

**Introduction
to Hebrew Linguistics
(‘Inleiding Hebreeuwse Taalkunde’)
UvA, Week 1, February 3, 2011**

Tamás Biró

Contact info

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- Course material (slides, readings, etc.):
<http://www.birot.hu/courses.php>
<http://www.birot.hu/courses/2011-introh/>
(username, passwd)

Do the anonymous test.

Course program:

Block 1: history of the Hebrew language

- **Week 1:** Introduction. Goals of the course. Why (Hebrew) linguistics? Different approaches to language. A general overview of the course. Four main periods of the Hebrew language.
- **Week 2:** The Afro-Asiatic and the Semitic context, including an introduction to comparative and historical linguistics.
- **Week 3:** NW-Semitic, Tell-Amarna, Proto-Hebrew. History of the alphabetic writing systems. Epigraphy and inscriptions from the first Temple period.
- **Week 4:** Biblical Hebrew (pre-classic, classic, post-exilic). The post-biblical period and Qumran. Samaritan Hebrew.
- **Week 5:** Rabbinic Hebrew (Mishna, Talmud, midrashim). Aramaic: a quick overview and its role in the history of Hebrew.
- **Week 6:** Medieval Hebrew: piyyutim, codices, commentaries. Code switching, pidgin and creole languages. The Judeo-languages.
- **Week 7:** Haskala, the revival of the Hebrew language, the Israeli (Hebrew) language.

Course program:

Block 2: descriptive and historical linguistics

- **Week 8:** Diachronic vs. synchronic linguistics. Description vs. explanation. Ways of explanation. Phonology 1: vowels.
- **Week 9:** Phonology 2: consonants, stress, phonological processes.
- **Week 10:** Morphology 1: nominal morphology; pronouns and verbal suffixes.
- **Week 11:** Morphology 2: verbal morphology; denominal verbs.
- **Week 12:** Syntax; semantics; lexicon.
- **Week 13:** Socio-linguistics: language contact, borrowing, foreign influences; language planning. Is Hebrew a Semitic language?
- **Week 14:** Summary. Questions and discussion. If time permits: psycho-linguistics, computational linguistics.

Requirements

- Weekly assignments: 20%
 - 12 assignments, best 10 counts.
 - 2 p (good) / 1 p (not really) / 0 p (unacceptable)
 - Deadline: Wednesday noon (12:00)
 - Email to: t.s.biro@uva.nl
 - Also accepted in Dutch.
- Take-home exam during middle semester break: 30%
- Final exam (during the exam period): 50%
 - Slides, readings, assignments.

Readings

Available from <http://www.biroth.hu/courses/2011-introhb/>.

- Block 1: Chaim Rabin: *A Short History of the Hebrew Language* (1973)
- Block 2: Patrick R. Bennett: *Comparative Semitic Linguistics: A Manual* (Eisenbrauns, 1998)
- Sometimes weekly assignments based on articles.
- You need it for course 'Intro to general linguistics':
R. Appel et al (eds): *Taal en Taalwetenschap*.

Let's get started: Intro to linguistics

(cf. your other course)

There are many ways of writing the history of a language. One is to describe in detail the changes throughout its existence which affected its sounds, script and spelling, grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. Another is to relate the history of its literature and to characterize the language of the most important works in each period. Or we may follow the contacts the language had with other languages, be it those of geographical neighbours or languages of civilization or religion, and note the influence each of these exerted upon the language with which we deal. Contrariwise, we could observe how our language influenced others, the interest it aroused, and enumerate the outstanding scholars who studied it and the results of their researches. The Hebrew language has been treated, though not exhaustively, in all the ways mentioned.

This little book adopts a different way. It endeavours to outline the links and relations between the Hebrew language and the Jewish people at various periods and to estimate the influence of changes in Jewish social life upon the use and character of the language and the services which it performed for the people in varying circumstances. The tendency of this

•Rabin: *A Short History...1973:5.*

•Points to note:

- approach history
- phonology, morphology, syntax
- vocabulary
- writing, spelling
- language of sources
- language contacts
- history of the people
- history of the discipline

Why doing Hebrew linguistics?

(Key figures + those whose name must be remembered for other reasons, too.)

- **Middle Ages:** Hebrew linguistics under influence of Arabic linguistics
 - *Sa'adiah Gaon* (882-942): Tafsir (Bible translation and commentary), Agron (dictionary), Kutub al-Lughah (grammar).
 - *Menahem ibn Saruk* (cca. 910-cca. 970): Mahberet (dictionary).
 - Some Bible commentators: *Abraham ibn-Ezra*, *David Kimhi*, etc.
- **Renaissance:**
 - *Elia Levita* (1469-1549): both Hebrew and Yiddish.
 - Christian Hebraists: most known is *Johannes Reuchlin* (1455-1522)
- **Modern period:** theologian H.F.W. *Gesenius* (1786-1842), rabbi *Samson Raphael Hirsch* (1808-1888). Wissenschaft des Judentums.
- Contemporary linguistics: many general linguists have worked on Hebrew, too. E.g., *Noam Chomsky's* MA thesis. Noam Chomsky's father, *William Chomsky* worked on Hebrew grammar and medieval Hebrew grammarians.

Why interested in linguistics?

- Aristotle and philosophers of language since:
 - Philosophical questions: what is meaning (of a sentence, of a word)?
 - Tool for other fields of philosophy: rhetoric, poetics, aesthetics...
- (Late antiquity and) Middle Ages (and since):
 - "Philology": tool to decipher the meaning/message of (old and/or holy) texts
- (Late 18th) and 19th century: *language as a historical phenomenon*
 - Historical linguistics (tool for history: history of language ≈ history of people)
- Early 20th century: *language a sign; language as a social phenomenon*
 - Structuralism (uncover structure of language), semiotics (study of signs)
- Since 1957 (Noam Chomsky): *language as a biological phenomenon*
 - Generative linguistics; the cognitive turn: information processing in the brain.

(Contemporary developments: balancing between different approaches.)

Why interested in linguistics?

- Tool for:
 - philosophy
 - exegesis:
 - religious or literary
 - history
 - sociology
 - semiotics
 - biology, psychology, brain science
 - language technology
 - language teaching
- Aim in itself:
 - understand language as a system
 - expressing thought
 - changing in time
 - of signs (socially agreed)
 - reflecting social facts
 - implemented in the brain
 - encoding information
 - learned/acquired without effort

Why interested in linguistics?

- Prescriptive approach: to know what is “correct”.
- Descriptive approach: to know what is there.

Stages:

- Describe the facts: *synchrony vs. diachrony*

Then:

- Explain the facts (why? for instance, create models)
- or interpret the facts
- or make use of the fact
(in another discipline or in real application)

Answering Why's in linguistics

Given a (linguistic) observation: why is it so?

- Because it has developed so:
historical explanations.
- Because this is how it is encoded in the brain:
cognitive explanations.
- Because this is how it can fulfill its (social) function(s):
functional explanations.
- Because this is how the child can learn it.
- ...
- By coincidence: Quite often the best answer, don't be afraid of it!

Fields of linguistics

“Core fields”

- Levels of the linguistics structure:
 - (Phonetics)

 - Phonology
 - Morphology
 - Syntax
 - Semantics

 - Lexicon/vocabulary
 - Pragmatics, discourse

“Peripheral fields”:

- Connected to external disciplines, or at least research methods:
 - Phonetics (biology, physics)
 - Psycholinguistics
 - Neurolinguistics, clinical linguistics
 - Computational linguistics, language technology
 - Sociolinguistics, dialectology
 - (Etymology)

Two dimensions:

synchrony (one state) vs. *diachrony* (change)

1500 BCE

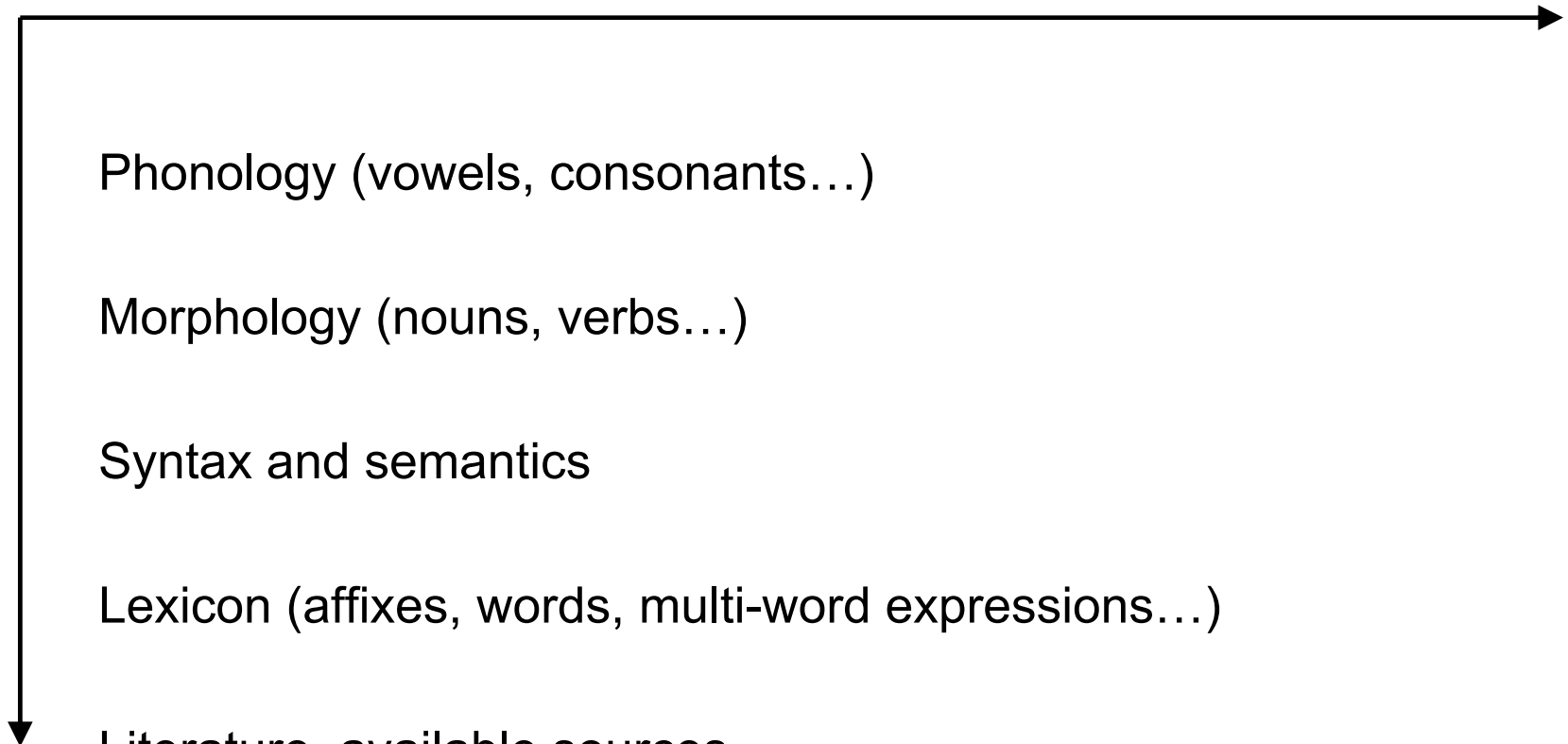
500 BCE

200 CE

1200 CE

1948

2011



Two dimensions:

synchrony (one state) *vs.* *diachrony* (change)

1500 BCE

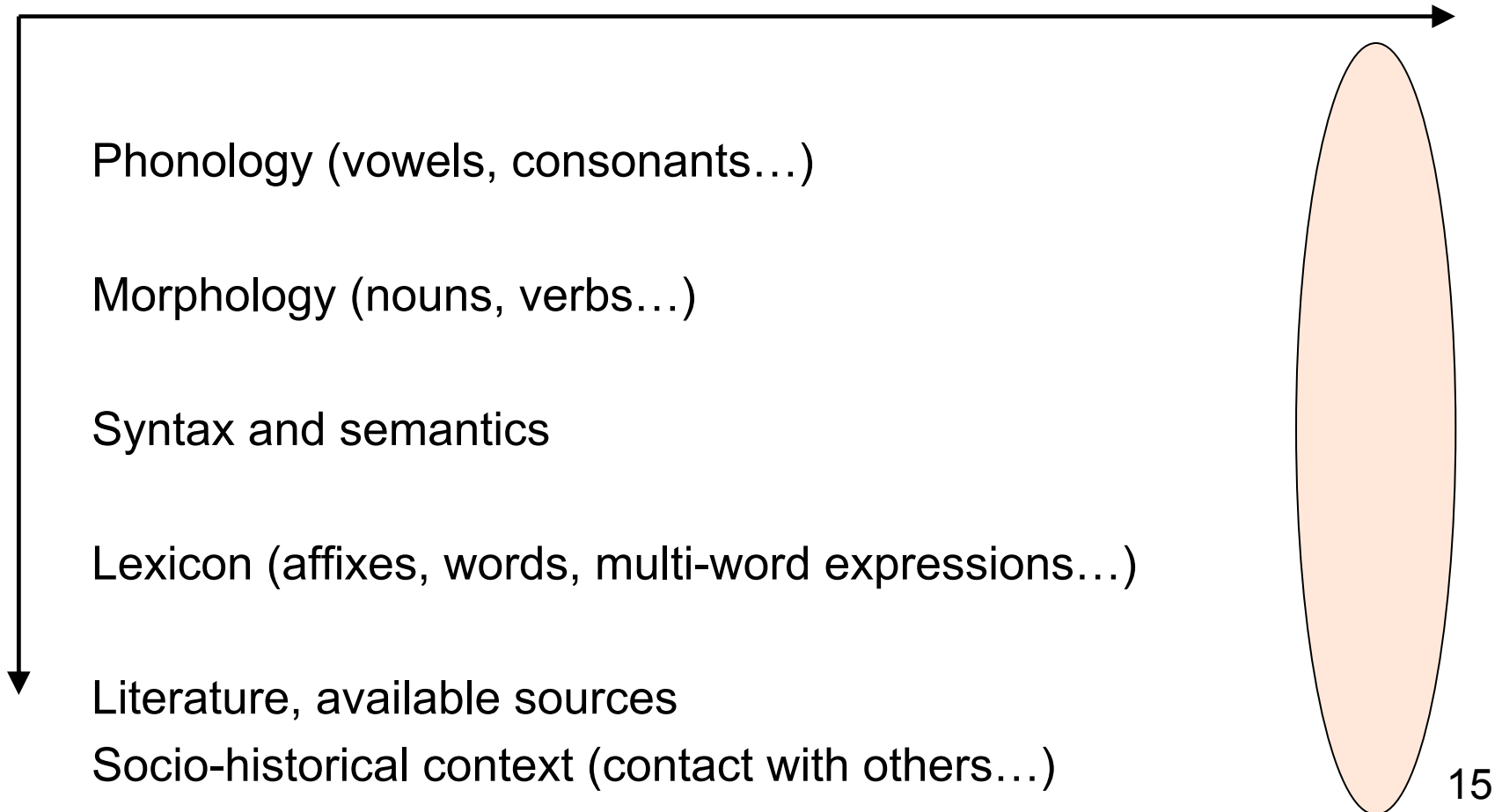
500 BCE

200 CE

1200 CE

1948

2011



Phonology (vowels, consonants...)

Morphology (nouns, verbs...)

Syntax and semantics

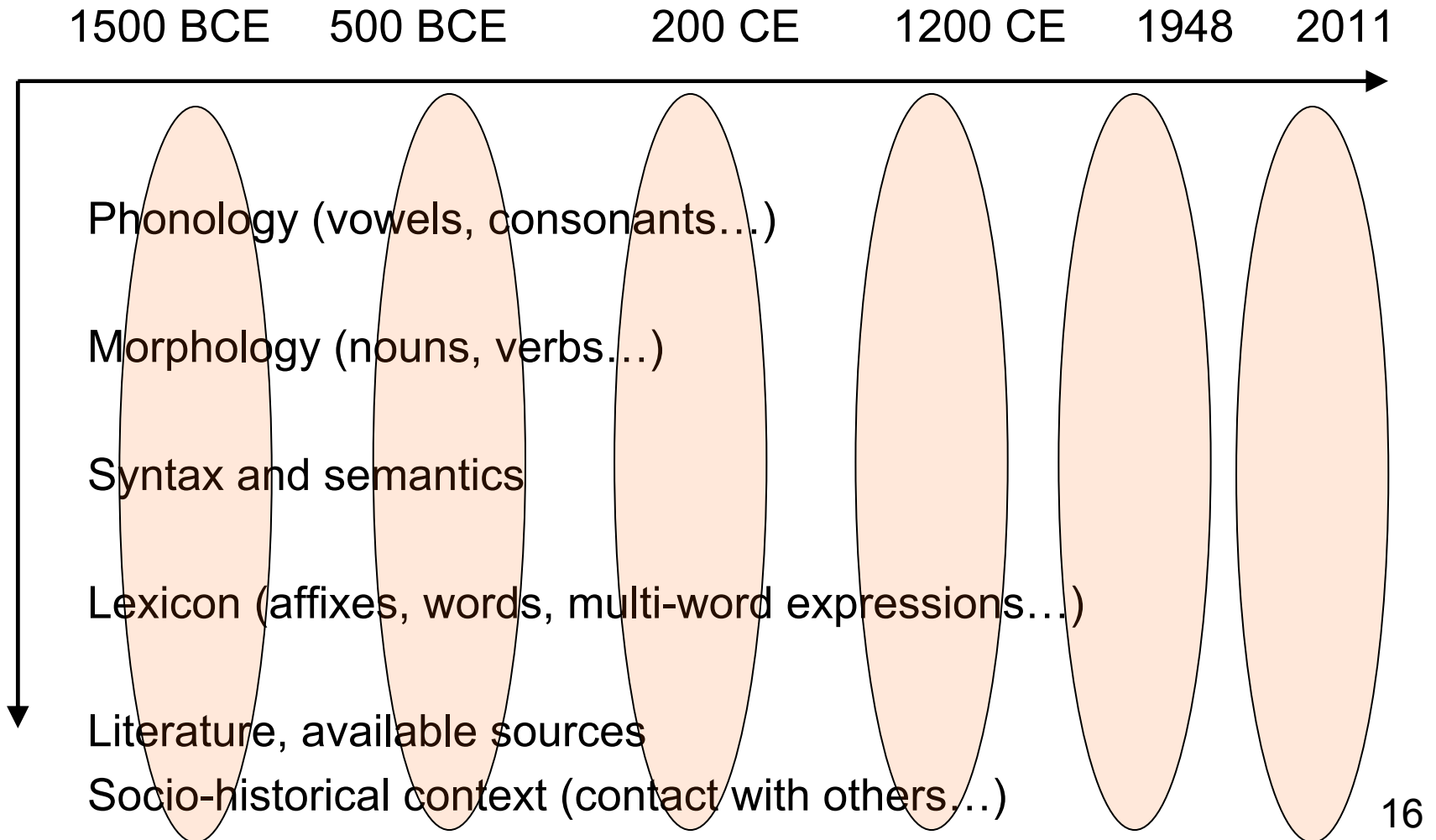
Lexicon (affixes, words, multi-word expressions...)

Literature, available sources

Socio-historical context (contact with others...)

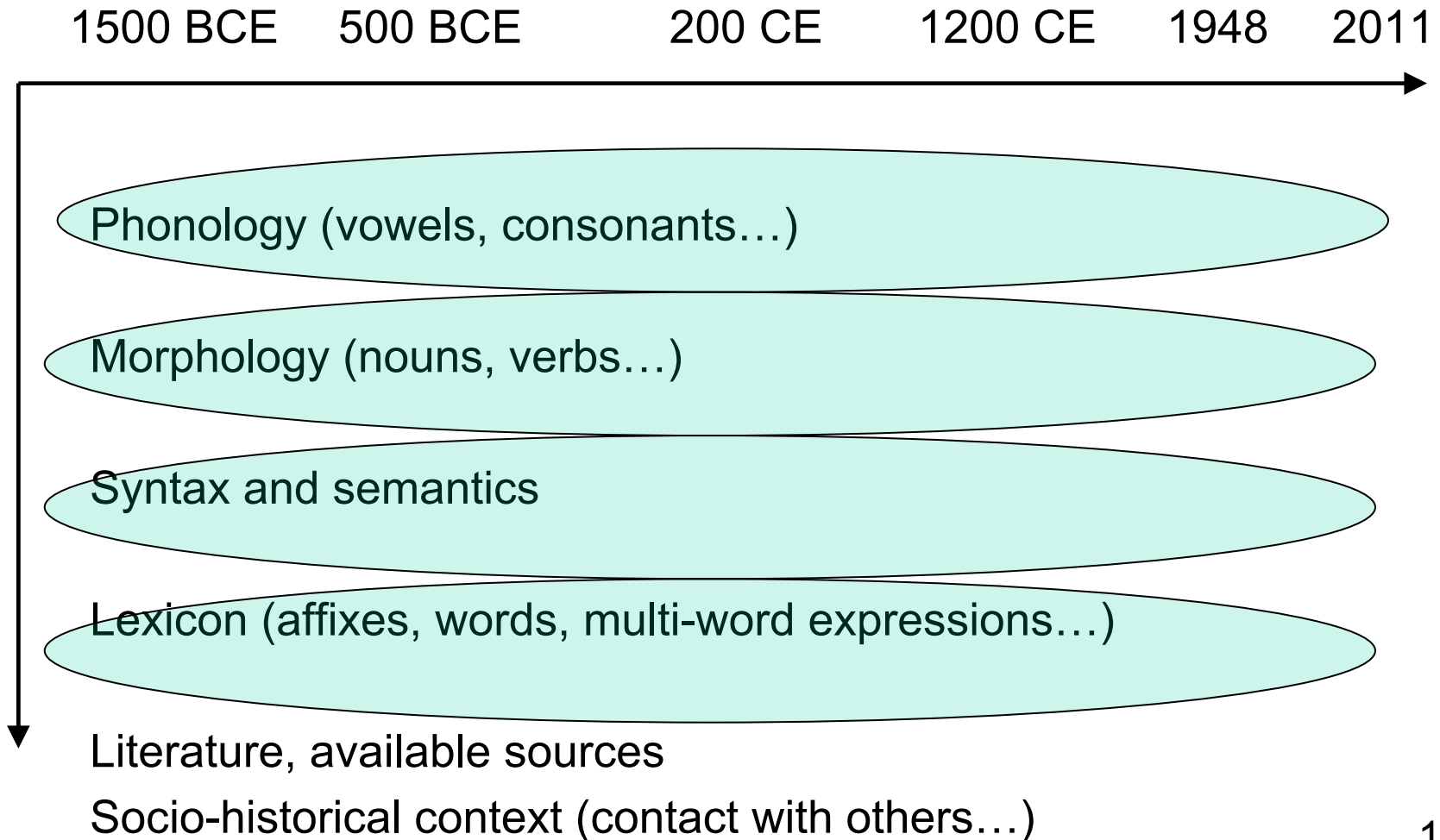
Two dimensions:

synchrony (one state) *vs.* *diachrony* (change)



Two dimensions:

synchrony (one state) vs. *diachrony* (change)



Hebrew: prehistory and four periods

0. Proto-Semitic, proto-NW-Semitic
proto-Canaanite, “proto-Hebrew”
1. Biblical Hebrew
Pre-classical BH, classical BH, post-exilic BH; Qumran
Masoretic Hebrew = Tiberian Hebrew
2. Mishnaic/Rabbinic Hebrew
3. Medieval Hebrew – dead or alive?
4. Modern Hebrew, Israeli Hebrew (Israeli language)
Haskala, language revival, contemporary IH

Other languages

- Aramaic
 - Ancient Aramaic, Imperial Aramaic
 - Eastern and Western middle Aramaic(s)
 - Talmud (and some midrashim); Zohar; liturgy
- Judeo-languages
 - J-Aramaic (from Biblical Arm. to Jewish modern Arm.)
 - Judeo-Greek (from Hellenistic Greek to *Yevanit*)
 - Judeo-Arabic
 - Yiddish
 - Judesmo/Ladino/Judeo-Spanish
 - and many other...

Comparing languages:

Contacts or no contacts? That is the question.

- Comparative linguistics: genetic or typological.
- Historical linguistics (since 19th cent.): Similarity due to common ancestor. Search for genetic relations.
- Language typology (20th cent.): Language *universals* + some variations = language types. Similarity due to belonging to the same type. Search for universals.
- Areal linguistics (20th cent.): Similarity due to geographic closeness and language contact. E.g. Balkan *Sprachbund*, or Baltic languages.

Comparing languages:

Contacts or no contacts? This is the question

- Similarity between to languages can be due to:
 - Common ancestor
(Proto-Semitic *shalaam > Hebr. *shaloom* ~ Arabic *salaam*)
 - Language contact, areal and cultural factors
(borrowings: Hebr. שק ~ Engl. *sack*; Hebr. טלוויזיה ~ Eng. *television*)
 - Language universals: [t] sound in both Hebrew and Dutch.
 - Language typology: 2 genders in both Hebrew and French.
 - Chance: suffix *-i* to derive adjective from geographic noun in both Hebrew and Hungarian: Hebr. ישראלי ~ Hung. *izraeli* 'Israeli'.

NB: observe conventional notations: [t], ~, *example* 'meaning', *, >.

Sources of linguistics

- (Prescriptive linguistics: the “Academy”)
- Data: whatever the native speaker says.
- L1 vs. L2. Adult vs. child.
- Observation vs. controlled experiments.
- What about past languages?
 - Written documents only. No tape rec. No chance to ask.
 - Written style often differs from oral style. Copyist’s errors.
 - Universals of *Homo sapiens* also apply to older languages.
 - Comparison with related languages (e.g. Hebrew vs. Arabic).
 - Internal reconstruction: irregularities explained by regular form in past?

Sources of Hebrew linguistics

We are lucky: really lots of data, from 3 millennia!

But, can we trust our sources?

- Hebrew Bible written during almost a millennium. Memorized + copied. Linguistically copy-edited?
- BH, RH: almost exclusively medieval manuscripts.
- Masoretes (8-10th century CE), the Ben-Asher and Ben-Naphtali families: “Tiberian Hebrew”. How reliable were they?
- Different traditions: Palestinian and Babylonian masoretes. Septuagint and other Greek translations. Samaritans. Various pronunciations world-wide nowadays. Spelling errors in mss.

Questions in Hebrew linguistics

- What can we reconstruct regarding past stages of the Hebrew language?
- Do written sources reflect the spoken language?
- Does the existence of a *corpus* (whose language is *normative*) influence spoken language?
- Does the language change differently when it is used only as L2? (Medieval Greek, Latin, Hebrew)
- When was Hebrew used as L1? What other languages were used by Jews?

Diglossia, bilingualism and code switching.

Code switching: What language(s) are they speaking?

- Football:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwvbJSnf_AE
- Parashat ha-shavua:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnTUGoEmhhA>
- Munkatcher rebbe:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucL9pM0G7wU>
- Rosh hashana:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2vNRJ2HZ3g>

*What is in Hebrew? What sounds like Hebrew?
Similarities and differences between the speakers?*

For next week:

Read: Chaim Rabin: *A Short History of the Hebrew Language* (1973), pp. 5-24.

(Available from <http://www.biroth.hu/courses/2011-introh/>.)

Warnings:

- Written in 1973: not state-of-the-art in 2011.
- Slight ideological biases: religious, national.

Question: have you observed such a bias?

Assignment for next week

Invite a Semitic speaker for a drink!

- Arabic (classical? Moroccan? Egyptian? else?), or else.
- Make “fieldwork”: collect information on that language.
- Then, contrast it to Hebrew: similarities, differences.
- Vocabulary: most frequent words, numbers, pronouns...
- Sounds. (Not the same as letters!) Writing system.
- Morphology: Gender and number of nouns, adjectives. Past and future tense of verbs. Are there prefixes or suffixes? If yes, what are they? Are there binyanim?
- And many more things...

Assignment for next week

Invite a Semitic speaker for a drink!

- Sociolinguistic background: Which languages does (s)he speak in everyday life? Which language is used in what context? Are there different emotions associated with different languages?
- Summary in an email by Wednesday noon: t.s.biro@uva.nl. Subject: Assignment 1.
- (At most 1 page. Preferably no attachment.)
- Can be done in small groups, but separate emails.

See you next week!