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Fautes de grammaire ou grammaire des fautes ? Or: **Should Hebrew Speakers Be Afraid of Linguists?**

*Fautes de grammaire ou grammaire des fautes ? Les locuteurs hébreux
devraient-ils avoir peur des linguistes ?*

שגיאות בדקדוק או דקדוק השגיאות? או: אל תפחדו מפני הבלשנים

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Fautes de grammaire ou grammaire des fautes ? Or: Should Hebrew Speakers Be Afraid of Linguists?

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Shlomo Izre'el

1. Introduction

- ¹ The title to this paper,¹ *Fautes de grammaire ou grammaire des fautes ?* “Errors of grammar or grammar of errors?” builds on a title of a book published 90 years ago by the French linguist Henri Frei, *La grammaire des fautes* “The Grammar of Errors.”² In this book, Frei claimed that what is usually regarded as language errors reflects functional needs of the speakers. While not trying to find functional bases to the emergence of errors in Hebrew, I will claim that our view of errors in Hebrew usually leans on wrong interpretation of linguistic facts and should rather be regarded as variants motivated by linguistic and extra-linguistic factors. I shall return to Frei’s book later, but first let me start with an anecdote that has been part of my life as a linguist.
- ² I still remember the first time—decades ago—when I dared write my then-newly acquired profession, “linguist” [בלשן *balšan*] in a form I needed to submit to a governmental office. The clerk at the other side of the counter raised his head, a big smile on his face, and asked in admiration: “How interesting! Do you work in the police or are you a private *balšan*?” For laymen, who had never heard the term *balšan* before, a readily interpretation of the form would derive it—how else?—from the Hebrew root *blš* “investigate,” interdigitated with the pattern for professionals, •a•an, thus interpreting the form as “investigator,” “detective,” the same as the term in actual use, *balaš*. A similar question has repeated itself numerous times since then, but there are also the

well-informed people, who would respond in—real or theatrical—restraint, covering their mouth with their hand, uttering something like: “Oh my! Now I should watch my language so that I do not make any mistakes...”

- 3 Should they indeed? Surely, a linguist, at least one that does linguistic research, is not apt to correct your language. Others may well do that, be it your parents, teachers, or just good people who think that they hold the key to correct language, not being aware that there is no such thing, or, at least, that correct language, like many other things, is correct only in the eyes (or ears) of the beholder. Nevertheless, linguistic inferiority complex among speakers of Hebrew—and not only Hebrew, as we shall see below—seems to be rather widespread. In a sociolinguistic survey taken at the time of compiling the pilot study for *The Corpus of Spoken Hebrew (CoSIH)*, only 8 out of 26 (ca. 31%) native speakers of Hebrew evaluated their Hebrew speech as “very good” (5 in a scale of 5). Notably, most of these speakers evaluated their ability to read and write Hebrew as very good (4 in a scale of 4). Among Arabs, who speak Hebrew as a second language, 7 out of 9 (ca. 78%) evaluated their ability to speak Hebrew as very good.³ Why do native speakers of Hebrew suffer from inferiority complex as regards their ability to speak their native tongue? After all, native speakers are thought to be a perfect model for the use of their native tongue.
- 4 The most readily available reason is the continuing brainwashing from both formal authorities and self-declared ones. One example will suffice to illustrate this. On July 17, 2018, The Academy of the Hebrew Language posted a call regarding language errors in its twitter account:

Figure 1

The Hebrew Language Academy call for language error listing (17 July, 2018) pic.twitter.com/61G2G4MGQj

“What is the error in Hebrew that drives you out of your mind?

Write us in talkbacks so that we know to list it down here in the Twitter page.

...

Echo, and many thanks in advance to all Hebrew lovers and frequent-errors eradicators.”

- 5 Thus, until these very days, “Hebrew lovers and frequent error eradicators” find strong support for their obsession in the highest authority for the Hebrew language.

2. A few words on the special history of Hebrew

- 6 As we shall see below, the tendency to feel uneasy about one's language is not unique to Hebrew. Still, the special history of Hebrew may perhaps suggest some further background to such feelings among speakers of Israeli Hebrew. During a period of 17 centuries Hebrew had been used almost exclusively in writing and prayers. Towards the end of the 19th century, and especially during the first decade of the 20th century, Hebrew entered a new era when it started to be spoken as a vernacular in Palestine and then as the everyday, all encompassing language, as well as an official language, first of British-mandate Palestine and then of the State of Israel. During this period, the number of speakers of the Hebrew vernacular increased from practically zero in 1882 (the beginning of the first Aliya) to more than 8 millions. However, the number of native speakers has not gone far beyond about half of the population, as shown in Tables 1 and 2. As of 2018, about a quarter of the population is non Jewish and therefore do not speak Hebrew as a mother tongue. Furthermore, continuing immigration waves, including the one from the ex-Soviet Union of the 1990s (over 1M immigrants), have brought in many non-Hebrew speaking Jews.

Year	Jewish population	Hebrew speakers
1882	24,000	0
1914	85,000	34,000 (40%)
1948	650,000	487,500 (75%)
1954	1,414,000	861,100 (61%)
1966	2,239,000	1,725,000 (77%)
1983	4,118,600	1,876,900 (46%)
1995	4,322,300	no data
2008	5,603,000	no data
2018	6,602,000	no data

Jewish population in Palestine/Israel and Hebrew speakers as their only or principal language among Jews since 1882.⁴

Jews		non-Jews	
native	non-native	Arabs	others
55.9%	18.6%	20.9%	4.6%
74.5%		25.5%	
49.5%	50.5%		

The sociolinguistic situation in Israel as of 2018

- 7 Thus, the ratio between native and non-native speakers of Hebrew in Israel is about 1:1.
⁵ This noteworthy sociolinguistic situation has brought some authorities to blame what

they consider to be lack of proficiency in Hebrew upon initial and continued foreign influences on the language.

- 8 Already in the formative period of the new vernacular, Eliezer Meir Lipschütz, a member of the Hebrew Language Committee, observed:

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.⁶

- 9 A few years later, Lipschütz stated: “The colloquial language is now rooted in an inner language.”⁷

- 10 As we have learned from Lipschütz’s previous quote, this inner language could not have been other than “foreign-Jargonic.” More than half a century later, Abba Bendavid, who was the Hebrew language consultant to the Israeli media between 1959 and 1982 and a prominent figure in the standardization of Hebrew on the radio, claimed:

Our state in its entirety is a large Ulpan in the middle of the academic season, both the newcomer in the immigrant camp and our best writers. [...] Most Hebrew speakers, even though they use it, still they do not want it as it is (now).⁸

- 11 Haim Blanc described the sociolinguistic situation in Israel during the early 1950s from a different point of view:

Most of these composing what might be called the dominant prestige group (scholars, writers, public figures) have until recently been non-natives; their attitudes regarding Hebrew are accepted almost as a matter of course by many natives, especially those having had the benefit of education, who maintain: “It does not matter that I am a native and the grammarians are not. They know the language while I do not, and what I speak is full of mistakes.”⁹

- 12 Blanc diagnoses the reasons for this situation:

Today, the situation of an educated person who speaks Hebrew is difficult [...], since too often he is being reminded by his teachers, parents, or just any “expert,” that his language is corrupt and that he has to say, for instance, *heḥalav* instead of *haḥalav*, *eyni yodea* instead of *ani lo yodea*, and so on.¹⁰

- 13 Acknowledging this atmosphere, Blanc tried to show that Hebrew had become a language having its own life:

Our language is being renovated in an unusual pace and very special circumstances, and it will be worthy if linguists turn at least some of their energy to studying this development and explain it, even if they are forced to abandon the chase of errors and corruptions and even to admit here and there that a certain error is not an error any more, but an innovation that linguistic life has introduced and made it rooted.¹¹

- 14 At the beginning of the 20th century, during the formative stages of the emergence of Hebrew as the new vernacular among Jews in Palestine, the need for language instruction of both children and adults brought with it prescriptive literature. Naturally, such literature brings forward not only prescribed forms, but also forms that were in use by Hebrew speakers of that time. An early example is an eight-pages brochure published in 1911 by The Language Committee, where two columns of equivalent phrases are listed: on the right a form in current use, on the left the “correct” form. The right-hand column is titled by the prohibitive *אַל-תִּאָמַר* “Don’t

say,” whereas the left-hand column is titled by the imperative אָמַר “say.” This is also the title of the brochure: אֶל-תֹּאמַר – אָמַר “Don’t say–Say” with a subtitle: השגיאות השגורות בדבור “The errors that are frequent in speech” (Fig. 2)

Fig. 2

נלחן א..

„אֶל-תֹּאמַר – אָמַר“
(השגיאות השגורות בדבור)
הוצאת, ועד הלשון בירושלים

אָמַר:	אֶל-תֹּאמַר:
— אני קוראת, קוראת	אני קוראת
— אני מוצאת, מוצאת	אני מוצאת
— אני שונאת, שונאת	אני שונאת
— אני חוטאת, חוטאת	אני חוטאת
— אני ישנה	אני יושנת
— אנחנו יושנים, יושנים	אנחנו יושנות
— הוא יושן	הוא יושן (בעבר)
— אני יכולה	אני יוכלה
— אנחנו יכולים, יכולים	אנחנו יוכלות

1

The Language Committee, אָמַר – אֶל-תֹּאמַר “Don’t say–Say” (1911)

- 15 Among the listed phrases there are quite a few that have entered the Hebrew language to the extent that nobody would deny their correctness anymore, whereas the “correct” forms sound really odd. Here are some examples:

אָמַר:	אֶל-תֹּאמַר:
ראשי כואב	כואב לי הראש
<i>roši ko’ev</i>	<i>ko’ev li haroš</i>
my.head hearts	hearts to.me the.head
“I have a headache.”	
אין לו הדבר הזה	אין לו את הדבר הזה
<i>’eyn lo hadavar haze</i>	<i>’eyn lo ’et hadavar haze</i>
there.is.not to.him the.thing this	there.is.not to.him ACC the.thing this
“He doesn’t have this thing.”	

לי אין!	לי אין (pausal form)
<i>li 'ayin</i>	<i>li 'eyn</i>
to.me there.is.not	to.me there.is.not
"I don't have (it)"	
אני צריך לדבר הזה	אני צריך את הדבר הזה
<i>'ani tsarik ladavar haze</i>	<i>'ani tsarik 'et hadavar haze</i>
I need to.the.thing this	I need ACC the.thing this
או: הדבר הזה צריך לי	
or: <i>hadavar haze tsarik li</i>	
the.thing this need to.me	
I need this thing."	

- 16 Judging from the above, it looks as if by 1911, The Language Committee has already had a language standard that one should strive for, or even a standard language that could be learned by the new speakers of Hebrew. However, as we shall see, this is not the case. But first let us delve a little bit into the question of what a standard language is.

3. On standard languages and their quandaries

- 17 As commonly used today, a "standard language is a planned and designed unitary referential variant which derives from its dialects or one and the same dialectal system."¹² Thus, the notion of standard language involves a process of standardization, which is the result of sociocultural, political and economic pressures.¹³ In his seminal article "Dialect, Language, Nation," Einar Haugen isolated

four aspects of language development that [...] [are] crucial features in taking the step from "dialect" to "language," from vernacular to standard [...]: (1) selection of norm, (2) codification of form, (3) elaboration of function, and (4) acceptance by the community.¹⁴

- 18 This perception of *standardization* has been adopted by many, albeit not without debate.

¹⁵ Hudson explains them as follows:

1. *Selection*—[...] a particular variety must have been selected as the one to be developed into a standard language. It may be an existing variety, [...] but it could be an amalgam of various varieties. [...] However, in some cases the chosen variety has been one with no native speakers at all—for instance, Classical Hebrew in Israel [...].
2. *Codification*—some agency such as an academy must have written dictionaries and grammar books to "fix" the variety, so that everyone agrees on what is correct. Once codification has taken place, it becomes necessary for any ambitious citizen to learn the correct forms and not to use in writing any "incorrect" forms that may exist in their native variety.

3. *Elaboration of function*—it must be possible to use the selected variety in all the functions associated with central government and with writing [...].
 4. *Acceptance*—the variety has to be accepted by the relevant population as *the* variety of the community—usually, in fact, as the national language. Once this has happened, the standard language serves as a strong unifying force for the state [...].¹⁶
- 19 The first aspect listed by Haugen and Hudson is not entirely clear in the case of the alleged emergence of a Hebrew standard at the beginning of the 20th century. Whatever is meant by “Classical Hebrew,” the emergence of spoken Hebrew in Palestine and the idea of a standard Hebrew that could have served as an impetus for the vernacularization of Hebrew was a deficient process, that concentrated mainly on the expansion of the lexicon and some discussion of a preferred standard(?) pronunciation of the emerging language.¹⁷ As will be implied by the discussions below, also the process of codification suffered severe deficiencies in the case of Hebrew, which bears also on the issue of acceptance. The only criterion that can be accepted without reservation is the elaboration of function in the use of Hebrew, which, of course, has been successful and duly widely acknowledged.¹⁸
- 20 Hudson notes that a standard language is a language construct “which is quite abnormal when seen against the context of the tens (or hundreds?) of thousands of years during which language has been used.”¹⁹ As noted by Milroy & Milroy, absolute standardisation of a spoken language is never achieved (the only fully standardised language is a dead language). Therefore it seems appropriate to speak more abstractly of standardisation as an ideology, and a standard language as an idea in the mind rather than a reality—a set of abstract norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent.²⁰
- 21 Following these authors, Linn has entitled his article on this topic “Vernaculars and the Idea of a Standard Language,” stressing that “[t]he key word in the title of this chapter is ‘idea.’”²¹ Linn, pointing at the significance of language planning in the process of standardization, claims that
- once people started to plan languages, that was the point at which it all started to go wrong, imposing a pressure on peoples and on languages—pressures which in earlier times were seen by those who promulgated them as social benefits, but which now, in our more ecologically minded times, we would regard as social ills.²²
- 22 Linn explains:
- Standards are not simply enshrined in formal books and pronouncements, but they are also loom large in the popular imagination [...]. Consequently, when the standard appears to be slipping, this can be a cause of anxiety and concern, and of course a standardized variety will always be in a state of slippage as it moves out of sync with change in the spoken varieties, hence the existence of usage guides to try to shore up the idea of unchanging language standards.²³
- 23 Lastly, Linn takes the illness metaphor further and to its extreme:
- Deumert (following Beck, 2002) sees standard languages as zombies, the living dead, no longer real but nonetheless haunting ‘the minds of speakers (and those linguists who believe in languages as unitary, well defined, and countable objects)’ (Deumert 2010: 258). While standards continue to haunt both language users and the gatekeepers of languages (planners, teachers, publishers, journalists, etc.), they are real enough, and it is too soon to kill them off. How, anyway, do you go about killing something that is already dead?²⁴

- 24 Objections to haunting people with language “errors” have been raised time and again in the Western societies. Just before the time when Blanc made his call for the newly emerged language, the American linguist Robert Hall raised his voice against correcting one’s other language in a book titled *Leave Your Language Alone*:

We have no trouble about most matters in our language; nobody is likely to criticize us for saying *I’m going home, he helped me* [...]. On other points, however, [...] some people are likely to raise objections to what they hear or see, but disapprove of: for instance, *I ain’t, he done it, I gotta stay ’n work but I don’ wanna* [...]. Then they tell us we must not say it one way, we must say it another—their way—because what we’ve just said is “bad,” “wrong,” “incorrect,” “ungrammatical,” “uneducated,” “ignorant,” or something else equally uncomplimentary. The result is, we are confused and insecure; we develop conflicts within ourselves on such points, and, in the end, no longer know what we should say.²⁵

- 25 Almost half a century later, John McWhorter, another American linguist, opens the Introduction to his book *The Word on the Street: Fact and Fable about American English*, with the following story:

- 26 Not long ago, I overheard a woman telling a friend that one reason she couldn’t see herself marrying the current man in her life was because his speech was so full of “errors,” like double negatives and *dose* for *those*. She knew that he talked this way because this was the way the people he grew up with had spoken, and that it therefore wasn’t his “fault.” Nevertheless, she had to admit that she just could not imagine spending her life with someone with such faulty speech—her mother had simply never allowed such errors in the house.²⁶

- 27 Haunting indeed!

- 28 While America is, like Israel, originally an immigrant society, this is not the case in France, where linguistic awareness is known to have held a strong hold up until very recently. This is where our title for this paper takes its inspiration. In 1929, the French linguist Henri Frei published a book titled *La grammaire des fautes*, which opens with a letter to its readers:

À MON LECTEUR

Cher lecteur,

Le titre de ce livre doit vous surprendre. « Comment ? Prétendre faire de la grammaire avec ce qui en est la négation ! » C’est que la plupart des gens, considérant communément les fautes soit comme des faits sans intérêt, dus à la négligence ou au hasard, soit comme des symptômes critiques annonçant le déclin de la langue, croient pouvoir juger des incorrections de langage sans être initiés à la linguistique.

[...]

Adoptant l’état d’esprit de l’observateur qui se refuse à corriger ce qui est, je me suis penché sur la vie des signes avec le seul souci de l’objectivité, pour rechercher en quoi les fautes sont conditionnées par le fonctionnement du langage et comment elles le reflètent ; car il est bien improbable, ami lecteur, que vous fassiez des fautes pour le simple plaisir d’être incorrect.

[...]

J’aimerais contribuer, par ma façon de regarder et de formuler les problèmes, à vous rendre moins rébarbatives des matières dont la tradition a su faire une des plus tristes disciplines. Et comme je serais heureux si mon livre, pauvre lecteur lassé des rabâchages de la grammaire traditionnelle, réussissait à vous communiquer un peu de cet intérêt et de cette sympathie que reclame l’étude intelligente des choses du langage²⁷ !

- 29 A witty acknowledgement is conveyed towards the end of the introduction:

Je remercie aussi puristes, littérateurs et amateurs pour les abondants matériaux fournis par leurs écrits, dont la lecture est souvent plus profitable que celle des théoriciens ; ils

*opèrent au moins sur des faits. Me pardonneront-ils d'avoir interprété ces faits dans un autre esprit*²⁸ ?

- 30 In his preface to a recent reprint of this pioneering book, Freiderikos Valetopoulos concludes:

*L'auteur traite de questions linguistiques rompant avec la tradition qui voulait que les fautes soient des pathologies du langage. H. Frei redéfinit le rapport entre le langage et la faute : celle-ci remplit une fonction dans la langue, elle prévient et répare un déficit du langage correct. Certaines questions semblent très actuelles, ou, même, elles nous permettent de suivre comment certaines « fautes » sont devenues, aujourd'hui, la norme*²⁹.

- 31 This, indeed, reminds us the Hebrew examples cited above from the 1911 Hebrew Language Committee's brochure *אל-תאמר—אמר* “Don't say—Say”. Hebrew—in spite of its special history—is not different from other languages in striving for a linguistic standard. The Hebrew linguistic community is thus not special in the inferiority feelings of its speakers and the behavior of both official and unofficial authorities.

4. Was there any standard to strive for at the forging stages of contemporary spoken Hebrew?

- 32 We can now return to our initial question, viz., whether The Language Committee had already had some idea of a Hebrew standard by 1911, when it started to issue calls for correcting common language errors. Whereas an apparent standard seems to have emerged naturally through time,³⁰ still it had not had any solid grounds to strive at. If we look at the forging stages of such a spoken standard during the emergence phase of the new vernacular, we can see that it was built on divergent ideologies and unsettled educational orientations.
- 33 A clue for the lack of an accepted standard during the forging years of the vernacularization of Hebrew is textbooks for language education of children. An alleged standard was a sort of biblical-like language.³¹ Fig. 3 is an illustration of one influential source, David Yellin's *לפי הַטָּעָה*, a textbook for children's Hebrew instruction, published in 1900.³²

Figure 3

David Yellin, הלפי הטף, "The teacher's book", 2nd edition, 1900, p. 39

- 34 However, there had not been an established, unified standard to lean upon, and the actual practiced language did not get close to that alleged standard. It will be noted at this juncture, 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.³³ Moreover, while education played a major role in the spread of Hebrew among children and its nativization, the input for the emerging language did not come only from schools, as noted, inter alia, by Lipschütz.³⁴ In any case, the imitation of biblical Hebrew has not gained success, as is well known. Most interesting, ideology and practice did not go hand in hand already when discussions on the type of Hebrew to be preferred for the emerging vernacular were taking place:

In addition, it has to be noted that there was some dissonance between the language used by the speakers in the discussions and their linguistic perceptions. The discussion is held mainly in a modern Hebrew style that is not very remote from today's Israeli Hebrew [...] However, in the speakers' imagination, the language they are using is mainly biblical [...] That is, although the discussion itself is complex and very polyphonic, both in substance and linguistically, it looks as if all participants have learned Hebrew grammar from Western grammatical treatises of Hebrew (like that of Gesenius [...]) and perceived Hebrew as basically biblical. The Committee members found it difficult to acknowledge the linguistic reality that had already existed even in their own conversational language, and it seems that turning this linguistic reality to become part of the (established) linguistic norm [=standard; S.I.] was contradictory to their linguistic beliefs.³⁵

- 35 Interestingly enough, although The Language Committee felt the need for a new grammar [=standard], it never accomplished one. An agreed modern grammar book was not composed by The Language Committee, and, in fact, has never been composed

until these very days.³⁶ As noted above, The Language Committee was occupied mainly with pronunciation and expanding the lexicon. As for other domains of language, “[t]he decisions and the preferences of the grammarians reflect to a large degree *subjective motivations, personal*.”³⁷

5. So, what are we haunted about?

- 36 We have seen that linguistic standards are only ideas. Ideas are, by their very nature, not unitary or solid, yet they tend to be totalitarian in the eyes (or ears) of authorities and individuals alike. We have also seen that a Modern Hebrew standard has never been established, so that all modern grammars and textbooks of Hebrew have been substantially based on personal ideas about a practically unestablished standard. It is time to ask whether language purists base their claims for a better Hebrew on some kind of reality.
- 37 One of the most established claims for a Modern Hebrew linguistic standard has been leaning on Hebrew sources, notably biblical ones.³⁸ This is a principle observed by the Hebrew Language Academy until these very days.³⁹ The following examples—only a few out of too many to count and to account for—will illustrate the absurdity in chasing confused speakers for fake errors.
- 38 A relatively recent change in phonology is the change of *i > e* in unstressed closed syllables. Its most prominent manifestation is in forms of the *hif'il* stem, as exemplified in Ex. 1:⁴⁰

(1)	הפסדתי או הרווחתי \
	<i>hervaxti o hefsadti /</i>
	I.profitfitted or I.lost
	“Did I make a profit or did I loose?” (CoSIH; D933_sp2_004) ^a
a. For the system of references from <i>The Corpus of Spoken Israeli Hebrew (CoSIH)</i> see CoSIH’s website.	

- 39 Being that prominent for linguists and laypersons alike, this form of the *hif'il* pattern has become an issue to scorn people with. For the recent call of the Hebrew Language Academy cited above (Fig. 1), some people mentioned this phenomenon as the error they find most intolerable. A few years ago, Ruvik Rosenthal, a prominent and influential popularizer of (socio-)linguistics in Israel, wrote as follows:
- A relatively new error in the domain of the verb is the pronunciation of the *hif'il* stem in the past tense, in which the *hireq* has been changed to *segol* as in *hef'alti*, *hešlamta*, etc. This corruption has been made a widespread spoken norm and can be heard also in the media. One can explain any such error in terms of phonetic convenience, analogy or the like, but the penetration of a prominent deviation from a grammatical norm exposes an inferior linguistic sub-culture.⁴¹
- 40 Although Rosenthal understands the phonetic basis of this change,⁴² he regards it as an “error,” a “corruption” of Hebrew. One may wonder whether Rosenthal will find a single person in the entire world that does not live in an inferior linguistic subculture. Since this article is available on the internet in Rosenthal’s blog (2014), his readers take

support for their views and feelings from his authority and keep haunting their environment by correcting their language and by complaining about the deteriorating language... But leaving aside any proper explanation for this change, the question raised here is whether similar forms are not attested in Hebrew sources of earlier periods, notably the Hebrew bible. But there are; e.g., הִגְלָה “he expelled” (Ezra 2:1; Nehemiah 7:6); הִכְלִימוֹם “we humiliated them” (1 Samuel 25:7). The reason for regarding such forms as errors is, therefore, unjustified also from this point of view.

- 41 One other example, from the domain of syntax, is the so-called lack of agreement between verb and what is regarded as its subject in sentences like the one illustrated in Ex. 2:

(2)	נשאר לך עוד כמה חודשים
	<i>niš'ar leḥa od kama ḥodašim </i>
	3SGM.remains to.you more several months
	“You still have a few months left” (CoSIH; P931_1_sp1_064)

- 42 Whereas the noun phrase חודשים “months” is in the plural, the verbal form includes a singular subject. For what is concerned with our question here, i.e., whether similar structures occur in ancient Hebrew sources, the answer is indeed positive, as shown by Exx. 3-4.

(3)	וְנִשְׁאַר-בּוֹ עוֹלֵלֹת
	<i>w=niš'ar=bo ʿolelot</i>
	and=3SGM.was.left=in.it remains
	“And (only) remains shall be left on it” (Isaiah 17:6)
(4)	כִּי מִצָּפוֹן יָבֹוא-לָהּ הַשּׂוֹדְדִים
	<i>ki mišṣəṭṭon jəboʾ laḥ haššodədīm</i>
	because from.the.north 3SGM.will.come to.her the.marauders
	“For the marauders shall come upon her from the north.” (Jeremiah 51:48)

- 43 While this is not the place to explain the syntactic and morphosyntactic structure of such sentences, it should be emphasized that these configurations are the norm in colloquial Hebrew and follow strict rules.⁴³ Ex. 5 illustrates the case:

(5)	אז אז רציתי
-----	-------------

	<i>az az ratsiti </i>
	then then I.wanted
	כאילו כמה שנשארו
	<i>ki'ilu kama še niš'aru </i>
	like how.many that they.were.left
	את החודשים שנשאר
	<i>et=ha=χodašim še niš'ar </i>
	ACC=the=months that stayed(SGM)
	לעשות את זה כמו שצריך
	<i>laasot et=ze kmo še tsariχ </i>
	to.do ACC=this like that necessary

“Then ... then I wanted like as many as there have been left ... the months that have been left, to do it properly” (CoSIH; P931_1_sp1_145-148)

- 44 The speaker in Ex. 5, a soldier in the IDF, tells his commander that—in spite of personal problems he had been suffering—he wanted to make his service as useful as possible during the time left until he would be discharged from duty. The interesting thing for our case here is his correcting the plural verbal form and replacing it with a singular form, although the noun phrase in this sentence is in the plural (“months”). Somehow he felt that the use of a plural verb in this context is improper. This, of course, goes against the view of the prescribers.
- 45 Our last example for this section strongly relates to the structures above and concerns with existential sentences where the existential component is the verb $\sqrt{hjj}$ “be.”⁴⁴

(6)	שיהיה תחרות
	<i>še jihje taχarut </i>
	that 3SGM.will.be competition(F)
	“Let there be competition.” (CoSIH; C711_1_sp1_021)

- 46 Whereas the noun phrase תחרות “competition” is a feminine one, the verbal form includes a masculine subject. As against similar constructions including other verbs (as

shown in Exx. 3 and 4 above), constructions with initial forms of $\sqrt{hjj}$ are very frequent in Biblical Hebrew,⁴⁵ as illustrated by Exx. 7 and 8:

(7)	וַיְהִי לְפִנְחָה יְלָדִים וּלְחַנָּה אֵין יְלָדִים
	<i>wa=jhi līpninnō jlcđim u=lḥannō ʔen jlcđim</i>
	and=3SGM.was to.Peninah children and=to.Hannah EXT.NEG children
	“Peninah had children, but Hannah did not have any children.” (1 Samuel 1:2)
(8)	וַיְהִי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בֹּאֵה וְעֶלְטָה הָיָה
	<i>wa=jhi haššemeš bōʔō wa=ʔlōṭō hōjō</i>
	and=3SGM.was the.sun coming.SGF and=darkness(F) was.3SGM
	“And the sun was setting, and there was darkness.” (Genesis 15:17)

⁴⁷ We shall return to this constructional type in Israeli Hebrew in §8 below.

⁴⁸ To conclude, there is no solid basis for arguing that such constructions are erratic even from the point of view of the purists who would look for ancient Hebrew sources for establishing a standard for Modern Israeli Hebrew. As already noted by Ben-Asher, “[t]he decisions and the preferences of the grammarians reflect to a large degree *subjective motivations, personal*.”⁴⁶ We are thus left with Hall’s observation (about English speakers), that people correct our speech because they want us to speak *their* way.⁴⁷

6. A different look at language: can we overcome preconceptions?

⁴⁹ We have seen, that a grammar of standard Israeli Hebrew has never been written by formal authorities. Nevertheless, we are still being haunted by the demand for using apparent “correct” forms and structures. The reason is, of course, that we are all, like Frei’s “poor readers” (see above, §3), condemned to the brainwashing of traditional grammar, which, in the case of Modern Hebrew, is, at least partly, based on an invented set of rules, or system, that has never existed as such.

⁵⁰ Furthermore, and more importantly, we have learned from the experience of other languages and cultures, that keeping a linguistic standard is doomed to fail. This is so because a standard, like any other variety of language, is not—and cannot be—monolithic.

⁵¹ So, can we overcome preconceptions? I believe we can.

⁵² Let us try look at language differently, so that we won’t see and hear phantom errors all over. Language is a human attribute. Very much like any other human attribute or behavior, a linguistic system, any linguistic system, is dynamic and inherently variable.

No language is monolithic, and must be described as dynamic, a continuum of features that are used according to demographic variables and according to circumstances. By its virtue of being a language, a standard language too has inherent variation in it. As already noted above, a standard language is only an idea, “a set of abstract norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent.”⁴⁸ As noted time and again, a standard language is intimately concerned with writing, yet it is the spoken varieties of language which play the major role in the linguistic life of a speech community.⁴⁹ It must be noted, though, that not only spoken language is dynamic, but so also the written varieties of language. Language changes synchronically and diachronically, i.e., it has inherent variation not only when looked at in a single point of time, but also through time. All linguistic varieties influence each other, both spoken and written, and there is constant interaction between these two modalities, including what is regarded—or rather believed to be—the standard variety.

- 53 Let us look at two samples dealing with the same topic, one in spontaneous speech, one in writing. In the spoken sample (Ex. 9a), two sisters and their father discuss how one of the sisters prepares pots from *papier-mâché*. In the written sample (Ex. 9b), there are instructions for doing the same.

\ אחות א': אני רוצה גם לעשות כאלו דברים || זה קשה 9a
 אב: ממה זה ||
 אחות ב': [עם דבק פלסטי | טיפה מים ||]
 אחות א': [מעיסת נייר || מה | מרחת אותם \]
 אב: אבל יש עציץ בפנים ||
 אחות א': כן || (פסק) איך את עושה | את פשוט מורחת על ה | עיתון | דבק \
 אחות ב': לא || אני שמה בקערה | מערבבת | גור- גוזרת את העיתון ל |
 קורעת אותו || אבל שיהיה | ארוכים | מרובעים |
 אחות א': ואז את מין | מדביקה כזה מפסלת \
 אחות ב': אני קודם שמה | מקווצ'צית נייר | כדי שיהיה לזה | רוחב | ..
 עומק כאילו אני | מדביקה קודם | קיווצ'צ'ים של נייר כאילו |
 ועל זה עושה ||

Sister 1: I too want to do such things. Is it difficult?

Father: What is it made of?

Sister 2: [With white glue and ... a drop of water.]

Sister 1: [From papier-mâché. What, did you smear them?]

Father: But there is a pot inside.

Sister 1: Yes. (Pause) What do you do? You simply smear glue on the newspaper?

Sister 2: No. I put (it) in a bowl, mix, cut the newspaper in ... tear it. But it should be long, square...

Sister 1: And then you sort of like glue (it), carve?

Sister 2: First I put ... crease paper, so that it gets width, like depth, I first glue like paper creases and make (it) on it.

(CoSIH; C714_sp1_012-021; sp2_011-012; sp4_004-022)

אני יוצאת מתוך הנחה שזה פיסול ברצועות כך שתחילי את הפיסול על עציץ קיים 9b
 [...] ולאחר כ-6-7 שכבות תשאירי לייבוש. העיסה אמורה להתקשות לאחר יום. תוציאי
 את העציץ ותיווצר לך תבנית שעליה את יכולה לעבוד ולשנות כרצונך. [...] ברגע שאת
 מתחילה לעבוד קל יותר להוסיף לו נפח ע"י קימטוטי נייר או קיפולים והצמדתם
 לעבודה.

I assume that this is sculpting in strips so that you start the sculpture on an existing pot [...]. After about 6-7 layers, let it dry. The paste should harden in a day. Take out the pot and create a pattern on which you can work and change (it) at your will. [...] Once you start working, it is easier to add volume to it with paper creases or folds and attach them to work.

[retrieved 16 February, 2021] / איך-מכינים-עציץ-מעיסת-נייר. <https://flix.tapuz.co.il/threads/3400541>

- 54 Apart from the conversational vs. monologic respective styles with their related structural differences, the notable use of prosody and some phraseological and speech forms divergencies, I should draw attention to the use of the participial form מְכַוְּצִים *mekavčēšet* “crease” and its derivative כִּיּוּצִים *kivčūčim* “creases,” which are the most available derivations for the desired meaning in the common language, as against the written equivalent כִּמְטוּטִים *kimtutim* (translated here as “creases” as well), a noun that is derived from the noun *kemet* “fold.” Will any of these forms be regarded as faulty language? If so, which of the two forms? Furthermore, will the purists be aware that the dictionary form of the latter, written one, is כְּמִטּוּט *[kamtut]* rather than] כִּמְטוּט *kimtut*]?⁵¹
- 55 Once we become aware that linguistic variation is an inherent feature of language, the notion of change, both synchronic and diachronic, manifests itself to the extent that faulty language no longer plays a role for either a single native speaker (an idiolect) or for a native speakers community. There are two communities for which we can look for errors: children and non-native speakers.⁵⁰ Still, both these latter communities do contribute to the change of language. At this juncture, one may do well to recall the motto to an old book on the development of the Semitic languages by Harry Torczyner:
Das Irrtum is das fruchtbare Prinzip der Sprache
“Error is the fruitful principle of language”⁵²
- 56 Thus, the recognition that language errors can foresee natural developments of language and should be regarded as potential seeds of later norms is old enough, yet it seems that people, both laypersons and language professionals, refuse to acknowledge this fact. It is high time that we respect this fact and change our view of language. Along teaching features of language varieties other than colloquial ones, language education should acknowledge linguistic variation and shed light on written and spoken varieties alike. It is the duty of schools to teach the differences between written varieties and spoken varieties, as well as varieties within each modality, rather than insist that the norms of some variety (“standard”) should be applied to all. Education should concentrate on teaching not only different variants, but also pay attention to their respective use in proper contexts. Thus, in language education, the notion of error should better be replaced by the notion of adequacy.⁵³

7. Spontaneous spoken language and its study

- 57 Having claimed that everyday language is not a faulty one, it would be beneficial to show that spoken language varieties are not random, viz., that they are governed by rules no less than any other varieties of language, written or spoken alike. Before illustrating this claim with one structural trait, I should put forward some premises that have guided me in my own research on this topic.
- Language is, first and foremost, a tool of expression and communication. Its most frequent manifestation is human communication.
 - Language should be studied for its own sake. A corollary of this demand is that linguistic analysis must detach itself from any dependence on other disciplines, notably logic.
 - Language is intimately related to discourse. Accordingly, language cannot be disconnected from the discourse for the sake of analysis.

- Spoken language varieties, notably the language of everyday conversation, are the most frequently used among all linguistic systems. It is this capacity of spoken language that lends it the power to have its impact on all other linguistic systems and their development.
 - Given the prominence of spoken language in human communication, proper linguistic attention must be drawn to the spoken varieties of language, notably spontaneous ones.
 - Spoken language must be analyzed according to its own properties. We must detach ourselves from any preconceptions about the structure of language based on its written forms.
 - One of the most prominent features of spoken language is prosody, including, mainly, tone, loudness, and rhythm.
 - Prosody is a formal feature of spoken language no less than segmental features and must be incorporated into any analysis of spoken language.
 - Prosody is the main tool we use for spoken language segmentation.
 - For the speaker, it is a means to convey information and thus it integrates with syntax and information structure.
 - For the recipient, prosody is the lead to reach a correct interpretation of the segmental structure and consequently a sound interpretation of the information conveyed.
- 58 Since spoken language is acoustic, linear and temporally extended, it is ephemeral by nature. Therefore, one needs special means to capture it and to enable its study. Visual transmission is necessary in order to enable any research, except, perhaps, for such that is focused on individual, small units. Nowadays, we have good means to capture the spoken linguistic output by recording, and special computer applications are available for quality transcription and analysis of its structure, both segmental and prosodic.
- 59 Analyzing language has been made much easier by compiling corpora. The importance of corpora for linguistic analysis have been claimed time and again by scholars dealing with either written or spoken language.
- To me a corpus of any size signals a flashing neon sign “Think again,” and I find it extremely difficult to fit corpus evidence into received receptacles ; [...] [T]he language obstinately refuses to divide itself into the categories prepared in advance for it.⁵⁴
- [I]l ne s'agit pas d'utiliser le français parlé pour illustrer une théorie, mais de trouver une théorie qui permette d'aborder les données du français parlé⁵⁵.*
- 60 In order to draw significant data from a corpus and to achieve a type of analysis that draws from corpus data, one should adopt a corpus driven approach, viz., building up a theory of language from actual data⁵⁶ rather than use a corpus-based approach, i.e., look for data to establish a preconceived theory.
- 61 Spoken corpora are notoriously hard to achieve, all the more so corpora for the study of spontaneous spoken everyday language, which is hard to record and most difficult and time consuming to transcribe. Therefore, corpora of colloquial Hebrew are scarce. The only corpus of this type which is freely available in sound and transcripts on the internet is *The Corpus of Spoken Israeli Hebrew (CoSIH)*.
- 62 CoSIH consists of recordings of real life speech, mostly conversations. It has been recorded and compiled between August 2000 and October 2002. The recordings are all real life natural speech, being samples from consecutive 6 to 18 hour recordings by 37 volunteers. As such, they naturally include both the speech of the volunteers who recorded them and their interlocutors. Thus, the number of recorded speakers comes

up to 140. Ca. 5h:15' (=ca. 40,000 words in Hebrew orthography) are presented in ELAN software files, segmented into prosodic units. This enables easy access to data, sound and transcripts aligned, via search capacities and other technical sophistications (see further §8 below). All these texts are also available in pdf files. In addition, one text of 5':30" is presented in sound and transcription in pdf files. In addition, over 5h of sound samples with transcripts are presented in pdf files with their respective sound files.⁵⁷ Further 2h:45' of sample recordings are presented only in sound files. Altogether, CoSIH's website offers 13½ hours of recorded samples. Apart from the Hebrew transcripts, there are 1h:13':45" in (mostly wide) phonetic transcription, mostly aligned with sound in ELAN files.⁵⁸ For further information see CoSIH's webpages with previous bibliography there: cosih.com/english/bibliography.html.

- 63 In what follows, I will illustrate the kind of analysis that can be achieved using a corpus driven approach by looking at presentative-existential sentences in spoken Israeli Hebrew as against the prescribed rules.

8. Variation and rules—an illustration: presentative-existential sentences

- 64 Presentative-existential sentences are those existential sentences that introduce new referents into the discourse. As is commonly described, Hebrew existential sentences exhibit the particle *ješ* for marking existentiality (Ex. 10).⁵⁹ Where time, aspect, or non-assertive modalities of existence are to be expressed, verbal forms of *vhjj* "be" are used instead (Exx. 11-12).⁶⁰

(10)	יש אוכל
	<i>ješ oxel</i>
	EXT food
	"There is food."
(11)	היה אוכל
	<i>haja oxel</i>
	it.was food
	"There was food."
(12)	יהיה אוכל
	<i>j-ihje oxel</i>
	it.will.be food
	"There will be food."

- 65 We have already seen above (§5) that the prescribed form of verbal existential sentences has to show gender and number agreement between the person marker which forms part of the verb and the following noun phrase (henceforth: pivot). The person marker is, thus, co-referential with the pivot (henceforth: referential person marker).
- 66 Written Hebrew generally shows agreement between the referential person marker and the pivot, in conformity with the prescribed rule (Ex. 13):

(13)	החדשות הטובות: תהיה תחרות
	<i>haḥadašot hatovot: t-ihje taḥarut</i>
	the.news good(PL) 3SGF-will.be competition(F) (Title in Ynet, May 5, 2004 https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-2911099,00.html [retrieved 16 February 2021])

- 67 As we have seen above (Ex. 6, repeated here as Ex. 14), spoken Hebrew may show a different configuration, where the person marker is indifferent for the gender and number of the pivot.

(14)	שיהיה תחרות
	<i>ʃe j-ihje taḥarut </i>
	that 3SGM.PRED-will.be competition(F)
	“Let there be competition.” (CoSIH; C711_1_sp1_021)

- 68 Whereas the noun phrase תחרות *taḥarut* “competition” is a feminine one, the verbal form includes a 3SGM subject, and is thus non-referential (usually called “impersonal”). In Ex. (15), the pivot is a plural noun, whereas the verbal form likewise includes a 3SGM subject.

(15)	היה כבר כמה פירות
	<i>haja-ø kvar kama per-ot </i>
	was-3SGM.PRED already some fruit-PL
	“There have already been some fruits.” (CoSIH; C711_4_sp2_048)

- 69 We have already seen a similar configuration in the second turn of sister 2 in Ex. 9a above (| מרובעים | שיהיה ארוכים “let it be long.PL, square.PL). One other example (Ex. 16) is taken from a television interview, where the speaker tells about a threat she got from a technician who deceived her:

(16)	“And he says: ‘Only I will do it for you, Only I. If not —”
	יהיה לך בעיות
	<i>j-ihje laχ baaj-ot</i>
	3SGM.PRED-will.be to.you problem-PL
	“you will have problems.”
	https://www.mako.co.il/tv-yetzata-tzadik/articles/Article-ec50de9cc1a4261006.htm

(17)	יהיו לך בעיות
	<i>j-ihj-u laχ baaj-ot</i>
	3PL.PRED-will.be-3PL.PRED to.you problem-PL

Figure 4

Correcting transcript: יהיו לך בעיות

- 70 This transcript has also been transformed to the written version of this program at www.mako.co.il/tv-yetzata-tzadik/articles/Article-ec50de9cc1a4261006.htm (retrieved 16 February 2021).
- 71 While the speaker in this case was a layperson, whom might be regarded by the subtitle writer or the journalist as speaking “faulty” language, this is definitely not the case in our Ex. 18, uttered by one of the most eloquent speakers of Hebrew, the eminent writer Amos Oz.

(18)	יהיה מלחמת אזרחים
------	-------------------

	<i>j-ihje milxem-et=e Ezraxim</i>
	3SGM-will.be war-F=citizens
	"There will be civil war,"
	יהיה מהומות
	<i>j-ihje mehum-ot</i>
	3SGM-will.be riots-PL
	"there will be riots,"

- 72 This passage is taken from a formal speech by Oz, given at Tel-Aviv University on June 3, 2018.⁶¹ In both lines, the verbs have 3SGM person markers, viz., non-referential, whereas the pivot is feminine in the first line and plural in the second one. What would the transcript of this speech look like? Would the transcriber dare to change Amos Oz's words? Would Oz be regarded as a person whose language should be corrected? Would Oz be regarded as a lay speaker like all of us, common people? Or, perhaps, would Oz's speech forms be respected as such?
- 73 The answer to this question can now be answered, since this lecture was brought posthumously to print by Amos Oz's family and friends (כל החשבון עוד לא נגמר: The Reckoning Is Not Over Yet: The last lecture"), giving us the "ההרצאה האחרונה" opportunity to see what the transcript of these forms actually looks like. As expected (or, should I write "suspected?"), the edited transcript does show agreement between the pivot and the person marker in the respective verbal forms, as follows:
- ... תהיה מלחמת אזרחים, יהיו מהומות, ...
 ... *t-ihje milxem-et eZraxim, j-ihj-u mehum-ot*, ...
 ... 3SGF-will.be war-F citizens 3PL-will.be-3PL riots-PL
 "... there will be civil war, there will be riots,"⁶²
- 74 Thus, the transcriber (or editor) has changed Oz's spoken utterances so that they fit the acknowledged standards of written Hebrew. This follows a common trend in transcription of spoken Hebrew, where transcribers correct what seems to them "wrong" or "non-standard" Hebrew in the actual uttered language.⁶³
- 75 The point is, however, different. A corpus study will result with two further important observations:
- 76 We should note that structures with referential person markers, i.e., ones that show agreement between the person marker in the verb and the pivot, occur not only in written varieties, but also in spoken ones, as illustrated by Ex. 19.

(19)	הייתה השקעה נוספת
	<i>hajt-a hafka-a nosef-et</i>
	was-3SGF.PRED investment-F additional-F

"There was an additional investment." (CoSIH; D933_sp2_033)

- 77 Further, we can discern rules that govern the occurrence of each of these variant configurations.
- 78 One of the capacities of the ELAN software is to create concordances. Fig. 5 shows a partial screenshot of such a concordance, where units with the string היה {hjh} are listed, suggesting configurations of existential sentences, including our Ex. 6 above (the first line in the concordance list, # 63) and Ex. 20 below (last but one line, # 85).

Figure 5

63	C711_1	sp1	... שיהיה תחרות
64	C711_1	sp1	... -- לפ- לפ- ואז אפשר יהיה
65	C711_1	sp1	... והמוגן היה נורא חזק
66	C711_1	sp1	... ולא היה לי כוח לרדת למטה לשים מחדש (את) ה ל להתעסק עם לסדר את המוזיקה
67	C711_1	sp1	... שיהיה לי גם למעלה וגם למטה טייפ
68	C711_1	sp1	... פשח עוד מעט יהיה את היינות של השי
69	C711_1	sp3	... לא היה הרבה דברים @@
70	C711_1	sp2	... זה היה סתם בכאלה
71	C711_1	sp2	... מה היה שם
72	C711_2	sp1	... אז היה אפשר באמת לשים את זה בשקע שביניהם
73	C711_2	sp1	... איך זה יהיה
74	C711_2	sp2	... אם היה אפשר
75	C711_2	sp2	... לא היה דבק
76	C711_2	sp2	... היה כנס אולי
77	C711_2	sp3	... מה יהיה הלאה
78	C711_3	Sp2	... אני רוצה שגם פה יהיה בבית
79	C711_4	sp1	... היה מהומות
80	C711_4	sp1	... גם לי היה רע מזה
81	C711_4	sp1	... זה היה נורא טעים
82	C711_4	sp1	... אבל היה רע מזה
83	C711_4	sp2	... הוא כבר לא יהיה בהכרה
84	C711_4	sp2	... שנה הבאה יהיה לנו רימונים בעץ שלנו
85	C711_4	sp2	... היה כבר כמה פירות
86	C711_4	sp2	... -- היה פר- --

ELAN concordance of the string היה {hjh} (partial view)

- 79 Having selected line 85 in the concordance list, a window showing the context of this line opens (Fig. 6), where one can, among other features, listen to this unit.

Figure 6

ELAN window showing the unit היה כבר כמה פירות in its context

- 80 Listening to the actual recording is essential for the study of spoken language, since transcription of any kind, no matter how narrow or expanded in details, cannot transmit all features of the spoken stretch and is always based on theory.⁶⁴ Other software, like Praat, can show us different features of speech needed for the analysis of spoken language (Fig. 7). For our case here, it will make prosodic features visual to enhance their analysis.

Figure 7

Praat window showing the phonetic and prosodic analyses of the unit היה כבר כמה פירות

- 81 Prosody, indeed, has been found most relevant to our study. By and large,⁶⁵ there is a complementary distribution between the place of accent and the occurrence of agreement between the person marker and the pivot. Whereas in constructions with non-referential (i.e., 3SGM) person markers the pivot is marked for focus by prosodic accent (Ex. 15, repeated here as Ex. 20; Figs. 7 and 8), constructions with referential person markers lack prosodic accent altogether (Ex. 19, repeated here as Ex. 21; Fig. 9).

(20)	היה כבר כמה פירות
	<i>haja-ø kvar kama per-ot </i>
	was-3SGM.PRED already some fruit-PL
	“There have already been some fruits.” (CoSIH; C711_4_sp2_048)

Figure 8

Focus marked by prosodic accent on the final syllable (Ex. 20)

(21)	הייתה השקעה נוספת
	<i>hajt-a haʃka-a nosef-et </i>
	was-3SGF.PRED investment-F additional-F
	“There was an additional investment.” (CoSIH; D933_sp2_033)

Figure 9

Lack of prosodic accent (Ex. 21)⁶⁶

- 82 Being in complementary distribution, the two configurations share the same function, viz., marking focus. That is, whereas in configurations using non-referential (3SGM) person marker, the focus on the pivot is marked by prosodic accent, in the alternative configuration, it is segmental focusing that is being used, marking focus on the pivot by an appositive, referential person marker (“agreement”).
- 83 While this strategy points to the function of the referential, appositive person marker as focus marking, a second strategy suggests the reason for using an alternative strategy to the first one, as it involves the discourse function of the pivot. Here another complementary distribution can be discerned, one between a brand-new pivot and a known, given or expected one that is (re)introduced as a discourse topic. When a brand-new element is introduced, the verbal complex will include a non-referential person marker. However, when a given, known, or expected element is to be (re)introduced as a discourse topic, this feature of the pivot is indicated by using a configuration with a referential appositive person marker, i.e., one that agrees in gender and number with the pivot.⁶⁷
- 84 Summing up, marking of focus in affirmative presentative-existential sentences has a complementary distribution. It is marked either by prosodic accent or by a referential, appositive pronominal element. The latter case is motivated by discourse factors, viz., a given, known or expected pivot (=the introduced referential expression). This is the rule in colloquial Hebrew. When people use what they think to be the standard language, or rather strive towards it, they use the latter configuration also when the pivot is new. It should be noted, though, that both contextual and demographic variation of this construction needs further research.

9. Some final words

- 85 Language use is not random: it is regulated by demographic factors and contextual settings. Synchronic variation is ubiquitous in the linguistic life of both the community and the individual. In fact, variation is an inherent characteristic language. It is functional, follows its own rules, and is a source for diachronic change. Therefore, the notion of language error is problematic, and should be avoided altogether. This is definitely so when looking at the native, adult speaker. In language education, the notion of error should better be replaced by the notion of adequacy. Linguistic education should acknowledge linguistic variation and shed light on written and spoken varieties alike. It is the duty of schools to teach differences between written

varieties and spoken varieties, as well as varieties within each modality, including their respective use in the proper context, rather than insist that the norms of some variety should be applied to all. Errors are the sole privilege of L2 learners and perhaps L2 speakers and, especially, children in their early stages of L1 learning.

86 Standard languages are not any different. The alleged system of any standard variety is not more logical or ordered than colloquial varieties.⁶⁸ Likewise, “errors” are not more arbitrary than older systems of language from which they deviate. Perhaps it is the other way round: as noted by Frei,⁶⁹ they result from speakers’ strive for more functionality than that of older, inherited norms. The strive for a linguistic standard is doomed to fail if disregarding linguistic variation, which is an inherent characteristic of language per se. Children learn the standard varieties aside their colloquial varieties, and so are other newcomers to the linguistic community. Here too, errors are a matter of adequacy.

87 The recent emergence of Hebrew as a spoken vernacular is a major source for its sociolinguistic situation. However, as in many other languages, language contact is but one of the factors influencing its current linguistic and sociolinguistic structure. Since no standard has ever been formally established and subjective preferences have been a major guide in the forging of what people would regard as a standard language nowadays, linguists and laypersons alike should be most careful when designating variants as errors.

88 In the subtitle to this article, a question was asked: Should Hebrew speakers be afraid of Linguists? While I hope my faithful readers already know my answer to this, it would do honor to the author of the book who has inspired the main title of this article, and cite from his introduction as follows:

[L]e linguiste qui observe un état de langue se met sur un autre plan que le puriste qui prétend, à tort ou à raison, agir sur les faits⁷⁰.

89 So, don’t be afraid of linguists. On the contrary: a linguist will most probably tell you that you do *not* speak faulty language. And to all those would-be linguists—or, as one of my most esteemed teachers would call them, “language maniacs,” i.e., all those who can’t help correcting your language—just answer in the same spirit my son used to respond when he was a small kid and I corrected his use of the numerals from שלוש בלונים *šaloš balonim* to שלושה בלונים *šloša balonim* “three balloons:” “Daddy, these are my balloons!”

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NOTES

1. The paper is built upon a lecture given in Paris on the occasion of the conference *Le voyage de l'hébreu à travers le temps et la société* held at Inalco (Paris), 12-14 September 2018. Special thanks are due to the organizers, Il-Il Yatziv-Malibert and Masha Itzhaki, for their kind invitation and their generosity. I thank the participants of the conference for an insightful discussion, as well as for some follow-ups. This lecture was based on partially similar lectures given at seminars, courses and other occasions at Tel-Aviv University and elsewhere during many years of teaching. It has been a real pleasure to have the opportunity to learn from generations of students. Thanks are due also to Anna Inbar and Leon Shor for discussing with me the issue of standard language and education.

2. FREI, 1929.

3. The questionnaires upon which this count has been made can be viewed at <https://www.cosih.com/table-2.html>.

4. It will be noted, that since the census of 1995, The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics did not include a question regarding language use, probably due to the fact that Hebrew had by then established itself as the principal language of Israel.

5. The number of non-native speakers is smaller than their percentage among non-native Jews, as the latter include people who immigrated as small children and therefore their language can be considered native. For the complex notion of native speaker see, inter alia, DAVIES, 2003.

6. LIPSCHÜTZ, 1923 [1917], p. 36; my translation.

7. LIPSCHÜTZ, 1920, p. 32; my translation.

8. BENDAVID, 1967, p. 313; my translation.

9. BLANC, 1954, p. 391.

10. BLANC, 1989 [1952], p. 11; my translation. הֶחָלָב *heḥalav* (or rather *heḫalav*, which is the most widespread pronunciation of ח in Israeli Hebrew) vs. הַחָלָב *haḥalav* (or *haḫalav*) “the milk” reflect two pronunciations of the definite marker /ha/, the first is ancient and therefore normative, the second colloquial. אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ *eyni yodea* vs. אֲנִי לֹא יוֹדֵעַ *ani lo yodea* “I don’t know” reflect the respective ways of expressing negation before participial predicates.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 10; my translation.

12. NIKOLOVSKI, 2015, p. 7.

13. FASOLD, 1984, p. 3; ROMAINÉ, 1994, p. 14; MILROY & MILROY, 2012, p. 19; NIKOLOVSKI, 2015.

14. HAUGEN, 1966, p. 933.

15. HUDSON, 1996, § 2.2.2.

16. *Ibid.* p. 33.

17. OR, 2016, pp. 110-128; ELDAR, 2018, pp. 141-144.

18. SÁENZ-BADILLOS, 1993, § 8.2.

19. HUDSON, 1996, p. 32.

20. MILROY & MILROY, 2012, p. 19.

21. LINN, 2013, p. 360.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 362.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 373.
24. LINN, 2013, pp. 373-374.
25. HALL, 1950, p. 1.
26. McWHORTER, 1998, p. 1.
27. FREI, 1929, pp. 9-10.
28. *Ibid.* p. 12.
29. FREI, 2011, p. III.
30. Cf. ELDAR, 2018, p. 140.
31. GLINERT, 1990, p. 114. This ideology has probably had its impetus from the *Haskala* “Enlightenment” linguistic trends (cf. KUTSCHER, 1982, § 307). This type of style can be seen in much of the children’s literature during the first decades of the 20th century.
32. The title of this textbook, לְפִי הַטֹּף *For the Mouth of Children*, refers to its being aimed at teaching Hebrew as a spoken language, as specifically claimed in the introduction to the first volume, סֵפֶר הַמּוֹרֶה “The Teacher’s book”. The second volume, מִקְרָא לְפִי הַטֹּף: סֵפֶר הַתּוֹלָדִים *For the Mouth of Children The Pupil’s Book*, is a reading tutorial for the beginning student. I thank Ruth Burstein and Chaim Cohen for exchanging views on this topic.
33. HARAMATI, 1979, pp. 15-16; 1981, p. 433.
34. Above; see further IZRE’EL, 2003.
35. OR, 2016, p. 213; my translation.
36. *Ibid.*
37. BEN-ASHER, 1969, p. 154; my translation; my emphasis.
38. BENDAVID, 1967.
39. COHEN, 1998. Although in the past three decades the weight of Biblical Hebrew has been decreasing in the decisions of the Hebrew Academy, still leaning on sources has remained a basic principle.
40. Transcription is usually broad phonetic, with some attention to the phonological system. Phonological input is added mainly in the representation of /h/, which is omitted in most environments in contemporary spoken Hebrew, and in the representation of some of occurrences of /j/, which may also elide in certain environments. For typographic and reading convenience, the rhotic phoneme, which in standard Israeli Hebrew is uvular, is represented as *r*. The mid vowels are represented as *e* and *o*, although their prototypical respective pronunciations are lower. Two successive vowels are separated by a syllabic boundary, e.g. *ba.it* “house” is to be read *ba.it*; diphthongs are indicated by vowel+semi-vowel (in both directions), e.g., *aj*, *ja*. Glossing follows, mutatis mutandis, the Leipzig Glossing Rules <https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php>. Additional glossing abbreviations are: EXT existential (particle); PRED predicational component (predicate or subject). Prosodic notation: | minor boundary; || major boundary; / major boundary with “appeal” tone (usually indicative of yes/no questions); – fragmentary (truncated) unit. Overlapping is indicated by square brackets [].

41. ROSENTHAL, 2008, p. 184; my translation.
42. This change is known to have occurred in Israeli Hebrew already in 1960s (GONEN & RESHEF, 2018). Gonen & Reshef list some other explanations for this change aside the phonetic one. It will be noticed, though, that a similar change is attested in many other forms aside forms of *hi/ef'il*, so that its phonetic basis seems strong enough.
43. BERMAN, 1980; KUZAR, 2012, § 3.3; cf. MASCHLER, 2015.
44. *vhjj* is used as a symbol of the root. This is a traditional notation of the root, and does not necessarily reflect actual allomorphs of the root in (spoken) Israeli Hebrew.
45. JOÜON & MURAOKA, 2006, pp. 519-520.
46. BEN-ASHER, 1969; see §4 above.
47. HALL, 1950; see §3 above.
48. MILROY & MILROY, 2012, p. 19.
49. ROMAINÉ, 1994, pp. 84-95.
50. Of course, all speakers, non-native and native alike, do make occasional mistakes. The term *mistake* is thus distinguished from *error*. By this differentiating terminology I follow, *mutatis mutandis*, recent trends in research on language acquisition as follows: “A mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or a ‘slip’, in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly. ... An error, a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflects the competence of the learner” (BROWN, 2007, pp. 257-258). Errors, rather than mistakes, are the subject matter of our discussion.
51. Harry TORCZYNER, or Naftali Herz TUR-SINAI, is known as the first president of the Hebrew Language Academy and as the chief editor of the Ben-Yehuda Hebrew dictionary after the latter’s death.
52. TORCZYNER, 1916, p. VII.
53. For some pertinent discussions about these topics in the context of English see MILROY & MILROY, 2012, especially chs. 4-6.
54. SINCLAIR, 2001, p. 357-358.
55. BLANCHE-BENVENISTE & JEANJEAN, 1987, p. 90.
56. TOGNINI-BONELLI, 2001.
57. These recordings have been transcribed separately from the CoSIH project by Nurit Dekel for her PhD thesis.
58. These have been offered to CoSIH by Yael Maymon (with Werner Arnold), Il-il Yatziv-Malibert (as part of CORPAFROAS: *A Corpus for Afro-Asiatic Languages*), Elissa Gutterman and Noam Faust, to whom we are much indebted.
59. We shall deal only with affirmative sentences.
60. Infinitive להיות *lihjot* [to be] can be used as well (IZRE’EL, 2018; 2019). Forms with infinitives do not contribute to our discussion in this paper, however.
61. The lecture can be watched at https://video.tau.ac.il/events/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=8704:amos-oz&Itemid=555 (where the relevant passage starts at 49’41”) or at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6DXUiZhRow> (where the relevant passage starts at 40’11”).
62. OZ, 2019, p. 33.

63. BOROCHOVSKY BAR-ABA, 2010, ch. 3. Of course, had Oz published this lecture himself, he would probably do the same and make the written version fit his standards of written Hebrew. Thus, he would have changed much of his wording, including these forms, so that they show agreement between the pivot and the personal marker on the respective verbs. A clue to this conclusion can be seen in Oz's article חלומות שמוטב לישראל למחר ולהשתחרר מהם "Dreams that Israel should better rush out of them" (Oz, 2017, pp. 107-131), upon which his 2018 lecture at Tel-Aviv University was based. Alas, this very passage does not occur in that article. Still, it is illuminating to compare Oz's use of the clause שתִּי מדינות כאן לא תהיינה אם לא "If there won't be here two states" right at the beginning of this article (p. 109). Although occurring in a conditional negative locative protasis, the use of the 3PLF form תהיינה suggests how Oz would put into writing other presentative-existential clauses like the ones cited in Ex. 17. Other occurrences of affirmative presentative-existential clauses in the same article support this conclusion, e.g., ודאי יהיו לא מעטים ש... "surely there will be not few (people) who ..." (p. 131).

64. OCHS, 1979; DU BOIS, 1991; IZRE'EL, 2005.

65. For some special cases see IZRE'EL, 2019.

66. The rise at the very end shows the continuing prosodic boundary tone rather than focus, which would have been put on the stressed syllable /sef/.

67. For further discussion on presentative-existential sentences in spoken Israeli Hebrew see IZRE'EL, 2018; 2019.

68. DEUTSCHER, 2011.

69. FREI, 1929, see § 3 above.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

ABSTRACTS

This paper tries to reevaluate the notion of linguistic error in the light of modern research on standard language, linguistic variation and the history of contemporary Hebrew since its emergence as a vernacular at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. We ask why Israelis perceive their Hebrew speech as faulty or bad and whether this perception is appropriate. We then discuss linguistic variation—synchronic and diachronic—and how acknowledging it as an inherent characteristic of language should affect our view of language and language education. Finally, we try to see how we can overcome preconceptions and do research not only on written Hebrew but also on its spoken varieties, so that they receive their proper place in our life and culture.

Cet article tente de réévaluer la notion d'erreur linguistique à la lumière des recherches modernes sur la langue standard, la variation linguistique et l'histoire de l'hébreu contemporain depuis son émergence comme langue vernaculaire à la fin du XIX^e siècle et au début du XX^e siècle. Nous nous demandons pourquoi les Israéliens locuteurs natifs de l'hébreu perçoivent leur discours en hébreu comme défectueux ou mauvais et si cette perception est appropriée. Nous

discutons ensuite de la variation linguistique – synchronique et diachronique – et comment sa reconnaissance comme une caractéristique inhérente de la langue devrait affecter notre vision de la langue et de l'enseignement scolaire de la langue maternelle. Enfin, nous essayons de voir comment nous pouvons surmonter les idées préconçues et faire des recherches non seulement sur l'hébreu écrit, mais aussi sur ses variétés parlées, afin qu'ils trouvent leur juste place dans notre vie et notre culture.

מטרת המאמר הזה לבדוק מחדש את מהותו של מושג ה"שגיאה" בלשון לאור המחקר המודרני בתחומים בלשניים אחדים: תקן לשוני ולשונות תקן; שונות לשונית; תולדות העברית בת-זמננו מראשית התהוותה כשפת היומיום בארץ ישראל בסוף המאה ה-19 ובראשית המאה ה-20. במרכז עומדת השאלה מדוע ישראלים דוברי עברית ילידית תופסים את לשון הדיבור שלהם כשגיאה או רעה והאם יש ממש בתפיסה זו. מתוך התבוננות במהות השונות הלשונית – שונות סינכרונית ושונות דיאכרונית – כמאפיין אינהרנטי של הלשון, נשאלת השאלה האם הכרה במהות זו של השונות בלשון עשויה לשנות את דעתנו על הלשון ואת התייחסותנו אל החינוך הלשוני. לבסוף, נעשה ניסיון לבדוק כיצד נוכל להתגבר על דעות קדומות באשר ללשון ולעסוק במחקר הלשוני לא רק של העברית הכתובה אלא גם של החלופות המדוברות של הלשון, כך שתפוסנה את מעמדם הראוי בחייה הקהילה ובתרבותה.

INDEX

Keywords: colloquial language, standard language, linguistic variation, language education

שפה מדוברת, שפת היומיום, לשון תקן, שונות לשונית, חינוך לשוני **מילות מפתח:**

Mots-clés: langage familier, langue standard, variation linguistique, éducation aux langues

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