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Learning to Think in the Language: Remediating the Oral and the Written Through Classroom Use of Digitized Films

A persistent challenge in teaching Hebrew to English native speakers is the concept of agreement between different parts of speech. Unlike in English, nouns and verbs in Hebrew have gender, male and female, and adjectives have both gender and number. Although the concept of agreement seems simple, lack of agreement is, nevertheless, the most prevalent mistake that students make in speech and writing, regardless of their level of knowledge of the language.

In order to explain this concept and to encourage students to be aware of it and to apply it to all their proficiency skills, I have found that digitization of films offers a unique possibility to which students are quick to connect. The digitized program I developed consists of six lessons taken from two different films. Each lesson contains all the information that a student will need to process the material independently, without the instructor's guidance. To that end, each lesson has a short digitized film (no more than 2 minutes); a transcript in Hebrew of the film; a list of vocabulary used, with each word translated into English; and a commentary section that incorporates cultural as well as grammatical notes. One of the recurring notes explains, and gives concrete examples from the film of, agreement (or lack of agreement) between the different speech elements.

One of the movies I use is *Aviya's Summer*. It tells the story of a girl, Aviya, whose mother is a Holocaust survivor suffering from deep emotional scars, which prevent her from taking care of her daughter. Aviya is sent to a boarding school until one day, one summer, her mother unexpectedly comes to take her home. In the course of many subsequent conversations between the daughter, a native speaker of Hebrew, and the mother, who acquired Hebrew as an adult, emerge conflicts that embody emotional, cultural and linguistic discrepancies between the two.

Hebrew students are assigned to watch a scene depicting one of these conversations. They are instructed to use the supporting material and commentary notes to identify all the mistakes that the mother makes and to explain why she is making them. For example, the mother cuts Aviya's hair unevenly and tries to comfort her by telling her that her hair will grow back. She uses the plural noun for hair but neglects to use the plural form of the verb that goes with it. Since films describe real-life situations, the concept of agreement metamorphoses from a grammatical and theoretical concept into a more familiar, natural and relatable language presence.

Students learn not by having their own mistakes corrected repeatedly but by identifying mistakes made by a speaker of the language as a foreign language. Students hear (as many times as they need to), and learn to listen for, the mistake, and then write down the corrected version. The differing ways of processing language through orality and literacy are in this way integrated. Furthermore, students are asked to explain the function of the grammatical errors in the context of the scene and to identify, as far as they can, the way the errors highlight the cultural differences between the second language speaker and the native speaker. In this way, they learn to make inferences regarding the grammatical forms in the

foreign language speaker's own native language. Even more, they can suggest ways in which these linguistic differences might exacerbate the tension between the two characters. Students thereby generate a frame for understanding the genesis and effects of their own errors. This frame can then be used in the classroom to direct students' attention to their own and each other's errors. Correcting errors is, then, no longer a matter of "drilling" but of examining the uses of language in a social context.

Teaching a foreign language makes it is easy to see critical thinking in terms of language, rather than logic, and specifically as the confrontation of linguistic habits with new linguistic demands. The intersection of speech, writing, film and computer science also makes it possible to see the "two-cultures" issue as a question of interdisciplinarity managed through concrete learning experiences.

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