

Yadin, Azzan and Zuckermann, Ghil'ad 2009 [in press]. '*Blorít*: Pagans' Mohawk or Sabras' Forelock?: Ideological Secularization of Hebrew Terms in Socialist Zionist Israeli' in 'Tope Omoniyi (ed.), *The Sociology of Language and Religion: Change, Conflict and Accommodation. A Festschrift for Joshua A. Fishman on his 80th Birthday*. London – New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

***Blorít* – Pagans' Mohawk or Sabras' Forelock?: Ideological Secularization of Hebrew Terms in Socialist Zionist Israeli**

Azzan Yadin and Ghil'ad Zuckermann

ABSTRACT

The greatest virtue of a new word is that it is not new. (Yechezkel Micha'el Pines, 1893)

versus

It is absolutely impossible to empty out words filled to bursting, unless one does so at the expense of language itself.

(Gershom Scholem, 26 December 1926)

One of the problems facing those attempting to revive Hebrew as the national language of the emerging State of Israel was that of Hebrew lexical voids. The 'revivalists' attempted to use mainly internal sources of lexical enrichment but were faced with a paucity of roots. They changed the meanings of obsolete Hebrew terms to fit the modern world. This infusion often entailed the secularization of religious terms.

This chapter explores the widespread phenomenon of semantic secularization, as in the politically-neutral process visible in English *cell* 'monk's living place' > 'autonomous self-replicating unit from which tissues of the body are formed'. The main focus, however, is on secularizations involving *ideological* 'lexical engineering', as often exemplified by – **either conscious or subconscious, either top-down or bottom-up** – manipulative, subversive processes of extreme semantic shifting, pejoration, amelioration, trivialization, allusion and echoing.

An example of **defying religion** is בלורית. Mishnaic Hebrew [bəlo'rit] is 'Mohawk, an upright strip of hair that runs across the crown of the head from the forehead to the nape of the neck', characteristic of the abominable pagan and not to be touched by the Jewish barber. But defying religious values, secular Socialist Zionists use *blorít* with the meaning 'forelock, hair above the forehead', which becomes one of the defining characteristics of the Sabra ('prickly pear', a nickname for native Israelis, allegedly thorny on the outside and sweet inside). **Is the 'new Jew' ultimately a pagan?**

This negation of religion fascinatingly adds to the phenomenon of negation of the Diaspora (*shlilat hagolá*), exemplified in the *blorít* itself by Zionists expecting the Sabra to have dishevelled hair, as opposed to the orderly diasporic Jew, who was considered by Zionists to be weak and persecuted.

An example of the complementary phenomenon, **deifying Zionism**, is משכן. Biblical Hebrew [mif'kán] means 'dwelling-place' and 'Tabernacle of the Congregation' (where Moses kept the Ark in the wilderness), 'inner sanctum' (known as אהל מועד [l'ohel mo'ed]). Israeli משכן הכנסת *mishkán aknéset*, however, refers to 'the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) building'. Translating *mishkán aknéset* as 'The Knesset Building' (as in the official Knesset website) is lacking. **The word *mishkán* is loaded with holiness and evokes sanctity, as if MKs (Members of Knesset, i.e. MPs) were at the very least angels or seraphs.**

In line with the prediction made by the Kabbalah-scholar Gershom Scholem in a letter to Franz Rosenzweig (*Bekentnis über unsere Sprache*, 1926), some ultra-orthodox Jews have tried to launch a 'lexical vendetta': using secularized terms like 'dormant agents', as a shortcut to religious concepts, thus trying to convince secular Jews to go back to their religious roots.

The study of Israeli cultural linguistics and socio-philology casts light on the dynamics between language, religion and identity in a land where fierce military battles with external enemies are accompanied by internal *Kulturkämpfe*.

1. BACKGROUND

This chapter explores semantic *change* which manifests the *conflict* between the religious and the secular in Israel. It also uncovers means of *accommodation* and negotiation, for example using vagueness or ambiguity resulting from semantic secularization to get out of a legal or political quagmire (see *bitakhón* ‘faith in God’/‘security’ in §7).¹

1.1 The Israeli language

Hebrew belongs to the Canaanite division of the north-western branch of Semitic languages. Following a gradual decline, it ceased to be spoken by the second century AD. The failed Bar-Kokhba Revolt against the Romans in Judea in AD 132-5, in which thousands of Jews were killed, marks the symbolic end of the period of spoken Hebrew. But the actual end of spoken Hebrew might have been earlier. Jesus, for example, was a native speaker of Aramaic rather than Hebrew. For more than 1700 years thereafter, Hebrew was not spoken. A most important liturgical and literary language, it occasionally served as a lingua franca for Jews of the Diaspora, but not as a mother tongue.

The genetic classification of ‘Israeli’ (Zuckermann 1999, 2006a, 2007), the language which emerged in Palestine at the end of the nineteenth century, has preoccupied linguists since its genesis. The still prevalent, traditional view suggests that Israeli is Semitic: (Biblical/Mishnaic) Hebrew *revived*. The revisionist position defines Israeli as Indo-European: Yiddish *relexified*, i.e. Yiddish, the ‘revivalists’ mother tongue, is the ‘substratum’, whilst Hebrew is only a ‘superstratum’ providing the vocabulary (cf. Horvath & Wexler 1997). Zuckermann’s *mosaic* (rather than *Mosaic*) hypothesis is that ‘genetically modified’ Israeli is a ‘semi-engineered’ multi-layered language, which is a Semito-European, or Eurasian, hybrid, i.e. both Semitic (Afro-Asiatic) and (Indo-)European. It is based simultaneously on ‘sleeping beauty’/‘walking dead’ Hebrew, ‘*máme lóshn*’ (‘mother tongue’) Yiddish (both being *primary contributors*) and other languages (Zuckermann 2006c, 2008a, 2008b). Therefore, the term ‘Israeli’ is far more appropriate than ‘Israeli Hebrew’, let alone ‘Modern Hebrew’ or ‘Hebrew’ *tout court*.

Almost all Hebrew revivalists – e.g. Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (born Perelman) – were native Yiddish-speakers. Not only were they European but their revivalist campaign was, in fact, inspired by European – e.g. Bulgarian – nationalism. Although territory and language were at the heart of European nationalism, Jews, albeit having a ‘Jewish **lense**’ (perspective and heritage), possessed neither a **land** nor a unifying **langue**. Zionism could thus be considered a fascinating and multifaceted manifestation of European discourses channelled into the Holy Land - cf. George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (1876).

Nevertheless, the revivalists wished to speak Hebrew, with Semitic grammar and pronunciation, like Arabs. But, clearly, they could not avoid their European mindset. Their attempts (1) to deny their (more recent) roots in search of Biblical ancientness, (2) negate diasporism and disowning the ‘weak, persecuted’ exilic Jew from public memory, and (3) avoid hybridity (as reflected in Slavonized, Romance/Semitic-influenced, Germanic Yiddish itself, which they regarded as *zhargón*) failed.

¹ Thanks to Grace Brockington, Simon Overall, Uri Eisenzweig, Ken Moss, Erez Cohen, Gary Rendsburg, Jeffrey Shandler and Yael Zerubavel, who read and commented on an earlier version of this chapter.

1.2 Lexical enrichment in Israeli

The main problem the ‘revivalists’ faced was that of Hebrew *lexical voids*, which were not semantic voids but cases in which purists tried to supplant unwelcome guestwords, foreignisms and loanwords. The purists tried to use mainly internal sources of lexical enrichment but were hampered by a paucity of roots.

- The number of attested Biblical Hebrew words is roughly 8000, of which some 2000 are *hapax legomena* (the number of Biblical Hebrew roots, on which many of these words are based, is roughly 2000).
- The number of attested Mishnaic Hebrew words is less than 20,000, of which (i) less than 8000 are Mishnaic *par excellence*, i.e. they did not appear in the Old Testament (the number of new Mishnaic Hebrew roots is roughly 800); (ii) around 6000 are a subset of Biblical Hebrew; and (iii) several thousand are Aramaic words which can have a Hebrew form.
- Medieval Hebrew(s) added more than 6000 words to Hebrew.
- The approximate number of new lexical items in Israeli is 17,000 (cf. 14,762 in Even-Shoshan 1970: vii:3062).

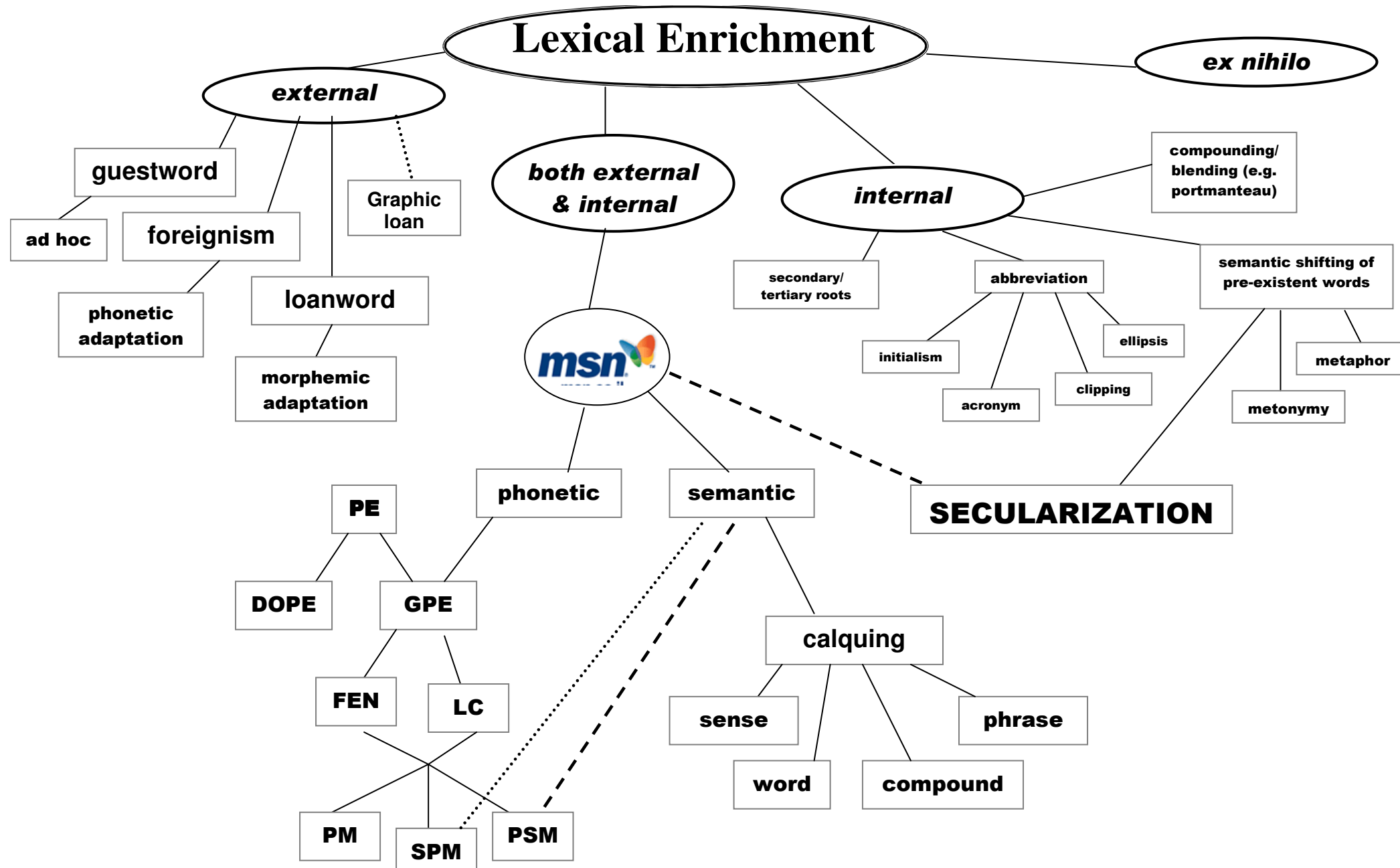
With the inclusion of foreign and technical terms we estimate that the total number of Israeli words, including words of Biblical, Mishnaic, Medieval and Maskilic descent, is more than 60,000. Even-Shoshan (1970) lists 37,260 words. Even-Shoshan (1997), the most comprehensive dictionary of Israeli, lists slightly more.

1.3 Sources of lexical enrichment – CHART: SOURCES OF LEXICAL ENRICHMENT

The following chart summarises the main methods of lexical enrichment.

ABBREVIATIONS

CONSTR = construct-state
 DEF = definite
 DOPE = derivational-only popular etymology
 FEN = folk-etymological nativization
 GPE = generative popular etymology
 LC = lexical conflation
 m = masculine
 MSN = multisourced neologization
 PE = popular etymology
 PM = phonetic matching
 PSM = phono-semantic matching
 sg = singular
 SPM = semanticized phonetic matching



2. EX INTERNO LEXICAL ENRICHMENT IN ISRAELI

The following are some of the *ex interno* lexical enrichment methods applied by ‘revivalists’:

2.1 Creating secondary (and tertiary) roots from nouns

Consider Israeli מיקום *mikúm* ‘locating’, from מקם \sqrt{mqm} ‘locate’, which derives from Biblical Hebrew מקום [ma'qom] ‘place’, whose root is קומ \sqrt{qwm} ‘stand’:

קומ \sqrt{qwm} ‘stand’ → מקום [ma'qom] ‘place’ → מקם \sqrt{mqm} ‘locate’ → מיקום <i>mikúm</i> ‘locating’

Figure 1

A recent example introduced by the Academy of the Hebrew Language in *Akadém* 8 (March 1996, p. 1) is מדרוג *midrúg* ‘rating’, from מדרג *midrág*, whose root is דרג \sqrt{drg} ‘grade’.

This process is morphologically similar to the production of frequentative (iterative) verbs in Latin:

- *iactito* ‘to toss about’ derives from *iacto* ‘to boast of, keep bringing up, harass, disturb, throw, cast, fling away’, which in turn derives from *iacio* ‘to throw, cast’ (whose past participle is *iactus*)
- *scriptito* ‘to write often, compose’ is based on *scribo* ‘to write’ (<‘to draw lines, engrave with a sharp-pointed instrument’)
- *dicto* ‘to say often, repeat’ is from *dico* ‘to indicate, say, speak, tell’
- *clamito* ‘to cry loudly/often, shout violently’ derives from *clamo* ‘call, shout’

Similar cases occur in Arabic:

- مركز \sqrt{mrkz} , cf. [ˈmarkaza] ‘centralized (m, sg)’, from [ˈmarkaz] ‘centre’, from [ˈrakaza] ‘plant into the earth, stick up (a lance)’ (< ركز \sqrt{rkz})
- ارتدّج $\sqrt{rdʒh}$, cf. [taˈʔardʒaħa] ‘oscillated (m, sg)’, from [ʔurˈdʒuːħa] ‘swing (n)’, from [ˈradʒaħa] ‘weighed down, preponderated (m, sg)’ (< رجح $\sqrt{rdʒh}$)
- محور \sqrt{mhwr} , cf. [taˈmaħwara] ‘centred, focused (m, sg)’, from [ˈmiħwar] ‘axis’, from [ˈħaːra] ‘turned (m, sg)’ (< حور $\sqrt{ħwr}$)
- مسخر $\sqrt{msχr}$, cf. [taˈmasχara] ‘mocked, made fun (m, sg)’, from مسخرة [ˈmasχara] ‘mockery’, from سخر [ˈsaχira] ‘mocked (m, sg)’ (< سخر $\sqrt{sχr}$)

The following is a tertiary root case in Israeli:

מור \sqrt{mwr} ‘change’ → Hebrew תמורה [təmuˈrã] ‘change (n)’ → → תמר \sqrt{tmr} ‘change, transform, substitute’ → (Phono-Semantic Matching) → Israeli מותמר <i>mutmár</i> ‘transformed, metamorphic’ → → מתמר \sqrt{mtmr} ‘metamorphose’ → Israeli מתמור <i>mitmúr</i> ‘metamorphosis’

Figure 2

2.2 Blending two distinct roots

- Israeli דחפור *dakhpór* ‘bulldozer’ hybridizes (Mishnaic Hebrew>>)Israeli דחפ \sqrt{dhp} ‘push’ and (Biblical Hebrew>>)Israeli חפר \sqrt{hpr} ‘dig’.
- Israeli שלטוט *shiltút* ‘zapping, surfing the channels, flipping through the channels’ derives from (i) (Hebrew>)Israeli שלט *shalát* ‘remote control’, an ellipsis – like *remote* (but using the noun instead) – of the (widely known) compound שלט רחוק *shalát rakhók* (cf. Even-Shoshan 1997: 1837b) – cf. the Academy of the Hebrew Language’s שלט רחק *shalát rákhak* (*Laméd Leshonkhá* 19, October–November 1996); (ii) (Hebrew>)Israeli שטוט *shitút* ‘wandering, vagrancy’. Israeli שלטוט *shiltút* was introduced by the Academy of the Hebrew Language in *Laméd Leshonkhá* 19 (October–November 1996) – cf. *Akadém* 11 (May 1997). Synchronically, it might appear to result from reduplication of the final consonant of *shalát* ‘remote control’.
- Israeli גחלילית *gakhilít* ‘fire-fly, glow-fly, *Lampyris*’ is another example of blending which has also been explained as mere reduplication. This coinage by Bialik blends (Hebrew>)Israeli גחלת *gakhélet* ‘burning coal’ with (Hebrew>)Israeli לילה *láyla* ‘night’. Compare this with the unblended חכלילית *khakhilít* ‘(black) redstart, *Phoenicurus*’ (<<Biblical Hebrew חכליל ‘dull red, reddish’). Synchronically speaking though, most native Israeli-speakers feel that *gakhilít* includes a reduplication of the third radical of גחל \sqrt{ghl} . This is incidentally how Klein (1987: 97a) explains *gakhilít*. Since he is attempting to provide etymology, his description might be misleading if one agrees that Bialik had blending in mind.

2.3 Semantic shifting of pre-existent words

Consider Israeli אקדה *ekdák* ‘handgun, revolver’ (initially ‘firing machine’, cf. *Ben-Yehuda* 1909: i:373a and *Ben-Yehuda* 1978: 249-50), from Biblical Hebrew אקדה $[\text{ʔeq}^{\text{d}}\text{d}á\text{h}]$ ‘carbuncle, carbuncle-stone’ (red precious stone used for decoration) – see Isaiah 54:12. The coiner, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, points out that he was affected by Hebrew/Israeli קדה $\sqrt{qd\dot{h}}$ ‘drill’ (cf. *Ben-Yehuda* 1909: i:373a:fn3) Note that the original אקדה $[\text{ʔeq}^{\text{d}}\text{d}á\text{h}]$ ‘carbuncle’ can be traced back to קדה $\sqrt{qd\dot{h}}$ as well (see *Ben-Yehuda* 1909: i:373a:fn1). If Ben-Yehuda had in mind English *drill full of bullets* or the like, אקדה *ekdák* ‘firing machine’, which gained currency with the specific meaning ‘handgun, revolver’, would constitute an etymological calque, or a sense-calque introducing a new sense.

Bar-Asher (1995: 8) calls the process of recycling obsolete lexical items עקרונ השאיבה מבפנים *ekrón hasheivá mibifním* ‘The Principle of Drawing from Within’ (also mentioned in *Akadém* 8, March 1996, p. 3), corresponding to the view expressed by Pínes and Klausner (1893: 61):

הגדולה שבמעלות למלה חדשה – אם איננה חדשה

‘The greatest virtue of a new word is that it is not new’

(Pínes 1893: 61)

כדי לחדש צריך למצוא מלה ישנה, שיש לה שורש עברי, שיש לה צורה עברית, שיש לה טעם עברי

‘In order to neologize one should find an old word, which has a Hebrew root, a Hebrew form and Hebrew stress’

(Klausner 1940: 289)

In response to Ben-Yehuda's rebuke of not having neologized enough Aaron Meyer Mazia said:

Not only am I unashamed of it but I am in fact satisfied that the [Hebrew Language] Council decided on numerous words for athletics, arithmetic, dresses and the like, but that the majority of these words were nothing but old words [...] we would not want to create new words as long as we are able to satisfy our needs with what is available from our ancient literature.

(cf. *Zikhronot Vaad Halashon* 4, 1914: 42; a similar view by Mazia can be found in *Zikhronot Vaad Halashon* 6, 1928: 85)

Very often, this infusion of new meaning includes the secularization of religious terms.

2.4 Semantic secularization

Secularization, in which an originally religious term is used with a non-religious meaning, is not unique to Israeli. Examples from English include the following:

- *cell* 'monk's living place' > 'autonomous self replicating unit from which tissues of the body are formed'
- *sanction* 'imposition of penance' > 'legal/political penalty'
- *office* 'church service' > 'commercial bureau'
- *hierarchy* 'medieval classification of angels into ranks (including cherubim, seraphim, powers and dominions)' > in the seventeenth century: ranking of clergymen > system of grading

See also *mercy*, *novice*, *passion* and *sanctuary*. The reverse process to secularization is demonstrated in English *bishop* and French *évêque*, which come from Greek *epískopos* 'overseer', the modern religious meaning resulting from the use of 'overseer' within the Christian community (cf. McMahon 1994: 180).

However, lexical secularization is particularly widespread in Israeli, which is a non-genetic, hybridic Jewish language, 120 years old.²

We believe that it is possible to reconstruct the coiner's mindset and motives. But this is not an easy task, especially given that there are numerous multifaceted dimensions involved. Semantic secularization can occur for many reasons, and only sometimes does it reflect ideological tension. A term may be secularized as a result of phono-semantic matching (§3.1), calquing (§3.2), semantic shifting (§3.3, §3.4) and survival of the best fit (§3.5). Particularly interesting are subversive secularizations involving *ideologically manipulative* 'lexical engineering' (to employ a term used in Zuckermann 2006b) – see survival of the best fit (§4.1), mild and extreme semantic shifting (§4.2, §4.3), pejoration (§4.4), mild and extreme amelioration (§4.5, §4.6), ameliorative recycling of biblical first names (§4.7), trivialization (§4.8) and allusion (§4.9). The degree of manipulation is on a continuum and – *inter alia* since we are dealing with a new emerging language with numerous 'revivalists' – it is sometimes hard to draw the line between *neutral* and *manipulative* secularization.

² See the discussion of Weiss (1977), Kantor (1992) and Zuckermann (2003: 75).

3. IDEOLOGICALLY NEUTRAL SECULARIZATION IN ISRAELI

Shift happens.

3.1 Phono-semantic matching (PSM)

PSM is defined as a **multi-sourced neologism** that preserves both the meaning and the approximate sound of the parallel expression in the source-language, using *pre-existent* target-language words or roots (cf. Zuckermann 2003, 2004). Consider the following secularizing PSMs:

(1) יובל [jo'bh^hel] → *yovél*

Israeli יובל *yovél* is an ‘incestuous PSM’ introducing a new sense:

Biblical Hebrew (perhaps from יבל \sqrt{jbl} ‘(to) lead’ >)

יובל [jo'bh^hel] ‘ram’ > whole-for-part synecdoche (a type of metonymy) >

‘ram’s horn, *shofar*’ > ‘fiftieth anniversary (after seven cycles of years of *shemittah*)’ >

Greek *iōbēlos* > *iōbēlaîos* >

PSM₁ (with Latin *iubilare* ‘shout for joy’ or Latin *iubilum* ‘wild cry’) >

Latin *iubilæus* (and not **ibelæus*) > > >

French *jubilé*, **Spanish** *jubileo*, **Italian** *giubileo*, **Russian** юбилей *yubiléj*,

Polish *jubileusz*, **German** *Jubiläum*, **Yiddish** יוביליי *yubiléy*, **English** *jubilee* >

PSM₂ (with Biblical Hebrew יובל [jo'bh^hel] ‘fiftieth anniversary (after seven cycles of years of *shemittah*)’ >

Israeli יובל *yovél* ‘(happy) anniversary, celebration’

(2) אבוב [ʔab'bu^h] → *abúv*

Consider the following ‘specificizing PSM’, a special sub-category of *PSM* that introduces a new sense, consisting of the specification of the initially *vague* meaning of a *pre-existent* target-language word, so it becomes limited to the *specific* meaning of the matched source-language word:

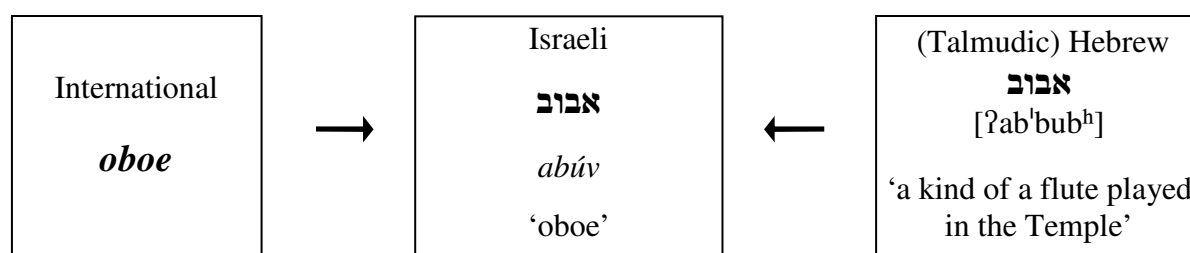


Figure 3

- (3) סמל [ˈsemel] → *sémel*

Biblical Hebrew סמל [ˈsemel] is ‘an object of idolatrous worship’, perhaps originally a reference to a foreign deity – see Deuteronomy 4:16, Ezekiel 8:3 and 2 Chronicles 33:7, 15. In Israeli, however, it simply means ‘symbol’ – due, at least in part, to the phonetic similarity with the internationalism *symbol*.

- (4) תורה [toˈrâ] → *torá*

Hebrew תורה [toˈrâ] usually refers to ‘the totality of the religious teachings that God has bestowed upon Israel’ or to ‘the book containing these teachings’ (see Psalms 19:8 and Nehemiah 8:1), although the original sense of the word in the Old Testament is ‘instruction’ (see Leviticus 6:2 and 6:18). Israeli *torá*, however, means ‘theory’ as in תורת היחסות של איינשטיין *torát hayakhasút shel áynshteyn* ‘Einstein’s Theory of Relativity’, cf. Israeli תורת לחימה *torát lekhimá* ‘military strategy’. The phonetic similarity with the internationalism *theory* – cf. Israeli תאוריה *teórya* – might have facilitated this secularization.

3.2 Calquing

- (5) קורבן [qorˈbân] → *korbán*

The European word for ‘sacrifice’ was transformed over time from a cultic term to a word designating the forfeiture of something highly valued for the sake of a still greater – though not necessarily religious – cause. Paralleling the semantic shift in European languages, the same dynamic is evident in קורבן [qorˈbân]: Biblical Hebrew [qorˈbân] ‘sacrifice’ takes on in Israeli the non-cultic meaning of today’s ‘sacrifice’.

- (6) פדי √*pdj*

Biblical Hebrew פדי √*pdj* ‘redeem’ occurs primarily in cultic and religious contexts, referring either to (a) the redemption of human firstborn from Temple sacrifice: ‘The first issue of the womb of every being, man or beast, that is offered to the Lord, shall be yours; but you shall have the first-born of man redeemed’ (Numbers 18:15), or to (b) God’s salvation of Israel: ‘For the Lord will ransom Jacob, redeem him from one too strong for him’ (Jeremiah 31:11).

In Israeli, however, the primary meaning is financial: לפדות *lifdót* is ‘to cash (a cheque)’ and פדיונות גדולים *pidyonót gdolím*, lit. ‘big redeems’, refers to ‘the trading volume on the stock market’. This shift mirrors the semantic expansion of *redeem* in English and other European languages into the financial sphere, so that one speaks of *redeeming stocks*, *redeeming coupons* and the like. The semantic expansion of the Hebrew root, then, may well be the result of calquing rather than of internal dynamics.

3.3 Semantic shifting: temple utensils

There is a large group of words that have undergone semantic secularization, but their new meaning is so closely associated with the old that the shift does not reflect cultural tensions beyond secularization as such. Consider the Temple utensils, many of which mean kitchen utensils in Israeli:

- (7) Biblical Hebrew כִּיּוֹר [kij'jor] is 'a pot used for cooking in Temple contexts' (see 1 Kings 7:30,38,42) or 'the Temple/Tabernacle laver' (Exodus 30:18,28). In Israeli, these meanings are for all practical purposes abolished: *kyor* means 'a sink'.
- (8) Biblical Hebrew קַעֲרָה [qəf'arâ] 'a dish found regularly in Temple context (Exodus 25:29, Numbers 7:13, 19, 25, 31, 37) → Israeli *keará* 'a kitchen bowl'.
- (9) Biblical Hebrew כַּף [kap^h] 'ritual pan vessel' (Exodus 25:29, 37:16; Numbers 4:7,15) → Israeli *kaf* 'tablespoon'.
- (10) Biblical Hebrew מַחְבַּת [mahă'b^hat] 'pan used in baking the priestly grain offerings' (Leviticus 2:5, 6:14, 7:9) → Israeli *makhvát* '(frying) pan, griddle'.
- (11) Biblical Hebrew מַזְלֵג [maz'leg] 'a sacrificial implement for picking up meat' (1 Samuel 2:13) → Israeli *mazlég* 'fork'.

3.4 Other semantic shifts

- (12) מִשְׁחָה [miʃ'hâ] → *mishkhá*

Biblical Hebrew מִשְׁחָה [miʃ'hâ] 'the ointment of sanctified oil used in a variety of sacrificial contexts by the priests' (Exodus 25:6, 29:7,21, 31:11) → Israeli *mishkhá* 'cream'.

- (13) מִשְׁנָה [miʃ'nâ] → *mishná*

Mishnaic Hebrew מִשְׁנָה [miʃ'nâ] referred only to the religious-legal teachings of the rabbinic sages. Israeli *mishná* can refer to non-religious teachings as well, as in *משנתו הפוליטית של בוש* *mishnató apolítit shel bush* 'Bush's political doctrine'.

- (14) פִּרְקָן [pur'qân] → פּוֹרְקָן *purkán*

Medieval Hebrew פִּרְקָן [pur'qân] means 'redemption, salvation'. In Israeli it usually means 'orgasm, relief'. Both meanings can be traced to the same semantic sense of 'release'.

3.5 Survival of the best fit

Often one meaning of a pre-existent word is superseded by another pre-existent sense either because the latter fits Zionist discourse (§4.1) or because it is more modern, as in the following:

- (15) יָרִיד [jârid] → *yaríd*

Mishnaic Hebrew יָרִיד [jârid] is 'a meeting place' or 'an annual fair', often – though not always – dedicated to a pagan deity and thus a site of idolatry.

In Israeli it is a secular 'fair', for example an arts fair, with no negative connotation.

(16) תקון [tiq'qun] → תיקון *tikún*

Mishnaic Hebrew תקון [tiq'qun] means ‘preparation, especially making fruits available by separating the tithes, the priest’s share etc.’, as well as ‘establishment, institution, amendment, making right’. Thus, Mishnaic Hebrew תקון העולם [tiq'qun háʔo'lám] refers to ‘the process of refining and rehabilitating the materiality of this world’.

In Israeli, תיקון *tikún* is simply ‘fixing’, as in ‘fixing a car’.

The journey from the Temple to the kitchen (§3.3) is interesting, but the shift is secular and nothing more: cooking utensils in a sacred context now appear in a secular one, a sanctified ointment (#12) is now a cream. Nothing here suggests a deeper ideological engagement with the earlier strata of Hebrew. Nothing reflects the structural tension inherent in the secular-nationalist return to a language containing religious-exilic strata. That is not the case in most of the following examples.

4. IDEOLOGICALLY MANIPULATIVE SECULARIZATION IN ISRAELI

4.1 *Survival of the best fit*

(17) עבודה [ʔäbʰo'dâ] → *avodá*

Biblical Hebrew [ʔäbʰo'dâ] has both a religious and a secular sense, referring to ‘work’ or ‘labour’, as well as to ‘ritual and cultic worship’. Examples of the former are the activity of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt (Exodus 2:23) and the labour imposed by the Persian satrap on the Jews (Nehemiah 5:18). Examples of the latter are the phrases עבודת המשכן [ʔäbʰo'dât hammif'kân] ‘the cultic service of the Tabernacle’ (Numbers 3:7, cf. Exodus 39:32), עבודת הקודש [ʔäbʰo'dât haq'qodeʃ] ‘cultic worship’ (Exodus 36:3) and עבודת יהוה [ʔäbʰo'dât JHWH] ‘the worship of the Lord’ (Numbers 8:11). The same two meanings carry into Mishnaic Hebrew, but the second becomes the more dominant, as evidenced, for example, by the tractate עבודה זרה [ʔäbʰo'dâ zâ'râ], lit. ‘foreign worship’, i.e. ‘idolatry’.

In Israeli, the cultic meaning is replaced by ‘labour’ in the positive sense that this term carried in the labour movement. Consequently, one finds the decidedly non-cultic מפלגת העבודה *mifléget aavodá* ‘the Labour Party’ and תנועת העבודה *tnuat aavodá* ‘the Labour Movement’.

4.2 *Mild semantic shifting*

(18) קלפי [qalpej] → *kálfi / kálpi*

Mishnaic Hebrew קלפי [qalpe] (from Greek, cf. *kálpis* ‘a vessel for drawing water’) refers to ‘a Temple urn used for drawing lots – an ancient divination technique – by which various matters were decided’:

[The high priest] came to the east, to the north of the altar... and there was a casket [qalpe] with two lots... he shook the casket and took up the two lots. On one was written ‘For the Lord’ and on the other was written ‘For Azazel’.

(Mishnah Yoma 3.9 and 4.1)

The word undergoes an interesting re-semanticization: Israeli *kálfi* / *kálpi* is not a tool for determining *vox dei* but *vox populi*: it comes to mean ‘ballot box, voting/polling booth, polling station’.

(19) כנסת [kə'neset] → *knéset*

Mishnaic Hebrew כנסת ישראל [kə'neset jisrá'el] refers to ‘the Jewish people as a collective’, ‘the community of Israel’ – see Song of Songs Rabba 1:4. In Kabbalah literature, [kə'neset jisrá'el] is one of the standard appellations of the tenth divine emanation, also known as שכינה [ʃək'hiná].

In Israeli, however, the phrase takes on a national, political meaning: ‘Israeli Parliament, the Knesset’.



(20) משכן [mif'kân] → *mishkán*

Biblical Hebrew משכן [mif'kân] means ‘dwelling-place’ and ‘Tabernacle of the Congregation’ (where Moses kept the Ark in the wilderness), ‘inner sanctum’ (known as אהל מועד [ʔohel mo'ʕed]).

Israeli *mishkán* is ‘a building for a specific purpose’, e.g. האומנויות משכן *mishkán aomanuyót* ‘the Art Centre’, משכן הכנסת *mishkán aknéset* ‘the Knesset building’.

(21) קבע [ʔəbʰaʔ] → *kéva*

Mishnaic Hebrew קבע [ʔəbʰaʔ] refers to ‘a fixed or permanent implementation of a practice’, particularly prayer or Torah study. Rabbi Eliezer speaks of one who ‘makes his prayer fixed [ʔəbʰaʔ]’ (Mishna Berakhot 4.4).

In Israeli, however, the fixed and ongoing commitment is not to prayer or to Torah study but to military service: שרות קבע *sherút kéva* refers to ‘military service that extends beyond the duty required by the draft’. Similarly, the standing army – as opposed to the reserves – is צבא קבע *tsava kéva*.

(22) מלוואים [millu'ʔim] → מילואים *miluím*

Biblical Hebrew מלוואים [millu'ʔim] refers to ‘the days following the dedication of the Tabernacle but prior to the priests’ inauguration’ – see Leviticus 8:33:

ומפתח אהל מועד לא תצאו שבעת ימים עד יום מלאת ימי מלאיכם

You shall not go outside the entrance of the Tent of Meeting for seven days, until the day that your period of ordination [millu'ʔim] is completed’

The term also appears as modifying the sacrifices offered as part of the inauguration ritual: ‘the ram of ordination [millu'ʔim]’ (Leviticus 8:22) and ‘the bread that is in the basket of ordination’ (Leviticus 8:31).

The precise meaning of [millu'ʔim] in this context is a matter of controversy among Bible scholars, but the root מלא $\sqrt{mlʔ}$ means ‘fill’ and it is this meaning that generates the Israeli appropriation of the word to refer to ‘supplemental / reserve military service’. Thus, one’s days of *miluím* are no longer served at the Tabernacle but in reserve duty.

Note that the [millu'ʔim] section in Leviticus is at the meeting of two portions:

- (a) צו [sʔaw] (named after its opening verse: ‘The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Command [sʔaw] Aaron and his sons...’ (Leviticus 6:1-2)
- (b) שמיני [ʃəmi'ni] (named after its opening verse: ‘On the eighth [ʃəmi'ni] day Moses summoned Aaron and his sons...’ (Leviticus 9:1)

In Israeli, צו שמונה *tsav shmóne* ‘Ordinance 8’ is the document informing one of upcoming (often emergency) reserve service, i.e. of *miluím*. But this is mere serendipity!

In these examples, secularization is presented as superseding / supersession. For example, priestly service gives way to reserve duty (*miluím*). Though the modern concepts replace the ancient, they do so as heirs that are still somehow anchored in the Old Testament or the Mishnah, or at least as ‘natural’ or ‘organic’ outgrowths of earlier Jewish strata. This sense of a natural – almost inevitable – development is itself an expression of the ideological hegemony of Zionism. It is certainly true that the ultra-orthodox community has waged a fierce polemic against these semantic innovations (cf. Be’er 2003 and Scholem in §5). But for Israeli speakers the radical nature of the semantic change is no longer visible. The new meanings do not represent an antagonistic or revolutionary break with their ancient predecessors. The potentially problematic return to the religious strata of Hebrew is overcome by assimilating the pre-modern meanings into Israeli, subsuming the earlier under the later.

4.3 Extreme semantic shifting

A widespread strategy for overcoming the potential dangers inherent in the ‘return to Hebrew’ involves the ‘transvaluation’ of an earlier meaning, usually through an axiological reversal (e.g. a word with a positive connotation takes on a negative one, and vice versa), or a radical shift in the register (e.g. an elevated word is debased). It is worth noting that Eliezer ben Yehuda, the symbolic father of Israeli, was vehemently opposed to traditional, rabbinic Judaism (cf. Kuzar 2001).

The following words exemplify the transfer from a sacred to an unrelated profane realm. Whereas the Temple cooking utensils are re-semanticized as secular cooking utensils (see #7-11), here the transformation of the word is a marked, conscious act of transvaluation.

(23) מוסף [mu'âp^h] → *musáf*

Mishnaic Hebrew מוסף [mu'sâp^h] refers to 'the additional sacrifices offered in the Temple on the Sabbath and the festivals' (Mishna Berakhot 3.10). With the destruction of the Temple and the institutionalization of prayer, מוסף השבת [mu'sâp^h haššab^t] comes to mean 'the additional Sabbath prayer service'.

Israeli *musáf* refers to 'the weekend supplement included with the Friday edition of daily newspapers'. Though not denigrating the classical meaning, this undoubtedly constitutes a shift in register – from the exalted to the mundane.

(24) מעריב [maš'rib^h] → *maarív*

The path from prayer to newspaper is also evident in *Maarív*, the name of an (originally evening) Israeli daily newspaper that draws its name from Medieval Hebrew [maš'rib^h] 'the evening prayer'.

(25) שחרית [šaḥ'rit] → *shakharít*

Mishnaic Hebrew [šaḥ'rit] means 'morning' and 'the morning prayer'. In Israeli, however, *shakharít* is 'matinée (in the original sense), theatrical/musical/cinematic performance before noon', e.g. שחרית מוזיקלית לנוער *shakharít muzikalít* (or *muzikálit*) *lanóar* 'a musical matinée for the youth'.

(26) קבלה [qabbá'lá] → *kabalá*

Mishnaic Hebrew קבלה [qabbá'lá], lit. 'that which is received, tradition', refers to 'the doctrines a disciple receives from his master', 'oral teachings not recorded in Scripture'. Later, the term becomes associated with a particular type of received tradition, the mystical doctrines known as the Kabbalah.

The 'Kabbalah' meaning is still current in Israeli, but the primary sense has been lifted from the religious arena of received doctrine to the commercial world: *kabalá* means both 'receipt' and '(hotel) reception'. Israeli שעת קבלה *shat kabalá*, lit. 'hour-CONSTR receipt', means 'office hour' and מבחן קבלה *mivkhán kabalá*, lit. 'exam:CONSTR receipt', is 'entrance exam'.

(27) הדרן [had'rân] → *adrán*

Rabbinic הדרן [had'rân] is Aramaic for the first person plural imperfect of the root הדר \sqrt{hdr} , cf. 'we shall return'. The word is recited upon completing a tractate of the Talmud: הדרן עלך מסכת [hădaran 'ălāk^h massek^het] 'we shall return to you tractate...'. The phrase is a promise made by the readers to the text itself, that Talmud study will continue and so eventually we will return to the same tractate and study it once again.

Israeli הדרן *adrán* is different in two ways:

- (a) Morphologically, since its Aramaic morphology obscures its verbal form and makes it look as if it has the Hebrew agentive nominal suffix *-án*, *adrán* comes to be used as a noun, so that one can speak of an *adrán* or the *adrán*.
- (b) Semantically, *adrán* shifted from the religious and scholastic usage of the Yeshiva world to the realm of popular concerts: it means ‘encore’. The onstage return of the popular singer takes the place of the commitment to ongoing Talmud study.

(28) ראיין [reʔáʕjon] → *reyón*

The Mishnah tractate Pe’ah opens with a list of religious categories that have no fixed measure:

These are things for which no measure is prescribed: *pe’ah* (the margins of the field that are to be left unharvested for the poor), first fruits, [reʔáʕjon] (the pilgrimage appearance), deeds of loving kindness, and the study of Torah.

(Mishnah Pe’ah 1.1)

The ‘pilgrimage appearance’ [reʔáʕjon] refers to the biblical decree that

שלוש פעמים בשנה יראה כל זכורך את פני יהוה אלהיך

‘Three times a year... all your males shall appear before the Lord’

(Deuteronomy 16:16)

The interpretation of this verse is a matter of some controversy. In the Masoretic vocalization [jeráʕε], the pilgrim is seen by God. But the linguistically more natural – though theologically problematic – reading [jirʕε] has the pilgrim seeing God (cf. Shemesh 1997). Whatever its original meaning, Mishnaic Hebrew [reʔáʕjon] refers to an encounter between the Israelite pilgrims and God.

In Israeli, however, the face-to-face encounter with the deity is replaced with a much more mundane engagement: *reyón* is an ‘interview’.

4.4 Pejoration

Another type of transvaluation involves the reversal of the values associated with a word. Thus, words carrying a negative connotation are, for ideological reasons, construed as positive, or vice versa. Consider the debasement, pejoration, exemplified in the following:

(29) בטלן [batʕlân] → *batlân*

The Mishnah tractate Megillah (1.2) establishes different schedules for the reading of the Book of Esther on Purim according to the size of the settlement:

If [the holiday] fell on the day after the Sabbath, villages read it earlier on the day of assembly, large towns on the day itself, and walled cities on the next day.

The Mishnah then goes on to ask what counts as a large town. The answer: ‘Any in which there are ten unoccupied men [batʕlânim]’ (Megillah 1.3). Mishnaic Hebrew [batʕlânim] refers to individuals who are free of the need to work, possibly because they are supported by the community as a ready prayer quorum (מנין [minʕân]) and possibly because they are gentlemen of

leisure. In either case this is not a negative designation. Jastrow (1903) translates this phrase as ‘ten persons having leisure’ (see under בטלן).

With the lionization of labour among the early Zionists, *batlán* becomes a pejorative term: ‘a loafer, an idler, a lazy person’, sometimes implying a parasite.

4.5 Mild amelioration (negative → neutral)

But much more often, secularization involves amelioration.

(30) לץ [les^ʕ] → *lets*

(31) ליצן [le^ʕsʔan] → *leytsán*

(32) מוקיון [muq^jjon] → *mukyón*

These three terms are grouped together because (a) they reflect a similar tendency: re-semanticization that neutralizes the religiously or theologically negative meaning of a word, (b) they belong to the same semantic domain.

Biblical Hebrew לץ [les^ʕ] refers to both of the following:

- (a) ‘a person bereft of wisdom’ – particularly in Proverbs, where the word is regularly contrasted with the sage, e.g. Proverbs 9:8; 13:1; 21:11
- (b) ‘a wicked man’ – the best known example for it being the opening verse of Psalms (1:1):

אשרי האיש אשר לא הלך בעצת רשעים ובדרך חטאים לא עמד ובמושב לצים לא ישב.

Happy is the man who has not followed the counsel of the wicked or taken the path of the sinners or joined the company of the insolent (לצים [le^ʕsʔim]).

‘Insolent’ is here a theological term, implying insolence towards God.

Meaning (b) largely carries over into the Mishnaic cognate ליצן [le^ʕsʔan], which is often used to designate the sacrilegious: whilst those who doubt the veracity of Jeremiah’s prophecy are called ליצנים [les^ʕʔanim] (Ecclesiastes Rabba 8), Yalqut Shimoni characterizes the serpent who tempted Eve as ליצן [le^ʕsʔan], as evidenced by its heretical statements against God (Yalqut Psalms 613):

Rabbi Yehoshua of Sakhnin in the name of Rabbi Levi: The serpent besmirched his creator ... thus we learn that was a [le^ʕsʔan].

Similarly, Mishnaic Hebrew מוקיון [muq^jjon] is the term for Maccus, one of the stock characters in the Roman theatre (the *ludi*), originally a celebration of the attributes of a pagan god. Not surprisingly, the Tosefta (Avoda Zara 2.6) explicitly prohibits viewing the [muq^jjon] (along with other theatrical characters and the pagan diviner), as part of the prohibitions against idolatry.

In Israeli, however, these terms lose this connotation. *lets* is ‘a joker, a kidder’, while both *leytsán* and *mukyón* mean ‘clown’. That said, *leytsán* and *mukyón* have a colloquial derogatory meaning: ‘not serious, loser’.

(33) מנחש [mena'heʃ] → *menakhésh*

(34) קסם [qo'sem] → *kosém*

A similar process is evident in Biblical Hebrew מנחש [mena'heʃ] and קסם [qo'sem], both referring to 'diviners'. In Deuteronomy 18:10-11 they appear in a list of practitioners of prohibited religious practices:

לא ימצא בך מעביר בנו ובתו באש קסם קסמים מעונן ומנחש ומכשף
וחבר חבר ושאל אוב וידעני ודרש אל המתים

Let no one be found among you who consigns his son or daughter to the fire, or who is an augur [qo'sem qəsá'mim], a soothsayer, a diviner [mena'heʃ], a sorcerer, one who casts spells, or one who consults ghosts or familiar spirits, or one who inquires of the dead.

In Israeli both words lose their theologically negative meaning: the root נחש \sqrt{nhf} refers to 'guessing' so that *menakhésh* is simply an individual who guesses. Israeli *kosém* is 'a magician'.

4.6 Extreme amelioration (negative → positive)

(35) עמל [ʔá'mál] → *amál*

Biblical Hebrew עמל [ʔá'mál] is generally negative. Jeremiah (20:18) asks 'Why did I ever issue from the womb, to see misery [ʔá'mál] and woe'. The Psalmist asserts that, though the wicked man thinks God is oblivious to what happens in the world, 'You do look! You take note of mischief [ʔá'mál] and vexation!' (Psalms 10:14). Habakkuk (1:13) speaks of God as one 'whose eyes are too pure to look upon evil, who cannot countenance wrongdoing [ʔá'mál]'. There are a number of verses – albeit strikingly few – in which the word appears to mean 'hard work, labour', but here too the meaning is consistently negative. Consider Ecclesiastes 2:11:

Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

In Mishnaic Hebrew, the narrower sense of 'labour' becomes more pronounced, as in the following statement from Mishnah Avot 2.14:

Rabbi Elazar says: be diligent in the study of Torah and know the proper response to a heretic [ʔepi'qoros], and know before whom you labour [ʔá'mel], and the supervisor is reliable – he will pay you the wages of your actions.

Here too, however, the sense is largely negative: [ʔá'mál] is regularly paired with יגע [jəgaʔ] 'exertion, tiring toil'. Man is sentenced to [ʔá'mál] and can only redeem this state of affairs by labouring in Torah.

Socialist Zionism, however, strips the term of its negative connotations, and it comes to mean 'productive work, labour', often in an unambiguously positive sense as in the following toponyms:

- תל עמל *tel amál* was the name of a kibbutz (the first of the so-called *khomá umigdál* settlements), established in 1936, today called Nir David.
- נוה עמל *nevé amál* is a neighborhood in Herzeliyah.

- קרית עמל *kiryát amál* is a settlement near Tiv'on.

Amál is also the name of a national network of technical and vocational schools. In the reflexive form, *amál* is something that people can and should impose on themselves for their health and well-being: ה^העמל^{ות} *hitamlút* means 'physical exercise'.

The shift in meaning is particularly marked in the appropriation of the phrase אדם לעמל יולד [ʔá'dám læʔá'mál jul'lád] 'Man was born into (or: to do) [ʔá'mál]'. In the book of Job (5:6-7), this sentence stands as an accusation of the inherent wickedness of mankind:

כי לא יצא מעפר און
ומאדמה לא יצמח עמל
כי אדם לעמל יולד

Evil does not grow out of the soil
Nor does mischief spring from the ground
For man was born to do mischief [ʔá'mál].

The negative force of [ʔá'mál] is clear from the parallel with און [ʔáwɛn] 'evil', so the statement – which is made by Elifaz the Temanite, not Job – stands as a pessimistic assessment of the human condition.

But in the language of Socialist Zionism, this very phrase is employed as affirmation that humanity finds its fulfilment in labour. Turning the semantic, etymological truth upside down, an Israeli who reads Job 5:7 is very likely to understand it as 'man was born to do productive work' – cf. §6.

It is important to note that Arabic, where *ʕ.m.l* means 'to work', might have facilitated this semantic choice in Israeli.

(36) הגשמה [hagʕá'má] → *agshamá*

The word [hagʕá'má] enters Hebrew in the Middle Ages under the influence of Arabic. It is part of the vocabulary of medieval philosophy, and one of the foreign words in Yehudah Ibn Tibbon's list of lexical innovations appended to his Hebrew translation of Maimonides' *The Guide of the Perplexed*, a philosophical work – written in Arabic – harmonizing and differentiating Aristotelian philosophy and Jewish theology.

Medieval Hebrew [hagʕá'má] refers to the attribution of a material reality to God, perhaps the most severe philosophical and theological error possible in this tradition, one that Maimonides addresses in the opening words of the *Guide*:

כבר חשבו בני אדם כי צלם בלשון העברי יורה על תמונת הדבר ותארו, והביא זה אל הגשמה גמורה.

People have thought that in the Hebrew language *image* [ʔsʕelem] denotes the shape and configuration of a thing. This supposition led them to the pure doctrine of the corporeality of God [hagʕá'má].

Ultimately, the negativity of the word derives from a negative valorization of materiality as such: the ultimate good (God) lies beyond the material world, and any attempt to conceive of

this good in terms drawn from lived human experience constitutes a grave philosophical and theological error.

In Zionist discourse, however, *agshamá* is ideologically positive, referring to the immanent physical realization of ideological ideals (usually settlement),³ for example moving from the city to a cooperative agricultural settlement, a *kibbutz*. Undoubtedly, it is this sense – rather than the Maimonidean – that is alluded to by the toponym רמת מגשימים *ramát magshímím*, lit. ‘*Magshímím* Heights’, a moshav in the Golan Heights, as well as by the *Magshímím* Zionist youth movement. *Magshímím* are the realizers of Zionist ideology.

Note that there were pre-Zionist trends towards reevaluating the term [hagʃã'må], particularly in Hasidism. In this case, Zionism sided with and radicalized a pre-existent sense of the word. The semantic shift – which indicates a break with the Mishnaic sense – may have already been evident in Yiddish or literary Hebrew. It is significant to realise that most often it is the case that the marked Yiddish meanings – rather than the classical senses – were adopted by Israeli speakers. This general process, however, was often subconscious – as opposed to most cases of ideological secularization discussed here.

(37) בית העם [bet há'ʕãm] → *bet aám*

The phrase [bet há'ʕãm] ‘house:CONSTR DEF-nation’, i.e. ‘the house of the people’, occurs in the Old Testament once (Jeremiah 39:8), where it is contrasted with the בית המלך [bet ham'melek^h] ‘house:CONSTR DEF-king’, i.e. ‘the king’s house’. In the Babylonian Talmud (Sabbath 32a), the term is part of a pejorative discussion of unlearned Jews, עם הארץ [ʕam há'ʕãres^ʕ]:

Rabbi Ishmael the son of Elazar teaches: the unlearned Jews [ʕam há'ʕãres^ʕ] die on account of two things: that they call the Torah ark ‘the ark’ and they call the synagogue ‘the house of the people [bet há'ʕãm]’

What, one might ask, is so terrible about calling the synagogue by that name? Rashi explains that ‘This is a derogatory term suggesting that everyone congregates there’. In other words, the term [bet há'ʕãm] marks the speaker as part of the unlearned, the antithesis of the rabbinic intellectual élite. This is such a derogatory term for the synagogue that employing it results in the death of the speaker.

When Zionist settlements – with their strong ideological commitment to populism – established cultural centres, they called them *bet aám*, taking on and transvaluing the role of the non-scholastic and non-rabbinic [ʕam há'ʕãres^ʕ] (see ‘A Song of Praise to ‘*amey ha-‘aretz*’ by Zalman Schneur, 1886-1959, cited in Luz 1987: 382).

³ On the shift toward an ‘earthly’ reinterpretation of Jewish history in Zionist thought (and Eastern European *Haskalah*), see Luz (1987).

(38) הלויני [hillo'ni] → חילוני *khiloní*

The priestly literature in the Old Testament draws a sharp distinction between the priest and the non-priest, so much so that there is a technical term for the non-priest: זר [zâr]. Thus we find: 'No lay person [zâr] shall eat of the sacred donations' (Leviticus 22:10); 'If a priest's daughter marries a layman [zâr]...' (Leviticus 22:12); 'When the Tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up; any outsider [zâr] who encroaches shall be put to death' (Numbers 1:51). In Onqelos's Aramaic translation of these verses, Biblical Hebrew [zâr] is consistently replaced by הלויני [hillo'ni].

The latter is the basis of Israeli חילוני *khiloní* 'secular'. The semantic shift is telling and, to an extent, emblematic: while the Aramaic word is defined negatively, as the individual who is *not* a priest and does *not* have the rights of a priest, Israeli *khiloní* assumes a positive cultural content or *Weltanschauung* (at least in the circles that adopted this new meaning), one centred around humanity rather than God.

It is worth noting that Israeli *khiloní* was coined by Joseph Klausner, a scholar intimately involved in the establishment of an anti-orthodox counter-history, primarily in his attempt to 'redeem' two Jews marginalized by rabbinic Judaism: Spinoza and Jesus. In a 1927 speech Klausner delivered at Mt Scopus, he addressed the excommunicated philosopher Spinoza saying 'You are our brother! You are our brother! You are our brother!'. On Jesus, see Klausner (1922).

(39) תרבות [tar'but] → *tarbút*

A biblical *hapax legomenon*, [tar'but] appears in Numbers 32:14 in the phrase תרבות אנשים הטאים [tar'but ?äná'jim hat'á'im] 'a breed of sinful men', with the root רבה \sqrt{rbh} being understood as referring to the group that was 'raised' in a certain manner. In Rabbinic literature it appears almost exclusively in the phrase תרבות רעה [tar'but rá'á] 'bad rearing/education' (e.g. Mishnah Niddah 10.8, Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 15a). In Israeli, the valence of *tarbút* changes and it becomes 'culture' in the sense of *Bildung*.

(40) בלוריית [bælo'rit] → *blorít*

In delineating the borders between the Jew and the non-Jew in Roman Palestine, rabbinic literature often draws the line at any action that could involve participation in idolatrous practices. It is generally permitted to trade with pagans, but not immediately prior to pagan holidays lest the Jew's money fund the idolatrous practices; it is generally permitted to purchase food from a pagan, though not wine that could be used for pagan libations; and so on.

Interestingly, this distinction is also found in the realm of coiffure: A barber is, as a rule, permitted to cut the hair of a pagan, but there is one exception (Mishnah Avoda Zara 3.6):

A Jew who is cutting the hair of a pagan, as soon as he reaches the [bælo'rit] he drops his hands.

According to Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah: The Book of Knowledge* (see Hyamson 1965: 78b), [bælo'rit] refers to the following haircut:

'And I have set you apart from the nations' (Leviticus 20:26): He shall not put on a garment like that specially worn by them, nor let the lock of his hair grow in the way they

do. Thus, he shall not cut the hair of the head at the sides, leaving the hair in the center untouched as they do – this is called [bəlō'rit].

Thus, Mishnaic Hebrew [bəlō'rit] is 'Mohawk', a hairstyle in which the scalp is shaved except for an upright strip of hair that runs across the crown of the head from the forehead to the nape of the neck. But the precise definition is less important than its function as a distinctive marker of the pagan. Consider the following drashot (interpretations):

'Or has any God ventured to go and take for himself one nation (גוי [goj]) from the midst of another nation (גוי [goj])' (Deuteronomy 4:34): Both these and those were uncircumcised; the Egyptians grew [bəlō'rit] and the Israelites grew [bəlō'rit]; those wore garments of mingled fabric and these wore garments of mingled fabric.

(*Leviticus Rabba* 23.2, see Slotki 1977: 292)

In describing Israel's exodus from Egypt, Deuteronomy speaks of the departure of 'one nation from the midst of another nation', using the word גוי [goj] for Israel and Egypt alike. The linguistic equation of Israel and Egypt suggests to the interpreter that the Israelites had lost their distinctive identity and adopted that of their hosts. To prove the point, the interpreter cites a number of characteristics which are normally associated with the pagans but which have been adopted by the Israelites: both are uncircumcised, both wear garments of mingled fabric, and both have grown a [bəlō'rit].

Similarly:

These things are prohibited because they savour of heathen practices [the way of the Emorites]: to trim the front of the hair and to grow a [bəlō'rit].

(*Deuteronomy Rabbah* 2.18, see Rabinowitz 1977: 44)

Intriguingly, in Israeli not only does בלורית *blorít* lose its meaning as the marker of the pagan as opposed to the Jew, but it also becomes one of the defining characteristics of the Sabra,⁴ the 'new Jew', characterized by 'forelock, hair above the forehead'.

Thus, in Naomi Shemer's classic song about two young men from the same village, who march through life in parallel until one is killed in battle:

אנחנו שנינו מאותו הכפר, אותה קומה, אותה בלורית שיער

We are both from the same village, the same height, the same *blorít* of hair

Israeli *blorít* also appears in Hayim Guri's poem 'Camaraderie' (הרעות *areút*), a paean to the fallen fighters of the *Palmach* brigade:

ונזכור את כולם, את יפי הבלורית והתואר

We shall remember them all, they of the beautiful *blorít* and countenance

⁴ *Sabra* 'prickly pear' (widespread in Israel) – cf. צבר *tsabar* – is a nickname for native Israelis, allegedly thorny on the outside and sweet inside. This is analogous to the use of the word *kiwi* to denote a New Zealander, not after the delicious fruit but rather after the nocturnal, wingless bird which has a long neck and stout legs.

And similarly in Haim Hefer's portrait of the *Palmach* fighter Dudu, who is also fated to die:

היתה לו בלורית מקורזלת שיער , היתה לו בת צחוק בעיניים

He had a curly *blorít*, he had laughing eyes

Almog (2003) characterizes *blorít* as the hairstyle of the mythical Sabra.⁵ Here we come to the ultimate ideological secularization: the Mishnaic marker of otherness is appropriated by the Sabra warrior. The new Jew is ultimately a pagan.

(41) תל אביב [tel ʔáʰbʰibʰ] → *tel avív*

It is often said that the name *Tel-Aviv*, 'hill:CONSTR spring', i.e. 'Hill of Spring', is a juxtaposition of the old (the ancient *tel*) with the new, an allusion to Herzl's utopian *Altneuland*, which was translated as *Tel-Aviv* by Nahum Sokolov. Both Sokolov's translation and the choice of this name for the 'first Hebrew city' are striking in light of the name's biblical precedent. It appears in the Old Testament only once, in Ezekiel 3:15. Ezekiel, who prophesied in Babylon after the fall of the first temple, has just heard God's call to speak to Israel, and a mighty wind (or spirit) carries him away:

And I came to the exile, to Tel Aviv [ʔel haggóʰlá tel ʔáʰbʰibʰ] those who settled by the river Chebar [kəʰbʰár]...⁶

The precise meaning of this transvaluation seems to be that Zionism would take an explicitly exilic location [haggóʰlá tel ʔáʰbʰibʰ] 'the exile, Tel Aviv' and turn it into the centre of Jewish national revival, forcefully reversing the biblical association of Tel Aviv with exile.

4.7 Ameliorative recycling of biblical names: using deep-rooted Hebrew forms ignoring their original negative associations

Extreme amelioration is also apparent in Zionist re-appropriation of anthroponyms of biblical figures that are disparaged by the Old Testament or later rabbinic tradition.

(42) רחבעם [rəʰabʰíʕám] → *rekhavám*

Consider רחבעם [rəʰabʰíʕám] 'Rehoboam', Solomon's son, best known for his draconian taxes and impositions on the populace:

אבי יסר אתכם בשוטים ואני איסר אתכם בעקרבים

My father flogged you with whips, but I will flog you with scorpions

(I Kings 12:14)

⁵ Thanks to Yael Zerubavel for reference to Almog's article.

⁶ Biblical Hebrew [haggóʰlá] most likely meant 'exile community' rather than 'the exile'. However, the relevant issue is how the phrase was understood by those who associated this Babylonian location with the Israeli city – cf. §6.

Indeed, these policies (at least according to the biblical narrative) contributed to the split of Israel into two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judea in the south. For obvious reasons, Rehavam has not been a popular name in traditional Jewish circles, but it has enjoyed a renaissance as a name for Israeli boys – cf. Rehavam Zeevi (nicknamed Gandhi – because on one occasion he looked like skinny Mahatma Gandhi, not because of his politics) (1926-2001), an Israeli general, politician and historian who founded the right-wing nationalist Moledet party.

(43) עמרי [ʔom'ri] → *omrí*

The example of 'Omri is even more dramatic. A king of the northern kingdom of Israel, the Book of Kings recounts that "Omri did what was displeasing to the Lord; he was worse than all who preceded him" (1 Kings 16:25), a damning appraisal by all accounts. Nonetheless, some Israeli speakers have chosen to name their sons Omri, cf. Omri Sharon (1964-), the son of the former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and himself a former member of the Likud party in the Knesset.

(44) ענת [ʔă'nát] → *anát*

Hebrew ענת [ʔă'nát] "Anat" was a bloodthirsty Canaanite goddess who slew her enemies and made herself a belt of their heads and hands. The great popularity of Anat as an Israeli girl's name is undoubtedly not in the spirit of the Old Testament.

Names such as Rehavam, Omri and Anat – as well as Hagar, Shamgar, Nimrod and many others – represent a cultural appropriation of biblical names that baldly undermines their (often explicit) biblical axiology. The names maintain a vaguely biblical – and thus authentic, desirable – sense (*Sinn*), but lose their biblical reference (*Bedeutung*). The material is biblical but the connotations are not.⁷

A similar phenomenon is the return of Canaanite divinities such as *Yam* (popular among kibbutz children), *Shákhār* and *Réshsef* as first names for Israeli children. To be sure, there is no cultural appropriation intended here, no conscious desire to reclaim a Canaanite identity. Still, the renewal of these names – meaning 'sea', 'dawn' and 'flame' respectively – may be a reflection of a deep affinity between the explicit identification of nature and the divine in Canaanite mythology, on the one hand, and the nature-worship that is part of the more Romantic strains of Jewish nationalism, on the other.

4.8 Trivialization ('Israelis have no God')

(45) תחתונים [tahto'nim] → *takhtoním*

In a number of instances the theological sense of a word is done away with by turning the word into a colloquial term. Thus Mishnaic Hebrew תחתונים [tahto'nim] designates the material world, literally 'those below', as opposed to the heavenly or supernal world, the latter being the עליונים [ʔeljō'nim]. Genesis Rabba, for example, discusses at length whether, in the process of creation, God first created the [ʔeljō'nim], the supernal world, and then the [tahto'nim], the material world, or vice versa (Bereshit Rabba section 2; vol. 1, p. 15 in the Theodor-Albeck edition).

⁷ Though the differences are obvious, the use of the Bible may be compared to what Schwarz (1995: 38) calls the "talismanic and evocative" use of Hebrew in the post-70 AD. Jewish Diaspora, inasmuch as it is not the biblical meaning that generates these names (and which may be quite unknown to, e.g. parents naming their daughters 'Anat), but their biblical *feel*. They serve to connect the bearer of the name with a vague and ill-defined biblical 'heritage', the precise details of which are much less significant. Thanks to Andrea Berlin for referring us to Schwarz's article.

In Israeli, however, *takhtoním* means ‘underwear, underpants’ (‘those below’). This is a marked re-semanticization inasmuch as one would expect the word for ‘underwears’ to be in the dual form, in analogy with מכנסיים *mikhnasáim* ‘trousers, pants’. The semantic shift is particularly jarring considering that the term is perhaps best known from a midrashic statement that played an important role in later Hasidic thought, namely that the divine presence originally resided in the material world (but took refuge in the heavens after Adam’s sin): עיקר שכינה בתחתונים: ‘originally the Divine Presence resided in the lower realm,’ i.e. in the [tahto'nim].

An internet search of the Hebrew phrase קרע את התחתונים Israeli *kará et atakhtoním* ‘tore [or: parted] the *takhtoním*’ will yield two types of sites:

(a) religious sites discussing Rashi’s statement (commentary on Deuteronomy 4:35):

When the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah, He opened for them the seven heavens. And just as he tore [or: split] the upper regions [ʔeljo'nim], so too he tore [or: parted] the lower regions [tahto'nim].

(b) Israeli erotica or pornography sites, where *takhtoním* appears in its Israeli sense.

The juxtaposition of the religious and the pornographic websites on the result page represents a striking manifestation of the distance this word has traversed, and of the willingness of Israeli to thumb its nose at the values of earlier strata of Hebrew.

(46) (פתוחה) הנות [ħă'nut (pətu'hã)] → *khanút* (*ptukhá*)

Both Mishnaic [ħă'nut] and Israeli *khanút* means ‘a shop, a store’. In Mishnah Avot 3.16, Rabbi Akiva uses the term in a theological metaphor:

The shop stands open (ההנות פתוחה [ħaħă'nut pətu'hã]) and the shopkeeper gives credit and the account-book lies open and the hand writes.

That is, God keeps open account books in which one’s debits and credits are listed.

The opening phrase, ההנות פתוחה [ħă'nut pətu'hã] is appropriated in a distinctly non-theological colloquial sense in Israeli: ‘the zipper is open’.

4.9 Allusion

Allusion to religious concepts is a very effective rhetorical device, often used by politicians. Consider George W. Bush’s use of *axis of evil* or Osama Bin Laden’s use of *crusade*. Ophir (2001) claims that Israeli nationalists use interpretation of holy texts and rituals to justify discrimination, segregation and overpowering of the Palestinian people.

Through allusion, in which the new meaning is heir to the older, while at the same time displacing it, socialist Zionists shrewdly draw on earlier linguistic strata without legitimizing the exilic and religious sensibilities they encode.⁸ Consider the following:

⁸ Don-Yehiah (1980) discusses Socialist Zionism’s appropriation of a number of traditional Jewish terms. His focus is more on the overtly ideological use of the terminology of, e.g., redemption, covenant and sacrifice.

- (47) מי ימלל גבורות יהוה [mi jəmal'lel gəb'hu'rot JHWH] → מי ימלל גבורות ישראל *mi yemalél gvurót israél*

Consider the shift from the religious cry of the Psalmist (Psalms 106:2) מי ימלל גבורות יהוה [mi jəmal'lel gəb'hu'rot JHWH] 'Who can tell the mighty acts of the Lord' to the lyrics of Menashe Rabina's popular Hanukkah song: מי ימלל גבורות ישראל *mi yemalél gvurót israél* 'Who can tell the mighty acts of Israel'. By replacing 'the mighty acts of the Lord' with 'the mighty acts of Israel', the songwriter is consciously seeking to shift the focus from the worship of the divine to the worship of the national collective.

This model of appropriation of classical Hebrew sources bespeaks a Zionist ambivalence toward earlier strata of Hebrew. The clear allusion to the words of the Psalmist indicates an explicit desire to link the nationalist song to an ancient poetic model. At the same time, the allusion to Psalm 106:2 involves an important shift: praise of God is replaced by the glorification of the nation of Israel. Indeed, the allusion serves to highlight the place of Israel – that is, of the nationalist ideal – as heir to the religious ideal regnant in the Psalms.

- (48) יזכור אלהים [jiz'kor ?elo'him] → יזכור עם ישראל *izkór am israél*

Another example of such supersessionist secularization is found in the standard memorial ceremony of the Israel Defence Forces (and other state institutions), that opens with the words יזכור עם ישראל *izkór am israél* 'Let the People of Israel remember' – followed by an exaltation of the fallen soldiers. This formula, which was composed by the Zionist leader Berl Katzenelson, is based on the Medieval *Yizkor* liturgy, that opens יזכור אלהים [jiz'kor ?elo'him] 'Let the Lord remember' – often followed by a description of religious martyrs.⁹

- (49) תורה ועבודה [to'rā waʔäb'ho'dā] → *torá veavodá*

The religious Zionist youth movement, B'nei Akiva, lit. 'Akiva's sons', has תורה ועבודה *torá veavodá* as its motto, an allusion to the well-known Mishnaic statement from Mishnah Avot 1.2:

על שלושה דברים העולם עומד: על התורה, על העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים

On three things the world is sustained: on the Torah [to'rā], on the (Temple) service [ʔäb'ho'dā] and on deeds of loving kindness.

Note, however, that the two terms, *torá* and *avodá*, refer in Israeli to the study of Torah and to labour as a Socialist value.

- (50) על המשק, על הנשק ועל החשק → על התורה, על העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים

In Moshe Shamir's play – adapted from his novel of the same name הוא הלך בשדות *u alákh basadót* 'He Walked Through the Fields' – the young prototypical Sabra protagonist, Uri, is taught the following from his rugged platoon commander:

It is written in the Torah: The world is sustained by three things: the agricultural plot (המשק *améshek*), the weapon (הנשק *anéshek*) and sexual desire (החשק *akhéshek*).

(Act 1, Scene 18, p. 53)

⁹ See the discussion in Azaryahu (1995).

This statement parodies the famous Mishnaic statement (see #49), replacing the values of ‘*torah*, Temple service and deeds of loving kindness’ with a trio that emphasizes the agricultural, military and sexual ethos of Zionism. But unlike ‘who can tell the mighty acts of Israel’ for ‘who can tell the mighty acts of the Lord’, the lofty, sublime register of the earlier phrase is not maintained. Similarly, whereas the B’nei Akiva motto, *torá veavodá*, alludes to the Mishnah statement as a way of legitimizing its own (radically new) ideology, here, quite to the contrary, the irreverent Sabra’s statement is a parody of the rabbinic dictum, not its heir.

Note that this is the position of the character, not necessarily of Shamir himself. The platoon leader gets his parody wrong by suggesting that he is making fun of a dictum that appears ‘in the *Torah*’ when, in fact, it is one of the best known statements in the *Mishnah*. Here Shamir may be subtly expressing his own scorn for the derisive attitude of the Sabra.

(51) בקי בהטיה [bá'qi bəhat'fá'jã] → *bakí beatayá*

There are instances of enthusiastic appropriation of sexual themes in earlier strata of Hebrew. A literary example appears in Haim Nachman Bialik’s children’s book ‘The Champion of the Onions and the Champion of the Garlics’ (*alúf abtsalím vealúf ashúm*), which refers to one of its characters as בקי בהטיה [bá'qi bəhat'fá'jã] ‘an expert incliner’. This is an obscure Mishnaic phrase referring to one who is able to have sexual intercourse with a virgin without drawing blood. That Bialik would choose to incorporate the phrase into juvenile literature – without, of course, making its meaning explicit – is an indication of the sexual playfulness that at least some prominent writers associated with their work – cf. Be’er (2004: 269-270).

(52) ונתתי את שמיכם כברזל ואת ארצכם כנחשה [wənáta'ti ʔet šəme'kʰem kabbar'zel wə'ʔet ʔarsə'kʰem kannəhu'jã]

Consider the sentence written beneath a portrait of a pilot standing in front of a jet fighter, in a recruitment poster hanging in some Israeli air force bases: ונתתי את שמיכם כברזל ואת ארצכם כנחשה. The Hebrew pronunciation was [wənáta'ti ʔet šəme'kʰem kabbar'zel wə'ʔet ʔarsə'kʰem kannəhu'jã] but in Israeli it would be pronounced *venatáti et shmeykhém kebarzél veét artsekhém kenekhushá / kenekhóshet*. The literal meaning of this high-register sentence is ‘I will make your skies like iron and your earth like copper’, implying that the Israeli Air Force makes the skies as impenetrable as iron to its enemies. But the use of Leviticus 26:19 as a recruitment slogan is remarkable considering its original meaning:

And if, for all that, you do not obey Me, I will go on to discipline you sevenfold for your sins, and I will break your proud glory. *I will make your skies like iron and your earth like copper*, so that your strength will be spent to no purpose. Your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit.

(Leviticus 26:18-20)

The biblical context is explicitly negative: the iron sky a sign of drought, the copper land an indication of barrenness – whilst the air force poster suggests military power and fortitude. Clearly, the appropriation of the biblical verse involves a shift in the original meaning. Be that as it may, this shift may simply be due to the graphic designer’s ignorance of the verse’s original meaning and while ignorance is a cultural force in its own right, it is not one of the manipulative forces treated in this chapter. But it *is* relevant to Gershom Scholem’s 1926 letter to Franz Rosenzweig.

5. CONFESSION ON THE SUBJECT OF OUR LANGUAGE

(*Bekanntnis über unsere Sprache*)

A Letter by Gershom Scholem to Franz Rosenzweig, 26 December 1926

This country is a volcano. It houses language. One speaks here of many things that could make us fail. One speaks more than ever today about the Arabs. But more uncannily than the Arab people [*unheimlicher als das arabische Volk*] another threat confronts us that is a *necessary* consequence [*mit Notwendigkeit*] of the Zionist undertaking: What about the ‘actualization [*Aktualisierung*]’ of Hebrew? Must not this abyss of a sacred language handed down to our children break out again? Truly, no one knows what is being done here. One believes that language has been secularized, that its apocalyptic thorn has been pulled out [*ihr den apokalyptischen Stachel ausgezogen zu haben*]. But this is surely not true. The secularization of language is only a *façon de parler*, a ready-made phrase. It is absolutely impossible to empty out words filled to bursting, unless one does so at the expense of language itself. The ghostly Volapük spoken here in the streets points precisely to the expressionless linguistic world in which the ‘secularization’ of language could alone be possible. If we transmit to our children the language that has been transmitted to us, if we – the generation of the transition [*das Geschlecht des Übergangs*] – resuscitate the language of the ancient books so that it can reveal itself anew to them, must then not the religious violence of the language one day break out against those who speak it [*gegen ihre Sprecher ausbrechen*]? And on the day this eruption occurs, which generation will suffer its effects [*und welches Geschlecht wird dieser Ausbruch finden*]? We do live inside this language, above an abyss, almost all of us with the certainty of the blind. But when our sight is restored, we or those who come after us, must we not fall to the bottom of this abyss? And no one knows whether the sacrifice of individuals who will be annihilated in this abyss will suffice to close it.

The creators of this new linguistic movement believed blindly, and stubbornly, in the miraculous power of the language, and this was their good fortune. For no one clear-sighted would have mustered the demonic courage to revive a language there where only an Esperanto could emerge. They walk, and walk still today, spellbound [*gebannt*] above the abyss. The abyss was silent and they have delivered the ancient names and seals over to the youth. We sometimes shudder when, out of the thoughtless conversation, a word from the religious sphere terrifies us, just there where it was perhaps intended to comfort. Hebrew is pregnant with catastrophes. It cannot and will not remain in its current state. Our children no longer have another language, and it is only too true to say that they, and they alone, will pay for the encounter which we have initiated without asking, without even asking ourselves. If and when the language turns against its speakers – it already does so for certain moments in our lifetime, and these are difficult to forget, stigmatizing moments in which the daring lack of measure of our undertaking reveals itself to us – will we then have a youth capable of withstanding the uprising of a sacred language?

Language is Name [*Sprache ist Namen*]. In the names, the power of language is enclosed; in them, its abyss is sealed. After invoking the ancient names daily, we can no longer hold off their power. Called awake, they will appear since we have invoked them with great violence. Truly, we speak in rudiments; we truly speak a ghostly language [*wir freilich sprechen eine gespenstische Sprache*]: the names haunt our sentences. One or another plays with them in writings and newspapers, lying to themselves or to God that this means nothing, and often, out of the ghostly shame of our language, the power of the sacred speaks out. For the names have their own life – had they not, woe to our children, who would be hopelessly abandoned to the void.

Each word which is not newly created but taken from the ‘good old’ treasure is full to bursting. A generation that takes upon itself the most fruitful in our sacred traditions – our language – cannot live, were it to wish it a thousandfold, without tradition. The moment the *power* stored at the bottom of the language *deploys itself*, the moment the ‘said [*das Gesprochene*]’, the content of language, assumes its

form anew, then the sacred tradition will again confront our people as a decisive sign of the only available choice: to submit or to go under. In a language where he is invoked back to a thousandfold into our life, God will not stay silent. But this inescapable revolution of the language, in which the voice will be heard again, is the sole object of which nothing is said in this country. Those who called the Hebrew language back to life did not believe in the judgment that was thus conjured upon us. May the carelessness, which has led us to this apocalyptic path, not bring about our ruin [*Möge uns dann nicht der Leichtsinn, der uns auf diesem apokalyptischen Weg geleitet, zum Verderb werden*].

Jerusalem, 7 Tevet 5687
Gerhard Scholem

(Translation by Anidjar, see Derrida 2002: 226-7)

6. THE MUTUAL INTELLIGIBILITY MYTH

‘Modern Greek, for example, boasts many similarities to its ancestor, yet a speaker of the current language must struggle to read ancient texts. The modern Hebrew speaker, however, moves smoothly through the Bible’ (Ravitzky 2000: 13-14)

Frequently, new research emerges allegedly demonstrating how ‘bad’ Israelis are at reading comprehension *vis-à-vis* pupils in other countries. I wonder whether these exams test reading comprehension in **Hebrew** rather than in **Israeli**. The former might be a second language for Israelis. The Mutual Intelligibility Myth posits that Israeli is Hebrew because an Israeli speaker can understand Hebrew. Edward Ullendorff (pc) has claimed that the biblical Isaiah could have understood Israeli. I am not convinced that this would have been the case. The reason Israelis can be expected to understand the book of Isaiah – albeit with difficulties – is because they study the Hebrew Bible at school for eleven years, rather than because it is familiar to them from their daily conversation. Furthermore, **Israelis read the Hebrew Bible as if it were Israeli and often therefore misunderstand it.**

- (53) When an Israeli reads **יָלֵד שְׂעִשְׁעִים** *yéled sha‘ashu‘ím* in Jeremiah 31:19 (King James 20), s/he does not understand it as ‘pleasant child’ but rather as ‘playboy’.
- (54) **בָּאוּ בָנִים עַד מִשְׁבֵּר** *Ba’u banim ‘ad mashber* in Isaiah 37:3 is interpreted by Israelis as ‘children arrived at a crisis’ rather than as ‘children arrived at the mouth of the womb, to be born’.

Add to these all the numerous lexical items discussed in this chapter, e.g. in Example 35: **אָדָם לַעֲמַל יוּלָד** *ʔādām ləʕāmāl yullād* (Job 5:6-7), which is interpreted by Israelis as ‘man was born to do productive work’ rather than ‘man was born to do mischief’. This Biblical sentence stands as an accusation of the inherent wickedness of mankind.

Most importantly, the available examples are far from being only lexical (as in the above *faux amis*). **Israelis are usually incapable of recognizing moods and aspects in the Bible. Whereas in Biblical Hebrew there is a perfect/imperfect *aspect* distinction, in Israeli there is a past-present-future *tense* distinction.**

- (55) Ask an Israeli what **אֲבָנִים שֶׁחָקוּ מֵיִם** *ʔabanim shaḥaqu mayim* (Job 14:19) means and s/he will most likely tell you that the stones eroded the water. Of course, on second thought,

s/he would guess that semantically this is impossible and that it must be the water which eroded the stones. But such an Object-Verb-Subject(A) constituent order is impossible in Israeli.

- (56) **נפילה גורלות** *nappila goralot* ‘let us cast lots’ (Jonah 1:7) is thought to be rhetorical future rather than cohortative.

By and large, Israelis are the worst students in *advanced* studies of the Bible, although almost all Israelis would disagree with this statement of mine. Try to tell Israel’s Ministry of Education that **the Hebrew Bible should be translated into Israeli!** (It will eventually happen!)

Yet, Israeli children are told that the Hebrew Bible was written in their mother tongue. In other words, in Israeli primary schools, Hebrew and the mother tongue are, axiomatically, the very same. One cannot therefore expect Israelis easily to accept the idea that the two languages might be genetically different. In English terms, it is as if someone were to try to tell a native English-speaker that his/her mother tongue is not the same as Shakespeare’s. The difference is that between Shakespeare and the current native speaker of English there has been a continuous chain of native speakers. Between the biblical Isaiah and contemporary Israelis there has been no such chain, while the Jews have had many mother tongues other than Hebrew.

An example from the Mishnah:

- (57) פרס [pə'rās] → *pras*

Israeli פרס *pras* means ‘prize’ (cf. *Milón leMunekháy haHitamlút, Dictionary of Gymnastics Terms*, 1937: 49, Item 625), nativizing the internationalism *prize* – cf. Russian приз [pris] ‘prize’, German *Preis* ‘prize, price’, English *prize* (cf. *price*) and Yiddish פריז *priz* ‘prize’.¹⁰ Originally, Mishnaic Hebrew פרס [pə'rās] meant ‘half a loaf’ – cf. Mishnah Kritot 3:3. Consequently it referred to ‘payment, reward’ – שלא על מנת לקבל פרס [ʃel'lo ʔal mə'nát ləqab'bel pə'rās] ‘not motivated by the wish to get a reward/payment’ (Mishnah Avot 1:3). The latter expression is currently understood by many native Israeli-speakers I have studied as meaning ‘not motivated by the wish to receive a prize’. Their belief that Mishnaic Hebrew פרס meant ‘prize’ is thus no more than the etymological truth turned upside down.¹¹

7. THE POLITICAL (AB)USE OF AMBIGUITY

Ironically, the very same people who may argue that Israelis can easily understand Hebrew often abuse the vagueness or ambiguity resulting from secularization. They nourish gray areas of mutual intelligibility as a means of getting out of a legal or political quagmire. Consider the beginning of the concluding sentence of Israel’s Declaration of Independence, construed to pacify both the religious and secular:

מתוך בטחון בצור ישראל הננו חותמים בחתימת ידינו לעדות על הכרזה זו, במושב מועצת המדינה הזמנית, על אדמת המולדת, בעיר תל-אביב, היום הזה, ערב שבת, ה' אייר תש"ח, 14 במאי 1948.

¹⁰ Cf. also Yiddish פריז *prayz*, Polish Yiddish *prās*, ‘price’, that has recently gained the additional meaning ‘prize’. Thus, *dóvid hófshteyn prayz* means ‘Dovid Hofshstein Prize’ – see *Förverts ‘Yiddish Forward’*, 28 July 2000, p. 16. This is an incestuous phono-semantic matching by semantic shifting of English *prize*.

¹¹ Cf. the 1999 advertisement (in the UK) for Toblerone chocolate (which ‘inspires the world’), which showed a photo of pyramids in Egypt, asking: ‘Ancient Tobleronism?’.

mitókh bitakhón betsúr israél...

Placing our *trust* in the *almighty* / Placing our *security* in the *rock of Israel*,
we affix our signatures to this proclamation at this session of the Provisional Council of State,
on the soil of the homeland, in the city of Tel Aviv, on this Sabbath Eve, the 5th day of Iyar,
5708 (14 May 1948)

Biblical Hebrew בטהון [bit^ʔʔāʔhon] means ‘trust, faith (in God)’. The semantic range of its root בטה √bt^ʔʔh is not limited to ‘trust/faith in God’ but this is certainly one of its main meanings. Indeed, in many instances the biblical text promotes faith or trust in God over earthly persons or institutions. The psalmist exhorts ‘O Israel, trust in the Lord! He is their (*sic*) help and shield’ (Psalms 115:9). Isaiah teaches ‘Trust in the Lord for ever and ever’ (Isaiah 24:4). The phrase ‘Happy is the man who trusts in You’ (Psalms 84:13) is incorporated into the *Havdalah* liturgy.

The question of earthly versus divine trust indeed comes to the fore in the nominal form בטהון [bit^ʔʔāʔhon]. When Hezekiah King of Judah (8th century BC) rebels against Sennacherib, the latter sends an emissary, Rabshakeh, to convince the Jerusalemites to lay down their arms. Rabshakeh sends the following question to Hezekiah: מה הבטהון הזה אשר בטהת ‘What is this confidence [bit^ʔʔāʔhon] you have?’ (Isaiah 36:4), then asserts the futility of claiming ‘we are relying [bāt^ʔʔāʔnu] on the Lord our God’ (Isaiah 36:7). But of course the [bit^ʔʔāʔhon] was not misplaced, as God does turn back the Assyrians and Hezekiah remains on the throne.

In later strata of literary Hebrew, the specific sense ‘faith in God’ is the dominant, almost exclusive meaning. Thus, Shlomo Ibn Gabirol (11th century AD) devotes a chapter in his ethical treatise *The Improvement of the Moral Qualities* (*tikkun middot hannefesh*) in Yehudah Ibn Tibbon’s translation of the moral attribute [bit^ʔʔāʔhon]. The opening statement of the chapter is ‘This is the exalted trait by which an individual comports himself according to his faith in God and his reliance on Him’.

In Israeli, however, בטהון *bitakhón* no longer derives from God but rather from military power. The word means ‘military power’ as in the phrase מערכת הביטחון *maarékhēt abitakhón* ‘the military’ and כוחות הביטחון *kokhót abitakhón* ‘the security forces’, while the minister charged with the army and other security forces is שר הביטחון *sar abitakhón* ‘Minister of Defence (literally: security)’.

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Israeli society is riven. Ironically, as well as being a highly symbolic common language, Israeli has come to highlight the very absence of a unitary civic culture among citizens who seem increasingly to share only their language (and enemies). The nexus which allegedly binds all Israelis together is an illusion. The existing continuum between the ultra-orthodox and the ultra-secular does not mitigate the divide, and mutual hostility is apparent in the two camps.

In line with the prediction made by the Kabbalah-scholar Gershom Scholem in his letter to Franz Rosenzweig, some ultra-orthodox Jews have tried to launch a ‘lexical vendetta’: using secularized terms like ‘dormant agents’, as a shortcut to religious concepts, thus trying to convince secular Jews to go back to their religious roots (cf. Walzer 1965 and Ravitzky 1993).

The study of Israeli cultural linguistics and socio-philology may cast light on the dynamics between language, religion and identity in a land where fierce military battles with external enemies are accompanied by internal *Kulturkämpfe*.

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APPENDIX:

REFERENCE CHART: PROPOSED PERIODIZATION OF HEBREW AND ISRAELI (Zuckermann, 2000)

