

Zuckermann, Ghil'ad 2005. "Abba, why was Professor Higgins trying to teach Eliza to speak like our cleaning lady?": Mizrahim, Ashkenazim, Prescriptivism and the Real Sounds of the Israeli Language'. *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* 19: 210-31.

Abba, Why Was Professor Higgins Trying to Teach Eliza to Speak Like Our Cleaning Lady?: Mizrahim, Ashkenazim, Prescriptivism and the Real Sounds of the Israeli Language

Ghil'ad Zuckermann

<http://www.zuckermann.org/>

1. Introduction

Language is such a sensitive issue in Israel that even politicians are involved. In a session at the Israeli Parliament on 4 January 2005, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon rebuked Israelis for using the etymologically Arabo-English expression *yàla báy*, lit. "let's bye", i.e. "goodbye", instead of "the most beautiful word" *shalóm* "peace, hello, goodbye". In an article in the daily newspaper *Ha'aretz* (21 June 2004), the left-wing politician Yossi Sarid attacked the common language of *éser shékel* as inarticulate and monstrous, and urged civilians to fight it and protect "Hebrew".

Israeli educators, as well as laymen, often argue that Israelis "slaughter" or "rape" their language by "lazily" speaking slovenly, "bad Hebrew", full of "mistakes" (see, for example <http://www.lashon.exe.co.il>). Most Israelis say *bekítá bet* rather than the puristic *bekhitá bet* "in the second grade" (note the spirantization of the /k/ in the latter); *éser shékel* rather than *asar-á shkal-ím* "ten shekels" (the latter having a polarity-of-gender agreement — with a feminine numeral and a masculine plural noun), *baréy mazál* instead of *bney mazál*, lit. "sons of luck", i.e. "lucky (plural)".

It might be the case that Israeli has several sociolects or dialects. However, I doubt that there is any authentic Israeli dialect which conforms to the rules enforced by Israeli teachers. *What public figures and educators are doing is trying to impose Hebrew grammar on Israeli speech, ignoring the fact that Israeli has its own grammar.*

Native speakers do not make mistakes. Rather, Israeli has its own internal logic, which is very different from that of Hebrew.

The translator and author Aharon Amir once mentioned to me that former Knesset Member Tufik Tubi, an Israeli Arab, claimed that his Israeli is the best in the Israeli Parliament. Paradoxically, there are many Israelis who agree with him. I have also been told that no one can speak Israeli better than the radio-presenter Zoher Bahalul, who is an Israeli Arab. But such claims are baffling. How on earth is it possible that every educated Arab who knows Israeli, automatically becomes the role model for Israeli native speakers?

One can see in some purists' rebukes the common phenomenon of a conservative older generation unhappy with "reckless" changes to the language — cf. Jean Aitchison (2001). However, prescriptivism in Israeli does have an unusual feature, which contradicts the typical model, where there is an attempt to enforce the grammar and pronunciation of an elite social group. The late linguist Haim Blanc once took his young daughter to see an Israeli production of *My Fair Lady*. In this version, Professor Henry Higgins teaches Eliza Doolittle how to pronounce /r/ "properly", i.e. as the Hebrew alveolar trill, characteristic of Sephardim (cf. Judaeo-Spanish, Italian, Spanish), rather than as the Israeli lax uvular approximant (cf. many Yiddish and German dialects). The line *The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain* was adapted as *barád yarád bidróm sfarád haérev*, lit. "Hail fell in southern Spain this evening". At the end of the performance, Blanc's daughter tellingly asked, "Abba [daddy], why was Professor Higgins trying to teach Eliza to speak like our cleaning lady?"

Do you know the difference between an orthodox, a conservative and a reform Jew? The orthodox says *borukh ato adonóy* "Blessed are you Lord", the conservative — just like Israelis — says *barukh ata adonay*, the reform says *barukh ata I don't know...* Ashkenazim used to pronounce *adonáy* "Lord" as *adonóy*, but Israelis' pronunciation of the *kamáts* vowel (Hebrew [á]) now follows the Sephardic ([a]), rather than Ashkenazic Hebrew ([o]). Consider also Standard Yiddish *khókhəm* "wise guy" (Polish Yiddish *khúkhəm*) versus Israeli *khakhám*. Likewise, a non-geminate *t* is pronounced [t]

following the Sephardim, rather than [s] as in Ashkenazic Hebrew, as in Ashkenazic Hebrew *leshóynəs* “tongues” versus Israeli *leshonót*.

When asked about the phonetics of Israeli, many distinguished linguists therefore claim that the sounds of Israeli reflect the Sephardic pronunciation tradition. However, this paper suggests that this is just “lip service”: The Israeli consonant and vowel inventory, and its intonation and basic stress, reflect Yiddish.

Unlike Israeli purists, I believe that the pronunciation of a Yemenite speaking Israeli is the exception, rather than the norm. In fact, such “*mizrahi* pronunciation” is gradually disappearing because Israeli was created mostly by Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazic Jews and its standards are thus different from the Semitic standards of Hebrew. Furthermore, as indicated by *sfirát yehudéy érets yisraél*, a census conducted in 1916-18 (cf. Bachi 1956:67-9), the Ashkenazim were the ones most receptive to the “Hebrew revival”: 61.9% of Ashkenazic children and 28.5% of Ashkenazic adults spoke Israeli in 1916-18. The percentage of Israeli-speakers among Sephardim (constituting most of the veteran residents in *Eretz Yisrael*) and the other *mizrahim* (excluding the Yemenites) was low: only 18.3% of Sephardic children and 8.4% of Sephardic adults spoke Israeli in 1916-18, whilst 18.1% of *mizrahi* children (excluding Sephardim and Yemenites) and 7.3% of *mizrahi* adults spoke Israeli (cf. 53.1% among Yemenite children and 37.6% among Yemenite adults). To obtain an idea of the approximate “real” numbers, note that between 1850 and 1880 approximately 25,000 Jews immigrated into *Eretz Yisrael* (mostly *Ashkenazim*), in 1890 a total of only 40,000 Jews lived in *Eretz Yisrael*, cf. Bachi (1977:32, 77). Between 1881 and 1903, 20,000-30,000 Jews arrived in *Eretz Yisrael* (ibid.:79). Let us examine Israeli’s phonetics and phonology more closely, so as to uncover its real origins.

2. Sociological Background

The colonialist dichotomy between ‘first world’ (Ashkenazic) and ‘third world’ (*mizrahi*) structures Israeli society, just as much as the hostilities between orthodox and secular Jews. Even the “burekas” films, like *snúker* (Boaz Davidon 1975), *khakhám*

gamliél (Yoël Zilberg 1974) (cf. *sálakh shabáti*, Ephraim Kishon 1963), which are regarded by many as the epitome of *mizrahi* culture, are hybridic and modelled, among other things, upon Ashkenazic *shtetl* life — see *kúni lémel*, as well as *shtétl kabtsíel* in Méndele Móykhær Sfórim’s *beémek habakhá*. Zionist historians, seeking to map the debates that shaped Israel’s national ethos, have claimed that the battle centres on religion, and that it began with the dispute between Ahad Ha’am (pen name of Asher Ginsberg, 1856-1927) and Micah Joseph Berdichevsky (1865-1921), both key Jewish thinkers of the early twentieth century. While the religious Ahad Ha’am wanted the nationalist movement to honour Jewish values (*or l-a-goím* “light to the Gentiles”, “light among the nations”), the secular Berdichevsky urged that it should promote Western culture. More recently, however, historians have turned their attention to the conflict between Ashkenazim and *mizrahim*, arguing that it exerts the stronger influence over modern Israeli society and its problems. I would add that this conflict manifests itself most eloquently in the Israeli language.

We can learn about the difficulties which the *mizrahi* experienced in their attempts to propagate their culture from the term *זמר קסטות* *zamár kasétot*, lit. “cassette-singer”, denoting a singer (crooner) of *múzika mizrahít*. For many years, this popular culture, widespread among *mizrahim*, was not represented in the (at least formerly) Ashkenazic-dominated Israeli media. Therefore, the singers had to find an alternative method of disseminating their songs. Audio cassettes were an affordable solution and were sold in Israeli street markets, such as Tel Aviv’s old central bus-station. The first Sephardic record was introduced only in 1974, in a collection by the *tsliléy haúid* Band, which included the *mizrahi* version of the song *khanale hitbalbela* (1934).

It is worth noting, however, that such Middle Eastern music now receives normal media coverage and is much loved by many Ashkenazim. By now, it is an integral part of Israel’s hybrid culture. In some cases, however, its popularity results from “inverse snobbery”; it is “cool” for an Ashkenazi to like Zohar Argov (rather than Beethoven). Compare this to the British violinist Nigel Kennedy, who speaks “Mockney”, i.e. fake Cockney, to improve his street credibility. A cynic might argue that such an affectation is similar to the tycoon Richard Branson preferring jumpers to suits, as if he is saying that he is rich enough to ignore the norms.

There are many stories about Jewish surnames, which touch on issues of self- and group- identity. You might have heard the one about Michael Berkovich who emigrated from Poland to the United States using a fake passport. When asked by the clerk at Ellis Island what his name was, he said in Yiddish *shoyn fargésn* “already forgotton”, so the clerk wrote *Sean Fergusson*. And do you know why a Georgian Jewish immigrant was slapped by the female immigration clerk on arrival at Ben-Gurion Airport? When asked his name, he said *Bòytishvíli* (or perhaps *Batiashvíli*, *shvíli* being a common suffix parallel to the English prefix *o'* (*of*) as in *O'Connor* or to the English suffix *-son* as in *Jacobson*, hence “(son) of Batia” — cf. other surnames ultimately named after a mother, e.g. *Bashevis* “son of Bat-Sheva”, *Rifkin(d)* “son of Rivka”, *Dworkin* “son of Dvorka (<Dvora)”, *Yudkin* “son of Yudke (<Yudit)’ and so forth. That was interpreted by the female clerk as Israeli “come and sit on me!” (בואי תשב לי *boy tishví li*, lit. ‘come, sit (feminine singular) to me!’).

However, the story most pertinent to the issue of Ashkenazic dominance is the one about the Moroccan immigrant to Israel, who changed his surname from *Abarjel* to the Ashkenazic *Berkovich*, and then three months later to the native Israeli *Barak* (lit. “thunder”). When asked why he made such a bizarre manœuvre, he retorted: “You know, in Israel they always ask you, ‘But what was your name before that?’”.

3. Consonant Inventory

Yiddish has determined the consonantal inventory of Israeli in the following ways:

3.1 Neutralization of the pharyngeals ק, ט and צ

In Israeli, the Hebrew pharyngealized (emphatic) consonants ק (q), ט (t^h) and צ (s^h) are neutralized. The sounds [q], [t^h] and [s^h] do not exist in Yiddish at all. Consequently, Hebrew ק [q] is pronounced in Israeli [k], equal to (Hebrew>) Israeli כ [k] and to Yiddish ק. Hebrew ט [t^h] is pronounced in Israeli [t], equal to (Hebrew>) Israeli ת (t) and to Yiddish ט. Hebrew צ [s^h] is pronounced in Israeli [ts̄], which did not exist in Classical Hebrew but which did exist in Yiddish and in Ashkenazic Hebrew, pronounced [ts̄]. Naturally, this does not only apply to the pronunciation of pre-existent Hebrew words. In borrowing foreign lexical items, ק, ט and צ are the letters used in Israeli to represent imported [k], [t] and [ts̄], respectively.

3.2 Neutralization of צ, ח, ח and כ

I remember a beloved primary school teacher in Israel lionizing the “correct” pronunciation of the Sephardi Yitzhak Navon (former Israeli President) and the *mizrahi* Eliahu Nawi (former Mayor of Beer Sheva). In his famous song *Aní vesímon vemóiz hakatán*, Yossi Banay writes *benaaláy shabát veková shel barét, vebeivrít yafá im áin veim khet* “With Sabbath shoes and a beret hat, and in beautiful Hebrew with Ayin and with Het”, referring to the Semitic pharyngeals צ [ʕ] and ח [ħ], which most Israelis do not pronounce but which are used, for example, by old Yemenite Jews (though less and less by young ones).

A language is, in fact, an abstract ensemble of idiolects — as well as sociolects, dialects etc. — rather than an entity *per se*. It is more like a species than an organism (cf. Mufwene 2001 and Zuckermann 2008). Still, generally speaking, I believe that the Yemenite pronunciation of *áin* and *khet* is non-mainstream, exactly the opposite of what Israeli children (pronouncing [none] and [χ]) are told.

In Yiddish there is neither [ʕ] nor [h], whereas [h] and [ʔ] are very weak. By and large, Hebrew ע [ʕ], א [ʔ] and ה [h] are all “pronounced” in Israeli in the same way: most of the time, they are not pronounced. They are only pronounced (both ע and א — [ʔ], while ה — [h]) when in a post-consonantal position *within uncommon words*. Israeli ה [h] is also pronounced by some speakers at the beginning of phrases. Compare the frequently used Israeli נראה *nirá* [ni'ʕa] “seemed (masculine singular)” (where the glottal stop is not pronounced) to the rare תשאַל *tish'él* [tiʕ'ʔel] “interrogated, questioned (masculine singular)” (where the glottal stop is pronounced). Hebrew ה [h] is pronounced in Israeli [χ], equal to Israeli כ [χ] (<Hebrew [k]).

3.3 ʔ: Hebrew alveolar trill versus Israeli uvular approximant

In Israeli, *r* — the Hebrew alveolar trill [r] — is realized phonetically as a lax uvular approximant [ʁ], similar to the [ʁ] in many Yiddish dialects — see §1.

4. The suffering of Israeli dyslexics

Dyslexics are teople poo.

Recent research has proved that some languages are harder than others for the dyslexic. If you have to be dyslexic, make sure you are born in Spain or Germany, rather than England. You should definitely avoid present-day Israel. There is no doubt in my mind that Israeli is much more problematic than Hebrew, the reason being that while Israeli's phonetic system is primarily European, it still uses the Hebrew orthography. As aforementioned, there is no one-to-one correlation between signs and sounds: כ (*k*) and ק (*q*) are both pronounced [k], ת (*t*) and ט (*tʰ*) — [t], while more and more Israeli children interchange ע (*ʕ*), א (*ʔ*) and ה (*h*).

The result is that there is usually no phonetic difference between מכבסים “doing laundry (masculine plural)” and מהפשים “looking for (masculine plural)” — both are pronounced *mekhapsím* [mexap'sim] (note the progressive assimilation of *b* to *s* in the former, resulting in [p]). Similarly, ידע “(he) knew” is pronounced like ידעה “(she) knew” and like ידה “her hand” — all *yadá* [ja'da]. Israeli קריאה “reading”, קריעה “tearing”, כרייה “mining”, and כריעה

“kneeling” are all pronounced *kriá* [kɪi'a]. So, do not be too surprised to see an Israeli child spelling עקבותיו (pronounced *ikvotáv*) “his traces” as אפוטב (cf. Hopkins 1990:315). In Yiddish one would say that this child spells *nóyekh mit zibn gráyzn* “Noah with seven mistakes” — cf. Soviet Yiddish נאַײַעך versus Hebrew גה.

One might claim that the neutralizations described above are not universally true since there are still some *mizrahim* whose pronunciation is “Hebrew”. However, more and more *mizrahim* are losing their Semitic pronunciation to an Israeli one. The *normal* spelling of some Israeli foreignisms reflects these phonetic neutralizations. Consider the Israeli slangism ארס *ars* “yob, someone with an attitude”, usually “a poorly educated, chauvinistic, young Levantine man”. Despite its origin, (Vernacular) Arabic عرص [ʔarsʕ] “pimp, cheeky, bastard”, it is usually written in Israeli as ארס (rather than the etymologically faithful ערצ), as though it were the same lexical item as in the Latin phrase *Ars longa, vita brevis* “Art (or science) is eternal, life (of the individual) is short”.

Sometimes alleged “mispronunciations” are more overtly analogous. It might have been former Israeli President Ephraim Katzir who visited a boarding school in the Negev and asked one of the kids where he lived. The pupil replied: *be-sderót ben-guryón* “in Ben-Gurion Boulevard” (with the sound *s* in *sderót*). The President was very impressed, obviously because most Israeli kids pronounce *sderót* as *shdérot*. Possible reasons are the lack of the diacritic on the *ש* and the analogy with (Hebrew>) Israeli שדרה *shidrá* “spine, spinal column” (see Sarfatti 1972:186). Anyhow, when the President pressed the point and asked “in which city?”, the child disappointingly replied *ber séva* “Beer Seva” (instead of *ber shéva* “Beer Sheva”).

In 2002, I gave a talk at the University of Hawaii in Manoa, Honolulu. I was taken to see the Polynesian Cultural Centre, and remember two things in particular. First, a Tongan presenter gave us a lovely big ice-cream in a grapefruit and said: “This ice-cream is for free”. Moments later he added: “The spoon costs 15 dollars!”. Second, I was approached by a blonde woman, who asked in a peculiar accent: “Excuse me, do you like Havaii”, pronouncing Hawaii as Israelis pronounce הווי *haváy* “way of life, cultural pattern”. The fact is that in the local language Hawaii is indeed pronounced *haváy'i*, so I replied: “Yes, I like havai'i and thank you very much for pronouncing it so beautifully!”. Her response, which

took my by surprise, was “You are welcome!”. Yes, the woman was a native German-speaker!

Similarly, the German-based final devoicing (although it is now established that the natural default of all speakers — not only of Germans — is final devoicing, cf. Singh 1987), means that instead of pronouncing *négev*, many *yékes* say *négef*, which means “plague”. I was reminded of my German friend in Oxford who pronounced *liver* as [ˈliwər] as if to counter-balance her frequent pronunciation of English *w* as [v] — cf. -What question invites the answer *9W!?* -Do you spell your name with *v*, Herr Wagner? (-Nein, *w*!).

5. Implications of the lack of vocalization

5.1 Introduction

There are additional problems in the writing system used by Israeli, arising from the avoidance of vocalization (vowel marking, *nikúd* “pointing”, cf. diacritics). I often hear the following “mispronunciations”: (1) *mitabním* instead of *metaavním* — for מתאבנים “appetizers”, from תאבון *teavón* “appetite”. Note the distinct מתאבנים *mitabním* “becoming fossilized (masculine plural)”; (2) *maalé edomím* instead of *maalé adumím* — for the toponym Biblical Hebrew מעלה אדמים in Joshua 15:7, 18:17 (see Ziv 1996:77; *Kol Makom Veatar* 1985:313); (3) The hypercorrect *yotvetá* instead of *yotváta* — for the toponym Biblical Hebrew יטבתה, mentioned in Deuteronomy 10:7 (see *Kol Makom Veatar* 1985:231); (4) *fára fost* instead of *fára fóset* — for the anthroponym פארה פוסט *Farrah Fawcett* (an American actress).

The lack of vocalization in Israeli might even result in a new name. For instance, there is an Israeli named *Reviel* who is thus called because his mother heard a child misreading רוֹיאל, pronouncing it REVIEL instead of ROYAL (a brand of cigarettes). Often, the only way of discovering what the writer means is by putting his/her words in context. Consider the homographs spelled בלבן: *balében* “in the sour milk”, *belaván* “in white”, *balabán* “Balaban (a surname)”, *belibán* “in their heart” (cf. בליבן). I remember looking for a *Morasha Shooting Range* (thinking it might be near *Morasha Junction*,

not far from Tel Aviv) because I was asked to go to מְטוּוּה מוֹרְשָׁה in order to renew a handgun licence. Israeli מוֹרְשָׁה actually stood for *murshé* (√r.f) “authorized, allowed, permitted” (and also “deputy, representative, delegate”). Israeli *morashá* (√jr.f) literally means “legacy, inheritance, heritage”. Finally, מוֹרְשָׁה could also stand for *mivársha* “from Warsaw”. Similarly, Israeli הילדה can represent both *hayaldá* “the girl” and *hílda* “Hilda (a name)”, and Israeli השפלה can stand for both *hashfelá* “the lowland” and *hashpalá* “humiliation”. Intriguing examples include misreading the newspaper headline ברון היה ערפאת as *arafát hayá babún* “Arafat was a baboon” instead of *arafát hayá bebón* “Arafat was in Bonn”.

Thus, *éven gviról* is the common pronunciation in Tel Aviv of אבן גבירול *Íbn Gabiról*, a street named after Solomon Ben-Yehuda ibn Gabirol (in Latin: *Avicebron*, 1022-70). This is probably a (subconscious/semi-deliberate) de-Arabicization assisted by (Hebraized) surnames such as אבן-שושן *Even-Shoshan* (a lexicographer; *Milón Even-Shoshan* in one edition or another, is familiar to almost all Israelis), toponyms such as אבן יהודה *éven yehúda* (a town in the Sharon), אבן ספיר *éven sapír* (a moshav near Jerusalem), אבן מנחם *éven menakhém* (a moshav in Galilee) and אבן יצחק *éven yitskhák* (a kibbutz in Ramat Menashe). The “mispronunciation” *éven gviról* is not that noticeable in Jerusalem, *inter alia* because its inhabitants are more used to the names of medieval Spanish Jewish thinkers.

Absurdly enough, Israelis, almost all of whom can read roman letters, sometimes turn to the English transcription on Israeli signs (confused though it may be) in order to find out how to pronounce an unfamiliar Israeli toponym. That said, there are cases in which the Israeli orthography is more effective than the “English”, compare Israeli אוצ'אלאן with English *Ocalan*, the latter sometimes being pronounced [ˈokɒlan] or [oˈkɒlan], as though he were Scottish, rather than a Kurd bearing a Turkish surname meaning “revenge seeker, vengeant” (cf. Turkish *öc* “revenge” + *alan* “taker”, cf. *almak* “to take, get, buy”; his full name being *Abdullah (Apo) Öcalan*) — cf. the Anglicization *O'Hana* of the Sephardic surname אוהנה Israeli *okhána*. Compare also Israeli מילושביץ *milóshevich* with English *Milosevic*, usually pronounced [miˈlɒsəvɪtʃ] with [s] instead of [ʃ]. The Israeli pronunciation is more faithful to the Serbian. Whereas English tends to maintain the original *spelling* of surnames, Polish, for example, prefers to adapt the

spelling to maintain the original *pronunciation* — cf. *Szekspir* “Shakespeare” and *Waszyngton* “Washington”.

But the fact that many Israelis sometimes turn to the English transcription on Israeli signs has prompted some linguists and non-linguists to propose romanization. A peculiar form of romanization is already apparent in witty Israeli advertisements, e.g. **שֵׁפִיקִינֵג** (*speaking*, note the schwa below the S), the name of a school teaching English in Z.O.A. House (“Zionists of America House”, Tel Aviv), **אֵפֵג** (note the vocalization) and **זֵפּוּזִינָה** (*ze tapuzína* “This is *Tapuzína* (the name of an orange juice drink)”). Incidentally, Japanese also uses roman letters in similar ways for advertising purposes.

5.2 Palindromic stories

Yet, its very lack of vowels makes Israeli an ideal medium for palindromic stories, an example of constrained literature which reads the same when the letters composing it are taken in the reverse order. Consider the following, ריצת-ציר (פלינדְרוֹם) מס' 1671ג, which I wrote several years ago:

**שם, היא לקחה לשון ורדים
ממידרונו של החקלאי המש**

שם, היא לקחה לשון ורדים וחולדה טרפה תולעת. לא נגרם אסון צורף וסבל. ברחוב, צעני בָּשֵׁם מתושלח
דחף בָּחָרוּף נפש רופא לבוש צָחֹרִים. ברור וחשוב לצַיֵן: הבחור, השוכר דירות ברחוב פִּינֵס, זכר סוֹד
רמאים והלך לדוג בָּיִם הזרמים הרמים. הזרמים נָטְרוּ סוג פֶּלֶג לפועלו. נוצר בו המוזר בתוך הים.

זמר להקה עמד ושאב רוחות מפָּרֶשֶׁן שבוי. האיש בלט והפיה נועם בקורס הכנה לבחן בספורט.

איבה נוצרה והרצון הביא טְרוּף. סב נח בְּלָה נְכָה סרוק במעון חיפה וטל בשיא היובש נשרף מתוח ורב אש
ודמע.

הקהל רמז מי הכותב הזומה וברצונו לעוף לגלפגוס, ורטן: מי מרזה? מי מרה מים רזה? מי בגוד לכלה? ומי אמר: "דוס רפז סניף בותר בתור יד רכוש"? הרוחב הניצל בו שחור ורב.

מי רוחץ שובל אפור? שפן פורה בפחד, חלש ותם משבי, נעץ בו חרב.

לבסוף: ריץ, נוס, אמרגן, אל תעלות הפרט הדלוח ומידרונו של החקלאי המש.

English Translation (Non-Palindromic)

There, she took a “bunch” of roses, and a rat devoured a worm. No pure disaster or suffering was caused. On the street, a Gypsy named Methuselah pushed in mortal danger a doctor dressed in white clothes. It is clear and important to mention that the fellow, who rents flats in Pines Street, remembered a liars' secret and went to fish in the sea of great currents. The currents reserved a certain stream for his activity. He became the strangest in the sea.

A band-singer stood and inhaled spirits from a captive commentator. The man stood out and inspired grace in a preparatory course for the sports test.

Hatred was created and the desire brought madness. A grandfather rested worn out, handicapped and combed in a Haifa (rest)home. Dew in the maximal aridity burned, thinly spread and full of fire and tears.

The audience hinted at who writes a résumé and wishes to fly to the Galapagos, and complained: Who reduces weight? Who gained power from a sea which reduces weight? Who is betrayed by a bride? And who said “An orthodox Jew, coordinator of a (local) branch, chooses property as help”? Its remaining width is black and great.

Who washes a grey train (of dress)? A rabbit escaping out of fear, weak and naïve from captivity, plunged a sword into him!

Finally, run, flee, impresario, to the tunnels of the filthy individual and to the slope of the moving farmer.

6. Word-Initial Schwa Mobile

Whereas Sephardim pronounce Schwa mobile (*shva na*) at the beginning of a word, Ashkenazim and Israelis do not. Consider Sephardic *shemi* “my name” as opposed to Israeli *shmi*, Sephardic *tesha fʿesre* “nineteen” vs Israeli *tsháesre*, *qesʿísʿa* “meatball” vs Israeli *ktsitsá*, *dehiya* “delay” vs Israeli *dkhiá*, *shelila* “negation” vs Israeli *shlilá*, *beḥira* “choice” vs Israeli *bkhirá*, *keli* “tool” vs Israeli *kli*, and *shebira* “breaking” vs Israeli *shvirá* (see §8).

7. Syllable structure

The syllable structure of Biblical Hebrew was $CV(X)(C)$. In other words, every syllable consisted of a consonant, a vowel, an optional consonant or vowel and finally, an optional consonant. For example, אקדה [ʔeq.daħ], אותו [ʔō.tō] (the long vowel means that the third slot is a vowel, identical to the vowel in the second slot), קמת [qamt] and סיר [sír]. However, the syllable structure of Israeli is $(s)(C)(C)V(C)(C)(s)$. On the one hand, you can have a syllable in Israeli which consists only of a vowel, for example או *o* “or” (Israelis do not usually pronounce the *áleph* (glottal stop) here). On the other hand, you can have a cluster of up to three consonants *preceding* the vowel, e.g. ספרינט *sprint* “sprint”, סטרפטיז *strep.tiz* “striptease”, זבוב *zvuv* “fly” and קציצה *ktsitsá* “meatball”, as well as a cluster of up to three consonants *following* the vowel, e.g. שרימפס *shrimps* and טלפרנט *til.prent* “sent a teleprinter”.

Now, there are people who believe that some of the examples I gave here are not in Israeli. I disagree. The fact that the foreign origin is transparent does not at all mean that the word has not entered the Israeli language. What is the plural of *shrimp* in English? It is usually *shrimp* (without the *s*). What is the plural of *shrimp* in Israeli? It is *shrímpsim*.

Furthermore, if any of the multi-consonantal words enter Japanese, it will receive a totally different treatment. For example, English *table* is *teburu*, *sexual harassment* is *seku hara*. Unlike Israeli, Japanese cannot keep the clusters because it contradicts the normal syllable structure. When I take the bullet train (*shinkansen*) in Japan, I always look forward to hearing the waitress asking in a high-pitched whisper *aisu kohi aisu kurimu, wa ikaga desuka* “Ice coffee, ice cream, what would you like?”. An Israeli might have said *ays kofi ais krim, ma barósh sh’khà?* There would be no problem whatsoever with the *KR* cluster in *cream*, although it would have been impossible in Hebrew.

There are many minimal pairs which illuminate this point. First, let me explain what I mean by minimal pair: two expressions differing from each other only in one phonetic feature. For example, the stress of *tsfoní* “northern” is different from that of *tsfóni* and thus the two words have different meanings. So what would be an example of a minimal pair related specifically to the difference between the syllable structure of Israeli and that of Hebrew? Compare the Israeli word *plástik* “plastic” with the Hebrew name *’aplatón* “Plato”. The prothetic *’a* of *’aplatón* was inserted to avoid the cluster *PL* at the beginning of the syllable because this was impossible in Hebrew. Linguists call this additional vowel a prothesis (cf. French *établir* ‘establish’, from Latin *stabilire*). If the Greek word *στάδιον stádion* entered Israeli today, we would not have added the prothetic *i* as in *itstadyón*. What do you call the game played by men with funny-shaped balls? Rugby! And what do you call the game played by two people and two small goals, in which each person starts out with the ball, but can only touch it once? *Stánga* rather than *itstánga*! The same applies to Israeli ספין *spin* “(political) spin” versus Rabbinic Hebrew אספלניית *’isplánít* “plaster, adhesive bandage”, from Greek *splēnión*.

The question is, where does the Israeli $(C)(C)(C)V(C)(C)(C)$ structure come from? Well, the syllable structure in Yiddish is identical, although Yiddish can also have a syllabic consonant (CC). Consider Yiddish *érshtṭs* “first of all” or *shtrúdl*, the latter pronounced in Israeli as *shtrúdel*. As opposed to some English speakers, for example, who pronounce *Sweden* as *swi:dŋ*, most Israelis say *komunízem* rather than *komunízm*. Intriguingly, whereas Lincoln College (Oxford) is pronounced *línkən* (the second *l* is not pronounced), Israeli students tend to call it *línkolen*. That said, Yiddish is far from being like Czech, where a whole sentence can have no vowel. For example, *Strč prst skrs krk* means “Put your finger down your throat!”.

8. Unaspired spirantization

None of the Sephardi/Mizrahi communities — apart from the Kurdistan Jews — pronounce a *v* for a beth without a dagesh, although of course that has become standard in Israeli use. Sephardim used to say *shebira* “breaking” rather than *shvirá* as in Israeli. On the other hand, I have already mentioned that most Israelis say *bekítá bet* rather than the puristic *bekhitá bet* “in the second grade”. The fricativization of the /k/ is referred to by linguists as spirantization. We all had to study the differences between schwa quiescence (*shva nakh*) and schwa mobile (*shva na*) so we could determine when we should spirantize. For example, we “should” say *lirkósh* “to purchase” but *rakháshti* “I purchased”, *lekhábés* “to do laundry” but *kibásti* “I did laundry”. But, wait a second, many Israelis say *khibásti* “I did laundry”! And *bli khibúdim* rather than *bli kibúdim* “without refreshments”. Are they wrong? Not at all! Their grammar is simply not the same as Hebrew.

Netiva Ben-Yehuda told me once about a promo for a movie on Israeli TV in which the presenter said that the movie is about *nezirá ve-khómer* “a nun and *khómer*”. How many Israelis would understand the *khómer* here as “priest” rather than “substance”, e.g. hashish? I think it was the famous Israeli Arab radio-presenter Zoher Bahalul who said *eynéy hakahál neutsót bekhár hadéshe* ‘the audience is glaring at the grass field (football pitch)’ (but cf. Israeli *khára* “shit”). The effect might be similar to the old grandmother who caressed her grandson called *Shakhar* while saying

Shakhárale, Shakhárale. Professor Yona Sabar once told me an anecdote about a Jew who, while singing in Qabbalat Shabbat *bóí khalá* “Come, bride” (denoting Sabbath), always looked pointedly at the חלה.

9. Penultimate Stress

Contrary to the traditional view that the Israeli unmarked stress is ultimate and follows the Sephardic traditions — I believe that the basic stress in Israeli is trochaic (penultimate). This explains, for example, the native pronunciation *albáni* “Albanian” rather than the prescriptive *albaní*. When I asked a friend of mine, who has lived in Tel Aviv for years, whether we can meet at *rekhóv yehudá hamakabí* (Judah the Maccabi Street), she claimed never to have heard of it. I had to pronounce it properly as *yúda makábi*. Often, the stress of Israeli names and words changes from ultimate to penultimate, as in Yiddish and Ashkenazic Hebrew.

In some cases, penultimate stress has several motivations, for example Yiddish influence, endearment, differentiation, Arabic influence, alienation. This is yet another manifestation of the crucially important notion of multiple causation, which is at the heart of Israeli (see Zuckermann 2003a, 2008). Consider the following examples of penultimate stress in Israeli:

1. Anthroponyms, for example the female first names שושנה *shoshána*, יפה *yáfa*, שרה *sára*, דבורה *dvóra*, יונה *yóna*, ברכה *brákha*, נחמה *nekháma*, שירה *shíra*, דינה *dína*, רינה *rína*, חיה *kháya*, חוה *kháva* and אסתר *éster*. Penultimately stressed male first names include חיים *kháim*, יהודה *yúda*, משה *móshe* (cf. Yiddish משה *móyshə*), מנחם *menákhem*, נחמן *nákhman*, יורם *yóram*, דוד *dávid* and יונה *yóna*. As in these examples in Israeli, the stress of Yiddish polysyllabic first names is never ultimate. The penultimate stress here might imply affection. Compare it to the non-anthroponymic *khatúla* “female cat”, an endearing form of Israeli התולה *khatulá* “female cat”.

Furthermore, many of the penultimately-stressed Israeli names, and especially the female ones, can serve as a lexical item when stressed ultimately. For example,

דבורה *dvorá* “bee”, שרה *sará* “female minister”, חיה *khayá* “animal”, חווה *khavá* “farm” and יפה *yafá* “beautiful (feminine plural)”. Thus, it is possible to explain the penultimate stress as mere differentiation. Compare this with those differentiations that are not related to stress: לאפר *leafér* “to flick ash from a cigarette/cigar” versus לאפר *leapér* “to put make up on”, השתבץ *hishtavéts* “had a heart attack (masculine singular)” versus השתבץ *hishtabéts* “was assigned (masculine singular)”, and התחבר *hitkhavér* “became friends (with) (masculine singular)” versus התחבר *hitkhabér* “became linked (to) (masculine singular)”. Nevertheless, diachronically, in the cases with penultimate stress, the influence of Yiddish has been more prominent than differentiation.

2. Toponyms, for instance the cities/towns בנימינה *binyamína*, נתניה *natánya* (cf. puristic *netanyá*), חיפה *kháyfa* (cf. puristic *kheyfá*), רחובות *rekhóvot* (cf. *rekhovót* “streets”), גדרה *gedéra*, טבריה *tvérya*, ראש פינה *rosh pína*, (זכרון (יעקב) *zíkhrón*, ראשון לציון *ríshon letsíon* or *ríshon*. Note that the usual stress of Yiddish toponyms is penultimate.
3. Common words, for example גלידה *glída* “ice-cream” (cf. Zuckermann 2000:129), עם/בלי כיבודים *im/bli khibúdim* “with/without sharing (goodies)” (used by children), פרסי *pársi* “Iranian (Jew)”, צבר *tsábar* “prickly pear”, a nickname for native Israelis (*Sabra*), allegedly thorny on the outside and sweet inside. (This is analogous to the use of the word *kiwi* to refer to a New Zealander, not after the delicious fruit but rather after the nocturnal, wingless bird which has a long neck and stout legs.)

There are many cases of penultimate plural form, which differentiates a word in the singular from a homophonous one. Consider Israeli סלים *salím* “baskets, vessels” versus סלים *sálim* “goals scored in basketball” (both based on Israeli סל *sal*). The same explanation can be applied to Israeli פן *pan* “aspect, form”, whose plural, פנים, is often pronounced *pánim*, in contrast to Israeli פנים *paním* “face”. Similarly, Israeli צחוק *tskhok* “laugh” has two plural forms: either *tskhókim* “funny bits, stories” or *tskhokím* “laughs” (both written as צחוקים).

In some cases, the penultimate stress is attributable to the influence of Arabic. For example, *kháyfa* (puristically *kheyfá*) is pronounced in Arabic [ˈhajfa]. This brings to mind the case of Israeli *yeríkho* “Jericho”, which might be a derogatory form of (Hebrew>) Israeli יריחו, usually *yerikhó* יריחו, the oldest town known in *Eretz Yisrael*. Correct me if I am wrong, but Israel’s late former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, pronounced יריחו as *yeríkho* once it became clear that the area was going to be ceded to the Palestinians, as though attempting to create revulsion for this land by hinting that “it is not biblical [jəriˈħō] but rather alien *yeríkho*”. Possibly the stress was also induced by Arabic أريحا [ʔarˈriːħa:] “Jericho”. Thus, penultimate stress can imply not only affection (as in the aforementioned anthroponyms) but also alienation or foreignness (as here).

A contrary example, which nonetheless sustains my argument, is Israel’s former Prime Minister Shimon Peres’s pronunciation of the Israeli acronym אש״א “PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization)”. In what I perceive as an attempt to “humanize” the PLO at a time when it was widely seen in Israel as a terrorist movement, Peres pronounced אש״א as *asháf*, unlike the common pronunciation *áshaf* (Zuckermann 2003b).

It seems that a small difference in stress can have huge political implications. *Maxima in minimis*. An analysis of a tiny linguistic feature can teach us a lot about society. Compare this to the political use of euphemisms, e.g. Israel’s former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s use of the neutral פעימות *peimót*, lit. “beatings (of the heart)”, to refer to the stages in the Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. Israeli *peimót* might have been intended to lessen the opposition of right-wing Israelis to such “withdrawal” (נסיגה *nesigá*). Consider also the semantic manipulation of words for religious or political motives is a weapon of the strong and weak alike (see Zuckermann 2006). An Australian example is that ‘asylum seekers’ have become *queue jumpers*, which has detrimental social connotations.

10. Intonation

While on a state visit to Israel, President George W. Bush took part in a ceremony to honour the country's fallen. Laying a wreath on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier near Jerusalem, he was confused to discover that the inscription read *kháim shúster, soldier and tailor*. "But why do you give his name?" he demanded of Ariel Sharon. "Surely this soldier is meant to be anonymous." "Oy!" replied Sharon with a strong Yiddish intonation: "As a soldier he was unknown, but as a tailor?!?"...

People familiar with both Yiddish and Israeli find it hard to deny that the intonation of Israeli is very similar to that of Yiddish. *Mizrahi* Israelis have acquired this very same intonation. Do you remember the Israeli TV commercial for the *Toto* football lottery, in which a *mizrahi* Jew is walking in a stadium (built by the *Toto*) and praising the activities of the *Toto* Committee? Among other things, he produces a sentence which became a catch-phrase for Israelis: !תדליק את האורות בבקשה! *kháim, tatlík et haorót bevakashá* "Haim, switch on the (projector-)lights please!". The relevant fact is that this Israeli, apparently of *mizrahi* descent, possesses an intonation which is indeed very Yiddish, for example when he states:

טוטו אני ממלא כל שבוע? ממלא! הטוטו מקדם את הספורט בישראל? מקדם! אז אני שותף!

*tóto ani memalé kol shavúa? memalé! hatóto mekadém et haspórt beisraél? mekadém!
az aní shutáf!*

Toto (do) I fill every week? I fill! Does the Toto promote sport in Israel? (It) promotes! So I am a part (of it)! (i.e. I am a part of the important contribution of the Toto to Israeli society).

At the end of 2004, the New Terminal of Ben-Gurion Airport was advertised on Israeli TV. A woman comes back from Paris and when her family comes to pick her up from the Airport, they ask her about the trip. She does not stop praising the shops and service at... the airport. When one of the family members prompts her to talk about Paris, she replies using a denigrating Yiddish intonation: *Paris? Paris!*

The rise-fall intonation in questions expecting a strong negative answer (i.e. “Of course not!”) is also a Yiddish pattern — cf. Weinreich (1956:642) and Blanc (1965:189). For example, *!אָוועק אָוועק אָוועק אָוועק?* *atá haréy lo halákhta leshám?!* “You did not go there, did you?!” or “Surely you did not go there?!”.

Consider also the intonation required for sentences with Y-Movement (i.e. Yiddish movement, left dislocation, cf. thematicization and topicalization). A customer enters a department store in New York and asks the assistant, “Do you have Nike shoes here?” — “No, I am sorry, goodbye!”, comes the reply. The owner, who happens to overhear, takes his employee to one side and rebukes him. “You should have said ‘We have no Nike but I can give you Adidas, New Balance or Hamgaper [Israeli company]’”, he explains. The next day, a customer asks the assistant, “Do you have toilet paper?”, to which he replies, “We’re out of toilet paper. *Sand paper* — *I can give you!*”. This construction is, of course, common in Israeli but one needs to use the right intonation.

This example raises another issue, the influence of Yiddish and other European languages on the syntax of Israeli (see Zuckermann 2008).

11. Concluding Remarks

The impact of Yiddish and “Standard Average European” is apparent in *all* the components of the language but usually in *patterns* rather than in forms. The term “Standard Average European” was first introduced by Whorf (1941:25) and recently received more attention by Haspelmath (1998, 2001).

That said, Israeli demonstrates a unique spectacular split between morphology and phonology. Whereas most Israeli Hebrew morphological forms, e.g. discontinuously conjugated verbs, are Hebrew, the phonetics and phonology of Israeli — including of these very forms — are European. One of the reasons for overlooking this split is the axiom that morphology — rather than phonology — is the most important component in

genetic classification. In fact, such a morpho-phonological split is not apparent in most languages of the world and is definitely rare in “genetic” languages. Israeli’s “non-geneticness” makes it a fascinating hybrid language.

Bibliography

- Bachi, Roberto. 1956. “tkhiyát halashón haivrít beaspaklárya statístit” (The Revival of the Hebrew Language from a Statistical Perspective). *Lešonénu* 20:65-82.
- 1977. *The Population of Israel*. Jerusalem: Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University of Jerusalem — Demographic Center to the Prime-Minister’s Office in Israel.
- Blanc, Haim. 1965. “Yiddish Influences in Israeli Hebrew”. *The Field of Yiddish: Studies in Language, Folklore and Literature (Second Collection)*, Uriel Weinreich (ed.), The Hague: Mouton, 185-201.
- Haspelmath, Martin 1998. ‘How Young is Standard Average European?’. *Language Sciences* 20:271-87.
- 2001. ‘The European Linguistic Area: Standard Average European’ in Haspelmath *et al.* (eds), *Language Typology and Language Universals*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter; Vol. 2:1492-510.
- Hopkins, Simon. 1990. “ivrít veyídish” (Hebrew and Yiddish). *Leshonenu La’am* 40-1:313-8.
- Kol Makóm veAtár (Israel — Sites and Places)*. 1985 (1st Edition: 1953). Ministry of Defence — Carta.
- Mufwene, Salikoko S. 2001. *The Ecology of Language Evolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sarfatti, Gad Ben-Ami. 1972. “od al haetimológia haamamít” (More on Popular Etymology). *Leshonenu La’am* 23:141-3.

- Singh, Rajendra. 1987. "Well formedness Conditions and Phonological Theory" in Wolfgang U. Dressler et al. (eds), *Phonologica 1984 (Proceedings of the Fifth International Phonology Meeting, Eisenstadt, 25-28 June 1984)*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 273-285.
- Weinreich, Uriel. 1956. "Notes on the Yiddish Rise-Fall Intonation Contour". *For Roman Jakobson: Essays on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, Morris Halle (ed.), The Hague: Mouton, pp. 633-43.
- Whorf, Benjamin Lee. 1956 [1941]. *Language, Thought, and Reality. Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. John B. Carroll (ed.). Cambridge (Massachusetts): MIT Press.
- Ziv, Yehuda. 1996. "yerushaláim — shemót savív la" (Geographical Names around Jerusalem). *Leshonenu La'am* 47:73-7.
- Zuckermann, Ghil'ad. 2003a. *Language Contact and Lexical Enrichment in Israeli Hebrew*. London — New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- 2003b. "Language Contact and Globalisation: The Camouflaged Influence of English on the World's Languages — with special attention to Israeli (sic) and Mandarin". *Cambridge Review of international Affairs* 16:287-307.
- 2004. "Cultural Hybridity: Multisourced Neologization in 'Reinvented' Languages and in Languages with 'Phono-Logographic' Script". *Languages in Contrast* 4.2:281-318.
- 2006. "'Etymythological Othering" and the Power of "Lexical Engineering" in Judaism, Islam and Christianity. A Socio-Philo(sopho)logical Perspective', pp. 237-58 (Chapter 16) of 'Tope Omoniyi and Joshua A. Fishman (eds), *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion* (Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture series). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- 2008. *Israelit Safa Yafa (Israeli, a Beautiful Language)*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved.