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Scientific abstract – Hebrew in Algeria from 1750 to 1962

Algerian Jews in the late-18th–20th centuries lived in a state of linguistic multiglossia, reflecting contact with surrounding languages and cultures (French, Arabic) as well as preservation of their cultural heritage (Judeo-Arabic, Hebrew and Aramaic). Hebrew was the main literary language of these Jews, who wrote Hebrew poetry and a broad range of Hebrew prose, from exegesis and theological works to historical and secular texts. Algerian *maskilim* even submitted Hebrew articles to Jewish *Haskala* newspapers. The modernity brought by French colonization gradually lessened the use of Hebrew in the 2nd quarter of the 20th century, especially in Algiers in which French influence was most prominent. Only few aspects of Hebrew written by Algerian Jews were studied so far, mainly Hebrew *poetry* and the Hebrew component in Algerian Judeo-Arabic. The Hebrew of the many genres of Jewish Algerian *prose* was barely studied to date.

The goal of the proposed research is to characterize and analyze the Hebrew used by Algerian Jews for *prose* in the modern era (1750–1962). The main objective of this research is to explore the development of modern Algerian Hebrew in the context of its multi-lingual interfaces, its exposure to the *Haskala* and Hebrew Revival, its use of the previous strata of Hebrew vs. linguistic innovations, and its variation as a function of genre and the distance from the metropolis Algiers. This goal will be attained through an in-depth detailed linguistic analysis of a representative corpus out of the extensive Hebrew literature composed in Algeria in that period.

The significance of this study is first and foremost in addressing a major gap in our current knowledge of Hebrew – the development of Hebrew in North Africa in the last few centuries in a complex multi-lingual environment. Specifically, this study will be the first ever comprehensive detailed linguistic research of Hebrew used in Algerian prose, shedding light on how the different strata within the language are interlaced in response to external interfaces and to spatial and temporal parameters. In fact, this research will be the first such comprehensive study of Hebrew anywhere in North Africa (which had so far seen only particular studies of specific texts or phenomena). In addition to its intrinsic value – the characterization of Algerian Hebrew – this study may be viewed as a test case for the development of Hebrew in the multi-lingual



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environment of the diaspora. This study may shed light on the processes that forged Hebrew when in contact with its immediate surrounding languages (in this case Arabic and French), while being in touch with the development of Hebrew in distant countries (Europe, Eretz Israel), and under the bipolar pressure of modernity vs. conservatism. The lessons that will be learned here may also be valuable for understanding the broader phenomenon of languages in contact.