

7 Conclusion

New lines of research for the study of linguistic variation in Israel were explored in this study with the potential to enrich methodological discussions about the study of linguistic variation in general. The choice of Israel as research area was crucial for the development of the original research design. Israel is geographically and culturally remote enough from the well-trodden paths of linguistic research to facilitate a relatively unbiased approach to reassess the established theories about linguistic variation. This effect was naturally reinforced, due to the researcher's position as a cultural outsider to Israel and a non-native HS. As Becke et al. suggest, many parallels can be found in the Israeli context which allow for comparisons and the transfer of hypotheses to other research areas:

While the state is often reduced in public perception to its conflictual relations with its neighbours, Israel offers an important microcosm that can be used to examine topics of global significance such as nationalism, coexistence and areas of tension between religions or migration history in a very profitable way.¹ (Becke et al. 2020: 18, my translation)

All the mentioned aspects about nationalism, religion, and history of migration were central threads in this study. In fact, the prominence of these and additional aspects in the HSs' representations of linguistic variation suggests that they should be considered more thoroughly for the study of linguistic variation in general. While it is assumed that 'regionality' is the main factor for linguistic variation in European contexts, it is evident that additional factors such as the ones that were highlighted in this study need to be considered in any contemporary variationist framework. The analysis of empirical data for this study demonstrated that concepts from cognitive science can enhance such a framework – consequently, it was argued to strive towards a Cognitive Variationist theory.

7.1 Methodological aspects

Knowledge about the cognitive basis of social and linguistic categorization processes is a prerequisite for the proper understanding of linguistic variation in its context: In-

¹ German original: Während der Staat in der öffentlichen Wahrnehmung nicht selten auf die konflikthaften Beziehungen mit seinen Nachbarn reduziert wird, bietet Israel aber einen wichtigen Mikrokosmos, anhand dessen sich Themen von globaler Bedeutung wie Nationalismus, Koexistenzen und Spannungsfelder von Religionen oder Migrationsgeschichte besonders gewinnbringend untersuchen lassen.

sights into the structure of the speakers' own categories, their associations and their contexts of use are needed to determine their meaning and to assert their possible effects on linguistic as well as on social systems. The empirical analysis of the categories that were used by participants during the interviews for this study showed the inseparability of social and linguistic categorization processes (see 6.1). Hence, these processes can at best be studied in conjunction. The label 'Cognitive Sociolinguistics' (Kristiansen 2008) expresses the aim to strive towards such an integrative framework that accommodates cognitive scientific theories within contemporary studies of linguistic and social processes. While theories from sociology and linguistics have been combined in interdisciplinary approaches to some extent, all disciplines would benefit from a more intensive and explicit exchange which can lead to a new theoretic momentum. For example, sociological research can benefit from empirical methods which are applied in linguistics: especially corpus linguistics can help to determine the nature of social categories such as 'Mizrahim' and 'Ashkenazim' and their use.

This study serves as an example for the combination of qualitative research methods, including fieldwork and interviewing techniques, with experiments and quantitatively oriented surveys and thereby, yielded valuable insights into these categories, their meaning and their impact on social structure. A wholesome research design enables the researcher to investigate gaps and relations between conventionalized categories and to find out more about the facts that cannot be modeled in terms of hard data – such as demographic statistics and linguistic structures in corpora and correlations between these types of data.

Theoretical input from the sociology of knowledge and concepts from cognitive psychology such as Rosch's (1978) *principles of categorization* can be applied beneficially for the analysis of social organization and linguistic behavior. From a universal perspective on representations of linguistic variation, the distinction between in-group and out-group – e.g. "our way of speaking" in opposition to "their way of speaking" – is the basis for any representations of regionally marked linguistic variants (cf. Harder 2010: 416). In contexts where societies are typically conceptualized as homogeneous, the differentiation between in-group and out-group is conjured with a regional differentiation of 'here,' i.e. 'our place,' and 'there,' i.e. 'their place.' However, the association of regionally defined concepts and group affiliation is not universal. Especially in immigrant societies such as Israel, 'regionality' can be deferred in favor of more complex concepts such as 'ethnicity,' 'nationality' and 'religion' which serve as primary categories for the speakers' distinctions between in- and out-groups – that is to say, for their construction of identity.

In this usage-based domain, much empirical research needs to be carried out to generate and validate original theories: as outlined in 2.3, it is desirable to strive for a fourth wave of variationist studies with the focus on the integration of cognitive

science into the sociolinguistic research paradigm. For this study, original methods were explored to suit the theoretical aims that were just reviewed. Following the tenets of PVL (see 2.1.4), I claim that in any under-researched area, it is most efficient to start exploring linguistic variation by studying speakers' representations thereof. On the one hand, this line of investigation with a highlight on the speakers' declarative knowledge (DK) is more likely to surface promising areas for future research in a short period of time than cost-intensive large scale surveys with a structurally oriented focus on production data (PD). On the other hand, the collection of DK is a prerequisite for any sensible analysis of PD because context matters. The study of DK requires a research design that is qualitatively oriented. In general, the methodological contextualization within a post-structuralist research paradigm helps to set off PVL from its theoretic predecessors and further underlines its own legitimacy.

In the course of this study, the principles of Grounded Theory Methodology (see 2.2) were followed for the planning and the implementation of an adequate research design that was able to combine both flexible and well-structured elements. In the beginning, open exploration was used to let the research population indicate the hot-spots of condensed meaning. In the following, a sound research design could be achieved through recursivity: the subsequent testing of hypothesis in discussions with the researched population was an integral part of the methods of this study. Thereby, the relevancy of the studied categories for the researched population could be assured. In the light of these methodological considerations, a new context-sensitive method for the elicitation of the speakers' categories for linguistic variation was introduced with GERT. The contextualization of the findings with participants' statements contributed to the general accessibility of the study and revealed further implications which can be tackled in future research.

Leaving the scientific aims of this study aside, some final remarks about working with participants are due. During the conversations which revolved around topics which are typically not on anyone's everyday agenda, participants displayed an incredible amount of enthusiasm and their reflected way of argumentation was at the same time astounding and inspiring. I am convinced that these kind of conversations which enable the exchange of ideas between participants and researchers can have valuable and lasting effects. At the very least, these conversations can help to enrich political discourse about several aspects that were addressed in this study. Personal perspectives on intricate matters such as religiosity, ethnicity and nationalism were constantly exchanged and most likely have been taken up in subsequent conversations. Ultimately, the understanding of social categorization is crucial to understanding the dynamics of harmful social processes such as marginalization, stigmatization and discrimination. Insights into these processes can hopefully contribute to the shaping of respectful societies.

7.2 Representations of linguistic variation in MH and lines for further research

The main empirical achievement of this study is the determination of common categories for linguistic variation in MH (see 5.4.3) and their contextualization with participants' utterances (see Chapter 6), which yielded insights into the structure and the use of the categories. While these categories are highly specific to the Israeli context, it became clear that traditional parameters for the classification of sociolinguistic variation need to be applied with consideration: at least for the participants of this study, other variables than 'regionality' and 'social class' turned out to be significant. In accordance with the existing research on linguistic variation in MH, no evidence for common representations of diatopic variation could be found: neither did participants systematically mention any geographical categories, nor did I notice any regionally determined variants during all the time I spent in Israel and when I analyzed the interview corpus that I recorded for this study.

Studies on sociolinguistic variation in MH can depart from the categories which were determined with the method GERT. These categories need to be researched with perception experiments and corpus analysis to reveal common associations with specific linguistic phenomena.

On the basis of Rosch's definition, most of these core categories can be understood as belonging to a basic level of social and linguistic categories for the Israeli context:

[B]asic objects appeared to be the most abstract categories for which an image could be reasonably representative of the class as a whole. [...] objects may be first [35] seen or recognized as members of their basic category, and [...] only with the aid of additional processing can they be identified as members of their superordinate or subordinate category. (Rosch 1978: 34–35)

For example, most participants asserted that younger L1 HSs can be classified as either 'Mizrahi' or 'Ashkenazi,' while subordinate categories such as 'Iraqi' were no longer discernible. The portrayals of *Mizrahi* characters in TV productions reveal that there are stereotypical images for this category, while it is hard to think of a stereotypical image on a superordinate category: arguably, any representation of the more general category 'Israeli' is associated either with *Mizrahi* or with *Ashkenazi* attributes. Therefore, the categories 'Mizrahi' and 'Ashkenazi' qualify as basic categories – they are essential Israeli styles which can be performed with linguistic means, among other things (see the "language as identity marker paradigm" Polzenhagen & Dirven 2008: 255–256).

Also Schmid's description of "basic level terms" resonates with several core categories of this study:

In the field of word-formation, basic level terms occur frequently as heads in compounds, because they have so many facets that can be further specified [...] When they occupy the modifier position, basic level terms are often exploited for their privileged position in associative networks: most things that you need while you are at the dinner-table can be found in this paradigm, for example the items table-cloth, table-linen, table-mat, table-knife, table-spoon, table ware, not to forget the table manners. (Schmid 1996: 293)

Categories such as ‘Mizrahi’ are extremely productive lexemes – there are, for example: *Mizrahi*-music, *Mizrahi*-cinema, *Mizrahi*-food, *Mizrahi*-look, *Mizrahi*-humour and *Mizrahi*-parties (in the sense of a political party) and the modifiers *Ashkenazi*-, *Haredi*-, Arab-, Russian-, periphery-, *Kibbutz*- and army- are similarly productive.

Besides the core categories that were determined with GERT, the concepts ‘standard Hebrew’ and ‘correct Hebrew’ were used by participants to make a basic distinction between conventionalized and normative correct language use (see 6.2). ‘Standard Hebrew’ was described as containing a moderate amount of ‘slang expressions’ and widespread linguistic phenomena which are normatively incorrect. While the notion ‘correct Hebrew’ was associated with *Ashkenazim* and a high level of education, ‘standard Hebrew’ was described as a default category: this notion is neither typically *Ashkenazi* nor *Mizrahi* – but, a hybrid category which can accommodate several and even contradictory stereotypical identities from the Israeli social space, such as the core categories of this analysis which are represented in association with certain linguistic styles that were described in terms of accents, lexical phenomena and different LAs.

Throughout this study, many aspects were highlighted which invite original lines of sociolinguistic research in Israel. First of all, there is still an urgent need for the compilation of multifaceted corpora of spoken Hebrew to expand the possibilities for usage-based linguistic research. The extensive interview corpus of more than 40 recorded hours which was specifically collected for this study is partly transcribed, published as Striedl (2023) and accessible for scientific purposes.

To pursue the path that was taken with this study, future research can try to answer the question: What exactly makes HSs sound Arab, Russian, *Mizrahi*, *Ashkenazi*, Army-like, *Haredi*, Ethiopian and – in respect to the generational variable – senior or young? The analysis of stereotypical portrayals of these categories, for example, in Israeli TV productions can pose a viable starting point for the design of perception experiments.

