"Realistic Prescriptivism": The Academy of the *Hebrew* Language,
its Campaign of "Good Grammar" and *Lexpionage*[1],
and Native *Israeli* Speakers

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Dedicated to the memory of Prof. Geoffrey L. Lewis z"l, a mensch, and inter alia the author of The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success

Abstract

Quis custodiet ipsos custodes? 'Who will guard the guardians themselves?' (Iuvenalis, Satirae, vi, 347-8). Over the past century, Israeli – a.k.a. "Modern Hebrew" – has become the primary mode of communication in all domains of public and private life in Israel. Linguistic issues are so sensitive in Israel that politicians are often involved. For example, in an article in *Ha'aretz* (June 21, 2004), politician Yossi Sarid attacked the (most widespread) "common language of *éser shekel*" as inarticulate and monstrous, and urged citizens to take up arms, fight it and protect "Hebrew". However, most Israelis say *éser shékel* 'ten shekels' rather than *asar-á shkal-ím*, the latter literally meaning 'ten (feminine) shekels (masculine plural)', and thus having a "polarity-of-gender agreement" - with a feminine numeral and a masculine plural noun.

Brought into being by legislation in 1953 as the supreme institute for Hebrew, the Academy of the Hebrew Language prescribes standards for Israeli grammar, lexis, orthography, transcription and vocalization (vowel marking) "based upon the study of Hebrew's historical development". This paper provides a critical analysis of the Academy's mission, as intriguingly defined in its constitution: "to **direct** the development of Hebrew in light of **its nature**". It sheds light on the dynamics of the committees' meetings, and exposes some U-turn decisions recently made by the Academy. I suggest that the Academy has begun submitting to the "real world", accommodating its decrees to the parole of native Israeli-speakers, long regarded as "reckless" and "lazy".

Keywords: prescriptivism/normativism, language planning, sociolinguistics, Israeli vs Hebrew, hybridity, Turkish, polyglossia, Arabic

1. The Israeli Language: Sociolinguistic Background

"Israeli Hebrew", which I have argued elsewhere (e.g. Zuckermann, 1999, 2006b) would be more apt to label "Israeli" – is one of the official languages of the State of Israel. Linguistic issues are so sensitive in Israel that politicians are often involved. For example, in a session of the Israeli Parliament on January 4, 2005, then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon rebuked Israelis for using the etymologically Arabo-English hybrid expression *yàla báy*, lit. 'let's bye', i.e. "goodbye", instead of "the most beautiful word" *shalóm* "peace, hello, goodbye". In an article in the "intellectual" daily newspaper *Ha'aretz* (June 21, 2004), left-wing politician Yossi Sarid attacked the (most widespread) "common language of *éser shekel*" (see §9) as inarticulate and monstrous, and urged citizens to take up arms, fight it and protect "Hebrew".

These rebukes reflect the common nostalgia of a conservative older generation unhappy with "reckless" changes to the language – cf. Cameron (1995), Hill (1998), Milroy and Milroy (1999) and Aitchison (2001). Some people do prefer a beautifully-arranged collection of dead butterflies to alive-and-kicking (albeit potentially injured?) butterflies in the wild.

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

Politicians, educators and many laymen are attempting to impose Hebrew grammar on Israeli speech, ignoring the fact – first observed in Rosén (1952) – that Israeli has its own grammar, which is very different from that of Hebrew (i.e. normative Hebrew or classical Hebrew).

The story goes that 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 bi-dróm sfarád ha-érev*, lit. 'Hail fell in southern Spain this evening'. At the end of the

performance, Blanc's daughter tellingly asked, "Daddy, why was Professor Higgins trying to teach Eliza to speak like our cleaning lady?" (see Zuckermann, 2005).

2. The Genetic Classification of the Israeli Language

The genetic classification of Israeli has preoccupied scholars since the beginning of the twentieth century. The still regnant (not to mention politically pregnant) traditional view suggests that Israeli is Semitic: (Biblical/Mishnaic) Hebrew *revived* (e.g. Rabin, 1974). An extreme opposite position defines Israeli as Indo-European: Yiddish *relexified*, i.e. Yiddish, most revivalists' *máme lóshn* (mother tongue), is the "substratum", while Hebrew is only a "superstratum", providing lexis and frozen morphology (cf. Horvath & Wexler, 1997). More views – intermediate between these extremes (see Blanc, 1968 and Izre'el, 1985) – are surveyed in Kuzar (2001).

Unlike these mono-parental views, my own *hybridizational* model acknowledges the historical and linguistic continuity of both Semitic and Indo-European languages within Israeli (cf. Zuckermann, 2006a, 2008). Hybridic Israeli is based simultaneously on Hebrew and Yiddish (both being *primary contributors* – rather than "substrata"), accompanied by a plethora of other contributors such as Russian, Polish, German, Judaeo-Spanish ("Ladino"), Arabic and English. Therefore, the term "Israeli" is far more appropriate than "Israeli Hebrew", let alone "Modern Hebrew" or "Hebrew" (*tout court*).

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

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

Standard Average European patterns in the speech of the Israelis who did choose to speak "Hebrew".

This is, obviously, not to say that the revivalists, had they paid attention to patterns, would have managed to neutralize the impact of their mother tongue(s), which was often unconscious (hence the term "semi-engineered"). Although they have engaged in a campaign for linguistic purity, the language the revivalists "created" often mirrors the very cultural differences they sought to erase (cf. *mutatis mutandis* Frankenstein's monster). The alleged victory of Hebrew over Yiddish was, in fact, a Pyrrhic one. "Victorious" Hebrew is, after all, partly European at heart. Yiddish and Standard Average European survive beneath Israeli grammar.

3. The Academy of the Hebrew Language

3.1 General Information

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

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

3.2 Goals and Functions

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

(1) To investigate and compile the Hebrew lexicon according to its historical strata and layers".

(2) "To study the structure, history, and offshoots of the Hebrew language".

(3) "*To direct the development of Hebrew in light of its nature*, requirements, and potential, its daily and academic needs, by setting its lexicon, grammar, characters, orthography and transliteration [in fact, transcription]".

Goal (1) is wonderful, as Israeli is indeed a multi-layered language (שפה מרובדת). For example, one could say both (a) חשכו עיניו *khashkhú enáv*, lit. 'His eyes became dark', i.e. "He saw black (after bad news)", and (b) נהיה/נעשׂה לו חושך בעיניים *niyá/naasá lo khóshekh baenáim*, lit. 'Darkness has been made in his eyes', i.e. "He saw black (after bad news)". While *khashkhú enáv* is Hebrew, *niyá lo khóshekh baenáim* is a calque of Yiddish ס'איז אים געוואָרן פֿינצטער אין די אויגן *siz im gevórņ fíntster in di óygņ* 'id.', which might in turn be an adaptation of the very Hebrew חשכו עיניו.

Note also other minimal pairs such as עשה דין לעצמו *asá din leatsmó* and לקח את החוק לידיים *lakákh et hakhók layadáim*, both referring to a person violating the law, with the latter being more colloquial, as well as לילות כימים, lit. 'nights as days', vs. מסביב לשעון, lit. 'round the clock', both often referring to hard work.

However, goal (3) *To **direct** the development of Hebrew in light of its **nature*** (**לכוון** את דרכי התפתחותה של הלשון העברית לפי **טבעה**) is intriguing for the following reasons:

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

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

3.3 Day-to-Day Work

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

(1) Historical Dictionary Project

(2) Scientific Secretariat

(3) Computer Section

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

Shortly after the founding of the Academy in 1953, Naftali Tur-Sinai[2], the first President of the Academy, renewed the previously suggested idea of creating a historical dictionary of Hebrew. In 1954, the Academy's plenum placed the dictionary on its agenda, and in 1959, the Historical Dictionary Project got underway following discussions at the Academy and in scholarly forums. The initial step was to locate all the Hebrew texts – from the post-biblical period onward – to create detailed catalogues known as sourcebooks. From the outset, Tur-Sinai decided to use computers to process the material, and what is now the Computer Section was born.

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

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

The following are the functions of the Scientific Secretariat:

(1) Answering queries from the public on a broad variety of Israeli/Hebrew linguistic matters, ranging from pronunciation and spelling to suggestions for children's names. (Currently, you can try your luck and call a single busy Tel Aviv phone number on Mondays and Wednesdays, between 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.)

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

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

It is not just "Hebrew language" high-school students and teachers who make use of the Secretariat's phone line. Just like the above-mentioned politicians (e.g. Yossi Sarid), many laymen have been brainwashed into believing that Israelis "rape" their language by speaking "bad Hebrew", full of "mistakes". On a website associated with Dr. Avshalom Kor – a famous prescriptive grammarian, who features on both radio and television segments in Israel – it is claimed that "every day the Israeli language is slaughtered [sic] on television" (www.lashon.exe.co.il, as of September 26, 2005).

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

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

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

> It is also desirable in Israel to learn the true nature of expressions whose origins are in English, Yiddish or Arabic. They were swept along, distorted, and "stuck on" to Hebrew, changing it to the point that it is unrecognizable, and becoming part of the vocabulary of the renewed language. Do they serve any good purpose? It is doubtful whether they strengthen Hebrew. In fact, they certainly impoverish it; they crush it. They change the essence of the language, while it

still hasn't fully recovered from the coma it was in during 2000 years of Diaspora.

From my interviews with Academy members, I often got the impression that – just like these laymen – they consider Israeli a child who needs nurturing and protection. I often hear the expression *hamatsúy eynó ratsúy*, lit. 'The found is not wanted', i.e. "The found is not sound", "The available is undesirable".

4. Plenum Dynamics

Wit makes its own welcome, and levels all distinctions. No dignity, no learning, no force of character, can make any stand against good wit. (Emerson, 1876: 144)

During the 76th session of the Academy plenum, on December 4, 1967, there was a discussion of גלדין *gladín*, the suggested neologism for the internationalism *gelatin* – cf. Israeli ג'לטין *dzhelatín*, French *gélatine*, Italian *gelatina*, Yiddish זשעלאַטין *zhelatín*, Russian желатин *zhelatín*, Polish *żelatyna* and German *Gelatine*.

Eitan opened the discussion, saying: "For the name of the material well-known in foreign languages, the Committee suggested a Hebrew form גלדין *gladín*. Based on this suggestion, the Hebrew consonant ג [g] would replace the foreign ג' [dž], and with the replacement of ת (*t*) with ד (*d*), the word would be linked to the Hebrew root גלד √*gld* 'clot [congeal, form a coating, stretch (skin) taut]'. It follows that the verb *to gel/jell* will be translated as הגליד *higlíd*".

His colleague Shraga Irmay objected, arguing that "this method resembles דילוג רב *dilúg rav* of the end of the *Haskalah* period". Maskilic Hebrew דילוג רב *dílug rav* (pronounced in Poland *dílIg raf*), lit. "a big bound", is a "phono-semantic matching" (Zuckermann, 2003) of the internationalism *telegraph* – cf. Russian телеграф *telegráf* and Polish *telegraf*. Irmay proposed that they stay with ג'לטין *dzhelatín* 'gelatin', and Committee Member Daniel Leibel joined the protest, arguing that "the Committee proposal is in the form of manipulation, which was used in the times of the [Hebrew] Language Council. Today we do not manipulate [words] in this way".

Committee Member David Zvi Banet proclaimed that "we ought not to proceed with the method of *dilúg rav*, because in this way, *the level of the terms will deteriorate*". The word גלדין *gladín* is obviously a phono-semantic matching, similar to the earlier גלידה *glída* 'ice-cream' (cf. Italian *gelato*), which also uses גלד √*gld* 'clot'.

Thus far, we can understand from the discussion that the Academy deems phono-semantic matches to be "second-class" neologisms and lexical temptations better

avoided. However, Committee Member Shimshon Rosenthal later defended this mechanism, stating: "What is wrong with the root גלד √*gld*? Only that it *accidentally* has a similar sound in the Romance languages? There is nothing [inherently] flawed in it".

His colleague, Chaim Rabin then added, "If it is possible of creating a Hebrew loan-translation which is similar to the foreign noun, I do not see this as a problem. And in my opinion, *it is beautiful*. Is it forbidden to use a Hebrew root because it *accidentally* resembles a foreign root?" As usual, at the end of the discussion, a vote was held. The exact results of which were:

> 12 votes in favour of *gladín;* 7 votes against *gladín;* 7 votes in favour of *dzhelatín* (*gelatin*); 11 votes against *dzhelatín* (*gelatin*); Accepted: *gladín*

> (pp. 19-20 of *Zikhronót* 14, 1967)

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

5. Possible Explanations for Failed Neologisms

> *I know most of the dialects of the Asian Turks. I also understand the dialect spoken by you and people like Yakup Kadri. If there's one dialect I can't make head or tail of, it's the dialect of the Turkish Language Society.*
> (Abdülkadir to Falih Atay in the 1930s, cf. Atay 1965, 1969: 478; translation by Lewis, 1999: 54, cf. 1997: 26)

It is generally believed to be almost impossible to explain why a neologism does not gain general currency. Torczyner argues, somewhat fatalistically, that "luck, on which everything depends, is the deciding force also for the fate of words and expressions in a language" (1941: 166). A similar view is presented in Ornan's 1996 *The Words Not Taken: A Dictionary of Forgotten Words* (Introduction: 7). I believe that we may not be able to give an explanation currently, not because it is impossible *a priori,* but rather because linguists have not yet developed an analysis sophisticated enough for the "duel between grammar and life"[3].

The following are some possible explanations for the failure of so many proposed neologisms by the Academy:

1. The   neologism   was   suggested   after   the   loanword/foreignism   (often

internationalism) had already entered the language and become widespread.

2. The neologism is regarded as ridiculous.

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. The Academy's Deliberate Slowness

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

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

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

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

A normativist may understand Har-Even's concern. Consider the loanwords *spa* and *blog*, for which no recommended alternatives have been proposed despite hours of committee discussions. When/if the Academy finally agrees on a Hebrew-descent neologism, it will be too late.

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

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

> *Ezer Weizman [1924-2005] (then President of Israel): […] and this week in the north there were thousands who went to* tsímerim *['B&Bs' cf. German* Zimmer*]. This is also a marvellous Hebrew word...*

> *Gavriel Birenbaum (from the Academy's Scientific Secretariat): We have a Hebrew term for it:* khadréy nófesh *[lit. 'rooms of holiday-relaxation'].*

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

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

7. "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em!": U-Turn Decisions by the Academy

> *Now... Sit! I said, Sit!*
>
> *[Bart's dog, Santa's Little Helper, walks away]*
>
> **Um, take a walk! Sniff that other dog's butt!**
>
> *See? He does exactly what I tell him.*
>
> (Bart trying to demonstrate his control over his dog in an obedience training class, "Bart's Dog Gets an F", *The Simpsons*; Sound:
>
> http://download.lardlad.com/sounds/season2/dogf10.mp3)

Reading through the Academy proceedings, interviewing its members and conducting research *in situ*, I have discovered **dozens** of examples of U-turn decisions. I suggest

that the Academy has begun submitting to the "real world", accommodating its decrees to the *parole* of native Israeli-speakers, long regarded as "reckless" and "lazy". The following are but a few examples.

7.1 Lexis: lahít

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

English/Intl		Israeli		Hebrew
hit	→	להיט	←	להט
(popular song)		*lahít*		√ *lht*
		'hit (popular song)'		'blaze, fierce heat' (implying passion/craving)

Israeli להיט *lahít* prevailed over the following suggestions for filling this indigenous Hebrew void, i.e. for replacing the internationalism שלאגר *shláger* 'hit' – cf. Yiddish שלאַגער *shláger*, German *Schlager*, Russian шляягер *shlyáger* and Polish *szlagier*[4]:

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

1. (Biblical Hebrew>>) Israeli יהלום *yahalóm* 'diamond', and sometimes metaphorically "any precious matter" – referring to the success of the song.

2. (Biblical Hebrew>>) Israeli הלמ √*hlm* '(to) hit', thus calquing the meaning of English *hit* or German *schlagen* (the origin of *Schlager* 'hit').

b. Tur-Sinai (the President of the Academy) himself proposed אשגר *ashgár*, which hybridizes the following:

1. Mishnaic Hebrew אשגרה [/aΣgåᴗrå] 'flow of words, routine expression' – cf. אשגרת לשון [/aΣgåᴗrat låᴗΣōn] in *Talmud Yerushalmi*: Megillah 73:2. Consider (Medieval

Hebrew>>) Israeli נשתגר *nishtagér* 'became common/ routine', which goes back to the same root שגר √Σ*gr*. Thus, אשגר *ashgár* is a 'commonly heard song'.

2. The internationalism שלאׄגר *shláger* 'hit'.

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

d. Isaac Avinery (1964: 168b), as a purist, proposed זמרון *zimrón*, based on (Hebrew>) Israeli זמר *zémer* 'singing'.

The Academy later gave up and adopted *lahít*. Moreover, in *leksikón dvír leshipúr halashón (Dvir Lexicon for the Improvement of the Language)*, Sivan (1985: 79) emphasizes that the ל (*l*) of להיט has schwa, i.e. the word is pronounced *lehít*. However, in *Laméd Leshonkhá* 169 (1988), the Academy defends *lahít* and defines it as an exception to the □□*i*□ (sometimes □*e*□*í*□) noun-pattern, implying that it should be pronounced *lahít* and not *lehít*[5]. This leads to the discussion of U-turn decisions vis-à-vis Israeli morphology.

7.2 Morphology: Construct-State

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

(1) מבקר המדינה

    mevakér   ha-mdiná

    comptroller   DEFINITE-state

    'State Comptroller'

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

The point relevant to our discussion is that the Academy made intensive orthoepistic efforts to uproot construct-states, in which the form used for the first noun is based on the free form rather than taking the special construct-state form. Consider Israeli *ptsatsá* 'bomb'. This free noun has a construct-state form which is *pitsetsát-*. However,

most Israelis – who use construct-state much less than in Hebrew anyway[6] – do not employ this form. Instead, they use *ptsatsát-*, which is a 'simplified' version, closer to the free form *ptsatsá* (consisting of *ptsatsá + t*).

The Academy attempted to force Israelis to say *pitsetsát-* rather than *ptsatsát-*, for example in the expression *pitsetsát serakhón* 'stink bomb' (which is actually pronounced *ptsatsát sirakhón*).

In 1998, however, realistically acknowledging that native Israeli-speakers would not be convinced to say *pitsetsát-*, the august Academy gave in, and allowed the pronunciation of the bound form to be *ptsatsát-* – cf. rule B5, remark 4 in p. 1068 of *Yalkút hapirsumím* 4602 (1998).

8. "…And if you join them, cover your arse!": Rationalizing the Surrender

In his article "'Hüküm' Nasıl Kurtuldu?" ('How was the word *hüküm* saved?'), Atay (1965) describes how the word *hüküm* 'judgement' – used in contemporary Turkish – was accepted during the Turkish language revolution in the 1930s:

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

> (Translation by Lewis, 1999: 54)

Atay himself was fully aware of the manipulation and knew that the commonly-used *hüküm* was, in fact, a loanword from Arabic حكم [ḥukm] 'judgement, verdict, valuation, opinion'.[7]

Similarly, I propose that the Academy bows to the public more readily if it can find that the grammatical feature it previously rebuked appears in the scriptures (e.g. the

Hebrew Bible, as well as the *Mishnah*, Rabbinic interpretation of the Pentateuch) – even if its appearance is irregular or marginal. As long as the Academy has an official seal/approval in the form of ancient Hebrew, it feels no guilt, so to speak.

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

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

9. Predic(a)tion: Numeral and Noun (Dis)agreement; Concluding Remarks

> *Female graduate student studying cabbala, Zohar, exorcism of dybbuks, seeks mensch.*
>
> *No weirdos please. P.O. Box 68.*
>
> (Personal advertisement attributed to the Jewish Chronicle)

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

Hebrew had a consistent polarity-of-gender agreement between nouns and numerals. Consider **‘éser banót** 'ten girls' versus **‘asar-á baním** 'ten-feminine.singular boys'. In the latter, the feminine suffix *-a* is added to the numeral, which modifies a masculine noun. (Israeli schoolchildren are taught that *asar-á* is masculine). However, in most Israeli idiolects, sociolects and dialects, the system is much simpler: **éser banót** 'ten girls' and **éser baním** 'ten boys'. Just like in Yiddish and Standard Average European[8], there is no difference between a numeral modifying a masculine noun and a numeral modifying a feminine one. Perspicacious Bolozky began arguing for the naturalness of "gender neutralization" in the 1980s (see Bolozky and Haydar, 1986).

That said, although 90% of Israelis (cf. Ravid, 1995) would not say *asar-á shkal-ím*, lit. 'ten-feminine.singular shekels-masculine.plural', i.e. 'ten shekels', there are some Israelis – (currently) cherished by the Academy – who speak a variety in which the

latter is the grammatical form. In fact, massive normative pressure has resulted in hypercorrect conflated forms. Official rules are often used inconsistently, because they are – paradoxically – counter-grammatical vis-à-vis numerous idiolectal, sociolectal or dialectal realities.

Thus, Israeli already shows signs of polyglossia: native Israeli versus non-native (high-faluting, pseudo-) Hebrew. If language planning persists, full polyglossia of the Arabic type may be established. Modern Standard Arabic (cf. Classical Arabic) – as opposed to the various vernacular Arabics (cf. so-called Arabic dialects) – is no-one's mother tongue (a fact which does not prevent some American universities from advertising for professors with "native or near-native fluency in Modern Standard Arabic" – see *Linguist List*, July 1, 2004). Most Arabs consider Modern Standard Arabic as their language, and yet speak Palestinian Arabic or Egyptian Arabic and so forth[9].

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

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

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[1] Lexpionage (portmanteau blend, based on lexicon and espionage): 1. hunting for neologisms; 2. spying on or controlling speakers' lexis.

2 Tur-Sinai, which literally means "Mount Sinai", was a phonetic matching of Naftali's original surname Torczyner. He had also been the last President of the Hebrew Language Council.

3 I translate Avraham Shlonsky's expression dukrav shebén hadikdúk vehakhaím, which appears in his letter of 26 March 1969 to Aharon Teiman (cf. Kna'ani, 1989: 5).

4 Polish szlagier is now slightly archaic, superseded by contemporary Polish hit – cf. Polish przebój 'id.'.

5 Note that the ה (h) is hardly pronounced in Israeli. It is pronounced only in the case of uncommon words, and by some speakers at the beginning of phrases. Indeed, most Israelis pronounce להיט as laít.

Note the existence of the Israeli colloquialism 'להת lehít (pronounced leít), a clipping of להתראות lehitraót 'see you, goodbye, later'. Although some Israelis regard this clipping as a modernism, it had already been mentioned by Persky (1933: 95).

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

  (3) HEBREW: 'em ha-ttalmíd 'mother (construct-state) DEFINITE-pupil', i.e. "the pupil's mother";

  (4) ISRAELI: ha-íma shel ha-talmíd 'DEFINITE-mother GENITIVE DEFINITE-pupil', i.e. "the pupil's mother".

  Etymologically, shel 'of' consists of the relativizer she- 'that' and the (dative) preposition le 'to'.

7 It is possible that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (the Gazi) adopted the "Sun Language Theory" (that Turkish was the Ursprache) precisely in order to legitimize the Arabic and Persian words which the language revolutionaries did not manage to uproot. Atatürk was particularly concerned with ridding Turkish of the Arabic/Persian components, but did not mind too much about the influence of French (which he knew well). In other words, he was anti-Arabic/Persian rather than "purist" in the traditional sense – cf. Zuckermann (2003: 164-5).

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

9 That said, Modern Standard Arabic, as practiced for example in news broadcasts, has been using the colloquial – rather than the classical – numerals for temperatures throughout the Arab world. In their case this was one of the first adaptations they have made towards the colloquial languages; in our case it will probably be the last (Ron Kuzar pc).

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