Abracadabra and Hocus Pocus:
Words of Magic and Their Transformation in Hebrew Children's Literature
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> If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
> If the unheard, unspoken
> Word is unspoken, unheard;
> Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
> The Word without a word, the Word within
> The world and for the world;
> And the light shone in darkness and
> Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
> About the centre of the silent Word.
> ***Ash Wednesday (5th verse), T. S. Eliot***

Introduction
In the Biblical myth of creation in the book of Genesis, there is great emphasis on the importance of the spoken word. "And God *said* let there be light and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). The word "said" has the power to create material substance. God's utterance of the word is inferred as a mode of creation through which he conceived the world. Hence, in Jewish mysticism, the 22 letters of the Biblical language are viewed not only as preceding reality, and specifically human reality, but as indeed constructing it (Scholem, 1980, pp. 39-40). Since ancient times, human beings have attempted to perform an imitation of the divine creator's work by employing words of magic.[1]

In this paper I will not deal with words as merely a component of ordinary language, but as something quite different. I will claim that the power of words is not in their semantics (or in their reference to an object), but rather in their implementation.

I will adopt Yuval Harari's definition of magic and magical words. Yuval Harari opens his book, *Early Jewish Magic* (2010), with the following sentences: "Magic is a rather boring matter: practical action, metaphysical technology. In its simple version [of magic] several words are uttered, some of which are senseless. In the more sophisticated versions, several actions are carried out, and then the words are said. That's all." (Harari, 2010, p. 1)

However, even the Hebrew words for magic and spell — *kesem* and *kishuf* — have a remarkable sound pattern that fires the imagination. Is it the combination of the consonants K and S, or K and SH, that together with vowels create onomatopoeias of the snake's hiss, leaves rustling in the breeze, or the flapping of a bird's wings? And what about the sound of the Hebrew word for "incantation" — *lakhash* — in its supernatural sense? Should *lakhash* be "whispered" (another meaning of the Hebrew word)? And why? Should one beware of the incantation/whisper?

I will try to answer these questions in this paper, yet it is clear that there are words — some of which are senseless[2] — that have been attributed with supernatural powers, and have always been uttered or are still uttered in the attempt to create a tangible change in the material world. This may include raising the dead, facilitating birth, getting rid of crickets in your house, removing worms from a fruit tree, catching fish in a net, and many more challenging situations (Harari, 2010, p. 1).

In this paper I will engage in a study of incantations in Hebrew children's literature, primarily the rhetorical characterizations of magic words and their uses. The concept of magic and usage of words as a means of magic in children's literature is derived from

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[1] In this article, I use the terms magic and spell as synonyms. Although in Hebrew "magic" is connected to what Frazer terms "white magic," and "spell" relates to "black magic," I follow Evans-Pritchard and the term of "magicality," in the sense of "damaging through spiritual means." (Harari, 2010, p. 68)

[2] By "senseless" I mean that they do not have a reference.

folk literature, one of the main sources of children's literature (Shavit, 1996; Shenhar, 1982b).

The function of words of magic in folklore

As indicated above, words are the key to successful magic. Although most of these words only have a vague rather than distinct and sometimes not at all semantic meaning, they do have a pragmatic-operative function since they are meant to alter reality. To begin with, I will not assume that there is a metaphorical connection (based on similarity, see Jakobson, 1986) between the word and its referent. In other terms, most magical words are not onomatopoeic or imitative. Perhaps the original use of magical words was based on imitation but this was lost over the span of time. Hence, some magical words do not maintain a similarity with the action that is performed when they are uttered, whereas some *do* demonstrate such similarity. To use Frazer's terminology, this would be "homoeopathic magic," based upon the element of similarity. What then distinguishes magical incantations from everyday words in folklore as well as in children's literature?

In the tradition of many scholars, I too will propose a comprehensive classification of magical words, especially in relation to their phonology and pragmatic function. However, it should be taken into account that, as in many folktales, the meaning of a word is connected both to the circumstances of the performance of the magical act as well as its concrete *cultural* context. In addition, whenever there is reference to words of magic, I refer both to nouns and verbs. Every oath or curse includes nouns and verbs, and usually the syntactic structure of the oath and curse is that of an elliptical sentence (Azar, 1976).[3]

Robert Marret claims that incantations are the core of magic rituals. Maintaining an evolutional approach in his comparison between magic and religion, Marret views magic as quasi-therapy. He emphasizes its operative and performative nature, stating that "magic functions for him [the savage mind] as a means of releasing disturbing emotions originating in distress and hardships he has encountered in his life" (Harari, 2010, p. 29). The role of incantations is to exercise a magical compulsion upon a supernatural power, as opposed to prayers that appeal to the will of that supernatural power without compulsion (see discussion below on words of blessing versus words of magic).

Hence, similar to the entire process of magic, words of magic are dependent upon the circumstances of the performance, resembling the process of storytelling (see Shenhar, 1982a; Turner, 2004). More explicitly, these are words with dramatic characteristics due to their oral implementation, or — in the case of amulets — their visual implementation. Thus, they must look strange and different or "other," and to a large extent they will lack semantic meaning.[4]

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[3] In this context, it is interesting to note Etgar Keret's story, "A Big Blue Bus," from the collection, *Suddenly a Knock on the Door* (Keret, 2010). This story tells, in parody form, about the magical words whispered by a little boy who is influenced by a cartoon featuring a

boy called Tony. Tony's fairy mother teaches him that if he says "I want," then his wish will come true, and if it doesn't–that's because he hasn't said it enough times. Thus, the boy in the story turns a clear, banal sentence into words of magic that ultimately fulfill his wish.

[4] In this sense, one may say that believers perceive words of magic realistically and not nominally. In the context of the centuries-long debate over the status of words in relation to reality, the nominalists view nouns as signs with no objective existence. The words only denote, but the world does not actually contain nouns —hence the connection of language to thought. The realists, on the other hand, claim that concepts and nouns do have an objective existence. Words of magic, according to their believers, are therefore not arbitrary but are rather tangibly connected to the world. Thus, when Wittgenstein speaks of the fallacy of intention, he claims that the recognition of the existence of such an idea enables anybody to utter a word or group of words and at the same time grant them meaning by virtue of their very intention. Consequently, when one attributes a certain meaning to a word that is different from its customary meaning in language, one is actually proposing a renewed definition of that particular word:

Can't I actually say "abracadabra" when I'm referring to a toothache? Of course I can, but that is a definition, not a description of whatever had occurred in me while I was uttering the word. Imagine someone pointing to his cheek in an expression of pain while uttering "Abracadabra!" We ask, "What do you mean?" and he replies,

For example, in magic Babylonian bowls, the words encircle the image of a devil or evil spirit, in order to enforce upon him or her the will of the bowl-owner (Harari, 2010). The visual implementation of the words (a spiral) demonstrates their pragmatic function, i.e., their impact on the real, extra-linguistic world. Their power is not in their semantic meaning but rather in their inscribed form, akin to a type of barrier blocking the power of evil so that it will not harm the bowl-owner. Amulets, too, "behave" in this fashion. People wore them as protection against the powers of evil, to ensure fertility, etc. The words written on the amulets are often meaningless, lacking semantic sense, but the very appearance of words on the amulet enables the implementation of their action in the real world. Consequentially, in this case, there is a connection of similarity between the desired magical action and the visual (written) realization of the word, although not necessarily with regard to its semantic meaning. This is reminiscent of Frazer's sympathetic magic — a relation of sympathy, of similarity, between the magical action and the actual change in the real world resulting from the magical operation (Frazer, 1925).

When words of magic are not written but spoken out loud, it is vital that they sound strange, different, and meaningless. If they do not fulfill these conditions, they will belong to the general family of words intended for everyday use (see Elior, 1998), and then it may be assumed that they will carry no supernatural power. Hence, words

of magic, similar to magic itself, embody the "other," the threat of the alien, which is perhaps why they are attributed with enormous power, enough to change the material world around them.

One may say that prayer words and blessings on the whole have a semantic sense, such as the words, *hallelujah*, *amen*, *asuta*,[5] *lekhayim*,[6] etc., whereas words of magic do not usually have an immediate and clear semantic sense, and consequently the strangeness and drama are intensified. However, specifically in Jewish prayers recited in Hebrew there is a mixture of God's three names —*Adonai* ("my Lord"), *Elohim* ("God"), and the sacred name *Jehovah* ("Lord"). The latter has no semantic meaning in Hebrew and is not to be spoken, although it is written in the prayer book and therefore appears visually. In other words, in order to avoid the dangers associated with holiness or magic, one cannot dwell on the semantic meanings of these names and cannot say them aloud, as Job's wife warned her husband (Job 2:9): "Curse God and die." Harari explains the similarity between words of magic and words of prayer or blessing with the aid of Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of "family similarity" (or "family resemblance"). In his treatise, *Philosophical Investigations* (2008), Wittgenstein notes the vagueness of language, and the inability to establish clear distinctions between various terms of language. To clarify this, he uses the example of games, contending that if we actually examine a variety of games, such as ball games, board games, war games and others, there is nothing shared by *all of them*, "[…] yet one sees a relation of similarity and closeness, and even a whole series of such relations" (Wittgenstein, 2008, p. 65). Wittgenstein studies the traits that are not shared by specific games and types of games, such as cards or ball games, and concludes that:

"I was talking about my toothache." You immediately think to yourself, "How can one 'mean a toothache' in this word?" or: "What is 'to mean pain' in a word?" However, in another context I would claim that the spiritual activity of meaning such-and-such is of utmost importance in language usage. (Wittgenstein, 2008, p. 205)

In connection to words of magic, however, one is not free to choose random words and imbue them with meaning according to one's will, but rather one is restrained by the actual result brought about by its use. One cannot take "abracadabra" and attribute to it a personal meaning of "toothache" a la Wittgenstein.

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5 *Asuta* is an Aramaic word sometimes used in Hebrew to indicate, "bless you" or "gesundheit."
6 *Lekhayim* is commonly a toast that means "cheers" or "to your health." Literally, it means "to life" in Hebrew.

[...] we can review many other groups of games and see similarities appear and disappear. The result of this study is that we see a complex network of similarities overlapping and crossing each other. Large and small similarities. I could not characterize these similarities better than through the expression "family similarity," since this is how the various similarities between family relatives overlap and cross: body structure, facial features, eye color, walk, temperament, etc. [...] just as we twine thread to thread, and the strength of the coil does not depend on one thread spanning its length, but rather on the many threads overlapping one another (Harari, 2010; Sovran, 2006; Wittgenstein 2008).

Harari wishes to show that the principle of family similarity can well explain the realms of magic and religious phenomena, and their mutual connections. In other words, the concept of family similarity can be applied to words of magic and prayer.[7]

However, what about the difference between our daily language (our human communicative language) and the magic-religious one?

Rachel Elior, a scholar of Jewish mysticism, distinguishes between daily language and magic language in her study of Hebrew mystic literature. She states that "in Jewish culture, the element of magic entails the use of meaningless nouns, meaningless sentences, and the combination of letters that lack an ordinary semantic meaning in the ritualistic context of a traditional use of nouns in order to achieve supreme powers, to reach supernatural experiences or to acquire mystic knowledge that may influence upper and lower worlds" (Elior, 1998, p. 83). Hence, she notes that the use of meaningless words in order to achieve supernatural power is common in Hebrew mystic literature. To continue her

line of thought, I would add that this principle applies not only to mystical words but also to the use of magical words. Dina Stein adds (see Harari, 2010, p. 88):

> The core of the magical experience is the sense of a gap [...] The gap is a basic experiential paradigm in a world that is separated and split: there is a semiotic gap (including literal) between the sign and its signifier; there is a gap between man and his surroundings and there is a gap between man and god. Moreover, the power of the magical language, stemming from its simultaneous affiliation to three usually separate categories —god, man and the object itself (language itself) —hints as well to a unified, undifferentiated system. Magic then expresses the yearning for a non-differential non-gap fantasy.

Thus, the tremendous power of the magical word —whether it is a noun or a verb — lies in eliminating the gaps between sign and signifier, god and man, man and environment. Perhaps that is why there is no need for the magical word to have a semantic meaning, since it is the thing-in-itself (to borrow the Kantian concept) which is important. It is not a sign relating to its signifier, but rather the signifier and sign together, its meaning inherent within. It is the glue uniting the wish and its fulfillment, man (or woman) and the world. This train of thought is somewhat reminiscent of Nietzsche's Dionysian literary concept, i.e., the enormous power by which the artist becomes part of his art and where the boundaries between man and world become blurred.

Hence, there is no basic difference between words of magic and holy words, except in their social context.[8] How, then, is their actual implementation carried out? Many scholars have considered John L. Austin's theory of "speech act" to be a plausible explanation

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7 Dealing with the conceptual development of semantics, Sovran claims that the transition from the Aristotelian definition, which aspires to a clear and distinct categorization, to a definition designating words according to a more flexible division, affords a more beneficial description of language usages (Sovran, 2006).

8 For example, Peter Schafer, another scholar in the field of Jewish mysticism, claims that the only criterion for distinguishing between magic and religion is "the means and the goals" (as cited in Harari, 2010, p. 97).

for the way that words of magic operate in the world.

The theory of "speech acts" applied to words of magic

In his book, *How to Do Things with Words* (1975), John L. Austin claims that words have the power to operate in the world and alter it, contrary to the traditional approach that distinguishes between actions and words. An example is when Ophelia's father, Polonius, asks Hamlet, "What do you read, my lord?" Hamlet replies, "Words, words, words," and then the entire play revolves around Hamlet's inability to take action and avenge his father's death (Shakespeare, 1981).

Following Austin and others, Harari claims (2010, Chapter 4, pp. 135-155) that "an operational utterance is such that by its very implementation its speaker carries out a certain action (beyond that of speaking, of course) […] This utterance […] itself constitutes the implementation of an act which alters the state of affairs in the world" (Harari, 2010, p. 137). For instance, an example supporting Austin is the words, "You are hereby sanctified to me by the religion of Moses and Israel," which are uttered during the Jewish wedding ceremony. These words carry a real commitment toward an actual change in the world. Another example is the words, "I bequeath this watch to my brother," in a will which indicates a promise of an actual change in the world. These are not descriptive utterances of a situation or intention of the speaker. Rather, they specify action in the world, since by their very expression the speaker carries out a real action and not merely a verbal one.

To better understand what real action is implemented by speech, Austin distinguishes among three stages that can be identified as "speech acts":

1. Locutionary — the utterance of the sentence or word;
2. Illocutionary — the real act that the speaker implements such as "I bequeath" or "I promise";

3. Perlocutionary — the effect that the speaker obtains through his or her speech, as when an army officer says: "In thirty seconds, you are out of here!" If the order is carried out, this is a perlocutionary act.

Many scholars of magic have applied the theory of "speech act" to words of magic since "Austin's description of 'speech act' impressively suits the act of magical language. Magical utterance, whether it is comprehensible or not, functions first and foremost as the implementation of the act's intent, and is meant to implement the desired change in the world by virtue of its expression." (Harari, 2010, p. 139) In other words, the incantation itself is the illocutionary act, and the promised change is the perlocutionary one.

Rebecca Lesses (see Harari, 2010, p. 145), who has researched mystic literature, claims that the "speech acts" described by Austin in human society may serve as a model for understanding oaths directed at angels. Thus, the same pragmatic function shared by both utterances indicates that there is no fundamental difference between language directed toward angels or human beings.

After having presented the opinions of most scholars of magic who claim that John Austin can help us comprehend the system of magical spells, Harari nevertheless argues that one cannot apply the theory of "speech acts" in relation to *Jewish* magic since the creative power of the word, according to the Jewish approach, is inherent in the following: "The incantation is the core of the ritual, around which are organized the other components. It retains a magical power of action without which the accompanying acts will not help. In the magical ritual, the words are the operative element, establishing a new reality." (Harari, 2010, p. 149)

Thus, the three central components of the theory of "speech acts" —(1) the linguistic formula; (2) the circumstances of utterance; (3) the authority of the speaker — exist both in the "speech act" and

in magical speech, but the main difference is that:

> Jewish magic [...] seeks to implement an unlimited change in the state of affairs of the world. Its results extend beyond the realm of human society and the social contracts valid therein, and they affect the world greatly. Sinking a ship, winning a horse race, curing a high temperature or a snake bite [...] and many other matters appearing in Jewish magic are not connected to the social contract upon which the possibility of the "speech act" is based. (Harari, 2010, p. 151)

However, in answer to Harari's claim, one may say that the results connected to a perlocutionary act always occur in the real world, for instance, when an officer gives the order to dig trenches or fill sand bags, the result of the order is a change in the real world. Thus, too, with magic; the incantation to sink a ship is not implemented directly onboard the ship, but through the mediation of angels or demons, and these —according to Lesses — function in magic the same as human beings. It has often been claimed that the appeal in magic is personal and directed at a supernatural power with a specific name, since names are one of the components of incantations. Hence, even if one attempts to directly affect objects such as ships or animals, the magical petition targets a personified object or animal. Hence personification, the well-known literary device (Shenberg and Ben-Cana'an, 2011) based on anthropomorphic thinking, puts objects of the world (stars, a ship, a drink, a horse, etc.) into the framework of human conventions, into the human mind, and not outside of it. Moreover, one must not forget that magical speech is not scientific speech. Scientific speech also relates to objects, animals, plants, etc. Yet in Stanley Tambiah's comparison of scientific speech with magical speech, we see that the similarity between them is based on the presence of an analogy. However, scientific analogy is mainly prediction, *whereas magical analogy is persuasive* (Harari, 2010,

pp. 53-54, 140). Thus, Tambiah claims that there are two central approaches that organize reality for a given person in a specific culture:
1. Causality
2. Participation

One cannot use the terms of one system to judge or explain another system of comprehending reality. Religion and magic therefore reflect the participation approach, which establishes in the human mind an alternative organization of reality to the scientific one.

So far, in relating to words of magic and blessing, I have dealt with the social and performance contexts of these words. But, in addition to these contexts, these words have rhetorical characteristics which may contribute to their magical power.

The rhetorical characteristics of magical words: A test case — "abracadabra" and "hocus pocus"

In English dictionaries, such as *Webster* and *Oxford*, and in Hebrew ones, such as those written by Ben-Yehuda or Even-Shoshan, the entries for words of magic are inadequate, except for words that have become synonymous with the act of magic itself, such as "abracadabra" and "hocus pocus." These dictionaries also note that words of magic are most often meaningless, that is, they lack semantic meaning. Hence, the study of these words should mainly address their phonology and their pragmatic, social and cultural implications.

However, when I examined the magical expressions themselves, I found that they could be explained semantically as an aberration caused by the transition from one language to another or by the imitation of a foreign language. These techniques are often conducted in order to imbue the phrase with a sense of holiness. For instance, "hocus pocus" imitates Latin for a Christian public that

does not know the language but hears the prayers and the sound of the language at church (see definitions of "hocus pocus" below).

Since the subject of magic is "trivial" and not canonical, when I searched for words other than "abracadabra" and "hocus pocus" (for instance, "gesundheit," "en den dino," etc.), I found them in slang dictionaries, folklore sources and over the Internet, but not in standard canonical dictionaries.

As noted above, many words of magic are characterized by incomprehensibility — hence, the absence of a semantic meaning is evident. What then is the meaning (if it exists) of the word most identified in Western culture with magic, i.e., "abracadabra"? There are several interpretations: "An ancient incantation written as a charm with magical traits" (Even-Shoshan, 1971); "A meaningless text: 'When they are young, they're taught an abracadabra of a few blessings, but when they grow up, they need something more intellectual.'" (Rosenthal, 2005) The *Webster Dictionary* definition is: "Charm or incantation: magical formulas relied on effigies and abracadabra to produce results. Used as a word to ward off calamity especially when written on an amulet in a mystical design. Also means confused or unintelligible language." (Gobe, 1986) Following is the *Funk and Wagnalls Dictionary* definition: "A magic word or formula used in incantation against fevers and inflammations and sometimes against misfortunes. The patient wore an amulet around his neck bearing the inscription:

<div align="center">
Abracadabra
Abracadabr
Abracadab
Abracada
Abracad
Abraca
Abrac
Abra
Abr
Ab
A
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The idea was that the disease would gradually disappear just as the inscription gradually dwindled to nothing." (Leach and Fried, 1972)

A different interpretation claims that a semantic meaning of the word indeed existed, specifically, an aberration of Aramaic, and incomprehensible to Western ears: "'Abra ca'adabra' means 'I shall create as I speak', that is — I utter a word that also fulfills what I said, hence the use of the word as a magic wand: after I utter it in words it becomes tangible." (Mahat, 2010) "There are those who believe that this word conveys blessing, ridding anything that causes damage by the evil eye [...] When the word is written as an inverted triangle it serves as a charm. Uttering the word near a patient brings about cure. In the Middle Ages, people battled diseases by writing the word on a scroll, burning it and spreading the ashes onto water, and the ill drank the water as a remedy." (Ibid.) As for the origin of the word, in Judaism it is sometimes considered an aberration of the sentence: "Avareh et haboreh" ("I shall bless the Creator"); but others believe the word to be originally Roman, passed down to Christianity and then to Judaism (Mizrahi, 2010, p. 55).

Most definitions imply that "abracadabra" lacks meaning, and its appearance on charms corroborates the assumption that the visual aspect, similar to the magical Babylonian bowls, is more important than the semantic interpretation, and this aspect operates by expressing sympathetic magic. For example, as the letters drop off at the end of the word, the illness decreases in the patient's body. Moreover, when Wittgenstein attacks the assumption that the intention of an individual in any utterance is essentially the result of a mental act of intending or meaning, he claims that this statement cannot be understood unambiguously. His example is the use of the meaningless word, "abracadabra" (see footnote 4 above).

In regard to "hocus pocus," all of the definitions emphasize its lack of meaning and that it has become a synonym for hoax and deceit. Here is the *Webster* definition: "Invented by jugglers

in imitation of Latin [...] words or a formula used in pretended incantation without regard to the usual meaning; nonsense or sham used or invented to cloak deception [...]" (Gobe, 1986). Other definitions are: "Incantation — 1. Snakelike. 2. Hoax, magician's act, illusion" (Even-Shoshan, 1971); "A Latin image used for a cover over magical illusions, yet actually lacking any meaning" (*Ynet Encyclopedia*); "Magic, trick: 'There is no hocus pocus. If there were, then many people would do hocus pocus' (Itzhak Shum, [Israeli television] Channel 1, Aug. 20, 2004); Yiddish: hokus-pokus; German: Hokuspokus, and other languages (meaningless verbiage intended to divert attention during a magician's act)" (Rosenthal, 2005). And finally, from Wikipedia: "[...] a pseudo-Latin phrase used as a magic formula by conjurors." "Some believe it originates from a corruption or parody of the [Roman] Catholic liturgy of the Eucharist, which contains the phrase '*Hoc est corpus meum*', meaning This is my body." "Others believe that it is an appeal to the folkloric Norse magician Ochus Bochus" (*Wikipedia*, 2012).

These definitions of the two words most identified with magic in Western society, "abracadabra" and "hocus pocus," emphasize their lack of semantic meaning to their listeners. Their senselessness is connected to the element of secrecy, which is perhaps why they are whispered, since one does not shout out secrets. The possessor of the secret (the wizard, witch, priest or priestess) knows something that others do not. Hence, by rendering some of the magical words senseless, they express the exclusion of those who are not privy to the knowledge and skills of magic.[9] Let us take, for example, the

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[9] In this context of exclusion, it is interesting to note George Orwell's *1984* (2011) novel where "Big Brother" deliberately downsizes the vocabulary. For instance, the adjectives, "good, excellent, wonderful," are reduced to the official word, "good." Moreover, in the language of "Newspeak," "lie" means "truth," and "war" is "peace," so that the gap between contrasts is also eliminated. Accordingly, Orwell adds a lexicon at the end of the book to show the degree to which senselessness and elimination of the gap between the "word" and the "world" reduces the ability to engage in critical thinking, thereby preventing people from

names of the three angels guarding the newborn from Lilith — Senoy, Sansenoy, and Semangelof. The amulet bearing their name is used to protect newborn babies, but the public is excluded from the knowledge — we do not know the meaning of their names (Graves and Patai, 1967, p. 63; Shenhar, 1982b, pp. 32-33).

Since many words of magic lack meaning, we have tried to understand the reasons for this. One possible direction of inquiry may be the phonology of magical words and blessings. They latter are often noticeably characterized by a distinct sound system, repetition, rhyme, alliteration, etc. In this sense, words of magic and blessings are similar to poetry. To cite Walter Benjamin's definition of artistic work: "The poetic work differs from ordinary modes of communication by enabling internalization of the life portrayed in the use of the words and their concentration in a restricted linguistic context. According to this understanding, the beauty of the artistic work is connected to its ability to gather the life of the language into itself. It is thus that the beautiful work itself seems alive." (Friedlander, 2010, p. 142) Benjamin, as a follower of Kant, describes poetry as having a life of its own, so that the gap between language and life in the literary work, especially poetry, disappears — not, however, due to a reduction in the meaning of the words but rather because of their colorful use. An example is the act of inserting a polysemic word into a poem while using all of its meanings at the same time.

Nevertheless, a contrast does exist between words of magic and words of poetry. As Kant wrote in the *Critique of Judgment*, words of poetry and the literary work are an end in themselves, not a means to an end (Kant, 2001), whereas, magical words serve a purpose beyond themselves, despite their phonological similarity to words of poetry.

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being able to take responsibility for their fate and confront the ruling power.

The language of poetry and the language of magic

The relationship between life (or the world) and language is a focal point of discourse both in the language of poetry and in the language of magic. To clarify this relationship, I choose at this stage to introduce Roman Jakobson's classic article, "Linguistics and Poetics" (Jakobson, 1986). In addition to his well-known model of language as an act of communication, he notes six functions of linguistic utterance:

1. The referential function—denotes the extra-linguistic context, the "world" or "the-thing-in-itself";
2. The emotive function—denotes the addresser;
3. The conative function—denotes the addressee;
4. The poetic function—denotes the message;
5. The phatic function—denotes the channel of communication, the contact;
6. The metalinguistic function—denotes the linguistic code.

Regarding the language of poetry, which emphasizes the poetic function, the same level of importance or even more is assigned to the form of the words in comparison to their meaning. In the words of Jakobson, as summarized by Sandbank: "The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination." (Jakobson, 1986, p. 145; Sandbank, 2002, p. 31)

If we follow Jakobson's line of thought, in the language of magic, as well, the projection of the principle of equivalence is of greater importance on the axis of combination than on the axis of selection, since the lack of meaning implies that the referential function has been reduced, if it at all exists. With respect to words of magic, therefore, it is important how the words sound or appear, without having a semantic meaning. But in addition to the poetic function, the other significant function is the conative function — the imperative. In the magical operation, a supernatural power is addressed in the attempt to force it to generate an action in the real world. Sandbank claims that while in poetry there is an attempt to get closer to "the-thing-in-itself" in the extra-linguistic reality (Sandbank, 2002, pp. 26-28),[10] the language of magic goes one step further wherein referentiality is superseded by a lack of meaning in order to allow unity with "the-thing-in-itself" without verbal interference. This is similar to Dina Stein's approach regarding the elimination of the gap between language and reality in Jewish mysticism (Harari, 2010, p. 88).

The two clear characteristics of the language of magic — phonology and lack of meaning — may be attributed to fact that words of magic actually have two addressees; the first being the supernatural power, and the second — the person requesting the magic. This duality of addressees is the contingency that grants magical words their characteristics.

The supernatural addressee is regarded with such awe and fear that the words are rendered meaningless. Since the supernatural power transcends human comprehension, the words addressed to it are understood only by this supernatural power and the magician, but not by ordinary people.

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10 In this context, it is interesting to note Fernando Pessoa's thoughts about the role of the poet/author and the use of the standard grammar of everyday language:

When grammar defines usage, it creates legitimate and false divisions. For example, it divides the verbs into transitive and intransitive; yet the person who knows how to say it [poet or author] often needs to turn a transitive verb into intransitive in order to photograph what he feels [...]. If I wish to say that I exist, I shall say "I am". If I wish to say that I exist and my soul is separate, I shall say "I am I". But if I wish to say that I exist as a reflexive entity that uses the form of self, fulfilling toward itself the divine role of creating itself, how should I use the verb "to be" if not by its sudden transformation into a transitive verb? And then, victorious and supremely ungrammatical, I shall say "I am to me". [...] Let grammar rule the man who doesn't know how to think what he feels. [...] It is told of Sigismund King of Rome that when someone pointed out a grammatical mistake he had made in a speech, he answered, "I am King of Rome, and above all grammar". And he went down in history as Sigismund super-grammaticus (Pessoa, 2006, pp. 34-35).

The human addressee is the one to whom the phonology is addressed. The incantation surpasses ordinary language in beauty and uniqueness, and its intention is to fascinate the addressee by its magical sounds.[11]

The word for "incantations" in Hebrew, *lakhashim*, alludes to its implementation by uttering a *whisper*. The purpose of the incantation is, of course, related to its vocal implementation:

1. Perhaps the whisper is due to a sense of fear (in Hebrew, "to fear" is *lakhshosh*). Why? Apparently because articulating it loudly is dangerous. Uttering the word out loud grants it its magical power, a power exceeding language and closely connected to a tangible reality. Similarly, one refrains from speaking the name of a devil out loud, due to the fear that by saying the name audibly–the devil may be summoned to that place (Graves and Patai, 1967).

2. The matter of whispering evokes the words "promise" or "threat," a basis upon which Austin began his discussion of the theory of "speech acts," subsequently applied by many scholars to words of magic (see above on the theory of "speech acts" applied to magic). In this context, the problem of the pragmatic paradox is relevant. When a person "promises" or "threatens" out loud and these are not fulfilled, there is a gap between language and reality. This gap would not have been created if the words had not been spoken audibly but had merely remained as a thought, and this creates the pragmatic paradox (Biletzki, 1997). Hence, *whispering* the words of magic may indicate an attempt to protect oneself from the failure of the magical operation. If the incantation is said out loud and the desired result was not achieved — it would constitute a broken promise.[12] Indeed, whispering is a quasi-action, a middle way enabling the obscuration of a possible failure. In this manner, the pragmatic paradox is not created, whereas in the case of a sharp loud utterance the result would be much clearer: success or failure, black or white; hence, a much greater chance of a paradox.

3. Another reason for whispering is connected to the lack of meaning. When one whispers, they mumble and the other person has difficulty hearing clearly. Consequently, the listener's comprehension is impaired, senselessness is increased, and the words are associated with the mystic and the incomprehensible, thereby evoking awe in the listeners and submission to the power of the magician.

4. The word *lakhash* ("incantation") is somewhat onomatopoeic, imitating a quiet voice in which the sounds of the guttural "kh" and the "sh" are more noticeable, reminiscent of a snake's hiss, the sound of leaves fluttering in the breeze, associated with the act of the *nakhash-lakhash* ("snake-incantation") — the magic.

As abovementioned, the vocal performance of the incantation is crucial to its action in the world, and therefore its phonological characteristics are related to its spoken mode, akin to the language of poetry. Phonological characteristics of magic words that are similar to the language of poetry are: alliteration, rhyme, rhythm and repetition. These characteristics of words of poetry and magic

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11 It is interesting, in this connection, to compare between words of magic and words used in military code. Army code is meant to be understood by one side but not by the other. For example, the names of military operations in World War II were not supposed to allude to their nature, and Churchill did not limit his intelligence service, except to stipulate that the sound of the code should be proper and not comical: "Do not give them names of frivolous characters, like Ballyhoo or Bunnyhog, […]. Sensible thinking will produce infinite names with proper sounds that will not compromise operations or force a widow or mother to say that her loved one died in an operation called Ballyhoo or Bunnyhog" (Macintyre, 2010, p. 61). Historian Ben Macintyre does, however, claim that both sides could not resist the temptation of the thought of double addressees, which is why the names of spies, political figures and military operations bore a similarity to reality. For instance, "Stalin" means "man of steel," and he received the code name "glyptic," meaning "image carved in stone." The Germans were worse in this matter than the others. The Nazi long-range radar was called "Heimdall" for the Norwegian god who "could see afar." (Macintyre, ibid.) The British joked at the German codenames for Britain and the United States, which were "Golfplatz" and "Samland," respectively.

12 Indeed, Shin Shifra claims that "the Mesopotamians believed in the magical influential power of words uttered out loud; they composed thousands of oaths meant to save man's life through their utterance." (Shifra, 2008, p. 28)..

are unique in the implementation of rhetorical devices that appeal to one's ear, intended for a spoken delivery that may be even more important than the reference.[13] Indeed, "abracadabra" features a distinct use of alliteration, rhyme, rhythm and repetition, as do "hocus pocus," and "amen," which is uttered three times as a blessing (Mizrahi, 2010). The language of poetry uses these devices and others to express the relations between the words themselves and reality in order to change the latter.[14]

This, in my opinion, explains the difference between extra-literary words of magic and those found in children's literature, and in Hebrew in particular — since words of magic in children's literature imitate those of real life in order to persuade the young listeners of their power to change reality. One must not forget, however, that this is a fictional reality, subject as well to the restrictions of children's literature. For example, one must refrain from explicit descriptions of sexuality and cruelty (Shavit, 1996), and the text should be adapted to the children's cognition (Cohen, 1988; Shenberg, 2013). Hence, words of magic in children's

literature are more connected to the language of poetry than to the language of magic.

Words of magic in Hebrew children's literature

Words of magic in children's literature are transformed from senselessness (as do "real" words of magic) to nonsense. To explain the concepts of "senselessness" and "nonsense," I will refer to Ze'ev Levi's article on *Alice in Wonderland* (Levi, 1989), which compares Wittgenstein's approach to Lewis Carroll's on the subject of nonsense. Levi characterizes the concept of nonsense according to the three ways in which Ludwig Wittgenstein and Lewis Carroll relate to the concept:

1. It doesn't make sense;
2. It lacks any sense of cognition;
3. It has no semantic meaning, such as "Jabberwocky," Carroll's poem from *Through the Looking Glass*, which became the most famous nonsense poem in English literature for children.

I prefer to call the two first characterizations using the general term of "nonsense," since in both we find semantic meanings of individual words, but their combination renders them nonsensical. They lack rational sense because they have been detached from their reference, i.e., they do not denote anything in the world. The third characterization is nonsensical since the individual words and their combination lack a semantic meaning, which I would like to call "senseless." That is, we cannot understand each one of the words, although their sequence may appear in a syntactic or logical structure which seems like a sentence.[15] In the first two characteristics, i.e., the nonsense features, we can understand each

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[13] This pertains as well to the visual rendition of words of magic imprinted upon, for example, amulets and magical bowls. There also is a type of poetry that appeals to the eye and not to the ear as, for instance, "concrete poetry." In the present study, however, I wish to emphasize the characteristics related to a spoken implementation of both words of magic and of poetry, thereby employing a generalizing language.

[14] One may speculate that words of poetry originated historically from words of magic. For example, Shin Shifra claims that the entire corpus of Mesopotamian literature served for rites and religion "and since the Mesopotamians believed in the great power of words, they granted literature a status of holiness. Their poetry was not the result of one person's creative spirit, but rather was revealed to the writer as a divine vision, then written down" (Shifra, 2008, p. 29). The supernatural origin of poetry was also accepted in the Bible (the spirit of God rested upon the poet), and in Greek sources, as well. When Socrates, for example, spoke with Phaedrus about rhetoric, he said: "It is told that even before the muses were born, the cicadas were human. When the muses were born and poetry was revealed, some people were so struck by its delight that they did not stop singing, and forgot to eat and drink, therefore perishing" (Plato, 2009, p. 79). Walter Benjamin also noted that the origin of ancient works of art could be found in rites: "The unique value of the 'authentic' work of art is based on rites, from which art obtained its primary original use." (Benjamin, 1987, p. 28) This seems to hold true for words of poetry as well.

[15] I refrain from using the term "gibberish" (pronounced and therefore sometimes written "jibberish") since it usually alludes to childish or comical usage. Whereas, magical "gibberish" is intended to be used seriously and even sacredly.

word but the combination is senseless like in the following limerick which describes a situation that cannot exist outside of language.

> There was a young lady of Niger
> Who smiled as she rode on a tiger;
> They came back from the ride
> With the lady inside,
> And the smile on the face of the tiger.

The entire situation is most cruel (a tiger devours a woman), but completely nonsensical, since it is clear that a young lady cannot ride on a tiger, and a tiger cannot smile. This combination creates humor which mollifies the shocking situation, since it cannot happen in reality. Each word is understood, hence it is clear that the situation has no bearing on reality and is intended merely for entertainment.

Nonsense is also created when a generic term is used for a proper name, as in the famous example from *Alice in Wonderland* (Carroll, 1990) when Alice says to the king: "I see nobody on the road," and the king envies her for seeing so far. When the messenger arrives, the king asks him who had passed there, to which the messenger replies, "nobody." The king tells him that this was indeed so, and that Alice had seen him as well. Then he adds: "So of course Nobody walks slower than you." The messenger had used "nobody" as a generic term referring to its semantic meaning, while the king used it as the proper name of someone called Nobody. This usage creates nonsense, although we understand each word. Wittgenstein paraphrased this by saying: "Imagine a language in which instead of 'I found nobody in the room' one said 'I found Mr. Nobody in the room.'" (Levi, 1989, p. 8) The sentence is clearly grammatical and yet its meaning does not fit reality.

I would like to show that while classic Hebrew children's literature[16] makes use of magical words, they often convey an ordinary semantic sense, and even when nonsense is employed, it is not always senseless.[17] Thus, words of magic in Hebrew children's literature are closer to the language of poetry than to the language of magic. Moreover, words of magic that have been transferred from a role of pragmatic implementation to children's literature, or were invented as words of magic by various authors, are addressed to a human addressee (the child, his or her parents, or all of them together; see Shavit, 1996). Hence, senselessness is not an issue, and most literary works make use of nonsense rhymes and poetic patterns intended to develop the child's linguistic ability as well as to amuse and entertain.[18]

When we study incantations in classic Hebrew children's literature, we find that the authors have maintained the repetition, rhyme and alliteration devices, while hinting at semantic meaning. Thus, incantations in classic Hebrew children's literature are neither nonsensical nor vague, and each word is clear and meaningful.

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16 I use the term "classic" in the sense of "great literature." See Shavit for more on the term, "classic children's literature," in *Just Childhood: Introduction to Poetics of Children's Literature* (1996), and in the wake of Shavit's approach, see my article on changes in classic adult literature when adapted to children's literature (Shenberg, 2013).

17 Ludwig Wittgenstein, as well, claimed in *Philosophical Investigations* (2008) that there is a difference between nonsense and a baby's mumbling —what I chose to call "senselessness."

> "But in the fairy tales, even the pot can see and hear!" (Of course, but it can also speak.) "But the fairy tale only makes up things that aren't facts; it doesn't say nonsensical things." —This isn't so simple. If one says that the pot speaks, is that non-truth, or is it nonsense? Do we have a full picture of the circumstances in which it is said of the pot that it speaks? (Even a nonsensical poem is not nonsense in the sense of the baby's mumbling) (Wittgenstein, 2008, p. 113).

18 The difference between senseless and nonsense is somewhat similar to Roman Jakobson's description of aphasia in his article, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances" (Jakobson, 1986). One is a disturbance of similarity and the other of contiguity. One can view senselessness in this manner —as related to similarity disorders, while nonsense is related to contiguity disorders.

They may be affiliated without difficulty to the language of poetry rather than to the language of magic. The actual change in modern children's literature in Hebrew came with Nurit Zarchi, who employs words of magic in her works. Yet, all the classics do not use senseless words.

Avraham Shlonsky, Miriam Yalan-Shteklis, and Leah Goldberg
When Shlonsky translated the Grimm brothers' fairytale about the nasty goblin, "Rumpelstiltskin," into Hebrew and adapted it for the stage, he chose the name "Utz Li Gutz Li" (the first performance took place on Dec. 15, 1965, at The Cameri Theater). Shlonsky took the German nonsensical name (*Rumpelstilzchen*) and turned it into a nonsensical Hebrew name (Shlonsky, 1970).[19] Thus, each word in the name has semantic meaning connected to the wisdom and resourcefulness of the goblin who could turn straw into gold (*utz* may come from *eitza* in Hebrew, meaning "advice" or the name of a faraway place like the Land of Utz in the Biblical Book of Job) and to his short height (*gutz*=short). However, the combination is non-grammatical, since *utz li* can be considered imperative (=advise me), but the continuation *gutz* is an adjective and cannot connect with *li* (=to me) as an imperative sentence. One may say that similar to the Emperor Sigismund, as told by Pessoa (see footnote 10 above), Shlonsky as a poet renders a precise description of the real essence, and is therefore above grammar. However, the "real essence" in Rumpelstiltskin is fictional, and therefore the intention is not to change a material reality, but rather to persuade the children of the transformational ability in the "reality" of the story. Since

suspension of disbelief is involved here, the words comprising the goblin's name should be similar to "real" words of magic, while also comprehensible. They should have a phonology that is similar to "real" words of magic (rhyme, alliteration, repetition); however, they cannot be entirely senseless. Hence, there is semantic meaning for every individual word yet the combination —instead of being logical — is entertaining and amusing, as it must neutralize the elements of cruelty in the goblin's character by creating "a humorous distance." Thus, the words of magic in children's literature are transformed from the realm of "real" words of magic into words of poetry.

Miriam Yalan-Shteklis translated Russian tales into Hebrew in her book, *Apples of Youth* (Yalan-Shteklis, 1997). Among them is the story, "Geese-Swans," about a little girl whose brother is kidnapped by geese-swans, and in which she subsequently encounters a character very similar to the witch in Hansel and Gretel. In the adaptation for children, Yalan-Shteklis calls the witch, *Savta Ashpeta*, using the Hebrew word, *savta* ("grandmother"), and inventing "ashpeta" (from *ashafit*/*makhshefa*, meaning "witch").

In the same book, she engages in a similar creation in her adaptation of the story, "The Immortal Shaldi," about a prince who tries to rescue his mother the queen from the Immortal Shaldi, a terrible devil who looks like a skeleton (in Hebrew, skeleton=*sheled*).

Attributing semantic meaning to words of magic is not limited solely to translations and adaptations of children's literature, but is also quite common in children's literature written in Hebrew. Avraham Shlonsky and Leah Goldberg wrote words of magic in their stories and they sometimes employed nonsense but there was always semantic meaning.

Shlonsky, for example, in his children's book, *The Adventures of Miki-Mahu* (1961), makes wondrous use of language with the aid of rhyme and alliteration, while at the same time he maintains

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19 The name Rumpelstilzchen in German means, literally, "little rattle stilt." (A "stilt" is a post or pole which provides support for a structure.) A rumpelstilt or rumpelstilz was the name of a type of goblin (also called a pophart or poppart), which makes noises by rattling posts and rapping on planks. The meaning is similar to rumpelgeist ("rattle ghost") or poltergeist ("noisy ghost"), a mischievous spirit that clatters and moves household objects (Wikipedia, 2016).

semantic sense and even tries to demonstrate a drawing of a face by means of Hebrew consonants, vowels and punctuation (Shlonsky, 1961, p. 51, see Appendix 1).

Another classic poem is Leah Goldberg's, "The Magic Hat" (2005). The words of magic in the poem are not vague or senseless. On the contrary, Goldberg uses "speech acts" with clear semantic meaning, so that there is repetition, rhyme, alliteration and rhythm, but no "exotic" use of a senseless word (Goldberg, 2005).

כּוֹבַע קְסָמִים
כָּל הַיָּמִים, כָּל הַיָּמִים
חוֹלֶמֶת אֲנִי עַל כּוֹבַע קְסָמִים,
כּוֹבַע קָטָן, מְקֻשָּׁט נוֹצָה,
הָעוֹשֶׂה כָּל מַה שֶׁאֲנִי רוֹצָה.

אֶחְבּוֹשׁ אוֹתוֹ וְאֹמַר, לְמָשָׁל:
"כּוֹבַע, עֲשֵׂה שֶׁאֲנִי אֶגְדַּל!"

וְהִנֵּה מִיָּד הִנְנִי עוֹלָה,
וְגוּפִי מִתְמַתֵּחַ וַאֲנִי גְדוֹלָה,
וְאֵין כָּמוֹנִי בְּכָל הָעוֹלָם:
כִּי אֲנִי גְבוֹהָה וּגְדוֹלָה מִכֻּלָּם.

וְהַכֹּל מִסְתַּכְּלִים בְּיִרְאָה וְכָבוֹד,
כִּי הֲרֵי אֲנִי גְדוֹלָה עַד מְאֹד.

(Goldberg, 2005)

The poem is of course reminiscent of *Alice in Wonderland*, where Alice drinks from the bottle labeled "Drink Me," or eats a cookie from the box labeled "Eat Me" (Carroll, 1990). As Leah Goldberg does make use of nonsense, one may ask why she does not employ invented, senseless words, as later will appear in Nurit Zarchi's writing. There are two reasons for this:

1. Goldberg was more restricted by didactic norms common in Hebrew children's literature in the 1950s and 1960s (Goldberg, 1978);

2. The poetics of her poems for adults also reflect clarity and classic transparency, rather than romantic inclination (Sandbank, 2002).

Both Shlonsky and Goldberg do not use senseless words in order to convey magic ones, but in Nurit Zarchi's works, who became a famous and highly-valued children's author in the 1980s, there is a use of senseless words that function as magic ones.

Nurit Zarchi

At the present time, the writings of Nurit Zarchi, author of children's literature and poet, are already part of canonical Hebrew children's literature. In her book, *Who Knows Tanina?* (2009), she makes extensive use of words of magic, of which a few of them are senseless. In this book, Zarchi essentially reveals how senselessness is born out of sense. She describes the method of turning magical words into senseless words, and she even employs genuinely senseless words, although not many.[20] As mentioned earlier, among the many interpretations of "abracadabra," there are scholars who claim that the word is but an aberration of Aramaic words that sound senseless to the European ear. They contend that this magic word originally had semantic meaning, and following aberration, or abbreviation, it became senseless (see Appendix 2).

The first thing that is odd in Zarchi's book is the name of the main character. If we examine the names of girls in Israel today, there is little chance we will find the name Tanina (*tanin* is Hebrew for crocodile). Why then call a girl Tanina (stress on the penultimate syllable)? Is she a *tanina* (stress on the final syllable, meaning "female crocodile")? Or is it connected to the names of

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20 Perhaps Nurit Zarchi's use of senseless words of magic is directed at her addressees, i.e., children. She uses gibberish to address the linguistic creativity of children and to add humor. In this fashion, she neutralizes the fear and seriousness attached to the magical words of the adult world.

the other witches in the book: Khanina (=pardon), Nina (=great granddaughter), Zimzum (=buzz) and Katzar (=short)? Semantically speaking, Khanina seems to be the opposite of Tanina, if we shift the stress from the penultimate to the final syllable of the words. However, the aural similarity also allows us to think of Khanina as *khnoona* (=nerd), and Tanina as *tnu-na* (=please give), referring to a girl who draws attention, recognizing her own worth.

And what is the place called Pariza? Is it *pri-zeh* (=this fruit) or Paris? The illustrator alludes to this when she inserts a sign saying: "Fine tastes from the City of Lights." In other words, Zarchi combines the city of "Paris," well-known as the capital of fine cuisine, with the word "fruit," and creates a nonsensical expression that is not senseless.

Tanina herself turns into a mosquito, and finds it very difficult to return to being a girl. The male cat, Kurkevan (=navel) (see Appendix 3 for the exact quotation), tells her that a proper witch should not expect help from others, especially a cat. Tanina, the mosquito, stings him and he jumps up to the sixth floor. Tanina has no alternative but to help herself, so she extracts herself from the mosquito form with the longest words she knows, and as a safety measure, she adds the whole alphabet at the end of the spell.

Thus, Nurit Zarchi inserts a senseless incantation that exerts influence on extra-linguistic reality, which is — one mustn't forget —the fictional reality of the story. This is similar to Jewish mysticism that views the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet as a necessary condition of creation in the real world.[21]

Tanina has two sisters, Gol and Yat. Their meaning is created by their combination into Golyat (Goliath). Nurit Zarchi also tries her hand at real incantation. When Tanina gets annoyed at her sisters,

she places a curse on them that will cause them to be shorter than her, and to enforce it she uses senseless words (see Appendix 4).

Therefore, in addition to a stanza with an a-a-b-b rhyme and a clear meaning (indicating that the sisters will never be taller than her), Zarchi inserts a line of words lacking semantic meaning. While the word *yod* is understood as "iodine," and "ether" is an archaic sort of gas, then, "emulzin" and "shakelmistor" are invented words that sound like they come from the field of chemistry, such as "emulsion"; or an ad for children's food such as "shake," as in milkshake, and "store," a shop for shakes. Their meaning isn't clear, except in the pragmatic context of influencing the non-verbal world, and, indeed, the moment Tanina utters these words, the sisters become dwarfs and she becomes a giant. Hence, the transformation occurring in the fictional reality is the changing of Tanina now perhaps related by name to the word *ktanina*, an invented word describing a very small girl, as *ktana* means "small," with an added diminutive suffix into something very big, in relation to the two sisters who together form "Goliath." The creative power of words is thereby revealed in Zarchi's text. The expressions used are not only nonsense, but also senseless, because if the words would have had meaning, we would understand each of them separately while their syntactic combination would render the entire utterance only nonsensical. Here, however, there is senselessness as well.

In the examples presented so far, we have seen that Nurit Zarchi in *Tanina* uses mainly words of magic that are nonsensical, and resorts only rarely to senseless words. The following example, however, will show how a meaningless word of magic is created. What is the method behind the creation of a meaningless word? The example refers to the creation of the word and name, "Mayetz" (see Appendix 5).

Nurit Zarchi personifies the sentence, "*Ma yetzeh li mizeh*?" (meaning in Hebrew: "What's in it for me?"), turning it into a real

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21 One may interpret Nurit Zarchi's approach as ironic, since the longest word possible indeed depends upon the 22 letters of the language, as these 22 letters contain all of the possible Hebrew words in the world.

entity called for short, "Mayetz." Thus, an imaginary creature embodies the transformation of semantic meaning, or sense, into senselessness, thereby revealing the method of the creation of magical words by reversing the process. While words of magic, both nouns and verbs, lack semantic meaning, then, Nurit Zarchi's magical word starts the sentence entirely clearly–and then becomes senseless. Is this the hidden method that worked in regard to magical incantations? We do not know. We may, however, assume that it is possible.[22]

Tanina says, "*Ma yetzeh li mizeh?*" three times and the words become real. This is similar to: "*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh*" ("holy, holy, holy") in Judaism or many other combinations that, because they are uttered three times, influence the extra-linguistic world. The words achieve the physical expression of a creature called "Mayetz." If the elliptical form isn't familiar in the following cases, such as asking "*ma nish?*" instead of "*ma nishma?*" (="how's it going?"), or "*lehit*" instead of "*lehitra'ot*" (="see you later"), it isn't clear what this is all about. Syntactically, this is an elliptical sentence (Azar, 1976; and Ben-Asher, 1972), which is transformed into a proper name and then inserted into a new sentence, similar to the creation of "hallelujah" from "*hallelu Ya*" (="praise the Lord"). This is an invented creature based on an invented word, and it is even defined as "makhtomat," which may be a combination of "*mekhashef*" (="magician") and "*automat*," subsequently explained as a magician with only one trick.

In her book, *Who Knows Tanina?* (2009), Nurit Zarchi makes great use of nonsense, as well as senselessness, in contrast to the classic Hebrew children's literature of Avraham Shlonsky, Miriam Yalan-Shteklis, and Leah Goldberg.

Conclusion

The incantation is at the heart of the magical act. In order to influence actual reality, it must look or sound convincing, although some of its words may be senseless, i.e., lacking clear semantic meaning. Hence, most incantations are based on rhetorical devices, such as alliteration, rhyme, and repetition (similar to the language of poetry), since they address two addressees at the same time–the supernatural addressee whom they ask to grant a certain wish, and the human addressee listening and looking on while the incantation is performed. In classic Hebrew children's literature, when one speaks of magic, the incantation becomes a comprehensible and endearing poem, as for instance with Miriam Yalan-Shteklis and Leah Goldberg, according to the educational norms of the children's literature system.

When there is use of nonsense, as in Shlonsky's case, for example, this option may supersede that of senselessness, since the writer appeals to two addressees — parent and child, while there is no supernatural addressee. This is not the case in Nurit Zarchi's works. Contemporary children's literature has shed its didactic nature, and Zarchi makes great use of nonsense with senselessness, meanwhile revealing the method of transforming meaning into senselessness.

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22 Take, for example, the game (or "counting rhyme"), "en den dino" —"A children's game of selecting, based on the aberration of numbers in Latin: en den dino / so fa la katino / so fa la kati kato / elik belik bom," (Rosenthal, 2005); or as often occurs in the creation of military codes, as mentioned earlier.

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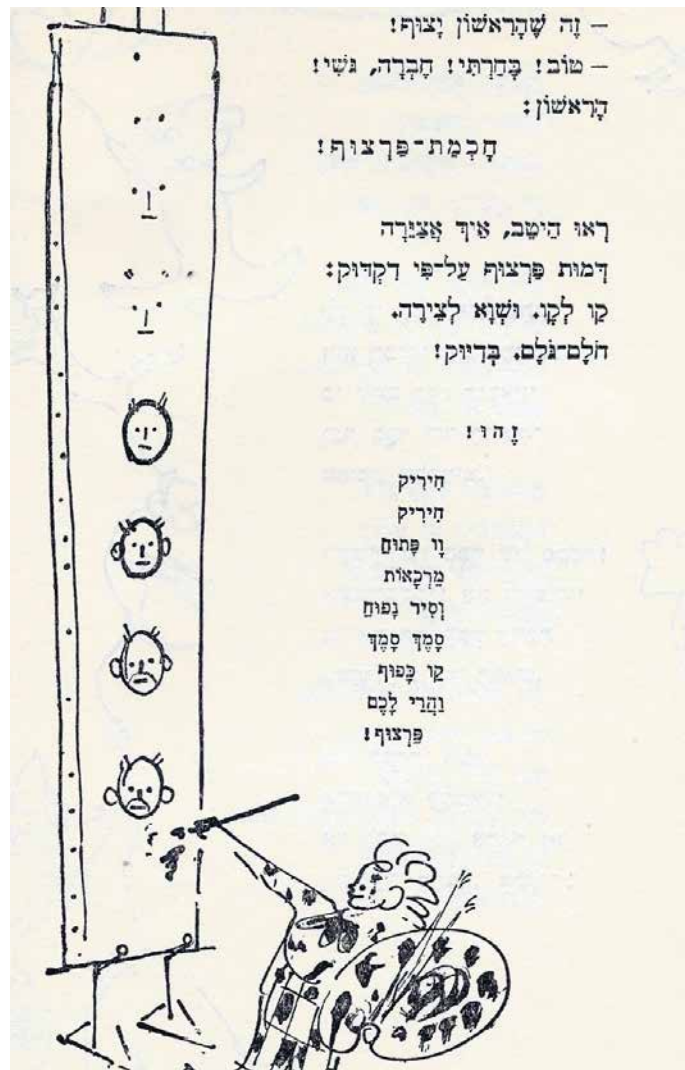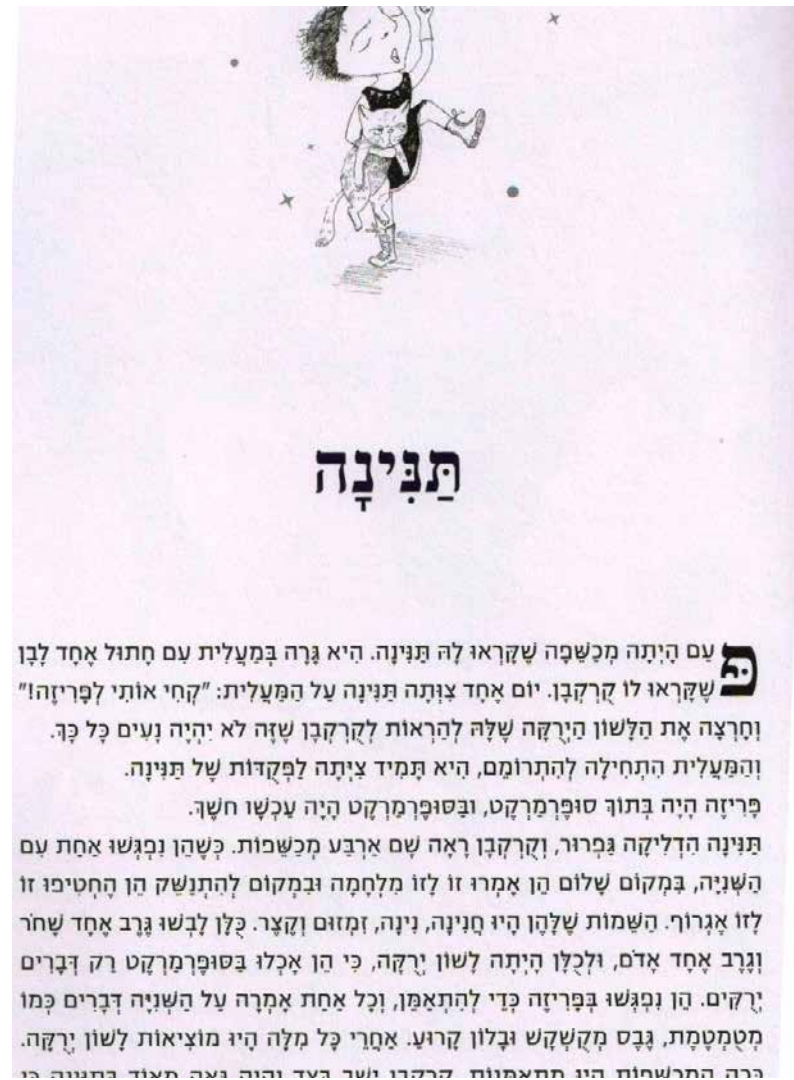"Hocus pocus." In A. Even-Shoshan's *The Abridged Dictionary of the Hebrew Language*. Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1971. (Hebrew)

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Appendix 2: Tanina by Nurit Zarchi

Appendix 1: Shlonsky

‫- זֶה שֶׁהָרִאשׁוֹן יָצוּף!‬

‫- טוֹב! בָּחַרְתִּי! חֶבְרָה, גְּשׁוּ!‬

‫הָרִאשׁוֹן:‬

‫חָכְמַת־פַּרְצוּף!‬

‫רְאוּ הֵיטֵב, אֵיךְ אֲצַיְּרָה‬

‫דְּמוּת פַּרְצוּף עַל־פִּי דִקְדּוּק:‬

‫קַו לְקַו. וְשָׂנָא לְצִיּרָה.‬

‫חֲלֹם־גֹּלֶם. בְּדִיּוּק!‬

‫זֶהוּ:‬

‫חִירִיק‬
‫חִירִיק‬
‫וָו פָּתוּחַ‬
‫מֵרְכָאוֹת‬
‫וְסִיר נָפוּחַ‬
‫סָמֶךְ סָמֶךְ‬
‫קַו כָּפוּף‬
‫וַהֲרֵי לָכֶם‬
‫פַּרְצוּף!‬

תְּבִינָה

‫כֹּה הָיְתָה מְכַשֵּׁפָה שֶׁקָּרְאוּ לָהּ תְּבִינָה. הִיא גָּרָה בְּמַעֲלִית עִם חָתוּל אֶחָד לָבָן‬
‫שֶׁקָּרְאוּ לוֹ קַרְקְבָּן. יוֹם אֶחָד צִוְּתָה תְּבִינָה עַל הַמַּעֲלִית: "קְחִי אוֹתִי לְפָרִיז!"‬
‫וְהָרְצָה אֶת הַלָּשׁוֹן הַיְרֻקָּה שֶׁלָּהּ לְהַרְאוֹת לַקַּרְקְבָּן שֶׁזֶּה לֹא יִהְיֶה נָעִים כָּל כָּךְ.‬
‫וְהַמַּעֲלִית הִתְחִילָה לְהִתְרוֹמֵם, הִיא תָּמִיד צִיְּתָה לִפְקֻדּוֹת שֶׁל תְּבִינָה.‬
‫פָּרִיז הָיָה בְּתוֹךְ סוּפֶּרְמַרְקֶט, וּבַסּוּפֶּרְמַרְקֶט הָיָה עַכְשָׁו חֹשֶׁךְ.‬
‫תְּבִינָה הִדְלִיקָה גַּפְרוּר, וְקַרְקְבָּן רָאָה שָׁם אַרְבַּע מְכַשֵּׁפוֹת. כְּשֶׁהֵן נִפְגְּשׁוּ אַחַת עִם‬
‫הַשְּׁנִיָּה, בִּמְקוֹם שָׁלוֹם הֵן אָמְרוּ זוֹ לָזוֹ מִלְחָמָה וּבִמְקוֹם לְהִתְנַשֵּׁק הֵן הֶחְטִיפוּ זוֹ‬
‫לָזוֹ אֶגְרוֹף. הַשֵּׁמוֹת שֶׁלָּהֶן הָיוּ חֲנִינָה, נִינָה, זִמְזוּם וְקֶצֶר. כֻּלָּן לָבְשׁוּ גֶּרֶב אֶחָד שָׁחֹר‬
‫וְגֶרֶב אֶחָד אָדֹם, וּלְכֻלָּן הָיְתָה לָשׁוֹן יְרֻקָּה, כִּי הֵן אָכְלוּ בַּסּוּפֶּרְמַרְקֶט רַק דְּבָרִים‬
‫יְרֻקִּים. הֵן נִפְגְּשׁוּ בְּפָרִיז כְּדֵי לְהִתְאַמֵּן, וְכָל אַחַת אָמְרָה עַל הַשְּׁנִיָּה דְּבָרִים כְּמוֹ‬
‫מְטֻמְטֶמֶת, גֶּבֶס מְקַשְׁקֵשׁ וּבָלוֹן קָרוּעַ. אַחֲרֵי כָּל מִלָּה הָיוּ מוֹצִיאוֹת לָשׁוֹן יְרֻקָּה.‬

Appendix 3: Tanina and her cat

מִי שֶׁהָיְתָה מִכֻשֶׁפָה חוֹטֶמֶת אֶת יָד וְחוֹטֶמֶת זְעָרָה שֶׁל חוֹטֶמָת יְנוּ נָה, שֶׁהָיְתָה
מְכֻשֶׁפָה מְאוֹד גַּאֲוְתָנִית, עָקְצָה אֶת קַרְקְבָּן בָּאַף. סַשׁ... קַרְקְבָּן קָפַץ בָּאֲוִיר וְהִגִּיעַ
בְּכֹחוֹת עַצְמוֹ לְקוֹמָה הַשְּׁשִׁית. וְתְנִינָה נִשְׁאֲרָה לְבַדָּהּ וְהָיְתָה מֻכְרָחָה לַעֲזֹר לְעַצְמָהּ.
תְּנִינָה מָשְׁכָה אֶת עַצְמָהּ מִן הַיַּתּוּשׁ בְּעֶזְרַת הַמִּלִּים הַכִּי אֲרֻכּוֹת שֶׁיָּדְעָה.

מְסֻכָּן לְהַגִּיד דְּבָרִים רָעִים
עַל עַצְמְךָ יוֹתֵר מֵאֲשֶׁר עַל אֲחֵרִים.
בְּקַלֵּי קַלּוּת אַתָּה עָלוּל לְהִפֹּךְ
לְחַרְדָּל, לְנַקְנִיק, וַאֲפִלּוּ לְשָׁרוּךְ.

וְתְנִינָה יָדְעָה אֶת זֶה.
וְהִיא הוֹסִיפָה גַּם לְיֶתֶר בִּטָּחוֹן: אבגדההוזחטיכלמנסעפצקרשת

Appendix 4: Tanina's two sisters

גֹּל אֲחוֹתִי וְיַת אֲחוֹתִי,
אַף פַּעַם שְׁתֵּיכֶן לֹא תַּשִּׂיגוּ אוֹתִי.
יוֹד אֱמוּלְזִין שִׁיקְלְמִיסְטוֹר וְאֶתֶר
תִּהְיֶינָה קְצָרוֹת מִמֶּנִּי בְּסֶנְטִימֶטֶר.
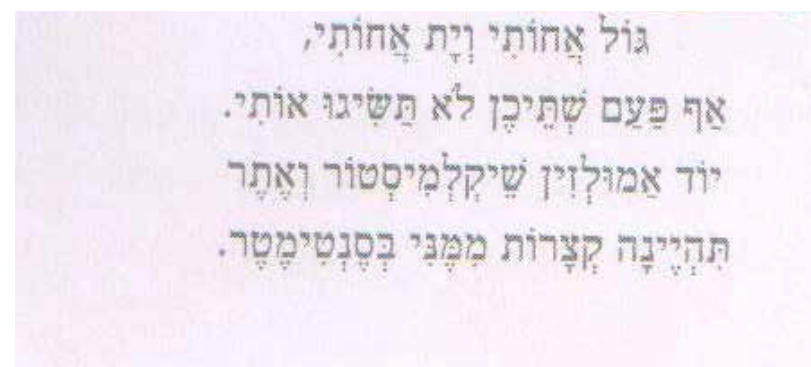
תַּנִינָה וּ"מַה יֵּצֵא לִי מִזֶּה"

יוֹם אֶחָד אָמְרָה תַּנִינָה: "אֵין לִי מַה לַעֲשׂוֹת, אֵין לִי מַה לַעֲשׂוֹת בִּכְלָל."

"מַה?" אָמַר קַרְקְבָּן, שֶׁהָיָה עָסוּק בְּשֵׁנָה.

"לֹא שָׁמַעְתָּ אוֹתִי?" הִתְכּוֹפְפָה תַּנִינָה וְצָרְחָה לוֹ לְתוֹךְ הָאֹזֶן, "אֵין לִי מַה לַעֲשׂוֹת."

"אַה," אָמַר קַרְקְבָּן, וּפָנָיו מִתְכַּוְּצִים בְּתַרְעֹמֶת. "אַתְּ יְכוֹלָה לִקְרֹא סֵפֶר."

"חָכָם גָּדוֹל," אָמְרָה תַּנִינָה. "וּמַה יֵּצֵא לִי מִזֶּה?"

"טוֹב טוֹב," הִתְכַּוֵּץ קַרְקְבָּן. מִיָּד רָאָה שֶׁשָּׁגָה בְּמַשֶּׁהוּ. "אַתְּ יְכוֹלָה לְשַׂחֵק בְּמַשֶּׁהוּ."

"לְשַׂחֵק," אָמְרָה תַּנִינָה בְּמֶתֶק קוֹל לְקַרְקְבָּן, "חֲמַדּוֹן מְפֻנָּר, לֹא שָׁמַעְתָּ שֶׁאָמַרְתִּי שֶׁאֵין לִי מַה לַעֲשׂוֹת וְזֶה כּוֹלֵל גַּם בַּמְּגֻנָּב אֶת זֶה שֶׁאֵין לִי בַּמֶּה לְשַׂחֵק, וְגַם אִם אֲנִי אֲשַׂחֵק בְּמַשֶּׁהוּ, מַה יֵּצֵא לִי מִזֶּה?"

"אַתְּ יְכוֹלָה לְהִתְעַמֵּל," אָמַר קַרְקְבָּן בַּחֲשָׁשׁ הוֹלֵךְ וְגוֹבֵר.

"מַה יֵּצֵא לִי מִזֶּה?" כָּעֲסָה תַּנִינָה, "תַּגִּיד לִי בְּעַצְמְךָ, אִם אֲנִי אָרִים אֶת הָרֹאשׁ

תַּנִינָה לַחֲלַל הַחֶדֶר בְּיֵאוּשׁ וְהֵנִיפָה אֶת זְרוֹעוֹתֶיהָ לַצְּדָדִים.

וְכֵיוָן שֶׁהִיא נָקְטָה שָׁלוֹשׁ פְּעָמִים אֶת שְׁמוֹ שֶׁל "מַה יֵּצֵא לִי מִזֶּה", הוּא נִצַּב פִּתְאֹם בְּאֶמְצַע הַחֶדֶר.

"אַתְּ קָרָאת לִי," אָמַר לְתַנִינָה בְּקוֹל יָבֵשׁ.

"מַה יֵּצֵא לִי מִזֶּה" אֲפִלּוּ לֹא הָיָה מְכַשֵּׁף שֶׁצָּץ מֵעַצְמוֹ. הוּא הָיָה מַכְטוֹמֶט, שֶׁיּוֹדֵעַ רַק כְּשׁוּף אֶחָד. כָּל מַה שֶׁמַּגִּיעַ לִסְבִיבָתוֹ הוֹפֵךְ מִיָּד לְ"מַה יֵּצֵא לִי מִזֶּה". הָרְגִּילִים מַעֲרִיצִים מַכְטוֹמְטִים כִּי הֵם חוֹשְׁבִים שֶׁיֵּשׁ בָּהֶם מִקְצָת מִן הַמְּכַשְּׁפִים. מִן הָרְגִּילִים מְקַבְּלִים הַמַּכְטוֹמְטִים אֶת בִּטְחוֹנָם. אִם זֶה הָיָה תָּלוּי בַּקּוֹסְמִים הָיוּ הַמַּכְטוֹמְטִים מְנֻדִּים מִזְּמַן מִן הַמְּדִינָה, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁלַעֲשׂוֹת רַק דָּבָר אֶחָד כָּל הַזְּמַן זֶה גָּרוּעַ מְלֹא לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּלוּם.

"אַתְּ קָרָאת לִי," חָזַר "מַה יֵּצֵא לִי מִזֶּה", שֶׁבְּקִצּוּר נִקְרָא מַיָץ.

"אֲנִי?" אָמְרָה תַּנִינָה בְּהִתַּמְּמוּת. "בִּשְׁבִיל מַה אֲנִי צְרִיכָה אוֹתְךָ, תַּגִּיד לִי מַה יֵּצֵא לִי מִזֶּה," הַמִּלִּים הָאֵלֶּה הֶחֱלִיקוּ מִפִּיהָ בְּלִי כַּוָּנָה.

מַיָץ בָּלַע אוֹתָן וְגָדַל וְתָפַח וּמִלֵּא אֶת כָּל הַחֶדֶר, עַד הַכִּסֵּא, עַד הַתָּנוּר. הִשְׁתַּרְרָה