

# Copy Raising Reconsidered

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## Abstract

This paper accepts the challenge with which Kay (2021) concludes his paper, namely to determine whether his approach is “helpful in understanding copy raising in other languages”. The language in the focus of the current study is Modern Hebrew. While copy raising (CR) in Hebrew seems to be remarkably similar to the construction in English, the paper discusses a number of differences between the constructions in the two languages and proposes a straightforward way to modify the English analysis to account for the Hebrew data. The analysis, however, raises a number of issues which call into question its feasibility and sustainability. These issues are presented and discussed in the second part of the paper, where an alternative analysis is considered.

## Background

The CR construction was first discussed in a series of papers by Rogers (e.g., 1972).<sup>1</sup> It is best described when juxtaposed with its alternation partner:

- (1) a. Richard<sub>i</sub> seems/looks/appears like/as if he<sub>i</sub> is in trouble.  
b. It seems/looks/appears like/as if Richard is in trouble.

In CR constructions such as (1a) a verb appears with a finite complement clause. The subject of the complement clause is a pronoun whose index is identified with the index of the matrix subject. In (1b), an alternate of the CR variant, the matrix subject is an expletive and the lexical NP appears within the complement clause.

The construction is referred to as *copy raising* due to its similarity to “real” subject-to-subject raising (2a), where, transformationally speaking, the embedded subject raises to the matrix subject position, leaving behind a phonetically empty trace. Similarly to (1a) the raising construction in (2a) has an alternate with an expletive subject (2b).

- (2) a. Richard<sub>i</sub> seems/appears t<sub>i</sub> to be in trouble.  
b. It seems/appears that Richard is in trouble.

In a recent paper Kay (2021) proposes a lexical-rule based analysis of CR in English. In a nutshell, his analysis incorporates the following assumptions and insights.

**Verbs** Among the class of perception verbs, Kay identifies a sub-class of perception verbs, namely *seem*, *appear*, *look* and *sound*, which in addition to their role as heads of perception reports (e.g., *She looks happy*) they can head the CR construction. Kay associates the double function of these *general perception verbs* with the ability to yield a “hearsay reading” (e.g., 3).

- (3) It seems/appears/looks/sounds like Nero didn’t really burn Rome. (Kay, 2021, ex.25)

Excluded from this class are the presumably more specific *taste* and *smell* (and possibly others).

**‘As if’** The complement clause in CR constructions is obligatorily preceded by *as if*, *like* or *as though*. Kay proposes that these words/strings select a finite clause and combine with it to form a *head-funct-construct* (Allegranza, 1998; Van Eynde, 2006). The distribution of *as-if* clauses extends beyond CR; they can serve as complements of various types of verbs as well as adverbial modifiers.

<sup>1</sup>It was first mentioned by Postal (1974) in a footnote.

**Subject** A key property of CR, according to Kay, which distinguishes it from perception reports is that the matrix subject cannot be the perceptual source. This is demonstrated in (4): a person who disappears cannot be a source of visual perception.

(4) Trump looks like he disappeared. (Kay, 2021, ex.1)

**Pronominal copy** The literature on CR is divided with respect to the question of the grammatical function of the pronominal copy. Kay (2021) adopts Potsdam & Runner's (2001) conclusion that "true Copy Raising exists only where the pronominal copy is in subject position".

**Ambiguity** The double-function of the general perception verbs as well as the multipurposeness of the *as-if* clause can result in ambiguity between CR and perception reports. Consider the following example:

(5) Marion looks like she will be elected. (Kay, 2021, ex.5a)

The CR reading can be paraphrased as "It appears likely that Marion will be elected.". In this reading, similarly to "standard" cases of raising, there is no semantic relationship between the verb and its matrix subject and *Marion* is not the perceptual source. This is not the case with the non-CR (perception report) reading. Here something about Marion's appearance suggests that she will be elected and this can be perceived only by looking at her. In this case the referent of the subject is seen and is the perceptual source of the proposition encoded by the complement clause.

## Copy Raising in Hebrew

The CR construction in Hebrew is remarkably similar to its English counterpart.<sup>2</sup>

- (6) a. *ha-ma'amar<sub>i</sub> ha-ze lo nišma ke'ilu še-hu<sub>i</sub> ba la'azor la-ovdim.*  
*the-article.SM the-this not sounds.SM as-if that-he comes to.help to.the-workers*  
'This article doesn't sound like it is meant to help the workers.'
- b. *ze lo nišma ke'ilu še-ha-ma'amar ha-ze ba la'azor la-ovdim.*  
*it.SM not sounds.SM as-if that-the-article.SM the-this comes to.help to.the-workers*  
'It doesn't sound like this article is meant to help the workers.'

The CR in (6a) is headed by a general perception verb *nišma* 'sounds'; the matrix subject is co-indexed with the subject of the complement clause; the complement clause is preceded by *ke'ilu*, the Hebrew counterpart of *as if*<sup>3</sup>; and the matrix subject cannot be simply construed as triggering an auditory perception. Furthermore, the (constructed) paraphrase of the CR in (6b) has an expletive subject and a complete finite complement clause.

Although the similarity between the constructions in the two languages is clear, in what follows are a number of aspects where the languages diverge. First, note that the complement clause in (6a) is not only marked with *ke'ilu* 'as if' but also with the complementizer *še-* 'that'. The complementizer, however, is optional (cf. 7 below). Consequently, the *head-funct-construct* analysis of the *as-if* clause must be modified so that it can apply to the Hebrew construction. More technically, the specification of the SELECT feature of *ke'ilu* must allow for both *unmarked* and *še-marked* finite clauses.

An additional language-specific difference involves the phenomenon of what is referred to as *pro*-drop. Corpus searches retrieved many cases of *as-if* clauses with missing pronominal subjects. An example is given in (7).

<sup>2</sup>All Hebrew examples are retrieved from the *heTenTen* 2014 corpus (Jakubíček et al., 2013), unless otherwise stated.

<sup>3</sup>The word *ke'ilu* is composed of *ke-* 'as' and *ilu* 'counterfactual if'.

- (7) *ma'arexet<sub>i</sub> ha-mišpat ha-sinit nir'et ke'ilu 0<sub>i</sub> nivre'a bimyxad avur ta'asiyat*  
*system.SF the-justice the-chinese looks.SF as-if was.created.3SF especially for industry*  
*haštalot ha-eyvarim.*  
*transplant the-organs*

'The Chinese legal system looks as if it was created especially for the organ transplant industry.'

Hebrew is known to exhibit what is referred to as 'partial pro-drop'. Yet, while 1st and 2nd person pronominal subjects are basically freely omitted, the omission of 3rd person pronouns, as is the case here, is restricted. Nevertheless, the occurrence of *pro*-drop in this context is consistent with the construction-based approach to Hebrew *pro*-drop proposed by Melnik (2007) and will be incorporated into the formal analysis in the full version of this paper.

Finally, alongside the English-like expletive-subject variant (e.g., 6b) there exists an expletive-less impersonal construction in which the verb appears clause-initially and exhibits default 3rd-person-singular-masculine agreement (8).

- (8) *nir'a ke'ilu ha-oniya klal lo ro'a otanu.*  
*looked.SM as-if the-boat.SF at.all not sees.SF us*

'It looked as if the boat was not seeing us at all.'

In the impersonal variant, regardless of whether an expletive appears or not, the complement clause must be marked by either *k'eilu* 'as if' or the complementizer *še*, or both.

The aforementioned language-specific differences notwithstanding, we can conclude that Kay's (2021) analysis of CR in English can be straightforwardly adapted to account for the parallel Hebrew construction. Kay's approach, however, raises a number of issues which will be briefly discussed in the following section.

## Discussion

The approach to CR adopted by Kay (2021) is highly restrictive in that it includes only cases in which the matrix subject is not the perceptual source and the co-indexed pronoun is the embedded subject. These constraints, I assume, are meant to echo "standard" cases of raising such as (2a), where the subject is analyzed as a syntactic argument of the main verb, yet it is assigned a thematic role by the head of the infinitival VP.

On the other extreme is the approach proposed by Landau (2011), who bases his definition of what constitutes CR on the co-occurrence of the two alternations illustrated in (1). Consequently, in his view even cases such as (9) – the Hebrew version as well as its English translation – where the subject is clearly the perceptual source and the pronominal copy is the specifier of the embedded subject, are considered CR.

- (9) a. *ze meriax ke'ilu še-avar zman-a šel ha-gvina ha-zot.*  
*it.SM smells.SM as-if that-passed time-her of the-cheese.SF the-this*

'It smells like the time of this cheese has passed.'

- b. *ha-gvina<sub>i</sub> ha-zot merixa ke'ilu še-avar zman-a<sub>i</sub>.*  
*the-cheese.SF the-this smells.SF as-if that-passed time-her*

'This cheese smells like its time has passed.'

Landau (2011) argues that in CR construction "[t]here need not be a copy, and even when there is, it is unlikely to be a residue of raising" (p. 782). He admits that in this case *copy raising* is a misnomer since no raising occurs, and explains that he uses the term 'CR' since "it has already established itself in the literature".

A similar more permissive approach is adopted by Kim (2014), who presents corpus examples of what he refers to as cases of *genuine copy raising* (GCR) and *perception copy raising* (PCR) with a pronominal copy as the specifier of the subject, a verbal object, or a prepositional object position, and also with no pronominal copy at all (e.g., 10).

(10) You sound as if the man has no choice in the matter.

An additional issue with respect to Kay's (2021) definition of CR is his requirement that the matrix subject not be the perceptual source. This constraint does not seem to be sustainable. The boundary between referents which are "perceptual sources" and referents which are not is fuzzy at best. Consider the following corpus examples of CR-looking constructions in which the matrix subjects exhibit various degrees of perceptual source-ness. In (11) the food is a literal perceptual source; in (12) it is not the shampoo that is felt, but rather the hair after the shampoo is washed off; in (13) the perception is not tactile, but rather auditory. Which of these should be considered a "true" CR construction?

(11) *ha-oxel.SM<sub>i</sub> margiš.SM li ke'ilu hu<sub>i</sub> lo yored la-beten.*  
*the-food.SM feels.SM to.me as-if he not go.down.SM to.the-stomach*  
 'The food feels to me as if it doesn't go do to the stomach.'

(12) *ha-šampo.SM<sub>i</sub> margiš.SM ke'ilu hu<sub>i</sub> myabeš et ha-se'ar yoter axarey ha-štifa šel-o.*  
*the-shampoo.SM feels.SM as-if he dries.SM ACC the-hair more after the-washing of-him*  
 'The shampoo feels as if it dries the hair more after it is washed.'

(13) *neginat.SF<sub>i</sub> ha-solo margiša.SM ke'ilu O<sub>i</sub> hunxeta be-ofen pit'omi mi-šum makom.*  
*the-playing.SF the-solo feels.SF as-if imposed.SF in-manner sudden from-nowhere*  
 'The solo piece felt like it was suddenly imposed (on the audience) from nowhere.'

Further difficulties associated with the perceptual source criterion feature in Asudeh & Toivonen's (2012) "puzzle of the absent cook". Consider the following three alternates which are taken to be uttered in Tom's kitchen:

- (14) a. It seems that Tom is cooking.  
 b. It seems as if Tom is cooking.  
 c. Tom seems as if he is cooking.

Asudeh & Toivonen argue that the two expletive-subject variants (14a) & (14b) are felicitous regardless of whether they are uttered in a context where Tom is visible or not. The CR variant in (14c), on the other hand, is infelicitous if Tom is not visible, even when evidence of cooking activities such as bubbling pots and scattered ingredients are present. The fact that Tom needs to be visually perceived in order for the sentence to be accepted suggests that the matrix subject is semantically associated with the matrix verb contrary to what is expected of a raising construction.

An additional factor which weakens the perceptual source constraint is introduced by Rudolph (2019). In a set of experiments designed to gain a better understanding of the concept of perceptual source and its role in the CR construction, she found that in an absent cook context speakers accepted (15), a variant of (14c) with the stage-level predicate in the embedded clause replaced with an individual-level predicate.

(15) Tom seems as if he is an experienced cook.

Rudolph's (2019) findings suggest that the licensing conditions of CR constructions cannot be based solely on whether the matrix subject can be construed as a perceptual source. Moreover, these findings together with the "puzzle of the absent cook" cast doubts on the assumption that the expletive-subject and CR variants are synonymous.

## Proposal

Similarly to Kay (2021) I distinguish between cases where the matrix subject is the perceptual source and those where it is not. Moreover, I agree that there are ambiguous cases, such as (5) above, as well as unambiguous ones such as (4), where the subject is clearly not perceived. Ambiguity is also found with a more specific verb of perception - *sound*.

- (16) Your car sounds like like it needs tuning very badly. (Heycock, 1994)

Heycock (1994) points out that (16) is acceptable not only in a context where the speaker is physically perceiving the sound of the car, but also in a long-distance phone conversation, after hearing a description of the bizarre noise the car is making. The speaker claims that what she is hearing from her conversation partner *about* her car suggests that it needs to be repaired. This context is clearly compatible with Kay's (2021) condition regarding the role of the subject.

Furthermore, as Kay (2021) observes, not all verbs of perception can appear in what he considers to be a CR construction. Kay's distinction between general perception verbs (*seem*, *appear* *look* and *sound*), which allow this reading, and other perception verbs (*smell* and *taste*), which do not, is corroborated by Rudolph's (2019) experimental findings. In her study she found that native speakers invariably rejected CR reports with *smell*, *taste* and *feel* when the subject was not directly perceived, but accepted them with *seem*, *look* and *sound* under certain conditions.

Nevertheless, my analysis parts ways with Kay's on the issue of the pronominal copy. As Heycock (1994) noted, the same message that is expressed by the CR variant in (16) can be expressed in a similar syntactic structure but with a pronominal copy appearing in a non-subject position (17).

- (17) From what you say, your car sounds like you need to get it tuned. (modified from Heycock, 1994)

Similar examples can also be constructed in Hebrew.

- (18) a. *ze nišma ke'ilu texna'i carix lehistakel al ha-mano'a.*  
*it sounds.SM as-if mechanic.SM should to.look at the-engine.SM*  
'It sounds like a mechanic should take a look at the engine.'  
b. *ha-mano'a nišma ke'ilu texna'i carix lehistakel al-av.*  
*the-engine.SM sounds.SM as-if mechanic.SM should to.look at-him*  
'The engine sounds like a mechanic should take a look at it.'

Consequently, with regards to the question of the pronominal copy, I propose that it being in an embedded subject position is not a necessary condition for a CR interpretation (i.e., a reading where the matrix subject is not a perceptual source). Moreover, I assume that given the appropriate context, a pronominal copy may not be necessary at all (cf. 10). Thus, the tendency for pronominal copies to appear in the complement clause is a pragmatic rather than a syntactic constraint. In this regard I concur with Kim (2014), who suggests that the preference for pronominal subjects is due to Ariel's (1990)'s "accessibility hierarchy". In CR constructions the argument which provides evidence for the proposition encoded by the complement clause is most naturally the most accessible one – the subject.

Finally, in the full version of the paper I will formalize the proposed analysis in HPSG for both Hebrew and English, building on the analyses by Kay's (2021) and Kim (2014) and incorporating my own insights. Moreover I will explore the relationship between CR and evidentiality. The epistemic "flavor" of the construction is apparent in its essential ingredient – the English *as if & like* and the Hebrew *ke'ilu* – which in addition to their role in the CR construction are used in the two languages as discourse markers used for hedging (Maschler, 2002).

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