Linguistic phenomena in Israeli Hebrew as reflected in an early Israeli song

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Tall Tales
Lyrics: Avshalom Cohen
Tune: popular

Grandma and I were sitting together
Next to the bonfire in the (back) yard.
I was dying for a thrilling story,
So Grandma would spin a tall tale.

Refrain: Please tell me, oh tell me some tale
About those good old days and what occurred then,
And please make it sound grand, Grandma,
As they say in Hebrew: tell a tall tale!

Grandma narrated how she stood guard in the Negev,
When it was still a desolate desert,
With an old sub-machine gun and a hand grenade, facing armies of riffraff,
She said: never mind, we will make it...

Refrain: Please tell me...
When Grandma remembers, she immediately brags
How she was bossing everybody,
How Grandpa Abner was courting her
And singing her songs of love...

Refrain: Please tell me...

0. Introduction

Using popular songs as a teaching aid in foreign language instruction is a commonly used device. A song, particularly one with a catchy melody, is attractive to the student, increasing learning motivation. It contributes a cultural aspect, and can serve as a mnemonic device. In our case, it will demonstrate how lyrics could be used to illustrate points of grammar. This particular song was chosen for two reasons:

(a) It is relatively simple and sufficiently colloquial in its style and vocabulary, unlike most other “classical” Israeli songs, and thus more likely to reflect the real language students are likely to encounter.

(b) As pointed out by Rivka Maoz (1998), this song constitutes a refreshing deviation from standard Palmach\(^1\) machismo typical of mainstream lyricist Hayyim Hefer and his contemporaries, where men fighters are idolized heroes, with light-minded girls grateful for their slightest attention. In our song, not only is the woman fighter given the stature she deserves, but she also dominates the scene, with men vying for her attention -- which is probably also more accurate portrayal of Palmach reality. Furthermore, with the close attention paid today to any form of expression, literary or otherwise, that is demeaning to women, a song like this would allow the teacher to devote all his/her attention to the song itself. S/he will not have to dwell on aggravating extra-textual material that should not have been there in the first place, but must be dealt with expeditiously whenever it shows up.

The grammatical points under discussion are not limited to those that can

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1 The legendary commando units of the Hagannah, the main pre-1948 military organization of the Yishuv in Palestine.
be taught to the students directly. At least some of them are intended to
sharpen the teacher’s awareness of grammatical structure, regardless of
whether the particular structure or process described should or should not be
taught as such. The assumption is that the teacher should know the structure
of the language taught before s/he can make a decision as to what structure
should be taught directly as rule of grammar.

1. Restricted realization of the glottal stop (or other
segments merged with it)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>word</th>
<th>meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>?ani</td>
<td>‘I, me’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?al</td>
<td>‘on, about’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>civ?ót</td>
<td>‘the armies of’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?éyx</td>
<td>‘how’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?aní</td>
<td>‘I’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hasávta</td>
<td>‘(the) grandma’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?iéy</td>
<td>‘Hebrew’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?ivrít</td>
<td>‘ivy’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The glottal stop ?álef, [?], is rarely realized in Israeli Hebrew, regardless
of whether it is underlying /?/ or /`/ (‘áyin). When it does surface, it is
normally as a glide to a heavily stressed vowel, usually for the purpose of
contrastive emphasis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>word</th>
<th>meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>amárti kar?á, ló kará</td>
<td>‘I said ‘she read,’ not ‘(she’s) cold’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amárti mitpa?éret, ló mitbagéret</td>
<td>‘I said ‘brag, f.s,’ not ‘grow older, f.s.’”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a natural phonetic realization: heavy stress is ‘reinforced’ by a
glottal stop, as in English: I said [?énvi], not jealousy. One may even hear it
in formal, deliberate pronunciation of a two-vowel sequence, as in
co[?ó]perate, co[?ó]rdinate. As for h, some speakers tend to maintain it,
some others merge it with [?], but for most, h is realized as zero just as the
glottal stop is, unless it is heavily/emphatically stressed:
mahér mahér! ~ ma?=ér ma?=ér! ‘(do it) very fast!’

The same is often true of English /h/, as demonstrated by a comparison
between a [h]istory and an h[=0]istórical event, for instance.

Our song may similarly be used to demonstrate that phonetically, glottal
consonants are realized (almost) only as onglides to heavily stressed vowels.
The teacher can read words containing a glottal consonant (or any of the
underlying segment merged with it) with the glottal realized, and ask the
students’ opinion as to which of the words they heard sound right and which
do not. It is likely that only items in which the glottal serves as a glide to a
stressed vowel will be judged acceptable, i.e civ?ót ‘the armies of,’
mitpa?éret ‘brag, f.s.,” possibly ?éyx ‘how,’ but not ?ani ‘I,’ hasávta ‘(the)
grandma,’ ?al ‘on, about’ > ?al, etc., which will sound unnatural with a
phonetically realized glottal stop.

The obvious question at this point is of what use this could be to either
the student or the teacher. If the glottal stop, or any `ayin that merges with it, or he, is (normally) not realized phonetically, why worry about it?

First of all, assuming an underlying consonant for ?álef, `ayin or he, even when they are not realized phonetically, allows us to maintain the generalization that except for a syllable-final consonant, an orthographic consonant stands for a CV sequence, i.e. a consonant followed by a vowel. In other words, just as non-final dálet stands for dì, de, da, do or du, so does ?álef stand for ?i, ?e, ?a, ?o or ?u. When the consonant is inherently weak, which the glottal stop is, it is elided and not realized on the surface, unless it is emphasized/stressed.

Second, although the glottal consonants are rarely realized, the consonantal slots they used to occupy still affect the behavior of neighboring segments. Thus, for instance, when comparing šoalim ‘ask, m.pl.’ with regular kotvim ‘write, m.pl.,’ the teacher may either have the students memorize a separate sub-pattern of CoCCim, CoCaCim, or explain that glottal consonants are hard to articulate at the end of a syllable, and that consequently, the bisyllabic Co?-Cim was restructured into Co-?a-Cim, a configuration that remains even when the glottal consonant is lost, i.e. Co-a-Cim. The vowel a was chosen to effect the split because it is a low vowel, and glottal consonants, being low themselves, clearly prefer to glide to non-high vowels. Regardless of whether this type of explanation is used or not, the historical glottal consonant is the cause of this difference in behavior.

And thirdly, in cases such as kará ‘cold, f.s.’ vs. kar?á ‘she read’ above, the emphasized glottal sometimes functions to maintain useful semantic distinctions.

2. Penultimate stress in Israeli Hebrew

sávta  ‘grandma’
yašávnu  ‘we sat’
(h)agzími  ‘exaggerate!, f.s.’
nizkéret  ‘remember, recall, f.s.’

In the Hebrew verb system, stress is penultimate in the following environments:
(a) when the suffix is +et (cf. segolate stress below), as in

kotévet  ‘write, f.s.’
medabéret  ‘speak, f.s.’
mitlabéset  ‘get dressed, f.s.’
nizkéret  ‘remember, recall, f.s.’
(b) when the suffix begins with a \(CV\) (consonant-vowel) sequence, as in

- \(ya\acute{s}\acute{a}vti\) ‘I sat’
- \(ya\acute{s}\acute{a}vnu\) ‘we sat’
- \(dib\acute{a}rta\) ‘you spoke, m.s.’
- \(dib\acute{a}rn\acute{u}\) ‘we spoke’
- \(kan\acute{i}ti\) ‘I bought’
- \(kan\acute{i}nu\) ‘we bought’

(c) in all forms other than the present/benoni of some conjugations.

Those include \(h\acute{i}f\acute{i}l\), as in

- \((h)isb\acute{i}ra\) ‘she explained’
- \(yasb\acute{iru}\) ‘they will explain’
- \((h)agz\acute{i}mi\) ‘exaggerate (f.s)!’
- \((h)e\acute{v}\acute{i}nu\) ‘they understood’

‘hollow’ root conjugations in \(p\acute{a}\acute{a}l\),\(^2\) as in

- \(k\acute{a}mu\) ‘they got up’
- \(yak\acute{u}mu\) ‘they will get up’
- \(\check{s}\acute{a}ru\) ‘they sang’
- \(ya\acute{\check{\acute{s}}iru}\) ‘they will sing’

and

‘double’ root conjugations in \(p\acute{a}\acute{a}l\), as in

- \((h)eg\acute{e}na\) ‘she protected’
- \(yag\acute{e}nu\) ‘they will protect’

Alternatively, one may say that in such cases, stress is stable, i.e. does not shift from the citation form to a suffix appended to it, and consequently the derived word is penultimately stressed. There is also the large group of the so-called segolate nouns, as in

- \(k\acute{e}lev\) ‘dog’
- \(s\acute{e}fer\) ‘book’
- \(b\acute{o}ker\) ‘morning’
- \(mik\acute{t}\acute{e}ret\) ‘pipe’
- \(tiz\acute{m}\acute{o}ret\) ‘orchestra’
- \(n\acute{a}xal\) ‘river’
- \(p\acute{e}rax\) ‘flower’
- \(s\acute{e}la\) ‘rock’
- \(mi\acute{s}\acute{l}\acute{a}xat\) ‘delegation’

The segolate class may also be argued to cover comparable verb forms in

\(^2\) In the colloquial, present/benoni forms like \(k\acute{a}ma\) ‘get up, f.s.’ are stressed penultimately, i.e \(k\acute{a}ma\).
benoni forms ending with +et (see kotévet ‘write, f.s.’ etc. above.)

These are the main environments noted in normative grammars for penultimate stress. Otherwise, the default location for stress assignment in Israeli Hebrew is the final syllable, regardless of whether a suffix is involved or not. This is what students of Hebrew are told: unless you know that the word belongs to one of the word classes noted above, assign stress to the final syllable. And indeed, for the majority of forms, this generalization is valid. Forms like sávta, however, raise the question of whether final stress is indeed the natural default in Israeli Hebrew. There are some other, well-defined groups of words where stress is typically penultimate, illustrated below:

(i) Proper names, as in
šmúel rína móše xáim adína avígdor nexáma isráel menáxem.

If proper names are stressed on the final syllable, it clearly characterizes the context as normative and (very) formal. Only one proper name is included in our song: avnér ‘Abner’ (vs. normal ávner). It is finally stressed to accommodate meter and rhyming, and it may also be argued that even though a song is not a poem, there is a limit on how colloquial it can be, which disqualifies ávner. The teacher can use this opportunity to explain that in everyday Hebrew, names are assigned penultimate stress, and that our avnér is a rather formal, non-colloquial variant.

(ii) Terms taken from children’s games and youth “terminology,” as in
rišon ‘first step in a child’s game, like hopscotch’
kláfim ‘card game’ (vs. klaflim ‘cards’)
búlim ‘stamp collecting’ (vs. bulim ‘stamps’)
cfóni ‘of Northern Tel Aviv’ (cf. cfoni ‘northern’)
mícim ‘(individual) juice drinks’ (cf. micim ‘types of juice’)

(iii) Gentilic terms and residents of geographical locations, such as:
švédi ‘Swedish’
súri ‘Syrian’
holándi ‘Dutch’
síni ‘Chinese’
xolóni ‘resident of Holon’
batyámi ‘resident of Bat-Yam’
telavíví ‘resident of Tel Aviv’

3 Not always. Gentilic names that constituted part of the Palestinian Jewish experience were ‘revived’ with normative final stress, e.g. anglí ‘English,’ germaní ‘German,’ etc. But subsequent natural formations opted for the more familiar, less formal penultimate alternative.
(iv) Some familiar kinship terms, like:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ába</td>
<td>‘Dad’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>íma</td>
<td>‘Mom’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dóda</td>
<td>‘Auntie’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sávta</td>
<td>‘Grandma’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stress is also penultimate in some individual familiar items like glída ‘ice cream’ and tíras ‘corn,’ and in numerous borrowed words. It appears that when speakers do not succumb to the normative preference for final stress, natural penultimate stress takes over in familiar or informal speech (a residue of Yiddish and Arabic sub-stratum effect?) in certain sub-groups within the lexicon. The dichotomy between final and penultimate stress assignment may or may not have pragmatic implications to teaching. As pointed out above, an argument in favor of describing realizations of a glottal stop in heavily stressed syllables is that it resolves potential ambiguity; the same applies to minimal pairs distinguished only by the location of stress, as in:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word 1</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Word 2</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bóker</td>
<td>‘morning’</td>
<td>bokér</td>
<td>‘cowboy’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rácú</td>
<td>‘they ran’</td>
<td>racú</td>
<td>‘they wanted’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bánu</td>
<td>‘in us’</td>
<td>banú</td>
<td>‘they built’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and in minimal pairs involving certain proper names vs. regular general nouns, as in

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>xáim</td>
<td>‘Hayim’</td>
<td>xaím</td>
<td>‘life’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>šošána</td>
<td>‘Shoshana’</td>
<td>šošaná</td>
<td>‘rose’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rína</td>
<td>‘Rina’</td>
<td>riná</td>
<td>‘song, song of joy’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ílan</td>
<td>‘Ilan’</td>
<td>ilán</td>
<td>‘tree’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some students may find stress assignment difficult to understand as a concept, and perhaps the best way for them to acquire it would be by correct reproduction of words they hear; others may acquire stress assignment regularities by induction. Still, there is growing awareness today of the need to tailor learning to individual needs and capabilities, and a certain type of student may benefit from the regularities being pointed out to him/her as ‘rules of grammar.’ And obviously, teachers should be aware of regularities involving stress assignment, regardless of whether they are planning to teach them directly or not.

3. **The distribution of secondary stress**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word 1</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vèasávta (vèasáfta)</td>
<td>mèdurá ‘fire’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bèxacér ‘in the yard’</td>
<td>mištokék ‘desire, m.s.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Israeli Hebrew, secondary stress tends to alternate: counting backwards from the main stress, every other syllable carries secondary stress. If more than one secondary stress is involved, the farther away it is located from the main stress, the stronger it is. Thus, the first secondary stress is stronger than the second, the second stronger than the third, etc. The strongest secondary stress is always one notch lower than the main stress (note that secondary stress is marked with a grave accent):

\begin{align*}
\text{vèamèdurá} & \ ‘\text{and the fire}' \\
\text{ùvaxàcerót} (\text{vùbaxàcerót}) & \ ‘\text{and in the yards}'
\end{align*}

The distribution of secondary stress suggests that Hebrew is one of those languages that prefer regular alternation of strong and weak syllables, which also means that two adjacent stresses are not favored. Thus, we can account for stress movement in grammatical words by attributing it to a natural tendency to avoid stress clash:

\begin{align*}
\text{atá bá} & \ ‘\text{are you coming?' } \sim \text{àtā bá} (\sim \text{tabá}) \\
\text{bó (h)éna} & \ ‘\text{come here!’ } \sim \text{bó enà} (\sim \text{bóna}) \\
\text{ù natán lánu makót} & \ ‘\text{he beat us up’ } \sim \text{ù natán lanù makót} \\
\text{èm raú bánu oyvím} & \ ‘\text{they considered us enemies’ } \sim \text{èm raú banù oyvím}
\end{align*}

Since secondary stress is fairly automatic, one may argue that there is no point in teaching it by rule. Nevertheless, a student with a sense for language would note the two realizations of \textit{lanu} (\textit{lánu} or \textit{lanú}), for instance, and the teacher should be able to explain the variation.

4. **Voicing assimilation**

\begin{align*}
\text{sávta} & \ ‘\text{grandma’ } \rightarrow \text{sáfta} \\
\text{cávta} & \ ‘\text{together, in company’ } \rightarrow \text{céfta} \\
\text{nitgabér} & \ ‘\text{we shall overcome’ } \rightarrow \text{nidgabér} \\
\text{nizkéret} & \ ‘\text{remember, f.s.’ } \rightarrow \text{niskéret}
\end{align*}

In Israeli Hebrew, voicing assimilation is regressive (or anticipatory). Voicing may start early, in anticipation of a voiced obstruent consonant that follows, causing a preceding voiceless obstruent to become voiced (e.g. \textit{nitgabér} ‘we shall overcome’ \rightarrow \textit{nidgabér}). By the same token, **cessation** of voicing may start early, in anticipation of the next voiceless obstruent, causing a voiced obstruent to lose its voicing (as in \textit{sávta} ‘grandma’ \rightarrow \textit{sáfta}). Voicing assimilation is not obligatory; rather, it is a variable process, whose application depends on degree of casualness. It is more likely to apply when attention is reduced, though increased rate of speech also creates conditions favorable for it. There are some marginal cases, like \textit{raxvá} ‘she rode’ above,
where the expected variant \([ra\gamma\acute{a}]\) is not very likely to be realized;\(^4\) generally speaking, however, the process is quite automatic. To demonstrate to the students that the voicing assimilation phenomenon is real, one could read two or three segments from the song and ask them to write down what they hear without looking at the text. It is quite likely that some of them will replace \(s\acute{a}vta\) by \(s\acute{a}fta\), \(nitg\acute{a}b\acute{e}r\) by \(nidg\acute{a}b\acute{e}r\), \(niz\acute{k}\acute{e}\acute{r}t\) by \(nisk\acute{e}\acute{r}t\), etc.

The question is whether there is any point in introducing voicing assimilation to students. The argument against it is that this is a fairly automatic process, which will occur naturally with time, with increased fluency, and thus does not require instruction. The usefulness of teaching the voicing assimilation phenomenon would depend on the existence of a sufficient number of instances where avoiding voicing assimilation could be beneficial in disambiguating similarly sounding pairs, like \(tizk\acute{\ddot{o}}r\) ‘you will remember’ \(>\) \(tisk\acute{\ddot{o}}r\) vs. \(tisk\acute{\ddot{o}}r\) ‘you will survey.’ Apparently, this has always been an issue. The Talmud warns readers of the Torah \(l\acute{o} le\hat{\acute{a}}t\acute{i}z et \hat{\acute{a}}s\acute{a}m\acute{e}x, vel\acute{o} le\hat{\acute{a}}t\acute{\ddot{i}}s et haz\acute{a}\acute{y}in\) ‘not to sound a \(s\)-sound like \(z\), nor to sound a \(z\)-sound like \(s\),’ in order to avoid potential ambiguity.

5. **Violations of sonority grading in consonant clusters**

Why do we need an \(e\) in \(m\acute{e}\acute{d}ur\acute{a}\) ‘bonfire’? It should have been \(mdur\acute{a}\), as suggested by comparable forms like \(t\acute{s}uv\acute{a}\) ‘answer’ or \(tnuf\acute{a}\) ‘momentum.’ Students can easily observe that \(mdur\acute{a}\) is hard to pronounce, and that insertion of \(e\) removes the difficulty. But why is \(mdur\acute{a}\) hard to pronounce? The answer is that it violates the sonority hierarchy.

Understanding of the sonority hierarchy -- or its inverse, the consonant strength hierarchy-- is of considerable importance to learners of Hebrew as a foreign language, particularly because there are consonant clusters or sequences that English allows, but Hebrew does not. Although it might constitute over-simplification, it would serve our purpose here to present sonority as the amount of energy audibly released during the production of a phonological segment, and consonantal strength as the inaudible energy spent on the production process itself. Thus, \(a\) is the most sonorant segment in Hebrew: the vocal tract is wide open, with minimal obstruction to the air column, and all the energy created is audibly released. A consonant like \(t\), on the other hand, is hardly audible, since most of the energy involved in its

\(^4\) Possibly because \([\gamma]\) the voiced counterpart of \([\ddot{x}]\), is too close to the voiced uvular fricative, the standard Hebrew realization of \([r]\).
production is spent on the closure of the vocal tract, and very little that is audible actually comes out. It is the vowel following t that projects most of the audible energy emitted. Thus, t is one of the “strongest” consonants, but at the same time one of the least sonorant. If we arrange the phonological inventory by increasing sonority (or decreasing consonantal strength), we will start with stops/plosives such as t, proceed with fricatives, e.g. f, where the closure is incomplete. Next come nasals such as m, followed by liquids, such as l, where the obstruction is considerably weaker, then semi-vowels such as y, where the closure is minimal. In vowels, there is no obstruction at all, but there can be aperture narrowing: the amount of energy allowed to come out is determined by degree of opening: high vowels are less sonorant that mid ones, mid vowels less sonorant than low ones. The importance of the sonority concept is in enabling us to define the structure of the syllable in relation to its components. A syllable has an optional consonantal onset, an obligatory sonority peak, and an optional consonantal coda. The sonority peak is normally a vowel, but may also constitute a syllabic consonant functioning as a sonority peak, as in the case of l in [bae-t] ‘battle.’ The syllable must be structured so, that sonority gradually increase from the beginning of the onset to the sonority peak, and gradually decrease from the peak towards the end of the coda. For example, in a word like blaInd ‘blind,’ l is more sonorant than b, and the diphthong aI is the peak. In the coda, d is less sonorant than n. The consonants, either in the onset or in the coda, cannot be ordered in any other way: neither *blaIdn, *lbaInd or *lbaIdn is pronounceable as a single syllable. If we wish to maintain all consonants in the *lbaIdn order, for instance, we must either split an impermissible sequence with a vowel, e.g. le-bal-den, or syllabify the misplaced sonorant consonants, making them the nucleus of a separate syllable, e.g. l-bal-dn. This is why the underlyingly bi-syllabic mdu-rá is realized as tri-syllabic mè-du-rá. Here are a few similar illustrations:

yè-la-dím ‘children’ (cf. kla-vím ‘dogs’)  
lè-va-ná ‘white, f.s.’ (cf. kta-ná ‘small, f.s.’)  
nè-ša-má ‘soul’ (cf. bra-xá ‘blessing’)  
mè-ti-xá ‘practical joke’ (cf. bdi-xá ‘joke’)  
rè-ši-má ‘a list’ (cf. sti-má ‘filling’)  

Speakers of English should realize that in Hebrew, violations of the sonority hierarchy cannot be resolved by syllabifying sonorant consonants, as in English [bae-t] ‘battle.’ Israelis can only split impermissible sequences with a vowel, which accounts, for instance, for:

/film/ > fi-lim or fi-lem  
/hercl/ ‘Herzl’ > hér-cel
Understanding the sonority hierarchy can also help students interpret the realization of the shwa. As shown in Bolozky (1999b), there are clear advantages to suggesting to students that all orthographic shwas be read as zero vowel signs, and that if a zero vowel is “difficult to pronounce,” the minimal vowel e is inserted to facilitate pronunciation. This is a simple way of making the student aware that a violation of the sonority hierarchy is settled by e-insertion.

When the improperly placed sonorant consonant is preceded by a vowel at the end of a proclitic (like a ‘the,’ ba ‘in the,’ etc.) or at the end of a preceding word in connected speech, e-insertion is no longer obligatory, since the absolute need for it is removed: that preceding vowel may attract the sonorant consonant to its coda, causing resyllabification. e may thus optionally be deleted in such environments (see Bolozky 1991):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{mè-du-rá} & \quad \text{‘bonfire’} & \text{a-mè-du-rá} & \quad \text{‘the bonfire’} & \sim \text{àm-du-rá} \\
\text{yè-la-dim} & \quad \text{‘children’} & \text{a-vè-la-dim} & \quad \text{‘the children’} & \sim \text{ày-la-dim} \\
\text{šlo-sá ye-la-dim} & \quad \text{‘three children’} & \sim \text{šlo-sháy-la-dím} \\
\text{lè-va-ná} & \quad \text{‘white, f.s.’} & & & \\
\text{xul-cá le-va-ná} & \quad \text{‘white shirt’} & \sim \text{xul-cál-va-ná} \\
\text{nè-si-xá} & \quad \text{‘princess’} & \text{a-nè-si-xá} & \quad \text{‘the princess’} & \sim \text{àn-si-xá} \\
\text{rè-ši-má} & \quad \text{‘a list’} & \text{a-rè-ši-má} & \quad \text{‘the list’} & \sim \text{àr-ši-má}
\end{align*}
\]

6. **Residues of the Biblical Hebrew aspectual system**

\((h)\text{asávta } čìzbát tesapér\) ‘Grandma spins a tall tale,’ instead of \((h)\text{asávta } čìzbát mesapéret\)

Although the aspectual system of Biblical Hebrew was replaced by a European-type tense system in Israeli Hebrew, possibly through the “intermediate stage” of Mishnaic Hebrew, it still plays a role in literary Israeli Hebrew. One might explain to the students that in literary Hebrew, the form they use for the future may be used for any ‘incomplete’ events as well (present ones, as well as past ones described as they were happening), and that this usage belongs to a higher, usually literary, register. Terminology such as ‘perfect’ and ‘imperfect’ is (probably) an unnecessary complication.

7. **The “new imperative” in colloquial Hebrew**

\text{saprí} \quad \text{‘tell (f.s.)!’} \quad \text{čazbetí} \quad \text{‘tell (f.s.) tall tales!’}

In Israeli Hebrew, second person future forms also function as
imperatives. Bolozky (1979) shows that what appears to be a return to the normative imperative in colloquial Hebrew is actually the future used imperatively, with its prefix reduced or “chopped off.” The motivation is apparently the tendency to shorten in order to increase the urgency of the command:

\[
\begin{align*}
ti\text{škev}i \text{ bešéket} & \quad \text{‘lie (down) f.s. quietly’} \\
\sim ti\text{škev}i & \sim \text{čkev}i & \sim škevibešéket \\
tis\text{gór et adélet} & \quad \text{‘close the door!’} \\
\sim tis\text{gór} & \sim cgor & \sim sgórtadélet \\
tis\text{talék m}i\text{pó} & \quad \text{‘get out of here!’} \\
\sim tis\text{talék} & \sim ctalékmipó \\
tit\text{kašér itò} & \quad \text{‘get in touch with him!’} \\
\sim tit\text{kašér itò} & \sim tkašéritò \\
ti\text{zaér miména} & \quad \text{‘beware of her!’} \\
\sim dzaér miména & \sim zaér miména \\
tik\text{ansi abáyta} & \quad \text{‘get f.s. into the house!’} \\
\sim tkansi abáyta & \sim kansiabáyta
\end{align*}
\]

That these are reduced future forms used as imperatives, and not a return to the normative imperative, is indicated by the fact that the suffixed forms are not of the normative CiCCV form (e.g. šixvî ‘lie down f.s.’), but rather CCeCV (škevî), which is clearly a shortened tiCCeCV (tiškevî). On the other hand, hagzîmi ‘exaggerate, f.s., make sound grand’ is clearly a normative, formal imperative variant, which is never found in the colloquial.

8. **Restructured morphology in some borrowed words**

The word čizbât is a borrowing from Arabic, meaning ‘lies.’ In the source language, it is the plural of čizb ‘lie,’ the Palestinian Arabic realization of Standard Arabic kâdab (cf. Hebrew kazav ‘lie’). In Israeli Hebrew it is treated as a singular. Restructuring the morphology of borrowed words is not uncommon, but in Hebrew it usually works the other way: a singular is reinterpreted as plural:

(a) As noted above, the realization filim ‘film’ is a way of avoiding sonority-sequencing violation; one consequence is reinterpretation of filim as a plural word, owing to the im ending, and the emergence of a singular fil.

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5 just as lengthening mitigates it, as in the first person cohortative in Biblical Hebrew  
6 That k becomes č in Palestinian Arabic should be clear to those who are aware of čilba in children’s slang, referring to one who is subserviently trying to fawn on another with whom he/she is in a state of brógez, i.e. not on speaking terms. čilba is Palestinian for ‘bitch,’ kâlba.
(b) In mechanics’ jargon, the borrowing *sealed beam* is realized as *silbim*, which again is interpreted as plural, producing a singular *silb*.

(c) In basketball, *hook shot* is borrowed as *úkšot*, and with the ending *ot*, it is reinterpreted as a feminine plural form, hence the singular *úkša*.

Needless to say, such restructuring is strictly colloquial. The use of *čizbát* as singular was legitimized in the colloquial long ago, but the other instances are definitely sub-standard. Pointing out to them could, however, increase students’ awareness of the importance of morphological analysis (and reanalysis…) in word formation.

9. Residues of lost ‘gutturals’

    *ma`âsiyá* 'tale' > *maàsiyá* > *mà:siyá* > *mâsiyá*

As noted above, *?álef* is realized (almost) only as a glide to a heavily stressed vowel, and the same applies to an *`áyin* that was merged with it, and to somewhat lesser extent to *he*. Within words, the loss of such segments results in a two-vowel sequence. When the two vowels are identical, they usually merge into one long vowel, or into one slightly longer vowel, and occasionally into one short vowel:

    *tà`avór* ‘(you will) pass’ > *ta:vór* > *tavór*
    *nà`azór* ‘we will help’ > *na:zór* > *nazor*
    *hè`evír* ‘he moved, transferred’ > *e:vir* > *evír*

The variant in which the double vowel has been completely reduced to a single short one is less favored: speakers prefer to maintain a residue of the lost consonant, either because they still maintain a two-syllable structure, and/or to avoid potential ambiguity. When full reduction does occur, it is characteristic of the speech of older generation Ashkenazi immigrants:

    *lecà`arí* ‘much to my regret’ > *lecàari* > *lècari*
    *?aní ma?amín* ‘I believe’ > *ani maamín* > *ani mamín*

The vowels resulting from guttural loss do not necessarily have to be identical to start with. An unstressed *e* is also assimilated into an immediately following unstressed vowel (that has resulted from the loss of a glottal or pharyngeal consonant):

    *šè`oním* ‘watches’ > *šèoním* > *šòoním* > *šoním* (> *šoním*)
    *nè?umím* ‘speeches’ > *nèumím* > *nu:mím* > *numím* (> *numím*)
    *mèhumá* ‘tumult’ > *mèumá* > *mùumá* > *mumá* (> *mumá*)
    *bè`ayót* ‘problems’ > *bèayót* > *bàyót* > *ba:yót* (> *bayót*)

In older generation Ashkenazi speech, even an *a* that was historically
inserted to avoid a syllable-final guttural may be elided:


It appears, however, that most native speakers do maintain some residue of the ex-guttural. It facilitates assigning a reduced form to a canonical pattern shared with other forms, e.g. sèarâ ‘storm’ belongs to the same pattern as ktata ‘a fight, quarrel,’ i.e. CCaCa, and it minimizes ambiguity, e.g. distinguishes between:

\begin{align*}
\text{sèarâ} & \quad \text{‘storm’} \quad \rightarrow \quad sàarâ > sa:râ \quad \text{vs.} \quad sarâ \quad \text{‘minister, f.’} \\
\text{šèoním} & \quad \text{‘watches’} \quad \rightarrow \quad šòoním > šo:ním \quad \text{vs.} \quad šoním \quad \text{‘different, m.pl’} \\
\text{šòalím} & \quad \text{‘they ask’} \quad \rightarrow \quad šoalím \quad \text{vs.} \quad šolím \quad \text{‘they fish me out’}
\end{align*}

### 10. Denominative verbs

A form like čàzbetí ‘tell (f.) a tall tale!’ was formed only after čizbát was borrowed. So it is clearly a denominative verb, like télefon ‘phone (N)’ > tilfén ‘phone (V)’ etc. Once a new borrowed form is incorporated in the verb system, its behavior is fully regularized, conforming to all morphophonemic alternations affecting native verbs. At the same time, however, the verb system does not accept borrowed forms as easily as the noun system does. So very often, a new borrowed verb is derived from a noun (or adjective) that has already been incorporated into the open noun system.

What can we learn from a form like čàzbetí regarding denominative verbs? First, it is realized in pi`el. Needless to say, the fact that pi`el maintains a bi-syllabic stem throughout the conjugation is helpful. Realization in pa`al (*yičzbot) or hif`il (*hičzbit) would have been virtually unpronounceable. But there is another reason: the verb form is realized in pi`el by virtue of its being an agentive verb\(^7\) – most agentive verbs prefer pi`el, whereas non-agentive ones tend to be realized in hitpa`el (see Bolozky 1999a). Also, the canonical structure of pi`el allows the innovator to preserve the consonant clustering of the base noun čizbat and maintain its transparency. Had the zb cluster been broken, it would not have been as easy to recognize the čizbát stem from which the verb has been derived.

\(^7\) i.e., when the performer of the action exercises some control over it. In a non-agentive verb, it “just happens,” without the agent voluntarily initiating it.
11. Register mix

Our song can also demonstrate under what conditions one may mix registers within a single context. The milieu in the song is essentially colloquial, but poetic license and a sense of humor justify a degree of register mix, and in some instances the everyday alternatives would have been too colloquial. Thus, sàvatí ‘(my) grandmother’ is used here mostly to rhyme with čàzbetí; its colloquial counterpart, (ha)sávta šeli, is never used as a vocative, so it will not be appropriate in this context. (h)agzími ‘exaggerate’, f.s.’ is a bit too high, but it might be argued that tagzími would have been too colloquial. mištokék ‘desire’ is high; but met le ‘dying for’ would have been too colloquial, and rocé meód ‘want very much’ too prosaic. Similarly, heytév could have been replaced by something like tov tov ‘very well,’ but it would have been very unpoetic… Under normal conditions, in day-to-day communication, register mix is out of place, and students should be instructed to avoid it, unless it is done on purpose, for humorous effect, for ‘poetic’ reasons, etc.8

12. Conclusion

The question of whether grammar should ever be taught directly, and if so under what circumstances, is not simple to answer. However, if one decides to do so, under special circumstances and to the right kind of students, one may enliven it by using unusual texts to illustrate points of grammar. A popular song is such a text: it increases student interest, and the points made are more likely to stick in the student’s mind. And as always, it should be borne in mind, that even if grammar instruction can be shown to be redundant, perhaps even confusing and thus potentially harmful, understanding grammatical structure is a must for the teacher, if s/he wishes to teach from a position of knowledge, not ignorance.

8 It sounds very much out of place when an American student comes back after a stay in Israel, and with his/her ‘broken’ Hebrew mixes very colloquial idioms like ála kéfak ‘great!’, mevoás ‘dejected,’ etc.
References


