

Non-canonical use of articles in Maskilic (Jewish Enlightenment) Hebrew

The Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment, is a hundred-year period lasting from the 1780s to the 1880s in Central and Eastern Europe. The Haskalah is characterised by the emergence of new genres of literature written in Hebrew, including a thriving press, popular science, and original and translated prose fiction. Maskilic Hebrew, the form of the language employed by the adherents of the Haskalah, is of great linguistic significance for two chief reasons. First, it can shed important light on the nature and development of written Hebrew in the Ashkenazic (Northern, Central and Eastern European) Diaspora. Second, it is an immediate forerunner of revernacularized Hebrew in Palestine, and as such can offer an unparalleled insight into the development of the modern (Israeli) form of the language. Despite its importance, Maskilic Hebrew has been subjected to little detailed linguistic analysis.

The Maskilim strove to modernize Jewish society using the language of the Hebrew Bible as their preferred model (Pelli 2010, Eldar 2014). However, examination of Maskilic writing reveals a much more complex picture composed of diverse elements – including Biblical, Rabbinic, Medieval, and later Hebrew, as well as Yiddish, German and the Slavic languages – that reflect the authors' vast linguistic heritage and combine to form a cohesive structure (Kahn 2009). This presentation will examine the intriguing ways in which these different elements manifest themselves in the Maskilic Hebrew use of definite and indefinite articles. We shall present and analyse three central features in this area with examples from prominent Maskilic Hebrew texts. These three features are significant because they are not commonly attested in the canonical forms of Hebrew, but are characteristic elements of Maskilic writing.

The first feature to be examined is noun phrases consisting of an indefinite noun appearing in conjunction with an adjective prefixed by the definite article, as in (1).

(1)

אזי נצטרך לאיזה כח הגדול בכמותו מן כח המושך

*'azay nišṭareḳ lə-**eyze koaḥ ha-gadol** bə-ḳamuto min koaḥ ha-mošēḳ*

'then some force is needed which is stronger than the force of gravity' (Porjes 1875: 431)

The second feature is the phenomenon of definite articles prefixed to a finite verb, as in (2).

(2)

בעיר לבוב כבתה אש המריבה ההיתה בין אחינו בני ישראל שמה

*bə-'ir laḅob kaḅta 'eš ha-məriḅa **ha-hayata** ben 'aḥenu bəne yiśra'el šamma*

'in the city of Lvov the fire of controversy, which had burnt among the Jews there, has extinguished' (*HaMaggid* 1 [28], 1857: 111)

The third feature is the widespread use of the numeral 'one' as an indefinite article, as in (3).

(3)

עלמה אחת בת ישראל נתנה אהבתה לנוצרי

*'alma **aḥat** bat yiśra'el natna 'ahaḅata lə-nošri*

'a Jewish maiden gave her love to a Christian' (Lippe 1869: 271)

This presentation will constitute the first linguistic analysis of Maskilic Hebrew articles. It can contribute to the literature on Hebrew definiteness and indefiniteness in diachronic perspective, e.g. Pat-El (2009), Rubin (2013a, 2013b), Doron and Meir (2015), Reshef (2015, 2016), and Stern (2018).

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