

Take home exam

Introduction to Hebrew Linguistics

(Tamas Biro)

Deadline: March 31, 2011.

To be handed in on paper, either personally in class, or by leaving it in my pigeon hole on the fourth floor of the Bungehuis. You can write it in Dutch, too, but preferably avoid handwriting. Hebrew can be transcribed. Each question is worth 10 points.

Answer to each of the following three questions, in approximately 1-2 pages per question. Refer as much as you can to the compulsory readings (with full scholarly references).

Question 1.

Describe the place of Hebrew within the Afroasiatic phylum and within the Semitic language family. Mention whenever you encounter more ways of grouping the Semitic languages.

Pay attention not only to the *genetic affiliation*, but also the *geographic* and the *temporal* dimensions. Are two languages similar, because they are closely related? Or because they are spoken by neighboring groups of people? Or because they exist in the same period? Mention, whenever relevant, possible influences on Hebrew (similarities that are not due to having a common ancestor, but due to later interactions). Elaborate more on the Aramaic language.

Question 2.

Describe the foreign influences that have (or might have) affected the Hebrew language in the course of its history. In which period what kinds of borrowed words would you search for in a text? Refer to all the four main periods of the Hebrew language, and its sub-periods we discussed, or are mentioned in your readings (including the last chapters of Rabin's book). Be creative regarding Israeli Hebrew, which we have not discussed yet.

Be specific, and mention dates (for instance "after 70 CE", or "before the 10th century", etc.), and not only general periods (such as "in the Roman times", "in the Middle Ages", "in the Persian period"). Mention also geographic areas, because even in the same time different influences are expected in different parts of the world.

Question 3.

Choose any Modern Hebrew text (either from your textbook or from the internet or from anywhere else), which you understand well enough. It can be a single long paragraph, or a few paragraphs, or even two different short texts. Supply a copy of it to your assignment.

Choose 8-10 words from this text, and *discuss* the history of those words. Make use of an etymological dictionary, such as the following:

E. Klein. *A comprehensive etymological dictionary of the Hebrew language for readers of English*. New York: MacMillian, 1987.

Available in the *Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana*: <http://permalink.opc.uva.nl/item/000040346>.

Do not forget to refer to it in a scholarly manner (with full bibliographical details and page numbers), when you use a piece of information from it.

Make sure that you include very old words, from Semitic origin, as well as innovations from every period (borrowings *and* internal innovations). Each word must have a very different story.

At least in the case of two words, make use of the table Wordlist B in Bennett's book (see website) to compare it to other Semitic languages. I will very much appreciate if in a few cases you use examples mentioned in your readings, and so you also refer to the literature (with full bibliographical reference and page numbers). Find one or two cases in which a comparison to English or Dutch (or German or French, etc.) is also important, for instance because these European languages have a word from Hebrew origin.

Good luck with it!

Feel free to contact me if you need more clarification or help.