**ha'emet hi she-** (‘the truth is that-’) in Hebrew talk in interaction

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The study investigates the construction *ha'emet (hi) (she)-* (‘the truth is that-’) in spoken Hebrew discourse. Normatively, it is considered a bi-clausal construction consisting of a main clause and a subordinate predicate clause opening with a complementizer. However, the usage of this construction reveals the inadequacy of traditional grammar’s analysis and shows instead, that it is a metalingual fragment functioning as a ‘discourse organizational device’ (Pekarek Doehler 2011). Its employment is fixed and formulaic, it occurs at a moment of shift in the discourse for specific interactional purposes and its function changes not only according to its optional components, but also according to its prosodic and syntactic properties.

The study builds on earlier studies of constructions in European languages traditionally treated as bi-clausal e.g., Hopper 2004; Hopper and Thompson 2008; Günthner 2011; Pekarek Doehler 2011, all of which show that the part traditionally considered “main clause” is a fragment functioning as a ‘projecting construction’.

The data come from the *Haifa Corpus of Spoken Hebrew* (Maschler 2016): 243 informal interactions between friends and relatives, comprising over 11 hours of talk. Altogether 44 instances of the *ha'emet (hi) (she)-* (‘the truth (is) (that)-’) construction were employed throughout the corpus. They are classified here into the following 5 groups according to the way the construction is spread across intonation units (the coma indicates the ending of a ‘more-to-come’ intonation unit):

1. *ha'emet (hi) she-[clause] (14 tokens)*  
   the truth (is) that [clause]
2. *ha'emet she--, [clause] (3 tokens)*  
   the truth tha--t, [clause]
3. *ha'emet (hi), she-[clause] (10 tokens)*  
   the truth (is), that [clause]
4. *ha'emet (hi), [clause] (10 tokens)*  
   the truth (is), [clause]
5. *[clause], ha'emet (hi) (7 tokens)*  
   [clause], the truth (is)

The analysis revealed that *ha'emet (hi) she-[clause]* (‘the truth (is) that [clause]’ (1) above) is employed in a point of speaker change: the speaker gains the turn and shifts the talk to his/her personal world, as in the following excerpt in which Yifat tells Topaz about a statue of the T.V monster, the Groke:

103 Yifat: ‘az yesh lanu pesel,  
so EXIST to-us sculpture  
so we have a statue,
104 shenir’a mamash kmo @hagrok,
    that-looks really like the-Groke
that looks exactly like @the @Groke,
105 leyad hame’onot.
near the-dorms.
106 'ai hadeshe.
on the-grass.
  
107 Topaz: [ha’emet she’anlo zoxer.. bixlal 'ex hu nir’a,]
  the-truth that-I don’t remember at all how he looks
the truth is that I don’t remember.. at all what it looked like,
108 'ani rak zoxer shehu mamash mamash mafxid.
I only remember that--he really really scary
I only remember it was really really scary.

At the point of speaker change following line 106, Topaz employs the construction ha’emet she-[clause] (‘the truth (is) that [clause]’) all in the same intonation unit. This formulaic fragment signals a shift from Yifat’s story to Topaz’s inner world and memories.

ha’emet she--, [clause] (‘the truth that--t, [clause]’ (2) above) softens a possible face-threatening action;

ha’emet (hi), she-[clause] (‘the truth (is), that [clause]’ (3) above) frames personal new information and intensifies the surprise conveyed by the clause;

Pre-clausal ha’emet [(4) above] signals a return to the speaker’s previous utterance, this time taking a positive stance towards it;

post-clausal ha’emet [(5) above] signals a return to a previous utterance, this time taking a disaffiliative stance (Stivers, Mondada and Steensig 2011) towards it.

The study shows correlation between the functions of the construction and the way it was produced: either at the same intonation unit or spread over several units, either with its optional components or without them. In this way it sheds light on the reciprocal relation between grammar and interaction.