RESEARCH ACTIVITY

I apply methods of research based on linguistic theories (including Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis, Lexical Pragmatics, Referential Semantics and Argumentation) in order to gain theoretical understanding of the way language is actually used in particular social contexts. Recently I am applying the tool of interpretation (I have derived from relevance-theoretic principles) for practice oriented studies focusing on the way Modern Hebrew is used, in particular in persuasive discourse, by real speakers in the particular circumstances of varied social contexts starting with court discussions (legal Hebrew) and ending with face to face conversations (Spoken Hebrew).

Legal Hebrew

Legal Hebrew – the language spoken in Israeli courts and written in Israeli legal documents (including contracts, wills, and so on) is, naturally, a legal language. I started my research activity with a general mapping of the peculiarities making legal Hebrew a sub-language of (Modern) Hebrew and surveyed the means of coherence and cohesion that characterize legal texts (see: “Publications, Ph.D. Dissertation”; “Articles In Refereed Journals, The Functioning of the Tense system in the Hebrew Legal Discourse, Published”; “Accepted for Publication, Law, language and discourse”; “Entries in Encyclopedias, Legal Hebrew, Published”). I discussed, in my first book, the linguistics means used by lawyers for demonstrating criminal intent (see “Publications, Authored Books, A Pragmatic Analysis of Legal Proofs of Criminal Intent”).

The study of the linguistics means used for demonstrating criminal intent from lexical, logic-semantic and pragmatic points of view sheds some light on the typology of legal Hebrew argumentation in general and its linguistic and pragmatics aspects in particular. In The rationality of legal argumentation (see “Publications, Published”), I discussed legal argumentative patterns which are characterized by presuppositions that are not conveyed in the text explicitly (but are, at most, hinted in it), and are interpreted by the perceptive hearer as a certain layers of meaning of the text.

Examining the uses of implied presuppositions in the Israeli Hebrew legal discourse, necessitated some study of the unique Israeli way of statutory interpretation according to which the court should interpret statutes in light of the purpose behind their legislation (see “Articles in Refereed Journals, The purposive method of legal interpretation in practice, Published”). This study of the extremely flexible Israeli method of statutes interpretation reveals the central position of the notion of “linguistic possibility” (as applied to judicial interpretations of legal texts) in the Israeli purposive method of statutory interpretation: linguistic possibility is one of the judicial criteria for appropriateness of purposive judicial interpretations. Discussing the controversies among the judges of the Supreme Court over this notion, I present in The legal notion of “linguistic possibility”: the Israeli case (see “Articles Submitted to Publication) two views about the legal meaning of “linguistic possibility”: according to the “empirical” view, an interpretation of a given expression is linguistically possible if the expression is occasionally used and understood as having the meaning suggested by the interpretation in question. According to the “theoretical” view, an interpretation of a given expression is linguistically possible if there is a method of interpretation that suggests, when applied to the expression in question, the same meaning that is suggested by the interpretation in question.

Theoretical linguistics

The discussion of the means for demonstrating criminal intent in court showed that the defendant’s intent is usually inferred from the messages delivered among the people involved in the case either explicitly or implicitly. This result led me to study the way messages are delivered implicitly – the question of what is conveyed “between the lines”; I focus on the linguistic and the pragmatic means that are available to the Hebrew speaker and allow him/her to express more than is said in the communicational process explicitly. I discuss these
means in *Means of Interpretation for Identifying Attitude assimilated into the Meta-Linguistic levels, The language of polemic discourse in the judicial drama* (see “Articles in Scientific Books, Published”) and *Semantically cued unspoken assumptions in the legal text* (see “Publications, Published”). In this last article I analyze a (legal) text that presents an argument containing parts (premises) that are not said explicitly: parts that are represented in the explicit text only by means of structural-pragmatic cues.

The results of the study of the pragmatic means that allow speakers to express meanings implicitly, encouraged me to develop a linguistic tool of interpretation usable in studies of human verbal communication. Interpretive precepts are often derived from principles that communicated texts are said to comply with; for example, both Horn and Levinson derive their neo-Gricean interpretive systems of heuristics from Grice’s maxims of rational communication (Horn 1984: 11-2; Levinson 2000: 213). In a similar way, I derive a tool of interpretation from two principles of Sperber and Wilson’s relevance theory: the communicative principle of relevance and the commonplace principle of deducibility (saying that the conclusions implicated, according to the interpretation, by a text must be deducible from the interpreted text). This tool consists of three conditions that function as a criterion of correctness of interpretations in the following sense: if an interpretation meets the three conditions then it reconstructs the meanings the text’s producer intended to convey by the text’s sentences – whether these meanings were presented explicitly or not.

The tool of interpretation is intended for people who wish to make sure that they thoroughly understand a certain text (including the meaning hidden between its lines) in general, and in particular for legal laypersons who wish to make sure that they thoroughly understand a legal text. In *Extracting meanings hidden in legal texts: the three conditions of relevance theory and their sufficiency* (see “Publications, Articles Submitted to Publication”) I exemplify that this tool of interpretation can be used as an interpretative tool enabling knowledgeable recipients of spoken Hebrew to identify the interpretation that reconstructs the meaning intended by the producer of a judicial opinion.

**Applications**

**Written Modern Hebrew: Persuasive Discourse**

Applying the interpretive tool I could specify the linguistic means enabling speakers, including lawyers, politicians and sale agents, to incorporate in their words contents that are not expressed explicitly, but are prompted by means of linguistic and contextual cues. Identifying the conditions in which contents of that kind may be missed completely by some of the hearers, I could present the actual strategies used in Modern Hebrew persuasive discourse (see “Publications, Articles in Scientific Books, Deciphering lawyer’s language by contextualist analysis, Accepted for Publication”; “Publications, Articles Submitted to Publication” *On the place of context models in manipulative communication; Entries in Encyclopedias, Political discourse, Published*). The results show that the manipulative use of language characterizing not just political discourse and marketing but also the discourse of members of elite groups that, like legal professionals, wish sometimes to talk above the heads of laypersons in their presence. In particular, in *On the incoherence of the legal language to the general public* (see "Publications, Published"), I show that one of the pragmatic traits making legal texts appear incoherent is their abstruseness: specialized legal meanings are frequently conveyed in the legal discourse implicitly without keywords that could direct laypersons to the knowledge making these meanings obvious to legal professionals.

**Spoken Hebrew**

Recently I apply the tool of interpretation to conversations from *The Corpus of Spoken Israeli Hebrew* (CoSIH; see [http://humanities.tau.ac.il/~cosih](http://humanities.tau.ac.il/~cosih)); see “Publications, The Three Conditions of Relevance Theory and their Sufficiency, Articles Submitted to Publication”. In this last article I present the tool of interpretation and exemplify that it can be used as a
general method of demonstrating that certain meanings (including metaform, implication and socio-semiotic meanings) are hidden in a given text.

The tool of interpretation enables identification of the proposition represented by each of the utterances of a given text and to present rigorous examination of the pragmatic hypotheses about the relation of the contexts and the speakers’ purposes to the content, structure and manner of utterance of the utterances of these speakers in these contexts. Using this tool enables me to study the linguistic and pragmatic means used by speakers of Spoken Israeli Hebrew for passing on implied messages – the linguistic and pragmatic means that give language its schematic nature. In *Levels of comprehension and ways of representing the subject in spoken Hebrew* (see “Articles in Scientific Books, Accepted for Publication”) I focus on the distribution of the subject components by means of referring expressions in spoken Israeli Hebrew, and in *The schematic nature and redundancy of language* (see “Publications, Articles Submitted to Publication”) I discuss the general phenomena: the circumstances in which speakers use schematic language in contrast with the circumstances in which they use redundant language. I show that the use of schematic or redundant language in Spoken Hebrew is affected by a contextual cognitive factor: the interlocutors’ assessment of the addressees’ degree of comprehension.

**ONGOING PROJECT**

Working on the schematic nature and redundancy of Spoken Hebrew I suggest the hypothesis that redundancy is inversely correlated with the assessed comprehension, and schematic language directly correlated with it. In order to establish this hypothesis, I am working now on a Research Proposal that will be submitted to Israel Science Foundation (ISF) Founded by the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities; the suggested research will examine empirically the uses of schematic or redundant language in Spoken Hebrew.

**References**


