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METAPHORS IN HEBREW SLANG, AND THEIR PARALLELS IN HEBREW LITERATURE AND IN THE SOURCES

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A common misconception is that slang constitutes a “corrupt” form of language, and that because it deviates from accepted norms of “appropriateness,” it must be regarded as an inferior mode of expression. The fact is, however, that slang does not violate any standard grammatical norms; it only defies stylistic conventions and breaks social taboos in order to impress the hearer with the distinctiveness and originality of some well-defined group of speakers. Furthermore, it can be shown that slang can be as creative as literary language. In Israeli slang, for instance, there are no less metaphors than in the highest literary registers of Hebrew: in both literature and slang, metaphors provide tangible realization of concepts through the use of objects and situations taken from real life, helping the reader/listener visualize an idea or concept in the most direct and colorful fashion. Although slang metaphors tend to be more blunt and down-to-earth, they are often characterized by a degree of creativity that may even overshadow the imaginative use of metaphors in the literary register, displaying highly sophisticated use of humor, sarcasm, double entendre, puns, etc.

1. INTRODUCTION

Slang is a component of the spoken language, but by no means a “corrupt” form of language in any grammatical or structural sense. It consists of a separate register within the colloquial, which stands out primarily because of its unusual nature, reflecting the desire of a well-defined group of speakers to express itself uniquely, by defying convention and breaking taboos. It aspires to create an original mode of expression, beyond the acceptable borders of everyday routine speech, to be different and shocking, and to impress interlocutors with cleverness and humor by using blunt, uncompromising language, usually with a high emotive load.

The professional jargon of a well-defined group of speakers may sound to other speakers as unconventional, but within that group does not constitute slang. For example, in the jargon of Israeli cab drivers, the term חָפֶר *hápér*, literally ‘grabber’ (from Yiddish), refers to a cabby who does not belong to a regulated cab station or company, and who “steals” customers from regular cabbies. Although it has had negative connotation to start with, it is part of the regular terminology of those engaged in the profession. It does not constitute a clever substitute for any “standard” term, and thus was not

regarded as slang usage by its users. When its use was extended beyond the original users group, two developments occurred: first, even if the referent remained the same, it already had some deviant, humorous flavor, possibly due to speakers' awareness of the Yiddish origin of the word; and second, it often got extended as a metaphor to anyone providing a service that is not part of an established group, or to persons illegally robbing others of their means of livelihood. It thus became "general" slang; but it was never considered slang among cabbies. So what would constitute slang in cab driver usage? Here are two examples: (1) when מטען חורג *mitan ḥoreg* 'oversize load' is used to refer to a big, fat passenger, or (2) when a cabby fighting for survival with a bus using the same route refers to it as *jámbo*, that is, a jumbo jet (alluding to its huge, threatening size). Only when a speaker's use of words or expressions intentionally deviates from normal usage do we attribute them to the realm of slang.

Clearly, slang develops very rapidly, and yesterday's slang may become tomorrow's standard usage. Thus, ישבן *yashvan* 'buttocks, ass (literally "sitter")' started as clear slang usage, alongside standard alternatives such as עכוז *akuz* or אחוריים *aḥoráyim* 'behind,' but today is considered standard, even somewhat elevated usage, whereas תחת *táhat* 'the under-part' is regarded borderline between slang and regular everyday use.

Except for the convention-breaking, unusual nature of slang, and its highly fluid status, it behaves very much like other registers of the language, and is by no means "corrupt" in terms of standard grammatical norms.¹ In fact, the claim made here is that it would be a serious error to consider slang as inferior to other language registers. On the contrary, in many respects slang shares some important features with the *literary* register, competing with it in inventiveness and originality. This can easily be demonstrated by comparing the use of metaphors in the two registers.

Hebrew slang makes use of metaphors at least as much as literary Hebrew does; both registers share at least one important motive, the desire to impress the reader/listener with originality, and one cannot think of a more effective means of achieving this than by using vivid, unexpected metaphors. Metaphors provide tangible realization of concepts through the use of objects and situations taken from real life, helping the reader/listener visualize an idea or concept in the most direct and colorful fashion. Thus, one can find metaphors in slang that have parallels in higher styles, demon-

¹ See, for instance, Sh. Boložky, *Measuring Productivity in Word Formation: The Case of Israeli Hebrew* (Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics 27; Leiden: Brill, 1999), where word formation mechanisms in slang are shown to be identical to those operating in any higher level of usage.

strating similar characteristics and comparable aims in the two registers. And since the higher literary register draws considerably from the Bible, from the Mishna and the two Talmuds, and to some extent also from Medieval Hebrew (when the language was not even spoken), the result is that a substantial number of metaphors in literary Hebrew originated in the Bible, in Mishnaic/Talmudic Hebrew, and sometimes in Medieval Hebrew. In the list of illustrations below, metaphors will be marked for origin: B = Biblical (in Hebrew מקרא = מ), T = Mishnaic/Talmudic (in Hebrew תלמודים = ת), Md = Medieval (in Hebrew ימי הביניים = ב). Metaphors originating in Modern Hebrew will be unmarked.

Ideally, it would have been more appropriate to juxtapose slang metaphors not only with those used in the literary register, but also with comparable expressions in the middle register, or in everyday speech that is not slang. But since our intention here is to point to the creativity manifest in slang metaphors, and to the richness and imagination involved in their creation, the comparison will be with the literary register only. The reason for it is simple: we know that literary usage is creative and original by definition, and comparing the two will enable us to more effectively support our claim that slang metaphors are at least as creative, occasionally even more. Below are some illustrations. Since the translations provided are literal, to properly convey the image, the resulting language is sometimes rather clumsy.

2. ILLUSTRATIONS OF LITERARY METAPHORS AND SLANG COUNTERPARTS BY SEMANTIC FIELDS

1. Fear, Shock

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
נעשה בשרו חידודין (חידודין ת)	(felt as if) his flesh was being cut/pricked many times over (T)	יש לו פרפרים בבטן	has butterflies in his tummy
פרחה נשמתו (ת)	his soul took leave of his body (T)	רעד לו הפופיק	his navel trembled
רחפו כל עצמותיו (מ)	all his bones quivered (B)	רעדו לו הביצים	his eggs (= balls, testicles) shook
סמר בשרו (מ)	his flesh bristled (B)	הלב שלו ירד למכנסיים/לתחתונים	his hearts sank into his pants/ underwear
התפלץ לבו	his heart shook with fear	רעד/שקשק (ביצים)	trembled/shook (eggs = balls, testicles)

נמס לבו (מ)	his heart melted (B)	השתין, עשה במכנסיים/בתחתונים	urinated, wet pants or underwear with urine
מת לבו בקרבו (מ)	his heart died inside him (B)	החליף צבעים	changed colors
דמו קפא בעורקיו	his blood froze in his veins	שפן, השתפן	a rabbit; became (= was scared like) a rabbit

We can see that both registers use concrete metaphors to convey fear and shock, both employ exaggeration for stronger effect, and most of the metaphors in both registers are drawn from body parts. Metaphors from both registers use the heart, the literary metaphors involve flesh, bones, and blood, slang also uses navel, tummy, balls (testicles). The slang metaphors of butterflies in the belly and of changing colors are more creative, it seems, than their closest literary counterparts.

2. Being Depressed

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
דבקה לארץ בטנו (מ)	his belly stuck to the ground (B)	עם האף באדמה	with his nose in the ground
נשפך לארץ כִּבְדוֹ (מ)	his liver spilled to the ground (B)	שִׁבּוֹז (> שְׁבוּר זֵין)	with a broken penis
נשבר לבו (מ)	His heart broke (B)	פרצוף של תשעה באב	a 9th-of-Av mug (= face) (day of Temple destruction)
פוגת לב	stopping of the heart		
הלך חשכים (מ)	walk in the dark (B)	שחור על הנשמה	“black on the soul”
פנים חשכות (ת)	dark face (T)		
העכיר עליו עולמו (ת)	his world turned murky (T)		

Again, body parts are involved: belly, liver, heart in the literary register, nose, penis and face in slang. Both belly and nose are in the ground; but there is nothing comparable to a broken penis in the literary register. A face of the ninth of Av, the day of the destruction of the second Temple (a day of mourning) is also quite creative.

3. Loafing

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
לא נקף אצבע (ת)	did not lift a finger (T)	עם הידיים בכיסים	with hands in his pockets
ישב בחיבוק ידיים (מ)	sat with folded arms (B)	עשה בטן גב	sunbathed, back and front of body alternately
חבק את ידיו (מ)	folded his arms (B)	לא הזיז ביצה	did not move a testicle
		גרָבץ/גירד את הביצים	scratched his testicles
		התחרדן	warmed his body in the sun like a lizard
		סטודנט חופשי	a carefree student
		התעצץ	was as active as a potted plant

There is little doubt in this category of the superiority of slang metaphors, especially the image of a loafer sunbathing, restricting his activities to turning from his back to his belly and vice versa, and referring to a loafer as a lizard warming in the sun or being as active as a potted plant.

4. Great Suffering; A Very Difficult Situation

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
שבע מרורים (מ)	was fed bitter herbs to capacity (B)	אכל חרא	ate shit
שתה את כוס התרעלה (עד תומה) (מ)	drank the poison goblet to the last drop (B)	אכל חצץ	ate gravel
נתחתכו מעיו (ת)	(felt like) his guts were slashed with a knife (T)	אכל קש	ate straw
		אכל צפרדעים	ate frogs
רע ומר (מ)	bad and bitter	החיים בזבל	life is in garbage dump
		על הפנים/על הקרשים	on the face/on the floor boards (planks)
		מצב בטטה	sweet potato situation
		סוג ז'	grade 7 (= penis)
		מזורגג, מזויין, מזופת, מחוריין, מחורבן, דפוק, מצ'וקמק	resultative adjectives meaning 'fucked up, messed up'

Essentially, both registers use feeding metaphors for great suffering. Slang excels in metaphors from everyday life referring to a very difficult situation. ‘On the face’ or ‘on the floor board’ conjures an image of a person with face and body on the ground, oppressed by immeasurable weight of trouble, and the next metaphor likens him to a (cooked?) sweet potato. The letter *zayin*, whose numerical value is seven, is used to convey two interpretations simultaneously: Grade 7, or G (cf. Grade A, Grade B, etc.), that is, of very inferior quality, as well as “Grade penis,” since this is what *zayin* refers to in the colloquial.

5. Failure

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
הקדיח את תבשילו (ת)	burned his food (T)	אכל אותה	ate it
יצא בשן ועין (ת)	ended up losing a tooth and an eye (= lost his shirt) (T)	אכל את הכובע	ate his hat
יצא וידיו על ראשו (מ)	ended up with his hands on his head (with a sense of terrible loss) (B)	יצא חומוס	came out as (ground) hummus
יצא ואוזניו מקוטפות (ת)	ended up with his ears cut off/plucked (T)	נדפק עד העצם	got screwed to the bone
העלה חרס בידו (ת)	try hard, but come out with a shard (a useless item) (T)	זין אטומי	atomic penis (= screw)
		צניחה חופשית	free fall (from plane)

Some of the slang expressions here are quite extraordinary: going through the grinding machine and coming out as hummus is a very strong metaphor, and free fall is also very powerful.

6. Success

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
שיחקה לו השעה (ת) שיחק לו המזל	had a good hour (= had a stroke of luck) (T)	הלך לו קלף (משוגע)	had a crazy (= wonderful) card
ההצלחה האירה לו פנים	luck smiled at him	שיחק אותה	“played” it
כוכבו דרך (מ)	his star shone (B)	שבר/לקח את הקופה	broke/took the kitty/jackpot
זרחה שקמשו (ת)	his sun shone (T)	תפס את אלוהים בביצים	grabbed God by the balls

הלך מחיל אל חיל (מ)	went from strength to strength (B)		
ראה ברכה (ת)	saw blessing (= was blessed) (T)		

In slang, success tends to be captured by metaphors taken from games and gambling; grabbing God by the balls, a very common expression, is obviously intended to shock.

7. Anger

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
חרה לו (עד מוות) (מ)	was very hot with anger (could die with anger) (B)	חס על/התחמם	was hot (about...)
חרה אפו ב (מ)	his anger was very hot (B)	רתח/התרתח	boiled
ניצתה/ניתכה/בערה חמתו (מ)	his anger fired up/ burned fiercely (B)	הוציא/שחרר קיטור	let out steam
הזעים פנים (ת)	his face angered (T)	עלה לו הדם לראש	his blood went to his head
הזעיק פנים (ב)	his face angered (B)	תפס (חטף) עצבים/קריזה	had a seizure of nerves/craze
הקדיר פנים (ת)	his face clouded (T)	בטן מלאה	full stomach
רעם (מ)	thundered (B)		
התקצף (מ)	foamed with anger (B)		
יצא מגדרו	broke all constraints (= lost control)		

The predominant metaphor in both registers involves extreme heat, but thunder and darkening are used as well. Some body nouns are also used: head, blood, stomach, nerves.

8. Arrogance

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
נטוי גרון (מ)	with neck bent in pride (B)	עם האף למעלה	with his nose upwards
זחוח לב (ת)	with a condescending heart, very pleased with self (T)	חרש את האף בין העננים	ploughed the clouds with his nose
גבה לב/רוח (מ)	with a haughty heart/spirit (B)	(נאד/בלון) נפוח; פלצן	overblown bag/balloon; user of haughty language (also “a fart”)

בן שחץ (מ)	son of a lion (שחץ is also arrogance) (B)	עלה לו (השתן) לראש	his urine went up to his head
		מוישה גרויס	Big Moses (Yiddish)
		סגן של אלוהים	God's deputy
		צנוע ידוע	well-known for modesty

Body terms are again common (nose, neck/throat, heart). Slang is very creative, for example, in associating the emission of haughty language with farting, in bringing up urine to the head, and primarily in the use of humor and sarcastic language: God's deputy, well-known for modesty.

9. Flattery

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
מלחך פנכה (ת)	bowl/plate lick (T)	לקקן	licker (from ass lick)
		מלקק תחת = תוכס לקר	ass lick (= kisser) (Hebrew and Yiddish)
		וישיונר (מליקוק) השמשה/תחת	windshield wiper type (suggesting ass-licking)

Licking metaphors are found in both registers. The slang expression meaning "windshield wiper type" is a metaphor on top of metaphor—quite creative.

10. Stupid; With Very Low Intelligence

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
נבוב מוח	hollow headed	ראש כרוב/חסה/ברזל/בלטה	cabbage/lettuce/iron/tile head
		אין לו שכל במיל	brain not worth a cent
		(עם שכל) שואף לאפס	with infinitesimal brain
		סתום (בלחץ), סתום בלום	(with mind) blocked under pressure
חמור חמורתיים (מ)	double ass (B)	חמור קופץ בראש	an ass who thinks he always has something to say
		חמור נשאר חמור	an ass remains an ass
		(עיני עגל, עז	calf's eyes; goat
		טיפש כמו נעל	as stupid as a boot

		פְּלוֹרֶסְצֵנֵט	(with the intelligence of) a fluorescent bulb
		צְנוּנִית	(as stupid as a) radish
		איִדְיוֹט עִם קְבֻלוֹת	an idiot with receipts (i.e., he can prove he's a bona fide idiot)
		אֵי קוֹ שְׁלִילִי	(with) negative IQ

Most metaphors in this field refer directly to the head and brain, and metaphors from the animal world are certainly favored. Slang excels in exaggeration and sophisticated humor: infinitesimally small brain, negative IQ, a certified idiot.

11. Not Realistic; Dreamy

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
פְּרַפְרָנִי/רַפְרָנִי	butterfly-like	בְּאוֹוִיר/מְרַחֵף/מְעוֹפֵף	in the air/hovering/ flying
סְהִירוֹרִי/מוֹכָה יָרַח	somnambulant, moonstruck	יֵשׁ לוֹ צִיפּוּרִים/פְּרַפְרִים בְּרֹאשׁ	has birds/butterflies in his head
		אֶסְטְרוֹנאוֹט	astronaut

Metaphors are similar, emphasizing unstable, dream-like quality. Butterflies and birds stand out.

12. Excellent

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
לְעִילָא וּלְעִילָא (ת), עֲדִי עֲדִית (ת), עֲדִית שְׁבַעֲדִית, מְשׁוֹפָרָא דְּשׁוֹפָרָא (ת), מְשׁוֹפָרֵי שׁוֹפָרֵי (ת)	on the highest level (Aram., T), the best of the best (T)	מִמְדְּרָגָה רִאשׁוֹנָה, סוּג א', אֶלְף אֶלְף, עֶשֶׂר, עוֹלָמִי	first class, grade A, AA, ten, world class
לֹא מֵעֵלְמָא הַדִּין (ת)	not from this world (Aram., T)	לֹא מֵהָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה	not from this world
בְּחֶסֶד עֲלִיוֹן	with God's grace	בֶּן זֹנָה (הַהֲטַעְמָה עַל "בֶּן")	son of a prostitute (positive!)
זָהָב פְּרוּוִיִּים (מ)	the gold of... (the best of the best) (B)	סוֹפְנִי > סוֹף הַדֶּרֶךְ	terminal (< the end of the road), i.e., there's nothing better beyond it
דָּגוּל (מִרְבֵּבָה) (מ)	the best in 10,000 (B)	חֶבְלִיז > חֶבֶל עַל הַזְמָן	so great that it's a waste of time to describe

		פצצות לגבות (+ רסיסים לריסים)	bombs for the eyelids (+ shrapnel to the eyelashes)
		מפוצץ/פצץ/מטמטם/ מהמם, משגע/שיגעון, מדליק, גנוב	verb-related adjectives meaning devastating like a bomb, shocking, driving crazy, setting on fire, etc.
		היסטרי, אשפי, חלומי, אגדי	hysterical, magical, dreamlike, legendary
		גדול/ענק; אדיר	big/huge; gigantic
		לא נורמלי, לא רגיל	not normal, unusual

Slang takes normal adjectives and gives them new meanings to convey excellence. Of particular interest are the use of “son of a prostitute” with very positive connotation (stress falls on “son”), and the use of “terminal” for something extraordinarily good. Not merely unusual, but totally unexpected.

13. Crazy

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
תזזיתי, תזזי	frantic, frenetic	חסר לו בורג	(he is) missing a screw (in the head)
		נשרף לו הפיוז	he burned a fuse
		שרוט; דפוק	scratched, fucked up
		עם שריטה במוח	with a scratch on his brain
		מסובב (על כל הראש)	his head is screwed wrong
		התחלק (נפל) על השכל/הראש	slipped on his brain
		קוקו	cuckoo

As expected, most slang metaphors here are brain- or head-related. Burned fuse and a missing screw equate man with a machine.

14. Does Not Let Go; Drives One Nuts

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
קשה כספחת (ת)/ דבק בו כספחת	stick/difficult like psoriasis (T)	התעלק; קרצץ/התקרצץ	(stick like) a leech/tick
העבירו על דעתו (ת)	made him lose his mind (T)	שיגע/זיין לו את הנשמה/השכל/ המוח	drove his soul/mind/ brain crazy; screwed his soul/ mind

The metaphors are comparable: one taken from the parasite world, the other uses a sickness that does not quit.

15. Falling Asleep; Napping

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
נתקשרו עיניו בשינה	his eyes “tied together” in sleep	ניקר	pecked (head moving while napping like a bird pecking)
חטפתו שינה (ת)	sleep snatched him (T)	חטף/תפס תנומה; חרפ	snatched some sleep; snored (from Yiddish חרופ ‘snore’)

The pecking metaphor is very effective—and unexpected.

16. Deep Asleep

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
ישן שנת מרמיטה/ תרדמת מרמוטה (ת)	marmot sleep (T)	חרש > חרופ + מקצב חרישה	snore in plowing rhythm (plowed plus snored)

17. Being Tired

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
כבד אברים	with heavy limbs	סחוט/מחוק/גמור/הרוג/ הרוס/קרוע/שחוט/מעוך /שפוך/נשפך/שבוז	resultative adjectives meaning wrung out, wiped out, finished, killed, destroyed, slaughtered, crushed, spilled, with broken penis
טרוט עיניים (ת)	bleary-eyed (T)	עם הלשון בחוץ	with tongue sticking out (with effort)
		חצי מת	half dead

Resultative adjectives predominate in the realm of slang in this field. The same applies to the field of “being in love”:

18. Being in Love

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
קשר אהבה ל... (ת)	formed a love-tie to... (T)	דלוק/נדלק (על); קרוע/נקרע (על); גנוב/נגנב (על); הרוס (על); נעול (על); שרוף (על); גזור (על); שפוט (של); משוגע (על); מורעל (על); נתפס (על)	resultative adjectives meaning enkindled by, torn by, stolen by, destroyed by, locked on, burned by, cut by, judged by, crazy about, poisoned by, caught by
נפשו קשורה בנפשה (ת)	his soul is tied to her soul (T)		
דבקה נפשו ב... (מ)	his soul was glued to... (B)		
נטה לבו אחרי... (מ)	his heart followed... (B)		

19. Old Age

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
שבע ימים (מ), בא בימים (מ)	one who had his fill of days (B)	אלטע זאכען	old/used objects (usually for sale by roving vendors)
		חלוד	rusted
		עם רגל אחת בקבר	with one foot in the grave

The slang metaphors are colored with humor.

20. Poverty

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
קשה יום (ת)	one whose day is hard	אין לו גרוש על הנשמה/שקל על התחת	does not have a penny “on his soul”/on his ass

21. Being Skinny; Emaciated

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
גל (של) עצמות (ת)	a heap of bones (T)	רבע/פֶּרְטֵל עוף	quarter of a chicken (Hebrew and Yiddish)
כולו עור ועצמות	all skin and bone		
גרוגרת דרבי צדוק (ת)	dried fig (T)		
שחף (לא סלג!)	thin piece of wood		

In this realm, the literary metaphors excel—skin and bones, and the dried fig metaphor referring to the diet of the emaciated Jerusalemite scholar Rabbi Tsadock.

22. Being Very Fat

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
עב כרס/בשר	thick-bellied, thick-fleshed	הר אדם	mountain of a man
בעל בשר (ת)	fleshy	מלא	full
בעל גוף	corpulent	מטען חורג (סלנג של נהגי מוניות)	oversize load (cabbie slang)

23. Nonsense; Idle/Empty Talk

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
קש וגבבה (ת)	Straw and stubble (T)	פתפותי ביצים	egg segments/flakes
עורבא פרח (ת)	a flying crow (T, Aram.)	שטויות במיץ (עגבניות)	nonsense in (tomato) juice
בוקי סריקי > בקבוקים ריקים (ת)	empty bottles (T, Aram.)	זיבול שכל/מוח; בולשיט	brain-shitting, bullshit
הבל ורעות רוח (מ)	vanity and chasing of the wind (B)	בבלי"ת > בלבול ביצים ללא תכלית	mixing of eggs (balls?) without a purpose
הבל וריק (מ)	vanity and emptiness (B)	בלבול מוח/ראש	confusing of the mind/head
		קשקוש (פֶּלְבוּשׁ)	scrambling, scribbling
		פֶּרְבוּרִים	talk sounding like br...br...

Both registers are equally productive here.

24. Being Lost

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
ירד לטמיון (ב), יצא לטמיון (ת)	went to the treasury (or king's coffers)	הלך	is gone
הלך לאבדון (ב)	went to perdition	הלך פייפן/קקון	went piping, went down with the shit (Yidd.)
נעלמו/לא נודעו עקבותיו	his/its track are unknown (have disappeared)		
בלעה אותו האדמה	the earth swallowed him		

The literary metaphors are more creative here.

25. Body Secretion

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
עשה צרכיו (ת)	did what s/he needed to do (defecated, urinated)	חרצף > חרא צף	floating shit (in toilet bowl)
חריונים (מ/ת)	pigeon droppings	מוקש (צואת כלבים ברחוב)	a mine (dog-poop in street)
		הלך לקטוף פרחים/ לקשור את החמור	went to pick flowers/ tie the donkey

The mine metaphor in slang is very clever. Both registers use euphemism (did what he needed to do, went to pick flowers).

Some of the metaphors above involve body parts, others are taken from daily life situations. According to Otto Jespersen, the use of body parts in forming slang metaphors is almost universal, especially when the reference is to the head or brain and equating it with different fruit or vegetables, or to a variety of containers (such as a jar, etc.).² The intention is to concretize an emotional or mental state and to make it more accessible. The head/brain, heart, nose, the genitalia, liver, stomach, intestines, spleen, tooth, eye, bones, and blood are the most “popular” body parts. In slang the metaphors are cruder and blunter: nose in the ground, broken penis, eating straw/shit, wetting one’s pants—except for love, which in part is attributed to madness, in part to fire and destruction.

Metaphors in some semantic areas are equally original in both registers. The metaphors for “not realistic, dreamy” are almost parallel. So are the ones for “arrogant,” more or less, except that the slang ones are more blunt; nose and breaking wind vis-à-vis neck and heart. For “emaciated body,” the literary register excels in “a heap of bones,” “a dried fig,” and “a thin piece of wood,” but slang’s “quarter of a chicken” is creative as well. The metaphors for “nonsense; idle talk” are equally picturesque in both registers, and in general, are taken from everyday life. In many instances, however, slang metaphors are more creative than their literary counterparts. This is true, for instance, in the case of most metaphors drawn from physical situations. “Did not lift a finger” for loafing is less original than “did not move a testicle,”

² O. Jespersen, *Mankind, Nation and Individual, from a Linguistic Point of View* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), pp. 134–148.

“sunbathed, back and front of body alternately,” “a carefree student,” or “was as active as a potted plant.” The power of “his eyes tied together in sleep” is in the association with התקשרו עבים ‘clouds tied together,’ but “pecked (head moving while napping like a bird pecking)” is more impressive. Even “plowed,” combining the rhythmic plowing of snoring with the onomatopoeic Yiddish word חָרופ *hrop*, is more original than “marmot sleep.” And clearly, “mountain of a man” and “oversize load” are more original than “thick-bellied.” Slang can derive a metaphor from an existing metaphor, which is the best evidence of productivity: “windshield wiper type” for a flatterer draws from “ass licking,” whereas “bowl licker” does not seem to develop any further. “With infinitesimal brain” and “an idiot with receipts” are cleverer than “hollow headed.” Metaphors that refer to body secretion are blunter and more original in slang, and the same applies to “driving one nuts.” Those that denote excellence overstate and exaggerate in both registers; “son of a prostitute” is unique as a euphemism. Slang metaphors referring to being tired, which also involve considerable exaggeration, are more effective than their literary counterparts, and the same is true of falling-in-love metaphors.

The negative is quite prominent in the slang of any language—or at least there is some negative connotation associated with many slang metaphors. In order to impress his audience, and to demonstrate publicly that he is not afraid to express his views, the speaker tends to use exaggerated expressions involving negativity and insult—but note that exaggeration also characterizes positive expressions (cf. slang metaphors for “excellent” and “being in love” above).

3. LITERARY METAPHORS AND SLANG COUNTERPARTS IN TABOO OR SOCIAL STIGMA AREAS

Of particular interest are metaphors taken from areas which carry a degree of social taboo or stigma. Both registers are characterized by the use of euphemism in these realms; some euphemisms involve diminution of value, others “uplift” and “upgrade”:

26. Stealing

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
קנה במשיכה (ב)	acquired by pulling (out) (Md)	השלים/שתה ציוד	complemented/drank (missing) gear
שלח ידו (מ)	stretched his hand (B)	הרים ; סילק ; סחב	lifted; took away; dragged

שם בכליו (ב?)	put in his vessels (Md?)		
אמר קדיש דרבנן (על) (ב)	said the mourner's prayer (over...) (Md)		
בחוכמה פותח שערים (ב)	cleverly opens gates (Md)		

“Complementing missing gear” is derived from army slang, referring to new recruits pilfering gear from others so as not to be fined for missing items. Saying the mourner’s prayer over a stolen item suggests that it is “dead” insofar as the victim is concerned.

27. Violence

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
הנחית מתנת יד	landed a gift of his hand	נתן ליטוף	gave a pat
הגביה/הניף ידו (על)	raised his hand (on/over)	השכיב, קימט, פיסח, שיפד	lay someone down, creased, mowed, skewered
דש	thrashed	דפק/הרס/זיין/ כיסח/ניפח/קרע לו את הצורה	screwed/ruined/mow ed/blew/tore his shape
הראהו (את) נחת זרועו (מ)	showed him the pleasure of his arm (B)	עשה ממנו קציצות/שקשוקה	made meat patties/ tomato omelet out of him
הפליא בו את מכותיו (ת)	amazed/astounded him with his blows (T)	הוציא אותו מוועד הורים	removed him from the PTA
		גירדו אותו עם שפכטל	they had to remove him with plasterer's spatula

Particularly clever are the slang metaphors “removed him from the PTA,” that is, hit him in the balls so hard that he will not be able to be a parent, and “removing with a plasterer’s spatula,” which is used to remove objects that are flattened and stuck to the surface.

28. Sexual Intercourse

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
דו-שיח	dialogue	דיבר בשפת אבר	spoke “penis language”
הכנסת עטרה (ת)	inserting the crown (T)	הרים אותה (על גיק)	lifted her up (on a jack)

נטע נטיעה (ת?)	planting (T?)	בדק לה את השמן	checked her oil
חרש חרישות (ת)	plowed back and forth (T)	תקתק	clicked/typed (her)
נמתחה הקשת וחזרה (ת)	the bow string was pulled and released (T)		
ערכה לו שולחן והפכו (ת)	prepared a table for him, which he turned upside down (T)	כפיות	teaspoons
		ששים ותשע	69
סיפר עימה (ת)	narrated with her (T)	מזרון (פלוגתי)	(the company) mattress
שימש מיטתו (ת)	used his bed (T)	חלילנית/מחלולה	pipe/recorder player
קרב אל אישה (מ)	drew close to a woman (B)		
עשה צרכיו עם אישה (ת)	fulfilled his needs with a woman (T)		

Plowing and the bow image in the literary register clearly denote a repeated action, which is paralleled in slang by the clicking or typing metaphor. The literary metaphors are much more creative in this case. In describing positions, the literary image of a table turned upside down is quite shocking. Slang images of sexual positions are also clever: the shape of the digits in the number 69 is very suggestive, as is the teaspoon metaphors (two teaspoons one on top of the other). “Mattress” originated from army slang, and “pipe/recorder player” clearly refers to oral sex. Two slang metaphors are derived from automobile mechanics: lifting on a jack and checking the oil. “Speaking penis language” is a pun on the homonyms עבר ‘Hebrew’ and אבר ‘penis, limb.’

29. Male Genitalia

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
מבושים (מ)	human genitalia (ones to be shy/ashamed about) (B)	זָכָג > גָּזָר או זָקָר	metathesis of ‘carrot’ or ‘erection’
עטרה (ת)	crown (T)	זין > האות הראשונה בזָנָב?	the first letter in ‘tail’?
זמורה (ת)	branch (esp. of grape vine) (T)	שטוזה	direct, powerful hit
גיד (ת)	tendon (T)	שטרוגול	penis (source unclear)
וו (ב?)	hook (Md?)	חבילה/ציוד (כולל אשכים)	package/equipment (penis + testicles)

פין (ת)	pin (T)		
קמה (ת?)	standing grain (T?)		
שמש (ת)	beadle, server (T)		
שרביט (ת?)	scepter (T?)		

The number of metaphors for penis in the Mishna and Talmud is remarkable. Most refer to shape.

30. Erectile Dysfunction

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
מלך אל-קום עימו (ת?)	he has a king that cannot rise (T?)	מידלדל (מלעיל)— מטפורה או מטונימיה שאינה מטפורה?	hanging loose— metaphor or metonymy that is not a metaphor?
		צנח לו זלזל	a twig lies loosely (from a poem by Bialik)

31. Masturbation

Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
עושה מעשה קוף	does what a monkey does (from Shlonsky?)	אלדין	Aladdin (reference to the rubbing of the lamp)
		הקשה עצמו לדעת	hardened himself to death (pun on עיצו לדעת 'committed suicide')

In both realms, the metaphors are quite humorous.

One central characteristic of both literary and slang metaphors in taboo areas or ones that carry some social stigma is the avoidance of “calling a spade a spade.” How can we account for the reluctance to do so, and for the extensive use—in either register—of euphemism?

In the literary register, the primary reason is apparently indeed the taboo/stigma itself, a degree of uncomfortable feeling in referring to this area, and a tendency not to sound coarse and lacking in finesse, and perhaps also the wish not to be judgmental. But an even stronger motive is humor on its own: The “clean” metaphor, the euphemism, has a degree of fine irony, as well as some forgivingness, reminiscent of the forgiving gentle humor of Shalom Aleichem, John Steinbeck, Damon Runyon, etc. —versus the bitter sarcasm of Mendelevich Sfarim.

Slang users, on the other hand, have no taboo problem—they are generally proud in their not being afraid to break it, and they also are not worried about coarseness or “inappropriate” language. The primary reason is, apparently, their feeling that there is nothing wrong with such metaphors, and in trying to give them the legitimacy that does not exist in the high register—they do not consider “casual” theft as theft, but rather as lifting, dragging, removing, complementing gear, etc. Another possible explanation (Ghil’ad Zuckermann, personal communication): What appears to be euphemism at first blush in slang is actually reduction. Slang uses metaphors that concretize and reduce the image to the simplest technical level, in order to deliver the message in its most basic level, so as to make it equally accessible to everyone. But just as in literary Hebrew, the primary motive is again the ironic humoristic effect. And although this humor has a degree of forgiveness, it is often more offensive than “calling a spade a spade.” In this respect, euphemism in slang is often more insulting than mere vulgar language, as can clearly be seen in “checked her oil,” or “lifted her (on a jack).” The very reduction to the mechanical level is particularly offensive. The same applies to “pipe/recorder player,” “(company) mattress,” etc. The slang register is machoistic and male-dominated in many languages, but Israeli slang “excels” in this respect. In the higher register, only “she prepared a table for him, which he turned upside down” provides a similarly offensive machoistic metaphor of this magnitude. “He has a king that cannot rise” is cynical as well, but not as offensive.

Occasionally, both registers introduce a type of euphemism which uses words with the opposite meaning, to increase the humor/irony, as, for instance, in “a gift of the hand” or “a pat” for a massive blow. Interestingly, it appears that at least according to the data collected here, this phenomenon is commoner in slang: “well known for his modesty” for an arrogant person, “son of a prostitute” for “excellent,” *היה שמח* ‘it was joyful’, which as pointed out by Nisan Netzer (personal communication) usually refers to violent, messy situations. In some cases, we are not dealing with reduction/diminution, but rather with “upgrading,” as in “crown” or “scepter” for “penis.” Puns and linguistic jokes exist in both registers: “dialogue” as well as “spoke penis language” for sexual intercourse (see above). Here too, slang surprisingly surpasses the literary: “tongue falling on tongue,” “hardened himself to death,” “grade 7 (= penis),” *צפוןבון* “spoiled North Tel Aviv type” < *צפון* + *בוןבון* (‘north’ + ‘candy’), *לשון נופל על לשון* ‘French kiss’ (literally ‘tongue falling on tongue,’ a literary expression for “pun”).

4. CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

It is important to note that comparing between metaphors in slang and in the high register has an inherent methodological problem. While slang develops and changes very fast, and draws from a live, vibrant language, the literary language draws in part from language strata that, insofar as the average speaker is concerned, originated from historically “dead” or obsolete languages or dialects. As noted above, historical metaphors regarded today as literary were once considered colloquial or slang. This does not mean, however, that the comparison should be regarded as invalid, since it has been customary, since the end of the nineteenth century, to include all previous historical strata in the lexicon of Modern Hebrew literature, and to regard all of them as legitimate.

Generally, then, we can point to a high degree of parallelism between metaphors in the high register and those found in slang. Often the parallelism is very close, but the slang metaphor is blunter. But it does not mean that slang metaphors are inferior to their high-register counterparts, or less sophisticated. One can find euphemisms and use of words with opposite meaning—and humor in general—in slang as well, and in a significant number of cases, slang metaphors display an even higher level of creativity. We will conclude by repeating a number of illustrations from the ones quoted above in which the highest degree of parallelism can be observed:

32. Metaphors with the Highest Degree of Similarity in the Two Registers

Meaning	Literary	Translation	Slang	Translation
Stealing	קנה במשיכה (ב)	acquired by pulling (out)	סחב	dragged
	שם בכליו (ב?)	put in his vessels (Md?)	השלים ציוד	complemented (missing) gear
Beating	הנחית מתנת יד	landed a gift of his hand	נתן ליטוף	gave a pat
Suffering	שבע מרורים (מ)	was fed bitter herbs to capacity (B)	אכל חרא/ חצץ/קש	ate shit/gravel/ straw
Depression	דבקה לארץ בטנו (מ); נשפך לארץ כִּבְדוֹ (מ)	his belly stuck to the ground (B); his liver spilled to the ground (B)	עם האף באדמה	with his nose in the ground

	הלך חשכים (מ); פנים חשכות (ת); העכיר עליו עולמו (ת)	walk in the dark (B); dark face (T); his world turned murky (T)	שחור על הנשמה	"black on the soul"
Anger	ניצתה/ניתכה/ בערה חמתו (מ)	his anger fired up/burned fiercely (B)	התחמם; רתח/התרתח	was hot (about...); boiled
Fear	פרחה נשמתו (ת); רחפו כל עצמותיו (מ)	his soul took leave of his body (T); all his bones quivered (B)	יש לו פרפרים בבטן; רעד לו הפופיק; רעד; שקשק	has butterflies in his tummy; his navel trembled; trembled; shook
	התפלץ לבו; נמס לבו (מ); מת לבו בקרבו (מ)	his heart shook with fear; his heart melted (B); his heart died inside him (B)	הלב שלו ירד למכנסיים/ לתחתונים	his hearts sank into his pants/ underwear
Being in love	דבקה נפשו ב... (מ)	his soul was glued to... (B)	דלוק/נדלק (על); נעול (על)	enkindled by, locked on
Failure	יצא בשן ועין (ת)	ended up losing a tooth and an eye (= lost his shirt) (T)	נדפק עד העצם	got screwed to the bone
Success	שיחק לו המזל	had a stroke of luck	הלך לו קלף (משוגע)	had a crazy (= wonderful) card
	שיחקה לו השעה (ת); ההצלחה האירה לו פנים	had a good hour; luck smiled at him	שיחק אותה	"played" it
Loafing	לא נקף (ב)אצבע (ת); ישב בחיבוק ידיים (מ); חבק את ידיו (מ)	did not lift a finger (T); sat with folded arms (B); folded his arms (B)	עם הידיים בכיסים; לא הזיז ביצה	with hands in his pockets; did not move a testicle
Falling asleep, napping	חטפתו שינה (ת)	sleep snatched him (T)	חטף/תפס תנומה; חרפ	snatched some sleep; snored (from Yiddish חרופ 'snore')

stupidity	נְבוֹב מוֹחַ	hollow-headed	(עם שכל) שואף לאפס	with infinitesimal brain
Not realistic, dreamy	פרפרני ; רפרפני	butterfly-like	מרחר ; מעופף ; אסטרונאוט ; יש לו ציפורים/ פרפרים בראש	hovering; flying; astronaut; has birds/butterflies in his head
Arrogant	נְטוּי גִּרּוֹן (מ)	with neck bent in pride (B)	עם האף למעלה	with his nose upwards
Flattery	מלחך פנכה (ת)	bowl/plate licker (T)	לקקו ; מלקק תחת=תוכס לקר ; וישיונר	licker (from ass licker); ass licker; windshield wiper type (suggesting ass- licking)
Excellent	לעילא ולעילא (ת) ; עדית שבעדית ; משופרא דשופרא (ת)	on the highest level (Aram., T), the best of the best (T)	ממדרגה ראשונה ; סוג א' ; אלקף אלקף	first class, grade A, AA
	לא מעלמא הדין (ת)	not from this world (Aram., T)	לא מהעולם הזה	not from this world
Does not let go, drives one nuts	קשה כספחת (ת), דבק בו כספחת	stick/difficult like psoriasis (T)	התעלק ; קרצץ ; התקרצץ	(stick like) a leech/tick
	העבירו על דעתו (ת)	made him lose his mind (T)	שיגע/זיין לו את הנשמה/ המוח/השכל	drove his soul/ mind/brain crazy; screwed his soul/ mind