‘The language that follows speech will not be the same as the one that preceded it’: spoken Hebrew in the pre-state period

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ABSTRACT The transformation of Hebrew from a liturgical and literary language into a modern national language has aroused great interest among scholars, yet the nature of spoken Hebrew among its first generations of speakers has not yet been explored. The article presents a linguistic analysis of spoken Hebrew in pre-state Palestine. Following a methodological discussion of the available source materials and their possible contribution to the reconstruction of Hebrew speech during this formative phase, structural features of the period’s spoken language are analysed in the various linguistic domains (phonology, morphology and syntax). Focusing on features extant in contemporary spoken usage, the analysis highlights the extent of continuity in the development of spoken Hebrew and traces the roots of many contemporary phenomena in pre-state Hebrew speech.

IN THE EARLY 1930s the writer Yaacov Rabinovitz discussed the likely implications of the recent transformation of Hebrew into a spoken language:

Now the Hebrew word has entered the mouth, and this has its own rules .... The language that follows speech will not be the same as the one that preceded it, and if there are many wild plants in the language – there is no danger in that. When a field grows many wild weeds, it is a sure sign that its soil is good. Some of the wild weeds will be uprooted, some will transform into cultivated plants, and there will be both language-thorns and language-flowers.

1. All translations from pre-state period sources are mine. The translation aims at reflecting the style of the original Hebrew texts, and is therefore occasionally non-idiomatic or ungrammatical. The Hebrew text is provided in the footnotes.

2. הלשון שאחרי הדבר לא תהי זו שלפניו, אם יש הרבה גדולי-פרא בלשון – אין סכנה. שדה שיש בו הרבה עשבי-פרא סימן הוא שקרקעו טוב. חלק מהעשבים הפראים יעוקרו, חלק יהיו לבני-תרבות, ויהיו גם קוצי-לשון ופרחי-שפה.

Rabinovitz expressed a tolerant view towards the processes of linguistic change witnessed in the language, and accepted the inevitable development of ‘thorns’ alongside ‘flowers’ on the speakers’ tongues. Such a view was quite unusual in the early phase of the formation of the speech community. Though the growing discrepancy between classical Hebrew and daily usage was evident to all, up to the 1950s it was considered a temporary phase which reflected the recent adoption of Hebrew as a spoken language. It was believed that the deviations from classical Hebrew would disappear once real proficiency had been obtained. As a result, throughout the formative pre-state period grammarians’ concerns focused on correcting current usages rather than on analysing them. As no systematic studies of spoken usage were conducted, its characteristics are unknown and the linguistic processes that operated therein are hard to define. In the absence of solid data, the validity of various hypotheses as regards the essence of the linguistic processes that shaped Modern Hebrew cannot be ascertained.

Reconstructing spoken Hebrew in its early phases poses a real challenge for contemporary research, as the source material on which such a reconstruction may be based is limited. No recordings of spontaneous daily speech were made during the language’s formative phases; speakers born in the pre-state period are incapable of fully reconstructing their speech habits from several

decades ago in a reliable manner; the period’s written sources do not include systematic documentation of the spoken language, but merely occasional fragments of information on some of its features. A full reconstruction of pre-state period spoken Hebrew is therefore practically impossible.

The aim of this article is to show that despite the inherent limitations imposed on such a reconstruction, a careful analysis of fragments of information extracted from a variety of sources may shed light on basic structural features of spoken Hebrew during the pre-state period. As in the case of archeological research, such reconstruction would inevitably be inconclusive due to the many gaps, yet it can provide significant insights into the structure and overall character of early spoken Hebrew.

As the nature of the source material restricts the scope of reconstruction, the understanding of its inherent limitations forms an integral part of the discussion. Certain angles of enquiry are altogether unavailable for research due to the lack of data, whereas for others, only partial information may be obtained. The article’s first part (sections 2 and 3) is therefore dedicated to a methodological discussion, outlining enquiry limitations and surveying the various types of source material containing data on spoken usage, its potential contribution, as well as its shortcomings. Section 4 presents a preliminary sketch of pre-state spoken Hebrew, based on the data extracted from the sources of information identified thus far.

Since a comprehensive analysis of the available data is premature in the current state of research, the aim of the present article is more modest: outlining some of the basic structural features attested in spoken Hebrew during the pre-state period in the various linguistic domains, namely phonology, morphology and syntax. Focusing on features identified with contemporary spoken usage, the analysis highlights the extent of continuity in the development of spoken Hebrew and traces the roots of many contemporary phenomena in pre-state Hebrew speech.

The limitations of enquiry: areas in which documentation is scant or non-existent

Historically, practical attempts to turn Hebrew into a spoken language originated in the 1880s. Initially, the initiative met limited success, and at the onset of the twentieth century the number of Hebrew speakers was

9. See e.g. Shelomo Morag, ‘The emergence of Modern Hebrew: Some sociolinguistic perspec-
Yet, by the end of World War I and the onset of the British occupation of Palestine, some 40% of the Jewish population (around 34,000 people) attested they were Hebrew speakers. Hence, the early signs of spoken Hebrew appeared in Palestine in the last phases of the Ottoman rule.

Yet little information is available on linguistic features of the emerging vernacular during the Ottoman period. Two short lists of erroneous usage published by the Language Committee in 1908 and 1911 are the only known sources that shed light on specific usages of the spoken language at the time. Both are ‘Say – Don’t Say’ type lists, offering a succinct list of common mistakes alongside the recommended usages to replace them. All other testimonies dating to the Ottoman period do not discuss specific features, but present generalizations about the nature of the spoken language. The most common aspect referred to is pronunciation, namely Ashkenazi vs. Sephardic, but otherwise very few details of specific usages are provided.

Typical to the period is the manner in which spoken Hebrew is described by Haim Arie Zuta, a well-known educator from Eastern Europe, who in 1904 was invited to teach in the girls’ school in Jaffa. His first impression was that ‘the pupils’ oral language was indeed more or less natural, but it abounded with vulgar jargon and colloquial words, sins against the language and its spirit’. Yet, he gives no examples of the mistakes he observed in the girls’ speech, nor of the features that rendered it ‘natural’ to his ear. Another visitor to Palestine similarly reports: ‘even the teachers speak with many

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13. Photocopies of two pages from the 1911 list (pp. 1 and 7) were published in Leshonenu la’am LVI, 4 (2008), p. 227.
severe mistakes, and what’s more, they don’t even try to speak according to the rules of grammar, as though the negligence and the mistakes render the language particularly alive.\(^\text{16}\) No details are provided about the linguistic facts on which this comment is based. Consequently, the most crucial phase in the emergence of spoken Hebrew, namely the formation of the first nuclei of speakers, cannot be reconstructed at all.

By contrast, during the period of the British Mandate the number of testimonies rises considerably and their nature changes. Details of specific features found in daily speech may be obtained from a variety of sources, reflecting the spread of Hebrew among the Jewish population.\(^\text{17}\) Consequently, from the 1920s onward it is possible to trace many structural features of the budding vernacular.

Yet, the possible scope of reconstruction is subject to certain limitations entailed by the nature of the source material. A hindering factor is the complete lack of recordings of spontaneous daily speech. Due to technological constraints, making recordings was a complicated and expensive activity, accessible only to few and requiring special resources.\(^\text{18}\) Consequently, its use was restricted to material considered worthy of documentation and conservation – and this included neither daily conversations nor native speech. Rather, recordings were limited to the formal registers of Hebrew used in speeches, cultural events, newsreels and documentary films,\(^\text{19}\) as well as in didactic material intended for language learners.\(^\text{20}\) These recordings consist

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\(^{17}\) On the consolidation of the use of Hebrew during the Mandate period see e.g. Morag, ‘The emergence of Modern Hebrew’, pp. 216–17.

\(^{18}\) The technical difficulties in conducting recordings have affected also the market of records of popular music, see Elyahu Hakohen, ‘Hataklit haʾivri: Sivuvim rishonim’, Hakol Zahav, ed. Yossi Mar Haim and Yair Stavi (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Maariv, 1993), pp. 9–20.

\(^{19}\) For a list of Hebrew speaking newsreels from the early years of film production in Palestine see Wendy Lauterman and Hillel Tryster (eds), Israel Newsreel Collection, vol. I: 1932–56 (Jerusalem: Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archive, 1992).

\(^{20}\) Three Hebrew courses intended for language learners are known to have been recorded in the pre-state period: David Yellin et al., LinguaPhone Conversational Course, Modern Hebrew; Vladimir (Zeev) Jabotinsky, Taryag Millim: Introduction into Spoken Hebrew; Asher Plawner, Mekhonat hadibur betor more safot: Po medabrim ʿivrit. For an annotated transcription of Plawner’s recordings see Shlomo Izreel, ’ʾemsor leḥaʿ et hanahuz vegam beseder: Tamlil muʿar’, in Mekhonat hadibur betor more safot: Po medabrim ʿivrit, ed. Shlomo Izreel (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2012), pp. 284–335.
of written texts read aloud by public figures, professional presenters, actors or teachers, and contain almost no trace of spontaneous daily speech.

The degree of fluency in these recordings greatly varies. Yet, they all bear signs of a variety of foreign accents belonging to the Ashkenazi domain. None of them documents either oriental pronunciation or native speech.21 The Ashkenazi background of the speakers recorded is reflected both in general features of pronunciation and in the occasional occurrence of specific forms stemming from the Ashkenazi reading tradition of Hebrew.22 Thus, for instance, Menahem Ussishkin, the World President of the Jewish National Fund, produces the form be-āmērīke ‘in America’ (rather than be-ʿāmērika) in a 1938 speech,23 and Tel Aviv’s mythological mayor Meir Dizengoff produces the form hakimōnu ‘we have built’ (rather than hakimónu, reflecting the Ashkenazi pronunciation of the vowel holam as [oi]), in a 1930s speech.24

The lack of documentation of either spontaneous or native speech limits the value of available recordings for the study of the spoken language. They may testify to the great diversity in the spoken language of the time in terms of pronunciation and proficiency. They may also provide valuable information about the language usages that native Hebrew speakers were exposed to in their contacts with parents, educators and other members of the older generation. Careful examination may even occasionally enable researchers to extract certain spoken features dispersed through such recordings.25 Even so, the scope and nature of these recordings prevent them from serving as


22. For a detailed discussion of forms that reflect the legacy of the Ashkenazi tradition in one of the period’s recordings see Chaim E. Cohen, ’Po medabrim ’ivrīt – ’ezo ’ivrīt medabrim po? Limkoroṭeḥa shel haʾivrīt hanilmēdet beʾerḵat po medabrim ’ivrīt’, Mekhonat hadibur betor more saṭot: Po medabrim ’ivrīt, ed. Shlomo Izreel (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2012), pp. 212–36.


24. The speech is included in Baruch Agadati’s 1935 film Zot hi haʾareẓ (see the online catalogue of the Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archive).

25. For a review of Plawner’s recordings from this perspective see Shlomo Izreel, “Mekhonat hadibur betor more saṭot: Po medabrim ’ivrīt”: ‘al limud ’ivrīt begermanya hanazit veʾal haʾivrīt hameduberet beʾerḵez yiṣraʾel bishḥot hashloshim’, Zmanim 93 (2006), pp. 36–69. For further analysis of these recordings see Mekhonat hadibur betor more saṭot: Po medabrim ’ivrīt, ed. Shlomo Izreel (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2012).
a major source of information on the period’s spoken language. Hence, as opposed to the study of contemporary spoken language, the study of early Hebrew speech has to base primarily on written sources.

However, fundamental differences separate contemporary research from the study of early Hebrew speech in the study of written sources as well. Nowadays research focuses mainly on literary dialogue, which often presents a relatively credible representation of spoken Hebrew. For the study of pre-state period Hebrew speech, however, this line of enquiry is largely irrelevant, as the ability to convincingly reproduce the spoken registers of Hebrew in writing developed at a relatively late stage, mainly from the 1970s onward. Previously, speech representation in prose and drama was anchored in the literary registers of Hebrew rather than its colloquial ones. Hence, literary texts did not reflect the existence of spoken Hebrew, let alone its characteristics.

Very few exceptions to this rule appear in literary works from the pre-state period. A handful of scenes aimed at reflecting the speech habits of youngsters is included in the work of Yosef Haim Brenner, who was known for his outstanding sensibility to linguistic nuances. These scenes document in the early 1920s utterances such as *medagdeg li* ‘it tickles me’, *megared li* ‘it itches me’, *kise beʿad lashevet* ‘a chair to sit on’, *kadur beʿad lesahanek* ‘a ball to play with’, *nesaḥek belaruẓ* ‘let’s play by running’, ḥorate ‘wants’, or ḥake ‘alay ‘wait for me’.

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Marginal literary genres were somewhat more tolerant towards the inclusion of spoken features, primarily entertainment songs written for the commercial light theatre (for example *Hamatate* ‘The Broom’). Yet, in most forms of culture, the inclusion of colloquial usages was considered unacceptable, and the sporadic deviations from this norm were severely criticized. Typical of the period is the following reaction to Shlonsky’s humoristic children’s book *ʿAlilot miki mahu* (‘The adventures of Miku Mahu’), which included certain colloquial usages: ‘it is unthinkable that one would consider it right to create special children’s “literature” based on all those expressions and linguistic mistakes …. Would our soul not grieve to view the “gruel” served to children?’ Literary texts which conformed as a rule to the period’s normative stylistic norms may therefore contribute only marginally to the reconstruction of early Hebrew speech.

The same holds true of written texts produced by ordinary speakers, who fostered no literary aspirations. Under the influence of the literary language on the one hand, and the strict normative approach of the school system on the other, most speakers adhered in writing to the formal and elevated registers of Hebrew on all occasions. Written texts produced by adults and youngsters alike — including private correspondence and personal diaries — only rarely reflected features of daily spoken usage.

Signs of change started to appear in the 1930s, as features of the spoken language started to penetrate into the written registers of Hebrew, graduating...
ally developing into realistic models of speech representation. However, as regards the pre-state period spoken language, its representation in literary texts is rare, and the reconstruction of its features must rely on other kinds of textual corpora.

Valuable sources of information

The richest source of information on characteristics of the spoken language prior to the 1950s is prescriptive literature. As the need for guidance in matters of language use was strongly felt in the newly created speech community, publications aimed at correcting current usage abounded, unintentionally leaving extensive documentation of the very linguistic habits they endeavored to eliminate. Yet, reliance on prescriptive literature as a source of information has to be done with caution, and the inherent inconsistency of the information therein must be taken into consideration.

Only some of the features discussed in prescriptive literature were widespread and long-lasting enough to permanently shape the structure of spoken Hebrew. Conspicuous examples of this kind are the placement of the definite article before construct state constructions (for example *ḥabeta sefer* ‘the school’, included as early as 1908 in a list of corrections published by the Language Committee), or speakers’ difficulty in keeping gender agreement in the realm of numerals. ‘Almost no one is capable, in the flow of daily speech, of correctly realizing the masculine and feminine forms of the numerals’, claims Zeev Jabotinsky in a 1930 publication. ‘I'm not sure whether I knew in the land more than ten meticulous speakers who did not confuse them.’ Numerous examples of this confusion can be found in a variety of pre-state period sources, for example *šesh esre [f.] yom [m.] ‘sixteen days’*

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38. Ben-Shahar, ‘Hitpathut leshon hadi’alag’.
41. Halevi Taller, ‘al tomar kakh’.
(instead of shisha ‘asar yom),\textsuperscript{45} shalosh [f.] yeladim [m.] ‘three children’ (instead of shlosa yeladim),\textsuperscript{46} shnei [m.] pe‘amin [f.] ‘twice’ (instead of shtei pe‘amin)\textsuperscript{47} etc. Such usages have been resistant to prescriptive attempts to eradicate them, and have characterized spoken usage from an early stage.

Other well-attested phenomena were short-lived, and disappeared from common usage over the years. An example of this is the frequent use of the preposition be‘ad. Widely attested during the pre-state period in speech and writing (for example kaniti be‘ad grush ‘I bought for a penny’,\textsuperscript{48} hevi dvarim be‘ad hastra ‘he brought stuff for the boat’,\textsuperscript{49} ha‘ashirim zrikhim leshalem be‘ad hakol ma shelokhìm ‘the rich should pay for all they take’,\textsuperscript{50} kise be‘ad lashevet ‘a chair to sit on’\textsuperscript{51}), it has been gradually replaced by prepositions that better conform to classical standards.

Alongside common phenomena, prescriptive literature often treated random, isolated usages which occurred on a specific occasion owing to insufficient mastery of Hebrew. The period’s intolerant attitude towards any kind of deviation from normative standards, as well as the need to be alert to mistakes of any kind lest they penetrate common usage, led normativists to include in their discussions occasional usages such as typos in store signs,\textsuperscript{52} and child language phenomena\textsuperscript{53} etc. Analysis of the evidence extracted from prescriptive literature should therefore exclude superfluous information, and focus on significant usages that attest to essential features of spoken Hebrew in its early layers.

At the other end of the spectrum, the evidence provided by prescriptive literature is marked by significant lacunae, as many common phenomena

\textsuperscript{45} Jabotinsky, \textit{Hamivta ha‘ivri}, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{46} Tamar Dolzansky, ‘Shibushe halashon befi hayeladim’, \textit{Leshonenu} 8 (1937), p. 46.
\textsuperscript{47} Ita Faktorit, \textit{Mipinati: Reshimot mitokh ha‘avoda bekhitot ‘alef} (Tel Aviv: Pesi‘ot, 1932), p. 42.
\textsuperscript{49} Faktorit, \textit{Mipinati}, p. 123.
\textsuperscript{50} a letter by Meir Dizengoff, 6.2.1918, Tel Aviv Historical Archive, file 1-98g.
\textsuperscript{51} in Brenner’s story, see above.
\textsuperscript{53} A particularly large number of random usages of this type are included in Yisrael Rivka’s, \textit{Al saf yeladenu ba‘arez} (mikhtavim lahorim B) (Tel Aviv: Mefiẓ hasefer, 1938).
evaded the attention of normativists. A particularly interesting example is the case of possessive sentences, for example *yesh li sfarim* ‘I have [some] books’. While pre-state period normativists repeatedly objected to the tendency of speakers to include the direct object marker in the construction (for example *yesh li ’et hasfarim* ‘I have the books’), none of them mentioned the common violation of the rules of grammatical agreement when feminine or plural nouns were involved. Yet, notes made in the late 1920s by an elementary school teacher testify to the propagation of that usage among her pupils. Her documentation includes utterances such as *na’alayim* [f.pl.] *lo haya* [m.sing.] *lahem* ‘they didn’t have shoes’ or *ḥanut* [f.sing.] *lo haya* [m.sing.] *lahem* ‘they didn’t have a shop’, which attest to the presence of this phenomenon in speech.

Another remarkable lacuna in prescriptive literature indicated by this teacher’s notes is the relatively early shift from *ʾeqtol* to *yiqtol* in future tense first person forms. While prescriptive treatment of the phenomenon goes back to the 1940s, her notes reveal that the shift was already extant among her pupils in the late 1920s, for example *ʾani yaruẓ bashuk, yeḥapes ganavim ve yidrokh ’alehem* (‘i will run in the market, will look for thieves and will step on them’).

As opposed to prescriptive literature, the teacher’s notes attempted to transcribe the children’s modes of expression rather than correcting them. Her main concern was didactic, and although she did not explicitly comment on erroneous usages, she unintentionally managed to capture usages that escaped the notice of writers who were focused on questions of language use, but may not have been in constant touch with the daily language of the younger generation. Her notes therefore include valuable information which is altogether missing from other sources. She documents a wide range of usages, some of which conform to the rules of grammar and some which deviate from them. Moreover, as her notes are based on actual communicative events, they often

54. The earliest documentation is found in a 1911 list of corrections published by the Language Committee (see *ʾal tomar – ʾemor*, p. 7), and repeated references to this usage appeared in subsequent publications. See Yael Reshef, ‘The construction *yesh lo ’et* in early modern spoken Hebrew’, *Leshonenu Laʿam* LVI,4 (2008), pp. 226–33.


57. The earliest reference located thus far in prescriptive literature is in Shelomo Dov Goitein, *Hora’at ha ’ivrit be’erez yisra ’el* (Tel Aviv: Yavne, 1945), p. 89.

reflect the natural flow of spontaneous language use. The linguistic features are brought within a context, as opposed to the normativists’ tendency to list isolated forms. Consequently, her notes often shed light on syntactic and discourse phenomena, whereas prescriptive literature contributes primarily lexical, phonological and morphological information. Prescriptive literature should therefore be ideally supplemented with sources of information that attempt to provide fuller quotations of actual speech, not necessarily as the result of a direct interest in linguistic issues but for other reasons.

Attempts to locate such sources indicated that their scope is limited. Many kinds of texts – such as notes, diaries or personal letters from the beginning of spoken Hebrew – have not been systematically preserved. Moreover, as mentioned in the previous section, they seldom contained spoken features to begin with. Additionally, it is hard to predict which type of texts is likely to include attempts to transcribe speech. Courtroom protocols, for instance, which seemed to be an obvious source for such quotations, proved to be disappointing in that respect, as they seldom recorded in detail the occurrences in court, but tended merely to summarize them.

Despite these difficulties, extensive search in archives enabled us to locate a significant number of non-literary texts containing presumed quotations. Such quotations repeatedly occurred, for instance, in letters of complaint sent during the pre-state period to the Tel Aviv municipality following a verbal confrontation.59 While many complainants merely reported that a verbal confrontation had taken place (for example besha’a 11,30 lifne haḥazorayim nikhnas lamisrad doctor ben ra’an an vehithil liẓ’ok ulehafría’ ‘et haseder ‘at 11:30 a.m. Dr Ben-Ra’an an stepped into the office and started shouting and disturbing the peace’),60 others tried to reproduce the details of the exchange, for example:

While I was seated at my work … all of the sudden engineer Magidovitz entered my office … and … started to drive out the witnesses … by shouting at them: mi ziva lakhem la’azov ‘et ha’avoda velavo hena ['Who ordered you to leave your work and come here'], and he turned to me in reprimand: madua’ lakahta ‘et ha’anashim meha’avoda ['Why did you take the people away from work?']

60. בפשעה 11,30 לוגר על 添加 רמא, תלבושה העותי הלשון, העותי הלשון, עותי המדריד, המדריד, תל אביב היסטורי ארכיון, תעודת 4-4300.
… I asked him: *meʾayn ʾata yodea ma sheʾasiti?* [‘How do you know what I did?’] and then he started reprimanding me and shouting at me in front of the assembled people.  

Although such quotations do not necessarily reflect precisely what was actually said during the speech event, they often provide indispensable examples of a vital, natural, often ungrammatical language use, clearly based on spoken usage. The documentation includes various features that were not treated in prescriptive literature, such as curse words, discourse markers or colloquial expressions, and attests to their diffusion in speech.

The value of such presumed quotations, independently of their factuality, may be demonstrated by a letter addressed to H.N. Bialik by the novelist S.Y. Agnon in response to a present sent to his son:

I returned home safe and sound, and found your two beautiful books and my son Shalom Mordechai delighted with your dear present … he too wanted to write to you *Bialik ʾata shalahta li sefer ʾaz ini roze lomar lekha toda ʾaz tavo* [‘Bialik you sent me a book so I want to say thank you so come’] but with the aid of the teacher he wrote to you otherwise.

Although the presumed quotation is very short, several typical characteristics of the spoken language may be observed in it: the use of short, simple sentences joined by the colloquial conjunction *ʾaz* ‘so’; the use of a pleonastic personal pronoun in conjunction with the verb (*ʾata shalahta* ‘you sent’, whereas according to traditional grammar *shalahta* [you] suffices); the employment of the future tense form instead of the imperative (*tavo* ‘come’ instead of *bo*). Though there is no evidence that Agnon quotes a text actually written by his son, it is clear that he aims at mimicking the typical language use of Hebrew-speaking children, and manages to represent it credibly and capture its spirit. The difference between this quotation and the stylized language used in his literary dialogue is striking.

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62. See the details discussion in Reshef, ‘Direct Speech’, pp. 188–92.  
64. For a discussion of Agnon’s sophisticated incorporation of references to the spoken language
provide a unique perspective on the flow of the spoken language, and are therefore an indispensable source of information despite their limited scope. Each of the available sources of information is partial and lacking. Yet, their combined evidence provides valuable insights regarding characteristics of Hebrew speech during the pre-state period. Though its full reconstruction may never be achieved, the fragments of information which can be extracted from various sources join together to form a relatively rich picture of its general structure. A short presentation of some of its conspicuous features in the various linguistic domains is offered in the following section.

Spoken Hebrew in the pre-state period: a preliminary sketch

The linguistic evidence from the early layers in the formation of Modern Hebrew points simultaneously in two opposing directions. On the one hand, as noted by Haiim B. Rosén, the founder of the linguistic study of Modern Hebrew in the 1950s, reading through early texts highlights the ‘differences between the Hebrew [of that period…] and the language used by us orally and in writing nowadays’. These differences are self-evident, considering the extensive change processes that Hebrew had to undergo in order to become a modern language within a relatively short time span. On the other hand, there is also an unexpected measure of affinity between the early layers in the use of Hebrew as a daily language and present-day usage. Many features which separate contemporary Hebrew from earlier linguistic stages are apparent already in the first decades of the twentieth century, indicating that the basic structure of the language was shaped at a relatively early stage.

As far as the written language is concerned, an analysis of the textual evidence may often enable the researcher to trace (and occasionally even to date) the formation processes of such modern features. Studies from recent years indicate that some of these processes followed the transformation of

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66. See e.g. Reshef, ‘Continuity vs. change’; Yael Reshef and Anat Helman, ‘Instructing or recruiting? Language and style in 1920s and 1930s Tel Aviv municipal posters’, Jewish Studies Quarterly 16,3 (2009), pp. 306–32.
Hebrew into a daily language, while others preceded it, and their origin can be traced to nineteenth-century written Hebrew. The case of the spoken language is different: due to the paucity of the source material, an aspiration towards a detailed description of its evolution is impractical. The evidence is too fragmentary to enable the observer to trace the penetration of features into practice, and in the majority of cases the sociolinguistic context for the formation of new linguistic features is unknown. Hence, the early phases in the emergence of spoken Hebrew have to be treated as a single unit, and a finer differentiation of the evidence is usually impossible to achieve.

From the chronological viewpoint, the boundaries of the period under investigation range from the earliest documentation of the spoken language to the beginning of the linguistic study of Modern Hebrew in the early 1950s. As systematic descriptions of contemporary Hebrew started to replace the sporadic documentation of the pre-state years, the foundation was laid for a comprehensive analysis of the spoken language. For the early years the goals of enquiry have to be more modest. A realistic objective would be to trace documentation dating from the first half of the twentieth century of spoken features treated hitherto by linguists solely in studies relating to the state of Hebrew in the second half of the century.

As the existence of documentation is rather coincidental, the dates provided here relate to documentation of features but not necessarily to their formation. The great bulk of evidence originates from the Mandate Period. Yet the Language Committee’s lists from 1908 and 1911 indicate that at least certain features were already extant in the spoken language among the first nuclei of speakers. The existence of documentation provides solid proof of the presence of a particular feature in the language from that point on, but does not exclude its earlier formation. In the same vein, no distinction may be made between native and non-native usage, as the information provided by pre-state period sources on this aspect of language use is either unreliable or altogether absent. Contemporary usage may serve as a criterion for

distinguishing short-lived phenomena from features that turned in the long run into markers of native speech, but extrapolating this distinction to pre-state period Hebrew would be speculative.

The available data point at a measure of continuity in the linguistic system, as contemporary usage shares a significant number of features with pre-state period usage. Yet in the current state of research, no founded claims can be made about the distribution of those features in the emerging speech community.

The following presentation focuses on some of the most typical features of spoken Hebrew, which according to the available documentation accompanied its evolution from a relatively early stage. No attempt will be made to cover all the details that may be extracted from the various sources. Instead, a panoramic picture of the general structure of language use will be presented through the discussion of a wide range of phenomena from various linguistic domains, namely phonology, morphology and syntax. The range of phenomena discussed indicates that the linguistic structure observed by linguists from the 1950s onward was not entirely new, but started to take root in speech as soon as Hebrew turned into a medium of daily oral communication.

**Features of pronunciation**

The earliest evidence for spoken Hebrew deals with pronunciation, namely the choice between the Ashkenazi and Sephardic pronunciation. In the first decade of the twentieth century it was already obvious that in Palestine preference for the Sephardic pronunciation prevailed, and in 1913 both vowels and consonants had already been established in the spoken language to a great extent. Whereas adults’ pronunciation tended to be tinged with a variety of substrate languages, among children a relatively uniform pronunciation rapidly emerged. Most descriptions of the pronunciation system focus on common speech habits prevalent among speakers. In most cases, the features referred to seem to coincide with contemporary native pronuncia-


69. See *Zikhronot va’ad halashon ha’ivrit*, 3rd volume (Jerusalem: The Language Committee, 1913).

tion. Noticeable foreign accents were separately treated by grammarians and normativists.\(^71\)

As far as the overall character of speech is concerned, speakers’ tendency towards fast and negligent pronunciation is repeatedly referred to. A typical example is Jabotinsky’s 1930 complaint that ‘[Our ancestors] did not speak in a quick manner, did not swallow syllables, did not switch one vowel with another – in short, did not know the sloppy manner of expression currently heard on our streets’.\(^72\) Present-day research describes the overall character of the spoken language in very similar terms. A typical example is Bolozky’s observation that ‘In informal speech, casual speech style as well as a quick natural pace may lead, each of them separately, to reduction and assimilation [of consonants and vowels]’.\(^73\)

While pre-state period sources seldom employ linguistic terms such as reduction or assimilation, they often provide examples familiar from contemporary speech as well. Cases such as lórзе (for ló roż ‘don’t want to’),\(^74\) shomim (for ’shome’im ‘[they] hear’),\(^75\) aḥakakh (for ’aḥar kakh ‘later’),\(^76\) vim (for ve’im ‘and if’)\(^77\) conform to present-day occurrences of vowel and consonant reduction. Examples for assimilation are less common, but those provided in the early sources correspond to contemporary usage, for example skhor (for zekhor ‘remember’),\(^78\) pkhina (for behina ‘examination’).\(^79\)

Another type of phenomena referred to in pre-state period sources are deviations from the grammar rules of pronunciation. Certain grammatical features were evidently lost in ordinary speech at an early stage, for example the realization of the consonantal he in final position (mapiq) or gemination

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\(^{71}\) See e.g. Yehiel P. Gumperz, ‘Lamivta hasefaradi befi ’olei germanya’, Leshonenu 9 (1938), pp. 99–109; Jabotinsky, Hamivta ha’ivri (various references to specific accents – German, Russian, English – are scattered throughout the book).

\(^{72}\) [אבותינו] לא דברו בחפזון, ולא בלעו הברות, לא ערבבו תנועה בתנועה — בקיצור, לא ידעו [אבותינו] את אופן-הتعبير המרושל הנשמע כיום ברחובותינו, Jabotinsky, Hamivta ha’ivri, p. 3.

\(^{73}\) Shmuel Bolozky, ‘Phonological and morphological variation in spoken Hebrew’, Medabrim ivrit: Lehecher halashon hameduberet vehashonot haleshonit beyisrael, ed. Shlomo Izreel (Tel Aviv: University of Tel Aviv, 2002), p. 239.

\(^{74}\) לארְצֶה, Rivkaʾ, ‘Al ifat yeladenu, 156.


\(^{76}\) אחכך, Faktorit, Mipinati, p. 42.

\(^{77}\) וʿם, Shlonsky, ‘Aliot miki mahu, p. 12.

\(^{78}\) Jabotinsky, Hamivta ha’ivri, pp. 14–15. The form is brought by Jabotinsky in transliteration (škhor), in order to highlight its ungrammatical pronunciation.

The pronunciation of the traditional mobile *shewa* and the quiescent *shewa* no longer reflected grammatical factors but purely phonetic ones. The former was pronounced as a zero vowel unless prohibited consonant clusters were involved; the latter was occasionally replaced by an auxiliary vowel for the sake of dissimilation, for example ‘*amadeti* (for ‘*amadti* ‘I stood’). ‘I do not believe that there are ten pious persons in the entire new *yishuv* – including teachers – that are punctilious in [the pronunciation of] gemination and the mobile *shewa*,’ states Jabotinsky as early as 1919.83

When prepositions preceded nouns, the rules of grammar were no longer obeyed. Thus, for instance, speakers pronounced *yeladim* *veyladot* ‘boys and girls’ rather than the normative *vitludot*,84 *veshlayyim* ‘and two’ rather than the normative *ushnayim*85 etc. Likewise, the rules of spirantization of the consonants *b*-k-*p* were often disregarded, for example *fsah* for *ptah* ‘open’,86 *bekesef* for *bekhesef* ‘for a fee’,87 *shapakh* for *shafakh* ‘spilled’88 etc. ‘Ordinary speech’, claims Jabotinsky, ‘has set up in this matter other rules, actually very successful ones: one would say *bekhol zot* (“nevertheless”), *lefi daʿati* (“in my opinion”) … but one would not say ‘*amar lekhalato* (“he said to his bride”) but *lekhalato*, and by no means would one say ‘*ani faniti* (“I turned”), *hu varah* (“he escaped”), but ‘*ani paniti* and *hu barah*’.89 Evidently, Jabotinsky’s examples refer to three different categories: fixed expressions, free combinations of preposition and noun, and spirantization across word

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84. Jabotinsky, *Hamivta haʿivri*, p. 14 (the form is brought by Jabotinsky in transliteration in order to highlight its ungrammatical pronunciation).
85. Barak and Gadish, *Safa qama*, p. 192 (the following explanation of the erroneous pronunciation is provided by the writer: את ואו החבירה הבאה לפני ′שנים′ או ′שתים′ מנקדים הרבה מדברי עברית בשוא )במקום מלאפום ושּנים(, the vav consecutive prior to *shnayim* [‘two’ (m.)] or *shtayim* [‘two’ (f.)] is vocalized by many Hebrew speakers with a *shewa* [rather than the vowel sound /u/ *ushnayim* [‘and two’ (m.)]]).
89. בהמריו הרגילים קטע החלו לחזות קפלים שונים. ודיברו מפגשים מאמר. נהג בפאת, [חוי], הניחו על עדרים שניים ממתקים שונים *אנכי פניתי* ו– *הוא ברח*. [חלי], זכתה, Jabotinsky, *Hamivta haʿivri*, p. 33.
boundaries. The rules which apply to each category according to his examples correlate with those regulating contemporary usage.  

Particular attention was devoted to the stress position. While in principle Modern Hebrew relies on the grammatical stress inherited from the Sephardic reading tradition, new penultimate stress categories emerged in speech as well. Pre-state period testimonies indicate a similarity to the inventory of new penultimate stress categories found in contemporary speech. In the verbal system, the grammatical stress was systematically replaced by penultimate stress in second person plural forms in the past tense (for example 'ʾamářem 'you said', 'ʾasítem 'you did') by analogy with the stress position in the rest of the verbal paradigm. Other extremely common categories are place names (for example yáfo, rehóvat, ríshon) and personal names (for example háyim, dvóra, yisráel). In addition, the phenomenon is found less systematically in minor word groups as well as in specific words that do not form distinct categories for example dóda ‘aunt’, glída ‘ice cream’, kóva ‘hat’, shméne ‘eight’, dávka ‘actually’, tel avívi ‘Tel Avivian’ and others. Almost all penultimate stress forms mentioned by pre-state period sources are still current in spoken Hebrew.

The evidence gathered thus far indicates that, in the area of pronunciation, a clear affinity can be observed between present-day usage and the speech habits documented throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The affinity manifests itself in the pronunciation of specific words and forms as well as in the general phonetic processes to which they point. The scope of documentation and the variety of features reflected in the early sources indicates that the roots of present-day usage lie in phonetic and morphophonemic processes dating back to the early phases of the transformation of Hebrew into an everyday spoken language.

**Morphological features**

In the realm of morphology the picture is more complex, as certain early phenomena are no longer extant in contemporary usage, while certain
contemporary phenomena are not documented in the early sources. Nevertheless, a great extent of continuity can be observed in this field as well, and many of the deviations from the inherited grammar which are associated with the morphological structure of spoken Hebrew nowadays were already documented – at least to a certain extent – during its period of emergence.

The deviations from classical morphology can be divided into three main classes: (1) a decline in the distribution of certain inherited categories; (2) the rise of new morphological mechanisms; (3) changes in the form of inherited morphological categories (primarily due to analogy). A variety of examples for all three classes may be located in pre-state period sources. Some are shared by the written and the spoken language, such as the loss of certain biblical verbal categories (wayyiqtol/weqatal, the cohortative, the jussive etc.), the significant decline in the employment of bound object pronouns in favour of their analytic counterparts, the modal use of haya+participle (for example hayiti mazia ‘I would suggest’), the formation of a new set of nominal prefixes (for example du-shavu’on ‘bi-weekly newspaper’, ben-le’umi ‘international’) and more. Other phenomena are specific to the spoken registers of the language. While a comprehensive survey of all spoken features that deviate from the classical morphology is beyond the scope of the present article, a survey of some prominent examples in the use of nouns, verbs and prepositions will be provided in order to demonstrate the measure of continuity between pre-state period spoken Hebrew and present-day usage.

One of the most widely discussed features of spoken Hebrew is the limited employment of the bound possessive pronoun. The legacy of classical Hebrew provided Modern Hebrew with two mechanisms to express possession: the use of bound possessive pronouns through the declension of nouns (the exclusive mechanism in biblical Hebrew), and the declension of the analytic possessive pronoun shel (a mechanism added to the language in post-biblical Hebrew). Modern Hebrew inherited both mechanisms, but differs in their distribution in speech and writing. In the written registers possession is normally expressed by the declined noun, while the analytic shel occurs only

93. Avinery, ‘Darkhei halashon ha’ivrit’, p. 204.
96. Halashon (Tel Aviv: Gdud megine hasafa, 1927), p. XI.
in particular circumstances. The spoken language presents a mirror image: the analytic pronoun serves as the default option, whereas the declined noun is restricted to specific categories. The early origins of this tendency are well documented in pre-state period sources.

As early as 1919 Jabotinsky states: 'the declension of nouns shows signs of decline. Habayit shelanu [“our house”], ha’ahayot shel [“his sisters”] are pushing aside, as far as I could judge, the classical forms.’ About a decade later Avinery ascribes this trend to foreign influence:

Since the declension of noun is not found in European languages, people have started to neglect it also in the Hebrew language; and not only in nouns whose declination is difficult or dubious (dyo [‘ink’], devek [‘glue’], zeret [‘little finger’] etc.) but also in nouns whose declination is very simple and straightforward. Indeed, even instead of sifri [‘my book’] one now says only hasefer sheli .... The majority adds shel and the definite article even to such nouns that have no declination: ha’aba sheli [‘my dad’], ha’ima shelkha [‘your mom’] ... instead of ’aba [‘dad’] or ’avi [‘my dad’], ’imkha [‘your mom’].

Another observer offers an alternative explanation, attributing the clear preference for the analytic over the bound forms to an internal Hebrew motivation:

It is obvious that the declinations of the Hebrew nouns are a very difficult matter ... due to the changes ... that occur in the vocalization of the nouns. ... Hence, there is nowadays a clear tendency in Modern Hebrew to get rid of the pronouns and the declinations alike: to take the nouns as they are and add to them, for the expression of the possessive case, the words sheli, shelkha, shelakh, shelo, shela, shelanu, shelakhem, shelahem: ’aba sheli [‘my dad’], ’imka shelkha [‘your mom’] instead of ’aba [‘dad’] or ’avi [‘my dad’], ’imkha [‘your mom’].

100. באשר נטייה השם אינה מצויה בלשונות אירופה - החלו להזניחה גם בלשון העברית; ולא רק במילים שנטיאתם קשה או מוטלת בספק (דיו, דבק, זרת) כי אם גם במילים שנטיאתם קלה ונוחה. Hence, there is nowadays a clear tendency in Modern Hebrew to get rid of the pronouns and the declinations alike: to take the nouns as they are and add to them, for the expression of the possessive case, the words sheli, shelkha, shelakh, shelo, shela, shelanu, shelakhem, shelahem: ’aba sheli [‘my dad’], ’imka shelkha [‘your mom’] instead of ’aba [‘dad’] or ’avi [‘my dad’], ’imkha [‘your mom’].

101. [...]


[...]
A similarly well-attested phenomenon is the notable decline in the use of imperative forms. Among children and adults alike, the substitution of the imperative for future tense forms is so widespread that we have almost ceased to feel the error in it: telekh ['go'] instead of lekh, tokhli ['eat'] instead of 'ikhli', notes one observer. Other normativists likewise testify to the dissemination of this tendency, and its established status in speech is further reinforced by its distribution in textual sources. Future tense forms repeatedly occur instead of the traditional imperative in presumed quotations attributed to children and adults alike, for example teshvi 'al yadi 'sit by me', tishlah li me' at haruzim 'send me some rhymes', telekh lemalon 'go to a hotel', 'im yesh lekha tluna tifne la'iriya 'if you have a complaint, turn to the municipality'.

Whereas most other morphological phenomena only rarely found expression in such quotations, and their documentation stems primarily from explicit comments in the normative literature, the replacement of the imperative by future tense forms is common in such texts. Their implicit testimony attests not only to the dissemination of these forms in speech, but also to their perception as acceptable enough to be granted written representation.

Another phenomenon related to the imperative is the emergence of new imperative forms in colloquial speech. The first sign for the presence of such forms in the spoken language seems to have been documented as early as 1911: the Language Committee's list of common errors includes the expression 'azvi 'oti 'leave me alone', rather than the grammatical 'izvi. Yet, the context of the correction is lexical rather than morphological, as the suggested normative

102. אבינרי, 'Darkhei halashon ha'ivrit', p. 300; Zvi Har Zahav, Leshon dorenu (Tel Aviv: Dfus hapo'el ha'azir, 1930), p. 9.
103. אבינרי, 'Darkhei halashon ha'ivrit', p. 300; Zvi Har Zahav, Leshon dorenu (Tel Aviv: Dfus hapo'el ha'azir, 1930), p. 9.
104. אבינרי, 'Darkhei halashon ha'ivrit', p. 300; Zvi Har Zahav, Leshon dorenu (Tel Aviv: Dfus hapo'el ha'azir, 1930), p. 9.
105. מאיציל, Hayeled be're'ez yisra'el (Tel Aviv: Self publication, 1935), p. 45.
106. מאיציל, Hayeled be're'ez yisra'el, p. 154
alternative provided in the list is ḥaniḥini.\textsuperscript{110} Unambiguous examples of new imperative forms appear in sources from the Mandate period, for instance kansi ‘get in’ (instead of hikansi),\textsuperscript{111} shmeru ‘guard’ (instead of shimru)\textsuperscript{112} or stakli ‘take a look’ (instead of histakli).\textsuperscript{113}

An example of a new formation mechanism in the realm of nominal morphology is the diminutive suffix -on, whose feminine form [-ōnet] was considered colloquial.\textsuperscript{114} Explicit reference to the suffix is provided in a 1930s list of colloquial usages (for example yaldonet, from yalda ‘girl’; tipshonet, from tipsha ‘silly’).\textsuperscript{115} Several occurrences of the form may be found in textual sources of the period (for example tipshonet or kirkasonet, from kirkas ‘circus’).\textsuperscript{116} The use of foreign suffixes to create colloquial lexical items is documented as well, for example kolboynik ‘bowl for leftovers’ (from the Hebrew kol bo ‘everything in it’ + the suffix -nik).\textsuperscript{117}

Innovations, as compared to the classical layers of Hebrew, may also be observed in the transition of specific nouns to new nominal patterns. Many of the forms commented on in pre-state period sources are also common nowadays, for example ḥaba‘i ‘painter’ (instead of ḥaba‘), maspera ‘barber shop’ (instead of mizpara), mizron ‘mattress’ (instead of mizran),\textsuperscript{118} makhshefa ‘witch’ (instead of mekhashefa).\textsuperscript{119} Certain changes of this sort reflect morphophonemic rather than morphological change, for example ofnaim ‘bike’ (instead of ofanayim).\textsuperscript{120} Changes in function words are likewise evident, for example zoti ‘that one [f.]’ (instead of zot),\textsuperscript{121} zu ‘this one’ (instead of zo).\textsuperscript{122} Changes in the gender of certain nouns may also be mentioned. Such a change occasionally

\textsuperscript{110} דניאל דלנסקי, ‘ע ב.placeholder’ , p. 3.
\textsuperscript{111} י׳ מרן, ‘ｚאppelin’ , p. 3.
\textsuperscript{112} י׳ מירקין, ‘ה긴ה, תראה, לה אומר את עמך, ה’ (1947), reprinted (with corrections) in ‘יוניקמ בר בלי כפורה, לסב-song כפורה וידעכת, ed. מושל בר-אשר, יוחנן ברגר ואחרים (ירושלים: ההפקה הלשונית, 2004), p. 182.
\textsuperscript{113} אליעזר בר וגדיש, ‘אין כל אנדמי’ , p. 115.
\textsuperscript{114} מיכאל בריקל, ‘Contained in, ofal miki mahu’, p. 115.
\textsuperscript{115} דניאל פרסקי, ‘הגיון המשכון, לימוד השפה’, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{116} ברק וגדיש, ‘alilot miki mahu’, pp. 72, 10 (respectively).
\textsuperscript{117} ברק וגדיש, ‘שפתהicles’ , p. 145.
\textsuperscript{118} ברק וגדיש, ‘אנו, עבורה ומדונה, Safa qama’, pp. 75–6, 96, 36 (respectively).
\textsuperscript{119} מיכאל בריקל, ‘אנו, עבורה’, p. 95.
\textsuperscript{120} מיכאל בריקל, ‘אנו, עבורה ‘bike’ – pe in a shewa instead of ofanayim ‘bike’ – pe in a patah followed by a geminated nun’, Barak and Gadish, Safa qama, p. 95.
\textsuperscript{121} מיכאל בריקל, ‘contained in, ofal miki mahu’, p. 44; מיכאל בריקל, ‘Contained in, ofal miki mahu’, p. 122.
\textsuperscript{122} ברק וגדיש, ‘Shasitxi halashon’, p. 95.
applies to a single word (for example the treatment of ‘et ‘pen’ as feminine), but may also affect an entire category. The most prominent example is the tendency to treat dual forms as feminine (for example garbayim ‘socks’ or mikhnasayim ‘trousers’).

Changes in the form of inherited morphological categories due to analogy are a particularly frequent phenomenon documented in pre-state period sources. The Language Committee’s list from 1911 already includes several such usages that still characterize spoken Hebrew today, namely yoshenet, yoshnim [she/they] sleep’ (instead of yeshena, yeshenim), yashan ‘he slept’ (instead of yashen), mavi ‘brings’ (instead of mevi), heder ha’okhel ‘dining room’ (instead of hadar ha’okhel), ‘ezelhem (3rd person plural of the preposition ‘ezel, instead of ‘ezlam), ‘otkhem (2nd person plural of the preposition ‘et, instead of ‘etkhem).

Later sources add further cases of analogy, for example hekif ‘surrounded’ (rather then hikif),126 hevrot (pl. of hevra ‘company’, rather than havarot).127

The features covered in this section include only a selection of the entire range of morphological phenomena documented in pre-state period sources. The evidence encompasses both general morphological processes and specific words and forms associated with spoken usage, separating it from written and normative standards alike. The rich array of features points to a fundamental continuity between early Hebrew speech habits and contemporary practice. Although change processes have constantly affected the morphological system – and continue to reshape it nowadays as well – the range of phenomena included in the documentation indicates that many structural features that came to be identified with spoken Hebrew originate in the speech habits of the early generations of speakers.

123. עט טובה, ‘al tomar – ‘emor (1911), p. 4; מַבִ יא, p. 2; חֵ דֶ ר האֹכל, p. 4; אֶצְלֵהֶם, p. 5; אוֹתְכֶם, p. 7.
124. מִנֶ י זכ ר הם [...] מִרְכָ ב, p. 2; [already been decided that the nouns mishkafayim “spectacles”, mikhnasayim “trousers”, magafayim “boots”, garbayim “socks” … are masculine], Barak and Gadish, Safa qama, p. 134.
125. יָשַ ן, ‘al tomar – ‘emor (1911), p. 1; מַבִ יא, p. 2; חֵ דֶ ר האֹכל, p. 4; אֶצְלֵהֶם, p. 5; אוֹתְכֶם, p. 7.
127. A. Avenery, ‘Darkhei halashon ha’ivrit’, p. 296.
**Syntactic features**

The evidence in the field of syntax is compatible with the findings regarding phonology and morphology. Many of the features documented in pre-state period sources conform to present-day speech habits, and just as in the other domains, the data is not confined to a single category. Rather, various types of phenomena are represented in the evidence, embracing the syntax of nouns, verbs, sentences and even discourse phenomena.

The nominal construction most often referred to is the construct state construction. Several aspects of its usage patterns are indicated in pre-state period sources. The spoken language was marked from an early stage by a clear preference for the analytic construction (created by *shel*) over the bound construct state construction. The latter is used mainly in lexicalized expressions, while in other cases:

A natural tendency to give up the construct state construction may be felt. Even in places where the first noun in the construction (*nismakh*) does not change its original form, namely in cases that do not involve any grammatical difficulty, Eretz Israeli speech prefers to use *shel*: *hamesharet shel haʿadon ploni* (*The servant of Mr so-and-so*), this form seems to be more common and usual than its counterpart *mesharet haʿadon ploni* (*Mr so-and-so’s servant*), and not only among children, but also on the tongue of those well versed in our ancient literature, including teachers.128

The decreased distribution of construct state constructions was also affected by their frequent substitution with noun+adjective constructions, for example *hamemshala haʿerez yisreʾelit* ‘Palestinian government’ (instead of *memshelet ʿerez yisraʾel*), *homez shulhan* ‘table vinegar’ (instead of *homez shulan*).129 It should be noted that while the majority of the specific combinations mentioned in pre-state period sources are no longer customary today, the phenomenon itself is manifest in the contemporary language in a variety of other lexical items.130

When construct state constructions were included in spoken utterances, two types of phenomena distinguished their use. One concerns the place of

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128. מוצאות מנהה מת𝒞 CSV שלחזרה על המופעים. אפריל, מבוקמה שֶנֶּסְמַךְ, אנגלית משנת א-טורה. 
129. הָמֶּשׂラָה של מַכְּסִית רַבִּיה, שֶלֶּה מַכְּסִית, פָּרְסָה, גַּלְגַּלְלָה, יְדַסַּה, לַאֲזִי, פָּרְסָה. 
the definite article ha-: in the spoken language it often appears before the first noun in the construction (for example habet sefer ‘the school’) rather than between the two nouns as is required by the rules of grammar (that is, bet hasefer). In addition, the form of the first noun in the construction (nisamkh) often deviates from the grammatical norms, for example marak (instead of merak) yerakot ‘vegetable soup’, toshvei (rather than toshavei) ha-ir ‘the town residents’. Both phenomena are common in contemporary speech as well.

Examples of other features of noun phrases include deviations from the rules of grammatical agreement (primarily the confusion already mentioned between feminine and masculine forms in the use of the numerals), or the place of modifiers. Whereas in classical Hebrew modifiers systematically follow the adjective, in the spoken language they often precede it, for example knas yoter gadol ‘a bigger fine’, yoter tov ‘better’, me’od nikhabd ‘greatly respected’. Change of word order as compared to the classical language is reflected also in cases such as kaze nes katan ‘such a small miracle’ or ka’ele tmunot ‘such pictures’.

In the verbal phrase category, the most widely documented phenomenon is the negation of present participle forms by lo rather than by ’en. ‘Despite the intense struggle against the usage ’ani lo yodea‘ “I don’t know”, this “erroneous” usage is gradually taking root in living speech’, declares Yosef Klausner in a 1925 publication. From the 1920s on this usage is repeatedly included in lists of common errors, such as the correction of ’ani lo roze ‘I don’t want’ to ’eneni roze in an undated 1920s list of corrections published by the Battalion of the Defenders of the Hebrew Language (Gdud Megine Hasafa). Likewise, negation by lo often appears in texts providing presumed quotations of actual speech events, for example ’ani lo ra’az lihyot soferet ‘I don’t want to be a writer’, recorded from a nine-year-old girl from Tel Aviv.

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131. ’al tomar kakh’ (1908); Avinery, ‘Darkhei halashon ha’ivrit’, pp. 203, 204. For contemporary usage see e.g. Borochovsky Bar-Aba, ‘Describing spoken Hebrew’, pp. 239, 240.
133. a letter from 1935, Tel Aviv Historical Archive, file 4-2807.
134. Faktorit, Mipinati, p. 62.
136. Faktorit, Mipinati, p. 62.
in a 1935 publication,\(^{139}\) or *lo meʾanyen ʿoti lismoaʿ ʾotam* ‘It does not interest me to hear them’ quoted in a complaint letter from 1935.\(^{140}\) An extended discussion of the topic, published in the Language Committee’s official journal *Leshonenu*, likewise attests to the established status of the phenomenon in the spoken language.\(^{141}\)

Other widely demonstrated phenomena include, inter alia, changes in the use of prepositions as compared to classical usage (for example *menake im sabon* ‘cleans with soap’ instead of *be-*),\(^{142}\) the volitional use of *she-*future tense forms (for example *she-tihyi kvar bri* ‘a ‘hope you’ll get well’ (lit. ‘that you will already be healthy’)),\(^{143}\) or the tendency to add personal pronouns to finite verb forms (for example *hu natan* ‘he gave’).\(^{144}\) In the classical language, the pleonastic use of the pronoun indicated some kind of emphasis. In Modern Hebrew, by contrast, ‘the personal pronouns are always added in the past and in the future without any need: *ani halakhti* “I went”, *ani ʾavakesh* “I will request”, even when there is no emphasis’.\(^{145}\) In order to express emphasis, one has to use *ken* ‘yes, indeed’, for example *ani ken hayiti* ‘indeed I was’.\(^{146}\)

Many colloquial usages and deviations from the classical norms are evident in the area of function words: for example *lo elav yoter* [rather than ‘*od*] ‘I will go to him no more’,\(^{147}\) *ekh she-hu azav et ha-ḥede r...* ‘The minute he left the room’,\(^{148}\) *le-ʾefo atah holekh* ‘where do you go’,\(^{149}\) *be-ʾaf makom* ‘nowhere’,\(^{150}\) *nora yismah* ‘will be extremely happy’.\(^{151}\) Particular attention was paid to the abundant use of adverbs as compared to previous linguistic layers.\(^{152}\) The employment of new lexical items and the formation of new

\(^{139}\) מאיציל, *חיよלו רֵאָז יְשָרָה* (א.י.ג), תל אביב, היסטוריית תל אביב, יחידה 4-4300.

\(^{140}\) ‘Hamuẓdak hashimush be“lo” lishlilat hahove’ (a discussion among various participants), *Leshonenu* 10 (1939), pp. 197–213.

\(^{141}\) אבנרי, ‘darkhei halashon haʿivrit’, pp. 201, 207.

mechanisms to fill the need for adverbs was often discussed (for example 'אני יודע נ נהדר', Faktorit, Mipinati, p. 123, 153 'אני יודעشت Conditioningヴィーノンすみだれ', for example 'אני יודעشت Conditioningヴィーノンすみだれ', Faktorit, Mipinati, p. 123).

Changes in sentence structure are occasionally referred to as well. The growing distribution of dative constructions, attributed to Slavic influence on Modern Hebrew, is indicated in utterances such as 'כואב לי הראש', 158 'רומא 초 לכלева קרן', Klausner, Dikduk kazur, p. 145, 155 'בעCategoryIdז מדיאה', Barak and Gadish, Safa kama, p. 58, 156 'אני אשבור לך את הראש', letter from 1934, Tel Aviv Historical Archive, file 4-311.

Changes in the structure of existential and possessive constructions included, as already mentioned, the tendency to add the direct object marker 'in the case of definite nouns (for example 'באמות', Faktorit, Mipinati, p. 41. For a detailed discussion see Yael Reshef, 'The construction yesh lo 'et'.

In addition to structural changes, production phenomena are occasionally evidenced as well. They occur most frequently in the case of word order, for example '嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞嗞凘凘凘 numberWithIntגгруз

153. אני יודעشت Conditioningヴィーノンすみだれ, Faktorit, Mipinati, p. 123.
155. אניי יודא Conditioningヴィーノンすみだれ, Klausner, Dikduk kazur, p. 145.
156. אניי יודא Conditioningヴィーノンすみだれ, Barak and Gadish, Safa kama, p. 58.
158. אניי יודא Conditioningヴィーノンすみだれ, 'al tomar – 'emor (1911), p. 5.
159. אניי יודא Conditioningヴィーノンすみだれ, Brenner, kol kitvei, p. 475.
160. אניי יודא Conditioningヴィーノンすみだれ, letter from 1934, Tel Aviv Historical Archive, file 4-311.
161. אניי יודא Conditioningヴィーノンすみだれ, Dolzansky, 'Shibushe halashon', p. 36.
162. אניי יודא Conditioningヴィーノンすみだれ, Shlonsky, 'Allot miki mahu', p. 117.
164. אניי יודא Conditioningヴィーノンすみだれ, Faktorit, Mipinati, p. 41. For a detailed discussion see Yael Reshef, 'The construction yesh lo ‘et’.
166. אניי יודא Conditioningヴィーノンすみだれ, Avinery, 'Darkhei halashon haʾivrit', p. 209.
167. אניי יודא Conditioningヴィーノンすみだれ, Faktorit, Mipinati, p. 41.
home'),\textsuperscript{168} *tov*, 'ani *'ashalem lakhem',\textsuperscript{169} *'az* 'ana li ‘so he replied to me’,\textsuperscript{170} *'ylla*, *mi li leha*’atik ‘come on, let me copy’.\textsuperscript{171}

Finally, it should be noted that although many of the presumed quotations incorporated in the textual material do not include any specific features identified with spoken usage, they often present examples of sentence flow and phraseology that are typically associated with it, for example *'ani* *'elekh *'el* *'adon dizingof ve-*'ar'e lekha ‘I will go to Mr. Dizengoff and will show you’,\textsuperscript{172} *'ani lo *'ahzir lekha, tir’e ‘I will not give [it] back to you, you’ll see’,\textsuperscript{173} *'im *'ata ta’se kunzim ka’ele, *'ata lo tiyhe ba-*'iriya harbe zman ‘if you’ll do such tricks, you won’t be in the municipality for long’,\textsuperscript{174} *'ani lo roze lada’at klum ‘I don’t want to know anything’.\textsuperscript{175} Such utterances show organizational patterns which differ fundamentally from those typical of the written language, and indicate considerable continuity between the early evidence of spoken Hebrew and the modes of expression customary in speech nowadays.

Summary

The possibility of reconstructing the early nature of spoken Modern Hebrew is by definition restricted by the scope and nature of the evidence. Nevertheless, a careful analysis of the available source material indicates considerable continuity between pre-state period spoken usage and contemporary speech habits. The data clearly shows that many familiar colloquial characteristics were created at a relatively early stage in the consolidation of spoken Hebrew. In all linguistic domains, structural features that separate spoken Hebrew from both the classical language and normative grammar are well documented throughout the early phases in the formation of the speech community, prior to the inception of the systematic linguistic study of Modern Hebrew in the 1950s. While features not discussed in the present article separate early spoken

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{168} Ani *'ashalem lakhem*, letter from 1926, Tel Aviv Historical Archive, file 4-916.
  \item \textsuperscript{169} *'az* ‘ana li ‘so he replied to me’, undated letter from the early 1920s, Tel Aviv Historical Archive, file 1-154.
  \item \textsuperscript{170} Letter from 1929, Tel Aviv Historical Archive, file 4-4300.
  \item \textsuperscript{171} *'ylla*, *yi'el*; *'adon dizingof ve-*'ar'e lekha ‘I will go to Mr. Dizengoff and will show you’, Bulletin of Second Grade Pupils, Hagimnasya ha'ivrit birushalayim, 27 Tevet Tarzah (1938).
  \item \textsuperscript{172} *'az* ‘ana li ‘so he replied to me’, letter from 1922, Tel Aviv Historical Archive, file 2-62b.
  \item \textsuperscript{173} *'adon dizingof ve-*'ar'e lekha ‘I will go to Mr. Dizengoff and will show you’, letter from 1923, Tel Aviv Historical Archive, file 3-170a.
  \item \textsuperscript{174} *'ani lo roze lada’at klum ‘I don’t want to know anything’, letter from 1926, Tel Aviv Historical Archive, file 4-4300.
  \item \textsuperscript{175} *'ani lo roze lada’at klum ‘I don’t want to know anything’, letter from 1931, Tel Aviv Historical Archive, file 4-4300.
\end{itemize}
Hebrew from contemporary speech habits, in a great number of features there is a clear continuity between these two linguistic phases.

Based on these findings, there are solid grounds for claiming that as soon as Hebrew first started to be significantly used as a spoken language, it developed characteristics of its own, which separated it from classical Hebrew, normative Hebrew or written Hebrew. The nucleus of present-day usage seems to have been created simultaneously with the formation of the speech community, and many features identified with spoken usage have been a fundamental component of the linguistic system from inception. Change processes which followed suit reworked certain details of this new structure, but did not fundamentally restructure it. This well-documented claim may significantly contribute to the on-going debate about the essence of the linguistic processes which resulted in the formation of contemporary Hebrew.\textsuperscript{176}

\textsuperscript{176} See note 7 above.