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Cross-generational Differences in Language Use among Mountain Jews in Israel

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1. Introduction

The proposed research will examine language use and variation among Mountain Jews (MJ) of the Caucasus who immigrated to Israel during the 1990s. Particular emphasis will be placed on cross-generational differences and their effect on the use of the three languages spoken by this community, namely Juhuri, Russian and Hebrew. For most MJs, the dominant language was Russian and Juhuri was preserved as a heritage language. The MJ community's arrival in Israel, where the dominant language is Hebrew, brought about a unique situation where both Russian and Juhuri are now considered heritage languages.

Code-switching (CS) between the three languages is one of the most prevalent phenomena in the community of MJ people. To this day, Juhuri remains the main ingredient of MJ's collective identity. In the 1990s, following a large immigration to Israel from the former Soviet Union and during the first years of absorption, the lack of recognition of MJ as a distinct group and of their cultural heritage has taken a toll on the status of Juhuri. This has led to a process of language attrition and has restricted its presence to private situations among families and in communal gatherings. Among the younger generation, Hebrew took over rather quickly, and the older generation was already operating under influences of Russification, which had been intensified by Soviet policy back in the Caucasus. This made Russian a major language of communication among MJ, who could not resist their everyday reality, and it might account for some of the blend of these two languages among the older generation today.

The MJ community includes three main generations. The first two generations include parents and children who were born in the Caucasus, and the third is comprised of Israel-born youth. In general, first-generation MJs are fluent in Russian and Juhuri; second-generation MJs are fluent in Russian with varying command of Juhuri and/or Hebrew; the youngest generation is fluent in Hebrew with practically no ability in Juhuri and very little knowledge of Russian, which is for the most part limited to comprehension.

Two main studies will be conducted for the purpose of this research:

- Study 1 will be a cross-sectional, observational study, where MJ participants (the middle generation), aged 35-50, will provide recordings of their conversations with both their parents (first generation) and children (second generation).

- Study 2 will be a case study of a 60-year-old woman (first generation) who will be recorded while conversing with other MJ people from different generations, including aunts, siblings, friends, children, and grandchildren.

The primary purpose of this study is to describe different aspects of CS as they might occur in the conversations from both studies involving different interlocutors.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Mountain Jews: Language and History

Mountain Jews (MJ) are an ethno-cultural group originating in the eastern mountains of Caucasus, where they were commonly known as descendants of Persian Jews from Iran. MJ's traditional language is Juhuri, also known as Judeo-Tat for its origin and likely relation to the Tat language. Considered to be a form of Persian, the number of speakers today is estimated at around 200,000, most of whom live in Israel and the United States. According to its speakers, Judeo-Tat is a Semitic language which is to be differentiated from the Indo-European Muslim Tat, thereby their preference to call it Juhuri. Most researchers, however, believe these two are one single language divided by religious differences eventually correlating with linguistic differences, where Juhuri is essentially a dialect of the Tat language with its lexicon being rich with Hebrew, Aramaic and Russian words, as well as other Jewish influences.

Bram (2008) discussed the changes in the use of Juhuri among Caucasus Jews in Russia and Israel, mostly owing to the discrepancy between how its speakers perceive it in contrast to the surroundings. The first major decrease in the use of Juhuri resulted from intense processes of Russification due to the Soviet cultural policy in the Caucasus. In Israel, this difference not only caused a substantial decline in the language; it brought about a decline in its status even among native speakers, who, due to the state's ignorance of the different ethno-cultural communities among Soviet Jews, were seen as no less Russian than the rest of former Soviet Union immigrants. This, in turn, marginalized the MJ community and the specific needs of its members to adapt to their new surroundings. Juhuri was granted no official recognition, with Russian being considered sufficient as their language, consequently creating a substantial lack of Juhuri communication arenas.

2.2 Code-switching

Code-switching has been defined as the alternative use of two or more languages within the same conversation (Poplack 1980). According to Hymes (1974), code-switching may be applied not only to languages but also to "varieties of a language or even speech styles". Multilingual speakers, particularly those acquiring a language later on in their lives, use elements of both their spoken languages when conversing with each other. Code-switching is the use of more than one linguistic variety in a way that would be consistent with the syntax and phonology of one or both languages. CS is considered to be a naturally-developing rule-governed phenomenon. It has structural, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic dimensions, as discussed in the remainder of this review.

2.2.1 Types of Switching

CS can be either intrasentential or intersentential. Intersentential switching is characterized by a switch outside the sentence or clause; in other words, the switching involves two different sentences. Intrasentential switching occurs within the clause, phrase, or word level within a single utterance (Koban, 2013). Intrasentential CS is regarded as the most complex type for linguistic evaluation and analysis, which might account for the fact that most studies focus on this type. According to Poplack, because of this complexity, intrasentential CS requires speakers to be in sufficient control of the grammars of both languages. That being the case, the more proficient speakers are in both languages, the more they will be able to engage in CS within a single sentence or clause.

Muysken (2000) suggested three main patterns of CS which occur in bilingual speech: insertion, alternation and congruent lexicalization. In most cases, the occurrence of one pattern will be more frequent, though not necessarily to the exclusion of the other two (Deuchar, 2005).

- The first category is *insertion*, where the overall structure is set by a base or matrix language. Appropriately configured lexical items or entire constituents from the other language are inserted into the matrix language. Winford (2003) referred to this procedure as "the insertion of elements from one language into the morphosyntactic frame of the other." By this idea, insertions would usually take the form of single-word or single-utterance expressions, making them border on the line of spontaneous lexical borrowings.
- The second pattern is that of *alternation* between structures from different languages, namely, the alternative use of both languages takes place while each employs its own structure. This

pattern, subsequently, marks the emergence of a new grammar that is a combination of both languages, normally by means of simultaneous switching of several constituents.

- The third category, *congruent lexicalization*, requires the languages in question to be typologically similar or, as its name suggests, structurally congruent. In Musken's words (2000), in this pattern, "the grammatical structure is shared by languages A and B, and words from both languages *a* and *b* are inserted more or less randomly." Consequently, it is practically impossible to determine which languages provide the primary structure. Muysken suggests that it is the structural equivalence itself that brings to switching.

2.2.2 Motivations for Switching

One domain of CS which is most relevant for the present study concerns the motivations for switching, wherein the most significant distinction is between psycholinguistic (structural) or sociolinguistic reasons for switching. Sociolinguistic analysis of CS explores the effect of social and stylistic variables on switching and the choice to mix languages. Psycholinguistic motivations address aspects of the mental lexicon and cognitive processing. Throughout the years, research has studied bilingualism in these two main fields, focusing separately on each. The literature sets the main distinction between the two in intention and direction. Sociopragmatic CS is motivated by identity as well as contextual factors, while psycholinguistic CS is dependent on individual linguistic and mental factors, including lexical retrieval. The latter occurs particularly when a bilingual speaker faces difficulties in finding the right words and comes to the point of struggling with lack of structural equivalence between languages.

The two alternative routes of switching could also be used to account for the kind of motivation involved in both directions of the process: CS to the less preferred language is easily prompted by social factors, while the primary language would stand as an instant solution for such hurdles as word finding and issues of fluency with which a bilingual speaker is often confronted. The point at which an unintended language comes to the rescue in the form of CS has been labeled *Code interference*. According to Riehl (2005), psycholinguistically conditioned CS could also be termed as non-functional CS, its main feature being its random and unplanned occurrence in the conversation of bilinguals.

2.2.2.1 SPPL Model

Walters (2004) established the Sociopragmatic Psycholinguistic (SPPL) processing Model, which proposed two central modules influencing the language production of bilinguals at every stage: language choice and affective modules. The stages of bilinguals' language production are represented by five sources of information: social identity (see 2.3), contextual/genre information, speaker intentions, formulation, and articulator. The linear top-down order of these components stands for the kind of information retrieved by the bilingual speaker, where they move from sociopragmatic to psycholinguistic information down this linear scale.

The language choice module "selects, regulates, and retrieves information from a speaker's two languages during the entire course of language production." In other words, this module is fundamental in accounting for a distinction between motivations for CS, namely sociopragmatic or psycholinguistic, by means of its interaction with the five foregoing components. During each one of the stages of language production, the language choice module is responsible for the availability of information from both languages to the bilingual speaker. The affective module "is designed to select, regulate, and retrieve emotion-based information from other components of language processing."

2.2.3 Contextualization

Within the realm of sociolinguistics, contextualization has been discussed as a main factor affecting the use of CS and, in turn, being served by it (Nilep 2006). First introduced by Gumperz (1982), it refers to the use of language and discourse as a means of indicating and highlighting relevant aspects of an interactional or communicative state of affairs. This theory reinforces the importance of setting, topic and function, and their impact on language choice and discourse content. When CS serves the purpose of a contextualization cue, it is the inferences provided by the spoken words of each language that come to the fore rather than the referential meaning they represent. Such instances thus provide information beyond the limits of referential content. According to Blom and Gumperz (1972), social events, which include the participants, setting, and topic, within a single situation, "restrict the selection of linguistic variables." In other words, the choice of some linguistic forms over others is essentially based upon their appropriateness in a given social situation.

2.3 Social Identity

In order to develop the discussion of bilingualism, CS, and the use of more than one language as consequences of a bilingual speaker's sociocultural world, the question of identity is to be addressed in more depth. A social identity basically relates to the way individuals perceive themselves based on group membership. Heller (1988) believes a language is most closely associated with the group of speakers using it, to the point of becoming one of the most notable representations of their identity. In her words, the use of multiple languages "permits people to say and do, indeed to be two or more things where normally a choice is expected." Going by this idea, CS comes to highlight an individual's social and ethnic background. Rampton (1995) defines CS as an "in-group behavior".

Hozhabrossadat (2015), in an article discussing how CS helps its users construct solidarity or otherness within multilingual societies, proposed four previously-discussed models which link identity construction with language. The first model is the renowned *Social Identity Theory* (SIT) that was originally formulated by Tajfel (1981), which aims to explain how membership of individuals in different groups affects their intergroup behavior and helps them keep a distinct social identity. Through the second theory, that of *Performativity*, Butler (1997) suggests that an individual's identity is constantly designed during their speech acts and activities. According to this theory, exchanging identities requires language users to resist the common constraints of communication to follow their own individual level. Another theory, *Speech Accommodation Theory* (SAT), as seen by Giles (1977), assumes individuals' adaptation in different social environments and the way they join or distance themselves from different communities by constructing their own identity and, inevitably, linguistic discourse. The concept that lies at the heart of the final model, *Hierarchy of Identities* (HOI), posits discourse as being located at the top of a hierarchy of identities.

3. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions will be addressed:

Research question 1: What are the effects of cross-generational differences on the use of the three languages (Juhuri, Russian, Hebrew) spoken among Mountain Jews in Israel? This is the main question in this study, which aims to explore the amount and quality of language use across the generations to be studied. Conversations among first-generation participants are expected to yield higher rates of Russian speech, closely followed by Juhuri, and very little use of Hebrew, used

mainly for culturally based terms. The patterns of the second-generation participants' speech are predicted to yield the highest rate of CS, as members of this group speak the three languages albeit with varying degrees of fluency. The third-generation participants are expected to speak Hebrew with little or no use of any other language even when the person they are talking to does speak other languages. Study 2 is expected to yield similar results, with less CS as we go down the generational scale.

Research question 2: What are the motivations for switching in each generation? In terms of the distinction between psycholinguistic motivations (for lexical retrieval and fluency) and sociopragmatic motivations (to express identity, in-group behavior and context), generational differences are expected. Code-switching is expected to be mainly sociopragmatic for both first and second-generation participants (see for example, Heller (1988), who ascribed language choice for expression of identity). This prediction is in line with various theories presented by Hozhabrossadat (2015), showing how CS helps speakers construct solidarity or otherness within multilingual societies. Lower levels of Juhuri and Russian proficiency among the younger generation is likely to result in less sociopragmatic motivation for switching and possibly lesser amount of switching on the part of their parents, with Hebrew being the main language. These theories could be used to account for the results of Study 2 as well, where the results are expected to reflect the social situation triggered specifically in the main participant's interaction with each one of the interlocutors. Since the case study participant is fluent in Russian, the more dominant language in her everyday speech, and Juhuri is more closely related to her social identity rather than pure language competence, most instances of CS are expected to be sociolinguistic rather than psycholinguistic. Giles' (1977) Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT) is particularly relevant for explaining how speakers join or distance themselves from different communities by constructing their own identity through linguistic discourse. That being the case, the case study participant's conversations with people around her age, including family members and friends, should produce considerably higher amounts of CS between Russian and Juhuri. This may be due to interlocutors' higher proficiency in Juhuri, to the social background they might be sharing with the case study participant, and/or to their own proficiency and use of Russian-Juhuri CS as well.

Research question 3: What is the type of switching for each generation? Considering Poplack's observations that the complexity of intrasentential CS requires sufficient control over the grammar of each language they speak, participants of the first two generations are expected to switch more within sentences. While Hebrew is not likely to be used in the conversations between first and

second-generation participants, its presence is expected to take the form of single utterances, namely insertions, in contrast to Juhuri and Russian which are expected to include alternations as well. Less switching is predicted among the younger generation, with speakers using one main language and little or no CS. The middle generation, with sufficient knowledge of the three languages, is predicted to use all three languages to varying degrees, between and within sentences in both single utterances and entire phrases. For the case study of a 60-year-old woman, occurrences of Juhuri are most likely to be reflected in idioms and phrases which do not have close counterparts in Russian.

4. Method

4.1 Participants

- Study 1 – The main participants are 5 MJ adults aged 35-50 who arrived in Israel during the 1990s. Every participant, considered to be the second, or middle generation in this study (hereafter G2), has both parents (first generation, G1) and children (third generation, G3) living in Israel, with whom they communicate regularly. The G2 participants will fill out a questionnaire for self-reported proficiency in each language, which will also include personal information, such as age, gender, family size, occupation, and age of arrival in Israel. Information on the G1 and G3 participants will be gathered after the recordings will be completed and submitted for analysis.
- Study 2 – The main participant is RS, a 60-year-old mother of three who arrived in Israel in 1993 at the age of 35. RS was the sixth out of ten children born into an MJ family in Derbent, Republic of Dagestan, then USSR. Her father originated from the city of Quba in Azerbaijan. A year after arriving in Israel and completing Ulpan studies, she started working at a factory, which she left shortly after, and since then has been a homemaker. RS's Hebrew knowledge is very basic and is limited to single words. Russian and Juhuri are the only languages she speaks fluently. Her children were all born in the Caucasus (in 1980, 1981, and 1989, respectively), and they communicate with RS mostly in Russian, while she often switches to Juhuri. In an interview RS picked Juhuri as her first language in spite of the fact that her formal education was in Russian and the fact that she has no literacy skills in Juhuri.

4.2 Procedure

- Informed consent. Each participant will sign a consent form after receiving an explanation of the purpose of the study and assured that the recordings will remain anonymous. Moreover, participants will be told that they can withdraw at any point if they wished.
- Study 1 – Each one of the G2 participants recruited for this research were asked to voluntarily record two 10-minute conversations, one with a parent and one with a child. The topic of each conversation was classified as 'everyday issues' with no particular direction, while specific emphasis was placed on the importance of natural speech, with no awareness of the recording on the part of the other interlocutors. The subject of the proposed research was explained and no specific use of a particular language was requested.
- Study 2 – RS's conversations with several participants from each generation will be audio-recorded. Each conversation will be recorded without anyone but the researcher being aware of it, in an attempt to limit the effects of the Observer's Paradox (Labov, 1972), centering on the idea that "the aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed." The interlocutors will include 8 participants: one aunt, two sisters, one older and one younger, a friend, three children, one nephew, and one grandson. Each interlocutor will engage the case study participant in conversation for at least 15 minutes.

4.3 Data Analyses

For both studies, all instances of CS and the preceding and following utterances will be transcribed and coded for the following information:

1. Amount of switching – overall occurrence of CS among the main participants, namely each G2 participant in Study 1 and the case-study participant in Study 2, as it will appear in the conversations with interlocutors from different generations.
2. Amount of language use – frequency distribution of the use of each of the three languages by every participant in both studies (regardless of who they are conversing with), in both percentage and absolute terms.
3. Motivation for switching – psycholinguistic (word retrieval, cross-linguistic differences,) or sociopragmatic (identity, context, cultural basis), or both, since neither of the two is an exclusive possibility.

4. Locus of switching – intersentential CS (between sentences), including cross-speaker CS where one interlocutor speaks a certain language and the second responds in another; and intrasentential CS (within sentences), where each shift to another language will be subdivided into insertions (including borrowed words, addressing, and discourse markers) and alternations.
5. Directionality – identification of the matrix language.

The first two sections should address the first research question and enable detailed analysis of the cross-generational differences in language use among different interlocutors. This will be done by means of categorization of the conversations into three main generation groups – First, Middle, and Third. For both studies, the results of this examination will provide the amount of code-switched turns in the interactions with interlocutors from different generations, as well as proportions of the overall use of each language by every participant.

The second and the third sections entail information which should address the second and the third research questions, respectively. The total number of occurrences of CS in each category is to be counted and divided by the number of turns of each conversational episode. Further investigation, including qualitative analysis of the different CS types, the psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic patterns which govern the expected findings will follow.

5. Contributions of the Study

The main contribution of the proposed research relates to the uniqueness of testing bilingualism and CS across two heritage languages, Russian and Juhuri, the latter of which has hardly been studied before. The results are not only likely to support the perceived nature of CS as a means for constructing identity and modulating social distance and affiliation, but enhance knowledge of generational evolution and the environmental effects of people's social situation on language use, attrition and development. Furthermore, the study aims to explore more complex sociological issues by shedding light on the Juhuri community and looking not only at its history but its current state. The observation of generational gaps through language use might enable us to obtain better understanding of the impact of absorption and bilingualism.

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Appendix

Self-reported Proficiency

Background Information

1. Name
2. Gender
3. DOB
4. Date of Arrival
5. Education level
6. Which ethnic group/community do you belong to or most identify with
7. Occupation/Profession
8. Family size

Linguistic information

Language	Age on Arrival	Context of Acquisition

On the scale from 1 (least proficient) to 5 (fully fluent) how do you rate yourself in speaking, understanding, reading, writing in all of the languages in question?

	Speaking	Comprehension	Reading	Writing
L1				
L2				
L3				