

Zuckermann, Ghil'ad 2006. "‘Etymythological Othering’ and the Power of ‘Lexical Engineering’ in Judaism, Islam and Christianity. A Socio-Philo(sopho)logical Perspective”, pp. 237-258 (Chapter 16) of ‘Tope Omoniyi and Joshua A. Fishman (eds), *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion* (Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture series). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

## CHAPTER 16

# ‘Etymythological othering’ and the power of ‘lexical engineering’ in Judaism, Islam and Christianity A socio-philo(sopho)logical perspective

Ghil'ad Zuckermann  
Churchill College, University of Cambridge; Research Centre for  
Linguistic Typology, La Trobe University; [www.zuckermann.org](http://www.zuckermann.org)

*El original es infiel a la traducción*  
‘The original is unfaithful to the translation’ (Borges 1943,  
cf. 1974: 732)

### 1. Introduction

This chapter casts light on cross-religious interactions at the micro-level of lexis. It focuses on mechanisms of ‘**etymythology**’ (popular/folk-/synchronic etymology) and ‘**lexical engineering**’, especially within Jewish, Christian and Muslim groups. Lexical engineering reflects religious and cultural interactions and often manifests the attempt of a religion to preserve its identity when confronted with an overpowering alien environment, without segregating itself from possible influences. The result can be contempt, as in the case of **rejective** phono-semantic matching. But lexical engineering is not always rejective: it can also lead to a kind of ‘cultural flirting’, as in the case of **receptive** or adoptive phono-semantic matching. Thus, lexical engineering gives us a valuable window onto the broader question of how language may be used as a major tool for religions and cultures to maintain or form their identity.<sup>1</sup>

I came to the topic of language and religion as a linguist who has been especially interested in language contact and historical ‘camouflage linguistics’, the study of the various forms of hidden influence of one language on another (cf. Zuckermann 2000, 2003). In particular, I have been dealing extensively with Jewish languages: Israeli (a.k.a. somewhat misleadingly ‘Modern Hebrew’), as well as Yiddish and Biblical, Rabbinic, Medieval and Maskilic Hebrew, which contributed to

the early development of Israeli in *fin de siècle Eretz Yisrael* ('Land of Israel'; cf. Zuckermann 2003, 2008). The Jewish experience in Europe over the past millennium has been one of cultural survivalism and isolation alternating with integration. I do not enter into a sociological discussion of the vicissitudes of this experience presently; it has been amply treated elsewhere.

In the course of my linguistic studies of Jewish languages, I have found numerous traces of this experience in a multitude of coinages in Hebrew, as well as Yiddish. These coinages were typically made by the most learned groups within Jewish society, that is to say those with the greatest exposure both to the ancient texts and those individuals with perhaps the strongest sense of cultural responsibility for how to guide their people over the perilous waters of the Diaspora.

My observation of this linguistic phenomenon within Judaism lead me, in turn, to speculate on how it might be manifested in other groups as well – for instance, Muslim and Christian, but also more recently emergent groups whose sense of shared identity and recognition by external society is not yet secure, such as the 'Black Jews'.

In my view, a micro-analysis of a specific phenomenon, such as lexical engineering, can tell us about the whole sociological picture. *Maxima in minimis*. I believe that – as in a hologram, where the whole picture can be seen in each constituent element – individual word biographies contain micro-representations of the broader socio-cultural dynamics. Such a 'holographic' model of information distribution – cf. Sacks' 'order at all points' view (1992) – 'understands order not to be present only at aggregate levels and therefore subject to an overall differential distribution, but to be present in detail on a case by case, environment by environment basis. A culture is not then to be found only by aggregating all of its venues, it is substantially present in each of its venues' (Schegloff 1992: xlvi).

This chapter does not pretend to provide the reader with exact details of the identity of the lexical engineers, how many people knew about their coinages and the nature and extent of their sociological influence. Rather, I intend to introduce the phenomena of lexical engineering and etymological othering from a sociolinguistic and theo-philological point of view, keeping in mind the cultural context of the coinage. I would invite colleagues in the field of the sociology of religion to consider further potential implications of this phenomenon for their own studies.

## 2. Rejective lexical engineering

The apparent identity of what appear to be cultural units – human beings, words, meanings, ideas, philosophical systems, social organizations – are maintained only through *constitutive repression*, an active process of *exclusion*, *opposition*, and *hierarchization*. A phenomenon maintains its identity in semiotic systems only if other units are represented as foreign or 'other' through a hierarchical dualism in which the first is '*privileged*' or favored while the other is *deprivileged* or devalued in some way.

(Cahoone 2003: 11)

Consider the following expressions, found in early, uncensored copies of the Babylonian Talmud, Sabbath Tractate, 116a:

1. און גליון *lāwēn gilyōn* 'evil revelation-book'
2. עוון גליון *lāwōn gilyōn* 'sin revelation-book'
3. אבן גליון *lābēn gilyōn* 'stone revelation-book'

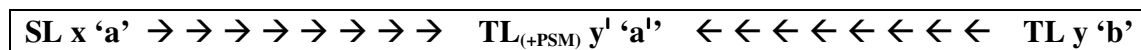
These terms all refer to the gospels and are adaptations of Greek εὐαγγέλιον *euangélion* (> Latin *euangelium*) 'gospel', lit. 'glad tidings, good news; reward of good tidings, given to the messenger', from *eû* 'good' + *ángelos* 'messenger, envoy'. (Only later did *ángelos* come to refer to 'divine messenger, angel', as in the diametric opposite – note the positive connotation and the direction of the etymythology – *Non angli sed angeli, si forent Christiani* 'Not Angles but angels, if they were Christian', attributed to Gregory the Great, when he was shown English children reduced to slavery in Rome in 573 AD – cf. German *englisch*, currently 'English', originally 'angelic'.)

(Biblical) Hebrew גליון *gilyōn/gillāyōn*, which I translate as 'revelation-book', generally refers to 'blank parchment, the margin of scrolls', 'writing tablet' (cf. Syriac גליון *gelayona* 'volume'). However, the etymon of גליון is the root גלי (cf. גלה) 'to uncover, reveal'. Thus, גליון is a good nativizer of *euangélion* since the latter was associated with Apocalypse (the revelation), cf. Latin *apocalypsis* and Greek ἀποκάλυψις *apokálypsis*, the latter being a noun of action from ἀποκαλύπτειν, the meaning of which is exactly the same 'to uncover, disclose' (< ἀπό 'off' + καλύπτειν 'to cover').

Note the *structural compromise* in the expressions above. For example, און גליון *lāwēn gilyōn* literally means 'evil of book' rather than 'book of evil'. Switching places between the *nomen rectum* and the *nomen regens* – resulting in און גליון \**gilyōn lāwēn* 'book of evil' – would have been much better semantically but not nearly as good phonetically. A similar 'poetic licence' occurs in Maskilic Hebrew עמוד פאר *péeyr ámud* (pronounced in Polish Ashkenazic Hebrew *péayr ámid*), lit. 'glory of pillar', an adaptation of European *pyramid*. עמוד פאר \**ámud péeyr*, lit. 'pillar of glory', would have been much better semantically.<sup>2</sup>

The phrases און גליון *lāwēn gilyōn*, עוון גליון *lāwōn gilyōn*, אבן גליון *lābēn gilyōn* and עמוד פאר *péeyr ámud* are but four examples of a widespread, non-anecdotal phenomenon, which I call 'phono-semantic matching' (henceforth, PSM; cf. Zuckermann 2000, 2003, 2003b). I define PSM as *etymythological nativization in which a foreignism is matched with a phonetically and semantically similar pre-existent autochthonous lexeme/root*. For the purpose of the following more specific, technical definition, as well as throughout this chapter, TL designates target language (recipient language, host language), SL denotes source language (donor language, stock language), and *neologism* is used in its broader meaning, i.e. either an entirely new lexeme or a pre-existent word whose meaning has been altered, resulting in a new sememe. Thus, PSM may alternatively be defined as *a multisourced neologism that*

*preserves both the meaning and the approximate sound of the parallel expression in the Source Language (SL), using pre-existent Target Language (TL) lexical items or roots.* The following figure is a general illustration of this process:



x is phonetically similar to y  
y’ is based on y; a’ is based on a

More specifically, און גליון *ʔawən gilyōn*, און גליון *ʔawōn gilyōn* and אבן גליון *ʔəbən gilyōn* – as opposed to עמוד פאר עמוד *péeyr á mud* – are what I call *rejective PSMs*. I define rejective PSM as *politically incorrect PSM; a subversive PSM – produced by members of one religion or national group – which undermines or attacks those of another group, in some cases used for propaganda purposes.*

### 2.1 Anti-Christian rejective PSMs concocted by Jews

Yiddish טום *tum* ‘cathedral’ (cf. Middle High German *tuom*, Modern German *Dom* ‘dome’) was transposed into the following:

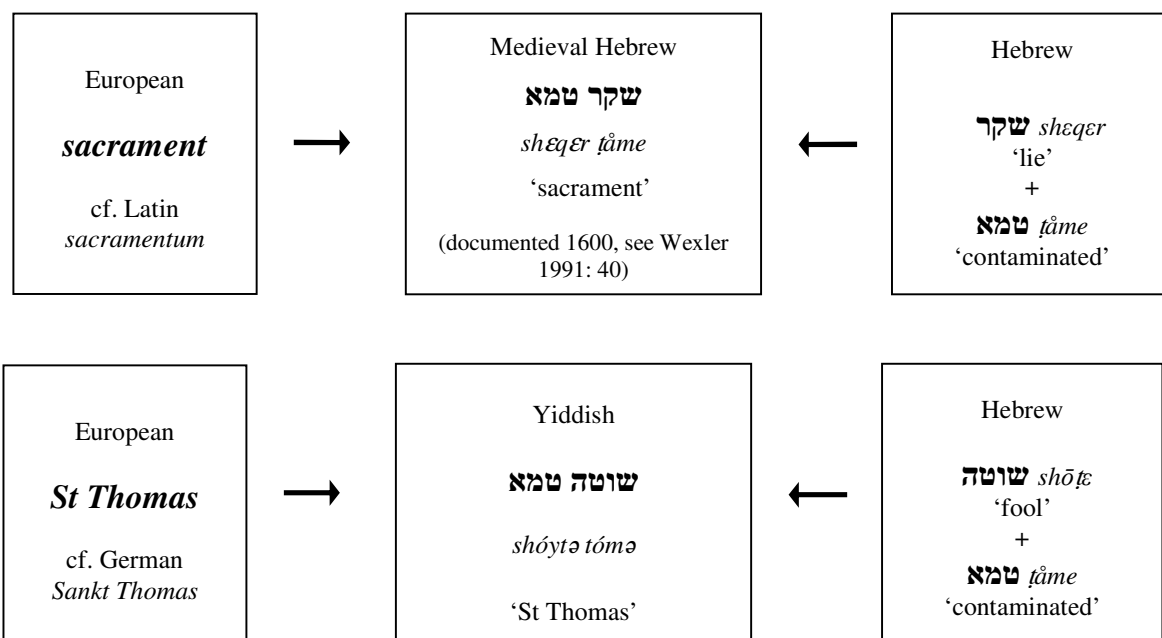
- Medieval Hebrew תהום *təhōm*, lit. ‘abyss’ (documented with the meaning ‘cathedral’ in the late thirteenth century)
- Yiddish טמאה *túmə*, lit. ‘abomination’ (cf. Hebrew טמאה *tumʔā* ‘abomination’)
- Medieval Hebrew טמיון *ṭimyon*, lit. ‘oblivion’ (cf. Rabbinic Hebrew יצא לטמיון ‘was lost completely, was gone for good’, Medieval Hebrew ירד לטמיון ‘id.’) (documented in Mainz, 1150)

Latin (*dies*) *natalis* (cf. Italian *Natale*, Dialectal Italian *nedal*) ‘Christmas (Day)’ (lit. ‘birthday’) was nativised as the following:

- Medieval Hebrew נתלה *nitle* / ניתלה *nīlē*, lit. ‘(being) hanged’, present form of (Biblical) Hebrew נתלה *nitlā* ‘was hanged’. Hebrew ניתלה *nīlē* ‘Christmas’ is documented in the writings of Ephraim ben Isaac of Regensburg from the twelfth century and is sometimes written as ניתל (see Lewinsky 1975: 446a, Wexler 1993: 69). There are two possibilities: (1) this PSM simply uses ‘hanged’ to refer to ‘crucified’ – cf. Ottoman Turkish: ‘Execution is often called *Salb*. Though literally meaning “crucifying” in the Ottoman kanun *salb* seems to be mostly synonymous with *asmak* “hanging”’ (Heyd 1973: 260); (2) this PSM implies that there was a Jewish tradition according to which Jesus was literally hanged, as distinct from crucified; compare this with some medieval traditions holding that Haman (the chief minister of Ahasuerus, as stated in the Book of Esther) was not hanged (on the gallows prepared for Mordecai) but rather was crucified.

- Medieval Hebrew נִיטַל *niṭṭāl*, lit. 'taken' (cf. Biblical Hebrew נָטַל *niṭṭal* 'was taken'), indicating that Jesus was taken from Judaism, see also חַג הַנִּיטַל *ḥag hanniṭṭāl*, lit. 'a holiday of the taken' or 'a holiday which was taken' (cf. Wexler 1990: 60). Modern Hebrew נִיטַל *niṭel* referring to 'Christmas Day' was used by Agnon (1962: 70). Even-Shoshan (1997: 1150c) and Klein (1987: 414c) claim that the etymon is Latin *natalis* (i.e. נִיטַל is a mere loanword from Latin). They ignore the co-influence of Hebrew נָטַל *niṭṭāl* 'taken' or of Yiddish נִיטַל *nítl*, itself a PSM of Hebrew נָטַל *niṭṭāl* 'taken', as well as Latin *natalis*. Supporting the hybridizational view is the existence of [i] between the [n] and the [t], cf. the possible [i] insertion in Hebrew פּוֹלִין *polin* 'Poland' (see below).

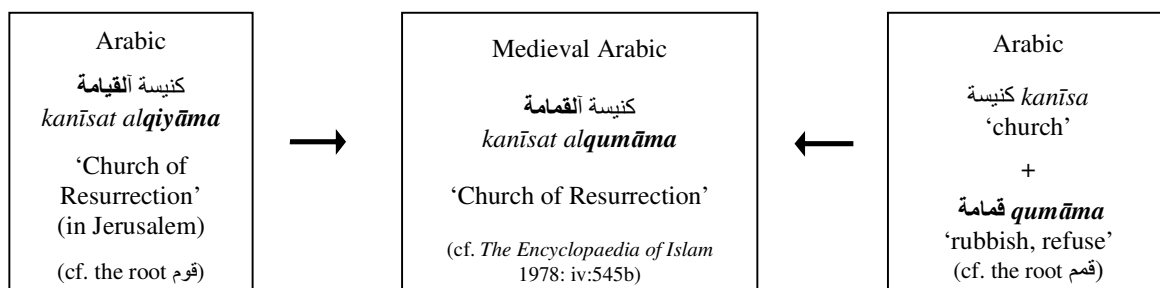
The following are other anti-Christian PSMs devised by Jews:



It is worth noting that such forms of 'travesty' are not limited to cross-lingual creations. Consider the following intra-lingual cases of lexical engineering. Medieval Hebrew בית תפלה *bet tiplā*, lit. 'house of tastelessness' (cf. Biblical Hebrew תִּפְלָא *tiplā* 'tastelessness', Yiddish *tíflə*), refers to 'church' (documented 1382, Wexler 1991: 39-40; cf. Even-Shoshan 1997: 1961b). בית תפלה *bet tiplā* is modelled upon Hebrew בית תפילה *bet təpīllā* 'house of prayer'. One might say that the result was a minimal pair: בית תפלה *bet tiplā* 'church' (negative, non-Jewish) and בית תפילה *bet təpīllā* 'house of prayer' (positive, Jewish). Following this line, Medieval Hebrew חג *hoggā*, lit. 'reeling, trembling, horror' (cf. Isaiah 19:17), refers to 'non-Jewish holiday', as opposed to Hebrew חג *ḥag* '(Jewish) holiday' (cf. Yiddish יום-טוב *yóntəf / yóntəv* 'Jewish holiday/festival', from Hebrew טוב *ṭob*, lit. 'good day'). The doublet חג-חג is an imitation of the dichotomy between Aramaic פסחא *pashā* 'Easter' (originally also 'Passover', cf. Rabbinic Hebrew פסחא *pishā* 'Passover') and Hebrew פסח *pesah*

‘Passover’. Consider also the Yiddish form of this manipulation: Yiddish *khógə* (< Hebrew *חג*) also refers to ‘non-Jewish holiday’. Similarly, Ashkenazic Hebrew *kéysakh*, Yiddish *kéysəkh*, is based on the Hebrew root *k.s.ḥ.* ‘cut down’ and refers to ‘Easter’. It is modelled upon Yiddish *péysəkh* ‘Passover’, cf. Hebrew *pēsāḥ*. Thus, the coinage can be conceived of as serving to differentiate between the two parallel vernal holidays.

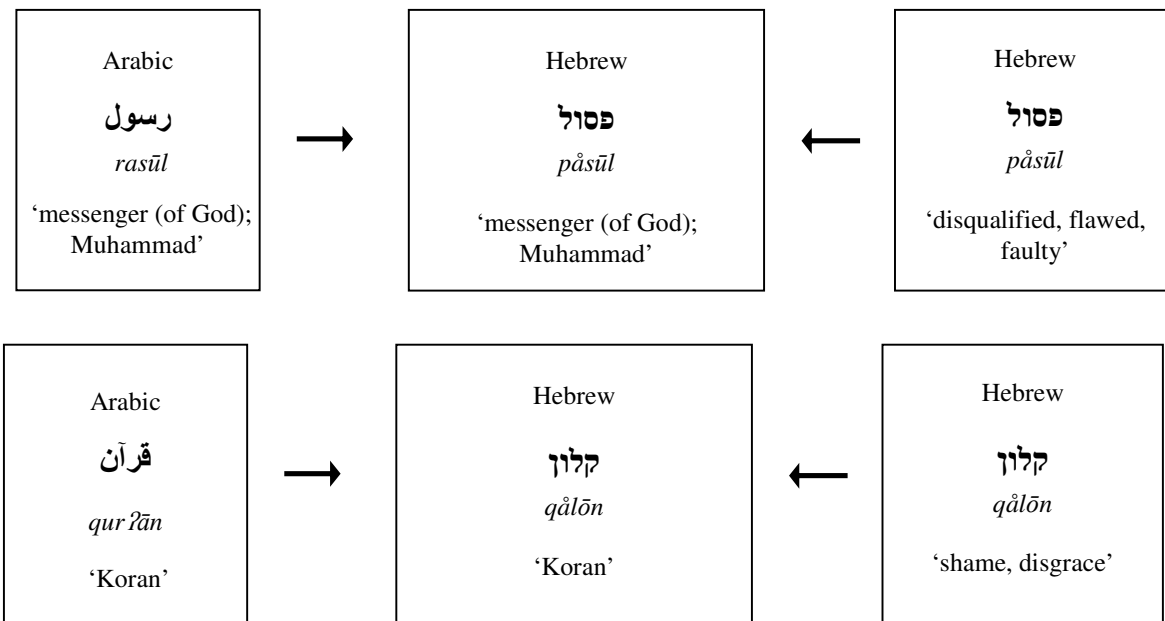
But the Jews were not the only group to engage in rejective PSM. An anti-Christian (intra-lingual) rejective PSM produced by Muslims is *kanīsat alqumāma* كنييسة القمامة, lit. ‘Church of Rubbish’, referring to ‘Church of Resurrection’, as following:



This Arabic example leads to Jewish PSMs designed to reject Islam.

## 2.2 Anti-Muslim rejective PSMs concocted by Jews

Lexical engineering by Jews has not been restricted to rejecting Christianity. Consider the following anti-Muslim PSMs:



The tension between Muslims, Christians and Jews is, of course, an ancient one. However, such inter-cultural rivalries can be attested linguistically in the New World too.

### 2.3 Anti-Jewish etymythology concocted by 'Black Jews'

The rhetoric of the 'Black Jews', who belong to the *Israelite Church of God and Jesus Christ* (formerly known as *The Israeli Church of Universal Practical Knowledge*; address: 1941 Madison Avenue at 125th St., New York, NY 10035, USA) contains many subversive rejective etymythologizations. In all their publications, there is an emphasis on the written word, typical of fundamentalists. Each claim is substantiated by references to the Old and New Testaments. As I have been particularly interested in their rhetoric, I have observed these Black Jews at one of their main propaganda centres: the intersection of Times Square and 45th Street in New York City. They gather there daily in order to persuade African-Americans and Hispanics to join their movement, preaching and distributing leaflets to their target audience (white people are welcome to listen but are not given leaflets). The Black Jews believe *inter alia* that they are the real Jews, that Jesus was black and that UFOs are the 'Chariots of God'. They claim that the following are the real twelve tribes of Israel: Juda – the Negroes, Benjamin – West Indians, Levi – Haitians, Simeon – Dominicans, Zebulon – Guatemalans through Panamanians, Ephraim – Puerto Ricans, Manasseh – Cubans, Gad – North American Indians, Reuben – Seminole Indians, Naphtali – Argentinians and Chileans, Asher – Colombians through Uruguayans, and Issachar – Mexicans.

The Black Jews believe that the Ashkenazic Jews are in fact Khazars in origin (i.e. people of Turkic origin who occupied a large part of southern Russia from the eighth century to the eleventh century).<sup>3</sup> Thus, the main preacher suggested homiletically that the word *Khazar* derived from Hebrew חזיר *hāzīr* 'pig' (cf. Yiddish חזיר *kházər*) (obviously, he pronounced both with [k]). In other words, 'white people are no more than pigs'.

On another occasion, the homilist insisted that the word *Jewish* (as used by white Jews) actually derived from *Jew* and *-ish*, the suffix meaning 'round about', 'somewhere near' (cf. *elevenish*) or 'approaching the quality of, somewhat' (cf. *yellowish*). Thus, 'white Jews are not the real Jews, but are pseudo-Jews'.

*Schindler* (cf. Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List*, 1993; etymologically 'shingler') for the Black Jews is a *swindler*, justifying their belief that 'the Holocaust is nothing compared to the tragedy of one hundred million black slaves'.

Listening to the Black Jews' rhetoric, I was reminded of the lexicological anecdote which I have heard in Germany, according to which the German word for 'key' is *Schlüssel* (cf. *schliessen* 'to close'), whereas the Hebrew word for 'key' is מפתח (cf. Israeli *maftéakh*; deriving from Hebrew פתח 'to open'), because 'the Jews were wandering thieves who *opened* the gates to farms, which had been *locked* by their German owners'. Consider also the etymythologies linking *Jew* with *jewellery*, *German* with *germ*, *French* with *frog* (note here the influence of the French culinary delicacy

frog legs, and possibly also of *quoi quoi quoi*, reminiscent of a frog’s croaking).<sup>4</sup> Consider also Russian жидёнок *zhiděnok* ‘Jewish child (derog.)’ (cf. *kike*), based on the model of чертёнок *chertěnok* ‘little devil’ and ягнёнок *yagněnok* ‘lamb’ (Malkiel 1968: 232), and (the now rare) Spanish *pecadezno* ‘little devil’, modelled on (the now rare) *judezno* ‘Jewish lad’ and *morezno* ‘young Moor’ (ibid.).

Such philological rationalizations were conducted by Friedrich Nietzsche – to ground his moral theory. For example, in the highly (if perhaps fancifully) etymological First Article (Chapters 4-5) of *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (1887) (cf. 1966: ii:774-7), Nietzsche suggested that there was a link between lexical items such as:

- German *schlecht* ‘bad’ and *schlicht* ‘plain, common’ (cf. 1966: ii:774-5) (Note that in pre-late eighteenth century Yiddish literature, שלעכט *shlekht* meant ‘simple’)
- Latin *malus* ‘bad’ and Greek *mélas* ‘black’ (ibid.: 776)
- Gaelic *fin* ‘gentle, fine’ and its earlier form, which meant ‘blond’ (ibid.: 776)
- Latin *bonus* ‘good’ and *duonus* (< *duo* ‘two’) ‘duellist, fighter’ (cf. *bellum–duellum–duen+lum*) (ibid.: 777)
- German *gut* ‘good’, *göttlich* ‘god-like’ and *gotisch* ‘Gothic’ (ibid.: 777)

## 2.4 Othering and Apollonianism

The most basic motivation for rejective lexical engineering is OTHERING, defining and securing one’s own (positive) identity through (the stigmatization of) the ‘Other’. The ‘Other’ is what permits us to discover – and even constitute – the ‘self’. The self is defined thanks to the mirror reflection that the Other represents. In other words, we define ourselves through the ‘Others’.

Instead of the ‘thinking I’, epitomized in Descartes’ (1637) revolutionary phrase *Je pense, donc je suis* (*cogito ergo sum*, ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’, a.k.a. ‘I think, therefore I am’), Lévinas (1972) begins with an ‘ethical I’. According to Lévinas, the self is possible only with its meeting of the Other. (The self is seen and defined thanks to a deep ‘shock’ which destabilizes one’s whole being until one discovers that one is defined as responsible for the Other. This discovery of oneself carries responsibility toward the Other without waiting for reciprocity. Thus the ‘Other’ constitutes the basis for ethics.) Following othering, an empowering sense of unity is created within a religious/national group, countering a perceived threat from outside the group.

Besides othering, lexical engineering can also be the result of APOLLONIANISM (see *la tendenza apollinea* ‘Apollonian tendency’, Pisani 1967: 160 and Zuckermann 2004).<sup>5</sup> I use the term Apollonianism in a general sense denoting the wish to describe and create order, especially with unfamiliar information or new experience. An updated, albeit frivolous, example of this general tendency is the story about the South Dakotan who went to Athens and was happily surprised to find out that the Greeks are



fans of NASA's projects: wherever he went, he saw the name *Apollo*.<sup>6</sup> As this anecdote shows, the 'Apollonian tendency' would also seem to include a significant dimension of ethnocentricity.

Specifically in linguistics, Apollonianism is manifested in justifications for the use of a word and in the craving for meaningfulness. Consider the perception of naïve young Israeli readers of the name סוס דוקטור *dóktor sus* (cf. *Dr Seuss* ['dɒktə(r) su:s]), the pseudonym of Theodore Seuss Geisel, an American author and illustrator of children's books (1904-91). Many Israelis are certain that he is 'Dr Horse' since Israeli סוס *sus* means 'horse'. I have heard an etymythology that this arises from the prevalence of animals in Dr Seuss's stories. This 'misunderstanding' might correspond to Haugen's general claim with regard to borrowing, that 'every speaker attempts to reproduce previously learned linguistic patterns in an effort to cope with new linguistic situations' (1950: 212).

Apollonianism often includes a significant dimension of ethnocentricity. But not necessarily. When travelling, I often ask locals trivia questions to find out what they know about world affairs. In Fiji I asked my taxi driver, who took me to Navala village: 'Have you heard of Clinton?' 'Yes!', he answered. 'Do you know of Kennedy?' 'No!'. 'How about Chomsky?', I continued. 'Yes!', he said, to my great surprise (How come a taxi driver in Fiji knows Noam Chomsky?). 'What do you know about Chomsky?', I said. 'It is from China', he retorted. 'You eat with it!'... The phonetic appropriation of *Chomsky* as *chopsticks* is Apollonian.

One may argue that othering and Apollonianism contradict each other, as othering is defining oneself *vis-à-vis* the other whereas Apollonianism is defining the other by appropriation to one's own *Weltanschauung* and reference-point system. I propose two solutions for this alleged paradox. First, complementary distribution: lexical engineering is sometimes the result of othering and other times the result of Apollonianism. Second – and more spectacularly – Apollonianism can be seen as ripples within the 'tsunami' of othering. In other words, lexical engineering often encompasses both processes simultaneously.

## 2.5 Other motivations and effects of rejective lexical engineering

There are many other reasons for lexical engineering and etymythology. The PLAYFULNESS of PSMs in Hebrew, Yiddish and Israeli can be linked to the Jewish midrashic tradition of homiletic commentary on the Hebrew scriptures, in which puns, or the use of serendipitous similarity between distinct words, were employed in the service of interpretation. In later generations too, wordplay has been a conspicuous feature of Jewish oral argumentation – cf. פלפול *pilpul*, which should be distinguished from the universal 'Apollonian tendency'. Producing witticisms (in both the general and the contemptuous sense of the word), which create humour at the expense of another, and often at the expense of oneself, is cherished in Judaism (known also for its self-deprecation).

Regarding the effect of rejective lexical engineering, my intuition suggests that in Judaism, theo-linguistic metaphors, etymology and lexical engineering might perform sublimation, i.e. they might release negative energy towards the 'enemy' and thus reduce or neutralize possible violence among the 'lexical manipulators'. In other words, *cross words, not swords* or *make words, not wars*. Alternatively, lexical engineering might be a symptom of pacificity rather than a cause for it. All that said, this chapter does not attempt to provide evidence for such a 'pacific claim', and the relative pacificity of the Jews throughout history can obviously be explained in other ways. Furthermore, it is hard to provide sociological insights for lexical engineering concocted in the past as there is no possibility of interviewing and surveying speakers. Still, it would be undesirable to reject 'socio-philology', i.e. socio-linguistic research of the past. Future research should analyse whether current etymological and lexical manipulations, for example by the Black Jews, really reduce possible violence among those who produce them, as well as among their listeners.

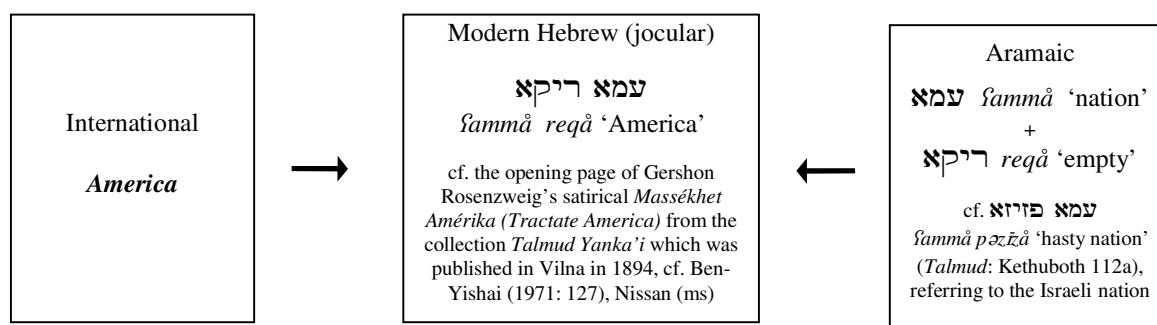
One of the main motivations for rejective PSM is ICONICITY, the belief that there is something intrinsic about the sound of names/words. The very iconicity might be the reason for refraining from translating *Hallelujah* and *Amen* in so many languages, as if the sounds of such basic religious notions have to do with their referents themselves – as if by losing the sound, one might lose the meaning. Compare this to the *cabbalistic* power of letters, for example in the case of *gematria*, the method of interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures by interchanging words whose letters have the same numerical value when added. A simple example of *gematric* power might be the famous proverb נכנס יין יצא סוד *niknas yayin yāṣā sōd*, lit. 'entered wine went out secret', i.e. 'wine brings out the truth', *in vino veritas*. The *gematric* value of יין 'wine' is 70 (י=10; י=10; ך=50) and this is also the *gematric* value of סוד 'secret' (ס=60; ו=6; ד=4). Thus, this sentence, according to many Jews at the time, had to be true.

A similar mechanism appears in the case of rejective PSMs. Consider Lithuanian Ashkenazic Hebrew רע דם *ra dom* (cf. Yiddish *ra dam*), lit. 'of bad blood' (from Hebrew רע דם *raḥ dam* 'of bad blood'). This is a toponymic rejective PSM of Polish *Radom*, the name of a town in Poland (approximately 100 km south of Warsaw), or of its Yiddish adaptation *ródəm* (see Weinreich 1955: 609, Wexler 1991: 42). Thus, if a pogrom had occurred in Radom, it would surely have been rationalized by *ra dam* 'of bad blood'. Obviously, providing such an etymological explanation for the pogrom was regarded by some Jews as a mere play on words. However, others might have conceived of *ra dam* as having deep intrinsic truth, which might have been religiously and homiletically based. One should not forget that at that time it was a common belief that all languages were God-created and that Hebrew was the divine *Ursprache*.

In Dovid Hofshsteyn's poem *Kindershprukh* (first published in 1920, cf. Shmeruk 1987: 261), *Kiev* is rhymed with Yiddish אייב *iev* 'Job' (the ancient patriarch whose story forms a book of the Old Testament), from (Biblical) Hebrew אייב *Āyyōḇ* 'Job', the connotation being of distress and disaster, corresponding to the life story of the biblical Job. Such iconicity is implied jocularly in one of Amos Oz's stories, where

a German-speaking Israeli is talking about going to the Negev (Hebrew נֶגֶב, a geographical region in southern Israel). Owing to a German-based final devoicing (although it is now established that the natural default of all speakers – not only of Germans – is final devoicing, cf. Singh 1987), instead of pronouncing *négev*, she says *négef*, which means ‘plague’.<sup>7</sup> In reality, the *Negev* (especially for someone who was brought up in Germany) is a terribly hot desert, hard for living.

Yiddish צאַר *tsar* ‘tsar’ (the Russian emperor) has sometimes been associated with (Hebrew>) Yiddish צער *tsar* ‘grief, sorrow’, whilst Israeli צאַר *tsar* ‘tsar’ was understood as an enemy (cf. Avinery 1946: 139) due to (Biblical Hebrew>>) Israeli צר *tsar* ‘enemy’ (cf. Esther 7:6: Biblical Hebrew איש צר ואויב *Āsh šar wəʔōyeb* ‘adversary and enemy’).<sup>8</sup> The youth movement in Israel הצעיר השומר *hashomér hatsáir*, lit. ‘The Young Guard’, was derogatorily acronymized as שמוץ *shmutz* (cf. Yiddish שמוץ *shmutz* and German *Schmutz* ‘dirt, filth’). Interestingly, this name was later adopted by the members (*shmutznikim*) themselves. This is certainly not the case with the following *fin de siècle* anti-American PSM:



Similarly, Israeli עם ריקני *am reykaní*, lit. ‘empty nation’, can jocularly replace (International>) Israeli אמריקני *amerikáni* ‘American’. Compare this to the diametrically opposite Chinese 美国 MSC *měiguó*, Cantonese *meiko*<sup>k</sup>, lit. ‘beautiful country’, a domestication of *America*. There are, however, also Chinese examples of rejective toponymic PSMs, used to propagandize against hostile nations. For example, the *Turks* were called in Classical Chinese 突厥 (MSC *tūjué*), consisting of 突 *tū* ‘attack, invade’ and 厥 *jué* ‘stone-launcher’ (sixth-ninth centuries). *Mongol* was allied with Classical Chinese 蒙古 (MSC *ménggǔ*), consisting of 蒙 *méng* ‘dark, obscure, abuse’ and 古 *gǔ* ‘old, locked, stubborn’ (introduced around the eleventh century but still used).

Similarly, Hawaiian *Pukikí* ‘Portuguese’ might constitute a xenophobic PSM deriving from English *Portuguese* and Hawaiian *pukikí* ‘strong, violent, impetuous’ (cf. Deroy 1956: 287). Note that Hawaiian *k* is *inter alia* the common replacement for English *t* and *g* (see *ibid.*: 243). Medieval Hebrew עמלק *Āmāleq* ‘Amalek’, a nation epitomizing evil since the days of the Old Testament, was used to refer to hostile *Armenia*. Ostra (south-east of Rovno) – cf. Yiddish אָסטראַ *óstrə* and Polish *Ostróg* –

was referred to in Yiddish as אויס תורה *óys tóyrə* 'without Torah'. However, by others (or by the same people in other times), it was Ashkenazic Hebrew אות תורה *oystóyro* or Yiddish אות תורה *ostóra*, i.e. 'sign of Torah' (cf. Bar-Itzhak 1996: 29). Hebrew אות תורה, as well as Chinese 美国 'beautiful country; America', lead us to a discussion of 'politically correct' PSM.

### 3. Adoptive lexical engineering

#### 3.1 Politically correct PSM

The following are 'politically correct' toponymic PSMs:

- Ashkenazic Hebrew שפירא *shapiro* 'Speyer' (a town near Heidelberg) (cf. *ibid.*) <<
  1. Aramaic שפירא *shappirā* 'beautiful', the female form of Aramaic שפיר *shappīr* (Daniel 4:9) 'handsome, pleasing, good, cheerful' (Jastrow 1903: 1616b).
  2. Yiddish שפייער *shpéyər*, German *Speyer* (toponym).

The positive connotation of this toponymic PSM might explain its frequent appearance in many Jewish surnames appearing from the beginning of the sixteenth century, e.g. *Shapiro, Shapirin, Shapira, Sapir* (cf. Beider 1993: 532b).
- Ashkenazic Hebrew מגן וצנה *mógeyn vetsíno* 'Mainz' (cf. Wexler 1991: 42) <<<
  1. Biblical Hebrew מגן וצנה *māgen wəšinnā*, a conjunction which appears in Jeremiah 46:3, Ezekiel 39:9 and Psalms 35:2, meaning 'shield and shield'.<sup>9</sup>
  2. Hebrew מאגנצא *magéntsā* 'Mainz', Yiddish מאָגענצע *magéntsə*, Polish *Moguncja*, Latin *Maguntia* (*Moguntia, Mogontiacum*) (toponym).
- Ashkenazic Hebrew הר אדני *har adó(y)noy* 'Hrodna, Grodno' (Weinreich 1955: 610)<<
  1. Ashkenazic Hebrew הר אדני *har adenóy* 'The mount of the Lord', from Hebrew הר אדני *har ʔādonāy*, cf. הר יי 'The mount of the Lord' in Isaiah 2:3.
  2. Yiddish גראָדנע *gródnə*, Polish *Grodno*, Belorussian *Hrodna*, Russian Гродно *Gródno* (toponym).

Consider Medieval Hebrew פולין *pōlīn* 'Poland'. Blanc (1989: 57) claims that there is no reason for its [i] vowel, cf. Yiddish *póylŋ*, Polish *Polska* (*polski* 'Polish'), Russian Польша *Pól'sha*, Italian *Polonia*, English *Poland*.<sup>10</sup> This might lead to the conclusion that פולין is a semanticized phonetic matching (henceforth, SPM) based on the Hebrew autochthonous root לין *l.y.n.* 'lodge, stay'. (As opposed to PSM, where the target language material is originally similar to the source language lexical item both

phonetically and semantically, in an SPM the target language material is originally similar to the source language lexical item phonetically but not semantically. The semantic rationalization is *ex postfacto*).

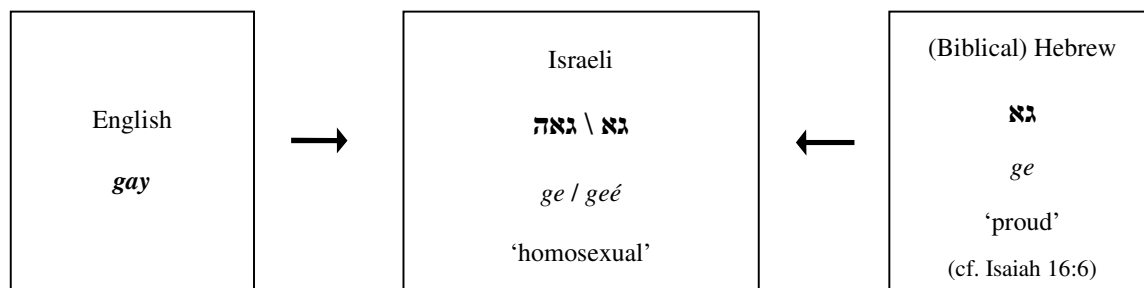
Blanc mentions the well-known popular rationalization according to which 'when the Jews came to Poland, the skies ordered them to stay there'. A detailed investigation is presented by Bar-Itzhak (1996: 30-7). However, my explanation, which may refute Blanc's claim regarding the [i] in פּוֹלִין, is that Yiddish *póylŋ* was spelled in pre-Modern Yiddish as פּוֹלִין or as פּוֹיִלִין (cf. the current spelling פּוֹיִלִין). Note that the pronunciation of (Medieval Hebrew>) Israeli פּוֹלִין by some speakers of Israeli, especially in the past, has been *pólin*, which resembles the German and the Yiddish forms (as distinct from *polín*). This pronunciation could serve to strengthen the orthographic explanation. It seems that Medieval Hebrew פּוֹלִין was not an SPM *ab initio* but rather a phonetic adaptation that has been rationalized etymythologically *ex postfacto*. The success of the etymythology is apparent among a few Israeli-speakers who pronounce בפּוֹלִין 'in Poland' *befolín* – rather than *bepolín* – although this kind of (Hebrew) spirantization is in decline (in Israeli).

Another name for Poland is Israeli פּוֹלִינְיָה *polányia*, which could be reanalysed as פּוֹלִינְיָה פּוֹלִינְיָה 'Here stays God'. However, the term might have been induced by analogy to other Israeli country names corresponding to the feminine form of the noun which refers to the person who lives in the country (or to the feminine adjective), cf. אַנגְלִיָּה *ángliya* 'England' versus *angliyá* 'English (feminine)', and רוֹסִיָּה *rúsiya* 'Russia' versus *rusiyá* 'Russian (feminine)'. Consider also Italian *Polonia* 'Poland'.

Such concoctions were very common among *maskilim*, followers of the Jewish Enlightenment movement *Haskalah* in Germany (1770s-1880s; cf. *Aufklärung*), led by the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729-86) and the poet, linguist and exegete Naphtali Herz Wessely (1725-1805, also known as Váyzl). Thus, Maskilic Hebrew פּוֹיָלוֹ טוֹבָא *poyálo tóvo* (Israeli *poalá tavá*), lit. 'good workingman/labourer' (an Aramaic expression appearing in the *Talmud*, as [pōḏʕala ṭāḇā], cf. Jastrow 1903: 281b, 1145a), was the name some *maskilim* used for *Poltava*, a city in the Ukraine (south-west of Kharkov, east of Kiev), with a thriving Jewish community – cf. Yiddish פּוֹלְטָווע פּוֹלְטָווע *poltávə*, Russian Полтава *Poltáva* and Polish *Pottawa* (cf. Avinery 1946: 135 and Klausner 1949: 97).

Maskilic Hebrew פּוֹ נוֹי זֶה *po novi ze* (Israeli *po naví ze*), lit. 'here (this) is my (beautiful) dwelling', was an SPM of Yiddish פּוֹנִיבֶזש *pónivezh*, the name of the town in Lithuania, famous for its Jewish centre (cf. Lithuanian Yiddish *pónivez*) (used by Gordon 1883: 151, cf. Klausner 1949: 97). Maskilic Hebrew שַׂר טוֹב *sar to(y)v*, lit. 'good ruler', was an SPM of Russian Сара́тов *Sarátov* (the name of a city in Russia), cf. Weinreich (1955: 610fn). One of many *anthroponymic* positive SPMs was Maskilic Hebrew פּאַר רַבָּת *rabes-per* (Israeli *rabát-peér*), lit. 'full (feminine) of glory', for *Robespierre*. Compare it to various Chinese SPMs of names of famous Westerners.

A politically correct PSM word (rather than name), which gained currency in Israeli is גַּי *ge* or גַּיִי *geé* 'gay, homosexual', as following:



Israeli גַּאָה *geé* ‘homosexual’ seems to override Israeli עליז *alíz* ‘homosexual’, which originally meant ‘gay (merry, cheerful)’ and thus constituted a calque of English *gay*. Note the semantic connection of the literal meaning of גַּאָה ‘proud’ to the use of English *gay pride* to imply an empowered homosexual community. For many lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered native speakers of English, signifiers which include the word *pride* immediately imply gay pride, cf. *pride week* (Israeli שבוע הגאווה *shvúa hagaavá*), *gay pride parade*.

Israeli גַּאָה *geé* ‘homosexual’ is a politically correct PSM, which is in contrast to *rejective PSM*, which is politically incorrect. On another continuum from *rejective PSM* is what I call *adoptive PSM*. Below, in §3.3 I shall provide a religion-related example of what I mean by *adoptive PSM*. But first, let us briefly discuss a related philological problem.

### 3.2 Multiple causation versus multiple etymology

The story goes that Osama Bin Laden died and went to heaven. He was greeted by George Washington, who slapped him and yelled, ‘How dare you try to destroy the nation I helped conceive!’ Patrick Henry then approached and punched Osama in the nose. After that, James Madison entered and kicked him in the shin. He was followed by an angry Thomas Jefferson, who whacked Osama over the head with a cane. The thrashing continued as John Randolph, James Monroe and sixty-six other early Americans came in and unleashed their anger on the terrorist leader. Suddenly, as Osama lay writhing in unbearable pain, an angel appeared. ‘This is not what you promised me,’ Osama said to the angel. ‘Come on, Osama,’ the angel replied, ‘I told you there would be seventy-two *Virginians* waiting for you in heaven.’

This amusing anecdote brings to mind a recent case of a scholarly reanalysis of the Koranic ‘virgins’ promised to Muslim martyrs: Luxenberg (2000) suggests that *حورعین* *hūr ūn*, promised to the faithful in Suras 44:54 and 52:20 of the Koran, are not seventy-two ‘dark, wide-eyed (maidens)’, as most commonly believed, but rather seventy-two ‘white (grapes), jewels (of crystal)’. In other words, Muslim martyrs will not get virgins but sultanas(!), the latter with the meaning of white raisins. Note that in Syriac the word *hūr*, a feminine plural adjective meaning ‘white’, is associated with ‘raisin’.

If this alternative interpretation is true, or rather, if one can convince fundamentalist Muslims that it is true, it has the potential to change the course of history, at least in cases like the story of a Palestinian teenager caught in Israel with his penis wrapped with delicate white cloth just before attempting a suicide-bombing. When asked about it, he said that his mother had told him that when he arrives in paradise he would get seventy-two virgins and his penis needed to be ready.

One could consider the various analyses of Arabic *hūr* to be a case of *multiple etymology*. Another multi-etymological lexical item is the internationalism *pidgin*, for which at least seven possible etyma have been offered, e.g. English *business* (as corrupted by Chinese; *OED*), Hebrew פדיון *pidyon* 'barter', and Yago *pidian* 'people' (see Hall 1966: 7, Mühlhäusler 1986: 1, Aitchison 1981: 192, Todd 1974, Hancock 1979, Baker and Mühlhäusler 1990). Another famous example is the English expression *OK*, allegedly deriving from *ole korrek* 'all correct' or *Old Kinderhook* or Choctaw *okeh*, and so forth.<sup>11</sup> Consider also *macabre*, which is traceable either to Hebrew מכבֵי *makkabbī* (cf. *Judas Macabré*, *OED*) or Arabic مقابر *maqa:bir* 'tombs, graveyards'.

In some cases, however, it is very hard to distinguish between multi-etymology and multiple causation. In other words, one should be careful not to mistake a multi-etymological lexical item for a PSM. Consider Rabbinic Hebrew פקר *pāqar* 'was heretic/ irreligious/licentious, broke faith (masculine, singular)', which has two possible sources:

1. Eponymous verbal morphemic adaptation of the name of the irreligious Athenian philosopher *Epíkouros* (*Επίκουρος*) 'Epicurus' (c.300 BC).
2. Metathesis of Rabbinic Hebrew פרק *pāraq*, cf. Rabbinic Hebrew פרק על תורה *pāraq šol tōrā* 'threw off the yoke of the Torah, became a heretic', from Biblical Hebrew פרק על *pāraq šol* 'shed responsibility'.

There are five possible analyses:

1. The etymon is (1) with (2) being a rationalization *ex postfacto*.
2. The etymon is (2) with (1) being a rationalization *ex postfacto*.
3. The etymon is (1) induced by (2).
4. The etymon is (2) induced by (1).
5. The origin is both (1) and (2), i.e. it is a PSM of *Epíkouros*.

### 3.3 Adoptive PSM: a tool for concealing the influence of non-Jewish traditions

In the following example, Wexler (1993) suggests that the Hebrew etymon is an *ex postfacto* interpretation serving to Judaize a foreign term (and tradition). In other words, his analysis is parallel to Analysis (1) above, and accordingly, if one confronts Wexler's 'foreign' etymology with the traditional Hebrew etymology, the following is a multi-etymological lexical item.

- Eastern Yiddish חלה *khálə* (Southeastern Yiddish *khólə*) ‘braided (white) bread loaf (eaten on the Sabbath), *hallah*, *chollah*’ (cf. Western Yiddish ברֶכַח *bárbkħəs* / *bérkħəs* ‘id.’ below; Both *khálə* and *bárbkħəs* are mentioned in the list of lexical isoglosses between Western and Eastern Yiddish by Weinreich 1973: ii:390 and Katz 1983: 1025a) <<<
  1. (Biblical) Hebrew חלה *hallā* – cf. Yiddish *khálə*, Southeastern (Ukrainian) Yiddish *khólə*, Israeli *khalá* – ‘dough loaf offered to the priest in the Temple in Jerusalem’ (e.g. Exodus 29:2, 23). I believe that the etymon of Hebrew חלה is the Hebrew root חלל *ħ.l.l.* ‘hole’. However, Even-Shoshan (1997: 538a) points out that a possible etymon is the Hebrew root חלי *ħ.l.y.* (cf. חלה *ħ.l.h.*) ‘sweet’, but note the *dagesh* in the ל of חלה *hallā*, which I analyse as *dagesh compensativum*. The semantic explanation for the use of the root חלל *ħ.l.l.* might be the fact that the ancient *hallah* had a hole in it, like today’s bagel, so that it could be put in a high place in order to prevent mice and other animals from spoiling it. Biblical Hebrew חלל *ħ.l.l.* might be related to Akkadian *ellu* ‘pure’ (see *Entsiklopédyá Mikraít*: iii:143), and Biblical Hebrew חלה *hallā* sometimes referred to ‘unleavened bread’ (usually called in Hebrew מצה *maṣṣā*), see Leviticus 8:26, Numbers 6:19. It is important to note that before it gained its current sememe, Yiddish חלה *khálə* referred to the part of the (non-braided) loaf separated out for sacred purposes, a tradition known as מִפְרִישׁ חֵלֶה (Israeli *mafrísh khalá*) ‘dedication/offering of *hallah*’.
  2. *Frau Holle*, a goddess/witch in German folklore (recounted by the Brothers Grimm), one of whose tasks was to inspect the **braids** of girls during winter (Wexler 1993: 116-7) – cf. the German idiom *Frau Holle schüttelt die Betten (aus)*, lit. ‘Mrs Holle is shaking the duvets’, i.e. ‘It is snowing’ (or, as children might say, ‘The old woman is plucking her geese’).

Figuratively speaking, Wexler suggests that the Hebrew etymon is the official step-father of the Germanic word but not the biological father. Following this line of thought, the Jews needed this step-father not in order to make the lexical item acceptable but rather in order to adopt officially the originally non-Jewish tradition denoted by the lexical item. The transplanted Hebrew etymon served as a passport. Like Nietzsche (see above), the iconoclastic Wexler uses philology in an *attempt* to kill some sacred cows, challenge our cultural mores and reveal the genuine origins of Jewish traditions and values. If Wexler’s foreign etymon is false, he can then be regarded as an etymological manipulator. Should it be true, however, it has the potential to change our perception of Jewish history (it is currently too shocking to be confronted by puritan Jewish institutions). His data are nonetheless valuable for the philologist since the Germanic (and, in other cases, Slavonic) etymon might have played a role in the creation of *some* of the phrases he discusses. That said, whilst Wexler seems to consider the Slavonic/Germanic etymon to be the only true origin and



the Hebrew to be a mere rationalization *ex postfacto*, my own tendency – being a strong believer in multiple causation – would be to argue that *both* Slavonic/Germanic and Hebrew took part in the nativization, thus constituting (adoptive) PSM. Hence, one could say that the lexical biography is *mosaic*, not only *Mosaic*.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

Language is a guide to ‘social reality’.  
(Sapir 1949: 162)

Some linguists regard any study related to popular etymology and humour as apocryphal. It is time to overcome this prejudice and to realize that humorous concoctions are indicative of personal and national attitudes, and that popular etymology shapes speakers’ perceptions and words’ connotations, and thus influences speakers’ actual lives. Since *etymythology* often results in altering the meaning and associations of a word, it, in fact, changes the ‘real etymology’. Thus, it should not be overlooked even from a strict linguistic perspective, *a fortiori* a cultural one.

Sociolinguistically, *etymythology* is often more influential than ‘real etymology’. The English word *bugger* originally denoted ‘Bulgarian’ (French *bougre*, Latin *Bulgarus*), referring to a sect of heretics who came from Bulgaria to France in the eleventh century. But since the real etymon (origin) is forgotten, Bulgarians don’t normally complain about the sodomite meaning of the word in English.

On the other hand, on 15 January 1999, David Howard, a white aide to Washington DC Mayor Anthony Williams, who happens to be black, used the word *niggardly* – which means ‘miserly, stingy’ – in a conversation with two colleagues. Eleven days later, he resigned as rumours were spreading that he had used a racial slur. Speakers linked *niggardly* to the politically incorrect *nigger* and *negro*, although, initially, *niggardly* had nothing to do with *nigger*.

A simple, non-charged example – as opposed to the cases above – is the tradition in some western Ashkenazic Jewish communities to eat cabbage soup on Hoshana Raba (the seventh day of the Sukkoth holiday, when every man’s fate for the coming year is irrevocably sealed in Heaven). The reason for this is the name of the Jewish prayer recited on this occasion, Hebrew קול מבשר *kōl məḇšašer*, lit. ‘a voice announcing’, pronounced in Ashkenazic Hebrew *kol meváser*, which was playfully reinterpreted as Western Yiddish קאָל מיט וואַסער *koul mit vásər* (cf. Yiddish קאָל מיט וואַסער *kol m’ vásər*) ‘cabbage with water’, cf. German *Kohl mit Wasser* (cf. Weinreich 1973: i:7, 192). Consider also Swedish *Vår fru dagen*, lit. ‘Our Lady’s Day’, which used to be the signifier for Lady Day (25 March), the Feast of Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is allegedly the day on which the Virgin Mary was told that she was going to give birth to Jesus – exactly nine months before Christmas. Throughout time Swedish *Vårfrudagen* has been reinterpreted as *Våffeldagen*, lit. ‘Waffle Day’. Consequently, on that day Swedes traditionally eat waffles with jam or cream. The waffles are sometimes heart-shaped, and those who still know about the

connection with the Virgin Mary might rationalize the form in terms of the Virgin Mary's heart.

Similarly, *mutatis mutandis*, Jimi Hendrix occasionally kissed a man on stage after singing 'scuse me while I kiss the sky (from the song *Purple Haze*, 1967) because he was familiar with the mondegreen 'scuse me while I kiss this guy (on mondegreens – misunderstood or misinterpreted phrases resulting from a mishearing, especially song lyrics – see Zuckermann 2003: 248, 2000: 24). Such shifts in reality alone render popular etymology a worthy subject for research.

One might argue against the PSMs discussed above: *canis a non canendo* 'The word *dog* is such because the dog does not sing/play' (note the phonetic similarity between Latin 'dog' and 'sing') – cf. the 'etymythological fallacy'; or *lucus a non lucendo* 'The word *grove* is thus named because it does not shine'. Thus, there are ugly women called *Bella* 'beautiful' (provided that *Bella* is not a phonetic matching of a Slavonic 'white', cf. the case of the 'Red (i.e. Beautiful) Square' in Moscow). However, such a claim disregards the power of etymythology, which in many of the aforementioned examples even results in a new lexical item.

Naphtali Herz Torczyner, who acted as the last president of the Hebrew Language Council (1942-9) and the first president of the Academy of the Hebrew Language (1953-73), wrote in 1938:

קדמונו דרשו כתב הנשתון 'כתב שנשתנה', חילקו את המלה פת-בג לשתיים ומצאו בה את המלה העברית פת 'לחם', וכדומה. דרשות אלו רחוקות הן מן האמת הבלשנית כמו הדרשות שטיפלו גם בשמות הפרטיים הפרטיים שבתורה, עד שנעשה שם בנו של המן הרשע פרשנדתא לשם תפארת בשביל רש"י 'פרשן הדת' המפורסם. אין אלו אלא משחקי מליצות ולא לשון חיה ואמיתית.

Our ancestors interpreted *ktav hanishteván* as 'script that has been changed' [mislinking *nishteván* with *nishtaná* 'changed'], divided the word *pat-bag* into two and found within it the Hebrew word *pat* 'bread', and so on. These homiletic interpretations are far from the linguistic truth, in the same way as the interpretations of the Persian proper names in the Old Testament, so that even the name of the son of Haman the Wicked, *Parshandáta*, became a name of glory, the famous *parshán hadát* ['interpreter of religion'], for Rashi. These are nothing but rhetorical games [cf. *melitzah*, an intertextual citational style] and not part of the living and true language.

(Torczyner 1938: 8)

Whilst I completely agree that such 'homiletic interpretations are far from the linguistic truth', this chapter shows that such 'games of rhetoric' are in fact an integral part of a 'living and true language'. In an article punningly entitled *בלשנות ובטלנות* *balshanút uvatlanút* (i.e. 'Linguistics and Idleness'), Torczyner – after phonetically matching his surname to Tur-Sinai (lit. 'Mount Sinai) – scorns laymen who think that German *privat* is derived from Hebrew פרטי (Israeli *prati*) 'private' (see Tur-Sinai 1950: 5). While Tur-Sinai's criticism is correct, he does not for a moment wonder whether such coincidental similarity can actually affect language itself, and not only meta-language.

Thus, Intl *private* increased the use of (Hebrew>) Israeli פרטי *prati* 'private'. Torczyner, as well as many other good linguists, is blinded by an indoctrinated linguistic desire to reprimand laymen for linguistic ignorance. The result is insensitivity, neglecting the fact that the subject of the matter, language, is, after all, spoken by these very laymen.

The linguistic analysis of popular etymology should not restrict itself to discussing cases of mistaken derivation because – again – popular etymology often results in a new sememe/lexeme. Most importantly, this chapter demonstrates that etymythological methods are employed by educated, scholarly religious leaders. The distinction between *créations savantes* and *créations populaires* is not so categorical since many *créations savantes* are in fact 'populaires' (and many *créations populaires* are indeed 'savantes').

This chapter also shows the power of SERENDIPITY: coincidental phonetic similarity induces PSM, which might result among other things in the revival of an obsolete lexical item. Life and death – even for lexical items – are sometimes a matter of luck. Finally, then, lexical engineering reflects religious and cultural interactions and often manifests the attempt of a religion to preserve its identity when confronted with an overpowering alien environment, without segregating itself from possible influences. The result can be contempt (as in the case of *rejective* PSM) or 'cultural flirting' (as in the case of adoptive – or *receptive* – PSM).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the Rockefeller Foundation's Research and Conference Center, Villa Serbelloni, Bellagio, Italy, and especially to its manager Gianna Celli, for providing me with a conducive and enjoyable research environment. I also thank the Research Centre for Linguistic Typology (La Trobe University), Churchill College (Cambridge) and the University of Haifa. Finally, I am grateful to Simon Overall, Grace Brockington, Katherine MacDonald and Felicity Newman for their comments.

<sup>2</sup> Note, however, the non-Semitic order in some Hebraisms coined within Yiddish, e.g. בחור ישיבה *yeshivə bókħər* 'Yeshivah student', cf. Israeli בורה ישיבה *bakhúr yeshivá*. Structural compromises as in און גליון *ʔawən gilyōn* and עמוד פאר *péeyr ámud* are also apparent in Chinese. Consider Modern Standard Chinese 福特 *fútè* 'blessing+special', a domestication of *Ford*, indicating that buying this car is a serendipitous choice. Semantically, 特福 *\*tèfú* 'special+blessing' would have been better. The same applies to MSC 波音 *bōyīn*, lit. 'wave+sound', a domestication of *Boeing*; whereas 音波 *\*yīnbō* 'sound wave' would have been a better semantic match.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. similar claims by Koestler (1976) and Wexler (1993).

<sup>4</sup> A similar case arose in March 2003, due to American anger over France's refusal to support the US in its position on Iraq. On the cafeteria menus in the three House office buildings in Washington, the name of *French fries* appeared as *freedom fries*, and *French toast* as *freedom toast* (What about a *freedom kiss*?)

- <sup>5</sup> Cf. *Apollinisch* 'Apollonian' versus *Dionysisch* 'Dionysian' in Nietzsche's works. *Apollo*, the beautiful sun-god of the Greeks and Romans, is symbolic of *reason*, whilst *Dionysus*, the Greek god of wine and fertility of nature, is associated with *wild* and ecstatic religious rites.
- <sup>6</sup> The same applies to the Indian scholar who went to Rome and was happily surprised to find out that the Italians are fans of Sanskrit grammar: wherever he went, he saw *PANINI* (Italian for 'sandwiches', as opposed to Pāṇini, the fifth-century BC Indian grammarian).
- <sup>7</sup> Cf. the story about the German Jew, a survivor of the Holocaust, who arrives in Roehampton (London) after the war, and enters a grocery store. While examining the oranges, he suddenly gets extremely upset when the grocer tells him: 'The small ones are for juice'.
- <sup>8</sup> Compare these to Yiddish נאַר *nar* 'fool', which was sometimes spelled as (Biblical) Hebrew נער 'boy'.
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. the same conjunction but in reverse order, צנה ומגן in Ezekiel 23:24, 38:4.
- <sup>10</sup> English *Poland* may be a partial PSM since the paragogic excrescent *d* might have been introduced in order to imitate the existent word *land*, as in *England*.
- <sup>11</sup> I have met Israeli speakers who provided the etymythology that the English initialism *OK* is an acronym of Hebrew כן אמנם *omnām ken*, lit. 'indeed yes', but they were aware of the manipulative recalibration.

## References

- Agnon, Shmuel Yosef 1962. *ha'esh vехаetsím (The Fire and the Trees)*. Jerusalem – Tel Aviv: Schocken.
- Aitchison, Jean M. 1981. *Language Change: Progress or Decay?*. Cambridge University Press. (2nd Edition: 1991)
- Avinery, Isaac 1946. *kibushéy haivrít bedorénu (The Achievements of Modern Hebrew)*. Palestine: 'Sifriat Poalim' Workers' Book-Guild.
- Baker, Philip and Peter Mühlhäusler 1990. 'From Business to Pidgin'. *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages* 1.1: 87-115. Amsterdam.
- Bar-Itzhak, Haya 1996. *polín – agadót reshít: etnopoétika vekorót agadatíim (Legends of Origin of the Jews of Poland: Ethnopoetics and Legendary Chronicles)*. Tel Aviv: Poalim.
- Beider, Alexander 1993. *A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire*. Teaneck (NJ): Avotaynu.
- Ben-Yishai, Aharon Zeev 1971. 'Parody, Hebrew' in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem: Keter, vol. xiii, pp. 124-40.
- Blanc, Haim 1989. *leshón bnay adám (Human Language)*. Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute.
- Borges, Jorge Luis 1974. 'Sobre el "Vathek" de William Beckford' (1943) in 'Otras Inquisiciones' (1952) in *Obras Completas*. Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores.
- Cahoone, Lawrence E. (ed.) 2003. *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology* (second edition). Malden (Mass.): Blackwell.
- Deroy, Louis 1956. *L'Emprunt linguistique*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

- Descartes, René 1637. *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison, et chercher la vérité dans les sciences (Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason in the Search for Truth in the Sciences)*.
- The Encyclopaedia of Islam – New Edition* 1960–. Leiden (– New York): E. J. Brill (and London: Luzac & Co).
- Entsiklopédyá Mikraít (Biblical Encyclopædia)* 1955-82. Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute. (8 vols)
- Even-Shoshan, Avraham 1997. *hamilón hekhadásh – hamahadurá hameshulévet (The New Dictionary – The Combined Version)*. Jerusalem: Kiryat-Sefer.
- Gordon, Judah Leib 1883. *kol shiréy górdon (All Judah Leib Gordon's Poems)*, vol. i.
- Hall, Robert Anderson Jr 1966. *Pidgin and Creole Languages*. Ithaca (New York): Cornell University Press.
- Hancock, Ian F. 1979. 'On the Origins of the Term *pidgin*'. *Readings in Creole Studies*. Ian F. Hancock (ed.), Ghent (Belgium): E. Story-Scientia, pp. 81-6.
- Harkavy, Alexander 1910. *yídish énglisher vértterbukh (Yiddish-English Dictionary)*. New York: Hebrew Publishing Company.
- Harkavy, Alexander 1988. *yídish énglish hebréisher vértterbukh (Yiddish-English-Hebrew Dictionary)*. New York: Schocken; YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. (Reprint of the 2nd Edition, 1928; 1st Edition: 1925)
- Haugen, Einar (Ingvald) 1950. 'The Analysis of Linguistic Borrowing'. *Language* 26: 210-31. Baltimore: Waverly.
- Heyd, Uriel 1973. *Studies in Old Ottoman Criminal Law* (edited by V. L. Menage). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jastrow, Marcus 1903. *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. Jerusalem: Horev.
- Katz, Dovid (=Hirshe-Dovid Katz) 1983. 'Zur Dialektologie des Jiddischen'. *Dialektologie: Ein Handbuch zur deutschen und allgemeinen Dialektforschung*. Werner Besch, Ulrich Knoop, Wolfgang Putschke and Herbert Ernst Wiegand (eds), Berlin – New York: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 1018-1041.
- Klausner, Joseph G. 1949. *halashón haivrít – lashón khayá: hakhyaatá shel halashón haivrít al yesodót madaím (The Hebrew Language – A Living Language: The Revival of the Hebrew Language on Scientific Foundations)*. Jerusalem: Va'ad HaLashon HaIvrit – The Bialik Institute. (2nd Edition)
- Klein, Ernest 1987. *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language*. Jerusalem: Carta.
- Koestler, Arthur 1976. *The Thirteenth Tribe: The Khazar Empire and its Heritage*. London – New York: Ransom House.
- Lévinas, Emmanuel 1972. *Humanisme de l'autre homme*. Montpellier: Fata Morgana.
- Lewinsky, Yom-Tov 1975. *entsiklopédyá shel haváy umasóret bayahadút (Encyclopedia of Folklore, Customs and Tradition in Judaism)*. Tel Aviv: Dvir.
- Luxenberg, Christoph 2000. *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran. Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*. Berlin: Das Arabische Buch.
- Malkiel, Yakov 1968. *Essays on Linguistic Themes*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Mühlhäusler, Peter 1986. *Pidgin and Creole Linguistics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. (1st Edition: 1979)
- Nietzsche, Friedrich 1966. *Werke in Drei Bänden*. München: Carl Hanser.
- Nissan, Ephraim ms (2000). 'The COLUMBUS Model' (Part II of 'Anticipatory Narrative Construal').

- Pisani, Vittore 1967. *L'Etimologia: Storia – Questioni – Metodo*. Brescia: Paideia. (= *Studi Grammaticali e Linguistici* 9)
- Sacks, Harvey 1992. *Lectures on Conversation: Harvey Sacks*, Vol I, edited by Gail Jefferson. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A. 1992. 'Introduction', pp. ix-lxiv of Sacks 1992.
- Sapir, Edward 1949. *Selected Writings in Language, Culture and Personality* (edited by D. G. Mandelbaum) Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Shmeruk, Chone 1987. *a shpigl oyf [=af] a shteyn: antologye. poezie un proze fun tsvelf farshnitene yidishe shraybers in ratn-farband (A Mirror on the Stone: Anthology. Poetry and Proze of Twelve Different Yiddish Authors in the Soviet Union)*. Jerusalem: Magnes. (2nd Edition; 1st Edition: 1964)
- Simpson, John A. and Edmund Simon Christopher Weiner (eds) 1989. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. (2nd Edition) [=OED]
- Singh, Rajendra 1987. 'Well formedness Conditions and Phonological Theory'. *Phonologica 1984 (Proceedings of the Fifth International Phonology Meeting, Eisenstadt, 25-28 June 1984)*. in Wolfgang U. Dressler et al. (eds), Cambridge University Press, pp. 273-285.
- Todd, Loreto 1974. *Pidgins and Creoles*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. (2nd Edition: 1990, London: Routledge)
- Torczyner, Naphtali Herz (see also Tur-Sinai) 1938. 'milím sheulót bilshonénu' (Loanwords in our Language). *Lešonénu* 9: 5-30.
- Tur-Sinai, Naphtali Herz (see also Torczyner) 1950. 'balshanút uvatlanút 1' (Linguistics and Idleness 1). *Leshonenu La'am* 2 (4): 4-8.
- Weinreich, Uriel 1955. 'Yiddish Blends with a Slavic Element'. *Word* 2: 603-10.
- Weinreich, Max 1973. *geshíkhte fun der yídisher shprakh: bagríffn, fáktn, metódn (History of the Yiddish Language: Concepts, Facts, Methods)*. New York: YIVO (Institute for Jewish Research). (4 vols: i and ii constitute the main text, whilst iii and iv are dedicated to further bibliographical and etymological discussion)
- Wexler, Paul 1990. *The Schizoid Nature of Modern Hebrew: A Slavic Language in Search of a Semitic Past*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.
- Wexler, Paul 1991. 'Yiddish – the Fifteenth Slavic Language'. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 91: 1-150, 215-25.
- Wexler, Paul 1993. *The Ashkenazic Jews: A Slavo-Turkic People in Search of a Jewish Identity*. Ohio: Columbus.
- Zuckermann, Ghil'ad 2000. 'Camouflaged Borrowing: "Folk-Etymological Nativization" in the Service of Puristic Language Engineering'. D.Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford.
- Zuckermann, Ghil'ad 2003. *Language Contact and Lexical Enrichment in Israeli Hebrew*. London – New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Zuckermann, Ghil'ad 2003b. 'Language Contact and Globalisation: The Camouflaged Influence of English on the World's Languages – with special attention to Israeli (sic) and Mandarin'. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 16.2: 287-307.
- Zuckermann, Ghil'ad 2004. 'Cultural Hybridity: Multisourced Neologization in "Reinvented" Languages and in Languages with "Phono-Logographic" Script'. *Languages in Contrast* 4.2: 281-318.
- Zuckermann, Ghil'ad 2008. *Israelit Safa Yafa (Israeli, a Beautiful Language)*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved.