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BIBLICAL HEBREW יש AND BIBLICAL ARAMAIC איתי FOLLOWED BY NON-VERBAL CLAUSES AS MARKERS OF POLARITY CONTRAST[*]

ABSTRACT

In both Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic, there is a construction formed by the existential marker followed by a non-verbal clause. This construction is used to mark polarity contrasts, i.e., to contrast a non-negated sentence with its negated counterpart or vice versa. If the subject of the non-verbal clause is a personal pronoun, this is incorporated in the existential marker as a pronominal suffix, but the presence of such a suffix is not an essential feature of the construction.

Martino Bastenio a discipulo grato dedicatum

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the many similarities between Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic is the use of an existential marker "there is/are", "is/are present". In Biblical Hebrew, this takes the form יֵשׁ or ־יֶשׁ; in Biblical Aramaic, אִיתַי.[1] Most commonly, they are used in combination with a following indefinite noun phrase and optionally a preposition phrase, as in the following two examples.

Gen 42:1a

וַיַּרְא יַעֲקֹב כִּי יֶשׁ־שֶׁבֶר בְּמִצְרָיִם

"And Jacob saw that **there was** grain in Egypt"

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1 Although it is likely that both words are historically one and the same, their reconstruction is fraught with formal difficulties. Brockelmann (1908:§253.B.c), for instance, limits himself to listing the various forms, without suggesting a reconstruction. Lipiński (1997:§49.23) reconstructs the proto-form as *yθ*, apparently without a phonemic vowel.

Dan 5:11aα

אִיתַ֨י גְּבַ֜ר בְּמַלְכוּתָ֗ךְ דִּ֠י ר֣וּחַ אֱלָהִ֤ין קַדִּישִׁין֙ בֵּ֔הּ

"**There is** a man in your kingdom with a spirit of holy gods in him"[2]

The topic of this article is a construction, marginal in Biblical Hebrew and relatively frequent in Biblical Aramaic, where the existential marker appears to function as a copula linking a subject to a non-verbal predicate.[3] Often, the subject is expressed as a pronominal suffix:

Gen 24:49a

וְעַתָּ֠ה אִם־יֶשְׁכֶ֨ם עֹשִׂ֜ים חֶ֧סֶד וֶאֱמֶ֛ת אֶת־אֲדֹנִ֖י הַגִּ֣ידוּ לִ֑י

"Now if **you are** going to treat my master faithfully and loyally, tell me"

Dan 2:26b

הַאִיתָ֣יךְ כָּהֵ֗ל לְהוֹדָעֻתַ֛נִי חֶלְמָ֥א דִֽי־חֲזֵ֖ית וּפִשְׁרֵֽהּ׃

"**Are you** able to tell me the dream that I saw and its interpretation?"

The meaning and function of the existential marker in this construction is debated. Among the scholars who have written about it in recent decades, Muraoka (1985:77-81) states that in Hebrew "these words emphatically indicate the fact that a state of things or behaviour of a certain man or men is *actually* as one wants or expects it to be, or as one thinks it should be", citing the similar explanation for Aramaic by Bauer and Leander (1927:§81e);[4] this interpretation is followed by Van der Merwe, Naudé and Kroeze (2017:§43.3), who write that in these cases יֵשׁ "[a]ffirms the presence or involvement of an identifiable entity in a situation". Focusing on the Aramaic construction, Gzella (2004:197) states that it can be used to disambiguate between a "here and now" present and a more general, habitual or extratemporal present. Li (2009:83-85) argues that "the addition

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2   The Biblical Aramaic quotations are given in the form encountered in the body of manuscripts, i.e., following the consonantal text of the *ketiv* and the vocalization of the *qere*. On the separate origin of these textual layers, now see Suchard (2021).

3   For an overview of the literature on non-verbal clauses in Biblical Hebrew and Semitic more generally, cf. Baasten (2006:40-120).

4   "Zur Hervorhebung der Tatsächlichkeit der durch das Partizip ausgedrückten Handlung steht öfters davor איתי mit Suffixe: הַאִיתִיךְ כָּהֵל [sic] 'bist du wirklich imstande?' D 2₂₆, 'wollt ihr wirklich meinen Gott nicht verehren (לָא אִיתֵיכוֹן פָּלְחִין)?' D 3₁₄".

of איתי to the active participle … makes explicit the [present tense] temporal reference of a participle, which would otherwise have to be inferred from the context". In a more recent restatement of his position, Muraoka (2013:882) describes two constructions with יֵשׁ that "highlight the veracity of the action" (referring to several cases with a suffixed pronoun) or otherwise draw attention to the reality of a statement (referring to some cases with a definite noun phrase as the subject).

In this paper, I will argue that Muraoka's explanation is on the right track and also holds for Biblical Aramaic, *pace* Gzella and Li and in line with Bauer and Leander. Employing a concept from pragmatics which will be introduced in the next section, I will analyze this construction as marking contrasts in polarity, i.e., the difference between negated and non-negated sentences. The existential marker emphasizes the sentence's truth value, implicitly or explicitly contrasting it with its negation. After a theoretical introduction, we will demarcate the syntactic constructions under discussion, which seem to be completely parallel in Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic. As I will argue, the existential marker that characterizes these constructions has as its scope the entire following non-verbal clause consisting of both the subject and predicate, not just the subject expressed by the pronominal suffix we find in most cases – hence, the examples placed into separate categories by Muraoka (2013) should be grouped together. These Hebrew and Aramaic examples will then be examined in turn. We will conclude by considering why this construction is so much rarer in Biblical Hebrew than in Biblical Aramaic and how its identification contributes to the typological discussion surrounding polarity contrast marking.

2.   *POLARITY FOCUS/POLARITY CONTRAST*

As I will argue, our construction marks what is commonly referred to in the literature as *polarity focus*, a subtype of *auxiliary focus* (e.g., Hyman & Watters 1984) or *predication focus* (e.g., Güldemann 2003). Alternative terms include *verum focus* (e.g., Höhle 1992), *VERUM* (Gutzmann, Hartmann & Matthewson 2020), *polarity emphasis* (e.g., Breitbarth, De Clercq & Haegeman 2013), and *salient polarity* (Matić & Nikolaeva 2018). Examples of English constructions with this function are given in (1-3) below, where boldface indicates the most prominent sentential accent.

1. a. Speaker 1: *I don't think Daniel wrote this.*
    b. Speaker 2: *Daniel **did** write this.*

2. a. Speaker 1: *I'm not sure I should go.*

b. Speaker 2: *If you **do** go, let me know.*

3. a. Speaker 1: *I heard Susanna and you broke up. **Did** you?*
   b. Speaker 2: *No, we **didn't**!*

Examples like these have mostly been treated as exhibiting focus on the sentence's inherent polarity. The truth value of *Daniel wrote this* and *Daniel **did** write this* is the same; in this focus-based approach, the difference is that the sentence's positive polarity is the most important new information in the latter case, contrasting it with sentences with different foci such as ***Daniel** wrote this, (not Ezra)*, *Daniel **wrote** this, (he didn't dictate it)*, and *Daniel wrote **this**, (not something else)*. Gutzmann, Hartmann and Matthewson (2020), however, make a strong case that what they call VERUM is something other than focus. They adduce new examples of languages that mark VERUM differently than focus, languages that cannot have multiple foci in the same sentence but can combine focus and VERUM, and languages that *can* have multiple foci in the same sentence but *cannot* combine focus and VERUM. They also show that VERUM marking is optional in certain conditions where focus marking is obligatory. Hence, they argue, VERUM should not be seen as the sentence's inherent polarity being focused, but rather as the addition of a semantic VERUM element that is lacking in the unmarked sentence. Matić and Nikolaeva (2018) go even further, stating that this kind of salient polarity is not explicitly marked in the sentence's grammar, but is inferred by the listener. The constructions that are normally taken as expressing polarity focus or VERUM, in their view, have other functions; they only result in salient polarity in certain contexts, whereas the same sentence's polarity may be made salient through various different constructions, which argues against the fixed form-to-meaning relationship that we might expect from a grammatical construction.

It is also debated what the exact semantic or pragmatic value of these constructions is. Hyman and Watters (1984:237) use an adapted version of Jackendoff's (1972:230) definition of focus in general: in their version, focus is "that information in an utterance which the speaker believes, assumes, or knows that the hearer does not share with him/her". In the case of polarity focus, this implies that the propositional content of the sentence other than the polarity is already shared between the interlocutors (or at least the speaker thinks so). As has been remarked by other authors, it is less important that the proposition itself has been brought up before than that its negation has been, i.e., there must be some uncertainty about the truth or falsehood of the proposition; contrast the second half of (3a) with that of (4), where it is unfelicitous (marked by #):

4. Speaker 1: *I know Susanna and you broke up. #**Did you?***

Hence, Gutzmann, Hartmann and Matthewson (2020:55) suggest that utterances containing VERUM are felicitous if and only if the speaker wants to prevent that the Question Under Discussion, which concerns the truth of the proposition marked with VERUM, be downdated with that proposition's negation – although they note that the exact semantics may need to be modified further. What is most important for our current purposes is the doubt or uncertainty about the proposition's truth value: its negation must already be on the table, so to speak. Thus, in (1b), *Daniel **did** write this* is felicitous because (1a) suggested the proposition "Daniel did not write this". In (2b), *If you **do** go* is felicitous because (2a) suggested the proposition "Speaker 1 will not go". And in (3), the question ***Did** you?* and the answer *we **didn't*** are felicitous because the uncertainty implied by *I heard that …* in (3a) suggested the proposition "Susanna and Speaker 2 did not break up".

Given the current debate surrounding the exact grammatical status of these constructions, we will use Dimroth and Sudhoff's (2018) fairly neutral term *polarity contrast* in what follows. The next section will analyze the various Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic constructions where an existential marker is used to mark this polarity contrast.

3.   THE STRUCTURE OF THE POLARITY CONTRAST CONSTRUCTION

Based on the general meaning of the existential marker, the most plausible meaning of an existential marker bearing a pronominal suffix like יֶשְׁכֶם would seem to be "you exist, you are there". The following participle that occurs in all our examples would then be in apposition to the personal pronoun: יֶשְׁכֶם עֹשִׂים would then be something like "you exist, doing", roughly equivalent to "you are doing". The existential marker looks a lot like a copula in this analysis and has often been taken that way (e.g., Lipiński 1997:§49.23.2°; contrast Muraoka 2013:882).

In addition to the cases with a pronominal suffix attached to the existential marker, however, we find a number of cases in both Hebrew and Aramaic where the existential is followed by a definite subject and a non-verbal predicate, as in the following examples:

Jdg 6:13a

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו גִּדְעוֹן בִּי אֲדֹנִי וְיֵשׁ יְהוָה עִמָּנוּ וְלָמָּה מְצָאַתְנוּ כָּל־זֹאת

"But Gideon said to him: 'Pardon me, sir, but if Yʜwʜ **is** with us, then why has all this happened to us?'"

Dan 3:17

הֵ֣ן **אִיתַ֗י** אֱלָהַ֙נָא֙ דִּֽי־אֲנַ֣חְנָא פָֽלְחִ֔ין יָכִ֖ל לְשֵׁיזָבוּתַ֑נָא מִן־אַתּ֙וּן נוּרָ֤א יָקִֽדְתָּא֙ וּמִן־יְדָ֥ךְ מַלְכָּ֖א יְשֵׁיזִֽב׃

"If the god we serve **is** able to save us from the furnace of burning fire and from you, O king, he will".

We also find an Aramaic example where the existential marker is followed by a nominalized verbal clause:

Ezra 5:17a

וּכְעַ֞ן הֵ֧ן עַל־מַלְכָּ֣א טָ֗ב יִֽתְבַּקַּר֙ בְּבֵ֤ית גִּנְזַיָּא֙ דִּי־מַלְכָּ֣א תַמָּ֔ה דִּ֥י בְּבָבֶ֖ל הֵ֣ן **אִיתַ֗י** דִּֽי־מִן־כּ֤וֹרֶשׁ מַלְכָּא֙ שִׂ֣ים טְעֵ֔ם לְמִבְנֵ֛א בֵּית־אֱלָהָ֥א דֵ֖ךְ בִּירוּשְׁלֶֽם

"Now, if it seems good to the king, let a search be made in the king's treasury there in Babylon, whether **it is so** that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to rebuild that house of god in Jerusalem"

As I will argue below, these sentences where the existential is followed by a non-verbal or nominalized clause have the same semantics as the examples where the existential has a pronominal suffix. Hence, it is attractive to analyze them as variations on one and the same construction. The examples without a pronominal suffix suggest that the analysis of the existential as a mere copula is inaccurate. More clearly than in the case with suffixed pronouns, removing the existential marker leaves us with fully grammatical sentences (the constructed examples below are marked with ′ and ″ and not provided with cantillation signs):

Jdg 6:13′

יְהוָה עִמָּנוּ

"Yʜwʜ is with us" (cf. Jdg 6:12)

Dan 3:17′

אֱלָהַנָא דִּי אֲנַחְנָא פָלְחִין יָכִל לְשֵׁיזָבוּתַנָא מִן אַתּוּן נוּרָא יָקִדְתָּא וּמִן יְדָךְ

"The god we serve is able to save us from the furnace of burning fire and from you"

Ezra 5:17′

מִן כּוֹרֶשׁ מַלְכָּא שִׂים טְעֵם לְמִבְנֵא בֵּית אֱלָהָא דֵךְ בִּירוּשְׁלֶם

"A decree was issued by King Cyrus to rebuild that house of god in Jerusalem"

In Ezra 5:17, the non-verbal clause is explicitly nominalized by the particle דִּי. As a nominalized clause, it can thus serve as the subject of a sentence. The salience of the clause's polarity now quite naturally arises from the existential meaning of אִיתַי:

Ezra 5:17″

אִיתַי [דִּי [מִן כּוֹרֶשׁ מַלְכָּא שִׂים טְעֵם לְמִבְנֵא בֵּית אֱלָהָא דֵךְ בִּירוּשְׁלֶם]]

"[That [a decree was issued by King Cyrus to rebuild that house of god in Jerusalem]] exists"

In the other examples, the particle דִּי is not used. Perhaps this has to do with the presence of what is probably a finite verb, שִׂים "it was issued", in Ezra 5:17, while the other examples occur with non-verbal clauses. Taking into account the semantic parallels, we may be dealing with an asyndetically nominalized clause in these cases:

Jdg 6:13″

יֵשׁ [[יְהוָה עִמָּנוּ]]

"[*That* [Yʜᴡʜ is with us]] exists"

Dan 3:17″

אִיתַי [[אֱלָהַנָא דִּי אֲנַחְנָא פָלְחִין יָכִל לְשֵׁיזָבוּתַנָא מִן אַתּוּן נוּרָא יָקִדְתָּא וּמִן יְדָךְ]]

"[*That* [our god, whom we serve, is able to save us from the furnace of burning fire and from you]] exists"

Taking the examples from the Introduction where the existential marker is followed by a pronominal suffix, the underlying non-verbal clauses should be as follows:

Gen 24:49′

עֹשִׂים אַתֶּם חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת אֶת אֲדֹנִי

"You are going to treat my master faithfully and loyally"[5]

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[5]   Following Michel (2004:168), the regular word order in a main clause with these constituents is predicative participle-subject-complement of the predicate. In subordinated clauses, the order of subject (*Mubtada* in Michel's terminology, from Classical Arabic *mubtadaʔ*) and predicate (*Chabar*, from *ḫabar*) are reversed; this is the order that we see in the version of this sentence preceded by the existential marker, given as (Gen 24:49″).

Dan 2:26′

כָּהֵל אַנְתְּה לְהוֹדָעֻתַני חֶלְמָא דִי חֲזֵית וּפִשְׁרֵה

"You are able to tell me the dream that I saw and its interpretation"[6]

Adding the existential marker at the beginning to mark the polarity contrast is less straightforward than with the previous examples, however. Apparently, the personal pronoun is incorporated into the existential marker as a pronominal suffix even though it alone is not the existential marker's subject, yielding:

Gen 24:49″

יֶשְׁכֶם עֹשִׂים חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת אֶת אֲדֹנִי

"That you are going to treat my master faithfully and loyally exists"

Dan 2:26″

אִיתָיִךְ כָּהֵל לְהוֹדָעֻתַני חֶלְמָא דִי חֲזֵית וּפִשְׁרֵה

"That you are able to tell me the dream that I saw and its interpretation exists"

It may seem strange that the existential marker latches on to the following pronoun and incorporates it even though it belongs to the following non-verbal clause, but it is paralleled in at least one other construction. In Biblical Aramaic, we find the third person pronoun used as a demonstrative in הוּא צַלְמָא "that statue" (Dan 2:32). While they are not attested, it is likely that the similar expressions *הוּא זִמְנָא "that time" and *הִיא שָׁעֲתָא "that moment" would also be grammatical. Accordingly, we may analyze בֵּהּ זִמְנָא "at that time" and בַּהּ שָׁעֲתָא "at that moment", which are attested, as the preposition -בְּ followed by *הוּא זִמְנָא and *הִיא שָׁעֲתָא, respectively. Here too, the independent personal pronoun is turned into a suffix, obscuring its function.

Both the construction of the existential marker followed by a pronominal suffix and a non-verbal predicate and that of the existential marker followed by a definite noun phrase and a non-verbal predicate can thus be analyzed as subtypes of a single construction, formed by the existential followed by

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6   Similar to Biblical Hebrew, the unmarked position for personal pronouns used as subjects in Biblical Aramaic is enclitic to the sentence's first core constituent, i.e., it comes in second place; cf. two examples in Dan (2:8). In sentences like (Dan 2:26″), the pronoun's unmarked position is thus after the existential marker, which then incorporates it as a suffix.

a non-verbal clause. We will now examine the occurrences of this construction in Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic.

4.   THE HEBREW EVIDENCE

Muraoka (1985:78) identifies the following five examples where the existential marker is followed by a pronominal suffix:[7]

Gen 24:42b

וָאֹמַ֖ר יְהוָה֙ אֱלֹהֵי֙ אֲדֹנִ֣י אַבְרָהָ֔ם אִם־יֶשְׁךָ֣־נָּא֙ מַצְלִ֣יחַ דַּרְכִּ֔י אֲשֶׁ֥ר אָנֹכִ֖י הֹלֵ֥ךְ עָלֶֽיהָ׃

"(And I said to my master: 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me'. And he said to me: 'YHWH, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you and will make your journey a success. …' And today I came to the well) and I said: 'YHWH, god of my master Abraham, if **you really are** going to make the journey I am on a success …'"

Gen 24:49a-bα

וְ֠עַתָּה אִם־יֶשְׁכֶ֨ם עֹשִׂ֜ים חֶ֧סֶד וֶאֱמֶ֛ת אֶת־אֲדֹנִ֖י הַגִּ֣ידוּ לִ֑י וְאִם־לֹ֕א הַגִּ֣ידוּ לִ֔י

"Now, if **you are** going to treat my master faithfully and loyally, tell me; and if not, tell me [too]"

Gen 43:4-5a

אִם־יֶשְׁךָ֛ מְשַׁלֵּ֥חַ אֶת־אָחִ֖ינוּ אִתָּ֑נוּ נֵרְדָ֕ה וְנִשְׁבְּרָ֥ה לְךָ֖ אֹֽכֶל׃ וְאִם־אֵינְךָ֥ מְשַׁלֵּ֖חַ לֹ֥א נֵרֵֽד

"If **you are** going to let our brother go with us, let us go and buy food for you. But if you are not going to let [him] go, we will not go"

Deut 13:4b

כִּ֣י מְנַסֶּ֞ה יְהוָ֤ה אֱלֹֽהֵיכֶם֙ אֶתְכֶ֔ם לָדַ֗עַת הֲיִשְׁכֶ֤ם אֹֽהֲבִים֙ אֶת־יְהוָ֣ה אֱלֹֽהֵיכֶ֔ם בְּכָל־לְבַבְכֶ֖ם וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁכֶֽם׃

"(If a prophet or dream-seer arises among you and gives you a sign or a miracle and the sign or miracle that he told you comes true, saying: 'Let us follow other gods that you do not know and serve them', you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dream-seer,) for YHWH your god is testing you to find out whether **you do** love YHWH your god with all your heart and all your soul".

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7   The translations of all following examples will reflect my analysis of the construction in question as a marker of polarity contrast, unlike in the previous examples.

Jdg 6:36

וַיֹּאמֶר גִּדְעוֹן אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים אִם־יֶשְׁךָ֫ מוֹשִׁיעַ בְּיָדִי אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּֽרְתָּ׃

"And Gideon said to God: 'If **you really are** going to save Israel through me, as you said, (here, I am putting a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there will be dew on the fleece alone, while the whole ground is dry, I will know that you will save Israel through me, as you said.)'''

Additionally, Muraoka (2013:882) lists a number of verses where the existential marker is followed by a definite noun phrase that I have argued above to exhibit the same construction:

Gen 28:16

וַיִּיקַץ יַעֲקֹב֙ מִשְּׁנָתוֹ֒ וַיֹּאמֶר אָכֵן יֵשׁ יְהֹוָה בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאָנֹכִי לֹא יָדָֽעְתִּי׃

"And Jacob awoke from his sleep and said: 'So YHWH *was* in this place, without me knowing it!'''

Gen 44:26

וַנֹּאמֶר לֹא נוּכַל לָרֶדֶת אִם־יֵשׁ אָחִינוּ הַקָּטֹן אִתָּנוּ֙ וְיָרַדְנוּ כִּי־לֹא נוּכַל לִרְאוֹת פְּנֵי הָאִישׁ וְאָחִינוּ הַקָּטֹן אֵינֶנּוּ אִתָּנוּ׃

"(And our father said to us: 'Go back and buy us a little food'.) But we said: 'We cannot go. If our youngest brother **is** with us, we will go, but we will not be granted an audience with the man if our youngest brother is not with us'''.

Exod 17:7

וַיִּקְרָא֙ שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם מַסָּה וּמְרִיבָה עַל־רִיב ׀ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל֙ וְעַל נַסֹּתָם אֶת־יְהֹוָה לֵאמֹר הֲיֵשׁ יְהֹוָה בְּקִרְבֵּנוּ אִם־אָֽיִן׃

"And he named the place Massa and Meribah, because of the Israelites' dispute and because of their testing YHWH, saying: '**Is** YHWH among us or isn't he?'''

Jdg 6:12-13a

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו מַלְאַךְ יְהֹוָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יְהֹוָה עִמְּךָ גִּבּוֹר הֶחָֽיִל׃ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו גִּדְעוֹן בִּי אֲדֹנִי וְיֵשׁ יְהֹוָה עִמָּנוּ וְלָמָּה מְצָאַתְנוּ כָּל־זֹאת

"And YHWH's angel appeared to him and said to him: 'YHWH is with you, O mighty warrior'. But Gideon said to him: 'Pardon me, sir, but if YHWH **is really** with us, then why has all this happened to us?'''

In all of these cases, there is doubt concerning the truth value of the proposition that is marked by the existential marker. In Gen 24:42, Jdg 6:36, and Jdg 6:13, the speaker doubts a statement that was previously made by someone else. The positive polarity of the earlier statement (e.g., "YHWH

will make this journey a success") is implicitly contrasted with the negative polarity of the alternative, which also seems likely to the speaker ("YHWH will *not* make this journey a success"). The same kind of implicit contrast is present in Deut 13:4, where the outcome of the test can be either positive ("You love YHWH with all your heart and all your soul") or negative ("You do *not* love YHWH with all your heart and all your soul"); moreover, YHWH has already commanded one of these options earlier in the same text (Deut 6:5). Exod 17:7 also presents a test, only with both options spelled out. In Gen 24:49, 43:4-5, and 44:26, the contrast is explicitly presented as two options, one with positive polarity and one with negative polarity. Finally, Gen 28:16 offers a possible example of יֵשׁ being used in a main clause.[8] The polarity contrast is not obvious from the context but may be implied by the use of the asseverative particle אָכֵן, which can express a conclusion that runs counter to one's expectations (Muraoka 1985:132-133). Apparently, Jacob is presented as having considered whether YHWH was present before going to sleep and having decided that he was not.

Given the presence of a contrast between positive and negative polarity in every example, it seems natural to identify the marking of such contrasts as the function of this construction. This function is more restricted than Muraoka's (1985:77-78) characterization of the construction as emphasizing the agreement between reality and the speaker's desire or expectation. Muraoka paraphrases his understanding of Gen 24:49 and Deut 13:4 as "'If you do send (…) our brother with us', as you should, seeing that there is left no other step to be taken in order to overcome the present critical situation" and "'if you do love (…) the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul', as you should because of the unique covenant established between us'", respectively, but the existential marker is left out in similar contexts.[9] By identifying this construction as a marker of polarity contrast we can more readily understand why it is not used in other cases where deontic modality plays a role.

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8   It is remarkable that the other examples all occur in subordinate clauses (the example in Exod 17:7 may be analyzed as the complement clause of נַסֹּתָם "their testing"). This may be conditioned by the use of יֵשׁ, which also frequently occurs with subordinating particles in its usual, existential function (Wilson 2017:169).

9   E.g., 1 Sam 7:3 ("If you are returning to YHWH with all your heart", 'as you should' according to the speaker, Samuel). The polarity contrast construction is not used here as the proposition "The Israelites are not returning to YHWH with all their heart" does not play a role in the discourse.

5.   *THE ARAMAIC EVIDENCE*

In Biblical Aramaic, we find the following examples:

Dan 2:26b

הַֽאִיתָ֣יךְ כָּהֵ֗ל לְהוֹדָעֻתַ֛נִי חֶלְמָ֥א דִֽי־חֲזֵ֖ית וּפִשְׁרֵֽהּ׃

"(Then Arioch quickly brought Daniel before the king. And thus he said to him, that 'I have found a man from the exiles from Judah who can tell the king the interpretation'. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar:) '**Are you really** able to tell me the dream that I saw and its interpretation?'"

Dan 3:14a

עָנֵ֤ה נְבֻֽכַדְנֶצַּר֙ וְאָמַ֣ר לְה֔וֹן הַצְדָּ֕א שַׁדְרַ֥ךְ מֵישַׁ֖ךְ וַעֲבֵ֣ד נְג֑וֹ לֵֽאלָהַ֗י לָ֤א **אִֽיתֵיכוֹן֙** פָּֽלְחִ֔ין וּלְצֶ֧לֶם דַּהֲבָ֛א דִּ֥י הֲקֵ֖ימֶת לָ֥א סָֽגְדִֽין׃

"(Thereupon, at that time, certain Chaldaean men approached and informed on the Judahites. … 'Those men have not paid you heed, O king. They do not worship your gods, and they are not bowing down to the golden statue that you erected'.) … Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them: 'Really, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed Nego, **is it so that you** do not worship my gods and are not bowing down to the golden statue that I erected?'"

Dan 3:15a

כְּעַ֞ן הֵ֧ן **אִֽיתֵיכ֣וֹן** עֲתִידִ֗ין דִּ֣י בְעִדָּנָ֡א דִּֽי־תִשְׁמְע֣וּן קָ֣ל קַרְנָ֣א … וְכֹ֣ל ׀ זְנֵ֣י זְמָרָ֡א תִּפְּל֤וּן וְתִסְגְּדוּן֙ לְצַלְמָ֣א דִֽי־עַבְדֵ֔ת וְהֵן֙ לָ֣א תִסְגְּד֔וּן בַּהּ־שַׁעֲתָ֣ה תִתְרְמ֗וֹן לְגֽוֹא־אַתּ֛וּן נוּרָ֖א יָקִֽדְתָּֽא

"Now, if **you are** prepared to fall and bow down to the golden statue that I made at the moment that you hear the sound of the horn … and every kind of musical instrument – but if you will not bow down, you will be thrown into the furnace of burning fire at that moment".

Dan 3:17-18

הֵ֣ן **אִיתַ֗י** אֱלָהַ֙נָא֙ דִֽי־אֲנַ֣חְנָא פָֽלְחִ֔ין יָכִ֖ל לְשֵׁיזָבוּתַ֑נָא מִן־אַתּ֛וּן נוּרָ֥א יָקִֽדְתָּ֖א וּמִן־יְדָ֥ךְ מַלְכָּ֖א יְשֵׁיזִֽב׃ וְהֵ֣ן לָ֔א יְדִ֥יעַ לֶהֱוֵֽא־לָ֖ךְ מַלְכָּ֑א דִּ֤י לֵֽאלָהָיִךְ֙ לָֽא־**אִיתַ֣נָא** פָֽלְחִ֔ין וּלְצֶ֧לֶם דַּהֲבָ֛א דִּ֥י הֲקֵ֖ימְתָּ לָ֥א נִסְגֻּֽד׃

"If the god we serve **is** able to save us from the furnace of burning fire and from you, O king, he will. And if not, may it be known to you, O king, that **indeed, we** do not worship your gods and will not bow down to the golden statue that you erected".

Ezra 5:17a

וּכְעַ֡ן הֵ֣ן עַל־מַלְכָּא֩ טָ֨ב יִֽתְבַּקַּ֜ר בְּבֵ֣ית גִּנְזַיָּ֣א דִּי־מַלְכָּא֮ תַמָּה֒ דִּ֣י בְּבָבֶ֔ל הֵ֣ן אִיתַ֗י דִּֽי־מִן־כּ֤וֹרֶשׁ מַלְכָּא֙ שִׂ֣ים טְעֵ֔ם לְמִבְנֵ֛א בֵּית־אֱלָהָ֥א דֵ֖ךְ בִּירוּשְׁלֶ֑ם

"(And thus they replied to us: '… But in year one of King Cyrus of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this house of god'.) … Now, if it seems good to the king, let a search be made in the king's treasury there in Babylon, whether **it is so** that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to rebuild that house of god in Jerusalem"

Like the Hebrew examples, each of these cases is characterized by an explicit or implicit polarity contrast. In Dan 2:26, 3:14, and Ezra 5:17, the speaker aims to verify a report he has heard, but doubts. The report (e.g., "Daniel can tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream and its interpretation") is thus implicitly contrasted with its negation ("Daniel *cannot* tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream and its interpretation"). In Dan 3:15 and 3:17, the contrast is explicit: both options are presented as hypothetical possibilities. In Dan 3:18, finally, the speakers confirm the report that their interlocutor had questioned in v. 15: despite Nebuchadnezzar's doubts, it is true that they do not and will not worship his gods or his golden idol.

As was mentioned above, Gzella (2004) and Li (2009) both state that אִיתַי makes explicit the (actual) present tense value of the following participle. This does not hold for Ezra 5:17, where the following clause is set in the past (as is clear from the suffix conjugation form שָׂם "he issued" in v. 13, the statement that the Persian authorities are asked to investigate).[10] Admittedly, the construction is slightly different here, as the existential marker אִיתַי is followed by the complementizing particle דִּי. Nevertheless, the (actual) present tense meaning does not sit well with some of the other examples either. Especially in Dan 3:17, the issue is not God's momentary ability to save Shadrach and friends. Rather, the question is whether God is generally able to save them and will be able to save them when they are thrown into the fiery furnace in the near future. Identifying אִיתַי as a polarity contrast marker avoids these temporal difficulties, explains why it is used in these verses and not elsewhere, and provides a complete parallel to the usage of Hebrew יֵשׁ discussed above.[11]

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10   As Li's work is limited to the Aramaic of Daniel, this example lies outside his scope. I was unable to locate Gzella's discussion of this verse.

11   Goldenberg (1983:118) attributes a similar meaning to the Syriac construction formed by the existential *īṯ* followed by the impersonal enclitic pronoun *-u*. From the examples on pp. 122-123, it is clear that this construction marks contrastive

6.   CONCLUSION

I have argued that in both Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic, the existential marker is used to form a construction marking polarity contrast. The construction expressing this contrast consists of the existential marker followed by a clause that is usually non-verbal; in the case of Ezra 5:17, the fact that the following clause has a verbal predicate may have necessitated its explicit nominalization by means of the particle דִּי. The pronominal suffix that we find attached to the existential marker in most cases (e.g., יֶשְׁךָ, אִיתָיִךְ) is in fact the pronominal subject of the non-verbal clause following the existential marker, not the subject of the existential marker itself. Just as the existential marker's more frequent usage asserts the existence of a noun phrase's referent, its employment with a non-verbal clause asserts the truth of the proposition it expresses, contrasting it with its negation.

It is striking that hardly more examples occur in Biblical Hebrew, which makes up 99% of the Hebrew Bible, than in Biblical Aramaic: we have seen some nine cases of this construction in Biblical Hebrew versus five or six in Biblical Aramaic. In other words, the construction is about fifty to one hundred times more frequent in Aramaic than in Hebrew. Why might this be the case?

Of the Hebrew examples, two occur in Gen 24, a passage that is rife with Aramaicisms (Bompiani 2014); another example, from Gen 28, occurs in the narration of Jacob's journey to Paddan Aram to visit Laban and might be attributed to the same kind of Aramaic style-switching.[12] The examples from Gen 43-44 are part of the Joseph narrative, with its focus on the eponymous ancestors of the (relatively) northern tribes of Joseph and Benjamin, while the protagonist of the Gideon narrative of Jdg 6 belongs to the northern tribe of Manasseh. If this construction was normal in Aramaic but rare or non-existent in Hebrew, it may betray Aramaic influence in these northern texts (cf. Rendsburg 2003). But it is not clear

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focus, but it seems to me that it is the following noun phrase that is contrasted rather than the polarity of the entire sentence; e.g., *en īṯ bī d-sāḡdīn la-p̄ṭaḵrē, īṯ-u bī sāhdē da-ḇ-ḏemhōn raʕīw l-allāhā* "[Earth:] if there are people on me who worship idols, there (also) are on me martyrs who have won reconciliation with God by their blood" (translation Goldenberg's, transcription mine), where *īṯ-u* contrasts the martyrs with the idolaters, not the martyrs' existence with their supposed non-existence.

12   On the concept of style-switching more generally, see Rendsburg (2013).

why a typically Aramaic construction should be used in the remaining examples from Exod 17 and Deut 13.

Instead, it may simply be the case that Biblical Hebrew normally expresses polarity contrast in other ways. One important means is the paronomastic use of the infinitive absolute (cf. Muraoka 1985:86), as in the following example which is semantically similar to Deut 13:4:

Deut 11:13

וְהָיָ֗ה אִם־שָׁמֹ֤עַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ֙ אֶל־מִצְוֺתַ֔י אֲשֶׁ֧ר אָנֹכִ֛י מְצַוֶּ֥ה אֶתְכֶ֖ם הַיֹּ֑ום לְאַהֲבָ֞ה אֶת־
יְהוָ֤ה אֱלֹֽהֵיכֶם֙ וּלְעָבְד֔וֹ בְּכָל־לְבַבְכֶ֖ם וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁכֶֽם׃

"And it will happen, if **you do listen** to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love YHWH your god and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul …"

This construction is not attested in Biblical Aramaic,[13] and the use of אִיתַי דִּי in Ezra 5:17 may show that Biblical Aramaic does use the existential marker to mark polarity contrast in sentences with a finite predicate. In Biblical Hebrew, the construction with יֵשׁ is limited to non-verbal clauses, where the paronomastic infinitive absolute cannot be used (as they do not contain a finite verb). This restriction further reduces the number of occurrences in Hebrew compared to Aramaic: whereas non-verbal clauses with a participial predicate are used for the general present tense and yet other functions in Biblical Aramaic (Li 2009:39-78), such clauses in Hebrew express continuous aspect only (Waltke & O'Connor 1990:624-628).[14] For habitual situations where Aramaic would also use the participle, Biblical Hebrew generally employs the prefix conjugation (Waltke & O'Connor 1990:502-506), which can be used with the paronomastic infinitive absolute and obviates the need for the construction with יֵשׁ. Hence, the construction with the existential marker is limited to sentences

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13   The paronomastic infinitive does occur in many other varieties of Aramaic, however; cf. the discussions by Goldenberg (1971:44-59) on Jewish Babylonian Aramaic and Syriac in particular and Mengozzi and Miola (2018) on Northeastern Neo-Aramaic. While these are all Eastern Aramaic dialects, both publications also refer to this phenomenon occurring in Western Aramaic; its absence from Biblical Aramaic thus has little bearing on the question of its origins (cf. Kutscher 1950).

14   As in many of our examples, this usage includes the prospective or near future. The term *continuous* is used here in the sense defined by Comrie (1976), encompassing all kinds of non-habitual imperfective aspect, both progressive and non-progressive/stative.

with continuous aspect, making it much more specific than its Aramaic counterpart. The great rarity of יֶשׁ as a marker of polarity contrast in Biblical Hebrew thus confirms that this usage of the existential marker is defined by its co-occurrence with a following non-verbal clause, not by the presence of a pronominal suffix.

At the theoretical level, the identification of this construction in Hebrew provides another example of polarity contrast being marked differently from focus, which is most commonly marked by word order in Biblical Hebrew (see the discussion of the recent literature by Hornkohl 2018), supporting Gutzmann, Hartmann and Matthewson's (2020) argument against interpreting polarity contrast as a kind of focus. And like the cases examined by Matić and Nikolaeva (2018), the polarity contrast construction is based on a construction that has another function, that of the existential. It is thus my hope that this study will contribute both to the crosslinguistic discussion on the nature of polarity contrast marking and to the great strides that have recently been made in the description of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic information structure marking and pragmatics more generally.

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