

## Chapter 7

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# Exceptional uses of the negative לֹא *lōʾ*

The previous chapters (4-6) examined constructions in which the negative לֹא *lōʾ* precedes finite verbs, the non-verbal categories and the non-finite verbs. A distinction was drawn between sentence- and constituent-negation. This chapter sets out to discuss briefly some exceptional uses of the negative לֹא *lōʾ*. These uses seem to be cases where the negative לֹא *lōʾ* has no properties of scope in the clause. The first discussion in section 7.1 illustrates the use of לֹא *lōʾ* in negative answers. The other two uses pertain to cases where the negative לֹא *lōʾ* no longer, in the true sense of the word, functions as a negative, and is therefore not translated with *not*. In section 7.2 the use of לֹא *lōʾ* to express certainty in לֹא אִם *ʾim lōʾ* constructions will be considered. Section 7.3 will discuss the possible use of לֹא *lōʾ* as a noun.

### 7.1 The use of לֹא *lōʾ* expressing *no* in an answer

According to Koehler *et al* (1974: 486) the negative לֹא *lōʾ* can also be used with the meaning of *no* in answer to a question as in (1):

(1) Gen 42<sup>10</sup>

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו לֹא אֲדֹנָי וַעֲבָדֶיךָ בָּאוּ לְשָׂבַר אֶת־לֶחֶם:  
*wayyōʾmer ʾelāyw lōʾ ʾadōnî waʿbādeykā bāʾû lišbār-ʾōkel*  
and-said-they to-him no lord-my and-servants-your came-they to-buy-food  
*And they answered: “No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food.”*

Gen 42<sup>9</sup> reads as follows (NIV): *Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, “You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected.”* In Gen 42<sup>10</sup> his brothers answer this accusation with “No, my lord...”

A further example of this use of the negative is provided in (2):

(2) 2 Sam 24<sup>24</sup>

<p>wayyōmer hammelek <sup>2</sup>el-<sup>2a</sup>rawnāh lō kī-qānō <sup>2</sup>eqneh mēōt<sup>kā</sup>  <i>bimhîr</i>                      and-said-he the-king to-araunah no but-buying will-buy-I from-(Acc)-                      you at-(market)price  <i>But the king replied to Araunah, “No, I will indeed buy at (market) price.”</i></p>	<p>וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל-אַרְוַנָּה לֹא כִי-קָנִי אֶקְנֶה מֵאֹתָךְ בַּמַּחִיר</p>
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2 Sam 24<sup>22-3</sup> (taken from the NIV) reads:

*Araunah said to David, “Let my lord the king take whatever pleases him and offer it up. Here are oxen for the burnt offering, and here are threshing sledges and ox yokes for the wood.”* <sup>23</sup>*O king, Araunah gives all this to the king.” Araunah also said to him, “May the LORD your God accept you.”*

If the context supplied by these verses is taken into consideration, it is evident that Araunah offers the king whatever pleases him to take. In 2 Sam 24<sup>24</sup> the reply of the king is recorded: “No, but indeed I will pay you the market price.”

In short then, the above two examples illustrate that the negative אֵלֹ לֹ can be used as a negative answer to previous statements or previously stated questions (direct or indirect). The negative אֵלֹ לֹ in such cases simply represents a negative answer to a preceding statement or question and does not have as such any scope over the subsequent phrase. Notice that the clauses following the negative אֵלֹ לֹ in (1) and (2) are both stated in the positive: *My lord, your servants came to buy food* and *but indeed I will pay you the market price*. In other words, neither of these clauses is

negated by the negative  $\text{לֹא } l\bar{o}$ , hence, the negative has no scope over the subsequent clauses.

Sivan & Schniedewind (1993: 223) discuss a possible counter-example to the above exposition. Consider the following discussion on Gen 23<sup>5-15</sup>. The following translations (taken from Sivan & Schniedewind) will be used to illustrate the development of their argument. Gen 23<sup>5-6</sup> read as follows:

<sup>5</sup> *And the Hittites answered Abraham saying, “Indeed, <sup>6</sup> listen to us my lord (לְאָמֵר לִי: שְׁמַעֲנִי אֲדֹנָי), you are a prince of God in our midst, bury your dead in our best burial plot. None of us will withhold his burial plot from you for burying your dead.”*

Sivan & Schniedewind (1993: 222) suggest that  $\text{לֹא } lw$  must be an asseverative in this instance, since the direct quotation marker  $\text{לְאָמֵר } Pmr$  is nowhere followed by a prepositional phrase. Gen 23<sup>10-11</sup> reads as follows (Sivan & Schniedewind 1993: 223):

<sup>10</sup> *Now Ephron was sitting in the midst of the Hittites and he answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, all who came in the gate of the city saying, <sup>11</sup> “Indeed (לְאָמֵר: לְאֲדֹנָי שְׁמַעֲנִי), my lord, listen to me. I give you the field and I give you the cave which is in it; I give it to you before my people. Bury your dead.”*

They state that most commentators understand  $\text{לֹא } P$  as a simple negation in v 11, ‘No, my lord!’. However, the similarity between vv 10-11 and vv 5-6 suggest otherwise. The asseverative sense of  $\text{לֹא } P$  in v 11 is borne out by v 13, where  $\text{אֲךָ } k$  follows the marker of direct quotation  $\text{לְאָמֵר } Pmr$ .

<sup>13</sup> *And Abraham spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, “Surely, if you would certainly listen to me (לְאָמֵר אֲךָ אִם-אָתָּה לִי שְׁמַעֲנִי). I give the price of the land; accept it from me, so that I may bury my dead there.” <sup>14</sup> And Ephron replied to Abraham, saying, “Indeed, <sup>15</sup> hear me (לְאָמֵר: לְאֲדֹנָי שְׁמַעֲנִי) the land is worth four*

*hundred shekels of silver – what is that between you and me. Bury your dead.”*

With regard to the above discussion it is evident that Sivan & Schniedewind (1993) propose that the negative  $\text{לֹא } l\bar{o}$  should be translated as *indeed*, thus, considering it an asseverative. If the different asseverative particles in v 6, 13 and 15 are taken into consideration, this seems to be a possibility.

The above exposition has discussed two examples, one where it seems probable to take the negative  $\text{לֹא } l\bar{o}$  as a “negative answer” translated as *no*. The other example, if Sivan & Schniedewind’s proposal is accepted, seems to be an example of the negative  $\text{לֹא } l\bar{o}$  used as an asseverative. No clear-cut answer can be provided at this stage and this phenomenon is in need of further research.

## 7.2 $\text{לֹא } l\bar{o}$ in constructions expressing certainty

This section focusses, firstly, on the possible use of  $\text{לֹא } l\bar{o}$  in the  $\text{לֹא } \text{לֹא } \text{יִמ } l\bar{o}$  construction expressing certainty.<sup>89</sup> Of the 125 cases of  $\text{לֹא } \text{לֹא } \text{יִמ } l\bar{o}$  that were found in the data search, 27 are assumed to be examples of the negative  $\text{לֹא } l\bar{o}$  in the  $\text{לֹא } \text{לֹא } \text{יִמ } l\bar{o}$  construction expressing certainty. It will be illustrated below that the negative  $\text{לֹא } l\bar{o}$  does not fulfil its primary function of negation in these constructions, but rather that it indicates, together with the conjunction  $\text{לֹא } \text{יִמ}$ , the certainty of the information expressed by the following clause. Van der Merwe *et al* (1999: 296) state that the conjunction  $\text{לֹא } \text{יִמ}$  with  $\text{לֹא } l\bar{o}$  marks a process *that will occur* (primarily in a *sworn oath*). In such cases it will be translated with *surely* or *indeed*. Waltke & O’Connor (1990: 679) state that the expression of wishes and oaths does not require the use of any sort of exclamation, but that a diverse set of exclamations are nevertheless used, for example protases with apodoses, and phrases headed up by substantives. Amongst the different particles involved in oaths and wishes,  $\text{לֹא } \text{לֹא } \text{יִמ } l\bar{o}$  (positive)

89 Cf Koehler *et al* (1974: 486) for a reference to the use of  $\text{יִמ } l\bar{o}$  expressing certainty, translated as *gewiss*. Brongers (1981: 188) conjectures that  $\text{יִמ } l\bar{o}$  is often used in a positive manner in the sense of *surely, without any doubt, wahrlich, gewiss, sicherlich, certainement, voorwaar*. Cf also Muraoka’s (1985: 128) reference to the use of  $\text{יִמ } l\bar{o}$  for emphatic affirmation in oaths.

is listed. It is evident that אֵלֶּךָ יְמִין לֹא is taken to have a positive meaning in such wishes and oaths. Van der Merwe *et al* (1999: 310) propose that with אֵלֶּךָ יְמִין לֹא a speaker expresses commitment that a process *will take place*. They illustrate with Josh 14<sup>9</sup>: *And Moses swore on that day, saying: “Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance for you and your children for ever.”* Cowley (1910: 471) similarly claims that the sequence, אֵלֶּךָ יְמִין לֹא, in the sense of *certainly*, is used to introduce promises or threats confirmed by an oath (especially after such formulae as הַיְ-יְהוָה *hay-yahweh*). Cowley (1910: 472) also discusses examples of אֵלֶּךָ יְמִין לֹא as simple particles of asseveration, for example Is 5<sup>9</sup> and Job 22<sup>20</sup>.

In short then, the sequence אֵלֶּךָ יְמִין לֹא, as a combination of יְמִין לֹא + אֵלֶּךָ, expresses certainty or asseveration, whether the two items are used in cases of certainty in oaths or merely as simple particles of certainty. Below, a number of examples illustrating this phenomenon are presented. As the constructions in question do not express negation as such, and hence do not shed light on the scope of the negative אֵלֶּךָ לֹא, their syntactic derivations will not be explicated here. Consider firstly the example in (3):

(3) Gen 24<sup>38</sup>

אָמַרְתָּ לֹא אֵלֶּי בֵּית־אָבִי תֵלֵךְ וְאֶל־מִשְׁפַּחַתִּי וְלִקְחָתָהּ אִשָּׁה לְבָנִי:
<i>ʾim-lō ʾel-bêt-ʾābî tēlēk wʾel-mišpaḥtî wʾlāqaḥtā ʾiššâ libnî</i>
Indeed to-house-of father-my must-go-you and-to-clan-of-my and- take-you wife for-son-of-my
...Indeed, you must go to my father's family and to my clan, and get a wife for my son.'

Suppose the sequence אֵלֶּךָ יְמִין לֹא is analysed as part of the protasis of a conditional clause. On such analysis it would make no sense to translate it as *if you do not go to my father's house or to my clan and take a wife for my son*, for the simple reason that there is no apodosis against this proposed protasis. In other words, there is no *if not..., then...* to render it a conditional clause. Neither could the sequence in question be an example of אֵלֶּךָ יְמִין לֹא introducing an alternative (cf Chapter 4, section 4.6), as there is no clause against which this alternative *or not to the house of my father and to my clan must you go, and take a wife for my son*

would hold. If the whole context is taken into consideration, however, it is evident that Abraham indeed sends his slave to his father's house and family to get a wife for his son Isaac from his own family, and not from amongst the foreigners present where he is currently living. In short then, the negative לֹא *lō* in the לֹא אֲנִי *'im lō* construction in (3) should not be considered as a negative in the true sense of the word, but rather as expressing, in combination with אֲנִי *'im*, the certainty of the following clause.

Consider, secondly, the example in (4) containing the sequence לֹא אֲנִי *'im lō*:

(4) Num 14<sup>28</sup>

<p>אָמַר אֲלֵהֶם חַי־אֲנִי נְאֻם־יְהוָה אִם־לֹא כִּפְאֶשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתֶּם בְּאָזְנֵי כֵן אֲשִׁשָׁה לְכֶם:  <i>'mōr 'alēhem ḥay-ʾānī n'ōum-yahweh 'im-lō ka'šer dibbartem  b'ōznay kēn 'e'šeh lākem</i></p>
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Say to-them life I declares-yahweh indeed/surely according-what said-you in-ears-my so will-do-I to-you

*Tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Lord, indeed, according to what you have said in my ears, so I will do to you.'*

Here too, the sequence לֹא אֲנִי *'im lō* cannot be analysed as being part of the protasis of a conditional clause, since there is no apodosis to complete the conditional clause. Furthermore, this sequence cannot be taken to introduce an alternative (cf Chapter 4, section 4.6), as there is no clause against which the clause under discussion could be taken as being the alternative to. Thus, semantically it will make no sense to translate (4) as either a conditional clause (a), or introducing an alternative (b):

- (a) *Say to them: As surely as I live, declares the Lord, if not according to what you said in my ears, so I will do to you.*
- (b) *Say to them: As surely as I live, declares the Lord, or not according to what you said in my ears, so I will do to you.*

If the two verses directly preceding and following Num 14<sup>27</sup> are taken into consideration, it is evident that neither a conditional clause, nor an alternative is expressed. The three verses, taken from the NIV, are as follows:

<sup>27</sup> “How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. <sup>28</sup>So tell them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say: <sup>29</sup>In this desert your bodies will fall – every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me.

It is clear from these verses that the Lord is making an oath that He will indeed do to the Israelites *according to their grumble in His ears*. Therefore, it is plausible that לֹא אֶלֶם *im lō* should be analysed as an expression of certainty, in this example after an oath, with the meaning of *indeed* or *surely*.

### 7.3 The negative לֹא *lō* used as a noun

According to Holladay (1971: 170) the negative לֹא *lō* can also be used as a noun with the implied meaning of *a nothing*, as in Job 6<sup>21</sup>:

(5) Job 6<sup>21</sup>

כִּי־עָתָה הָיִיתִם לֹא־תִרְאוּ חַת וְתִירְאוּ:
<i>ki-attâ h<sup>e</sup>yîtem lô tir<sup>u</sup> h<sup>a</sup>tat wattîrâ<sup>u</sup></i>
<i>For-now became-you a nothing (Qere reading=for him) see-you</i>
<i>horror and-are-afraid-you</i>
<i>For now you became a nothing; You see horror and you are afraid.</i>

It could be argued that the verb הָיִיתִם *h<sup>e</sup>yîtem* in (5) is transitive, that is, that it requires an object as in *you became [...something...]*. If this is accepted, then the negative לֹא *lō* may be considered as the object. Another possible reading of this text is provided by the *qere* reading in the margin of the Hebrew text, according to which the negative לֹא *lō* should be superseded with לוֹ *lô* (for him). However, the proposal to change the negative לֹא *lō* to לוֹ *lô* is problematic, as the clause will then be incomplete, lacking a direct object: *For now you became for him [a*

90 The Qere-reading in the margin of the text proposes לוֹ *lô* (for him) instead of the negative לֹא *lō*.

what?]. A third possibility is provided by the text critical apparatus proposing אֵל לֹ to be changed to אֵל לֹ, that is a preposition לֹ with the negative אֵל. If this proposal is accepted, despite the fact that it lacks supporting textual evidence, it could be argued that the preposition לֹ with the negative אֵל represents the direct object. This would be similar to the first possibility mentioned above in terms of which the negative אֵל לֹ functions as the direct object of this clause. To sum up, then, it should be obvious that there is no clear-cut analysis of the negative אֵל לֹ in (5). To the extent of this research, it will be tentatively proposed that the negative be retained as אֵל לֹ and analysed as the direct object of the clause. A plausible translation of (5) would then be: *For now, you became a nothing, you see horror and you fear.*

Consider, finally, the example in (6):

(6) 1 Kgs 11<sup>22</sup>

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ פַּרְעֹה כִּי מַה־אַתָּה חָסֵר עִמִּי וְהִנֵּה מִבְּקִשׁ לְלֶכֶת אֶל־אַרְצְךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא כִּי שְׁלַח תִּשְׁלַח־נִי:
<i>wayyōmer lô far'ōh kî mâ-attâ ḥāsēr 'immî w'hinn'kâ m'baqqēš          lāleket 'el-'aršekā wayyōmer lō kî šallēaḥ t'sall'hēnî</i>
And-said-he to-him pharaoh for <sup>91</sup> what you lacked-you with-me and- behold-you seek to-go to-land-your and-said-he nothing but to-let-go let-go-you-me
<i>And Pharaoh said to him: "What have you lacked with me, and behold,          you seek to go to your land? And he said: "Nothing, but do let me go!"</i>

The question that is asked in (6) concerns what Hadad lacked while being with Pharaoh. His answer is *Nothing*, which could be paraphrased as: *I lacked nothing*. It seems plausible, therefore, to analyse אֵל לֹ as a noun, the object of the implied verb *lacked*, and not as the negative element אֵל לֹ.

91 According to Cowley (1910: 491) direct narration is also very frequently introduced by אֵל לֹ. It seems possible to "translate" אֵל לֹ in this example with a colon, introducing the direct reason.



## 7.4 Conclusion

This chapter focussed on a number of exceptional constructions in which the negative  $\text{אֵל} \text{לֹא}$  is found. It was made clear that  $\text{אֵל} \text{לֹא}$  does not function as a regular negative element in these constructions, and that the question of the scope of the negative  $\text{אֵל} \text{לֹא}$  does not arise in these cases. In section 7.1 the negative  $\text{אֵל} \text{לֹא}$  as the simple negative answer *no* to a question, without having any scope over a subsequent clause, was discussed. Section 7.2 discussed the negative  $\text{אֵל} \text{לֹא}$  in  $\text{אֵל} \text{לֹא} \text{יָמַד} \text{לֹא}$  constructions expressing the certainty of the subsequent clause. Section 7.3 briefly examined two examples in which  $\text{אֵל} \text{לֹא}$  could perhaps be analysed as a noun. In these cases, however, no firm conclusions could be drawn on the basis of the available evidence.