


Spring 2021

Innovation From Above, Below, and Behind: The Linguistics of the Hebrew Revival

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Recommended Citation

Porath, Aviv J., "Innovation From Above, Below, and Behind: The Linguistics of the Hebrew Revival" (2021). *Senior Projects Spring 2021*. 151.

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Innovation From Above, Below, and Behind:
The Linguistics of the Hebrew Revival

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2021

Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to thank my project advisor, Shai Secunda, for helping me clarify the directions I wanted to explore, and introducing me to the lesser known historical nuggets of this field. I want to thank authors Norman Berdichevsky and Lewis Glinert, in particular, as I wouldn't have gotten very far in my research without their incredibly helpful books. I would also like to thank my ima, Basmat, for patiently reading pre-modern Hebrew newspaper archives with me, and answering all my pedantic Hebrew inquiries. I would also like to thank Omar Cheta, my academic advisor and history professor, whose encouragement and lessons provided me with a sturdy historical foundation upon which I was able to fashion my narrative. Next, I would like to like to give a shoutout to all my friends that tolerated my extensive bouts of fact-spilling in the excitement of my research. Finally, I want to extend my gratitude to those who will read my work in its entirety (including the footnotes); I poured my all into this project and I sincerely hope you find it as interesting as I did!

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Introduction

The modern revival of the Hebrew Language over the last two centuries is recognized by many scholars and statisticians as an outstanding success. Hebrew, as the narrative goes, had been relegated to a religious ‘second tongue’ by Jews after their expulsion from Jerusalem at the start of the Common Era. While various Jewish scholars throughout the millennia since then have attempted to preserve and improve Hebrew on smaller scales, the revival of spoken Hebrew with the founding of the Jewish nationalist project in Palestine was the most monumental and integrated trial run. By integrated, I mean that Modern Hebrew came to be spoken by an extremely diverse group of Jews from across the diaspora—and deliberately so, as Hebrew was thought to be the only way to unify them under one national identity (Berdichevsky 79). The *ulpan* method of immersive Hebrew-only classrooms rapidly increased the ability of these new immigrants to participate in a joint society. Meanwhile, each sub-community subtly imprinted their own linguistic backgrounds onto freshly developing spoken Hebrew norms. Hebrew’s linguo-nationalist ideology was one of many budding throughout Europe and the Middle East; yet, while other parallel movements in the 19th and 20th centuries attempted to create national cohesion via the standardization, purification, and reinvigoration of a collective language, none, I maintain, yielded a profound and culturally productive revival like that of Hebrew in Israel today.

Comparative Analysis

To better understand why the case of Hebrew is unique and generated the transformative results it did, it is worthwhile to engage with these various other linguo-nationalist revival movements that occurred in tandem with Hebrew's modernization.

European Minority Revivals:

A handful of heritage languages in Europe were finding themselves replaced by the predominant tongue of commerce and administration, such as with Gaelic and Welsh fearing erasure by English assimilation, or Basque and Catalan disappearing under Spanish dominion. Such movements involved local government subsidies and initiatives designed to promote the smaller regional language and grant it equal status with the national tongue (Berdichevsky 33).

In the early 20th century, usage of Welsh was declining at an alarming rate—with only 4% of the population speaking it exclusively (Lance-Watkins). In 1925, the *Plaid Cymru* political party was founded with the goal of promoting a language revival, and striving to evoke national unity and pride by deeming Welsh the oldest language in Europe (Berdichevsky 33). Members of *Cymdeithas*, the Welsh Language Society, used social protests and direct actions to raise awareness of the issue, vandalizing English-only road signs, staging sit-ins, and campaigning for a Welsh television channel (launched in 1982) (Griffiths). Wales sought to systematically increase language accessibility by instating Welsh as a compulsory language in 1993. After gaining partial autonomy from the UK in 1997, Wales has commenced social programs to reinvigorate its historical tongue, endeavoring to reach one million speakers (out of a population of 3.5 million) by 2050.

In Catalonia, politicians decreed Catalan the official language of instruction, with Castilian Spanish becoming the 'compulsory *foreign* language requirement' (Berdichevsky 33).

Fluency in Catalan is now essential for high-ranking government positions. While forced measures like these can increase official comprehension on a national scale, they are incomplete without the sociocultural component—and, accordingly, Catalan is still only spoken by around 35% of the total population today. Basque speakers in the north of Spain also aspired to a revival of their cultural tongue, and claimed it to be the oldest language in Europe to garner popular interest in a revival. Inspired by the success of Hebrew’s revival, representatives from all these regions studied Israel’s modernization procedures and education methods from the 20th century—Basque intellectuals even mailed a confidential letter to the Israeli consul in Paris in 1957 asking for advice on executing *ulpan* education (Berdichevsky 33).

Middle Eastern Modernization and Purification:

Around the same time, many Middle Eastern countries were seeking to create a cohesive and singular national identity by expunging foreign influences from their language and attuning their respective language to the modern world. Upon the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923, its founding father, Mustafa Atatürk, led a campaign to integrate social classes and level regional diversity by standardizing the language and ‘freeing’ it from foreign taint (Berdichevsky 34). The removal focused on Arabic elements in particular, eliminating Arab and Persian loanwords (over 50% of words) and even transitioning to a latinized alphabet—with the aim of simplifying written Turkish to increase literacy, and symbolically disconnecting from the Islamic legacy of the Ottoman Empire (Quataert 196).

In Iran, the Persian language was also undergoing a process of modernization and purification. Contact with Western culture fostered a need to bring Farsi into concordance with Standard Average European (a conglomerate of similarly modernized European languages,

abbreviated SAU) while retaining loyalty to its literary classics (Borjian 257). This manifested in the form of replacing ceremonial wordiness with more simplified and intelligible forms in prose, and updating its vocabulary (Borjian 258). Originally, technical terms, such as ‘bank,’ ‘machine,’ and ‘cabinet,’ were directly borrowed from French, but by the early 20th century, literary societies arose with the purpose of coining new terms from within Farsi. In 1935, the *Farhangestan* (Academy of the Persian Language) was established to standardize orthography and eliminate ‘impurities.’ Inspired by Turkish policies, the academy produced some 2,000 terms to replace words of European or Arabic origin (although not all coinages lasted in the public sphere) (Borjian 262). After the Islamic coup in 1979, the (replaced) members of the Academy became more indifferent to the Arabic loanwords, and concentrated on extraction of Western influence (Borjian 264).

The Arabic language notably underwent extensive reconfiguration in the 20th century, in parallel with Hebrew’s process. ‘Corrupted’ dialects throughout the Arab world began to eclipse the archaic literary form (*Nahwi*), so groups of Arab intellectuals created a modernized universal version of Arabic to be taught everywhere, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) (Blau 2). The impracticality of *Nahwi* was perpetuated by the traditional dogma of ‘*Arrabiya*, which asserted that classical Arabic was not to be tampered with. Consequently, over the centuries, this led to an increasingly widening gap between the static historical form and the spoken realities of different Arab communities. Symbols of Arab unity and of harking back to a glorious past were utilized to galvanize the Arab world into accepting modernization as a form of cultural retention and empowerment (Blau 22). SAU norms—French in particular, due to colonial influence—redefined Arabic grammar, vocabulary, idioms, and journalistic styles (Blau 31). A simplification of

grammar, introduction of modern terms derived from traditional sources, and a declaration of Arab unity were promoted by the various Arabic Language Committees that sprung up in the Arab world. Based on the French Language Academy, meetings took place in Egypt and Damascus throughout the early 20th century to craft a standardized literary form that has come to constitute the upper register of Arabic (Blau 160). Today, local dialects are almost exclusively used for communication purposes, while MSA is heard on the news or read in literature and academic articles (with native Arab speaking youth generally still struggling to or uninterested in commanding it fluently).

Hebrew:

The modern Hebrew revival has many overlapping qualities with these other movements, as well as several features that mark it as a distinct case study. Similarly to the European language revivals that Hebrew would later go on to inspire, the Zionist movement worked to reestablish a linkage to an ancient legacy, incorporating elements of Biblical Hebrew and celebrating the revival of a spoken tongue in the land of Palestine as a return to the ‘original Hebrew society.’ While other language movements, like the Turkish modernizers, switched to a latinized alphabet to increase literacy, Hebraists concluded that the cultural importance of Hebrew lettering, as well as its reinforcement of a sense of ancient glory, was irreplaceable (Blau 162). Reminiscent of the *Farhangestan*’s motions to reduce Farsi’s empty, overly convoluted literary idiom into more aesthetically pleasing and simplistic prose, the Hebrew revivalists shifted from pseudo-Biblical to Mishnaic syntax, and championed a blunt and direct mode of speaking to negate the flowery traditional Hebrew of the diaspora (Kahn 1; Katriel 1). Reflective of Atatürk’s staunch secularity in the founding of the Turkish state, where Arabized Muslim

elements were removed from the language and culture, the Zionist project deliberately secularized Hebrew words and customs in the fledgling Israeli state (Quataert 196; Berdichevsky 34).

Hebrew Success In Context

The key factors that set apart the revival of Hebrew in its modern form are its *population* and its *vernacular*. Regarding population: in all the above examples, the relevant community was *already living* in their historical territory. In some cases they may have been disconnected from their heritage language, as with Wales and Catalan—where a culturally established ethnic group has been largely assimilated into the tongue of regional administration. In others, locals spoke dialects or an unrefined version of the national language—as was the case in Iran and Turkey, where the culture and tongue are entrenched, but could be consolidated and modernized. Either way, a constituency of fairly homogenous populations (or a national myth conveying this) in one location is systematically impelled to feel a sense of national unity and cohesion through a common language.

Hebrew, on the other hand, was to become the new language of *a people scattered* throughout the world (Blumenfeld 2). Hebrew had long been supplanted by the local vernacular (as Wales or Basque feared), or a Judeo-version of it, in every respective diaspora community. Upon settlement of Palestine, these distinct Jewish communities mostly had no physical ties to the territory, did not necessarily have strong cultural connections to one another, and all spoke *different languages* (Bartal 19). Hebrew was designed to be the one language culturally relevant enough to all, and possibly the only element that could unify them. A cohesive community that

could be legally and symbolically relabeled as a nation, as in the other examples, was far from the reality; rather, the nation had to be *imported* from around the globe. A vague cultural and religious connection, spurred by global anti-Semitism and nationalism, was comparatively little to work with. As the state of Israel came about much later, extensive amounts of revival and modernization work were completed without the legal, political and financial assistance of a cohesive state that the later instances of revival mentioned benefited from (Aytürk 800). In having to create a revival out of such diverse participants (due to the tumultuous timeline that is Jewish history), Hebrew is an outlier.

Regarding the second point: the Zionist project revived *spoken* Hebrew as a native tongue for the first time in roughly two millennia. In the aforementioned examples, the tongue was in decline and needed more support, or could have profited from modernization and standardization. Either way, a well-developed spoken language already existed. The Hebrew revivalists had to not only systematically encourage immigrants to use an *incomplete* foreign tongue until it gained native-spoken status, but also had to modernize as this was happening. The maturation of an active spoken vernacular involved a lot of creativity and linguistic detective work, far removed from its last reincarnation some 2,000 years prior. A whole new vocabulary, pronunciation, and culture had to be designed around a language international Jews were (in the early stages, at least) learning only as adults. In the contrasting examples, a culture and language had long been developing in tandem, but needed consolidation, or policies to ensure they received more attention. MSA, similarly to Hebrew, had to update an archaic literary form and create cultural unity, but its revival work was, practically speaking, reserved to formal cultural

purposes (Blau 23) In this way, Hebrew is much more artificial than other revivals that simply reach back to a language that has been around for a long time, but is in decline.

*

The rest of the essay will engage in detail with the linguistic decisions and innovations that created modern Hebrew, as well as the policies enforcing its success. Nevertheless, I will quickly highlight some of the strategies and historical reasons that Hebrew was comparatively so successful. Firstly, the other revivals were often entirely top-down in direction, i.e. nationalist or intellectual movements espoused by elite ideologues. Hebrew was as well, but the sheer amount of Jews around the world who deliberately chose to uproot their lives, move to Palestine, and convert all their daily conversations into a strange tongue, displays an unusual collaborative ardor beyond that of the other movements (Blumenfeld 3). While other revivals may have incorporated popular protests and political involvement, such as the *Cymdeithas*, the relative scale of multicultural Hebrew speakers active in Palestine present as an anomaly.

Another crucial element to rapid assimilation and integration of Jews into Hebrew speaking environments is the aforementioned efficacy of the *ulpan* system, which numerous subsequent revivals have attempted to recreate (Berdichevsky 33). Relatedly, the long maintained traditions of Hebrew literature in Jewish communities throughout the world have historically maintained a Jewish affinity for, and familiarity with, Hebrew writing (also, Jews have traditionally had much higher rates of literacy than their counterparts) (Glinert 112). These have ranged from Biblical studies and the Talmud to scientific treatises, ancient and modern Hebrew encyclopedias, transcontinental Jewish correspondences, and Jewish newspapers in the diaspora and in Palestine. The external sociopolitical factors of the era were also pivotal in

solidifying the success of the Hebrew establishment. These include the nationalist tendencies of the 19th century, the fall of the Ottoman Empire, British support of the Zionist cause, European partitions of the Middle East, the Holocaust, and the influence of Jewish philanthropists. With all of this outlined, we can undertake a thorough analysis of the Modern Israeli Hebrew revival process itself, from its devised beginnings to its multifaceted repercussions.

Main Arguments

This thesis seeks to investigate the singular example of Modern Hebrew's linguistic revival and determine the historical and linguistic qualities that made it successful. Furthermore, as this former question has received extensive academic attention throughout the years, I intend to challenge the common narrative of Hebrew revival as miraculous and isolated from Jewish history. I will demonstrate the long legacy of Hebrew creativity, preservation, and reinvention that formed the foundations the Zionist movement was able to build upon. I also seek to expand the narrative of the revival process itself to more accurately account for the modern result that is Israeli Hebrew. The 'planned' element of the revival process, i.e. the well-documented top-down impositions of the Hebrew revivalists, was just one of many conflicting forces that converged to actualize a functioning vernacular; in fact, simultaneously, the population was engaging with, and even defying, the rules of the establishment—introducing foreign loanwords, using 'incorrect' grammar, inventing slang, and, ultimately, choosing which of the Hebrew revivalists' innovations would survive. In this way, the organic and unorganized actions of a young Hebrew-speaking population worked alongside the revivalists to determine what 'correct' Hebrew is today. Thus, I argue that the modernization of Hebrew is actually a composite of

clashing influences testing out new linguistic ideas in the early stages of a country, as performed into existence by a mix of immigrants desiring to function and communicate in an antiquated language that still lacked the words necessary to express their modern needs.

Chapter Summaries

In the first chapter of this tract, I will trace the history of the Hebrew language from its beginnings in 2000 BC down to the 1800s. This involves seeing how the alphabet, pronunciations, and vocabulary of the language have shifted and mutated over time. By delineating the various iterations of Hebrew present throughout its chronology—often emerging in reaction to one another—I will attempt to dispel the Zionist conception of a ‘dead’ or ‘dormant’ tongue prior to their efforts. Movements of Hebrew innovation, revision, and prominence throughout Europe and the Middle East that are often overlooked will be provided as evidence. Moreover, I will argue how Hebrew’s history vis a vis imperial domination and diaspora have put it in contact with foreign influence so consistently and thoroughly that it has become an inextricable quality of the language itself—and that the issues of Hebrew ‘impurity’ that the Zionist Hebraists tackled are, in fact, age old.

The second chapter will resume the timeline from the 19th century and set the stage for the modern revival of Hebrew in Europe. An outline of the history of the *Haskalah*, or Jewish Enlightenment, during the era of European nationalism will explicate the changes in vocabulary, grammar, and function that *Maskilic* Hebrew underwent. The chapter will recount the rise of Zionist ideology, and how this transformed the use of Hebrew in Europe from literary to revolutionary to preparatory. I will then give a brief history of the Old Yishuv (the longstanding

Jewish presence in Jerusalem, Safed, and Tiberias) and explain the pre-modern Ottoman patchwork societal structure that diverse Jewish communities lived in. This contains an analysis of the pre-revival Hebrew used by Jerusalem Old Yishuv communities in their newspapers, which reveals the arbitrary nature of modernization efforts. Finally, I will note the impact of the Jewish community in Algeria on Hebraist Elie'zer Ben Yehuda, in demonstrating the possibility for and character of a spoken Hebrew revival.

The third chapter will focus on the actions of the Hebrew revivalists. We will engage in detail with their linguistic decisions in forming Modern Hebrew, including grammatical shifts, coinages, and the appropriation and desacralization of Biblical Hebrew terms. Various case studies of how new coinages fused Biblical roots, Greco-latin terms, and Arabic vocabulary will exemplify their linguistic ideology and creativity. The second half of the chapter will address the establishment's attempts to enforce their new Hebrew on the population and invoke a new ethos and cultural idiom in Palestine to negate the ignominious recent history of the diaspora.

The fourth chapter will address the response of the heterogeneous aggregate of early Hebrew-speaking communities to the policies of the previous chapter. I will give examples of citizens coining new words, inventing slang, attempting to teach Hebrew without a strong grasp of it, integrating loanwords from their home cultures, and youth trying to fabricate their own mannerisms and ways of talking. These sundry illustrations, which are arguably much more defining of modern Israeli Hebrew today, all serve to emphasize that the establishment's policies were but one part of the re-vernacularization process. I will expound my concept of 'spoken linguistic efficiency,' the cyclical process by which the colloquial register is self-defined, and the words that fit it are selected. With all this being said, I contend that Israeli Hebrew can be

interpreted as the dialectical synthesis between the deliberate designs of the state, and the myriad haphazard forces emanating from within the population in order to enable an incomplete spoken tongue to address all their functional, emotional, and existential needs.

Hebrew Transcription Conventions and Methodology

In order to convey Hebrew words in latinized letters, I will use ‘k’ to indicate the letter *kaf* (כ), and ‘kh’ for its phoneme pair *khaf* (כּ). ‘Q,’ depicts the letter *quf* (ק). A lowercase ‘h’ represents the letter *hey* (ה), and a dotted ‘h’ is the guttural *het* (הּ)—and when Anglicizing Arabic words, a dotted uppercase H will represent the breathy *Ḥa*, while lowercase will express a raspy *ḥa*, as in Hebrew (for Hebrew words, an uppercase H just indicates a proper noun or the start of a sentence). Wherever is necessary to engage with roots, uppercase ‘S’ portrays a *Samekh* (ס), and an uppercase ‘T’ is *Tet* (ט). An apostrophe signifies a glottal stop in between vowels (as is customary in Hebrew pronunciation), and an apostrophe before the letter ‘a’ expresses a guttural *‘ayin* (ע). To convey vocalized stresses of certain words, emphasized syllables will be capitalized. Also, the appendix with the reference images accompanying the chapters can be found on page 135.

Regarding methodology, my conclusions were drawn through research of archival newspaper articles, academic texts, encyclopedia entries, videos, podcasts, interviews, and my personal observations about Semitic and European languages and Israeli popular culture.

Chapter 1: Hebrew Evolves With History

Hebrew is a West-Semitic language¹ with a 4000 year old history. As the ancient Middle East saw the rise and fall of empires and conquerors, bringing with them new languages, expulsions, and administrative systems, Hebrew speakers were forced to adapt and adjust to foreign pressures. When at the start of the Common Era virtually all Hebrew-speaking communities were forcibly resettled, Jews formed a network of transcontinental *diaspora* communities, from the Galilee to Mesopotamia to Southern Europe. As these communities assimilated and changed, spoken Hebrew faded out of common use in a world that seemed to have moved on without it. That is, until the national-scale revival of the 1800s, as the narrative goes.

This chapter aims to investigate the timeline of Hebrew from its early formations up until this modern revival; to explore the circumstances that forced Hebrew to adjust; the foreign languages that influenced Hebrew, and the unique cases of Jews *and* non-Jews using it to communicate and study. These case studies and lesser known histories work to dispel the popular notion that Hebrew was a dead or dormant language before the 19th century, when it effectively jump-started out of nowhere. I will illustrate that, while it was not spoken in a concentrated ethnic community, Hebrew was surviving, utilized, and morphing in impressive ways throughout the last few millennia—self-preserving and reimagining itself in the face of obsolescence so consistently throughout its history that these struggles are, in effect, part of the fabric of the language itself. I argue that there was not *one* revival in the 19th century, but, in fact, *numerous* revivals and resurrections on smaller scales that not only dealt with the same linguistic and social

¹ Semitic languages are a subsection of Afroasiatic languages that originated in the Middle East, including Aramaic, Arabic, Amharic, and Maltese.

issues that the modern revivalists did, but also kept the fire going so that their work could happen.

Judean History 101

Before I delineate the ways Hebrew evolved in tandem with its sociopolitical context, it may be useful to offer a brief historical timeline of the region. The ancient Middle East featured various tribes and settlements, such as the Ancient Egyptians, developing and exchanging ideas and technology. The Egyptians are credited with creating the very first alphabet system² circa 2000 BC—the ancestor of every subsequent alphabet in Eurasia (Schniedewind 33). Early Hebrew writing utilized the Phoenician alphabet (the Phoenicians were a Semitic-speaking conglomeration of coastal city states in the *Canaan* area), an alphabet widely employed throughout the Levant in the second millennium without ethnic associations (Schniedewind 55). As expected with such widespread use, the alphabet accumulated small regional discrepancies, with one such variation being paleo-Hebrew (see fig. 1 in the Appendix). Hebrew as a *spoken* language can be traced back to circa 2000 BC, around when the Canaanite dialect became distinct and its speakers actively reinforced a communal identity. This corresponds to a larger Late Bronze Age trend of ‘nationalisms,’ or internal senses of collective ethnic identity, in Syria-Palestine (Schniedewind 26).

The northern tribes of Israel and the southern region of Judea (where Hebrew was spoken with regional differences) were united under a Jewish Kingdom, and established a conquered

² Interestingly, alphabet letters are believed to have evolved out of the pictorial hieroglyphs of the time, and therein maintain illustrative content in their shapes. This legacy can be seen in shapes of modern Hebrew letters, with *aleph* depicting an ox head (see fig. 1, Appendix), *nun* a snake, *resh* a head, *mem* water, etc... where the Hebrew words for these pictures match the names of these letters, e.g. *nun*/naḥash, *resh*/rosh, *mem*/maim (Schniedewind 35, Horowitz 14).

Jerusalem as its administrative center around 1000 BC. Corresponding to the Biblical monarchs David and Solomon, this era saw the subsequent rise of two separate Israelite kingdoms—the so-called kingdoms of Judah and Israel—proliferating the use of Hebrew in cultural life and bureaucracy (52 Schniedewind). This brief period of self-rule was interrupted by the Assyrian conquest of the northern settlement of Israel in 722 BC, and then the ravaging of Jerusalem in 597 and 586 BC by Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. 586 BC saw the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, and expulsions began in 567 BC. The Judean elite, including scribes, were taken back to Babylon—the first traces of modern Jewish *diaspora culture*—and Babylon witnessed a Jewish intellectual renaissance in the following century. These events kick off the long chain of expulsions and multicultural assimilations that go on to define Jewish history, and that put Hebrew at constant risk of obscurity.

The next imperial presence in Judea were the Persians (538-333 BC), under whom Jews were allowed to return from exile and rebuild the Jerusalem Temple in 516 BCE. Persian dominance was replaced by Greek reign after the conquests of Alexander the Great in 333 BC. Greek rule ushered in an era of Hellenization (see page 22), significantly altering local custom, administration and architecture (Glinert 32). Ptolemy replaced Alexander following his death, and subsequent campaigns to paganize and suppress the worship of the Hebrew population resulted in the Maccabean uprising of 167 BC (the story behind the modern holiday of Hanukah). The Maccabees successfully ejected the Greeks from Jerusalem, ushering in a century of Jewish autonomy with the Hasmonean dynasty (Glinert 34).

The final blow to Hebrew presence in the region was under the Roman Empire. Rising tensions with Roman administration coalesced into a Jewish revolutionary movement that was

violently quelled; the Second Temple in Jerusalem was burned down in 70 CE and over a million Jews were sold into slavery or fled into Jordan (Glinert 130). This marks the transition of Jewish culture into a decentralized and diasporic one, wherein Hebrew was relegated to secondary vernacular among disparate Jewish communities with a mostly liturgical function, and without a prominent spoken presence in Judea (Schniedewind 191). As diaspora communities went on to define their relationships vis a vis local cultures, Hebrew appeared more symbolic than practical, finding itself less relevant in quotidian circumstances (Glinert 194).

Outside of Judea, influential diaspora communities began to form in Southern Europe, Babylon, Yemen, and Northern Africa, to name a few, each developing their own interpretations of Hebrew language and Jewish custom—with much respective internal distinction as well. The Middle Ages are characterized by Jewish expulsions and migrations in Europe and the Middle East, as well as sporadic artistic and academic movements. Jewish communities, overall, had little political influence in their respective diaspora homes, but sought out religious, mercantile, and intellectual ties with one another (Berdichevsky 39). Jewish culture, on the whole, balanced increasingly individualized customs and universal religious and sociocultural characteristics. Throughout all the relocations and community-building in unfamiliar places, historic Palestine remained the glorified birthplace of cultural heritage and language in Jewish collective memory.

Hebrew Through the Years

The Hebrew language has a long history that weaves into that of many cultures and countries; a history of nostalgia, inventiveness, and forward-thinking sages, particularly from the Roman expulsions onwards. Below I will show how the threat of linguistic erasure, the different

foreign influences that have influenced Hebrew (see lists of their loanwords into Hebrew in the footnotes), and internal tensions between the masses and elite classes, have prompted innovation and preservation. In and outside of religious contexts, the ideological compulsion to ‘not forget Hebrew’ has kept the language reshaping and resurfacing intermittently, from antiquity up until the present.

To rewind to the foundations of written Hebrew, we begin with the Ancient Egyptians. It is theorized that the first alphabet might have been an attempt at an administrative language to manage their non-Egyptian subjects,³ an initiative that they abandoned, but that was picked up by other communities in the region around 1000 BC (Schniedewind 54). The Phoenician template that Hebrew scribes adopted was a 22-letter *abjad* alphabet system. The term *abjad* indicates that only consonants are written,⁴ with vowel sounds being implied (for an analogous English example: “tht tbl hs sx lgs”). Spoken Hebrew, however, had at least 25 *consonantal graphemes*, or sounds, to the 22 written Phoenician letters, meaning that some letters became *double phonemes*, having two distinct sounds ascribed to them, such as *sin/shin*, *het/Het*, and ‘*ayin/ghayin* (Schniedewind 9); in reading, the letters looked the same, but context clues would imply a different vocalization. This could explain why Hebrew, unlike many other languages, has multiple double phonemes (see fig. 2 in Appendix), still seen today, albeit with the much newer innovation of *niqqud* dots and dashes to differentiate.⁵ The end result was that for the first 3,000 years of its history, Hebrew readers had to determine the vocalization of the word based on

³ Alphabets are believed to have been developed for non-Egyptian use, stemming from a linguistic ideology that hieroglyphics were a superior writing form reserved for Egyptians. The alphabetic system, then, may have been contrived as a ‘mundane alternative’ to their sacred cuneiform (Schniedewind 35).

⁴ Technically it is an *impure* abjad, as over time a few vowels entered the alphabet, but it is still a heavily consonant based *abjad*. The term derives from the opening letters of the alphabets, *aleph/bet/gimmel/dalet*.

⁵ Although in Modern Hebrew, *niqqud* is only used in religious texts and children’s books— representing a reversion back to context clues.

intuition and established speech patterns. This exhibits that the *very character* of Hebrew itself has always been shaped by external linguistic sources, from its very inception and down through the ages; a language that is consistently redefining itself in relation to external pressures and internal adjustments. This chapter will engage with the cultural and linguistic groups that interacted with Hebrew throughout its history, and therein defined Hebrew as we know it.

Challenging Writing Norms

In this early period, Hebrew was developing its writing system through canonical scribal work (including collecting the stories that would become biblical mythos), fairly disconnected from the spoken norms of Judeans. This text-based Hebrew, which developed into what we call Biblical Hebrew (BH), is considered stilted and ornate with a heavy tone (Berdichevsky 41). The democratization of written Hebrew around 800 BC (attributed to the advent of government bureaucracy) expanded literacy⁶ from the scribal elite down to the lower classes (Schniedewind 99), generating a plethora of letters, deeds, tomb inscriptions, and graffiti in Hebrew. These can give us insight into the ancient everyday use of Hebrew, which challenged scribal writing standards and set off the age-old dichotomy between proper prose and informal vernacular; one which modern Hebrew (and most languages) struggles with today, as will be explored in chapter 4.

An interesting example of this dichotomy are the Bar Kokhba letters, written circa 133 CE by the venerated leader of the Hebrew resistance against the Romans. His military and administrative letters, discovered in the Judean desert, feature colloquialisms that represent the

⁶ Literacy rates were, of course, a fraction of the percentages we would expect in society today.

late antiquity spoken vernacular (Glinert 39). For example, *et ha* is consolidated into *ta* (comparable to ‘going to’ as ‘gonna’ in English—*ta* is actually very common in modern Israeli parlance) and ‘*al nafsha*, “on his own behalf,” is compressed into ‘*anafsha*, reflecting vernacular speech more than the standardized spellings found in literary texts (Glinert 39; Schniedewind 197). Here we can see that, even its early stages, Hebrew struggled to define itself, teetering between scribal establishment designs and organic conventions.

Aramaic Influence

Around the year 1000 BC, the imperialistic *lingua franca*, or language of regional commerce and administration, shifted from Akkadian (see footnote for Akkadian loanwords in Hebrew)⁷ to Aramaic. This was further augmented by prominence of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (911-605 BC) in the Levant, who imbued their tongue, Aramaic (a Semitic sister language of Hebrew), with a status of prestige. While at first Judeans attempted to define themselves in contrast with the imposed Aramaic scribal tradition, with time, Aramaic transformed into an integral part of Hebrew and Jewish culture—due to interconnected factors such as assimilation, ease of regional operation, and the decline of Hebrew (Schniedewind 74; Glinert 23). The impact of Aramaic on Hebrew is considerable: vowels were added to Aramaic writing by 900 BC (making it an *impure abjad*) and Hebrew mimicked the convention (Schniedewind 115). Jews eventually embraced Aramaic script around 500-250 BC, employing it to the extent that it became known as Jewish script—displacing the Phoenician inspired *paleo-Hebrew* alphabet

⁷ The influence of ancient Akkadian on Hebrew can be seen in loanwords such as: *aron, gan, tahana, kishuf, tel, yesod, halon, ulam, delet, adrikhal, mazal, mabul, heykhal, gesher* (Berdichevsky 44), with some of these as *trans-loanwords*, i.e. transmitted to Hebrew via a third language, in this case Sumerian or Aramaic (134 Schniedewind).

previously in use (Schniedewind 141). In specific, Hebrew adopted the ‘holy square biblical font’ still known to us today, a Jewish stylization of Aramaic script introduced in Babylon around 500 BC (Berdichevsky 67).

In daily use, Jews mixed imperial Aramaic with their Hebrew vernacular: this inscription from 300 BC Jerusalem exemplifies this linguistic synthesis, reading “ככרן לף חנניה בצק,” translating to “loaves (of bread): a thousand for Hananiah, dough” (Schniedewind 166). The Hebrew word for dough, *batssek*, is used (as opposed to the Aramaic *lisha*), as is the word *kikar* for loaf. However, loaf is pluralized with the Aramaic suffix *-in*, rather than the *-im* ending common⁸ in Hebrew. Aramaic replaced Hebrew as the main Jewish language of communication by the Roman period, circa 200 CE. The *Talmud* (a compendium of Jewish legal discourse composed in an amalgam of Aramaic and Hebrew at the start of the Common Era), and official Jewish documents like the *Ketubah*, or wedding contract (see Appendix, figure 3), are still read in Aramaic today. Although the languages are fairly similar, and with much overlap, a contemporary Hebrew speaker can only comprehend bits and pieces of Aramaic without translation. Here Hebrew, and not for the last time, is inundated until near supplantation with an outside imposition, and Jews must reckon with how to absorb it into custom. Aramaic has gone on to effectively become a Jewish language, interwoven with Hebrew in important rituals and texts—a duality that has lasted into modernity.

The Persian Empire

⁸ Rabbinic Hebrew would go on to adopt the *-in* suffix, likely because of contact with Aramaic. But in 300 BC this change had not yet occurred (Schniedewind 166).

It was actually under Persian influence that Aramaic was fully crystallized as a Jewish language. As Aramaic had become the local *lingua franca* by this period, the Persians pragmatically used it as language of regional administration (rather than teaching everyone Persian), cementing its prominence in Syria-Palestine. Nevertheless, many Persian terms of statecraft and leisure successfully permeated the Hebrew lexicon during the First Temple period, as well as later on—indirectly through Greek (around 300 BC), Latin (via the Romans circa 10 CE), Arabic (roughly 600 CE), or through 20th century Persian-Jewish immigration to Israel (see footnote for a list of loanwords).⁹ This demonstrates how Hebrew, in adopting words from the same foreign languages in different eras, can be seen as a layered cake of global history that reveals the histories of many other cultures as well—and can be used to trace their linguistic development.¹⁰

In this Persian period, Jews were permitted to rebuild their Temple (i.e. the Second Temple, 516 CE) and mint their own coins. These coins symbolically featured inscriptions in the old Paleo-Hebrew lettering—no longer in use and likely no longer comprehensible to the average Judean—suggesting an ideological move towards creating a sense of national legacy and identity (a technique applied to Modern Israeli coinage as well) (Schniedewind 158). Paleo-Hebrew helped generate a sense of Jewish distinction in relation to their Aramaic surroundings, harking back to a *uniquely Jewish* writing system; this subtly indicates to us that although Aramaic firmly entered the fold of Jewish custom, Hebrew still presented as the historical and cultural

⁹ Persian loanwords include: *ishpooz* (via *aspinj* = hotel/hostel), *bazaar*, *gizbar*, *dukhan*, *balagan*, *bustan*, *dat*, *handasa*, *haki*, *ethrog*, *shah-mat* (chess, literally ‘king is dead’)

¹⁰ Consider some examples of preserved Middle Persian influence on Hebrew: The Hebrew word for oven, *tanur*, derives from Middle Persian, yet Modern Persian has a new word for it—thus, Persian history has been enshrined in Hebrew. In Hebrew, the word for elephant, *pil*, was borrowed from Middle Persian, but in modern Persian is pronounced *fil*. This is because *pil* entered into Arabic (which replaces *p*’s with *f*’s, as there is no letter *p* in Arabic), and Persian reappropriated the Arabic pronunciation (Bahador Alast).

centerpiece of Jewish identity. Ultimately, due to two levels of linguistic subjugation, Persian *and* Aramaic, vernacular Hebrew was reduced to sparse isolated villages in Judea, and its popular written use limited to symbolism (Schniedewind 138). Here, we see how outside pressure helped solidify the role of Hebrew writing as part of Jewish identity, with Paleo-lettering engendering a sense of cultural heritage. These pressures, furthermore, reinforced the Jewish need to keep Hebrew present in the cultural consciousness, even if it was no longer spoken—a sentiment that has lasted well into modern times.

Hellenization

The presence of Greek Empire ushered in an era of Hellenism, or the zealous planting of Greek values, architecture, settlers, and schools throughout their empire (Glinert 31). This caused a massive cultural and linguistic reshaping of the Middle East, which Hebrew stood to further lose from (Glinert 31). The impact on Jews in certain regions of the diaspora can be seen in the shift from Hebrew names to Greek monotheistic names and the rise of Jewish religious literature in Greek (Glinert 31). In Judea, the homeland that diaspora Jews looked towards and donated to, the stakes of assimilation were higher.

Internal strife grew as the Jewish elite were slowly drawn to Greek culture and establishments, and peaked with external Syrian-Greek campaigns to forcibly paganize the Jewish population. A consequent guerrilla uprising expelled the foreign armies and instated the Hasmonean dynasty (Glinert 35). This Jewish state, however, lurched between Jewish and Hellenistic identities, expressing both the communal traditions and contemporary Greek cultural norms they had become accustomed to. This duality can be spotted in the mixed names of

Hasmonean leaders (Yohanan, Hyrkanos, Yannai, Alexander) and the mixed ethical foundations of their statecraft (Glinert 34).

While Hellenistic offenses did create reactionary Jewish sentiments and reinvigorate Hebrew scribal tradition, the lasting influence of Greek can be seen in the over one thousand Greek loanwords of governance and commerce that have become inextricable from Hebrew speech,¹¹ naturalized by the altering of consonant prefixes to match Hebrew morphology (Glinert 37). In this era, assimilation happened along class lines, with elites and city-dwellers adopting Greek and ordinary Jews continuing to primarily use Aramaic. Here both groups prioritized practicality and social currency over ethnic principles of loyalty. Again, we see Hebrew struggling to maintain prominence amongst languages more established and socioeconomically relevant, yet never disappearing completely—manifesting emblematically, and slowly co-opting terms and ideas that later become part and parcel of modern reincarnations.

Mishnaic Hebrew Part 1

In the first and second centuries of the Common Era, a unconventional group of Jewish scholars known as the *Hakhamim*, or sages, began to preach and tutor in a less formal and less stunted Hebrew, with the aim of making sermons more approachable and accessible to young students outside of the aristocracy (Glinert 36). Their legal teachings harnessed a simpler, everyday folksy Hebrew that featured lists of everyday things, catchy phrases, and incisive anecdotes. The tone, as well as the tenses, syntax, and noun patterns were a refreshing contrast to the Hebrew of Genesis (Glinert 36). The Sages, additionally (and radically), did not hesitate to

¹¹ Greek (or Latin via Greek) loanwords: *arkhitect*, *sfog*, *mistorin*, *zug*, *geographia*, *aklim*, *horlogin*, *'ogen*, *itztadion*, *namal*, *dugma*, *pombi*, *mekhona*, *philosophia*, *okhlusia*, *tik*, *sefel*, and *katedra*, to name a few (Berdichevsky 44)

purge outdated words,¹² even of religious import, to keep their audience focused on substance. This suggests that by the start of the Common Era, BH already seemed antiquated to native speakers (Glinert 36).

Most scholars agree that the Hebrew the Ḥakhamim used originates in the dialects spoken in various regions of Palestine throughout the Second Temple period—some estimate even earlier (Bar Asher 118). This vernacularized approach of religious education shows early internal linguistic work, consciously addressing Hebrew’s lack of accessibility with preservation-minded initiatives. While these orations lacked the authoritative tone of BH—garnered by its austere syntax and holy content—important Hebrew texts penned in this new Mishnaic Hebrew (MH) began appearing around 100 CE (Bar Asher 116).

Most Jewish texts were written in Aramaic at this point, so the decision to write in Hebrew *at all* presents as a conscious attempt to counteract Aramaic assimilation: in contemporary religious services in Babylon and Palestine, passages were read in Hebrew first before the familiar Aramaic, so that the traditional yet mostly incomprehensible form would still exist in the religious space (mirroring the predicaments of many diaspora communities today, such as American Jews). In its more spoken-adjacent ‘flow,’ it made Hebrew simpler to decipher for Aramaic-speaking Jews interested in learning. New generations of documents followed, such as the eponymous *Mishnah* (a foundational work of Rabbinic law), the related compilation known as the *Tosefta*, and early Midrashim—although MH was eventually superseded by Aramaic in use by the later Midrashim.

¹² For example, *tefillin* replaced *totafot*, and *ḥag* (literally, feast) supplanted *ḥag ha-sukkot* (the feast of Tabernacles) (Glinert 36).

As we can see, the desire to revive a simplified, more accessible Hebrew in communities defaulting to a vernacular tongue, has followed Hebrew since the beginning. Almost, I argue, to the extent that this duty to update and spread it is woven into the language itself. MH literature as a phenomenon shows the dialectical interplay between dogmatic and organic, in the way that naturally developing spoken norms went on to inform subsequent literary trends; in other words, internal overhaul determined by external encroachment. The modern revivalists, who weighed the efficacy of both BH and MH towards their aims, then, were not too dissimilar in sentiment and predicament from the sages leading up to them.

Niqqud

The next big advancement in the preservation of Hebrew on our timeline, redefining the way the diaspora understood Hebrew, was the transformative addition of standardized pronunciation marks. For most of its history, Hebrew was an orally transmitted tradition, taught and passed down to posterity via chanting and rote memorization (Glinert 60). This meant that as diaspora cultures, from Babylon to the Rhineland, evolved, idiosyncratic pronunciations and vocalizations did as well. Moreover, the double phonemes and abjad spellings inherent to Hebrew writing made it near impossible to pronounce words correctly unless you had extensive training or familiarity—augmenting the possible range of relative variation.

In the Middle East, seventh century Muslim conquests inaugurated *Arabic* as the new regional language of prestige, displacing Aramaic. Apprehension about Jewish assimilation into the Arabic sphere galvanized Hebrew-language guardians to act. A vast project called the *masorah*, or transmission, was undertaken by scholars in Tiberias, Jerusalem, and Babylon. Over

the course of 300 years, the *Ba'aley Masorah* worked with manuscripts and cantors to devise an authoritative system to notate correct pronunciation, spelling, and chanting of Biblical texts (Glinert 62). By the year 1000, there existed four rival systems of such diacritical marks, with the Tiberian system winning out (and still in use today).

Their *niqqud* (dots and dashes indicating pronunciation, see fig. 4) and *ta'amei negina* (cantillation marks, or melodic vocal instructions—a form of pre-modern grammar) established an authoritative way to read the Bible, creating a sense of Jewish unity in Hebrew culture worldwide (Glinert 68). Their dissemination was expedited by the rise of codices, which outpaced the prevalent yet burdensome medium of scrolls in portability and specificity (i.e. you could easily flip to a particular page). The codification of the *Siddur* (a collection of Jewish prayers) by Babylonia's Geonim in the 800s dramatically increased knowledge of Jewish custom in Hebrew. This created a new expectation of Hebrew literacy in the diaspora worldwide, with reading the standard prayers in Hebrew—regardless of how much of it they understood—as a duty for every man and boy (Glinert 72). So, although it was not a habitually spoken language, it universally existed on the tongues of Jewish scholars and students in the Middle Ages and rekindled a universal Jewish tradition (Glinert 71).

Medieval Pronunciations

As globally scattered diaspora communities interacted with their new settings, particularized idiosyncratic ways of pronouncing Hebrew developed (especially prior to the aforementioned standardization of Hebrew scripture). Spoken Hebrew, in its all-encompassing day to day usage, was virtually left behind in ancient Judea, and most younger generations came

to know Hebrew as a text-based language within a religious context. Hebrew was sung by cantors, murmured or spoken aloud by praying congregants, and even sometimes used for formal conversation in synagogues (Glinert 195). But as societies changed (with technological advancements and local cultural norms demanding whole new sets of words and concepts) and local languages became more comfortable and familiar, Hebrew seemed too clunky and antiquated for everyday conversation.

Over time, Jewish diaspora culture, impelled by expulsions and migrations in the medieval period, concentrated into three general traditions (with much interplay, of course): Sephardic Jews in Iberia, Italy, and Western North Africa, Ashkenazi Jews in Germany and Eastern Europe, and Mizrahi (or “eastern,” to apply an anachronistic term) Jews in Middle Eastern countries—needless to say, each of these groups has massive internal diversity.

Relatedly, Lewis Glinert traces ancient Hebrew spoken traditions into three major Medieval ‘reading pronunciations’ of the standardized masoretic Bible: one system has five full vowels, *i, e, a, o, u*, purportedly brought from ancient Israel to medieval Spain and Italy, then to France and Germany, and the Sephardic ancestor of modern Israeli speech. The second features, *i, ey, a, o u* (“kalav” for dog, and “seyfar” for book), allegedly transferred from Babylon to Yemen. (Yemeni Hebrew is thought to be the most ‘correct’ Hebrew, as it preserves much of the old pronunciations and sounds of ancient BH such as *lakh* and *likh* (“to you,” in masculine and feminine forms) instead of *lekha* and *lakh* in Modern Hebrew (Glinert 30)). The third has seven vowels, *i, ey, e, a, o, oh, and u* (e.g. “Yisroel” for Israel), apparently cultivated in Tiberia and relocated to medieval Ashkenaz (Glinert 68).

With the passage of time, further distinctions arose or vanished, such as the guttural ‘*ayin*, emphatic *dhaled*, and a spectrum of soft *h* to breathy Arabic *H* to raspy *h* (Glinert 69). The masoretic standardized system, interestingly, also caused shifts in these preexisting reading pronunciations: Sephardic Jews of the first Medieval lineage had to match their five spoken vowels to a seven-vowel Tiberian system, condensing *kamatz* and *patah* marks into the same ‘*a*’ sound—reflective of modern Hebrew speakers today (Glinert 70).

The Sephardic Classical Age (900-1492 AD)

As time progressed, diaspora Jews revisited the questions of how to treat Hebrew, what to use it for, and what the language should look like. Muslim conquests in the 7th century spread the use of Arabic to Jewish communities, including everyday affairs and even Jewish scholarship, albeit in Hebrew script (Glinert 79). This, coupled with the impressive rise of grammar, poetry, and religious studies surrounding the Arabic language, propelled Hebrew linguists to act. Sa’adiah Gaon, a Jewish philosopher, poet, and linguist out of Baghdad, embraced concepts from Islamic philosophy and sciences to encourage Hebrew arts and Jewish rationalist philosophy (Glinert 80). He famously wrote the *Tafsir*, an Arabic rendition of the Torah, in plainsense, a move the Rabbinic authorities had opposed for fear of replacing the traditional Aramaic translations. It appealed to assimilated tendencies, but also enabled native Arabic speakers to cross-examine it with the Hebrew text to learn new words in Hebrew.

In response to Arab claims of language superiority, Sa’adiah advocated for *tsahut ha-lashon*, or the purist ideal that BH contained superior spiritual, linguistic, and historic beauty (Glinert 83), and that Hebrew was being tainted by mistakes due to its decline. He mourned that

“our language is mocked in the land of our captivity,” and that Hebrew must be “constantly on our lips...spoken by all Jews in their goings-out and comings-in and in all their works, in their bed chambers and with their infants...[for] if only the nation would return to Hebrew, it would ultimately become the language of humankind (Glinert 83).” These ideas precede the Zionist movement by a thousand years, yet the vision for a reinvigorated and all-encompassing Hebrew existence corresponds. Sa’adiah hoped to reinvigorate Jewish creativity, going on to write the first Hebrew rhyming dictionary and its first extensive grammar study (Glinert 84). The Hebrew grammar discipline, which borrowed terminology and concepts from the more fleshed out Arabic school (including the exalted 3-consonant¹³ framework, which matched Hebrew’s Semitic roots quite well), enabled a more thorough understanding of the Hebrew language for artists. A Sephardic Golden Age of *piyyutim* (liturgical poetry) and literature blossomed, igniting similar artistic movements throughout Jewish communities in the Arab world (Glinert 92).

The ideals of *tsahut*, and to what extent Hebrew could be purified, sparked fierce debate among Jewish academic circles. Around 950 AD, Spain’s earliest Hebrew poets, Ibn Saruq and Ibn Labrat (a disciple of Sa’adiah) argued whether to consider Hebrew a pure and independent entity, or recognize it as part of a larger linguistic picture. Saruq compiled what is probably the first dictionary of all the Hebrew and Aramaic words of the Bible to illustrate that the rich source material was enough (Glinert 89). Labrat, on the other hand, was prepared to mine sister languages, such as Arabic and Aramaic (believing them to be corrupted offspring of Hebrew) in order to learn the roots of obscure Hebrew words. The latter notion implicitly embraced

¹³ Which used to be only *two* consonants: Originally, two letter roots represented words of basic survival actions or feelings, and a third letter was subsequently added to thematically expand off of them: e.g. the root *G-Z*, as in *gaz* (cut), led to three-letter words such as *gazar* (cut), *gez’a* (trunk), *gazaz* (trim), and *gazel* (loot); *H-SH*, as in *hash* (feel), inspired *hush* (sense), *hashash* (sensed), *hashav* (thought), *heshek* (desire), etc. (Horowitz 299, 301, 303).

Hebrew's ancient interminglings as part of its fabric. Later, Hebraists like Ben Yehuda would fill gaps in Modern Hebrew by looking to these same sources.

Maimonides (1138-1204) and Mishnaic Hebrew Part 2

In Morocco, Maimonides (referred to as *Rambam* in Hebrew) continued in the same vein, writing philosophical treatises and scientific studies in Arabic (more specifically *Judeo-Arabic*), yet striving to make Hebrew and Jewish law more accessible to Jews overly acculturated to their surroundings (Glinert 85, Khan 566). He wrote his magnum opus, the *Mishneh Torah*, a systematized code of Jewish law and customs,

“neither in contemporary Arabic nor in contemporary Hebrew-Aramaic legalese, but instead went right back to the classical of rabbinic literature, the Mishnah. The Hebrew of the Mishnah was simplicity itself, a mirror of the everyday Hebrew of the masses. Maimonides's goal, he wrote, was that his book be “easily understood by the majority”...his choice of Hebrew was a key weapon in achieving his goal” (Glinert 87).

This new Hebrew, which carried a folkier and more informal tone, provided a refreshing contrasting the dense Hebrew of the Bible that Jews frequently interacted with. This strategic initiative aimed to rejuvenate Hebrew in Jewish spaces, showing that it could, in fact, work as a perspicuous and popular medium. That Maimonides used Hebrew at all points to a desire to revive a culture around a lost language. This revival had a universal Jewish approach: Maimonides chose to write in Hebrew since Arabic would not be intelligible to all the Jews of the Diaspora (Khan 566). Similarly to when it was first introduced, applying MH to a Jewish academic context highlights the internal competition between the formal and informal for the

character of Hebrew; in each era, the informal revises the formal for a functional compromise, defining a new default for subsequent revivals.

Hebrew Medical Schools

Fleeing waves of persecution in Muslim Andalusia, many Jews resettled in the Christian lands of Italy, Provence and Northern Spain. Medieval Italy, under the Byzantines, was largely Greek speaking (for non-Jews and Jews alike). Yet, by the eleventh century—inspired by the Andalusian influx—Hebrew experienced a mini-renaissance of sorts, featuring a wealth of piyyutim, mystic poetry, and historic verses (used to educate Jews about their ancient pasts). Most notable is the Jewish transferring of scientific knowledge—which was already well-developed in Arabic literature—to Christian Europe via Hebrew (Glinert 103). This was a joint effort of European Jewish intellectuals and Andalusian Jewish refugees, who effectively rendered the entire Greco-Arabic body of science into Hebrew across three centuries. The knowledge gap was no secret, when medieval royalty required a doctor, Jewish physicians were the ones called (Glinert 104).

Shabbatai Donnolo is the first European Jew credited with writing scientific works in Hebrew, publishing a string of books on astrology, medicine, and pharmacology (Glinert 103). He wrote in a semi-formal Hebrew style, and employed technical terms transliterated from Greek or Latin, such as *stomakhus* (stomach) and *trigon* (triangle). He frequently cites the oldest known Hebrew medical encyclopedia as his inspiration, *Sefer ha-Refuot*, thought to have been composed in the Eastern Mediterranean around Late Antiquity by a physician named Asaf (Glinert 104). This book surveyed the medical knowledge of the area in pseudo-Biblical Hebrew,

with plenty of transliterated Greek terms. Upon reading, Asaf seems to be ornamenting his vernacular Hebrew with Biblical structures and diction, aiming to channel the authoritative weight of the older format in order to bolster the content of his writing.

This acutely encapsulates the interplay between the formal and informal, and how they needed each other to keep Hebrew alive. Previously, we have seen the lauded compact form co-opting informal conventions to regain relevance. Here, we see the opposite: Hebrew stopped being spoken in Palestine around 200 CE, so, in merging respected BH with the dying vernacular, as well as with Greek medical concepts, Asaf blends a metaphorical revival concoction to give Hebrew a new presence in a secular academic context (Bar Asher 116). Hebrew is a medium that allows him to tap into the Jewish cultural and intellectual legacies of the past, a medium which Asaf mobilizes and reinvigorates to give credence to his work. By the same token, Donnolo perpetuates these traditions of Hebrew scientific writing *and* borrowing terms from other languages to compensate for the decline of Hebrew in spoken and non-religious academic use. The aspiration to keep it alive and applicable to any context, which requires recognizing the influence of vernaculars and foreign terms, seems present from the start of Hebrew's timeline.

The huge influx of scientific and technical knowledge via Hebrew texts cemented Hebrew as the language of science in the Christian world (with the ancient legacy of books like *Sefer ha-Refuot* bestowing upon Hebrew an air of ancient medical wisdom akin to Greek). In the Provençal medical schools of Arles, Narbonne, and Montpellier, Hebrew was even the *official language of instruction* in the ninth and tenth centuries, and at Italy's first medical school, Hebrew was spoken among Arabic, Greek, and Latin (Glinert 104). This indelible legacy of

Hebrew on European medical pedagogy is absent from entrenched historical narratives, but represents one of the many smaller-scale intellectual revivals on the timeline of Hebrew survival to the present. Thus, for a time, *spoken* Hebrew was heard again; in classrooms, by Jewish physicians, and by Jewish refugees (see *Global Connections* section, p. 34).

But for some, like Hebrew loyalist Shem Tov Ben Isaac, borrowed latinized vocabulary would not suffice. He transliterated calques from Arabic (*efer ha-'enayim*, or ‘ash of the eye,’ instead of the Latin *ophthalmia* in Hebrew pronunciation, as Donnolo might have done) and mined biblical sources to create new terms (*ginnuah*, for asthma, from biblical *ganah*, or groan). Others, like Abraham Ibn Ezra, made a point of sourcing astronomical and mathematical terms from Biblical texts, and in Provence an ‘indigenous’ technical syntax, modeled on MH, was developing (Glinert 106). These still heavily relied on borrowing and transliteration, this time from Arabic instead of Latin; for some, this Arabic-centric ‘translationese’ felt disjunct or clunky, and too divergent from traditional Hebrew. Nevertheless, it was a step towards an internal vocabulary, and enabled professors and students to express new ideas. Perhaps this comparatively coarse and contrived academic rendering of Hebrew was missing a vernacularized ‘polishing’ or ‘smoothing’ to make it more utilitarian; a democratization and expansion of specialist Hebrew such as we have seen before, channeling the formal and informal dialectical process.

What may have organically followed cannot be known, for this apex of Hebrew literacy was cut short by the persecutions of the fourteen and fifteenth centuries—this time by the Christians. Provençal and Spanish Jews fled into Italian and Muslim lands, and thousands of the aforementioned Hebrew manuscripts were destroyed and burned (Glinert 108). For a period,

Hebrew had been a functional medium outside of the synagogue, a functionality that even incorporated non-Jews. This era, furthermore, reinforced the creative tradition of looking to classical Hebrew sources to find inspiration for modern vocabulary, which Ben Yehuda and the modern revivalists repeated some 600 years later. This abstruse Arabized Hebrew lived on in the occasional philosophical and scientific treatise for the next few centuries, and with time, its vocabulary and style became enshrined in the canon of venerated Hebrew variants (Glinert 107). That is, until the late nineteenth century, when it was shelved by the Hebrew Enlightenment thinkers, who sought to reformat Hebrew in a more European style (Glinert 107).

Global Connections

Outside of the medical realm, Hebrew has long been a tool of Jewish global communication. Throughout the Middle Ages, the mutual language connected Jews from around the world, serving as a common denominator for simple interactions in new settings. Hebrew, in some shape or form, can be found in nearly every Jewish congregation, with learning how to read it for religious purposes as an essential part of Jewish education. This meant that, in particular throughout the Middle East, many Jews had at least a decent command of it, which came in handy when traveling:

“For centuries, Hebrew was used as a means of communication between educated Jews traveling abroad where the native languages were unintelligible. It admirably filled this role in the Middle Ages when Sephardi Jews (living in Spain and Portugal) maintained a wide net of commercial contacts in an alliance of merchants known as the *Rhadanites* (after the Jewish quarter in Baghdad). This link connected trade stations across the Mediterranean, the Sahara and the Abbasid and Byzantine empires and beyond through a kind of *secular-commercial Hebrew*. It was in wide and respected use for religious commentary and as an eminent “high language” for philosophical, legal and

even scientific texts by learned individuals who addressed themselves largely to a Jewish, but not necessarily Orthodox, audience” (Berdichevsky 77).

As we can see, while a Hebrew speaking *state* did not exist, Hebrew enabled a sort of transnational Jewish *state of identification*, with Jews utilizing the intimate language of their homes or places of worship to transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries. Not only did this help with mercantile initiatives, but it also enabled Jewish leaders to communicate with each other in an academic fashion. The *She’elot* or *Responsa* correspondences, hundreds of years of philosophical and religious inquiries sent between Rabbis in Europe and the Middle East (as discovered in the Cairo Geniza), attest to the utility of Hebrew as a “high language” of critical expression. For example, Maimonides’ letter to the Jewish community of Montpellier on Astrology was written in Hebrew to enable an intellectual transcontinental Jewish discourse (Khan 566).

Christians and Hebrew

It is important to note that Hebrew has a parallel timeline of Christian investigation. Religious thinkers have always held a fascination for the Hebrew language, stemming from its status as the original language of the Old Testament, or *hebraica veritas*. Accordingly, different movements throughout Christian history have promulgated learning Hebrew in order to interpret the original source material for themselves; for a ‘direct’ connection to God, as well as to indulge the age-old anti-Semitic accusation that exclusive knowledge of Jewish texts had enabled Jews to corrupt and censor Hebrew scripture to hide Christian truths (Glinert 138). While certain Christian thinkers did occasionally interact with Rabbis, discrimination and disregard for

Rabbinic thought meant the academic pursuits stayed fairly separate (in specific, at different points studying with Jews was forbidden, Jews were forced to attend Christian sermons, and thousands of Hebrew texts were burned for being ‘un-Christian’ (Glinert 137)).

With the aims of direct interpretation (and, in some cases, conversion of Jews), the *Victorines*, British and French scholars in the 12th century, studied the Bible in Hebrew in Paris. Prep colleges across Spain opened in the 13th century to train friars in Hebrew and Arabic (the first foreign language schools in Christendom), and in 13th century England, devoted Christian Hebraists compiled meticulous Hebrew dictionaries and grammar books (Glinert 131, 133, 137). In this way, Hebrew was profoundly present and revered in ardent religious circles in Europe—a resurrection of sorts, but for different purposes than Hebrew’s Jewish torchbearers.

Hebrew study and comprehension was again reinvigorated by colonists in the Americas (partially inspired by the Puritan self-perception as ‘Israelites sent to forge a new promised land’). A key doctrine of the Protestant Reformation was *ad fontes*, or ‘to the sources,’ meaning that every Christian should be able to read the Bible for themselves *in Hebrew*. Some of the earliest American colleges, including Harvard, had robust Hebrew departments and encouraged Hebrew composition and oration (Glinert 162). Later on, the 1800s saw another burst in religious interest in the Bible, known as ‘the Second Great Awakening,’ roused by the news of Jews returning to the Holy Land. Evangelists, who supported Zionism as a step towards fulfilling their own prophecy of salvation at Armageddon,¹⁴ modernized their BH to be able to communicate with Jews—not to mention that the era saw various German missionary projects in Palestine (Glinert 164). Therein, Hebrew had an academic and religious life, written and oral, in colonial

¹⁴ A word derived from Har Meggido, a mountain in the West Bank.

America. Moreover, these advances in the philological tradition of Western scholarship, from the Victorines to down to Harvard scholars, would later influence the linguistic and nationalistic zeitgeist of the 1800s, during which Jewish Enlightenment thinkers in Europe reassessed their relationships to Hebrew and nationalism.

Vernacular Dialects

Throughout the roughly two thousand years that Hebrew lacked a concentrated national community to speak it day to day, virtually every community in the diaspora worked to keep facets of Hebrew alive in some shape or form. While generations adapted to local languages, by force or by choice, the fascinating and nearly universal phenomenon of Hebrew-influenced dialects survives still today. Hundreds of these exist around the world, such as *Judeo-Arabic*, *Ladino* (medieval Spanish and Hebrew), *Yiddish* (German and Hebrew), *Judeo-Persian*, *Yevanic* (Greek and Hebrew), *Bukhori* (Tajik and Hebrew), and *Judeo-Berber* (Amazigh and Hebrew), to name just a few. For the most part, these are closer to the local vernacular, but contain Hebrew terms, calques (directly transliterated phrases), and inflections. Most strikingly, however, is the fact that *all* of these dialects independently (unless external forces intervened) utilize the Hebrew alphabet to express their Judeo-mixture of transliterated foreign vernaculars and archaic Hebrew words. This is potentially due to the sense of Jewish community, and advantageous privacy, it provided.

With the advent of the printing press circa the 1700s, these dialects began to generate new waves of Jewish fiction and secular verse, notably in Yiddish and Ladino communities (Glinert 121). Some Hebrew literature made it to the presses, but struggled to compete with the

easier to read and more fluid sounding Judeo-vernacular. The upside was that the proliferation of books spiked literacy rates within Jewish communities (often to the envy or suspicion of outsiders), and that, since the letters of the alphabet were the same, learning to read Hebrew for those interested was fairly accessible (Glinert 112).

In summary, these diverse linguistic adaptations have been used by Jews over four thousand years to maintain an insulated sense of cultural unity, as well as to communicate away from outsiders' ears. Each dialect has its own expressions, folklore, and history, and by imbibing local vernaculars with their own customs, Jews navigated a liminality of ethnic individualism within the cultural fabric of their new residences. Through them, the Hebrew language, in minute yet culturally significant ways, lived on; a diaspora compromise.

Conclusion

As we have seen throughout this timeline, Hebrew was always present: whether in ancient letters, religious ritual, or on the tongues of merchants; in medical classrooms, or co-opted into a Judeo-vernacular. The myth that Hebrew was a dormant language until the modern revival is only true if it implies a single centralized ethno-national community speaking it as a first language. We know Hebrew was written, and even spoken, at various points in the last two millennia in the Middle East and Europe. The fragmented nature of this narrative is a result of the long legacy of imperialism, diaspora, assimilation, and cultural evolutions that have incessantly coaxed Hebrew into reinventing itself. Changes happened calculatedly at the hands of forward-thinking preservationists, or more organically on popular levels—and each new step of Hebrew progress was a composite product of their synthesis.

In this chapter, we have seen that the desire to increase accessibility to Hebrew within Jewish populations resulted in syntax and grammar shifts, literary movements, borrowing of foreign words and concepts, and centuries-long processes of standardization. Ultimately, the issues that the 19th century revivalists faced, such as Hebrew's stilted structure, lack of modern words, variety of accents, ample loanwords, and limited grammar education and literacy, are, in fact, the same issues that Hebrew's tenuous history have reckoned with time and time again ; almost to the extent that these issues and their resultant ethical dilemmas are part of the Hebrew language itself (Berdichevsky 66). This sporadic, yet farsighted chronology of Hebrew innovating, adapting, and imitating, laid the indispensable building blocks upon which Hebraist Zionists were able to modernize Hebrew, and spread it on a mass scale to a fledgling Israeli population. After being marked by Akkadian, Aramaic, Persian, Latin, Greek, and Arabic, Hebrew was now to have a modern European reinvention.

Chapter 2: Written Hebrew Old and New

The *Haskalah* and European Nationalism

In late 18th century Europe, literary Hebrew underwent an intensive revival and reimagination, setting off the modernization process that would ultimately culminate with Modern Hebrew as we know it. Trends of nationalism and modernization spread fervently throughout Europe at this time, with intellectuals and political leaders aiming to create cohesive and unifying national narratives. Nationalisms utilized their respective *language of the masses* to disseminate notions of cultural and historical pride, and in order to increase the appeal of the message, imbued the language itself with national importance (Aytürk 798). To this end, European languages experienced a unifying process of standardization, leveling of regional discrepancies, codifying of spellings, and coining of new words to express modern concepts and objects.

Inspired by these waves of linguistic reform, as well as general movements towards secularity, Jewish intellectuals in Berlin toiled to reconfigure Hebrew into an Enlightenment language of art and expression. As Jewish sovereignty had not formally existed since 100 CE Palestine—long since severing the link between Hebrew and national territory—Jewish nationalism was reformatted to fit a European diaspora context (Aytürk 799). The original aims of this movement, known as the *Haskalah*, or Jewish Enlightenment, were to integrate Jews (who traditionally lived in closed off communities, completely disengaged from European culture and modern secular values) into society (Shohamy 207). This would, in theory, modernize Jewish culture by introducing new European literary genres, and—inspired by linguistic

nationalism—reconnect Jews throughout the continent via a modernized literary medium, Hebrew (Reshef 2012, 547). This reform was strictly literary in function, but by the end of the 19th century, as will be discussed later on, the linguistic nationalist aspect took on a more tangible and political form with the movement of Zionism under the vision of language revivalists like Eli'ezer Ben Yehuda. Overall, the efforts of the *Maskilim* (or *Haskalah* proponents) marked a new era in Hebrew usage and purpose, introducing what has become known as *Maskilic Hebrew* to the ancestral list of Hebrew reiterations.

Timeline of the Haskalah

The Haskalah is said to begin with philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, who, among his many other projects, composed non-religious literature in Biblical Hebrew (BH) in order to spread his ideas to a wider Jewish audience—specifically, the Hebrew-reading Jewish population, educated in *heder* Hebrew schools (see page 48) (Aytürk 799). For European Jewry, Hebrew was revered as a holy tongue, reserved for religious texts and academic discourse (i.e. medieval science treatises), and so using it to write secular genres and topics, such as travelogues, satire, poems, and biographies, was what could today be labeled ‘anti-establishment.’ By exposing Jews to non-traditional forms of literature, as well as the cultural world surrounding them—such as with the first Hebrew literary journal *ha-Meassef* in 1783—Mendelssohn aspired to begin the process of acculturating Jews to the modern societies of the cities nearby them (Kahn 2).

By the 1820s, Maskilic values and literature had seeped into the neighboring Austro-Hungarian Empire, marking the start of the Haskalah’s middle period. Fueled by mass pushback against Maskilic works by Jewish religious leaders—because of their conservative and

insular stances regarding Enlightenment values and secularity, *especially* when expressed in the sacred Hebrew tongue—Maskilic literature began to take on an anti-hassidic tone and featured satirical depictions of Orthodox Jews (Kahn 2). The Maskilim continued to produce literary journals and translate European written works into Hebrew, furthering the contact of Jewish readers with “outside culture.”

In the 1850s, the movement made its way into Czarist Russia, ushering in the Haskalah’s late period (Kahn 2). This period featured original and translated prose fiction, nonfiction and scientific treatises, and the very first full-length novel (a modern literary form) in Hebrew: Abraham Mapu’s *Ahavat Zion* (Love of Zion, 1853). While Biblical purism characterized Maskilic Hebrew, many writers at this time began to borrow from other more ‘impure’ forms of Hebrew, such as Mishnaic and Rabbinic (Kahn 2). Ultimately, the Haskalah’s impact was fairly minimal—as its readership consisted mostly of like-minded educated Maskilim—but their efforts were monumental in transforming Hebrew into a multi-genre language beyond the ancient history of treatises and liturgy, and, in that way, turned it into a much more accessible creative tool (Kanh 6).

While separate from the Haskalah movement, it is worth giving mention to another stream of Hebrew revival from within the religious sectors of European Jewry. The Hassidic movement, a Romantic spiritual revival movement with a folkish and communal ethos, began to spread widely through word of mouth in Eastern European Jewish communities, and some of its metaphysical discourses were translated from vernacular Yiddish into written Hebrew (Glinert 170). This new literary form set in motion a new Hassidic literature canon in the 1800s, more related to spoken Yiddish than the high and artificial Hebrew seen in traditional religious texts.

By infusing Hebrew with Yiddishisms, casual turns of phrase, and toying with its grammar and conjugations, Hasidism created a more palatable third stylistic alternative to rigid BH and its descendant medieval Arabized Hebrew (see chapter 1). This differed greatly from Maskilic Hebrew, which drew almost exclusively on flowery Biblical sources and strove for linguistic ‘purity.’ Moreover, Hasidic literature centered around a *communication ethos*, contending that as the Holy Tongue (Hebrew) permeates Yiddish, or any language when expressing piety, all languages are sacred—thus, not only Hebrew, but also Yiddish was to be revered (Glinert 172). So, while Maskilim focused on the elevation of a refined and expressive Hebrew idiom, Hassids cultivated literature filled with short stories and sermons for the masses, in Hebrew and Yiddish alike (to reach Jews from more and less educated backgrounds, respectively). The immortalized Rabbi Nahman (1772-1811) even published his own collection of tales evoking the Hassidic spirit in a side-by-side bilingual edition (Glinert 172). This stream of literature, while setting a precedent for mass Hebrew literature, faded out by the end of the century as Zionism took control of the Hebrew narrative.

The European Haskalah was decisively curtailed in 1881, when Zionist immigration to Palestine began, shifting the locus of Hebrew language innovation away from Europe. In these newly founded Jewish colonies the ‘re-vernacularization of Hebrew’ commenced, appropriating Maskilic Hebrew as the stylistic template for incipient Israeli literature. Back in Europe, however, Maskilic ideals persisted into the end of the decade, with many thinkers transitioning back into Yiddish (or back and forth between Hebrew and Yiddish) to promulgate their principles more efficiently in their local communities.

The Linguistic Character of Maskilic Hebrew

Maskilic Hebrew drew almost entirely from BH, aspiring to evoke its sociocultural gravitas, classical aesthetic, and—in keeping with nationalist tendencies—a historical legacy of Jewish sovereignty (Reshef 2013a, 413; Kahn 2). Maskilic Hebrew’s morphology, vocabulary, and syntax are Biblical in character, yet it contains grammatical and lexical elements from later forms of Hebrew, like Mishnaic or Medieval Hebrew, as well as from Yiddish and European languages (Kahn 1). There were no standardized rules of spelling (with some words being spelled differently within the same book), and texts generally followed German or Russian punctuation symbology and conventions (Kahn 4). More European influence can be identified in the grammatical shifts that differentiate Maskilic Hebrew from earlier Hebrew variations: increases in SVO (*subject-verb-object*, see page 69) constructions, as well as complex sentences constructed out of subordinate clauses, suggest the presence of European writing standards (Kahn 4).

Melitzah, Shibutz, and Innovation of Vocabulary

Two literary concepts that defined Maskilic literature are *melitzah* (figurative language) and *shibutz* (insertion). *Melitzah* channeled a Biblical tone by using formal register, esoteric vocabulary, and a circumlocutory descriptive style (Kahn 3). The approach was more flowery and eliminated medieval grammar issues, in contrast to Hassidic Hebrew, which Maskilim viewed as sloppier and ungrammatical (Glinert 173). The complexity of *melitzah* helped Maskilim posit Hebrew as a rich and intellectual medium, yet added to their disconnect from the population due to gaps in education. *Shibutz* involved the frequent appropriation of Biblical quotes in newer secular literary forms. This worked to instill the authentic and revered resonance

of BH into Maskilic Hebrew, linking them historically. Moreover, it helped to desacralize the language, in Enlightenment fashion, engaging with the wisdom of old Jewish texts without the religious connotations (Kahn 1).

However, Maskilic Hebrew was constrained by the archaic and vague vocabulary of BH. One author, reflecting on the Maskilic literature he read in his youth in the 1870s, had this to say:

Their ideas seemed to appear as though through a fog, blurred, lacking a clear outline. The most everyday needs were conveyed amid rhetoric. Sentences were a maximum of words and minimum of content. Take color: Hebrew authors could only see the colors for which the Bible had names. Or food: when they were not having to eat dry bread, people were always partaking of “delicacies,” but the reader was never informed of what these were (Glinert 179).”

Here we see that the issues with written Hebrew that bothered Jews back in Palestine over a thousand years before, such as lack of relevant terms, confusingly descriptive sentences, and impracticality, persist (see chapter 2). This illustrates a consistent desire throughout Jewish history, ever since its loss of vernacular status, to modernize and restructure Hebrew. Regarding the lack of necessary words, Maskilim preferred to coin new terms from within the language, likely influenced by similar German nationalist processes (Halperin 239). These words could derive from Mishnaic Hebrew, like *nitalmenu* (‘they were widowed’), or in the form of two to three word phrases to describe nameless concepts, such as a ‘wall safe’ being described as ‘the door of the wall for hiding letters’ (דלת הקיר למחבא המכתבים) in one text (Kahn 5). The necessity of European vernaculars as reference points was acknowledged, however: a Russian or Yiddish translation of the new term usually followed in parentheses for clarity, and many new scientific or political concepts were adapted to fit Hebrew morphology (Kahn 5). For example, Cholera

was reconfigured into *holi ra* (literally 'bad illness'), which not only kept the original sound of the word, but also added a new layer of Hebrew meaning (Kahn 5). Finally, Yiddish expressions were borrowed directly into Hebrew, such as *dos teller fun himl* ('the saucer in the sky,' meaning 'unrealistic wish') becoming *ke'arat shamayim* (or 'bowl of the sky') (Kahn 5).

Yiddish and Zionism

To the Maskilim, Hebrew's authoritative and historical tone was a source of cultural pride and singularity amongst their European counterparts. To many Jews at the time (particularly German Jews, who internalized the Western European bias) Yiddish was frowned upon as a corrupt and bastardized tainting of both German and Hebrew. Thus, Hebrew, in its purest form, was a better choice for the national revival, matching the European nationalist trends of expunging foreign influences and embracing older elements of cultural heritage. Maskilim, therein, aimed to redefine Hebrew as a viable medium of cultural expression, and emphasized its rich Biblical legacy, which had become distant from the spoken Yiddish vernacular. In direct contrast to the Hassidic movement, which elevated both Yiddish and Hebrew in order convey spiritual ideas to the masses, revived Maskilic Hebrew was to function as a literary language of prestige to contrast the common vernacular, enabling the Jewish press to connect intellectuals (who spoke different European languages or Judeo-vernaculars) throughout the continent (Aytürk 799).

It is important to clarify, however, that the early Maskilic thinkers did not aim to eliminate diglossia in the Jewish world. Jewish communities were expected to continue using their Judeo-vernaculars in daily life, as diaspora was considered a perpetual condition (Aytürk

799). This Maskilic imagined ‘Republic of Letters’ was a purely literary endeavor, and, in fact, the idea of developing *spoken* Hebrew was generally scoffed at until the late 1870s (Kahn 3). This variant of literary nationalism only became politicized about a hundred years in with the advent of Zionism, reincorporating a territorial component to Jewish nationalism. Only in 1913 did the World Zionist Organization vote to declare Hebrew the official language of the Jewish people in a future Jewish state (Aytürk 800). As Glinert puts it, the origins of Modern Hebrew do not lie with Zionism, but with the Haskalah of the late 1700s; its adoption by Zionism was by no means pre-determined, and the Hebrew question nearly tore the movement apart (Glinert 6).

The Rise of Spoken Hebrew in Europe

As mentioned above, the idea of Hebrew as a spoken language was universally ridiculed, even by Zionists. The idea of Hebrew as the language of the Jews was consistently vetoed at the annual World Zionist Congress by the religious wing—as Ashkenazis tended to view Hebrew as too sacred to be used outside of a religious context (Aytürk 800). Theodore Herzl himself (considered the father of the Zionist movement) scoffed at the idea of resuscitating the dead language, instead envisioning a new state of cosmopolitan multilingual Jews, speaking Russian, French, German, and English (or Turkish, were the Ottoman empire to survive WWI (Berdichevsky 77). Hebrew was thought to be too antiquated and unfamiliar on the modern secular Jew’s tongue, a sentiment acutely illustrated by Herzl’s well-publicized quip: “who among us knows enough Hebrew to buy a railroad ticket” (Glinert 191). The tides were turned by the eventual success of spoken Hebrew in Palestine, which was, in turn, enabled by the educational efforts of Hebrew language schools and Speaking Clubs in Europe of the late 1800s.

To elaborate on this point, Jewish youth were formally taught in religious schools for practically all of Jewish history. In Western Europe, with the rise of secularity and integration, Jews generally received less of a Hebrew education, but in the more traditional Jewish communities of Eastern Europe and North Africa, Hebrew education stayed virtually the same late into the 1800s. *Heder* ('room,' or *Kutab* ('book') in its Sephardic equivalent) classrooms gave young, particularly male, Jews a full Jewish education: commencing at ages four or five, students would study in their teacher's home daily to learn the Hebrew alphabet for the purpose of reading prayers and Biblical commentary. There was no addressing of Hebrew grammar or writing, rather rote memorization and chanting of religious content (Glinert 175). By ages eleven to twelve, students would move on to an advanced *heder*, studying the Talmud without formal Hebrew or Aramaic instruction. These schools also became a center of socialization, as in Lithuania and parts of the Sephardic world, men would spend much of their free time in their *hevrot* (*heder* study groups). In this way, Hebrew was acquired (or ingrained) indirectly via context and content, rather than an addressing of the language itself. While it was only for a singular religious purpose, it gave many young men a strong grasp of the language, which could aid in communicating with Jews from other backgrounds (see chapter 1).

As a Jewish state began to seem more and more like reality, the national revival movement, or *Teḥiyah*, worked to expand Hebrew education in Europe and globally. In 1922, the *Tarbut* (culture) movement began to open Secular Hebrew language schools in Eastern Europe, after their first conference in Warsaw, Poland (Berdichevsky 96). A network of kindergartens, secondary schools, teachers' seminaries, libraries, and even a publishing house (with a biweekly journal describing current events in Palestine) helped spread Hebrew literacy throughout the

continent, as well as to Jews in Latin America and South Africa (Berdichevsky 96). By 1939, Europe had 45,000 Hebrew students in 270 institutions, including 25% of all students enrolled in Jewish schools in Poland (Berdichevsky 96). In the interwar period, one in four Jewish children in Eastern Europe was taught in Hebrew in a Zionist elementary school, and often emerged able to speak it comfortably (Glinert 182). Many eager young Zionists participated in Hebrew speaking clubs throughout the Russian empire to prepare for immigration to Palestine (Glinert 192). In this tumultuous era, Hebrew became associated with political change, self-determination, and revolution for Jewish youth (Glinert 192). This movement was essential for the success of spoken Hebrew in Palestine, as not only did it enable countless Jews to arrive with speaking experience, but also helped train some of the leading figures of the *Teḥiyah* movement, such as politician Ze'ev Jabotinsky and poet Ḥaim Bialik (Berdichevsky 96).

The 20th century saw modern secular Hebrew education in Europe (via Zionism) emboldened and evolving in tandem with the rise of anti-Semitism. Russian upheaval in the 20th century, for example, saw the politicization of Hebrew in positive and negative lights. The transition from feudalism to communism in 1917, which enabled a brief flourishing period for Hebrew and Jewish culture in the USSR (Berdichevsky 124). Yet in 1928, a sudden change of policy deemed Zionism and Judaism as subversive, and speaking Hebrew—now a counterrevolutionary crime—was virtually eliminated (Glinert 182). All the Jewish and Hebrew education that existed prior was quickly extinguished and remained illegal for 50 years. Spoken Hebrew survived through the ‘Jews of Silence,’ an organization of individuals who taught Hebrew in secret, at risk of the death penalty, as late as 1982 (Glinert 182). Events like these, and anti-Semitism in Europe writ large (culminating with the Holocaust), helped politicize the

Hebrew language and encourage Zionist immigration. The consistent influx of zealous secular Jews from Europe, starting with the *Second 'Aliyah* (literally 'ascension,' a term used by Jews to denote immigration to Israel, see page 59) in 1904 and onwards, was crucial for creating a stable Hebrew speaking population in Palestine.

The Old Yishuv

The *Old Yishuv* is a term generally used to describe the Jewish minority that existed in Palestine (specifically in Jerusalem, Tiberias and Safed) prior to Zionist and nationalist immigration. Jewish communities of Middle Eastern and European origin have persisted in Palestine to varying degrees throughout the last two thousand years, influenced by local and global politics. My focus will be on introducing the multicultural Jewish society present in cities like Jerusalem at the end of the 1800s as Jewish immigration en masse began, and the internal tensions between these subcommunities; but first I will quickly summarize some of the history that brought these pre-modern communities to Palestine. After the Roman expulsions (see chapter 1) at the start of the Common Era, small communities of Jews survived in the Galilee. Larger communities in Judea, Samaria, and the Galilee, known as *musta'aribun* by locals, can be traced to before the First Crusade (1096 AD). A mass influx of Sephardic Jews joined them after the expulsions of the Spanish inquisitions in 1492 and 1498, as well as a new wave of Jews of mostly Eastern European origin to Safed, Tiberias, and Jerusalem in the 1700s (Bartal 9). Under the Ottoman Empire (1517-1919), Muslims and Christians and Jews in cities such as Jerusalem lived side by side, yet were socioeconomically segregated (Bartal 11). Ashkenazim were not officially recognized as Jews by the Ottoman Empire (considered subjects of their empires of

origin) until the Tanzimat reforms of 1839, and their presence in Jerusalem was intermittent, subject to occasional mass expulsions and book burnings, such as in the year 1845 (Harari 24).

The patchwork of Jewish communities in Ottoman Jerusalem was diverse and divided, and built around separate remittance economies with respective donors (Bartal 10). The Jewish community in Palestine was not self-sustainable and relied mostly on external funding from diaspora communities, who believed its existence of religious import. Both Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews were dependent on European printing presses for their literature (Bartal 11). Jews in Palestine were sent as cultural and religious representatives, or *shluḥim* (emissaries), back to their diaspora communities in order to heighten senses of Jewish identity and connection to the Holy Land; these dynamics were fortified as transportation and technology improved with globalization, and Jewish donors and benefactors became directly involved with the daily lives of Jews in Palestine (Bartal 11). In this way, the myriad Jewish communities from throughout Eastern Europe and North Africa barely interacted, as they had separate economic existences and little in common culturally (Bartal 19). The only unifying factors were the Sephardic authority as per Ottoman decree, the *Kotel* (the Western Wall, a Jewish holy site in the Old City), and certain Jewish institutions labeled *klali* (or ‘general’ in Hebrew) that were funded by diaspora sponsors for all Jews to use (Wallach 278).

The Ashkenazi *kollel* (or cultural unit of settlement) was a lot more internally fragmented and conservative than the Sephardic one, with the latter considered more organized and tolerant (Reinharz 61). Within their respective *kollelim*, immigrants even splintered off based on their city or district of origin, such as the *Batei Ungarin* (or ‘Hungarian Houses,’ an ultra-orthodox neighborhood established in 1891) and the courtyard especially for the Galician Jews of

Northwestern Spain (Bartal 17). This trend of cultural fragmentation continued into the late 1800s, with even the Maghrebi Jews of North Africa separating from Iberian Sephardis to found their own *kollel* (Bartal 17).

Language in the Old Yishuv

Each Jewish kollel spoke primarily in its own Judeo-dialect, namely Yiddish, Ladino, or Judeo-Arabic—as well as varying levels of Turkish and the Palestinian Arabic variant to communicate with officials and locals, respectively. Culturally, Sephardic Jews were seen as more local, and had an easier time communicating outside their ethnic group (Wallach 281). Ashkenazis of the Old Yishuv, however, were not completely disconnected from their surroundings and underwent processes of acculturation and integration into their Ottoman Arab environment (Wallach 282). Many Ashkenazim learned how to speak Arabic in order to communicate in work settings, and many local Arabs, as well as Yemeni Jews of the *First Aliyah*, became fairly comfortable communicating in Yiddish (Wallach 282). The most interesting phenomenon of this cultural transplantation is *Palestinian Yiddish*: the Yiddish variant spoken in Safed and Jerusalem, had, by the 1930s, borrowed over 800 words and expressions from local Arabic via day to day relations (Wallach 282).

To get a sense of the local linguistic fabric, we can look to an eyewitness account. In 1839, a Lithuanian Jew by the name of Menaḥem Mendelbaum wrote a book documenting his experiences in a kollel in Safed. Near the end of the book, Mendelbaum writes of the three languages customarily found in the Holy Land, the language of the *Isma'ilim* (i.e. Turkish), *Portugal* (Ladino), and the local Arabic tongue used in commerce (Harari 25). He provides a

short list of common words for future ‘olim (Jewish migrants doing ‘*aliyah*) to use in Arabic, with a translation in Hebrew. The choice of providing a *Hebrew* translation of these vernacular terms, particularly when Eastern European Jewry confined Hebrew to a Holy Tongue status, is peculiar. I theorize it illustrates the utility of Hebrew as the universally comprehensible tongue of the Jewish world, allowing for a wider span of readers. Hebrew’s proximity to Arabic may also have made it more comparable and useful for understanding the local dialect.

The presence of European languages in Palestine, however, was on the rise—linked to the aforementioned influence of Jewish diaspora organizations. The two main institutions active in Jewish Jerusalem at the end of the 1800s were the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) and the Austrian-German Ezra Foundation (AGE), who educated in French and German, respectively. These organizations aimed to raise a new generation of modern and ‘cultured’ Jews, effectively creating a unified and pan-ethnic Jewish middle class (Wallach 287). The AIU, which had branches throughout the Ottoman Empire and North Africa, was composed of mostly Sephardic students (as religious Ashkenazis shied away from its ‘modern values’), and led to the emergence of a French-Sephardic subculture that threatened the existing Sephardic authority in Jerusalem (Bartal 16). Local Jewish youth at this time grew up with a European language of high culture at school and their respective culture’s Judeo-dialect at home. This perceived encroachment of European modernist values intensified the reactionary traditionalism of Ashkenazi circles, advancing the Orthodox movement we know today (Bartal 17). The cross-cultural modern Jewish identity fostered among students of these diverse classrooms, who were sometimes even educated in Hebrew, laid the groundwork for the development of a new imagined Jewish community in Israel (Wallach 287). The nascent *New Yishuv* of Zionist nationalists entering this

dynamic at the end of the 1800s (although the dichotomous split of Old and New is contested)¹⁵ had to push back against not only the traditional religious values of the fragmented Old Yishuv, but also the impingement of European languages and culture, both of which threatened the success of Hebrew's revival and the founding of a modern Jewish nation-state.

Regarding Hebrew usage in the Old Yishuv, although it enabled Jews to communicate among themselves, their respective accents were so distinct that they were often unable to understand one another (Bartal 19). Written Hebrew could be utilized as a mutually intelligible textual form, however, as seen with the *Klali* (itself a Hebrew word) *institutions* that all Jews had access to. The advent of the printing press drastically increased the importance of written Hebrew in Palestine, with the various Jewish kollelim publishing their own Hebrew language newspapers from 1863 onwards (alongside articles in Ladino and Yiddish (Havatzelet)). Publishing in Hebrew helped expand the potential audience of these editions, and enabled transmitting of knowledge and concepts throughout the multilingual Jewish collective of Jerusalem. These served more to spread ideas within and between the kollelim, rather than as financial endeavors, as evidenced by their extensive lifespans despite limited readership (Ben Bassat 463). In this way, the Palestinian Hebrew Press can be considered as a sort of continuation of the Haskalah, in the sense that a small ideologically charged readership advocated for it, with limited success, for long periods of time. The mass immigration of Zionists from Europe that would come to form the New Yishuv (bent on encouraging a Hebrew revival and forming a

¹⁵ Wallach writes about how the Old Yishuv is an anachronistic term used to contrast Zionist nationalist immigration, as informed by the 1908 Revolution. He writes that the 'Old Yishuv' implies cohesion, while it should actually be conceived of as fragmented groups of Jews in Palestine—a model of multiple communities embedded in their context (Wallach 275). Thus, the term is tied to the colonizing intentions of Jewish nationalists to distance their identities from the local fabric. Moreover, the lines were blurred, as most of the immigration to Israel in the early days (i.e. the First 'Aliyah), was not with intentions of 'yishuv,' or settlement—more so for religious or mercantile reasons.

Jewish nation-state) joined the patchwork quilt of Ottoman society by the end of the 19th century and created their own Hebrew newspapers. Their policies and ideals produced ideological rifts in the existing sociocultural status quo and placed the Hebrew question in the spotlight.

Newspapers and Nationalism

In 1908, the Young Turks—a political association aspiring to replace the Ottoman Empire’s absolute monarchy with a constitutional government—succeeded in pressuring the Sultan to reinstate the Ottoman Constitution of 1876, reintroducing multi-party politics to the Empire (Quataert 65). The ethos of the Young Turk Revolution trickled down to the various ethnic groups comprising Ottoman society, who began to engage with nationalist ideas and renegotiate their autonomy and relationships vis a vis the Ottoman Empire (Quataert 190). The constitution protected free speech for minorities, so its restoration enabled the aforementioned Jewish newspaper culture to thrive; moreover, as Ottoman authorities were more concerned with fledgling Arab nationalist movements, and had to rely on a member of the Jewish community to translate, the Hebrew Press went relatively uncensored (Ben Bassat 463).

The diverse and disjunct aggregate of Jews in Palestine had differing opinions regarding Jewish nationalism and the stature of Jews within the Ottoman Empire, with some arguing for religious minority status within an empire and some arguing for the creation of a Jewish nation-state within a Ottoman federation (Ben Bassat 463). These differing stances by Jewish subcommunities can be uncovered in their newspapers.

Havatzelet (meaning ‘lily,’ active 1863-1911) was the main Hebrew newspaper of the Ashkenazi sector of the Old Yishuv, although in its early days it published a few editions in

Yiddish and Ladino. Despite shutdowns by Turkish authorities on several occasions, it was the only Hebrew journal published in Jerusalem for most of the 1870s (Havatzelet).

ha-Tzvi ('the deer,' 1884-1914) was the official newspaper of the Zionist New Yishuv movement. The head of the *ha-Tzvi*, Eli'ezer Ben Yehuda (EBY), harnessed the medium to criticize the Old Yishuv, spread Zionist ideas, and showcase Hebrew as a viable language for speaking and daily needs (*HaTzvi*)—his efforts and methods in the revival will be expanded on at length in the next chapter.

ha-Herut ('the liberty,' 1909-1917) was the primary newspaper of the Sephardic community of Jerusalem. The paper was run by young intellectuals of the Europeanized Sephardic subculture and largely supported the Zionist national project. Due to their historic and cultural ties to both Jews and the local Arab populations, these intellectuals saw themselves as the bridge between the two in the face of rising hostility to Jewish immigration (Ben Bassat 476). The paper aimed to encourage traditional members of their community, who were integrated into the interwoven Ottoman way of life, to join the separatist nationalist movement.

To inspect the Hebrew in use in these newspapers, we can look to one of the earliest ones, *Havatzelet*. This Hebrew writing precedes the modernization process, and thus comes off as mostly comprehensible, yet confusing and erroneous at times to a contemporary reader. The tone and syntax of BH are present, including traditional religious idioms and flowery language. (As it is an edition written by the religious Old Yishuv, it features classical forms of Jewish interpretation, as well as *Rashi script*—a traditional semi-cursive font used in Talmudic scripture and other Jewish literature. *Rashi script* (see Appendix, figure 5) is not present in modern

Hebrew writing, possibly due to a desire to break away from religious or diaspora traditions, and is thus representative of pre-modern Hebrew texts).

One arbitrary page from an early 1863 edition efficaciously illustrates how different pre and post-Zionist immigration Hebrew (in the same location, just some 20-30 years later) are: one article describing current events in the Jewish Yishuv mentioned *maqhelot Ashkenazim* ('Ashkenazi communities'), whereas a modern Israeli would use *qehilot* for communities—with *maqhela* now indicating a 'choir,' displaying a shift in terminology¹⁶ (Havatzelet 1863, 3). The article features the phrase *sam 'al lev*, instead of the current *sam lev* (literally 'put on a heart' vs. 'put a heart,' an expression meaning 'to pay attention'), the former which would now only be found in high literature aiming to harken back to older writing styles. The starkest differences were in denoting a house as a feminine object in *bayit gdola* ('big house,' whereas today one would say *bayit gadol*), as well as an alternative feminine conjugation of 'luxurious' (*mefoa'ra* instead of today's *mefo'eret*) (Havatzelet 1863, 3). These samples demonstrate the contrasts between pre-modern and modern Hebrew in terminology, idiom, and gender conjugation norms; any modern speaker would find *maqhelot* used in that sense very peculiar and would instinctively correct you if you called a house *gdola* or *mefo'arah*. This suggests an arbitrary character to the gendered and grammatical conjugations of modern Hebrew, as these two older forms could well have been used and come to feel 'right.' While Hebrews newspapers typically showcase higher registers, modern Israeli newspapers feature more modernized and Europeanized academic terms—Old Yishuv grammar and terminology is only found in lofty Hebrew literature as a stylistic decision.

¹⁶ A modern speaker would also most likely conjugate it as *qehilot Ashkenaziot* (קהילות אשכנזיות) to keep the femininity consistent.

Regarding the expression *sam 'al lev*, I speculate that the dropping of the *al* preposition occurred because *sam 'al lev* is a bit awkward to say out loud (especially in fast paced speech), and makes it difficult to discern if a masculine or feminine speaker is using it (*sam al lev* vs *sama 'al lev*); this issue would never arise on paper, and thus, this idiom perfectly encapsulates the organic processes of sound reduction and spoken *linguistic efficiency* (see page 96) that would accompany a spoken revival.

Yishuv From Old To New

To conclude the relevant history of the Old Yishuv, the revolution of 1908 and turmoil in Palestine helped form a national Jewish identity amongst a conglomerate of Jews in Palestine that had long stayed separate—with no cultural rallying point or impetus strong enough to unite them (Bartal 19). For nationalists, a modern secular Jewish Yishuv in Palestine had originally been an ideology spreading within the existing societal framework. It was only in the 1930s that it transformed into a social reality, an agricultural society of Hebrew speakers divorced from the historic Ottoman quilt¹⁷ (Wallach 284). In actuality, the nationalist project had only been adopted by a small cohort of educated Ashkenazim and Sephardim. The violent escalation of Arab resistance to European Jewish settler-colonization, the solidification of Arab nationalism, and political turbulence following the First World War, however, made it clear to the Jews of Jerusalem that it was necessary choose a course of action: they could get closer to the Muslim

¹⁷ Note that most sectors of Jewish society encouraged compliance and cooperation with Ottoman authorities, particularly regarding citizenship. Nationalists like EBY conceived of a Jewish state forming within an Ottoman federation (alongside various other nations erupting throughout the empire at the time), and thus there was no contradiction between Jewish nationalism and Ottoman loyalism (Wallach 288). As the empire was defeated by the British, and the nation-state came to define the post-war era, the autonomy of the Jewish state took on its modern legal framework.

population and work towards becoming a protected minority in a new Arab state, become a culturally aligned protectorate of a European colonial power, or strive for national self-determination. In any case, all sectors of Jewish society agreed they needed to move past the long tradition of infighting and unite under centralized leadership to strengthen their political voice (Ben Bassat 469). As local Arab hostility to Jewish settlements rose, the pluralist and fragmented Jewish sectors of Palestine (some reluctantly and some enthusiastically) accepted the authority of the Zionist leadership and became a part of the new state that was beginning to be built (Bartal 24).

Now that the scene has been set, we can focus on the New Yishuv community that began to populate Ottoman Palestine in the 1880s. Their linguistic efforts, via policy, cultural activities, and education, took the Maskilic Hebrew of the Haskalah and transformed it into Modern Hebrew. The subsequent chapter will focus on how they invented new words and enforced their usage amongst the population. The New Yishuv officially begins with the foundation of two agricultural settlements, *Gei-Oni* and *Petaḥ Tikva* in 1878 (Bartal 4). The *First 'Aliyah* occurred between 1881-1903, with an estimated 25,000 Jews arriving in Palestine from Eastern Europe and Yemen. These Jews came from more traditional communities, mostly migrating to the Holy Land for religious or mercantile reasons. They tended to speak Yiddish and Judeo-Arabic amongst themselves, and interactions and transactions with the local population took place in the local Arabic dialect and sometimes in Yiddish. Ideologically, they blur the line between the Old and New Yishuv, yet mark the onslaught of mass agricultural immigration.

Modern Israel as a state, however, is the result of the massive changes instituted by the *Second 'Aliyah (1904-1914)*, wherein roughly 35,000 Jews from within the Russian Empire (and

some from Yemen) emigrated to Palestine with nationalistic ambitions (Reshef 2013a, 411). These were the staunch proponents of Zionism that evolved out of the Haskalah, hoping to actualize a revival of a Jewish state. Figures like Eliezer Ben Yehuda (crowned the father of Modern Hebrew—see page 65) came to Palestine with intentions of resurrecting a modernized version of spoken Hebrew to unify the diverse Jewish locale (Ben Bassat 467). This was antithetical to the vernacularized, religious, and integrated essence of the Old Yishuv, and the two camps fought ardently for control of the Jewish community. The New Yishuv viewed the older Jewish communities as too religious, old-fashioned, and passive—for they had no aspirations of autonomy.

The Algerian Haskalah and Its Elders

It is worthwhile noting that the earlier Haskalah movement, and its linguistic and nationalist offshoots, gained traction in Jewish communities outside of Europe as well. In North Africa, Maskilic academics and Zionist enthusiasts began organizing Hebrew cultural events, establishing Hebrew language societies, and founding public libraries to make Hebrew accessible to the public (Tirosch-Becker 436). By the 1930s, a vibrant Zionist-Hebrew culture was flowering in Morocco—likely tied to the AIU-educated new generation of Sephardic intelligentsia (Glinert 102).

Maskilim were active in Algeria by the second half of the nineteenth century, having encountered the Hebrew modernization efforts of EBY through Hebrew journals, such as *Do'ar ha-Yom* ('the daily mail') (Tirosch-Becker 438). Some Maskilim were even correspondents in European Hebrew journals—the back and forth nature of these intellectual and cultural exchanges

recalls the *She'elot* correspondences (see page 34) and can be seen to reaffirm the historic role of Hebrew as the Jewish global medium of communication and connection. French colonization—and the technology and concepts that accompanied it—stimulated an Algerian need for new words, and Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew scholars created accordingly. The most notable effort of this initiative is a Hebrew-Arabic-French dictionary¹⁸ published in 1930 by Rabbi Yosef Renassia (Tirosh-Becker 439).

Thus, inspired by EBY's movement of word creation, Algerian Maskilim combed through Hebrew scripture for terms and root systems that could be applied to a modern context. Their innovations, which diverge from those of EBY and his cohort for various reasons,¹⁹ provide a little-known alternative history of Hebrew revival and modernization. An umbrella, for example, was labeled a *matara* (מטרה) in Algerian Hebrew, while in Israeli Hebrew it is known as a *mitriyya* (מטרייה, with *matara* unrelatedly meaning target) (Tirosh-Becker 444). These are both derived from the same Biblical word, *matar*, meaning rain. The difference lies in the suffix: whereas Renassia chose the Hebrew ending *-a*, for this word EBY was more partial to the Arabic suffix *-iyya*. A key difference in the word generations of the two variants of Hebrew was that Algerian Maskilim followed in the Maskilic tradition of multi-word descriptive terms (see page 45), whereas EBY strove for single word counterparts—the Algerians crafted the term *otzar kli hemda* (literally 'treasury of desired objects'), while EBY defaulted to the European word

¹⁸ In this impressive undertaking each entry has five columns: French, Hebrew in Hebrew script, Hebrew transliterated into Latin script, Arabic in Arabic script, and Arabic transliterated into Latin script (Tirosh-Becker 439).

¹⁹ I conjecture that context and linguistic influences may have caused different word creation. By context, I mean the words needed to be created at a given point and to which scriptures they looked, as well as probably how the word sounded in their particular Hebrew accent. The second point suggests that Algerian Hebrew (influenced by North African Arabic and French) and Israeli Hebrew (which was influenced by mostly Yiddish and Russian terms and syntax, as well as local Turkish legal terms and Palestinian Arabic slang) had different linguistic influences guiding which words were chosen or how words would sound.

muzeeun ('museum') for concision's sake (Tirosh-Becker 440). These discrepancies reveal that, ultimately, Hebrew revival is a very subjective process and the Modern Hebrew we know today is very much a result of specific influences, decisions, ideals, and contexts.

While consigned to the fringes of revival history, Algeria was actually a crucial site for the re-vernacularization of Israeli Hebrew as well. EBY, known as the symbolic father of the spoken Hebrew revival, first visited Algeria in 1880—a few months before his 'aliyah to Palestine—as per his physician's suggestion to heal his tuberculosis (Tirosh-Becker 431). It was here that he first encountered the Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew while listening to Algerian Jews reading the Torah. Furthermore, it was in Algiers that he, for the very first time, conversed completely in Hebrew out of necessity (Tirosh-Becker 431). In his journals, he explains how the Sephardic pronunciation made a deep impression on him, and how he was thoroughly impressed by the *spoken* command of Hebrew that the elders (זקנים) of the Algerian Jewish community possessed. During his healing period in Algiers, he writes, he increased his Hebrew proficiency greatly by talking with the Jewish elders, to the extent that at times it felt like his 'natural tongue' (Tirosh-Becker 431).

It was from Algeria that he published his open letter in *ha-Shahar* journal outlining his idea that the resettlement of the Jewish homeland must be coupled with the revival of Hebrew (Tirosh-Becker 431). This is one of his earliest letters formulating his ideology. Thus, this sojourn was clearly an salient influence on and galvanizer of his revivalist effort in a few pivotal ways: firstly, his ability to communicate with Sephardic Jews confirmed Hebrew to be the universal Jewish language, which would be indispensable in unifying multicultural Jews in a national context. Secondly, having to speak Hebrew extensively (and getting very comfortable

with doing so), as well as the impressive spoken capabilities of the Algerian elders, exhibited Hebrew's viability as a functional and learnable spoken tongue. Thirdly, EBY famously advocated for a Sephardic pronunciation of Modern Hebrew (see chapter 4), which undoubtedly stems from the deep impression it left on him in Algeria (Tirosh-Becker 431). This choice was likely a mix of appreciation for the Arabized sounds it featured (which harken back to a more Biblical Hebrew, whereas Yiddish connoted the shame of the diaspora) and strategic reasoning that it would bridge the gap of phonetic unintelligibility between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Hebrew.

*

In summary, EBY's stay in Algeria defined the trajectory of Modern Israeli Hebrew in monumental ways. His stay left an impression on the Jewish community of Algiers as well, as he received five eulogies in various Algerian newspapers upon his death (Tirosh-Becker 431). Now that the New Yishuv was in full swing, and the vision of a spoken Hebrew had been elucidated, the next chapter will focus on the linguistic methods used to invent new words, as well as the sociocultural policies used to propagate them to create a significant Hebrew-speaking population.

Chapter 3: The Creation and Enforcement of Modern Hebrew

Part 1: Hebrew Innovation

The New Hebrew

The 20th century saw the New Yishuv redefine Jewish identity in Palestine through the painstaking creation of a new 'Hebrew' ethos. The revival of a modernized Hebrew tongue was accompanied by the accelerated reshaping of Hebrew as an *adjective*, denoting new cultural forms such as mannerisms, dances, literature, and ideology that formed a common sense of identity. Thus, Hebrew enabled the spread of a unifying national narrative, and in turn, increased the appeal of the message by imbuing the language itself with national importance (Aytürk 798). The Zionist nationalist movement further strove, with the help of public campaigns and slogans, to make Hebrew a *noun*, forming a personality type that signaled a new era in Jewish culture. The design of the 'New Hebrew' was a very deliberate attempt to break off from the historical associations of the diaspora 'Jew,' which, particularly in Eastern Europe, connoted a weak, downtrodden, brainy and overly sensitive character (linked to centuries of persecution and minority conditioning). In his place was the muscular tan Hebrew, who spoke curtly and labored self-sufficiently on his farm. This legacy of artificial cultural design, as will be discussed in detail in this chapter, likewise epitomizes the new Hebrew language developed for these Hebrews at the start of the 20th century. Top-down establishment policies of sociocultural shaping, ranging from cultural events to curricula to outright censorship, helped crystallize Modern Hebrew as the language of a young population in Israel.

Eli'ezer Ben Yehuda And Spoken Hebrew

Eli'ezer Ben Yehuda ('EBY,' 1858-1922), is widely considered the primary initiator of Hebrew in its modern spoken form. Born Eli'ezer Itzhak Perlman in Vilna, Lithuania, he was an active member of the *Haskalah* movement, frequently contributing to Hebrew journals like *ha-Shahar*. In contrast to most of the Zionists who were born of the Haskalah movement, however, he was an ardent proponent of the spoken Hebrew revival. For EBY, Hebrew was the indispensable common ground for coalescing a diverse Jewish state—it was a part of virtually every Jewish diaspora culture, and, logistically speaking, many Middle Eastern and North African Jews could transition from Arabic to Hebrew fairly easily (Berdichevsky 79). This notion was crystallized during his brief sojourn in Algeria (see chapter 2), where his Hebrew conversations with the local Jewish community revealed the potential for rapid Hebrew acquisition by immersion, as well as inspired his advocacy for a Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew (Tirosch-Becker 431). The modern Hebrew accent, then, was a top down mandate to unify Jews more efficiently (as different Hebrew accents were hard to understand) and evoke a more Biblical and non-European aura among the New Hebrews (Bartal 19). The actual results of Sephardic accent imposition, and the societal pressures and cultural responses that unfolded overtime, will be explored in chapter 4.

Ardent Zionists, in 1881, at age twenty-three, EBY and his wife Hēmda set sail for Palestine. In Jerusalem, EBY utilized the Hebrew press to criticize the ways of the Old Yishuv, propagate Zionist ideas, and showcase the day to day viability of spoken Hebrew in his journal, *ha-Tzvi* (HaTzvi). The latter task consisted of publishing his Hebrew innovations, such as lexicons, neologisms, and Hebrew stories featuring them (Reshef 2013a, 410). While the early

Zionist movement consisted of mostly Ashkenazi Jews, EBY attempted to incorporate Sephardic Jews into the movement and find a common basis for Jewish nationalism (Ben Bassat 464).

His fiercely secular values and advocacy for mass Hebrew revival caused enormous friction with the deeply pious traditionalist communities²⁰ of the Old Yishuv (Glinert 187). They denounced his actions to the Turkish authorities on numerous occasions, leading to his imprisonment, and even refused to bury his children in their cemeteries; in several agricultural colonies where Hebrew schools would be erected, teachers were threatened or expelled for ‘going too far’ by promoting Hebrew as the language of instruction for *secular* subjects (Berdichevsky 88). Despite this, EBY and his circle pushed on with narrative of returning to past glory by resurrecting spoken Hebrew in Palestine for the first time since Roman times (Glinert 4).

EBY was fully committed to transitioning to Hebrew life. He and his wife vowed to only speak Hebrew in the home (initially she was silent) (Glinert 189). When his son, Itamar, was born in 1882, EBY made sure he was *only* exposed to Hebrew. To this end, Itamar was forbidden from playing with other children, who spoke the Yiddish, Russian, or Ladino of their parents. As the story goes, Itamar did not speak until age three, when he finally muttered *abba*, or ‘dad’ in Hebrew (Glinert 189). This firmly planted Itamar’s name in the history books as the first person with Hebrew as their native tongue in two millennia (Aytürk 800). This watershed set an example for other Jewish families and commenced a new generation of native Hebrew speakers born in Palestine. At the time, many criticized EBY’s parenting as immoral, or fanatical

²⁰ There were certain Ashkenazi traditionalists who practiced Hebrew-speaking as a religious exercise and would have been supportive of Hebrew revival. Opposition to it in Palestine solidified as a reaction to the ‘overly nationalist and modern’ disruptive actions of the New Yishuv that aggravated the Ottoman authorities (Reinharz 65).

experimentation that would set up his son for isolation and lifelong confusion, while others viewed him as the radical individual who single handedly resurrected Hebrew's spoken status.

Throughout his career, EBY worked meticulously to modernize Hebrew for practical usage amongst the population. He is said to have coined around 300 new words, such as *bubba* and *magevet* ('doll' and 'towel'), and published them in his newspapers to spread them (Schwarzwald 358). He compiled an extensive Hebrew language dictionary (the first volume was released in 1909, and with another four following before his death in 1922), and founded organizations and committees to generate new words and standardize Hebrew spelling and conjugation (Glinert 189, 195). He set up seminal mechanisms for the dissemination of Hebrew speech, introducing Hebrew as the language of instructions in local schools and garnering diaspora approval to legitimize his efforts, yet failed to build a significant nucleus of Hebrew speakers around him in his own lifetime (Reshef 2013a, 410; Aytürk 800).

Many historians have debated how influential EBY was on Modern Hebrew. He and his family certainly took action to prove Hebrew could be a working language in the home and in the education system. EBY was also a meticulous scholar, delving deeply into Hebrew scriptures and neighboring linguistic frameworks to provide Hebrew with new roots and words—and compiling all this into extensive lexicons and dictionaries that took a lifetime to complete. Yet, for all of his innovations, only about 150 coinages have remained in common parlance (a small fraction of the thousands of words generated by revivalists at the time; his son's coinages were far more successful) (Glinert 196). The most popular example of his failures is his word for telephone that never caught on, *sah-rahok* (סה-רחוק)—an amalgamation of the verbal root *S-H* and *rahok*, meaning conversation and far (Berdichevsky 56). Israelis instead opted for the SAU

loanword *telefon*, as Hebrew coinage is a bit of phonetic mouthful and would not flow in natural speech. Thus, we can conclude that EBY certainly inspired, planned, and laid foundations,²¹ but it was the work of many other revivalists, diaspora hebraists, and literary creators that delivered the language to a more stable place. Through the Zionist statebuilding narrative, however, EBY's name has virtually become synonymous with Hebrew revival, and most Israeli cities feature a central street with his namesake. In this way, his status can be considered more symbolic—or as a Zionist politician in 1908 put it, “the people needed a hero, so we’ve given them one” (Glinert 196; Reshef 2013a, 410).

The Makeup of Modern Hebrew

EBY and his cohort crafted a new variation of Hebrew, building off of the Maskilic Hebrew devised in Europe, but with a lot of modern terms and foreign influences. Many Maskilic lexical and grammatical elements spread directly into the developing vernacular, such as the use of the *qatal* form as a past tense (*va-yomer* of the Bible into the more quotidian *ve-amar*, roughly equivalent to ‘sayeth’ into ‘said’), and European transliterated idioms such as *tappuah adama* and *mesilat barzel* (‘apple of the ground’ for ‘potato,’ ‘iron track’ for ‘railway’) (Kahn 6). Most crucially, the Maskilic tendency—in keeping with both European nationalist processes and medieval Hebrew traditions—of mining the Bible for new vocabulary was heavily exploited during the re-vernacularization period to fill lexical gaps (see *Word Creation*, page 72). However, Modern Hebrew in Palestine generally diverged from the flowery and highbrow

²¹ EBY also attempted to make the Hebrew language clearer and more organized. In the 1800s, Hebrew speakers were pronouncing the word for ‘artist’ (root system *A-M-N*) as either *uman*, *aman*, and *oman*. EBY attempted to address this by officially defining *aman* as an artist and *uman* as a craftsman (Gilad 2021). This distinction was effectively glossed over, however, as most people today still regularly mix them up.

literary style of the Haskalah, opting instead for the New Hebrew traits of concision, directness and purity: for example, *sefer milim* became *milon* ('book of words,' a European calque, rebranded as *word* + the *-on* suffix), and *ktav 'et* became *'iton* ('periodical writing' as *period* + *on*) (Blau 162).

Besides Biblical vocabulary, the Hebrew revivalists worked off of the Maskilic method of using Mishnaic Hebrew (MH) as a model for syntax and grammar. Not only was it more fluid and approachable than Biblical Hebrew (BH) (see chapter 2), but it was also closer to the morphology of modern European languages, due to the ample presence of Greek and Latin loanwords (Berdichevsky 54). BH, for example, tended towards VSO sentence structure (or *verb-subject-object* order, e.g. "eats he the apple"), while Mishnaic, as well as most modern European languages, featured more SVO arranged sentences (or *subject-verb-object*, i.e. "he eats the apple"), which would have felt more natural for second-language Hebrew learners. The same can be said for the use of *shel* (of) to denote possession, more common in MH and prevalent in Standard Average European (SAE) languages. *Shel*, in most cases, replaced the signature Semitic attached pronoun suffix (a.k.a *declension*), although the latter form is more succinct (Blau 156): to demonstrate, voicing 'your friend' as *haverkha* would come off overly formal and old-timey in comparison to the more European-adjacent, yet lengthier, *ha-haver shelkha* ubiquitous in common speech.

Generally speaking, Modern Hebrew features more continuative relative clauses, or long sentences with distinct pieces of information, such as "yesterday evening a car ran over a man, who was severely wounded and brought to the hospital," which features three distinct chronological events (Blau 120). Hebrew, and other languages like MSA that experienced a

Europeanized revival, saw the rise of the comparative ‘as’ (*ke* or *ka*) prefix: based on words like *comme* in French or *vi* in Yiddish. Journalism began to utilize phrases like “*as* an American” (“כאמריקאי,” as well as *betor* (בתור) via the Yiddish *betoyras*), which diverged from the adverbial circumstance function *as* served in Biblical texts²² (Blau 122). Modern Hebrew also borrowed SAU idioms like ‘*ici et la*/here and there’ (*po ve sham*), and shifted some pronouns to match European grammar (*ha yeled hu tov* rather than *ha yeled tov hu*, and *yesh li oto* in lieu of the archaic *yesh li hu*—these could roughly be transliterated as ‘the boy is good’ vs ‘the boy, good is he,’ and ‘I have him’ vs ‘I have he’—the former options sound more natural in English, as they mirror SAU patterns) (Blau 127, 133). Hence, all these contributions to syntax, grammar, and idiom mark Modern Hebrew as a distinct new layer in Hebrew history (Blau 144). Some linguists disagree about whether Hebrew is still fundamentally a Semitic language. I will address these arguments in the conclusion (page 126).

The presence of Biblical and Mishnaic forms in Modern Hebrew was prudent for the Zionist narrative of returning to the Jewish glory of ancient Israel, but can also be explained to a degree by the fact that many of them were just basic Hebrew words that have remained in use since since Biblical times, and due to the unnatural and intermittent nature of Hebrew use, did not get to evolve over time (Schwarzwald 357). The Zionist movement revered BH, while challenging the Old Yishuv, diaspora culture, and religious traditional values—a strategy of “revolting against the old while preserving it” that effectively enlisted innovators and conservatives alike (Bartal 2). Overall, EBY’s decision to move towards Mishnaic structures

²² In Biblical Hebrew *ke* was used for comparison, as in “קהל גדול ישובו הנה” (“they will return *as* a great company,” but literally ‘big company they will return here.’ *The ke, or ‘as,’ is implied*). *Ke* does, however, appear in phrases like *ke-shod meshadday yavo*, meaning “it shall come *as* a destruction from the Almighty” (Blau 122). In this case, the ‘as’ is adverbial and circumstantial, rather than comparative or linked to identity, such as in “*as* an American.”

meant, as Norman Berdichevsky puts it, surrendering some of the poetic imagery and austerity of the Biblical idiom in order to gain the the simplicity, linguistic clarity, and richness MH provided—an essential step towards modernization of the language (Berdichevsky 54).

Couplets and Synonyms

Having two rich and historic forms to choose from meant that there were often two distinctive terms to describe a given thing. Biblical forms were generally utilized unless the later alternative was easier. However, on many occasions the alternative Mishnaic form remained behind as a cultivated alternative to be used in literature or academic registers, as can be seen in doublets like *ani/anokhi*, *anahnu/anu*, *eikh/keitzad*, *yareah/levana* (meaning ‘I,’ ‘us,’ ‘how,’ and ‘moon,’ respectively) (Schwarzwald 358). Oftentimes, the Mishnaic doublet evolved to have a related, yet distinct meaning, such as with *yeled/tinok*, *‘adi/takhshit*, *beten/keres*, and *kisse/kursa* (‘child/baby,’ ‘jewel/trinket,’ ‘stomach/potbelly,’ and ‘chair/armchair’—*kursa* is actually from Talmudic Hebrew via Aramaic, reminding us that of the other archaic Hebrew sources like Talmudic and medieval Hebrew were also mined, albeit as a later resort). This technique of linked doublets could also be applied to Hebrew’s gendered format, i.e. having masculine and feminine pairs of words with different suffixes. ‘*Adasha* was attributed masculine and feminine versions with two distinct meanings, ‘*adashim* are lentils, and ‘*adashot* are lenses (corresponding with the French homonym pair of lentils and lenses, both *lentilles*).

To add another element to this double vocabulary phenomenon, many European words have entered common parlance (much to the chagrin of the purist revivalists), resulting in a whole class of words with two interchangeable variations in two different languages. To name

just a few of the endless examples: *aggressivi/tokpani*, *helicopter/masok*, *shock/helem*, *improvizatzia/iltur* (Berdichevsky 62). The result is a diglossia condition, wherein Hebrew speakers can choose from two (for some words even three, including the Mishnaic equivalents) registers to express themselves. The Europeanized words tend to elicit a more sophisticated or international air, while the Hebrew responses might seem more natural (and the highbrow Mishnaic alternative more intellectual).

Word Creation

Adjusting Connotations

When EBY or one of his colleagues encountered concepts or objects that needed names, there were a few possible approaches for coining new Hebrew words. The first was to look to early strata of Hebrew for a vague term to reappropriate. *Mesheq* from the Biblical story of Abraham denoted an ‘administrator,’ but now it describes a ‘market’; *moqesh* was an obstacle, now it means ‘landmine’²³ (Schwarzwald 358, Horowitz 328). The most interesting example is the word for electricity, *hashmal*, for which the Hebrew poet Yehdua Leib Gordon (1830-1892) took the biblical term for *amber* (the Greek root for the modern word electricity *elektron* had meant amber, too) (Blau 62), which appears in Ezekiel’s dramatic vision of the divine chariot (1:4). Gordon reinforced his choice by considering the word as a compound of *hash* and *mal*: derived from the Biblical noun *maher-shalal-hash-baz*, *hash* meant ‘hasty’ and *mal* implied

²³Other examples include *moosakh* (‘structure’ into ‘garage’), *oogav* (an archaic musical instrument into ‘organ’), *tvaḥ* (or ‘range,’ from the phrase *במטחוי קשת*, the ‘distance of a bowshot’), *tesher* (‘money’ into ‘tip’) (Horowitz 238; Schwarzwald 358).

‘word’ (from *milla*)—as if to say “the word is quick” when using electricity to send telegrams or make phone calls (Blau 62).

Besides showing the revivalists’ penchant for wordplay, this example demonstrates how obscure Biblical vocabulary was given more relevant and specific modern purposes. It is worth noting that some of these words were not borrowed in their original form. The modern word for funeral, *halvaya*,²⁴ mistakenly incorporated the *ha-* preposition into the official form (for a rough English parallel, calling it a ‘Theprocession’) (Horowitz 330). Plurals like *sakin* (the Aramaic-inspired Biblical plural form of *sika*, or ‘pin’) became *knife*, and *katzin* (two *kotz*, or ‘thorn/spike’) became *officer*—exhibiting a creative use of imagery and a very liberal adherence to the original designation (Horowitz 329). Also, many of these words took on a modern connotation, as influenced by newly introduced European concepts: the coinage *matzpon* was inspired by the MSA term *damir* (both historically denoted something along the lines of ‘hidden inner feelings’), which, in turn, took on the Western sense of ‘conscience’ in the 1800s (Blau 42).

Planting New Roots

The second strategy for word creation was to extrapolate new variations from a triconsonantal root and fixed Hebrew grammatical patterns (Schwarzwald 358). With the Semitic root system, once a root was uncovered or invented, a multitude of new words and their conjugations could be derived. In 1880, Haim Hazan, a teacher in Belarus, created a new Hebrew word for ‘glasses’ by combining Biblical word patterns, Semitic triconsonantal root systems, and Greco-Latin scientific terminology. He looked to the Greek word *skepeo* (‘I will see’)—from which we get the suffix *-scope*, used in scientific instruments such as telescopes and

²⁴Although the original *levaya* still exists as a variation.

microscopes—and turned it into the root system *sh-q-f* (this involves a process of Hebraization: Hebrew traditionally converts foreign *s* sounds into *sh*, and due to double phonemes, *p* and *f* are often interchangeable). For the shape of the word encompassing the root, Ḥazan borrowed the ‘*m* + *ayim*’ form from established words in traditional scripture describing instruments made of two equal parts²⁵—e.g. *moznayim* (‘balance scales’) and *misparayim* (‘scissors’) (Berdichevsky 56). Together, the word *mishkafayim* was formed; and from this root system many new words conceptually related to lenses/clarity/vision could be added to the dictionary, such as *sheqef*, *leshaqef*, and *shaquf* (‘presentation slide,’ ‘to reflect,’ and ‘transparent’).

A simpler form of this method involved taking existing words and appending new suffixes, like *-ot*, *-on*, or *-ut* (as explained on page 69) to shorten Maskilic multi-word terms, such as *moreh sha'ot* becoming *sha'on* (literally ‘shows hours’ vs ‘hour + *on* suffix’) (Tirosh-Becker 440). But the revivalists did not always agree on the best words or root systems for a given object: while EBY advocated for calling the airplane *aviron* (a mix of *avir*, or ‘air,’ and the *-on* suffix, intended to mimic the European *avion*), the famous Hebrew poet, Bialik, preferred *matos* (derived from his new root system *T-W-S* (ט"רס), which he thought should be the root for all flight related terms). *Matos* ultimately won out with the population over time,²⁶ and paved the way for tangential coinages like *tayas*, *tayyis*, *tisa*, and *tayesset* (‘pilot,’ ‘aviation,’ ‘flight,’ and ‘squadron,’ respectively) (Tirosh-Becker 443). Word creation could also be enacted via practical implementation, such as Bialik’s *de facto* coinage of *rishrush*, or ‘rustling’ (based

²⁵ The *-ayim* (איי-) suffix in Hebrew indicates a double quantity. For a counting example: *shana*, *shnatayim*, *shalosh shanim* (a year, two years, three years).

²⁶ Older generations (my parents included) may still call it an *aviron*, but *matos* is more widespread.

on the word for *ra'ash*, or 'noise'—one of Hebrew's ample onomatopoeic terms), by deliberately placing it in a poem (Horowitz 220).

Semitic Borrowings

The third strategy, if Hebrew scriptures did not provide good source material, was to look to other Semitic languages. Aramaic, having a comparable cultural importance (including seminal Jewish texts like the Talmud) and interwoven linguistic history with Hebrew, was first consulted. *Kvish* was an Aramaic adjective meaning 'blazed' or 'trodden down,' and was reimagined as the general noun for 'road' or 'street.' Probably the most successful example of Aramaic in Modern Hebrew is the word for 'ice cream,' for which EBY looked to the book of Exodus: the BH word for 'frost,' *kfor*, was already in use, so EBY opted for the same word from the same passage, but from the classical Aramaic translation: *gleeda* (Gilad 2013b). The benefit of having different linguistic sources to choose from was discrete versions of the same word that could be ascribed associated meanings (see *Couplets and Synonyms*, page 71).

The next most important source of linguistic inspiration was Arabic. Arabic was a sister language that had not only developed continuously since antiquity and produced extensive practical vocabulary and root systems, but was also undergoing a similar process of modernization, Europeanization, and standardization during the same period. In its simplest form, the Arabic word in question would be Hebraicized (i.e. transfigured in spelling and pronunciation to match Hebrew phonology) and was ready for use, e.g. *rasmi*, *jurib*, *markaz*, *sabun*, and *raSin* becoming *rishmi*, *gerev*, *merkaz*, *sabon*, *retzini* ('official,' 'sock,' 'center,' 'soap,' and 'serious,' just to name a very small fraction of them) (Tirosh-Becker 441; Blau 33). EBY mined literary *FusHa* (traditional literary Arabic) and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)

texts for his words, and so the corresponding Arabic terms were not always in common use—*rasmi* and *markaz* could be heard in conversation, yet *raSin* is more ornate and formal. The exception to the literary rule would be the countless widely understood Arabic nouns, such as names of fruits or spices, that were codified in Hebrew, including *mishmish* and *finjan* (‘apricot,’ and ‘coffeepot’) (Berdichevsky 45).

The source material upon which Hebrew vocabulary was invented was often only loosely related to the new coinage—EBY’s purpose was simply to locate existing starting points from which Hebrew could be creatively enriched, and so consistency with the Arabic term, or thorough research of its precise definition or conjugations, was often forgone. This is the case with *adib*, a popular Arabic name denoting a writer, or cultured and well-mannered individual, which in Hebrew became the adjective *generous*. Other Hebrew coinages were often selected to match the Arabic word in common parlance, but usually had a related ancient Hebrew root to justify it, as seen with *mitbah*, *maḥsan*, and *geshem*²⁷ (‘kitchen,’ ‘storehouse,’ and ‘rain’) (Horowitz 27; Blau 37).

In keeping with the method of tacking on new suffixes, EBY also attached the Arabic ending *-iyya* to various Hebrew words such as *shimshiya* and *mitriyya* (‘parasol’ and ‘umbrella,’ from *shemesh* and *matar*) as well as many calques, such as “*boker tov/boker orr*” from “*SabaḤ al-ḥiir/SabaḤ a-nur*” (literally “morning good, morning light,” a ubiquitous Arabic morning call and response) (Blau 35). In its more elaborate form, an Arabic word would be broken down into

²⁷*Mitbah* as ‘kitchen’ was copied from the Arabic in use in the area, but it is related to the BH root *T-B-H* meaning ‘to slaughter’ (Horowitz 273). *Makhzan*, which in its modern Arabic form was supposedly borrowed in the modern connotation of French’s *magasin*, means ‘storehouse,’ and is related to the old Hebrew word *ḥosen*, or store (Horowitz 273, Blau 37). The word for ‘rain,’ *geshem*, was coined through Arabic influence, but has the same meaning in BH (Schwarzwald 358).

its triconsonantal root, the root would be Hebraicized, and then this new system would enable many new coinages. For example, EBY created the Hebrew root *L-T-F* (לִּטֵּף), meaning ‘to pet,’ based off of the Arabic triconsonantal *لَطَفَ* (*L-T-F*), meaning ‘kind’ (Sivan 78). As seen before, the coinage was gleaned from a vaguely related source word—out of which various permutations, such as ‘petting,’ ‘(he) pets,’ ‘(she) pets,’ ‘pet (past tense),’ ‘petter,’ etc. could be derived. EBY and the revivalists generally looked to literary Modern Standard Arabic for terms to borrow (as well as Persian literature), but it is important to note that many Arabic-loaned Hebrew words commonly heard in Israel today are specific to the Palestinian dialect, via more organic absorption occurring from interaction with locals. This resulted in ample informal slang in Hebrew that was not always approved by the revivalists (see chapter 4).

European Technical Additions

The next method, particularly used for modern concepts and technology, was appropriating SAU terms into Hebraic morphology and syllabic structure (Schwarzwald 358). Early examples include *meter*, *insta-LA-tor*, *ta-PETTE*, *shpakhtel*, *gummi*, and *otto* (‘meter’, ‘installateur,’ ‘tapestry,’ ‘paint scraper,’ ‘rubber’ and ‘car’—the capitalized syllables represent the shift in stress applied to make them sound like Hebrew)²⁸ (Horowitz 239). These are mostly loaned from German/Yiddish and English, but the Second ‘Aliyah brought forth more Russian conventions regarding latin terminology and suffixes, as seen in words like *civiliz-atzia*, *autonom-ia*, *progressiv-i* (‘civilization,’ ‘autonomy,’ ‘progressive’—with the new suffixes separated) (Halperin 239). EBY and his cohort often crafted new Hebrew words that mimicked existing SAU terms: from the German word for brush, *burste*, a new ***b-r-sh*** root system was

²⁸ Many loanwords did retain their first syllable stress, however. From the list, *ME-ter* and *SHPAKH-tel*.

developed, giving us the Hebrew equivalent *mivreshet* (other more outdated illustrations include the aforementioned *aviron*, and words that had a Hebrew justification like *holi r'a*) (Horowitz 239). Finally, words were in some cases amusingly crystallized in a misconstrued form, reflecting the local way of pronouncing it with an Israeli accent more than European spelling rules or conventions. The most famous occurrence is 'handbrakes' mutating into *ambreks*.

Condensation And Hybridization

The next method for word creation, in keeping with the post-Maskilic terse tendencies of Modern Hebrew, was condensing existing compound structure phrases into single words (Schwarzwald 358). *Ish tzava* turned into *ḥayal*, *te'udat masa'* into *darkon*, and *'et oferet* into *'iparon* (in order: 'soldier' changing from *army man* into *force person*; 'passport' changing from *certificate of journey* into *way + on* suffix; 'pencil' from *lead pen* into *lead + on*) (Schwarzwald 358; Gilad 2013a). Probably the most prominent example is the anointing of 'orange' as *tapuz*, a synthesis of *tapuah* and *zahav*, or 'golden apple.'

Modern Hebrew also generated a host of new words for modern technological objects by glueing two words into a new one: *ramkol*, *kolno'a*, *ramzor*, and *ḥaidak* ('speaker' as *ram + kol*, or *loud + voice*; 'cinema' as *kol + noa'*, i.e. *voice + moving*; 'stoplight' as a melange of *remez + or*, or *hint + light*; 'bacteria' as *ḥai + dak*, or *living + thin*) to name just a few (Horowitz 319). This fondness for thematic hybrids can also be seen in the omnipresence of abbreviations, such as the word for report, *doh*, a condensation of *din ve ḥeshbon* ('justice and accounting') (Blau 173). These are a prime display of the revivalists' creative drive and concise intentions, which were implemented with the aim of crafting easy-to-grasp functional names. These cases

epitomize the perceptive quip that ‘most of the words created by the Hebrew Language Committee either describe what it does or what it looks like’ (Horowitz 59).

Modern Hebrew In A Sentence

All of the above was the beginning of an immense linguistic process that would evolve and grow into a viable and vibrant contemporary language. Modern Hebrew was a conscious and selective combination of historic Hebrew strata—Biblical and MH, in particular—archaic terms, and new words derived from their roots. *Even Shoshan Dictionary* puts contemporary Hebrew at 22% Biblical, 21% Mishnaic, 17% Medieval, and 40% Modern (with its new coinages 65% Biblical, 16% Mishnaic, 5% Medieval, 14% Modern in origin) (Schwarzwald 356). To see this fusion in action, we can examine an arbitrary excerpt from a current piece of Israeli literature.

Ora Schwarzwald dissects these randomly selected two sentences from David Grossman’s 1994 novel, *Yesh Yeladim Zigzag* (literally “there are zigzag children,” with *zigzag* as an English loanword):

“הרכבת צפרה והחלה לעזוב את התחנה. ילד עמד בחלון אחד הקרונוט והביט באיש ובאישה שנופפו לו מן הרציף”

Transliterated:

Ha-rakevet tzafra ve-hehla la'azov et ha tahana. Yeled 'amad be-halon ehad ha-qronot ve-hebit be-ish u-be-isha she-noffefu lo min ha-ratzif.

And in English:

“The train blew the whistle and began leaving the station. A boy stood at the window of one of the train cars and gazed at a man and a woman waving at him from the platform” (Schwarzwald 357).

The Biblical words present include the prepositions *ha-*, *ve-*, *be-*, *lo*, and *min*, as well as the words *heḥel*, *‘azav*, *yeled*, *‘amad*, *hibit*, *ish*, *isha*, and *noffef*. MH influence is expressed in the use of *et* and *she-* (rarely found in the Bible), *shel*, and *qaron*. Modern Hebrew additions include *rakevet* (‘train,’ from Biblical *rakhav* (‘rode’) and *rekhev* (‘vehicle’)), *tzafar* (‘whistled,’ a verb that exists in the Bible with a different meaning), *taḥana* (‘station,’ from Biblical *maḥane* (camp)), and the word *ratzif* (‘platform,’ inspired by Biblical *ritzpah* (‘floor’), *martzefet* (‘floor tile’), and *ratzuf* (‘consecutive’)) (Schwarzwald 357). Thus, reflective of the dictionary breakdown of Modern Hebrew, the majority of Grossman’s sentences consist of Biblical terms transplanted directly into modern literature, with small Mishnaic modifications, and with coinages to label modern technological phenomena (such as trains, stations, and platforms); the words of this latter category are derived from mostly Biblical sources by extrapolating new vocabulary from root systems and imbuing archaic designations with new purpose.

In closing, the arduous undertaking of Hebrew revival and modernization was initiated by the Hebrew revivalists, namely EBY and his intellectual companions, who devoted their lives to filling in the gaps the modern world had induced. Thousands of new words vital for daily life—‘sidewalk,’ ‘restaurant,’ or ‘butterfly,’ to name a few—were devised, based on Hebrew scriptures, neighboring semitic languages, and European terms and concepts (Glinert 206). Israel Bartal classifies this new Hebrew as “an idiomatic Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew with an Eastern European syntax (closer to Russian or Yiddish) and Hebraicized Arabic and French vocabulary” (Bartal 101). Creation was half the battle, however. Convincing the diverse immigrant populations to pick up an incomplete and strange tongue, as well as abandoning their own languages and customs in doing so, was a difficult task, to say the least.

Part 2: Hebrew Enforcement and Dissemination

The Academia

In 1889, EBY founded the Hebrew Language Committee (*Va'ad ha-Lashon ha-'Ivrit*), which strove to innovate, perpetuate, and systematize the constant changes and additions occurring to Hebrew. This was part of the self-professed Zionist mission of continuing the historic process of Hebrew creation and resuscitation from obscurity, a tradition that actually goes back to the Second Temple period (Halperin 236, see chapter 1). After various disbandings and reiterations, the Jerusalem committee was enshrined in the law in its current form, *the Academy for the Hebrew Language* (or in Hebrew, *ha-Akademya la-Lashon ha-'Ivrit*, commonly known as 'the Academia'). Their very first publication included lists of plant names and terminology for dress, food, furniture, and geography (Berdichevsky 59). The Academia is responsible for adding over 30,000 terms (as of today) in 60 professions—hoping to replace, or prevent recourse to, the pre-existing *lo'azi* (or 'foreign') loanwords in daily use by Israelis (Berdichevsky 59). Their *Leshonenu* ('Our Tongue') periodicals worked to encourage uniform spelling, Sephardic pronunciation, and clear up grammar discrepancies arising from European influence and conflicting Hebrew traditions (Berdichevsky 58; Blau 159).

The legitimacy of Zionist hegemony, in reviving spoken Hebrew and usurping control of Jewish life in Palestine from the religious Old Yishuv, hinged on the reinvention of the New Hebrew as a secular personality type (Shavit 102). The linguistic dimension of this entailed desacralizing the Biblical idiom the Academia was reintroducing (Halperin 236). Words like *shaharit*, *mishkan*, *'avoda*, and *masekha* were stripped of their sacred value and deliberately given everyday purposes (in order: the name of the Jewish morning prayer now plainly connotes

‘dawn’ (or even a matinee); ‘tabernacle’ came to mean ‘housing’; in ancient times, ‘*avoda* was ‘worship of God,’ now it is ‘work’; the Biblical ‘molten image’ is now simply a ‘mask’) (Blau 165; Schwarzwald 359; Horowitz 239). To aggressively symbolize this separation of powers in the new Israeli state, the word for ‘religious congregation’ and ‘synagogue,’ *knesset*, was very intentionally chosen as the name of the new parliament (Blau 165).

The most formidable obstacle to societal assimilation that the revivalists had to reckon with was literacy. Not only was learning to speak with their neighbors in a whole new language—and one not yet fully equipped to express all their needs, at that—but reading and writing Hebrew successfully would take extensive teaching (Shavit 102). This is because Hebrew uses an *abjad* writing system (see chapter 1), meaning that you need to have a solid understanding of the morphology and rules of the language in order to read it successfully. It is also read right to left, which can be disorienting to non-Semitic language speakers. Thus, a latinized alphabet was at various times suggested to replace Hebrew letters—the thought process being that literacy and Hebrew comprehension were more important than the traditional alphabet (Berdichevsky 69). The sociocultural value of the Hebrew alphabet proved indispensable in the end, however, reinforcing the distinctive and Biblical aura that the revivalists aimed to evoke (Blau 162). To compensate for this, revived Hebrew emphasized shortened and concise new vocabulary, uniform spelling conventions, and cultural integration for recent arrivals.

A Hebrew Name

The revivalists sought a holistic and thorough reinvention of Jewish identity. As we saw, the start of the 1900s marked a transition from the Yiddish diasporic ‘Jew’ of the past into the modern secular ‘Hebrew’ of Israel. This new ‘Palestinian Jew’ was blunt, sarcastic, and brawny

from working traditionally non-Jewish jobs, such as fishing and farming.²⁹ Beyond public pressure to speak Hebrew, promulgated by the notorious saying “*Ivri daber Ivrit*” (“Hebrew, speak Hebrew”), the revivalists demanded embodiment of a modern Hebraic identity complete with a new Hebrew name.

These names were by design Biblical (evoking the ancient landscape of the Hebrew-speaking nation), secular, and compact (normally 1-2 syllables). Upon arrival in Palestine, Jews were strongly encouraged to shed their old names, and therein identities, for a name from the Bible, such as Avner (Saul’s chief general), Nimrod (a primeval conqueror, literally ‘let us rebel!’), or Mikhal (David’s wife) (Glinert 214). Note that these names were not the classic Biblical names omnipresent in the world today, like Yonatan (Jonathan), Mikhael (Michael), Saul (Shaul), David, etc.; rather, they were the less known, more formidable, even in some cases more reviled figures of the book (Berdichevsky 89). This was a direct attempt to challenge religious monopoly on the Bible, as well as channel a sense of physical prowess and empowerment that rejected diaspora stereotypes. Other new sets of names featured inspiring messages or elements of nature, e.g. ‘Oded (‘motivate’), ‘Uzi (‘my might’), Nir (‘field’), Rakefet (‘Cyclamen flower’), and Smadar (‘vine blossom’) (Berdichevsky 88). Hebraization of names was spurred on institutionally by slogans like “no foreign names in our midst” by the National Council, and “soldier, hebraize your name” of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) (Glinert 214). All famous figures of the pre-state period (namely, politicians and scholars such as EBY or Prime Minister Ben Gurion) were known by their Hebrew names, reinforcing the new norm. These conventions were concretized in 1944, when the Zionist leadership proclaimed the “Year of

²⁹ ‘Non-Jewish’ because anti-Semitic laws in medieval Europe had barred Jews from working them. Jews were usually confined to trade and finance, leading to the Western stereotypes of Jews as rich, scheming, and greedy.

Naturalization of the Hebrew Name,” and published a booklet with guidelines for creating new Hebrew surnames (Berdichevsky 87).

Trends in Hebrew names, reflecting shifts in the recently blossomed Hebrew culture, would go in novel directions over time. By the 1970s, newer generations began to prefer unpretentious names, such as Lihi (‘she is mine’), Liora (‘I have light’), Tal (‘dew’), and Mor (‘myrrh’) over the popular Biblical names of the founding period—now not as radical and unorthodox as before (Glinert 214); Alternately, older, more standard, names were altered slightly, like Sarah into Sarit, or Aharon into Ron (Glinert 214). Israeli society also now featured more English names that fit Hebrew syntax, such as Tom, Guy, or Shelly. Reminiscent of the wordplay of the revivalists, many of the Western names selected had a secondary Hebrew meaning, e.g. Shirli and Keren (‘song for me’ and ‘horn/ray’). Most of these names were monosyllabic and many were unisex.

Hebrew Action

Trying to create a Hebrew speaking society with a unified culture out of multicultural immigrants was no easy task. Despite the presence of immersive Hebrew *ulpan* classes provided for *olim* on arrival, every wave of immigration was an obstacle to Hebrew dominance, creating countless private and public domains where other languages prevailed (Shavit 101). Much of Yishuv life was conducted in foreign languages, with robust cultural enclaves and business signs usually written in multiple languages, such as Yiddish, English, German, Polish, or Arabic (Shavit 117). A concerned National Council released a document in 1939³⁰ advocating for the

³⁰ *The Directive for Linguistic and Culture Protection* (צו התגוננות המועצה המרכזית להשלת העברית ביישוב), dated August 22, 1939 (Shohamy 210).

‘total domination of our Hebrew language,’ which should be spoken everywhere and kept pure (Shohamy 210). To this end, the Central Council for the Imposition of the Hebrew Language (המועצה המרכזית להשלטת העברית ביישוב) was formed, aiming to control public space and monitor Hebrew proficiency in the home (Shohamy 209).

To minimize the influence of foreign words on pure Hebrew communications, all non-Hebrew storefront signs were removed (particularly in the municipality of Tel-Aviv, the celebrated ‘first Hebrew city’), and propaganda campaigns like the aforementioned *‘ivri daber ‘ivrit* governed public socialization. Furthermore, city hall only accepted Hebrew appeals, and letters addressed in foreign tongues were returned to the sender (Shohamy 117; Glinert 209). The Council ambitiously devised an action plan to eradicate all non-Hebrew newspapers (particularly the flourishing subculture of German journalism) within one year: German newspapers had to be written in 50% Hebrew within the first six months, and then 75%, and after one year the paper could not be published at all (Shohamy 211); German newspaper owners refused to comply at first, fearing the existential erasure of their culture and loss of agency. 1954 was crowned the ‘Year of Learning Hebrew,’ wherein 3,000 enthusiastic volunteers taught around 50,000 adults (their kids were learning in school) spoken and written Hebrew (Blumenfeld 5).

As older generations were more stuck in their ways and linguistic customs, revivalists focused on inculcating the Palestinian-born Jewish youth with a sense of national pride and a desire to speak Hebrew (and convince their parents to follow suit). These children experienced a perpetual tension between their ‘home language,’ which could elicit a sense of shame in the eyes of their peers, and their language of socialization, Hebrew (Shohamy 103). According to the 1923 census, nearly half of those born or raised in Palestine (*dor ha-Banim*, ‘the generation of

sons’) spoke Hebrew, and not even one amongst the approximately 15,000 Tel-Aviv residents that participated declared Yiddish as their language—however it is known that the establishment skewed statistics to amplify their successes (the psychological impact of which would be encouraging more immigrants to cooperate and assimilate) (Shavit 104, 108).

While this native-born generation usually spoke Hebrew amongst themselves, many needed to have a decent grasp of other languages in order to interact with their elders (or friends’ parents), even if they were taught to despise these languages (especially Yiddish) in school (Shavit 117). Israeli youth, similarly to children of immigrants worldwide, would often *codeswitch*, i.e. craft sentences that seamlessly interweave phrases and vocabulary of up to three languages (as some parents would speak a ‘crude vernacular’ amongst themselves while preferring a ‘proper’ language education vis a vis their kids, e.g. ‘intellectual’ Russian over Yiddish ‘jargon,’ or ‘refined’ French over ‘coarse’ Judeo-Arabic) (Shavit 116). The educational system, while featuring extensive room *within* Hebrew for innovation in the void of supervision (see chapter 4), was closely monitored for total Hebrew dominance among students; and in each town the mayor would be obligated to frequently report on the ‘apathy or vigor with which Hebrew was received’ to the central authorities (Shavit 116).

Defense Squad

The success of Hebrew as a culturally prevalent force could not be ensured by government policies and public events alone, galvanization of the populace (who internalized and lived out the ideology) was required. To surveil the private sphere, the cultural committee would send couples of volunteers to visit houses and conduct censuses on the use of Hebrew in

the home (as a 1939 Ra'anana newspaper advised, “you are requested to welcome these couples using good manners”) (Shohamy 213).

Accounts from the 1930s depict loyalist ‘battalions of [Hebrew] language defenders’ (גדודי מגיני השפה) patrolling the streets and putting a ribbon around your neck reading *‘ivri daber ‘ivrit* if you spoke in a foreign tongue. These vigilante squadrons threw bricks at non-Hebrew store windows, assaulted Yiddish speakers, and reported other such violations to their local authorities (with the penalty being a fine humiliatingly broadcasted in public) (Glinert 209; Shohamy 214). Even iconic Hebraist public figures preferred to speak their home languages in secret, finding them more natural and expressive; the ever-adored Bialik had to publicly apologize for his frequent use of Russian (Glinert 210). As the Hebrew project was a question of new identity for many, and was dependent on the all-encompassing compliance of all its citizens, immigrants could find speaking other languages as counterrevolutionary and offensive—one could even compare the enforcement efforts of the Hebrew patrollers to the Red Guard of Communist China.

Yiddish in particular—being the most prominent Jewish language in use in Palestine, and therein the largest sociolinguistic obstructor of Hebrew revival—faced the most ruthless repression tactics. The ‘War on Yiddish’ lasted three generations and effectively eliminated Yiddish’s vivacity (Berdichevsky 76). Preeminent figures of the fledgling Hebrew state pushed to associate Yiddish with the shame of European persecution, while framing Hebrew as the superior language of machismo and robustness: Ben Gurion, the lauded first Prime Minister of Israel, is quoted describing Yiddish as the language the Jews took with them to Auschwitz and Treblinka, while Hebrew was the languages that Jews in Palestine took with them marching into the Negev desert (Berdichevsky 81).

This sentiment trickled down to local communities, emboldened by a mass influx of German Jews in the 1930s (eager to shed their diasporic identities, and who already viewed Yiddish as ‘Eastern European crude jargon’). ‘Good Hebrews’ were applauded for acting feverishly to impose the young vernacular in public spaces. As mentioned above, the use of Yiddish in public often led to violent exchanges, most notably in the Tel Aviv arts community: the Yiddish theater was stink-bombed in 1914, and a play in 1930 was disrupted by so much yelling and screaming by Hebraist fanatics the show had to be called off; a movie screened in Yiddish was shut down after aggressive riots broke out, after which the mayor banned the film (Glinert 214; Shohamy 123). In 1951, a directive banning Yiddish plays altogether effectively moved Yiddish culture underground (Berdichevsky 198). Their psychological warfare further worked to expel all traces of Yiddish from Ashkenazi spoken Hebrew. The authorities officially promoted the Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew, and mocked the undular inflections of European Hebrew speakers: Ze'ev Jabotinsky, a famous politician, is said to have remarked that Ashkenazis should not ‘sing when they speak, as the weeping tone stirs unpleasant memories of the ghetto in us’ (Berdichevsky 80). Overall, these methods were expedient and promising; by 1936, only one third of the 300,000 Jews in Palestine could not communicate in Hebrew (Glinert 210).

Who Controls Hebrew?

The new establishment had a clearly defined ethos it sought to foster in the early years of the Israeli state. As Hebrew needed to reach stability, in the eyes of the new government there was no room for pluralism (Shohamy 215). Parents often kept their linguistic traditions alive in

the home, but these were held back from the children for naturalization and assimilation. The question of whether these expedient methods were necessary to generate the entrenched state of Hebrew in Israel is not one I will attempt to answer in this essay. I attribute their success to a host of factors, including the enthusiasm and determination of new immigrants vis a vis learning Hebrew, and Jewish persecution in Europe, which increased international support of the statebuilding initiative; the Holocaust also tarnished Yiddish for many, instigating a commitment to Hebrew identity. Additionally responsible are the efficacy of the immersive *ulpan* model and the extensive compensatory work of the Academia—averaging around 2,000 coinages annually (Blumenfeld 3; Berdichevsky 57). Finally, the consistent readership of the Hebrew press, which convinced the British to accept Hebrew as an official language of Palestine, and the consequent legal transition to Hebrew as the official language of instruction in schools by 1912, all massively contributed to Hebrew's success (Berdichevsky 83).

Their achievements notwithstanding, the establishment itself was certainly not immune to the role of popular trends in linguistic development, or to *lo'azi* ('foreign') seepage. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the direction of Hebrew was, in practice, determined by the organic innovations and decisions of everyday Israelis, seeking efficiency in communication or creative ways to express themselves. Sometimes the public appreciated EBY's Hebrew coinages, such as when they chose *doar* over SAU's *posta* for 'mail,' but many times internationalisms won out (and in some cases, both found a place in common parlance) (Glinert 194). As more slang and informal linguistic restructuring proliferated and became a source of pride for Israelis, the disconnect between the rigid proper Hebrew of the authorities widened.

Mesagenim, or style monitors, extensively ‘corrected’ the Hebrew being used in television broadcasts, in novels (as most authors allegedly had ‘bad grammar’ that needed to be exhaustively reconfigured), and in textbooks (Glinert 219). Children's books and toothpaste commercials universally featured a quasi-BH variety little evolved since the revival in the late 1800s. Israeli literary figures latched on the Haskalah-esque forms of early Modern Hebrew and snuffed their noses at the improper ‘folk’ flavor of Israeli speech (Berdichevsky 22). It was only in the late 80s and 90s that restrictions loosened and literature and television began to reflect the reality of its viewers, featuring characters that used informal conventions and slang in their dialogue (at any rate, ‘proper’ Hebrew still ultimately dominates journalism and literature).

Yet, despite aggressive enforcement efforts, the revivalist project—fueled by a desire to expunge foreign influences from Modern Hebrew, while modeling extensively on SAU and Arabic tropes—is itself filled with ironies and inconsistencies. The epitome of it all is that the Academia itself, whose role it was to design and enforce Modern Hebrew within an insular Hebraic culture, was erected on an internationalism: despite actually being founded in 1949, it only began to function in 1953, due to infighting over the use of the word *academia* in the name (Berdichevsky 59). *Academia* was likely originally preferred because EBY and the revivalists were partial to Greco-latin terms, as Hebrew had naturalized an extensive amount of them during the Rabbinic period, as well as for their universal modern utility (Berdichevsky 59). A provision written into the 1953 law that founded the Academia decreed that there would be a search for a new purer name. In 2012, the Academia finally conceded and voted to endorse its Greek name. Moshe Bar Asher, the incumbent president at the time, remarked that the word had become as deeply rooted as the *Sanhedrin* itself—the name for the Jewish supreme court of the Talmudic era,

another Greek word deeply embedded in Jewish legacy (Berdichevsky 226). This comment keenly exemplifies Hebrew's volatile relationship with foreignisms—oscillating between seeking purification and assimilation from the world around it—which has accompanied Hebrew through every stage of its existence, to the extent that it has defined the language itself (see chapter 1).

Ultimately, it is the population that dictates the future of a language. Over time, Hebrew has been forced to expand to naturalize new foreign sounds, names, syntaxes, and even letters.³¹ In the 1990s, many Israelis underwent a process of reclaiming their original 'unseemly' diaspora names, co-opting their cultural heritage into their Israeli identity (possibly linked to the mass influx of Russian immigrants at the time, making the population more familiar with Eastern European names, and in turn, mitigating their previous humiliating connotations) (Berdichevsky 89). Today, municipal laws of equal Hebrew and English signage are barely heeded, where main streets are saturated with stores brandishing Hebrew names written in English letters and vice versa, challenging the "purity" of both.

Whether or not today's Hebrew is improper, corrupted, and riddled with Englishisms, the success of the revivalists in generating a national language is self-evident. While contemporary rules and conventions can be seen as inconsistent and foreign-influenced, they can also be appreciated as the inevitable changes a spoken language in a nation with open borders undergoes. I interviewed EBY's great grandson, who resides in Tel Aviv, and asked him if he thought the exalted grandfather of Modern Hebrew would be disappointed with the state of Hebrew today. He responded without hesitation, "absolutely not," declaring that the fact that you can walk

³¹ To be able to pronounce words from French, Hebrew, and Arabic, in particular, Hebrew has added modifications to certain letters: by adding apostrophes to the letters **gimmel**, **zayin**, and **tzadi**, you can now make **j**, **zh** (as in French 'Jacque'), and **ch** sounds, respectively. By putting two **vav**'s together, you can create a **w**. Furthermore, the rule that the *soffit* versions of letters always bookend a word is broken by lo'azi words, such as the word **clip** **קליפ**, to indicate it is a P sound—i.e. of foreign origin, as in Hebrew morphology the word would always end with an F.

around in Israel today and witness Hebrew conversations, music, and writing means EBY and his son's dreams are now the reality. As Lewis Glinert puts it, the revival was not about any one type or version of Hebrew, it was simply about Hebrew (Glinert 194). The next chapter makes a distinction between Modern Hebrew, as crafted by EBY and his cohort, and Israeli Hebrew, or what was done with and added to it on an organic popular level.

Chapter 4: Israeli Hebrew Defines Itself

In the previous chapter, we examined the planned facets of Modern Hebrew that the revivalists aimed to model and enforce. Hebrew as it manifests today, however, is greatly removed from the original formulations of the late 1800s. This is due to the day-to-day actions of a young Yishuv population—‘Hebrews’ who later became ‘Israelis’ upon the founding of the state, working off of or against the innovations being published and instilled by the authorities. This chapter seeks to explore the unplanned, yet highly formative, impacts of such innovations, to show that contemporary Hebrew is actually an amalgamation of conflicting forces—many of which were haphazard and improvisational in nature. To this end, we should differentiate between the cultural terms ‘Jewish,’ ‘Hebrew,’ and ‘Israeli.’ Bartal defines the former as the pre-modern ethnic traditions of diaspora communities, and ‘Hebrew’ as the ideologically driven identity the secular revivalist elite seeks to propagate in the cultural vacuum of the pre-state period, as inspired by European political concepts and Biblical Jewish sources.

‘Israeli,’ by contrast, is the composite of spontaneous development of individuals and Jewish ethnic enclaves, as synthesized within the Palestinian context, and with much contact with local customs (Bartal 3). This bottom-up model of cultural development enriched the daily lives of Hebrew speakers immensely, providing practical Hebrew coinages, *lo’azi* (foreign in origin) words to compensate for Hebrew’s incompleteness, slang for self-expression, and unique ways of crafting senses of identity. While Modern Hebrew defined the official public sphere, or the metaphorical and literal ‘upstairs’ of social spaces, the ‘downstairs’ of immigrant homes featured authentic old world customs, religion and languages. Elements of these secret underground worlds, such as Yiddish or Moroccan community gatherings, may have overall lost

their linguistic stabilities as collateral damage in the revival, but have left indelible markings on the public realm by fundamentally shaping its character (Bartal 52).

Words For Word Users

While the Academia endeavored to create Hebrew coinages for every domain and career, they could not fulfill all of the expressive needs of a growing and productive population. Hebrew revival was a continuous process that EBY and his fellow Hebraists laid the foundations for, and as Israeli society developed, literature, politics, and journalism became sites of genuine innovation for concepts that required labeling. Many such staples of Hebrew vocabulary today were *de facto* coined by everyday Israelis in their respective fields, creatively naming important concepts out of necessity.

In 1955, journalist Daniel Libel of the newspaper *Davar* reported on the rare discovery of a painting by Baroque artist Peter Paul Rubens. Libel wanted to impart that art critics were skeptical of its ‘authenticity or credibility,’ yet this idea had no concrete word at the time; he chose the word *aminut*, which he derived from the root *a-m-n* (meaning belief or faith, the source of the universally known *amen*). This caught the eye of one Ya’akov Cana’ani, who was gathering material for a new Hebrew dictionary. Cana’ani mailed the newspaper to clarify if *aminut* was a typo or a deliberate (and much needed) innovation. The paper responded that it was an intentional attempt to describe authenticity; and, thus, *aminut*, as well as the related adjective, *amin* (trustworthy, reliable), were added to the dictionary (Gilad, 2021). When reporting on the momentous 1978 Israeli election, a TV broadcaster coined the term *ma’apakh* (‘revolution,’ from the word *mit’apekh*, or ‘overturns’), now used in academic writing and dinner conversations

alike (Schwarzwald 358). These are but a few examples of non-revivalist individuals seeking to describe the world, and inadvertently becoming Hebraists along the way.

Besides fabricating coinages, the Israeli population was the ultimate arbiter of the revivalists innovations, determining which ones would catch on and which would be consigned to obscurity. As mentioned in chapter 3, many early coinages—such as EBY’s *sah-rahok* (roughly ‘long-conversation’), which did not have the ring or elegance that the European *telefon* carried—were not successful, and so became the first of many Academia terms subject to public ridicule.³² EBY not only had to oppose the temptation of SAU terminology, but also the pre-Modern Hebrew of the Old Yishuv, such as with the Hebrew word for ‘tomato.’ Rabbi Yehiel Pines, a distinguished figure of the 1800s Jewish community in Jerusalem, began calling the tomato ‘*agbanit*—from the Biblical root ‘*A-G-B*, i.e. to ‘lust’ or ‘desire’ (related to ‘*agavot*, or ‘buttocks’). This was inspired by the appellation of ‘love-apple’ found in various European languages, due to their perception of tomatoes as aphrodisiacs (Berdichevsky 60). EBY found this moniker vulgar and opted for the Arabic loanword *bandura* instead. His convictions did not persuade the Hebrew speaking population at the time, who preferred the new indigenous coinage (and were probably amused by its sexual connotations) over the already regionally recognized term (Glinert 194). Today, a slightly altered form, ‘*agvania*, is the only term in use.

In other cases, EBY’s coinages successfully replaced alternatives, such as with *mufnam* over the SAU ‘introvert,’ suggesting the population was not always averse to revivalist Hebrew (Berdichevsky 62). To speculate, these decisions were made on the ground of what I would call

³² Today, the Academia coins Hebrew words to substitute New Age English loanwords, such as ‘emoji’ or ‘freestyle,’ and works to correct common spelling or pronunciation mistakes. These new words are generally ignored or not taken seriously, but the Academia’s use of memes and social media to educate about Hebrew and introduce new terms to the public has gained it a sizable following (167 million on Instagram as of 2021).

spoken linguistic efficiency: i.e. which words flow off the tongue the most naturally in a spoken context; which are most pleasing to the ear (more subjective); which are the quickest to say. The filtration of colloquial Hebrew vocabulary (or ‘which words sound too formal or foreign to be used in everyday speech’) was an ever-dynamic feedback loop—in the sense that the words that feel most fitting to use in a given situation are the ones normalized within spoken Hebrew idiom, and are normalized by virtue of being most frequently heard. Furthermore, for a large set of words arbitrarily accepted over time, a double multilingual framework arose (see *Doublets and Synonyms*, chapter 3), in which Israelis seamlessly alternate between the Hebrew and Hebraicized English doublet (Berdichevsky 62). Interestingly, for some of these pairings, like *shock/helem*, the English variation may read as more casual, while for some, like *improvizatzia/iltur* the foreign version may present as equally, if not more, intellectual and professional. The process of alien-term Hebraization and naturalization into common speech, occurring on an everyday and utilitarian career basis, was often informal in essence, seeking efficiency over accuracy. This is demonstrated by the loaning of English words into quotidian Hebrew with distorted enunciations or misconstrued meanings, such as with *pancher*, and *chaser*—respectively, ‘puncture’ (as in ‘flat tire’), and ‘alcoholic chaser’ (but which is actually used to mean the ‘shot’ itself, not the chaser following it. This could either be due to a mistake in translation, or possibly the fact that *shot* could be more easily mixed up with native Hebrew words and sounds less elegant).

Informal Conventions

Besides specific word choices, notable shifts in the grammatical and syntactical makeup of spoken Hebrew were taking place throughout the 20th century. Many of these arose from the SAU linguistic conventions recent immigrants applied to their Hebrew when trying to learn, while others were likely the result of spoken efficiency and related informal processes. EBY and his cohort were, for the most part, appalled by these ‘incorrect’ uses of Hebrew, but over time many won out and became the new standard for written and spoken Hebrew.

A clear example is the frequency of *et* (a sign of the accusative in linguistics. It’s not typically found in English, but is used in languages like German, Polish and Russian) in spoken Hebrew idiom, which is usually attributed to Jewish immigration from European countries (Blau 156). While Biblical Hebrew (BH) may have conveyed the same information with the more minimalist *yesh li ha-davar* (I have the thing), there was already widespread use of *yesh li et ha-davar* in everyday speech at the start of the 20th century. A 1911 publication by the Council for the Hebrew Language issued a list of ‘common speech error do’s and don’ts,’ including the above sentence, along with a host of other examples³³ (Reshef 2008, 226). For many of them, the phrase in the ‘do’ section ‘feels’ correct, yet many of the wrong examples match common speech today, as well. Actually, in some cases neither category felt most representative of contemporary Hebrew, due to changes in register (words used that now feel antiquated), prepositions, and crystallized tense mistakes.

Et is said to be one of the earliest phenomena differentiating spoken Hebrew from its written counterpart (Reshef 2008, 228). Early revivalist surveys of spoken Hebrew attributed its

³³ Here is a list of some of the other examples. The *don’t* is followed by one or two *dos*, and one most heard today is in bold. *Ani koraat, ani korah, **ani koret*** (I read, feminine form). *Ani yoshenet, **ani yeshena*** (I sleep, feminine). ***Hu yashsan, hu yashen*** (he slept). *Avo elekha matay ata hafetz, avo elekha ke-asher tahfetz* (today you hear **avo elekha matai she-ata rotze/avo elekha kshe-tirtze**, reflecting changes in diction and syntax).

spread to grammar mistakes of young children—ignoring the fact that their teachers were seen to be using it as well, demonstrating its pervasiveness (Reshef 2008, 229). Despite its predominance in Israeli life, *et* was still markedly absent from written Hebrew until the 1960-70s (except for the occasional folk satire in the 1950s), instantiating the growing rift between the artificial and censored world of formal literature on one end, and the organic development of conversational norms on the other (Reshef 2008, 231). Another extraneous component of the new vernacular was the addition of pronouns before pronoun-conjugated verbs (*shalaḥta* vs *ata shalaḥta*—‘you sent,’ likely an emphatic adoption) (Reshef 2013b, 169).

While the revivalists believed deviations and language errors would dissipate with collective proficiency and literacy, many informalities came to redefine the modern Hebrew dialect (Reshef 2008, 158). Grammatical inaccuracies, such as using the third person verb instead of first person (*ani yarutz* over *ani arutz*, akin to ‘I runs’) and the use of the future instead of the imperative (*tavo* instead of *bo*) still exist today (Reshef 2013b, 167). The casual use of *lo* over *ein*, such as in the phrase *ani lo yode’a* (I don’t know) was the victim of aggressive extermination campaigns, but to no avail (Reshef 2013b, 182); the preferred Biblical *einenni* is only found today in regular speech ironically.

Other noteworthy differences include changes in prepositions (*menake be-sabon* into ‘*im sabon*— to ‘clean [something] in soap’ versus to ‘clean with soap’), moveable *aval* and *gam* (the informal placing of *but* and *also* at different points throughout a sentence), and shifts in vowel vocalizations in certain words (‘*izvi* into ‘*azvi*, *ḥavarot* into *ḥevrot*, *zoti* over *zot*) (Reshef 2013b, 179). These all reflect adjustments in the communal ear of the Israeli speaker, wherein mistakes and desires for *linguistic efficiency* (including the somewhat less tangible ‘what feels right’) in

daily life brought about a new normal. To use evolution as an analogy, the populous encounters various mutations of the established trait, the one most socially fit spreads, and comes to characterize the population as a whole.

Another defining difference of spoken Hebrew (present in virtually all spoken languages), is ‘assimilation.’ *Shelkha* and *aḥar kakh* were unofficially reduced to the speedier *shkha* and *aḥakakh* (‘yours’ and ‘after’; comparable to ‘I do not know’ becoming ‘ionnow’). This infuriated the establishment, which envisioned a society with a cultivated manner of speech; already in the 1930s, Jabotinsky complained that ‘our ancestors’ did not swallow syllables or switch vowels in the sloppy manner heard on the streets today (not entirely true, however)³⁴ (Reshef 2013b. 173).

An undeniable agent informing many of the changes happening in the nascent vernacular was the mix of foreign grammars manifesting in Hebrew exchanges. Slavic languages left their mark on Israeli Hebrew in the utilization of reflexive forms to indicate emotions, such as *ko’ev li ha-rosh* and *megared li*: the first phrase is used today to mean ‘my head hurts’—which would align more literally with the native Hebrew rendering, *roshi ko’ev*—but literally translates to ‘hurts for me the head’ (Reshef 2013b, 184). The second expression is ‘I am itchy,’ but roughly equates to ‘it itches me.’ Naturalized phrases like these began to permeate written registers by the 1950s (Reshef 2013b, 165). SAU preposition conventions also swayed popular speech, such as in the shift from the more traditional *beit ha-sefer* into *ha-beit sefer* to identify a

³⁴ There is evidence of assimilation of words (and other divergences, such as the masculine single *haya* (‘was’) used for feminine and plural events), encapsulated in texts from Biblical and post-Biblical eras, such as the Bar Kokhba Letters (see chapter 1) (Reshef 2008, 232). This not only reconnects Israeli Hebrew back into the long-winded narrative of defying linguistic rules, but also of having operating spoken forms at all.

school–school in Hebrew is historically portrayed as the ‘house of the book,’ whereas this new alteration reads as ‘the house of book’ (Reshef 2013b, 182).

Many of the rearrangements mentioned above reflect the contemporary vernacular, indicating the influence of the collective on the linguistic direction of the Hebrew revival. At such an early and volatile stage, many rules and conventions took shape for seemingly arbitrary reasons, but came to feel inherent to the syntax, grammar, and spoken flow of Hebrew. Try as they might, the first Israelis were struggling to manage daily affairs in a complex and incomplete language. It is important to remember even the devoted revivalists would err frequently when attempting to use only Hebrew at all times; in 1930, Jabotinsky maintained that “almost no one is capable, in the flow of daily speech, of correctly realizing the masculine and feminine forms of the numerals. I’m not sure whether I knew in the land more than ten meticulous speakers who did not confuse them” (Reshef 2013b, 165). Thus, in the trials of the revival experiment, mistakes, reconfigurations, and insertions occurred, and became the cause for them to occur once more. As writer Ya’akov Rabinowitz astutely articulated in the same decade:

“now the Hebrew word has entered the mouth, and this has its own rules...the language that follows speech will not be the same as the one that preceded it, and if there are many wild plants in the language—there is no danger in that. When a field grows many wild weeds, it is a sure sign that its soil is good. Some of the wild weeds will be uprooted, some will transform into cultivated plans, and there will be both language-thorns and language-flowers” (Reshef 2013b, 157).

Pronunciation: The Israeli Accent

The development of the modern Israeli accent is a timeline of decisions, reactions, and fluctuations. EBY was a staunch advocate of universal Sephardic pronunciation and stress patterns. The Sephardi (Jewry from Iberia, Turkey, and North Africa) and Mizrahi (historically residing in countries like modern-day Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, and Yemen) accents feature Spanish-adjacent vowels and Arabized gutturals, and usually lay their stresses on the last syllables of a word. The rationale for Sephardic endorsement was a coalescence of practical, ideological, and emotional concerns: in the Yishuv, EBY determined that it was more logical to use an Arabized pronunciation, as the prestigious Sephardi community in Jerusalem enjoyed a closer relationship to the Ottoman authorities, and it would enable mass communities of Arab-speaking Jews to transition into Hebrew more easily, increasing societal cohesion (Berdichevsky 54). Ideologically, Zionists endeavored to evoke an ancient Middle-Eastern ethos in their new identities, and so Arabized sounds (believed by most scholars to be historically closer to original Hebrew morphology, with Yemenite Hebrew widely considered the best preserved) were serviceable to this end (Glinert 195). Moreover, EBY decided to promote a spoken revival after his encounters with the Algerian Jewish community, through which ideas of viable spoken Hebrew were reared with a Sephardic character (see chapter 2). Emotionally speaking, the new Hebrew identity was designed to be the antithesis of Eastern European diaspora culture, in order to disassociate from the traumas of the Holocaust and anti-Semitism writ large (Berdichevsky 80).

The new pronunciation of Hebrew featured trilled r's, fully sounded vowels, word-end stresses, and a relatively stern and monotone air (in contrast to the melodious and undulating intonations of Yiddish). These sounds, especially the full vowels and rolled r's, were reinforced

by the large proportion of Russian Zionists in the pre-state period (Russian featured these traits as well). Yet, essential qualities of the Sephardic accent, such as the guttural *‘ayin* and breathy *Ḥet*, were often omitted due to difficulty in pronouncing them. With time, the throaty phonetics were commonly supplanted by preexisting letters (*‘ayin* and *alef* became indistinguishable, as well as *Ḥet* and *het*), amplified by Ashkenazi demographic dominance circa 1948. The emergent accent felt Sephardic to Ashkenazim, but had a definite Ashkenazi ring to Sephardim, a sort of middle of the road mode of speaking (Berdichevsky 238).

Later waves of Jewish emigration from Europe brought with them different mindsets vis a vis the phonetic makeup of Hebrew speech. While early generations of revivalists expressed an affinity for the Sephardic accent and a rejection of European qualities, later generations of Ashkenazi Jews (due to superiority complexes and political tension with Arab neighbors) came to view Arabized sounds as less sophisticated. Even as Mizrahim began to outnumber their Ashkenazi counterparts due to mass arrivals of Jews from Egypt, Morocco, Yemen, and many other Middle Eastern countries (via a series of secret rescue operations) between 1948-1970, the midway accent was already deeply entrenched and societally enforced (Berdichevsky 238).

With time, Ashkenazi pronunciations slowly replaced certain Sephardic aspects of the midway accent, now considered outdated or too formal—most notably the Yiddish alveolar *reys*h came to replace the tongued-fluttered *resh* of their parents (roughly equivalent to transition from a Spanish ‘r’ to a French ‘r’) (Reshef, 2013a, 412). In this period, Sephardi Hebrew faced a double standard in which it was anonymously judged to be the most correct form of Hebrew—Israeli radio announcers imparting the news or weekly Torah portions were almost

exclusively Mizrahi, as their accent was clearer in its differentiation of letters—yet was disparaged and considered primitive in social settings.

The early stages of Israel were defined by a chaotic melting pot of school, work, and army service, in which Mizrahi youth were pressured into shedding their *‘ayin*, *resh*, and *Het* from their accents in public settings. In these intensive loci of youth socialization, a relatively uniform way of speaking surfaced fairly quickly, concretizing this new ‘quarter-way’ variation of the midway accent (Reshef 2013b, 173).

This is the variation of spoken Hebrew ubiquitous today, reinforced by a diverse generation of young Israelis. This pronunciation is the stable compromise that has come to dominate standard speech, incorporating a Sephardic vowel system and syllabic stress modality, and mostly Ashkenazi pronunciation of consonants (Reshef 2013a, 413). Vestiges of an exclusively Mizrahi accent in everyday speech (or of other ethnic enclaves, like Russian pronunciation) exist on the fringes of society, and typically in older individuals. However, since the 1980s, Mizrahi culture, particularly music and food, has undergone a profound process of de-stigmatization, and due to its almost universal presence and demographic shifts, has become effectively synonymous with Israeli popular culture (Berdichevsky 238).

First Stress Preferences

One really interesting case study of how popular foreign influences impacted the spoken mode of Hebrew, in spite of the enforcements of the revival, is the informal shift of syllabic stresses. As mentioned above, EBY and his colleagues worked to establish Sephardic forms of Hebrew, including the placing of the emphasis on the ultimate syllable of a word (known as *milra*’ in medieval Hebrew grammar) (Schwarzwald 362). This demanded the silencing of

Yiddish inflections, such as the characteristic placing of emphasis on the first syllable of a word (known as *mil'el*, ironically pronounced with a *milra'* stress in Modern Hebrew—compare *SHA-bbes* to *sha-BBAT*). Despite the pressures of the Hebrew authorities, the *mil'el* persisted in informal spaces as a challenge to the ‘proper’ deliverance of words. Titled ‘Yiddish’s Revenge’ by Hebrew academics, this tendency has become a staple of casual spoken Hebrew (Kan). The undeniable preference for *mil'el* in Israeli speech is also (and arguably more influentially) due to contact with Arabic, which features first-syllable stresses; this Hebrew tendency was naturalized via abundant Palestinian loanwords, as well as the speech patterns of Mizrahi communities (Po Medaykim).

Hebrew speakers today frequently alternate between these two forms of stress, using the Sephardic *milra'* form in formal situations, and subverting words with *mil'el* stresses to emanate warmth and intimacy. This predominantly applies to names of people or places—it may be known as the city of *hai-FA* on paper, but is universally called *HAI-fa*; where I may introduce myself as *na-TAN* at a job interview, my close friends will endearingly call me *NA-tan* (Kan). In many cases, flipping to the first-syllable inflection of the word can suggest a secondary definition. For example, *skhu-NA* and *pa-SHUT* mean ‘neighborhood’ and the adjective ‘simple,’ respectively, but in a conversational context *SKHU-na* denotes ‘causing a ruckus’ and *PA-shut* is slang for a ‘simple-minded individual.’ This is the epitome of collective spoken innovation, as these minute shifts contain large amounts of social information, hinting at nuances in social register, intimacy, and slang, via the ‘nounification’ of adjectives (*PA-shut* subtly creates a new informal noun out of the adjective form, known to those inaugurated into the cultural context). These moveable

shades of enunciation, while essential to daily communication, are exclusively a spoken development, as the writing system does not make room for expressing such subtleties.

Galilean Dialect

Another unique case study of spoken innovation in the cultural vacuum of the pre-state period is the short-lived Galilean dialect. In the late 1890s, before spoken norms were fully established, there were many regional variations of Hebrew in existence throughout the country, largely rooted in the decisions of Hebrew teachers and the nationalities of incoming immigrants. Yitzhak Epstein, a teacher in the Upper Galilee region, constructed a distinctive pronunciation of Hebrew based on Sephardic pronunciations and BH patterns (Schwarzwald 2013). While the fledgling Hebrew accent that won out collapsed niqqud diacritical markings and different letters, this accent emphasized certain vowels differently based on their niqqud, realized the mobile shewa as an ‘e,’³⁵ and differentiated between Hebrew letters (e.g. ‘*ayin* and *Het*, but also *Tet* and *quf* as separate from *tav* and *kaf*) (Schwarzwald 2013). The most exceptional feature of the Galilean dialect was the interchange of double phoneme sounds (or the spirantization rule) not applying to *bet-vet*: where other locals would say *yashavti* (‘I sat’), Epstein’s followers said ‘*yashabti*.’ Epstein’s ideas greatly impacted the shape of Hebrew in the Northern Galilee, even influencing the Hebrew of infants that had not yet gone to school, via contact with their older siblings. But, by the start of the 20th century, the midway accent firmly fixed itself as the proper spoken accent, and the Galilean variation was mocked out of existence by the 1920s (Schwarzwald 2013). This example succinctly illustrates the unique mix of planned creativity, regional organic development, and sociocultural pressures that inform and develop spoken

³⁵ Mobile shewa is a niqqud (pronunciation diacritical mark) symbol drawn as two vertical dots below a letter. In modern it is either silent or a slight ‘e’ sound. Galilean Hebrew always voiced it as a full ‘e.’

trends. Interestingly, Epstein's cancellation of the bet-vet rule, considered grammatically incorrect in Israeli Hebrew, has recently returned to popular culture, where youth can be heard saying *shabur* instead of *shavur* ('broken') for emphasis, highlighting how the defying of established norms can be a source of cultural creativity.

Lo'azi Influence and Slang

'Hebrew is Killing Me!'

Today's Israeli Hebrew is stamped by a sizable impact of foreign words, usually revealed in informal settings, and with many of them becoming so quintessentially 'Israeli' that people may not even know they are of foreign origin. Aware of this threat, the revivalists encouraged complete Hebrew assimilation—with teachers compelling their students to demand only Hebrew be spoken in their homes as far back as the 1890s (Shavit 1891)—and abandonment of their rich linguistic legacies.

Moreover, Hebrew was not the easiest language to learn, despite the touted triumphs of immersive ulpan classes. For one, *abjad* alphabets require a thorough understanding of the inner workings of a language to be able to fill in the vowels correctly. Nearly all writing encountered on signs or in books is not adorned with niqqud. This suffices most of the time, but occasionally certain vague words that may have multiple potential variations will feature the symbols for precision. These moments of confusion can slow down the reading comprehension of even native speakers (Berdichevsky 66). New learners of the language often complain of the similar shapes of many letters, especially in the handwritten form (כתב)—see Appendix, figure 6).³⁶ All of the

³⁶ The handwritten font (כתב) has different shapes than the official printed lettering (דפוס) letters. In particular, the letter pairs *daled* and *tzadi*, *yud* and *vav*, *zayin* and *gimmel*, and *quf* and *kaf soffit* can be hard to discern.

above, as well as the lack of uppercase letters to differentiate important words or proper nouns, contributed to the low levels of literacy at the start of the 20th century (Berdichevsky 72).

Moreover, Hebrew is a thoroughly gendered language; while many languages have separate sets of masculine and feminine forms for adjectives (Reshef 2013b, 165), Hebrew also has two sets of *numerals* based on the gender of what you are quantifying—which Israelis today still stumble over in everyday speech. In terms of spoken comprehension, the collapsing of certain vowels and consonants in the modern Israeli accent produces an ambiguous monotony and even more homophones. Whereas English has about fifty phonemes (sounds) in its spoken form, and Russian has forty, Modern Hebrew makes do with about twenty five (Berdichevsky 70). Finally, all of these challenges notwithstanding, early Hebrew speakers were inhibited by the lack of modern vocabulary to convey their needs; there is a telling anecdote of a young girl in the Yishuv saying that ‘flowers don’t have names’ (Berdichevsky 51).

All of the above pushed many of the new immigrants to figure out Hebrew themselves, filling in the gaps staggering their communication with pre-existing foreign phrases—effectively assimilating their culture into the new ‘Israeli’ one, and challenging the singular ‘Hebrew’ culture being constructed simultaneously. Familiarity with foreign languages, furthermore, was a defining characteristic of the the Old Yishuv: many students studied in French schools, conducted business in Arabic or Yiddish, preferred to read the Jerusalem Post newspaper in English, and were surrounded by imported German books (Hebrew books were only about 30% of available local literature) (Shavit 125, 130). Many adults preferred to express themselves in their mother tongue—as with statesman Ḥaim Weizmann complaining in Yiddish that “this *loshn*

koydesh ('holy tongue,' i.e. Hebrew) is killing me!"—and many native-born youth were deeply attached to their home languages, or even knew them even better than Hebrew (Shavit 118, 120).

The pre-state landscape was profoundly multilingual. As Haim Bialik once bemoaned in a lecture, "I longed to listen to Hebrew speech, like of the these speakers here on the podium, but alas, in the Jewish quarters of Neve-Shalom and Neve-Tzedek, I heard Russian jargon, and Spanish jargon mixed with many Arabic words. The sounds of Hebrew rang nowhere, except from the mouths of a few children" (Shavit 121). While the establishment deemed these organic developments as impurities to be expunged, foreign influence (which all active languages encounter) could also be read as Hebrew's return to a natural process of synthesis with the outside world, transitioning from ossified isolation to a process of vibrant engagement and receptivity (Halperin 234). This sheds lights on the causes of the mass assimilation of *lo'azi* words, phrases, and sounds into Israeli culture.

European Loans and Their Adaptations

Immigration from a wide mix of European backgrounds, and centuries long internalized attraction to European culture, helped solidify a diverse range of words within Hebrew daily speech (Halperin 230). Lots of SAU terms and expressions (more easily accepted into 'proper' Hebrew than those from non-Western sources) have become indispensable unofficial terms for describing the world, including *protektiya* ('protections,' in the sense of cronyism or having connections), *kombina* ('combination,' in the sense of a under-the-table deal), or *interessim* ('interests,' as in ulterior motives) (Schwarzwald 361). Below I explore some of the impacts of different European languages in particular.

German:

19th century Palestine was speckled with half a dozen Templar³⁷ agricultural colonies, who introduced a lot of modern technology and construction methods to local Jews and Arabs. The *Tekhnion*, the engineering college in Haifa, was supposed to be run in German, until massive protests by revivalists successively changed the language of instruction Hebrew (Glinert 197). This, along with the large impact of German-Jewish immigration and philanthropy towards the Zionist project, imprinted numerous German words onto modern Hebrew terminology. Hebrew has directly translated many technical terms, such as *gan yeladim* ('kindergarten,' literally 'children's garden'), the months of the Gregorian calendar, and naturalized various words such as *gummi* (rubber), *beton* (concrete), and *otto* (car, from 'auto') (Berdichevsky 45). Informally, words like *pyjama* and *schwung* (e.g. 'to be in the *schwung*, or swing, of something') have become ubiquitous (Schwarzwald 359).

English:

The British Mandate of Palestine (1920-48) set the stage for countless English words of science and technology to transpire (often inaccurately) into spoken Hebrew. This, not to mention the massive impact of American Jews, and Israel's longtime relationship with and admiration for the USA, has led to large amounts of naturalized English words and expressions. Technical terms like, 'exhaust,' 'podium,' 'plus,' 'clutch,' and 'pedal,' have native Hebrew alternatives that are hardly used, if known at all. English today has replaced Arabic and Yiddish and the primary source of modern slang, imbuing English words with new meanings, such as with *down* (used in the sense of a slump, "I'm in a down"), *after* (an after party), *fix* (solid or

³⁷ The German Templars were a Protestant sect formed in Southern Germany in the 1800s. Their leader encouraged them to move to Palestine to hasten the second coming of Christ, and their colonies introduced a lot of modern technology and infrastructure.

down pat, as in “I have it fix”), and *clutch* (found in the expression *hetzi-clutch* as in ‘half-clutch,’ from manual gear driving, meaning incomplete or half-assed) (Ben Israel 101).

Russian:

Russian has also loaned many indispensable words and phrases into conversational Hebrew, such as *juk*, *balagan*, *samatokha*, *ḥaltura* (‘cockroach,’ ‘mess,’ ‘tumult’ (originally from Persian), and ‘moonlighting’) (Schwarzwald 359; Ben Israel 105). A Hebrew profanity for ‘get lost’ is *lekh kibinimat* (literally ‘go fucked mother’), in which *kibinimat* not only distorts the original Russian *yebyona mat* in the Hebraization process, but also creatively incorporates into Hebrew phraseology and transforms it into a metaphorical location.

Yiddish:

Yiddish has contributed unquantifiably to Israeli Hebrew. Endearing suffixes that can be tacked on various nouns, are accounted for in writing as early as the 1930s (Reshef 2013b, 179). These include *-lakh*, *-er*, *-onet*, and *-nik* (as used in examples: *kinderlakh*, comparable to the *-os* in *kiddos*; *biziner*, comparable to the possessive *-aire* in *millionaire*; *yaldonet*, used to indicate smallness, sort of like the Spanish *-ito*; and as in *jobnik*, or someone with a insignificant desk job, for playful attribution) are all widely present in modern speech³⁸ (Schwarzwald 359, Berdichevsky 47). Yiddish has contributed essential informal words such as *lefargen* (to spoil/treat well), the notoriously untranslatable *davka* (precisely/in spite),³⁹ *takhles*⁴⁰ (‘to be frank’ or ‘bottom line’), and expressions like *ma pitom* (literally ‘what suddenly,’ meaning ‘of course not’) (Ben Israel 101; Berdichevsky 177). The Israeli word for penis, *zayin*, is a Yiddish

³⁸ Yiddish has also introduced more the formally accepted *-an* and *ba'al* (a suffix for characterization, sort of like the *-er* in *exchanger*; *ba'al* means owner, and is used in the sense of *ba'al 'esek*, or owner of a businessman).

³⁹ From the Hebrew root *D-W-K* for precision, as in *diyuk*.

⁴⁰ From the Hebrew word *takhlit* or plan/objective. Yiddish pronounces *tav* as an *s*, so *takhlit* would be *takhlis*.

innovation: Jewish students in Europe would call it a *zanav*—the Hebrew word for tail, mirroring Yiddish slang of *schvantz*—but in order to be able to say it in front of their teachers, abbreviated it to its first letter, *zayin* (Ben Israel 44).

Furthermore, Yiddish shifts in connotations of Biblical words were returned to Hebrew speech, like *metziah* (shifting from ‘something found’ to ‘a bargain/steal’) and *mazal* (from ‘constellation’ to the modern concept of ‘luck’) (Horowitz 324). Yiddish is said to be responsible for supposedly around 2,000 slang terms (Berdichevsky 177, 450). (One counter to the overwhelming victory of Hebrew over Yiddish is the various Orthodox Haredi enclaves, such as Mea She’arim and Bnei Brak, in which *Leshon ha-koydesh* (‘the holy tongue,’ as in BH, but with an Ashkenazi accent) is reserved for prayers, and Israeli Hebrew is used to communicate with outsiders out of necessity) (Bartal 52).

Middle Eastern Influences

Various Middle Eastern cultures have impacted Hebrew throughout its history, from the external hand of governing forces, to commercial relations, to the more recent Judeo-cultures of Sephardi and Mizrahi Jewry in Israel.

Persian:

Many Persian words originally entered Hebrew through the First Temple period, and many via Greek or Latin.⁴¹ Persian Jews emigrating to Israel in the 20th century also introduced phrases that morphed into modern day slang; a key example is the Hebrew term *hanTarish*, used to describe someone untrustworthy, or who prefers words over actions. This item of slang is constructed from the Persian words *handa* and *rish*, which together mean ‘beard laugh.’

⁴¹ This includes words such as *ishpooz*, *gizbar*, *dukhan*, *bustan*, and *shahmat* (‘hospitalization,’ ‘treasury,’ ‘stand/booth,’ ‘orchard,’ and ‘chess’ (literally ‘king is dead’) (Berdichevsky 45)

Presumably, the message was that a man laughing from behind a beard was not to be trusted or taken seriously. Thus, not only did the Hebrew slang innovators combine and alter the sounds of Persian vocabulary, but also cleverly crafted a new meaning to fit their context.

Turkish:

Ample Turkish vocabulary entered Israeli Hebrew during the 400 years of Ottoman rule in Palestine (in particular, technical or administrative terms), as well as through immigration of Turkish Jews in the 20th century. The former contributed more terms overall, as Turkish Jews mainly spoke Ladino in the home. Formal terms that Hebrew loaned directly include *dunam*, *tabu*, and *kiosk* ('acres,' 'property deed,' 'kiosk'), as well as more cultural terms, like *shesh-besh*, *mangal*, *burekas*, (in order: 'backgammon' (literally 6-5), 'barbecue,' and a type of savory phyllo pastry) (Berdichevsky 45). Another category is crude words like *huzuk*, *tembel*, *harman*, and *mechukmak* ('a harsh beating,' 'a fool/moron,' 'someone horny,' and 'shriveled') (Ben Israel 99). Many Turkish words entered Hebrew use via Arabic (the local population's dialect was heavily influenced by Turkish as well), as seen in words like *dugri*, or to be direct and blunt, a nuanced and socioculturally important term (explored in detail on page 121).

Ladino:

Unlike Turkish, Ladino only entered Hebrew through Sephardic immigration, rather than from higher official sources, and so is almost exclusively seen as informal vocabulary. *Sponja* and *pustema*, for example, denote 'mopping' (related to 'sponge'), and an 'empty-headed woman' (Schwarzwald 359).

French:

While a European language, French usually entered Hebrew through North African Jewish immigrants (whose country of origin was colonized by the French, or had attended an Alliance Israélite French school). Thus, due to socio-economic reasons, French was deemed less refined in stature than other European languages. Some loans were more technical, like *baggage* (trunk) or *odeklon* (a compression of ‘eau de cologne’), while others were more profane, like *débile* (moron/airhead) (Schwarzwald 359; Hefner 2019b).

Arabic:

Arabic has had the largest impact on modern Israeli Hebrew, by far. Besides the literary Arabic that EBY co-opted, dozens of words, phrases, and expressions were integrated into daily Hebrew life via contact with locals. This latter category eased in content from more universal Arabic, as well as from the local Palestinian dialect. The most present influence is in expressive words like *walla*, *yalla*, *ya’ani*, and *ya* (roughly ‘oh really’; ‘come on,’; ‘that is/in other words’; and the sound made before addressing someone directly, all fairly universal in Arab culture).

There is also an extensive set of slang terms directly loaned from Arabic that Israelis use daily, such as *sababa*⁴² (a dialect term for ‘great’), *aSli* (‘authentic’), *majnun* (‘crazy’), *da’awin* (putting on a front to impress), *kef* (‘fun’), *fashla* (‘a mess up’), *masTul* (‘drunk/intoxicated’), and sayings like *shufuni ya nas* (‘look at me people,’ i.e. an ‘attention-seeker’), *ahlan wa-sahlan* (a greeting phrase), *kulu kalb biji yomo* (‘every dog has his day’), and *yom ‘asl yom baSl* (‘honey day onion day,’ i.e. ‘there are good days and bad days’) (Hefner 2019a). Hebrew has also appropriated large quantities of Arabic words or sayings and then warped their definitions, such as *sahi* (‘sane/healthy’ in Arabic, but ‘sober’ in Hebrew), *dir balak* (‘be careful’ transitioning

⁴² *Sababa* (صباية) is Palestinian slang derived from the Arabic literary word for ‘romantic longing,’ repurposed for casual affirmation. Due to being universally adopted by Israelis, it has long been phased out of Palestinian use altogether (LangFocus).

from cautionary advice into a threat or warning), *'alek* (from Palestinian *oolek*, or 'as you say,' which conveys a lack of belief or trust—and oddly developed an *'ayin* for emphasis in Hebrew), *aḥla* ('the most pleasant/sweetest' becoming 'cool/great'), *abu arba* ('father of four' in Arabic, and 'four-eyes' in Hebrew), and *lehitharfen* (from Arabic's noun *ḥarfān* (حَرْفَان), portraying a 'chattering senile man,' turned into a verb for 'going crazy') (Hefner 2019a). Some of these are so assimilated into Hebrew (and stray from their original meaning and pronunciation so greatly) that most native speakers are not aware of their foreign origin.

The most noticeable impact of Arabic on Modern Hebrew is the extensive catalog of Arabic curse words in the Israeli lexicon, often imitated unchanged. Arabic obscenities outnumber Hebrew ones significantly, and—I theorize—this can be attributed to the rich arsenal of slurs and slanders in the Arabic language (which can be mixed and matched for a greater punch), as well as Jewish hesitation to curse in their sacred tongue, at least in the more traditional early days, which prevented development of more indigenous vulgarities over time. Israelis will frequently use fixed phrases like *kus emek* ('mothers pussy'), *beḥiyat rabak* ('for the life of your lord,' equating to 'for god's sake'), *in'al abuk* (an metathesis of the Arabic *il'an abuk*, or 'cursed be your father'—roughly equivalent to 'holy shit' in Israeli use), or *aḥu sharmuTa* (which in Arabic is the incendiary accusation 'brother of a prostitute,' but in Hebrew is often used as modifying exaggeration, similar to 'as hell' in English) (Ben Israel 104). Crude Arabic words of the sort can be combined with Hebrew ones to create insults with new function, such as *pe jora* (*pe* is Hebrew for 'mouth,' *jora* is Arabic for 'septic tank'; together they indicate a 'sewer mouth').

Besides local Arabic influences, lots of Arabisms were introduced via Mizrahi Jewish immigration, and thus are of Judeo-Arabic or North African dialect, in particular: *BalaTa* ('tile'), *freha* ('bimbo,' related to Hebrews word for 'baby chick,' *efrohit*), *ahuya* (the Moroccan way to say 'my brother,' with the North African 'a' for addressing individuals merged into the Hebrew word), *kus omok* (the Maghrebi pronunciation of *kus emek*) and *legajder* (from the Moroccan-Amazigh word for 'wailing at a funeral,' and meaning 'to complain' in Hebrew), to name a few (Schwarzwald 360; LangFocus).

Slang in Identity

Most of these words and phrases, while now partially in dictionaries (with Hebrew forced to expand in order to naturalize foreign sounds, names, syntaxes, and even letters), were assimilated bottom-up through popular use. The revivalists were threatened by the diverse forces threatening the purity they so sought, yet the organic developments ended up being the most influential on Israeli identity. As more slang and informal linguistic restructuring proliferated and became a source of pride for Israelis, the disconnect with the rigid proper Hebrew of the authorities grew. This 'second register' of Hebrew, while from above viewed as uneducated or uninformed, was, in fact, a mix of cultural preservation and linguistic imagination. Israeli folk specialist Danny Ben Israel contends that slang flourishes in the gaps of the proper dialect, for semantic and emotional purposes (or, in other words, for explaining things and self-expression); it is not just about new words, but about how they are used (Ben Israel 1). Thus, rather than a corrupt form of language, in defying the social conventions of the authorities, the population was unconsciously crafting a distinctness that would go on to shape Israeli personalities, attitudes, and diction—in other words, culture (Bolzky 269).

So, while the Hebraist revivalists struggled to artificially instate a new Hebrew culture, the heterogeneous and fragmented population collectively and arbitrarily gathered a pile of concretized *lo'azi* phrases, manipulated them, and organically formed an Israeli culture upon them. As we saw with the imaginative new meanings Hebrew speakers derived, the turning of nouns into verbs, the crafting of vivid metaphors, and the modernizing of old meanings for a new context, Israeli Hebrew was as focused on innovation, creativity, and modernization as the revivalists were (Bolzky 269). These colloquialisms were not a unified effort, nor were they a cohesive intentional statement. They were the roots that couldn't be deracinated in a wild garden that was growing much too fast. These diaspora influences cropped up in different parts of the nascent country, due to different cultural enclaves—or neighborhoods in which various Jewish diaspora cultures formed a new synthesized enclave. The Hebrew that developed in different areas throughout the Yishuv, and then the State of Israel, was also largely due to the specific educational infrastructure of the area. The next section will explore the role of Hebrew teachers in crafting Modern Hebrew on the job.

Hebrew Schools as Laboratories

In the early days of the Yishuv, with the rising credibility of spoken Hebrew, Hebrew schools began to pop up throughout the region. These teachers were not well educated in Hebrew (fluency did not fully exist yet, as the dialect itself was still being formed), and therein struggled to teach secular subjects, like science or mathematics, without all the necessary terms. This, along with the intensive facilitation of inquisitive youth developing Hebrew as a first language, meant that every school was a unique laboratory for Hebrew innovation.

Timeline

In 1889, the first all Hebrew elementary school opened in Palestine; the Sephardic community was, by and large, exuberant, while traditionalist Ashkenazi circles were generally opposed to its existence (Glinert 190). Its teachers, members of the First 'Aliyah, had been taught Hebrew in a *heder* (or *kutab* for the minority of Yemenite teachers) (see chapter 2), receiving a traditional religious education along with some modern subjects (Tadmor-Shimony 125). This small group—only around 50 teachers by the turn of the century, mostly male—was untrained in pedagogy, yet hoped to mold a new generation with an identity divergent from that of their parents (Tadmor-Shimony 125). They relied on the 'Hebrew in Hebrew' immersive approach to integrate new students as quickly as possible, reflecting the indirect Hebrew acquisition of *heder* classrooms.

A Teacher's Union was formed in 1903, and the Second 'Aliyah ushered in a massive restructuring of the educational system. This subsequent generation, responsible for the kibbutzim, were more familiar with marxist ideology and worked to secularize Jewish religious symbols in their lessons. Around 25% of teachers were now women, with the Union granting them equal rights in the field (Tadmor-Shimony 126). This wave of educators also lacked pedagogical training prior to entering the classroom, yet often received a strong general education before 'aliya—including commendable Central European educational institutions (Tadmor-Shimony 126). This cohort founded the first comprehensive Hebrew high schools, as well as Hebrew Teaching Seminaries to train future Hebrew facilitators (Tadmor-Shimony 127).

In 1904, the Gedera Program tried a common curriculum for grades 1-8, but the lack of executive oversight mostly reduced education to the capabilities of the teacher; by 1908, the Union unified the educational system, pushing an agenda of patriotism and common identity

(Tadmor-Shimony 127). In 1909, the first standardized examination program was launched, and in 1913, 'the Battle of the Languages' saw Hebrew protesters secure Hebrew as the official language of instruction at the Tekhnion (Tadmor-Shimony 128).

The third era of Hebrew education in Palestine under the British Mandate (1920-48), saw rapid expansion and an inability to manage it effectively. Education branched out into three state-sanctioned ideological tracks: a general nationalist curriculum, religious Zionist Mizrahi, and the schools of the Socialist Labor movement (Tadmor-Shimony 129). In this pre-state era, students usually grew up on *moshavot* (agricultural communal settlements), urban *gymnasium* schools, or religious communities. This 'generation of the land' could speak Hebrew fluently, and curse in Yiddish and Arabic (Tadmor-Shimony 128).

The final generation solidifying and creating Hebrew was 1948-68, with the formation of the new state of Israel. Mass immigration of Jews meant that the education system had to absorb enormous amounts of youth from diverse origins and with varying educational backgrounds (Tadmor-Shimony 132). Israel's population skyrocketed from 650,000 to 1 million in only its first 5 years, so the desperate need for new teachers caused a general decline in qualifications and age; lots of recent high-school graduates were drafted, with a few receiving a couple months of crash courses (rather than completing the required Hebrew seminaries) before being sent to new settlements in the periphery (Tadmor-Shimony 132). For the first time since the 1920s, many teachers entered the profession with subpar Hebrew, having bypassed official Hebrew education in Palestine.

By this time many of the teachers were native-born themselves (the first time Hebrew was being taught by native speakers), and a religious track, *Agudat Israel*, was organized to bring

Orthodox Jews into the mainstream educational system (Tadmor-Shimony 132). By 1913, about 33% of all teachers were from Muslim countries and only about 13% of teachers were male (Tadmor-Shimony 137). *Ma'abarot*, or shantytowns, were established throughout the peripheries to house the mass influx of Jews (Mizrahis were generally bound to their abhorrent conditions, while Ashkenazis experienced considerably more social mobility at the time). Children of these towns were either taught by a visiting, most likely inexperienced, teacher in makeshift classrooms, or were sent to the local Ashkenazi Kibbutzim to be educated (and Westernized) alongside them (Tadmor-Shimony 194). Other extra-curricular, yet highly formative sites of Hebrew acquisition and cultural inauguration were youth movement activities and the Israeli Army (IDF). Both of these centers of socialization harnessed propaganda, community building, and cultural events to unify a variegated and disjunct population, and tended to develop strong insider behaviors and slang (Glinert 213). All of this history, with its socio-political nuances included, is to expose the rapid changes, lack of oversight, multicultural influences, and conflicting ideologies, that created so much room for microcosmic Hebrew innovation in every school.

Linguistics in the Classroom

Schooling, especially in the earlier days, depended heavily on local initiative, as centralized organization and cohesion of curriculum came much later. Teachers were mostly young, inexperienced, and often unaccustomed to speaking Hebrew so dependably (let alone teaching it) (Reshef 2013a, 411). Lack of guidance, textbooks, and relevant terminology for most subjects resulted in inconsistent Hebrew education throughout the Yishuv. The teachers of the first wave had to invent new scientific terms daily to accomplish their lesson goals. These terms

would spread to the local population via ‘children-to-adult direction language acquisition,’ and some of them would eventually end up in newspapers and textbooks (Tadmor-Shimony 126). These teachers would attempt to translate European textbooks for their lessons, doing complex linguistic work without any training or a profound understanding of Hebrew (Shohamy 216). In their essence, Hebrew classrooms of the era were ‘linguistic laboratories,’ wherein new words were tested on kids, discovering real-time which terms would survive the spoken ‘linguistic efficiency’ of the new generation, and go on to shape the community (Tadmor-Shimony 126).

In the pre-state period, Hebrew was, in effect, ‘a mother tongue without mothers,’ and a sort of wild west of different educational methods and decisions (Glinert 193). The teachers themselves had little guidance or qualifications, and so linguistic decisions (many of which could have been considered wrong by the authorities) varied greatly from town to town, with great disparities between the Hebrew of the underfunded peripheries and the wealthier urban schools (Tadmor-Shimony 194). The minimal Hebrew language infrastructure in place was focused on teaching out-of-date biblical inflections, and so proved often unrelated to the spoken trends forming at the time.

An account from the 1900s poetically describes every school as a ‘word-minting factory,’ with many of the seemingly arbitrary conventions established at the time going on to define the legacy of Israeli Hebrew (Glinert 193). This highly fragmented process of improvisation and haphazard decision making caused concern in the establishment, who desired to make Hebrew spelling, vocabulary, and grammar standardized and consistent throughout the country. However, the nuances of correct Hebrew were often disregarded due to the large presence of political issues, such as looming war, lack of funding, union concerns, understaffing,

and more. At the 1903 Zikhron Ya'akov Teacher's Union Convention, many Hebrew language issues and discrepancies were brought to the attention of the council by struggling teachers; these cases were directed to Hebrew scholars in Jerusalem but never addressed, and thus the finer points of Hebrew spelling, syntax, and grammar were systematically left open to interpretation (Glinert 193).

The youth being taught Hebrew at this time were largely responsible for developing it in its spoken form. In socializing with one another and playing games in the schoolyard, they were constantly pushing the boundaries of Hebrew's practical application. The new words, phrases, and concepts they developed, organically synthesizing foreign influences from home with the Hebrew of their classrooms (in incongruous ways throughout the nation), set the precedent for spoken traditions that still resonate today. The Hebrew they were taught by their immigrant teachers was formal and prestigious, which—fueled by the attitudes of the New Hebrew—created an association of bombastic flowery Hebrew with foreignness and adulthood (Glinert 193). The youth developed *dugri* Hebrew as a response.

Embodying Sabra and Talking Dugri

The older oratorical Hebrew (*'ivrit safrutit*) being taught in schools, and being espoused by new immigrants, became quite divorced from the natural developments of native-born Israelis. Ironically, 'speaking like a new immigrant' did not connote broken Hebrew, but rather an exceedingly educated and stilted register (Glinert 223). The first generation of native-born Hebrew speakers were aware of the exciting linguistic experiment taking place, with their parents and the diaspora keenly monitoring their Hebrew successes (Glinert 217). To distinguish

themselves from the proper Hebrew they were expected to know, and the old-fashioned modes of expression of their parents, a new 'Israeli' way of talking developed.

The authorities sought to generate a new personality type (see chapter 3) to negate the bookish and submissive stereotypes of the Jewish diaspora (*shlilat ha-gola*). The New Hebrew figure was tough and hardworking, and spoke curtly and without embellishment. This artificial ethos is largely responsible for the trends in attitudes shaping the native-born generation. What more profoundly marks the new generation, however, and what EBY's purist Hebrew intentions did not account for, was the forming of a new identity inextricable from the Palestinian context; the explicit difference between Hebrew and Israeli culture. Thus, local youth culture was a union of imposed nationalist sentiments, and collective youth reimaginations of spoken Hebrew and identity.

The logical extension of youth rejecting diaspora values and European identity was searching for a new one in their surroundings. Israelis sought to be part of the local landscape and looked to Arabs as a behavioral model (Katriel 10). Besides some influence of their home cultures, these youth set to fill the cultural vacuum that the new Yishuv Hebrew ethos instated with localisms (Katriel 18). The new personality type formed was thus heavily influenced by the established local language and custom; a self-assertion of distance from their parents by Ashkenazi youth, in particular, that crystallized in 1930-40s (Katriel 1).

Native-born Jews came to be called *sabras*, after the local fruit that buds off of cacti. Not only was this plant indigenous to the region, implying the connection of these Jews to the land, but was also an acute metaphor for their espoused personalities: with a thorny exterior, yet sweet

and tender on the inside (Katriel 19). Upon this foundation, sabras began to craft new Israeli ways of talking and being.

The word *dugri* was assimilated into Hebrew through contact with local Arabic colloquial speech, which in turn borrowed it from the Turkish *dorgu* in the Ottoman period (Katriel 10). In Arabic, its literal meaning is straight, as in ‘going dugri down a road,’ but has also come to mean being truthful or impartial, as in ‘speaking the dugri’ or to ‘be dugri’ in situations of arbitration. In Hebrew, by contrast, it alludes to a stylistic practice of being ‘true to oneself’ (Katriel 10).

The name for this unprecedented Jewish way of acting was encapsulated in the word *dugri*. Not only was it one of the countless Arabisms appropriated into spoken Hebrew as part of this movement, but also came to define the essence of sabra behavior. ‘Talking dugri,’ meant skipping the empty pleasantries and communicating plainly—or ‘straight’ as the name suggests (Glinert 217). Dugri speech included the adoption (and eventual naturalization) of copious Arabic emotives (see page 21), like *zift* (rotten) and *mabsuT* (glad); these were more than just loanwords, they were ways of broadcasting that you were one of the natives, as it were (Berdichevsky 217). These Palestinian phrases, alongside traces of Yiddish, Ladino, English and Russian, were expressed in a confident, blunt vernacular Hebrew.

Tamar Katriel boils the essence of the new dugri persona into sincerity, assertiveness, naturalness, spirit of community, and anti-style (Katriel 10). In being blatantly honest, having outdoor survival skills, feeling a sense of solidarity with fellow sabra, and rejecting religious and ornate Hebrew, dugri came to symbolize a novel way of existing in Palestine. In schools, army units, and youth movement meetings, youth would performatively display their nativeness by partaking in the self-conscious activity that was Hebrew revival (Berdichevsky 217). While not

all the native-born Jews were ready to reject their cultural legacies, or appreciated the caustic nature of dugri interaction, the pressure to conform to the new culture, Hebraize your name and identity, and reject the past was great indeed; as was commonly said at the time “if you can’t speak like us, then shut up” (Katriel 20).

In these ways, the native-born generations of Israel did highly impactful linguistic work, naturalizing foreignisms, popularizing slang, copying local customs, entrenching new manners of speech, and ultimately, defining what Israeli culture is today. The legacy of dugri today is as an ubiquitous expression of transparency and candor—as in “listen, I’m gonna tell you dugri...”, exhibiting that these qualities are still valued in and critical to Israeli communication. In Israeli hip hop today, the spirit of dugri is an expression of authenticity, with Israeli artists utilizing a heavily slang-based vocabulary (rampant with Arabic loanwords) and a crude attitude.

In Closing

This chapter explored all the conflicting different forces that collectively shaped Israeli Hebrew, as opposed to Modern Hebrew. This newest cultural mode is actually a combination of the two prior forms, Jewish and Hebrew, but in a modernized and territory-specific context, and with new purpose: a thorough integration of all the different varieties of diaspora culture, never before attempted on such a scale, for the sake of national unity.

While the authorities strove for artificial cultural creation and linguistic standardization, organic movements throughout the country worked off of or against these top-down impositions. This innovation was functional and existential in purpose, trying to fill gaps in communication and define new identities. The enigmatic collective of efforts that is ‘the population’ crafted new

words on the job, challenged stress syllables and grammar rules, tested out new coinages and conventions, and formulated slang and insider ways of existing to fill the cultural void. All of the above, despite its clashes and inconsistencies, became crystallized as Israeli Hebrew (much to the chagrin of the early establishment, who did not allow spoken Hebrew into written spaces until the 1980s) and represents the new ‘correct’ way to communicate. This was the final step in the intricate chain of Hebrew innovations of the revival project—passing through Biblical, Mishnaic, Talmudic, Medieval, Maskilic, Modern, and Israeli incarnations.

The unplanned work of the Israeli population was so monumental that there now exists a disparity between the Biblical and Modern Hebrew that Jews around the world understand, and Israeli Hebrew; while Jewish students of the Bible in the global diaspora can read, and sometimes even converse in Hebrew, they usually completely incapacitated upon visiting the country where it is natively spoken. This divide is mostly a result of the heavily nuanced and intricate slang that pervades most conversations, and effectively marks the cultural insider from the outsider. Therefore, in a roundabout way, being *local* is measured by familiarity with the recent history of *foreign* elements and popular innovations that differentiate Israeli Hebrew from its past.

Conclusion

I have attempted to trace the long and dynamic history of Hebrew up until the modern revival, in order to place it within the chronology of Hebrew revisions and preservations that kept it afloat. This calls into question the Zionist perception of a miraculous language revival out of nothing, instead framing their linguistic efforts as part of a longer heritage. I have also attempted to engage with all the conflicting sources of innovation that fostered Israeli Hebrew as we know it today, which includes looking past the coinages and policies of the Yishuv authority and appreciating the unplanned contributions of a diverse public. In closing, I will place my research in its academic context by addressing disputed questions about Modern Israeli Hebrew.

Is Modern Hebrew Still A Semitic Language?

I have frequently mentioned throughout this project the heavy influence of modern European languages on Modern Hebrew. Hence, it is reasonable to ask if Hebrew can still be characterized as Semitic—a question highly debated among scholars today. In chapters two, three and four, we encountered various Europeanisms that Modern Hebrew assimilated. These included top-down grammatical trends (*SVO* word order and multi-clause sentences), calques (*gan yeladim* from the German ‘kindergarten’), and vocabulary (words like *akademia* and *sotzializm*); as well as informal borrowings, such as grammatical shifts (*megared li*, the rise of *et*) distorted vocabulary (*ambrex*, *pancher*), and new slang (*after*, *down*). Clearly, the modernization process, and the nationalist project itself, was heavily modeled after European movements and cultures active at the time.

Based on my research, I maintain that while Hebrew generously assimilated European concepts and phraseology—similarly to the modernization process Modern Standard Arabic was undergoing around the same time—it remains firmly in the Semitic category. Ancient Hebrew traditions of spelling, morphology, vocabulary, diacritics, and grammar are still present in Hebrew today (Blau 141). These qualities of Hebrew, including the triconsonantal root system and declension, are staples of Semitic languages. Furthermore, the reinvigorated connection with ancient Biblical writings that the revivalists advanced made it so that the average contemporary speaker can understand the Bible fairly well—a convincing case for consistency with linguistic tradition (Berdichevsky 66). Overall, Hebrew is still much more related to Arabic (which mirrors many of the SAU assimilations that Hebrew has internalized) than any one SAU language.

Moreover, chapter 1 expands on how the tumultuous history of Hebrew has made it so that integration of foreignisms is as old as the language itself, and therein an inherent part of its fabric. By this logic, SAU influence is just the latest addition to the linguistic impacts on Hebrew throughout its history, preceded by Akkadian, Aramaic, Persian, Greek, Latin, and Arabic, to name but a few. Engaging with current European elements in the 19th and 20th centuries is an expected result of being a lively and developing language in a country with open borders and diverse residents. Most non-Western languages have borrowed extensively from European languages in the last two centuries, or have even fused with them in a hybrid creole, but can still maintain a distinct identity.

Recapitulation

This project has traced the evolution of the Hebrew language from its very genesis as a distinct dialect in the Levantine circa 2000 BC, to the casual chinwags of Israelis in Tel Aviv cafes today. This expansive history has framed Hebrew as a continuous and ever-changing force, revamping and redefining itself in relation to its surroundings. Different imperial forces triggered periods of linguistic assimilation and cultural crisis, and Hebrew has stayed a multicultural blend since. While Hebrew lost its vernacular status around the date of the Roman expulsions from Jerusalem and the surrounding area, I recounted how Hebraists from around the world worked to reconfigure and reinvent Hebrew back into relevance constantly—whether by creating a more palatable Mishnaic idiom, utilizing Hebrew as a global mercantile tool, or positing Hebrew as the official language of science in Europe.

I argued that the latest, and most thoroughly successful, procedure of Hebrew adjustment was the one that fit into nationalist tendencies and political context of the 19th century. Maskilim, aspiring to connect European Jews through a ‘republic of letters,’ broadened Hebrew style, vocabulary, and function within the world of modern literary forms. This vision was co-opted by a Zionist mission looking towards Palestine, which was, in turn, overtaken by the proponents of a spoken revival.

After delineating the quilted amalgamation of socioeconomically disparate Jewish subcommunities in Ottoman society, I outlined the ways in which heterogeneous Jews studying in Hebrew language societies in Europe and Palestine helped create a dedicated populace actively reviving Hebrew by virtue of their day to day interactions. Subsequently, in the nascent state of Israel, I explored the linguistic modernization processes EBY and his revivalist colleagues implemented to amend Hebrew’s functionality. These changes to syntax, vocabulary, and

grammar were systematically enforced by government policies, censorship, cultural pressures, and Hebrew patrollers. The establishment further worked to negate the submissive traits of diaspora Jewry with the fabrication of a New Hebrew ethos.

At the same time, however—as the Zionist narrative fails to mention—the aggregate Jewish population was doing equally, if not more impactful, linguistic work. This included testing out new coinages for linguistic efficiency, performatively creating new dugri personas in the cultural vacuum, innovating in their careers, translating textbooks on-the-job in classrooms, and naturalizing essential expressive terms and elements of their home cultures. At times in concordance, and other times at odds, the dialogical combination of the meticulous top-down revivalist government and the myriad clashing forces that constituted a young Israeli population is what is now known as Modern Israeli Hebrew. This modernization and re-vernacularization process happened at an extremely rapid pace, with many haphazard spoken conventions concretizing seemingly arbitrarily, yet coming to constitute the new ‘correct.’ Thus, the modern revival process can be more accurately framed as an interwoven collaboration of organic factors and policy.

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Appendix: Figures

⚡	⚡	⚡	⚡	⚡	⚡	⚡	
א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז	ח
⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
ט	י	כ	ל	מ	נ	ס	ע
	פ	צ	ק	ר	ש	ת	

vet	becomes	bet
⚡	↔	ב
khaf	becomes	kaf
כ	↔	כּ
fey	becomes	pey
פ	↔	פּ



16	20	30	20	6	16
⚡	••	•••	••	—	⚡
CHOLAM	SH'VA	SEGOL	TZEIREH	PATACH	KAMATZ
16	30	10			
⚡	•••	•			
MILUPIM	SHURUK	CHIRIK			



- Fig. 1** (top left): Paleo-Hebrew with modern Aramaic-script Hebrew below for comparison (read left to right).
- Fig. 2** (top right): A few of Hebrew's double phonemes, differentiated with niqqud. The letter can either make a 'b' or 'v' sound, as in the first example of bet and vet.
- Fig. 3** (mid left): The Ketubah, or Jewish wedding contract, alternates between Hebrew and Aramaic words within each sentence.
- Fig. 4** (mid right): These different nikud can be put above or below a consonant to add an a, e, i, or u vowel sound to it.
- Fig. 5** (penultimate): traditional Rashi Script, with the 'holy square font' below it for comparison (read right to left).
- Fig. 6** (bottom): The top is dfus (the traditional printed square font), below is ktav (the handwritten variation).