

ENGLISH IN ISRAEL:
SOCIOLINGUISTIC AND LINGUISTIC ASPECTS*

Yael Reshef

English in Israel takes part in a complex linguistic situation, characterized by a dominant monolingual ideology, accompanied by actual multilingualism. The population is divided into a Jewish majority and a big Arab-speaking minority, amounting to circa 20% of the population.¹ The Jewish sector itself, while in principle Hebrew-speaking, is only partly composed of native speakers of the language. Reflecting the character of Israel as an immigrant society, it includes a large percentage of native speakers of a variety of other languages, whose share in the population periodically increases due to waves of mass immigration from various parts of the world. While a full integration into Israeli society requires the immigrants to acquire Hebrew, some immigrant groups show a tendency towards language maintenance, either in the domestic sphere alone or in wider communicative functions, creating pockets of other languages within the surrounding Hebrew-speaking environment.² In recent years

* This article was originally written upon request from Prof. Maria Luisa Mayer Modena for a conference which took place at the University of Milan in October 2003. I thank her for the opportunity to study this topic, as well as the long-term guidance she gave me in the field of Judeo-Italian.

¹ This article concentrates on the Hebrew-speaking Jewish population. For a discussion and bibliographic references regarding English in the Arab sector see BERNARD SPOLSKY - ELANA SHOHAMY, *The Languages of Israel: Policy, Ideology and Practice*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 1999 [SPOLSKY - SHOHAMY], chapter 7 (especially pp. 160-161, 183-184).

² For data see SPOLSKY - SHOHAMY, pp. 3-4.

this linguistic complexity was further enhanced by a growing number of legal and illegal foreign workers of various nationalities, who do not normally acquire Hebrew and do not integrate into Israeli society, but live in closed communities and have a minimal contact with the surrounding environment.

Within this complex linguistic situation, English has a special place. While it is the mother tongue of a negligible portion of the population, it has a strong presence in Israel, surpassed only by the presence of Hebrew. It is the language of wider communication, used as a default option whenever the use of Hebrew is not possible. It enjoys a prestigious status, its knowledge is shared by all graduates of the Israeli school system, exposure to it is high, and it plays a significant role in the professional and cultural life of large portions of the population, especially among the affluent and educated social strata. An examination of the factors behind this strong presence of English in Israel reveals that it should be attributed to internal dynamics rather than to the former Anglophone colonial status of the territory or to direct diffusion efforts by the English-speaking world powers.³

The Historical Dimension

(a) The pre-state period

The Hebrew-speaking speech community was exposed to the influence of English from a very early stage in its existence, practically since Hebrew was first used on a large-scale basis from the 1920s on. Up to the 1880s Hebrew had not been a spoken language, but served as the liturgical and cultural language of the Jews. The efforts to transform Hebrew into a vernacular accompanied the rise of the Jewish national movement

³ BERNARD SPOLSKY, *English in Israel after Independence*, in JOSHUA A. FISHMAN - ANDREW W. CONRAD - ALMA RUBAL-LOPEZ (eds.), *Post-Imperial English*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 1996 [SPOLSKY], pp. 535-555; ELIEZER BEN-RAFAEL, *Language, Identity and Social Division*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994 [BEN-RAFAEL], p. 181; ELIZABETH NADEL - J.A. FISHMAN, *English in Israel: A Sociolinguistic Study*, in J.A. FISHMAN - ROBERT L. COOPER - ANDREW W. CONRAD (eds.), *The Spread of English: The Sociology of English as an Additional Language*, Rowley, Newbury House, 1977 [NADEL - FISHMAN], p. 165.

in the late 19th century. These efforts played a significant role in the nation-building activities conducted in Palestine, which at that time was a province of the Ottoman Empire. Initially these efforts had only a limited success, and their influence was felt mainly in the school system, but by the onset of the First World War the language started to take root outside the school system, and the first nuclei of Hebrew speakers were created. With the British occupation of the territory at the end of the war, 40% of the Jews in Palestine declared Hebrew to be their principal language.⁴

The British government, which was nominated by the League of Nations as the Mandatory power in Palestine, granted recognition to the emerging speech community, and the 1922 King's Order in Council defined Hebrew as the third official language of the territory, after English and Arabic.⁵ Official, administrative and legal activities were to be conducted in all three languages, but in its internal affairs the local population was granted linguistic autonomy. English was introduced as a compulsory school subject from 5th grade on, replacing French and German which were hitherto the main foreign languages taught at schools, but each community was free to establish its own language policy and to conduct its schools in its own language.⁶ The Jewish population had a strong ideological commitment to Hebrew. It invested great efforts in its diffusion and consolidation, and discouraged the use of other languages by the Jewish inhabitants of the country.⁷

At the onset of the British Mandate period, the knowledge of English among the local population was very low,⁸ and the 30 years of British presence in the territory did not leave a strong colonial heritage in the

⁴ ROBERTO BACHI, *A statistical Analysis of the Revival of Hebrew in Israel*, in "Scripta Hierosolymitana" III (1956), pp. 179-247. For descriptions of the revitalization processes of Hebrew see e.g. BENJAMIN HARSHAV, *Language in Time of Revolution*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993; SHELOMO MORAG, *The Emergence of Modern Hebrew: Some Sociolinguistic Perspectives*, in LEWIS GLINERT (ed.), *Hebrew in Ashkenaz*, New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 208-221.

⁵ NADEL - FISHMAN, p. 139.

⁶ SPOLSKY, p. 539.

⁷ NADEL - FISHMAN, p. 141; SPOLSKY - SHOHAMY, p. 161.

⁸ ROBERT L. COOPER, *Fantasti! Israeli Attitudes towards English*, in SYDNEY GREENBAUM (ed.), *The English Language Today*, Oxford, Pergamon, 1985 [COOPER, *Attitudes*], p. 234; NADEL - FISHMAN, p. 139.

linguistic domain.⁹ The lack of an explicit policy of language diffusion on the part of the British authorities on the one hand, and the strong “Hebrew Only” ideology of the Jewish population on the other hand, limited the exposure to English and impeded its spread. The instruction of English in the school system followed weak and outdated methods, was literary and elitist rather than practical in nature, and failed to establish a widespread knowledge of the language among high school graduates.¹⁰ The growing opposition to the policies of the British authorities during the 1930s and 1940s was accompanied by resentment towards English, and further affected students’ achievements in this subject.¹¹

Daily life under British control did not counterbalance these trends, as it posed no real need to command English. The contact with government institutions could normally be conducted in Hebrew, as administrative positions which involved direct contact with the public were usually filled by local clerks. The official status of Hebrew permitted its usage in the correspondence with the British authorities and in the legal system. Good command of English was normally achieved by Jewish citizens who served in the British army during the Second World War,¹² but in the population at large the knowledge of English remained low.

Though the spread of English during the Mandatory period was rather limited, it undoubtedly provided the basis for an English presence in the territory.¹³ Had Palestine been included in the French rather than the British sphere of influence, the linguistic situation in Israel would probably have developed differently.¹⁴ Still, the current prominence of English in Israel reflects much later developments, disconnected from its colonial past.

(b) English in Israel after independence

When Israel gained independence in 1948, the legal status of English as an official language was abolished. Nevertheless, in practice it retained many of its former functions.¹⁵ Currency and postage stamps con-

⁹ SPOLSKY - SHOHAMY, p. 186.

¹⁰ *Ivi*, pp. 157-159.

¹¹ NADEL - FISHMAN, p. 140.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ SPOLSKY, p. 552.

¹⁴ SPOLSKY - SHOHAMY, p. 173.

¹⁵ BEN-RAFAEL, p. 181.

tinue to be printed to date in all three languages, the Ministry of Justice still publishes an English translation of all Israeli laws, and so on.¹⁶ The abolition of the legal status of English as an official language with independence has therefore not significantly affected its usefulness for government, administrative and other official functions.¹⁷

Furthermore, in many contexts English is given precedence over Arabic, although from the legal point of view Arabic retained the status of an official language while English no longer enjoys such a status. Thus, bilingual road signs are usually printed in Hebrew and English rather than in English and Arabic, outside areas densely populated by Arab-speakers English-speaking clerks are more readily found in government offices than Arabic-speaking ones, and similar examples for the precedence of English abound.¹⁸

In the school system English remained the main foreign language taught in all government-recognized schools. It is a compulsory subject of study from elementary school through graduation, and an essential subject in the matriculation exam. In the Jewish sector it is the only foreign language studied by all for an extended period of time, and in the Arab sector it has been since independence a second foreign language, after Hebrew. Its importance is further enhanced by the fact that its knowledge is essential for admission to higher education.¹⁹

In the first 20 years of independence the amount of English spoken in Israel was consistently low.²⁰ The strong commitment to the "Hebrew Only" ideology impeded language maintenance among all immigrant groups, English-speakers among them. As a consequence English-speaking parents reported difficulties in trying to maintain the knowledge of English among their children.²¹

Still, the hostility towards English, which was strongly felt in the first

¹⁶ R.L. COOPER, *Language Planning and Social Change*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 100; SPOLSKY, p. 538.

¹⁷ NADEL - FISHMAN, p. 141.

¹⁸ COOPER, *Language Planning*, p. 100; SPOLSKY, p. 538.

¹⁹ SPOLSKY - SHOHAMY, pp. 165-166.

²⁰ NADEL - FISHMAN, p. 141; SPOLSKY, p. 538.

²¹ FERN SECKBACH - R.L. COOPER, *The Maintenance of English in Ramat Esbko*, in J.A. FISHMAN - R.L. COOPER - ANDREW W. CONRAD (eds.), *The Spread of English: The Sociology of English as an Additional Language*, Rowley, Newbury House, 1977, p. 168.

years of independence, soon started to fade, and by the end of the 1950s the language was no longer perceived as a symbol of colonial oppression.²² In the early 1960s the prestige of English was already manifestly on the rise. Israeli high school children who were asked in a 1961 survey to rank languages in terms of prestige, gave English the highest ratings, alongside Hebrew.²³ The same trend is highlighted by the furious reactions of immigrants from North Africa towards a mid-1960s proposal to teach their children French rather than English. The proposal intended to ease the children's integration into their new school environment, taking into consideration that they already knew some French, but was interpreted as compromising their prospects.²⁴ This incident stands in sharp contrast to the opposition encountered by the Mandate government in 1943, following its intention to add one weekly hour of English instruction.²⁵ The comparison between the two incidents clearly attests to the change in the attitude towards English in those 20 years.

The real expansion of English in Israel did not take place, though, until the late 1960s. This development is attributed to the changed demographic, political, cultural and economic situation following the 1967 Six Days War. The growing economic and political ties with USA, the increased tourism both to and from Israel, the wave of immigration from Western countries, which brought to Israel a relatively sizable English-speaking population with strong educational and business qualifications, the growing openness towards Western culture, and the introduction of TV in 1968 were among the factors which increased the need for English and the exposure to it.²⁶

This crossroad in the spread of English in Israel was examined in detail in a series of groundbreaking research projects collected in Fishman et al. 1977. Since then the trends described in these studies were consolidated and strengthened. In contemporary Israel, concludes a leading Is-

²² COOPER, p. 234.

²³ YEHUDIT ROSENBAUM - ELIZABETH NADEL - R.L. COOPER - J.A. FISHMAN, *English on Keren Kayemet Street*, in FISHMAN - COOPER - CONRAD (eds.), *The Spread of English* [ROSENBAUM *et al.*], p. 186.

²⁴ NADEL - FISHMAN, p. 143; COOPER, p. 233.

²⁵ NADEL - FISHMAN, p. 140.

²⁶ NADEL - FISHMAN, pp. 141-142; SECKBACH - COOPER, p. 169; SPOLSKY, pp. 538-539.

raeli sociologist, «English constitutes the most honoured linguistic resource besides Hebrew. It holds the upper position in the market of languages». ²⁷ Hebrew is the symbol of Israeli identity and the main means of communication within Israel, but English is a valuable resource, playing a significant role in the professional, cultural and social life of large portions of the local population.

The Sociolinguistic Dimension

(a) Knowledge of English

The overall exposure to English in Israel is relatively high, and some knowledge of it is shared by most Israelis. ²⁸ At the same time, the level of English proficiency among the population is not uniform and is subject to great variation. The two factors which best correlate with a good knowledge of English are socioeconomic status and level of education. While English is the best known language in all social classes, its mastery is clearly concentrated in the higher social strata. ²⁹

The main force in the acquisition of English by Israelis is the school system. English is a compulsory subject of study from elementary school through matriculation, and all teaching materials (textbooks, workbooks, tapes, television programs) are produced in Israel, with the Israeli student in mind. ³⁰ The language is mainly taught by native-speakers of English, at least in the Jewish sector. ³¹ Still, students are not exposed to a uniform variety of English, but to a mixture of British and American English. ³²

Since the Mandate period there was a gradual transition of the curriculum from a literary orientation towards more practical goals, recognizing the importance of English as the principal means of international communication. ³³ This change was reflected in students' achievements.

²⁷ BEN-RAFAEL, p. 188.

²⁸ *Ivi*, p. 182.

²⁹ NADEL - FISHMAN, p. 146; COOPER, p. 239; BEN-RAFAEL, pp. 123-124, 183.

³⁰ SPOLSKY - SHOHAMY, p. 175.

³¹ SPOLSKY, p. 544.

³² DAVID L. GOLD, *An Introduction to English in Israel*, in "Language Problems and Language Planning" V,1, 1981 [GOLD 1981], p. 32.

³³ SPOLSKY - SHOHAMY, pp. 158-159, 174.

While in Mandatory Palestine the knowledge of English was relatively poor, and as late as 1972 the failure rate in the matriculation exam amounted to 43%,³⁴ nowadays most high school graduates achieve a fair amount of fluency in English.³⁵ In 1993 circa 80% of all examinees chose the advanced level in the matriculation exam.³⁶ Despite this progress, «English teaching is still under the influence of a now outdated assumption that the goal is to produce near native speakers, rather than to produce plurilinguists capable of carrying out needed functions in their second language».³⁷

Some of the drawbacks in the achievements of the scholastic teaching of English become apparent at university level. Functional knowledge of English is taken for granted in Israeli universities, and while the normal language of instruction is Hebrew, the reading lists in most courses are primarily in English.³⁸ A certain level of English proficiency is a prerequisite for entering university, and a proven ability to read academic texts in English is a requirement for graduation or even for enrolment in second-year courses.³⁹

In practice, most Israeli students do not meet the formal requirements for English proficiency and have to attend English courses during their first year of studies. Many of them find it difficult to cope with the English reading lists even after completing these courses, and resort to Hebrew translations. For those who continue to participate in academic life through graduate studies and university careers, the need to use English actively in publications and oral presentations often remains a challenge, and many academics have to use translators in order to meet the requirement to publish in English. For others, however, English becomes the default language of academic and professional life, and they often feel more comfortable in English than in Hebrew in professional matters. This man-

³⁴ NADEL - FISHMAN, p. 143.

³⁵ SPOLSKY - SHOHAMY, p. 185.

³⁶ SPOLSKY, p. 540.

³⁷ SPOLSKY - SHOHAMY, p. 185.

³⁸ The main exception is Jewish Studies, where reading lists are often based on Hebrew publications.

³⁹ NADEL - FISHMAN, p. 144; ROBERT L. COOPER – JOSHUA A. FISHMAN, *A Study of Language Attitudes*, in FISHMAN - COOPER - CONRAD (eds.), *The Spread of English*, p. 239; SPOLSKY - SHOHAMY, pp. 166, 161.

ifests for example in occasional requests of Hebrew-speaking students to be granted permission by university authorities to submit their final thesis or research project in English rather than in Hebrew.

Defining the degree to which English is known in Israel therefore depends on the level of proficiency used as a criterion. Overall, it is a very familiar language, and visitors to the country may expect some knowledge of English and the ability to perform at least basic communicative tasks from most local people.⁴⁰ In higher levels of proficiency, though, the fluctuation in the knowledge of English is great, as is the role the language plays in the individual's life.

(b) Exposure to English and usage domains

The greatest part of the population is exposed to the sound and sight of English on a daily basis at the work place, by using computers, in TV shows and popular music, in street signs, in contacts with tourists and foreign workers etc. Being addressed to in English is a familiar experience to Israelis, and is not likely to be encountered with surprise or confusion.⁴¹ A more complicated question to tackle is how deep this exposure is, and to what degree it affects the actual knowledge of English and the level of comfort Hebrew-speakers feel in its regards.

A main channel of exposure to English is the mass media. The introduction of TV broadcasts in 1968 significantly increased the direct exposure to the language, as subtitles rather than dubbing are the common practice in translating imported programs. Subtitles are similarly used in films shown in cinemas. This practice has become part of the viewing habits of the Israeli audience, and while the subtitles are essential for most viewers,⁴² many follow the soundtrack as well. In fact, there is a demand for accessibility to the original soundtrack, revealed in cases in which an alternative to subtitles exists. Thus, for example, full-length animated films screened in cinemas are usually offered in recent years in two versions: a dubbed version in daytime shows intended for children, and an original version with subtitles intended for teenagers and adults.

As TV watching in Israel is extensive and the percentage of local production has been for years relatively low, English soundtracks have been

⁴⁰ ROSENBAUM *et al.*

⁴¹ *Ivi*, p. 190.

⁴² NADEL - FISHMAN, p. 153.

heard by the local population on a daily basis. Cinema going and the popularity of British and American songs work in the same direction. As a result, most children start their formal learning of English when they are already familiar with the sound of the language, at least to a certain extent. A new school curriculum introduced in 1998 actually takes this fact into consideration.⁴³ Nevertheless, as already mentioned, the overall effect of this high exposure to native-English through the mass media on the conscious and unconscious absorption of the language has not been studied yet.⁴⁴

In recent years the patterns of exposure to English via the mass media have gone through a significant change, whose long-term effects are yet unknown. Since the early 1990s, the hitherto one state-owned TV channel was supplemented by additional channels and cable TV, which provide the audience with a variety of options.⁴⁵ English language programs are now available 24 hours a day, but at the same time the availability of programs in Hebrew has also considerably increased. A particularly significant change is noticeable in children's viewing patterns. The great supply of original and dubbed children's programs and video cassettes available now in Hebrew eliminated their dependency on productions in English, and may have reduced their exposure to the language via the mass media.

It is similarly uncertain what was the effect of the growing expansion of computer culture on the exposure to and the use of English by Israelis. Some phenomena show that for many Israelis English is the default language in this field. This is reflected, for example, in the demand for an option to use English rather than Hebrew menus in computer applications ('Hebrew-enabled' rather than 'Hebrew' versions), or in the frequent choice of English as the language of email correspondence between native-born Israelis. Even when Hebrew script does not pose a technical problem, English is often preferred. An indicative example is the fate of a recent proposal of a faculty member in one of Israel's universities to switch from English to Hebrew in the internal communication network

⁴³ SPOLSKY - SHOHAMY, p. 181.

⁴⁴ NADEL - FISHMAN, pp. 152, 153.

⁴⁵ HANNA ADONI, *The Israeli Readership and Changes in Leisure Culture*, in ISRAEL BARTAL (ed.), *A Century of Israeli Culture*, Jerusalem, Magnes Press, 2002, p. 103 (in Hebrew) [ADONY].

of that institution. The proposal was mainly ignored, and participants continued to post their messages in English.

On the other hand, Hebrew flourishes too in the world of computers, and many other phenomena reveal the possibility to conduct an extensive computer activity primarily in Hebrew. Most common computer applications exist in Hebrew versions, Internet sites in Hebrew abound, and alongside email users who prefer English, many others who are fluent in the language are reluctant to use it and resort to Hebrew whenever possible. More research is therefore needed in order to determine the effect of computer culture on the spread of English in Israel.

The cultural options available in English in Israel also include locally-published and imported books, newspapers and magazines. These are not read only by the English-speaking population, but also by many native-speakers of Hebrew. As many as 7% of the respondents in a 1990 survey declared that the last book they read was in English.⁴⁶ Yet, Hebrew is the main vehicle for cultural debates, and while English publications may be relevant to a small elite, an attempt to reach a broader readership requires authors to publish in Hebrew.⁴⁷

An important usage domain of English is the job market. A working capacity in English is considered an asset, especially in middle- and higher-rank jobs. A 1970s study of job advertisements revealed that English was an explicit requirement in circa 10% of the ads, mainly among those prominently displayed.⁴⁸ These data, however, probably do not reflect the real demand for the language. As an academic degree and certain professional qualifications necessarily imply at least a minimum level of English proficiency among candidates, employers do not necessarily mention English in their ads.⁴⁹ The job market provides a significant incentive to learn and use English, and it plays a central role in the importance acknowledged to it by the population.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ ADONY, p. 108.

⁴⁷ RON KUZAR, *Hebrew and Zionism: A Discourse Analytic Cultural Study*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 2001, pp. 39, 288 [KUZAR].

⁴⁸ R.L. COOPER - FERN SECKBACH, *Economic Incentives for the Learning of a Language of Wider Communication: A Case Study*, in FISHMAN - COOPER - CONRAD (eds.), *The Spread of English*, pp. 212-219.

⁴⁹ SPOLSKY 1996, p. 545.

⁵⁰ COOPER, *Attitudes*, p. 235.

(c) Attitudes towards English

The positive attitude towards English is reflected both in the language behavior of Israelis and in their expectations from English-speaking immigrants. One of the best indicators for the importance Israelis grant to the acquisition of English is the efforts they make to expose their children to English at the earliest age possible. Already in 1973 the Ministry of Education was under pressure to start English instruction before the 5th grade, and the number of schools in which the teaching of English started a year earlier was on the rise.⁵¹ An attempt to halt this trend by forbidding the instruction of English in the first three grades of elementary school failed, as parents responded by hiring English teachers to give English lessons as an “extracurricular activity”, often during regular school hours.⁵² The Ministry of Education therefore authorized the early start of English instruction provided the schools use local funds to pay for it, and has undertaken to develop curriculum guidelines from 3rd grade on.⁵³

A related phenomenon is the large number of special classes for “speakers of English”, attended by children of English-speaking parents and by Israeli children who spent a year or more abroad. Such classes are supported by a special syllabus published by the Ministry of Education. This is a rare case of language maintenance program in the Israeli school system, attesting to the special status of English compared to other immigrant languages.⁵⁴

While the instruction of English prior to 4th grade is still relatively rare,⁵⁵ the shift towards an early start of English learning has reached preschool age in recent years. A locally developed instruction method, offering English classes for children aged one year and upward, is very popular,⁵⁶ and there is a growing demand for English in daycares. A search for the keyword “English” in a Hebrew Internet forum serving parents of preschool children⁵⁷ provided 133 results, the majority of which addressed the question of English language preschools. While some of the parents

⁵¹ NADEL AND FISHMAN 1977, p. 143.

⁵² COOPER 1989, pp. 84-85.

⁵³ SPOLSKY 1996, p. 542.

⁵⁴ SPOLSKY AND SHOHAMY 1999, pp. 178-179.

⁵⁵ See data in SPOLSKY - SHOHAMY 1999, p. 180.

⁵⁶ For details see the Web site *www.belendoron.com*.

⁵⁷ *www.ganyeladim.co.il/forum*. The results are updated for 6 August 2003.

were motivated by the wish to maintain knowledge their children acquired during an extended stay abroad, others merely wished to give their children the advantage of an early exposure to English.

As opposed to the past, immigrants from English-speaking countries are no longer expected to give up their former language. Diversely from the prevailing attitude towards other immigrant groups, language maintenance among English speakers is not stigmatized, and their «continued use of the language as a daily vernacular may even be viewed as “positive” by other Israelis». ⁵⁸ English-speakers are typically characterized by a strong professional and socioeconomic status, and their presence in a neighborhood is considered an asset. Native-speakers of Hebrew therefore tend to be willing to create for them an accommodating environment by communicating with them in English. As a result, English-speakers feel that the retention of their original language gains them prestige rather than criticism, and as opposed to the 1960s they no longer report major difficulties in raising their children as bilinguals. ⁵⁹

The Linguistic Dimension

The influence of English on Modern Hebrew has not been studied yet in detail, and it is therefore possible to outline only some central trends in the contact between the two languages. ⁶⁰ A diachronic examination indicates a growth in the influence of English on Hebrew over time. In the Mandatory period, the main source of foreign influence was the substrate languages of the population, primarily Yiddish, and despite the presence of English in the territory its impact on Hebrew was limited. Only later on did English gradually turn into a main source of influence on Hebrew, reflecting the considerable growth in its knowledge and prestige among Hebrew speakers.

One of the manifestations of this change is revealed in the term-coining activity of the linguistic establishment. Initially, official lists of professional terminology provided German and French translations, and com-

⁵⁸ BEN-RAFAEL 1994, p. 189.

⁵⁹ *Ivi*, p. 184 ff.

⁶⁰ On the influence of Hebrew on the usage of English in Israel see GOLD 1981, pp. 34-37.

bined calques on those languages with original Hebrew formations. However, since the 1970s the main reference in such lists is to English, and the official terminology shows a strong tendency to rely on direct translation from English, through semantic or structural calques. Moreover, in a growing number of cases no Hebrew term is offered, and the English terms actually employed in the professional jargon are preserved in the official terminology. These include in some cases English abbreviations transcribed into Hebrew, such as *em-ti-em* or *em-es-di*.⁶¹ Spontaneous and unplanned linguistic developments point in the same direction, and mark English as the major source of foreign influence on contemporary Modern Hebrew.

During the mandatory period, the partial knowledge of English by Hebrew-speakers was clearly revealed in the patterns of influence of English on Hebrew. Word borrowing tended to concentrate in specific domains, primarily transportation and the military,⁶² and often reflected the English words in distorted forms. Well-known examples are *pantšer* (<puncture, flat tire), the car part *egzoz* (<exhaust) and the military metal food utensil *mesting* (<mess tin). Such distortions are rare nowadays, and the pronunciation of English words borrowed into Hebrew is usually much more loyal to their original form.

The realization of the English phoneme /w/ in loan words is a conspicuous example for this change. In the past, this phoneme was consistently replaced by a /v/ sound in English words borrowed into Hebrew, such as *pingvin* (<penguin), *vigvam* (<wigwam), *vašington* (<Washington)⁶³ or *viski* (<whiskey). When the phoneme /w/ was accepted into Hebrew later on, not only newer borrowings such as *wokman* (<walkman), *wikend* (<weekend) or *teikewey/tekewey* (<takeaway) were affected, but in some cases the pronunciation of established loan words was altered as well, such as *pingwin*, *wošinton* or *wiski* (though the earlier *viski* is still often heard).

English has mainly influenced Hebrew in the lexical and semantic domains, through word borrowing and loan translations.⁶⁴ It is hard to determine, though, the exact extent of such influence as opposed to the

⁶¹ See in detail YAFFA ALLONY-FEINBERG, *The influence of English Terminology in Hebrew*, in FISHMAN ET AL. 1977.

⁶² GOLD 1981, p. 39.

⁶³ The pronunciation *vashington* is attested for example in REUVEN SIVAN, *Developments in the Hebrew Language of Today*, Jerusalem, E. Rubinstein, 1976, p. 88.

⁶⁴ GOLD 1981, p. 41.

influence of other European languages. Many foreign words reflect the common stock of Standard Average European rather than a direct borrowing from a specific, identifiable language. The origin of words is further blurred by a process of morphological adaptation, which integrates the borrowed words into the Hebrew declination system, especially through the use of Hebrew suffixes such as *univèrsita* (pl. *univèrsitaòt*, =university), *historyòn* (pl. *historyònim*, =historian), *politikài* (pl. *politikàim*, =politician), *elegànti* (pl. *elegàntiyim*, =elegant) etc.⁶⁵ It is similarly problematic to determine the direct source of many loan translations and of international prefixes such as *re-*, *pre-*, *post-* etc., which penetrated Modern Hebrew and added a new morphological mechanisms to those inherited from previous linguistic layers.

Yet, with the decrease in the share of European-born speakers in the population and with the growing familiarity with English there was a clear rise in the direct borrowing from English. A growing number of specifically English words and expressions keep penetrating Hebrew, either as borrowings or as loan translations. Many of such words and expressions have been accepted into general use, such as *tšips* (<chips, French fries), *stok* (<stock), *bai* (<bye), *še-yihiye lexa yom naim* (=have a nice day) or *asita li et ha-yom* (=you've made my day). Others are common in certain social or professional groups but are still perceived as marked by most speakers, such as *be-sofo šel yom* (=at the end of the day), *ze lo ose sexel* (=it doesn't make sense [literally: brains]) etc. The status of international terms has changed as well, and «[u]nless we have evidence to the contrary, elements of International Standard Vocabulary now entering Hebrew may [...] be attributed to English influence».⁶⁶

It is important to note, though, that alongside the growing reliance on English, the inherited mechanisms of lexical innovation are still very productive in Modern Hebrew. Even in the realm of computer terminology, which is one of the professional fields most dominated by English, indigenous neologisms abound alongside borrowings and loan translations. Of special interest are the neologisms which are not structurally or semantically related to the English term, such as *xomra* (=hardware, from the Hebrew *xomer* 'material') or *toxna* (=software, from the Hebrew *toxen*

⁶⁵ RAPHAEL NIR, *Word-Formation in Modern Hebrew*, Tel Aviv, Open University, 1993, pp. 32-34.

⁶⁶ GOLD 1981, p. 40.

'content').⁶⁷ In many cases the Hebrew term is exclusively used, whereas in others the Hebrew and the English terms are used side by side, such as *font* alongside *gofan*, *imeil* (<email) alongside *doar elektroni*, *kibord* (<key-board) alongside *mikledeṭ* etc.

A notable stylistic phenomenon which took root in recent years in the language, both written and spoken, is the insertion of English words and expressions into the Hebrew sequence. This marked usage can be found in several contexts,⁶⁸ but it is especially typical to relatively young speakers from educated and affluent background. In writing such items usually appear in transliteration, but when the Hebrew script cannot clearly render the English item intended, Latin characters are used.

The stylistic, rather than pure linguistic, nature of the phenomenon is clarified by the type of English items used. In most cases they do not fill lexical gaps in the language, but substitute established Hebrew words. Typical contexts demonstrating this usage are *ani rotsa libiyot be-kontrol* (=I want to be in **control**, instead of the Hebrew *šlita*), *list ha-muzmanim* (=the **list** of the invited, instead of the Hebrew *rešima*), *bevanti še-ha-reputation šeli on-stake axšav* (=I understood that my **reputation** is **at stake** now, instead of the Hebrew *monitin* and *be-sakana*). The first two examples derive from a newspaper interview and from a gossip column (respectively), while the third example is quoted from a novel by one of the leading figures among the young generation of Israeli writers, many of which share this marked linguistic style.⁶⁹

This stylistic trend, which originated in the spoken language, was introduced into written Hebrew during the 1980s and the 1990s by writers in their 20s and 30s, first in journalism and later on in literature. This usage has been constantly criticized by members of the linguistic establishment, but has been given legitimacy by newspaper editors, publishing houses and radio and TV channels. It is too early to determine whether it will constitute a short-lived stylistic trend or a long-lasting change in the nature of spoken and written Modern Hebrew.

⁶⁷ For further examples see RUVIK ROSENTHAL, *The Joy of Language*, Tel Aviv, Am Oved, 2004.

⁶⁸ ROSENTHAL 2001, p. 48 notes, for example, the diffusion of such usage among society women.

⁶⁹ For further examples see e.g. ROSENTHAL 2004, p. 42.

To what extent does English pose a threat to Hebrew?

The growing spread of English as the primary international language is perceived by many throughout the world as a threat, and in Israel too attempts are repeatedly made to block its influence. Proposals are raised from time to time to eliminate by law the use of English in certain domains. Examples are the demand for compulsory dubbing of foreign language films and TV shows, the prohibition on English shop names and similar suggestions.⁷⁰ An especially well-known case was the intervention of the Academy of the Hebrew Language in a 1994 initiative of the Ministry of Education to introduce an experimental project of teaching music and sports classes in English in some schools. The proposal was viewed as a severe blow to the status of Hebrew, and following a meeting with the minister in an urgent irregular meeting of the Academy's plenum, the plan was abolished in the Jewish sector.⁷¹ Occasional public debates in the press and the mass media also attest to the concern of language-conscious circles about the growing prestige of English, about its influence on the semantic and lexical structure of Hebrew, and about the contribution of the public's language behavior to the consolidation of such trends.

But despite its significant role in the social, cultural, economic and linguistic texture of contemporary Israel, English currently seems to pose no real threat to the status of Hebrew as the base language of Israeli society. One of the best indicators to the strong standing of Hebrew is the importance granted to its acquisition by Israeli Arabs and by Jewish immigrants. The fact that both these groups give priority to the knowledge of Hebrew over the acquisition of English attests to the unthreatened status of Hebrew in Israel.⁷² Just like other non-English speaking western countries, Israel is affected by the growing power of English as the international language par excellence, but Hebrew is definitely not among the languages whose mere existence is threatened by the spread of English.

⁷⁰ See SPOLSKY - SHOHAMY 1999, p. 254; COOPER 1985, pp. 240-241.

⁷¹ See KUZAR 2001, pp. 36-38.

⁷² SPOLSKY - SHOHAMI 1999, p. 257.

Bibliography

- ADONI HANNA, 2002. *The Israeli Readership and Changes in Leisure Culture*, in I. BARTAL (ed.), *A Century of Israeli Culture*, Jerusalem, Magnes Press, pp. 102-109 [in Hebrew].
- ALLONY-FAINBERG YAFFA., 1977. *The Influence of English on Formal Terminology in Hebrew*, in FISHMAN ET AL., pp. 223-228.
- BACHI ROBERTO, 1956. *A statistical Analysis of the Revival of Hebrew in Israel*, in "Scripta Hierosolymitana" III, pp. 179-247.
- BEN-RAFAEL ELIEZER, 1994. *Language, Identity and Social Division*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- COOPER ROBERT L. - FERN SECKBACH, 1977. *Economic Incentives for the Learning of a Language of Wider Communication: A Case Study*, in FISHMAN ET AL., pp. 212-219.
- COOPER R.L. - JOSHUA A. FISHMAN, 1977. *A Study of Language Attitudes*, in FISHMAN ET AL., pp. 239-276.
- COOPER R.L., 1989. *Language Planning and Social Change*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- COOPER R.L., 1985. *Fantasti! Israeli Attitudes towards English*, in S. GREENBAUM (ed.), *The English Language Today*, Oxford, Pergamon, pp. 233-241.
- FISHMAN J.A. - R.L. COOPER - ANDREW W. CONRAD (eds.), 1977. *The Spread of English: The Sociology of English as an Additional Language*, Rowley, Newbury House.
- GOLD DAVID L., 1981. *An Introduction to English in Israel*, in "Language Problems and Language Planning" V, 1, pp. 11-55.
- HARSHAV BENJAMIN, 1993. *Language in Time of Revolution*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- KUZAR RON, 2001. *Hebrew and Zionism: A Discourse Analytic Cultural Study*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter.
- MORAG SHELOMO, 1993. *The Emergence of Modern Hebrew: Some Sociolinguistic Perspectives*, in L. GLINERT (ed.), *Hebrew in Ashkenaz*, New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 208-221.
- NADEL ELIZABETH - J.A. FISHMAN, 1977. *English in Israel: A Sociolinguistic Study*, in FISHMAN ET AL., pp. 137-167.
- NIR RAPHAEL, 1993. *Word-Formation in Modern Hebrew*, Tel-Aviv, Open University [in Hebrew].
- ROSENBAUM Y. - E. NADEL - R.L. COOPER - J.A. FISHMAN, 1977. *English on Keren Kayemet Street*, in FISHMAN ET AL., pp. 179-194.
- ROSENTHAL RUVIK, 2001. *The Language Arena*, Tel-Aviv, Am Oved [in Hebrew].
- ROSENTHAL R., 2004. *The Joy of Language*, Tel Aviv, Am Oved [in Hebrew].
- SECKBACK FERN - R.L. COOPER, 1977, *The Maintenance of English in Ramat Eschkol*, in FISHMAN ET AL., pp. 168-178.

- SIVAN REUVEN, 1976. *Developments in the Hebrew Language of Today*, Jerusalem, E. Rubinstein [in Hebrew].
- SPOLSKY BERNARD, 1996. *English in Israel after Independence*, in J.A. FISHMAN - A.W. CONRAD - ALMA RUBAL-LOPEZ (eds.), *Post-Imperial English*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 535-555.
- SPOLSKY B. - ELANA SHOHAMY, 1999. *The Languages of Israel: Policy, Ideology and Practice*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters.

