

**Menaḥem Kaddari**

## **The Negative Particle 'al (A Study in Diachronic Syntax)**

The function of the negation *'al*, frequent in Modern Hebrew in its whole range of sociolinguistic registers, is stylistically marked when used as deontic modality operator. In journalèse and non-fiction literary language it is commonly used in the structure *'al + le-NF + le-infinitive*, e.g. *'al lanu lishko'ah* ('let's not forget'). This construction of weak deontic modality is in opposition to *'al tishkah* ('don't forget').

The non-marked use of *'al* as operator of negation in Modern Hebrew is of Biblical Hebrew heritage; even the *'al + infinitive* construction can be traced back to an obscure hapax construction in Proverbs XXXI, 4: *'al lamlakhim lemo'el* etc. ('let the kings not be fool(?)). Regularly in Biblical Hebrew, *'al* as negation operator functions in the performative as operator of prohibition.

In some cases, however, transition from the performative to the constative has occurred, even resulting in syntactic ambiguity (e.g. Is. 2, 9; Ps. 69, 15). In post-biblical Hebrew (as in Ben-Sira, the Qumran texts, the Mishna and other Tana'itic sources, Talmudic Hebrew), the Biblical Hebrew variations of *'al* have been restricted to its main use as operator of prohibition. Its use in Modern Hebrew as a marked expression of weak deontic negation (in journalèse and scientific prose) is to be regarded as a neologism.