Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: THE REVIVAL OF HEBREW

Hebrew is the official language of Israel. The revival or as some scholars say revitalization of Hebrew in Israel is a fascinating subject. Hebrew which is one of the oldest surviving languages of the world could not have survived but because of the special role it played in the history of Jews in particular. Jews have been multilingual for most part of their history quickly became ‘monolingual’ with the establishment of the state of Israel. Israel was established in 1948 as a result of the need felt by the Jewish community around the world to have a Jewish state in the aftermath of their persecution in different parts of the world. Jews from around the world with their diverse background immigrated into Israel. Hebrew helped in bringing uniformity and in nation-building. This chapter tries to understand the passage of Hebrew from a secluded use to the all dominant language of Jews. Needless to stress that this passage wasn’t smooth and the resistance it received was from none other than the Jewish community itself who were the actual carrier of the language for ages. The chapter tries to understand the philosophy behind this resistance. The most profound change was with regards to the emergence of Hebrew out of the sacred to the profane and from the limited literary use to the all purpose language of communication. The chapter would also study the historical background of Jews with regards to their language use and the need to adopt a common language, Hebrew, as a sign of their identity.

The Jews who survived the Roman-Judean wars continued to live in Palestine until the modern times. Their numbers increased at various times over the centuries by Jews from Diaspora communities returning to Palestine either as a possible place of asylum from persecution or in order to pray, study, or to be buried in their ancestral home, a wish to which their daily prayers make reference to even today. Until the nineteenth century, however, immigration was small and sporadic, and poor local conditions – economic, health, and security – under the various foreign rulers meant that remigration was probably substantial (Bachi, 1976: 77).

In the nineteenth century the local conditions in Palestine saw slight improvement and to this, increased external pressure led to continuous Jewish
emigration with some 25,000 Jews arriving between 1850 and 1880. The inflow of Jews made a sizeable increase in the small total population of Palestine. By 1890 there was a sizeable increase in the small total population of Palestine due to Jewish immigration. The estimated population at the time was 532,000 including 43,000 Jews (Bachi, 1976: 77).

This Jewish population was divided into several communities, each with its own language pattern. Jews from Eastern Europe spoke Yiddish; Jews from the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans spoke Judezmo (Ladino); Jews from Africa and Asia spoke their own local varieties of Arabic. But all of them shared some knowledge and use of Hebrew.

Although Hebrew was not a language in daily spoken use, it had remained to some degree its place in most Jewish communities as a language to be read and to be written, to be prayed in, and to be studied. While it was the pre-eminent language for religion, it was used in secular domains as well: in the composition of legal, scientific, and philosophical texts, and with the development of the Enlightenment, for secular belles-letters. Several books were written in Hebrew throughout this period. With each new book the language continued to develop and change to meet new demands. The first Hebrew novelists in the nineteenth century had the enormously demanding task of writing novels in the limited Hebrew vocabulary of the Bible (Patterson, 1991: 57). Expressions and phrases to portray the real situation were missing. The vocabulary and its contexts were out dated and could not confirm to the society that had evolved continuously and modernized. It was later in the century, when this limitation could be overcome, when it was accepted that Modern Hebrew prose could draw freely on its linguistic evolution from classical Hebrew and other sources and only then the flowering of Modern Hebrew literature began.

During the period when Hebrew was not a daily spoken language, it was restricted in its domains, serving mainly liturgical, scholarly, and literary functions. Occasionally it was used as a lingua franca by Jews from different places who shared no other language; it served this purpose most especially in contacts between European Yiddish-speaking Jews and their fellows living under Muslim suzerainty. In nineteenth-century Jerusalem too it performed this function in formal and possibly in informal contacts between the established Ladino and Arabic speaking Sephardic community and the newly arrived Yiddish speaking Ashkenazim. There are some
evidences of the development of Hebrew as a lingua franca among the Sephardim (Rabin, 1973: 70).

Counting on this limited use which is probably misleading, some scholars like Blanc (Blanc, 1968), Rabin (Rabin, 1973: 70), and Fellman (Fellman, 1973: 250-7) have pointed out that revitalization might be a better term to refer to what is known as Hebrew language revival. Hebrew is no exception to the general rule that once a language has passed out of all use whatever, it remains dead. The ‘revival’ of Hebrew was its revitalization, the restoration of the vitality involved in being a mother tongue, its resuscitation as a vernacular, as the language of daily life and especially as the language that parents speaks to their children.

Though Hebrew was in use albeit in some limited sense it was revived by revitalizing the use and then adding new spheres, new vocabulary and by promoting and popularizing it. The European national movements, which viewed the language of a people as inseparable from its nationhood influenced the movement for revival of Hebrew language. The movement began in Eastern Europe and gradually moved to Palestine in the latter part of the nineteenth century. There was, however, as Rabin (Rabin, 1973: 69) noted, an essential difference between the Hebrew revival movement and the language movements associated with European nationalism. In the latter cases, the usual task faced by the language revival campaign was to find a way to add literacy functions and formal status to a spoken variety of a language. In the case of Hebrew, the goal was reversed: to add spoken functions to a language whose literacy status was already clear though in a limited sense. Whereas the people mobilized by the European national movements could often be united by common vernacular, the Jews were divided by theirs – but they could be united by appeals to the symbolic association of Hebrew with tradition and people hood.

A series of pogroms and repressive measures in Russia following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 started a wave of emigration of Jews; around two million Jews left Eastern Europe. Most found their way to America, but a small number came to Palestine, then an outpost of the Ottoman Empire. Among them were young intellectuals, influenced by European nationalism and imbued with the notion of building a life in Palestine that was better than, and different from, the one they had known in Eastern Europe. It was these young Zionists who brought with them to Palestine the notion of using Hebrew as their national language, an all purpose vernacular that would serve to mark the distinction from life in the Diaspora.
The idea was first promulgated by Eliezer Ben Yehuda, a young Russian Jew who arrived in the Promised Land in 1881. He was an indefatigable promoter of the revival of Hebrew, in his specific writing, in his speaking and in his own practice: he was the first to insist on using Hebrew at home and to raise his own children speaking the language. Ben-Yehuda himself lived in Jerusalem, but, with a few distinguished exceptions, his arguments fell on deaf or even inimical cars, as the bulk of the religious Jews in Jerusalem continued to favour the restriction of Hebrew to its sacred functions. It was to be in the new Zionist settlements that the revitalization of Hebrew was to take place.

The Revitalization Process

The young Zionists who arrived due to both push and pull factors took up the task of reviving Hebrew language. Deeply influenced by the European National movement these young enthusiasts took up for themselves to achieve this task. The major steps that highlight the revival of the language are as follows (Nahir, 1988): First, the community members were ‘instilled’ with the required linguistic attitudes, both before and after reaching Palestine; second, those who went to schools were presented (in school) with a model of language use; third, they themselves came to speak and use Hebrew, not just in school but gradually also outside it, as a second language; fourth, when these children grew up, they started using Hebrew as the language of communication with their own children, who then grew up as native speakers of Hebrew.

The attitude of the Jewish community towards Hebrew was being molded in its favour. It was done so because of the practical problem of an all ready in use language Yiddish, which all were conversant with. The language choice in the new settlements was essentially between Yiddish, the common language of the settlers, and Hebrew. In a new setup in Palestine with the fresh memories of Diasporic hard life, Yiddish was seen as a reminder of the rejected features of Diaspora life, as vulgar, a jargon to be used and written only if one was illiterate in Hebrew. Hebrew was the language of the new nationalist movement, the language with a respectable literature, the language that expressed the national spirit. It evoked strong ideological support, especially among those settlers who had chosen to come to Palestine for
nationalist reason. The notion of attitude was very important in the final outcome of the tussle between languages.

**Yiddish versus Hebrew**

Ideology provides one major rationale underlying motivation. The main conceptual dispute between Hebrew and Yiddish, which Pilowsky (Pilowsky, 1985) says, was brought to Palestine from Europe. It came to its full expression only at the beginning of the twentieth century, when it was fought out most bitterly within the Labour movement. In 1907 Po’al Zion (a part of the Labour party) issued two numbers of its periodical in Yiddish; this was strongly criticized by another faction, *Ha-po’el ha-Za’ir* (The Young Labour). The Labour party decided, at the end of a long debate in the summer of 1907, to issue its official journal only in Hebrew. It is significant that this decision was made one year before the Czernowitz conference, which Fishman (Fishman, 1980: 43-73) holds as marking the establishment of an ideological basis for the Yiddish language movement. The Czernowitz conference is considered a pro-Yiddish conference which proclaimed Yiddish as an expression and symbol of Jewish national identity (Fishman, 1980: 66). Though the conference argued for Yiddish, it did realize the importance of Hebrew and the reasons behind the official support of the strong Labour movement. The conference took note of the fact that Zionists who favoured Hebrew had not rejected Yiddish, and so the conference in its turn should not reject Hebrew; this was why the conference declared Yiddish to ‘a’ and not ‘the’ national Jewish language (Fishman, 1980: 69). Thus, the vital decision about language choice had been made in Palestine before Yiddish was ready, as it were, to enter the conflict ideologically.

The proponents of both Hebrew and Yiddish continued to promote the place of their language through different means and on different platforms. This was despite the fact that both the languages had different targets to achieve to become a complete language. For Yiddish, as with so many other European languages associated with national movements, the aim was to add, or approve the addition of, high-status functions to a widely spoken but low-status language; for Hebrew, the task was to add, or approve the addition of, daily use and speech (a low-status function which could be raised ideologically) to a language with high status. The dispute between the two sides was marked by strong rhetoric, and at times with confrontation. In 1914, for
instance, Chaim Zhitlowsky visited Palestine, lecturing in Haifa, Jerusalem and Jaffa in Yiddish. The last of his planned series of lectures was disrupted by a demonstration of Hertzalia High School pupils. In an article in *Ha-Ahdut*, Zhitlowsky argued that only Yiddish could maintain the unity of the Jewish people. In a reply, A. Hashkin argued that Yiddish was not revolutionary; only Hebrew could be the national language. After the end of the First World War, the supporters of Hebrew, concerned that new immigration from Europe would strengthen Yiddish led a renewed ideological campaign. A proposal by N. Twerski that knowledge of Hebrew should be a prerequisite for election to the autonomous Jewish institutions in Eretz Israel was adopted at the Third Constituent Assembly for the *Yishuv* (the Jewish community in Palestine) in December 1918. A meeting in Philadelphia of American Po'ale Zion, held at the same time, passed a resolution calling for equal rights for Yiddish in Palestine. The language question became a major issue in the struggle to unite the labour movement. It remained a central polemical issue until at least 1925. From 1925 until 1930 the debate in Palestine was much more personal, and attempts to establish a chair of Yiddish at the Hebrew University in 1927 were defeated. The distinguished Hebrew poet, Nahman Bailik, who himself continued to speak Yiddish at home with his wife, was involved in the 1930s in a public incident with members of the self-styled Legion of Defenders of the language.

The argument on language choice in Palestine was a continuation of a European debate, but the important decision was made by the labour movement before the Czernowitz conference. Extremists on each side held on to their monoistic position, ignoring the possibility of multilingualism. At this point of time the language debate was essentially a struggle within the Zionist movement; the language question was not relevant in the conflict with the non-Zionists like the orthodox Jewish community, where Yiddish continued to be used. Ideologically, the Hebraists refused to allow any cultural role for Yiddish in Palestine, and the debates in the 1930s were intensely political. Later, in the 1940s, there was even violence, with a Yiddish printing-press being blown up. Paradoxically, after 1948, Oriental Jews came to identify with the very elite which had chosen Hebrew as their language and had rejected Yiddish.

These ideological disputes are clear indicators of the gravity and nature of dispute. The support for Hebrew, the kinds of attitude that the Zionist settlers brought
with them from Europe and passed on to the children in the Hebrew-medium schools, and the degree of motivation to learn and use the language was remarkably high.

This ideological preparedness was realized into acquiring language skills through systematic institutional setup. The children of the new immigrants were provided with a model of Hebrew speaking, which followed from the decision to teach Hebrew in Hebrew, making use of the direct method. Initially, there was no uniformity in course and content, even the pronunciation varied greatly among the Sephardim and Ashkenazim and also in different quarters of Palestine. Traditional European Jewish teaching had always adopted the familiar practice of teaching Hebrew (and Aramaic of the Talmud) through Yiddish, the pupil’s native language. Eliezer Ben Yehuda was a staunch promoter of the new direct method where Hebrew was to be taught in Hebrew. Ben-Yehuda (Fellman, 1973: 250-7) had worked for a few months in an Alliance Israelite Universelle school, using (at the suggestion of the principal, Nissim Bechar) the Berlitz (or direct) method of learning Hebrew through Hebrew. In the schools of the agricultural settlements, under the patronage of the Baron de Rothschild, the regular medium of instruction for general subjects after 1884 had been French, with Yiddish being used as the language for teaching Jewish subjects. There was no objection, however, when, in 1886, David Yudelevic emulated Ben-Yehuda and started teaching Hebrew in Hebrew. Texts were prepared; all general subjects were being taught in his schools in Hebrew by 1888, and by 1891 some subjects were being taught in Hebrew in several other colonies as well. In 1892 a meeting of the nineteen members of the Hebrew teachers’ association decided that children of 6 should attend school for five years, that the school should use direct method (Hebrew in Hebrew), and that ‘the explanation of the Bible is to be in Hebrew and in general all studies are to be explained in Hebrew’ (Fellman, 1973: 253).

The Hebrew teachers’ association in a meeting in 1895 adopted Hebrew as the language of instruction, using Sephardic pronunciation but Ashkenazic pronunciation was to be allowed in the first year in Ashkenazic schools, and for prayers and rituals. The association could meet only in 1903, at the close of a major convention of Jews of the Yishuv called in Zikhron Ya’akov by Ussishkin, the Russian Zionist leader. The fifty-nine members present accepted Hebrew as the medium of instruction, and the direct method as the technique of instruction without much debate; there was general agreement on the use of Ashkenazic script and Sephardic pronunciation.
The next major step in providing children with opportunities to learn Hebrew was the opening of kindergartens or preparatory programmes. In 1892 the Baron de Rothschild opened a French kindergarten in Zakhron Ya'akov. Two years later, in 1894, a preparatory (pre-school) programme in Hebrew for 4 and 5 years old was instituted in Rishon Le-Zion. Although the programme started it lacked the required infrastructures particularly manpower. The teachers were untrained, unimaginative and unsuitable to achieve the desired goal. For this purpose a young graduate who was ready to take up the task, was sent to Jerusalem to be trained at the Evelina de Rothschild School, in English. She returned in 1898 to open the first Modern Hebrew kindergarten at Rishon Le-Zion, with thirty pupils. More Hebrew kindergartens were opened in Jerusalem in 1903, Safed, Jaffa, Haifa, Tiberias, Rakhovot, Zikhron Ya’akov, and Nes Ziyyonah in 1904. Kindergartens became the main instrument for developing Hebrew fluency: ‘Hebrew became almost the daily language of the youngsters’ (Azaryahu, 1988); ‘The child became the teacher of his parents, his brothers, his sisters...’ (Chaim cited by Fellman 1973).

Another issue and debate among the early Zionists was with regards to the model of Hebrew to be adopted and transpired. This was an important issue to be resolved and only then the aspiring teachers could be trained in it. At this stage these were difficult decisions to be made because of practical reasons. There is hardly any doubt that the level of Hebrew itself and that of the early Hebrew teachers was quite low. Religion and rituals were the prime source of Hebrew. The secular sphere was almost absent. Teaching and expressing contemporary issues in Hebrew was a Herculean task. There were no Hebrew teacher’s seminars; the all Hebrew-teacher seminar in Jerusalem was only established in 1904. Glinert takes the issue with scholars like Tur-Sinai and Avineri who belong to the “Zionist-Hebraist” camp and claim that, before its revival, the Hebrew language was incapable of dealing with everyday life. They attribute the enrichment of Hebrew to the work of secular scholars and committees in the early years of the twentieth century. Glinert (Glinert, 1987: 39-56) argues on the other hand, that in fact a semi-vernacular religious Hebrew was already available and in use. He cites Ganzfried’s Kitzur Shulhan Arukh (popularly known as Kitzur), an abridged and popularized guide to Jewish religious practice, first published in Hebrew in Hungary in 1864, of which more than twelve editions 400,000 – 500,000 copies had appeared by 1908, including plagiarized ones. Th.: Kitzur was taught in the traditional Jewish elementary schools in Europe and in Palestine, and
covered the daily life of a Jew, all aspects of which were fully governed by religious law. It required Hebrew words for such everyday items as fruits, vegetables and trees (some of which Avineri claims as later discoveries of the dictionary compilers) as well as other normal objects of daily life. Because the first Hebrew teachers in the settlements had themselves had a religious education, they would have known these words. But these arguments of Glinert do not suffice the vast range of vocabulary required to meet the needs of a very different time. The Kitzur though popular and sold many copies catered around religious and ritual needs of the Jewish population. Fellman (Fellman, 1973: 50) refers to the account of one of these early teachers, Izhak Epstein, who claimed to have had little Hebrew education beyond elementary schools; this education, however, included the Talmud until he entered school, after which he read ‘very little’ modern Hebrew literature. No matter how limited was this knowledge of Hebrew it definitely played a crucial role in building up what Hebrew is today. Gilnert (Gilnert, 1987: 52) argues for the importance of this knowledge:

The very case with which the Spoken Revival took place, and the will to do it, suggest the existence of a fairly nonliterary underlying model, not the highly complex and daunting system of Biblical Hebrew; add to this the less-than-scholarly nature of the teaching cadre, more at home with the unselfconscious ‘unartificial’ Hebrew of Kitzur and Rashi than with grammatical treatises or Enlightenment fiction...

Given the tradition of imparting religious education to next generation it is likely that not just the teachers but also the parents of the children in the first Hebrew classes were likely to have had a similar educational background, and so to have been familiar with the ‘semi-vernacular’ that Glinert Postulates; this would obviously be a major factor in providing the children with a wider model and in establishing the possibility of their later use of Hebrew at home. It is also intriguing to note that the revival of Hebrew signified separation from the Diaspora and Yiddish that represented the Diaspora (Weinreich, 1980: 311). It was mainly the Yiddish speakers who came from Europe and became the pioneers of modern Hebrew; building on the complex pattern of functional allocation that existed between Yiddish and lashon hakodesh (The holy language) (Fishman, 1976), they were able to draw on both languages as they started to use Hebrew as a daily language.

The third stage after providing ideological support for Hebrew was streamlining and defining the model of Hebrew. The children in the Hebrew-medium
classes became the carrier of Hebrew outside the school. First, they started speaking Hebrew not just with their teachers but also with each other outside school, and then with their parents and other adults. This involved overcoming what Spolsky (Spolsky, 1989: 162) called ‘the inertia condition’ on language choice, a strong preference to continue using the same language to the same person. Once the children started to speak freely in Hebrew in the class-room, this condition favoured speaking it to each other outside the class-room. It, however, required considerable effort to overcome the inertia of home-language practice. This is where the trained language teacher charged with ideological backing played a crucial role in preparing the next generation.

The development and spread of Hebrew outside the class-room domain was gradual and in stages (Nahir, 1988). The initial progress was cautious and slow. Smilansky (Smilansky, 1930: 7) reports that in 1891 Hebrew-school graduates stopped speaking Hebrew when they left school. But ten years later or so the situation had changed. Azaryahu claims that Hebrew had become the ‘children’s tongue’, though not the children’s mother tongue. Haviv (Haviv, 1910: 128) reports that Hebrew was spoken in the streets and homes of Rishon Le-Zion. Hazikhroni (Hazikhroni, 1902: 32) reports that in Zikhron Ya’akov young men and women also used Hebrew. Feinsod-Sokenick (Feinsod-Sokenick, 1929: 14-15) says that the kindergarten children brought Hebrew into the home; the mothers then took evening classes in Hebrew. Pirhi (Pirhi, 1905: 21) reports on a two-year old who spoke only Hebrew and sang songs in it; she was teaching her parents all she knew. By 1912, Klausner (Klausner, 1915) claims, all young men and women could read a Hebrew newspaper. As time went on a number of language islands appear to have developed in Palestine. In Zikhron Ya’akov Hebrew was almost like a second language and was the language at least of the young. A newspaper article in 1907 there expressed surprise that a public speech was given in Hebrew, considered to be the normal language of children in the settlement but not of adults.

The next step was the crowning one, as graduates of the Hebrew-medium schools, for whom Hebrew had become the regular second language and the main first language with each other, married and started to communicate with their children in Hebrew. This change happened between 1905 and 1915. Bachi (Bachi, 1956: 179-247) says that 40 percent of Jews (34,000 of 85,000) recorded Hebrew as their first or
only language in the 1916 census; the figures are higher (75 percent) among the young.

**Reasons for the initial adoption of Hebrew**

In a new society that was settling in Palestine choosing Hebrew as its language was not just one of many other languages that the Jewish community used through ages. The factors that led the debate in favour of Hebrew were more than simply lingual. Of all the options of language choice taken into consideration to be the language of the new settlement, Hebrew was the only language that had an advantage over others. It served more than one purpose. Owing to this variety of purposes that it served scholars differ on the reasons that led Hebrew surpass all her rivals and row in all the ideologs.

Cooper (Cooper, 1989) in his comparison of the Irish and Hebrew cases, stressed the material incentives for the adoption of Hebrew, that is, the inherent value of Hebrew as a lingua franca in the growing Jewish population of the Yishuv. Fishman too downplayed the importance of ideology:

> Intellectuals (and even intelligentsia) alone can rarely establish a movement. Intellectuals can rectify language and react to it as a powerful symbol, as the bearer and actualizer of cultural values, behaviors, traditions, goals. However for an L (Vernacular language) to spread into H (Classical language) functions more concrete considerations (jobs, funds, influence, status, control, power) are involved (Fishman, 1980: 55).

Evidence does not support fully this argument as the socio-linguistic situation in those settlements where Hebrew was first taken outside the class-room seems to suggest that this most critical of all steps took place in communities where Yiddish was already a satisfactory language of communication, where no lingua franca was needed. It occurred not in the mixed Ashkenazic/Sephardic towns like Jerusalem and Tiberias, but in the mainly Yiddish-speaking agricultural settlements.

On the other hand Hebrew was not yet ready to be a language of daily use. It was still carrying the sacred aura around it. The vital task in the case of Hebrew was to take a language with virtually no vernacular use and no native learning, but a language generally known in its written and learned forms, and add the spoken functions. In other words, to add Vernacular language function to an Classical language function. The Irish and Maori case was the one with a language with
decreasing vernacular use and dying native learning. At the same time there was no widespread knowledge of the classical or written version of the language. This may be compared to the analogous, but the more complex task undertaken by those who set out to add high-culture functions to the Yiddish used in everyday life (Fishman, 1980: 43-73). The arguments at Czernowitz conference were not that Yiddish should be a spoken language (that it already was), but that it should be used as a vehicle for high culture.

A critical issue in the case of language choice is the nature of the competing languages. In the twentieth century and particularly in the latter half of it English emerged as one of those languages that has shown its power to spread universally, offering itself as an attractive alternative (or at least, necessary component) to most other languages in the world. Both Irish and Maori were unfortunate enough to be competing with it. During the period of Hebrew revival the opposing languages were less powerful. Yiddish was the language that Hebrew replaced as a vernacular, but it was in many ways a pre-ideological Yiddish, a Yiddish plainly labeled as not just a language associated with the Diaspora (the denial of which was their very reason for being in Palestine), but a language lacking clearly acknowledged cultural value. Many hardly considered Yiddish to be a language at all, but a jargon. The religious culture that used Yiddish as a vernacular valued Hebrew more highly, though Yiddish was recognized as having a limited but important status in educational functions (Fishman, 1980: 55). The secular section of the population that used Yiddish for daily speech valued non-Jewish languages like French and German more highly. Nor were there strong arguments for Judezmo (which turned out to have quite a low language loyalty) or Arabic (for Jews in most Arab countries had used vernacular and other local low-valued variables). In other words, Yiddish, Judezmo, and Arabic were all perceived as vernacular language varieties in competition with one or more classical language varieties, while Hebrew already had the status of a high language variety.

In the Jewish schools of the Yishuv there were two serious competitors for secular teaching, French and German. The strength of French was sapped by the withdrawal of the Baron de Rothschild in 1899; some opposition to his control was expressed as early as 1887, in arguments for the use of Hebrew in Rishon Le-Zion. The strength of German dated from the inauguration of the Hilfsverein schools in 1901. By this time Hebrew had already started asserting itself and from the beginning there was strong ideological support for Hebrew here, especially in schools outside
the city (Fellman, 1973: 250-7). And it was in these schools that the language war, the struggle over whether to use Hebrew or German as the language for higher scientific instructions, was fought in 1913-14.

A major shortcoming with Hebrew was the extent and breadth of the teacher’s knowledge of Hebrew as high language. The language they knew was not the Hebrew of the intelligentsia, the classical variety of Enlightenment literature, but a combination of religious varieties, ranging from the high formality of the Bible to the semi-vernacular of the religious commentaries and codes of practice in which so many of them had been educated. Their task in starting to speak Hebrew with their pupils was not an easy task and inversely it was equally true for the pupil to understand their teacher.

The Spread of Hebrew

Having established an ideological base for itself Hebrew succeeded in outplacing Yiddish in the everyday language of the Jewish community in Palestine. Unlike Irish or Yiddish, Hebrew had a different task to perform. It had to become a spoken language, a language that would touch upon different facets of life. This would mean the language of the masses and a language that would need to shed its sacred aura and enter the secular domain. The immigrant population quickly adopted Hebrew and they had reasons to do so.

Between 1881 and 1903 some 20,000 to 30,000 Jews arrived in Palestine (Bachi, 1976: 79). Ben Yahuda’s idea of using Hebrew as the language of instruction was adopted in the new settlements that they founded. The first graduates of these schools, who were fluent and natural in Hebrew, married each other and their first generation children spoke fluent Hebrew at the time in their homes and outside. ‘They were the first people, after a lapse of 1,700 years, who know no language but Hebrew’ (Rabin, 1973: 73).

During the First World War immigration to Palestine came to virtual stop, but started again at the end of the war. Palestine was occupied by Allied Forces and was removed from Turkish rule. The League of Nations awarded the mandate to control Palestine to the British Government in 1922; the British divided the territory into two, proclaiming the eastern sector as a separate kingdom of Transjordan, where they set up Abdullah as king. The territory west of the Jordan river, in the former Turkish
sanjaks of Acre, Nablus (Shechem), and Jordan, was established as Palestine. The British Mandate government proclaimed English, Arabic, and Hebrew to be the official languages of Palestine.

In less than three decades, between 1919 – 1947, the population of Palestine doubled from 670,000 to 1,970,000 (Bachi, 1976: 40). During this period, which was under the British mandate both Jews and Muslims, the two major sections of the population, showed the same absolute increase – 600,000 each – but in relative terms the Jewish population had a much greater increase. The population had an eleven fold increase, from about 56,000 in 1919 to about 650,000 in 1948 (Bachi 1976: 40). This high rate of increase among Jews was mainly due to immigration (Table 1.1). During this period most of the immigrants came from Eastern and Central Europe, initially for political and economic reasons, but after 1933 because of Nazi persecution. British government policy in 1939 set limits to this immigration, limits which continued in effect even as the outcome of the Holocaust became public after 1945. There was also a substantial Jewish immigration from the Yemen and other Asian countries at this time.

Table 1.1

Arrival of Jews in Israel, 1948-2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>1,018,287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>2,395,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>1,702,499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1,750,957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>243,699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>113,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>18,370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>37,478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>56,234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>71,224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>27,082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>23,895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>24,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>47,638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>61,328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>64,364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>54,716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>30,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>15,730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>14,327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>20,544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>37,804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>36,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>41,930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>55,888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>54,886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>31,979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>20,028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>19,754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>21,429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>26,394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>37,222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>20,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>12,599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>13,723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>16,906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>12,965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>13,034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>24,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1,920,017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1,686,97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>70,580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>56,070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>48,537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>70,586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>55,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>39,571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>33,567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>23,268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>20,898</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In 1948 the British government gave up its mandate, and a United Nations decision led to the partition of Palestine and the establishment of the state of Israel. The second element of the United Nations decision, assuming the creation of an independent Arab state, was not carried out; rather, part (Gaza) was occupied by Egypt, and the remainder, including the Old City itself, was occupied by Jordan.

The first act of the newly established state of Israel in May 1948 was to repeal the British restrictions on immigration, and an enormous wave of settlers followed. Survivors of the Holocaust, unwilling or unable to remain in Europe, were now able to enter the new Jewish state. At the same time, a growing sense of insecurity among the Jews living under Arab rule in Asia and North Africa, bolstered in many cases by Messianic expectations, led to mass exodus. During the first three and a half years of the existence of the state of Israel close to 700,000 Jews flocked there, more than doubling the population (Bachi, 1977: 79); and the rest of the 1950s through to the
end of 1960 saw the arrival of another 300,000. Altogether, from independence in 1948 until the end of 1978, more than 1,600,000 Jews came to Israel, about two and a half times the number of Jewish inhabitants before independence. In 1950 immigrants constituted approximately 75 percent of the Jewish population in Israel; by 1978 this figure had declined to about 45 percent. Now the percentage of immigration to the total population is very low. In 2004 the immigration was just 20,898 out of the total population of 6,869,500 forming just 0.3 percent.

There was continuous immigration to Israel throughout the twentieth century. The earlier immigrants took up the task of reviving the language, the later ones adopted the language on their arrival to Palestine. This adoption of Hebrew was not uniform. The immigrants came from different background, educational level, and belonged to different age groups. Other factors that too decided the pace and level of adoption of Hebrew was the factor that brought them to Palestine/Israel and their place of settlement in the new land. Cooper discusses the spread of Hebrew in terms of the factors that would influence the performance of Hebrew learning. He makes a number of generalizations by studying the demographic characteristics of those adopting Hebrew. Among immigrants, the younger they were when they arrived and the longer they have been in Israel, the more likely they are to use the language with ease. For immigrants who arrived during the British Mandate period, those who came from Arabic speaking countries and from Eastern Europe were most likely to use Hebrew; those who came from Austria, Germany, Hungary and Turkey were less likely to use Hebrew. Among those who arrived after 1948, the index of Hebrew speaking remained high among Jews from Arabic-speaking countries, but the index for persons from Eastern Europe declined. Schmelz and Bachi ((Schmelz and Bachi, 1974) suggest that this decline can be explained by the collapse of organized Jewish education in Eastern Europe under Nazi and Soviet rule, and the fact that earlier immigrants tended to have had a Zionist ideology. The high indices among immigrants from Arabic speaking countries are explained in part by the relationship between Arabic and Hebrew, two Semitic languages, an affinity which helps a speaker of one learn the other. The low indices among immigrants from Austria, Germany, and Hungary can be explained in some measure by the strong cultural ties with Germany and Hungarian on the part of those Jews whose communities had been assimilated for a long time (Bachi 1956: 230-1), as well as by the greater ability of
German speakers to use their mother tongue or cognate English to earn a living (Hofman, and Fisherman, 1971: 204-26).

Among the new immigrants the use of Hebrew was higher among the younger people than older people, both because they were more likely to have been born in Israel and because they had a higher level of formal education. Formal education appears to contribute to use of Hebrew in a number of ways – many well-educated immigrants had studied Hebrew abroad and in formal situations in Israel – but it is neither a necessity nor a sufficient condition, as witnessed by the many highly educated German speaking immigrants who resisted the adoption of Hebrew, and the many poorly educated or illiterate immigrants from North Africa and Asia who adopted it with alacrity. Perhaps the main reason for the link between education and use of Hebrew can be found in the fact that those occupations involving a working knowledge of Hebrew are also those for which a formal education is required. Thus, managerial and clerical workers and people in the liberal professions, especially teaching, show comparatively high indices of Hebrew use, while workers in the service occupations, such as traders, salesmen, tailors, shoemakers, and unskilled workers, show low indices (Schmelz and Bachi 1974: 778-9). There is a striking contrast with the Palestinian’s knowledge of Hebrew. Those in the service occupation have better control of Hebrew. Among Jews as well, the index was directly proportional to the interaction with other speakers at work place. It was higher among those with employment than those without employment, for those who worked at least thirty-five hours per week than for those who worked less, and for those who worked for more weeks in the year than for those who worked fewer (Schmelz and Bachi 1974: 778).

Linguistic heterogeneity works as a catalyst. It worked in favour of Hebrew. Linguistic heterogeneity (Brosnahan, 1963) showed its relevance as one of the conditions promoting the spread of Greek, Latin, and Arabic in the empires associated with those languages. The influence of linguistic heterogeneity can be seen in a survey carried out among 190 adults in eighty Romanian speaking Jewish families from three communities in Israel (Hofman and Fisherman, 1971). About half of the families had been in the country for more than twenty years and the other half for three to six years. Among the newcomers, those who lived in Jerusalem, where they were scattered all over the city, know more Hebrew than those who lived in the town of Nahariyyah, where they were concentrated more homogenously. Among the earlier
immigrants, those who live in Nahariyyah, the home of many ethnic groups, knew more Hebrew than those who lived in a nearby rural settlement populated mainly by Romanian speakers.

The Jewish community in Palestine and Israel has for long maintained linguistic heterogeneity. Taking account of the principal languages in the 1916-18 censuses, Bachi (Bachi, 1956: 197) estimated that if any two Jews met at random during that period, the chance that they would share the same principal language was only about one in three. Hebrew was already (Bachi, 1956: 194) the most common principal language by then (40 percent), followed by Yiddish (36 percent), Arabic (18 percent), and Judezmo (4 percent). There is a good chance that Hebrew was also the chief lingua franca among the Jews of Palestine by that time, for it was the language most likely to be shared by interlocutors who did not have any other language in common.

When the state of Israel was established in 1948, the probability that two speakers drawn at random from the Jewish population would share the same principal language had increased from 32 percent (at the close of the Ottoman period) to 58 percent (Bachi 1977: 177). Hebrew was by then the principal language of the bulk of the Jewish population. But while the linguistic homogeneity of the Jewish population as a whole was increasing, the trend was in the opposite direction with the non-Hebrew speaking immigrants. The linguistic heterogeneity of the immigrants became more marked during the British Mandate and especially during the period of mass immigration after independence, partly because of the marked erosion of Yiddish. Whereas the censuses of 1916-18 had confirmed that nearly 60 percent of all Jews who did not speak Hebrew as a principal language spoke Yiddish, by 1972 that figure had dropped to 19 percent for those aged 14 and above (Bachi 1977: 290). Of the eight languages listed by Bachi (Bachi 1977: 290), Yiddish is the only one whose percentage of use among non-Hebrew speakers had declined consistently since 1916. This decline was temporarily checked when a large numbers of Yiddish speaking immigrants arrived in the mid 1950s.

In retrospect, the rapid decline of Yiddish was owing to its low status in terms of aura and sacredness and in part from its decreasing usefulness as a lingua franca. The spread and usefulness of a language commensurate with its use as lingua franca and hence it exerts pressure on others to learn (Greenberg, 1966). Conversely, nothing stops the spread of a lingua franca more surely than the existence of a rival. The
growth of Hebrew as a lingua franca at the end of the Ottoman period created a conducive environment for its acquisition and slowed the spread of its chief rivals, Yiddish and Arabic. The potential of Yiddish as a lingua franca was almost certainly undermined, in addition, by its association with the ultra orthodox anti-Zionists of East European origin, who used it as their internal lingua franca. Thus, the inner strength of a language needs the external support of political patronage to establish itself.

**Spoken Hebrew**

Modern Hebrew shows relatively little differentiation among speakers when it comes to everyday, informal conversation, and, at the same time, relatively great differentiation between formal and informal varieties. There is virtually no geographic variation in modern Israeli Hebrew, except few words like the Jerusalem pronunciation of the word for ‘two hundred’ and names of some children’s games. Two major varieties of Hebrew are generally recognized: general Israeli Hebrew and Oriental or Sephardic Hebrew, the latter identified by a few pronunciation variants which are stereotyped marker of membership in Asian and African ethnic communities (primarily glottal letters like ꙺ, ꙼) More and more Jews from these communities are now adopting the general pronunciation (Bentolila, 1983) and the differences are very slight. This change can be attributed to various factors including inter-group marriages, growing number of native born Israelis and other institutions. The relative lack of differentiation in informal Hebrew speech has simplified the learning process and contributed to the speed with which the vernacular has spread.

The homogeneity of informal spoken Hebrew has simplified learning, but the substantial difference between spoken and written Hebrew and between informal and formal varieties has complicated the task of mastering the latter varieties. The distance between the two is much greater than in English, but not so great as between the informal and formal varieties of Arabic. While the knowledge of the informal language can be picked up by interactions in the everyday world of market-place and work-place, knowledge of the more formal varieties depends essentially on education. This is particularly related to the status of Hebrew as a revitalized language. Hebrew’s status (Rabin, 1975) as a literary language is ancient and continuous, whereas the vernacular tradition is discontinuous, having suffered an interruption of 1,700 years.
During this long period, literacy in Hebrew meant literacy in a classical language. Vernacular literacy is something new. The Hebrew grammar taught to Israeli children in the schools, for example, is not the grammar of the modern vernacular, but a normalized systematization of biblical Hebrew carried out in the thirteenth century (Rabin, 1983: 41-56). Formal Hebrew varieties, the immediate heirs of this ancient literary tradition, exhibit substantial differences from everyday Hebrew in vocabulary and grammar. Thus, the radio news is presented in a variety of Hebrew somewhat remote from that used in everyday speech: the language of the newspaper is also quite different from everyday speech.

The Hebrew of everyday speech is learned by the immigrants more easily than the Hebrew of newspapers and radio. This is aptly demonstrated by language usage data gathered by Rosenbaum (Rosenbaum, 1983: 115-30). Similarly, the study of Hofman and Fisherman (Hofman, and Fisherman, 1971: 204-26) found much more knowledge of spoken Hebrew than of written; length of residence in Israel accounted for an increase in spoken ability, but not necessarily in written, which was dependent on formal education instead. Even in formal education the achievement was greatly influenced by age factor. Even the spoken ability was dependent upon the homogeneity of the neighborhood. The difference between informal and formal varieties of Hebrew represented a more serious problem among immigrants arriving after 1930. Before then, most male immigrants were likely to have had a formal religious education and so to know literary Hebrew. Those who came later were less well prepared.

Hebrew gradually moved from prayers and rituals to more formal use and from the formal public use to private and intimate domains. In 1902, twenty years after Ben-Yehuda arrived in Palestine, there were only ten families in Jerusalem who spoke Hebrew at home (Rabin, 1973: 70). Jerusalem was much more conservative in this respect than the new Jewish settlements. The first use of Hebrew was in a public setting, the schools. The language entered the homes only when the graduates of these schools married each other. Among immigrant families, there is similar evidence that Hebrew enters the home through the children who learn it in the street and at school: when they come home they continue to use it among themselves and with their friends, and finally insist on using it with their parents. A mother of three, for example, who arrived from Germany as a young woman in the 1930s and whose children were born in Israel, reports that she spoke German to her first child, who
answered in German; she spoke German to her second child, who answered in
Hebrew; and she spoke Hebrew to her third child.

Hebrew is now the dominant language in public setting. A survey
(Rosenbaum, Nadel, et.al., 1977) of language use on a street in West Jerusalem:
outside the walls of the old city noted that about half of those heard speaking Hebrew
did so with a marked non-native accent. Public language use on that street could be
practiced by the following rule: speak Hebrew unless your mother tongue is English
and you are speaking to another mother-tongue speaker of English. Although most
shopkeepers knew English, most native speakers of English switched to Hebrew to
carry out their transactions. Between Jewish Israelis who do not share the same
mother tongue, Hebrew is the virtually unchallenged lingua franca.

Efforts to Promote Hebrew

Historically, Jews have remained multilingual. Different Diaspora communities spoke
different languages in different places and at different times. Language choice was not
"the" issue in Jewish history though they learned Hebrew for religious reasons. This
situation changed when the task of making a nation state was taken up by the Zionists.
Jews around the world were mobilized to immigrate to Palestine/Israel and
considerable efforts were made to help the new immigrants to Israel learn Hebrew:
the government subsidized Hebrew courses, and language learning was connected
with immigration, some of the news broadcasts are still transmitted in simplified
Hebrew spoken at a slower pace than the normal, and there a few newspapers in
simplified Hebrew.

The efforts to promote the spread of Hebrew are mainly on two fronts: one is
helping the immigrants to learn the language, and the other is training the new
generation for good citizenship through the education system. There were at least
three types of organized language-spread activities. First, there is a continuous effort
to modernize the language and to standardize new terms. This work, started a hundred
years ago by the Hebrew Language Council, continues today in the form of a formally
constituted Academy of Hebrew Language. Second, there were efforts by teachers
and pupils in Jewish schools to establish Hebrew as the language of instruction; this
culminated in the "language war" of 1913, which Rabin (Rabin, 1973: 75)
characterizes as the "first national struggle" of modern Jewish Palestine. A German
Jewish foundation for the advancement of Jews in technologically underdeveloped countries, the *Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden*, was developing plans to establish a technical high school in Haifa. The foundation already operated a number of schools in Palestine, in all of which Hebrew was used as a language of instruction. None the less, in planning the curriculum of its new tertiary technical institute, the foundation felt constrained to promote German as a language of culture; it announced in 1913 that the new *Technikum* would use German and not Hebrew as the medium of instruction, on the grounds that Hebrew was not sufficiently advanced for work in the sciences. This gave rise to strong resentment, expressed particularly by teachers and students in other *Hilfsverein* schools, who proclaimed a boycott. The foundation was forced to reconsider its plan and to accept that Hebrew should be the medium of the new curriculum. The third type of organized effort involved encouraging people to use Hebrew. For instance, a youth organization called the *Gedud meginnei ha-safah* (*Legion of Defenders of the Language*) was found in 1923 to combat the use of languages other than Hebrew; it remained in existence until the late 1930s (Wigoder, 1972: 100).

The history of Hebrew clearly shows that the motives and goals of the revival of the language were more than linguistic. The goals of those who promoted Hebrew were Zionist goals, those of the Jewish national movement – the return of the Jewish people to its land and to normality. Hebrew was a central symbol for the awakening and maintenance of national sentiment. The promotion of Hebrew was a reminder of the glorious tradition connecting the Jewish people to its ancestors, and a sign of the national self-determination that they could win again. In principle, any common language can serve to mobilize the masses, but an indigenous language, a carrier of classical, religious, and historical tradition, is an eminently the most powerful symbol which can rally behind it different factions.

Over a period of time Hebrew established itself as the chief Jewish lingua franca in Palestine and consequently there was a change in the emphasis in the national goals served by the promotion of Hebrew. A vehicle of mass communication was needed to integrate the diverse ethnic groups making up the new nation, especially after the mass immigration that followed the establishment of the state of Israel and to facilitate the working of national institutions. This is not to say that Hebrew lost its role as a symbol of national identity. In fact it grew in symbolic values as the population became more diverse ethno-linguistically. The efforts originally
directed towards exploiting the symbolic value of Hebrew, in order to mobilize the Jews in their struggle for self-determination, were redirected, once the struggle had been won, towards strengthening of the position of Hebrew as a language of mass communication, in order to integrate and control a diverse population. The initial objectives of language planning were channeled chiefly towards modernizing Hebrew and encouraging people to learn it and to use it.

As for the motivation of potential adopters of Hebrew, it is sometimes claimed that instrumental considerations were paramount in the case of immigrants who arrived after independence, but that, in contrast, ideological motivations were paramount in the early days of the revival movement. The relationship between participation in the work-force and knowledge and use of Hebrew suggests the contemporary importance of material incentives in the adoption of Hebrew. It is also true that the immigrants who came to Palestine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were different from those who came later. Those who arrived before 1930 tended to be younger, with a better Jewish education and, therefore, greater prior knowledge of at least basic Hebrew, and with a much stronger commitment to Zionist ideology than those who came thereafter. Thus, the idea of reviving Hebrew as the chief language of everyday life among the Jews in the new settlements of Palestine was fully consistent both with their national aspirations and with their previous education.

Certainly, a strong ideological commitment was an essential component of Hebrew revitalization. At the same time the increasing linguistic heterogeneity of the growing Jewish population in Palestine clearly demanded a lingua franca, and Hebrew was the natural and logical choice for this purpose. For most Jewish men and many women at that time had the benefit of a religious education which made them familiar with Hebrew, at least in its written forms. Any of the other competing possibilities — Yiddish, Arabic, German, French, Judezmo — would have had to be learned by a substantial portion of the population. And, of course, Hebrew did not have the more particular communal association of the other languages, symbolizing, as it did, the great tradition common to all Jews.
Jewish Multilingualism

Having dealt with different aspects of Hebrew revival, it spreads and establishing itself as the vital language in the newly established state of Israel, one should not undermine the importance and role played by different languages in Jewish history. As a note of caution it would be worth mentioning here that historically Jews had not been mono-lingual. In order to understand the present socio-linguistic situation of Israel in its fullest historical context, it is necessary to look at the beginning of the first century of the Common Era. At least four languages appear to have played significant roles: Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin. Each one of these languages had a role and an operational area in the society. Over a period of time one language was replaced by another and finally Hebrew became the language of the Jewish community and here we would consider the pattern of multilingualism involved.

Hebrew is one of the longest continuously recorded languages that has survived to the modern day. It first appeared around the late 11th or early 10th century BCE in the form of the Gezer calendar. While the script on this inscription is called Old Hebrew, it is barely discernible from Phoenician from where it originated.

Meanwhile, another Phoenician-derived script, Aramaic, was fast becoming the international trade language. Consequently, the Hebrews started writing in Aramaic for every day use and confined the Old Hebrew script for religious use (and the occasional inscription on coins). The Aramaic script adopted by the Hebrews quickly became known as the Jewish script, and because of the shape of its letters it also became known as *ketab merubba*’, or “square script.” It has twenty two alphabets and in addition to it there are five alphabets called “sofit” or word ending alphabets.

Hebrew

It is now generally agreed that the two varieties of Hebrew used by Jews in Palestine in the late Second Temple period are represented more or less by biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew. There are, of course, important distinctions to be made between poetic and non-poetic biblical Hebrew, and between early and late varieties. Chomsky (Chomsky, 1957) argues that Mishnaic Hebrew represents a later form of the vernacular spoken in biblical times. The difference between the two are easily and
quickly summarized, and extended to grammar, vocabulary, and general style. Segal (Segal, 1927) pointed out that the main differences in grammar concern the tenses, the expression of possession, and the dependent clause.

**Hebrew – the Debate**

While the differences between the two varieties are clear, there is some disagreement on their status in the late Second Temple period. In one view as expressed by Dubnow (Dubnow, 1967) Hebrew had become extinct as a spoken language some time after the return from the Babylonian Exile in 537 BCE, and had been completely replaced as a spoken language by a variety of Aramaic. According to this view, only the learned still knew and understood biblical Hebrew which had to be translated into Aramaic for the masses. Mishnaic Hebrew was explained as an artificial language of scholars, developed by the rabbis in much the same way as medieval Christian scholars developed their own variety of Latin (Pfeiffer, 1949: 379).

The argument that Hebrew died out immediately after the return of some of the exiles from Babylon depends largely on two references in the book of Nehemiah. In the first there are complaints about the fact that many of the Jews who stayed behind in Israel had intermarried with non-Jews, and that their children no longer spoke the ‘language of Judah’ (Hebrew) but ‘half in the speech of Ashdod’ (Nehemiah 13: 24). Nehemiah seems to have used Ashdod to refer to Palestine in general. The linguistic situation of Ashdod, which had also been conquered by the Babylonians, is not clear. Some scholars interpret his complaints as meaning that Hebrew had already been replaced by Aramaic. Some argue that the reason for the switch to Aramaic was the time spent in Aramaic-speaking Babylon, for it refers specifically to those Jews who had not gone into exile but who had mixed with the local people and with the populations moved into the area by the Babylonians.

The second text refers to reading the Torah aloud in public in the days of Ezra, after the return from the Babylon Exile: ‘And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people… and Yeshua … and the Levites caused the people to understand the Torah of God, distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.’ (Nehemia 8: 5- 8) The Babylonian Talmud (Tractate Nedarim 37b) interprets the last verse of this passage as referring to the institution of the Targum, the practice when reading the Torah in public of following of each Hebrew sentence.
with its Aramaic translation. It is possible that it refers to a translation into any language; it could also mean an interpretation given in more colloquial language.

Even if the practice did not start as early as this, and even if, as Chomsky suggests, it was limited to neighborhoods where the mixture of populations had led Jews having a poorer knowledge of Hebrew, it is a fact that, within a few centuries, the Aramaic oral translation and interpretation of the written Hebrew Torah had become a firmly established custom of public reading. There had been a clear distinction between formal and written versions of the Targum and the oral version accompanying the public Torah reading, which was intended for listeners who could also understand Hebrew. The pattern of oral translation survived in some Jewish communities until the modern times. But Hebrew and Aramaic versions were kept distinct, and Hebrew had the higher status. For some time the Aramaic version was considered to be Oral Law, which could not be written down (Spolsky, 1986: 23-37).

The two texts and their later interpretations give some support, therefore, to those who argue for the early spread of Aramaic, but they are far from conclusive and do not themselves prove that Hebrew was no longer spoken. Evidences have been drawn establishing the continuity of spoken Hebrew well beyond the destruction of the Second Temple, so that it appears to have survived for more than 700 years after the return from Babylon.

The case for the continuity of Hebrew use has been presented by Hebrew language scholars, beginning with Graetz (1893) and Segal (1908, 1927), and by the Christian scholar Birkeland (1954), who argued that Jesus was undoubtedly fluent in Hebrew; which has been ably summarized by Rabin (1976). These scholars have demonstrated that the language in which the rabbis composed the Mishnah was not an artificial language of scholars, but just what would be expected if biblical Hebrew had continued to be spoken and develop as a language (Pfeiffer, 1949: 379). Its grammatical and lexical differences from biblical Hebrew are those of living language, and not the attempts of scholars to reproduce an extinct language.

The existence of literature written in Biblical Hebrew style until quite late is also cited as an evidence for the continuity of Hebrew. This was the case with the Dead Sea sects, who chose archaic biblical Hebrew as their written language. Some believe that the presence of some resemblance to contemporary Hebrew in their literature can indicate to the usage of Hebrew in their spoken language. There is no reason to doubt, therefore, that the rabbis could have written in the archaic style had
they wished; they had no need to create an artificial language. Furthermore, since the Mishnah was composed and transmitted orally and not in writing, there would have been no reason to have written it down later in Mishnaic Hebrew were it not as a record of the spoken version.

Thus, the use of Mishnaic Hebrew in the Mishnah constitute strong evidence that the rabbis of the period actually spoke Hebrew and did not limit its use to prayer and writing. Safrai (Safrai, 1975) argues that Hebrew was the language of the Temple; most references in the Talmud to Temple life—sayings, prayers, blessings, readings—are in Hebrew, with comparatively few examples of Aramaic. There is also good evidence of the use of Hebrew by ordinary people. There is an account of the rabbis learning the meaning of an archaic term from a servant who came from a village in Judea. Furthermore, a number of the Bar Kokhba letters (Benoit, Milik and De Vauz 1961, letters 42-52) are written in Hebrew, in a style that is very similar to the Hebrew that is found in the Mishnah.

The distinction between the two varieties of Hebrew is, Chomsky (Chomsky, 1957: 167) points out, attested to in the Talmud; the varieties are referred to as leshon Torah, ‘the language of the Torah’, and leshon hakhamim, ‘the language of the learned’; and there is also reference to leshon bnei adam, ‘the language of ordinary people’. Chomsky (Chomsky, 1957: 167) argues that the rabbis consider all three varieties to be included in leshon hakodesh; Aramaic is referred to separately as the language of the targum (translation).

Evidence for regional differences in Hebrew usages does exist: it would seem, however, that Hebrew was better maintained, or at least less influenced by Aramaic and other languages, in Judea than in Galilee, an area where a great number of other peoples had settled during the Babylonian exile: ‘The Judeans who had been careful about their language succeeded in preserving the Torah, while the people of Galilee, who did not care for their language, did not preserve the Torah.’ The Talmud goes on to discuss in considerable detail the kinds of mistakes that the people from Galilee made in their spoken Hebrew, complaining especially of the careless pronunciation which led to humorous misunderstandings. The linguist would recognize the kind of stereotype often expressed about another dialect.

There are reasons to believe that Hebrew was still a spoken language well into the first century, differing from the Hebrew of the Bible in those ways that one would expect in the normal course of development of a language with exposure to
Some scholars present a strong case for continued Jewish Hebrew/Aramaic bilingualism in the Galilee well into the Talmudic period, during the third to sixth centuries.

Other Languages

The three other languages that had significant place in the general pattern of language use in Palestine in the late Second Temple period were:

**Aramaic**: Aramaic was one of the major languages of Jews in Palestine in the first century, and almost certainly the dominant language of wider communication. During the Babylonian Exile, as the book of Esther attests, knowledge of Hebrew had been maintained for some time, but the upper classes at least must have learned Aramaic. During Babylonian rule a policy of resettlement of conquered population, reminiscent of the modern Soviet Union, brought a great number of foreign settlers into Palestine, and, just as this population mix has led in the Soviet Union to the spread and strengthening of Russian (Lewis, 1972), so Aramaic developed first as the lingua franca between groups and then as the language to be used within the various communities. It is not clear, however, how fast Aramaic spread among the Jews who returned from Babylon or among those who had stayed behind.

Aramaic was the principal language of the non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine – the Nabateans, the Samaritans, the Idumeans (the later converted to Judaism by the Hasmoneans). By the first century Aramaic had moved from an imperial lingua franca to a local vernacular. It remained the official language for commercial and personal contracts, including marriage and divorce documents, and number of Jewish books like part of Daniel. Tobit, Jubilees, Enoch, the Greek Esther, and the second book of Maccabees were written in it in the first century BCE; still others like Josephus’ histories, Esdras, and Baruch were composed in Aramaic in the first century CE. Aramaic became the first language of Jewish homes and it was then that the rabbis, faced with the possibility of language loss, started arguing for the need to teach Hebrew. Hebrew was getting restricted to Jewish intellectual and religious life, although there is evidence to suggest bilingualism in Hebrew and Aramaic and in fact, multilingualism, with Greek as the third language into the sixth century in Galilee.

**Greek**: The evidence of widespread knowledge of Greek has been presented by Lieberman (Lieberman, 1942) and Hengel (Hengel, 1974). As early as 345 BCE
Clearchus of Soli reports meeting a Greek-educated Palestinian Jew: ‘He was a Greek not only in his language but also in his soul’ (Josephus, 1974: 59). By 150 BCE a good knowledge of the Greek language existed among the members of the Palestinian Jewish aristocracy; for instance, one learns in the first book of Maccabees (8: 17 – 23) that Judah and some of his supporters knew enough Greek to carry on diplomatic negotiations in Rome and Sparta. A young Jew who wanted to rise in the secular world would have to learn Greek; a good number of contemporary Jewish books were written in Greek. In the house of Rabbi Gamaliel, it is reported, as many students studied Greek culture as Hebrew.

Even among the Dead Sea sects at Qumran, Hengel reports that there were many Greek papyri, and the ‘Overseer of the Camp’ was expected to know Greek. It was Lieberman who drew attention to how well the rabbis knew Greek. Not only are there many words in the Talmud derived from Greek sources, but at a number of places in the Babylonian Talmud – for example, Tractate Shabbat 31b and 63b, and Tractate Sanhedrin 76b – points are made with Hebrew/Greek puns of the kind that only a bilingual would be able to follow. The rabbis did not just know Greek but saw reasons to encourage people to learn and use it: ‘Rabbi said: why use the Syrian [= Aramaic; also a pun on sursi, ‘clipped’] language in Palestine? Either the Holy tongue or Greek (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sotah 49b) . . . . The relative value of Greek and the other languages is recognized in the Jerusalem Talmud, in a view attributed to the fourth century Rabbi Jonathan of Beith Gubrin: ‘Four languages are of value: Greek for song, Latin for war, Aramaic for dirge, and Hebrew for speaking.’

Greek was the language of the Greek colonies including Palestine. It was the language of cities like Caesarea, Ashkelon, Akko, Jaffa, Gadara, Philadelphia, and Beth-Shean (Seythopolis), just as it was of other Greek colonies throughout Asia Minor. Levine (Levine, 1975) in a study of Caesarea, suggests that Greek was the predominant language of pagans, Jews, and, later of Christians. It was, for instance, the language used on most Jewish funerary inscriptions. This was true in Jerusalem as well: Meyers and Strange (Meyers and Strange, 1981: 65) points out that two-thirds of the ossuary inscriptions found on the Mount of Olives dating from the first centuries BCE and CE were written in Greek alone; a quarter were in Hebrew and Aramaic. By this time it had also become the first and, in many cases, the only language of the extensive Jewish communities in Egypt.
Jews in Egypt had spoken Aramaic until the middle of the second century BCE, but Greek eventually became the language of intercourse in the cities; the Jews did not feel any particular loyalty to Aramaic, and it was quite soon replaced by Greek. By the time of Philo (c20 BCE – 50 CE) Hebrew was virtually unknown in Egypt. It was presumably for the sake of these Greek-speaking monolingual Egyptian Jews that the rabbis gave permission, recorded in Tosefta Megillah (IV. 3), for prayers in the foreigner’s synagogue in Jerusalem to be recited in Greek.

It must be conceded that there was, at various times, opposition to Greek. Palestinian Jews resisted Hellenization (Feldman, 1987: 83-111); learning Greek tantamount to Hellenism and deviation from religion. The poor quality of the Greek on Jewish ossuaries indicate this attitude of Palestinian Jews and Josephu’s knowledge of the language was an exception. After the war against Quietus in 116 CE there was even a ban on the teaching but not on the use of the Greek language, this being explained by the story of a Greek-speaking Jew who had betrayed Jerusalem to the Romans (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sotah 49b). But there is good evidence that not just aristocrats with close relations with the government, but also the rabbis, except for those who had come from Babylon, knew and spoke Greek. And just as with their use of Hebrew there is no reason to suggest that the rabbis were exceptional in their knowledge of Greek.

Greek then, had a role not just as the language for interaction with the government, and for those Jews who lived in, or traded with, the many Greek towns, but also for contact with Jewish pilgrims from Greek speaking Asia Minor and Egypt. In the Greek towns Jewish knowledge of colloquial Greek was good; there is evidence in the Jerusalem Talmud that the Jews of Caesarea said prayers in Greek; and Lieberman (Lieberman, 1942: 32ff.) reports a case of Greek being used in a street prayer during a drought (it was customary to ask the common people to pray in their own language in the streets). He also points out that the rabbis often quoted or referred to Greek proverbs in their sermons without translating, apparently assuming that they would be familiar to their listeners. A number of multilingual synagogue inscriptions, dating as late as the sixth century CE, suggest the continued importance and knowledge of Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic.

**Latin:** The place of Latin is somewhat more difficult to determine. It was the language of the Roman army and of officials, probably much of Roman government. Meyers and Strange (Meyers and Strange, 1981: 65) conclude that though Latin was
present in Palestine it did not gain ‘a firm foothold’ but remained ‘the language of narrow specialist application’.

At least until the end of Bar Kohkba revolt in 135 CE, the Jews of Palestine were multilingual, using Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek for different purposes and in different parts of the country (Weinreich, 1980: 59ff). Hebrew was used in the villages of Judea until then, and continued for a while longer – perhaps as late as the sixth century CE in the villages of Galilee where Jews settled after the Romans drove them out of Judea; Greek was the language of many cities and towns; and Aramaic was the most common first language.

**Jewish Linguistic Situation**

**Table 1.2**

**Jewish Multilingualism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jews in Diaspora</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt, Rome, Asia Minor</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babylon</td>
<td>Aramaic and Hebrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Jews in Palestine</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government officials</td>
<td>Greek and some Latin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal cities (Greek colonies)</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elsewhere</strong></td>
<td>Aramaic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jews in Palestine</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judean villages</td>
<td>Hebrew, Aramaic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galilee</td>
<td>Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal cities</td>
<td>Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jerusalem</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Class</td>
<td>Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Class</td>
<td>Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Language use and Jewish Multilingualism at the beginning of the Common Era.
The table provides a summary of the regional and class variations in language-use patterns. The order in which languages are mentioned in the right hand column is significant, representing the probable frequency of use and level of proficiency. The functional separation is much more complex. According to the pattern proposed by Ferguson (Ferguson, 1959: 325-40) as being distinctive of what he called ‘diglossia’¹ the functions form two groups: a set of H (or High) functions, such as public life, formal writing, religion, high culture, and formal education; and a set of L (or lower) functions, such as home, neighborhood, and work. In first century Palestine certain functional allocations appear clear – Greek was the language of the government, Hebrew for prayer and study, and Aramaic for trade – but the functional distribution is much more complex, being more than just the addition of one more language to the normal diglossic pattern. This becomes clearer if we look specifically at the use of the various languages for literacy functions (Spolsky, 1983: 95-110).

In East Europe

The linguistic situation of the Jews in East Europe before the revival of Hebrew can be summed as:

Traditional diglossia inside the Jewish communities
- High variety: Hebrew
- Low variety: Yiddish

Co-territorial national languages of wider communication outside the Jewish communities:
- Russian
- Polish
- German

Three possible solutions to the traditional diglossia can be:
- Hebraism
  - High variety: Hebrew

¹ Ferguson used the term ‘diglossia’ when these two sets of functions are expressed by related varieties of the same language, as with classical and vernacular Arabic, or Haitian Creole and French; Fishman extended it to include cases where the varieties were distinct, e.g. Spanish and English in the Puerto Rican community in New Jersey.
Low variety: Hebrew

- Yiddishism
  High variety: Yiddish
  Low variety: Yiddish

- Assimilations
  High variety: co-territorial national language
  Low variety: co-territorial national language

In Palestine

The Jewish Multilingualism in Palestine included Non-Jewish languages:

i) Turkish: official language of the Ottoman Empire, the ruler of Palestine

ii) Arabic (Literary and Palestinian spoken): language of the indigenous Arab Population in Palestine

iii) Jewish languages
  - Ladino/Judezmo: language of (Eastern) Sephardim
  - Yiddish: language of Ashkenazim

iv) No single predominant lingua franca at the turn of the 19th century in Palestine.

Understanding the process of the development of Jewish languages is important, for it exemplifies the special function of Jewish multilingualism in permitting a kind of acculturation that does not become assimilation. It starts when Jews in a minority situation, whether through numerical or political and economic weakness, come to adopt the majority and alien languages, the co-territorial vernacular, not just as a language for communication with outsiders but also as the language for internal community functions.

It is important to stress how much this step threatens the identity of the community, for the universal adoption and internalization of another peoples’ language brings with it the clear danger of assimilation of, and submersion in, its culture and life. Weinreich (Weinreich, 1980) suggests that first, the alien language is employed only in dealings with members of the outside community; it remains ‘Goyish’. For members of a minority group, the status of those with well-developed skills in dealing with the majority community is high; so high that they start to signal this status by using the alien language within the community itself. The community after its initial
half-hearted resistance gives in, citing pragmatic reasons. So was the case with the Jewish community that remained multilingual and the languages were determined by the local circumstances. This situation changed with the Zionist movement. Hebrew language came to the fore and played a role in the Jewish community that was more than a language. The language took symbolic position, invoked Jewish nostalgia, reminded of the Jewish history and unified it. The symbolic and functionist role it played brought it further patronage and promotion from the pioneers of the Zionist movement.

Conclusion

Jews have traditionally been multilingual community. For most part of their history they have been using more than one language and their general attitude towards language had been 'pragmatic'. Though Hebrew was the most important language because of the religious sanctity and the sacredness it carried on account of the religious texts; it was never 'the' issue in the Jewish historical discourse. The Jewish population in Palestine and other parts of the world as Diasporic communities were well versed in the regional languages but as a religious commitment they also learned Hebrew. Every Jew learnt in his/her childhood the minimum Hebrew that could facilitate the daily and occasional rites and rituals.

The religious authority that Hebrew carried prompted and promoted its learning. The little and basic Hebrew that one learned was because of the religious obligations. Hebrew was considered by the Jews a 'holy language'. This sanctity and element of holiness was also a hindrance in the overall development of Hebrew as a language. Hebrew was not an ordinary language that could be used anytime and anywhere. Its sanctity allowed only its limited use. Its usage was allowed only in religious texts and some literary texts with religious and moral contents. This limited the growth of new vocabulary and expressions. Hebrew wasn’t rich enough to express modern and varied topics.

Apart from this the usage of Hebrew was limited to text and literature. Hebrew hardly had a vernacular and was seldom in use as a spoken language. Off and on Hebrew has served as lingua franca between different Jewish communities, particularly when they met outside their own locality, as in Jerusalem. Most agree that such conversations were in broken and phrase form as Hebrew was not a fully
developed language for everyday use. The Jews too were not versed in Hebrew and was difficult for both the interlocutors. The Ashkenazi community primarily spoke Yiddish or the regional language while the Sepharidi community spoke Ladino or Arabic. Apart from these languages, Hebrew also faced competition from French and German which were sponsored through missionary institutions of their respective countries.

Hebrew faced resistance from the religious Jews and also from the languages that the Jews were more comfortable with. The religious Jews spoke and promoted Yiddish. For the religious community the very idea of political Zionism was irreligious and profane. For them the use of a holy language for profane and mundane activities was unimaginable. Although they read the religious texts in Hebrew but the language of teaching and explaining those texts was in Yiddish. The interpretation and explanations were made in Yiddish.

The Zionist movement started a major project of establishing a Jewish nation state. The Zionist pioneers had to take up two tasks simultaneously: a task of making a Jewish nation and a task of establishing a Jewish state.

The initial success of Hebrew language revival accounts not so much from the material conditions but the strength of motivation came from the stronger ideological commitment towards Zionism. The Success of the revival of Hebrew is confirmed on establishing a sufficiently high solidarity value for the language to overcome any power or economic effects of the competing language. There are reasons to believe that the ideological arguments for Hebrew were strong enough to overcome not just the ideological arguments for French and German (and, later, for Yiddish), but also any perceived power or economic values of all the competing languages; ultimately, it was sufficiently powerful to overcome some of the inertia condition and to make parents ready to switch to their children’s language. It was a unique case when the parents learnt the tongue of their children en-mass.

The revival of Hebrew language is a major development in Jewish history. The revival of the language along with the Zionist movement is not a coincident. The secular and the religious Jewish community consolidated their opinion in favour of Hebrew in the larger interest of the Jewish community. Thus the religious groups gave up their resistance to the language. The seculars had no problem adopting the holy language as their main language. Hebrew had a bridging and consolidating role from the very beginning. Apart from this, the revival of Hebrew played other significant
roles in the individual and community life of the Israelis and thus contributed much more than mere linguistic function. It significantly contributed in nation and state building and in creating a Hebrew culture in a new society. Hebrew and the language policy helped symbolically consolidate the Zionist ideological position and prepared the Jewish community for the ultimate change of preferring community over individual.