

UZZI ORNAN, *Diqduq ha-pe w-ha-?ozen (Grammar of Mouth and Ear)*. The Hebrew University Magnes Press, Jerusalem 2016. Pp. 242. Price: \$26.00. ISBN: 978-965-493-824-2.

This is an updated edition of the book *Diqduq ha-Pe w-ha-?ozen (Grammar of Mouth and Ear)* by Uzzi Ornan, who is now in his 90s. Ornan is known for his independent opinions both as a public figure and as a linguist, and his original ideas enrich linguistic discourse in many domains.

Grammar of Mouth and Ear was first published 70 years ago under fascinating circumstances. It was based on a Hebrew grammar course Ornan taught when he was in his early twenties, while he was imprisoned in an internment camp in East Africa during the 1940s.

Ornan was born in Jerusalem in 1923, during the British Mandate, and in his youth he was a member of the Irgun underground militia. At the age of 16 he

helped his commander prepare bombs to booby-trap British mailboxes. The first bomb they built exploded in the commander's hand, killing him and wounding Ornan. The boy managed to escape but from then on he was wanted by the British authorities. At the age of 20 he was captured and sent to a prison camp which was located first in Eritrea and later in Kenya and Sudan. During his four years at the camp Ornan taught a weekly grammar course to his fellow prisoners; the preparation of the lessons kept him busy throughout the week.

Since no grammar books were available in the camp, Ornan had to rely on his own wits to figure out the rules of Hebrew vocalization. In a 2015 paper he wrote: 'For many years after this, I used to say that it was a stroke of luck there were no books at the camp and I could not read the established explanations of the experts. Because of this I had to figure out the hidden rules for myself.'¹ Elsewhere he said: 'My text was a copy of the Bible I had, and by studying it I discovered the rules of vocalization and saw the morphology of the words in a new and different light.'²

The original edition of *Grammar of Mouth and Ear* aimed to impart a thorough understanding of traditional Hebrew vocalization, and was intended for speakers of Hebrew. In the latter aspect it differed from most grammar books that were used by Hebrew speakers at the time, which were intended primarily for learners of the language. Ornan sought to give readers a systematic understanding of the intuitive knowledge they already possessed, but also to instil higher standards of Hebrew usage and improve the readers' proficiency in written and spoken Hebrew. Although he believed spoken Hebrew to be deficient in many respects, especially in the way it was pronounced, he thought it could serve as a basis for learning. At the same time, he believed that in order to instil better standards of speech, learners had to be imbued with respect for their spoken tongue and for the proper pronunciation, and to this end teachers had to be careful of their own speech habits. Being a teacher himself, he took care to speak impeccable Hebrew, and even in his 90s, Ornan, who comes from an East European family,³ takes care to pronounce the pharyngeal consonants *het* and *'ayn*.

The original edition of the book was revolutionary in that its point of departure was the spoken language, an approach Ornan consistently followed in his later writings as well. For example, in one of his articles he complained that the rules adopted by the Academy of the Hebrew Language for unvocalized Hebrew spelling were based on the vocalized spelling,⁴ and emphasized that 'today the rules of unvocalized spelling must be formulated solely from the perspective of the *speaker*, not from the perspective of the *expert on vocalization*. Our rules are intended for the community of people who speak and understand Hebrew; today, unvocalized writing is the only, or at least the primary, means of recording the language they speak, while vocalized spelling is an outdated and little-known means of recording it.'⁵

¹ U. Ornan, 'A New Edition of *Diqduq ha-Pe w-ha-?ozen*', *Akadem* 54 (2015), 7 (in Hebrew).

² From an interview on the Israeli television show *Hotze Israel*, recorded in 2015.

³ Ornan's family was among the first European Jewish families who used Hebrew as their spoken language. His father opened the first Hebrew-speaking kindergarten in Europe, in Warsaw, and his mother taught there. Later Ornan's father also opened a Hebrew college for training kindergarten teachers. During World War I the kindergarten and college were both transferred to Odessa (Y. Porath, *The Life of Uriel Shelah*, [Israel 1989], 19–26 [in Hebrew]).

⁴ U. Ornan, 'A New Approach to the Rules for Non-vocalised Orthography', *Leshonenu La'am* 43 (1992), 169–74, p. 168 (in Hebrew).

⁵ U. Ornan, 'A New Approach', 170 (emphasis in the original).

The new edition of *Grammar of Mouth and Ear*, like the original edition, is intended for Hebrew speakers. However, in this edition Ornan put aside the goal of improving the reader's speech and rephrased the book's objectives, which are now two:

1. To serve as a comprehensive linguistic introduction to Hebrew phonology and morphology;
2. To impart a full understanding of Hebrew vocalization.

Teaching vocalization, which was the central goal of the original edition, is now defined as a secondary goal, and this is no coincidence. On many occasions, including in this book, Ornan pointed to a drawback of the Hebrew script: While the sounds that make up spoken speech follow one another in a linear fashion, the Hebrew script is non-linear: the consonants in a word are represented by letters, whereas most of the vowels are represented by marks appearing below, above or inside the letters. In his opinion, the solution for the difficulties posed by the Hebrew script is to represent all the phonemes, both consonants and vowels, 'in a single channel' (i.e., in the same manner, using letters) — but he concedes that this solution is unfeasible for social (rather than linguistic) reasons. Hence, we must make do with 'slightly improving the existing mode of writing' by formulating rules for unvocalized spelling that represent more of the vowels.⁶ A prominent feature of the new edition is that explanations and examples are given not only in vocalized Hebrew script but also using international transcription symbols. Ornan stresses that this mode of representation closely corresponds to the spoken language: it represents all the sounds that make up the word, in the order they are pronounced.

One might wonder, then, why Ornan regards it as important to teach the traditional rules of vocalization. He is motivated not by a desire to preserve tradition, but rather by linguistic considerations. Although he advocates finding a new method of unvocalized spelling that 'is based on the phonemic structure of the word and does not disregard phonemic elements, yet offers easy rules for reading, and, most importantly, is written in a single channel', he nevertheless regards it important to understand the traditional vocalization system. 'The traditional vocalized script', he stresses, 'will forever remain a beacon that faithfully illuminates the full phonological and morphological structure of our tongue. I believe we should revisit it at all times and at every level of education, including in elementary school, in order to examine the linguistic issues of modern Hebrew by its light'.⁷

Next I shall examine to what extent the new edition meets the objectives Ornan set out for it.

As noted, the book's first objective is to serve as a comprehensive and detailed linguistic introduction to Hebrew phonology and morphology. Ornan's style is readable and suited to a book intended for independent study. He takes the perspective of the reader and engages in a dialogue with the reader. He assumes no prior knowledge except for a command of spoken Hebrew, and provides definitions for basic concepts such as consonant, vowel, syllable, stress, phoneme, *mishqal* (nominal pattern), root, inflection, derivation, etc. Concepts are explained and exemplified in a clear and lucid manner, rendering them accessible to readers with no background in linguistics.

⁶ U. Ornan, *In the Beginning was the Language* (Jerusalem 2013), 221 (in Hebrew).

⁷ U. Ornan, 'Distorted Use of Respected Ancient Signs', *Leshonenu La'am* 55 (2005–6), 151–5, p. 155 (in Hebrew); Ornan, *In the Beginning*, 213.

Some of Ornan's explanations may be edifying even for readers with knowledge of linguistics, such as his explanation of consonant sonority (pp. 23–4), which serves to clarify why the first consonant of the word *yeladim* is followed by a vowel while the first consonant of the word *klavim* is not.⁸ Ornan also addresses the impact of sonority on the morphology of the segolate nouns, explaining why the Hebrew word *nerd* (a kind of aromatic plant), for example, can be pronounced without adding a vowel between the last two consonants, whereas the word *nedr* cannot be, and requires the addition of a vowel: *neder*. He notes that some nouns, such as *berez*, can be easily pronounced with a word-final consonant cluster, but the vowel is nevertheless added by analogy to the numerous nouns that require it for ease of pronunciation.⁹

As a book whose foremost and primary goal is to serve as a linguistic introduction, it might have provided more references to the academic literature for those wishing to broaden their knowledge. Moreover, the reader could have benefited from clearer explanations as to what Ornan's innovations are, along with references to sources presenting approaches different from his own.

Since the book is meant as a comprehensive and detailed introduction to the phonology and morphology of the Hebrew language, the question arises, what precisely is meant by 'the Hebrew language'. A fundamental assumption that is not explicitly stated in the book but which Ornan articulates elsewhere is that Hebrew of all periods can be associated with a uniform phonological and morphological description.¹⁰ This assumption is often at odds with the book's basic claim, that its point of departure is 'Hebrew as it is spoken and as it is heard'.¹¹ Ornan is inconsistent in addressing the differences between spoken modern Hebrew and classical or standard written Hebrew. In some cases he does acknowledge these differences. For example, according to the traditional vocalization rules, past-tense *qaṭal* verbs in the second person plural, suffixed with *-tem* or *-ten*, are pronounced with stress on their last syllable (namely on the suffix itself). Therefore, in many such verbs the initial consonant loses its vowel, resulting in *ktavtem* rather than *kataavtem*. Ornan notes, however, that 'in our ordinary speech, as it is heard everywhere', these suffixes are never stressed, by analogy to other past-tense suffixes that are never stressed.¹² Conversely, in other cases Ornan disregards the situation in contemporary spoken Hebrew, even though this Hebrew is claimed to be the book's point of departure. For example, he details the rules for pronouncing the definite article before consonants that cannot be geminated (e.g., *he-xalav*, *he-harim*, in which the definite article *heh* is pronounced with an [e], rather than the default [a]), without noting that these rules are not observed in contemporary spoken Hebrew.¹³

⁸ U. Ornan, *Diqduq Ha-Pe W-Ha-ʔozn: Hebrew Grammar for Hebrew Speakers* (Jerusalem 2016), 23–4.

⁹ Ornan, *Diqduq*, 47.

¹⁰ Ornan, 'Distorted Use', 154.

¹¹ Ornan, *Diqduq*, 4.

¹² Ornan, *Diqduq*, 140 (my emphasis).

¹³ Ornan, *Diqduq*, 56. In a corpus of spoken Hebrew from the early twenty-first century, all instances of the definite article were pronounced with the vowel [a] (O. [Rodrigue] Schwarzwald, 'Selected Morphological Phenomena in the Corpus of Spoken Hebrew', in E. Gonen [ed.], *Studies in Spoken Hebrew*, Te'uda 27 [2016], 274–5, p. 252) (in Hebrew).

The book's second objective is to serve as an accessible and interesting textbook on Hebrew vocalization.¹⁴ First, it is important to note that Hebrew vocalization is not at all easy to master, and that the difficulty is an inherent one, stemming from the discrepancy between the pronunciation on which this vocalization system is based and the pronunciation of contemporary Hebrew. The introduction to vocalization on the Hebrew Academy website acknowledges this difficulty: 'Learning the rules of vocalization is not easy for contemporary Hebrew speakers, and this is not surprising, [given that] the vocalization system we use does not correspond to our modern pronunciation, but rather to Tiberian pronunciation during the first half of the first millennium'. Moshe Bar-Asher explains the essence of the problem: 'After a century or more of Hebrew speech – which essentially utilizes only five vowels ("the Sephardic pronunciation") but coexists with the Tiberian vocalization that utilizes seven signs representing seven different pronunciation elements (vowels) — the inevitable result is a perpetual conflict between the spoken language and the written vocalization system'.¹⁵

Consequently, as pointed out by Mordechai Mishor, who proposed simplifying the vocalization system, the Israeli school system largely ignores the vocalization system, and its application has become the province of professional grammarians.¹⁶ Ornan himself stated elsewhere that the suggestion to simplify the vocalization system — a suggestion which he himself rejects — stems from the fact that Hebrew speakers find its rules impossible to master.¹⁷

Ornan's method of teaching vocalization merits separate consideration. His method is based on the "rule of vowels", which states:

- a. An (unstressed) open syllable has a long vowel (*cāfon, lēvav*);
- b. An (unstressed) closed syllable has a short vowel (*mashpekh, heskem*)
- c. A stressed open syllable has a short vowel (*shaxar, kevel*)
- d. A stressed closed syllable has a long vowel (*parpār, hesbēr*).

It is important to note that Ornan's rule of vowels differs from the 'rule of syllable vocalization', which is commonly used in teaching vocalization and appears, for example, in Nisan Netzer's book *Haniqud halakha lema'ase* ('Vocalization in Practice')¹⁸ and on the Hebrew Academy website. This fact is not mentioned in Ornan's book, although it is important and relevant to anyone interested in vocalization. In another book, *In the Beginning Was the Language*, Ornan clarifies that grammarians agree on rules (a), (b) and (d) presented above, but that rule (c) is a matter of controversy: Ornan's rule specifies that a stressed open syllable features a short vowel, while the rule of syllable vocalization specifies that a stressed open syllable features a long vowel. Ornan explains that the disagreement stems from the

¹⁴ Ornan, *Diqduq*, 4.

¹⁵ M. Bar-Asher, Preface, *Leshonenu La'am* 55 (2005–6), 119–20, p. 119 (in Hebrew).

¹⁶ M. Mishor, 'Our Vocalization System at the Crossroads', *Leshonenu La'am* 55 (2005–6), 121–49, p. 122 (in Hebrew). Mishor's main recommendations for reforming the vocalization system are to discard the *qamatz* and *segol* and simplify the rules of reduction (*batafim*) (*ibid*). Y. Ofer, who opposes reforming the vocalization, likewise admits that most Hebrew speakers — including educated individuals who successfully completed their high-school and university studies — are unable to correctly vocalize a simple Hebrew text (Y. Ofer, 'Is Reforming the Vocalization System Worthwhile', *Leshonenu La'am* 55 (2005–6), 182–8, p. 183 [in Hebrew]).

¹⁷ Ornan, *In the Beginning*, 209.

¹⁸ N. Netzer, *Haniqud halakha lema'ase* (Israel 1976) (in Hebrew).

numerous cases in which a stressed open syllable indeed has a long vowel (such as *cafōna, tāʔ, yaldā, ārec, sēfer, xōdesh*).¹⁹

A second rule set out by Ornan is the ‘opened syllable rule’, which pertains to syllables that are theoretically closed but are pronounced as open syllables. Closed syllables become ‘opened’ when they lose their coda (their final consonant) in one of two ways:

- a. The coda becomes part of the following syllable, e.g., *ma-ʕemid* instead of *maʕ-mid*;
- b. The coda is silent, leaving the syllable without an overt final consonant, as in the first syllable of *riʔ-shon*, where the ʔ is not pronounced, or the second syllable of *ro-feʔ*, which exhibits the same phenomenon (as opposed to the word *ro-fef*, for instance).²⁰

‘Opened’ syllables occur for example in feminine nouns such as *susā* (‘mare’). The theoretical form is *susat*, but in the independent (non-construct) form the /t/ is silent — it is neither pronounced nor represented in writing. Ornan explains the *qamatz* (i.e. the long *ā*) in *susā* based on the ‘opened syllable rule’: the second syllable in *susā* was stressed and closed, and therefore (according to clause (d) of the rule of vowels) it has a long vowel.²¹ Applying the rule of syllable vocalization — which states a stressed open syllable has a long vowel — is simpler in this case.

The book includes exercises for practicing the material, but does not provide answers, which are an important element in a book intended for independent study.

Ornan states that the new edition takes a synchronic approach, in contrast to the original edition which took a diachronic one. Instead of relying on assumptions about the historical development of the language, he now relies on a distinction between ‘theoretical’ and ‘empirical’ concepts. He argues that, in order to uncover the theoretical concepts, there is no need to compare the contemporary state of the language with its state in the past; rather, it is enough to examine the language as it is today. The discrepancy between the theoretical concept and the empirical one is exemplified by inflected forms. For instance, in the original edition of the book Ornan explains that feminine nouns ending with the suffix *-a* once ended with the suffix *-at*. In later periods the /t/ became silent, resulting in an ‘opened’ syllable.²² In the new edition, Ornan explains that the suffix *-at* is part of the theoretical structure of these feminine nouns, although the /t/ is neither pronounced, heard nor written. When a syllable is added to the noun, the silent /t/ reappears, as in *susati, dodatxa*, etc.²³ Ornan stresses that there is a sharp contrast between the two rules he utilizes: according to the ‘opened syllable rule’, it is the theoretical state of the syllable that matters, whereas according to the ‘rule of vowels’, it is the empirical state that is important.

In conclusion, the new edition of the book *Grammar of Mouth and Ear* has two objectives: first, to serve as a comprehensive linguistic introduction to Hebrew phonology and morphology, and second, to teach the skill of Hebrew vocalization. As a linguistic introduction the book elucidates fundamental concepts in phonology and morphology, and can also be illuminating for readers with prior knowledge in

¹⁹ Ornan, *In the Beginning*, 207.

²⁰ Ornan, *Diqduq*, 36.

²¹ Ornan, *Diqduq*, 42.

²² U. Ornan, *Diqduq Ha-Pe W-Ha-ʔozn* (Tel-Aviv 1962), 11 (in Hebrew).

²³ Ornan, *Diqduq*, 42.

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linguistics. But a reader interested mainly in acquiring practical skills of Hebrew vocalization will find the book inadequate as a single source.

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