ISRAELI RESEARCH ON BIBLICAL HEBREW LINGUISTICS

by CHAIM RABIN

Speculation on linguistic aspects of the Hebrew Bible began with the etymologies of the Midrash. These were perhaps influenced by Hellenistic etymology, but on the other hand, to the best of our knowledge no Jew was inspired by Greek philological activity to write a dictionary or a grammar of Biblical Hebrew. The impetus to undertake these came from the philological developments in the Arab world, and began with Saadiah Gaon (ca. 880–940), of whose grammar and dictionary only small fragments have been preserved. Our knowledge is also fragmentary with regard to the linguistic researches of Northwest European Jews between 900 and 1200, of which details are preserved in the grammatical and lexicographical material in the commentaries by Rashi (Troyes, France, 1040–1105). The main development took place in medieval Spain, and the immense amount of work done there influenced Northwest European Jewry and later, with the Renaissance and Reformation, also Christian scholars. The latter at first mainly systematized the material they drew from Jewish works. They remained ignorant of the use Jewish scholars had made of etymological comparison with Arabic and Aramaic since Saadiah, but as knowledge of these languages, as well as of Ethiopic, increased in Europe, it was, since the middle of the 18th century, also applied in the search for improved interpretation of Biblical Hebrew. With the achievements of Albert Schultens (1686–1750) and Friedrich

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Wilhelm Gesenius (1768–1842), comparison with other Semitic languages became one of the basic features of Biblical Hebrew lexicography. These two scholars also introduced the "philosophy" of the emerging science of general linguistics into the writing of Hebrew grammars, and the 19th and 20th centuries witnessed intensive and successful research into both these aspects of Biblical Hebrew, to some extent also into syntax, and much less into semantics.

Individual Jews took an active part in these scientific advances, but since the study of Biblical Hebrew was concentrated in departments of Theology or in theologically-oriented Bible departments, those Jewish scholars remained outsiders, and the Jewish community as a whole took little interest in the new linguistics of Biblical Hebrew. The period from 1750 to 1880 coincides with the period of Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*), during which a considerable body of literature in pure Biblical Hebrew was produced. The 18th-century grammarian Solomon Hanau continued in the ways of the scholars of the Spanish period, though he criticized them in some matters, and those who came after him mainly simplified the material and somewhat modernized the manner of presentation, without drawing upon the results of contemporary linguistic investigations.

With Eliezer Ben-Yehuda's (1858–1922) programmatic article in 1879[1] the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language in Palestine and in Zionist circles in Eastern Europe and in North America began. This was followed from 1885 onwards by the wholesale introduction of Mishnaic Hebrew and later material into the written and spoken language. Thus, Biblical Hebrew changed from the status of a living literary language to that of one component of the complex of "sources" from which Hebrew was to be reconstituted. At the same time its full investigation became a necessity in order to set up standards for the revived language, now the medium of instruction in schools and teachers' colleges, and since 1924 also at institutions of higher learning (1924 the Haifa Technion, 1928 the Hebrew University). The first attempt at a Hebrew-Hebrew dictionary of Biblical Hebrew along Western lines was made by Joshua Steinberg in 1895.[2] In 1908 started the publication of E. Ben-Yehuda's *Thesaurus Totius Hebraitatis,* completed in 16 volumes in 1958, primarily Hebrew-Hebrew, though the main meanings of words were also given in German, French, and English. This comprised the entire vocabulary of Biblical Hebrew, marked off by symbols[3] from

1.   English translation by D. Patterson in: E. Silberschlag, ed., *Eliezer Ben-Yehuda,* Oxford, 1981, pp. 1–12. See also J. Fellman, *The Revival of a Classical Tongue,* Hague, 1973.

2.   *Mishpaṭ ha-Urim,* with renderings in German and Russian (like many of the works mentioned here, this had many reprints and new editions). Steinberg also published a Biblical Hebrew grammar, *Ma'arkhey leshon 'Ever,* Wilna 1885.

3.   I.e. Mishnaic, medieval and modern formations are marked by asterisks, circles, etc., while Biblical words remain unmarked. An important feature of the *Thesaurus* are the details from Jewish medieval lexicographers in the footnotes.

words originated in later periods, and interpreted by the methods of etymology and context current in Biblical scholarship. In 1903, Abraham Kahana began to publish volumes of a scientific commentary in Hebrew to the Bible, taking full account of European scholarship, and in 1907 Samuel Leib Gordon started a popular commentary, which however, without specifying his sources, also used Western scholarly results and modern approaches. Both began publication in Eastern Europe, but later volumes were published in Palestine. The first professor of Bible at the Hebrew University in 1926, Moses Zevi Segal, was a collaborator in the Kahana series and wrote a series of volumes in Hebrew and English on Biblical subjects.[4] His successor in 1949, Yehezkel Kaufmann, produced an 8-volume work on the history of Israelite religion.[5] Naphtali Herz Tur-Sinai (Torczyner) joined the Hebrew University Faculty in 1933[6] and became professor of Hebrew Language in 1938. During his stay in Israel, he published several editions of his commentary on Job,[7] a three-volume collection of his articles, mostly on Biblical subjects and Biblical language,[8] and a six-volume collection of critical notes on the text of the Hebrew Bible.[9] For many years, he was president of the Hebrew Language Committee and its successor, the Hebrew Language Academy. On behalf of these bodies, he organized a team of scholars to prepare an academic dictionary of Biblical Hebrew, but in his lifetime the work did not reach a sufficient degree of co-ordination to make it possible to continue it after his death.[10]

A lexicon of Biblical Hebrew in the tradition of Gesenius and his successors was started in 1957, in combination with a specially-prepared concordance, under the name *Thesaurus of the Language of the Bible*, by S. E. Loewenstamm and Y. Blau. Its main text is in Hebrew, with an abbreviated English translation. Volume III, to the end of the letter *ṭ*, was edited by M. Z. Kaddari in 1968. Since then publication has ceased, for lack of funds.

Philological activity along Western lines started simultaneously with the revival of Hebrew, both in Palestine and in Eastern Europe. David Yellin, born at Jerusalem, 1864–1940, one of the founders of Hebrew education in Palestine, and

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4. Note: *Mavo la-Mikra'*, 2 vols., 5th rev. edn., Jerusalem, 1960.
5. *Toldot ha-emunah ha-Yisra'elit*, 8 vols.; abridged English translation by Moshe Greenberg, *The Religion of Israel from its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile,* New York, 1972.
6. By then he had published, inter alia: *Die Bundeslade und die Anfänge der Religion Israels,* Berlin, 1922; *Die Entstehung des semitischen Sprachtypus* I (all published), Wien, 1916.
7. English, Jerusalem, 1957.
8. *Ha-lashon ve-ha-sefer,* 3v., Jerusalem, 1954–5.
9. *Peshuṭo shel Mikra,* 6 vols., Jerusalem, 1967.
10. It is probable that Biblical Hebrew will be included in the dictionary on historical principles being prepared under the editorship of Z. Ben-Ḥayyim for the Hebrew Language Academy, which will cover the entire vocabulary of the language to the present day.

at the end of his life Professor of Medieval Poetry at the Hebrew University, wrote a Hebrew Grammar based apparently entirely on Biblical Hebrew, of which the part dealing with phonology was published in 1942,[11] and a list of all biblical nouns and adjectives classified by patterns and paradigms as an appendix to another posthumous publication on medieval grammarians of Biblical Hebrew.[12]

The only complete presentation of Biblical Hebrew phonology and morphology which appeared in Hebrew in Israel, is a six-volume work by Zevi Har-Zahav[13] (the book originally contained double the quantity of text, but had to be shortened to make printing possible). This is intended as a grammar of Hebrew of all ages, but mainly analyzes Biblical Hebrew, adding material from Mishnaic Hebrew in separate paragraphs. The distinction is less clear in Mordecai Bezalel Schneider's grammar, which also includes a volume on syntax.[14] Neither Har-Zahav nor Schneider dealt with medieval or modern Hebrew.

More modern treatments of Biblical Hebrew grammar have mainly appeared so far in polycopied form as material for courses at the various Israeli universities, and are not available through the book trade. In fact the only printed grammar of Biblical Hebrew by an Israeli scholar is in English, Yehoshua Blau's *Biblical Hebrew Grammar*.[15] The same scholar's Hebrew treatment of grammar[16] is a comparative grammar, though it gives much new detail on B.H., as does also his Hebrew work on Syntax,[17] though meant as school guide to syntactic analysis of Modern Hebrew. The same is to some extent true of the school syntax by Yizhak Perez,[18] of Tel Aviv University.

A much more detailed study of the construction of relative clauses in Biblical Hebrew by Y. Perez forms part of a monograph on the history of the relative construction.[19] Among other volumes on syntax should be noted M.Z. Kaddari's

11. *Dikduk ha-Lashon ha-'Ivrit*, Jerusalem, 1963.

12. *Toldot hitpathut ha-dikduk ha-'ivri*, Jerusalem, 1945, pp. 167–260. A full list of Biblical nominal patterns, restricted to nouns without prefixes or suffixes, is also given in I. Avinery, *Hekhal ha-mishkalim*, Tel-Aviv, 1976, with extensive philological notes.

13. *Dikduk ha-Lashon ha-'Ivrit*, Tel-Aviv, 1951–6.

14. *Torat ha-Lashon be-hitpathutah*, 3 vols., Wilna, 1923–39. Only few copies exist of the syntax. The fullest description up to date of the difference between Biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew is to be found in the normative study by Abba Bendavid, *Leshon ha-mikra u-leshon Hakhamim*, 2 vols., Tel Aviv, 1967–71 (a much smaller first ed. appeared in 1956).

15. In the series *Porta Linguarum Orientalium*, N.S. no. 12, Wiesbaden, 1976.

16. *Torat ha-hegeh ve-ha-zurot*, Tel Aviv, 1972.

17. *Yesodot ha-tahbir*, 2 vols., Jerusalem, n.d.

18. *Tahbir ha-lashon ha-'ivrit*, Tel-Aviv, 1943.

19. *Mishpat ha-zikkah*, Tel-Aviv, 1967.

studies in Biblical Hebrew syntax,[20] the last part of which is a syntactico-semantic study of the verb *natan*. Syntactico-semantic are also Moshe Azar's studies on promises and oaths in Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew[21] and a series of articles by Eliezer Rubinstein, who employs techniques of componential analysis. The volume on undiscovered syntactic rules in Biblical Hebrew by Meir Rotenberg[22] is more stylistic in character, and should not be used without reference to Simḥa Kogut's review article in *Leshonenu*.[23] A great amount of details of phonology, grammar, syntax, semantics, and lately also discourse analysis[24] are contained in periodicals and collective volumes, and any partial enumeration would be misleading.[25]

The only book on Biblical Hebrew semantics is also not in Hebrew: Benjamin Kedar, *Biblische Semantik,* Stuttgart, 1981. Biblical semantics is, however, extensively discussed in Gad Ben-'Ammi Sarfatti's *Semantikah 'ivrit,* Jerusalem, 1978. A particularly Hebrew field of semantics, the etymological comments, especially on proper names, found in Midrashic literature, is represented by a brochure of Y. Pereẓ[26] and a material collection by D. M. Hardof.[27]

The rising interest in differentiating, as much as possible, between the language of the different periods included within the general concept of "Biblical Hebrew" is represented by Raphael Sappan's study of grammatical features of the poetry of the classical, pre-exilic period,[28] Avi Hurvitz's evaluation of post-exilic grammatical, syntactic, stylistic, semantic and lexical features as a means for identifying post-exilic psalms,[29] as well as the latter's *Linguistic Study of the Relationship between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel.*[30] In contrast to the lists of linguistic peculiarities of Biblical books or "sources " found in research literature on the Bible, which did not distinguish between features belonging to the structure of the language at the period investigated and stylistic features likely to be part of the authors' style, the new Israeli school concentrates on structural features and uses Mishnaic Hebrew and the Dead Sea Scrolls in order to achieve a chronological focus.

20. *Parashiyot be-taḥbir leshon ha-mikra,* Ramat-Gan, 1976.
21. *Leshonot hithayevut ba-Mikra u-va-Mishnah,* Haifa, 1981.
22. *Kelalei taḥbir ne'elamim shel leshon ha-mikra',* Tel-Aviv, 1979.
23. 44 (1979–80), pp. 12–23; 109–23.
24. E.g. C. Rabin, "Ḥeker ha-siaḥ ke-'ezer be-ḥeker ha-Mikra," *Yeter S'et* (Y.T. Radday Festschrift), Haifa, 1981, pp. 72–89.
25. For further bibliography, see C. Rabin, in: *Current Trends in Linguistics* VI, Hague, 1970, pp. 304–16, and in the classified annual *Reshimat Ma'amarim be-Mad'ei ha-Yahadut,* sect. 9.
26. *Balshanut darshanit,* Tel-Aviv, 1964.
27. *Millon u-mafteaḥ le-midreshey ha-shemot,* Tel-Aviv, 1960.
28. *Ha-yiḥud ha-taḥbiri shel leshon ha-shirah ha-mikra'it,* Jerusalem, 1981.
29. *Beyn lashon le-lashon,* Jerusalem, 1972.
30. *Cahiers de la Revue Biblique,* 20; Paris, 1982.

This does not mean, of course, that there is no value in the investigation of stylistic features as a means of examining authorship, rather than dating, of literary texts or their constituent parts. In this field should be mentioned, though they are in English, the applications of literary statistics by Yehuda T. Radday (of the Haifa Technion) to Isaiah and Judges, and the separate analysis of each of the presumed sources of the Book of Genesis (in press).

These research trends will no doubt influence the treatment of Biblical hebrew as part of the history of the Hebrew language, by treating it as a stage in the evolution of the language, with its later period being perceived as one of transition to the colloquial language lying at the back of literary Mishnaic Hebrew rather than as one of corruption due to Aramaic influence. The view that the Hebrew language has a continuous history from the Exodus until the present day was slow in taking root amongst Israeli scholars, owing to the concept of the Hebrew language as having been revived[31] in the 1880s directly from the ancient literary sources, with the intervening periods being those when the language was "dead". N. H. Tur-Sinai still restricted his historical sketch of the Hebrew language, in the German *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1928–34), to Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew,[32] while in 1957 William Chomsky[33] records no history or development of Hebrew in the Middle Ages, though he endeavoured to show (pp. 217–23) that Hebrew was still spoken throughout that period. To the best of my knowledge, the first attempt to write a continuous history of Hebrew was a small booklet published in 1973.[34] The articles on Hebrew Language in the *Entsiklopedya ha-'Ivrit* and in the English *Encyclopedia Judaica* cover the entire life of the language, as does E. Y. Kutscher's *History of the Hebrew Language,* Jerusalem, 1982. All the works mentioned, of course, devote to Biblical Hebrew space in accordance with its special importance as the oldest, and so far the best researched, period.

In evaluating Israeli research on Biblical Hebrew, it must be stressed that the Hebrew-speaking scholars were faced with an almost total absence of research on the twenty-two centuries of the life of the Hebrew language after the completion of the Biblical canon, while for Biblical Hebrew there was a plethora of both general and specialized published material. The lion's share of the attention of

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31.   What was revived was, of course, the use of Hebrew as spoken language for everyday communication, but in 19th-century ideology only spoken languages were "alive".

32.   This is also the scope of M. Hadas-Lebel, *Histoire de la langue hébraique;* Paris, 1981. She defines these two periods of the language as "ses deux strates les plus importantes" and the rest of its history as a process in which those two forms of Hebrew "se concurrencent et se complètent" (p. 5).

33.   *Hebrew: The Eternal Language,* Philadelphia, 1964.

34.   C. Rabin, *'Ikrei toldot ha-lashon ha-'ivrit,* Jerusalem, 1972; English version: *A Short History of the Hebrew Language,* Jerusalem 1974. Both versions are largely reprints of a series of articles in *Orot,* 1965–71.

Israeli scholars went into descriptive work on Mishnaic, medieval, and Modern Hebrew, and the latter two especially are even now a long way from being satisfactorily described. The situation in Mishnaic Hebrew is instructive: after M. Z. Segal provided in his English and Hebrew grammars a fairly comprehensive systematic description of the language as found in printed editions,[35] it became increasingly obvious, mainly through the work of Ḥanoch Yalon, that the printed editions of the Mishnah offered forms corrected in accordance with Biblical Hebrew grammar, and that the same texts, as found in older MSS, exhibited a markedly different Mishnaic Hebrew. The collation and evaluation of that material is now approaching its completion, and the time may not be distant for writing a grammar more closely approaching the language as it really was.

The problem of the linguistic authenticity of the Hebrew text of the Bible, and especially that of the evidential value of the vocalization of our printed Bibles, is of course well known to Biblical scholars. The search for the pre-massoretic Bible took two courses: on the one hand the fragments of MSS in the Babylonian and Palestinian pointing systems, which were considered older than the Tiberian one of our Bibles; on the other grammatical emendation, i.e., the "restoration" of forms which did not fit the grammatical rules as established by scholars, and were thought to have been corrupted by the Massoretes. In this field, the most spectacular contribution of Israeli scholarship has been the photographic reproduction of the Aleppo Codex of 905 C.E. by the Hebrew University,[36] the proof that this is indeed the codex pointed by Aaron ben Asher of Tiberias, which through its recognition by Maimonides became the fountainhead of all later MSS and printed editions,[37] and the careful analysis of its scribal system.[38] It also emerged that in a number of minor, but linguistically interesting, features the printed Bibles did not follow exactly the original of Ben Asher.

The *Hebrew University Bible,* of which so far two fascicles have appeared,[39] also provides, for the first time, a critical apparatus based upon pointed MSS close in time to Ben Asher, thus laying a foundation for the better understanding of the standardized Tiberian vocalization in its early form.

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35.   *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew,* Oxford, 1927 (with constant reference to Biblical Hebrew); *Dikduk leshon ha-Mishnah,* Tel-Aviv, 1936.
36.   M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, ed., *The Aleppo Codex,* Jerusalem, 1976.
37.   M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, "The Authenticity of the Aleppo Codex", *Textus* 1 (1960), 17–58.
38.   I. Yeivin, *Kether Aram-Ẓovah, nikkudo ve-ṭa'amav,* Jerusalem, 1968.
39.   *The Hebrew University Bible. The Book of Isaiah,* ed. M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, Pt. 1–2 (till 22:9), Jerusalem, 1975; Vol. II (till 44:28), 1981.

The grammatical system underlying the MSS in Babylonian and Palestinian pointing has been examined by Israeli and Western scholars.[40] These not only differ in technique, but in part of the MSS represent a different pronunciation from that of the Tiberian pointing, resulting also in some different grammatical forms. Such pronunciations still exist in several Jewish communities, and their way of reading the Pentateuch and the Haftaroth in Synagogues is apt to throw light on the phonetic reality underlying the early medieval pointing systems. Such pronunciations are being systematically recorded by the Hebrew University Language Traditions Project, headed by S. Morag, and described in monographs. The fullest treatment so far has been accorded to the Biblical Hebrew of the Samaritan tradition. In a series on the literary and oral tradition of Hebrew and Aramaic among the Samaritans (*'Ivrit va-Aramit nosah Shomron*), Z. Ben Hayyim has published a complete text in phonetic transcription of the Samaritan Pentateuch, with vocabulary and concordance (1977), a full grammar (1977) and editions of Samaritan medieval grammars of Hebrew and of a fragmentary Hebrew-Arabic-Aramaic dictionary to the Pentateuch (1957).

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40.   See "Nikkud", by S. Morag in *Entsiklopedyah Mikra'it* V: 873–57. A grammar according to the Babylonian pointing is I. Yeivin, *Masoret ha-lashon ha-'ivrit ha-mishtakkefet ba-nikkud ha-bavli*, Jerusalem, 1973.