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Blends

A blend (Hebrew בלגמ belgem), also known as a portmanteau word, is formed by combining two independent words into one, like English ‗tangelo‘ ≠ tangerine + pómelo and Hebrew פומלית ≠ פומלה + פומלו pomelit. An introduction to Biblical Hebrew syntax. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns.

The semantic properties of a blend depend on the relation between its two base words. The relation can be endocentric, where one of the base words functions as a semantic head, or exocentric, where both words have the same semantic status.

Blends are somewhat like compounds, but with fewer restrictions. While all Hebrew compounds are left-headed, as in מָשְׁחֵת פּוֹרֶט mashech perot ‘fruit drink’ (literally: ‘drink of fruit’), blends can be left-headed, right-headed, or headless:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base words</th>
<th>Blend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>הפומלה פומליה פומלית pomelit ≠ pomela + pomelit</td>
<td>pallet, palette, pomegranate blend ≠ pomegranate + grapefruit blend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>בראחנה בראח נאראחנה נאראחנה nařašat ≠ nařašat + nařašat</td>
<td>‘bread’ + ‘baldness’ ≠ ‘baldness’ + ‘baldness’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Blend formation usually involves the truncation of segmental material from the inner edges of the base words (cf. clipped compounds, where the right edges of the base words are truncated; e.g. סיטקום sitcom ← situation + comedy). The amount of truncated material varies from one blend to another. Blend formation must therefore be analyzed using a constraint-based approach, in which the constraints define the observed tendencies.

The two most prominent constraints involved in the formation of blends are Size and Overlap. The Size constraint refers to the tendency of blends to have (at least) as many syllables as there are in the longer base word. However, since Hebrew prefers words with at least two syllables, a base of two monosyllabic words does not undergo truncation, as in רמקול rámqol ‘loud speaker’ ← ר + הקול qol ‘loud+voice’. The Overlap constraint determines the switch point at which the first word ends and the second begins, which is often on the segment(s) shared by the two base words (marked in romanized letters in (2)).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base words</th>
<th>Blend</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Overlap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>מחזה ma≤ażé זמר zémer</td>
<td>מחזמר ma≤azémer</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>חופש of≤ofná</td>
<td>חופנה ofná</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>דמוקרט demoqrát</td>
<td>דמוקטטור demoqṭátor</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>שחורה šorá</td>
<td>שחורדינית šordínit</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>תפוז tapúz</td>
<td>תפוזינה tapuzína</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References

Outi Bat-El
(Tel-Aviv University)

Bne Hes and Bne Kes

Historical sources and linguistic evidence combine to tell us about the existence in the Late Middle Ages of two groups of Ashkenazic Jews. On the one hand, they were distinguished by their religious customs, following the so-called Western and Eastern rites, respectively. On the other hand, there were also major differences in their systems of the pronunciation of Hebrew. The most discussed feature concerns the phonetic value of the letter ב bet. In the West (the Rhineland, Alsace, Swabia, Switzerland, Franconia, and a large part of Bavaria), it was glottal [h], often reduced to zero if not preceding the stressed vowel, and so identical to the rendition of ב be. In the East (Austria, the town of Regensburg, Bohemia-Moravia, Eastern Germany, Hungary, and Poland), it was velar [x], which therefore merged with the reflexes of fricative כ kaf. Because of this difference, in the rabbinical literature of the 15th century the two groups are called Bne Hes and Bne Kes, respectively, making a pun based on the similar Biblical expression בָנָי בַּנּוֹ בֵּן הֶגֶט ‘children of Heth, Hittites’ (see Gen. 23.3–20).

Several other important differences distinguished Bne Hes from Bne Kes in their pronunciation of the Hebrew component of their German-based vernacular languages. Bne Kes pronounced ש shin as [s], but both ש sin and כ samekh as [s] (during the 13th century, this distinction, as well as the velar character of ב bet, also characterized the pronunciation of Hebrew by Slavic-speaking Jews of Bohemia, from whom Ashkenazic Bne Kes may have borrowed or inherited these features). Yet for Bne Hes, all three letters were read as [s]. For Bne Hes, the stressed vowels expressed in the Tiberian tradition by patah, bateph-patah, and qames were pronounced as a front mid-vowel, [e] or [ɛ], when adjacent to bet or ‘ayin, a phenomenon unknown in the pronunciation of Bne Kes. Among the examples found in documents using Latin characters are: ezzi from דָּזִּי ‘future’, rechmati from יְהִי רַחֲמִי ‘mercy’, ed רַע ‘ad ‘until’, eza השנ ‘dssà ‘he made, did’ (manuscript of the 12th century, Swabia) and besier ‘swine’ (ריייח bǎżir) (1384, Zürich).

The phonological peculiarity of this non-Tiberian western oral tradition of Hebrew had two consequences for the orthography of the vernacular language of Bne Hes. Firstly, in a number of documents compiled in medieval western Germany using Hebrew letters, we find ב bet used to express the sounds of the German letter combination “he”. Another orthographic convention characteristic to Bne Hes involves the use of ב ‘ayin for [e]-colored vowels. Its earliest examples appear in the Rhineland in the 11th century and by the end of the 15th century this spelling convention had become systematic. It remains one of the most distinctive features of Yiddish spelling.

The analysis of several testimonies by early Christian authors about the Jewish pronunciation of Hebrew shows that names of certain letters of the Hebrew alphabet were also pronounced in a different way by the representatives of the two groups of medieval Ashkenazic Jews. Bne Hes had tsadek/tsodek for צ, kof for ק and, regionally, yus/yus for י; Bne Kes had tsadi, kof, and yod/yot, respectively. These letter names are of particular interest. On the one hand, they provide evidence about the genetic independence of the Hebrew components of the languages of...