

linguistic means and their exploitation in different functional dialects as used by either individuals or schools of thought, trends, etc.

Note 1. It would for instance be useful for Czech philosophic language to have an analysis of the philosophic terminology of Czech Hegelians, Herbartians, positivists, and others.

2. We need an analysis of journalistic language from the standpoint of its special requirements, with particular regard to things like clichés.

2. Linguistics points out the possibilities for the functional differentiation and exploitation of the devices of the language, particularly those of the lexicon and the syntax, as well as the evolutionary trends that have bearing on these; it also makes pertinent recommendations, but of course without forcing all functions on all languages.

3. Linguistics can systematically develop the stylistics of different functional dialects.

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Finally, linguistic theory may also make its contribution by a critique of particular works of language from a functional point of view. Such a critique should not be based on general criteria such as clarity, precision, etc., but rather should evaluate the means of the language and their utilization only in terms of their adequacy to the purpose of the work, but taking into account the author's right to make his individual choices. Thus, precision should be required only if this is the purpose of the work (after all, imprecision may also be functionally justified); the formulaic expressions of the language of business are to be evaluated from the standpoint of their special purpose, etc. Neither in looking at different purposes of individual instances nor in considering the various functions of the standard language should this critique introduce an evaluative hierarchy that might give some function priority over another. If deviations from the norm are found they should be judged from a functional standpoint. — Linguistic critique is essentially different from poetic critique; the latter is always linked to esthetic valuation.

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JACK FELLMAN

THE ROLE OF ELIEZER BEN YEHUDA IN THE REVIVAL OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE: AN ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

The revival of the Hebrew language is generally considered one of the outstanding sociolinguistic phenomena of modern times. The man most closely associated with the revival and the person given the most credit for its success is Eliezer Ben Yehuda, as he was the first both to *articulate* and to *implement* the perennial dream of having the Hebrew language take its deserved place alongside the other modern spoken languages of the post-Renaissance world.

In analyzing available materials, we have found that Ben Yehuda took seven steps in order to implement his vision of the language revival:

1. The setting up of the first Hebrew-speaking household in his own home
2. A call to the Diaspora and to the local population for assistance and advice
3. The creation of Hebrew-speaking societies
4. The establishment of Hebrew through Hebrew classes in the schools
5. The publishing of a modern Hebrew newspaper
6. The compiling of a dictionary of the Hebrew language, ancient and modern
7. The forming of a Language Council.

This paper examines the *effectiveness* of these steps in the total revival-process.

In delineating the revival in terms of Ben Yehuda's seven initiatives,

however, we do not mean to imply that he was the *sole* factor or even necessarily the *dominant* factor in the revival. Actually there were *several* elements involved. It is true that the seven projects were initiated by Ben Yehuda, but their *ultimate* effectiveness was due to their elaboration and expansion by Ben Yehuda's followers, who were at first restricted to a small group of individuals, mainly teachers, centered in Jerusalem, later spreading to nationalistic pioneer settlers in the country's rising agricultural settlements, and finally reaching the laborers and workers in the newly-developing towns and cities. It cannot be stated too emphatically, and contrary to the impression given by many articles in the literature,¹ that Ben Yehuda did not revive Hebrew via the above-listed steps either singlehandedly or otherwise, but rather, by his actions, he set the examples to be followed by others.

Moreover, as is now well understood² Hebrew at the time was not a dead language which had to be artificially revived by Ben Yehuda and his followers, but was, in fact, a flexible instrument of expression for many purposes, including even some topics of everyday conversation. As Cohn-Schachter notes, "Hebrew had lost only the language of the market and the kitchen."³ The linguistic situation before the revival, especially among those European Jews who came to Palestine, was such that the speaking of Hebrew, *once begun*, was *almost* natural. As Rabin points out, Hebrew was "on the threshold of speech ... for one whose entire intellectual life took place in that language, speaking it offered no difficulty."⁴

With these facts in mind, we turn to an examination of the effectiveness of the seven initiatives Ben Yehuda took in order to revive Hebrew. Reviewing them in this perspective, we may say that, if Ben Yehuda had been left solely to his own devices, the revival of Hebrew would *not* have succeeded, and his dream would have died with him. Rather, the society around him, in particular the immigrant-pioneers and more especially their native-born children, are ultimately those most responsible for the revival of the language. As Rabin writes, "It is hard to believe that Ben Yehuda would have succeeded in his propaganda for ... Hebrew ..., were it not for the people of the agricultural colonies who wanted to break all connections with the Diaspora and therefore were also ready to go

¹ Cf. for example, the article by Yizhaq Karniel, "Rabbi Eliezer the Miracle Maker", *Doar Ha-Yom* 64 (December 23, 1924), 2, and various articles cited below, *passim*.

² Cf. for example the article "Hebrew" by Chaim Rabin in *Current Trends in Linguistics* 6 (1971), 304-46.

³ Cohn-Schachter (no first name given), "The Hebrew Language and Education", *Shevile Ha-Hinukh* 3 (1947/48), 218.

⁴ Chaim Rabin, "The Role of Hebrew in Forging a Nation: The Case of Hebrew", *The Incorporated Linguist* (January 1970), 1-2.

over to Hebrew."⁵ Indeed, the real influencing agent with respect to the revival is more along the lines sketched by Yudeleviz: "Much has been said ... about the influence of literature in the matter, the influence of the schools, the matter of publishing textbooks and children's books, but among all these important factors the most important influence is forgotten: the influence of the society in which we live."⁶ We now examine the steps taken by Ben Yehuda within this society.

THE SEVEN STEPS OF BEN YEHUDA

1. *The First Hebrew-speaking Household*

Of all Ben Yehuda's projects, this one was undoubtedly a success in setting the example for others to follow and showing that the Hebrew language had within itself the capabilities of becoming a natural everyday language of the home, the language of a parent talking to a child.⁷ However, although Ben Yehuda succeeded here in what was perhaps his most daring project, paradoxically he also failed. Had he found himself in a different locale, for example in the environment of newly developing Jaffa, or on one of the more influential agricultural colonies such as Rishon LeZion, he could have succeeded still further in setting the example for others. Instead, Ben Yehuda chose to remain and live in conservative, tradition-bound Jerusalem, surrounded by many Orthodox enemies who harassed him, excommunicated him and finally even had him jailed for a time. That Ben Yehuda failed in his own surroundings is perhaps most dramatically indicated by the fact that after forty years of his efforts to revive Hebrew in Jerusalem, very few Jews of that city spoke the language even at the beginning of the British Mandate after World War I. Furthermore, these Jews were mostly Sephardic Mediterranean and Oriental Jews and therefore more sympathetic to the cause of Hebrew than their Ashkenazic (European) brethren, even before Ben Yehuda's arrival in Jerusalem. Thus, of all places in the country, Ben Yehuda's home-base, Jerusalem, fared the worst in the revival of the language and only after his death on December 22, 1922 did Hebrew begin to win the attention of the

⁵ Chaim Rabin, *Goremim Soziologiim Be-Toledot Ha-Lashon Ha-Ivrit* (New York: The Jewish Agency, 1967), 15.

⁶ *Ha-Zevi* 90 (1897/98), 2.

⁷ Rabbi Binyamin, however, even questions whether it was really necessary for Ben Yehuda to speak only Hebrew to his son or whether teaching Hebrew (through Hebrew) to him just as to the other children in the schools would not have brought about virtually the same result. As he writes, "The sacrifice of Ben Yehuda was not necessary ... (but) he was impatient, he had no time." Cf. his "The Sacrificing of Ittamar Ben-Avi", *Moznayim* 16 (1953), 245.

residents of Jerusalem, inasmuch as it had now been declared the official language of the Jewish Yishuv under British jurisdiction with Jerusalem as its center.

The fact that Ben Yehuda lived in Jerusalem, removed from the centers of innovation, resulted in the additional paradoxical fact that his speech played a very minor role in the revival of actual Hebrew speech. As we have said, the true revival of Hebrew took place on the agricultural colonies, which Ben Yehuda was only able to visit at infrequent intervals, due to his other activities, including his other projects. Moreover, it is relatively clear that, even if he had been able to go to the settlements more often, Ben Yehuda would not have affected the revival, or, if he had, his influence would not have been great. For, as Brainin writes,

The author of the largest treasury of Hebrew words we have ... would use in his living speech a small number of words. ... He would struggle ... with the pronunciation, would have difficulty in choosing his idiom and would not get (the words) out of his mouth without great difficulty. The Hebrew language in his mouth was pale. It lacked color and nuance. It was too cold and dry. Perhaps this was the influence of his ... opposition to the old Hebrew flowery phrases which were too smooth and slick.⁸

Similarly, Kimḥi notes, "His conversation ... was not the conversation of the great. ... He was dry in his speaking. Even his conversational Hebrew was dry, hard."⁹

Tur-Sinai has made a very perceptive statement on the speech of the leaders of the entire period which deserves being quoted at this point in order to explain and appreciate in particular the speech of Ben Yehuda himself.

It was ... a curious sort of language which the fathers of Modern Hebrew started to speak. It was a ... kind of mosaic work, a literary Hebrew, composed of phrases and quotations from Hebrew literature, i.e. especially those parts of the Bible that were read in synagogues, certain chapters of the Talmud and its commentaries, and religious poems and philosophical treatises which everybody who had some basic Jewish learning knew from prayers and studies. ... It was a Hebrew consisting mostly of quotations from books, a literary and high-flown Hebrew, using ... figurative phrases from poetic books, allusions rather than actual names for the things and ideas of the modern world. ... It also involved difficulties owing to differences in the pronunciation of Hebrew and the different use of words and phrases As a matter of fact, the first generation, the scholars, writers and teachers of the first generation, did not actually *learn* to speak Hebrew. They knew some Hebrew from the sources and wrote and spoke Hebrew remembering those sources and combining phrases drawn from them.

⁸ *Ha-Toren* 10 (1933), 5.

⁹ *Ha-Poel Ha-Zair* 16 (1928), 11.

But the new population born in Israel ... learnt Hebrew as a practical spoken idiom, and what before might have been literary quotations were for them words and phrases from actual life.¹⁰

Thus, it is even more clear that Ben Yehuda's personal brand of Hebrew played but a minor role in the revival. Nevertheless, we would like to know more about his form of spoken Hebrew, but unfortunately, very few examples of his usage remain, these being confined to a few differences of word-usage.¹¹

2. *The Call to the Diaspora and to the Local Population*

This step, taken at the very beginning of the revival, although appearing to be in theory a most logical form of action, nevertheless proved almost fruitless, since it evoked almost no enthusiastic response. The answer to Ben Yehuda's call for a linguistic and national revival would take time, a factor that Ben Yehuda, with his urgent sense of mission, did not and would not comprehend. His appeals and exhortations thus fell on unsympathetic ears in the early years of the revival, and he often thought the situation was hopeless and his ideas merely the results of a "pious dream" ("ein frommer Wunsch").¹² In general, even the local population at best remained generally apathetic to Ben Yehuda until late into the revival period (1900ff.). As for those in the Diaspora, many to whom his appeals were addressed *ultimately* came to Palestine, and it was through these people and their children that Hebrew was revived, but they did *not* come in direct response to Ben Yehuda's early calls.

3. *The Hebrew-speaking Societies*

Two societies dealing with the problems of reviving and furthering Hebrew speech among the local population were established by Ben Yehuda, the Teḥiat Yisrael 'The Revival of Israel' Society in 1882 and the Safa Berura 'Clear Language' Society in 1889. Whereas the first-named society dealt with other matters of national revival in addition to language, the second devoted itself completely to language problems.

¹⁰ Tur-Sinai, Naftali. *The Revival of the Hebrew Language* (Jerusalem, 1960), 12.

¹¹ These include Ben Yehuda's use of 'amma for 'mother' (on the analogy of 'abba 'father') in contrast to the settlements' imma; his use of bandora for 'tomato' (as in various Arabic dialects), in contrast to the settlements' agvaniya; his use of kozit for 'spinach' in contrast to the settlements' tered; his use of hen, hen and 'ahanhen for 'thank you' in contrast to the settlements' toda, and his use of bexavod for 'please' in contrast to the settlements' bevakasha. These examples are few, and yet, as very basic everyday words, they indicate some far-reaching differences in Ben Yehuda's speech patterns which unfortunately have been virtually lost.

¹² Cf. *Hashkafa* 19 (1902/03), 47-48.

Very little information exists concerning the *Tehiat Yisrael* Society, particularly because it took the form of a secret society with as few written records as possible, preferring to disseminate its rules and proceedings by hand or by word of mouth. Mal'akhi has published certain of these records, and his conclusions are quite revealing for our purposes here. He writes,

To the Jews of the Diaspora, the ideas of *Tehiat Yisrael* were vague and not sufficiently clear. Even in Israel the Society influenced only a handful, and it is even possible that its founders were its only members. From the work of Yaaqov Goldman it is possible that the Society did not even exist. Cf. his article on Ben Yehuda: "At that time, the idea came to Ben Yehuda ... to form a society for the 'Revival of Israel' (*Tehiat Yisrael*), but for various reasons the idea didn't actualize." But even if it did, it did not influence the *Yishuv*. The good intentions of Ben Yehuda ... did not produce results.¹³

Thus, we see that the first of Ben Yehuda's societies achieved no substantial results towards his goal for reviving Hebrew. Membership was limited and the surrounding environment and ruling authorities remained hostile. Contrary to Goldman above, however, Ben Yehuda¹⁴ notes that at least four families lived up to the *Tehiat Yisrael* (Revival of Israel) tenet of speaking only Hebrew "even in the marketplace and on the street" (the families of David Yudeliviz, Yosef Meyuhās, Yehuda Grazovski, and Arye Hurviz). However, four families was not a very significant number, and the very fact that Ben Yehuda is at pains to point out the fact leads one to suspect that they were the only four to listen to his ideas.

As for the *Safa Berura* 'Clear Language' Society, although its format was devoted specifically to language and its functioning was public, it too enjoyed little influence, if only because it was so short-lived, with a total existence of less than a year and a half. This Society, however, encouraged the establishment during the 1890s and 1900s of many *Safa Berura* societies throughout the Diaspora, which adopted the same goals and ideologies as those of the parent-model in Jerusalem.¹⁵ We may therefore say that, as in our discussion of Ben Yehuda's first step above, he failed at home, but by his example and ideas he succeeded elsewhere. In the first case, 'elsewhere' indicated the agricultural settlements, in the

¹³ Eliezer Mal'akhi, "A Secret Society for the Redemption of the Land", *Horeb* 8 (1944/45), 120-134.

¹⁴ Eliezer Ben Yehuda, "The First Four", *Luah Ahiever* 1 (1918/19), 28-37.

¹⁵ These societies have been surveyed by Yisrael Klausner. Cf. his "The Pioneers of Hebrew in the Diaspora", *Leshonenu La-Am* 15 (1964). Similar societies were also set up in Palestine in the years following although they also seem to have been very short-lived. Cf. a second article by Klausner, "The Pioneers of Hebrew Speech in Palestine", *Ha-Umma* 2 (1963), 447-48.

second, it signified the Diaspora. The combination of these two socio-geographic groups ultimately brought about the success of the Hebrew revival by the utilization of Ben Yehuda's fourth field of activity, to which we now turn.

4. Hebrew through Hebrew in the Schools

The introduction and spreading of Hebrew in the schools, the development of the Direct 'Berlitz' Method of teaching the language and more modern techniques of pedagogy, the establishment of an educational structure based on Hebrew — these factors more than any other effected the revival of Hebrew in the mouths of the new generation. These achievements, however, are to be attributed in the main to the efforts of the teachers on the agricultural colonies, and not to those of Ben Yehuda, whose teaching career was only of (approximately) three months' duration. Although by introducing the Hebrew through Hebrew method into his classroom in the Jerusalem Torah and Avodah 'Knowledge and Work' School, he initiated the method's success, the original source of the idea was not Ben Yehuda but the school's principal, Nissim Bechar. Had it not been for Bechar's example, advice, and encouragement, Ben Yehuda would *not* have been able to exert this influence on the development of Hebrew in the schools. As for the establishment of a complete Hebrew educational system, Ben Yehuda, pre-occupied as he was with his other projects and activities, played no real role in this sphere. For, as we have already noted, the Hebrew revival took place on the agricultural colonies and in the newly populated cities, and not in the traditional cities such as Ben Yehuda's Jerusalem where Hebrew through Hebrew had first been initiated. The individual teachers of Hebrew in the colonies, in particular, by means of their translations and preparations of school books and children's books, formed the spearhead of the revival, although it is true to say that Ben Yehuda did participate somewhat in this work.¹⁶ His influence in this sphere cannot, however, be considered decisive.

5. The Newspaper

The circulation and influence of Ben Yehuda's newspaper were indeed considerable and through them many readers, from all classes and walks of life, became acquainted with novel ideas, concepts, techniques, sciences, and philosophies and hence broadened their outlook on the modern

¹⁶ Cf. for example his history book for school use, *Divre Ha-Yamim Livne Yisrael Be-shivtam Al Admatam* (Jerusalem, 1902 [and several further editions]), and his geography book for school use, *Sefer Erez Yisrael* (Jerusalem, 1883).

world while at the same time they became more enlightened and better informed about the Middle Eastern World around them. What concerns us most here, however, is to what extent the newspaper played a significant role in the language revival. Ben Yehuda's assumption that a newspaper could achieve far more, for example, than literature and poetry in the sphere of a language revival proved correct, in this particular case at least, and some new Hebrew words and expressions were indeed learned by the public through this medium. These various new items, however, were learned piecemeal, precisely as they were created and presented, and it is at least questionable whether they could not have been learned more effectively and more quickly had Ben Yehuda proceeded differently. Thus, for example, it is open to discussion whether, for example, a few new words inserted in what was *at best* (until very late in the revival) a weekly newspaper in a random and generally unannotated fashion actually had a direct effect on the majority of readers. If Ben Yehuda had been truly convinced that the newspaper offered the most effective means of disseminating language material among the people, he could have approached this task in a more deliberate and systematic fashion, for example, by publishing weekly word lists of everyday topics together with their translations.

The question of word lists. In a letter to the editor of *Ha-Zevi*, we read:

A new newspaper, a new style. ... The ... papers are full of life. ... How precious is the material! How alive the style! How sweet and uplifting is the language of life, movement and work, the language of the agricultural colonies! ... And how dear to us are ... the new and revived words which we meet most in the descriptions of the life on the agricultural colonies! But ... most of the young readers (and this includes old readers) simply do not understand the new words and ... they will not remember them. ... For example ... we find *hatmad*, *ha-qaqtus*, *hit'aqlemut*, *avatihim*, *ha-qitoria*, *be-maamad ha-melay*, *ha-bandora*, *ha-zabbar*, *ha-aspargil*, and so on. Even though most of the words are taken from the Mishna and the Talmud, their meaning lies hidden even from the young person who has read Talmud; and the great majority of the names of grain, fruits and vegetables are strange even to old and regular readers! Far be it from me to ask that (the newspaper) be a dictionary or primer ... but I would like to suggest to the editor and his writers in the name of most of the young Hebrew readers, to translate at least the new and revived words into a European language for the benefit of the readers and for the expansion and acceptance of the words in our language.¹⁷

Ben Yehuda, in reply to this letter,¹⁸ does give a short bilingual word-list, the first to appear in his paper, and promises to comply with the

¹⁷ *Ha-Zevi* 6 (1898/99), 23.

¹⁸ *Ha-Zevi* 7 (1898/99), 28.

reader's request in subsequent issues. This he does for one further issue only, and after that he stops.

Similarly, even earlier, Dr. A. Masie had written to Ben Yehuda that, "At the end of each year in the last issue (you) ... should give an alphabetical listing of the new words and their place in the paper, so that your work will not be in vain", to which Ben Yehuda adds his reply: "We will work as much as possible to heed the advice of our distinguished friend."¹⁹ Nowhere, however, do we find such a list of words. In brief, Fuchs is at least partly right when he complains, "*Ha-Zevi*' creates a language which perhaps only its steady readers know. To every stranger who looks at it, it looks like a foreign language."²⁰ It is clear, however, that Ben Yehuda approved of Dr. Masie's idea outlined above. Indeed in an earlier book review, Ben Yehuda commended a writer for performing precisely such a service, that is, appending a glossary of new words to his book "so that everyone can find them easily. Truly the writer did a good thing."²¹ If we ask, then, why did Ben Yehuda not supply such guides and word lists for his readers, certain answers suggest themselves.

(1) In the short amount of time at his disposal for the preparation of his weekly paper, Ben Yehuda could not spare sufficient time to go through the columns and pick out the non-Biblical and newly revived words.

(2) Moreover, even if he had been able to carry out such a task — if he in fact did so desire — Ben Yehuda, steeped as he was in traditional Hebrew literature, might well have overlooked the non-Biblical word. His newly created words likewise were incorporated quickly and naturally into his vocabulary and he would therefore be unaware of the difficulties these words posed for others.

(3) Many of the revived or newly-created words were already in daily use in Palestine, whether in their Arabic or in their new Hebrew form, through the efforts exerted by Ben Yehuda, his family and others. Many of these new words were therefore already familiar to Palestinian readers from their daily conversation. Rather, they posed more of a problem for the Eastern European Diaspora readers who lived far removed from the living Hebrew center. As we have seen, however, Ben Yehuda chose to concentrate his activities among the Jewish settlements in Palestine, both old and new, and he did not have the time to direct his energies also towards the particular needs of the Jewish readers in the Diaspora.

(4) After 1900, when the first pamphlets of his *Dictionary* became available, Ben Yehuda wanted people to buy these leaflets and therefore mounted a campaign in his newspaper to promote their sale. The first

¹⁹ *Ha-Zevi* 18 (1893/94), 62.

²⁰ *Ha-Maggid* 6 (1898/99), 45.

²¹ *Ha-Zevi* 18 (1887/88), 72.

advertisement appeared in *Tehiat Ha-Lashon* 'Revival of the Language' column in folio 54 of his newspaper for 1900-1901. This column usually appeared on the last one or two pages of his newspaper, but this time it was displayed on the front page, its caption forming the headline to the paper as a whole, and reading: "There has begun to be published the big book *THE DICTIONARY OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE* in modern times, compiled by Ben Yehuda." (The emphasis is Ben Yehuda's). Because he wanted people to purchase the pamphlets, Ben Yehuda forbore to explain the new or obscure words found in his articles. For example, we read that Ben Yehuda affixes an asterisk to a word in the following folio (55) of the paper and adds in the footnote: "See the *Dictionary of the Hebrew Language of Modern Times* by Ben Yehuda."

(5) What was perhaps a crucial reason for Ben Yehuda's failure to supply glossaries and word lists can be found in an anonymous article in *Ha-Zevi* itself which states,

It is in the nature of our writers that they will not voluntarily concede anything, and never will they submit to the will of others. For example, if the editor of [*Ha-Zevi*] revives any word offhandedly, then little by little the writers will accept this word, but if he were to revive that same word in a special paragraph entitled "The Revival of the Language" or some other name, then not only would they not accept that word, they would also be likely to laugh and mock at it.²²

That is, Ben Yehuda preferred not to draw attention to his new creations precisely because he wanted them unconsciously, almost naturally, to become part of the reader's vocabulary, without the artificiality of learning word-lists and the like.

The acceptance of neologisms. — This last seems to us to be the most cogent reason for the non-appearance of the word-lists in the newspapers because it finds echoes in other material written by Ben Yehuda. For example, he writes,

Every new creation of ours and every foreign word we tried to insert into our language was an undisappointing source of mockery and derision, and everyone found in 'our language' the place to take out their vengeance. But all this derision could not really do anything against the unquestionable necessity (of new creations), and many of our creations ... already have become glorious citizens of our language, and many use them without knowing who their creator is.²³

In another context, he writes,

I succeeded in having many of them accepted gladly, and the best writers use them and they have already become common. ... Their use in newspapers has

²² *Ha-Or* 12 (1892/93), 58.

²³ *Ha-Or* 39 (1891/92), 160.

spread so that it is already forgotten who their coiner is, and many who use them, if they knew who created these words, would have them outlawed.²⁴

Whether his choices for new words were accepted or not, however, did not necessarily concern Ben Yehuda. He was more interested that new coinages be created and generally approved to express necessary concepts and ideas. Concensus and agreement on a unified usage, whether based on his innovations or not, was what Ben Yehuda strove to achieve and "the hope that the day will come when the nouns and usages will be clear and fixed, and there will not be in our language the chaos of the Tower of Babel generation",²⁵ was the wish he held most dear. As he writes,

We are a simple laborer; we form bricks and the builders will come and construct from them a place for our language. ... We know that not all our creations will be accepted ... that not all will become citizens in our language. ... We know that our method in reviving the language is not correct in the opinion of many, even of the best writers and learned men whose judgment we admire and respect. ... We know that from time to time we bring pleasure to those who like a joke, when we give them cause to laugh a bit about one of the words for which, in their opinion, it is good to (use) lofty phraseology instead of ... a simple word taken from Arabic or ... from ... our wide literature. ... And we are happy even with this little bit of pique we cause ... (for) our feeling tells us that even if all the words we bring to our language are not accepted, at least a half, or a quarter of them will finally penetrate and their birthplace will not be forgotten.²⁶

All this, however, by no means implies that Ben Yehuda did not consider that his creations in particular were not the best possible, or that he should not be given the chance and right to be heard. As he writes,

It is ... years since we have put all our heart to investigating the nature and spirit of our language, in the way it composes nouns and verbs. We read the ... literature from the Middle Ages, we paid special attention to the use of the language in the first days of the Talmudic scholars while the language was still alive. ... We investigated and compared our language with Arabic, ... all this with the particular aim of fixing new nouns and verbs for the concepts which aren't in our language ... and our work has not been in vain. ... The living speech which I and my whole family speak and which forces us to express our wants and thoughts in this language ... all this gives me the right to think, that even if I am not above error, I am much further away from error in this than the other writers, and even with respect to the matter of style and language in general, my approach is ... better.²⁷

²⁴ Cf. the introduction to his *Dictionary*, 13.

²⁵ *Ha-Zevi* 6 (1889/90), 23.

²⁶ *Ha-Zevi* 6 (1889/90), 23.

²⁷ *Ha-Zevi* 3 (1889/90), 12.

In the same vein as above, we read²⁸ that Ben Yehuda had wanted to compile an Appendix to his *Dictionary* of all the new words he had introduced into Hebrew through the medium of his newspaper. Unfortunately, this desire never materialized, although various of his neologisms are given in the *Dictionary* itself and are preceded by a special sign. We may assume, at least partly, that he did not have enough time to complete this task although he had collected the rest of the material for the *Dictionary* before his death. Perhaps a better reason for the absence of any Appendix on the lines suggested can be drawn from the quotations above. Simply stated, if everyone were to know exactly which were the words that Ben Yehuda had created, these words might be rejected on grounds of personal jealousy, and the like. Ben Yehuda wishes the words to be judged on their own merits, and not on their creator's. Thus, concerning the neologisms in his *Dictionary*, he writes,

I brought in it a number of new words that I created in my work on this subject during the past ... years to fill the gap still existing in our language with respect to new concepts. ... All of these words are expressly indicated ... so that the reader will immediately see that it is a new word, and if it is not fitting in his eyes let him consider it as if it never was and never had been created.²⁹

The problem of vocalization. — However, even those new words created by Ben Yehuda which were explained in his newspapers caused further difficulties because of absence of vocalization, at times confronting the reader with added obstacles. Various subscribers drew Ben Yehuda's attention to this fact, including Dr. Masie,³⁰ in the same article discussed above, and David Yudeleviz, whose humorous piece deserves quoting:³¹

I am crazy over one thing. I want to speak only Hebrew in my home. My wife ... agreed to [this] ... but only on the condition that every word that she doesn't know in Hebrew I have to tell her and also give her its complete inflection and explanation. Once my wife wanted to say to me 'sympathy' and she asked me: "How do you say sympathy in Hebrew?" I immediately remembered that the Editor ... wrote concerning this <Phdh>, but how do you say this in speech with vowels? And what is its origin? — I began to stutter to her <Paha" ... <Pahi>. ... "Aha!" my wife cried out in the happiness of victory, "I said to you that it isn't possible to talk only in Hebrew. Because many words are missing in it, and now please tell me how do you say sympathy!" "God", I cried ... "Send these problems to the language purists". ... — and my wife, standing by my side, cried out in a smile, Now, so, I want to speak — you don't want me to say a non-Hebrew word, do you — <Phah>, where does this word come from? And

²⁸ *Ha-Zevi* 17 (1901/1902), 6.

²⁹ A letter written by Ben Yehuda to Professor William Bacher of Budapest, undated. Hebrew Language Academy Archives, Ben Yehuda file.

³⁰ *Ha-Zevi* 18 (1893/94), 62.

³¹ *Ha-Zevi* 11 (1900/01), 5-6.

how should I say 'I sympathize': *ani me ahedet?*" I took out the copies (of the newspaper) from my trunk and began searching. I found it and showed it to her. "Here it is written ...!" Then she asked, "And from where did the (Editor) get it ...?" Here I present to you a suggestion and a plea ... please, my dear Editor, every time you present a new word in *Ha-Zevi*, vocalize it, and give its source and inflection in a footnote, and I will be freed of my wife's complaining.

Here again, the time factor involved in the preparation of the newspaper and the difficulties of type-setting must be seen as responsible for the fact that in general Ben Yehuda did not vocalize the new words. We would stress also the fact that, had Ben Yehuda vocalized his new words, they would become instantly and obviously recognizable in the newspaper which was, as a rule, not vocalized and he perhaps feared that they would therefore not be accepted and integrated successfully into the language.

A new Hebrew style. — However, the spreading of new words was only part of the linguistic function of Ben Yehuda's newspapers. Perhaps ultimately more important Ben Yehuda wanted to create a new style of synthetic total Hebrew writing. In this, however, he virtually completely failed, for his main base was still the Biblical Hebrew style. This attitude to style was too conservative, for the Biblical style sounded artificial, stilted and archaic in the modern world, and connoted too close a reliance on a written text. As people began *speaking* Hebrew, they instinctively moved away from undue dependence on a given text, no matter how holy or revered, and adopted a style of Hebrew more in keeping with the Indo-European style of their mother-tongues (generally Yiddish, Rumanian, Polish, or Russian). This form of Hebrew ultimately resembled the Post-Biblical style more than the Biblical style. As Kreschevski writes, "In the spoken language everyone uses Midrashic [Post-Biblical — J.F.] style, even the teachers who write pure Hebrew."³²

It is, however, uncertain whether Ben Yehuda had a true appreciation of matters of style. As Tamir writes, "Ben Yehuda did not feel exuberating freshness nor depressing boredom (in language). He only looked for words."³³ In the same vein Klausner writes: "In his style he united two extremes which cannot be joined: extreme novelty with conservatism. He used many Biblical forms which were antiquated even in the time of the Mishna."³⁴ Frischmann's comments, too, are instructive:

For this type of work, some sense of taste, ... of sound ... is needed, which will always tell what is acceptable and what is forbidden. ... Ben Yehuda did not ...

³² Mordekhai Kreschevski, "The Correcting of Pupils' Compositions", *Ha-Hinukh* 2 (1911), 112ff.

³³ Noah Tamir, *Seminaristim Be-Maavaq Am* (Tel Aviv, 1963), 76.

³⁴ Yosef Klausner, *Eliezer Ben Yehuda: Toledot Hayyaw We-Avodat Hayyaw* (Tel Aviv, 1939/40), 133.

realize that everything which is acceptable for the language of the market is not acceptable for the language of a newspaper, and everything which is acceptable for a newspaper is not acceptable for a literary language. He brought ... to the world of language a kind of freedom that no sensitive person could allow.³⁵

And, as Brainin writes,

(The newspaper) was not free of artificiality, floridness, repetition of unnecessary words and phrases. There was not yet a difference between the language of the book ... and the language of ... daily speech. ... There was lacking the flexibility of a living language. There were not a few hesitations and doubts with respect to the real meaning of individual words and expressions ... In brief, the linguistic material was still raw, and the form — unstable and weak.³⁶

Moreover, as if unknowingly substantiating the above comments, Ben Yehuda himself writes, "We have chosen ... to prefer the fullness of the language, its breadth and power, over its beauty."³⁷

Ben Yehuda's main interest, then, in the language was in words, not style. His chief aim was to add words, to make the language 'full' and 'broad'. As with his words, Ben Yehuda never claimed that his views alone provided the final answer to questions of style. As he himself writes concerning his style, "We know that this (style) is like a jargon, and we do not think that as it now stands it is fine and good."³⁸ Ben Yehuda preferred to consider himself, with regard to questions of style too, as the "simple laborer who builds bricks and others will follow". Indeed, the main forerunners and molders of Modern Hebrew style had no connection with Ben Yehuda and exerted their influence from Europe, not from Palestine, which, understandably, was a milieu as yet too young and inexperienced to produce anything of outstanding merit in the early years of the revival.³⁹ The chief among these writers were Asher Ginsburg (Aḥad Ha-Am) in the field of non-fictional prose, Shalom Yaaqov Abromoviz (Mendele Mokher Seforim) in fiction, and Ḥaim Naḥman Bialik in poetry. These as well as other writers opposed, at least initially, the revival and use of spoken Hebrew and would refer to it variously as the "language of tricks", "children's speech", "a foolish habit", and "Gentile Hebrew". Ben Yehuda's style, therefore, was not a success, neither in its spoken, nor in its written form.

The decline of the newspaper. — After 1895 and especially after 1903 the circulation figures of his newspaper as well as its standards began to

³⁵ David Frischmann, *Kol Kitve David Frishman* (Poland, 1937/38), volume 7, 979.

³⁶ *Ha-Toren* 10 (1933), 4.

³⁷ *Ha-Shiloah* 3 (1898/99), 125 ff.

³⁸ *Ha-Zevi* 39 (1891/92), 160.

³⁹ On this point, cf. the article by Yisrael Ḥanani, "The Beginning of the Israeli Short Story", *Molad* 19 (1961), 650-55.

decline because of differences of opinion over Ben Yehuda's support of the Baronial administration of the settlements on the one hand and his support of Herzl's Uganda plan for a Jewish home in East Africa rather than in Palestine on the other. Thus, Klausner writes in 1903: "In the last two-three years, ... (the newspaper) has gone down considerably. It is small and poor in its quantity and even its quality is not worth much. ... A newspaper is needed in Palestine."⁴⁰ With the commencement of the second great wave of pioneer immigration (called in Hebrew the Second Aliya) in 1903-1905, many of the dynamic elements in the country began turning their backs on traditionalist Jerusalem and its spokesman, Ben Yehuda, and devoted their interests to Jaffa, the agricultural colonies and the expanding workers' movements. They gave their support to the main newspaper of the Second Aliya, *Ha-Poel Ha-Zair* 'The Young Worker', which was founded in 1907 partly as an antidote to the "maudlin, melodramatic, baroque and old fashioned"⁴¹ newspapers of Ben Yehuda. After 1903, therefore, the newspapers of Ben Yehuda failed even in their attempt to revive the language. For *Ha-Poel Ha-Zair* adopted as its style the synthetic Post-Biblical Hebrew of the European writers, in particular that of Asher Ginsburg (Aḥad Ha-Am), as if in defiance of Ben Yehuda's more Biblical style of writing. Kressel gives us an impression of the Second Aliya's somewhat overbearing opinion of Ben Yehuda's newspaper:

The newspaper is low, small, petty ... an extravagant style ... overstatement and exaggeration, a pathetic style. ... The reviver of the Hebrew language reached a Hebrew style in his newspapers the like of which is difficult to find in all the literature and Hebrew journals outside the realm of Ben Yehuda's home. It was a style free from all attempts to being of Hebrew base. It was a type of showing off in which no type of phraseology was used from the sources but rather all was for the sake of newness.⁴²

In the period after 1900, moreover, Ben Yehuda virtually left the editorship of the newspaper and entrusted it to the care of his son and had begun giving his attention almost exclusively to his *Dictionary*. As his wife Ḥemda Ben Yehuda writes,

The newspaper we had already given a long time ago to Ben-Avi, who had grown up in this and been trained in this. What was good and right in his eyes he could do in it, as long as it remained an instrument for spreading light in the life of Jerusalem, which was still dark, (and) as long as it was used as a means for publishing all the neologisms and necessary terms for spreading the Hebrew language in the country and for the complete dominance of the language. Only

⁴⁰ *Ha-Shiloah* 12 (1903/04), 285.

⁴¹ Gezel Kressel, *Toledot Ha-Itonut Ha-Ivrit Be-Yisrael* (Jerusalem, 1964/65), 97-98; 101.

⁴² Kressel, *Toledot*, 97-98; 101

from the side did Ben Yehuda interest himself in the newspaper, and all his time was devoted to the *Dictionary*. Only to the Language Council did he still give of his time. ... He did not participate in gatherings or public events, unless his participation was most urgently demanded. He did not visit friends and even at home at the time for receiving guests, he stayed in his workroom and only for a few moments would come out to greet the guests.⁴³

Conclusions. — To sum up, then, Ben Yehuda's newspapers played a dominant role in the revival of the language in particular during the first great wave of immigration (the First Aliya), that is, until 1903. Thereafter, their influence declined rapidly, their place having been taken by the journal of the Second Aliya, *Ha-Poel Ha-Zair*. Ben Yehuda during this period continued to exert a diminishing personal influence on his paper, his attention now being directed to his *Dictionary* and 'his words'. Even during the period when the newspapers enjoyed their greatest prestige, however, Ben Yehuda's positive influence on the language was wielded not in the realm of style but rather in the sphere of individual words.

6. *The Dictionary*

Of this project, Ben Yehuda was to write in later years, "If God wishes to severely punish someone, he decrees upon him to be a dictionary compiler. ... The life of the compiler is like living in Hell."⁴⁴ This task, which was to cost Ben Yehuda so much time and effort that even he was forced to admit that, "If I had known this was what it would entail, I never would have begun",⁴⁵ must also be judged wanting if, as Ben Yehuda repeatedly stated, the *Dictionary's* main purpose was to "be a useful book to the reader of our ancient and modern literature and especially for he who wants to write or speak Hebrew."⁴⁶ Only five volumes covering only twelve of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet appeared during the formative years of the Revival and the first only in 1909. Thus, during the most critical first two decades of the revival (1881-1900) there existed no such dictionary for the benefit of the common reader. Ben Yehuda realized this deficiency and very early applied himself to finding a solution to the problem.

⁴³ Hemda Ben Yehuda, *Ha-Milhama Im Ha-Satan*, undated and unpublished ms., Jerusalem, the Zionist Archives, Chapter 9, 10.

⁴⁴ Eliezer Ben Yehuda, *Millon Ha-Lashon Ha-Ivrit Ha-Yeshana We-Ha-Ḥadasha* (Jerusalem, 1909), Introduction, 24.

⁴⁵ Ben Yehuda, *Millon*, 24.

⁴⁶ Eliezer Ben Yehuda, *Millon Kelali Shalem U-Meforat Le-Lashon Ivrit, Meturgam Zarfatit We-Germanit* (Jerusalem, 1896), 8.

Substitutes for a dictionary. — The simplest method, one would have thought, for Ben Yehuda to introduce the necessary Hebrew words into circulation would have been to devote column space in his newspapers to word lists, with their equivalents given in the principal European languages familiar to his readers: Russian, Yiddish, German, and French. Surprisingly, however, as we noted above,⁴⁷ very little recourse is given to this means of popularizing new words in his newspapers.⁴⁸ Annotated words and words to which an asterisk is affixed also appear rarely in his newspapers. Discussion of new words was limited to the language columns in his newspapers and even there, as we have noted, such features were infrequent occurrences.

For a time, interestingly enough, the newspaper *did* serve as a means for the publication of his *Dictionary*, leaf by leaf, as it appeared. Ben Yehuda adopted this procedure as a service to the average reader whom, he felt, would be unable to defray the cost of acquiring the complete *Dictionary*, whose length at one time he had estimated in his naiveté would not overrun a thousand pages. If he printed the *Dictionary* piecemeal, as a column, in his newspaper, it would lie within the grasp of all his readers as well as being accessible to so many potential users. As Hemda Ben Yehuda writes, "Ben Yehuda decided to publish his *Dictionary* weekly on the corner columns of his newspapers, in such a way that everyone could cut it out, and later connect all the sections and have a dictionary! ... Who will not want to buy the newspaper for a poor penny and along with it get a free dictionary."⁴⁹ This idea, however, very soon came to nothing and only five such *Dictionary* leaves appeared. As Hemda continues, "How childish this idea was Ben Yehuda understood quickly enough when he saw the first sections rubbed out and smudged by the fingers while reading the newspaper, because it was published on poor paper."⁵⁰

Another way to remedy the absence of a dictionary for use by the common man during the critical years of the revival were the sample monographs Ben Yehuda wrote, the first of which appeared in 1896. These monographs, ultimately ten in number, were composed, however, chiefly for the benefit of scholars who would thereby validate the *Dictionary's* scientific and cultural worth and thus indirectly promote its publication. They were not intended to be sold to the ordinary reader. Moreover, altogether the monographs covered only the first two letters

⁴⁷ Cf. the discussion of Ben Yehuda's newspapers, section 5 above.

⁴⁸ We mention in particular the lists he gives in his newspaper of 1903, folios 15, 16, 17 and 18, pp. 123, 127, 137 and 147, respectively. These cover, however a total of only 28 words.

⁴⁹ Ben Yehuda, *Ha-Milhama*, ch. 9, 10.

⁵⁰ Ben Yehuda, *Ha-Milhama*, ch. 9, 10.

of the alphabet and therefore, from a practical point of view, contributed little to Ben Yehuda's overall purpose of popularizing new words.

The Dictionary as a practical work. — Ben Yehuda also made his own contribution in the field of bilingual pocket dictionaries, publishing two, a Russian-Hebrew edition which appeared in 1899 and contained over 30,000 entries (a second edition of which was produced in 1905 with Yiddish additions by Yehuda Grazovski) and a Hebrew-Russian-Yiddish dictionary which was published in 1902, with 15,000 entries. The contribution of these two dictionaries to the language revival was positive and considerable since, although their preparation had been based on Ben Yehuda's more scholarly researches on the *Dictionary* itself, they were in fact directed towards the needs of the average man and therefore assumed an immediate, useful and practical role in this sphere. Simple, brief translation-equivalents were given for the various entries, with a minimum of abstract scholarly discussion or etymological comments.

However, the very notion of a dictionary for the common man as envisaged by Ben Yehuda seemed naive to some. Thus, Avi-Dor comments sarcastically,

These naive people see their people, this chosen people, the people of the Book, the people of the spirit, sitting and worrying many years now and genuinely miserable over the lack of a *Dictionary of the Hebrew Language*. — "How can I take a Hebrew book in my hand when I have free time, when I don't have a good Dictionary by my side to explain the difficult words..." — thus will claim the Jew steeped in sorrow and hiding shamefaced. ... "Because every other language is built on its Dictionary and our Holy Tongue is downtrodden, destroyed, and desolate. The people of every other nation sit and derive pleasure from the encyclopedias arranged and shining in their cases from behind the glass of the bookcase, they sit and savor their great wide lexicons and as for us — we don't have an encyclopedia, nor a lexicon, nor a treasury of Judaism, ... where will we hide our shame? Where will we run?" And all the Jews, saddened and ashamed, sit and wait ... for the time of miracles, when the blessed hour will arrive, when the great trumpet is sounded to herald and proclaim: "Arise thou Hebrew language ... thy Redeemer cometh, from atop the Holy Mountain is heard the voice of Ben Yehuda heralding the publication of the *Dictionary of the Hebrew Language*. Here is the work before thee ...". And immediately all the Jews will come thronging. ...⁵¹

The real aids to the common man in the field of new words proved, therefore, to be the word lists, the bilingual dictionaries in pocket format produced by Ben Yehuda and others, and not the *Dictionary*, which in its final form became more of a scholar's reference work and was in fact

⁵¹ *Ha-Zevi* 17 (1901/02), 1-2.

bought mainly by teachers and other intellectuals, not by the ordinary reader. The *Dictionary*, then, can be considered a failure, in that it was not available during the formative years of the revival and did not reach the layman for whom it had initially been compiled even when the revival was completed.

The Dictionary as a scholarly work. — Moreover, even as a scholarly work, the value of the *Dictionary* is debatable. Ben Yehuda was unprepared, *by his own admission*,⁵² for serious scholarly work and both his approach and his methods of research were unsystematic. It is clear that Ben Yehuda was not himself a scholar and did not adequately control the materials of his *Dictionary*. As a Jew, Ben Yehuda knew both Hebrew and Aramaic, but his knowledge, as he admits, was not scientific and ordered. With this intuitive background, the acquisition of Canaanite languages and (Northern Classical) Arabic and its dialects did not pose especially difficult problems for him. When at work on the *Dictionary*, Ben Yehuda, not being a philologist, was unable to read Akkadian and Ethiopic materials in the original and generally was forced to rely on secondary sources. This applied also to Egyptian and Coptic which Ben Yehuda also investigated in the course of his researches. With respect to Akkadian, Ben Yehuda acknowledges the assistance offered by Father É. Dhorme and mentions the dictionaries of Franz Delitsch and Muss-Arnold. Similarly W. F. Albright mentions helping Ben Yehuda with Egyptian and Coptic.⁵³

Being a self-taught layman in these matters, however, Ben Yehuda, by unwittingly restricting himself to Ancient Aramaic and Northern Arabic languages, added considerably to the difficulty of his task since he neglected the existing literature on Modern Aramaic and Modern South Arabic dialects, both of which could have been of considerable assistance to Hebrew since they constituted further living remnants of now-extinct Semitic tongues besides Arabic. The above stricture also applies to the Semitic languages and dialects of Modern Ethiopia, which also were unknown to Ben Yehuda.

Criticisms of the Dictionary. — Bialik writes, in connection with the *Dictionary*, "It is not very scientific. ... He was not a specialist but a dilettante."⁵⁴ In Zifrinoviz's opinion, "From the abundance of material collected from many and various books, sometimes important and known words are missing or not explained correctly. ... Sometimes Ben Yehuda puts doubtful explanations and dubious opinions in his *Dictionary* as if

⁵² Eliezer Ben Yehuda, *Millon*, Introduction, 5.

⁵³ William Albright, "Eliezer Ben Yehuda", *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 3 (1923).

⁵⁴ Haim Nahman Bialik, *Devarim She-Be-Al Pe* (Tel Aviv, 1935/36), 208-209.

they were established facts."⁵⁵ Avrunin,⁵⁶ and Avineri⁵⁷ cite particular examples of errors and omissions from the *Dictionary*, including some indicating faulty understanding of texts, faulty pointing, faulty spelling, and spurious forms.

The layout of the *Dictionary* has also been subjected to criticism. Regarding Ben Yehuda's adoption of the Thesaurus method, Zifrinoviz writes, "For main concepts he brings also all pertinent words according to their similarity and associativeness in ideas. However, this ... is too broad. ... Almost every concept can be brought into connection with a great number of others."⁵⁸ As for the citation method, Bialik writes, "It is artificial broadening which is not needed. For every word there are all sorts of citations, not to emphasize nuances but to multiply the number of volumes."⁵⁹ For example, as Epstein points out, "The citations are not only many, but also long. ... He sometimes brings an entire sentence or a long paragraph. Next to the word *ken* 'yes' are 210 examples comprising 24 columns, next to the word *lo* 'no' 335, next to *ahaz* 'hold' 5", next to *lakah* 'take' 175."⁶⁰ With regard to the entries, Tur-Sinai writes, "There is almost no root in the language whose meaning does not have to be changed, either wholly or in part",⁶¹ while Sivan, with regard to the definition of entries, writes, "The form of the definition of words is very different from the perfected and meticulous definition of the dictionaries of our time."⁶²

In fact, the entire scope of the *Dictionary* has been called into question. Rabin notes, "[The *Dictionary*] is far from recording the entire vocabulary of the ... sources."⁶³ Bialik comments, "The tragedy is that he did not even cover all the language. It is not in the power of one man to do this."⁶⁴ Indeed the number of Hebrew works extant which would have to be included in a truly representative Hebrew Dictionary is estimated, according to Ben-Hayyim⁶⁵ at "approximately 30,000". Similarly, Zinger:

⁵⁵ Aharon Zifrinoviz, "A Work Unique in Kind", *Ha-Shiloah* 24 (1921/22), 68-69.

⁵⁶ Cf. the articles by Avrunin in *Leshonenu*, 9 (1938), 229-34; 13 (1944), 236-48; 14 (1946), 50-57; 17 (1951), 44-53; 18 (1952), 31-40, 193-200; 19 (1953), 105-14; 21 (1965), 166-75.

⁵⁷ Isaac Avineri, "On Errors in Dictionaries", *Leshonenu La-Am* 17 (1966), 35-96.

⁵⁸ Aharon Zifrinoviz, "A work".

⁵⁹ Haim Nahman Bialik, *Devarim*.

⁶⁰ Yizhaq Epstein, *Mehqarim Be-Pesikhologia Shel Lashon We-Hinukh Ivri* (Jerusalem, 1947), 333.

⁶¹ *World Congress of Jewish Studies*, 1947 (Jerusalem), 90.

⁶² Reuven Sivan, "The Neologisms of Eliezer Ben Yehuda According to His Dictionary", *Leshonenu La-Am* 12 (1961), 39.

⁶³ Chaim Rabin, "Sources for a Modern Hebrew Vocabulary", in: Aharon Dotan and Shlomo Ketko (eds.), *The Academy of the Hebrew Language* (Jerusalem, 1963), 18.

⁶⁴ Haim Nahman Bialik, *Devarim*.

⁶⁵ Zeev Ben Hayyim, "Composing the Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language by the Hebrew Language Academy", *Leshonenu* 23 (1959), 102.

It is ... doubtful whether all the main points in the explanation of many words, which even the giants among the commentators of all generations left aside, can be explained with certainty by one man only, if all the concepts old and new in the different branches of learning and the sciences, if all the kinds of animals and birds and many things in every corner we look ... [can] be named by one man even if he is a very learned writer like Ben Yehuda or even greater than him.⁶⁶

Assuming even some measure of completeness of its scope, however, the *Dictionary* still remains faulty in its periodicization of the various eras and ages of the language. Zifrinoviz notes the lack of a clear system on the part of Ben Yehuda with respect to Hebrew words in the Talmud, some of them, for example, being incorrectly listed as Medieval. Shakheviz writes, "Ben Yehuda's *Dictionary* ... states in which period the word entered into use, but it does not give examples of its use in periods after its entry into the language. ... However, this does not at all mean that the word in question is not found in these periods."⁶⁷ Even more cogently, Bacher notes, "It is ... a genuine fault of the *Dictionary* that nineteenth-century (Pre-Modern) words are not given a special sign and that Ben Yehuda disparaged the Enlightenment period so much."⁶⁸

The entire basis of the *Dictionary* has been called into doubt by Ben-Hayyim. He considers the *Dictionary* too atomistic and piecemeal and that even when it was published it was outdated. As he writes,

Its format was fixed when the author began his labors eighty years ago. ... The *Dictionary*, by its very nature, only deals with details, every detail taken by itself since ... the way of looking at language in those days was historical. ... As a whole the book falls short of our needs. ... In truth the compilation of a lexicon of a language spanning three thousand years is so formidable a feat that only an intrepid individual like Ben Yehuda could ever have dreamt of being able to accomplish it.⁶⁹

Ben Yehuda, however, should not be taken too heavily to task for his scholarly errors. As he himself writes in a sample pamphlet of his *Dictionary*, "a forty-page booklet ... badly printed on cheap yellow paper".⁷⁰

From all that we have said above the reader should understand the extent of this work and all the hardships of work which the author had in compiling this

⁶⁶ Abraham Zinger, "Concerning the Hebrew Language and Its Expansion", *Ha-Meliz* (1902), 274.

⁶⁷ Boas Shakheviz, "Vocabulary Layers in *Divre Shalom We-Emet* of N. H. Wessely", *Leshonenu* 32 (1968), 304, footnote 1.

⁶⁸ *Ha-Zofe Me-Erez Hagar* 1 (1911/12), 47.

⁶⁹ Zeev Ben-Hayyim, "A Hebrew Dictionary on Historical Principles", *Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1968), 428.

⁷⁰ Robert St. John, *The Tongue of the Prophets: The Life Story of Eliezer Ben Yehuda* (New York, 1952), 193.

book, and he should deal with him kindly and forgive him his many errors and omissions from which a large work cannot escape, especially a work new in so many matters. ... The author knows that many new things were discovered in language investigation in the last years, and he did not get to see them. He knows certainly that he missed many things and especially in citations. In many matters he has most surely erred. But even with all this he is pleased that the book has been compiled ... and it should not fall due to these errors.⁷¹

Moreover, Ben Yehuda never actually claimed that his *Dictionary* was to be a complete dictionary of the Hebrew language. As he writes, "There is no doubt in the matter that even after all my work and effort, much has been left out. ... I even have gathered additions and comments."⁷² Similarly, the writer adds, "In it are all the words of the Bible and *most* of the words from Talmudic literature and the new literature *which our writers are accustomed to use*."⁷³ Further, he states, "I am not exaggerating if I say that in this *Dictionary* come *almost* all the words in our language as it is now in our hands, from the Bible, the Talmud, and Midrashim, to the words in our scientific literature and the words coined in recent times"⁷⁴ [Italics mine — J.F.]

The Dictionary as a nationalistic work. — It is quite clear from the above, then, that Ben Yehuda never intended his *Dictionary* to be regarded as a work of pure scholarship. Indeed, it was only in 1896, on the advice of Professor Samuel Krauss, a scholar who had come to visit him, that Ben Yehuda began changing the nature of his work from "a purely national one to a scientific one".⁷⁵ As Hemda Ben Yehuda writes, "Our first and foremost duty was: to the nation, the language and the land. To science? — Only as an afterthought did we do what we did. At the base of all was the nation, to that and only to that were our lives dedicated."⁷⁶ In the same vein, Tur-Sinai writes, "All this gigantic work of gathering material from innumerable books, newspapers, and written manuscripts and ordering it into a dictionary Ben Yehuda did not because he was entranced by learning and found personal satisfaction in research, but in order to give nourishment to the impoverished soul of the nation."⁷⁷

⁷¹ Eliezer Ben Yehuda, *Millon Kelali U-Meforat Le-Lashon Ivrit Meturgam Zarfatit We-Germanit* (Jerusalem and Vilna, 1905/06), Introduction, 12.

⁷² Eliezer Ben Yehuda, *Millon*, 24-25.

⁷³ Eliezer Ben Yehuda, *Millon Ivri Meturgam Ashkenazit Ha-Medubberet Ben Ha-Yehudim We-Russit* (Vilna, 1905/06), Introduction, 1, with Yehoshua Steinburg.

⁷⁴ Eliezer Ben Yehuda, *Millon Russi - Ivri - Ashkenazi* (Warsaw, 1899/1900), Introduction, 1, with Yehuda Grazovskii.

⁷⁵ Hemda Ben Yehuda, *Ha-Milhama Im Ha-Satan*, Chapter 5, 3.

⁷⁶ Hemda Ben Yehuda, *Ha-Milhama*, Chapter 8, 3.

⁷⁷ Naftali Tur-Sinai, "The Scientific Work of Eliezer Ben Yehuda", *Al Mahadura Amamit Shel Millon Ha-Lashon Ha-Ivrit Le-Eliezer Ben Yehuda Yizhaq Ben-Dor* (ed.) (Jerusalem, 1947), 72-73.

Ben Yehuda, then, had no pretensions to being a scholar. For him, actually, "the principal of all principals was the newspaper".⁷⁸ "On it was his pride: it was his child of delight."⁷⁹ And he only gave it up, as we have seen, because of nationalistic reasons. Thus, Ben Yehuda writes,

Because of the many matters in the past months we have not been able to devote space in our papers to articles dealing with the revival of the language, because our first duty, we think, is to give to our reading public all the news and the deeds which are done and being newly enacted in the entire world, everything which can interest our readers and bring them some use or pleasure. The news and the daily events are things that time necessitates and it is impossible to defer them. The theoretical discussions about the revival of the language, however dear they are to our heart, we feel it our duty to our reading public to put them aside until the appropriate time, when we can devote space to them without any other important or urgent matter.⁸⁰

In many respects, it was just as well that Ben Yehuda was not, in fact, a scholar. He himself admits,

It is good ... that I didn't know at first what I was taking upon myself, because there is no doubt that if I had seen what this work entailed, how big and broad it was, and how hard, I certainly would not have found the strength to begin it. ... Scholars in this field know how great, how vast and how difficult is the work of compiling such a *Dictionary* as this, and they retreat. I at first had no such project in mind ... and afterwards, when I saw that I would have to do such work, I didn't know what it was, I didn't see all its size, and I didn't realize its difficulty. ... The better that it happened so!⁸¹

Moreover, even from a scholarly viewpoint, Ben Yehuda may be forgiven. As Tur-Sinai writes,

It is clear that like every researcher, Ben Yehuda was not free of errors in his work. ... But many of these mistakes ... are not mistakes if we will only understand completely the ... intention of their originator. Ben Yehuda, for example, explains this word or that as a new word with a new meaning while at the same time we do not see in it anything but a known word in its regular meaning. But is Ben Yehuda, according to his methods and goals, required to give this other possibility also, because, maybe, in spite of all this, there is a new word here in our vocabulary? Is he allowed to leave aside a single shoot which perhaps can ... flower, and bear fruit in the language?⁸²

Indeed, even from a strictly scholarly viewpoint, Ben Yehuda's *Dictionary* has many good features. Thus, for example, Rabin writes, "Ben Yehuda

⁷⁸ Hemda Ben Yehuda, *Ha-Milhama*, Chapter 5, 3.

⁷⁹ Rabbi Binyamin, *Mishpaḥat Soferim* (Jerusalem, 1960/61), 17.

⁸⁰ *Ha-Zevi* 6 (1894/95), 23.

⁸¹ Eliezer Ben Yehuda, *Millon Ha-Lashon Ha-Ivrit Ha-Yeshana We-Ha-Hadasha* (Jerusalem, 1909), Introduction, 6.

⁸² Tur-Sinai, "The Scientific Work", 73-74.

... provides a complete Biblical Hebrew dictionary ... less detailed than others in the distinction of meanings, but more important in giving in its footnotes a conspectus of the renderings of medieval Jewish exegetes and lexicographers, and etymologies ... at times better."⁸³ Similarly, the fact that one man had taken upon himself the difficult task of composing a dictionary singlehandedly is not to be criticized, for it is clear that virtually all great dictionaries were the work of one or a few persons. The dictionaries cited by Ben Yehuda as influencing his own work, for example, were all so compiled.⁸⁴

Conclusions. — Taken as a whole, and within its total context, then, Ben Yehuda's *Dictionary* must be considered a monumental work arousing both awe and admiration. But it did not substantially further the cause of the language revival except perhaps emotionally, in that it did bring some lukewarm persons to express a newly discovered pride in 'their language' and also perhaps psychologically, in that it proved to some skeptics that Hebrew was a language like every other language, since it now possessed a lexicon on which it could be based. For many people believe that a language is based on its dictionary. Therefore it follows logically that a language without a dictionary is simply not a language but only a dialect or jargon bereft of the prestige that is conferred automatically on what is accepted as a 'true language'. Biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic-Talmudic Hebrew, for example, had dictionaries and were therefore considered languages; Medieval and Modern Hebrew did not, and were for this reason relegated to the class of secondary, unimportant appendages to the classical Hebrew language. Ben Yehuda's *Dictionary* demonstrated the untenability of this thesis with respect to Modern Hebrew. A new, revived language for a new, revived nation had appeared on the stage of history.

7. The Language Council

The Language Council (Waad Ha-Lashon), created by Ben Yehuda in 1890 with a total of five members, could play only a limited role in the early critical years of the revival, as it was handicapped by an unjustified apathy towards its work on the part of the general public and a shortage of funds. As Silman writes, as late as 1912, in connection with the work of the Council, "a bunch of foolishness, less than half a word a year per

⁸³ Rabin, "Hebrew", *Current Trends in Linguistics*, 6 (The Hague, Mouton, 1971), 315.

⁸⁴ Cf. Eliezer Ben Yehuda, *Millon Ha-Lashon Ha-Ivrit Ha-Yeshana We-Ha-Hadasha* (Jerusalem, 1909), Introduction, 23-24, for examples of the dictionaries of E. Littré, G. Murray, and the Brothers Grimm.

man ... has been created."⁸⁵ The transformation of the Language Council into a truly effective instrument which could actually influence the growth and development of the language was only achieved by the joint action of the teachers and the Teachers' Union in the period after 1904 and not by Ben Yehuda.

As for his purely personal influence on the work of the Council, Ben Yehuda was the Council's founder and first President and also was responsible for drawing up the Council's protocols. Thus in a sense he can be said to have determined its work and functioning. From a reading of the Council's proceedings, however, it becomes evident that general agreement on the main spheres of the Council's activities had already been reached *before* Ben Yehuda wrote the protocols, and therefore his role became more or less a secretarial activity. Of the four main tasks with which he charged the Council — the creation of a unified Hebrew terminology, the unification of pronunciation, the unification of the spelling system, and the fixing of grammatical forms — his individual ideas were rejected in those areas into which he personally had ventured. This refers in particular to the first and last-named tasks (since for the questions of spelling and pronunciation the Council's Vice-President David Yellin assumed the principal responsibility).

With respect to the creation of a unified terminology, general agreement on the procedures Ben Yehuda had originally incorporated in the Council's protocols was early reached. In 1914, however, Ben Yehuda addressed the Council, placing before it two further suggestions he himself wished to make: to make use of all the roots found in Arabic dictionaries in order to form new Hebrew terms, since the "two languages were originally one and the same", and at the same time to employ every possible combination and permutation of the twenty-two Hebrew consonants with a view to creating new trilateral verb-roots.⁸⁶ Both of these motions were rejected by all the members of the Council on the grounds that they were at best "impractical", "unnatural" and "unrealistic", and at worst "anti-nationalistic", "unpatriotic" and an "insult to the Hebrew language".⁸⁷

Similarly, regarding the issue of the fixing of linguistic forms, Ben Yehuda introduced the motion to use Mishnaic Hebrew forms even in cases of conflict with Biblical Hebrew forms. Over this question, too, he was opposed by all the members of the Council with the exception of one (Dr. Masie).

⁸⁵ Qaddish Yehuda Silman, "About This and That", *Ha-Poel Ha-Zair* 20 (1912/13), 14-15.

⁸⁶ These lectures and the general discussions which followed are preserved in the *Zikhronot Waad Ha-Lashon* of 1913/14.

⁸⁷ See footnote 86.

The self-image of the Council. — To explain these facts we must examine the Council's own concept of its role in the language revival, as contrasted with Ben Yehuda's standpoint regarding both the Council's and his own mission towards the achievement of the greater goal of the language revival. Ben-Asher⁸⁸ has distinguished two views the Council might have adopted, a rationalistic view symbolized by the Council's President, Ben Yehuda, who looked at Hebrew as one continuously developing language with no phase intrinsically preferable to any other, and a romantic view as symbolized by the Council's Vice-President, David Yellin, who while he viewed Hebrew in its entire historical development, particularly halloved the Hebrew of the Bible. From all the Council's proceedings it becomes obvious that the Council viewed itself according to the standpoint of Yellin rather than the position of Ben Yehuda. That is, the Council considered itself primarily a traditionalist body, its foundations firmly secured on the Sacred Text as a base for its chief mission, that of a learned preservative defense against the penetration of foreignisms into the language. Ben Yehuda's radical views could not be tolerated by such a body, no matter how rational they might appear. The soundness of the Council's position may be gauged by its relative success, to which, briefly, we turn now.

The success of the Council. — Few positive results emerged as a result of the Council's work. Only one section in the four main fields of activity Ben Yehuda had set for the Council originally — that of word coining — can be considered to have succeeded. Pronunciation did ultimately become uniform, but this should be attributed not to any planned campaign on the part of the Council, but rather to a slow 'koineization' process. Furthermore, the results of this koineization were *not* the results the Council itself had predicted.⁸⁹ As for unified spelling, no agreement was reached within the Council itself on this issue, while that of the fixing of grammatical forms was, as we have already mentioned, handicapped by the Council's firm efforts to restrict the development of the language particularly to the limits and standards of Biblical Hebrew correctness. For the speakers of the revived language did base their speech on Biblical Hebrew norms, but *not* exclusively. Rather, they drew on the Post-Biblical sources at their common disposal in the fashioning of their speech. The new generation of children speakers, moreover,

⁸⁸ Mordekhai Ben-Asher, "Hitgabbeshut Ha-Diqduq Ha-Normativi Be-Ivrit Modernit", unpublished doctoral thesis, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1968), Chapter I.

⁸⁹ On these points, cf. Haim Blanc, "The Israeli Koiné as an Emergent National Standard", in: *Language Problems of Developing Nations*, J. A. Fishman, C. A. Ferguson and J. Das Gupta (eds.) (New York, 1968), 325-40.

learned Hebrew as a practical spoken idiom before they were able to read any sources at all. They were therefore even farther removed from the influences of written texts and their Hebrew departed significantly from that recommended by the Council. As Ben-Asher writes (although in a somewhat different connection), "There is no cause why certain forms [were] accepted and others rejected. Biblical words [did] not prevail over Mishnaic ones, older words [were] not preferred to new ones. No one particular method [was] followed."⁹⁰ In brief, as Tur-Sinai writes, "If the purpose was to revive the language of the Bible proper, it [was] not achieved."⁹¹ The only one, therefore, of the Council's four tasks to succeed to any appreciable extent was that of word-coining. As Blanc in this connection points out, "Standardizing efforts were strong in vocabulary, moderate in grammar and phraseology, weak in orthoepy."⁹²

From examining the Council's records, it becomes obvious that they were unknowledgeable regarding the true nature of language. In their opinion, language could be defined as a collection of words pronounced, spelled, defined, and inflected in a certain predetermined fashion. This conception coincides generally with that of the layman. The Council neither realized nor appreciated the fundamental roles syntax and style play within a language structure, and which in the case of Hebrew at that time, just beginning to be revived in full living speech with all its functions, levels, and uses, were ultimately questions of far greater importance. The problem of vocabulary — the one stressed most by the Council — was after all merely a matter of words. This neglect of syntax and style reflects the influence of Ben Yehuda, this time negative, on the Council for it was he who wrote the Council's protocols and for him, as we have seen,⁹³ the question of language and style was limited mainly to words.

We may, in brief, quote Rosen, whose view, although somewhat too strong, is still significant.

The real image ... of Hebrew was ... left to develop without any control on its own lines. Had the declared principles of language guiding the Jewish community of Palestine ... taken notice of the intrinsic nature of ... Hebrew as a language, that is, as an activity of the human mind facing the world and its realities and 'expressing itself into them', then ... Hebrew ... would have been stillborn.⁹⁴

However, going one step further than Rosen, we may conclude that the

⁹⁰ Mordekhai Ben-Asher, "Hitgabbeshut", conclusions.

⁹¹ Naftali Tur-Sinai, *The Revival of the Hebrew Language* (Jerusalem, 1960), 19.

⁹² Blanc, "Israeli Koiné", 239.

⁹³ Cf. the style of Ben Yehuda's Hebrew, section 5 of this paper dealing with Ben Yehuda's newspaper.

⁹⁴ Haiim Rosen, "Israel Language Policy, Language Teaching and Linguistics", *Ariel* 25 (1969), 93.

Language Council was ineffectual in the language revival because the very fact of its foundation indicated that Hebrew was *already* being spoken by a sizeable number of persons and that the language merely needed regulating and expanding rather than actual reviving. Indeed, in many if not most cases the Council merely noted its acceptance of material already in use which had been coined by the public (teachers, farmers, tradesmen and so on).

CONCLUSIONS

Ben Yehuda had in mind almost no real plan of action for the revival of the Hebrew language when he arrived in Palestine, except for a firm decision based, as he admits, on the "rashness of youth" to speak only Hebrew himself, to set up a Hebrew-speaking home with a wife who did not herself know Hebrew, to issue a summons to the Diaspora for others to follow his example and to put into practice a partial school solution which he himself later acknowledged as "ein frommer Wunsch". On his own admission, he was totally unprepared for what lay in store and he was spurred on only by the idealism of youth. His character, too, was not suited to the task he had set himself. As Kimḥi writes, "In a certain sense he was ... limited. ... His conversation ... was not the conversation of the great. Of poetic instinct — that possession of all creators — he had none. He was dry. ..." ⁹⁵ Moreover, when he finally embarked on a course of action, none of his projects fully succeeded and many can be written off as almost complete failures. Even when we consider the role of Hebrew in the schools — easily the single most important factor in the revival — we see that Ben Yehuda played a very minor role in its implementation.

What, then, was Ben Yehuda's total contribution towards the Hebrew revival? He unassumingly and modestly writes, "We were fortunate to be at the right time and place for this great event." ⁹⁶ Yaaqov Yehudi, however, has captured the essence of Ben Yehuda's role more accurately when he writes,

Ben Yehuda worked for the revival of the language and its extension in speech as well as in literature. But besides that and more than that was his strong spirit, which influenced all the members of that generation, ... the holy flame which consumed him all the days and which he had in his power to kindle in the hearts of everyone who was near to him. ⁹⁷

⁹⁵ David Kimḥi "Eliezer Ben Yehuda, Sketches of His Personality", *Ha-Poel Ha-Zair* 12/13 (1923), 11.

⁹⁶ *Ha-Zevi* 18 (1889/90), 58-59.

⁹⁷ *Hashkafa* 65 (1906/07), 1-2.

Ben Yehuda was not a methodical planner or thinker. Rather, as Tur-Sinai notes, his actions were based "not on scientific reasoning but on inspired feeling". ⁹⁸ Ben Yehuda's claim to significance in the revival of the Hebrew language consists, then, of two points.

(1) He was the instigator of all the projects connected with the revival of the language, including the initiation of the very idea of the revival itself.

(2) Through his charismatic personality, he instilled into those who showed some initial receptiveness to his projects the determination to go forth and complete the tasks on which he had embarked whether these persons later acknowledged his influence or no. He was, moreover, possessed of the strength of character and single-mindedness of purpose to continue what he had begun even in the face of what seemed insurmountable obstacles and even among those who were apathetic, antagonistic, or not interested in his projects, ultimately transforming "ein frommer Wunsch" to "eine wirkende Realität".

Roth admirably has summed Ben Yehuda's contribution to the Hebrew language revival when he writes, "Before Ben Yehuda ... Jews *could* speak Hebrew; after him they *did*." ⁹⁹ Or, as Ben Yehuda writes in an entirely different context, but appropriate enough here:

For everything there is needed only one wise, clever and active man, with initiative to devote all his energies to it and the matter will progress, all obstacles in the way notwithstanding. ... Not by judgment (and) precise and factual approaches of sensible people are all the steps of human progress in the world made, all the revolutions great and small. In every new event, in every step, even the smallest in the path of progress, it is necessary that there be found one pioneer who will lead the way without leaving any possibility of turning back. ¹⁰⁰

For the revival of the Hebrew language in Palestine, that pioneer was Eliezer Ben Yehuda himself.

Bar-Ilan University

⁹⁸ Naftali Tur-Sinai, *The Revival of the Hebrew Language* (Jerusalem, 1960), 19.

⁹⁹ Cecil Roth, "Was Hebrew Ever A Dead Language?" in his *Personalities and Events in Jewish History* (Philadelphia, 1953), 136.

¹⁰⁰ *Ha-Zevi* 86 (1908/09), 1-2.