

Introduction to Hebrew linguistics
April 14, 2011, assignment for week 12
Deadline: April 28

We have learnt much about Hebrew, and we have learnt much about Semitic languages. Obviously, we learnt about Semitic languages in general *because* Hebrew is a Semitic language. Well... is it?

Quite a few linguists question whether Modern Hebrew (after the language revival), Israeli Hebrew, or – as Ghil’ad Zuckermann provocatively puts it – the Israeli language is actually a Semitic language.

I want you to work in groups, and to prepare together arguments for and against the proposition that *Israeli Hebrew is a Semitic language*. One group will prepare a 5-minute-long presentation arguing *against*, and the other group the same arguing *for* this proposition. To support the presentation, the group has to prepare either one or two slides (PowerPoint, Prezi, pdf, etc.), or a handout, summarizing the argumentation. Make sure 5 minutes are enough to present it.

You must build up a single but logical line of argumentation. For instance, first define what counts as a Semitic language, and then test whether Israeli Hebrew meets the criterion. Or ask why one would like to see (or not to see) Hebrew as a Semitic language. While you are preparing your argument, you must not discuss it with the other group, but you have to try to find out their arguments, too, in order to be able to refute them.

When you prepare your arguments, you must use your own creativity, but also look up arguments in the literature. You can divide the articles among yourselves. Suggestions:

- Part 2 of Banennett’s *Comparative Semitic Linguistics*.
- Papers by Ghil’ad Zuckermann (<http://www.zuckermann.org/>, for instance “‘Abba, why was Professor Higgins trying to teach Eliza to speak like our cleaning lady?’: Mizrahim, Ashkenazim, Prescriptivism and the Real Sounds of the Israeli Language’. Australian Journal of Jewish Studies 19: 210-31; as well as ‘A New Vision for Israeli Hebrew: Theoretical and practical implications of analyzing Israel’s main language as a semi-engineered Semito-European hybrid language’)
- Stefan Wild: ‘Ist Ivrit eine Semitische Sprache?’. In: Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlaendischen Gesellschaft. XIX. Deutscher Orientalistentag. Wiesbaden.
- Haiim B. Rosen: *Contemporary Hebrew*. De Gruyter Mouton, 1977. Pp. 24-29. (Three copies in the UvA library + on the website.)
- For the most courageous: Joseph Shimron: ‘Semitic languages: Are they really root-based?’. In: idem (ed.): *Language Processing and Acquisition in Languages of Semitic, Root-based, Morphology*. John Benjamins: Amsterdam, 2002. Especially p. 1-4, and around p. 11.

... as well as anything you find. Let me know if you find something interesting!

If you participate in preparing and presenting your group’s argumentation, then you do not have to hand in anything. If, however, for any reason you cannot make it, as a really last resort, you can write down your arguments and send to me in an email before the class.