

“What has Hagit ever done for us?”
(cf. *Monty Python’s Life of Brian*, 1979)

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I’d love to write an elegant piece on syntax for Hagit, but that is her strength, not mine. I’ve loved working with Hagit though, so I’d like to contribute to this celebration of her many distinguished achievements. Others will write about the obvious things such as her hugely important contributions to linguistics and her work in Palestine, so this is simply a few personal memories from our time as colleagues in London. There will be little here to surprise people in the QMUL Linguistics department, but I don’t think Hagit knows how much she’s been admired and loved here for her great personal qualities as well as the intellectual ones.

Starting at the beginning, we were all delighted when Hagit accepted the chair at Queen Mary in 2012, and even more delighted when she agreed to immediately become Head of the department. It was a truly positive contribution to not only be willing to take on that job immediately on her arrival but to do so in a university system that was altogether new to her. I was grateful then and I still admire her now for agreeing to do that. Maybe she already knew a couple of department colleagues in the immediate fields, but she’d never met most of us before, and must have had no idea what we were like. And she couldn’t have known in advance about the ridiculously crazy UK university system she was going to have to navigate as department Head – no-one from outside the UK could imagine such a bizarre world. Hagit negotiated the higher echelons of Queen Mary with supreme efficiency and she led the department to accomplish great things, with charm and adeptness. Thank you, Hagit.

Skipping to the end (my end, not hers), Hagit was once again our Head of department in 2020. It was a horrible year because of the Covid 19 pandemic, which raised the horrendous administrative, bureaucratic, and political duties of a Head of department to a completely new level. Hagit must have been worked off her feet. I retired in December of that year and in Covid times was expecting a little Zoom get together to say goodbye to people in the department. Instead, Hagit (with Devyani Sharma and Colleen Cotter – so huge thanks to them too) hosted an amazing and fun online party, with guests from around the world, music, happy reminiscences, and lots more. Hagit was the most charming host imaginable, speaking against a happy bright blue background with her cat wandering across the screen every now and then, tail held high. It’s a treasured memory for me.



There's another thing to admire about Hagit: her range of technical skills, which she'd kept secret from us all. She edited the video of the entire event into a transmissible form – it must have taken ages – and sent it to me the very next day. I've managed to extract one clip of the delightful host (sadly without the cat). I don't know if Hagit will like the photo, but for me it's a reminder of the smile she was wearing throughout the evening. Thank you, Hagit!

For such a busy person Hagit's willingness to set aside time to patiently help students with their analyses is extraordinary and admirable. Hagit's office was just down the corridor from mine, so I often saw students queuing outside her door nervously waiting to show her their work, and then leaving some time later, beaming. Another treasured memory is of Hagit, doing this for me too, equally willingly, when she offered to look at a French sociolinguistic analysis that wasn't going right. The problem was why adolescent speakers of a language that supposedly does not allow *wh*-in-situ in embedded questions produce utterances such as

lui tu sais on l'appelle comment
him you know they call him what
'do you know what they call him'

Our discussion was all too brief, hedged in by administrative meetings we each had to attend both before and afterwards. Nonetheless in that brief discussion Hagit came up with more insights than any of the linguists on the research team (despite having said that French wasn't one of the languages she knows well). It turns out that something is going on with *savoir* (quite what, we still haven't worked out), the lack of an overt complementiser may be relevant, and there are other points to consider too. I left her office with a smile on my face, just like the students. Thank you again, Hagit!

When it was my turn to be Head of department again, I had to look at everyone's course evaluations from their students. Hagit's, of course, were outstanding. Many students thanked her for explaining difficult concepts in ways that were easy for them to understand. I have first-hand experience of this as well. Hagit had just heard the news that her application for a very competitive UK Leverhulme Major Research Award had been successful. I remember mentioning that there was no point my asking her to tell me what she was planning to work on, because a syntactically illiterate sociolinguist like me would never be able to understand. On the contrary! Hagit may have forgotten this, but she rose to the challenge, enthusiastically explaining in the simplest of terms not only what she would be doing but also why it mattered and why it was exciting. I swear she could convert anyone to becoming a formal linguist.

Here's another memory, also of an occasion that Hagit has probably forgotten. This was soon after she'd arrived in London, at a Highgate pub where the department was celebrating a birthday. I found her dismay and shock when her so-called American burger

arrived very amusing (sorry, Hagit), as well as her subsequent attempt to explain to the bar staff what an American burger should look like, taste like, and how it should be cooked. The explanation was even more enthusiastically conveyed than the research she was planning for the Leverhulme Award, and in terms that were just as simple. But it didn't seem to be as convincing, and I'm not sure the chef was converted. I had a good laugh though, so thanks for that, Hagit. The fish and chips that night were not good either, but at least the chef knew what they were supposed to be like.

And finally, here's another happy memory of a department social event. There are many lovely photos of Hagit in this volume, but this is the only suitable one I could find on my phone. Again I'm not sure if Hagit will like it, but it captures a treasured moment of seasonal cheer. I love her smile. And I like the hat.



Congratulations, Hagit, and thank you for everything!

PS. In case it's needed, here's the Monty Python quote, which I thought was appropriate in the context of what Hagit has done for us: "apart from the sanitation, medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, fresh water system and public health, what have the Romans ever done for us?"