Contents

Introduction

In May 2014, scholars from Israel, Europe, and North America gathered at Yale University to present their research on Mishnaic Hebrew. The symposium was organized by Prof. Moshe Bar-Asher of the Academy of the Hebrew Language in Jerusalem and Prof. Steven Fraade of the Department of Religious Studies at Yale University, assisted by (now) Dr. Ariel Shaveh of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. It is always a treat to spend a few spring days in New England, especially on the charming Yale campus, and even more so while enjoying the beneficence of the Yale Program in Judaic Studies.

The papers presented at the symposium discussed Mishnaic Hebrew from many different perspectives: the grammar of the dialect, from morphology to syntax to pragmatics; the relationship between the literary dialect and epigraphic evidence; particular manuscripts; questions of language contact, lexicography, social history, and medieval traditions; and the problem of translating Mishnaic Hebrew into modern languages. Following the symposium, it was decided that the papers should be published, for two primary reasons.

First, it has been noted that there are not many volumes of collected papers by different scholars dedicated to the study of Mishnaic Hebrew in any language. Such volumes serve an important scholarly purpose, reflecting the state of a field and the various areas of research being pursued at the time of the publication. Bar-Asher edited two volumes of previously published studies in the field in 1972 and 1980.[1] Other relevant volumes were edited by Bar-Asher in 1990 and by Bar-Asher and Fassberg in

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1   *Collected Articles on Mishnaic Hebrew*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher (Jerusalem: The Hebrew

1998.[2] In addition, a recent festschrift contains sixteen articles in this field.[3] This dearth is striking when compared with the situation in the study of Biblical Hebrew for which almost every year there is a new edited volume discussing a different aspect of its grammar. In light of this, it is evident that an update regarding the major themes in current research in the field is a timely contribution.

The second consideration in deciding to publish the papers is a peculiar state of affairs in the study of Mishnaic Hebrew: although most work on Semitics today is published in English, for better or worse, most of the work on this branch of Northwest Semitic—the Hebrew dialects of the later Roman period, Byzantine period, and early Middle Ages—is published in modern Hebrew. This isolation has worked to the detriment of Semitics and linguistics generally, and arguably to the detriment of the study of Mishnaic Hebrew as well.

The exceptions are not numerous. Yehezkel Kutscher's surveys of Mishnaic Hebrew in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, and his posthumously published *History of the Hebrew Language* showed the results of the first generation of modern Israeli study of the dialect to English readers.[4] Moshe Bar-Asher has written a number of fundamental articles on Mishnaic Hebrew, some of which were published in French[5] and English.[6] The volume

University, 1972) and *Collected Articles on Mishnaic Hebrew*, Vol. 2, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1980) [both in Hebrew].

2   *Studies in Language* 4, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990); *Studies in Mishnaic Hebrew*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher and Steven E. Fassberg; Scripta Hierosolymitana 37 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1998).

3   Aharon Maman, Steven E. Fassberg, and Yochanan Breuer, eds., *Sha'arey Lashon: Studies in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Jewish Languages in Honor of Moshe Bar-Asher*, vol. II (Jerusalem: Bialik, 2007) [in Hebrew].

4   Eduard Yehezkel Kutscher, "Mishnaic Hebrew," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 16, 1590–1608; *A History of the Hebrew Language*, ed. Raphael Kutscher (Jerusalem &Leiden: Magnes / Brill, 1982).

5   Moshe Bar-Asher, *L'Hébreu mishnique: études linguistiques*, ed. Sophie Kessler-Mesguich (Paris-Louvain: Peeters, 1999).

6   Moshe Bar-Asher, *Studies in Classical Hebrew*, ed. Aaron Koller (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

edited by Bar-Asher and Fassberg was an English-language collection of articles by Israeli scholars on the subject.[7] Sophie Kessler-Mesguich offered her own contribution to Mishnaic Hebrew scholarship, as well.[8]

On a more didactic level, Angel Sáenz-Badillos's *History of the Hebrew Language* has a good section on Mishnaic Hebrew, and Miguel Pérez Fernández's *Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew* distills much of the findings of the previous half-century of research into a teaching grammar.[9] Despite these contributions, much of the work done in the latter half of the twentieth century is not represented in scholarship outside of Israel. Most of the publications of Azar, Ben-Hayyim, Blau, Breuer, Gluska, Gross, Haneman, Mishor, Morag, Qimron, Sharvit, and Yalon, for example, are unavailable in any European language, not to mention the many articles, dissertations, and books that have been published on the broad topic of Mishnaic Hebrew by a new generation of Israeli scholars over the past two decades.

One recent work should be singled out as an exception: the sophisticated recent contribution of Edward Cook's 2016 Ullendorff Lecture in Semitic Philology at the University of Cambridge, "Language Contact and the Genesis of Mishnaic Hebrew."[10] The fact that this was delivered by an American scholar in a lecture series for Semitic philology generally bodes well for the place of Mishnaic Hebrew within Semitics.

It is conventional to lament that M. H. Segal's *Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew*, from 1927, is still the reference grammar for the dialect,[11] which,

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7   See n. 2.

8   Sophie Kessler-Mesguich, *La langue des sages: matériaux pour une étude linguistique de l'hébreu de la Mishna* (Paris-Louvain: Peeters, 2002).

9   Ángel Sáenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, trans. John Elwolde (Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Miguel Pérez Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew*, trans. John Elwolde (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

10   Edward M. Cook, *Language Contact and the Genesis of Mishnaic Hebrew*, Fourth Ullendorff Lecture in Semitic Philology; University of Cambridge, 2016, available at http://www.ames.cam.ac.uk/news-events/mes/hebrew-semitic/semitic-philology/pdfs/CookUllendorfflecture2016DOIFINALVERSION.pdf

11   See M. H. Segal, *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927).

despite Segal's remarkable erudition and insight, is unfortunate, as the grammar is based on the printed editions of the Mishnah and does not reflect the major advances made in the study of Mishnaic Hebrew throughout the second part of the last century. It should be noted, though, that Segal has never been replaced in Hebrew, either. There is no grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew reflecting the previous century of research, and this is a state of affairs indeed to be lamented. There is also no modern dictionary of Mishnaic Hebrew, also a lamentable state of affairs, nor is there a critical edition of the Mishnah, the central literary work that lent its name to the dialect under discussion.

This volume, then, provides a snapshot of what scholars are focusing on these days. Most of the papers naturally concentrate on the language of Mishnaic Hebrew, and the following is an attempt to group them in a thematic manner.

Two papers in this volume are historical in their approach, and each discusses various aspects of the Hebrew of the two first centuries CE in light of data from contemporary epigraphy. **Steven Fassberg** (113–127) revisits the language of the Bet-ʿAmar papyrus. He agrees with previous scholars who concluded that this document was produced by an unskilled scribe, and he further argues that one can learn from this document how Hebrew and Aramaic coexisted in the relevant period and therefore could be used interchangeably. Dealing with Mishnaic Hebrew itself, **Aaron Koller** (149–173) argues that it is possible to determine the geographic origin of this idiom. According to his analysis, this is a literary dialect whose origin is in the Shephelah in the last centuries of the Second Temple era. Koller reaches this conclusion due to recognition of some influence of Phoenician and the lexical absorption of Greek loanwords (which presumably happened only when the rabbis moved to the north) on the one hand, and the non-occurrence of some attested Judean developments on the other hand.

Notably, only three papers focus on aspects of the grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew per se. **Moshe Bar-Asher** (37–57) raises some methodological problems he encountered in his comprehensive study of the morphology of Mishnaic Hebrew. Specifically, he notes two inherent problems in

MS Kaufman, which, since Kutscher's studies, has been considered the most reliable source for the original Mishnaic Hebrew: (1) the limitation of the orthography, and (2) the readings reflected in the vocalization of this manuscript when they have no support from other sources. **Gabriel Birnbaum** (93–111) provides comments on the phonology and the morphology of forty-three nouns found in MS Antonin, a manuscript of the Mishnah on Seder Teharoth and discusses the peculiarities found in this manuscript. Within the field of semantics, **Elitzur Bar-Asher Siegal** (59–91) provides an analysis of the Tense–Aspect–Mood system of Tannaitic Hebrew. Following an outline of the methodology in his choice of the corpus for this study, he sketches out his analysis with a focus on the theoretical motivations in its favor.

Alongside these papers should be mentioned **Rivka Shemesh-Raiskin**'s article (265–291), which deals with an examination at the pragmatic level, as she aims at describing the nature of the halakhic give-and-take conversations in the Mishnah. In this context, she classifies the various parts of these conversations according to their speech acts, and elaborates on their distribution in the various schematic parts of these literary conversations.

All other papers dedicated to the analysis of linguistic phenomena in Mishnaic Hebrew focus on the lexicon. Two papers are diachronic in their nature: **Steven Fraade** (129–148) examines nominalized verbs that appear for the first time in the tannaitic corpora. The thesis he advances in this paper is that there is a correlation between this linguistic innovation and a conceptual novelty. In other words, he demonstrates that the nominalization of such words served for the coining of new concepts that evolved around the same period. **Emmanuel Mastéy** (189–220) examines peculiar usages of two verbs *hillēk* and *qāraṣ*, and provides a proposal for how these verbs acquired their new meanings. **Ruth Stern** (337–348) and **Alexey Yuditsky** (411–422) examine different aspects of specific lexical items. Stern deals with the exact denotation of the word *ḥaluq* (and discusses its nominal pattern) and Yuditsky proposes a new etymology for the two nouns *qosin* and *qorpayot*, suggesting that they contain the *nisbe* (gentilic) suffix.

Still in the realm of lexical semantics, but focusing on figurative

language, **Bernard Septimus**'s study (241–264) goes in the other direction, from meaning to form, as he demonstrates how the notion of shame is depicted differently in Palestinian and Babylonian sources. While in the former it is associated with a blushing of the face, in the latter it is linked to the bleaching of the face.

Five papers in this volume can be put under the thematic umbrella of Mishnaic Hebrew in the Middle Ages. The focus of **Michael Ryzhik** (221–239), **Ofra Tirosh-Becker** (369–394), and **Doron Yaʿakov** (395–409) is still on the way that the original Mishnaic Hebrew is reflected in medieval sources. Tirosh-Becker demonstrates that in the spelling of the relative pronoun *še-* with an ʾ*alif* in the Karaite Arabic transcription of rabbinic literature reflects the existence of compensatory lengthening before all gutturals (not including /r/) and that the spelling of certain words suggest a reading of this pronouns with a *šəwa*. Ryzhik traces the changes that took place in the transformation from manuscripts to printed editions and the role of normativization in this process. This is a historical moment through which we can follow the type of changes that the texts underwent, making this a productive subject for study. Yaʿakov examines the close relationship between two traditions of Mishnaic Hebrew: Maimonides' tradition and the Yemenite tradition. His claim is that this affinity is a result of influence of the former on the latter. The papers by Ryzhik and Yaʿakov present a fresh type of investigation into the transmission of Mishnaic Hebrew. While earlier studies investigated the various traditions only in an attempt to identify the original language of Mishnaic Hebrew, these papers represent attempts to learn how changes in the text happen for their own sake.

The topic of the two other papers is Mishnaic Hebrew in the Middle Ages, one approaching the ideological level and the other the practical level. At the ideological level, **Aharon Maman** (175–188) demonstrates that there were three approaches to Mishnaic Hebrew and its relation to Biblical Hebrew among the medieval Hebrew philologists: (1) those who believed that both idioms are one and the same language; (2) those who argued that they are two separate layers; and (3) those who took a more moderate approach, according to which they are separate layers,

but Mishnaic Hebrew was already embodied in the biblical grammar. At the practical level, **Chanan Ariel** (1–35) begins with the assumption that Maimonides customarily wrote in Mishnaic Hebrew and therefore examines several syntactic phenomena in which he deviated from Mishnaic Hebrew. In all of the cases studied, according to Ariel, it is possible to point to an Arabic influence, and therefore he attempts to determine the level of intentionality in these deviations.

Two papers in this volume deal with satellite topics to the discussion on Mishnaic Hebrew and focus on practical aspects of its study. **Nurit Shoval-Dudai** (293–335) provides a methodological discussion on how to present identical lemmata of Greek and Latin loanwords within the project of the Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language. In this paper, she focuses mostly on a group of identical lemmata with different meanings and she proposes criteria for the classification of the entries. **Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra**'s paper (349–367) concerns the new project of translating the Mishnah into French which will appear in digital format. After surveying the history of the translations of the Mishnah into French, Stökl Ben Ezra discusses in a methodological way several topics that must be repeatedly dealt with when Mishnaic Hebrew is translated into today's French. Among them are phenomena pertaining to the use of tenses, stylistic issues such as a tolerance for the repetition of a similar roots in proximate sentences, and practical decisions as to what should be transliterated and how to do the actual transliterations.

Contemporary scholars have a good idea of the most reliable manuscripts on which to base their work in Mishnaic Hebrew. We have the comparative data from other Roman-era Hebrew texts to which Mishnaic Hebrew can be compared, and knowledge of some of the internal Hebrew and foreign sources from which Mishnaic Hebrew developed. The study of Mishnaic syntax is still underdeveloped,[12] and the lexicon is strangely

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12 For contributions, see Moshe Azar, *The Syntax of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1995); Richard C. Steiner, "The History of the Ancient Hebrew Modal System and Labov's Rule of Compensatory Structural Change," in *Towards a Social Science of Language: Papers in Honor of William*

unstudied especially with updated tools from the general studies of lexical semantics. There are numerous small subjects that are yet to be thoroughly studied, but the contours of these will become clearer only when the current state of knowledge is synthesized. The natural next step for the study of Mishnaic Hebrew is to produce a grammar and a lexicon. If the papers in this volume can contribute towards the knowledge needed for each of those, and perhaps spur researchers to take on those tasks, it will have accomplished the goals of the symposium and the publication.

Acknowledgements

Labov. Volume 1: Variation and Change in Language and Society, ed. G. R. Guy, Crawford Feagin, Deborah Schiffrin, and John Baugh (Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1996), 253–61; Richard C. Steiner, "Ancient Hebrew," in *The Semitic Languages*, ed. Robert Hetzron (London: Routledge, 1997), 145–73.

Deviations from Mishnaic Hebrew Syntax
in Mishneh Torah
Due to the Influence of Arabic:
Subordination or Intentional Usage?

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In his introduction to *Sefer HaMitzvot* (Book of Commandments), Maimonides writes that he deliberated concerning the choice of language for writing Mishneh Torah. He ruled out Biblical Hebrew (=BH) because it was too limited, and he ruled out Talmudic language—Aramaic—because

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his audience was not sufficiently familiar with it. He decided to use the language of the Mishnah "to make it accessible for most people."[1]

The author's declaration that he chose to write his work in one particular stratum of language is a very valuable one. It is evidence of the author's acute linguistic awareness, and it allows us to compare the actual language of the work to his linguistic declarations. Was he successful in keeping to the stratum of language he had chosen? Are his departures from it deliberate or unintentional? Can we establish a link between Maimonides' linguistic divergences and his desire that people be able to read his work?

This article deals with four syntactic issues. Each issue is discussed separately and compared to previous strata of Hebrew and to the contact languages Aramaic and Arabic. Building on the separate analyses of these case studies, I will attempt to reach general conclusions regarding the methods that Maimonides used to formulate his unique style of language.

Maimonides' syntax is particularly interesting for two reasons. The first is related to the status of syntax in the Middle Ages. Today, the term "language" is understood as covering orthography, phonetics, morphology, syntax, lexicography, and semantics. Did Maimonides think that all of these subfields had the same importance?

Rabbi Jonah ibn Janaḥ, whose books on Hebrew language had a significant influence on Maimonides, dedicated most of his works to morphology (following Rabbi Judah Ḥayyuj) and to lexical issues, devoting only a few chapters in *Kitāb al-lumaʿ* (*Sefer ha-Riqma*) to some syntactic issues. It is thus possible that even though Maimonides declared his intention to write his book in Mishnaic Hebrew (=MH), his attention was primarily on the lexicon and less on syntax.

The second reason is that other writers throughout history who tried to write in a "pure" version of Hebrew—such as the authors of the Qumran sect[2]

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1   See Qafiḥ 1971:2. For discussion of the "missing option," Arabic, see Twersky 1980:333–37.

2   See, for example, Schniedewind 1999:243.

or the poets of the Golden Age in Spain[3]—have been found to have had greater success in the lexicon than in the syntax. In each of these periods, there was a clear influence of contact languages on the syntax of the texts. During the Second Temple period the influence originated in Aramaic, and during the Golden Age in Spain the influence was Arabic.

Two criteria may be suggested to help determine whether a deviation from MH due to Arabic influence is intentional or not:

(a) The Distribution of the Construction in Mishneh Torah as Compared to the Distribution of Its Alternative in Mishnaic Hebrew:
Differences in the distribution of a construction require an explanation. If a construction which is rare in Rabbinic Hebrew (=RH) becomes more frequent in Mishneh Torah and it also has a parallel in Arabic, one should suspect that its occurrence in Mishneh Torah may not be attributed to internal Hebrew development but rather to Arabic influence.

Changes in the distribution of constructions can hint at additional information as well. The wider the distribution a construction has in the language of Mishneh Torah, the greater the chances are that Maimonides was aware of his departure from MH grammar. If Maimonides chooses not to use a relatively frequent construction from MH, one has grounds to believe that this is his conscious linguistic choice.

(b) Writing Category:
As Ori Samet demonstrates,[4] it is possible to identify three categories of writing in Maimonides' work:
(1) His own prose
(2) Adaptations of Hebrew sources
(3) Translations of sources from Aramaic or Arabic

It seems likely that in passages where Maimonides adapted a Hebrew source, the change was intentional, since he could have cited the original without changing it. In contrast, his translations into Hebrew or his own

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3   See, for example, Fleischer 1975:414–15.
4   Samet 2004:1.

prose are more likely to stem from an unconscious influence of Arabic syntax.

1. The Future-Perfect

Let us demonstrate the first criterion with a paragraph that appears in the laws of Manner of Offering. The law is about a person who sanctified only one limb of an animal as a sacrifice, specifically a limb that the animal could live without.

הָאוֹמֵר ״יָדָהּ שֶׁלָּזוֹ עוֹלָה״ אוֹ ״רַגְלָהּ שֶׁלָּזוֹ עוֹלָה״ – תִּמָּכֵר לְחַיָּבֵי עוֹלוֹת, וְדָמֶיהָ חֻלִּין חוּץ מִדְּמֵי אוֹתוֹ אֵבֶר; וְהוּא **שֶׁיִּהְיֶה** זֶה הַמְחֻיָּב עוֹלָה שֶׁקָּנָה אוֹתָהּ **נָדַר** עוֹלָה בְּדָמִים קְצוּבִים. (מעשה הקרבנות טו, ב)

If one said, "The hand of this beast shall be a burnt offering," or "the foot of this beast shall be a burnt offering," it had to be sold to one obliged to bring a burnt offering, while the purchase money was unhallowed except for the value of the consecrated limb. It could be sold thus only if the purchaser who was obliged to bring a burnt offering **had vowed** to bring the offering at a certain price.[5]

We encounter here a peculiar syntactic construction which exists in Arabic yet is foreign to Hebrew: "he will (יהיה)"—an auxiliary verb in the future tense—followed by "he vowed (נָדַר)"—a primary verb in past tense (future-perfect).[6] To date, I have not found another instance of this construction in Mishneh Torah. Even though this sentence is not a translation from Arabic, its foreign status in Hebrew on the one hand, and its rareness in Mishneh Torah on the other, probably bear evidence of an unconscious Arabic influence.

Indeed, the future-perfect is well documented in Judaeo-Arabic and specifically in Maimonides' Arabic (Blau 1980:185). A construction similar to the one in Mishneh Torah is found in Maimonides' commentary on *B. Qam* 5:3:

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5   Lewittes 1957:225.
6   See Wright 1896–1898:II, 22; Fischer 2002:108.

ולד׳לך ילזמה כופר, ובשרט אן **יכון רמי** בנפסה הנאך למאכול ראי פי אלביר.
and therefore he must pay the ransom price, but only if it [the ox]
threw itself into the pit because it saw food inside.[7]

Further evidence that Maimonides was not conscious of the Arabic
influence in this instance comes from a comparison of the draft of the law,
which was found in the Cairo Geniza,[8] with its final version in Mishneh
Torah. The draft version states:

האומר ידה של ⟨זו⟩ עולה או רגלה שלזו עולה
תמכר לחייבי עולות ודמיה ⟨חולין⟩ חוץ מדמי אותו אבר
והוא שיהא זה שחייב עולה נדר עולה ∘∘∘∘∘∘∘∘∘∘∘∘[9]

When Maimonides edited this law, he made several changes to the
sentence in defining to whom it is possible to sell the animal:

והוא שיהא זה שחייב עולה נדר עולה ∘∘∘∘∘∘∘∘∘∘

וְהוּא שֶׁיִּהְיֶה זֶה הַמְחָיָב עוֹלָה שֶׁקָּנָה אוֹתָהּ נָדַר עוֹלָה בְּדָמִים קְצוּבִים.

Despite these changes, Maimonides did not alter the future perfect
construction in the final version of the work, indicating that he did not
perceive this construction as problematic.

2. The Numeral Construction

Not all deviations from the MH syntax in Mishneh Torah were
unintentional. I will now discuss three syntactic constructions which
seem to show that Maimonides was aware of the Arabic influence, yet it
did not deter him from using a construction with clear affinity to Arabic
syntax. First, let us consider numerals.[10]

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7   And see additional examples, ibid., 4:5 (אן יכון קד קתל) and 5:6 באן יכון קד ג׳אז אל
     (ביר).
8   See Shailat 2011.
9   The rest of the line is effaced.
10   A brief description of the use of numerals appears in Sheḥadeh 2004:335.