

Hebrew and Arabic in Contact: Deviation and Interference in Iraqi Jewish Fiction

*El hebreo y el árabe en contacto: desviación e interferencias
en la ficción judía iraquí*

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Resumen

Como autores bilingües, los novelistas judíos iraquíes utilizan el árabe en algunas de sus novelas hebreas, lo que ha originado algunos fenómenos lingüísticos relacionados con el contacto entre lenguas. Este artículo analiza las desviaciones y las interferencias entre el árabe y el hebreo en la ficción judía iraquí, afirmando que tanto la interferencia y la desviación del hebreo moderno se producen a veces bajo la influencia de la lengua árabe. El artículo concluye preguntando si estas desviaciones destacan los textos literarios de autores judíos iraquíes.

Palabras clave: contacto de lenguas; bilingüismo; árabe; hebreo; Ficción judía iraquí; primer plano.

Abstract

As bilingual authors, Iraqi Jewish novelists use Arabic in some of their Hebrew novels, the result of which has been some linguistic phenomena related to languages in contact. This paper discusses the deviations and interferences between Arabic and Hebrew in Iraqi Jewish fiction, asserting that both interference and deviation from the Modern Hebrew norm occur at times under the influence of Arabic. The paper concludes with the question of whether these deviations from the Modern Hebrew norm foreground literary texts by Iraqi Jewish authors.

Key words: Language in contact; Bilingualism; Arabic; Hebrew; Iraqi Jewish fiction; Foregrounding.

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1. Iraqi Jewish authors and bilingualism

This paper investigates the interference between Arabic and Hebrew in a selection of Hebrew novels written by three Iraqi Jewish authors – Sami Michael (b. Baghdad, 1926), Shimon Ballas (b. Baghdad, 1930) and Eli Amir (b. Baghdad, 1937) – between the 1960s and the second decade of the twentieth century.

Living in a mobile world, particularly in the period of post-colonialism, constitutes a propitious atmosphere for bilingual authors who write in «in-between» languages and countries to express their cultural experiences: «With the great movement of peoples from all quarters of the globe, it is not surprising to find expatriate writers producing more of their works in one of the main languages of their adopted countries»¹.

The above quotation determines the general status of Iraqi Jewish authors; they share some essential features. First, they all immigrated to Israel from Iraq, where Arabic was their mother tongue, and they were culturally Arabs. As Berg asserts: «The Iraqi Jews were traditionally well educated in Arabic and Arab culture, as reflected in their important contributions to the development of modern Iraqi literature before their exodus»². Second, they belong to the first generation of Jews who left, or had to leave, Iraq and found refuge in Israel. The members of this generation had to reconstruct their life in a country that was completely new and in many ways foreign to them. Third, their writing is mainly autobiographical and through it they try to come to terms with their past and present, with Arabic and Hebrew, in order to find a bridge between the two.

This situation sheds light on the sociolinguistic background of the three authors, which is demonstrated by the inner conflict between their mother tongue, i.e. Arabic, and the adopted language of the new land, i.e. Hebrew. Their engagement between two cultures and two languages resulted not only in bilingualism but also in biculturalism. The language negotiation engaged in by these three bilingual/bicultural authors gave rise to the need to establish connections to their Iraqi cultural background. This reality is considered one of the salient aspects of post-colonial literature, in which the conflict between adapting and refusing certain linguistic norms confronts the nature of this type of writing:

Language is adopted as a tool and utilized in various ways to express widely differing cultural experiences. These differences may exist in cultures which

1. Sarkonak, 1993: 48.

2. Berg, 1996: XV.

appear to be quite similar. For in one sense all post-colonial literatures are cross-cultural because they negotiate a gap between ‘worlds’, a gap in which the simultaneous processes of abrogation and appropriation continually strive to define and determine their practice³.

2. Arabic in Hebrew Novels

Although the phenomenon of using Arabic in some modern literary Hebrew texts constitutes a rich field for linguists and literary critics, the study of Arabic in Hebrew texts is under-researched. One of the most important studies on the issue, written by Berg, approaches Iraqi Jewish novelists as writers in exile after their immigration to Israel. She also includes a brief discussion about the use of Arabic in early Hebrew novels, which she regards as a cultural translation process⁴, concluding that: «The use of Arabic words, phrases, expressions, and formulas in all of these novels is present mostly in the speech of the characters in the literature describing the period shortly after the Iraqis’ arrival to Israel»⁵. Feinberg has noted the influence of Arabic on the language in Ballas’ Hebrew texts⁶. Another important study conducted by Snir focuses on the dilemma of identity in the literary works of Iraqi Jews written either in Arabic or in Hebrew⁷. Gat has also analyzed the reflection of an Oriental environment in some Iraqi Jews’ novels in Hebrew⁸, while Hever has studied Oriental Jewish writers in general and Iraqi Jewish novelists in particular⁹. However, the use of Arabic in Iraqi Jewish Hebrew prose is woefully under-researched.

The paper at hand sets out to study the use of Arabic in a selection of Hebrew novels from a sociolinguistic perspective. The following section introduces the theoretical framework of the study.

3. Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Deviations

To understand the sociolinguistic background of the three Iraqi Jewish authors, the terms «language in contact» and «bilingualism» should be briefly explained. Living in a world with more than 5,000 languages creates an environment ripe for multilingualism. With all of these different languages and cultures in a mobile world, it is not surprising that three decades ago François Grosjean claimed that: «bilingualism is present

3. Ashcroft – Griffiths – Tiffin, 2003: 38.

4. Berg, 1996: 59–62. Berg also wrote a book about the literary work of Sami Michael. Berg, 2005.

5. Berg, 1996: 62.

6. Müller – Feinberg – Kolo, 2011: 159–163.

7. Reuven Snir, 2005.

8. Moshe Gat, 1998.

9. Hever, 2002; Hever – Motzafi-Haller, 2002; Hever, 2007.

throughout all nations in varying patterns of distribution»¹⁰, an apt comment about the possibility of multilingualism and multiculturalism in the world in the modern era.

Bilingualism and multilingualism have a long history of research and investigation, with the question of determining what counts as a bilingual person producing immense debate. This is due to the fact that a variety of branches of study are associated with the bi-/multilingualism phenomenon, including literary studies, linguistics, sociolinguistics, literacy and second language acquisition. As far back as the 1950s, Haugen established a bilingual as a person with the ability to «produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language»¹¹. According to *The Linguistic Encyclopaedia*: «A bilingual (or multilingual) person is one whose linguistic ability in two (or more) languages is similar to that of a native speaker»¹². The world «similar» here contradicts Bloomfield's definition of the term, which states that being bilingual means: «native-like control of two languages»¹³. On the other hand, some scholars consider that bilingualism does not necessarily mean mastering the second language like a native. A recent definition of bilingualism suggested by Myers-Scotton, for instance, asserts that bilingualism is: «the ability to use two or more languages sufficiently to carry on a limited casual conversation»¹⁴. Beardsmore's comment on the different definitions of bilingualism still shows a very deep insight into the phenomenon: «Bilingualism as a concept has open-ended semantics»¹⁵. The debate, however, on defining bilingualism is ongoing¹⁶. This study will not go into depth about the appropriate definition of bilingualism, but will rather focus on the linguistic and literary aspects that produce a bilingual literary text as a result of bilingual and bicultural contexts.

In response to the question «what is language contact?», Thomason discussed the definition of the term, putting it very simply: «language contact is the use of more than one language in the same place at the same time»¹⁷. According to Thomason, the simplicity of the definition, however, does not overlook some other complicated aspects associated with language in general and dialects in particular. Thomason also admits that questions of place and time can be complicated. She brings up the issue of sacred texts, mainly Christian and Islamic, as instances of language contact in many places at different periods of history where two or more languages might not share the same geographical zone.

Languages are in contact when they are used interchangeably by one person, as Weinreich defines it¹⁸. The result of the contact is the interference between the two

10. Grosjean, 1982: 24.

11. Haugen, 1953: 7.

12. Malmkjaer, 1991: 76.

13. Bloomfield, 1933: 56.

14. Myers-Scotton, 2005: 44.

15. Beardsmore, 1982: 1.

16. Beardsmore, 1982: 1.

17. Thomason, 2001: 1.

18. Weinreich, 1968.

language systems involved, described by Weinreich as the deviation from the norms of one of the two languages. In this context, the difference between syntagmatic and paradigmatic needs to be established. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a «syntagm» is defined as «a set of linguistic forms in a sequential relationship», while the term «paradigm» is «a set of units which are linguistically substitutable in a given context». De Saussure was one of the elites who highlighted that syntagmatic/associative [paradigmatic] relations are represented by means of vertical/horizontal axes¹⁹. Example (1) elucidates the syntagmatic/paradigmatic difference:

Example (1):

- a. Adam drinks water.
- b. Adam drinks juice.
- c. Drinks Adam water.
- d. Adam drinks sorrow.

If the cause of the deviations in (1-c) and (1-d) is the interference between English and Arabic, the results are as follows:

- The syntagmatic relationship between the units of one sentence is due to the *combination* of its units in a horizontal axis (Adam+drinks+water). The paradigmatic settings, on the other hand, stand for the *selection/replacing* of units in the vertical axis (water/juice).
- Syntagmatic deviation, accordingly, is supposed to be the form of the word order (the combination) in which this combination does not follow the rules of one linguistic norm; see (1-c).
- Paradigmatic deviation, on the other hand, is a selection of unexpected or infrequent units instead of the available or expected choices in one context; see (1-d).

The deviation from paradigmatic or syntagmatic norms is likely to be frequent when there is some interference between two languages. This is because of the number of language systems involved in addition to the mother tongue. The deviation from a norm can be demonstrated by the author's choice, making it also somehow connected to the author's writing style:

Choices represent variations within a norm (different «correct» ways of saying the same thing), deviations from a norm (mistakes), and idiosyncrasies (author-specific forms). The style of a writer is demonstrated by his or her unique ag-

19. Saussure, 1986. For more information about the syntagmatic/paradigmatic difference see: Malmkjaer, 1991.

gregate set of grammatical patterns, which is usually the result of the writer's recurrent (habitual) use of some or all of the forms in the set²⁰.

Since Hebrew novels contain Hebrew/Arabic interference in many places, the likelihood of deviating from the Hebrew norm is expected. These Hebrew paradigmatic/syntagmatic deviations are discussed below with examples from the novels.

4. Syntagmatic deviation in Iraqi Hebrew Prose

The syntagmatic deviations in some Hebrew sentences in the novels reveal the way in which Arabic/Hebrew interferences influence the authors' style. This is especially true in the case of word order in Modern Hebrew. Modern Hebrew is considered one of the SVO languages²¹, although there are exceptions. Shlonsky asserts that there are two cases in which a verb might come before a subject. The first is *triggered inversion*, while the second, which does not require a trigger, is called *free inversion*²². Shlonsky cites nine types of triggers: «Triggers can be sentential adverbs, PPs (Prepositional Phrase) and preposed clauses, direct and indirect objects of the verb, clausal complements, certain negative phrases, Wh-expressions and (null) relative operators»²³. Free inversion, according to Shlonsky, is likely to occur in the passive voice²⁴. Deviation is expected, then, when there is no trigger and the sentence is not in the passive mode. This is seen in the following examples.

4.1. Word order

Example (2):

«חנן אלוהים את כאזם וחסך ממנו מפח-נפש כזה»²⁵

ḥanan 'elohīm 'et kāzem ve-ḥasaḵ mimenu mapah nefeš kaze.
(God blesses Kazim and fends him off frustration like this).

The word order in example (2) does not follow the word order in Modern Hebrew. The example shows that the word order is probably under the influence of Arabic, since the word order in the Modern Hebrew Norm (MHN), as noted above, is:

20. McMenamin, 2002: 132.

21. Shlonsky, 1997: 7.

22. Shlonsky, 1997: 145.

23. Shlonsky, 1997: 146–147.

24. Shlonsky, 1997: 163.

25. Ballas, 1991: 117

Subject (1) + Verb (2) + Object (3) = (SVO)²⁶. However, the word order in example (2) is: (VOS), which is closer to standard Arabic in which the verb precedes the subject. When the sentence is reordered according to MHN, it goes as in (2-b):

(2-a) ḥanan + 'elohīm + 'et Kāzim

V + S + O

(2-b) 'elohīm + ḥanan + 'et Kāzem.

S + V + O

Assuming that the verb > subject in the above example is not a triggered inversion, then it seems that the main reason for the syntagmatic deviation here is the influence of standard Arabic, which prefers to put the verb before the subject.

The same holds true for these examples:

«ירחם האל עליה»²⁷

«חרב עלי עולמי»²⁸

«אבל קרה ההיפוך והמשבר היה בלתי־נמנע»²⁹

«יתן לך אלוהים בריאות, אמא».³⁰

5. Paradigmatic deviations in Iraqi Hebrew Fiction

As two Semitic languages, Hebrew and Arabic share a number of phonological and morphological aspects. Paradigmatic deviations are highly expected in the Hebrew texts owing to the influence of Arabic, which probably affected the authors' selection of certain Hebrew lexical items in favour of others. This study asserts that an author's choices from the alternatives and variations in the Hebrew lexicon are sometimes influenced by the Arabic lexicon. Loan translations can constitute paradigmatic deviations as well. The two terms *lexical choices* and *loan translation* are discussed below.

26. Berman, 1980: 759; Shlonsky, 1997: 7-8; Zuckermann, 2008: 111.

27. Ballas, 1964: 36.

28. Amir, 1983: 144.

29. Ballas, 1991: 11.

30. Michael, 1993: 105.

5.1. Lexical choices

Example (3):

«להגשמת החלום הכביר»³¹

li-hagšamat haḥālom hakabīr.
(To achieve the great ‘big’ dream).

The Hebrew lexical item *kabīr* has a long history. It is an adjective with two meanings and can refer to «much» in the sense of quantity or quality and also describe something with greatness³². The item shares the Arabic use of the term as one of God’s attributes, as well³³. The alternative lexical items available for the author are (‘*ašum*, *gadol*), which mean «great» and «big», respectively. However, the author selected *kabīr*, whose use in the Modern Hebrew lexicon is not common. The choice of *kabīr* was most likely motivated by the Arabic lexical item, which is phonologically and semantically identical to the Hebrew lexical item.

This lexical item is also employed repeatedly in Michael’s novel *Me‘of ha-barburim*³⁴.

Example (4):

«טבע נפסד הוא באדם שאינו יכול לומר לא»³⁵

ṭeva‘ nifsad hu ba-adam še-ēno yaqol lomar lo.
(bad attribute of a person who is unable to say no).

The word *ṭeva‘* (nature) is phonetically closer to the Arabic lexical item *ṭab‘*. Although one of the meanings that *ṭeva‘* has is «essence» or «personality», this lexical item is not commonly used in Modern Hebrew in the context of a human being³⁶. Moreover, the Iraqi Judeo-Arabic lexicon also uses the term *ṭab‘*³⁷. The author selected a Hebrew lexical item here that shows the influence of the Arabic lexicon on him, instead of using other Hebrew lexical items like *’ofi* or *teḵunā*. The use of Arabic in this case appears during a section of non-dialogue narrative, which reflects Ballas’ intention to highlight his textual choices with regard to style. The same holds true for the following example:

31. Amir, 1992: 197.

32. Ben-Yehuda, 1980: 2242–2243; Sagiv, 2008: 652; Kena’ani, 1998: 1997.

33. Kena’ani, 1998: 1998.

34. Michael, 2011: 18, 59, 114, 223.

35. Ballas, 1991: 8.

36. Ben-Yehuda, 1980: 1843–1844; Sagiv, 2008: 205, 614.

37. Yona-Swery – Rejwan, 1995: 151.

Example (5):

«כבר היה בן שש-עשרה, עלם יפה וגבוה»³⁸

kevar hayā ben šeš - 'ešre, 'elem yafe ve-gabua.

(He was already 16 years old, a tall, handsome young man).

The author again chose a Hebrew lexical item closer to Arabic. The equivalent Arabic lexical item is *ghulam/gholom*, which is semantically identical to the Hebrew *'elem* used to refer to youth or adolescents³⁹. In short, the similar phonological lexical aspects between Arabic and Hebrew are employed by the author when he wants to bring his Hebrew closer to Arabic.

5.2. Loan translation

According to The Linguistics Encyclopaedia, loan translation occurs when: «the meaning of a foreign word or expression is borrowed and the word or words are translated in the borrowing»⁴⁰. Backus and Dorleijn describe it as: «any usage of morphemes in Language A that is the result of the literal translation of one or more elements in a semantically equivalent expression in Language B»⁴¹. Loan translation constitutes a deviation from the paradigmatic norm in the target language because of the semantic and lexical interference that may occur as a result of the translation.

Since Hebrew novels have a considerable number of Arabic codes and expressions translated into Hebrew, paradigmatic deviation is highly expected, especially when the context or narrative in a novel represents an Arab culture. The following examples discuss this phenomenon in the Hebrew texts.

Example (6):

«אם הבנים אינה בבית»⁴²

'em habanim 'ena ba-bayit.

(The mother of the boys is not at home).

(The children's mother is not home).

38. Ballas, 1991: 67.

39. Ben-Yehuda, 1980: 4526; Ya'qov Kena'ani, 1998: 4344.

40. Malmkjaer, 1991: 284.

41. Backus – Dorleijn, 2009: 77.

42. Ballas, 1964: 33.

In the Hebrew sentence, the author seems to use a uniquely Arabic dialectic expression: *um lewlad*, which refers to a mother or a wife in an Arab cultural context. However, there is no such use of *'em habanim* (the mother of the boys) in Modern Hebrew. Modern Hebrew uses *em* or *ima* to refer to mother. The interference occurs here with the use of the Hebrew lexical item *banim*⁴³ (boys) in association with *em* to create the connotation of «mother of children, the mother». However, the loan translation used by Ballas here may be understood as the mother has only boys and not girls: the mother of boys. In fact, this term is widely used in the Iraqi Arabic dialect to refer to the «mother of children, both boys and girls». This approximation between Arabic and Hebrew semantic phonological terms stylizes Ballas' writing. Furthermore, the author uses the loan translation of an Arabic expression to add a new connotation to the lexical item *banim*, referring to *yeladim* when it is connected to *em*.

The same holds true for the following example:

Example (7):

«ועם הזמן נעשיתי כמוהו עבד לכסף»⁴⁴

Ve-'im hazman ne'sīti ke-mohu 'eved la-keseḥ.
(And eventually I became like him, a slave to money).

The selection of the expression *'eved lakesef* («a slave to money») shows the influence of Arabic on the author's style via a loan translation into Hebrew. The Arabic expression *abdu-lmal*, associated with a dire personal attribute of greed, was transmitted into Hebrew. This choice constitutes a deviation from the Hebrew norm concerning the common expressions in the Hebrew lexicon for this idea, which are, for instance, *beṣa' kesef* or *rodef beṣa'*⁴⁵. Other idioms are used to express the similar denotations of the term («greedy») in the Arabic dialect spoken by Jews in Iraq, for instance *temma'* (Yona and Rejwan, 1995, p. 156) and *bani 'adam temma'* («a greedy person»); *'enu gaw'āna* («his eye is hungry») and *nifsu deneyye* («someone despised») ⁴⁶. However *'abdun lelmāl* was not included in the Iraqi Judeo-Arabic lexicon. Paradigmatic deviation is also expected when folk sayings are transferred into Hebrew texts.

43. The Hebrew lexicon differentiates between masculine and feminine forms of the singular lexicon item *ben* pl. *banim*, and *bat* pl. *banot*. See, for instance: *בְּנֵי וּבָתֵּיךְ נִתְּנִים לְעַם אֲחֵר* (De 28, 32).

44. Amir, 2010: 95.

45. Sagiv, 2008: 470. Note that Amir also uses the expression (רודפי דינרים) *rodfe dinarim* in the same novel: Amir, 2010: 347.

46. Me'iri – Moreh, 2006: 171–172.

6. Arabic in Hebrew: Foregrounding or Deviance?

Foregrounding, a term borrowed from the field of art, was later developed to serve as an essential theory in stylistic analysis⁴⁷. One mission of this type of analysis, which approaches literary texts by means of linguistic tools, is to compare the text to a norm, which may take several forms. In Enkvist's words:

All stylistic analysis is ultimately based on the matching of a text against a contextually related norm. Such norms may be explicitly circumscribed, or they may remain implicitly embedded in the past experience of a speaker, writer, or literary critic⁴⁸.

Regarding Enkvist's interpretation of the term «contextually related norm», Leech and Short discussed the issue of the «relative norm», in which the anticipation of participant elements (e.g. speakers, hearers, writers and readers) shows a discrepancy due to the sets of language situations⁴⁹. They define the term deviance as «the difference between the normal frequency of a feature and its frequency in the text or a corpus»⁵⁰. In addition to the «circumscribed and gained norm through experiences» established by Enkvist⁵¹, MacMenamin has also discussed related norms pertinent to this study (e.g. prestige norms, norms of social convention or necessity, norms governing use of registers, varieties, and other languages, class norms, regional norms, circumstantial norms, appropriate-language norms and correct-language norms)⁵².

Although deviation may be considered an undesirable behaviour within a linguistic repertoire, it can be perceived as Leech asserts: «Deviation provides us with a working criterion (though not an exclusive criterion) for the selection of those linguistic features which are of literary significance»⁵³. The following example briefly looks at this issue in relation to Iraqi Jewish fiction.

47. For more information about the term «foregrounding» in relation to stylistic theory, see for instance Leech – Short, 1981; Mukařovský, 1964.

48. Enkvist – Spencer – Gregory, 1964: 54–55.

49. Leech – Short, 1981: 53.

50. Leech – Short, 1981: 48.

51. Enkvist – Spencer – Gregory, 1964.

52. McMenamin, 2002: 133.

53. Leech, 2008: 59.

Example (8):

«אלוהים ימחל לנו», אמרה עזיזה. «ימחל לנו אלוהים»⁵⁴

'elohim yemaḥel lanu, amra 'aziza. yemaḥel lanu 'elohim.
(God forgives us, said 'Aziza, forgives us God).

This example demonstrates a very interesting literary and linguistic aspect in Michael's novel *Viqtoriya*. The author presents the linguistic variety of the word order in two forms: SVO and VOS, the former of which represents the norm, while the latter shows the deviation from this norm. In this way, Michael wants to show that the way in which the words are ordered is intentional and conscious. It is clear from this example, therefore, that not all deviations occur because of interference between two language systems. Rather, sometimes deviation must be perceived as a literary device by which the author wants to foreground his work. The following example demonstrates the same type of stylistic manoeuvre within the paradigmatic range.

Example (9):

«ואללה עשיתי אוכל יערב לחכך. שאל את מונירה»⁵⁵

walla 'aṣiti 'oḳel ya'rov leḥaḳeḳa. še'al 'et Monira.
(I swear of God that I cooked for you food that is pleasant to your palate,
do ask Monira).

The use of loan translation here echoes the style used by Ballas. On the one hand, the choice of the lexical item *ḥeḳ* (palate) makes the dialogue language sound like high Classical Hebrew with regard to the choice of biblical lexical items. Yet the use of such lexical items might reflect the influence of the Iraqi Arabic dialect. The Arabic sentence used in the same context would be *walla sawwēt akel jestāhel ḥanakak*. A reader may regard Ballas' use of such codes as the high use of language, although it is most likely a loan translation of an Iraqi folk saying used in the context of expressing hospitality in an Arab culture. Indeed, the image used to describe the food and the way in which the guest is offered the food are uniquely Arab cultural images.

54. Michael, 1993: 154.

55. Ballas, 1964: 33.

7. Conclusion

This paper discusses some cases in Hebrew novels in which authors deviate from the Modern Hebrew norm. The deviations were primarily categorized in two axes, syntagmatic and paradigmatic. The first category involves the word order of Hebrew lexical items structured in a way that violates the Hebrew norm, on the one hand, and imitates the Arabic norm on the other. The second category (paradigmatic deviation) includes the lexical selection of varieties existing in the Hebrew lexicon that are similar phonologically to the Arabic lexicon. Paradigmatic deviations are highly expected in the cases of loan translation from Arabic into the Hebrew text, as well. Deviations are not derived from interference and/or unconscious desire. Rather, the author's choices in the literary paradigm are more intentional. Therefore, deviations in Iraqi-Jewish fiction can arguably be seen as an example of foregrounding.

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