אבגדהוזחטיכלמנסעפצקרשת אבגדהוזחטיכלמנסעפצקרשת

אבגדהוזחטיכלמנסעפצקרשת אבגדהוזחטיכלמנסעפצקרשת

History of Hebrew & Jewish languages: Cultural, historical and linguistic aspects

Yale University, Summer 2014

Course code: LING S215 01 (Su14)

Meetings: June 2 to July 4, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays between 1.00–3.15 pm

Instructor: Tamás Biró, lecturer at the Department of Linguistics (tamas.biro@yale.edu)

Jewish culture has always had a very intimate relationship to texts and language. But what languages did the Jews actually speak? Did King David converse in Biblical Hebrew? How could a vernacular turn into the language of the rabbinic literature? Why would a dead language flourish in the Middle Ages? How did Yiddish and other Jewish languages emerge? Is it self-evident that Hebrew is the language of the modern State of Israel? By looking at the history of the languages of the Jews, this course will offer a unique perspective on social and cultural aspects of Jewish history.

Beside an overview of the history of the Hebrew language and the Jewish languages, students will also be introduced to a multitude of linguistic methodologies. The historical-comparative method will be discussed to locate Hebrew among the Semitic languages. The family tree model will be contrasted to the wave model when discussing the Northwest Semitic continuum. Biblical Hebrew can be approached by traditional philology as much as by generative linguistics. Understanding rabbinical and medieval Hebrew requires the perspective of the sociolinguist. Modern Hebrew has been posing constant challenges to contemporary linguistic theories.

The course requires no familiarity with linguistics, and no knowledge of Hebrew, although any of these will prove beneficial. Attendees will however be expected to have at least a superficial knowledge of Jewish history (for instance, by having read an introductory text). The course does not teach Hebrew, but provides a familiarity with interesting phenomena in Semitic languages. The course does not teach a specific linguistic framework, but explain why we should keep our minds open to a plethora of methodologies.

Further information

Syllabus: http://birot.hu/courses/2014-HB/Syllabus-Hebrew S2014.pdf

(includes requirements, course outline, etc.)

Yale Summer Sessions: http://summer.yale.edu/

Or contact the instructor, Tamás Biró, at tamas.biro@yale.edu.