Beautiful Script, Cute Spelling and Glamorous Words:

Doing Girlhood through Language Playfulness on Israeli Blogs

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Introduction

Research on gender and language in computer mediated communication (CMC) has evolved through two trajectories: differences in language use and communication styles between men and women (e.g. Herring 1993, 2000; Huffaker & Calvert, 2005; Kapidzic & Herring, 2011) and the performance of gender through linguistic resources (e.g. Danet, 1998; Katsuno & Yano, 2007; Del Teso-Craviotto, 2008), exploring the diversity among men and among women, who perform a variety of masculinities and femininities. The findings on gender differences in CMC have been consistent with gender differences in spoken communication (Kapidzic & Herring, 2011), however, gender performance through language online has been less explored, and both trajectories are still underrepresented in languages other than English.

This paper is concerned with the ways a group of Israeli girls employ linguistic resources for preforming a specific feminine identity on their blogs. Specifically, I look at the playful use of four linguistic levels: digital typography, deviant orthography as well as morphology, and lexical borrowing. While previous studies of language playfulness in CMC have focused mainly on the levels of typography and/or orthography (Herring, in press 2012), this study demonstrates a playful principle evoked for preforming a specific gender identity across four linguistic levels. Although this study clearly associates with the research trope of gender performance through language, I will argue for a connection between the discourses of gender differences and gender performance in CMC, by demonstrating that gender is preformed online through linguistic style choices associated with stereotypical differences.
The paper emerges from a larger ethnography of girls' engagement with new media literacies in the Hebrew-language blogosphere. The study is based on posts sampled between 2004 and 2007, from the blogs of 140 Israeli girls aged 11–16 on Israblog, Israel's largest blog-hosting website and populated mainly by adolescent girls. This paper contributes to the recently growing interest in multilingualism on the internet (Danet and Herring 2003, 2007) and offers a compelling case study of the interplay between language, gender, cultural globalization and CMC.

**Language and Gender**

Research on language and gender emerged from a motivation to explore the reflection of social differences/inequalities between men and women (e.g., Lakoff, 1975) and initially was based upon an assumption of gender as a fixed category and on the sociolinguistic framework of speech communities. In the early nineties, however, the field was revolutionized by two concepts that changed both the perception of gendered identity and the contexts in which it was analyzed. Judith Butler (1990) extended Goffman's identity performance concept in supporting her argument that gender was not simply a biological category but, rather, a set of performed rituals—something we do, not something we are. Research on language and gender then took a “performance turn” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003), exploring the diversity among men and among women, who perform a variety of masculinities and femininities.

One well-known example of this approach is Kira Hall's (1995) study of phone-sex service workers, which demonstrates how women (and one man) move between diverse feminine identities performed solely through their speech styles and other discursive resources. At the same time, the classic sociolinguistic framework of speech community was also being problematized and has now largely been replaced with the notion of “community of practice” (Bucholtz, 1999; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992). The turn to practice theory has encouraged research on language and gender to take on more refined microanalyses of various linguistic practices involved in the performance and the struggle over gender identities. The focus is thus on language as local practice (cf. Pennycook, 2010) and on vernacular practice.
Much of the prominent research on gender and language is concerned with spoken discourse among groups of girls (e.g., Bucholtz, 1999; Coats, 1999; Goodwin, 2006), with less attention given to written discourse (mostly fictional, see Gilbert, 1993; Orellana, 1999). Indeed, the historical tendency of linguistics as a field is to focus mainly on spoken language, especially where nonstandard language is concerned (Sebba, 2003). This has, of course, changed with the advent of CMC.

**Gender and Language in CMC**

The first wave of new media language research was mainly descriptive (cf. Crystal, 2001), listing formal features of new media genres. Increasingly, it has been complemented by analyses that shed light on how different contextual parameters shape and are evoked in the discourse of various new media (see Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011 for a comprehensive review of the paradigm). In this way, we can trace the study of language and gender in new media in Susan Herring’s pioneering research (Herring, 1993, 2000) through to more “doing gender” approaches (Rodino, 1997) and studies of multigender identity play (Danet, 1998; Turkle, 1997). All gender identities are produced through everyday communicators’ discursive repertoires of which language is a key one (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Eckert and Rickford, 2001). Where in offline life this may also include clothing, gestures, hairstyles, and so on, gender performances online rely heavily on language.

Danet (2001) refers to the computer as a grand piano on our desktop. Indeed, in early online text-based communities, the use of keyboard was interpreted as voice and tones production. (For instance, the use of CAPS was interpreted as shouting.) In this way, digital texts could be regarded as objects to look at rather than to look through for their meaning; it is this that also invites aesthetic play (Lanham, 1993). Danet (2001) defines playfulness as playing with the rules as opposed to playing by the rules, a definition that applies for deviant orthography and typography. Typography is not to be looked at as an abstract sign system, but as a situated code choice, which is always part of a specific genre in a specific communicative situation (Androustopoulos, 2004). Playful practices with orthography and typography demonstrate how people convey social
meaning through form and not solely content (Sebba, 2003), signifying the discourse and text as sources of fascination apart from the semantic content they convey (Kataoka, 1997).

In this regard, vernacular forms of nonstandard orthography have been common throughout history (Shortis, 2007); however, the first known example of online, English-language subcultural language play is *leet* (stands for 'elite'), the creative orthographic and typographic practices of (usually male) hackers (Raymond, 1991). Additional studies on youth subculture discourse (e.g., Androutsopoulos, 2007; Sebba, 2003) have demonstrated deviant orthography and misspelling are signifiers for speech styles and social identities. Few of these studies, however, emphasized linguistic playfulness as means of performing gender identities (cf. Del Teso-Craviotto, 2008) and none demonstrated a consecutive identity performance principle evoked on several grammatical levels.

While studies exploring gender differences in English language CMC genres argue if patterns are changing (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005; Kapidzic & Herring, 2011), evidence on language use from the multilingual web shows women and girls employ diverse linguistic resources to purposely preform specific feminine identities (e.g. Zelenkauskaite & Herring, 2006; Kataoka, 1997; Katsuno & Yano, 2007; Nishimura, 2010). This paper suggests a bridge between the discourses of gender performance and gender differences by presenting ethnographic evidence from the Hebrew speaking web of girls’ playfulness with four linguistic levels on their blogs.

**Methodology**

The online and offline fieldwork was conducted between August 2004 and December 2007 and followed 140 girls’ blogs of which half volunteered or were recommended by their friends, and half were chosen randomly through Israbloget’s “random blog” function. These blogs, as well as other blogs they interacted with, 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 field of digital language and discourse analysis has also
recently recognized the importance of the ethnographic data as context for analysis (Androutsopoulos, 2008)

In my fieldwork I have found that Israeli girls mash-up popular culture and media symbols in preforming diverse subcultural identities related to media consumption and social practices. Girls who identified as *Freak* chose black backgrounds to their blogs and decorated it with gothic iconography, *Anime* Girls create blogs with Manga iconography and other girls created blue or khaki colored blogs decorated with symbols of girl scouts and other local youth movements.

Of a particular interest to me were the group of girls who were labeled and/or identified as *Fakatsa* – a Hebrew acronym for a young female derogatory directed at "loud" and extreme feminine performances and their associated practices - following fashion fads, narcissistic obsession with one's appearance and related consumerism etc. Although initially *Fakatsa* was a category applied to specific girls by nonmembers (Sacks, 1979), some of those girls proudly adopted the category, negotiating its meaning and thus their gender identity. As a result, self-proclaimed *Fakatsa* girls portrayed their practices as the desired model for being a girl, constantly attacking other groups of girls for not being feminine enough.

*Fakatsa* girls' blogs were dominated by the color pink and decorated with celebrities; kitsch and Japanese *Kawaii* iconography (see Kinsella, 1995 on the visual culture of cuteness in Japan). *Freak, Anime* and other blog styles described in my fieldwork distinguished themselves mainly through graphic design and did not exhibit any special linguistic patterns other than those common and familiar in youth spoken language and Hebrew 'netspeak'. The focus of this paper is on *Fakatsa* girls' engagement with four levels of digital Hebrew as part of their repertoire of preforming an extroverted girly-feminine identity.

While the grammar of spoken language includes phonology, morphology and syntax, in text based CMC typography and orthography take over the functions of sound (Herring, in press 2012). This study examines, therefore, playful and creative ‘deviations’ on all e-grammar levels excluding syntax, as well as addresses unique lexical phenomenon associated with this groups' identity.
Doing Girly Girl: Beautiful Script, Cute Spelling and Glamorous Words

Starting in 2004, the front page of Israblog displaying latest blogs updates was filled with usernames, blog titles, and posted comments written in a very unusual, distinctive typography: mixing the standard Hebrew writing system with various ASCII signs. Bloggers who clicked on these typographies reached colorful blogs dominated by the color pink and excessively decorated with blinking or glittering kitsch, popular culture and celebrities iconography. These new bloggers seemed more concerned with the appearance of their blog rather than its content. This concern was also reflected through various self-promoting comments they had left on other blog posts regardless of their contents, consisting of a single phrase that later became iconic in the Israeli blogosphere: “Beautiful blog! You’re invited to see mine: (link to their blog)”.

For these bloggers, a blog was something to look at and appreciate visually, while the majority of Israblog community did not share this perspective and became engaged in validating the blog as a text, in response to such comments. The preoccupation with a blog’s “beauty” (appearance), the unique typography and other linguistic ‘deviations’ made it instantly clear to other bloggers that these new blogs were created by girls. The new blog style was labeled by young male bloggers as Fakatsa blogs, applying the social judgment of girls’ bodies to their blogs. Bloggers described Fakatsa blogs as “scribbled” and “meaningless” or even as an “environmental hazard contaminating the blogosphere,” as one dismissive blogger put it.

Some girls were startled by this type of attention that often came with flames on their blogs and withdrew from those visual and linguistic styles. Others referred to themselves proudly as Fakatsa girls, further stressing and developing those styles to craft a positive, glamorous and desirable girlish identity. For them, being called a fashion victim was a compliment they had echoed through blog buttons labeling themselves as proud fashion victims and portraying fashion as the center of a girl’s life. This desirable girlhood identity preformed through blog design was complemented by unique linguistic performances, which are the focus of my analysis in this paper. I divide the analysis to three parts: typography, phonology (expressed through orthography
and morphology) and lexicon (including native language morphology on words borrowed from other languages).

1. Aesthetic Play with Digital Typography

The seemingly "scribbled" typographies of Fakatsa blogs usernames, titles and signatures were based on a principle similar to Hacker's "l33t" mentioned earlier: replacing Hebrew characters with ASCII characters—specifically, those that are graphically similar to the Hebrew script. The Hebrew alphabet consists only of consonants, written from right to left. It has 22 letters, 5 of which use different forms at the end of a word. It has no distinct capital or lowercase letters, but it has both typographic and cursive writing systems with various fonts and variations.

During the years I documented Fakatsa style, I found that ASCII signs were used as visual replacements for all but two Hebrew letters, including two extra forms used for the end of a word. Half of the letters had more than one possible replacement, and many of these signs were, in fact, similar to the respective cursive Hebrew letters, which vary from the shape of their typographic equivalents.

Table 1 shows all documented variations, including rare replacements with extended ISO-ASCII signs, arranged by frequency of use. One need not know Hebrew to assess the visual resemblance of Hebrew letters to their ASCII replacement signs. Every sentence written using this creative typographic form is a unique performance of style, exercising different, often spontaneous choices that compel readers to “decipher” them according to their specific context of use. Each letter has a number of possible replacements, and not all letters are replaced in every word.
In a profound analysis of this typographic style (Vaisman, 2011a) I found that many of the less common variations were preferred over the more keyboard-accessible ones when the sign bore greater resemblance to the Hebrew letter. For instance, the cursive Hebrew letter numbered 14 in Table 1 can be represented by an easily accessible sign like \( \mathbb{J} \), yet it is more commonly represented by the roman letter \( J \), which has more pleasing, rounded proportions. For the same reason \textit{Fakatsa} typography is both case and font sensitive (notice that the roman "g" replacing letter number 17 is always in lowercase \textit{Arial} font, since the uppercase G or the \textit{Times New Roman} lowercase font do not graphically resemble the Hebrew script).

Another typographic convention that makes \textit{Fakatsa} typographic style unique is its added ornamental function for aesthetic emphasis of titles, prose,
and quotes. Some ASCII and extended ASCII signs, although they might serve as letter replacements, are purely ornamental and are used to decorate the sentence as a form of pencil art around and sometimes within written words, as seen in extract 1.

**Extract 1.**

![Image of a decorated sentence]

This function could be interpreted as an attempt to dissolve the alienation of standardized digitized writing by bringing it closer to a brushstroke, performing the calligraphy of personal handwriting (and then “drawing” some cute signs around it, as girls often do in their notebooks). The practice certainly brings orthography closer to ASCII art, corresponding with a reversed practice of ASCII calligraphy—letters “drawn” with ASCII signs (see Danet, 2001, for more on this).

2. "Cute" Phonology - Deviant Orthography and Morphology

_Fakatsa_ Girls’ blogs display many instances of deviant orthography and morphology, beyond the speech-like spelling associated with Hebrew netspeak. Other bloggers and Israeli media have often assumed _Fakatsa_ girls’ blog writing is evidence of poor language skills; much like the typical media stance towards other variations of English netspeak and texting conventions (Thurlow, 2007). However, a careful analysis of the instances of deviant orthography and morphology reveals two patterns that become meaningful when interpreted in a gendered context: additive letters and suffixes aimed at achieving diminutive cute phonology, and systematic consonant devoicing or increased sibilant quality, resulting in the written representation of a cute infantile speech style.

The first set of examples demonstrates the existing variations of the pattern of consonant devoicing (the original phonology is transliterated in the parenthesis):
• **taf** (tov), ‘az natkhil me-ha-hatkhalah  
Translation: Well, let’s start from the beginning

• **me’anyen me’ot** (me’od) ma ‘avar lo ba-rosh  
Translation: It’s very interesting to know what was going through his mind

• ‘ani mit’aperet, ‘afal (‘aval) ktsat  
Translation: I use makeup, but only a little

• afal se (aval ze) lo ha-kol... se (ze) ha-rov!  
Translation: but it’s not everything... though it’s the majority!

• ve-az my fater hitkašer ve-se mase (ze maze) haras! hu amar li lehoci et nofar ha-yom me-ha-gan! ve-mase (maze) ravnu biglal še-kavati dvarim!  
Translation: ‘So my father called and that so ruined it! He told me to take Nofar home from kindergarten today! And we so fought ‘cause I had things planned!

A large portion of the deviant spelling found on **Fakatsa** blogs was indeed replacing the Hebrew script equivalents of "z" for "s", "v" for "f" and "d" for "t", resulting in an increased sibilant quality so if the words were read aloud they sound like Hebrew "baby talk" characterized by diminution. There were only two orthographic variations in which vocalization increased with the replacement, yet it still produced childish phonology through sibilant quality increase, as in the following examples:

• **ma kore, mekho’arim chili (sheli)?**  
Translation: Why are you bothering me, did you have something to say?
Translation: what's up my ugly ones?

- zarakti et chmulik ve-hitslakhti lehafrid beyn ‘akhiv la-khavera chel (shel) ‘akhiv
  Translation: I dumped Shmulik and I succeeded in separating between his brother and his girlfriend

- Yech' (yesh) khaver khadash! שchester חשרה! Translation: got a new boyfriend! (The number 2 is a visually based replacement of the second letter in the Hebrew alphabet as explained in the typography play section earlier)

In the examples above the Hebrew letter that produces the syllable "sh" is replaced with a letter that produces the syllable "ch". Although the vocalization of the syllable increases, the sibilant quality that produces the childish-pampered like speech style increases for the entire word. The increase of the sibilant quality of words not only preforms childish phonology in Hebrew but is also typical of a speech style associated with rich and pampered Tel Aviv uptown girls; a dialect which is a Hebrew interpretation of the Californian speech style (Siegel, 2002) often represented in Hollywood teen movies. Another such example that has become standardized by now, is the writing of the adjective seksi (sexy, seksi in Hebrew phonology) as šeksi. Here the soft "s" is replaced with the vocalized syllable "sh" but the phonology of the word as a whole, which includes a second "s", resonates with the cute-pampered uptown girl Hebrew dialect.

The second pattern is concerned with deviant morphology. Fakatsa girls make excessive use of the inflections of the Hebrew suffix –ush, which similarly to the Russian language, adds diminution and cuteness to words. The girls often add it to multiple words in the same sentence and to many names they mention. Sometimes this suffix is in fact used in the middle of words, as in the following examples:
What's up people?

Excluding the poor comments of the jealous people...

Embedding the cuteness suffix into the word 'people' makes (pragmatic) sense as affection and/or flattering the people, however, in many other sentences the suffix is embedded into random words that don't necessarily allow such inflections, like in the second example above. Adding cuteness to jealousy as an adjective makes no pragmatic sense, although it can be somewhat understood as hedging the insult to those jealous people. In such cases, especially when multiple suffixes appear in the same sentence, the purpose is purely to transform the sentence into baby-talk cute regardless of its meaning. Cuteness suffixes, however non-standardly used, cannot be mistaken for misspelling, however, that is not the case with the use of the tenth letter in the Hebrew alphabet as an improvised "cuteness additive" in words that should not include it normally. For example:

- ha-blog ha mušilam (mušlam) shili (šeli)
  Translation: my perfect blog.

- Hem lo me-ha-šxuna shili (šeli)
  Translation: they are not from my neighborhood

The additive letter producing the sound of "i" or "y" tends to come after a sibilant vowel, usually "sh", thus further increasing its sibilant quality and 'forcing' the word into sounding like cute baby talk. The tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet does not have any conventional meaning associated with cuteness and could seem like unintentional misspelling, yet it is used systematically as a 'cuteness device' by Fakatsa girls.
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 for the Hebrew Language and many Israeli linguists (e.g. Muchnik, 1994; Schwarzwald, 1998) have dealt in length with the problem of foreign languages in modern Hebrew and even gave 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 only since 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 injected into the spoken language and slang, a variety of borrowed words and culture markers from English (Fisherman, 2006).

Fakatsa girls, however, take lexical borrowing to its extreme on their blogs, switching codes a few times within a short sentence, randomly borrowing mundane nouns, adjectives and conjunctions from English. Fakatsa girls are consuming commercial media products designed for American girls, like Clueless or Legally Blond, that portray the everyday life of rich and glamorous Californian teenagers and feature the Californian speech style mentioned earlier.

The images of celebrities like Alicia Silverstone, Rees Witherspoon or even Paris Hilton are prominent in these blogs, thus the excessive borrowing of mundane words can be explained as a desire of Fakatsa girls to identify with and appropriate the lifestyle they see in these movies. Their blog posts often contain fictional narratives of a Hollywood movie or Disney fairytale lifestyle applied to a
local context, or texts that exaggerate, glorify and perfect their daily routine. It is in these texts that lexical borrowing and code switching feature most, as linguistic means of association with a desired gender identity and lifestyle. For example:

• עד כה ממשהכל המראה של חברה שלך? אם כךiks ו公开发وظים מסוים של חיות

  ‘ad kama mešane lax ha-mar’e šel ha-xaver shelax? ‘mm of-kors še-yeš lo xašivut raba...ani lo estovev im mišeu יולמי מxašavtem?
Translation: ‘How much does the appearances of your boyfriend matter? mmmm of course it is very important... I wouldn’t hang out with someone ugly. What were you thinking?’

• אז אני, Liori my boy friend veMaori (Mor boy friend) veMor yacanu lasafsaim im haš’ar ve-axar-kax stam yašavnu ba-kafeteria ve-dibarnu

  az ani, Liori my boyfriend veMaori (Mor’s boyfriend) and Mor went outside to the benches with everyone else and later just sat in the cafeteria and talked

• אני ו-Giluš-like nos’ot maxar le-azri’eli... soo funn!!

  ani ve-giluš like nos’ot maxar le-azri’eli... soo funn!!
Translation: ‘Gilush and I are like going tomorrow to Azrieli... so fun!!!’

• יש ליأمומי ו Daddy xamudim ve-maksimim, ve-ax xatix.

  yeš li mommy and daddy xamudim ve-maksimim, ve-ax xatix.
Translation: ‘I have a mommy and daddy who are sweet and wonderful, and a handsome brother’

• So layk set hayta onli ha-hatxala
Translation: ‘So like that was only the beginning’

• לא הבנתי מה הקטע שלו להתקשר אליי שאני בבית! ואז מיי פאטר התקשת...

_ve-az my fater hitkašer! lo hevanti ma ha-keta šelo lehitkašer elay še-ani ba-beyt-sefer!!...ve-fater ka’as...

Translation: and then my father called! I didn’t understand what’s up with him calling me at school!!!... and father was mad...

Some conventions of lexical borrowing are boosters and quantifiers or discourse markers like 'like'. In spoken American slang, “like” fits any place in a sentence and lacks specific meaning, much like the words _ke’ilu_ (as if/like) and _kaze_ (like this/like) in Hebrew colloquial dialect, as studies by Maschler (2001). Judging from girls’ blog writing it seems these Hebrew words are no longer in use, at least not in online written speech, while _Fakatsa_ girls have adopted the English "like" transliterated into Hebrew script in their place. Ethnographic evidence suggests the borrowing of 'like’ became so closely associated with _Fakatsa_ girls that one risks immediate categorization as _Fakatsa_ by borrowing this word and _Fakatsa_ girls are often mocked through ironic use of 'like' by other girls, in both Hebrew CMC and spoken contexts.

Many other borrowed words are, however, nouns and adjectives from the everyday-life, that do not offer any pragmatic advantage or additional meaning over their Hebrew equivalents; their borrowing ‘value’ is in performing the girls’ affinity with the gender identity and lifestyle portrayed in their favorite American media products. It is worth noting, that 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”, as in the last example above ("my fater"). This tendency further integrates the English borrowed words into the deviant Hebrew orthography of consonant devocalization.
In addition to borrowing English words transliterated into Hebrew script, Fakatsa girls also apply Hebrew morphology and syntax to borrowed words. For example:

- **layk ‘iyaw, tir'u le-ma aten gormot!!! Sow stupid-ot!**
  Translation: *like ewww*, look what you are causing!!! *soo stupid* [English transliteration with female plural Hebrew suffix]

- **eze milyon people-im xamudimim niršemu la-tab'a‘ot ha-šavot šeli!!**
  Translation: ‘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 plural yet the girls are conjugating 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 cuteness phonology to the words. It is worth noting that the performative predicate of disgust "ewww", does not exist in Hebrew and is borrowed from English slang solely by Fakatsa girls, thus it has come to mean a specific form of disgust – that of an uptown pampered girl, disgusted of all that is not part of her 'perfect pink world'.

Fakatsa girls are not satisfied with borrowing words only from English, but draw additional words from a variety of popular cultural texts associated with their desired gender identity. Spanish and Japanese are the sources of the most common borrowed words. The Spanish quantifier *mucho* (a lot) and the booster *muy* (‘very/so’) are common in Fakatsa blogs. For the past decade a number of Spanish language television series from Latin America intended for an adolescent viewing audience 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 Fakatsa girls, together with the Hollywood stars mentioned earlier.

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 Fakatsa girls and muy was coupled with other words as a substitute for the English “so”, thus code switching between three languages often occurs within the same short sentence, as the following examples will demonstrate.

Another interesting convention prevalent in these blogs is the integration of the word ovio in place of the Hebrew barur (clear or 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 the words muy or mucho and ovio tend to co-occur, I believe this is not a mistake in transliteration or an abbreviation of the English “obvious” but a direct borrowing from Spanish. In the following examples of the use of "ovio", notice the code switching between three languages, thus invoking the flavors of media texts that inspire the 'girly girl' gender identity, through play with lexical borrowing:

- Like ovio še-raza ve-muy yafa
Translation: like, it's obvious I'm thin and very pretty

- As higia' ha-mištara ve-ovio she-he'ifu otam la-taxana... ze haya muy fani.
Translation: than the police arrived and obviously booted them [slang form] to the police station... it was very funny [English transliteration].

- Ovio še-lo nora cazz ‘axšav ani xozeret la-xayim šelaxemm
Translation: **Obviously** it’s not so bad ’cause [English transliteration of slang form] ‘I’m back in your life now!’

In conclusion of the lexical part, I introduce another common word in *Fakatsa* blogs - ***muši*** - which has no meaning in Hebrew, yet appears in various affectionate inflections and/or integrated into sentences as a noun or an adjective in the context of desirability and acceptance. The following examples demonstrate the variety of meanings found in the research corpus:

- **בעшив את אטא’ המושי וה wyłącznie מושי שלו… קארינה המושי המושי**

  "axšav ani ata’er laxem et ha-muši mušlam šeli… Karina ha-muši mušlemet"

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

- **אף על פי/documents/image.png [signed as]**

  "afal basa še-atem lo megivim….. layk sow not muši!"

  Translation: ‘But it’s a bummer that you’re not responding.. like so not mushi!’

- **הם לייק שתו וודקה לא מושית, סתם משהו זול, אצלי בגינה**

  "hem layk šatu vodka lo mušit, stam mašehu zol, ecli ba-gina"

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

- **יש לי חדשות סוו מושיות ברמות על**

  "yeš li xadašot sow mušiyot be-ramot ‘al!!...

  Translation: ‘I have got so mushi top level news!’

The word *mushi* is clearly a multi-sourced neology (Zuckerman, 2003): its source within Hebrew might be a cute abbreviation of *mušlam* ('perfect'), but it is also a phonetic transliteration of the English adjective “mushy” (both in the sense
of texture and being sentimental), yet most likely it is an adaptation of the Japanese mushi-mushi (‘hello’) which the girls were exposed to while consuming Japanese kawaii imagery as mentioned earlier.

The first example above stresses its Hebrew source, as it appears compounded with the word mušlam (‘perfect’) (muši mušlam) and can be understood as a perfection booster (perfecty-perfect?) due to the similar morphology. However, juxtaposed with the other examples, it can also be understood as a cuteness prefix (due to the –ush structure), exalting other adjectives and nouns, making them cute (perfect in a cute way? 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 while “not muši” is just uncool, uninteresting and does not belong to their perfect worldview. Despite its multi-sources, 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 mushi-mushi means “hello,” the word was probably borrowed just because it sounds cute, disregarding its meaning and using it as ‘cuteness marker’.

**Discussion: Language, Post Feminism and CMC**

This paper focused on unique evidence of Israeli girls' playfulness with four linguistic levels, as part of a multimodal identity toolkit articulated through their blogging practices. Juxtaposing the interpretations of these findings may offer a fresh perspective on the interplay between the discourses of language and computer mediated communication, language and gender and language and globalization.

Feminist theorists are at odds with contemporary girlhood, often confused by trends among girls and young women to adopt the same feminine stereotypes their mothers fought to dissolve (Mazarella and Pecora, 2007; McRobbie, 2009). This paper presented evidence of the invoking of such traditional stereotypes through play with language, but should this necessarily be interpreted as a feminist backlash?
Gill (2006) argues that post-feminism isn’t a backlash, a historical turn or an epistemological break, but rather a sensibility, defined, inter alia, by free choice and a move from objectification to subjectification. Along these lines, I offer two possible explanations, in which CMC constrains and cultural globalization are variables or layers of sensibility that interplay with the discourse of language and gender.

1. Language, Gender and Globalization

These findings suggest Gender is a dominant variable in linguistic choices, to the point 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 be labeled a girly Fakatsa.

Internet correspondence is based on the ASCII protocol, which is adapted to the English language 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. Playerfman & El Khalil, 2003; Tseliga, 2007; Fialkova, 2005). Fakatsa typography, however, is unique in applying this principle to the native Hebrew script for no apparent practical reason other than aesthetic playfulness (although see Herring, Kouper, Kutz, Vaisman and Zhang, 2012).

The Fakatsa, like the nerd girl (Bucholtz, 1999), isn’t just a stigma but a purposefully chosen alternative, in this case to the gender identities modeled by the orthodox Jewish faith, the socialist ethos of Zionism or even the gender-blurring Goth and Anime global youth subcultures which are prevalent in the same blogging community. 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 in the local context.
Since global styles could be sometimes liberating for local social groups (cf. Hjorth, 2003; Peuronen, 2011), exaggerating the rhetoric of cuteness and beauty and applying it as a playful and decorative principle to blog writing, may be a strategy to negotiate Israeli girlhood vis-à-vis **Freak**, **Anime** or Zionist girl scouts' interpretations of it.

2. **Language, Gender and CMC**

*Fakatsa* typography offers a feminine response to the conventions of l33t, which is a playful performance of the (mostly masculine) hacker identity (Danet, 2001), demonstrating technological virtuosity and expertise in software decoding through virtuosity in the coding of language. *Fakatsa* girls, who seemingly applied the same principle of typography to those of hackers, always made the effort to maintain its orthographic clarity, replacing only a few letters based on aesthetic criteria rather than coding the communication. These aesthetics are complemented by the convention of decorating usernames, titles and prose with additional ASCII and extended-ASCII signs.

Male hackers’ typographic invention is typically perceived to be a sophisticated performance of linguistic skills (Danet, 2001) based on the assumption that one can only play with language when fluent in it and mastering it. By contrast, the Israeli media and adult bloggers have been quick to dismiss *Fakatsa* girls’ no less inventive typography as illiterate and shallow, expressing explicit concern for the deteriorating literacy and spelling skills of young girls, not even entertaining the possibility of linguistic creativity, nor appreciating the sophistication and the linguistic mastery required for producing text in their typography or code switching between three languages within a short text on both typographic and lexical levels.

It is the linguistic and digital virtuosity of *Fakatsa* girls that attests to their sophistication, in rising to the challenge of participation in online male dominated subcultures by girlishly messing with their language coding patterns. Following these girls for over three years and meeting many of them offline in different stages of their lives puts their online performances in a broader perspective: preforming extreme girlhood online was a powerful but also playful
resource for (re)negotiating their stereotype as shallow, vain fashion victims and for reframing their social identities in a self-aware performance of a desirable, stylish girlhood; without reducing the complexity of their identities to their gender. It is in all these ways I argue Fakatsa writing style fits within Adroutsopoulos’ (2011) interpretation of heteroglossia to digital discourse, as it weaves together different ideologies and social voices on different linguistic levels, that must be taken into consideration.

While playful typography is clearly a feature unique to digital writing, deviant orthography and lexical borrowing online are consistently interpreted in the body of research cited throughout this paper as representations of speech styles. The examples presented in this paper also seem to represent speech styles and are written in ways that lend themselves to be read as such, but ethnographic evidence suggests 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 linguistic strategies seem to be unique to their blogs, where their body and voice are missing, thus they have less expressive systems to perform their desired gender identity.

Katsuno and Yano (2007) demonstrated a distinct feminine orthography based on motion and onomatopoeia inspired by Manga art and Japanese calligraphy tradition. They claim Japanese women have a tendency to artfully design handwriting and at the same time interpret online Kaomoji as a form of female embodiment online, facilitating emotional sharing within the respective community. Similarly, in the playful typography of Fakatsa girls, the graphic form—the look—of the sign prevails over any other connotative meaning that it may carry (cf. van Leeuwen, 2006) or the phonology of the sign. It is in all these ways that I argue alphabet letters can be thought of as avatars, since they are a performative sign system facilitating both the ways girls appear on their blogs and appear to their blog readers.

Considering the avatar quality of digital writing in a bodiless and voiceless space may account for the excessive invocation of traditional feminine stereotypes, as part of an effort of girls to perform an authentic gender through the limited symbolic systems blogs and other written based spaces offer (cf. Del Teso-Craviotto, 2008). I argue, therefore, that Fakatsa girls are purposefully
using traditional and stereotypical differences found in linguistic and communication styles between men and women, as resources in performing their specific girly-girl identity.

3. *The case of muši: Language, CMC and Globalization*

The progression of lexical borrowing of foreign slang has been documented in language. Zuckerman (2003) demonstrates that quite a few multi-sourced neologies in Hebrew and in other languages involve phonology playfulness, but none of them were borrowed outside their context, merely because of how they sound. Susan Herring has witnessed such a phenomenon in Japan, where random English words were printed on bags and t-shirts regardless of their meaning, just because they sounded 'cute', yet there is no available academic research on such borrowing motivations. In fact, existing literature on lexical borrowing does not stress enough the agency of the speakers exercised in the motivations for borrowing and the conventions of using borrowed words.

The globalization of culture and CMC constrains can help explain this unique phenomenon of borrowing foreign words (in this case – muši) based on their phonology. Contemporary youth worldwide have been referred to as "digital natives" (Palfrey & Gasser, 2010) and a growing body of research suggest they share mindsets across cultures due to shared digital practices. Sound based lexical borrowing may represent a youthful yearning for a global context and the consolidation of internet language. Reducing a word to its phonology can be interpreted as an attempt to build a recognized universal internet language structure, by bringing the word closer to what it actually means; possibly in a pursuit of the essence it stands for, thus the engagement with onomatopoeia. Thus, Cuteness is both a rhetoric attribute of Fakatsa girls gender identity performance and a strategy to make the words sound more like what they actually mean.

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1 In personal conversation, October 2011.

2 There is one more case of sound based lexical borrowing of the Russian profanity "blat", among another community of practice on the Hebrew web, which I have analyzed in a different publication (Vaisman, 2011b).
Another possible explanation for the case of "muši" 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 and preformative predicates documented in research, such as LOL (an acronym for laughing out loud), hehehe as a sign of laughter, grrrrrr as a sign of anger etc. (Werry, 1996). It is possible, therefore, that some online communities of practice would borrow foreign words based on their sound for their expressive and performative needs, in order to compensate for the lack of sound in CMC.

**Conclusions**

This study has demonstrated how Fakatsa girls juxtapose multiple facets of language and invoke linguistic stereotypes to perform a "girly girl" identity, yet one should not be tempted to assume a feminist backlash based on the analysis of such language variations. Acknowledging digital discourses as heteroglossic and taking an ethnographic approach to discourse (Androutsopoulos, 2008; 2011) offered a more nuanced interpretation, bridging between the perspectives of linguistic gender differences and gender performance through language. The linguistic stereotypes invoked by Fakatsa girls may not be ideologically meaningful for them in the traditional sense, but rather serve as ephemeral stylistic strategies invoking certain identity aspects in specific situations; aligning with specific lifestyles and subcultures and negotiating social identities and practices in different contexts (see also Peuronen, 2011).

CMC research tends to interpret discourse as text and focus on its meaning, despite the growing evidence that language has additional performative functions, carrying the burden of representing other expressive systems absent from digital spaces, such as aesthetics, kinesthetic or ambiance. As demonstrated by this study, some cases of language play may occur in attempt to represent or evoke these additional dimensions of meaning when they are perceived as essential to the performance of a specific identity.
Therefore, future research of online language variations might require additional nonlinguistic methods of interpretation for user generated discourse.

In light of the additional roles of digital language, it should not be surprising that online communities of practice sometimes favor the look and/or sound of linguistic signs over their traditional meaning. Along these lines, this paper supports Thurlow (2011) in the assertion that new media expressions are beyond a mere representation of speech but a communication mode of their own, often facilitating playfulness with language so that language is felt and lived organically.

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