If you can't beat them, join them; if you join them, cover your arse!:

The Academy of the *Hebrew* Language and the Native *Israeli* Speakers

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**1. The Israeli Language**

Israeli (Zuckermann 1999; a.k.a. – somewhat misleadingly – ‘Modern Hebrew’) is one of the two (‘Hebrew’ and Arabic) and a half (English) official languages of the State of Israel, established in 1948 on 20,770 km$^2$. It is spoken to varying degrees of fluency by the 7,337,000 citizens of Israel (as of September 2008) – as a mother tongue by most Jews (whose total number is 5,542,000), and as a second language by 1,477,000 Israeli Arabs and 318,000 others (including 200,000 foreign workers). It is also spoken by some non-Israeli Palestinians, as well as by a few Diaspora Jews. (There are approx. 5,280,000 Jews in the USA, 494,000 in France, 372,000 in Canada, 298,000 in the UK and 235,000 in Russia.)

**2. Sociolinguistic Background**

During the past century, Israeli has become the primary mode of communication in all domains of Israel’s public and private life. For reasons which include post-modern Americanization, rejection of bureaucratic authority and increasing individual autonomy, Israel has developed from a collectivist workers’ union culture to an individualistic capitalist consumerist society (cf. Ram 2000, 2005). The khalúts ‘pioneer’ ethos has been replaced by the lo fráyer ‘not a sucker’ mentality and rotsé késef ‘wants money’ attitude.

The increasingly confrontational divisions within Israeli society occur not only between Jews and Arabs, but also within the Jewish population, especially between the secular and the religious. As well as being a highly symbolic common language, Israeli has come also to highlight the very absence of a unitary civic culture among citizens who seem increasingly to share only their language.

Issues of language are so sensitive in Israel that politicians are often involved. In a session at the Israeli Parliament on 4 January 2005, then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon rebuked Israelis for using the etymologically Arabo-English hybrid expression yàla báy, lit. ‘let’s bye’, i.e. ‘goodbye’, instead of ‘the most beautiful word’ shalóm ‘peace, hello, goodbye’. In an article in the Guardian-like daily Ha’aretz (21 June 2004), the left-wing (and thus often regarded by some as ‘enlightened’) politician Yossi Sarid attacked the (most widespread) ‘common language of éser shékel’ as inarticulate and monstrous, and urged civilians to fight it and protect ‘Hebrew’.

Most Israelis say éser shékel ‘ten shekels’ rather than asar-á shkal-ím, the latter which follows Hebrew (rather than Israeli) literally meaning ‘ten (feminine) shekel (masculine plural)’, and thus having a ‘polarity-of-gender agreement’ – with a feminine numeral and a masculine plural noun – cf. §10.


But normativism in Israeli contradicts the usual ‘do not split your infinitives’ model, where there is an attempt to enforce the grammar and pronunciation of an elite social group. Using a ‘do as I say, don’t do as I do’ approach, Ashkenazic Jews (most of them originally native Yiddish-speakers), who have usually controlled key positions in Israeli society, have urged Israelis to adopt the
pronunciation of Sephardic Jews (many of them originally native Arabic-speakers), who happen to have been socio-economically disadvantaged.

As I see it, politicians, educators and, in fact, many laymen are attempting to impose Hebrew grammar on Israeli speech, ignoring the fact that Israeli has its own grammar, which is very different from that of Hebrew.

The late linguist Haim Blanc once took his young daughter to see an Israeli production of My Fair Lady. In this version, Professor Henry Higgins teaches Eliza Doolittle how to pronounce /r/ ‘properly’, i.e. as the Hebrew alveolar trill, characteristic of Sephardim (cf. Judaeo-Spanish, Italian, Spanish), rather than as the Israeli lax uvular approximant (cf. many Yiddish and German dialects). The famous line ‘The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain’ was adapted as bardd yarad bi-diróm sfarad ha-érev, lit. ‘Hail fell in southern Spain this evening’. At the end of the performance, Blanc’s daughter tellingly asked, ‘Abba (‘Daddy’), why was Professor Higgins trying to teach Eliza to speak like our cleaning lady?’ (Zuckermann 2005).

3. The Genetic Classification of the Israeli Language

One of the greatest Reasons why so few People understand themselves, is, that most Writers are always teaching Men what they should be, and hardly ever trouble their heads with telling them what they really are.

(Mandeville 1714, cf. 1723: 25)

Although ‘language is an abstract ensemble of idiolects – as well as sociolects, dialects and so on – rather than an entity per se’ (Zuckermann 2006a: 57), the genetic classification of Israeli has preoccupied scholars since the beginning of the twentieth century. The still regnant – not to mention politically pregnant – traditional view suggests that Israeli is Semitic: (Biblical/Mishnaic) Hebrew revived (e.g. Rabin 1974). The revisionist position defines Israeli as Indo-European: Yiddish relexified, i.e. Yiddish, most revivalists’ máme lóshn (mother tongue), is the ‘substratum’, whilst Hebrew is only a ‘superstratum’ providing lexis and frozen morphology (cf. Horvath and Wexler 1997).

From time to time it is alleged that Hebrew never died (e.g. Haramati 1992, 2000, Chomsky 1957: 218). It is true that, throughout its literary history, Hebrew was used as an occasional lingua franca. However, between the second and nineteenth centuries it was no-one’s mother tongue. The development of a literary language is surely different from that of a fully-fledged native language. But there are many linguists who, though rejecting the ‘eternal spoken Hebrew mythology’, still explain every linguistic feature in Israeli as if Hebrew never died, suggesting, for example, that Israeli pronunciation originates from internal convergence and divergence within Hebrew.

I wonder, however, how a literary language can be subject to the same phonetic and phonological processes (rather than analyses) as a mother tongue. I argue, rather, that the Israeli sound system continues the (strikingly similar) phonetics and phonology of Yiddish, the native language of almost all the revivalists. These revivalists very much wished to speak Hebrew, with Semitic grammar and pronunciation, like Arabs. However, they could not avoid the Ashkenazic mindset – and consonants – arising from their European background. Thus, their attempts (1) to deny their (more recent) roots in search of Biblical ancienntness, (2) negate diasporism and disown the ‘weak, persecuted’ exilic Jew from public memory, and (3) avoid hybridity (as reflected in Slavonized, Romance/Semitic-influenced, Germanic Yiddish itself, which they regarded as zhargón) failed.

Unlike the traditionalist and revisionist, my own hybridizational model acknowledges the historical and linguistic continuity of both Semitic and Indo-European languages within Israeli (cf. Zuckermann 2006a, 2006b, 2008). ‘Genetically modified’, semi-engineered Israeli is based simultaneously on ‘sleeping beauty’ / ‘walking dead’ Hebrew and máme lóshn (mother tongue)
Yiddish (both being primary contributors), accompanied by a plethora of other contributors such as Russian, Polish, German, Judaeo-Spanish (‘Ladino’) Arabic and English. Therefore, the term ‘Israeli’ is far more appropriate than ‘Israeli Hebrew’, let alone ‘Modern Hebrew’ or ‘Hebrew’ (tout court).

What makes the ‘genetics’ of Israeli so complex is the fact that the combination of Semitic and Indo-European influences is a phenomenon occurring already within the primary (and secondary) contributors to Israeli. Yiddish – a Germanic language with Romance influence and with most dialects having undergone Slavonization – was shaped by Hebrew and Aramaic. On the other hand, Indo-European languages, such as Greek, played a role in pre-Medieval Hebrews. Moreover, before the emergence of Israeli, Yiddish and other European languages influenced Medieval and Maskilic variants of Hebrew (see Glinert 1991), which, in turn, influenced Israeli (in tandem with the European contribution).

The distinction between forms and patterns is crucial too (see Zuckermann 2006a: 61). In the 1920s and 1930s, gdud meginéy hasafá, ‘the language defendants regiment’ (see Shur 2000), whose motto was ivrí, dabér ivrí ‘Hebrew [i.e. Jew], speak Hebrew!’, used to tear down signs written in ‘foreign’ languages and disturb Yiddish theatre gatherings. However, the members of this group did not look for Yiddish or other European patterns in the speech of the Israelis who did choose to speak ‘Hebrew’.

This is, obviously, not to say that the revivalists, had they paid attention to patterns, would have managed to neutralize the impact of their mother tongue(s), which was often subconscious (hence the term ‘semi-engineered’). Mufwene suggests that ‘linguistic change is inadvertent, a consequence of “imperfect replication” in the interactions of individual speakers as they adapt their communicative strategies to one another or to new needs’ (2001: 11).

Although they have engaged in a campaign for linguistic purity, the language the revivalists ‘created’ often mirrors the very cultural differences they sought to erase (cf. mutatis mutandis Frankenstein’s monster). The alleged victory of Hebrew over Yiddish was, in fact, a Pyrrhic one. ‘Victorious’ Hebrew is, after all, partly European at heart. Yiddish survives beneath Israeli grammar. Israeli embodies not rétsakh yídish (Israeli for ‘murder of Yiddish [by Israeli]’) but rather yídish redt zikh (Yiddish for ‘Yiddish speaks itself [within Israeli]’).

4. The Academy of the Hebrew Language

4.1 General Information

Brought into being by legislation in 1953 as the supreme institute for ‘Hebrew’, the Academy of the Hebrew Language (known is Israeli as ha-akademya l-a-lashón ha-ivrít) is funded by the Ministry of Education, which increasingly suffers from budget cuts. It superseded the (Hebrew) Language Council (váad ha-lashón (ha-ivrít)), which was established in 1889 – as a branch of Safá Brurá ‘Clear Language’ – by the symbolic father of Israeli, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, and colleagues.

As described in its website, the Academy – based in Giv’at Ram, Jerusalem – ‘prescribes standards for modern Hebrew grammar, orthography, transliteration [in fact, transcription] and punctuation [vocalization, vowel marking] based upon the study of Hebrew’s historical development’. The Academy’s plenum – which holds 5 or 6 annual sessions – consists of 23 members and an additional 15 academic advisors. These are either scholars from the disciplines of languages, linguistics and Jewish studies, or accomplished writers (e.g. Amos Oz) and translators. The Academy’s decisions are binding upon all governmental agencies, including Israel Broadcasting Authority.
4.2 Goals and Functions

As defined in its constitution, the Academy’s functions are:

(1) ‘To investigate and compile the Hebrew lexicon according to its historical strata and layers.’
(2) ‘To study the structure, history, and offshoots of the Hebrew language.’
(3) ‘To direct the development of Hebrew in light of its nature, requirements, and potential, its
daily and academic needs, by setting its lexicon, grammar, characters, orthography and
transliteration [in fact, transcription].’

Goal (1) is wonderful, as Israeli is indeed a multi-layered language. For example, one could say
both (a) חָשְׁכוּ עֵינָיו (khaskhú enáv) (cf. Hebrew [hāʃkā' ū ne'náw]), lit. ‘His eyes became dark’, i.e. ‘He
saw black (after bad news)’ and (b) נויָ/נָשְׂאָה לְחָשַׁךְ בֵּיתֵהּ (niyá/naasá lo khóshekh baenáim), lit.
‘Darkness has been made in his eyes’, i.e. ‘He saw black (after bad news)’. Whereas the high-
register khashkhú enáv is Hebrew, the colloquial niyá lo khóshekh baenáim is a calque of Yiddish
ונײָ של אֶה’ (nentser in di òygn ‘id.’, which might in turn be
an adaptation of the very Hebrew [hāʃkā' ū ne'náw]).

However, Goal (3), to direct the development of Hebrew in light of its nature (לְפָנֵי אֱלֹהִים
הַלֵּאָה לַחְשֹׁכַת מַעַל שָׁוָא הַשָּׁוָא
וְאֵל הַשָּׁוָא) is intriguing for the following reasons:

(a) It is oxymoronic. If the nature of a language is to evolve in a specific direction (cf. Sapir’s
‘drift’, the pattern of change in which the structure of a language shifts in a determinate
direction), then why direct it by language policing?

(b) It assumes that Israeli is Hebrew tout court, a natural evolution of the language of Isaiah.
However, I suggest that – especially in the past – the Academy has been forcing Hebrew
grammar on Israeli. In fact, Israeli possesses its own distinct grammar, which is very different
from that of Hebrew.

4.3 Day-to-Day Work

The daily work of the Academy is implemented by several sections:

(1) Historical Dictionary Project
(2) Scientific Secretariat
(3) Computer Section

The Historical Dictionary Project is the research arm of the Academy. It aims to encompass the
entire Hebrew lexis throughout its history; that is, to present every Hebrew word in its
morphological, semantic and contextual development from its first appearance in written texts to the
present.

Shortly after the founding of the Academy in 1953, Naftali Tur-Sinai,¹ the first President of the
Academy, renewed the previously suggested idea of creating a historical dictionary of Hebrew. In

¹ Tur-Sinai, which literally means ‘Mount Sinai’, was a phonetic matching of Naftali’s original surname Torczyner. He
had also been the last President of the Hebrew Language Council.
1954, the Academy’s plenum placed the dictionary on its agenda, and in 1959, the Historical Dictionary Project got underway following deliberations at the Academy and in scholarly forums. The initial step was to locate all the Hebrew texts – from the post-biblical period onward – in order to create detailed catalogues known as sourcebooks. From the start, Tur-Sinai decided to implement the use of a computer to process the material, hence the establishment of the computer section (above).

As I see it, the Historical Dictionary Project is the Academy’s most important contribution to Israel. It is the closest Israeli parallel to the Oxford English Dictionary. The main problem is that since Israeli is axiomatically considered to be Hebrew, some etymologies are flawed as they tend to explain a semantic shift as internal development rather than as multisourced neologization (see Zuckermann 2003, 2004) based on both a Hebrew root/lexeme and so-called ‘foreign’ lexical item or semantics.

Moreover, even if the Academy sometimes acknowledges ‘foreign’ influence, its etymology still starts off from the point of view of contact-induced change within Hebrew, whereas – historically – many Israeli words derive from European languages as much as from Hebrew. Thus, hybridization and multiple causation – rather than contact-induced change within Hebrew – are much more suitable for the description of numerous Israeli neologisms.

The following are the functions of the Scientific Secretariat:

(1) Answering queries from the public on a broad variety of Israeli/Hebrew linguistic matters, ranging from pronunciation and spelling to suggestions for children’s names. (Currently, one can try his/her luck and call a single busy Tel Aviv phone number on Monday and Wednesday between 11am and 2pm)

(2) Overseeing the work of specialized committees that develop technical terminology for a wide spectrum of professional spheres. Over 100,000 terms have been coined by terminology committees established by the Academy and its predecessor the Language Council. These terms are available to the public in dozens of published dictionaries and lists, as well as through the media (e.g. newspapers).

(3) Prescribing standards for Israeli grammar, orthography, transcription and vocalization – through additional specialized committees.

It is not just ‘Hebrew language’ high-school students and teachers who make use of the Secretariat’s phone line. Just like the above-mentioned politicians (e.g. Yossi Sarid), many laymen have been brainwashed into believing that Israelis ‘rape’ their language by speaking ‘bad Hebrew’, full of ‘mistakes’. In a website associated with Dr Avshalom Kor – a famous prescriptive grammarian, who features on both radio and TV skits in Israel – it is claimed that ‘every day the Israeli language is slaughtered [sic] on TV’ (יום יום נשחטת השפה העברית בטלוויזיה http://www.planetnana.co.il/avshalomkor/, as of 13 October 2008).

Most importantly, for these laymen, correcting ‘stupid’/slovenly native Israeli-speakers is something to take pride in, and a source of cultural capital. These self-appointed language ‘guardians’ therefore find it hard to digest the Academy’s suggestion that ‘both forms are possible’ (see below). They want clear-cut black-or-white, good-or-evil answers.

The very same ‘guardians’ are often responsible for numerous myths about the Academy. For example, they wrongly believe that the Academy prescribes makrér – which fits the most common noun-pattern for appliances – rather than the actual mekarér for ‘refrigerator’ (מקיר). Similarly, they
allege that the Academy wanted *sakh-rakhók*, lit. ‘speaking (3rd person, masculine, singular) far’ – and thus constituting a calque of the internationalism *telephone* – rather than the actual *télefon* for ‘telephone’. Some have claimed that the Academy produced a decree that one should use the second person *feminine* plural if there are more women than men among the listeners etc. Such exaggerated myths are actually used to mock the Academy, ‘straw man fallacies’ in the style of *The Sun* headline Euromythically alleging that the European Union has, for example, outlawed excessively-bent bananas (4 March 1998, p. 6).

The following is the punch-line last paragraph of an article in the daily *Ha’aretz*, written by Daniel Cohen-Sagi on 21 September 2005 and entitled *yesh ód safót khuts meanglí* ‘There are Languages Other than English’:

It is also desirable in Israel to learn the true nature of expressions whose origins are in English, Yiddish or Arabic. They were swept along, distorted, and ‘stuck on’ to Hebrew, changing it to the point that it is unrecognizable, and becoming part of the vocabulary of the renewed language. Do they serve any good purpose? It is doubtful whether they strengthen Hebrew. In fact, they certainly impoverish it; they crush it. They change the essence of the language, while it still hasn't fully recovered from the coma it was in during 2000 years of Diaspora.

From my interviews with Academy members, I often got the impression that – just like these laymen – they consider Israeli a child who needs nurturing and protection. I often hear the expression *hamatsíy eynó ratsúy*, lit. ‘The found is not wanted’, i.e. ‘The available is undesirable’ (in Israeli it sounds better).

5. Plenum Dynamics

*Wit makes its own welcome, and levels all distinctions. No dignity, no learning, no force of character, can make any stand against good wit.*

(Emerson 1876: 144, I wonder whether what he had in mind is that the English weather is like Iraq: partly Sunni but mostly Shi’ite…)

During the 76th session of the Academy plenum, on 4 December 1967, there was a discussion of *gladin*, the suggested neologism for the internationalism *gelatin* – cf. Israeli *dzhelatín*, French *gélatine*, Italian *gelatina*, Yiddish יאָסלאָגıl *schelatín*, Russian ше̄лата̀нин *zhelatín*, Polish żelatyna and German *Gelatine*.

Eitan opened the discussion, saying: ‘For the name of the material well known in foreign languages, the Committee suggested a Hebrew form *gladin*. According to this suggestion, the Hebrew consonant *ג* will replace the foreign *ג* [dʒ], and with the replacement of *ת* (t) with *ד* (d), the word will be linked to the Hebrew root *זלד* \(√zld\) ‘clot [congeal, form a coating, stretch (skin) taut]’. It follows that the verb *to gel/jell* will be translated as *higlíd*.

His colleague Shraga Irmay objected, arguing that ‘this method resembles *dilúg rav* of the end of the *Haskalah* period’. Maskilic Hebrew דילוג רב *dilug rav* (pronounced in Poland *dilóg raf*), lit. ‘a big bound’, is a ‘phono-semantic matching’ (Zuckermann 2003, 2006c, Sapir and Zuckermann 2008) of the internationalism *telegraph* – cf. Russian телегра̀ф *telegraf* and Polish *telegraf*. Irmay proposed that they remain with *לטין’ג* *dzhelatín* ‘gelatin’ and Committee Member Daniel Leibel joined the protest, arguing that ‘the Committee proposal is in the form of manipulation, which was used in the times of the [Hebrew] Language Council. Today we do not manipulate [words] in this way.’
Committee Member David Zvi Banet proclaimed that ‘we ought not to proceed with the method of dilúg rav, because in this way, the level of the terms will deteriorate’. The word גִּלדִין gladín is obviously a phono-semantic matching, similar to the earlier גָּלִידה glída ‘ice-cream’ (cf. Italian gelato), which also uses גָּלַד gld ‘clot’.

So far, we can understand from the discussion that the Academy deems phono-semantic matches to be ‘second-class’ neologisms and lexical temptations better avoided. However, Committee Member Shimshon Rosenthal later defended this mechanism, stating: ‘What is wrong with the root גָּלַד gld? Only that it accidentally has a similar sound in the Romance languages? There is nothing [inherently] flawed in it.’

His colleague, Chaim Rabin then added: ‘If there is a possibility here of determining a Hebrew loan-translation which is similar to the foreign noun, I see no problem in it. And in my opinion, it is beautiful. Is it forbidden to use a Hebrew root because it accidentally resembles a foreign root?’ As usual, at the end of the discussion there was a vote, the exact results of which were:

- 12 votes in favour of gladín
- 7 votes against gladín
- 7 votes in favour of dżelatin (gelatin)
- 11 votes against dżelatin (gelatin)
- Accepted: gladín

(pp. 19-20 of Zikhronót 14, 1967)

And so, despite their high ideals, even the Academy purists were seduced by the delectable charms of a multisourced neologism such as gladín. That said, gladín did not gain currency among Israelis, who say dżelatin or dżelatína, which leads to the next section.

### 6. Possible Explanations for Failed Neologisms

I know most of the dialects of the Asian Turks. I also understand the dialect spoken by you and people like Yakup Kadri. If there’s one dialect I can’t make head or tail of, it’s the dialect of the Turkish Language Society.

(Abdülkadir to Falih Atay in the 1930s, cf. Atay 1965, 1969: 478; translation by Lewis 1999: 54)

It is sometimes believed to be almost impossible to explain why a neologism does not gain general currency. Torczyner argues, somewhat fatalistically, that ‘luck, on which everything depends, is the deciding force also for the fate of words and expressions in a language’ (1941: 166). A similar view is presented in Ornan’s 1996 The Words Not Taken: A Dictionary of Forgotten Words (Introduction: 7). I believe that we may not be able to give an explanation currently, not because it is impossible a priori but rather because linguists have not yet developed an analysis sophisticated enough for the ‘duel between grammar and life’.

The following are some possible explanations for the failure of so many proposed neologisms by the Academy, whose main goals include lexpionage (portmanteau-word based on lexicon and espionage, i.e. hunting for neologisms, or spying on or controlling speakers’ lexis):

1. The neologism was suggested after the loanword/foreignism (often internationalism) had already entered the language and become widespread.

2. The neologism is regarded as ridiculous.

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3. The neologism has not reached the mass of native speakers, for example it was overlooked by the institutions which were urged by the Academy to use it; or it has not reached the media.

4. The referent of the neologism is alien (non-Israeli) by nature.

5. The neologism is too close phonetically to the already successful loanword/foreignism, so the speaker is reminded of the loanword/foreignism.

6. The neologism is based on a pre-existent lexical item, which is already highly diffused in its original sense.

7. The neologism is regarded as obscure and is thus initially hard to remember.

On 2-7, see Chapter 5 of Zuckermann (2003). Here, I would like to elaborate on Reason 1, which is a very widespread one.

7. The Academy’s Deliberate Slowness

Many neologisms do not catch on because the Academy is intentionally slow in responding to (normative) speakers’ needs. One of the arguments I have heard in the Academy is that they do not want to write a decree only to discover later that the linguistic need the decree responds to is transient. Consider also the following:

Shulamith Har-Even [1930-2003, leading novelist] (Academy member): […] It is desirable that the Academy should run a forum for quick consultation. The plenum does not assemble frequently. Therefore we need a body of seven or ten people that the Secretariat will be able to turn to, consult by phone, and receive an opinion.

Moshe Bar-Asher (President of the Academy): With all due respect, the Academy does not need to establish an ‘instant academy’. If the question is a weighty one, it should be discussed in the plenum. Until it is discussed in the plenum, there is a tradition of several generations that the respondent gives his reason, his usage and the usage of others. One should not create an academy-within-an-academy for quick answers. Rather, one has to decide with composure and by serious deliberation. Almost every small question is part of a big question.

(Discussion during the 224th session of the Academy plenum, on 29 May 1995 – cf. p. 324 of Zikhronót 42, 1998)

A normativist may understand Hareven’s concern. Consider the loanwords spa and blog, which have not been given any recommended alternatives despite hours of committee discussions. When/if the Academy finally agrees on a Hebrew-descent neologism, it would be too late.

Yaefet and khamarmoret were proposed by the Academy – in Laméed Leshonkhá 4 (March 1994) – for ‘jet lag’ and the long-established concept of ‘hangover’ respectively. They failed to gain currency despite their creative sophistication, because dzétleg and hengover were already ensconced in Israeli. The same applies to midrúg ‘rating’, which the Academy proposed on 20 November 1995 (cf. Akadém 8: 1, March 1996), hoping it would supersede réyting.

Consider the following marvellous exchange between the President of Israel(!) and Gavriel Birenbaum from the Scientific Secretariat:

Ezer Weizman [1924-2005] (then President of Israel): […] and this week we had in the north thousands who went to tsímerim [‘B&Bs’ cf. German Zimmer]. This is also a marvellous Hebrew word…
Gavriel Birenbaum (from the Academy’s Scientific Secretariat): We have a Hebrew term for it: khadréy nófesh [lit. ‘rooms of holiday-relaxation’].

Ezer Weizman: You are saying khadréy nófesh, but if you go to rent a khéder nófesh in Metula [a town in northern Israel], they will tell you ‘it’s a pleasure, go to Marj Ayun [a town in southern Lebanon!’].

(Discussion during the 229th session of the Academy plenum, on 27 May 1996 – cf. p. 421 of Zikhronót 43, 1998)

8. ‘If you can’t beat them, join them!’: U-Turn Decisions by the Academy

Now... Sit! I said, Sit!

[Bart’s dog, Santa’s Little Helper, walks away]
Um, take a walk! Sniff that other dog’s butt!
See? He does exactly what I tell him.

(Bart trying to demonstrate his control over his dog in an obedience training class, ‘Bart’s Dog Gets an F’, The Simpsons; Sound: http://download.lardlad.com/sounds/season2/dogf10.mp3)

Reading through the Academy proceedings, interviewing its members and conducting research in situ, I have discovered dozens of examples of U-turn decisions. I suggest that the Academy has begun submitting to the ‘real world’, accommodating its decrees to the parole of native Israeli-speakers, long regarded as ‘reckless’ and ‘lazy’. The following are but a few examples.

8.1 Lexis: lahít

A most successful neologism was coined in the 1960s, not by the Academy, but rather by the popular radio presenter, Moshe Khovav (cf. Sivan 1966: 208 = 1995: 34), although Rosen (1994: 85) also mentions yet another radio presenter, Rivka Michaeli as a possible co-coiner. I am referring to lahít ‘hit (popular song)’, which is an etymological hybrid of Hebrew להט lhít ‘blaze, fierce heat’ (implying passion and craving) and the English internationalism hit (cf. Contemporary Polish hit). There could be a slight influence from the intra-English similarity of heat to hit. Lahít is fitted into the □a□ï (cf. □□i or □e□í) noun-pattern to retain the vowel of English hit:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English/Intl</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hit (popular song)</td>
<td>להט lhít</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘hit (popular song)’</td>
<td>‘blaze, fierce heat’ (implying passion/craving)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Israeli להיט lahít prevailed over the following suggestions for filling this indigenous Hebrew void, i.e. for replacing the internationalism שלאגר shláger ‘hit’ – cf. Yiddish שלאגןר shlágner, German Schlager, Russian шлагер shlyáger and Polish szlagier.3

a. Saddan provided the shrewd semantic loan יהלום yahalóm, an intra-Israeli hybrid of the following:

2. (Biblical Hebrew>>) Israeli להט lhít ‘(to) hit’, thus calquing the meaning of English hit or German schlagen (the origin of Schlager ‘hit’).

3 Polish szlagier is now slightly archaic, superseded by contemporary Polish hit – cf. Polish przebój ‘id.’.
b. Tur-Sinai (President of the Academy) himself proposed אָשְגָר ‘ashgár, hybridizing the following:


2. The internationalism שלָג ‘shläger ‘hit’.

c. The official Academy neologism – suggested by Uri Zvi Grünberg (see p. 172 of Zikhronót 7-8, 1960-1) – was כְּפֶטֶר ‘kaftór, lit. ‘button’, which alludes to (Biblical>Mishnai c Hebrew>>) Israeli כְּפֶטֶר וּפָרָח ‘kaftór vaférakh, a fossilized idiomatic exclamation meaning ‘Beautiful!, Marvellous!, First-class!’, which was adopted in Israeli en bloc and is therefore often pronounced kaftór vepérakh rather than kaftór vepérakh, the latter following the non-prescriptive Israeli grammar.

d. Isaac Avinery (1964: 168b), as a purist, proposed זִמְרוֹemplem zimrón, based on (Hebrew>) Israeli זֶמֶר ‘singing’.

The Academy later gave up and adopted lahít. Moreover, in leksikón dvír leshipúr halashón (Dvir Lexicon for the Improvement of the Language), Sivan (1985: 79) emphasizes that the ل (l) of لِهِتَ (lehit) has schwa, i.e. the word is pronounced lehit. However, in Laméd Leshonkhá 169 (1988), the Academy defends lahít, which is how Israelis pronounce this word anyway, and defines it as an exception to the □□i□□ (sometimes □□e□□) noun-pattern, implying that it should be pronounced lahít and not lehit.8 This leads to the discussion of U-turn decisions vis-à-vis Israeli morphology.

8.2 Morphology: Construct-State

Israeli sometimes uses the Semitic feature known as ‘construct-state’ (smikhút), in which two nouns are combined, the first being modified or possessed by the second:

(1) רפובליקת בננות repúblika-t banánot
‘banana republic’

(2) ביטאֱִימְר mevakér ha-mdiná
‘State Comptroller’

The first noun, which is sometimes called nomen regens ‘governing noun’, is the morphologically marked head. The second noun, referred to as nomen rectum ‘governed noun’ is the morphologically unmarked ‘genitive’.

The point relevant to our discussion is that the Academy made intensive orthoepistic efforts to uproot construct-states in which the form used of the first noun is based on the free form rather than taking the special construct-state form. Consider Israeli ptsatsá ‘bomb’. This free noun has a construct-state form which is pitsetsát-. However, most Israelis – who use construct-state much less

8 Note that the ה (h) is hardly pronounced in Israeli. It is pronounced only in the case of uncommon words, and by some speakers at the beginning of phrases. Indeed, most Israelis pronounce הַלֶּהֶית as laít. Note the existence of the Israeli colloquialism לֶהֶת (pronounced leít), a clipping of Lehitraot ‘see you, goodbye, later’. Although some Israelis regard this clipping as a modernism, it had already been mentioned by Persky (1933: 95).
than in Hebrew anyway⁵ – do not employ this form. Instead, they use \textit{ptsatsárt}, which is a ‘simplified’ version, closer to the free form \textit{ptsatsá} (consisting of \textit{ptsatsá} + \textit{t}).

The Academy attempted to force Israelis to say \textit{pitsetsárt} – rather than \textit{ptsatsárt}, for example in the expression \textit{pitsetsárt serakhón} ‘stink bomb’ (which is actually pronounced \textit{ptsatsárt sirakhón}).

In 1998, however, realistically acknowledging that native Israeli-speakers would not be convinced to say \textit{pitsetsárt}, the august Academy gave in, and allowed the pronunciation of the bound form to be \textit{ptsatsárt} – cf. Rule B5, Remark 4 in p. 1068 of \textit{Yalkút hapirsumím} 4602 (1998).

9. ‘…And if you join them, cover your arse!’: Rationalizing the Surrender

In his article ‘‘Hüküm” Nasıl Kurtuldu?’ (‘How was the word \textit{hüküm} saved?’), Atay (1965) describes how the word \textit{hüküm} ‘judgement’ – used in contemporary Turkish – was accepted during the Turkish language revolution in the 1930s:

Abdülkadir [İnan] […] said, ‘You look worried. Tell me what words are bothering you and I’ll find Turkish origins for them.’ ‘Well,’ I replied, ‘there’s this word \textit{hüküm}.’ ‘Don’t worry,’ he said, ‘tomorrow we’ll make \textit{hüküm} Turkish.’ Next day he quietly put into my hand a slip of paper on which he had noted that some dialects had a word \textit{ök} meaning ‘intellect’, which in several of them took the form \textit{üm}. I had myself discovered that in Yakut there was a word-building suffix -\textit{üm}. The rest was easy: \textit{ök} plus -\textit{üm} had in the course of time become \textit{hüküm}. When the meeting began, I said, ‘The word \textit{hüküm} is Turkish,’ and gave a full account of what I had learned, which reduced the two professors to silence. We had laid the foundations of the science of – I shan’t say fakery, but flim-flam. That evening I reported to Atatürk on the Commission’s proceedings and he was very pleased that we had won so important a word by this fabrication. What he wanted us to do was to leave as many words in the language as possible, so long as we could demonstrate that they were Turkish.

(Translation by Lewis 1999: 54)

Atay himself was fully aware of the manipulation and knew that the commonly-used \textit{hüküm} was, in fact, a loanword from Arabic \textit{حكمة} [hukm] ‘judgement, verdict, valuation, opinion’.⁶

Similarly, I propose that the Academy bows to the public more readily if it can find that the grammatical feature it previously rebuked appears in the scriptures (e.g. the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible), as well as the \textit{Mishnah}, Rabbinic interpretation of the Pentateuch) – even if its appearance is irregular or marginal. As long as the Academy has an official seal/approval in the form of ancient Hebrew, it feels no guilt, so to speak.

Consider the form \textit{היכיתי hikéti} ‘beat (1st person, singular, past)’, whose root is \textit{n.k.h}. Initially, the Academy regarded this form as mistaken and resulting from an analogy to the conjugation of verbs whose root ends with \textit{h} rather than with \textit{q} – e.g. \textit{miléti} ‘fill (1st person, singular, past)’, whose root is \textit{m.l.}² The ‘correct’ form – as originally advocated by the Academy – was \textit{hikíti} rather than \textit{hikéti}.

However, luckily for the Academy, in the Hebrew Bible there are instances of \textit{hikkéti} – e.g. Jeremiah 2:30. Consequently, the Academy recently changed its decrees and decided that both \textit{hikéti} and \textit{hikíti} are now legitimate.

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⁵ Unlike in Hebrew, the construct-state is not highly productive in Israeli. Compare (3) and 4):

(3) HEBREW: ‘em ha-ttalmíd ‘mother (construct-state) DEFINITE-pupil’, i.e. ‘the pupil’s mother’
(4) ISRAELI: ha-ima shel ha-talmíd ‘DEFINITE-mother GENITIVE DEFINITE-pupil’, i.e. ‘the pupil’s mother’

tEtymologically, \textit{shel} ‘of’ consists of the relativizer \textit{she}- ‘that’ and the (dative) preposition \textit{le} ‘to’.

⁶ It is possible that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (the Gazi) adopted the ‘Sun Language Theory’ (that Turkish was the \textit{Ursprache}) precisely in order to legitimate the Arabic and Persian words which the language revolutionaries did not manage to uproot. Atatürk was particularly concerned with ridding Turkish of the Arabic/Persian components, but did not mind too much about the influence of French (which he knew well). In other words, he was anti-Arabic/Persian rather than ‘purist’ in the traditional sense – cf. Zuckermann (2003: 164-5).
10. Predic(a)tion: Numeral and noun (dis)agreement; Concluding Remarks

Female graduate student studying cabbala, Zohar, exorcism of dybbuks, seeks mensch. No weirdos please. P.O. Box 68.

(Personal advertisement attributed to the Jewish Chronicle)

Numbers are often most telling. Consider the two Germans who went to a New York bar and tried very hard to camouflage their German accent. ‘We would like two glasses of white wine, please!’, they said to the bartender in a high nasalized pitch. ‘Dry?’ the bartender asked. ‘Zwei!’ they forcefully retorted.

Hebrew had a consistent polarity-of-gender agreement between nouns and numerals. Consider ‘éser banót ‘ten girls’ versus ‘asar-á baním ‘ten-feminine boys’. In the latter, the feminine suffix -a is added to the numeral which modifies a masculine noun. (Israeli pupils are told that asar-á is masculine but this is historically incorrect.) However, in most Israeli idiolects, sociolects and dialects, the system is much simpler: éser banót ‘ten girls’ and éser baním ‘ten boys’. Just like in Yiddish and Standard Average European,7 there is no difference between a numeral modifying a masculine noun and a numeral modifying a feminine one.

That said, although 90% of Israelis (cf. Ravid 1995) would not say asar-á shkal-im, lit. ‘ten-feminine shekel-masculine.plural’, i.e. ‘ten shekels’, there are some Israelis – (currently) cherished by the Academy – who speak a variety in which the latter is the grammatical form.

In fact, massive normative pressure has resulted in hypercorrect conflated forms. Official rules are often used inconsistently because they are – paradoxically – counter-grammatical vis-à-vis numerous idiolectal, sociolectal or dialectal realities. For example, there are speakers who say – normatively – shlosh-á shkal-im ‘three shekels’ (cf. the non-prescriptive shalósh shékel) but – hypercorrectly perhaps – shlósh-et ha-dód-ót ‘the three aunts’ (cf. the normative shlósh ha-dod-ót).

Thus, Israeli already shows signs of diglossia: native Israeli versus non-native (high-flown, pseudo-) Hebrew. If language planning persists, full diglossia – or actually polyglossia – of the Arabic type may be established. Modern Standard Arabic (cf. Classical Arabic) – as opposed to the various vernacular Arabics (cf. so-called Arabic dialects) – is no-one’s mother tongue (a fact which does not prevent some American universities from advertising for professors with ‘native or near-native fluency in Modern Standard Arabic’ – see Linguist List, 1 July 2004). Most Arabs consider Modern Standard Arabic as their language and yet speak Palestinian Arabic or Egyptian Arabic or Moroccan Arabic and so forth.

That said – and although it is hard (and often considered un-academic) to speculate (especially about the future) – I predict that the Academy will continue to be at war between august, arcane normativism and ‘sober realism’, and may have tidal currents pulling to either side, inter alia depending on who the elected President of the Academy and the powerful members are.

Eventually, however, the Academy – which is characterized by realistic prescriptivism – will approve of éser shékel. When that happens, it may signal the complete acceptance of the native speaker and the embracing of his/her infinite, generative power. It will also mark the acknowledgment that language evolution – and in the case of Israeli: language genesis too – is not something to chastise but rather to indulge.

7 The term ‘Standard Average European’ was first introduced by Whorf (1941: 25) and recently received more attention from Haspelmath (1998, 2001) and Bernini and Ramat (1996) – cf. ‘European Sprachbund’ in Kuteva (1998).

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