

On the history of negative counterfactuals

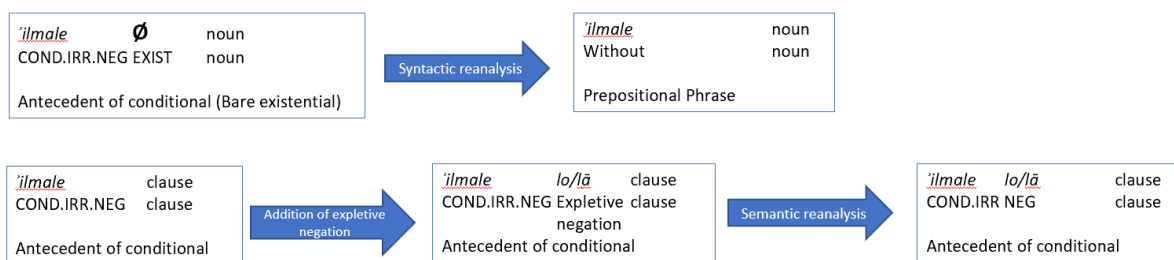
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The syntactic and semantic development of the Hebrew and Aramaic form *'ilmale* has been extensively studied over the past 140 years (Lambert 1880, Jastrow 1885, Schlesinger 1928, Segal 1932, Ben-Yehuda 1948, Ben-Hayyim 1952-1953, Avineri 1964: 34, Breuer 1987, Bar-Asher Siegal 2019, 2020a, and Bar-Ziv Levy 2021). These studies primarily focus on the two contrasting meanings of the form, which can introduce either a positive counterfactual condition (PCC) or a negative counterfactual condition (NCC). In the latter context, the term itself conveys a negative meaning. The fact that the same term has two distinct meanings with opposite polarities has intrigued Hebraists and garnered significant attention.

This paper aims to examine the functions of *'ilmale* in the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Babylonian Talmud, where it displays the following distribution: NCC when preceding a noun, and PCC when preceding a clause. I will argue that this distribution resulted from the following historical developments:

- I. Initially, *'ilmale* exclusively served as a clause-initial marker introducing NCCs. Later, a split occurred, whereby *'ilmale* preceding a noun (*'ilmale* + NP) was reinterpreted as a preposition, akin to the English word "without". However, in clause-initial position (*'ilmale* + p), it retained its original syntactic function and meaning as a conditional marker with a negator ("if not").
- II. Subsequently, *'ilmale* underwent a semantic shift, changing its meaning from an NCC marker to a PCC marker. This change was only possible in environments where the term functioned as a marker of a conditional clause and not as a preposition.

The proposed changes that this expression underwent are presented in the following scheme:



The paper will explore various phenomena in which negation plays a role in diachronic phenomena, such as how expletive negations evolve and their impact on their surroundings, distinctions between NCC and PCC, and the semantics of prepositions that carry negative components.