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Communicative Methods for Teaching Biblical Hebrew

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ABSTRACT

The field of Second Language Acquisition has long since reached consensus that the most effective way to teach a foreign language is through “Communicative Methods” that immerse students in the language as soon and as fully as possible, requiring them to hear and speak—not translate—the new language. Are there lessons from this we can learn for teaching classical languages such as Greek and Hebrew? Below is an edited transcript of a panel sponsored by the National Association of Professors of Hebrew at the 2017 conference of the Society of Biblical Literature. The publication of Paul Overland’s textbook, *Learning Biblical Hebrew Interactively* (2016), provided the occasion for a group of Hebrew language instructors to reflect together on the challenges and possibilities of Second Language Acquisition communicative methods for teaching Biblical Hebrew.

KEYWORDS

second language acquisition methods, aural and oral immersion, Greek, Hebrew, language pedagogy, communicative language teaching, multiple intelligences, brain-based learning, learning styles

Communicative Language Teaching Reduces Barriers to Learning Biblical Languages

Paul Overland

Two barriers deter students who contemplate learning biblical languages: impracticality (doubts of usefulness) and intimidation (fears related to language learning). Modern language instructors have successfully reduced these barriers, owing largely to an approach known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

CLT takes the following approach.¹ For modern language learning to be useful, the learner should be able to negotiate everyday experiences when he or she travels to the region of that language. Buying transit tickets and groceries, meeting one's neighbors, interviewing for employment, expressing likes and dislikes, asking directions—the traveler will want to be prepared to navigate communicative exchanges such as these—hence the title, “Communicative Language Teaching.” While learning grammar and vocabulary remains vital, in the CLT classroom they serve the greater goal of achieving communicative competence. As they use the language to execute practical functions, students acquire the language more deeply, thus achieving greater automaticity.²

Fortunately, gains realized through CLT are not limited to those learning modern languages. They can benefit classical language learners as well (for the purposes of this article, “classical” refers to any language with no living native speakers). Thus, the American Classical League (2020) has embraced standards matching those of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. The following paragraphs summarize how modern approaches to language teaching (principally CLT) are reducing the learner-barriers of intimidation and perceived impracticality, with examples drawn from an introductory textbook for Classical Hebrew, *Learning Biblical Hebrew Interactively* (Overland 2016).³

Learners are not the only persons affected by intimidation and concerns about impracticality. When considering transitioning to a CLT approach, instructors similarly may hesitate, registering a sense of intimidation in the face of an unfamiliar pedagogy, and concern of potential impracticality. After exploring solutions for learners, this article will consider solutions for instructors as well. This will be followed by an overview of a textbook offering a CLT approach to Biblical Hebrew.

Lowering Barriers for Learners

The Barrier of Intimidation

Consider first how CLT reduces the barrier of intimidation—that anxiety sensed by many when contemplating study of any foreign language. CLT reduces intimidation through two principal means: kindling learner interest and supplying context. Each of these helps to lower a student's affective filter, thereby increasing receptivity to language learning.

Learners find language learning engaging when it enables them to exchange information about topics of interest to themselves. Consequently, CLT orients learning around actual communication (the exchange of messages and ideas). This contrasts with approaches such as the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), which instead concentrates on textual analysis through parsing and consulting rules of grammar.

1 For a more complete introduction to CLT, see Brumfit and Johnson (1979), Lee and VanPatten (2003), Savignon (1997), Tarone and Yule (1989), and Wong (2005). Resources focusing on second language literacy include Grabe and Stoller (2006) and Urquhart and Weir (1998).

2 Automaticity refers to the ability to understand and compose messages directly in the target language, without recourse to one's native language for decoding.

3 *Learning Biblical Hebrew Interactively* (Overland 2016) hereafter abbreviated *LBHI*. This textbook grew out of the Communicative Hebrew Learning and Teaching Project (Cohélet Project), a three-year collaboration funded by the Wabash Center. For a description of the Cohélet Project, please see Overland, Fields, and Noonan (2011).

CLT optimizes a learner's interest by encouraging communication in four ways. First, each CLT lesson enables learners to perform an activity connected with everyday life, such as introducing themselves to a classmate and learning that classmate's name. In contrast, each GTM lesson focuses on language analysis—introducing successive morphological, grammatical, or syntactic components of the language being learned in the target language (abbreviated L2).

Although vocabulary and grammar remain essential to a CLT language-learning experience, it is the communicative activity (such as self-introduction) which will occupy the foreground of a given lesson.⁴ Those elements of vocabulary and grammar necessary for engaging the intended communicative activity now serve as means to a communicative end, rather than comprising the end itself.⁵

Second, a CLT course kindles learner interest by ensuring that the learner controls the outcome of his or her L2 communication. Consequently, the messages that students exchange carry a measure of authenticity, called “meaningful communication.” CLT avoids messages that, while grammatically accurate, lack any connection with actual life (known in CLT as “display sentences”).

CLT achieves authenticity by posing L2 questions that invite response by selecting from among multiple correct answers. Thus, if inquiring what activities a learner enjoys, response options encompass a range (e.g., eating, traveling, talking, running) from which the learner may choose, forming a grammatically correct response.⁶

A third aspect of kindling learner interest involves the use of realia and pictorial illustrations. By positioning a simple visual aid such as a plastic fish beneath a desk, an otherwise static display sentence such as, “The fish is under the table,” can become a meaningful communication.⁷ The learners observe that the fish actually has been placed under a table. By giving one of the class members a second, smaller fish, one could easily employ meaningful communication to teach the comparative: “Your fish is smaller than my fish.”

The fourth feature kindling learner interest involves the use of L2 stories (see Adair-Hauk, Donato, and Cuomo-Johansen 2005, 198-213). Stories ignite a sense of curiosity as successive episodes unfold. Learners subconsciously wonder, “What will happen next to the fleeing, drowning prophet?” As increased curiosity draws learners into the story, their sense of fear over language learning proportionately fades. L2 becomes a vehicle enabling them to reach a desirable end. If illustrations accompany a story, then a learner's interest increases all the more, further lowering the barrier of intimidation.

A rather comprehensive example integrating language-learning with a multiple-episode story may be seen in the *LBHI* textbook, with its serialized story spread over eleven units, illustrated by over 230 sketches.⁸ Successive episodes of the story integrate the vocabulary and grammar resident within the corresponding lesson module. In addition, dialogic exchanges embedded within the storyline often model those communicative activities that students will engage in that same module. Thus, if an activity will train students to report what their group of friends plans to do later that day, within the corresponding story episode several of the characters will describe what they are planning to do.⁹

In addition to reducing a sense of language-learning intimidation by kindling learner interest, CLT lessens anxiety by broadening the context within which the learner encounters L2 elements. CLT supplies context in three ways.¹⁰

4 CLT courses are organized around a what is known as a “functional syllabus,” referring to practical communication tasks (functions) which students will learn to perform during the course (such as introducing oneself, and other everyday tasks described above). A functional syllabus contrasts with the “grammatical syllabus” typical for GTM courses. Instead of occupying center-stage, grammar now serves the goal of achieving communicative competence. Although literacy remains the end-goal for students of classical languages (not learning to ask directions or buy groceries), nevertheless, the “interest factor” kindled through hands-on language activities remains a prominent asset in the classical language classroom that embraces a CLT approach. As the course progresses, the activities themselves will suitably shift toward facilitating L2 conversations centered around literary observations arising from the biblical text.

5 For a sample communicative activity, please see the self-introduction exercise in *LBHI* §1.1.v [tet], l:88–89.

6 For an example, please see *LBHI* §3.1.x. [alef], l:182–4.

7 Cf. *LBHI* §2.4.b. [bet], l:153–5.

8 I.S. Paul Nation observes that an accompanying picture assists learning vocabulary since the picture leads to “mental elaboration that deepens or enriches the level of processing” of the target lexeme (2001, 69).

9 E.g., *LBHI* Jonah Episode 5.1 and activity §5.1.a. [gimel], l:317–22.

10 Since certain elements that kindle learner interest also contribute to context, what follows at times will overlap what was described above.

The first example of context has already been encountered: weaving vocabulary and syntax into a serialized story. When woven into a story, new vocabulary no longer exists in sterile isolation. When memorizing the verb “to sit,” learners will recall that in the story a sailor invited a prophet to board his vessel and then sit down. When learning the noun “water,” they may remember the story dialogue where a passenger asked a crew member for a drink of water. To provide context for participles, the characters in the story may describe various activities that round out their respective occupations.¹¹ Thus vocabulary gains dynamic context.

Second, context may be supplied by providing a large number of examples illustrative of a particular L2 form. When introducing the *3mpl* conjugation of the *yiqtol* (imperfect) tense / aspect, a CLT approach will “flood” the learner with multiple verbs in that specific conjugation. This enables students to focus on features that characterize that particular form (a principle known as “focus on form”).¹² In contrast, the GTM would not limit focus to one form at a time, but would present a complete paradigm at once (e.g., a full verb paradigm of the *qatal* / perfect conjugation). Further, GTM would supply a modicum of illustrative verbs, rather than flooding the learner with a large volume of examples.

Third, modern language textbooks foster awareness of context by supplying brief insights concerning the indigenous culture where the L2 originates. In classical language textbooks this can take the form of concise articles about city defenses as part of a unit introducing the words “gate” and “wall.” Such articles are well-suited to enrichment with photos.¹³

The Barrier of Impracticality

Consider next how CLT overcomes the barrier of impracticality—the assumption that language skills will not yield sufficient practical benefit to justify the time needed to learn them. CLT embraces a user-centered, design thinking approach to teaching. After determining those specific ends for which the student wishes to acquire the language, CLT packages the language training to achieve those discrete aims. In the case of modern languages, practical ends may include purchasing transit passes, asking directions, interviewing for a job, or discussing current events.

For classical languages, the learning goal focusses on literacy, not conversational ability. Within literacy, the goal further focuses on the ability to form higher-order observations (i.e., the ability to detect nuances and literary structures, discernment of which depend on the reader’s ability to notice lexical, thematic, and syntactic emphases that often go untranslated). Equipped with these sensibilities, the L2 learner can formulate his or her own independent observations. Furthermore, he or she will be in a better position to assess the validity of interpretations implied by Bible versions and encountered in commentaries. Especially when reading poetry (which in the Hebrew Bible represents 60 to 70 percent of the corpus), higher-order observations considerably enhance one’s grasp of a text’s message—a distinctly practical dividend of language learning.

If higher-order insights form the chief practical benefit of classical language literacy, how does a CLT approach advance that aim? CLT raises the learner’s ability to form higher-order L2 insights by optimizing automaticity. As noted earlier, automaticity refers to the ability immediately to grasp the meaning of an L2 expression (written or spoken). With automaticity, one no longer must divert mental attention to decoding an L2 text, converting it to one’s native language (L1) before grasping its meaning. As a result, more of the brain’s attentive energy is freed up to observe nuances and literary structures within the text.

What, in turn, fosters automaticity? CLT explains that automaticity develops in two phases. First, the learner must receive a high volume of comprehensible L2 input—both oral and written.¹⁴ So modern language specialists advise: “for progress in

11 E.g., occupations of sailors and a prophet in 3.2 Jonah Episode, LBHI §3.2, l:200–4.

12 E.g., LBHI §4.1.x. [alef], l:258–9.

13 E.g., an article and photo from Megiddo regarding casemate walls, LBHI §8.1.n. [chet], ll:138–9.

14 Concerning meaningful input Krashen observes: “The goal is to focus the student entirely on the message; this requires the use of topics and activities in which real, not just realistic, communication takes place” (1985, 56). Elsewhere he explains that “[t]he best input is so interesting and relevant that the acquirer may even ‘forget’ that the message is encoded in a foreign language” (Krashen 1982, 66). This contrasts the use of “display sentences,” described earlier. Savignon affirms that “[t]he importance of meaningful language use at all stages in the acquisition of communicative skills has come

reading, classroom time will be better spent in increasing proficiency and exposure to the spoken language generally than in attempting to teach comprehension skills” (Walter 2008, 470). Second, learners must generate a high level of L2 output, which also must be meaningful.¹⁵ Consider first the need for L2 input.

In a CLT course, students will experience increased L2 input, both written and oral. They may encounter written input in five ways. First, within the instructions for each communicative activity the student will encounter L2 dialogue prompts together with model responses. For example, an activity may lead them to describe what they plan to do tomorrow. Both the question prompt and a model reply appear in L2.¹⁶ Second, if the course embeds vocabulary and grammar in an L2 story, each story episode will supply considerable L2 input (in addition to verb paradigms and vocabulary lists). Third, story comprehension questions in L2 provide additional written input.¹⁷ Fourth, culture articles may include more common Hebrew expressions pertinent to the topic at hand.¹⁸ Fifth, a given unit would be accompanied by selected L2 Bible readings corresponding to that unit’s content. Of these five, L2 input in a GTM-styled course will typically be limited to vocabulary lists, verb paradigms, isolated display sentences, translation exercises, and Bible readings.

In addition to L2 input of a written sort, learners in a CLT classroom experience substantially more L2 oral input than in a GTM classroom. This occurs primarily in three forms. First, oral input results from reading-aloud any of the forms of written input listed above.¹⁹ Second, since CLT activities often are designed for dialogue, as an activity is produced in class it results in L2 oral input issued both by the instructor and by any classmate who may be participating. Even homework projects resulting in written L2 may be solicited by the instructor in a subsequent class, resulting in oral input for those classmates who listen as one of their group reads aloud his or her composition (Lee and VanPatten 2013, 195-216).²⁰ Third, according to the measure of an instructor’s steadily increasing ability, he or she will supply L2 input through immersive classroom navigation interactions. These range from simple greetings, to taking attendance, to distributing or collecting homework.²¹ As learners’ abilities increase, the instructor may lead class discussions concerning insights arising from observations rooted in the syntax of Bible readings, all the while remaining within L2.

Beyond increasing L2 input (both written and oral), CLT observes that automaticity (and thus higher-order observations) follows as students learn to generate a high volume of L2 output—using what they have learned to carry out short projects using L2. Admittedly, at the earliest stage the “projects” may be kinesthetic, requiring L2 understanding but no actual output of L2. Thus, a student may show by manipulating objects on a table that he or she understands a teacher’s L2 instruction: “Place the stone in the cup” (a method known as “Total Physical Response,” or TPR).

Later the student will be able to engage more sophisticated tasks that involve L2 output. These may involve responding orally to L2 questions posed in class such as, “What did you do yesterday?,” using L2 to poll class members concerning their preferences, or responding to L2 comprehension questions following a story they have been reading.²²

Class navigation provides another occasion for students to generate L2 output with a clear sense of practicality. Such navigation may be student-initiated, such as requesting help by saying (in L2), “I have a question,” “Please repeat,” “I don’t understand,” or by asking, “How would one say [insert desired expression] in Hebrew?”²³

to be recognized by language teachers around the world” (1997, xi).

15 In order to be meaningful, output must remain to a certain degree under the learner’s control, so that he or she may provide new information during the exchange (Lee and VanPatten 2003, 54, 121).

16 E.g., LBHI §4.3.1. [gimel], l:285–6.

17 For the serialized story within LBHI, comprehension questions are available to instructors through the website (www.LearningBiblicalHebrewInteractively.com).

18 E.g., a brief article regarding hematite, spherical, and duck weights of the Ancient Near East, accompanied by photographs (LBHI §2.4.n. [heh], l:158–9).

19 E.g., thirty-eight story episodes, numerous activity instructions, and over 225 Bible selections appear in LBHI.

20 Paul Sulzberger further observes: “Our ability to learn new words is directly related to how often we have been exposed to the particular combinations of the sounds that make up the words. Neural tissue required to learn and understand a new language will develop automatically from simple exposure to the language” (2009, 9). Regarding the role of aural output skills (silently generating the sound of what one reads) for the development of skilled readers, see Pressley (2006, 51).

21 For greetings and inquiring wellbeing, see LBHI §2.2.x. [alef], l:123–4. For additional classroom navigation expressions and conversation topics, see Overland (2016b).

22 Cf. LBHI §6.4.1. [vav], l:429–30; §7.5.1. [beit], ll:91–2; and §3.2.1. [beit], l:208–12, respectively.

23 See LBHI §4.2.1. [gimel], l:273; §1.3, l:94; §3.3.x. [alef], l:221; and §2.1.7. [dalet], l:113–4, respectively.

To summarize, biblical languages courses taught with a CLT approach will benefit learners as they reduce intimidation by kindling interest and by supplying context, while at the same time they enhance practicality by increasing automaticity. Whereas some respond to students' reluctance to learn biblical languages by offering simpler versions of the difficult task of language-learning, a CLT-styled course repackages the complete grammar and vocabulary of a traditional course into a more learner-friendly curriculum, enlisting as allies the learner's natural inclination to communicate meaningfully and to visualize concretely. As a result, a CLT approach makes it possible to graduate learners able to handle the language in a more robust and more deeply internalized fashion, than would be typical through a GTM approach.

Lowering Barriers for Instructors

Learners are not the only persons in the language learning enterprise who encounter barriers. For their part, instructors may feel intimidated by the prospect of transitioning to a CLT pedagogy. Again, the effort required for such a transition may make it seem impractical. After all, these instructors already have mastered the L2 grammar, memorized a considerable volume of vocabulary, and may have taught a given language (such as Biblical Hebrew or Koine Greek) for years using the GTM. The prospect now of having to comprehend oral L2, or the expectation to compose L2 (whether written or oral) may place some among us in territory that is both unfamiliar and intimidating. The discussion that follows will focus on Biblical Hebrew, although the concepts are applicable to other classical languages as well.

Despite their accumulated skills, understanding aural Hebrew and composing in Hebrew (oral or written) will strike some instructors as overwhelming. Two solutions help to lower this barrier. First, instructors need to be reassured that they need not be L2 fluent in order to be able lead a communicative classroom with considerable effectiveness. The instructor need only control a bit more of communicative Hebrew than what the student controls at any given point. Since the student begins with zero Hebrew, the initial amount that the instructor needs to control communicatively is only slightly more than zero. Granted, when students realize they are encouraged to experiment with the language, they will occasionally attempt expressions beyond their present learning (and beyond the instructor's present control). This is an encouraging indication of student engagement, even though the composition may be incorrect. At this point the instructor need only affirm the attempt and respond, "We will learn how to say that, later in the course. At present, let's stay with the type of expressions and vocabulary we know."

The second solution lowering instructor-intimidation involves supplying complete scripting of all Hebrew expressions needed for conducting the activities associated with a given module. If the module calls for students to tell what destination they would like to visit when traveling, the textbook would supply the prompt question and sample answer in L2, ready for use. That much is available in both the instructor and student editions.²⁴

In the case of *LBHI*, further aids appear only in the instructor edition. At the outset of each unit the instructor edition presents a unit overview. The instructor version provides a summary of the grammatical goals before each segment, together with suggestions for how to introduce it. In the case of activities, the instructor version routinely offers suggestions explaining how to carry out the activity effectively, together with a list of simple props that may be helpful. Finally, for the Jonah Episodes, the instructor version supplies an interlinear translation.

Although the various L2 scripting aids such as are supplied within *LBHI* may dismantle an instructor's feeling of intimidation, he or she may harbor doubts concerning the practicality of embracing a CLT approach. After all, have not many (including ourselves as instructors) fared rather well, using the GTM?

CLT responds to the question of practicality from both the learner and the instructor perspectives. Consider first the practicality of CLT from the learner's perspective. As laudable as is a track record of students who have learned Hebrew successfully through the GTM, this perspective overlooks evidence of a far larger proportion of students who would have

²⁴ *LBHI* §2.3.n. [heh], 1:142–3.

learned languages more effectively and efficiently if a Second Language Acquisition (SLA) approach such as CLT had been available to them.²⁵ Providing a CLT approach is more practical, from the standpoint of better serving a broader scope of students.

Consider next the practicality of CLT for instructors themselves. Instructors who already are proficient readers of Classical Hebrew, but who had not before cultivated automaticity skills in hearing and composing Hebrew, report anecdotally that, after beginning to teach with a CLT approach, their own Hebrew literacy noticeably improves. This will position them to form higher-order L2 observations with greater depth and frequency than before. Most would concur that such a gain is eminently practical.

A CLT Approach to Biblical Hebrew

Learning Biblical Hebrew Interactively presents a CLT curriculum for first-year Classical Hebrew. Following a presentation of the alphabet, the student is helped to acquire the language through a series of immersive, communicative activities that are ready for classroom use. The activities are synchronized with progressively more complex grammar and syntax, as encountered through instructional explanations and incorporated into successive episodes of an illustrated serialized story. By the end of the course the student will have had the opportunity to master a sophisticated level of literacy (including poetry and an introduction to cantillation), equivalent to the more rigorous among other first-year textbooks.

While the student learns over five hundred high-frequency words and encounters customary paradigms (including strong and weak verbs), and rules of grammar and syntax, the focus remains on internalization of the language through L2 input and language utilization (generating meaningful communication), rather than rule-memorization and accelerated parsing. The learning is multi-experiential, with over 230 illustrations and photos. In addition to over 225 guided Bible readings, the learner gains insight into the world of Classical Hebrew through more than forty concise articles on cultures. The instructor edition (paginated the same as the student edition) supplies teaching tips for each segment, enabling the instructor to employ the material with little effort.

A number of additional resources are freely available to students, instructors, and visitors through the textbook website (<http://www.LearningBiblicalHebrewInteractively.com/student>). These include instructional videos, vocabulary videos, culture videos, and Jonah Episode PowerPoint shows, keyed to each textbook portion.

For example, when learning the comparative, in addition to reading the textbook explanation and examples, a student (or instructor) may view a brief instructional video keyed to that segment. The video walks the student through that portion of textbook, highlighting portions and supplying additional comments to aid understanding (*LBHI* §3.1.τ. [*zayin*], 1:193–4).

If they wish, instructors may refer students regularly to instructional videos as part of the homework process. As a result, class time may be spent reinforcing learning by reviewing Bible translations and engaging activities already completed as homework (a flipped classroom approach).

Early in the course, as students are growing accustomed to vocalizing Hebrew, the vocabulary video segments provide audio support to train proper pronunciation. These resolve any uncertainty concerning pronunciation and may be reviewed until the learner pronounces words reliably.

Brief videos introduce each culture article as well. In addition to audiating each Hebrew word found in an article, the video presents textbook photos in color (the print version is not in color). Whether examining Hezekiah's Tunnel (*LBHI* §11.1.τ. [*zayin*], 11:321), Megiddo's gateway (§8.1.π. [*chet*], 11:138), a Phoenician ivory (§9.1.π. [*heh*], 11:179), a roller olive press (§4.4.τ. [*zayin*], 1:299), Lachish sling stones (§7.4.υ. [*yod*], 11:84), gold foil jewelry (§6.3.π. [*chet*], 1:418), or a Canaanite jar with dipping pitcher (§4.1.τ. [*zayin*], 1:263)—the web clips visually enrich the culture articles.

²⁵ According to a study by Deagon, 90 percent of post-secondary students enrolled in a classical course will learn more effectively in courses that take a CLT approach (2006, 27–49).

Also available on the textbook website is a full complement of PowerPoint shows corresponding to each of the thirty-eight illustrated Jonah Story episodes. Captions provide the storyline dialogue. By clicking on any line, the student may reinforce pronunciation and practice listening skills by hearing it read aloud. Since each show may be downloaded, instructors may more easily use them in class for reading practice or class discussion of a given episode.

Additional resources supporting instructors include course calendars, vocabulary quizzes, L2 reading comprehension questions, and unit assessments. Consistent with story-style learning, quizzes include illustrations, and assessments are configured as L2 stories. Resources such as these are available upon request through the textbook website for instructors who adopt the course textbook.

Paradoxically, the barriers of intimidation and impracticality that often deter language learners may actually work to the learner's and instructor's favor. When those barriers press Classical Hebrew instructors to utilize solutions supplied through CLT, then students stand to gain substantially. Due to the varied avenues CLT employs for kindling interest, a CLT curriculum will appeal to a broader range of learning styles (or multiple intelligences). By cultivating automaticity, learners will deepen their ability to form higher-order insights in the biblical text. The sense of personal reward fostered by such insights makes it easier for students to realize the practicality of their decision to study the biblical language.

Accounts of Student Experience

A student in Jennifer Noonan's online Hebrew course at Columbia International University provided the following account of his experience. This CLT course employed the *LBHI* textbook.

Student: This was not my first time learning a language. I've studied both Spanish and Mandarin at the college level. I've also taken four semesters of Greek, and now I'm learning Hebrew. Both the Spanish and Mandarin classes had a very conversational, immersive, environment in the classroom. Then I took Greek in an online format.

My experience in Hebrew 1 online, using this textbook, was very different from my experience in a Greek 1 online class. The Greek class used a textbook through which we learned all the paradigms and had to memorize everything ourselves. The role of the instructor was really just in testing. But the textbook we used in Hebrew 1 and 2 was focused much more on interacting and using the language. I had to generate my own thoughts, put them into Hebrew, and express that to my classmates and the instructors.

I felt that having to use the language in those ways—reading it, and learning from it, and then also communicating with it, from a very early point—really helped my learning, and was much more similar to the way that I learned Spanish, in particular . . .

I found *LBHI* most helpful as I was learning a new topic in a chapter . . . the presentation was really helpful for that initial learning. As I went through the course, however, if I wanted to review a topic that we had covered a few chapters previously, I found it was a little difficult to navigate the textbook to find the grammatical information that I was looking for. So that was one frustration I had working through the textbook.

Earlier on in the course, I really enjoyed using the serialized artwork and story format. I found it very helpful. Maybe if there was vocabulary that I was a little less familiar with, seeing a picture sort of primed my brain to expect a certain word, which helped me learn and grasp the vocabulary. Then, if I was able to read the whole frame in the story on my own, I could look at the picture and confirm yes, I actually got this right. It was great having that immediate feedback, both to help me to read it, and then also to confirm that what I was grasping from the text was indeed correct. So early on, I found it helpful.

As we went on, I didn't stay on top of the vocabulary as much as I should have. I found that, as the story was incorporating lots of vocabulary from past units, it was harder for me to read. That was probably due to my own negligence.

. . . Each section has a heading at the top so that you can read the Bible. That was encouraging: from the first days in the course, reading the actual text of the Hebrew Bible, and finding that I could actually understand what was going on . . . It made me want to learn more. It made me want to engage with the course.

Then, at times, as we moved into some of the syntax, and relationships between clauses in narrative preterit, and things like that, I found that I could see things in the Hebrew text, even in a first or second semester course that maybe I couldn't see in the English translation. I could at least be more sure of some of the syntactical relationships between clauses that, in the English, I could try to hope to understand and guess at what was going on. That was encouraging too.

Bob Stallman (Northwest University): After using this curriculum for one year with a class of undergraduates, one student told me how very helpful it was for him to generate Biblical Hebrew in oral conversation and in writing. Learning Biblical Hebrew with SLA methods helped him internalize and retain the language much longer and much more thoroughly than he had expected. He found the Bible excerpts at the end of each unit to be motivational. These kept the goal in sight: to be able to read the Bible more effectively. He found that element very inspirational.

On the other side, I heard from many students that they sometimes found the interactive exercises too complicated. Sometimes the grammatical discussions contained explanations that were a bit difficult for them to follow.

Overall, I think the thoroughness of the material and the amount of grammatical metalanguage may make this curriculum somewhat more suitable for graduate students, but I would like to hear from others about their experiences.

Steve Cook (Johnson University): I had one student who had completed a total of three semesters using SLA approaches. She wanted to meet with me over lunch and read through the book of Ruth. We spent thirty to forty minutes once a week doing that, using no English whatsoever. We weren't translating it. We were asking kind of circling questions about what was going on. She already knew what the book of Ruth said. She wanted to read it out loud, and be able to answer questions about it. We did that. We went through the whole book of Ruth. Then she stopped. For about a year she was doing something else. In preparation for this discussion, I asked her about that experience. She said that just a couple weeks ago she had picked up the book of Ruth again and read the whole thing. It just flowed so well. She had a lot of retention: in her ability to not just recall raw memory, but to actually process the language as language. She told me how encouraging that was for her.

Teachers' Reflections on Using Communicative Methods

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Discussion

Introductions

Steve Cook: I am professor of Old Testament at Johnson University in Knoxville, Tennessee. I've been teaching Biblical Hebrew since 2004. I teach undergrads, and I have used Dr. Overland's material with students for the past two years.

Jennifer Noonan: I've used this textbook three different times, each time in a summer intensive course teaching to a mix of graduate and undergraduate students, but in two very different contexts. First, I taught two summers at the Evangelical

Theological College in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. These intensive courses consisted of two, three-week sessions each summer for a total of six weeks to cover the entire textbook. The other context was online for Columbia International University's seminary, which was also a summer intensive: eight weeks each to cover Hebrew 1 and 2 (sixteen weeks altogether).

Benjamin Noonan: I serve as Associate Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew for Columbia International University (CIU) in Columbia, South Carolina. I've used *LBHI* for several years as part of teaching CIU's first-year Biblical Hebrew sequence, which spans two terms. I've taught this sequence with *LBHI* in both sixteen-week residential and eight-week asynchronous online contexts. My students for these contexts were both undergraduate and graduate students because CIU cross-lists its biblical language courses.

Bob Stallman: I teach at Northwest University near Seattle, a Christian liberal arts university. In the 2015-16 academic year I had a class of eight undergraduate students and used this material in a traditional semester format of three hours per week.

Teaching Grammar and Vocabulary

Benjamin Noonan: I found *LBHI* to be effective overall regarding grammar. *LBHI* covers all the basic grammar that a first-year textbook should, and even covers some grammar topics in detail that aren't always treated in depth by your typical Biblical Hebrew textbook: e.g., *wayyiqtol* and verbal disjunction (§§7.1-3), poetry (§§10.1-3), and the *Qal* passive (§11.1). The introduction of grammatical forms by frequency rather than the typical order of presentation is beneficial from an SLA perspective, although *LBHI* contains some notable exceptions to this principle (e.g., presentation of the *Nifal* before the more common *Hifil* and *Piel* stems).

Regarding vocabulary, *LBHI* prepared my students well for second-year Hebrew, which at CIU assumes the students have learned all words occurring more than a hundred times (approximately 425 words total). Nevertheless, the quantity of vocabulary in *LBHI* is a bit much because the textbook lists discrete conjugated forms deriving from a single root (i.e., "chunks") as individual vocabulary entries. The quantity of words to learn was often overwhelming to my students, and only once they became familiar enough with the Hebrew verbal system did many of my students find it easier to focus on learning the verbal root rather than all the conjugated forms.

Steve Cook: In some cases, the textbook introduces a grammatical element very gradually, and sometimes overly so. For example, the first common singular of a given conjugation is introduced in one segment with corresponding 1cs verb forms placed in the vocabulary list, while the remaining forms of that same conjugation are introduced in separate segments afterward, each also with corresponding verb forms in the vocabulary list. This conjugation is introduced over numerous segments and hence multiple weeks of class time. My students and I found this pace frustrating.

But on the positive side, this also means that vocabulary lists are populated by inflected forms, rather than being introduced only once in root form. Thus, a given root may appear many times in vocabulary lists, based on inflection or stem variations. It is helpful that asterisks mark the roots that have been introduced in earlier lists. If you're going to have inflected forms in vocabulary lists, this is the right way to do it.

Also, the *yiqtol* is introduced before the *qatal* which, depending on your pedagogical philosophy, could be a good thing or a bad thing. In hindsight, my students found that sequence to be a bit awkward, as do I. I prefer to start with the *qatal*.

Bob Stallman: I found it helpful that the book separated the vocabulary lists, distinguishing "Words for Responding" from "Words for Hearing." The words for responding were the higher-frequency words, which we expected to actually use in class. For the fall semester, when we covered units 1 through 5, there were 200 words in that category and 155 words for hearing, so about 355 words in total. And it's probably about the same in the second half, too. I compiled all of these into a supplement so students could see all of the words together. At the end of a unit, students can see all the primary words they should know, with the inflected forms taken off. This created a summative moment, so students could have some

confidence going forward. As they reached into new material, they could solidify what was behind them. It's common for students to struggle with vocabulary; I felt that dividing it into those two categories and providing that kind of summary helped them.

Benjamin Noonan: The resources on *LBHI*'s [website](#) are a great supplement to the textbook. Of the resources available online, I made most use in the classroom of the PowerPoint illustrations for the serialized Jonah story.²⁶ I downloaded them and projected them onto the screen so that the students and I could read through them together. My students also made use of other resources available on *LBHI*'s website, particularly the instructional videos.

In addition, I also developed some of my own materials to make more effective use of *LBHI*. For example, I created vocabulary flashcards, keyed to the vocabulary for the different units in *LBHI*, in [Quizlet](#). My students especially appreciated this additional resource.

Jennifer Noonan: I supplemented Ben's Quizlet with photographs that I took. This worked really well. In addition, I found the videos on the website very useful for developing the online course. I had to produce only a handful of videos to supplement them because the videos were already there, online, available for me to use. I could just refer the students to the videos for lecture material. That took a large burden off of me for the online version of the course.

Student Engagement and Response

Bob Stallman: There are quite a few Bible readings at the close of each unit. I didn't make an attempt to go through all of them; I just sampled a few to show how the lesson works in the actual text. The Bible readings tend to be isolated, pulling out verses that illustrate certain things, and that's a helpful feature. On the other hand, when I have taught Hebrew using other materials, we'll select a passage such as 1 Kings 21. By proceeding through a connected passage, certain vocabulary will naturally be recycled. In contrast, the isolated Bible readings felt a little more fragmented than what I was used to. But the payoff was that the isolated verses did illustrate vocabulary or grammar corresponding to what we had learned in that module. So that allowed us to look at an isolated verse and say, "Look at what's happening here. We just saw that."

Steve Cook: I found the Bible excerpts at the end of each unit to be one of the strongest features of the material. In the past, with other books I've used, I've often found that students struggle greatly in making the transition from the grammar book to actually reading "real Hebrew" (as opposed to the artificial exercises that are in the book). But Overland's book presents Bible excerpts all along the way, helping my students to make the transition to real Hebrew much more smoothly than they have in the past.

Benjamin Noonan: I also appreciate the "You Can Read the Bible" readings found at the end of each chapter. *LBHI* presents a good variety of passages, from a variety of genres, and thereby provides students with valuable practice in reading authentic Biblical Hebrew. My students found the "You Can Read the Bible" readings very helpful in this regard, and it certainly aided them in achieving a good standard of literacy, in addition to providing encouragement and motivation. However, these readings did not seem to facilitate the transition from reading to exegesis, which becomes a significant focus during the second year in CIU's Hebrew sequence, as much as I had hoped. This may be an issue with the structure of our curriculum as well as with how we define literacy and fluency, but it is an issue nonetheless.

Jennifer Noonan: The online class had a range of outcomes; it seemed to be dependent on the amount of time the students put in. For the face-to-face classes in Ethiopia, I was really pleasantly surprised by the level they were able to achieve, especially considering that they were learning the language in English (which was their second, or third, or fourth language) and that it was compressed into six weeks. It was just amazing how well they did over that time and how much fluency they had gained.

²⁶ Vocabulary, grammar, and communicative activities in *LBHI* are carried along by a serialized and illustrated story, fancifully expanding on the account of Jonah, beginning toward the close of Unit 1 and extending through the last unit (Unit 11).

Bob Stallman: I found the literacy level was much higher than when I taught in a straight GTM way. We were reading much more quickly and comprehending things much more automatically. Other times that I've used communicative approaches, we'll read the biblical text—but then we'll talk about it more. We'll answer questions about it. And we do all this using Biblical Hebrew as our medium of exchange and try to just stay completely away from English. With these materials, I didn't have time enough to do that kind of an activity, which I think has helped general literacy.

Jennifer Noonan: In regard to retention, on one occasion I was messaging back and forth with one of my former students in Ethiopia and, in the midst of the conversation, she switched into Hebrew, initiating a Hebrew conversation with me in that messaging exchange. I thought that was great evidence of her continuing on with the language even though she was no longer taking the course.

Steve Cook: One thing I regard as a drawback with this book is that it contains an enormous amount of grammatical metalanguage. The students are still expected to process grammatical terms like “indicative,” “volitional,” “telic,” “locative,” “frequentative,” and so forth. I would like, if possible, to reduce the use of such terms in a more natural SLA environment. At times, I felt like this material was trying to move things in a communicative direction but without really leaving the GTM behind. And so, in trying to achieve the goals of both SLA and GTM, it comes up a little bit short on both.

Jennifer Noonan: I have another story about a different Ethiopian student. We were translating the Ten Commandments and got to, “Do not make an idol for yourself.” He said jokingly, “Well does that mean I can make it for someone else?” This joke shows that he was thinking along the lines of how to interpret the text; it was beyond the level of just getting the Hebrew words it into English.

Benjamin Noonan: *LBHI's* communicative activities seemed to provide my students with a literacy level higher than that of my students taught with a GTM approach. This is largely because the communicative activities provided a real-life context for the language. My students appreciated the activities because they gave Biblical Hebrew a real-life context—in their words, using vocabulary and grammar within a communicative setting helped the language to “stick” better.

The communicative activities in *LBHI* also made learning more enjoyable. CIU typically offers its first-year Biblical Hebrew sequence in block format, which means that classes meet for approximately three hours once a week. This can make for a lengthy class session, especially when the class meets during the evening. But, *LBHI's* creative activities made the learning experience more fun for my students. This in turn helped to lower their affective filters, enabled them to automatize certain processes, and overall increased their learning.

Nevertheless, I had some students who struggled with the communicative activities. Many, but not all, of these students were ones who wanted a GTM approach. This was especially true of introverted students, students with natural language ability, and students who had already taken Biblical Greek, which is taught at CIU using GTM. These students didn't like engaging in communicative activities when they felt like they had not already mastered the material. They didn't want to try using the language in a communicative context and instead preferred learning from vocabulary lists and grammatical paradigms.

Bob Stallman: As a teacher I found that I really needed to focus more on teaching students rather than on teaching Hebrew. I had to consider their learning styles. Some people are naturally reserved and responded to creative ways to draw them into the activity. Sometimes, despite having students of one gender in class, we would do an activity which required both genders, using fun props to play act. This lightened the attitude of the whole class and took their minds off the application of rules that seemed to stand between their first language and what they were trying to learn. So, a bit of humor and awkwardness actually helped with acquisition of the language and automaticity.

Steve Cook: A trick I've used in these situations is to give students a gendered doll and have them carry out the instructions for the doll.

I would echo all of the positives that everyone has mentioned. But in terms of another negative of this material, I would note that the activities for many segments have instructions that my students have found difficult to follow. They come to class and say that they read the instructions three or four times and still couldn't quite figure out what they were supposed to do until I explained it to them. But I wasn't always sure, either. This was an issue that recurred a number of times.

But in general, the activities that required students to generate Hebrew and use it interactively were very helpful.

Another positive feature of the book is that from time-to-time Hebrew wording is even embedded into the grammatical explanations (e.g., *LBHI* II:236). As the book goes on, there's more and more of these sorts of Hebrew phrases sprinkled in that the students are expected to read and follow. I find that a plus.

Bob Stallman: I think the cartoon serialized story of Jonah is a strength of the book, just in its concept. Sometimes I would point to different objects in the pictures and ask, "What's this?" or "What is Jonah going to do next?" Most students said the images and story really livened up their experience of the language and helped them appreciate the comical and dramatic elements of the Jonah story.

Benjamin Noonan: I agree that the serialized Jonah story is another strength of *LBHI*. Reading through the Jonah story was a key component of my class sessions, and students responded extremely well to it. In fact, for many of my students, the Jonah story was their favorite feature of the textbook because it gave them a context for learning vocabulary and grammar. My students appreciated how the Jonah story is entertaining and creative, and how it also gives *LBHI* a coherent narrative. Overall, the Jonah story does an excellent job of incorporating and reinforcing the vocabulary and grammar learned in each unit.

Jennifer Noonan: In Ethiopia, my students would not let me end the class unless we had done at least one part of the Jonah story. Even if we were running out of time, they insisted. And so, we did.

Advice for Faculty

Jennifer Noonan: Each time I teach in this way, I get a little better. So, I would say you should start where you can. Start small. If you have to continue using your GTM textbook and supplement with something like this textbook's interactive activities, then start there. And each time you do it, add a little bit more. Don't expect to jump in and be able to conduct the whole class in Hebrew. Do what you can, where you are, and keep adding each time around. Keep pushing yourself. I think that would be my advice.

Benjamin Noonan: My advice is similar. I say: give it a try without setting your expectations too high, especially at the beginning. The communicative approach is probably very different from the training most Hebrew teachers—including myself—received. Thus, most instructors will likely need to implement it gradually. It can take quite a bit of extra time and effort to plan a communicative class session, and you have to allow yourself to make mistakes and learn as you go along. But, the payoff is more than worth it. You'll gain a greater understanding of Biblical Hebrew yourself, and you'll see your students become more fluent and enjoy the language more.

Bob Stallman: I think a major benefit of SLA is that it can be brought into the class in small or large doses. You don't have to make a huge transition to it if you don't want to. If you're more familiar with your GTM textbook, SLA can work well to supplement this. For example, talk about a Bible story using Hebrew for questions and answers. The class could act out the story with students speaking Hebrew lines. Also, the teacher can bring props from a Bible story into class and pass them around, practicing Hebrew. "What do you have? What do I have?" Put people in a circle and give each a different item. Then pass the items around clockwise, practicing Hebrew: "What did you have? What are you going to have? What is she going to have next?" Create an opportunity to work with a little vocabulary and see how students respond and participate.

Another bit of advice is to find ways to expose yourself to a lot more spoken Hebrew. It can be by listening to the Bible, but it can also be using the online learning programs Duolingo or Rosetta Stone. Biblical Languages Center has audio that works with pictures quite well.

In the flipped classroom, students must do a significant amount of work before the next class. It's helpful when the teacher finds ways to monitor the extent of their investment and reward that. For example, I've made handouts that identify each task I expect students to complete prior to our next meeting. At the beginning of class, students turned these in for credit. They liked having my expectations spelled out clearly and appreciated being recognized for keeping on pace.

Benjamin Noonan: One of the main hurdles I experienced in using *LBHI*—a challenge that has more to do with the textbook itself than the communicative approach—was the textbook's organization. As we've already noted, *LBHI* contains many helpful activities and other items in addition to the grammar explanations. However, the presence of so many different components often made it difficult for the students to find what they were looking for, especially if they were looking for a grammar explanation. In fact, the scattered organization of the textbook is probably the most common complaint I receive from students about *LBHI*. To help the students in their struggle to find material in *LBHI*, I produced grammar summary sheets and vocabulary lists keyed to the textbook's relevant sections.

Bob Stallman: I think that professors have different preferences for the way they like their materials to look and be organized. Some prefer diagrams and charts; others are much more text heavy, or prefer an outline. The assessments provided for teachers were really designed well at the conceptual level, though I reformatted them to make it easier for students to understand what they were being asked to do. That kind of adjustment is inevitable and I think it's far better to have something to work with than to make up quizzes and exams from scratch.

Steve Cook: When I was considering switching to a communicative style for teaching Hebrew, I knew it would take a long time to learn the new method. And this was indeed a hurdle at first. I didn't learn Hebrew through a communicative style. I learned with grammar-translation. I've been steeped in that for years and years, and I'm pretty good at it. And I taught Hebrew that way for a number of years. Making the transition to a communicative style was, and remains, very difficult. I don't feel up to it. I feel like David trying to put on Saul's armor, to steal Bob's great analogy. It's not just a matter of what textbook I'm using; it's a matter of switching approaches as well. That's tough. It's very tough.

Bob Stallman: Personally, I can say that as a result of communicative teaching, I myself know the language much better. This ease and joy with Hebrew encourages students to keep reaching for more.

Jennifer Noonan: I think for me it's fun and it really engages the students. In technical language, it lowers the affective filter so that students are not so nervous or scared. They can really participate and enjoy and engage and potentially learn more because that wall isn't up.

Bob Stallman: This took much less preparation time than what I've spent in some other cases. I love producing supplemental material, and I know I have to scale back because more is not always better. But I've found that, with the exception of needing to reformat a few things and providing some collated vocabulary lists and so on, pretty much everything was there in the materials. I needed to spend less prep time as a teacher working on that sort of stuff.

Steve Cook: The material in Overland's book is divided into units, modules, and segments. A segment will be identified as "4.2.alef," which can be a bit confusing at first; it takes the students a while to get used to that system of labeling sections. Also, I found that the modules and segments vary in length from one unit to the next. That's another thing that takes a while to get used to. A module may have three segments or may have as many as eight or nine. So, from one day's class to the next, students have to spend uneven amounts of time preparing for class. This affects my own prep time as well. But in comparing this book to other grammar books I've used in the past, my own startup time the first year was about the same.

Jennifer Noonan: I feel like there's a learning curve, and each time I go through the materials I do a little more and a little better. I started with some level of fluency, but not nearly as much as would have liked. I keep going through it, and the next time around I do it a little better. There are some things that I've decided that I'm just not up to. I'll just skip it. But that's okay—the next time around I'll catch it.

Bob Stallman: For a teacher who is trying to transition into the SLA approach for Hebrew, Paul Overland's book gives a lot of help though pretty specific activities. It models many kinds of learning activities and helped me to create new ones of my

own that worked for the specific class of students I had during that semester. A teacher doesn't have to have true fluency to be effective at running an activity that helps students to work with a particular element of grammar. Little by little, I've found my own command of Hebrew growing beyond translation into generating fresh expressions. At the same time, it's been instructive to listen to my students answer questions that I put to them. Real communication is so helpful, even when vocabulary and grammar are in the early stages of development. This particular textbook provides a lot of opportunity for practice.

Steve Cook: I find the interactive exercises to be just plain fun. I've accumulated bags and bags worth of props and toys, such as plastic horses, swords, grapes, and all sorts of stuff. The use of props helps students to remember the vocabulary really well. I show them a picture of a family and have them point out who the "ach" [brother] is and who is the "em" [mother] and the "av" [father], and they remember that really well. It's a great way to teach vocabulary.

Responses

Paul Overland's Comments

Regarding the effectiveness of *LBHI* for teaching grammar and vocabulary, instructors' comments clustered around (a) a comparison concerning the extent of grammar and vocabulary covered by comparable textbooks, (b) elements of grammar and vocabulary within *LBHI* that reflect CLT influence, and (c) the value of supportive materials available in the *LBHI* website.

First, let's consider the extent of grammar and vocabulary covered. The instructors' comments concerning the extent of grammar and vocabulary are crucial, since an observer may wonder whether a CLT approach might either bypass essential elements of grammar, or leave a student with too small a vocabulary. Responses indicating that grammar and vocabulary covered by *LBHI* corresponds to what instructors would expect in a first-year Hebrew textbook (or a bit more, in some areas) confirm that the intended goal has been met or exceeded. Since lists of grammatical principles, syntax, and vocabulary frequency lists were regularly consulted while writing the textbook, such an assessment was expected, but is nonetheless gratifying.

Consider next the observations about grammar and vocabulary that reflect CLT influence. There are three. First, an instructor's appreciation for the vocabulary list distinction between "words for responding" and "words for hearing." This distinction helps students prioritize memorization, recognizing the difference between the need for output (responding) and the need for input recognition (hearing).

A second observation involves the gradual pace by which a learner encounters the components of a verb paradigm. According to CLT, in order to achieve automaticity only one element of a given paradigm should be introduced at any point (enabling what is called "focus on form"). Consequently, verb conjugations are introduced one person-gender-number at a time, not as completed paradigms. Such an approach will strike the GTM-trained instructor as needlessly gradual, but marks the path enabling the learner to achieve automaticity. To help orient learners, a full paradigm of the conjugation appears each time a new component is introduced.

In a third observation an instructor wondered why the *qatal* conjugation (in part connected with past tense) was not introduced before the *yiqtol* conjugation (in part connected with future tense). From the vantage of morphology, a good case can be made that a student will be able to memorize the *yiqtol* (future) paradigm more easily if he or she has already memorized the simpler *qatal* (past) paradigm. The fact that *LBHI* introduces *qatal* forms after students have mastered the *yiqtol* (albeit not by memorizing paradigms) illustrates that CLT (unlike GTM) is not driven primarily by a grammatical or morphological scheme. The team of Hebrew instructors designing what later became *LBHI* determined that communicative activities engaging a future tense scenario would serve students best. Thus, they sequenced activities (and grammar) in that fashion.

Finally, consider instructors' comments concerning supportive materials available from the textbook [website](#). One instructor displayed the PowerPoint files of illustrated Jonah Episodes in class, while another outfitted the entire course in

an online format, taking advantage of the existing set of instructional videos. Such feedback is gratifying, since part of the intent was to create sufficient materials so that instructors would be able to run the course with little or no need to invent new materials for a face-to-face setting. It is inspiring to learn that some have built new materials to aid students even more (e.g., online course-formatting, Quizlet vocabulary tools).

Consider next the field observations concerning how well students interacted with the CLT approach of *LBHI*, and the level of literacy they achieved. It is helpful to distinguish between factors that helped students overcome a sense of intimidation (students in the United States with little or no success in learning modern languages tend to recoil in fear at the prospect of studying a classical language), in contrast to factors that resolved a perception of impracticality (that studying biblical languages is impractical for future ministry). Notice first the factors pertaining to students' feeling of intimidation: two assets and two critiques.

Two assets helped students overcome intimidation: the serialized story and the numerous activities. Observed benefits that derived from the L2 story included the following: (a) the story supplied context, thus simplifying the task of learning both grammar and vocabulary, (b) artwork helped bring language learning to life, and (c) comic elements within the plot lightened the overall atmosphere, helpfully diverting attention from the rigor of linguistic analysis. These results match what was anticipated.

As for benefits derived from L2 activities, first, the activities ushered the L2 learning into a real-life context. During an activity, learner attention focuses less on language learning, and becomes preoccupied with completing the task or exchanging information (in L2) as stipulated by the activity. Second, the change-up that varied activities bring to a class session makes the course more enjoyable for students—particularly when they meet in three-hour blocks. Again, these outcomes are consistent with expectations.

In addition to assets, instructors offered two critiques of *LBHI* pertaining to learner intimidation. The first involves metalanguage or technical linguistic terms included within the book. While on the one hand instructors felt the extent of grammar covered in *LBHI* met or exceeded what they would look for in a first-year textbook, on the other hand some would have preferred fewer technical terms. It is worth noting that, with one principal exception, *LBHI* seeks to relegate non-essential technical terms to footnotes and the appendix in hopes that they will not encumber students, while at the same time placing those terms within easy reach of instructors who may wish their students to become comfortable with the metalanguage. That exception involves the explanation of various modal nuances within the *yiqtol* (imperfect) conjugation (§5.4.x [alef], l:352–9). Depending on a given course's goals, some instructors may opt to withhold this information until a more advanced course.

A second critique relating to learner intimidation surfaced among certain students reluctant to attempt L2 communication. Some of these had grown accustomed to GTM from Greek courses, and, not surprisingly, anticipated navigating Hebrew from an equivalent pedagogical approach. Consequently, the very communicative activities which appealed to some classmates made other learners shy away. The principal factor underlying their reluctance can be traced to a fear of making mistakes. Fear of mistakes comprises an obstacle common to all introductory L2 learning, irrespective of language or textbook. Consequently, CLT instructors have developed various techniques to lessen its effect, including the following. First, students need overt reassurance that they will be praised for attempting, not penalized for failing perfection at the first try. Second, during oral conversation, student errors can be corrected subtly by restating correctly what a student said mistakenly (known as “recasting”). Third, one should explain that, absent students' language production errors, an instructor would not know what features of grammar or syntax merit reteaching or deeper explanation. So, errors benefit overall learning. Fourth, instructors should capitalize on moments of uncertainty (as when a student hesitates to respond, searching for a term or expression). By supplying students with particular L2 class navigation expressions, a student can remain in L2 even when searching for how to finish a conversational response. Most helpful are phrases such as “Help me!” or “How would one say in Hebrew [insert L1 word or phrase being sought]?” Fifth, instructors should model candor concerning the mistakes that they, too, commit. This gives students permission to make mistakes when attempting to express themselves in L2. Combined with an explanation concerning the gains documented for communicative language learners (e.g., automaticity leading to retention and higher-order observations), these techniques can help hesitant students engage communicative activities.

Notice the factors that indicate, or facilitate, practical value gained from language study. The practical gains revolve around the skill of literacy, language retention, meaningful L2 communication within *LBHI*, and the gain registered through Bible readings included in *LBHI*. Two of the four instructors observed specifically that the communicative approach was responsible for a higher level of literacy (“much higher,” in the words of one instructor), when compared with other students they had taught using GTM textbooks. The students “were reading much more quickly and comprehending things much more automatically.” Since literacy constitutes the principal goal of classical language learning, the compact assessment offered by these two experienced instructors carries considerable significance.

In addition to literacy skills displayed while a course is in session, the ability to retain and continue using the language after the course has disbanded indicates quite persuasively that the student regards the language learning as highly practical. Such was the account of a student who initiated a Hebrew messaging-conversation with her instructor after the CLT course had concluded. According to students in another CLT course, the real-life L2 activities helped them retain the grammar and vocabulary (those activities made the language “stick,” as they put it). These student responses confirm the effectiveness of CLT pedagogy.

Meaningful communication at the textbook level constitutes another component within *LBHI* that enhances a student’s sense that the language has practical value. “Meaningful communication at the textbook level” refers to instances where, in the middle of a paragraph introducing an activity, a grammatical explanation, or a cultural note, the textbook will switch from English to Hebrew (e.g., II:236). This feature registered as an asset in the opinion of one of the instructors. The exclusive use of Hebrew for map labels illustrates the same meaningful communication strategy (cf. maps in I:564–5, also II:554–5).

Another element within *LBHI* that contributes to practicality derives from the selected and connected Bible readings. The “You can read the Bible” heading is found at the close of each unit. Several skill-graded excerpts follow, together with comments concerning the context from which they are taken. *LBHI* contains more than 225 Bible excerpts and two connected readings (those connected readings may have been overlooked by one instructor, who wished for longer readings). Notice again how involvement with Bible readings affected one student (as described earlier):

That was encouraging: from the first days in the course, reading the actual text of the Hebrew Bible, and finding that I could actually understand what was going on. That was really encouraging. It made me want to learn more. It made me want to engage with the course.

That practical value derived from frequent Bible readings confirms the observation of one instructor who opined that “early and frequent inclusion of Bible readings is one of the strongest features . . . enabling students to make the transition to real Hebrew much more smoothly than they have in the past.” Students’ enjoyment of Bible readings is not unique to a CLT-styled textbook. The difference consists in the background comments that preface each reading.

Periodically the textbook author has observed instructors wondering how students may fare when transitioning from a CLT first-year Hebrew course to a second-year CLT course in exegesis of the Hebrew Bible. One instructor in the present panel whose students registered strong literacy skills (“higher than my students have had when I taught with a GTM approach”), nevertheless remarked that their skill with Bible readings did not translate easily into exegetical facility. Since higher literacy that follows CLT training regularly makes possible higher-order literary insights, one wonders what are the aims of such an exegesis course. For exegetical courses that measure skill in terms of rapidity of narrow parsing, CLT-trained students may not perform so well as GTM-trained students. But for exegetical courses that prize the ability to trace themes across broader reaches of a text in L2, the observation of L2 literary devices, and automaticity that strengthens facility with translational nuances, CLT-trained students typically will excel. Perhaps, then, what is needed are exegesis courses conducted immersion-style in Classical Hebrew, so that students may converse in Hebrew concerning Hebrew texts (see Overland 2013).

The instructors’ insights concerning how to begin teaching with a CLT approach center on three suggestions. First, begin gradually. Even while using a GTM textbook, begin incorporating a few CLT activities. Add a bit more each year. This is

sound advice. At some point, the instructor will reach a point of enjoyment and confidence regarding this partial CLT approach. He or she will realize that the added benefit and enjoyment resulting from transitioning to a fully CLT textbook and classroom will outweigh concerns associated with that shift.

Second, don't be concerned that your fluency with Classical Hebrew is insufficient to employ CLT with substantial benefit. Of those currently using CLT, few are fluent. This does not prevent them from realizing benefits. As regards fluency, the instructor needs to know only a bit more than the students. By using scripted activities, the need for fluent generation of Hebrew is minimized. And when students observe the instructor searching for correct words or expressions, they are emboldened to experiment with generating Hebrew themselves.

Third, take advantage of supportive materials available to instructors using *LBHI*. These range from weekly vocabulary quizzes (styled in a CLT manner) to reading comprehension questions (for the serialized Jonah Episodes) and unit-level assessments. The instructor may employ these as is. Or he or she may adapt and improve, according to the particular situation. Available to both the instructor and student are the web-based instructional videos and the Jonah Episodes PowerPoint files (with embedded audio of the Hebrew story). Finally, the Syntax Summary found toward the end of the second volume may support students who need a systematic recap of elements of grammar and syntax (II:395–409).

Looking Forward, Jennifer E. Noonan

In this panel discussion, we have seen how communicative and interactive methodology for teaching Classical Hebrew works in the classroom. So, where do we go from here? I would like to address two issues to consider for the future. The first is oral-preference learners and the culture of secondary orality that is developing in print-preference cultures and its relevance for language learning. The second is technology, specifically interactive language learning in an online environment.

The first area for consideration is orality and secondary orality. I would first like to define oral- versus print-based cultures, keeping in mind that we are talking about a continuum. According to Ong, a primary oral culture, on one end of the continuum, refers to “a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print” (2012, 11). Oral cultures communicate primarily, and often exclusively, by means of speaking and listening and not reading and writing. By contrast, print-based cultures, on the other end of the continuum, rely heavily on reading and writing (Ong 2012, 50, 55; [Lovejoy 2012](#), 31).

Table 1: Learning preferences of students from oral- and print-based cultures (Moon 2012, 31)

Category	Oral Learners' Preference	Print Learners' Preference
Dialogue	Learn mostly in dialogue with others, often communicate in groups	Learn mostly alone, often communicate one to one
Oral Art	Appreciate clarity/style of speech through oral art forms (for example, stories, proverbs, songs, drama)	Appreciate clarity/validity of reasoning through interesting literature
Experience	Learn best when teaching is connected to real events, people, and struggles of life	Learn by examining, analyzing, comparing, and classifying principles that are removed from actual people and struggles (events are examples)
Holism	View matters in the totality of their context, including everyone involved (holistically)	View matters abstractly and analytically (compartmentally)
Mnemonics	Mnemonic devices like stories, symbols, songs, rituals, repetition serve as valuable memory aids	Written words can be recalled later; therefore, value brevity and being concise. Stories merely help illustrate points
Participation	Respond to a speaker and participate in a storytelling event	Read alone and listen quietly

While the differences between these two types of cultures appear to be superficial, research has shown that the ability to read and write affects how people in these cultures process information and affects their learning preferences. The chart above summarizes some of these differences in learning preferences.

One of the significant things to notice in this chart is that oral-preference learners like to learn together with other people, in dialogue, using things like stories, songs, and proverbs. On the other hand, print-preference learners like to learn by themselves with a book, analyzing and categorizing. As a result, an oral-preference learner is more connected to real-life events and looks at the totality or the whole, whereas print-preference learners look at individual pieces and parts of the whole. Oral-preference learners prefer mnemonics, whereas print-preference learners assume that if they can find it in a book then they don't need to memorize it.

The significance of this chart is twofold. First, those who identify as oral-preference learners prefer teaching methods that are more interactive, that involve storytelling, that align more with the activities that are used in a teaching grammar as Paul Overland's textbook does. This stands in contrast to the more traditional GTM approach in which a student effectively learns by himself or herself, by memorizing. Those who are identified as oral preference learners clearly outnumber those of us, myself included, who identify as print preference learners. At least 80 percent of the world's population is made up of oral preference learners ([Madinger 2013, 19](#); [Lovejoy 2012, 31](#)). Those of us, primarily in the West, who are print preference learners are in the minority.

The second issue related to orality is that in places like the United States, where historically there have been more print-preference learners, the times are changing. Print-based cultures have a growing population of learners who exhibit the learning preferences of what is known as secondary orality. According to Ong, a secondary oral culture is developing in the "present-day high-technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print" (2012, 11). One might add to this list such recent developments as the internet, Facebook, Zoom, and texting. Ong goes on to say, "The electronic transformation of verbal expression has both deepened the commitment of the word to space initiated by writing and intensified by print and has brought consciousness to a new age of secondary orality" (2012, 133). Further confirmation of this development comes from a recent study by Moon of over two hundred American seminary students from a variety of cultural backgrounds over a five-year period (2012, 31). In this study, Moon found that slightly over half of the students had a preference for oral learning. If oral-preference learners really do respond better to a communicative and interactive style of language teaching, and if oral-preference learners really do outnumber print-preference learners, then one's teaching methodology should adapt accordingly. Interactive teaching is not just a passing fad, but it is becoming more and more necessary in our culture of secondary orality.

The second forward-looking issue to address is the adaptation of interactive teaching methodologies, such as those used in *LBHI*, for the online, distance-learning environment, which is an ever-growing segment of higher education. I speak primarily from experience here, having created an online Hebrew 1-2 sequence using *LBHI* for Columbia International University. There were a number of adaptations that had to be made in order to get the course online, including lectures, translation homework, and assessments. However, the big issue is, "How can we make online distance learning interactive?" Therefore, I will focus on the interactive discussion board forums I created for this course.

The discussion board forums for this course were asynchronous discussions that required the students to interact with each other in Hebrew; each had a prompt that was adapted from the *LBHI* textbook. For the first couple of forums, initial posts and replies were in the form of audio files. The students didn't have to do any typing in Hebrew. They didn't have to deal with the Hebrew fonts and the new Hebrew letters. They just recorded themselves saying, "*Shalom. Hashalom lekha?*" ("Hello. How are you?"), and then they responded to their classmates with another audio file. Once they became more familiar with the Hebrew alphabet, they were able to use an online [keyboard](#), so they didn't have to master the physical Hebrew keyboard layout. All they had to do was take their mouse, click on the letters they wanted and then copy and paste the word they had created into the forum.

A different discussion board forum required that they ask two different classmates, "What did you do yesterday?" For this forum, it was important that the students identify which classmates they were addressing in the initial posts, so we could

differentiate masculine and feminine forms. Then the students replied with whatever they did yesterday. In another forum, the students had to ask a classmate, “What do you want?” Again, they had to specifically select which students they were addressing so that they could practice doing masculine and feminine forms correctly. Later in the course, during the unit on the narrative preterite, I asked the students to start a story using at least three of these verb forms. For the reply phase, they were required to go back and complete a couple stories started by their classmates, using at least two more of the narrative preterite forms.

I didn’t limit the forums to audio files and print, however. I also required the use of some photographs to help in this interactive forum. For one of the forums, the initial post required the students to choose two classmates and tell them, “Go to” something. This was early on in the class, with somewhat limited vocabulary, so posts included: go to a table, go to a chair, go to bread, and so forth. Then, in reply, students had to take a picture of themselves in that place or with that item. For another forum, the student’s initial post was a photograph of himself or herself performing an action with friends. In addition to the picture, the student had to include the question, “What are we doing?” in Hebrew. Again, they had to use the correct masculine and feminine forms, because a couple of groups were all female, which would require a different form in Hebrew. In the reply phase, their classmates had to answer the initial question, describing the photo using participles. For example, “You are eating.”

Looking further forward, we could go on to include videos. That is not something I did for this particular class, but it would be quite possible to require students to post a short video of themselves walking, sitting, or drinking. This approach doesn’t have to be limited to still photographs, text, and audio. Looking even further forward, an online language class could incorporate virtual worlds (an online 3D environment, populated by avatars) (Sadler and Dooley 2013, 159). These virtual worlds allow students to interact with other avatars by audio, by moving their avatar, or by text.

Technology certainly adds some exciting options for us. However, a word of caution: “The potential benefits of collaborative exchanges, whether set in the classroom or managed online, as always, depend more on sound pedagogical design of the tasks the participants are asked to perform rather than the actual locus of the learning event” (Blake 2009, 823).

As we hone our pedagogical skills for teaching languages and Biblical Hebrew specifically, we continue to look forward. Understanding oral-preference learners and familiarity with online teaching options will help us in that endeavor.

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