

# THE MAIN MOTIVATING FACTORS DICTATING LANGUAGE CHOICES IN THREE JEWISH WOMEN

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## **Abstract**

This is an investigation into the motivating factors behind the language choices of three Jewish women living in the Diaspora community of Manchester. Interviews were carried out to assess their various attitudes towards Yiddish, the heritage language of Eastern European Jewry as well as other Jewish languages.

The findings of this study suggest that perpetuation of religion, the Holocaust, assimilation and nationalism are all significant factors influencing the diverse language choices of the three women interviewed.

## **1. Introduction**

Approaching Yiddish solely as a language is superficial. Yiddish encompasses everything that the most important and most creative portion of our people produced in recent centuries. It is not literature or music or scholarship or ideas but all of these and something more. It is throbbing life, Jewish spiritual energy, dream of redemption, consciousness and instinct, idea and fantasy, discipline and liberty. (Auerbach 1995:172-3)

Yiddish pleads to be and needs to be read, spoken, laughed, cried, shouted. It is a breath of life itself. (Fishman 1981:X)

The very fact that native speakers assign such emotive qualities to Yiddish, rather than viewing it as a neutral vehicle for communication, demonstrates that Yiddish is “quite unlike any other language” (Harshav 1990:90). Its history as the mother tongue of Eastern European Jews, evolving as a melting pot of languages, nationalities and folk wisdom only adds to its uniqueness. For the last millennium Yiddish has mediated between the daily lives, education and religion of the Jews on the one hand and the beliefs of the surrounding Christian world on the other (Harshav 1990:xiii). In effect it enabled the Jews to keep their social and religious network entirely separate from their non-Jewish neighbours. However, the flourishing of Yiddish segued into a ‘dying language’, dividing modern Jews into those that rejected, those that retained and those that revived it.

This study examines the perception and usage of Yiddish by Ashkenazi Jews living in the Diaspora today and, more specifically, the motivating factors that are responsible for their language choices. The study will also focus on the role of an ‘ethnic language’ in modern Diaspora Jewry. I will be investigating whether this function is still performed by Yiddish, whether it has been replaced by something else, or whether it is indeed extraneous. Hence although the major focus of this project will be upon Yiddish, attitudes towards Hebrew and English will also be taken into account.

Three individuals living in Manchester were interviewed. Each of these represents a different language background and a different level of religious observance, so as to offer the views of a cross section of the Manchester Jewish community. The informants for this study will be introduced in chapter three.

Every effort has been made to allow the various thoughts, feelings and viewpoints of the participants to emerge from their own perspectives. Yet ultimately, the very choice of the research questions and focus on Yiddish and the linguistic behaviour of the Manchester Jewish community reflect the interests of this researcher. Rather than avoid such influences, this study acknowledges them from the outset. I am the great-granddaughter of Eastern European Yiddish speaking immigrants, and despite having never had any Yiddish influences in my lifetime, the language remains an important part of my heritage, without which, as Kaplan suggests, life as a Jew would be “unthinkable” (1956:376). Awareness of this paradox has led to my fascination with the link between language and ethnicity and the reconciling of both my British and Jewish identities.

The predominantly Jewish area of Manchester upon which this study is based is my own home neighbourhood. Thus I have first-hand knowledge of the different sections which make up this unusual area. Among the 35,000 Jews living in Manchester there are many different levels of religious observance, and both schools and youth groups exist which cater to each stratum. One of the groups contributing to this diversity is a small Yiddish speaking Hasidic population (see below for an explanation) who have not, to my knowledge, previously been formally researched.

Chapter two will contain a review of the literature relevant to this project, including the history of Yiddish and its status today, Modern Hebrew and the Manchester Jewish community. The experiment design and its operation will be discussed in chapter three, entitled methodology. The results of the interviews will be analysed in chapter four, followed by a summary of the conclusions in chapter five. Copies of the interview questions and detailed notes of the transcriptions can be found in the appendix section six.

## **2. Research Context**

The subject of Yiddish is one which has been greatly exploited for sociolinguistic research purposes in America. However, formal research into British Yiddish speakers is minimal, and the same can be said for research on the Manchester Jewish community itself. Despite this there are a few studies which are of relevance to Yiddish in Manchester and they will be discussed below. Initially it is necessary to gain some understanding of Yiddish itself, exploring its history and status today as well as gaining a basic understanding of the Jewish community in Manchester. Since Modern Hebrew is an important factor in this study this too will be discussed below.

### **2.1 Origin of Yiddish**

According to Poll (1965:208), “language is one of the major factors contributing to cultural assimilation”. Those who relocate to a foreign land and learn its language find it easier to interact with the native population. He states that through this interaction, facilitated by a common language, migrants tend to become integrated into the host society. On the other hand, for those who retain a distinct language, interaction is retarded.

Ever since the Jews were driven from Palestine by the Romans in 70 AD and subsequently dispersed around the globe, their identifying languages have been used as the pivot around which they resisted the constant threat of assimilation (Gittleman 1978:8). Offered substantial hospitality in many countries worldwide, they frequently compromised parts of their cultural habits and heritage in return for acceptance and stability. Local languages were picked up rapidly, yet always adapted to suit their own

needs and spoken somewhat differently to their non-Jewish countrymen. These differences vary from the addition of a few Hebrew words to a highly variant syntax.

The Rhineland in particular, provided enormous linguistic hospitality (Gittleman 1978:12). The language as well as the culture of the German speaking natives was readily accessible to the Jewish community, thanks to sufficient social and commercial interaction. By 1200 these Rhineland Jews spoke and wrote a language variously described as Ivri-Teutsch, Judenteutsch or Jüdisch. This new language was soon identified as *Yiddish* (German spoken by Jews) by its speakers and soon dominated their means of communication in all daily Jewish life outside the synagogue (Gittleman 1978:13). Biblical Hebrew remained and remains the sole language of prayer.

Yiddish spread quickly through the Jewish communities of Western Europe. At its peak in the years immediately preceding the Holocaust, Yiddish was the main language of approximately ten million Eastern European Jews, making it the most widely spoken Jewish language (Weigel 2002).

Unfortunately the hospitality the Jews enjoyed in many countries was not to last. The crusades induced a period of violent pogroms against the Jews who were forced to live in ghettos, totally cut off from the gentile society. In some cases they were expelled from their longstanding homelands. During this time, Yiddish, impenetrable to non-Jews, acted as a form of protection for them. Inevitably, emigration followed, mostly in the direction of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Ukraine where the Jews and Yiddish would flourish until the Nazi threat loomed, prompting widespread emigration to the West, in particular to America and Britain.

## **2.2 Structure of Yiddish**

Yiddish is a fusion of many other languages. But fundamentally Yiddish is a West Germanic language, and thus a close cousin of English, and an even closer relative of German (Weigel 2002). Its vocabulary is predominantly German but it also combines elements from other languages spoken by Jews with loan words from Aramaic, medieval French, Italian and Slavonic languages. Hebrew provides numerous terms for religious concepts and traditions. Modern Yiddish is rich in English and Russian loanwords. In return colloquial English borrows freely from Yiddish with words such as *Kosher* and *Schmaltz* (Dalby 1998).

## **2.3 Status of Yiddish Today**

In 2002 Weigel estimated that there were probably fewer than two million speakers of Yiddish remaining in the world, with the majority of these no longer using Yiddish as their primary language. He concludes that this rapid decline in numbers was the combined result of “genocide in Europe, cultural assimilation in America and official and unofficial pressure to shift to Hebrew in Israel and Russian in the Soviet Union”. Three small groups of Yiddish speakers remain today: an elderly generation of Eastern European Jews, a group of “Yiddishists” (secular advocates of Yiddish) and -the largest group- Hasidic and ultra-Orthodox communities who exemplify a thriving case of ethnic mother tongue revival (Abraham 1999:56).

The Hasidim are a sect of ultra-Orthodox Jews who strive to maintain the ethos of former Eastern European Jews specifically in their dress and language. This is hoped to act as a segregating barrier between them and the perceived threat of the secular society. Glinert (1999:31) suggests that their sense of angst is compounded by the near destruction of traditional Jewish life in the Holocaust. Since these speakers of Yiddish no longer have a geographical base they feel duty bound to recreate the past

using Yiddish, the language of their heritage. Interestingly, Alladina and Edwards (1991: foreword) propose that “for a language of immigrants to exist in a state of stable bilingualism...continuing contact with the country of origin in the forms of visits or new arrivals would seem to be a prerequisite” and that “Britain is intolerant of minority languages and works towards deculturalization of these groups and their eventual Anglicization”. Yet, it would seem that the current surge of Yiddish revitalization in Britain contradicts both of these statements. In 1999 Pinter (personal contact cited in Glinert 1999:32) estimated that 6000 children in the UK were attending an ultra-Orthodox Yiddish-medium school and that this number was steadily rising. Indeed this number is nearly 90% higher than the figure in 1975 (Worms 1992 in Glinert 1999:33). This rate of expansion is not enjoyed by any other ethnic immigrant language in the UK.

Studies by Glinert (1999) and Abraham (1999) investigated attitudes towards Yiddish amongst Hasidim in London. Both researchers identified significant conflict with English and perceived that duty to Yiddish “was being expressed in terms of Jewish distinctiveness, peoplehood and Hasidic solidarity” (Glinert 1999:31).

Historically, an obstacle to revitalization has been Anglo-Jewish perceptions of these subsequent immigrant communities. Livshin (1990:81) explains that the established Anglo-Jewish communities of the late nineteenth centuries felt that the Eastern European immigrants would have a negative impact on the respectable status of Anglo Jews and would effect anti-Jewish feeling against the entire community. The extent of this attitude can be seen in a quote from the Jewish Chronicle 1881<sup>1</sup>:

They come mostly from Poland, they as it were bring Poland with them, and they retain Poland while they stop here. This is most undesirable: it is more than a misfortune, it is a calamity.

This attitude led the large majority of newcomers to adapt quickly to the surrounding British society. Many immigrant males chose British born Jewish wives and threw themselves into becoming English in every sense of the word from playing cricket to wearing bowler hats (Lipman 1990:222). The most striking evidence of this was that Yiddish as a spoken language practically died out in a single generation (Lipman 1990:222) and thus as Livshin (1990:93) states, “within one generation foreigners were turned into English Jews”.

As losses from the Jewish community to intermarriage and non-identification continue to rise the distinction between Jew and non-Jew is becoming less and less distinct. At present, throughout most communities in the Diaspora one young Jew in two is deciding not to continue the Jewish story by living a Jewish life, marrying another Jew and having Jewish children and grandchildren (Sacks 2000:19). The linguistic barrier which for so many years acted as a preventative measure against such a phenomenon is either no longer effective or desired. Despite these extraordinary statistics, research into the role of Yiddish among British ultra-Orthodox Jews remains cursory.

## **2.4 Manchester Jewish Community**

Today Manchester boasts the second largest Jewish Community in England and indeed Williams (1976: vii) proposes that it is the most influential Jewish community in provincial England. Predominantly as a result of immigration from

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<sup>1</sup> JC 12<sup>th</sup> August 1881

Russia, Galician districts of Austria-Hungary and Romania, the Jewish population of Manchester swelled from 6,000 to over 30,000 between 1875 and 1914. Consequently, the demographic structure of Manchester Jewry was drastically transformed (Williams 1999:13). By 1976 there were over 30 synagogues, 120 Jewish societies and charities and 45 Zionist organisations in Greater Manchester. Today there are approximately 35,000 Jews living in Manchester, over half of whom live in the northern district of the city, known as 'Broughton Park' upon which this study is based.

The Broughton Park community is divided into groups of differing levels of religious observance. Unusually among world Jewry, the irreligious are the minority and the dominant group is a Hasidic population consisting of 1500 families (Holman & Holman 2003:4). The average household size for this community is six, significantly larger than the English (2.36) average (Holman & Holman 2003:20). This reflects the adherence to the Biblical obligation to "be fruitful and multiply", prohibiting the use of contraception. Consequently the community is growing exponentially. Like all Hassidic communities, this one is extremely tightly knit. This is aided by their own educational system comprising Yiddish-medium junior and senior schools. Further education exists in the form of several Yeshivot<sup>2</sup> for men and seminaries for women. Contrasting drastically from the attitude which prevails among the non-Hasidic Jews in Britain, education in secular colleges and universities is not encouraged for Hasidic youth.

## **2.5 Modern Hebrew**

Mass emigration, combined with a growing Jewish nationalism, culminated in the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. The State's revival of Hebrew and its establishment as a national language by a society of immigrants is a rare example of a successful linguistic revolution (Ben-Rafael 1994:2). This resurgence was undertaken at a time when there numbered only twenty or thirty thousand Jews in (then) Palestine. Jewish nationalism was originally separated into two language camps with Yiddish as the opposition to the new territorial stream with Hebrew as its chosen language. Despite Yiddish being the first language of many of these immigrants, supporters of Hebrew believed that with its chequered history Yiddish was too closely associated with Jewish oppression and lack of freedom. As a result of negative reinforcement towards Yiddish, Hebrew prevailed in Israel. For the third generation of Israelis Yiddish has been all but forgotten. Hebrew is now the language of both Israeli culture and necessary communication (Ben-Rafael 1994:72). Furthermore, for the vast majority of Diaspora Jewry, it is now to Modern Hebrew that they look for identification. According to Shaffer (1972:315) Modern Hebrew is the "only known example of a language which has become once again the vernacular for a group of people after it had been no one's mother tongue for centuries".

## **3. Methodology**

This study seeks to discover the motivating factors behind the language choices of modern Diaspora Jews. For this purpose I have researched the attitudes of three individuals from the Diaspora community of Manchester. I hope that my results will provide some valuable insights into the overall perception and usage of Yiddish in world or even British Jewry. But naturally I am aware that by using such a small number of informants, and looking at only one community this study will not necessarily be truly representative.

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<sup>2</sup> Centre of religious study

### **3.1 Research Questions**

As a consequence of my research I have concentrated specifically on three research questions to help me answer the main issues of this project. It is hoped that the methods described in this section will help to answer the following questions:

1. What are the language backgrounds of the informants and how have these influenced their language choices and attitudes?
2. What are the attitudes of the informants regarding language practices in their own family homes?
3. What views do the informants hold with regard to the future of Yiddish and other Jewish Languages?

### **3.2 Informants**

Finding three subjects who fit the requirements for this study was quite problematic. The choice of informants was firstly limited with respect to gender. Due to the religious constraints of the Hasidic community, it would be considered inappropriate for a Hasidic male to be interviewed by a female. In order to eliminate gender from the list of confounding variables, females were used for all the interviews. Secondly, since Hasidim are a notoriously closed group, with a suspicion of outsiders, my choice of subjects for this category of Yiddish speaker was restricted all the more. After being refused by numerous women on the grounds that I would be an 'unwanted secular influence', one of the other subjects introduced me to a Hasidic contact of hers who was willing to participate in the study only after this recommendation. Despite the fact that the subjects are of the same sex and approximately the same age group, one variable which may strongly influence their attitudes is their different levels of religious observance. Hopefully this will represent a subset of the broad spectrum of beliefs and observance levels of Judaism which comprises the Manchester Jewish community.

I refer to my chosen subjects for this study by pseudonyms. Avital (45), Brocha (59) and Clara (42) were each selected because they represent differing language choices with regard to Yiddish. Avital is a bilingual Hasidic Jewess who grew up speaking Yiddish and English and continues to do so with her seven children and numerous grandchildren. Two of her children were by chance briefly present at the interview. Brocha is an Orthodox Jewess who also grew up with much Yiddish but did not continue to speak the language with her own children. Clara is a non-religious (or cultural) Jewess originally from Belgium who has settled in Manchester after a few years in Israel. Her parents spoke to her in Yiddish but she never spoke her parents' mother tongue and has therefore not been able to pass on any knowledge of Yiddish to her own children. English is now her method of communication in wider society but she uses Modern Hebrew at home.

### **3.3 Data collection**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted since this method of data collection permits the exploration of issues that may otherwise be too complex to investigate through quantitative means alone. Semi-structured interviews in particular bridge the gap between structured and unstructured interviews, combining their most favourable attributes. The interviewer is not bound by standardised questions and can consequently respond to the positions and comments expressed by the interviewee, including those not anticipated. Questions were devised which would reveal the

attitudes of the informants as well as their actual language practices. Hence the interview questions were deliberately open ended. The informants were also challenged throughout the interviews as demonstrated by questions including: “is Yiddish merely a rejection of modernity?”. These questions were posed in order to disentangle the complexities of their attitudes and gain an insight into the justification for such approaches.

The interviews, all conducted in English, were divided into three sections, each intended to reflect one of the three original research questions. All of the interviews, which varied in length between forty-five minutes to an hour, were recorded onto a Dictaphone. In conjunction with this, notes were taken during each interview and later detailed notes were made of each recording. I felt that this amount of data was perfectly adequate in order to be able to evaluate the attitudes of the interviewees reasonably accurately. Furthermore, an absolutely accurate transcription would be a waste of valuable time. Unfortunately the first interviewee, Avital was rather shy and became even more reticent when faced with a Dictaphone. Consequently, the recording from the first interview is not terribly clear. With lessons learnt, the latter two interviews were conducted with an extra microphone which amplified the speech sufficiently. The analysis for Avital’s interview is based on the detailed notes made at the time of the recording. The collective data subsequently underwent a thorough process of examination in order to highlight comparative themes which emerged throughout the interviews.

### **3.4 Process of analysis**

The results and analysis section below is structured in three parts. Each one addresses one research question and gives all three participants’ responses, interspersed with my own comments. Section 4.1 will cover issues relating to research question 1. Thus the backgrounds of the three participants will be discussed in order to gain an understanding of where the motivation for their language choices originated. The focus of section 4.2 is upon the language practices exhibited in the informants’ marital homes, their attitudes to Yiddish and other languages today and the views of their children. This section will be the largest of the three. Section 4.3 will focus on the attitudes of the participants with respect to the future of Yiddish. At the end of each section there will be a short conclusion of the main points relating specifically to the particular research question. The final major conclusion will summarise all the key points raised during the project and will relate to broader issues which are relevant to this project.

## **4 Analysis**

### **4.1 Past**

Noticeably, the three women had significantly different backgrounds, although the father of each of the subjects spoke Yiddish as their mother tongue. Avital’s father was a Holocaust survivor from Hungary. A Hasid himself he puts his escape from Auschwitz down to *emunah*<sup>3</sup> or ‘faith in God’. She describes him as an “*intellectual*” who “*appreciated literature*”, suggesting that this was unusual for a man of his level of religious observance. Her mother emigrated from Belgium, speaking both Yiddish and Flemish, and the family came over to England where her father opened one of the largest *Yeshivas*<sup>4</sup> in England as well as the first Yiddish speaking school in

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<sup>3</sup> Faith in God

<sup>4</sup> Place of religious study

Manchester. Avital spoke Yiddish until the age of four when she learnt English and began code switching between the two. Contrastingly, her brother only used Yiddish when they were growing up.

Since most popular culture is at odds with Hasidic values and norms, many families are selective in their choice of literature (Holman & Holman 2003:14). Indeed Avital remembers considering her parents 'radical' for allowing her to read "*secular books*" such as 'What Katy Did' and titles by Jane Austin which were strictly forbidden amongst her friends. Avital credits these books with her ensuing appreciation of English literature and her own "*good standard*" of English.

Brocha grew up in a similarly religious family, although despite being "*interspersed with a great deal of Yiddish*", English was prominent in her household. Since her grandmother, who lived across the road, spoke only Yiddish, Brocha and her siblings used Yiddish when she was in the house as well as with their parents. Conversations amongst the siblings, however, were mostly in English. She claims that she was never encouraged one way or the other with respect to her language choices:

*"We never discussed 'oh we're talking Yiddish' we just fell into it quite naturally. It was just a way of life for us...an accepted fact. Nobody discussed or analysed why we spoke Yiddish, we just did."*

In Brocha's case it was her mother who was considered the academic and was always "*particular*" about the use of "*good*" English. Although Brocha told me that her parents never articulated the importance of Yiddish, it seems that their regular Yiddish conversations with their children demonstrated their commitment to its retention.

Contrastingly, Clara's revelations of parental language influence present quite a different picture. Although aware that her father's mother tongue was Yiddish, in the interview she was uncertain about her mother's, "*I think Flemish. She might have told me once that her mother tongue was Yiddish...I should have asked her*". The day following the interview, however, Clara returned to me after speaking to her mother saying she had found that Yiddish was in fact her mother's first language. Clara's vague recollection confirms how little emphasised Yiddish was by her mother.

She disregarded the idea of speaking Yiddish from a young age, despite demonstrating fluency:

*"I remember instances where [my parents] said something to me and just a second after I asked myself in which language did they say it? French or Yiddish and I didn't know. I had grasped the idea and forgotten the language."*

Whereas she shows no regret for her discontinuing her parents' mother tongue, she seemed to be unusual among her peers in her lack of condemnation for the "old ways":

*"Our parents knew we weren't going to speak Yiddish. That was the fact with the generation. In fact I think they were quite happy that we didn't say anything about **them** speaking Yiddish."*

All three of the women stated that relating to non-Jewish society during their childhood was not an issue. They all lived in predominantly Jewish areas and on the

whole did not mix with anyone outside of their own religious denomination. For Avital, coming from the tight knit social network of Hasidic families, attending a non-Yiddish speaking and non-Hasidic but still ultra-Orthodox school was the closest she came to the 'outside world'. Here she refrained from using Yiddish since she felt that she was already distancing herself from her peers with her Hasidic dress and she "*didn't want to stand out with language too*". Although she was not forbidden by staff from speaking Yiddish at school, she preferred to save her Yiddish for home use only. Few of her school friends or teachers spoke Yiddish as it "*wasn't the done thing*". A possible explanation for this could be that many of them were the children of Holocaust survivors, growing up in an atmosphere of fear and anxiety associated with speaking Yiddish and practicing their Judaism. Yet Avital's experience at school did not make her perceive Yiddish negatively and she continued to enjoy speaking it with her family.

Clara attended a Jewish school in Belgium and began learning Hebrew at the age of nine, reaching a very high standard by the time she left school. Her decision to move to Israel was attributable to negative feelings towards her Diaspora community:

*"I didn't like the situation of feeling like being in a ghetto...the feeling of being oppressed, always escaping. I wanted to be free in my own country."*

This seems to have also motivated her choice to discard Yiddish in favour of a more positively reinforcing language...Hebrew.

Brocha offers no explanation for her phasing out of Yiddish use. However when asked her opinion of other Mancunians' preference for English, she suggests that many people of her generation associated Yiddish with being religious and "*that sort of Jew image*". She told me people thought if they spoke English they would be perceived more positively and be "*better off*". Brocha does not include herself in this description of anglicised Jews but the fact that she has mainly ceased to speak Yiddish and not passed in on to her children suggests that, subconsciously at least, this is an opinion that she shares.

### **Conclusion to 4.1**

As members of the first post Holocaust generation, the families of all three subjects were greatly affected by this persecution. Avital's family remained ultra-Orthodox but were afraid to show this in public. Her parents ensured, however, that she and her siblings spoke Yiddish together with a good knowledge of English so as to prevent them from being too conspicuous. Yiddish in her childhood differentiated her from most of her peers. Evidently this is where both her tendency for segregation and her enthusiasm for Yiddish originated.

For Avital, Yiddish provides a clear link with the past, encompassing values that she wishes to maintain today. Brocha too sees Yiddish as a connection to the history of the Jews. Yet she appears to have attached Yiddish to the negative image of the "ghetto Jew" of the past, and I suspect that this has been an enormous motivating factor in her own language choices although she does not admit this herself. Contrastingly, Clara admits openly that she moved to Israel and learnt Hebrew in a bid to break away from the image of persecution and oppression that seemed to follow the Jews in Europe. This apparent prioritising of Hebrew over Yiddish was a common pattern amongst new immigrants to Israel, eager to rid themselves of a negative stereotype. As well as moving away from the language of her parents she has also

abandoned their level of religious observance, whereas Avital has retained her parents' level of religion.

The issue of respect appears to be a motivating factor dictating language choices when the subsequent generations judge the mores of the previous ones. I propose that Avital's respect for the lifestyle of her parents has been influential in her retention of Yiddish. By comparison, Clara considers the lifestyle and culture of her parents to be 'old' fashioned and out of date and has rejected their language as a result. Brocha falls somewhere between the two, clearly respecting the values that they too cherished but recognising the need to compromise further with reality.

#### 4.2. Present

Avital's daily life is totally dictated by the obligations and restrictions of Judaism. Whilst the other two women have attempted to remove themselves from living in a Jewish 'ghetto', Avital has purposely remained in this culture and environment. She states that Yiddish is at the core of her Jewish identity, encompassing religion, culture and tradition. More than a vehicle of communication, Yiddish is a fundamental part of the social barrier that separates her family from activities which may encroach on their religious and cultural stability. She deliberately avoids, and shelters her children from, all non-Jewish influences, and is therefore grateful that "[Yiddish is] something we have that no Goyim<sup>5</sup> understand (p1)". She defines Yiddish as "a way of speaking to other Yiddisher<sup>6</sup> people (p1)". She fails to address the fact that a greater number of Jews do not understand Yiddish. Consequently she is also separating herself from the vast majority of her own ethnic group. The possibility exists that in fact she does not consider those Jews more acculturated to English society to be a part of her ethnic group at all.

Avital denies the suggestion that she rejects modernity by her use of Yiddish, saying that her clothes and outlook are modern. Comparison with fashions in wider society would refute this, but she would be loath to examine this more closely. We will see again later how her perceptions are clouded by myopia.

The Manchester Hasidic community has grown considerably since Avital's own youth. She describes how everybody knew each other and their business intimately: "*Manchester was so small, we were much smaller then.*" Significantly she calls her community "Manchester" when referring in reality to a very small area of the city. This growth has encouraged the creation of single-sex Yiddish-medium schools, facilitating her children's Yiddish education. Avital stresses the importance of her children's education being in a mostly Yiddish environment, portraying English as restrictive and detrimental:

*"English textbooks tend to put things in a box so to speak. Using Yiddish is like going deeper into the subject. It's like thinking outside the box. In English you only get the tip of the iceberg. It is limiting the child's imagination."*

According to Avital's daughter Rachel, the school day is broken up into two distinct linguistic sections. The mornings are filled with religious study, exclusively in Yiddish and a few hours in the afternoons are for secular study which is taught in English. During break time the girls are encouraged to use Yiddish. They are not reprimanded for using English outside the classroom but they are influenced not to do so if they are overheard by a teacher. When asked if she would ever use English in

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<sup>5</sup> Yiddish, meaning non-Jewish people

<sup>6</sup> Yiddish, meaning 'Jewish'

front of the headmaster the look of horror on Rachel's face told me that this was an unthinkable act. She appeared to have no objections to such rigid discipline, "*they are just trying to teach us properly*". We can see how much has changed in a single generation in this area by Rachel's attitude towards using Yiddish at school: "*around me they all speak Yiddish, so I would stand out if I didn't*". This is the reverse of her mother's reticence with Yiddish when she was at school and Avital clearly relishes this transformation. Indeed, when Rachel is first introduced to me, Avital tells me with some pride that 'Rachel's English is probably the worst in the family'.

Yiddish and Judaism in Avital's mind are inextricably linked. This can be seen by her opinion of Jews who do not speak Yiddish:

*"I don't hold anything against them; I just feel sorry that they're missing out on so much. People think it's just words but it's not. Yiddish comes from Yiddishkeit<sup>7</sup> so people who don't know Yiddish at all are missing out on a big part of Yiddishkeit as well."*

The fact that she refers to Judaism with the title 'Yiddishkeit' illustrates her feelings regarding the relationship between the language and the religion. Avital associates speaking Yiddish with holiness, and speaking English with a non-religious, almost anti-religious lifestyle. She cites the examples of her young grandchildren who are currently totally shielded from English influences:

*"They have a certain freshness about them, an openness, an unaffected honesty. The world out there's so....Yiddish encompasses all that is holy and pure. There's a truth there in Yiddish that isn't there in English."* *"You can't really compare Yiddish to an ordinary language"*.

Contrastingly Brocha concedes that "*maybe there is some holy connotation in Yiddish because it was the language of choice of some of the great Torah personalities*". It is the personalities of those who used it which make it significant for her rather than anything intrinsic about the language itself. However, she feels that Yiddish "*doesn't in any way relate to being more religious.*" As far as she is concerned it is the Torah, the Old Testament, written in Biblical Hebrew, which is the solitary focus of Judaism. Nevertheless, her reaction to the American secular Yiddish movement suggests that she in some way associates Yiddish with religious observance:

*"I have come across a great deal of people who speak Yiddish and are not religious, which is quite surprising."*

When articulating her feelings concerning her children's lack of Yiddish, it is evident that for Brocha this loss does not represent a departure from religion as Avital sees it:

*"I'd love them to have spoken more Yiddish and I'm sorry they haven't [because] if you're interested in Torah and things that it stands for, many things are written in Yiddish...and I feel that there's a certain charm in Yiddish and I think that's lost."*

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<sup>7</sup> Yiddish, meaning Judaism

To her it is simply a ‘charming’ language which was spoken by Jews historically which is being “watered down” as the generations progress. Brocha supposes that her children do not miss Yiddish because, “*what you don’t have you don’t miss.*” She believes that they consider Yiddish to be a relic of Jews from the Haim<sup>8</sup> and that “*now we live in England, this is the way we are.*”

In Brocha’s family home she spoke English with some Yiddish expressions, “*but not to the same extent as when I was a child. It was already much less*”. Her use of the word ‘already’ suggests that she sees this pattern as inevitable and continual over time. She is certainly sorry that her children are not fluent in Yiddish, yet she makes no apology for her lack of forcefulness. She states that it was “*easier*” and “*natural*” to speak the language of the country and at the time she never consciously encouraged or discouraged either language. I noted the conflict between her stated disinterest and her later admission of sending her children to English elocution lessons. Brocha states: “*I’m extremely keen on expressing and articulation. That matters a lot in my family*”. This shows a clear preference for English over Yiddish. Thus rather than being the ‘natural language choice’, English was heavily promoted.

Clara’s children have had many linguistic influences in their lives. Originally they were spoken to in French by their mother and Hebrew by their father. After moving to America the children learnt English fluently before moving to England. Yiddish played no part in Clara’s children’s lives and she reports that they “*have no idea about Yiddish*”. Their grandparents never attempted to communicate with them in Yiddish and the children never expressed any desire to communicate with their grandparents in their mother tongue. Clara felt that the lack of Yiddish continuity within her family was an acceptable fact of life, “*this is what happens. You can’t fight a tendency ... an inevitability*”. She neither expressed regret nor felt in any way that this was a loss culturally, spiritually or traditionally. Her relationship to Judaism and other Jews is cemented by the use of Modern Hebrew and participating in common social activities rather than adherence to a shared historical language.

Regardless, she still considers Biblical Hebrew a vital part of Jewish life: “*if somebody is Jewish and wants to be a practicing Jew, then [Biblical] Hebrew is extremely important*”. But she sees this as a necessity for gaining understanding of the meaning behind the prayers as opposed to achieving a closer connection to God. This is evident in her assertion that Hebrew holds just as much significance for Secular Jews: “*I cannot conceive being a Jew without Hebrew*”. Nonetheless she is sceptical of ascribing spurious spirituality to Biblical Hebrew:

*“you must be very cautious because you can sometimes interpret [Biblical Hebrew] in all kinds of directions because of the way you can add letters and make computations...Most people can come out with very strange ideas just because a word would have the same value as another word and things like that. It’s amazing and puzzling but it’s not science.”*

Despite acknowledging the desirability of Modern Hebrew Clara feels that “*learning Hebrew was certainly not a religious endeavour.*” Recognising both the cultural and social aspects of Modern Hebrew, she realised it would be necessary for her to learn the language because she wanted to live in Israel. Following the decision

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<sup>8</sup> Widely regarded as encompassing the areas of Eastern Europe heavily inhabited by Jews.

to acquire Hebrew she endeavoured to perfect this skill, eventually fulfilling her ambition to teach Hebrew to new Israeli immigrants.

Interestingly, when discussing Hebrew with all three subjects, both Brocha and Clara took it to mean Modern Hebrew instinctively. Avital understood this to refer to Biblical Hebrew, the language of the Jewish scriptures, and required the additional term 'modern' to be prefixed in order to differentiate.

We saw above that Clara now looks to Modern Hebrew for her identification. But this is an unacceptable choice for Avital. Chasidim like her consider Biblical Hebrew to be the *loshon hakodesh*<sup>9</sup>, the language of prayer and study, and is thus considered unsuitable for temporal and mundane words of everyday communication (Holman & Holman 2003:30). In her opinion:

*"...Biblical Hebrew is something holy; above others...Modern Hebrew has taken down the holiness of [Biblical] Hebrew to a level of just an ordinary language like English. In Biblical Hebrew even the sounds have so much behind them. So many secrets and mystery... That is missed out on [in Modern Hebrew]."*

Brocha takes a similar line on the merits of Biblical Hebrew, stating: *"the only real holy language is loshon hakodesh."* But unlike Avital, Brocha speaks basic Modern Hebrew and also encouraged her children to learn. Although she does not consider it to be "holy", Modern Hebrew, unlike for Avital, holds great religious significance for Brocha. She believes that it is a religious requirement to live in Israel now and therefore Modern Hebrew is important for all Jews to learn:

*"I think [Hebrew] is very useful because one day we all hope to go on eagle's wings<sup>10</sup> to Eretz Yisroel<sup>11</sup> so it's very good to be prepared and have the language at your fingertips."*

As well as lauding the nationalistic aspects of Modern Hebrew, Brocha feels quite strongly that bilingualism is a favourable quality and that it is equally if not more preferable to be bilingual in English and Hebrew as it is in Yiddish and English. This reconfirms the notion that she fails to ascribe much significance to the usage of Yiddish today.

During the interviews it became apparent that Yiddish was thought of by Brocha and Avital as a predominantly masculine language. Both women refer to Yiddish as the 'language of their father'. Furthermore although Brocha's children were not taught Yiddish growing up, her sons learnt Yiddish in Yeshiva and *"could give a whole lecture in Yiddish quite easily"*. Brocha's daughters, however, do not speak the language at all aside from a few expressions. Such differences are supported by the findings of a survey by Holman and Holman (2003:30) of 127 Jewish families in this area of Manchester. Respondents were asked to identify languages which they used at home and those which they spoke and read fluently. The results showed that men were much more likely to speak and read Yiddish (53% of men compared to 29% of women). But when questioned about this apparent gender bias both Avital and Brocha initially denied that this was the case, saying that this was an inaccurate generalisation. Yet soon after this claim Avital stated that her sons speak to her in Yiddish and her daughters in English. She confirms that this is also the case with most

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<sup>9</sup> Literally the 'holy tongue'

<sup>10</sup> Biblical description of the redemption of the Jewish people

<sup>11</sup> Hebrew for 'Land of Israel'

of her friends even those with British born fathers. Later when I question her daughter on her own usage of Yiddish she unknowingly contradicts her mother's original claim:

*"I use English with my mother...Yiddish with my father. With males I speak Yiddish and with the females I speak English."*

Avital's choice to use Yiddish predominantly in the home is heavily influenced by the fact that her husband cannot speak English. He grew up in an ultra-Orthodox neighbourhood in Israel where he spoke only Yiddish. He moved to England shortly before they married and has never learnt English above a very basic level. He is depicted by his wife as feeling that English is not at all necessary in his life as *"he can get by perfectly well in Yiddish"*. In contrast, Avital is aware of the need for English not least for day to day transactions such as calling an electrician, or dealing with social security (Abraham 1999:73). Additionally, her childhood appreciation of literature has led her to value 'good English' and promote this high standard with her own children. She proudly demonstrated this by showing me her children's writing so that I could see it was of a high level. She was especially enthusiastic to display one child's piece of writing which had been published in the local English-medium Jewish newspaper.

This appears to contradict Avital's earlier comment about her youngest daughter's poor grasp of English. Perhaps, as Abraham (1999:62) found with her own research, in the latter situation Avital was accommodating her own ideology toward what she perceived were my own pro-English attitudes. But I would postulate that this apparent inconsistency probably reflects her attempt to reconcile the acknowledgement of the need for English with her aspiration for the continuation of Yiddish.

Brocha acknowledges the bias in the community unknowingly in her response below, but she fails to see the contradiction herself:

*"I think it's because the boys are taught by Great Rabbis who are more at ease in Yiddish...whereas the girls have [female] teachers who are able to speak English. So I don't think there's any bias, no."*

Abraham's research (1999:73) echoes this distinction between male and female attitudes towards English and Yiddish in her research and suggests that this could be partly a carry-over from the much broader English education that their mothers would have received when views on Orthodox women's secular education were more liberal.

## **Conclusion to 4.2**

What emerges in the second section of the interviews is that the relationship of each informant to Yiddish is directly proportional to their level of religious observance today. Both Avital and Brocha define languages by their relationship to God or by their religious connections. Clara has rejected strict Orthodoxy and to a certain extent has assimilated into the surrounding society. Clara regards Yiddish as being a symbol of the 'old-Jew' and therefore no longer relevant to her and her family. Her language choices relate to her feelings of Jewish culture and nationalism rather than any religious connotations. Crystal (1997:34) asserts that cultural identity usually goes hand in hand with demand for territorial independence. This suggests that Clara's choice to replace Yiddish with Hebrew as her 'Jewish language' is a natural

progression. Furthermore this highlights the uniqueness of Avital's choice to cling to Yiddish with no imminent aspirations of nationhood. Moreover, Clara's language of choice is both unacceptable and valueless in Avital's opinion.

Clearly Avital uses Yiddish to cultivate 'in-group' identification, setting her apart from those with any variant ideologies and protecting her from all external influences. She sees speaking Yiddish as the only possible way of keeping Judaism alive and pure. Consequently she is unperturbed by ensuing negative repercussions such as the alienation of non-Yiddish speaking Jews.

Brocha intends Biblical Hebrew alone to carry the badge of religious Jewish identity in her life. The only benefit of Yiddish today, in her opinion, is to aid the study of Torah through the reading of Yiddish literature on the subject, and as a means of communicating with the other Jews who do speak Yiddish. She values English to a much greater degree than Avital and sees Modern Hebrew as a symbol of the Jews' emerging nationhood.

Interestingly we have seen that Avital and Brocha deny awareness of any bias of Yiddish speech towards males. However, it is clear from their own attitudes that there is indeed a gender bias. Perhaps the women are aware of this and do not want to admit it, believing that it reflects badly on the women in the community.

### 4.3 Future

Yiddish continues to be spoken in the next generations of Avital's family. Furthermore, she reports that her married children are even more restrictive with the use of English amongst their own children than she was. Many aim to prevent any English influences for as long as possible. Although we have seen that Avital is eager to sustain Yiddish and recognises the religious ideal of segregation, she also recognises the practical need for compromise with reality (Abraham 1999:62). Consequently Avital tries to "sneak in" English books like 'Noddy' for her grandchildren to read.

When I asked how she would react if one grandchild decided to reject Yiddish altogether on the grounds that "everybody else speaks English" her response was telling:

*"I would ask 'who is this everybody?' because in the circles that they mix in everybody speaks Yiddish. I mean if they were trying to learn Gomorrah<sup>12</sup> in English...it misses the taste."*

Her children and grandchildren are so sheltered in the Hassidic Yiddish speaking community that there is no 'everybody else'. Avital could not conceive that her offspring or anyone else in her 'circle' would want to discard Hassidism and be involved in a world which does not revolve around Yiddish, learning and prayer. She relates an anecdote of a local 'problem child' who has turned her back on Judaism and Yiddish. Avital's value judgement of the situation is that the 'problem' could not be with Judaism but with the child who is "*depressed about life in general*". The extent that Avital's family are sheltered from even the wider Jewish society is demonstrated by the grossly inaccurate statement made by Avital's nineteen year old daughter Ruth when explaining the merits of speaking Yiddish: "*...most Jews know how to speak Yiddish*".

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<sup>12</sup> Jewish Scripture

Believing that Judaism and Yiddish are intertwined, she is certain that her grandchildren's love for the religion is the core of their continuation of the language. But conceivably this continuity is as much a consequence of the blinkered lifestyle that is being passed down the generations as from love of Judaism alone. Indeed, there is an argument to say that such seclusion removes any 'free language choice' of the Hasidic children, even though they are presumably unaware of this restriction.

Avital's family is very much a part of the Yiddish revival taking place in Britain. I feel that she recognises that this has been greatly influenced by the Holocaust: *"In the same way that the Jews will never die, neither will their language"*.

Brocha echoes Avital's sentiments about the future of Yiddish: *"I think it will always be there. It will never die. Just like the Jews, Hitler tried otherwise..."*. Brocha's grandchildren living in Manchester do not speak Yiddish. Those in America do however. She is sorry that the majority will be unable to gain from the 'beautiful literature' that is written in Yiddish. But familiarity with Biblical Hebrew is her priority for her grandchildren *"so that they can learn torah"*. She also stresses that it is highly important that they speak the language of whichever country they live in absolutely fluently. We have seen this already with her eagerness to send her children to elocution lessons. But she also considers it vital that Jews keep themselves linguistically separate from the rest of society with an every day language:

*"It is important to keep ourselves separately, even linguistically...it's a bond between ourselves...Not because...I think people are wonderful, we live in a 'medina shel chesed', a country of kindness, where we are free to come and go. [But] as a result of that...the more we have here, the more there's assimilation and we're losing our Yiden."*<sup>13</sup>

Brocha feels that a common language would *"help to keep us safe"* from the assimilation that is so rife amongst Diaspora Jewish communities. It appears obvious that similarly to Avital, Brocha fundamentally struggles with the dichotomy of preserving a separate language while wishing for her children to blend seamlessly into their country of birth. What differentiates the two is evident in Brocha's comments about the revival of Yiddish in Manchester. She states that Yiddish can only add to the linguistic repertoire of the children involved since they will *"still speak their natural language, English"*. While both women desire the perpetuation of Yiddish, Brocha has compromised further with the culture of her home country and considers English the 'natural language' of Jews living in Britain. Avital however is resisting this notion and still considers Yiddish the 'natural language'.

As far as Clara is concerned, Yiddish is already a dead language. To her it represents the European Jews of the past and her own family history. Her only use of Yiddish emerges when she and her brother are together:

*"We would say a few words in Yiddish like my parents would have said and then we'll laugh. In the same way as to friends who are still living in Belgium I would say a word in Flemish just to have a laugh about it."*

Yiddish is in no way more significant in her life than Flemish and Clara expresses no regret over this matter. She has no idea what language her grandchildren will speak, guessing that they could feasibly end up in Israel, England or America.

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<sup>13</sup> From the Yiddish meaning Jews

Clearly it is geographical location alone that she expects to determine their language choices. She has no strong feelings about the language that they will speak, saying she has only one emotional preference, "...I would not have a problem unless they speak another language that I don't".

However she would be happier if her grandchildren spoke (Modern) Hebrew citing the reason: "*because this is something which keeps us to be Jewish*". As Clara and her children are not religiously observant they can no longer rely on the restrictions and regulations of Orthodoxy to 'keep them Jewish'. Instead Clara looks to Hebrew and Israel for her Jewish identity and assumes that this will be the case for her children and grandchildren.

Clara laughs when contemplating her grandchildren speaking Yiddish. She sees the only way this could happen would be if they became ultra-Orthodox. She doubts that they will and says she would be disappointed if they did: "*I don't like anything which is 'ultra'. I don't like extremism.*" Clara is certainly open to the idea of her children or grandchildren learning Yiddish as an academic subject later in life. This is mainly because she believes "*every language opens up a world*". But unlike for Avital, it is Hebrew which opens up the world of Judaism according to Clara. She states that Yiddish "*does in some way too*" but is eager to point out that Yiddish opens up "*the history of part of the Jewish people because it wasn't all of the Jewish people, but the part which was in Europe*". Significantly, this distinction is neglected by Avital and Brocha in their interviews both of whom have a less broad understanding of Jewish demography.

### **Conclusion to 4.3**

As we saw in the previous chapter, it seems likely that both Clara and Brocha sought to break away from Yiddish to escape the image of an oppressed and persecuted foreign people. However, Avital appears to see the continuation of Yiddish as a victory against those who sought to persecute and oppress the Jews. A fascinating aspect of the future of Yiddish in Avital's children is that their use of Yiddish exceeds their parents'. If they are no more religious, what motivates this language exclusivity? I would hypothesise that such ultra-Orthodox groups see themselves as having less and less in common with the average person on the street. They see only the morally threatening nature of the wider society who no longer share values such as family, principles and prayer. Consequently they erect a stronger social wall than in previous generations to aid resistance to Anglicisation.

Avital and Brocha share the notion that having a distinct language would keep them 'safe' from assimilation although they act upon this differently. However, it is possible that by separating themselves from the wider society, the ultra-Orthodox are increasing the danger of anti-Semitism, encouraging hostility caused by fear of the unknown. Perhaps fear of anti-Semitism is one motivating factor which has caused Brocha and Clara to abandon Yiddish. It is possible that Avital is aware of this risk but has chosen to continue speaking a distinct language since she deems assimilation a greater threat than anti-Semitism.

Brocha demonstrably strives to balance two elements of her children's future. On the one hand she is keen for them to be widely integrated, on the other she feels that without a separate language of some kind her children are more likely to lose their fervour for religion and eventually assimilate. The fact that even in her Orthodox family Yiddish has been almost forgotten emphasises how difficult this is. English has a major role, Yiddish has come to represent the Jews of the past and Brocha now identifies Hebrew as the Jewish language of the future.

Not being particularly religious, Clara fails to affiliate with the ultra-Orthodox revival of Yiddish. She regards their behaviour as an extreme reaction to modernity. Judaism has not been rejected as Clara shows that she wants her children to have a Jewish language, Hebrew. But to her, Judaism is about identity rather than religious observance. Thus she looks to Israel and Hebrew to cement her Jewish identity and shows no sadness that she has not propagated Yiddish. Language choices for her future generations are significantly socio-cultural rather than spiritual or religious.

From the language choices of these women we can theorize that maintaining a distinct language is the most effective way of averting assimilation. So perhaps it is unfair of Clara to regard the ultra-Orthodox as unacceptably extreme. In fact I would propose that it is unrealistic of her to expect future generations to remain Jewish when living outside their own nation relying solely on a Jewish identity and peripheral traditions without the aid of an everyday Jewish language.

## **5 Conclusion**

The motivating factors dictating the language choices of the three women in this study varied dramatically. We have seen that Avital's choice to preserve Yiddish was encouraged by respect for her heritage, as a symbol of victory over oppressors of the Jews and as a spiritual connection to God. But above all, it appears that she is motivated by its use as a barrier against a world with conflicting moral values to her own. Her language choices have certainly achieved her aim of perpetuating Yiddish to the next two generations at least. Consequently her grandchildren are unlikely to abandon their faith, but at what cost? Surely such shelter from society is harmful for the gentile society's image of Jews.

Brocha's neglect of Yiddish can mostly be attributed to her harbouring negative attitudes towards preceding speakers of the language, and to her desire to fit into the society in which she lives. She has failed to pass on a Jewish language for everyday use in the Diaspora. Despite valuing Modern Hebrew it has not replaced Yiddish as a language of regular communication. She encourages interaction with the non-Jewish world with less trepidation than Avital and although she perceives the threat of assimilation it seems probable that she will be less able to avoid it without the maintenance of Yiddish or a replacement ethnic language to pass on to future generations. Perhaps this will happen in the future as the threat of out-marriage increases.

Clara shares the negative image of Yiddish and its speakers but has chosen to adopt an alternative Jewish language, Hebrew, to replace it. She recognises that the continuity of Judaism cannot be taken for granted, thus her positive impetus for maintaining a Jewish language is her desire for nationalism. As Alladina and Edwards (1991: foreword) attested, it will be easier for future generations to continue to speak Hebrew with the aid of possible "continuing contact with the country of origin".

Maintaining ethnicity as a minority is not easy. Unfortunately, as Sacks (2000:19) avows, "Judaism depends for its very existence on the willingness of successive generations to hand on their faith and way of life to their children, and on the loyalty of children to the heritage of their past". Crystal (1997:34) agrees that preservation of religious practices, long standing institutions and traditional customs are necessary to preserve ethnic identity. However, he stresses that language is the most essential component as it is the primary outward sign of a group's identity. The attitudes of the spectrum of women in this study reflect a broader pattern of Jewish identity, transforming from fate to choice, from a fact of birth to conscious

commitment. The rejection of Yiddish amongst Ashkenazi Jews is one key corollary of this evolution.

The following quote from the Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks utilises the metaphor of language to discuss multiculturalism in Britain, and in so doing articulates my own attitudes towards the findings of this study:

*“In a complex society we have to be bilingual. There is the second language that we each have of history and identity. But there must be a first language of common citizenship, because wherever we have come from we have now landed in this same place together...Multiculturalism [leans] excessively towards second languages. The assimilationist model [leans] excessively towards a first language. We have just got to learn to be bilingual.”* (The Times. April 17 2004)

### **5.1 Scope for further research**

Research in the field of Jewish languages is severely lacking. Much of that in existence focuses on language use among the ultra-Orthodox, particularly in America. If I were undertaking further investigation in this field I would like to explore a relatively new concept, identified by Fishman (1985) and Steinmetz (1987); Hundreds of thousands of Jews in Britain, America, Australia, Israel and more use particular varieties of English in lieu of a distinct Jewish language to distinguish themselves from non-Jewish speakers. This variety is known as “Jewish English”, with influences from Yiddish, Biblical Hebrew and Modern Hebrew (Benor 2002). It would be interesting to assess how variables such as gender, religiosity and generation may affect this phenomenon, particularly in England. Moreover it would be of value to see whether the only one of my subjects without a distinct conversational Jewish language, Brocha, exhibits many of these features, and thus uses “Jewish English” as her segregating language.

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