

**European Association for Jewish Studies**  
**Nachmanides Forum 2019, 22–24 September**  
**Workshop grant report**

**Applicants**

Doc. PhDr. Pavel Sládek, Ph.D. (Charles University, Prague)

Prof. Dr. Elisabeth Hollender (Goethe University Frankfurt)

PhDr. Milan Žonca, Ph.D. (Charles University, Prague)

**Participants**

Amsterdam University (Yaniv Hagbi)

Ca' Foscari University, Venice (Dario Miccoli)

Catholic University of Leuven (Joachim Yeshaya)

ELTE, Budapest (Szonja Ráhel Komoróczy)

Charles University, Prague – The Prague Centre for Jewish Studies, Charles University, Prague  
(Daniel Boušek, Pavel Sládek, Dita Válková, Milan Žonca)

Palacky University, Olomouc – The Kurt and Ursula Schubert Center for Jewish Studies, Palacky  
University, Olomouc (Lenka Uličná)

Goethe University, Frankfurt (Elisabeth Hollender and Annelies Kuyt)

INALCO Paris (Il-Il Yatziv-Malibert, Rinat Tsal-Sela)

Jagiellonian University, Krakow (Ewa Węgrzyn)

National University of Kyiv – Mohyla Academy (Nadia Ufimtseva)

The University of Manchester (Sophie Garside)

University of Granada (Carmen Caballero Navas)

University of Helsinki (Riika Tuori)

**Key-note speaker:** Eva Lehečková (Prague)

**Student participants:**

Alžběta Glancová (Prague), Karolina Kaševá (Prague), Javier Leibusky (INALCO Paris), Valerica van der Geld-Dodan (Amsterdam), Franziska Pabst (Frankfurt), Hana Trnečková (Olomouc)

**Official guests:**

HE Daniel Meron Ambassador of the State of Israel in the Czech Republic

Dr. Michal Pullmann, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Charles University

## Report

The 2019 Nachmanides Forum continued the discussions initiated at the successful meeting in Girona in 2017 and at the EAJIS congress in Krakow in 2018, where the Nachmanides Forum initiative was formalized. The workshop aimed to take these debates further by providing a more structured look at some of the challenges facing Jewish Studies programmes in Europe. The central theme of the meeting was the place of Hebrew language in European Jewish Studies programmes.

During their history, the Jews spoke and wrote in many different languages. However, Hebrew always was and still is the most important Jewish language. In Jewish societies, the highest cultural value was always attributed to Hebrew. Even during the centuries when Jews did not use it as a spoken language on everyday basis, Hebrew was the main language of synagogue liturgy as well as of the rich prose and poetic literary production. It is not surprising that the academic programmes focusing on Jewish culture see the teaching of Hebrew language in its various strata as one of their most important tasks.

At the same time, teaching and learning Hebrew, a beautiful but difficult non-European language, poses a number of challenges to instructors and students alike. This is why the 2019 Nachmanides Forum, organized in Prague jointly by the Prague Centre for Jewish Studies and the Seminar für Judaistik of the Goethe University Frankfurt, chose Hebrew instruction as its main topic.

The 2019 Nachmanides Forum consisted of a keynote lecture, six panels, two official addresses and a concluding debate. Participants were invited from thirteen academic institutions with Hebrew instruction, ranging from Granada to Kyiv and from Helsinki to Venice, providing geographical but also institutional diversity. Student participants were invited to debate in two parallel sessions. The chairs of the panels organized the content of their sessions in advance, defining questions, selecting presenters from among the participants and thus ensuring that each panel would address well-defined issues, foster a meaningful debate and formulate concrete suggestions for the follow-up. The panels addressed the following issues in particular:

How are the Hebrew classes distributed in our curricula? How much Hebrew is needed and how much can we actually teach? How shall it be divided between BA and MA in order to provide high-quality education also for the master's degree? What are the pros and cons of the distance learning? Can the use of e-learning enhance our courses in addition (or instead of?) sending our students to Israel?

The panels dedicated specifically to the Hebrew instruction showed that while each institution faces specific challenges resulting from the situation of the given programme in the national academic and university system, there are several crucial issues, for which a joint action might be extremely vital. They are especially the following:

- The university teachers of Hebrew work in a very specific environment, which is rather different from public language schools including the network of the Ulpanim. While the collaboration with the Ulpanim is desirable wherever they exist, the instructors of Hebrew associated with

academic programmes need to create a platform for discussion, sharing of teaching materials and good practices. Prof. Hollender, the acting President of the EAJS, suggested that the EAJS might try to make its website available for such online forum.

- In the light of recent discontinuation of Israeli funding for scholarship programmes, which for many years helped many of our students to study at the Israeli Ulpanim and universities, alternative options were debated. Suggestions for a “European Summer Ulpan” were brought forth, based on the experience in Amsterdam, as presented by Mr. Yaniv Hagbi. Prague – Olomouc emerged as possible locales for such project, given their central location, favourable economic context and the presence of two collaborating Jewish Studies Programmes. The feasibility of this idea will however need to be considered further.
- On a related note, several participants called for an introduction of a shared system of Hebrew proficiency levels, as the CEFR system is not suitable neither from the academic point of view, nor with regards to the specifics of the Hebrew literacy (while CEFR is oriented towards the practical language competencies, Jewish Studies programmes must consider also Biblical and Medieval Hebrew, as well as the academic Modern Israeli Hebrew). While creating a universally accepted system would be not easy, its benefits for Jewish Studies as an academic discipline, existing in a rather unstable and sometimes even hostile academic environment, could be invaluable. The absence of such reference system is a major obstacle in student mobility and would be a *sine qua non* for any project of shared Hebrew instruction, be it a summer Ulpan or a shared e-learning interface etc.

Among the more general challenges that were repeatedly mentioned was the growing reliance of the management of academic institutions on the initiatives of individual academics and departments to secure external funding for activities which are in fact vital for the survival of the programmes. The so-called “small programmes” are delegitimized and neo-liberal arguments are used to justify the withdrawal of both financial and political support.

In this light, joint action on multiple levels was underlined as a key instrument for survival. Among the various suggestions the following are the most important:

- Creating a web of institutions interconnected by Erasmus (Erasmus+) contracts, securing funding not only for student but also academic mobility.
- Creating a portfolio of shared block-courses (academics create courses in areas of their expertise and agree to teach them at different host institutions).

All the co-organizers believe that if EAJS will take steps to endorse the above mentioned initiative of the university Hebrew language instructors, it will evolve into a continuous and fruitful platform.

**NACHMANIDES FORUM 2019**  
**Prague Centre for Jewish Studies**  
**Faculty of Arts, Charles University**  
**nám. Jana Palacha 2, Prague**

**Sunday, 22 September**

4pm–6pm

**Key-note lecture and debate**, Room 201

**New Approaches to the Didactics of Non-European Languages**

Keynote speaker: Eva Lehečková, Director of the “Library of Languages” Project

With the recent upsurge of L2 acquisition studies, the question whether and how the new findings can be integrated in L2 teaching methods and practice becomes more and more pivotal. In my talk, I will demonstrate various facets of this challenge, focusing on two concepts associated with L2 acquisition research, namely interlanguage and construction. I will show how two specific findings related to the above concepts, i.e. that 1) students at the same level of interlanguage make predictably similar errors, and 2) like L1 learners, L2 learners too acquire constructions as basic linguistic units can be implemented in class, and what advantages may come out of it.

7pm

**Dinner at Mistral Restaurant** (Valentinská 11/56, Prague)

**Monday, 23 September**

10am–12pm

**Panel A** (both academics and students present), Room 201

**The Role of Hebrew Instruction in the Curriculum**

Chairs: Lenka Uličná (Olomouc), Daniel Boušek and Milan Žonca (Prague)

Participants: Il-Il Yatziv-Malibert, Rinat Tsal-Sela and Javier Leibusky (INALCO, Paris), Carmen Caballero Navas (Granada)

In this panel we want to discuss the distribution of Hebrew instruction in our curricula. How much Hebrew is needed and how much can we actually teach? How shall it be divided between BA and MA in order to provide high-quality education also for the master’s degree? We shall also look at different approaches to the instruction of different strata of Hebrew and discuss how to strike a balance between them.

12pm–1pm

**Lunch**, Room 217

1pm–3pm

**Panel B** (both academics and students present), Room 201

**Goals and Methods of Instruction: Distance Learning**

Chair: Sophie Garside (Manchester)

Participants: Annelies Kuyt (Frankfurt), Joachim Yeshaya (Leuven), Riika Tuori (Helsinki)

This panel will focus on the pros and cons of distance learning based primarily on the experience at the University of Manchester. Does distance learning become an inevitable part of the future? We shall explore the ways to use e-learning as a tool to enhance our courses in addition to (or instead of?) sending our students to Israel.

3pm–3.30pm

**Tea**, Room 217

3.30pm–5.30pm

**Panel C** (closed session), Room 201

**Troubleshooting and Evaluation of Our Programmes**

Chair: Yaniv Hagbi (Amsterdam)

Respondent: Pavel Sládek (Prague)

In this panel we wish to tackle concrete problems we all share, and to help each other with ideas for solutions. We'll discuss issues such as: do we need to justify our existence? How to recruit more students? How to motivate them? How to help them in their future careers? And maybe the most important of all, how can we help each other?

3.30pm–5.30pm

**Panel S1** (student session), Room 225V

**Effective language teaching/learning**

Chair: Valerica van der Geld-Dodan (Amsterdam)

In this panel we will discuss both a variety of effective ways of teaching/learning Hebrew and eventual challenges teachers and students may encounter in teaching/learning certain language skills. The participants will present various materials/methods of teaching experienced as successful while also target aspects that can be improved. We will also focus on student-tailored instruction and the way students' input can enhance the effectiveness of teaching.

7pm

**Dinner at Restaurace Století** (Karolíny Světlé 21/320, Prague)

## Tuesday, 24 September

10am–10.15am

**Official address**, Room 201

HE Daniel Meron, Ambassador of the State of Israel in the Czech Republic

Dr. Michal Pullmann, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Charles University

10.15am–12.15pm

**Panel D** (closed session), Room 201

**Institutional framework and challenges**

Chair: Elisabeth Hollender (Frankfurt)

Participants: Szonja Ráhel Komoróczy (Budapest),  
Dario Miccoli (Venice), Ewa Węgrzyn (Cracow),  
Nadia Ufimtseva (Kiev)

This session will ask broader questions we assume all programmes of Jewish Studies in Europe encounter. Bringing in experience from different countries, we would like to use this session to compare notes, seeing both the similarities and the differences. We will ask for reasons to study Jewish Studies in Europe, will investigate what kind of support we need, what is available in different countries, and invite everybody to discuss what the EAJS might do to strengthen the teaching of Jewish Studies in Europe.

12.15pm–1pm

**Lunch**, Room 217

1pm–2.30pm **Conclusion debate** (both academics and students present)

10.15am–12.15pm

**Panel S2** (student session)

**Visit to the Memorial of Silence at Praha-Bubny train station**

Guided by: Alžběta Glancová, Karolina Kašeová (Prague)

Meeting place: Faculty of Arts, nám. Jana Palacha 2