A note from the editors

Hebrew has been extensively studied, as evident by the various grammar books, numerous dissertations and a great many journal articles. Quite a few of these studies have also contributed to cross-linguistic morphophonological issues, such as reduplication, acronyms, co-occurrence restrictions, non-linear exponence and abstractness in morphological representation. But to date, there is no authoritative, encompassing volume on the phonology of the Modern Hebrew.

Such a volume is necessary not only for documentation purposes, but also to clarify controversial issues regarding the nature of the language. Such controversies arise primarily due to the confusion between the two types of “Hebrews” that are prominent in the morphophonological literature: Biblical/Masoretic Hebrew (BH) and Modern Hebrew (MH).

BH is the language of the Hebrew Bible, and as such, it does not provide the researcher with the commodities of a living language. There are no native speakers and the corpus is limited, thus predictions cannot be checked beyond what is available in the biblical script. MH is the opposite of BH in this respect. It is currently spoken in Israel as a native language by an ever-growing number of speakers.

Because MH and BH share much of the vocabulary, and since most of the morphology of MH originates in BH, it is common to find in the phonological literature statements about “Hebrew” that are not at all true of MH. For instance, one can read that /b/ in “Hebrew” is spirantized into [v], or that the epenthetic vowel of “Hebrew” is [e] only in closed, final syllables. Such statements are not only factually false for MH, they are also misleading by treating BH-based normative rules as a possible natural phonological system.

Another common confusion stems from the reliance on orthography. MH inherited the orthography of BH, but not the pronunciation of that orthography. For instance, guttural and emphatic sounds, represented by specific letters in the orthography, and pronounced in BH, are mostly absent from the prominent variety of MH pronunciation. Yet nowadays, there are several scholars of MH, mostly non-phonologists, who transliterate the orthography rather than transcribe the pronunciation. Thus, when consulting the literature on MH syntax, for example, one might get an inaccurate impression of MH phonology.

This volume is intended to resolve such controversies with respect to MH phonology. It includes detailed descriptions of the main areas of interest of MH phonology, the only Hebrew that allows consulting native speakers while studying its phonological system. In this volume, interested scholars will find empirically-based, precise, well-informed and comprehensive descriptions of the basic domains of MH phonology, alongside excursions into specific areas of interest.

The first four papers concern the phonetics and phonotactics of MH. In the first paper, Asherov and Cohen provide an authentic and reliable phonetic description of MH vowels and consonants using both acoustic and articulatory (ultrasound imaging) methodologies. The following three papers target specific issues: Cohen, Laks, and Savu present an acoustic phonetic study of the MH rhotic, investigating the effects of prosodic position and gender on rhotic production; Mizrachi argues, on the basis of an experimental study, that MH voicing assimilation is actually *devoicing* assimilation; and Yeverechyahu addresses the role of similarity in MH co-occurrence restrictions in C_1 and C_2 .

The following two papers deal with two aspects of prosody: Asherov and Bat-El lay out quantitative and qualitative details on MH syllable structure, with a special emphasis on word initial complex onsets; and Bat-El, Cohen, and Silber-Varod describe the distribution of MH stress and its phonetic manifestation.

The following three papers deal with the interactions between morphology and phonology. They aim to disentangle morphologically-conditioned phenomena from phonological processes that are general in the language, but are only apparent when morphologically complex words are factored in. In the first of these papers, Faust provides a general overview of vowel alternations in MH. The other two papers target more specific domains: Albert reviews the issue of stop-fricative alternations ("spirantization"), which are inseparable from morphological considerations in MH; and Faust describes effects related to orthographic gutturals, which are not phonetically realized as such, but still give rise to regularities that have arguably been phonologized.

The last three papers address more general issues in MH phonology. Cohen provides an overview of the phonology of MH loanwords, with reference to the core-periphery contrast; Bolozky goes beyond the word in his corpus-based study of connected speech; and Gafter discusses socially-conditioned phonetic variation in MH.

Taken together, the papers in this volume provide a much needed state-of-the-art for all things phonological in Modern Hebrew.

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