Procedural stance marking in Modern Hebrew: The case of ya xatixat

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The vocative particle *ya* and the word *xatixat* ‘piece-of’ are commonly used in derogative utterances in Modern Hebrew, in the patterns *ya* PRED, *xatixat* PRED and *ya* xatixat PRED. Such utterances are unusual in that they trigger a negative interpretation even when the predicate itself is not explicitly negative. See the examples in (1).

In this study I describe the use of these three patterns as reflected in a corpus of >300 utterances retrieved from Google Search. I then analyze the encoded functions of *ya* and *xatixat* in light of the conceptual-procedural distinction (Blakemore 1987; 2002, Wilson 2011) and the stance triangle theory (Du Bois 2007). In addition, I propose an account for the evolution of these functions from the literal meanings of the words (Traugott and Dasher 2002, Ariel 2008; 2010).

All three of *ya*, *xatixat* and *ya* xatixat are used not only with established negative terms (e.g. *ya* xatixat zevel ‘you piece of garbage’), but also with neutral terms, in which case a negative interpretation is still available, as in (1). But the three patterns differ with regard to the contexts in which they are used: *ya* is attested freely in both positive and negative contexts; *xatixat* appears to be limited to negative contexts when used to refer to humans (85% negative), but is attested in nonnegative contexts when referring to nonhumans (only 34% negative); lastly, *ya* xatixat is virtually restricted to negative contexts (94% negative). These differences are illustrated in (2)-(4).

I analyze *ya* and *xatixat* as procedural stance markers. *ya* PRED is similar to the patterns PRED *fe-kamox(a) ‘PRED such-as-you’ and PRED *exad/axat ‘one PRED’, in that all are forms of direct address attested with both positive and negative terms, but not with modified, possessed or proper nouns. Additionally, they all trigger negative interpretations when used with neutral terms. I propose that these patterns encode evaluation of the stance object as a stereotypical member of a set denoted by the accompanying predicate.

I argue that nonliteral *xatixat* is ambiguous between an intensifier and a derogative marker, both of which encode affective positioning of the subject in relation to the stance object. Intensifier *xatixat* encodes heightened affect with no encoding of polarity, while derogative *xatixat* encodes negative affect (e.g. contempt). I propose that intensifier *xatixat* developed through use in understatements, similarly to Israel’s (2000) analysis of exclamative *some*. I raise several possibilities for the development of derogative *xatixat*, all of which can be traced back to the negativity associated with objectification.

Finally, the constraints on the use of *ya* xatixat follow from the functions of its components, as *ya* cannot be used with intensifiers and hence the accompanying *xatixat* must be interpreted unambiguously as derogative. Despite its compositionality, I argue that *ya* xatixat must be analyzed as a separate grammatical construction (Goldberg 1995), due to its frequency and salience (Bybee 2006).
EXAMPLES:
(1) a. me-eyfo naxata aleynu ya orex-din meduplam
    from-where landed.2MSG on.us VOC lawyer certified.MSG

    Where did you land from, you certified lawyer?


    b. hu xatixat smolani
      he is (a) piece.of leftist.MSG

      He’s a leftist.

    Retrieved 29.3.2015 from http://www.kol-barama.co.il/live/72037/

    c. sim spoyler ba-koteret fel ha-firfur felxa ya xatixat d'ג' indispensible
      put.IMP (a) spoiler in.the.title of the-thread your VOC piece.of redhead

      Put a spoiler alert in the title of your thread, you redhead.

    הלך-ב-מילון-דollar-סקירת-י-ש万亿-هامר-
    המר-

(2) a. ya metumtemet
    VOC stupid.FSG

    b. ya xamuda
    VOC adorable.FSG

(3) a. hi xatixat metumtemet
    she is (a) piece.of stupid.FSG

    b. #hi xatixat xamuda
    she is (a) piece.of adorable.FSG

    c. hi xatixat mexonit xamuda le-nehiga
    she is (a) piece.of car adorable.FSG for-driving

    It’s an adorable car to drive.


(4) a. ya xatixat metumtemet
    VOC piece.of stupid.FSG

    b. #ya xatixat xamuda
    VOC piece.of adorable.FSG

SELECTED REFERENCES: