INTRODUCTION

Consonant clusters are part of the phonotactic structure of a language. Every language has certain phonetic restrictions on possible combinations of consonants in initial, medial and final position. The restriction on the occurrence of identical consonants in a cluster seems to be universal and was formulated as the Obligatory Contour Principle (OCP) by McCarthy (1981, 1986). This principle prohibits the creation of clusters of identical consonants. Modern Hebrew (MH) is no exception, and it follows the same principle. However, several other generalizations determine the prevention of consonant clusters in word lexemes in either inflected or derived forms. Several factors in MH prohibit consonants from occurring in clusters: historical “gutturals”, cluster position in the word, phonetic features of the consonants, morphological categories, word origin and word register. The paper examines the theoretical relevance of word history to the morphological and phonological processes involved in consonant cluster avoidance in MH.

The first part of the paper will demonstrate OCP conditions, followed by further MH phonetic restrictions on consonant clusters. Lexical, morphophonemic and stylistic limitations will be discussed along the lines of these restrictions, and the final part of the paper will focus on the theoretical issue of the relevance of word history on cluster formation.
IDENTICAL CONSONANT CLUSTERS

The Obligatory Contour Principle (OCP) prohibits the creation of clusters of identical consonants. Whenever two identical consonants would have naturally occurred in MH, either the vowel e is inserted between these consonants to prevent the cluster or the consonants are unified in fast speech. In Classical Hebrew unified consonants were assigned a dagesh forte that marked geminate consonants (Gesenius, 1910: 55–56). In MH there is a slight emphasis on the unified consonant, which is marked here by the elevated identical consonant.¹

The examples in (1) show that the identical consonant break can occur within the stem in either its lexical form (1a) or inflected form (1b), as well as across morpheme boundary (1c). McCarthy (1986) explains examples such as kafel and dimena in (1b) by an “antigemination” tendency: syncope rules are prohibited from creating clusters of identical consonants (Bolozky, 1997: 293), therefore, the vowel e is inserted to prevent the formation of such identical consonant clusters.

According to McCarthy, the OCP does not apply across morpheme boundary, though the examples in (1c) contradict this prohibition. However, when the identical consonant across morpheme boundaries is n, there is no break, as in (2).

The possible consonants that begin suffixes in MH are t, n and x. The fact that there is no consonant-cluster break in the case of n across morpheme boundary means that the sonority of the consonant plays a role in identical consonant clusters.

Moreover, the OCP does not apply to prefixes. When the root starts with t in hitpa'el, there is no consonant break, but rather consonant unification, as in (3).

¹C stands either for a consonantal radical or any consonant. The dash sign (−) marks morpheme boundary. Stress is marked only when not in final position. The sign x marks phonemic h (spelled with Het), and Ɂ marks phonemic ‘ (spelled with Ayin); they are marked distinctly from plain x and ‘, because they still exist in the pronunciation of many speakers of MH. Angled brackets indicate orthography. Most examples appear in standard noncolloquial register. The forms in parentheses refer to word formation, see Berman (1978: 69–117), Ravid (1990), and Schwarzwald (2001: 21–45).