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Agent

In general terms, the agent is defined as the entity performing a given action, as opposed to the → Patient, the entity affected by it. In active constructions (→ Voice) the agent occupies the position of → Subject, while in passive clauses it is usually omitted, but may be expressed by an adjunct phrase, e.g., הטכנאי תיקן את המחשב *ha-ṭexnay tiqen ʾet ha-maxšev* 'the technician repaired the computer' vs. המחשב תוקן (על ידי הטכנאי) *ha-maxšev tuqan (ʿal yede ha-ṭexnay)* 'the computer was repaired (by the technician)'. Experiencers of cognitive processes, e.g., as in שמחנו לראות אתכם *śamaxnu lirʾot ʾetxem* 'we were glad to see you' or אני מבינה מה שאתה אומר *ʾani mevina ma šeʾata ʾomer* 'I understand what you are saying', do not, strictly speaking, perform an action, and so should not be labeled as agents—unless the notion of 'agent' is taken in a very broad sense (Lyons 1968:350–351; Van Valin 2006:683, 686–687).

The agent (in its more restricted definition as performer or instigator of an action) is usually expected to be a sentient being acting willfully, whereas inanimate things are more likely to be perceived as instruments (→ Instrumental) wielded by some other, possibly implicit, agent. This distinction can in fact be seen as part of a larger 'hierarchy of volition', in which the initiator of an action ranks higher than the doers—whether animate or inanimate—actually performing the action under his/her command or control. Thus in הקבלן / הפועל / הדחפור חפר תעלה *ha-qablan / ha-poʿel / ha-daxpor xafar teʿala* 'the contractor / the workman / the bulldozer dug a canal', the workman's intermediate position between the contractor and the bulldozer makes *הקבלן והפועל חפרו תעלה *ha-qablan ve-ha-poʿel xafru teʿala* *'the contractor and the workman dug a canal' just as nonsensical as *הפועל והדחפור חפרו תעלה *ha-poʿel ve-ha-daxpor xafru teʿala* *'the workman and the bulldozer dug a canal'. The higher-ranking agent, or decreeing authority, can be likened to the causer in causative constructions (→ Causative Verb), for example, הוא מאכיל את התינוקת דייסה *hu maʾaxil ʾet ha-tinoqet daysa* 'he is feeding the baby (f) porridge' vs. התינוקת אוכלת דייסה *ha-tinoqet ʾoxelet daysa* 'the baby (f) is eating porridge'.

Meteorological phenomena and similar uncontrollable events ('forces' according to Van Valin 2006:685) are intermediate between agents and instruments, in that they occur independently, but do not set out intentionally to affect their surroundings (Borochovsky-Bar Aba 2001:47–49); in religious contexts, however, they are often perceived as instruments of divine intervention (→ Instrumental). The same can be said about inner states and emotions, as in הפחד שיתק אותו *ha-paxad šiteq ʾoto* 'fear paralyzed him'.

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Agnon

Shmuel Yosef Agnon is thought by many to have been the most important Hebrew writer in modern times. He was the first Israeli, and the only Hebrew author, who has so far been awarded the Nobel Prize. Most of the writers of his generation have been forgotten, but Agnon continues to attract growing interest to this day. More studies have been published on his writings than on any other Hebrew writer (Laor 2010). His language is unique and differs

greatly from the common usage of his generation. His style possesses poetic beauty and his sentences have a tightly-knit rhythmic construction. However, only relatively few studies have focused on his unique style (Sadan 1967:157; Bar-Adon 1997:184).

Agnon's style possesses three features that make it different from the common modern Hebrew style.

(1) One prominent feature of his writing is a constant link to the early Jewish writings. These texts are fundamental to his writing; hardly a sentence of his is bereft of allusions to them, and he takes great care to shape his own style in their spirit. Such a constant reliance on the early Hebrew texts was a characteristic of the very early stages of Modern Hebrew literature, when such texts constituted the sole basis for writing in Hebrew and colloquial Hebrew was as yet non-existent. But Agnon wrote at a time when Hebrew secular literature already possessed a distinct style of its own and lived in an environment in which Hebrew had already become a lively spoken language. The writers of his generation no longer had to base themselves on the early texts; he was the only author of his times, and the last Hebrew author in general, who maintained such close contact with traditional sources. He may therefore justifiably be called "the last of the Hebrew classicists" (Scholem 1989).

Agnon's unique adherence to the early Jewish texts probably explains at least in part why he wielded such a great influence on the 'generation of the founding of the State', writers who were in their prime just before and after the establishment of the State of Israel, who considered Agnon's style a model (Rabin 1966:220, 234). These writers felt a need to establish contact with classical Hebrew works which, however, were inaccessible to them because they were composed from a religious perspective and were full of halakhic terms. Agnon's oeuvre is essentially secular and addresses major issues of modern times, and yet it is steeped in the early sources. It is therefore capable of addressing a modern reader and at the same time to grant him a sense of contact with the classical Jewish sources.

(2) A second characteristic, derived from the first, is Agnon's refusal to adopt the new Hebrew style. His adherence to the style of classical Hebrew reflects his opposition to Modern Hebrew and his effort to ignore it (see *Samux ve-nir'e* 252). His opposition to the modern language appears to have evolved over time. Therefore even new Hebrew words that appeared in his early writings tended to be used more sparingly as time went on. Even when he edited texts of his that had already been published in the past, he often erased neologisms and replaced them in later editions with more traditional counterparts, for example the modern word מטבח *miṭbaχ* 'kitchen', which he later replaced with the archaic חדר הבישול *χadar ha-bišul* (Dalmatzki-Fischler 2002).

Despite his opposition to Modern Hebrew, Agnon did himself also invent a number of new words, for example זוכרן *zoxran* 'person with a good memory', צנומית *ṣnumit* 'very thin person 9 (fs)', and קהואי *qahavay* 'coffee shop owner' (Moreshet 1978). The lexicon of traditional Jewish texts is insufficient for the description of life in modern times, and therefore even he did not completely refrain from inventing new words. He did his best, however, to avoid common Modern Hebrew usages in order to create a style whose very differentness arouses a sense of a classical style.

(3) The third and perhaps most important unique trait in Agnon's writing is his preference for Mishnaic Hebrew. In the first stages of Modern Hebrew literature the dominant style was purely biblical. This was the chosen style because the *maskilim*, the creators of modern Hebrew literature, perceived Rabbinic Hebrew, the language of the Mishna, the Talmud, halakhic literature and other pious writings, as representing everything that they scorned in contemporary Jewish life, while Biblical Hebrew represented the golden age of Hebrew existence in antiquity (see, for example, Cohen 1995:39; → Maskilic Hebrew). Later a new, 'mixed' style emerged, in which elements from every stage of Hebrew were used. This became the dominant style in Modern Hebrew.

Agnon chose a different path. He adhered totally to Mishnaic Hebrew. This is the main feature that distinguishes his style from that of other writers of Modern Hebrew. He never explained this decision, and any explanation must of necessity remain no more than a hypothesis.

It would seem that Agnon's decision to choose Mishnaic Hebrew is evidence for his strong objections to the position represented by

the *haskala*, which consists of strong criticism of Jewish life and an attempt to reform it. The writers of the *haskala* chose Biblical Hebrew in an attempt to revive a period in the history of the Jewish people that they perceived as more pure and beautiful, namely the biblical period. Agnon's works all attempt to show the exact opposite. He highlights the special beauty of Jewish life in the *shtetl*. That is the life which he deems to be the ideal, and whose loss he constantly mourns (Sadan 1967:21–23; Meron 1968:187). This is apparently why he chose Rabbinic Hebrew, which for him also represents this life, as the foundation of his style (Breuer 2009b:246–249).

His opposition to the style of the *haskala* is apparent not only in his overall style, but was also expressed quite explicitly in his writings (*From myself to myself* 167; *ʿAl kapot ha-manʿul* 25). In fact, his opposition to the *haskala* became stronger as time passed. In later life he refrained from using *haskala*-like expressions that appear in his earlier works. For example, he replaced זולפת אורה חשאית *zolefet ʾora xaša'it* 'illuminated secretly' with מאירה *me'ira* and בת צחוק נוגה *bat ṣexoq nuga* 'a sad laugh' with צחוק נוגה *ṣexoq nuge* (Dalmatzki-Fischler 2002). Indeed, post-*haskala* Hebrew literature in general rejected the style of the *haskala*. This rejection, however, in most cases led to the adoption of the mixed style, while Agnon chose the extreme path of adhering solely to Mishnaic Hebrew.

Although his style may arouse an impression of classicism and antiquity, Agnon is in fact a modern author. This can be seen clearly not only in the literary aspects of his texts, namely the themes on which he writes and the way he constructs his plots, but also in his language. Texts composed in the early period tend to be linguistically quite uniform and do not usually reflect the language of the various characters. In Agnon's case, on the other hand, the impression of linguistic uniformity is only a first impression. Research reveals linguistic echoes of numerous different sources with various kinds of Hebrew style to which his texts allude (Schweid 1960; Breuer 2009a). For example, he reports a question in direct speech as follows: מותר לי לשבת? *mutar li laševet?* 'may I sit down?', while in the next sentence the narrator reports: נטל לו כסא לישב *naṭal lo kise lešev* 'so he took a chair to sit down' (*Tmol šilšom* 142), because לשבת *laševet* 'to sit' is the usual form in colloquial Hebrew while לישב *lešev* is the Mishnaic form that Agnon usually uses (→ Morphology: Rabbinic Hebrew). At times the source of an expression is alluded to more indirectly, by means of 'combined speech' (Golomb 1968). Such techniques are characteristic of modern literature. The fact that they appear in Agnon's writing proves that he adopted new techniques despite the ostensible impression of his being a pure classicist.

According to scholars, Agnon's language is in fact derived from the so-called ספרות היראים *sifrut ha-yereʾim* 'literature of the God-fearing', whose style is derived from that of the Mishna but which also contains numerous other elements (Rabin 1966:234). However, in this respect, too, it would appear that Agnon's language evolved over time. At first his language was indeed just like that of the ספרות היראים *sifrut ha-yereʾim*, but as it became more firmly established it came to resemble Mishnaic Hebrew more and more. His growing inclination toward pure Mishnaic Hebrew is manifested not only in his own writing, but also in the way he re-phrased stories borrowed from previous sources (Stern 1996). The similarities between his mature, final style and Mishnaic Hebrew can be subsumed under the following three headings:

(1) In contrast to the rather sloppy language of ספרות היראים *sifrut ha-yereʾim*, Agnon is very careful and sensitive in the way he shapes his text (Schweid 1960).

(2) In contrast to ספרות היראים *sifrut ha-yereʾim*, which is characterized by a complete disregard of the rules of grammar, Agnon refrains from grammatical mistakes (keeping in mind, of course, that the grammar in question is that of Rabbinic and not Biblical Hebrew), as a study of his language has clearly shown (Mansur 1968). The importance which he attached to matters of grammar is also proven by the fact that he sought Yalon's advice on numerous points of grammar (Dalmatzki-Fischler 2000). Yet another piece of evidence for his interest in grammar is the story חוש הריח *xuš ha-reax* 'Sense of smell', a polemical rebuttal that he wrote in response to a certain critical comment about his grammar. In it he uses conventional

grammatical arguments to defend himself and nowhere claims that one may ignore the rules of grammar.

(3) The language of ספרות היראים *sifrut ha-yere'im*, although based on that of the Mishna, in fact consists of a mixture of all strata of Hebrew. In Agnon's works, in contrast, one discerns a gradual increase of Mishnaic elements instead of elements taken from other strata. He even makes effort to hide Biblical quotations by translating them into Mishnaic Hebrew (Breuer 2009b), thus creating a more uniform Mishnaic language. Furthermore, the scholarly study of Rabbinic Hebrew began to gather momentum in his days and he took the fruits of this research into consideration when he wrote. He maintained close contact with Hanoch Yalon, a leading expert on the study of Rabbinic Hebrew, through whom he became aware of the latest developments in the field (the discovery of early manuscripts and oral traditions), all of which also influenced his writing (Dalmatzki-Fischler 2000:231–232). He thus made an effort to write in the original Mishnaic Hebrew and to avoid later patterns, that is, to write truly classical Hebrew, not merely in a language that would sound like Mishnaic Hebrew to the average Jew. In this sense he strove to produce pure and independent art that did not take conventional taste into account.

These three points prove that for Agnon ספרות היראים *sifrut ha-yere'im* as a literary genre possessed a language that was a kind of substandard Rabbinic Hebrew, an error-ridden Mishnaic-like language that he wanted to foster and turn into a model language. Perhaps, too, this was his way of expressing his covert opposition to the *haskala* view of the contemporary Jewish life. For the adherents of the *haskala* the flawed language of the ספרות היראים *sifrut ha-yere'im* reflected the flawed Jewish existence, while Agnon wanted to turn this language into a model, as part of his attempt to turn contemporary Jewish life into a model.

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Agreement: Biblical Hebrew

The term 'agreement' (or 'congruence') indicates syntactic correspondence of words in gender, number, person and determination. Generally in Hebrew, nouns, verbs, adjectives, and pronouns agree, depending on whether they are masculine or feminine, singular or plural. Thus, in אָמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ הַגָּדוֹל *'ā̆mar ham-meleḵ hag-gā̆ḏōl* 'said the great king' (2 Kgs 18.19) all forms, i.e., the verb אָמַר *'ā̆mar* 'said' and the adjective הַגָּדוֹל *hag-gā̆ḏōl* 'great' agree with הַמֶּלֶךְ *ham-meleḵ* 'the king', the verb in terms of person (3rd), gender (m), and number (s),