**The Rationalization of Linguistics in the Middle Ages:**

**Hebrew Following the Arabic Model**

**1. Introduction\***

The origins of logic, which was called *melekhet ha-higayon* in medieval Hebrew (a translation of the Judeo-Arabic צנאעה אלמנטק), lay in Greek philosophy. This field flourished as part of the renaissance of the sciences which followed the Arab conquest. The ancient Greek and Hellenistic philosophical texts were translated into Arabic and many scholars contributed their commentaries.[[1]](#footnote-1) Throughout the ninth and tenth centuries, the Arab logicians developed and enriched traditional Greek logic and discussed new issues which had not concerned the classical Greek philosophers.[[2]](#footnote-2)

One of the most-discussed topics in the Arabic literature on logic is the relationship between logic and grammar. Islamic culture, through the lens of the religious belief in its divine origin, considered Arabic to be the most perfect of all languages. As a result, the study of Arabic grammar was considered an important and elite activity in Islamic culture. With the development of philosophy and particularly logic, a real tension developed between logician-philosophers and Arabic philologists. One expression of this tension is the famous debate on the importance of logic and the relative status of Arabic grammar, between a Muslim theologian and linguist and a philosopher, which took place in Baghdad in 932.[[3]](#footnote-3)

This paper is the first to point out that a similar process occurred within Hebrew culture, about four hundred years later. Hebrew linguistics started to develop in the ninth century in both the East and the West and reached a pinnacle during the eleventh century in the works of Judah Hayyuj and Jonah ibn Janah. The introduction of Aristotelian sciences, rational and critical thought, and the theory of logic to the world of Jewish culture undermined the stature of Hebrew grammar and inspired the need to establish disciplinary boundaries between fields and the determination of their relative importance. Joseph ibn Kaspi was the first, within the world of Jewish culture, who deliberately and systematically questioned the validity of the grammatical rules. As a radical Maimonidean, Kaspi was well-trained in philosophy and authored many books related to philosophy. However, he conceived his main role to be to interpret Scripture based on logic. Kaspi viewed this activity as groundbreaking; he was the first in the Jewish world who systematically and comprehensively dealt with the relationship between grammar and logic.[[4]](#footnote-4) His work *Retuqot Kesef* (Chains of Silver) aims to set out general, logical rules for the Hebrew language in place of the *ad hoc* rules of earlier Hebrew linguists.[[5]](#footnote-5)

This paper has two goals. The primary one is to point to a deep conceptual change that took place within the Jewish world, that resulted from its absorption of Greek philosophical ideas. These changes affected the Hebrew language and the attitude towards its laws of grammar, even those considered the most binding. A second goal is to demonstrate the surprising similarity between the processes of conceptual change undergone by the philosophical linguists of medieval Arab and Jewish societies as they developed new attitudes to linguistics and grammar following their exposure to Aristotelian thought.[[6]](#footnote-6)

**2. Logic as compared with grammar**

2.1 The debate in Baghdad

The acceptance of Aristotelian rationalism in the Arab world led to tension between the two major fields, religion and science, or more precisely, between faith and philosophy. This clash is evident in the debate that took place in the court of Ibn Furātin 932, during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Muqtadir.[[7]](#footnote-7) The debate revolved around the status of logic and philosophy as opposed to the study of the Arabic language, which, according to Islamic belief, was imparted by God. This notion is based on the Qur’an: وعلم آدم الاسماء كلها (האל לימד את האדם את כל השמות)., “God taught mankind all the names.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Muslim theologians consider the study of Arabic grammar of the utmost importance, as it is the language of God. Arabic grammar reflects absolute truth, a belief represented by the great theologian and philologist Abu Sa’id Al-Sirafi, as opposed to the schools of philosophy and logic which continued the Aristotelian philosophical tradition. According to the latter, language is a matter of human consensus. They view logic as superior to grammar because its laws are rationally derived, and are therefore binding for all languages, whereas the particular grammatical rules of each language are consensual and apply only to itself. This stance is represented by one of the pioneering logicians in the Arab world, Abu Bishr Matta ibn Yunus. Significantly, Abu Bishr was a Christian, not a Muslim, and was therefore unconfined by the Islamic dogmata that stood at the root of the aforementioned discussion.

2.2 The Superiority of logic over grammar in Al-Farabi’s works

Echoes of this debate can be found in the works of Abu Nasr Al-Farabi. Al-Farabi was one of the greatest philosophers of the Arab world and one of the first to write about logic. He wrote a commentary on the Organon, Aristotle’s collection of works on logical analysis and dialectic, in addition to his own essays. One central issue that Al-Farabi discusses is the relationship between logic and grammar, where he compares and contrasts the two:[[9]](#footnote-9)

وهذه الصناعة تناسب صناعة النحو وذلك ان نسبة صناعة المنطق الى العقل والمعقولات كنسبة صناعة النحو الى اللسان [...][[10]](#footnote-10)

מלאכה זו [מלאכת ההיגיון] מקבילה למלאכת הדקדוק משום שיחס מלאכת ההיגיון לשכל ולמושכלות שווה ליחס מלאכת הדקדוק ללשון [...]

This task [referring to the art of logic] is parallel to the art of grammar, for the relationship between the art of logic and the intellect is equal to the relationship between the art of grammar and the language […]

According to this, both grammar and logic supply the correct tools for reaching the absolute truth. Just as grammar deals with the structure, and not with the content, of any particular phrase, so too logic deals with the structure of the thoughts and arguments that aim to prove a particular truth, and not with their content. The goal of logic is to provide the optimal tools for acquiring intellect. The goal of grammar is to provide the optimal tools for expressing the language in question.[[11]](#footnote-11)

In the *Ahsaa El-Alum* (احصاء العلوم מניין המדעים), Al-Farabi occasionally contrasts grammar with logic. In his words:

فهذه هي الفرق بين نظر اهل النحو في الالفاظ وبين نظر اهل المنطق فيها وهو ان النحو يعطي قوانين تَخُصُّ الفاظ امة ما وياخذ ما هو مشترك له ولغيره لا من حيث هو مشترك بل من حيث هو موجود في اللسان الذي عمل ذلك النحو له والمنطق فيمه يعطي قوانين الالفاظ انما يعطي قوانين تشترك فيها الفاظ الامم وياخذها من حيث هي مشتركة, ولا ينظر في شيء مما يخص الفاظ امة.[[12]](#footnote-12)

אלה ההבדלים בין עיונם של אנשי הדקדוק בנוגע למילים ובין עיונם של אנשי הלוגיקה: הדקדוק קובע חוקים המיוחדים ללשון אומה כלשהי, ועוסק ב(חוקים) המשותפים לו ולשפות זולתו, לא משום שהוא משותף אלא משום שהוא נמצא בשפה שהוא עוסק בו. הלוגיקה נותנת כללים המשותפים לכל השפות, ורק משום כך היא עוסקת בהם. הלוגיקה אינה עוסקת בחוקים המיוחדים לאומה (כלשהי) [...]

These are the differences between the studies of the grammarians regarding words and the studies of the logicians: The grammarian determines specific rules for the language of a given nation, and deals with (the rules) that it has in common with other languages, not because he is part of it but rather because the is within the language he studies. The logician provides rules which are common to all languages, and it is only by virtue of this that he studies them. Logicians do not concern themselves with rules which are specific to (any) given nation […]

Al-Farabi demonstrates the distinctive fields of logic vs. grammar:

[...] في الالفاظ تشترك فيها الفاظ جميع الامم مثل أن الالفاظ منها مفرد ومنها مركب, فالمفرد اسم وكلمة وأَدَاة [...] وهاهنا احوال تخص لسانا دون لسان مثل ان الفاعل مرفوع والمفعول به منصوب [...]

במילים יש עניינים המשותפים לכל האומות, כגון חלוקה ל(מבעים) מורכבים ולמילים נפרדות;[[13]](#footnote-13) בנפרדות – 'שם', 'מילה' ו'מילית' [...] וכאן יש מצבים המיוחדים ללשון ולא לזולתה, כגון היחסה הראשונה בנושא והיחסה השנייה במושא הישיר [...]

Words include issues common to all nations, such as the division into complex (utterances) and separate words; The particular words – ‘name,’ ‘word,’ and ‘particle’ […] entail conditions that are specific to one language and not to another, such as the first case and the second case of the direct object […]

According to him, logic deals with the general structure of the language, and with its most basic components, which exist in all languages. Therefore, the study of logic contributes to a deeper understanding of people’s communicative needs. Grammar, on the other hand, is concerned with all of the rules which apply to a certain language; it is not at all interested in the universality of these rules. Furthermore, logic deals with the components found in all languages which are not consensual, but rather, have rational validity. Grammar deals with components applicable to the specific language it studies, which may vary from language to language.[[14]](#footnote-14)

2.3 Rationalization in Hebrew linguistics in Provence during the fourteenth century: Perceptions and applications

2.3.1 Prioritizing logic over grammar

The tension between philosophy and faith affected not only the Islamic world, but the Jewish world as well. Suffice it to mention the famous controversies over the study of philosophy and the writings of Maimonides, which started in the thirteenth century.[[15]](#footnote-15) The opinions of Jewish philosophers and logicians regarding the superiority of the intellect over human conventions affected their attitude toward Hebrew grammar as well.

The study of grammar, grammatical rules, and Hebrew lexicography commenced in the tenth century, reaching the peak of its medieval development in eleventh-century Spanish Andalusia. Judah Hayyuj’s conclusions regarding the third root were implemented in the books of Jonah ibn Janah, and many other grammatical rules were established during that period. Since then, no far-reaching innovations have entered Hebrew linguistics. The conclusions of these medieval grammarians were unconditionally accepted during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries among exegetes and scholars of the Hebrew language. However, following their continued exposure to logic in the fourteenth century, cracks developed in the perception of the validity and absolute standing of traditional Hebrew grammarphilosophers started viewing grammar as a human convention that changes from one language to the next, and is therefore not binding. Joseph Kaspi was the first among the logicians to compare grammar with logic, arguing for the superiority of the latter. Others noted that Kaspi’s primary endeavor as a commentator on Scripture was his use of logic;[[16]](#footnote-16) however, to date, no study has thoroughly examined the way in which logic is superior to grammar, nor how Kaspi implemented logic within Hebrew rules of grammar.

In *Tirat Kesef* Kaspi states the importance of teaching children logic and grammar immediately after they acquire knowledge of the language:

[...] ואמנם אנחנו אחר שנשתדל להבין אל הילדים הדבור, ראוי שנשתדל להבינם אותו הדבור על יושר תקון מלאכת הדקדוק וההגיון. ואין ספק שמי שאינו יודע לשונו, איזה לשון שיהיה לפי שתי אלו המלאכות אינו יודע לדבר!וזה מה שאין צריך ביאור.[[17]](#footnote-17)

[…] And we, after trying to teach the children to speak, should try to teach them to speak according to the art of grammar and logic. And there is no doubt that one who does not know his language, whichever language it may be, according to these two arts, does not know how to speak! And this does not need to be explained.

However, Kaspi did not consider grammar equal in importance to logic and to rational laws.

In his commentary on the verse אִם תִּגְאַל גְּאָל וְאִם לֹא **יִגְאַל** הַגִּידָה לִּי (“If you are willing to redeem it, redeem! But if he will not redeem, tell me, that I may know,” Ruth 4:4), Kaspi quotes exegetes who note Boaz’s use of *yig’al* in the third person as opposed to *tig’al* in the second person. He writes:

טרחו בזה אבן ג'אנח ואבן עזרא כי לא אמר 'תגאל'; והנה יש למאות ולאלפים כאלה בעברי, כי פעם מדבר לנמצא ופעם לנסתר, וזה נכון בעברי ובהגיון, כי כל הסימנים אשר בדקדוק אינם ממין ההכרחי [...]

Ibn Janah and Ibn Ezra noted that he did not say *tig’al*;[[18]](#footnote-18) while there are hundreds and thousands of these [examples] in the Hebrew, where on occasion the speaker uses the second person form and at other times the third person form, and this is correct in Hebrew and in logic, because all the grammatical rules are not of the type that is necessary […]

It seems that Kaspi believes that there is no need to provide an explanation for the various linguistic forms according to the accepted rules, for the grammar and its rules are not necessary by nature but are rather the result of consensus. Therefore, the Torah does not insist on their absolute and systematic implementation.[[19]](#footnote-19) By contrast, the rules of logic are not the result of consensus, and their validity, according to Kaspi, stems from their content; therefore, they are binding and cannot be changed.[[20]](#footnote-20)

**3. Applications**

Logicians solved grammatical challenges by using logical and philosophical premises that are systematic and valid for all languages.

Several sections of Kaspi’s book *Retuqot ha-Kesef* deal with this issue directly.[[21]](#footnote-21) I will now present three linguistic issues basic to Kaspi’s theory; by extrapolating from the details to the general, we can better comprehend the place grammar held in Kaspi’s orks.

3.1 The linguistic distinction between male and female

Hebrew demands a clear distinction between grammatical genders. Exegetes and grammarians worked hard to explain why, in certain places, the Bible deviates from the grammar rules regarding gender. However, Kaspi explicitly denies the importance of this grammatical rule. He discusses this in one paragraph of *Retuqot ha-Kesef* where, as in all other sections, he divides his discussion into three planes: A topic heading with no explanation, a short explanation of the topic, and a wider discussion, which may include examples.[[22]](#footnote-22) Accordingly, we will now examine and clarify topic heading #18 in *Retuqot ha-Kesef*:

להודיע כי סימן הזכר והנקבה אינו דבר הכרחי.[[23]](#footnote-23)

To state that the male and female markers are not necessary.

He then follows with a short explanation:

לכן נעלמה מהם [=ממפרשים רבים] הלכה בענין סימן הזכר והנקבה עד שנטו נטיות רבות. ואנו נאמר כי אין היִחוּד בזה דבר הכרחי, וכי יֵעָשׂה, אינו רק חסד גמור. ולכן על כל דבר ונמצא יצדק ויתכן שיורמז אם בלשון זכר אם בלשון נקבה.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Therefore they [several exegetes] did not understand the rules regarding the male and female markers which led them to create many inflections.[[25]](#footnote-25) And we say that consistency here is not necessary, and when the rule is carried out, it is benevolent.[[26]](#footnote-26) And therefore every case is correct and may be indicated by either the male or female forms.

Kaspi determines that there is no need to discuss the places where the Torah uses a marker that does not agree with the subject’s grammatical gender. He claims that every noun could be treated as either male or female.

In explanation #18 Kaspi elaborates upon this, and adds various explanations:

אם שמו לבם המפרשים למה שהקדמנו, לא נטו כמה נטיות בפירושם, מצד ההבדל הנתון בסימן זכר או נקבה. וזה כי גם אלה בבחירת המְּדַבר, ואין חובה עליו שיבאר לנו אם הרָמוּז זכר או נקבה, כל שכן במה שאין לו כלי הולדה. [...] מצורף לזה שמבואר שאף מצד הלשון נכון לרמוז על כל גשם וגם על כל נמצא, אם בלשון זכר אם בלשון נקבה. וזה בלשון זכר, מפני שעל כל פנים הוא "גשם" ו"גוף" "נמצא" ו"נברא" ו"יש" ו"דבר". ואם בלשון נקבה, כי על כל פנים הוא "גופה" או "מציאות" ו"בריאה". וכן כל הדומה לזה.[[27]](#footnote-27)

If the exegetes would have attended to what we had written, they would not have proposed the various inflections in their commentaries regarding the difference in male and female markers. And this is because these, too, were the speaker’s choice, and he is not compelled to indicate whether the subject is male or female, especially regarding objects that do not have the ability to procreate.[[28]](#footnote-28) […] In addition, it is even grammatically correct to indicate every corporeal or present object by either the male or female forms. By the male form, because in any case, it is “corporeal” (*geshem*) and a “body” (*guf*), “present” (*nimtza*)*,* “created” (*nivra*), “existing” (*yesh*) and an “ojbect” (*davar*). By the female form, because in any case… [here Kaspi brings the above terms in their female forms, such as “*gufa,*”“*metziut*,” and “*beriah*.”]

Kaspi offers two reasons for the lack of importance imparted to the *linguistic* grammatical gender distinction:

a. The distinctive linguistic marker is designed to mark and indicate the linguistic gender. This marker is chosen by the speaker and is considered an accepted addition, though not a necessary one. Kaspi seems to use this principle also in other linguistic issues. Hence, we will refer to this as the “general indicator principle.”

b. Every noun can be referred to as either male (such as “*guf*” or “*nivra*”) or female (such as “*gufa*” or “*beriah*”), since every noun is included in categories indicated by either gender.

3.2 The linguistic distinction between singular and plural markers

Just as Kaspi undermines the importance of the grammatical gender distinction, so, too, he questions the importance of the numerical distinction between the singular and the plural in the Hebrew language. He even adds new reasons for this. For example, explanation #19:[[29]](#footnote-29)

הנה כמו כן סימן ויחוד לשון יחיד ולשון רבים אינו דבר הכרחי, אבל הוא מטבע האפשרי ובבחירת המדַבר. כל שכן כי מִטֶּבַע הדבר, נכון לומר על הגשם האחד [...] כל לשון רבים, מצד שידוע, שכל גשם הוא רב ובעל חלקי[ם] [...] כן הפך זה, רוצה לומר, לשון יחיד על לשון רבים מצד שאותן הרבים יעלו אל כלל אחד.[[30]](#footnote-30)

The sign and distinctive language for the singular and the plural is not necessary, but it is of a possible nature and given to the choice of the speaker. Indeed, it is natural to speak of the corporeal in the singular […] Every plural form, as it is known, every corporeal object comprises several part[s] […] The opposite is true as well, meaning, the singular form for the plural form as those plurals unite under one rule.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Kaspi offers two logical reasons for denying the importance of linguistic distinctions between the singular and the plural forms, reasons which are similar to those given regarding the gender distinctions:

a. The “general indicator principle”: The speaker is not obligated to disclose the nature of his subject – whether it is singular or plural, or male or female, unless he chooses to do so.

b. Any object can be treated as plural since it is comprised of several parts, especially when speaking of a collective noun that includes many individuals. Conversely, even collective nouns can be treated as individuals due to its definition which is shared by all members of the collective, such that all of its various parts can be treated as one.

3.3 The linguistic distinction between past and future

Kaspi relates to grammatical time, listing several reasons that completely blur the distinction between past and future. He writes:

הנה כמו כן סימן ויחוד לשון עבר ולשון עתיד. כי צריך שנדע, כי גם זה ההבדל והיִחוּד אינו דבר הכרחי, כי מְיַסְּדֵי הלשון הסכימו מראש, כי יהיה אפשר לרמוז על כל דבר-עבר בלשון עתיד, וכן הפך זה. ואמר אבן רשד, כי בלשון ערבי היה לשון העתיד משותף לעתיד ולעבר. והיה זה בי>סוד העברי דבר נכון, מצד שטבע המציאות הוא, שכל זמן יצדק עליו עבר ועתיד, מפני שהגלגל סובב וסָבַב ויסבוב תמיד. ולכן כל עבר כבר היה עתיד, וכל עתיד עוד יהיה עבר. כל שכן שיש בענין זה עוד דיוקים דקים, מצד מה שבכח ומצד מה שבפעל. כל שכן בעתיד הנבואי, שהוא מחויב כמו העבר, כאשר קדם לנו. ולכן אמר על העתיד: "הנה באה ונהיתה" (יחזקאל כא, יב; לט, ח), ויש דומה לזה הרבה ...[[32]](#footnote-32)

There are also specific markers for the past and future tenses. We need to know that these distinctions and specificities are not necessary; it was those who established the language who agreed to make it possible to indicate a previous event in the future tense, and vice versa. Ibn Rushd said that in Arabic the future tense served to indicate both the future and the past. And this was correct for the Hebrew language as well, since the nature of reality is that every moment justifies a past and a future, as the wheel turns and had turned and will always continue to turn. Therefore, every past was already in the future, and every future will become a past.[[33]](#footnote-33) This issue has even finer distinctions if we consider the gap between the potential and the actual.[[34]](#footnote-34) This is even more true for the prophetic future, which is as binding as the past, as it precedes us. Therefore, he said about the future: הנה באה ונהיתה – “it has come and it will be” (Ezek 21:12; 39:8),[[35]](#footnote-35) and many others…

As in the previous cases, here too Kaspi provides several logical and philosophical reasons for dismissing the importance of distinguishing between the past and future tenses:

a. The “general indicator principle”: The speaker is not obligated to disclose the time of which he speaks.

b. One can refer to the past as to the future, and vice versa, because “every time justifies both past and future”; past events were in the future before they occurred, and events in the future have already commenced – “the wheel has turned and will continue turning.”

c. Every future exists “in potential” and can be viewed as a past.[[36]](#footnote-36)

d. The prophecies indicate the future, but they are spoken in the past tense because they are necessary and certain.

**4. Conclusion**

Kaspi’s rationalistic thought led him to treat language, and linguistic issues, differently from the grammarians who preceded him. Grammar and its rules are neither necessary nor self-evident, but rather the result of social consensus; therefore, the Torah does not insist on absolutely and systematically implementing them. As opposed to these rules, the rules of logic are not the outcome of social consent, and their validity, according to Kaspi, stems from their content. Therefore, they are binding and unchangeable. For example, Kaspi avers that the grammatical markers that the speaker uses to indicate distinctions between past and future, male and female, or singular and plural, are *extraneous*, and constitute non-essential information. The speaker may choose to employ them, but he is not required to do so. Kaspi draws upon Aristotle’s *Sefer ha-Ma’amarot* which divides each utterance into its various parts, and views the different distinctions – between male and female, singular and plural, past and future – as additions that are essentially added components to the speaker’s message. These are additions that the speaker adds. Therefore these additions, as any addition, are dependent upon the speaker’s choice, while he is not obligated to supply these details.

His predecessors, Ibn Janah, Ibn Ezra, and David Kimchi focused on solving grammatical problems with linguistics. As opposed to Kaspi, these scholars viewed the type of speech that expresses these distinctions as the only correct method of speech. According to them, an utterance that does not adhere to the grammatical rules regarding gender, number, and time is an incorrect utterance.

The influence and priority of logic over grammar are not unique to Kaspi; however, Kaspi was the first to treat these from a rationalistic linguistic perspective. Hebrew grammarians from the second half of the thirteenth century until the first half of the sixteenth century characteristically introduced theoretical and philosophical discussions, and the Hebrew grammar of the time was significantly influenced by logic.[[37]](#footnote-37) We see this in the works of Profiat Duran (“the Ephodi”), author of *Ma’aseh Ephod* (1403, Spain), and Abraham de Balmes, author of *Miqneh Avraham* (1523, Italy).[[38]](#footnote-38)

**5.** **Summary**

This paper is the first to outline a rationalistic trend regarding Hebrew linguistics and the attitude toward its grammar, which Rabbi Joseph ibn Kaspi initiated in fourteenth-century Provence. Rational Aristotelian thought undermined the validity of the rules of grammar and brought about an attempt to create universal rules applicable to all languages, which are based on logic and the intellect. We demonstrated how a well-known and respected exegete and lexicographer allowed himself to undermine grammar rules that were considered necessary, such as the grammatical distinction between male and female, singular and plural, and others.

Both Al-Farabi and Kaspi were aware of the tension between the traditional world, which regarded grammatical rules as binding and absolute, and the rational enlightenment world that revisited issues of social consensus and occasionally even overruled them. Therefore, the phenomenon discussed in this paper is not limited to the topic of linguistics but reflects a general cultural revolution that found its expression in the undermining of traditional norms, one of which was grammar. This revolution was testimony to the crisis and struggles experienced by the traditional societies following their exposure to the Enlightenment. This crisis shook the very foundation of these societies and is one that, until this day, poses the challenge of smoothly navigating and reconciling two very different sources of knowledge: the traditional-religious source on the one hand, and the intellectual-rational one on the other.

**References**

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   On the development of philosophy in the Islamic world and in Baghdad see D. Gutas, *Origins in Baghdad* (Cambridge, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Gutas, *Origins*, p. 24-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See the following paragraphs for a more detailed discussion of this debate. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For more on Kaspi see Moshe Kahan, “*Yosef ibn Kaspi – netunim biografiim* hadashim,” *Peamim* 145 (2016), p. 143-166; Moshe Kahan, “Joseph Kaspi – from Arles to Majorca,” *Iberia Judaica*, 8 (2016), p. 181-192. For a detailed biographic description of Kaspi see Adrian Sackson, *Joseph Ibn Kaspi: Portrait of a Hebrew Philosopher in Medieval Provence* (Brill, 2017), p. 26-60. For an updated summary of the state of the literature on Ibn Kaspi see Hannah Kasher and Moshe Kahan, “Joseph Kaspi,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/kaspi-joseph/. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Retuqot Kesef* is found in a single manuscript and has never been published. For a survey of this book see B. Finkelscherer, *Die Sprachwissenschaft des Joseph Ibn Kaspi* (Breslau, 1930), p. 5–13; Moshe Kahan, “*Hiddushim* *miloniim be-milon ‘Sharsheret Kesef’ le-Yosef ibn Kaspi,*” *Mehkarim be-Lashon* 14-15 (2017), p. 136-138. I am currently preparing a scientific edition, with an extensive introduction, of this important book. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. As I will note at the end of this paper, the process of change in perception was not particular to Kaspi, but was also expressed by linguistic philosophers who followed him, such as Profiat Duran and Abraham de Balmes. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For a broader survey of the background for this debate see M. Mahdi, “Language and Logic in Classical Islam,” in: *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture*, ed. G.E. von Grunebaum (Weisbaden, 1970), p. 51-83; L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age* (Leiden, 1986), p. 104-116; and A. Elamrani-Jamal, *Logique aristotélicienne et grammaire arabe* Paris, 1983), p. 61-67, 149-163. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For more on this topic see Deborah L. Black, “Al-farabi,” in: *History of Islamic Philosophy,* Vol. 1 (London, 1993), p. 178-197; and in the Hebrew translation Deborah L. Black, “Al-farabi,” in: *De’oteihem shel anshei ha-‘ir ah-me’uleh* (Tel Aviv, 2007), p. 7-30. See also Mahdi, *Language*, p. 18-24. General surveys of Al-Farabi’s role among the logicians can be found in F. W. Zimmermann, *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione* (London, 1981), pp. xxiv–xlviii; and S. Abed, *Aristotelian Logic and the Arabic Language in Alfarabi* (Albany, NY, 1991), pp. xii–xix. For logical aspects in the structure of the Arabic language see Abed, *Logic*,119-141. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Al-Farabi, “Introductory Risalah on Logic,” D.N. Dunlop (ed. and trans.), *Islamic Quarterly* 3 (1957), p. 226-239. See also Al-Farabi, *Ahsaa El-‘Arum* (1953), p. 23. Maimonides famously copied this saying in his *Milot ha-higayon*, 14. See also footnote 4 which doesn’t exist in the original. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. This issue is discussed in depth by Zimmermann, *Commentary*,xxxviii-xlviii. See also Y. Stern, “*Ha-tahbir ha-logi ke-mafte’ah le-sod be ‘Moreh ha-nevohim*,’” *Iyyun* 38 (1989), p. 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Al-Farabi, *Ahsaa*, p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Al-Farabi, *Ahsaa*, explains in chapter 1 (pp. 18-19) that a ‘complex word’ appears a sentence that includes an object, such as ‘the person lives’; while a ‘separate word’ is the naked, context-less word. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For a broader and deeper discussion on Al-Farabi’s thought see, among others, M. Mahdi, “Science, Philosophy, and Religion in Alfarabi's *Enumeration of the Science*',” in *The Culture Context for Medieval Learning*, eds. J.E. Murdoch and E.D Sylla (Dordrecht, 1975), p. 118–125; Zimmermann, *Commentary*, xlviii-xxxviii. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. To name just two of these controversies: The first, a controversy initiated by Rabbi Solomon b. Abraham of Montpellier and two of his students, R. Jonah b. Gerondi and R. David b. Saul, in 1232. These called for a ban on all of Maimonides’ books, as his views contradict the basic tenets of Judaism. As opposed to these, sages from Provence called for a counter-ban on those who ban Maimonides. For more on this controversy see I. Twersky, “The Beginnings of Mishneh Torah Criticism,” in: *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, 1963), p. 161-182; and Bear Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career of Ramah* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 61-74. An additional controversy broke out at the beginning of the fourteenth century, reaching its climax in the banning, by Rabbi Solomon b. Aderet, of those who learn philosophy before age 25. On this controversy see Moshe Halbertal, *Bein Torah le-hokhmah – R. Menahem ha-Meiri u-va’alei ha-halakhah ha-Maimoniim be-Provence* (Jerusalem, 2003), p.152-180. See also Y. Zeitkin, “­*Me’afyenei parshanut ha-Miqra be-yetziroteihem shel parshanei ha-peshat benei ha-asqolah ha-Maimonit shel Provence be-meot ha-13-14*,” PhD Diss (Bar-Ilan University, 2011), p. 21-30. Sackson (*Portrait*, p. 47-50) analyzes the effects of this controversy on Kaspi in depth. Kaspi was the first to dedicate books to the educated elite and other books to the general populace. See Sackson, *Portrait*, p.107-109. This tension was apparent among Jewish philosophers in the thirteenth century as well. Harvey proves that Shem Tov ibn Falaquera deliberately omitted a section of Al-Farabi’s writings that deals with the relationship between religion and philosophy, due to the great difficulty of presenting philiophy as superior to religion. S. Harvey, “*He’arah ‘al ha-parafrazot shel qetavim mediniim le-Al-Farabi be-sefer ‘Reishit Hokhmah,*’” *Tarbiz* 65 (1996), p. 729-742. The opposition to philosophy also included an opposition to the study of logic. See, for example, A. Ravitzky, *Logiqah Aristotelit u-metodologiya talmudit* (Jerusalem, 2010), p. 11-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See Kahan, “*Hiddushim*.” Also see H. Kasher and B. Menkin, “*Perusho shel Yosef ibn Kaspi le ‘Milot ha-higayon’ la-Rambam*,” *Tarbiz* 78 (2009), p. 383-398; C. Aslanov, “La réflexion linguistique hébraïque dans l'horizon intellectuel de l'Occident médiéval: essai de comparaison des traités de grammaire hébraïque et provençale dans la perspective de l'histoire des doctrines grammaticales,”  *Revue des Études Juives* 155 (1996), p. 5-32; H. Kasher, *Shulhan Kesef le-Rabi Yosef ibn Kaspi* (Jerusalem, 1996), p. 14-15; Shalom Rosenberg, “*Higayon, safah, u-farshanut ha-Miqra be-ketavav shel R. Yosef ibn Kaspi*,” in: *Dat ve-safah: maamarim be-filosofiya kelalit ve-Yehudit*, eds. M. Halamish and A. Kasher (Tel Aviv, 1982), p. 105-113. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Joseph Kaspi, *Tirat Kesef*, Last edition (Pressburg, 1905), PAGE?? [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibn Ezra, on Ruth 4:4, writes: “Rabbi Jonah said that it should have been written ‘*ve-im lo tig’al*,’ and also ‘*u-ve-eshet ne’urekha al yivgod*’ (2Kgs 15) […] and this is its explanation: If the redeemer does not redeem her, and I know that there is no redeemer closer than you.” Ibn Janah assumes that the letters *tav* and *yod* were switched, while Ibn Ezra posits that Boaz was speaking to the anonymous redeemer wherever he may be, and had therefore used the third person “*yig’al*.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. According to Kaspi, the Torah changes verbs from future tense to past tense and vice versa, to show that these issues are not “necessary” (according to his definition). On this see M. Kahan, “*Qedimat ha-higayon le-diqduq be-mishnato shel Yosef ibn Kaspi*,” *Da’at* 77 (2014), 89-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. While Kaspi viewed the rules of logic as absolute, he did not consider them equal in importance to metaphysics. On the role of logic and the relationship between logic and philosophy, Kaspi wrote (in his commentary on Prov 10): “And Boethius said: Logic develops the money which opens the door in which philosophy lies on golden beds.” Logic is, therefore, according to Kaspi, the means available to the wise man with which to reach knowledge, or philosophy. See also Kasher, *Shulhan* (above note 16); Rosenberg, where? 120-135 שים לב שהעמודים האלה אינם תואמים לאף אחד משני מבואות של רוזנברג בביגליוגרפיה. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The author of this paper is currently preparing a scientific edition of this book. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. On Kaspi’s method of presentation see Kahan, “*Hiddushim*.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Yosef Kaspi, *Retuqot Kesef*, MS Roma-Angelica OR60 (National Library of Israel, *Ketiv* digitization project, call no. 11708), p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Kaspi, *Retuqot Kesef*, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The exegetes came up with different explanations and changed the simple meaning of the texts to explain why the Bible, in certain places, does not use the accepted gender form. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Using the correct gender form is not necessary; the Bible may use a male noun with a female adjective or verb, and vice versa. Fortunately, in some instances, the gender markers agree with the subject, but we should not wonder about the instances where that agreement is lacking. See the continuation of his words. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Kaspi, *Retuqot Kesef*., p. 50-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. See footnote ??. Regarding “things that do not have the ability to procreate,” Kaspi here determines that nouns whose gender is exclusively grammatical, and not physiological, may be treated as either male or female since their gender is only consensual and not absolute. Evidence for this can be found in the fact that the grammatical genders of non-biological entities may differ from language to language. I thank Prof. Hannah Kasher for pointing this out to me. Kaspi’s distinction between biological and non-biological entities hints at the principle behind the saying "אשר אין בו רוח חיים זכרהו ונקבהו", that which does not have the spirit of life – treat as male and female (de Balmes, *Miqneh Avraham*, vii). Abraham de Balmes incorrectly attributed this saying to the Ibn Ezra in his book *Miqneh Avraham* )published in 1523, Venice(. Many followed de Balmes in their essays, though some attributed it to Rashi. A similar rule was documented for Arabic, particularly Arabic poetry, from no later than the tenth century. Use of this principle in Hebrew exegesis is documented from the twelfth century. On this topic see Aloni, “*Zokhrehu ve-nakvehu*”; Goldenberg, “*Torot*,” 190-216; Harlap, “*Ibn Ezra*,” 131-132; and Dror Ben Aryeh, “*Torah ha-lashon shel Avraham de-Balmash lefi hiburo ha-diqduqi ‘Miqneh Avraham*,” PhD Diss (Bar Ilan University, 2011), p. 208-214. I thank Dr. Dror Ben Aryeh, a researcher of de Balmes’ linguistic theory, for directing me to the above sources. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Kaspi does not elaborate on this issue in either the topic heading or in the chapters, and therefore we quote only his explanatory paragraph. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Kaspi, *Retuqot Kesef*, p. 53-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Many objects with common attributes can be referred to by a collective form, in the singular, given their shared definition. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Kaspi, *Retuqot Kesef*, p. 54-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Every incident that happened was considered to be a future event (even before it occurred); conversely, every future event will turn into an event that had already taken place in the past. The wheel that animates the world turns and has always turned, and therefore the future could be viewed as the past, since it is then that its action had commenced (in the turning of the wheel). On the other hand, the wheel will continue to turn, and therefore every action could be viewed as a future one even before it occurs. To clarify, there are two principles in Kaspi’s words: a. The wheel of reality cannot be perceived as either past or future. It turned in the past and will continue to turn in the future; b. Each individual event can be viewed as part of the wheel of reality, and therefore can be indicated by either the past tense or the future tense. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. In several places Kaspi says that the texts referred to “potential” events as if they had actually occurred, and therefore potential future events could be referred to as a past event that had already taken place. In *Gavi’a ha-Kesef* he writes: "ובכלל כל תאר וכל פעל, פעם יונח על הכח כמו על הפועל, כי על הכל יאמר שם נמצא והיה, ר"ל על הכח כמו על הפועל. ומה שהוא נמצא בנפש לבד שהוא כמו חוץ לנפש, וכן מה שנמצא בדיבור חיצוני, כמו חוץ לנפש ... והכל אמת לפי ההגיון האמת" (‘Every adjective and every verb will sometimes be placed on the potential as on the actualized, because for all things we can say that it was and occurred, meaning the potential as on the actualized. And what is found only within the mind is as if were outside the mind, and what is in external speech is as if it were outside the mind… and all is truth according to the logic of truth’) Kaspi, *Gavi’a*, chapter 18. This means that according to the rules of logic, one can treat an event that may happen as if it had already happened. This is also the way in which Kaspi explains the verse הִנְּךָ מֵת עַל הָאִשָּׁה, “you are a dead man because of the woman you have taken” (Gen 20:3): "אין זה בפועל רק בכח קרוב", “this is not in actuality but in a near potential.” Meaning, Abimelech could be viewed as dead even before his death, because his death existed “in potential.” [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The prophets used the past tense for prophecies regarding the future to emphasize that their prophecies will certainly take place. Therefore, Ezekiel uses the words הנה באה ונהיתה, “it has come and will be,” when speaking of the future. Furthermore, he doubled his words – באה והניתה – to underscore the veracity of his words. Just as Joseph said to Pharaoh (Gen 41:32): וְעַל הִשָּׁנוֹת הַחֲלוֹם אֶל פַּרְעֹה פַּעֲמָיִם כִּי נָכוֹן הַדָּבָר ... (“And the dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing is established by God…”); it is the doubling that demonstrates its certainty. See, for example, A. Rock, “*Parshanut ha-Miqra shel Rabi Yosef ibn Kaspi: darkei ha-parshanut u-mahadurah mada’it meva’eret shel mitzraf hakesef le-Bereshit*,” PhD Diss (Bar Ilan University, 2006), p. 336, and note 65. The Ibn Ezra also repeats several times that the prophecies use the past tense to describe future events (see, for example, Num 23:23; Jon 2:2; and others). I thank my friend Dr. Yehiel Zeitkin for calling my attention to this method of the Ibn Ezra. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Reasons (b) and (c) are not connected to language. They blur the distinction between the past and the future within reality itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. On the classification of Hebrew grammarians by period see D. Tene and J. Barr, “Linguistic Literature Hebrew,” *Encyclopedia Judaica* 16 (1971), p. 1355. Tene distinguishes between four sub-periods: The early experimental period (tenth century); the creative period (until the mid-twelfth century); the distribution period (until the mid-thirteenth century); and the stagnation period (until the mid-sixteenth century). Several studies have shown that the fourth period was not one of stagnation, but is characterized by the introduction of theoretical discussions to the Hebrew grammar. See M. Kahan, “Aspects of Medieval Lexicography – Between Yonah ibn Janāḥ’s Kitāb al-ʾUṣūl and Joseph Kaspi’s Šaršot Kesef,” *Revue des Etudes Juives* [accepted]; and A. Klijnsmit, “‘Stand–Still’ or Innovation?,” *Helmantica* 148–149 (1998), p. 39-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See, for example, Aslanov, “Réflexion”; C. Aslanov, “*Bein ha-medaqdeqim ha-Latiniim (Donatos u-Friqianus) le-vein Radaq, ha-Efodi ve-de Balmash le-‘inyan ha-diyyun ha-foneti*,” *Mehqarim be-Lashon* 8 (2001), p. 303-324; Dov Rappel, “*Haqdamat sefer ‘Ma’aseh Ephod’ le-Profiat Duran*,” *Sinai* 100/2 (1987), p. 1749-1795; Ben Aryeh, “*Torat ha-lashon*”; Klijnsmit, “Stand-still”; A. Klijnsmit, *Balmesian Linguistics: A Chapter in the History of Pre–Rationalist Thought* (Amsterdam, 1992); S. Campanini, “‘Peculium Abrae,’ La Grammatica Ebraico–Latina di Avraham de Balmes,” *Annali* d*i ca' Foscari* 36/3 (1997), p. 5-49. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)