

Sounds of Modern Orthodoxy: The Language of Talmud Study

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The speaking of language is...a form of life.
LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

Three principles underlie the logic of what follows in this paper. First, human culture and language are in an inherent dialectical relationship with each other. As Peter Berger writes: ‘Men invent a language and then find that its logic imposes itself upon them’ (Berger 1970: 374). Second, religious outlook is woven into that relationship. Thus, according to Max Weinreich, ‘variations in religion may be said to occasion some separateness in culture which, in turn, leaves its mark in the form of language differences’ (1980: 392). The third principle is drawn from the work of Erving Goffman. It maintains that the use of language in human interaction provides ‘evidence to suggest a functional relationship between the structure of the self and the structure of spoken interaction’ (1967: 36).

Building upon these principles, this paper examines the language of those who share the religious, cultural, and personal outlook of modern American Orthodox Judaism. As I have suggested elsewhere (Heilman 1976), these people shift between the modern, secular, cosmopolitan world and the Orthodox, religious, parochial one. Since they ease their alternation by compartmentalizations and reinterpretations or conceptual compromises, one would accordingly expect their language use to echo and abet this movement. This paper aims to demonstrate that such indeed is the case, to elucidate the process, and, in so doing, to shed further light upon the character of American modern Orthodoxy.

THE RESEARCH SETTING

Although there are various social contexts of modern Orthodox life which might yield the necessary information, one in particular is most revealing: the modern

Orthodox Talmud class. Here, in a relatively intimate atmosphere, the time-honored ideas and discussions of the Talmud are translated – both linguistically and conceptually – into the vernacular. In the process, one may discover the cultural and religious influences upon those who are engaged in the study.

In order to understand the social factors in language selection and use, I spent several years as a participant observer in a Talmud class held one evening a week in a suburban, New York, modern Orthodox synagogue. Over the years the number of participants was between eight and ten men, ranging in age from the early thirties (the largest number) to the seventies. These men neatly fit the model of cosmopolitan-parochial, modern Orthodox Jew; they hold strong attachments to the parochial world of Orthodoxy while pursuing a course of life which weds them to the modern American, cosmopolitan milieu. The very attempt to live an Orthodox life while living in a community with few Orthodox institutions and relatively few Orthodox Jews is some indication of the marginal character of their existence. Moreover, while all have had an extensive Jewish education, most have had a college education or beyond, further indicating an immersion in the world outside the Jewish one. Of the ten regular students, three are physicians, one is a businessman, one a shopkeeper, one an art teacher in the public schools, one is in real estate, one a dentist, one a pensioner, and I am an academic. The rabbi who leads the class was ordained by a traditional Orthodox seminary and comes from a family replete with rabbis. Significantly, he also holds a doctorate in education from a major American university, a fact stressed in his title, Rabbi, Doctor. . . . Finally, although the rabbi and four of the students are immigrants, they, like the other class members, see themselves as *American* Jews for whom English is the accepted language of everyday speech.

I occasionally recorded the audio portion of the class sessions on a small cassette tape recorder. Ironically, this practice was instituted by another student who wanted the tapes to help him review the class material at home. I later made use of his tapes. By the time I began to record, the presence of a tape recorder was no longer an obtrusive element in the setting.

The tapes enabled me to examine more closely the shifts in the language of Talmud study: the shifts between the language of the text and translation and between the speech associated with study and the inevitable digressions occurring during a typical class (cf. Heilman 1976: 233–237). The discussion below grows in large measure out of what the tapes revealed, and I shall later quote from them at length.

THE TALMUD AND THE JEWS

The Talmud, or as it is alternately called *gemore*¹ or *shas*, is regularly studied as

1. The orthography used throughout these pages is one that has been standard since 1936. Estab-

lished in the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research and accepted by the Library of Congress, this

part of the ritual and religious life of all Orthodox Jews. 'Without mastery of Talmud, one must be considered as having received an elementary education at best since it is only via the Talmud that one is introduced to the complexities of Orthodox Jewish law and its regulation of every aspect of individual and group life' (Fishman 1965a: 58). '*Lernen*' Jewish study, is the eternal preoccupation which the Orthodox Jews have had with the Jewish book in general and the Talmud in particular. As Max Weinreich puts it, '*lernen* is a lifelong activity. . . And the maximum of *lernen* is desirable' (1980: 440, 452). So much so has the study of Talmud become a part of Jewish life that the term *derekh hashas*, literally 'the way of the Talmud', was used by Jews for generations to designate their way of life. In this way of life, no sphere of existence was considered beyond the boundary of religion. There were details but no trifles; and hence nothing was irrelevant to Talmudic concern.

The Talmud, a compilation of divinely revealed and rabbinically debated 'Oral Law' transmitted over generations, demands unending study for reasons logical and theological. In the first case, one needs to repeat the words of Talmud to know details of the law in order to act properly. In the second case, as a divinely inspired document, the Talmud is subject to the sacred repetition and study that all such books are endowed with in Judaism. For both these reasons, the Talmud became a document whose every word and idea, however difficult they might be, must be understood. In the final analysis such understanding demands continual study, but in any case it demands simple translation.

The translation of divine precepts into tractates of law resulted in a document whose language is a combination of tongues and replete with loanwords. The *mishna*, the nucleus of the Talmud, was redacted and arranged around the year 200 C.E. It contains the legal codification of the Oral Law and is essentially in Hebrew. The *gemore*, consisting of discussions and elaborations of the *mishna* by the rabbis who lived in Israel and Babylonia between the third and sixth centuries, is divided into two sections – *halakha* (law) and *aggadetta* (lore). In the Babylonian Talmud, which is longer and more influential in the tradition, the text is in Hebrew and Aramaic, the vernacular among the Babylonian Jews. It also contains loanwords from Greek, although these are all transliterated into Hebrew characters. The nearly mandatory commentaries of Rashi, the eminent French-Jewish exegete, and the Tosafot, his kin and disciples, added between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, are in Hebrew and Aramaic. They also contain elements of the vernacular of the day, primarily Loez – a sort of proto-Yiddish – and Old French.

Around the sixteenth century, Yiddish became the accepted language of

orthography is elaborated upon in Uriel Weinreich's *Yiddish Dictionary*. All letters are sounded. Special note should be made of 'ey' which is sounded like *ey* in 'grey', 'ay' which is sounded like

i in 'fine', and 'kh' like *ch* in 'Bach'. Although standard only for Yiddish, I have used it for all words using Hebrew letters.

Talmudic discussion and legal disputation among the Ashkenazim, Jews of central and Western Europe whose descendants centuries later would settle in America in the greatest numbers (M. Weinreich 1980: Mark 1954). For the next four centuries, Yiddish remained the primary language of Talmud study. In the twentieth century, when even the Orthodox Jews learned to speak English in America and Hebrew in Israel, the latter languages have begun to supplant Yiddish as the dominant languages of Talmud study.

One might think that the sixteenth century use of Yiddish represented a precedent-setting effort to translate the language of the Talmud into a vernacular all could comprehend – a necessary feature for a people who saw study as an eternal religious and ritual responsibility. However, a closer examination reveals that from its very beginnings the ‘Oral Law’, which forms the basis of Talmud, incorporated within it the vernacular. Thus, when the Jewish people were in Israel, as they were in Mishnaic times, the text was predominantly Hebrew. When they were exiled to Babylonia, the language of study and debate, as captured in the *gemore* text, became Aramaic – although Hebrew, the ‘holy tongue’ remained in secondary use. When Jews moved to Europe, Yiddish, a distinct language evolving out of the interference between Hebrew and the indigenous languages and dialects of the region – Loez and Old French, among the most prominent – became the dominant language of Talmud study. Although the Hebrew and Aramaic of the written text remained part of the *lernen* in the form of a recitation, increasingly the latter was followed with a Yiddish translation and discussion. Those Jews who sought and learned to speak in the non-Jewish languages of the area (e.g. German, French, Polish, and Russian) were also ones who generally ceased Talmud study as they ceased all active association with religious matters, and thus these languages generally did not become integrated into the study process except as loanwords which made their way into Yiddish.

Today, in America and in Israel, English and Hebrew (once again), the new vernaculars of a growing number of Jews involved in the study of Talmud, have begun to take greater roles in *lernen* (Fishman 1965a: 59). Yet, Talmud students still recite the Hebrew and Aramaic, while Yiddish phrases, loanwords, syntax, inflection, and intonation become part of the English² in ways that are elucidated below.

Thus both the history of the Talmud’s evolution and its study manifest a kind of ‘supplementary syncretism’, wherein prior linguistic elements are incorporated into the current mode (Burger 1966: 103–115). The effect, however, is such that both the prior as well as the contemporary linguistic elements are modified in the process.

2. Although there is some evidence to suggest that among those who study Talmud in Hebrew the same residual influence of Yiddish obtains, the

present discussion is based upon research among predominantly English speakers and will therefore concentrate upon them.

Generally, the syncretism has come about through constant translation which – after an oral recitation (more precisely, cantillation) of the text – is the first step of *lernen*. Translation, however, is more than the simple replacement of one word or phrase in one language for its equivalent in another. It requires a penetration of the original ‘verbal envelope’ of the message and a repacking of it in terms that make sense in another *communication system* (Vološinov 1971: 165). This may call not only for a *semantic extension of meaning*, wherein new interpretations are added to the original meaning of a lexical unit, but also *conceptual transformation*, wherein an ideal meaningful in one culture and expressed through its language is supplanted by a similar but not identical idea in another culture simply because the latter has no exact lexical parallel to the former. In the case of Talmud study in English translation has often meant extending and transforming a ‘meaning directly related to Jewishness to another related to the world in general’ (Weinreich 1980: 494).

Where the material evokes an emotional charge, translation may also require an *expressive repetition*, wherein the speaker tries to communicate the original emotion through intonational patterns which make sense to those who need the translation. Such intonation constitutes ‘a shade of meaning added to or superimposed upon . . . intrinsic lexical meaning’ (Pike 1947: 21). Intonation contours, are, however, indigenous to each language and the culture of its users. Consequently, because ‘no language uses a pure monotone’, translation often raises intonational difficulties as well (Pike 1947: 20).

As Dorothy Henderson, in her sociological examination of language, sums it all up: ‘It is clearly the case that all cultures or subcultures are realized through communication forms which contain their own, unique, imaginative and aesthetic possibilities’ (Henderson 1970). This linguistic distinctiveness creates complex problems for translators, and especially amateur metaphrasts like most Talmud students, who must switch from one language and intonation contour to another or several others.

At the same time, however, these very problems of language choice, use, and intonation embedded in the process of *lernen* serve as a rich source of sociological and psychological information about the speaker and his linguistic community. All communities provide their members with a set of linguistic resources and a lexical and intonational repertoire (which an outsider may discover over time as he is exposed to speakers from the same group). Moreover, ‘language is both the foundation and instrumentality of the social construction of reality’ (Berger 1970: 376). Hence, the choices a speaker makes in any given speech situation reveal a great deal about the group with which he identifies himself and about the speaker himself. His ultimate choices, from the range of open alternatives, can be used as a behavioral index of the speaker’s group preferences, except in the case of the speaker – immigrant or neophyte of one sort or another – who involuntarily utilizes old forms of communication because he is incapable of

carrying on in the new ones he would otherwise choose. Normally, however, each language and intonational choice identifies the speaker with a particular group to which he belongs or may wish to belong and from which he seeks acceptance (Fishman 1965b: 68).

Not only does speech reveal group preference and reference, it also discloses the speaker's 'state of mind', which is made up of 'all of the relevant contextual information, linguistic and non-linguistic, that the language user needs when carrying on communicative activity (Yngve 1970: 567). Indeed a person's (or group's) talk over a long period of time 'is a record of the means by which that person [or group] tries to achieve, maintain, relieve, or avoid certain intrapsychic states through the verbal management of his [or its] relations with his [or its] social environment' (Soskin 1963: 229). In terms of the concerns here, the problems of language choice and intonation in Talmud study's translation process study reveal that for the students, in some measure, 'what shapes language... is the preoccupation of their minds' (M. Weinreich 1968: 398, n.25).

In the modern Orthodox Talmud class, the language use illustrates the particular preoccupation of this group: its cosmopolitan parochialism, or cultural dualism. Perhaps more boldly than in any other linguistic situation, the class's language intonation contour, syntax, and translation process reveal the way in which the speakers have come to terms with their Jewishness and their American cosmopolitanism.

LERNEN

As practiced in the class studied, *lernen* consisted of the rabbi's reading of the Talmud text, translating it into English, Yiddish or combinations thereof, reading the commentaries of Rashi and occasionally the Tosafot, and translating them in like fashion. Interspersed with the translation and often indistinguishable from it were explanations and exemplifications of the text's significance. Exemplification often required not only an expressive repetition of text contents but also a sort of dramatic enacting of the text in language that was socially and psychologically meaningful to the students.

Thus, for example, one section of text studied describes a man who, while passing through a marketplace, finds a bill of divorcement. The bill lists as correspondents a man and woman with names identical to his and his wife's. He decides on impulse to make use of that document for himself (in contradiction to the law which requires him to have one expressly written for him and his wife). The teacher translates the text into English and Yiddish and then puts into the mouth of the man in question a metatextual monologue which makes the latter sound like a thoroughly modern man: 'Hey, here's a *get* (bill of divorcement) with my name and Janey's. Why don't I use it'? Throughout, the language and

cadence of these metatextual remarks which are being used for illustrative and explanatory purposes are distinctly English, lacking the characteristic rise–fall contour of Yiddish (cf. U. Weinreich 1956: 633–643). Moreover, the setting of the marketplace in which the document is found and the circumstances of its discovery are also described in terms that make sense in the contemporary world and can thus be visualized by the modern student.

As the one who reads the text and offers the preliminary translations, explanations and illustrations, the rabbi is the dominant speaker, but the students often add to the class by offering alternative explanations and translations as well as different illustrations. Moreover, they often ask questions about the text or topic, frequently anticipating questions that the text will raise later and thereby signifying their ability to follow precisely the essential point of the text. As such they too add to the language setting.

LANGUAGE CHOICE AND LANGUAGE SHIFT

Because the text is in Hebrew and Aramaic, languages with which most of the students in the class like other Orthodox Jews have some familiarity, and because the discussion of it is in English and Yiddish and combinations thereof, the participants in this class must generally be considered to be polyglots or multilinguals. As moderns, however, their common and everyday language is English, a tongue in which all of them are fluent. Given the choice of any language, all would in the course of normal conversation use English. In the Talmud class, however, such linguistic exclusivity is out of the question, if for no other reason than that the text must be recited. Accordingly, one might say as the situation or purpose of activity (i.e. reading or explaining) changes, so does language.

One might also say that as content shifts so does language.³ ‘A language shift may be defined as the change from the habitual use of one language to that of another’ (U. Weinreich 1953: 68). The languages in contact, those used alternately by the same persons, are essentially Hebrew, Aramaic, Yiddish, and English. In addition to the shifts between these various languages there is also phonemic, syntactic, and intonational interference. In the course of a typical class I observed, the language may become so fraught with shifts and interference as to suggest an argot all its own. The notion of a group developing its own special language or argot is one that Arnold van Gennep pointed to long ago when he asserted the principle that: ‘The linguistic situation of each language will depend upon the social situation of the group which speaks it’ (1908: 328). Moreover, he went on to point out, the more a group is ‘organized around a special sacred activity, the more its special language is so organized as well, to

3. Although this is stated in the reverse by S. Ervin-Tripp (1964), the correlation between con-

tent and language is the *primary* issue here – and *that is not* in question.

the point of sometimes being a veritable argot outside of general usage . . . ' (1908: 329). The sacred and religious character of Talmud study would thus perfectly fit this description, and the particular language of the class should therefore come as no surprise.

The argot serves in some measure as an exclusionary device which helps guarantee that the group will remain relatively homogeneous and at least linguistically protected against the intrusion of heterogeneous elements. Indeed, the surest way for an outsider to signal his presence is through his inability to shift language along with the others in the class, his inability to speak combinations of Yiddish and English or even to understand them, and his faulty intonational contour. Thus, in a very definite way, the argot of the Talmud class serves to distinguish its members as Orthodox Jews, something which their command of English, dress, occupation, education, and residence does not do as clearly. That all of this social marking is done in the absence of outsiders is characteristic of modern Orthodox Jews who choose to privately express their Orthodoxy without publicly (i.e. in the presence of outsiders) endangering their association with modernity.

In any event, the language shifting becomes so frequent as to be taken for granted and becomes unconscious both to the interlocutors, senders and receivers of communication, and the audience, those others present who are not the primary addressees but who nonetheless follow the talk. So much so is this the case that, for example, during one class, as he frequently does, the rabbi stopped in mid-sentence and asked one of the students, 'How ya' doin? By the way, do you understand Yiddish?' only to receive the reply, 'Fine, I thought you were speaking English'.

The literature on language switching among bilinguals described five frequent circumstances of such switching: (1) when an imperfect bilingual tries to turn the conversation to the language in which he is more proficient; (2) when entering or leaving a conversation and setting; (3) when making a direct quotation in another language, that is in reported speech; (4) under the stimulus of a loanword because there is no satisfactory equivalent in the dominant language of the conversation; and finally, (5) when the conversation turns to a topic associated by the speaker with the other language. Additionally, language switching may be used as a rhetorical device where the speaker chooses to emphasize a statement by repeating it in more than one language (common among Yiddish speakers and possibly derived from biblical Hebrew which uses repetition in this way), where he wants to contrast two statements, where he wishes to make a parenthetical remark, or where he wishes to speak of taboo words or topics (Rayfield 1970: 56-57, 155-156). Speakers may also switch language in the presence of those whom they perceive as outsiders in order to exclude those outsiders from understanding and to assure their own differentiation.

Traditionally Talmud students developed their own argot in the course of their study, thereby trying to distinguish themselves from lower status, less learned Jews. 'But the prestige of the students was so high in the society that everyone wanted to be among them or at least their equal as far as possible', so the argot of Talmud study became integrated into the special linguistic style of the entire Ashkenazic Jewish community. Additionally, the entire linguistic

מכירת יוסף

דיא בענגענעסיום פון יוסף מיט דיא ברודער
 מיט זיך ווערשער אונד הערלויבע לידער
 צו זינגען אין פורים מיט דעם בעקער אין די סאנד
 אין יעדער שטאט אונד אין יעדער לאנד.

ווילנא
 בדפוס פ. מן החי.
 שנת תרס"ח לפ"ק

ЮСИФЪ ВЪ ЕГИПЕТЪ.
 Собст. и изд. П. Вельчера.
 В П Л Ъ Н А.
 типографія Л. Л. Мана, Завальная
 1 9 0 8 г.

„מכירת יוסף“, פורים-שפיל, פארלאג מאץ, ווילנע

“The Sale of Joseph,” Purim play,
 Matz Publication House, Vilna

„מכירת יוסף“, הצגת-פורים, הוצאת-ספרים מן, ווילנא
 „Продажа Иосифа“, Пурим-шпиль, изда-
 тельство Мана, Вильна

1908

'Joseph's meeting with his brothers, with sweet words and exquisite songs, to sing on Purim with a wine goblet in your hand, in every town and in every land.'

community seemed to adopt ‘the Talmudic chant, the habit of answer *why not?* to a question that began with *why?*’ as is so characteristic both of the text and its elaboration (M. Weinreich 1980: 472–473).

For all the circumstances of language switching, in the final analysis one must conclude, as did Uriel Weinreich, that ‘there are no strictly linguistic motivations in language shifts’ (1967: 1). Rather, the roots of switching may be understood in social and psychological terms. The speaker may wish to appear as a member of the local, parochial community on some occasions while identifying with more cosmopolitan values on another, and he can accomplish this transformation in great measure through the medium of language switching. Even where certain spheres of activity are dominated by one language rather than another, the socially and psychologically motivated switcher may nonetheless use the language of his choice to make a statement indirectly about himself and his identity. Thus, for example, he may choose to phrase a medieval Talmudic tale in English, using syntax and intonation, in order to stress the tale’s contemporary relevance and applicability; or vice versa, phrasing a contemporary matter in Yiddish with Hebrew or Aramaic loanwords in the distinctive rise–fall cadence that characterizes Talmudic chant, thereby asserting the matter’s Jewish character.

THE GROUNDS FOR SWITCHING

In light of the previous general discussion, one might say that, although the circumstances of language switching in the Talmud class conform to the broad rules outlined for code-switching, there are specific explanations which provide insight into the particular character of modern Orthodox switching. In order to arrive at these explanations, however, one needs a clearer idea of the grounds for switching.

To begin, a ‘speaker in any language community who enters diverse social situations normally has a repertoire of speech alternatives which shift with the situation’ (Ervin-Tripp 1964: 197). Where the speaker is multilingual, and especially where the situation allows (e.g. when there are other multilinguals present with whom he can speak a variety of languages), this repertoire is accordingly enlarged. Given such an array of choice, each language is, in a sense, in competition with the other, and its being chosen represents an indirect victory for the community in which that language is dominant.

Specifically, in the case of the languages in use during the Talmud class, one might suggest that use of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Yiddish – all languages formed in and generated by the Jewish community – represents a victory by that community in its capture of the speaker. Contradistinctively, use of English (along with its syntax, intonation, etc.) represents a victory for the English speaking community, America.

Further, speech that is a combination of all languages represents a stalemate or cultural compromise. The speaker using a language mix indirectly identifies himself with both communities. To discover the precise mechanics and nuance of this compromise, however, one needs to look more closely at the process of switching.

Certain code variations in the Talmud class can be easily explained. These are what J. J. Gumperz calls, 'superposed varieties of speech', such as occupational argots and language indigenous to a particular activity (Ervin-Tripp 1968: 197). The Talmud class uses many such expressions which come from the text. Here I may quote from my previous work on this matter:

The Talmud in its text makes use of shorthand terms for various of its conceptualizations. Such terms act as representations of complex Judaic legal arguments. When translated literally, they make little or no sense, since they are usually composed of key words of the argument. Although these words could be translated into English abstractions, to do so would destroy their codical and referent qualities. Moreover, such efforts are intellectually gratuitous, since they often obliterate important nuances of meaning in the interests of coining some pithy neologism. Accordingly, such terms remain untranslated. For example, in the sentence '*Hasholayach es ha kayn* is the principle working here', the first words refer to a legal principle which mandates one to chase away a mother bird from a nest before taking away her eggs. The words themselves make little sense if literally translated. However, they act as simple referents to the complex argument of which they are the opening words. In much the same way as a pope's encyclical may be referred to by its opening words, so certain legal and talmudic principles become epigrammatized (Heilman 1976: 231).

In addition to such mandatory code variations, there are the switches that come from the interspersing of explanation with textual cantillation. Strictly speaking, such recitation constitutes switching, although the switch is governed by very formal rules governing it. Still, as the examples will later make clear, recitation may become expressive repetition and thereby integrated into the discussion and explanation of the text. In this case, it will have to be accounted for differently. Where a speaker uses the text's language as his own, one must assume that at least to some degree he is willing to identify himself with or through the text and its viewpoint.

Topic switches constitute another ground for code variation:

The implication of topical regulation of language choice is that certain topics are somehow handled better in one language than in another in particular multilingual contexts... Thus, some multilingual speakers may 'acquire the habit' of speaking about topic x in language X partially because that is the language in which they were *trained* to deal with this topic... , partially because *they (and their interlocutors)* may *lack the specialized terms* for a satisfying discussion of x in language Y, partially because language Y itself may currently lack as exact or as many terms for handling topic x as those currently possessed by language X, and partially because it is considered strange or inappropriate to discuss x in language Y (Fishman 1965b: 71).

Normally, speakers indicate that they know they have made a topic shift, that they have changed the manifest content or referent of speech. When only one language is in use such shifts are marked by what Goffman calls 'weak bridges',

expressions like ‘oh, by the way’ (1976: 267, n.11). Uriel Weinreich notes as well the marking accomplished ‘by special voice modifications (slight pause, change in tempo, and the like) in speech’ (1953: 83). In multilingual situations, all these markings may obtain, but in addition there is the assertive and unmistakable sign of the different language in use.

Perhaps an illustration from the Talmud class can be helpful here. The following interchange occurred during a one minute digression from the text. The stimulus for the digression had been a phrase in the text in which the Emperor Vespasian is quoted as asking the great sage Rabbi Yokhanan ben Zakkai, who had just come to him from out of the besieged city of Jerusalem to ask for mercy, why he had not come earlier. The phrasing of Vespasian’s question is: ‘*Ad ho idno a may lo osis le gaboy*’?⁴

Now the digression begins:

R: Amongst Hasidim it’s supposedly Reb Aron Karliner, one of the *gdoley khasidus*, one of the giants of our hasidic world, who used to on Rosh Hashono (pause) go before the *omed*. And the story comes back that one year (pause) as he approached the *omed* (pause) to say ‘*hamelekh*’ (pause) he went into a faint (pause) and he actually fainted (pause), and it took quite a to-do to revive him (pause). And when they revived him, he was speechless (pause). And the whole *besmedresh* [house of study (and prayer)], and the whole spirit of the holiday (long pause) – What’s with the rebee? What happened? *Hamelekh?* (pause). He says he approached there *lifney melekh malkhey hamlokhim, ot zokh zikh dermant di gemore: ‘eey malko ano’, oyb ikh bin take got, ikh bin di melekh malkhey hamlokhim* [before the King of all Kings, he reminded himself of the Talmud, ‘if I am a King’, if I am indeed God, I am the King of all Kings], *ad...*

H: Why did you not come be...

R: ‘*Ad ho idno a may lo osis le gaboy*’, *vus varts di a gans yor*, why didn’t you come before now?

There are various sorts of code variations here, including loanwords and superposed varieties of speech, particularly those which name what Max Weinreich (1980: 404) called ‘concepts of concrete Jewishness’ (the words *omed* [lectern], *besmedresh* [house of study]). There are also referential terms deriving from liturgy. Included here is *hamelekh* (the King), the opening word of the morning prayers with which the cantor begins the service. Additionally, there are the special and traditional names of God which are not commonly translated and could be considered either as a loanword or one that is superposed: *melekh malkhey hamlokhim* (the King of all Kings).

By far, however, the most significant language switch occurs when the topic switches back from a description of the episode of Reb Aron Karliner to a gloss and explanation of the original Talmud text. Here there is a switch into Yiddish, Hebrew, English, interfered versions of each, and, finally, a reversion into the

4. To distinguish quoted text from other words, I will surround all such excerpts with quotation marks. When foreign words or phrases are not followed in the utterance by literal translations or

are not translated in the ensuing discussion, I will provide such a translation in brackets following the first appearance of the foreign material.

text. And when one of the members of the class, H, tries to translate the phrase from the text into English, he is cut off as the speech is recited first in the original Aramaic (*ad ho idno a may lo osis le gaboy*), followed by a Yiddish gloss (*vus varts di a gans yor* [why have you been waiting for a whole year]) which refers back to the original tale about Reb Aron Karliner, and then finally closed with an English translation of the text.

While H has tried to skip the shift back to the text and keep the whole matter in English, the rabbi who is not only telling the story but who seeks to use it to teach the meaning of the Talmud cuts off this effort by staying in the Aramaic, glossing in Yiddish and thereby rhetorically emphasizing the Jewish character of this episode, and only in the end reverting to English to complete the tale. The Aramaic and Yiddish emphasize solidarity with the text and the Jewish people, while the English leaves the story in the domain of the English speaker, the modern American. It is as if the narrator here was finally overcome by the Jewishness of his story and could no longer hear himself tell it in words other than those associated with the Jewish community.

In a sense the language shifting here is a means of bracketing the Jewishly oriented activity. It represents an instance of 'embedding', a process in which speech of another is reported in its original form and where the reporting is done by means of 'expressive repetition', repeating the words in the manner in which they presumably were originally spoken. Through the language switch one enters fully into the Jewish *domain*.

Were this, however, simply a case of reported speech, the Yiddish gloss would be absent, since the text in the Talmud was not in Yiddish. Moreover, no actual speech is really being reported here but rather an emotion is being put into the terms of the Talmud and Jewish experience. Accordingly, one may conclude that what has happened here is an effort to merge text, Jewishness (as expressed in the Yiddish), and contemporary sense (as signified by the English), precisely the sort of synthesis that is characteristic of modern Orthodoxy which seeks to blend Judaism (faith), Jewishness (parochial ethnicity), and cosmopolitanism.

One last note is in order. I remarked earlier that this speech contained language interference. In intonation contour there can be no question of this fact, since the English which normally does not have a rise-fall cadence characteristic of Yiddish is here being spoken in rise-fall cadence (cf. Pike 1947; U. Weinreich 1956; and Rayfield 1970). The combination of English language and Yiddish intonation contour is, one might suggest, an example of cultural compromise – again a characteristic of modern Orthodoxy.

There are also Yiddish syntactical structures, the most obvious of these being: 'And the story comes back that one year', which is clearly a construction much more at home in Yiddish than in English. The interference results in an unusual English phrase.

Finally, there is the English morphological structure. The word *rebe* which

refers to a Hasidic leader has become 'rebee', thus containing morphology which is far more American than the word *rebe*. Here too one discovers the compromise so much a part of modern Orthodox Jewish existence.

These conclusions raise some important questions. If indeed code variation and interference mark the particular cultural dualism and compromise characteristic of Orthodoxy, why do modern Orthodox Jews not always speak in this polyglottal way? One might answer simply that in great measure they do. The syntax and cadence of their speech is filled with interferences from the various languages of their lives. Indeed, one might suggest that through a process of cultural exosmosis the American Jews, and most particularly the New York variety, many of whom once talked this way, have infused American, and especially New York, English with some of the vocabulary, syntax, and cadence of their multilingualism.⁵

Beyond this sort of a simplistic answer, one must note that language choice and switching is also grounded in situational factors; that is, not only topic change accounts for shift, but situational change also does so. Simply defined a situational shift is one which occurs, 'when within the same setting the participants' definition of the social event changes [and] this change [is] signalled among others by linguistic clues' (Blom and Gumperz 1972: 424).

In the case of the Talmud class situational factors may account for switching. We have already seen how, in spite of H's effort to avoid a switch from English to Aramaic and Yiddish, the situation of the class forced him to acquiesce in the switch. One might go further and suggest that, in general, the situation of *lernen* fosters and demands linguistic flexibility and switching to the extent that even those who speak an otherwise essentially faultless English find themselves speaking in a multilingual manner during the course of the class (cf. Heilman 1976: 230). One simply learns that *lernen* calls for its own multilingual argot. Those who fail to make such switches are either neophytes, outsiders, or rebels.

There is a qualification that must be made here. Alternative definitions of the situation may occur within the same setting. In the Talmud class this may be understood when one realizes that for some members the class is essentially a teaching experience, for some a religious one, for others an opportunity to identify themselves with the sacred community of Jewish scholars, for others a chance to meet with friends, for others an opportunity for field research, and so on. Each of these varying definitions of the situation may manifest itself in linguistic terms. Thus the field researcher, emphasizing his marginality may speak in ways that signal that status, an emphasis on English with English morphology, syntax, cadence, and the like. The sacred scholar may infuse his speech with a variety of Hebraisms and other elements of the holy tongue; and so on for each participant. Indeed, in my observations, I discovered just this sort

5. L. M. Feinsilver (1956) has, for example, reported on the plethora of Yiddish words –

'hutzpa' being perhaps the best known – which have infiltrated American English.

of variation in the language use by the various participants. Nevertheless, what united them was a multilingualism which the *lernen* situation, as supported by the rabbi/teacher, forced upon them. Some were predisposed to fewer cases of code variation and some to more, but all did some switching.

Although among Jews who sought to become acculturated to American life and society, English became the 'prestige-language' and preferred, Orthodox Jews generally held on to Yiddish and Hebrew as an antidote to the threat of what Irving Howe has called 'religio-ethnic abandonment' (Rayfield 1970: 95). That holding action eventually evolved into synthetic forms – interlanguage – under the tremendous acculturative pressures of American life. Through the schools, in the streets, and at work Jews learned to speak English, and through it some of the ways of America. Even the most isolationist Orthodox Jews⁶ found that the dominant American culture interfered, at the very least linguistically, with Jewish life (cf. Joffe 1943: 601–602).

Modern Orthodox Jews generally associate the Yiddish and Hebrew dominated interlanguage of their more traditional brethren with a manifest parochialism and concomitant lower social status which they, as moderns, eschew. Accordingly, in their everyday discourse and outside the environment where Jewish life is dominant, many adopt the speech patterns of their particular American milieu.

The controlling factor in speech pattern is 'the socio-psychological sense of *reference group membership*' (Fishman 1965b: 68). However, at the same time that the modern Orthodox Jew may in public, outside the synagogue and away from the Orthodox Jewish domain, seek to identify himself with the outside culture, accomplishing this aim at least in part through his speech, he may in the Jewish environment 'employ dialect... to signal his Jewishness to other Jews', or his Orthodoxy to other Orthodox (Dubb 1977: 56). When these worlds overlap, when, for example, he is with Orthodox Jews with whom he wishes to assert some modicum of solidarity at the same time that he wishes to demonstrate his Americanism, he may *in the linguistic sphere* revert to a highly nuanced form of interlanguage, often using only intonational signals rather than the more obvious lexical ones.

The degree to which modern Orthodox Jews continue to strive to signal their simultaneous reference group membership in American and Jewish society is displayed boldly in the Talmud class. Here repeated efforts are made to translate all matters into English and American cultural sense wherever possible, yet at

6. Consider for example the following, spoken by a Hasidic rabbi in which he explained the character of his highly isolationist community. 'When we have free time we're sitting in the synagogue learning Torah' (N.Y. Times, May 26, 1978). The language is English and all that remains of the Jewish world is content and a calque

or loan translation. Here the calque 'learning Torah', is in fact an interfered version of the Yiddish '*lernen Toyre*'. The interference becomes immediately apparent when one realizes that the construction 'learning Torah' really makes no sense in English where the phrase would more properly be 'studying the Torah'.

the same time the linguistic nexus with Judaism is assiduously maintained. The latter is accomplished through textual recitation, Yiddish translation, and interlanguage. An example is in order.

Much is going on in the following two minute and eighteen second speech event. I wish primarily to focus upon the effort to maintain linguistic ties with both the Jewish and English-speaking societies. This remains the social and psychological motive – whether conscious or not – which seems to explain much of the language choice.

The selection quoted within this extract comes from a section of text which is *aggadetta* (lore), describing an encounter between Abba Sikra and Yokhanan ben Zakkai. The teacher begins with an identification of the characters involved.

R: Abba Sikra who was head, one of the heads of the *biryoni*, the *biryoni* were a group of fanatics or . . .

S: Zealots

R: . . . people, zealots who refused to take leadership, a peaceful resolve on the basis of the spiritual leaders of Israel. Instead they decided, and they forced the issue, to bring about a war between the besiegers as against the inhabitants of the holy land, of *Yerushalayim* [Jerusalem], by burning down all the storehouses of food and forcing the siege to reach the point that the people can't hold out and they have to go do battle.

In any case, one of their leaders was Abba Sikra. And Abba Sikra turns out to be no less than a nephew of *Reb* Yokhanan ben Zakkai.

Hertzoch ayn, haynt az men hert a mol a rebe hot epes a mishpokhe vos er iz nisht azoy hoo-ha-ha makht men shh! Bald zagt men do [listen to this, today when one hears of a rabbi who has something of a family which is not so hoo-ha-ha one says shh! Presently it says here]; 'Abba Sikra *reysh biryoni*', the whole *tsore-makher e' geveyn* a nephew, a son of a daughter (sic) [text says 'sister'] (pause)

H: Yeah, but he wasn't a, he wasn't a (pause) a gangster, he was a . . .

R: On this point he was willing to listen to Yokhanan ben Zakkai, But basically, if somebody becomes a general amongst vagabonds, amongst brigands, eh, he must have earned his title as such.

H: He wasn't even a vagabond amongst, amongst brigands. He was a leader of the . . .

R: . . . 'Biryoni.'

H: Of the . . .

R: *Shteyt dokh, 'Reysh biryoni hava.'* [But it says, 'He was the head of the *biryoni*.']

H: Meyer Kahane. Something like Meyer Kahane, *nu* not necessarily the, the *loshn* brigands (pause). He was a, he was a nationalist, eh . . .

R: The *khazal gebn zogn* [rabbis say] *dis az zey hobn ongebrenge dem khurbn* [that they brought on the destruction] . . .

H: That's right, no question about it.

R: Alright, *shoy*n.

H: But it's not necessarily that he was a, he was a robber or stealing money.

R: *Ober dos vort* [but this word] '*biryoni*' is (*iz*) a very negative term.

H: (softly) Yah.

R: '*Biryoni*'

H: He wasn't . . .

S: . . . a *bulgan* [ruffian] . . .

H: . . . stealing money.

R: What? (to S.)

- S: A *bulgan*.
 R: I like your word better.
 40 H: He wasn't robbing money; he wasn't stealing money (pause).
 R: Na, no. No!
 H: He was a . . .
 R: No, they had their ideologists . . .
 H: . . . a nationalist, eh (pause)
 45 R: But they would not take spiritual guidance, *nu*?
 H: That's right; that's right.
 M: That wasn't his real name anyway.
 R: What, 'Abba Sikra'?
 M: No, his name over here was (pause) 'Ben Batya'.
 50 S: That's his last name.
 R: *M'vet nisht onheybn lernen haynt mit, mit eym, mit dem*, [we won't start *lernen* today with, with him, with this], with all this historical and literary criticism. (pause) *Shoyn*.
 H: (chuckles)
 R: *Lomer shoyn onfangn lernen epes* [let's begin *lernen* something].

Perhaps the most striking feature of this speech event is the code variation wherein R speaks in a mix of English, Yiddish, and their combinations along with a heavy dose of textual quotation while H, S, and M speak predominantly in English but make clear in the content of their responses that they fully understand R's words.

Generally, one might describe the entire discussion as an effort to contemporize as well as translate the Talmud, to make it sensible and relevant to moderns. Those who speak in English, H primarily, are trying to explain Abba Sikra and the *biryoni* in terms intelligible to contemporary Americans – a group with whom they choose to identify themselves linguistically – while the rabbi continually tries to bring the intellectual effort back to the text and its particular concerns.

But why it should be of such concern to H, S, M, and the others who, although not among the interlocutors, made up an interested audience to understand the term '*biryoni*' in contemporary terms? One might suggest the motive lies in the fact that to some extent the modernist associates himself with the contemporary world. Insofar as he does so he feels a compelling need to transform and comprehend the various layers of his experience in its terms. Linguistically this need demonstrates itself in the desire to translate, literally and figuratively, everything into contemporary (American) language. To fail to do so is perhaps to signal the division between the world of the Talmud and that of contemporary life, a division which is an anathema to the modern Orthodox, who wish to assume continuity. On the other hand, to succeed in identifying '*biryoni*' in present-day terms is to once again give evidence of the ceaseless relevance of Talmud and, associatively, Jewish tradition.⁷

7. The notion of the relevance of Jewish texts to contemporary life goes back at least as far as Philo (c. 20 B.C.E.–50 C.E.), the Alexandrian Jewish thinker who 'developed to its acme the idea that

whatever was noble in Greek thinking was to be discovered in the sacred scripture of Judaism' (Moreau, J. L. 1961).

While it is H who leads this effort here, even the rabbi in his initial translation of *'biryani'* made the effort at contemporization. His effort was far more tentative. Choosing uncommon, if not archaic, words ('vagabonds', 'brigands'), he does not smoothly make the transition from the parochial language of the Talmud to English, leaving the task to be completed by others. Moreover, he reverts frequently to the languages of Jewishness, Yiddish, and textual quotation. In so doing he acts as one would expect him to, as protector of the tradition (and traditional language) and defender of the parochial (through his emphasis on the text).

Repeatedly the rabbi tries to cut off the moves into contemporaneity and its linguistic reflection, English. To English remarks he responds in Yiddish or with text, as if refusing to ratify the American identity of his interlocutors. In addition, twice – at what he considers opportune moments for closure – he tries to end the discussion with *'shoy'n'*, a Yiddishism which means 'already' but which has come to be a common lexical marker used by Orthodox speakers for framing and closing conversation. *'Shoy'n'* often serves as a bridge to something else: another conversation, a change in action, closure. Finally, following his last *'shoy'n'* he remarks in Yiddish *'Lomer shoy'n onfangen lernen epes'*, 'let us begin (already) to learn something', let us begin our study. Speaking in Yiddish constitutes a linguistic emphasis on the need to return the group from its digression into the modern word and world to the traditional words and world of the Talmud page.

Lest one suppose that the rabbi represents a pristine example of the parochial, one ought to note that his speech is heavily dosed with English, indeed predominantly English. Moreover, his Yiddish also displays English interference. Perhaps the most blatant example is in his phrase *'tsore-makher'* which he uses (line 14) early on as an epithet to describe Abba Sikra. The rabbi has undoubtedly meant to call Abba Sikra a 'troublemaker', an epithet that comes from contemporary American English. Rather than using the actual Yiddish word for troublemaker which is, according to the authoritative Weinreich Dictionary, *'shterer'*, he has translated literally from English by combining the word *tsore* (trouble) with *makher* (maker) in a structure rooted in American English.

Beyond this example of a calque, there are other illustrations of English (and by association American cultural) interference in the rabbi's speech. For example, the morphological interference that occurs (line 26) in the word 'dis', which more properly should be the word 'dos'. 'Dos' is Yiddish for 'this'. 'Dis' thus seems to be a compromise form. Or again (line 31) one discovers a sentence which is part Yiddish and part English. The bridge between these two parts is the word 'is', which may be either English or the Yiddish *'iz'*, which means the same thing. The morphological ambiguity is ideal here for the speaker since it serves almost effortlessly to connect a sentence (and idea) which begins by

being parochial – spoken about and to a strictly speaking Jewish audience – and ends by being put in contemporary English terms.

One must also not assume that H, as quoted in the above extract, represents a pure form of the cosmopolitan modern. Not only does he respond to Yiddish, but also his English is dotted with Jewish influences. The most prominent of these is intonation pattern about which there will be more to say later. There is also a series of parochial references, both contextual and lexical. For example, the phrase (line 24), ‘the *loshn* brigands’, contains the Yiddish ‘*loshn*’ (language or words) which serves as a linguistic marker of H’s insider status among those who ‘speak the language of the Talmud’. He inserts this signal – whether consciously or not is here irrelevant – as if to indicate thereby as an insider he is to be taken seriously by the others. Although he speaks in English and about matters an English speaker might comprehend, he still is Jewish enough to easily throw in a word associated with the parochial setting and situation.

What one finds in all of this code variation and interference is a sense in which the interlocutors comprehend the duality of their lives as modern Orthodox Jews and how that duality plays itself out in the linguistic shifting of the *lernen* situation. Each foray into one world – be it the parochial or the cosmopolitan – seems to bring about a pulling back to the other. Even among those whose speech is *predominantly* Hebrew, English, or Yiddish, the overall effect is one in which the speech is *primarily* multilingual; and it is this multilingualism which is of greatest sociological significance.

In addition to topical and situational factors, role must be considered an influence in language switching. Those who see themselves as linked to a parochial identity and role, like the rabbi, would, for example, adjust their speech behavior accordingly.

To be more explicit, in certain situations, particular behaviors – including language behaviors – ‘are expected (if not required) of particular individuals *vis-à-vis* each other’, (Fishman 1965b: 76). Thus, for example, in the Talmud class one expects the rabbi/teacher to be conversant with the terminology of the text, making much use of it. Furthermore, one expects him (and the typical extract quoted above demonstrates this) to be tied both linguistically and contextually to the text and its meaning, and that he will therefore try repeatedly to focus discussion and language around it. On the other hand, the students, most of whom in this class and others like it may be considered avocational pupils, may be expected to display some role distance from the Jewish-student role and associated text. Although it is ritually mandated, their *lernen* is still very much a once-a-week, after-hours activity. Displaying distance becomes especially crucial for those modernists who even in this limited period of *lernen* wish to indicate their marginality in the Orthodox world and their immersion elsewhere.

Normally distance is displayed in speech by means of ‘side-involving byplays’ and other nonverbal signs of one’s dissociation from the ongoing discourse

(Goffman 1974: 542). In the case of the Talmud class, there is additionally the use of English: its syntax, grammar, vocabulary, and cadence.

Perhaps the most obvious example of this effect of role upon language choice occurred when one of the physicians in the class translated into modern medical terminology a portion of the text which referred to sickness. Here the vocabulary offered not only translation and explanation but served latently to indicate his immersion in the medical (i.e. non-Jewish) world where he had become familiar with such terminology. Lexically, he succeeded in distancing himself from the role of Talmud student and reminding the others of his doctor role.

Thus one may suggest the principle that: insofar as modern Orthodox Jews comprehend their various social roles, both in the microcosm of the Talmud class and in the larger worlds of American and Jewish life, they will in part display these roles through language. While none of the factors – topic, situation, role, reference group or textual argot – alone can serve to account for all incidents of language choice and shift, together they enable one to make sense out of the language behavior in a modern Orthodox Talmud class. Behind all of these factors is the fundamental cosmopolitan parochial ambivalence and preoccupation that describes the modern American Orthodox Jewish state of mind. The life in several worlds is reflected in the speech in several languages.

INTONATION

One last element of modern Orthodox Talmud study needs to be considered. Earlier repeated references to the role of cadence and intonational contour were made. These need now to be organized and further elucidated.

To understand the importance of intonation in Talmud study one must first realize that the text is essentially a cryptic compilation of the minutes of rabbinic debates on matters of the orally transmitted law and tradition. It is devoid of any punctuation or vocalization and even the basic exercise of reading it properly requires an expertise beyond that available to the unschooled. In part as a result of this situation, a method of cantillating the text developed. This cantillation, or *gemore-nign* (Talmud tune) as it came to be called in Yiddish, served syntactic and interpretive functions. Cadence helped one distinguish between primary and subordinate clauses and ideas, between rhetorical questions and real ones, between one topic and another, between speech and reported speech, and so on. Indeed still today ‘melodic variety is used for the phrasing of the Aramic text, which, as it stands, is compressed to the point of obscurity. Since a brief sequence . . . may encapsulate a major difference of opinion between two authorities, exaggerated pitch contrasts are used to restore syntactic colorfulness to the emaciated, almost “telegraphic” legalistic formulae’ (U. Weinreich 1956: 639).

During the great cultural flowering of Jewish life in central and Eastern Europe, study became accessible to increasingly larger numbers of Jews, and along with it came an increasing familiarity with and prestige of *gemore-nign*. In the process the 'chant figures, or analogs of these figures, deprived of singing voice quality, [were] easily transposed . . . from the reading of the Talmud to oral discussions about it, and thence to ordinary conversation . . .' (U. Weinreich 1956: 640).

Gradually, as earlier pointed out, the entire community of Ashkenazic Jewry seemed to adopt the Talmudic chant as a feature of speech. Moreover, an examination of intonations of many European languages and of English reveals that the particular contour of this chant, taken over in great measure by Yiddish, is not to be found in them (U. Weinreich 1956; Pike 1947). Thus the intonation pattern of Yiddish and *gemore-nign* may be considered a cultural characteristic by and through which a Jew may identify and present himself.

Basically the pattern consists in the 'rise of the pitch from a low point to a peak, followed by a distinct fall . . .' (U. Weinreich 1956: 633–634). More precisely, a level intonation is used for an unmarked transition, a partial rise signifies a marked transition and the rise–fall cadence indicates a dramatized transition. The rise–fall plays an especially large part in Talmud since it serves to set the stage for a remark that seems unexpected but is nevertheless instructive. It is the sound of the rhetorical and rather incredulous question which has become closely linked with Yiddish in particular and Jewish inflection in general.

Ironically, the very cadences which for the traditional Jewish community had been a mark of prestige, a sign of one's high status as scholar, became a stigma in the era of acculturation and emancipation. The Jew who did not wish to stand out amongst the other nations had, among other things, to learn to control his intonation.

In America where the rise–fall contour is rarely a part of normal speech, Jewish inflection and cadence are particularly noticeable. Compared to the Yiddish, in fact, the sound of English seems rather monotonic (reflecting perhaps the stoicism of a Protestant heritage rather than the passion of a Jewish one). And although it is undoubtedly true as Pike points out that 'no language uses a pure monotone', to the immigrant Jew the sound of English seemed to approach that (Pike 1947: 20).

'The retention of intonation patterns of the native language constitutes one of the last features of a foreign accent in the speech of a bilingual who speaks the secondary language almost perfectly' (Rayfield 1970: 72). Jews carried their tone with them into English (especially the New York variety) as they had in the European languages. Under the impact of acculturation, however, the influence of English on Yiddish was to make it relatively 'less sing-song in nature' (U. Weinreich 1956: 642). A distinctively American kind of Yiddish arose, one

that not only took into it English expressions and some vocabulary but also some cadences of American speech.

To Orthodox Jews, Jewishness was not a stigma. On the contrary, for them the sing-song sounds of *gemore-nign* retained an association with high social status and prestige even in the face of the acculturative pressures in Europe and America. Accordingly, long after the most marked cadences of Yiddish had disappeared from the speech of most American Jews, the Orthodox generally still talked in the distinctive rise-fall intonation pattern. Their exposure to Jewish learning, and even more importantly, their continued reverence for it served to nourish a speech contour clearly at odds with the sound of contemporary America.

As long as Orthodox Jews protected their Jewish way of life through efforts at isolation from American life, they continued to speak Yiddish and sound English in ways that reverberated the *gemore-nign*. Indeed, even today those who stress separation from American society and culture – various Hasidic sects, for example – may be recognized when they speak English. Their word order, choice, and intonation mark them immediately.

When Orthodox Jews began to value modernity and sought accordingly to decrease their remoteness from the world outside the Jewish one, among the aspects of their existence ultimately subjected to change was their language. Yet unlike so many other Jews who in great measure accepted acculturation as a paramount goal and therefore hoped to diminish their separate identity as Jews, modern Orthodox people wished at once to become part of the contemporary world and remain true to the world of their past. Rather than viewing tradition and parochialism as anachronistic, these Jews adopted an attitude that could best be described as panchronistic and cosmopolitan parochial, seeking to include all time and cultural existence in one frame of reference.

In the sphere of language this meant the modern Orthodox evolution of a speech pattern which brought together traditional tongues with contemporary ones. More to the point of intonation, the cadence of modern Orthodox speech, although lacking the extreme rise-fall of Yiddish and *gemore-nign*, still retained many of its features. While it is not possible here to exhaustively trace the intonational lines of the modern Orthodox speech community, measured against the cosmopolitan American ideal of unmusical speech and other systems of pitch control common in American English, the sound of modern Orthodox Jews speaking *amongst and to one another* is quite distinctive. Perhaps the heavy presence of what to the American ear sounds like incredulity and protestation is the most obvious illustration of lingering influences of *gemore-nign*. In addition one also discovers a frequent use of the untransposed word order typical of Talmudic and Yiddish language questions accompanied by the rise-fall cadence, as for example in the rhetorical question: 'This is coffee'?!

On the other hand, in the outside world, when modern Orthodox Jews try

to pass as and interact with moderns or when the topic of their discussion is particularly cosmopolitan in character, the language and cadence betrays none of these Jewish influences.

THE SOUND OF LERNEN

The general procedure for explaining and translating Talmud which, as already outlined, evolved most distinctively in Europe, was such that each phrase of text was followed by a long, often free Yiddish translation. In order to maintain the unity of so complex a structure, melody and cadence were used in such a way that subordinate clauses of the same hypotactic level together with their interspersed Yiddish translations and glosses would always revert to the same tone level. The tonic of the scale would be returned to when the main clause and its translation were completed.

Much of this intonation remains in use in the American modern Orthodox Talmud class. Here however the explanations and translations are not always, nor even necessarily most frequently, in Yiddish. They may rather be in English. Nevertheless, even so, they are often spoken in precisely the same cadence as the original Talmud text. This speech has been described as ‘speaking English as if it were Yiddish’ (Fishman 1965a: 59). Not only are lexical and syntactic structure reflective of Yiddish and *gemore*, but there is also an intonational and accentual interpenetration. It is as if the English were a sort of expressive repetition of the text, even when the content of the English is strictly speaking liminal.

An example is in order here. The section of text quotes an incident during which the rabbis upbraid the sage Yokhanan ben Zakkai for not having asked the Emperor Vespasian to save Jerusalem but rather to have asked simply for the preservation of the small city of Yavneh and its scholars.⁸

2 2 2 3 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 3
R: Fregt di gemore [the Talmud asks]: And *Reb Yokhanan ben Zakkai hot nisht*
 3 4 4 4 4 2
gevist vegn di zakhn?! [did not know about these things]
 2 3 4 3 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 3-2
 ‘*Vehu sovar* [and he thought]’, *ober* [but] *Reb Yokhanan ben Zakkai* thought:
 3 2 2 2 3-2 2 4 2 3 2 2 2 4 2 2 2 2 2 4-2 2 3-2 3-2 2 2
 ‘*Dilmo kuley hay lo ovid*’; Listen, there are limits to what you can ask. He felt there are things
 2 2 2 2 3 2 2 2 2 4-2
 he can get away with and things he can’t.

What stands out intonationally in this extract is the preponderance of rise–fall

8. No universally agreed upon notation for intonation has yet been established. Accordingly, I will use a combination of Kenneth Pike’s numerical notation (lower numbers signify lower pitch, higher numbers high pitch) and Uriel Weinreich’s punctuation (?!). I have also used a dash (–) to

note a glide, when an intonational contour occurs in a single syllable.

One last point with regard to transcription: since the extract quoted contains words from the text which are being integrated into the utterance, I have framed these with quotation marks to distinguish them from the rest of the utterance.

contours in the English. While much of the English is spoken in the monotone (2) which is characteristic of that language, there are notable exceptions: thought, listen, limits, ask, felt, there, away with, can't. These contours are what gives the English its particularly Jewish sound, a sound one discovers to be predominant in the Yiddish and *gemore* material constituting the rest of the utterance.

The rise-fall and the partial rise that occurs in the English seem to add the drama of the text to what is really a metatextual remark in the English. The precise meaning of the text is: 'And he [Yokhanan ben Zakkai] thought that perhaps he would not have been able to gain so much'. The statement beginning with the word 'listen' assumes one to have comprehended the denotational meaning of the previously quoted text and instead of translating it, dramatically elaborates it, using language that speaks to the contemporary American. But, although the language is quite American, the intonation is distinctively talmudic such that the English *sounds* as if it simply continues the text. Indeed, the intonation of the English is interfered with by the intonation of the text, and one might add – sociologically – by the ethos of the text as well.

When one speaks English in a cadence which is Jewish in its genesis, one thereby partially leaves the domain of the English speaking world. That departure cannot be assumed to be accidental. Rather one must suppose that the speaker is swept up by the world of the Talmud and its language and that this involvement is reflected in language. At times the reflection is lexical, at times syntactic or morphological, and at times intonational. Whatever the sign, the fact remains that through language (or paralanguage, if you will) social involvement is demonstrated.

Surely, one might ask, it is just as conceivable that the sound of English would dominate the sound of Talmud. That is precisely what happens among those who study in a primarily cosmopolitan atmosphere. Thus, for example, in the university where Talmud is studied by Jews and non-Jews alike, the rise-fall sing-song so noticeable in the extract here is absent. Instead one hears a Talmud that sounds like English. Indeed, a person who has learned his Talmud in the cosmopolitan university setting rather than in the parochial *besmedresh* reveals this background both by the intonation and language choice of recitation. The former sound English while those who have done their *lernen* in a *besmedresh* sing the words.⁹

By choosing to sing both English and text, the student implicitly identifies himself with the generations of those who have religiously cantillated *gemore*. The signal, although not formal or explicit, is never misunderstood.

9. Dr. Shlomo Noble, the noted Yiddish linguist, tells the story of his first day of Talmud study under the late Professor Wolfson at Harvard. Noble had just asked a question, using a *gemore-nign*.

Wolfson replied, using the same cadences, 'Mr. Noble, this is not a Yeshiva, this is Harvard University'. Noble never again made the same intonational mistake.

For the modern American Orthodox Jew, the choice of how to sound, like the choice of what language to speak, is of course affected by role, topic and situation. Ultimately, however, it is affected by his particular state of mind. Generally this is one in which, as already noted, he finds himself somewhere between the parochial Jewish and cosmopolitan American communities. Although at times, in the rush of living, he may momentarily disattend one world in favor of the other, there are other times, such as during the Talmud class, when the two worlds touch upon each other and disattention is simply not possible. At these moments some compromise must be struck. The use of English in a cadence associated with *gemore*, although not necessarily the only means, may be considered as representing something of a compromise. The generating force behind the intonation is the speaker's sensitivity to cultural factors. He speaks the way he does either because he wishes to put things in ways that the listeners will understand or because he wishes to present himself through his language and cadence in a particular way, or both. Generally, those matters which seem to resonate Jewish concerns display Jewish language or intonation while more neutral matters may be spoken in standard American English.

CONCLUSION

Long after most American Jews abandoned the characteristic patois which was neither quite English nor quite Yiddish at least within the context of the Talmud class (i.e. in the community), modern Orthodox Jews still retain remnants of it. The reasons are only in part explained technically and linguistically. They are as well social and psychological. Talmud study is more than an intellectual or ritual exercise; it provides an opportunity for interaction, arrangements during which individuals come together to sustain some sort of intersubjective mental world. The students become 'inhabitants of a partly shared social world, established and continuously modified by their acts of communication' (Rommetveit 1974: 23).

When the others with whom one is talking share the same ethos and state of mind, when their preoccupations are similar, the interplay of talk cannot help but intensify that preoccupation and at times make it manifest. For modern Orthodox Jews this means that the dualism of their existence displays itself in their conversation among themselves. The patois which develops out of this dualism, seen most boldly in the Talmud class but often present whenever modern Orthodox Jews get together to *shmooz*,¹⁰ the term that denotes sociable conversation among intimates, has in a sense become the argot of modern

10. Properly speaking the Yiddish word for a chat is *shmues*. But modern Orthodox Jews 'shmooz'. The variant morphology draws on English as well.

Thus even the term itself betrays the compromise linguistic structure that characterizes the modern Orthodox.

American Orthodoxy. As such it serves not only to mark these people as a distinct group, as all argots do, but also provides a linguistic basis for solidarity.

In the outside American world this argot may be camouflaged. But in the intimate environment of the Talmud class, in the *haymish* (homey) atmosphere of the *besmedresh*, the language and all it symbolizes reappears. Here the well-tuned ear will hear the sound of modern American Orthodoxy.

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This paper was made possible by a research grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. I would like to thank Professors Roland Wulbert and Steven Cohen for their helpful criticism of earlier drafts and Professors Shlomo Noble and Marvin Herzog for their help in providing me with the necessary linguistic background for my research. Mrs. Norma Gayne was enormously helpful in the typing. This paper is derived from my forthcoming book on the general subject of American Modern Orthodoxy, entitled *Cosmopolitan Parochials* (in press).