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# Contents

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*Chapter 1*

# History, Culture, and the Speech Community

## 1. THE UNCONVENTIONAL GENESIS OF MODERN HEBREW

Hebrew has an unconventional history. It is the only known case of a language that ceased to be spoken through a process of language death and was successfully revitalized centuries later. The current form of the language, Modern Hebrew, emerged in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as part of the Zionist vision to transform the traditional liturgical and written language of the Jews into a national vernacular, and today it is the native tongue or a major second language of several million people. Prior to the revival of Hebrew speech, traditional forms of Hebrew were employed in restricted domains by Jews who spoke other languages in their daily lives. Nowadays, Modern Hebrew is a fully fledged linguistic system serving all the communication needs of a modern speech community.

This unique process has naturally attracted significant scholarly attention, but while there are comprehensive descriptions of its sociolinguistic dimensions (e.g., Harshav 1993; Morag 1993; Fellman 1973; Rabin 1996; Efrati 2004; Lang 2008; Reshef 2011; Reshef 2013b), a consensual account of its linguistic aspects has yet to emerge. In the absence of parallels among the languages of the world, the processes involved are only partially understood. Evidently, modern usage differs significantly from previous historical strata of Hebrew, but since it did not evolve from them through continuous spoken use, the differences cannot be attributed to the familiar processes of change that affect spoken languages over time (Doron et al. 2019). Moreover, unlike other modern languages, which developed from an immediately preceding linguistic state, Modern Hebrew is not based on a single dominant variety of Hebrew. Its first L2 speakers relied on their familiarity with the vast corpus

of Hebrew texts that comprise the cultural patrimony, and since this corpus includes texts from many different periods, it presented them with the various historical strata of Hebrew "side by side, rather than each on top of the other, as in languages which have proceeded in historical continuity" (Ben-Hayyim 1953/1992, 58). Consequently, their speech incorporated heterogeneous linguistic features originating in different historical strata, which then had to be reconstructed into a coherent system (Doron et al. 2019, 13). Furthermore, since the first adult speakers were all native speakers of other languages, who adopted Hebrew as their spoken tongue for ideological reasons after circa 1700 years in which it had not been spoken, the linguistic input they presented to their children, the first native speakers of Hebrew, was not only highly varied, but inevitably included a high proportion of substrate phenomena. While some of these phenomena were identified by the children as foreign and therefore rejected, others were accepted as genuine features of Hebrew. As a result, contact-induced phenomena have become an integral component of native usage, alongside original Hebrew structures (Blanc 1954; Blanc 1968; Rosén 1956).

These highly idiosyncratic circumstances sparked an intense debate in the literature about the very nature of Modern Hebrew and its relationship to the earlier forms of the language. While most scholars regard the present-day language as the latest phase (albeit an idiosyncratic one) in the evolution of Hebrew, some scholars argue that Modern Hebrew should be classified as a different language altogether due to its genetic connection to the substrate languages (for a detailed discussion of this debate see Doron et al. 2019, 1–2, 3–5, 9–11, 15–17). In attempting to support these opposing views, the proponents of both have generally adopted two dominant assumptions. First, that by comparing contemporary structures to traditional forms of Hebrew, scholars can measure the degree of continuity with the inherited language and identify the type of change in cases of divergence. Second, that, since contact-induced phenomena were a major factor in the restructuring of the modern linguistic system, it is essential to explore the possible effect of the contact languages during the formative years of the speech community, as well as in later periods of Modern Hebrew (see, for example, Doron 2016).

Though the present book is not meant to directly participate in this debate, it aims to offer a different perspective on the emergence of Modern Hebrew by shifting the focus from the *outcome* of the restructuring processes to their *progression*. It presents a diachronic analysis of a series of case studies from the emergence period, based on data collected from non-belletristic textual corpora reflecting the everyday practices of writers and speakers throughout the modernization period of Hebrew. Initially, this line of investigation was intended to shed more light on the standardization of Modern Hebrew and the factors that affected it. But quite unexpectedly, its findings also proved to

have important implications for the question of continuity with earlier forms of the language.

The question of continuity proves to be more complex than was assumed, for it transpires that, during the early years of the vernacularization of Hebrew, the restructuring of the emergent language often took an unexpected course of development. In the small and close-knit budding speech community, changes could occur with unusual speed (on change patterns in close-knit communities compare Milroy and Milroy 1985; O'Shannessy 2019); furthermore, due to the unusual sociolinguistic circumstances that prevailed in those early years, linguistic processes did not always proceed in a linear manner, but often changed direction, resulting in the reversal of initial trends. The consequence of this is that the appearance of continuity or disparity between contemporary Hebrew and earlier strata can be highly deceptive. Structural correspondence with the classical models is not always sufficient evidence of continuity, since in many cases, nonclassical practices that had been prevalent among the first L2 speakers were discarded in favor of usages that better conformed to the classical models. This generated an appearance of continuity with the classical strata, when in practice, Hebrew had been developing away from the classical features until it abruptly changed direction. Similarly, disparity between classical and modern usage cannot automatically be attributed to changes that occurred following the revernacularization of Hebrew. This is because, in certain cases, the nonclassical features were not Modern Hebrew innovations. Rather, they originated in popular, non-canonic varieties of Hebrew that had developed during the long interim period in which the language was restricted to the cultural sphere, varieties that were well known to the first L2 speakers. This type of continuity has often been overlooked due to the scarcity of research into the popular varieties of Hebrew used during the period immediately preceding the revival of speech (Glinert 2013a). However, data on actual language use in the formative years of the speech community demonstrate the far-reaching impact of these varieties. The diachronic examination of early textual corpora is therefore crucial for distinguishing between genuine and apparent continuity in the formation of Modern Hebrew (and see Mor 2017 for a similar line of reasoning, though from a slightly different perspective).

Obviously, the complex nature of continuity is not an exclusive feature of Hebrew. Since natural languages are always in flux, identifying continuity in their evolution is not always a straightforward matter; this is true not only when there is an obvious breach in the usual form of transmission, as in the case of Hebrew, but also in cases of more conventional historical development. External resemblance between linguistic varieties used in different periods does not always indicate continuity, but may have other explanations, including contact, incidental parallel development, the impact of a

prestigious classical model, etc. As noted by Joseph (2019), the crucial factor in determining continuity is neither structural correspondence between two linguistic varieties nor the extent or type of contact with other languages, but rather the existence of an unbroken line of transmission. When transmission is unbroken, linguistic features can change. Conversely, when the line of transmission is interrupted, they can only be *replaced* by other linguistic features. However, as the outcomes of these two processes are structurally indistinguishable, the social and historical circumstances of the speech community must be examined in order to determine whether or not historical linguistic varieties are related through direct linear descent.

In the case of Hebrew, although the usual path of transmission was certainly disrupted, the language never ceased to develop, as it remained in productive use over the ages as a written language, and was employed in the composition of texts, both religious and secular. While there were no native speakers of Hebrew, most men in the traditional Jewish communities were educated in Hebrew from a very early age, and in adulthood used it as a major language of culture. Cultural continuity and familiarity with the classical sources persisted up to the beginning of speech revival; in fact, Hebrew's ongoing presence in Jewish life was one of the major factors that made the revival possible in the first place (Harshav 1993; Morag 1993).

The book at hand focuses on the linguistic manifestation of these factors and on their effect on the emergence of Modern Hebrew, with emphasis on the distinction between genuine and apparent continuity and between linear and nonlinear processes in the evolution of the modern linguistic system. Its first part consists of three introductory chapters, devoted to a general discussion of the emergence processes in light of the question of continuity with the linguistic legacy. The present chapter presents essential background information about the geographical, temporal and cultural framework in which Modern Hebrew developed, with special emphasis on the status of the classical linguistic strata in education and language planning during the early years of the speech community. Chapter 2 argues for considering the first few decades of the revival period as a distinct linguistic phase, characterized by a unique set of linguistic features that set it apart from previous strata of Hebrew on the one hand, and from contemporary Modern Hebrew on the other. It will be shown that, following fundamental changes in the social basis for the use of Hebrew in the 1920s, certain common linguistic practices were discarded, and accelerated standardization processes generated far-reaching changes in both the spoken and the written language. Chapter 3 focuses on the formation of a distinct colloquial register, and traces its origins in non-canonic varieties of Hebrew that were an integral part of the linguistic background of the first-generation L2 speakers. Outlining patterns of rejection versus adoption

of pre-existing linguistic habits, it will highlight some of the main factors that determined the measure of continuity with the period immediately preceding the revival of Hebrew speech.

The second part of the book presents a diachronic examination of three case studies displaying unexpected, nonlinear paths of development. Each of these case studies highlights the interplay between different, and occasionally opposing, forces that affected the restructuring of the emergent language. Chapter 4 traces the formation of a system of honorifics in the early years of the speech community, and its subsequent disappearance, within just a few decades. In the case of honorifics, the first-generation L2 speakers adopted means from the linguistic legacy to meet functional needs triggered by the contact languages, but the next generation of L1 speakers made different linguistic choices and rejected this usage altogether. Chapter 5 discusses the formation of two new paradigms of adjective grading, which replaced a formerly well-established paradigm introduced into Hebrew by medieval writers. In this case, linguistic elements originating in Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew were assigned new functions, and once available, were preferred over the patently medieval usage. The strong preference for constructions that conform, or appear to conform, with the classical models was a recurring phenomenon in the restructuring processes of the emergent language, and while it was often encouraged by language planners, it sometimes also affected the spontaneous choices of ordinary speakers regardless of prescriptive dictates. Chapter 6 discusses the transformation of derived nominals into an integral part of the verbal system. It shows that, although this appears to be the culmination of a gradual historical process rooted in previous strata of Hebrew, the early phases of standardization were actually marked by a break with the immediately preceding stratum of Hebrew, which made use of medieval structures, and a retreat to an earlier, more classical linguistic state. The subsequent standardization of these nominals was not accomplished through a smooth and simultaneous process of development, but through a complex process involving conflicting trends and different aspects of their use developing at different paces.

Taken together, these case studies demonstrate that standardization was not a uniform process but was affected by multiple factors and pressures. Consequently, although it ultimately yielded a significant decrease in the measure of linguistic variation as compared to the initial diversity among the first L2 speakers, it did not necessarily result in a simplification of the linguistic system. This is because, in many cases, options that were structurally more complex were chosen over simpler ones.

The following section presents the historical and sociolinguistic background of these linguistic choices.

## 2. THE HISTORICAL STAGES OF HEBREW AND THEIR ROLE IN THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN HEBREW

A main factor that enabled the successful revival of Hebrew as a spoken language was the knowledge of Hebrew among men in the traditional Jewish societies, and among both men and women in the modern, nationalist Jewish circles in late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Eastern Europe (Stampfer 1993; Rabin 1996; Harshav 1993). Despite the long hiatus in its use as a vernacular, Hebrew served as the liturgical and cultural language of Jews throughout the ages, and following more than a century of secular literary revival starting in the late 18th century, by the time of the revival it was also established as a vehicle of secular modern culture (Rabin 1985a; Myhill 2004; Eldar 2014). Since the corpus of culturally-significant Hebrew texts was produced over many generations, the first speakers who adopted Hebrew as a vernacular for ideological reasons did not have one single dominant model to rely on, but were familiar with multiple forms, variations, genres, and styles originating in different historical periods. All linguistic strata were directly available to them, and each was associated with a different set of values and occupied a different place in the linguistic ideology (Ben Hayyim 1953/1992; Rabin 1985b; Mor 2017).

Cases of nonlinear development during the early years of Modern Hebrew were a direct consequence of this heterogeneity, particularly since the earlier, classical forms of Hebrew had greater prestige than the later forms, created when the language was no longer spoken. In antiquity, Hebrew served for several centuries as a fully fledged vernacular, both spoken and written. It first emerged as a distinct branch of the northwestern Semitic family towards the end of the second millennium BCE, but following the loss of political independence in the sixth century BCE it began to decline as a spoken language, until it eventually ceased to be spoken in the early third century CE (Kutscher 1982; Badillos 1993; Myhill 2004). Although Hebrew during its classical periods was probably characterized by extensive diversity (Hornkohl 2013; Givón 2019, part I; Bar-Asher 2009, 3–30, 76–127; Breuer 2013b), this diversity was only partially represented in the textual legacy of that period, and more importantly, it hardly affected the emergence of Modern Hebrew since the classical texts were perceived at that time as a uniform, monolithic representation of the original classical language. The popular view distinguished only two major linguistic states within the textual corpora considered as classical: Biblical Hebrew and Rabbinic Hebrew. However, each of these seminal corpora occupied a different position in Jewish life in subsequent generations (Rabin 1985b).

Biblical Hebrew is the earliest documented stage of the language. As the tongue of the holy scriptures, it was meticulously conserved over the ages

by an erudite tradition dedicated to preserving both the graphic representation and the reading of the biblical text (Golinets 2013). As a result, despite differences in the pronunciation of the phonemes among the various Jewish communities (Morag 1971), they have all shared a uniform, authoritative version of the Bible. Familiarity with Biblical Hebrew was a central component of the knowledge of the language throughout the ages. In religious Jewish communities, a portion of the Bible is read every week as part of the religious ritual, and in contemporary Israeli society, Bible is a compulsory school subject taught at all grade levels even in the secular education system, due to its central place in Zionist ideology (Shapira 2004). Considered the "exemplary" model of Hebrew, Biblical Hebrew had considerable impact on writers throughout the ages, and its linguistic style was repeatedly emulated in various periods, particularly by literary schools inclined towards classicism.

From the grammatical viewpoint, Biblical Hebrew had been the basis of grammatical thought from medieval times onwards, and traditional grammars were composed to describe and explain its rules (Téné et al. 2007). Conversely, at the time of speech revival the grammatical structure of later linguistic stages had not yet been explored (Bar-Asher 1998; Bar-Asher 1999). Biblical grammar therefore was a central component of language instruction throughout the modernization period of Hebrew, and also served as a standard for the prescriptivists, who aimed to keep Modern Hebrew as close as possible to its classical sources. While contemporary prescriptivists are open to other traditions of Hebrew, in the seminal years of the speech community the reverence for biblical grammar predominated prescriptive rulings (Cohen 1998). Furthermore, biblical texts were highly familiar to members of the emergent speech community, and portions of them were often known by heart even in secular social circles due to repeated exposure from an early age at cultural events (see e.g. the personal testimony of Givón 2019 on the role of Song of Songs in the yearly anniversary celebrations of his Kibbutz).

This cultural and ideological centrality of Biblical Hebrew rendered it an extremely influential factor in shaping the modern linguistic system (Blau 1990). It not only supplied much of the raw material for the grammar and lexicon in the initial stages of modernization, but influenced the linguistic choices of both ordinary speakers and the linguistic establishment throughout the restructuring processes that continued to shape the language in subsequent years (Gonen 2013; Mor forthcoming).

The second linguistic stratum based on spoken usage in antiquity is Rabbinic Hebrew, which served as the literary vehicle for the codification of Jewish law towards the end of the Classical period. The corpus of Rabbinic Hebrew consists of texts created before as well as after the decline of Hebrew as a vernacular, and some texts include both Hebrew and Aramaic (Breuer

2013b). Unlike the Bible, Rabbinic texts were transmitted only orally for many years, and as the various traditions were never codified into a uniform, authoritative version, they diverge in many textual and grammatical details. Being the major subject of study in religious Jewish circles, Rabbinic texts were highly familiar to Jews at the time of speech revival. However, after the rise of the secular national Zionist ideology, which associated these texts with the traditional, diasporic Jewish identity, they became marginalized in education and culture (Shapira 2004; Zerubavel 1995). Consequently, while biblical texts maintained their centrality because L1 speakers in subsequent generations were consistently exposed to them, Rabbinic texts gradually lost their former position as an integral component of the linguistic experience of Hebrew speakers.

In addition to the difference between the two classical strata in terms of exposure, they had a very different status in linguistic ideology. Unlike the current perception of Rabbinic Hebrew as an acceptable model of correct Hebrew (Cohen 1998), in the seminal stages of Modern Hebrew the attitude towards it was highly ambivalent. On the one hand, it was recognized as part of the classical phase of Hebrew, that is, as a genuine manifestation of Hebrew as a spoken living language, and as such it contributed essential linguistic material, both grammatical and lexical, to modern usage. On the other hand, since medieval times language purists had considered Rabbinic Hebrew to be flawed, because unlike Biblical Hebrew, in the absence of political sovereignty it was subject to intense pressure from the contact languages (primarily Aramaic, and later also Greek and Latin). For this reason, during the transmission of Rabbinic texts many of their original features were "corrected" to conform to biblical grammar (Bar-Asher 2009, 313–18; Heijmans 2013; Blau 1978; Rabin 1985b). However, those portions of Rabbinic grammar that survived this process were highly familiar to the first L2 speakers, and were in fact far more natural for them than the classicized, elevated style of Biblical Hebrew. The conflicting forces of habit and prestige both had an effect on the linguistic choices made by these speakers as they began using Hebrew for productive daily communication.

The clash between habit and linguistic consciousness was even more significant in the case of material originating in Medieval Hebrew, a cover term for the vast and highly varied corpus of texts produced between the end of the Rabbinic period and the onset of a secular literary revival in the second half of the 18th century. Medieval Hebrew includes both religious texts (exegesis, responsa, codices of Jewish law, moral literature etc.) and secular ones (philosophy, grammar, science, letters, community archives, etc.), composed in a broad range of nonclassical varieties of Hebrew by writers (or translators) who were native speakers of other languages. Whereas belletristic writing, mostly restricted to poetry, was subject to a strict set of aesthetic

norms requiring attention to style and grammar (Sáenz-Badillos 2013a), non-belletristic medieval texts were highly diverse and tended to be written in an unregulated, linguistically careless style, intensely influenced by the contact languages and featuring random deviations from the rules of classical grammar (Kogut 1981; Sáenz-Badillos 2013b).

Despite their extensive diversity, the medieval texts written in different times and places shared a core set of linguistic features, which persisted in subsequent periods and thus became routine characteristics of later texts as well (Rabin 1985a, 20; Rabin 1996; Glinert 1987; Kaddari 1990; Kahn 2018). These features were highly familiar to the first L2 speakers of Modern Hebrew from medieval texts of cultural significance, as well as from popular texts written in later periods (including scientific works, religious books, and Hasidic tales, as well as journals and newspapers), and they were an integral component of their linguistic habits. However, awareness of their medieval origins and their incompatibility with the classical models often hindered their integration into the standard register of Modern Hebrew (Mor 2017). As will be shown in various parts of this book, such elements were particularly susceptible to nonlinear development during the early years of the speech community.

The transformation of Hebrew into a spoken language at the onset of the twentieth century was not a sudden, isolated event, but the culmination of long processes of modernization that affected traditional Jewish communities in Central and Eastern Europe (Harshav 1993; Rabin 1996; Reshef 2013b). In the first stage of this far-reaching historical change, the gradual emancipation of the Jews, which began in the late eighteenth century, enabled them to integrate in the surrounding society, and an elite intellectual movement, the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment), was established to promote the ideas of modernization by means of a secular literary revival. The subsequent rise of national feeling among Jews toward the end of the nineteenth century created the need for a common spoken language, and triggered waves of nationally motivated immigration to Palestine. The modernization of Hebrew therefore initially proceeded on two parallel paths: a literary revival in Europe starting in the mid-eighteenth century, and the gradual formation of a speech community in Palestine starting in the 1880s. However, by the 1930s the two processes converged, as writers and publishing houses moved to Palestine, and with them the center of Hebrew literature (Lipschütz 1920; Shaked 1985; Even-Zohar 1996; Rabin 1999; Harshav 1993).

The literary revival of the Haskalah aspired to create, through original works and translations, a range of writings equivalent to those available in other languages, including but not limited to poetry, belletristic prose, children's literature, science, philosophy, and journalism. A key component of the *maskilic* ideology was the perception of Biblical Hebrew as the sole

"genuine" form of the language, and of later linguistic strata—from Rabbinic Hebrew onwards—as marred by foreign influence. These classicist ideas were manifested in the meticulous study of Hebrew grammar and in the aspiration to base poetry and belletristic prose on Biblical Hebrew (Patterson 1988; Pelli 2006; Bartal 1993; Kahn 2013). However, belletristic prose in the Haskalah was actually replete with nonclassical (Rabbinic and Medieval) elements which the authors allegedly sought to avoid (see Kahn 2008; Kahn 2012), and non-belletristic texts were exempt from these purist pressures even during the Haskalah period itself. The limitations of Biblical Hebrew eventually prompted a change of norms in belletristic writing as well, and in the late 1880s linguistic material from all historical stages of Hebrew gained legitimacy in literary style (Rabin 1985a, 1999). At this stage, first attempts to transform Hebrew into a spoken language were already underway in Palestine.

At the onset of the speech revival period, the linguistic practices of the first L2 speakers relied heavily on their intimate familiarity with nonclassical forms of Hebrew, yet the literary legacy of the Haskalah and its standards of biblical purism were culturally dominant. Thus, although it was natural for these speakers to utilize the full range of linguistic forms available to them, the nonclassical character of many common usages was an influential factor in their linguistic choices (assuming that they recognized them as such) (Mor 2017). This ambiguity persisted throughout the formative phases of the speech community, and speakers were aware that their failure to conform to the classical models was due not only to the foreign substrate languages but also to the influence of the nonclassical linguistic legacy (Rabin 1958; Ben-Hayyim 1953/1992; Bar-Asher 2012a; Mor forthcoming).

A lack of confidence in their mastery of Hebrew was not just a characteristic of the first L2 speakers, but continued to prevail in the speech community for several decades (Mor 2017). Until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Hebrew was the language of a minority in Palestine, and although the number of speakers was constantly on the rise, their percentage within the Jewish population did not increase in a linear fashion, but dipped for a while following each wave of Jewish immigration to the country (Bachi 1956). After independence, Hebrew not only became the language of the majority, but turned into the language of the state. However, its dominance was initially felt to be at risk due to massive demographic changes that occurred as a large wave of Jewish refugees arrived in Israel both from Europe and Muslim countries, doubling the size of the population within a few years (Bachi 1956, 189–91; Lissak 2003; Helman 2014, 20–46). In the early years of statehood, the character of the speech community thus remained highly fluid, and most adult speech continued to be characterized by unmistakable signs of foreign influence (Blanc 1968).

In the first few decades of the speech community, a sense of linguistic inadequacy was felt even by native speakers, who were a young minority and only rarely grew up in Hebrew-speaking homes (Rabin 1983). While Hebrew was their main, and often exclusive, language, linguistic education drew their attention to the gap between their actual usage and the linguistic ideal, and expected them to adapt their language accordingly. Up to the second half of the twentieth century, cultural norms were based on a purist ideology that attributed positive value to the elevated linguistic registers, and completely excluded casual native usage from the cultural sphere (Even-Zohar 1996; Mor and Sichel 2015; Bar-Ziv Levy 2016). Children were exposed from an early age to the absolute dominance of the elevated registers in songs, children's literature and school textbooks, and were constantly faced with language corrections and prescriptive rulings that differed considerably from their own acceptability judgements (Blanc 1957; Blanc 1989; Rabin 1958; Rabin 1996; Reshef 2015, 11–38; Mor forthcoming). Classical and nonclassical models were both part of their linguistic environment, but the dominance of the former in the formal, monitored registers, and the absence of the latter, which were largely restricted to colloquial Hebrew, in monitored language use highlighted the favored status of the classical models. Due to their prominence in the linguistic ideology, particularly during the early phases of standardization, these classical models played an active role in shaping educated language usage and had a significant impact on the structure of Modern Hebrew's formal registers, which is apparent to this day (Blau 1990, 104; Bar-Asher 2012a, 68).

The common standard register of Modern Hebrew began to stabilize in the 1920s, with the emergence of a community for which Hebrew was a daily means of communication. In the decade leading up to World War I, the efforts that had been underway since the early 1880s to implement the idea of speech revival finally started to bear fruit. Following the arrival, beginning in 1904, of a new wave of highly committed immigrants, and as the first graduates of the Hebrew school system reached adulthood, Hebrew gradually became the major public language of the nationally spirited Jewish population, and began to expand into domestic use as well (Bachi 1956; Harshav 1993; Morag 1993; Greenzweig 1997; Ornan 1984). In 1922 this new social reality was officially recognized by the British Mandate authorities, who declared Hebrew an official language, alongside English and Arabic.

At that time, a distinct unmarked variety of Hebrew, both spoken and written, was forming among native and near-native speakers (Morag 2004, 324; Reshef 2015, 39–66). This linguistic variety was fully compatible with the accepted definition of a standard language as a "set of grammatical and lexical forms [ . . . ] typically used in speech and writing by educated native speakers" (Trudgill 1982, 32). Initially, however, this variety of Hebrew was

frowned upon by the linguistic establishment, which perceived it as one of the many unwelcome varieties of language produced by the highly diversified speech community (Rabin 1943, 10; Blanc 1957, 399; Blanc 1989, 33; Morag 2003, 169). Some early commentators foresaw that this variety would eventually gain dominance despite the disapproval of educators and language planners. For instance, a book published in 1930 states that "some current mistakes in spoken Hebrew grate upon the ears of our grammarians" (Spiegel 1930, 16), but predicts that they will "become current in the spoken Hebrew of Palestine," and therefore "one day we shall be compelled, we purists and pedants, to write the current errors and wrong usages into our dictionaries and grammars" (ibid., 16–17). However, most members of the linguistic establishment continued for many years to consider native usage as "flawed" despite its wide distribution among educated speakers (Rabin 1943, 10), and it became the main object of linguistic enquiry only in the second half of the twentieth century, following intense controversy among linguists in the 1950s regarding its legitimacy (see Reshef 2013c; Kuzar 2001, 137–96).

The rapid consolidation of a basic standard register during the early 1920s was a significant turning point in the emergence of Modern Hebrew. In historical studies, the few years between the British occupation of Palestine in 1918 and the official beginning of the mandatory rule in 1922 are recognized as a period of sweeping changes that affected all aspects of the life of the Jewish population in Palestine (Shapira 1999, 29). Our findings indicate clearly that the linguistic realm was no exception. Chapter 2 will show that it was precisely in those years that accelerated processes of selection rapidly narrowed down the range of linguistic options that had formerly been current in actual language production, laying the foundations for a stable, unmarked standard variety of Hebrew in writing and speech. These processes create a clear dividing line between two distinct periods of Modern Hebrew: the early period in which language use had only non-native models to rely on, and a later period, starting in the 1920s, in which the common standard started to stabilize. In the latter period, Hebrew was already used by an organic speech community, and was subject to ordinary processes of linguistic change. In the former period, by contrast, its unconventional sociolinguistic circumstances resulted in unconventional development patterns. This book is dedicated to that early, unconventional linguistic state in the evolution of Modern Hebrew.

*Chapter 2*

# Emergent Modern Hebrew as a Distinct Linguistic Phase

## 1. EMERGENT MODERN HEBREW AND THE QUESTION OF CONTINUITY

As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, the 1920s were a major watershed in the emergence of the Hebrew speech community. After an extended period during which the written language underwent processes of modernization in Europe, and after several decades of efforts to transform Hebrew into a spoken language in Palestine, in the decade preceding World War I a speech community finally started to form (see chapter 1). After the war Hebrew was recognized as an official language by the British Mandate authorities, and it clearly served as the main language of the Jewish community in Palestine in the public domain, although not yet necessarily as the main spoken language in all households (Harshav 1993, 91; Reshef 2015, 11–38). Amid considerable multilingualism and the ongoing need to promote the adoption of Hebrew (Halperin 2015; Helman 2002), its usage domains expanded, and it increasingly became the major everyday means of communication of the Jewish population in both public and private settings. As a distinct native variety formed among the younger generation, Hebrew gradually came into its own as a fully fledged vernacular of an organic speech community (Blanc 1968).

This new sociolinguistic reality triggered accelerated processes of standardization. Some of the structural changes involved were spontaneous, produced by ongoing use and the need for efficient communication (Reshef 2015, 39–66, 135–79), whereas others were the outcome of extensive language planning aimed at adapting speakers' practices to the planners' vision of the ideal language (Morag 1959; Mor forthcoming). While the foundations of the modern language were laid as early as the 1880s (Rabin 1999), the 1920s stand out as a major turning point in the emergence of a common standard

linguistic variety (Reshef 2009; Reshef 2016a). Until that point, multiple possibilities for future linguistic development coexisted in speech and writing, since Hebrew was used in small, isolated social circles. However, with the spread of Hebrew as a vernacular among larger portions of the Jewish population, certain options gained dominance while others were rejected by the majority of speakers. Changes were rapid; in fact, some were completed by the early 1920s, and by the end of that decade the basic structure of the new standard had formed and stabilized (Reshef and Helman 2009). Subsequent changes no longer involved extensive restructuring but mainly specific details within a relatively stable system (Reshef 2015).

The recognition of the 1920s as a seminal turning point, both sociolinguistically and linguistically, calls for a periodization that recognizes the preceding years as a distinct linguistic phase (Reshef 2016a). Following Doron et al. (2019), the term used in this book is Emergent Modern Hebrew (EMH). In spite of some difficulty in determining the exact historical boundaries of this early phase in the evolution of Modern Hebrew, its core years span almost five decades, from the first attempts to turn Hebrew into a spoken language in the early 1880s until the clear emergence of an embryonic standard during the 1920s. This period has received relatively little attention in the linguistic research, and the present study aims to show that a close examination of language use throughout it sheds crucial light on the evolution of Modern Hebrew.

EMH is the initial phase of Hebrew's development into a fully fledged vernacular. It is also a transitional stage between the preceding state of diglossia (and often multiglossia), characterized by partial knowledge and partial use of Hebrew by speakers of several other languages, and the following sociolinguistic stage, in which Hebrew became the main language of an increasingly monolingual speech community, particularly among the younger generation. In this interim period Hebrew was used in unconventional social circumstances, and was therefore affected by an unusual set of linguistic forces and conflicting pressures. As a result, alongside standard, linear changes, nonlinear developments occurred as well, as certain linguistic phenomena took unexpected turns in their course of development.

Recognizing these nonlinear processes sheds crucial light on the origins of many structural properties of Modern Hebrew, and also informs the ongoing debate about the nature of the connection between the classical linguistic stages (namely, Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew) and the present-day language (Doron et al. 2019; and see also the previous chapter). Most accounts of the emergence of Modern Hebrew ascribe its basic structural properties to the interaction between inherited structures and contact-induced phenomena among its very first speakers: the adult L2 speakers who used it in the unique sociolinguistic circumstances of speech revival. However, the data presented

here indicate clearly that the spread of certain linguistic phenomena in that initial phase was not necessarily deterministic, and that many phenomena followed a nonlinear development path that involved a reversal of initial trends. Given these nonlinear processes, the aspect of continuity in the development of the language should be reexamined—not only in terms of the relationship between Modern Hebrew and the historical stages of Hebrew but also in terms of the relationship between contemporary Hebrew and EMH.

This chapter focuses on some conspicuous features of EMH that did not persist in later phases of Modern Hebrew despite their initial popularity. Although in the early 1920s they seemed to be well-established in the linguistic practice of the emerging speech community, they did not survive standardization, and within a few years became outdated. Section 2 focuses on written usage and discusses the factors involved in the decline of certain common EMH features. Section 3 turns to spoken usage, and presents data from recently discovered recordings from the early 1960s that document the vernacular of speakers born in the early twentieth century (Gonen, Silber-Varod, and Reshef 2017; Reshef and Gonen 2018). Exposed to EMH during the critical years of language acquisition, these speakers preserved some early forms that were extant in the emergent speech community but were not adopted by later generations.

Although EMH is conspicuously different from the stages of Hebrew that preceded and followed it—because its initial and final stages involved extensive and rapid changes in the linguistic system—the distinctive EMH features discussed below are not necessarily exclusive to this stage of the language. Many of them originated in previous historical stages, and were abandoned only in the course of standardization. Similarly, some features of EMH did not disappear altogether in the late 1920s but persisted in the following decades, albeit sporadically and often as markers of old-fashioned style. This presumably indicates that the pace of change among individual users was not uniform, and alongside the gradual acquisition of new linguistic practices, speakers may have also maintained the old ones. However, the features discussed in this chapter distinguish EMH in that their use as prevalent means of expression within modern linguistic style was peculiar to that stage of the language.

## 2. SOME TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF WRITTEN EMH

EMH was by no means a uniform linguistic system. In the absence of an organic speech community, writers had no common standard to rely on, and their linguistic choices often reflected individual factors such as their level of proficiency in Hebrew, their social background, and their linguistic ideology,

such as their position on innovations or on the incorporation of classical elements in contemporary usage (Reshef 2009; and compare Kahn 2018, 159–62 for the premodern use of Hebrew). Genre differences also played a crucial role, as most writers of nonreligious texts employed different linguistic styles in different genres. The major distinction was between literary writing and utilitarian genres such as essays, journalism, science, law, administration, private correspondence, advertisement, and so on. While the former tended to be affected by aesthetic norms and purist considerations, the latter focused on the practical goal of conveying information and were therefore more likely to include nonclassical elements (Shakhevitz 1968; Reshef 2009; Kahn 2018).

But although EMH was characterized by considerable linguistic variation, certain usages were shared by most writers. Many of these common usages gained currency in the emergent speech community and later became part of the standard register of Modern Hebrew. However, other usages, no less common in EMH, began to fall out of favor soon after Hebrew became a daily means of communication, and in the 1920s their frequency sharply declined (Reshef 2016a).

One subcategory of features of the latter type consisted of patently medieval usages that had been spurned as incorrect by modern writers since the advent of the Haskalah in the late eighteenth century (see chapter 1). These features were stylistically marked even before speech revival, for, although frequent in non-belletristic texts, they were generally avoided in the period's purist literary style (Shakhevitz 1968; Mor 2017). As Hebrew began spreading to wider social circles, they began to seem old-fashioned and to drop out of use even in nonliterary styles. In many cases their decline was remarkably swift and they disappeared altogether within a few years. Such a drastic development was possible in cases where the nonclassical features were not the exclusive means of expression available to writers but had well-established alternatives that could easily and swiftly replace them (Reshef 2016a, 207–12; and see chapter 5).

A conspicuous example is the use of *ʔezo*, originally a feminine interrogative pronoun ("which?"), as an indeterminacy marker. Hebrew does not have an indefinite counterpart of the definite article *ha-*, but medieval writers developed the means of overtly expressing various shades of indefiniteness by placing either *ʔeze* or *ʔezo* (the masculine and feminine singular forms of the interrogative "which," respectively) before the noun. Grammatical agreement was not required: either *ʔeze* or *ʔezo* could be used, regardless of the noun's gender and number (Kaddari 1990; 1991, Vol. I, 141–99). This practice remained prevalent throughout the EMH period, with both *ʔeze* and *ʔezo*. In examples 1a-c, the feminine form *ʔezo* is attached to a singular masculine noun, a plural masculine noun, and a plural feminine noun, respectively (for similar examples with *ʔeze* see chapter 3).

(1)

(a) *ʔalmana [. . .]* *še-šalħa* ***ʔezo*** ***davar***
widow REL-send.PST.3FSG INDF.FSG thing.MSG
*l.a-ʕir* *limeriq*
to.DEF-city Limerick

"a widow who sent something or other to the city of Limerick" (*ħavacelet*, 1899)

(b) *lo* *tov [. . .]* *še-nitʔasef* *le-maqom* *ʔeħad [. . .]*
NEG good that-gather.FUT.1PL to-place one
*ʕim* ***ʔezo*** ***ʔanašim*** *bilti* *menumasim*
with INDF.FSG people.MPL NEG polite

"It is unadvisable for us to gather in one place with all sorts of impolite people" (*hamelic*, 1902)

(c) *kol* *ʔadam* *ʕalul* *le-**ʔezo*** ***šgiʔot***
*any* *person* *liable* to-INDF.FSG mistakes.FPL

"Anyone can make certain mistakes" (*hapoʕel hacaʕir*, 1907)

Examples of this kind are extremely common in EMH, and are likely to be found in almost any randomly selected non-belletristic text. In the early 1920s, however, their frequency sharply decreased. Data from six randomly chosen issues of the socialist newspaper *hapoʕel hacaʕir* ('the young worker'), published at equal intervals between 1907 and 1925, clearly demonstrate this. The issues published before 1922 all included examples of non-agreeing *ʔezo/ʔeze*. These issues yielded forty-three instances of *ʔezo* used as an indeterminacy marker, thirty-five of them displaying no agreement with the following noun, and twenty-five occurrences of *ʔeze*, seven of them non-agreeing (Reshef 2016a, 209). However, in the latest issue examined (from 1925), these indeterminacy markers no longer deviated from the rules of grammatical agreement but conformed in all cases to the gender and number of the noun. Strikingly, in the issues from the 1920s, *ʔeze* sporadically occurred with masculine singular nouns, but *ʔezo* was no longer used by itself as an indeterminacy marker, even with singular feminine nouns, but occurred exclusively in the formula *ʔezo+še-hi* (INDF.F+REL-3FSG), doubly marked for the feminine. Its total absence from these 1920s texts apparently reflects the writers' need to distance themselves from recently outdated linguistic habits. Over time, however, the initial reluctance to use *ʔezo* in isolation faded, and in present-day language it regained its former role as a feminine indeterminacy marker in written and formal registers (Glinert 1989, 92).

This tendency toward greater adherence to the classical rules of agreement was accompanied in the 1920s by additional changes. The overt expressions of indeterminacy in general became notably less frequent (Reshef 2016a, 209), and in addition, writers started to avoid altogether the formerly common use of both *ʔeze* and *ʔezo* as quantifiers preceding time expressions and numerals, such as the following:

(2)

(a) *raq* *ʕata* *nigmar* *ha-mišpat* *še-nimšax*
only now finish.PST.3MSG DEF-trial REL-last.PST.3MSG
***ʔezo*** ***šanim***
INDF.FSG year.FPL

"the trial that went on for several years ended only now" (*hamelic*, 1902)

(b) *bemešex* ***ʔezo*** ***šaʕot*** *yardu* *ʔanašim*
within INDF.FSG hour.FPL descend.PST.3MPL people
*ʔamidim* *mi-nixse-hem*
wealthy from-assets-POSS.3PL

"within a few hours, wealthy people lost all their assets" (*hacfira*, 1898)

(c) *hu [ . . . ]* *šalaħ* *l-ah* ***ʔezo*** ***meʔot*** *mark*
he send.PST.3MSG to-her INDF.FSG hundred.FPL mark

"he sent her [a sum of] several hundred marks" (*hamelic*, 1902)

While indeterminacy is not a uniform category and includes different shades of meaning in both EMH and contemporary Hebrew (e.g., "some," "several," "about," "all kinds of," "a certain," "any" and more, see Glinert 1989, 92–6), *ʔezo* as a quantifier, exemplified in 2, has totally disappeared from the language. In fact, this change was conspicuous enough to be mentioned in a survey of the state of Hebrew published in the late 1920s by a leading language planner (Avinery 1929, 198–99). In present-day Hebrew only the masculine form *ʔeze* may precede numerals, but this is restricted to colloquial usage, and more importantly, can only express approximation ("about," for example, *ʔeze meʔa poʕalim* "some 100 workers"). The restructuring of the field of indeterminacy therefore affected not only the distribution of forms but also their structural and functional properties.

In the course of standardization, a distinction formed between the formerly interchangeable *ʔeze* and *ʔezo*, each of them evolving in a different direction. While non-agreeing *ʔezo* completely disappeared from the language,

non-agreeing *ʔeze* endured in speech with slightly different functions, and assumed a colloquial flavor (see the discussion in chapter 3). The case of *ʔeze/ʔezo* therefore highlights two notable (and related) developments that accompanied the consolidation of Hebrew as a living language during the 1920s: the accelerated standardization of the written and formal language on the one hand, and the emergence of a clear register distinction between speech and writing on the other.

A much simpler example of restructuring is provided by the usage of the definite article *ha-* after uniconsonantal attached prepositions, primarily *le-* "to" and *be-* "in." In Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew, the consonant *h* of the definite article is elided in these environments, and the definite form retains only the vowel *a* to differentiate it from the indefinite form. Both constructions thus look identical in unvocalized writing (i.e., *l*+NOUN and *b*+NOUN), but are pronounced differently, the indefinite form being *le/be*+NOUN, and the definite form being *la/ba*+NOUN. Following the written practices of Medieval and Premodern Hebrew (Kahn 2018, 164–65; Reshef 2016a, 198–99), in EMH the *h* of the definite article was often retained in writing, and the form *le/be-ha*+NOUN commonly appeared instead of the classical spelling, for example,

(3)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (a) | *ha-nituaħ* | *yeʕase* | | ***le-ha-melex*** | *be-šaʕa 2* |
| | the-operation | do.PASS.FUT.3MSG | | to-the-king | in-hour two |

"The king's operation will be performed at two o'clock" (*hamelic*, 1902)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (b) | *ħefce* | *ʕerex* | *ʔaħadim* | *nimceʔu* | ***be-ha-bayit*** |
| | objects.CS | value | several | found.PST.3MPL | in-the-house |

"Some valuables were found in the house" (*ħavacelet*, 1903)

As in the case of the previous phenomenon discussed, this practice notably declined at the beginning of the 1920s, as clearly reflected in the above-mentioned six newspaper issues. The four earlier issues (from 1907 to1919) include multiple instances of *be-* or *le-* followed by *ha-*, 156 occurrences in total. By contrast, the two issues from the 1920s include no examples at all of *be+ha*, and only eight occurrences of *le+ha*, three of them in the same article (Reshef 2016a, 208). In this case, too, the speed at which the change occurred is very striking. Within a few years, this formerly common EMH practice disappeared almost without a trace.

Features with a marked medieval flavor were particularly susceptible to restructuring processes (for an additional case, see the discussion of the

superlative in chapter 5), and as stated, because the change was usually simple—involving the replacement of a particular usage with a familiar alternative—it was often completed within a very short time. A series of entrenched linguistic habits that did not conform to the classical models were thus abandoned quite abruptly in the early 1920s, becoming archaic and rare within a few short years. As a result, the consolidation of Hebrew as an established vernacular triggered significant changes not only in its spoken form but in its written registers as well.

Another group of elements strongly affected by the restructuring processes involved competing variants within the classical linguistic stages. In these cases, too, standardization involved the simple measure of selecting one familiar variant over another, and so was relatively swift (Reshef 2015, 171, 178–83). A notable example from the domain of morphology is that of the feminine participle suffix. Both Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew use two different suffixes in this category, *-h* and *-t*, but with different distribution. In Biblical Hebrew *-h* and *-t* alternate freely in the active verbal templates, whereas in passive forms only *-h* is used. In Rabbinic Hebrew *-t* is dominant in all verbal templates, and *-h* is restricted to specific categories (e.g., *yexola* "can.3F" in the *qatol* pattern, or *ʕosa* "does.3F" from a final-*yod* verb, see Rendsburg 2013; Breuer 2013a).

In contemporary Modern Hebrew, the choice of suffix in feminine participle forms is based on a new set of rules, combining elements from both inherited systems. The suffix *-t* is dominant throughout the paradigm, as in Rabbinic Hebrew, but the suffix *-h* is not restricted to the rabbinic categories. In the causative verbal template (*hifʕil*) the form *maqtila* was chosen over *maqtelet*, probably due to its transparent connection to the masculine form *maqtil*, or in order to avoid homography with the passive forms *mequtelet* and *muqtelet*, since, according to the period's spelling conventions which made sparse use of *matres lectionis*, all three forms were spelled *MQTLT* (for other possible factors see Avinery 1964, 135). Contemporary practice thus selected one of the two possibilities offered by Biblical Hebrew for the active forms, but in the passive templates, it chose the Rabbinic suffix *-t* rather than the Biblical *-h*.

This new alignment of feminine participle forms did not yet exist in EMH, where the choice of suffix was apparently subject to free stylistic choice. Forms like *yoševet/yošva* "sits," *mafraʕat/mafriʕa* "disturbs," *mesukenet/mesukana* "dangerous" or *muxšeret/muxšara* "qualified, adapted, prepared" alternated freely in both predicative and attributive environments (Reshef 2016a, 193–5), and even individual writers were inconsistent in their preferences. They occasionally alternated between the suffixes in a single context in instances of the same verbal template (as in *ʕavoda meʕorevet u-mešuxlala* "mixed and advanced work," *hapoʕel hacaʕir*, 1913), or even in

instances of the same lexical item (as in a press article which referred to the same woman both as *melumedet* and *melumada* "educated," *ħavacelet*, 1900).

The alternation between the two suffixes is particularly common in EMH in the case of the passive feminine participles, which consistently take different forms in Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew (featuring *-h* in the former and *-t* in the latter). The inconsistency of EMH writers is best explained by their patterns of exposure to the two variants. In language instruction, clear preference was given to biblical grammar (Goldenberg 1996, 161–2), and therefore to the suffix *-h*. For example, Ben Zeev's *talmud lašon ʕivri* ('the study of the Hebrew language,' first published in 1796), which was the most popular grammar book throughout the nineteenth century, presents two variants of the feminine participle in the active and middle-voice biblical verb templates (i.e., *qotla/qotelet*, *niqtala/niqtelet*, *meqatla/meqatelet*, *maqtila/maqtelet*, *mitqatla/mitqatelet*), but only one option for passive feminine participles, namely the variant with *-h* (i.e., *mequtala* and *muqtala*), making no mention of the *-t* variant that emerged in the later linguistic stages. However, although the *-t* forms were not learned as part of the formal study of grammar, they were routinely encountered in reading, and were therefore extremely familiar to writers and presumably dominant in their consciousness. In the case of the active and middle-voice forms, there was nothing to dissuade writers from using the suffix *-t* that naturally came to their minds, as the rabbinic preference for this suffix was not at odds with biblical grammar. But in the case of the passive forms, writers felt compelled to rely as much as possible on the biblical suffix rather than on *-t*, which was salient in later corpora. Habit pulled in one direction, encouraging a preference for *-t*, while grammatical consciousness pulled in the other, favoring *-h*. Hence the greater tendency to alternate between the two suffixes in the case of the passive forms.

As Hebrew began to be used on a daily basis, this state of affairs rapidly changed, and the free alternation gave way to a systematic division of labor between *-t* and *-h* based on morphological category. The suffix *-t* became the default option in most categories, but *-h* was adopted in the causative *hifʕil* template and in the few other categories where Rabbinic Hebrew employed it. Textual evidence indicates that this regular pattern was not established by professional writers but first spread to the language of ordinary speakers using Hebrew for everyday purposes (Reshef 2009, 155–7). As noted by Milroy (1999, 37), standardization often originates in the need for efficient communication, a factor that has greater impact on pragmatic texts than on literary ones, which tend to conserve tradition. Accordingly, the systematic distribution was first evident in utilitarian texts, geared toward practical ends, which largely abandoned the nonstandard suffix by the early 1920s. Conversely, literary texts and other language-conscientious written genres preserved the alternation for many more years (Reshef 2015, 181–3).

In this sense, the feminine participle suffixes differ conspicuously from the medieval features discussed above, which disappeared very quickly from all genres in the early 1920s. This difference is best explained by the historical origins of the linguistic features involved. Usages originating in Medieval Hebrew were at odds with the notions of correctness, which were based on the classical models (Mor 2017). As a result, features recognized by users as medieval were often readily discarded as soon as the speech community started to form, and disappeared quite abruptly from all types of text. In the case of the feminine participle suffixes, standardization was more gradual since both options originated in the classical layers, and genres sensitive to aesthetic or ideological considerations preserved the outdated forms for stylistic reasons. According to the cultural norms of the period, rich, flowery language was considered an asset in educated usage. As a matter of fact, this was not limited to literary texts; the stylistic preferences of individual writers often led them to employ elevated style in non-belletristic writing as well (Blanc 1957, 299; Rabin 1958, 13; Even-Zohar 1996, Reshef 2015, 35–38). The "old-fashioned" feminine suffixes were therefore maintained for a while as a stylistic marker of elevated language, mostly in literary style, but occasionally also in other text types (Reshef 2009, 155–7; Reshef 2015, 181–3).

A similar transition from diversity to uniformity by choosing between inherited variants can be seen in the case of the direct object marker *ʔet*. At first glance, the present-day grammar seems to conform very closely to the rules of classical (i.e., Biblical and Rabbinic) Hebrew. In Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew, definite direct objects are marked as a rule with the particle *ʔet*, although omission is also sometimes found, particularly in poetic Biblical texts (Zewi 2013). The same is true for contemporary Hebrew: definite direct objects are preceded by *ʔet* (Danon 2013a), except in very limited contexts that are strongly marked for elevated style (Glinert 1989, §15.5.1; Botwinik 2013). However, the continuity between these two linguistic states is merely apparent, for the near-obligatory status of *ʔet* with definite direct objects is in fact a relatively recent development, dating back to the early phases of standardization.

In EMH, the use of *ʔet* with definite direct objects was highly inconsistent. Following a practice that developed in Medieval Hebrew under the influence of contact languages that did not mark accusative case with a particle (Rabin 2000, 117; Avinery 1964, 57–61), the particle was often omitted by writers. As shown by the examples below, *ʔet* was freely omitted in various contexts, regardless of word order, type of definite marker, and type of noun phrase serving as object. This could occur whether the direct object followed the predicate (4a-d) or preceded it (4e-f); whether the nominal was marked for definiteness by an article (4a, c, e) or an attached possessive pronoun (4b, d); and whether it was a standalone noun or a construct chain. Omission was

less frequent but still possible with other categories, such as demonstratives or proper nouns (4f):

(4)

(a) *laxen* *šalaħ* ***ha-kesef*** *le-yade-nu*
therefore send.PST.3MSG the-money to-hands.ours

"He therefore sent the money to us" (*hacvi*, 1909)

(b) *hu* *ʕoved* ***ʔadmat-o*** *be-ʔofen* *primitivi*
he cultivate.PRS.3MSG land-his in-manner primitive

"He cultivates his land in a primitive manner" (*hapoʕel hacaʕir*, 1907)

(c) *ha-patriarx* *hibiaʕ* ***todat*** ***ha-ʔarmenim***
the-patriarch express.PST.3MSG thanks.CS the-Armenians
*le-ha-ʔapifyor*
to-the-pope

"The Patriarch conveyed the Armenians' gratitude to the Pope" (*hamelic*, 1895)

(d) *šam* *yimkeru* ***pri*** ***ʕavodat-am***
there sell.FUT.3MPL fruit.CS labor-their

"They will sell there the fruit of their labor" (*hapoʕel hacaʕir*, 1907)

(e) ***ħaci*** ***ha-kesef*** *natan* *la-hem* *miyad*
half.CS the-money give.PST.3MSG to-them immediately

"He immediately gave them half the sum" (*hamelic*, 1903)

(f) ***ʔerec*** ***yisraʔel*** *niqaħ* *be-xoaħ*
land.CS Israel take.FUT.1PL by-force

"The Land of Israel will be taken by force" (*hazman*, 1905)

As standardization proceeded, the pronounced inconsistency in the use of *ʔet* that had characterized EMH disappeared quite rapidly from ordinary writing. By the early 1920s, pragmatic texts systematically distinguished between definite and indefinite direct objects (Reshef 2015, 78–9). However, as in the case of the feminine participle suffixes, the new standard did not spread immediately

to all text types, and the omission of *ʔet* continued to serve as a stylistic marker of elevated language (Reshef 2004, 181–5). In fact, this practice acquired particular prestige since influential prestate leader David Ben-Gurion (who later became Israel's first prime minister) consciously adopted the omission of *ʔet* as a marker of his unique personal style (see, for example, Ben-Gurion 1953, 3). Nevertheless, standardization eventually prevailed, and in contemporary Modern Hebrew *ʔet* is no longer omitted before definite direct objects, except in some fixed expressions and as a marker of highly literary style.

The abrupt disappearance of well-established EMH practices may be observed not only in grammar but also in the lexicon. While many lexical items common in EMH became part of standard Modern Hebrew, others did not. Many became extinct (see Ornan 1996 for a comprehensive list of such words), while others were retained, but with different meaning. In the latter case, the original meaning was usually taken over by a different lexical item, often (though not always) derived from the same root but in a different nominal template. A few examples of particularly common EMH usages that underwent this process are presented in table 2.1 below (for an extended discussion, see Reshef 2015).

Despite their initial prevalence, these words dropped out of use in their EMH meanings, and by the 1920s they were already outdated, like the grammatical features discussed above. The spread of Hebrew as a vernacular in daily use was thus accompanied by a marked transformation in the status of an entire set of formerly common usages. Their salience in EMH did not necessarily secure them a place in the emerging standard, and many of them were either totally discarded or became stylistically marked within a very short time.

The extent of these changes marks the 1920s as a major turning point in the early development of Modern Hebrew. Up to the 1920s, Hebrew was in partial use, mostly by L2 speakers, and as a result, linguistic habits were particularly amenable to change and could even reverse their course of development.

**Table 2.1 Some Common EMH Lexical Items and Their MH Equivalents**

| *Lexical Item* | *EMH Meaning* | *MH Meanings* | *MH Equivalent* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *hofaʕa* | phenomenon | showing up, appearance, look, entertainment show | *tofaʕa* phenomenon |
| *teʕuda* | (a) purpose, mission (b) destination | document, diploma | (a) *yiʕud* purpose, mission (b) *yaʕad* destination |
| *yiħus* | attitude, relationship | attribution, pedigree | *yaħas* attitude, relationship |
| *ħizayon* | theater play | vision, spectacle | *maħaze* theater play (or, more commonly, *hacaga*) |
| *ciyur* | (verbal) description | drawing, painting | *teʔur* (verbal) description |

Once a social basis for a Hebrew speech community began to form, this was no longer possible. Constant use and the pressing need for efficient communication pushed toward stabilization, and accelerated standardization process soon affected many facets of the linguistic system and significantly diminished the scope of variability compared to the former period.

As this study aims to show, a detailed examination of linguistic change in this seminal period sheds considerable light on the question of continuity in the emergence of Modern Hebrew. A crucial insight is that these changes often created an appearance of continuity with the classical stages of Hebrew where no continuity actually exists. Although standardization mainly comprised the adoption of well-established EMH practices, it occasionally involved a retreat from former trends, or a reversal of changes that had been dominant in the development of Hebrew up to that point. These nonlinear processes caused contemporary Hebrew to resemble the classical models more closely than EMH, and obscured the difference between true and apparent continuity in its evolution. This distinction will be addressed in detail in the following chapters. First, however, the status of EMH as a distinct linguistic phase will be further established by discussing some typical features of the speech of its first native speakers—namely, individuals born in the early twentieth century, who acquired Hebrew from infancy in an EMH environment.

## 3. SOME TYPICAL FEATURES OF SPOKEN EMH

In contrast to data on written EMH, which exist in abundance, the information available about the character of the budding Hebrew speech is limited, since no recordings or linguistic studies were conducted during this seminal phase in the formation of the speech community. Therefore, almost all the evidence about spoken usage before the mid-twentieth century is gleaned from prescriptive comments by language planners (Reshef 2013a). But since language planners tend to focus on specific phenomena with the aim of discouraging them, the information they provide on spoken usage is very partial. Moreover, since prescriptive activity gained momentum only in the late 1920s (Mor forthcoming), it does not refer to the earliest stages of Hebrew speech but only to later spoken Hebrew, which was already standardized to some extent (Reshef 2013a). The Hebrew of the early speakers, prior to the onset of standardization, is therefore largely unknown and may never be reconstructed in full (compare Gordon 1998 about the study of the origins of New Zealand English).

Nevertheless, in addition to comments in the early prescriptive literature, another source of information has now become available, thanks to the recent

discovery of historical recordings documenting spontaneous speech (Gonen, Silber-Varod and Reshef 2017; Reshef and Gonen 2018). The tapes were made in the early 1960s, soon after the invention of reel-to-reel recording, that is, some fifty years after the first cadre of native speakers started to form. Hence, they obviously do not reflect all the initial linguistic practices of that generation. However, since older speakers tend to be relatively conservative and resist linguistic change, these tapes include some traces of first-generation spoken usage.

The tapes reflect a clear generational difference between the speech habits of older speakers, who were born in the first quarter of the twentieth century and were middle-aged at the time of recording, and younger speakers born from the 1930s onward. The older speakers acquired their language skills at Hebrew-speaking educational facilities within a largely non-Hebrew-speaking adult environment (Reshef forthcoming). Their speech habits as adults thus reflect their exposure, during the critical years of language acquisition, to a linguistic state marked by considerable variance. By contrast, the next generation grew up in a speech community for whom Hebrew was a fully fledged vernacular, and their speech habits are not only more uniform but also strikingly close to the contemporary spoken standard (Bar-Adon 1959).

This is not to say that contemporary Hebrew does not exhibit a degree of variation, like any other spoken language. But in the case of the tapes, some of the variation can be traced back to the rivalry between variant forms that coexisted in EMH (Reshef and Gonen 2017; Reshef and Gonen 2019). The first Hebrew-speaking children acquired their language skills from L2 adults who learned it from written sources and were strongly influenced by the contact languages. These children were therefore exposed to highly heterogeneous linguistic input, which they restructured into a coherent linguistic system (Blanc 1968; 1989, 40; and compare to Aboh 2019). According to studies of dialect mixing, in such circumstances first-generation speech tends to retain a considerable degree of variation, whereas a distinct local variety usually crystallizes only in the following generation (Trudgill 1986, 195). Hebrew certainly conforms to this observation, for the process of leveling and selection was not completed within one generation. This is evident from the tapes, in which the first-generation speakers still exhibit alternations that are altogether absent from the Hebrew of speakers born in later years.

These alternations can be traced back to EMH speech based on historical considerations. One type of alternation is between rival forms inherited from the classical linguistic stages, only one of which eventually became standard. In some of these cases, the initial variation manifested in writing as well as speech, and therefore the gradual decline of the outdated form is well attested in written corpora.

A notable example is the two inherited forms of the middle-voice verbal template *hitpaʕel/nitpaʕel*. From the historical viewpoint, the form *hitpaʕel* was replaced by *nitpaʕel* in the transition from Biblical to Rabbinic Hebrew, but in Medieval Hebrew, Premodern Hebrew and EMH both forms were used side by side. In EMH the distribution of the two forms was affected by a subtle functional consideration: *nitpaʕel* was associated with low agentivity, whereas *hitpaʕel* was unmarked for agentivity and therefore occurred with a wider range of roots, realizing the various possible meanings of the middle voice (i.e., reflexive, reciprocal, inchoative, or passive). Despite this, *nitpaʕel* was statistically more common than *hitpaʕel* due to the very high frequency of certain low-agentivity verbs that tended to take the *nitpaʕel* form (e.g., *nitqabel* "to be received, to be accepted" or *nitbaqeš* "to be requested," see Widgerson 2016, 198–201; Reshef 2009, 157). During standardization, the more versatile *hitpaʕel* became the default form in standard Modern Hebrew.

Although *nitpaʕel* has not disappeared, its distribution in present-day language is limited. It occurs only in elevated registers with certain low-agentivity verbs, and even in this environment it is not very common (Shatil 2009; Bolozky 2010). The dominant form in all registers is *hitpaʕel*, which can replace *nitpaʕel* in any given context. However, in the 1960s recordings *nitpaʕel* forms are occasionally used by several first-generation speakers, indicating that they are familiar with *nitpaʕel* not only as a written form but also as a spoken one (Gonen and Reshef 2016, 66–67). For the sake of transparency, the transliteration of the recorded utterances in 5 and throughout the rest of the chapter reflects spelling rather than pronunciation, and production phenomena such as hesitations or false starts have been omitted:

(5)

(a) *ha-yadayim* *šel-i* ***nitmalʔu*** *pcaʕim*
the-hands POSS-1SG fill.PST.3PL wounds

"My hands became covered with sores" (Avraham Saragosti, born 1903)

(b) *be-ʔezešehu* *ʔofen* ***nitgalgelu*** *ha-dvarim [. . .]*
in-some manner roll.PST.3MPL the-things

"Somehow events unfolded (in a certain way)" (Dov Yirmiyah, born 1914)

(c) *maħalat* *ha-ʕenayim* *šel-o* ***nitgalta***
illness.CS the-eyes POSS-3MSG discover.PST.3FSG
*kvar* *ʔaz*
already then

"His eye disease had already been discovered at that time" (Aya Meir, born 1925)

(d) *lo* ***nitʔafšer*** *le-ʔanašim [. . .]* *bne* *maʕamad*
NEG be.possible.PST.3MSG to-people members.CS class.CS
*ha-poʕalim [. . .]* *lilmod* *be-ʔoto* *bet.sefer*
the-workers to.learn in-that school

"Working class children were not able to learn at that school" (Meir Davidson, born 1916, immigrated to Palestine in 1921)

Another example of competing forms inherited from the classical language involves past tense forms of middle-*yod/waw* roots in the verbal template *hifʕil*. In the biblical paradigm, the vowel /o/ is inserted between stem and suffix in the singular and plural first- and second-person forms, for example, *hexin* "prepare.PST.3MSG">*haxin-**o**-ta* "prepare.PST.2MSG." In Rabbinic Hebrew, by contrast, the suffix is attached directly to the stem, that is, *hexan-ta* "prepare.PST.2MSG." These shorter, more regular forms are the standard in Modern Hebrew, both written and spoken. The only traces of the biblical form are the two fixed expressions *haxinoti* "prepare.PST.1SG" and *havinoti* "understand. PST.1SG," which are restricted to elevated style (Saidon 2018, 309–11).

The tapes suggest that the biblical paradigm was initially represented in speech as well as writing, at least to some extent (Gonen and Reshef 2016, 70). For example, one of the older speakers consistently uses the biblical inflection with three verbs: *hexin* "to prepare," *hevin* "to understand," and *heqim* "to set up, to found." He uses the biblical forms not only in first person singular, like the rare relics of this usage that occasionally appear in present-day Hebrew, but also in first person plural, for example,

(6)
(a) ***haqimonu*** *ʔet* *ha-qibuc* *šel-anu*
found.PST.1PL ACC the-kibbuts POSS-1PL

"We founded our kibbutz" (Dov Yirmiyah, born 1914)

(b) ***haxinonu*** *ʔet* *ha-mexoniyot* *šel-anu* *li-fliša*
prepare.PST.1PL ACC the-cars POSS-1PL to-invasion
*me-ha-yam*
from-the-sea

"We prepared our vehicles for an invasion from the sea" (Dov Yirmiyah, born 1914)

Second person forms do not occur in any of the tapes, but this is probably due to the lack of suitable contexts, not to their absence from spontaneous speech. Middle-aged speakers in present-day Israel still remember forms such as *havinotem* "understand.PST.2PL" or *haxinota* "prepare.PST.2MSG" in speech by grandparents or teachers born in early twentieth century.

In the two cases discussed so far, the competing forms are spelled differently, so the initial alternation between them is clearly discernible also in written corpora. In other cases, the evidence of the tapes is particularly important, since the differences between the competing forms are not reflected in writing. Hebrew orthography is essentially consonantal, and while the vowels can be fully represented using a system of diacritics (*niqqud*), most types of text do not include them (Dan 2013; Aharoni 2013). In standard, non-vocalized spelling the vowels /i/, /o/, and /u/ are only partially indicated using the so-called *matres lectionis*, and /a/ and /e/ are only marked at the end of words. In cases where alternative pronunciations of a single form look identical in writing, the tapes provide unique evidence of their coexistence in speech among the first-generation speakers.

A simple example is the alternation between *qacar* and *qacer* "short," spelled identically as a three-letter word (*QCR*) in non-vocalized writing. Both pronunciations are well-attested in the reading traditions of rabbinic texts (Peretz 1965, 170–1; Sharvit 1974, 238; Sharvit 2006, 216–17; Cohen 2012, 227–8; Reshef 1996, 510), and following an initial period in which they existed side by side in the budding Hebrew speech (Weiman 1975, 54), *qacar* was selected as the sole form in Modern Hebrew. Consequently, contemporary speakers no longer produce *qacer* in spontaneous speech, though many of them are familiar with the form from older songs and poems (e.g., *ha-balada ʕal ha-seʕar ha-ʔarox ve-ha-seʕar ha-qacer* "the ballad about the long hair and the short hair" by poet Yehuda Amichai).

The tapes indicate the frequent use of *qacer* by first-generation speakers. The speakers quoted in 7a-b consistently pronounced the word in this manner, but others alternated between the two forms, even within a single expression (as in 7c-d):

(7)

(a) *ze* *haya* *zman* ***qacer*** *ʔaħare* *siyum* *ha-milħama*
it was time short after end.CS DEF-war

"It was a short time after the end of the war" (Aya Meir, born 1925)

(b) *hociʔu* *ʔet* *ħel* *ha-raglim* *šel-anu*
take-out.PST.3PL ACC corps.CS DEF-infantry POSS-1PL
*le-nofeš* ***qacer***
to-recreation short

"Our infantry received a short recreation break" (Avraham Yafe, born 1923)

(c) *kaʕavor zman* ***qacer*** *gam heħlafti ʔet ha-more*
after time.CS short also replace.PST.1SG ACC DEF.teacher

"After a short while I also switched to a different teacher" (Dov Yirmiyah, born 1914)

(d) *ʔaħare zman* ***qacar*** *ha-yeħida ha-zot hitparqa*
after time short DEF-unit DEF-DEM disassemble.PST.3FSG

"After a short while that (military) unit was dissolved" (Dov Yirmiyah, born 1914)

A more complex case of competing pronunciations originating in Rabbinic Hebrew is that of the suffix *-ay/-aʔi*. Orthography allows both readings of the same consonantal spelling, and they are both well-attested in ancient vocalized manuscripts and in oral reading traditions of rabbinic texts (Bar-Asher 1980, 43–45; Cohen 2012, 228–9; Eldar 1979, 164–5). Prescriptivists attempted to establish a distinction between the two pronunciations in Modern Hebrew, applying the suffix *-ay* to occupations (e.g., *ʕitonay* "journalist") and the suffix *-aʔi* to adjectives associated with the same occupations (e.g., *ʕitonaʔi* "journalistic"). Actual practice follows these dictates only partially, and *-aʔi* is often applied to occupations, alongside *-ay* (e.g., *ʕitonaʔi/ʕitonay* "journalist," *ħaqlaʔi/ħaqlay* "farmer" and so on, see Academy of the Hebrew Language n.d.-ħaqlay).

While complete uniformity has not been achieved to this day, the tapes show that the suffix *-aʔi* was initially much more common than it is today. This pronunciation appears repeatedly in words that are now usually pronounced with *-ay*, for example,

(8)

(a) *hu haya [. . .] baħur meʔod bari,* ***sportaʔi***
he be.PST.3SG guy very healthy, sportsman

"He was a very healthy guy, an athlete" (Avraham Yafe, born 1923)

(b) *hu haya* ***ʔaħraʔi*** *ʕal ha-maxširim*
he be.PST.3SG responsible on DEF-instruments

"He was responsible for the instruments" (Aya Meir, born 1925)

Several additional profession words are pronounced in the tapes with *-aʔi*, such as *texnaʔi* "technician," *ʔalħutaʔi* "wireless operator," *ʕitonaʔi*

"journalist," *ħaqlaʔi* "farmer," whereas the pronunciation *-ay* is attested only once in this context, in the word *muziqay* "musician." Moreover, the *-aʔi* pronunciation is also extended to forms in the *qattay* template that do not actually feature this suffix: *qanaʔi* "jealous" (instead of *qanay*), *rašaʔi* "allowed, permitted" (instead of *rašay*), and *banaʔi* "builder" (instead of *banay*). In contemporary Hebrew the *-aʔi* pronunciation has grown rare in nouns in the *qattay* template. Some of the abovementioned forms are still heard occasionally, but they sound old-fashioned to younger speakers, and the pronunciation with *-ay* has become the norm.

In the cases discussed so far, the variation attested in EMH reflected an initial state of indecision between two ancient forms, both of them familiar from the reading traditions. However, traditional pronunciation did not necessarily reflect the original Hebrew forms, but was sometimes based on later developments within the liturgical language. One such case is the form *sxar*, originally the construct state of *saxar* "wages, reward, retribution," but used also as a standalone form by Ashkenazi Jews. The form was salient due to its inclusion in the weekly Shabbat prayer, in the expression *bisxar ze* "as a retribution for that" (Avinery 1976, 139), and consequently entered into the vocabulary of Yiddish, the spoken vernacular of Ashkenazi Jews (Berggrün 1995, 213). Its initial adoption in EMH speech is demonstrated in 9 from one of the recorded L1 speakers:

(9)

| *ʕavadti* | *be-ʔoto* | *zman* | *be-kibucim* | *ʔaħerim* | *bi-**sxar*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| work.PST.1SG | at-that | time | in-kibbutzim | others | on-wages |

"At the time I was working in other kibbutzim for a salary" (Dov Yirmiyah, born 1914)

A much more common usage, still occasionally produced by elderly speakers, is *tekef* "immediately, in a moment" (instead of *texef*), also reflecting a late development in the reading traditions initially adopted in speech (Berggrün 1995, 82–3), for example,

(10)

| ***tekef*** | *hayinu* | *racim* |
|---|---|---|
| immediately | be.PST.3PL | run.PRS.MPL |

"We would immediately run" (Avraham Saragosti, born 1903)

The variability of EMH speech was enhanced by the opacity of Hebrew orthography, which allows multiple readings of the same consonantal

sequence (Reshef and Gonen 2017). This applied both to competing inherited forms and to multiple possible readings of neologisms. In both word classes, the inconsistency diminished significantly over time, but complete standardization was achieved only in certain cases, while in others a degree of variability remains to this day.

A case of the former kind, where one of the variants became obsolete, is that of sentence adverbials preceded by *ke-*, "as," an innovation of Modern Hebrew, for example, *kanirʔe* "probably" (literally "as it seems"), *kamuvan* "of course" (literally "as is understood"), *karagil* "usually" (literally "as is usual"). Today the prefix in these expressions is uniformly pronounced *ka-*, indicating that they are perceived as definite, but initially this pronunciation alternated with *ke-*, reflecting uncertainty about the definiteness of the expressions (Peretz 1965, 264). In the tapes, the obsolete pronunciation is still occasionally evident in the speech of first-generation speakers, for example,

(11)

(a) *lemaʕase* *hem* ***kenirʔe*** *lo* *hitħatnu*
in.fact they probably NEG get.married.PST.3PL
*meʕolam*
never

"In fact, they apparently never got married" (Avraham Yafe, born 1923)

(b) ***kemuvan*** *še-hikarti* *ʔet* *yigal* *alon*
of.course REL-know.PST.1SG ACC Yigal Alon

"Of course I knew Yigal Alon (a famous military commander)" (Yochanan Zaid, born 1920)

(c) ***keragil*** *be-miqrim* *ka-ʔelu* *hixnisu* *ʔotanu*
as.usual in-cases as-these admit.PST.3PL us
*ʔet* *ha-yeladim* *li-txum* *ha-qešer*
ACC the-kids to-field.CS DEF.communication

"As is usual in cases like these, we kids were brought into the field of communications" (Avraham Yafe, born 1923)

A case where some variability persists to this day is presented by certain feminine nouns in *m*-initial templates, for example, *mispara/maspera* "hair salon" or *miglaša/magleša* (often pronounced *magleča*) "slide." However, the tapes indicate that the variability in this word class was initially much greater, because the recorded speakers produced several forms that have since become obsolete, such as *madrexa* "sidewalk" (instead of *midraxa*) or *maxleqa* "department, unit, platoon" (instead of *maxlaqa*) (see Gonen and Reshef 2018; Gonen 2019).

In sum, the recordings from the 1960s indicate that, at the time, the Hebrew of first-generation speakers still displayed multiple features originating in the earliest phase of spoken Hebrew. While these features appear only sporadically, and usually side by side with their standard alternatives, they are shared by multiple speakers. Moreover, in most cases their former presence in speech is also evident from comments by language planners, who witnessed the spread of Hebrew as a spoken language and sought to direct its development.

Just like the written phenomena discussed in the previous section, these spoken phenomena demonstrate the heterogeneous character of EMH. The first L1 children, who acquired Hebrew in early childhood prior to the impact of standardization, restructured the heterogeneous input provided by their L2 caregivers into a coherent linguistic system. But as often happens in such circumstances, this process was not completed within a single generation (Trudgill et al. 2000; Kerswill and Williams 2000; Reshef forthcoming). As restructuring continued in the following generation, some linguistic practices of the first-generation L1 speakers gradually became old fashioned and were discarded by the generation of their children, or occasionally of their grandchildren. However, these features were retained, at least to some extent, in the speech of the first-generation L1 speakers themselves. As reflected in the tapes, in middle age these speakers still preserved some EMH speech habits they had acquired in their early childhood.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The fundamental shift in the sociolinguistic status of Hebrew that occurred as a speech community began to form had a significant effect on the structure of the language. The exponential expansion of usage domains during the early 1920s triggered standardization processes that reshaped many aspects of the linguistic system within a few short years. This chapter focused on one major facet of these processes: the considerable decline in the degree of variability in both written and spoken usage as compared to the preceding period.

In written Hebrew, the integration of the various historical strata into a single system emerged during the transition, at the end of the Haskalah period, from biblical classicism to a more flexible outlook that accepted all previous layers of Hebrew as legitimate sources for revitalizing and modernizing the language (see chapter 1). This change of norms caused EMH to be highly diversified, since the linguistic heritage offered writers and speakers a wide array of options to choose from, in both the grammar and the lexicon, and the choice between them was initially based on individual style. The influence of the contact languages generated further diversity.

This state of diversity persisted as long as the language was used by individuals rather than by a speech community. In the first few decades after the birth of the speech revival idea, the adoption of Hebrew as a spoken language was limited to a small group of enthusiasts who learned the language from the written sources and differed in their level of proficiency (Morag 1993; Harshav 1993; Reshef 2011). These individuals were socially isolated, and could communicate in Hebrew only with each other, or with children who learned Hebrew in school, and later also in kindergarten (Sichel and Bar-Ziv Levy 2018; Reshef forthcoming). The speech habits of these enthusiasts were highly heterogeneous, reflecting their different backgrounds, preferences, and linguistic ideologies. However, as Hebrew started to spread as a regular means of communication, first among embryonic nuclei of speakers and later in larger social circles (Harshav 1993; Reshef 2013b), the initial state of extensive diversity underwent considerable change.

In the small, closely-knit Jewish population of Palestine, the constant use of Hebrew generated an accelerated process of standardization, and starting in the early 1920s the linguistic system became increasingly more stable (Lipschütz 1920; Avinery 1929; Reshef 2015). As noted by leading Hebraist Shelomo Morag, after World War I "the general outline of standard spoken usage had already stabilized based on the way Hebrew was spoken by the 'veterans'" (Morag 2004, 324). The extreme variation of EMH was soon replaced by a state of stable variation, namely variation that can persist for generations without precipitating change (Guy 2011, 179). This dramatic change was able to occur so rapidly because it did not necessarily involve the adoption of new usages, but first and foremost the rejection of previous ones. While the adoption of innovations can be quite slow, the rejection of usages is a simpler process, and since standardization was to a great extent a matter of choosing between available options, it could proceed very quickly. Within a few years, the distinction between standard and nonstandard features crystallized, forming clear distinctions of register, an essential condition for the development of Hebrew into a fully fledged language capable of meeting all the communication needs of the newly formed speech community (Rosén 1992; Reshef and Helman 2009).

As opposed to the swift stabilization of the standard register, the rate at which specific outdated features faded was not uniform, and was greatly affected by their historical origins. Features recognized by speakers as patently medieval tended to vanish very quickly from all text types, regardless of their former popularity. By contrast, classical features that were not integrated in the newly formed standard tended to wane more gradually, and persisted for years as markers of an elevated linguistic register. Diachronic factors therefore played a significant role in standardization, and often had a strong effect on the fate of linguistic features.

The next chapter focuses on another salient group of common EMH usages that played a role in the emergence of register distinctions, but this time not distinctions between the standard and elevated registers, but between the standard and the colloquial registers. It will be shown that some of the most common features of present-day colloquial Hebrew did not originate in the spoken language at all; rather, they are nonclassical features that developed in writing during the long interim period in which Hebrew was not a spoken language. These features were highly familiar to first-generation speakers due to their prevalence in certain popular written genres, and as a result were easily incorporated in speech. Unlike the phenomena discussed in the present chapter, they were not abandoned following standardization, but turned into typical markers of colloquial usage. Their discussion, too, sheds important light on the difference between true and apparent continuity in the emergence of Modern Hebrew. Since they deviate from the classical models, studies of contemporary Modern Hebrew usually regard them as indicators of change. As opposed to this accepted view, we suggest analyzing them as examples of a hitherto overlooked facet of continuity in the emergence of Modern Hebrew.

*Chapter 3*

# The Role of Inherited Nonclassical Elements in the Emergence of a Colloquial Register

## 1. CHANGE OR CONTINUITY? A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE ORIGINS OF SOME COLLOQUIAL USAGES

The first systematic attempt to analyze the revival of Hebrew and describe its outcomes was published in 1920 by Eliezer Meir Lipschütz (1879–1946), a well-known public figure and a member of the Hebrew Language Committee (Lipschütz 1920). One of his most intriguing remarks relates to "certain linguistic features prevalent among the uneducated and certain linguistic errors that are difficult to fight" (ibid. 24). These he regards as relics of the pre-revival period, during which the ethnically diversified Jewish population of Palestine made limited use of Hebrew as a lingua franca. According to his testimony, certain characteristics of the budding Hebrew speech could be traced back to that lingua franca, which arose from the need of the various ethnic groups to communicate with each other (ibid. 23, 24, 31).

Sadly, Lipschütz does not provide specific examples of the usages to which he refers, and no other historical source records them either. The first comprehensive accounts describing concrete features of spoken usage were published in the late 1920s and early 1930s (e.g., Avinery 1929; Garbell 1930), but they focused on condemning features that were incompatible with the classical models, without discussing their origins, their distribution in speech, or how long they had been known to exist. However, some of the gaps in our knowledge can be filled based on sporadic evidence found in written sources (Reshef 2013a; cf. Gordon 1998), and although this evidence enables only a partial reconstruction of early spoken usage, it indicates that this spoken Hebrew was surprisingly similar to the current colloquial register, at least from the 1920s onward (Reshef 2005; Reshef 2013a). The spoken language,

then, developed its own distinctive features practically from its inception, simultaneously with the formation of the speech community.

This chapter focuses on the early stage of this distinct colloquial register, and suggests that some of its major characteristics were not the result of spontaneous structural innovations by speakers, but were based on preexisting features of the written language. As will be shown below, multiple features currently associated with spoken usage are well attested in textual corpora from the pre-revival period and the EMH period, indicating that they originally formed in writing and were transferred into speech by the first generation of speakers. In the literature, these features are usually attributed to the dynamics of speech, that is, to forces known to be involved in processes of language change, such as analogy, simplification, paradigm leveling, information structure, and so on. The evidence presented in this chapter challenges these assumptions and suggests that these features of spoken Hebrew represent continuity with preexisting linguistic habits, rather than recent change.

Nonclassical usages were well known to anyone familiar with medieval and premodern written texts, and due to their saliency in popular genres such as religious books, newspapers, or Hasidic tales, they were liable to influence the oral production of L2 speakers who learned Hebrew from the written sources. This applies both to Jews who used Hebrew as a lingua franca prior to the revival of Hebrew speech and to speakers who adopted Hebrew in adulthood as a main means of communication for ideological reasons. The first Hebrew-speaking children heard these usages from their elders, and while they spontaneously rejected obvious errors that occurred in adult L2 speech, they picked up in early childhood those usages that were linguistically motivated and were compatible with the grammatical structure of Hebrew as they understood it. Consciousness of the nonclassical character of some of these common usages usually came later in life, with the acquisition of literacy. Exposure to school instruction, which was highly influenced by ideals of language planning and correctness, blocked the incorporation of these nonclassical usages in the emerging written standard (see also the discussion in chapter 2). But daily speech was more resistant to correctness considerations than careful, planned language, especially where the prescriptive demands contradicted the natural dynamics of speech. Features that would have most likely emerged in speech anyway due to natural processes of change were likely to be retained in spoken usage, leading to the early formation of register differentiation between the standard and colloquial language. According to the analysis presented here, the colloquial register did not develop from scratch as Hebrew was revernacularized; rather, some of its basic features derived from continuity with preexisting linguistic habits that originally emerged in writing.

This suggestion underscores the need to distinguish between true and apparent continuity as a prerequisite for a fruitful discussion of the formation of Modern Hebrew and its relationship with the previous layers of the language. Elsewhere in this book it is shown that apparent continuity with the classical strata may be illusory. That is, it may in fact result from the reversal of former trends that had initially opened up a gap between the classical models and the Hebrew of the first-generation L2 speakers. The present chapter tackles this issue from the opposite direction, arguing that certain colloquial features which evidently deviate from the classical models are not the outcome of spontaneous change; rather, they are based on direct continuity with the non-belletristic written Hebrew used by Jews in the pre-revival period, particularly in East European Ashkenazi communities. Kahn's studies of these practices (e.g., Kahn 2015; Kahn 2018) demonstrate that the various popular genres in pre-revival written Hebrew shared certain deviations from classical Hebrew grammar. Here we focus on some features that these genres share not only with one another but also with contemporary colloquial Hebrew.

Many of these features are not recent innovations, but date back to Medieval Hebrew. However, their historical origins will not concern us here; the discussion will focus on their presence in the Hebrew of the period immediately before the revival. The crucial factor responsible for their integration in the contemporary language seems to be their centrality in productive language use, as indicated by texts produced during those seminal years. Section 2 of this chapter will present grammatical similarities between contemporary speech and written production in the pre-revival and early revival periods, while section 3 will briefly discuss specific lexical items evident in both periods. The grammatical phenomena presented in section 2 involve entire categories, and since they reflect quite ordinary, motivated linguistic processes, they may have arisen in speech regardless of the precedents in written language. However, their early integration in speech, as well as their continuous presence in written corpora, argue for an explanation based on continuity. In other words, these facts suggest that the phenomena in question were not created by young L1 speakers as the Hebrew vernacular took shape but originated in the earlier written linguistic habits of L2 speakers. The discussion of the lexical items in section 3 strongly supports this assumption as well, for the idiosyncratic character of the items discussed suggests that their presence in both linguistic stages is not incidental, but reflects the phenomenon of transferring particularly common usages from writing into speech.

Given the relative scarcity of studies on the nonclassical strata of Hebrew, the features of written Hebrew in the period of interest—on the eve of the revival period and in the early revival stages—has to be established through direct examination of textual corpora reflecting non-belletristic written practices. For each phenomenon, the findings of this extensive research

are represented here by just two examples: one from the second half of the nineteenth century, indicating the distribution of the phenomenon in written pre-revival Hebrew, and the other from early-twentieth-century Palestine, indicating its distribution in the linguistic practices of the emerging speech community.

## 2. GRAMMATICAL FEATURES SHARED BY CONTEMPORARY COLLOQUIAL USAGE AND WRITTEN EMH

One of the most typical characteristics of contemporary colloquial Hebrew involves the position of the definite article in certain types of nominal expression. Generally speaking, the placement of the definite article (the attached particle *ha-*) in all registers of Modern Hebrew conforms to the rules of traditional Hebrew grammar, but in certain circumstances only written and formal language abide by these rules, whereas colloquial speech tends to deviate from them. A salient example involves the construct chain. The formal standard register conforms to classical grammar which, rather counterintuitively, attaches the definite article only to the last element in the construction, but in colloquial language the definite article often precedes the entire chain, as in the following example:

(1) Standard construction:
*bet* ***ha-****sefer* house.CS DEF-book, literally "book the-house," that is, "the school"
Colloquial construction:
***ha****-bet sefer* DEF-house.CS book, literally "the book house," that is, "the school"

The colloquial construction is usually explained by assuming that speakers perceive the construct chain as a single unit and therefore treat it like other nominal expressions and prefix the definite article to it (e.g., Berman 1978, 250; Agmon-Fruchtman 1982, 15; Glinert 1989, 27; Borochovsky Bar-Aba 2009, 239–41). A different view is taken by Doron and Meir (2013), who suggest that this practice is part of a broader change in the properties of the definite article in Modern Hebrew, reflected in other contexts as well. In any case, this construction was one of the earliest spoken phenomena that caught the eye of language planners. It is mentioned in the earliest known list of corrections, published by the Hebrew Language Committee in 1908 (Teller 1908), as well as in other early prescriptive publications (e.g., Avinery 1929, 203–4; Garbell 1930, 59).

However, despite its association with contemporary colloquial speech, this usage has in fact existed in written Hebrew for centuries. It is widely attested in various genres of written Hebrew since medieval times (e.g., Goshen-Gottstein 2006, 89–90; Rabin 2000, 86, 88; Kahn 2015, 60–61; Kahn 2018, 173–4), and it is well represented in our written corpora from the pre-revival period (as in 2a) and the early revival period (as in 2b):

(2)

(a) *raq* *baʕavur* *šte* *šanim* *ha-raʕot* *še-hayu*
only on.account.of two.CS years DEF-bad.FPL REL-be.PST.3PL
*baʔaħarona* *ʔeħaru* *leyased* ***ha-bate.sefer***
lately delay.PST.3PL to.found DEF-schools

"The establishment of the schools was delayed only because of the two recent bad years" (*halevanon*, 1869)

(b) *hinenu* *meʕirim* *b.a-ze* *ʔet* *ha-qahal*
we.hereby remark.PRS.PL with.DEF-DEM ACC the-public
*ha-nixbad* *ʕal* *tiv* ***ha-mey*** ***kolon*** *šel-anu*
the-honorable on quality the-water.CS Cologne POSS-1PL

"We hereby draw the attention of the honorable public to the quality of our cologne" (advertisement, *hapoʕel hacaʕir*, 1913)

Another (related) case in which colloquial Hebrew prefixes the definite article to an entire nominal expression, in deviation from classical grammar, involves numerals. In the standard language, a numeral accompanying a definite nominal expression appears in its bound (construct-state) form, preceding the noun, and the definite article is attached to the noun itself. But in colloquial Hebrew the free form of the numeral is often used and the article is often placed before it, for example,

(3) Standard construction:
*ʔarbaʕat* ***ha****-šavuʕot* four.CS DEF-weeks, literally "four the weeks," that is, "the four weeks"
Colloquial construction:
***ha****-ʔarbaʕa šavuʕot* DEF-four weeks "the four weeks"

The presence of this usage in speech was first mentioned in prescriptive literature from the late 1920s (Avinery 1929, 204). However, it is attested in various written genres in the pre-revival period (see, for example, Kahn 2015, 140–1), and the corpora reflect its continuous presence in the written

language throughout the modernization of Hebrew and its transformation into a vernacular, for example,

(4)

(a) *bemešex* ***ha-ševaʕ*** ***šanim*** *ʔašer* *hu* *ħay* *ʕal* *pne*
during DEF-seven years REL it live.PRS.3MSG on face.CS
*ha-ʔarec*
DEF-earth

"During the seven years of its existence" (*hamagid*, 1863)

(b) ***ha-ʔarbaʕa*** ***šavuʕot*** *ha-qcuvim* *l-ah*
the-four weeks REL-allotted.PL to-her

"The four weeks allotted to her" (*haħerut*, 1911)

A particularly common phenomenon in present-day colloquial Hebrew, also involving numerals, is the neglect of gender agreement between the numeral and the noun (Melnik 2013; Meir 2013). As the exact details of the phenomenon are complex, and the descriptions of it in the literature diverge (see, for example, Bolozky 1982; Ravid 1995b; Glinert 2005, 24, 140; Meir 2008; Melnik forthcoming), we will suffice with describing only some of its basic features that are directly relevant to the current discussion.

According to the rules of traditional Hebrew grammar, the gender (and definiteness) of the modified noun determine the form of the numeral. The numeral must agree with the noun in gender, and whereas an indefinite noun is modified by a numeral in the unbound form, a definite noun requires a numeral in the bound (construct-state) form. However, in spontaneous usage, speakers tend to use the unbound form of the numeral with all nouns, whether definite or indefinite. Moreover, they often pair masculine nouns with feminine numerals, for example, *šaloš yeladim* "three.F children.M," and, less frequently, feminine nouns with masculine numerals, for example, *šloša banot* "three.M girls" (see Gonen and Rubinstein 2015; Gonen and Rubinstein 2016). When the bound form is used, usually in formal registers, there is a clear preference for its masculine form even with feminine nouns, for example, *šlošet ha-banot* "three.M.CS DEF-girls" (rather than *šloš ha-banot* "three.F.CS DEF-girls"), thus again producing a gender mismatch.

The preference for the unbound form of numerals in colloquial speech, as well as the tendency to produce gender mismatch both in colloquial speech and more formal registers, is probably due to the complexity and relative opacity of the rules regarding numerals (for a detailed description see Melnik

forthcoming). According to prescriptive grammar, in addition to the structural difference between the definite and the indefinite constructions, the numerals 3 to 10 are subject to a different set of rules than the smaller and larger numbers, and are morphologically irregular due to an inversion of the masculine and feminine suffixes compared to the rest of the linguistic system. In this group, the feminine is morphologically unmarked (e.g., *šaloš* "three.F") while the masculine takes the suffix *-a* (*šloš-**a*** "three.M"), or *-t*, in the case of the bound form (*šlošet* "three.M.CS"). In all other environments, the masculine forms are morphologically unmarked, whereas the suffixes *-h* and *-t* are associated with the feminine forms (e.g., nouns: *dod* "uncle"/*dod-**a*** "aunt," *ħayal* "soldier.M"/*ħayel-**et*** "soldier.F"; adjectives: *ʔafor* "grey.M"/*ʔafor-**a*** "grey.F," *meluxlax* "dirty.M"/*meluxlex-**et*** "dirty.F"; verbs: *laqaħ* "take.PST.3MSG"/*laqħ-**a*** "take.PST.3MSG," *ʔoxel* "eat.PRS.3MSG"/*ʔoxel-**et*** "eat.PRS.3FSG").

The difficulty in mastering this complex set of rules is not peculiar to speakers of Modern Hebrew, but was apparently also experienced by Hebrew writers in previous historical stages. Deviating usages are occasionally found even in classical texts (see, for example, Sharvit 1995, 62; Shivtiel 2013), and their frequency increases considerably in Medieval Hebrew (Goshen-Gottstein 2006, 107–8). In nineteenth-century Eastern Europe, in the popular genre of Hasidic tales, the inherited rules of gender assignment were completely discarded in favor of new rules based on actual pronunciation (Kahn 2015, 136–9).

Considering these precedents, it is plausible to assume that no generation of Modern Hebrew speakers ever fully and consistently realized the traditional rules as they apply to the numerals (Gonen 2017). Indeed, from an early stage, language planners repeatedly commented on speakers' inability to implement them (e.g., Doljansky 1937, 46; Jabotinsky 1930, 37; Har-Zahav 1930, 33). The prevalence of the phenomenon in spontaneous speech is apparent not only from the number of comments but also from their occasionally hyperbolic tone, such as the statement by one of the prescriptivists that "*nobody* can really use them [=the numerals] in fluent speech without getting confused" (Jabotinsky 1950, 43, emphasis mine).

While the testimonies on spoken usage refer mainly to the free form of the numerals, written corpora consistently record gender mismatches in the bound forms as well, for example,

(5)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (a) | *marʔe* | *kol* | ***ʔarbaʕat*** | ***ragl-av*** | *lavan* |
| | sight.CS | all | four.M.CS | leg.FPL-POSS.3MSG | white |

"[The hamster's] four legs are all white" (*toldot hatevaʕ*, 1862 [cited from Ma'agarim, n.d.])

(b) *beyiḥud* *hitqadma* *ʕir-enu* ***bi-šlošet*** ***ha-šanim*** *ha-ʔaḥaronot*
particularly progress.PST.3FSG city-POSS.1PL in-three.M.CS DEF-year.FPL DEF-last.FPL

"Our city has progressed in particular over the past three years" (*hapoʕel hacaʕir*, 1907)

Given the prevalence of gender mismatch in numerals, both bound and unbound, throughout the formative years of Modern Hebrew, it is reasonable to attribute the salience of the phenomenon in contemporary educated usage to continuity with preexisting practices, rather than to recent change.

Contemporary spoken Hebrew exhibits additional deviations from the inherited rules of grammatical agreement. Crucially, these deviations are not random but are confined to specific environments (Melnik 2013; Melnik forthcoming); furthermore, just as in the case of the numerals, many of them can be traced back to previous states of the languages, for they are well attested in the written Hebrew of the pre-revival and early revival periods.

A salient example is the use of *ʔeze* as an immutable form unmarked for gender and number agreement. Originally the masculine singular form of the interrogative "which" (cf. the discussion of the feminine form *ʔezo* in chapter 2), *ʔeze* is now commonly used as a non-inflecting form attached to either masculine, feminine, singular, or plural nominal expressions in one of several functions: as an interrogative (Burstein 2013), an exclamative (Di Giulio 2013) and an indeterminacy marker.

Fundamentally, Hebrew does not have an indefinite article, but its various layers used different linguistic elements to explicitly mark nouns as indeterminate in case of need (Rubin 2013). In the present-day speech, the element most commonly used for this purpose is *ʔeze*, expressing various shades of indeterminacy ("some kind of," "sort of," "a certain," etc., see Glinert 1989, 92–6; Melnik forthcoming). From the historical perspective, this usage originated in Medieval Hebrew, which indicate indeterminacy by attaching either *ʔeze* or its feminine counterpart *ʔezo* to nouns regardless of gender and number (see chapter 2). Since this practice was well entrenched in the written practices of Ashkenazi Jews (Glinert 2013), the first-generation L2 speakers of EMH were familiar with it and naturally incorporated it in their speech. Up to the 1920s, both the masculine and the feminine forms were widely and interchangeably used in this function (Reshef 2016a, 201–4, 209–11). Their interchangeability is evident from their frequent occurrence in similar contexts, as in 6a-b, where they appear with the same feminine plural noun:

(6)

(a) *ha-qvuca* *ha-nal* *mitnagedet* ***me-ʔeze***
DEF-group DEF-aforementioned oppose.PRS.3FSG from-INDF.MSG
***sibot*** *le-becalʔel*
reason.FPL to-Bezalel (school of art)

"The aforementioned group objects, for some reason, to the Bezalel School of Art" (*hapoʕel hacaʕir*, 1907)

(b) *hu* *ħadel* *lihyot* *ħaver* *mipne*
he stop.PRS.3MSG to.be member for
***ʔezo*** ***sibot***
INDF.FSG reason.FPL

"He ceases being a member (of the organization) for any reason" (*hapoʕel hacaʕir*, 1907)

Despite the initial interchangeability of *ʔeze* and *ʔezo*, the standardization process of the early 1920s, discussed in the previous chapter, affected them in different ways. The feminine *ʔezo* was completely discarded as an immutable form, and in present-day Hebrew it occurs only with feminine singular nouns. However, it is mostly restricted to the written and formal registers and rarely encountered in spontaneous speech. As for the masculine form *ʔeze*, standardization did not result in its complete rejection as a non-inflecting form, but only in the relegation of this use to the colloquial register. Like *ʔezo*, its frequency in written texts dropped sharply in the early 1920s (Reshef 2016a, 209–11), but unlike *ʔezo*, it retained its function as an immutable, non-agreeing form in colloquial speech, and soon became one of the most typical markers of this register (see, for example, its documentation by Garbell 1930, 61–62 in all three functions).

The different development paths of *ʔeze* and *ʔezo* reflect a fundamental difference in the usage of masculine and feminine forms in Hebrew. Masculine singular forms serve as the unmarked, default option in Modern Hebrew, not only in cases of gender neutralization like those considered here but also in a broad set of nonclassical constructions that were exempt from the rules of agreement to begin with (e.g., *ze* "this" employed as subject and copula, see Halevy 2006 and Danon 2013b, or certain impersonal and passive constructions, see Berman 2011 and Taube 2007). The continued use of *ʔeze* as a non-inflecting form fits well with this general pattern, and since it was compatible with the rest of the system, speakers had no reason to avoid it in colloquial usage. Hence, while non-inflecting *ʔeze* declined in the more regimented linguistic registers, which were affected by prescriptive demands,

in spontaneous speech it remained common. The fate of the immutable *ʔezo* was different because the use of the feminine as a default non-inflecting form is highly idiosyncratic, having no parallels in the linguistic system. Since it did not conform to the rules governing the rest of the system, but manifestly contradicted them, it was readily rejected in the early stages of standardization not only in writing but also in speech, like many other phenomena with a marked nonclassical flavor (see chapter 2).

Another environment susceptible to lack of agreement in contemporary colloquial usage is verb-initial constructions. Generally speaking, the rules of subject-verb agreement are consistently kept in all registers. In most sentence types, deviations are confined to cases in which two nouns, differing in gender or number, appear in the same context and may potentially control agreement in two different ways (Melnik forthcoming). The only systematic exception to the rules of agreement is verb-initial constructions, where the default non-inflecting masculine form of the verb is often used regardless of the gender or number of the subject. Like the other cases discussed here, this phenomenon was common in written texts prior to the revival, but following standardization it became associated with colloquial usage.

A particularly salient category of verb-initial constructions is that of existential and possessive sentences, which have certain unique properties (see, for example, Ziv 2013; Henkin 1994). In colloquial Hebrew, past and future sentences of this kind often feature a predicate in the masculine singular form, regardless of the properties of the nominal subject. The examples below show that the same phenomenon existed in written Hebrew prior to the formation of the speech community. Example 7a pairs a masculine singular predicate with a feminine subject, and 7b pairs a masculine singular predicate with a plural subject:

(7)

(a) *me-ʔaz* *ve-ʕad* *hayom* *lo* ***haya*** *l-anu* *šum*
since-then and-until today NEG be.PST.3MSG to-us any
***yediʕa*** *mim-enu*
information.FSG from-him

"Since then and to this day we have received no news from him" (*hamagid*, 1874)

(b) *mošava* *še-**haya*** *b-ah* *tamid* *2-3 **meʔot***
colony REL-be.PST.3MSG in-it.F always 2-3 hundreds.CS
***poʕalim***
worker.MPL

"A colony in which there had always been 2-3 hundred workers" (*hapoʕel hacaʕir*, 1910)

This usage is recorded in speech from a relatively early stage (Reshef 2008), and while contemporary research draws a convincing connection between the neutralization of agreement in such constructions and their unique semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic properties (see, for example, Ziv 1976; Givón 1976; Henkin 1994; Melnik forthcoming), our data indicate that the phenomenon does not result from recent change, but was present already in the written Hebrew of the pre-revival period, and was probably transferred into speech from there.

Another construction that sometimes displays lack of agreement, although not as frequently, involves sentence-initial unaccusative verbs. This too is typical of contemporary colloquial Hebrew (e.g., Ravid 1995a, 124–9; Melnik forthcoming), but is also attested in pre-revival written corpora (for discussion and examples see Reshef 2019).

Due to their prevalence in various popular written genres, such nonclassical features formed an integral part of the linguistic capacity of first-generation L2 speakers, and the more prominent of them were naturally incorporated into written and spoken EMH. However, this did not guarantee their continued employment in the emergent language, and their eventual fate depended on their structural properties. As shown in chapter 2 and will also be discussed in chapter 5, in the restructuring processes that accompanied the transformation of Hebrew into a living vernacular, features that blatantly clashed with the classical models were often rejected, and soon turned old-fashioned and fell into disuse. The first-generation L1 children, born in the early twentieth century, were probably still exposed to such usages in their L2 adult environment, but since these usages were incompatible with the rest of the system, as well as with the puristic models presented to them in school and in children's literature (Even-Zohar 1996; Reshef 2004, 38–4), they associated them with non-native speech habits of the older generation and did not adopt them. By contrast, nonclassical features that were linguistically motivated, like those discussed in this chapter, tended to follow a different path. Since they conformed to the internal logic of the *synchronic* system, L1 speakers did not recognize them as residues of a former, non-native linguistic state, and incorporated them into their own speech. Awareness of their nonclassical nature—which came later in life, through literacy and linguistic education—caused speakers to avoid these features in formal, planned, or monitored linguistic registers, but this did not exclude them from spontaneous speech, since they made linguistic sense. By placing the definite article before construct chains or numerals, speakers leveled the paradigm, making these expressions similar to other nominal expressions. Similarly, the continued employment of *ʔeze* as an indeterminacy marker is not only compatible with the inherent tendency of spontaneous speech toward imprecision and vagueness (Chafe 1982, 48) but also conforms to the general pattern of employing the masculine singular form as a default immutable form in a large

set of constructions that do not conform to the inherited rules of grammatical agreement (e.g., verb-initial constructions).

Because they are linguistically motivated, the phenomena discussed in this section could have developed anyway in the speech of the first-generation L1 children, even if they had not been present in the speech of their elders. For this reason, it is not entirely possible to rule out an alternative explanation of independent parallel development, rather than a diachronic connection between spoken Hebrew and its written predecessor. However, the hypothesis presented here seems to have greater explanatory force. Textual data show that these features remained robust in the non-belletristic genres of written EMH, while language planners' comments indicate that they were prevalent in speech from a very early stage, sometimes even from the very first years of the speech community. It seems unlikely that spontaneous change would produce such a well entrenched and widely shared set of colloquial usages within such a short time, especially since the textual data support the more straightforward explanation of preexisting written practices transferred into speech.

Further support for the assumption of continuity is provided by cases of lexical similarity between the present-day colloquial register and EMH usage. As opposed to syntactic phenomena, which apply to entire categories and could have conceivably been triggered spontaneously by known linguistic forces, lexical similarities between these two linguistic stages are unlikely to be incidental. The likelihood that a random selection of unrelated lexical items was subject to parallel development in two consecutive historical stages is small, and continuity is evidently a better explanation. The wide scope of the phenomenon, demonstrated by some examples below, suggests that a process of register differentiation between preexisting familiar usages played an important role in the early formation of a distinct colloquial register. According to this analysis, some of the most typical features of this register were not produced by structural change but resulted from the assignment of a colloquial value to certain nonclassical features formerly common in writing.

## 3. SOME LEXICAL SIMILARITIES

As stated, certain lexical items that today have a colloquial flavor were common in the non-belletristic genres of written EMH. The set of these items is highly heterogeneous—which strongly suggests that colloquial Modern Hebrew sourced some of its vocabulary from these written practices, via a process of register differentiation. As already mentioned, usages excluded from the emerging standard, either spontaneously or in response to explicit

prescriptive censure, did not necessarily disappear from speech, as evident from comments in early prescriptive literature that mention some of them as errors requiring correction (Reshef 2013a), but instead assumed a patently colloquial flavor.

Some of the earliest examples appear in pamphlets published in the 1920s by *Gdud megine hasafa* "the Battalion of the Defenders of the Language," a civic movement dedicated to the promotion of Hebrew. In two of these pamphlets (*hasafa* 1927, 16; *laʕivri* 1927, 4), speakers are advised to avoid certain common errors, among them the function words *betaħ* "sure," *ʕod ha-paʕam* "again, one more time," and *šama* "over there" to denote location. In the first case, the suggested alternatives are *kamuvan* and *vaday* "certainly, of course"; in the second case speakers are advised to use *šuv* "again," and in the third they are reminded to distinguish between *šama*, indicating direction (thereto), and *šam* "there," referring to a location.

However, before acquiring a colloquial flavor in the 1920s, these expressions were commonly used in writing. In the pairs of examples below, the first example is from a pre-revival written text, and the second demonstrates the continued use of the same expression in the early twentieth century by members of the budding speech community in Palestine:

(8)

(a) *davar* *gadol [. . .]* *ʔašer* *ʕal-av* ***betaħ*** *yismeħu*
thing great REL on-it surely happy.FUT.3PL
*ha-qorʔim* *ha-nixbadim*
DEF-readers DEF-honorable

"A great thing that will surely please the honorable readers" (*hamagid* 1871)

(b) *kol* *ha-dvarim* *ha-ʔelu* ***betaħ*** *yeduʕim* *la-xem*
all DEF-things DEF-DEM.PL surely known.PL to-you.PL

"All these things are surely known to you" (*hapoʕel hacaʕir*, 1908)

(9)

(a) *leʔaħar* *kama* *yamim* *ba* ***ʕod.hapaʕam***
after some days come.PST.3MSG one.more.time
*ha-šaxen* *ha-ze* *le-miškan-i*
DEF-neighbor DEF-DEM to-dwelling-POSS.1SG

"A few days later, that neighbor came to my house again" (*hamagid,* 1876)

(b) *ha-ħayalim* *šavu* ***ʕod.ha-paʕam*** *ʔel* *ha-mošava*
DEF-soldiers return.PST.3MPL one.more.time to DEF-colony

"The soldiers came back again to the moshava (=type of agricultural settlement)" (*hapoʕel hacaʕir*, 1908)

(10)

(a) *kol* *ha-morim* *ha-nimcaʔim* ***šama*** *yexabdu*
all DEF-teachers REL-be.found.PRS.3MPL there respect.FUT.3PL
*ʔet* *ha-doqtor* *meʔod*
ACC DEF-doctor a.lot

"All the teachers there respect the doctor very much" (*hamagid*, 1858)

(b) *macav* *ha-poʕalim* ***šama*** *raʕuaʕ* *u-maʕaciv* *meʔod*
state.CS DEF-workers there precarious and-saddening a.lot

"The workers there are in a very sorry state" (*hapoʕel hacaʕir*, 1907)

Similar examples, discussed elsewhere (Reshef 2019, 195), are *texef* "immediately, in a minute," *gam ken* "also," or *ʔex še-* "how."

The lexical items in this group are not many, but their appearance in both written EMH and early colloquial Hebrew is highly indicative. Whereas changes affecting entire word classes are driven by general linguistic forces and can arise independently in different times, places or genres, lexical affinity is idiosyncratic, and is therefore less likely to be incidental. Not surprisingly, most of the relevant examples are function words, a relatively small group of unrelated items that tend to be morphologically and functionally unique. In other lexical categories, which are morphologically more uniform, the phenomenon is very rare, although occasional examples may be found.

A conspicuous example from the class of nouns is the form *sinor* "apron." This form is considered incorrect by language planners, who, based on evidence in Rabbinic sources, insist that the correct pronunciation is *sinar* (e.g., Barak and Gadish 2009, 36; Mirkin [Morag] 1947, 330; for a detailed discussion see Academy of the Hebrew Language. n.d.-*sinor*). However, in EMH written corpora, the form *sinor* was dominant, both in literary texts (see the Historical Dictionary Database: Ma'agarim, n.d.) and in non-belletristic ones, for example,

(11)

(a) *sar* *ha-šotrim [. . .]* *hoci* *pquda [. . .]* *ki*
minister.CS DEF.policemen issue.PST.3MSG order that

| *baʕale* | *ha-ħanuyot* | *ha-ʔele* | *yilbešu* | ***sinor*** | *lavan* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| owners.CS | DEF.shops | DEF-DEM.PL | wear.FUT.3PL | apron | white |
| *ve-naqi* | | | | | |
| and-clean | | | | | |

"The chief of the police issued an order that the owners of these shops wear a clean white apron" (*hacfira*, 1892)

(b)

| *ha-naʕara [. . .]* | *ha-levuša* | *le-motne-ha* | ***sinor*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| the-girl | REL-wear.FSG | to-waist-POSS.3FSG | apron.CS |
| *meši* *kaħol* | | | |
| silk blue | | | |

"The girl who is wearing around her waist a blue silk apron" (*hapoʕel hacaʕir*, 1919)

Today this word is usually pronounced *sinor*, and although *sinar* is occasionally heard as well, it is largely restricted to formal or careful language use. As the preference for *sinor* over *sinar* is not based on any general linguistic principle, but is quite arbitrary, it is best explained as reflecting continuity with an established linguistic habit of the first-generation L2 adult speakers.

A more complex case is presented by the lexical item *hamon*, which, through a process of grammaticalization, came to be used in colloquial speech as a quantifier ("a lot"). *Hamon* was originally a noun; in the Bible it means "loud noise, hubbub," and by metonymic shift, also "crowd." In later linguistic stages, its frequent occurrence in expressions such as *hamon ʔanašim* and *hamon ʔadam* "a crowd of people" led to its reanalysis as a quantifier meaning "a lot" (on the role of ambiguous bridging contexts in grammaticalization see, for example, Brinton and Traugott 2005, 27, 109). As demonstrated in 12, *hamon* as a quantifier is well attested in written EMH, and thus it was naturally transferred to speech by the first-generation L2 speakers:

(12)

(a)

| *be-ʔocar* | *ze* | *nimcaʔim* | ***hamon*** | ***sfarim*** | *yeqarim* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| in-treasure | DEM | found.PRS.3PL | countless | books | expensive |
| *be-safot* | | *šonot* | | | |
| in-languages | | different | | | |

"This treasure consists of many precious books in various languages" (*hamelic*, 1886)

(b) *hamon* *ha-miqrim* *ha-ʔayumim* *ve-ha-noraʔim* *ʔašer*
countless DEF.cases DEF-awful and-DEF-horrible REL
*qaru* *be-ʕitim* *šonot*
happen.PST.3PL in-times different

"The many horrible cases which occurred at different times" (*hašqafa*, 1908)

In the case of verbs, it is difficult to separate lexical functions from the functions of the verbal templates. But several cases reflect striking similarity between present-day colloquial usage and prior written practices, which is unlikely to be a coincidence (see Reshef 2019, 193–4). A noteworthy example is the preference for the middle-voice form *neʔevad* "lost" (usually pronounced *neʔebad* in spontaneous speech) over the classical form *ʔavad*. Contrary to the popular belief that the middle-voice form of this verb is frowned upon by prescriptivists, they do not actually rule it out (see Academy of the Hebrew language n.d.-*ʔavad*). The preference for the middle-voice form is in line with the strong association, in Modern Hebrew, of the middle-voice templates with inchoative meaning (Blanc 1965). But in this specific case, the change of template is evidently not a recent development but a well-established prior habit. Its salience in pre-revival linguistic practices is best indicated by its routine occurrence in press notices of private people, announcing lost items or seeking help finding missing relatives, for example,

(13)

(a) *lifne* *yamim* *ʔaħadim* ***neʔevad*** *sefer* *misħar* *qatan*
before days several lost.PST.3MSG book.CS trade small

"A few days ago, a small account book was lost" (*hacfira*, 1893)

(b) *raħamu* *ʕal* *ʔav* *ʔumlal* *ve-ʔem* *ʔumlala*
have.mercy.IMP.2PL on father miserable.M and-mother miserable.F
*ʔašer* ***neʔevad*** *bn-am* *yeħid-am*
REL lost.3MSG son-POSS.3PL single-POSS.3PL

"Have mercy on an unfortunate father and an unfortunate mother who have lost their only son" (*hamelic*, 1895)

The striking prevalence of this usage in EMH suggests that its prominence in present-day speech was not established by L1 speakers, but stems from its salience in the shared linguistic habits of first-generation L2 speakers.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The phenomena discussed in this chapter include some of the most typical characteristics of contemporary colloquial Hebrew. In the research, they have often been treated as reflecting processes of change that progressively widen the gap between Modern Hebrew and the classical models. However, our examination of EMH data indicates that their prominence in contemporary speech actually reflects continuity with established features of pre-revival written Hebrew. In the case of this group of expressions, the change triggered by the revival of the Hebrew vernacular was stylistic rather than structural. The usages themselves predated the revival, but, as a speech community emerged and Hebrew underwent standardization, a distinction formed between spontaneous speech and the more monitored registers. While the formal standard register was much affected by considerations of abiding by the prescriptive rules and adherence to classical ideals, spoken usage, being harder to police, retained certain entrenched nonclassical usages that were excluded from written and formal usage.

Due to the conservative nature of linguistic education and the extensive exposure to the classical sources, educated speakers were aware of the nonclassical origin of these common linguistic habits. Moreover, it was repeatedly pressed upon them that, in a young speech community composed of L2 adults and young L1 speakers still in the process of mastering the language, special efforts were needed to ensure correct language usage. They were therefore inhibited from using linguistic features they recognized as nonclassical in careful, planned language. Consequently, these features acquired a nonstandard flavor and did not become part of the emerging formal standard.

The dynamics of spoken usage were different. Since the adult L2 speakers had less control over their spontaneous oral production, L1 children were exposed to many nonclassical usages from an early age. However, they did not pick up all elements of the highly diversified linguistic input provided by their L2 caregivers, but only those forms that conformed with the internal logic of the language as they understood it. They intuitively rejected idiosyncratic, unmotivated usages that felt alien to Hebrew and seemed to reflect the foreign background of the L2 adults (Rosén 1992), and adopted only those usages that did not contradict the generalizations they were able to form about the linguistic system. During their school years and the acquisition of literacy, Hebrew-speaking L1 children learned to avoid these nonclassical features in careful language production. However, at that point, these usages were already well-rooted in their spontaneous speech.

The fate of nonclassical features in the budding native speech therefore depended not solely on their historical origin but on their compatibility with underlying synchronic linguistic forces. Features that contradicted these

implicit forces, like the ones discussed in chapter 2 (e.g., the use of *ʔezo* as a non-inflecting form) were completely excluded from all registers, both written and spoken. Conversely, features that conformed to these forces, like those discussed in the present chapter, tended to endure in speech, and became associated with colloquial usage in a process of register differentiation.

Hence, while the vernacularization of Hebrew—that is, its transformation from an L2 culture language in a state of diglossia to a native spoken tongue—inevitably involved extensive changes, not all colloquial usages in present-day Hebrew can automatically be assumed to result from change. Our data show that in many cases the change is merely apparent, and the gap between standard and colloquial usage emerged as alternative inherited options were relegated to different registers. The examination of EMH data therefore offers a new perspective not only on the origins of specific features of Modern Hebrew but also on the essence of the general processes involved in its evolution. Alongside the factors usually considered—that is, the impact of the classical texts on the one hand and the contact languages on the other (see, for example, various articles in Doron [ed.] 2016)—more attention should be paid to the stage immediately preceding the revival, specifically to the nonliterary popular written genres of that period.

In addition to insights on the respective weight of continuity versus change in the genesis of Modern Hebrew (see Doron et al. 2019), our data highlight that the colloquial register of Modern Hebrew has been surprisingly stable since an early stage. Although it emerged quite recently, many of its most typical features were part of it from inception, since they are not instances of spontaneous change but preexisting written habits incorporated into speech. The relatively marginal role of spontaneous change is reflected with particular clarity in the historical recordings of first-generation L1 speakers, as discussed in chapter 2. A contemporary speaker listening to these recordings does not find the Hebrew grossly unfamiliar or outdated, but surprisingly similar to the contemporary language, despite the occasional occurrence of some unusual forms.

The emergence of a native variety of Hebrew was a major turning point in terms of stabilizing language use. Prior to the formation of the speech community, Hebrew was used in anomalous sociolinguistic circumstances, which yielded an exceptional measure of variation and an unusually rapid pace of change (see chapter 2). However, the formation of a small but tightly knit cadre of native speakers led to stabilization (Bar-Adon 1959), and since the 1920s Modern Hebrew has evolved as any other spoken living language. This turning point affected the pace of change as well as its patterns. Prior to the stabilization of native speech, changes could spread not only exceptionally fast, but they did not necessarily proceed in a linear fashion, namely

occasionally they took unexpected turns and reversals of direction. The upcoming chapters present three case studies involving such idiosyncratic paths of development: the use of polite terms of address (chapter 4), the formation of adjective grading paradigms (chapter 5), and developments in the category of action nouns (chapter 6). The detailed discussion of these cases highlights some of the main forces involved in the consolidation of present-day practices.

# *Chapter 4*

# The Rise and Fall of Honorifics

## 1. POLITENESS, DIRECTNESS, AND THE SYSTEM OF HONORIFICS

Communication patterns in contemporary Israeli society tend to be more direct and less polite than in other Western societies. People are normally addressed by their first names regardless of the social circumstances, titles such as "Ms.," "Sir," "Dr.," and so on are rarely used, and attitudes and opinions are often expressed quite bluntly, with little regard for considerations of face (Cooper 1985, 69–70). This is manifested for example in the relatively direct formulation of face-threatening speech acts such as requests and complaints (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984; Blum-Kulka, Danet and Gherson 1985), or in the acceptability of laconic, unmitigated responses such as "yes" or "no" where an English speaker would automatically use politeness markers (e.g., "yes, please," "no, thank you") or hedge a negative answer (e.g., "I'm afraid not," "I'm sorry").

This strong preference for direct modes of expression characterized the speech community from an early stage, though not from the very beginning. The first generation of Hebrew speakers, composed of adult L2 speakers, mostly from Europe, was strongly influenced by the contact languages and consequently tended to employ linguistic strategies associated with deference. However, these practices were rejected by their children, the first generation of native speakers, who, based on the fundamental Zionist ideal of the "New Hebrew" (as opposed to the "Old Jew"), were encouraged to develop a markedly non-diasporic local identity (Shapira 1997; Even-Zohar 1996; Almog 2000). From the linguistic viewpoint, the ideal of the "New Hebrew" generated a strong preference for direct modes of expression (Katriel 1986)

and soon led to the rejection of politeness markers associated with the linguistic practices of the older generation.

One of the phenomena that most clearly reflect this process is the rise and fall of a system of honorifics in EMH. This system took root in the emergent speech community in the early twentieth century, but soon after the establishment of Hebrew as a main means of communication it completely disappeared from everyday speech, leaving almost no trace in the present-day language. Historical evidence indicates that this usage spread among the L2 speakers who adopted Hebrew as adults in the first two decades of the twentieth century, and began to decline by the 1930s, as the first generation of native speakers began to emerge as a dominant component of the Jewish society in Palestine. Directly connected to the transition from European-born L2 speakers to locally born L1 speakers, this process resulted in the complete discarding of this contact-induced habit that had emerged at an earlier stage. The rejection of this usage was so complete that many contemporary speakers are unaware that it ever existed.

The emergence and decline of the honorifics system has largely been overlooked in the research (Reshef 2002; Reshef 2015, 180–218). However, it will be shown that this phenomenon sheds considerable light on some of the major factors that underpinned the restructuring of Hebrew in the seminal early years of its revival. The sharp changes in the use of honorifics highlight in particular the complex interplay between the forces of conservation and the forces of change in shaping the modern linguistic system. Since the classical layers of Hebrew lacked a regular system of honorifics, their emergence in EMH necessarily involved a departure from the classical models, whereas their rejection at a later stage realigned the language with these models. Within EHM, the use of honorifics by adult L2 speakers reflected the interaction between two influences: that of the contact languages and that of the linguistic legacy of Hebrew, with which most male speakers of that generation were highly familiar. The rejection of this system by the first native speakers highlights the forces that caused their linguistic choices to differ from those of the former generation, composed of L2 speakers.

Sections 2 and 3 of this chapter trace the details of this historical process. Sections 4 and 5 focus on the factors that affected the spread of honorifics in EMH, with particular attention to the effect of the linguistic legacy on the ways in which foreign practices were integrated into Hebrew and adapted to it—both in terms of the forms chosen and in terms of their distribution. Section 6 is devoted to the subsequent generation, who grew up speaking Hebrew from early childhood. Unlike the L2 speakers of the previous generation, the members of this generation no longer viewed the classical models as the primary example of genuine Hebrew, and thus were not directly influenced by these models in their linguistic choices to the same extent. Nevertheless, due

to certain ideological and cultural factors, in this particular case they unintentionally enhanced the similarity between classical and Modern Hebrew by reversing trends that had emerged in EMH. This is therefore one of the cases in which contemporary practices are not the result of linear development that proceeded smoothly since the very beginning of the speech community, but result from a dialectic process associated with the rise of native usage. The discussion of honorifics thus highlights the complexity of identifying continuity versus change in the emergence of Modern Hebrew, and the essential role of EMH data in setting them apart.

## 2. EARLY EVIDENCE OF THE SPREAD OF HONORIFICS IN EMH

Determining exactly when honorifics first started to spread in the nascent speech community is difficult, due to the scarcity of data on everyday linguistic practices in the initial phases of the revival (Reshef 2013a). However, two explicit mentions in the Hebrew press, both from 1907, treat it as a recent phenomenon. One is in a letter sent to the Jerusalem-based newspaper *Hashkafa* by an unnamed teacher requesting expert advice on Hebrew usage. The teacher, who describes himself as highly proficient in the language, notes the recent phenomenon of incorporating European-style politeness markers into Hebrew and wonders what the language mavens think of this. He writes that unlike German and French, which have polite forms of address (using third-person plural and second-person plural, respectively), Hebrew famously "hates flattery" and addresses "even the king himself" in the second-person singular. However, "now that the speakers of the language have become more numerous," he has noticed that many of them have started to use honorifics, "and they will not speak three words without saying *adoni* [literally 'my master'] or *kvodo* [literally 'his honor,'" and couch entire utterances in the third-person singular. If he responds in the second-person singular, "as has always been [his] habit," his interlocutors take offence, and he finds himself at a loss: "My poor tongue starts twitching in my mouth; I begin with 'my master,' move on to 'his honor,' finish with 'he,' and return to the offending 'you'" (*Lešoni* 1907, 5).

A week later, the paper published a response by the secretary of the Language Committee, echoing the original writer's disapproval of these practices, and adding that the problem is not restricted to speech but affects writing as well. The secretary notes that he finds the use of the third person as an honorific form to be particularly disturbing: "When he [=my interlocutor] says: 'how is his honor?,' he is concerned about my honor, and not about me [. . .] and in letters [writers] likewise address 'my master' and 'my honor'

rather than me." Like the teacher, he feels that this practice is at odds with the "custom of our fathers in ancient times, who were not smooth-tongued," and admits he finds it difficult "after seventy years to change my taste [. . .] and habits" (Teller 1907, 5–6).

In 1907, when these two texts were written, daily Hebrew speech was still limited primarily to language enthusiasts and to preschool and elementary school children, and was only beginning to spread among the general adult population. As a language used in domestic, intimate settings, it was mainly restricted to embryonic social cells formed by the ideologically motivated young immigrants who had arrived in the recent wave of immigration (the so-called Second Aliyah, 1904–1914, see Harshav 1993, 133–52; Morag 1993; Greenzweig 1997). However, it was beginning to gain traction among wider social circles in the public sphere. It was heard more and more in social gatherings, cultural events, and public meetings, and due to demographic changes, it was increasingly used as a common language by the diverse ethnic groups that comprised the Jewish community in Palestine (Reshef 2011; Reshef 2013b). Accustomed to the European norms which mandated polite modes of speech in formal settings, the L2 speakers presumably felt the need to find equivalent means of expression in Hebrew while using the language in the public sphere.

As noted by the teacher and the expert who answered him, the functional need for a system of honorifics was undoubtedly contact-induced. However, in their efforts to meet this need, speakers did not simply replicate the linguistic forms that served this purpose in their native tongues but preferred to employ means of expression native to Hebrew. This was possible because traditional Hebrew texts, from the Bible onward, as well as modern texts produced by both *maskilic* and Hasidic writers, feature a selection of sporadically used deference markers of various kinds (see section 3 below). One of these markers, the employment of the third-person singular to address the interlocutor, had the advantage of resembling the European models to which the speakers were accustomed (such as the German device of using third-person plural as the polite form of address, or the Yiddish employment of the second-person plural form in that function). Forming a parallel system in Hebrew therefore required minimal change, namely using address forms in the same manner, though in a different person.

The strategy of co-opting existing means of expression to serve needs triggered by language contact is well attested in studies of contact-induced language change. According to these studies, "An exact correspondence between source-language structures and target-language structures is not very likely, much less inevitable" (Thomason and Kaufmann 1988, 63). Language contact seldom prompts speakers to replicate grammatical categories; instead they "tend to develop new structures of grammatical expression, manipulating the linguistic resources available in ways that are most beneficial to

them" (Heine and Kuteva 2005, 35). In the case of the Hebrew honorifics, the manipulation of the available resources involved no structural or functional change but merely a change in distribution, as a relatively rare classical usage became a common, routine usage in speech and writing.

Since the change was minimal, and had precedents in familiar Hebrew texts, the process could occur within a very short time. By the early 1920s, when Hebrew was granted formal language status by the British Mandate authorities, the use of honorifics was already fully established in official documents written in the formal register (Reshef 2002). Business and administrative correspondence from the 1920s and 1930s is highly standardized in this respect, featuring a consistent use of honorifics by clerks and administrators who produced formal documents as part of their jobs (Reshef 2015, 205–9). Nevertheless, the consistent use of honorifics was restricted to the administrative register, whereas in other written genres and in speech their distribution was far more sporadic and irregular, and was subject to free stylistic choice. Although they were evidently used in various circumstances by many members of the speech community, a binding system of honorifics never fully materialized in EMH.

## 3. THE CONSOLIDATION AND DECLINE OF THE HONORIFICS SYSTEM

In 1922, Britain received the Mandate for Palestine, and Hebrew was granted the status of an official language, alongside English and Arabic (Efrati 2004, 201–14). The new circumstances spelled significant changes for the Jewish population of Palestine in all domains, including in terms of the character of public activity. Under Ottoman rule, a small group of public figures, many of them familiar with each other, dominated most aspects of public life in the small, semiautonomous Jewish community. The volume of correspondence they exchanged was limited, and when they did communicate in writing it was often on an informal, personal footing. By contrast, after the British Mandate introduced modern government mechanisms, a cadre of professional administrators was formed to handle the public, business, and administrative affairs of the growing Jewish population (Smilansky 1936, 435–37), and the volume of formal correspondence, both within the Jewish community and with the British authorities, expanded considerably, to unprecedented dimensions (Reshef 2015, 11–38).

These developments resulted in the consolidation of a distinct administrative register already in the 1920s (Reshef and Helman 2009; Reshef 2015, 100, 130, 135–38). Needing to produce formal documents in bulk and at speed, clerks soon established shared linguistic practices equivalent to those

that existed in the European languages. The daily production of numerous texts accelerated the standardization process, resulting in the rapid emergence of a relatively uniform administrative style. While the written practices of the speech community as a whole continued, for many years, to exhibit a wide variety of personal styles and proficiency levels (Reshef 2009; Reshef 2015, 39–66), professional administrators in Mandatory Palestine no longer produced texts reflecting their personal style and preferences, but conformed to the shared set of norms that comprised the newly formed administrative register (Reshef 2015, 97–179).

An intriguing aspect of this new register was the full conventionalization of honorifics. In official correspondence, a single addressee was consistently referred to in the third-person singular (evident in personal pronouns, verbal and adjectival forms and bound morphemes). In addition, a special honorific address form, *kvodo* "his honor," could optionally replace the personal pronouns. Typical examples are provided by the following short letters, written by the secretary general of the Tel Aviv municipality to the local chief of police and to the author and Zionist leader Shmaryahu Levin, respectively:

(1)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *racuf* | *la-ze* | ***yeqabel*** | *ʔet* | *ha-taqanot* | |
| attached | to-DEM | receive.FUT.3MSG | ACC | DEF-regulations | |
| *l.a-šuq* | *he-ħadaš* | *be-tel* | *aviv,* | *li-tsumat* | *lib-**o**.* |
| to.DEF-market | DEF-new | in-Tel | Aviv | for-attention.CS | heart-POSS.3MSG |
| *ʕal* | ***kvod-o*** | *lehašgiaħ* | *ʕal* | *miluy* | *kol* |
| on | honor-POSS.3MSG | to.supervise | on | execution.CS | all |
| *ha-seʕifim* | *ha-mesumanim* | *ba-ze* | *ʕal* | *yadenu* | |
| DEF-clauses | DEF-marked.PL | in-DEM | by | us | |

"Attached herein he will receive the regulations for the new market in Tel Aviv, for his perusal. His honor is required to supervise the implementation of all the clauses marked herein by us" (Tel Aviv Historical Archives [henceforth: THA] 1-162a, 1922).

(2)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *hinenu* | *lehodiʕ-**o*** | *ba-ze* | *ki* | *ʔanu* | *mesadrim* |
| we.hereby | inform-him | with-DEM | that | we | arrange.PRS.MPL |
| *yešivat* | *moʕaca* | *be-yom.ʔalef* | *ha-ba.* | | |
| meeting.CS | council | in-Sunday | DEF.coming | | |
| *heyot.ve* | *le-ʔoto* | *yom* | *u-le-ʔotah* | *šaʕa* | *niqbeʕa* |
| since | to-same.M | day | and-to-same.F | hour | schedule.PST.3FSG |
| *gam* | *harcaʔat* | ***kvod-o** [ . . . ],* | *hinenu* | *mevaqšim* | |
| also | lecture.CS | honor-POSS.3MSG | we.hereby | ask.PRS.MPL | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***mi-kvod-o*** | | *lidħot* | *ʔet* | *ha-harcaʔa* | *ha-zo.* |
| from-honor-POSS.3MSG | | to.postpone | ACC | DEF-lecture | DEF-DEM.F |
| *ʔanu* | *meqavim* | *ki* | ***kvod-o*** | ***yitħašev*** | |
| we | hope.PRS.MPL | that | honor-POSS.3MSG | consider.FUT.3MSG | |
| *ʕim* | *ha-davar* | | | | |
| with | DEF.thing | | | | |

"We hereby inform him that we have scheduled a council meeting for next Sunday [. . .]. Since a lecture by his honor [. . .] has been scheduled for the same day and the same hour, we hereby ask his honor to postpone this lecture. We hope that his honor will take this into consideration" (THA 3-2a, 1925)

The (masculine or feminine) third-person singular became the standard manner of addressing single individuals in official administrative documents. The vast corpus we examined, consisting of thousands of letters from the 1920s, yielded almost no instances of second-person singular address, apart from isolated instances produced in exceptional circumstances (Reshef 2002, 311–12). Other alternatives occur in this corpus in specific, well-defined circumstances: (a) letters directed at a collective addressee (e.g., a commercial company or a municipal authority) use the second-person plural (e.g., "we hereby inform you.2PL"); (b) letters referring metonymically to an institution rather than to its human representatives use the non-honorific third-person singular (e.g., "we demand that the municipality"); (c) handwritten notes conveying instructions or requests to colleagues or subordinates are sometimes couched as short non-sentential impersonal phrases in the infinitive (e.g., "to send a reminder" or "it is necessary to inform them") (Reshef 2002, 309–10; Reshef 2015, 231, 233).

In the early 1920s, honorifics seem to have become fully conventionalized in the newly created administrative register, and they were considered obligatory in addressing a single individual. However, in other domains—both written and spoken—their spread was partial and they were considered optional, a matter of personal choice. Private correspondence from the 1920s between L2 Hebrew speakers exhibits both second and third-person singular forms, depending on stylistic preference, the identity of the addressee, or the aim of the correspondence (Reshef 2002, 304–5; Reshef 2015, 212–13). While some writers made extensive use of honorifics, others consistently preferred the second-person singular forms, and many used both, freely alternating between them not only in different letters to the same addressee but sometimes even within the very same text. An example is the following personal letter by Tel Aviv mayor Meir Dizengoff, which shifts from second-person singular ("your letter") in the first sentence to third-person singular in the following sentence:

(3)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *yedid-i* | *ha-yaqar,* | *samaħti* | *meʔod* | *l.a-hizdamnut,* | |
| friend-POSS.1SG | DEF-dear, | rejoice.PST.1SG | very | to.DEF-opportunity | |
| *še-nitna* | *l-i* | *ʕal.yede* | *mixtav-**xa** [. . .]* | *lizkor* | |
| REL.given.PST.3FSG | to-me | by | letter-POSS.2MSG | to.remember | |
| *ʔet* | *yedid-i* | *me-ʔaz* | *ve-ʔet* | *ha-yamim* | *ha-tovim* |
| ACC | friend-POSS.1SG | from-then | and-ACC | DEF.days | DEF-good |
| *šel* | *ħalomot* | *ha-noʕar* | *šel-anu.* | | |
| of | dreams.CS | DEF-youth | of-us | | |
| *meʔod* | *meʔod* | *hayiti* | *ħafec* | *ladaʕat* | *ma* |
| very | very | AUX.PST.1SG | want.PRS.MSG | to.know | how |
| *šlom-**o** [. . .]* | | *u-ma* | *šlom* | *bit-**o*** | |
| wellness-POSS.3MSG | | and-how | wellness.CS | daughter-POSS.3MSG | |

"I was overjoyed at the opportunity, provided to me by your letter [. . .], to be reminded of my friend from those days and of our youthful dreams. I would very much like to know how he is doing [. . .] and how his daughter is doing" (THA 7(6)-1a, 1923)

In the last sentence of the letter, Dizengoff shifts back to the second-person singular as he cordially invites his friend to come for a visit (see Reshef 2015, 196). Unlike his official correspondence, which conforms to the style of the administrative register and makes consistent use of honorifics, Dizengoff's private letters alternate between the unmarked second-person singular forms and the polite third-person singular forms, as was typical of L2 EMH speakers at the time.

The situation in the period's spoken language is more difficult to discover, since there are no recordings of spontaneous speech from those early years (see chapter 3). However, indirect evidence can be found in written materials from the Mandate period itself or in later works depicting or describing the reality of those years (Reshef 2013a). Chronicles and autobiographies occasionally include constructed dialogues, like the following example, from Dizengoff's memoir about a trip to an Arab village. During the visit, Dizengoff noticed that the soldier who was serving as his guide and advisor was regaling their Arab hosts with tall tales and asked him (in Hebrew) why he was doing this. According to Dizengoff, the soldier replied:

(4)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***kvod-o*** | ***yislaħ*** | *li* | *ʔaval* | *ʔen* | ***hu*** |
| honor-POSS.3MSG | forgive.FUT.3MSG | me | but | NEG | he |
| *makir* | *ʔet* | *ha-minhagim* | *be-ʔarcot* | *ha-mizraħ* | |
| know.PRS.MSG | ACC | DEF-customs | in-lands.CS | DEF-east | |

"His honor will forgive me, but he does not know the customs of the eastern lands" (Dizengoff, 1936)

Likewise, the writer Amos Oz (born in 1939) recounts an incident in which his father was invited by the renowned writer S. Y. Agnon to come for a visit but had to decline because Amos, who was a little boy at the time, was tired. Oz quotes his father as saying:

(5)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***yislaħ*** | *l-anu* | *mar* | *ʕagnon [. . ]* | *ha-yeled* | *ʕayef* |
| forgive.FUT.3MSG | to-us | mister | Agnon | DEF.child | tired |

"Mr. Agnon will forgive us [. . .], the child is tired" (Oz 2006, 87)

Agnon himself referred to the optional status of honorifics in spoken EMH in a press interview he gave in the 1960s. Describing a trip he took with the poet Chaim Nachman Bialik during the latter's 1909 visit to Palestine, he reconstructed some of their conversation, in which he addressed the poet in the third-person singular. Agnon notes in the interview that using the polite form of address was a deliberate choice, stemming from his special respect for Bialik:

(6)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *le-rabanim* | *ʔani* | *ʔomer* | "*ʔata*," | *le-bialik* | *hayiti* |
| to-rabbis | I | say.PRS.MSG | you.MSG | to-Bialik | AUX.PST.1SG |
| *medaber* | *bi-lšon* | "*hu*" | | | |
| speak.PRS.MSG | in-language | he | | | |

"To rabbis I say 'you' (MSG), to Bialik I used to say 'he'" (Be'er 1992, 92)

Literary dialogue presents a similar picture, likewise reflecting the optional status of honorifics in the early days of the speech community. In literature from the early twentieth century, characters mostly address one another in the second-person singular, but honorifics occasionally appear as well, mirroring their partial spread in the speech of the period. The writers' familiarity with this linguistic practice is reflected in their frequent use of honorifics for literary effect, namely to characterize the figures in their stories or indicate the social relationships between them (see Reshef 2002, 315–20; Reshef 2015, 201–5).

The partial spread of honorifics in EMH speech is also reflected in a handful of early recordings. While the earliest known recordings of spontaneous speech are from the 1960s (Reshef and Gonen 2018), there are a few recordings of narration from the Mandate period: newsreels, documentary films, and

didactic materials for language learners (Reshef 2012a, 164–9; Reshef 2013a, 161–3; Izreel 2012a). The following example, from a kit of recorded Hebrew lessons published in Nazi Germany in the early 1930s (meant to facilitate the emigration of Jewish refugees to Palestine [Izreel 2012b]), suggests that both second and third-person singular forms were considered acceptable in daily conversation, in this case, a conversation between a doctor and a patient:

(7)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***tifšot*** | *na* | *gvirt-i* | *ʔet* | *bgade-**ha*** | |
| take.off.FUT.3FSG | please | lady-POSS.1MSG | ACC | clothes-POSS.3FSG | |
| *ve-**titen*** | *li* | *lehaqšiv.* | ***nišmi*** | *bimnuha!* | |
| and-let.FUT.3FSG | me | listen.INF | breath.IMP.2FSG | calmly | |
| *ken,* | *ve-ʕata* | ***ʕicri*** | *ʔet* | *nešimat-**ex!*** | |
| yes | and-now | hold.IMP.2FSG | ACC | breath-POSS.2FSG | |

"The lady will please take off her clothes and let me listen. Breathe calmly! Yes, and now hold your breath" (Izreel 2012c, 280)

As the textual data indicate, then, the obligatory use of honorifics in EMH was evidently limited to one well-defined register: formal administrative correspondence. While other registers allowed a choice between second- and third-person forms, the administrative style employed honorifics across the board throughout the 1920s. However, this situation was short lived, and signs of its decline began to appear by the 1930s. Initially, the deviations were limited to handwritten comments on the margins of administrative letters, written by superiors to inform their subordinates of the action required in response to the letter. While in the 1920s such comments were consistently phrased either in the third-person singular or in the impersonal form (e.g., "to notify the chief of the police"), during the 1930s second-person imperative forms gradually became the norm in this context. In the early 1940s, second-person forms began to appear in the documents themselves, and although their occurrence was initially sporadic, it clearly points to a decline in the use of honorifics, especially among young, inexperienced clerks. Consequently, drafts written by low-level employees in the second-person singular were sometimes corrected by their superiors to the third-person singular (Reshef 2015, 212).

By the end of the 1940s, the balance had tipped in favor of the less formal usage, and in the 1950s, texts using second person outnumbered those using third person. The change is reflected even in the writing of single individuals: experienced administrators who had previously adhered to the system of honorifics started shifting to second-person forms. A particularly striking example is provided by the secretary general of the Tel Aviv municipality, Yehuda Nedivi, who served in this position for four decades (from 1925 to

1965), and produced dozens of written documents on a daily basis throughout his years in office. His early correspondence includes no examples at all of second-person singular forms, regardless of the identity of the addressee (citizen or colleague, superior or subordinate, familiar or unknown) or the type of letter (internal or external, typed or handwritten). A shift begins to appear in the late 1940s, initially only in correspondence with functionaries within the municipal administration. For instance, in a 1949 letter to the sanitary inspector, drawing his attention to complaints about the state of sanitation in the city, Nedivi employs second-person forms, but in another letter to the same person in the same year and on the same topic he uses third-person forms (see Reshef 2015, 215). In the 1950s, he begins to alternate between second and third-person forms in external correspondence as well, whether addressing private citizens or functionaries in other institutions (Reshef 2015, 233–34).

A reversal of trend began then in the 1930s: after gaining traction in the speech community during the first quarter of the twentieth century, honorifics fell out of favor and ultimately vanished altogether from both speech and writing.

## 4. THE IMPACT OF THE LINGUISTIC LEGACY ON EMH HONORIFICS—THE FORMAL ASPECT

The advent of EMH honorifics was undoubtedly influenced by the contact languages. However, the speakers did not simply replicate the European models, for EMH usage differed from these models in two respects: in terms of the linguistic means employed to express politeness (the formal aspect), and in terms of the distribution of these forms (the functional aspect, to be discussed in the following section). Both differences can be attributed, at least in part, to the impact of the internal Hebrew legacy.

From the formal perspective, until the EMH period Hebrew had never developed a conventionalized system of deferential address: in all its historical stages, single individuals were addressed in the second-person singular and two or more individuals were addressed in the second-person plural. However, the language did have means of linguistically encoding status differences between participants in an interaction, which are sporadically attested in Hebrew texts.

Biblical Hebrew has two ways of signaling deference (Brin 1994, 78–96). The simpler involves particular ways of referring to the participants in an interaction. The speaker may refer to himself as the interlocutor's "slave," for example, "Speak, for **your slave** is listening" (1Samuel 3:10), or refer to the addressee as his "master," for example, "Drink, **my master**" (Genesis 24:18).

Alternatively, the addressee may be referred to by his role, for example, "Let **the king** not say such a thing" (1Kings 22:8). These options can appear in isolation, but they can also be combined, for example, "Let your **slave** speak a word in my **master's** ears" (Genesis 44:18).

The second method is to formulate the entire sentence in the third person, including pronouns and verbs, for example, "Why does my lord **pursue** (3MSG) **his** slave? " (1Samuel 26:18, meaning "why do you pursue me"). This strategy, which is only occasionally combined with honorific terms of address, may apply either to the speaker, as in "Why should your slave **live** (3MSG) in the royal city with you?" (1Samuel 27:5), or to the addressee, as in "Is it not from this [cup] that my lord **drinks**?" (Genesis 44:5). All these usages are optional in Biblical Hebrew, however; moreover, they are quite rare. In most instances speakers refer to themselves in the first person and to their addressees in the second.

In the later linguistic strata, linguistic means for encoding deference declined even further, and the biblical mechanisms were only partially preserved. Speakers' self-reference as "slave" disappeared altogether. Third-person reference to the addressee was partially preserved, and occasionally occurs in rabbinic and medieval texts, although far less frequently than in Biblical Hebrew. The use of honorific terms of address, on the other hand, persisted, and the biblical inventory was even expanded with new lexical items. Rabbinic Hebrew first added the form *rav* "rabbi" and later the form *mar* "master, mister" (borrowed from Aramaic), and Medieval Hebrew added its own honorific formulas (see section 5). Despite their infrequency, these linguistic means remained part of active linguistic knowledge and continued to appear in new texts throughout the years.

In early nineteenth century, new means of signaling deference were introduced into Hebrew via the popular genre of Hasidic tales. The Hasidim who translated these stories from Yiddish, their spoken tongue, into Hebrew employed a unique linguistic style aimed at echoing the spirit of the original oral presentation (Glinert 2006; Kahn 2015). Accordingly, the language of these tales drew heavily from Yiddish and was rich in contact-induced phenomena. Among other features, it occasionally replicated the Yiddish convention of using the second-person plural as a deferential form of singular address. In the following example, the context clearly indicates that the plural form refers to a single person:

(8)

| *šaʔalti* | ***ʔoto*** | *rab-enu* | *ma* | ***ʔatem*** | ***mevaqšim*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ask.PST.1SG | him | rabbi-POSS.1PL | what | you.PL | look.for.PRS.MPL |

"I asked him, our rabbi, what are you looking for?" (Rubinstein 2005, 108)

The Hasidic writers were not consistent in their use of this convention. In composing dialogue, they alternated between simple second-person singular forms of address, third-person singular forms inherited from Biblical Hebrew, and second-person plural forms borrowed from Yiddish (see section 5).

Second-person plural deferential address also percolated into the Hebrew of Yiddish-speaking ultra-Orthodox Jews when they had to use Hebrew for some reason in face-to-face interaction. The following example is from a story published by a Jew from Palestine in 1897, when the revival of spoken Hebrew was at an embryonic stage. The story tells of a devout Yiddish-speaking ultra-Orthodox Jew from Jerusalem who travels to one of the newly founded agricultural settlements. Needing to communicate with strangers along his way, he resorts to Hebrew, which is familiar to him as a language of prayer and study. In the sentence presented in 9a, he uses the second-person plural in asking directions of a stranger who insists on speaking with him in Hebrew, and in the sentence presented in 9b, some travelers address him in this language in the second-person plural:

(9)

(a) *rabi* *qarov,* *roʔe* *ʔani* *še-yeš* ***la-xem***
rabbi nearby see.PRS.MSG I that-EXIST to-you.MPL
*lev* *yehudi;* ***harʔu-ni*** *na* *ʔet* *ha-derex*
heart Jewish show.IMP.2PL-DAT.1SG please ACC DEF-way

"Rabbi stranger, [. . .] I see that you have a Jewish heart, please show me the way" (Eisenstadt-Barzilay 1897/1968, 140)

(b) *rabi* *qarov!* *me-ʔayin* ***ʔatem*** ***holxim*** *ve-ʔana*
rabbi nearby from-where you.MPL go.PRS.MPL and-where
***pne-xem*** *muʕadot?*
face-POSS.2MPL headed.to.PRS.3FPL

"Rabbi stranger, where are you coming from and to where are you heading?" (Eisenstadt-Barzilay 1897/1968, 141)

This usage remained customary among Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox Jews, and is heard even today. Since it never spread to wider circles of Hebrew speakers, it became one of the most salient markers of the unique speech habits of this distinct social group, and it is often adopted by Mizrahi ultra-Orthodox speakers to index group identity (Muchnik 2006/7, 146–47).

The ultra-Orthodox are in fact the only group in contemporary Israeli society that still uses honorifics, whereas other social circles retain no trace of the honorifics that were briefly evident in EMH. In these circles, distance is

occasionally indexed by the employment of formal terms of address, namely title and surname, but in most circumstances individuals are addressed by their first name, and the employment of deferential terms of address is optional even in formal interactions such as business meetings, media interviews with public figures, and interactions with figures of authority such as doctors, teachers, and military commanders. Even when titles are used to index distance, they are not accompanied by a change of pronoun: singular addressees are addressed exclusively in the second-person singular. The only real exception is in courtroom hearings, where interactions between judges and lawyers are conducted in the third-person singular (Muchnik 2006/7, 147–48). Apart from this context, third-person singular forms are almost never employed, except for comic, sarcastic or ironic effect, and even this only rarely (Shatil 1997, 229). Present-day speakers are therefore rarely exposed to this form of address, and many of them are not even aware that it ever existed in Hebrew.

The EMH honorifics, however short lived, clearly highlight the impact of the linguistic legacy on the choices of the first-generation L2 speakers. While the temporary adoption of honorifics by the emergent speech community was certainly influenced by Yiddish, the honorifics themselves were not modeled on the Yiddish ones (with the exception of the forms used by the ultra-Orthodox Jews). Instead, speakers adopted a linguistic model originating in the Bible, while significantly expanding its contexts of usage. In other words, in meeting their need for a system of honorifics, they preferred a classical model over a familiar contemporary one. Thus, despite the contact-induced nature of the sociolinguistic phenomenon itself, the preference for classical forms created an apparent continuity with the classical models.

As is shown elsewhere in this book, this tendency shaped multiple aspects of the emerging linguistic system. Classical forms and structures were often adopted—with or without change of meaning, function or distribution—and were preferred over forms borrowed from other languages, even if the latter were familiar from the nonclassical strata of Hebrew, and even if they had been established as common linguistic practices prior to speech revival.

## 5. THE IMPACT OF THE LINGUISTIC LEGACY—THE FUNCTIONAL ASPECT

The use of honorifics in the previous linguistic strata influenced not only the forms adopted in EMH but also their distribution in the speech of the first-generation L2 speakers. In European languages, honorifics were fully conventionalized and the choice between casual and deferential forms was therefore determined by the social parameters of the conversation. In Hebrew,

by contrast, such an obligatory system had never developed; even during their heyday in EMH honorifics remained optional and partial almost in any context.

This departure from the European practices again reflects the impact of the inherited classical models. The comments quoted in section 2, from 1907, show that speakers were well aware of the dominance of second-person singular forms in the classical linguistic strata. This awareness impeded the adoption of honorifics as an obligatory convention, despite the pressure of the well-rooted habits in the speakers' native tongues.

As already noted, Biblical Hebrew had two sets of means for expressing deference: a range of terms referencing the speaker and addressee, and the option of phrasing the utterance as a whole in the third-person singular. Nevertheless, the appearance of these means is quite arbitrary, and most dialogues in the biblical narrative are formulated in the second-person singular, regardless of the identity of the interlocutors. Moreover, second- and third-person forms of address, and the use versus omission of honorific terms of reference, alternate not only in different dialogues between the same interlocutors but even in the same conversation. Thus, utterances like "all that my lord the king commands **his servant**, so **your servant** will do" (2Samuel 9:10), featuring the second- and third-person forms of the bound possessive pronoun side by side, are not unusual. The biblical narrator could choose whether to linguistically encode differences in status between interlocutors, and to what extent. Consequently, Biblical Hebrew is characterized by a partial distribution of deference markers, and the occurrence of any such marker, even in isolation, is sufficient to explicitly indicate status differences (Brin 1994, 88–89).

As a result, the distribution of deference markers in biblical dialogue is quite unpredictable. While they are particularly common in contexts involving a marked status difference between the participants, for example, in conversations with a king, a prophet or an esteemed father, they occasionally occur also in less obvious contexts, such as a dialogue between two brothers (Genesis 33:5–15). Conversely, even high-ranking figures such as kings are often addressed in the second-person singular, regardless of the identity or social status of the speaker (Reshef 2002, 302).

The partial employment of deference markers is even more noticeable in Rabbinic Hebrew. Although this stratum augmented the biblical inventory with new honorific terms, namely *rav* "rabbi" and *mar* "mister," it made far less use of third-person address, which is mainly restricted to the formula *yelamdenu rabenu* "will our rabbi teach us" (Reshef 2015, 190) and is otherwise rarely encountered. In later linguistic stages, when Hebrew was no longer used as an everyday means of communication, the inventory of honorifics continued to expand with new formulas such as *kvodo* "his honor," *maʕalato* "his excellency" and a wide range of longer, multi-word expressions (e.g.,

*haqesar yarum hodo*, "the Kaizer, may his glory be praised," used also as an acronym, *haqira*, for the beloved monarch Franz Joseph I of Austria in the nineteenth century). Nevertheless, this proliferation of deferential terms of address was not accompanied by the use of the third person, which remained extremely limited.

The impact of the linguistic legacy on the use of honorifics is particularly noticeable in Hasidic Hebrew. As mentioned, Hasidic writers adopted the second-person plural as a deferential form of address, as a calque of their spoken language, Yiddish. However, they did not fully replicate the Yiddish discourse practices. First, the realization of honorifics remained optional, as in the classical strata of Hebrew, and Hasidic narratives use them side by side with second-person singular forms. Second, the writers did not limit themselves to the contact-induced deferential forms, but often preferred the classical alternative, namely the third-person singular. As in Biblical Hebrew, the various discourse strategies alternated not only in similar contexts but sometimes even within single utterances. For instance, in the following example the first sentence is formulated in the second-person plural, but the second sentence refers to the same addressee in the third-person singular:

(10)

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *ʔamar* | *l-o* | *haʔim* | *lo* | ***šmaʕtem*** | *še-yeš* | *bešt* |
| say.PST.3MSG | to-him | INTERR | NEG | hear.PST.2MPL | that-EXIST | Besht |
| *b.a-ʕolam* | *ve-**yisaʕ*** | | *maʕalat-**o*** | | *ʔel-av* | |
| in.DEF-world | and-travel.FUT.3MSG | | highness-POSS.3MSG | | to-him | |

"He said to him: have you not heard of the *Besht* (acronym for Baal Shem Tov, that is, Rav Yisrael ben Eliezer, founder of the Hasidic movement)? Your highness shall go to him" (Rubinstein 2005, 126)

Despite the strong influence of Yiddish on Hasidic Hebrew, the Yiddish usage of honorifics was only partially replicated, and the classical influence was reflected both in the optional status of honorifics and in the occasional employment of third-person singular forms.

Alternation in the use of modes of address characterized the discourse practices of EMH as well, for first-generation L2 speakers differed in their stylistic preferences. Some of them employed third-person forms more frequently than others, and for each individual speaker factors such as the identity of the addressee, or the circumstances and objectives of the interaction, played a central role in the selection of forms (Reshef 2002, 304–5; Reshef 2015, 194–97). In the speech community as a whole, both honorifics and unmarked second-person forms were acceptable, as indicated by private correspondence from the relevant years (in the case of written language) and

by literary dialogues or didactic materials for language learners (in the case of speech), as noted in section 3.

The inconsistency in the employment of honorifics reflected the tension between two conflicting sources of influence: the European substrate languages on the one hand and the linguistic legacy on the other. As indicated by the 1907 comments quoted above, former habits impelled the use of honorifics, yet many speakers felt this usage to be alien to the spirit of Hebrew. The adoption of the biblical forms also added a measure of inconvenience, since third-person singular forms often created ambiguity between reference to the addressee and reference to a third party. These two factors—the sporadic use of honorifics in the Bible itself and the ambiguity of third-person forms—are presumably both responsible for the patchy use of honorifics in EMH.

## 6. THE EFFECT OF NATIVE HEBREW PRACTICES

As stated, the linguistic practices of first-generation L2 speakers reflect a degree of ambivalence toward the use of honorifics, due to the tension between their old and new languages. In the 1930s and 1940s, this ambivalence resolved as the new generation of native speakers became numerous enough to dominate and shape the linguistic norms of the emergent speech community (Katriel 1986, 1; Almog 2000, 1–3, 144–46; Blanc 1968). Members of this generation, nicknamed *Sabra*s (after a thorny cactus that grows in Israel), were either locally born or educated in Hebrew from an early age, and the distinctive linguistic characteristics they developed were considered prestigious by the surrounding society due to their authenticity, although their language was also severely criticized for its incompliance with the prescriptive notions of correct language usage (Almog 2000; Morag 2003, 168; Blanc 1968; Bar-Adon 1959; Mor and Sichel 2015). Their marked preference for direct modes of expression had a sweeping effect on the character of contemporary Hebrew (Katriel 1986), and one of its outcomes was the disappearance of honorifics from the domains where they had previously taken root.

The formation of the distinct *Sabra* subculture was gradual. Although the first Hebrew educational facilities were established as early as the 1880s, it was only in the early twentieth century that a stable cadre of Hebrew-speaking youngsters started to emerge (Sichel and Bar-Ziv Levi 2018; Reshef forthcoming). For several decades, the graduates of the local education system constituted a very small minority in the Jewish population, and it was not until the 1930s that their part in the population became large enough to make them a significant social force (Almog 2000). The peak of their prestige came during the 1948 War of Independence, in which they played a prominent role, and after independence many of them became part of the leading elite of the

newly formed state, which increased their dominance in Israeli society even further (Shapira 1990).

From the linguistic perspective, the distinctive features of native usage were initially dismissed as temporary characteristics of child language, liable to disappear in adulthood after the completion of linguistic education (Rabin 1958, 12; Rabin 1975, 152). However, as is known from other cases of linguistically heterogeneous communities, if language use among children is distinctly different from that of their adult environment, and if peer relations among children are strong, standardization usually follows their speech habits rather than those of their parents (O'Shannessy 2019). And indeed, voices identifying a permanent change in the linguistic system among native speakers of Hebrew began to be heard in the 1950s (e.g., Blanc 1954, 1989; Rosén 1956, 1957). By that time, *Sabra* linguistic practices had become the most dominant force shaping the emerging standard, and linguistic practices rejected by the *Sabra*s came to be associated with the older generation and soon turned obsolete (Blanc 1957, 408). The decline of honorifics was one of the many manifestations of this transition from non-native to native Hebrew usage.

As mentioned, the rejection of honorifics was part of the directness that characterized the *Sabra* subculture as a whole. This central ethos of native usage, termed "*dugri* speech" in anthropological research (Katriel 1986), involved a strong preference for free expression and a deliberate disregard of politeness considerations, which were perceived by the *Sabra*s as markers of foreign, diasporic behavior. As direct modes of expression were met with approval, speakers often prefixed the word *dugri* to an utterance to explicitly mark it as a direct expression of face-threatening contents, for example,

(11)

| *ʔani* | *ʔagid* | *le-xa* | *dugri,* | *lo* | *met* | *ʕal* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I | tell.FUT.1SG | to-you | *dugri* | NEG | die.PRS.MSG | on |
| *ha-tisporet* | *šel-xa* | | | | | |
| DEF-haircut | POSS.2MSG | | | | | |

"I'll tell you *dugri*, I don't like your haircut" (https://www.motke.co.il/index.php?idr=400&p=201141, accessed March 7, 2019)

Rather than being considered rude, these modes of expression were condoned as part of the *Sabra* ethos and associated with sincerity, solidarity, and social cohesion (compare Eckert 2000; Irvine 2001; Culpeper 2011). In contrast, politeness strategies were incompatible with the ethos of *dugri* speech, and *Sabras* associated them with an old-fashioned, diasporic linguistic style, like other practices of the older speakers, such as a foreign accent or nonstandard morphology and syntax (see chapter 2).

The marked linguistic difference between the *Sabra*s and their L2 elders was personally witnessed by linguist Talmy Givón, who was born in Palestine in the late 1930s. In a personal remark in one of his publications, he notes that the first-generation L2 Hebrew speakers used

> what the native speaker tend[ed] to regard as mistaken, "funny", variable Hebrew. [. . .] The linguistic dichotomy between the first-generation native speaker and the immigrant was a parameter highly salient in the children's consciousness [. . .] [generating a] feeling of social "differentness"—and elitism—which often marked the conscious attitude of the natives towards their own parents. (Givón 1979, 32)

It should be noted that although *dugri* speech was one of the main characteristics of the Hebrew used by *Sabra*s in spoken communication among themselves, in other contexts it was not considered acceptable. In conversations with older speakers, and in the production of written texts, native speakers usually resorted to different linguistic modes (Even-Zohar 1996; Reshef 2015, 35–38). This dichotomy was naturally reflected, inter alia, in the employment of honorifics. Since they were no doubt familiar with their elders' use of these linguistic markers, *Sabra*s could produce them when circumstances required it, although honorifics were definitely not part of their own spontaneous speech.

There is no direct evidence of the attitude of first-generation L1 speakers toward the use of honorifics, but some insights can be gleaned from a later testimony by a second-generation native speaker, the writer Yehonatan Geffen, born in 1947 to a father and a mother who were both prototypical *Sabra*s. Geffen relates that when he first encountered this unfamiliar usage in conversations with the poet Yocheved Bat-Miryam, born in Russia in 1901, he was initially perplexed, but later tried to match his own speech to hers:

> It took me a long time, months, to get used to Bat-Miryam's habit of employing the third person. [. . .] I once tried to answer her in the third person, and she smiled and said: "He does not need to speak like me. Really, he should speak as he wishes." (Geffen 1983, translation mine)

In the early days of the speech community, adult L2 speakers dominated, and L1 speakers were a young minority. Although their spontaneous speech was little affected by prescriptive demands, they were well aware that they were expected to confine it to in-group communication, and resort to careful, elevated language in other circumstances (Even-Zohar 1996; Mor and Sichel 2015, 138–42; Reshef 2012b, 145–49; Reshef 2015, 35–38). This is reflected, inter alia, in their adoption of honorifics in the administrative

register. Initially, young administrators were relatively few, and their formal correspondence was mostly addressed to older L2 speakers. However, as their number grew, the employment of honorifics gradually became awkward. While they were accustomed to using them with older coworkers or with strangers, young clerks felt uncomfortable using them with each other, as this sharply contrasted with the communication practices customary within their peer group. As a result, honorifics began to drop out of favor even in the administrative register, where they had previously been the norm. And since in other contexts the spread of honorifics had always been patchy, their gradual decline in administrative correspondence was probably hardly felt. In fact, since the decline of honorifics conformed to the general drift in the period's language towards simpler stylistic norms (see, for example, Ben-Shahar 1994; Mor and Sichel 2015; Reshef 2012c), their eventual disappearance from the language as a whole remained largely unnoticed by ordinary speakers and linguists alike.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The brief appearance of honorifics in EMH, and their subsequent disappearance, is one of many changes that occurred in the language with the rise of native usage. As the new generation of L1 speakers took over, the highly variable Hebrew of the L2 speakers gave way to a stable and more uniform variety of the language (Bar-Adon 1959; Blanc 1968; Reshef forthcoming). The case of honorifics highlights that this process sometimes involved some complexity, since during the standardization that shaped Modern Hebrew as we know it today, linguistic phenomena did not necessarily evolve in a linear manner, from premodern structures through EMH usage to the present-day linguistic state; in many cases there was a change of direction or a reversal of initial trends. A recurring pattern, shared by honorifics and other linguistic features, involved the rejection by the new native speakers of certain features that had been common among the first L2 speakers. This was not limited to contact-induced phenomena, but it also affected certain classical features and many nonclassical usages inherited from earlier strata of Hebrew (see chapters 2 and 5). Occasionally, though to a much lesser extent, the native speakers also rejected innovations by their L2 elders that had emerged spontaneously based on natural linguistic processes (see, for example, the case of sentence adverbials preceded by *ke-* discussed in chapter 2, or the rejection of certain regular action nouns discussed in chapter 6).

The rise of native usage, then, triggered two opposing processes. In many cases it increased the gap between contemporary usage and the classical models. This was due partly to natural changes occurring in speech, and

partly to the fact that native speakers were exposed to the classical models to a lesser extent, and at a much later stage of language acquisition, than most L2 speakers (Blanc 1989, 40). However, in other cases native usage gave rise to features that were closer to the classical models than those found in the speech of the first-generation L2 speakers (see also Rosén 1992). In those cases, the rise of native usage increased the affinity between contemporary Modern Hebrew and the classical language, as compared to its starting point in EMH.

Paradoxically, although the first-generation L2 speakers were usually more familiar with the classical models than the younger L1 speakers due to the traditional Jewish education they received in their youth, it was sometimes the L1 speakers who unwittingly contributed to the exclusion of nonclassical features from the emerging standard. This was the case with honorifics. Introduced by L2 speakers under the influence of their native tongues, the honorifics were later discarded by the native speakers, who thus unintentionally created a closer match between the classical and the modern language.

*Chapter 5*

# Adjective Grading—The Formation of a Paradigm

## 1. PRELIMINARY OVERVIEW

The previous chapter highlighted the complex relations that often existed in EMH between the linguistic legacy and foreign influence. To meet functional needs generated by their former tongues, speakers did not necessarily create exact calques, but often co-opted inherited linguistic means and adapted them to their requirements. Furthermore, contact-induced phenomena that gained currency among first-generation L2 speakers did not necessarily trigger long-lasting structural changes, since they may have been rejected by the L1 speakers of the next generation.

The present chapter addresses additional facets of the restructuring processes that attended the advent of the modern linguistic system by tracing the origins of the comparative and superlative paradigm of adjectives. In this case, the impact of the contact languages was not limited to the distribution of the inherited forms but triggered extensive changes in their function as well. At the same time, the chapter highlights the impact of internal forces: processes of grammaticalization and register differentiation, the preference for classical over medieval elements within the linguistic legacy, and the influence of prescriptive dictates on speakers' linguistic behavior in the formative years of the speech community.

All these factors together resulted in a complete realignment of the adjective grading paradigms of Hebrew. The current state of affairs is not a direct continuation of any previous linguistic state, as in the case of the superlative degree, it evolved through a multiphase, complex process of change. In the first stage, a process of grammaticalization within the written language transformed two classical intensifiers into superlative markers, and these were employed in EMH alongside the formerly dominant construction,

originating in Medieval Hebrew. In the next stage, following the emergence of the speech community, the medieval construction was discarded due to its marked nonclassical flavor, leaving only the two newer alternatives. This change occurred quite abruptly in the 1920s, as part of a general reshuffle of the linguistic system that accompanied the vernacularization of Hebrew (see chapter 2). But before long, the more popular of these two constructions incurred the displeasure of language planners, causing speakers to avoid it in careful, monitored language use. As a consequence, its prevalence in the written and formal language sharply dropped. However, in spontaneous speech, which was much less susceptible to prescriptive rulings, this construction maintained its dominance. A distinction of register was thus created between the two alternatives: one became dominant in colloquial usage, while the other remained a feature of the more formal linguistic registers.

This case study highlights some of the major forces that affected the restructuring processes in the early years of the speech community. While in EMH the coexistence of a range of interchangeable options was common, the transformation of Hebrew into a daily means of communication often involved a process of culling that reduced the measure of redundancy in the linguistic system (see chapters 2 and 3). A recurring phenomenon, clearly reflected in the case of adjective grading, was an aversion to patently nonclassical constructions and a preference for usages that bore at least a superficial resemblance to classical ones. Since the latter elements often assumed new functions, this process created an apparent continuity with the classical models when in fact a significant change was involved. The reality of change was further obscured by the fact that the new functions were often quite natural extensions of the former ones (compare the discussion in Tsirkin-Sadan 2019)—in this case, the very common transformation of intensifiers into superlative markers.

The rejection of the medieval superlative construction, which had previously been dominant, stemmed from speakers' spontaneous distaste for idiosyncratic usages not rooted in the classical language. By contrast, the subsequent restructuring of the paradigm reflected the impact of prescriptive pressures. Since speakers in the early days of the speech community felt unsure of their linguistic proficiency (see chapter 1), they were relatively open to prescriptive guidance, and although they rarely followed the planners' dictates to the letter, in many cases these dictates did have a quite significant, albeit partial, effect on their linguistic behavior. Here, the planners' strong objection to the superlative use of one of the classical elements resulted in its exclusion from the formal registers in favor of the previously less dominant option. Consequently, two different paradigms, each associated with a different register, emerged. The contemporary state of affairs is thus a result of a nonlinear process, which created apparent continuity with the classical

language through the rejection of formerly well-established practices and the allocation of a new function to inherited lexical items.

This chapter traces this historical process and the forces that shaped it in detail. Section 2 presents the main constructions used in EMH and in contemporary Hebrew, while section 3 discusses the inventory of forms that were available in the earlier layers of Hebrew. The discussion highlights the fundamental difference between the classical linguistic strata, which lacked a paradigm of adjective grading, and the later linguistic strata—from Medieval Hebrew onward—in which an independent adjective grading paradigm developed. Sections 4 and 5 focus on the changes that led to the development of the modern paradigms, first within the written language and later in the linguistic habits, both written and spoken, of the emergent speech community.

## 2. THE EXPRESSION OF ADJECTIVE GRADING BEFORE AND AFTER STANDARDIZATION

As stated, adjective grading was among the linguistic domains most affected by the far-reaching standardization processes that shaped Hebrew in the 1920s, following its transformation into a vernacular. The reshuffling of the paradigm resulted in a radical difference between EMH and contemporary Hebrew.

EMH inherited its dominant adjective grading paradigm from the written practices that immediately preceded it. As demonstrated in table 5.1, it used the modifier *yoter* "more" to form both the comparative and the superlative. To express the comparative meaning, the modifier was added to an indefinite construction and could either precede the adjective or follow it; to express the superlative meaning, the modifier was added to a definite construction and had to follow the adjective.

This paradigm, which emerged in the medieval era and served in written Hebrew for generations, is based on the crosslinguistically common strategy of deriving the superlative from the comparative by adding the definite article (Bobaljik 2012, 52–54). However, in the course of the standardization processes that accompanied the emergence of the speech community,

**Table 5.1 The Main Adjective Grading Paradigm in EMH**

| | *Positive* | *Comparative* | *Superlative* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Construction: | ADJ | ADJ + *yoter/yoter* + ADJ<br>ADJ + "more"/"more" + ADJ | *ha-yoter* + ADJ<br>DEF-"more" + ADJ |
| Example: | *gadol* "big" | *gadol yoter/yoter gadol* "bigger" | *ha-yoter gadol* "biggest" |

this straightforward paradigm was rejected in favor of two idiosyncratic paradigms that differed from each other both structurally and stylistically. As demonstrated in table 5.2 below, the transparent relationship between the comparative and superlative that had characterized the EMH paradigm was lost, and the two new paradigms each became associated with a different register, one with colloquial usage and the other with more formal Hebrew (Glinert 1989, 291–92).

From the structural perspective, the expression of the comparative did not change in the course of standardization, but the expression of the superlative underwent a significant change. The construction *ha-yoter*+ADJ (DEF-"more"+ADJ), derived by the simple expedient of adding of the definite article to the comparative, was discarded, and the lexical items *haxi* and *beyoter*, originating in the classical linguistic strata, replaced it as superlative markers. From the stylistic perspective, in the case of the comparative construction, the two possible word orders each became associated with a different register, whereas in the case of the superlative, each register came to use an entirely different construction.

The medieval and EMH superlative construction presented in table 5.1 clearly deviates from the classical models, as the definite article is placed in it before the entire syntactic construction (compare to the discussion of such constructions in chapter 3). Its rejection therefore narrowed the gap that had initially formed in EMH between the classical and modern usages, since the present-day language employs constructions that are externally similar to those found in the ancient Hebrew sources, albeit quite different in function. In other words, we once again discern a nonlinear process involving a retreat from linguistic practices that had taken root in the emergent speech community, thus creating an apparent continuity with the classical strata. In this case, however, the "illusory" nature of this continuity is especially pronounced, since both Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew lacked an independent comparative/

**Table 5.2 The Main Adjective Grading Paradigms in Contemporary Modern Hebrew**

| | *Comparative* | *Superlative* |
|---|---|---|
| Formal Register: | | |
| Construction: | ADJ + *yoter*<br>ADJ + "more" | *ha*-ADJ + *beyoter*<br>DEF-ADJ + "most" |
| Example: | *gadol yoter* "bigger" | *ha-gadol beyoter* "biggest" |
| Colloquial Register: | | |
| Construction: | *yoter* + ADJ<br>"more" + ADJ | *haxi* + ADJ<br>"most" + ADJ |
| Example: | *yoter gadol* "bigger" | *haxi gadol* "biggest" |

superlative paradigm altogether, so the mere existence of such a paradigm is a postclassical phenomenon.

## 3. STRATEGIES OF ADJECTIVE GRADING IN PREVIOUS HISTORICAL STAGES

Hebrew never developed morphological mechanisms for expressing the comparative and superlative degree of adjectives (such as *big-bigger-biggest* in English) but has employed syntactic means to express this in all its strata. While these means differed considerably from one historical period to another, a major dividing line separates the classical linguistic strata (Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew) from later ones, because a mechanism for grading standalone adjectives only developed in Medieval Hebrew. In the classical linguistic stages, the adjective could not be graded in isolation; in order to express the comparative or superlative, a noun denoting the class of comparison had to be explicitly stated. Typical examples are the biblical expressions *ʕaz me-ʔari* "stronger than a lion" (Judges 14:18) or *ha-yafa ba-našim* "the most beautiful among women" (Song of Songs 1:8). However, the employment of such unambiguous formulas was optional, and in many cases the comparative or superlative meaning of the utterance was not indicated by its formal properties at all, but could only be inferred from the context. Thus, *qirʔu beqol gadol* (1Kings 18:27) translates as "cry louder" although the verbatim translation is "cry with a loud voice," and *bit-i ha-gdola* (1Samuel 18:17) translates as "my eldest daughter" although the verbatim translation is "my old daughter" (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, 264, 269).

Although the employment of explicit adjective grading formulas was not compulsory, various such formulas are found in the classical Hebrew sources (see Waltke and O'Connor 1990, 263–71 for Biblical Hebrew, Pérez Fernández 1997, 81–83 for Rabbinic Hebrew), the most salient of which are the following. The basic mechanism used in the classical strata of Hebrew for the expression of the comparative degree was the insertion of the preposition *mi(n)* "from" between the adjective and noun, for example, the biblical *matoq mi-dvaš* "sweeter than honey" (Judges 14:18) or the rabbinic *gadol mi-moše* "greater than Moses" (Sota 1:9). Minor variations on this basic formula are attested in both Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew (Waltke and O'Connor 1990, 263–67; Azar 1995, 133–34). Particularly significant for the subsequent development of the adjective grading paradigms was the occasional addition, in Rabbinic Hebrew, of the adverb *yoter/yater* "a lot" in order to emphasize the comparison, for example, *ʕani yoter mi-hilel* "much poorer than Hillel" (Babli Yoma 35v).

In these rabbinic expressions, the function of adjective grading was expressed syntactically, by the insertion of *mi(n)* between adjective and noun, and the noun denoting the class of comparison had to be included. However, over time, *yoter* became associated with this syntactic formula, and in a process of grammaticalization it absorbed the scalar function and could eventually express it on its own (Kaddari 1995, 514–15). The path of grammaticalization followed by *yoter* therefore led from Biblical Hebrew, which used it as an adverb but not as a modifier of adjectives, through Rabbinic Hebrew, which occasionally incorporated it in the adjective grading formula, to Medieval Hebrew, which started to use it independently as an indicator of the comparative degree not only with adjectives but with adverbs as well (e.g., *maher yoter* "more quickly"). In addition, under the influence of the contact languages, Medieval Hebrew also began to place this modifier before the adjective and not only after it (Shatil 2014, 294–95). This practice persisted, and to this day *yoter* functions as the default means of expressing the comparative and can occupy either of the two positions.

The evolution of the superlative degree was more complex, since it underwent fundamental changes not only during the transition from the classical stages of Hebrew to the later linguistic strata but also throughout the emergence of Modern Hebrew. Unlike the strategy for expressing the comparative, which has maintained continuity since medieval times, the present-day forms of the superlative stabilized only in the 1930s.

The main strategy for expressing the superlative in the classical texts involved the insertion of the preposition *be-* "in" between the adjective and noun, as in the aforementioned biblical example of *ha-yafa ba-našim* "the most beautiful among women." Rabbinic Hebrew added the relative pronoun *še-* to the formula, and the inclusion of the definite article became optional, for example,

(1)

(a) Definite construction:
*ha-yafa* *še-ba-hen*
DEF-lovely REL-in-them.F

"The loveliest of them all" (Pesahim 9:8)

(b) Indefinite construction:
*qtana* *še-ba-banot*
small.F REL-in-daughters

"The smallest daughter" (Shabbat 8:4)

Means for expressing the superlative degree of standalone adjectives first appeared in medieval translations of texts originally written in Arabic by the Jewish sages of Muslim Spain. The deliberately literal approach of the medieval translators created a unique linguistic style that became popular among Hebrew readers, and many of its features were later adopted by Jews in Christian lands who had no knowledge of Arabic (Hopkins 2013). Since in Arabic the superlative is a distinct grammatical category, the translators produced various nonclassical syntactic constructions to serve as a Hebrew equivalent (Goshen-Gottstein 2006, 95–96). Among other strategies, they resorted to the crosslinguistically common one of deriving the superlative from the comparative by adding the definite article (Bobaljik 2012, 52), producing the formula *ha-yoter*+ADJ (DEF-"more"+ADJ). Resembling constructions familiar from the European contact languages (compare, for example, the French "le plus+ADJ"), this formula was soon adopted in the production of original Hebrew texts and became the most common strategy of superlative formation.

The classical superlative formulas were retained as well, primarily for purposes of stylistic variety, but they were far less common than the standalone medieval construction and were often used in combination with it, as shown in the examples below (cited from Ma'agarim, n.d). In 2a the standalone construction is used in isolation, in 2b it is combined with the rabbinic superlative formula ADJ+*še+be-*, and in 2c it appears along with the comparative formula ADJ+*mi(n)*.

(2)

(a) *ha-har* ***ha-yoter*** ***gadol*** *ha-ʕomed*
DEF-mountain DEF-more big REL-stands
*be-ʔemcaʕ* *ha-ʔi*
in-middle.CS DEF-island

"The largest mountain, standing in the middle of the island" (*švile ʕolam*, 1822)

(b) *ve-hu* ***ha-yoter*** ***gadol*** ***še-be-****hare* *ha-ʔarec* *ha-hi*
and-it DEF-more big REL-in-mountains.CS DEF-land DEF.DEM

"and it is the largest of the mountains in that land" (*švile ʕolam*, 1822)

(c) *ha-ʔi* ***ha-yoter*** ***gadol*** ***me-****ʔiye* *ʔafrika*
DEF-island DEF-more big from-islands.CS Africa

"The largest island in Africa" (*toldot haʔarec*, 1841)

Being the most salient option in written Hebrew since medieval times, the formula *ha-yoter*+ADJ retained its dominance in EMH. Up to the 1920s, it was widely used in various non-belletristic genres, from journalistic, scientific, and philosophical works to administrative, business, and private correspondence, and it eventually even began spreading to the literary style as well (according to the Historical Dictionary Archives (Ma'agarim, n.d.), its first occurrence in literary texts was in 1897). The medieval construction, then, was well-rooted in the language, and its domains of usage were even expanding. Nevertheless, in the early 1920s the trend reversed itself, and within a few years this formerly common construction became old-fashioned and disappeared almost completely from all text types.

A necessary condition for this dramatic shift was, of course, the existence of alternative means for expressing the superlative. Indeed, despite its long-established supremacy, the formula *ha-yoter*+ADJ had always shared the field with alternative means of expression. In addition to the classical formulas, which remained in productive use to some extent, there were also newer superlative markers that had formed in written Hebrew since the late eighteenth century, namely two classical intensifiers, *haxi* and *beyoter*, that had gradually acquired a superlative reading.

This process, which is discussed in detail below, evolved spontaneously due to the semantic proximity of the intensifier and superlative functions. In many contexts there is no clear-cut distinction between a "high degree" and the "highest degree," and both interpretations are possible. Such ambiguous contexts may generate a process of grammaticalization, which is completed once the affected element starts occurring in unambiguous contexts that rule out its original meaning (Brinton and Traugott 2005, 26–27). In our case, the process culminated in the formation of a real alternative to the medieval construction, namely new linguistic means for the grading of standalone adjectives. This coincided with the transformation of Hebrew into a vernacular, and as it enhanced the measure of variation in the language, it was likely to be affected by the standardization processes that followed suit. The final outcome of these processes was the formation and stabilization of the modern adjective grading paradigms currently in use.

## 4. THE FORMATION OF NEW SUPERLATIVE MARKERS

The modernization of Hebrew began many years before it was revived as a vernacular, as writers, from the Haskalah period onward, started to use it in the composition of modern, nonreligious texts (see chapter 1). Adjective grading was one of the grammatical phenomena that underwent far-reaching changes during that period. Although *maskilic* writers continued to use the classical and medieval formulas for the expression of the superlative, in

non-belletristic texts they also created new superlative markers through the grammaticalization of two classical intensifiers: the Biblical *haxi* and the Rabbinic *beyoter*. Grammaticalization rarely originates in the written language (Mair 2011, 245), but these two elements are clear examples of this rare phenomenon, since indisputable cases of their employment as superlatives are attested in texts that predate the revival period.

The association of *haxi* with intensifying force is based on a single instance in the Bible, which in all probability represents a scribal error. Ordinarily, the Bible uses *haxi* as an interrogative, but in one obscure passage in the book of Samuel it precedes the adjective *nixbad* "important" in a declarative sentence referring to one of David's heroes (2Samuel 23:19). In another version of the same passage (1Chronicles 11:25), the emphatic particle *hino* "he is indeed" appears instead. Based on this single occurrence, the form *haxi* was sometimes used by medieval Hebrew poets as an emphatic element in various syntactic environments, usually in order to meet the constraints of the poetic meter, whereas in prose the form occurred very rarely, and solely as part of the expression *haxi nixbad* "very important," borrowed from the aforementioned biblical verse (Berggrün 1995, 229–31). The latter usage is demonstrated in the following example, from a *maskilic* scientific work (cited from Ma'agarim, n.d):

(3)

| *ha-yatuš* | *ha-qatan* | ***haxi*** | ***nixbad*** | *hu* | *mi-kol* | *ʕace* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DEF-mosquito | DEF-little | indeed | important | COP | from-all | trees.CS |
| *ha-yaʕar* | *ha-gvohim* | *baʕavur* | *ha-ħayut* | *še-b-o* | | |
| DEF-forest | DEF-tall.PL | for | DEF-life | REL-in-it | | |

"Indeed, the little mosquito is more significant than all the tall trees of the forest, because it is alive" (*sefer habrit,* 1797)

As opposed to *haxi*, with its dubious origins and limited distribution, the form *beyoter* "very" has served as an intensifier since the Rabbinic Hebrew period. In medieval and premodern Hebrew texts, the form occurred freely in both definite and indefinite constructions without any difference in meaning (Kaddari 1991, 516–17, 541), as evident from the following examples, from a *maskilic* medical manual (cited from Ma'agarim, n.d):

(4)

(a)

| *lo* | *tov* | *le-ha-ħole* | *liškav* | ***be-ħeder*** | ***ħam*** | ***beyoter*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NEG | good | to-DEF-sick | to.lie | in-room | hot | very |

"It is not good for the patient to lie in a very warm room" (*darxe harefuʔa*, 1870)

(b) *lo* *laševet* ***b.a-ħeder*** ***ha-ħam*** ***beyoter***
NEG to.sit in.DEF-room DEF-hot very

"[It is advisable] not to sit in a very warm room" (*darxe harefuʔa*, 1870)

During the nineteenth century, while preserving their traditional use, *beyoter* and later *haxi* also gradually acquired a superlative meaning. This kind of change may happen based on the presence of ambiguous bridging contexts, in which both the original meaning and a new interpretation are equally likely (Brinton and Traugott 2005, 26–27). In the case of *beyoter*, such ambiguity often occurred in definite constructions, since the definite article often suggests an end-scalar reading, namely "the most" rather than "very" (Kaddari 1991, 541). For instance, in the following example, from the same *maskilic* medical text, both interpretations ("very strong and healthy people" and "the strongest and healthiest people") are possible:

(5)
*liʕʕamim* ***ha-ħazaqim*** ***ve-ha-briʔim*** ***beyoter*** *tidbaq*
sometimes DEF-strong.PL and-DEF-healthy.PL more/most stick.FUT.3FSG
*ba-hem* *ha-maħala* *yoter* *mi-ba-ʔanašim* *refuyim* *va-ħalašim*
in-them DEF-illness more than.in.people frail.PL and-weak.PL

"Sometimes the illness affects very strong and healthy people/the strongest and healthiest people more severely than the frail and the weak" (*darxe harefuʔa*, 1870)

Given the author's practice in the rest of the book, he probably intended the intensifier reading rather than the superlative one, but the context allows both. Eventually, the definite construction became exclusively associated with the superlative reading and began appearing in contexts that preclude the intensifier reading. The first clear-cut example recorded in the archives of the Historical Dictionary Project (Ma'agarim, n.d) is from 1797:

(6)
***ha-paštan*** ***beyoter*** *mi-kol* *tofse* *ha-tora* *hu*
DEF-literalistic most from-all keepers.CS DEF-Bible is
*raši*
Rashi

"The most literalist of the interpreters of the Bible is Rashi" (*sefer habrit,* 1797)

Grammaticalization processes are usually slow to spread (Mair 2011, 249; Hopper and Traugott 2003, 49), and in this case too, the new usage remained

marginal in written Hebrew for more than a century (Reshef 2016a, 211–12). The ambiguity of the form was probably one of the factors that hindered its establishment as a superlative, and while nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Hebrew texts occasionally used it as such for the sake of stylistic variation alongside its alternatives, often within a single context (Reshef 2016b, 237), until the 1930s it was the least preferred strategy for expressing the superlative.

The fate of *haxi* was markedly different. Although first signs of its transformation into a superlative appeared only in the late nineteenth century, this new usage spread at a staggering pace, and by the 1920s it had become the dominant superlative form. As noted in the previous section, for many generations *haxi* was sporadically used in writing as an intensifier, exclusively in the biblical expression *haxi nixbad* "the most important" (Berggrün 1995, 229–31). The *maskilic* writers, who made extensive use of biblical quotations, adopted this expression, but for the sake of stylistic variation they occasionally replaced *nixbad* with other adjectives (Ben-Asher 1969, 40). The following example is particularly noteworthy, since the author replaced *nixbad* with a different adjective (*tovim* "good"), but also included *nixbad* in the very same sentence:

(7)

| *šnehem* | ***haxi*** | ***tovim*** | *ʔulam* | *ha-rišon* | ***nixbad*** | *yoter* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| both | indeed | good | but | DEF-first | important | more |

"Both are indeed good, but the first is more important" (*more nevuxe hazman*, 1851 [cited from Ma'agarim, n.d.])

In this particular example *haxi* is clearly an intensifier, but in *maskilic* texts it also frequently occurs in ambiguous contexts that allow both an intensifier and a superlative interpretation. For instance, in a list of prominent medieval grammarians presented by the well-known *maskilic* grammarian Yehuda Leib Ben Ze'ev in the preface to his popular dictionary *ocar hašorašim* ("the thesaurus of roots," first published in 1807), the last name mentioned is preceded by a fixed formula that often appears in such lists: *ha-ʔaħaron haxi nixbad* "the last very important (one)" (cited from Ma'agarim, n.d.). However, since the author immediately states that this grammarian was "the pillar on which all later authors relied," the formula may be easily interpreted by the uninitiated reader as expressing the superlative degree, namely "the last and most important (one)."

In the second half of the nineteenth century, *haxi nixbad* appeared ever more frequently in contexts that allow an end-scalar reading, and although the earliest examples in the Historical Dictionary Archives are from the 1870s (Reshef 2016b, 275), the Jewish press yields some earlier instances, for example,

(8)

(a) *kama* *me-ʔaħe-nu* *yošvim* *ben* *yoʕace*
some of-brethren-POSS.1PL sit.PRS.3MPL among counselors.CS
*ve-sare* *ha-memšala (kongres)* *ve-ʔeħad* *me-hem*
and-ministers.CS DEF-government (Congress) and-one of-them
***haxi*** ***nixbad***, *ha-ʔadon* *ha-senator [. . .]* *yehuda* *filip*
particularly important DEF-Mr. DEF-senator Yehuda Philip
*binyamin*
Benjamin

"Some of our brethren are among the advisors and leaders of Congress, and one of them is particularly important, the Senator Mr. Yehuda Philip Benjamin" (*hamagid*, 1860)

(b) *min* *ha-ʔarbaʕ* *ha-ʔele* ***haxi*** ***nixbedet*** *ʔitalya*
of DEF-four DEF-DEM particularly important Italy
*bi-gvurat* *yemin* *gibore-ha* *garibaldi* *ve-čialdini*
in-bravery.CS right.hand heroes-POSS.3FSG Garibaldi and-Cialdini

"Of these four (countries) Italy is the most noted for the bravery of its heroes Garibaldi and Cialdini" (*hakarmel*, 1861)

This usage soon expanded to other adjectives, and joined the set of options for expressing the superlative degree. In contrast to the slow spread of *beyoter*, the adoption of *haxi* was rapid, and it soon became very common. This difference in the pace of diffusion between the two usages may be attributed to the unambiguous nature of *haxi*, whose distribution as an intensifier was hitherto restricted to the biblical expression, and was too limited to compete with its new superlative meaning, as well as to its structural resemblance to the dominant medieval construction *ha-yoter*+ADJ—namely the fact that unlike *beyoter*, it precedes the adjective. Thus, while in early twentieth century it still competed with the medieval construction, by the 1920s it had replaced this construction as the most popular strategy of superlative formation in daily written practices (Reshef 2015, 81; Reshef 2016a, 211–12). The reasons for this shift, and for the subsequent restructuring of the field during the 1920s, is the topic of the next section.

## 5. RESTRUCTURING PROCESSES FOLLOWING THE SPREAD OF HEBREW SPEECH

Although the three strategies for expressing the superlative were not equally prevalent in EMH texts, writers treated them as stylistic variants and

alternated between them freely, often using them side by side in the very same context (Reshef 2016b, 274, 276). In speech, however, *haxi* reigned supreme. Its dominance was repeatedly noted by language planners, who tended to attribute it to the impact of the contact languages or to the length of the competing forms. One of them claimed that the medieval construction *ha-yoter*+ADJ "does not express the superlative degree with the same force as equivalent expressions in other languages," and therefore "a short superlative expression is sorely needed" (Schneider 1930, 189). Another noted the brevity of *haxi* (Peretz 1953, 4), and a third attributed the spread of this usage to the expression *haxi tov* "best" (literally "most good"), used as a short Hebrew equivalent for the common German expression *am besten* (Avinery 1964, 128). Writers also mentioned word order as a possible reason for the popularity of *haxi*, claiming that speakers, and especially children, "do not want, and are unable, to restrain themselves, namely to postpone the excitement of the exaggeration to the end of the sentence" (Avinery 1943, 397). The opaque morphology of the form may have also contributed to its popularity in speech by rendering it syntactically flexible. Unlike its alternatives, *haxi* can be used independently (as in 9a), can be reduplicated (as in 9b), and can even be attached to certain verbs (as in 9c):

(9)

(a) *ʔaba* *šel-i* *hu* ***haxi*** *b.a-ʕolam*
dad POSS-1SG COP most in.DEF-world

"My dad is the best in the world" (children's song)

(b) *šeʔelat* *ha-ʕavoda* *ha-ʕivrit* *hi* *ʔaħat* *ha-šeʔelot*
question.CS DEF-work DEF-Hebrew COP one DEF-questions
***haxi*** ***haxi*** *ħašuvot*
most most important

"The question of Jewish work is one of the most important questions" (*doʔar hayom*, 1920)

(c) *[hu]* ***haxi*** *ʔahav* *basar*
[he] most liked meat

"[He] liked meat best of all" (*maʕariv*, 1961)

In the 1920s, the preference for *haxi* spread to the written language, and it replaced the medieval formula *ha-yoter*+ADJ as the dominant superlative expression in ordinary, non-belletristic writing (Reshef 2015, 74–6; Reshef 2016, 211–12). Like many other phenomena discussed in this book, this

development was part of the comprehensive standardization process triggered by the transformation of Hebrew into a daily means of communication. This process involved inter alia the abrupt rejection of nonclassical linguistic habits in favor of alternatives that better fit the classical models (see chapter 2). In the case of the superlative, the isolated biblical instance of *haxi*+ADJ was sufficient motivation for preferring it over the formula *ha-yoter*+ADJ, which does not occur even once in any of the classical sources. Prescriptive rulings reinforced this popular view by repeatedly highlighting the nonclassical character of the medieval construction (e.g., Schneider 1930, 189; Lazebnik 1930, 413).

Before long, however, the explosive spread of *haxi* attracted the attention of language planners, some of whom pointed out that it probably represented a scribal error in the Bible rather than a genuine biblical usage. This point was made already in 1920, in a meeting of the Language Committee (Klausner 1920, 52). Although an official decision to reject this form was made only in 1933 (Barak and Gadish 2009, 58), individual language planners expressed their reservations about it in very forceful terms. Typical examples are the claim that "there is no basis for the employment of *haxi*" since "there is no doubt that the [biblical] passage is flawed" (Schneider 1930, 190), or that "such a peculiar form must not be used in Modern Hebrew" (Klausner 1935, 45). Coming at such an early stage, when *haxi* was only beginning to gain currency in the written language, the effect of prescriptive disapproval on the general public was very strong. This usage thus became one of the hallmarks of colloquial Hebrew that must be avoided in writing, and although language planners later changed their minds and started advocating it as correct (see the survey of Ben-Asher 1969, 40–41), its perception as unsuitable for monitored, careful linguistic registers had already been internalized.

The prescriptive condemnation of *haxi* soon led to a further reshuffle in speakers' written practices, leading them to avoid it in formal language. The formerly popular construction *ha-yoter*+ADJ was no longer a viable option, not only because it had been branded as nonclassical and therefore unsuitable but also because it had become outdated. Therefore, in monitored, careful language use, speakers resorted to the third option, until then only marginally used, of *beyoter*. As a result, the balance of power between *haxi* and *beyoter* shifted. This is clearly reflected in the period's newspapers, a collection of which can be accessed on the Historical Jewish Press website (http://web.nli.org.il/sites/jpress). As is evident from the data presented in table 5.3, in comparison to the 1920s, in the 1930s *beyoter* occurs much more frequently with a range of common adjectives. Although the figures presented in the table are merely approximate due to the limitations of the search engine of the website (Reshef 2017, 544–45), they clearly indicate a consistent trend: for all the adjectives examined, the prevalence of *haxi* dropped significantly between the 1920s and the 1930s, whereas *beyoter* became more common.

**Table 5.3 The Distribution of the Main Superlative Formulae for Some Common Adjectives in the 1920s and the 1930s according to Data Extracted from the Historical Jewish Press Website**

| | haxi+*ADJ* | | ha-*ADJ*+beyoter | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *The Adjective* | *1920s* | *1930s* | *1920s* | *1930s* |
| *gadol* "big" | ~700 | ~380 | ~300 | ~2300 |
| *tov* "good" | ~320 | ~160 | ~230 | ~1280 |
| *ħašuv* "important" | ~250 | ~90 | ~200 | ~1000 |
| *qaše* "hard" | ~150 | ~80 | ~100 | ~520 |
| *qatan* "small" | ~80 | ~35 | ~30 | ~220 |

In this case, prescriptive dictates evidently had a significant and almost immediate influence on careful language use. However, the more colloquial registers were not affected in the same manner, and *haxi* retained its former status as the main—in fact nearly exclusive—superlative marker in spontaneous speech. In other words, the result of the prescriptive dictates in this case was neither full compliance by the general public nor total rejection, but the formation of a clear-cut register distinction in educated language use. Thus, in the 1930s two different paradigms emerged, one consistently used in daily speech, and the other preferred in formal circumstances and in writing.

This situation, of two paradigms in complementary distribution, remains a stable property of standard Modern Hebrew to this day (Glinert 1989, 291–92). The classical superlative constructions are still familiar to speakers and used in literary and elevated style (Glinert 2013b), but the medieval construction, which had become outdated by the early 1920s, is no longer part of their linguistic experience. Once again, the complete disappearance of this construction enhanced the affinity between present-day Modern Hebrew and the classical models, in comparison to EMH. Whereas EMH relied on a markedly nonclassical construction, present-day usage is confined to the inventory of forms found in the ancient language, albeit with new functions. Thus, despite fundamental differences between contemporary Hebrew and the classical linguistic strata (namely, Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew) in the overall organization of the adjective grading system, apparent continuity replaced the former state of an obvious departure from the classical models.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The combined impact of two factors—transformation processes within written Hebrew prior to the revival, and prescriptive demands presented to speakers in the initial years of the revival—resulted in a closer match between classical and modern usage in the domain of adjective grading. Like many

other nonclassical features, the patently nonclassical superlative formula that had been well-established in the language for many generations failed to survive the accelerated standardization processes that attended the vernacularization of Modern Hebrew. Although in early twentieth century this formula seemed to be gaining currency, and started penetrating into literary registers that had formerly avoided it, by the early 1920s the trend reversed itself, and this formula was replaced by alternatives originating in the classical inventory of forms.

The need to express the superlative degree of standalone adjectives was not inherited from the classical language, but it was due to the influence of the contact languages from the medieval period onward. However, the modern users of Hebrew met that need in a different manner from their predecessors. While medieval writers created a simple paradigm, deriving the superlative from the comparative through the addition of the definite article, more modern writers, motivated by the purist bias that characterized written Hebrew from the Haskalah period onward, developed more idiosyncratic paradigms through the grammaticalization of linguistic elements originating in the classical linguistic strata. These new usages were adopted by the emergent speech community, and the relationship between them was then restructured by a complex set of pressures, including the influence of the contact languages, linguistic considerations such as word order and length, and the significant influence of prescriptive demands in those early years. The result was a complete reshuffle of the field through the creation of superlative constructions from the range of possibilities offered by the classical sources—for the mere combination of *haxi* and *beyoter* with adjectives is not new, but is well attested throughout the history of Hebrew in the role of intensifiers.

As a rule, differences in distribution and function are less obvious than differences in the inventory of forms and constructions. Consequently, notions of correctness in Hebrew have always been based primarily on formal correspondence to the classical inventory of expressions. Such affinity satisfies the ideal of continuity with the inherited language without necessarily requiring a complete structural and functional similarity to it, and therefore allowed adapting Hebrew to the changing needs of expression while maintaining an appearance of continuity (Ben-Hayyim 1953/1992). The case of adjective grading is a particularly striking example of this, since it involves an especially wide gap between the classical forms and their modern functions. This case thus highlights with particular clarity the complexity of such issues as the origins of Modern Hebrew, its relationship with previous linguistic strata, and the notions of continuity, linearity, and change as they apply to its evolution.

# *Chapter 6*

# The Standardization of Action Nouns

## 1. VERBAL TEMPLATES AND ACTION NOUNS

This final chapter of the book deals with the class of derived nominals known in Hebrew as "action nouns" (*šmot peʕula*), and outlines major trends in the process of their standardization (for the definition of the category and for alternative terms used in the literature see Kuzar 2013; Berman forthcoming). As the most laconic, "tightly packaged" form of nominalization available in Hebrew (Kuzar 2013; Berman forthcoming), action nouns are productively employed in speech only sparsely, and are therefore acquired relatively late in the process of language acquisition, as part of mastering educated usage (Ravid and Avidor 1998; Ravid and Berman 2009). This, in fact, is a cross-linguistic trait of nominalization. It tends to be a feature of written and formal registers, which use it as a means to distance language from actual events in order to achieve a detached, authoritative tone (Chafe and Danielewicz 1987, 100; Miller and Weinart 1998, 135; Biber 1991, 15, 19). As such, action nouns were a crucial component in the creation of a Hebrew equivalent to the formal registers of other modern languages. Since these registers developed spontaneously at an early stage, in response to need and through constant use (see chapter 2), tracing the evolution of action nouns is of special interest, for it can shed light on the unconscious forces that affected the linguistic choices of educated speakers as they developed Hebrew's modern means of expression.

Unlike in former strata of the language, in present-day Modern Hebrew action nouns are considered an integral, albeit special, category of the verbal system. Generally speaking, this system is based on nonconcatenative morphology, involving of the insertion of roots, typically consisting of three radicals and bearing the core meaning of the verb, into one of seven verbal

templates: the active templates *CaCaC*, *CiCeC*, and *hiCCiC*, the passive templates *CuCaC* and *huCCaC*, and the middle-voice templates *niCCaC* and *hitCaCeC*. These templates express systematic valence distinctions associated with agency and voice, as well as idiosyncratic meanings specific to certain roots (Doron 2003; Berman 1975a). For example, the root *ʔ-k-l*, bearing the core meaning "to eat," predictably denotes "ate" in the basic *CaCaC* template, "was eaten" in the middle-voice *niCCaC* template and "fed" in the *hiCCiC* template (typically associated with causative meaning), but in the *CiCeC* template it means "to consume," which is not predictable from any semantic feature associated with this template. In principle, any root may be inserted into any verbal template, but most roots appear only in some templates but not in others (for discussions of the verbal system of Hebrew see for example Berman 1978; Schwarzwald 1996; Arad 2005; Bolozky 2007; Cook 2013).

In addition to tense inflection and the imperative, the verbal paradigms of Modern Hebrew include three nominal categories associated with the verb: the infinitive, the participle, and the action noun. Action nouns occupy a special place in this system, since unlike the infinitive and the participle, whose derivation is very regular, the derivation of action nouns has both regular and irregular aspects. The system is regular in that each nonpassive verbal template is associated with a default action noun template, which in principle can be used productively to derive an action noun from any given verb (see, for example, Berman 1978, 84; Berman forthcoming; Schwarzwald 2001, 40–41; Schwarzwald 2002, vol. 2, 66). In practice, however, the inventory of lexicalized action nouns that form part of the standard language features a large portion of irregular forms as well as many lexical gaps (Ravid and Avidor 1998; Ravid 1999; Berman forthcoming). This inherent tension between regularity and irregularity, as well as its origins in the historical development of the action-noun category, will be briefly discussed in section 2.

Whereas action nouns and the morphological templates for their derivation originate in previous historical strata of Hebrew, the category as a whole underwent considerable restructuring during the formation of the standard register of Modern Hebrew. At first glance, present-day usage seems to follow directly from earlier linguistic states, since much of the change involved cementing the association of each verbal template with a major inherited action-noun template through lexical expansion. However, a closer look at action-noun usage during the early years of the speech community reveals that certain nonlinear processes were also at work.

A comparison of EMH practices and contemporary practices reveals two main types of differences between them. First, although the linguistic legacy provides nominalization mechanisms for all verbal templates, section 3 will show that unlike in present-day Hebrew, in EMH nominalizations were

mostly restricted to active verbs. Middle-voice verbs, by contrast, were rarely associated with action nouns, and alternative means of expression were clearly preferred. In these templates, the connection between verb and action noun was evidently not yet established in speakers' perception, and it was only in the later phases of standardization that middle-voice action nouns gained currency. Thus, although the process of standardization did not involve the introduction of brand new mechanisms for deriving action nouns, it did produce a significant structural change in this domain, in that the relatively loose connection between verbs and derived nominals gave way to a situation whereby each nonpassive verbal template became firmly associated with a specific default action-noun template, thus transforming action nouns into an integral, quasi-inflectional category of the verb. Second, section 4 will demonstrate that, although the general thrust in the domain of action nouns was toward greater morphological regularity, some regular forms that were common in the early phase of standardization were later rejected in favor of irregular alternatives, and despite their initial prevalence they have not integrated into the standard lexicon of Modern Hebrew.

These two processes affected action nouns in opposite ways. The extension of the quasi-automatic formation of derived nominals to the middle-voice templates obviously increased the measure of regularity. At the same time, the rejection of some common regular action nouns in favor of irregular ones increased the measure of lexical irregularity. This dialectic process, which, it will be argued, is closely connected to the use of action nouns in the previous linguistic strata, highlights the lasting impact of the linguistic legacy on certain structural properties of standard Modern Hebrew.

## 2. ACTION NOUNS IN MODERN HEBREW AND IN PREVIOUS LINGUISTIC STRATA

Table 6.1 presents the systematic pairing of each nonpassive verbal template with a default action-noun template in contemporary Hebrew. The minor morphophonological variations evident in the examples are produced either by synchronic phonotactic rules or by rules of traditional Hebrew grammar that are no longer phonetically motivated (e.g., changes in the vicinity of historical gutturals) (see Bolozky 2013; Schwarzwald 2004). Most of the forms are polysemic, but here and throughout the chapter, the translation is restricted to the most relevant meaning, which best demonstrates the regular semantic relation between the action (or state) expressed by the verb and the gerundive meaning expressed by the action noun.

The default status of these templates potentially enables speakers to productively nominalize any given verb—but in actual production this potential

**Table 6.1 The Regular Action-noun Templates in Modern Hebrew**

| *Basic form of Verbal Template* (PST.3MSG) | *Default Action Noun Template* | *Examples* |
|---|---|---|
| CaCaC | CCiCa | *badaq* "examined"><*bdiqa* "examination"<br>*ʔaxal* "ate"><*ʔaxila* "eating"<br>*pataħ* "opened"><*ptiħa* "opening" |
| CiCeC | CiCuC | *qipel* "folded"><*qipul* "folding"<br>*piteaħ* "developed"><*pituaħ* "developing"<br>*tipel* "treated"><*tipul* "treatment" |
| hiCCiC | haCCaCa | *hidbiq* "glued"><*hadbaqa* "gluing"<br>*hifgin* "demonstrated"><*hafgana* "demonstration"<br>*himci* "invented"><*hamcaʔa* "invention" |
| hitCaCeC | hitCaCCut | *hitnacel* "apologized"><*hitnaclut* "apology"<br>*hitqadem* "progressed"><*hitqadmut* "progress"<br>*hitpateaħ* "developed"><*hitpatħut* "development" |
| niCCaC | hiCaCCut | *nifrad* "separated"><*hipardut* "separation"<br>*neʕelam* "disappeared"><*heʕalmut* "disappearance"<br>*nimnaʕ* "abstained"><*himanʕut* "abstention" |

is constrained by arbitrary lexical restrictions of various kinds (Ben-Asher 1976; Berman 1975b; Berman forthcoming; Ravid 1999; Ravid and Avidor 1998; Ravid and Cahana-Amitay 2005; and see section 4 below). According to Ravid (1999, 68), the derivation of action nouns subject to such restrictions amounted to nearly 20 percent of the 600 common Modern Hebrew verbs included in her sample. Some verbs lack an action noun altogether (such as *ħika* "waited"), others take an action noun in a template that is normally associated with a different verbal template (as in the case of *rašam* "enrolled"> *rišum* "enrollment"), or are paired with an action noun in one of the minor nominal templates, which are not the default form associated with any verbal template (e.g., *ʔahav* "loved">*ʔahava* "love"). In certain cases, a verb may be nominalized in a nominal template that is not normally associated with the verbal system at all (e.g., *šilem* "paid">*tašlum* "payment"), or in two different templates with very similar meanings (e.g., *haras* "destroyed">*harisa* "destruction, destroying," and *heres* "destruction"). The irregularity is enhanced even further by the fact that some action-noun templates are also used to form other types of nouns. For instance, many forms derived in the template *CCiCa* denote objects rather than actions (e.g., *blita* "bulge" or *rešima* "list"), and some have both meanings (e.g., *kvisa*, which denotes both the action of doing laundry and the laundered clothes themselves). Hence, although Modern Hebrew action nouns constitute an integral component of the verbal paradigm, the status of a form as an action noun does not follow automatically from its morphology, but rather from its syntax, as is generally the case with nominalizations (compare Comrie and Thompson 2007).

Due to this inherent tension between regularity and irregularity, it is not sufficient for speakers to be familiar with the default pairings of verbal and action-noun templates; rather, they must master a set of arbitrary conventions that determine whether a certain action noun exists, what form it takes, and to what extent it is lexicalized (Ravid and Chana-Amitai 2005, 161; Berman forthcoming). However, the dominance of the default action-noun templates does enable speakers to form nominalizations on an ad-hoc basis from any given verb, regardless of these conventions. As a result, spontaneous language occasionally features regular forms that are not part of the established lexicon, such as *hitraglut* (from *hitragel* "got used to"), cited by Ravid (1999, 66) from a casual conversation. Grammars of Modern Hebrew tend to cope with this inherent tension by presenting the category of action nouns as an integral component of the verbal system, while pointing out its uniqueness as the only category within the paradigm that only partially follows the default formation rules (e.g., Berman 1978, 84–85, 325ff.; Berman forthcoming).

Another noteworthy characteristic of action nouns regards their division into two groups of forms. Although in broad grammatical terms each of the nonpassive verbal templates is associated with a default action-noun template, active and middle-voice action nouns differ quite significantly in their usage patterns. The former are not only statistically much more common but are more prone to morphological irregularity, whereas the latter tend to be morphologically regular but are more prone to lexical gaps (i.e., fewer forms are lexicalized, and they are not as frequently used) (Ravid 1999).

The difference in prevalence stems from agency and voice differences between active and middle-voice verbs. Looking at active verbs and their middle-voice counterparts, we find that the basic meaning of the root is typically expressed by the active template, while the derived middle-voice form has a more specific meaning stemming from the change of valence (Berman 1975a; Doron 2003). Since nominalization neutralizes valence distinctions, the noun derived from the active verb often serves as the action noun for the middle-voice verb as well, as it encodes the basic meaning they share (Ravid 1999; Berman forthcoming). For instance, the lexicalized form *bišul* "cooking" corresponds both to the transitive verb *bišel* "cooked" (as in *We cooked the food*) and to its middle-voice intransitive counterpart *hitbašel* "cooked" (as in *The food cooked quickly*). When speakers need to explicitly express the intransitive shade of meaning, they may produce the middle-voice action noun *hitbašlut*, but this ad-hoc form is not part of the standard lexicon of Modern Hebrew (Ravid 1999) and therefore sounds rather unconventional.

The difference in the proportion of irregular forms in each group is connected to their measure of lexicalization (Ravid 1999), as well as to historical factors (Reshef 2012d; Reshef 2012e). Synchronic complexity in

contemporary Hebrew often stems from the heterogeneous character of the linguistic legacy, namely from the incorporation of grammatical rules and lexical items originating in different historical strata into a single linguistic system (Ben-Hayyim 1953/1992). In the case of action nouns, both the tension between regularity and irregularity and the different behavior of active and middle-voice forms stem, to some extent, from historical parameters.

Action nouns first emerged as an independent grammatical category in Rabbinic Hebrew. Biblical Hebrew obviously has nominal forms related to the verbal system, but their number is limited, they are morphologically heterogeneous, and their functions are not clearly distinct from those of the infinitive. Conversely, in Rabbinic Hebrew action nouns constitute a separate grammatical category, different from both the infinitive and the abstract nouns associated with the verb (Kutscher 1977; Ben-Asher 1976). Moreover, although Rabbinic Hebrew still employs multiple nominal templates to form action nouns, there are signs for the association of each of the three active verbal templates with a default action-noun template, indicating that action nouns were in the process of becoming an integral part of the verbal paradigm (Bar-Asher 2012b, 208–9; Mor 2015).

However, Rabbinic Hebrew derived action nouns only from active verbs. Middle-voice action nouns were first coined by medieval writers who, based on the biblical hapax legomenon *hitħabrut* "joining, making an alliance" (Daniel 11:23), started using the nominal template *hitCaCCut* to derive action nouns from verbs in *hitCaCeC*, and by analogy also formed the template *hiCaCCut* for verbs in *niCCaC* (Yalon 1971, 3–5). In subsequent generations, the proportion of regular action nouns in all verbal templates grew significantly, though the category never became fully regular, even in Modern Hebrew.

Action nouns naturally became part of the modern linguistic system, and a process of lexical expansion reinforced their association with the verbal templates and thereby cemented their status as an integral category of the verbal paradigm. On the face of it, this was a simple, linear process of sourcing forms from the linguistic legacy, which provides action-noun templates for all five nonpassive verbal templates, and expanding their distribution. However, a thorough comparison of EMH and contemporary practices reveals that active and middle-voice action nouns were treated differently. The former, originating in Rabbinic Hebrew, were incorporated into EMH immediately, whereas the latter, originating in Medieval Hebrew, gained currency only later. Once again, we see that the preference for classical forms gave rise to a nonlinear path of development: EMH practices did not follow directly from the immediately preceding linguistic state but involved a retreat to an earlier linguistic state, prior to the emergence of action nouns for the middle-voice verbal templates. In other words, rather than adopting the entire range of inherited means at once, EMH first emulated rabbinic practices and shunned

the medieval ones, which were reinstated only later. A detailed discussion of this gradual process is the topic of the following section.

## 3. THE USAGE PATTERNS OF ACTION NOUNS IN THE INITIAL STAGES OF STANDARDIZATION

The existence of the action-noun category in the linguistic legacy facilitated the swift formation of a formal standard register, which was essential for the successful transformation of Hebrew into a fully fledged living tongue. The formal register, required on a daily basis for composing business, administrative and legal texts, and for translating official documents of the Mandatory authorities, was one of the first linguistic registers to undergo standardization, and its basic features stabilized as early as the 1920s (Reshef 2015, 39–66, 97–179). Aimed at conveying authority and detachment, formal registers tend to rely on linguistic means that minimize explicit mention of the participants in an action, such as the passive voice, impersonal constructions, and nominalizations (Chafe 1982; Chafe and Danielewicz 1987; Biber 1991). Action nouns were therefore a major component of the formal register from the earliest stages (Reshef 2012d; Reshef 2012e).

Initially, this register imbued action nouns with a modern flavor mainly by embedding them in modern syntactic constructions, while lexical expansion was limited. For instance, in a sample corpus of several dozen circulars issued by the Tel Aviv municipality in the 1920s and the early 1930s, the vast majority of action nouns (87.8%) were adopted from the inherited lexicon, that is, from Biblical, Rabbinic, or Medieval Hebrew, and only a very small minority were newly coined (Reshef 2012e, 425–26).

The initial reliance on the inherited inventory in the written formal register is particularly noticeable in cases where EMH used idiosyncratic inherited forms that were later replaced by newly coined forms derived in the regular action-noun templates. A prominent example is the common word *binyan* "building," used in Biblical Hebrew as a concrete noun and in Rabbinic Hebrew also as an action noun. EMH used this word in both functions, as demonstrated by example 1, in which it occurs twice, first as an action noun and immediately afterward as a concrete noun (the morphophonemic alternation between /b/ and /v/ in the transliteration reflects the correct pronunciation according to prescriptive standards):

(1)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *hacaʕat* | *vaʕadat* | *ha-tarbut* | *lehištatef* | *be-50%* |
| suggestion.CS | committee.CS | DEF-culture | to.participate | in-50% |
| *be-**vinyan*** | ***binyan*** | *qavuaʕ* | *ʕavur* | *bet.ha.sefer* |
| in-building.CS | building | permanent | for | DEF.school |

> "the culture committee's proposal to contribute 50% (of the expenses) for building a permanent building for the school" (administrative letter, Tel Aviv Historical Archives [henceforth: THA] 3-73b, 1925)

Present-day language draws a clear distinction between the noun (*binyan*) and the action noun (*bniya*), but at first only the former word, inherited from the classical texts, was available to writers. The form *bniya*, derived from the verb *bana* "built" using the default action-noun template for the *CaCaC* verbal template, is a typical example of a later innovation—part of the massive expansion of the action-noun inventory through regular derivation in the later stages of Modern Hebrew. This straightforward, linear process accounts for much of the difference between the early texts and present-day practices.

As opposed to the extensive expansion of the action-noun inventory, which gained momentum only later, from the syntactic perspective the modernization of the field occurred at a very early stage. By the 1920s, action nouns—whether inherited or new—were regularly used in modern syntactic constructions rather than those found in the traditional Hebrew sources, and syntactic constructions that are no longer customary are only rarely encountered (Reshef 2012e, 423-4). Thus, in the abovementioned corpus of circulars, the only departure from the present-day syntax of action nouns was the employment of the form *diyuq* "precision" as the head of a construct chain, for example,

(2)

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *ha-ʔaħrayut [. . .]* | *lišmor* | *ʕal* | ***diyuq*** | ***boʔam*** | ***ve-lextam*** |
| the-responsibility | to.supervise | on | precision.CS | coming | and-going |
| ***šel*** | ***ha-pqidim*** | | | | |
| POSS | DEF-clerks | | | | |

> "the responsibility of supervising the clerks' arrival and departure on time" (circular letter, THA 21-1, 1929)

The usage highlighted in this example is incompatible with present-day conventions. Although the word *diyuq* "precision" is part of the current Hebrew lexicon, to contemporary ears, the sentence in 2 sounds just as odd as its verbatim English translation ("the precision of the coming and going of the clerks"), and a subordinate verbal clause is expected to be used in this context instead. However, this was the only exception of its kind in the abovementioned corpus; all other instances that sound unconventional to contemporary ears involved lexical items that were excluded from the inventory of action nouns during the standardization of the field (see section 4 below).

This discrepancy between the syntax and the lexicon is noteworthy, since it indicates that, in the case of action nouns, these two linguistic levels standardized at a different pace. The conventions regulating present-day usage did not form simultaneously but evolved in a gradual process in which the syntax conventionalized first, and lexical expansion followed. This finding is compatible with the claim made by Meir and Sandler (2019, 339), based on a series of studies on the evolution of sign languages, that "conventionalization of structure [. . .] and of the lexicon need not go hand in hand."

Moreover, our data also support another finding of their studies of sign languages, namely that "different structures may conventionalize at different paces, even within one linguistic domain" (Meir and Sandler 2019, 350). In the case of action nouns, this is manifested in a conspicuous difference in the pace of standardization between the active and middle-voice forms, as initially the use of action nouns was restricted almost exclusively to the active templates, whereas middle-voice action nouns were rare. Thus, in the above-mentioned corpus of circulars, there are about three middle-voice forms for fifty active ones (Reshef 2012d, 105), and the examination of other corpora yielded similar results (Reshef 2015, 165).

This difference in prevalence is not incidental and may not be attributed to the lack of relevant contexts, but it clearly reflects different usage patterns of active and middle-voice action nouns: EMH textual corpora are characterized by a consistent tendency to avoid middle-voice action nouns in favor of other nominalization mechanisms. The following examples demonstrate the different choices made by writers in similar contexts. The examples in 3 both feature the infinitive *leʔafšer* ("to enable") followed by a nominalization, and show that while writers tended to use action nouns when nominalizing an active verb (as in 3a), they often opted for an infinitive when nominalizing a middle-voice verb (as in 3b).

(3)

(a) *leʔafšer* *l.a-ʕiriya* *ʔet* ***ptiħat*** *ha-ganim*
to.enable to.DEF-municipality ACC opening.CS DEF-kindergartens

"to enable the municipality to open [literally: the opening of] the kindergartens" (THA 23-1, late 1920s)

(b) *leʔafšer* *le-xol* *ʔezreħe* *ha-ʕir* ***lehištatef***
to.enable to-all citizens.CS DEF-city to.participate
*b.a-ħagigot*
in.DEF-celebrations

"to enable all the citizens of the city to participate in the celebrations" (Poster Collection at the Manuscript Department of the National and University Library, 1932)

In example 4, *lehimanaʕ mi-* "to avoid" is followed by three different types of nominalization. Once again, an action noun is used only in the case of an active verb (*ʕamida* "standing"), whereas for middle-voice verbs two alternative strategies are employed: an abstract noun (*cfifut* "congestion, crowding") and an outdated biblical infinitive construction (*me-hištameš* "from using"):

(4)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (a) | *lehimanaʕ* | *min* | *ha-**cfifut*** | *ve-ha-**ʕamida*** | *be-šura* |
| | to.refrain | from | DEF-congestion | and- DEF-standing | in-line |

"to avoid crowding and standing in line" (THA 23-1,1932)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| (b) | *lehimanaʕ* | *me-**hištameš*** | *be-maʕatafot* |
| | to.refrain | from-using | in-envelopes |

"to avoid the use of envelopes" (THA 23-1, 1933)

Example 4b is particularly noteworthy since the nominalization is based on an outdated biblical usage of the infinitive. In Biblical Hebrew, the infinitive construct could be preceded by any preposition, but in Rabbinic Hebrew the attached preposition *le-* became an integral part of the infinitive. Consequently, in Modern Hebrew the standard infinitive form of this verb is *lehištameš*, and the use of other prepositions is restricted to the gerundive construction, a relatively rare and stylistically marked manner of forming temporal clauses (see Berman 1978, 287–95; Berman forthcoming; Glinert 1989, 315–18; Schwarzwald 2013), which is very different from the context cited in 4b. At the time of composition, the construction in 4b was already stylistically marked (Reshef 2004, 126–27), and the writer probably employed it to avoid using two consecutive prepositions (*mi-* followed by *le-*), which is unacceptable by prescriptive standards. It is, however, telling that he preferred this solution over the employment of an action noun. The verb *lehištameš* "to use" was one of the few middle-voice verbs that were regularly nominalized in the *hitCaCCut* template in EMH, and the resulting form *hištamšut*, as well as the corresponding active action noun *šimuš*, were both very common. Nevertheless, the writer chose to avoid both of them in favor of an outdated Biblical construction. Examples like this indicate that writers did not necessarily feel comfortable using even those few middle-voice action nouns that were familiar at that time.

The repeated occurrence of such cases in the textual corpora points to a clear difference in the status of active and middle-voice action nouns in EMH. Whereas active action nouns were evidently regarded as an integral part of the linguistic system, and were used by writers with ease, middle-voice action nouns were usually avoided, and rarely occurred in similar circumstances. Unlike in the present-day language, this difference cannot be attributed to the broader meaning of active action nouns (i.e., to the fact that they nominalize the core meaning of the root, and can therefore correspond to both active and middle-voice verbs). This explanation is ruled out because, apart from the abovementioned alternation between *šimuš* and *hištamšut*, the early texts do not substitute active action nouns for middle-voice ones, but, as we have seen, resort to other nominalization strategies altogether.

Since a synchronic explanation for the different behavior of the two groups of forms seems to be excluded, a diachronic explanation suggests itself. As noted above, active action nouns were part of the legacy of the classical language, as they existed already in Rabbinic Hebrew (Kutscher 1977; Mor 2015). Consequently, at the onset of standardization, the templates for regular action noun derivation of active verbs were perceived as an integral part of the verbal paradigm, and subsequent changes were mainly restricted to the lexical domain, involving an expansion of the inventory of forms used in those templates. The templates for middle-voice action nouns, on the other hand, originate in Medieval Hebrew. As a result, in the early phases of standardization not only that they were less familiar to language users, but they were not yet systematically associated with the verbal system. Instead, they were merely perceived as a marginal strategy of abstract noun formation.

This fact was explicitly noted with respect to the *hiCaCCut* template, associated with the verbal template *niCCaC*, in two articles by well-known grammarians, both published in 1922 (and cited here from later reprints). One of them complained that, although forms such as *himanʕut* "abstention, avoidance" or *hišanut* "reoccurrence" have been extant in Hebrew texts since medieval times, "not everyone is familiar with [. . .] abstract nouns [. . .] derived from [verbs in] *niCCaC*" (Klausner 1957, 114), and recommended to "use the multiple examples in medieval literature [. . .] to derive [. . .] new abstract nouns [in this template], as required by the more complex human thought of our time and the living Hebrew speech of our generation" (ibid., 117). The other grammarian criticized the compilers of dictionaries for disregarding forms derived in the *hiCaCCut* template, and like his colleague, claimed that "it is the duty of our writers to revive this template and expand it" (Yalon 1971, 5). The claims of these writers correlate with our findings, for the few middle-voice action nouns we found in our corpora were all in the *hitCaCCut* template, whereas *hiCaCCut* was not represented even once in our vast textual sample (Reshef 2012d, 105).

A possible explanation for this difference between the two middle-voice templates is the relevance of their historical origins to their distribution in EMH. Although both middle-voice templates were first brought into use by medieval writers, *hitCaCCut* spread in Medieval Hebrew based on a single precedent in Biblical Hebrew, whereas *hiCaCCut* was a completely medieval innovation (see section 2). As a result, *hitCaCCut* action nouns were perceived as an extension of a rare but well-known classical usage, whereas *hiCaCCut* was an erudite form known only to experts. As nonclassical origins often hindered the adoption of forms (see chapter 2), the difference in rate of spread between the active and middle-voice action-noun templates, as well as between the two middle-voice action-noun templates, seems to be best accounted for by a historical explanation.

Action nouns thus trace two different paths of development with regard to the linguistic legacy: a linear path of continuity with this legacy, reflected in the early adoption of the classical templates and their perception as an integral part of the verbal system already in the early phases of standardization, and a nonlinear process of discontinuity with developments that started in Medieval Hebrew. The nonlinear dimension is reflected in the fact that, despite the sporadic occurrence of a few lexical items in the *hitCaCCut* template in EMH texts, they did not serve as a regular nominalization strategy. Consequently, the standardization of middle-voice action nouns was not limited to lexical expansion but involved the reestablishment of a fundamental correlation between verbal and nominal templates that had existed in Medieval Hebrew and later waned. The different paths of development taken by the active and middle-voice action nouns thus suggest, once again, that the integration of grammatical categories into the modern linguistic system may have been influenced by their status in previous historical strata.

## 4. LEXICAL EXPANSION AND THE FORMATION OF LEXICAL RESTRICTIONS

Generally speaking, standardization increased the measure of regularity in the derivation of action nouns by a process of lexical expansion that reinforced the basic correlation of each nonpassive verbal template with a default action-noun template. Nevertheless, the domain as a whole retained a measure of morphological variation due to arbitrary lexical restrictions. Thus, forms serving as action nouns in the present-day language fall into the following categories (Ravid 1999):

(a) Regular action nouns formed in the default template associated with the relevant verbal template (see table 6.1 above).

(b) Regular action nouns formed in a template associated with a different verbal template, for example, *rašam>rišum* "registration," *nixnas>knisa* "entrance, entry."
(c) Forms derived in minor action-noun templates, for example, *biqeš>baqaša* "request," *saraf>srefa* "burning," *paʕal>peʕula* "action," *hifsid>hefsed* "loss."
(d) Abstract nouns derived in various nominal templates that are not usually associated with the verbal system, for example, *šilem>tašlum* "payment," *hitʔamec>maʔamac* "effort," *šalaħ>mišloaħ* "delivery."

While the domain of action nouns never became wholly regular, the significant increase in the number of regular forms continued the movement toward greater regularity that characterized this domain throughout the history of Hebrew. Whereas in Biblical Hebrew the derivation of abstract nouns from verbal forms was morphologically random, later linguistic stages saw the establishment of a more stable association between verb and action noun, first in the active templates and later in the middle-voice templates as well. Thus, at first glance, the status of action nouns as a special category of the verb in contemporary Hebrew seems to be the culmination of a linear process that evolved throughout the history of Hebrew. However, EMH data indicate that standardization took a more convoluted path, which included a certain measure of nonlinearity as well.

One nonlinear aspect involves the rejection and subsequent reinstatement of the medieval practices, discussed in the previous section. An additional facet concerns the inventory of lexical forms, as changes in this domain did not all conform with the move toward greater regularity. Generally speaking, most action nouns that were not yet available in EMH but nowadays form part of the standard lexicon of Modern Hebrew are derived in the regular action noun templates. This process was particularly salient in the middle-voice templates due to the marked change in their linguistic status, but it affected the inventory of active action nouns as well. In certain cases, the change involved the coining of new forms, as in the abovementioned case of *bniya* "building" (example 1), whereas in other cases the increase in regularity stemmed from distinctions established between existing forms. This is demonstrated in example 5. In EMH, the form *hanhala* "management, managing" functioned both as an abstract noun (as in 5a) and as an action noun (as in 5b); in the second reading it alternated with the regular action noun *nihul* (as in 5c):

(5)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (a) | ***hanhalat*** | *ha-rakevet* | *kvar* | *hizmina* |
| | management.CS | the-train | already | order.PST.3FSG |
| | *mi-london* | *ʔet* | *ha-šeʕarim* | *ha-ħadašim* |
| | from-London | ACC | DEF-gates | DEF-new |

"The management of the train (company) has already ordered the new gates from London" (THA 3-168, 1926)

(b) *ʕiriyat* *tel aviv* *mazmina* *hacaʕot*
municipality.CS Tel Aviv invite.PRS.3FSG proposals
*le-misrat* *rofe* *sanitari [. . .]* *le-**hanhalat*** *ha-maħlaqa*
to-position.CS doctor sanitary to-managing.CS DEF-department
*ha-sanitarit*
DEF-sanitary

"Tel Aviv municipality is inviting proposals for the position of sanitary doctor to manage the sanitary department" (THA 23-1, 1926)

(c) *ha-ksafim* *ha-neʔesafim [. . .]* *lešem* ***nihul***
DEF-funds DEF-collected for managing.CS
*ha-ħaqira*
DEF-investigation

"The funds collected in order to conduct the investigation" (*hacfira*, 1926)

As opposed to the initial interchangeability of the two forms for the nominalization of the verb, in contemporary Modern Hebrew they are clearly distinct: *hanhala* is used exclusively as an abstract noun and *nihul*, conforming to the default rules of action-noun formation, serves as an action noun. As a result, only 5a and 5c are acceptable in the present-day language, whereas 5b is not.

The distinction between same-root forms derived in different templates, either with or without lexical expansion, played a major role in shaping the standard lexicon of Modern Hebrew (Rosén 1992). Action nouns tended to become associated with regular derivation, whereas forms derived from the same root in other nominal templates were often restricted to patently nominal roles. This process accords with the move toward a stronger association between verbal templates and regular action-noun templates, and is therefore a case of linear development.

However, some changes in the field resulted from a more marginal process that pulled in the opposite direction. This process involved the rejection of certain regular action nouns that had been common in EMH in favor of irregular alternatives, so that today the regular forms are no longer part of the standard lexicon. Although this process affected a relatively small set of lexical items, it increased the irregularity of the lexicon as compared to earlier practices. The retreat from these forms, which contrasts with the general move toward greater regularity, is best characterized as nonlinear.

Example 6 presents two instances of this process. The form *hitʔamcut* "exertion, effort," derived from the verb *hitʔamec* "made an effort," was

replaced in the course of standardization by the biblical abstract noun *maʔamac*. As opposed to its frequent occurrence in EMH texts, in contemporary Hebrew *hitʔamcut* is used only sporadically, as it stresses the specific shade of meaning associated with the middle-voice verbal template (Reshef 2015, 154–55). The second form, *haspaqa*, is now used solely in the sense of "provisions, supplies," namely as an abstract noun, not as a nominalization of the verb *hispiq* "do something in the designated time," as in example 6. Instead, an alternative construction based on the infinitive form would be used in this context, for example, *kedey lehaspiq* "in order to finish on time":

(6)

| *yešno* | *hexreaħ* | *be-**hitʔamcut*** | *gdola* | *yoter* | *lešem* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| there.is | need | in-effort | big | more | for |
| ***haspaqat*** | *ha-ʕavoda* | *bi-zman-ah* | | | |
| completion.CS | the-work | in-time-POSS.3FSG | | | |

"It is essential to make a greater effort in order to complete the work on time" (THA 23-1, 1929)

Table 6.2 on the following page presents several additional lexical items that were affected by this process. For each verb, the regular form used in EMH is provided in isolation and in context, followed by the standard equivalent expected in this context in contemporary Modern Hebrew.

Cases of transition from regular EMH action nouns to irregular forms in present-day language are evident in all verbal templates, but the manifestation of this minor process in the middle-voice templates is particularly noteworthy. As already stated, action nouns in the *hitCaCCut* template were quite rare in EMH, but the few forms that do occur in the texts were evidently well-established in the period's shared lexicon, as they were used frequently by different writers in different text types. Given that contemporary middle-voice action nouns tend to be more regular than their active counterparts (Ravid 1999), one would have expected these early regular forms to endure over time, that is, to persist in the contemporary lexicon. But in practice, most of these forms are no longer used. The extinct (or near-extinct) usages include forms such as *hitʔamcut* "effort" (example 6) and *hitʕasqut* "engagement, involvement" (table 6.2), used in present-day language only in negative contexts, as well as *hištamšut* "use, employment," discussed in the previous section and demonstrated in the following example:

(7)

| ***hištamšut*** | *be-nešeq* | *lešem* | *ʔiyum* |
|---|---|---|---|
| use.CS | with-weapon | for | threat |

"the use of weapons in order to threaten" (*davar*, 1925)

**Table 6.2 Some Regular EMH Action Nouns and their Irregular Present-day Equivalents**

| *Verb* (PST.3MSG) | *Regular Action Noun Form* | *EMH Context* | *Present-day Equivalent* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *natan* "gave" | *netina* | *netinat raportim*<br>giving.CS tickets<br>"the issuance of traffic tickets" (1926) | *matan* |
| *ʔasaf* "gathered, collected" | *ʔasifa* | *ʔasifat ha-ksafim*<br>collecting.CS the-money<br>"the collection of money" (1922) | *ʔisuf* |
| *gamar* "finished" | *gmira* | *gmirat ha-ʕavoda*<br>finishing.CS the-work<br>"the end of the working hours" (1927) | *gmar** |
| *himšix* "continued" | *hamšaxa* | *hamšaxat ha-milħama*<br>continuing.CS the-war<br>"the continuation of the war" (1926) | *hemšex* |
| *hisbir* "explained" | *hasbara* | *hasbarat ha-hacaʕa*<br>explaining.CS the-suggestion<br>"explaining the suggestion" (1928) | *hesber* |
| *hitʕaseq* "engaged in" | *hitʕasqut* | *hitʕasqut bi-sport*<br>engaging in-sport<br>"engaging in sport" (1926) | *ʕisuq*** |

* In contemporary Hebrew, the form *siyum* (derived from *siyem* "finished") is often preferred in this context, probably because the verb *gamar* has taken on erotic connotations.

** In the present-day language, *hitʕasqut* in this context would have a different, negative meaning of "obsessive preoccupation."

Although this form is compatible with the general trend of integrating regular middle-voice action nouns into the verbal system, in the transition to the present-day language it fell out of use, to be replaced by the rabbinic form *šimuš*, derived in the regular action-noun template of the corresponding active verb.

The factors underlying the phenomenon are not entirely clear. Unlike the phenomena discussed in previous chapters, nominalization strategies did not attract the attention of the language planners, and the standardization of the field therefore depended on the spontaneous choices of ordinary speakers engaged in formal writing for professional or other practical purposes, not on their reaction to prescriptive demands. The influence of the classical sources does not seem to be a crucial factor either in this case. While some of the regular EMH forms that fell out of use were indeed replaced by classical ones (e.g., *hištamšut*>*šimuš* or *hitʔamcut*> *maʔamac*), this does not hold true for other cases. Thus, a preference for the inherited lexicon cannot provide a comprehensive explanation for the phenomenon.

Despite the lack of a satisfactory explanation, the case of action nouns underlines the importance of EMH data to an accurate description of the development of Modern Hebrew. As opposed to the general thrust toward greater regularity, which immediately becomes apparent when the contemporary lexicon is compared to those of previous historical strata, the effect of the more marginal process is only revealed when EMH data is taken into consideration. These data indicate that, despite the appearance of continuity with previous historical stages, present-day practices in fact took a more complex path of evolution, marked by a measure of discontinuity. As in the case of other phenomena discussed in this book, Modern Hebrew practices did not necessarily develop in a linear manner, since early forms were sometimes supplanted by usages that went against the general current of development.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Standardization in the field of action nouns involved a combination of linear and nonlinear processes, with various aspects of the linguistic system tracing different routes of development and changing at a different pace. Syntactic structures stabilized earlier than the morphology and lexicon, middle-voice templates were slower to stabilize than active ones, and certain lexical restrictions which formed over time contrasted with the general tendency toward greater regularity.

The availability of an action-noun category in the linguistic legacy facilitated the swift formation of a formal register in the emergent language, since there was no need to develop new means of expression but merely to adapt extant linguistic devices to modern usage. In order to meet the needs of modern expression, action nouns were incorporated into different syntactic constructions than those generally used in the classical sources, to create a Modern Hebrew equivalent of the formal style familiar from other languages.

The classical sources, however, continued to affect the use of action nouns, creating a difference between the active and middle-voice templates in terms of their full integration into the verbal system. The former category, originating in Rabbinic Hebrew, was adopted immediately, whereas the latter, originating in Medieval Hebrew, took longer to become integrated. Although the classical language provided no real alternatives for these medieval middle-voice templates, they were initially eschewed, and were reinstated only in the later phases of Modern Hebrew. Thus, standardization did not involve direct continuation with the entire preexisting inventory of forms available in the linguistic legacy, but it proceeded in a gradual process, in which the classical mechanisms were adopted first and the nonclassical ones only later.

Nonlinearity was also evident in the discarding of certain regular forms that had been common in EMH but were later replaced by alternative forms derived in irregular nominal patterns. The decline of the regular forms went against the general move toward greater regularity in the derivation of action nouns. This dialectic process highlights the tension that often existed between linear and nonlinear processes in the emergence of Modern Hebrew, and which must be recognized and accounted for by theories seeking to explain this unique process of language genesis.

## *Chapter 7*

# True and Apparent Continuity in the Genesis of Modern Hebrew

As a unique case of language genesis, the emergence of Modern Hebrew poses special challenges to research. This book provided new insights into the linguistic aspects of the process, based on data extracted from textual corpora composed in the period immediately preceding the revival of Hebrew speech and throughout the formative years of the speech community. The focus on data reflecting the everyday practices of ordinary speakers enabled us to trace the progression of linguistic change and to uncover trends and processes that are otherwise inaccessible to research.

Our sample of case studies clearly indicated that some of the structural properties of Modern Hebrew evolved in a nonlinear manner, as seemingly classical features replaced formerly common usages originating in later historical stages of Hebrew. We argued that this may be attributed to the fact that in the early years of the speech community all historical stages of Hebrew were simultaneously accessible to the first generations of speakers and could directly influence their linguistic choices. Since the idiosyncratic development paths of linguistic phenomena did not always leave a trace in the contemporary language, these processes and the factors that affected them may only be identified via the diachronic examination of early textual corpora.

Detecting these processes can shed considerable light on the ongoing controversy about the measure of continuity between contemporary Hebrew and the previous historical stages of the language, as it suggests that the notions of "continuity" and "change" should be reevaluated in the context of Hebrew. A conclusion repeatedly suggested by our data is that apparent resemblance to the classical language does not necessarily reflect true continuity; instead, it may result from later development that narrowed a gap that had previously opened up between classical and modern usage. Paradoxically, it is precisely such nonlinear developments, which involve no direct continuity with the

immediately preceding linguistic state, that highlight in the clearest manner the strong linguistic and cultural bond between Modern Hebrew and the earlier stages of the language. Despite the undisputable influence of the contact languages on many structural properties of the modern linguistic system, the inherited language had a major long-term effect on its course of development. It not only provided much of the raw material of Modern Hebrew in its infancy but also continued to influence subsequent linguistic choices within the emergent speech community, often in unpredictable ways.

The revernacularization of Hebrew could have been expected to produce linear evolution, namely a steadily growing gap between classical and modern usage through natural processes of change of the kind that occurs in all living languages. However, the textual data indicate that, as the standard register of Modern Hebrew took shape, change sometimes had the opposite effect, since it involved a retreat from early contact-induced phenomena and nonclassical linguistic habits that had initially taken root in the emergent language. Due to these processes, the current native standard is sometimes closer to the classical models than the initial state that characterized EMH.

The possibility that in certain cases "contemporary modes of expression are in fact 'closer' to 'classical' Hebrew than their 'Early Israeli Hebrew' counterparts" was first suggested by the prominent Israeli linguist Haiim Rosén (1992, 33), based on his examination of a limited selection of textual examples collected quite randomly from the early Hebrew press. The detailed diachronic analysis presented in this book fully confirmed Rosén's hypothesis by showing that this is in fact a pattern: the decline of certain nonclassical usages that had been common in EMH repeatedly generated a closer match between the present-day language and the classical models in many areas of the linguistic system. Similar conclusions have been reached by other scholars, based on the diachronic examination of additional early usages that were initially common but were subsequently discarded, such as past-tense relative clauses preceded by the definite article (Stern 2018) or the employment of *ʔecel* "at" in possessive constructions (Taube 2019).

The impact of the classical models on the orientation of certain linguistic processes during the formative phase of Modern Hebrew is best explained by the sociolinguistic circumstances that prevailed during that phase. Since most of the first-generation L2 adult speakers grew up in traditional Jewish communities, most of the men were intimately familiar with the classical sources, to which they were extensively exposed from an early age as part of their Jewish schooling and upbringing. This intensive and early exposure to the classical models often counterbalanced the impact of the speakers' substrate native tongues. Hence, seeking Hebrew equivalents of linguistic devices in their original languages, they did not necessarily replicate the foreign structures, but sometimes turned intuitively to the linguistic legacy and adapted

inherited usages to their needs by imbuing them with new meanings. Conspicuous examples are the initial adoption of the biblical system of honorifics, discussed in chapter 4, or the transformation of inherited intensifiers into superlative markers, discussed in chapter 5. The repeated tendency to adapt inherited elements rather than introduce structural innovations enhanced the apparent continuity between Modern Hebrew and the language of the classical texts, since despite the fundamental differences between them, the external resemblance of forms and constructions remained relatively intact.

Among the first-generation L1 speakers, familiarity with the classical models was much more superficial, for it was secondary to their natural acquisition of Modern Hebrew, and they were exposed to the classical texts only at a later stage and to a limited extent. However, since the classical language had a central place in the linguistic ideology, in education and in culture, its perception as superior to contemporary practices was an essential component of their linguistic consciousness. Language use in their adult environment was highly heterogeneous and heavily influenced by foreign tongues, and preexisting prestigious native models were inexistent. The prevalent attitude toward their own speech habits was ambivalent, since alongside admiration for their naturalness and vitality, their language was considered flawed in many ways by prescriptive standards. Consequently, for many years L1 speakers of Hebrew were constantly presented with linguistic ideals based on the inherited language that differed considerably from their ordinary, spontaneous usage.

Exposure to the ideal language occurred through different channels. School curricula placed much emphasis on the memorization of classical texts, on traditional Hebrew grammar, and on language correction, and schoolchildren were expected to use elevated language in the composition of written texts. Literary and cultural norms likewise did not reflect the emerging standard but were based on elevated linguistic registers. Prescriptive activity presented multiple bans and demands aimed at promoting compliance with the classical models. As a result, for many decades L1 Hebrew speakers were not only familiar with many inherited linguistic features but also tended to use them productively in circumstances calling for careful linguistic style (Ben-Hayyim 1953/1992, 59; Even-Zohar 1996; Reshef 2015, 35–38).

The prestige ascribed to the classical language by the budding speech community accounts for its impact on the processes of standardization. In the absence of prestigious native models, linguistic elements of classical origin had a preferred status, at least in formal language use. Conversely, a patently nonclassical origin often impeded the integration of a linguistic element into the evolving standard, either preventing its adoption entirely (chapter 2), delaying it (chapter 6), or restricting it to substandard registers (chapter 3). Linguistic features associated with Medieval Hebrew were quite naturally

particularly susceptible to this fate, and many of them were excluded from the language in the early phases of standardization despite their former prevalence in EMH (but see Mor 2017 for other possible development paths). Lexical studies of EMH indicate that a similar pattern can be discerned in the lexical domain (Maman 1997, 155; Reshef 2017). According to our findings, this phenomenon was not always the result of prescriptive activity; it sometimes occurred spontaneously, reflecting the linguistic choices of ordinary speakers based on intuitive acceptability judgments (see chapter 2).

The basic character of the emerging standard is discernible in practically-oriented texts written as early as the 1920s. However, its spread to other text types was gradual, for linguistic features that were eventually excluded from modern usage did not always disappear at once from all manifestations of speech and writing. Here, too, the origin of the elements is relevant, since it had considerable impact on the rate of their decline: patently nonclassical phenomena tended to be discarded, or relegated to colloquial usage, in the early phases of standardization, whereas elements of classical origin often declined more gradually, and many of them remained in productive use for decades as markers of elevated, prestigious linguistic style (e.g., the participle feminine suffix *-h*, discussed in chapter 2).

The wide range of options provided by the previous historical strata was among the factors that facilitated the swift formation of the basic standard register of Modern Hebrew. The reason for it is that adapting Hebrew grammar to the needs of modern expression could rely to a great extent on selection between existing options, rather than on far-reaching structural innovations. In this sense, Hebrew benefited from the centuries-long hiatus in its transmission as a spoken language, since the inventory of forms available to speakers was not drawn from a single linguistic stage—that is, the immediately preceding one—but from the entire range of classical, medieval, and premodern corpora that formed part of the cultural patrimony. As constructions from different historical stages often served similar functions, their simultaneous presence in the linguistic legacy resulted in a significant measure of redundancy. Hence, while in the lexical domain there was a pressing need for expansion in order to meet the needs of modern usage (Eldar 2010; Bar-Asher 2012a), in many areas of morphology and syntax the wide range of options actually had to be narrowed down, and distinctions soon formed between unmarked, standard usages and their marked alternatives.

This elimination of redundancy did not necessarily result in simplification of the linguistic system, since the usages that eventually prevailed sometimes involved greater structural complexity than their formerly common alternatives. For instance, in the case of adjective grading, a simple means—deriving the superlative from the comparative by adding the definite article—was supplanted by idiosyncratic paradigms (chapter 5), and in the

case of feminine participle suffixes, a suppletion between *-h* and *-t* emerged, although Rabbinic Hebrew offered a more uniform paradigm dominated by *-t* (chapter 2). Due to such processes, the relationship between the inherited linguistic material and contemporary structures is often unexpected, since external similarity does not necessarily indicate true continuity, but may also result from nonlinear evolution.

According to the findings currently available, a research paradigm focusing on selection between preexisting linguistic options as a major restructuring mechanism seems to be a most promising tool for the analysis of the formation of Modern Hebrew. In fact, such a paradigm was proposed at the onset of linguistic interest in Modern Hebrew by Israeli scholar Haim Blanc, but it was not pursued in subsequent studies. Blanc suggested viewing Modern Hebrew as a special case of a *koine*, shaped by processes "analogous to those known from the more familiar cases of 'national language formation' [. . .], given a definitive shape by a slow 'koineizing' process drawing on several pre-existing sources" (Blanc 1968, 237–38). According to Blanc, the initial fluctuation diminished over time through a process of selection and accommodation that eventually consolidated one dominant linguistic variety as the basis for native usage (ibid., 239).

The research direction outlined by Blanc's brief description is not only fully in agreement with our findings but also suggests that the study of the genesis of Modern Hebrew may benefit greatly from focusing on the approach outlined by studies of new dialect formation in communities composed of speakers of mutually intelligible varieties of a single language (e.g., Trudgill 1986; Trudgill et al. 2000; Kerswill and Williams 2000). This research paradigm seems to offer a more fruitful perspective on the emergence of Modern Hebrew than the current debate over continuity versus discontinuity. At any rate, in light of what has been demonstrated in this book regarding nonlinear development and genuine versus apparent continuity, these notions in themselves probably need to be better defined in order to promote the linguistic analysis of this unique case of language genesis.

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