המשפט השמני והאוגד

Nominal/Verbless Sentence and Copula in Hebrew

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The Nominal/Verbless Sentence and the Copula

What is a "nominal sentence" or a "verbless sentence"?
The answer is very simple: It is a sentence without a verb. It is missing a verb!

Have you ever heard the sentence from the Tarzan movies "*Me Tarzan, you Jane*"? Well, this is a verbless sentence, and it sounds weird to you, because in English you expect a verb, for example, "I *am* Tarzan, you *are* Jane." In English you use the (conjugated) verb "to be" in between the two nouns or a noun and an adjective (which are subject and predicate).

> **Hebrew lacks the equivalent of the English *is*, *am*, or *are*, and therefore sentences like "*You Jane*" are completely normal in Hebrew. This type of sentence has no verb in it at all!**
> **אני תלמיד - "I [am a] student." Literally: "I student."**
> **אני עייף – "I [am] tired." Literally: "I tired."**

As you could see, there is no connecting word between the subject and the predicate.

> **Hebrew also does not use "do" and "does" in cases like "Did you go?"; "He did go."; "I do know," "How does this work?" etc., which confuses English speakers. English speakers look for these words when they speak Hebrew, and therefore they tend to make grammatical mistakes.**

Usually, a sentence like that, without "am" or "are," is simply not possible in English, because in English (unlike in Hebrew) we need a verb to connect the two parts. However, there are some verbless expressions in English, too. For example: *The more – the better*. To save space in media writings, such as in newspapers, nominal sentences are quite common in English. When you look at newspapers headlines you read sentences like "*Wildcats out!*" "*Smith elected.*"

> Later, we will see that Hebrew can have words that connect the nouns (or the noun and the adjective), and it still remains a verbless sentence!

Let us have a few examples of verbless sentences or nominal sentences:

(Remember: In this case there is no "a" in Hebrew. You just skip it!)

1. הוא מורה - "He is a teacher."
2. הוא המורה - "He is the teacher."
3. המורה כאן (פֹּה) - "The teacher is here."
4. הלחם כמו אבן - "The bread is like a rock/stone."
5. הילדים שלה כאן - "Her children are here."
6. זאת המְכונית שלי - "This is my car."
7. רחל בבַּיִת - "Rachel is at home."
8. רחל יפה - "Rachel is beautiful."
9. רחל מורה - "Rachel is a teacher."
10. רחל ודני תלמידים טובים - "Rachel and Danny are good students."

Quite easy! You skip the "am," "are," and "is" in English, and the rest remains the same. Now you will not be confused anymore.

> **The negation ("is not," "does not," etc.) is through "לֹא."**

הוּא לֹא תַלְמִיד - "He is not a student."
הוּא לֹא עָיֵיף - "He is not tired."

Statements with "יֵשׁ" - "there is," and "אֵין" - "there isn't" or "there aren't" - also are verbless sentences:
1. יֵשׁ בְּעָיוֹת - "there are problems."
2. אֵין בְּעָיוֹת - "there are no problems."
3. יֵשׁ שֶׁלֶג בחוּץ - "there is snow outside."
4. אֵין שֶׁלֶג בחוּץ - "there is no snow outside."
5. יֵשׁ לִי בְּעָיָה - "I have a problem."
6. אֵין לִי בְּעָיָה - "I have no problem."
7. לְרִינָה יֵשׁ בְּעָיָה or יֵשׁ לְרִינָה בְּעָיָה- "Reenah has a problem."
8. לְרִינָה אֵין בְּעָיָה or אֵין לְרִינָה בְּעָיָה- "Reenah does not has a problem."

Translate the following sentences into Hebrew:

1. I am (your name).
2. I am a student.
3. I am not a teacher.
4. There is a book.
5. There is no book.
6. There are books.
7. There are no books.
8. Danny is good.
9. The house is white.
10. Danny is at home.
11. Danny is not at home.
12. Danny is not good.
13. Danny and Tammy are teachers.
14. Danny and Tammy are not teachers.

In all these cases, there isn't any word to replace the English (conjugated) verb "to be." This does not mean that Hebrew must not have a marker or a connecting word between the nouns or the noun and the adjective.

> **The Copula:**
> A connecting word between the subject and the predicate (noun and noun or noun and adjective) - which is not a verb - is called copula (plural: *copulae*).

In Hebrew, "copula" is **אוֹגֵד**.

The word *copula* comes from Latin, and it means a *link* or *tie* to connect different things together.

The copula is usually the equivalent of the English verb *to be*. It IS NOT an action verb!

The examples we had so far have zero copula. All of them are translated into **PRESENT TENSE**.

Connecting words (copulae):
The third person independent pronouns can mean "is," "are," for example:
טל מורה טוב - טל הוא מורה טוב - "Tal is a good teacher." This the same as טוב, with more emphasis.
רחל היא האחות של אילן - "Rachel is the sister of Ilan ("Ilan's sister")." Here the copula הִיא is important, becaues if we say רחל האחות של אילן one would think that האחות של אילן is just an identifying part, and waiting for a continuation, such as "רחל, האחות של אילן, לומדת אנגלית" - "Rachel, Ilan's sister, learns English."
דויד ויוסי הם תלמידים טובים - "David and Yossi are good students." This is the same as דויד ויוסי תלמידים טובים.

Translate the following sentences into Hebrew, using "הוּא," "הִיא," "הֵם," and "הֵן."

[הוּא for singular masculine; הִיא for singular feminine; הֵם for plural masculine, including a combination of male and female; הֵן for plural feminine]

1. **Tamar is my teacher.**
2. **Michael is the brother of Sarah.**
3. **Sarah and Michael are brother and sister.**
4. **Tishrei is the first month.**
5. **Deenah and Ruth are good students.**

**Do not use a copula
when there is a verb in the sentence!**

**The copula agrees with the noun
in gender and number!**

In a higher register (level) of Hebrew, one can use the word "אֵין" - CONJUGATED, to indicate negation ("is not," "are not"), for example:

1. אברהם אינו תלמיד - "Avraham is not a student."
2. אברהם אינו עָיֵיף - "Avraham is not tired."

Note that when the sentence is not in present tense, the conjugation of the verb היה ("be") is used, but this is for later.

In the traditional Hebrew grammar, verbs like "היה (ל...)" - "become," and "נהפך ל..." or "הפך ל..." - "becom" - are also considered copulae.

Note: In Modern Hebrew, ...יֵשׁ ל - "to have," and "...אֵין ל" - "does not have," or "not to have" - are used as verb (though they are not). For example, יֵשׁ לִי אֶת הַסֵפֶר - "I have the book." It is still considered a verbless sentence. In formal Hebrew it is יש לי הספר (not really used in spoken Hebrew.

Also: אין לי את הספר - "I don't have the book." In formal Hebrew it is אין לי הספר.

And something more advanced: יֵשׁ and אֵין can be conjugated: שירה איננה "Shira is not ("available," "here," etc.). הוא איננו פֹּה - "He is not here." דויד ישנו? - "Is David available/there?"

Impersonal expressions (a statement without a specific subject) can be verbless. These are words such as ...אסור ל - "it is forbidden to...," "...מותר ל - "It is allowed to," "...כְּדַאי ל - "It is worthwhile to..."; חוֹבָה; "...רְצוּי ל - "It is preferred to..."; ...אֶפְשָׁר ל - "It is possible to..."; ...מוּמְלָץ ל - "It is suggested/recommended to....,"; "...ל - "One must [to]...", etc.

Examples:

1. אסור לעַשֵן - ""It is forbidden to smoke" = "Smoking is not allowed."

2. כְּדַאי לקרוא - "It is worthwhile to read."

The expression ...יש ל - "One has to/needs to..."

And there are also other similar expressions, such as ...עלֵינו ל (and all conjugated forms of על), which means "one must." So, עָלֵינוּ לְשַׁבֵּחַ means "We have/need to praise."

All these are followed by infinitive!