

Textures of Language

The three articles in the language section appear to be unrelated; a closer look, however, will reveal that in their totality, they do cover three essential sub-areas within the field of Hebrew and Arabic studies.

Chaim Cohen's article represents the philological/etymological approach to research in Semitic linguistics, as applied to the study of Biblical Hebrew. Since one is dealing with ancient languages, the analysis is text-based, relying not only on the Hebrew Bible itself, but on other Semitic texts as well (inscriptions included) – in this particular case in Hebrew, in closely-related Ugaritic, in Akkadian, and even in Arabic. The methodology is comparative, and the analysis is typical in its meticulous attention to every manifestation of the form in question across texts and across languages. The issue investigated is characteristic as well. The question is whether a form like *bištaḥānā* 'bow down' (or *ḥšḥmḥ* in Ugaritic) is to be derived from the root *šḥy* or *ḥmy*. This is of particular importance, because if the root is *ḥmy*, which is the position Cohen supports, it means that *š*, or *š'*, is not part of the root; rather, *bištaḥānā* is a realization of the derivational pattern *šCCeC*, or more specifically, its related pattern *bištaCCeC*. Although the article deals with essentially a single form, the analysis has implications to the status of *šCCeC* as an independent verb pattern.

Shmuel Bolozky's contribution to this section represents the type of research done on Israeli Hebrew, a living language. It explores the status of consonant doubling/lengthening (or gemination) in current Israeli usage. As in the case of any study of Israeli Hebrew, the analysis cannot be completely devoid of reference to earlier phases of the language, such as Biblical Hebrew. It is typical of the research on contemporary Hebrew, in that it evaluates a phenomenon that used to be pervasive in Biblical and in Mishnaic Hebrew, but has very limited phonetic manifestation today. On the other hand, there are structural residues to historical germination, which continue to affect the organization of the phonology and morphology of the language, and must still be accounted for. Bolozky argues that there is no sufficient justification for assuming underlying gemination within morphemes as an abstract means to capturing certain phonological or morphological behavior, only to get rid of it across the board afterwards. Geminate consonants arising out of morpheme combinations, however, are to be described as such, as well as the reasons why some of them may be simplified into regular (non-long) segments, or may be split.

Mohammed Jiyad's evaluation of computerized reading programs represents the field of pedagogy as applied to language teaching (Arabic as well as any other), and in particular the debate regarding the effectiveness of computer-assisted instruction (CAI). At the theoretical level, Jiyad argues for the importance of reading as a means of enhancing total language acquisition, well beyond the skill of reading proper. He then presents a strong case

for making CAI an essential part of the language teaching curriculum – in increasing student interest and motivation, in providing total language context (with the help of audio and video links) and a variety of help screens, and in allowing instructors to integrate their own reading materials, drills etc. by using the simple and easily accessible authoring programs provided. He then evaluates the different reading programs available, and argues for the relative advantages of one of them, the Genimi program.

Shmuel Bolozky