

Midterm take-home exam due by Thursday October 31.

Write a short essay (approx. 5 pages) with the title

Is Tiberian Hebrew a Semitic language?

In this essay, you will discuss arguments in favor of and against the statement: “Tiberian Hebrew is a Semitic language”. Preferably, I would like you to come up with a negative conclusion. Note that there are (at least) three ways to reject this statement:

- (1) Tiberian Hebrew is not a Semitic language, but it is....
- (2) I do not know what it is, but (certainly/probably) not a Semitic language.
- (3) I cannot make any affirmative statement, but I conclude that evidence for this claim is weak.

As part of your argumentation, I would like you to consider the following questions:

- (a) What do we mean by a statement that language *X* belongs to language family *N*?
- (b) What kinds of arguments do we need for such a statement to be made?
Are there stronger arguments than others?
- (c) What kinds of alternatives are there to the “language classified as part of a family” approach?
- (d) What do we know about the status of *Tiberian Hebrew*?

While presenting your arguments, observations or data, be careful to distinguish between:

- (i) Raw data (such as a manuscript) and conjecture (the analysis of a medieval grammarian, or of a contemporary historical linguist, or even of yourself).
- (ii) Synchronic linguistics vs. diachronic linguistics. Historical approach vs. typological approach.
- (iii) Cross-linguistic comparative data and language-internal comparison.
- (iv) Different linguistic levels: phonetics; phonology; morphology; syntax; semantics; lexicon;...

While writing your essay, refer to the discussions we had in class, to the literature read, as well as look up further literature (on the web, in the library...). Feel free to cite data from Bennett.

Good luck!