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Positioning in the Community

The Interplay of Language, Nationality and Religion for Jewish Speakers in Berlin

This article discusses how nationality and religion structure Berlin's Jewish community in the perception of its members and explains to what extent language reflects these perceived boundaries. The findings in this article are the outcome of interviews with Jewish speakers in Berlin that I conducted as part of my research project on the "distinctively Jewish linguistic repertoire" (Benor 2008: 1068) of German-speaking Jews in contemporary Berlin. The research project as a whole encompasses a description of the linguistic repertoire that Jewish speakers in Berlin have access to and make use of and an analysis of the categories that affect speakers' choices with regard to the use of lexical elements from this repertoire.

For this paper I analysed speakers' statements concerning the subdivisions of Berlin's Jewish community and their perception of linguistic reflections of this subdivision.¹

1 Language in Jewish communities

Since the 6th century BCE, Jewish communities have been more or less permanently living in a multilingual environment. After a short period of monolingualism with Hebrew as the spoken language, forced exile and conquest led to a trilingual situation with Aramaic and Greek. Thus, around the beginning of the CE, Palestine was triglossic (see Spolsky 1983). Since then this pattern has been typical for Jewish communities and has emerged in their various exiles with clear functions for each of the respective languages: Hebrew-Aramaic remained the sacred language for religion; the territorial languages were used for communication with non-Jews; and, quite often on the basis of the territorial language, a third language developed that served as a vernacular for in-group speech (see Spolsky/Benor 2006). In linguistics, the latter are often labelled "Jewish languages",

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and since the first half of the 20th century have been researched both individually and from a comparative perspective under different denominations (see Benor 2008; Gold 1981; Wexler 1981). In the territory of today's Germany, this "Jewish language" was Yiddish, which in addition to Ladino is the most prominent "Jewish language". There are, however, also other examples from different territories where Jewish communities settled, e.g., Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Provençal or Judeo-Tat in the Eastern Caucasus (see Hary/ Benor 2017).

Although contemporary Jewish languages are generally less distinct from their co-territorial languages than their historical ones, Benor (2011) and Klagsbrun Lebenswerd (2016) show in their respective studies about American and Swedish Jews that these communities do make use of a "distinctively Jewish linguistic repertoire", as Benor describes it (2008: 1068). This means that speakers, when speaking the territorial majority language, have access to an additional repertoire. This repertoire consists mainly of lexical loans from Hebrew and "Jewish languages" that have not only been spoken in the respective territory (e.g. Yiddish), but also might contain some distinctive grammatical features.

Research from my project on Jewish speakers in contemporary Berlin provides evidence that this is also true for the city's German-speaking Jews (see Jahns 2021). These speakers also make use of a distinctively Jewish linguistic repertoire that consists of loans from Hebrew, Yiddish, and, to a lesser extent, Aramaic, that are integrated into German, as well as a small number of German lexemes that are not used by non-Jewish German speakers. My main focus is lexical loans, and to a smaller extent, pronunciation variants as the most salient difference between the dialects of Eastern Yiddish, as well as between Eastern and Western Yiddish (with an emphasis on stressed vowels in the latter case) (see Aptroot/Gruschka 2010; Jacobs 2005). The reason for focusing on lexical items is that findings from research on other Jewish communities have shown that the speech patterns within contemporary Jewish communities differ from the majority language of the respective country, mainly concerning the lexicon (see above). As this is to my knowledge the first study on language use within a contemporary Jewish community in Germany, the lexicon seems to be an appropriate starting point.

2 Variation in the linguistic repertoire and its function

In addition to one main function of contemporary Jewish linguistic repertoires, i.e. expressing alignment towards the Jewish community, an integral part of it is

the degree of variations that they allow, as their users also have the option of displaying the subtle characteristics of their Jewish identity. As Benor states, “Jews make selective use of this repertoire as they index their identities as Jews and as certain types of Jews” (Benor 2011: 141).

There are two layers of variation. One is the use of the repertoire itself, as in every utterance the speaker has the option of using an item from, in the case of the current study, the German of the majority instead of an item from the repertoire. This layer also encompasses the quantity of items used. The second layer of variation is choosing between the different variants that the repertoire offers. This means choosing from variants based on the different donor languages, Hebrew and Yiddish, between variants from Western and Eastern Yiddish, and also different dialectal variants of Eastern Yiddish. In my study, I am focusing on this second layer of variation, the choice between variants within the repertoire, as I am interested in processes of positioning and presenting oneself through stylistic choices (see Rickford/Eckert 2001). By choosing a variant and rejecting another with the same referential meaning, speakers can express a social meaning that this variant carries (see Eckert 2012; Johnstone/Andrus/Danielson 2006).

This is in line with 3rd wave sociolinguistics, which marks a dramatic change in the perspective on variation in relation to previous work, i.e. a change “[...] from a view of language as reflecting the social to a view of language as also creating the social”. (Rickford/Eckert 2001:6). This means that speakers are seen as agents presenting themselves through their linguistic choices. As a consequence, linguistic variants are a means of constructing and positioning identity, as they are capable of assuming social meaning. Variants that are perceived as typical for speakers of a certain group can develop into an index for membership within this group or for characteristics that are attributed to its members. Speakers who wish to align with this group or to be linked with the respective characteristics of its members might therefore choose to integrate these variants into their personal style (see Eckert 2012: 94). Therefore, it is of interest to see how speakers perceive and interpret the language use of others, how this perception influences their linguistic choices, and to what extent the linguistic variation reflects the perceived boundaries within the community.

3 The Jewish community in Berlin

The Jewish community in Berlin is the largest in Germany. In this context, the term community does not entail a homogeneous group nor a close-knit network where every member knows each other. The term is instead used here as a blanket

term for all persons of Jewish faith or ancestry. It is crucial to note that Jewishness is not only a religion but also an ancestry, and that it is necessary to keep this interweaving of religion and ancestry in mind throughout the current study, as it contrasts with other communities of faith, e.g. Christianity.

Berlin also has the biggest *Jüdische Gemeinde*, a so called *Einheitsgemeinde* (“unity-community”)² which is the institution that acts as an umbrella organisation for most Jewish congregations in Berlin. On 31 December 2020, the unity-community had 8,702 members (see ZWST 2021). There is no official number of Jews who are not a member of the *Jüdische Gemeinde*, but their number is estimated to be much larger than that of members (see Strack 2018). The *Jüdische Gemeinde* does not have a strictly religious character, which means that Jews who regard themselves as secular are also members and take part in its cultural and social activities, as well as the services that are offered. There are also religion-specific congregations among the numerous Jewish initiatives outside the *Jüdische Gemeinde*. As a result, the *Jüdische Gemeinde* cannot be defined as a purely religious institution, yet at the same time, not all non-members or outside initiatives are of a secular character. Congregations and initiatives under the umbrella of and outside of the *Jüdische Gemeinde* offer a broad variety of religious and cultural activities, and Berlin’s Jewry is highly diverse with respect to both linguistic and cultural backgrounds (see part 5) and religious denominations.

4 Method

For this paper, I analysed eleven semi-structured qualitative interviews that I conducted across 12 Jewish speakers in Berlin in 2017. The interviews were generally conducted with only one speaker, as I was aiming for an unbiased reaction from the individual speaker. However, in one case, the interviewee asked if a colleague could participate in the interview, which led to an interesting debate at some points in the interview. As an explorative pre-study I conducted expert interviews (see Meuser/Nagel 1991 on this methodology) with Jewish leaders in Berlin (e.g. rabbis, leaders of Jewish organisations, teachers at Jewish schools). In addition to the fact that these interviews revealed the existence of a “distinctive Jewish linguistic repertoire” among Jewish speakers in Berlin, the experts contributed

² The concept of the unity-community is typical for Jewish communities in Germany. It can be described as a single congregation embracing all the denominations. Its members might have a preferred synagogue they attend, but it is not uncommon to attend religious services at different locations, or to be a member of the unity-community without defining oneself as religious.

lexical elements that are part of this repertoire. This led to a collection of elements that I used as stimuli for the main interviews. These included religious items such as *Kippa* (“skullcap”), *Gabbai* (“officer of the synagogue”); *Git Schabbes*³ (Shabbat greeting) as well as everyday items from Yiddish and Hebrew, such as *Balagan* (“mess”), *jiddische Mame* (“Jewish mother”), and *Tuches* (“buttocks”), as well as some German items that are either unfamiliar to non-Jewish German speakers or used differently, such as *Beter* (“member of congregation”) or *Jahrzeit* (“anniversary of death”). Thus, the items represent a part of the distinctive repertoire of Jewish speakers in Berlin, which may overlap to some extent with the linguistic repertoires of other Jewish communities.⁴

I recruited speakers for the main interviews based on the recommendations of the experts or other interview partners. To allow for different perspectives on the community and a variety of interlocutors, I aimed for speakers from different backgrounds. In determining the different backgrounds, I considered categories that played a role in previous studies on language use in other contemporary Jewish communities (e.g. Benor 2011). Among my 12 informants, nine were women and three were men. Five of the 12 informants considered German to be their mother tongue⁵, while four indicated Russian, one both German and Russian, one Polish and one Swiss German. I did not include L1 speakers of Hebrew in my sample for two reasons; firstly, they often do not speak German with other Jewish speakers, and secondly, even if they were to do so, Hebrew loan words in German might have a completely different social meaning for Hebrew L1 speakers, or even none at all due to being used also as part of the speaker’s L1. The 12 speakers were born between 1959 and 1992, which means that they were between 25 and 58 years old when the interviews took place. Eight of them regarded themselves as religious (four as Orthodox, one as Masorti, one as Reform and two without further specification) and four as secular. As this study seeks to shed light on speakers’ perception of Berlin’s Jewish community and language use within this community, I did not apply religious or scientific definitions of Jewishness when

3 As both Yiddish and Hebrew are written in the Hebrew alphabet (square script) and most items from the distinctive repertoire are very seldomly written and if written mainly the Latin alphabet is used, several spelling variants exist for each item. I used spelling variants according to either Weinberg’s two dictionaries (1969, 1994); the spelling the speakers themselves used (if possible); or the spelling rules of the German language.

4 To what extent these repertoires are similar and where they differ goes beyond the scope of this article and will be discussed in the larger project on this topic.

5 I deliberately asked speakers about their mother tongue – although this concept has been rejected in linguistics and is replaced by L1 – as I did expect them to be more familiar with the term of mother tongue and to interpret this term in a more emotional way.

selecting speakers. Instead, I regarded those individuals as Jewish who perceived themselves as Jewish.

All interviews were audio-recorded and had a length between 30 and 100 minutes, with most of them lasting around one hour. I transcribed the interviews with the transcribing tool f4, which I also used afterwards for the analysis. My transcription was based on HIAT, which means that I basically transcribed according to the orthographic rules of written German, but included information on laughter and self-reparation. Speakers' names have been replaced with pseudonyms to avoid drawing conclusions concerning their identities.

Each interview was divided into three parts. The first part consisted of general questions about Jewish Berlin and speakers' positioning within the community. These questions were not related to language and language use. Speakers were asked to describe Jewish Berlin, if the community can be structured into distinctive subgroups or networks, and, if so, which criteria are used for structuring it. The second part of the interview comprised a task where speakers were asked to evaluate lexical items from the distinctive Jewish linguistic repertoire. The third part was a short questionnaire on personal data including a self-evaluation on language proficiency in Hebrew and Yiddish as well as on the religious denomination that the speakers aligned with.

During the second part, it was mainly single items that were evaluated, though formulaic sequences like greetings were also included. More precisely, informants were asked to stack items written on cards according to the following three categories: (1) items they know and use themselves; (2) items they know, but would not use; or (3) items they do not know. During the task, the informants were asked about the choices they made and encouraged to comment on their decision-making. The presented lexical items were chosen from the items collected during the expert interviews. The number of elements that speakers evaluated depended on their time and how comfortable they felt with the task. Some of them were very eager to comment on more items. The minimum number of presented items was 51, the maximum, 76.

As I was looking for variation, I selected items with either existing variants within the collection, such as the Hebrew *Tallit* vs. the Yiddish *Tallis*⁶ (both 'prayer shawl') or items that according to the literature were presumably only used by a certain group of speakers. Doing this task, the speakers made their own

⁶ As this is a study on speakers' perceptions, I stick with speakers' differentiations and the labels they used. Speakers generally differentiated only between Hebrew and Yiddish and did not go in more detail in for example differentiating between Eastern and Western Yiddish or mentioning that some items in Yiddish are Hebrew-derived.

language use (first category and stack) visible in contrast to the language use of others (second category and stack). The second category is therefore of special interest as it contains lexical items that the individual speaker is familiar with, but reports to not make use of for certain reasons. The aim of the overall project was to reveal speakers' explanations and justifications for the linguistic choices that they make. A possible explanation for rejecting certain items might be that speakers perceive these items as typical for a certain group that they want to distinguish themselves from.

In this study I am describing and analysing according to which criteria speakers subdivide the Jewish community in Berlin. To investigate whether this subdivision is based on a perceived linguistic difference, I will then compare the perceived subgroups with those lexical items that speakers attribute explicitly to certain groups.

5 Perceived groups

For the question about subgroups within the community, no categories were suggested, as the intent was to keep the question completely open. Even if being Jewish does not necessarily include a religious faith, I expected that the subgroups within the community would be structured along religious denominations (e.g. orthodox, traditional, progressive), or, due to the heterogeneity of the community as a whole, along much smaller local networks of which I, as an outsider, could not be aware. Interestingly, two main criteria emerged during the interviews under which my informants' answers can be subsumed: religion, as was expected, but also, surprisingly, nationality. However, my informants attributed different importance to the two criteria or interpreted them in different ways. Some speakers saw the groups' boundaries as shaped by only one of the two main criteria, while others considered it a mixture.

Concerning nationality, speakers generally divided the community into three groups:

- (1) Naja es gibt halt diejenigen, die aber mittlerweile leider aussterben, natürlich, klar, die halt den Holocaust noch überlebt haben und hier geblieben sind und also ja, in Berlin geblieben sind und ähm, ja dann eben, wo sich eben die Generationen quasi weiter fortgeführt haben. Ähm, also aus so'ner Familie komm ich zum Beispiel auch. Dann gibt es ganz viele Russen. Es gibt super, super viele Russen. Und diese Familien werden eigentlich immer weniger, also, werden eigentlich übermannt von den Russen, kann man sagen. Und dann gibt's mittlerweile sehr, sehr viele Israelis auch. Aber diese Gruppen, also das ist so ganz grob so'ne Dreiteilung, sag ich jetzt mal. (Julia, 1:45)

[Well, there are those who are unfortunately dying off by now, of course, who survived the Holocaust and who have been staying here and yes, staying in Berlin and um, where the generations have been continuing. Um, me too, I am from such a family, for example. Then there are many Russians. There is a huge, huge number of Russians. There are less and less of these families, they are actually getting overpowered by the Russians, you could say. Meanwhile, there are also many, many Israelis. And these groups, so that's a sort of rough tripartition, I would say.]⁷

The tripartition according to national belonging is in line with studies from other disciplines (see Kranz 2016 on the lifeworld of Jews in Berlin, Kessler 2003 for findings from a survey of *Jüdische Gemeinde Berlin* members). According to Kranz, the three biggest groups in today's Berlin are "local Jews", "Russian Jews", and Israelis. The first group encompasses German Jews and Jewish displaced persons. The "local Jews" label refers to the fact that, compared to the other groups, this group has been living in Berlin for the longest time, i.e. their members are either Holocaust survivors or their descendants, as indicated in the above quote, or displaced persons that came to Berlin after the Holocaust and their descendants. In Kessler's survey, this group is also sometimes labelled as *Einheimische* ("natives"). Both denominations, "local Jews" and *Einheimische*, suggest that the labelled groups own this place and are entitled to live there. My informants did not use these labels, but did speak of *deutsche Juden* ("German Jews", see another quote from Julia below) or of those who want to appear established. This is also forming the basis of a new debate about centrality within the community.⁸

The second group describes the immigrants from the former Soviet Union who have entered Germany since the 1990s. Despite their various countries of origin, they are labelled as "Russians" in public debates both within the Jewish community and outside of it. This group and their descendants currently represent the largest number of Germany's Jewish population. Precise numbers are difficult to obtain, but are estimated to be as high as 95% (see Belkin 2017: 10). This proportion is also true for Berlin and highlights an important change within Berlin's Jewish unity-community. On the one hand, these immigrants from the former Soviet Union, i.e. the *Commonwealth of Independent States* (CIS), in a way ensured the survival of a community that had been shrinking. On the other hand,

⁷ As the interviews were conducted in German, I've provided my own translations of the quotes into English.

⁸ Even though my speakers do not use the label "local Jews", I will make use of it as a blanket term. The reasons are a) that speakers that are subsumed under this label act similarly in this study (see below) and b) the label addresses the debate with regard to becoming established in Germany and having stayed there, which also falls under this topic (see quote (1) above).

the fact that the proportions have been completely reversed has also been perceived by speakers of the first group. This is evident in the use of the verb *übermannen* [to overpower] in Julia's quote above.

The third group refers to the increasing number of Israelis who have moved to the city of Berlin, primarily since 2000. As they rarely become official members of the unity-community, and often have dual citizenship – information that Germany's registry offices do not request – their number is difficult to determine (see Kranz 2015: 9). In public debates, especially in German newspapers, the number of Israelis is often estimated to be much higher than it actually is (see Kranz 2019).

In my data, the division of the Jewish community according to nationality emerges several times and always includes the three nationalities mentioned above. Americans are sometimes mentioned as an additional group. Some of the speakers, like Zeruya, confirmed the tripartition (replacing the label “Russian” with “migrants”), even though her answer to the question did not explicitly use the category of nationality. However, she did introduce the groups later in the interview:

- (2) Ich würde mich aber... ich gehör nicht zu den Zuwanderern, also mein Vater ist Israeli, aber meine Mutter ist Deutsche. (Zeruya, 6:44)

[But, I myself would... I don't count myself among the immigrants. Well, my father is Israeli, but my mother is German.]

Interestingly, among the informants who used nationality as either the only criterion or one of the main structuring criteria of the Jewish community, all had in common that they were what Kranz refers to as “local Jews”, i.e. German L1 speakers and one Polish L1 speaker, who all had been living in Germany for most of their lives. Among these speakers, some were secular and some were religious. There are several explanations for the fact that these speakers perceive the community as being structured by nationality, while speakers with Russian as their L1 did not. First of all, it is plausible that people who immigrate into another country are perceived as groups by those who already live in the country at that time, no matter whether they themselves were immigrants at an earlier time or have been living in that place for generations. Those who previously immigrated benefit from newer immigrants as the new group allows the former immigrants to become more aligned towards the local population. More evidence for this explanation is the fact that most speakers, including those who did not mainly structure the community according to nationalities, mentioned the Israelis as a distinct group. More precisely, speakers with Russian as their L1 perceived the next group of Jewish migrants as a group that was defined by nationality, namely

the Israelis who entered Berlin in large numbers, which mostly occurred after immigration to Germany from the CIS came to an end.

Another explanation emerges through a more in-depth analysis of quote (1). The speaker positioned herself as part of a we-group, which contrasts with the two groups that are not part of this we-group. This is a common pattern within the context of migration (see Spieß 2018: 39). The distinction between the we-group and the other groups is reinforced by the threat that the others represent for the we-group. The speaker highlights the large number of “Russians” via replication of the adjective *super*, which is itself intensifying the quantitative word *viel* (“many”), and the large number of Israelis via replication of the adverb *sehr* (“very”), again intensifying *viel*. With regard to the group of “Russians”, the sense of threat increases with the use of the verb *übermannen*, which I translated as “to overpower”. Thus, this speaker felt that the arrival of Jewish immigrants from the CIS brought about a significant change not only in the power relations within the Jewish community as a whole, but also especially within Berlin’s unity-community. This explanation and the labelling of the two groups is, of course, tied to the topic of language use, as the groups defined by nationality are also considered as such due to their differing language use, i.e. speaking Russian or Hebrew. The perceived change in power relations also led to an actual change to the language policy within the unity-community: the monthly magazine of the *Jüdische Gemeinde* appears today in both German and Russian, and several activities are only offered in the Russian language.⁹ In quote (1), the perceived threat of the group labelled as “Russians” seemed to be stronger than the perceived threat of the Israelis, as the former group was attributed the activity of overpowering the we-group, whereas the latter group was not. This perception can be explained by the quasi absence of Israelis in the unity-community, as there is naturally a bigger need to debate the positioning between the “local Jews” and the “Russians” – the organisation’s two main groups. This is supported by the following quote:

- (3) Aber das ist wie gesagt, das ist natürlich ne ganz eigene Gruppe. Also ich würde noch mal... also man kann auch sagen, dass diese deutsche Juden mit den Russen, die kennen sich noch einigermaßen. [...] Wobei die Russen auch eher für sich sind, aber da gibts schon Überlappungen, sag ich jetzt mal. Aber die Israelis sind schon sehr für sich. Also, die kennen sich eigentlich kaum mit den Anderen. (Julia, 13:06)

[But that is as I said, that is of course a very distinct group. Well, I would again... well, you could say, that the German Jews and the Russians do more or less know each other. [...]. Even

⁹ See archive of the magazine *Jüdisches Berlin* at the website for the *Jüdische Gemeinde* <http://www.jg-berlin.org/ueber-uns/juedisches-berlin.html>.

though the Russians tend to stay among themselves, there are overlaps, I would say. But the Israelis are very much among themselves. They actually don't really know the others at all.]

Thus, the arrival of the two groups of migrants (interestingly, the Israelis are never referred to as migrants, but this issue is outside the scope of the current study) has changed the situation and position of the “local Jews”. These groups are perceived the way they are due to the different L1s that their members speak, i.e. speakers refer to Jews that migrated from the CIS and their descendants as “Russians” or “Russian-speaking Jews”, equating a L1 with the nationality sharing its name. This is what Irvine and Gal have labelled “erasure”, i.e. the “process in which ideology, in simplifying the sociolinguistic field, renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena) invisible” (2000: 38). In this case the differences between languages spoken in the countries forming the former Soviet Union, such as Russian and Ukrainian, are erased, as well as the fact that people are coming from different countries even though they might all speak Russian as one of their languages. This highlights the language ideology that one language is tied to one nation which is still very prominent in Europe, especially in Germany (see e.g. Blommaert/Verschueren 1998).

An example of a speaker who does not see nationality as the main criterion for subgroup definition within the community, but nevertheless mentions the Israelis as one distinct group, leads us to the other criterion that is perceived as structuring the community: religion.

- (4) Lea: Also es gibt ähm einerseits unsere Gemeinde, also die [Name der Gemeinde]. Ich weiß nicht wie, ja wie Sie das kennen auch.

Interviewer: So'n bisschen.

Lea: Ähm, da würd ich sagen [Name anderer Gemeinde], dann die insgesamt, also jüdische Gemeinde an sich, ja, vielleicht dann die ganzen Israelis, die hier sind, die ganzen jüdischen Is-, also die Israelis, die insgesamt eigentlich schon jüdisch sind. (Lea 1:20)

[Lea: Well there is, um, on one hand our congregation, that is [name of the congregation]. I don't know whether, yes if you know it also.

Interviewer: A little bit.

Lea: Um, then, I would say [name of other congregation], then the whole, well the Jüdische Gemeinde as such, yes, maybe then all the Israelis, who are here, the, the Jewish Is-, well the Israelis, who are, generally-speaking, Jewish.]

This speaker divides Jewish Berliners according to two different congregations, neither of which are part of the *Jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin*, or the *Jüdische Gemeinde* itself. Religion as a criterion for structuring the Jewish community operates on two different layers. The first layer is the intra-religious differentiation, which divides the community according to the different religious denominations

(including secularity). Boundaries are defined according to different congregations (4) or, as in the following quote, the denominations that congregations align with and that are more or less similar across countries:

- (5) Also ja, es gibt die Orthodoxie, verschiedenartig, aber doch insgesamt irgendwie auch schon ein, mhm, vielleicht ein Monolith, aber man kann sie doch definieren, also s'is ne definierbare Masse. Mhm, es gibt die, immer noch die Traditionellen. [...] Äh, und es gibt natürlich noch die Liberalen. [...] Das wären vielleicht die drei größten Gruppen. (Leo, 5:31)
- [Well yes, there is Orthodoxy, differentiated, but nevertheless a sort of, mhm, maybe a monolith, but you can define it, so it is a definable lot. Mhm, there are, still the traditionals. [...] Um, and there are of course the liberals. [...]. That might be the three biggest groups.]

Those speakers who differentiate Berlin's Jewish community according to religious congregations or denominations, i.e. along intra-religious boundaries, have in common that they regard themselves as Orthodox. This is plausible considering that Orthodoxy is, so to say, the most religious way of being Jewish, at least in Berlin, where no ultra-orthodox communities exist (in contrast to Jerusalem, New York and Antwerp). Therefore, the speakers whose strong religious faith and beliefs form the basis and structure of their Judaism and daily lives, perceive the Jewish community according to religious denomination.

The boundaries that the other speakers perceive who use religion as the structuring criteria divide the community, in contrast, into either a religious and a secular part or into institutionalised (religious) life and Jewish life outside the *Jüdische Gemeinde*. I subsume both of these ways of perceiving boundary divisions under an inter-religious division, as religiosity is the dividing factor, even if the *Jüdische Gemeinde* institution is not a purely religious organisation (see above). Speakers who divide the community along inter-religious or institutionalised boundaries, or mention this as an additional criterion, have in common that they define themselves as secular. One of the speakers summarises it in a nutshell with the dichotomy of "Gemeinde vs. Gemeinschaft" [congregation vs. (comm)unity] (Aliah 2:57). Another speaker experiences the boundary in a more excluding way, as his answer to my question on how Jewish Berlin could be described was:

- (6) Äh. Leider oder wie soll ich sagen, leider, äh, hab ich wenig Bezug dazu. [...]. Und da ich eben ähm ein Agnostiker bin, fehlt mir der religiöse Bezug. Äh, ich habe jüdische Freunde ähm, aber das, also Jüdischsein als solches ist kein großes Thema. (Alexander 2:49)
- [Um, unfortunately or how should I say, unfortunately, um, I have only a weak relationship with it. [...]. And as I am an agnostic, I lack the religious bond. Um, I have Jewish friends um, but well, Jewishness as such is not a big topic.]

So even if this speaker clearly defines himself as Jewish, he reports having hardly any relationship with the community due to his being a secular Jew. This suggests that the Jewish community in Berlin is perceived as an exclusively religious community, despite the fact that Jewishness has (as described above) both a religious and an ancestral component.

In addition to these larger categories mentioned across the whole spectrum of speakers, individual speakers also named other criteria, such as political stance or social status.

In sum, nationality and religion are perceived by my informants as the main criteria for structuring the Jewish community in Berlin. While nationality was perceived only by “local Jews”, i.e. descendants of families that have been living in Germany for generations, religion as the structuring criterion, no matter which layer, seemed to not correlate with nationality or L1. Speakers who considered religion as the main criterion had different L1s, i.e. Russian, Swiss German and German (one German L1 speaker provided a mixture of both criteria, i.e. nationality and an institutional/inter-religious boundary), but viewed themselves as Orthodox when intra-religious boundaries were highlighted, or as secular when the distinction between religion/institution and secularism was emphasised.

6 Linguistic reflexes for perceived groups

As previously explained, 3rd wave sociolinguistics also understands linguistic variation as creating a social and linguistic style for positioning oneself within the social landscape. To be successful with this positioning means to be interpreted by the listener in the way that the speaker intended. Success requires distinctiveness, or more precisely, salience, evaluation and contrast (see Irvine 2001). This entails that hearers perceive features as distinct for a respective speaker or group of speakers.

Therefore, it is of interest to the current study whether the group boundaries were also perceived by my informants in linguistic terms, i.e. that listeners could clearly attribute distinct lexical items to speakers from the above-mentioned subgroups in Berlin’s Jewish community. To this end, I analysed the perceived variation within the distinctive linguistic repertoire of Berlin’s Jews. This means that my focus was the variation concerning the integration of different items from the repertoire into German, not the general use of different languages, such as the Hebrew spoken by Israelis. More precisely, among the lexical items and formulaic sequences that my informants were presented with, I investigated if some were perceived as shibboleths for special groups or as an index for national and/or

religious belonging. Every item that was mentioned by at least one informant as being typical for a certain speaker group was considered.

First, the data was analysed for lexical items attributed to speakers from the different nationalities and religious denominations. With respect to nationalities, only very few items were explicitly mentioned as typical for speakers from these groups.

For speakers with a German heritage, two lexical items or formulaic sequences could be listed. One is the expression *die ganze Megille* (“the whole story”), which is said to be used by speakers from the “*altes deutsches Judentum*” (“old German Jewry”) (Petra 46:25). The other is *Barches* (variant for “Shabbat bread”) which, according to the informant, was used by Berlin Jews, but has since been replaced by the more frequent item *Challe*. Both speakers are from the group that could be labelled as “local Jews” and have German as their L1. However, they do not use these items themselves or at least not frequently or exclusively, but attribute them to a subgroup within the group of local or German Jews, namely older German Jewish speakers like their parents. Due to their own upbringing, they do not consider themselves part of this group, even if they are familiar with this language use. Additionally, so called *jeckische Juden* (“Jews of German heritage”) were said to use pronunciation variants, e.g. *Taura* (a variant for *Tora*, “the holy book of Judaism”). Here again, the speakers who mention this pronunciation variant do not consider themselves part of the group that would make use of it.

Two items were attributed to the group of speakers labelled as “Russians” by “local Jews”; *Git Schabbes* (Yidd. dialectal variant for the Shabbat greeting) and, especially to older “Russians”, *Toire* (another variant for *Tora*). No distinct items were attributed to Israelis. General statements were also made about the language knowledge of “Russians” and Israelis. “Russians” were said to know fewer items in general and, except for older generations, have no proficiency in Yiddish or Hebrew. Israelis were said to have no knowledge of Yiddish in general. A general statement about Israelis without any mention of distinct items is not surprising, as the study is about the Jewish repertoire integrated into German, and communication between Israelis and other Jews might happen less frequently in German, but in English or (if the other speaker is proficient enough) Hebrew instead. At least with concern to the interviewees of this study, however, this is often not the case. Therefore, it is less probable that speakers have been in contact with distinct items that Israeli speakers make use of in German. Furthermore, Israelis were not included in the pre-study, where items were collected, or in the main study. General statements referring to the “Russians”’ lack of Yiddish and Hebrew language knowledge included neutral statements, among other sentiments, that explained the political situation in the former Soviet Union, where

the use of these languages was suppressed. The quote below is from an interview with an expert and is in response to a question about whether he would use a distinct item with all Jewish speakers.

- (7) Na, wenn du, sagen wir mal, mit einem von den Russen, hat doch gar keinen Wert. Die wissen's doch gar nicht. Würden dich angucken... (Michael 29:44)

[Well, if you, let's say, with one of the Russians, that wouldn't make any sense at all to them. They have no idea. They would just stare at you...]

Interestingly, this alleged general lack of knowledge concerning the items that I was asking about was not supported in the data for speakers with Russian as their L1. In fact, the orthodox Jews with Russian as their L1 whom I interviewed were those who knew most of the items, while secular Jews with Russian as their L1 knew the fewest items.

The perception of “Russians” having less knowledge of the two languages was also accompanied by the perception that they also lacked knowledge about Jewish religion:

- (8) Weißte die lernen noch 'n Seminaren bei der ZWST, Zentrale Wohlfahrtsstelle, da lernen die n' bisschen Religion und hebräische Begriffe, die werden dann vielleicht auch aktiviert. Aber das ist jetzt nichts, was schon da gegessen hat. (Ruth, 19:12)

[You know they learn in seminars at ZWST, Central Welfare Board of Jews in Germany, that is where they learn a little about religion and some Hebrew items that might then be activated. But that is nothing that had existed there before.]

Thus, a group that is now numerically much larger than the group that had before the 1990s been the majority is, in a way, marginalised due to its alleged lack of knowledge concerning the identity marker language (see Blommaert/Ver-schueren 2010: 192) and the Jewish community's other identity marker: religion.

As mentioned above, “Americans” were explicitly mentioned by only one informant as another nationality forming a subgroup. She perceives *Jarmulke* (“skullcap”) and *Schul* (variant for “synagogue”) as typical for the “Americans” or would only use these items with those speakers.

In addition to the nationality groups that I previously mentioned, another nationality (or, more precisely, origin) emerged that was triggered by distinct items. Speakers with either a Polish or, more generally, Eastern European background, were said to use *Git Schabbes* (“Good Shabbat”) and *Schil* (another variant for “synagogue”). Thus, on the lexical level, which was the primary focus of my study, only a small quantity of linguistic evidence could be found for the different nationality groups. However, two additional groups emerged, “Americans” and speakers

of a Polish or Eastern European origin. One item (*Git Schabbes*) was mentioned as typical for both “Russians” and for speakers of Polish or Eastern European origin, which indicated a relatively broader use of the term. Interestingly, speakers with German as their L1 also indicated having used this variant.

Concerning the different religious denominations that were perceived in structuring the communities, several lexical items and formulaic sequences were perceived as mainly typical for Orthodox speakers, e.g. *Haschem* (“God”), *Sollst zajn gezunt* (“Be healthy”), *Toire* (variant of *Tora*), *pessachdig* (“acceptable for pesach”), *Git Schabbes* (“Good Shabbat”) and *Schil* (“synagogue”). In the following quote, Petra takes an ironic stance when describing the exaggerated use of the noun *Haschem* or related sequences like *Baruch Haschem* ‘Thank God’ by Orthodox Jewish speakers, a group that she does not belong to and distinguishes herself from.

- (9) Und jedes zweite Wort... du sagst irgendwie “und wie geht’s?”, “mmh (hohe Stimmlage) *Baruch Haschem*” und “So *Haschem* will” und “Es liegt alles bei *Haschem*” und “Wie geht’s den Kindern?” “Ah ja, wenn *Haschem* will, dann geht’s denen gut” (Petra, 49:50)

[And every second word... you say like “How is it?”, “hum (high pitch) *Baruch Haschem*” and “If *Haschem* allows” and “It’s all in *Haschem*’s hands” and “How are the children?” “Ah yes, if *Haschem* allows, then they are fine”]

For other religious denominations, speakers did not seem to perceive distinct lexical items. It was only generally stated that more religious speakers prefer Yiddish variants to Hebrew ones, which is in line with the fact that Yiddish is spoken as L1 exclusively in extremely religious communities. Yiddish variants can therefore take over the indexical meaning of religiosity. Indexical values are, however, not necessarily fixed, but rather fluid (see indexical field below).

Thus, distinctive linguistic items were mentioned only for some of the groups that were perceived when attempting to structure the community. However, several items discussed during the interviews were perceived as typical for the following groups of speakers, which are neither national nor religious groups, and were not mentioned in response to my question on subgroups within the community.

Some items were said to index either having a connection to Israel (in the sense of spending time in Israel and having a positive attitude towards the country) or a knowledge of Hebrew, e.g. *sababa* (“cool”) and *Jesch* (“I have”, used for affirmation). Others are categorised under the label “*Machane*-slang”, as these items are typically used during *Machane* (“Jewish summer camps for children”) or more generally during youth activities under the roof of the *Jüdische Gemeinde*, e.g.: *Rosch* (“head of the camp”), *Chug* (“group activity”), and *Chanich* (“camp participant”). The latter group of items could also be defined as indexing a special

age group, namely younger speakers. For older speakers, there were also several items uttered, e.g. *Toire* (variant for *Tora*), *die ganze Megille* (“the whole story”), and *Sollst zajn gezunt* (“be healthy”). Interestingly, these items were also mentioned as typical for speakers of other groups, namely all of them for Orthodox Jews, *Toire* for “Russians” and *die ganze Megille* for “German Jews” (see above).

Thus, it has been shown that there are variants or items that are perceived by at least one speaker as typical for the above-mentioned groups. However, the number of typical items is small and there are overlaps with other groups, which could allow for two interpretations: either the items cannot be considered as distinct features for one single group or the indexing value varies according to the listener (and the respective speaker) and their respective backgrounds. The latter would be in line with Eckert’s conception of the indexical field, where “[...] the meanings of variables are not precise or fixed but rather constitute a field of potential meanings – an indexical field” (Eckert 2008: 453). Moreover, for some of the groups, no distinct items were mentioned. Instead, only very general statements were made. The reason for the absence of typical items for these groups could lie, however, in the selection of items chosen for the task.

In sum, the data reveals a more complex picture than the very broad categories that were explicitly uttered by my informants at the beginning of each interview.

7 Conclusion and outlook

My data show that speakers perceive the Jewish community in Berlin as mainly structured by national and religious belonging. However, which criterion is more prominent or how it is defined (inter- vs intra-religious boundaries) depends on what is important for the individual speaker and her or his Jewishness. While speakers from families that have been living in Germany for generations considered nationality as the most important criterion, the most religious (= Orthodox) and least religious (= secular) speakers perceived the community as structured by religiosity. This perception by the very religious is no surprise, as religiosity, which for the speakers in this study is Orthodoxy, determines their way of life in almost every aspect. It is the integral component of their Jewishness, and as a result, it is the lens of religiosity, or more precisely, religious denominations within Judaism, through which they perceive the Jewish community in Berlin. For speakers who consider themselves secular and have Russian as their L1, however, religiosity is also the community’s structuring criterion. Even if they are not religious, religiosity is what determines their access to and participation within the community, whether this means that they are an active member of the

community participating mainly in non-religious events, or do not participate in the community at all.

Those speakers whose families have been living in Germany for generations perceive nationality as the most important criterion when subdividing the community. The reason seems to be that the arrival of migrants from two different countries (while the countries of the former Soviet Union are perceived as one single entity) has challenged their exclusive and central position within the community. The two groups are probably perceived separately due to the different periods of arrival, but also due to the different languages they speak, namely Russian and Hebrew. Here again, the former is perceived as one single language, as differences are ignored or erased. The equation of nationality and language can be explained by the one-nation-one-language ideology that still has a significant impact within Germany. Even though both groups, Israelis and “Russians”, are perceived as quantitatively overwhelming, the “local Jews” in this study mainly debate their position within the community in relation to the “Russians”. The reasons for this might be that the Israelis are often not members of the unity-community and are as a result absent from activities and events under its aegis. In contrast, this is where “local Jews” and Russians get in contact regularly. In addition, the Hebrew language enjoys a high prestige not only among all Jewish speakers from my study, which I prove in my larger research project (in preparation), but also for Jewish speakers in general and throughout history (see Peltz 2010: 141; Myhill 2004). It might therefore be a strategy for the “local Jews” in this study to debate their central place within the community by emphasising their knowledge and use of Hebrew, as well as Yiddish elements from the repertoire and via their knowledge of Jewish religion. This would distinguish them from the group that outnumbers them in quantitative terms.

However, regarding the use of the distinctive Jewish linguistic repertoire, i.e. the integration of lexical items from Hebrew and Yiddish into German, the linguistic variation that is perceived by the speakers from this study is much more complex than the perceived very broad and allegedly clear-cut boundaries between subgroups of the community. Only to some of the perceived groups could some of the tested lexical items from the repertoire be deemed shibboleths. In addition, not all of these items can be considered shibboleths, as they were mentioned as typical for speakers of other groups as well. Moreover, additional groups emerged when the informants were discussing the tested lexical items.

A question for further research that therefore arises, which I am investigating in my larger project, is what are the additional factors that affect the linguistic choices of Jewish speakers in Berlin if the perceived groups can explain only part of the inter- and intraspeaker variation within the community.

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