# 34

# Hebrew

*Robert Hetzron*

*Revised by Alan S. Kaye*

## 1 Introduction

The importance of the Hebrew language is not to be measured by the number of its speakers at any time in its history. It is the language of the Jewish Bible, the Old Testament of Christians. It also has a very long continuous history. Kept in continuous use by Jews from antiquity to modern times, its reformed version, in an unprecedented process of revival, became the official language of the modern state of Israel.

It is futile to ask whether Modern Hebrew is the same language as the idiom of the Hebrew Bible. Clearly, the difference between them is great enough to make it impossible for the person who knows one to understand the other without effort. Biblical scholars have to study the modern language if they want to benefit from studies written in Hebrew today and Israelis cannot properly follow Biblical passages without having studied them at school. Yet a partial understanding is indeed possible and the similarities are so obvious that calling them separate languages or two versions of the same tongue would be an arbitrary, purely terminological decision.

Impressive as the revival of Hebrew as a modern language may be, one ought not to have an exaggerated impression of its circumstances. Since Biblical times, Hebrew has never been a dead language. True, it ceased to be a spoken language used for the 'pass me the salt' type of everyday communication, but it has been cultivated – applied not only to liturgy and passive reading of old texts, but also to correspondence, creative writing and, occasionally, conversation. Actually, it was so extensively used for writing that the language, through this medium, underwent all the changes and developments that are characteristic of a living language. The revival in Israel made it again an everyday colloquial tongue.

## 2 The Script

Hebrew is written from right to left. This is essentially a consonantal script. (In the following, capital letters will be used for transliteration of Hebrew words.) A word like

*šibbōlεŧ* (*shibboleth*) 'ear of corn' is written in four letters *ŠBLT*. Yet long *ū* and *ī* (but not long *ā > ō*) are indicated by the letters otherwise marking semi-vowels: *W* and *Y* respectively. Moreover, the original diphthongs *\*aw* and *\*ay*, which were legitimately represented by *W* and *Y* in the consonantal transcription, were mostly reduced to *ō* and *ē*, yet they kept their *W* and *Y* symbols, making these trivalent symbols for semi-vowels and both closed and mid labial and palatal vowels respectively. Thus, the word which was originally *\*hawbi:lu:* 'they carried', Biblical *hōᵂᵬīʸlūᵂ*, modern /hov'ilu/, is written *HWBYLW*. Two more factors need to be added. The *aleph*, originally a symbol for the glottal stop *ʔ*, has been maintained in the orthography even after the *ʔ* ceased to be pronounced. Word-final *-H* was pronounced in a few cases only; otherwise the letter stands as a dummy symbol after a final vowel *-ε/-ē* or, more frequently, after final *-ā̊*. This latter is most often a feminine ending. The use of *-H* here preserves the second stage of the phonetic development of this ending: *\*at > -āh > -ā̊*.

These originally consonantal letters used for partial vowel marking are traditionally called *mātrēs lectiōnis* 'mothers (= helping devices) of reading'. I transcribe them with raised letters.

The old Hebrew consonantal script, practically identical with the Phoenician one, was gradually replaced, beginning at the end of the sixth century BC, by an Aramaic script which, through the centuries to come, evolved into what is today known as the Jewish 'square' script, the standard printed form. From the second century BC on, graphically more or less different cursive systems further developed for casual handwriting. Two of these are still in use today: the modern cursive and a calligraphic development of the so-called Mashait cursive, the latter used today chiefly for printing the commentaries on the Bible and the Talmud of the eleventh-century Jewish scholar, Rashi (hence the name 'Rashi script').

Table 34.1 presents the consonantal letters of the major alternative scripts. Note that the letters *K*, *M*, *N*, *P* and *Ṣ* have special 'final' versions when they occur at the end of the word. These are parenthesised in the table. The names represent the Modern Hebrew pronunciation, as they are currently used. In the transcription column, the capital letter stands for the transliteration of the script, the letters after '~' show the Modern Hebrew pronunciation. These letters may serve as number symbols up to four hundred. They may be combined – thus *KZ* stands for 'twenty-seven', *RMḤ* for 'two hundred and forty-eight', etc.

Writing systems that transcribe words incompletely or inconsistently (English is an example of the latter) may be viewed as basically mnemonic devices rather than as truly efficient scripts. With the decline of Hebrew as a spoken tongue, the introduction of vowel symbols and other diacritics became necessary. In order not to alter the original sacred, consonantal texts, this was done by means of added symbols, dots or other reduced-size designs placed under, above and in some cases in the centre of the consonantal letters. These were always considered optional supplements, omissible at will. There were several such systems, chiefly the Babylonian and Tiberian vocalisations; the latter alone is now used. The introducers of these systems are called Masoretes, the 'carriers of tradition', who carried out their work between AD 600 and 1000.

In the Tiberian Masoretic system, for example, a dot over the top left corner of a letter indicates *ō*, and if a *W* had traditionally been used for the same sound, the dot is placed over the *W*, to distinguish it from *ū*, which has the dot in the middle. Dots in the middle of consonantal letters other than those marking laryngeals and, with some exceptions, *r* may mark gemination, doubling of the consonant. However, in the beginning

**Table 34.1** The consonantal letters

| Phoenician (=Old Hebrew) | Jewish Square (modern print) | Rashi | Cursive (modern) | Name | Transcription | Numerical Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | א | | | alef | $ʔ$ | 1 |
| | ב | | | bet | $B; b, b\!\!\sim\!\!v$ | 2 |
| | ג | | | g'imel | $G; g, g̱$ | 3 |
| | ד | | | d'alet | $D; d, d̄$ | 4 |
| | ה | | | he | $H; h$ | 5 |
| | ו | | | vav | $W; w\!\!\sim\!\!v, u,o$ | 6 |
| | ז | | | z'ayin | $Z; z$ | 7 |
| | ח | | | xet | $Ḥ; ḥ\!\!\sim\!\!x$ | 8 |
| | ט | | | tet | $Ṭ; ṭ\!\!\sim\!\!t$ | 9 |
| | י | | | yod | $Y; y, i, e$ | 10 |
| | כ(ך) | כ (ך) | כ(ך) | kaf | $K; k, k̠\!\!\sim\!\!x$ | 20 |
| | ל | | | l'amed | $L; l$ | 30 |
| | מ(ם) | מ (ם) | מ(ם) | mem | $M; m$ | 40 |
| | נ(ן) | נ (ן) | נ(ן) | nun | $N; n$ | 50 |
| | ס | | | s'amex | $S; s$ | 60 |
| | ע | | | 'ayin | $ʕ$ | 70 |
| | פ(ף) | פ (ף) | פ(ף) | pe | $P; p, p̄\!\!\sim\!\!f$ | 80 |
| | צ(ץ) | צ (ץ) | צ(ץ) | tsade | $Ṣ; ṣ\!\!\sim\!\!c(=ts)$ | 90 |
| | ק | | | qof | $Q; q\!\!\sim\!\!k$ | 100 |
| | ר | | | resh | $R; r$ | 200 |
| | ש | | | shin | $Š; š$ | 300 |
| | ת | | | tav | $T; t\!\!\sim\!\!, t̄\!\!\sim\!\!t$ | 400 |

of syllables, a dot in *B, G, D, K, P, T* (this is the traditional order of listing) means that they are to be pronounced as stops; absence of the dot points at the spirantised articulation *β* or *v*, etc. (see below). A dot in a final *h* indicates that it is to be pronounced and is not a mere dummy symbol, a tradition that has usually not been observed.

One diacritic symbol is used for a true phonemic distinction. Hebrew has separate letters for *Š* and *S*, but in some cases, the former is read [s] as well. To mark this, the *Š* symbol was supplemented with a dot in the right top corner for [š] and the left for [s]. This latter is usually transcribed *ś* and represents an original separate phoneme, a lateral fricative.

The vocalic notation was brilliantly constructed, yet it is not always perfectly adequate for all traditional pronunciations. A small T-shaped symbol underneath a consonant usually stands for a long *ā* but in some cases, in syllables that were originally closed, it may be a short *å* (< *u*), see the beginning of Section 4.1. Two vertically aligned dots underneath a letter, called 'shwa', may indicate lack of a vowel or, at the beginning of the word or after another shwa (and in some other cases), an ultrashort sound [ə]. After laryngeals, there are 'tainted shwas', ultrashort *ă, ĕ* and *ǻ* (*ŏ*). At the end of a word, lack of vowel is indicated by the lack of any vowel symbol, although final shwa is written in some grammatical endings under -*T* (with a dot in the middle) and always in final -*K*.

The vowel symbol is supposed to be read after the consonantal letter to which it is attached, except in word-final *Ḥ, ʕ* and dotted *H* with an *A* underneath, where the vowel sounds first. This is called a 'furtive *a*', a euphonic development.

Table 34.2 illustrates the use of vowels and other diacritic symbols, traditionally called the 'pointing'.

**Table 34.2** The Pointing

---

A.   The dot in the consonant (*dagesh*)

a. Spirantisation.

ŧ ת; t תּ; **p̄** (ף)פ; p פּ; **k̄** (ך)כ; k (ך)כּ; đ ד, d דּ; **ḡ** ג, g גּ; **ƀ** ב, b בּ

b. Gemination.

...*qq* קּ; ...*mm* מּ; ...*ww* וּ; ...*bb* בּ

B.   The letter Š.

*ś* שׂ; *š* שׁ

C.   The vowels (combined with various consonants).

| Long | | | Short | | Ultrashort | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *ṭå̄* | טָ | *ṭa* | טַ | *'ă* | עֲ |
| *lē͏ʸ* | לֵי | *lē* | לֵ | *lɛ* | לֶ | *ʔɛ̆* | אֶ |
| *mōʷ* | מוֹ | *rō* | רֹ | *ṣå* | צָ | *ḥǎ̆* | חֲ |
| *tīʸ* | תִי | | | *si* | סִ | *zə, z* | זְ |
| | *nūʷ* | נוּ | | *nu* | נֻ | | |

As we have seen, the Biblical Hebrew script was not exclusively consonantal. The *mātrēs lectiōnis* indicated some of the vowels. The use of these was later extended. Already in Late Biblical Hebrew, we find *W* also for *ō* that does not come from *\*aw*. In Modern Hebrew, except for some very frequent words and common patterns (where a certain degree of convention has still been maintained), *W* may be used for any /u/ or /o/, and *Y* for any /i/.

In modern practice, consistent vowel marking is restricted to Biblical texts, poetry, dictionaries and children's books. Otherwise, only the consonantal script is used, with fuller application of *mātrēs lectiōnis* and with occasionally strategically placed vowel symbols to avoid potential ambiguities. It should be noted that the duality of 'obligatory' *W*'s and *Y*'s sanctified by tradition and 'optional' ones which may appear in unvocalised texts only is very confusing to the student of Modern Hebrew. Another serious problem, for native Israelis too, is that no consistent system has been worked out for the transcription of foreign words and names. Some conventions do exist, such as *G* with an apostrophe marking [ǰ], non-final *P* in word-final positions for final *-p*; yet this is insufficient, and many such words are often mispronounced.

It should be added that the texts of the Old Testament print cantillation marks (some above, some beneath the word), which note the melodic pattern to be used in chanting the texts in the synagogue service. Their exact position provides a clue to stress in Biblical Hebrew.

Table 34.3 reproduces part of verse 24 in chapter 13 of the book of Nehemiah. First the consonantal text is presented, then the same with full pointing.

## 3 The Periods of Hebrew

Hebrew may be historically divided into distinct periods on the basis of grammar and vocabulary.

**Table 34.3** Part of Nehemiah 13.24

| |
|---|
| ואינם מכירים לדבר יהודית |
| Transliteration: W?YNM MKYRYM LDBR YHWDYT |
| וְאֵינָם מַכִּירִים לְדַבֵּר יְהוּדִית |
| Transliteration: wəʔēʸnˈåm makkīʸrˈīʸm lədabbˈēr yəhūʷdˈīʸt |
| Translation: 'and-they-do-not know [how]-/to/speak Judean' |

## 3.1 Pre-Biblical Hebrew

Hebrew is a Canaanite language, closely related to Phoenician. It is even likely that its northern dialect barely differed from Phoenician. There exist Canaanite documents from the mid-twentieth century to the twelfth century BC, transcribed in Akkadian and Egyptian documents. It is hard to assess their exact relationship to the contemporary ancestor of Hebrew, but the two may be assumed to be identical in essence. Case endings and other archaic elements in phonology and morphology are found here. The most important source of these data are fourteenth-century BC letters found in Tell el-Amarna, Egypt.

## 3.2 Biblical Hebrew

This is the most important period, documented through the Old Testament (but note that substantial parts of the books of Daniel and Ezra are in Aramaic). This collection of texts spans over a millennium-long period (1200–200 BC). The literary dialect was based on southern (Judean) Hebrew, though the northern dialect of some authors does show through. It is wrong to think of Biblical Hebrew as a homogeneous dialect. It covers different places and periods.

This heterogeneity, in particular the coexistence of doublets (e.g. a dual tense system for the verb, see below), led some scholars to declare that Biblical Hebrew was a *Mischsprache*, a mixed language, representing the coalescence of the speech of Israelites arriving from Egypt and of the local Canaanites. Yet the doublets attested do not seem to be particularly exceptional in the history of standard dialects.

It is customary to speak of Early Biblical Hebrew (the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, the prophetic books) and Late Biblical Hebrew (Chronicles, Song of Songs, Esther, etc.) but this is a simplification. The Song of Deborah (Judges 5) is considered to be the oldest text. In several books one finds traces of their having been compiled from different sources. Poetic texts such as the Psalms, the Song of Songs and poetic inserts elsewhere have their own grammatical and lexical features.

It should also be remembered that no matter how rich the material contained in the Hebrew Bible may be, no document of even that length can represent the full riches of a living language. We shall never know the true dimensions of Biblical Hebrew spoken at that time.

Biblical Hebrew ceased to be spoken at some unspecified time (the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BC may have been a major factor), yielding to Mishnaic Hebrew (see below) and Aramaic. The very last period of written Late Biblical Hebrew extends, however, into the Christian era, as represented by texts found in Qumran, known as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

One should thus keep in mind that what is described under the label 'Biblical Hebrew' is basically hybrid material: text in a consonantal script from between 1200 and 200 BC, while the pointing (vowels, indication of stress, gemination, spirantisation) comes from a much later date (after AD 600), when even the next stage of Hebrew, Mishnaic, had long ceased to be spoken. True, the pointing is based on authentic tradition, but certain distortions through the centuries were unavoidable.

### 3.3 Mishnaic Hebrew

This dialect represents the promotion into a written idiom of what was probably the spoken language of Judea during the period of Late Biblical Hebrew (sixth century BC) and on. It ceased to be spoken around AD 200, but survived as a literary language till about the fifth century AD. It is the language of the Mishnah, the central book of the Talmud (an encyclopedic collection of religious, legal and other texts), of some of the older portions of other Talmudic books and of parts of the Midrashim (legal and literary commentaries on the Bible).

### 3.4 Medieval Hebrew

This was never a spoken language, yet it is the carrier of a rich literary tradition. It was used by Jews scattered by now around the Mediterranean world, for poetry (both religious and secular), religious discussions, philosophy, correspondence, etc. The main spoken languages of Jews from that time on were varieties of Arabic, Spanish (later Judeo-Spanish, Ladino) and Judeo-German (Yiddish). The earliest layer of Medieval Hebrew is the language of the *Piyyuṭ*, poetry written for liturgical use from the fifth to sixth centuries. After a period of laxity, the great religious leader of Babylon, Saadiah Gaon (892–942), heralded a new epoch in the use of Hebrew. This reached its culmination in the Hebrew poetry in Spain (1085–1145). The eleventh to fifteenth centuries saw a richness of translations into Hebrew, mainly from Arabic. The style developed by Jews of eastern France and western Germany, who later moved to eastern Europe, is known as Ashkenazic Hebrew, the written vehicle of speakers of Yiddish. The origin of the Ashkenazic pronunciation as known today is unclear; the earliest Ashkenazim did not have it.

The Medieval Hebrew period ended along with the Middle Ages, with the cessation of writing Hebrew poetry in Italy. In the interim period that followed, Hebrew writing was confined to religious documents.

### 3.5 Modern Hebrew

Even though Spanish and Italian Hebrew poetry did treat non-religious topics, it was the period of Enlightenment (Hebrew *Haskalah*, from 1781 on) that restored the use of Hebrew as a secular language. This led to important changes in style and vocabulary. Words denoting objects, persons, happenings of modern life were developed. Hebrew was becoming a European language. This development was concentrated in eastern Europe, with Warsaw and Odessa as the most important centres. The great writer Mendele Moikher Sforim (Sh. J. Abramowitz, 1835–1917) was perhaps the most important and most brilliant innovator. Hebrew began to be spoken regularly only with the establishment of Jewish settlements in Palestine, mainly from Russia. In this revolutionary development, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858–1922) played the most important role as the initiator

and leader of the movement. His first son, Itamar Ben-Avi, was the first native speaker of Modern Hebrew. Ben-Yehuda brought many innovations to the Hebrew language. The type of Hebrew developed for speech adopted the Sephardic pronunciation as uttered by an Ashkenazi. In 1922, Hebrew became one of the official languages of Palestine under the British Mandate. Hebrew literature, now transplanted to the Holy Land, experienced an impressive upsurge. With the creation of the State of Israel (1948), the status of Modern Hebrew as the national language became firmly established. Modern Hebrew has been to a great extent regulated by the Academy of the Hebrew Language. On the other hand, native speakers have become a majority in Israel, many of them children of native speakers themselves. In order to express themselves, they do not consult grammars and official decisions, but create their own style, their own language, based on the acquired material according to universal laws of linguistic evolution. This dialect, Spoken Israeli Hebrew, itself a multi-layered complex entity, has only recently been systematically described (see Coffin and Bolozky 2005), although its existence was earlier noted and its importance acknowledged. Israeli Hebrew has about five million speakers.

## 4 The Structure of Hebrew

In the following, emphasis will be placed on the culturally most important dialect, Biblical Hebrew. When warranted, indications will be given of parallel phenomena in later periods. Modern Hebrew data will be quoted below in phonemic transcription, between /oblique strokes/.

### 4.1 Phonology

There are many traditional schools of pronunciation for Hebrew. That of Biblical Hebrew is only a reconstruction. It is customary to divide the numerous traditions into two major trends: Sephardi(c) (Mediterranean) and Ashkenazi(c) (Central and Eastern European). The most striking differences between these are the pronunciation of $\bar{a}$ as Seph. *a* vs Ashk. *o* (but short *å* is realised as *o* even in the Sephardic tradition) and *ŧ* as Seph. *t* vs Ashk. *s*. To a declining extent *ħ* and *ʕ* have been preserved in Sephardic only, vs Ashk. *x* and zero respectively.

For consonants, in the laryngeal domain, the Semitic sounds *γ* and *ʕ* are represented by the single letter *ʕ*, and *x* and *ħ* also by a single *Ḥ* in the Biblical Hebrew consonantal script. The emphatic consonants of Biblical Hebrew: *ṭ*, *ṣ*, *q* (or *ḳ*) may have been pronounced glottalised (though there is no explicit proof of this). Today, there is no feature 'emphasis' and the three consonants are realised respectively as /t/, /c/ (= *ts*) and /k/. Thus, only the middle one remained a separate entity, the other two are pronounced the same way as original *t* and *k*.

Except for the laryngeals *ʔ*, *ʕ*, *h*, *ħ* and *r* (this one may have been at some time a uvular, since it belongs to this class), all consonants may be single or double (geminate) in Biblical Hebrew. Gemination disappeared from Modern Hebrew. Moreover, in the Masoretic tradition, the stops *b*, *d*, *g*, *p*, *t*, *k* were spirantised respectively into *β*, *ð*, *γ*, *f*, *θ*, *x* in post-vocalic, non-geminate position, e.g. *bayiθ* 'house', *bəβayiθ* 'in a house', vs *babbayiθ* 'in the house', *bāttīʸm* 'houses'. As can be seen, alternations within the root have resulted from this conditioned spirantisation. Some incongruities in the system

(such as 'houses' with a geminate after an apparently long vowel, *habbayθ$\bar{\bar{a}}$h* '(to) home' with *θ* after a diphthong) make the phonemic status of both vocalic length and spirantisation rather unclear. Therefore, a non-committal transcription *ḇ*, *d̠*, etc., rather than the independent symbols *β*, *ð*, etc., will be used below. Modern Hebrew has only the alternations /b/~/v/, /p/~/f/ and /k/~/x/.

The vowel system, as noted by the Masoretes, does have its problems. As just mentioned, the phonemicity of vowel length is debatable. This is why it is advisable to use the macron and not the modern symbol ꞉ to mark this questionable length. Yet it is clear that vocalic length was once indeed present in the Biblical Hebrew system and played an important role in it.

It seems that at some point in its history, Hebrew equalised the length of all full-vowelled syllables (other than /ə/). Already in Proto-Semitic, long vowels could occur in open syllables only. Now, all vowels in an open syllable became either long: *\*a > $\bar{a}$*, *\*i > $\bar{e}$*, *\*u > $\bar{o}$*, or ə. Short vowels were confined to closed syllables. However, word-final short vowels with grammatical functions survived for a while. The subsequent loss of these vowels, which made a C$\bar{V}$CV# sequence into C$\bar{V}$C#, did not occasion the shortening of $\bar{V}$, even though the syllable became closed. This produced minimal pairs such as *z$\bar{\bar{a}}$kar* 'he remembered' (from *\*zakar*) vs *z$\bar{\bar{a}}$k$\bar{a}$r* 'male' (from *\*zakar* + case ending).

The ultrashort vowel ə caused spirantisation of a subsequent non-emphatic stop. After laryngeals, it has the allophones: ultrashort *ă*, *ɛ̆* and *ŏ*, selected according to the context, mainly on a harmony principle. The vowel [ə] is called *shwa mobile* in contrast with *shwa quiescens*, i.e. lack of vowel, which is marked by the same diacritic symbol. From the written sign's point of view, the shwa is supposed to be pronounced (mobile) after the first consonant of a word, after a consonant cluster or a geminate and, in principle, after a long vowel; the shwa symbol stands for zero (quiescent) elsewhere. However, in some cases, a traditionally quiescent shwa does spirantise the subsequent stop (as it comes from an originally short vowel). This is called *shwa medium*.

Vocalic reductions producing shwas would occur when suffixes were added: *d$\bar{\bar{a}}$ḇ$\bar{\bar{a}}$r* 'thing, word', pl. *dəḇ$\bar{\bar{a}}$r$\bar{i}$$^y$m*; *dibbɛr* 'he spoke', pl. *dibbər$\bar{u}$$^w$*.

Modern Hebrew gave up all length distinction and simplified the system. Shwa is pronounced only when otherwise an unpronounceable cluster would result.

Because of the tightly regulated syllable structure (only aggravated by some loopholes), it is impossible to decide which one(s) of the following features: spirantisation, vocalic length, gemination and shwa were phonemically relevant in Biblical Hebrew. By dropping length, Modern Hebrew unequivocally phonemicised spirantisation: BH *s$\bar{\bar{a}}$p̱ar* 'he counted' and MH *s$\bar{\bar{a}}$pp$\mathring{a}$r* 'barber' respectively became Modern Hebrew /safar/ and /sapar/.

Biblical Hebrew stress fell on one of the last two syllables of the word. In many cases it can be shown that final stress occurs when a word-final short open vowel had disappeared. Hence it was assumed that Proto-Hebrew had uniform penultimate stress. However, in other cases of final stress no such development can be posited, e.g. *ʔatt'$\bar{\bar{a}}$$^h$* 'you (m. sg.)', *dibbər'$\bar{u}$$^w$* 'they (m.) spoke'. It is then possible that originally the placement of the stress was not conditioned, but may have been functionally relevant (see the discussion of the tense system below). In transcription, only penultimate stress is traditionally marked, not final stress.

A remarkable feature of Biblical Hebrew (like Classical Arabic) is the existence of 'pausal' forms. At the end of sentences, many words have special shapes, e.g. contextual/pausal:

(a) *šā̆mərū̆ʷ/šā̆mˈā̆rū̆ʷ* 'they guarded';
(b) *kˈēlɛḇ/kˈā̆lɛḇ* 'dog', *bˈɛ̆gɛḏ/bˈā̆gɛḏ* 'clothing';
(c) *mˈayim/mˈā̆yim* 'water', *bā̆ṭˈaḥtā̆/bā̆ṭˈā̆ḥtā̆* 'you (m. sg.) trusted)';
(d) *yiṯhallˈēḵ/yiṯhallˈā̆ḵ* 'he walks about';
(e) *wa-y-yˈā̆må̆ṯ/wa-y-yā̆mˈōṯ* 'he died'.

Though the pausal forms of (a) and (d) have archaic vowels, it would be wrong to view the pausal forms as simple survivals, especially in the domain of stress. They contain melodic signals of terminality, an artistic-expressive procedure. The basic principle was that stress, or rather the melismatic tune, fell on the last vowel of the word that was followed by a consonant. This refers to the period when pausal chanting was adopted. Thus, the penultimate vowel of (a) was saved from later reduction. The penultimate stress in (e) was brought to the end. In 'water' in (c), the *i* was not syllabic (*\*maym*). In (b), an epenthetic *ɛ* was added. With few exceptions, the melismatic syllable had to be long, thus original short vowels were lengthened. The retention of the original vowel in (d) needs clarification. Example (b) shows that we do not have here mere archaisms: 'dog' used indeed to be *\*kalb-*, and the *ā̆* may be viewed as a survival; yet 'clothing' was *\*bigd-*, and the pausal *ā̆* is only the result of a secondary lengthening of the *ɛ*.

### 4.2 Grammar

The Semitic root-and-pattern system (see Chapter 32, page 556) was complicated in Hebrew by the alternations introduced by spirantisation as imposed on root consonants according to position. Thus, the root *K-P-R* has, among others, the following manifestations: *kā̆ p̱ ar* (MoH /kafar/) 'he denied', *yiḵp̄ōr* (MoH /yixpor/) 'he will deny'; *kippɛr* (MoH /kiper/) 'he atoned', *yə̆ḵappēr* (MoH /yexaper/) 'he will atone'.

Inspired by their Arab colleagues, Hebrew grammarians adopted the practice of marking patterns by means of the 'dummy' root *P-ʕ-L* ('do, act' in real usage), e.g. *puʕʕal* means a form where the first root consonant is followed by an *u*, the second one is doubled and is followed by an *a*.

In the verbal system, seven derivational classes (*binyanim* 'structures') are to be distinguished:

(I)    *pā̆ʕal* or *qal*, the basic form (with a special subclass where the non-past has the thematic vowel *a* instead of the usual *ō*);
(II)   *nip̱ʕal* (marked by a prefix *n-*, assimilated to the first radical after a prefix), a passive of I if transitive, always an intransitive itself, occasionally inchoative;
(III)  *piʕʕēl* (with gemination of the middle radical), originally an iterative (for repeated actions), denominative and some other functions (often vaguely labelled 'intensive');
(IV)   *puʕʕal*, the passive of III;
(V)    *hip̱ʕī̆ʸl*, originally a causative;
(VI)   *hå̆p̱ʕal*, later *hup̱ʕal*, the passive of V; and
(VII)  *hiṯpaʕʕēl*, a reflexive or reciprocal, from Medieval Hebrew on, also a passive of III and with some other functions.

Note that the derivational 'meanings' are not always to be taken literally. From the transitive *binyanim* I, III and V, passive II, IV and VI may be freely formed, but a II verb

does not necessarily come from a I. V may be the causative of I only when sanctioned by attestation in the sources; it is thus not productive. IV and VI have only restricted, mainly participial uses from Medieval Hebrew on. Some other derivational forms are occasionally found as archaisms or innovations.

In Biblical Hebrew the passive may have the syntax of an impersonal: *lōʔ yēʔå̄ḵēl ʔɛ̱t bǝśå̄rōʷ* (Exodus 21.28) 'not will-be-eaten acc. its-flesh' = 'its flesh will not be eaten', where an object prefix precedes what might have been expected to be subject of the passive (corresponding to the object of the corresponding active).

The weak-root classes are designated by means of two letters, the first of which indicates which radical is weak (using the *P-ʕ-L* system), the second specifying which weak consonant might disappear or be transformed in the conjugation. Thus *P:y* means that the first radical is a *y*. The main classes, beside regular (strong) roots, are *P:y* (with two subgroups), *P:n*, *P:ʔ*, *ʕ:w*, *ʕ:y*, *L:y* (often named *L:h* because the grapheme *H* is used here when there is no suffix), *L:ʔ* and *ʕ:ʕ* (verbs where the last two radicals are identical). For all these roots, the conjugation presents some special features in the various tenses and *binyanim*. When *ʕ* or *ḥ* is one of the radicals, changes occur in the vocalisation.

The tense system is among the most controversial and the most variable through the periods of Hebrew. The heterogeneity of Biblical Hebrew manifests itself the most strikingly precisely here.

It seems that the archaic system may be reduced to a dual opposition of two tenses (the traditional label 'aspect' for these is unjustified and rests on indefensible arguments): past and non-past (present and future in one, though the beginnings of a separate present already show), appearing in different guises in two main contexts: sentence-initial and non-initial. The jussive (the volitive mood, order, imperative, subjunctive) is homonymous with the non-past in most, but not all verb classes.

Like Semitic in general, Hebrew has a prefix conjugation and a suffix conjugation. In non-initial contexts (when a noun, a conjunction or an adverb opens the clause, in negation, etc.), the former is a non-past (present-future) and a jussive (imperative) and the latter a past. Note that occasionally, and almost always co-occurring with a coordinated suffixed form, the prefix form may stand for repeated, habitual actions in the past. This is a deviation from the straightforward pattern, yet it does not qualify for analysis as aspect. Sentence-initially, on the other hand, a prefix form preceded by *wa*+gemination of the next consonant (except when there is *yǝ*-) expresses the past and the suffix form preceded by *wǝ*-, with final stress in the first person singular and second person singular masculine (instead of penultimate) is non-past, actually very often a jussive because of the nature of the text. The following is a tabular representation of the four basic tense forms and the jussive, using two roots: *Q-W-M*, a *ʕ:w* root used here in the *på̄ʕal* for 'get up', and *D-B-R* in the *piʕʕēl* 'speak, talk', in the second person singular masculine, with the prefix *t*- or suffix *-tå̄*.

| | Sentence-initial | Non-initial |
|---|---|---|
| Past | wa-t-t'å̄qå̄m, wa-t-tǝđabb'ēr | q'amtå̄, dibb'artå̄ |
| Nonpast | wǝ-'qamt'å̄, wǝ-đibbart'å̄ | tå̄q'ūʷm, tǝđabb'ēr |
| Jussive | | tå̄q'ōm, tǝđabb'ēr |

For *D-B-R* there is syncretism, only one type of prefix form, but the stress difference is found in the suffix forms. For *Q-W-M*, the non-initial non-past has a long *ū*ʷ (from an older *\*taqu:m-u* with an indicative ending), whereas the initial past and the jussive

have a vowel with no *māter lectiōnis* in the same position (the differentiation *å/ō* is secondary). It is important to notice that this verb class exhibits a stress difference between the otherwise homonymous prefix past and the jussive. This suggests that the position of the stress must have been relevant in Proto-Hebrew (and in Proto-Semitic): *\*y'aqum* 'he got up'/\**yaq'um* 'let him get up' (cf. \**yaq'u:m-u* 'he gets up'), a distinction that must have disappeared in other verb classes.

This dual system may be explained by the assumption that in the literary dialect an archaic system became amalgamated with an innovative one. Then, the latter 'non-initial' system prevailed and became the only one in later periods of Hebrew (complemented by a new present tense). The 'initial' system has preserved the original decadent prefix-conjugated past, reinforcing it with an auxiliary of the new type: *\*haway(a)* 'was', later reduced to *wa-:-*, to avoid confusion with the new non-past that had become completely homophonous with it in most verb classes. As for the *wə-* + suffix form for non-past and jussive, this may have been more or less artificially created to make the system symmetrical. The fact that the two systems were distributed according to position in the sentence is not hard to explain. Proto-Hebrew must have had strict VSO order, whereas Biblical Hebrew shows gradual relaxation of this and the slow emergence of SVO (cf. the parallel phenomenon in Arabic). Thus, the old morphology was associated with the old word order and the new morphology with the new word order.

The opposite roles of prefix and suffix conjugations in the two contexts inspired the term 'converted tenses' for those preceded by *w-*, itself called 'waw conversive'. The term 'waw consecutive' is still very common, based on the contestable assumption that for its origin it is to be identified with the conjunction *wə* 'and' used as a link with what precedes, in a system where the verb is claimed to express aspect with relation to the preceding sentence, rather than tense. This is untenable. Secondarily, however, and independently of tense use, the conversive *waw* came indeed to be identified by the speakers of Biblical Hebrew as a conjunction, an understandable case of popular etymology, hence the creation of the *wə-* + suffix forms, and, more importantly, the use of the true conjunction *wə-* 'and' in the beginning of sentences, even texts (e.g. the beginning of Exodus vs the beginning of Deuteronomy), as a stylistic convention, before nouns, demonstratives, etc., as well.

After Late Biblical Hebrew the converted (*w*-marked) forms disappeared. Beginning already in Biblical Hebrew, the active participle gradually took over the expression of the present. The prefix forms were restricted to the function of jussive in Medieval Hebrew (which used a periphrastic expression for the future), but were revived also as a future in subsequent periods. 'Was' plus the active participle has been used as a habitual past from Medieval Hebrew on.

Since conjugation fully specifies the subject in the prefix and suffix conjugations, no subject pronoun is required in the first and second person. On the other hand, the active participle as a present form expresses in itself gender and number only, so that the co-occurrence of an explicit subject, noun or pronoun, is necessary. In Modern Hebrew, a third person pronoun is required in all tenses in the absence of a nominal subject. A third person plural masculine form without any pronoun or nominal subject is used as an impersonal: /hem amru/ 'they said', but /amru/ 'one said, it was said'. The first person distinguishes no gender.

Shown in the chart is the conjugation of the root *K-T-B* 'write' (*pǟʕal*) in Modern Hebrew. Note the alternation due to spirantisation /k/ ~ /x/. In verb-final position, only

/v/ may represent B. In literary usage, past pl. 2 m., f. /ktavt'em/, /ktavt'en/ and future pl. 2 = 3 f. /tixt'ovna/ are also attested. These continue the classical forms.

|  |  | Past | | Future | |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | *Masculine* | *Feminine* | *Masculine* | *Feminine* |  |
| Sg. | 1 | kat'avti | | | | ext'ov |
|  | 2 | kat'avta | kat'avt | tixt'ov | tixtev'i | |
|  | 3 | kat'av | katv'a | yixt'ov | tixt'ov | |
| Pl. | 1 | kat'avnu | | | nixt'ov | |
|  | 2 | kat'avtem | kat'avten | | tixtev'u | |
|  | 3 | katv'u | | | yixtev'u | |

|  | *Present = Active Participle* | | *Passive Participle* ('written') | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Masculine | Feminine | Masculine | Feminine |
| Sg. | kot'ev | kot'evet | kat'uv | ktuv'a |
| Pl. | kotv'im | kotv'ot | ktuv'im | ktuv'ot |

*Infinitive* lixt'ov          *Verbal Noun* ktiv'a ('(the) writing')

In the nominal system, a distinction is made between a masculine and a feminine gender. The gender of objects is arbitrarily assigned. In the singular, feminine is most frequently marked by the ending -*ā̃ʰ* (< \*-*at*), but also by -V*t*. Some nouns are feminine without an external mark: most paired parts of the body (e.g. *ʕayin* 'eye') and a few more (*kikkā̃r* 'loaf'). Some nouns may have either gender (e.g. *š'ɛmɛš* 'sun', only feminine in Modern Hebrew). Beside the singular, there is a restricted dual and a plural. The dual ending -'*ayim* is used to express two units in a few nouns, mainly relating to time units (*šənā̃t'ayim* 'two years'); it marks the plural of paired elements, such as some body parts (*ʕē̃ʸn'ayim* 'two eyes' = 'eyes') and others (e.g. *mɛlqā̃ħ'ayim* 'tongs'). It cannot be freely used, most nouns accept the numeral 'two' only for the expression of double occurrence.

The masculine plural ending is -*ī̃ʸm* and feminine plural is -*ō(ʷ)t*. However, a restricted number of feminine nouns may have the apparently masculine plural ending (e.g. *šā̃nā̃ʰ* 'year', pl. *šā̃nī̃ʸm*) and, more frequently, some masculine nouns may have the feminine plural ending (e.g. *lū̃ʷᵃħ* 'tablet', pl. *lū̃ʷħō̃t*). Syntactically, however, the gender of a plural noun is always the same as in the singular (e.g. *šā̃nī̃ʸm rabbō̃ʷt* 'many years', where the quantifying adjective does carry the feminine plural ending). This morphologically incongruent plural marking may be a remnant of the old polarity system operative in the Semitic languages (see numerals below).

Nouns may change their internal vocalisation when they adopt the plural ending. An extreme and mysterious case is *b'ayit/bā̃ttī̃ʸm* 'house/houses'. The most systematic such change takes place in the case of the bisyllabic so-called 'segholate' nouns. These are characterised by a penultimate stress and a vowel ɛ (called *seghol*) in their last syllable, e.g. *m'ɛlɛk* 'king', *s'ēpɛr* 'book'. These originate in an old CVCC pattern \**malk-* and \**sipr-*, cf. still *malkā̃ʰ* for 'queen' in the feminine. The plural pattern of the segholates is CəCā̃C- – *məlā̃kī̃ʸm* 'kings', *məlā̃kō̃ʷt* 'queens', *səpā̃rī̃ʸm* 'books'. Though many scholars prefer to explain it as a phonetic reduction, this could very well be the survival of the old broken plural (see Chapter 32, page 555).

Nouns may also appear in the construct state, which means that they precede a genitival noun. Here the feminine ending -*ā̃ʰ* becomes -*at*, penultimate *ā̃* becomes ə, -*ayi*- is reduced to -*ē̃ʸ*-, the masculine plural has the ending -*ē̃ʸ* (borrowed from the dual) and some nouns do not change at all. Examples: *šənat* 'year of', *šənō̃ʷt* 'years of', *ʕē̃ʸn* 'eye

of', *ʕēʸnēʸ* 'eyes of', *bēʸṯ* 'house of'; plurals of segholates: *mal(ə)ḵēʸ* 'kings of', *sip̄rēʸ* 'books of', with the archaic singular vocalisation.

Hebrew has altogether three genitival constructions. The only one occurring in Biblical Hebrew consists of a possessum in the construct state followed by the possessor: *bēʸṯ hā̃-ʔīʸš* 'house + of the-man' ('the man's house'). Here the possessum is always understood to be definite and never takes the definite article, but adjectives referring to it do. Moreover, this construction may not be broken up by qualifiers. Adjectives follow the whole group, no matter which noun they refer to (only one of the nouns may be so qualified). Thus *bēʸṯ hā̃-ʔīʸš ha-g-gā̃ḏōʷl* 'house+of the-man the-big (m. sg.)' is ambiguously 'the great man's house' or 'the man's big house'. When the two nouns govern different agreements, ambiguity is dispelled: *mišp'aḥaṯ hā̃-ʔīʸš ha-g-gəḏōʷlā̃ʰ* is only 'the man's big family', for feminine 'big' agrees with 'family', whereas *mišp'aḥaṯ hā̃-ʔīʸš ha-g-gā̃ḏōʷl* is clearly 'the great man's family'. There is no simple expression for 'the great man's big family' in Biblical Hebrew.

In the later stages of Hebrew the role of the above construction was reduced. In Modern Hebrew, it is basically a compounding device only, e.g. /bet xolim/ 'house + of sick-pl.' for 'hospital'. Here an article before the second noun definitises the whole expression: /bet ha-xolim/ 'the hospital'. Plurality is expressed on the first noun: /bate xolim/ 'hospitals' and /bate ha-xolim/ 'the hospitals'.

The other genitival constructions, introduced in Medieval Hebrew, use the genitive particle *šɛl* 'of', still in a possessum–possessor order, and no construct case: MoH /ha-b'ayit šel ha-iš/ 'the-house of the-man'. Here, an indefinite possessum may also occur. Alternatively, one may say /bet-o šel ha-iš/ 'house-his of the-man', where the possessum is always definite and its third person possessive pronominal ending agrees in number and gender with the possessor.

In Biblical Hebrew, pronominal possession is expressed by possessive endings. These are attached to a construct state-like form of the nouns, with archaic vocalisation for the segholates: *malk-īʸ* 'my king', *sip̄r-īʸ* 'my book', *bēʸṯ-īʸ* 'my house', *šənā̃ṯ-īʸ* 'my year', etc. The plurality of the noun is expressed by a palatal element between the noun and the ending (which may be somewhat modified thereby): *ʕēʸn-īʸ* 'my eye', but *ʕēʸn-ay* 'my eyes', *ʕēʸn-ēḵ* 'your (f. sg.) eye', *ʕēʸn-'ayiḵ* 'your (f. sg.) eyes', *ʕēʸn-ōw* 'his eye', *ʕēʸn-ā̃ʸw* 'his eyes' (the last ʸ is traditionally silent) etc. In the feminine plural, the ending -*ōʷṯ* is retained: *šən-ōʷṯ-ay* 'my years'. In Modern Hebrew, a periphrastic construction is used for this with a conjugated form of *šɛl* /šel/ 'of', e.g. /ha-s'efer šeli/ 'my book' ('the-book of + me'). Possessive endings are regularly used in a third kind of genitival construction (see above), occasionally in some kinship terms and other inalienable possessions (/šmi/ beside /ha-šem šeli/ for 'my name') and regularly, again, in idioms (/ma šlomxa/ 'how are you (m. sg.)?', lit. 'what (is) your+peace?'). Contrast /be-libi/ 'in my heart' used for 'inside me', 'in my thought' and /ba-lev šeli/ 'in my heart' in a physical sense.

Qualifying adjectives follow the noun and agree with it in gender, number and definiteness: *ha-m-məlā̃ḵ-ōʷṯ ha-ṭ-ṭōʷḇ-ōʷṯ* 'the good queens' ('the-king-f.pl. the-good-f.pl.'), in contradistinction to the predicative construction where no definiteness agreement is enforced: *ha-m-məlā̃ḵ-ōʷṯ ṭōʷḇ-ōʷṯ* 'the queens are good'.

Adjectives may be derived from nouns by means of the ending -*īʸ*, a device very productive in Modern Hebrew: /sifruti/ 'literary' from /sifrut/ 'literature'. Adjectives may act as nouns as well.

Demonstratives follow the noun-adjective group: *ha-m-malk-ā̃ʰ ha-ṭ-ṭōʷḇā̃ʰ ha-z-zōʔṯ* 'this good queen'. Note the definite articles before all three words, omissible en bloc for

stylistic variation. In predicative constructions the demonstrative is initial: $z\bar{o}^{\textipa{P}}\underline{t}$ $malk\bar{\bar{a}}^h$ $\underline{t}\bar{o}^w\underline{b}\bar{\bar{a}}^h$ 'this (is a) good queen'.

As examples have already shown, the definite article is a prefix $ha$ + gemination of the next consonant.

The numeral 'one' is a regular adjective. From 'two' up, cardinal numerals precede the noun (in Biblical Hebrew they may occasionally follow as well). 'Two' appears in the construct case. From 'three' to 'ten' (and with some exceptions from 'eleven' to 'nineteen') the external gender mark of the numerals (the 'teen' part for the latter group) is the opposite of what one would expect: $\textipa{P}arb\bar{a}\textipa{Q}\text{-}\bar{\bar{a}}^h$ $b\bar{\bar{a}}n\text{-}\bar{\imath}^y m$ 'four sons', where the numeral has the ending $\text{-}\bar{\bar{a}}^h$, elsewhere a feminine, before a masculine noun, vs $\textipa{P}arba\textipa{Q}$ $b\bar{\bar{a}}n\text{-}\bar{o}^w\underline{t}$ 'four daughters', where the feminine numeral carries no ending. Traditional grammars sometimes adopt the misleading practice of labelling the numerals with $\text{-}\bar{\bar{a}}^h$ 'feminine' and stating that they co-occur with masculine nouns. This 'incongruence' is a residue of the old polarity system (see Chapter 31, page 549). Nouns appear in the plural after numerals, with few exceptions: 'year', 'day' and a few more have the singular after the round numerals from 'twenty', e.g. $\textipa{P}arb\bar{a}\textipa{Q}\bar{\imath}^y m$ $\check{s}\bar{\bar{a}}n\text{-}\bar{\bar{a}}^h$ 'forty years'.

Ordinal numerals, formed by means of the $\text{-}\bar{\imath}^y$ ending for 'second' to 'tenth', are adjectives: $ha\text{-}y\text{-}y\bar{o}^w m$ $h\bar{\bar{a}}\text{-}r\textschwa\underline{b}\bar{\imath}^y\textipa{Q}\bar{\imath}^y$ 'the fourth day'. From 'eleven' they are homonymous with the cardinal numbers, but exhibit the syntax of adjectives: $ha\text{-}y\text{-}y\bar{o}^w mh\bar{\bar{a}}\text{-}\textipa{P}arb\bar{a}\textipa{Q}\bar{\imath}^y m$ 'the fortieth day'.

The syntactic function of nouns in the sentence is expressed by means of prepositions. The subject carries no mark. The direct object has the preposition $\textipa{P}\varepsilon\underline{t}$ when the object is definite. Contrast: $r\bar{\bar{a}}\textipa{P}\text{'}\bar{\imath}^y\underline{t}\bar{\imath}^y$ $\textipa{P}\bar{\imath}^y\check{s}$ 'I + saw (a) man/someone' and $r\bar{\bar{a}}\textipa{P}\text{'}\bar{\imath}^y\underline{t}\bar{\imath}^y$ $\textipa{P}\varepsilon\underline{t}$ $h\bar{\bar{a}}\textipa{P}\bar{\imath}^y\check{s}$ 'I+saw acc. the+man'. Proper names as objects have $\textipa{P}\varepsilon\underline{t}$ even without the definite article. On the other hand, nouns with possessive endings, though otherwise definite, receive no $\textipa{P}\varepsilon\underline{t}$ in most cases in Biblical Hebrew. Three prepositions are written joined to the following word: $l\textschwa\text{-}$ 'to', $b\textschwa\text{-}$ 'in, with' (instrumental)' and $miC\text{-}$ (with gemination of the next consonant, an alternative to $min$) 'from'. The rest ($\textipa{Q}al$ 'on', etc.) are separate words. They are conjugated by means of possessive endings of the singular type $l\text{-}\bar{\imath}^y$ 'to-me' or the plural type $\textipa{Q}\bar{\bar{a}}l\text{-}ay$ 'on-me'. For pronominal object (accusative), the separate word $\textipa{P}\bar{o}^{(w)}\underline{t}\text{-}\bar{\imath}^y$, etc., for 'me' and so on had been available since the beginnings of Biblical Hebrew, but alternatively in Biblical Hebrew and in archaising style later, object suffix pronouns attached to the verb were also used, e.g. $r\bar{\bar{a}}\textipa{P}\text{'}\bar{\imath}^y\underline{t}\bar{\imath}^y$ $\textipa{P}\bar{o}^w\underline{t}\text{-}\bar{o}^w$ 'I+saw him' or $r\textschwa\textipa{P}\bar{\imath}^y\underline{t}\bar{\imath}^y w$ with the pronominal suffix.

In the pronominal domain, three sets of pronouns are to be listed: independent subject or predicate pronouns, object pronoun suffixes and possessive pronoun suffixes. The latter are subdivided according to whether the preceding noun is singular or plural (see above). The object pronoun suffixes are homonymous with the singular possessive set, except in the first person singular, not considering the connective vowels (which are not specified in Table 34.4). No gender distinction exists for the first person.

For the indicative prefix-conjugated non-past, in those persons where no further suffix is used, the third person singular masculine/feminine object suffixes are $\text{-}nn\bar{u}^w/\text{-}nn\bar{\bar{a}}^h$. Thus, $yi\check{s}m\bar{o}r$ 'he guards/will guard' (indic.) or 'let him guard' (jussive) is disambiguated: $yi\check{s}m\textschwa r\text{'}\varepsilon nn\bar{u}^w$ 'he guards/will guard him' vs $yi\check{s}m\textschwa r\text{'}eh\bar{u}^w$ 'let him guard him'. These $\text{-}nn\text{-}$ marked suffixes are not to be confused with the distributionally unlimited use of $\text{-}n\text{-}$ between prefix-conjugated verbs and object suffixes, which are traces of the old 'energic' mood of the verb (for 'he *did* do; he did indeed'), the type $yi\check{s}m\textschwa r\text{'}enh\bar{u}^w$ 'he does/will indeed guard him'.

**Table 34.4** Personal Pronouns

| | | Independent Masculine | Feminine | Object ~ Sg. Poss. Masculine | Feminine | Pl. Poss. Masculine | Feminine |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sg. | 1 | ʔănī̆ʸ=ʔā̆nōkī̄ʸ | | -nī̄ʸ (obj.)/-ī̄ʸ (poss.) | | -ay | |
| | 2 | ʔattā̆ʰ | ʔattə | -kā̆ | -ēk | -'ɛʸkā̆ | -ayik |
| | 3 | hū̄ʷʔ | hī̄ʸʔ | -ō̆ʷ/-w/-hū̄ʷ | -ā̆h/-hā̆ | -ā̆ʸw | -'ɛʸhā̆ |
| Pl. | 1 | ʔăn'aḥnū̄ʷ | | -'nū̄ʷ (unstressed) | | -'ēʸnū̄ʷ | |
| | 2 | ʔattɛm | ʔatt'en(ā̆ʰ) | -kɛm | -kɛn | -ēʸkɛm | -ēʸkɛn |
| | 3 | h'em(mā̆ʰ) | h'ennā̆ʰ | -m | -n | -ēʸhɛm | -ēʸhɛn |

The basic Biblical Hebrew word order is VSO with the converted form of the verb and 'verb-second' with a simple tense verb, where the first word is a topic. Medieval Hebrew is still basically VSO, but no more converted tenses are used. However, from Late Biblical Hebrew on, SVO has been becoming more and more common, and it is the basic order in Modern Hebrew. The adoption of the original active participle as a present tense encouraged the adoption of SVO.

Interrogative pronouns and the yes–no interrogative particle (Biblical Hebrew *hă-*, later *haʔim*) or the introduction of a question with an obvious answer ('isn't it the case that … ?') *hălōʔ* or *hărēʸ* are always sentence-initial. The negative *lōʔ* 'not' precedes the predicate. The rule that required that negation in the present tense should be effected by a pre-subject *ʔēʸn* (originally the negation of *yɛš* 'there is') is widely disregarded in spoken Modern Hebrew. Contrast normative /eyn-i/ or /eyn'eni roce/ 'not-I want' and colloquial /ani lo roce/ 'I not want' for 'I don't want'.

Biblical Hebrew has no copula in the present. In later stages, a third person pronoun in agreement with the subject may stand for a present tense copula, obligatorily in Modern Hebrew if the predication is of some complexity: /g'ila hi ha-mora/ 'Gila is (= she) the-teacher' (definite predication). Hebrew has no verb 'to have'. Possessive predication is expressed by means of constructions like 'there is to': *yɛš l-*. An interesting development of colloquial Hebrew is that when the element possessed (the grammatical subject) is definite, it receives the accusative preposition /et/, as if it were the object of a transitive verb 'have': /yeš li et ha-b'ayit/ 'I have the house'.

Relative constructions follow the Semitic pattern (see page 558): *ha-m-mā̆qō̆ʷm ʔăšɛr ʔ attā̆ʰ ʕō̆ʷmēđ ʕā̆lā̆ʸw* 'the place that you (m. sg.) standing on+it' for 'the spot on which you are standing'. The invariable relative marker is *ʔăšɛr* in Biblical Hebrew, originally a noun meaning 'place' with a functional change 'where' > 'that'. Medieval Hebrew uses the archaic particle *šɛ-*, which is also extended to many other subordinating functions. In Modern Hebrew /še-/ is the relative particle and the complementiser (Biblical Hebrew *kīʸ*, cf. Biblical Hebrew *ʔăm'artīʸ kīʸ* … , Modern Hebrew /am'arti še- … / 'I said that …'). In Modern Hebrew there is a tendency to bring forward the referential pronoun of the relative construction right after the relative pronoun: /ha-makom še-alav ata omed/ (see above).

# Bibliography

Chomsky (1957) is a vividly written, scholarly but no longer up-to-date history of Hebrew, with special emphasis on its role among the Jews. Kutscher (1982), a posthumous publication, shows some unfortunate

traces of being unfinished, yet is extremely rich in information on the history of the language and is characterised by a depth of scholarship.

For Biblical Hebrew, Gesenius (1910) is an indispensable classic; Blau (1976) is a rigorously scientific descriptive grammar, recommended to the student; Lambert (1972) is perhaps the linguistically most solid grammar. Segal (1927) is a clear descriptive grammar for all students of post-Biblical Hebrew. Coffin and Bolozky (2005) is an excellent grammar of Modern Hebrew.

Further recommended are the articles on 'Hebrew Language' and 'Pronunciations of Hebrew' in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1972, vol. 13, pp. 1120–45 and vol. 16, pp. 1560–662); these are up-to-date presentations by C. Brovender, J. Blau, E.Y. Kutscher, E. Goldenberg, E. Eytan and S. Morag.

# References

Blau, J. 1976. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden)

Chomsky, W. 1957. *Hebrew, the Eternal Language* (The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia)

Coffin, E.A. and Bolozky, S. 2005. *A Reference Grammar of Modern Hebrew* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge)

*Encyclopaedia Judaica*. 1972 (Keter, Jerusalem)

Gesenius, W. 1910. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, as Edited and Enlarged by the Late E. Kautsch*, 2nd English edn, ed. A.E. Cowley (Clarendon Press, Oxford)

Kutscher, E.Y. 1982. *A History of the Hebrew Language* (The Magnes Press, Jerusalem; E.J. Brill, Leiden)

Lambert, M. 1972. *Traité de grammaire hébraïque*, reprinted with additions (Gerstenberg, Hildesheim)

Segal, M.H. 1927. *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Clarendon Press, Oxford)