“We didn’t learn grammar, we learned Hebrew: Divisions and displacement in the language classroom”

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Abstract

The author explored her personal history of feeling stranded in anomie and displacement between two languages, cultures, and identities through her ethnographic research on the subject in a university modern Hebrew language class in Canada. She discoverd a clashing divide between two community sub-groups of “Canadian” and “Israeli” students who based their stereotypes and Othering on their definitions and relationships to the Hebrew language as primarily literary and text-based or oral and speech-based. As the author discoverd the roots of this in-group Othering, she ultimately came to terms with her own feelings of displacement.

Introduction

As a Hebrew language teacher and language acquisition researcher living in North America, I have always found myself thinking deeply about how my commitment to the Hebrew language affects and creates my sense of identity. Because I spent time as a young child in Israel, where I was immersed in the Hebrew language and Israeli culture, ownership of modern Hebrew language marked me as different from my peers after returning to Canada with my family. In my Canadian parochial Jewish day school, most students' parents had never visited the homeland of Israel, and could not relate to certain cultural artifacts of my childhood. My ever-constant feeling of displacement and abandonment between two languages, two cultures, and two identities led me to pursue doctoral work on this subject of linguistic, cultural and social anomie. I was eager to elicit the feelings and attitudes of those in similar positions who likewise placed Hebrew in a primary role in the constructions of their identities. Living in Canada, in the Jewish Diaspora, how did others negotiate their dual linguistic, national, and cultural loyalties? I decided to enter a Canadian undergraduate university Hebrew class to discuss this topic with students and the professor.

I began my exploration with three questions to discuss in collaboration with participants. First, what framework of ethnic identity did participants structure in their lives? Rather than define identity specifically as Jewish identity, I chose the term "ethnic identity" to ensure freedom and flexibility in defining senses of self while limiting the subject area to the notion of shared ancestry, lineage, or heritage. Second, I asked how Hebrew language fit into participants' framework of ethnic identity. Because the students, professor, and I committed time and effort to the study, teaching, or practice of the

language, it clearly held a place of priority in our lives and, I hypothesized, their ethnic identities. Third, I wondered how these perceptions of the importance of Hebrew would be manifested in social interactions in the Hebrew classroom. In retrospect, I realize that underneath these initial questions, I was truly interested in how participants used Hebrew to negotiate a life in the Diaspora; more specifically, whether these individuals managed to build a sense of comfort, satisfaction, and belonging in Canada with my assumption of their deep connection to the Hebrew language and its indelible link to Israeli culture. If their experiences were similar to mine, how did they minimize the discomfort of anomie I had experienced?

Although no empirical studies exist examining the complexities of multiple identities among Hebrew speakers, several have been conducted in ESL and EFL contexts. Tse (2000) examined the ethnic identity rejection and repossession among Asian American heritage language members who inhabit a stage prevalent in childhood and adolescence of “ethnic ambivalence” or “ethnic evasion.” Alvarez, Bliss and Vigil (2001) determined a similar sense of confusion among Cuban Americans who expressed a connection to the Spanish heritage language, among other cultural artifacts of their community, but felt disconnected from the oppressive Cubans governing their homeland. Interviews of 100 Chilean-Swedish teens and their parents by King and Ganuza (2005) found that participants had a “double identity” based on their language switching between Spanish among family and friends and Swedish with members of the dominant linguistic group. Schecter and Bayley (1997) determined that Mexican-American bilingual children defined themselves according to Mexican or American allegiance based upon the value

placed on the languages by their parents, and by their relationships with minority and majority group members.

Whereas these preceding studies analyze elements of hybrid identity between ethnic and dominant monoliths, the following studies probe more deeply into in- and out-group complexities of identity. Lotherington's (2001) action research of multilingual content-based course teachers in Australia illustrated the heterogeneity of language classes, students, and their teachers. She observed complex identities of Chinese teachers and students due to differences in country and region of origin, connection to Chinese, and ability in the Chinese language and specific dialects. Auer (2005) suggested a broader framework in social group identification among Turkish-German bilinguals in Germany. He noticed that a particular group of females who spoke German-Turkish code-switch were not necessarily a homogenous group as typically discussed in previous studies. For example, one Persian female spoke German-Turkish code-switch as a *Muslim* identifier among members of her social group.

History and Context

During the first three years after the establishment of the state in 1948, the Jewish population more than doubled, and more than 300,000 additional immigrants settled in Israel by 1960 (Spolsky & Shohamy, 1999). Despite the plurilingual nature of the diverse groups of Jewish immigrants, a Hebrew hegemony worked to build a modern nation state and absorb immigrants of diverse backgrounds (Glinert, 1995). New immigrants felt a sociological need to identify with veteran Israelis and learn Hebrew, a crucial element of the identity of the sabra: strong, young, proud, and daring. They also wanted to psychologically break away from their pasts of oppression and destitution of the Old

World (Fischler, 1990). New Israelis bonded when learning Hebrew in *ulpanim*[1] and in the Israeli army.

The actively monolingual stance of the state of Israel changed in 1989 with a huge influx of 600,000 Soviet immigrants (Glinert, 1995). Most Russian immigrants were not motivated to immigrate because of Zionism, but rather because of oppression in their home countries and for economic reasons. These immigrants were highly educated and had a "strong instrumental drive to adapt contrast[ing] with a weak 'integrative' desire to acculturate" (p. 353). In contrast, the Israeli government did not actively seek to preserve Amharic with the arrival of 75,000 Ethiopian immigrants in the 1980s; the largely uneducated and illiterate group unfamiliar to Western culture was absorbed by a strict and typically paternalistic policy (Glinert, 1995). Today, Israel is becoming a multilingual society with Arabic and English taught as requirements in schools and other languages such as Russian, French and Spanish offered as options (Spolsky & Shohamy, 1999). There is evidence of multilingualism in Israel in its media, street signs, storefronts and street languages.

Modern communicative Hebrew, as well as Biblical or religious Hebrew literacy are widely taught in formal and informal Jewish educational settings in North America. Private Jewish day schools usually devote half of a school day to Judaic studies courses, including modern spoken Hebrew, while supplementary schools (alternately called "Sunday," "synagogue" or "Hebrew" schools) take place after the hours of public school classes for 2-3 hours on Sundays, with additional hours sometimes held after school during the week and usually include a small amount of time devoted to Hebrew, although this Hebrew study is usually used for prayer purposes

[1] *ulpanim*- intensive Hebrew language schools, plural form of *ulpan*

Roots of Displacement

My personal history of migration began when my family moved from Canada to Jerusalem. In the 1970's, my parents had both lived in Israel before meeting one another: my mother had been employed as an English teacher and my father had studied and worked on a kibbutz. Both were from rural Canadian communities and wanted more than the Canadian Jewish community offered. My mother said:

> It was the desire to live as part of the mainstream and not to be in the fringe. You don't have to take time off for the holidays, and there is such a sense of vitality there. In Canada, I won't even know when it's a holiday, but in Israel, you can't not know. You live and feel the holidays.

My father said, "We moved to Israel because of idealism. We felt that we had to give it a shot. Israel was the best thing that happened to the Jews in a couple thousand years and our lives wouldn't be complete if we didn't try it."

Our first residence was a Jerusalem immigrant absorption center for English-speaking immigrants, known in Hebrew as the *merkaz klitah*[2]. My mother worked as an English teacher and my father as a journalist for an English language newspaper. Most of my friends were children of English-speaking immigrants, and my father tells me today that it was very difficult to cultivate friendships with *sabras*[3]. In the mid-1980's, they decided to move back to Canada. My father explained:

> We didn't have the language; we weren't really plugged in. The *merkaz klitah* was an island. The Jerusalem Post was also an island of English speakers. We

[2] *merkaz klitah*= immigrant absorption centre
[3] *sabras*= native born Israelis

> didn't have ties. It was also a time of great inflation. We would have had to buy an apartment and move from the *merkaz klitah*. We always thought of that Canadian passport…when things aren't going so well, you remember the good things about Canada- the lakes, the prairies, and our family was back here. But we still had the ideology and liked the idea. You're going from a higher standard of living in Canada to a lower standard of living and you really have to be *chazak, chazak*[4].

Although after moving back to Canada as a child, I attended and graduated from Jewish day schools, I held a deeper connection to Hebrew fluency and Israel than my peers. In high school, much of our exposure to Israeli and Diasporic Jewish culture came from movies played in school such as *Yentl, Exodus,* and episodes of *Seinfeld*. The Hebrew programs consisted of completing the same photocopied grammar drill exercises year after year with no communicative, social interactive usage or exposure. Language lessons, instead, were text- or prayer-based: rote rather than meaningful. I perpetually felt marooned in an anomic, in-between state of not belonging in the social group of my peers who had not lived in Israel and were not exposed to Israeli cultural, linguistic, and societal influences.

When I arrived in Tel Aviv after high school, 15 years after leaving Israel as a child, I instantly felt a sense of great familiarity and comfort when I discovered my ability to communicate with Israelis in a new language. I felt connected to them on a new plane unreachable by my Canadian peers. After one year in university in Canada, I moved to Tel Aviv in 2000. The most empowering element of living in Israel was

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[4] *chazak*: strong

feeling that I could fully function, attend classes, and successfully hold employment in another language and culture. I could lead a full and successful Israeli life, or an equally fulfilling Canadian life. While others had only one identity, I had two.

However, along with a feeling of ownership of two identities and cultures due to proficiency in two languages, I alternatively felt in the in-between, anomic state of belonging in neither. I recall sitting in low-slung chairs on the sand of a Tel Aviv beach one evening with my Israeli roommate and two of her friends. We were quite close with no barrier of language, but I always felt like the token English-speaker when among her friends. That evening, her friends briefly attempted to practice their English with me, but frequently rambled about personal stories and army memories with no attempt to explain the context to me. Although I shared their ability in the language, I did not share their cultural history or experiences. These incidents caused me to question my decision about moving permanently, and I returned to Canada to complete university, postponing my decision to immigrate to Israel.

I further deferred the decision by pursing graduate studies at an American and then Canadian university, in which I immersed myself in studying the motivations behind individuals' study of modern Hebrew. I aimed to learn more about my intense connection to the language and why it so greatly impacted my identity formation.

Methodology

I sought to find advanced learners of Hebrew of diverse backgrounds who, like me, felt a deep connection to the language and viewed Hebrew as a large part of their ethnic identities. After obtaining permission from the Hebrew professor at a large, urban Canadian university, I began my research in an advanced Hebrew language

undergraduate class made up of 10 female and 5 male students. Most students were 19 or 20 years old, and one student was 26. The course was held twice a week, for 2 hours. The study included one semester of participant-observation, a group discussion, and individual interviews with 11 students and the professor. I obtained consent from all classroom members and wrote detailed notes as I observed classes, and structured questions based on linguistic and social behaviors of the students and professor that I observed. Throughout the study, I emphasized that participants could communicate with me in Hebrew or in English. After recording discussions with students, I transcribed and coded their responses. Using the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I continuously re-analyzed transcripts in relation to others and returned to participants for clarification or additional information.

First Days in the Classroom

On first glance, the Hebrew classroom at the focus of my study seemed unspectacular: the desks and chairs were aligned in messy rows, students chatted and reviewed homework before class, and the teacher stood at the front of the room and frequently wrote on the blackboard as a teaching tool. However, as I spent more time integrating into the classroom setting and observing daily activities, I discovered that an abundance of cultural nuances and social rules shaped the atmosphere and content of the class. Students sat in divided social and language groups, and throughout the class, I heard words and phrases in diversely accented Hebrew and English. Students of this class were Canadian-born graduates of Jewish day schools; former USSR-born immigrants to Canada who grew up as immigrants in Israel before moving to Canada; children of Israeli emigrants who were born in Canada or moved to the country at a young age; and students

born in Canada or elsewhere with no or limited previous elementary or secondary formal or informal Hebrew education who worked their way up to an advanced level. In addition to the varieties of nationalities, levels and denominations of religious observance were similarly diverse among students. Despite such complex diversity, I was initially struck by the sharp physical and psychological divide as the class was separated by labels I would later discover to be called, "Israeli" and "Canadian."

Upon entering the field, I took note of these two distinct groups in the class. My groupings were based on features of their speech: the Israelis spoke quickly, fluently, and unconscious of their language which they used as a means of expression, and the Canadians spoke slowly and laboriously in Hebrew with much English code-switching and pauses, conscious of the mechanics of their language. Although I originally classified several students as "Russian," I later retracted this category because though they spoke with what I perceived to be Russian phonological accent features, they did not mention their Russian identity in discussions and did not ever refer to themselves using this label. Instead, they frequently asserted their Israeli identities:

Yana (student): *Tishmei-* [Listen-]

Aviva (professor): *Tishmei? Ani pochedet mimech* [Listen? I'm scared of you].

Yana: [LAUGHTER] *Kita shel Israelim* [A class of Israelis].

At this point, Yana motioned to students Marina and Tatiana who sat beside her, attributing her forceful (and implied by the professor, rude) manner of speaking to the professor to her Israeliness; namely, the shared knowledge of the stereotype that Israelis are rude and aggressive.

Although I discovered that among the "Canadian" students were American-born and South-African born students, those in the class constantly referred to the Canadian/Israeli dichotomy in class as illustrated by Ravit:

> It's very Israeli versus Canadian [LAUGHTER]. A lot of the Israelis probably thought they'd get an easy credit out of it. I mean, it's mostly the Israelis who talk in class, I find. So, I don't know, I just feel like the Israelis want get their words out there, they want more practice. I think the Canadians are trying to just take it all in and learn from it.

I understood that the national labelings of "Canadian" and "Israeli" referred not entirely to nationality, but often to linguistic communicative ability. These two groups of students sat on opposite ends of the room and rarely spoke to members outside their respective sub-groups.

Students' proficiency levels were wide-ranging. According to the instructor, those students known as "Israelis" spoke rapidly and fluently, but at an immature underdeveloped level with little reading or writing proficiency. Their speech was characterized by stubborn clinging to fossilized, non-standard language that the professor consistently attempted to correct. For example, these students often overgeneralized gender agreement plural forms: they often uttered phrases such as "*hen yodim shezeh nachon* [They know it's correct]" in which the verb "know" should feature a plural marker in agreement with the feminine "they" but is overgeneralized with a masculine "they." They additionally used incorrect, overgeneralized adjective phrases such as "*yesh male anashim bacheder* [There are full of people in the room]" that meant "there are many people in the room" because a correct, standard phrase is, "*Hacheder male anashim*

[the room is full of people].” Most of these participants were born in the former USSR and moved to Israel at the age of 6 or 7, and then moved to Canada as teenagers. Russian was their L1 home language, but after moving to Israel, Hebrew overtook Russian as the L1, childhood acquired language (particularly in interactions with siblings). In Israel and Canada, they spoke Hebrew with friends who shared similar immigration histories. In class and in conversations with me, they often shared their experiences in Israel ostracized from their peers in the majority Israeli culture. Because of their Russian language and culture, they felt like second class citizens in Israel. Interestingly, upon immigrating to Canada, their Israeliness rather than Russianness was the identity they chose to assert. The few students born and raised in Israel who moved to Canada as teenagers similarly asserted their Israeliness and chose to socially align themselves with those Israelis originally from the former USSR, primarily because they could hold Hebrew conversations with ease, rapidity and fluency. These students spoke Hebrew as their L1 at home, and all self-defined Israelis learned English as their L2 in Israel and after moving to Canada. The professor was also an Israeli emigrant who moved to Canada in her mid-20s and defined herself as Israeli.

The Canadian students struggled to communicate orally in class, but many who were religiously observant were experienced readers of biblical and rabbinic texts and conscientious of grammatical structures. Although these students were not all born and raised in Canada, they were slotted by the Israelis into the “Canadian” social group because of their inferior oral communication skills. English was the L1 of the Canadian students, and all learned Hebrew as their L2 as a foreign language in Canada. I soon learned that these linguistic divisions resulted in acrimonious power struggles between

these two minority sub-groups within the larger Jewish ethnic community. As I embarked upon my exploration of the conflicts within the language class, I found myself in a familiar place of in-betweenness and anomie amid two clashing cultures: my Canadian, English, diasporic culture, and that of Hebrew and Israel.

Aviva, the professor of the class, closely followed a textbook that comprised the curriculum and positioning of the Hebrew class (*Ivrit: Havanah Vihabaah*: "Hebrew: Understanding and Expression"). The text was published by Hebrew University's Overseas Students Program and intended for teaching of international students in Israel to familiarize them to Israeli language and culture. Aviva explained that her goal in teaching this particular level was to impart a thorough understanding of advanced Hebrew syntax, exemplified in short textual passages about the history, geography, and culture of Israel. Several of the students, she said, possessed higher oral communicative proficiency due to years raised in Israel and speaking Hebrew as a home language but had limited skills in reading and writing, whereas those who learned Hebrew at North American Jewish day schools had great literacy experience but limited oral communicative ability. In addition to learning grammatical rules and reading through the passages of the textbook, the professor asked students to present a 15 minute lecture on topics of their choosing that would lead to discussions. The professor's close following of the text placed a larger emphasis on literary skills than oral communication, although the latter skill was still a prominent feature, though lesser priority in the class.

Throughout my fieldwork, I alternatively felt a sense of belonging in both groups because of my ability to relate to the Israelis' communicative ability and the Canadians' literacy-based prior education, as well as not fully belonging in either category because of

my connection to the opposing sub-group. My investigation into the nature of sub-group divisions led me to an understanding of my own sense of place within the anomic realm.

Sub-Group Divisions

The following chart outlines each participant's background and classroom group identification:

Table 1: Names, backgrounds, and classroom group identifications

NAME	BACKGROUND	CLASSROOM GROUP IDENTIFICATIONS
Meg	- Born in South Africa - Moved to Canada at age 5	Canadian
Yana	- Born in Ukraine (former USSR) - Moved to Israel at age 6 ½ - Moved to Canada at age 14	Israeli
Ravit	- Born in Israel - Moved to Canada at age 11	Israeli
Amy	- Born and raised in Canada	Canadian
Naomi	- Born and raised in Canada	Canadian
Marina	- Born in Russia - Moved to Israel at age 5 - Moved to Canada at age 17	Israeli
Tatiana	- Born in Russia - Moved to Israel at age 7 - Moved to Canada at age 14	Israeli
Moshe	- Born and raised in Canada	Canadian
Adam	- Born and raised in Canada	Canadian
Seth	- Born in the U.S. - Raised in Canada and the U.S.	Canadian
Professor: Aviva	- Born and raised in Israel - Moved to Canada after marriage in her 20s	Israeli

Despite discovering great divergence in religious denomination, knowledge of Jewish culture and history, academic concentration, and country of birth, strength in communicative oral proficiency versus textual literacy divided the class respectively between the Israeli haves and the Canadian have-nots who felt disadvantaged because their investment in acquiring oral proficiency yielded very small returns (Norton Pierce, 1995) of poor grades and little oral linguistic progress, evident in this exchange between the Canadian and Israeli students:

Moshe: But just poll our marks in the class, though. I mean, they all score higher than us because they have the background.

Adam: Stop being coy, come on, it's true.

Ravit: But you guys have the tools that we don't really learn.

Adam: But what tools are those?

Yana: You have the grammar.

Ravit: Yeah, exactly, you have the grammar. And that's what this class is, this class is grammar, and we didn't learn grammar, we learned Hebrew. It is- we didn't learn grammar, we didn't learn these rules.

Adam: [SAME TIME] But it's intuitive though, come on, it's intuitive to you.

Yana: [SAME TIME] But like, you know-

Adam: Okay, I'll take, I'll take your intuition, over my skills, my apparent skills.

In the perspective of Krashen's Monitor Theory (1982), the Canadians were consciously learning Hebrew using grammatical rules and the "monitor" function, which worked as an editor of their speech whereas the Israelis had acquired the language unconsciously. Although students indicated a knowledge gap in the Israelis' literacy and grammatical levels compared with Canadians' understanding of these concepts, Hebrew fluency was defined in terms of spoken proficiency and not in terms of the skills of reading, writing, or listening. While Israelis held weaker literacy skills, their oral communicative intuitiveness regarding correct-sounding conjugations and syntax allowed them to fare well on written essays and assignments with little effort. Thus, Israelis in the class held the symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1994) as the dialogic partners with a higher linguistic status: they possessed what the Canadians strove for. Spoken fluency was the

prestigious currency of the class, and knowledge of grammar and reading comprehension skills were less desirable. Nevertheless, the class curriculum was largely text-centered, and this likewise led to dissatisfaction on the part of the Israeli students.

I discovered that many of the students, particularly the Israelis, were enrolled in the class not to seriously commit to the study of the language, but to engage socially with peers in their sub-group, using Hebrew as a vehicle of communication. Yana expressed her true motivation to enroll in the Hebrew course:

> Words of these poets and writers- honestly, I never find I use them. The thing is, I will try but I'll usually forget it. So I really don't see the point of doing it. I think for the Canadians, first of all, they need to learn the basic language. And I find that they don't know, like they know some basics but she takes them right away to the hard stuff. People would learn modern Hebrew much better if instead of sitting and learning in the class like this, the grammar, if we were talking about actual things like politics or history or whatever. I found, like it seems like everyone would participate if we learned, like- everyone is sitting here like idiots, because that's what they do- they make you learn the grammar rather than learn actual language. If you would be talking, and if you would be participating, you would have a bigger vocabulary, you would understand more. You don't just memorize the words if you're not going to use them.

Yana, a perpetrator of the "teenager" Hebrew previously mentioned, did not aim to improve her linguistic skill sets using the tools Aviva imparted; rather, she desired to maintain her fossilized and non-standard speech she acquired as a young child in Israel to

continue to speak as her peers spoke and feel a sense of belonging within her social group. Ravit similarly articulated her motivation not to improve her language but her GPA:

> A lot of the Israelis probably thought they'd get an easy credit out of it. I mean, it's mostly the Israelis who talk in class, I find. So, I don't know, I just feel like the Israelis want to get their words out there. They want more practice. I think the Canadians are just trying to just take it all in and learn from it.

When I questioned two other Israeli students about why the Canadians would be motivated to learn Hebrew, Tatiana proposed, "*Ulai hem margishim shayachut laYahadut vilasafah*" [Maybe they feel a belonging to Judaism and to the language]. Marina assumed, "*Chelkam mivchinat dati, ki hem datiim"* [Some of them in terms of religion, because they're religious]. Each Israeli student stated to me that she was not religiously observant and in fact, when asked to define their personal ethnic identities, Marina and Tatiana similarly noted they would not define themselves as *Jewish* because they were not *religious*. Contradictorily, in classroom conversations centered on the Arab-Israeli conflict or anti-Semitism, these Israeli students grouped themselves as "Jewish" to unite with their peers and Jews worldwide.

The Israeli students vastly stereotyped members of the opposing Canadian sub-group in the language class as they affiliated literacy and grammatical ability that stemmed from text-based educational background with the religiously observant social classification, dichotomous to their religiously secular lifestyles. While I identified with the Israelis' disinterest in what they deemed to be irrelevant grammar and vocabulary building through literacy exercises, their imposed identification on to the Canadian

students based on their linguistic strengths caused me to distance myself from inclusion in this constructed sub-group.

One of the students identified in the social context of the class as "Canadian" was actually an American student. Seth had studied Hebrew at Jewish day schools and Jewish summer camping, and defined his religious denomination as Conservative. Seth described the dichotomy of the class this way:

> There are the people who were born in Israel and have Israeli parents who speak it pretty well and quickly but don't quite grasp the grammar or the reading comprehension so well but they're good at spoken, conversational Hebrew or street Hebrew. So they probably need to learn some more fundamentals.

Seth and several other Canadian-grouped students were motivated to study Hebrew as part of a larger religious and social Jewish framework, based largely on textual study. Seth explained:

> I talk about *halachah*[5] all the time, but I talk about it mostly in English, so it was great for me to have the opportunity to present in Hebrew and think about it in Hebrew terms, and prepare and find words I didn't know existed. People were doing things they were passionate about and I think everyone in the class is passionate about Judaism to take Advanced Hebrew.

Moshe similarly expressed his motivation to study modern Hebrew as, "*Kdei lilmod Tanach vihaparashim vikdei lilamed Tanach vihaparashim"*[In order to learn Bible and the commentaries and to teach Bible and the commentaries]. Whereas Seth's language learning interest and goal was to use modern oral Hebrew to communicate ideas

[5] *halachah*= Jewish rabbinical law

regarding text, Moshe enrolled in the course to facilitate biblical or classic literacy learning.

When I spoke to Moshe and Seth, I understood their perspective as an individual educated in a largely religiously textually- and grammatically-based method, although I was far less knowledgeable than these students in the area of Biblical study due to their higher level of involvement in religious life. Self-defined "secular Jewish" Canadian students studied the modern language as more of a cultural membership key to the Jewish Diasporic in-group, rather than for religious purposes. Naomi did not plan to move or travel to Israel, but said Hebrew was important to her because, *"Ani choshevet shehi mekasheret et haYehudim- lo rak anashim shegarim biIsrael* [Because I think that it connects Jews- not just people who live in Israel]". In the group discussion, she said:

> I don't think it's a language that is only for Israelis. I think it's a language that brings Jews together not just if you move to Israel. It's a language that, like, all Jewish people can speak to each other.

I similarly felt distanced when speaking to members of the Canadian group of students; although I recognized their interpretation of Hebrew as a symbolic and abstract cultural artifact that facilitated religious learning because of my similar educational background, my connection to oral communication in the modern Israeli language was primarily based on human social interaction rather than prayer and texts. These students equally created generalizations in order to Other and stereotype those students who used the language in dissimilar ways. Naomi was one of several students who expressed deep animosity toward members of the Israeli group because of the power imbalance in class that she felt was caused by unfair advantages of those classroom members:

> As much as they keep saying that it's easier for you in many ways because you're, you don't have to re-learn mistakes that they already may have, I really don't agree with that. I don't think it's true that they thought they'd have to put as much time into the class, and so, that effort they're putting in, it's like, "Well, it's just as hard for us". But like, we still have to put in that effort and I just don't agree that it's easier for us in more ways, I don't buy it.

Discussion

Although I did not feel particularly affiliated with either constructed sub-group in the language classroom, I began to accept feelings of displacement and in-betweenness throughout the research and dialogue with classroom members. Despite great diversity within the language class, students chose to classify themselves, accept the classification of others, and comfortably create identity frameworks using in-group Othering and stereotyping. While I ruminated about my placement within the dichotomy of the groups, I discovered that the "Canadian" and "Israeli" sub-groups were in fact, not based on distinct national differences, but rather on imagined social communities (Anderson, 1991). These communities provide a sense of solidarity among individuals who belong to a common culture based on shared histories, values, and loyalties. The imagined groupings were composed of characteristics approved consensually by members who acted as gatekeepers of entry and access. The Israeli group was more exclusive as it included in its membership characteristics modern spoken communicative Hebrew, secularity, and unconscious acquired and not learned language (that is, not literacy-based or grammar-focused Hebrew) as authentic, real Hebrew. The Canadian group was more concerned with modern spoken Hebrew as a cultural symbol, or as a tool for textual study.

Although the class was principally text-based, oral fluency was the sought-after currency that the Israelis wanted to maintain and the Canadians wanted to acquire (albeit for symbolic or text-related reasons). Because the Israeli students had intuitively acquired the language without a conscious focus on grammar while the Canadians consciously learned the language through grammar drills and literacy exercises, a power struggle existed stemming from the disparity in language proficiency abilities. Quite simply, symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1994) was held by the Israelis, and hence, textual knowledge of Hebrew was not valued. Although texts learned in class did not typically address religious issues (most were short passages on topics such as Tel Aviv's scenery or Einstein's quirky manner of dress that were used to impart new syntactic subjects). Text-based learning became associated with religiosity by some students and held in opposition to oral fluency, secularity, and Israeliness (national identity). The Others were "Canadians" because a neat dichotomy had to exist in opposition to Israeli students Israeliness. I, and others within our minority diasporic community effectively placed others within a particular identification and limit their membership to groups we felt part of, while forbidding entry and exit to and from imagined social groupings. I realized the power all of us exert in classifying ourselves into sub-groupings and Othering those we dissociate from. As educators and advocates on behalf of language learners, we must ensure that all students of diverse backgrounds and sub-group classifications benefit from the knowledge and potential held by their classmates. The Canadian and Israeli strengths in areas such as text-based religious interpretation, oral communication, Israeli daily life and culture, and Diasporic Jewish life can be emphasized to equalize the power

imbalance in the classroom and give each member a sense of place, belonging, and acceptance within the diverse ethnic minority community.

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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Group Discussion Questions

1. Warm-up activity: On a blank sheet of paper in Hebrew or English, complete this sentence: Hebrew is important to me because…
2. Group activity: Divide class into three groups. Each must decide if they agree or disagree with the following statements:
    a. In order to live as a Jew, it is not necessary to speak Hebrew.
    b. In order to live in Canada, it is not necessary to speak Hebrew.
    c. It is necessary to speak Hebrew only if one has the intention of moving to Israel.
3. Why do students mix English and Hebrew in class?
4. Describe the group dynamics and atmosphere in the class.
5. Return to warm-up activity: what did you learn or discover during this session? Would you change your original answer?

Appendix B: Semi-structured Individual Interview Questions (Students and Professor)

1. How did you get to this point- describe your background and motivation to enroll in Advanced Hebrew? What are your language goals? (For teacher: Describe your journey before becoming professor of this class. What are your teaching goals?)

2. What place does Hebrew have in your life?
3. Growing up, did you feel particularly tied to one ethnic or cultural group? Why? Did that feeling ever change?
4. Why do students in the class code-switch between Hebrew and English?
5. Describe the group dynamics in the class.
6. Describe your relationship to Judaism.
7. Describe your relationship to Canada.
8. If you had to define your ethnic identity, how would you define yourself? Why?