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"Speech Creates a Kind of Commitment"

QUEERING HEBREW[1]

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> עמיר: ובכן, קוראים לי עמיר, אני בן 19, טרנסג׳נדר, לסבית וקצת הומו וגם ג׳נדרקוויר. אני לא בדיוק טרנס קלאסי כי אני, מה שנקרא, מתנייד בין המגדרים. אני לא מגדיר את עצמי כגבר באותה מידה שאני לא מגדיר את עצמי כאישה, ואני מדבר בלשון זכר רק כי זה יותר מאתגר (בעיקר את הסביבה) ולא כי זה בהכרח יותר נכון לי מלשון נקבה.

> Amir: huvechen, korhim lee Amir, ani ben[M] 19, transgender[M], lesbit[F] vecsat homo[M] vegam genderqueer. Ani lo bedihuk trans classi ki ani ma shenikra mitnayed[M] ben hamigdarim. Ani lo magdir[M] et azmi kegever[M] behota mida sheani lo magdir[M] et azmi keisha[F], veani medaber[F] beleshon zachar rak ki ze yoter mehatger (behikar et hasviva) velo ki ze behechrach yoter nachon[M] lee meleshon nekeva.

> Amir: Well, my name is Amir. I am nineteen, transgender, lesbian and a bit homo, and also a genderqueer. I am not exactly a classic "trans" be- cause, you might say, I move between the genders. I do not define myself as a male just as I do not define myself as a female, and I speak gram- matically in the masculine, solely in that it is more challenging (primar- ily challenging the surroundings) and not because it is necessarily more accurate for me than speaking in the feminine.

In the interview quoted above, Amir, a nineteen-year-old art student from central Israel, led me for the first time into a new world of unfamiliar and imported words that fill a void in Hebrew (e.g., trans, genderqueer).[2] He posed another challenge for me as he unraveled the conventional connection between language and biology, speaking in masculine forms of self-reference while in the body of a woman. Amir's style of speech undermined the limit- ing system of grammatical gender in Hebrew, which uses discrete morpho- logical markers to indicate the gender of its speakers, thereby demarcating the domains of linguistic propriety and determining who can speak and how. In other words, Amir employed this apparent linguistic disadvantage

as an advantage. When using the masculine, he positioned his identity in the "wrong" sex category and thus challenged the perceptions of gender held by others in his surroundings. I argue that this subversive effect can be achieved only within the binary-gender reality molded by Hebrew. That is, Amir's ability to perform his relatively novel gender position would be devoid of meaning and unrecognizable had it not occurred within the limits of a language shaped by a restrictive system of gender.

In the current chapter I explore the role of Hebrew in constituting gender-queer identities by examining the different ways in which Amir and five other Israeli interviewees employed Hebrew's gendered grammatical structures as a means of self-expression. These six study participants—all of whom described themselves as "moving between the genders"—reported that language has a significant role in the process of forming their gender identities. Because Hebrew abounds with grammatical configurations that prevent interlocutors from overlooking each other's gender, it excludes genderqueer individuals, who manifest ambiguity toward the two standard gender identities. Hebrew leaves such speakers without appropriate means of expression to conduct a dialogue corresponding to their conception of themselves as outside of the gender binary. This situation prompted the interviewees to seek and create alternatives within the linguistic structures available to them. These creative alternatives, which included using personal pronouns associated with the "other" gender, switching between or neologistically combining feminine and masculine forms, and avoiding gender altogether, assisted them in maneuvering between the limitations imposed by Hebrew and aided their struggle for legitimate representation within the established linguistic reality. In other words, these speakers were not passive. They utilized the power provided by language to shape their world and gained a certain latitude by selectively choosing the available linguistic resources that best served their needs (Certeau 1984; Giddens 1991).

However, picking from the lexical and linguistic repository does not carry its own legitimation within itself but rather is subjected to socially normative rules specifying the "proper" way to use language. Yet, as Lyotard puts it, "if there are no rules there is no game and even an infinitesimal modification of one rule alters the nature of the game" (1984, 10). Thus, in this chapter I wish to argue that the research participants' linguistic practices derive their subversive meanings from Hebrew's dichotomous rules for linguistic gender, which shape a world of opposites divided into female and male. The very linguistic rules that make genderqueer identities impossible can also expand, in many instances, the options for linguistic maneuvering outside of the binary. In a paradoxical manner, Hebrew's insistent distinction between the feminine and the masculine bolsters genderqueer individuals' positioning as neither women nor men. The use of linguistic gender markers outside of their usual context enables speakers to cross social gender boundaries, wander through social gender positions, and undermine the binary norms of Hebrew.

This chapter is neither an attempt to extol the virtue of social and linguistic conventions nor to detract from the burden that arises as a result of these conventions. Instead, it is an interpretive endeavor meant to illustrate the dynamic relationship between the social gender order latent in language and the individual's position or latitude within it. These two forces do not necessarily stand against each other as opposing poles but rather shape each other in reciprocal relations, to the point that it is difficult to discern where the boundaries of one terminate and those of the other commence.

Language, Social Structure, and Agency

Hebrew creates clear distinctions based on gender in most grammatical forms and obligatorily marks the gender of its speakers. By contrast, some languages, such as Finnish and Hungarian, make no grammatical reference whatsoever to the gender of interlocutors. Meanwhile, the English language limits the distinction to third-person singular forms and a small number of suffixes, and French divides nouns, adjectives, and some verb forms into feminine and masculine, again only in the third person. Hebrew goes further, expanding gender marking not only to all nouns and their modifiers but also to most forms of the first and second person (both singular and plural). Furthermore, in order to produce cohesive and comprehensible sentences, Hebrew speakers must provide all nouns and personal pronouns with adjectives, numerals, and verb forms that agree in their grammatical gender. Thus, each person and object is catalogued into one of two "drawers," feminine or masculine; the option of not choosing is nonexistent (Mor 2004).

Language is in essence the way a culture imposes a single social reality in a world rife with multiple choices (Cameron 1998). But what if the dominant "reality," structured by means of language, does not correspond to the world of marginalized social groups? This question has driven both feminist and queer theories. The two bodies of thought recognized early on the role of language in the institutional politicizing of the private domain, and they worked to understand the reciprocal relations between the gender order molded by language and individuals' part in shaping their world and identities. This issue has been debated at length by diverse theorists. Some of these scholars have emphasized the influence of social structure upon human thought and behavior (Althusser 1992; Foucault 1982; Lacan 2003); according to them, the individual has no capacity to act independently or make her or his own free choices and in fact is captive within historical and social ideologies, which acquire hegemonic status through language.

A more integrative approach to agency combines the interpsychic with sociopolitical processes and seeks to reinstate power to the individual as an active initiator in forming her or his identity and future (Bucholtz and Hall

1995; Butler 1997; Gergen 1991; Giddens 1991). According to this approach, one's identity is a continuum made up of a series of choices by an individual using available cultural resources to negotiate her or his needs according to an array of roles and personae that change throughout time and per the requirements of the social situation (Cerulo 1997; Gergen 1991; Giddens 1991; Goffman 1976; Kaplan 1998). Language provides an assortment of resources that play a major role in each individual's declaration of identity. It is not a well-oiled machine, churning out individuals that function as puppets, but rather it is both an arena for numerous practices that can be used to disrupt the existing linguistic order and a political tool in the struggle for identity (Borba and Ostermann 2007; Butler 1993; Hall and O'Donovan 1996; Kulick 1998; Livia 1995).

This chapter investigates the reciprocity between the binary gender order and the linguistic latitude of the individual by examining the contribution of Hebrew's obligatory gender system in constituting genderqueer identities (see also Bucholtz and Hall 2005). I argue, based on the interviews, that the participants' linguistic practices do indeed succeed in bypassing the obstacles of Hebrew, but concomitantly derive their performative power from Hebrew's binary rules. That is, in spite of the numerous drawbacks in Hebrew's gender system, which subject its genderqueer speakers to a sole dichotomous reality, it also allots them a certain advantage over their Finnish-, Hungarian- or English-speaking counterparts. Hebrew's gender dichotomy actually expands the interviewees' ability to play with linguistic resources in denoting their gender and aids them in leading change and undermining the decisive status of sex (or the categorization of bodies) in ascribing gender (or identities).

Methodological Remarks

This qualitative study is based on face-to-face interviews conducted from 2004 to 2007 with a group of six genderqueer individuals, whom I met through two Israeli online forums. These selected participants define themselves in their metaphorical parlance as "citizens of the whole world" (*ezrahay^M kall haholam* אזרחי כל העולם). That is, they do not identify with an exclusive gender group, and they object to the notion of a uniform or fixed identity; instead, they prefer to assume their place in both genders or neither at the same time. Unlike many transsexual individuals, who journey forward to a stable and clear place on either side of the gender partition, these genderqueer "citizens of the whole world" seek to present a fluid identity, which does not establish its home in one place. This stance finds its expression in corporeal practices that blur the conventional indicators of affiliation with either sex, such as attire or hairstyle, sometimes augmented by hormonal or surgical treatment. However, in many instances, these individuals are not interested in

undertaking any radical action to alter their bodies, and language becomes the primary means available to them in order to express their uniqueness. Thus, their lived experience reflects the significant change that occurred in feminist thought from perceiving gender as originating in sex to perceiving sex and the body as revolving around gender and its social meanings (Bordo 1993; Butler 1990; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Zimman, this volume).

The interviews were conducted during two time periods, with an interval of approximately a year and a half between them. In the initial stage, due to my lack of previous acquaintance with members of the community and my desire to allow their words to determine my research objectives, unstructured interviews were chosen as a data collection tool. The interviewees were asked to tell me the story of their lives, which usually began with their first memory concerning thoughts or feelings about "differentness." The stories described in detail the long process of coming to identify as genderqueer, replete with the vicissitudes of acceptance and rejection of these feelings. The interviewees also detailed the social encounters that aided or delayed their decision to carry out their lives according to their preferences. In the second stage of research, and following the decision to focus my research on language, semistructured interviews were again conducted with the participants. These interviews included direct questions concerning Hebrew, which were divided into a number of categories: general feelings and thoughts concerning the fetters of language; the linguistic solutions that compensate for them; and changes in language use over time or according to context.

Throughout the process of writing this chapter, I grappled with my uncertain legitimacy as an unfamiliar researcher studying an oppressed community, as well as the question of how much I could understand members' innermost experiences as an outsider. These issues grew even more intense as I wrote about individual participants, many of whom have endured having authority figures speak on their behalf and doubt their humanity, such as members of the medical or judicial establishment (Butler 2001). As a heterosexual woman, a member of the oppressor group, I shall never be able to understand the experience of being in a body that is at odds with my identity or of being under the strict and reproachful eye of others on that basis. Moreover, I am obligated to examine the various meanings of my presence for the interviewees, my opinions regarding them, and the influence my social subjectivity had on my interpretations of their words. One resolution to this issue has been to present the manuscript to some of the participants, who examined the measure of my understanding and achieved a bit of control over the information in the text (cf. Gumperz 1982).

My encounter with the Israeli genderqueer community was not at all simple. The participants challenged the fundamental gender binary within which I was reared, incessantly testing my own gender conventions. During the interviews, I was guided in how to use language acceptable to the group.

I had to learn a whole new vocabulary and use noncustomary sex markers according to each interviewee's preferences, which led to frequent linguistic lapses. My relative success in recruiting cooperation from the interviewees stemmed from my candid approach, in which I renounced the status of 'the expert,' and from my feminist orientation, which is shared by some of the participants due to their considerable interest in gender. Moreover, the unfamiliarity between me and the interviewees constituted an advantage, in that it enabled me to present naïve questions whose answers were obvious to insiders. These questions could not have been raised had I been exposed to the community in the past, and they gave me greater access to valuable data regarding the interviewees' experiences and linguistic practices (Johnstone 2000).

Because direct questions regarding language and its use are likely to affect speakers, I used the initial exploratory interviews, which did not focus on language, to analyze the participants' styles of speech before they were aware of my interest in language. Furthermore, I do not approach the interviewees' declarations as statements of pure "truth" that stand on their own, untouched by social influences. On the contrary, the participants' declarations in my presence provide yet another view of the guiding norms that grant these linguistic practices their meanings.

An additional constraint on this research was connected to the degree of the participants' awareness of their routine expressions. That is, to what extent are direct queries concerning their modes of language use likely to produce reliable responses? After all, speakers are frequently unconscious of their linguistic practices, and it is not always possible to attribute premeditated intention to them. Nevertheless, speakers, especially those that belong to ostracized groups, are able to use language in order to consciously present themselves in one way and not another (Kulick 2005). Kulick (1998) argues, for example, that transgendered individuals have a more self-reflexive and hence greater understanding of the strategic power of language than members of prestigious or powerful groups. In my own data, interviewees' corrections of my linguistic lapses regarding gender constituted a palpable example of their awareness of the power of language in molding or indexing identity.

In the interviews and analysis, I focused more on gender than on other identities—such as family status, ethnic origin, or others—since gender is the main identity that occupies the participants; however, complementary aspects of identity are necessarily involved when it comes to language (e.g., Levon, Davis, this volume). Moreover, despite the decision not to select the participants according to characteristics other than their nonconformist gender identities, most interviewees were from the upper middle class and were politically involved individuals who perceived the research as an opportunity to heighten the visibility of their community. For this reason, it is not possible to generalize their statements to all genderqueer people.

Finally, between the two interviews, some participants underwent physical transformations and changes in self-definition. For example, Amir changed his self-definition from "genderqueer individual" to "FTM" (female-to-male). Correspondingly, his approach toward language altered, and he expressed his preference for masculine forms of address and self-reference over feminine ones. Such changes underscored that identity is subject to incessant development and vacillation. It is therefore important to note that the statements quoted from the participants reflect their identities and language use only during the interview. It is possible that a few years from now, some of them will no longer find themselves in the words that they uttered while participating in this research.

Language Games in Genderqueer Identity Formation

In the analysis below, I demonstrate that Hebrew simultaneously constrains and enables non-normative gender expressions, and hence language that appears to be confining in its dichotomous structure can actually be liberating. The study participants employed a number of linguistic practices that assisted them in declaring their identities; these were chosen according to personal preferences and, participants reported, the context of specific social interactions. These practices include the adoption, whether consistently or only in specific social contexts, of what I call *inverse personal pronouns*, or pronouns that belong to the gender category "opposite" to the speaker's biological sex (cf. Bunzl 2000); alternating between or mixing feminine and masculine morphological forms; and entirely avoiding gendered self-reference.

Alongside the constraints that arise as a result of Hebrew's obligatory morphological gender marking, a different and more complicated linguistic experience is evident from the participants' statements. According to the interviewees, when used by others Hebrew's linguistic gender markers leave little room for imagination, unambiguously declaring how their gender identity is perceived. These gender markers, which make palpable the gap between the participants' bodies and their perceived gender identities, irritatingly insist on classifying them against their will. On the other hand, when used by genderqueer speakers and their allies, the same linguistic gender dichotomy can be liberating. It constituted, in many instances, the main means for participants to indicate their non-normative identities. By manipulating Hebrew's gender markers, the interviewees constantly repositioned themselves as being at a distance from or in proximity to either conventional gender category, as crossing over or wandering between them, silencing one or emphasizing the other, thus highlighting diverse aspects of their gender identities according to the nature of the conversation. The participants succeeded in accomplishing a wide range of gender actions despite Hebrew's restrictive lexicon; indeed, it

was precisely this binary linguistic reality that granted their innovative practices meaning and hence performative power.

"GIRLS WHO SPEAK IN THE MASCULINE": INVERSE PRONOUNS

One key linguistic practice of the study participants was the use of personal pronouns that represented the "opposite" gender category, at odds with their biological sex. The use of "incorrect" linguistic gender markers helped them to reposition their identity either at a distance from or in proximity to the two conventional genders. The participants were in fact performing two actions with language, one positive and the second negative. The first served them in structuring a preferred identity and in defining its chosen attributions, while the second assisted them in distancing their identity from undesired categories, as if declaring what they were not (Bucholtz 1999). Alternatively, in the words of one participant, Eyal, the use of linguistic gender markers outside of their customary application enabled him to present an identity that did not belong to any exclusive group.

1.   אייל: השימוש בלשון זכר אינו הצהרה "אני גבר", כמו גם אינו הצהרה ש"אני לא אישה". ברירת
    המחדל *it*בשפה היא לשון זכר, כי בעברית היא נחשבת לצורה הנייטרלית, למכנה המשותף. היא ה-
    שיש בה רק זכר ונקבה. וזה נותן לי יותר כוח, זה שם אותי במקום הנייטרלי בו אני רוצה להיות, זה
    מעניק לי את החופש להיות אף לא אחד מהם.

    Eyal: Hashimush bilshon zhazhar eino hatshara "ani gever", Kmo gam eino hatshara "ani lo isha" breirat hamechdal basafa hi leshon zahar, ki behivrit hi nechshevet latsura hanetralit lamachane hameshutaf. Hi ha-*it* basafa sheyesh ba rak zachar venekeva. veze noten li yoter coach, ze sam oti bamakom hanetraly bo ani rotse^M lihiot. Ze mahanik li et hachofesh lihiot af lo echad mehem.

    Eyal: Using the masculine forms is not to declare "I am a man," just as it is not a declaration that "I am not a woman." The masculine is a default mode, because in Hebrew it is considered the neutral form, the common denominator. It is the *it* in a language in which there is only masculine and feminine. This gives me more power. This puts me in the neutral place which is where I desire to be. It allows me the liberty to be neither of them.

At the time of the study, Eyal, who was born as a genetic female, was twenty-six. The uncomfortable feelings that had long accompanied him ended two years before I first interviewed him, after finding an appropriate label: "genderqueer with tendency toward masculine" (*genderqueer him netia lakivoon hagavri* ג'נדר קוויר עם נטיה לכיוון הגברי). According to Eyal, he did not belong to "any one [gender] camp, but rather, to all of them, because there are more than two" (*mahane echad ela lekoolam, yesh yoter mishnahim* יש יותר, מחנה אחד אלא לכולם

משניים) and he attempted to distance himself as much as possible from all ste-
reotypic gender molds. He said that he never was a girl, and as a boy he avoided
traditional patterns of masculinity, wearing dresses or pink hair bands. At the
time I interviewed him, Eyal was uninterested in physical changes in order to
become more masculine, and he was taking activist-political steps to redefine
his identity, such as speaking in masculine self-reference.

Since Eyal did not belong to one "camp," selecting masculine gender
markers positioned him in a neutral territory that he found more suitable.
The masculine markers, which are perceived within patriarchal discourses as
neutral, informed Eyal's rejection of membership in either gender category.
Thus, despite his conflict with Hebrew's grammatical gender system, he suc-
ceeded in clarifying his strategy: to move beyond the binary distribution to
two genders and to stray from their borders. This is accomplished thanks
to the linguistic distinction between genders and the supposed neutrality of
masculine forms vis-à-vis feminine ones. Eyal's invocation of the unmarked
status of masculine speech may be seen as an example of strategic essential-
ism (Grosz and Spivak 1985; McElhinny 1996), wherein alignment with op-
pressive ideologies can be put toward subversive ends.

Eyal's use of the masculine accomplished another function. This linguis-
tic practice, which may seem unsuitable to some bystanders, in fact reveals
the usual obligatory bond between language and biology and undermines the
requisite of coherence between sex and gender identity (West and Zimmer-
man 1987). In this way, Eyal executed a move that detracted from the impor-
tance of his female body and granted it a secondary position by detaching his
biological sex from its symbolic roles and marginalizing, even if only tempo-
rarily, its social meanings. Hence, sex ceased to serve as a "natural" reflection
of gender identity.

Like Eyal, Amir, the nineteen-year-old quoted at the beginning of this chap-
ter, adopted inverse personal pronouns and invoked the repressive linguistic
system of Hebrew for subversive purposes. Using metaphorical language, Amir
compared the masculine to an idyllic home, a protected and love-filled place
that enables him to shed masks, to be "genuine," and to obtain a kind of balance
between his external female body and his internal feelings or self-perception.
In our interview, he emphasized a time period during which he learned from
a close friend, M., about the possibility of being addressed and conversing in
masculine forms, even before he crystallized his self-definition or assigned a
moniker to his feelings.

2.   עמיר: מ' הראתה לי בפעם הראשונה שיש אפשרות כזו, שבנות ידברו בלשון זכר, לא בגלל שהן
טרנסיות כי ככה טוב להן, זה נותן להן כוח... נראה לי כמו לגלות משהו חדש, שמתאים לי, נכון לי,
גורם לי להרגיש טוב עם עצמי...זאת נקודה משמעותית... לדבר בלשון זכר היה כיף. כמו לעבור
לבית הזה. זה היה מקום בטוח, מקום שאני יכול להיות בו מה שאני. סוג של איזון בין החוץ לפנים.
מקום יותר מוגן, של אנשים שאוהבים אותי, מכירים אותי ומכירים בי. זה היה המקום של לשון זכר.

Amir: M herheta[F] li bapaham harishona sheyesh efsharut kazoo, shebanot yedabru bilshon zachar, lo biglal shehen transiot ki kacha tov lahen, ze noten lahen coach . . . nirha li kmo legalot mashehu chadash, shematim li, nachon li, gorem li lehargish tov im atsmi . . . zot nekuda mashmahutit . . . ledaber bilshon zachar haya kef. Kmo lahavor labait haze, ze haya makom batuach, makom sheany yachol[M] lihiot bo ma sheani. Sug shel hizun ben hachuts lapnim. Makom yoter mugan, shel anashim sheohavim oti, ma-kirim oti vemekirim bi. Ze haya amakom shel leshon zachar.

Amir: M. showed me for the first time that such a possibility exists, that girls might speak using masculine self-reference, not because they are trans, but because it is good for them, it gives them power. . . . It seems to me that it is like discovering something new, which suits me, is right for me, makes me feel good about myself . . . this is a meaningful stage. . . . Speaking in masculine self-reference was fun, like moving to this house. It was a safe place, one in which I can be what I am, a kind of balance between the outside and the inside. A more protected place of people that love and recognize me. This was the place of masculine self-reference.

Amir was born female. Until several years ago he identified as a member of the lesbian community, but after additional consideration, he found a safer and more comfortable place midway between both genders. He was neither female nor male, and he made use of language as a primary tool for expressing his genderqueer identity. According to Amir, M.'s linguistic gesture helped him to form his identity anew and to learn about gender possibilities that did not originate solely in biological sex. By saying so, he illustrated the practical effect of language, which made sense of his preliminary amorphous feelings and provided him with an identity. In Amir's opinion, using the masculine contributed to establishing his self-perception and was a catalyst for finding his place as a genderqueer individual. The moment of discovery served as additional stimulus for him to gradually distance himself from the lesbian community. In other words, language urges speakers into action and accelerates the clarification and demarcation of the boundaries of self.

The use of inverse personal pronouns by the participants was in many instances reinforced by words of negation, which served to distance the interviewees from undesired gender categories. In the course of self-definition, the participants undertook a process of elimination, as if discarding characteristics that they were supposed to possess by virtue of their assigned sex.

3. שחר: אני מגדירה את עצמי כלא גבר ולא אישה. אין שום דבר שמשייך אותי לקבוצה הזו. אני לא יודעת למה. אין לי את המילים, אני לא יכולה לנסח לעצמי למה אני לא אישה או מה מייחד אישה כדי שאגיד אני לא.

Shachar: ani magdira[F] et atsmi kelo gever velo isha. Ein shum davar she-emeshayech oti lakvutsa hazo. Ani lo yodaat[F] lama. Ein li et hamilim, ani

lo yechola^F lenasehach leatsmi lama ani <u>lo</u> isha o ma meyached isha kedey sheagid ani <u>lo</u>.

Shahar: I define myself as <u>non</u>-male and <u>non</u>-female. There is <u>nothing</u> that connects me to this group. I do not know why. I don't have the words, I cannot formulate for myself why I am <u>not</u> a woman, or what makes a woman unique so I could say that I am <u>not</u> one.

4. ‫אייל: אני ל<u>א</u> גבר ול<u>א</u> אישה אני כל מה שבאמצע... אני ל<u>א</u> אישה. כי אני ל<u>א</u>, כי זה ברור לי‬
‫בכל עמקי הווייתי שאני ל<u>א</u>. אני ל<u>א</u> גבר, אבל אם מכריחים אותי לבחור אחד מהשניים‬
‫ובהרבה מקרים מכריחים אותי, אז אני אבחר בגבר.‬

Eyal: ani <u>lo</u> gever ve<u>lo</u> isha. Ani kol ma shebaemtsa . . . ani <u>lo</u> isha, ki ani <u>lo</u>, ki ze barur li bechol imkey havayati sheani <u>lo</u>. Ani <u>lo</u> gever, aval im machrichim oti livchor echad mehashnaim ibeharbe mikrim machrichim oti, az ani evchar begever.

Eyal: I am <u>neither</u> a male <u>nor</u> a female; I am everything in between. . . . I am <u>not</u> a woman. . . . Because I am <u>not</u>, because it is clear to me from the depth of my being that I am <u>not</u>. I am <u>not</u> male, but if I am compelled to choose one of the two, and in many cases I am compelled, then I would choose the male.

Words of negation—*no*, *non*, *not*, *nothing* (‫לא, אין, שום דבר‬)—were commonplace in the interviewees' accounts, more than the use of words that signaled positive identities. They demonstrate that language is underpinned by opposites and distinctions, so that the subject can be itself only when it is defined as not something else (Sayer 2004, 70). The participants' repeated "no" emphatically rejected the gender category that was assigned to them by virtue of their sex, and seemed to grant legitimization to their unique identities by demonstrating the ways that gender assignment fails to capture their individual sense of themselves.

　　To sum up, the frequent use of inverse gender markers and words of negation demonstrates that language offered numerous different resources for aligning participants' identities with existing social categories, blurring or creating lines of similarity and difference between the self and gender conventions (Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Kristeva 1986; Morrish 2002). By positioning them in relation to both gender categories, the study participants' language constituted a significant tool for structuring an identity that was opposed to the expected social perceptions. When they explicitly adopted the inverse gender markers or repeatedly denied their membership in conventional gender categories, participants invoked the repressive linguistic system for subversive purposes or as a means of gender liberation. That is, their linguistic practices challenged the ideological demand for coherence between sex and gender and undermined the social expectation that all speakers must

use "appropriate" gender markers based on their sex. This tactic empowered the participants and urged them to further explore their identities. Yet, these outcomes become possible solely within the framework of a linguistic system that is based upon opposites and distinguishes between the genders in various ways.

"CITIZENS OF THE WHOLE WORLD": GENDER "BILINGUALISM," "CODESWITCHING," AND NEOLOGISMS

The participants' selective use of both feminine and masculine personal pronouns and their related movement between female and male identities operated for them as a kind of metaphorical "bilingualism," which was closely related to their "citizens of the whole world" metaphor. Community members' use of the bilingualism metaphor did not imply that they accepted the dichotomous "two cultures" model of gender (Lakoff, 1975; Tannen 1990). On the contrary, they rejected homogenized, simplified boxes of femininity and masculinity and chose to wander between feminine and masculine grammatical forms as a linguistic leeway in various social situations and as a means for indexing identity that did not commit to either side of the gender partition. They described this movement as a situational necessity and a kind of default mode due to their refusal to commit to only one gender's grammatical forms and therefore to a defined and fixed space.

The participants reported that their movement between the feminine and the masculine transpired in the course of routine and daily dialogues, while their decision about which gender markers would be more suitable depended on the linguistic situation and the nature of their relationship with their interlocutors. In other words, the choice of feminine or masculine indicated the manner, both intentional and unconscious, in which the participants preferred to present themselves to their audience and shape the nature of their relations (Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Cameron and Kulick 2003).

5. ליטל: בסקס, אם אני רוצה להיות בקטע של בן שם, אז אני בדרך כלל מדברת בזכר ומוחה לגבי איזה ג'נדר מדברים אליי... בגלל שמעטים האנשים שהתייחסו אליי כמו שאני חווה את עצמי בהקשר הזה (סקס הומואי), זה מאד פגיע אצלי כי זה הרבה חוויות שליליות. אז כדי לוודא שאני בטוחה, אני מדברת ורוצה שידברו אליי בלשון זכר. אני רוצה לוודא שבאמת חווים אותי כמו שאני רוצה. כדי לבוא לסיטואציה ולהגיד כן, אני בן, אני הומו ותקבלו אותי ככה. בגלל שהמקום פחות בטוח אז זה חשוב לי מאד... השפה נותנת לי עוד ערבויות שאני במקום בטוח... אני צריכה בסיטואציות כאלה כמה שיותר תוקף. דיבור יש בו התחייבות מסוימת. להמליל משהו הופך את זה ליותר קונקרטי. במקומות אחרים אני יכולה לתת לעצמי את זה, אני חווה את עצמי כמו שאני רוצה וזה בסדר, זה פחות מטריד אותי...

Lital: besex, im ani rotsa^F lihiot beketa shel ben sham, az ani bederech klal medaberet^F bezachar vemocha^F legabei eize jender medabrim

elai . . . biglal shemeatim haanashim shehityachasu elai kmo sheani chova et atsmi baheksher haze (sex homoii). Ze meod pagia etsli ki ze harbe chavaiot shliliot. Az kedei levade sheani betucha^F, ani medaberet^F verotsa^F sheyedabru elai bilshon zachar. Ani rotsha^F levade shebeemet chovim oti kmo sheani rotsha^F. kedey lavo lesituatsia velehagid ken, ani ben, ani homo vetekablu oti kacha. Biglal shehamakom pachot batuach az ze chashuv li meod . . . hasafa notenet li od arvuiot sheani bemakom batuach . . . ani tsricha^F besituatsiot kaele kama sheyoter tokef. Dibur yesh bo hitchaivut mesuiemet. Lehamlil mashehu hofech et ze leyoter konkreti. Bemekomot acherim ani yechola^F latet leatsmi et ze. Ani chova et astmi kmo sheani rotsa^F veze beseder. Ze pachot matrid oti.

Lital: In sex, if I want to play the part of a boy there, then I usually speak as a male and protest about which gender they speak to me in. . . . Since few people relate to me as I experience myself in this context [i.e., as homosexual], this is extremely vulnerable for me, because it brings up many negative experiences. . . . So, I speak and want to be addressed using the masculine. I want to make sure that they really experience me as I desire. . . . "Yes, I am a boy, I am homo, and you will accept me this way." It is very important to me. . . . language gives me guarantees that I am in a safe place. . . . In such situations, I require as much validation as possible. Speech creates a kind of a commitment. To verbalize something turns it more concrete. In other places, I can provide this for myself, I experience myself as I wish and it's okay, it bothers me less . . .

Lital, twenty-seven years old, was born female, but his gender was "more fluid than the expected" (*nazil yoter mehanidrash* נזיל יותר מהנדרש). He did not identify with the crude dichotomy of boys and girls and did not find his place exclusively in only one gender category. Sometimes he was a boy and other times a girl, sometimes a drag queen and many times "I am just there, I am just me" *(ani stam sham, ani pashut ani* אני סתם שם, אני פשוט אני*).* During his teenage years, while examining his sexual preferences, he learned that he enjoyed all genders and was not interested in ruling out any of the possibilities. He was attracted to women when he saw himself as female, but thoughts about "differentness" began when he saw himself as a male and sensed an attraction to men; he then identified with male homosexuality. Lital granted his two genders characteristics that did not necessarily correspond to social expectations. The girl that he was, for instance, was assertive and "good at home renovation" (*tova^F beshiputsim* טובה בשיפוצים). The boy that he was applied makeup, wore glittering high-heeled shoes, donned a purple wig, or put polish on his nails. Lital termed the latter performances "girl to boy to girl" (*bat leben lebat* בת לבן לבת) or, alluding to the subtitle of J. R. R. Tolkien's classic fantasy quest novel *The Hobbit*, "there and back again" (*lesham hubehazara* לשם ובחזרה). In other instances, the expression of his identity included selected and intentional use of

masculine self-reference, which helped him to achieve "those things that are inside of me" (*hadvarim haele shebetochi* הדברים האלה שבתוכי) and to be experienced by others as "not just like a girl" (*lo stam kebat* לא כבת סתם).

As previously mentioned, Lital was attracted to women as a woman and to men as a man. However, due to his lack of a male body, which was more evident in sexual contexts, Lital's passion for homosexual contact led to negative experiences. His potential sexual partners, mostly heterosexual men, saw Lital in the customary "penetrated woman" role, which was in contrast to his self-perception. During these experiences he did not compromise his use of the personal pronoun that he preferred. He referred to himself as male and wanted his male sexual partners also to use masculine forms toward him. In this way, he undermined one of the fundamental rules of patriarchal discourse, which has been identified by Judith Butler as "the compulsory order of sex/gender/desire" (1990, 6). Butler indicates the involvement of a third variable in the "sex = gender" equation: the object of sexual desire. Each of these components of the triangular equation is presented by patriarchal discourse as though it stems from its predecessor in a direct, fixed, and enduring relation. For example, a biological male should adopt the expected corporeal and behavioral characteristics of a man and must be attracted to women.

By insisting on using masculine forms with his male sexual partners, Lital rejected these cultural expectations. The masculine forms made Lital's female body less obvious, rendering it to an incoherent component of the triangular equation that does not fit into heterosexual ideological patterns. Moreover, Lital's use of the masculine molded him as the possessor of a sex that corresponded more to his identity and decreased the gap between his sex and gender. That is, it had the symbolic power to transform the "imagined" body into something real or "concrete" (Zimman, this volume). Simultaneously, it served as a sort of certificate validating Lital's masculinity in this context and transforming him into a "natural" candidate for male homosexual contact.

Like Lital, Naomi described herself as wandering between two gender morphological forms, and she recognized the need to translate from one to the other according to the social situation. In other words, she altered her linguistic choices according to the audience. One sort of audience was genderqueer-friendly or revealed understanding and empathy toward her, while the other was an unfriendly listener, from whom she had to conceal incriminating bits of evidence that were liable to reveal her identity.

6. *נעמי:* יש לי קושי די גדול לספר חוויות שעוברות עלי במוד אחד ולתרגם אותם ל"מוד" השני. אם אני יושבת עם ההורים שלי ומספרת על משהו שקרה לי, והוא קרה לי בתור בת, אני צריכה ממש לצטט את החברים שלי כאילו פנו אליי בזכר, לתרגם את כל הדברים, כדי שאני אוכל להגיד להם אותם כמו שצריך. ולהפך, כשקורה לי משהו בעבודה ואני מספרת על כך לחברות, אז אני צריכה עוד פעם לתרגם. זה ניראה לי קצת מוזר כי הרי כולם יודעים שהבוסית שלי לא פונה אלי בתור נקבה, כי אני שם בתור בן. זה משהו שמפריע – הצורך הזה לעוות את המציאות.

Naomi: yesh li koshi dey gadol lesaper chavayot sheovrot alay bemod echad veletargem otam la"mod" hasheni. Im ani yoshevet[F] im hahorim sheli vemesaperet[F] al mashehu shekara li, vehu kara li bettor bat, ani ts-richa[F] mamash letsatet et hachaverim sheli keilu panu elay bezachar, le-targem et kol hadvarim, kedey sheani uchal lehagid lahem otam kmo shetsarich. Velehefech. Kshekore li mashehu baavoda veani mesaperet[F] al cach lechaverot, az ani tsricha[F] od paam letargem. Ze niraa li ktsat muzar ki harei kulam yodiim shehabosit sheli lo pona elai btor nekeva, ki ani sham betor ben. The mashehu shemafriaa – hatsorech haze leavet et hametsiut.

Naomi: I have a fairly big difficulty in recounting experiences that hap-pened to me in one "mood" and translating them to a second "mood." If I sit with my parents and tell them about something that has happened to me as a girl, I really need to quote my friends as if they address me as a man and to translate everything in order to be able to tell it "properly" to my parents. Alternately, when something happens to me at work and I tell my friends about it, then I need to translate it once more. It seems a bit strange to me, because after all they know that my boss does not address me as a woman, because I am there as a male. It is a disturbing thing, this need to distort reality.

Naomi presented a divided self, describing feelings of loss involved with the need to translate her experiences from one gender to another. She was forced to play the gender game expected from her, despite the awareness of her par-ents and friends that she lived in two gender modes. On the one hand, the translation process created difficulty in transferring the details of a narrated event with all its meanings and distorted Naomi's reality. Thus, she lost a portion of her experiences and therefore part of herself. Translation imposed on her a silence, the result of existing between two linguistic selves, a kind of parting of the ways of being neither here nor there. On the other hand, this metaphorical bilingualism was a sort of transformational practice that Naomi used to obtain her preferred place in her world (Hoffman 1989). According to Naomi, her novel linguistic practice provided her with an identity and helped her to reveal her queer tendencies to selected friends. As she phrased it, "Using the feminine as well as the masculine was the point at which I un-derstood I was really getting out of the closet" (*ksheitchalti leishtamesh gam benekeva hevanti shezot hanekuda sheani behemet yozet mehaharon* כשהתחלתי להשתמש גם בנקבה הבנתי שזאת הנקודה שאני באמת יוצאת מהארון).

Unlike bilingual individuals who acquire a second language in adult-hood, whose mother tongue is often interwoven with positive emotions while the new language may be associated with detachment and fear of loss of the self (Granger 2004), the participants in this study presented the converse pro-cess. The use of the gender morphological forms assigned to them by virtue

of their biological sex was an act of severing and distancing themselves from their identities, while the new grammatical gender forms they appropriated indicate adaptation to their "real" identities. Thus, the participants emphasized their rapid acclimation to the movement between feminine and masculine markers and the small number of slips that they made. They clarified this clear transition between the two markers by recurrent use of the adjective *tivhi* טבעי ("natural").

7.   אייל: בהתחלה זה היה קצת מוזר, אך תוך פחות מחודש זה היה נראה לי הכי טבעי בעולם.

> *Eyal:* bahatchala ze haya ktsat muzar, ach toch pachot mechodesh ze haya niraa li hachi tivii baolam.

> *Eyal:* It was a bit strange initially, but within less than a month, it seemed to me the most natural thing in the world.

This "natural" acclimation to moving between the two sets of personal pronouns and gendered grammatical forms helped to construct the participants' identity as authentic and legitimate (West and Zimmerman 1987). It indicated a true self, which merely awaited the opportunity to be revealed, contrary to the imitation and counterfeit identities represented in their previous form of speech. Hegemonic discourses that present such identities as contrary to nature are designed to preserve established political divisions by creating gender outsiders (Wittig 1992). Since the participants required acceptance and sought to convince others of the unalterable character of their identities (Gross and Ziv 2003), they adopted available concepts from these hegemonic discourses, such as the notion of a "natural" identity.

At the same time, the study participants' selective use of morphological forms for both genders helped them to present an identity that undermined the social requirements of "the fiction of heterosexual coherency." Their metaphorical bilingualism gave them a sense of belonging to the "whole world" of gender rather than only one half or the other. Thus, despite the difficulty in translating the self from the feminine to the masculine or vice versa, their gender bilingualism broadened speakers' possibilities of identity positioning and helped them to present a self that was adapted to the character of the audience or the requirements of specific interactions. Their bilingualism became part of the complicated process of desired identity transformation and the struggle for self-expression, as if compensating the participants for the bodies they were given and validating their success in moving between genders. In describing their subversive style of speech as "natural," they reclaim a term often used by patriarchal discourses to deny the legitimacy of their identities.

In line with their reports about their language use in other domains, during the interviews most of the interviewees occasionally used a speech style that mixed both feminine and masculine grammatical forms either in

a single word or sentence or throughout the course of a single conversation. This "codeswitching" created an array of rhetorical effects and played an additional role in defining and negotiating identity (Gumperz 1982). These linguistic switches between the feminine and the masculine constituted a means for placing the interviewees' narratives in their exact context, distinguishing between different or contrasting events, indicating a direct quotation of another speaker, or emphasizing changes between the former self and the self of today. Concomitantly, the participants' "codeswitching" became a means for denouncing and mocking gender conventions and social perceptions. When Eyal said, for instance, 'When I was young^M and a woman' (*kshehahiti tsahir^M vehisha^F* כשהייתי צעיר ואישה), he switched between male and female forms to refer to the same temporal point in his life, hence creating a dissonance which helped him to display a subversive identity. That is, he was not merely recounting a story or reporting an event; rather, by mixing the feminine with the masculine, Eyal shaped his identity and life story anew and granted them subversive meanings (McAdams 1997).

Because Eyal did not identify as either a woman or a man, he used bodily practices that blurred his belonging to only one of the two gender categories. His hair was cropped and he occasionally wore a chest binder and a skirt or alternatively attached a sort of codpiece to his trousers, simulating male genitalia, along with unbound female breasts. Switching linguistically between the feminine and the masculine also served his protest against the gender binary and the social ideology requiring a coherence between sex and gender. Eyal's subversive linguistic practices, like his physical appearance, constituted an educational tool designed to instruct those around him as to the existence of additional gender possibilities. His blended language positioned him as a rebel and served as a source of power as well as a primary means for rebuking or displaying opposition to social customs. As Eyal phrased it, "We learn the rules and then mock them" (*hanachnu lomdim^M et hahukim vehaz mesachkim^M belelagleg halehem^M* לומדים את החוקים ואז משחקים בללגלג עליהם אנחנו).

Lital gave a similar meaning to his gender "codeswitching."

8. ליטל: יש לי משהו יותר חזק, יותר חשוב להראות לעולם, להגיד לעולם. זה עזר לי להתמודד עם זה שהגוף לא תואם בדיוק את איך שבא לי שזה יהיה. .. זאת הרגשה שיש לי מקום בעולם והוא חשוב. מגיע לי להיות פה... ואני דוגמא פיזית לעוד אופציה, חה טוב אופציות. אני אוהבת אופציות ואנשים לא מכירים את האופציה... אז אם מישהו יראה אותי ויגיד: היי, תראו עוד אופציה! חה יפתח משהו בראש, זה משהו שעושה טוב, זה חופש.

    Lital: yesh li mashehu yoter chazak, yoter chashuv leharot laolam, lehagid laolam. Ze ozer li lehitmoded im ze shehaguf lo toem bidiuk et eich sheba li sheze ihie . . . vezot hargasha sheyesh li makom baolam vehu chashuv. Magia li lihiot po . . . veani dogma fizit leod optsia, veze tov opstiot. Ani ohevet optsion veanashim lo mekirim et haoptsia.

> *Lital:* I have something stronger, more important to show the world, to tell the world. It helps me to cope with a body that improperly corresponds to how I want it to be…. The feeling is one of having a place in the world and that is important. I deserve to be here…. I am a physical example of another option, and options are good. I like options, and people are unfamiliar with options…. So if someone sees me and says, "Hey, look at this other option!" this activates something mentally, it creates a benefit, it is freedom.

The dissonance produced in the ears of listeners who heard a "woman" using both feminine and masculine forms transformed Lital into a sort of a missionary with a message, who both illustrated and offered new options for both gender categories. In his own words, he opened a channel for contemplation, creativity, and freedom devoid of social, linguistic, or physical limitations.

Like gender codeswitching, gender neologisms evolved via the interviewees and other members of the community. These neologisms, which deviated from prescriptively correct Hebrew grammatical structures, were created through the use of both feminine and masculine morphology in a single word. The intermingled new words ironically transformed gender into an unimportant—or, as Ohad puts it below, "irrelevant" (*lo hashuv* לא חשוב)—status, hence aiding the participants to argue against the rigidity of Hebrew's binary gender system or against the dominance of the masculine forms. At the same time, their linguistic practices also directed attention to the gender binary, thereby denaturalizing it, as Butler argues is the case for drag (Butler 1990).

In our interview, Ohad discussed his reasons for using these neologistic forms:

9. *אוהד:* לכתוב ברבים זה לא פמיניסטי. לכתוב ברבות זה מעליב. אז יש שתי שיטות לכתוב במעורב. להגיד: החברים עושות, הילדים הולכות. להחליף כל הזמן את המגדר ואז ברור שזה לא חשוב. השיטה השנייה זה להכניס הכול ביחד: לכמן, חברימות, טרנסימות. שתי שיטות שהן פשוט יותר נחמדות ופחות מעצבנות מהקווים הנטויים. וגם הקו הנטוי מנציח את הדיכוטומיה.

> *Ohad:* lichtov berabim the lo feministy. Lichtov berabot ze maalivaz yesh shtey shitot lichtov bemeurbav.lehagid: hachaverim[M] osot[F], hailadim[M] hilchot[F.] lehachlif et hamigdar kol hazman veaz barur sheze lo chashuv. Hashita ashnia ze lehachnis hakol beyachad: lachemn, chaverimot, transimot. Shtey shitot shehen pashut yoter nechmadot vepachot meatsbenot mehakavim hanetuim. Vegam hakav hanatuy mantsiach et hadichotomia.

> *Ohad:* Use of plural masculine forms is not feminist. Using plural feminine forms can be offensive to some of us. So, there are two ways of writing in a mixture. To state: "The friends[M] are doing[F] this"; "The children[M] are going[F] there." Switching the gender all the time makes it clear that it is

irrelevant. The second method is to mix everything together, using male and female in the same word; *haverimot* ['friends'] or *transimot* ['transgender people'].[3] The two methods are simpler, nicer, and less irritating than the slashes [i.e., combining feminine and masculine], since the slash perpetuates the dichotomy, as well.

Ohad, forty-one, was born a genetic male and described himself as a 'genderqueer with a tendency toward femininity' (*genderqueer him netia lenashiyut* ג'נדרקוויר עם נטיה לנשיות). He refused to commit to a single gender, enjoyed cross-dressing, and reported using feminine markers on various social occasions, such as at genderqueer community events or during sexual encounters (although he preferred masculine reference in general, which I have adopted here).

To sum up, the participants rejected the obligation to uphold the rules of hegemonic discourse and were not reluctant to use creative language that disrupted the binary order and undermined the requirement of coherence between sex and gender. Their "bilingualism," "codeswitching" and neologisms rebuked the social ideology that everyone should only use either feminine or masculine forms. These practices thus constituted a source of power and could inform others of new forms of existence involving movement between gender positions. Nevertheless, the participants also described as artificial or contrived the use of both feminine and masculine forms in the same conversation, sentence, or word. Their day-to-day speech had one primary gender morphology, a fact that illustrates the difficulty in mixing together both grammatical forms and the need to preserve a comprehensible dialogue with others, reflecting the ways that Butler's (1990) notion of cultural intelligibility is grounded in the interpretability of everyday discursive practices. Using one chosen gender form works as a unifying process, which ignores the many facets of the interviewees' identities and personal experiences and transforms the self unwillingly into a single gender (McAdams 1997).

"TO BE UNCLEAR": GENDER AVOIDANCE

A final linguistic practice designed to maneuver between Hebrew's gender restrictions was the use of impersonal or "neutral" language. Most participants used this practice, which avoided personal pronouns and thereby indicated neither feminine nor masculine subjectivity, as a sort of self-censoring.

10.   *שחר:* העברית זה קצת בעיה. בתור בת לא נוח לי לדבר, אבל אני רגילה זה יוצא לי אוטומטית. ניסיתי תקופה לעבור לדבר בלשון זכר. זה היה נורא, כי לא הרגשתי בכלל בן, אז למה שאני אדבר בכלל בלשון זכר. אז ניסיתי לעבור לשפה נייטרלית, אבל זה היה סיוט, כי לפני כל משפט אני צריכה לחשוב פעמיים ואני גם צריכה לבקש איך יפנו אליי.... אני זוכרת שיצאו לי דברים, שאנשים אפילו לא הבינו מה רציתי להגיד. הרבה פעמים ויתרתי על דברים, טוב אני כבר לא אגיד את זה וזהו.

Shahar: haivrit ze ktsat beaya. Betor bat lo noach li ledaber, aval ani regila[F], ze yotse li otomatit. Nisiti tkufa laavor ledaber belshon zachar. Ze haya nora, ki lo hergashti bichlal ben, az lama sheani adaber bichlal belshon zachar. Az nisiti laavor lesafa netralit, aval ze haya suit, ki lifnei kol mishpat ani tsricha[F] lachshov paamaim veani gam tsricha[F] levakesh eich ifnu elay... ani zocheret[F] sheyatsu li dvarim, sheanashim afilu lo het-slichu lehavin ma ratsiti lehagid. Harbe peamim vitarti al dvarim, tov ani kvar lo agid et ze vezehu.

Shahar: Hebrew is something of a problem. I am uncomfortable speak-ing as a female, but I am accustomed—it comes out automatically. For some time, I attempted transitioning into using masculine self-reference. It was terrible, because I did not feel male at all, so why I should try using masculine self-reference at all? Then, I tried to switch to neutral language, but that was a nightmare, because then, before each sentence, I needed to think twice.... I recall how some things came out, so people did not even understand what I wanted to say. I frequently gave up on things, "OK, so I won't say it and that's that."

Thirty-one-year-old Shahar was born female, but did not identify with either gender. She was "neither male nor female" (*lo gever velo hisha* לא גבר ולא אישה), but if she could have chosen, then she would have preferred to become male because the masculine is perceived as more inclusive and neutral than femi-nine, thus "I can reach closer to the center via the male side" (*ki hani yechola[F] lehagiha lamerkaz derech hatsad shel habanim* כי אני יכולה להגיע למרכז דרך הצד של הבנים). In other words, Shahar's gender identity was neutral and she wanted "to be unclear to people" (*shelo yihiye barur lehanashim ma hani ani* שלא יהיה ברור לאנשים מה אני), to cause others to stare and be confused. She dis-tanced herself from every element that indicates femininity, going so far as to undergo chest reconstructive surgery to look more male. However, the use of feminine linguistic forms was her default mode, in the absence of other, more suitable possibilities.

Most participants, like Shahar, reported that in at least some contexts they avoided forms that receive gender marking and were accustomed to using a "neutral" language that camouflaged their gendered self. According to their statements, this linguistic practice was not optimal, and they used it due to the absence of other possibilities. They contorted their language both in order to avoid the necessity of choosing one side of the gendered "fence" or the other and in order to distance themselves from the coercive symbolic order of Hebrew.

This linguistic practice could be enacted in several ways. One was to switch to first-person past and future tense, which do not require speakers to mark their gender, and to avoid the use of present tense, which requires gender marking. For instance, below Amir told me about his linguistic transition

to "a world that is all future" (*leholam shekulo hatid* לעולם שכולו עתיד), which eased his discomfort with using feminine forms and helped him to avoid the cultural costs that might stem from using the masculine, such as loss of rights or misinterpretations (Sedgwick 1990).

11. *עמיר: באיזה שהוא שלב שלב כבר לא רציתי להגיד שום דבר בנקבה. אבל לא יכולתי להגיד אני הולך, אז התחילה השפה הכללית הזאת. במקום "אני רוצה ללכת" (ז) "אולי נלך". להפוך מהווה לעתיד. זה אפשרי. זה להפוך כל דבר... יוצא קצת עילג, אבל אפשר.*

Amir: beeize shehu shalav kvar lo ratsiti lehagid shum davar benekeva. Aval lo yacholty lehagid ani holech[M], az hetchila hasafa haklalit hazot. Bimkom "ani rotse[M] lalechet" "ulay nelech". Lahafoch mehove leatid. Ze efshari. ze lahafoch kol davar . . . yotse ktsat ileg aval efshar.

Amir: At some stage, I no longer wanted to say anything using feminine self-reference. However, I was unable to say "I am going,[M]" so this general language began. Instead of "I want to go,[M]" "Perhaps we will go." Namely, change it from present to future. It is possible. It means changing everything. . . . It turns out a bit garbled, but it is possible.

When there was no way out and participants were forced to speak in the present tense, they reported using passive forms, which also contributed to the reduction of gender and assisted in the avoidance of personal pronouns. One such practice involved switching the sentence subject (i.e., the speaker) for whom a gender-marked verb is required, with another subject. For example, *hani mevakeshet[F]* אני מבקשת 'I request[F]' became *yesh lee bakasha* יש לי בקשה 'Have a request' (in Hebrew the verb form יש לי 'to have' does not take gender marking); instead of *ani holechet[F] vezehu* אני הולכת וזהו ("I am going and that's it,[F]") a speaker might say, *tov hegiha hazman lalechet* טוב, הגיע הזמן ללכת ("Okay, the time has come to part."); instead of *ani roze[M] caffe* אני רוצה קפה ("I want coffee,[M]") one might say, *caffe yachol lehathim hachshav* קפה יכול להתאים עכשיו ("Coffee would be suitable now.").

Additional pitfalls lie in words that denote family status, such as *hima* אימא "mother," *haba* אבא "father," *hisha* אישה "wife," *bahal* בעל "husband," *geveret* גברת "Mrs.," and *adon* אדון "Mr.," which, in Eyal's words, "bother me more than verbs, as they relate to me a bit more directly." In order to overcome these obstacles and to obscure gender, the interviewees created neologisms. One strategy involved blending two words into a new form, as in Ohad's description of himself as "momdad of three children" (*abima leshlosh yeladim* אבימא לשלושה ילדים). Another formation process was to add a suffix to an existing form to alter its meaning. For example, Naomi stated that *ishtati* אישתתי ("wifeband") is "a word that does not force me into the position of a husband. It does not fall into the collective subconscious when I say *wifeband*, you think a moment about what she intends" (*mila shelo*

dohefet hotcha lehemdat bahal. Ze lo nofel latat muda hacolectivi. Kshe-hat omeret ishtati hat choshevet rega lema hi mitkavenet מילה שלא דוחפת אותך להמדת בהל. זה לא נופל לתת את המודע הקולקטיבי. כשאת אומרת אישתתי, את חושבת רגע, למה היא מתכוונת אותי לעמדת בעל.). Or a speaker might use alternative lexical items; hence, Ohad, said he prefers to use phrasing such as "*I am the parent of . . .* not *father* or *mother*. Or *I have two children*, then I can be what I want" (*ani horeh shel . . .* lo *aba* velo *ima,* oh *yesh li shney yeladim,* vehaz ani yechola[F] lihiyot ma shani rotsa[F] אני הורה של... לא אבא ולא אימא, או יש לי שני ילדים, ואז אני יכולה להיות... ה שאני רוצה.).

This gender-neutral language indeed reduced the necessity to choose between feminine and masculine and somewhat loosened the shackles of Hebrew. But, according to the participants, it was impossible to avoid gender marking for long periods of time. Impersonal language is, in Amir's words, "a castrating language" (*safa mesareset* שפה מסרסת), which demands concentration and juggling, restricts self-expression, and therefore produces silence. This silence stems from the impossible intersection between two linguistic functions: to express identity but also to communicate with others (DeFina 2003; Tabouret-Keller 1997). Due to the need to be clear and consistent and to connect with their interlocutors, the participants reported, they capitulated in advance and reverted to the prescriptive rules of the hegemonic social order and eventually chose only one side. They experienced this act as one of surrender, forcing them to suppress their linguistic practices in order to conceal their identities or to facilitate the encounter between the complex self and the ideologically rigid outer world.

Conclusion

Transgender individuals act as troubleshooters for gender, revealing resources available in the linguistic system of which people with more traditional gender identities may have scant awareness. These speakers expose the gendered apparatus of language and the constraints imposed by its grammar. Simultaneously, they illustrate that language constitutes a set of resources available to be invoked and manipulated in order to convey and construct gendered positions and identities. In this chapter I have argued that when a language produces more gender constraints by presenting a wider set of grammatical gender rules, as in the case of Hebrew, it expands and facilitates speakers' ability to perform their identities according to their goals within various social interactions. Moreover, it is these same obligatory grammatical rules that in fact enable the speakers' manipulation of language and their ability to invest it with subversive meanings and operative power. Hence, in a paradoxical manner, Hebrew's restrictive binary structure can also be liberatory.

In the above analysis, I have described the study participants' manipulation of Hebrew and demonstrated its performative power. Despite the fact that

Hebrew does not include genderqueer identities in the realm of its morphology, it serves as an arena for various subversive practices and performances of identity. In other words, the apparent disadvantages of Hebrew's binary structure were transformed in the hands of the interviewees into an advantage, which assisted them in expressing their non-binary genders. The interviewees' linguistic practices, such as using inverse gender markers, blending feminine and masculine forms, and avoiding gender, undermined the decisive status of sex in ascribing gender and displayed a stance that mocked social perceptions and expectations. Their selective use of both the feminine and the masculine constituted a multifaceted gender identity, one that was neither static nor constant but was subject to change according to diverse social interactions and audiences. The interviewees' linguistic choices also informed the practical role of language in accelerating the clarification and demarcation of the boundaries of self (as in the case of Amir, who discovered his identity as a genderqueer after using masculine forms). These practices decreased the imbalance between the interviewees' internal self-perception and their external bodies—bodies that were often at odds with any essence that they were supposed to represent.

The interviewees' reliance upon available concepts from patriarchal discourses, such as the ideologies that masculine forms are neutral or constitute a powerful way to speak, aided their struggle for self-expression and provided them with a stance of power. Eyal, for example, used the supposed neutrality of the masculine forms to index an identity that did not belong to any gender category. Amir, on the other hand, used the masculine to claim power. This range of functions reveals the potential for apparently oppressive systems to be reworked in liberating ways.

The interviewees' reliance on Hebrew's binary structure and preexisting discourses in order to perform their unconventional identities illuminates another significant aspect of the nexus between social structure and individual's agency. Namely, their manipulation of Hebrew reveals both individuals' dependence on the given gender order and their freedom to deviate from it and change the external conditions they inhabit. In other words, their social actions are both mediated by the social structure and can also lead to changes to it (Bourdieu 1990; Giddens 1991).

The interviewees' reliance upon preexisting discourses uncovers, on the one hand, the real difficulty of speaking in alternative terms that deviate from the dichotomous gender structure of the linguistic system—a system that is based on opposites and is well internalized by the interviewees and hence directs their speech practices. When they used, for example, extensive negation or endowed their gender identity with different attributions than the customary ones, they relied on the dominant gendered oppositions in order to rebel against them. This situation indicates that their linguistic choices were not generated in a vacuum, autonomous, or devoid of external influences. However,

in spite of the difficulty of evading these external social influences through language, the interviewees were not unconscious subjects who simply fortified the existing gender order with their words. On the contrary, my analysis illustrates that they played an active role in the process of forming their gender and that they had the ability to glean from the linguistic rules those that best suited their needs. They decided in which circumstances to express opposition or when to insist on their right to speak and be addressed as they saw fit. Moreover, they used the available linguistic resources to lead change and instruct others in their surroundings about alternative gender possibilities. The participants were no mere product of the dichotomous gender order that they found so restrictive; rather, their speech became an act of personal agency. Thus, even from the social margins and from a position of relative powerlessness, a counterdiscourse can emerge, exposing the arbitrariness of language, rebelling against its rules and proposing alternative possibilities for action.

Given this possibility for agency, it would be fruitful to explore in future research the effect of genderqueer individuals' linguistic practices upon their surrounding communities. In other words, how do the educational processes they seek to provide their interlocutors affect the interlocutors' linguistic actions? In my own case, I now use gender "codeswitching," mixing feminine and masculine grammatical forms of address when I speak to mixed-gender audiences, in order to rebel against the dominant or "neutral" status of the masculine. This example demonstrates the effect of the interviewees' linguistic practices upon me even during our short acquaintance. In addition, because identity is an elusive concept that is subject to incessant development, it would be valuable to follow the genderqueer community's speech patterns for an extended period of time to discern changes in attitudes toward language use as well as changes in the desire and ability of individuals to cleave to a rebellious linguistic stance throughout their lifetimes. Finally, these observations about the creative repurposing of restrictive language in Hebrew are just a beginning. It would be illuminating to perform similar research on less restrictive languages as a basis for comparison of the elicitation and expressions of power through language manipulation.

Notes

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2. All interviewees have been given pseudonyms.

3. In Hebrew, the feminine plural for 'friends' is *haverot* and the masculine plural is *haverim*. Mixing them together creates the new word *haverimot*. Likewise, mixing the feminine plural for transgender individuals (*transiot*) with masculine plural (*transim*) yields the new word *transimot*.

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