

English Abstracts

Classical Hebrew

Yitzhak Avishur

The Meaning of עָשׂוּ in Obadiah Verse 6 and the Link Between the Prophecy on Edom in Obadiah and in Jeremiah

The difficulties noted by commentators in the verse איך נחפשו עשו נבעו (verse 6) concern grammar, style and subject matter. The grammatical problem is the disagreement between the singular (עשו) and plural (נחפשו), while the stylistic problem, which in fact is one of subject matter, is the parallel between נחפשו and נבעו, which at first sight contains no matching synonymy and is encountered nowhere else in the Bible. The commentators indicate a further difficulty, which is not contingent on verse 6 in its present place and version. Since they did not consider the beginning of verse 7, "they have brought thee even to the border," to suit that verse and indeed flawed its structure and meaning, they assigned it to the end of verse 6 and created a new verse: "How are the things of Esau searched out/How are his hidden things sought up/ Even to the border they have brought thee." Scholars have sought to solve these problems in various ways. In one view, the name עשו should not be taken as a personal noun; at most, this name is intimated by virtue of the common noun rather than the reverse. That is, we suggest that the noun here is עש inflected in the third person plural possessive. We translate עש as "nest," a meaning that is found in the Bible and in Akkadian, and is common in Arabic. The word should be pointed, עשו in the sense of "his nests." The grounds for this interpretation are the following.

1. This meaning suits the text and context of verse 6.
2. This meaning provides a logical conceptual continuity to the verse formed by transferring the phrase "they have brought you even to the border" at the beginning of verse 7 back to the end of verse 6.

3. This meaning conforms with the entire literary unit (vv 1-7) in terms of subject matter.
4. The word עש in the sense of "nest" is found in the Bible, in Akkadian and Arabic.
5. In prophecies against gentile nations the use of rare words similar to the language of the nation concerned is a common phenomenon.
6. The meaning of the word עשו in Obadiah is different from that in Jeremiah (49:8,10).

Zvi Betzer

Irregular Verb Phrases in the Hebrew of the Responsa and Their Effect

The Hebrew of the Responsa can be divided into a number of groups. In the field of morphology, the language can be divided into two groups - Ashkenazi and non-Ashkenazi - because the main reason for their differences lies in the various traditions they have imbibed: Oral Law for the Ashkenazim and the Bible for the non-Ashkenazim. In contrast, in the sphere of syntax and lexicography, the main reason for the differences is to be assigned to the diverse mother tongues. Hence, the language of Responsa can be divided differently in this area from the above division. Here the division is primarily based upon the authors' mother tongues: Yiddish, Ladino and Arabic.

In this article a number of verb phrases are presented where the differences in their use derive from the influence of the mother tongue, and in the case of a number of phrases the twofold division is of two groups: Yiddish and Ladino speakers, on the one hand, and Arabic speakers, on the other.

The phrases discussed here are: הוציא ל, which serves mainly Ladino, and to a small degree, Yiddish speakers; הוכיר ל, found primarily in the works of Ladino speakers; ראה ל, found in all Responsa treatises and originating by a fronting transformation; שאל ל, which is an extended use of a phrase found in Rabbinic literature and existing in the whole corpus

of Responsa; \emptyset /אח/זלזל, used primarily by Ladino or Yiddish speakers; directional verbs בא/הלך/נסע/שלה and, at times other verbs, e.g. מכר/קנה/עמר, with the preposition על, found in the books of Yiddish speakers; המתין על, found mainly in the works of Yiddish speakers and less frequently in authors of other languages.

Moshe Bar-Asher

The Orthography and Vocalization in Biblical Verses in the Manuscripts of *Leshon Limmudim*

The article examines the orthography in Hebrew words from Biblical verses in sixteen manuscripts of *Leshon Limmudim*, which was composed in Meknes (Morocco) by Rabbi Raphael Berdugo about two hundred years ago. The study also examines the infrequent vocalization found in some of the manuscripts. Our investigation reveals many deviations from the rules of orthography and vocalization of the Masoretic text. One is able to learn much from these deviations about local pronunciation.

The following topics are dealt with in detail:

- 1) the *scriptio plena* used in most manuscripts as against two manuscripts that adhere to the Masoretic orthography (MSS, פ, ב);
- 2) the *scriptio defectiva* that manifests itself mainly in the absence of *yod*, a phenomenon that would seem to have its source in the smallness of the letter in the cursive script employed in the Maghreb - as a result of its size it was frequently joined to neighboring letters;
- 3) the fluctuation in use of *matres lectionis*;
- 4) the infrequent vocalization, which was added primarily to help in understanding readings made difficult by defective spelling. The fluctuations in the vowel signs *qames/pataḥ*, *hiriq/ṣere* and *qibbuṣ/ḥolam* indicate the realization of only one vowel underlying each pair. The simpler of two signs is preferred, e.g., *ḥolam* (with one dot) is preferred as a graphic sign to *qibbuṣ* (with three dots).

The alternation of consonants found in the manuscripts is also discussed. Generally one finds alternation between similarly pronounced

consonants in the linguistic tradition of Moroccan Jews, such as alternation of sibilants, e.g., מְשֹׁה instead of מְסֹהָ (MS ה, Ex.34, 33), וִיפְסֵל instead of וִיפְצֵל (MS ח, Gen. 30, 37), פִּשְׁע instead of פִּצְע (MS ג, Ex.21, 25). One also finds alternations that stem from Arabic, e.g., זֹעֲפִים (Gen 40:6) in the manuscript turned up as זֹעֲפִין-דְּבֹאחִין (the *nun* of the Arabic דְּבֹאחִין was caused by attraction to the Hebrew word). There are also errors and pseudo-alternations in the fluctuation of consonants.

In sum, interesting phenomena show up in the process of copying Biblical verses. Both learned and middle class copyists impose on the Biblical text much of their pronunciation.

Eljakim Wajsberg

Classification of Talmudic Manuscripts by Linguistic Means

Linguistic differences between Talmudic manuscripts may originate in idiosyncrasies of scribes or have their Sitz-Im-Leben in the Babylonian Talmudic centers. I ignore orthographical differences, attributing them to scribes, and restrict myself to drawing conclusions from phonological evidence, which is often covert. Comparing several manuscripts we may discern two distinct sets: one group of manuscripts is characterized by the trio: אִי =if, אִלָּא, אִשְׁמָא; the other by the trio: אוּ =if, אוּלָּא, אִשְׁמָא.

I found a strong correlation between the first group and the prefix -ל in the imperfect and between the second group and the prefix -נ. The Massora to Targum Onkelos attributes the prefix -ל in the first person plural to the school of Sura, lending support to the conjecture that both above-mentioned groups represent geographical isoglosses and not sociolects (diglossia).

A by-product of the classification process is the observation that the prefix -ל for the first person plural imperfect - as a variant of the prefix -נ - is quite common in Talmudic manuscripts. This leads me to propose that the prefixes נ, ל for the third person derive from the prefixes נ, ל for the first person plural. The linkage is supported by the relative frequency

of the prefix -ל in the first person plural and third person in Babylonian Aramaic, Syriac and Mandaic.

Aharon Maman

Medieval Grammatical Thought: Karaites vs. Rabbanites

This article deals with three phenomena concerning Karaite theory of verb:

1. Grammarians before Hayyuj recognized uniliteral and biliteral roots in the Hebrew verb, but they hesitated as to whether the additional letters, such as the ה in ינרפה, the י in ידע or the ה in ראה, were "servants" or not. In fact, they were content to define them indirectly: "It is not a radical." The anonymous Karaite author of *Meor Ṣayin* proposed a solution that called this kind of letter "neṣbad" (root complementary).

2. Whereas the Rabbanites adopted the Baṣra conception that the infinitive form is the basis of the inflection system of the verb, the Karaites, without giving any reasons, assumed the imperative form to be the basic form. However, from Abu-l-Faraj Harun's "Mushtamil", one can reconstruct the reasons: in many cases the infinitival form bears the meaning of the imperative; the imperative form is close to the meaning of the infinitive; the imperative has a single form as against the various variants of the infinitive; the infinitive is the basis for the construction of the participle (e.g., me + nasse) and the "ism al-fīl" (e.g., ma + ṣase, mi + shkav).

3. The early Karaites did not recognize the *Binyanim*, but rather an inferior system of verbal inflection that classified verbs according to *Simanim* (meaning "mnemonic terms"). For instance, verbs whose base forms are the *sapper-sipper* pattern are classified under *Siman Ganni*, which was chosen to represent this morphological category only because the initial syllables of the given forms are pointed alike (*Ga* stands for *Sa* and *Ni* stands for *Si*). Similarly *Shira* is the morphological category of *sim-sam* and the like. Abu-l-Faraj listed seven *Simanim* (among them *Perat*, *Shuṣal*, *Konan*, *Shela*) according to the initial vowels and three

according to the final vowels. *Meor Ṣayin* enhanced the system and listed twelve *Simanim* according to the initial vowels and five according to the final vowels; the author of this work subdivided the *Simanim* even further.

4. According to the quotation from Hayyuj, it appears that Abu-l-Faraj knew this theory, but did not adopt it, either because he did not successfully internalize it or because he was unwilling to part with the traditional Karaite concept. In Byzantium, Yehuda Hadassi's *Eshkol Hakkofer* (1148) is already compatible with the grammatical theory of Hayyuj, Ibn Janah, and Ibn Ezra. The same is true for Aharon B. Elia's commentary to the Tora (Nikodemia 1362).

Shlomo Naeh

Šebet, Šibta, Sibtana

The article deals with two puzzling texts - one Biblical (II Sam 23:7) and one Rabbinic (Ber. Rab. 29:2) - both of which include the word **bšbt** which, in the given contexts, cannot be explained according to the regular meanings of the root **šbt**.

A new meaning is suggested here, which is discussed from a philological point of view, and takes into consideration the real life phenomena reflected in the special use of the word.

Steven E. Fassberg

The Orthography of the Relative Pronoun **שה in the Second Temple Period**

Almost half a century ago J. N. Epstein collected seven examples from Tannaitic literature in which the relative pronoun was spelled **שה**. Since then additional examples have been identified in MS Kaufmann and other manuscripts of Rabbinic Hebrew, in Late Biblical Hebrew, and in

epigraphic material from the Second Temple period. Epstein, followed by J. Naveh and others, argued that the *hë* serves as a *mater lectionis* for medial ε . A. Wasserstein proposes that this scribal practice is similar to the use of *hë* for medial ε in Greek words in Syriac and in Jewish Aramaic.

The fact that *hë* for ε is attested in Hebrew only after the relative pronoun **-ש** suggests that *hë* does not serve as a *mater lectionis* for medial ε , but rather is related to the realization of the relative pronoun: $\check{\varepsilon}CC-$.

Gemination following a proclitic particle is a salient feature of Hebrew, found not only with the relative pronoun (שקטל), but also with the waw conversive *waCC-* (ויקטל), the definite article *haCC-* (השרדה), the demonstrative *zeCC-* (זה-מזבח), the interrogative *maCC-*, (מה-זה), and the *daghesh conjunctivum* (עשה פרי, לכה-נא). It is noteworthy that *hë* appears in the orthography preceding gemination in most of these categories. It would appear that scribes associated the gemination following a proclitic particle with the written *hë* that preceded the gemination; by analogy with forms like **מה-זה, לכה-נא** and **זה-מזבח, מה-זה, עשה פרי**, they inserted *hë* after the relative pronoun, producing the orthography **שה-**.

2. The tendency of translators to focus on the linguistic material of the text and to seek formal equivalence.

The translational difficulties specific to the Hebrew language and culture are the lack of literary tradition of dialogue formation based on authentic speech, an unawareness of language's pragmatic function and an essentially normative approach to language.

Rivka Halevy

The Structure of Lexical Meaning and its Contextual Modulation

Formal semantics, by treating sentence meaning as a compositional function of its lexical parts as ordered by syntax (Frege's compositional principle), tends to ignore that overall meaning of a sentence is greater than the sum of its lexical parts. The aim of this paper is to show that meaning is not only a function of the combination of lexical items, but is also a function of the environmental relations between words and their surroundings. This paper examines word meaning through its relations with actual linguistic contexts and ignores extra-linguistic situational factors.

The paper assumes a difference between inherent lexical meaning which is semantic and additional or conceptual meaning which is pragmatic. It is argued that lexical meaning (namely, a word's semantics) is highly abstract and thus highly formal and remote from all ambient contingencies. This semantic/pragmatic distinction is opposed to the view of some current formal linguists (e.g., R. Jackendoff). The author of this paper attempts to show that our notions of word meaning have been formed by an implicit idealization in which language stands independent of extralinguistic contexts; as a result, factors supposedly outside the isolated domain of the lexeme are incorrectly included in it. This SEMANTIC OVERLOADING is one common shortcoming of many dictionaries.

In addition, the paper examines the axiomatic lexical shape of core and peripheral meaning. It is argued that the boundary between these two

aspects of lexical shape is not the same for all words. The author argues that, as in the case of biological cells, there are two kinds of words: words with "permeable membrane," whose meaning is undetermined, and words with "impermeable membrane," whose meaning is pre-established and fully determined. Contextual modulation of lexical meaning is active mainly with words having "permeable membrane." The paper describes two directions of contextual modulation in Modern Hebrew - one which leads to overspecification of lexical meaning by "impregnating" the word which functions as the semantic head of the collocation (e.g., כלכל את מעשיו/צעדיו, where the verb is impregnated with the features of the adverbs (בתבונה/ בזהירות/ בקפידה), and the other, which leads to contextual depletion or near-emptiness of the core meaning of the lexical item (e.g., בא in lexical expressions like בא בדברים עם, בא בסוד העניינים, בא בדרישות).

Tamar Sovran

The Semantics of 'Negativity'

Is there a semantic field of negativity?

The answer to this question stems from a combination of an empirical test and a semantic content analysis: a group of 30 Hebrew speakers was asked to divide a set of 80 Hebrew words chosen randomly from the dictionary into a three column table with the following three signs: +, -, and ?. Although no further word of explanation was added, the informants found no difficulty in fulfilling the task. This fact shows that a. the arithmetic signs of 'plus' and 'minus' are meaningful; b. part of the lexicon lends itself to a dichotomous division with the symbolic aid of these two signs. A further semantic analysis of the common answers in the minus column yielded four semantic sub-domains: 1. The psycho-physical sub-domain, which includes words such as 'pain', 'cry', 'discomfort', 'fear', etc. 2. The inter-personal domain, with words like 'kill', 'dominate', 'robbery', 'oppression', and the like. 3. The third sub-domain included words such as 'sin', 'hell', 'devil', 'impure', 'scapegoat', etc. It points at the culture dependant nature of part of the lexicon, the way in which a culture or a cult molds the behavior of their members and prohibit them

from doing what is considered wrongful or evil. 4. The remaining words like 'lack', 'less', 'absent', 'no', 'denial', 'deficient', 'redundant', and others form no distinguished semantic group, however, they all bear a certain opposition to various aspects of identity, consistency, norm and function.

The result of this query into the nature of the semantic nature of negativity shows that there is no simple, homogeneous semantic field of negation or negativity with clear observable semantic ties to a fixed conceptual center, but rather a meaning component NEG that cuts across various content domains and semantic fields portraying the range of human interests and human activity. The study of the nature of this super-organizing element offers a glimpse into some hidden semantic mechanisms and into the nature of conceptual stratification. It shows that beside the function of language as a mirror of the psycho-physical feelings of rejection (and attraction), language reflects human inter-activity and the culture dependant aspects of thought and behavior. Under these surface levels exists a certain hidden positive inclination towards 'positivity', namely, identity, stability, consistency, distinctiveness and function, probably as means of survival.

An innocent semantic question about the existence or absence of a certain semantic field led to a better understanding of the ways human experience is coded in language. Studying other abstract concepts promises to reveal more.

Brakha Fishler and Iris Parush

Between מקרא שכתוב and מקרא שנאמר in the Writings of Mendele Mokher Seforim

This article traces the occurrence of two expressions, מקרא שכתוב and מקרא שנאמר, in the publicistic scientific writings and literary works of Mendele Mokher Seforim. An analysis of the contexts in which this expressions are woven - expressions which suggest an affinity with

Biblical Hebrew (לשון תורה) and Rabbinic Hebrew (לשון חכמים) - exposes a key principle in both Mendele's concept of language and in his linguistic usage. The relations that Mendele builds between מקרא and שכתוב, and especially the way of parodying both of them, create a paradigm of the manner in which Mendele detached both languages from the images of their respective literary corpora. This rupture, which makes for a deconstruction of the dichotomy between Biblical Hebrew and Rabbinic Hebrew, endows each of them with the status of linguistic raw material, and creates one of the most important unifying elements in Mendele's mixed language - the language canonized by Bialik as the נוסח language.

