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THE CONCEPT OF "DEAD LANGUAGE" AS EXEMPLIFIED BY HEBREW[1]

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This paper examines the problematic concept of *dead language* as exemplified by the Hebrew language. The first section presents a brief history of the concept of *dead language* in European linguistic thought. Originating in Italy of the 15th century, the term became common in European linguistic writings during the 16th to 18th centuries as an epithet for Latin, Ancient Greek and Hebrew. During the Haskala (Jewish Enlightenment) in the 19th century it was adopted by Jewish intellectuals and was current in linguistic controversies throughout the 20th century. Sections 2 and 3 show the key role the label *dead* as applied to Hebrew played in wide-spread polemics on Jewish language choice in Russia during the first quarter of the 20th century (§ 2) and in the discourse about a Hebrew "revival" in Palestine at the same period (§ 3). Later works on the history of Hebrew published in the 19th and 20th centuries proposed novel conceptualizations but nevertheless followed the idea of the "deadness" of the Hebrew language of previous periods, discussed in § 4. Examples of Hebrew usage which contradict Hebrew's functioning exclusively as a language of religion and high-level writings are provided in § 5. The last section is a humble attempt to outline a possible direction for a description of Hebrew language history, avoiding the problematic term *dead language* and other related terms. Refs 69.

Keywords: biological metaphor in linguistics, linguistic terminology, dead language, Hebrew language "revival", Yiddish language, diglossia, dissolution of diglossia, history of linguistics.

АНАЛИЗ ПОНЯТИЯ «МЕРТВЫЙ ЯЗЫК» НА ПРИМЕРЕ ИВРИТА

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В статье на примере иврита анализируется проблематичный для лингвистики термин «мертвый язык». В первом разделе дана история данного понятия с момента его возникновения. Появившись в ходе полемики итальянских гуманистов в XV в., оно вошло в обиход европейских филологов XVI–XVIII вв. как эпитет для латыни, древнегреческого и иврита. В XVIII–XIV вв. понятие «мертвый язык» было акцептировано еврейскими просветителями. В первой четверти XX в. термин «мертвый» применительно к ивриту сыграл ключевую роль в полемике о выборе еврейского национального языка в России (§ 2) и в становлении идеологии «возрождения иврита» в Палестине (§ 3). Новейшие трактовки истории иврита XIX–XX вв. наследуют идее «мертвости» иврита предыдущих периодов (§ 4). Примеры, опровергающие представления, будто бы иврит использовался только в литературе высоких жанров и в религиозной сфере, приведены в § 5. В последнем параграфе предлагаются подходы к изучению истории иврита без использования проблематичного термина «мертвый язык». Библиогр. 69 назв.

Ключевые слова: мертвый язык, возрождение иврита, диглоссия, иврит.

Introduction: Biological Metaphor

In modern linguistics the concept of *dead language* is part of a conceptual metaphor which treats language as a living organism. This conceptual metaphor flourished in the linguistics of the middle of the 19th century following the trend of the natural sciences in general and Charles Darwin's writings in particular. August Schleicher was the first to apply Darwin's ideas to linguistics and propagated them in his "Darwinism Tested by the Science of Language," perceiving language as an "organism of Nature" [2].

In the 1880s the biological metaphor "became so powerful, that people were forgetting it was a metaphor at all" [3, p. 88]. Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralism was a way to escape this discourse, bringing linguistics closer to being a "science" with an exact terminology. Baudouin de Courtenay, who once had been a student of Schleicher's, criticized this biological approach for its lack of logic and coherence: "At one time language is compared with the individual, at another with a species; in one case one word is equal to an organism, another, to a language as a whole […] if a language is an organism, then to learn other languages means to burden oneself with other organisms…" Baudouin de Courtenay insists instead that "they are nations which occupy and destroy each other," not languages *per se* and this should be always kept in mind [4, p. 38].

In later elaboration of the conceptual metaphor in linguistics many new terms have evolved, some of them anthropomorphous: *mother tongue, mother-in-law language, language murder, killer language, healthy language, sick language, language suicide, sleeping language, dormant language, dead language* and others. Some are more ethnomorphic: *language wars*, *linguicide*, *linguicism*, etc. Language here appears as a target domain, while the source domain teeters between the collective and the personal, between the individual man/woman and the human group/nation. This personification of language, while productive for linguistic thought, carries with it the inherent danger of misleading or the tail wagging the dog.

According to Lakoff and Johnson we actually perceive and act according to metaphors [5], and even in science metaphors can dominate our thinking, the major danger being that this influence can occur unconsciously. Coming back to the concept of *dead language*, when we attempt to comprehend one conceptual domain (language in a specific sociolinguistic situation) in terms of another (the living/dead organism/person), on one hand we do clarify some features of the phenomenon being studied, but on the other we unconsciously and completely follow the logic of the second domain, which can obscure many other aspects and misrepresent the whole picture. The situation becomes even more complicated when words invested with the authority of scientific terminology are used in journalistic and political discourse. A similar situation occurred a century ago regarding the Hebrew language in Russia and in Palestine: in both cases the phrase in question was used as an argument, yet for opposite ends.

1. Origins of the Concept of Dead Language

The history of the concept of *dead language* goes back to Renaissance Italy. Glynn Faithfull was the first to describe it [6]. Thomas Bonfiglio [7] and Giorgio Agamben [8] who continue to be engaged in the field in recent years also find the origins of the idea of language life and death in the humanist polemics of Italy, emerging from the writings of *il Sommo Poeta* Dante Alighieri. In his treatise *De vulgari eloquentia*, an opposition between Latin and the vulgar language is based on the idea that Latin is a grammatical, eternal, incorruptible and artificial language (because it is acquired through studying), while the vernacular language is mutable, corruptible and natural; i.e., a language "which we learn without any formal instruction, by imitating our nurses" [9 *i*, p. 3]. The idea of language maternity and the metaphor of milk as a principal provider of native language acquisition, widely used in sociolinguistics, is rooted in this treatise by Dante as well. Dante characterizes Hebrew as a language of grace, "that which the lips of the first speaker moulded" [9, vi, p. 13], which the people of Israel spoke until the time of their diaspora [9, vii, p. 17].

Further polemic flared with regard to the question of which language to choose for literature, the Latin language or national Italian vernaculars, with heated discussion of the status of the latter. During the controversy, Dante's opposition of eternal/variable turned into the binary dead/living. Pietro Bembo, the Italian scholar and cardinal, is believed to be the first to use the term *dead language* as a definition of Latin in his "Prose della volgar lingua" of 1525 [10].

Italian humanist and writer Sperone Speroni was the first to treat the term *dead language* as an argument against the Latin language in his "Dialogo delle lingue." In this dialogue the vernacular is depicted as a pure young maiden who has not yet blossomed, while Latin is portrayed as a crone and even as a corpse. "If you are willing to keep it [the Latin language] in your mouth, dead as it is, then do it," one character of the dialogue says to another named Bembo, "but will you do us the courtesy of speaking it only among one another, and let us idiots speak our living vernacular, which God gave us" [11, p. 88]. Gradually *dead language* became a fixed phrase. By his time Benedetto Varchi was using the phrase as a term for language classification in the treatise "L'Ercolano" [12, pp. 213–214].

Greek literature entered Italian universities at the turn of 14th and 15th centuries, when Manuel Chrysoloras left Byzantium for the University of Florence [12, pp. 135, 147]. The subsequent fall of Constantinople in 1453 caused many Greek scholars to move to Western Europe.

Later in the 15th century Hebrew language studies first appeared at some Italian universities [14, p. 98]. Johann Reuchlin, a German humanist, absorbed grammatical and exegetical Jewish tradition, especially that of the medieval Hebrew grammarian David Kimhi, and propagated the Hebrew language among a European audience. His works on Hebrew grammar and vocabulary gained popularity and were used, for example, by Martin Luther while he worked on his translation of the Bible.

Thus Hebrew became the third language of European scholarship together with Latin and Greek. Colleges teaching this trio began to appear in Europe: the College of the Three Languages at the University of Alcalá, and, modeled after it, the Collegium Trilingue at Leuven, the Collège de France etc. [15, pp. 13–14]. The central role of those three languages

was due primarily to interest in the sacred and classical texts, which meant new texts in those languages were entirely outside of academic focus. In the case of Hebrew it was perceived as a language of the Old Testament (and sometimes of cabalistic writings), while texts of other periods (such as Medieval Hebrew poetry, Hassidic literature and secular novels) did not exist within the paradigm of European culture. This explains the ease with which the epithet of *dead language* was applied to Hebrew.

In the 16th and 17th centuries the concept of "langue morte" was acquired by French academia through the writings of authors such as Pierre de Ronsard, Charles Sorel and in the Port-Royal Grammar by Arnauld & Lancelot [16, p. 590; 17, p. 3; 18, p. 445]. Since that time the cliché of *dead language* rooted within linguistic science and survived into modern times, when during the Haskala — the Jewish Enlightenment movement of the 18th and 19th centuries — many general ideas of European culture were adopted by Jewish intellectuals, including the concept of language in general and the concept of *dead languages* in particular.

2. Hebrew/Yiddish Polemics

At the turn of the 20th century the major portion of the Jewish population lived in the Russian Empire. This was a period when Jewish culture flourished in both languages: prose, poetry and periodicals, theatres and secular education were developing fast in Hebrew and Yiddish alike. And in many cases these were by the same people. We can scarcely discover a single Jewish writer, journalist or activist who used one but the not the other. Mendele Mocher Sforim, considered the founding patriarch of the new literary style in both Hebrew and Yiddish, is perhaps the best example of this.

Over several years the sociolinguistic context of the coexistence of these two Jewish languages changed drastically. The Jewish intelligentsia suddenly realized they had to choose one language as a national tongue, either Yiddish (and in this case it would be necessary to develop its high domains, including poetry and literature, scientific writing, the political press and others), or Hebrew (for which it would be an urgent matter to develop its lower speech domains, to which purpose kindergartens with instruction in Hebrew were established).

The Czernowitz conference on the Yiddish language held in 1908 developed into a vast public debate on this issue which had been discussed in the Jewish press in different languages for years. The main argument used by the proponents of Yiddish was the same idea of the "deadness" of the Hebrew language, the very same argument Italians had applied four centuries before to defend the vernaculars against Latin. Jewish socialist leader Ben-Adir in 1910 wrote: "The idea that a nation could accept a ready-made dead language without any rhyme or reason, just because of the will of a certain portion of the intellectuals is only possible in dreams!" [19, pp. 15–16]. Proponents of Hebrew held two bargaining chips, the first one being over 2,000 years of Hebrew culture and the Torah as its cornerstone, the other being that Hebrew was the only common language of the varied groups of Jews living around the world. Still, they were unable to come up with a counter-argument to the "deadness" claim.

Ten years later this emotional controversy became even more violent. "The fact is that the Ancient Hebrew language is dead, and this dead corpse, which refuses to be buried, stinks," Semen Dimanshteyn (head of the Yevsektsia, or Jewish section of the Soviet

Communist Party) said during a discussion on the fate of the Habima Hebrew theatre in Moscow [20, p. 208]. Yet the left-socialist revolutionary Yakov Blumkin invented an argument in the spirit of the time against its supposed dead status:

> Here we have heard some reproaches of the Hebrew language, that it is not vital for art, that it is dead and incomprehensible to everyone. At the present time language has a political significance and a political meaning in life. Now I'm translating the Soviet constitution into the Ancient Hebrew language, and I must emphasize that political forms are composed in this language with a remarkable ease [20, pp. 235–236].

3. The Myth of Hebrew Revival

The story of Ben-Yehuda as the father of the Hebrew language, rooted back to the beginning of the 20th century, began to take on the shape of a national legend in Israel and abroad in the 1950s, when family mythology began to meet the public demand for a miraculous origin story. Agnon explained the legend in the following way: "The people sought for a hero, and we gave them that hero" [21, p. 96]. It was enshrined in a vast hagiographic literature, such as "The Tongue of the Prophets: The Life Story of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda" by St. John [22], "HaBekhor Leveit Avi" by Omer [23] and others. To give an example, the Ben Yehuda of St. John's novelized biography is made to say:

> I promise that if we find it impossible to bring up our children speaking only Hebrew, then I will admit publicly that I have failed. I shall publish it in my newspaper and say to the world that I was wrong; that it is impossible to revive a dead language [22, p. 114].

This speech demonstrates the heartache of a hero who has resolved to sacrifice life and family all for the *revival of a dead language*, who trusts in his sacred calling and, at the same time, doubts its possibility.

The central pillar of the legend is the resurrection of the Hebrew language *ex nihilo*. Since the miracle of bringing back to life is only possible with a dead object, the Hebrew of preceding periods was pronounced dead. In this case the argument of language death is used to prove the miraculous nature of the language revival: the reader knew Hebrew was the state language of Israel, now he is informed the language was dead before, and thus the miracle is demonstrated.

The myth of Hebrew revival has been criticized a lot. Harshav [24] is supposed to have been the first authoritative scholar to question it in detail, and later similar ideas were elaborated by Izre'el [25]. Glinert in a short encyclopedia article presents it as already common knowledge [26], while Seidman deconstructs the mythology taking a gender approach [27, pp. 102–114], among others.

4. Revisionist theories

Critics of the traditional history of the Hebrew revival based on the myth of Ben-Yehuda have driven the emergence of new theories. Three figures in the area should be mentioned: Paul Wexler [28], Shlomo Izre'el [25] and Ghil'ad Zuckermann [29, 30]. The authors accept the thesis of Hebrew's *deadness*, but reject identifying the Modern Hebrew language with the Hebrew of previous periods. The starting point for their reasoning can be reduced to the following: no dead language can be revived; and it's absolutely impossi-

ble to make a language which exists only as a written tongue, which has no native speakers, and which is not the mother tongue of anybody, into a spoken language of a society. This means that what we have in the case of Hebrew is not a revival of an ancient tongue, but the creation of a new, mostly non-Semitic language. Wexler interprets Modern Hebrew as relexified Yiddish, Izre'el as a creole language emerging from the mixture of Hebrew with Slavic and West European languages, and Zuckermann as a hybrid Semito-European language. Uncovering in Modern Hebrew remnants of influence from other languages, they use these as arguments to deny the Modern Hebrew language's identity with respect to the Hebrew of previous periods. This modern (non-Semitic) Hebrew emerged, according to those conceptions, during a process of language nativization, i.e., while it was being acquired by children as their native tongue from their parents, for whom it was not.

Those new concepts are of significant importance for a reconsideration of Hebrew language history. Nevertheless, some weak points can be mentioned at two different levels: at the level of linguistic data and at the level of general theory.

Harshav claims Hebrew "newspapers and the mass media which grow out of them (especially radio) were, perhaps, the main force which disseminated and unified Modern Hebrew" [24, p. 127]. These same newspapers were the main genre in which language development took place and language innovations crystallized. What we observe in the genre beginning with the Maskilic press of the 19th up to the present is a sequential continuum of language changes. Moreover, the most significant innovations of Modern Hebrew, such as the tense system, sentence structure, models of loanword adaptation and loanword orthography, were elaborated at the level of the written language. Furthermore, the deep influence exerted by the Slavic and Western European languages can be traced through the European Hebrew press of the 19th century chronologically and instance by instance. This leads us to suppose the nativization of the Hebrew language has not caused such significant language changes as to enable us to speak of language shift, unless we describe modern Hebrew as a diglossia of H, the written (Semitic) language, and of L, the spoken (native, non-Semitic) language, which, if so, requires thorough proof. The main shift which has occurred in Hebrew was a geographical shift: the newspaper language register was imported to Palestine from Russia mostly in the 1920s. This was the Hebrew press style elaborated in Russia and Eastern Europe which formed the later Israeli style of Hebrew newspapers. My observations on Hebrew press development [31] are much confirmed in an article by Reshef in which she distinguishes three language styles in the early Israeli press, and demonstrates that it was the style of the European, mainly Russian, Hebrew press, in which the modern Hebrew press language was fostered [32, pp. 327–345].

As for the theoretical aspect of the question, the initial point of departure for the revisionist conceptions is the presupposition that Hebrew was a dead language. The notion *dead language* was defined using the terms *native speaker* and *mother tongue*, which, although widely used in sociolinguistics and in daily life, could be seen as questionable. Many works on the idea of nativity contained in the term *native speaker*, which means an ownership of a language by birthright, have been published (Davies [33]; Doerr [34]; Bonfiglio [7]; LaDousa [35]; Love & Ansaldo [36], etc.). As early as 1985 Paikeday pointed out: "There are no native speakers any more than there are born engineers" [37, p. 56]. Both terms emerged from the early European ideology of the nation-state and are closely related to national prejudices, in that a native language is supposed to belong to a native speaker by right of birth, the same as with nationality, and is even transmitted through

maternity. The terms are problematic not only from the ethical standpoint, but also from the side of logic: they presuppose a monolingual society, where the choice — which language is the mother tongue — is obvious. In multilingual societies (which make up the majority of those in the world [38, p. 468]), however, it can be a tricky question — if the mother uses two languages or more at home, which one language is the "native mother tongue" for her child? Is it correct to apply these terms to multilingual societies? In the case of the Hebrew language, we know for a certainty that the Jewish society of Eastern Europe was mostly a multilingual one, and that the intellectuals who wrote were definitely multilingual (see Fishman [39, p. 747]).

5. Hebrew in Russia till the 1910s

The first Hebrew newspaper appeared in the mid-18th century in Germany; a century later the centre of the Hebrew press had moved to the Russian Empire. The St Petersburg National Library contains 79 periodicals in the Hebrew language issued before 1918 in Russia and Eastern Europe. There is a notion that Hebrew newspapers were only appropriate for Jewish intellectuals, not for common people. This view was widespread within the framework of Soviet ideology but did not reflect the real state of affairs. I'll quote Berl Kagan's memoirs, a Yiddish writer and journalist, who can hardly be suspected of devotion for the Hebrew language:

In the second half of the 19th century in Russia, four (we emphasize this) daily newspapers in Hebrew were published: *Ha-Magid*, *Ha-Melits*, *Ha-Yom*, and *Ha-Tsfira*. In Yiddish there were none. Magazines were also issued in Hebrew in this century more frequently than magazines in Yiddish, and their number, just imagine, was larger [40, p. vii, the author's translation from Yiddish].

More evidence of ordinary people reading the Hebrew press in small towns comes from the memoirs of Yekheskl Kotik:

Precisely at that time reb Simkha-Leyzer, the father of Yosele, began to receive *Ha-Magid*, and we used to read the newspaper regularly. Through it we got to know a bit of what was going on in Jewish world. In *Ha-Magid* at that time they were writing about projects for buying colonies in Erets Isroel, and one guy had even calculated that for 600 rubles one could have a whole colony in Palestine [41, p. 254, the author's translation from Yiddish].

Secular Hebrew literature published since the mid-19th century is widely known (Alter [42]; Mirkin [43] and others). Hassidic Hebrew literature and its influence on later Hebrew have also been more or less described (Frieden [44, 45]; Kahn [46; 47]). What is less well known are a number of manuals of the Russian and Polish languages published in Hebrew (sometimes in Hebrew and Yiddish). That is, Hebrew served as the language of instruction for teaching Jews to speak Russian and Polish. There were four popular self-teaching manuals and grammar books for the Russian language, for example, by author and pedagogue Abraham Paperna written in Hebrew [48]. According to the Russian National Library, his manuals were published and republished in Vilna and Warsaw almost every year from 1869 into the 1880s. Manuals of Russian language of that kind usually contain grammar, vocabulary and dialogues of courtly Russian speech. Here is a fragment from a conversation book by Zalkind Epshtein, printed in Warsaw in 1869:

— Have the kindness, my Lord, and order to serve me a glass of beer, for I am much athirst.

— Would it be better to serve you a goblet of wine?

— I humbly thank you, my Lord, currently I do not want wine, for it is very hot now, and I am very hot-tempered by nature [49, p. 135, author's translation from Russian].

The target language of teaching — Russian — here is flowery and highly styled, which reflects an important task for the Maskils (enlighteners), that is, to educate the Jew, to teach him good manners, *ergo* his Russian language should be not only correct, but also "beautiful," as they perceived it. The Hebrew of the manual is rather average Maskilic Hebrew without any special attempt to color it. Actually, the choice of Hebrew as a language of instruction conforms to the general ideological position of Haskala in Eastern Europe (unlike Western Europe, where they usually used German for the same purposes). Nonetheless, the manuals lead to two conclusions: first, Hebrew at that time had at its disposal sufficient language tools to convey dialogues on everyday topics; and second, the commercial success which the manual enjoyed shows the Hebrew language it employed was comprehensible to the Jewish masses.

Forty years later, at the same time as Dimanshteyn was calling Hebrew a "dead corpse which stinks", the famous opera singer Chaliapin was singing Ha Tikva on the stage in Petrograd, Bialik was lecturing in Hebrew at the Moscow Polytechnic Museum and Nahum Tsemakh began to organize the Hebrew theatre Habima in Moscow. This period of the flowering of Jewish culture in Russia is described by Kenneth Moss [50]. The following brief overview of Hebrew development in Russia is based on the daily broadsheet political newspaper in Hebrew called Hoom. The level of Hebrew activity among the Jewish masses can be judged from private advertisements placed in the newspaper, sent to editors from throughout Russia and surrounding countries[2]. The main subject of the advertisments was Hebrew education. Thus 13 different kindergartens with Hebrew as a language of instruction are mentioned in the newspaper in 1918. According to documents at the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), that same year 55 Hebrew kindergartens operated under the supervision of Tarbut (the Hebrew education organization) (via Chistiakov [51, p. 4]), and from the advertisements we know that at least another half that number operated independently, thus the total number of Hebrew kindergartens might have been much larger. In Moscow and Odessa there were special courses led by Halperin and Itzkhak Alterman for training Hebrew kindergarten teachers. The early education system developed by Friedrich Fröbel, a German pedagogue of the first half of the 19th century, was especially popular among Jews. In many advertisements we encounter a "frebelit", which is a teacher trained according to his system. One example:

WANTED: A FREBELIT,
who knows how to teach in Hebrew.
Salary from 150 to 200 rub. monthly.
Living conditions are much better than in other towns.
Address: Borisoglebsk, Tambov Province
to M. I. Samburskaya
(see newspaper Haam [52, p.1], author's translation from Hebrew)

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[2] A map of the newspaper distribution compiled based on personal ads is presented here: http://goo.gl/maps/xZdrG.

Twenty-six Hebrew schools in different towns all over Russia were opened at that time. Hebrew was used there as the language of instruction either for half of the subjects or for all of them. In Odessa the Moria publishing house printed manuals for schools in Hebrew by Bialik. In Moscow, Kharkov and other cities and towns, evening Hebrew courses were organized. The newspaper contains numerous advertisements for private Hebrew tutors, such as: "two maidens are looking for an intelligent lady with secondary education or more who knows Hebrew," or the other way around: "philologist, student from Paris University, offers Hebrew lessons."

Now we approach an important issue: how can we explain this apparent contradiction? On the one hand we see a long-standing tradition of producing new texts in Hebrew, including daily newspapers, and even Hebrew kindergartens where they spoke Hebrew in some manner, but despite all this the Hebrew language was regarded as a "dead language, similar to Old Church Slavonic or the Latin language," as Lunacharsky, an education commissar in the first Soviet government who sympathized with the Hebrew *Kulturtragers*, put it (via Ivanov [20, p. 201])[3]. Evidently Hebrew did not match prevailing notions of what a normal *living* language was, while a term which could describe its unusual state as anything other than a *dead language* did not yet exist. Indeed, Hebrew was not used for low registers as a rule. Usually a mother did not speak Hebrew with her child at home, it wasn't used when haggling in the market, for buying a chicken for a holiday, and etc. Instead, those registers were represented in the other Jewish language — Yiddish, which was rapidly developing high registers at that time.

6. Diglossia

Perhaps if Charles Ferguson had described the phenomenon of diglossia half a century earlier, attitudes towards the Hebrew language would have been different, especially since proponents of Hebrew held reverence for Arabic, which became a classical example of diglossia [53]. Actually, the coexistence of Hebrew and Yiddish in the 19th century matches well cases of diglossia described by Ferguson, for example, classical Arabic and the Egyptian dialect, Katharévusa and Dimotikí in Modern Greek, etc. Hebrew (H) and Yiddish (L) were "appropriate in different types of situations, with a certain overlap;" prestige differences are reflected in the denominations of "language" vs. "jargon;" literary heritage was presented mainly in H, modern literature was pursued as a continuation of an old tradition of high prestige, while L's literary tradition had to defend itself and prove its validity; standardization of H was codified in grammar books and dictionaries, and the orthography was thus standardized as well; Yiddish, on the contrary, was varied much more in orthography, pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary (in different Yiddish dialects); Hebrew was learned via formal instruction, while Yiddish was acquired from family without instruction.

The status of high language in diglossia does not necessarily presuppose that the language is regarded as a dead one, as we see in the case of Arabic diglossia: Arabic (H) is the official language of 26 states, it is not "native" for anyone because it is acquired through

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[3] Evidently results of discussion about Hebrew and Yiddish in USSR were partially predicted by the terms used: Until 1949, Hebrew was called in Russian *древнееврейский* 'the ancient Jewish language', which gave Lunacharsky, the Minister of Enlightenment in Soviet Republic, a false association. The Yiddish denomination was also problematic, for it was usually called 'Jewish jargon'.

education, not in familial communication. The degree of intelligibility between Literary Arabic (H) and vernaculars (L) which are accepted as Arabic dialects "is similar to that between Latin and contemporary Romance languages such as French or Spanish" (see Bate [54, pp. 14–15]), so the question of whether they are dialects or separate languages is a political rather than a linguistic matter. Nevertheless it is the official status of Arabic which precludes judging it a dead language.

The most significant mismatch between Arabic diglossia and the case of Hebrew and Yiddish is the fact that Yiddish and Hebrew are not kindred languages, which affects the linguistic aspects of language interaction, although the social functioning of the two languages can be quite similar. Joshua Fishman has expanded Ferguson's term diglossia to include the use of unrelated languages as high and low varieties [55]. He was the first to describe the Eastern European Jewish speech community as a diglossia of Hebrew and Yiddish [55, p. 31]. Following Fishman, Hebrew-Yiddish diglossia was usually referenced in different works as common knowledge. Diglossia itself, however, is a linguistic term and its social context has not yet been described explicitly. This work doesn't attempt to fill that gap, its humble and only intention is to indicate a direction for further study.

As I was trying to show above, the everyday meaning of the concept of *dead language* exerts a significant influence on researchers and acts as a stumbling rock for any attempt to describe Hebrew language history in the 20th century. Even a very cautious definition of *dead language*, as a language which can produce new texts and be used in speech occasionally but which has no real native speakers, is misleading and derails logic of arguments. The metaphor itself forces our thinking into its common meaning: a dead cannot be revived unless by miracle.

The concept of diglossia allows us to avoid the biological metaphor in general and the dichotomy of living/dead in particular. The development of the Hebrew language at the turn of the 20th century can be described in these dehumanized and thus much more precise terms as a dissolution of the Hebrew-Yiddish diglossia[4] and the gradual separation of two languages, instead of the commonly employed term of Hebrew revival.

Indeed, Hebrew and Yiddish functioned in Eastern Europe as a single sociolinguistic system of "Jewish language" in which language domains were distributed between two languages with slight overlap. Remnants of the former diglossia can be seen even now. In a field expedition to Podolia in 2009 I interviewed long-term Jewish residents about their childhood, Jewish life before WWII in general and language usage in particular. In most cases interviewees used the term "Jewish language" (the interview was held in Russian) and it was pointless to ask which one, Hebrew or Yiddish. Both were implied; the interviewees didn't distinguish them as two different languages, even in cases where the interviewee came from a family of educated rabbis. Only oblique questions were able to clarify exactly which language was used in a given situation.

The phonological systems of two languages (Yiddish and Ashkenazic Hebrew, that is, Hebrew with Ashkenazic pronunciation as used in Eastern Europe) are closely related:

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[4] The term *dissolution of diglossia* was used for the case of Hebrew and Yiddish by Joshua Fishman in 1985 [56] and Paul Wexler in 1990 [57]. During recent years the term was popularized for different diglossic situations during the conference "Linguistic Awareness and Dissolution of Diglossia" held in Heidelberg in 2011, and in the ensuing collection of papers "Divided Languages?: Diglossia, Translation and the Rise of Modernity in Japan, China, and the Slavic World" [58].

the same set of phonemes is present in both languages; the dialect areas of Yiddish and Ashkenazic Hebrew coincide as well (see Katz [59, p. 48]). As to the phonetics of Ashkenazic Hebrew, there is a sociolinguistically determined continuum between the pole of "Formal Ashkemazic" (the way how Torah used to be read in synagogue) and the pole of "Popular Ashkenazic", which is the Semitic component in Yiddish. The later phonological shift in Hebrew which emerged in Eastern Europe and is fixed in Israeli pronunciation can be seen as a consequence of dissolution of the the diglossia and the separation of Hebrew phonology, which allows the researcher to avoid arguing ideological reasons for that shift, since they are relatively well known and too ambivalent: ideology can be used either way to explain contradictory phenomena with the same degree of credibility.

The orthography of Hebrew, being stable in general, was variable in the area of new loan words and proper nouns in the period under consideration. The orthographic development in Hebrew in the 1910s clearly demonstrates the process of a gradual separation from Yiddish orthography, although the latter was far from being stable in the period [see 31, p. 99–100]. The later standardization of Yiddish orthography in the USSR reflected the same trend, insulation from Hebrew spelling of the Hebrew lexical component in Yiddish.

The process of divergence can be observed on the lexical level as well. Thus in many cases new Hebrew avoids Hebraisms well established in Yiddish where such an opportunity presents itself: *jareaḥ* instead of *levana* (moon), *cibur* instead *ʿolam* (public), *more* instead of *melamed* (teacher), *bejt-kvarot* instead of *bejt-olam* (cemetery), etc. (see Harshav [24, pp. 167–168]).

7. The Broad View

For many centuries two opposed but closely related tendencies have operated in respect to the Hebrew language: fear of language attrition and forgetfulness, which stimulated language development and the generation of new texts in Hebrew; and fear of language corruption and contamination, which caused the suppression of the development of Hebrew in domains and forms supposed to be improper. Both can be clearly observed in the Middle Ages when in the period of the flourish of Hebrew poetry many prominent authors complained the Hebrew language's attrition. Ibn Janah, a Hebrew grammarian and lexicographer, lamented that everyone used the Hebrew language in their own way, violating language rules (see Haramati [60, pp. 30–32]). Shlomo ibn Gabirol, a prominent Hebrew poet, devoted the long poem "Anak" to the Hebrew language and its being forgotten. The same motif is found in Maimonides's "Moreh nevukhim" ("Guide for the Perplexed"). Judah Halevi, a Hebrew poet who achieved international renown during his own lifetime, said in his late treatise "Kuzari" that composing poetry in Hebrew was a great mistake because it spoiled and corrupted the language [61, pp. 55–56].

We have much evidence from the Middle Ages to the 20th century showing that in many cases Jews did use Hebrew for speech (see Chomsky [62]; Roth [63]; Haramati [64]). These facts taken in total support the claim by Chaim Rabin that "Jews didn't use Hebrew in daily speech, not because of lack of language proficiency, but because they supposed it to be improper" [65, p. 8].

A case in point can be observed now among Orthodox Jews, for whom common use of Hebrew is heresy. From time to time they disrupt the memorial tablet on the house

of Ben Yehuda because they, too, see him as the patriarch of Israeli Hebrew, i.e., as the heretic responsible for the contamination of the Holy Tongue.

This attitude towards Hebrew has preserved that special state of the language, in which it was constantly and intentionally maintained on the one hand, and defended from non-kosher, profane usage on the other. This specific state of Hebrew caused it to be potentially the high language (H) in diglossia, as Hebrew required the use of a second language for internal communication, low language (L). This internal diglossia (see Fishman [66, p. 321]) characterized Jewish societies for at least two millennia. During its history Hebrew has seen a number of associated languages emerge in its orbit from very early times: the Ancient Judeo-Persian language of the Achaemenid epoch which is thought to be an ancestor of later Persian Jewish languages such as Bukhori, the Tat language and others (see Aikhenvald [67, pp. 10–11]); Judeo-Greek (Yevanic, Romaniyot); Judeo-Italian (Italic), Judeo-Portuguese, Judeo-French (Zarphatic, Western Loez), and Judeo-Provençal (Shuadit) in Europe; Judeo-Arabic (Yahudic) and many others (see Spolsky [68, p. 120]).

8. Conclusion

The notion of *dead language* originated in Renaissance Italy in the course of humanist polemics and was used as an argument against the dominance of Latin as a language of culture (both in its written and oral forms). Thus it emerged and functioned in historical circumstances mainly as a tool in political discussion.

Later in the framework of European culture Hebrew became one of the languages of scholarship in a triad formed by Latin, Greek and Hebrew. These three languages were selected primarily because of the interest in sacred and classical texts, meaning new texts in these languages were outside of the picture. In the case of Hebrew, it was viewed as the language of the Old Testament, while texts from other periods (such as Medieval Hebrew poetry, Hassidic literature and secular novels) did not exist within the paradigm of European Christian culture. For this reason the appellation *dead language* was applied easily to Hebrew.

In the period of the Haskala, Hebrew embarked upon the process of modernization in the meaning proposed by Charles Ferguson: "The modernization of a language may be thought of as the process of its becoming the equal of other developed languages as a medium of communication; it is in a sense the process of joining the world community of increasingly intertranslatable languages recognized as appropriate vehicles of modern forms of discourse" (see Ferguson [69, p. 32]). Paradoxically, it was the Maskilim (enlighteners) who developed new forms in the Hebrew language and also they who implanted within Jewish culture the notion of Hebrew being a *dead language*, this being one among the basic ideas of European culture (including linguistic knowledge) acquired and propagated by them.

The idea of Hebrew being a *dead language* was not accepted into Jewish culture easily and caused wide-spread and large polemics among Jewish intellectuals at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. When the period of historical changes arrived, the label *dead* was trotted out once again as a political argument, both for and against Hebrew, as these arguments are always extremely flexible: (1) in Palestine the label *dead* was used to depict the miraculous revival of the biblical language; (2) in Soviet Russia Hebrew was wiped off as a *dead language* and kindergartens, schools, libraries and daily newspapers were closed.

The fate of Hebrew culture in the USSR can be succinctly illustrated by the doom of Chaim Lensky.

The important sociolinguistic change which the Hebrew language underwent was a long-term Hebrew modernization which led to the dissolution of the Hebrew-Yiddish diglossia. The crucial point that made Hebrew a "living language" in the public's perception, and a "normal" language ("the equal of other developed languages" in the words of Ferguson), was the political success of its adherents, when Hebrew acquired an "army and navy", i.e., the status of state language, first in Palestine and later in the state of Israel, now having become Israeli Hebrew, the one language in a nominally monolingual society, whatever it actually was.

For linguistic and sociolinguistic matters, the term *dead language* for Hebrew before its "revival" is more incorrect than useful. It is misleading regarding the nature and history of the language, obscures significant features of Hebrew and confuses and conflates scientific and political discourse.

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