

# Hebrew-language Narratives of Yiddish-speaking Ultra-Orthodox Girls in Israel

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This paper reports on a study conducted with children belonging to a rarely studied minority group, the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in Israel, an extremely religious group that endorses patterns of voluntary segregation. The research population also demonstrates linguistic segregation, as they use only Yiddish for daily communication with Hebrew, the main official language of Israel, serving primarily for study and ritual purposes. The sample consisted of 56 girls, divided between 4th graders and 7th graders, who were asked to write a story in Hebrew about a good thing that had happened to them. Two lines of analysis were adopted: (1) Quality of referential information, defined in terms of three types of 'Information-Units': events, descriptions and interpretations. Analysis revealed that informative density of narratives increased significantly with age, with a higher proportion of interpretive elements in 7th than in 4th grade – in marked contrast to baseline data of similar analyses of Hebrew monolingual schoolchildren in the same age-groups. (2) Analysis from a 'social capital perspective', which revealed high frequency of elements expressing affect, bonding and dogmatism in relation to the family, the community and the larger cultural-religious context. Results are discussed in view of the role of Hebrew in the lives of the participants, its ideological context and the ways language development and usage among ethno-linguistic minorities may reveal deeper layers of thought and emotion.

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## Introduction

Narrative analysis is widely used in research as an efficient tool in learning about language development, language usage, differences between use of first and second language, comparing different ethnolinguistic groups or different modalities, examining social and emotional attitudes, and so forth. The present study is based on narrative analysis, focusing on a minority group rarely studied from this perspective – the ultra-Orthodox community in Israel. Through narrative analysis of members of this community we can gain information about their linguistic as well as socioemotional world. This is the first study of its kind conducted with this population, and as such can

contribute both to our understanding of this community and to language development and usage among ethnolinguistic minorities.

## The Ultra-Orthodox Community in Israel

Linguistic patterns can often be highly revealing concerning the internal dynamics within ethnolinguistic minority groups, relationships between minority and majority groups, and the position of individuals vis-à-vis minority and majority groups. Israel's multicultural and multilingual setting is a fascinating locale for the exploration of these issues. Since its establishment in 1948 and until the present, Israel has been an immigration country absorbing Jews from all over the world and also has a large Arab minority, constituting close to 20% of the population. Although these circumstances have given rise to extensive research on different aspects of patterns of acculturation and of linguistic behaviour among Israel's ethnolinguistic or cultural minorities (e.g. Al-Haj, 2002; Ben Rafael, 1994; Jasinskaja *et al.*, 2003), an interesting group that has rarely been studied in these contexts is the ultra-Orthodox community, an extremely religious sector within the Jewish population.

Overall, the ultra-Orthodox display variations along a number of parameters such as members' countries of origin, study methods, subgroup leaderships or attitudes towards the state of Israel. All these elements entail further repercussions for the daily life of these groups, and often act as a visible or invisible barrier between them and their surroundings (Baumel, 2003; Hasson, 2001; Heilman & Friedman, 1991; Levy, 1988). Nevertheless, their common characteristics have allowed researchers, statisticians and policy-makers to relate to them as members of a single, though heterogeneous, subgroup.

On the whole, the ultra-Orthodox adhere strictly to religious commandments including food laws, prayer, religious studies, familial rituals, welfare activities and the like, and are voluntary segregated from other Orthodox or secular Jews in a number of ways, including residence (living in separate neighbourhoods), dress code (extremely modest for women, specific traditional attire for men), traditions and education. The ultra-Orthodox have a separate educational system, which contributes heavily to the continuation of their strict religious way of life and to the solidarity of this society. Boys and girls study separately from an early age; at the age of three, boys begin their studies at the *heder*, where they embark on a lifelong study of traditional texts and usually master reading skills by the age of five. Girls usually go to kindergarten from the age of three until the age of six, and then to elementary and secondary school. Upon graduation, most of the young women attend a teacher-training seminar. The majority of schools, for both boys and girls, use Hebrew as the language of instruction, while a few use Yiddish (Baumel, 2003; Bogoch, 1999; Goshen-Gottstein, 1984; Shandler, 2000).

### Historical perspective

Most researchers view the communal patterns prevailing in today's ultra-Orthodox communities as the result of two major events, more than a century

apart: the *Haskalah* [Jewish Enlightenment] movement and the Holocaust. The *Haskalah* was an intellectual movement active during the 18th and 19th centuries in European Judaism, which sought to expand the traditional educational curriculum by adding secular studies, European languages and Hebrew for secular purposes. The ultra-Orthodox rejected these attempts, claiming that *Haskalah* followers had succumbed to the lure of modernity and had abandoned genuine Judaism.

The Holocaust of WWII, which largely annihilated European Jewry, is another reason adduced by contemporary ultra-Orthodox groups for their current communal patterns. Not only were six million European Jews murdered during the Holocaust, but most centres of Jewish learning were also destroyed. Contemporary ultra-Orthodox society perceives itself as 'the heir of pre-Enlightenment Judaism' and 'the last remaining ember' of traditional Jewish society. Consequently, it feels compelled to endorse segregation to preserve what it considers the most authentic Jewish values and modes of life (Glinert & Shilhav, 1991; Shilhav & Friedman, 1989).

It is not easy to determine exactly the size of this complex and heterogeneous community as there is no clear-cut definition of 'ultra-Orthodoxy', but assessments range between 5 and 8% of the present Jewish population of Israel (Don-Yehiya, 2005; Grylak, 2002). Resembling the processes that led to the creation of separate communities in the wake of the *Haskalah* movement, present-day ultra-Orthodox segregation is also widely regarded as a reaction to the cultural threat posed by the secular majority. Segregation, however, does not entirely preclude interactions with the surrounding secular society. Just as the various ultra-Orthodox groups overlap geographically with the secular society, both in Israel and in the Diaspora, we also find some form of economic and cultural interchange between these groups and between them and the secular environment. But this interchange is limited in scope and depth, and is approached with distrust and aversion by most ultra-Orthodox educators (Glinert & Shilhav, 1991; Shilhav & Friedman, 1989). This community invests great effort in avoiding such contacts, presuming it thereby minimises the potential for evoking positive emotions towards the secular group. As a more positive perception of the 'outside' could induce individuals to leave, these contacts are not in the community's best interest (see also Yadgar, 2003, on indications of devaluation of the other as a tool for strengthening one's own collective identity; and Baumel, 2003 of creating fences around it).

### **The linguistic aspect**

Language plays an interesting role in this voluntary segregation, and in this paper we address the ultra-Orthodox community as a linguistic minority. Most ultra-Orthodox in Israel do use modern Israeli Hebrew as their primary language of communication. This is equivalent to their mastery of English in the USA or French in Belgium, where they live as minority groups and view these languages as the lingua franca of their external reality, aware of their importance for their physical survival and social mobility (Isaacs, 1999a; Mitchell, 1998). All ultra-Orthodox groups pray and study religious texts in

what they call *Loshn Koydesh*, the 'Holy Tongue', which is essentially Talmudic Hebrew interspersed with varying amounts of Aramaic, and is basically (although not exclusively) a written language (Baumel, 2003; Ben Rafael, 1994; Shandler, 2000). Nevertheless, some of the more extreme subgroups use Yiddish as their primary language of communication and relate to Hebrew, one of Israel's official languages, as a holy tongue to be restricted for prayer and for the study of traditional texts (Baumel, 2003; Fishman, 1991; Isaacs, 1999a, 1999b).

The wider meaning of this linguistic choice should be placed in a historical context. The Zionist endeavour that culminated in the creation of the State of Israel involved a revolutionary linguistic dimension: the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language. Until the destruction of the First Temple (587 BC), Jews living in the Land of Israel had spoken mainly Hebrew. The impact of Aramaic increased during the Babylonian exile and, following the Jewish exile after the Roman destruction of the Second Temple (70 AD), Hebrew lost its function as a vernacular and was mainly reserved for literary-religious usage. In most Jewish communities around the world, Hebrew was considered 'the Holy Tongue', while the local language or one of the several so-called Judeo languages (based on local languages, and on Hebrew) developed in the Diaspora served for day-to-day communication. The revival of spoken Hebrew as a cornerstone of the Zionist enterprise during the late 19th and 20th centuries was accompanied by a determined campaign to eliminate the use of other languages, and particularly Yiddish, in daily communication. Hebrew thus became one of the main factors in the efforts to weld together Jews arriving from many lands. The newly established State of Israel adopted a melting pot policy concerning this immigration, and vast efforts were invested in ensuring everyone learned Hebrew (Ben Rafael, 1994; Ravid, 1995).

The Hebrew revival was presented as symbolising the battle between Zionism, or the 'new Judaism', and the traditional religious way of life in the Diaspora. Hebrew was associated with Israel as an independent state, with modernity, with a new way of living, while Yiddish was associated with the opposite: 'Yiddish . . . evoked images of the religious ghetto Jew, odious to the Zionists who promoted the image of a newly "liberated", secular, Hebrew-speaking *homo hebraicus*' (Mitchell, 1998: 192; see also Glinert, 1993; Shandler, 2000; Yadgar, 2003). During the struggle waged in the early 20th century to agree on an official language for the evolving society (known as 'the linguistic war'), Yiddish was targeted as the bitterest foe, *the* icon of all that was negative in the Diaspora. Yiddish, then, becomes synonymous with the premodern, traditional Diaspora Jew. Yet, whereas Zionists view this simplistic image as negative, the ultra-Orthodox groups embrace it as positive for the very same reasons. Consequently, parts of this community are bilingual, using Yiddish for daily communication and Hebrew, or *Loshn Koydesh*, for religious studies and prayer.

## Narrative Analysis

The present study examines written narratives produced by ultra-Orthodox school girls. Narrative is a genre with strong theoretical and empirical support

in discourse (Labov, 1972; Longacre, 1996) and developmental research (Berman & Slobin, 1994; Hickmann, 2003). In general, narratives focus on people, their actions and motivations, and express the unfolding of events in a temporal framework (Berman & Slobin, 1994). Typically, narratives open with a background, contain a hierarchy created by the high point in the narrative, and often end in a coda.

In an attempt to define a line or continuum of means used for rhetorical distancing or de-personalisation, Berman *et al.* (2002) define *discourse stance* along three related dimensions: *orientation* – sender, text, recipient; *attitude* – epistemic, deontic, affective; and *generality* – of reference and quantification. Underlying this approach is the assumption that discourse stance reflects a key facet of human discourse in general: the fact that any state of affairs in the worlds of fact or fantasy can be described in multiple ways. Against this background, the personal-experience narratives of the type discussed in this study are typically constructed from a direct, immediate, concrete and highly personalised perspective (Berman, 2005). They have a *sender* orientation that is subjective, take the writer as their deictic centre, and tend to be affective or prescriptive in attitude, and specific in reference, reflecting the personal involvement of writers in the events and ideas they have experienced or thought about. Their *attitude* is deontic, entailing a judgmental or evaluative viewpoint; and also *affective*, concerning the writer's emotions (desire, anger, grief, etc.) with respect to a given state of affairs. *Generality* relates to how relatively general or specific is the reference to people, places and times mentioned in the text. All these aspects of discourse stance find interesting expression in the current study.

### Information-units

Ravid and Berman (2006) propose that narrative information in narratives is divided into *information-units*, each of which conveys novel narrative information, related to actions and events that make up a story, the circumstances surrounding them, and how these are interpreted by narrators. The ratio of narrative information and ancillary information in narratives indicates to what extent their content is informative and hence lexically and syntactically dense and complex. Ravid and Berman distinguish three classes of narrative information that constitute a narrative text: *eventive information*, which represents the chain of events that define the story's plotline (Berman, 1997); *descriptive information*, which refers to facts rather than events, the states of affairs or circumstances (time, place and motivations), providing additional information on the events that make up the story. Descriptives are linked to events by non-temporal contingencies (e.g. cause, purpose, concession). Another type of descriptive material consists of non-sequential temporal relations that lie outside the sequence of eventives that make up the plotline; specifically – simultaneity, where events co-occur in time, and retrospection, relating to situations or events that occurred prior to the story; finally, *interpretive information* (or 'attitudinals'), which is closest to canonic notions of narrative evaluation (Labov, 1972; Segal, 2001). It expresses narrators' attitudes and perspectives on events and circumstances, and their subjective

commentary on the inner states and reactions that the narrator attributes to participants in the events. Interpretives, like descriptives, are typically embedded in stative rather than dynamic terms, but unlike descriptives, they are inferential or subjectively attitudinal rather than objectively factual.

Analysis of information-units in children's and adolescents' narratives highlights two facets of their narratives. First, the amount of narrative information versus ancillary information in their texts, which is an indicator of denser informative content and hence denser and more complex linguistic expression (Ravid, 2004). Second, the amount of interpretive units versus eventive and descriptive material is an indicator of the developmental shift from 'bare bone' to 'fleshed out' stories across adolescence (Ravid & Berman, 2006). This shift relates to general cognitive development – information processing, memory enhancement and executive control (Case, 1985; Flavell *et al.*, 1993; Kluwe & Logan, 2000) and the consolidation of literacy, coupled with gaining wider horizons and more mature perceptions in the moral and social domains (Kohlberg, 1984; Light & Littleton, 1999; Selman, 1980).

### Content-based analysis

Narratives can be analysed from a content point of view as well. McManamey (2001) elaborated on the perspective of *social capital*, citing Halifan (1920), who argued that social capital 'refers to those tangible assets that count for most in the daily lives of people: namely good will, fellowship, sympathy and social intercourse among individuals and families who make up a social unit' (McManamey, 2001: 78). Along the years, the concept has been expanded, relating to different approaches including anthropology (resting on the notion that humans have natural association instincts), sociology (centring on literature describing social norms, motivation, social organisations and networks of civil engagement), economy (based on the assumption that people will maximise their personal utility and draw on social capital resources through interactions with other people) and politics (based on the emphasis on the role of institutions and political norms affecting human behaviour) (OECD, 2001). Various researchers agree that there is a decline in social capital, in terms of sense of community, or centrality of communal life, at least in Western countries (Cox, 1995; Putnam, 2000).

Regarding content analysis, McManamey (2001) emphasised several aspects including *bonding* – discourse elements that indicate solidarity with family and community (see also, OECD, 2001); *affect* – related to terms indicating highly emotional activities and states; and aspects that refer to the writer's stance, including items indicating rigid and *dogmatic thinking* expressed in the text. The latter was elaborated especially by Ertel (1985), who identified categories indicating 'cognitive closure' and open-mindedness. He selected six categories of lexemes, which had common semantic meaning and seemed to represent dogmatism, including frequency (*always, forever*), quantity (*all, complete, none*), degree (*absolutely, totally*), certainty (*certainly, surely*), exclusion (*only, nothing-but*) and necessity (*must, impossible*). Ertel and his followers tested the validity of dogmatism analysis by applying it to various contexts. Hence, they found that extremist political parties use more close-minded

words and phrases in public speeches and written material; dogmatic words were found to be more frequent among utopian than among critical philosophers, and abrupt deviations in the use of dogmatic words and phrases were noticed in people suffering psychotic episodes, such as Van Gogh or Strindberg. This issue was further elaborated by McKenny (2003), who used the concept of dogmatism descriptively, as a measurable dimension of text shown by writers. McKenny claims that, in general, closed-minded writers are expected to use more dogmatic words in order to communicate exaggerated ideas, while open-minded writers are expected to prefer words that express less certainty, such as sometimes, partly, maybe, need not, and the like.

Furthermore, an ideological commitment to a single doctrine of thought, or narrow interpretation of ways of thought that contradict a certain ideology, prompt dogmatism and isolationism (Lu, 1999). Plamper (2001) analysed Soviet censorship in the 1930s, describing it as obsessed with reducing signs to a single meaning, abolishing ambiguity. He claims that censorship can be seen as one of the many practices of cultural regulation, a broadly defined rubric that is also meant to accommodate market forces from the capitalist West. Plamper views this tendency as part of what Bourdieu has called the 'unification of the linguistic market', referring to a process whereby different linguistic fields are collapsed into one, where signs, words or phrases have the same meaning for all members of a community. By the same token, researchers from various disciplines have analysed the concept of ambiguity-avoidance, pointing to relationships between ambiguity and anxiety (Leichsenring & Meyer, 1994), ambiguity-avoidance and an effort to secure agreement in views (Richardson, 2001), or as a means of showing off knowledge (Keren & Gerritsen, 1999).

Narrative analysis among bilinguals has been a subject of extensive research (e.g. Berman, 1999; Kupersmitt & Berman, 2001; Rabukhin, 2002). Yet few studies to date have engaged in an empirical investigation of the languages spoken and written by bilinguals who are part of the ultra-Orthodox population in Israel. There are even fewer studies taking a developmental psycholinguistic perspective on this topic. The aim of the present study is to analyse Hebrew narratives produced in writing by Yiddish–Hebrew bilingual ultra-Orthodox girls from both developmental and sociocultural perspectives, exploring linguistic as well as content aspects characterising their written narratives.<sup>1</sup>

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The sample consisted of 56 ultra-Orthodox girls for whom Yiddish is the first language and Hebrew the second (information about their linguistic background was collected from the school principal), including 20 girls aged 9–10 (4th graders) and 36 girls aged 12–13 (7th graders). All the girls live in several ultra-Orthodox neighbourhoods in the centre of Jerusalem, and come from a variety of religious streams. At school, Yiddish is the language of

instruction of all curriculum studies, and Hebrew is studied only in a religious context, as a holy tongue.

### Procedure

All participants were asked to write a story in Hebrew about a good thing that had happened to them,<sup>2</sup> which is not a regular part of their studies. The stories were written during school hours. Instructions and clarifications, when needed, were given by the experimenter in Hebrew. It bears emphasising that the experimenter is not part of this community, which was one reason why entering the school to conduct this study required the approval of several individuals, including the rabbi of the school, the school principal and the curricular inspector.

### Results

Top-down analysis included in this study the analysis of information-units (IU) – eventives, descriptives and interpretives as well as global text structure in terms of narrative type and content analysis.

#### Information-units analysis

Analysis of IU reveals significantly more IUs in general in the 7th grade ( $M = 19.28$ ,  $sd = 8.65$ ) than in the 4th grade ( $M = 7.50$ ,  $sd = 6.55$ ;  $t_{54} = 5.30$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). In order to examine the ratio of eventives, descriptives and interpretives and the differences between the grade levels regarding specific IUs, we preformed a series of *t*-tests for independent samples for each IU per clause by grade. As presented in Table 1, there were more eventives than descriptives, and more descriptives than interpretives in each grade level. A two-way ANOVA by grade level and IU category revealed significant differences ( $F_{2,106} = 52.37$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ); there were more eventives ( $M = 58.34$ ) than descriptives ( $M = 36.74$ ) and both were higher than interpretives ( $M = 4.92$ ). Also, there were significantly more interpretives in the 7th grade than in the 4th grade.

**Table 1** Mean percentages of eventives, descriptives and interpretives out of total amount of IUs

	4th grade (n=20)		7th grade (n=36)		df	t value
	M	sd	M	sd		
Eventives	61.60	27.43	55.08	23.95	53	0.91
Descriptives	38.19	27.40	35.30	19.91	53	0.45
Interpretives	0.21	0.92	9.62	18.28	35.3	3.08**

\*\* $p < 0.01$

### Narrative types

Initial analysis of the narratives revealed two major text types: script-like reports and narratives. A script is a set of expectations a narrator has about routine events, which is organised in a temporal–causal sequence of actions (Ross & Berg, 1990). *Scripts* emerge typically earlier than narratives in child language development (Berman, 1995; Katzenberger, 1994; Nelson, 1986). In this context, they are expressed as a personal viewpoint, with the speaker as the central figure, but they lack the global structure of the narrative. *Narratives* were further divided into three subtypes: canonic narratives, eventive narratives (which carry elements from both script-like reports and canonic narratives) and traditional story retellings (telling a miraculous story about righteous rabbis or horror stories about communities threatened by pogroms) (see the Appendix for examples). Table 2 presents the distribution of the text types by grade levels. Chi-square analysis indicates that the relationship between narrative type and grade is significant ( $\chi^2(3) = 16.76, p < 0.01$ ). For the 4th grade, 55% of the girls produced script-like reports, 30% produced eventive reports, 15% produced canonic narratives and none produced a traditional narrative. For the 7th grade, 13.9% of the girls produced script-like reports, 16.7% produced eventive reports, 50% produced canonic narratives and 19.4% produced a traditional narrative.

Given that not all text types appeared in both grade levels, we could not perform a three-way ANOVA, therefore a two-way ANOVA of IU by narrative type was performed, revealing a tendency for interaction between the two variables ( $F_{2,102} = 2.13; p = 0.06$ ). On the basis of Bonferroni test, we found that overall, eventive reports had on average significantly more eventives than script like reports (70.6 versus 45.3), and that script-like reports had on average significantly more descriptives than eventive reports (46.6 versus 26.6).

In addition, we calculated the average and standard deviations of each category by text type per clause (see Table 3). Analysis revealed that there were significantly more eventives in script-like reports than in traditional retellings ( $F_{3,51} = 2.97; p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 2** Distribution of narrative types by grade

Narrative type	4th grade		7th grade		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Script-like report	11	55	5	13.9	16	28.6
Eventive report	6	30	6	16.7	12	21.4
Canonic narrative	3	15	18	50.0	21	37.5
Traditional narrative	0	0	7	19.4	7	12.5
Total	20	100	36	100	56	100

**Table 3** Mean, standard deviation and *F* value of IUs by text type per clause

	<i>Script-like report</i> (n = 16)		<i>Eventive report</i> (n = 12)		<i>Canonic narrative</i> (n = 21)		<i>Traditional narrative</i> (n = 7)		<i>F</i> <sub>3,51</sub>	<i>Source differ.</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>		
Eventives	0.33	0.28	0.55	0.20	0.54	0.21	0.43	0.15	2.97*	1 < 2,3
Descriptives	0.36	0.35	0.21	0.21	0.27	0.28	0.33	0.34	1.46	
Interpretives	0.11	0.07	0.04	0.02	0.03	0.06	0.003	0.05	1.12	

\**p* < 0.05

### Content analysis

**Table 4** Mean, standard deviation and *F* test of affect, dogmatism and bonding by text type per clause

	<i>Script-like report</i> (n = 16)		<i>Eventive report</i> (n = 12)		<i>Canonic narrative</i> (n = 21)		<i>Traditional narrative</i> (n = 7)		<i>F</i> <sub>3,51</sub>	<i>Source differ.</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>		
Dogmatism	0.15	0.16	0.23	0.19	0.11	0.11	0.08	0.09	1.99	
Affect	0.65	0.44	0.52	0.46	0.48	0.49	0.26	0.34	1.12	
Bonding	1.39	0.89	1.07	0.45	1.29	0.55	1.20	0.39	0.59	

**Table 5** Mean, standard deviations and *t* values of mean number of dogmatism, affect and bonding out of total number of words, by grade

	<i>4th grade</i> (n = 20)		<i>7th grade</i> (n = 36)		<i>df</i>	<i>t-value</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>		
Dogmatism	3.26	4.52	3.54	2.91	54	0.28
Affect	8.27	9.29	14.70	10.01	54	2.36*
Bonding	33.01	15.94	29.59	13.40	54	0.85

Following Berelson (1952), McManamey (2001) and Weber (1990), we conducted content analysis in order to reveal cultural patterns within the group or the community in focus (the ultra-Orthodox in Israel); to reveal the focus of individual, group, institutional or societal attention, and to describe trends in communication content. The research paradigm that was applied to the texts in this study was a content-based analysis (McKenny, 2003) especially adapted for the purposes of studying this kind of population. We examined

the participants' perception of their identity and sociocultural background through three analyses reflecting their values and attitudes: *bonding* – looking into those discourse elements that indicate solidarity with family and community (e.g. plural verbs, words or phrases related to religious life, referring to Israel or Jerusalem, mentioning family members, etc); *affect* – terms indicating highly emotional activities and states (e.g. *happiness, fun, disappointment* or adjectives such as *beautiful, dear, bad* and the like); and *dogmatism* – items indicating formulaic and dogmatic thinking expressed in the text (e.g. *cannot, exactly, immediately, had to, was told, everyone, only*, and so forth). Words indicating bonding, affect and dogmatism in all narratives were counted independently by three judges, reaching a high level of agreement. These were then divided by the total number of words in each narrative to neutralise the effect of text length. Table 4 presents mean frequency of words and phrases according to their categorical content and text type. No differences were found regarding this distribution.

Further analysis was conducted to compare the three content categories according to participants' grade. As presented in Table 5, there are significantly more affect expressions among 7th grade ( $M = 14.70$ ) than among 4th grade ( $M = 8.27$ ) participants, while bonding and dogmatism words and phrases did not differ significantly between grades.

## Discussion

Hebrew narratives of Yiddish–Hebrew, bilingual ultra-Orthodox girls were analysed, both in terms of linguistic complexity, and in terms of content, looking for possible associations between those elements and the wider societal context.

Two interesting findings regarding developmental changes in IUs that emerged in our study set it apart from narrative production in monolingual non-Orthodox Hebrew children and adolescents. First, analysis revealed significantly more IUs in the 7th grade than in the 4th grade, as evidence of greater informative content (and consequently higher lexical and syntactic complexity) among the older girls as compared with the younger ones. The baseline study reported in Ravid and Berman (2006) did not find such age-related differences. Rather, the crucial difference in that study was found between the spoken and written modalities rather than among age groups. Thus, all participants (4th, 7th and 11th graders, as well as the adults) had more IUs in their written than in their spoken narratives, and there was no difference in this respect between 4th and 7th grade. The finding of the current study that informative density in the written narratives produced by the ultra-Orthodox girls increased with age and schooling may be related to their greater familiarity with the narrative genre and to a growing ability to express themselves in Hebrew, their second language. This increase may be due, on the one hand, to a greater reverence for the written text and a more cautious approach to conveying information through writing than those revealed in the secular baseline population; on the other hand, it may reflect a diminishing reliance on the formulaic, sparse, script-like format found among the 4th grade ultra-Orthodox girls.

The general distribution of eventive, descriptive and interpretive units is similar to that reported by Ravid and Berman (2006) in the younger age groups: eventives constitute the backbone of the narratives, while descriptives, and to a lesser extent interpretives, flesh out the narrative to provide a more well rounded text. However, an interesting finding that again deviates from the baseline study is that the proportion of interpretive IUs increases significantly from 4th to 7th grade among the ultra-Orthodox participants. Examples of interpretives found in the 7th grade are such expressions as: 'I felt that now I have to be more serious and not act like a little girl'; 'It was out of excitement'; 'I felt how I admire the girls and the secretaries'; '[I prayed that] I would have great success with my studies'; 'How God looked after him!'; 'Moving to a new school was hard for her'; and so forth. In the secular baseline population, this shift typically takes place later, between 7th and 11th grades.

The difference between the two populations could be explained from two separate perspectives or from a combination of both. Girls could be more oriented than boys towards an interpretation of the protagonists' internal states, a distinction that was not investigated in the baseline study. As the baseline population included both genders, developmental change might be more pronounced in the ultra-Orthodox population, which included only girls. It could also result from the subjective *sender* orientation typical of this population described in the introduction, which takes the writer as its deictic centre and tends to be affective in attitude, reflecting their personal involvement in the events (Berman, 2005). The earlier emergence of interpretive IUs may be grounded in the cultural background of our participants, which encourages solidarity and bonding among themselves, their community and families, and may have fine-tuned them towards explicit expression of subjective attitudes and perspectives. Ultra-Orthodox culture could also encourage overt religious evaluation of experiences, which is conveyed in the relatively high frequency of interpretive IUs at a rather early age.

Differences found between narrative types strengthen our division between those types and contribute interesting information about the nature of different sub-genres of narration. Thus, we found differences in IU distribution between eventive reports, script-like reports and traditional retellings, which may deepen the categorisation that exists at present in this field. Traditional story retellings may be more interpretive in their nature, while eventive reports are more descriptive. This finding may be due to the cultural segregation of the ultra-Orthodox girls and the type of stories they are familiar with, unlike secular and Orthodox Israelis who are exposed to stories from a broad array of genres from early childhood (Aram, 2002) as well as to narratives in movies, television programmes and plays. Many of these are Hebrew translations of well known stories typical of secular Western culture. Children are also encouraged to tell stories on any topic and to discuss them in kindergarten and school. Topics of children's stories vary from legends to social and family conflicts. By the age of five, Hebrew-speaking children from a monolingual background are able to tell a well formed personal-experience spoken story (Berman & Slobin, 1994), and by 4th grade they also do so in writing (Berman & Verhoeven, 2002). The ultra-Orthodox participants, in contrast, are extremely restricted in access to narratives, encouraging members

of the community to read or listen mainly to traditional stories and tales of righteous rabbis and of children's conformist behaviour within the ultra-Orthodox context. Moreover, story writing, in Hebrew or Yiddish, is not a regular activity encouraged in the school we investigated and is not part of the curriculum. Against this background, it is clear that the story types revealed in this study emerge from the relative novelty of story writing and lack of familiarity with the genre on the one hand, and exposure to traditional stories of miracle-making in religious contexts on the other. This, however, calls for further research, in order to deepen our understanding of various narrative types as governed by differential cultural setting.

Our content analysis revealed that most narratives were rather collectivist in their nature, with most of them describing events related to their family, school, class or the wider community. Of the 56 narratives, only 5 were merely personal in their content, with no direct indication of family, school, religion or rituals. In addition, we identified narratives that can fit the criteria of traditional narrative type, which is unique to this group and does not appear in the research literature (see the Appendix). We also explored the issues of affect, bonding and dogmatism from a social-capital perspective, revealing an interesting interassociation between the three angles. Thus, most affect expressions (which were mostly positive) were associated with the family and the community and, together with other markers, indicated strong bonding. Also, dogmatism was usually associated with the family, the community and the broader cultural context of being ultra-Orthodox. For example, 'I *had to* go to my grandma'; 'I prayed that I could fast during *all* the fasts'; 'Everybody remembered how to say the blessings'; 'The *only* solution is praying'; or, with regard to her turning 12, a significant age in Judaism for girls (*Bat Mitzvah*) 'I felt I *need* to be more serious, and *not behave* like a little girl'. These narratives reflect then that, in contrast with various recent studies (Cox, 1995; Putnam, 2000), it appears that members of this community *do* rely heavily on social capital assets.

These findings can be viewed as associated with the wider conceptual framework of language and thought, or ideology – language is the means through which we are socialised into our culture, and through language the cultural heritage is received, reshaped and bequeathed to the following generations. In this context, we can view the use of Yiddish and Hebrew as associated with, reflecting and sometimes creating identity issues. In other words, language is not only a means of communication but also a medium of symbolic value, especially when it turns into a vehicle for the transfer of ideology, as in this case. This issue can also be viewed from a discursive psychological approach, which directs attention towards the way that the notion of community is actually used by members in order to 'construct versions of the collectivities in which we live' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 137; and see also Colombo & Senatore, 2005). Accordingly, knowledge is inherently constructed by social processes or by communal practices. The same line of thought is reflected in the writings of Burr (1995), who elaborated on the Whorfian notion that people are born into a world where the conceptual frameworks and categories used by the people in their culture already exist, reproduced day after day by everyone who shares the culture and the language. In other words, the way people think is strongly related to the language they use.

If we explore this argumentation in the context of the ultra-Orthodox community, as a segregated and highly ideological group, this community invests a great deal of effort in building and maintaining barriers between themselves and the secular majority, including dress, geographical separation, extreme devotion to traditional Jewish customs and so forth. The specific group explored in this study segregates itself also in terms of language, because they study in Yiddish, and in principle use Hebrew only for holy purposes. Therefore, it is not surprising to find a rather high frequency of words that indicate strong bonding with the family and the community, words that reflect dogmatism and ambiguity-avoidance. Dogmatism encourages loyalty to the ingroup and rejects outflow of members to the threatening secular majority, similar to what was found to be rather prevalent among other communities or regimes that are highly ideological and close at the same time (just for comparison see, for example, Lu, 1999; Plamper, 2001). The language they use may reveal a deeper level of thought and belief. Using a language marked by high levels of bonding with the community, dogmatism and ambiguity-avoidance could have a strong effect on the community members' thoughts and emotions and, in turn, create, strengthen or maintain further loyalty to the group and the family, especially in religiously or ideologically driven societies such as the one described in this study. Further research is needed to explore this suggestion, using additional and alternative methods of data elicitation and analysis such as expository texts, oral narratives and script production, text comprehension, and systematic structured tasks, as well as comparisons between narratives in Hebrew and Yiddish.

The fact that we analysed narratives of *girls* adds another interesting angle to the discussion. In fact, we were interested in analysing narratives of boys as well. However, due to the difficulties we had to surmount in order to enter the school in the first place, we decided to limit ourselves to a population of girls because female experimenters might have been met with suspicion at a boys' school. As noted, boys also begin attending the formal educational system earlier than girls (from the age of three), including learning how to read and write in both languages. This, of course, would create a very different sample than most, if not all, samples explored in other studies of narrative analysis. Having only a female sample also allowed us to gain insight into the role of women in terms of language usage and language maintenance, in view of the special role of women in this society. Although this is a typically traditional community in terms of gender roles, early (and usually arranged) marriages, expectations from women to have many children and the like, women are still very dominant in the household. Often, they are expected to be the main breadwinners, freeing their husbands from financial responsibilities that could take them away from holy studies (Friedman, 1999; Goshen-Gottstein, 1984; Levy, 1988). In fact, when we asked the head teacher whether the girls should master Modern Hebrew, which is not taught at school, she replied: 'Of course; they will have to support their family financially and Hebrew is a "must".' In many senses, ultra-Orthodox women are agents of change – socially, economically, culturally and also linguistically (on this issue, see more in Blumen, 2002), and as such constitute an interesting target group for analysis. In other words, through the narrative analysis of these girls we might learn

not only about their current linguistic reality but also about hidden agendas related to language in this community. Further research exploring similar issues with boys or with older participants could shed light on those issues.

Another interesting perspective relates to the position of Hebrew in the world of our participants. The narratives we analysed were in Hebrew, which was viewed as their second language. Yet, although their spoken language is mainly Yiddish, both in the family and in school, and in many senses Hebrew serves as a typical second language, there are unique features to this language in their world. The language in which they pray, in which the Bible is written and studied, is Hebrew. True, not Modern Hebrew, the language spoken by the Israeli majority, but the holy tongue, *Loshn Koydesh*. In other words, the narratives that were analysed were written in a second or foreign language, but this is still not a typical second- or foreign-language context. Yiddish is a Judeo-language, which includes a large proportion of Hebrew words; Yiddish and Hebrew share the same orthography and, in fact, Yiddish has a significant role in the maintenance and revival of Hebrew as a modern, spoken language (Ravid, 1995). The narratives, then, are written in a language that partially overlaps a holy, frequently used language, especially in the written mode. A language that the girls are exposed to in spiritual and holy contexts may thus evoke specific emotions, and therefore specific words. The high frequency of positive affect related to family and community, the frequent indications of bonding with the family and the community, and the rather highly dogmatised narratives, might be a result not only of communal life, or even of ideological indoctrination, but also of the specific language the girls used. Although the girls have not been educated in Modern Hebrew and its use for daily communication is discouraged, it is plausible to assume that they are still exposed to it as the language of the street, of officialdom, and at times even of their teachers. Future research analysing narratives by these girls written in English, for example, which is a more typical foreign language, may contribute to a deeper understanding of this issue.

To conclude, via narrative analysis of girls from the ultra-Orthodox community, we were able to learn about their linguistic, social and psychological worlds. As the first study of this kind conducted with this population, the results represent a significant contribution not only to the understanding of this community but also of segregated minorities in general, offering insights into the remarkable effect of language on each one of us in terms of our internal worlds and of the rich and varied ways in which it is expressed.

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### Notes

1. We also collected narratives in Yiddish from the same participants, which were written at a later stage, and we are now waiting for establishment of tools for narrative analysis in Yiddish, from a developmental perspective (see for example,

- the new institute Yeled V'Yalda, Multilingual Development and Education Research, directed by Isabelle Barriere).
2. In most studies that analyse narratives from a developmental perspective, the request is to write about a conflict. In this study, at the request of the school authorities, we adjusted the instruction and asked the girls to write about a good thing – not merely a technical change, but rather a reflection of deeper layers of this community's values in general.

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## Appendix: Examples of Written Texts

### Script-like text – 4th grade

Last week I went to my neighbor's Brith [circumcision] ceremony, and the baby was very cute, and it was all very happy. And it was a very beautiful hall.

### Canonic narrative – 4th grade

I got a balloon from grandma. Today I am very happy. Why, everybody asks me why. I start to tell everybody. Today I have a birthday and I am going to my granny also for my birthday. And in an hour I am going to my granny.

Time passed, and I had to go to granny. I was very very happy. And I went and I was happy \*to granny. And when I reached granny's she told me 'mazal-tov' and gave me a balloon. I took it, I kept it, I played with it, and I said goodbye to granny and also thank you for the balloon and I went home with mommy.

I brought it to everybody and everybody played with it till the balloon burst.

**Traditional story retelling – 7th grade**

Midnight. The whole city is fast \*asleep. Only one light is still on at the edge of the city. There sits Rabbi Mendel deep in his thoughts. Tomorrow is the last date to pay the money for his son's Brith [circumcision ceremony] and he has no dime \*to his soul. He has walked all day from house to house from door to door and to no avail. What will he do? First thing in the morning there was a weak knock on the door. Rabbi Mendel got up and went to open. And here is one of the \*people of the charity-givers and \*holding in his hand a bag with money and starts to tell that yesterday he went walking and found a bag with money and asked his Rabbi what to do. The Rabbi told him to give it to a man in need. And I decided to bring it to you. Rabbi Mendel took \*with his face \*shining with happiness and calls 'blessed be the good Lord'. How God looked after him!

\*indicates a spelling or grammar error in the original text.