

Final take-home exam

Introduction to Hebrew Linguistics

Deadline: June 25, 2011.

This take-home exam consists of three parts. You can receive 50 points in total (10+20+20), which amounts to 50% of the 100 points you can get during the course.

When writing your answer, you can/have to use any books. Beside the compulsory readings during the semester, you are expected to look up additional materials (for instance, the Encyclopaedia Judaica). With the exception of the information covered in class (that is, the slides), you must explicitly refer to all resources consulted in an academic way (for instance, footnote and/or bibliography). Resources on the web are allowed only if they are reliable (for instance, information on Wikipedia also must be checked elsewhere). You have to demonstrate your familiarity with all required readings, as well as your ability to look up further material.

Make sure you employ (and you employ correctly) the linguistic terminology you have learnt in this course and in parallel linguistic courses. You have to demonstrate that you can apply the basic concepts of linguistics in practice.

You can write your answers in Dutch, too. You can hand it in either electronically or on paper.

Part 1. Answer five of the following six questions, in two-three sentences each.

(2 points each, 10 points in total)

- a. Describe what we know of the Mesha stele. What is its importance for the Northwest Semitic languages? What is its importance for Northwest Semitic scripts?
- b. Describe how the Hebrew orthography developed from chaser/defective to male/plene.
- c. Explain the difference between the Syriac language and the language spoken nowadays in Syria.
- d. Describe what kinds of texts were found in Qumran/in the Judean Desert. What language(s) do they represent? Which stage(s) of the history of the language?
- e. Give an argument that vowel length is a phonemic difference in Biblical Hebrew, and give an argument that it is not in Israeli Hebrew.
- f. Give an argument that /p/ and /f/ are different phonemes in Israeli Hebrew, and give an argument that they are allophones in Biblical Hebrew.

Part 2. Choose two of the following three statements. For each of them, bring arguments both in favour of it, and against it. Develop your argumentation in a 1-to-2-page-long essay.

(10 points each, 20 points in total)

- a. At the end of the 19th century, it was self-evident that the language of the State of Israel would be Modern Hebrew.
(Hints: Biblical Hebrew, Rabbinic Hebrew, Yiddish, German, French, Ladino, Arabic? What was Theodor Herzl's opinion? What other languages were competing as potential languages of the yishuv? What factors helped Eliezer Ben-Yehuda in his struggle? What was the yishuv's attitude toward Hebrew? What role was played by the Vaad, the Academy, the ulpanim? You can rely on Rabin's discussion of the topic.)
- b. Israeli Hebrew is not a Semitic language.
- c. Biblical Hebrew and Israeli Hebrew share the same verbal system.
(Hints: Distinguish form and meaning. Discuss affixes apart, tenses apart, stems apart, and irregular verb groups apart. Do you find cases of paradigmatic levelling due to analogy?)

Part 3. Compare the Masoretic Text (MT) of Gen. 29:15-23 to its Israeli Hebrew translation (RAM). See the handout to the lecture on Biblical Hebrew, also available as a pdf on the website. It is highly recommended that you look up *several* Dutch Bible translations. (20 points)

- Collect eight interesting differences covering different phenomena in each subfield of linguistics: phonology, nominal morphology, verbal morphology, syntax, semantics, lexicon/vocabulary, as well as pragmatics (the way language is used in a situation). Although it is not a linguistic subfield, you can also discuss differences in orthography. Sometimes a single example will cover more subfields. Try to cover all subfields in total.
- A difference is “interesting” if you can answer at least some of the questions below. Avoid choosing differences that are there just because the RAM text aims to be more explicit, less ambiguous, and easier to read. So do not discuss the “explanatory additions” of the RAM.
- The RAM text is an Israeli Hebrew literary text. You can also compare the Masoretic Text (MT) to everyday (spoken) Israeli Hebrew. (How would *you* translate the MT to IH?)
- You may also want to compare the “original” Tiberian Hebrew pronunciation, as canonized in the masoretic orthography, to the contemporary native Israeli pronunciation.
- It is fine with me to be creative: you may use the text just as a *pretext* to compare Tiberian Hebrew to Israeli Hebrew in general. (“Although the comparison to RAM is not really good here, but I would like to mention that this expression/this verbal form/this syntactic structure in the MT is very characteristic of Biblical Hebrew, whereas Rabbinic Hebrew/Medieval Hebrew/Modern Hebrew has a different expression/different verbal form/different syntactic structure.” Or: “Although the comparison to MT is not really good here, but I would like to mention that this word/this use of a verbal tense/this word order is typical of Israeli Hebrew, and never occurs in Biblical Hebrew. Instead, you find that word/that form/that word order.”)
- Describe each of the differences: What do you find in the Masoretic Text (in Biblical Hebrew in general)? What do you find in the RAM translation (in Israeli Hebrew in general)? What has changed? What has remained the same?
- Explain each of the differences: What do you know of the history of that phenomenon? Do you know of some reason for this change to have taken place? Or is it a random change? Is it an internal development, or do you suspect external influence? Do you think this is a change that frequently occurs in other languages, too (if relevant)? Mention proto-Semitic and each of the four periods of the Hebrew language (if relevant). You must discuss proto-Semitic and/or other Semitic languages at least for one of the eight differences that you discuss. You must mention Rabbinic Hebrew at least for one of the eight differences. You must mention medieval Hebrew at least for one of the eight differences.
- Use an etymological dictionary when you discuss the history of words (at least once): What is the origin of this word? Has its meaning changed in the last 3000 years?
- Use the comparative Semitic word lists from Bennett’s book (at least once): Is this word an ancient Semitic word? Can you guess what the proto-Semitic form could have been?
- Refer at least twice to Rabin’s book: what does he say about this phenomenon?
- Refer at least twice to other readings: what do they say about this phenomenon?
- Make sure you distinguish explicitly between changes in form and changes in meaning.
- Bring, at least twice, additional examples for the phenomena you discuss (for instance, quoting from text samples discussed in class, or from the texts you read in other courses).