# 4 Data collection

> Unfortunately, much of the ethnographic contributions of sociolinguistic fieldwork is not often published. As Feagin (2002: 36) points out, 'the more successful the fieldwork, the less noticeable it is in the final analysis'. Information about how sociolinguistic fieldwork is conducted is more properly found in its legends, the stuff of late-night gatherings in the conference hotel bars and other informal settings. (Tagliamonte 2006: 35)

The data collection was designed and carried out exclusively for this study. To enhance a proper understanding of the quality of the obtained data, I will revise the process leading to the data collection and the collection itself. The following presentation of the underlying theoretical assumptions and the applied methods will follow a chronological order, along the early conception of the methods, their adjustment in the course of the first fieldwork stage and the subsequent development of new methods for the second fieldwork stage. This account is paired with a methodological evaluation and a general discussion that exceeds the scope of this study. The following topics will be addressed:

– Initial approach: What can be done in an unknown field to yield information about sociolinguistic variation?
– Sample design: Which parameters should be looked at more closely? Which participants should be looked for?
– Practical and ethical considerations: What should one have in mind when designing a research project with similar objectives?
– Question of perspective: How can different perspectives on the research area be included?
– Saturation: At which point can the data collection and fieldwork be stopped?

I hope that the detailed account of my approach may prove helpful and encouraging for researchers who are looking to realize their study with an open and flexible research design.

## 4.1 Approaching the field and research topic

> [T]he ethnographic approach puts the sociolinguist in touch with the cultural context of the speech community so that the linguistic reflections of that community can be interpreted and explained. Further, knowledge of the cultural context can also provide lucid indications of what is important to analyse [...] (Tagliamonte 2006: 20)

In the above citation, two key aspects of the ethnographic approach are expressed: On the one hand, contextual information is gathered to enable a more complete

understanding of the data. On the other hand, the area of research is explored in an open and flexible manner, which can affect the way data is chosen and gathered – the sample generation – and can generate new hypothesis and theories. As exemplified by GTM, theoretical reasoning, the collection of data and the verification of hypothesis are understood as interdependent and iterative, rather than linear processes, in qualitative research paradigms.

For the sample generation this means that instead of adhering strictly to statistical models for the data collection – data mining – the researcher is allowed to use his natural capacity to look left and right of the targeted data. Thereby, new perspectives and aspects can be included in the study, which may even be more valuable for the research goals than standardized and easily analyzable data. Kulkarni-Joshi states the need to use ethnographic methods for sample generation in sociolinguistic research, with a focus on identity construction:

> Ethnographic methods need to be used to identify smaller groups within the larger population which are indeed culturally and linguistically homogeneous. Only after conclusions regarding sociolinguistic behaviour for each such group are drawn, can generalizations regarding the larger population become possible. This approach should take us closer to an understanding of the heterogeneous nature of identity. (Kulkarni-Joshi 2013: 87)

This line of reasoning suggests a positive effect on the overall quality of the research methodology through the right application of ethnographic methods. It is argued that representativeness of a sample and the possibility for generalizations can only be reached through an ethnographic micro-perspective on social groups.

The exploratory approach for this study, based on two periods of fieldwork in Israel, was chosen originally because no adequate corpus of SH was available (see 3.2.2). I knew very little about what could be meaningful variables in MH. My hypotheses were based partly on my own experience and to a larger extent on the scarce research which was available. I hoped to enhance my knowledge about variation in MH by doing fieldwork. The exploratory approach to the field, which is characteristic for GTM, was termed as "nosing around" in the context of the Chicago School of Sociology, where it was popularized (Breuer 2010: 62).

During my fieldwork stays in Israel, I shopped at local food markets, trained in a boxing gym, went to concerts, the cinema, shopping malls, football matches, lectures, restaurants, museums, universities, libraries, visited sights and celebrated religious holidays with friends and their families. Many of these activities are not particularly relevant for my research questions per se, but the observation of the HSs' behavior in different contexts helped me to shape my thoughts. Most of the time I spent in Israel, I could not help relating my daily experiences to my research goals.

Some of the encounters with participants developed into friendships that helped me to gain a deeper understanding of their lives. In contrast, with some participants I

shared only very few similarities and my role as a cultural outsider became apparent. Different perspectives and personal relations to the participants and the contexts of the research are a natural component of the ethnographic method. Both insider and outsider perspectives can bring about valuable aspects for the research. Because the relation between the researcher and the participants is more personal and less controllable than in experimental settings, certain general ethical requirements need to be followed – these will be discussed in 4.1.2.

My choice of methods for the first stage of fieldwork was guided by the Labovian notion of 'natural speech' and its idealized elicitation through narratives (see 2.1.2). Therefore, I experimented with open interviews and a picture story as stimulus for standardized elicitation. I tried to collect, detect and describe meaningful variables by sampling my participants along diverse socio-demographic criteria. The open interviews yielded some promising results just as i53f2l1's (26:48) statement (1) that was cited above. In contrast, the task of recounting a picture story turned out as frustrating experience for the participants which threatened to ruin the dynamic of the entire interview. Some participants expressed their unease because the task reminded them of psychological tests which were run on them during their army service. Others probably felt disturbed by the childish nature of this task. Consequently, I decided early on to discard the picture story and focus on open interviews.

I planned my research to include a "member check" to test hypotheses with members of the field – a method which is systematically used in GTM (Strübing 2008: 88). Constant conversations with Hebrew speakers about my research, which were not restricted to my recordings alone, were an essential component of each fieldwork stage. In the early phase of this study, I set out to ask my Israeli friends and soon every Hebrew speaker I met about their opinion on linguistic variation in Hebrew. I asked if they could give me any examples for variants or typical ways of speaking – *signonei ha-dibur* – which can be found in Israel.

Instead of providing insights on systematic variation, the open interviews led to more questions about the nature of possible variables and the appropriateness of socio-demographic categories that I had in mind. In the following, I decided to focus on individual HSs and their mental representations of sociolinguistic variation. Instead of mapping variants and varieties, which seemed to be the logical thing to do in the light of the research literature, I came to investigate social institutions in Israel by asking Hebrew speakers about their representations of linguistic variation. This realigned approach is in line with the theoretic principles of PVL and GTM because it focuses on the speakers' representations without too many prior assumptions about specific variants or varieties, on the one hand, and particular social groups, on the other hand.

In the following, the sample design for this study (4.1.1), the strategies which were applied for the recruitment of participants (4.2.2.2) and the composition of the sample (4.2.2.3) will be reviewed.

### 4.1.1  Principles for sample generation

Sankoff summarizes the requirements for a good sociolinguistic corpus as follows:

> [T]he most useful sociolinguistic corpora are those which provide data on many linguistic problem areas, most of which need not have been envisaged in any detail at the time the recordings were collected. Thus we wish our sampling scheme to result in data appropriate for a wide variety of research topics. [...] we often prefer to regard as an empirical problem the determination of the social dimensions along which linguistic change and variation proceeds. In this case the appropriate strategy is to ensure that as much as possible of the existing linguistic diversity in the community is represented in the sample. (Sankoff 2005: 1001)

Tagliamonte equally stresses the importance of representing some kind of diversity in the corpus:

> Despite a movement away from imposing traditional demographic classifications, it is still necessary to maintain some level of representativeness of the community, whatever that community is defined to be. (Tagliamonte 2006: 27)

As a "minimum requirement for any sample" Sankoff lists the variables

> age, sex and (some operationalization of) social class or educational level, or both, and perhaps of ethnicity and rural versus urban origin. (Sankoff 2005: 1001)

Bisang (2008: 16) points out that in the light of phenomena such as industrialization and migration "social factors" like "age, social class, education and gender" should be considered, if one tries to "cover the whole range of linguistic variety within a geographical location unless its population is very stable and conservative." Although I dropped the idea of collecting a well-structured sociolinguistic corpus, I still wanted to diversify my sample along the variables which are discussed in the literature. For the reasons outlined in 1.1 it is not reasonable to sample HSs in Israel along the NORM-characteristics which were typically used in dialectologist research (see 2.1.1). Instead, additional demographic variables should be considered, as Izre'el et al. suggest in their outline for the design of "The Corpus of Spoken Israeli Hebrew:"

> differences in place of birth, native/non-native status [in respect to Hebrew as L1], ethnicity, place of residence, type of settlement (urban, rural, kibbutz, etc.), age, sex, socioeconomic status,

profession, occupation, military service, religious affiliation, whether one has spent time out of Israel, and language(s) spoken at home. (Izre'el et al. 2001: 180)

Taking into account the strong impact of migration on the Israeli population, they argue for the systematic inclusion of non-native HSs and of Israeli Arabs:

> Many prominent Israeli figures, like the Nobel Literature prize laureate, S. J. Agnon, or the Nobel Peace prize laureate, former prime minister Shimon Peres, have not been native speakers of Hebrew, yet as dominant figures in the cultural and political life of Israel, their influence on the linguistic behavior is potentially high. Furthermore, the society is constantly being augmented by a huge influx of immigrants, resulting in a highly variable linguistic structure that should be recorded. Moreover, Arab citizens of Israel are increasingly demanding their fair share of the 'Israeli pie,' using Hebrew as a vehicle for their cause. (Izre'el et al. 2001: 175)

The summary of participants' socio-demographic data in 4.2.2.3 shows that all variables referred to by Izre'el et al. (2001: 180) are represented in the sample. For the variable 'education,' which is not easily measurable (see 4.2.1), Izre'el et al. (2001: 182) distinguish between three categories: "1 People who have not graduated from high school 2 High school graduates 3 College or university graduates." I tried to recruit participants from all three categories, though I knew about the difficulties I would have to recruit participants from category 1. For the classification of my participants with a siglum, I introduced a fourth category "PhD or higher" to distinguish further among numerous participants who were university students or graduates.

Although Israelis with different origins are included in the sample, I will not use 'ethnicity' as predetermined variable in this study and no prior distinction between "Ashkenazi and non-Ashkenazi" participants, as Izre'el et al. (2001: 181) suggest, is made. Also, I did not differentiate systematically on the basis of "socioeconomic status." According to GTM principles, it is important to consciously work around these and similar apriori categories. I had to consider commonly assumed categories for the purpose of creating a reasonably differentiated sample, while staying conscious of their potentially pre-scientific nature.

Sampling strategies for this study resulted from a combination of "purposeful sampling" and "practical sampling," as described by Corbin & Strauss (2015: 154). Like many researchers, I had limited access to persons or sites and it was necessary to collect all the data in a relatively short period of time and in a flexible way. The sample was not designed to represent fixed ratios of the above variables. Instead, I followed principles of a recursive research design for sampling. At first, I aimed to get a diverse sample through the exploration of the sociodemographic variables and later, I tried to fill in some gaps and focused on certain aspects which seemed to merit further investigation. For example, I included more Israeli Arabs in the sample than I had initially planned because I felt that the analysis would benefit

from an additional perspective. To this extent, my sampling strategy is conform with Charmaz's (2004: 78) GTM approach, who advises that theoretical sampling should not be used unconditionally right from the beginning because it "may bring premature closure to your analysis."

The argument has been made that the unconditional sampling along predetermined sociodemographic variables (such as NORM) is no longer the method of choice – irrespective of the resources which are available for a research project. Theoretic developments in dialectology and in variationist linguistics call for more context sensitive strategies which stem from qualitative sociology. A sensible research design should not overemphasize the significance of the variables which are used for its sample design: questionable premises about these variables can be counter-effective and compromise the representativity of a sample.

In other words, participants might not be good representatives of the variables according to which they were selected. During my research, I was often surprised by an unexpected aspect about a participant which came up during the interview or appeared on the sociodemographic questionnaire. For example, I was surprised to find out that a70f3l1's family origin is Yemenite because from several telephone conversations which preceded the interview I had the impression that she personified typical *Ashkenazi* characteristics. Judging from the interview experiences, most participants turned out to be somehow untypical for their sociodemographic data. This reinforces the premises of third wave variationist studies (see 2.1.2.2): most variables which are represented in the data do not allow for predictions about complex correlations.

In respect to the saturation of the sample size, there seems to be a consensus among researchers who have worked with GTM that a number of about 40 interviews is sufficient for most studies – regardless of the topic (Hadley 2017: 130). For sociolinguistic purposes, Sankoff (2005: 1000) equally asserts that "for qualitative distinctions, sample sizes of a few dozen, rather than a few hundred, suffice." To determine the endpoint of the data collection, qualitative considerations and the researcher's own judgment are more decisive than any quantitative criteria. Hadley describes how it can feel to reach saturation

> Essentially, if you come to a place in your research where you find that you are spending large amounts of time to find interesting yet incidental details, it is probable that you have gone as far as you can with your study, and what you have will be sufficient for developing a working grounded theory. (Hadley 2017: 130)

That was what I perceived when I tried to talk to participants from minority groups in Israel, such as Ethiopian Jews, Druze and other groups who sparked my general interest, but were not likely to add substantially different aspects to the analysis.

In retrospect, I could have also settled with about 25 to 30 interviews from the first fieldwork stage instead of 36. Towards the end of each fieldwork stage, it appeared as if I only came across summaries of what has already been said by other participants.

### 4.1.2  Ethical considerations

As von Unger (2014b: 22) points out, examples about the practical treatment of ethical questions in sociological research are scarce and needed. There seems to be a general consensus about basic principles for ethically responsible research in qualitative sociology that can be extended to adjacent fields of research, ethnography and sociolinguistics. The three monographs on research ethics for qualitative (social) research from Hammersley & Traianou (2012), Farrimond (2013) and von Unger et al. (2014) all treat the principles of "autonomy," "informed consent," "privacy" (in connection with "confidentiality" and "anonymity") and the "assessment of possible harm" as the "Hot Topics" of ethical research (Farrimond 2013: 109).

While all agree on these general principles which will be reassessed in the following, they also stress the fact that these principles are not to be understood as binding laws: in principle no guidelines can be worked out in advance that fit all purposes. This is due to one of the premises of "applied ethics," as von Unger argues:

> There is no supreme, universally valid ethical principle [...]. There is merely a set of middle-order principles that are valid at first glance – i.e. they are only binding as long as they do not conflict with others.[1] (von Unger 2014b: 18, my translation)

Consequently, each researcher has the responsibility to interpret these principles for his research and continuously reassess his methods accordingly when working in the field. Of course, legal frameworks such as the DSGVO in Germany prescribe principles for the treatment of participants and their data, but remain less definite than might be expected. Hammersley & Traianou (2012: 136) express a critical stance towards "moralism" and summarize the challenge of balancing powers in the field as follows:

> It is also essential to remember that in the social situations in which researchers carry out qualitative studies they will usually have very limited power and resources, yet they must nevertheless try to produce conclusions that reach a relatively high threshold in terms of likely validity, and that make a worthwhile contribution to collective knowledge. While some

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**1** Original German: Es gibt kein übergeordnetes, allgemein gültiges ethisches Prinzip [...]. Es gibt lediglich eine Reihe von Prinzipien mittlerer Ordnung, die „prima facie" gültig sind; d. h. sie sind nur verpflichtend, solange sie nicht mit anderen kollidieren.

commentators have suggested that researchers have great power in relation to those they study, and that they should empower participants in order to balance this, we have argued that researchers need to be able to exercise power if they are to pursue research effectively; and also, for that matter, to live up to their responsibilities in terms of extrinsic values. At the same time, we have insisted that the ethical issues qualitative research raises in terms of extrinsic values are, generally speaking, much less serious than in the case of both medical research and investigative journalism, and are close to what is common most of the time in everyday life. (Hammersley & Traianou 2012: 144)

On these grounds, Tagliamonte's (2006: 33) four "main ethical guidelines for collecting informal interviews" for the purpose of variationist linguistics can be reassessed critically: "[c]onsent for audio-recording" is generally needed before starting the recording and recordings without consent are only legitimate in very special situations. "[G]uaranteed anonymity" is practically an unreachable ideal because as long as some context about the work with participants is included, it cannot be ruled out that someone will be able to recognize participants. Based on this remark, some argue against the principle of anonymity altogether and in the oral history domain it is common practice to disclose the participants' identity for the sake of scientific integrity (Farrimond 2013: 131). In linguistics, treating participants anonymously has almost become common practice – especially where the participants are supposed to make judgements about linguistic phenomena and hence about other people. "[V]oluntary participation" is expressed in the principle of autonomy and informed consent: as a matter of principle, participants cannot be forced to participate in research. Involuntary participation would also compromise the nature of the obtained data as unnatural or forced. To make a choice whether they want to participate, participants need to know about the research in the first place. The possibility of guaranteeing "access to researcher and research findings" is somewhat dependent on the environment of the study. Generally, it should be easy to give participants access to online publications. However, people without access to the internet or without the necessary reading skills (in the language of the publication) need to be informed in a different way. The only certain way to guarantee access to the research findings would be to revisit every participant and hand out hard copies of the research findings, which is hardly practicable. Because I established contact with participants by email, telephone or social networks, all my participants were able to contact me through the same channels. When the contact was established personally without prior texting or phoning, or was arranged by a third party, I left my contact details with the participants. Often, we exchanged contact details out of courtesy at the end of the interview. After the last fieldwork stage, no participant had contacted me again about the study.

The common-sense principles which were outlined above can best be treated jointly: participants' autonomy depends on their informed consent and their privacy

can be safeguarded by confidentiality and anonymity. It has been argued so far that these principles are not strictly defined and need to be reassessed carefully in different fieldwork situations (cf. Hammersley & Traianou 2012: 144).

### 4.1.2.1 Autonomy and respect

To establish a respectful relation with the participants, I tried to arrange meetings in a location where they would feel at ease and adapted to their schedule (see 4.2.2.1). Most participants did not receive any compensation for their participation. When we met in a cafe or a restaurant, I offered to pay the bill. Some happily accepted the offer and others refused or even insisted on paying for both of us. Gestures of mutual respect can be very rewarding for the participants and I would advise approaching them in terms of fellow human beings instead of mere "informants," as is common in day-to-day contexts. On many occasions, participants went out of their way to be able to meet me and even postponed or cancelled their following appointments in the course of the interview. Autonomy is very important as a basis for respect because participants have expectations and their own goals when entering the interview situation. Not respecting these dynamics would lead to an unsatisfying experience for the participants and the researcher as well. Respectful treatment requires constantly assessing the benefits for the study against possible harm which can be caused.

It may not be obvious, but the benefits for the participants from mere interviews, without any financial compensation, can be manifold (Farrimond 2013: 149). Especially during open interviews when I let the participants choose topics more or less freely, I felt that most participants were pleased merely because I listened to them. As Davis (1995: 443) points out somewhat dramatically, "the catharsis provided by attentive listening on the part of the researcher is often the most appreciated service rendered." It seems to me that most participants enjoyed the interview situation which allowed them to talk freely and to take on the role of an expert or to act like an ambassador for their community.

Nonetheless it is important to be aware of possible psychological or emotional harm which may be caused by the interview:

> This might include distress, upset, annoyance, emotional dependence on researcher, misunderstanding the nature of the relationship, provoking negative memories/flashbacks/mental health issues or any other negative aspect of psychological interaction. (Farrimond 2013: 144)

Sometimes I sensed that a particular question may have irritated a participant because his attitude grew more reserved. Nevertheless, no extreme situations occurred where I had to stop the interview. These moments of unease cannot be avoided completely and sometimes it is even necessary for the researcher to ask uncomfortable questions, as von Unger (2014a: 223) points out. Usually, I could regain the

participants' confidence by reformulating the question in a more sensitive way or by switching to another topic. It can also help to clarify the research aims, in reaction to suspicion expressed by the participants. These momentary situations of lacking trust hint at the fact that participants are more vulnerable than they might have thought when they entered the interview – some boasted that they do not care about their anonymity because they "have nothing to hide." As a cultural outsider it seemed to me that there is a tendency in Israel to express one's opinion publicly and confidently, without too many constraints. This attitude, which is referred to as *dugri* 'direct,' was often characterized as authentic. However, it is likely that participants would alter this attitude in an international environment because it may be perceived as too direct or insensitive to other worldviews. In this context, Goebl (2005: 947) hints at the researchers' responsibility to counteract cultural relativism. In this study, I am trying to shed light on the participants' representations, instead of applying widespread stereotypes to the participants and thereby reproducing them uncritically.

The respectful treatment of "vulnerable groups" can require additional attention (Farrimond 2013: 164–165). I observed that people who are associated with minority groups were more reluctant to participate in my study: they did not react to impersonal calls for participation and were more hesitant, in general, or at least I felt that it was harder to build trust with them. In this study, these groups include Ethiopian Jews, immigrants, ex-*Haredim*, Druze, inhabitants of the periphery and potentially all socioeconomic weak groups, but, also *kibbutsniks*. Because children and school kids are commonly considered vulnerable groups, there are legal restrictions for their recruitment in most societies. During my research, I was told by members of some well-studied groups, including Druze, Ethiopian Jews and the very kibbuts where I lived, that they have had negative experiences with insensitive researchers. Therefore, it is understandable that members of these groups do not want to participate in similar research projects or at least retain a skeptical attitude. Nonetheless, it is important to include these groups in future research – out of respect for them and their opinion.

In the context of variationist linguistics, it is a challenge to study socially stigmatized variants without deceiving the participants about the purpose of the study. Participants are easily irritated by a researcher who explicitly asks to study their speech because it is stigmatized. Usually, people do not like being studied as mere representatives of a vulnerable group.

### 4.1.2.2 Informed consent

The aim of informed consent is to allow the participant or group to make an 'autonomous' decision (i.e. an independent one), with enough relevant information, enough understanding (i.e. the capacity to consent) and no pressure to participate. (Farrimond 2013: 109)

With the goal of reaching an informed consent with my participants, I used a consent form, which is presented in 4.2.1. It is important that forms of this kind are "understandable to ordinary people who do not have specialist scientific knowledge" (Farrimond 2013: 110). To inform about my research goals, I included the working title of my dissertation on the form. In fact, the full disclosure of the research goals may be impractical at an explorative stage where the researcher himself is not yet aware of the exact topic and the scope of his study (Hammersley & Traianou 2012: 94). In practice, I could explain and justify my approach directly with the participants and shared this information already during the recruitment process, when possible.

Generally, consent needs to be reached about the recording of the data, its storage and its use "for research purposes", which is subject to interpretation, as Hammersley & Traianou (2012: 90) remark. I included this information on the consent form and additionally, I explained that I needed to record the interviews and asked directly for participants' permission. On rare occasions, participants did not want to be recorded or only consented at a later point in the interview when they appeared to have gained trust. If the recordings are essential to the study, this can be problematic and it should be made clear, as early as possible, that the interviews are not useful for the study without the recording. All the same, participants who do not want to be recorded may share insightful information and other contacts. Most of the time the recording of the interview was accepted as inevitable because it cannot be expected that the researcher would remember the whole content just by making notes.

Sometimes I did not hand out the consent form right away, but rather at the end of the interview. I felt with some participants that asking them for a signature immediately after the first encounter would complicate the situation, as Farrimond points out:

> It can establish a culture of 'mistrust' between researcher and researched by making the agreement seem 'legal' and not a matter of mutual understanding. (Farrimond 2013: 112)

Farrimond (2013: 112) hints at "cultural differences" in the Middle East where "asking for signatures can be perceived as strange at best, and distrustful at worst." In my experience, this observation does not apply to Israel. With very few exceptions, participants were neither surprised nor reluctant to fill out and sign my form of consent. A68m3l1 remarked that he is used to filling out forms because of the excessive bureaucracy in Israel. Gaining consent should not be misunderstood as "passing the responsibility for making ethical judgements about privacy from researchers to other people" (Hammersley & Traianou 2012: 114). Even though participants consented in principle, they may have forgotten that they were being recorded and their comments can include sensitive information which has to be retained or anonymized (Hammersley & Traianou 2012: 116).

### 4.1.2.3 Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity

> Privacy is the extent to which you can control how much access others have to your private life, thoughts and feelings. (Farrimond 2013: 126)
>
> Confidentiality means not sharing the data after collection beyond agreed limits. Anonymity is a way of ensuring confidentiality, as the data is stored in an unidentifiable form. Confidentiality covers not only data protection and storage, but also how you, as the researcher, share the data in other ways, such as in conversation. (Farrimond 2013: 133)

Regarding the anonymization of the data, von Unger (2014b: 25) asserts that it has to be decided if it is generally reasonable to treat all participants anonymously and how such a treatment can be successfully achieved. There are good arguments for the citation of the participants with their full names, such as their authorship of the data, the impossibility to guarantee absolute anonymity and the principle of scientific integrity through the disclosure of all facts (Hammersley & Traianou 2012: 129).

Nonetheless, the counterarguments are given more emphasis by Hammersley & Traianou and they stress the particular nature of qualitative research, in opposition to common practices of lawyers or journalists:

> The aim is not to speak on behalf of, to give voice to, or even to portray the lives of particular people, but rather to answer research questions. Moreover, all data are co-constructed, and developed into evidence by researchers. Even in the case of data from interviews or documents these are not simply the personal expressions of informants. Finally, those who ask to be named will not always recognise the dangers involved. (Hammersley & Traianou 2012: 130)

For Hadley's notion of scientific integrity, the disclosure of the participants identity is not a criterion:

> For grounded theorists, accuracy of reporting means being faithful to what was reported by participants, being fair to the multiple perspectives portrayed, and insuring that the theory is a plausible explanation for what is taking place in the research domain. (Hadley 2017: 68)

Farrimond (2013: 130) also states that "[a]nonymity has become a 'default' practice within research ethics, promoted within ethical codes and underpinned by legislation." Originally, I wanted to enable participants to appear with their full names in the text. I included the option against anonymity in the consent form to leave participants a choice on how they want to appear. At that time, I did not know which information would be analyzed and cited nor in which direction the research would develop. If all the interviews were purely about linguistic topics, I would not have any concerns about disclosing participants' identities. I do not have the impression that the interviews contained sensitive information which the speakers would not convey voluntarily in day-to-day conversations. However, the nature of the recordings is

different because they are not as futile as casual talk. In this respect, von Unger (2014b: 27) points out that participants tend to forget about ongoing research and may be surprised negatively by the publication.

In fact, I noticed that most interviews unfolded in a casual way which does not suggest that participants altered their attitude because they were being recorded. Although the bulk of information which the participants provided is not going to pose any risk to them, there is still the chance that some statements could shine a bad light on them: judgmental statements were elicited during the interviews and especially during GERT. During the interviews, participants occasionally voiced concerns about being perceived as racist because of their judgments of accents in connection with social groups or stereotypes. I feel obliged not to link these statements to their person in a way which could be held against them at any point in the future. I cannot know the exact margins of what it means to be politically correct in Israel and it is impossible to estimate how this matter is going to be seen in the near future.

As the nature of this study is sociolinguistic, questions about social identity and attitudes towards religion, the military, the state, family members and politics have been discussed that are labeled as "sensitive data," which must not be traceable to a real person, by German law:

> Die Verarbeitung personenbezogener Daten, aus denen die rassische und ethnische Herkunft, politische Meinungen, religiöse oder weltanschauliche Überzeugungen oder die Gewerkschaft-szugehörigkeit hervorgehen, sowie die Verarbeitung von genetischen Daten, biometrischen Daten zur eindeutigen Identifizierung einer natürlichen Person, Gesundheitsdaten oder Daten zum Sexualleben oder der sexuellen Orientierung einer natürlichen Person ist untersagt. (Art. 9 DSGVO 1)

The so prescribed universal treatment of data as "sensitive" is debatable. For example, some participants presented their religious affiliation as a key component of their identity: it was important to them to talk about their conception of religiosity in the interview. In these cases, it is questionable if this information should constitute sensitive information per se.

Besides the treatment of the so defined 'sensitive data,' I had the impression that participants expressed their views on societal topics with me, as a cultural outsider, more freely or differently than they might have usually, with fellow Israelis. To publish their statements in a wider context can violate the safe space which they seemingly constructed during the interview situation, even though they had opted for disclosure initially. I do not know the participants to such a degree as to be able to judge what type of information could be considered as unpleasant or as a violation of their privacy. The participants, in turn, could not know exactly how their statements were going to be presented, published and interpreted. Even though they knew it would be published as a dissertation, they were probably not familiar with

the holistic style of argumentation in qualitative research: personal information is contextualized with their statements about "facts." Some participants expressed that they were not familiar with the Hebrew term *anonimi* which appeared on the consent form and I cannot be sure that my explanation was understood.

Therefore, I decided to treat all participants equally in the text and only refer to them with a siglum, without disclosing their identity. I am convinced that in this way, the participants' privacy can be respected and at the same time they will still be able to recognize their voices in the text and assure their correct citation. Outsiders will not be able to identify the participants, easily – at least, it will be hard to prove their identity on the basis of the information contained in the study. However, Israel is a small country where social bonds are strong, which makes it impossible to grant complete anonymity to any participant. The option on the consent form provided me with information on who wanted to be treated as anonymous and I made sure to treat these participants' data more cautiously. Because I cannot know how participants are going to think about their statements in the future, or how a wider dissemination of their statements in the internet might affect them, this degree of anonymization is preferable. Farrimond asserts that

> [i]t also affords them some protection from harms they may not have [129] anticipated when initially consenting (e.g. if they had expected their names to only appear in a few academic journals and later this research is disseminated widely online). (Farrimond 2013: 128–129)

Researchers have the obligation to store the data safely which can at best be achieved by its anonymization (Farrimond 2013: 130). The use of unequivocal sigla assures that every citation is still traceable in the corpus of the original data which is published as online resource (see Striedl 2023).

## 4.2 Methods for the collection of data

Table 4.1 is an overview of the methods which I used for data collection. In the middle column, the number of participants for each method is listed. In the right column, the duration of all 57 recorded interviews are displayed, grouped by methods and fieldwork stages.

With the exception of three pilot interviews, all open interviews were conducted during the first fieldwork stage in Israel between January and April 2019. I tested the method with three recordings in summer 2018. I recorded the first pilot interview in Germany and two more during a short stay in Israel. The open interviews consist of 29 recordings with 31 different participants, including pilot interviews. Expert interviews were conducted in both fieldwork stages: six in the first and two in the

**Tab. 4.1:** Methods, number of participants (n) and duration of recordings (1st stage + 2nd stage)

| Methods | n | Duration in hh:mm:ss |
|---|---|---|
| 1 Open interviews | 31 | 21:47:04 |
| 2 Expert interviews | 7 (6+1) | 06:27:39 (05:38:54 + 00:48:45) |
| 3 Guided interviews | 21 | 12:00:30 |
| 4 GERT | | |
| | | |
| Total | 59 | 40:15:13 (27:25:58 + 12:49:15) |

second. One expert interview with a Hebrew language teacher recorded in the second stage was combined with methods 3 and 4 and is included in the summary of these methods in the table.

Almost all guided interviews were conducted in combination with GERT and recorded during the second fieldwork stage, between December 2019 and February 2020. Only the first recording with these methods was conducted as a pilot interview with an Israeli exchange student in Germany, shortly before embarking on the second fieldwork stage. All pilot interviews are included in the main corpora because there is no reason to treat them differently from an analytic perspective. From the very beginning of the data collection, I asked participants to fill out a socio-demographic questionnaire and a written consent form. The different methods will be explained and evaluated in detail, in the order of their application.

### 4.2.1 Consent form and socio-demographic questionnaire

Before conducting the first pilot interviews, I devised a form which was filled out by almost every participant who was interviewed for the study. Only five expert interviews were conducted without filling out the form. The function of this form was twofold: On the one hand, it was designed to facilitate the process of reaching an informed consent (see 4.1.2.2) with the participants about their participation in the study and on the other hand, to collect the participants' socio-demographic data which was considered as necessary to answer the research questions. Five experts were not asked to fill out the form because their status as participant was different. They were selected as experts because of their socio-demographic characteristics which were already known to me and their consent was reached during the communication which preceded the interviews. Not only was filling out the form obsolete in their case, but it felt inappropriate to ask them to do so because it was inconsistent with their expert status.

The form which can be found in Appendix B is in Hebrew, except for the working title of the PhD project in English. In the following, the content of the form will be presented in English. The form was designed to fit entirely on one side of an A4 sheet for practical reasons. In challenging fieldwork situations, an excess of paperwork can cause unnecessary confusion for the participants and the researcher. The risk of getting lost in one's own paperwork during the interview and the fear of losing anything is worth considering. Possibilities to stock or to reproduce the needed forms in the field should also be considered.

In terms of content, the form is organized in three sections: Under the title "Consent form," the readers are informed that they consent to participate in the academic research project with the title "Linguistic Variation, Varieties and Standard in Modern Hebrew: A Sociolinguistic Survey." They are also informed that the conversation is going to be recorded and can be published as scholarly literature and it may be used by other researchers. Then, they are asked to choose whether to stay anonymous or to appear and be cited by their name. The two options are printed on the form and can be chosen by checking a box.

When I designed the form, I had not yet decided on the way of citing the participants in the text. I did not know how the nature of the data and the participants' behavior during the interviews was going to develop and I liked the idea of letting participants have a say in the treatment of their data. After the completion of the interviews and a thorough consideration of the inherent risks and benefits, I decided against the disclosure of any of the participants' names (see also 4.1.2.3). Although the option against anonymity was dismissed, the design of the form was beneficial for the research because it helped to record participants' reactions to the topic: a majority of 36 participants opted against anonymity, in contrast to 18 who opted in favor, and 7 who did not make a choice. Some participants discussed their options with me and thus helped me to make a responsible decision.

The second section is entitled "sociolinguistic data" and contains 18 open fields with indications of the type of data to be filled in, followed by blank spaces, and two fields with multiple choice answers. The third section at the bottom of the page consists of indications and blank spaces for the registration of the participants' signature, the location and the date of the interview.

The 20 fields were selected to address the most relevant factors which may influence linguistic variation in Hebrew in Israel according to my hypotheses (see 1.1) and the principles which were discussed in 4.1.1. At the same time, these factors served as guiding principles for the sample generation as described in 4.2.2: the initial goal was to recruit participants who differed from each other in respect to their sociolinguistic data, as it appears on the form. All the demographic factors outlined by Izre'el et al. (2001: 180) are addressed directly, except for "socioeconomic status" (the factors were cited in 4.1.1). For the sake of discreetness, I decided against the collection

of data about the participants' financial situation. The participants' socio-economic status can be determined contextually with data about their education, occupation and place of residence. To guarantee the adequacy of the form, I reviewed existing questionnaires which were used by researchers in Israel for similar purposes for the design and the exact wording of the questionnaire.[2] Additionally, I asked my pilot participants to check the draft of the form for incomprehensible or inappropriate questions and implemented their minor corrections in the final version.

The open fields numbered from 1 to 4 inquire about participants' names, their age and sex (the blank space was intended to leave more options for non-binary distinctions). Participants' names were used as a form of address during the interview and intended for their citation which was finally ruled out.

Some fields on the form are specific to the Israeli context: Because of the recent immigration of many Israelis, two fields are intended for "5. country of birth" and "6: year of migration (Aliyah)." As discussed by Gafter (2014: 27–28), direct questions about 'ethnicity' can be insensitive, but it is quite usual on official forms in Israel to inquire about one's parents' places of birth. Consequently, the next fields are intended for "7. father's country of birth" and "8. mother's country of birth." Compared to European contexts, many Israelis express their religious affiliation self-confidentially on a daily basis, with their choice of clothes or food (*kosher*), for example. Therefore, this domain was considered as unproblematic and could be tackled with the fields "9. your religion," intended for entries of the type "Jewish" or "Christian" and "15. How do you define your level of religiosity? Choose one of the options:" which was intended for the registration of the participants' degree of religiosity. The six options are based on the religious distinctions which are commonly applied to Judaism in Israel (see 3.1.4): "ḥaredi," "religious," "traditional," "not religious," "secular" and "other." Though not all options fit for other religious groups, the participants were left with enough relevant options or could resort to the residual category "other."

Because of the supposed social and linguistic significance of the military in Israel, field "16. Have you served in the army?" asks to choose between the options "yes" and "no" to determine the participants' familiarity with army contexts. Some participants were sensitive towards this topic. Those who were not in the army can feel the need to justify themselves by explaining medical or ideological reasons for their exemption, as a reaction to the social pressure which evolves around this topic in Israel. Usually, their unease passed and did not pose a problem for the continuation of the interview. I tried to react understandingly and as a cultural outsider I was less likely to be seen as someone who would exert this kind of social pressure anyway.

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**2** Especially helpful was the questionnaire for CoSIH which is accessible online: http://cosih.com/CoSIH_files/questionnaires/C1_questionnaire.pdf (Accessed: 2024-09-08)

To gather information about the participants' profession, question 17 asks "What is your main occupation?"

Fields 11 to 14 inquire about variables, which belong to the domain of classical dialectology: "11. current place of residence," "12. Since when have you been living there?" "13. earlier place of residence" and "14. place of residence during childhood." They are meant to collect geographic data about the participants' places of residence in a diachronic perspective to determine the participants' mobility.

To determine participants' 'level of education,' they were asked: "10. How many years of education have you completed (including academic studies)?" According to Schneider (2016: 15,17), this type of question is a valid and widespread instrument for the measurement of educational data in surveys, though the calculation of the total duration "can be very cognitively demanding," which can lead to measurement errors. In the Israeli context, this type of question is preferable over a potentially more precise question about the highest educational degree because there are differences in educational systems within Israel and in the countries of origin of the participants which impede a direct comparison.

Finally, linguistic variables about language command of Hebrew, other languages and their usage are queried with the fields: "18. At what age did you begin speaking Hebrew?" "19. Which is your main spoken language, currently?" and "20. Do you know other languages, besides Hebrew? If yes, which are those?"

Besides a few variables, such as 'age' and geographic indications, most fields are to some degree dependent on the participants' interpretation, their thoroughness in calculation and memorizing, and rely on their honesty.[3] In general, the participants had no difficulties filling out the form and did so willingly. The only field which was sometimes challenging for them was question 10 about the years of formal education because of the reasons mentioned above. A summary of the data which was collected with the questionnaire will be presented in 4.2.2.3.

## 4.2.2 Access to the field and sample composition

Three years before embarking on this PhD project, in Spring 2018, I had spent more than five months in Israel during an *ulpan kibbuts* Hebrew course. Prior to this first extended period, I had spent ten days of vacation in Israel in 2013, which was my first stay in the Middle East. After the completion of the *ulpan* language course, I was

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**3** Against this assumption, which may be obvious for European minds, some participants did not know their exact age because their date of birth was not recorded. Furthermore, geographic indications, such as toponyms (places of birth) and borders, may change or move in the course of time.

almost fluent in Hebrew, both in speaking and writing and I was familiar with many practical aspects about living in Israel and how to get along. I was able to follow conversations and if I had missed something, I could ask for explanations. I had acquired active competence to a somewhat lesser extent and was able to talk fluently with basic terms about common day-to-day topics. For some time, I was planning to pursue a Master's degree in Israel on the history and culture of the Middle East, but I dropped this plan after the completion of the *ulpan* course. By inquiring about different programs which were offered at Israel's major universities I gained some experience with more elaborate conversations in Hebrew about academic topics, with students and university staff. This basis of experience enabled me to access scholarly literature in Hebrew and to contact participants via email or social media. At the beginning of my research I was confident enough to converse freely with the participants and to conduct interviews in Hebrew. Naturally, my language skills and my confidence as a researcher in an interview situation further improved in the field. Luckily, I also had a small network of Israeli friends whom I could ask for advice and for practical help for the organization of my study.

I started to explore interesting sites and aspects for this study with a preparatory stage consisting of two short stays in Israel, in spring and in summer 2018. As a kick-off, I had arranged meetings with eight linguists from all five major Israeli universities with linguistic faculties. I asked them about existing research and promising topics in Israeli sociolinguistics and – more generally – about scientific practice in linguistics in Israel. These talks were very challenging, as they drastically revealed to myself my outsider-position as a European researcher and my lack of knowledge. At the same time, they were very inspiring on a personal level because of the overall friendly and encouraging atmosphere. From a theoretical perspective, the meetings certainly helped to shape my research goals.

Only in retrospect did I understand these early meetings as expert interviews and I regret not having recorded more material right from the beginning. Despite having brought my recording device to most meetings, I just took some notes. Most of these talks already contained relevant statements which could have been analyzed later. Even if not used for an analysis, a recording in addition to notes can always be helpful for the documentation of the research progress. I refrained from recording these talks on the basis of two poor reasons: firstly, I was inexperienced and too shy to ask if I could record the interviews. Now, I am certain that my interlocutors would have happily agreed if I had asked. Secondly, I did not regard these talks as a proper part of the study, yet. In general, I would advise anyone to start gathering data and recording speech as early as possible. Regardless of the type of data and its quality, there is still a benefit from practicing the methods for the collection of data and its recording. Besides the consultations with colleagues, I traveled and met with friends in different parts of the country and I started to experiment with

different interview methods which led to the recording of three pilot interviews. The theoretical basis for the design of the sample of participants was outlined above (see 2.2.2 and 4.1.1). The applied recruitment strategies and the detailed make-up of the sample is presented in the next sections.

### 4.2.2.1 Research locations

During the first fieldwork stage, between January and April 2019, I lived for five weeks each in Tel Aviv and in Jerusalem, and three weeks in Haifa. Due to the flexible research design, I did not want to book my accommodation a long time in advance. When I traveled to Israel for the first extended period for this study, I wanted to stay in different cities and parts of the country to get an idea of different living conditions and geographic notions. I would have liked to have stayed in smaller towns and rural areas as well, but, outside the cities and the tourist hot-spots there were hardly any available options. In general, living space in Israel – especially short term rental – is extremely expensive. I chose to rent rooms in shared apartments with Israeli flat mates for financial and for practical reasons. Naturally, most shared flats can be found in the bigger cities with a university. This fact and the overall higher availability of options are the reasons for which I stayed in Israel's three major cities for almost the entire time of fieldwork.

I considered the search for accommodation and the interaction with Israeli flatmates as a part of the fieldwork experience. On several occasions, I could arrange interviews or establish new contacts with the help of my temporary flatmates or people I had met originally when I was looking for a room. Altogether, I stayed at eight different locations during the first stage – for up to three weeks in one place, including three shorter stays at friends' homes. During the second fieldwork stage, between December 2019 and February 2020, I had some more difficulties finding accommodations and stayed again five weeks in Haifa and four weeks in Tel Aviv. To compensate for the city-centeredness of my living places, I took trips to several more remote locations and explored the extended surroundings of my living places. I either arranged to meet participants on the trips or I tried to recruit participants spontaneously – with more or less success.

Most of the time, the interview locations were close to the participants' living or work space. Principally, I asked the participants to pick a location and was happy to go to them. This was intended as a gesture to save them some time and to show interest for their environment and, at the same time, I could explore new places and get to know the participants' contexts. Occasionally, participants also went out of their way and came to me – especially when they were living in remote places that I could not reach easily.

Most interviews were recorded in cafes, in an office or a quiet place at the participants' work space and occasionally at the participant's or my home. Contrary to a common dislike of cafes as research locations in the literature (see Hadley 2017: 100), I found them to be the best suited interview locations for the purpose of my study: cafes are safe public places and neutral terrain for both the participant and the researcher. Most of the time, cafes can easily be found on smart phone applications and they are commonly known in the neighborhood. Although the atmosphere is less personal than in someone's home, most people feel comfortable in cafes. On contrary, visiting a stranger's home can be intimidating – both for the guest and the host – which will have notable effects on the atmosphere of the interview. Working places are less private than homes and information about the participants' job is revealed naturally. Most participants feel secure and confident in their working environment and may even display a sense of pride when explaining their job. The atmosphere at a working place can be formal and time may be very limited, due to the participants' work obligations.

Typical background noise in cafes like music, air conditioning and chatter can be disturbing during the interview and affect the quality of the recording. This problem can sometimes be avoided by choosing a quiet place. From my experience, it was hard to find very quiet places anywhere during fieldwork. As long as the study does not require the absolute absence of background noise, which can only be found in a laboratory, this slight disturbance can be dealt with and minimized with some recording experience. There are only very few sequences in my recordings which are not understandable due to noise interference. The quality of the recordings, which I made with a Zoom H1 recording device, are surprisingly good – even when recording in very noisy environments.

All in all, I completed 55 recordings across all administrative districts of Israel (see Fig. 3.4 for a map of Israel's districts) and two pilot interviews in Munich, as can be seen in Table 4.2.

**Tab. 4.2:** Locations of and number of recordings

| District or City | Recordings |
|---|---|
| Center | 6 |
| Haifa (municipality and district) | 10 |
| Jerusalem (municipality and district) | 19 |
| North | 5 |
| South | 4 |
| Tel Aviv (municipality and district) | 11 |
| Munich | 2 |

It can be seen that most interviews were recorded in Israel's three major cities. Because many people live and work in cities, the chances for the (spontaneous) recruitment of participants are more favorable than in rural settings. Intellectuals and white collar workers who are more likely to take part in research projects tend to live in cities. Due to the limited time and resources for this research project, the geographical space in Israel could not entirely be explored in the fashion of a dialectologist survey. However, I managed to get an impression of most regions and major cities in Israel and to include some regional diversity in the sample.

Judging from my experience, I argue that research projects with a focus on certain neighborhoods and rural villages can best be realized with a local contact person who can help to establish contacts and to organize living arrangements for the researcher and additional needs, such as interview locations and transportation.

### 4.2.2.2 Recruitment strategies

My strategies for the recruitment of participants are typical for variationist studies.

> [A] balance between random sampling and the social network approach via judgement sampling is undoubtedly the most [28] common fieldwork technique. Whereas random survey methods ensure representativeness of the sample, a social network approach goes a long way towards mitigating the observer's paradox and reaching the right people. (Tagliamonte 2006: 27–28)

My main hypotheses about the significance of socio-demographic characteristics which led me to select certain locations and social groups were already presented. In accordance with the principles of theoretical sampling (see 2.2.2), I did not have a detailed sample design in mind. My fieldwork approach complies with the following description:

> Unlike statistical sampling, theoretical sampling cannot be planned before embarking on a study. The specific sampling decisions evolve during the research process. Of course, prior to beginning the investigation, a researcher can reason that events are likely to be found at certain sites and within certain populations. (Corbin & Strauss 2015: 157)

I used the same strategies to access the field and to recruit participants in both stages of fieldwork: spontaneous exploration of my environment leading to participant observation, recruitment of participants with the help of already existing contacts – the "friend of a friend" method – unspecific and group-specific recruitment via social media.

A few weeks before I traveled to Israel for the first fieldwork stage, I asked colleagues and friends whether they could help me to recruit participants and establish contacts in Israel. For this purpose I wrote a call for participation in Hebrew:

I am a linguistics student from the University of Munich in Germany and I am doing research on sociolinguistic variation in Israel. To obtain language data, I want to record conversations with Israelis from different social groups at several locations. The conversations will have a duration between half an hour and an hour. I am interested to find out about your opinions on the topic and to speak about your experiences. I will be in Israel from the end of January until April to carry out my work. Please write me if you are going to be able to participate in my research project. Any help will be appreciated.[4]

They sent out my call to their contacts (mostly friends) and forwarded me the answers. This way, I received about ten phone numbers and email addresses from possible participants who I contacted to determine locations and time frames for a meeting. Whenever my explorations did not lead to the recruitment of new participants or when I wanted to take a new direction, I resorted to this small pool of contacts.

However, the very first HSs I interviewed in the first fieldwork stage were recruited through a different source. Shortly before starting my fieldwork, I met the researcher Yossi David at my home university when he gave a lecture about *Haredi* media in Israel. As an insider, he reposted my call on social media groups of ex-religious Israelis. In my call, I declared that I was interested in differences between the Hebrew of secular and religious speakers. To my surprise, many group members were interested in speaking with a foreign researcher about this specific topic. Through this channel, I received about as many new contacts as I had so far. I recorded five interviews with participants from this group and received further contacts which led to three more interviews – two of them with self-identifying *Haredim*. These contacts were especially valuable because I thought it impossible for me to reach *Haredim*. These unlikely encounters with (ex-)*Haredim* opened exciting new strands of research I could not have thought of beforehand – some of the most intriguing and personally enriching conversations originated from this pool of ex-religious participants.

Another source for my early interviews were my Israeli roommates and their friends. These contacts provided three recorded interviews and many unrecorded conversations during shared activities which were part of the fieldwork experience.

When I felt that I needed new contacts for the arrangement of additional interviews, I started to publish calls on social networks. The use of social networks is extremely widespread in Israel. According to an article from the Times of Israel (Staff 2019),

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**4** Original Hebrew: אני סטודנט בחוג לבלשנות באוניברסיטת מינכן בגרמניה ואני חוקר בדוקטורט שלי את הווריאציות הסוציולינגוויסטיות בישראל. כדי לקבל נתונים לשוניים אני רוצה להקליט שיחות עם ישראלים מקבוצות חברתיות שונות בכמה מקומות. כל שיחה תקח משך בין חצי שעה ושעה. אני מעוניין לגלות את דעתכם על הסוגיה ולדבר על חויתכם. אהיה בארץ מסוף ינואר עד סוף אפריל כדי לבצע את עבודתי. אם אתם תוכלו להשתתף במחקר שלי תכתבו לי בבקשה! כל עזרה תתקבל בברכה.

> Israelis are the world leaders in social media use, with 77 percent of adults using social platforms, and rank second in smartphone ownership[...]. Younger, better educated and higher income Israelis were more likely to use outlets such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, and women more likely than men.

Recruitment through social networks should not be understood as 'random sampling' in terms of representativeness because only certain types of participants tend to respond – introverted participants are very unlikely to react. The more widespread (active) use of social networks among the young and educated was also reflected in the reactions to my calls. In general, the rate of respondents – even in very large groups – was quite low. Most calls which I published in specific Facebook groups for certain towns or neighborhoods did not yield any reactions. Nonetheless, the participants who were recruited through social networks are a valuable addition to the sample because they are not connected to my already existing networks and therefore brought up some new aspects.

The following is a call that I published in Hebrew in a local group of Haifa on the social network *couchsurfing*, which is aimed at connecting travelers with locals for shared activities and free accommodation at locals' homes:

> Hello everybody, I am a student from Germany and I am doing research on spoken Hebrew for my PhD thesis. I am looking to record conversations with Israelis from different social groups. I want to speak with Russian speakers, with Ethiopian Jews, with Arabs, with Mizrahim and Ashkenazim. I am going to be in Haifa until the 18th of April and we could meet in a cafe, for example. I will be happy if you could find some time to participate. Half an hour will already be enough. Write me here or on facebook.

With this inclusive wording, I tried to reach specific social groups mentioned in the text – with more or less success. I found out that the recruitment of specific social groups only via social media is unlikely to yield good results. Instead, a more personal approach, such as the 'friend of a friend' method, is required for gaining access to most specific social groups. Described by Tagliamonte (2006: 21) as a "component of the social network approach" a 'friend of a friend' can help to open doors:

> These are people with a status that is neither that of an insider nor that of outsider, but something of both. With a 'friend of a friend' you do not go into a situation cold. You have some 'in' into the situation. Naming yourself a 'friend' means that you have an entry into the relationships of the network you have attached yourself to. [...] Using the 'friend of a friend' approach also means that the researcher becomes enmeshed in exchange and obligation relationships as well. In other words, the fieldworker becomes part of the community – an observer who is also a participant. (Tagliamonte 2006: 22)

Slight social pressure through the initiative of a friend can be a good reason to participate in the research for some participants who would otherwise not have

considered doing so. J38m3l2 stated that he would not have had the slightest interest in my research if a friend had not asked him to participate. After the interview, he in turn provided me further contacts which led to one more interview with s35m3l2 who again stated that it was both duty and pleasure to participate in the research because of his friend's request. This sort of chain reaction opened surprising and insightful strands of research which I neither thought of pursuing, nor would I have been able to do, without the help of others.

During the second fieldwork stage, I tried to fill in some blanks in my sample by reaching out to more specific groups, including self-identifying religious and national religious Israelis, Israeli Arabs, the population of the kibbuts where I had studied in the *ulpan* course and the population of remote 'development towns' such as Dimona, Netivot, Yeruham and Bet She'an. For the recruitment of most participants, I resorted to contacts I had already established. With more confidence to approach new contacts, I was successful in recruiting some participants spontaneously. Both for the kibbuts and the development towns, I published calls in local Facebook groups. My success was very limited in both cases, but I was lucky that an Israeli researcher from Yeruham answered my call and acted as contact person during my visit in the town.

It is not surprising that people from these environments were less eager to participate in my research. Both development towns and kibbutsim have been subject to many studies which in some cases shed an unfavorable light on the research population. I came to learn only later that the very kibbuts where I had studied was the subject of a notorious study which failed to respect the anonymity of the participants and led to public controversy. In general, access as an outsider to groups with a small amount of social power (in the case of development towns) requires some extra effort and thought on how to attract the interest of the group's members in compliance with fieldwork ethics. On many occasions, my role as a cultural outsider was beneficial for my research interests in Israel. Levon also describes this surprising effect:

> [I]nterestingly, while wary of other Israelis observing them, most people I encountered in Israel were used to the idea of foreigners taking an interest [...] (Levon 2010: 74)

Further relevant aspects for the recruitment of participants are described by Hadley:

> [T]o find yourself with a small pool of participants who, either through friendship, social status, or worldview, share strong affinities with you [...] can skew your grounded theory, since your work might lack adequate levels of constant comparison. To avoid this, persuasion, rapport building, and image management will be necessary skills for gaining, maintaining, and expanding access both to people and places after getting your foot in the door. Even when you

have done this though, be prepared for a wide range of variability in the quality of availability to participants. (Hadley 2017: 79)

In my fieldwork approach, spontaneous exploration, participant observation, the recruitment of participants and the recording of interviews are interdependent processes which follow on each other or potentially unfold simultaneously. Because of the limited time for my fieldwork, I was eager to constantly recruit new participants and to arrange interviews. The recruitment and the arrangement of meetings was as time consuming as the recording of the interviews itself. To stay on track, I needed to send and reply to innumerable messages to contacts and to make phone calls, all the time. Some meetings never materialized and successful arrangements had to be organized carefully, especially if I had arranged several meetings on the same day.

During my fieldwork stages of less than three months each, I experienced recruitment and interviewing in waves: either all planned interviews were canceled on the same day and I was not able to make any new arrangements for several days, or everything happened at once and I could arrange a number of new interviews, while rushing from one location to the next for consecutive days. It can be challenging to cope with the pressure of limited time for fieldwork and the requirement to stay flexible and open for new possibilities. Because interviewing can be very exhausting, some time during fieldwork has to be spared for recreation – mentally and physically. In reality, I found it very hard to find some time during fieldwork for data analysis and conscious theoretical reasoning, as GTM requires. Surely, every fieldwork experience is subconsciously processed and can have effects on subsequent sampling decisions and the theoretical development of the study. Because of the wave-like experience of recruiting, I had to consider after every wave which individuals I would like to recruit next to enrich the sample. Theoretical sampling proved itself as a natural and sensible process within my fieldwork approach.

With this approach I succeeded in including at least one participant from the social groups I had envisaged as relevant for the study. While I tried to include a variety of Hebrew speakers, the sample of participants is not representative of Israeli society as a whole – in the sense that it does not represent different social groups proportionally. Marginal societal groups are arguably over-represented. This can be understood as a reaction to the concern of recruiting too many participants who are similar to myself. Instead of collecting only slightly differing interviews with similar – but easily reachable participants – I hoped to get more informative and differentiated interviews by going out of my way.

### 4.2.2.3 Participants' socio-demographic data

Analysing participants' socio-demographic data reveals that most of the characteristics of the Israeli population that were discussed in 3.1 are included in the sample. The ratios of most characteristics, such as the percentage of Israeli Arabs among the participants, are even close to the overall ratios. With a total size of 59 participants, the sample cannot be representative of any population or group in a statistical sense. However, the sample is differentiated enough to include various aspects of Israeli society. In accordance with Sankoff's understanding of representativeness, we have the "possibility of making inferences about the population based on the sample" (Sankoff 2005: 1000). For a detailed qualitative analysis, the amount of collected data is certainly sufficient. An increased amount of data would necessarily lead to a more superficial analysis (Dunkelberg 2005: 250). Essentially the same conclusions can be drawn in respect to the sub-sample for GERT.

All in all, I recorded 58 interviews with 59 different participants. Two requirements had to be fulfilled by all participants: At the time of the interview the participants' main residence had to be in Israel on a permanent basis. Only two participants were living outside of Israel for a limited period of several months, but their home was in Israel. The second requirement was the participants' sufficient command of Hebrew to be able to conduct the interview in Hebrew as well as to read and fill out the consent form and the socio-demographic questionnaire with minimal help of the interviewer, if needed. Participants' data which collected primarily with this questionnaire (for a detailed description see 4.2.1) will be summarized in the following. Because the sample design has consequences for the validity of the method, a detailed account of the data of the participants who completed GERT in combination with the guided interviews is provided. For convenience, the sample for the guided interviews and GERT is referred to only by "GERT" because the methods were always combined.

For the registration of the participants' sex, a blank space following the Hebrew word *min* 'sex' was included in the questionnaire. By the use of the blank space I intended to leave the participants more options than the binary gender distinction. All participants indicated either *neḵeva* 'female' or *zakhar* 'male' or referred to either one of the categories by the indication of their first letter – as is customary in Israel. Overall, the sample was perfectly balanced in this respect with 30 women and 29 men. The samples for the different methods are slightly uneven: I recorded 18 women and 20 men as participants for the open and expert interviews, whereas 12 women and 9 men for GERT (see Fig. 4.1).

All but eight participants indicated their age at the moment of the interview in years. The missing data was estimated by assigning the participants who had not indicated their age to an age cohort. Most of the participants (62.7%) were aged between 20 and 39 years. For the age cohorts "40 to 49," "50 to 59" and "60 to 69,"
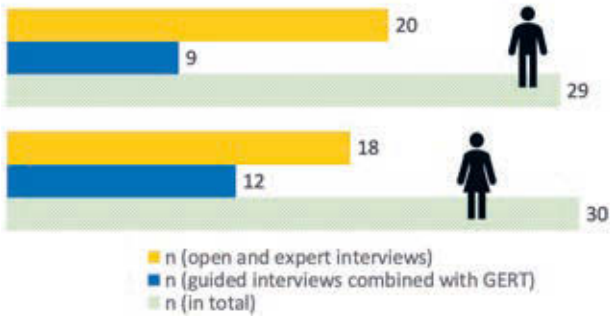
**Fig. 4.1:** Number of participants for each sex

six participants could be interviewed for each decade (see Fig. 4.2). The youngest participant was aged 17 and the oldest participant who indicated her age was 82 years old. The applied recruitment strategies proved to be impractical for reaching
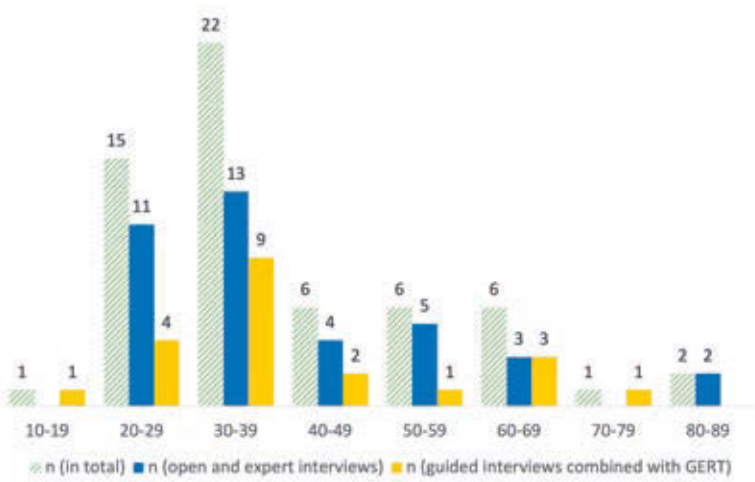


**Fig. 4.2:** Number of participants per age cohort

participants under the age of 20. Because of ethical considerations, children and school kids cannot be recruited in the same way as adults, as outlined in 4.1.2. Furthermore, the majority of Israel's population aged between 18 and 20 are serving in the army, which leaves them with very limited resources for leisure time. Soldiers

are said to experience physical and psychological exhaustion and therefore are not likely to take up voluntary tasks such as the participation in research projects during their army service.[5] Studies with a focus on pupils or soldiers as participants need to apply more adequate recruitment strategies and strive for an official cooperation with educational or military institutions.

A majority of 32 participants (54.2%) indicated that they had served (or were serving in one case) in the Israeli army – compared to 23 participants (39.0%) who indicated that they had not and four who did not specify. The ratio for GERT is similar: 11 participants (52.4%) indicated that they had served, compared to nine (42.9%) who indicated that they had not served and one did not indicate. The participants' involvement with the military institutions in Israel is considerable – bearing in mind that a number of participants such as the Arabic population and adult immigrants were exempt from military service.

Participants' families stem from all kinds of countries. Based on the data, it does not seem reasonable to lump together participants with different L1s from countries of origin such as South Africa, Argentina and Poland as 'Ashkenazi,' for example. The fact that already 47.5% of the participants were born at least to one Israeli-born parent is another reason to question the relevance of the notions 'Ashkenazi' and 'Mizrahi' for the participants' construction of identity. Therefore, and because of the pre-scientific nature of ethnic categories such as 'Mizrahi' and 'Ashkenazi' (for a discussion of the terms see 3.1.3), no summary along these lines is made. I did not ask participants to characterize themselves in terms of 'ethnicity' during the data collection. Instead, information about the participants' and their parents' country of birth was collected with the questionnaire. A majority of 43 participants were born in Israel, in comparison to 14 participants who were born abroad and two participants who did not indicate their country of birth (see Fig. 4.3). In this context, 'Israel' is interpreted geographically as the territory which was considered as belonging to the state of Israel at the time of the study – regardless of the historical situation at the participants' birth. The term "Israeli-born" is used with the same geographical intention. In the sample for GERT, the ratio is almost identical: 15 (71.4%) were born in Israel and six (28.6%) were born abroad. Among 14 participants who were born outside of Israel, four marked Ethiopia as their country of birth, three Ukraine, two South Africa and one each Argentina, Germany, Kazakhstan, Morocco and Russia. One participant's history of migration is singular because she was born to Arab Israeli parents who had been living abroad, but they returned to Israel together in her childhood. The other 13 participants who were born abroad immigrated as *'olim* or

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**5** When I published a call to recruit participants which was aimed specifically at soldiers in one of Tel Aviv's largest and most active Facebook group, nobody reacted.
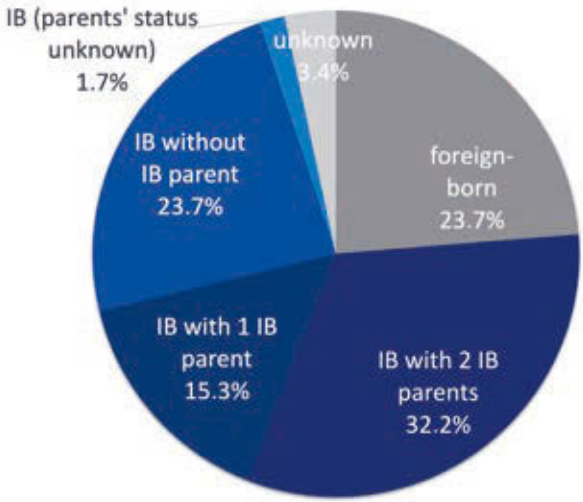
**Fig. 4.3:** Percentages of Israeli-born (IB) participants with or without IB parents

were brought by their parents who immigrated as *'olim.* Among them, the majority of seven participants were aged under twenty at the moment of their (parents') migration to Israel and five were even younger than ten years. Four participants immigrated to Israel in their twenties and only two were in their forties. All in all, 19 Israeli-born participants (seven for GERT) were born to two Israeli-born parents (32.2% in general and 33.3% for GERT) and can be termed as 'second generation Israelis.' Another nine (two for GERT) were born to one Israeli and one foreign-born parent (15.3% in general and 9.5% for GERT). The remaining 14 Israeli-born (six for GERT) participants were born to two foreign-born parents (23.7% in general and 28.6% for GERT) – those can be termed as 'first generation Israelis.' One Israeli-born participant did not indicate his parents' country of birth.

The Israeli-born participants' 37 foreign-born parents stem from the following countries: five from the USA, four from Poland, three each from Ukraine and Yemen, two each from Ethiopia, Argentina, Morocco, Persia, Tunisia and Romania. The remaining were born in South Africa, Chile, Hungary, Iran, Azerbaijan, Italy (in a camp for displaced persons), Russia, Moldova, Slovakia and Iraq.[6] Figure 4.4 is a word cloud of these countries of origin – more frequently mentioned entries appear

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**6** The participants' entries on the questionnaire were translated and not edited further. Some participants used historic geographic designations such as "Persia," while others used the contemporary designation "Iran." In this case, it is likely, but not certain, that both were referring to the same geographic territory.

relatively larger. This illustration demonstrates the diversity of origin of just the 23 Israeli-born participants. Their parents' twenty countries of origin are located all around the globe – except for the Australian continent – with a higher concentration in Europe and the America.



**Fig. 4.4:** IB participants' parents' origin

A majority of 61.0% indicated Hebrew as their L1, 13.6% Arabic, 8.5% Russian, 6.8% English and 5.0% Amharic (see Table 4.3). If not further specified, participants re-

**Tab. 4.3:** Number of participants per L1 (in total and for GERT)

| L1 | n (in total) | n (GERT) |
|---|---|---|
| Hebrew | 36 | 10 |
| Arabic | 8 | 6 + 1 Moroccan Arabic |
| Russian | 5 | 2 |
| English | 4 | 1 |
| Amharic | 3 | 0 |
| Sidama | 1 | 0 |
| Spanish | 1 | 1 |
| Yiddish | 1 | 0 |

ferred with "Arabic" to a variety of the Palestinian Arabic dialect as L1 or to Modern Standard Arabic which is taught in schools and as a second language (L2). Among the participants were seven speakers of Palestinian Arabic and one speaker of a Moroccan Arabic variety who migrated to Israel in her childhood together with her

parents as *'olim*. Sidama is a language belonging to the Cushitic family which is spoken in Ethiopia.

Participants were asked to list their L2s in a blank space on the questionnaire. According to this information, there were no participants who were strictly monolingual. Almost every native HS listed English as L2 – only one wrote French instead and two did not provide any information. Among the native HSs, 18 listed other L2s, in addition to English. The following languages were listed more than once: Arabic (including Moroccan Arabic), French, German, Russian, Spanish and Yiddish. In accordance with the criteria for the participants' selection, every participant with a different language than Hebrew as L1 had learned Hebrew as L2. Among the participants with Arabic and Russian as L1, English was slightly less prominent as L2, in addition to Hebrew: five of the native Arabic speakers indicated English as L2 and two of the native Russian speakers. All native speakers of an Ethiopian language listed English as L2. Some of the participants with Hebrew as L2 listed other languages than English as L2.

On the questionnaire, there was one field to determine the participants' "main spoken language today." Most participants indicated their L1 in this field. All of the native Hebrew speakers indicated Hebrew as their main spoken language and two of them indicated English in addition. Among the participants with a different language than Hebrew as L1, there is some deviation from their L1: two native Arabic speakers, three native Russian speakers and three native English speakers indicated Hebrew as their main spoken language (one of the English speakers listed Hebrew and English). All the speakers of the other L1s which are listed in Table 4.3 indicated Hebrew as their main spoken language. Four Amharic speakers (as L1 and L2) indicated Amharic along with Hebrew as their main spoken languages. Taking this data at face value, it means that ten participants had completely switched from their L1 to Hebrew and that seven participants were using two main spoken languages – one in addition to their L1. There was no evidence for a complete switch to any other language besides Hebrew. Although there is evidence in the sample for some degree of linguistic diversity, it does not match the participants' diverse family origins which were reviewed above. Among native HSs, there seems to be almost no continuity in the use of heritage languages – the (grand-)parents L1s – with a slight exception of English, Amharic and Russian. English is very prominent as L2 among all participants. The minor role of heritage languages among immigrant families and the consequent switch to Hebrew, more than one generation ago, can be explained by Israel's monolingual language policy (see 3.1). Arabic speakers indicated Arabic as their main spoken language – two of them along with Hebrew. They are the only group who continue to use another L1 than Hebrew as their main and only spoken language.

For each district, at least one participant was interviewed, with most participants living in the Haifa and Jerusalem districts (see Table 4.4 and Fig. 3.4 for a map of Israel's districts). Among the 43 Israeli-born participants, 21 (48.8%) indicated on the

**Tab. 4.4:** Participants' living places per district in Israel

| District in Israel | Living place of n |
|---|---:|
| Center | 6 |
| Haifa (municipality and district) | 17 |
| Jerusalem (municipality and district) | 18 |
| Judea and Samaria (West Bank) | 1 |
| North | 5 |
| South | 5 |
| Tel Aviv (municipality and district) | 6 |
| Unknown | 1 |

questionnaire that they were living at the same place at the time of the interview where they had been living during their childhood. This is to say that they had either stayed in their hometown throughout their whole life or that they left and returned at some point. The ratio of almost half of the Israeli-born participants who were living in their hometown appears high – considering that the Israeli population is often characterized as extremely mobile. Among seven native speakers of Palestinian Arabic who are included in the population of the Israeli-born participants, the ratio is even higher. Only one of them was living outside her hometown in Israel at the time of the interview because she had moved to her husband's hometown. Another participant was born and grew up abroad, but returned with her family to her father's hometown. All the remaining five speakers of Palestinian Arabic were living in their hometown at the time of the interview.

The same constraints which were lined out above in respect to 'ethnicity' apply to the categorization of participants' 'religiosity.' Participants were asked about their 'religious affiliation' and were given six options for the indication of the 'degree of religiosity' on the questionnaire (see Table 4.5) Five participants did not specify their religious affiliation: two of them argued that it would be contradictory to indicate a religion, while they opted for "not religious."

Not included are the Christian participant who opted for "secular," the Druze participant who opted for "religious" and four Jewish participants who did not make a choice or wrote down another designation.[7] In summary, a slight majority of 31

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7  Their own wordings are: *ḥaredia le-she'avar, ḥiloni masorṭi, tarbuti zehut*.

**Tab. 4.5:** Number of participants per religious affiliation (in total and for GERT)

| Religion | n (in total) | n (GERT) |
|---|---|---|
| Christian | 1 | 0 |
| Druze | 1 | 1 |
| Jewish | 46 | 13 |
| Muslim | 6 | 5 |
| unknown | 5 | 2 |

(52.5 %) participants categorized themselves with a low or no degree of religiosity, including the options "not religious," "secular" and the three participants' own wordings. In contrast, 23 (39.0 %) participants attributed themselves a high degree of religiosity, including the options "*Haredi*," "religious" and "*masorți*" (see Fig. 4.5). In the sample for GERT, there are 13 participants who identified as "Jewish," with
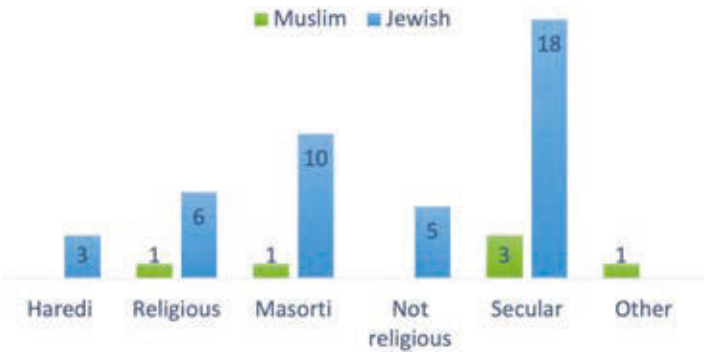


**Fig. 4.5:** Number of participants per 'level of religiosity'

the following choices: one "*Haredi*," three "religious," three "masorți," two "not religious" and four "secular." Of the five participants who identified as "Muslim," two opted for "secular" and one each for "religious," "masorți" and "other." Another two participants with unknown affiliation opted for "not religious" and "secular" and the Druze participant opted for "religious." In summary, the GERT sample is balanced with ten participants on both sides of the religious spectrum (high degree against low degree of religiosity) and one who chose the option "other."

Participants who self-identify as "religious" and "very religious" are harder to reach with the applied recruitment strategies, as outlined above (4.2.2.2). However, some degree of heterogeneity in the sample, both in terms of the participants' indicated religious affiliation and their degree of religiosity, could be achieved.

The number of years of exposure to formal education is not a precise criteria to allow for direct comparisons between the participants. As mentioned in 4.2.1, participants had some difficulties counting the years they had spent in a formal education setting and it was not entirely clear which institutions should be included in the counting. From a general perspective, the focus on formal education is misleading. On the one hand, older participants might not have received much formal education – but have been learning their whole life. Younger participants, on the other hand, might not have had enough time to obtain degrees, which does not mean that they are uneducated. Additionally, the quality of different educational systems are hardly comparable, even though the indicator "years of education" is appealing because of its intuitive comparability across time and space (Schneider 2016: 18). It also needs to be taken into account that some of the participants were educated in other countries than Israel, due to their migration history. Besides, several parallel educational frameworks with considerable differences are in existence in Israel. These institutions developed along ethnic and religious concepts and vary in their application of pedagogical methods, contents and even the language of instruction – Hebrew, Arabic, Yiddish, English, Russian and French are among the most common. Therefore, it is reasonable to assess the notion 'level of education' individually for each participant and within a larger context of additional information from the interviews such as the participant's occupation or religious identification.

Information about participants' level of education was queried with the entry on the questionnaire "how many years of studies have you completed (including academic studies)?" Some participants indicated their highest degree next to the blank space on the questionnaire besides the number of years or mentioned it during the interview. Based on this information, the participants were grouped into four categories (see Fig. 4.6). The lowest category "less than 12 years of schooling" refers
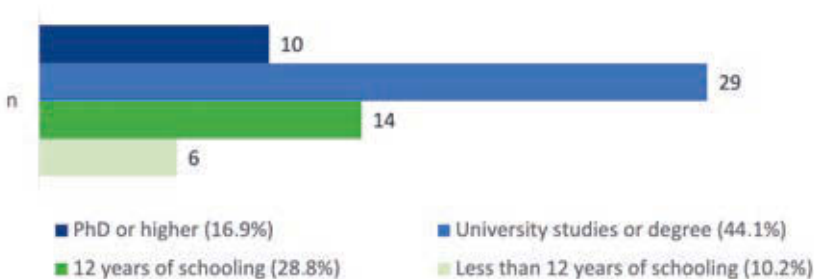


**Fig. 4.6:** Participants' level of education

to all participants without a high school diploma. There are no participants without any formal education – all completed secondary school at least. Usually, it takes 12 years of schooling before obtaining a high school diploma in Israel. All participants who were enrolled in university or college studies at the moment of the interview and those with a university or college degree are subsumed under the category "university studies or degree." The category "PhD or higher" contains all participants who had at least obtained a doctoral degree, which is referred to as *to'ar shlishi* 'third degree' in Hebrew. Considering only the sample for GERT, the ratio of the category "university studies or degree" was higher, with 13 participants (61.9%). Another four participants (19.0%) belonged to the category "12 years of schooling" and two participants each (9.5%) belonged to the highest and the lowest category.

### 4.2.2.4 Speaking sigla for the designation of the participants

I use speaking *sigla* (*siglum* in the singular) to designate the participants anonymously and unambiguously. Every siglum has five components (see Fig. 4.7). The first letter
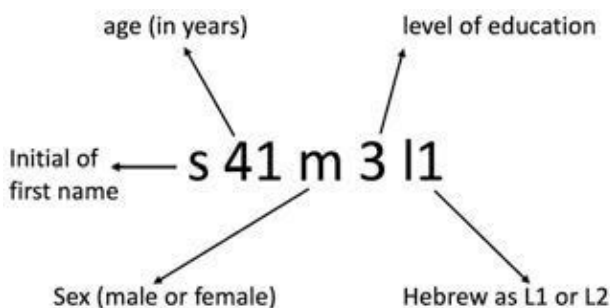


**Fig. 4.7:** Components of the siglum

is either the initial of the participant's first name or a random letter, if the participant had opted for anonymity. The four variables following the initial letter are codes of the participants' selected socio-demographic characteristics. Every participant is designated by just one siglum – no identical sigla were composed for different participants. The number after the initial letter refers to the participant's age (in years) at the moment of the interview. In case a participant did not indicate his exact age on the questionnaire, it was estimated by decades and indicated by a cipher for the decade followed by "+." For example, "5+" stands for the estimation 'over fifty.' The second variable refers to the participants' sex and takes either the values "f"

for 'female' or "m" for 'male.[8]' The third variable refers to the participant's level of education with numerical values form 1 to 4, following the categorization which is outlined in Fig. 4.6: "1" stands for 'less than 12 years of schooling,' "2" for '12 years of schooling,' "3" for 'university studies or degree' and "4" stands for 'PhD or higher.' The final variable takes the values of either "l1" or "l2" and indicates whether the participant learned Hebrew as his or her first language (L1) or as a second language (L2). For example, "s41m3l1" designates a male participant who was aged 41 years at the moment of the interview, with exposure to university studies or a degree and Hebrew as his first language.

### 4.2.3  Open interviews

> For narrative is in almost everything we see and everything we do – we render all experience into story. (Yorke 2013: 214)

In general, it is hard for people to answer to complex questions without telling stories (cf. Kahneman 2011: 159) – constructing meaning – in Berger & Luckmann's 1967 terms. Qualitative research tries to profit from this natural human capacity by elevating the participants' stories to data which can provide additional perspectives and insights into the meaning of the researched categories. The method of exploratory interviews is described by Hadley (2017: 99–101) as variable and subject to personal style – there is no consensus on a uniform interviewing technique in GTM. The general idea of open interviews is to give the participants space for their own choice of topics and to treat them as partners in research, rather than mere informants (see 2.2.1). Breuer summarizes the aim of the method as follows:

> Forschungsbezogen geht es darum, den Untersuchungspartner zum ausführlichen Erzählen über die fokussierte Thematik, zum Darstellen seiner Sichtweisen, seiner Problemdeutungen, seiner Handlungserfahrungen, seiner Lebensgeschichte etc. zu bewegen und ihn als Zuhörer mit anteilnehmendem Interesse zu begleiten und seine Präsentations- und Explikationsbemühungen zu unterstützen. (Breuer 2010: 64)

In GTM, interviewing is used to create further hypothesis and to narrow the focus of the research subsequently, as it is exemplified by Senior's account of her fieldwork with teachers:

> The insights provided by each teacher generate additional questions in the researcher's mind: questions that the next teacher can be invited to answer. This kind of questioning, which

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**8** No participant indicated a value other than 'female' or 'male' in the blank space on the questionnaire.

grounded theorists call 'theoretical sampling', enables the researcher to identify and explore the significance of additional phenomena that they may not have considered important prior to conducting the study. These phenomena may be central to an understanding of the totality of the experience. By asking subsequent teachers to elaborate on insights and observations provided by previous teachers, a composite picture of what all teachers are collectively saying is gradually developed. The validity of the findings is also enhanced, since the researcher can check whether the insights provided by one teacher are unique, or shared by others. (Senior 2006: 21)

In Chapter 1, I illustrated how I derived additional hypothesis from the analysis of an early interview and singled out aspects which I tried to investigate in following interviews. To this end, I conducted open interviews during my first fieldwork stage. The procedure of my interviews was everything but uniform, although I had devised a modular guideline with topics I wanted to address. Before I started interviewing, I had prepared myself to conduct "sociolinguistic interviews" in the style of Labov (1984: 32) which is described by Tagliamonte (2006: 37–49). Therefore, my guideline (see Appendix C) includes several modules that I adapted from Tagliamonte's interview schedule which was in turn adapted from Labov.[9] I included additional modules such as "Standard Hebrew" for which I adapted Questions 5 and 6 about "model speakers" from Purschke (2011: 166–169).

In principle, my interviewing technique was similar to Levon's (2010: 88–89) description: I used several thematic modules to elicit narratives and tried to create an atmosphere of casual conversation with an emphasis on the participants' initiative. From the beginning, I used the guideline only as orientation. Usually, I introduced myself at the beginning of the interview and allowed for some time to settle, to explain the recording device, the consent form and the questionnaire. Often, my participants took the initiative right from the start and talked about my research area, based on the information I had given them in the recruitment process.

The recordings of the 29 open interviews have a duration between 15 minutes and two hours and 15 minutes – the average length of the recordings is about 45 minutes. I conducted four interviews with two participants at the same time. In two interviews, one of the participants acted as a contact person and in the other two, the participants came together to the interview. Towards the end of the interviews, I included a debriefing just as Farrimond (2013: 117) explains: I gave the participants time to ask questions and thanked them for the participation. In the early interviews, I asked more questions about the participants' experience of the interview to make sure the questions were appropriate and that the participants felt at ease. Occasionally,

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**9** The interview schedule can be accessed online: https://www.cambridge.org/pk/files/5213/6689/9619/2846_APPENDIX_B.pdf

participants wanted to exchange contact details, mostly out of courtesy or to plan future activities and provided me with contact information of other participants.

Many aspects about the organization of interviews have been outlined so far. Nonetheless, the unfolding of each interview depends on many factors – some of which are not controllable. For example, the researcher's and participants' mood determine the dynamics of the event. During interviews, much sensitivity towards these interpersonal nuances is required to make the situation agreeable for the participants and fruitful for research. Listening attentively to someone who speaks in a foreign language for about one hour, while keeping the research goals in mind, can be incredibly exhausting – I got used to bringing snacks to be able to refuel right after the interview.

All in all, I was surprised how smoothly most interviews evolved without much initiative on my part. Apparently, most participants enjoyed taking on the expert role and being listened to, as y28f3l1 stated. This effect can result in astounding data: I was puzzled how participants brought up exactly the topics I was interested in, completely on their own. As long as the participants were talking about aspects which I had envisaged with the guideline or related topics, I only interrupted them to clarify. When the conversation had lost momentum, I posed a thematically related question from the guideline or asked spontaneously about something which had caught my attention. Sometimes, if I had noted an aspect about the participants' socio-demographic data which they had provided on the questionnaire, I inquired further in this direction. The only modules from the guideline which I tried to include in every interview were the ones about "local language" and "standard Hebrew."

After the first research stage, I had conducted interviews with 38 speakers and thus collected more than 27 hours of recordings. Some conversations with the participants started some time before I was able to record them or even continued naturally after I had already stopped recording and switched to another topic in the meantime. For a period of three months, I spoke about my research on a daily basis with many different people more or less consciously. The topic of my research just came up naturally when someone asked me what I was doing in Israel. On many occasions people got intrigued and started to develop their thoughts on the topic without me being able to record the conversation because of the spontaneity of the situation. I tried my best to remember these conversations and made some notes, when I was able to do so. With more and more conversations, I had gained experience regarding which questions from the guideline usually sparked the participants' interest and were likely to yield insightful narratives. To be able to compare the participants' statements, I posed these questions to several participants. I adapted other questions the way Charmaz describes:

> If you attend to respondents' language, you can adapt your questions to fit their experiences. Then you can learn about their meanings rather than make assumptions about what they mean. (Charmaz 2004: 65)

At the end of the first fieldwork stage, I had become weary of having similar conversations again and again. My goal was to lead the participants to the places of interest and to clarify my own thoughts which came up during the interviews. However, I noticed that I interrupted the participants more often in comparison to the early recordings. I felt that at some point it did not make sense for me to carry on with the same type of interviews because it seemed that I had heard and recorded very similar statements before. This feeling set in shortly before the time for my first fieldwork stage was up and I returned home.

Only some months after I had made the recordings, I was able to compare my first and last interviews: it is remarkable how the conversations developed in a specific direction. During the first interviews, I was not sure what I was going to ask and tried to let the conversation flow, whereas I conducted the interviews more confidently towards the end, when I knew how to ask the 'right questions.' Of course, I was only able in retrospective to judge which questions were the right ones for my research goals: questions which brought the participants to elaborate on various aspects about the research area, in a personal and associative manner. It seems now that these questions crystallized in the course of the interviews. My experiences from the open interviews resonates in Charmaz' description:

> A researcher has topics to pursue; research participants have goals, thoughts, feelings and actions. Your research questions and mode of inquiry shape your subsequent data and analysis. Thus, you must become self-aware about why and how you gather data. You learn to sense when you are gathering rich, useful data that do not undermine or demean your respondent(s). Respondents' stories may tumble out or the major process in which people are engaged may jump out at you. Sometimes, however, respondents may not be so forthcoming and major processes may not be so obvious. Even if they are, it may take more work to discover the subtlety and complexity of respondents' intentions and actions. The researcher may have entered the implicit world of meaning, in which participants' spoken words can only allude to significance, but not articulate it. (Charmaz 2004: 64)

When I noticed how focused my late interviews had become, I got the impression that a theory was emerging in the course of the many conversations, just as it is described by GTM writings.

### 4.2.4  Expert interviews

As I described in 4.2.2, it was natural to include this method in the study, even though I did not conceive of the early consultations with Israeli colleagues as expert interviews at that time. In their definition for this study, some expert interviews do not differ significantly from open interviews, besides the status of the participant as an expert on a particular social group or a particular topic. In some instances, participants just revealed themselves as experts in the course of the interview and I had to react spontaneously if I had not been able to prepare special questions and wanted to find out more. When I had been informed about the participant's expertise, I just asked additional questions about this field during the interview or I prepared specific questions which treated only the expert's field.

Many aspects which were detailed above for the open interviews equally apply for the expert interviews. Usually, the roles of the participants were determined more clearly in the expert interviews: participants were confident in their position as an expert and were willing to share their knowledge with me. Therefore, the topics of the interview were predetermined. For several interviews, I contacted the experts specifically and informed them about the purpose and the goals of the interview. My aim was to get more information about the field of expertise or a particular group of people and to get more sources or ideas for further research in this direction.

Besides sharing useful information, experts can add an additional perspective on the research area. Davis reflects on the benefits of the outsider perspective of the researcher and how local researchers should be consulted in order to ensure the study's quality:

> Researchers who are from the culture or social situation studied (insiders) can guard against bias based on ethnocentric views. On the other hand, because insiders often have a hard time getting outside everyday practices to see what is unique and patterned about those practices, researchers from another culture or social experience (outsiders) can often more readily identify cultural patterns. Thus, by working together, insider and outsider researchers can build on each other's strengths in helping to ensure a credible and dependable study. (Davis 1995: 437)

Hadley (2017: 34) points out that consultations with insider experts and experts in general should be handled carefully because they "may simply try to debunk the emerging grounded theory either by pointing out peripheral issues only hinted at within the data or by attempting to foist their own 'pet theory' on the theorist's tentative interpretations." Generally, grounded theorists advise to write down their ideas, instead of "talking too much" about them with colleagues (Hadley 2017: 34). During the preparatory phase, I sometimes felt intimidated when I consulted with linguists in Israel about my ideas. Nonetheless, these consultations were important to

determine research gaps and to carve out space for my own study. In retrospective, I would advise recording these consultations to be able to come back to them at a later point and to treat them as expert interviews. Moreover, it is important – especially in early research stages – to remain confident about one's own methodological capacity and to assess advice critically: sometimes well-meant advice may not be helpful because it simply expresses a different or more traditional scientific methodology.

### 4.2.5 Guided interviews

Towards the end of the first fieldwork stage, the interviews were becoming more and more uniform: in the course of almost forty recorded interviews, I came to ask similar questions in a similar sequence. I automatically tried to double-check certain statements from the interviews with different participants. This process of focusing on some core topics during the interviews and asking very similar questions gradually developed in a natural manner, as I described above (4.2.3). This standardization of my interviewing technique became obvious when I listened to some of the last interviews from the first fieldwork stage. For the analysis of these interviews, I coded all similar questions with the same codes. Thus, I already had the basis for a condensed questionnaire which I wanted to use in the second fieldwork stage. After having compiled these condensed questions, I compared them with my initial RQs and added or modified a few questions to tackle them more precisely.

The final questionnaire, which is included in Appendix D, includes the three modules "language attitude," "language practice" and "local/group varieties." At first, I explored different aspects about 'standard Hebrew' and subsequently of 'non-standard Hebrew.' Thereby, it was obvious for the participants that the interview is going to center on language related topics. In contrary to some of the open interviews, there was no confusion about the nature of the interview and the aims of my study. The next questions are a bit more personal, while still focusing on these notions and the participants' attitude. Q4 and Q5 inquire about model speakers. Then, the domain of language policy is brought up with Q6. Q8 asks about deviations from the 'standard' and 'mistakes' from the participants' perspective. Starting with Q11, attention shifts to different aspects of 'non-standard Hebrew.' Q14 finally asks about group specific styles in Hebrew and about the associated characteristics. The last questions function as a transition to GERT, when the participant is asked to rate groups of speakers systematically by marking them on a diagram – this method will be explained in the next section.

To test the method, I started with one pilot interview with an Israeli acquaintance in Munich before I set out for the second research stage in Israel. Because I was

satisfied with this first interview, I only made minor corrections on the questionnaire and decided to include the pilot interview in the regular corpus.

During the second fieldwork stage, I usually proceeded along the questionnaire. Occasionally, I changed the order of the questions if the participant already had mentioned some topics from subsequent questions. At the end, I tried to ask all the missing questions. Sometimes, I did not ask a question when it did not seem appropriate. For example, I skipped Q3 about the participant's children in cases where I did not know about the family situation and it seemed too private to ask. I tried to ask Q1-8 and Q11 and Q14 consequently in every interview.

Due to the fixed structure and the narrowed focus of the guided interviews, there was less space for the participants' initiative than in open interviews – the roles of researcher and participant were more profiled. Because the participants knew that I was using a list with a limited number of questions, they did not want to spend too much time with one question after having answered and waited for me to pose the next question. In general, they still took enough time to elaborate their thoughts and in any case, they were able to diverge from the original question if they wanted to. In contrast to open interviews, the guided interviews were completed in relatively short time. Some short interviews yielded concise answers and I found out that more time does not necessarily improve the quality of the interview.

The more structured the interviews are, the clearer is the line of analysis. Certain questions yielded very structured and even polar answers. They can be understood as tackling a certain variable: for example, Q2 and Q3 can be understood to measure the amount of importance a participant attaches to 'correct Hebrew.' This type of questions could also be used in a quantitative research design, using ratings on a Likert scale. Thereby, one could inquire about complex correlations within a large sample of participants, for example, with the evaluation of PD in perception experiments.

According to GTM, it is assumed that judgments about the relevance and the appropriateness of the RQs can be deduced from the participants' behavior. Interviews without much interference by the researcher are thought of as authentic. From my experience, I seemed to come across important categories which are used by the participants themselves when they practically conducted the interview by themselves. During the second fieldwork stage, some participants almost anticipated all of my questions once I had posed the first one – the interview with l6+f4l1 is one of several examples. Flow in the interview probably means that the participant is interested in the topic and that 'common ground knowledge' about the researched categories has been established between the researcher and the participant, which is likely to hint at shared understandings between more participants.

### 4.2.6 Social Group Elicitation and Rating Task

In the next sections a method that was developed particularly for the aim of this study for the elicitation and rating of groups of HSs will be presented. During the task, the participants are asked to name distinguishable groups of HSs and to fill them into a two-axis diagram by rating them along the variables 'correctness of Hebrew' and 'social status.' This method will be referred to in the following with the acronym GERT, which stands for 'social Group Elicitation and Rating Task.' First, the theoretical background, the conception of the method and the hypothesis which can be tested with it will be laid out. Then follows a description of the practical application of the task, the participants' reactions and a general evaluation of the method.

#### 4.2.6.1 Theoretical basis

GERT was developed as a method for the second fieldwork stage of this study with the aim of yielding more condensed and readily quantifiable data to complement the interview data I had already collected. My practical experiences from the first fieldwork stage as well as the content of the interviews which I had analyzed in the meantime were the basis for the conception of GERT. During the analysis of the interviews after the first fieldwork stage, I came up with some sketches to summarize the participants' statements about different groups of HSs and what they associated with these groups. One of these sketches, dating from September 2019, can be seen in Figure 4.8. With this sketch, I tried to visualize a system of linguistic variation in MH in reference to the factors 'prestige' and 'correctness of Hebrew.' I wanted to express how these notions are perceived in Israeli society at large, judging from my fieldwork impressions. These impressions were revived during the interview analysis when I was listening to the recordings. Some of my hypothesis from that time will be revised.

The sketch contains twelve notions of groups of HSs such as "Mizrahim," geographic notions, for example, "Jerusalem" or linguistic styles such as "Standard" and "Radio." The entry "Standard" is located on the diagram at the intersection of the axes and marks a neutral point of reference for both variables. Thereby, I was referring to Krefeld's (2011: 104) notion of a neutral background which is conventionalized in a speech community and against which all marked linguistic variants are contrasted.

It can be seen from the sketch that I did not expect a direct correlation of the two factors which are expressed with the axis. For example, participants stated that typical residents of North Tel Aviv can be recognized because of their snobbish style of speech. Even though participants characterized this group as speaking in accordance to the normative standard most of the time, their linguistic style and stereotypical
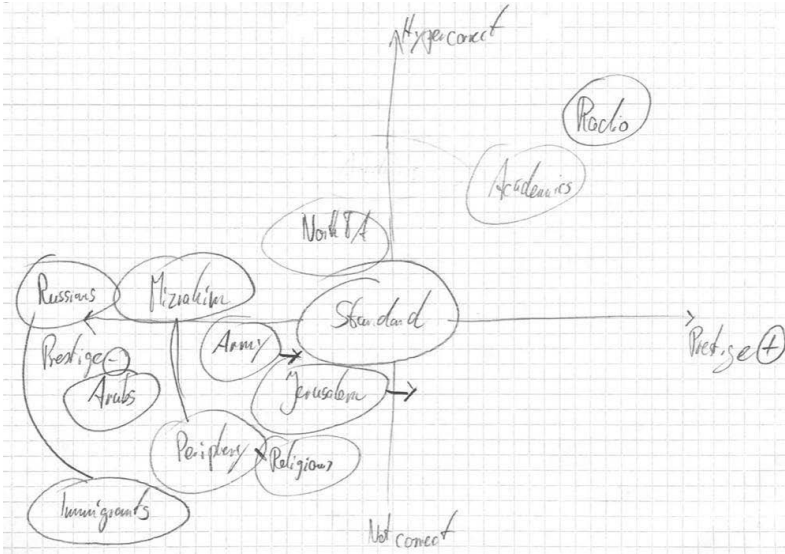
**Fig. 4.8:** Early sketch: 'prestige' and 'correctness of Hebrew.'

appearance was described as unfavorable. Therefore, I put the entry "North TA" a bit higher than "Standard," but in terms of 'prestige' lower than "Standard." It seemed that a HS who adheres to the normative linguistic rules cannot be sure of being perceived as more prestigious than speakers who do not adhere strictly to these rules.

When I came up with the sketch, I was thinking about the dynamics of language change and what I perceived as a surprisingly high degree of deviation from the normative correct Hebrew to which I had been exposed in language courses (see 1). Based on Labov's (2001: 502) description of linguistic change, I expected that more prestigious linguistic variants would be more likely to replace less prestigious variants. The sketch shows that I expected that "army Hebrew" would be rated by participants as a prestigious way of speaking. Consequently, I considered that linguistic variants from "army Hebrew" would "diffuse" – in Schmid's (2020: 93) terminology – in the speech community and replace other forms.

The form of my sketch was inspired by Gafter's (2014) use of diagrams in his investigation of linguistic variation in MH in relation to notions of ethnicity and authenticity. Gafter (2014: 181) expands Lefkowitz' (2004: 89) model *The space of Israeli Identity* which was discussed earlier in 3.1.3, by adding the variable "authenticity" and conflating the original variables "Easternness" and "Israeliness" together. Neither Lefkowitz nor Gafter made use of diagrams for data collection during their ethnographic fieldwork.

There are existing models from Perceptual Dialectology for the elicitation of representations about linguistic variation, for example, 'mental maps.' In their empirical methodological study about mental maps with pupils in Germany, Lameli et al. (2008: 57) explain that they explicitly refrained from the use of the term 'dialect' when instructing the pupils on how to complete the task. Their intention was to elicit any possible concept of language and not just geographically determined concepts – therefore, they used the term *Sprachräume* 'language spaces' in the instruction. Still they got only geographically determined references as results: seven of the eight most prominent categories which were used by the pupils are geographically determined references. They contain four names of German *Bundesländer*, two names of cities and one reference to the cardinal direction 'north.' The only exception, which is not primarily determined by a geographic reference, is the term *Hochdeutsch* 'High German', which commonly denotes 'Standard German.' Historically and from a dialectologist perspective, the term *Hochdeutsch* also denotes regional varieties of German.

The use of maps as templates is likely to trigger geographically determined answers and the use of the term *Sprachräume* 'language spaces' is likely to be interpreted as reference to geographical spaces – especially in combination with the maps which were used for the task. Therefore, I ruled out the use of maps for elicitation in Israel where the factor of geography is not considered as significant for variation in MH. Instead, I decided to use the factors which were addressed by the participants during the interviews to design a context sensitive method of elicitation which is suited for Israel.

### 4.2.6.2 Design and aims of the method

During the first collection of data, it was sometimes difficult to get the participants to reflect in an orderly manner about different social groups in Israel and their ways of speaking. At some point during the interviews, I asked the participants about social groups in Israel and their corresponding styles of speech. Therefore, I used a similar wording as the one which was later fixed in the questionnaire for the guided interviews of the second collection of data as question 14:

**Q14**

| | |
|---|---|
| *Are there people or social groups who speak with a certain style of speech? Can you distinguish them because of their speech?* | יש אנשים או קבוצות חברתיות שיש להם איזה סגנון דיבור מסוים שלהם ? אפשר לזהות אותם רק לפי הדיבור ? |

Usually, the participants elaborated a bit on one social group which came to their mind before they digressed from the question and moved on to other issues they

wanted to talk about. I thought of GERT as a slightly playful stimulus to get the participants to talk more about their representations of social groups in Israel and their ways of speaking Hebrew. It was designed as a method to bring the participants to dwell for some minutes on Q14 and to think out loud which social groups are meaningful to them and how they would order them on the graph. By giving them a task with pen and paper, I wanted to disturb the hierarchy of the interview situation and provide more space for the participants to brainstorm. While the task was recorded as a part of the interview, I hoped that their attention would be continually diverted from the recording device and the formal nature of the interview situation. Because I accompanied them during the task, I could continuously ask the participants about their way of completing the task, investigate about their choices and assist them with further explanations of the task, if necessary. Later, I was able to analyze the recordings of the participants' statements during the task as additional data, in conjunction with the completed templates.

A simple design of the task with pen and paper was adopted because I wanted to be able to conduct the task during the interview, anywhere I met with my participants. I decided against a digital implication of the task because I did not want the participants to get distracted by a potentially unfamiliar device, a software and further instructions on how to use it. Most people are likely to have been exposed to similar tasks with pen and paper many times in school – in geometry class or whenever they were asked to construct diagrams. Therefore, a task which requires the participants to fill out an empty template of a diagram by using a pen should feel familiar to most people and encourage them to start with the task right away, without the need for much explanation. Hage & Harary (1983: 9) point out that "[i]t is easy to understand a social or cognitive structure as a graph open to inspection and amenable to manipulation for the elucidation of its structural properties" and that graphs are an apt method for ethnographic studies because "they have a certain naturalness and inevitability in the representation of complex structures." Within a GTM approach, a task such as GERT can be included in the research design to function just as "repertory grids" as described by Hadley:

> [R]esearch participants essentially provide, through their elicited constructs, coded data. The interviews that follow help to unpack those codes. (Hadley 2017: 99)

GERT was supposed to yield basic categories which HSs use to differentiate social groups and ways of speaking in Israel. I also expected insights into the concepts which are commonly used for these categorization processes. Because of the quantifiable nature of the data that can be elicited with GERT, I expected that I could roughly determine the relevancy of the categories on the basis of their frequency. The rating of the elicited categories and their comparison during the task was intended as a

stimulus to set off natural processes of categorization and to get the participants to talk about these processes.

I chose the variables according to which the categories should be rated on the basis of my fieldwork experience. During the open interviews, the notions of hierarchies between social and especially, ethnic groups, stereotypes and racism often came up. For example, h37f2l1 spoke about the relevancy of hierarchies between *Mizrahim*, *Ashkenazim* and other sub-groups. From her standpoint as someone who opted against a religious way of life, she compared the relevancy of these categories within *Haredi* society, where she grew up, and secular society in Israel, of which she sees herself being part of.

**(4) h37f2l1 (29:12)**

| | |
|---|---|
| *Despite that racism is less severe in the secular* | למרות שבחברה החילונית הגזענות פחות |
| *society – still they categorize. Guys from* | קשה עדיין מקטלגים. חבר׳ה ממשפחות |
| Mizrahi *families are guys who will have a* | מזרחיות הם חבר׳ה שיהיה להם יותר קשה |
| *harder fitting into society, in key positions or ...* | להשתלב בתוך החברה בתפקידי מפתח |
| | או... |

Weingrod describes this recurrent topic in the Israeli discourse as follows:

> [I]n the then mass immigration setting, incomes were determined more by ethnic membership then by length of time spent in the country. These striking inequality figures lead to a lengthy series of demographic studies tracing the "ethnic gap" (par ha'adati, in Hebrew) between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim. Indeed, the gnawing question of ethnic social stratification became a major public issue, and measuring, comparing and explaining ethnic inequality continues to be an Israeli preoccupation. (Weingrod 2016: 284)

H37f2l1 criticized this practice of categorization as racist and stressed that these categories should no longer be relevant for her children who are third generation Israelis. Then she described this topic of categorization as being part of conversations with her friends. Towards the end of her statement she digressed from her general description of the topic with its impact on the Israeli society and expressed personal points of view: she conceded that there are meaningful differences between Israelis with different family origin and even related these differences to language practice.

**(5) h37f2l1 (37:22)**

| | |
|---|---|
| *There are debates about who is higher in the hierarchy, from the point of view of* Ashkenazi race theory: *who is considered more. Although the* Sfaradim, *also among them there is, let's say my* Ashkenazi *girlfriends don't know which ethnicity I am – they know that I am* Mizrahit. *They don't know if I am Iraqi or Moroccan, for them it's all the same. Among the* Mizrahim *there is a total separation between Iraqis, Moroccans, Persians, Yemenites and French-Moroccans. It is very different, there is a common language. It's like to know, let's say you meet a German, but he comes from the same city, where you grew up, there is a common language.* | יש ויכוחים מי יותר בהיררכיה, מבחינת תורת הגזע האשכנזית, מי יותר נחשב. לעומת הספרדים שגם אצלם יש בפנים, נגיד החברות האשכנזיות שלי לא יודעות איזה עדה אני. הם ידעו שאני מזרחית. הם לא יודעות אם אני עיראקית מרוקאית, זה בשבילם אותו דבר. אצל המזרחים יש מאוד הפרדה מוחלטת בין עיראקים למרוקאים לפרסים לתימנים לצפרוקאים. זה נורא משתנה יש שפה משותפת. זה כמו להכיר, נגיד אתה פוגש גרמני, אבל שמגיע מאותו עיר שאתה גדלת בה, אז יש איזה שפה משותפת. |

Based on these and similar statements from the open interviews, I decided to use this topic of hierarchization as a stimulus in GERT, by using the notion of 'prestige' as one axis-variable of the diagram. The significance of 'prestige' for variationist studies has already been discussed in 2.1.2.1 and is summarized again by Milroy:

> It is clear that speaker/listeners attribute greater or lesser prestige to different varieties of language and, indeed, to different languages, and descriptive linguists have, almost routinely, used the idea of prestige in their attempted explanations for linguistic changes. (Milroy 2012: 572)

In respect to linguistic dynamics, Schmid (2016: 550) describes 'prestige' as one of "the social forces acting on the conventionalization process." Schneider & Barron highlight a different aspect which is closely related to prestige, in their list of "micro-social factors" which are significant for linguistic variation:

> Power, which is also referred to as '(relative) social status,' concerns the relationship between interactants in terms of dominance. Interactants may be equal or unequal. (Schneider & Barron 2008: 18)

Milroy hints to the relations between "prestige," "socio-economic class" and "standard" language:

> Variation in the speech community has been interpreted on a scale of prestige, which derives from the socio-economic class of speakers, but this scale is frequently interpreted as though it were identical to a scale of 'standard' to 'non-standard.' (Milroy 2012: 576)

In GERT, the relation between 'prestige' and the representation of linguistic norms is used for the general exploration of HSs' representations of variation. I chose these two concepts as additional stimuli to spark the participants' imagination about different groups of HSs when they are asked Q14. Thereby, I do not posit that these concepts are the most significant variables for variation in MH. Other concepts such as 'age' could have been chosen as well for an elicitation task. However, I hoped that the two variables which are used in GERT are conceptually vague enough to yield categories from different domains, including 'age,' 'region,' 'origin,' 'religion' and others.

In my initial sketch, the axes of the diagram were reversed and I was not entirely sure how to name the axis in Hebrew. I translated 'prestige' into Hebrew as *yoḵra*. During the pilot-interview, I discussed the design of the task with the participant who had just completed GERT for the first time. N31f3l1 expressed that she had some problems with the term *yoḵra* and that she felt that the term *ma'amad*, which is used for '(social) status' in a more sociological understanding, just as in Schneider & Barron's (2008: 18) above citation, would suit my purposes better. She argued that participants will categorize people during GERT more readily in relation to *ma'amad* because it makes them think they are asked about social facts rather than their own opinion, thus being able to take a neutral standpoint.

**(6) n31f3l1 (46:32)**

*It seems to me that when you say to someone*   נראה לי שכשאתה אומר לבן אדם איך
*'how society thinks' – then he relaxes. He is not*   החברה חושבת אז הוא משתחרר, הוא לא
*afraid to put, to classify people into categories.*   מפחד לשים, לקטלג אנשים בקטגוריות.

Thereby she expressed that the outward categorization of people can be problematic. Bourdieu (1991: 121) refers to this aspect with the original meaning of the Greek term "*kategorein*, meaning originally, to accuse publicly."

### 4.2.6.3 Using GERT

At the beginning of the guided interviews, I told my participants that I was going to ask them about fifteen questions and then move on to a pencil and paper task, which I would explain to them in detail later on. Usually, I switched from the interview to the task when I asked Q14: "Are there people or social groups who speak with a certain style of speech? Can you distinguish them because of their speech?" At that moment, I handed the participants an empty template, which was printed on an A4 sized sheet with the sociodemographic questionnaire and the consent form on the back. Figure 4.9 shows the empty template. The template contains a graph consisting of a longer horizontal axis and a shorter vertical axis spanning over the
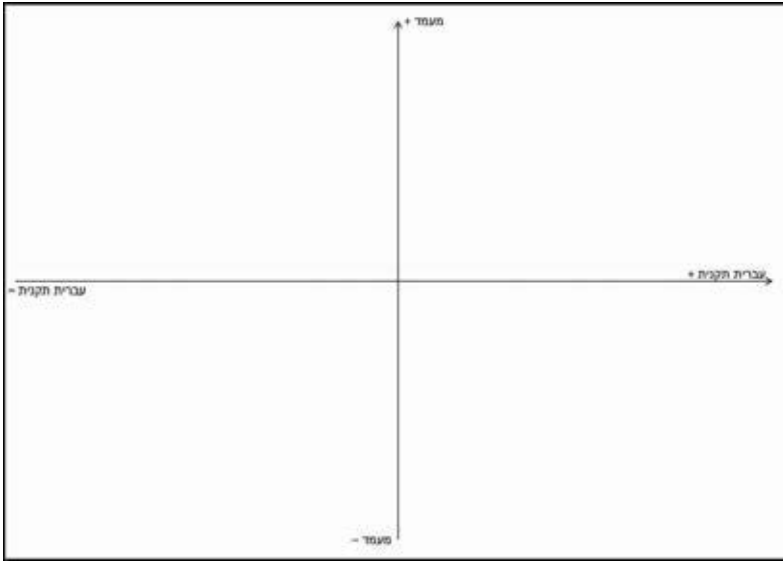
**Fig. 4.9:** Empty GERT template

sheet and crossing at its center. An arrow pointing to the right delimits the right end of the horizontal axis alongside the indication +עברית תקנית *'ivrit tiḵnit* + for 'correct Hebrew +' above it and on its opposite end –עברית תקנית for 'correct Hebrew –.' The vertical axis is delimited at its top by an arrow pointing upwards alongside the indication +מעמד *ma'mad* for '(social) status +' and at its bottom end by –מעמד for '(social) status –.'

The task consists of two stages. At first, I tried to elicit several groups of HSs by asking Q14. Usually, I explained the template right after I had asked the question and most of the time, the participants had already answered the question by mentioning one or two groups of HSs. On some occasions, the participants had already talked about different groups of HSs earlier in the interview on their own initiative. At the second stage of the task, I asked the participants to fill in the template with all the groups they had mentioned by allocating the group's ability to speak correct Hebrew on the horizontal axis and its social status on the vertical axis.

I asked the participants to use a pencil and gave them an eraser so that they could adjust their entries if they wanted to. I also gave them a blue pen and asked them to make use of it for all entries that they didn't come up with by themselves, but were mentioned by me earlier in the recording or for which I asked for specifically. Thus, I wanted to mark the entries which I had potentially induced right away to be able to exclude them from the analysis later on.

When the participants asked how they were supposed to fill in the template, I instructed them to write down the group's designation in a circle at the position on the graph where their ratings on the axes intersected. In contrast to groups, I asked them to indicate persons' names together with an "X" on the graph. Some participants chose slightly different ways of representation. Anyhow, I did not want to force them towards a uniform procedure and only corrected them when the entries and their positions were not recognizable. Figure 4.10 shows the completed template from s41m3l1. This example is representative of the way most participants filled out the template.
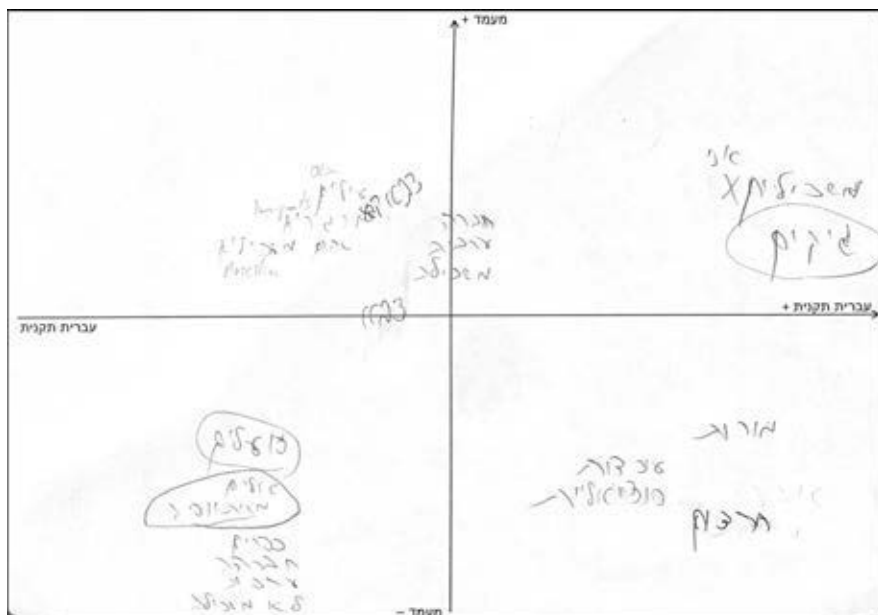


**Fig. 4.10:** GERT template, filled out by s41m3l1

Most of the time, participants started by comparing two or three groups and ordered them tentatively on the template. Then, they would gradually add more groups until they paused to revise their work and either continue to fill in more entries or to express that they were done with the task. Often they changed the order of their entries and made corrections by using the eraser. It seems to me that their basic reasons for ending the task were either that they were satisfied with their work and could not think of more groups or just did not want to continue. Some participants spent over thirty minutes on the task until they expressed their satisfaction with

their work, while others declared that they were done after a short while and were reluctant to add anything, even if I encouraged them to do so.

If a participant hesitated at the beginning of stage two, I explained the template again. Therefore I said, for example, "Right on top means: Speaking correct Hebrew and possessing a high social status" and asked if he could find at least one example for each of the four segments of the graph. If participants paused after filling in a few entries, I asked them for more and reminded them occasionally of groups they had already mentioned earlier, but had not filled in yet. At the end of the task, I asked most of the participants to locate me and themselves on the template as well. In some situations, I used this question to draw the participant's attention back to the task.

Besides the basic indications of "positive" or "negative" with + and – included in the axes' designations, there were no other numerical values printed on the axes. I did not want to ask of the participants to rate their impressions with absolute numbers because I assumed that it was sensible to rate the notions of 'correct Hebrew' and 'social status' in terms of 'more' or 'less correct' and 'higher' or 'lower status.' However, a statement of the type "group X speaks Hebrew correctly to a degree 8 out of 10" seems odd and conceptually too abstract.

When it comes to comparing different entries on the template, I instructed the participants to think of the distance between two entries as carrying meaning. Thus, a position further to the right and further up on the template is intended to stand for 'more correct Hebrew' and 'higher status' compared to entries, which are located to its left and beneath.

Because of the design of the template, it was not possible for the participants to locate all the entries so precisely on the template that the distance between two entries can be measured exactly and compared to other distances on the same template or even with the distances between entries on other participants' templates. Due to the limited space on the template and because I wanted to elicit intuitive statements, I encouraged the participants to allow for some degree of vagueness in their completion of the task.

Consequently, the location of the entries on the template have to be interpreted as ordinally scaled. This means that the entries on each template can be ranked according to their position on the horizontal and on the vertical axis and the resulting ranks for each individual participant can be compared to some degree. In contrast, it would not make sense to measure distances between two entries on the same template precisely and use the resulting values for comparisons. Nor would it be sensible to compare the entries' absolute positions – for example, 1.2 cm left of the status axis – in between different participants. The task was not designed to allow for comparisons of this sort.

The position of each entry, in respect to the four different sections of the template, can be extracted in a straightforward manner. Occasionally, participants posited

entries very close to or on the axes of the graph, thus indicating a neutral rating of the entry. Still, most entries are positioned clearly in only one of the four sections of the graph. Because of the printed designations on the axes with plus and minus signs and my explanations in the fashion of "Right on top means: Speaking correct Hebrew and possessing a high social status," I argue that the location of an entry can be interpreted as indicating the participants' tendency to rate the entry 'positively,' 'negatively' or in some cases 'neutrally.' The methods, which were devised for the interpretation of the GERT templates, will be presented in 5.4 and 5.5.

### 4.2.6.4 Evaluation of the method

Participants displayed different attitudes towards GERT. Principally, all reacted positively to the task and I had the impression that all participants understood the requirements of the task and none dismissed the task completely. Some spent more than thirty minutes with the task and apparently enjoyed it, while others were very quick to complete it and probably just wanted to get it done. The basic form of the template and the way of filling it out with pencil and pen worked fine. The participants were able to compare their entries spatially on the template, even though no absolute numbers were indicated on the axes and the available space was limited. Because I wanted the participants to complete the task intuitively and without thinking too much about the details of the graphical representation, I encouraged them to allow for some degree of vagueness.

Apparently, most participants understood the intended meaning of the axes intuitively and only some asked for additional explications. While the concept 'correct Hebrew' was not questioned, some asked if they should treat 'social status' from a societal perspective or from their own point of view. Most of them conceded that the perspectives are interdependent and inseparable, as n31f3l1 put it:

**(7) n31f3l1 (46:06)**

| | |
|---|---|
| *It seems to me that it doesn't matter because as soon as you ask someone to classify it – clearly it is how he sees it. It's how he imagines how the society sees it [...] like, either way it's subjective.* | נראה לי שזה לא משנה כי כאילו, כי ברגע שאתה מבקש מבן אדם אחד לדרג את זה, ברור שזה איך שהוא רואה את זה. זה איך שהוא מדמיין שהחברה רואה [...] כאילו בכל אופן זה סובייקטיבי. |

From the way the participants completed the task, I deduce that the concepts 'social status' and 'correct Hebrew' are relevant for HSs: most of the participants handled these concepts confidently for their rating of groups of HSs. Although it may be

unusual to talk directly about these concepts, they are likely to refer to them somehow in natural contexts as well.

Ultimately, it can neither be controlled nor determined precisely how the task is understood by each participant. For example, it is likely that the participants substitute a question which is connected to the task with another question, thus following Kahneman's (2011: 97) principle of "substitution" of a complicated question with an easier one. Participants may have rated whether they like a certain social group, instead of their social status or their tendency to speak correct Hebrew.

What I consider innovative about the method is the combination of the semi-directed interview situation with a task in which participants are encouraged to take a more active part and use pen and paper alongside their explanations. Of course, more participants could be reached with a digital implementation of the task which can be distributed in large numbers and filled out remotely. For my purpose, it was crucial to get to know the participants to be able to contextualize their statements. GERT was not designed as a research tool for the generation of quantitatively usable data. My focus was on the qualitative interpretation of the participants' statements, for which I used GERT as a trigger.

Because I let the participants use pencil and paper for the task, the analysis of the filled-out sheets had to be carried out one by one, as described in 5.4. This meticulous way of analyzing each sheet individually is time consuming and therefore the number of participants which can be included in the analysis is naturally limited. The mere summary of the twenty-one sheets my participants had completed took more than a week's time. There are limits to the sample size due to the method of data collection as well because it is time-consuming to sit down with each participant individually. The quality of the interviews and the obtained data is dependent on the ability of the interviewer to spark the participants' interest in the task and to show interest in their statements. Therefore, not too many standardized interviews should be carried out in a short time-span. I felt that two guided interviews with GERT per day, with approximately three days of interviews per week, was a good measure. Several researchers working independently can reach a bigger sample size – but in this case different ways of conducting the interviews have to be accounted for which may lead to a more complex overall research design.

In comparison to the use of mental maps, GERT is a stimulus which is more likely to yield a broader spectrum of categories from different conceptual domains. By the use of the concepts 'correct Hebrew' and 'social status' as stimuli, different interdependent factors such as wealth and education are highlighted in relation to common attitudes towards social groups. As explained above, in 4.2.6.2, GERT was specifically designed for the context of Israel. For other contexts and different research objectives, different variables may be more appropriate.

In general, a more quantitatively oriented approach could use a similar task within a highly standardized set-up: for example, an online resource can be used to reach as many participants as possible.

## 4.3 Organization of the data collection into corpora

The data collection for this study consists of three main corpora. The socio-demographic data of the participants which was collected with the help of a questionnaire was transferred from the filled out questionnaires into a spreadsheet and was summarized in 4.2.2.3.

The recordings of the interviews are separated into two sub-corpora: open interviews together with expert interviews and the guided interviews which were conducted in combination with GERT. For the analysis of the interviews, I entered the most important metadata of the recordings and the progress of the analysis in a spreadsheet and wrote a case summary for every interview. For the transcription and the coding of the recordings, I used the open source software ELAN.[10] While I mostly coded and summarized the open and the expert interviews and only transcribed them selectively, all guided interviews were fully transcribed and coded. Based on the reflections which are outlined by Izre'el (2005), I decided to stick to an "intelligent verbatim" transcription style oriented to the standard Hebrew orthography (Hadley 2017: 81).

During the analysis, it was necessary to translate from the original Hebrew data into English codes. The coding with the software made it easy to listen to the original recordings while editing the codes. Therefore, I could compare the analytic decisions and the translations at any time with the original recordings to avoid losing track of the data. ELAN contains multiple options for the export of transcripts, for example, into a txt-file, which opens possibilities for further analysis and representation of the data.

The third corpus consists of the filled out GERT templates which were analyzed with the help of a spreadsheet, as will be explained in detail in 5.4. This data will be referred to as "GERT corpus."

All recordings, interview transcripts and the GERT corpus are published as Striedl (2023). Recordings contain diverse narrative contexts with up to three participants, and the sample of participants is socio-demographically rich. The data is accessible upon request and can be reused for various research purposes.

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**10** https://archive.mpi.nl/tla/elan

## 4.4  Summary and evaluation of the methods

My approach to the data collection and the development of my research methods was described chronologically and in the context of the theoretic premises. The research design evolved in accordance with the principles of GTM: during subsequent stays in the field, I could develop my research questions, adapt the methods and narrow the scope of the research objective. The flexible, qualitative approach that was chosen for the exploration of a so far understudied area not only turned out to be practicable in the scope of a PhD project, but it yielded large corpora of valuable data which can be studied for various purposes, beyond the research goals of this study.

Ethnographic fieldwork can be rewarding and challenging, at the same time. For the contextualization of the collected data and as an example for researchers who plan to undertake a similar research project, the application of my methods in the field were described and evaluated in detail. Besides purely scientific considerations, organizational aspects about fieldwork in Israel and in general were discussed. While fieldwork is potentially a good way to generate authentic and relevant data, this method has natural restrictions. Any approach that is centered on conversational data is likely to neglect the less eloquent, or to oversee the silent members of the researched population. Even if these members can be reached during fieldwork, it is contradictory to expect them to produce articulate and easily analyzable statements. In other words, some participants probably were used to a less verbal style of communication than what is expected for the collection of recorded speech. Even though I did not experience a communication barrier with these participants, it was more difficult to formulate interpretations of their statements. For example, t37m3l2 used very few words and incomplete sentences, which he repeated. It seems that words were not as important for him to get his message across. At times he even spoke in a higher register, but sometimes he just stopped in the middle of the sentence when he felt that he had made his point and I had indeed understood. For the analysis, it is a challenge to give silent types of participants enough consideration and to convey their messages eloquently in the text.