

August 31, 2013

Response of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Department of Linguistics to  
The CHE Evaluation Report

We find the committee's report fair and balanced, and overall, very positive. We endorse most of the recommendations, and will take these recommendations into consideration in our development plans. We would like to address some points it raises, and to raise some concerns of our own.

**1. Interactions among faculty in the two tracks**

The most consistent and persistent point made about our department in the report concerns what is perceived as the the lack of personal and intellectual interaction between the two tracks. It is true that at the time the SE report was compiled - only two years after the merge of two distinct groups of researchers - there was little work on developing a common vision for the department. Since then, time and concerted effort have changed this considerably. Notably, several senior faculty have jointly and successfully applied for a prestigious Scholion research grant (Edit Doron, Malka Rappaport Hovav and Moshe Taube, as well as Yael Reshef from Hebrew Language Department) and will be spending three years of intensive research on a project devoted to the emergence of Modern Hebrew. It is worth pointing out that this project, which includes PhD students from the department of Linguistics and the Hebrew department, will also help further the goal of strengthening the ties between these two departments, as recommended by the report. The departmental seminar is also well attended by members of both tracks. The report points out that "The faculty members in the two tracks have very different outlooks on linguistics as a discipline, and employ very different methodologies in their research and teaching" (p. 12). It is clear, then, that it will take a while for the two communities of scholars to develop a common language and the members of each to benefit from exposure to the work of the members of the other. We find it, therefore, quite encouraging that this year many students and faculty from each track have attended seminar lectures from members of the other track. This is especially true for lectures dealing with Modern Hebrew, and it is safe to say that we are developing a wider community of scholars from diverse backgrounds sharing an interest in the study of various aspects of Modern Hebrew. In addition, we have instituted the Interdisciplinary Forum for the Study of Language, which hosts lectures with a wider appeal and draws faculty and students from around Humanities and even social sciences and the exact sciences. Of course, all this is an ongoing process, but we are confident that it is going in the right direction.

We agree with the committee that the striking difference in quality of infrastructure available to the members of the two tracks does not contribute to the sense of shared destiny and call on the Faculty to address this issue.



## 2. Personnel and hiring

The report correctly points out (p. 8): "The opposition between these two approaches corresponds reasonably well to the broader conflict in the field between "functional" and "formal" approaches to linguistics. *Most departments are heavily oriented in one way or the other; the decision to build a department on a dialogue between the two is unusual.* This choice is in part the consequence of the historical origins of the Department in the merger of two quite disparate programs. *If it could be carried out successfully, it might be very productive for the field.*" As we indicated in our SE report, we feel that this is one of the unique features of our department, and a major attraction for potential students. No other Israeli university has such a diverse program of study in linguistics, where students can be exposed to a range of theoretical approaches and subdomains of linguistic research, while at the same time receiving training as descriptive linguists through work on less-studied languages. It is therefore important to maintain this diversity, and the only way to do this is to replace retired faculty from the Structuralist track with new appointments that will help maintain this diversity. On the other hand, in order to strengthen the coherence of the department and programs of study, we have asked for a joint appointment in the field of phonology and morphology, the lack of which is keenly felt within both tracks, and which the committee rightly emphasized in their report.

## 3. Program(s) of study

The committee makes two concrete recommendations regarding academic programs. The first is that students be allowed to major in one track and minor in the other. We fully support this recommendation, and would like to see it implemented as soon as possible. We are currently working on drafting such a proposal for the Teaching Committee of the Faculty.

The second recommendation is 'to work to reduce the present separation between the two tracks, so as to move toward a single department without strong internal boundaries.' Here, too, we have taken concrete steps in this direction. In particular, we have, along with linguists from other departments, applied for a grant from the Humanities Fund (jointly funded by Yad Hanadiv and the CHE) for developing courses which would provide a solid foundation in all core sub-disciplines in linguistics for students of linguistics and philology from all relevant departments in the faculty. Noteworthy is the fact that we have teams of teachers working on these courses, where the members of each team are drawn from more than one track or department. Central among these courses are the courses in the history of the discipline, language documentation courses and courses in sociolinguistics and language contact. We entertain the hope that we will get the funding, but our plans to proceed with this program is independent of the outside support. In general, we have been using the framework of the School of Language Sciences as a locus for courses that serve to bridge hitherto unbridgeable divides.

Within our own department, we see the move toward a more coherent structure involving the following components:

Strengthening coherent programs of study in both generative and descriptive



linguistics;

Developing a set of joint courses in core disciplines, taken by students from both tracks, supplemented by the courses offered in the School of Language Sciences;

A requirement that students from each track take courses from the other track (this already exists).

We think that both moves are consonant with the committee's recommendation to 'move to a curriculum that bridges the two sets of interests, rather than separating them, especially at the BA level and including an expanded major. This might be addressed by providing students with a range of choices, including the current ones at either end of a spectrum that also allows for intermediate choices.' It is important to keep in mind that 'bridging interests' implies that different interests (as well as research methods, frameworks, and specializations) are allowed to exist and flourish.

In any event, we are confident that we can reach decisions about our program of study, and the department as a whole is committed to developing a proposal in the near future.

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