

# Modern Hebrew

An Essential Grammar

Lewis Glinert

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# Modern Hebrew

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Third Edition

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

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## *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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# 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

London 1993/5753

### **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 koach.**

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

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*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:

הַפִּלְפֶּל קר	The falafel [is] cold
הַפִּלְפָּלִים הָאֵלֶּה קרִים	These falafels [are] cold

Alternatively – especially after a longish subject like כָּל הַפִּלְפָּלִים 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.	הַפִּלְפָּלִים הָאֵלֶּה הֵם קרִים	These falafels are cold



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