

Introduction to Hebrew linguistics

Material for the final exam

UvA, spring 2012

Compulsory readings

Rabin, *A Short History of the Hebrew Language*.

Patrick R. Bennett: *Comparative Semitic Linguistics: A Manual*. Pages 1–33.

Jana Loose (ed.), *De Talen van het Oude Nabije Oosten*, pp. 77-120.

Arie Schippers en Kees Versteegh. *Het Arabisch: Norm en realiteit*. Coutinho 1987. Pp 11-27.

John Huehnergard: 'Introduction'. In: Kaltner and McKenzie (eds.): *Beyond Babel*. Pp. 1-18.

Segal (1927/1958/1991). *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew*. Introduction (pp. 1–20).

Handout on sociolinguistics by J. Junger from 2008.

Haiim B. Rosén. *Contemporary Hebrew*. The Hague [etc.]: Mouton, 1977. Chapter 1.

R. Appel et al: *Taal en Taalwetenschap* – or any other introductory book/course in general linguistics.

Lecture slides and additional material distributed in class.

Structure of the exam:

In total: 50 points. Suggested time: 120 minutes. But the room is ours for 4 hours.

Part 1: Concepts, definitions (10 x 1 point = 10 points)

Out of the following twelve concepts/names, etc. choose ten and define them in a longer sentence or two. The twelve concepts will come from the list appearing on the next page.

Part 2: Short questions (3 x 4 point = 12 points)

Answer three of the following four questions. (Suggested length: a paragraph.)

The four questions will be those (or extremely similar to those) appearing below.

Part 3: Essays (2 x 9 = 18 points)

Write essays about two of the following three topics. (Suggested length: half a page or a page.)

The three topics will be those (or extremely similar to those) appearing below.

Part 4: Text (2 + 8 = 10 points)

You find enclosed a sample text. (It is going to be a text that we discussed in class and/or you worked with as a homework).

Question 1: Identify the text and the exact linguistic period it comes from. (NB: “exact linguistic” period means “late Biblical Hebrew”, and not “Biblical Hebrew”; or “Rabbinic Hebrew 1”, and not “Rabbinic Hebrew”; “early Haskalah Hebrew” or “contemporary spoken Israeli Hebrew”, and not “Modern Hebrew”; “Middle Aramaic”, “Palestinian Jewish Aramaic” or “Syriac”, and not only “Aramaic”.)

Question 2: Discuss eight linguistic features, using this text as illustration. Show where this linguistic feature appears in the text, and explain what it is. Then, tell as much as you can about this feature: for

instance, whether it is typical for this linguistic period, where it comes from (compared to earlier periods or other Semitic languages), where would it develop into (compared to later periods). Are there related phenomena in other languages you are familiar with (e.g., Dutch, English, German, French, Greek, Latin, Aramaic, Arabic, Yiddish...). Have you learnt about this phenomenon in your “Intro to general linguistics” course? Are there related phenomena within Hebrew itself? For instance, you will give a comparative Semitic explanation here, and mention a Yiddish-Dutch borrowing there, discuss the change of possessive constructions in Biblical Hebrew, Rabbinic Hebrew and Modern Hebrew at a third point, etc.

I would like your discussion to be as varied as possible. Choose phenomena from phonology, morphology (verbal and nominal), lexicon, syntax, semantics, orthography, typography, etc.

I will bring with me Klein’s dictionary, print-outs of the appendices of Bennett’s book and a few dictionaries. You may bring with you your Hebrew dictionaries, unless it contains notes pertaining to this course.

List of concepts and names for part 1, to be defined in a (longer) sentence:

Cognate, internal reconstruction, isogloss, dialect continuum, sociolect, language planning.

Phoneme, morpheme, minimal pair. The Canaanite sound shift.

Diglossia. Bilingualism. Code-switching/code-mixing.

Sumerian, Akkadian, Ge’ez, Amharic, Tigre, Tigrinya, Ugaritic, Aramaic, Syriac, Phoenician, Ammonite, Edomite, Moabite, Tell el-Amarna glosses/Old Canaanite, Coptic, Hittite, Persian.

Yiddish, Ladino/Judezmo, Karaim. Rashi-script.

Gezer calendar, Mesha stele, Shiloam inscription, ostrakon.

Mishna. Talmud. Gaon/geonim. Sa’adiah gaon. Piyyut and paytan. Haskalah. Maskil.

Eliezer ben Yehuda. Bialik. A Burning Question. Vaad ha-Lashon (Language Council/Committee).

List of short questions for part 2 (to be answered in a few sentences):

(Some of them are long. In the exam, they will be shortened.)

- Draw a family tree of the Semitic languages.
- List the six branches of the Afro-Asiatic language phylum.
- List five Judeo-languages.
- Explain the difference between South-Arabian and Southern dialects of Arabic.
- Explain the difference between Syriac and Syrian Arabic.
- Explain the difference between Egyptian and Egyptian Arabic.
- Compare the family tree model to the wave model.
- List the five main periods of the Aramaic language. Describe each with a sentence or two.
- Give an example (a text) for each of the following language stages: Old Canaanite, pre-exilic Hebrew epigraphy, pre-classical Biblical Hebrew, classical Biblical Hebrew, late BH, Tannaitic Rabbinic Hebrew, Amoraic Rabbinic Hebrew, Medieval Hebrew prose, Medieval Hebrew poetry, Haskalah Hebrew, Biblical Aramaic, Palestinian Jewish Aramaic, Babylonian Jewish Aramaic.

- Explain the innovation of the Northwestern Semitic alphabetical script, compared to previous (hieroglyphic and cuneiform) scripts.
- Draw a family tree of the alphabet. Add the following scripts to this tree: proto-Canaanite, Phoenician, Greek, Latin, Cyrillic, Coptic, paleo-Hebrew, Jewish/quadratic Hebrew, Samaritan, Arabic, Syriac.
- Explain the difference between “Biblical Hebrew” and “Tiberian Hebrew”. Why is it important to make a distinction?
- Explain when and why Yiddish and Ladino become separate languages, and not mere sociolects.
- Are /p/ and /f/ separate phonemes in Israeli Hebrew? Bring arguments pro and con.

List of essay topics for part 3:

- Biblical Hebrew: what kind of language is the language we encounter in a standard TaNaKh edition nowadays? (Hints: why does it look so homogeneous; different periods and dialects; written vs. spoken language; the language spoken by King David and attested in inscriptions vs. the language codified by the Tiberian masoretes; other traditions: Hexapla, Samaritan traditions, other masoratic traditions, etc. Pre-history: NW-Semitic and Canaanite. Post-history: late BH, apocryphal literature, Qumran, Rabbinic Hebrew, etc.).
- External influences on Hebrew: present an overview of the history of the Hebrew language, and for each period, describe the languages that influenced Hebrew. If you can, give examples.
- Orthography along the history of the Hebrew language (the development of the matres lectionis; defective/haser and plene/male writing; transcription of foreign words into Hebrew; the importance of an Academy, etc.)
- The role of functional diglossia in Jewish history. (Suggested additional reading: Harshav: 'Essay on Multilingualism'. You may mention examples from other [Semitic] languages.)
- Rabbinic Hebrew: how did it develop, its stages and where did it go? Describe some of its features, and the external influences affecting it. Mention works written in RH.
- Middle Ages: varieties of Medieval Hebrew and the birth of Judeo-languages.
- Tendencies and counter-tendencies in the revival of Hebrew (Biblical Hebrew serving as the only model, or using all previous periods? Purifying Hebrew from Aramaic, or allowing various external influences? Language planning and the norm imposed by the Academy of the Hebrew Language, vs. spontaneous development)
- Enriching vocabulary in Modern Hebrew: internal and external ways, Semitic techniques and Average Standard European influence. Provide examples.
- The development of the expression of possession (“John’s house”) from proto-Semitic to contemporary spoken and written Israeli.
- The development of the verbal system from Biblical Hebrew to Modern Hebrew.