

## **The weakening role of inalienability in the Hebrew possessive dative: a blog corpus study**

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Possession in Hebrew can be expressed in one of two ways:

(1) Ordinary possession:

Hu shavar et ha-yad sheli

He broke ACC the-hand my

(2) Possessive dative:

Hu shavar li et ha-yad

He broke to.me ACC the-hand

The possessive dative (PD) is a relatively recent borrowing from European languages. Traditionally considered substandard, it is becoming acceptable in more and more registers. From a typological point of view, most European PD constructions are limited to inalienable possessions, mostly body parts (König and Haspelmath 1998). While Hebrew does not impose this limitation as a categorical constraint, the Hebrew PD still shows a strong statistical association with inalienable contexts. The central goal of this study is to investigate how the effect of alienability on the choice of possessive construction is evolving with time.

The quantitative analysis was based on an apparent time corpus of 1745 blogs, extracted from a blogging website which requires users to report their age and gender. The corpus was morphologically analyzed in order to facilitate the automatic extraction of the tokens of each construction. A set of 200 verbs for which PD tokens could be automatically identified was selected for the analysis. A mixed-effect logistic regression model, fitted using the R software package, revealed that PD accounts for a larger proportion of possessive constructions in younger speakers (60%) than in older speakers (55%), indicating that it is gradually gaining ground. PD was more common with female authors (59%) than with male authors (53%), consistent with the general tendency for women to lead linguistic change. In addition, the finding from previous studies that inalienable contexts are overall more favorable to PD was replicated. Crucially, however, the favoring effect of inalienable contexts for the use of PD was significantly weaker in younger speakers: older speakers were 1.8 times as likely to use PD in an inalienable context than in an alienable context, whereas among younger speakers the size of the effect decreased to 1.3.

This decline in apparent time of the strength of a contextual effect is a potential counter-example to Kroch's (1989) Constant Rate Hypothesis, which states that syntactic change proceeds at a constant rate in all relevant contexts. The Hebrew data indicate that a shift towards greater use of the PD construction is proceeding more rapidly in the alienable possession context. The statistical association between PD and inalienable contexts, which has its origins in a categorical constraint in most European languages, is being constantly eroded, turning PD into a general-purpose possessive construction.