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The Standard Language Ideology of the Hebrew and Arabic Grammarians of the ʿAbbasid Period

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Cover image: A fragment of an unidentified dual-script (Hebrew and Arabic) grammatical-exegetical discussion from the Cairo Genizah (Cambridge University Library, T-S Ar. 31.26). Courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library. Cover design: Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal.

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2. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON THE INTERFACE BETWEEN THE MEDIEVAL HEBREW AND ARABIC GRAMMATICAL TRADITIONS

The interface between Hebrew (and/or Jewish) and Arabic (and/or Muslim) grammar and literature in the Middle Ages is a well-documented phenomenon (see, e.g., Becker 1998; 2005; 2013; Drory 2000). Nevertheless, most of the attention has been garnered by shared grammatical concepts and literary genres. Specific treatments of shared beliefs and attitudes about language—i.e., language ideology—are less common.[2] When they do occur, comments that may fit into the framework of language ideology are often made in passing in works devoted to broader topics. In the present chapter, then, we will outline the relevant portions of a brief selection of previous scholarship as it touches on matters related to the interface of language ideology between the medieval Hebrew and Arabic grammarians.

1.0. Jewish Education (Goitein 1962)

One of the earliest relevant pieces of scholarship related to our topic is Goitein's (1962) סדרי חינוך בימי הגאונים ובימי הרמב״ם: מקורות חדשים מן הגניזה (*Sidre ḥinux bime hageonim uvime harambam: meqorot ḥadašim min hageniza*) '*Jewish Education in Muslim Countries—*

[2] For the definition of language ideology, see chapter 3.

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Based on Records from the Cairo Genizah', in which he marshalls the documentary evidence from the Cairo Genizah to shed light on various aspects of Jewish education in Arab cultures during the Middle Ages. Although not directly concerned with interface of language ideology, one of the important findings of Goitein's work is that Jewish students were generally required to develop eloquent proficiency in both Hebrew and Arabic. Presumably, then, in being exposed to the grammatical literature that developed in the Muslim world for teaching *al-ʿarabiyya*, learners would also have been exposed, if indirectly and covertly, to the ideologies that underlay it.

2.0. Arabic Sources (Becker 1998; 2005; Basal 1998; 1999)

On this point, we should also mention the works of Becker (1998; 2005) and Basal (1998; 1999), who identify the various Arabic grammatical sources utilised in the works of the medieval Hebrew grammarians Jonah ibn Janāḥ (ca 990–ca 1050 CE), Abū al-Faraj Hārūn (first half of 11th c. CE), and Isaac ben Barūn (d. 1128 CE).

In the case of Jonah ibn Janāḥ's *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, for example, Becker argues that Ibn Janāḥ imitated the overall shape of contemporary Arabic grammars. What is more, he even replicated a large number of grammatical rules and definitions by merely replacing the Arabic examples with Hebrew. Becker also identifies specific Arabic grammatical works on which Ibn Janāḥ based his

work, such as *al-Kitāb* by Sībawayh (d. ca 796 CE) and *Kitāb al-muqtaḍab* by al-Mubarrad (d. 898 CE).[3]

In the case of Isaac ben Barūn's *Kitāb al-muwāzana bayn al-lugha al-ʿibrāniyya wa-l-ʿarabiyya* 'Book of Comparison between the Hebrew and the Arabic Language', he finds explicit references to *Kitāb al-ʿayn* by al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad (d. 786/791 CE), *Maʿānī al-qurʾān* (though the title is not mentioned) by al-Farrāʾ (d. 822/823 CE), *Kitāb al-nabāt* by Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 895 CE), and numerous other well-known works of the Arabic grammatical tradition. Though without an explicit reference, ben Barūn also makes use of the famous *al-Kitāb* by Sībawayh (d. ca 796 CE). In his analysis of the material, Becker notes that the grammatical terminology used in the Hebrew grammatical tradition consists mostly of calques or pure transliterations. Moreover, even the way that ben Barūn builds his linguistic arguments—quoting ancient sources in Hebrew and Arabic (i.e., Bible, *Qurʾān*, poetry) for exemplification—follows the pattern of the Arabic grammarians.[4]

In the case of Abū al-Faraj Hārūn's (first half of 11th c. CE) *al-Kitāb al-muštamil*, Basal demonstrates that there was strong reliance on Ibn al-Sarrāj's (d. 928/929 CE) *Kitāb al-uṣūl fī al-naḥw*. In addition to cases where Abū al-Faraj appears to correct the version of Ibn al-Sarrāj he was working with, there are a number of other pieces of evidence that support this. It appears that the overwhelming majority of Abū al-Faraj's syntactic theory is based on that of Ibn al-Sarrāj, some portions of which were even copied

[3] For an evaluation of Becker's work, see Maman (2004, 10).

[4] For a review of Becker's work, see Shivtiel (2007).

word for word. The overall structure and order of chapters also exhibits considerable similarity. Finally, in many cases, Abū al-Faraj appears to simply replace Arabic examples with Hebrew ones that parallel (in meaning) the Arabic originals of Ibn al-Sarrāj. If Ibn al-Sarrāj quotes the *Qurʾān*, Abū al-Faraj quotes the Bible.

The work of Becker and Basal makes clear just how heavily the Hebrew grammarians depended on Arabic grammatical sources. In the words of one reviewer of Becker's work—though it could perhaps apply to each of the grammarians—"the influence of the Arabic sources is so significant that one may have the impression... that Ben Barūn's book was in fact a discussion of Arabic grammar and lexicon with illustrations from biblical Hebrew" (Shivtiel 2007, 398–99). Though more focused on grammatical concepts than language ideology, establishing such a close connection between the Hebrew and Arabic grammatical traditions opens the door for a very plausible endeavour of identifying linguistic ideological similarities as well.[5]

3.0. Bible and *Qurʾān* (Khan 1990; 1998)

Indeed, Khan (1990; 1998) has demonstrated just such an ideological interface between the attitude of the Hebrew grammarians towards the text of the Bible (and its oral reading) and the Arabic grammarians towards the text of the *Qurʾān* (and its oral reading).

[5] For a summary of the influence of the medieval Arabic grammatical tradition on the Hebrew grammarians, see Becker (2013).

Dealing specifically with the work *Kitāb al-anwār wa-l-marāqib* by Jacob al-Qirqisānī (first half of 10th c. CE), Khan notes a number of ideological parallels between al-Qirqisānī's views of the various Biblical Hebrew reading traditions and Muslim views of *Qurʾānic* reading traditions.

In disputes about inconsistencies between the written text and the oral reading tradition of the Bible, al-Qirqisānī ascribes authority to that which has been transmitted (*naql*) by the nation as a whole and is thus validated by consensus (*ijmāʿ*). In cases where there is no general consensus across the entire nation—as with differences between the 'Palestinian' (i.e., Tiberian) and Babylonian reading traditions—it is the Tiberian tradition that is regarded as authoritative. In this respect, the community that remained in 'the Land' is regarded preferentially for determining consensus.

A similar pattern of thought is also evidenced in Muslim attitudes towards the text and reading of the *Qurʾān*. Among the first generations of *Qurʾān* readers, grammatical considerations were primary in determining the reading of the fixed ʿUthmānic consonantal text. Over time, however, additional criteria beyond grammaticality and compatibility with the consonantal text were introduced. Proper *Qurʾānic* readings had to comport with those of renowned readers of previous generations and have majority acceptance. As a result of this development, grammarians like Sībawayh (d. ca 796 CE) and al-Farrāʾ (d. 822/823 CE) were prone to accepting certain readings of the *Qurʾān* even if they seemed less grammatical. In some cases, however, the principle of majority acceptance led to some tension and thus had to be

restricted. Rather than majority or consensus applying to the nation as a whole, it was limited to certain authoritative groups of readers from particular centres, such as Kūfa, Baṣra, the Ḥijāz, Medina, and Mecca.

In both the Hebrew and Arabic traditions, then, the proper text and reading was ideally determined based on the 'majority principle'. Because this principle gave rise to some tensions when scholars were faced with different conflicting readings, however, it could be replaced (or somewhat modified) by ascribing authority to certain traditions in what may be termed the 'tradition principle'. This shared pattern of thinking likely indicates that the permeation of Arabic grammatical thought was not merely in terminology or concepts but in the realm of ideology as well.

4.0. Comparative Philology (Maman 2004)

Maman's (2004) work on *Comparative Semitic Philology in the Middle Ages* is dedicated to the grammatical theory of those medieval Hebrew grammarians who engaged in comparative philology. These philological discussions, however, touch on aspects of language ideology. Primary among them are the very terms used to refer to the languages in question. The fact that both the Hebrew grammarians and the Arabic grammarians use the terms *lisān al-ʿarab* 'language of the Arabs' and *kalām al-ʿarab* 'speech of the Arabs', often in reference to ancient Arabic speakers, is significant. The parallel use of *lughat al-ʿibrāniyyīn* 'language of the Hebrews' to refer to Hebrew speakers of the biblical and mishnaic periods constitutes an important parallel that indicates an underlying similarity of how those grammarians conceived of these

languages (Maman 2004, 53–55). This will be picked up again in chapter 4, §1.0.

5.0. Terms for Language, Bible, etc. (Harkavy 1891)

On this point, it is also worth noting that some editions of the works of the Hebrew grammarians may contain comparisons with the Arabic grammatical tradition, such as those regarding terms for the language, the sacred text, the title of a grammatical work, and other central figures in the history of the language. Note, for example, how in Harkavy's (1891, 32 n. 3) edition of *Sefer Ha-Galuy* and *Sefer Ha-Egron*, he calls attention to the fact that elements of the title of Saadia's grammar resemble those of Arabic grammarians: (i) using *al-lugha* 'the language' to refer to Hebrew without a modifying adjective and (ii) using *faṣīḥ* to refer to the particular register of the language codified. He also notes how various Hebrew grammarians refer to the Bible as *al-Qurʾān* 'that which is read; the recitation'. Finally, he points out that various Hebrew grammarians refer to Moses as *al-rasūl* 'the messenger', co-opting the common term for Muhammad. While all of these points are relevant for constructing the language ideology of the Hebrew grammarians, they are still largely restricted to specific concepts and terms.

6.0. Language Usage, Standard Language, and Traditional Jewish and Arab Societies (Blau 1962; 1981)

A number of important points related to language ideology appear in the works of Blau. First of all, in a review of Goitein's work (Blau 1962), he highlights how the linguistic practices of medieval Jewish communities in Muslim societies involved a complex 'mosaic' of Hebrew, 'Middle Arabic', and Classical Arabic. While 'Middle Arabic' had become the default spoken language for Jews in Muslim lands, in large part due to urbanisation of the population, Hebrew was still maintained as a language of study, especially in and for certain religious contexts. At the same time, because Arabic had generally replaced Aramaic in the realms in which it had been previously used among the Jews, (Classical) Arabic also served as a language of study and composition. Nevertheless, because the Jews did not generally learn Classical Arabic to the depth required to compose poetry—and the typical settings and themes for Classical Arabic poetry did not transfer well to the Jewish context—the Jews still favoured Hebrew for poetic composition. From an ideological perspective, this suggests that the cultural 'fit' of a particular genre could determine language use for the medieval Jewish community. We should also note here that the preference for Hebrew in the composition of poetry has relevance for a particular aspect of language ideology to which we will return later in this volume (see chapter 5, §1.0).

Also significant for our purposes is Blau's development of the concept of a 'traditional society', a term he uses to describe

both medieval Jewish and Muslim communities. In his work on *The Renaissance of Modern Hebrew and Modern Standard Arabic*, Blau (1981, 9–13) defines a 'traditional society' as a society "based on religion with which the standard language was closely interwoven." For Blau, this entails a parallel between the Bible (and Talmud) in Jewish society and the *Qurʾān* in Arab society, both of which were strongly connected with the standard language. From the perspective of medieval language ideology, this is a prevalent concept that we will see echoed later on in the present work. The concentricity of 'ancient' sacred texts and the standard language is indeed present in the language ideologies of both the Hebrew and Arabic grammarians (see chapter 4, §2.0). Nevertheless, while Blau's insight into this phenomenon is undoubtedly ahead of its time, his description of it does not benefit from more recent advances in the field of linguistic anthropology regarding standard language cultures.

7.0. Literary Genres and *Topoi* (Drory 1988; 1991; 2000; Tobi 2004)

The existing scholarship that may come closest to the goals of the present work is perhaps Drory's (1988; 1991; 2000) treatment of the impact of Arabic literature on medieval Jewish literature and culture. A number of (primarily literary) points of similarity relevant for or related to language ideology are cited throughout her work.

Drory calls attention to cases where Jewish culture adopted and/or adapted existing Arabic literary genres (e.g., the *maqāma*), which points to interface of a certain type. The concept

of a canonical text corpus centred around one sacred text—the Bible in Jewish culture[6] and the *Qurʾān* in Muslim culture—also appears to be a feature of the Arabic grammatical tradition adopted initially by the Karaites and popularised by Saadia Gaon. This appropriation of Arabic models in the Jewish literary system applies to concepts, organisation, and writing models (2000, 135). These points have relevance for a number of topics treated later in the present volume (see, e.g., chapter 4, §2.0).

Drory also argues that a diglossic configuration of language usage is another similarity that exists between the two medieval cultures. For her, both Jewish and Muslim communities utilise a classical language (Hebrew or Classical Arabic) for performative, festive, and formal contexts, in a diglossic environment where another language (Judeo-Arabic or Colloquial Arabic) is utilised for simple communicative functions (2000, 158–79). We will return to and elaborate on this idea later in the book.

But perhaps the clearest case of interface between the Hebrew and Arabic grammatical traditions identified by Drory, as relevant for our purposes, occurs in her treatment of *topoi* associated with grammarians accessing linguistic informants. She recalls the fact that Arabic grammatical literature is replete with examples of the well-known *topos* of grammarians seeking out Bedouin informants for linguistic examples. After all, the Bedouin were regarded as untouched by the corruption and/or modernisation attached to more urban forms of the language and thus the

[6] This should be contrasted, however, with the prominent or even predominant role of the Talmud in Rabbanite Judaism.

preserve of 'pure' and 'unadulterated' Arabic. The Arabic grammarians therefore had to venture out into the desert to seek out contemporary sources for *al-ʿarabiyya*. According to Drory, this *topos* was appropriated into the Hebrew grammatical tradition and applied to the Hebrew of the inhabitants of Tiberias and the Tiberian reading tradition. This is perhaps nowhere clearer than in the text published by Allony (1970) recounting ʿEli ben Yehudah ha-Nazir's trip to Tiberias to determine the proper pronunciation of the Hebrew letter *resh*. Indeed, Drory (2000, 141) notes that the exemplary status of the Tiberians and the Tiberian reading tradition "is not just an isolated theme that was borrowed from the Arabic and adapted into the Jewish cultural system, but rather a full ideological paradigm." For Drory (1988, 138–49; 2000, 7, 35–36, 84, 140–42), it is not just the 'fieldwork' *topos* but rather the whole ideology of the prestige of the Tiberian tradition that is built on an Arabic model. This discussion will be picked up again in greater detail in chapter 4, §3.0.

It should also be noted that, while Drory appears to be the scholar who has worked most extensively in this area, there are other scholars who have touched on the interface between medieval Hebrew and Arabic literature as well. Note, for example, that Tobi (2004) has a produced an entire volume addressing the link between Hebrew and Arabic poetry in the Middle Ages. Of particular note in this volume are Tobi's (2004, 55–58) comments on the role of the Bible and *payṭanim* in Jewish culture—particularly in the thought of Saadia Gaon—and the *Qurʾān* and ancient poetry in Muslim culture for supplying exemplary language to be imitated. As part of this discussion, Tobi also calls attention to

the fact that Saadia hoped to restore the use of Biblical Hebrew to the Jewish community, at least in part due to national and religious motivations. These observations have relevance for a number of sections in the present work, which we will pick up again later (e.g., chapter 4, §2.0; chapter 5, §2.0).

8.0. Summary

While there does not appear to be any one specific work in previous scholarship devoted to the interface of the Hebrew and Arabic grammatical traditions with respect to language ideology, the preceding review demonstrates the validity of such a topic. In addition to a number of adjacent or related topics, such as Jewish education in a Muslim context, we find a number of points of linguistic ideological interface identified in the literature. Some of the most prominent among them concern the ideology surrounding sacred texts with their oral reading, the formation of the canon around an 'ancient' sacred text, and the appropriation of a sort of 'fieldwork' *topos* for retrieving reliable linguistic examples.

Nevertheless, there are many more strands of linguistic ideological interface that can be explored between the Hebrew and Arabic grammatical traditions. This scholarly review has merely served to call attention to the fact that the Hebrew grammarians' connection with and reliance on the Arabic grammatical tradition is so profound as to impact (perhaps even subconsciously) language ideology. Beyond mere quantity of examples, however, it is also worth noting that much of the previous literature has not

availed itself of the advances in the field of linguistic anthropology regarding language ideology as a theoretical framework. For this reason, we will briefly address this body of literature (and its relevance for our research topic) before proceeding to analyse the primary material of this study in the remainder of this book.