

Modern Hebrew

An Essential Grammar

Lewis Glinert

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Modern Hebrew

An Essential Grammar

Third Edition

This new edition of *Modern Hebrew: An Essential Grammar* is an up-to-date and practical reference guide to the most important aspects of modern Hebrew as used by contemporary native speakers of the language.

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Lewis Glinert is Professor of Hebrew Studies at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, USA.

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Modern Hebrew

An Essential Grammar

Third Edition

 **Lewis Glinert**

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To the memory of Sarah Katz
A teacher of inspiration

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Contents

Preface	xiii
Glossary	xvi
Hebrew grammatical terminology	xix

LEVEL ONE

1 The simple sentence: basic word order	3
2 The simplest sentences: 'Me Tarzan, you Jane'	3
(a) The pattern יֹרָם עֵינָהּ 'Yoram is tired'	
(b) The pattern יֹרָם בְּתֵל אָבִיב 'Yoram's in Tel Aviv'	
(c) The pattern 'Yoram is a . . .'	
(d) The pattern 'I am . . . , he is . . .'	
3 The personal pronouns	5
4 The definite article הַ	6
5 The Hebrew for 'a', 'some'	7
6–8 Masculine and feminine, singular and plural	
6 Masculine and feminine nouns (gender)	7
7 The feminine and plural of nouns	8
(a) The endings ים and ות – the simplest noun type	
(b) The plural of nouns of the type דְּבָר	
(c) The plural of nouns of the type סְרָט (segolate nouns)	
(d) The plural of nouns ending in ות	
(e) The feminine of nouns denoting people, e.g. מוֹרְהָ 'teacher'	
8 The feminine and plural of adjectives	13
(a) The simplest adjective type: טוֹב, דְּהֵי	
(b) Adjectives ending in הַ	
(c) Adjectives of the type גְּדוֹל 'large', קָטָן 'small'	

9	Noun + adjective phrases, e.g. יְלֵד קָטָן ‘small boy’	16
10	Quantity phrases	17
11	Noun + determiner phrases (‘this . . . , the same . . . , which . . . ’)	18
12–13 Agreement		
12	Agreement of הַ	19
	(a) For noun + adjective: הַפֶּלֶב הַרְטוּב ‘the wet dog’	
	(b) For noun + זֶה: הַפֶּלֶב הַזֶּה ‘this dog’	
13	Agreement for gender and number	19
	(a) Adjective agreement	
	(b) Agreement of verbs	
	(c) Agreement of ‘particles of being’	
	(d) Agreement of determiners: כֵּן, כֵּן, etc.	
	(e) Agreement of quantity words	
14	Numerals	23
	(a) The numerals 1 to 10	
	(b) The numerals 11 to 19	
	(c) The numerals 20 to 99	
15	Partitives: ‘many of the . . . , all the . . . ’	26
16	Pronouns and words standing in for nouns	26
	(a) Definite pronouns	
	(b) Indefinite pronouns: ‘someone, something . . . ’	
	(c) Adjectives without their noun: הַיָּרוֹק ‘the green one’	
	(d) Numerals without their noun	
	(e) Quantity words without their noun	
17	Possessives and constructs	29
	(a) Possessive ‘of’: הָאָח שֶׁל יוֹרָם ‘Yoram’s brother’	
	(b) Possessive ‘my, your’, etc.: הָאָח שְׁלִי ‘my brother’	
	(c) The construct: set phrases	
	(d) Construct endings	
	(e) הַ in construct phrases	
18–23 The inflections of the verb		
18	Introduction	33
19	The past tense	34
	(a) Form of the past tense	
	(b) Syntax of the past tense	
	(c) Meaning of the past tense	

20	The present tense	35
	(a) Form of the present tense	
	(b) Use of the present tense	
21	The future tense	36
	(a) Form of the future tense	
	(b) Use of the future tense	
22	The imperative	39
	(a) Form of the imperative	
	(b) Use of the imperative	
23	The infinitive	40
	(a) Form of the infinitive	
	(b) Use of the infinitive	
24	Root and base	41
25	Word patterns: <i>binyanim</i> and <i>mishkalim</i>	41
	(a) Introduction	
	(b) Functions of the verb patterns	
	(c) Functions of the noun and adjective patterns	
26–9	Illustrating the four active binyanim	
26	Binyan PA'AL	45
	(a) Two-syllable PA'AL	
	(b) One-syllable PA'AL, e.g. קָם 'get up'	
27	Binyan HIF'IL	49
28–9	Binyan PI'EL and HITPA'EL	
28	PI'EL	51
29	HITPA'EL	52
30–2	The passive binyanim: NIF'AL, HUF'AL, PU'AL	
30	NIF'AL	55
31	HUF'AL	56
32	PU'AL	57
33	Direct and indirect object	59
34	Object markers	59
	(a) The direct object marker אֶת	
	(b) Indirect objects with לְ, בְּ, עִם, מִן, עַל	

35–6	Prepositions and other prefixes and suffixes	
35	Preposition + suffix	61
	(a) Preposition + suffix: לִי, בִּי , etc.	
	(b) Preposition + suffix: אוֹתוֹ, אוֹתִי , etc.	
	(c) Preposition + suffix: עִם and מִן	
	(d) Preposition + suffix: בְּשִׁבִיל	
	(e) Preposition + suffix: עַל, אֶל, לְפָנַי, אַחֲרַי	
36	Pronunciation rules	65
	(a) וּ, וְ, בְּ, בִּ and the like	
	(b) Which syllable is stressed in nouns and adjectives?	
37	יֵשׁ ‘there is, there are’	68
38	‘I have’: יֵשׁ לִי	68
39	Questions	70
	(a) Questions of the type יֵרָם בְּתֵל-אֲבִיב ?	
	(b) ‘What, where, when’	
40	Negation or how to say ‘no’	71
	(a) ‘I’m not . . . , he isn’t . . . , they didn’t’	
	(b) יֵשׁ אֵין as the opposite of יֵשׁ	
	(c) Negative instructions	
41	‘The cake in the fridge, stamps from Israel’	72
42	Degree words: כִּי, כָּל-כֶּה, מְאֹד , etc.	72
43	Adverbs of time and place in the sentence	73
44–9	Embedded clauses	
44	The pattern אֲנִי רוֹצֵה לְהִתְעַטֵּשׁ : ‘I want to sneeze’	73
45	The pattern טוֹב לְחַיֵּיךְ : ‘It’s good to smile’	74
46	Reported thoughts and object clauses	74
47	Relative clauses with שֶׁ	75
48	Adverbial clauses: כִּי, אִם, בְּגִלְלֵי, אַחֲרַי, שֶׁ, בְּגִלְלֵי, שֶׁ, אִם, כִּי , etc.	76
49	Sentences without a subject	78
	(a) The ‘general’ plural שָׁקֵט, חוֹשְׁבִים ! ‘Quiet, people are thinking!’	
	(b) אֶפְשָׁר, צָרִיךְ, כְּדָאי, אֶפְשָׁר without a subject	

LEVEL TWO

50–9 Special root-types

50	ל'ה roots	81
	(a) Introduction	
	(b) ל'ה in PA'AL and PI'EL	
	(c) ל'ה in HITPA'EL and HIF'IL	
	(d) ל'ה in NIF'AL	
51	Roots with 'gutturals'	85
	(a) Introduction	
	(b) When the first letter is a 'guttural'	
	(c) When the middle letter is a 'guttural'	
	(d) When the final letter is a 'guttural'	
52	Roots with פ, כ, ב: 'soft' or 'hard'?	90
	(a) Usually soft	
	(b) Usually hard	
	(c) Always soft	
53	Four-consonant roots	92
54	פ"י roots	93
	(a) Regular פ"י verbs	
	(b) Deviant פ"י verbs	
55	'Cross-over': roots with initial ז, צ, ס, ש, ש	96
56	Maverick verbs	97
	(a) פ"נ roots	
	(b) לקח	
	(c) הלך	
	(d) יָכֹל and יָרִיף	
	(e) Some verbs beginning with א	
	(f) The verb הָיָה 'be'	
	(g) The verbs חָי 'live' and מָת 'die'	
	(h) ע"ע roots	
57	HIF'IL verbs with two-consonant stems: הָכִיר, הָכִיל	102
	(a) הָכִיר verbs	
	(b) הָכִיל verbs	
	(c) What are the roots of these verbs?	

58	PA'AL verbs with <i>-i-a-</i> in the future: גָּדַל 'grow'	104
(a)	גָּדַל, יִגְדַּל, יִגְדְּלוּ	
(b)	שָׁכַב, יִשְׁכַּב, יִשְׁכְּבוּ	
(c)	לָבַשׁ, יִלְבֹּשׁ	
(d)	מָצָא, יִמְצָא ל"א verbs	
59	A minor binyan: the PO'EL and HITPO'EL	107
60	More plurals of nouns	108
(a)	Plurals ending in יִים_	
(b)	Duals ending in יִים_	
(c)	Plural of segolate nouns with ת־ (e.g. מִסֹּרֶת 'tradition')	
(d)	Plural nouns: some exceptions	
61	Vowel-raising: כָּל-כּוֹלוֹ, אָדוֹם-אֲדוּמִים	112
62	Generic plurals: 'I hate cockroaches'	113
63	Plural loss: עֶשְׂרִים אִישׁ 'twenty persons'	113
64–8	Noun types (<i>mishkalim</i>)	
64	Action nouns, e.g. הַיְדוּשׁ 'renewal'	114
65	Nouns from adjectives, e.g. אִיטִיּוּת 'slowness'	115
66	The noun patterns פִּעֻלָּן and פִּעֻלָּ	116
67	Nouns with the suffix י_ and אִי_	117
(a)	The suffix י_	
(b)	The suffix אִי_	
68	Some other noun patterns	118
69–71	Adjective types	
69	Passive adjectives (מְכֻנָּס, מְכֻנָּסִים, מְכֻנָּסִים)	123
70	Adjectives from nouns	124
71	Other meaningful adjective patterns	125
72	Present tense 'verbs' as nouns and adjectives	128
73–7	Constructs and possessives	
73	The construct as a possessive	129
(a)	Noun + noun, e.g. הַזֶּה הַיְדוּשׁ 'the bride's parents'	
(b–c)	Possessive suffixes: . . . דוֹרֵי, דוֹרֵיהֶם	
(b)	With singular nouns	
(c)	With plural nouns	
(d)	Construct adjective + noun e.g. אֲרוֹבֵי-שֵׁיעַר 'long-haired'	
74	לְ of possession: תִּסְתַּכֵּל לְהַבְּעֵינֶיּוֹם 'Look into her eyes'	134

75–6 Construct nouns – vowel changes	
75 Construct segolates	134
(a) The פֶּרַח/בְּגֵד type (initial ֿ)	
(b) The בְּעַל type (initial ֿ)	
(c) The טוֹפֵס type (initial וֹ)	
76 Some other vowel changes in constructs	136
(a) Loss of <i>a</i> : מְקוּם~מְקוּם	
(b) Inserting an <i>-i-</i> : דְּבָרִים, בְּרִכָּה, etc.	
(c) Some important oddments	
77 Double possessives: בֵּיתָהּ שֶׁל שָׂרָה	138
78 Preposition + suffix: בְּלִי, בֵּין, כְּמוֹ	138
79–81 Numerals	
79 Definite numerals: ‘the three idiots’	139
80 Ordinals: ‘first, second, third . . .’	141
81 Hundreds and thousands	141
82 Tense	142
(a) Past habitual tense: ‘I used to . . .’	
(b) Unreal conditionals: ‘If I were . . .’	
(c) Tense in reported thought	
(d) Tense with תוֹךְ שֶׁ, אִם, כִּשְׁ	
83 The object suffix: לְבִנּוֹתוֹ ‘to build it’	145
84 Reflexives: ‘myself, yourself . . .’	145
85 ‘One another’	146
86 Experience adjectives: נוֹחַ לִי, קָר לִי ‘I’m comfortable, I’m cold’	146
87–90 Comparatives	
87 Comparative phrases	147
(a) יוֹתֵר מִ ‘more than’	
(b) מֵאֲשֶׁר ‘than’	
(c) מְדַי ‘too’, מְסַפִּיק ‘enough’	
(d) ‘the more that . . ., the more . . .’	
88 ‘The most . . .’	149
89 ‘As big as’: . . . כְּמוֹ	149
90 Measurement: . . . מֵה גוֹדֵל ‘How big is . . .’	150

91–6 Adverbials	
91 Adverbs of manner: e.g. בְּמְהֵרָה ‘quickly’	150
92 Echo phrases: e.g. נִיצַח נִצָּחַן מִוְחָלָט ‘won decisively’	152
93 כֵּן of time, place and means	152
94 הַיּוֹם, הַשָּׁנָה ‘today, this year’	153
95 הָ of destination: e.g. צָפוֹנָה ‘northwards’	153
96 מִ of location: e.g. מִשְׁמָאל ‘on the left’	154
97 The gerund: בְּהִגִּיעוֹ ‘on his arrival’	154
98 Where to position גַּם and כִּן	155
99–100 Negatives	
99 Inflexion of אֵין	155
100 ‘No one, nothing, nowhere, non-, un-, neither’	156
101 Questions	158
(a) Questions using הֲאִם	
(b) Questions using אִם ‘whether’	
102 Wishes and requests	159
(a) ‘I want (him) to . . .’ . . . אֲנִי רוֹצֶה שֶׁ . . .	
(b) Commands with שֶׁ	
103 ‘Either . . . or’: אוּ . . . אוּ	159
104 Clauses as subject: ‘Painting is fun’	160
105 Relative clauses	160
(a) Relative clauses with a pronoun	
(b) מֵהַ שֶׁ . . . , מִי שֶׁ . . . , אֵיפֶה שֶׁ . . .	
(c) Relative clauses with הַ	
106 When the order is not subject–verb–object	162
(a) Inverting subject and verb	
(b) Starting with the object	
(c) Presentative verbs	
107 Backtracking	164
108 Israeli spelling	165
Exercises	167
Vocabulary for exercises	217
Key to exercises	261
Index	299

Preface

Modern Hebrew: An Essential Grammar is intended as a grammar and workbook for the first two years of modern Hebrew at high school or university.

The book covers the features of syntax and morphology – colloquial and more formal – that are most useful to the average student. Many other features of modern Hebrew might arguably have been included – but we wished to keep things short and sweet. For a much fuller picture of the language, teachers and advancing students are referred to our *The Grammar of Modern Hebrew* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Modern Hebrew is *not* a graded, step-by-step coursebook. Of those there are many. It supplies what they generally lack: a simple, up-to-date outline of Hebrew structure.

The grammar and exercises are arranged by topic, with several sections on the noun, several on the adverb, and so on. Using the contents or index, students will be able to home in on the points of grammar that they wish to learn, in whichever order suits them best. The exercises should provide an entertaining challenge, but a carefully managed one: the exercises for Level One require no knowledge of Level Two (and in fact little knowledge of *any* subsequent sections in Level One), and all vocabulary is listed in the custom-built word list.

If some of this vocabulary is rather more colorful than the usual beginners' fare, so much the better. The old 'basic Hebrew' word lists upon which modern Hebrew courses have rested for forty years are starting to look distinctly dated.

Thus the exercises in this book are more than just an exercise-ground for the grammar: they also introduce a colorful spectrum of vocabulary, spanning the colloquial and the elegant, current affairs, kitchens and kibbutzim, and religious and secular culture.

To the teacher

The way we have divided the material between Levels One and Two may cause surprise. Some of the things traditionally fed to beginners do not appear until Level Two – and not by accident. Hebrew education has had an unhealthy tradition of fussing over inflections while ignoring syntax, and the written word, even to this day, gets more attention than the colloquial language. We have endeavored to redress the balance.

At the same time, in leaving *all* defective verb inflections until Level Two, we have taken advantage of the fact that language teachers today no longer deal with each grammatical structure fully as soon as it crops up. Instead, a word with לִלְכֹת or יוֹרְעֵת may be learned simply as a vocabulary item, or even just as part of an expression, until the time is ripe for the grammatical facts of the verb הִלָּךְ or the guttural verb to be confronted *in toto*. The signal we have tried to convey in leaving all defective verbs till Level Two is that there are many more important – and above all, simpler – things to be learned systematically before these.

A word on colloquial language, ‘slang’, and ‘grammatical errors’: some teachers may be surprised to see that we have given primacy to the norms of the average educated Israeli speaker rather than the traditional norms of school grammar books. For example, forms of the type כְּנִסְתָּם appear throughout the verb tables, rather than the ‘classical’ form כְּנִסְתֶּם. Similarly, our *nikkud* seeks to echo colloquial pronunciation rather than Biblical norms. The reason is simple: the main purpose of modern Hebrew teaching, as of modern French or Spanish teaching, is to teach students to understand and simulate an average educated speaker – not to sound like a newsreader or funeral orator.

Thanks are due to the Research and Publications Committee of the School of Oriental and African Studies for sponsoring the first, experimental edition of this book, to Simon Bell of Routledge for bringing it to full fruition, to Professor Reuven Tzur of Tel Aviv University for his wizardry with the Hebrew Mac and to my students at the universities of London and Chicago, perforce anonymous, for being such magnificent guinea-pigs in the evolution of an idea.

יבואו כולם על שכרם

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About the third edition

This third edition is a response to the comments and suggestions of the many teachers and students who have used this book over the past ten years. Mindful in particular of the needs of intermediate students, I have introduced several new points of syntax and expanded the coverage of noun, verb, and adjective morphology and their semantics, as well as the exercises to match. Thanks are due to the reviewers for their valuable advice and criticisms, and above all to Routledge for their unstinting commitment to the teaching of the Hebrew language around the globe. **Yishar kochem.**

Lewis Glinert
Dartmouth College, USA
2003/5764

Glossary

Action nouns indicate an action: *destruction, dancing, development*.

Actives are the forms of the verbs that indicate ‘doing an action’: he *grabbed*.

Adjectives are words that describe: a *bad* boy, the eggs are *bad*.

Adverbials are any word, phrase or clause that tells us how, when, where, or why: he stopped *suddenly*, he stopped *after the lights*, he stopped *to scratch his nose*.

Adverbs are any one-word adverbial: he sings *loudly*, he *always* knows.

Agreement shows that a word hangs together with a particular noun – the word may agree in number and gender (sometimes even in person) with that noun: times *are* changing (not: *is* changing).

Bases are the basic uninflected forms, before the addition of inflectional prefixes and endings. Thus the bases of *kibbutzim* and *madricha* are *kibbutz* and *madrich*.

Binyan: a verb pattern. There are seven *binyanim*, allowing one to build a variety of verbs from a single root.

Clauses are sentences nested inside the larger sentence: he thinks *you’re crazy*.

Comparatives denote *more, most, as* (e.g. *easy as*) and the like.

Construct phrases are two Hebrew words side by side (usually two nouns and usually a set phrase), much like English *soccer game, apple tree*. The first noun in the Hebrew is called ‘the construct noun’ and often displays a special construct ending.

Definite article: the word ‘the’.

Degree words are a special sort of adverb, indicating degree: *very* cold, *somewhat* strange, *more* slowly, I *quite* agree.

Demonstratives single out: *this* tape, *that* disk, *such* ideas (demonstrative determiners), give me *this*, what’s *that* (demonstrative pronouns).

Determiners are words added to a noun to indicate its identity: *which* guy, *any* time, *this* tape, the *same* guy.

Feminine. *See* masculine.

Gender. *See* masculine.

Generic plural: refers to 'x in general': I hate *exams*, *dentists* chew gum.

Gerunds are a verb form that does the job of a noun: on *arriving* in Israel . . ., before *meeting* his fiancée

Imperative: a verb form expressing a request: *kiss* me! *stop!*

Infinitive: a special verb form that is unchanged for gender or plural, and has an abstract meaning. In English: *to go*, *to be*, *to squeeze*.

Inflections are the variations in number, gender, tense, etc. that can be created in a word by adding prefixes, suffixes, etc.: *take*, *takes*, *took*, *taken* . . . *long*, *longer*, *longest*.

Masculine and feminine: all Hebrew nouns have a certain 'gender', either masculine or feminine. This has nothing essentially to do with male or female.

Mishkal: a noun or adjective pattern, with a distinctive set of vowels, prefixes or suffixes.

Nouns indicate a person or thing – concrete or abstract: *mat*, *mate*, *materialism*.

Object: the object of a verb is the person or thing undergoing the action: I got *jelly*.

Object marker: the small word (**preposition**) that often introduces objects in Hebrew and English: I looked *at* Joel, he thought *of* jelly.

Ordinals indicate order by number: *first*, *third*, *twenty-fourth*.

Partitives indicate 'part of': *some of*, *all of*, *three of*, *most*.

Passives: forms of verbs indicating 'undergoing an action': he *was grabbed*, *I am asked* by many people. (Compare **actives**.) Hebrew has special *binyanim* for the passive.

Person: depending on whether the subject of the verb is *I* or *we* ('first person'), *you* ('second person') or *he*, *she*, *they*, or any noun ('third person'), the form of the verb may vary, even in English: *I am*, *you are*, *Jane is*.

Personal pronouns denote *I*, *you*, *he*, *she*, *it*, *we*, *they*.

Plural indicates 'more than one': *dogs* vs. *dog*.

Possessive indicates to whom or what something belongs or relates: *Jane's* husband, *my* surprise, the end *of* the world.

Prefixes are bits prefixed to words – future tense prefixes, noun prefixes, etc.

Prepositions are short words commonly indicating an object or when, where, how, etc.: *to* Sara, *for* me, *with* Daniel, *under*, *by*, *through*, *after*.

Pronouns stand in for a specific noun: *they*, *them*, *this*, *someone*, *who*, *what*.

Quantity words indicate quantity: *a lot of*, *some*, *several*, *most*, *half*, *seven*.

Reflexive verbs involve doing something to oneself: *he shot himself*.

Relative clauses add information about some noun: the car *that I bought* does 30 to the gallon.

Roots are ‘skeletons’ of consonants from which the typical Hebrew word is built.

Singular indicates ‘one’: *dog* vs. *dogs*.

Subjects of sentences are the nouns doing the action (more strictly speaking: nouns with which the verbs agree): *films with subtitles* annoy me.

Suffixes are bits attached as word endings – *dogs*, *confessed*, *scientific*.

Tenses are the various verb forms expressing past, present and future time.

Verbs indicate actions (occasionally states): *fry*, *enjoy*, *adore*.

Hebrew grammatical terminology

Commonly used Hebrew equivalents for our grammatical terms:

action noun	שם פעולה
active	פעיל
adjective	שם-תואר
adverb	תואר-הפועל
adverbial	תיאור
agreement	התאם
base	בסיס
clause	פסוקית, משפט
comparative	מלת השוואה
conjunction	מלת קשר
construct noun	נסמך
construct phrase	צירוף סמיכות
definite article	תווית יידוע
degree word	מלת דרגה, דרג
demonstrative	מלה רומזת
determiner	תווית
direct object	מושא ישיר
embedded	משועבד, נטוע
feminine	נקבה
gender	מין
generic plural	ריבוי סתמי
gerund	שם-הפועל
imperative	ציווי
indirect object	מושא עקיף

Hebrew
grammatical
terminology

infinitive	ל + שם-הפועל
inflection	נטייה
interrogative	שאלה
masculine	זכר
negative	שלילי
negator	מלת שלילה
noun	שם-עצם
object	מושא
object marker	סמן מושא
ordinal	מספר סידורי
particle of being	אוגד
partitive	פרטיטיווי
passive	סביל
person	גוף
personal pronoun	כינוי גוף
phrase	צירוף
plural	ריבוי
possessive	קניין
prefix	קידומת, תחילית
preposition	מלת-יחס
pronoun	כינוי
quantity word	מלת כמות, כמת
reflexive verb	פועל חוזר
relative clause	משפט זיקה
root	שורש
singular	יחיד
stress	הטעמה
subject	נושא
subordinate	משועבד
suffix	סיומת, סופית
tense	זמן הפועל
verb	פועל

Level One

1 The simple sentence: basic word order

In the basic modern Hebrew sentence, the subject comes before its predicate, e.g.

Subject + verb

Subject + adjective

Subject + adverb

Examples:

יֹרָם צָף	Yoram floats
יֹרָם עֲצֻבָנִי	Yoram's uptight
יֹרָם שָׁם	Yoram's there

Note: We will also encounter the reverse order – verb + subject etc.

2 The simplest sentences: 'Me Tarzan, you Jane'

a The pattern יֹרָם עֵיִף 'Yoram is tired'

For sentences of the type 'Yoram is tired, the falafel is cold', i.e. *noun* + 'be' + *adjective*, Hebrew commonly omits the verb:

הַפֶּלְפֶּל קָר	The falafel [is] cold
הַפֶּלְפֶּלִים הָאֵלֶּה קָרִים	These falafels [are] cold

Alternatively – especially after a longish subject like כָּל הַפֶּלְפֶּלִים הָאֵלֶּה 'all these falafels' – Hebrew often inserts the 'particles of being', הוּא, הִיא, הֵם, הֵן. Which one is chosen depends on whether the subject is masculine or feminine, singular or plural:

Masc. sing.	יֹרָם שְׁלֵנוּ הוּא עֵיִף	Our Yoram is tired
Masc. pl.	הַפֶּלְפֶּלִים הָאֵלֶּה הֵם קָרִים	These falafels are cold

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