Jewish Leadership, Language Choices and Community Sustainability

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Produced in]'s Spring 2021 ENC1102H

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For thousands of years and despite continual dispersions and persecutions, the Jewish people have maintained cultural continuity. Language has consistently been among the leading factors in Jewish communal and cultural survival. Analysis of Jewish linguistic practices and choices can help us identify and understand the strategies which can empower minority cultures to persist and thrive despite the assimilationist pressures from dominant cultures.

Jewish communities have a long, complicated, and firmly established relationship of using quasilects and translanguaging. Bryant (2013) defines quasilects as a "historical language which is used for cultural purposes, but not for open-ended active or receptive communication" (p. 696). Translanguaging, is a type of communication which takes place by utilizing multiple language

practices like code-switching, language blending (also known as code-meshing), and loan words. As a people intimately familiar with expulsion, othering, and religious/racial persecution, Jews' historically unsettled community necessitated a constantly fluctuating yet common pattern of communication; thus, the use of quasilects and translanguaging became part of their everyday life. According to Benor (2009), "the norm throughout Jewish history has been communities that have migrated to a new land and taken on a variety of the local language, infusing it with distinctive Jewish features" (p. 236). A community dispelled across the nations and continents of the world, the Jewish people adapted to their particular regional cultures while maintaining aspects of their supranational identity. For example, prayer books for the holiday of Passover were historically printed with different commentary languages for their respective audiences but always shared common lettering (in Hebrew), and maintained the original Hebrew prayers. The *Haggadah shel Pesach*—printed in Livorno, Italy in 1867—serves as a symbolic example for the blending of languages in diaspora communities. Produced for a Tuscan-speaking audience, the prayer book utilizes Hebrew Prayers and Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) commentary with Hebrew script, as many Italian communities were refugees of the Spanish expulsions of the 15th century. (Sternthal, 2021)

Throughout the world similar quasi-Jewish languages sprang into living modes of communication, from Judeo-Italian, Ladino, Yiddish, Syriac, Judæo-Provençal, etc. The plethora of similar but unique forms of communication allowed Jewish communities to connect to each other linguistically, intellectually, and religiously, despite their geographic separation in an age of historically slow-moving communication, through their use of translanguaging. The cultural and geographic circumstances, which had compelled these adaptations, persisted for millennia. These adaptations connected Jewish communities spanning from the Babylonian exile of the 6th century BCE, to Roman domination of the Levant in the 1st century CE, to the shtetls (small villages) of early 20th century Europe.

Scholars have established the existence of similarly unique Jewish languages in America, whose development follows a historically consistent pattern of adaptation of the regional primary linguistic culture into Jewish terms. Benor (2016) writes that scholars have argued the prevalent and historical pattern of Jewish language practices has been characterized by assimilation (to the dominant culture and linguistic traditions) rather than adaptation. However, she argues instead that Jewish communities maintain a pattern of linguistic adaptation instead of assimilation, modifying languages of the surrounding nations into new and distinct Jewish languages for the purpose of in-group speech and distinguishing communities. Baumel (2003) identified the phenomenon of blending English and Jewish languages in his study of *Hasidic* Jews, an ultra-orthodox sect in England. His research showed how the *Misnagedim* (a sect of *Orthodox* Jews), through a language he terms *Yeshivish,* blend Aramaic, Yiddish, and Biblical Hebrew with Standard English expressions. The *Yeshivish* movement was also recognized by Fader's (2007) research, where she found that religious Jews participate in traditional patterns of distinguishing Jewish languages through their adaptation of English in the modern form of communication, *Yeshivish/Yinglish*. Therefore, scholars have mostly agreed and identified how Jewish communities in English-speaking countries have continued the historical process of linguistic adaptation.

Jewish communities also actively consider their unique forms of code-switching as a mode or strategy to establish distinctiveness between Jews and non-Jews, and between different Jewish communities. Baumel (2003) argued that many different *Hasidic* communities used language, most commonly Yiddish and Hebrew, as a means of communal identification. One English headmaster Baumel interviewed, decided to make his school bilingual in Yiddish and English, arguing that "Yiddish is a language for 'uniting Jews.'" (p. 95) According to Baumel's research, *Chabad* (another sect of *Hasidim*) households are increasingly using Yiddish as a communal identifier and specifically choose to maintain a Russian-Lithuanian dialect of Yiddish, distinguishing themselves from other *Hasidic* and Jewish communities. Similarly, the *Ger Hasidim* use Hebrew orthography for street signs

or Jewish marketplaces to distinguish themselves as Jewish. However, despite using Yiddish and Biblical Hebrew to identify themselves as Jewish, the community refrains from incorporating Modern Israeli Hebrew to disassociate from more modern/progressive Jewish communities. Benor (2009) argued that contrasting communal norms amongst linguistic Jewish groups, such as *Ashkenazim* and *Sephardim* lead to distinctions in how they adopt loan words, creating communal distinctiveness. *Sephardic* communities are more likely to use Hebrew expressions while *Ashkenazic* communities make more use of their historical language, Yiddish.Benor also identified as Baumel had, the use of Hebrew characters and orthography within American Jewish life to express and identify Jewish identity in a non-Jewish area. Fader (2007) demonstrated in her research how *Hasidic* communities in New York City actively view their language positively in contrast to a negative association with Standard English, viewing their use of Yiddish specifically as a signifier of distinction. Fader presented an article from the community explicitly stating in Yiddish: "*Mir darfn nisht fargesn az der tsil fun der Yiddisher sphrakh iz zikh optsuzunderen fun de goyim*" (We must not forget that the goal of the Yiddish language is to separate us from Gentiles.) Jewish communities, therefore, recognize the connection between language and culture and actively see their use of loan-words and alternative languages as a means for distinguishing themselves as a unique community.

Scholars have also identified a linguistic divide within religious Jewish communities between the speech of men and women, finding that boys are more likely to speak or utilize loan-words from Hebrew, Aramaic, or Yiddish. These patterns establish a connection between decisions about language made on a communal level, and social or linguistic outcomes. Benor (2009) found that communal use and study of traditional texts profoundly affects the linguistic repertoire of a community member. As a result, men who culturally spend more time studying have a stronger connection and use historical Jewish languages more often than women who less frequently study religious texts. In a separate article, Benor (2004), noted how gender roles—and

consequently gendered approaches to Jewish learning—have significantly impacted the linguistic practices of Orthodox boys and girls in America. She found that, although men and women both knew and recognized religious language, religious boys utilized their loan-words from Jewish languages in 4.8% of their speech, while their female counterparts only used loan-words 1.9% of the time. These patterns remained prevalent even while discussing religious topics. Benor (2004) argued that the linguistic outcomes are the result of gender roles in the Jewish community which expect boys to learn more technical topics and to be accustomed and familiar with textual references, while girls use them less frequently because of a less technical upbringing. As a result, although girls know the same language and loan-words as their male schoolmates, they are less likely to use them in their speech (p.159)

While unconscious decisions about language affected gendered outcomes in Jewish communities, some communal decisions regarding language are instituted with clear outcomes in mind. Fader (2007) introduced the influence of communal policy on linguistic practices through a statement from an article in a Yiddish publication: "*Oy bwa khapn zikh ober aran etlikhe Englishe, ober Yiddish-klingende verter, darf es aykh nisht tsufil 'bodern'*" (If some English words come into Yiddish, but they sound Yiddish, they shouldn't 'bother' anyone. p. 8) (Fader, 8) That is to say, *Hasidic* communities in New York, according to Fader's research, make a conscious effort to adapt English into Jewish culture, rather than have Yiddish/Jewish culture become assimilated into American culture. Communal decisions, either made subconsciously or purposely, can therefore have an immediate and realized effect on a community's linguistic practices.

In the modern age the ties of oppression historically connecting dispersed Jewish communities—which had necessitated the development of translanguaging modes of communications—have changed drastically, threatening the continuity of the practice in Jewish life. Although anti-Semitism and persecution remain widespread, the advent of globalism and the Internet have produced the capacity to connect people across regional and linguistic boundaries,

mitigating the longstanding need to constantly reshape and adapt different regional languages to a Jewish mode of communication. A structured and standardized form of Hebrew has arisen from the founding of the State of Israel, offering a singular form of Jewish communication. Modern Hebrew, as disseminated in the classrooms of Jewish schools throughout the world, has begun to establish a standardized form of Jewish language. As this modern language has taken hold, it has usurped the centuries of unique cultural features translanguaging provided. There exists an ongoing argument amongst Jewish scholars and communities about the role Modern Israeli Hebrew should play in Jewish community development. William Cutter (1995) outlined some of these arguments and identified negative opinions about the advent of the modern language (1995) Opponents argue that "Hebrew has become, in Lewis Glinert's term, a "quasilect," a medium that binds people to a community but is not used to generate meaning. Jewish life can now be translated into one's vernacular, if the thickness of cultural experience is secondary to abstract meanings." (p. 295) Cutter however argues that Hebrew possesses a socially important "wealth unspent," which connects Jewish people with a connected past and a similar destiny. Similar arguments take place within Jewish communities. Baumel (2003) identified how *Hasidic* communities in England prioritize teaching historical Jewish languages such as Yiddish and Aramaic over Modern Israeli Hebrew, adapting their language—*Yeshivish*—along an *Ashkenazic* (European) dialect of Hebrew speech unlike Standard Israeli Hebrew which codified a *Sephardic* (Middle Eastern/North African) pronunciation. Additionally, *Hasidic* communities are more likely to use Biblical Hebrew or Yiddish on their store signs to signify Jewish identity, and generally avoid using standard Hebrew, as opposed to more Modern Jewish communities which use Standard Hebrew more frequently.

Ultimately, the current conversation surrounding the use of Jewish languages seeks to identify and describe language practices within American or English Jewish communities but does not clearly define or discuss how those linguistic choices are made within those communities. While Benor, Fader, and Baumel all studied different Jewish communities and clarified their practices and

opinions about language, their work did not emphasize or develop an understanding of how and why those community's language choices and policies were made and implemented. Benor's (2004) work, however, began to identify the importance of communal decisions about language on community development regarding gendered speech, linking communal policy about language to real-world outcomes. Since the decisions being made by Jewish communities, as Benor demonstrated, can have a significant impact on community members, it necessitates a deeper analysis into how Jewish community leaders make their decisions about linguistic practices.

Description of Study

The purpose of my research is to document and analyze the decisions which leaders of Jewish community's make regarding language and identify reasons and intentions that shape those decisions. Although previous research focused on distinctiveness and separateness as important factors in Jewish communities' views on language, my research shows that Jewish leaders, at both the local and national level, make decisions about linguistic practices for the purpose of clarity, authenticity, and inclusivity. My research has utilized the translingual framework as a basis of analysis and study for the primary data which has been collected. I conducted two interviews with Rabbis (Jewish leader) at the University of Central Florida, responsible for the development of Jewish communities on campus. Their insight clarifies the decisions local community leaders make when choosing whether to use Jewish languages through multilingualism or utilize the universality of English as the dominant language in the United States. Furthermore, I used textual analysis of documents written by a national leader of the Jewish community in America to draw comparisons or differences between decisions made about linguistic practices at the local and national level. Findings from the research showed that language choices by national and local leaders are determined by the same factors of inclusivity, authenticity, and clarity.

The Jewish community serves as a prime example for research into the effect language has on community development and sustaining cultural ties in an age of multiculturalism and globalism. Many minoritized communities globally and in the U.S. are making attempts to revitalize and maintain their languages and cultures, particularly pressure to assimilate to dominant cultures and languages. Romney (2013) shows how the Yurok tribe are making efforts to revive and revitalize their Yurok language by teaching it in community schools taught by Native American elders. Similar to how the Yurok tribe sought to revive their language through the reintroduction of its use in its various cultural practices, Jewish language serves as an additional example of a community which, through thousands of years of persecution and banishment across the world, managed to maintain its culture and linguistic practices. My research into the Jewish communities' linguistic practices can serve to broaden the discussion and provide a historical template for the continuity of minority languages and communities across the globe. There exists a necessary chain, an unbreakable bond between the use of Jewish languages and cultural and communal continuity which needs to be understood.

My research will be guided by the translingual framework of research, viewing language as an everchanging mode of communication which developing its own unique forms and modes serve to open barriers between communities and different viewpoints, instead of creating barriers to understanding. In one's research on semantic traditions, one must recognize that they are unique, and that speakers utilize them to connect with other communities and cultures. The implications for my research would be to recognize all forms of Judeo-English communication as being valid in the landscape of Jewish communication in America. Instead of focusing on the direct or literal meaning of certain words in their origin languages (Yiddish, Hebrew, etc.), I will focus on what those words mean to the community, and how they are utilized in their shared space.

My research question asks how and why leaders within the Jewish community make decisions regarding the use of historical Jewish languages in their role as "community builders". To

accomplish my goals within the translingual framework, I will be utilizing interviews and textual analysis. I will also draw from my own experience as a member of the Orthodox community. Although textual analysis cannot perceive or imply the intentions of a community, I will offset those limitations through interviews conducted with community leaders, gathering an official account from community builders about how they utilize language, and my own experience.

My research was guided through specific case studies of Jewish community leaders to study the specific decisions certain leaders take regarding language. I conducted interviews with leaders of the community who have insight into the decisions actively made to incorporate translingualism into community development. I interviewed two Rabbis at the University of Central Florida, responsible for the development of Jewish communities on campus. Their insight will involve and the decisions they take when choosing whether to use Jewish languages through multilingualism or to utilize the universality of English for the sake of simplicity. Furthermore, I will be specifically analyzing the use of multilingualism in community messaging regarding the Coronavirus pandemic. The messages analyzed were written by Rabbi Schachter, a respected leader throughout the Jewish community known as a *gadol shebedor* (great of our generation). Throughout the pandemic, Jews across the world looked to him for answers to religious proceedings during the unprecedented period of community-lessness. As different holidays have come throughout the past year, Schachter delivered instructions to communities on how to proceed with the holiday in a *Halachic* (per the Torah) way. In his writings, he utilized Hebrew, Aramaic, Yiddish, and English, which I will evaluate through the approach of textual analysis, as it relates to creating universal messages for a disconnected Jewish community, bringing them together during the pandemic.

Description of Methods

My research question attempts to discover the reasoning behind the decisions that leaders of the Jewish community make in regard to utilizing historical Jewish languages. I therefore conducted interviews of Rabbis (spiritual/communal leaders in the Jewish community) at the

University of Central Florida to understand and analyze more personally how they came to make those decisions. I have been part of the Modern Orthodox Jewish community my whole life and have heard Jewish languages being used constantly, contributing to me gaining an imperfect understanding of Aramaic, Hebrew, and Yiddish languages. Although I can understand many words and phrases commonly utilized within American-Jewish communities, I cannot speak them fluently. Having a background and personal connection with these leaders, as a member of their community, gave me access and the ability to ask more direct cultural and linguistic questions that someone studying decisions made from the outside may not be able to adapt to understanding communal linguistic policy.

My interview questions focused on three main subject areas:

1) Linguistic Background

2) Language Use

3) How those languages are introduced/utilized by the interviewee's in their role as a community leader

The purpose of asking about the Rabbis' linguistic backgrounds was to identify the traditions and linguistic repertoire of the interviewee; ascertaining the languages and scope in which they might use in their communities. Since Jewish communities have been historically separated and developed different cultural traditions, certain community leaders may utilize languages or linguistic traditions which cannot be accessed or understood in other Jewish communities. As the interviews revealed, one Rabbi might have the ability to access Russian or Yiddish while another of a Sephardic community may incorporate or understand Arabic. The extent to which a community leader understands/speaks a particular language will inform and impact the languages they choose to introduce into their communities.

Establishing a community leader's use of languages informed me about how the languages a Rabbi speaks are used personally. Therefore, I could compare the decisions/policies a leader made

regarding implementing certain languages in the community with their own practices, determining whether those decisions are meditated or an outgrowth of their everyday practices.

My main subject area focused on how and why those languages are introduced/utilized in the interviewee's role as a community leader. These questions directly addressed the goal of the study and sought to determine and ascertain the decision process behind a community leaders' language choices and policies. I first questioned how they implement historical Jewish languages, and finally why those decisions were made.

Rabbi Lipskier Interview: Authenticity and Inclusivity

Rabbi Lipskier serves as Rabbi at Chabad of UCF, an organization which, according to their website, has dedicated themselves to "engaging every Jew, regardless of background, affiliation, or personal level of observance, and providing resources to help increase their level of Jewish knowledge, enthusiasm, and commitment" (Chabad of UCF). The organization and Rabbi seek to create community among Jewish students at UCF and therefore serves as an excellent study as to how linguistic practices are involved in those goals of community development.

Linguistic Background

Rabbi Lipskier's first language was Yiddish, which was the language his parents spoke at home. He also developed a fluent understanding of English while growing up in Brooklyn and learned "Biblical Hebrew" through his upbringing as a religious Jew, in which the language encompasses a necessary component in prayers and religious study. Finally, he developed a fluency in Modern Hebrew while studying in Israel. In sharing how he learned Hebrew, Rabbi Lipskier said: "When I was in Israel in *yeshiva*, the *shiurim* were all in only Hebrew, so it's like sink or swim." He also learned some French while studying in France for two years. Additionally, he was introduced to Russian through his community in New York, primarily composed of Jews from Russia. When I asked him about whether his upbringings in a *Chabad* household, a Jewish community which originated in Eastern Europe, exposed him to Russian, he responded:

Yeah, lots. I mean, all four of my grandparents were Russian. Most of our community

growing up was from Russian descent. At the *Rebbe's farbrengens*, the *Rebbe* would—there

were Russian songs that we sing till today, even at *Chabad,* sometimes we sing songs with

Russian in them. So Russian, Ukrainian—yeah, that was around the whole time, and

especially once the '90s came and all the Russian immigrants, it was everywhere.

Rabbi Lipskier is describing the influx of Russian-Jews to America following the collapse of

the Soviet Union, wherein Jewish communities of Russia, persecuted against for decades, came to

America bringing their cultural traditions and linguistic practices with them. A *farbrengen* is a

community event where Jews, usually from the *Chabad* tradition, gather around the table for food,

alcohol, songs, and meaningful and deep conversations. The *Rebbe* was Rabbi Menachem Mendel

Schneerson, otherwise known as the *Lubavitcher Rebbe*—the leading Rabbi of the *Chabad*

movement in America from the 1950s until his death in 1994. That such a prominent figure for a

whole movement of Jews in America utilized Russian in his *farbrengens* shows the importance of

that language in the culture and traditions of *Chabad* Jewry in America.

Despite the importance of Russian in *Chabad* communities according to Rabbi Lipskier

Yiddish, a distinctly Jewish historical language, takes precedence.

Yes, Yiddish is first, even in our community growing up. Although everyone was Russian, the

primary language was Yiddish. It's funny, I just had a conversation with someone recently,

that, you know, the Russian Jews when they came to America were confused. Because the

Americans called them Russians, but, in Russia, they never considered themselves

Russian—they considered themselves Jewish. They couldn't understand why everyone's

calling them Russians when they're not really Russians and never identified as Russian. One

of the amazing things about Jewish communities is, throughout the ages, wherever Jews

were, they always had kind of their own language. Whether Yiddish, Ladino, Aramaic; they

always had some sort of jargon that they created from local languages and had kind of their

own language.

These Jews did not identify themselves through their ability to speak Russian, the primary

language, but through there distinct languages and traditions. Therefore, in Rabbi Lipskier's home

growing up, Yiddish was the language he was most familiar with and utilized the most.

Rabbi Lipskier's *Language Use and Choices*

When I asked Rabbi Lipskier about his personal use of Jewish languages, he identified the

importance of Yiddish as a language of study and tool for accessing a historical tradition.

For me, personally, Yiddish—a lot of the *Rebbe's* talks, the *Lubavitcher Rebbe's* talks, are in

Yiddish. If you want to listen to the *Rebbe* speak firsthand, publicly, it's in Yiddish. So,

speaking Yiddish helps tremendously in being able to—listening firsthand to a video or a

recording and actually understand for yourself and not someone telling you what they think

the *Rebbe* said. A lot of his work's published in Yiddish. .

He further explained:

Knowing a little bit of Aramaic, or Yiddish . . . can open the world for you, because there's

thousands of books written in Yiddish that you can pick up. If you want to listen to a *shiur* of

the *Rav,* half of them are in Yiddish. You can find a good translation, but it's still not the

authentic. It's beautiful to listen for yourself, so you go back 50 or 100 years, *Rosh Yeshivas*

are giving all their *shiurim* in Yiddish. .

The term "authenticity" was used frequently by Rabbi Lipskier regarding the use of

historical Jewish languages. What he is describing in these two passages are two extremely

influential Rabbis in American history: the *Lubavitcher Rebbe* and the Rav, Rabbi Joseph B.

Soloveitchik, who was the primogenitor of the *Modern Orthodox/Yeshivish* philosophy and

communal structure in America. Although both of these religious leaders were important for the

work and ideas they disseminated in America, a majority of the concepts and speeches they gave

were delivered in Yiddish. Rabbi Lipskier makes use of Yiddish in his personal studies, to draw a

connection between himself and the philosophical/intellectual lineage of Jewish thought and study

in America and, before that, in Europe. The use of historical Jewish languages allows him to connect

to those traditions and perform religious duties and studies authentically, with a full and total

understanding of an ideas original meaning and intention.

Utilizing Jewish Languages/Multilingualism at UCF

Rabbi Lipskier identified two ways in which he utilized multilingualism in

creating/developing community, both by connecting students with their historical cultural

traditions and by making them feel welcome and included. Rabbi Lipskier described one scenario to

me where he was able to connect a student with their history by translating her

great-grandmother's letters and correspondences, which were written in Yiddish. He was able to

connect them with their "*bubbies* and *zaydies"* (Yiddish for "grandmothers and grandfathers"),

which connected them to their Jewish heritage and community.

Similarly, Rabbi Lispkier helped connect another student with her grandmother and

community by utilizing his knowledge of Yiddish:

> You meet somebody, and they say: 'Oh, my grandmother spoke Yiddish,' and you say: 'Oh,
>
> what Yiddish words did she know?' And they say: 'I don't even know what they mean.' 'What
>
> did your grandma say?' '*Gai kaken oifen yam!*' You know what that means? Literally to go
>
> poop in the ocean, but it's just a saying, as in "go scram." They start laughing. It's that certain
>
> bond, that you know something about their past. There's a way to communicate to them. .

In this example the use of Yiddish and historically Jewish languages serve as a bridge

between the community and the student and help form universal bonds of understanding and

cultural affiliation, which form the backbone of Jewish communities. UCF is no exception.

One final example Rabbi Lipskier provided from the Passover meal he provided for students recently established how he uses language to connect with students and make them feel part of a community:

> For the *seder* the other night, we were finishing the *seder* and everyone sings אחד מי יודע. We first sang it in Hebrew, because that's the traditional, and a lot of people knew it. Some people had no clue, because they never spoke Hebrew, so there was a few Israelis that loved it, and a few traditional kids that loved it, and most of the people are out of it; they don't understand it. Then we sang it in English, same song: "Who Knows One," and a bunch of people get involved. It's easy to catch on. When we finish that, we're like, 'Anyone speak any other languages?' And one girl says she's Russian, so we sang it in Russian. Makes someone like that feel very much included. So here, the knowledge of a little bit of Russian can make someone feel that this is their community and feel like this is a place they can belong. They speak my language, so to speak. Maybe not perfectly, but it's close to home. .

It can be concluded from these examples that Rabbi Lipskier actively decides to use different languages and historical Jewish languages in his leadership positions, but primarily utilizes them in situations that can bring people together or make them feel part of a community. When it comes to language and community, there are decisions made about when to use certain languages, but as long as the ideas and concepts can be imparted to the students—as long as every student at UCF can learn the lyrics to a traditional song, in whatever language connects with them—that is what would accomplish the goals and aspiration of Rabbi Lipskier in his community building. It is not necessarily the meaning or need to maintain distinctiveness, or to be proficient in a language; rather, it is the desire to connect which necessitates the use of a translingual approach to community building.

Rabbi Abisror Interview: Understandability

Rabbi Yisrael Abisror is the Rabbi at Hillel and Yehudi of UCF—organizations which are similarly committed to engaging UCF students in Jewish community and traditions during their college experience. The organizations and Rabbi Abisror seek to create community among Jewish students at UCF and therefore serves as an excellent study as to how linguistic practices are involved in those goals of community development.

Linguistic Background

Rabbi Abisror's repertoire incorporates five languages which he utilizes. Rabbi Abisror speaks and understands English, because he is an American, Yiddish, although not fluent, Aramaic through his Talmudic studies, and Arabic from his father who immigrated to America from Morocco. Modern Hebrew, *Ivrit (*Hebrew for "Hebrew"*)*, came about because he grew up in a family with a lot of Hebrew speakers, as well as a community of Hebrew speakers. Additionally, he spent a year studying in *yeshiva* in Israel.

Rabbi Abisror's father switched between languages and code-switched when trying to communicate different concepts or ideas. When I asked him whether his use of language involved taking specific terms and incorporating them occasionally, he responded:

> Yeah, it's *geshmak* (awesome) to use [them]; it's like terminologies that fit in. And my father, who speaks four languages—French, Arabic, English, and Yiddish—switch with people who do know those languages depending on what he's trying to express. Something romantic, he might use French; something that fits within Hebrew, he'll use Hebrew. If it's biblical terms, quoting a verse, he'll use Hebrew. So, he adds a little bit of both.

Rabbi Abisror's Language Use and Choices

When I asked Rabbi Abisror about his use of his Jewish languages, he particularly mentioned the need to utilize them in their proper contexts, in the right environment, and to accomplish a specific purpose.

If you are in a crowd that understands the terminology, you'll use it. For example, you will say "*m'heicha teisi.*" If you don't know what that means, you're not going to use it; but, if you're in a group and you're having a discussion, no matter what it is, you will use it. But it's important to note that the Aramaic—language itself—is built for learning, in that give and take format.

Rabbi Abisror was identifying with his use of the Aramaic phrase "*m'heica teisi*" ("from where is this known") to describe the meditated and purposeful way in which he utilizes language in his speech. The most important aspect of speech, according to Rabbi Abisror, was to "give over a feeling." He utilizes language to relay those concepts in their most authentic form to an appropriate audience.

Utilizing Jewish Languages/Multilingualism at UCF

Rabbi Abisror identified the challenge of using historical Jewish languages at UCF due to students having a varied background in those languages, but acknowledged that Jewish languages are important for creating a connection with a message which can only be understood through those languages. I reminded him of an event he ran where he utilized a long Yiddish expression in the middle of a story and inquired as to how he made the decision to incorporate such a long and likely not understood phrase. He answered that the goal was "not to communicate an understanding of the word, but to give to the overall context of the story. So, using another language, I feel, brings out more of that kind of authenticity by using the original language." There exists an authenticity surrounding Jewish languages which help people feel connected with a community and therefore an essential component in the development of Jewish communities.

Rav Hershel Schachter: Linguistic Decisions at the National Level

Rav Schachter is one of the most well-respected Rabbis in America and is considered by many to be *gadol shebedor* (great of our generation). Throughout the pandemic, Jews across the world looked to him for answers as to religious proceedings during the unprecedented period of

community-lessness. As different holidays have come throughout the past year, Rav Schachter has delivered instructions to communities on how to proceed with the holiday in a *Halachic* (per the Torah) way. In his writings, he utilized Hebrew, Aramaic, and English. His works delivering messages to the wider Jewish community identify and exhibit the decisions which are made regarding languages in delivering messages during a crucial time (Schachter, 2021).

There were two goals of his messages to Jewish communities in America:

a) Argue for his decisions through Jewish Talmudic/legal analysis and;

b) Inform the American-Jewish community about how to perform one's religious duties during an unprecedented pandemic.

To accomplish the goal of forming a legal decision, Rav Schachter entirely utilized Hebrew and Aramaic in his document, even using a specific script (Rashi Script), which even speakers of Modern Hebrew may be unable to read or identify (see *fig. 1*). For him, those languages—Hebrew and Aramaic—are the language of study, and to impart a full legal analysis of the arguments and sources he needed to make use of languages which have been used for over a thousand years to explain those debated topics. On the other hand, at the bottom of the document, Rav Schachter provided an English synopsis which only imparted the decision. It's important to note that when the idea (how to proceed in action) was the aim, Rav Schachter utilized English, prioritizing understandability and universal knowledge—Similar to how Rabbi Abisror identified the need to impart an idea to students at UCF regardless of the language in question. However, when it came to complicated arguments and topics, they could only be expressed in historically Jewish languages to capture the breadth and depth of the discussion.

Figure 1

ו. גם ביום ייערכו לסדר כמה וכמה מנינים לקריאת המגילה. לכתחילה מן הנכון שלא להתחיל בקריאת המגילה עד לאחר הנץ (משנה מגילה כ.). לדעת הגאון האדר"ת הך גזרה לא נוהגת עוד בזמננו, אך עי' שדי חמד (מ"ג עמ' שמ"ז) שדעתו לא התקבלה (ובביאור הענין עמש"כ בס' ארץ הצבי סי' י"ט). אבל בשעה"ד קיי"ל דמותר לכתחילה לעשות דבר שבדרך כלל רק כשר בדעבד, וממילא באותם מקומות שייערכו לקרות כל היום כולו קריאה אחר קריאה, יש להתחיל מעלות השחר (עי' מג"א סי' תרנב דבאונס קלא יש להקל).

והשעה"ד הוא (מסתמא) רק על קריאת המגילה, אבל לגבי טלית ותפילין ותפילת שחרית, מסתמא עדיף להתפלל ביחידות לאחר שהגיע הזמן של משיכיר, שיוכלו לברך על הטו"ת ולהניחם קודם שיתפללו, וכספרו של פרופ'. יהודה לוי (זמני היום בהלכה עמ' ל"ח) הובאו שני זמנים לגבי עלות, ומן הנכון להמתין בקריאה הראשונה עד הזמן המאוחר.

יא. עמשנ"צ שיש דעה שאינו נכון כלל לחלק את קריאת המגילה לשני אנשים - שחציו הראשון יקרא ראובן וחציו השני יקרא שמעון, ואף דקיי"ל דבדעבד כן יצא, אך לכתחילה מן הנכון להחמיר בזה.] והרב יוסף לוקשטיין ז"ל הנהיג ברמ"ז לחלק את פרקי המגילה בין כמה וכמה מבוגרי הישיבה, כדי להמשיך הקשר בינם ובין הישיבה ולחזקם בשמירת המצוות, ובודאי אם יש צורך לזה, שעה"ד כדעבד דמי, ומותר לכתחילה.]

1. The practice is to read Parshas Zachor with a minyan from a kosher Sefer Torah on the Shabbos before Purim. If one is unable to do so, they may read from a kosher Sefer Torah without a minyan (without reciting the brachos). If that is not an option, one should have in mind to fulfill this obligation with the Kriyas HaTorah on Purim morning. If that too is impossible, one should have it in mind when reading Parshas Ki Seitzei (in the summer months). If a person feels that they will not remember to have this in mind during the summer months, then an additional reading of Parshas Zachor can be added this year. This should be done on a weeknight (without brachos), so anyone who is unable to leave their homes may participate via Zoom.

Analysis and Discussion

Fader (2007) introduced the influence of communal policy on linguistic practices through the statement of one article, "*Oy bwa khapn zikh ober aran etlikhe Englishe, ober Yiddish-klingende verter, darf es aykh nisht tsufil 'bodern.'*" ("If some English words come into Yiddish, but they sound Yiddish, they shouldn't 'bother' anyone."; p. 8) That is to say, *Hasidic* communities in New York, according to Fader's research, make a conscious effort to adapt English into Jewish culture, rather

than have Yiddish/Jewish culture become assimilated into American culture. Communal decisions about language can therefore, either made subconsciously or purposefully, have an immediate and realized effect on a community's linguistic practices.

The Rabbis at UCF who were interviewed although realizing the impact of language on community differed in their understanding of the importance of Yiddish or historically Jewish languages to Jewish community development. Instead of stressing the importance of distinctiveness, both Rabbi Abisror and Rabbi Lipskier identified the importance of "authenticity" realized by using and connecting Jewish people and communities with their past. Rabbi Lipskier utilized Yiddish because it connected students with their grandparents' writings, Rabbi Abisror made use of Yiddish in relaying a story to impart the authentic meaning behind it, and even Rav Schachter relied on Jewish languages to authentically argue legal cases from the languages that could express them the most.

The data collected from interviews and textual analysis shows that Jewish community leaders are utilizing multilingualism for community inclusiveness, whether in Rav Schachter's case to include everyone in an understandable decision, or at UCF to make sure everyone can feel welcome in a community. Jewish languages are utilized by these Rabbis to impart ideas and concepts which cannot be expressed in English, and to create a connection between Jewish heritage and a student by introducing them to their culture, as Rabbi Lipskier did at his Passover meal. Their responses are similar to what Baumel (2003) identified in an interview he conducted with a headmaster in England who had decided to make his school bilingual in Yiddish and English, stating that "Yiddish is a language for 'uniting Jews'" (p. 95).

Benor (2009) also hinted at the connection, explicitly maintained by community leaders, between community involvement and language. Her work shows how, through various forms of expression, naming schemes, or linguistic word choices, Jewish languages are increasingly being used in the American Jewish community. Importantly, Benor found that even non-religious Jews are

beginning to make use of, and participate in, the historical process of adapting languages to distinct Jewish communication. The language that one chooses to engage with therefore has a drastic effect on how they see themselves as "part of," or associated with, a community. For that reason, Jewish community leaders—including Rabbi's at UCF—are utilizing language as an avenue for facilitating communities of inclusion and authenticity. According to Rabbi Lipskier, "knowing a little bit of Aramaic, or Yiddish; knowing these languages can open the world for you because there's thousands of books written in Yiddish that you can pick up." The more one involves themself within their community through language or communal activities, the more they will feel connected to their heritage and background.

Current conversations surrounding the use of Jewish languages sought to identify and describe language practices and choices within American or English Jewish communities, but did not clearly define or discuss how those linguistic determinations are made within those communities. The data I have collected has provided an example showing how those determinations are made: through balancing the need for authenticity with a genuine concern and hope that everyone can feel included and take something positive away from the community.

The decisions and outcomes exhibited by an everlasting Jewish community serve as a template for the sustainability and reemergence of minority cultures. In order for minoritized communities to last, there needs to be a high level of participation with the culture and language which is deemed necessary to maintain. The Jewish people serve as an example of a community which, through thousands of years of persecution and banishment across the world, managed to maintain its culture and linguistic practices. These linguistic practices are not only naturally maintained, but are the outcomes of decisions being made by community leaders to engender feelings of community and inclusiveness. My research shows that minority community leaders should engage their communities in an active dialogue with their past and their heritage through language, fostering an authentic experience which will entice younger members to remain part of

their cultural communities, instead of leaving them for the perceived inclusivity of a global network. Ultimately, my research has shown that a permanent connection exists between the use of Jewish languages and cultural and communal continuity, which is recognized by Jewish community leaders and utilized to maintain and create warm, welcoming, and authentic communities.

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Appendix

Rabbi Lipskier Interview Transcript

[E] What languages do you speak?

[R] I speak, my first language was Yiddish, I speak English, speak Hebrew, I used to speak—I still understand, but—decent French and Russian. But those are languages that I picked up for a while and haven't spoken in year, so very rusty. Mainly Yiddish, English, and Hebrew.

[E] How did you learn those languages?

[R] So, Yiddish was my first language—that's the language my parents spoke to me—that's the language I learned how to speak in. English—obviously I grew up in Brooklyn, so English came along with that, hanging out with friends, going to school. Hebrew, obviously, growing up as a religious Jew, you learn how to read Hebrew—read Hebrew for prayers, learning, and stuff like that. That's more like Biblical Hebrew. I just had a bunch of… In Yeshiva, I spent time in France for two years and then Israel for a year, hopped around and, you know, when I was in France and Israel, when I was there, I hung around a lot of Israelis and picked up more Modern Hebrew. So now I speak a pretty fluent Hebrew.

[E] Yeah, it's tough to pick up Hebrew.

[R] Yeah, I mean, for me, somehow, I picked it up, and a lot of times Israelis—when I do birthright trips and stuff like that—they don't believe that I'm not an Israeli. I think I have an accent, but they're like: 'No, no, you sound Israeli.' So why is it so good? Just hanging out with friends.

[E] Yeah, definitely, like when I was in *yeshiva* and we did Hebrew *shiurs*, definitely helped a little bit, but it was…

[R] Yeah, so when I was in Israel in *yeshiva*, the *shiurim* were all in only Hebrew, so it's like sink or swim.

[E] That would have been a little tough for me.

[R] But I had a little background already; I was already kind of okay. So, once I had that, being in that environment, helps you brush up on it.

[E] How many of those languages would you say you're fluent in?

[R] English, Hebrew, and Yiddish, I can speak fluently. Russian, I can read Russian, I can say many words in Russian, I can understand a lot of Russian. French, the same thing, but I wouldn't say I'm fluent in those in any way, shape or form. But English, Hebrew, and Yiddish I can speak as if they were all first languages.

[E] How did you come by Russian?

[R] So, I learned Russian—I spent time as a *yeshiva* student as a counselor in Russia. So we went to Russia a couple of summers and was a counselor for kids. The first summer, we didn't speak a word of Russian, but being a counselor over a bunch of 12-year-olds that only speak Russian—in the beginning you use motions and signs to speak with your hands, but eventually you pick up a lot of words.

[E] Obviously, *Chabad's* a more Eastern European movement. Did you ever hear, growing up, any Russian?

[R] Yeah, lots. I mean, all four of my grandparents were Russian. Most of our community growing up was from Russian descent. At the *Rebbe's farbrengens*, the *Rebbe* would—there were Russian songs that we sing till today, even at *Chabad,* sometimes we sing songs with Russian in them. So Russian, Ukrainian—yeah, that was around the whole time, and especially once the '90s came and all the Russian immigrants, it was everywhere.

[E] Would you say Yiddish is more primary/prevalent?

[R] Yes, Yiddish is first, even in our community growing up. Although everyone was Russian, the primary language was Yiddish. It's funny, I just had a conversation with someone recently, that, you know, the Russian Jews when they came to America were confused. Because the Americans called them Russians, but, in Russia, they never considered themselves Russian—they considered themselves Jewish. They couldn't understand why everyone's calling them Russians when they're not really Russians and never identified as Russian. One of the amazing things about Jewish

communities is, throughout the ages, wherever Jews were, they always had kind of their own language. Whether Yiddish, Ladino, Aramaic; they always had some sort of jargon that they created from local languages and had kind of their own language.

[E] Do you think there's an importance to those languages, in terms of preservation?

[R] Yeah, I think it's very powerful and amazing. A common language creates a certain bond.

[E] Meaning—I was going to get to this later, but now that there is the state of Israel and we have a Standardized Hebrew, there could be a language that all Jews speak, overall, and there might not be a need for distinct Jewish dialects. Is it important to teach Yiddish in the communities, or to use those languages, or should we focus on Modern Hebrew?

[R] The beauty of a community is diversity. To try to make everyone conform to one way because we have Israel and Israel speaks Hebrew, that [sic] losing so much culture. There's so much culture and background, so many things in Yiddish, so many books, so much—to just let it die out, it would be silly. A certain Yiddish personality, if you will—same thing with Ladino or other Jewish languages throughout the ages—you lose them and you lose a large part of Jewish culture. You know, your average Jew, especially if they're observant, could probably break their teeth in Hebrew and figure it out. If they spent time in Israel, they could get better at it, and there's no need to take away their own culture. To swap cultures is kind of silly. If they move to Israel and wind up speaking Hebrew, that's great. But to say that everywhere in the world—everyone should drop their background and culture, that's kind of silly. A lot of people think that if everyone was more alike, people would get along better, or there would be a more unified community. Doesn't work. Everyone has their personality and brings something different to the table. You would think that if everyone was only *Orthodox* or only *Charedi*, or *Yeshivish*, Modern Orthodox, figure out one way to be, everything would work out. That's not true. The beauty of group is diversity. You say a rainbow is beautiful; why is a rainbow beautiful? Many colors. There's just one color in the sky, wouldn't be as beautiful. When you have a multicolored thing, that really adds to the beauty.

[E] Being that there are all these colors to Jewish languages, how do you use those different languages? Meaning, Aramaic might be a language of *Gemara* study—when do you find yourself using Yiddish? When do you find yourself Russian or French?

[R] For me, personally, Yiddish—a lot of the *Rebbe's* talks, the *Lubavitcher Rebbe's* talks, are in Yiddish. If you want to listen to the *Rebbe* speak firsthand, publicly, it's in Yiddish. So, speaking Yiddish helps tremendously in being able to—listening firsthand to a video or a recording and actually understand for yourself and not someone telling you what they think the *Rebbe* said. A lot of his work's published in Yiddish. But even, it seems here, I've had people do genealogy searches and find out family history, and uncovered documents, and a lot of times those documents are in Yiddish. People come to me and I help them translate it and give them a connection to their own heritage, if you will—with their *bubbies* and *zaydis*. Just recently I had someone find letters written by their great-grandmother, back and forth in Yiddish, and no one in their family could read it because they forgot Yiddish, and I was able to translate it for them because I speak Yiddish.

[E] So, would you say Yiddish is important as a cultural and historical thing, in terms of connecting with our history?

[R] That, and Yiddish is very much an alive language. Now, in Orlando, Florida, you would be hard pressed to find more than five people that speak Yiddish—but, if you go to Brooklyn, you have a community of hundreds of thousands of people that speak Yiddish. People often times so Yiddish is a dying language. Maybe in the mainstream Jewish community, most people will tell you: 'Oh, my grandfather used to speak Yiddish.' Things like that. Maybe for those people it's a dying language. But if you go to any *Chassidic* community here in America, or even in Israel, Yiddish is alive and well.

[E] And people try to infuse that into *yehivish* and…

[R] Yeah, even in the *yeshivish* world, in the *Chassidic* world. You walk into the *Mir*, even if they're not speaking Yiddish, they'll be using Yiddish lingo.

[E] Since there's all these different language: Hebrew, Aramaic, Yiddish, and all these different things to draw from, do you find yourself sort of switching between them? Like, when you're talking to other Jews or in a Jewish community, you use Yiddish phrases or…

[R] Yeah, in lingo, even with kids that don't necessarily understand it, a lot of kids pick up Yiddish words because it's just part of the way I speak. Even Hebrew, your average kid coming to UCF doesn't necessarily say *Baruch Hashem,* right? But you will find a lot of kids that come to *Chabad* at UCF, that walk around, and if you ask them how they're doing, say: *Baruch Hashem,* or *B'H.* How did that come about? That's not the vernacular they grew up with; they didn't grow up speaking like that, but because they are around people that speak like that, it becomes something they say and do. Me, trying to be my own authentic self, my own way of speaking comes out to other people and it bring a certain richness—a certain authenticity, and things like that.

[E] And I guess it helps create community?

[R] Yeah. There are certain things that only certain people understand. Certain things you say that no one else understands—only a certain community. It makes you feel like, 'Oh, now I'm in the community.'

[E] How do you use different language in your role as a community leader? And, in that question is, that there are many people from different backgrounds and understandings of Judaism and…

[R] I'll give you an example. For the *seder* the other night, we were finishing the *seder* and everyone sings אחד מי יודע. We first sang it in Hebrew, because that's the traditional, and a lot of people knew it. Some people had no clue, because they never spoke Hebrew, so there was a few Israelis that loved it, and a few traditional kids that loved it, and most of the people are out of it; they don't understand it. Then we sang it in English, same song: "Who Knows One," and a bunch of people get involved. It's easy to catch on. When we finish that, we're like, 'Anyone speak any other languages?' And one girl says she's Russian, so we sang it in Russian. Makes someone like that feel very much included. So here, the knowledge of a little bit of Russian can make someone feel that this is their community and

feel like this is a place they can belong. They speak my language, so to speak. Maybe not perfectly, but it's close to home.

[E] As a Rabbi in the community at UCF, you try to reach people through language?

[R] Of course! You meet an Israeli and start speaking Hebrew to them, there's an automatic bond. You meet a Russian and drop a couple Russian words, that's an automatic bond. You meet someone that's French—we had a French soccer player for UCF, a Jewish kid; he played for UCF soccer team—and he came, and we spoke a couple of French words. You know, *comment ça va,* and all of a sudden he's like: 'This is a place where I'm welcome.' So, language has the powerful ability to bring people in and make them feel close.

[E] Do you use them in—to give a *dvar torah* or something? Would you use a Yiddish phrase, explain it, or would you decide not to because you want more people to understand?

[R] No, I use Yiddish phrases all the time in a *dvar torah* and I'll translate what it means. I try to be authentic, use a Yiddish saying. But even simple things like, you meet somebody, and they say: 'Oh, my grandmother spoke Yiddish,' and you say: 'Oh, what Yiddish words did she know?' And they say: 'I don't even know what they mean.' 'What did your grandma say?' '*Gai kaken oifen yam!*' You know what that means? Literally to go poop in the ocean, but it's just a saying, as in "go scram." They start laughing. It's that certain bond, that you know something about their past. There's a way to communicate to them. So, yeah, I use Yiddish words all the time; I wouldn't say every speech, but when it calls for it, and there's an [applicable] saying in Yiddish or Aramaic, I say it and then translate it. Can't say it without translating or they won't know what you're talking about.

[E] Do you think it's important for a kid to learn Yiddish?

[R] My son is now studying for his *bar-mitzvah*; just shy of three months and he's studying what we call in *Chassidic* circles a *maamer.* He's studying it to say it in Yiddish. So we definitely try to learn things all the time in Yiddish.

[E] For kids at UCF, the students, would learning Yiddish be beneficial or important for them to feel connected to those things?

[R] If they're interested. There's a kid who started at UCF and she transferred to Montreal—whatever the name is—she transferred for the Yiddish program. There are definitely students at UCF who learn Yiddish, that pick up some Yiddish, that want to learn some of the *Rebbe*'s talk in the original, so they practice and learn.

[E] So I guess the main theme is that we want to deliver the idea to the people, and language can help us get there and connect it to the right people?

[R] Exactly, especially if they're interested in historical Judaism, and you want to read and learn things in the original, knowing a little bit of Aramaic, or Yiddish. Knowing these languages can open the world for you, because there's thousands of books written in Yiddish that you can pick up. If you want to listen to a *shiur* of the *Rav,* half of them are in Yiddish. You can find a good translation, but it's still not the authentic. It's beautiful to listen for yourself, so you go back 50 or 100 years, *Rosh Yeshivas* are giving all their *shiurim* in Yiddish.

Rabbi Abisror Transcript

[E] So, first question is: what languages do speaker use in all the things you do?

[R] My mother tongue is English, being from the United states. But languages that I use or be more fluent in are also spoken Hebrew today as well as biblical Hebrew, and then, on top of that, because of my upbringing in *yeshiva*, I use a lot of Yiddish. I'm not fluent in Yiddish, but I use a lot of Yiddish. And then I also have a lot of Aramaic because of *gemara,* and some Arabic because of my father—because he's Moroccan.

[E] So not French?

[R] French, not so much, but only because I never picked it up.

[E] How did you learn those languages?

[R] English, growing up here, and my parents both speak English. Hebrew, I was taught in school—biblical Hebrew for sure taught in school. Ivrit came about because I grew up in a family with a lot of Hebrew speakers; community had a lot of Israelis and Hebrew speakers. And then, obviously, living in Israel for a year, as well. I did not pick it up in *yeshiva,* and then you pick up a lot of Yiddish in *Yeshiva*. I'm not fluent in Yiddish; I couldn't have a conversation.

[E] So, did the high schools you went to in Florida focus on Hebrew over Yiddish, or Aramaic?

[R] In the Judiacs program, we naturally picked up Yiddish because there are certain characteristic terms that can really define a concept. But, besides for that, they didn't really teach it to me. Biblical Hebrew, of course.

[E] Do you consider yourself fluent in those languages, or really it's just English and Hebrew, and the other ones are languages you take and use terms from?

[R] So, I consider myself fluent in Hebrew and in English. Yiddish I'm not fluent in. It also depends what dialect of Yiddish. More like *Chasidish* or *Litvish* pronunciation, I know enough to hear a class. Not perfectly, but…

[E] So then it's more just taking terms and using them sometimes?

[R] Yeah, it's *geshmak* to use it; it's like terminologies that fit in. And my father, who speaks four languages—French, Arabic, English, and Yiddish—switch with people who do know those languages depending on what he's trying to express. Something romantic, he might use French; something that fits within Hebrew, he'll use Hebrew. If it's biblical terms, quoting a verse, he'll use Hebrew. So, he adds a little bit of both.

[E] How do you use those languages, and what contexts do you make use of them?

[R] I use those languages mainly while trying to explain ideas, because when you try to explain an idea, the idea is almost thought of through words, and some words express the idea better. So, to give over a feeling, if you're with someone who understands the culture of that language, you can relay the message over much more accurately.

[E] Are Aramaic and Yiddish languages of Torah study, or are they everyday sort of expressions?

[R] Really, everything is everyday. If you are in a crowd that understands the terminology, you'll use it. For example, you will say "*m'heicha teisi.*" If you don't know what that means, you're not going to use it; but, if you're in a group and you're having a discussion, no matter what it is, you will use it. But it's important to note that the Aramaic—language itself—is built for learning, in that give and take format.

[E] How do you use those languages, like Aramaic and Yiddish, in your role as a community leader?

[R] I think just mainly the way you communicate with people. Here, it's not so easy because most people don't understand those languages. But, when you're really trying to relay over the idea, I think it's really important to understand the terms.

[E] For example, at JLF one night, you used some examples from Yiddish—some expressions—and in some of the stories you tell. Do you intend to include those expressions, and decide: "With this group, I can do this"? How do you make the decision to use Yiddish or Hebrew with certain people?

[R] In that case, it's precisely the opposite; not to communicate an understanding of the word, but to give to the overall context of the story. So, using another language, I feel, brings out more of that kind of authenticity by using the original language.

[E] So, you think that using Jewish languages is about authenticity and distinctiveness?

[R] I think all languages, because all language carries the culture. You have to ask yourself, "Why do languages exist? Why are there multiple languages? Why isn't there one spoken language?" And you can also look at a language and understand the culture and—even within the language, some cultures are very loving, and there's a lot of words to express that. And some, not so much, and there's a lot of words to express the opposite of that.