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Internet

1. INTRODUCTION

Hebrew is a relative newcomer to the Internet, like many other languages that use non-Roman script. When the forerunner of what would later be known as the Internet was launched in the United States in 1969, it used English exclusively and was not open to the general public. English continued to be the official language of the most widely used service of the Internet, the World Wide Web (henceforth: the Web), which made its debut in 1991, and into the decade, as access to the Internet for personal use increased. Subsequently techno-linguistic barriers were eliminated and hardware, software, and encodings in languages other than English became widely available. The Internet has thus grown increasingly multilingual, though English remains the dominant language. It was not until the late 1990s, however, that Hebrew gained currency on the Internet. The increasing popularity of the new 'computer-mediated communication' has affected the form and use of Hebrew (and other languages) on the Internet.

2. ENCODINGS FOR HEBREW SCRIPT

Characters must be encoded, i.e., rendered in machine-readable form, so that they may be processed by computers and displayed in a human-readable form for 'netizens'. There are a number of encodings used for Hebrew script. In the earliest days of the Internet and even after the Web was invented, a 7-bit encoding called ASCII, designed for the language of the inventors of the Internet, i.e., (American) English, was the only encoding widely in use. It included capital and lower-case characters of the Roman alphabet, as well as numbers, punctuation marks, and some control characters, but no 'accented' characters for other European languages using Roman script, and there was no popular encoding for Hebrew script.

This limitation led to the proliferation of a number of competing 8-bit encodings still in use. Unlike 7-bit encodings, these may include not only ASCII but also 'accented' Roman characters or a single alphabetic non-Roman script, like Hebrew. However, they cannot cover both or combine more than one non-Roman

script. The first widely used 8-bit encoding for Hebrew script was ISO-8859-8, commonly known as 'Visual Hebrew'. The first Hebrew websites in the late 1990s used this encoding, but it was later superseded by others because of a technical problem. As the name suggests, 'Visual Hebrew' characters had to be input 'visually', i.e., in a reverse logical order. This is the only viable solution for operating systems and applications that do not understand the so-called 'bidirectional algorithm' essential for the correct processing of Hebrew and other right-to-left scripts by computers.

Two other 8-bit encodings for the Hebrew script still widely used on the Internet are ISO-8859-8-I and Windows-1255; both incorporate the bidirectional algorithm, and hence enable the correct visual rendition of Hebrew characters encoded in a logical order. ISO-8859-8-I, commonly known as 'Logical Hebrew', covers ASCII and Hebrew consonantal characters, but not diacritics. Windows-1255, also called 'Windows Hebrew', is a proprietary encoding by Microsoft. It is identical to ISO-8859-8-I in positions that are assigned to ASCII and Hebrew consonantal characters, but covers all diacritics, except for cantillation marks in positions that are reserved for control characters in ISO-8859-8-I.

Unicode, whose first official version was released in 1991, is a 16-bit encoding aimed at covering all the active, living language scripts, including Hebrew, and some major scripts used in extinct languages. It covers not only Hebrew consonantal characters, but also all diacritics, including cantillation marks. Unicode supports the bidirectional algorithm and has a number of 'dialects', UTF-8 being the one usually preferred on the Internet because of its backward-compatibility with ASCII.

3. CHOICE OF HEBREW IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

Written computer-mediated communication can be classified according to the following five types and their subtypes: (1) the Web with conventional websites, with blogs, and forums as three subtypes; (2) email, with ordinary email and mailing lists as two subtypes; (3) news-groups; (4) instant messaging; (5) and chat.

For conventional websites, which are among the most widely used subtypes of written

tense, e.g., אָנִי יֵגִיד *'ani yagid* instead of אָנִי אֶגִּיד *'ani 'agid* 'I'll say'.

Syntax. Intentionally mixed word order.

Lexicon. English Internet terms transcribed in Hebrew script, e.g., האַקר *haqer* 'hacker', קראַקר *qraqer* 'cracker', בּלוג *blog* 'blog', טוֹקבֶּק *toqbeq* 'talkback'; Hebrew words used in Internet-specific meanings, e.g., שְׂטְרוּדֶל *štrudel* '@ sign (lit. 'strudel)'; אֶשְׁכוֹל *eškol* 'thread (lit. 'cluster [of grapes])'; new verbs formed from English Internet terms, e.g., גִּיגֵל *gigel* 'to Google', הִקְלִיק *hiqliq* 'to click', צ'וֹטֵט *coṭet* 'to chat', קִסְטֵם *qisṭem* 'to customize'.

Since this register of Hebrew is still quite new, and hence rather unstable, it may well change and/or develop further in the future, as the number of Hebrew-speaking 'digital natives' grows.

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Interrogative: Biblical Hebrew

The interrogative clause is one of several clause types found in Biblical Hebrew, in addition to

the declarative, imperative, and exclamative. The various clause types constitute a syntactic system whose categories are defined based on formal criteria, such as verb form or the presence of grammatical particles. Each clause type is characteristically used to perform a different speech act, declarative clauses to make assertions, interrogative clauses to request information, and so on.

The relation between clause type and speech act is not one-to-one. Not all questions are expressed by interrogative clauses and interrogatives are not always used for questioning. Declarative sentences can be used to ask questions, as in 'You told him to come?' (on declarative questions in Biblical Hebrew, see Harper 1890:119; Mitchell 1908; Sperber 1966:622–623; Kedar-Kopfstein 1992:*146–*148; Steiner 1997:167). When interrogatives are embedded in larger sentences, they do not normally perform their own speech act. For example, in the sentence 'He told me who won the contest', the complement clause 'who won the contest' does not perform its own speech act, but participates in the speech act performed by the entire sentence, i.e., a statement (Huddleston 1994:3845).

The term 'question' is used at both the semantic and pragmatic levels of analysis. From the semantic perspective, a question is a sentence that defines a group of possible answers (Huddleston 2002:865). There are three types of questions (Huddleston 2002:867–876). 'Polar' questions (also known as 'yes/no' or 'closed' questions) have a pair of possible answers, one positive and one negative. The question itself can be positive, e.g., 'Are you ready?', or negative, e.g., 'Aren't you ready?' 'Variable' questions (also termed 'wh', 'open', or 'X' questions) involve presupposed propositions containing an unknown variable, e.g., 'Who won the contest?' involves the presupposed proposition 'Someone (X) won the contest'. Lastly, 'alternative' questions have a set of possible answers which are specified in the question itself, e.g., 'Do you want tea or coffee?'

Although these three question types are distinct semantically, languages usually distinguish only two interrogative clause types, one used for both polar and alternative questions, and the other for variable questions (Siemund 2001; Huddleston 2002:868–870). The two types often have little or nothing in common from the formal perspective, and it is arguable