A Linguistic Introduction to the Origins and Characteristics of Early Mishnaic Hebrew as it Relates to Biblical Hebrew

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ABSTRACT

Scholarship has failed to clearly establish the linguistic relationship between Mishnaic Hebrew and Biblical Hebrew. This article serves as an introduction to the problem by: (1) discussing the diachronic development of Mishnaic Hebrew, (2) providing a synchronic linguistic analysis of Mishnaic Hebrew in relation to Biblical Hebrew, and (3) offering direction for future research. The discussion highlights the proposal that Mishnaic Hebrew developed alongside Biblical Hebrew as a popular oral language that was later significantly influenced by Aramaic. The present study shows the non-systematic relationship between Biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew, and therefore concludes that students of Biblical Hebrew must exercise caution in looking to Mishnaic Hebrew to interpret the Old Testament.

A   ORIGINS OF MISHNAIC HEBREW

1   Corpus

Mishnaic Hebrew (MH), also referred to as Rabbinic Hebrew (RH), characterizes Hebrew literature produced by rabbinic scholars from approximately 70 C.E. to 400-500 C.E. (thus, the common phrase *leshon hakhamim* "the language of the sages").[1] Within this timeframe, MH can be divided into the earlier language of the *tannaim* "repeaters" (ca. 70-250 C.E.) and the latter language of the *amoraim* "speakers" (ca. 3rd-5th century C.E.). Tannaitic Hebrew is found in the Mishna, Tosefta, Halakhic Midrashim, and Seder Olam Rabbah, while Amoraic Hebrew characterizes the Jerusalem Talmud, Haggadic Midrashim, and the Babylonian Talmud.

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[1]   Moshe Bar-Asher, "Mishnaic Hebrew: An Introductory Survey," in *Literature of the Sages: Midrash and Targum Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science and the Language of Rabbinic Literature* (vol. 2; ed. Shmuel Safrai ל''ז, et. al.; CRINT 2.3b; Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 2006), 568; Baruch Levine, "Hebrew (Postbiblical)," in *Beyond Babel: A Handbook for Biblical Hebrew and Related Langauges* (ed. John Kaltner and Steven L. McKenzie; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 157; Cf. Moses H. Segal, *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Oxford: Clarendon; repr., 1978), 1.

Debate exists as to whether external texts like the Copper Scroll and the letters of Simon Bar Kochba fall within the boundaries of the Tannaitic corpus. Both texts are dated closely to other early Mishnaic sources (ca. 1st century B.C.E.) and both exhibit MH tendencies.[2] However, Ian Young helpfully describes the difficulty of relating such external sources to a MH corpus,

> One must be cautious of baldly stating that the Bar Kochba letters are "written in MH."… [These] letters, therefore, remind us of the important fact that, despite the size of the corpus, the rabbinic texts do not show us all of the varieties of Hebrew in the Tannaitic era.[3]

Therefore, the synchronic analysis of this work will draw upon rabbinic texts found in the Mishnah, while making note of the grammatical and morphological "overlap" observed in MH and the Copper Scroll and the Bar Kochba letters.

2   Origins of Tannaitic Hebrew (MH1)

Prior to the 20th century, scholarship generally accepted Abraham Geiger's theory that MH was a "Hebraized Aramaic" created by the rabbis for their halakhic discussions.[4] However, in 1927 Moses H. Segal produced his MH grammar arguing that MH was instead a natural outgrowth of biblical Hebrew (BH). He writes:

> Far from being an artificial scholastic jargon, MH is essentially a popular and colloquial dialect. Its extensive literature does not consist of books composed by literary men in their study. It is rather a record of sayings, oral teaching, and discussions of men of the people on a variety of subjects… Its vocabulary and its grammar both bear the stamp of colloquial usage and popular development.[5]

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[2]   Miguel Pérez Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew* (trans. John Elwode; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 3; Bar-Asher, "Mishnaic Hebrew," 569. Cf. Elisha Qimron, "The Nature of DSS Hebrew and Its Relations to BH and MH," in *Diggers at the Well: Proceeding of a Third International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira* (ed. Takamitsu Muraoka and John F. Elwode; STDJ 36; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 234.

[3]   Ian Young and Robert Rezetko, *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts: An Introduction to Approaches and Problems* (vol. 1; London: Equinox, 2008), 237.

[4]   Edward Y. Kutscher, "Hebrew Language: Mishnaic," in *EncJu* (Woodbridge, Conn.: Macmillan Reference USA, 2006): 639-50, 640.

[5]   Segal, *A Grammar*, 6.

Contemporary scholarship has followed Segal's basic premise to a certain degree.[6] From the standpoint of vocabulary, John Elwode writes,

> the overall lack of new words in the extra-biblical corpora and the overlap of what new material there is with words previously regarded as "rabbinic" innovations, supports the notion of a *constantly* developing, seamless, Hebrew language.[7]

Words such as "seamless" may overstate the case; however, it remains highly probable that MH existed as a spoken dialect in and around Palestine during the Second Temple period, and possibly even before the exile.[8]

Recent epigraphic discoveries of inscriptions, legal documents, and letters from the 1st centuries B.C.E. and C.E. display a common use of MH during this period.[9] These epigraphs, mostly associated the fore-mentioned Bar Kochba letters, provide additional support to the theory that MH was a living spoken and written language. Chaim Rabin argues that the amalgamation of BH and MH found in texts like the Bar Kochba letters and the Copper Scroll provide evidence "for the colloquial character of MH."[10]

The notion that MH existed orally for centuries prior to the Tannaitic period is generally accepted, but what was the process by which it became a

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[6] Kutscher highlights two weaknesses in Segal's work: (1) he denies Aramaic influences in the development of MH, and (2) his grammar is based solely upon printed MH texts instead of reliable manuscripts. On the relationship between BH, MH, and Aramaic, see Edward Y. Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (ed. Raphael Kutscher; Leiden: Brill, 1982), 119; Moshe Bar-Asher, "The Study of Mishnaic Hebrew Grammar Based on Written Sources: Achievements, Problems, and Tasks," in *Studies in Mishnaic Hebrew* (ed. Moshe Bar-Asher; ScrHier 37; Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1998), 19-20; Mireille Hadas-Lebel, *Historie de la Langue Hébraïque: Des Origines à l'Époque de la Mishna* (Paris: Peeters Press, 1995), 159.

[7] John Elwode, "Developments in Hebrew Vocabulary Between Bible and Mishnah," in *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira: Proceedings of a Symposium held at Leiden University 11-14 December 1995* (ed. Takamitsu Muraoka and John F. Elwode; STDJ 26; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 50.

[8] Angel Sáenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (trans. John Elwode; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 166; Moshe Bar-Asher, "A Few Remarks on Mishnaic Hebrew and Aramaic in Qumran Hebrew," in *Diggers at the Well: Proceeding of a Third International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira* (ed. Takamitsu Muraoka and John F. Elwode; STDJ 36; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 18-19. Qimron controversially asserts that there is no evidence for the use of MH in the Second Temple period. See Qimron, "The Nature of DSS Hebrew," 235.

[9] Levine, "Hebrew (Postbiblical)," 158, 178-180.

[10] Chaim Rabin, "The Historical Background of Qumran Hebrew," in *Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Chaim Rabin and Yigael Yadin; ScrHier 4; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1965), 149.

literary language? Kutscher argues that a Hebrew-Aramaic mix developed after the exile and was used throughout Palestine until the 1st century B.C.E. when Rome invaded Judea.[11] Instead of MH flowing directly out of BH as Segal argued, it is more likely that both BH and MH developed synchronically as *diglossic* dialects.[12] If this was indeed the case, BH would have functioned as a "high" but dead literary language and MH the "low" vernacular.[13]

According to Kutscher, foreign attacks on the Jewish state, their political center, and their national identity, served as the impetus to BH phasing out and MH replacing it as the standard literary form. MH then became the new "high" language with Aramaic and Greek becoming the vulgar tongues. Angel Sáenz-Badillos describes the current discussion regarding the linguistic milieu of the 1st century C.E. by stating:

> Nowadays, the most extreme positions have been abandoned and it is almost unanimously agreed that RH, Aramaic, and, to some extent, Greek were spoken in this period by large sections of the population of Palestine, although there are differences in the geographical distributions of each language and its importance.[14]

The diachronic development of BH to MH1 can be compared to a stream that is continually moving in one general direction but sometimes divides into parallel branches that sometimes reunite later downstream.

3   Origins of Amoraic Hebrew (MH2)

MH2 reflects a period of Hebrew literature when MH was no longer a spoken language but had been completely replaced in Palestine by Galilean Aramaic.[15] Consequently, the dialect is characterized by an abundance of Aramaisms. During this period Hebrew copyists were working with two literary dialects, and given the authority of the biblical text, BH forms were frequently re-incorporated into their writing. The result was, as Kutscher warns, a dialect that

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[11]   Kutscher, *A History*, 115. For a linguistic argument supporting Aramaic influences on MH and Kutscher's thesis, See Pérez Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 5-6.

[12]   See Gary A. Rendsburg, *Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew* (AOS 72; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1990); the chapter by Young and Rezetko, "Dialects and Diglossia," 173-200; Ian Young, *Diversity in Pre-Exilic Hebrew* (FAT 5; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1993), 80-81; Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 3-4.

[13]   Young notes that grammar tends to be simplified in the low form of the language and this could explain the transition of verb tenses in MH to a tripartite past, present, and future versus BH's perfect and imperfect (*Diversity in Pre-Exilic Hebrew*, 79).

[14]   Sáenz-Badillos, *A History*, 170.

[15]   Kutscher, "Hebrew Language: Mishnaic," 640.

does not serve as "a trustworthy basis for the study of MH."[16] For this reason, many studies devoted to MH tend to focus only upon MH1.

Some basic characteristics of the MH2 dialect illuminate its conglomerate origin and development. Palestinian *amoraim* tended to use a *nun* preformative when constructing the first person singular imperfect instead of an *aleph*. In Genesis Rabba 29 we find שנברך "that I should bless" instead of שאברך, and נבור "shall I choose" instead of אבור in *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*.[17] Bar-Asher asserts that this phenomenon demonstrates the influence of Galilean Aramaic upon MH2.[18] Other characteristics of MH2 are the use of שנה to introduce a text instead of אמר "say" (likely due to the establishment of formal texts called משנה), and the demonstrative הללו.[19] In a recent study of MH2, Yohanan Breuer concluded that MH2 underwent continual internal development, and despite being a non-spoken language, it was far from being linguistically "dead."[20]

B   LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF MISHNAIC HEBREW

This discussion follows the tendency of most scholars in heeding Kutscher's warning about the unreliable nature of MH2. Consequently, the traits of MH described below are based upon earlier Tannaitic literature. Using BH as a comparative foil, we will examine issues of orthography, phonology, morphology, grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. Morphology, grammar, and syntax will be organized and discussed according to various parts of speech.

1   Orthography

Vowels. MH demonstrates an increased use of *matres lectionis* as compared to BH. Long vowels like $\bar{o}$ and $\bar{u}$ are frequently spelled with *waw* (e.g., שומר "guarding" and כותב "writing"), and *i*-class vowels are represented with *yod*, as seen in ליקרות "to call" (cf. BH לקרות) and דויד "David" (cf. BH דוד).[21] Occasionally, even *aleph* was used to indicate an *a*-class vowel (e.g., שיארה

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[16]   Kutscher lists the following as "good manuscripts" for the study of MH: "the Kaufman manuscript of the Mishnah (entirely vocalized), the Parma manuscript of the Mishnah (partly vocalized), the Cambridge manuscript published by W. H. Lowe (unvocalized), and fragments from the Cairo *Genizah*." See Kutscher, "Hebrew Language: Mishnaic," 639-41; Pérez Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 1-2;

[17]   Bar-Asher, "Mishnaic Hebrew: An Introductory Survey," 577-78.

[18]   Bar-Asher, "Mishnaic Hebrew: An Introductory Survey, 577.

[19]   Yohanan Breuer proposes sixteen linguistic features of MH2. See his "On the Hebrew Dialect of *Āmōrā'im* in the Babylonian Talmud," in *Studies in Mishnaic Hebrew* (ed. Moshe Bar-Asher; ScrHier 37; Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1998), 132-58.

[20]   Breuer, "On the Hebrew Dialect," 149-50.

[21]   Kutscher, "Hebrew Language: Mishnaic," 642.

"caravan").[22] This is also seen in the Babylonian tradition with the final diph-thong *ay* being represented by *aleph-yod* as in בנאי "my sons."[23] Segal notes the vowel change from *ē* to *û*, like in אום "mother" (cf. BH אם) and שום "name" (cf. BH שם), is unprecedented in BH but observed in MH.[24]

Consonants. When used as consonants or sufformatives, *yod* and *waw* were often doubled as in מייבמים "contract levirate marriage" or בניי "my sons."[25] In MH it is common for *aleph* to lose its consonantal value (e.g., שאר becoming שר "remain") or display *aphaeresis* (e.g., אלעזר becoming לעזר "Eliezer"). [26] It is also not uncommon to see interchange between *sin* and *samekh* (e.g., חרש and חרס "shard") or *bet* and *waw* (e.g., יווני and יבנה "Jab-neh").[27] A pattern (or confusion) arose within MH of treating *lamed-aleph* verbs as if they were *lamed-heh* verbs, resulting in forms such as קרינו "we call" (cf. BH קראנו).[28] Increasingly, forms beginning with *yod* were replaced with *waw* like in ורד (cf. BH ירד "child").

2   Phonology

Gutturals. The spread of the Greek language throughout the urban centers of the ancient world created confusion with regard to Hebrew phonetics. Greek transcriptions indicate a weakening of the gutturals—the laryngeal consonants (*aleph* and *heh*) and the pharyngeal consonants (*het* and *ayin*).[29] Statements in the Talmud indicate that there were people residing in Galilee who could not distinguish between any of the gutturals (*Baraita*, ca. 300 C.E.).[30] Kutscher asserts that this statement communicates the exception (i.e. Greek speaking Galileans) and not the rule.[31] However, if Jews were fully pronouncing guttur-als during this time, Kutscher must explain the abundant orthographic variation witnessed in MH, such as איד and עיד "festival," היכן and איכן "where?" אוממות and עוממות "dim," and אגדה and הגדה "tradition/legend."[32] The form שהצלכם

[22] Levine, "Hebrew (Postbiblical)," 161.

[23] Sáenz-Badillos, *A History*, 180.

[24] Segal, *A Grammar*, 24.

[25] Gotthelf Bergsträsser, *Introduction to the Semitic Languages: Text Specimens and Grammatical Sketches* (trans. eter T. Daniels; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 72-73.

[26] Pérez Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 11.

[27] Sáenz-Badillos, *A History*, 182.

[28] Pérez Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 11.

[29] Pérez Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 11.

[30] Segal, *A Grammar*, 27.

[31] Kutscher, *A History*, 120. Supporting Kutscher's view, Fernández writes, "There is clear evidence that *het* continued to receive a guttural pronunciation. Even in the amoraic era, the Greek word κλεπσυδρα 'bowl' was transcribed as חלף סדרא (Genesis Rabbah 49)." See Pérez Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 12.

[32] Pérez Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 12; Segal, *A Grammar*, 27; Levine, "Hebrew (Postbiblical)," 161.

"who are with you" found in the Bar Kochba letters, appears to be a confused spelling of the form אצל.[33]

Mem-Nun Sound Shift. A *mem-nun* shift began to occur during the period of late biblical Hebrew (LBH) due to the encroaching influence of Aramaic.[34] In Nehemiah 3:15 the name שלום is spelled שלון, and approximately thirty times in the latter books of the Old Testament ין– is used as a plural noun ending.[35] This pattern became increasingly more common in MH despite the fact that early copyists did not like it. Kutscher notes that in the Kaufman manuscript, copyists repeatedly "corrected" a final *nun* to *mem*. The ין– ending dominates other texts like the Copper Scroll—observed in forms like ככרין "talents" and קברין "graves." In MH this sound shift is also witnessed in undeclined nouns (e.g., אדן > אדם "man"), verb sufformatives, and plural noun and participle sufformatives.[36] From these examples Kutscher concludes, "This sound change must have been operative throughout the whole territory of Palestine and Syria."[37]

3   Independent Pronouns

Morphology. The common BH forms אנכי (1cs) and אנחנו (1cp), which were dropping out in LBH, were replaced by the period of MH with אני (1cs) and אנו (1cp).[38] The third person masculine pronoun הם is frequently replaced with הן, and either form can be used for both genders. The second person masculine singular אתה is frequently replaced with the feminine equivalent את.[39] Levine writes that independent personal pronouns in MH are "symptomatic of the character of [MH] in general and [are] the result of three forces: (1) the background of BH, (2) the infusion of Aramaic, and (3) internal Hebrew developments."[40]

Grammar and Syntax. Somewhat similar to BH, MH utilizes the personal pronouns to communicate emphasis, as in הקדוש ברוך הוא "the holy one, blessed be he" (SDt 19), and third person pronouns occur more as a copula (e.g., אני הוא הטהור "I am pure"[Naz 8.1]).[41] Occasionally, MH will place the pronoun proleptically before the object, as in אין עומדין לו לאדם "they do not stand by him—by the man" (Abot 2.3). וכן הוא אומר "and in the same sense it

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[33] Young and Rezetko, *Linguistic Dating of the Biblical Text*, 233.

[34] Kutscher, *A History*, 121-22.

[35] Bar-Asher, "Mishnaic Hebrew: An Introductory Survey," 571.

[36] Kutscher, *A History*, 121.

[37] Kutscher, *A History*, 122.

[38] Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 18.

[39] Sáenz-Badillos, *A History*, 185.

[40] Levine, "Hebrew (Postbiblical)," 162.

[41] Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 19.

says" is a common tannaitic phrase and reflects idiomatic use of the pronoun used in *midrashim* to introduce texts and confirm examples of exegesis.[42]

4   Possessive and Relative Pronouns

MH developed an independent possessive pronoun שֶׁל (e.g., שֶׁלִי "mine") and a prefixed relative pronoun -שֶׁ which occur alongside the common BH form אֲשֶׁר.[43] These two forms seem to be related with the possessive pronoun being developed by adding the preposition ל to the relative pronoun (cf. possession in BH, אֲשֶׁר ל-).[44] In MH, both forms are added as prefixes to a noun or prono-minal suffix, as in שֶׁלַמֶלֶך "of the king" (note the assimilation of the article) and כל תורה שאין עמה מלאכה "any torah with which there is no work," (Abot 2.2).[45] Given that Hebrew typically uses the construct form to communicate the geni-tive relationship, it is believed that שֶׁל is used primarily to indicate situations where the construct chain might not be clear.[46] The transition away from the BH form אֲשֶׁר is seen in the Copper Scroll where the possessive pronoun שֶׁל occurs 17 times and אֲשֶׁר is not used once.[47]

5   Pronominal Suffixes

As with pronouns, there is frequent interchange between *mem* and *nun* in MH pronominal endings. Significant change from BH suffixes can be seen in the transition of the second masculine singular form from ךָ- (דְבָרְךָ "your word") to ךְ– (דְבָרֵךְ).[48] MH also tends to use a long spelling (אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם "their fathers," cf. BH אֲבוֹתָם) when adding a third person pronominal suffix to an ות– ending.[49] Despite these occurrences, there is significant decrease in the use of prono-minal suffixes due to the presence of the possessive pronoun. For example, instead of seeing בֵתִי "my house," one would likely find הַבַיִת שֶׁלִי in MH.[50]

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[42]   Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 20.

[43]   Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 643.

[44]   Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 33.

[45]   Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 50. Kutscher notes that good manuscripts have שֶׁל as a prefix, and it was probably not written independently until the Middle Ages. See Kutscher, *A History*, 130.

[46]   Kutscher, *A History*, 32.

[47]   Florentino Garcia Martinez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition: IQI-4Q273* (vol. 1; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 232-39.

[48]   Kutscher, "Hebrew Language: Mishnaic," 641.

[49]   Moshe Bar-Asher, "Qumran Hebrew Between Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew," in *The Dynamics of Language and Exegesis at Qumran* (ed. Devorah Dimant and Reinhard G. Kratz; FAT 2. Reihe 35; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 4-10.

[50]   Levine, "Hebrew (Postbiblical)," 167.

6   Noun Mishkalim

MH noun patterns remain fairly consistent with those seen in BH, but transitions seem to have occurred. The qĕṭîlâ pattern is rarely seen in BH as a verbal-noun pattern, but it is used 130 times in the Mishnah alone.[51] Segal notes that this form became a *nomen actionis* for the *Qal* and often replaces the BH infinitive construct (דריסה "treading," רחיצה "washing").[52]

MH developed the qāṭôl pattern as a *nomina agentis*. In BH nouns of agency are often patterned after the participle form קוטל. The following examples demonstrate the change observed in MH: טחון "miller," סרוק "wool-comber," and לקוח "buyer."[53] Agency in MH is also expressed by the suffix ‍ן–, as in גזלן "robber."[54]

Many new nouns were developed in MH according to the intensive *Pi'el* conjugation qiṭṭûl.[55] Like the qĕṭîlâ pattern, this intensive conjugation also communicates verbal action, as in כבוד אב ואם "honoring father and mother" (Pea 1.1), and חלול השם "profaning the name" (Abot 4.4).[56]

Suffixes. It is common in MH for the suffix ות to be added to concrete nouns in order to make them abstract. This is seen in אומנות "handicraft," מלכות "kingdom," and עניות "poverty."[57] Pérez Fernández notes that the feminine suffix ת- is an ancient Semitic form strangely retained more in MH than BH.[58] This possibly demonstrates the early influence of other Semitics languages on the spoken patterns of the Hebrew language.

7   Verbs

Conjugations. In MH the *Pu'al* disappears completely except for the participle.[59] Other BH forms drop out as well, such as the cohortative, jussive and infinitive absolute.[60] The *Niph'al* takes on a more diverse function by expressing reflexivity, passivity, and at times incipient action.[61] The increased use of the *Niph'al* in a passive-reflexive manner explains why, in the perfect, the traditional reflexive form *Hitpa'al* develops into *Nitpa'al* borrowing *nun* (e.g.,

[51]   Kutscher, "Hebrew Language: Mishnaic," 645.
[52]   Segal, *A Grammar*, 103.
[53]   Segal, *A Grammar*, 106.
[54]   Sáenz-Badillos, *A History*, 187.
[55]   Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 57.
[56]   Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 57.
[57]   Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 122. See the above section on the *mem-nun* sound shift for changes observed in plural noun endings in MH.
[58]   Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 63.
[59]   Levine, "Hebrew (Postbiblical)," 163.
[60]   Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 105.
[61]   Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 163.

נתפצעו "to be cracked").[62] We also see the development of a *Nuph'al* stem functioning like a *Qal* passive, as in the phrase ונוטל טעם הפירות "the taste of the fruit has been removed" (Sot 9.12).[63] Aramaic influences upon MH are seen in the intensive quadriliteral forms *Pi'lel, Pilpel, Pir'el,* and *Pi'les*, as in ערבב (ערב) "mix, confuse" and דקדק (דקק) "crush."[64]

Characteristics of MH are seen in differing conjugation patterns in the perfect, imperfect, and participle. There are two ways in which the conjugation of the perfect in MH differs from BH: (1) the second person masculine singular form frequently reflects a *plene* spelling (כוננתה "you established") and (2) the second person masculine plural form ends with *nun* (e.g., שמרתן "you guarded").[65] The imperfect changed by (1) eliminating the archaic second and third person feminine plural form תקטלנה and (2) by continuing the Qumran pattern of vocalized *plene* spellings like אקטול "I will kill."[66] With regard to the participle, the feminine ending ת– (e.g., שומרת "guarding") is routinely preferred over the traditional ה– in MH.[67]

Tense and Syntax. Scholars generally agree that a significant shift took place in the Hebrew verbal system with the development of MH. Kutscher writes, "The most revolutionary change between BH and MH occurred in the area of the tenses and moods. Here the verb was entirely reorganized."[68] The subtle beginnings of a tripartite tense system seen in BH become realized in MH.[69] Similar to BH, the perfect is used in MH to denote the simple past. The present is communicated by the participle, as in על השלש דברים העולם אומד "upon three things the world stands" (Abot 1.2), and it is also common for MH to use periphrastic constructions like אתה הולך "you are going" to denote the present. The imperfect form is used to communicate the future tense in subordinate statements (וכן לא יאמרו שניהם "and so the two of them will not be able to say" [Ket 12.1]), but it is regularly reserved to communicate commands or desires in the main clause.[70] The future tense can also be stated using the participle, as in ותחית המתים באה על ידי אליהו "and the resurrection of the dead will come through the hand of Elijah" (Sot 9.15).[71] Continuous action, either past or future, can be communicated by the participle with היה (e.g., שהיהכ הי וזה מת

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[62]   Bar-Asher, "Mishnaic Hebrew: An Introductory Survey," 572.

[63]   Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 95.

[64]   Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 96. See the section on morphology for examples of morphological changes in *lamed-aleph* verbs.

[65]   Kutscher, *A History*, 126.

[66]   Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 106.

[67]   Kutscher, "Hebrew Language: Mishnaic," 644.

[68]   Kutscher, *A History*, 131.

[69]   Amnon Gordon, "The Development of the Participle in Biblical, Mishnaic, and Modern Hebrew," *AAL* 8/3 (1982): 146.

[70]   Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 108.

[71]   Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 108.

(מתפלל על החולים היה אומר זה) "When he prayed for the sick, he used to say, 'This one will live, this one will die'" [Ber 5.5]).[72]

Alongside the development of a tripartite tense system, the *waw*-conversive forms increasingly disappeared. The narrative structures common to BH were replaced with relative (-שׁ), comparative (כנגד "corresponding to," and -ב כיוצא "analogously to"), and conditional (אלמלא "if") clauses, in order to communicate the logical style of the rabbis with increased clarity.[73]

8   Vocabulary

Significant semantic change took place during the transition from MH to BH. Segal's study reports, "Of the 1,350 verbs which are found in the Lexicon of BH, MH has lost 250 verbs, and gained 300 new ones."[74] Kutscher asserts that roughly half of BH vocabulary overlaps with MH. Presently no definitive work has been produced. The following table, adapted from the work of Sarfatti and Kutscher, summarizes some of the elements of semantic change in MH: [75]

(i)   Numerals – "no change whatsoever," except for "second," BH שׁנית > MH שׁניה

(ii)   Parts of the body – "the majority of names survived," change is seen with "nose" BH אף > MH הטם

(iii) Kinship – "most of the terms survived," Aramaic forms for "mother" and "father" אמא ,אבא replace BH אם and אב

(iv)   Notions of time – "basic notions survived," creation of שחרית "morning" and ערבית "evening" based on BH nouns, a new Aramaic form שעה "hour," and עולם shifts from "eternity" (BH) to "world" (MH)

(v)   Clothing – "only one Biblical root preserved," מנעל "footwear"

(vi)   Foodstuff – "basic elements did not change," except BH לחם > MH פת[76]

(vii) Basic human actions – "verbs…survived for the most part," changes seen with "enter" BH בוא > MH כנס (Niph'al); "return" BH שׁוב > MH חזור; "to wish" BH חפוץ > MH רצוה[77]

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[72] Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 137.
[73] Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar*, 198.
[74] Segal, *A Grammar*, 43.
[75] Gab B. Sarfatti, "Mishnaic Vocabulary and Mishnaic Literature as Tools for the Study of Biblical Semantics," in *Studies in Ancient Hebrew Semantics* (ed. T. Muraoka; AbrNSup 4; Louvain, Belgium: Peeters Press, 1995), 36.
[76] Sarfatti notes this semantic transition Kutscher overlooked. See Sarfatti, "Mishnaic Vocabulary and Mishnaic Literature," 37.

C   CONCLUSION

This study has surveyed the issues surrounding the development and characteristic of early MH. It appears highly probable that MH did exist as a living language in and around Palestine in the Second Temple Period, and in many ways developed out of and alongside BH. The features of MH highlighted in this study are characteristic of that development and additionally testify to significant Aramaic influence.

The study of MH is in continual flux, with basic premises being regularly re-visited. Bar-Asher asserts that the way forward is by focusing on a synchronic description of MH that might prepare the way for more fruitful diachronic study. [78] Pérez Fernández's 1999 work *An Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew* contributes significantly to this concern, but one always has to settle upon a corpus before commencing in grammatical analysis. The difficulty with Bar-Asher's way forward is that diachronic commitments to a corpus must be made before synchronic studies can be carried out. Comparative analyses between newer synchronic works like Fernández's and works like the Copper Scroll, the Bar Kochba letters, and Amoraic texts remains a *desideratum*.

Provided these present difficulties, students of the Old Testament must recognize that re-tracing the development of MH back toward BH is a much more challenging task than simply describing changes, and this task may or may not prove useful in shedding light on difficult biblical texts. The parallel streams of BH and MH represented by a possible diglossic setting, present problems for a method of textual dating that builds upon the mere presence of certain MH or BH features. However, with these challenges noted and caution excercised, MH should not be ignored. The Hebrew recorded during the Tannaitic era remains a critical area of study for understanding the history of the Hebrew language.

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[77]   Kutscher, *A History*, 132-40. MH has hundreds of foreign loadwords from Akkadian, Persian, Greek, and Latin. See the pages cited in Kutscher for a more lengthy discussion of these in English.

[78]   See Bar-Asher, "The Study of Mishnaic Hebrew Grammar," 9-42.

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