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Negotiating subjective conflict: Language, belonging and same-sex desire in Israel

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Identity

affiliations and identifications with different groups and social positions

- central or more peripheral
- fleeting or more durable
- determined, ascriptive or emergent

(Cameron & Kulick 2003, 2005; Bucholtz & Hall 2004, 2005)

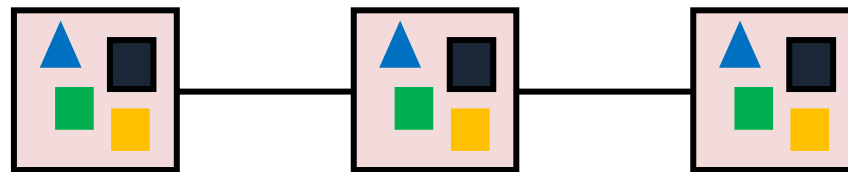
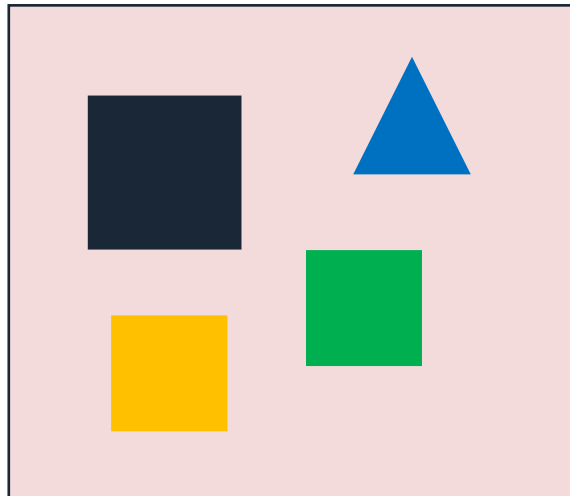
Selfhood

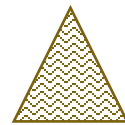
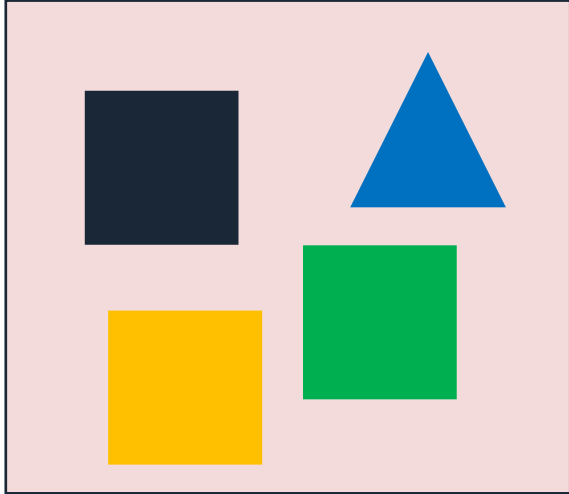
conceptualisation of the human subject as a discursive figure, potentially comprising multiple identities

(Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985; Johnstone 1996; Bell 2001; Coupland 2001, 2007)

Sociological Self

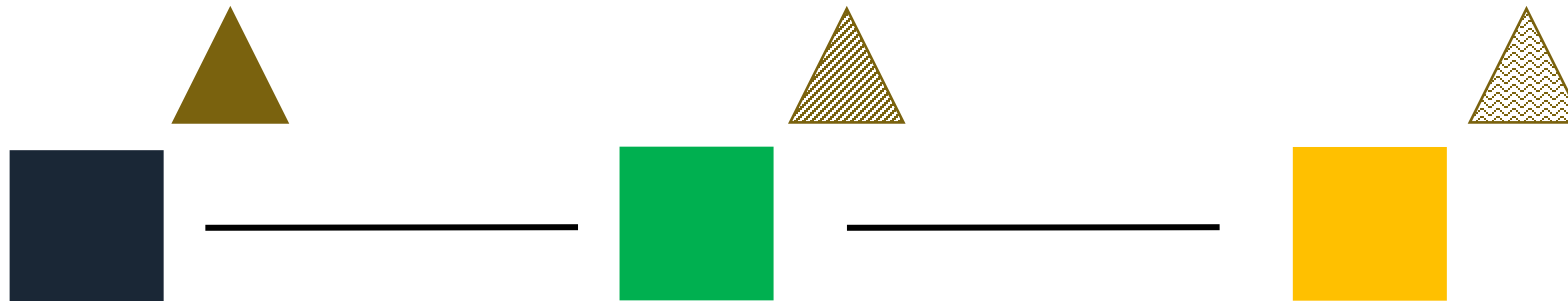
- **coherent** and integrated core of being
- emerges in relation to **others** and **social positions** we “slot” into
- self is **sovereign** (though via different facets)
- in sociolinguistics, underpins theories of **responsive style-shifting** (e.g., Labov 1972; Bell 1984; Schilling-Estes 2004)

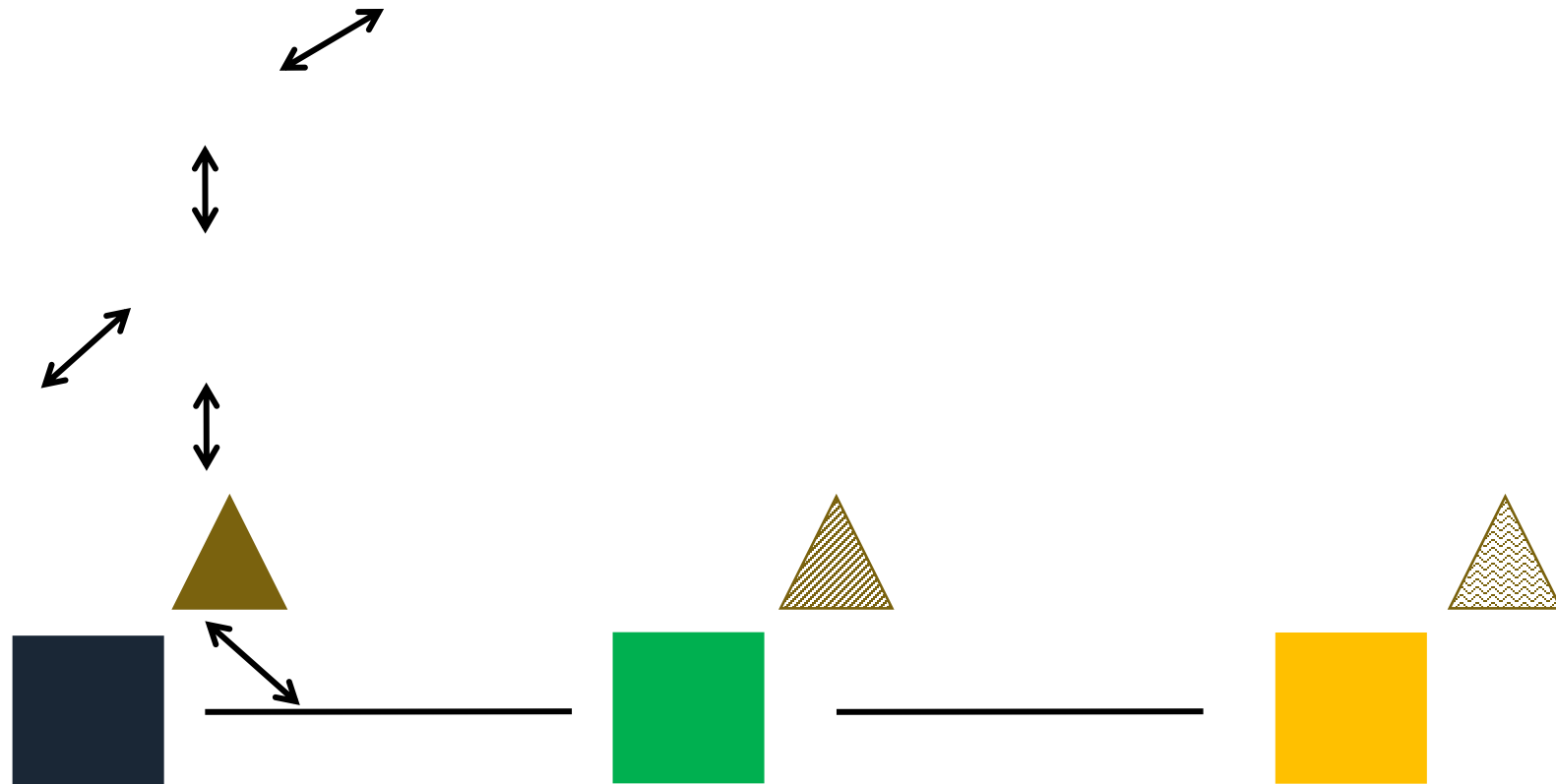




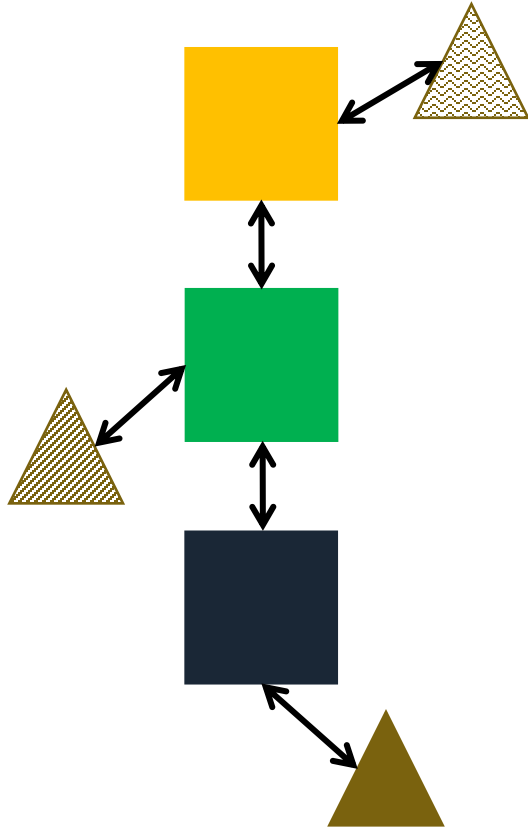
Late-Modern Self

- **self** is multiple, lacking in sovereign centre
- relationality of self is preserved, but conceptualised as product of a context-bound **dialectical** process
- in sociolinguistics, underpins theories of **speaker design** and **voicing** (e.g., Rampton 1995, 2006; Coupland 2001, 2007; Eckert 2008, 2012; Bucholtz 2009; Jaffe 2009)





Dialogical Self



- contracts temporal differentiation into **spatial oppositions** experienced simultaneously
- posits the existence of **dialogue** as the defining relation between positions
- incorporates relationality as **internalised voices** (otherness in the self)
- argues that phenomenal experience results from **dialogue between positions** (even conflicting ones)

Goal

Demonstrate how dialogical models of self allow us to capture how individuals **negotiate subjective conflict in interaction** and how they **incorporate novel aspects of self** into their overall self-concept

Outline

- Overview of **multidimensional position repertoires** (Dialogical Self Theory: Hermans 2001; Hermans & Gieser 2012) and processes/principles governing **change in self-concept** (Identity Process Theory: Breakwell 1986; Jaspal & Breakwell 2014)
- Two example of negotiating subjective conflict with sexuality in Israel (Milani & Levon 2017; Levon 2016)
- Summary & Ramifications

Dialogic Self Theory

[The self is] a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous *I*-positions, each associated with its own history, values, and practices, organised within an extended position repertoire

(Hermans et al. 1992; Hermans 2001)

I-positions (and counter-positions)

locations within the position repertoire that the *I* can inhabit; positions are endowed with voices, so that dialogical relations between positions can be established

Core position

dominant position, upon which the functioning of other positions depends

Meta-position

superordinate position produced by generalisation over multiple positions

Third position

emergent position that mediates between two conflicting positions

Dialogic Self Theory

Social positioning

position that emerges by virtue of socio-political location

Reflexive positioning

position that emerges by virtue of interaction between interior positions



Centring processes

Centripetal movements that encourage integration

continuity, coherence, self-efficacy, belonging

(Breakwell 1986, 1992; Jaspar & Cinnirella 2010, 2012)



Decentring processes

Centrifugal movements that encourage innovation and dispersion

distinctiveness, self-esteem, meaning

(Breakwell 1986, 1992; Vignolles et al. 2002, 2006)

Conflicted Identifications

Harmonious incorporation via reevaluation of what affiliation means (Yip 1997, 2002, 2005, 2007a) – potential threat to continuity (e.g., of belief system) and belonging (e.g., within religious community)

Disidentification with one affiliation (Phellas 2005; Yip 2007b) – potential threat to continuity (e.g., of belief system), belonging (within family/ethnic/religious community), and “core” status of identity position (Halbertal & Koren 2006; Jaspal & Coyle 2010)

Compartmentalisation of identity positions (Yip 2004; Jaspal & Cinnirella 2010, 2012) – potential threat to self-esteem (valuing the self), meaning, self-efficacy (control of self), and “core” status

Milani & Levon (2017): *Queering multilingualism & politics*

- Louie: from Nablus
- Living as an undocumented migrant in Tel Aviv for over 10 years
- Feels unable to return to Nablus out of fear for his safety, but also subject to frequent arrest and deportation in Tel Aviv
- Considers and ultimately decides to apply for political asylum in a third country
- Subjective **conflict** involves position as Palestinian and position as gay



“breathe my culture”



Breathe my culture

Affirmation of belonging (positioning) in *my culture, my land*

→ **appropriating** / that works to establish core, centring position

“a real problem”



Breathe my culture

Affirmation of belonging (positioning) in *my culture, my land*

A real problem

Discursive renegotiation of “Israel” as geopolitical space (*ba-arets, šxem*)

→ positioning via **dialogue** with (imagined) **external** positions (Ethiopians, Thais) and a discourse of institutional equality of rights

“a bad place”



Breathe my culture

Affirmation of belonging (positioning) in *my culture, my land*

A real problem

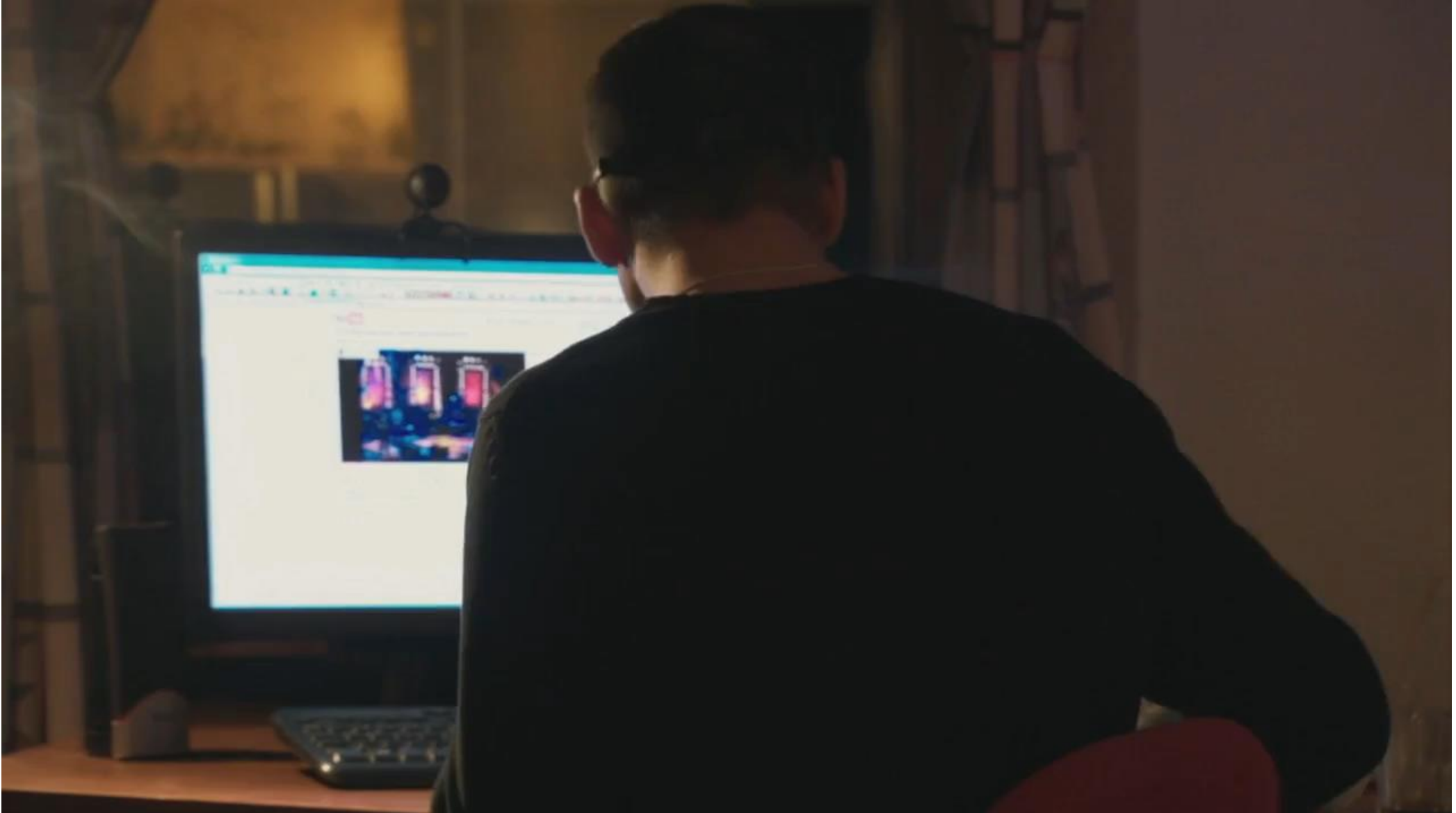
Discursive renegotiation of “Israel” as geopolitical space (*ba-arets, šxem*)

A bad place

Calcification of *us/them* contrast and embodiment of incommensurability

→ responding to **counter-positions** (voiced by others-in-the-self)

“I’ll return”



Breathe my culture

Affirmation of belonging (positioning) in *my culture, my land*

A real problem

Discursive renegotiation of “Israel” as geopolitical space (*ba-arets, šxem*)

A bad place

Calcification of *us/them* contrast and embodiment of incommensurability

I'll return

Authentication/reaffirmation of belonging (*my land* = Israel)

Breathe my culture

Affirmation of belonging (positioning) in *my culture, my land*

A real problem

Discursive renegotiation of “Israel” as geopolitical space (*ba-arets, šxem*)

A bad place

Calcification of *us/them* contrast and embodiment of incommensurability

I’ll return

Authentication/reaffirmation of belonging (*my land* = Israel)



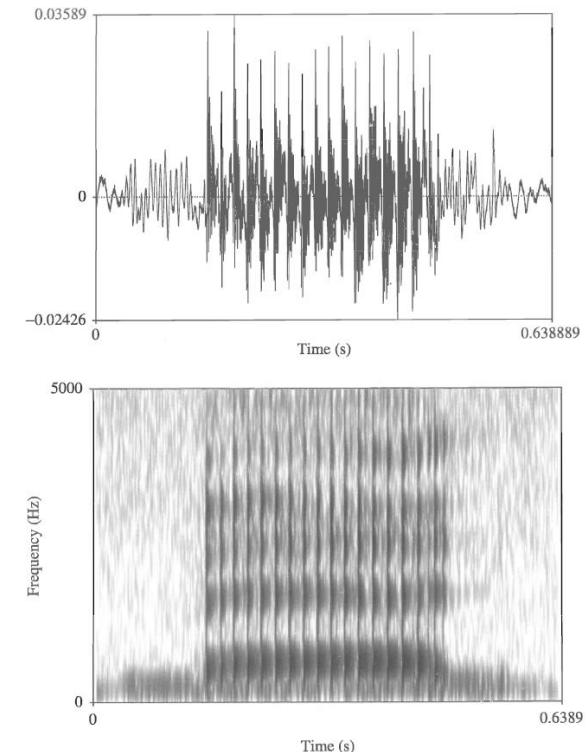
- asserting “Israeli” identification as a **third position** that seeks to resolve conflict between Palestinian and gay positionings
- assertion (and resolution) **blocked** by structural-material conditions

Levon (2016): *Conflicted selves*

- Igal: man in mid-40s, from Jerusalem
- Raised in an Orthodox Mizrahi Jewish family (parents made *aliya* in 1950s from Iraq and Yemen) and lives normative Orthodox Jewish life
- Married for over 20 years, with 2 children
- Sexual/romantic relationships with men for past 10 years

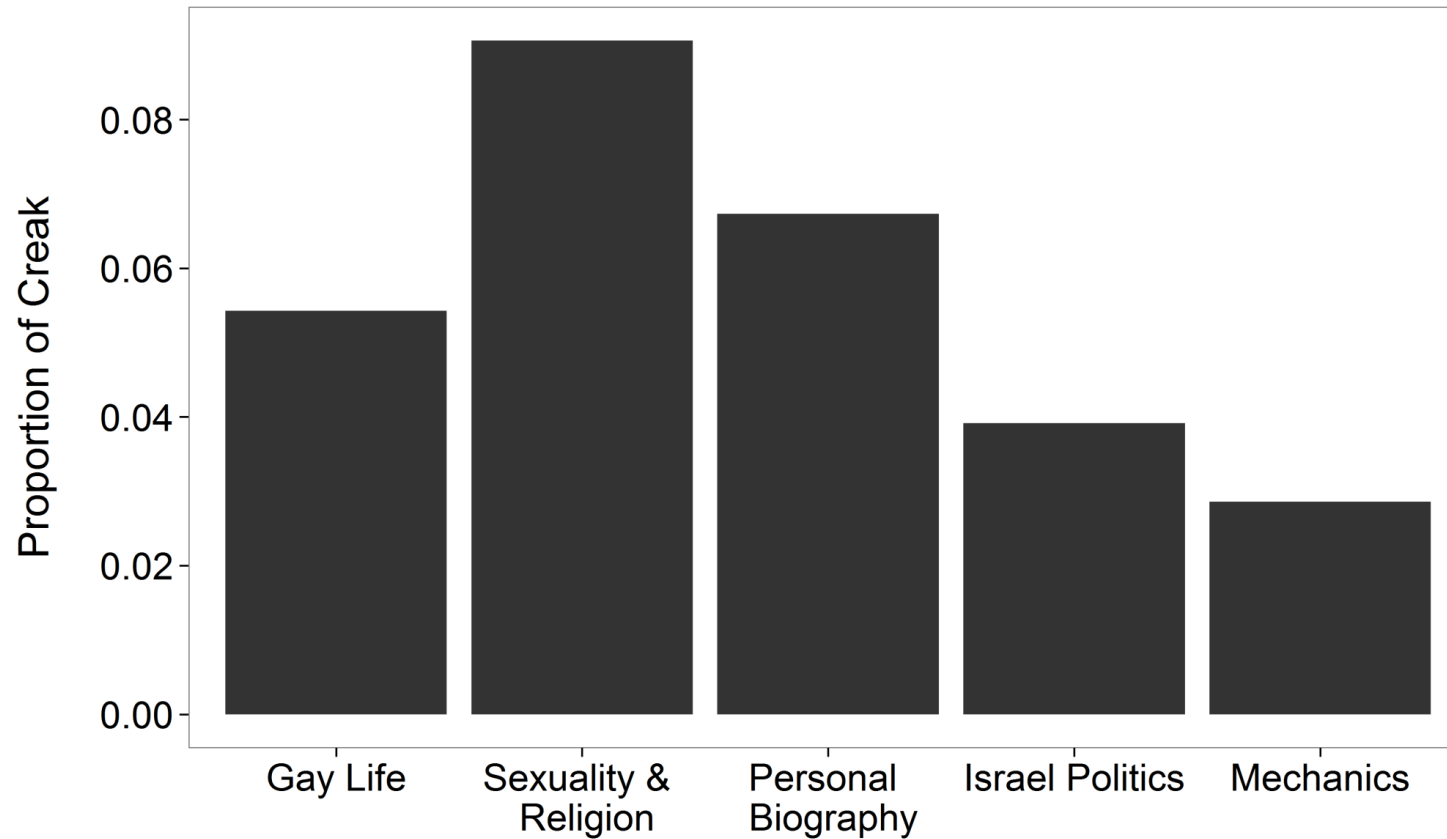
- interview in 2005 in West Jerusalem café
- focus on **creaky voice** (*like an old hinge needing oil*; Sicoli 2010)

- creak argued to be linked to *masculinity, authority, emotional distance* and *restraint*



Creaky voice is linguistically predicted in various speech contexts (phrase-finally, when co-occurring with other glottal elements)

Elsewhere, the feature can do **social/interactional** work:



“time to get married”

Igal: A:::nd I finished my BA. And I decided that it's necessary, that the time had come to get married. So I started going out with women. People introduced me to women. Friends. Family. From here from there. Would go out with women [Heb. *haja jotse im baxurot*]. Sometimes I didn't like her sometimes she didn't like me. Once it's one thing, the next time it's another. e:m I have no idea how many women I went out with. And I hated it. I hated that whole period. You need to show yourself off and to sell yourself. e:::

EL: When was this? When you were in=

Igal: =24. I was 24. I finished my BA and said OK I have some time now to do this. e:m in the end I met- also there never really was this feeling of (1) yes this will work or no this won't work. You you (.) it's like with a man that you (.) you weigh all sorts of things. He looks good, he's smart, intelligent, he's interesting. He's serious. e:: if there's a chance or there isn't a chance. A:::nd fine so at the end of the day I met someone (Heb. *mišehi*) and. We went out for three months and then we got engaged. And three months later we got married. And a year after that the eldest son was born, who's already 15 years old now. e: a year and a half after him the second son was born. A:::nd (.) that's it.

“apparently I’m in love with him”

l:: (1) all this time nothing was clear to me about e (1) **who I am or what I want or or** (.) **what it even means to be gay.** **e::::** and **there wasn't** any way to check it out or t- to ask anybody. u::m **but e** around around age thirty:: (2) there were two things. I went to **to** (.) abroad **to** (.) I went to study a language **and and** (.) there I met a man. We became really good friends. There was never anything between us. And only on the last day the day before the last day ((in English)) *it dawned on me* that that (.) that apparently I was in love with him. **And and that there was something more there.** And then uh I was already lying in bed, I couldn't fall asleep, I called him to me and (1) for an hour tentatively and circling around it and here and there **tell me are you are you** (.) straight o:r (.) not? So he said he didn't know a:nd. And that he had had experiences with men. And that's it, it ended at that. e he was the first person I had ever even talked to about it.

“the biggest love of my life”

And even though we were (.) complete opposites. He came a few times to Jerusalem and we talked and we talked and we talked and we talked. A:::nd that's it. And then I went to him in Tel Aviv. And we slept together. And slowly something that he thought would just be this fun summer romance for him (.) e: turned into love that for me was the biggest love of my life. I never loved like I loved him. I guess I'd never truly loved anyone until I loved him. And also for him it was (2) things got a lot more complicated than he thought they would be. e:: uh u:::h I don't know how t- t- to explain it. I was really in love. And and (.) I I (.) for him I was ready e (1) I fought with my wife and (.) I would go stay at his sometimes and stay over the night and come back the next day. Which I had never done before. e::: but from his point of view after a few months it became intolerable. Because he wanted, he said that he couldn't be satisfied with once a week. And with all the patience, with all the that. And and he wanted me to come and live with him. And I said that there's no chance. We both knew the restrictions on our relationship from the beginning. And that I had no intention of breaking up my marriage for something unknown. e:: (1) that's it.

“nowhere is it written”

EL: I wanted to ask a few questions about within the Orthodox community, e like=

Igal: = look (.) in the beginning (2) it's it really bothered me. Later you come to understand **that** (1) **e (.) as long as you don't get into having anal relations** e (.) then you haven't really done anything worse **than than masturbation**. And that's fine. You've done it before, **you'll do it again**. If you find someone that you're happy with, fine. Nowhere is it written that you're not allowed **to love a man or to hug him or to kiss him or to caress him**. (1) e:: the the the: the other issue is much more problematic **and**. So some of the **religious people** (Heb. *ha-dati'im*) e (.) stop here. **And say that I'm not going to do**. And some of them (1) e everyone has (.) some some kind of different excuse some kind of **different** story (.) gets over it and says. OK. e: I don't care so **I'll I'll get my punishment** in the next world or I'll deal with it or it's not relevant to me **and so on and so on and so on**. And and this too passes.

(Podesva 2013; Levon 2016)



- for Igal, this fundamental meaning used to **discursively contain** identification with same-sex desire, and relegate it to **hierarchically lower position** than Orthodox Judaism (cf. McIntosh 2009)
- through creak, Igal voices an **interactive meta-position** whose purpose is to promote (integrate) positions related to Orthodox Judaism and distance himself from “gay” positions (shadow positions)
- creak is a tool for **organising** the position repertoire

- for both, practice results from **negotiation** of multiple I-positions
- negotiation involves different types of **centring process**:
 - (attempted) **integration** via a third-position (*Louie*)
 - **organisation** of position repertoire via a meta-position that establishes relations of **dominance** between positions (*Igal*)
- Dialogical models of self provide **conceptual tools** for understanding these processes, and for **extending our analytical gaze** beyond the immediate interactional moment
- Particularly important for capturing the **interrelations** between an individual's "inner-selves" and the ways they work **together** to inform social practice
- Sociolinguistics can contribute nuanced understanding of how **management of self** dynamically negotiated in practice (Gillespie & Cornish 2010; Jasper et al. 2012; Dixon et al. 2014)

Thank you!

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