

Creative Uses of English Words in Hebrew

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Abstract

English-Hebrew blends and loans collected from newspapers, advertisements and television are analyzed and discussed. The emphasis is on sophisticated combinations of the two languages. The examples are classified according to the degree of English in them from whole English words to individual letters embedded in Hebrew words or phrases. Finally, some neologisms, mainly verbs are discussed. The analysis shows on the one hand, an increase in English loan words in Hebrew with special creative uses in advertisements, but also, on the other hand, a trend of new loan translations and original Hebrew words replacing the loans.

Introduction

Cross-linguistic borrowing is a productive way of increasing the lexicon in most of the languages. Hebrew is no exception in this respect. Throughout its long history, Hebrew has assimilated words from many languages. As far as English is concerned, there have been two major sources: British English (due to the rule of the British Mandate over Israel between 1918 and 1948) and the more recent influence of American English nowadays due to the American movies (which in Israel are not dubbed, but subtitled), American TV and of course due to the global trend of Americanization.

Examples of words that were borrowed during the British Mandate include 'BREKSIM' which is the English 'brakes' plus a Hebrew plural suffix (IM), ignoring the fact that "brakes" is already a plural. A similar example is 'PANTCHER' which is the English 'puncture', only in Hebrew the word has undergone a semantic shift i.e. widening, to mean any "hitch" or "unexpected difficulty", not necessarily related to a puncture in a tire. Examples of words

derived from American English include ‘duty free’ ‘homeless’, ‘happening’, ‘catering’, etc.

Many articles have been written on the influence of foreign languages on Hebrew, a sample of these is represented in Muchnik (1994). In a more recent study by Fisherman (1999), a sample of 160 loan words were collected from a daily Hebrew newspaper within two months: 55% of these words were nouns and 45% were adjectives. English loan words amounted to 40% of these nouns. The purpose of this article is not to dwell on the normal process of borrowing, but rather to analyze some of the more “creative” occurrences of borrowing in the realms of commercial names and electronic communication in Israel.

First, a number of examples will be analyzed starting with whole English word borrowing, continuing with the borrowing of single letters from the English alphabet, and concluding with some examples of English verbs assimilated into Hebrew.

Secondly, a contrastive analysis will be made between the words that have been adapted or loan translated into Hebrew and the words that are now in the status of being “neologisms.”

Finally, an attempt will be made to reach some conclusions.

Examples of whole English words

Grand Canyon, Grand Prix

A big shopping mall in Haifa was named ‘Grand Canyon’, (written in Hebrew letters.). This name goes far beyond the geographical name it denotes. The ingenuity of the name stems from the fact that the Hebrew word for a shopping mall, KANYON, is a homograph of the English word ‘Canyon’. The Hebrew word for a shopping mall is made up of the Hebrew root meaning to “buy” KNH and a noun suffix ON. Moreover, because the two words are homographs, many Israelis actually pronounce the word KANYON (a shopping mall) in the same way they pronounce the word for ‘canyon’. In addition, the word ‘grand’ is familiar to Israelis as part of the name ‘Grand Alexander’ which happens to be here a name of a certain variety of apples.

A similar example is a name of a yogurt ‘Grand Prix’ (written in Hebrew letters). Again, the second word ‘Prix’ spelt in Hebrew (without the silent x) is homophonous with the Hebrew word for fruit ‘PRI’. The idea here is to point out that this yogurt is full of big chunks of fruit.

Of Course

A restaurant was named ‘Of course’. The word ‘Of’ was spelt in Hebrew in a way that was homographic with the Hebrew word meaning “chicken”.

This name suggests that the main course in this restaurant is probably some chicken dish.

Super, Center, Big

In addition to the genuine American businesses that have become global and have branches in Israel (e.g. McDonald's, Best Buy, Pizza Hut, etc.), many Israeli businesses bear English names. 'Clean Wash' (written in Hebrew characters) is the name of a cleaners' business which is a local enterprise.

The words 'Super', 'Center' and 'Big' are very common in Israeli businesses. Here are a few examples: There is a chain of shops named 'Super Center'. An apartment-tower being built now is going to be called 'City Center' (written in English!).

Some business names consist of blends of English and Hebrew; e.g. 'SUPER ZOL' (written in Hebrew characters) which is a chain of supermarkets. In this name, the first word 'super' can be interpreted as the beginning of 'Supermarket' (which is a loan word in Hebrew), but since the second word 'ZOL' means "cheap" in Hebrew, the actual meaning of the name is "super cheap".

Another blend is 'BIG RIHUT' (written in Hebrew characters). This is a furniture store. The meaning of the name is "big furniture". The advertisement for BIGRIHUT says 'BIGLAL HAMIVKHAR' meaning "because of the variety". The **BIG** in BIGLAL ("because") was printed in bold to echo the name of the store. What we see here is dividing a Hebrew word into two syllables in a way that the first one is a word in English!

Using Alphabet letters to replace whole words

It is a common practice in commercial contexts and electronic communication to replace whole words by single letters. In addition to the traditional abbreviations in the form of initials and acronyms, more and more letters are chosen for their phonological characteristics and not for their initial position in the words. For example, ICQ = I seek you. This is the name of software used for locating people on the Internet.

We got used to seeing 4 replacing 'for' or U replacing 'you'. This practice becomes much more fascinating when there is a blend of two languages.

ZER 4 U Here the letters ZER sound like the Hebrew word for 'wreath' or 'bouquet' of flowers. Indeed, ZER 4 U is the name of an Israeli chain of flower shops.

Certain English names of letters happen to be homophonous with Hebrew words. The world of advertising takes advantage of this fact. Here are a few examples:

M= /em/ = “mother”

(Hebrew letters) KANYON + M + (Hebrew letters) HADEREKH

This means “the crossroad shopping mall” (lit. ‘mother’ of the road shopping mall).

A language school advertises teaching English at the level of mother tongue by using the Hebrew for ‘level of tongue’ but replacing the Hebrew word for mother /em/ by the English letter M. The ad. reads: (Hebrew letters) ‘ANGLIT BERAMA SHEL SFAT’ + M

The use of ‘M’ is very clever because in addition to being homophonous with the Hebrew for “mother”, its collocation as a compound with the word for language creates an analogy with names of computer languages which consist of (Hebrew word for language) SFAT+ a letter.

E.g., SFAT C = “C language”.

P = /pi/ This letter is homophonous with the word for “times” in the mathematical sense. Thus, an Israeli Internet shopping web site was named P 1000 which means “ a thousand times”.

Sophisticated use of B.A.

A college preparing for B.A. degrees was named ‘HADOR HABA’ which means “the next generation”. Only ‘HABA’ was spelt: (Hebrew letters) HADOR HA + B.A

Moreover, the Hebrew diacritic symbol for the /a/ sound was added to the English letters.

Similarly, another college uses the phrase (Hebrew letters) HAMAHALAKH HA + (English letters) B.A meaning “The next move”. Again, the diacritic sign was added.

Still, a third college used BA as a Hebrew verb: BA + (Hebrew letters) LEKHA LEHATZLI’AKH? Meaning “Do you feel like succeeding?” The verb BA (lit. “came”) + LE (lit. “to”) is a colloquial expression for “to want something or to feel like doing something”. This style fits the young generation the ad is addressing. Another college ad says ‘Everywhere you will be told that you have been accepted’. The verb “You have been accepted” is HITKABALTEM. This word appears in Hebrew characters except for the middle /BA/ which is written in English as B.A.

TV replacing the suffix /tivi/

The English adjective suffix /ive/ is realized in Hebrew as /ivi/ in many loan words. Thus:

alternative=alternativi. This fact is used in naming TV programs by replacing the final letters by ‘TV’.

Thus we get (Hebrew letters) ALTERNA +(English) TV

In the same way, a TV sport program was named (Hebrew letters) SPOR + T.V.

This sounds /sportivi/ which is homophonous with the Hebrew adjective for Sport, but it also shows that it is a TV program.

English verbs transliterated and conjugated according to Hebrew grammar

A TV program was named 'HAKLIPA'. The meaning of this word is "the peel". But this was not the intended meaning in this case. The program consisted of music clips, so the word HAKLIPA sounds on the one hand as a Hebrew word, but actually it's a word that includes the word 'clip' inside. In its form, it echoes a verbal noun form (e.g. SHMIRA, STIRA) as if there were a Hebrew verb 'clip'.

Many verbs denoting communication functions especially those related to a technological device get quickly assimilated in many languages. Thus 'to telephone' behaves as a Hebrew verb although it has 4 root letters T,L,F,N instead of the traditional 3 letters. Telephone is an old example of a loan word. Similarly, new verbs are: 'LEFAKSES' meaning "to fax" and 'LEMAKSES' meaning "to mix" (in the technical musical jargon only!) The form 'MIKSESU' meaning "They mixed (music)" appeared in an article on pop musicians in a Hebrew daily newspaper (Boaz Arad, Yedioth Ahronoth June 22, 2001)

Many years ago, the English verb 'discuss' was adopted in Hebrew slang in the form 'LEDASKES'. It can be conjugated as a Hebrew verb: 'ANI DISKASTI' = "I discussed", 'ATA DISKASTA' = "You discussed", etc.

Chat

Now that we have "chat" on the Internet, this word is a neologism in Hebrew. I found three instances of its use in two different articles (no.1 by Ronen Tal and nos.2 and 3 by Mike Nelkin) in the same newspaper (Yedioth Ahronoth Sept. 5, 2001): 1. 'HU HIKIR OTA BE'OFEN MIKRI BEMAHALAKH **CHAT** BA'INTERNET. (" He got to know her accidentally during a **chat** on the Internet"). 2. ANI **MECHOTET** IM HA'ANASHIM SHAM. (" I **chat** with the people there "). 3. HABAT SHELI MEKHURA LE ICQ VE'OSA **CHATIM** . HI LO MEKHAPSET PARTNER LESIKHOT, ELA, **MECHOTETET** IM ANASHIM SHE'ANI MAKIR VEYODE'A MI HEM. (" My daughter is addicted to ICQ and does **chats**. She is not looking for a partner for talks, but is **chatting** with people that I know who they are"). In all the three instances, the word 'chat' has been transliterated. In numbers 2 and 3 the word gets the form of a Hebrew verb (present participle) and the markers for gender.

In another case, the noun form of the verb **chat** was formed according to the Hebrew paradigm: 'CHITUT.' This gerund is analogous with 'SHITUT' which means "wandering", but is also used as synonymous with 'surfing'. 'Surf' was loan translated into 'LIGLOSH' which literally means "to surf". This brings us to the next section which will try to contrast foreign words, loanwords and loan translations in Hebrew.

Discussion: foreign words, loan words and loan translations

As noted at the beginning of this article, Hebrew has absorbed many foreign words from various languages. Linguists e.g. Fisherman (1999), Nir (1994) usually place these words on a continuum starting with the most foreign words (i.e. words that don't take any Hebrew suffix, gender, etc), then come the loan words i.e. words that have undergone adaptation and behave according to the rules of Hebrew, and finally come the loan translations, i.e. Hebrew words that are actually translations of words or expressions from another language.

Since the influence has come from various languages, there are certain words that look "English", but actually have completely different meanings. Levenston (1970) has a chapter on "Cognates and False Friends" in Hebrew where he mentions the large number of English words in Hebrew newspapers. He notes that in spite of the purists' objection, the practice of taking words from other languages shows no sign of decreasing. (p.236). And he was right as seen 26 years later in Machauf (1996). But we must agree with Nir (1994) that there are two parallel processes that affect Hebrew: On the one hand, there is massive borrowing especially in slang and local newspapers reflecting a kind of "fad", but on the other hand many original words are created and used.

If we go back to my example of 'BREKSIM', I can safely say that the Hebrew word 'BALAMIM' has almost completely replaced 'BREKSIM'. Similarly, the word 'MAKHSHEV' has replaced 'KOMPUTER' ("computer"). This section dealt with general linguistic processes. The focus of this article however, has been the creative aspects of borrowing, especially in advertising, trade names and communication.

In these fields, as described here and in Machauf (1997), the various blends of languages, especially English and Hebrew are very common. This finding is similar to the examples found in works on English advertisements e.g. Meyers (1994) pp 40,42.

Conclusions

1. The process of Americanization is still very powerful, and we can predict that the impact of English on Hebrew will not decrease in the near future. Some of the current neologisms such as LECHOTET will probably become standard at least in colloquial Hebrew. Others may fade away as original Hebrew words may replace them.
2. It seems that Hebrew advertisements and trade names follow the general practice (common in many countries) of using foreign languages especially, English.

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Appendix

English/Hebrew Loans and Blends in the order they appear in the article

<u>Meaning in English</u>	<u>The Hebrew version</u>
Brakes	ברקסים
Puncture, hitch	ר'פנצ
Duty free	פרי דיוטי
Homeless	הומלס
Happening	הפנינג
Catering	קטרינג
Grand Canyon	קניון גרנד
Grand Prix	פרי גרנד
Of Course	קורס עוף
Clean Wash	ווש קלין
Super Center	סנטר סופר
Super Cheap	זול סופר
Big Furniture	ריהוט ביג
Because	ביגלל
The crossroad shopping mall	הדרך M קניון
English as a mother tongue	M כשפת אנגלית
C language	C שפת
A thousand times	אלף פי P 1000
The next move	B.A ה המהלך
Do you feel like succeeding	?להצליח לך B.A
You have been accepted	לתק B.A התק
Alternative	אלטרנטיב TV
SporTV, Concerning sport	ספורט TV
Haklipa, concerning clips	הקליפה
To telephone	לטלפן
To fax	לפקס
To mix	למקס
To discuss	לדסקס
To chat (on the Internet)	וטט'לצ
To surf	(באינטרנט לשוטט) לגלוש
Computer	קומפיוטר, מחשב