Structuring aspectual and temporal relations with two Hebrew adverbials, and the semantics/pragmatics of still

Yael Greenberg
Bar Ilan University

0 Introduction

Yitzhaki (2003) discusses two Hebrew particles which intuitively correspond to the English particle *while*, namely the *be*- (literally ‘in’, as in (1)) and *beodo* (literally ‘while-he’, as in (2)). In both cases the non-tensed adjunct clauses get their tense marking from the matrix:

(1) \( \text{be-}[\text{xacoto et ha-kviS}]_{\text{adjunct}} [\text{pag’a bo mexonit}]_{\text{matrix}} \)
    in-cross-he ACC. the road hit him car
    ‘While he was crossing the road a car hit him’

(2) \( \text{beodo xoce et ha-kviS}]_{\text{adjunct}} [\text{pag’a bo mexonit}]_{\text{matrix}} \)
    while-he cross ACC. the road hit him car
    ‘Id.’

Yitzhaki proposes an equivalent semantics for *be*- and *beodo* where in both the temporal location of the matrix event (e.g. crossing the road) interrupts / is located within the interval where the adjunct event (e.g. being hit by a car) holds.

In this paper I argue that despite the apparent similarity between the two constructions, exemplified in (1) and (2) their semantics is different. I start in section 1 by pointing out three differences between *be*- and *beodo*. In section 2 I give a brief semantics for *be*- in terms of temporal coincidence. And in section 3, the main part of the paper, I claim that the semantics of *beodo* is composed of that of *be*- (temporal coincidence) plus the semantics/pragmatics of *odo* — an inflected form of the Hebrew word for *still* (*od/adayin*). I develop an analysis of *odo/still* which is based on both traditional claims about the assertion and presuppositions of sentences with *still*, as well as on some novel claims. Specifically I propose that (a) The reference time of sentences with *still// odo* must be salient/anaphoric (The ‘reference time anaphoricity requirement’), and (b) that this ‘anaphoricity requirement’ is a conversationally triggered presupposition.

1 The data: Three differences between *be*- and *beodo*

Whereas *beodo* can only express temporal inclusion between the matrix and the adjunct interval (i.e., \( \text{i}_m \subset \text{i}_a \)), *be*- can express a wider range of temporal relations, namely temporal inclusion, reverse inclusion and temporal identity (\( \text{i}_m \subset \text{i}_a, \text{i}_a \subset \text{i}_m \) and \( \text{i}_a = \text{i}_m \), respectively). For example, the *beodo* version of (3) can only mean that not feeling well is temporally included in writing the paper, whereas the *be*- version can also mean that writing the paper was temporally included in not feeling well, or that the two events have exactly the same temporal locations:

(3) \( \text{beodo kotev / be-kotvo et ha-maamar hirgiS dani lo tov} \)
    while-he write / in-write-he ACC. the-paper felt Danni not good
    ‘Writing the paper Danni didn’t feel well’
In addition, the adjective ca’ir ‘young’ is fine in the adjunct of both be- and beodo (see (4)) whereas mevugar ‘old’ is bad with beodo but fine with be- (see (5)):

(4) be-heyoto / be-odo ca’ir, haya dani populari meod in-he-be / while-he young, was Danni popular very
‘Being young, Danny was very popular’

(5) be-heyoto / beodo mevugar hirvi’ax Danni harbe kesef in-he-be / while-he old, earned Danni lots-of money
‘Being old, Danny earned lots of money’

Finally, as seen in (6), be-, but not beodo adjuncts can restrict adverbial quantifiers:

(6) be-holxo / beodo holex la-avoda, ro’e dani lif’amim et ha-ganan in-he-go / while-he go to-the-work, see Danni sometimes acc. the-gardener
‘Going to work, Danny sometimes sees the gardener’

2 The semantics of be-

Despite the range of temporal relations with be-, I suggest that be-\textnormal{[\textit{p}_\textit{a}]}/\textnormal{[\textit{q}_\textit{m}]}, uniformly asserts that \( i_a \) temporally coincides with \( i_m \), written as \( i_a \succ i_m \) (see Stump 1985, Bonomi 1997’s semantics for \textit{when}), and defined as in (7). The be- version of (3), for example, has the truth conditions in (8), according to which there is a past time where Danni wrote the paper, and a past time where he didn’t feel well, and the two time intervals coincide — they have a nonempty intersection:

(7) \( i_a \succ i_m \) holds iff \( i_a \cap i_m \neq \emptyset \) (i.e., iff \( i_a \) and \( i_m \) have a nonempty intersection)

(8) \[ \exists e_1, t_1, e_2, t_2 [\text{write}(e_1, \text{dani}, \text{the paper}) \land t_1 < t_c \land \text{at}(e_1, t_1)] \land [\sim \text{feel well}(e_2, \text{dani}) \land t_2 < t_c \land \text{at}(e_2, t_2)] \land t_1 \succ t_2 \].

Temporal coincidence is flexible enough to cover temporal inclusion, reversed temporal inclusion and temporal identity. The fact that (1) above expresses only temporal inclusion can be attributed to the well known fact, reported also for \textit{when}-clauses, the progressive and the perfect, that achievements (like car hitting) are taken to be temporally included in accomplishments (like crossing the road).

3 The semantics of beodo

3.1 A still-based analysis of beodo

The proposal I would like to make is that unlike be-, beodo is not a simple word. Rather it is composed of be- plus odo, where be- expresses temporal coincidence (as just defined above) and odo is the inflected form of the Hebrew \textit{od}/adayin ‘still’, seen in (9):

(9) dani odo / adayin yaSen
Danni still-he / still asleep
‘Danny is still asleep’

Thus beodo \textit{p, q} is reanalyzed as be-odo \textit{p, q}, i.e., be- still \textit{p, q}, and roughly asserts that the temporal location of odo \textit{p} (still-\textit{p}) coincides with the temporal location of \textit{q}.

As initial evidence for this proposal notice that adding an explicit adayin ‘still’ to be- and beodo, as in (10), is fine in the former case, but in the latter it sounds odd and redundant:
(10) be-heyoto / be-odo ‘adayin ‘al ha-‘ec Sama dani klavim novxim in-be-he / in-he-still still on the-tree heard Danni dogs bark

‘Being still in the tree (? when he was still in the tree), Danni heard dogs barking’

To account for the three constraints on beodo, reported in section 1, let me start by following previous work on still, according to which it has three components: an assertion and two presuppositions. These are summarized in (11) for the example John is still asleep:

(11) Traditional assertions and presuppositions of John is still asleep
    a. **Assertion**: $\exists e : \text{asleep}(e, \text{Danni}) \land \text{at}(e, t_c)$ (i.e., ‘John is asleep at the speech time ($t_c$), i.e., now’, e.g., Löbner 1989, Mittwoch 1993)
    b. **The prior time presupposition**: $\exists t', e : t' \propto t_c \land \text{asleep}(e, \text{Danni}) \land \text{at}(e, t)$, where $\propto$ stands for the ‘abut’ relation — i.e., ‘John is asleep also at a time prior to (and abuts) the speech time (i.e., before now)’ (e.g., Löbner 1989, Mittwoch 1993, Krifka 2000)
    c. **The ’expected cessation’ presupposition**: ‘It is expected/reasonable that John will stop being asleep at some time after the speech time, i.e., after now’ (e.g., Michaelis 1993)\(^1\)

3.2 Explaining the incompatibility of beodo with mevugar ‘old’

Assuming that in the beodo construction odo has the semantics of still we can immediately explain the incompatibility of beodo with mevugar ‘old’, seen in (5) above. The ‘expected cassation’ presupposition of still and odo is easily met with ca’ir ‘young’ (you can expect someone to stop being young), but not with mevugar ‘old’ (once someone is old, you do not expect him to stop being old). As (12) shows, we find the same difference with English still:

(12) Danny is still young/*old.

3.3 Explaining quantification facts with still and beodo

Let me start with the observation that quantification with the beodo construction has parallel manifestations with when-clauses with still andadayin. Compare, for example (13) with and without adayin/still:

\(^1\) The ‘expected cessation’ presupposition can be derived as an implicature from Krifka’s (2000) approach to still according to which

(a) still is focus sensitive and induces a set of alternatives. Specifically it can be associated with the whole sentence. For example, It is still raining asserts that ‘It is raining’ and has as its alternative ‘It is not raining’;

(b) the alternatives are aligned to the right with respect to time (i.e., we consider alternatives, e.g., ‘It is not raining’, later than the reference time); and

(c) the implicature that ‘the alternative propositions must be considered reasonable, or entertainable’ (p. 5). We thus get the fact that that John is still asleep implicates that it is reasonable/entertainable that John is not asleep at some later point — namely exactly the ‘expected cessation’ implication.
kSe-dani (adayin) halax le-beit ha-sefer hu tamid haya meduka
when-Danni (still) went to-house the-book he always was depressed

‘When Danni (still) went to school, he was always depressed’

Without adayin/still (13) is ambiguous between a quantificational reading (‘For every event where John went to school there is an event where he was depressed’) and a ‘temporal background’ reading (‘In the period where Danny went to school, Danni was depressed in every contextually relevant event/situation’). But crucially, when adayin/still are present (13) has the background reading only, and the quantificational reading is lost.

This observation supports an analysis of beodo in terms of still — neither can restrict adverbial quantification. But why do we get this general constraint on still and odo?

The reason, I suggest, is that when still is present, the reference time of the sentence must be contextually salient or anaphoric. In Heim’s (1982) terminology, the reference time of still p or odo p has to be familiar.2 I will call this the ‘reference time anaphoricity requirement’ on still and odo, and will suggest below that this is what blocks restricting adverbial quantification with still and adayin (as in (13)) and in the beodo construction (as in (6) above).

As a support for the ‘reference time anaphoricity requirement’ suggestion let us compare first simple past tense sentences with and without still. In English simple past tense sentences can be uttered out of the blue, or with no salient past reference time (Kratzer 1998), and can be asserted to hold at an existentially closed time prior to the speech time: a sentence like (14) asserts in the indicated context that \( \exists t', e : t' < t_c \land \text{unemployed}(\text{my brother}, e) \land \text{at}(e, t) \), i.e., that my brother was unemployed at some past time interval:3

(14) (How’s your brother?) Well, he was unemployed, (but now he has a job).

But when still is present, as in (15) the past tense sentence is bad:

(15) (How’s your brother?) Well, he was (# still) unemployed (but now he has a job).

The example in (15), I suggest, is infelicitous because its reference time is novel — it cannot be anaphoric to anything. This is further supported by the existence of four types of felicitous sentences with still seen in (16–19), where, unlike (15), in all of them the reference time can be anaphoric. Each of these sentences uses a different strategy for satisfying the ‘anaphoricity requirement’.

The first strategy is having a contextually salient reference time antecedent, as in (16):

(16) (How’s your brother ?) Well, he is still unemployed.

a. **Assertion:** \( \exists e : \text{unemployed}(\text{my brother}, e) \land \text{at}(e, t_c) \)

b. **Presupposition:** \( \exists t', e : t' \sim t_c \land \text{unemployed}(\text{my brother}, e) \land \text{at}(e, t) \)

2 Ippolito (2004) has already suggested that still has an anaphoric, ‘familiar’, component, but the type of anaphoricity she talks about and the predictions she makes are different from the present ones. Ippolito, for example, is talking about anaphoricity of events. Unlike the predictions in this paper (see below), she predicts that a sentence like *John is still cooking* ‘will be felicitous only if the common ground entails that: (a) there is a salient eventuality of cooking by John and (b) the time of this eventuality includes a past time’ (p. 6). Below I will follow Ippolito’s methodology, however, in illustrating the anaphoricity requirement on still by using comparisons from nominal anaphora.

3 Though this can be thought of as a subinterval of a larger, contextually relevant period, e.g., last year.
The sentence in (16) asserts that my brother is unemployed now, and presupposes that he was unemployed also before now. Importantly, the latter information is not necessarily present in the common ground, but can be accommodated. The same happens if one hears out of the blue somebody whispering *Be quiet! The baby is still asleep!* Here too the information that the baby was asleep before is easily accommodated. This holds for the presuppositions of (17–19) as well.

What is important in (16) is that the reference time of *He is still unemployed* is indeed familiar — it is anaphoric to the (contextually salient) speech time. The parallel in the nominal domain are cases like *He is really handsome* (pointing to a contextually salient man).

The second strategy is having a referential antecedent, as in (17):

(17) (How’s your brother?) Well, last month he was still unemployed, (but now he has a job).

\[ \text{a. Assertion: } \exists e : \text{unemployed}(\text{my brother}, e) \land \text{at}(e, t) \land t = \text{month before } t_c \]

\[ \text{b. Presupposition: } \exists t', e : \text{last month} \land \text{unemployed}(\text{my brother}, e) \land \text{at}(e, t') \]

The sentence in (17) asserts that my brother was unemployed last month and presupposes that he was unemployed also before last month. Here too the reference time of *He was still unemployed* is anaphoric — this time to the explicitly mentioned reference time of the sentence (last month). The parallel in the nominal domain are cases like *John i came in. He i sat on the chair.*

The third strategy is having an existentially closed antecedent, as in (18):

(18) John knocked on the door. I was still undressed, so I told him to wait.

\[ \text{a. Assertion: } \exists e_1, e_2, t : \text{knock}(\text{john}, e_1) \land \text{at}(e_1, t) \land t < t_c \land \text{undressed}(\text{me}, e_2) \land \text{at}(e_2, t) \]

\[ \text{b. Presupposition: } \exists t', e : \text{t} \land \text{undressed}(\text{me}, e) \land \text{at}(e, t') \]

The sentence in (18) asserts that John knocked on the door at some past time \( t \), and that I was undressed at that time \( t \) and presupposes that I was undressed also before that time. The anaphoricity requirement is met since the reference time of *I was still undressed* is anaphoric to the existentially closed reference time of the previous sentence. The parallel in the nominal domain are cases like *A man i came in. He i sat on the chair*, where the pronoun refers to an existentially closed indefinite.

Finally, the anaphoricity requirement can be met by having a quantified-over antecedent. This happens when *still* appears in the scope of a quantificational structure, as in (19):

(19) Whenever I came to pick up John from school, he was still eating.

\[ \text{a. Assertion: } \forall e_1, t : \text{came to pick-up j(}\text{me}, e) \land t < t_c \land \text{at}(e_1, t) \rightarrow \exists e_2 [\text{eating}(j, e_2) \land \text{at}(e_2, t)] \]

\[ \text{b. Presupposition: } \exists t', e : t' \land \text{eating}(j, e) \land \text{at}(e, t') \]

The sentence in (19) asserts that for every event in every past time \( t \) where I come to pick up John, there is an event where John is eating at that past time \( t \), and presupposes that John is eating also before the time I come to pick him up. The reference time of *He was still eating* in the scope is anaphoric to the reference time of *I come to pick him up* in the restriction. The parallel in the nominal domain are donkey sentences like *When John owns a donkey, he always beats it*. 

\[ \text{LoLa 9/Yael Greenberg: Structuring aspectual and temporal relations} \]
In contrast to these strategies, still clauses are bad when their reference time cannot be anaphoric, as in the past tense (15) above, and crucially, also when still appears in the restriction (rather than the scope) of a quantificational structure, as in (20):

(20) # Whenever John was still eating I came to pick him up from school.

a. **Assertion:** ∀e1, t [eating(j, e) ∧ at(e1, t)] → ∃e2 [came to pick-up (me, e2) ∧ at(e2, t)]

b. **Presupposition:** ∃t′, e : t′ ∝ t ∧ eating(j, e) ∧ at(e, t′)

Here the reference time of John was still eating is novel has no antecedent. Crucially, it cannot be anaphoric to the time variable (t) in the scope (I come to pick him up) because not only the scope appears linearly after the restriction, it is also inaccessible to it. The parallel in the nominal domain are things like # When John owns it, he always beats it/a donkey.

We can now turn back to the beodo construction. We claimed above that odo has the semantics of still, and that still cannot appear in the restriction of a quantificational structure, since the anaphoricity requirement on still p cannot be met there. This immediately explains why beodo cannot restrict quantification. Here too the reference time cannot be anaphoric.

### 3.4 Explaining temporal inclusion with beodo

In section 1 above we showed that beodo constructions express only temporal inclusion. I suggest that this is caused by the combination of the ‘prior time’ presupposition on odo, plus the ‘anaphoric reference time’ requirement on odo, argued for in the previous section.

Notice, however, that there is an apparent problem with assuming the anaphoricity requirement on odo. Unlike the good sentences with still before, in (16–19), in be-odo p, q (be-still p, q) odo p does not seem to have any anteceding reference time — explicit, contextually salient or quantified — before it. Why is be-odo p, q (be-still p, q) felicitous, then?

The answer, I suggest, is that beodo uses another strategy for satisfying the ‘anaphoricity requirement’, namely backward anaphora, manifested in the nominal domain by sentences like When he saw me, John was really surprised. In such sentences the reference of the pronoun in the adjunct is anaphoric to that of the linearly later noun in the matrix. Similarly, I suggest, with the beodo sentences (as in (21)) the reference time of the adjunct (writing the paper) is anaphoric to the linearly later reference time of the matrix (not feeling well):

(21) be-odo kotev et ha-ma’amir hirgiS Dani lo tog
in-still-he write ACC. the-paper felt Dann not well
‘When he was still writing the paper Dann didn’t feel well’

In (21) p (writing the paper) is required to have the same temporal location as q (not feeling well) due to the anaphoricity on odo p. In addition, p is presupposed to be temporally located also before q (due to the ‘prior time presupposition’ on odo p. Thus we necessarily get temporal inclusion, as can be seen in (22) (assertion: —, presupposition: —):

(22) —— running time of odo p (still writing the paper)
    —— running time of q (didn’t feel well)
Notice that using the traditional definition of *still* cannot guarantee inclusion. If *odo* \( p \) is not required to be temporally anaphoric to \( q \), the assertion and presupposition of (21) can be easily met as in (23), with no inclusion:

\[
(23) \quad \text{running time of } odo \; \text{running time of } q \text{ (didn't feel well)}
\]

But in reality inclusion is expressed by the *beodo* construction (this is what gives it its *while*-like nature, observed by Yitzhaki 2003). This indicates that anaphoricity, which guarantees inclusion, is indeed an integral part of the semantics of *odo*.

### 3.5 Status and triggering ‘anaphoricity’ requirement

The anaphoricity requirement on *still* survives in (24a–24c):

\[
(24) \quad \begin{align*}
\text{a. } & \text{Was John still asleep?} \\
\text{b. } & \text{It's possible that John was still asleep.} \\
\text{c. } & \text{If John was still asleep, his mother was angry at him.}
\end{align*}
\]

All of these sentences are very odd when no contextually salient time is present in the common ground. The anaphoricity requirement, then, seems to be a presupposition. But if it is indeed the case, what triggers it?

I suggest that without the anaphoricity requirement, the ‘prior time’ presupposition of *still* \( p \) may be trivially met. Suppose, for example that all you know is that John was unemployed, i.e., that there is some past interval (\( I \)) where *John is unemployed* is true. This is schematically illustrated in (25):

\[
(25) \quad I
\]

But given (25) one can automatically infer also that (a) there is a subinterval of \( I \), \( I' \) where John was unemployed (the assertion of *John is still unemployed*), and (b) that there is another subinterval of \( I \), \( I'' \), such that \( I'' \propto I' \) where John was unemployed as well, (the presupposition of *John is still unemployed*), as shown in (26):

\[
(26) \quad I \\
\]

Thus, given the traditional definition of *still*, the paradoxical result is that once you know that *John was unemployed* is true (in (25)), you can automatically infer that *John was still unemployed* is true (in (26)), since both the assertion and the ‘prior time presupposition’ of this sentence are met in (26). The ‘prior time presupposition’, then, is trivially met. But this presupposition is the main contribution of *still* to the sentence (remember: the assertion of *still* \( p \) is just like that of \( p \)). If it is trivially met then using *still* is unjustified — it is vacuous.

In contrast, if we require that the reference time be identified with another reference time — i.e., anaphoric — the presupposition cannot be trivially met. Suppose it is known
that John was unemployed at some salient time interval in the past, e.g., between January and April, as in (27):

$$I \quad \text{now} \quad \begin{array}{c} \text{January} \\ \hline \text{April} \end{array}$$

(27)

If we want to utter now *Between January and April John was still unemployed* there should be a time prior to January (and abuts it) where John was unemployed as well. Unlike the previous case, the information about such a prior time cannot be inferred on the basis of (27) — it has to exist in the common ground, or to be accommodated by the listener. Hence, the use of *still* is not trivial, not vacuous, and is thus justified.

We can thus say that the anaphoricity requirement on *still p/odo p* is some sort of conversational presupposition. It is triggered by the need to ensure that the ‘prior time presupposition’ of *odo p/still p* — i.e., its semantic presupposition — is not trivially met.

### 4 Conclusion

In this paper I argued that the semantics of the *beodo* construction in Hebrew is composed of that of *be-*, which asserts temporal coincidence, and *odo*, which is the inflected form of *still* in Hebrew. To account for the full range of facts about *beodo* I used both traditional, as well as novel claims about the semantics and pragmatics of *still*, and motivated the latter by comparing felicitous and infelicitous sentences with *still*. The resulting semantics/pragmatics of *still* and *odo* is now summarized in (28):

(28) **Summary of the semantics/pragmatics of *odo p/still p***

a. **Assertion**: $p$ holds at reference time $t$

b. ‘**Prior time presupposition**’ (semantic/conventional): $p$ holds before $t$ (and abuts $t$)

c. ‘**Anaphoricity presupposition**’ (pragmatic/conversational): $t$ is anaphoric to another reference time/familiar

d. **Expected cessation presupposition/implicative**: $p$ is expected to cease after $t$.

### REFERENCES


