (25, 26) all continue in Qumran Hebrew (27) and in Mishnaic Hebrew (28). However, new constructions in which the pronominal subject is realized as an independent pronoun are appearing in Qumran Hebrew (29, 31) alongside those inherited from Biblical Hebrew and those changes are diffusing and persisting into Mishnaic Hebrew (30). The shift from synthetic (inflectional) to analytic (isolating) pronouns is apparent in the new constructions that have developed after Biblical Hebrew. There is, however, one similar example with independent subject pronouns in post-exilic Biblical Hebrew:

- (32) wə-’ên ’ānî wə-’aḥay û-nə’āray wə-’anšê
 and-NEG.EX 1SG and-brothers.1SG and-servants.1SG and-men.GEN
 ham-mišmār ’āšer ’aḥāray ’ên=’ānaḥnû pōšəṭîm bəḡāḏênû ’iš
 ART-guard REL after.1SG NEG.EX=1PL put.off.PTCP clothing.1PL man
 šilḥ-ô ham-māyim
 weapon-M.3SG ART-water
 ‘So not I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who
 followed me – we did not take off our clothes; each (kept) his weapon
 (even) at the water.’ [BHS Nehemiah 4:17]

The example in (32) is striking because it involves both constituent negation of the subject with the first person plural independent pronoun (as well as conjoined noun phrases) and left dislocation with the subject resumed in the sentence proper (see Miller-Naudé & Naudé 2015). It is also the only example in the Bible which uses an independent subject pronoun for both the dislocated element and the resumed element. In this respect, the example exhibits an early change which was diffused and persisted in Qumran Hebrew and into Mishnaic Hebrew. The left-dislocation construction is a plausible environment for the birth of an idiolect which was subsequently embraced and diffused throughout the linguistic community.

Example (32) is also striking for another reason. According to the Subject Agreement Cycle as described in van Gelderen (2011: 41), the cycle of change in subject agreement often begins with the first and second person rather than third person. Van Gelderen describes three stages of the Subject Agreement Cycle. In stage (A), a full pronoun is used for the subject. In stage (B), a pronominal suffix is used for the subject. In stage (C), a new nominal element is needed alongside the pronominal suffix, usually a noun phrase functioning as the topic (van Gelderen 2011: 41). The developments in Ancient Hebrew subject agreement in

constructions with the negative existential marker display a trajectory of language change. Biblical Hebrew exhibits the stage (B) – the subject is indicated as a pronominal suffix on the negative existential – as illustrated in examples (25) and (26). Stage (B) persists in Qumran Hebrew (27) and Mishnaic Hebrew (28). Stage (C) is attested in Biblical Hebrew in only one late, post-exilic case (32), but it becomes more frequent in Qumran Hebrew (29, 31) and Mishnaic Hebrew (30).

In the second construction involving negation of the participle with the negative existential marker in Biblical Hebrew, the negative existential is followed by an explicit noun phrase subject and the participle with its objects and/or adjuncts:

- (33) haṣ-ṣaddîq ʾābād wə-ʾên ʾiš šām ʿal=lēḥ
 ART=righteous perish.PFV.M.3SG and-NEG.EX man put.PTCP on=heart
 ‘The righteous person perishes and no one considers (lit. puts it on the heart).’
 [BHS Isaiah 57:1]

The construction is found in Qumran Hebrew:

- (34) w-ʾ]yn yd[yw] šṭ[w]pwt b-mym¹⁹
 and-NEG.EX hands.M.3SG wash.PASS.PTCP in-water
 ‘... and his hands are not washed with water.’
 [DSSR 4Q277 f1ii:11]

The construction is also found in Mishnaic Hebrew:

- (35) ʾên ḥāmôr yōṣēʾ bə-mardaʿaṭ bi-zman še-ʾênāh
 NEG.EX donkey go.out.PTCP with-saddle at-time REL-NEG.EX.F.3SG
 qəṣûrâ lô
 tied.PTCP.F.SG to.M.3SG
 ‘A donkey does not go out with its saddle cloth when it is not tied to him.’
 [M Šabbat 5:4]

With a dislocated subject constituent, constructions of this type take the shape of (30) above and do not manifest the shift from suffixes to independent pronouns.

In the third construction of the negative existential marker with the participle, the negative existential occurs in a sentence in which a participle does not have an explicit subject:

¹⁹The square bracket in this example indicates that the letters to the left are reconstructed because the manuscript is fragmentary.

- (36) wə-ʾim=ʾên mōšîaʿ ʾōṭānû wə-yāšāʾnû ʾēlēkā
 and-if=NEG.EX deliver.PTCP OBJ.1PL and-go.out.IPFV.1PL to.M.2SG
 ‘... if no one delivers us, then we will go out to you’ [BHS 1 Samuel 11:3]

This use of the negative existential marker is also found in Qumran Hebrew, as illustrated in (37):

- (37) wʾn qbr
 and-NEG.EX bury-PTCP.MS
 ‘and no one buries’ [DSSR 4Q176:Frgs. 1–2, col. 1:4]

In contrast to example (35) in which the scope of the negative existential is the sentence, in (36) and (37), the negative existential marker syntactically modifies a null (or, implicit) subject – the scope of the negative existential particle is the null subject constituent and not the entire predication. In effect, the negative existential marker is functioning as a quantifier. Three arguments have been advanced for this claim (see Miller-Naudé & Naudé 2015, Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2016a). First, the participle is always in the unmarked masculine singular form, as illustrated in (38):

- (38) tāqəʿû bat-tāqôaʿ wə-hākîn hak-kol wə-ʾên
 sound.PFV.M.3PL on.ART-horn and-prepare.INF ART-all and-NEG.EX
 hōlēk lam-milḥāmâ
 go.PTCP.M.SG to.ART-battle
 ‘They have sounded the horn and everything is prepared, but no one goes to battle.’ [BHS Ezekiel 7:14]

The finite verb (*they have sounded*) has a plural subject; the participle (*goes*) is masculine singular and has an indefinite, non-referential subject.

Second, the negative existential may be followed by a prepositional phrase which modifies the null subject and not the participle:

- (39) wə-ʾên mib-balʿāday mōšîaʿ
 and-NEG.EX from-beside.1SG save.PTCP.M.SG
 ‘and no one beside me saves’ [BHS Isaiah 43:11]

Third, the negative existential as a quantifier may serve as the subject of more than one participle, as in (40):

- (40) wə-’ên=ḥōleh mikkem ‘ālay wə-gōleh
 and-NEG.EX=sick.PTCP.M.SG from.M.2PL over.1SG and-uncover.PTCP.M.SG
 ’et=’oznî
 ACC=ear.1SG
 ‘and no one of you is concerned over me and informs me’ (lit., and no one
 of you is sick for me and uncovers my ear)
[BHS 1 Samuel 22:8]

The negative existential marker in (40) cannot be understood as negating the two predications expressed by the participles because negation of a predication in ancient Hebrew, either by the negative existential marker or by the marker of standard negation, regularly requires that the negative marker be overtly expressed with each predication (for the ways in which negation in poetry may differ from prose in this regard, see [Miller 2005](#)). Instead, the negative existential marker in (40) functions as a negative quantifier ‘no one’.

5 Conclusion

In this paper we have provided evidence that Ancient Hebrew manifests diachronic change which corresponds to Croft’s negative existential cycle. While stages A (at the beginning of the cycle) and C ~ A (at the end of the cycle) are only rarely attested in Biblical Hebrew, variable stages A ~ B and B ~ C are well attested. In Qumran Hebrew, variable stage A ~ B continues, but the use of the negative existential marker expands its range of constructions while the alternate construction for expressive negative existentials (the standard negator *lō’* + copula) decrease. The same is true in Mishnaic Hebrew. Variable stage B ~ C presents a similar kind of expansion involving the negative existential marker in Qumran Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew and a concomitant decrease in the alternative construction involving the copula. The stages of the negative existential cycle thus reveal both complex toleration of multiple constructions in single stages, as well as clear diachronic trajectories of change from Biblical Hebrew into Qumran Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew.

We have also demonstrated a trajectory of change from Biblical Hebrew to Qumran Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew in the form of the subject of a participial predicate negated with the negative existential marker. In Biblical Hebrew, the subject in this construction is a pronominal suffix affixed to the negative existential marker (synthetic morphology). In Qumran Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew, the subject may continue to be a pronominal suffix (synthetic morphology) or it may be an independent subject pronoun (analytic morphology). The trajectory

from a pronominal suffix to an independent subject pronoun is in accord with the Subject Agreement Cycle.

The syntactic data on negative existentials support a complexity approach to language change and diffusion in ancient Hebrew in which there is a diachronic trajectory from Biblical Hebrew to both Qumran Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew. This is in direct contradiction to the claims of those who deny any diachronic trajectories in ancient Hebrew.

Sources

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- DSSR *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader*. 2 vols. 2nd edn. Edited by Donald W. Parry & Emanuel Tov. Leiden: Brill, 2014.
- HAE *Handbuch der Althebraischen Epigraphik*. 3 vols. Edited by Johannes Renz & Wolfgang Röllig. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995.
- M *Six Divisions of the Mishnah (Shisha Sidrei Mishnah)*. Eshkol edition. Accordance software, 2000.

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Abbreviations and symbols

1	first person	COMP	complementizer
2	second person	COP	copula
3	third person	EX	affirmative existential
ABSL	absolute	F	feminine
ACC	accusative	GEN	genitive
ART	article	IMP	imperative

INF	infinitive	NIND	non-indicative
IPFV	imperfective	OBJ	object
JUS	jussive	PASS	passive
M	masculine	PFV	perfective
NEG	negative	PL	plural
NEG.EX	negative existential	REL	relative marker
		SG	singular

The stem (*binyān*) of verbal forms is not indicated; footnotes clarify the glosses where necessary.

The equals sign represents the orthographic symbol *maqṣef* in the Hebrew text, which indicates cliticization of one word on another.

Square brackets are used to indicate reconstructed letter(s) in places where an epigraphic text or manuscript is fragmentary.

In the epigraphic texts cited from HAE, texts are identified by location (e.g. Jer = Jerusalem, Lak = Lakish, Arad = Arad) and century (e.g. 6 = 6th century BCE).

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