

Handbook for Students of Hebrew

Introduction

Welcome to the study of Hebrew. This handbook is meant to serve as an introduction to strategies and resources that can assist a student in his or her study of the Hebrew language and has been developed under the auspices of the National Middle East Language Resource Center (NMELRC – www.nmelrc.org).

This handbook is intended primarily for the beginning student, but intermediate and advanced students may also profit from what is presented. This information is of course not comprehensive or exhaustive. Above all, we intend it to be practical, and hope that whatever doses of “theory” it contains can be easily implemented in practice. We hope this handbook will help fulfill the NMELRC’s mission to be “a coordinated concentration of educational research and training resources for improving the capacity to teach and learn foreign languages.”

The handbook is divided into eight major sections:

- (1) A brief introduction to the Hebrew language
- (2) Learning foreign languages in general and Hebrew in particular
- (3) Getting started in Hebrew
- (4) Hebrew in the language classroom
- (5) Special features of Hebrew you should know about
- (6) Hebrew goals and strategies
- (7) Hebrew and Israel
- (8) Useful resources for the student of Hebrew, including links to web-based resources

1. What is Hebrew?

1.1 The place of Hebrew among the families of languages

Hebrew belongs to the Semitic family of languages. The Semitic family has three branches. South Semitic includes the Ethiopic languages and Arabic. The earliest known Ethiopic language is called Ge'ez. It is used today as a liturgical language by Ethiopian Christians. Later Ethiopic languages like Amharic and Tigrinya make up the majority of languages spoken today in Ethiopia. Arabic has been by far the most widely spoken of all Semitic languages since the Middle Ages. Classical Arabic is the language of the Qur'an and is used as a liturgical language by Muslims all around the world. The Arabic that is spoken as a native language in Arab countries today is somewhat different than Classical Arabic and varies greatly from region to region. While modern spoken dialects of Arabic differ greatly, a modified version of Classical Arabic known as Modern Standard Arabic is used as a literary and formal language throughout the Arab world.

East Semitic was represented in the past by the Akkadian language. While this entire branch is long extinct, the two branches of Akkadian, Assyrian and Babylonian, were the languages of the once powerful ancient empires of the same names. These languages are preserved today only in the form of inscriptions.

The third branch of the Semitic family is the Northwestern branch that includes the Canaanite languages and Aramaic. Hebrew is the only surviving Canaanite language. A number of others, including Ugaritic and Phoenician, are preserved in the form of inscriptions. Aramaic was once the most commonly spoken Semitic language, as Arabic is today. Old Aramaic was the native language of Jesus Christ and the language the gospels were originally written in. Some Aramaic dialects are still spoken today in parts of Iraq and Syria.

The Semitic family of languages is thought to be distantly related to five other language families. Four of them: Chadic, Cushitic, Omotic, and Berber, are represented by several dozen languages each that are spoken in parts of Northern Africa today. The fifth family is Ancient Egyptian which was the language of the Pharaohs. It is preserved today in the form of Hieroglyphics. A later variation of Egyptian known as Coptic is still used as a liturgical (but not a spoken) language by the several million Coptic Christians who live in Egypt today. These five families, together with the Semitic family, are known collectively as the Hamito-Semitic or Afro-Asiatic family of languages and are thought to originate from a common ancestral language spoken some nine thousand years ago. There is no physical evidence of such a language, however, since it ceased to be spoken before the advent of writing.

1.2 The early years

For most of its history, Hebrew has been strongly associated with the Jewish people and the Jewish religion. In recent years, it has also come to be associated with the state

of Israel. Because of its history, Hebrew is heavily marked by religious and national symbols. It makes little sense to study Hebrew today without at least some passing regard for Jewish history and religion. As a spoken language, Hebrew actually predates any particular religious or national entity. Four thousand years ago, it was a dialect of Canaanite, a Northwest Semitic language spoken on the eastern rim of the Mediterranean. How this dialect came to be associated with the tribes known as Hebrews or Israelites is not entirely clear. These tribes probably originated in Mesopotamia, not Canaan, and thus probably spoke Aramaic as a native language and learned to speak Hebrew as a second language. In Hebrew, "Hebrew" or *ivri*, means "from the other side." As Abraham put it: "I was a stranger in a strange land." Possibly these tribes came to Canaan and settled among Canaanites who spoke this dialect and called the newcomers "Hebrews" because of their foreign origin. With the passage of time, all speakers of this dialect came to be known as speakers of "Hebrew." Quite possibly, most speakers of the dialect eventually converted to the religion of the newcomers. The Canaanite dialects probably diverged into separate languages (Hebrew, Ugaritic, Moabite, etc.) on the basis of the different gods the various tribes worshiped. Regardless of the exact origin of the name "Hebrew," by the time of the Canaanite split along religious and linguistic lines, the monotheists and the Hebrews were one and the same.

The Hebrew of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) is similar to other Canaanite languages like Ugaritic that are known from Canaanite inscriptions of a similar date. The books of the Hebrew Bible fall into three categories: *Torah* (laws of Moses), *Nevi'im* (prophets), and *Ketuvim* (chronicles and scrolls). These books show clear changes in style that represent the language's natural development over a period of around a millennium and a half. However, all texts from this period are thought to make up a single grammar and are usually referred to collectively as Ancient Hebrew, Biblical Hebrew, or Tiberian Hebrew. During this time the language remained the dominant spoken language of the Israelites. The Hebrew of this period is known only from biblical texts.

1.3 The fall of Hebrew as a widely spoken language

Until the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians in 572 B.C., Hebrew was still a widely spoken language. However, this traumatic event saw a decline of the Israelite sacrifice-based temple ritual and the rise of more modern Jewish prayer and learning based ritual. It also led to a split between the Jewish scholars and the masses. The scholarly elite were exiled to Babylon where they continued to use Hebrew. The masses remained in Judea, where they came under the influence of Aramaic speaking peoples who had been exiled to Judea by the Babylonians. As a result, Hebrew went into a decline and was gradually replaced by Aramaic as the spoken language of the Jews. During this period, many religious books, documents, and prayers were written in Aramaic and added to the growing Jewish liturgy. To this day, many of the most important texts of Jewish liturgy remain in Aramaic, even though it has long since ceased to be widely spoken. These include such basic Jewish texts as the *Talmud* (interpretation of the laws of Moses), the *Ketuba* (writ of marriage), and the *Kaddish* (prayer for the dead).

The return of the Jewish scholars and building of the Second Temple after the destruction of Babylon by the Persians saw a new age of alienation between Jewish clergy and laymen. Throughout this period, Hebrew remained as a liturgical language, but was spoken only by the relatively small class of scholars. This state of affairs persisted throughout the Greek and Roman periods and is well attested in the relation between Jesus and the Pharisees as told in the gospels. Since Jesus was a largely uneducated Jew from a rural area, he most probably did not know Hebrew, or at least did not know it very well. When he argued scripture with the Pharisees of Jerusalem, he knew the meaning of the passages but could not quote the actual Hebrew text. To the Pharisees, who still spoke Hebrew and probably knew most of the Torah by heart in the original, this was a sign of ignorance and incompetence.

The destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in the second century saw something of a revival of scholarly activity in Hebrew as the new class of rabbis became more important than the old class of Temple priests. It was during this time that the Hebrew Bible was canonized and the vowel system invented. The Hebrew Bible is sometimes known as the *Masora* and the scholars who canonized it and added the vowels and other marks are known as the Masoretes. The original biblical texts did not contain vowels, as the Torah scroll to this day does not. The writing system also did not distinguish between certain pairs of sounds like “p” and “f”. This did not bother the ancient Israelites, who had an intuitive feel of how the words of their own language should be pronounced. However, by the second century the language itself was no longer spoken and the Masoretes saw a need for a system that specified vowels and other ambiguous sounds so as to remind people how the words should be recited. The sounds that the Masoretes wrote out were the sounds they used when reciting the scripture, but not necessarily the sounds they used when pronouncing the same words in their own speech. This enhanced form of writing provides the only real evidence of how this more ancient form of Hebrew was actually pronounced in earlier times. The name of the more ancient language is sometimes known as Tiberian Hebrew after the city of Tiberias by the sea of Galilee which was one of the Masorite centers. “Tiberian” is not an ancient Hebrew word, but is of course a Roman word since the Romans named the city after the emperor Tiberias and the river Tiber in Rome. This system is known today as *Nikkud*, and it is still used in the teaching of Hebrew although it is seldom used in texts intended for native speakers.

At the same time the Masoretes were compiling the old Hebrew texts into the Hebrew Bible, early Christian scholars were busy translating the same Hebrew texts into Greek in a translation known as the Septuagint, which was the basis for the Christian translations of the Bible into all other languages. For this reason, the Hebrew and Christian Bibles to this day differ somewhat in the editing, selection, and ordering of the books. For instance, the Hebrew Bible does not contain the books of the Maccabees.

The Hebrew scholars of the period also composed many new prayers and books in Hebrew, including the *Mishnah* (oral law attributed to Moses but not included in the Torah) and most of the *Shmoneh-esreh* (series of prayers said three times daily). The Shmoneh-esreh is highly symbolic of the changes the Jewish religion underwent during

this period immediately following the destruction of the Second Temple: the thrice-daily recitation of the Shmoneh-esreh replaces the thrice-daily offering of animal sacrifices in the Temple. On the Sabbath and on holidays when four sacrifices were offered in the Temple, the Shmoneh-esreh is recited four times. The Hebrew written (and to some extent still spoken) in this period is sometimes known as Mishnaic Hebrew.

1.4 The Middle Ages

While the Middle Ages saw Hebrew decline further as a spoken language, this period also saw the rise of Hebrew study among Christian theologians and clergymen because it is the language of the Old Testament. It is also common today for Christian scholars to study Aramaic, which is the language of the New Testament, Greek, which is the language of the Septuagint, and Latin, which is the language of Roman liturgy. Moreover, many Christian seminaries require some study of Biblical Hebrew as a condition for ordainment. Over the years, a number of important grammars of Tiberian Hebrew have been written by Christian scholars.

With the rise of Islam, Arabic largely displaced Aramaic as well as a host of other regional languages like Phoenician and Coptic. Up to this time, Arabic had been restricted to the Hejaz region of the Arabian peninsula, but it soon came to dominate most of the fertile crescent as well as the Mediterranean basin as far as Spain as the peoples of these regions converted to Islam. Even local languages that survived the Islamic conquest came to be written in the Arabic script and adopted a large number of Arabic loanwords. Persian, which is an Indo-European language like English, saw almost half its words replaced by Arabic loanwords. Even the languages of non-Muslim peoples in India and all over Africa to this day contain significant numbers of Arabic loanwords.

Most Jews living in the Islamic world spoke Arabic as a first language from the Middle Ages until the mid-twentieth century. A number of Jews in the eastern Islamic countries spoke Persian. Still, Hebrew remained not only the liturgical language of Judaism, but also the literary and even the spoken language of the scholarly classes. This period also saw a revival of Hebrew poetry. Like the influential Arabic and Persian poetry of the period, medieval Hebrew poetry addressed not only religious, but also romantic and personal themes. During this period, the Arabic language began to change and Islamic scholars saw a religious need to more fully describe classical Arabic, in much the same way that 500 years earlier the Mishnaic scholars had seen a need to more fully describe Biblical Hebrew. However, the Islamic interest in linguistics led the Jewish scholars of the period to write further studies of the Hebrew language as well. The Hebrew that survives in books and poetry from this period is different enough from earlier forms of Hebrew that it is sometimes known as Medieval Hebrew.

The Middle Ages saw the rise of a number of new Jewish languages that further displaced Hebrew as a spoken language. The Jews of Islamic Spain spoke a Romance language known as Ladino. After the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492, these Spanish Jews scattered throughout the Ottoman Empire where their language was sometimes

known as Judezmo. In Christian Europe, the dominant language of Jews was Yiddish and remained so until the mid-twentieth century. Yiddish is a Germanic language that is said to resemble Old German more closely than modern German does. It also contains a large number of loanwords from Slavic and of course, from Hebrew. While Yiddish originated in Germanic central Europe, it soon came to be spoken predominantly in Slavic Eastern Europe. By the rise of the modern German state, Jews in Germany tended to speak German, not Yiddish. It was the far greater number of Jews in Russia, Poland, and Galicia, who spoke Yiddish. In Europe as in the Islamic world, most Jews knew little Hebrew and only learned scholars knew enough to speak and write in it. It is probably the case that from the Middle Ages until the mid-twentieth century, most Jews in the world spoke either Yiddish or Arabic as a native language.

1.5 Modern times

The revival of Hebrew as a spoken language outside the confines of religious scholarship begins in the late nineteenth century with the rise of Zionism in Europe. While Jews had continuously been moving back to their ancestral homeland over the years, this had occurred only in small numbers and largely for religious reasons. With the rise of nation states in late nineteenth century Europe, many Jews began entertaining more political ideas of self-definition. These Jews, whose ideas were diverse and often conflicting, became known as “Lovers of Zion,” or simply “Zionists.” Not all of these Zionists saw a need for a contiguous Jewish territorial entity. Among those who did, not all thought this territory necessarily had to be located in the historical land of Israel. To be certain, few thought much of reviving Hebrew as a widely spoken language. By the early twentieth century, however, it was these three ideas that came to dominate the other early Zionist proposals.

The idea that Hebrew should be the language of the new Jewish nationality traces primarily to one man, a Russian-born linguist named Eliezer Perelman. Perelman knew Hebrew well and early in his career became convinced that Jewish national identity could only be sustained if Jews spoke Hebrew amongst themselves. He changed his name to Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (son of Judah) and moved with his family to Jerusalem where he sought converts to the Hebrew cause. At the time, Ben-Yehuda and his wife and sons were the only ones who attempted to speak only Hebrew in Jerusalem; the languages used by the Jews there were Yiddish, Ladino, or Arabic. Some religious Jews even objected to the use of Hebrew except for liturgical purposes. However, some local Zionist leaders embraced his project, and with the arrival of large numbers of Russian Jews to the Holy Land in the last years of the nineteenth century, Hebrew began to spread there as a spoken language, mostly owing to a conscious effort by teachers to speak only Hebrew to their students. The rise of spoken Hebrew in the land of Israel was meteoric, and it became the dominant language of local Jews of all backgrounds within one generation. It also came to be taught to Jewish children all over Europe in Jewish day schools and summer camps. After WWI, it was also taught as a spoken language to Jewish children in Muslim countries.

Yiddish remained the dominant spoken language among Jews in Europe until their wholesale slaughter by the Nazis during WWII. The fall of Arabic among Middle Eastern Jews took place when Jews were expelled from Arab countries following the founding of the state of Israel in 1948. The resulting massive numbers of immigrants to Israel following these tragic events greatly increased the numbers of Hebrew speakers and made Hebrew the dominant language of the state of Israel, although Arabic is also recognized as an official language.

The closing of the twentieth century has seen massive decline of all Jewish communities outside of Israel and the United States. Most of the Persian speaking Jews of Iran, Russian speaking Jews of the former Soviet Union, and Spanish speaking Jews of Latin America have emigrated to either Israel or the US. Only France and Great Britain retain Jewish communities larger than 100,000. Jewish emigration from France has increased since the year 2000. It is probably not an exaggeration to say that soon half of the Jewish world will be English-speaking and the other half Hebrew-speaking. Hebrew is currently the native language of some 3 million people in Israel and is spoken as a second or third language by a comparable number there. Another 6 million Jews around the world (mostly in the United States) probably know at least a few words of Hebrew. Better knowledge of Hebrew tends to be correlated with stronger religious affiliation as well as interest in Israel. Most Israelis know at least some English.

While early Zionist ideology made the rebirth of Hebrew possible, the rebirth of Hebrew also plays an important role in strengthening the Israeli state. While the early Zionists imagined the natural bond between Jews to be national and political, the Jewish immigrants arriving in Israel from the four corners of the earth often had little in common and each did not always easily recognize the other as Jewish. It was the Hebrew language, still new to most, that served as the building block of Israeli society. This is particularly the case in the army, where new recruits are taught Hebrew together before going through basic training. In the civilian world, a system of Hebrew schools known as Ulpanim was established where immigrants from any and all countries learn Hebrew together on an intensive basis by the process known today as immersion. No other language is allowed in class.

The Hebrew spoken in Israel today is quite unique and has had a massive effect on the pronunciation of Hebrew as spoken by Jews in other countries as well, even for religious purposes. Over the centuries, each Jewish community had its own pronunciation: the Jews of Europe had an Ashkenazi inflection, the Yemenite’s had a Yemenite inflection, etc. Yet Israeli Hebrew, also known as Modern Hebrew, has a style and trope all its own. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, this new Hebrew quickly came to dominate and override other pronunciations of Hebrew within Israel. After WWII, and especially since the six-day war of 1967 when Israel’s influence greatly increased in the Jewish world, Israeli pronunciation has come to dominate other pronunciations in all Jewish communities. A good example of this is the pronunciation of the word that means “Sabbath.” The European (“Ashkenazi”) pronunciation was *shabbes*, with stress on the first syllable. Since most American Jews are Ashkenazim, until the 1960s they

always said *shabbes*. In recent decades, though, they can be heard saying more and more *shabbat*, with stress on the second syllable, as it is pronounced in Israel.

1.6 What kind of Hebrew is taught today?

When we talk about teaching Hebrew, we normally refer to contemporary Hebrew, which incorporates components from all historical phases of the language: Biblical Hebrew, Mishnaic/Rabbinical Hebrew, Medieval Hebrew and Modern Hebrew. Even colloquial Hebrew contains elements from earlier historical layers. However, there are varying views as to how much of the historical pronunciation and grammar would be followed in class, depending on the objectives of the course and the teacher's approach. In a typical class, Modern Hebrew is taught with the goal of enabling the students speak, read and write Hebrew as it used in Israel today. However, some universities offer specific courses specializing in a particular period of Hebrew, mostly Biblical, intended to enable students to read and understand Biblical texts, but not to converse or write in Hebrew.

Although Modern Hebrew incorporates components from earlier historical phases, it still differs markedly from all other known forms of Hebrew. Much of this was anticipated by Ben-Yehuda, who himself manufactured large numbers of new Hebrew words for things like "soap," "cauliflower," etc. But many changes involved in the creation of Modern Hebrew were completely unforeseen and are still not well understood. Many new words were borrowed from Modern languages like Arabic, Russian, English and French. Certain simplifications seem to have taken place in the grammar during the period when large numbers of immigrants to Israel were learning the new language for the first time and trying to communicate with each other. This is a process that is sometimes called creolization. And of course, like all languages, Modern Hebrew evolves like all languages do, constantly displaying new forms of slang and popular expressions that go in and out of style and sometimes come to replace old forms completely.

Much controversy remains regarding the precise relation between Modern Hebrew and older forms of Hebrew. This controversy is nowhere more contested than in the teaching of Hebrew. When Hebrew is taught for religious purposes only, say, in order to prepare a youngster for a bar- or bat-mitzvah, it is Tiberian Hebrew that is usually taught. Some teachers, however, believe that all Hebrew should conform to the rules of the older grammars and will use textbooks and methods of Tiberian grammar to teach Modern Hebrew as well. Even in Israel, where most schoolchildren are native speakers of Modern Hebrew, children are often told by their teachers that they don't speak their own language correctly because it differs too much from the biblical. This is probably too extreme a position to yield very good educational results. Certain aspects of Tiberian Hebrew are completely alien to Modern Hebrew and vice versa. Still, it is probably not a good idea to teach Hebrew that is too modern and up-to-the-minute, since it is constantly changing and what was hip this year may sound ridiculous next year. The problem is that while Modern Hebrew is clearly distinct from older forms of Hebrew, there is no consensus on what Modern Hebrew actually is. Tiberian Hebrew has been

the focus of intense study for two thousand years, while only in the last three decades have a few linguists been looking at the way modern speakers of Hebrew talk and attempting to describe it. Until more studies are made and some agreement is reached, there will be no one standard of teaching Modern Hebrew. It is a compromise that every teacher of Modern Hebrew will have to decide for his or her self.

The student of Modern Hebrew will at first be at the mercy of the teacher's decision in this respect. If the teacher assumes a very formal approach based on Tiberian Hebrew, the student may be laughed at and misunderstood when confronting modern speakers. On the other hand, if the teacher assumes a very hip and happening approach that ignores the historical structure of the language, the student may not be able to make the necessary leap to reading literature and putting Hebrew to more formal use. You may be surprised how even young and slovenly speakers of Modern Hebrew have the ability to lapse into older and more formal forms of the language in certain formal and professional situations. It is probably best to learn Hebrew that is a little more formal than necessary, because it is easier to go from the formal to the informal than vice versa and because the informal is always changing, while the formal remains relatively constant. Unfortunately, a beginning level student would have a hard time controlling how formal the instruction they are receiving is. At a more advanced level, a good teacher would point out which forms are more formal and which are less. The advanced student should at least be able to recognize formal forms even if he doesn't use them, and certainly should be aware that there is a difference.

One example of such a difference is the imperative. Older forms of Hebrew had a special imperative form that differed from the regular second person form of the verb. For example, the verb *lehoil* "to lead" had the second person form *toil* "you lead" and the imperative form *hoel* "lead!" In Modern Hebrew, the special imperative form has fallen out of usage for most verbs and speakers will use the regular second person form to mean the imperative. In Modern Hebrew, *toil* can mean both "you lead" and "lead!" while the form *hoel* is seldom heard. And yet all speakers of Modern Hebrew are familiar with the special imperative forms like *hoel*, can recognize them when they encounter them, and may even use them themselves in certain situations, especially in formal writing.

Such examples of split-level usage can be multiplied at will. It is up to the teacher of Hebrew today to decide whether to teach students the special imperative forms together with the regular forms and then later tell the students that these forms are seldom used, or else wait until a more advanced level to even tell the students about the existence of such forms. The choice depends on the teacher's own views and on the needs of the students. Are they studying Hebrew more for conversational or formal purposes? Some students have some religious knowledge of Hebrew and need more work on the conversational. Some students have had exposure to spoken Hebrew in childhood but need more work on the formal aspects. The line is always a fine one, far more subtle than the difference between Modern Standard and colloquial forms of Arabic.

1.7 Who studies Hebrew today?

Students may choose to learn Hebrew for various reasons and goals. Some are interested in Jewish and Israeli culture, and plan to visit, study, and work in Israel, or hope to work in the Jewish community. Other students major in Hebrew, Jewish, or Middle Eastern Studies, as well as Archaeology and Religious Studies, or need to satisfy a language requirement. There are also those who have a general interest in foreign culture and foreign languages. Lastly, some students enrolled in Hebrew courses have some prior knowledge of the language (they are known as “heritage students”), and are seriously interested in improving their Hebrew as a means to connect with their Israeli/Jewish heritage.

Seminarians studying for the clergy, as well as some students of linguistics and archeology, often study Tiberian Hebrew as preserved by the Masoretes. Almost everyone else studies a more expanded Hebrew that embraces the modern spoken language at least to some extent. Study of the modern language obviously focuses more on conversational skills. Study of Tiberian Hebrew will be far more focused on grammar, including a number of grammatical forms and rules that are completely obsolete in the modern language (distinction between long and short vowels, perfective and imperfective aspect, etc.). Obviously, the two types of study will also involve very different types of vocabulary.

It is no secret that the majority of students who study Hebrew as a foreign language today are Jewish or from Jewish backgrounds. These students often have at least some prior knowledge of Hebrew. Such students are sometimes known as “heritage students.” Many such “heritage students” are seriously interested in improving their Hebrew either for religious reasons, as a means to connect with their heritage, or because they are thinking of living in Israel. However, this situation is unfortunate for a number of reasons. Mainly, it makes the classroom environment difficult for beginners. It also means that the students who have the prior knowledge often see their knowledge as a reason not to acquire any new knowledge. Barring the unlikely event that the Hebrew speaking population of the world experiences phenomenal growth in the near future and the language becomes viewed as more important by non-Jews, or the equally unlikely event that business opportunities in the Hebrew-speaking world become amazingly attractive, this situation is likely to continue.

At present, non-Jews who study Hebrew are often interested in it for linguistic reasons or want to learn more about Judaism, Israel, the Jewish world, or some combination of the above. If you are a beginner with a serious intention to learn Hebrew, take heart. Most teachers of Hebrew will be thrilled to have a more diverse body of students. Furthermore, many “heritage speakers” do not know Hebrew as well as they think and are not quick to learn more. With some quiet dignity and hard work on a daily basis, it should be possible to surpass many of them even within a single course of study. If you already know some Hebrew and are serious about improving your skills, quiet dignity and hard work will serve you well, too.

2. Learning Foreign Languages in General and Hebrew in Particular

2.1 How to study a foreign language

While foreign languages may differ greatly one from another, the process of learning a foreign language always involves the same kinds of skills and techniques. One reason some people never learn a foreign language successfully is that they never learn how to go about it. They may possess all of the necessary abilities, but simply never apply them in the right way. In fact, no superhuman talents are required. It is a matter of finding the right attitude, the right people, and the right study habits. If you have had trouble learning foreign languages in the past, read this section carefully. Once you successfully acquire your first foreign language, you will discover that each new foreign language you learn is easier than the last.

The single most important factor in how effectively you will learn a foreign language is desire. Perhaps passion is a more appropriate word. The desire that will enable you to learn a foreign language needs to be the passionate desire familiar from other areas of life. Neither a romantic whim to learn a language nor a calculated decision of how important it is or how good it would be for you to learn it, will be enough. What is required is physical passion for the language. Convincing the love of your life to marry you is probably easier (and quicker) for most people than successful acquisition of a foreign language.

The second most important thing is a good teacher. Mere contact with native speakers is not enough. Children can learn any language well, even several languages at once, by the time they are six years old without any formal instruction just by being raised in an environment where the language is spoken. However, if you are older than six, this is no longer an option. As far as linguists can tell, something physical actually changes in your brain at this age. The few known cases of children who were raised in complete isolation or by animals and were only discovered after the age of six show that these children were never able to learn a human language later in life. This does not mean that you can never learn any new languages after the age of six. But it is highly suggestive that you can not learn them by the same methods with which you learn your first language as a child. An adult needs structure, grammatical structure as well as discipline, in order to assimilate the dizzying array of sounds and phrases that make up the language they are trying to learn. If you have a savant for languages, or if this is your third or fourth foreign language, you may get by with a good instructional book instead of a flesh-and-blood instructor. However, even accomplished polyglots will benefit from actual classroom experience. Everyone else should not do without it.

Finally, you should have contact with native speakers. This is absolutely necessary to mastering any language, but only once you have received some formal instruction. The more formal instruction you have, the more you will benefit from your contact with native speakers. Only after a large amount of both will additional formal instruction become superfluous. The best kind of native speaker to learn from is one you see every day. A boyfriend/girlfriend or spouse is simply the best way to learn any language,

although this cannot and probably should not always be arranged on demand. A gang you can hang out with or a close friend is almost as good. A roommate or workmate is very good, too. Sometimes having close relations with native speakers in your own country can be more beneficial than being in a foreign country among strangers.

Whether you are traveling to a foreign country or not, creating an immersion-like environment is invaluable. Some people spend time in a foreign country but allow an English-speaking enclave to be created around them. Wherever you are, make a point of speaking your target language with anyone who can speak it with you, including fellow learners. Immerse yourself in the culture. If you like music, listen to music in your target language. Practice telling jokes in your target language. If you do pushups in the morning, count them in your target language. Don't be ashamed to carry flashcards or a small notebook around so you can drill your vocab while you wait in elevators, etc. If you are in a foreign country, write down unfamiliar words during the day so you can find out what they mean later. Remember the context you first saw the word in so that when you find out what it means, you will understand the context better, too. Learning in context is the best way to memorize anything.

2.2 Do you feel that you sound like a tourist?

If you are studying Hebrew as an adult, the chances that you will ever be able to speak it without a traceable accent are not high—attaining a native-like pronunciation is one of the most difficult challenges foreign language learners face. On the one hand, you should know that a variety of accents is a normal phenomenon, especially in countries like Israel—think, for example, of Russian or South American immigrants who speak perfect Hebrew while retaining their native accents, or about speakers of Middle Eastern heritage who retain the guttural *chet* and *ayin* in their speech. So it is not all bad—people may find your accent interesting or intriguing. On the other hand, a foreign accent will mark you as an “other”, which may at times make you uncomfortable or, in some situations, affect your socialization.

What is it that makes an accent foreign? By and large, this “foreignness” manifests itself in the lack of ability to pronounce some of the sounds of the target language or to pronounce sounds in the way a native speaker would pronounce them, and in a speech rhythm that is markedly different from that of a native speaker in both speed and intonation. While languages share much of their speech sound inventories, each language has a number of unique sounds. For example, Hebrew has the *chet* and the *chaf* which English does not have, and English has the “th” sound while Hebrew does not. English speakers who learn to speak Hebrew initially find it difficult to pronounce *chet* and the *chaf*, producing them as “h,” and Hebrew speakers, unaccustomed to the “th” sound often pronounce it as “d” or “z”. English tends to aspirate the sounds “p,” “t,” and “k” in stressed syllables (aspiration is a puff of air following the consonant sound). Hebrew does not aspirate these sounds or aspirates them to a lesser degree. As an English speaker, you will have a tendency to aspirate these sounds automatically without much control over the degree of aspiration. You will struggle with the Israeli

“r,” pronounced deep in the throat with no involvement of the tongue, as opposed to the English “r” which is much softer and whose quality depends to a large extent on the position of the tongue against the side of your mouth. You may be relieved to learn that Hebrew has a five-vowel system, i e a o u, with no variants such as long and short “i” (sleep vs. slip) that speakers of Hebrew have such difficulties with when they speak English. Awareness of such differences is the first step toward developing a solid pronunciation in Hebrew, one that reflects good control of the language even if you are not at the “near-native” level.

Like every other language, Hebrew has a unique “rhythm.” In Hebrew, stress usually falls on the last syllable of the word, with certain classes of exceptions. Within any given utterance, there are relative degrees of stress (secondary, tertiary, etc.) that are fairly predictable, and while the intonation patterns of Hebrew are different from those of English, they can be acquired almost automatically once you have developed keen awareness of such patterns and had sufficient exposure to the language. The same is true for syllables that are slurred over and other elements that create the impression of native speech.

So how can you improve your pronunciation? Here are some ideas.

- Become aware of the sounds of Hebrew, making mental notes regarding sounds that need special attention.
- Ask your teacher for tips on how to produce the difficult sounds physically. Putting your hand on the teacher's mouth or throat while he or she produces Hebrew sounds may help more than any explanation.
- Practice producing each sound repeatedly, watching yourself in a mirror. When you think that you can produce the sounds reliably in isolation, try repeatedly pronouncing entire words that contain them.
- Make a list of pairs of words that differ along the feature you are trying to learn (e.g., parallel words with *he* and *chet*, such as *horim* “parents” and *chorim* “holes,” or words with identical sounds yet different accentuation, such as *birá* “capital” and *bíra* “beer”). Listen carefully every time you hear a word from your list. If you can, get a native speaker to carefully pronounce words from your list and see if you can tell which is which. The more pairs of vocabulary items you memorize that differ along this feature, the more real the difference between the two sounds will seem to you.
- Find a computer program that allows you to tape yourself, play back your recording and compare short segments of your taped speech to identical segments in native speech.
- Listen to taped segments of native speech, paying attention to prosodic features such as accents and peaks within sentences. Memorize short sentences and paragraphs, having learned them from recorded native speech. Work on speed and sentence flow.
- Watch movies and TV programs in Hebrew, even if you do not understand the bulk of what is said. Listen to the rhythm. Speak or sing along.
- Speak in class as much as you can. Do anything that would increase your exposure to the language and will give you the opportunity to practice speaking.

Be patient—you are likely to sound like a tourist for quite some time. But even at the very beginning of your training, if you focus on the pronunciation of short sentences or paragraphs, you can have amazing results.

2.3 Tips for English speakers

English is an unusual language in many ways. It's actually quite exotic. There are a few particularly bizarre features of the English sound system that you will probably need to get rid of when studying any foreign language. Getting rid of sound patterns from your own language is similar to acquiring sound patterns of a foreign language, only in reverse. The hardest thing is learning to perceive the sound patterns of your own language. Normally, you are not even aware you are making them. You must raise your awareness before you can make the decision to stop doing these things.

The number one sign of an American accent is the pronunciation of “r.” The American English pronunciation of “r” is actually more like a vowel than a consonant. Even British English tends to avoid this pronunciation. Many languages, like Italian and Russian, have an “r” that is trilled with the tip of the tongue. Other languages, like French and German, have an “r” that is trilled with the back of the tongue and sounds like a soft growling or purring noise. Whatever the language, learn how to make their “r.” Chances are it will not be the “r” of American English. Another star culprit is the pronunciation of the vowels “o” and “u,” as in the English words “go” and “goo” respectively. These vowels are very common among the languages of the world, and yet they are hardly ever pronounced as they are in English. English speakers pronounce these vowels very long, and usually end them with a “w” sound. This adds greatly to your accent in many languages. Practice pronouncing these words while making the vowels very short and not making a “w” sound at the end.

Another big factor in the American accent is the tendency to pronounce the sounds “d” and “t” identically between vowels after a stressed syllable. You may not realize that you do this, but you do. If someone recorded you saying “There’s a chair and a ladder in there; the former is high and the latter is low,” and then cut out your pronunciations of “ladder” and “latter” and played them back to you, you would not be able to tell which was which. Once you realize you are doing this, you can begin not doing it when speaking your target language. If you do not make this distinction in your target language, you will sound funny at best. At worst, you might say something other than what you mean.

One final point is the distinction in English between so-called “light l” and “dark l.” You are most probably not aware of this, but you pronounce the sound “l” differently in the words “let” and “lot.” In particular, the body of your tongue is down when you pronounce “l” before “e” or “i,” but it clings to the roof of your mouth when you pronounce “l” before “o” or “u” or at the end of a word. As an English speaker, you make this distinction automatically. Many languages do not make this distinction. In French, Spanish, and Hebrew, for instance, all “l”s are “light,” i.e., the tongue body is

always down. If your attention has not been called to this, you will raise the body of your tongue automatically when you pronounce an “l” in certain positions. In this case, you do not run the risk of being misunderstood, but the effect is similar to wearing a T-shirt that says “Say hello to Mr. American.”

There are many other such pitfalls. Some apply only to certain languages; others, like the ones above, probably apply to most languages. A good teacher will point these differences out to you. A bad teacher may not. In any case, don't let yourself be the weak link in the learning chain. With experience of more than one teacher and with increased exposure to the target language, you will pick up on more and more of these differences. It is worth making the effort. You do not need to learn to do anything new. All you need to learn is when not to do certain things you are used to. The more you do this, the more easy and complete will be your entry into the world of your target language.

2.4 How to read a text in a foreign language

The two most important principles to remember when reading foreign texts are:

- 1) Read every text three times.
- 2) Never write any translation on the text itself.

The first time you read a text, you should not use a dictionary. Simply read the whole thing from beginning to end and try to make the most of it. Not using a dictionary will force you to put to use all the knowledge you have. You may actually understand more than you would have with a dictionary. This will deepen your memory of words that until now you only knew tangentially. Even if you don't have time to read the text a second and third time, you will have gained something.

The second time you read a text, underline the words you still don't know and look them up as you read them in context. Write down their translations somewhere else: on flashcards or on a list. Do not write them onto the text itself. If you have read the entire text first without a dictionary, you will now find these words much easier to memorize because now you have a context for them. Even if you don't have time to read the text a third time, you will have made a better start towards committing the new words to long-term memory than if you had simply tried to memorize them cold from flash cards or from a list.

Before you read the text a third time, use the new words you have extracted from it to quiz yourself without looking at the text they are taken from. When you are confident you have learned most of them, read the text again without a dictionary. If you have done everything well, you should understand the text much better than you did the first time. If you still have some trouble, don't worry. This is probably simply the best you can do for the time being. Your abilities will improve as you read more texts. There is no reason to read any text more than three times. Doing so may result in unnecessary confusion.

Whatever you do, never, never write translations of words down on the text itself. If you do this, you will not learn the words nor will you understand the text very well. Even if you are simply cramming for a vocabulary quiz, you will do better if you write the words down separately. This rule should be as dear to you as keeping your PIN separate from your ATM. The results can be equally detrimental.

3. Getting Started with Hebrew

3.1 How and where should I begin to study Hebrew?

There is no one “best” way or place to study Hebrew. Your goals will determine what is best for you. The most common way to study Hebrew is in a classroom setting, and the greatest progress in a language is generally made under the guidance of an experienced teacher. If you are not currently enrolled in a college or university and would like to pursue the study of Hebrew, ask at local institutions about the possibility of taking classes. Some may even offer evening courses. Students who aim at achieving a high level of proficiency with Hebrew generally plan to travel or study in the Middle East. We encourage those who have the opportunity to take advantage of travel or study abroad programs. In most cases, the ability to “soak up” the language by living in Israel is increased with the help of a structured program.

3.2 What books will I need?

There are several Hebrew textbook series that are used in the United States today. Among these are (listed in alphabetical order by the last name of author):

- Band, Ora. 1981/83/86. *Ivrit, Shlav I, II & III*. New Jersey: Behrman House.
- Brosh, Shoshana. et al. 1993. *Ivrit me-Alef ad Tan, Levels I-VI*. Tel Aviv: Dyonon (Tel Aviv University).
- Chayat, Sholomit, Sara Isreeli and Hilla Kobliner. 1990 (new edition 2002). *Ivrit min ha-Hathala, Levels I & II*. Jerusalem: Academon (Hebrew University).
- Coffin, Edna Amir. 1977/78. *Lessons in Modern Hebrew, Levels I & II*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Coffin, Edna Amir. 1992/93/97. *Encounters in Modern Hebrew, Levels I, II and III*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Cole, Peter et al. 1975. *Israeli Hebrew for Speakers of English, Books 1 & 2*. Urbana: Hagalil.
- Etzioni, Giore. 2009. *The Routledge Introductory Course in Modern Hebrew: Hebrew in Israel*. Routledge.
- Lauden, Edna & Liora Weinbach. 1989. *Everyday Hebrew Dialogues*. Tel Aviv: Ad.
- Raizen, Esther. 2000. *Modern Hebrew for Beginners*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Raizen, Esther. 2001. *Modern Hebrew for Intermediate Students*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Ringvald, Vardit, et al. 2003. *Brandeis Modern Hebrew*. Waltham: Brandeis Univ. Press.

All of these textbooks incorporate a full range of language skills exercises and activities and include audiovisual components.

An important tool is a good dictionary, such as:

- Ben-Abba, Dov. 1994. *The Meridian Hebrew/English, English/Hebrew Dictionary*. Meridian.
- Bolozky, Shmuel. 1996. *501 Hebrew Verbs*. New York: Barron's.
- Lauden, Edna & Liora Weinbach. 1988. +2000. *A Dictionary for Learners of Hebrew*. Tel Aviv: Ad.
- Lauden, Edna & Liora Weinbach. 1998. *Multi Dictionary, Bilingual Learner's Dictionary, Hebrew-Hebrew-English, English-Hebrew*. Tel Aviv: Ad.
- Perez, Hanna G. 2009. *English-Hebrew by Subject: Topic Dictionary for Learning and Reference* (Audio CD included). Joel Yaron Publishing.
- Sivan, Reuven. and Edward. A. Levenston. 1967/77. *The Megiddo Modern Dictionary, Hebrew-English*. Tel Aviv: Megiddo.

These texts should be enough to get you off to a good start, and all of them can be readily found in bookstores or online.

Additional Learning Materials:

A valuable resource for learners of Modern Hebrew is the “Gesher” Series of books published by WZO. This is an extensive and diverse series of literary works adapted into relatively easy Hebrew and printed in small volumes with large print and nikkud. This series offers an excellent way for learners to become familiar with Hebrew literature without yet having to deal with the unabridged, vowel-less originals.

The Israeli daily *Yediot Ahranot* publishes a weekly newspaper in easy Hebrew with *nikkud* called *Sha'ar Lamathil*. More information can be found at:

<http://www.slamathil.co.il/>

3.3 Should I get a native speaker as a tutor?

As the saying goes, having teeth doesn't make you a dentist. As is generally true of native speakers of English, most native speakers of Hebrew aren't great at explaining their language. Good tutors are few and far between. Shop around, and try different tutors out if you can. Find someone who strikes you as a flexible personality who will be easy to work with. It helps if you like them, and if they can be something of a role model for functioning in Hebrew. Find someone whose pronunciation strikes you as clear. An educated person will generally be a better bet, but only to a point. Find someone who will create opportunities for you to speak and stay away from someone who does most of the speaking. You want someone down to earth who will work with you and create opportunities for you to use the language. Most importantly, find someone who'll cut

to the quick and give you just what you need. A good tutor will be able to quickly assess your personal level of Hebrew, listen to and understand your goals, and help you get to where you want to be, rather than simply applying a preconceived notion of how Hebrew should be taught that supposedly fits “one and all.”

3.4 I’m interested in learning some Hebrew, but I don’t plan to reach an advanced level. Is it worth my time just to take a course or two?

The answer is an emphatic YES! Even if you have an hour or less a day to devote to Hebrew you can still learn a great deal in only a few months. The writing system can be learned quickly, as can basic conversation skills. Studying a language for any period of time is an investment worthy of your time and effort.

4. Hebrew in the Language Classroom

4.1 Is learning a language just like other classroom learning?

Language learning is quite different from most classroom experiences. Language learning tends to diverge from other disciplines both in the way a typical classroom operates and in the behaviors a student should adopt to attain their goals. Unlike a traditional classroom setting where professors lecture and students listen or take notes, a language-learning environment should be dynamic and student-centered. The teacher should help foster this kind of environment, but the student is also responsible to participate actively and contribute positively to the classroom dynamic. The degree of success achieved in a language class will depend very much on the active participation and involvement of each individual student in the class. Frequent absence and lack of preparation will negatively impact the overall progress of the class. (If you feel that language learning is not intuitive for you, read carefully the comments under question 4.2 for ideas on how to improve your language learning abilities.)

Language learning involves some apparently contradictory tendencies. For example, there is a great deal that is purely formulaic: vocabulary lists, verb conjugations, noun declensions, and grammar rules. But there is also that which is creative and unique: poetry, jokes, and culture-specific references and nuances. Ambiguities, idioms, and exceptions to the rule are as much a part of languages as are charts for verb conjugation. Competence in a language also subsumes cultural know-how and sensitivity, as well as the ability to take risks and feel comfortable with a new language “persona.”

Few other learning experiences provide such a combination of logic, rigor, and an outlet for creativity. In short, learning a foreign language can be one of life’s most challenging, stimulating, and satisfying experiences.

4.2 What strategies do good language learners employ?

Some otherwise excellent students inevitably find that they aren’t on top when it comes to learning a foreign language. Just as some will claim that they aren’t “cut out” for learning math, a few students believe that learning a foreign language is beyond their capacities. Such assumptions are counterproductive. Certainly, varying levels of talent, inclination, and discipline affect the rate of progress in language learning—as in any field—but there are both general attitudes and specific steps that students can take to improve their ability to learn a foreign language. Here are some typical strategies and characteristics of good language learners.

- **Be an active learner in the classroom and maximize your exposure to the language in general.** Even if your teacher does not have a “target language only” policy in class, it is still a good idea to use the language as much as possible. Ask questions, chat with your classmates, and participate whenever possible in Hebrew. You may not feel like you know much, but by using what you do know, you will add to that knowledge much more quickly. Try to encounter Hebrew whenever possible. Put up vocabulary cards around your house or apartment. Listen to a Hebrew news update once a day on the Internet. When you study vocabulary words, listen to them on tape (preferably in context) and repeat them out loud, then use them in sentences and write them down. Make it a goal to get to know Hebrew speakers and try speaking the language with them as much as possible.
- **Be persistent.** Persistence pays: Take each assigned text or exercise as a challenge, a puzzle to solve. Language learning involves hard work, but that doesn’t mean one has to perceive it as a burden. Viewing some aspects of language learning with a playful attitude can also be beneficial. For example, use rhymes or songs to learn new words or expressions. Play games to conjugate verbs or to memorize vocabulary lists.
- **Have a positive work ethic.** Even the most naturally gifted language learners don’t achieve advanced levels of proficiency without hard work and significant amounts of “time on task.” You will be surprised how much improvement you can make when you concentrate and patiently keep trying. Expect to put in the time, and try to make it effective time. Willingness to work hard is important, but so too is the willingness to analyze your efforts to determine where they are well spent.
- **In the classroom, be a team player and learn by doing and “teaching” as well as by listening.** Many language teachers assign small group work both in and out of the classroom, not only to add variety to the class but also to give students the chance to learn by doing. Studies have shown that even speaking practice with students at beginning levels of proficiency can have great benefit. You don’t have to be speaking Hebrew with a native speaker to learn something. Also, you’ll need to recognize that students have different learning styles. For example, some students can’t wait to jump in, while others prefer to watch from the bank or wade

in the shallows until they feel comfortable before they try “swimming” in the language. If you are too loud and outspoken, you may have a negative impact on the ability of others to learn. Develop a balance between patience with the teacher, your classmates, and yourself, and an anxious desire to master material and move forward. Be considerate of others, but whatever you do stay mentally engaged, focus, and push yourself.

- **Language is a skill to be acquired, not just information to be accumulated.** While the importance of memorizing vocabulary and verb tables can not be stressed enough, by itself it will never constitute knowledge of a language. Students who can pass vocabulary and grammar quizzes but do not bother to write the essays or engage in discussion will find that even their memorization efforts will have been in vain.
- **Good language learners are unafraid to make mistakes.** They are willing to try, and correction from a teacher or others is appreciated instead of resented. An enthusiastic attitude in a language class can have a tremendous impact on your own progress as well as on that of others.
- **Good language learners learn from their mistakes and those of their classmates.** While they are not afraid of making mistakes, they focus on how to avoid repeating previous mistakes. They learn from the mistakes other students make in class and correct them silently while listening.
- **Good language learners are comfortable with a little ambiguity.** They are comfortable with not understanding everything they hear or read in the language for the first time. They focus on getting the overall meaning rather than getting “hung-up” on one word or another.

In conclusion, good language learners come from all kinds of backgrounds and with a whole variety of styles, preferences, and abilities. Not all good language learners are the most naturally gifted. They are simply better at adopting effective attitudes and strategies, and they keep at it. None of us can afford to rely on talent alone. Hard work, an enthusiastic attitude, and time-tested strategies are the best formula for success in language acquisition.

4.3 My teacher’s style doesn’t match mine. What should I do?

No one teacher’s style will be ideal for every student in the class. Expect your teacher to have strengths and weaknesses. Perhaps your teacher is a native speaker of Hebrew but has a hard time answering questions about grammar. Other teachers may have a talent for explaining difficult concepts but will never have native conversation abilities. Students should not let teachers’ weaknesses limit how much they will learn. Instead of giving in to a tendency to blame the teacher for an apparent lack of progress, students can, to a very large degree, determine the course and rate of their progress. Even a

good teacher is only a guide and resource. Ultimately students should take responsibility for what they learn.

If you do struggle with a teacher’s style or methodology, before you give in to frustration you should find appropriate ways to express your concerns to your teacher. You may be surprised at the results. Good teachers want to improve how they teach and are eager for student feedback. In those rare cases where a teacher truly is hindering students from reaching their goals and is unwilling to accommodate requests for change, those students should consider changing classes and making their experience known to a program administrator.

4.4 Why are other students progressing more quickly than I am?

Simply put, learning any language will have moments of difficulty and discomfort. Hebrew is no exception. Few people are so well adjusted that they feel no discomfort when they don’t understand a question addressed to them or when they make mistakes in front of others. But don’t let the quick progress—or the apparent quick progress—of others deter your own. A very common perception among students in language learning classrooms is that while “I” am struggling, everyone else is doing well. Occasionally that perception may be true, but in the great majority of cases, you are simply experiencing the natural fears and insecurities of language learning.

It can be especially challenging to have “heritage” students in class who come with various degrees of exposure to Hebrew but appear to know everything. These students, in fact, may know enough to intimidate their peers but may not perform well otherwise—even those who have good listening comprehension and speaking skills may have other serious gaps to fill. The point is that, whatever your background, learning Hebrew takes a lot of hard work and occasional frustrations. Everyone must stretch themselves to learn Hebrew.

We might have posed a different question: what should I do if I feel that other students are holding me back? If you are a strong language learner who catches on quickly, don’t detract from the rest of the class. Your assistance to other students and patience with the speed of the class will be greatly appreciated by the teacher and will actually increase your language abilities. Help contribute to an encouraging environment where all students are unafraid to try or make mistakes. There are learning strategies you can adopt to improve your performance.

4.5 What are reasonable expectations for proficiency and progress?

Language proficiency is typically measured in terms of how students or users of the language perform in a variety of situations and tasks. Less proficient speakers will be limited in the kind of tasks they are able to perform and in the fluency and precision with which they perform them. More proficient speakers exhibit fluency, precision, and

general cultural awareness, and are able to communicate effectively about both concrete and abstract topics.

For a more in-depth description of these levels according to the ACTFL scale, visit:

<http://www.gwu.edu/~slavic/actfl.htm>

There will be a range of proficiency achieved by students of Hebrew. After 1 year (2 semesters) of Hebrew study, most students will have achieved a “novice high” level or better (on the ACTFL scale). After 2 years, most students exhibit “intermediate low” or “intermediate mid” proficiency. The steps between the proficiency levels require progressively more time to move up, so achieving “intermediate high” proficiency is a reasonable goal for 3 or 4 years of study. A few students may reach an advanced level in the same amount of time.

5. Special Features of Hebrew You Should Know About

5.1 Is Hebrew harder than other languages?

To say that learning Hebrew is no “harder” for native English speakers than learning Spanish would probably be false advertising. It is hard to put a number on how objectively “hard” any language is. What certainly makes Hebrew harder for English speakers than Indo-European Languages like Spanish, French, Italian, Latin, Greek, German, or Russian is simply that Hebrew has less in common with English than these other languages do. This means starting from scratch with both vocabulary and grammar. It means fewer short-cuts and less reliance on cognates. On average, then, it takes longer to acquire the same level of proficiency in Hebrew than it would in Spanish or French.

We emphasize, however, that Hebrew is not the exclusive realm of “elite” students or the linguistically gifted. Hebrew is absolutely “do-able” and can be an enjoyable challenge. Students of average native talent have been very successful in learning Hebrew, and even gifted students run into frustrations. Stubborn perseverance and dedicated study count for more in the long run than does “catching on” quickly to a new language. Don’t be daunted by Hebrew’s reputation of difficulty.

5.2 Why is Hebrew written in two different alphabets?

The short answer is that it simply is and you must learn both alphabets if you are to be considered literate in Hebrew. It’s not really that hard. Both alphabets contain the same letters, they are just written a bit differently, sometimes not even that differently. Also, you only need to be able to read the *dfus* alphabet; you do not need to be able to write it. The word *dfus* means “print” and this alphabet is only printed—it is never handwritten. The other alphabet, called *ktiv* which means “write,” is the exclusive alphabet for handwriting and is never used in print except sometimes in highly stylized advertisements and titles.

The dfus alphabet (above) vs. the ktiv alphabet (below)

Of the two alphabets, the *ktiv* is actually the older one. It is also the more authentically Hebrew alphabet. It resembles the alphabets found in inscriptions of other Canaanite languages such as Phoenician. Something like *ktiv* was probably the dominant alphabet used by literate Hebrew speakers until the destruction of the First Temple. The *dfus* alphabet was originally used to write Babylonian or Aramaic, not Hebrew. It was picked up by Jewish intellectuals living in Babylon during the Babylonian exile. They apparently thought it looked more stylish than the older Canaanite script, and adopted it. They brought it back with them when they returned to Judea, where the commoners still used the older system. To this day, *ktiv* has a more colloquial feel to it and *dfus* a more formal feel.

5.3 What is the root system?

One of the characteristic features of Semitic languages is their system of roots and patterns. Most (but not all) Hebrew words have trilateral roots—in other words, there are three letters in these words that connect them to a “root” meaning, and also to other words that share the same root. In Hebrew, roots can be manipulated by varying the vowels between the roots letter, by adding suffixes and prefixes, or placing other consonants and vowels between the root letters. These changes give derived meanings that are often (though not always) related in predictable ways to the root meaning.

The whole idea of roots and patterns may be quite foreign to someone who grew up speaking a Western language. What is important to remember is that the patterns that guide the manipulation of Hebrew roots are not the bane of English-speaking students. On the contrary, they are methodical and often predictable systems that, once mastered, become highly useful in understanding and producing language. Learning the root and pattern system early in your study of Hebrew—and reviewing it often—is an investment that will pay high dividends in the future. Many learners of Hebrew find the root system to be among the most fascinating aspects of the language.

5.4 Why are Hebrew dictionaries more difficult than other dictionaries?

The root and pattern system of the Semitic languages means that many closely related words do not begin with the same letter. Most Arabic dictionaries address this issue by not listing entries alphabetically by word, but instead listing them alphabetically by root. This means that students of Arabic must be able to recognize the root of a word before they can look it up in the dictionary. Dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew such as *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (see 8.1) follow the same approach. Forms

are grouped under roots; non-verbs are listed separately as well, but only for the purpose of referring them to their roots, where the actual information is provided. There are certain pedagogical reasons to teaching verbs this way, but the obvious disadvantage is that the specific form you are likely to encounter will not be identical to the dictionary entry, and in many cases will be quite different from it.

This is why current Hebrew dictionaries do not list all entries by root, which makes things easier for students, but it also means that many closely related words appear in completely different parts of the dictionary. In general, this makes dictionaries easier for students to use, except in the case of verbs. Hebrew verbs may begin with a different letter depending on what tense, gender, or person they are in. Obviously, no dictionary wants to have more than one entry per verb. Many dictionaries use the past tense third person masculine singular as the default form, but other approaches may be used as long as they are consistent. A verb-only reference book like *501 Hebrew Verbs* (see 3.2) groups verbs by roots, but you can identify the root by checking the index first, which lists verbs by the 3rd person singular form in the past tense. Grouping by root has the advantage of making use of the verb class or “binyan” system of Hebrew. For instance, *kafats* means “jumped” and *hikpits* means “caused to jump.” The alphabetical by root system would list both these verbs under one entry, just as it would list *shakbav* “lay down” and *hishkiv* “caused to lie down” as a single entry. Make sure you understand your dictionary’s system. In any case, when looking up a verb, you will need to first realize that it is a verb and then put it into the correct tense and form so you can look it up. With Hebrew, you can never just look up any word as you saw it spelled in a text and expect it to appear in the dictionary as such.

What makes all Hebrew dictionaries uniquely difficult is the issue of writing or not writing vowels. Hebrew once distinguished between short and long vowels, as Arabic does. Also as in Arabic, only long vowels could be written as separate letters. Short vowels were introduced into the writing system later in the form of markings written below or above the consonants they followed. However, in both Arabic and Hebrew, these markings are not used in most forms of everyday writing and printing. The difference between the two languages in this respect is that Arabic still distinguishes long and short pronunciation of vowels, so there is never any question as to how words are spelled. If the vowel is long, it is always written as a letter. If the vowel is short, it is never written as a letter but may be written optionally as a marking.

In Hebrew, the vowel situation is far more problematic. The main problem is that speakers of Modern Hebrew no longer pronounce many distinctions between the long and short vowels. Only the vowel “e” is ever pronounced differently. It sounds more like “ey” in some cases where it was historically long. Compare the Hebrew words *ben* “son” (historically short) with *beyn* “between” (historically long). The other four vowels are pronounced the same whether historically long or short. This has led to a large number of homonyms or near-homonyms and has made it very difficult even for native speakers to remember how words should be spelled. The vowel “a” was never written as a letter under any circumstances, but the three vowels “i, o, u” have become a source of confusion. While the Academy for the Hebrew Language has published a set of

guidelines for the use of vowel letters, many native speakers use their own judgment in writing, and often produce texts that are inconsistent with the rules and within their own system of spelling. This practice is known as *ktiv male* “full script” and has gained some legitimacy in recent years. It certainly facilitates reading. Most dictionaries, however, insist on writing vowels as letters only if they were historically long. This is known as *ktiv baser* “deficient script” and of course changes the order in which the words appear in the dictionary. If you are looking up a word in the dictionary that contains one of the vowels “i, o, u” and you can’t find it, read the preface of the dictionary to find out how it treats vowel letters. If vowel letters are not included, try looking up the word as if these vowels are not written. Also, note that this omission of the letters (‘ and ı) applies only to when they are pronounced as the vowels “i, o, u.” When these letters are pronounced as the consonants “v” and “y,” they are always included.

There is little point in trying to predict whether a vowel in a particular word will be written in a dictionary or not. You may just have to check all possible spellings until you find it. The good news is that you can feel free to write these vowels in your own spelling of words as you see fit, particularly since, as noted above, many Hebrew speakers do not necessarily follow the Hebrew Academy guidelines for *ktiv male*.

5.5 Reading and writing without vowels

While dictionaries may do you the discourtesy of omitting some of the vowel letters, they do you the courtesy of writing in all of the vowels markings, which are also called *nekudot* or *nikkud*. These markings actually do more than specify vowels. They also mark syllable boundaries and the differences between some consonants like “p” and “f”. The Hebrew writing system is such that unless you know in advance how a word is pronounced, you can never be completely sure if it is written without *nikkud*. As an Israeli chef once pointed out, the words “pâté” and “feta” are written the same in Hebrew. And yet, outside of dictionaries, *nekudot* are almost never written. The major exceptions are prayer books, poetry, books for teaching children to read, and the spelling of novel foreign names. Since language is to a large extent behavioral, you can not be said to be proficient in Hebrew until you feel comfortable reading and writing without *nikkud*. You will probably have to gain some practice reading texts that have *nikkud* before you are able to read a *nikkud*-less text. You should attempt to switch over from the former to the latter as soon as possible. As for writing, you should probably start writing without *nikkud* from the very beginning. As long as you are writing words you know, you will not have trouble reading them back, and this will help train you to read novel texts that lack *nikkud*.

The *nikkud* system dates back to the 6th and 7th centuries, and was designed to describe differences in pronunciation that were distinguished in the Hebrew of the Bible. Modern Hebrew maintains a basic five-vowel system (i, e, a, o, u) that is pretty close to the seven-vowel system of Biblical Hebrew. However, the loss of the distinctive vowel length has rendered many of the distinctions of the *nikkud* system redundant. In addition to distinguishing between short and long vowels, the *nikkud* systems also distin-

guishes between short vowels that are historically part of the stem, and some short vowels that were added for ease of pronunciation (the so-called *hatafim*). The result is a system of about 15 different vowel markings to designate five vowels. Modern dictionaries maintain the old system as a means of keeping the historical origins of the words apparent. You should feel comfortable reading all of these markings. However, when writing, you do not need to remember which vowels were historically long or short or inserted. Most native speakers wouldn't have a clue. It is probably best never to write the vowel markings yourself at all. Most native speakers don't.

5.6 Will studying Hebrew help me learn other languages?

The language most closely related to Hebrew that is commonly taught in the West is Arabic. While Hebrew and Arabic are members of different branches of the Semitic family, and Modern Hebrew and the modern Arabic dialects differ greatly from their historic ancestors, Hebrew and Arabic remain more alike than any other two languages you are likely to study. This may not be immediately obvious, since their writing systems appear to be so different. The base vocabularies of the two languages are largely overlapping. "One, two, three" in Hebrew are *ehad, shtaim, shalosh*. In Arabic they are *wahad, ithmein, thalathe*. Words for family members, body parts, basic foodstuffs, and animals are also very similar. Words that are more abstract and modern are less similar, but in many cases make good cognates. Predicting the words of one language from the other is made easier when one learns to recognize regular correspondences instead of just looking for surface similarities. For instance, Arabic "th" (ث) always corresponds to Hebrew "sh" (ש) as can be seen in the words for "two" and "three" above. In fact, while Hebrew and Arabic letters look different, they correspond to each other to a high degree of regularity.

Another great advantage in studying Arabic if you know Hebrew is the notorious Semitic root and pattern system. Not only is the logic of the system the same in both languages, but many of the roots and many of the patterns are actually the same or at least correspond to a high degree of regularity. For example, the seven Hebrew "binyanim" that are crucial to understanding Hebrew verbs and deverbal nouns correspond to seven of the ten Arabic "Verb Forms" you will have to learn if you choose to study Arabic.

These advantages should hold in the case that you decide to study any of the world's lesser-studied Semitic languages. Some of the advantages should also hold if you decide to study any of the non-Semitic languages that, like Persian, have borrowed greatly from Arabic and have been influenced by its grammar. In a more general sense, learning Hebrew can make the task of learning languages more closely related to English much easier by comparison. Spanish, French, or German are not quite as intimidating after wrestling with a language like Hebrew.

6. Hebrew Goals and Strategies

6.1 Should I focus on reading comprehension skills or on listening and speaking?

The best-case scenario is to have a balanced approach that allows you to gain familiarity and expertise in all areas of language comprehension and production. Practical constraints may limit what can reasonably be done, so the decision of what to focus on must be made by each individual student. If you are planning on living in Israel, speaking and listening must have a high priority. Likewise, someone who hopes to read literature and scholarly books or translate newspaper articles should focus on reading comprehension (though, in the second case, translation is often considered a skill of its own). No approach should focus on one aspect of language learning to the exclusion of all else. In fact, competence and experience in one facet of language undoubtedly improves ability in other areas.

6.2 I'm having trouble learning vocabulary. What are some effective strategies?

Students who encounter Hebrew after learning a Western European language can be frustrated by the difficulty of building up a functional vocabulary. Learning vocabulary in Hebrew is not easy, especially for beginning students, but it is crucial to communication and must not be neglected. We offer a few suggestions on building a better vocabulary in Hebrew, but the important principle is to try various strategies and find one (or many) that works for you.

- **First of all, become comfortable with the writing system and then with the fundamentals of the root and pattern system.** Spend as much or more effort in mastering these as in rote memorization of individual words. A solid foundation will aid in the retention of new words.
- **Give up the crutch of learning vocabulary by cognate association.** One of the first reactions of English-speaking students to Hebrew is surprise at the scarcity of cognates. One simply can't depend on a Hebrew word sounding similar to an equivalent English word.
- **Ask your teacher or a native Hebrew speaker to slowly and clearly record the words from your vocabulary lists.** Hearing the words spoken can be an excellent prompt for your memory and can help to improve your pronunciation. While you listen, try visualizing how each word is written in the Hebrew alphabet, remember what it means, and mimic the pronunciation of the speaker.
- **Flashcards** are neither high-tech nor novel, but they still do the job. Write the words down on both sides of cards and practice going from Hebrew to English and English to Hebrew. Work with a classmate when possible; otherwise, use the flashcards for multi-tasking while walking or eating.

- **Try to memorize new vocabulary words “in context.”** Memorize (or create your own) model sentences containing the word. If the vocabulary comes from a Hebrew text, try to remember how it was used in that text.
- Most importantly, **use the words.** Make it a point to incorporate new words into compositions or conversation. If you don’t use it, you will lose it.

6.3 How much should I study each day?

Language learning is by its nature time-intensive. Most university courses in Hebrew will expect you to study at least one hour a day outside the classroom, and more likely two. Some students will find they need to spend more than two hours a day—above and beyond any time in the classroom—to keep pace. Naturally, there is a limit to how much one can profitably accomplish in one sitting or in one day. More important than the quantity of time you spend on Hebrew is the quality of the time.

Not uncommonly, determined students who find that the process does not come easily to them will throw themselves at the task in rather unproductive ways. Some students will work on Hebrew for hours on end, with little gain. This can be frustrating and humiliating, particularly when learning the language appears to come so easily to others. Learn to recognize the difference between “healthy” and unhealthy levels of frustration. Your mind gets tired just like your body, so don’t attempt marathon study sessions. Expect Hebrew to challenge you, and rise to the challenge by working with focus and determination, but don’t expect to get to the top of the mountain in one day (week, year, etc.). Enjoy the privilege and challenge of Hebrew study.

As should go without saying, it is particularly ineffective to try to “cram” to learn a language. If success on a final exam is your only goal, then that, sadly, will likely be your only benefit from the class. Regular, consistent study is the best—and probably only—way to learn a language well. Not only will you perform well in class and really learn something about the language, you will also develop sound study habits that will carry over into other areas. Some students have noted that the rigor of learning Hebrew helped them develop a personal discipline that benefited them even if they did not pursue a Hebrew-related career.

6.4 Tell me about some pitfalls to avoid.

- **Frustration.** Early on in the process of learning Hebrew, students should prepare for the normal feelings of frustration that are a part of language learning. Students need to be reminded that each of us has different talents and different challenges, but when it comes to language learning, all of us feel some frustration. Remember, frustration is not all bad: it promotes growth and builds strength.

- **Unreasonable Expectations.** Underlying the frustration of many students are unreasonable expectations about the rate of progress in reading and listening comprehension, vocabulary assimilation, and, generally, any of the typical measures of “fluency” or proficiency. Mastering Hebrew is a lifelong endeavor, and focusing solely on how far one has yet to go will inevitably be a little discouraging. Recognize the progress you’ve made. It can be quick. In fact, a lot can be learned in one semester or term. We really can’t emphasize that enough. It’s a question of attitude. Some students feel that Hebrew is a perilous mountain with crags and precipices awaiting the faint of heart. Looking only up at the mountain can be discouraging. Stay focused on the big picture.

- **Get used to reading and writing Hebrew from the start without *nikkud*.** Writing these is unnatural for native Hebrew speakers, and should be so for you as well. *Nikkud* is typically only used for children’s books, poetry and religious texts, and in spelling some novel foreign words. There are some patterns and words one should definitely learn well, such as verb forms, active participles, and passive participles. Like all other aspects of the language, your control of short vowels will increase gradually as your overall proficiency in the language expands.

7. Hebrew and Israel

7.1 How important is knowledge about Israeli culture for me in learning Hebrew?

No language should be studied in isolation from the social and cultural nexus in which it exists as the active medium of communication. One of the areas of language “competence,” as the pedagogues like to call it, is cultural competence. To emulate the proficiency model of the educated native speaker, you must have awareness of religion, history, politics, and generally speaking any of those subjects about which an educated person might have occasion to chat in a social situation—not a mastery of all these subjects, but some knowledge and a good deal of curiosity.

Gain all the knowledge you can about the culture and history of Israel. In order to follow a discussion it is important to have background knowledge. No matter how good one’s language skills, one will have a difficult time following a discussion about political matters if one knows nothing of the history and politics of the region being discussed. Develop a healthy fascination for all these topics. It will make you a better language learner. Those who follow current affairs already know that the Middle East is constantly in the media spotlight. Try to stay abreast of important events, and explore what the Hebrew press has to say about the same issues.

7.2 I want to get to know native speakers of Hebrew. Any suggestions?

Getting to know native speakers of Hebrew is an excellent way to practice the language and be exposed to Israeli culture. Many universities have Israeli student associations or Hebrew language clubs. These might be a good place to start if you are a university student. Most large cities in the United States will have a Jewish community center. Some may offer language, religion, or culture classes.

When you are with speakers of Hebrew, don't be afraid to try out your Hebrew. Because of Hebrew's reputation, native speakers and others will be mighty impressed that you're learning it. They are also likely to be patient and forgiving of your mistakes.

7.3 How important is it for me to study in Israel?

Students who aim at achieving a high level of proficiency with Hebrew generally plan to travel or study in Israel. We encourage those who have the opportunity to take advantage of travel or study abroad programs. In most cases, the ability to "soak up" the language by living in Israel is increased with the help of a structured program.

8. Resources for Students of Hebrew

8.1 I want to read more about Jewish history, religion, and culture to help me contextualize my study of the language.

You may wish to consult a teacher or standard reference books for ideas on where to start. The list below offers a sampling of titles but is by no means comprehensive.

Biblical Hebrew

- Blau, Joshua. 1976. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Brettler, Marc Z. 2002. *Biblical Hebrew for Students of Israeli Hebrew*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press.
- Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver and Charles A Briggs. [1906] 1980. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Futato, Mark D. 2003. *Beginning Biblical Hebrew*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
- Kautsch, Emil. 1910. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. tr. A. E. Cowley. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Kelley, Page H. 1992. *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Kittel, Bonnie P, Vicki Hoffer and Rebecca A. Wright. 1989. *Biblical Hebrew: A Text and Workbook*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press.
- Lambdin, Thomas O. 1971. *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*. New York: Scribner's.
- Moscato, Sabatino, A. Spitaler, E. Ullendorff and W. Von Soden. 1969. *An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Pratico, Gary D. and Van Pelt, Miles V. 2001. *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Workbook*.

- Weingreen, J. 1959. *A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Van Pelt, Miles V. and Gary D. Pratico. 2001. *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar*. Zondervan (with CD).

Hebrew and the Semitic languages

- Chomsky, William. 1957. *Hebrew: The Eternal Language*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America.
- Gray, Louis. 1971. *Introduction to Semitic Comparative Linguistics*. Amsterdam: Philo Press.
- Hetzron, Robert (ed.). 1997. *The Semitic Languages*. London: Routledge.
- Kutscher, Raphael. 1982. *A History of the Hebrew Language*. Jerusalem: The Magnes press, The Hebrew University.
- Sáenz-Badillos, Angel. 1993. *A History of the Hebrew Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hebrew Language Structure

- Coffin, Edna Amir and Shmuel Bolozky. 2005. *A Reference Grammar of Modern Hebrew*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Glinert, Lewis. 1991. *Modern Hebrew: An Essential Grammar*. London: Routledge.
- Glinert, Lewis. 1989. *The Grammar of Modern Hebrew*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schwarzwald, Ora B. 2001. *Modern Hebrew*. Munich: Lincom Europa.

Jewish history and religion

- Dawidowicz, Lucy. 1986. *The war against the Jews: 1933-1945*. New York: Bantam.
- Eban, Abba. 1984. *Heritage: Civilization and the Jews*. New York: Summit Books.
- Johnson, Paul. 1987. *A History of the Jews*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Josephus. *The Jewish War*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Lewis, Bernard. 1986. *Semites and anti-Semites: an inquiry into conflict and prejudice*. New York: Norton.
- Lieber, David (ed.). 2001. *Etz Hayim: Torah and commentary*. New York: The Rabbinical Assembly.
- Millgram, Abraham. 1971. *Jewish Worship*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America.
- Patai, Raphael. 1977. *The Jewish Mind*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Jews in the Diaspora (excluding America)

- Frank, Anne. 1995. *The diary of a young girl: the definitive edition*. New York: Doubleday.
- Haddad, Heskel. 1986. *Flight from Babylon*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Roth, Cecil. 1948. *Doña Gracia of the house of Nasi*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.
- Singer, Isaac Bashevis. 1966. *In my father's court*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Sharansky, Natan. 1988. *Fear no evil*. New York: Random House.

Wiesel, Elie. 1960. *Night*. New York: Hill and Wang.
Zborowski, Mark and Elizabeth Herzog. 1952. *Life is with people*. New York: International Universities Press

Jews in America

Chafets, Ze'ev. 1988. *Members of the tribe: on the road in Jewish America*. Toronto: Bantam Books.
Eisenberg, Robert. 1995. *Boychiks in the hood*. San Francisco: Harper.
Howe, Irving. 1976. *World of our fathers*. New York: Harcourt Brace Janovitch.
Klein Halevi, Yossi. 1995. *Memoirs of a Jewish extremist*. Boston: Little Brown.
Porter, Jack Nusan and Peter Dreier (eds.). 1973. *Jewish radicalism: a selected anthology*. New York: Grove Press.
Sachar, Howard. 1992. *A History of the Jews in America*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Modern Hebrew literature in translation

Abramson, Glenda (ed.). 1996. *The Oxford book of Hebrew short stories*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Appelfeld, Aharon. 1981. *The Age of wonders*. New York: Washington Square Press.
Bialik, Hayyim Nahman. 1999. *Random harvest: the novellas of Bialik*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.
Domb, Risa(ed.). 1996. *New women's writing from Israel*. London: Vallentine, Mitchell.
Goldberg, Leah. 1976. *Selected poems*. London: Menard Press.
Grossman, David. 1991. *See under: love*. London: Picador.
Keret, Etgar. 2001. *The bus driver who wanted to be God and other stories*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books.
Levin, Hanoah. 2003. *The labor of life: selected plays*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
Raizen, Esther(ed.). 1995. *No rattling of sabers: an anthology of Israeli war poetry*. Austin, Texas: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the University of Texas at Austin.
Shalev, Meir. 1991. *The blue mountain*. New York: Harper Collins.
Shabtai, Yaakov.1985. *Past continuous*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

Arab-Israeli conflict

Bard, Mitchell. 2003. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Middle East Conflict*. Indianapolis: Alpha Books.
Grossman, David. 1988. *The Yellow Wind*. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux.
Harkavi, Yehoshafat. 1971. *Arab Attitudes to Israel*. New York: Hart.
Israeli, Raphael. 1985. *Peace is in the eye of the beholder*. Berlin: Mouton.
Karsh, Efraim. 2002. *The Palestine War 1948*. Oxford: Osprey Pub Co.
Lozowick, Yaacov. 2003. *Right to Exist: A Moral Defense of Israel's Wars*. New York: Doubleday.
Oren, Michael. 2002. *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Rabinovich, Abraham. 2004. *The Yom Kippur War: the epic encounter that transformed the Middle East*. New York: Schocken Books.

Sachar, Howard. 1996. *A history of Israel: from the rise of Zionism to our time*. New York: A.A. Knopf.
Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud Ya'ari. 1984. *Israel's Lebanon war*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

8.2 Movies

Except in the unlikely case that you don't like to watch movies, movies are an excellent way to learn any language. The number of Israeli movies available on videocassette and DVD in stores and catalogues in the West has grown since the 1990s. Hopefully, this trend will continue. Israeli movies that are sold or rented in the United States have been converted to the NTSC system used by VCR and DVD players sold in America. Most videocassettes and DVDs sold by Israeli vendors use the PAL resolution system and will not play on American VCR or DVD players. Converting films from PAL to NTSC requires special equipment and is usually expensive. Luckily, however, PAL DVDs will play on any standard DVD-ROM drive on any computer. You can thus confidently buy any movie on DVD directly from an Israeli vendor as long as you have access to a computer with a DVD-ROM drive and you don't mind watching a movie on your computer or else you have some way of hooking your computer up to a TV. Do not buy videocassettes from Israeli vendors unless you know that you have access to a VCR that will play PAL video recordings.

Many, although not all, of the new Israeli DVD releases contain English subtitles as a feature. Try to watch each movie without subtitles, at least the first time you view it. You may understand more than you think if you just make the effort. You will not make this effort if you have the subtitles in front of you. Besides, subtitles are never completely accurate and often don't bother to translate the juicier bits of the dialogue. Subtitles on Israeli movies are notoriously sloppy. If you are watching a videocassette, you can not turn off the subtitles, but you can attach a strip of thick paper to the bottom of the screen to cover them up.

Amy Kronish has written several decent books on Israeli movies. The most recent is:

Kronish, Amy and Costel Safirman. 2003. *Israeli film: a reference guide*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Here is a selected list of Israeli movies given by their original Hebrew title and followed by their director and production year. Some of these movies have never been subtitled or released in the West. Some have never been released on DVD, even in Israel. One hopes more will be released in the future. A title is given in English only when a Western-released subtitled version is known to exist.

מתחת לאף (ינקול גולדוואסר 1982)

English title: "Big Shots"

A well-loved crime thriller that has a gang of inept and quarrelsome thieves up against a Dirty Harry style detective. With Moshe Ivgi, Uri Gavriel, Makram Khouri.

מבצע סבתא (דרור שאול 2002)

A combination of slapstick and black humor as three brothers attempt to bring the body of their dead grandmother back to the family kibbutz for burial.

האח של דריקס (דורון צברי, אורי ענבר ומשה זונדר 1995)

A rather sad comedy about a young soldier who encounters problems at his new base. One of the only movies to depict the despair in the lives of non-combat soldiers. With Tal Friedman.

גבעת חלפון אינה עונה (אסי דיין 1975)

A slapstick comedy about reservists at an outpost in the Sinai in the 1970s. The ultimate showcase for the gashash hahiver trio.

מציצים (אורי זוהר 1972)

The first and best of Uri Zohar's trilogy of beach movies. A lifeguard and his friend, an out-of-work guitarist, attempt to rid the beachfront of peeping toms. With Uri Zohar, Arik Einstein.

לול (אורי זוהר 1988)

Compiled from the episodes of the early 1970s musical comedy TV show of the same name. The songs and the skits are classics. With Arik Einstein, Shalom Chanoch.

מאחורי הסורגים (אורי ברבש 1984)

English title: "Beyond the Walls"
Jewish and Arab prisoners in a maximum security prison join forces to stage a strike against their brutal wardens. One of the only Israeli political movies that was actually popular in Israel.

נישואין פיקטיביים (חיים בזוגלו 1988)

English title: "Fictitious Marriage"
An unusual political allegory about an Israeli man who plans a trip to America but instead disappears and reemerges as a Palestinian construction worker. With Shlomo Bar-Aba.

ההסדר (יוסי סידר 2002)

English title: "Time of Favor"
A young religious settler who serves as an army officer is suspected of being an extremist who plans to blow up the temple mount. The only feature film to date about settlers. With Aki Avni.

עץ הדומים תפוס (אלי כהן 1995)

English title: "Under the Domim Tree"
The sequel to Summer of Aviya. After her mother is institutionalized, Aviya is sent to a boarding school where most of the other children are holocaust survivors. With Kaipo Cohen.

חגיגה בסנוקר (בעז דוידזון 1975)

A classic borekas film, roughly concerning the attempts of twin brothers to marry the same woman. With Ze'ev Revah, Yehuda Barkan, Yosef Shiloah, Tuvia Tsafir, Nitza Shaul.

אוואנטי פופולו (רפי בוקאי 1986)

English title: "Avanti Popolo"
A classic anti-war movie concerning Egyptian soldiers caught behind Israeli lines in the Sinai desert in aftermath of the 1967 war. With Salim Dau.

גמר גביע (ערן ריקליס 1992)

English title: "Cup Final"
The story of an Israeli reservist who is taken prisoner by a PLO cell during the Lebanon war. The prisoner and captors discover they are all avid soccer fans. With Moshe Ivgi, Muhamad Bakri.

זוהר (ערן ריקליס 1993)

The biography of legendary Israeli singer Zohar Argov. Starring Shaul Mizrahi, but the songs are the originals sung by Zohar.

צירלי וחצי (בעז דוידזון 1974)

Together with סנוקר, this is one of the classics of the so-called borekas films of the 1970s. An unemployed young man befriends an orphaned boy. With Yehuda Barkan.

סאלח שבתי (אפרים קישון 1965)

English title: "Sallah"
A Sepharadi immigrant in the early years of the state tangles with the authorities and tries to do right by his family. Still funny after all these years. With Haim Topol.

חתונה מאוחרת (דובר קוסאשווילי 2002)

English title: "Late Marriage"
A young Israeli of Georgian descent has to decide between the woman he loves and loyalty to his family. Everyone likes this movie. With Lior Ashkenazi.

עפולה אקספרס (גיולי שלז 1997)

English title: "Pick a card"
The unlikely tale of a mechanic from the small town of Afula who moves to Tel-Aviv with the intention of becoming a professional magician. With Zvika Hadar, Esti Zakheim.

חסד מופלא (עמוס גוטמן 1992)

English title: "Amazing Grace"
A young Israeli homosexual falls in love with an older man who has recently returned from America. Amos Gutman's last movie. Starring Sharon Alexander.

8.3 Web-based resources

Learning resources

- National Center for the Hebrew Language:
www.ivrit.org
- Esther Raizen's materials:
<http://www.laits.utexas.edu/hebrew/index.html>
- Yamada Language Center/ University of Oregon (mostly links to other sites)
<http://babel.uoregon.edu/yamada/guides/hebrew.html>
- Alphabet learning:
http://hebrewverb.hul.huji.ac.il/newtest/pre_abc.html
- Giora Etzion's site:
<http://www.artsci.wustl.edu/%7Eetzion/lessons.html>
- Vered Shemtov's site:
<http://www.stanford.edu/class/hebrew/mmedia/index.html>
- Brandeis U Summer Institute:
<http://www.brandeis.edu/summer/hebrew/index.php>
- CARLA Hebrew archives:
<http://www.carla.umn.edu/lctl/VAVA/audio/hebrew/>

News/media

- Ha'aretz
(Hebrew): <http://www.haaretz.co.il>
(English): <http://www.haaretz.com>
- Ma'ariv
(Hebrew): <http://www.maariv.co.il>
(English): <http://www.maarivenglish.com>
- Yediot Ahronot
(Hebrew): <http://www.ynet.co.il>
(Arabic): <http://www.araby.net>
- Arutz Sheva
(Hebrew): <http://www.a7.org/>
(English): <http://www.israelnn.com/>
(Russian): <http://www.sedmoykanal.com/>
(French): <http://www.a7fr.com/>
- The Jerusalem Post (English):
<http://www.jpost.com>
- The Jerusalem Report (English):
<http://www.jrep.com>
- Reshet Bet live radio:
<http://bet.iba.org.il>

Culture and entertainment

- "Walla" - a popular Israeli search engine:
<http://www.walla.com>

- Another media and blogging portal:
<http://www.tapuz.co.il/>
- Many web-based vendors sell Israeli CDs and DVDs online. One such site: <http://www.israel-music.com>, plays reduced quality samples of all songs on CDs they offer.
- A Hebrew language site with more information and news about Israeli musicians and singers:
<http://www.mooma.com>
- Hebrew Radio, TV Directories:
<http://www.Hebrew2000.com/index.html>
- A good English language catalogue of Israeli movies and TV shows:
<http://www.imdb.com/Sections/Countries/Israel/>
- A Hebrew language site, <http://www.televizia.net/> is dedicated to old television shows, from the days when Israel had only one TV channel.
- Great Link to Music, Dancing, and Cultural Articles:
www.shira.net/culture.htm