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SEMANTIC BORROWINGS AND GRAMMATICAL CHANGE IN WRITTEN ARABIC IN ISRAEL UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF HEBREW: THE FUNCTION OF DPS AND THE PECULIAR ماحش

Torkel Lindquist

ABSTRACT

Influence from Modern Hebrew (MH) on written Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) as found in the Israeli-Arab Press in Israel can appear as 1) semantic borrowings; 2) orthographical borrowings; and/or 3) grammatical change in syntax or morphology. The word *māHiš* appears to be a borrowing into MSA with more than one of these aspects.[1]

***

In earlier works, different scholars have examined the linguistic changes of languages which have been in contact for hundreds and sometimes thousands of years.[2] Indeed, this has been considered a sine qua non: “Long-term contact with widespread bilingualism among borrowing-language speakers is a prerequisite for extensive structural borrowing.”[3] In the material that I examine, however, there is a very interesting phenomenon that undermines the previously understood need of centuries of contact for grammatical change. For a long time before the birth of the state in 1948, Hebrew did not play the dominant role that it plays in present day Israel; even among the Jews, it had long since assumed a liturgical role. Modern Hebrew, one of the two official languages in the state of Israel, is a revived as well as a renewed language.[4]

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[1] With the generous support of the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet) and the hospitality of the Moshe Dayyan Center at Tel Aviv University, I was able in 2007–2009 to conduct research on the thrilling subject of contact-induced grammatical change. I would like to express my gratitude to several colleagues at Tel Aviv University, foremost of all to Prof. Eyal Zizzer, Director Chaim Gal, Prof. Ilai Alon, and PhD-student Michael Barak.

[2] Saxena 1997: 144 ff.; Heine & Kuteva 2005: 77, 118.

[3] Kaufmann & Thomason 1988: 67.

[4] Zuckermann 2003.

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Before the formation of Israel, Arabic in the area had been in contact with (and possibly influenced by) other languages, such as Byzantine Greek during the Crusades, Ottoman-Turkish when it was incorporated in the Ottoman Empire, English for a brief time during the Mandatory Government over Palestine, as well as different European languages which exerted general influence in its modernization process. It is only after 1948 or thereabouts that Hebrew could have possibly influenced Arabic on a massive scale.

How could a mere sixty years of significant influence affect linguistic traces in Arabic? The answer lies probably in the speed of exchange and communication today. In contemporary Israel, Arab-Israelis are bombarded with television and radio in Hebrew, school education in Hebrew, and newspapers in Hebrew. Apart from all this, they interact with Hebrew speakers professionally and in daily society in informal meetings.

The question of *intensity* as a contact factor resulting in change is explored by Nagy, who lists three types of intensity: degree of contact, cultural identity, and linguistic factors.[5] Other languages in contact over the centuries needed time for any influence to have an effect. This is because most contacts were limited then to a personal level and physical proximity, as possible influence from books or schools was virtually non-existent, at least for the great majority.

Nearly any part of a language is subject to change when exposed to the influence of another language. When it comes to grammatical meaning and structure, constraints on linguistic transfers do exist, but influence is nevertheless possible.

The question naturally arises whether grammatical change could not also be brought about due to influence from another language (i.e. by language contact, rather than, or in addition to, causes internal to the language itself). Here linguists stand divided. It remains open to debate whether a language can borrow grammatical constructions and categories from another language, or whether foreign influence can at most bring about a change in the distribution of already existing constructions and categories.[6]

When dealing with linguistic transfer from one language to another, Heine and Kuteva recognize the following five factors: 1) form (sounds or combinations of sounds); 2) meanings (including grammatical meanings or functions) or combinations of meanings; 3) form-meaning units or combinations of form-meaning units; 4) syntactic relations (the order of meaningful elements); and 5) any combination of the first four factors.[7]

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[5] Nagy 1996: 41.

[6] Saxena 1997: 1–3.

[7] Heine & Kuteva 2005: 2.

In this work, I adopt the terms proposed by Weinreich. He distinguishes between the Model Language (M) that provides the model for transfer and the Replica Language (R) that makes use of the model.[8] What takes place, according to the findings of Heine and Kuteva, is the creative manufacturing of a new grammatical structure based on the pattern of (M) with a material already existing, albeit less frequently, in (R). Thus the result is by no means an identical copy. The "replication" gives instead something new: (R2).[9]

Previous studies of Modern Colloquial Arabic (MCA) in Israel have established an influence on Arabic with borrowings of lexemes, as well as morphological and syntactical changes under the influence of MH.[10] I also find influence, even if it is more limited in scope and less easy to detect, in the written MSA of the Israeli press.

Both semantic and orthographical borrowings from MH into MSA are fairly easy to discover. When it comes to orthography, the reason is obvious. For semantics, it is rather straightforward to establish through the use of different dictionaries if a meaning has previously been accepted or if it is a novelty. On the other hand, grammatical change resulting in (R2) through a transfer from (M) to (R) is quite complicated. Perhaps the most challenging aspect is to determine whether the change in question is indeed due to an influence by the language in contact or if the change is the result of an internal development in the language – or even, if it is the result of influence by a source other than the language in contact (e.g. a colloquial variant of the same language). Thus the basic task in front of me is to prove that the differences between (M) and (R) are obvious enough to manifest a link to (R2).

The case can be found in the *al-Fajr al-jadīd* newspaper (1/1 2006, p. 9).[11] The item in question is ماحش (*māHiš*).[12]

سكب الطعام والشراب الساخن عليه و**ماحش** تحقق

He spilled food and hot drink over himself and an investigation is *urgent*. *

تواصل دائرة التحقيق مع رجال الشرطة **ماحش** التحقيق في الشكوة التي تقدم به الشاب
الفلسطيني

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[8] Weinreich 1964.

[9] Heine & Kuteva 2005: 37.

[10] Amara 1986; Amara 2005: 165–172.

[11] This newspaper has, according to the Director of the Archives at Moshe Dayyan Center, Mr. Chaim Gal, been published since the beginning of 2008 as a weekly rather than a daily.

[12] I observed an expression that was identical to the second example (that is, **ماحش** التحقيق في الشكوة) in a radio broadcast by the local station of Nazareth on the 13th of April 2008. On that occasion it was also used in connection with a police investigation.

> The rounds of investigation continue with policemen and *it is urgent/haste is needed* to investigate the complaint the young Palestinian has raised. *

INFLUENCE IN SEMANTICS AND ORTHOGRAPHY

The root (*m-H-š*) exists in Arabic.[13] As suggested in the above translation, the meaning of this root arguably should be close to 'an urgent need' or 'a need to accomplish something hastily'.

BūTrus al-Būstānī, on one hand, explains *māHiš* in his dictionary (also the first modern dictionary) as follows:

> كثير الاكل حتى يعظم بطنه والمرحق[14]
>
> (He ate) a great deal of food until his stomach became large (or aching) and (the second possible sense) began to burn (in the infinitive).*

Further, in the dictionary of Muhammad Ibn Mukarram Ibn Manzūr,[15] meanings are found that may be translated into English as 'tear to pieces, violate, or burn oneself on a flame'.*

Similar suggestions are found in the dictionary of A. Kazimirski de Biberstein: 1. *qui brûle et endommage (feu, chaleur excessive)*; 2. *gourmand, qui avale tout avec avidité*. Similar examples are found on a general level for the root: 1. *brûler au point de noircir (la peau, etc.)*; 2. *arracher, enlever sur son passage des objets qui s'y trouvent (se dit d'un torrent)*; 3. *violer (une fille)*; 4. *manger beaucoup*.[16]

This is to say that, according to these dictionaries, no meaning that fits the journalistic context exists. Thus it remains for me to examine dictionaries of Hebrew in order to establish if this is a case of semantic borrowing. And indeed there is a very suitable and almost identical term with a meaning that is compatible with the context. From the dictionaries of Reuben Alcalai, Eitan Avneyon and Abraham Even Shoshan,[17] the following is found:

> (*mekhīš* of the root *kh-w-š*)[18] *rush, hasten*.[19]

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[13] Wehr's dictionary (1976) does not include the root.

[14] al-Būstānī 1998.

[15] Ibn Manzūr 1955.

[16] Kazimirski de Biberstein 1860.

[17] Alcalai 1990; Avneyon 1997; Even Shoshan 1993.

[18] According to Nyberg, this *hifʿīl* pattern differs from the *paʿal* pattern, *khūš*, in that while both have a basic sense of 'to hurry', in Biblical Hebrew the sense is 'to hurry in a particular situation'. The pattern *hekhīš* is in the Biblical context found in Judg. 20:37, meaning 'to flee (in a hurry)' and in Isa. 28:16, meaning 'to hasten/hurry up'. (Nyberg 1972: 226)

[19] Other examples of Hebrew roots introduced into cognate stems of the Arab verb system are found in Talmon 2000: 216–217.

Therefore, a contact-induced influence is proven at least in the case of semantics. That is, from the above it is clear that a previous meaning of the root in Arabic has been altered under influence from MH.

Orthographically, however, it is not possible to argue for any influence; the *ism al-fā‘il* of the first stem as *māHiš̌* is found earlier, albeit with a different meaning.

GRAMMATICAL INFLUENCE

It is far more difficult to establish a case of influence from MH on morphology and syntax, especially the latter. Morphologically, the MH equivalent of the *ism al-fā‘il* of the first stem (the *pō‘el*) is obviously not the source of this borrowing. Rather it is a participle of a derived conjugation that stands at the fore: instead of being the pattern *pa‘al* (as above), the *hif‘īl* is the pattern from which this meaning is taken. Interestingly, the participle in MH is still the base, but in a derived form (*maf‘īl*) which is a factitive or causative conjugation.[20] The corresponding pattern in Arabic would be stem IV (i.e. *muf‘il*).[21] Furthermore, the root in MH of *mekhīš̌* of the (conjugated) verbal pattern (*binyan*) of *hif‘īl* is not the same as the root for *māHiš̌* of the first stem of Arabic. In Arabic the root is *m-H-š̌*, while in Hebrew it is a ע‘ו[22] (with the root *kh-w-š̌*). Finally, in accord with the above, Wright gives the equivalent in MH to this form (that is, form I). It goes without saying that this form in MH is not the source of influence in the case of *māHiš̌*. In Hebrew this form would be the *pō‘el*. That is, the *’alif* corresponds to *vāv*.[23]

Thus far, I have argued for an influence from MH both in semantics, where the meaning of the root is altered in MSA, and in morphology, where the (R) in Arabic does not belong to the corresponding stem as the (M) of MH, nor even the same root. Below I will examine the possibility of influence on syntax as well.

THE FUNCTION OF DPS

When it comes to its syntactical function in MSA, *māHiš̌* might be used as evidence of influence from the *beinōni* of MH. The *ism al-fā‘il* has no temporal value by itself, although it may express temporality in a given context. Standing alone, it serves as a noun in the function of an adjective or a substantive.[24] While one role of the *ism al-fā‘il* is that of an active participle – and if derived from certain verbs and positioned in some contexts, it can have a function similar to that of a present tense verb – the *beinōni* of MH is the participial form that serves as present tense.[25]

---

[20] Wright 1966: 204–207; Glinert 1989: 465–466.

[21] Haelewyck 2006: 145.

[22] Nyberg 1972: 127–132; Gesenius 1909: 208–210.

[23] Wright 1966: 196–197; Fox 2003: 240.

[24] Badawi, Carter & Gully 2004: 241; Ryding 2005: 103 ff.

In Classical Arabic (CA) and MSA, temporal forms are expressed by the verb. As it is not the focus of interest of this article, I will not elaborate on the ongoing disagreements about whether Arabic as a language is “temporal” – or, as several scholars (e.g. Reckendorf) have claimed, should instead be considered as “aspectual”.[26] As such, Arabic verbs would determine an act either as “accomplished/finished” or “unaccomplished/unfinished”.[27] Others (among them Sibawayhi) recognize temporal values, along with aspectual values, in the verbal system of Arabic.[28] In fact, and this is different from MH, MSA does even express “present”, “past” and “future tenses” in one verbal form: *yaktubu* may be translated as ‘he writes’, with an added particle for the future (*sayaktubu*) as ‘he will write’, and with the jussive particle for negating the past (*lam yaktub*) as ‘he did not write’.[29]

As stated above, time may also be expressed by the *ism al-fāʿil.* Already Al-Farrā’ has suggested a three-part division of the Arab verbal system,[30] one expressing past tense (*al-māDī*), one expressing a present or future tense (*al-muDāri’*), and finally the *ism al-fāʿil* expressing a continuous past or present (*al-dā’im*).[31] Indeed, the *ism al-fāʿil* can have a temporal value. According to Wright, when the *ism al-fāʿil* is derived from verbs that are *faʿala* and transitive *faʿila*, “these nomina agentis are not only real participles, indicating a temporary, transitory or accidental action or state of being, but also serve as adjectives or substantives, expressing a continuous action, a habitual state of being or a permanent quality”.[32]

The difference between the participle and the adjective is that the adjective describes permanent and enduring situations (as such, it is stative), while the participle expresses something that is happening, and seems to have in independent nominal clauses a verbal function (in that sense being dynamic or non-stative). A simple way of putting it would be to claim that every pure stative lexical root, such as *k-r-m*, is unable to form active participles. This is, unfortunately, not correct: there are examples (like *fāhim*) that prove otherwise. Fassi-Fehri suggests the term “contingency” for states of affairs that are contingent or temporally restricted or transitory; the opposite would be absolute, permanent or temporally unrestricted.[33] He further argues that "verbs that originated as adjectives cannot form participles".[34] I believe, in accordance with the latter, that adjectives are indeed associated with pure states in the lexicon and that they are not deverbal. Here I shall examine what *māHiš* is and what properties it has. First, however, I will look into the (M) of this investigation – that is, the *beinōni* of MH – and what properties it has.

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[25] Ouhalla & Shlonsky 2002: 10; Siloni 1997; Fassi-Fehri 1993: 178.

[26] Reckendorf 1895.

[27] Wright 1991: I51. C; Brockelman 1910: 149.

[28] Cohen 1924; Sibawayhi, 1970: 24–25; Fassi-Fehri 1993: 141–156.

[29] Ouhalla & Shlonsky 2002: 10.

[30] Albeit in opposition from the grammarians in Basra who refused to see the *ism al-fāʿil* as having any connection to the verb.

[31] Messaoudi 1985: 103–104.

[32] Wright 1991: 131–132.

Certainly, the *beinōni* has a stronger case of temporal value; this is especially pronounced in MH. L. Glinert identifies the *beinōni* as having *the* function of present tense in MH.[35] As its name indicates ('between'), it may however also be used as "a noun" when directly describing a being (animate or inanimate). Also in Biblical Hebrew (BH), which provides an interesting historical reference, the *beinōni* has a temporal value. H.S. Nyberg claims that the active participle may, depending on the context, express either a continuous, past or future act for a present, past or future time. Indeed, according to Nyberg, it can even be used in a simple verb phrase *instead of* the imperfect indicative.[36]

It seems then, that both the *beinōni* and the *ism al-fāʿil* may be used as a kind of temporal marker, albeit not necessarily as present tense.[37] In MCA of Egypt, the *ism al-fāʿil* clearly expresses different tenses: *farīdah dārisah* (perfect tense), but *ir-rāgil nāzil* (imperfect tense) and *huwwa ʿārif šuġlo* (present tense).[38] But the *ism al-fāʿil* as a tense marker is also found in MSA/CA: *huwa kātibun darsahu* ('he is writing his lesson' or 'he had written his lesson').[39] In any case, I believe it to be a mistake to exclude the possibility of the *ism al-fāʿil* playing any central role in the temporal system since it does not possess T-morphology.[40] Although its counterpart in MH does not carry T-morphology, it nevertheless expresses present tense as if it were a verb (except when functioning as an adjective).

In sum, tenses in MH have their very own form. While *yaktub(u)* in Arabic may actually express three different tenses, its counterpart in MH (*yiktob*) expresses only the future tense, with *katab* as past tense and the *beinōni* as the form expressing present tense (*hu kōteb*). In rare cases, the Arabic *ism al-fāʿil* may express present tense, as in *anā fāhim* ('I understand').

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[33] Fassi-Fehri 1993: 178–181.
[34] Fassi-Fehri 1993: 186.
[35] Glinert 1989: 122–123.
[36] Nyberg 1972: 274–275, 292.
[37] Eisele 1990: 175.
[38] Ouhalla & Shlonsky 2002: 87.
[39] Altoma 1969: 73.
[40] Fassi-Fehri 2004: 255 n. 33.

When it comes to the syntactical function of *māhiš*, the first question is whether it should be considered an adjective or if its function is that of a participle. A brief comparison between the two languages gives the following:

The *beinōni* of *mekhīš* in MH, the (M) in this investigation, as an adjective would be ungrammatical:

> *Ha-khaqirah mekhīš**
> The investigation is urgent.*

Whereas in (R) it would be grammatical:

> *māHiš ut-taHqīqi*
> The investigation is of urgency.

However, while the example in Arabic seems to operate as an adjective, in order for it to have verbal power as in the *status constructus*, in (R) it should function as an active participle and not as an adjective.[41]

In (M), a temporal use of the *beinōni* is grammatical, of course:

> *Ha-geber mekhīš la-ʿabodah*
> The man rushes to work.

If translated into MSA, using this borrowing, the *ism al-fāʿil* would have an identical function (of present tense) to that of the *beinōni*:

> *Ar-rajulu māHišun ʾilā šuġli-hi**
> The man rushes to his work.*

Finally, even if it seems to have the function of an adjective, such a function is incompatible with the *status constructus* if expressing time (like a verb). Only the active participle in MSA may take the construct state in this function. This borrowing, both in semantics and in morphology, is used after the grammar of (R). In (R2), however, the function as adjective alters to that of an active participle. As such it is influenced by MH.

To summarize, the word *māHiš* in itself would be an adjective when borrowed into MSA. However, in this context and in the construct state, it seems rather to be an active participle. Thus the function in MH of *mekhīš* influences the MSA: the borrowing adopts the use of the *beinōni*.

---

[41] Wright 1991: II64B; Ouhalla & Shlonsky 2002: 177.

Could it be a case of borrowing, not from MH but rather from MCA? On a secondary level that would be possible, if it were used first as a borrowing into MCA and then taken from MCA into MSA. The origin of the semantics, as well as the borrowing in morphology, is nevertheless MH. When it comes to the function of the *ism al-fāʿil*, it is possible to argue for influence from MCA, since the function there could be considered more verbal than is the case in CA/MSA.[42] The tendency of the function to move from adjective to active participle speaks in favor of MH as (M).

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS ON THE TERM IN MODERN HEBREW

Having written the article to this point, I acquired new information on the term in MH that complicates matters. According to an Israeli Arab with whom I discussed the issue, it turns out that perhaps I am not dealing with *mekhīš* at all (or at least not altogether). Instead it appears to fundamentally be a question of a short form in MH, an abbreviation that stands for several terms. In that case, the (M) would not in itself be a *beinōni*. Rather, (M) is מח“ש *makhaš*, short for *Ha-makhlaqah le-kheqirōt šotrīm* – that is, a judicial department of the Israeli Police, a kind of "Internal Affairs" ('The Section for Investigating Policemen'). As such, it would constitute a direct borrowing into the MSA text, placed as an "Island"[43] of MH inside the MSA sentence.

But it is not that simple either. After searching online for the word in different Arab Israeli publications, I found that this borrowing into the MSA of Israel seems to have two separate spellings: one spelling uses the letter *ʾalif* twice in order to reflect the pronunciation of the short form in MH (*m-ā*(1)-*H-ā*(2)-*š*), while the other spelling (which I found in my two earlier sentence-examples) looks just like the *ism al-fāʿil*, with the *ʾalif* written only once after the first letter.

From this it is possible to assume that *māHiš* in MSA has the very same function as if it was written, in more or less free translation into Arabic, like the 'FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation)'. Or is this borrowing used as *ism al-fāʿil* after all? To clarify the matter, I take the following two steps: 1) I return to the translation of my earlier example to determine if the abbreviation, a direct borrowing from MH as an "Island" in MSA, is reasonable; and 2) I compare other sources of MSA in Israel where the two variations of spelling appear, in order to establish if they are different.

To repeat the two examples given above:

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[42] Brustad 2000: 162.

[43] Myers-Scotton 1993: 3.

(١) سكب الطعام والشراب الساخن عليه و**ماحش** تحقق
(٢) تواصل دائرة التحقيق مع رجال الشرطة **ماحش** التحقيق في الشكوة التي تقدم به الشاب الفلسطيني

In the first example, the short form as a MH “Island” inside the MSA sentence seems to fit rather well. In order to illuminate the “Island” more clearly, I placed the version in (MH) inside the sentence instead of translating it:

> He spilled food and hot drink over him and מח“ש investigates.

In the second example, however, the short form is not suitable. That also goes for the earlier observation I made with the radio broadcast. For this “Island” to be appropriate, something would need to be added in MSA, such as *taqūmu bi* or *yaqūmu bi* (depending on the gender in the translation) after the abbreviation. Otherwise the sentence is not grammatical.

Written without such an addition, it would be: ‘The rounds of investigation with the policemen continues מח“ש (conduct) the investigation … into the complaint that was forwarded by the young Palestinian.’

Other examples from Arab publications found online suggest that both spellings in Arabic are used for the abbreviation in MH. In these examples, one finds an “Island”:

قدم شاب من مدينة سخنين... سكوى رسمية في **قسم التحقيقات مع افراد الشرطة ماحش...**[44]

اعلنت و**حدة التحقيقات مع افراد الشرطة لوزارة القضاء (ماحش)...**[45]

وقد اوصت **لجنة التحقيق الرسمية ماحاش** بالتحقيق في العديد من الحالات التي ادت الى مقتل ٣١ شخصا...[46]

...وحدة التحقيق مع الشرطيين ماحاش التابعة لوزارة العدل...[47]

ان **قسم التحقيق مع الشرطة ماحاش بدأ بالتحقيق**...[48]

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[44] *Kull al-Arab:* 27/3 2009, p. 58. ‘A young man from the city of Sahnin presented … an official complaint to the section of investigations with policemen *māHiš*’.

[45] *Al-Sinarah*: 15/5 2009, p. 1. ‘The unit for investigating policemen belonging to the Justice Department *māHiš* announced’.

[46] www.Adalah.org ‘The committee for official investigation *māHāš* was entrusted the investigation into several of the cases that led to the death of 13 persons’.

[47] *al-Akhbar*: 14/4 2009, p. 1. ‘The unit of investigations with policemen *māHāš* belonging to the Justice department’.

[48] *al-Watan:* 5/2 2007, p. 1. ‘The section for investigating the police *māHāš* began investigating’.

CONCLUSION AND FINAL REMARKS

The word *māHiš* in MSA of Israel is a borrowing from MH. Its function is that of a translated "Island" inside Arabic sentences. While the translation varies, the connection to a certain unit in the Israeli Ministry of Justice is the same. There are texts, however, where the function of an "Island" is not appropriate. There may be two distinct reasons for this: the first would be *a recurring* mistake where words in Arabic are lacking, thus making the sentence ungrammatical. The second possibility is that this abbreviation in Arabic, which is orthographically identical with the *ism al-fāʿil*, has as (R2) become an active participle. Thus, there appears to be a new function for this borrowing from MH into MSA, suggesting a development in the use of *māHiš*. From being at first a translated "Island", it moves to being a new (R2) creation, a neologism.

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