

Intelligibility of Hebrew Between Hasidim and Israelis

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Background



Yiddish news stand, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, 2023.

◆ **Anti-Israeli sentiment** is due in part to the belief of some (not all!) American Hasidim believe Jews shouldn't yet return to Israel or that Israeli Jews are too secular.



Anti-English magazine poster, Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Frida Vizel, 2022.

◆ **Anti-Hasidic sentiment** is due in part to anti- old-country sentiment stirred up by early Hebrew revivalists and a history of Israeli Haredim avoiding the draft, wanting a more Halachic state, and being hostile to secular Israelis.



Chabad Rebbe with wounded Israeli soldiers, 1976, chabad.org



Satmar school bus with Yiddish writing. Williamsburg, Brooklyn, 2023.



For more background or full paper

Example Words

Dialects vary internally; IPA approximates common pronunciations and is not representative of every speaker.

Israeli pronunciation Hasidic pronunciation

[ˈbeit. ˌha.mik.ˈdaʃ] *beit.ha.mik.dash.*

[ˈbeis. ha.ˈmɪk.dɑʃ] *beis.ha.mik.dash.*

בית המקדש

[ˈbeit. mi.ˈdʁaʃ.] *beit.mee.drash.*

[ˈbeis. ˈmɛ.dʁɑʃ.] *beis.me.drosh.*

בית מדרש

[sim.ˈχat. to.ˈʁa.] *seem.chat.to.ra*

[sim.ˈχat. to.ˈʁa.] *sim.chas.toy.re*

שמחת תורה

[ˌme.gi.ˈlat. es.ˈteʁ.] *me.gee.lat.es.ter.*

[mʌ.ˈgi.ˌlɑs. ɛs.ˈtʊʁ.] *me.gi.los.es.tur.*

מגילת אסתר

[ˈmɑ.mɪʃ] *ma.mash.*

[ma.ˈmaʃ] *mo.mish.*

ממש

[ˌte.hi.ˈlim] *te.hee.leem*

[tɛ.ˈhi.ˌlim.] *tu.hi.lim*

תהלים

[ʃa.ˈbat.] *sha.bat.*

[ˈʃɑ.bɪs] *sho.bis*

שבת

[la.ˈʃon. ha.ˈʁa] *la.shon.ha.ra*

[ˈla.ʃɪn. ˈhɑ.ʁa] *lo.shin.ho.ru*

לשון הרע

סעודה שלישית/שלוש סעודות

[ˌse.u.ˈda. ʃli.ˈʃit] *se.u.da.shlee.sheet.* [ˈʃa.la.ʃɪs.dɪs.] *sha.lish.shu.dis.*

on Dialects of Hebrew

Jews from across the diaspora speak distinct dialects of Hebrew. In modern Israeli Hebrew's revival period (1880s-1920s), Sephardic Hebrew was chosen to be the language of Modern Israel, though it has since evolved into its own distinct accent. Modern Israeli Hebrew is the most common dialect spoken by non-Israeli Jews, including Ashkenazim, but Hasidim across the world still pray and study in a version of Ashkenazic Hebrew, even in Israel where they speak (differently accented) Israeli Hebrew day-to-day.

Methods

Participants from three groups— Israelis, Chabad Hasidim, and non-Chabad Hasidim— listen to audio recordings of words from both dialects and their level of understanding and impressions are recorded in a matched guise study. Data is combined with informal interviews

Findings

“I am more of a ‘shabbat’ person than a ‘shabbos’ person”

-**Michal**, Modern Orthodox American who actually did say “shabbos” more than “shabbat”

American Chabad Hasidim:

- ◆ Largely able to understand Israeli Hebrew
- ◆ Some shluchim can speak Israeli Hebrew comfortably

Secular Israelis:

- ◆ Have trouble understanding single words/phrases in Hasidic Hebrew
- ◆ Sometimes repeat words/phrases in Israeli Hebrew in order to understand

“My grandparents say you can't be friends with Orthodox people”

-**Tal**, Secular Israeli with Orthodox friends