

**Israel and the Place of Modern Hebrew in Jewish Education
Worldwide: A Consultation about the Possibilities for Hebrew
Language Instruction**

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I. Research Goals and Design: Description and Some Observations

The present study attempts to survey the state of instruction in the modern Hebrew language (a definition a bit broader than “contemporary Israeli Hebrew” but largely coterminous with that description) in or for Jewish communities outside Israel. In most of the institutions with whose work we are concerned, this is linked in some way to instruction in reading classical literary Hebrew: Bible texts, rabbinic literature of the talmudic era and beyond, medieval prose and poetry. We will be concerned, however, only with the portion of their programs that concentrate on instruction in modern (post-Haskalah) Hebrew and include a communicative component: writing alongside reading, and speaking alongside understanding the spoken language.

The goals of this study are:

- (1) to survey the state of instruction in the modern Hebrew language (often linked to instruction in classical literary Hebrew) in or for Jewish communities outside Israel,
- (2) to assess the accomplishments and needs of those endeavors, and
- (3) to identify areas of activity—program development, program support, or further research—in which JAFI’s educational resources might most profitably be invested.

The design for this research is described as a “consultation,” because the assessments of local or regional accomplishments and needs in each case is the aggregate of the collected opinions of key professionals in the field of Hebrew language instruction to whom the researcher was referred by colleagues in Jewish education worldwide who identified these individuals as well-informed and insightful practitioners. In-depth interviews conducted by telephone and in person enabled this researcher both to ask standard questions, which would provide some bases for comparison, and questions tailored to the unique circumstances of each community or institution, as known to the questioner in advance and/or as revealed in the responses to the standard questions. Thirty informants were interviewed, several more than once, and written communications from two others took the place of interviews.

The questions probe the state of Hebrew instruction: What goals are set, what sort of programs are in place to meet those goals, who is teaching, who is learning, and what are the current outcomes and the current attitudes? In addition, the questions ask for some diachronic observations: What processes of change have been observed in recent years, and what gives rise

to them? What new initiatives are currently being tested or considered? The final questions in almost all interviews were meant to elicit comments and suggestions about the way in which hypothetical additional resources might be invested in improving achievement in Hebrew language instruction in the respective places with which the interviewees are familiar.

A full inventory of interview questions is appended. Not all questions were asked of all interviewees, due to time constraints and the interviewer's judgement about their applicability.

Crucially important in interpreting the findings of this research is an awareness of the nature of the informants. Without exception, these are Jewish educators who are themselves comfortable or fluent in the Hebrew language. Many are native speakers. They have, for whatever reason, chosen careers in which Hebrew language instruction is a central focus. While they may reasonably be assumed to be among the best-informed Jewish educators regarding this particular subject area, they may also be assumed *not* to be impartial about the field. Their general enthusiasm and excitement – perhaps elicited by the opportunity to speak about their work with someone who evidently shares their interest – stands in contrast to what this researcher would expect to find among a representative sample of all Jewish educators worldwide.

The findings of this study and their implications, then, need to be tested and refined by examining perceptions and attitudes among the other constituencies of Jewish education: professional and lay leaders in education and community roles, teachers of other subjects, current and potential students, and the adult parents of school-age students.

II. Hebrew and the Teaching of Hebrew in the Jewish World

1. Hebrew in the Diaspora: The Uniqueness of Jewish Linguistic Diversity

The role of Hebrew in the life of the Jewish people is unparalleled among other nations and ethnic groups. Most national and ethnic groups define themselves in part by language, and the language they have in mind is to a large degree a medium of communication among the group's members. It may be shared with other national groups—the Irish and the Scots are nearly completely English-speaking; or it may exist as a minority language within a multi-national

state—Basques in Spain, for example, are a linguistic minority as one aspect of their status as an ethnic minority. In each case, though, the primary language of the group’s members is shared and serves as one of its more-or-less distinguishing characteristics. The case of the Jewish people is different. To the extent that Hebrew language skills are shared by Jews, though, language becomes another component of group identity.

The recent social history of Hebrew is also quite unusual. Unlike, say, Italian for the children and grandchildren of Italian emigrants worldwide, Hebrew is not the language recently “forgotten” by Jews outside the national homeland. Hebrew is not still spoken or understood in a truncated “kitchen” version by those of the Diaspora-born generations, who, unlike their immediate forebears, are unschooled in its formal use (unless, of course, these are Israeli emigrant families, who are a small proportion of Diaspora Jews).

Jews in the Diaspora are also unlike, for example, the descendants of Swedish Lutherans, who may retain their Lutheran religious ties without encountering any texts or practices in Swedish. Jews do in fact encounter Hebrew in whatever religious practices they may maintain or encounter, whether it be blessings at Hanukkah candlelighting, passages of the Haggadah at Passover seder, liturgy at a *brit milah* ceremony, or synagogue rituals of Sabbaths and holidays.

Other contrasts could be sketched as well to illustrate the uniqueness of the relationship between the Jewish people and the Hebrew language. The history of Jewish diglossia (the use of two or more languages for socially distinct purposes) reflects the unusual history of the Jewish people since the loss of independence and homeland. Jews everywhere have used diverse local vernaculars for ordinary communication and a shared “internal” language for study and worship. This situation was transformed by the revival of the narrowly employed “internal” language as the broadly encompassing first language of millions of Jews and of the public sphere in Israel. Thus we find that for one very large community of Jews (soon to become the largest), the Hebrew language is one aspect of a nationalist definition of Jewishness that is often blurred with the definition of citizenship in the State of Israel. For Jews outside Israel, too, the Hebrew language is often defined in large part by being identified with Israelis, for whom it is their primary language.

2. Hebrew Instruction in the Diaspora: Purposes and Goals

Many educational institutions among the Jews worldwide undertake to foster and maintain a knowledge of Hebrew among Jews outside of Israel for a variety of purposes. Some seek to impart a reading knowledge of classical strata of the language for purposes of religiously motivated text learning and worship. Some aim to provide a communicative facility in contemporary Israeli Hebrew in order to enable visitors and immigrants to Israel to conduct their daily affairs in the local language. Some attempt to equip the language learners with the skills to draw on the productions of classical and modern Hebrew culture—including the works of fiction writers, poets, lyricists, dramatists, filmmakers, and journalists—as part of making their students at home in the cultural life of contemporary Jews. Many attempt to reach some combination of these goals.

The motivation for acquiring skills for communicating in a foreign language may be instrumental or it may be more rooted in the identity of the learner. One might learn Russian because of a need or desire to trade with Russian people or to conduct intelligence research for a government agency. These are instrumental goals. If, however, one were studying Russian out of a desire to become immersed in Russian culture, live temporarily or permanently among the Russians, or to somehow “become Russian” oneself, these would be identity-based goals. An individual student of a language may have a combination of goals from the two categories, some weaker and some stronger.

For Jews outside Israel, the mix of instrumental and identity-based goals is complex, and it differs among Jewish communities and among individual Jews working to acquire skills in using the Hebrew language. We will explore this subject only briefly here. Jewish students of Hebrew may self-identify as members of the group whose language Hebrew is, and not merely (as in the case of our Italian or Swedish emigrants) as descendants of members of that group—even while being ignorant of the language. That is, they may make the evidently problematic statement, “I am a Jew, and Hebrew is the Jewish language, but I don’t know Hebrew.” How they would interpret such an observation to themselves is perhaps reflected in the choices they have already made about studying or not studying Hebrew in one or another fashion.

Furthermore, the cultural divide between speakers of modern Hebrew and non-speakers might reasonably be perceived as one aspect of the more pervasive differences of experience and

(imputed) ideology between Israeli Jews and Jews living outside Israel. The last distinction is made even more complex because of the existence of an Israeli Diaspora in the worldwide Jewish community, for whose children the dynamics of studying Hebrew are even more complex. In both the Israeli subset and the larger group of Diaspora Jews, then, there is an interplay—in both directions, one might imagine—between choices and attitudes related to Hebrew language learning and the nature of one’s values and choices regarding one’s relationship to Israel and Israelis. Among the factors at work are:

- ? perceptions and attitudes toward Israelis held by students, parents, and teachers,
- ? social and family ties to Israel, and
- ? expectations about visiting Israel and/or living there for an extended period or permanently.

Most of the informants for this study were not asked directly about their own reasons for valuing the study of modern Hebrew, but the conversations did occasionally raise these questions, especially in discussing the relationship between Hebrew and (other) Jewish studies subjects in the curricula of the institutions that were the focus of discussion. It is this researcher’s impression—for the most part not backed by explicit quotations in the notes taken during the interviews—that a significant majority of informants would express agreement with this rationale, including the last and most controversial point:

- ? Hebrew is the common language of the Jewish people. (That statement is recognized for what it is: a value-statement, not an objective observation. I.e., it is a statement about what Jews *ought* to have in common.)
- ? Hebrew is the key to Jewish learning. This comprises two interlocking positions:
 1. Authentic Jewish learning requires reading comprehension in classical forms of Hebrew, including (for some: primarily) the biblical and rabbinic strata of the language.
 2. The most efficient way to teach a person to learn classical Judaica (Bible, rabbinic literature, medieval Jewish thought, etc.) is to teach him or her to communicate in modern Hebrew and then make the transfer to reading classical texts.

III. Factors and Issues Common to Many or Most Communities

In this section, I will describe and analyze a number of factors that appear from my research to display common features and common problems in widely disparate communities. Within each, I will make an effort not to “flatten” the local and regional distinctions that do exist.

1. Sociolinguistic Factors: General and Uniquely Jewish

I have sketched above some of the issues of identity and identification that have an impact on Hebrew language acquisition among Jews. This is an area in which social science research may be of considerable value to the Jewish educational community. Little is known about the attitudes held by parents, teachers, and students in Jewish educational settings regarding the Hebrew language and its relationship to other aspects of learning and identity.

The obvious identification of Hebrew language learning with the community of native speakers in Israel makes this area of instruction a part of the tangled web of Israel-Diaspora relations. In general, I would argue on the basis of observation (but without solid data), that the more the Jews in a given community see themselves as an ethnic or national minority, especially one closely allied with Israel, the greater the extent to which importance is attributed to Hebrew language. This would help explain, for example, why the Antwerp Jewish community has a very high level of Hebrew language attainment in its premier day school, while in England and the United States, achievement is generally lower even among day school students.

The case of Argentina, however, demonstrates that other sociolinguistic factors can have a strong influence as well. Until about five years or so ago, Jewish students in Argentina, coming from a community largely self-identified as an ethnic minority with a secular Zionist orientation, were, on average, notably more fluent in Hebrew than those in the English-speaking world. A perceived need to focus on acquiring facility with the English language has impinged on the place of Hebrew in Argentina’s Jewish schools.

Item: Jewish day schools in Buenos Aires experienced considerable pressure in the 1990’s, well before the present economic crisis in Argentina, to reduce the amount of time devoted to Hebrew studies in order to upgrade the teaching of English. The latter language is perceived by parents as having overwhelming instrumental value. [Daniel Feinstein.] (The same is true in Mexico. [Raquel Kleinberg]) “Over the past 15 years, parents have come to value everything American. We used to teach British English, but now we teach American English. The community feels that since their children are not going to *use* Hebrew, why should they learn it?” [Sergio Herskovits]

In the case of Argentina, the Jewish educators whom I interviewed found it difficult to tease apart the influence of English and the decline of Zionism as a core component of local Jewish identity as factors in the decline of achievement in learning Hebrew. The two shifts in attitude are related, and their relative weight is difficult to assess, but the rise of the importance of American English, a phenomenon in Argentinean education at large, has had a strong impact on attitudes toward Hebrew and the allocation of resources for Hebrew instruction.

Similar differences in attitude toward the learning and teaching of different second/foreign languages would appear to be a partial determinant of the level of success attained by Hebrew language instruction not just in Latin America (where it has recently emerged as a more salient factor), but in many settings worldwide.

Item: Some parents of children in Jewish day schools in Russia think Hebrew is a poor investment of precious time, taking up a large part of the local-option segment of the government-mandated curriculum. “Parents, then, are negative about Hebrew when they feel it is not successful.” [Yevgenia Lvova]

As a language spoken by only six million or so speakers, modern Hebrew is in the category of “less commonly taught languages” in every country of the Diaspora. Furthermore, Hebrew language instruction is, not surprisingly, most often measured against achievement in second/foreign language instruction in other languages in the local educational environment. The “host societies” of different Jewish communities differ in the extent that second- or foreign-language learning in general enjoys widespread success, but common factors militate against flattering comparisons.

Foremost among these common factors is the relative paucity of investment in the infrastructure of Hebrew teaching as compared to what are perceived as the lavish expenditures by public institutions and private publishers on programs and materials for instruction in languages with the status of “world languages.” One could imagine this obvious imbalance being offset by intensive effort on the part of institutions within the Jewish community, especially since the Hebrew language is such a common component of the curriculum in Jewish educational institutions.

In fact, though, Hebrew enjoys – or, more accurately, suffers from – a status in the world of Jewish education similar to a malady for which there exists what the pharmaceutical industry calls an “orphan drug”—that is, there is an available solution to a problem not shared by many,

but its production costs would make the per-unit price unaffordably high for those who need it. No major country-wide or worldwide institutions or movements outside Israel that are active in promoting an ideology of Jewish life and practice place Hebrew language acquisition at the forefront of their endeavors. Few local advocates, either, now make a comprehensive effort to convince the Jewish community of the instrumental or symbolic importance of the acquisition of communicative facility in the Hebrew language. The paucity of ideological support is reflected in a similarly weak level of programmatic support in the areas outlined below.

2. Personnel: Shaping Professional Practitioners

First, to clarify definitions: a sketch of a well-trained professional in this field would include:

1. near-native proficiency (Most agree that it is not necessary to be a native speaker; several informants noted that there are even some advantages to having non-native speakers as teachers of non-natives.)
2. academic training in teaching a foreign/second language (not necessarily Hebrew);
3. some linguistic training to attain meta-linguistic awareness [a cognitive knowledge *about* the language, as distinguished from proficiency in its use]
4. supervised field experience (this time, specifically in Hebrew).

Practitioners of Hebrew language instruction who may fairly be described as “professionals” are a group whose numbers are small. Significant concentrations of such people acting collaboratively can be found in very few places in the world outside Israel. In contrast to the situation in the teaching of the commonly taught languages in each country, opportunities to obtain the training that one needs to be a professional teacher of Hebrew are all but non-existent.

Item: An M.A. program in the teaching of Hebrew at Brandeis University, opened in the past two years, is a notable exception, but it has so far attracted only a tiny number of students. [Vardit Ringvald] Attention will be paid later in this report to the decline of the Jewish teacher training programs in Argentina, which graduated Hebrew-speaking teachers of Jewish subjects.

At the level of support for practicing teachers of Hebrew, no worldwide network of such teachers exists, and no institution in the world Jewish community presently facilitates the sharing of information among them. Hebrew language educators everywhere bemoan the paucity of opportunities to share their concerns and successes with their colleagues. (A notable exception: in North America, the National Association of Professors of Hebrew is an active organization of people teaching at the post-secondary level.) Few coordinated efforts have been made to apply

the expertise and experience of the concentration(s) of professionals in Israel to the improvement of Hebrew instruction in communities outside Israel.

The need identified by our informants most commonly and with the most urgency is the need to provide in-service training for those employed in this field and to create pre-service training options to begin to train more teachers.

The low status and poor remuneration of language instructors in all settings are frequently cited as factors limiting the ability of the field to attract personnel. One professional observed that schools in her area “hire anyone who breathes and knows some Hebrew.” Comments such as these are frequently accompanied, however, by the observation that those presently engaged in the task (and those likely to join them) are generally open to receiving assistance from professionals whom they perceive as able to enhance their success as teachers.

Improving instruction in modern Hebrew necessarily involves working to upgrade the skills of the teachers, often undertaking to cause them to reframe and revamp their basic assumptions and procedures. The population of teachers in our schools, however, is constantly shifting, with turnover high enough to make those professional development efforts seem Sisyphean.

Item: Of the approximately 100 teachers involved in teaching NETA materials [described below] in North American Jewish day schools during the 2001-2002 school year, 20-25 were replaced by new teachers in 2002-2003. Participating schools report that they anticipate similar turnover annually. [Hila Kobliner]

Another commonly voiced concern is the aging of the cadre of teachers presently employed in Hebrew language teaching. In the United States, interviewees described a large number of people at age 55 and above (“as old as me,” in the words of one informant, “and they are going to have to be replaced someday”). Sources familiar with the situation in Argentina expressed concern about the aging of the Hebrew teachers there, too: even though their profile was of professionals in their late 20s and above, the ranks of those retiring or leaving the field are not being replaced in the past several years by younger recruits.

A number of informants stressed that once cannot expect to deploy in every institution or community the resources—primarily human resources—needed to provide the support required to upgrade the skills of non-professional teachers of Hebrew. In that case, creative local solutions are needed.

Item: “What we have to have is groups of teachers who attack problems together. Building that kind of community in many places [in the metropolitan area that my agency serves] takes a lot of time, which I alone do not have.” [Aviva Kadosh]

3. Standards and Measurements

As mentioned above, the Hebrew language does not enjoy the benefits of having commercial textbook publishers create comprehensive, graded curricula for which they produce textbooks, teachers’ guides, tests, and peripheral teaching materials (topics to be addressed below, in section II.4). Here we should spell out one of the implications of that situation: not only does the immediate need that teachers have for guidance on “what to teach tomorrow” go unmet, but another important function of such curricular efforts is left to chance: measurement of achievement and the setting of standards.

Few objective measures of attainment or fluency in modern Hebrew are available. Curriculum development efforts aimed at multiple communities can and often do have the effect of creating measurable standards applied across a variety of settings. This can serve as a catalyst for improvement in the measurable outcomes of instruction in all those locales. No consensus, written or unwritten, exists, though, as to what constitutes (by way of example) “first-year high school Hebrew”—an advantage held by English, French, Spanish, and many other languages commonly taught as foreign languages. Teachers of those languages know what knowledge and skills will be expected of their students when those students move to the next level of instruction. They are also able, reciprocally, to base their work with their students on generally accepted assumptions about what those entering their classrooms will know from previous instruction.

In the absence (previously noted) of strong professional organizations dedicated to supporting the work of members who are teachers of Hebrew language, no consensus has emerged from the field (as distinct from curriculum producers) as to what constitutes a reasonable achievement level for various stages of learning. A notable exception in this regard is the adaptation to Hebrew language teaching of the Proficiency Guidelines of the ACTFL (American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages). That document, first formulated a decade or so ago, does enable programs of Hebrew instruction to measure achievement and provide for graded placement, but the definitions of proficiency are not universally accepted among Hebrew teaching professionals as appropriate tools for the placement of students at different levels of instruction.

Tools for measuring language learning achievement that are applicable beyond the level of the individual classroom or institution can have a system-wide effect. Teachers and schools faced with a basis for comparison between their own students' learning outcomes and those of students in other classrooms and institutions may be expected to respond with nervous defensiveness. Some have learned, however, that the external test results may be a source of pride, and the tools with which they equip the school may in fact spark improvements in learning and in attitudes toward Hebrew language learning in their institutions.

Item: The students at one secondary school piloting NETA [a curriculum initiative for Hebrew in Jewish high schools, described below, that includes placement tests and end-of-unit exams] did well on initial placement tests in comparison to students at other schools, and the school was able to publicize that fact to parents through a school newspaper story and the much-visited curriculum area of the school's website. (The fact that the program was being piloted successfully elsewhere was also a selling point.) "Parents understood from all this that there was now a new level of accountability, standards, and structure to their children's Hebrew language program. Some began to question their children's placement, with some achievement-oriented parents calling me to ask to have their children placed at a higher level than the test results would indicate is warranted," the school's Hebrew language coordinator noted. She observed that "the simple presence of objective standards made the subject more prestigious." [Yaffa Dagoni]

Without such uniform standards and the tools to measure achievement against those standards, we will see a continuation of the current situation, in which, in the words of one observer of many schools, "Teachers write their own tests so that everyone will know everything on the test, and drill students without letup on the material they will be tested on."

4. Curriculum Planning, Teaching Materials, and Technology

These three related but disparate topics are addressed together not only because they are intrinsically related to each other and to the previous topic, but also because all four (standards and measurement and the present three) lend themselves to intervention most cost-effectively at a level wider than a single locality.

The "orphan drug" analogy drawn above refers mostly to the paucity of curriculum materials for the teaching of Hebrew at any level. Such materials would be based on an articulated pedagogic approach and would include a graded series of student materials for a given age level and setting, accompanied by teachers' guides and such peripheral products as sound and video recordings and computer software. In the absence of a carefully conceived, field-tested curriculum, teachers often adopt or are given a hodgepodge selection of materials

without articulated goals and methods and without careful linguistic gradation. Coherence and continuity are attained haphazardly, if at all, and students report frustration at the lack of measurable progress from unit to unit and from year to year. Instruction frequently degenerates into the teaching of vocabulary for the processing of written texts chosen for their (real or ostensible) cultural value, with the work of translation replacing real language acquisition.

The provision of curriculum components is not enough to move beyond a situation in which (in the words of one informant, critical of the situation in the schools with which he/she works, who therefore will remain anonymous) the norm is “incessant review to ensure that all students will pass [the tests that teachers themselves prepare].” According to the same informant, “There are five openings through which you can begin to make improvements in the teaching of Hebrew in these schools: student materials, curriculum, teaching methods, teaching materials, and the transition into teaching subjects *in* Hebrew. Curriculum components turned out to be marginal to the real work to be done. The teachers don’t know how to use the materials [in that list]. You have to have teachers’ manuals, and you have to have people in place who can work with teachers to analyze lessons with teachers and model good teaching.” [Hila Kobliner]

A number of independent, fairly comprehensive initiatives to create curriculum materials for early childhood, elementary schools, and secondary schools [about which more will be said below] have highlighted the crucial importance of providing teachers with most aspects of curriculum in detail, as a determinant of the initial and sustained success of such undertakings. (This needs to be reinforced with ongoing inservice training and on-site professional supervision.)

Item: The coordinated Hebrew language curriculum effort of the Reform Jewish day schools in North America [about which more will be said below] found that teachers had tremendous difficulty teaching the materials in their initial form. Five 20-page units for each grade level have become five 40-page units, enabling the program to rely less on teachers to invent activities. [Lesley Littman]

Many informants highlighted the potential contribution of new communication technologies for the teaching of Hebrew. Advances in technology offer students and teachers of Hebrew instant access to many communicative possibilities previously unattainable. Already one can access authentic Hebrew news sources from Israel in real time: newspapers publish on-line editions with constant updates, and several Israeli radio stations offer streamed audio in one or another format on the Internet. Making educational use of these requires further curriculum

development and, once again, further profession development opportunities for teachers. It would appear that few institutions make any significant use of these resources at present, but there are some initiatives to harness the power of Internet communications for Hebrew language instruction.

Item: The National Center for the Hebrew Language in New York plans to offer a range of lesson plans for teaching Hebrew texts on its website. [Joseph Lowin]

Item: Boston's Hebrew College and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America are among the institutions that have pioneered the teaching of Hebrew using Internet technology.

5. The general state of Hebrew language education

The state of affairs described in each of the previous four sections makes, in the aggregate, for a gloomy portrait of the state of instruction in Modern Hebrew in contemporary Jewish education:

1. Hebrew teaching is an untended system, in which much of what is done is vestigial, not guided by clear goal-oriented thinking, planning, and training. To construct a metaphor not suggested by any informant, Hebrew language instruction resembles a machine left un-oiled, with aging parts and insufficient fuel to keep it operating at full power—and most people served by it are not sure why they need done what it does.
2. In unusual cases, in which considerable effort has been invested over a sustained period by trained professionals, remarkable achievements have been made in teaching students to communicate with facility in modern Hebrew. In such cases, a confluence of supportive sociolinguistic factors has often also been present. [Dori, 1992].

Hebrew language instruction competes for resources with other educational and cultural endeavors. While the target population (or their parents, in the case of young children) often sees instrumental value in such instruction, in terms of access to classical texts and the ability to communicate with others who speak, write, and read Hebrew, it also brings to bear an informal cost-benefit analysis, measuring the utility of the effort against the potential return on similar investments of time and resources in other pursuits. Whether it is a Jewish day school in Buenos Aires or an informal Sunday-morning program in St. Petersburg, institutions offering Hebrew language instruction must convince their constituencies that their programs will be successful, at least as measured against the goals that participants may have in mind.

IV. Observations Regarding Local and Regional Characteristics

1. North America

Section V below outlines several promising efforts to make systemic change in the teaching of Hebrew language skills in networks of schools, primarily Jewish day schools at all levels. The willingness of foundations and institutions to fund these initiatives indicates something about the relationship toward Modern Hebrew among the committed core of North American Jewry. Among that important constituency, one can find both continued ideological commitment to the place of Hebrew in intensive Jewish education and a belief that success can be attained by a coordinated effort in curriculum development, teaching in-service training, and assessment according to uniform, measurable, system-wide standards.

In North America, *morim shelihim* play a small role, but Israelis resident in the local communities fill the large majority of teaching posts. Numerous informants expressed, along with the anticipated reservations about the appropriateness of those teachers, a sanguine outlook about the ability of many of them, especially those with pedagogic training, to adapt well to the meeting the challenges of their task.

2. Western and Eastern Europe

The relatively small numbers of most communities and their dispersion among different countries and language groups seem to have blocked efforts at cooperation and coordination of curriculum, teacher training, and staff development. Coordinated use could be made of the resources of European universities with developed Hebrew language programs and language-teacher-training programs, with such notably successful schools as the Takhkemoni School in Antwerp serving as lab schools for teacher trainees.

3. The Former Soviet Union

The Jewish Agency and the Israel Ministry of Education bear central responsibility for ulpanim and for the teaching of Hebrew (and Jewish studies generally) in many Jewish day schools. All the actors have recognized the need for greater articulation and coordination between these Israel-based agencies and their local partners. A notable point of entry for developing the sort of systemic change envisioned in the North American projects – which

would have a particular local character in the FSU – is the pedagogic center created cooperatively by Moscow’s six Jewish day schools (four of them state schools, two private).

4. Latin America

In order to understand the rapidly changing reality of Jewish education in Argentina and the processes at work in other Latin American communities, many more questions need to be answered that the scope of this study provides. Nonetheless, it is clear that local resources have been depleted and, beginning even before the current economic woes, fewer of those resources are being directed toward Hebrew language education. Efforts could be made to provide incentives and support for the choice of Hebrew language teaching as a career, building on existing patterns. Planning should also include provision for supplying schools with visiting Israeli teachers to fill the vacancies that will soon be created, and for

5. English-speaking Countries Outside North America

These communities have been paid insufficient attention in the present study. Although they lack the concentration of resources that the North American communities possess, they share a first language and many cultural affinities with American and Canadian Jewries. This may enable them to be the natural first beneficiaries outside North America of the curricular initiatives described below— after adaptation to local needs, of course.

V. Directions and Initiatives

Some individuals and institutions have undertaken to improve the teaching of modern Hebrew in specific locales or regions. They have recognized that Hebrew language education requires systemic change, not merely an upgrading of this or that component, and they believe that such improvement is important and attainable. Much can be learned from their experience.

1. Recent and Ongoing Curricular Initiatives

In this section, I will describe several ongoing initiatives, each of which is designed to bring about improvements in the teaching of Modern Hebrew in a network of institutions or through upgrading the skills of a number of teachers. Most are ambitious, consciously attempting to employ a coordinated initiative on several fronts in order to bring about comprehensive

change in goals, objectives, methods, and results. Most have a history of less than five years' duration. Most are focused on North America. And most, it is interesting to note, make use of the skills and experience of veteran Israeli teachers and curriculum innovators, applied for the first time in a systematic way to Diaspora education.

1. **NETA: *Noar le-Tovat ha-Ivrit***, a comprehensive program of curriculum development and teacher in-service training for secondary schools, sponsored by the Avi Chai Foundation in cooperation with Hebrew College (Newton, Massachusetts). Israeli professionals in Hebrew language instruction, primarily from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, work with a growing network of secondary schools in the United States and Canada, to which they provide curriculum materials (including placement examinations and oral and written tests on the curriculum units), intensive short-term training programs, extensive written teachers' guides, and North-America-based consultants who visit the school regularly to observe and critique the progress of the school's Hebrew language faculty. At present, 13 schools, 100 teachers, and 3500-4000 students are being served, with a staff of curriculum developers in Israel and the equivalent of 2.5 full time employees in North America. Project director: Hila Kobliner, Jerusalem.
2. ***Haverim be-Ivrit***: The UAHC (North American Reform movement), in response to a request from its network of 18 day schools, is developing a Hebrew language curriculum for the upper elementary grades, supplemented by extensive teachers' guides and on-site training. This is the second year during which some units are being piloted in the schools. Funded by the Jim Joseph Foundation. Project directors: Lesley Littman, UAHC Northeast Region. Head curriculum writer: Mira Owen, Jerusalem; with Nehama Baras, Ronit Ben-Ari.
3. ***Nitzanim***, a Hebrew language program for early childhood (kindergarten through grade 2), was piloted in close cooperation with four schools, 2 in the United States, 1 in Argentina, and 1 in Australia. It is now in commercial distribution and used in dozens of locations by a surprising variety of institutions. This curriculum uses child-centered stories from daily life situations and from Jewish holidays to build active language skills. Crucial to its success is the carefully graded series of introductory oral and written activities that enable the learners to understand the story at its first reading, as well as follow-up activities to build on that experience. The curriculum was developed at the Melton Center for Jewish Education at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the materials were produced by the Centre for

Educational Technology in Tel Aviv. Head curriculum writer: Mira Owen. Esther Bruner
Project director: Naava Nevo, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

4. **Tal-Am & Tal-Sela:** This program stands out from the rest in several ways: it has been in development for nearly two decades, it is widely disseminated, it is not produced by people living in Israel, and it deliberately works to include a maximum of materials laden with attention to traditional Jewish values and practices. In fact, it is less an initiative than a common standard. According to the sponsors of Tal-Am and Tal-Sela, their comprehensive programs for Hebrew language for Jewish elementary schools, integrated with Jewish studies, have been adopted by 275 schools around the world (in North America, Europe, South Africa, South America and Australia). The program has its detractors, among whose claims are (1) that its materials are too focused on traditional themes and its “Jewish heritage” components are too traditional for many schools, (2) that it creates unattainable expectations of the amount of material to be “covered,” and (3) that its cost is relatively high. Others praise the program for the rich variety of student activities and the attention to the pedagogic implications of studies of the neurology of learning. Sponsored by the Bronfman Jewish Education Centre, Montreal. Project director: Tova Shimon, BJEC, Montreal.
5. **Brandeis University M.A. in the Teaching of Hebrew:** The only program of its kind (to this researcher’s knowledge) in the English-speaking world has attracted only a handful of students in its first two years. Project director: Dr. Vardit Ringvald.
6. **Involvement with other professionals teaching “Less Commonly Taught Languages”** has enabled the BJE of Greater Los Angeles to provide Hebrew language instructors access to state- and federally-funded programs for in-service training. A cluster of initiatives that could be replicated in many other places. Program director: Aviva Kadosh, BJE Los Angeles.

2. Suggestions from the Field

1. Dr. Gilead Morahg, Professor of Hebrew at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and Executive V.P. of the National Association of Professors of Hebrew, observing that “we need to promote Hebrew through the culture of Israel,” suggests that university-level Hebrew language instruction could benefit most from the creation of **a Hebrew equivalent to the British Council or the Goethe Institute**, an institution dedicated to bringing cultural enrichment programming to Jewish communities outside Israel, with a

strong Hebrew-language component: visits by writers and scholars, film series, concerts, and the like, geared in part to university audiences.

2. Several North American informants suggested the creation of a professional organization of Hebrew language teachers modeled on those of the teachers of more commonly-taught languages in the United States and Canada, welcoming classroom teachers, subject coordinators, and other interested parties. Conferences, a journal (in print or electronic), and other forms of communication and support would enable teachers to be partners in upgrading their skills and advocating for their subject. Similar efforts could be encouraged in Europe, Latin America, and indeed worldwide. [A written version of this suggestion appears in Morahg, 1999/2000, 16.]

3. The need for partnerships and coalition-building

There are significant similarities among communities (or: among parallel institutions even in widely separated communities), and the scale and duration of investment needed for successful intervention is very large. It appears advisable to this observer, therefore, to concentrate efforts for improving the teaching of Hebrew on creating and maintaining partnerships and coalitions of institutions prepared to make substantial, sustained investments. Those institutions should seek to create wide (and widening) circles of well-trained professionals whose expertise can be leveraged for the widest possible impact through the training and mentoring of classroom teachers and, closely articulated with that effort, a parallel development of curricula and instructional materials.

Among this particular, admittedly tendentious group of informants, there is a broad consensus of opinion that a focused investment in solving the “technical” problems (as opposed to the “sociolinguistic” problems) of Hebrew language instruction in specific institutions can yield such a marked improvement in achievement that attitudes toward Hebrew language learning will be significantly improved as well. “Nothing succeeds like success” could be their motto, and notable successes, even of limited numerical scope, can be leveraged into greater investment and wider success. My informants’ field of observation encompasses primarily their present constituencies, of course: the families with children in Jewish day schools.

VI. Policy Implications for the Jewish Agency

In section III.1 above, I have identified as a problem for the field being surveyed the fact that “[n]o major country-wide or worldwide institutions or movements *outside Israel* that are active in promoting an ideology of Jewish life and practice place Hebrew language acquisition at the forefront of their endeavors.” There is a tight and natural linkage between promoting the acquisition of Modern Hebrew by Jews worldwide and promoting the idea of a unique and central role for Israeli Jewry among Jewish communities because of a nationalist conception of Jewish identity. The former is a concomitant of the latter.

As the one central organization whose primary mission is to foster Jewish national revival in Eretz Yisrael, the Jewish Agency for Israel is the uniquely appropriate institution in the Jewish world to undertake to promote and foster improvements in the teaching of Modern Hebrew in Jewish communities around the globe. The fact that Israeli resources has proved to be a critical component in initiating improvement projects of that sort is additional evidence for the wisdom of having an Israel-based institution stepping up to offer assistance in this field to colleagues abroad.

The Jewish Agency could choose, in cooperation with other funding agencies—those already supporting the curriculum-and-training initiatives described above and other potential partners—to take on any and all of the following roles, as well as others that might be suggested:

- 1. Evaluation:** The research and development unit of the Jewish Agency’s Department of Jewish Zionist Education could conduct field research into the outcomes of the systemic change efforts. This should include both quantitative and qualitative measurements.
- 2. Coordination:** As an institution with a presence in Jewish communities around the globe, the Jewish Agency could play an important catalytic role in fostering coordination among people and institutions facing similar challenges. At the level of the classroom teacher or program director, there is a dearth of contact among colleagues and counterparts in many communities and institutions concerned with teaching the Hebrew language. The capstone of efforts to create such networking would be the establishment of an active international association of Hebrew language teachers with strong and active regional groupings.

The Jewish Agency might also be an appropriate co-sponsor or catalyst for a conference bringing together people involved in the initiatives described above and other efforts to make systemic change in Jewish schools' approach to Hebrew, so that practitioners at that level could have the opportunity to learn from each others' experiences. Identifying areas of commonality and clarifying differences of assumptions and approach should prove fruitful for all those involved, and those discussions would be of interest to other present and potential stakeholders in such efforts.

3. **Dissemination:** Systemic change projects that prove successful need to move beyond the introductory stage. They need to become institutionalized for the long term and disseminated more widely, within the limits of what is appropriate and possible. The work of training teachers, adapting materials to a new cultural and linguistic milieu, and producing those materials should, wherever possible, be undertaken with local resources. The Jewish Agency, though, might “prime the pump” of such efforts, though, with seed money for the adaptation/localization effort or the like.
4. **Advocacy:** Here we conclude this section at the point where we began it. The Jewish Agency is, for all its inclusiveness, an ideological organization. Its efforts to stimulate and support Jewish educational activities are part of the agency's wider efforts to influence and encourage some trends in the life of the Jewish people, while refraining from supporting—or, conceivably, even actively opposing—other trends. In the field of Jewish education, if the Jewish Agency is not at the forefront of efforts to advocate for the importance of Hebrew language education as a core component of Jewish formal and informal education, the language will find no such champion elsewhere.

Interview Questions

Self and Experience (if interviewer is not familiar with interviewee)

1. What is the nature of your present position? What perspective does it afford you on Hebrew language instruction in your area, movement, or other larger domain?
2. What formal training in pedagogy, applied linguistics, or Hebrew linguistics do you bring to your work? What previous experience do you bring to it?

Nature and Scope of Hebrew Language Instruction in Interviewee's Domain

1. What goals, stated or unstated, are accepted as reasonable in the settings in/with which you work?
2. Who are the teachers? What is/are the typical profile(s) of those involved in classroom instruction, both in terms of pre-service and in-service training and in terms of the conditions of their employment (scope, remuneration, prestige, etc.)?
3. What role does Hebrew language instruction play vis-a-vis the rest of the curriculum (in a school) or other areas of the students' lives (for an ulpan or informal institution)? Is there curricular integration with Jewish studies?
4. What attitudes toward the Hebrew language and the teaching of Hebrew characterize the local Jewish environment?
5. What type(s) of motivation do the learners bring to Hebrew language learning? (Instrumental? If so, to what uses will their knowledge be put? Identification? If so, do the learners intend to understand native speakers (i.e., Israelis), experience solidarity with them, or become part of their community?)
6. If there is a basis for comparison, how do achievement and attitudes in Hebrew language learning compare to those in other languages that these learners are studying?

Issues / Problems / Frustrations with Present Reality and Accomplishments

1. What sort of technical issues or problems constrain or hinder accomplishment in Hebrew language learning.
2. [By "technical" I mean those factors—available teachers and their suitability, hours allotted, materials available, and the like—that are *not* sociolinguistic (see next question) and could be addressed somewhat directly by allocating financial resources to them.]
3. What sort of sociolinguistic issues or problems constrain or hinder accomplishment in Hebrew language learning.
4. [By "sociolinguistic" I mean those factors for which a financial investment could not be expected to yield quick results, such as: the attitudes of various stakeholders toward foreign languages in general and Hebrew in particular, attitudes toward Hebrew's native speakers (i.e., Israelis), the nature of the self-definition of the local Jewish community (national minority? ethnic group? religious group?), and the relative importance to the community of skills for traditional Jewish text study.]
5. How has the situation changed regarding those two sorts of issues over the past years and decades? (Answer primarily from your own experience.)

Initiatives – Actual, Proposed, Imagineable

1. Are there local/regional/national/international initiatives currently being undertaken that address the problems and challenges of Hebrew language instruction in your domain? If so, please offer a description and an estimate of what you expect to be the initiative's effectiveness (and an analysis on which this estimate is based).
2. If you were to address the "technical" issues by allocating financial and human resources to improving instruction in Hebrew language, what problem(s) would you address first, and how would you do so? Why this approach?
3. Do you have any suggestions for improving the "sociolinguistic" climate for Hebrew language learning in your domain?
4. Is there an interaction between potential "technical" improvements in Hebrew language instruction and the "sociolinguistic" setting in which that instruction is pursued? (I.e., could attitudes toward the teaching/learning of Hebrew be changed by enhancing student achievement through "technical" improvements?)

Names of Informants

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JAFI, Jerusalem

Ms. Sonia Barzilai, Director

Centre National pour la Langue Hebreu, Paris

Ms. Svetlana Busygina, educational program coordinator,

JDC, Moscow

Ms. Marci Dickman, head of Jewish studies

Kreiger-Schechter Middle School, Baltimore, Maryland

Dr. Daniel Feinstein, independent consultant,

Mexico City

Ms. Raya Gechtman, former director

Jewish educational center, Kiev

Rabbi Yossi Gordon, teacher and founding principal,

St. Paul Talmud Torah Day School, St. Paul, Minnesota

Mr. Ronnie Gotkin, Principal,

Herzlia Elementary School in Cape Town

Ms. Rahel Halabe

Vancouver

Mr. Sergio Herskovits, Executive Director

Colegio Tarbut, Buenos Aires

Ms. Aviva Kadosh, Hebrew language consultant,

Board of Jewish Education of Greater Los Angeles

Ms. Raquel Kleinberg, independent educational consultant

Mexico City

Ms. Hila Kobliner, teacher and curriculum writer

Unit for Hebrew Language Instruction, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Mr. Yigal Kotler, Educational Consultant / F.S.U.

American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Jerusalem

Ms. Gladys Lehrer, Principal

Takhkemoni School, Antwerp

Ms. Nira Lev, Hebrew language consultant,

Agency for Jewish Education, Detroit

Ms. Lesley Litman – Regional Educator,

Union of American Hebrew Congregations Northeast Council

Dr. Martin Lockshin, Professor of Jewish Studies and former Coordinator of Hebrew Lang.

Instruction, York University, Toronto (and academic advisor to NETA)

Dr. Joseph Lowin, Executive Director

National Center for the Hebrew Language, New York

Ms. Yevgenia Lvova, Director
“Adayin Lo” Jewish Educational Center, St. Petersburg

Dr. Daniel J. Margolis, Executive Director,
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Dr. Gilad Morahg, Professor of Hebrew
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Board of Jewish Education of Greater Washington

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Mintz, Alan, ed., 1993. *Hebrew in America: Perspectives and Prospects* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press). [Especially valuable for our topic are the five articles in Part 2, “Hebrew on the Campus and Beyond,” and the article by Stephen P. Cohen, “The Eclipse of Hebrew as the National Language of the Jewish People.”]

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