

**Introduction
to Hebrew Linguistics
(‘Inleiding Hebreeuwse Taalkunde’)
UvA, Week 1, February 10, 2012**

Tamás Biró

Contact info

- Tamás Biró
- t.s.biro@uva.nl
- <http://home.medewerker.uva.nl/t.s.biro/>
- Course material (slides, readings, etc.):
<http://www.biroth.hu/courses.php>
<http://www.biroth.hu/courses/2012-introhb/>
(username, passwd)

Do the anonymous test.

Goals of this course

1. Basics of “Hebrew linguistics”:
 - a. Semitic linguistics, Hebrew in the Semitic context.
 - b. (Socio)-historical development of Hebrew.
 - c. Descriptive of and theoretical linguistics on Hebrew.
2. General cultural, socio-historical background.
3. Supporting Hebrew language skills:
 - a. Reflections on skills acquired in the past.
 - b. Refreshing forgotten details.
 - c. Preparing future courses (rabbinic Hb, Aramaic, Yiddish).

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.
- **Week 4:** History of the alphabetic writing systems. Epigraphy and inscriptions from the first Temple period.
- **Week 5:** Biblical Hebrew (pre-classic, classic, post-exilic). The post-biblical period and Qumran. Samaritan Hebrew.
- **Week 6:** Rabbinic Hebrew (Mishna, Talmud, midrashim). Aramaic: a quick overview and its role in the history of Hebrew.
- **Week 7:** Medieval Hebrew: piyyutim, codices, commentaries. Code switching, pidgin and creole languages. The Judeo-languages.

Course program:

Block 2: descriptive and historical linguistics

- **Week 8:** Haskala and the revival of the Hebrew language.
- **Week 9:** The Israeli (Hebrew) language, sociolinguistics: language contact, borrowing, foreign influences; language planning.
- **Week 10:** Lexicon.
- **Week 11:** Phonology.
- **Week 12:** Morphology.
- **Week 13:** Syntax and semantics.
(If time permits) psycholinguistics and computational linguistics.
- **Week 14:** Is Israeli (Hebrew) a Semitic language? Summary.

Requirements

- Weekly assignments: 20%
 - Goal: to prepare the next topic.
 - 12 assignments, best 10 counts.
 - 2 p (good) / 1 p (not really) / 0 p (unacceptable).
 - Minimum 10 points required for final grade.
 - Deadline: Thursday 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/2012-introhb/>.

- Chaim Rabin: *A Short History of the Hebrew Language* (1973).
- Various chapters from various books.
- Some weekly assignments based on articles.
- 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 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.)

An over-simplified history of linguistics

		Linguistics is a tool to...	Language belongs to...
Middle Ages	<i>"Philological" linguistics</i>	...analyze (holy) texts.	... a text or author.

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2 nd half of 20 th century	<i>Generative linguistics</i>	... studying human brain.	... a brain or a species.

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

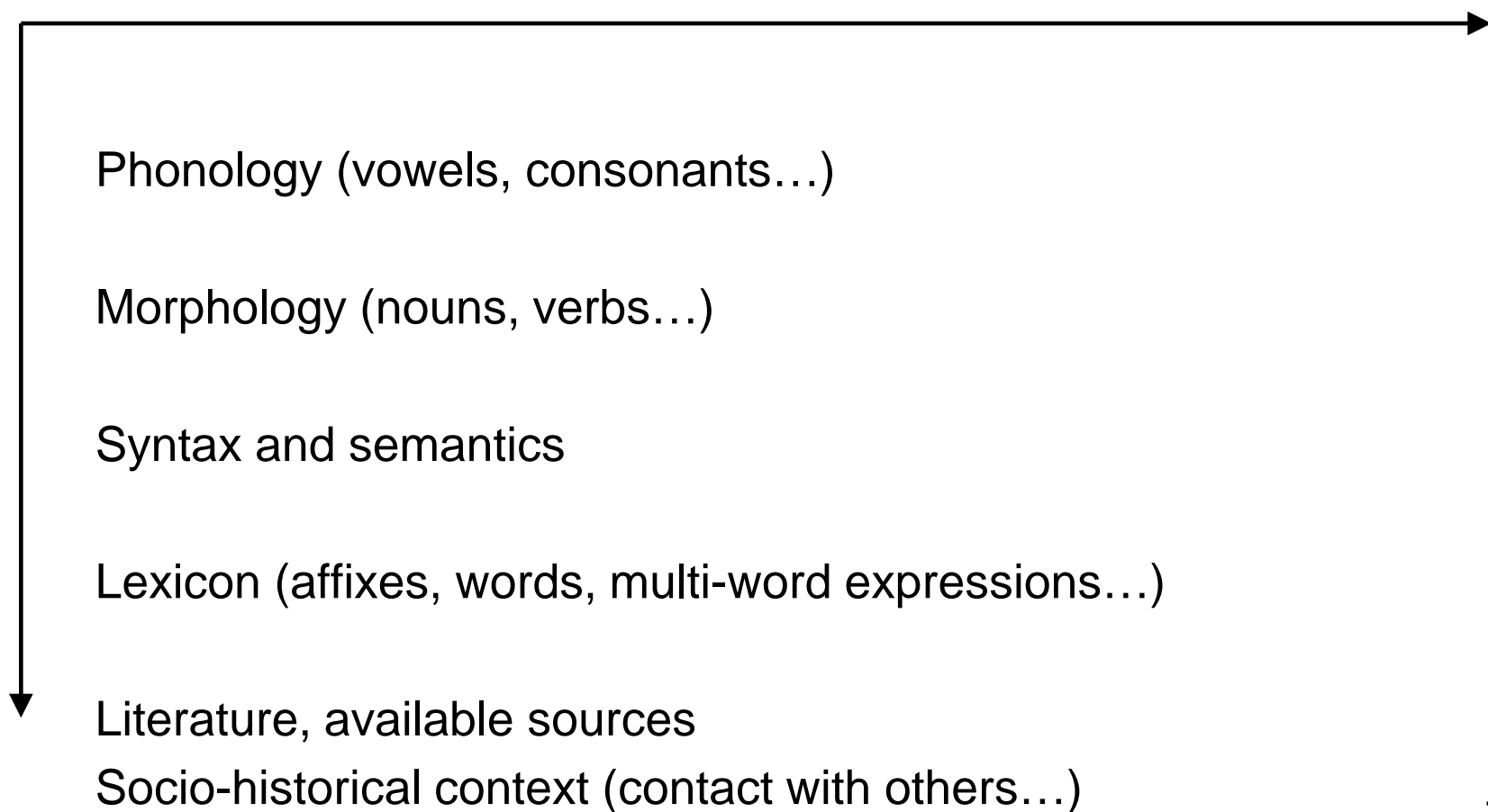
 - Lexicon/vocabulary
 - Pragmatics, discourse

“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)

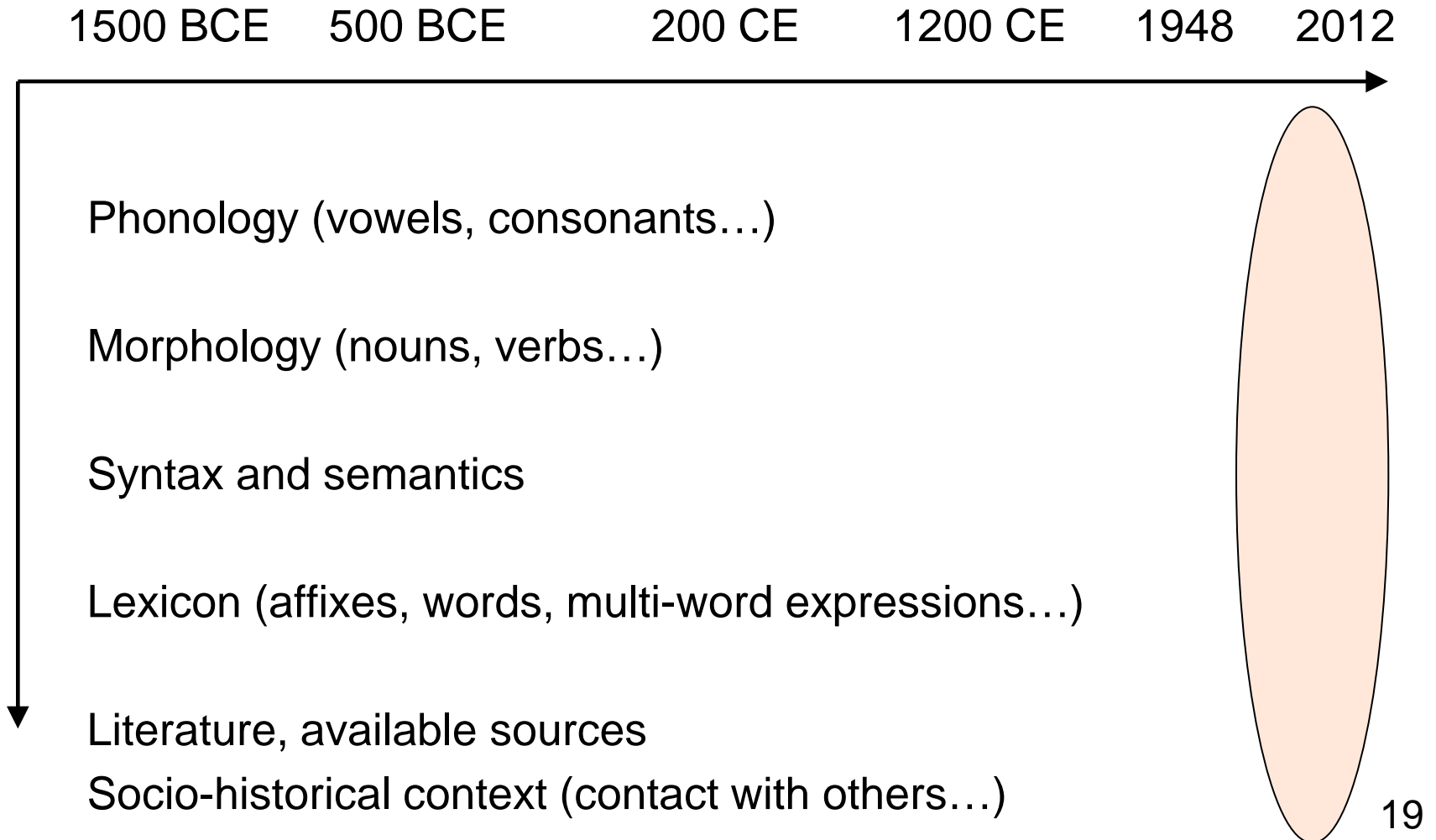
Two dimensions: *synchrony* (one state) vs. *diachrony* (change)

1500 BCE 500 BCE 200 CE 1200 CE 1948 2012



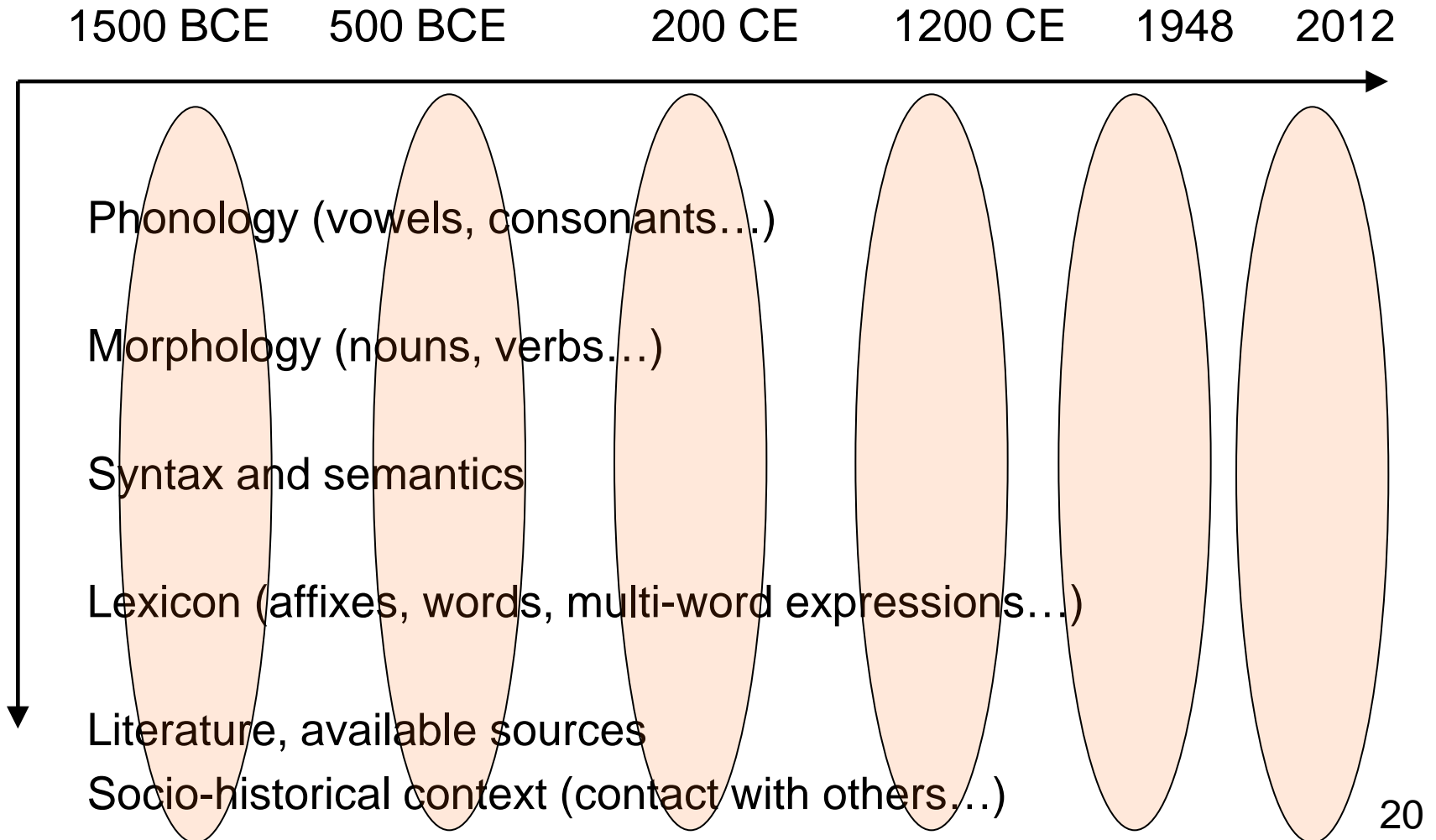
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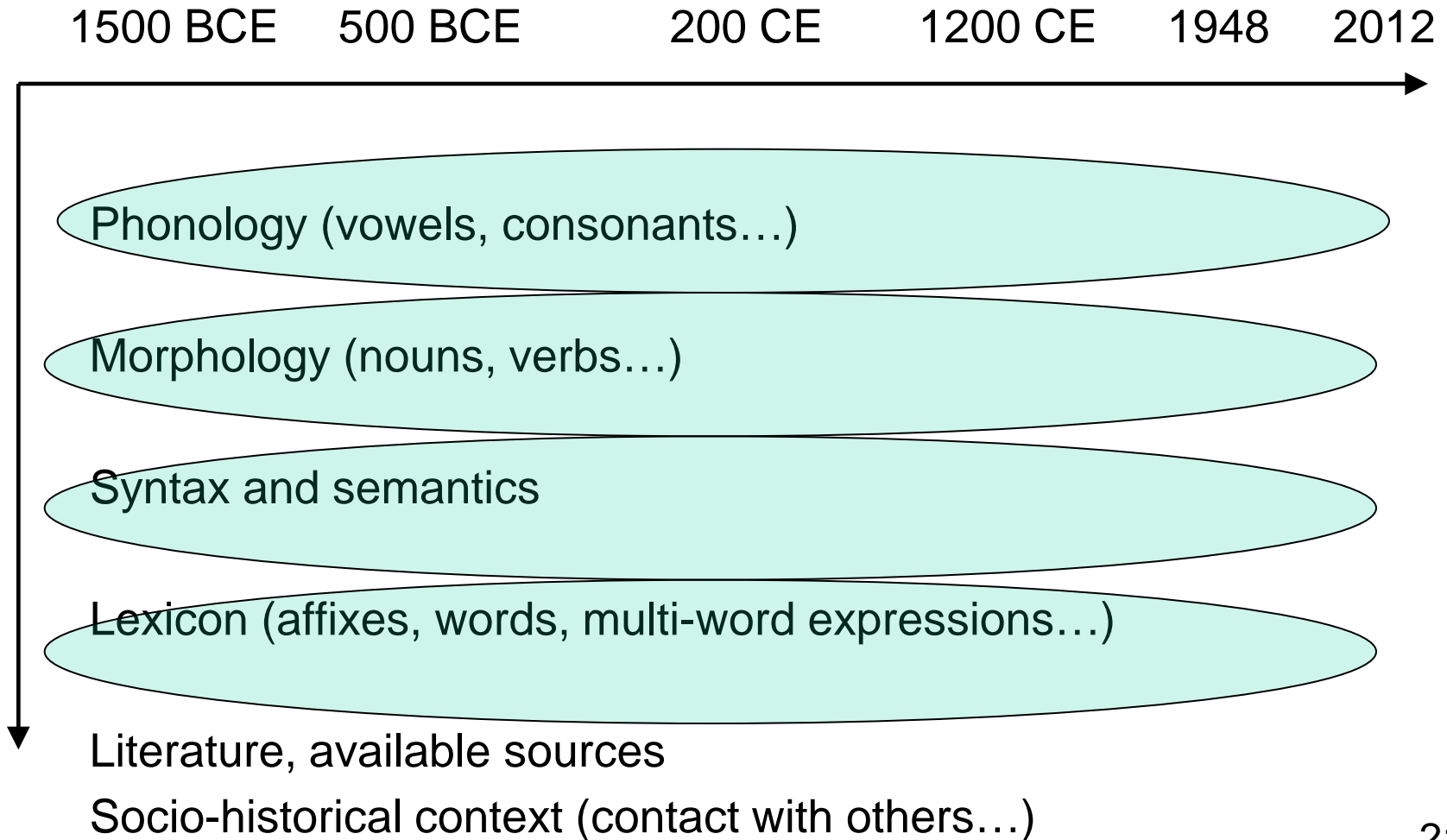
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Hebrew: prehistory and four periods

0. Proto-Semitic, proto-NW-Semitic, proto-Canaanite, and proto-Hbrw: *“The family tree: ancestors and relatives.”*
1. Biblical Hebrew: *“Did King David speak like the Bible?”*
Pre-classical BH, classical BH, post-exilic BH; Qumran Masoretic Hebrew = Tiberian Hebrew
2. Mishnaic/Rabbinic Hbrw: *“A spoken language written”.*
3. Medieval Hebrew: *“Dead or alive?”*
4. Modern Hebrew, Israeli Hebrew (Israeli language)
Haskala, language revival, contemporary IH
“Is it obvious that Hebrew is the language of Israel?”

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... as well as Karaim.

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 adjectives from geographic nouns in both Hebrew and Hungarian: Hebr. ישראלי ~ Hung. *izraeli* 'Israeli'.

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

Sources of linguistics

- (Prescriptive linguistics: the “Academy”)
- Modern linguistics:
 - whatever the native speaker says.
 - observations and controlled experiments.
 - adults, children, L2 learners...
- But 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., cognates.
 - Internal reconstruction: irregularities explained by regular form in past?

Questions in Hebrew linguistics

- How can we reconstruct the earlier stages of Hebrew?
- Which sources are more reliable? (E.g., MT vs. LXX)
- Did written sources reflect the spoken language?
- Was/is spoken language influenced by the *corpus* whose language is *normative*?
- Did the language change differently when it was used only as L2? (Medieval Greek, Latin, Hebrew)
- When was actually 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/2012-introh/>.)

Warnings:

- Written in 1973: not state-of-the-art in 2012.
- 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 Thursday 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!