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| **Student Name** | Reuven Chaim (Rudolph) Klein |
| **Student Number** | N/A |
| **Course Title** | Masters of Jewish Education |
| **Module Title & Number** | JED 750 – Research Methods and Dissertation |
| **Assignment title** | Master's Dissertation: Ivrit's Place in the Dual Curriculum Model of Orthodox Jewish High Schools in North America |
| **Module Leader** | Dr. Helena Miller |
| **Word Count** | 16,462 |
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Reuven Chaim (Rudolph) Klein

November 2021

# Ivrit's Place in the Dual Curriculum Model of Orthodox Jewish High Schools in North America

## Abstract

The dual curriculum model ubiquitous to Orthodox Jewish day schools in North America typically bifurcates into religious (Judaic) studies and general studies. While most classes generally fit into one of those two halves of the curriculum, some classes are not intuitively categorized as wholly belonging to one part over the other. One of those classes is *Ivrit* (Modern Hebrew). This study aims to describe *Ivrit's* place in the dual curriculum model and the various factors that contribute to that reality by exploring the context in which *Ivrit* emerged as a subject-matter for Orthodox schools and seeking to identify trends in the ways *Ivrit* is taught.

This paper lays out the theories behind how ideology influences curriculum formation and documents how Hebrew has fit into the curriculum of Jewish Education throughout the ages. It also provides a picture of the particular context of North American Orthodox Jewry that this study focuses on, as well as a review of the different theories behind Hebrew education (heritage language vs. communicative language).

With this theoretical background in hand, this dissertation surveyed 36 Orthodox high schools in North America to better understand how they viewed *Ivrit's* place and shows that ultimately this subject's place in the dual curriculum model remains ambiguous. Documenting how *Ivrit* is taught and examining the reasons as to why *Ivrit* is taught helped shed light on *Ivrit's* precarious place in the dual curriculum model, as some of those policies/techniques/motives seem to line up with the aims of the Judaic studies curriculum, while others seemingly reflect the goals of the general studies curriculum.

Keywords: Jewish Education, Hebrew language, American Orthodox Judaism, dual curriculum, applied linguistics, heritage language.

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# Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I must acknowledge and thank the One God who created us and sustains us on a daily basis. Without His help, nothing would be possible.

I also recognize the help of Rabbi Michael Pollak of PAJES, who originally brought me into this Master's program and mentored me during the first year. I additionally thank Dr. Helena Miller, Dr. Joe Mintz, Dr. Mario Moya, and Rabbi Dr. Raphi Zarum who taught me and assessed my assignments during my second year of the Master's program.

In addition, I would like to thank my fellow students Mrs. Lizzie Caplan and Mrs. Cindy Moritz, as well as the staff at the LSJS Library and the Rambam Library in Tel Aviv for providing me with some of the sources cited in this dissertation.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the contribution of all those who participated in my surveys, as well the gatekeepers who helped me secure those participants. For privacy reasons, I cannot mention their names explicitly, but I still owe them a debt of gratitude. You know who you are.

Additionally, I would like to thank my various employers, especially Rabbi Dr. Harry Zvi Davis of Baruch College, Rabbi Yehoshua (Jeremy) Steinberg of the Veromemanu Foundation, and Rabbi Shlomo Simon of Yeshivat Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem. You have all given me the opportunity to use my skills and do what I love doing, while also supporting my family in an honest and respectable fashion.

*Aharon aharon haviv*, I would like to thank my wife and children for their help and support during this period. While the entire world was stuck at home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, nobody else had to suffer being in the same apartment with me—except for my wife and children. They put up with me and allowed me to continue working and studying; if not for their superlative patience, this dissertation would be naught but a dream.

Thank you, Shira, for making this a reality; I really do appreciate it. Let's see where the journey of life takes us next…

"ברוך אתה... אשר בחר בנו מכל עם, ורוממנו מכל לשון, וקדשנו במצוותיו..."

"Blessed are You… that chose us from all nations, and exalted us from all languages, and sanctified us with His commandments…"

-*Kiddush,* Festival Liturgy

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Personal Introduction

As a native English speaker living in Israel, I am acutely aware of language issues, so language is often in the forefront of my thinking. On a near-daily basis, I use various combinations of English, Hebrew, Yiddish, and Judeo-Aramaic. In my professional work, I write English articles about words in Hebrew and work as an editor for a foundation that publishes rabbinic texts related to the language. My children are native Hebrew speakers, while most of my neighbours are fluent in Yiddish. Finally, as a religious Jew, I study the Talmud, written in Judeo-Aramaic. Because language — and especially Hebrew — is relevant to me in my personal and professional life, I wanted to explore a related aspect of Jewish Education.

The questions at the core of this study partially reflect my own experiences as a student in Orthodox Jewish schools in North America. At the Centrist Orthodox junior high school that I attended, I felt that *Ivrit* ("Modern Hebrew") was studied as part of the school's Judaic studies curriculum, yet in my Ultra-Orthodox high school, I felt that *Ivrit* was taught as part of the general studies curriculum.

In more recent reflections on this topic, I have come to realize that neither institute from my early schooling clearly placed *Ivrit* in either half of the curriculum. Rather, *Ivrit* was treated as belonging to both the Judaic studies and general studies curricula. In my junior high school, all the boys' Judaic studies teachers were male rabbis, yet the *Ivrit* teacher was a woman. This suggests that *Ivrit* was not viewed as a Judaic course, yet it was taught in the morning alongside the other Judaic classes (while general studies were all consigned to the afternoon). In high school, the converse was true: None of the general studies teachers were male rabbis, yet the *Ivrit* teacher was a well-respected rabbi whose primary occupation was teaching Talmud at a local Yiddish-speaking elementary school. This suggests to me that my high school treated *Ivrit* as part of the Judaic curriculum, yet in practice,

*Ivrit* was taught in the late afternoon alongside other general studies classes, while all the other Judaic studies classes were taught in the morning and early afternoon.

While admittedly anecdotal in nature, these personal experiences contribute to my interest in exploring the place of *Ivrit* in the dual curriculum model.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The dual curriculum of Orthodox Jewish high schools in North America comprises subjects that can be typically classified as either *kodesh* (literally "holy," i.e., Judaic religious studies) or <u>h</u>ol (literally, "profane," i.e., general/secular studies). For example, subjects like Biology, Math, History, and English intuitively fall into the <u>h</u>ol section of the curriculum, while subjects like Halakha ("Jewish Law"), <u>H</u>umash ("Pentateuch"), Mishnah, and Gemara ("Talmud") clearly belong to the curriculum's *kodesh* component. However, in the case of *Ivrit*, my experience shows that this divide often appears blurred, as the subject cannot be said to fit exclusively into either category. This dissertation thus seeks to explore where *Ivrit* fits along the secular-religious axis of the dual curriculum model of Orthodox Jewish high schools in North America.

My thesis maintains that *Ivrit* does not always have a clearly-defined place in the school curriculum. I argue that the ambiguity of *Ivrit*'s place in the curriculum reflects multivalent (even contradictory) religious sentiments towards the study of the Hebrew language itself, and towards Modern Hebrew in particular. In other words, the hypothesized ambiguity in contemporary practice reflects the multiple voices within Jewish tradition that variously view the study of Hebrew as a religious endeavour or not. This leads to the reality that *Ivrit* cannot neatly fit into either the *kodesh* or <u>h</u>ol component of the curriculum.

To test this argument, my dissertation engages with the following two research questions:

1. **Can *Ivrit* classes be clearly classified as either *kodesh* or <u>h</u>ol, or does *Ivrit* straddle the otherwise hard line between the two parts of the dual**

**curriculum in contemporary North American Orthodox Jewish high schools?**

2. **Why do North American Orthodox Jewish high schools teach *Ivrit*?**

## 1.3 The Debate about Hebrew

As Chapter 2 will put into context, there is no unanimous consensus as to the goals of scholastic Hebrew study. Case in point: On a committee charged with establishing standards for curriculum expectations of Orthodox day school graduates in the UK, the question of how much *Ivrit* a student ought to know after twelve years of Jewish schooling was "the most heated area of discussion" (Kohn, 2011, p. 46). Although the controversy could be reduced to whether the goal was "fluency" in *Ivrit* or mere "familiarity," the differing opinions show that even within the Orthodox community there is no unanimous consensus as to the goals of studying Hebrew in school.

Additionally, Pomson and Wertheimer (2017) found that teachers disagree whether the study of Hebrew should be optimized to enable textual study or to enable communication. In the former case Classical Hebrew might be more appropriate, while in the latter case Modern Hebrew would be more apropos. This dissonance has the potential to create conflicting expectations of what students should gain from studying Hebrew and which elements of the language ought to be emphasized.

## 1.4 Aims and Objectives

Anecdotal accounts report that it is not uncommon for a school's *kodesh* and <u>h</u>ol departments to quarrel over responsibility for the *Ivrit* program (whether each department claims or disclaims that program under its own umbrella).

By clarifying the different factors related to *Ivrit's* place in an Orthodox high school curriculum, my research has the potential to aid in diffusing misunderstandings and tensions that often arise between *Ivrit* and *kodesh* teachers.

Additionally, this study can potentially aid schools in better articulating to parents the reasons for their policies regarding *Ivrit*.

It will also provide researchers with access to little-known rabbinic sources whose opinions might influence Jewish schooling practice.

Moreover, *Ivrit*'s place in the dual curriculum can also serve as an exemplar for how religious ideology and other non-pedagogical factors play a role in curriculum formation and development in parochial schools. Cognizance of the different views and their points of convergence/divergence can help educators in developing curricula and learning objectives for *Ivrit* classes. Such awareness can especially help educators select the appropriate content, methodologies, and resources for teaching *Ivrit* according to their and their school's values and objectives.

Finally, this study can also provide a framework for understanding the place of other subjects that straddle the line between *kodesh* and *hol,* like *Historia* ("Jewish History") in the Beis Yaakov school system for Orthodox girls.

## 1.5 Research on Hebrew Education

Avni (2014) laments the lack of descriptive accounts of Hebrew education in the United States, and notes that most of what has been written on the topic remains anecdotal or polemic in nature. Those reports usually offer prescriptive declarations about what the state of Hebrew education *ought* to be, rather than descriptions of what it *actually is*. My dissertation partially fills this lacuna.

Likewise, after discussing teaching Hebrew in Jewish schools outside of Israel, Nevo (2011, p. 435) concludes with a litany of important, yet-unanswered questions:

> "Why Hebrew? What are the aims of teaching Hebrew in any given study context and what is the envisioned Hebrew profile of a graduate of that context? Is there a connection between the attitudes of students, teachers, and parents toward the study of Hebrew and the students' achievements? Are these attitudes linked to the size of the community and to its contacts with Israel? Whether and to what extent does teaching Hebrew have to be part of university Jewish Studies and Jewish identity programs? What is the place of the study of modern Hebrew as compared to Jewish textual

study?... Is there a connection between students' attitude to their first language and their achievements in Hebrew? Is it possible to point to a link between students' attitude to Israel and their achievements in Hebrew? What image of Israel does the school's curriculum present? Does teaching the Jewish subjects in Hebrew add or subtract value for these subjects?"

Although this small-scale research cannot address all the questions Nevo raised, this dissertation is one small step towards providing a better picture of the situation and mapping how many of these questions relate to one another.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## 2.1. Introduction

This chapter opens with a discussion on "curriculum" and how such programs of study are influenced by the ideologies of their authors/proponents. It then explores Hebrew's place in the Jewish educational curriculum, both in the pre-Modern era and after the rise of the *Haskalah* ("Jewish Enlightenment").

This chapter also provides the contextual background behind the dual curriculum model popular in American Jewish day schools, showing how and why the Orthodox subset of American Jewry generally uses this model to create a clear barrier between *kodesh* and *ḥol* classes. This chapter then visits the basis for *Ivrit*'s place in the curriculum of Jewish-American schools, concluding with an overview of some differences between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox related to *Ivrit*. Pertinent issues addressed in these last sections include the controversy behind the modality of *Ivrit B'Ivrit* ("Hebrew in Hebrew"), and whether the goal of studying *Ivrit* in North American Jewish schools relates to second-language acquisition or heritage language acquisition.

## 2.2. The Nature of Judaic Curricula

Although no universal consensus exists as to an exact definition of "curriculum" in the educational context (Ojong, 2013 and Zarum, 2005), the English word *curriculum* is rooted in Latin, cognating with other English words like *course* and *career* (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2021). Thus, to simplify the meaning of the term, a *curriculum* is a course, or path of study as typically implemented within an educational institution. Such courses of study are generally comprised of multiple, pre-determined subjects that advance the pedagogical and educational goals and learning outcomes of that institution.

Even though pedagogical and educational considerations contribute to the formation of a specific curriculum, they are not the only factors. There are also less-intuitive issues, like matters of ideology, that play a role in determining which subjects are taught at a given school. Curricula can be highly political and religious

roadmaps that serve to advance specific agendas. In fact, a curriculum is never neutral or objective; it is always loaded with different subjective/prejudiced ideologies that its framers seek to inculcate in students. In highlighting the importance of ideology for curriculum formation, Nozaki and Apple write:

> "Curriculum, then, is part of what we might call the selective tradition. Thus, it needs to be interpreted as part of the ideological processes through which hegemonic power is maintained and challenged. Out of the vast universe of possible knowledge, only some... are selected to become official knowledge taught to everyone. Particular beliefs and assumptions about what is important to know... provide the filter through which decisions about curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation are made. These ideological beliefs and assumptions are not always visible to the naked eye..." (Nozaki and Apple, 2014, p. 381).

Because the curriculum represents the officially-selected educational content/objectives, it plays an important role as the mediator between the official policy-makers and the actual act of teaching/assessing in the classroom (Westbrook, et al., 2013).

In the same way that non-Jewish schooling is built on the concept of a curriculum, traditional Jewish learning also has its own *seder*—a Hebrew term that literally means "order," but colloquially refers to a "curriculum" (Zarum, 2005).

For pre-Modern Ashkenazi Jews, education was synonymous with *Jewish* education, as all formal subjects of instruction were related to Jewish religious education (Chazan, Chazan, and Jacobs, 2017). Thus, given that the centerpiece of Jewish religious education is the Talmud, "the teacher's aim was to hasten the child on to Talmud as quickly as possible" (Fishman, 1944, p. 86). Teachers themselves were not the only stakeholders responsible for this, as "parents would hardly have preferred their sons to receive instruction in grammar rather than in Talmud or Tosafoth" (Fishman, 1944, p. 111). This ideological emphasis on Talmud study led to the deemphasis of other subjects (like Bible and Mishnah) in the typical curriculum of pre-Modern Jewish society, and, as Fishman (1944, p.

109) suggested, "Grammar appears to have been the most neglected subject in the curriculum."

The "Talmudocentric" (Katz, 2004, p. 104) attitude continued to be a fixture of traditional Jewish educational philosophy through the twentieth century. Twersky (2003) finds this focus on the study of Talmud to be a consequence of the centrality of Halakha to Judaism. Likewise, Zarum (2005) submits that the Talmud emerged as a central part of Jewish Education because the Talmud functions as the crucible from which most of Halakha derives, making studying Talmud a more practical guide to Jewish life than studying the Bible.

## 2.3 Hebrew in the Traditional Judaic Curriculum

The linguistic study of Hebrew as an independent genre first emerged in the early ninth century, with the works of R. Saadia Gaon (882–942) considered the first rabbinic (i.e., non-Karaite) books about the language. What characterized this emerging linguistic literature from prior Jewish works was its focus on the grammar, syntax, morphology, semantics, and lexicon of Hebrew. Although linguistic-like statements are recorded in earlier rabbinic works — like the Talmud and Midrash — scholars typically label those sorts of statements as exegetical or mystical in nature, as opposed to actual linguistic description and analysis (Tene, Maman, and Bar, 2007).

Early rabbinic grammarians like R. Yonah Ibn Jana<u>h</u> (990–1050) had to justify their engagement in this newly-established discipline in the face of more traditionally-minded rabbis, who "had a thorough knowledge of Hebrew," but no concept of "rabbinic grammar" (Zwiep, 1996, p. 44).

In pre-Modern traditional Jewish schooling, most of the time was spent studying texts written in Hebrew, with no emphasis on studying the Hebrew language itself, *per se* (Goelman, 1953). This is because traditional Jewish schooling typically focused on the Talmud and related Halakha literature, while it viewed the language arts as largely irrelevant. In this milieu, accruing more than the most basic skills in Hebrew was deemed an unnecessary distraction. As Pomson and Wertheimer (2017, p. 37) said about contemporary times, "The dueling commitments of

Hebrew and Torah [i.e., Talmud/Halakha] are seen by some to exist in a zero-sum game."

Traditional education policies about studying Hebrew as a language in pre-Modern times can be best understood through attitudes and practices surrounding the study of Hebrew grammar (Parush, 1996). Thus, this study will examine Hebrew's place in the traditional curriculum by investigating the official attitudes taken towards studying grammar.

In the introduction to his book *Eitz H̲aim* on Hebrew grammar, R. H̲aim of Friedburg (1520–1588) cites an anonymous interlocutor who argued that the rabbis decided to stop teaching Hebrew as a language to young children so as not to interfere with their Talmudic studies (Schneeblag, 1973). Although R. H̲aim rejects this line of reasoning, his polemic against this view shows that such sentiments were probably in vogue.

In the seventeenth century, R. Yair H̲aim Bachrach of Worms (1639–1702) wrote about studying Hebrew grammar: "a little bit is necessary for any thinking person to know the general rules... but to waste time studying the various morphological inflections that the grammarians mention is totally unnecessary... one should not waste time trying to know all the secondary, ancillary rules and tertiary rules that branch off from these general rules. This is because learning them is an ordeal and brings little benefit" (Bachrach, 2000, p. 343).

A similar attitude was later expressed by R. Gedaliah Teikos, who authored a Yiddish primer on Hebrew grammar. He noted in his introduction that although it is important for a Jew to know the basics of Hebrew grammar, one should not waste too much time delving into the more intricate details of the language (Teikos, 1765).

In traditional Jewish societies, even when the learning goal was ostensibly language-acquisition of Hebrew, religious content still remained the focus. For example, the traditional prayer book would often be used as a reading primer (Fishman 1944), instead of a simpler book written for that purpose. Similarly,

Stampfer (1993) describes the near-universal literacy rate for East European Jews in the nineteenth century, but specifies that this literacy was restricted to fluency in *reading* Hebrew, while *writing* was not part of the learning objectives of a typical Jewish <u>heder</u> ("elementary school"). Stampfer explains: "Reading the holy writ was one thing and writing a shopping list was another, and it was unbefitting for a <u>heder</u> devoted to the teaching of... Torah and Gemara to devote time and effort to such mundane, though practical, skills" (Stampfer, 1993, p. 129).

However, there was not a universal consensus on this issue in pre-Modern times. For example, Ashkenazi Rabbis as early as R. Yehuda ben Asher ben Ye<u>h</u>iel (1270–1349) encouraged parents to make sure that their children study Hebrew grammar (Chavatzelet, 2005).

R. Yishaya Horowitz of Frankfurt (1555–1630) wrote that it is "good" (Horowitz 1648, fol. 181a) for young children to learn a substantial amount of Hebrew grammar so that they will remember those rules forever, a recommendation repeated by his son R. Sheftel Horowitz (1590–1660) in his ethical will (Waldman, 1993).

R. Yonah Landsofer of Prague (1678–1713) writes in his ethical will that parents should teach their children Hebrew, and take special care to ensure that children excel in reading (*Asher Yitzaveh*, 2005). R. Eliezer Papo (1785–1828) similarly writes that the foundation of Torah study lies in young students learning how to read clearly with preciseness in the vowels, cantillation, and other parts of Hebrew grammar (Papo, 2017).

Even in pre-Modern times, the importance of studying Hebrew as a language was subject to debate. For example, when R. Meir of Lublin (1558–1616) wrote, "the wisdom of grammar is not fundamental" (Steinmetz, 2019, p. 193), his interlocutor, R. Shabsai Sofer of Przemysl (sixteenth century) took exception to this claim and countered that Hebrew grammar is "the foundation of the entire Torah" (Atias, 1707, p. 4). These two authorities adopted two opposite approaches regarding the importance of studying the language.

Likewise, the communal records of the Jewish community in Krakow, Poland from the sixteenth century document that only the most gifted students would study Hebrew grammar, implying that ordinary students would not (Gruber, 1892, pace Fishman, 1944 who mistakenly cites that source as recommending that *all* students study Hebrew grammar). Yet, a 1638 account of the *yeshiva* ("Jewish religious educational institute") at Hanau, Germany records that studying Hebrew grammar was part of the curriculum (Peles, 1991).

Fishman (1944, p. 110) notes, "the fact that frequent reference was made to the necessity for teaching grammar indicates how consistently it was ignored." Thus, the traditional Jewish community in pre-Modern times was never monolithic in either its acceptance or rejection of teaching Hebrew as a language.

The literature shows that the tension between studying Talmud or Hebrew was already apparent as early as the pre-Modern period.

## 2.4 Hebrew Education after the rise of Haskalah

### 2.4.1 Traditionalist responses to Haskalah

One of ways that the *Haskalah* threatened the traditional Jewish community at the onset of Modernity was its undermining the status quo regarding the study of Hebrew. Kutscher (1982, p. 183) writes: "The *Haskalah* movement, originating in Germany at the close of the eighteenth century, aimed at the secularization of the Jewish people and motivated the revival of Hebrew..." Followers of that movement "created the new ideology of Hebrew as a modern language of culture and communication" (Shavit, 1993, p. 111). Although more traditional *Maskilim* ("members of the *Haskalah*"), like R. Naftali Hertz Wessely-Weisel (1725–1805), called for restricting the use of Hebrew to sacred matters, the *Haskalah* did not follow this advice, instead becoming "the vanguard of secularization for Hebrew" (Shavit, 1993, p. 115).

Wormser (2021) summarizes the *Maskilim*'s *modus operandi* by noting: "The [*M*]askilim (Jewish enlighteners) are well-known for their interest in the linguistic elements of the Jewish community. They sought to expand and cultivate the Hebrew language as a medium suitable for any cultural, scientific, or artistic

purpose" (Wormser, 2021, p. 10). In their attempt to rebrand Hebrew as a non-religious language, the *Maskilim* originally touted Biblical Hebrew as a purer form of the language, thereby disassociating themselves with later Rabbinic Hebrew typical of the Mishnah and Talmud (Shavit, 1993 and Bortal, 1993). This was an anti-rabbinic take on the concept of *tzaḥot ha-lashon* ("clarity of the language") first introduced by R. Saadia Gaon in the tenth century (Brovender, et al. 2007 and Septimus, 1994). Eventually, though, the *Maskillim* even began to include post-Biblical Hebrew words and meanings in the various lexicons they published (Klein, 2021). Although the Haskalah movement itself later shifted its focus away from the study of Hebrew, it had nonetheless given the study of Hebrew "a bad name" in the eyes of many traditionalists (Hamberger, 2011).

Studying Hebrew was not the exclusive purview of the *Haskalah* movement. According to Goelman (1953), the centuries preceding the rise of the *Haskalah* (starting from the Renaissance Period) saw Christian Hebraists show an interest in Hebrew as something to be studied in its own right. Their ideological heirs in the Humanists and early Reformists placed Hebrew prominently — alongside Latin and Greek — within their institutional curricula. The esteem in which these non-Jewish scholars held Hebrew partially influenced the early *Maskilim* to similarly place a heavy emphasis on studying Hebrew as a language.

Beginning in the late eighteenth-century and through the nineteenth-century, *Maskilim* across Europe established non-traditional Jewish schools that taught Hebrew as a language (Goelman, 1953).

As the *Haskalah* progressed and spread, there was fierce rabbinic pushback against the concept of studying Hebrew as a language, partially echoing the tradition of opposition in pre-Modern times. R. Tzvi Elimelech Spira of Dinov (1783–1841), author of the important Ḥassidic work *Bnei Yisaskhar*, wrote that in his times, studying Hebrew grammar was used as a gateway for leaving Halakhic observance and questioning rabbinic authority. Even though Spira acknowledged the importance of learning Hebrew grammar as an aid to studying Torah, he recommended that in his generation fathers should distance their children from

studying Hebrew grammar. Spira felt that once a child has a grasp of the basics of Hebrew, the focus of their studies should be solely on the Talmud and related literature (Pannet, 2000).

Parush (1996) assumes bad faith on the part of rabbis like Spira and attributes their attitude to the elitist values of traditional Jewish society that purposely tried to suppress literacy amongst the masses and retain it as the exclusive purview of the rabbis. However, in my view, it is more likely that this attitude could be traced to the ongoing ideological commitment to Talmud/Halakha as the core subject-matters of study.

Early Modern rabbis deviated from their rabbinic predecessors, many of whom were also accomplished grammarians, by explaining that while in earlier times studying Hebrew grammar was considered a noble endeavour, the reality has changed. In their discourse, these rabbis would compare the study of Hebrew to the *matzevah* ("single stone altar") of Biblical Times, which was originally considered a noble mode of worship, but was later re-branded an aberration (Schlesinger, 1833). This discursive homiletic adopted by other rabbinic authorities of the time and in subsequent generations (Kluger, 1950; Ehrenreich, 1971; Weisz, 1990; and Greenwald, 1994). In practice, Spira recommended holding off on studying Hebrew grammar until one has mastered other aspects of Torah study and piety (Pannet, 2000 & 2011).

Hamberger (2011) explains that opposition to the study of Hebrew as a language came to characterize the traditionalist approach across the continent, uniting Jews from Eastern Europe and Western Europe, including *Hassidim* and *Misnagdim* ("those who *opposed* [Hassidism]").

Yet, as Hamberger (2011) demonstrates, many traditional Jews also engaged in and even encouraged the study of Hebrew grammar. Such traditionalists were not necessarily part of the *Haskalah* movement, nor did they agree with their secularization objectives, but they nonetheless shared in the movement's enthusiasm of studying Hebrew as a language. Hamberger (2011) lists many influential traditionalists who personally appreciated Hebrew grammar, and even

encouraged their students to master that discipline, including: R. Zalman of Volozhin (1755–1788), R. Yosef Zundel of Salant (1786–1865), R. Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (1816–1893), and R. Yera<u>h</u>miel Yisrael Yitz<u>h</u>ak Danzinger of Alexander (1853–1910). Some prominent figures, like R. Sim<u>h</u>a Zissel Ziv-Broide of Kelm (1824–1898), openly regretted not having studied Hebrew grammar.

Significantly, R. <u>H</u>aim of Volozhin (1749–1821), whose influence is strongly felt in the structure of contemporary *yeshivas*, told his students to study Hebrew Grammar, but warned that it is not *overly important* and did not officially allot time for such study in his *yeshiva*'s curriculum (Shuchat, 2021). In contemporary times, his descendant R. Meir Soloveitchik (1929–2016) — an influential *yeshiva* dean in Jerusalem — stated that any moratoria against learning Hebrew grammar only applies to teaching that discipline to the masses, but concedes that there is no problem for an individual to study it (Eichorn, 2017).

### 2.4.2 Hebrew and Zionism

In the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, early Zionist adopted (Modern) Hebrew as part of their vision for the future State of Israel. As Klein (2021) explains, some elements of the Orthodox rabbinic leadership rejected the very notion of Modern Hebrew as "part and parcel of their rejection of the secular and nationalistic agenda that came with it [Zionism]" (Klein, 2021, p. 145). Like the *Haskalah's* efforts in previous centuries, the Zionist secularization of Hebrew served "to distance the new Hebrew language from traditional sources" (Rabkin, 2010, p. 133), while simultaneously "win[ning] over traditionalist Jews who were drawn by terms familiar to them" (there).

From a religious perspective, the rabbis took issue with Modern Hebrew's changes to Classical Hebrew, its heretical exponents, its use in non-religious contexts, its non-traditional mode of pronunciation, and its unbridled adaption of foreign words without rabbinic regulation (Klein, 2021).

Nonetheless, by the mid-twentieth century, rabbinic opposition to Modern Hebrew softened, as much of the Orthodox leadership pragmatically accepted the *de facto*

reality that Modern Hebrew became the dominant language in the State of Israel (Klein, 2021).

In contrast, I believe that Orthodox Jews in North America were not faced with the same reality, as they lived in English-speaking countries and could survive without making (Modern) Hebrew an important part of their life.

## 2.5 The Dual Curriculum Model in Orthodox Jewish Day Schools in North America

With the restructuring of Christendom in the Early Modern period and the emancipation of the Jews, the need arose for Jewish education to include secular/non-religious subjects that were conducive to training Jews in their newly-established civic duties as equal citizens of the societies within which they lived (Chazan, Chazan, and Jacobs, 2017). These subjects were to be taught alongside the Judaic studies that had dominated Jewish Education hitherto, resulting in a dual curriculum model (there). This model can be traced back to the Jewish Free Schools originally established by the German *Maskillim* in the late eighteenth century (Goelman, 1953 and Katz, 2004).

Besides Sunday Schools and supplementary schools, one particularly important model for Jewish-American schooling is the day school model, which emerged in the mid-twentieth century (Chazan, et al., 2017). This type of school catered to a "sector of American Jewry seeking both a rigorous general education and more intense study of Jewish heritage than that provided by supplementary schools" (there, p. 102). Chazan, et al. (2017) describe the two-part curriculum common to these day schools:

"As to the curriculum, the general education of the day school encompassed the standard subject areas of American schools: English language arts, sciences, mathematics, social studies, and other subjects (e.g., languages, arts, physical education) variously mandated by local authorities. In addition, the day school provided enhanced teaching of Jewish topics: Bible, Hebrew, Jewish texts, Jewish ceremonies and observances, prayer

book and synagogue skills, Jewish history, Jewish values and beliefs, and Israel. The two spheres of knowledge that constituted the curriculum of the day school came to be popularly known as 'the dual curriculum,' referring to two core bodies of knowledge regarded as important for being a well-educated twentieth-century American and Jew. The educational vision of the dual curriculum day school was that students could master these differing but complementary intellectual and cultural domains together and under one comprehensive program" (there, pp. 102–103).

Chazan, et al. (2017) raise various epistemological and hierarchical questions that mar the bifurcation enterprise inherent in the dual curriculum model. These problems proved more acute in non-Orthodox milieu, but:

"The modern Orthodox day school resolved some of these questions by referring to general studies as *limudei chol* (secular studies) and Jewish studies as *limudei kodesh* (sacred studies)—terminology that is both descriptive and pejorative. *Limudei chol* were taught by highly qualified teachers in specific secular subject areas and were aimed at the highest levels of academic achievement and advancement. *Limudei kodesh* were taught by rabbis and Jewish educators who had deep knowledge of Jewish sources while also being exemplars of Orthodox Jewish lifestyle. This structure called for excellence in all areas while establishing a clear hierarchy between the general, which was mundane, and the Jewish, which was holy" (Chazan, Chazan, and Jacobs, 2017, p. 104).

While curricula, in general, are typically comprised of multiple subjects with clearly-defined boundaries, the more contemporary trend of curriculum integration calls for blurring those rigid boundaries. In recent decades — partly under the influence of Dewey's liberalizing attitude to education — scholarship has begun to call for the integration of multiple disciplines in schooling and blurring the lines between subjects (Malkus, 2011). Nonetheless, the fact remains that "subject-centered curricula dominate most schools" (Apple, 2019, p. 37), as school days remain structured around classes devoted to specific topics.

Contemporary Orthodox Jewish education reflects this trend in its tendency to eschew integration of its two key components (Malkus, 2011). Calls for integration — such as those put forward by Solomon (1978), Lookstein (1978), Holtz (1980) and Bieler (1986) — notwithstanding, in practice there is typically a clear divide between an Orthodox school's *kodesh* curriculum and their *hol* curriculum. As Pomson (2011) demonstrates, this sort of compartmentalization is promoted by various elements of Orthodox schools' structure, including the nature of the subject-matters taught, teachers' training backgrounds, and student/parental ideological commitments.

In practice, this typically means that Orthodox schools will have separate principals, teachers, and time schedules for their *kodesh* and *hol* programs. R. Dr. Zalman Ury characterizes the compartmentalizationist view as reflecting "Jewish tradition" (Ury, 1978, p. 26), further explaining:

> "The sacred and the secular are two separate realms. It may be all right for some thinkers to view creation as a whole entity, but it is something else when it comes to curricula and actual life-situations. In the world of reality definite lines of demarcation are clearly discernible" (there, p. 27).

Given the compartmentalization of these various facets of the Orthodox schools, the question of where *Ivrit* classes fit can be better appreciated.

## 2.6 Ivrit in American Jewish Curricula

Parallel to what Myers (2016) reported about UK Jewish schools and what Gross and Rutland (2020) reported about Asian-Pacific Jewish schools, Biblical Hebrew in America is typically dealt with as part of Judaic studies, and is not offered as a class on its own. In general, the basics of Biblical Hebrew are taught when studying *Humash* ("the Pentateuch") in early grade school. The same is true of Mishnaic Hebrew, when studying Mishnah. Therefore, our discussion of Hebrew classes will focus on the study of *Ivrit* and will generally exclude earlier permutations of Hebrew. [The intricate linguistic differences between Biblical Hebrew, Mishnaic Hebrew, and *Ivrit* (Brovender, et al., 2007) are too complex to be properly addressed in this dissertation.]

The first Jews who settled in America in the seventeenth century were mostly of Spanish-Portuguese origin, had little training in Hebrew, and were mostly interested in teaching their children the basics of Judaism, such that "their attempts to teach Hebrew... were few and feeble" (Chomsky, 2001, p. 250). Thus, early American Jewry had no prior tradition of Hebrew education.

Even the first wave of Jewish immigration from Germany and Hungary in the early to mid-nineteenth century did not bring a renewed interest in Hebrew among the Jews as a community. Nevertheless, several American Jews, like R. Isaac Leeser (1806-1869), engaged in the systematic treatment of Hebrew and even published textbooks on the language. The earliest Jewish schools in America, like the Hebrew Sunday School Society of Philadelphia founded by Leeser, were limited in how much they could teach, so they chose to focus on Judaism itself, to the exclusion of Hebrew (much to Leeser's chagrin). It was the third wave of Jewish immigrants—those who came from Russia and Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth century—that finally brought the idea of formal Hebrew education to Jews in America (Chomsky, 2001).

Avni (2014) traces the history of Hebrew education in America through articles in the *Journal of Jewish Education* over a span of eight decades. The early 20th century introduction of Hebrew education in American Jewish schools is attributed to Dr. Samson Benderly (1876–1944). He championed the modality of *Ivrit be-Ivrit,* literally, "Hebrew in Hebrew," (Avni, 2014), also known as the Natural Method (Goelman, 1953). This immersion approach for teaching the language — first brought to American shores by Zvi Hirsch Neumann in 1893 (Sarna, 1998) — emphasized conversational Hebrew (as opposed to literacy skills) and essentially taught Hebrew content with Hebrew instruction, forcing students to become proficient in the language of instruction to understand the materials taught.

Avni (2014) documents the later decline of this modality and the emergence of a generation of Jews less fluent in Hebrew, such that by the late twentieth century, serious Hebrew education was largely confined to summer camps and universities. Adar (1977) concludes about Reform Judaism in that time-period: "teaching

Hebrew is not a serious... aim, even though it is listed in the curriculum" (Adar, 1977, p. 244). The Conservative movement took/takes teaching Hebrew more seriously, making Conservative Jewish education — in Adar's words, "the most Hebraistic of American Jewish education" (there, p.182). Nonetheless, such Hebrew instruction typically ends at *Bar Mitzvah* age (thirteen)—before students even enter high school (Adar, 1977).

In her ethnography of a non-Orthodox junior high school, Avni (2012a) records that Hebrew was considered so sacrosanct that "students were reprimanded for using translated editions of the Hebrew Bible. However, due to their varied level of linguistic proficiency, they often had difficulties fully comprehending what they were reading. Despite these challenges, it was believed that the benefits of studying the texts in Hebrew outweighed the pedagogical disadvantages" (Avni, 2012a, p. 328). Avni does not elaborate on what those benefits might be, but Pomson and Wertheimer (2017) report that the most compelling reason for learning Hebrew amongst non-Orthodox stakeholders (besides helping children connect with Israel) was that learning a second language contributes to brain development—a benefit that, strictly-speaking, does not apply exclusively to Hebrew.

The Reform and Conservative denominations of Judaism are antinomian movements that eventually rose from the secularization efforts of the *Haskalah*. The narratives presented by Avni and Adar focus exclusively on those sectors, while the developments related to the study of Modern Hebrew in the American Orthodox community follows a different story. The atavist Orthodox movement serves as an exemplar of the more traditional Jewish model. In fact, the Orthodox style of Jewish observance continues to remain the barometer by which "tradition" is measured, even in Reform circles (Charmé, 2009).

In the Orthodox sector, the method of *Ivrit b'Ivrit* proved more controversial from the onset. Many of the more liberal/Zionist segments of Orthodoxy embraced this way of teaching Hebrew and Judaic studies, yet many rabbis of the Orthodox persuasion voiced concerns over this modality (Klein, 2021). Besides objections to *Ivrit* as a vehicle of Zionism, Klein explains that "the general objection to this

method is that teaching students a subject in a language with which they are not familiar (or not as familiar) will cause them to not properly understand the material and will weaken their interest in that subject… Ultimately, Rabbi Kamenetsky concluded that it is best to teach students in whatever language they will learn best" (Klein, 2021, pp. 146–147). Essentially, these prominent Orthodox rabbis were unwilling to sacrifice their students' ability to the learn the *content* of Judaic studies for their ability to learn *how to* speak conversational Hebrew (Nevo, 2011). These Orthodox objections to *Ivrit b'Ivrit* were voiced across the world, including America, Poland, the UK, and even pre-State Palestine (Goelman, 1953).

The literature on second language immersion education points to a weakness of that modality in that students are often not given ample opportunities to use their expressive skills in the second language (Cummins, 1998). This leads to a situation whereby students might be able to *understand* the language, but cannot effectively use it to *express themselves* as they can in their first language. Considering the give-and-take nature of Talmudic education in particular, students' weaknesses in expressing themselves can significantly hamper their capacity to partake in the conversation, thus handicapping their ability to excel in Talmudic studies. For the Orthodox, because Talmud/Halakha is a mainstay of Jewish Education, a pedagogical technique that potentially interferes with studying those subjects would understandably be rebuffed.

As Avni (2012b) makes clear, the non-Orthodox are also cognizant of the aforementioned inversion of schooling norms, whereby "loyalty to the use of Hebrew meant that often *how* something was taught took precedence over *what* was taught" (Avni, 2012b, p. 181). Yet, Avni (2012a) reports that in non-Orthodox settings, studying Hebrew was considered so important that junior high school students could not fathom a Jewish Education curriculum without Hebrew. She argues that the school she observed purposely leveraged Hebrew "as a signifier of Jewishness" (Avni, 2012a, p. 329) because of the possibly greater challenge of defining Judaism/Jewishness in a non-Orthodox school, wherein families come from a wide range of levels of Jewish religiosity and Halakhic observance.

This suggests that in Orthodox schools where traditional religiosity and Halakhic norms are generally more uniform, there is less of a need to use Hebrew as a means of negotiating a new definition of "Jewishness." From a traditional Jewish perspective, "Jewishness" is an objective legal/Halakhic category, not an issue of *identity*, which, as something more subjective and fluid, can be reinforced through linguistic affiliation (Morgan and Clarke, 2011). Because identity is less of a factor in the Orthodox setting, this dissertation does not emphasize that theme in its literature review or in the actual study.

Similarly, Zarum (2005) explains the need for the formalization of Hebrew education in general: "It was only when Jewish communities became part of modern pluralistic societies (such as in the United States) that the study of Hebrew language had to be formalised in the curriculum to compensate for lower standards and religious commitments" (Zarum, 2005, p. 29). This too implies that in more traditional circles, there is less of a need to formally teach Hebrew, allowing schools to justifiably focus on aspects of Judaism historically associated with traditional Jewish education (i.e., the Talmud/Halakha).

Theoretically, Orthodox Jewish schools can be said to form the sort of "metalinguistic community" proposed by Benor and Avineri (2019), through which attaching oneself to discussion *about* a language and in engaging with cultural symbols *tied* to a language serve as alternatives to actual language proficiency. However, practically-speaking, Gross and Rutland (2020) report that students at ultra-Orthodox schools in Australia actually demonstrate a *higher* level of Hebrew proficiency than students from non-Orthodox homes. Indeed, American Orthodox Jewish schools typically do teach *Ivrit*, especially at the elementary and junior high school levels. Pomson and Wertheimer (2017) even report that Orthodox stakeholders are *more likely* to view Hebrew Education (both Classical Hebrew for learning texts and Modern Hebrew for communication) as "very important" than non-Orthodox stakeholders.

## 2.7 Why teach Ivrit?

Pomson and Wertheimer (2017) report that of Orthodox parents' top four reasons for wanting their children to study Hebrew, two relate specifically to Modern Hebrew ("it helps my child for a connection with Israel" and "it helps my child when visiting Israel"), while the other two apply to Classical Hebrew as much as to Modern Hebrew ("it maintains the Jewish people's language" and "it is part of being Jewish"). This dichotomy seems to stem from differing theories as to how/why *Ivrit* should be taught.

Much of the contemporary discourse surrounding the study of Hebrew in American Jewish Schools focuses on individuals' attachment to the language or Jewish society's drive to ensure the perpetuation of Jewish identity (Avni, 2014). Because of this, scholars are inclined to characterize Hebrew's place in American Jewish schools as that of a "heritage language." However, in recent decades, various pre-packaged *Ivrit* curricula as a sort of second language acquisition program (like NETA) have grown popular. That trend reflects the notion that Hebrew ought to be taught as a "communicative language" (Goodman and Katzew, 2011, p. 76), as opposed to a "heritage language."

A heritage language is typically an immigrant, indigenous, or colonial language, or a language spoken in the home in a time and place where that language is not dominant on the street. Even though *Ivrit* in North America and elsewhere in the Diaspora does not quite fit those criteria (Nevo, 2011), it is still often labelled a heritage language because of the religio-cultural role it plays in Jewish society (Avni 2012a, Benor and Avineri, 2019).

Gross and Rutland (2020) have identified four factors that contribute to the standing of heritage languages within relevant societies: emotional attitudes towards the language (e.g., nostalgia, or simply a love of the language), cultural importance (i.e., the language's place in the society's cultural heritage), pragmatics (i.e., the ability to use this language in everyday life), and religion (i.e., the holiness and sanctity ascribed to the language from a religious perspective).

In this way, "Hebrew language learning is not simply language acquisition in the generic sense, but rather a distinctive set of social, political, economic, and religious practices" (Avni, 2014, p. 258). If the goal of *Ivrit* classes is to teach a heritage language, then there is little reason, *per se*, that Modern Hebrew should be preferred to any form of earlier Hebrew. Indeed, Schachter and Ofek (2008, p. 272) wrote in the context of Hebrew language instruction that teaching it as a heritage language is "likely to include older forms of the language no longer used in contemporary communication."

By contrast, Hebrew as a communicative language would focus specifically on Modern Hebrew as a means of allowing American-Jewish students to proficiently communicate with their co-religionists in Israel or even as a *lingua franca* to communicate with Jews from other non-English speaking countries (Nevo, 2011), akin to Hebrew's role in earlier times (Klein, 2021). Thus, if the goal of *Ivrit* classes is to teach a communicative language, then, it could be argued that almost *per force*, Modern Hebrew should be preferred to earlier forms of Hebrew.

Myers (2016) describes a third pedagogical model — "cultural language" — whereby *Ivrit* is taught as a communicative language, but instructors also make explicit connections between Modern Hebrew words and Classical Hebrew words/concepts (by way of their shared etymological roots). By proposing to integrate the study of these two strands of Hebrew, she calls for more collaboration between *kodesh* faculty and *Ivrit* faculty, recommending that *kodesh* instructors also make explicit references to Modern Hebrew when discussing Classical Hebrew. This cross-pollination model was originally applied in a non-Orthodox elementary school setting. To me, this approach seems mostly redundant in an Orthodox milieu, where the basic word connections that Myers proposes are intuitive for most high school students, and many *kodesh* teachers would object to devoting class time to discussing Modern Hebrew.

## 2.8 Conclusion

The literature shows that the Orthodox relationship with the study of Hebrew proves quite complicated. Even once the linguistic study of Classical Hebrew

emerged as a separate genre from Talmudic/Halakhic studies, that line of study was not typically included within the curriculum because pre-Modern Jewish Education prioritized Talmudic/Halakhic studies to the near exclusion of everything else. In Modern times, when the *Haskalah* threatened the traditional community, the study of Hebrew as a language was even problematized in an effort to check *Maskillic* influence.

Attitudes toward Zionism in the Orthodox sector varied, but in many hardliner Orthodox circles, Hebrew (Classical Hebrew and Modern Hebrew alike) was consciously *excluded* from the curriculum for ideological reasons, just as it was purposely *added* to the curriculum in *Maskillic* and Zionist circles for ideological reasons. This reality reflects the idea that educational curricula can be used as a tool to advance ideological or religious goals by including or omitting certain subjects.

By the mid-twentieth century, the hardliner stance against (Modern) Hebrew eventually softened into a pragmatic acceptance of the language, leading many strictly-Orthodox communities in Israel to adopt Modern Hebrew as (at least one of) their spoken language. However, outside of Israel there continues to exist on some ideological level an opposition to studying Hebrew as a language, and, in some circles, to Modern Hebrew altogether.

From a traditionalist perspective, Hebrew could only be insured a place in the *kodesh* curriculum as long as it is conducive to the objectives and goals of that half of the curriculum, namely to study Talmud/Halakha.

The literature shows that even staunch traditionalists have historically admitted that there is at least some, minimal advantage to studying Hebrew as a language for Talmudic/Halakhic studies, but that advantage has typically been downplayed.

For example, R. Avraham Yishaya Karelitz (1878–1953) — a rabbinic personality who influenced the softening of Ultra-Orthodoxy's opposition to Modern Hebrew (Klein, 2021) — acknowledged the validity of linguistic/philological matters in Torah study, yet still considered such concerns secondary to the thematic textual analysis

typical of traditional study (Greineman, 1990). He wrote: "For those who toil in the Torah, the results of linguists' and translators' work only help intermittently and for rather unimportant matters, because the entire purpose of toiling in Torah is the *content* of the matter, not the translation of a word…" (Greineman, 1990, p. 47). Incidentally, Kenig (2012) clarifies that this letter was addressed to Karelitz's first cousin R. Shaul Lieberman (1898–1983), who was personally Orthodox, but professionally associated with the non-Orthodox Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Thus, for the Orthodox community, the slight advantages of studying Hebrew for Talmudic/Halakhic learning goals does not seem to be significant enough to warrant Hebrew a prominent place in the Judaic curriculum. To me, this seems to be true especially at the high school level, where students can be expected to have already accrued a rudimentary grasp of Hebrew's basics.

Myers (2016) writes of the UK that it is not just government curriculum requirements that lead to the schism between *Ivrit* and the rest of the *kodesh* curriculum, but "that this separation has been in existence for centuries and has developed because of the different religious, historical and political influences that existed in the different periods and contexts of the Jewish people" (there, p. 85).

In practice, Jewish high schools in North America across the denominational spectrum generally do teach Hebrew/*Ivrit* as a formal class. If, as Twersky (2004) and Zarum (2005) claim, Talmud is so important to Jewish Education because of its role in fashioning Halakha, then it makes sense why non-Orthodox Jews, who reject normative Halakha, would reduce the Talmud's importance and promote other subjects in its stead.

Moreover, for the non-Orthodox, Hebrew is a very important subject for maintaining a sense of "Jewish identity" in the absence of Talmud and Halakha. Such an approach no doubt makes less sense from a traditional Orthodox perspective. For example, R. Yosef Yedid HaLevi (1867–1930), the Chief Rabbi of the Bukharian neighborhood of Jerusalem, wrote an open letter in 1928 which denounced adding Hebrew to the curriculum of traditional Jewish schools in Jerusalem, with one of his points arguing: "they [secular Zionists] think that to be called 'a Jew' it is enough

to speak Hebrew and be a nationalist without religion" (Goldstein, 2006, p. 141). For Orthodox Jews, speaking Hebrew is not always such an important part of the definition of "being Jewish."

So why do Orthodox schools in North America teach *Ivrit*? The literature shows that for the traditionalist Orthodox community, "Hebrew classes" actually represent a break from the typical pre-Modern curriculum of Jewish Education that focused on Talmud/Halakha. From that perspective, it would seem that *Ivrit* does not fit in the *kodesh* curriculum.

Yet, it is still difficult to ignore the fact that studying the language — even if a Modern incarnation— is still helpful in advancing the goals and objectives of the *kodesh* curriculum. This is especially true of *Ivrit* classes that teach the language as a heritage language. Moreover, for some elements of the Orthodox community, Zionism is a very important component of religion; for them, advancing a Zionist goal like mastering *Ivrit* would have religious significance and belongs in the religious curriculum.

Does *Ivrit* fit in the *hol* side of the curriculum? General studies were introduced to Jewish Education in order to ease Jews' integration into society and the workforce after the Jews were emancipated and offered opportunities for such integration. Thus, the *raison d'etre* of that curriculum is to facilitate civic and social integration. From that perspective, it would seem that *Ivrit* does not fit with the *hol* curriculum, as there is seemingly no civic value in learning *Ivrit* in an English-speaking American environment.

Yet, it is still difficult to ignore that learning *Ivrit* helps an American Jew fit in the global Jewish community, especially with Hebrew-speaking Israeli Jews. This quasi-civic aspect of *Ivrit* may somewhat justify including the language in the *hol* curriculum. Moreover, in states that mandate that high school students learn a foreign language, *Ivrit* serves as the obvious choice for many Jews, and in that way, it finds its place in the *hol* curriculum alongside subjects like French or Spanish. These points especially ring true of *Ivrit* classes that teach the language as a communicative language.

# Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The research questions described in Chapter 1.2 will be explored through a qualitative survey that will yield data concerning *Ivrit*'s place in the curriculum of Orthodox Jewish High Schools in North America. Such information will shed light on how the dynamic described at the end of the previous chapter plays out in the real world. This chapter describes and justifies the research methodologies I used for gathering and presenting the data proffered by this dissertation. The data from this survey will be collated and presented in Chapter 4, followed by an analysis and discussion of my findings in Chapter 5.

As Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) note, the line between an insider researcher and an outsider researcher is often blurred. In this case, I am a member of the broader American Orthodox Jewish community, and I authored a popular book about Hebrew that has helped shaped many people's perspectives on the topic. In some sense, these two facts render me an insider researcher. The primary way of alleviating the problems of bias in insider research is transparency (Cohen, et al., 2018). I hope to achieve transparency in this chapter by clearly spelling out the methodologies used in my research design and the reasons why I chose them, as well as pointing out any relevant ethical issues within my study.

## 3.1 Epistemology and Research Paradigm

The over-arching approach used in my research study will be qualitative. This is because that modality is especially useful when examining data related to patterns, opinions, feelings, values, and participant interpretations/responses. This form of research is especially important in the social sciences like education studies, where the aim is often to explain the complicated reasons for people's behaviour (McMillan and Weyers, 2011).

Two important paradigms associated with qualitative research are interpretivism and post-positivism. Ryan (2018) explains how in the social sciences — as opposed to in the natural sciences — there must be an admission that knowledge is subjective. Thus, many researchers in such fields prefer an interpretivist

approach, which allows them to gather and analyse data without having to pretend to divorce themselves from their own personal values or beliefs. I am also influenced by the epistemology of the post-positivist paradigm, which grants the researcher herself more of a role in gathering and analysing information than positivism does, but does not allow for the relativist existence of multiple truths (Taylor and Medina, 2011).

As a result, in the qualitative data-gathering and analysis, I as the researcher will serve as the principal research instrument in determining the correct interpretation (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018), but will nonetheless aim to produce an objective study about the social trends in question.

## 3.2 Research Design and Data Collection

As mentioned earlier (Chapter 1.2), this dissertation seeks to address two research questions:

1. **Can *Ivrit* classes be clearly classified as either *kodesh* or *ḥol*, or does *Ivrit* class straddle the otherwise hard line between the two parts of the dual curriculum in contemporary North American Orthodox Jewish high schools?**
2. **Why do North American Orthodox Jewish high schools teach *Ivrit*?**

These questions can be addressed by identifying patterns and trends in the ways *Ivrit* is taught at Orthodox Jewish High Schools in North America, so qualitative data about such practices may be useful for better understanding *Ivrit*'s place in the dual curriculum.

To obtain relevant data, I used a multi-case questionnaire built with Google Forms to provide me with information about how *Ivrit* is taught in practice. The questionnaire (reproduced in full in Appendix B) asked school administrators (heads of school, *kodesh* principals, and *ḥol* principals) and *Ivrit* teachers to provide information about their school's practices and policies regarding *Ivrit* classes. The modality of internet surveys is particularly advantageous because it

is cost-efficient, fast, and more convenient for researchers and participants (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018).

McMillan and Weyers (2011, p. 124) note: "In obtaining and interpreting qualitative information, there is recognition that such information is interpreted according to a set of values belonging to the researcher." In this case, my own experiences were reflected in the nature of the questions presented in the survey and, following my post-positivist approach, will be interpreted with those values in mind.

Because this small-scale research project attempts to describe the current state of affairs, a single survey design was most appropriate to capture the current scene, rather than a longitudinal or trend survey study which collate information from multiple points in time (Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle, 2010).

To ensure the quality of my survey, I first piloted the Google Forms questionnaire items and refined them based on feedback from a convenient small group that consisted of two Orthodox *Ivrit* teachers and one director at an umbrella organization for Jewish day schools in North America. Piloting a survey serves as a test-run that allows a researcher to validate the relevance, clarity, and grammatical correctness of the questions that will be posed to research participants (Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle, 2010). Piloting my questions with Jewish educators otherwise uninvolved in my research project assured that my questions were pointed, clear, unbiased, and not too intrusive.

Because I sought patterns in the way *Ivrit* is approached by Orthodox high schools in North America, it was desirable to obtain a large number of respondents, so that their answers can be collectively understood as representative of wider trends. Precise information about how many Orthodox high schools exist in North America was unavailable, but Besser (2020) reports that there are 720 Orthodox day schools in North America, including preschools, elementary schools, and high schools.

Given the nature of internet surveys, it was difficult to estimate ahead of time how many participants will be involved, but I initially expected approximately 30

participants. I reached my target audience through social media groups and private email lists for Jewish Educators, as well as targeted emails to random Orthodox high school administrations.

Although Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) argue that the most persuasive form of data triangulation is "between methods" (p. 266), the small-scale nature of this research project precluded that possibility. Instead, this dissertation relies on data triangulation of information yielded through a single method—a survey—albeit from multiple sources. Because the participants varied in terms of their geographic location in North America, their exact position in the educational hierarchy, and their affiliation within the sub-groups of Orthodoxy, this wide-ranging demographic potentially allows my survey to find trends amongst schools of different backgrounds, leading to the triangulation of the data through different perspectives on the same questions.

Another aspect of triangulation in this study are the parallel data points resulting from the multiple questions in the survey questionnaire. The questionnaire followed the research methodology recommended by Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) in using a combination of broad questions that directly mirror the core research questions, as well as sub-questions, which test for some of the possible ramifications of the broader research questions. Essentially, the core questions and the sub-questions test for the same information, yet could possibly result in different answers. Because this sort of data triangulation is more novel and unexpected, I chose to present my data with a focus on this paradigm.

The information yielded by my survey includes data about the *Ivrit* teachers themselves (Chapter 4.3.1) and about the policies (Chapter 4.3.2), content (Chapter 4.3.3–4.3.4), and scheduling of *Ivrit* classes (Chapter 4.3.2). I have also included a section about the various names by which schools refer to this subject (Chapter 4.3.5). These datapoints reflect the sub-questions that emerge as practical ramifications of the two research questions that this dissertation studies.

Afterwards, I present my participants' answers to the two core research questions themselves, namely: "Why do you teach Ivrit in your school?" (Chapter 4.4) and

"Overall, do you feel that your school treats *Ivrit* as part of the <u>h</u>ol curriculum, the *kodesh* curriculum, or somewhere in between?" (Chapter 4.5).

## 3.3 Data Presentation and Analysis

The presentation of the survey data in Chapter 4 largely follows the order of question items as they appeared on the Google Forms survey. Thus, the presentation begins with the responses to the more specific sub-questions because they appeared earlier in the survey questionnaire, and concludes with the broader core questions, which appeared at the end of the questionnaire.

I used a hybrid data display methodology, consisting of a combination of text, tables, and graphs depending on the nature of the specific datum being presented (Kumar, 2011). The intent is to make the information as succinct and easily digestible as possible. To protect my participants' confidentiality, all direct quotations from my survey have been anonymized and any information as to their identity has been redacted.

The dominant methodology for my data analysis is content/thematic analysis. Because my over-arching research design is qualitative, the analysis will typically follow an inductive process, which begins with observations and the data culled (Ryan, 2018). Subsequently, I will read the collected data and draw inferences from that data as they apply to my research questions.

One useful mode of thematic analysis mentioned by Peterson (2017) is coding. I used this modality to assign meaning to the answers that my participants gave to the various questions in my Google Forms survey. In doing so, I color-coded the cells within in the spreadsheet that contained the tabulated raw data to emphasis to myself the themes and trends that emerge from the data to help me in presenting that information.

## 3.4 Risk Assessment and Ethical Considerations

### 3.4.1 Incentives for participation

Before officially commencing, I communicated with a rabbi who administers an online email list for Orthodox Jewish Educators, who advised that I offer a small

incentive to increase participation among his subscribers. However, due to ethical considerations brought to my attention by the LSJS Ethics Committee, I declined to offer an incentive. (Thus, despite its mention in Appendix A, an incentive was not actually offered.)

### 3.4.2 Clarifying my goals

In my preliminary discussion with said email list administrator, the latter conveyed his assumption that my research aims to criticizing the approach to *Ivrit* taken at Orthodox institutions. In private correspondence, he presumed that I intended to write an *exposé* about how "Hebrew is taught in an unorganized, incomplete, or secular fashion (or all three)… that the teachers may not be that qualified…" He advised that if my goal is to publish a dissertation about "how bad things are, then people might be uncomfortable taking the time to fill this [questionnaire] out."

This attitude presumably stems from Orthodoxy's understandable mistrust of academia, and required me to clarify my intentions before said administrator would assent to my request in publicizing a call for participants.

To alleviate this concern, I emphasized to the list administrator my own rabbinic *bona fides* and assured him that my goal is not to criticize or change any practices within the Orthodox community. On the contrary, I explained, my dissertation is dedicated to documenting and explaining why the current situation is the way it is.

This incident underscored to me — as a researcher — that it is of utmost importance that the questions in my survey be phrased in a clear way that will preclude my participants from being confused about my motives or possibly even offended. It also underscored the need for me to actively maintain my neutrality in my interactions with educators, and not allow them to perceive me as "judging" them for being right or wrong. Indeed, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) write: "a major ethical dilemma is that which requires researchers to strike a balance between the demands placed on them as professional scientists in pursuit of truth, and the participants' rights and values potentially threatened by the research" (there, p. 113).

### 3.4.3 Trusting my participants

Because my research is of a qualitative nature, it is widely-open to interpretation. This means that the question of the validity and reliability of the data harvested needs to be considered (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

To mitigate the possible risk of inferior data, I deliberated over the possibility of smaller-scale research designs, like purposive sampling that targets certain participants to serve as a microcosm of the wider population being studied (Palinkas, et al., 2015). Because that design can be done on a smaller scale, it might yield data of a higher quality and allow more control in assuring the validity and reliability of the data collected. Ultimately, however, I opted to use a greater sample-set so that my data represents wider trends, rather than a few localised phenomena.

I consciously optimized my research design for maximum validity and reliability, remaining cognizant of the issue throughout the time I conducted my research. The techniques used to this end include consistent observation (ensuring that all participants faced the *exact same* survey questions), leaving an audit trail (I kept records of the raw data yielded by my survey and my own notes on processing that data), checking for representativeness (making sure that my data reflects a cross-section of the Orthodox Jewish world, not just one particular subsector), interpreting outlier cases (see several examples in Chapter 4), and triangulation (see above Chapter 3.2). These precautions represent some of the ways that Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) posit that issues of validity and reliability can be avoided.

### 3.4.4 Finding enough participants

Another risk to this project that I initially identified was the possibility that I will not reach enough of a critical mass of participants to make my survey representative. To address this issue, I prepared a backup, contingency plan in case my preferred research scheme fails, which entailed using the same questions as my survey in structured interviews. This would allow a minimal number of participants to serve as informants about their particular classrooms.

## 3.5 Research Proposal

My initial research proposal was sent to and approved by the LSJS ethics committee. That document included a draft of my "Participant Information and Consent Sheet" (Appendix A), and a final version of that document was linked to on my Google Forms questionnaire. As seen in Appendix B, a notice was placed at the beginning and end of my Google Forms questionnaire that informed participants that by clicking "submit," they formally agree to the terms of the "Participant Information and Consent Sheet."

# Chapter 4: Research Findings

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the Google Forms survey described in the previous chapter. My survey gathered information from educators involved in 36 Orthodox high schools in North America. The participants who reported about the *Ivrit* programs in their respective schools were educators directly involved in those programs (*Ivrit* teachers and/or *Ivrit* curriculum coordinators) or administrators in schools that run *Ivrit* programs (heads of school, *ḥol* principals, and/or *kodesh* principals).

After presenting my findings (Chapter 4.2–4.5), the last section of this chapter briefly summarizes and discusses these various data points, analysing them for relevance to my research questions and testing the various ramifications of the positions implied by those pieces of information.

## 4.2 Participant Demographics

Social scientists often subdivide the Orthodox community into Modern Orthodox, Centrist Orthodox, and Ultra-Orthodox. This classification system is somewhat artificial, as there are no clear definitions to delineate one segment from another. As Besser (2020) writes, these various subcategories within Orthodoxy "can bleed into one another, and at the margin differences… may be small" (Besser, 2020, p. 13). Nonetheless, my survey followed the accepted nomenclature and asked participants to self-identify their personal affiliation and report their schools' and students' affiliation using this tripartite model. Some participants opted not to enter this discussion and chose to use the broader "Orthodox" label, without being more specific (Figures 1–3).

## Figure 1 -
## With which stream of Orthodox Judaism do you personally identify?

Non-Orthodox (Conservative)
3%

"Orthodox" 17%

Ultra-Orthodox
41%

Modern Orthodox
25%

Centrist Orthodox
14%
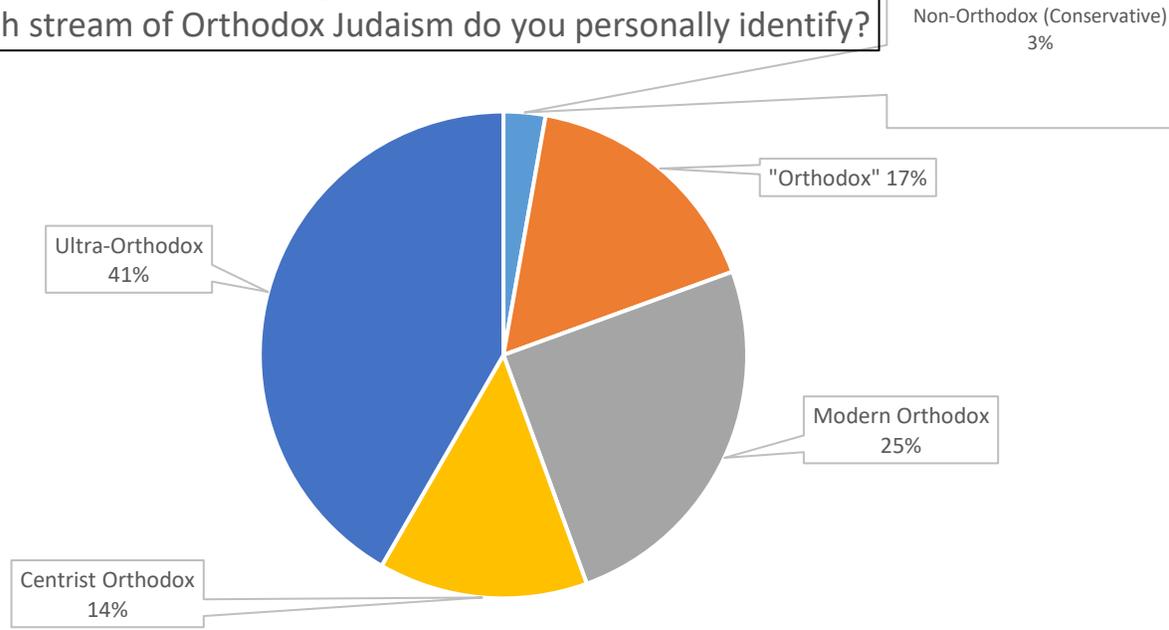
## Figure 2 -
## With which stream of Orthodox Judaism do your students generally identify?

Non-Orthodox (Open Orthodox)
3%

"Orthodox" 11%

Ultra-Orthodox
36%

Modern Orthodox
36%

Centrist Orthodox
14%
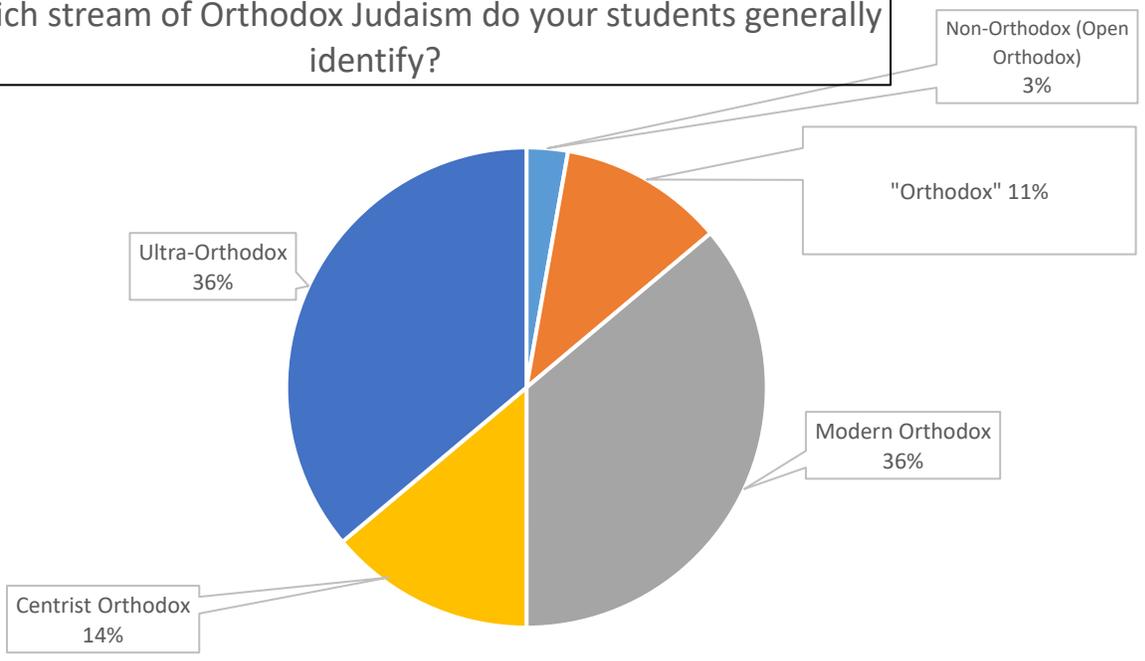
Figure 3 -
With which stream of Orthodox Judaism does your school generally identify?

Ultra-Orthodox 39%
"Orthodox" 11%
Modern Orthodox 33%
Centrist Orthodox 17%
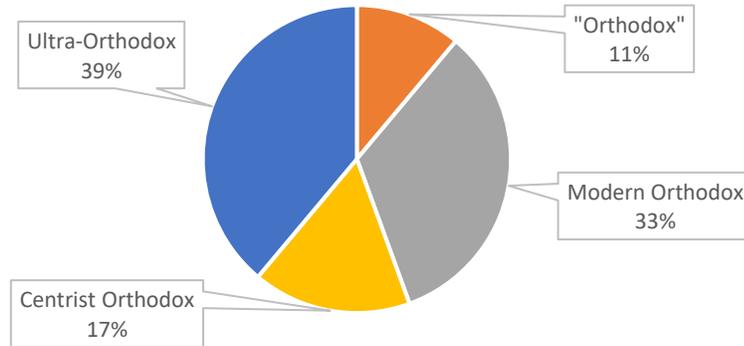
Precisely half the participating schools volunteered information about their location. Of those, 12 were located in the New York-New Jersey area, while the others were in geographically-diverse places like Chicago, Baltimore, San Diego, Houston, Portland, and Montreal.

The 36 educators who participated in the survey comprised of 16 *Ivrit* teachers, 4 *Ivrit* curriculum coordinators, 11 *kodesh* principals, 10 *hol* principals, and 3 heads of school. (Note that the total exceeds 36 because some educators have multiple roles within their school.)

Thus, the religious, geographic, and professional diversity of its participants allows this survey to represent a cross-section of American Orthodoxy. Nonetheless, the student body the data describes skews towards girls. Only 4 of the schools studied are exclusively boys' high schools, while 19 of the schools are girls' schools and the remaining 13 schools are co-educational (albeit not necessarily within the same classroom).

Two responses were excluded from this study because the participants failed to meet the criteria for inclusion: one excluded participant described teaching *Ivrit* at younger than the high school level, and the other was a *hol* principal of an Ultra-Orthodox boys' high school that only had an *Ivrit* class on paper to meet

government requirements who admitted in the survey that the class did not actually convene.

## 4.3 *Ivrit* Teachers and *Ivrit* classes

This section presents the data related to the various question items on the questionnaire related to the profiles of *Ivrit* teachers and the structure (policies, content, priorities, and branding) of their *Ivrit* classes. These are the sub-questions mentioned above that probe the specific possible ramifications of the broader core research questions.

The numbers given in the tables and figures reflect the amount of schools who answered a given response to each question. Some tables are followed by brief explanatory discussion of the data therein and/or comments about outlier responses. A fuller discussion of the data will appear later (Chapter 5).

### 4.3.1 Ivrit Teachers
*Table 1 Teacher: Israeli/Lived in Israel*

| Is your *Ivrit* instructor Israeli or did he/she ever live in Israel for a period of more than 5 years? | 22 = Yes |
| --- | --- |
| | 7 = No |
| | 4 = It varies |

*Table 2 Teacher: Rabbinic training*

| Is your *Ivrit* instructor male or female? | If your *Ivrit* instructor is male: Is he a rabbi or somebody who has received rabbinic training? | 8 = Yes |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | | 4 = No |
| | | 2 = It varies |
| | 22 = Female | |

*Table 3 Teacher: Use students' Hebrew name or English name*

| Does the *Ivrit* teacher typically refer to students by their Hebrew name, their English name, or other? | 25 = Hebrew names |
| --- | --- |
| | 3 = English names |
| | 7 = Other |

## 4.3.2 Ivrit Class Policies

*Table 4 Modern Hebrew pronunciation*

| | |
|---|---|
| Are students and instructors expected to adhere to the Modern Hebrew mode of pronunciation (*Sepharadit* style, e.g., *tav* instead of *sav*, non-differentiation between *pata<u>h</u>* and *kamatz*)? | 20 = Yes |
| | 12 = No |
| | 3 = No set policy/Depends on the individual teacher's preferences |

*Table 5 Strict focus on Modern Hebrew*

| | |
|---|---|
| Does *Ivrit* class focus strictly on Modern Hebrew, or does the class also teach some principles related to Biblical Hebrew, Mishnaic Hebrew, or even Judeo-Aramaic? | 20 = Strictly Modern Hebrew |
| | 7 = Not strictly Modern Hebrew |
| | 7 = Also Biblical Hebrew |
| | 1 = Also Mishnaic Hebrew |
| | 1 = Also Aramaic |

Two of the schools whose *Ivrit* classes also teach principles related to Biblical Hebrew additionally mentioned that they try to impart the skills necessary "to learn *sefarim* ['religious books']" (often written in Rabbinic Hebrew) and "for *tefillah* ['prayer']."

Two of the schools whose *Ivrit* classes focus strictly on Modern Hebrew reported separate classes that focus on Biblical Hebrew (in one school, this was said to be an elective). An additional school has two *Ivrit* classes, with one class focusing strictly on Modern Hebrew, and the other that also focuses on other strands of Hebrew (see below).

In almost all the schools surveyed, *Ivrit* is a mandatory part of the curriculum, with only one school reporting that *Ivrit* is an elective class and two schools reporting that in some grades *Ivrit* is an elective.

In 13 schools, *Ivrit* classes are scheduled within the time blocks allotted to the *kodesh* curriculum, while in 10 schools, *Ivrit* is scheduled within the time blocks allotted to the <u>hol</u> curriculum. In 12 schools, Ivrit classes are neither solidly within

the *kodesh* or _hol_ time blocks, mostly because classes are scheduled based on teacher availability (9 schools). Three of those 12 schools run an integrated schedule, so *kodesh* and _hol_ classes are purposely scheduled at mixed times throughout the school day. Finally, in one school, grades 9–11 study *Ivrit* during the time allotted to the *kodesh* curriculum, while grade 12 studies *Ivrit* during the time slotted for the _hol_ curriculum.

As mentioned above, one Ultra-Orthodox school that caters to Centrist Orthodox students reports that they have two *Ivrit* classes, one in the morning scheduled with the *kodesh* classes and one in the afternoon with the _hol_ curriculum.

On days with early dismissal (like Fridays, Sundays, fast days, and/or legal holidays), 9 schools teach *kodesh, _hol_,* and *Ivrit* classes; 6 schools teach only *kodesh* and *Ivrit*, 2 schools teach only *kodesh* classes (but not *Ivrit* or _hol_), and one school teaches only _hol_. The remaining schools have no specific policy for the types of classes in session on such days. None of the schools in this study reported that they teach only _hol_ and *Ivrit* on early dismissal days.

## 4.3.3 Reading Samples



Figure 4 -
How likely is the Ivrit teacher to use a reading sample from…?

Number of Schools

Traditional religious Hebrew texts | Secular/Maskillic Hebrew text | Neutral Hebrew texts (neither religious nor secular)

1 = Highly Unlikely    2 = Somewhat Unlikely    3 = Neutral    4 = Somewhat Likely    5 =Highly Likely



Figure 5 -
How likely is the Ivrit teacher to make use of…?

Number of Schools

Early Hebrew Grammarians (like Radak, Machberet Menachem, or Rashi) | Later Hebrew Grammarians (like Wolf Heidenheim, Zalman Henna, or Yaakov Zvi Mecklenburg) | Modern Hebrew authorities (like Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, Avraham Even-Shoshan, or the Academy of the Hebrew Language)

1 = Highly Unlikely    2 = Somewhat Unlikely    3 = Netural    4 = Somewhat Likely    5 = Highly Likely

## 4.3.4 Class Priorities



Figure 6 -
How do these four skills rank in Ivrit class priorities: Reading Hebrew / Writing Hebrew / Speaking Hebrew / Listening to spoken Hebrew?

As shown in Figure 6, only 16 schools ranked all four language skills in terms of their priority. The principals of two Ultra-Orthodox girls' school that ranked reading and writing as their lowest priority commented that this was partially because their *Ivrit* program focused primarily on speaking and listening, while reading and writing was emphasized in other classes within their *kodesh* curriculum.

The remaining schools (not depicted in Figure 6) did not rank the priority of these four skills. Of them, 9 schools reported to emphasize all four skills equally. Finally, some schools only reported that they emphasize or deemphasize one of the four skills in question: 2 schools emphasized reading, 2 schools deemphasized reading, 1 school emphasized speaking, 1 school emphasized writing, and 1 school deemphasized listening.

*Table 6 Ivrit B'Ivrit*

| Does/did your school have an *Ivrit B'Ivrit* policy? Is yes, how is/was it implemented? If it is no longer practiced, why did they drop this policy? | 25 = No |
|---|---|
| | 3 = Yes |
| | 5 = Partial |

Of the 5 schools that partially implement an *Ivrit B'Ivrit* policy, 3 schools only use this modality in honors-level *Ivrit* classes, 1 school allows individual teachers to choose whether or not they will teach *Ivrit B'Ivrit*, and 1 school reports that they "try" to teach *Ivrit B'Ivrit*.

Of the 26 schools that do not have an *Ivrit B'Ivrit* policy, 6 schools report that they had previously had such a policy before later discontinuing it. Various reasons for discontinuing *Ivrit B'Ivrit* policies include: "no qualified instructors," "not enough interest," "we were losing content and *hashkafa* ['Jewish outlook'] by prioritizing language," and "student[s] were unable either to understand or express themselves in *Ivrit*."

### 4.3.5 Naming the Class

The participating schools reported that they name their *Ivrit* classes in different ways:

- The clear majority of schools reported that they refer to their *Ivrit* class as simply "*Ivrit*" (20 schools).
- The next popular name for the class is the neutral "Hebrew" (4 schools).
- Two schools use the names *Ivrit* and Hebrew interchangeably.
- Two schools refer to their Hebrew class as *Lashon* (literally, "tongue" in Hebrew, a somewhat archaic Hebrew term for "language"), while 1 school reported that they name the class *Leshon Hakoydesh* ("the holy tongue")— a traditionally rabbinic term for Hebrew (see Appendix C.5) that has recently been found in the DSS as well (Klein, 2021).
- One school reported that their official name for the class is *Ivris* (which reflects the traditional Ashkenazi pronunciation of *Ivrit*), while two schools reported that although the class is officially called *Ivrit*, in practice students typically refer to it as *Ivris*.
- One school uses the name "Hebrew *Ulpan*" for their Hebrew class. [*Ulpan* is a Modern Hebrew term that refers to a school/institute for the intensive study of Hebrew. It is derived from an obscure Biblical term that means "learning."]

- One school refers to their Hebrew class as "*Safa*/*Dikduk*" (the Modern Hebrew terms for "language" and "grammar," respectively).
- The aforementioned school that has two *Ivrit* classes reports that the one in the *kodesh* curriculum is called *Safa* and the one in the *ḥol* curriculum is called S*iḥa bi-Ivrit* ("conversation in Hebrew").

## 4.4 Why Teach Ivrit?

This section and the next present the participants' answers to the core research questions of this study. Those questions were purposely situated at the end of the questionnaire so as not to color the participants' responses to the above-presented sub-questions.

When asked: "Why do you teach *Ivrit* in your school?" The participants offered a wide range of answers. I coded these answers to look for recurring themes amongst them. Emerging themes from these responses include teaching *Ivrit* for students to forge a "connection" to the Jewish People and/or to Israel (7 schools), to be able to communicate in Israel (4 schools), to further the Zionist cause (4 schools), to attain the ability to learn/engage with religious Hebrew texts and prayers (11 schools), and to satisfy government curriculum requirements that include foreign language instruction (7 schools). Many schools surveyed offered more than one of these answers.

*Table 7 Why teach Ivrit?*

| Why do you teach *Ivrit*? | Sample responses: | # of schools: |
|---|---|---|
| **Connection** | "It is our language! …connects us to Jews the worldover [sic]" | 7 |
| **Jewish texts** | "Primarily to be able to learn *seforim* better." | 11 |
| **Communicate with Israelis** | "I want students to be able to get around in Israel" | 4 |
| **Zionism** | "We are an Orthodox Zionist school, so Hebrew language is central to our mission" | 4 |

| Government Requirements | "…to fulfill their foreign language requirement" | 7 |
|---|---|---|

[Unfortunately, this question on the survey could have been worded more effectively, as some participants misunderstood the intent as "Why do *you* — as opposed to somebody else — teach *Ivrit* in your school?" Based on that misunderstanding, some participants responded that they do not teach *Ivrit* (because they are principals or heads of school, rather than *Ivrit* teachers) or that they teach *Ivrit* because there is nobody else available as qualified. Regretfully, the pilot participants did not pick up on this issue.]

## 4.5 General Attitude to Ivrit

*Table 8 Overall Attitude to Ivrit Class*

| Overall, do you feel that your school treats *Ivrit* as part of the <u>ho</u>l curriculum, the *kodesh* curriculum, or somewhere in between? | 15 = *Kodesh* |
|---|---|
| | 5 = *Hol* |
| | 12 = Both/Somewhere in between |

A *kodesh* principal at an Ultra-Orthodox girls' school commented that *Ivrit* is "overseen by [the] *Kodesh* principal," but is connected to the <u>ho</u>l curriculum "because of [government] high school requirements." Similarly, the <u>ho</u>l principal of a Modern Orthodox school wrote that *Ivrit* is "mostly" part of the *kodesh* curriculum, implying that it is also partially related to the <u>ho</u>l curriculum in her school.

By contrast, the dual principal of a co-ed Orthodox school volunteered that even though her school treats *Ivrit* as part of the <u>ho</u>l curriculum, it overlaps with the *kodesh* curriculum around *Yom ha-Atzmaut* ("Israeli Independence Day").

A non-Orthodox <u>ho</u>l principal of an Ultra-Orthodox school that considered *Ivrit* as "between" the *hol* and *kodesh* curricula admitted that in the past it had been considered part of the <u>ho</u>l curriculum, but shifted because "now we have more LK [*limmudei kodesh,* "religious studies"] teachers teaching the subject."

An *Ivrit* teacher from a "between" school opined that *Ivrit* is "part of the Israel curriculum" — which seems to be separate from the *ḥol* and *kodesh* parts of the curriculum. That particular school happens to cater to a student body that does not largely self-identify as Orthodox.

As mentioned earlier, one school reported to have two sets of Hebrew classes, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. In that school, the latter class is devoted more exclusively to Modern Hebrew, while the morning session also focuses on Biblical Hebrew. The Ultra-Orthodox *ḥol* principal of this school commented about the downside of this approach: "Sometimes when it is shared between departments, I don't feel that students come away with the best grasp of the language, as the standards and way[s] it is taught differs."

An educator at a Centrist Orthodox boys' school that runs its *Ivrit* classes through its *ḥol* program considered the repetition of materials taught in *Ivrit* and in *kodesh* subjects a "challenge" because the *kodesh* curriculum "teaches/reinforces Hebrew language skills with other priorities."

# Chapter 5: Discussion

## 5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1.2, I asked whether *Ivrit* classes can be placed into the categories of *kodesh* and *ḥol* in the dual curriculum model typical of Orthodox High Schools in North America. I also asked *why* such high schools even teach *Ivrit* in the first place. This chapter discusses the findings of my survey presented in Chapter 4 as it relates to these two questions.

The results of my research suggest that for those Orthodox high schools where *Ivrit* is taught, its place in the curriculum is often ambiguous, as the class is neither totally considered a *ḥol* subject, nor is it totally considered a *kodesh* subject—sometimes even within a single classroom. This duality is indeed borne out by the data yielded through my survey, which highlights the murkiness and contradictory-nature of *Ivrit*'s place in the curriculum.

## 5.2 Overall Impressions

When my participants were explicitly asked whether they felt their school treats *Ivrit* as part of the *kodesh* curriculum, the *ḥol* curriculum, or somewhere in between, nearly half responded that it was part of the *kodesh*, nearly half responded that it was both/somewhere in between, and the small remainder responded that it was considered part of the *ḥol* curriculum (Table 8, Chapter 4.5). This suggests that, for the respondents in the sample, *Ivrit* is generally viewed as somewhere in between the two parts of the curricula, with a somewhat strong inclination towards the *kodesh* side.

## 5.3 Reasons for teaching *Ivrit*

This "disjointedness" is further reflected in my participants' responses to the question: "Why do you teach *Ivrit* in your school?" (Chapter 4.4). Of the themes that emerged from the answers to this question, "Communicate with Israelis" and "Government Requirements" (11 schools) are not related to the *kodesh* side of the curriculum, while "Connection" and "Zionism" (11 schools) could be related to the *kodesh* side of the curriculum, and "Jewish texts" (11 schools) almost certainly is.

Thus, the reasons given as to *why* schools teach *Ivrit* seem to point to a near stalemate.

## 5.4 Ambiguity in the Answers to the Sub-Questions

The complexity of *Ivrit*'s place in the dual curriculum model is further suggested by the responses to the sub-questions asked of my participants. Unlike the core research questions which were asked point-blank, these sub-questions tease out a school's view on where *Ivrit* belongs in the curriculum by testing for the various ramifications of placing that class in the *kodesh* or *hol* parts of the curriculum. In this way, the core questions and the sub-questions can be used to corroborate my findings through triangulation, as they both point to similar conclusions.

Moreover, the data from the sub-questions indicates that Hebrew is taught as both a heritage language and a communicative language (see below for examples). In Chapter 2.7–2.8, I noted that the literature indicates that Hebrew is more comfortably at home in the *kodesh* curriculum when taught as a heritage language, while it leans towards the *hol* curriculum when taught as a communicative language. My study suggests that both elements are present in the way *Ivrit* is typically taught, thus solidifying the class's ambiguous place along the *kodesh-hol* axis.

For example, most schools surveyed report that their *Ivrit* teacher is Israeli and/or lived in Israel for more than five years (Table 1), that their *Ivrit* class expects students to follow Modern Hebrew pronunciation (Table 4), and that the class focuses strictly on Modern Hebrew to the exclusion of earlier forms of the language (Table 5). This corresponds with what one would expect of classes that teach Hebrew as a communicative language. Yet, in all three cases, these majorities are only slim; a substantial number of schools remain in which the exact opposite is true: the teacher is *not* Israeli and did *not* live in Israel, the students are *not* necessarily expected to follow the Modern Hebrew pronunciation, and the class *does* involve itself in earlier forms of Hebrew.

## 5.5 Inclined toward *kodesh*

Despite the overall ambiguity, there are specific points within the dataset that support *Ivrit* as belonging to one part of the curriculum over the other. For example, in most schools that employ a male teacher for *Ivrit,* that teacher is a rabbi or has received rabbinic training (Table 2). The Orthodox world looks to rabbis as purveyors of Jewish heritage and tradition, so hiring specifically a rabbi to teach *Ivrit* implies that instruction in that language relates to Jewish tradition and belongs to the *kodesh* side of the curriculum.

Similarly, American-Jewish students often have two names: a religious name (typically Hebrew or Yiddish), by which they are known in their *kodesh* classes and a secular name (typically English), by which they are known in their <u>hol</u> classes (Avni 2012a). If over 70% of *Ivrit* teachers choose to use their students' religious names instead of their secular names in class (Table 3), this may suggest that those teachers view teaching *Ivrit* as part of their students' religious instruction, and thus part of the *kodesh* curriculum. Nonetheless, this argument remains inconclusive because it may be that *Ivrit* teachers simply prefer to use Hebrew names even without the religious significance of those names instead of secular names because, after all, they are teaching Hebrew.

Over 90% of participating schools reported that they do not have a full *Ivrit B'Ivrit* policy (Table 6). This trend may be the result of a conscious decision not to overemphasize language to the detriment of content (as was typical of the Orthodox objections to *Ivrit B'Ivrit*, per the discussion in Chapter 2.6). Several participants explicitly noted that their schools discontinued previously-instituted *Ivrit B'Ivrit* policies precisely because of this concern (Chapter 4.3.4). If *Ivrit* were merely taught as a communicative language, the language and content would be one and the same. Thus, the concern that content not be sacrificed in deference to language is most relevant in a class which teaches Hebrew as a heritage language, and not as a communicative language. This too suggests that *Ivrit* at least partially belongs to the curriculum*'s kodesh* component.

## 5.6 Inclined towards _hol_

Other data from my study points to _Ivrit_ as more closely related to _hol._ For instance, although _Ivrit_ teachers were slightly more likely to use secular/_Maskillic_ Hebrew texts for reading samples than traditional religion Hebrew texts, the overwhelming majority were most likely to use neutral Hebrew texts (Figure 4). Neutral Hebrew texts are the sorts of excerpts and exemplars generally found in language acquisition textbooks. This seems to deemphasize the _kodesh_ aspect of _Ivrit_ instruction and place it more firmly within the _hol._

Likewise, for the most part, _Ivrit_ teachers were unlikely to make use of any Hebrew grammarians, but if they were to make use of Hebrew grammarians, they clearly favour Modern Hebrew authorities like Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858–1922), Avraham Even-Shoshan (1906–1984), and the Academy of the Hebrew Language over traditional grammarians who specialized in earlier forms of Hebrew (Figure 5). This might indicate that _Ivrit_ classes are more closely linked to the _hol_ side of the curriculum.

## 5.7 Inconclusive data

The data concerning when _Ivrit_ classes are scheduled within the curricular time blocks remains inconclusive vis-à-vis whether _Ivrit_ fits with the _kodesh_ or _hol_ curricula. In roughly one-third of the schools surveyed, _Ivrit_ is scheduled with the _kodesh_ classes, in another one-third it is scheduled with the _hol_ classes, and in the final third, it varies (Chapter 4.3.2). This reality once again highlights _Ivrit's_ precarious and ambiguous place in the dual curriculum model. Nevertheless, it is somewhat telling that no school reports to teach only _hol_ and _Ivrit_ on early dismissal days (Chapter 4.3.2), which suggests that in some aspects of class-scheduling, _Ivrit_ is clearly not considered a _hol_ class.

As noted (Chapter 4.3.2), three participating schools run an integrated schedule. From the responses of those schools, it seems that only their class schedule is integrated, but that otherwise the line between the _kodesh_ and _hol_ curricula is clearly demarcated, per Ury's (1978) characterization of the traditionalist practice (Chapter 2.5). _Ivrit_ teachers from two of these schools (an Ultra-Orthodox girls'

school and a Modern Orthodox co-ed school) reported that *Ivrit* is considered somewhere between *kodesh* and *hol,* while the *kodesh* principal of the third school (a Centrist Orthodox institute) reported that *Ivrit* is considered a *hol* subject.

In terms of prioritizing the four skills associated with language learning (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), my survey shows wide variation (Figure 6), with the only discernible trend being the deemphasis of writing. It is cogent to argue that for the typical Jewish-American student *speaking/listening* in Hebrew represents using the language as a communicative language, while *reading* Hebrew involves using the language as a heritage language. The fact that both of these apparently-contradictory elements are given near-equal priority likely reflects the multi-purpose nature of *Ivrit* classes and the various motives for engaging in the study of Hebrew.

Almost all schools that participated in my survey reported that *Ivrit* is mandatory in their school (Chapter 4.3.2). This suggests that the class is something more than simply a neutral way of fulfilling a government mandate to teach a foreign language. If *Ivrit* were simply about checking off a box, it would not overwhelmingly be made obligatory, especially as any other foreign language could equally suffice. However, this does not necessarily mean that *Ivrit* is best associated with the *kodesh* curriculum, because one may argue that Hebrew has a place in the *hol* curriculum on account of its quasi-civic role in allowing English-speaking Jews to integrate into the greater global Jewish community (Chapter 2.8).

## 5.8 School branding

Although I have not found any literature that describes this phenomenon, it seems clear that the way a school names the classes taught can sometimes serve as a window of insight into how the schools view those subjects. Such "branding" designations can be demonstrative of a school's outlook on a given subject. When it comes to *Ivrit* classes, most schools surveyed reported that their name for the class is itself a Hebrew word—*Ivrit, Ivris, Safa, Lashon, Ulpan,* or *Siḥa* (Chapter 4.4.5). The very name for the class thus implies a preconceived familiarity — and, perhaps, even intimacy — with the language. These schools could have just as

easily used the neutral English term "Hebrew" (like 6 schools did), but instead chose to self-referentially use Hebrew to refer to Hebrew. This contrasts with the common practice of American High Schools whose foreign language classes include Spanish, French, or German, but not *Española*, *Française*, or *Deutsch*. Thus, the name that the schools give *Ivrit* classes might show that these classes are intended as something more significant than just fulfilling foreign language requirements. That significance might be religious, which would provide a reasonable justification for *Ivrit's* place in the *kodesh* curriculum.

## 5.9 Conclusions

Given that one of the central reasons for studying *Ivrit* in Orthodox Jewish high schools is that it facilitates a connection with Israel and helps students when visiting the Holy Land (Chapter 4.4), it is inevitable that some of the religious sentiments and tensions associated with Modern Hebrew would surface in the school setting. In some Orthodox circles, these sentiments might partially be responsible for *Ivrit's* precarious place in the dual curriculum, as it cannot solidly be considered part of the *kodesh* curriculum because of traditional objections to studying Hebrew as a language (Chapter 2.3), and particularly religious anti-Zionist objections to Modern Hebrew (Chapter 2.4), yet it also cannot be considered part of the *ḥol* curriculum given that language's practical status as the modern-day incarnation of Classical Hebrew (Chapter 2.7). It is likely because of contradictory sentiments like these that *Ivrit's* place in the curriculum often remains somewhat ambiguous.

Overall, my study points to the unclarity of *Ivrit*'s place in the dual curriculum model, as some data points suggest it belongs to the *kodesh* curriculum, some data points link it more closely with the *ḥol*, and some data points remain totally inconclusive.

# Chapter 6: Conclusion

## 6.1 Summary

      This dissertation asks whether in contemporary North American Orthodox Jewish high schools *Ivrit* classes be clearly classified as either *kodesh* or <u>hol</u>, and why such schools teach *Ivrit* in the first place (Chapter 1.2). My study has shown that *Ivrit*'s place in the dual curriculum model remains unclear, with some aspects of the class aligning with the *kodesh* curriculum, and some aspects, with the <u>hol</u>.

As discussed in Chapter 2.3, various rabbinic authorities have downplayed the importance of studying language simply because it does not fit their view of what students should be learning. The traditional focus on Talmud/Halakha places much weight on *content/subject-matter* and thus leads to the de-emphasis of subjects related to *form*, like language (see also Appendix C). In the traditionalists' cost-benefit analysis, studying Hebrew wastes time and energy that could have been better spent on more important endeavours, like studying Talmud/Halakha. Thus, the ideology of Talmudic/Halakhic fealty that shapes the pre-Modern curriculum of Jewish Education (Chapter 2.2) also leads to the exclusion of Hebrew as a subject-matter. This attitude can be traced back to pre-Enlightenment times, when the religio-sociological problems that the rabbinic leadership associate with the *Maskillic* emphasis on Hebrew as a language had not yet been born. Eschewing the study of Hebrew as a subject matter of its own became further entrenched with the rise of the *Haskalah* and, later, Zionism that competed with the rabbis for Jews' attention and loyalties (Chapter 2.4). Assuming that the contemporary Orthodox community are the ideological heirs to the traditions of pre-Modern nomianist Judaism, this historical context may explain why Hebrew has not an unambiguous place in the *kodesh* curriculum.

On the other hand, Hebrew's role as a heritage language forever associated with the Jewish People (Chapter 2.7) and its usefulness in helping students study religious texts somewhat justifies placing *Ivrit* within the *kodesh* curriculum. Moreover, for those segments of the Orthodox world committed to Religious

Zionism, the very existence of a *Modern* Hebrew has religious significance (Klein, 2021) and its study then probably belongs to the *kodesh* curriculum.

My research shows that Hebrew is not just taught as a heritage language, but is also taught as a communicative language. Educators believe that because Orthodox students often end up in Israel at some point, it is important for them to know *Ivrit* for communicative purposes (Chapter 4.4). Moreover, because in many localities in North America, high schools are required to teach a foreign language, schools presumably felt that it might as well be *Ivrit* (Chapter 4.4)—which could, in some ways, help further one's Judaic studies. These justifications for teaching *Ivrit* place the subject within the realm of the *hol*.

All in all, the acceptance of all these contradictory considerations that contribute to *Ivrit*'s precarious place in the dual curriculum model reflect the multivalent nature of modern Orthodoxy, which balances various, often-conflicting ideals. Commitments to ideals like Talmudic/Halakhic nomianism or Religious Zionism help shape the content and structure of the dual curriculum of Orthodox Jewish schools, alongside practical considerations like legal requirements and communicative pragmatics.

In the field of Jewish Education, researchers often seem unaware of the nuances that this dissertation has brought to the forefront. For example, Pomson and Wertheimer (2017) report that, on average, Orthodox high schools devote 43% of school time to "Hebrew and/or Judaic studies." This datum simply lumps together Hebrew with Judaic studies, without allowing one to see Hebrew as a separate subject-matter. This statistic was written from a non-Orthodox perspective in which Hebrew and Judaic Studies are inseparable (Chapter 2.6). As I hope this dissertation has made clear, the conflation of Hebrew with the *kodesh* curriculum itself ought not to be taken for granted; there is ample reason for *Ivrit* to be labelled part of the *hol* curriculum, both on a theoretical level and in practice.

## 6.2 Limitations of This Study

Understanding the limitations of this small-scale research project can pave the way for future research and inquiry into the subject under discussion and related topics.

One limitation of this study is that its data essentially only reflects the perspectives of a segment of stakeholders within the Orthodox educational system—high school teachers and school administrators. A more detailed study might broaden the scope of those surveyed to include parents and teachers above and below the high school level, students themselves, and communal lay/rabbinic leaders. Moreover, an in-depth ethnography on language policies and how they are implemented in American Orthodox Jewish high schools might shed light on the phenomenon in question, as the field observations typically associated with such ethnographies might be able to pick up on some nuances that cannot be reflected in the type of data yielded by surveys or even interviews.

Another shortcoming of this study is its non-engagement in the topic of gender differences. While Halakhic fealty is a norm expected of Orthodox girls as much as of Orthodox boys, in most Orthodox circles, Talmud and in-depth Halakha study are deemed inappropriate for girls. How does this impact the way that the dual curriculum is structured in girls' schools in contrast to the way it is structured in boys' schools? Are there differences between Orthodox boys' schools and girls' schools in terms of the goals and techniques used for teaching Hebrew? These questions and others like them can be the subject of a future study related to the topic at hand.

Further studies might explore with deeper complexity the relationship between a school's position on Zionism and its approach to teaching *Ivrit*. This study recognizes that within Orthodoxy there are Zionist, anti-Zionist, and even a-Zionist elements, but does not offer a more nuanced look at how one's view of the State of Israel and the Zionist enterprise might colour one's attitude toward *Ivrit/*Hebrew and the ways it is taught.

## 6.3 Focus on Ultra-Orthodox Boys' Schools

As the principal investigator of this research project, I received multiple communications from potential survey participants who reported that their school does not formally teach *Ivrit*. All such communications came from educators in the Ultra-Orthodox community (mostly located in the areas of Monsey, NY and Lakewood, NJ), largely from boys' high schools colloquially known as *mesivtas* (a Judeo-Aramaic cognate of the Hebrew term *yeshiva).* These educators did not participate in my study, which only surveyed schools that *do* teach *Ivrit*.

The limited nature of this small-scale research project did not allow me to further explore this phenomenon, but my informal preliminary research has shown that of the ten Orthodox boys' high schools in a certain mid-sized Jewish community in North America, seven of those schools have no formal *Ivrit* program whatsoever, two schools have robust, well-structured *Ivrit* programs, and one school has a token, almost symbolic *Ivrit* program. This reality accentuates the broad tension over *Ivrit*'s place in the curriculum and highlights the notion that for some Orthodox high schools, *Ivrit* does not even belong in the curriculum altogether.

This largely Ultra-Orthodox phenomenon has not yet been studied in a systematic way. The Ultra-Orthodox sector does not represent an insignificant share of the Jewish day school movement in North America: Schick (2014) reports that in the 2013–2014 academic year, as much as 60% of enrolment in American Jewish day schools occurs within the Yeshiva World and Hassidic sectors, and Besser (2020), reports that in the 2018–2019 school year, that figure rose to at least 65%. Ultra-Orthodoxy's growing clout and student body should catalyse education researchers to study more about that insular community as an important part of the larger field of Jewish Education.

Why do many Orthodox Jewish high schools — even those that otherwise do offer *hol* classes in their curriculum — *not* include *Ivrit* in their curriculum at all? This research question looks to explore the opinions/feelings and values of Orthodox high schools that omit *Ivrit* from their curricula, and would also be best suited for a qualitative approach.

I envision a future study devoted to this question utilizing semi-structured interviews with stakeholders of such schools that do not teach *Ivrit*. That modality would allow for more flexibility in collecting information about different attitudes, opinions, and values related to why those institutions do not formally teach *Ivrit*. Such stakeholders would potentially include Heads of School (*Roshei Yeshiva*), *kodesh* teachers, *ḥol* teachers, parents, and students at those high schools, in addition to educators at post-high school learning institutes (in America and Israel) where graduates of such schools attend. This will help explore the issue from various perspectives, as the Head of School typically sets the school policy, the teachers implement that policy, and parents can usually choose which schools to send their children. Such a study would supplement the findings of this dissertation, which focuses solely on Orthodox high schools that *do* teach *Ivrit*.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Research Proposal and Related Documents

### A.1 Research Proposal and Ethics Form



**Research Proposal and Ethics Form**

**LONDON SCHOOL OF JEWISH STUDIES**
**MA Jewish Education**

**APPLICATION FOR THE APPROVAL OF A RESEARCH PROJECT INVOLVING**
**HUMAN PARTICIPANTS**

**Students to complete this form as part of the submission of their dissertation**
❖ **Before completing this application familiarise yourself with the "Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research" published by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) available at https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-for-Educational-Research_4thEdn_2018.pdf?noredirect=1**

| |
|---|
| 1. Your name: Reuven Chaim Klein<br><br>Your proposed title: The Place of *Ivrit* in American Orthodox Jewish High Schools within a Dual<br><br>Curriculum |
| 2.a. Why have you chosen the topic and the proposed title?<br>I have chosen this specific topic for several reasons: Firstly, as a native English speaker living in Israel, I am acutely aware of language issues, so language and the study of language are often in the forefront of my thinking. As a multilingual person, I use various combinations of English, Hebrew, Judeo-Aramaic, and Yiddish on a daily basis. In my professional work, I pen a weekly syndicated column about synonyms in the Hebrew language, and I am an editor for a Foundation which publishes rabbinic texts related to the Hebrew Language. Because language — and especially Hebrew — is relevant to me in my personal and professional life, I wanted to explore an aspect of Jewish Education related to that topic. |

Secondly, the question partially reflects my own experiences as a student in Orthodox Jewish schools. In the Centrist-Orthodox Junior High School that I attended, I felt that *Ivrit* (Modern Hebrew) was studied as part of the school's religious curriculum, yet when I later matriculated and advanced to an Ultra-Orthodox High School, I felt that *Ivrit* was actually taught as part of that school's general (secular) curriculum. I have noticed this dissonance, and the various practical ramifications of it in terms of how *Ivrit* is actually taught. In more recent reflections on this topic, I have come to realize that neither institute from my early schooling clearly placed *Ivrit* in either part of the curriculum, but rather treated it as partially part of the religious and partially part of the general curriculum. Because of my internal desire to reconcile the schools of childhood, I wanted to further explore whether *Ivrit* straddles the line between the two parts of the curriculum and how traditional considerations may or may not contribute to that phenomenon. I have not yet seen this issue addressed anywhere else explicitly, so I would like to undertake my own study on the topic.

2.b. What are the potential benefits of your proposed study?
My topic is an example of how religious ideology and other non-pedagogical factors can play a role in curriculum formation and development in parochial schools. Awareness of the different ideologies on this subject and their points of convergence /divergence can help educators in developing curricula and/or learning objectives for *Ivrit* classes. It can especially help educators in choosing the appropriate content, methodologies, and resources for teaching *Ivrit* according to their and their school's own values and objectives. Moreover, by clarifying the different factors that lead to *Ivrit's* place in the curriculum, my research has the potential to aid in diffusing the misunderstandings and even tensions between *Ivrit* teachers and Judaic Studies teachers in terms of what could/should be expected of students in *Ivrit* class and what elements of Hebrew ought to be emphasized/prioritized.
This study can also help schools articulate to parents the reasons and bases for schools' policies regarding *Ivrit*.
It will also provide researchers with access to little-known rabbinic sources whose opinions heavily influence Jewish schooling practice.
This study can also provide a framework for understanding the place of other subjects that straddle the line between religious studies and general studies, like Historia ("Jewish History") in the Beis Yaakov Girl's School System.
***Answer both questions in no more than 500 words.***

2. Timeline – Indicate your milestones using dates. Consider aspects such as background reading, reading for the literature review, contacting participants, fieldwork, data analysis, report write-up, and proofreading. This section must demonstrate your organisation and time-management skills.

| Milestone | Completed by |
|---|---|
| • Research Proposal<br>• Begin reading for literature review | June |
| • Contact participants and begin collecting data<br>• Write literature review | July |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| • Finish data collection<br>• Complete literature review & methodology chapters | August | |
| • Complete discussion and analysis of data | September | |
| • Complete first draft of dissertation | October | |
| • Introduction, Acknowledgements, Table of Contents, Figures, Appendices<br>• Complete final draft of dissertation including proofreading | November | |
| | | |

3. Abstract – Include the research questions you will attempt to address; provide an indication of some background reading you have undertaken in relation to the topic (up to five sources) articulating the aims (i.e., objectives) of your study and the research questions.
   *Answer this section in no more than 1,000 words*

The dual curricula of Orthodox Jewish High Schools in North America comprise of subjects that can be typically classified as either *kodesh* (religious studies) or *chol* (general studies). However, in the case of *Ivrit* (Modern Hebrew), that divide often appears to be blurred in the context of North American Orthodox Jewish High Schools, as the subject cannot be said to fit exclusively into either category. This dissertation seeks to explore where *Ivrit* fits along the secular-religious axis of Orthodox Jewish Schools' dual curriculum.

My thesis maintains that there is a broad tension over *Ivrit*'s proper place in the curriculum because it does not always have a very clearly defined role in the school curriculum. My hypothesis further argues that the ambiguity of *Ivrit*'s place in the curriculum reflects contradictory religious sentiments towards the Hebrew language and especially towards Modern Hebrew. In other words, the hypothesized ambiguity in contemporary practice is informed by the multiple voices within Jewish tradition that variously view the study of Hebrew as a language as a religious endeavour or not.

To test this hypothesis, my dissertation engages in two research questions:
   1. Can *Ivrit* classes clearly be classified as either *kodesh* or *chol*, or does *Ivrit* class straddle the otherwise hard line between the two parts of the dual curriculum of North American Orthodox Jewish High Schools?
   2. Why do Orthodox Jewish High Schools in North America teach *Ivrit*?

The nature of my research questions are observable and pragmatic, so they will be explored through a survey that will yield important data as to how the dynamic in question plays out in the real world. I hypothesize that the results of this survey will demonstrate that *Ivrit* is neither totally considered a secular/general subject, nor is it totally considered a religious subject—sometimes even within a single class.

My literature review will open with a discussion on *curriculum* and how such programmes are typically comprised of multiple subject with clearly-defined boundaries. Curricula can be highly political/religious roadmaps that serve to advance specific agendas. A curriculum is never neutral or objective; rather, they

are often loaded with different ideologies and sometimes even conflicting views that they seek to inoculate in students. This discussion is offered in the context of the trend of curriculum integration that calls for blurring those rigid boundaries. The review continues by drawing from Zarum (2005) in describing the concept of a Judaic curriculum and how/why Orthodox schools often eschew curriculum integration by insisting on maintaining a boundary between Judaic and general studies.

In the next section, my literature review draws on the traditional Jewish sources that influence Orthodox Judaism to provide the theoretical/historical background for the reality of *Ivrit*'s place or absence in the curriculum of North American Orthodox Jewish High Schools. Those high schools are modelled – in part – after the traditional Yeshivas, whose curriculum is said to be "Talmudocentric" (Katz 2004, p. 104). That heavy focus on the Talmud and rabbinic jurisprudence places much weight on *content/subject matter* and thus leads to the de-emphasis of subjects related to *form* like language, which is relegated to secondary importance. Various rabbinic sources have thus downplayed the importance of studying language, *per se,* simply because it does not fit their view of what Yeshiva students should be learning. This attitude can be traced back to pre-Enlightenment times, when the political/sociological problems that the rabbinic leadership associate with the Maskillic ("Jewish Enlightenment") emphasis on Hebrew as a language has not yet been born.

The Yeshivas' eschewing the study of Hebrew as a subject matter of its own became further entrenched with the rise of the Haskalah ("Jewish enlightenment") and Zionism ("Jewish nationalism") that competed with the rabbis for Jews' attention and loyalties. Thus, another aspect of my study will explore the tensions between religious sentiments associated with Biblical/Rabbinic Hebrew and Modern Hebrew that could lead to the refusal to seriously teach any strand of Hebrew as a subject altogether. My literature review will also adduce sources that discuss the curricula taught historically in Jewish schools that either taught or did not teach language.

Finally, my literature review will explore the historical and ideological bases for the study of *Ivrit* in North American Jewish schools. Important questions probed in this section include the use of the modality of *Ivrit B'Ivrit* ("Hebrew in Hebrew") and Orthodox reactions to that technique, and whether the goal of studying *Ivrit* in North American Jewish schools relates to second-language acquisition or heritage language acquisition.

Relevant sources I have consulted with and/or intend to consult with include:
- Avni, S. (2014) 'Hebrew Education in the United States: Historical Perspectives and Future Directions,' *Journal of Jewish Education*, 80:3.
- Katz, D. (2004) *A Case Study in The Formation Of A Super–Rabbi: The Early Years Of Rabbi Ezekiel Landau, 1713-1754.* PhD Thesis. University of Maryland, College Park.
- Kohn, E. (2011) 'What should I have learned as a Jew after 12 years in a Jewish school?', *International Journal of Jewish Education Research*, 3.
- Nevo, N. (2011) 'Hebrew language in Israel and the diaspora', translated by Daniel Verbov, in Miller, H., et al (eds.), *International Handbook of Jewish Education*. London: Springer, pp. 419-440.
- Zarum, R. E. S. (2005) *Curriculum Production for Traditional Adult Jewish Education* (Master's thesis, University College London – Institute of Education). Retrieved from: https://www.lsjs.ac.uk/files/?m=125&s=1&l=1

4. (i) Research design – Explain the over-arching approach that you will use to frame your study (i.e., this can be quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods). Provide reasons for your choice highlighting the advantages and supporting your claims with in-text references from a research methodology book (*up to 200 words*).

The over-arching approach used in my study will be qualitative. This is because that modality is especially useful when examining data related to patterns, opinions, feelings, values, and participant interpretations/responses. This form of research is especially important in the social sciences like education studies, where the aim is often to explain the complicated reasons for people's behaviour (McMillan & Weyers 2011, pp. 123–124). My research questions look for patterns in the ways *Ivrit* is taught at Orthodox Jewish High Schools, so qualitive data about those practices and trends will be useful for answering my question.
References:

- McMillan, K. & Weyers, J. (2011) *How to Write Dissertations & Project Reports.* Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Limited.

(ii) Data collection techniques – Explain how you will elicit data, such as questionnaires, observations, and interviews, amongst others. Provide reasons for the choice of techniques using in-text references to support your claims. You need to choose, at least, two different techniques *(up to 250 words).*

To answer my RQ, I will use a multi-case questionnaire built with Google Forms to provide me with data about how the schools and/or *Ivrit* teachers approach the subject of teaching *Ivrit* in practice. McMillan & Weyers (2011, p. 124) note: "In obtaining and interpreting qualitative information, there is recognition that such information is interpreted according to a set of values belonging to the researcher". In this case, my own experiences will be reflected in the nature of the questions proffered in the survey. The modality of internet surveys is particularly advantageous because it is cost-efficient, fast, and more convenient for researchers and participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison 2018, pp. 361–362).
References:

- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018) *Research Methods in Education*, 8th edition. London, UK: Routledge.
- McMillan, K. & Weyers, J. (2011) *How to Write Dissertations & Project Reports.* Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Limited.

(iii) Sample – Explain who will take part in your study (i.e., your participants). Provide reasons for the type of sample and describe the individuals in terms of gender, age, roles (e.g., learners, teachers, parents, etc.). Provide an indication of how many people you will involve in your study *(up to 200 words).*

The multi-case Google form questionnaire will be sent to various principals (*kodesh* and *chol*) and *Ivrit* teachers at Orthodox Jewish High Schools in North America. I have already tested the feasibility of this endeavour by informally communicating with a rabbi who administers an online email list for Orthodox Jewish Educators, and he advised to offer a small incentive for participants to increase participation from his subscribers. Most of those educators teach boys. I have separately been in contact with Torah U'Mesorah who has helped connect

me with a parallel email list for girl's school principals (both *kodesh* and *chol*). These two resources will give me access to participants from the more traditional camps of North American Orthodoxy (i.e., the ultra-Orthodox community).

To reach other segments of the Orthodox spectrum, I have been in contact with Dr. Matthew Williams of the Orthodox Union (OU) Research Division and with Dr. Layla Solomon from the Azrieli College of Education in Yeshiva University who will hopefully help me reach Centrist Orthodox and Modern Orthodox educators.

Given the nature of internet surveys, it is difficult to forecast how many participants will be involved, but each of the two email lists to which I intend to appeal for participants have approximately 300 members.

References:
- Palinkas, L.A., Horwitz, S.M., Green, C.A., Wisdom, J.P., Duan, N. and Hoagwood, K., 2015. Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and policy in mental health and mental health services research*, 42(5), pp. 533-544.

(iv) Only if applicable. Copyrighted resources – If you are using pre-validated instruments (such as questionnaires, tests, or any other data collection technique not designed by yourself), explain how these data elicitation techniques are suitable for the age and role of your participants. Include references as appropriate *(up to 200 words).* If you are not using pre-validated instruments, please respond: Non- applicable.

Non-applicable.

(v) Data analysis – Explain how you will analyse the datasets (e.g., percentages, thematic analysis, categories, and word frequency, amongst others). If you are using a mixed-methods approach, indicate which data will be quantitative and which ones will be qualitative. In all cases justify your choices using in-text references from a research methodology *book (up to 250 words).*

The dominant methodology for my data analysis will be content/thematic analysis. Because my over-arching research design is qualitative, the analysis will typically follow an inductive process, whereby I will read the collected data and draw inferences from that data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison 2018, p. 645) as it applies to my research questions. This will be the main methodology for analysing the results of my Google Forms questionnaire, for my semi-structured interviews, and my relevant historical primary sources.

Regarding the historical primary sources, in at least once case that I have already identified, qualitative data analysis does not suffice because a normative thematic reading of the relevant sources does not directly address my research question(s). In this particular case, I will employ discourse analysis which focuses on the words/linguistic devices (Cohen et al. 2018, pp. 686- and Wetherell et al. 2001), namely the ostensibly intentional absence or presence of honorifics within the works of a certain Eleventh Century rabbi.

References:
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018) *Research Methods in Education*, 8th edition. London, UK: Routledge.
- Wetherell, M., Taylor, S. & Yates, S. J. (2001) *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis*. The Open University.

5. Risk assessment – All types of research carry potential risks. **Please do not leave this section blank. Answer in full sentences**.

(i) What risks have you identified in your assessment?
One possible risk I have identified is that I will not find enough willing participants to respond to the Google Form in order to yield substantial data about the phenomenon I wish to explore.
In case this endeavour fails and I cannot successfully reach a critical mass of participants to make my survey statistically significant, my alternative plan is to use deep interviews, whereby a minimal amount of participants will serve as an informants to tell me their particular classrooms. Moreover, it is of utmost importance that the questions be phrased in a clear way that will preclude my participants from being confused or possibly even offended.
Another possible risk is upsetting participants in the survey who might not have realized that the way *Ivrit* is taught does not actually live up to their own expectations/ideals, especially for those participants who are educators themselves. I plan to minimize this risk by maintain my neutrality in my talks with educators and not allowing them to perceive me as "judging" them for being right or wrong.

(ii) What precautions will you take to minimise risks to the participants?
In order to ensure the quality of survey, I plan to pilot the question items and tone of my Google Forms questionnaire with a Jewish educator otherwise uninvolved in my research to ensure that my question are clear, unbiased, and not too intrusive.
I also hope that by informally reaching out to the administrator of the email list for Jewish Educators and other research resources, I will be able to cast my net wide enough that a substantial number of participants will volunteer. On the advice of said administrator, I am offering a small incentive for participants from my own pocket to ensure that they will actually respond to the survey. Another risk is the reliability of my participants. Because I have already made contact with the email list administrator, he can serve as a gatekeeper of sorts and can help me ensure that the participant will be of the appropriate calibre for this survey. To mitigate these risk, I am considering the possibility of a purposive sampling, which purposely targets certain participants who can serve as a microcosm of the population being studied as a whole. This data collection technique can be done on a smaller scale, but might yield data of a higher quality.

6. Your responsibility in relation to the rights of the participants, their protection, and your safety. Please provide full and comprehensive responses to the questions below.

(i)     How will you approach your participants?
        Participants for the Google Forms survey will be approached via email listservs.
(ii)    How will you inform the participants about the aims of your study?
        Participants for the Google Forms survey will be informed of the aims of my study in an initial email, and will again see that information in short on the actual Google form.

(iii)   How will you obtain your participants' consent?
        Participants for the Google Forms survey will give be prompted to give their consent on the actual Google Form with notice that submitting their responses to the survey will constitute giving consent. Participants in the semi-structured interviews will be emailed a Participant Information and Consent sheet, and will consent either in writing by returning that sheet or verbally at the onset of the interview.

(iv)    What personal information will you collect?
        Name of participant, name and location of affiliated school (partially in order to make sure that multiple responses do not simply reflect the same institute), students' gender, participant's personal religious affiliation, school's religious affiliation, students' religious affiliation, *Ivrit* instructor's background (including training and places of domicile).

(v)     Where will you store your participants' personal information?
        The Google Form information will be stored on Google Drive.
(vi)    How will you ensure that the identity of your participants is not disclosed?
        The information on Google Drive is password-protected and only accessible to the owner of the account (i.e., myself). My computer is protected with a fingerprint password and is only used by myself.

(vii)   How will you ensure that the data provided by your participants remain anonymous?
         When drawing on the data provided by my participants, I will anonymize the participants when referring to particular ones.
(viii)  How will you communicate your participants their right to withdraw from the study?
        The Google Form will explicitly inform them of their right and will link to my my Participant Information and Consent sheet.
(ix)    What will happen to the personal information and the data you gathered once the study is over?
        They will remain on my computer until nine months (two academic terms) has passed, whereupon they will be deleted.
(x)     Will you be knowingly exposed to any health and/or safety risks? No.

- ❖ Attach copies of the Information Sheet and Informed Consent that you will share with your participants. <u>Do not send these documents to your participants until your proposal has been approved.</u>

7. Incentives to participants – This section covers any rewards, either monetary or of any other kind, that you will give your participants to acknowledge their contribution to your study.

(i)    Will the participants be paid?
       No.

(ii)   If yes, how much?

(iii)  How will you calculate how much to pay them?

(iv)   Will the participants receive any rewards, not necessarily monetary?
       Yes**.**

(v)    If so, of what kind?
       For every 10 participants, there will be a raffle to win one free Mosaica Press book.

(vi)   What is the approximate monetary value of the reward? $25.

8. Other permissions and additional ethical clearances. Please respond the following questions fully.

(i)    Is permission required from an external institution/organisation (e.g., a school, charity, local authority, etc.) for you to be able to collect data?
       No.

(ii)   Will you be collecting data overseas by proxy? Please indicate the arrangements that you will make.
       No.

(iii)  **This item is only applicable to research students in the United Kingdom.** If your study requires the collection of data from minors or vulnerable adults, you need a valid DBS certificate. Please confirm that you have the relevant clearance by providing your DBS number. If your study will not involve minors or vulnerable adults, then answer: Non-applicable.

**9.  DECLARATION**

**I undertake to abide by accepted ethical principles and appropriate code(s) of practice in carrying out this applied research project.**

**Personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and not passed on to third parties without the written consent of the participants involved in the study.**

**The nature of this project and any possible risks will be fully explained to the potential participants, and that they will be informed that:**

(a) **They are in no way obliged to volunteer if there is any personal reason (which they are under no obligation to divulge) why they should not participate in the study; and**

(b) **They may withdraw from the research at any time, without disadvantage to themselves and without being obliged to give any reason.**

**10. Signatures**

**Your Name: Reuven Chaim Klein**

**Signature (electronic signatures are accepted):** Rudolph C. Hein

**Date: June 16, 2021**

**Supervisor's name: Dr. Helena Miller**

**Signature:** Helena Miller

**Date: 23rd June 2021**

## A.2 Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in an important research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part in this study, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and sign the appended consent sheet.

<u>What is the purpose of the study?</u>

The purpose of this study is to explore where *Ivrit* (Modern Hebrew) classes fit within the dual curriculum of Orthodox Jewish High Schools in America. It seeks to identify in what

ways this subject is part of the secular curriculum and in what ways it is part of the religious curriculum, and why some schools omit *Ivrit* from their curricula altogether.

Clarifying the place of *Ivrit* can help education researchers better understand how religious ideology and other non-intuitive factors can play a role in curriculum formation and development in parochial schools. Moreover, awareness of the issues can help educators in developing curricula and/or learning objectives for *Ivrit* classes that are custom-tailored to the needs and values of their schools and communities. The findings of this study may also have the potential to aid schools in articulating to skeptical parents the reasons and bases for their often-times contradictory policies regarding *Ivrit*. Finally, this study can also provide a framework for understanding the place of other subjects that straddle the line between *kodesh* and *chol*, like *Historia* ("Jewish History") in the Beis Yaakov Girl's School System.

Who is carrying out the research?

The research will be conducted by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein, an American expatriate living in Israel who is currently an Master's student at the London School of Jewish Studies (LSJS, formerly, Jews' College). The research will contribute to Rabbi Klein's MA dissertation in Jewish Education. This research project is not funded by outside backing.

The research project and design has been approved by the LSJS Research Ethics Committee. His research is being supervised by Dr. Helena Miller. Feel free to contact her with any questions or concerns: Miller-helena.miller@lsjs.ac.uk

Why have I been invited to participate?

As an educator in an Orthodox Jewish High School, you have been invited to participate and contribute to the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon in question. We expect your personal and professional to retain much valuable information related to the research questions at the heart of this study. We have asked a broad array of Jewish Educators to participate in this study.

In our study about how Ivrit is taught, we have prepared a questionnaire for school principals (overseeing the secular and/or religion programs at their school) and *Ivrit* teachers to share with us their experiences and teaching practices. To better understand the rationale of schools that do not teach *Ivrit*, we will interview principals and Judaic teachers.

<u>Do I have to take part?</u>

This is an entirely voluntary process. If you decide to continue with the questionnaire or interview, you are kindly asked to fill out the attached consent form. Even after you decide to participate, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. You have the right to refuse to answer any specific question and to ask the researcher anything you would like.

<u>What will happen to me if I take part?</u>

Participants who contribute data through the Google Forms questionnaire or interviews will aid in the research of this phenomenon. The researcher undertakes to insure that your privacy will be protected and your confidentiality will be preserved. Any data you contribute will be anonymized in the research findings and no clearly identifiable information about the participants will be appear in the dissertation. All personal data related to the participants will be deleted once two academic terms (9 months) have passed since the conclusion of this research study. Any other data generated for the study will be retained in accordance with the LSJS policy on Academic Integrity.

Participants who will be interviewed will do so via teleconferencing (Zoom) or a similar modality. The interviews will be recorded in order for the researcher to play them back at a later stage, so as to record participants' comments accurately and the audio recordings will be transcribed for use in the researcher's dissertation. The researcher estimates that the conversation with each interview would last about 20-40 minutes.

<u>What are the possible benefits of taking part?</u>

The obvious benefit of helping the researcher further his or her understanding the topic at hand, participants who fill out the Google Forms questionnaire will have a chance to receive a complimentary copy of a Mosaica Press book (~$25 value). There will be one such gift for every 10 participants.

<u>What should I do if I want to take part?</u>

To participate, please simply fill out the Google Forms questionnaire and submit the information to the researcher. If you have been invited for an interview, then please follow up with the researcher to schedule an appropriate date and time.

<u>What will happen to the results of the research study?</u>

The results of this research will contribute towards Rabbi Klein's MA dissertation paper. Please contact Rabbi Klein directly to obtain copies of this after January 2022: [private email address redacted].

**Thank you very much for participation! Your time and efforts are valuable to us.**

## A.3 Informed Consent Form

By clicking submit to Google Forms questionnaire / signing the attached document, I, the undersigned, confirm that:

· I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the Information Sheet.
· I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.
· I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.
· I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.
· The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymization of data, etc.) to me.
· The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.
· I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.
· I agree to sign and date this informed consent form.


Name of Participant: _____              Signature:_____              Date:_____

# Appendix B: Full Survey on Hebrew/Ivrit classes in Orthodox Jewish High Schools in North America

This survey is for principals (kodesh or chol) and Ivrit teachers at Orthodox Jewish High schools in N. America

Participant Information and Consent

* By clicking submit to this form, you affirm that you agree to the terms and conditions of this study's Participant Information & Consent sheet available at: [website address redacted] and the LSJS/Middlesex University Ethics Policy.

* All questions are optional and you have the right to refuse to answer anything on this form.

* All responses and information will remain confidential. If presented in the final research study, they will be anonymized.

* If you can help spread the word about this survey to other relevant educators, that would be greatly appreciated!

1. Name (optional):
2. Email (optional):
3. Location (optional):
4. School (optional):

5. What is your role in your school? (Check all that apply)
*Check all that apply.*
Ivrit Teacher
Ivrit Curriculum Coordinator
Principal (Kodesh)
Principal (Chol)
Other:

6.With which stream of Orthodox Judaism do you personally identify?
*Mark only one oval.*
Modern Orthodox
Centrist Orthodox
Ultra-Orthodox
Other:

7. With which stream of Orthodox Judaism do your students generally identify?
*Mark only one oval.*
Modern Orthodox
Centrist Orthodox
Ultra-Orthodox
Other:

8. With which stream of Orthodox Judaism does your school generally identify?
*Mark only one oval.*
Modern Orthodox
Centrist Orthodox
Ultra-Orthodox
Other:

9. Who comprises your student body?
*Mark only one oval.*
Girls
Boys
Co-ed


Format of the Ivrit Class
Teaching Ivrit
10. What name does your school give Ivrit classes? (E.g., Hebrew, Ivrit, Ivris, Leshon HaKoydesh)
11. How many minutes per week is devoted to Ivrit classes in your school?
12. Is Ivrit class in your school optional/elective or mandatory?
*Mark only one oval.*
Optional/Elective
Mandatory
Other:

13. Are Ivrit classes slotted with time blocks allotted to Kodesh classes (typically in the morning) or Chol classes (typically in the afternoon)?
*Mark only one oval.*
With the Kodesh classes
With the Chol classes
Other:

14. Ivrit classes are conducted in the same classroom that students learn...
*Check all that apply.*
Religious Studies
General Studies
Other:

15. On early dismissal days (e.g., Fridays, fast days or legal holidays), in your school...
*Check all that apply.*
Kodesh classes are in session
Chol classes are in session
Ivrit classes are in session
Other:

16. If your Ivrit instructor is male: Is he a rabbi or somebody who has received rabbinic training?
*Mark only one oval.*
Yes
No
Our Ivrit teacher is female
Other:

17. Is the Ivrit instructor Israeli or did he/she ever live in Israel for a period of more than5 years?
*Mark only one oval.*
Yes
No
Other:

18. Does Ivrit class focus strictly on Modern Hebrew, or does the class also teach some principles related to Biblical Hebrew, Mishnaic Hebrew, or even Judeo-Aramaic?

19. Are students and instructors expected to adhere to the Modern Hebrew mode of pronunciation (Sepharadit style, e.g., tav instead of sav, non-differentiation between patach and kamatz)?
*Mark only one oval.*
Yes
No
Other:

20. Does the Ivrit teacher typically refer to students by their Hebrew name, their English name, or other?
*Mark only one oval.*
English Name
Hebrew Name
Other

Frequency Questions
How likely... questions (Likert style)
21. How likely is the Ivrit teacher to use a traditional religious text as a reading sample when teaching Ivrit?
*Mark only one oval.*
Highly Unlikely 1-2-3-4-5 Highly Likely

22. How likely is the Ivrit teacher to use a secular/maskillic Hebrew text in a reading sample when teaching Ivrit?
*Mark only one oval.*
Highly Unlikely 1-2-3-4-5 Highly Likely

23.How likely is the Ivrit teacher to use a neutral text (neither religious nor secular) in a reading sample when teaching Ivrit?
*Mark only one oval.*
Highly Unlikely 1-2-3-4-5 Highly Likely

24.How likely is the Ivrit teacher to make use of early Hebrew Grammarians like Radak, Machberet Menachem, or Rashi in Ivrit classes?
*Mark only one oval.*
Highly Unlikely 1-2-3-4-5 Highly Likely

25. How likely is the Ivrit teacher you to make use of later Hebrew Grammarians like Wolf Heidenheim, Zalman Henna, or Yaakov Zvi Mecklenburg in your Ivrit classes?
*Mark only one oval.*
Highly Unlikely 1-2-3-4-5 Highly Likely

26. How likely is the Ivrit teacher to make use of Modern Hebrew authorities like Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, Avraham Even-Shoshan, or the Academy of the Hebrew Language?
*Mark only one oval.*
Highly Unlikely 1-2-3-4-5 Highly Likely

Final Words
Open-ended Questions
27. How do you prioritize these four skills in your Ivrit class: Reading Hebrew / Writing Hebrew / Speaking Hebrew / Listening to spoken Hebrew?

28. Does/did your school have an Ivrit B'Ivrit policy? Is yes, how is/was it implemented? If it is no longer practiced, why did they drop this policy?

29. Why do you teach Ivrit in your school?

30. Overall, do you feel that your school treats Ivrit as part of the chol curriculum, the kodesh curriculum, or somewhere in between?

31. Any other comments on the question of whether the study of Ivrit ought to be considered part of your school's religious curriculum or general studies curriculum?

Participant Information and Consent
By clicking submit to this form, you affirm that you agree to the terms and conditions of this study's Participant Information & Consent sheet available at: [website address redacted] and the LSJS/Middlesex University Ethics Policy

# Appendix C: Traditional Rabbinic Attitudes towards Hebrew

Avni (2012, p. 324) writes: "Judaism is a religion steeped in language practices and language beliefs. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Jewish tradition has a lot to say about Hebrew – a language that theologically and culturally occupies a place of privilege and power in defining authentic Jewish practice and traditions." In that spirit, this appendix engages with various primary sources that either downplay or tout the religious import of learning Hebrew (not necessarily Modern Hebrew) as a supplement to the discussions featured in Chapter 2. It offers a collection of important sources on the topic of studying Hebrew that will contribute to our understanding of the nuances of the traditional approach to studying the language.

Primary sources include "every kind of evidence which people have left of their past activities, produced during the period being studied" (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018, p. 325). One drawback of studying primary sources is that there is often too much material available to researchers, so that the quantity information yielded is too overwhelming. A way of alleviating this issue is for researchers to limit themselves to *significant* sources (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018). In line with that methodology, I have limited the primary sources that will be examined in this appendix to those written by the most famous/influential rabbis of their times (admittedly, determined by my own biased perception of which rabbis hold the most sway).

## C.1 Justification for the Pursuit of Hebrew Grammar

Three of the most prominent early Hebrew Grammarians wrote in the introductions to their respective works that studying the Hebrew language is conducive to understanding the Torah. Stressing this point demonstrates that for these rabbinic grammarians studying Hebrew as a subject-matter in its own right was indefensible; it was only viewed as a means to an end.

- R. Saadia Gaon in A. Harkavy (ed.), *Sefer ha-Egron* (St. Peterberg, 1892), p. 55: "It is befitting for us and for the entire nation of our God to always

expound, understand, and investigate [the Hebrew language]... because through it we will understand the statutes of the Torah of our Creator..."

- R. Yonah Ibn Jana<u>h</u> in D. Goldberg (ed.), *Sefer ha-Rikmah* (Frankfurt, 1856), p. iv maintains that one cannot understand Scripture without mastering the intricacies of the language.

- R. David Kim<u>h</u>i in *Mikhlol* (Furth, 1793), p. 1b offered a similar reflection: "It is not good for a person to be barren from the wisdom of grammar, but he needs to toil in [the study of] Torah and commandments and the commentaries, and the words of the rabbis as needed, and to [only] toil in grammar in an abbreviated way so that it will provide him [with the knowledge] to learn the words properly."

Others have made the point that various rituals and commandments that require speech-acts can only be fulfilled through the proper pronunciation of Hebrew— something that requires at least a modicum understanding of some of the grammatical/linguistic features of the language (Kurdi, undated).

For example, R. Shmuel ha-Kohen Schotten of Frankfurt (1644–1719) uses Kabbalistic terminology to stress the severity of those who pray without being careful about the intricacies of Hebrew grammar. He claims that the "pipelines to Above" are jammed through such sub-optimal prayers. In response to this, it is related that in his own Study Hall, Schotten instituted that students engage in the study of Hebrew grammar (Hamberger, 2011). Significantly, Schotten's own grandson, R. Moshe Sofer, took a less enthusiastic approach, and is even quoted as having polemicized against studying the language by comparing Hebrew grammar to the *matzevah* (see Chapter 2.4).

## C.2 Excuse for Ignorance in Grammar

When criticized by R. Shlomo Luria (1510–1574) for his grammatical mistakes in penning Halakhic responsa, R. Moshe Isserles (1520–1572) openly admitted that he never studied Hebrew grammar, but defended himself by noting that he focuses on the *meaning/content* of what he says and writes, instead of on the exact *wording/phraseology* (*Teshuvos ha-Rama* §7). Elsewhere, R. Isserles comments

that studying grammar is only valuable as an "off-shoot" of something else (*Teshuvos ha-Rama* §130)—ostensibly, Talmud and Halakha. R. Luria, on the other hand, wrote that it is imperative that Torah Scholars know how "to write responsa and rulings and letters of greeting with clear expression as befitting a Torah Scholar" (*Yam Shel Shlomo*, <u>Hullin</u> §1:15). He seems to understand that knowledge of the language is not optional for the Torah Scholar.

A similar debate along these lines played out in earlier times. Literary-minded exegetes like Ibn Ezra criticized the grammatical irregularities in ha-Kallir's poetry (see Ibn Ezra to Ecc. 5:1). Ha-Kallir's admirers defend his alleged irregularities by noting that ha-Kallir's poetry was not intended to follow the strictures of Biblical Hebrew, but reflect the more flexible strand of Mishnaic Hebrew (Klein, 2021). These defenders agreed to Ibn Ezra's assumption that ha-Kallir ought to be constrained by the linguistic/grammatical rules of Hebrew, they simply differed with Ibn Ezra about to which variety of Hebrew's rules ha-Kallir ought to be held.

On the other hand, R. Shimon ben Tzema<u>h</u> Duran (responsa *Tashbetz*, vol. 1 §33) defends ha-Kaillir by writing: "It is not a blemish in the esteem of a sage if he does not know the particularities of the language and lexicon." This approach not only questions the very notion that a sage-poet ought to be constricted by the linguistic/grammatical rules of Hebrew and allows the poet more latitude, but even calls into question the assumption that a sage should even *know* those rules.

Similarly, R. Yosef Engel (*Gilyonei ha-Shas* to TB *Yevamos* 26b) explains away a seemingly non-grammatic usage in Talmudic phraseology by explaining that the rabbis did not feel the need to be exact in their terminology as long as their phraseology preserved the meaning of what they attempted to convey. This follows the rabbinic attitude demonstrated by R. Isserles that as long as the meaning is still discernible, there is no need to adhere to linguistic/grammatic rules. On the other hand, R. Elias Levita (*Sefer Tishbi*, s.v. נשוי) discusses the same issue that R. Engel raises and defends the rabbis' seemingly non-grammatic usage by explaining the phenomenon in question as a grammatic feature of Rabbinic Hebrew. He seems to understand that even if the meaning can be relayed through

grammatically-incorrect usage, the rabbis are still expected to strive for grammatic accuracy.

R. Yaakov Emden (1697–1776) in responsa *Sheilas Yaavetz* (vol. 1 §152, see also vol. 2 §108) criticizes R. David ha-Levi Segal (1586–1667) and R. Binyamin Solnik (1530–1620) for basing a Halakhic ruling about a missing letter in a Torah Scroll on a faulty understanding of Hebrew grammar. He further laments that Torah Scholars who are not adept in grammar cannot realize how many blasphemous mistakes they could potentially be perpetuating.

In another missive, Emden (*Migdal Oz, Birkos Shamayim, Birkas Givon* §2) stresses the importance of studying Hebrew grammar and notes that even if somebody has studied the entire Torah, he may approach utter blasphemy simply by not being familiar with Hebrew Grammar.

Nonetheless, in this context, Emden adds a caveat that the linguistic/grammatical discipline is man-made and is not a "Divine" form of wisdom. As such, Emden writes that it is not absolutely necessary to learn all the intricacies of Hebrew Grammar and the opinions of all the different Hebrew grammarians. He therefore concludes his diatribe by switching tones and actually warning against spending too much time studying Hebrew Grammar.

## C.3 Studying Hebrew Grammar in the Bathroom

The *Shulḥan Arukh* (*Oraḥ Ḥaim* 85:2) rules that it is forbidden to even think about Words of Torah in the bathroom, bathhouse, or other dirty places where urine and faecal matter are found. Emden in responsa *Sheilas Yaavetz* (vol. 1 §10) tests the parameters of this prohibition by discussing whether or not one may study works of Hebrew Grammar in the bathroom. At the core of this discussion lies the question of whether or not such linguistic inquiries are considered "Words of Torah." This demonstrates that no matter the place of the Hebrew Language in the educational curriculum, it still may not be considered "Words of Torah" with all the religious/Halakhic connotations of that phrase.

Ultimately, Emden concludes that it is forbidden. He argues that because Hebrew Grammar is essentially based on Scripture and cannot be separated from that corpus, then if one studies Hebrew Grammar, he will inevitably think about Scripture which is certainly considered "Words of Torah," and this is forbidden in the bathroom.

In other words, Emden rules that it is forbidden to peruse works on Hebrew grammar in the bathroom because such literature typically uses Scriptural texts as exemplars, so that studying those works will lead one to think about Scriptures in the bathroom. Emden thus seems to imply that Hebrew Grammar on its own is not really considered "Words of Torah," but for technical reasons may still not be studied in the bathroom. His ruling is codified into normative Halakha by *Birkei Yosef* (*Ora<u>h</u> Haim* §85:4), *Kaf ha-<u>H</u>aim* (there §85:8), and *Mishnah Berurah* (there §85:5).

Nonetheless, R. Yosef <u>H</u>aim Sonnenfeld (1849–1932) wrote that books on Hebrew grammar written by righteous people that are necessary for understanding the Torah are certainly included in the study of Torah (and are thus forbidden to be studied in the bathroom). But, he adds that whatever appears in those works that is not directly relevant to the study of Torah (e.g., instructions for writing poetry) is not included in the study of Torah and may thus be studied in the bathroom (Hamberger, 2011).

## C.4 Rabbinic Honorifics for Grammarians

Throughout his commentary to the Bible, R. Shlomo ben Yitz<u>h</u>ak (1040–1105), better known as Rashi, offers countless grammatic insights into the Hebrew Language, but never explicitly offers his views on the language itself or about studying Hebrew grammar. In the case of Rashi, I can use discourse analysis which focuses on the words/linguistic devices within primary sources (Cohen, et al., 2018 and Wetherell, et al., 2001) to extrapolate an interesting point. In particular, this modality allows me to focus on the ostensibly intentional absence of honorifics for Hebrew Grammarians in Rashi's commentaries.

Broadly-speaking, whenever Rashi (in his commentaries to the Bible and Talmud) cites a post-Talmudic scholar, he always takes care to grant such figures the honorific title *Reb/Rav* ("rabbi"). For example, whenever Rashi cites figures like R. Moshe HaDarshan, R. Makhir (Rashi to Gen. 43:11), R. Shabtai Donnolo (Rashi to TB *Eruvin* 56a), R. Kalonymos (Rashi to Deut. 18:2, TB *Beitzah* 24b), or R. Meshullam bar Kalonymos (Rashi to TB *Zevaḥim* 45b), Rashi always puts this honorific before their personal name.

When making grammatical or lexical comments about the text of the Bible, Rashi frequently draws from the works of the Spanish grammarians/lexicographers who preceded him, namely Menaḥem Ibn Saruk (920–970) and Donash Ibn Labrat (920–990). Yet, every time Rashi cites either Menaḥem or Donash, he never gives them the honorific. [Rashi only cites Menaḥem three times in his commentary to the Talmud (*Kesubos* 10b, *Sotah* 38b, and *Sanhedrin* 104a), while he cites Menaḥem and Donash tens of times throughout his commentary to the Bible.]

This conspicuous omission has led me to speculate that perhaps Rashi does not view mastering Hebrew grammar/vocabulary as a pursuit worthy of giving somebody the title "rabbi.*"* Although Rashi undeniably took a great interest in grammatical issues and even refers to them in his commentary to the Bible, he may not have viewed the grammatical efforts of Menaḥem and Donash as particularly "religious" or "rabbinic" pursuits. If this theory is true, it may reflect the earliest example of Ashkenazi ambivalence towards the study of Hebrew as a language in its own right. Professor Eric Lawee (a scholar who has written extensively on Rashi) somewhat agreed with this assessment, writing to me in personal correspondence: "you are probably right… that they did not consider study of Hebrew 'on its own' a pursuit, but perhaps preparatory to biblical/rabbinic studies."

When asked about these conjectures, R. Dr. Ephraim Kanarfogel theorized in private correspondence with me that perhaps Rashi only bestowed the "rabbi" title to a scholar who had some involvement with writing in the realm of the Oral Torah (i.e., the extra-Biblical rabbinic corpus of writings) or otherwise demonstrated some

sort of competence/excellence in that realm. Scholars like Menaḥem and Donash whose contributions lie *exclusively* in the realm of the Written Torah (i.e., Biblical Scripture) may have been considered esteemed scholars, but do not deserve the title "rabbi."

In contrast to this, R. Avraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1167) does generally grant rabbinic honorifics to Hebrew Grammarians. For example, in *Safah Berurah* (Furth, 1739), Ibn Ezra typically grants Menaḥem the "R." honorific (fols. 25b, 41b), although in at least one instance does not (p. 31a). Ibn Ezra similarly refers to Donash a "R. Adonim ha-Levi" (fol. 25b). This is in consonance with Ibn Ezra's treatment of other Hebrew grammarians, like R. Yonah Ibn Janaḥ, whom he consistently refers to as "R. Marinus" (there fols. 13a, 26b, 29b, 41b, and throughout his commentary to the Bible).

Alternatively, scholars like Baron (1965), as well as Trager and Auerbach (undated), theorize that the introduction of the honorific "Reb/Rabbi" was specifically meant to differentiate between rabbinic Jews and Karaite Jews. Accordingly, persistent rumours about Menaḥem's alleged Karaite leanings (a legend put to rest by modern scholars like Howard, 2018) may have led Rashi to withhold rabbinic honorifics from that scholar and, perhaps out of respect for him, from his interlocutor Donash as well. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Ibn Ezra seems to use the "Reb/Rabbi" when citing commentators who are typically understood to have been Karaites.

## C.5 Maimonides

Maimonides and Naḥmanides represent two of the most important Medieval Jewish thinkers and they seemingly adopt radically opposite approaches to the Hebrew language. Both figures address the meaning of the rabbinic term *Leshon ha-Kodesh*, which literally means "The Holy Tongue" but colloquially refers to the Hebrew Language.

In his *Guide for the Perplexed,* Maimonides writes that the Hebrew language is called holy "because it does not have specific words for the reproductive organs and concepts… which instead are simply alluded to euphemistically" (Klein, 2021,

pp. 74–75). This shows that Maimonides views the language itself as intrinsically holy, as he adduces its holiness from an apparently linguistic feature of the language. For Naḥmanides, by contrast, the language's holiness is extrinsic — imbued by holy *usage*, but not related to any particular element of the language itself, *per se* (Klein, 2021).

The Maimonidean view on the Hebrew Language demonstrates a nuanced and multifaced approach as befits a complex figure like Maimonides. According to Maimonides (*Laws of Prayer* 1:4), the Jews' inability to speak grammatically-proper Hebrew at the beginning of the Second Temple period prompted the rabbis to institute formulaic prayer with an established text and phraseology. Thus, the ideal of linguistic mastery leads to one of the hallmarks of Jewish life throughout the ages. As Septimus (1994) clarifies, the Maimonidean sentiment of Hebrew linguistic purity is typical of the Andalusian Jewish tradition that was established by R. Saadia Gaon (see Chapter 2.3–2.4). This suggests that Maimonides understood such a pursuit to be an important part of Judaism.

Yet, the Mishnah states: "Rebbi [i.e., R. Judah the Prince] says: You shall be careful with a 'light' commandment as with a 'heavy' [commandment]" (*Avot* 2:1). Maimonides comments that an example of a "light commandment" is the commandment to study the Hebrew language. This shows that for Maimonides studying the language is a religious duty, albeit not a "heavy" one. (See however, Wahrman, 1984 who argues that Maimonides only commented that this is a "light commandment" because popular opinion maintains that it can easily be achieved through regular Torah Study and one need not exert any special financial effort to perform this commandment.)

Maimonides' attitude is reflected in later comments written by R. Yehuda Lowe of Prague, better known as the Maharal of Prague. He wrote in his approbation to R. Yosef Heilpern's work *Eim ha-Yeled* (Prague, 1702): "True and trustworthy that it is a great *mitzvah* ["commandment"] for a person to accustom his children to learning the Holy Language [i.e., Hebrew] and in [studying] the grammar of the language."

R. Yosef Kapa<u>h</u> (1917–2000) in *Ketavim* vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1989), pp. 59–61 points out that although Maimonides mentions a commandment to learn the Hebrew language in his commentary to the Mishnah, he never again mentions this commandment in his *Sefer ha-Mitzvos* ("Book of Commandments") or in his Halakhic code. Kapa<u>h</u> addresses this omission by explaining that Maimonides understood this commandment to be subsumed within the general commandment to study Torah.

R. Yehuda Gershuni (1908–2000) in *Kol Tzofayikh* (Jerusalem, 1980), p. 306 similarly argues that the commandment of learning the Hebrew Language is a subset of the commandment of studying Torah, such that one *only* fulfills the commandment of studying the language if one does so through studying Torah. According to Gershuni, if one studies Hebrew in a secular, non-religious context, although this may be permitted, it does not constitute a fulfillment of the commandment postulated by Maimonides.

Parenthetically, R. Mordechai Fogelman (1898–1984), Chief Rabbi of Kiryat Motzkin, speculates that Maimonides specifically identified the "light commandment" mentioned in the Mishnah as a reference to the commandment of learning Hebrew because of other rabbinic sources in which R. Yehuda the Prince — the overall redactor of the Mishnah and speaker in the above cited Mishnah — touts the importance of the Hebrew language. In these comments, Fogelman sees Talmudic precedent for the importance of Hebrew from a religious perspective. For his part, R. Fogelman argues that Maimonides understood that the commandment to study the Hebrew language is independent from the commandment to study Torah (responsa *Beis Mordekhai* §51).

## C.6 R. Ye<u>h</u>ezkel Landau

R. Ye<u>h</u>ezkel Landau (1713–1793), famous for his Halakhic responsa *Noda be-Yehudah* (NB), served as the Chief Rabbi of Prague during the period when the *Haskalah* first emerged. Betzer (1997) finds it noteworthy that in various places in his Halakhic responsa, Landau apologizes for his limited knowledge of the linguistic aspects of Hebrew, writing variously: "I never even studied an iota of this

wisdom" (NB *Ora<u>h</u> <u>H</u>aim* §1:2), "…according to the [Hebrew] language's grammar in which we are not experts" (NB *Even ha-Ezer* §1:87), and "to adduce proof from linguistic particularities, even though this is not my labor, for I have not accustomed myself in this labor... neither myself nor my masters..." (NB *Even ha-Ezer* §1:94).

On the other hand, the Halakhic discussions within Landau's responsa betray his deep understanding of linguistic issues related to Hebrew phonology, morphology, spelling, etymology, and the like (Betzer, 1997). It seems that while Landau admittedly never studied Hebrew as a language in the formal sense, he absorbed many important linguistic lessons by osmosis through his mastery of the Talmud and Halakha. Yet, despite personally demonstrating a familiarity and appreciation for the language arts aspects of Hebrew, Landau discouraged students from engaging in that field of study to the detriment of their more important Talmudic and Halakhic studies. Landau's approbation to R. Elias Levita's *Sefer ha-Ba<u>h</u>ur* (Prague, 1789) thus reads:

> "...certainly the knowledge of grammar is a great requirement for prayers, to pray in a clear language, to toil in the Written Torah in reading it properly, and to be careful with the melody of the cantillation and syllabic emphasis. Indeed, it is a good thing for unmarried students to accustom themselves in this [field of study] at most a half-hour or one hour per day. But they should not be drawn to this discipline and waste time on this, because studying the Talmud and the Halakhic deciders is our life and that is the crux of Torah..."

Indeed, Landau was one of the main opponents to the curriculum proposed by the Maskillic scholar R. Naftali Hertz Wessely-Weisel. This new curriculum emphasized studying Judaic subjects other than the Talmud, including, *inter alia*, the Hebrew language. For Landau, this curriculum represented an inappropriate inversion of traditional Jewish educational norms. As Katz (2004, pp. 513–514) explains: "To rabbinical scholars such as Ezekiel Landau, persons who were unable to excel in Talmud could not be regarded as serious scholars... Thus, even an expert in Hebrew linguistics was regarded by traditional rabbinic culture as an intellectual lightweight."

Interestingly, Landau (*Tzla<u>h</u>* to TB *Brakhot* 28b) offers a scathing diatribe against teaching one's children logic/philosophy, arguing that sending one's children to a seasoned Torah Scholar for tutoring proves more effective in teaching the child how to think deeply and critically.

Landau's slightly younger contemporary, R. Yosef Teomim (1727–1793) in *Notrikon* (Bilgoraj, 1910) pg. 54a cites these negative comments about philosophy and applies them to the study of Hebrew grammar as well. He warns parents not to hire a tutor from among those who study the Scriptures overly critically and engage in Hebrew grammar (i.e., members of the burgeoning *Haskalah* movement). Teomim further claims that while such scholars purportedly seem to care about advancing knowledge about the Hebrew Language, they actually care about making themselves look more knowledgeable and intelligent in gentile social circles. As Hamberger (2011) notes, Teomim lived in Berlin at the same time as the first *Maskillim* were active there, so he was intimately familiar with their assimilationist activities and motives.

## C.7 Contemporary Orthodox Leaders on Hebrew

Despite a tendency in rabbinic circles to downplay the importance of learning Hebrew, in recent times there have been renewed calls for establishing *Ivrit*/Hebrew Grammar as a mainstay of the Orthodox Jewish educational curriculum. Such appeals have materialized in diverse parts of the Orthodox camp, here are three such examples coming from Israel:

R. Shmuel Wosner (1913–2015) served as one of the foremost Halakhic deciders in the Ultra-Orthodox city of Bene Barak and in the global <u>H</u>assidic community at large. In his responsa *Shevet ha-Levi* (vol. 8 §209), Wosner agrees that learning Hebrew Grammar is important and even considered a *mitzvah*. However, he notes that in previous generations the rabbinic leaders decided not to teach children more than just the basics of Hebrew Grammar in order to keep them away from the influence of the *Haskalah,* which served as an intellectual entryway towards non-observance and secularism.

To that effect, Wosner argues that since nowadays secular Jews are more hedonistic in nature and are not as intellectually-inclined as they once were, theoretically the rabbinic leaders should once again encourage Jewish schools to teach more than just the basics of Hebrew Grammar. Nonetheless, Wosner humbly concludes that his recommendation only be followed if a majority of contemporary rabbinic authorities agree to do so.

The Tunisian-born R. Meir Mazuz heads a Sephardic *yeshiva* in Bene Barak and serves as one of the most influential religious leaders and policy-makers in the traditional Sephardic world. He is also one of the foremost rabbinic grammarians in contemporary times, publishing and lecturing prolifically on the topic of Hebrew. Mazuz makes a similar point to Wosner's in arguing that there is no excuse to not study Hebrew Grammar nowadays. He finds it especially appalling that even when secular Jews are knowledgeable in that discipline, in the traditional Orthodox camp, such knowledge remains deficient (Mazuz, 2012).

Finally, R. Yitzhak Blau heads a post-high school *yeshiva* in Israel that caters to North American students of the Modern/Centrist Orthodox persuasion. Blau (2021) calls for the reintroduction and reinvigoration of *Ivrit* studies in American high schools where that subject has been dropped or curtailed. He argues that the lack of knowledge in Hebrew on the part of Orthodox high school graduates adversely impacts their Torah learning in multiple ways, and that strengthening high school *Ivrit* programs is conducive to a stronger commitment to and identification with the Zionist project. Blau (there) admits that these various arguments "do not all lead to the same conclusion; the first motivates study of biblical Hebrew whereas the latter… emphasize contemporary Hebrew. Nonetheless, the two goals work together. Despite language's development over time, the two Hebrew discourses exhibit considerable overlap…"

<div align="center">תם ונשלם בשבח לא-ל בורא עולם</div>