

**Polite pronouns in European Hebrew:
historical overview and present-day situation**

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In the Hebrew prayers, one addresses God with a simple pronoun *אתה* (*'ata 2sm*). In the same manner in the Hebrew Bible servants address their masters and even kings, for there was no specific polite pronoun of address. Similarly, nowadays the speakers of Modern Israeli Hebrew use the same pronouns to address each other. The distinctive system of polite address in Hebrew remained unknown until recently.

Between these two historical periods that encompass about two thousand years, the Hebrew language was used continuously and productively as the main written code in Jewish communities. In the talk I present my research on the system of T/V distinction (i.e. the use of polite vs familiar modes of address) in European Hebrew from the 16th to the 20th century, whereby polite forms of address were expressed by third-person address (i.e. *he/she* was used instead of *you*). My findings are based on a wide range of various Hebrew sources: textbooks, letter manuals, private correspondence and dialogues in Hebrew translations of European novels. In order to trace the origins of the Hebrew linguistic politeness, I compare it to similar phenomena in Polish and German and conclude that it is unlikely to be a result of contact-induced change caused by these languages.

The use of third-person address forms to express respect and formality became a usual practice for a short period in Mandate Palestine in the 1920s but was rejected by following generations of Hebrew speakers and left almost no trace in the language experience of contemporary Hebrew speakers in Israel. However, my recent field research in Ultra-Orthodox (mainly Hasidic) Jewish communities of the UK and Israel reveals the use of these historical forms of address in private and formal inter-community correspondence.