

INTRODUCTION

TO THE TEACHER

Encounters in Modern Hebrew consists of three volumes designed to introduce English-speaking students to modern Hebrew. The first two volumes, *Level 1* and *Level 2*, include instructional materials designed for beginners and intermediate students. The primary objective is to help learners acquire the basic skills in Hebrew for the purposes of oral and written communication and reading comprehension. To acquire a proficiency in such skills, it is necessary to get an understanding of the basic structures of Hebrew and a meaningful working vocabulary. The learning environment is thus built to accommodate the stated goals. The methodology that guided the writing of *Encounters in Modern Hebrew* is an eclectic one and incorporates many current communicative approaches. It takes into account proficiency goals set by the foreign-language teaching community, but at the same time it does not ignore the more traditional approaches that emphasize the introduction of essential linguistic structures of the target language. It is my belief, based on many years of teaching Hebrew, that the process of acquisition of communicative skills in a foreign language is enhanced by a better understanding of the structure of the target language, especially in an environment where that language is not spoken.

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Encounters in Modern Hebrew: Level 1 provides a language learning environment mainly through a textbook, but when complete it will include additional materials in the form of computer-based tutorials, an interactive video program, and audio cassettes keyed to the textbook. The textbook is designed to be used with or without the additional materials. The audio tapes and the computer-based instructional materials allow the learner to gain further practice in different learning modes.

Level 1 consists of a lesson introducing the Hebrew alphabet followed by nine lessons organized around various subjects, language functions, language patterns, and grammatical points. Each lesson is unified by subject matter and is divided into two parts for ease of instruction. The lessons include reading selections, which are presented as dialogues. The dialogues lend themselves to many individual and classroom activities such as practicing listening and reading comprehension, and can serve as triggers for spoken interactions, role playing, and other tasks. The readings introduce new vocabulary items and new language structures and functions in appropriate situations. The lessons introduce new language patterns and include grammatical explanations. Exercises and other tasks accompany the new information. A word list at the end of each chapter presents all the new vocabulary introduced in the lesson. As the vocabulary is fairly extensive, the instructor can divide the word list

into categories: essential vocabulary and vocabulary for enrichment. A short summary at the end of each lesson gives the learner a frame of reference for the new points introduced.

The contents of the lessons in *Encounters in Modern Hebrew: Level 1* are designed to guide learners in the acquisition of a number of essential language structures that will allow them to express themselves in the world around them. Topics include the domains of study and work, family and friends, and daily routines. Other language domains are addressed in *Level 2* and *Level 3*. Students will be given guidance as to how to function within the environment of Hebrew speakers.

Ideas for group activities and language tasks designed to promote free and authentic speech are presented in several of the lessons and can be adapted for use with much of the material in the book.

The language presented in *Level 1* is informal Hebrew. The formal style present in much of written Hebrew fiction and nonfiction is used more extensively in *Level 3*. The text is presented in nonvocalized form. Vowels are added in some places to make it easier for learners to pronounce new words they encounter. The reading selections, word lists, and other materials included in the lessons are available on audio tapes, to ensure correct pronunciation and to enhance listening, reading, and speaking skills.

TO THE LEARNER

RECORDED MATERIALS

The purpose of the recorded materials is to provide you, the learner, with the opportunity to hear Hebrew as it is spoken and pronounced. All the participants in the recordings are native speakers of Hebrew and their pronunciation is authentic. No vowels are provided for most of the texts included in the book. Unvocalized texts are standard for adult readers, and as an adult learner, you too are introduced to such texts. Because of the absence of vowels, stress, and intonation markers, it becomes doubly important for you to use the audio tapes when studying. The correct pronunciation of words will make it possible for others to understand what you want to express in Hebrew.

To improve your listening and comprehension skills and to contribute to your development as a speaker, you are advised to listen to the tapes regularly, alternating between listening with open and with closed books. When you listen to a dialogue for the first time, try to get the general gist of the text rather than attempting to understand each word. After you reach a general understanding of the text, you can look up the new words to find out their meanings. You will have an opportunity to repeat the texts, and the new words, and to answer comprehension questions. When you study individual words, remember that meaning units are composed of strings of words and of interactions between speakers. Words gain their meaning from their context. The model dialogues provide you with examples of speech interactions and appropriate contexts for words and structures and will help you build language patterns and strategies that you can use in communication.

The purpose of the dialogues is to provide you with an example of communication acts; they are not intended to be memorized. They provide a way to start a conversation, a trigger for a meaningful interaction.

READING PASSAGES

Reading in a foreign language is a skill that seems to have lost popularity with some instructors who emphasize spoken communicative skills above all other skills. It is important to understand that reading is also a communication skill, one that is essential to the understanding of written/printed texts with a variety of communicative functions. Just as reading and writing skills are expected of all literate native speakers of Hebrew, they are expected of nonnative learners as well. The ability to read gives you, the new user of Hebrew, access to materials available to native speakers: newspapers and works of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, as well as such practical items as road signs, manuals, and maps.

Encounters in Modern Hebrew: Level 2 and Level 3, puts a special emphasis on the development and enhancement of reading and writing skills and presents a variety of texts in several language domains. In *Encounters in Modern Hebrew: Level 1* you will be introduced mainly to simple readings in modern Hebrew that will prepare you for more complex texts, in modern as well as classical Hebrew. The language style used in most Hebrew texts is of a higher and more formal level than the one used in speaking. The choice of style and vocabulary is a distinct one and demands your special attention. Learning how to speak won't necessarily prepare you for the language used in literary texts. It is thus important to develop reading strategies early in the process of language acquisition.

In reading new passages, as in listening to dialogues, it is a good idea to get an overview of the passage before addressing individual concerns. Many yet unknown vocabulary items can be intelligently guessed from the general context of the passage. The process of deciphering the text should be focused on what is known and understood, rather than on the features that are new. As a learner it is useful to adopt the attitude that you need not know *all* the vocabulary items in a written or spoken passage in order to understand the general meaning of the discourse.

Since all reading passages in this book are recorded, you might try reading them first, then listening to the recorded text, with either an open or a closed book, before consulting word lists. The intonation and pauses provided in the recordings will help you decipher the meaning of the text.

WORD LISTS

The word lists provided at the end of each lesson include many essential vocabulary items for the subject matter at hand, as well as a few less essential items that are part of the text or dialogue. In the word lists you will not only get the translation of vocabulary items into English but also additional grammatical information. Even though the words at the end of each lesson are organized in a list, rather than being presented in a context, it is useful to go through the list with the help of the audio tape. Words are the building blocks of language and, no matter what else you may know about a language, you cannot have meaningful use of language unless you accumulate a rich vocabulary that will allow you to express not only meanings but subtleties of language as well. Do not forget that the spelling of words is extremely important to make yourself understood in writing and that the exact and clear pronunciation of words is important in making yourself understood in speaking.

GRAMMAR AND EXERCISES

Working under the assumption that Hebrew is the sole language used in class, grammar explanations provided in English in the book become a very important part of the learning process. Many of the explanations and examples in the book use a contrasting description to illustrate Hebrew structures, showing the similarities and differences between your native language, English, and the target language, Hebrew. It is very useful not only to understand the Hebrew structures, but also to know how they differ from English. First-language interference is at the heart of many of the mistakes you will make in Hebrew. If you understand the two language systems, you will be able to produce a more accurate and correct Hebrew.

Language teachers are encouraged not to talk *about* language, but rather to activate the learners in the use of the target language. The explanations in the book will make the teacher's task much easier. At some point, you should be aware of what you need and want to know *about* the language, and the textbook is the appropriate place for such explanations.

Exercises of various sorts are provided after each explanation of a new language structure in order to give you an opportunity to put the new concept into practice. In addition, classroom activities based on these exercises will further guide you toward free and authentic expression.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

Additional materials are available for further self-study. There are review lessons available for the IBM computer. They provide you with the opportunity to review vocabulary, practice reading comprehension, review grammatical structures, and do some writing. Meaningful feedback helps you check your performance. In addition, an interactive video program is available for the IBM multimedia platform. The program "Encounters" is suitable for learners who have finished the ten lessons in *Level 1*. For further information contact the University of Michigan's Hebrew Division at 3081 Frieze Building, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109.

It is my hope that you, the learner, will find this book useful. Relax and enjoy the study of Hebrew.