

The Emergence of Spoken Israeli Hebrew

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Hebrew was spoken in Palestine during biblical and Mishnaic times. At the beginning of the twentieth century Hebrew was reintroduced into speech, and has become a full-fledged vernacular and the national language of the Jews in Israel. As an official language of Israel, and as the language of the majority, Hebrew is used also by minorities in the State of Israel as their second language. The shift in status of Hebrew to a full-fledged native language is most commonly referred to as the "revival" of Hebrew.

Pre-twentieth century Hebrew, however, while not used as an everyday all-purpose vernacular, must not be regarded a dead language. "Its most unusual feature was not that it was 'dead' (a much abused term) and had to be 'artificially revived', but that it was no one's mother tongue, and that there were no speakers of any dialects closely related to it" (Blanc 1968: 237). Although there were no native speakers of Hebrew during the many centuries of Jewish existence in the Diaspora, Hebrew was used as the language of liturgy and religious studies. It also served for writing secular literature, notably during the Middle Ages and the nineteenth century.

Furthermore, Hebrew was used as the Jewish lingua franca, both in the Diaspora and in Palestine. *Eretz Israel*, "The Land of Israel," always attracted Jews. Jews from all over the world visited Palestine, sometimes settling there, especially since the late eighteenth century (Eliav 1978: 75-109, 1981: x-xi).¹ Thus, Jews of various communities and from different linguistic backgrounds came into contact in Palestine, necessitating a common language. This lingua franca could only be Hebrew, the common language shared by Jews throughout the world. The Hebrew lingua franca of nineteenth century Palestine was used for trade and other purposes (Roth 1934; Ish-Shalom 1944; Chomsky 1950; Parfitt 1972, 1984; Rabin 1975, 1979).

Driven by the understanding that the change in status of Hebrew was not a revival per se, other terms were suggested for the process of nativization and vernacularization of Hebrew. "(Re)vernacularization" would probably be the best term for this sociolinguistic change (cf. Spolsky 1995: 199, although Spolsky himself adopts the term "revitalization"). For this discussion, however, focusing on the linguistic aspects of the formation of the spoken medium, the term "emergence" is preferable; it suggests the formation of a new linguistic entity.

The spread of the nationalistic movements in Europe in the nineteenth-century spurred the idea of the national revival of the Jewish people in Palestine. There was a call for the revival of the Hebrew language as a prerequisite for this Jewish national revival. Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, later known as "the father of the Hebrew language revival", vigorously raised this call. Ben-Yehuda, who immigrated to Palestine in 1881, was a leading figure in the activities surrounding the so-called "revival" of Hebrew. He fought fanatically for its spread as a spoken language, even so far as to make his eldest son (born in 1882) speak Hebrew as his first language. Yet it was not until the first decade of the twentieth century, after the arrival of another wave of immigration (the so-called "Second Aliya"), that the rapid spread of spoken Hebrew and the nativization of Hebrew took place (Bar-Adon 1975: 19; cf. Haramati 1979: chaps. 2-4). The popular status of Ben-Yehuda as the only reviver of the Hebrew language is, therefore, a myth. Agnon, the Nobel-Prize laureate in literature, summed up this attitude to

1. The Jewish population in Palestine in the nineteenth century included mainly the Sephardi communities and the Ashkenazi communities. The Sephardi communities spoke either Judeo-Spanish or Judeo-Arabic and Arabic. The Ashkenazi communities for the most part had Yiddish as their vernacular. See Eliav 1978: 156 with n100; also, as well as for other small communities, Parfitt 1972: 241-2.

Ben-Yehuda and the "revival" of the language in the following way: "the people look for a hero, and we give them one" (Bar-Adon 1977: 96, my translation).² The mythology about Eliezer Ben-Yehuda has persisted to such an extent that even some recent work, such as Claude Hagège (2000: chapter 10) still bases the "resurrection" of the Hebrew language on Ben Yehuda's role. Hagège does so in spite of his understanding that "la résurrection de l'hébreu israélien n'a pas été une œuvre véritablement planifiée," and that even the evolution of the lexicon of the emerging language, where Ben Yehuda had indeed played a major role, was a collective endeavor (p. 317).

The conditions for the so-called "revival" of the Hebrew language were most favorable. The *Haskala* (Enlightenment) movement of nineteenth-century Europe had already taken the initial step towards the modernization of Hebrew in its written form (Patterson 1962; Kutscher 1982: §§306-8). The new idealistic immigrants were then impelled to make Hebrew their language not only as a means of intercommunal communication, but also as a matter of principle (Simon 1920: 132). The adoption of Hebrew as the intercommunal language was eased by the fact that Palestine at that age did not have a national language (Ornan 1984: 243-245). By 1916-18 more than 75% of the young population in the new settlements in Palestine used Hebrew as their sole or primary language, and the number of native speakers of Hebrew steadily grew (Bachi 1955: 179-189; for Jaffa and Tel Aviv, see Smilansky 1930).

The sociolinguistic data on the emergence of Hebrew as a spoken language may indicate the spread and nativization of the Hebrew language through education, suggesting that the acquisition of the language occurred first with the children and subsequently with their parents (Haramati 1979, 1981; Walk 1981).³ Yet the question of how it was possible—from the linguistic point of view—to transform the Hebrew language once again into a vernacular has not yet been answered satisfactorily.

This paper aims to suggest a new direction for the study of the linguistic processes that have created the Israeli Hebrew vernacular. The emergence of Hebrew as a spoken language can be compared to other cases of language genesis, notably the emergence of Creoles. Thus, the case of the vernacularization and nativization of Hebrew should not be regarded as a miracle, a view that is encountered quite often (Wexler 1990: §1.1).

The emergence of Hebrew as a spoken language was not the revival of a dead language, but the creation of a new language. Even the people active in that idealistic movement of introducing Hebrew use into the new Zionist agenda realized that the emerging Hebrew vernacular was a new system, a language composed of elements drawn from various stages of older (or ancient) Hebrew, mainly biblical and mishnaic forms (cf., e.g., *Zichronot* 1929: 15-37; also Klausner 1925). And so it was: Modern Hebrew has been constituted of elements—words and phrases, individual forms—from all previous stages of the language (Kutscher 1968: 309; Blau 1978; already Rosén 1956: chap. 2 and others before him, as early as Rabinowicz 1924).

Yet the *structure* of the emerging language was not and could not have been based upon a preexisting vital Hebrew structure. Gotthelf Bergsträsser, one of the leading Semitists at the beginning of this century, defined Modern Hebrew as a "europäische Sprache in durchsichtiger hebräischer Kleidung" (Bergsträsser 1928: 47; cf. also Rosén 1977: §1.5). E.

2. For Ben-Yehuda and the revival of Hebrew, see Fellman 1973, and the review by Wexler 1975; also Bar-Adon 1975: chaps. 2-3.

3. Bar-Adon (1975: chap. 10) presents a lively description of the acquisition of the new language by the children in the Galilee district. Cf. also Givón (1979: 32), who describes how the children in Israel acquired a new mother tongue from second-language speaking parents. Er'el (1977a, 1977b: §5.1.3) describes the emergence of spoken Hebrew as a process of second language acquisition, within which the children played the major role.

M. Lipschütz, an internal observer, had made a similar observation as early as 1914:

Our inner language is not Hebrew, but foreign-jargonic. This truth has to be said, although it is not pleasant. The inner form of the words is foreign, and the syntax is foreign. The foreign influence comes from remote languages, most of them Indo-European (Jüdisch-Deutsch, Ladino, Judeo-Persian). The influence of the jargons is not to be lost with children and children of children, since the children will have learned the foreign syntactical features within the Hebrew of their parents (Lipschütz 1923: 36).

Several years later he spoke of a younger generation for whom "the colloquial language is now rooted in an inner language." (Lipschütz 1920: 32). This "inner language" was, of course, Hebrew; but it was a new Hebrew, structured during the first decades of the emergence of the spoken language. The generators of this Hebrew were the first group to have this newly emerged language as their mother tongue.

The restructuring of existing elements of a language is not a unique phenomenon. Other languages have emerged in a similar way, by rapidly building and restructuring existing materials from other languages. The process of emergence of new languages that acquire native speakers is known as "Creolization". This is the process through which Creole languages have emerged worldwide. The best-known examples include the languages of the Caribbean, among which are the English-based Jamaican Creole and the French-based Haitian Creole.

The nativization of Hebrew has already been compared to the emergence of Creoles, yet with reservations. It was perhaps Bar-Adon who—with great caution—was the first to compare the nativization of Hebrew to the forging of Creoles out of pidgin languages (Bar-Adon 1965: 84, 1975: 42). He insisted, however, that "it would be utterly wrong to conclude that contemporary Hebrew is a 'mixed language' or the like. This would be a misstatement" (1965: 82). While demonstrating the emergence of Creoles from a starting point different than a pidgin, Hymes (1971: 79) mentions the creolization of Hebrew after an initial process of koinéization (after Blanc 1968; see further Siegel 1985, 1997). Bendavid, a normativist by orientation, observed that "the birth processes of the Hebrew speech in its renewal in the mouth of several types of immigrants and children of immigrants resembles ... the way in which pidgin languages were created" (Bendavid 1985: 165).⁴

Hebraists ignored the suggestions I made in the mid-1980s (cf. Izre'el 1986) for new directions of research into the emergence of spoken Hebrew in the framework of creolization; creolists regarded them as too controversial (cf. Izre'el 1986). The Hebraists' dismissal of this suggestion is understandable in view of their prescriptivist inclination, still widespread in present-day Israel. Still, the reluctance of creolists to accept this idea is surprising. Perhaps it was the result of the state of the art of Creole Studies at that time, which tended to see Creoles and creolization as a special case within the vast continuum of language contact. Any idea, which tended to categorize as Creole a linguistic variety not perfectly congruous with what a Creole seemed to be, was rejected. Indeed, when I first considered this idea, I stated—perhaps too vigorously—that Israeli Hebrew was a Creole.⁵ I have now softened this claim to suggest

4. My thanks go to Gideon Goldenberg for drawing my attention to this reference.

5. Following the presentation of a previous version of this paper on the web, I received some responses from creolists, both publicly (<<http://listserv.linguistlist.org/archives/creolist.html>>; November 29–December 6, 2000; Subject: The Emergence of Modern Hebrew) and privately. Objections to comparing the forging of Israeli Hebrew to the emergence of Creoles seem to arise from either structural considerations or from undermining the validity of whether Creoles can be regarded a special case of language contact (cf., e.g., Mufwene 1997; Siegel 1997). While there is obviously no consensus among creolists whether Creoles and creolization are special cases of language contact, interest has been raised regarding the emergence of Israeli Hebrew as a prominent case of language contact. This

that Israeli Hebrew be viewed on a continuum of contact-induced languages and its emergence to be viewed as related to creolization processes.⁶

There is still no general agreement among creolists as to what a genuine Creole is, and to what extent a process resulting from language contact is to be regarded as closely related to the processes active in forging exemplary Creoles. Recently, there has been a bitter months-long debate on the CreoLIST, an electronic list of Creole Studies (starting on March 1999 at <CreoLIST@ling.su.se>; archived at <<http://listserv.linguistlist.org/archives/creolist.html>>). This debate revealed totally opposing ideas about the very basics of the field. In his column in a recent issue of *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Linguistics*, Peter Mühlhäusler, an eminent creolist, refers to a recent conference on "Degrees of Restructuring in Creole Languages." Many of the participants discerned "an uneasiness with the existing definitions of pidgin and creoles," as only "very few languages indeed conform to the definitions of the past" (Mühlhäusler 1999: 121). He further says:

[T]here is, however, a sense that many pidgins and creoles (especially the ones the majority of creolists have tended to work on) have something in common. What they share is that they have developed over a short period of time in the context of mass population movements in the colonial and post-colonial age and that typically they are examples of the ability of humans to adapt their ways of speaking to new communicative requirements. (Mühlhäusler 1999: 122)

Mühlhäusler states that "[i]nasmuch as these requirements differ from situation to situation, different linguistic outcomes can be expected" (*ibid.*).

In this complex situation, I believe that there will be a large consensus as to the general features of creolization. Basically, the process of creolization is a process of linguistic restructuring, and it usually follows a stage of simplification and reduction of the input language or languages, which may be termed "pidginization." It might be useful to return to the definitions of these two processes as iterated by Dell Hymes in his influential volume of the proceedings of the second conference on Pidginization and Creolization of Languages:

Pidginization is that complex process of sociolinguistic change comprising reduction in inner form, with convergence, in the context of restriction in use

...

Creolization is that complex process of sociolinguistic change comprising expansion in inner form, with convergence, in the context of extension in use

...

Pidginization is usually associated with simplification in outer form, creolization with complication in outer form. (Hymes 1971: 84)

In their basic essence, pidginization and creolization are opposites. The pidginization process seems to be prerequisite to the creative process of the forging of a Creole. However, the generation of a Creole does not necessarily require an initial pure pidgin-stage of a language; a Creole may well emerge on the basis of another language variety that underwent a pidginization process (Rickford 1977: 195; Bickerton 1977; Hymes 1971: 78-9, 84; Mühlhäusler 1997: 6-10). Creolization may be defined, then, as first language acquisition with restricted input (Bickerton 1977:49). Mühlhäusler (1997: 231) views pidginization—another aspect of creolization (p. 10)—as the unmarked case of first language acquisition.

thesis is forwarded here for further consideration. My thanks go to Henri Wittman, Jeff Siegel and especially Salikoko Mufwene for their correspondence.

6. My thanks go to Ron Kuzar for many instructive discussions and for putting at my disposal a previous draft of his recent book (Kuzar 2001).

What seems most significant in the process of forging, or in the emergence of Creoles is a rapid sociolinguistic change that brings with it a rapid restructuring of the language over a restricted input of the target language, and a widespread nativization of this newly structured language. The emergence of spoken Israeli Hebrew definitely parallels this process. The context of a mass movement of population in a colonial or post-colonial setting, mentioned by Mühlhäusler, also has a parallel in the setting of the emergence of spoken Israeli Hebrew. The immense waves of immigration into Palestine were, of course, mass movements of population. The colonial or post-colonial setting involves two or more communities which communicate in yet another language. This language is not the native language of any of the communicating parties and assumes the role of a superstrate. This situation has its parallel in the setting of the emergence of Israeli Hebrew, where Jews from all over the world and of different linguistic backgrounds made Hebrew their common language not only by necessity, but also as an idealistic construct, thus making Hebrew the superstrate.

While the rapid pace at which Israeli Hebrew was forged and the complex sociolinguistic situation with all its linguistic substrata and participating groups are fairly well attested (Bachi 1955; Schmelz and Bachi 1974), the question of limited input in the emergence of the new language is still worth mentioning. It could not have been a normal linguistic input (cf. Ferguson and DeBose 1977), as Hebrew did not have any native speakers on the eve of its emergence as a spoken language. The input to the creation of Modern Hebrew consisted of elements from literary Hebrew. As a result of its history, literary Hebrew lacked an everyday, all-purpose vernacular. For example, Fellman (1973: 37-8) describes the lack of terms necessary for the performance of daily household tasks. Textbooks published around the turn of the twentieth century, which introduced different variants of such terms, illustrate the confusion regarding the simplest terms of daily life (Haramati 1981: 434). Indeed, the input to the process of shifting Hebrew into a full-fledged vernacular was deficient.

We must also consider the question of whether there was a transmission of linguistic features from the Hebrew lingua franca of nineteenth-century Palestine into the emerging native Hebrew (cf. Rabin 1975: 231, 1979:136). In my opinion, it is almost impossible to postulate a clear distinction between the two periods of spoken Hebrew in Palestine, that is, before and after the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

Just what were the linguistic characteristics of the Hebrew lingua franca is a very interesting question. Although research has established only the sociolinguistic data (Roth 1934; Ish-Shalom 1944; Chomsky 1950; Parfitt 1972, 1984; Rabin 1975, 1979), we must surmise that this language was reduced and simplified: not only did it lack many needed terms, not only was the shift to a spoken medium difficult even for highly literate Hebrew users, not only was communication restricted to specific social interactions, but the need for intercommunication between Hebrew speakers of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds would entail, almost by definition, the simplification of the communicative medium. It may well be, then, that the Hebrew lingua franca spoken in Palestine during the nineteenth century, restricted in use and reduced in form, was a pidginized Hebrew.

Ben-Yehuda, in his memoirs, tells of his first attempts—crowned with success—to communicate in Hebrew with local inhabitants upon his arrival in Palestine. He even recalls with joy his speaking Hebrew with a coachman (Ben-Yehuda 1978: 87-8). Even before his immigration, Ben-Yehuda had the opportunity to speak Hebrew in Paris with visitors from Palestine, from whom he learned that Hebrew was used as a spoken language in the Holy Land (*op. cit.*: 78-9, 139-140).

Lipschütz also attests to the linkage between the two linguistic stages. He too had observed that the chronological sequence must have had its influence over the vernacular of his day (Lipschütz 1920: chap. II, especially p. 24).

We lack, however, written data from the alleged pidginized Hebrew variety of pre-twentieth century Palestine. The available written materials reflect the literary Hebrew styles of the time. Yet we may gain some idea of how such a language might have been structured. I would like to mention three sources. The first is Arnold von Harff's travel book, in which he recorded some phrases of the spoken language of the Jews in Palestine in the fifteenth century. It is a kind of Hebrew that reveals European influence, both lexical (the use of *beyueren* "drincken" and *dormen* "schlaeffen") and syntactical (e.g. *toeff boker* "guden morgen," *toeff laila* "gude naicht," with an inverted word order). (See Groote 1860; Babinger 1920; Klausner 1923.)

The other two sources are much more important. These are two Hebrew textbooks that attest to spoken Hebrew in London in the nineteenth century. The two books were published almost in the same year by I. L. Lyon (in 1837) and by Abigail Lindo (in 1838). In both we find examples of everyday Hebrew phrases. Some of the phrases are "scriptural phrases." Some are direct translations from the English: e.g. *כיצד בני ביתך* "How is your family?"; *היכן תלך* "Where are you going?" Others are independent creations of simple Hebrew phrases: e.g. *היום חם מאוד* "It is very hot today" (lit. "today hot much"); *אכל מעשה אופה* "He did eat pastry for dinner" (lit. "he ate baker's work"); *היום זמן טוב* "It is a fine day" (lit. "today time good").⁷

This evidence does not prove that the beginning of the spoken Modern Hebrew language were a true pidgin. Instead, we must speak of a much more complex continuum of speech varieties, which is yet to be studied. This speech continuum, varieties of which went through various degrees of pidginization processes, was the starting point for the emergence of twentieth-century Hebrew.

Furthermore, while education played a major role in the spread of Hebrew among children and its nativization, one must take into account the fact that even the best teachers of that period did not speak a fluent vernacular, and many of them were quite deficient in their use of Hebrew in speech (Haramati 1979: 15-16; 1981: 433).⁸

More importantly, one must acknowledge that there is always a conceptual gap between written and spoken language, i.e., written and spoken varieties of language are inherently different: no literate person can write in the same linguistic form that he or she speaks. That is the reason why, when these teachers, who were highly literate, switched from written Hebrew to spoken Hebrew, this shift could not produce an identical form of language from the structural point of view. Thus, the emerging Hebrew speech would have profited from the converted genre (or register) of teachers in quite a limited manner.⁹

The input upon which the emerging Hebrew was constituted was limited not only because it consisted of insufficient extant core vocabulary or carry-overs from a stipulated pidginized variety, but also because teachers could provide only limited input.

7. See Lyon 1837; cf. Lindo 1842, a reference is taken from Malachi 1955. The data have been taken from Scharfstein 1961 and Rabin 1963).

8. See also Harshav 1990: 9-14. Harshav cites an anecdote about Bialik, who is regarded as the national Hebrew poet, who described the difficulties in speaking Hebrew in the Yiddish words: *יידיש רעדט זיך*, העברעיש דאַרף מען רעדן "Yiddish is self-spoken; Hebrew one must speak."

9. Glinert (1990) suggested that the inner language of Hebrew educators had a long tradition of structural entity, so it could have served as a structural basis for the emergence of the spoken language (cf. also—with a different perspective—Harshav 1990). Glinert's suggestion was based upon two syntactic features that he regards as significant to his thesis. While definitely correct as regards the written language, this suggestion remains problematic when we speak about nurturing a spoken variety on a wide scale. Glinert's refutation of the widely accepted notion of Israeli Hebrew being a merger of three earlier phases of the language without any direct sequence to the immediate linguistic predecessor of twentieth-century Hebrew is obviously correct.

Still, one must not dismiss the importance of the role that the development of the written language of the time played in the forging of Modern Hebrew. In contrast to the rupture in the continuity of development of spoken Hebrew, the written language has never ceased to develop. Like all other languages, Hebrew too has changed continually throughout its long history, and has shown demographic (especially geographic) and contextual varieties. Throughout its history, written Hebrew has been used in religious commentaries and scholastic tractates, in literature and poetry, in petitions, in administration and in correspondence. As a second language for its users, Hebrew had absorbed foreign features from many languages. Diverse Hebrew texts display radically different structures from those of older stages of that language. One can think of both phonology and syntax in this connection, of lexical semantics, grammatical semantics and phraseology and style. An illustrative example of such radical differences is shown by the respective pronunciations of Hebrew as reflected in the Sephardi, Ashkenazi, Yemenite and other traditions (Morag 1971).

On the eve of the emergence of the spoken varieties in Palestine, Hebrew had already been altered to a large degree from its original sources: Biblical Hebrew or Mishnaic Hebrew. What is now considered a radical linguistic change in the writings of Mendele Mocher Sfarim, a Yiddish and Hebrew writer active in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century (Kutscher 1982: 190-2), must be taken *cum grano salis* and be contrasted with the type of pseudo-biblical language used during the Enlightenment period (Karmi 1997: 25-6). In fact, the language used by the Enlightenment Hebrew writers was itself an intentional and temporary regression in the linear development of Hebrew writing in Europe (Kutscher 1982: 184). Mendele's Hebrew, which in its own way tried to counteract this regression, was one variety out of many that were based upon diverse Jewish linguistic substrata, in this case, Yiddish.

During the period up to the emergence of the spoken language and during the first decades of its forging, literary Hebrew in particular, and written Hebrew in general, has kept to its course of linguistic development. To what degree this development is to be regarded as more rapid and therefore more radical than its development before the twentieth century is an interesting issue to investigate. What seems obvious is that spoken and written varieties of Hebrew have nurtured each other in varying degrees since the emergence of spoken Hebrew. While this type of bilateral nurturing is different from the emergence of prototypical Creoles, it may find its own interesting parallel in the so called decreolization process attested in subsequent developmental stages of Creoles, where "the creolized varieties lose their distinctive features and begin to level in the direction of the original target language" (Rickford 1977:192; see also Lehiste 1988: 87-88; Romaine 1988: 158-161; Holm 1988: 52-60; Mühlhäusler 1997: 211-219). It would be interesting to investigate this bilateral nurturing, although, admittedly, the sources of information on the spoken language of previous generations are very limited.

In spite of these reservations, the processes that have ended in the emergence of the spoken varieties of Hebrew largely fit the requirements put forth for regarding them as processes of creolization. Studying the processes which led to the creation of Israeli Hebrew, one will have to look closer at all aspects of language. From the limited research completed so far, one may suggest a working hypothesis that will consider the lexicon and morphology differently than semantics, syntax and phonology. While the first two domains will probably show more links to Hebrew's Semitic origins, the latter domains will take us further from Semitic and into Indo-European structures.¹⁰ Historical processes that have resulted in this new structure

10. When considering Modern Hebrew as consisting of older Semitic elements and foreign structure, the issue of relexification may arise. Relexification is the process wherein a language uses a lexicon from one language overlaid on a grammatical structure of one or more other languages (Mühlhäusler 1997: 102-108). Wexler (1990) has gone so far as to suggest that Hebrew in its twentieth century form is a relexified Yiddish (with further, even more remote implications). More recently Wexler has taken

should be investigated in the framework of creolization, or, rather, in the wider framework of language genesis (cf. Kuzar 2001). Such an investigation will have to take into account two distinct lines of development: first, the longitudinal evolution of the written language, and second, the discontinuous development and abrupt emergence of spoken varieties on the basis of restricted input. These developments were followed by swift nativization, thus involving linguistic changes which have much in common with the emergence of Creole languages.¹¹

To understand the active processes within the creation of Modern Hebrew, research should take the following two directions:

- Search for evidence of spoken Hebrew during the early years of its emergence;
- Search for evidence of prior creolization in data from contemporary Israeli Hebrew; and
- Reevaluate the sociolinguistic and especially the linguistic research made hitherto on the emergence of twentieth-century Hebrew.

The search for evidence of spoken Hebrew during the early years of the revival can proceed by checking written sources of the time. Laymen, including those who had learned Hebrew following (or just before) their arrival in Palestine, and the children at schools, may have produced written sources.¹² People who had already mastered the literary language may have produced other written sources.

Hebrew has always been written, which distinguishes it among the Creole languages. The written language of the Palestinian Jews who actually spoke Hebrew, even if they were well

up this question again, and together with Horvath has suggested that the genesis of both Israeli Hebrew and Creole languages share some significant features, of which the most important one is relexification (in a new version developed by Lefebvre; see Horvath and Wexler 1997). Horvath and Wexler entertain a new theoretical framework for the creolization process, where Hebrew would be distinct from Creole by the type of input used for its generation. While this article is not the place to discuss this hypothesis in detail, contemporary Hebrew—pace Horvath and Wexler—has preserved so many of its older features that a theory of relexification in this case seems to be going too far. Furthermore, the authors ignore some crucial features in the history of Hebrew and its structure that render their theory doubtful. For example, Horvath and Wexler describe the generation of Modern Hebrew as a process of relexification of what they term Old Hebrew, which is in fact Biblical Hebrew. They ignore the rich history of Hebrew and its linear development in both its written and (allegedly) spoken varieties during almost two millennia. They deny the communicative needs of newcomers to Palestine, and look at the population as if it consisted of only Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern European origin. To what extent the grammatical structure of Modern Hebrew is detached from previous stages of Hebrew is subject to further research. This issue is inherent to the question of both the classification of the newly emerged language and its place in the continuum of language mixture. (Some comments on the Semitic affiliation of Modern Hebrew can be found in Izre'el 1986; for a criticism of Wexler's relexification theory in its relationship to Hebrew as developed in his 1990 book, see Goldenberg 1996; see also Kuzar 2001). This issue will certainly have ramifications for our interpretation of the historical process that Hebrew has gone.

11. Kuzar (2001) suggests a multifaceted research program for the history of Israeli Hebrew, which will include "the process phenomena of language contact, of pidginization and creolization, of decreolization, of second language acquisition by the parents' generation, and of nativization in first language acquisition by the children of these parents." In addition, Kuzar calls for consideration of the role of teachers, and of activation processes of a passively known written language, a language as yet unidentified.

12. Judith Harari (1956: 554) illustrates, many years later, the way children spoke in the late nineteenth century: "די שווארצה פרה שלאגט זיך מיט די קרניים" "the black (Yiddish) cow (Hebrew) fights with the (Y) horns (H)"; "דער שומר רייט על סוס" "the (Y) guard (H) rides (Y) on a horse (H)"; "בכד האדום יש קאלטה מים" "there is (H) cold (Y) water in the jug (H)." Harari's examples may serve only as illustrative material, and by no means present recorded data.

acquainted with the formal literary style, absorbed properties of the spoken language (see, e.g., Sivan in Ben-Yehuda 1978: 32).¹³

This research should be oriented to adducing those innovations due to the influence of the emerging spoken language. It may be carried out by comparing the linguistic features of that time with features evident in previous stages of written Hebrew to reveal these innovations.

Modern Hebrew has also been subject to language planning and normative demands since the very beginnings of its creation (Morag 1959). We may find references to "mistakes" and evidence for the actual contemporary performances of the language in written records of the grammarians of that period (e.g., Lipschütz 1923: 36 n. 22).¹⁴

For a reevaluation of the extant research, two examples are given: (1) The formation of the phonemic inventory of the standard variety of Israeli Hebrew is usually described as contemporary to the formative years of the vernacularization of Hebrew, and even taken as a planned endeavor. However, there is some evidence, however, that not only the second Aliya immigrants found the Sephardi pronunciation as a *fait accompli* (Harshav 1993: 154), but so also did the immigrants of the first Aliya at the end of the nineteenth century (Parfitt 1984: 264). (2) As against the view that the initial stage of twentieth-century Hebrew was heavily influenced by the adopted speech of European immigrants and thus became an Ashkenazi amalgam, Morag (1993: 213-217) suggests that this blend had included Sephardi features which declined only after mass numbers of European Jews arrived during the British mandate (1917-1948).

Apart from the phonological domain (cf. Rosén 1977: 57), convergence of other features from literary sources of diverse demographic traditions has never been shown for the spoken medium. Research of its literary and, more generally, all its written varieties is still lacking. Research on the diverse sources (i.e., chronological layers) upon which Modern Hebrew has been constructed has concentrated mostly on the lexicon and semantics, along with some morphological aspects. The nature of the outcoming linguistic fusion is, therefore, open for discussion. As implied from the discussion of the history of written Hebrew above, another open question is whether the absorbance of elements drawn from diverse sources was contemporary or should be viewed as a longitudinal development.

Returning to the call of creolists like Mühlhäusler to widen the scope of their field of research, one may well admit the emergence of spoken Israeli Hebrew into the framework of Creole linguistics. Mühlhäusler's statement that "[b]oth creoles and creole space are multidimensional" (1999: 129) may be reiterated. Israeli Hebrew may well fit into this continuum.

One last point I should raise at this juncture is the need to reevaluate the nature of previous knowledge of Hebrew by newcomers to Palestine during the formative years of the emerging spoken language. As against the impression we get from secondary literature, it may well be that the change from written to spoken was not comprehensive of the entire population, not even for most of it. I suspect that only a small fraction of the population that acquired Hebrew at the beginning of the twentieth century had had previous knowledge of the written medium. As noted by Bar-Adon (1975: §10.32), "[i]n many cases, the children became the *teachers* of their parents in their first attempts to speak Hebrew" (emphasis in the original). It would be

13. This "new style," as it was called, immediately raised much criticism. See Sivan 1980; also Yardeni 1969: 402 note 372.

14. Needless to say, contemporary Hebrew as spoken in Israel, a century after its emergence as a spoken medium, is a full-fledged language with several generations of native speakers. Contemporary interference from either substrata of immigrants or from the American English superstratum is unrelated to the processes of creolization that were active during the formative period of Israeli Hebrew.

very interesting to study the acquisition of Hebrew at the beginning of the twentieth century by adults. I doubt if the majority of the newcomers could really understand written Hebrew as is usually surmised. People might know how to read the letters (and even here we may probably speak only or mostly of males), but hardly understand anything apart from basic prayers, if anything at all. (Parallels can be drawn from the knowledge of Hebrew by Jews in the Diaspora today).

All aspects raised in this article or implied from its subject matter must and can be investigated: the extent to which contemporary Hebrew is different from all previous layers of the language; the gap between spoken and written varieties of Hebrew; the interrelationship between the continuum of varieties within each, and the impact of any of the existing varieties on each other; the history of Modern Hebrew in both its literary and spoken continua; and how Hebrew fits into the larger continuum of Creole and Creole-like languages. All of these issues and many others must and can be investigated. Investigations of these types, however, can be effective only where data exist. Without the compilation of a spoken Hebrew corpus, none of these issues will emerge from obscurity. In fact, none of these topics can be treated at all unless we have at our disposal a corpus of spoken Hebrew.

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