

“So Fun, Muy Kef”**Lexical Glocalization in Israeli Teenage Girls’ Blogs¹**

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Abstract

Evidence that English has become the lingua franca of Internet culture has in recent years stimulated academic interest in the use of multiple languages on the Internet. Since the 1980s, Hebrew speech and writing, including slang and journalism, have increasingly borrowed words from English, and preliminary research in chat rooms shows similar speech forms are used in Hebrew new media speech-write. This paper is the first scholarly treatment of digital written Hebrew in asynchronous online communication – in this case blogs – as well as the first scholarly treatment of the influence of foreign languages on Hebrew writing by Israeli adolescents on the web.

The paper is based on ethnographic research carried out over three and a half years (2004-2007) on the website *Israblog*, the first and largest blog-hosting platform in Israel. The linguistic analysis in this paper is specifically based on texts from 56 blogs of girls aged 11-16 belonging to two distinct speech communities, referred to as *Fakatsa* and *Freak*. This paper aims to answer the question: what are the sociolinguistic contexts of girls’ lexical borrowing choices on blogs?

Although the spoken language of adolescents is generally considered to be homogeneous, a significant difference exists between the linguistic norms and discourse patterns of these two speech communities that perform their gender identity as subcultural style on blogs. The *Fakatsa* speech community makes wide use of unique language characteristics that mix words borrowed from the lexicons of specific popular culture and media content in English, Spanish and Japanese, combining the foreign words phonologically transliterated into Hebrew within the Hebrew syntax of the sentence.

The paper demonstrates that certain words borrowed by both speech communities from foreign languages are chosen by their phonology with little importance to their meaning and used in diverse ways, including as onomatopoeic paralinguistic signs.

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This phenomenon is apparently unique to Internet writing that lacks paralinguistic and kinetic signs, and thus develops them through the nonstandard use of writing. The paper demonstrates that borrowing from foreign languages is closely linked to the interplay between gender, globalization and computer-mediated communication, and also suggests new insights on the relationships between language and these discourses.

Keywords: Lexical borrowing, glocalization, identity performance, playfulness, *Fakatsa*, digital speech-write, nonstandard orthography

Introduction

This paper is the first scholarly treatment of digital written Hebrew in asynchronous online communication – in this case blogs – as well as the first scholarly treatment of the influence of foreign languages on Hebrew writing by Israeli adolescents on the web. The paper is based on a larger ethnographic research project carried out over three and a half years (2004-2007) on the website *Israblog*, the first and largest blog-hosting platform in Israel. According to *Israblog*'s formal statistics made available to the public every year, it has witnessed the opening of nearly half a million blogs, yet only about 50,000 remain active.²

A blog is an online space for personal and instantaneous publishing that is open to all. Blogs are characterized by high connectivity and a chronology that is similar to a diary; indeed, the word “blog” is short for “web log”. It is a multimedia format distinguished from websites by its use of technological conventions and norms: it is updated very frequently, uses a personal and informal tone of writing, is organized in reverse chronological order and has a mechanism of linkage to other blogs – trackbacks and permalinks (Herring et al., 2005).

The blog gained popularity over the past decade as part of a wider trend toward micro-publishing: increased availability of publishing and distribution tools on the Internet, accessible to all. Blogs are a space for spontaneous personal writing, and thus offer a current picture of the characteristics of digital speech-writing and foreign influence on spoken and written Hebrew among adolescents.

² Circa 2008, the importance of blogs in teen life decreased, as they migrated to Facebook and other social networks.

Before *Israblog* was founded in 2001, the early adopters of new Internet applications had already opened blogs in English on international platforms or had opened personal websites in Hebrew that later became independent blogs. This is probably one of the reasons that *Israblog* largely attracted adolescents, especially girls, who tend to write in the personal diary genre.

According to *Israblog* statistics, in August 2006, 74% of their total bloggers were minors, and 73% were female (Vaisman, 2010a). From the outset of *Israblog*, the usage trend for female bloggers was consistently upward, and by August 2010 had reached 78%. This paper focuses on two speech communities of Israeli girls on the *Israblog* website; they are referred to, by both others and themselves, as *Freak* and *Fakatsa*.

The two communities were in a constant flame war, while struggling to distinguish themselves through the performance of distinctive online styles: the blogs of *Freak* girls are characterized by graphic design based on the color black combined with Gothic imagery (vampires, blood, death, etc.) and feature references to punk, metal and alternative rock music, all of which correspond to counter-culture symbols common among adolescents around the world. The narrative and discourse in these blogs are analogous to the narrative of the Gothic novel, with the girls presenting and representing their lives as complex and dramatic nightmares. For the most part, they deal with the dark side of their spirits: sense of imprisonment, death wish, depression, hardship and evil (Vaisman, 2010a, 2010b).

The blogs of *Fakatsa* girls, in contrast, are characterized by graphic design based on the color pink combined with popular culture, kitsch (sunset, roses, babies, Disney characters, etc.) and Japanese Kawaii imagery (Hello Kitty, Pokémon, Pukka, etc.) and feature international pop and Israeli ethnic music. These blogs present extreme narratives of stereotypical femininity that takes place in a “bubble” of blissful and luxuriant life in a perfect world taken from fairy tales. The narrative includes obsessive display of fashion and consumerism, narcissism, romance, love of life, infantile construction of a rose-colored, yet sexually flirtatious world and a rhetoric of perfection (Vaisman, 2010a).

Fakatsa is a new hybrid of two veteran local stereotypes: *Freña*, originally used as a derogatory term for Moroccan-Israeli women, who rebelled against family tradition by identifying with American/global culture and fashion (Mizrachi, 2003), and later

became a common derogatory for women, similar to the use of “bimbo” or “tart” in English, and *Tsfonit* (lit. ‘northern’) referring to rich and snobby girls from upper class of northern Tel Aviv. These stereotypes that used to be dichotomous (Almog, 2004) are now juxtaposed based on their interpretation of femininity and its associated practices (Vaisman, 2010a), as opposed to the *Freak* counter-culture that allegedly rejects such norms (Holland, 2004).

The word *Fakatsa* was originally derogatory military slang taken from the Hebrew acronym for a young female army clerk and/or greenhorn. The name later became widespread on *Israblog* as the Hebrew acronym for “a small and loud bimbo” and was assigned to girls whose blog designs were flashing with pink, fashion and kitsch imagery. The definition was updated accordingly in Rosenthal’s (2005) slang dictionary. Today it is a popular derogatory term continuously acquiring additional meaning, while negotiating its differences from its sires, the *Freħa* and *Tsfonit*.

However, similar to “nerd” girls (Bucholtz, 1999), *Fakatsa* is not merely a negative stereotype, but an identity meticulously structured by some of the girls and performed through language and sociolinguistic practices on blogs (Vaisman, 2010a; 2011). For example, self-proclaimed *Fakatsa* girls have often been identified by the use of playful typography, mixing Hebrew characters with ASCII signs that resemble the Hebrew letter’s cursive form, which is performed as part of a specific gendered identity style (ibid.).

The main purpose of this paper is twofold: to describe the evidence of lexical borrowing from foreign languages on *Fakatsa* blogs in their sociolinguistic contexts and to juxtapose it with similar phenomena on other types of blogs, to the extent it exists, in order to account for patterns that might be unique to online communication.

Lexical Borrowing in Modern Hebrew

There can be many reasons for borrowing from another language. For example, some speakers feel they cannot express themselves well in their mother tongue, want to impress their listeners with their knowledge, or show they are cultured or belong to a specific community. Consequently, speakers may use words, expressions or grammatical structures from a different language (Crystal, 1997). When this phenomenon is especially prominent, there is frequent skipping from one language to the other.

Modern Hebrew speakers, both standard and slang, have been noted to borrow extensively from English. The Israeli Academy of the Hebrew Language and many Israeli linguists (e.g. Muchnik, 1994; Schwarzwald, 1998) have dealt at length with the problem of foreign languages in modern Hebrew and have even given the new language developing in Israel hybrid names such as Hebrish, Engrew, or Angrit (*Anglit-Ivrit*), as the author Yitzhak Ben Ner called it (Fisherman, 2006). Although English was one of the official languages of pre-state Israel during the British Mandate (1920-1948), its wide influence on Hebrew dates back only to the 1980s, due to globalization of culture and communication, and incursions from American culture into Israeli society.

The influence of English is strongest on journalism and it, in turn, has introduced a variety of borrowed words and culture markers from English into the spoken language and slang. According to Fruchtman (2006), the 1980s were also when spoken Hebrew, including slang, had a great deal of influence on written language. Characteristics of spoken Hebrew and slang have gradually encroached on print journalism, and since the 1990s, even on Hebrew dictionaries, including the standard-bearer Even-Shoshan Dictionary, beginning with its 2003 edition (*ibid.*). Those tropes of influence are connected. In fact, the first characteristic Fruchtman described of spoken Hebrew and slang that became common in the written language was lexical borrowing: “Choosing foreign words, mostly from slang, especially American: *lixoyt be-style* [to live in style], *lihiyot in* [to be “in”, or trendy]” (*ibid.*, p. 4).

Nowadays, the presence of English words and culture markers in both spoken and written language has become so pervasive that many Hebrew speakers mistake them for original Hebrew slang; for instance, “cold feet”, “went to their head”, or “made my day”. According to research conducted by Fisherman (2006), sixty percent of words or phrases borrowed from English in journalistic language are from the entertainment, communication, and socio-economic fields, with only twenty percent from technology.

Language and the Internet

Internet language has been called a hybrid language (Danet, 2001), or as Lotan & Shimoni (2005) called it in Hebrew, *ktibur*, a compound of speech-write. Many scholars assume it is “written speech”, since writing in most common Internet

configurations fails to maintain the conventions and standards developed in the culture of the written and printed word. Researchers studying language on the Internet have demonstrated that written digital language is comprised of characteristics of the spoken language even in applications comparable to written genres, such as e-mails (Danet, *ibid.*; Baron, 2003).

The reason for this development is because the dynamic interactive nature of the Internet makes it the only medium that allows communication between multiple individuals, either synchronous (in real time, as in chats), or asynchronous (as in forums or blogs). Writing on the Internet is therefore a permanent reminder of, and even a natural return to, the original aim of writing as the representation of speech (Baron, 2000).

Research on mobile phone texting in Hebrew found high structural compatibility between “SMS-Hebrew” and spoken Hebrew (Borochovski & Kedmi, 2010). Earlier research that examined the language used in Israeli chats (Lipetz-Eliassi, 2006) demonstrates similar variants of spoken Hebrew and slang in Internet writing to those described by Fruchtman above. However, these studies did not focus on the influence of foreign languages.

The Internet has gradually staked its position as a central agent of mass communication and global culture. Evidence that English has become the *lingua franca* of Internet culture has in recent years stimulated academic interest in the use of multiple languages on the Internet (many of these are to be found in Danet & Herring, 2003, 2007). Internet correspondence is based on the ASCII protocol, which is adapted to English and cannot represent other writing systems, such as Cyrillic or Chinese.

Accordingly, users scattered around the globe, whose keyboards do not support their spoken language, but want to write in it on the Internet frequently, either represent it in Roman letters, replace their writing systems or combine them with ASCII symbols to represent the letters and sounds in their language that are missing in English (e.g. Palfreyman & El Khalil, 2003; Tseliga, 2007; Fialkova, 2005). These phenomena have often been seen as a threat to local languages (Androutsopoulos, 2009).

The concept of glocalization implies the combination of globalization and localization, yet the two-way flow between local and global is not a subversive force, but a part of the very process of globalization (Ram, 2007). Glocalization is

sometimes expressed by translation of global signs into the local context, thus lexical borrowing could be seen as a form of linguistic glocalization.

For Israeli society, globalization has actually meant Americanization, as suggested in the body of research mentioned above on the influence of English, as well as studies documenting the strong presence of American symbolism and rhetoric in the Israeli media (First & Avraham, 2009). This paper shows these trends have diffused further into the speech-write of teens online, as well as accounts for the selective influences of additional languages on teen speech-write.

Methodology

This paper presents evidence derived from larger ethnographic fieldwork on the communicative aspects of teenage girls' blogs on *Israblog*. The fieldwork was conducted between August 2004 and December 2007 and followed the blogs of 140 girls, half of whom had volunteered or were recommended by their friends, and half were chosen randomly through *Israblog*'s "random blog" feature. These blogs, as well as other blogs with which they interacted, were followed in real time as ethnography of performance, rather than analyzing a textual archive. A virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000) accounts for broader sociolinguistic and contextual meanings of the observed linguistic behaviors.

The above ethnographic fieldwork discovered and defined *Fakatsa* style in detail (Vaisman, 2010a), and found unique linguistic styles and norms that appeared only on *Fakatsa* girls' blogs and became associated with them, such as their previously mentioned playful deviant Hebrew typography (Vaisman, 2011). The purpose of this paper is to shed light on another linguistic component of *Fakatsa* blogs and link it to their specific gendered identity performance.

While *Fakatsa* typography is a unique online phenomenon, lexical borrowing is an established linguistic norm. Since my ethnographic evidence has proved that girls carefully and purposefully choose their stylistic expressions online, this paper aims to answer the question: what are the sociolinguistic contexts of girls' lexical borrowing choices on blogs?

Ethnographic evidence suggests that some of the *Fakatsa* linguistic styles are written but not necessarily spoken and therefore are unique to blogs (Vaisman & Gonen, 2006; 2011). However, as contemporary cultural texts, blogs allow us to identify

current slang trends and language norms among teens, and I do not rule out the possibility that some of the findings of this chapter may be common in speech as well. In fact, it will only support my assertion of identity-related motives behind these lexical choices both online and offline.

It should be noted that *Freak*, *Anime* and other blog styles described in my fieldwork did not exhibit any special linguistic patterns other than those common and familiar in the spoken language of youth. Therefore, the discussion of such blogs in this paper is limited to the presence or absence of similarities to *Fakatsa* blogs' lexical borrowing styles, in order to support the claim of the uniqueness of certain linguistics patterns to *Fakatsa* blogs and/or to online communication. Thus, this paper does not purport to account for the entire phenomenon of lexical borrowing online and will focus on the sociolinguistic contexts of the examples found within this corpus.

The linguistic analysis in this paper is specifically based on texts from 56 blogs of girls aged 11-16 identified as either *Fakatsa* or *Freak*. These 56 blogs are an exhaustive sample of the relevant linguistic variants discussed, within the 140 blogs constituting the corpus of my fieldwork. However, my overall ethnographic evidence during the years spent on *Israblog* suggests the described phenomena were (and some continue to be) typical of many hundreds of girls' blogs.

Findings: Lexical Glocalization

Digital *Engrew* – lexical borrowing from English

The vocabulary of *Fakatsa* girls' blogs is influenced by words from foreign languages, particularly English. The girls prefer not to shift back and forth from the Hebrew writing system in the middle of a sentence, but to combine the foreign words phonologically transliterated into Hebrew within the Hebrew syntax of the sentence. The following are examples from the research corpus:

עד כמה משנה לך המראה של החבר שלך? אממ אופקורס שיש לו חשיבות רבה...
אפל סה לא הכל... סה הרוב! אני לא אסתובב עם מישהו עגלי! מה חשבתם?
(62268, 24.9.2004)

'ad kama mešane lax ha-mar'e šel ha-xaver shelax? 'mm **of-kors** še-yeš lo
xašivut raba, afal se lo ha-kol... se ha-rov! ani lo estovev im mišehu **ugly!**
ma xašavtem?

'How much do your boyfriend's looks matter? mmmm **of course** it's very important... but it's not everything... it's the most though! I wouldn't hang out with someone **ugly**. What were you thinking?'

אז אני, ליאורי מיי בוי פראיינד ומאורי (מור בוי פראנד) ומור יצאנו לספסלים עם השאר ואח"כ סתם ישבנו בקפיטריה ודיברנו [= אוהבת אותכם (111046), 18.11.2005]

az ani, Liori my boy friend veMaori (Mor boy friend) veMor yatsanu lasafsalim im haš'ar ve-axar-kax stam yašavnu ba-kafeteria ve-dibarnu =] ohevet otxem

'So me, Lior **my boyfriend** and Maori (Mor['s] **boyfriend**) and Mor went outside to the benches with everyone else and later just sat in the cafeteria and talked =] love you all'

אני וגילוש לייק נוסעות מחר לעזריאליי... סו פאן!! (85036, 20.4.2005)
ani ve-giluš like nos 'ot maxar le-'azri'elii... so funn!!

'Gilush and I are **like** going tomorrow to Azrieli... **so fun!!**'

אויי מיי גאדד אתם לא מתארים לעצמכם מה קרה לי!!! (66673, 17.1.2005)

Oh my God *atem lo meta'arim le-'atmexem ma kara li!!*

'**Oh my God** you can't imagine what happened to me!!'

יש לי מאמי אנד דאדי חמודים ומקסימים, ואח חתיך (230563, 9.9.2006)
yeš li mommy and daddy xamudim ve-maksimim, ve-ax xatix.

'I have a **mommy and daddy** who are sweet and wonderful, and a brother who's a hunk'

מי שידע לעצב פליזוזזז שילמד אותי!!! (103754, 6.6.2005)
mi še-yodea' le 'atsev plizzzz she-yelamed oti!!!

'Whoever knows how to design, **please** teach me!!!'

For the most part, the girl's English vocabulary consists of common expressions borrowed from adolescent American dialect that reach Israeli girls by way of popular films, such as *Clueless* and *Legally Blonde*, which feature the California teen lifestyle. The stars of the films, Alicia Silverstone and Reese Witherspoon, are objects of adoration and personify the youthful fashionable feminine ideal with which the *Fakatsa* girls identify. English words such as "like" and "so" are the most common foreign words in the writing of the *Fakatsa* speech community. In spoken American slang, "like" fits any place in a sentence and lacks specific meaning, much like the

word *ke'ilu* ('as if') in Hebrew, which is considered colloquial register. These girls use the words transliterated into Hebrew in a similar fashion in their written language. Over the past decade, many scholars have examined the use of "like" (e.g. Dailey-O'Cain, 2000; Fuller, 2003; Hasud, 2008). Despite the stigma attached to it, it continues to develop and take on new pragmatic meanings and functions, for example describing a contradiction between what a speaker is thinking and what is being said (Hasud, *ibid.*). Maschler (2001), who studied the linguistic use of *ke'ilu* ('as if/like') and *kaze* ('like this/like') in Hebrew, believes they are a post-modern substitute for the *Dugri* style, a blunt and direct discourse typical of Israelis. Barak (2006) suggests that *ke'ilu* is related to the virtual, while *kaze* is related to the material. In the examples above, substituting "like" for *ke'ilu* maintains the usage mode of *ke'ilu* documented by Maschler and is evidence of global influence on Hebrew.

The examples above also illustrate that girls belonging to the *Fakatsa* speech community frequently insert trivial English words such as "daddy", "mommy" or "ugly" into their Hebrew writing. In these cases there is usually congruence between the vocabulary they use and the substance of their writing, which attempts to impress their readers with the materialistic and cultural consumer affluence of their families, including myriad vacations abroad and life "right out of a [Hollywood] movie", authentically linking their life style to the use of English words. This convention is common mostly on blogs written by girls who write about ideal fictional daily experiences, thus experimenting with identities far removed from their actual lives. The use of these basic everyday English words helps them situate their fictional narrative as a routine.

In addition to integrating English words into Hebrew syntax, the girls also conjugate the Hebrew inflections. For example:

(187132, 22.11.2005) לייק איאוوو תיראו למה אתן גורמות!!! סו סטופידות!

layk 'iyawwww, tir'u le-ma aten gormot!!! **Sow stupid-ot!**

'like ewwww, look what you are causing!!! **so stupid** [English transliteration with feminine plural Hebrew suffix]'

eze (88335, 14.6.2005) איזה מיליון פיפולים חמודימים נרשמו לטבעות השוות שלי!!!

milyon people-im xamudimim niršemu la-tabat'ot ha-šavot šeli!!

‘Some million cute **people** [English transliterated with additional Hebrew plural suffix] joined my awesome blog rings!!’

In both cases, the borrowed words are already in the plural, yet the girls conjugate them all the same with the relevant Hebrew plural suffix (*-im*, *-ot*). In addition, it is worth noting that the Hebrew word *xamudim* – cute in plural form – has a double plural suffix (*xamudimim*). This playful form may be a symmetry matching *people-im*, indicating the awareness of the blogger to the plural duplication, as well as adding cutesy phonology to the word. Cuteness here is both a rhetoric attribute of *Fakatsa* girls gender identity performance (Vaisman, 2010a; 2011) and a strategy to make the words sound more like what they actually mean – a pattern I return to later in this paper.

The Hebrew transliteration of many English words on *Fakatsa* blogs is often characterized by decreased vocalization. In a widespread Israeli accent considered substandard, the letter combination “th” makes a phonetic sound closest to the Hebrew “d” or “z”; yet many girls tend to transliterate “th” as “t” or “s”:

ואז מיי פאטר התקשר וסה מסה הרס! ולא הבנתי מה הקטע שלו להתקשר אליי
שאני בבית ספר!! והוא אמר לי להוציא את נופר היום מהגן! ומסה רבנו בגלל
שקבעתי דברים! ופאטר כעס... (80582, 23.2.20)

*ve-az my fater hitkašer ve-se mase haras! ve-lo hevanti ma ha-keta šelo
lehitkašer elay še-ani ba-beyt-sefer!! hu amar li lehotsi et nofar ha-yom
me-ha-gan! ve-mase ravnu biglal še-kava‘ti dvarim! ve-fater ka‘as...*

‘So **my father** called and really screwed things up! And I didn’t understand what his deal was calling me at school!! He told me pick Nofar up from kindergarten today! And we **so** fought ’cause I had things planned! And **father** was mad...’

סו לייק סאת הייתה אונלי ההתחלה (187132, 22.11.2005)

so layk set hayta onli ha-hatxala

‘**So like that** [de-vocalized transliteration] was **only** the beginning’

The latter example is doubly playful, as the female form of “that” in Hebrew is pronounced “zot”, and by replacing the “z” with “s”, it allows the written word to be read either as devocalized Hebrew or devocalized transliterated English. Reading these aloud (the sentences include decreased vocalization of Hebrew words as well)

produces a cute, childish tone of speech characterized by diminution; it also imitates *Tsfonit* speech, the local version of California speech (Siegel, 2002) prevalent in the popular adolescent films mentioned above. Both interpretations are compatible with blogs' imagery and other feminine identity characteristics the girls perform (Vaisman, 2010a; 2011), as well as consistent with evidence from Lithuanian IRC chats (Zelenkauskaitė & Herring, 2006) of women's nonstandard orthography using softer palatalized consonants, thus performing written Lithuanian "baby talk".

Most words borrowed from English are adjectives and conjunctions. The girls almost never transliterate verbs from foreign languages, probably because English syntax includes auxiliary verbs and a complex system of tenses that makes correct integration into Hebrew sentences difficult (Vaisman & Gonen, 2011). This is consistent with the body of research on lexical borrowing that finds little evidence of borrowed verbs. However, the girls occasionally bypass the difficulty by inserting translations of entire English phrases complete with verbs, such as:

איי לאב יו [transliterated completely] (2010, 29.12.2005) 'I love you'
 לאב יו אול, 10.8.2005 [transliterated completely] *lav yu 'ol* – 'love you all'
 (111854)

דונט פורגט להגיב (151854, 11.8.2005)
 'Don't forget *lehagiv*' ('to comment') [transliterating the "don't" along
 with the verb]

גו פאק יור סלף (187132, 22.11.2005)
go fak yor self
 'go fuck yourself' [transliterated completely, yet "your" and "self" are
 separated into two different words, as the syntax of the Hebrew translation
 would have been]

In contrast to the *Fakatsa* speech community, which Hebraizes English within the Hebrew syntactical structure, the *Freak* speech community occasionally does the opposite by inflecting Hebrew words according to English syntactical structure, as is common in the spoken Hebrew of many Israeli adolescents and documented in Rosenthal's slang dictionary (2005). The prevalent convention calls for adding suffixes borrowed from English, such as the nominal *-ation*, for example, *idkunation* [from *'idkun* ('update')], *magnivation* [from *magniv* ('cool')] and *šī'amumeyšen*

[from *ši'amum* ('boredom')]. I argue it is not merely a coincidence that such common forms were absent from *Fakatsa* blogs in my corpus, but more evidence of a purposely avoided borrowing convention to distinguish their speech style from that of other girls.

Against this backdrop, the linguistic idiosyncrasies of the *Fakatsa* community, based on contrasting norms of subordinating global English to the (syntactic) context of local Hebrew, are especially conspicuous.

***Muy kef*: Instances of borrowing from other foreign languages**

The *Fakatsa* speech community is not satisfied with borrowing words from English alone, but draws additional words from a variety of popular cultural texts associated with characteristics associated with the *Fakatsa* identity. Spanish and Japanese are the sources of the most common borrowed words.

The Spanish words *mucho* ('a lot') and *muy* ('very') are common on *Fakatsa* blogs. For the past decade, a number of Spanish-language television series from Latin America intended for adolescent viewing audiences have been broadcast in Israel. One of the most popular during the research period was *The Rebels (Rebelde Way)*, a series that caused fierce debate about television content for children. Luisana Lopilato, one of the leading stars of the series, is worshiped by the *Fakatsa* speech community, together with the Hollywood stars mentioned above.

Lopilato visited Israel several times and filmed Israeli commercials for the *Kef* ('fun') brand of shampoo. In a series of commercials, Lopilato is seen in the shower or bouncing on a Pilates ball, excitedly saying that Israel is *muy kef* ('very/extremely fun'). *Muy kef* became a common expression among girls and *muy* was coupled with other words as a substitute for "very" or as a synonym for the English "so", which are used by *Fakatsa* girls alternately in their writing. The expression *muy fun* transliterated to Hebrew, mixing both Spanish and English, was common as well.

Another interesting convention prevalent on these blogs is the integration of the word *ovio* in place of the Hebrew *barur* ('clear/obvious'). While it seems that their intention is a phonetic shortening of the English word "obvious", it often appears as *ovio* in Hebrew literation, corresponding to the Spanish popular pronunciation of *obvio*. Because there is a strong correlation between girls who often use the word *muy*

or *mucho* and those who use the word *ovio*, I believe this is not a mistake in transliteration or an abbreviation of the English “obvious”. For example:

לייק אוביו שרזה ומוי יפה אוקצור! (64813 ,5.11.2004)

like ovio *še-raza ve-muy yafa* ‘uktsur!

‘Like, it’s **obvious** I’m thin and, in short [slang form], I’m **very** pretty!’

הם לא מהשכונה שילי!! אוביו! הם התפלחו לפה... אס הגיעה המשטרה ואוביו שהעיפו אותם לתחנה... זה היה מוי פאני (187132 ,22.11.2005)

hem lo me-ha-šxuna shili!! ovio! hem hitfalxu le-po... as higia’ ha-mištara ve-ovio še-he’ifu otam la-taxana... ze haya muy fani

‘They are not from my neighborhood! **Obvious!** They sneaked in here... so the police arrived and **obviously** “booted” them [slang form] to the police station... it was **very funny**’.

אוביו שלא נורא קאזז עכשיו אני מושי חוזרת לחיים שלכם! (83323 ,8.7.2006)

ovio *še-lo nora cazz* ‘axšav ani **mushi** xozeret la-xayim šelaxemm

‘**Obviously** it’s not so bad ’cause [English transliteration of slang form]

I’m **mushi** [another borrowed word, see below] back to your life now!’

The latter example features another common word in *Fakatsa* blogs, *mushi*, which normally appears in various affectionate inflections and/or integrated into sentences as a noun or an adjective in the context of desirability and cuteness. Often the word appears compounded with the word *mušlam* (‘perfect’) (*mushi-mušlam*), but seems to carry additional meanings, as the following examples show:

עכשיו אני אתאר לכם את החבר המושי מושלם שלי... קארינה המושי מושי מוושלמת (175405 ,15.10.2005)

ʔaxšav ani ata ʔer laxem et ha-xaver ha-mushi mušlam šeli... Karina ha-mushi mušlemet

‘Now I shall describe for you my **mushi**-perfect boyfriend... [signed as] Karina the **mushi**-perfect’

אפל באסה שאתם לא מגיבים... לייק חוצמתגובות המסכנות של הקנאימושים... לייק סוו נוט מושי! (136595 ,25.6.2005)

aḥal basa še-atem lo megivim... layk xuts-me-ha-tguvot ha-miskenot šel ha-kana’imušim... layk sow not muši!

‘But it’s a bummer that you’re not responding... **like** excluding the poor comments of the envious [cuteness suffix]... **like so** not **mushi!**’

הם לייק שנו וודקה לא מושית, סתם משהו זול, אצלי בגינה (187132 ,22.11.2005)
hem layk šatu vodka lo mušit, stam mašehu zol, etsli ba-gina

‘They **like** drank non **mushi** vodka, just something cheap, in my garden’

יש לי חדשות סוו מושיות ברמות על!!!... (64813 ,19.11.2004)
yeš li xadašot sow mušiyot be-ramot ‘al!...

‘I have got **such super mushi** news!’

The word *mushi* is clearly a multi-sourced neology (Zuckerman, 2003): its source within Hebrew might be a cute abbreviation of *mušlemet*, (‘perfect’, the feminine of *mušlam*), but it is also a phonetic transliteration of the English adjective “mushy” (both in the sense of texture and being sentimental), but most likely it is an adaptation of the Japanese *muši-muši* (‘hello’), which the girls might have been exposed to while consuming Japanese *kawaii* imagery (on the culture of cuteness, see Kinsella, 1995). The examples above are representative of the various uses of this word in the corpus. They indicate *muši* exalts other adjectives or nouns, making them utterly perfect or puts them in the context of cuteness (cutely perfect). Furthermore, the examples suggest *muši* is a form of girly coolness in the “cute pink world” Fakatsa girls portray on their blogs, since whatever is *muši* is desirable and perfect and “not *muši*” is just uncool, uninteresting and less than perfect. The word has no apparent meaning and in all its inflections seems to be used as a type of onomatopoeia for cuteness. Since in Japanese *muši-muši* means ‘hello’, the word was probably borrowed just because it sounds cute, disregarding its meaning and using it as cuteness marker.

Borrowing a word merely for its sound can be found outside *Fakatsa* blogs as well. A language fad featuring the increased use of the Russian expletive *blat* was found in *Freak* and other adolescent blogs, including those of young male bloggers. In Russian, it is considered a very foul curse directed at women, though it is claimed Russian slang has begun to “downgrade” its meaning to being synonymous with the English word “shit”. Most adolescents who use it frequently are apparently unaware of its real meaning, and I have sometimes read comments on blog posts and other Web forums by adolescents who use the word, trying to discover its real meaning.

From the research corpus, however, it is apparent that Israeli girls use the word *blat* with no special meaning, possibly as a paralinguistic sign based on playing with the sound of the word. There is anecdotal evidence that this norm is also common among male bloggers and in the spoken language of adolescents. The role of the word *blat* in a sentence is as diverse as the roles of “like” mentioned earlier and extends beyond that: it appears in a variety of contexts, sometimes with no special meaning, like a period at the end of a sentence, and sometimes as an amorphous noun when readers must use their imaginations to fill in the blank. The following examples demonstrate the four different uses of *blat* found in my corpus:

אוף, המורה הבלאט הזאתי (87339 ,4.10.2006)

Uf, ha-mora ha-blat ha-zoti

‘Ugh, that **blat** teacher’

בלאט... כאילו מה? אין היגיון נכון? חיחי...

blat... ke'ilu ma? ein higayion naxon? hihi...

‘**Blat**... as if what? There is no logic, right? Ha ha...’

אוףףף... הפכתי להיות ילדה טובה מידי... בלאט! אין לי עצבים בגרוש למטמתיקה...

(90408 ,29.12.2004)

ufff... hafaxti lihiyot yalda tova miday... blat! ein li 'atsabim begruš le-matematika...

‘Ugh... I’ve become too much of a good girl... **Blat!** I don’t have the patience for math’

כואבת לי העיוון בלאט. כואב לי למצמץ. כואב לי להסתכל. ארררר (16.10.2006)

(12590

ko'evet li ha-'ayinnnn blat. ko'ev li lematmets. ko'ev li lehistakel. arrrrrg

‘My eyessss hurt **blat**. It hurts me to blink. It hurts me to look. Arrrrrg’

It appears that in the absence of an agreed and known meaning for the word *blat*, it is used as a paralinguistic sign, almost onomatopoeic, in keeping with its phonology, like a knock, a grumble or a vocalized “fill in the blank” line. There are not enough instances in this small corpus to make a generalization, yet some usages of *blat* resemble the pragmatic uses of *like* (see second example above). Since a *Freak* or *Anime* girl cannot use the word *like*, unless she does so to ridicule *Fakatsa* style, it would seem the word *blat* substitutes for some of these pragmatic functions. The

origin of the word in masculine Russian profanity is in keeping with the subversive identities these girls perform on their blogs, distancing themselves from whatever is considered “girly”.

However, unlike *like*, in some instances the word *blat* seems to serve as an adjective of some unclear negative meaning (see the first example above). From what I have gathered on *Israblog*, the use of *blat* seems even more common among male bloggers, and further research is required to establish its influence and determine if it is indeed more common in writing than speech, thus functions as an online paralinguistic signifier.

Discussion

Israeli girls' blogs are generally consistent with familiar conventions of speech-write in synchronous communication both in Israel and worldwide, and with familiar norms of lexical borrowing. However, this paper focuses on a few unique conventions, whether they are linked to a specific gender identity performance or to the constraints of online mediated communication. Thus, these findings contribute to the interplay between the discourses of language and computer-mediated communication, language and gender, and language and globalization.

Lexical borrowing styles and gender identity performance

Although the spoken language of adolescents is generally thought of as homogeneous, different linguistic norms and discourse patterns are to be expected when speakers associate themselves with different subcultural styles. Among the *Fakatsa* speech community, I found wide use of words borrowed from the lexicons of various languages, transliterated into Hebrew script and conjugated into Hebrew syntax. The *Freak* speech community, in contrast, performs its style mainly through Gothic imagery and display of musical tastes, thus did not exhibit distinctive linguistic style. Nevertheless, two common language norms relating to foreign language were found in the blogs of *Freak* girls in which they may represent the spoken language more generally prevalent among adolescents, and are exhibited to distinguish their linguistic style from that of the “girly” *Fakatsas*. This further highlights the fact that *Fakatsa* linguistic norms are an aware playful expression of a gendered identity performance.

English has the most influence of any language on digital Hebrew, though there is also evidence that Spanish and Japanese words have penetrated spoken Hebrew through popular culture and media content from Japan and South America. The exception is the Russian expletive *blat*, which was apparently spread orally in the Israeli school system by new immigrant teens from Russia.

This paper demonstrates how borrowing from foreign languages is selective, when various speech communities carefully choose certain words and linguistic expressions from media and popular culture, as part of a repertoire of a specific identity performance. The lexical choices of *Fakatsa* girls are often nouns and adjectives from everyday life, that help them perform through writing the desired routine of a Californian girl from the Hollywood movies they consume. Many of the common borrowed words are boosters that stress and validate the meaning of what is being said (of course, obviously, so or many), serving as dramatic emphasis, attesting to the confidence of the speaker, and helping her preform luxury and abundance through writing.

Androutsopoulos (2007) has demonstrated how German hip hop fans use lexical borrowing from English transliterated into German in their online writing, as well as write in nonstandard spelling that bring conventions of hip-hop speech style into German grammar. If we regard the Californian girlhood portrayed in movies as a girly subculture in the Israeli context,³ the lexical borrowing strategies of *Fakatsa* girls could be understood as part of the performance of this subcultural style, since their result is the performance of cuteness and/or the movie-like speech style of a glamorous girl.

These forms of writing are designed to be read aloud or at least imagined voiced, but ethnographic evidence (Vaisman, 2010a; Vaisman & Gonen, 2006, 2011) suggests they are not merely a representation of a speech style. *Fakatsa* girls do not do cute speak or excessive lexical borrowing in face-to-face communication, where they can perform their identity through fashion and behavior. These strategies are unique to their blogs, where their body and voice are missing, and they have less expressive systems to perform their style.

³ For American audiences, Hollywood products might signify a hegemonic mainstream, but in the Israeli cultural context, it is still an emerging style, competing with additional locally and globally informed interpretations of girlhood that are nevertheless popular, thus cannot be considered hegemonic or mainstream vis-à-vis local values and/or the Zionist gender ethos.

Lexical borrowing and computer-mediated communication

The paper further demonstrates that certain words borrowed from foreign languages by both speech communities (in this case, *mushi* and *blat*), are chosen by their phonology with little importance to their meaning, and used in diverse ways, including as onomatopoeic paralinguistic signs, a phenomenon apparently unique to digital writing. Indeed, some of the pragmatic uses of such words resemble the varieties documented of “like”, yet their use in blogs’ written speech suggests their sound is important to their meaning: *mushi* sounds cute and *blat* sounds foul or like a rant. Their original meaning is of little importance to the speech communities that borrow these words into Hebrew and engage with their sound playfully.

The progression of lexical borrowing of foreign slang has been documented in language (Zuckerman, 2003), though the findings of the present research are unique in demonstrating that words may be borrowed because of their sound, regardless of their meaning, and used in keeping with their phonology as online paralinguistic signs. I call this phenomenon lexical borrowing that is based on “onomatopoeic playfulness”. Zuckerman (ibid.) demonstrates that quite a few multi-sourced neologies in Hebrew involve phonology playfulness, but none of them were borrowed outside their context, merely because they sound cute or profane.

A possible explanation for this finding is the absence of paralinguistic and kinetic signs in digital writing, which has encouraged creativity in developing agreed upon alternative sign systems: this was the source of emoticons, based on enhanced use of punctuation marks, as well as dozens of paralinguistic signs documented in research, such as LOL (an acronym for “laughing out loud”), hehehe as a sign of laughter, grrrrr as a sign of anger, etc. (Crystal, 2006), with equivalent signs found in Hebrew (Lipetz-Eliassi, 2006) and other languages.

It is possible, therefore, that some web users would borrow foreign words based on their sound to make up for the lack of sound in online speech-write. Another possible explanation for borrowing words based on their phonology is the craving for globalization and consolidation of an Internet language. Reducing a word to its phonology may represent an attempt to build a recognized universal Internet language structure, common to all “digital natives” (Palfrey & Gasser, 2010), in attempt to bring the word closer to what it actually means, possibly in a pursuit of the essence it stands for, thus the engagement with onomatopoeia.

This paper should be regarded as small-scale initial ethnographic evidence of such a phenomenon, which invites further research of the existence and the frequency of similar play with language in Hebrew and other languages online.

Lexical borrowing and Glocalization

The *Fakatsa* identity is “glocal”, in that it combines global and local feminine stereotypes (Vaisman, 2010a) that are also expressed through language – the girls borrow words from foreign languages and adapt them to Hebrew spelling and syntax. They thus differentiate themselves from the *Freak* speech community and other adolescents whose blogging language norms conform to and sustain the flow of foreign languages over Hebrew, exemplified by the infiltration of English syntax into the Hebrew language.

There are several different ways of practicing glocalization, and it seems different strategies are employed by different speech communities: *Fakatsa* girls are as vulnerable to the influence of foreign languages as any other teens, yet despite their preference of foreign words, they seem to localize them into Hebrew grammar. The *Fakatsa*'s sire image, the *Freħa*, has a reputation for creating local original fashion by practices of mash-up that are localizing global fashion (Ivri, 2008), thus it would be fair to say *Fakatsas* are practicing the same with language.

One of the points Assi Dayan makes in his popular song ridiculing the *Freħa* bimbo stereotype (“Song of the *Freħa*”) is the way it provincially combines itself with global culture (“A handsome one will come in English and with colors, **come on baby**, the airplane is waiting” [using English for “come on baby”]). It seems that the *Fakatsa* inherited this glocalization pattern, that is considered colloquial and even provincial Israeli, from the *Freħa* stereotype: the language norms of *Fakatsa* speech community on blogs are ridiculed by other bloggers and local press, while other norms, including integration of English in writing, usually by using affixes – widespread on other blogs – are widely accepted in the population and exist in general adolescent speech.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that language plays an important role in the intersection between gender, globalization and technology. The discourse of globalization in Israel has traditionally been focused on the influence of English, yet this paper suggests

lexical borrowing from media content can invoke the influence of additional languages, on one hand, and teens may use words based on their sound or appearance in order to aim beyond language all together, possibly in pursuit of universal signs understood by digital natives worldwide, on the other hand.

Existing literature on lexical borrowing does not sufficiently stress the agency of the speakers exercised in the motivations for borrowing and the conventions of using the borrowed words. This paper demonstrates how the borrowed repertoire is purposely chosen as part of a toolkit of a specific identity performance. As such, these foreign influences might be merely language fads, as fluid as the identities they help perform, leaving little impact on the Hebrew language and not spreading beyond the boundaries of a specific youth subculture.

This paper suggests that gender is a dominant variable in linguistic choices, to the point that it can overcome some effects of globalization on language: the overall ethnographic evidence strongly suggests teen bloggers refrain from extensive English lexical borrowing in order not to be labeled a girly *Fakatsa*. Furthermore, since the use of “like” was appropriated by *Fakatsa* girls and became a salient feature of their style, it is less likely to be found in the speech or speech-write of other teens, who do not want to gender mark themselves. This assumption calls for further research of teen speech, both online and offline.

Finally, my earlier research on how *Fakatsa* girls play with typography concluded that girls try to write words like they sound to make their online writing livelier and closer to speech (Vaisman, 2011). Therefore, it is not surprising that the opposite occurs online as well, when one may choose a word to borrow, because it sounds cute or profane, preferring the sound over the meaning and using the word accordingly. This paper, hence, supports Thurlow (2011) in the assertion that new media expressions extend beyond mere written representations of speech, but have a communication mode of their own, often facilitating playfulness with language so that language is felt and lived organically.

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