

# ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HEBREW LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

## Volume 2 G–O

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Muslim neighbors may explain the astonishing interest shown by the universities in the teaching of Hebrew. This interest is two-fold. It is present in the training of the future imams in the faculties of theology through the study of Biblical Hebrew and the new opening which this represents towards another religion of the Book, whose founding texts, along with the ancient history of the Near East, are perceived as being very close and even, in part, shared. But no doubt the development of the teaching of Modern Hebrew goes further than mere linguistic interest in another Semitic language. The departure of the Jewish communities after decolonization and after the Arab-Israeli wars could not completely erase a shared recent history. It is this past which is still not so remote, but at the same time is distant enough from current events for an appeasement to be possible, that explains the passion for Modern Hebrew. The tensions in the Middle East and the concern to understand the Israeli-Palestine situation from within, with a closer look at Israel, involving the knowledge of the language, reading the Israeli press or publications directly, may also be one of the reasons for which Modern Hebrew has found its place in the university education of young Muslims.

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## Maimonidean Tradition of Rabbinic Hebrew

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Like many other educated Jews in the Arab world during the Middle Ages, Maimonides learned Arabic, Hebrew and Aramaic, but he

did not use them all equally: he wrote, read and spoke Arabic, wrote and read Hebrew, and only read Aramaic (Hopkins 2005:89).

Maimonides wrote Hebrew and Arabic in different contexts. He attached great importance to effective communication, and this is what dictated his choice of one of these languages or the other (ibid:94). As a result, most of Maimonides' writings were composed in Arabic (more precisely, Judeo-Arabic), which was his own and his audience's mother tongue and main literary language (ibid:95; for more discussion concerning Maimonides' approach to language and its implications on philosophy and thought, see Rawizky 2007).

### 2. MAIMONIDES' HEBREW WRITINGS

Maimonides wrote most of his works in Arabic, but the prefaces of some were composed in Hebrew (e.g., 'Iggeret Teman, Commentary on the Mishna). Some of his *responsa* were written entirely in Hebrew, especially when their addressee did not know Arabic (see, e.g., his letter to the community of Montpellier on astrology, Hopkins 2005:96; for further discussion on the language of *responsa*, see Waxman et al. 2007).

Beside these short Hebrew writings, Maimonides also composed a number of larger works entirely in Hebrew. In his youth he wrote three works on the Talmud: (a) a commentary on difficult laws in the Talmud (which covered most of the tractates of the Babylonian Talmud); (b) a critical monograph on some issues raised by R. Isaac Alfasi; and (c) the laws of the Jerusalem Talmud. These writings were neither proofread nor published by Maimonides, and therefore only small fragments of them have survived, whose Hebrew was influenced by Aramaic (Shilat 1995:19).

Only one major surviving work of Maimonides was originally written entirely in Hebrew, the Mishneh Torah. Maimonides believed that only Hebrew was suitable for this extensive composition on Jewish law (*Halakā*; Hopkins 2005:97), which he hoped would be used by the entire Jewish nation. Had it been written in Arabic, it would have been inaccessible to a vast part of the Jewish people throughout the Diaspora.

## 3. MAIMONIDES' HEBREW

Below we note some representative grammatical characteristics of the Hebrew used by Maimonides in several of his rabbinic works written in Hebrew (mainly Mishneh Torah, based on Fink 1980:17–115).

*Morphology.* (a) Maimonides used independent pronouns as subject, as well as copula (3rd person only). His use of the pronouns אני *'ani* and אנכי *'anoki* 'I' (1s), and אנו *'anu* 'we' (1pl); אתה *'atta* 'you' (2ms) and אתם *'attem* 'you' (2mpl); הוא *hu* 'he' (3ms), היא *hi* 'she' (3fs), הם *hem* 'they' (3pl) and הן *hen* 'they' (3fpl), constitutes a biblicizing trend, continuing the usage of pronouns in Amoraic Hebrew (ibid:17).

(b) As stated by Fink (ibid), demonstrative pronouns and adjectives have the same form: זה *ze* and אותו *'oto* 'it' (ms); זו *zo*, זאת *zot* or זה *ze* (less commonly) and אותה *'ota* 'it' (fs); אלו *'ellu* 'these', הללו *hallalu* 'those' (adj. only) and אלה *'elle* 'these' (mpl); and אותן *'otan* 'these' (fpl).

(c) Due to the influence of Arabic, the construct state and possessive suffixes came to be used with greater frequency in Medieval Hebrew (ibid:18). Nouns with possessive suffixes have the same form as in Biblical Hebrew, whether singular (e.g., לילו *lelo* 'his night', כתב ידו *ketab yado* 'his handwriting', שדהו *sadehu* 'his field'), or plural (i.e., לילותיו *lelotaw* 'his nights', גזירותם *mošebotehem* 'their colonies', עשרותם *gezerotam* 'their laws' (sometimes with *yod* and sometimes without). As with nouns, personal suffixes are added to prepositions like in Biblical Hebrew (ibid).

(d) The inflectional morphemes of verbs are no different from those of Biblical Hebrew, with the following exceptions: suffix -תה *-ta* for 2ms (suffix conjugation); -ה or -ת *-a* or *-at* for 3fs (pret.); the 2fpl and 3fpl (prefix conjugation) forms are identical to the masculine forms (ibid:19).

(e) Infinitive: as in Mishnaic Hebrew, the infinitive is generally preceded by a frozen ל- *l-* prefix in Maimonides' Hebrew. When the preposition מן *min* 'from' is used before the infinitive, the pleonastic ל- *l-* is retained (e.g., מללמד *millelammad* 'from teaching'). Maimonides occasionally uses the infinitive without the prefix ל- *l-* as in Biblical Hebrew, and in line with the Arabic *masdar* (ibid).

(f) *Verbal stems.* *Qal* (Fink 1980:20): in the imperfect the two forms יקטל *yiqṭal* and יקטול *yiqṭol* alternate (e.g., ילמד *yilmad*—'will study', יכעוס *yik'os* 'will be angry', etc.). The use of the active participle for expressing the stative is more common in Maimonidean than in Mishnaic Hebrew (e.g., שבע *sabea* 'sated', קרב *qareb* 'approaching'). The increased use of this form of participle may perhaps be due to the Aramaic form *pā'el*, which is identical to this Hebrew form, but should more likely be ascribed to its resemblance to the Arabic participle form *fā'il* (ibid).

(g) *Nif'al*. In Biblical Hebrew the infinitive of this *binyan* has ה *h* before the consonants of the root. Maimonides sometimes uses the form with ה *h* and on other occasions it is elided as in Mishnaic Hebrew (i.e., לישבע *liššaba* 'to swear', ליחלק *liḥaleq* 'to divide', but להעשות *lehe'asot* 'to be done').

(h) *Hif'il*. Maimonides retains the initial ה *h* of the stem as in Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew (Fink 1980:22). However, some nouns derived from *hif'il* verbs have initial א *'* (e.g., אזהרה *'azhara* 'warning', אזכרה *'azkara* 'commemoration'). Further discussion about the *huf'al* stem can be found in Segal 1935:69.

(i) *Hitpa'el/nitpa'el*. Most of the perfect forms start with the initial נ *n*, as in Mishnaic Hebrew. The assimilation and metathesis which occur in the *hitpa'el* usually take place, but there are also exceptions (e.g., מתטמאין *mittamme'in* 'become contaminated' or יתזכה *yitzakke* instead of יזדכה *yizdakke* 'will be acquitted'; for further discussions about the verb system in Maimonidean Hebrew see Fink 1980:31–72 and Zurawel 2004).

*Syntax.* (a) Object suffixes. The suffix for representing 3ms is regularly ו- *-o* (e.g., מניחו *meniḥo* 'puts him down', הביאו *hebi'o* 'brought him', לסייעו *le-sayye'o* 'to help him'). After *h* or a vowel the suffix is הו- *-hu* (i.e., ראוהו *ra'ahu* 'saw him', עשהו *'asahu* but also עשאו *'asa'o* and אותו *'asa'oto* 'made him'). In imperfect forms, after a consonant the suffix is נו- *-ennu* (e.g., יעבירו *ya'abirennu* 'will pass him' but also יעבירו *ya'abiro*). The suffix for 3fs is usually -ה *-ah* (e.g., קראה *qera'ah* 'named her', יחזירה *yahazirah* 'will bring her back').

(b) Impersonal constructions. Maimonides uses three different ways to express the impersonal: (1) 3pl without specified subject: אין *'en* 'עובדים *'obedin* 'oto' 'worshiping him is

not permitted'; (2) an indefinite general noun: זרה אם עבד אדם עבודה זרה *'im 'abad 'adam 'aboda zara* 'if a man had practiced idolatry', and (3) 2s or 2pl, addressing the reader: אין לך מצוה *'en leka mišwa* 'you find no commandment'.

(c) Agreement. Occasionally subject-verb agreement is absent: (1) plural subject follows singular verb: ואם היה שם עדים *we-'im haya šam 'edim* 'and if there were witnesses'; (2) feminine plural subject follows masculine singular verb: עד שיהיה לו שתי תורות *'ad še-yihye lo šte torot* 'until he will have two laws'; (3) feminine singular subject follows masculine singular verb: יועיל תוספת העומק *yo'il tosefet ha-'omeq* 'additional depth would help'.

(d) The Maimonidean tense system. Below is a summary of the tense system used by Maimonides, according to Fink (1980:51–53), accompanied with several examples:

#### Perfective aspect:

- (1) The past is expressed by the suffix conjugation: חילק *hilleq* 'he distinguished'.
- (2) The present/future is expressed by the prefix conjugation: יעלה על דעתן *ya'ale 'al da'atan* 'occurs to them/will occur to them'.
- (3) The jussive is expressed by a participle: אין ישנים *'en yešenim* 'one may not fall asleep'.

#### Imperfective aspect:

- (1) The past is expressed either by a participle (for present historic narrative): שלמה אומר *šlomo 'omer* 'Solomon says', or by היה *haya* 'was' + participle (for past progressive): הרב יושב *haya ha-rab yošeb* 'the Rabbi was sitting'.
- (2) The present is expressed by the prefix conjugation: ידע *yeda'* 'knows', or by a participle (for stative verbs): ואין מבין ענינה *we-'en mebin 'inyanah ka-ra'uy* 'and he does not understand it properly'.
- (3) The future is expressed by יהיה *yihye* 'will be' + participle: כיצד יהיה אדם עושה *kešad yihye 'adam 'ose* 'how will one do'.
- (4) For expressing the jussive the prefix conjugation is used: תדע *teda'* 'know!'.

(e) Number. (1) Maimonides uses both the morphological (יומיים *yomayim* 'two days') and the semantic dual (שתי פעמים *šte pe'amim* 'twice'). For words which possess no conventional morphological dual, the semantic dual is

used always. (2) Plural formation tends to vary (e.g., טיפין *tippin* versus טיפות *tippot* 'drops'). (3) Maimonides treats collective nouns as plural, for instance: כשהצאן רובצים *ke-še-ha-šon robešin* 'while the flock crouches' (see also Cohen 2003:39–44); כל אחד קורין בדרך *kol 'ehad qorin ke-darkan* 'each one read his own way'. (4) With numbers over ten, Maimonides presents the counted noun in the singular as is the case in Arabic (e.g., משלש מאות איש *miššelos me' ot 'iš* 'from three hundred men'; עשר חלקים *šnem 'asar heleq* 'twelve parts').

(f) Definiteness. The definite article tends to be omitted on the demonstrative adjective (e.g., דבר זה *dabar ze* 'this thing', דברי אלו *debaray 'ellu* 'those words of mine'). The demonstrative adjective without the article can also appear after a definite construct phrase (e.g., ביום הכפורים זה *be-yom hak-kippurim ze* 'on this Yom Kippur'). Some nouns are always definite: titles of office (e.g., הרב *ha-rab* 'the Rabbi', המלך *ham-melek* 'the King', התורה *hat-tora* 'the Torah'), and nouns denoting collectives: הערביים *ha-'arbiyyim* 'the Arabs'). Nouns and their modifying adjectives often do not agree in definiteness: מחלוקת השנייה *mahaloqet haš-šeniyya* 'the second disagreement'.

(g) Genitive constructions. (1) The construct state is the most common genitive construction used by Maimonides (e.g., מעשה רב *ma'ase rab* 'deed of a Rabbi', תשובת שאלה זו *tešubat še'ela zo* 'the answer of this question'). In the plural form of the genitive construction, both parts may appear in the plural: ראשי ישיבות *raše yešibot* 'heads of yeshivas' (see also Cohen 2003:37–39). (2) של *šel* 'of': in most of its occurrences, של *šel* 'of' is prefixed to the noun. When the noun is definite, its article is assimilated to the ל- of של *šel*. This form of prefixed של *šel* continues the usage in Mishnaic Hebrew (Fink 1980:78–80).

(h) Word order. The usual word order is subject-predicate in nominal sentences, and verb-subject in verbal sentences. In some contexts word order may change (Fink 1980:90–91): when the subject is emphasized (e.g., in an appositive construction), it will appear before the verb: כל הנביאים כולם צוו *kol han-nebi'im kullam šuwu'u* 'all the prophets were ordered'; verbs denoting mental acts, such as asking, commanding and naming, may come after their subject: סעודה [...] וחכמים קראו לה *we-ḥakamim*

*qare'u lah* [...] *se'uda* 'and sages named it [...] a feast'.

(i) Relative clauses. Maimonides mostly used relative clauses introduced by *ש-* *še-*. When the antecedent has the function of object in the relative clause, the occurrence of a resumptive object pronoun is optional (e.g., *הכלים שאין מכניסין* *hak-kelim še-'en maknisin* 'the dishes which one does not insert', but: *הילדה...שחברתיה* *hay-yalda...šehibbartiha* 'the thought which I have composed'; *והיא שהתאו כל הנביאים* *we-hi še-hit'awwu kol han-nebi'im* 'that which all the prophets wanted', but *לא חברו חבור שמלמדין* *lo hibberu hibbur še-mellamedin* 'no one wrote a composition that is being taught'.

When the antecedent appears in the relative clause in other grammatical roles, the resumptive pronoun will usually occur: *העיקר שסומכין* *ha-'iqqar šes-somekin* 'the principle on which one relies', but *במקום שבני אדם דרים* *be-maqom šeb-bene 'adam darim* 'in a place where people live'.

The biblical relative pronoun *אשר* *ašer* 'that' appears several times in Maimonides writings (e.g., *המשפט אשר יתבאר* *ham-mišpat 'ašer yitba'er* 'the law which will be clarified').

*The lexicon.* (a) Maimonides himself stated that he decided to compose his *Mishneh Torah* in Mishnaic Hebrew because, so he claimed, Biblical Hebrew was not rich enough, and Amoraic Hebrew was too difficult and unfamiliar to most Jews. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Bacher (1922:324–325), *Mishneh Torah* is not written in a pure Mishnaic Hebrew, and contains a considerable number of words which do not occur in the Mishnaic literature (Bacher lists 130).

Some of these words were borrowed from Biblical Hebrew (e.g., *משך* *mešek* 'duration', *ניצב* *nišṣab* 'standing'). Maimonides also took words from the Bible and changed their meaning in accordance with his needs (e.g., *סעד* *sa'ad* 'dine', *רדיד* *radid* 'coat'). Maimonides also expanded the meanings of existing words (Biblical as well as Mishnaic) and created calques (e.g., *חגג* *haḡag* 'celebrated', under the influence of the Arabic word *haḡḡa* 'went on a pilgrimage'; *מפוצל* *mefuṣṣal* 'divided', under the influence of the Arabic verb *faṣala* 'disjoined').

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## Manuscript Sources of Hebrew from the Judean Desert

Since 1947 fragments of approximately 700 Hebrew manuscripts (and of about 300 manuscripts in other languages, mostly Aramaic) have been found in the Judean Desert, the semi-arid region on the western shore of the Dead Sea. Most of the manuscripts were found in eleven caves near Khirbet Qumran; the rest come from various other locales, especially Wadi Murabba'at, Naḥal Ḥever, and Masada. Whereas the first manuscripts were published almost immediately, the publication of many of the others, especially the fragmentary ones, was slow to follow (see Shanks 1991:vii–viii). By now, however, virtually all the known manuscripts have been published, primarily in the *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert (DJD)* series. The manuscripts consist mainly of fragments of leather scrolls (hence the common term 'Dead Sea Scrolls'); apart from these, some texts are written on papyrus, a few on pottery shards (ostraca), and one is written on a copper sheet (the 'Copper Scroll'). The texts may be categorized generally as biblical texts, sectarian texts, non-sectarian literary texts, and administrative documents; nevertheless, some of the manuscripts cannot be classified unequivocally according to these categories. The manuscripts may be dated