

## The Double Standard in Modern Hebrew

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### Abstract

How did the new native vernacular (NNV) variety of Modern Hebrew eclipse the prestigious prescriptive variety to become a Hebrew standard? How does value accrue to language varieties? We analyze the social meanings associated with the new Hebrew style as a complex positive stance towards NNV, constructed via differentiation from its alternatives. NNV is reflexive, and it speaks for itself: for the authority of experience, as opposed to the traditional authority of the text. A speaker of modern vernacular Hebrew is necessarily, often unknowingly, the subject of a positive attitude towards the vernacular, an active agent in the propagation of the new collective and its values. We explore this emergent subjectivity as a set of ideological coordinates in relation to language, and specifically, to speech: to be a subject, in this context, is to participate in the dissemination, by way of speech, of a collective set of ideas about NNV.

We also explore the consolidation and dissemination of these values by cultural agents. We focus on one typical example: *Ma nishma*, a weekly column by Dahn Ben Amotz published in the 1950s. The texts present snapshots of “everyday life” in multiple sites in Palestine/Israel, as part of the modernist project of constructing a hegemonic folk identity. We show how variation in the use of spoken Hebrew, together with other tropes such as location and ethnic descent, are implicated in the construction of the new folk identity: just as the notion of vernacular gains substance from the depiction of everyday life variation, so the creation of a vernacular language, and by extension, a vernacular culture, constructs an imaginary local past which normalizes the presence of European Jews in the land.

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In 1953, during the academic debate over the “normalcy of Hebrew,”<sup>1</sup> the Israeli linguist Haiim Rosén published “On Standard and Norm, on Processes and Mistakes,” a response to Ze’ev Ben-Hayyim, a scholar of Hebrew and Aramaic and a leading figure in the Academy of the Hebrew Language.<sup>2</sup> In this paper Rosén distinguished between the (non-prescriptive) *standard* and the (prescriptive) *norm* in Israeli Hebrew, and made the following claim:

Whoever demands this state of affairs for Hebrew [i.e., complete separation between “the language of speech” and “the language of culture”], should also be lamenting that whoever pronounces [the city name] *Reḥóvot* with penultimate stress [and not *Reḥovót* as in the prescribed norm] is not speaking the language of culture! The psychological effect is clear: a speaker who constantly hears that his or her language is incorrect in many respects, will end up with a “who cares” attitude, even when making an actual mistake which truly deserves correction. “My language is uncivilized anyway,” he will say to himself, “so I might as well just say *yesh li et ha-keseif* [and not the prescribed *yesh li ha-keseif* (=I have got the money) without the accusative marker *et*].”<sup>3</sup>

This early comment on linguistic reality in Israel is illuminating in two ways. First, it identifies a “double standard” in contemporary Hebrew, i.e., two *hegemonic* varieties: the expected prescriptive norm, tied to the traditional Jewish texts, and a vernacular norm, associated with

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<sup>1</sup> Ron Kuzar, *Hebrew and Zionism: A Discourse Analytic Cultural Study* (Berlin, 2001), ch. 3.

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.*, 165–68.

<sup>3</sup> Haiim B. Rosén, “Al standard ve-norma, al tahalikhim u-shgi’ot,” *Leshonenu la'am* 4, no. 7 (1953): 4. All translations from Hebrew were made by the authors.

nativeness and spontaneity.<sup>4</sup> Second, it suggests that the tension between the two extends beyond grammatical differences, and bears sociocultural meaning related to style and ideology. In this Rosén heralds the emergence of a new identity of native Hebrew speakers and a new anti-intellectual stance, epitomized by this “‘who cares’ attitude.”<sup>5</sup>

How did the new native vernacular (NNV) eventually eclipse the prestigious prescriptive variety to become a Hebrew standard? More broadly, how does value accrue to language varieties? We explore these questions in two separate domains. First, we analyze the NNV style and the social meanings embedded within it. As we show, NNV is a reflexive style, and it speaks for itself: for the authority of experience, as opposed to the traditional authority of the text. A speaker of modern vernacular Hebrew is necessarily the subject of a positive attitude towards the vernacular, an active agent in the propagation of the new collective and its values. We then turn to the activity of cultural agents and the related vernacular values which they promoted. We show how the style

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<sup>4</sup> On this distinction, to be elaborated below, see Haim Blanc, “The Israeli Koine as an Emergent National Standard,” in *Language Problems of Developing Nations*, ed. Joshua A. Fishman, Charles A. Ferguson, and Jyotirindra Das Gupta (New York, 1968), 240–41; Uri Mor, “Prescriptive Activity in Modern Hebrew,” in *Usage-Based Studies in Modern Hebrew: Background, Morpholexicon, and Syntax*, ed. Ruth A. Berman (Amsterdam, 2020), 114–15.

<sup>5</sup> Rosén notes in passing two structural features which separate the language of educated speakers from the prescriptive norm: penultimate stress in proper names (a wider discussion of this topic is offered in Haiim B. Rosén, *Contemporary Hebrew* [The Hague, 1977], 76–78; Shmuel Bolozky, “Stress Placement as a Morphological and Semantic Marker in Israeli Hebrew,” *Hebrew Studies* 41 [2000]: 60–61) and the use of an accusative marker with the existential predicate *yesh* (Blanc, “Israeli Koine,” 242–43; Ron Kuzar, *Sentence Patterns in English and Hebrew* [Amsterdam, 2012], 93–94); Rosén considers this “an actual mistake,” i.e., substandard usage, but it had been a standard phenomenon for decades (Kuzar, *Sentence Patterns*, 93), documented as early as 1911 (Yael Reshef, “Le-toldot ti’udo shel mivne ha-ba’alut ‘yesh lo et’ be-reshit yameha shel ha-ivrit ha-medubberet,” *Leshonenu la’am* 56, no. 4 [2008]: 226–33). Additional features are listed in the first part of Rosén’s paper: *Leshonenu la’am* 4, no. 6 (1953): 7–8.

served as an effective medium for embodying the collective. Nothing expresses the relation between NNV and the new collective better than the title of Rosén’s pioneering study of Israeli Hebrew: *Our Hebrew*.<sup>6</sup>

We begin with a brief overview of the historical context, and proceed to an analysis of NNV style as a positive stance towards NNV values. Our analysis builds on the ideological underpinnings of indexicality as a generator of social meaning, and we present the alternatives in the immediate Jewish context against which the vernacular subjectivity constructs itself, and the role of authenticity and authentication in this process. Lastly, we turn to the weekly column *Manishma* by Dahn Ben Amotz, published in the 1950s, to trace the semiotic activities through which NNV gained value and extended its reach.

### **Normative Shift and the Emergence of Native Spoken Hebrew**

Native vernacular Hebrew first emerged in Palestine in the 1890s, with the offspring of the first immigrants in the modern Zionist era. These early speakers were the first to attend the first Hebrew nursery school, which opened its doors in 1898.<sup>7</sup> By the 1930s a new native way of speaking could be identified.<sup>8</sup> However, only a minor part of the population, less than 10 percent and mostly very young, actually used it.<sup>9</sup> The new native speakers of Hebrew were designated as *Sabras* (named

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<sup>6</sup> Haiim B. Rosén, *Ha-ivrit shellanu* (Tel Aviv, 1955).

<sup>7</sup> Uzzi Ornan, “Hebrew in Palestine before and after 1882,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 29, no. 1 (1984): 225–27; Miri Bar-Ziv Levy and Ivy Sichel, “Trumatan shel neshot ha-aliyya ha-rishona li-vniyyat kehillat dovre ivrit be-rishon le-ziyyon,” *Cathedra* 169 (2018): 75–108.

<sup>8</sup> Blanc, “Israeli Koine,” 240; Uri Mor and Ivy Sichel, “Yesh hofesh medina ba-dibbur ha-ze: ha-ivrit ha-yelidit vehagashash ha-hivver,” *Carmillim* 11 (2015): 138–39.

<sup>9</sup> Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*, trans. Haim Watzman (Berkeley, 2000), 3.

after the Hebrew name for the local cactus tree and fruit), and their unique speech style was recognized, later coined *dugri* (=honest in Arabic, straightforward in Hebrew).<sup>10</sup> Yet for several decades, NNV was considered an inappropriate sub-standard child language, which with time and instruction would come to resemble the prestigious formal standard. It was thus excluded from the public domain: in Belles-lettres, journalistic writing, the theatre, and films, on the radio, at assemblies, and even in private letters and diaries, only the formal, non-native, standard prevailed.<sup>11</sup> It was only gradually, over the 1950s and 1960s, that this vernacular variety came to be considered a “legitimate language,” appropriate for use in the public sphere.<sup>12</sup>

During this period the dominant formal standard in the Jewish Yishuv was a planned language, based primarily on Classical Hebrew, but also incorporating later features, original as well as borrowed. The goal of the scholars and educators who designed and implemented the language planning efforts was to create a uniform national Hebrew standard, both authentic and modern.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 4–5; Tamar Katriel, *Talking Straight: Dugri Speech in Israeli Sabra Culture* (Cambridge, 1986), 1–3, 17–21.

<sup>11</sup> Miri Bar-Ziv Levy, “Kartis knisa la-dibbur ha-zabbari: ha-seret ‘dan ve-se’adya’ ki-nkuddat mifne be-yizzug ha-dibbur ha-ivri ba-kolnoa,” *Carmillim* 12 (2016): 97–128; Yael Reshef, *Historical Continuity in the Emergence of Modern Hebrew* (Lanham, 2020), 11.

<sup>12</sup> Mor and Sichel, “Ha-ivrit,” 138–45. On “legitimate language” see Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, trans. Richard Nice (London, 1993 [1984]), 66–67; Eliezer Ben-Rafael, *Language, Identity, and Social Division: The Case of Israel* (Oxford, 1994), 58–59. Reference to a single native vernacular is a gross over-simplification. Alongside NNV, which eventually achieved hegemonic status, there existed other non-hegemonic native Mizrahi Hebrew varieties, often ignored in the literature (see Bar-Ziv Levy “Kartis knisa,” 98; for study of these varieties, see Yehudit Henshke, “Israeli, Jewish, Mizrahi or Traditional? On the Nature of the Hebrew of Israel’s Periphery,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 68, no. 1 [2017]: 137–57). Here our focus is on the process of legitimization, ultimately hegemonization, of NNV.

<sup>13</sup> Mor, “Prescriptive Activity,” 105–107.

Although used occasionally in speech – in courtrooms, classrooms, and a host of other public settings – and associated with *overt prestige*,<sup>14</sup> it remained symbolic and never became a native language.<sup>15</sup>

The linguistic status quo was disrupted by the events of 1945–49: the waves of immigration and the establishment of the state, culminating in the emergence of the double standard acknowledged in Rosén’s paper. The massive waves of immigration doubled the Jewish population in Palestine/Israel and resulted in major ethnic-sectorial shifts.<sup>16</sup> The Jewish immigrants hailing from communities across the Middle east, North Africa, and Europe brought with them diverse varieties of Hebrew.<sup>17</sup> This massive heterogeneity posed a significant threat to the hard-won dominance of the new local varieties of Hebrew, both formal-engineered and vernacular-native. Fear of the oriental “other” was compounded by concerns that Yiddish, brought in by the survivors after 1945, would regain its privileged status, previously repressed only with enormous effort, but never completely.<sup>18</sup>

These developments impacted the language norms on both sides: (a) Fear of cultural change and moral decline triggered an increase in prescriptive activity and purism, and a long line of institutional and public efforts, including the establishment of the Academy of the Hebrew Language in 1953, proliferation of prescriptive literature, and an extensive array of Hebrew

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Trudgill, “Sex, Covert Prestige and Linguistic Change in the Urban British English of Norwich,” *Language in Society* 1, no. 2 (1972): 179–95.

<sup>15</sup> Reshef, *Historical Continuity*, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Anat Helman, *Becoming Israeli: National Ideals & Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Waltham, 2014), 22.

<sup>17</sup> Shelomo Morag, “Ha-ivrit ha-ḥadasha be-hitgabbeshutah: lashon be-aspaklarya shel ḥevra,” *Cathedra* 56 (1990): 70–73, 89.

<sup>18</sup> Yael Chaver, “*Ma she-ḥayyavim lishkoah*”: *yiddish ba-yishuv he-ḥadash* (Jerusalem, 2005), 43.

education for new immigrants.<sup>19</sup> (b) After decades of accepting institutional norms which denigrated their language, the Sabras challenged the authority of these sociocultural codes by consolidating their native-based style and investing it with new authority. A central component of the emergent identity was NNV, further elaborated to distinguish it as a new hegemonic standard that replaced textual correctness with a new prestige-based measure of correctness.<sup>20</sup> The new style soon became easily recognized, and its speakers intolerant towards any manifestation of non-nativeness, diasporic or institutional.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout this period, and up until the present, the Sabras' vernacular is associated with native speakers, yet it is not used exclusively by native speakers. Rather, since it was imagined to be spoken natively, mastery of the vernacular became a common badge of membership in the native collective. One could become native, performatively.<sup>22</sup>

Another factor in the realignment and legitimization of NNV was the establishment of the State of Israel. Hamutal Tsamir describes the founding of the state as an event of historical crisis, a "passage from a linear-progressive time to a commemorative-reproductive time," in other words, from the heroic times defined by collective nation building to a sovereign phase.<sup>23</sup> New oppositions emerged, especially between the individual and the state. Tsamir traces the transformation in the

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<sup>19</sup> Helman, *Becoming Israeli*, 22–28; Mor, "Prescriptive Activity," 110–11.

<sup>20</sup> According to the terminology of John Myhill, "A Parameterized View of the Concept of 'Correctness'," *Multilingua* 23, no. 4 (2004): 394–98.

<sup>21</sup> Katriel, *Talking Straight*, 20; Mor and Sichel, "Ha-ivrit," 140–43.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Almog, *Sabra*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Hamutal Tsamir, "Jewish-Israeli Poetry, Dahlia Ravikovitch, and the Gender of Representation," *Jewish Social Studies* 14, no. 3 (2008): 93; see *ibid.*, 90–99.

poetry of the late 1940s and 1950s as a new focus on the personal, and a desire for release from the burden of collective representation.

A parallel transformation occurred in language, a shift away from the traditional Jewish authority of the text towards a new authority, rooted in the experience of the native born. It is in the context of this shift that NNV began to gain new currency. The attitudes which contributed to its promotion were inscribed in the distinctively native speech style, to which we turn next.

### **The Native Vernacular Style**

NNV was consolidated, as mentioned above, by the 1930s. Its role within the new double standard reality required, of course, more than mere consolidation – it needed to be invested with social value. How did this transpire? *Enregisterment* refers to the set of processes through which a linguistic repertoire becomes individuated as a socially recognized register, including value production, maintenance, and transformation.<sup>24</sup> Here we focus on value production and dissemination: not only does NNV style usher in new linguistic forms and new associations between forms and cultural values, but also new cultural values are produced and reproduced by the speakers and agents of the new style. The process of value production is ideological, and is constituted of multiple shifts by multiple, mostly anonymous, agents. A central mouthpiece for these shifts was the style itself, which embedded and enacted new vernacular values.

Sociolinguistic distinctiveness is organized and rationalized via language ideologies – value systems shared by speakers in a community – which govern linguistic choices against a background of possible contrasts. NNV drew on the existing alternatives in the Jewish world, and distinguished itself from them. Our focus here is not on these alternatives' formal linguistic

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<sup>24</sup> Asif Agha, "The Social Life of Cultural Value," *Language & Communication* 23 (2003): 231–73.



contributions, which were no doubt significant,<sup>25</sup> but on the raw semiotic material that they presented for the construction of social meaning. We return to this after introducing the new style.

*Style* in sociolinguistics refers to intra-speaker variation in language use; different styles may be employed by the same speaker under different circumstances. All kinds of linguistic variables may be implicated: phonetic, lexical, grammatical, and others, which may cluster together to form a distinctive style. Like style in other domains (fashion, music, art), linguistic style is part of a system of distinction, and ideology and social meaning are key.<sup>26</sup>

A distinctive property of NNV style is reflexivity. It reflects and enacts attitudes towards other ways of speaking and seeks to differentiate itself from them. In this sense, NNV style represents a series of stances towards these alternatives, which, when combined, represent a new subjectivity, the subjectivity of the native born. The element of distinction at the core of NNV style is expressed in the following excerpt from an early comic depiction, a skit in which a scholarly type is interviewing a Sabra, humorously referred to in the title as a *zabbarolog* (=Sabrologist).<sup>27</sup>

– האם מבדיל הצבר בין דברים צבריים ובלתי צבריים?

– ועוד איך!

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<sup>25</sup> Gershon Shaked, “Signonah shel ha-sipporet bi-shnot ha-arba'im vеха-ḥamishim: min ha-yad el ha-pe – ha-sikkuy ve-hitbadduto,” *Meḥkarim ba-lashon* 2–3 (1987): 474, 477; Roni Henkin, “Sociolinguistics of Modern Hebrew,” in *Usage-Based Studies in Modern Hebrew: Background, Morpholexicon, and Syntax*, ed. Ruth A. Berman (Amsterdam, 2020), 57–58.

<sup>26</sup> Judith T. Irvine, and Susan Gal, “Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation,” in *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*, ed. Paul V. Kroskrity (Santa Fe, 2000), 35–83; Penelope Eckert, “Variation and the Indexical Field,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 12, no. 4 (2008): 453–76.

<sup>27</sup> Uri Avnery, “Zabbarit ka-halakha o shi'ur be-zabbarit bsisit (siḥa im zabbarolog),” in *Shok pinu*, ed. Efrayim Davidzon (Tel Aviv, 1951), 494–96 (originally in *ba-ma'avak*, ed. Uri Avnery [Tel Aviv, 1946], 25).

– איך הוא מכנה דברים צבריים?

– "זה משלנו".

– איך הוא מגדיר דברים בלתי צבריים?

– "זה לא משלנו, זה חלש, זה סתם ככה".

– איני חפץ עוד לגזול מזמנך. תרשה לי להביע את תודתי העמוקה...

– אל תבלבל. שלום.

– Does the Sabra distinguish between Sabra and non-Sabra things?

– And how!

– What does he call Sabra-type things?

– That's ours.

– And how does he define non-Sabra things?

– That's not ours, that's lame, that's nothing special.

– I do not wish to take up any more of your time. Please allow me to express my sincere gratitude...

– Cut the bull. Shalom.

Even though this exchange is fictionalized (possibly even because of it), it nicely illustrates the linguistic-performative construction of the new Sabra identity, via contrast with the formal variety, and a dismissive attitude towards it and its speaker. This is condensed in the last two lines, which contrast both linguistic features and language use, as in the rude Sabra response to the politeness of the interviewer. It is also expressed in the content, in the categorical divide between "ours" and "not ours," and the scorn towards the latter, i.e., "that's lame, that's nothing special." This alignment of content, linguistic form, and style draws a portrait of the Sabra as distinct from his scholarly interlocutor, as acutely aware of this distinction (i.e., the double standard), and as bearing

a dismissive attitude toward him, expressed succinctly in the parting expression “cut the bull”.<sup>28</sup> The excerpt expresses what is most stereotypical: the Sabra is proudly judgmental, scornful of expressions of politeness and wordiness of any sort.

More generally, there is a trend in the native lexical repertoire of the period for disproportionately many slang expressions referring to core Sabra traits:<sup>29</sup>

- (a) Certainty and self-confidence: e.g., *smokh (alay)* (=don’t worry; literally: trust [me]).
- (b) Dismissiveness and disdain for authority: e.g., *azov shtuyot* (=leave out the nonsense).
- (c) Anti-intellectualism: e.g., *millim shel bet merkaḥat* (complicated foreign terms; literally: pharmacy words).

These represent a departure from the traditional textual authority and a shift towards a new authority rooted in experience and authenticity, performatively enacted in the native *dugri* style. Below we elaborate on how these values are constructed as stances, and on the semiotic processes which invest stances with social meaning.

### **Native Stances**

The NNV values can be described as a series of micro-stances towards alternative ways of speaking (see below). Taken together, and linguistically enacted, they constitute the new style. Here we elaborate on the relation between stances and style.

*Stance* is a socio-linguistic category which refers to speakers’ self-positioning in specific interactions *vis-à-vis* the content of their words, their audience or other interlocutors, or their

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<sup>28</sup> The original *al tevalbel* is also a shortening of a crude phrase: *al tevalbel et ha-moaḥ* (=stop talking nonsense; literally: don’t confound my brain).

<sup>29</sup> Almog, *Sabra*, 113–17, 150 (with additional examples).

language. Stances are evaluative, including both positive and negative attitudes that the speaker may bear towards the stance objects.<sup>30</sup> They may also convey the speaker's degree of certainty or the affect accompanying the evaluation.<sup>31</sup> Stance also functions within specific interactions to produce ideological orientation.<sup>32</sup>

Scott F. Kiesling builds on these ideas to develop a theory of stance that characterizes collective stances and entire styles.<sup>33</sup> According to Kiesling, all stances include three components: evaluation, discussed above, alignment, and investment. The alignment component refers to the expression of solidarity between interactants regarding the assessment. Terms of address such as *bro* or *dude*, for example, express high alignment. The investment component represents how strongly the speaker's investment in the uttered proposition is expressed; stances which value precision or emphatic uses of language are high investment stances.

Kiesling's model is insightful because of the relationship that it forges between stance and style, where stance is a central ingredient of style. The shift from stance properties which are particular to specific interactions, to collective stances which define entire styles, is directly relevant for the characterization of NNV style in terms of a novel set of stances. It is useful to

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<sup>30</sup> John W. Du Bois, "The Stance Triangle," in *Stancetaking in Discourse: Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction*, ed. Robert Englebretson (Amsterdam, 2007), 139–82.

<sup>31</sup> Alexandra Jaffe, "Introduction," in *Stance: Sociolinguistic Perspectives*, ed. Alexandra Jaffe (Oxford, 2009), 7.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Silverstein, "Indexical Order and the Dialectics of Sociolinguistic Life," *Language & Communication* 23 (2003): 196, 202; Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, "Identity and Interaction: A Sociocultural Linguistic Approach," *Discourse Studies* 7, no. 4–5 (2005): 595.

<sup>33</sup> Scott F. Kiesling, "Style as Stance: Stance as the Explanation for Patterns of Sociolinguistic Variation," in *Stance: Sociolinguistic Perspectives*, ed. Alexandra Jaffe (Oxford, 2009), 171–194; Scott F. Kiesling, "Stances of the 'Gay Voice' and 'Brospeak': Towards a Systematic Model of Stance," in *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Sexuality*, ed. Kira Hall and Rusty Barrett (published online, 2019).

consider the NNV style in these terms because it is decidedly evaluative, reflected in the rich lexical repertoire described above: positive, for “us,” and negative, for “not us.” This is a hallmark of the emergent identity, constructed in relation to other identities.

The caricaturization of the skit interviewer’s register is directed both towards language use and towards groups of people, and humoristically captures the evaluative aspect of the style. The stance also features high alignment with group members, hence solidarity, reflected in the slang expressions above, and especially in the use of deictic indexicals in the skit: “ours” and “not ours.” There is no need to name the group, as if its members were physically present, speaking in unison. The style also features high investment, represented by “and how!” and “cut the bull,” and in the broader set of the slang expressions. In the next section we explain the processes by which social meaning accrues to these native stances.

### **Indexicality and Identity**

Our central point is that the new native subjectivity is constructed via a series of micro-stances oriented towards language varieties: NNV and its alternatives are the raw semiotic ingredients from which its social meanings are assembled. These micro-stances construct a modern Jewish-Israeli notion of authenticity, via the following set of oppositions, where the first member designates the native value, and the second its non-native negative.<sup>34</sup>

- (a) Assertive vs. submissive
- (b) Action-oriented vs. wordy

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<sup>34</sup> A similar classification of values is suggested by Katriel, *Talking Straight*, 17–32, for the *dugri* speech: assertiveness (=confidence, strength), sincerity (=directness, truthfulness), “antistyle” attitude (=action over words, transparency), naturalness (=simplicity, spontaneity), and *communitas* spirit (=solidarity, liminality).

- (c) Direct vs. obfuscating
- (d) Natural vs. pretentious
- (e) Authentic vs. planned
- (f) Modern vs. traditional

Below we show that the negative values map onto the perception of alternative language varieties: the language of the traditional Jewish sources; the formal standard of the the State and the older generation; and the Hebrew varieties of Jewish immigrants. But how do linguistic signs, arbitrary pairings of form and meaning, come to be associated with particular social meanings, such as the above? The link between a linguistic form and its social meaning is indexical: linguistic forms index certain stances, or attributes (such as “confrontational” or “authentic”), which are then associated, often stereotypically, with types of speakers.<sup>35</sup> Before turning to these associations, we introduce the process through which linguistic forms become invested with social meanings and the ideological mechanisms underlying their production in NNV.

Beginning with Michael Silverstein, social meaning is understood as social semiosis.<sup>36</sup> A central notion is *indexicality*, an interpretive mechanism that designates reference by directly pointing to the entity denoted, in the way in which a first person pronoun directly points to, or *indexes*, the speaker. In this example, the index is the first person category, which “points” to distinct individuals depending on the identity of the speaker in a given speech act. Importantly, the index is not the denotation, nor is the index related to the denotation iconically (via some notion of similarity, as in onomatopoea) or symbolically (via conventions of the sort which link words,

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<sup>35</sup> Silverstein, “Indexical Order;” Bucholtz and Hall, “Identity and Interaction.”

<sup>36</sup> Michael Silverstein, “Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology,” in *The Elements: A Parasession on Linguistic Units and Levels*, ed. Paul R. Clyne, William F. Hanks, and Carol L. Hofbauer (Chicago, 1979), 193–247.

such as *cat*, with descriptive content). In an indexical relationship, there is a direct link between a linguistic form and its meaning, or denotation.

The indexical mechanism is useful for understanding associations between linguistic forms and social meanings since these associations typically do not rely on any descriptive content in the way that the meaning of *cat* does. Furthermore, linguistic forms which are not words can also bear social meaning. A set of vowel pronunciations can index a social-regional property, such as “Californian:” there is no iconic or symbolic relation between vowels and region; certain vowels become *associated* with certain speakers, and this association colors the perception of these vowels in a particular way – this is the social meaning of these vowels. In the most basic instance of this association, a particular vowel pronunciation indexes “being from California.”

Two additional properties are important in the discussion to follow: indexical relationships are *dynamic*, and they are *ideological*. Indexicality is *dynamic* in the sense that the social meaning of an index may shift over time. The set of vowel pronunciations associated with a Californian accent can also index a fun, laid back, carefree attitude, or stance.<sup>37</sup> The recycling of a regional feature to index a stance plays an important role in language change and provides a useful key for understanding the emergence of social meanings in NNV style.<sup>38</sup> In this example, “fun,” “laid back,” “carefree” refer to attributes, or stances, and only indirectly to social categories. Following work in socio-linguistics, we take linguistic forms to directly index stances, rather than full-fledged identities, and we show that NNV can be characterized as a series of micro-stances, indexed by linguistic forms.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Robert J. Podesva, “The California Vowel Shift and Gay Identity,” *American Speech* 86, no. 1 (2011): 32–51.

<sup>38</sup> Silverstein “Indexical Order;” Eckert, “Indexical Field,” 463–64.

<sup>39</sup> Elinor Ochs, “Indexing Gender,” in *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon*, ed. Duranti Alessandro and Charles Goodwin (Cambridge, 1992), 335–58.

Indexicality is also an *ideological* operation which naturalizes the link it creates between forms and social meanings through *essentialization*<sup>40</sup> (or *rhematization*<sup>41</sup>). In this process, linguistic features that index social groups are perceived as essentialist representations of them, as if a linguistic feature somehow displayed a group's inherent essence. For example, mitigating language comes to be associated with feminine gender, as if femininity was related, in its essence, to weakness. Many researchers have pointed out that, rather than representing a pre-existing frailty, the normative link *produces* subordination via indexical essentialization combined with ideologies surrounding gender.<sup>42</sup> In this way, indexical mechanisms contribute to the *production* of identity in language, including the new Jewish national identity associated with NNV.

With all of this in mind, we return to the excerpt above and the double standard situation it introduces. NNV style is constructed in distinction to the style of the interviewer, characterized both linguistically, as the formal-synthetic variety of educators, and in terms of parameters related to politeness and rudeness. The caricature of the formal standard reflects the perspective of the Sabra, and in the skit's alignment with this perspective, it performatively enacts the attitude at the core of the native style. More generally, NNV is constructed in contrast to alternative varieties or styles, all of which are non-native.

(a) The heterogeneous language of the **traditional (post-biblical) Jewish sources**, associated with the pre-revival rabbinic world (religious literature of Jewish law, textual exegesis, and liturgy), indexed learnedness, verbal sophistication, elderliness, and submissiveness, categories which

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<sup>40</sup> Silverstein, "Indexical Order," 202–204.

<sup>41</sup> Susan Gal, "Language Ideologies Compared: Metaphors of Public/Private," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (2005): 35 n. 5.

<sup>42</sup> Robin Lakoff, *Language and Woman's Place* (New York, 1975).



contrast with the native anti-intellectual orientation, preference for action over words, and assertiveness.<sup>43</sup> In the native-born ethos of the period, these categories are also ideologically related (though not identical) to femininity.<sup>44</sup>

Sander L. Gilman documents a 400-year history of anti-Semitism targetting language specifically, and tracks the shifting associations in the German-speaking world with “the hidden language of the Jews.”<sup>45</sup> The text provides a deep historical perspective on the consistency of anti-Semitic attention to Jewish language and speech, and their ideological roots, beginning with the perception of Hebrew in the early modern period as the language of magic; the Hebrew-German mixture in the seventeenth century perceived as a thieves’ jargon; and *Mauscheln*, the Jewish accent in German during the enlightenment. Later, when the Jews in Germany shed their accent, the science of race postulated that it is the *essence* of language that the Jews can never truly possess. In this respect, the language of the Jew and the language of women suspiciously coalesce. Like women, the Jews perversely privilege the signifier over signified, as indicated in their love for wordplay, and in their failure to grasp the essence of language as a vehicle for transparent communication: language is used to conceal and deceive rather than to reveal. We suspect that

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<sup>43</sup> Katriel, *Talking Straight*, 17–18; Almog, *Sabra*, 138–46.

<sup>44</sup> Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The sexual politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (University of California, 1997); Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley, 1997); Michael Gluzman, *Ha-guf ha-ziiyoni: le'ummiyyut, migdar u-miniyyut ba-sifrut ha-ivrit ha-hadasha* (Tel Aviv 2007), 22–23, 182; Nurith Gertz, “From Jew to Hebrew: The ‘Zionist Narrative’ in the Israeli Cinema of the 1940s and 1950s,” *Israel Affairs* 4, no. 3–4 (1998): 177–78.

<sup>45</sup> Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore, 1986).

these historical sentiments, which made their way into the Zionist anti-diasporic ethos of the early pioneers,<sup>46</sup> informed the Sabras' verbal preferences, most likely subconsciously.

The values of directness and transparency have their source in European modernity and enlightenment, beginning in seventeenth century Britain.<sup>47</sup> The ideological preference for directness in NNV ethos is therefore also a step into modernity and its value system, aligning vernacular Hebrew with values far removed from the Jewish world.

(b) The language of the formal standard of the **new state establishment** and the **older generation** of parents and educators indexed formality and institutionalized regulation, and by extension, artificiality, contrasting with the native values of naturalness, authenticity, and vernacularism.<sup>48</sup> The coexistence of two conflicting standards and the denouncement of prescriptivists as outdated and counter-revolutionary date back to the Second Aliya period (1904–14): Lewis Glinert describes an “apathy to the language planning attempts of a group of dry dogged scholars” by “the post-1904 wave [of] typically young, unmarried Socialists, seeking [...] to erase their bourgeois past.”<sup>49</sup> This cultural struggle intensified and became a matter of public concern only after the War of Independence (1947–49) and the establishment of the state (1948), which marked a pivotal

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<sup>46</sup> Katriel, *Talking Straight*, 17–21; Almog, *Sabra*, 76–80; Raḥel Elboym-Dror, “‘Hu holekh u-va, mi-kirbenu hu ba ha-ivri he-ḥadash’: al tarbut ha-no'ar shel ha-aliyyot ha-rishonot,” *Alpayim* 12 [1996]: 122–123.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality* (Cambridge, 2003), ch. 2.

<sup>48</sup> Helman, *Becoming Israeli*, 167; Mor and Sichel, “Ha-ivrit,” 141–43.

<sup>49</sup> Lewis Glinert, “The ‘Back to the Future’ Syndrome in Language Planning: The Case of Modern Hebrew,” in *Language Planning*, ed. David F. Marshall (Amsterdam, 1991), 228.

transition: from a reality of nationalist progression<sup>50</sup> and exhilarating marginal existence<sup>51</sup> to a non-glamorous nation-state routine. In this new context, the older, nonnative, generation, suddenly seemed out of touch with current events and the original socialistic values of the first pioneers. In the eyes of the Sabras, now beginning to attain visibility in the public sphere, the language of their parents, teachers, and political leaders became associated with bureaucracy, patronizing formality, and artificiality.

The native born youth felt betrayed by the new state's leadership, and reacted by enregistering their native style.<sup>52</sup> The formal/informal opposition is dramatized in the skit above, where one speaker combines formal Hebrew features and extreme politeness, only to be scorned by the Sabra. The combination of the linguistic formality of the register and the social formality of politeness enhance each other to produce formality as a social meaning, an index of stiffness and artificiality contrasting with the informality and authenticity of the native style.

(c) The overwhelming waves of **Jewish immigrants** from Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East in the late 1940s and early 1950s brought with them regional varieties of Hebrew, used mainly for religious purposes within specific communities, as well as spoken Jewish languages: Yiddish, Judeo-Arabic, Judezmo, and many others.<sup>53</sup> Despite many differences, these varieties, as a whole,

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<sup>50</sup> Tsamir, "Jewish-Israeli Poetry," 90–99.

<sup>51</sup> Katriel, *Talking Straight*, 29–32; Miri Talmon, *Bluz la-zabar ha-avud: havurot ve-nostalgiyya ba-kolnoa ha-yisre'eli* (Tel Aviv 2001), 121, 131.

<sup>52</sup> An important precedent can be found in the elitist attitude of the first native-Hebrew children of the First Aliya (Elboym-Dror, "Tarbut ha-no'ar;" Almog, *Sabra*, 7–8), but this early activity did not produce a new enregistered style, probably because they were too few, and the new Hebrew culture in Palestine was too young.

<sup>53</sup> Ben-Rafael, *Language*, 50–53; Henkin, "Sociolinguistics," 51–54.

indexed non-modernity, submissiveness, and overall diasporic foreignness, contrasting with native values of modernity, assertiveness, and national uniformity.<sup>54</sup>

Henriette Dahan-Kalev describes the encounter between immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa and the locals in terms of an anxiety that the massive number of immigrants would interfere with the Europeanization project in the new state. She attributes the threat posed by the immigrants to a set of contrasting values, including modernity vs. tradition and secularity vs. religion,<sup>55</sup> and stresses two other related contrasts: (a) whereas the new Israeli culture contained an anti-diasporic strain and sought to break away from diasporic customs, the new immigrants remained aligned with the traditions of the diaspora; (b) the orientation of the community in Israel towards democratic, often socialist, values, was not shared by the immigrants. New immigrants were expected to shed their ways of speaking, dressing, and socializing, and often even their own names, and to assimilate to local native norms. Language acquisition, specifically acquisition of the native variety, was a central vehicle for social mobility,<sup>56</sup> suggesting, once again, an indexical link – rather than a natural one – between linguistic features (NNV) and social meaning (attributes of modernity).

In summary, the values embedded in the native style can be understood as a series of micro-stances towards non-native varieties against which the new style is constructed, always as the positive member in an opposition. In the list of oppositions presented above, (a–c) are most closely related

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<sup>54</sup> Almog, *Sabra*, 82–103, 117–18; Helman, *Becoming Israeli*, 32–33, 43–44.

<sup>55</sup> Henriette Dahan-Kalev, “Zehut yisre'elit – ben olim le-vatikim,” in *Ben olim le-vatikim: yisra'el ba-aliyya ha-gedola, 1948–1953*, ed. Dalia Ofer (Jerusalem, 1996), 177–90; see also E. Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (New York, 2010 [1989]), 105–109.

<sup>56</sup> Katriel, *Talking Straight*, 19–21; Almog, *Sabra*, 95–96.

to the language of traditional Jewish sources, (d–e) are most closely related to the language of the older generation, though (b) and (c) could also fit into this category, and (f) as well as (a) seem related to the varieties brought by the immigrants. Because the object of these stances is language itself, these values are enacted in NNV style: assertive, action-oriented, direct, natural, authentic, and modern.

Just as these stances collectively construct the emergent vernacular subjectivity and style, they also construct a version of modern masculinity. Language use constitutes a core site for the symbolic molding of a modern Jewish masculinity, rooted in sovereignty and statehood. The ideological link to masculinity is not accidental, as it contrasts with the ideological associations to femininity of the language of traditional Jewish sources alluded to above. In this way, the positive values of modern masculinity, nativehood, and vernacular authority mutually embed and solidify each other within the emergent symbolic order, in alignment with broader post-war performances of masculinity, authenticity, and modernity in the west.<sup>57</sup>

### **The incorporation of Arabic words**

Another source of raw semiotic material in the production of the new identity is provided by words in foreign languages, and especially Arabic. Many Arabic words were incorporated into Hebrew, a process usually identified with the culture of the Palmah (the commando segment of the underground Haganah military organization in Palestine during the last decade of the British Mandate period): words like *ahlan* (=hello), *dir balak* (=watch out), *finjan* (=cezve), *ma'alesh* (=nevermind), *dugri* (note 10). The skit from which we quoted above includes *mabsut* (=happy,

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<sup>57</sup> For example, in the silver screen performances by Marlon Brando in *Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) and *On the Waterfront* (1954).

content) and *mekayyef* (a verbal form based on nominal *kef* [=fun]). These words were not only in very common use, but became status symbols for the new native image.<sup>58</sup>

How can the widespread incorporation of Arabic words be reconciled with the broader ambivalence towards Arabic?<sup>59</sup> A pure Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew, though proposed and argued for, was ultimately not adopted, despite its greater resemblance to the hypothesized ancient pronunciation.<sup>60</sup> The semiotic concept of orders of indexicality is key – Arabic words, now part of a vernacular Hebrew lexicon, index Arabic speakers, but not *only*. In higher indexical orders linguistic forms typically index attributes that correspond to a social evaluation of a group, and accordingly, the incorporation of Arabic words into Hebrew can be understood as appropriation, within the native variety, of attributes associated with the common perception of Palestinian Arabs. Rather than trying to become Arab, speakers using Arabic words are absorbing, via indexical links, particular qualities of “Arabness,” as part of a broad process of cultural appropriation which extends beyond language to include dance, dress, and other forms of cultural expression.<sup>61</sup>

What does Arabic in Hebrew index? It is highly probable that it indexes qualities of stereotypically perceived Arabic culture that align with the native identity, such as the desire for direct and warm relationships, suggested by a significant set of Arabic words describing familial relationships, friendship, and hospitality. It is also possible that Arabic words index the Sabra desire for intimate familiarity with the land, related to the value placed on knowledge of local flora

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<sup>58</sup> Haseeb Shehadeh, “Arabic Loanwords in Hebrew,” *Studia Orientalia* 111 (2011): 333–36; Roni Henkin-Roitfarb, “Hebrew and Arabic in Asymmetric Contact in Israel,” *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics* 7, no. 1 (2011): 66–70.

<sup>59</sup> Almog, *Sabra*, 185–90; Henkin, “Sociolinguistics,” 59.

<sup>60</sup> Mor, “Prescriptive Activity,” 116–18.

<sup>61</sup> Helman, *Becoming Israeli*, 37; Uri Mor, “Prescriptivism, Nation, and Style: The Role of Nonclassical Elements in the Stylistic Stratification of Modern Hebrew,” *Sociolinguistic Studies* 11 (2017): 4–5.

and topography. One of the arguments made in pre-state Palestine for the study of Arabic was that it would help Jewish youth strengthen their ancient Semitic identity, a step towards an authentic Hebrew one.<sup>62</sup> To this we add a symbolic notion of nativeness and authenticity: Arabic words index the local Palestinian's native connection to the land; what is appropriated and incorporated into the new identity is Palestinian nativism.<sup>63</sup>

### **A Style which Speaks for Itself: Authenticity and Authority**

The indexical link to native authenticity defines the core value of NNV, and connects to the set of micro-stances from which NNV style is constructed, which together contribute to a composite notion of authenticity: direct, transparent, natural, and native. But the notion of authenticity is deceptive, because as it presents itself as free of ideological intervention, i.e., natural, it is, in fact, ideologically saturated. It is also inextricably tied to authority, in this case, the new vernacular authority of the native born.

The value of authenticity has historical roots in modernity, Romanticism, and ideas related to the nation. It is one of the three factors which, according to Joshua Fishman, determine language choice or language engineering in the service of the state, along with modernity and unity.<sup>64</sup> So while Sabra authenticity may present itself as new and unique, it is deeply rooted in European

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<sup>62</sup> Liora R. Halperin, *Babel in Zion: Jews, Nationalism, and Language Diversity in Palestine, 1920–1948* (New Haven, 2015), 183–84, 204.

<sup>63</sup> Henkin, "Contact," 66.

<sup>64</sup> Joshua A. Fishman, "Language and Nationalism: Two Integrative Essays, Part II: The Impact of Nationalism on Language and Language Planning," in *Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective* (Clevedon, 1989 [1972]), 299–309.

modernity, part of broader European Romanticism and “back to nature” movements.<sup>65</sup> Lionel Trilling traces the shifting values of sincerity and authenticity during the Enlightenment, and shows how their social meanings vary across cultures.<sup>66</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, authenticity was understood in opposition to beauty, considered the superior member of the pair, evoking also gendered nuances, possibly related to the meanings of authenticity within the emerging youth culture in Palestine/Israel: authenticity as offensiveness and masculinity.

Authenticity is thus an ideological construct that implicates a consensus, since authenticity requires a process of authorization; and value, since authentic objects have been ratified in the broader cultural context.<sup>67</sup> Authorization and value are directly related to our opening question: how does value accrue to language varieties? In Coupland’s discussion, authenticity depends on a process of authentication, and this invokes authority of some sort, but also the reverse: since authenticity is already invested with value, it follows that authentic things are authenticating for people who recognize their authenticity. NNV is authenticating for the native born generations, but not only. Once its value is recognized, the use of the native variety is authenticating for whoever adopts this way of speaking. Similarly, the authenticity of NNV style also performatively enacts a new kind of Jewish authority, that of the native born. An alternative to the traditional authority of the text, the new authority, based on mastery of NNV, is rooted in experience: of being born in Palestine and raised as a member of the hegemonic group.

### **Dahn Ben Amotz’s *Ma nishma***

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<sup>65</sup> Katriel, *Talking Straight*, 22, 28.

<sup>66</sup> Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), 58.

<sup>67</sup> Nikolas Coupland, “Sociolinguistic Authenticities,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 7, no. 3 (2003): 417–31. See also Bucholtz and Hall, “Bucholtz and Hall,” 601–605.



By the end of the 1940s the Sabras had become a recognized demographic group, and their native identity an established fact.<sup>68</sup> However, their collective voice was still evolving and lacked in public presence. Only in the 1950s did the vernacular style and authority incrementally emerge through the activity of young cultural agents in popular arenas, most significantly journalism and entertainment troupes.

Agha's model of enregisterment (note 24) emphasizes the role of speakers and cultural agents in the production of cultural value and social meaning. The expansion of style is mediated by characterological figures – social personae who come to typify a way of speaking – and processes of role alignment, in which speakers may align themselves with a characterological figure of their choice. In the case of NNV, multiple cultural agents actively created and disseminated such figures.

A typical public platform of enregisterment in the 1950s was *Ma nishma*, a weekly column by Dahn Ben Amotz (1923–89), published between 1953 and 1959 in *Dvar ha-shavua* and *Ma'ariv*, and in 1959 as a book.<sup>69</sup> It supplied the native identity with its optimal articulation: a distinct NNV style, among a range of sociolinguistic possibilities. It also generated an ongoing flow of vernacular representations, through which it could be molded, celebrated, and promoted to a legitimate standard. The content of the columns was in line with this performance of native authority – they aspired to depict the everyday life of the new state and to capture its cultural essence by focusing on snapshot moments and experiences in select locations: a Hebrew lesson for new immigrants, a stop at a Tiberian café, a visit to an Arab refugee camp, a breakfast with the mayor of Be'er Sheva, and many more. Vernacular values are sometimes constructed in these

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<sup>68</sup> Almog, *Sabra*, 5–14; Helman, *Becoming Israeli*, 168–69.

<sup>69</sup> Dahn Ben-Amotz, *Ma nishma* (Jerusalem, 1959).

writings via an imaginary native local folk, identified as Middle Eastern rather than European. An important feature is the presence of the author at these sites, and the imposition of his gaze produces a nascent blueprint for orientalism Israeli-style.

The 1959 compilation of the columns, a 400-page book that included about 150 segments, is analyzed below as a demonstration – one of many – of the verbal mechanisms that led to the emergence of NNV standard, and the indexical practices of distinction, authentication, stance taking, and enregisterment involved in this process.

Who was Dahn Ben Amotz? From the 1950s through the 1980s he was an innovative and popular figure in Israeli popular culture, and engaged in a wide range of activities, from journalism to film acting. Although he immigrated to Palestine from Poland in 1938, and for several years struggled to shake the newcomer image,<sup>70</sup> many Israelis saw in him the epitome of Sabra identity. The fact that he was a known sexual predator did not, during his lifetime, detract from his public image.<sup>71</sup> In the 1950s Ben Amotz was known not only for his journalistic writing but also for participation in the highly popular radio panel show *Shlosha be-sira ahat* (1956–59) and for two other bestselling projects with the lyricist Haim Hefer: the book *Yalkut ha-kzavim* and the nostalgic musical show *Tel Aviv ha-ktanna* (1959).

In his *Ma nishma* columns Ben Amotz functions as an “iconic speaker.”<sup>72</sup> Not only does he master the prestigious variety, he is also its authoritative producer and designer – one of many

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<sup>70</sup> Amnon Dankner, *Dan ben amoz* (Jerusalem, 1992), 31–65.

<sup>71</sup> Ben Amotz’ authoritative stance was also expressed as male entitlement towards underage girls. We cannot do justice here to the complexity of a potential relationship between the model of predatory masculinity presented by Ben Amotz and his work as cultural innovator.

<sup>72</sup> Penelope Eckert, *Linguistic Variation as Social Practice: The Linguistic Construction of Identity in Belten High* (Oxford, 2000), 217.

“cultural ‘copywriters’”<sup>73</sup> who operated during the 1950s, along with Shaul Biber, Amos Kenan, Ephraim Kishon, Yigal Mossinson, Shaikhe Ophir, Chaim Topol, and others (notably all male). Although in the columns Ben Amotz feigns anonymity and often writes in the first person plural, he is in fact an established “authentic” authority whose role is to present a naturalistic report on Israeli life in order to make the desired Sabra spirit accessible to common Israeli readers. In Agha’s terms, the weekly sequence of columns constitutes an array of messages that motivate their receivers to participate in the speech chain by means of typification and role alignment, eventually leading to enregisterment.

Unlike Avnery’s skit above, the columns’ style is not an unselective imitation of vernacular Hebrew, perhaps because naturalistic representation of speech in writing was only at its inception,<sup>74</sup> and unthinkable in journalistic writing. However, representations of the vernacular do stand out, mostly in reported speech and the self-reflective introduction to the book, in two ways: (a) the language is unmistakably simple and distant from other written genres, both literary (Belle-lettres, poetry, plays) and non-literary (administrative correspondence, newspapers, radio broadcasting). In many cases of potential variation Ben Amotz chooses the variant which would be more natural in spoken Hebrew, for instance: *eze reshima* rather than *ezo reshima* (some list), *im lo hayiti poteah* rather than *illule patahti* (if I had not opened), *hi lo yoda'at* rather than *hi ena yoda'at* (she does not know), *tishme'u sippur* rather than *shim'u sippur* (listen to this story);<sup>75</sup> (b) it is overlaid with vernacular lexical elements, for example: *lehashviz* (to show off), *ekh ze holekh?*

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<sup>73</sup> Almog, *Sabra*, 259.

<sup>74</sup> Shaked, “Ha-sikkuy;” Rina Ban-Shahar, “The Phonetic Representation of Spoken Language in Modern Hebrew Literature,” *TTR: Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction* 8, no. 2 (1995): 245-73.

<sup>75</sup> Ben-Amotz, *Ma nishma*, 5, 6, 12, 17.

(how does it go?), *he'afnu mabbat mi-saviv* (we looked around), *horgim sha'a she'atayim* (kill an hour or two), *lenadned* (to nag),<sup>76</sup> and the column title: *Ma nishma* (what's new).<sup>77</sup>

This selective use of vernacular elements reveals the performative nature of the texts: they mark and enact the native identity rather than adopt it. This general style, which incorporates vernacular features and authoritative attitude into simple, occasionally slightly elevated, Hebrew, indexes naturalness and nativeness and is indexically linked to Sabras. However, its full social meaning is defined in contrast to other styles, most significantly of the older (non-native) generation, associated with the old Jewish world on the one hand and the stiff establishment on the other hand, and new immigrants, associated with cultural detachment. This is achieved, as we demonstrate below, through (a) indexical distinctions between styles and demographic groups; (b) hierarchical positioning between them, by means of micro-stances, authentication, and authorization; (c) ideological essentialization of links between linguistic features and social categories.

The most telling part is the introduction,<sup>78</sup> which frames the compilation as the ultimate representation of Sabra identity. Its reflexive title, “Without Much Introduction,” discloses the fact that the book is geared towards a biased audience that has no need for long preliminaries, either because it already belongs to this elite group and enjoys its ceremonious self-reflection, or because it wishes to join it. The introduction does offer a short description of *Ma nishma*, cited from one of the earliest columns,<sup>79</sup> but only reluctantly.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 5, 18, 27, 47, 59.

<sup>77</sup> On this idiom see Almog, *Sabra*, 246.

<sup>78</sup> Ben-Amotz, *Ma nishma*, 5–6.

<sup>79</sup> *Dvar Ha-Shavua*, Mar. 6, 1953, p. 12.

## בלי הרבה הקדמות

אין לי כבר מה לעשות רק לכתוב הקדמות. אני אוהב מאד את הטיפוסים שלא יכולים להוציא משפט מהפה בלי להקדים אותו בשלושה משפטים של דברי פתיחה. הם עולים לי על העצבים. ועוד יותר מרגיזים אותי כל אותם סופרים צעירים שאינם יכולים להוציא לאור איזה קובץ רשימות בינוניות מבלי לכתוב בו הקדמה מפוצצת שבה הם מנסים להסביר לקורא את מה שהוא יכול להבין גם בלעדיה [...] הנה תראו: אני מוציא לאור ספר. אז מה? אני אתחיל להתעסק כאן עם כל מיני דברי פתיחה. שגוען מוחלט! [...]

למה, אתם שואלים ודאי בגבות מורמות, אני מפרסם דוקא את הרשימות הגרועות? פשוט מאד: מתוך ענווה. אני לא אוהב להשוויץ ובכלל לא נעים לי לדבר כל כך הרבה על עצמי. אני לא אתחיל לספר לכם כאן את תולדות חיי כמו שסופרים אחרים נוהגים לעשות. [...]

כוונת כותבי המדור הזה היא לתת חתך על מצב רוחם והלכי מחשבותיהם של תושבי הארץ הזאת. תפקידו לבטא את הטיפוסי ואת הבלתי רגיל שבחיים. החומר למדור זה נאסף על-ידי כמה אנשים וערוך בידי דן בן אמוץ הרוצה בעילום שמו. כוונת לשון רבים היא מצד אחד לדבר בשם כל הכותבים למדור זה, ומצד שני לפתח סגנון חסר פניות ככל האפשר. [...]

אתם רואים? אמרתי לכם: מתחילים בהקדמות – לא יוצאים מזה. אם לא הייתי פותח את הפה הגדול שלי, לא הייתי צריך להתחיל להודות עכשיו ל"דבר השבוע" ו"מעריב" על שאירחו אותי במשך שנים כה רבות בבתיהם המרווחים [...]

נו אולי תתחילו כבר לקרוא את הספר? כמה זמן לוקח לכם לקרוא את הפטפוטים האלה? יללה, תמשיכו. בלי הרבה הקדמות.

## Without Much Introduction

Don't I have better things to do than write introductions. I just love those guys who can't utter a word without first introducing it in three sentences. They get on my nerves. I get even more annoyed by these young writers who can't publish a collection of mediocre pieces without a bombastic introduction where they explain what any reader would gather without it. [...] Check this out: I'm having a book published. So what? So I'll begin with all kinds of opening remarks? Completely nuts! [...]

Why, you may ask, am I including only the bad pieces in this collection? It's simple: out of modesty. I don't like showing off, and I really don't like talking about myself too much. I'm not going to tell you the story of my life now, the way other writers do. [...]

The column's goal is to provide an overview of the moods and thoughts of the people of this land. Its purpose is to express both the typical and the unusual in life. The material for the column is collected by a few people, and edited by Dahn Ben Amotz who prefers to remain anonymous. The point of the plural conjugation is, on the one hand, to represent all of the contributors to the column, and on the other hand, to develop as objective a style as possible. [...]

You see? I told you: once you start with introductions, you're never done. If I hadn't opened my big mouth, I wouldn't have had to thank *Dvar ha-shavua* and *Ma'ariv* for having me for so many years in their commodious homes [...]

Start reading the book already. How long does it take to read these yappings? Get going, without much introduction.

The text essentializes the links between the represented vernacular style and the attributed values of authenticity, modernity, and authority. The Sabra identity is foregrounded through a set of oppositions: action vs. wordiness; folksiness and simplicity vs. pretentiousness; directness and truthfulness vs. politeness; vernacular language (natural, authentic, and vibrant) vs. sophistication and learnedness; modernity and subversiveness vs. obedience. This set of indexed stances, orchestrated authoritatively, consolidates a new style while charging it with social meaning and preparing it for enregisterment.

On the other hand, the introduction displays the performative and playful quality of the *Manishma* project. It makes clear that Ben Amotz is not really an anonymous observer, but rather a cultural leader; that his declaration of modesty cannot be entirely honest; and that in spite of the dismissive tone, the compilation is an important cultural event which does call for an introduction.

This does not contradict the aforementioned values of truthfulness and simplicity, but rather testifies to the tongue-in-cheek character of the Sabra ethos and to the fact that it is a cultural construct,<sup>80</sup> subject to performance.

Another example is “An Ulpan Class.”<sup>81</sup> According to Ben Amotz it is a translation of an English letter from one of his regular readers, describing a typical class in an Ulpan (Hebrew school for new immigrants). The text mocks two types of non-native Hebrew: the students use a rudimentary foreign kind of Hebrew, which indexes foreignness, and the teacher is described as follows:

בן 50 בערך. פנים מבריקים, קרחת קורנת, שפתיים צרות ומחייך עד אזניו. כנראה מפולין. במקום שין או סמך הוא מבטא כמעט את האות תיו.

About fifty. Glowing face. Shiny bald head. Narrow lips and smiling to his ears. Apparently from Poland. Instead of *shin* [=sh] or *samekh* [=s] he pronounces a sound that almost sounds like *tav* [=t].

For a native speaker of Hebrew, this pronunciation is undeniably European, i.e., diasporic, and in the text it is represented phonetically in the reported speech of the teacher, e.g., *tirtemu be-vakata* instead of *tirshemu be-vakasha* (=please write down). The absurdity of assigning a non-native speaker to be the face of practical Modern Hebrew highlights the detachment of the Israeli establishment from social reality as well as its hypocrisy. In this way Ben Amotz authenticates the

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<sup>80</sup> Elliott Oring, *Israeli Humor: The Content and Structure of the Chizbat of the Palmah* (Albany, 1981), 122–30.

<sup>81</sup> *Dvar ha-shavua*, Oct. 15, 1954, p. 15; Ben-Amotz, *Ma nishma*, 53–55.

native standard while delegitimizing its alternatives, thus inverting the decades-long tradition of educators rebuking Sabras for their faulty language.<sup>82</sup>

Similarly, “The Hebrew Teachers”<sup>83</sup> describes a meeting at the Ministry of Education branch in Be'er Sheva between an administrator and two enthusiastic education experts who wish to open an Ulpan: a woman with a Polish accent and a man with a Lithuanian accent. Both accents are demonstrated phonetically in the reported speech of the experts throughout the text. Ben Amotz ends his report by citing from a poster hung on the office’s wall, but instead of simply recording the pedagogic text, which specifies the national goal of “governmental education,” he manipulates it to reflect a mix of the two foreign accents. The result is a grotesque combination of two non-native alternatives: the diasporic (the European accent of the two experts) and the institutional (the formal style of the Ministry of Education).

In spite of the repudiation of the old Jewish world and its textual hegemony, the documentation of Ben Amotz’s journalistic impressions and thoughts in writing, followed by their compilation in a book, ultimately led to an increase in his textual authority. This strategy is more apparent in *Yalkut ha-kzavim*, a collection of short folkloristic tales associated with the Palmah.<sup>84</sup> In addition to the written documentation of anecdotes originally relayed orally,<sup>85</sup> both the usage of Jewish “Rashi” script<sup>86</sup> in the headlines and the mock-colophon<sup>87</sup> frame *Yalkut ha-kzavim* as a

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<sup>82</sup> Glinert, “Back to the Future,” 236–37; Mor and Sichel, “Ha-ivrit,” 139–40, 145–46.

<sup>83</sup> *Dvar ha-shavua*, Mar. 26, 1954, p. 13; Ben-Amotz, *Ma nishma*, 31–32.

<sup>84</sup> Dahn Ben Amotz and Haim Hefer, *Yalkut ha-kzavim* ([Tel Aviv], 1956). On the folklore of the Palmah and *Yalkut ha-kzavim* see Oring, *Israeli Humor*.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 2.

<sup>86</sup> Ada Yardeni, *The Book of Hebrew Script* (Jerusalem, 1997), 97, 246.

<sup>87</sup> Ben Amotz and Hefer, *Yalkut ha-kzavim*, 137.



traditional Jewish composition, thus ridiculing Jewish tradition and simultaneously recruiting it to articulate and enregister a new folkloric authority. In this respect, Ben Amotz, along with Hefer, Avnery, and other non-Sabra “cultural ‘copywriters’” who had to establish their legitimacy, stands between the old textual regime and the new vernacular one. By lampooning traditional Jewish writing he gains cultural prestige twice: once for rejecting it, and once for mastering it.

Alongside these practices, a common perspective is constructed along with a collective folklore and a hierarchical configuration of variation. This is realized, first, in the abundance of sites, customs, and linguistic varieties, portrayed as cultural richness and wholeness. Ben Amotz travels the land of Israel – not only Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa, and Be'er Sheva, but also Nahariya, Ma'abarot, Rosh Ha-Ayin, Nes Harim, Gaza, among others – and documents a tapestry of local types and quaint, or amusing, cultural phenomena, in order “to express both the typical and the unusual in life,” as stated in the book’s introduction.

For example, in “A Marvel from Degania”<sup>88</sup> Ben Amotz arrives at Degania Alef, a Kibbutz on the south shore of the Kinneret, to interview comrade Avraham, who immigrated to Palestine from Russia in the 1920s and astonishingly hadn’t been to Tel Aviv in 25 years. He is described as “tanned only up to his joints and wearing a gray undershirt and khaki pants,” and speaks “in an accent that to this day we have not been able to identify.” “Carmel Market”<sup>89</sup> is an ode to the famous Tel Aviv market, where “the people haven’t changed, and the language is the same old language, a blend of Hebrew, Arabic, and Yiddish peppered with Russian and Spanish curses.” The text sensuously recounts the produce sold at the marketplace and the merchants’ juicy lines.

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<sup>88</sup> *Dvar ha-shavua*, June 18, 1954, p. 12; Ben-Amotz, *Ma nishma*, 126–28.

<sup>89</sup> *Ma'ariv*, June 8, 1956, p. 5; Ben-Amotz, *Ma nishma*, 72–74.

The columns pay special attention to manifestations of local flavor. The authentic sites are indexed as simple, honest, and communal, and are of two kinds: rural agricultural communities and locations chosen for their oriental nature, either local Arab or Jewish (Mizrahi). In both cases the authentic communities are not identical to the Sabras', but the columns bind them together by means of *adequation*.<sup>90</sup> As demonstrated above, the authentication action is two-sided: it increases Ben Amotz's authority as an agent of authentication, while associating him with the authenticity value of the folkloristic sites.

“Harvesters Base”<sup>91</sup> narrates excerpts of dinner talk in a rural communal dining hall.<sup>92</sup> The simple food and lifestyle of the combine harvester operators are matched by simple native language:

שני לוקסים הפיצו בפנים הצריף אור עירום וחמימות טובה. ליד שני שולחנות ישבו כשמונה אנשים רחוצים ושזופים והפריחו משפטים קצרים תוך כדי אכילה. שניים ישבו בפניה ושיחקו שח. מתוך המטבח הופיעה אשה צעירה בסינור לבן ושאלה: "רוצים מרק, בחורים?" ומישהו קרא: "תני הנה, נעמי". על השולחנות עמדו קומקומי אלומיניום עם תה, קערות סאלאט, חמאה, דג מלוח, גבינה, לחם, חלב וכלבוניקים. בחור אחד נטל את הקומקום בזרוע עבה ושזופה ואמר: "כשעליתי למעלה חשבתי שהבקאקס נשבר לי". ואחרים הניעו ראשם בהשתתפות.

Two oil lamps filled the shed with dim light and pleasant warmth. About eight people, all clean and tanned, sat at two tables, and released short sentences while eating. Two sat in the corner and played chess. A young woman wearing a white apron stepped out of the kitchen and asked: “want some soup, fellows?” and someone called: “give here, Naomi.” On the tables stood aluminum kettles with tea, salad bowls, butter, herring, cheese, bread, milk, and trash bins. One fellow grabbed the

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<sup>90</sup> I.e., establishment of indexical similarity (Bucholtz and Hall, “Bucholtz and Hall,” 599–600).

<sup>91</sup> *Dvar ha-shavua*, May 28, 1954, p. 15; Ben-Amotz, *Ma nishma*, 75–77.

<sup>92</sup> On the central role of the dining hall in Kibbutz life of the 1950s see Helman, *Becoming Israeli*, ch. 7.

kettle with a thick tanned arm and said: “when I went up I thought the back axle broke down on me.” The others nodded their heads in agreement.

On the other hand, “Party,”<sup>93</sup> a report from a Bar-Mitzvah celebration, exhibits the typical orientalist mixture of condescension with admiration and desire.<sup>94</sup> In the Israeli context it translates into a conventionalized stereotype of a generic Mizrahi: authentic and exotic yet primitive and unsophisticated.<sup>95</sup> The text opens with a shameless validation of sociocultural stereotypes of Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Israelis by posing a simple Moroccan woman against a vague impersonal “we:”

את משרד המערכת שלנו מנקה מארוקאנית אחת בשם אסתר. היא עושה את מלאכתה כצל העובר בין הרהיטים. לולא הרצפות השטופות והחלונות הנקיים כי אז לא ידענו כלל על קיומה. לפני ימים מספר פתחה אסתר לראשונה את פיה ובחיוך כן הזמינה אותנו להגיגת בר־מצוה של בנה יעקב שתיערך באותו ערב. ורק אז, לאחר חדשים רבים, הצצנו בה ונוכחנו לדעת שהיא אשה נמוכת־קומה כבת חמשים, שכרסה מלאה, שצוארה מקומט ונעלם לתוך שמלה דהויה ורכה ושרגליה האיתנות קבועות בתוך זוג סנדלי־בית מרופטים.

The cleaning lady at our office is a Moroccan whose name is Esther. She works like a shadow floating around the furniture. Were it not for the washed floors and sparkling windows, we wouldn't have even noticed her. A few days ago Esther said something for the first time, and with an earnest smile invited us to the Bar-Mitzvah celebration of her son Ya'akov, which was to take place that night. Only then, after many months [of working at the office], we took a look and realized that she

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<sup>93</sup> *Dvar ha-shavua*, Feb. 6, 1953, p. 12; Ben-Amotz, *Ma nishma*, 99–102.

<sup>94</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994), 72–84.

<sup>95</sup> Shohat, *Israeli Cinema*, 105–109, and see the analysis of the text below. See also the discussion above on the Sabras' stylistic differentiation from new immigrants in the first years of statehood.

was a short woman of around fifty with a round belly, a wrinkled neck which disappeared into a faded soft dress, and firm legs inserted into a scruffy pair of sandals.

This brief description binds Esther's shabbiness and foreignness to simplicity, warmth, hospitality, physical strength, and directness – a concise display of the stereotypes associated with Mizrahi identity.<sup>96</sup> The interaction between Esther and the office workers resembles a first encounter between colonialists and natives: she is positioned within their gaze, her body examined and compartmentalized into “meaningful” attributes. The text then disparages the common (Ashkenazi) insufferable parties, and goes on to describe the surprisingly wonderful experience of the Moroccan gathering:

האולם הארוך היה מלא אנשים. ששים בערך. רובם מרוקאנים. דיברו עברית וערבית [...] רובם פועלים. אפשר היה להבחין זאת בידיהם המרובעות והכבדות. לבושים במיטב בגדיהם. כמו בשבת. חליפות כהות עם פסים לבנים. חולצות לבנות סגורות עד אחרון הכפתורים. לא דוקא מגולחים. כמו אנשים אמיתיים אחרים בעולם. כמו איטלקים, צרפתים, מאכסיקאנים. לא עושים את עצמם. מנגנים כמו שאבותיהם ניגנו [...] אה, הנשים המארוקאניות! מנקות המשרדים, מוכרות הירקות, המדשדשות בסנדלים, העניות, המטופלות בילדים למכביר, הרעבות לפעמים, הצעקניות, הבכייניות. כולן, כולן היו יפות. יפות ממש. זה לא הבגדים החגיגיים, הנעליים החדשות או המטפחות הצבעוניות. זה החיוך הנפלא בפנים. השמחה האמיתית. מחיאות הכף הקצובות, המאופקות. העינים הגדולות והעליונות. התאבון הגדול לאכילה, לשירה, לצחוק, לאהבה. לכל דבר יסודי בחיים.

The long hall was full of people. About sixty. Most of them Moroccans. Spoke Hebrew and Arabic [...] Most of them blue collar workers. It was clear from their square and heavy hands. Wearing

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<sup>96</sup> For their arrangement in an indexical field see Roey J. Gafter, “Pharyngeal Beauty and Depharyngealized Geek: Performing Ethnicity on Israeli Reality TV,” in *Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes Our Ideas about Race*, ed. H. Samy Alim, John R. Rickford, and Arnetta F. Ball (Oxford 2016), 193–94.

their best clothes. As on the Sabbath. Dark suits with white pinstripes. White shirts buttoned up to the neck. Not always shaven. Like other real people, Italians, Frenchmen, Mexicans. Not pretending. Playing the way their ancestors had played [...] Ah, the Moroccan women! The office cleaners, vegetable vendors, trudging in sandals, poor, burdened with many children, sometimes hungry, vociferous, weepy. All, all of them were beautiful. Truly beautiful. It isn't the fine clothes, the new shoes, or the colorful handkerchiefs. It's the glowing smiles on their faces. The true happiness. The steady, restrained, hand clapping. The big merry eyes. The great appetite for eating, singing, laughing, loving. For anything essential in life.

The narrator – who, according to the text, was assigned by Ben Amotz to cover the event – is captivated by the traits of simplicity, robustness, and authenticity, which he treats as raw material for a new Hebrew folksiness, comparable to other cultures around the world. But this is done from the safe distance of an alienated monologic report, filtered through the orientalist gaze's fascination with crudeness and physical appearance.

Another means of establishing a common hegemonic perspective is via a contrived mythological memory and nostalgia for the pre-state period<sup>97</sup> and for the Palmah and War of Independence.<sup>98</sup> This surprising longing for the very recent past betrays a desire to return to the liminal state of pre-adulthood which was typical of the Sabra gang (*havura*) and the Palmah ethos, particularly during the War of Independence.<sup>99</sup> More than a few of the columns include long lists

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<sup>97</sup> Helman, *Becoming Israeli*, 190–91; Eitan Bar-Yosef, “Bonding with the British: Colonial Nostalgia and the Idealization of Mandatory Palestine in Israeli Literature and Culture after 1967,” *Jewish Social Studies* 22, no. 3 (2017): 2, 5–6.

<sup>98</sup> Shaked, *Ha-sipporet ha-ivrit 1880–1990*, vol. 3 (Tel Aviv, 1988), 208–209; Talmon, *Bluz*, 113–15, 135–36.

<sup>99</sup> Talmon, *Bluz*, 121–23, 131, 141–42.

of nostalgic capsules, reminders of the good old days: places, people, sounds, foods and drinks, bygone crafts, forgotten words and expressions, and so on.<sup>100</sup>

An interesting example is “The Palmah Book.”<sup>101</sup> The monumental anthology *Sefer ha-palmah* was published in 1953, and Ben Amotz used this occasion to lament the erosion of Palmah values, specifically the spirit of volunteering:<sup>102</sup>

מי מאתנו מוכן היום לרדת לנגב, לסלול כבישים, לבנות בתי חרושת, לחנך עולים חדשים ללא תשלום? הפלמ"ח היה מוכן לעשות זאת עבור קופסת סיגריות ליומיים, לירה לחודש להוצאות קטנות וטפיחה קלה על השכם [...] יהיו החישובים לפרוק הפלמ"ח אשר יהיו. דבר אחד ברור: היה היתה רוח פלמ"ח וראו איננה עוד. על קברה ניצבים שני כרכים כחולי שער ועליהם חרוט כל הסוד. היסטוריונים, מחנכים ואנשי מדע-האדם יוכלו לפענח בקלות, במידה שירצו, את סודם הגדול של אנשים שהושיטו את ידם הטובה ביותר לבנין הארץ והקמת המדינה והשאירו אותה עם לבם בשדה, ליד טנק חרוך ועמדה חרבה של שקי חול. היינו רוצים לקוות שבספרי ההיסטוריה שילדי 1983 ישאו בילקוטיהם ימצא פרק קטנטן שיספר על חלקו של הפלמ"ח במלחמת השחרור [...]

Who among us today would go down to the Negev, pave roads, build factories, educate new immigrants without pay? The Palmah was willing to do this for a two days' supply of cigarettes, one monthly lira for small expenses, and a light pat on the back [...] Be the motives for the disbandment of the Palmah as they may, one thing is clear: once there was a Palmah spirit, and now it is over. On its grave stand two blue-covered volumes, and in them the secret is engraved. Historians, educators, and anthropologists will easily be able to decipher, if they wish, the big secret

<sup>100</sup> E.g., “Summer” (*Dvar ha-shavua*, Aug. 20, 1954, p. 15; Ben-Amotz, *Ma nishma*, 149–50), “The Second Aliya” (*Dvar ha-shavua*, Jan. 7, 1955, p. 15; *ibid.*, 189–91), “What’s Not New?” (*Ma'ariv*, Feb. 14, 1958, p. 3; *ibid.*, 399).

<sup>101</sup> *Dvar ha-shavua*, May 8, 1953, p. 14; *ibid.*, 296–97.

<sup>102</sup> On the painful affair of the disbandment of the Palmah in 1948 see, e.g., Dan Horowitz, *Tkhelet ve-avak: dor tashah – dyokan azmi* (Jerusalem, 1993), 46–50.

of those who extended their best hand to build the land and establish the state, and left it with their heart in the field, next to a scorched tank and a ruined [military] station of sandbags. We would hope that the history books carried in the schoolbags of the children of 1983 would include a small chapter relaying the role of the Palmah in the War of Independence [...]

The text formulates a collective desire to go back to pre-state days, before the transition from a vigorous community, dedicated to the true values of Zionism, to a more cynical society, ignorant of its recent past. It achieves this by *erasure*<sup>103</sup> of non-hegemonic groups, authentication of the aforementioned values, and essentialization of the indexical links to the Palmah identity. This nostalgic trend is typical of trying times of change and psychosocial stress, when collective identity is questioned, and an imaginary ideal past is constructed to create a comforting feeling of solidarity.<sup>104</sup> The strength of the sentiment is expressed in language slightly more elevated and figurative than the usual. Ben Amotz's text betrays the fact that the printed commemoration of the Palmah is also its funeral, but by romanticizing the past he in fact contributes to the mythologization process: the book is reduced to a gravestone, and the whole Palmah experience to a chapter in a history school book.

A further step in the process of self-definition is offered in the epilogue, written in English and titled "Basic Hebrew."<sup>105</sup> It is a parodic "good everyday language manual" consisting of six conversations, each followed by a list of "Useful Sentences." Ben Amotz acknowledges the cultural potential of linguistic style in this context by announcing: "I have taken the utmost care to translate the Hebrew word by word into English so that the exceptional flavour of this wonderful

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<sup>103</sup> Irvine and Gal, "Language Ideology," 38–39.

<sup>104</sup> Talmon, *Bluz*, 16–17, 21–23.

<sup>105</sup> Ben-Amotz, *Ma nishma*, 400–405.

language may be retained in full.” The texts follow Mr. and Mrs. Cohen, an American Zionist couple, on their visit to Israel, where they dine in a Hebrew restaurant, visit a Kibbutz, go on a bus ride, and tour Tel Aviv.

#### Mr. AND Mrs. COHEN ON THE BUS

*Mr. Cohen:* How marvelous (are)<sup>106</sup> the fields of Israel.

*Passenger:* They are our fields. Our forefathers’ fields. They are Jewish fields.

*Mrs. Cohen:* How lovely (is) the scent of Jewish petrol.

*Mr. Cohen:* Behold, there (is) another ruined village.

*Passenger:* That is a transit camp for our brothers from the Diaspora. Israel has ingathered the twelve tribes. We (are) a melting pot.

*Mrs. Cohen:* I have a melting pot at home. It saves time. Excuse me, comrade. Your chicken (is) on my suitcase.

*Passenger:* This is a Hebrew chicken.

*Mrs. Cohen:* My heart is full of sorrow. I did not know.

#### USEFUL SENTENCES

1. Don’t push, comrade.
2. Why don’t you stand in the queue, comrade?
3. You are standing on my foot, comrade.
4. Go to hell, comrade.

This is another attempt to authenticate Sabra collective identity, this time in contrast to diasporic (American) Jewry. The conversations portray common Israelis as aggressive, loud, direct, and

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<sup>106</sup> The parenthesization of the copulative verbs is meant to reflect an underlying Hebrew phrasing, which would not require a copula.



vivacious, different from traditional Jewish communities as well as the Zionist image of the early pioneers, the Sabras' parents. The Cohens, on the other hand, are portrayed as naive, polite, and easy to manipulate. They have a hard time with the noise and the turmoil, and are defined by talking and paying (rather than doing).

This cultural difference is typical of encounters between Israelis and outsiders in the 1950s.<sup>107</sup> The indexical distinction between Sabras and American Jews signifies not only their hierarchical relationality, but also the very fact of miscommunication: the texts reveal a fundamental disparity between the diplomatic Zionist image of Israel as a prospering Hebrew-Jewish harmony, and actual everyday reality, far less heroic and ideal, but more dynamic and real. This is highlighted by ridiculously literal understandings of Hebrew idioms: “the house of the seat (W.C),” “in order” (alright), and the difference between the polite conversations and the practical “Useful Sentences,” which betray a less civilized reality. The epilogue, then, scorns the attempt to mediate the local vernacular culture. The Sabra way of life is singular and cannot be understood by outsiders, and non-Israeli Jews and non-native Israelis shouldn't pass judgment or try to control them.

## **Conclusion**

In this study we traced the linguistic and sociocultural developments that led to the enregisterment of NNV as a new Hebrew standard, accompanied by the construction of a new subjectivity. The combination of methods from sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology allowed us to understand the relationships between linguistic forms, social categories, cultural values, stances, and styles, and in particular the ways in which language not only reflects, but also produces and reproduces new subjectivities.

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<sup>107</sup> Helman, *Becoming Israeli*, 169–70.

We explored two complementary sites of value production and dissemination. First, vernacular style itself: to speak in the the new style was to perform a set of positive micro-stances towards the vernacular and to actively promote, via speech, the new values that it embeds – often unknowingly. The same values underlie the popular productions of cultural agents such as Dahn Ben Amotz, an immigrant who arrived in Palestine at the age of 15, rapidly nativized, and went on to fashion himself as an icon of performative nativization.

More specifically, the values embedded in NNV were constructed in contrast with the social meanings associated with alternative varieties in the Jewish world, motivated by an elitist desire to establish a native identity and a novel authority, grounded in authenticity, masculinity, and experience. The Sabra enregisterment enterprise was a mighty success: it challenged the decades-long reign of the formal standard, and eventually replaced it with a new double standard regime. To this day the prevailing standard in Israel remains a conventional native-oriented norm, an offspring of NNV.<sup>108</sup>

More generally, our analysis of NNV demonstrates the major role that language can play in the production of new identities and social hierarchies, particularly in national contexts. Not merely a source of raw semiotic material, language is also a potential object of identification and an effective tool for the embodiment and dissemination of cultural values.

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<sup>108</sup> Mor, “Prescriptive Activity,” 115–16. On significant cultural changes in the conventional norm after the 1950s see Mor and Sichel, “Ha-ivrit;” Uri Mor, “Le-toldot ha-ma'avak ben ivrit mimsadit le-ivrit yelidit be-yisra'el, *Iyunim: The Semi-Annual Series* 34 (2020): 28–31.