

# ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HEBREW LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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original language (e.g., Yiddish קרפּלך *qreplax* ‘filled dumpling’, קניש *qnišes* ‘stuffed dough’; Italian: פּאַפּאַרצִי *paparasi* ‘paparazzo’). The stressed suffix *-in* is adopted from Mishnaic Hebrew and is also common in plurale tantum nouns (אִירוּסִין *erusin* ‘engagement’).

The plural suffix of the plurale tantum nouns is not inflectional, as the regular plural suffix, but rather derivational, because it is part of the word’s basic form and not a morpheme which is attached to the singular form. Therefore, it must be marked in the lexicon as [+Plural] (Kiparsky 1982).

Plurale tantum words can be divided into two main groups (Avioz 2004). One group includes nouns which either lack a singular form or their singular form is rare or was created by back formation. In this group we find generic nouns (אֶגוֹזִיִּים *egoziyim* ‘Juglandaceae (botany)’, חוּלִיִּיתַיִם *xulyetanim* ‘vertebrae’, כִּימִיקָלִים *ximiqalim* ‘chemicals’); nouns indicating objects consisting of units, usually of small size (טוגנים *tuganim* ‘French fries’, פּתִיתִים *ptitim* ‘toasted pasta’; זִמִּים *zimim* ‘gills’; טַחורִים *taxorim* ‘hemorrhoids’, כִּבְסִים *kvasim* ‘laundry’); nouns indicating objects with a ‘dual’ element (גַּפְיִים *gapayim* ‘limbs’; גַּרְבוֹנִים *garbonim* ‘tights-pantyhose’; אוֹפָנָיִם *ofanayim* ‘bicycle’, מֶלְקָחַיִם *melqaxayim* ‘clamps’), etc. The second group includes nouns and sememes which have a singular form, but the semantic relation between the singular and the plural is dubious. In some cases the grammatically singular form is semantically distinct from the plural form, e.g., מִיעוּטִים *mi’uṭim* ‘minorities’ (singular מִיעוּט *mi’uṭ* ‘diminution’), מְקוֹרוֹת *meqorot* ‘heritage’ (singular מְקוֹר *maqor* ‘source’), שְׂקָדִים *šqedim* ‘tonsils’ (singular שְׂקָד *šaqed* ‘almond’), סַנְפִירִים *snafirim* ‘flippers (for swimming)’ (singular סַנְפִיר *snafir* ‘fin [of fish]’). The plural form may occur in idioms and fixed expressions which do not allow the singular, e.g., טִפִּין טִפִּין *ṭipin ṭipin* ‘little by little’, בְּחַדְרֵי חֲדָרִים *be-xadre xadarim* ‘in inner chambers’; חָרַשׁ מִזִּמּוֹת *xaraš mezimot* ‘he devised evil’; אוויר פּסגוֹת *avir psagot* ‘mountain air’. The singular form may be semantically identical with the plural form, e.g., סֵתֵר-סֵתָרִים *séter-starim* ‘secret hiding place/places’, מְרוֹם-מְרוֹמִים *marom-meromim* ‘heaven’. The singular form may be a different part of speech from the plural form as a result of category shift, e.g., מִתְפַּלֵּלִים *mitpalelim* ‘worshippers’ vs. מִתְפַּלֵּל *mitpalel* ‘he prays’,

אלפים *alafim* ‘thousands of people’ vs. אֶלֶף *’ēlef* ‘a thousand’, פְּלֵאִים *pla'im* ‘drastically’ vs. פֶּלֶא *péle* ‘a wonder’, בְּעִנְיָנִים *ba-'inyanim* ‘in the know’ vs. עִנְיָן *'inyan* ‘matter’. The plural form may have a special function, e.g., רַבּוֹתַי *rabotay* ‘gentleman (vocative)’, שְׂטוּיּוֹת! *šṭuyot!* ‘nonsense! (exclamation)’.

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## Pluralis Majestatis: Biblical Hebrew

The term ‘majestic plural’ or *pluralis majestatis* refers to the use of a plural word to refer honorifically to a single person or entity. It is also called the ‘plural of respect’, the ‘honorific plural’, the ‘plural of excellence’, or the ‘plural of intensity’. In the Hebrew Bible such plural forms are most commonly used when referring to the God of Israel, e.g., אֲדֹנָיִם אֲנִי *’ādōnīm ’ānī* ‘I am a master (lit. ‘masters’)’ (Mal. 1.6), although it can also be used when referring to a human, e.g., אֲבְרָהָם אֲדֹנָי *’abrāhām ’ādōnāv* ‘Abraham his master (lit. ‘masters’)’ (Gen. 24.9), an object, e.g., קִבְרֹתַיִךָ *qibrōteḵā* ‘your grave (lit. ‘graves’)’ (2 Kgs 22.20), or a personified abstraction, e.g., בֵּיתָהּ בְּנֵינָהּ בִּיתָהּ *ḥākmōt bāntā bēṭāh* ‘Wisdom (lit. ‘wisdoms’) has built her house’ (Prov. 9.1). The pluralis majestatis appears most frequently in nouns, particularly אֱלֹהִים *’ēlōhīm* ‘God (lit. ‘gods’)’, but may also be used with nominalized adjectives, e.g., קְדוֹשִׁים *qədošim* ‘the Holy One (lit. ‘holy ones’)’ (Prov. 9.10); some participles, e.g., עֹשֵׂיךָ *’ōsayiḵ* ‘your maker (lit. ‘makers’)’ (Isa. 54.5) seem to be examples of the pluralis majestatis as well (Jouön and Muraoka 1991:501–502; Waltke

and O'Connor 1990:123; but see GKC 399). There are no undisputed examples of a pronoun or a verb displaying the pluralis majestatis; plural self-reference by a deity, e.g., נַעֲשֶׂה אֲדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ *na'āše 'ādām ba-salmēnū* 'let us make humankind in our image' (Gen. 1.26), has occasionally been explained as pluralis majestatis, but comparative Semitic and contextual factors favor other explanations (for further discussion, see GKC 398; Hasel 1975:58–66; Westermann 1981:144–145).

When a plural word used in the pluralis majestatis is modified by an adjective, the adjective is usually singular, e.g., אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים *'ēlōhīm ḥay* 'the living God' (Isa. 37.4), although a plural adjective is occasionally used, e.g., אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים *'ēlōhīm ḥayyim* 'the living God' (Jer. 23.36). Similarly, when a plural word in the pluralis majestatis is the subject of a verb, the verb is usually singular, e.g., הָלַךְ הָאֱלֹהִים *hālak hā-'ēlōhīm* 'God went' (1 Chron. 17.21), but a plural verb is occasionally used, e.g., הָלְכוּ אֱלֹהִים *hālķū-'ēlōhīm* 'God went' (2 Sam. 7.23).

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## Pluralis Majestatis: Modern Hebrew

Despite its meager presence in the language, the term *pluralis majestatis* refers in Hebrew to two different phenomena:

(1) Plural of excellence or intensity, namely nouns in the plural form which denote a singular referent of particular importance or to which particular honor is due (Waltke and O'Connor 1990:122–123, §7.4.3a–d; Joüon and Muraoka 2006:469–470, §136d–e). Most cases of this biblical usage refer to the God of Israel, primarily the form אֱלֹהִים *'ēlōhīm* 'God' (2,603 occurrences in the Bible), but also קְדוּשִׁים 'the Holy One' (e.g., Prov. 9.10), אֲדֹנַיִם *'ādōnīm* 'Lord' (e.g., Deut. 10.17), and אֲדֹנָי *'ādōnay* 'my Lord' (425 occurrences in the Bible). Forms referring to humans include אֲדֹנַיִם *'ādōnīm* 'lord' (e.g., 1 Kgs 1.43) and בְּעָלִים *ba-'ālīm* 'master' (e.g., Isa. 1.3), mostly in the suffixed forms. Also worthy of mention in this context are the names of two great monsters, בְּהֵמוֹת *bəhēmōt* (Job 40.15) and תַּנְיִנִים *tannīnīm* (Ps. 74.13), certain participle forms (e.g., עֹשֵׂי *'ōsāy* 'my creator [lit. "creators"]' [Job 35.10]), and a few other isolated items. Forms in the *pluralis majestatis* take singular agreement, as in בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים בְּרֵאשִׁית *ba-rēšīt bārā 'ēlōhīm* 'in the beginning God created' (Gen. 1.1). When the same nouns serve as ordinary plurals, they take plural agreement, as in אֲחֵרִים אֱלֹהִים *'ēlōhīm 'aḥērīm* '(various) other gods' (multiple occurrences).

(2) Majestic or royal 'we', namely the employment of plural rather than singular 1st person forms by a single speaker. Originally used by monarchs or high ranking individuals in socially-stratified cultures, this usage has not taken root in Hebrew. In Biblical Hebrew it does not exist at all. Apparent cases such as וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אֲדָם *way-yōmer 'ēlōhīm na'āše 'ādām* 'And God said: 'Let us make man' (Gen. 1.26) manifest rather the plural of 'self-deliberation' (Joüon and Muraoka 2006:347, §114e, n. 7, 469, §136d, n. 3). In Modern Hebrew the use of majestic 'we' occasionally occurs, but its presence is very limited. The main context in which it may be found is academic writing (i.e., the so-called 'editorial we', mirroring a usage extant in this register in other languages as well).

1st person plural forms may be employed in Modern Hebrew by a single speaker in certain other contexts (e.g., while talking to young children, in propaganda texts describing one's achievements, etc.), but in most cases they reflect other factors, and may only dubiously be interpreted as manifestations of the majestic 'we'.