Some Highlights of Contemporary Hebrew Dictionaries and Lexicography

This feature highlights the main monolingual dictionaries of Hebrew in Israel today – Milon Ariel (Maya Fruchtmann), Milon Even-Shoshan (Moshe Azar), Milon ha-Hoveh (Mordechay Mishor), Milon Sapir (Yitzhak Shlesinger), Rav-Milim (Yaacov Choueka) and its online version (Yoni Ne'eman, Rachel Finkel) – with an overall cross-review (Ora R. Schwarwald), as well as the Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language of the Academy of the Hebrew Language along with a glossary and notes (Doron Rubinstein).

The roots of Hebrew lexicography are traced to Rav Saadia Gaon, who worked mostly in Babylonia in the early 10th century CE. His Egron (902 CE) contained nearly 1,000 Hebrew entries, and Kitab al-sab‘in lafza al-Mufrađa had 70 (actually 90) entries translated into Arabic. In addition, he was the first to write an Arabic translation of the Bible.

The initiative for this focus has been generated by what is considered to be the first major monolingual Hebrew dictionary, the Mahberet by Menahem ben-Saruq, which appeared in Spain around 950 CE.

Issue Number 13, July 2005, will feature an article on the Mahberet by Aharon Maman, articles on modern Hebrew/Arabic dictionaries, and highlights of Arabic dictionaries and lexicography.

Modern Hebrew Dictionaries

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The past decade has seen the appearance of a great number of monolingual modern Hebrew dictionaries, each with a different linguistic approach and editorial aims. Besides these, there are dictionaries of proverbs and idioms (e.g. Lashon Rishon [First Tongue], 2000; Nivon Ariel [Ariel Dictionary of Idioms], 2001), clichés (Medabrim bi-Klisha‘ot [Talking in Clichés], 2002), a thesaurus (Mila be-Mila [Word in/word], 2000), idioms (Haruzim le-Khol ‘Et [Rhymes for all Times], 2001), loan words (Leksikon Lo‘azi-Turi [Foreign-Hebrew Lexicon], 2000), lost words (Milon ha-Milim ha-Ovod [Dictionary of Lost Words], 1996), slang (Slang Tsvai‘i [Military Slang], 1994; Leksikon Shotrim ve-Ganavim [Cops and Robbers Lexicon], 1997; Slang ve-Humor [Slang and Humor], 2003) and professional dictionaries, all published within the past ten years.

The following nine dictionaries will be the focus of our discussion, listed here chronologically with their abbreviations – first the five general dictionaries, followed by the four junior ones.

General Dictionaries


Junior Dictionaries

Tel Aviv: C.E.T., Miskal and Steimatzky, 1996. 2 volumes, 8+1022 pages; also CD-ROM, RMH.

- Milon ha-Hoveh: Milon Kis Shimushi ha-Loomed [Practical Pocket Learner’s Dictionary of Contemporary Hebrew] by Haya Gil. Tel Aviv: Maariv and Eitav, 1996. 512 pages; HK.

Except for ES, all these dictionaries are entirely new. ES is a revised version of ha-Milon he-Hadash [The New Dictionary], written by Avraham Shoshan and first published in 1948, revised in the 70s by Even-Shoshan, updated in the 80s, and now revised by Moshe Azar and a team.

H and its followers – SM, S, HK and SB – form one group of dictionaries based on their verb representation system, whereas RM, ES, RMH and A form another. From here on S refers to SM, S and SB, and H to HK and HK, unless otherwise stated.

All the dictionaries attempt to present the most up-to-date list of the vocabulary of contemporary Hebrew; they vary, though, in a number of ways. In the following sections the special features of the dictionaries will be discussed. The idiosyncrasies of some of them will be described at the end.

**Entry Form**

S is the only dictionary that presents all the meanings of the meanings on a new line; all the other dictionaries, including SM and SB, have all the meanings assembled together within one paragraph. H includes in this paragraph derived words, such as dati [religious] in dat [religion], as well as sub-entries; in the other dictionaries, derivatives appear as independent lexical items, except for RMH which lists only gerunds as a sub-entry of the verb; other sub-entries appear separately, following the explanations (see discussion below).

**Roots and Verbs**

Until recently, there was a clear difference in Hebrew dictionaries between the representation of verbs and all other words. The verbs were listed as sub-entries of the (triconsonantal root, whereas other words were listed in their alphabetical order. Among the new dictionaries, ES continues the old practice, whereas H started a revolution in listing all the verb forms alphabetically like any other word, and all the other dictionaries (except ES) use this system. Thus, for example, ES has under the root TBL, in the letter Tet [T], the following verbs: taval [immersed, dipped], nitbal [was dipped], tibel [dipped – especially food in liquid (Mishnaic use)], tubal [was dipped], hitibl [dipped, baptized], hubal [was dipped, was baptized], and also tovely shaharit [Essenes; morning batters (Talmudic use)], and tovel ve-sherets be-yada [religious hypocrite]. H and the other dictionaries list the verb entries alphabetically, though there is a difference in their listing, as will be described in the Tenses section. Hence, the above verbs appear under the letter Tet, as tavol or taval, including tovel ve-sherets be-yada (but not tovely shaharit); nitbal under the letter Nun [N]; no metabal, nor tibel and metabal, nor tubal (because they represent archaic use); matibl and mutbal under the letter Mem [M] hitibl and hubal under the letter He [H].

**Tenses**

Contrary to the traditional way of listing verbs in their past tense forms, H was the pioneer in positing the present (participle) forms as the main lexical entry for all the verbs. Mordechay Mishor, one of its editors, presented the theoretical background for this system in an article published in Hebrew Computational Linguistics 24 (1987, see also in this issue). One of the arguments was that because every verb in its present tense form can potentially become a noun or an adjective, it is more economical for a dictionary to list the present form and catch both the nominal and the verbal functions at the same time. S follows the same system. RM, ES, RMH and A continue the old tradition of bringing the present tense singular form as the base form. The latter system has an advantage for the user, because it shows instantaneously the verb pattern in which the verb is conjugated (the binyan). Hence, if we pursue the previous example, tavol is conjugated in pa’al, nitbal in nif’al, hitibl in hij’al, and hubal in huf’al. Existing nouns and adjectives from the same roots are listed separately. For example, the verb hidrich [guided; directed; instructed, coached] is listed under He, whereas the noun madrich [a guide; instructor, counselor; manual] under Mem. H and its followers have one entry, madrich, for both functions. However, contrary to expectation, the phrase bi-zman hoveh [in the present tense] precedes the nominal meaning in H and HK.

The present tense system caused a change in the distribution of the letters: traditionally the letter Mem covered about

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**A NOTE ON THE TRANSCRIPTION**

According to the transcription rules of the Academy of the Hebrew Language, every dagesh forte has to be transliterated by doubling the letter; however, in this issue, this rule is applied only in the article and glossary by Doron Rubinstein. According to the above-mentioned rules, the symbol <- > is used for the letter נ (Aleph) and the symbol <- > for the letter ב (Ayin); however, in this issue, <- > is used to indicate either letter. Moreover, this and other Academy rules are not applied systematically in this issue, especially concerning words and names that are used commonly in other languages, e.g. Avraham – not ’Avraham (Abraham), Gaon/Geonim – not Ga’on/Ge’onim (Sages), etc.
13% of the headwords in a dictionary, whereas in H and S it covers about 30% of them.

Vocabulary

1. Although most of the dictionaries claim to be contemporary, they do include obsolete items. Some of them give the old meaning rather than the contemporary one.

The example tovel shaharit above appears only in ES and the detailed S; the other dictionaries do not include it at all. The phrase mete leet appears in all the dictionaries; however, most of them give just the old meaning [24 hours], which is still used in orthodox circles for a religious Halachic term, while the current more widely-spread secular use [from time to time] is only represented in RM, RMH, ES and A.

ES describes all the sources used for compiling the dictionary, and it states explicitly that even rare words are included, for two reasons: anybody may encounter them in literature and should be able to find them in the dictionary; and, even if a word looks like dead wood, it can potentially become alive. The words porfan [a tool to help buttoning or pinning], potahat [Mishnaic a key or lock], pisul [crossed-eyes], pazaz [was gold-like], and many more, occur only in ES and the complete S, but not in the other dictionaries. RM and the junior dictionaries largely avoid ancient and too literary words, because they reflect no current use, literary or colloquial.

2. Not all the dictionaries include sub-standard, colloquial and slang words. H claims to be a normative dictionary, therefore such words are avoided; so are the junior dictionaries, for educational reasons. For instance, the word taftran [(slang) down-and-out] appears in the general dictionaries, but only in A of the junior ones. The popular expression haval al ha-zman (also pronounced as the acronym havlaz) [(colloquial) a waste of time; (slang) extraordinary)] is explained on the web version of RM, but does not appear in any other dictionary.

3. Encyclopedic information appears in detail only in S and SM; they include names of countries (Peru), rivers (Danuba), cities (Teheran), etc, with a comprehensive explanation. Only wide-ranging information terms are brought in the other general dictionaries, e.g. pahmeman [hydrocarbon], petunia; however, this encyclopedic information is one of the causes for the wider volume of S and SM.

Historical Information

Only SM, S and ES indicate for each word and meaning when it was first used: in the Bible (unmarked in ES, <m> in S, SM and SB), in Mishnaic Hebrew (<r> in ES, <mm> or <yc> in the others), in Medieval Hebrew (<sh> in ES, <yh> in the others), and in Modern Hebrew (<h> in ES, <ch> in the others). New loan words are marked as well: <r> in ES, <mm> in the others, but not old loan words that became part of Hebrew, e.g. pardes [orchard (modern); fruit tree ground (Biblical); (cf. paradise)]. The information about the first appearance of a word or a meaning is totally unnecessary for the layman, but relevant for researchers and for people who are interested in the history of words.

Etyymology

Only ES marks the word etymology consistently. This information appears in parentheses next to the entry indicating: (1) parallel words in other Semitic languages, i.e. Acadian, Aramaic, Arabic; (2) a related root of the same word; and, (3) the source language of loan words and their original form. This is semi-scientific information that resembles Webster or Oxford dictionaries. RM and RMH indicate the language of origin only in loan words, e.g. profil [profile] from Italian. All the other dictionaries do not have it.

Sub-entries

Sub-entries include phrases and commonly used idioms that the lexical item shares with other words. Except for H, all the other dictionaries list sub-entries following the basic meanings of the item. H has the sub-entries in the same paragraph with the meanings and derived words. All the sub-entries are listed consecutively in one new paragraph after the explanations in SM, HK and A. However, RM, S, ES and RMH have each sub-entry in a separate line. As stated above, ES has all the verb forms as sub-entries to the root.

Examples

H, SM and A do not incorporate any examples after the definitions. ES brings citations from the listed sources after each meaning in the same font size as that of the meaning, and only the reference is marked by a smaller font. At times, especially with new words, examples are given with no indication of the source. RM, RMH, S, SB and HK bring invented examples in either a smaller font or italics, though sometimes citations and references are brought in SB. RM and RMH in particular have examples for the sub-entries as well, whereas the other dictionaries give them only occasionally.
Illustrations

H, S and ES do not have illustrations. The junior dictionaries HK, RMH and A include pictures to exemplify some of the lexical items, and RMH has them in color. RM has a few illustrations as well, in black-and-white.

Orthography and Vocalization

Two spelling systems are used in Hebrew, vocalized (ktiv haser) and 'pene' spelling (ktiv male, ktiv hasar nikud). In vocalized spelling it is not necessary to add the vowel letters Yod [י] and Vav [ו] in word medial position, whereas in pene spelling their addition is imperative. ES and A are the only dictionaries that use full vocalized spelling. However, ES brings the pene spelling after the vocalized word, whereas A lists pene spelling in an index at the end of the dictionary. All the other dictionaries use pene spelling. If there is no difference between the two spellings, the vowels are added to the entry; if they are different, the vocalized form is written immediately after the pene spelling. For instance, tigun [frying] is written in vocalized dictionaries as <lqwn> ירגע, whereas in the others it is written <lygw> ירגע followed by <lykh> ירגע or as <lykh> ירגע followed by <lykl> ירגע. HK and SB add the script writing of the word following the vocalized form, e.g. לרגע, לרגע.

But not only are the lexical entries either vocalized or not — explanations follow suit. In ES and A the whole text is vocalized, even the originally unvocalized citations are vocalized in ES. The other dictionaries avoid systematic vocalization in the explanations and examples. Vowel signs are added sporadically to facilitate reading, e.g. a dagesh [= dot stressing a consonant] is inserted to indicate a stop or fricative p, b, k — such as פ or ב.f.

Grammatical Information

1. Parts of speech are indicated in all the dictionaries. H and HK do not have an abbreviation for verbs (that appear in their present form), but the conjugation (feminine; past, future, infinitive) that immediately indicates the main entry indicates it is a verb. Because only in nouns one finds gender distinctions, they are marked only for gender (<♂> for masculine; <♀> for feminine). Like verbs, adjectives are not marked at all, and if they do not belong to the participle forms, only the feminine form is inflected, e.g. yahir (vehira) [arrogant]. Other parts of speech are marked.

Parts of speech are marked in the other dictionaries. S and its followers distinguish in their dictionaries between verbal and nominal uses of the participle forms, and the words are listed as separate lexical items, one as a verb, and the other as a noun or adjective. RM and RMH mark the entries for Noun (<♂> and gender, Verb (<♂>) and verb pattern (biyun), and other parts of speech. ES and A indicate a verb by <♂> but nouns only by the gender; other parts of speech are marked, too.

2. Conjugations and inflections are brought immediately after the main entry in H, S and A, whereas they are placed after the definition (and examples) in RM, RMH and ES. A demonstrates verb conjugation and noun inflection, but not adjectives, before listing the meanings.

3. All the dictionaries except A bring the consonantal roots of the word (if there is one). ES brings it as part of the etymological information at the beginning of the lexical entry, whereas the others bring it at the end. RM and RMH are unique in that they bring the root with a list of other words derived from it, in RMH in the margins next to the entry, which provides important information about word families.

4. Prepositions required by the verbs are given in RM, S, SM and ES — in the first three at the beginning of the entry next to the relevant meaning, and in ES at the end of the entry before the inflections. They are implied from the examples in the other dictionaries.

5. Phonetic information is given through the vocalized words. Ultimate stress is unmarked; other stresses are marked in RM, RMH, S and ES.

Register Information

The general dictionaries and RMH indicate registers by assignment of phrases like bi-shon ha-dibur [colloquial], slang, ‘aga [jargon], sifrut (literary), mahshevim [computers], refu’a [medicine]. This information is missing in the other junior dictionaries, which provide just normative practical vocabulary.

Sources

Only ES and SB record in the beginning of the dictionary all the literary sources that served in compiling the entries, with the abbreviations. Most of their examples are based on these sources.

Homonyms

All the dictionaries list homonyms as independent lexical entries. However, H and HK are the only ones that include verbs and nominal forms in the same present tense form, while all the other dictionaries use parts of speech as well as sense variations to distinguish between
homonyms, e.g. *tsedek* [justice, rightness], *tsedek* [Jupiter (the planet)]; *moreh* [a teacher], *moreh* [teaches, instructs] (the latter is one entry in H and HK).

**Appendices**

H has three appendices: 1. rules of plene spelling; 2. past, future and infinitive verb forms, referring the reader to the lexical entries; 3. a list of roots, and the words that are derived from them.

S has five appendices: 1. rules of plene spelling; 2. new rules of punctuation; 3. Hebrew letters as numbers, e.g. \(<l>=2, <k>=20, <r>=200\); 4. Roman letters and their values; 5. Greek letters and their names.

ES has the largest number of appendices: 1. proper names; 2. a list of roots and their derivatives; 3. *hapax legomena* – single words that are not new loans, yet they cannot be analyzed as derived from a root and a pattern, e.g. *shuliyat* [apprentice]; 4. fused words, e.g. *mashehu* [something]; 5. a brief summary of Hebrew grammar; 6. a table of patterns and their conjugations (verbs and nouns); 7. new rules of punctuation; 8. rules of plene spelling.

SM and HK have only the rules of plene spelling at the end. RM has a list of English and Greek letters, vowel and punctuation signs, Biblical cantillation and music notes, mathematical signs and geometric shapes, all with their Hebrew names.

**Other Idiosyncrasies**

The junior dictionaries aim at school children, and all except RMH are published in a relatively small format to enable users to easily carry the books to school. RMH is the most detailed dictionary, which gives exhaustive grammatical information on roots, word families, pattern formation, meaning of patterns, and some general information in boxes outside the regular listing, e.g. the source of *demokratia* [democracy], or *ha-giben mi-noterdom* [the Hunchback of Notre Dame]. As mentioned above, the CD has auditory options, games, and a lot of additional information about the history of words and their use.

**In Sum**

H is the most compact, handy and practical dictionary, in spite of its awkward use of present tense entries. Its normative system and definitions are good. RMH is the best junior dictionary, though for school purposes A could be recommended due to its handiness. RM is the most updated and thorough dictionary of contemporary Hebrew, especially because of its computerized devices. ES remains the most reliable dictionary for scientific purposes, particularly for those who need historical information or those who like to rely on the authentic sources from which the word derives.

**Cross References**

S, SM, SB and HR refer the user from the past tense form to the present form. All the dictionaries in groups H and S, as well as RM and RMH, refer the user from vocalized spelling to plene spelling, and from either loan or non-normative words to the Hebrew normative one. RM refers vocalized spelling to plene spelling by the use of smaller letters in the lower margin of the page. RMH refers gerund forms to the verb in which they are listed as sub-entries. ES has cross references either for weak verbs, where the root is unclear, e.g. *hipil* [dropped], \(<\text{NPL}\>\), and for *hipp\'el* verbs where the first radical precedes the t, e.g. *histalek* [gone] \(<\text{SLK}\>\), or when there is an equivalent proper Hebrew word for a sub-standard or loan word. A has no cross references at all.

**Computerized Devices**

As mentioned above, RM and RMH have CD-ROMs that include all the information presented in the hard copy and much more: there are games and puzzles in the CD version of RMH, as well as audiovisual devices. The CD version of RM, which operates only on Windows 98, includes synonyms, inflections, phrases, lists of words derived in the same syllabic structure, ways to analyze each word, etc. The online version enables the user to access the most updated information about the words, including their translation into English, in addition to all the features mentioned for the CD.

The CD-ROM that accompanies SM offers no more information than the book whatsoever.