# Yiddish oral traditions of the batkhonim and multilingualism in Hasidic communities

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# YIDDISH ORAL TRADITIONS OF THE BATKHONIM AND MULTILINGUALISM IN HASIDIC COMMUNITIES[1]

Jewish oral traditions in Yiddish[2] comprise, along with other speech events, the following main elements:

- Examples of the spoken language that express multiple aspects of social life and daily reality, including personal accounts of oral history. An analysis of such speech acts or discourse can give us a better understanding of many areas of Jewish life in the Ashkenazi communities.

- Oral practices linked to liturgy or para-liturgy, traditions of reading, translating and pronouncing the Bible in Ashkenazi communities and para-liturgical poetry (*shirim, zmires, pizmoynim* in Yiddish)

- Educational practices linked to the transmission of sacred texts, like the *limud tanakh ba-kheder*, the *diklumim yeladim* or the rules of *shiurim*, of the *limud mishnah ve-gemara ba-yeshivah*

- Ritual and cultural practices, linked either to halachic prescriptions or to customs (*minhogim*) which accompany the main religious ceremonies and events of traditional Jewish life like the *tish redes* of *admorim* or the *derashot* of the *maggidim*, *darshanim*, the *purim shpiln*, the *gramen* (oral poetry in verse) sung and recited at ultra-orthodox weddings by the *badkhanim*, mainly during the *mitsve tants*.

*Badkhanut* or *batkhones* in Yiddish represents a kind of speech act that is very characteristic of the oral traditions in the Hasidic world. This paper will

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concern this specific speech event. Let us briefly recall how the wedding ceremony is performed. After the wedding meal, there is singing, dancing and sometimes pantomimes. Then the *mekhitsah* (*mekhitse* in Yiddish) the separation between men's and women's areas, is removed and all the guests form a circle, although women still stay on one side and men on the other. Generally, the bride and groom sit outside the circle. The *batkhn*, as a true master of ceremony (*marshelik*) stands facing the bridal couple and moves about throughout the dancing. To obtain silence and capture the attention of the audience, he precedes the ritual dance with a short recitative, a variation on the word *shabbes* (an allusion to one of his sources of remuneration, the *shabbes gelt*). Then comes the recitation of a poem in verse (*gramen*) which leads up to the dancing by the family, eminent members of the community, the *rebbe* and finally the bride and groom. After each sequence of couplets, the melody sung by the *batkhn* is repeated by the audience or by a chorus. At the same time, a collective dance begins, in which members of the community take part, by order of hierarchy and degree of kinship. In order to avoid any physical contact between men and women, the guests dance holding on to one end of the *gartl*, the sash of the Hasidic caftan. The dance varies in different communities. Sometimes, the dancer holding the *gartl* moves in a half-circle around the bride. Or he may take small steps back and forth while the bride remains nearly motionless, her eyes lowered as a sign of modesty. In other communities, the dancer moves from side to side. The duration of the dance is also variable. In some communities, like Karlin, it is only a few seconds long. In others, like the Wishnitser or the Kershnever, it can last several minutes.

Prof. Hava Turniansky has shown that bilingual creations have existed in all epochs of the Yiddish literature – songs, hymns, religious hymns (*piyyutim, pizmoynim, zmires, shirim…*). It may be an original text in Hebrew with a translation or adaptation in Yiddish. For example the song of divine unity (*shir ha-yikhud* ) by Avigdor Cara (XVth century) from the Birkat ha-mazon of Bâle (1600). Or it may be alternating couplets in Hebrew and Yiddish, like the wedding song (*kale lid*) in the Seyfer minhogim by Simeon Levi Ginzburg, printed in Venice (1593), written by Yaakov ben Eliezer Ulma. It may also be a macaronic poem, a mixture of two languages, or alternating lines of poetry as the parodies in *Purim shpil* (Manuscript from Frankfurt, 1697 edited by Chone Shmeruk). The creations of *batkhonim* are part of this category of religious poems recited in the course of domestic celebrations or para-liturgical ceremonies, in which Hebrew and Yiddish alternate. They belong to an ancient tradition, somewhere between Hebrew *piyyut* and Yiddish folksongs. The linguistic practices of the Hasidic masters must also be taken into account.

Yiddish is the common, daily language, but it is also used during lessons (*shiurim*) or *tish redes* where there can be an alternation of quotations from the *Tanakh* or the commentaries and *parshanut* of the *parasha* in Yiddish. The major texts of the Hasidic tradition like the <u>Shivkhei ha-Besht</u>, are full of Yiddishisms showing both the internal bilingualism in Jewish communities and the codified division between the two languages.

As a basis for the present study, I have chosen a few poems of *batkhonim* representing various levels of culture and styles of oral poetry[3]:

- Yosef Grunwald (YG) who died in the 1980s. He spent the first part of his life in a Hasidic community in Eastern Hungary (Debrecen) before emigrating to Eretz Israel. He lived in Ramla, then in Rehovot in the Kreshnever community and was a *batkhn* for various communities before settling in Rehovot where he became the appointed *batkhn* of the Kershnever. A good musician, he drew his inspiration from religious folk poetry and *muser lider*. The poem I will study was recorded in 1971 by Yaakov Mazor. It is a long poem of 84 quatrains.

- Shaul Hutterer (SH), originally from the Jewish community of Oswiecim. He fled Eastern Europe during the war and took refuge to Switzerland, then moved to Antwerp were he lives today and works in the diamond trade. About 75 years of age, he has a network of close relations with the Bobover communities all over the world, both in Israel and the United States. He represents the classic style of *batkhones* influenced by the tradition of Hebrew *piyyutim*. The examples I will choose are taken from *gramen* recorded in Antwerp in 1997.

We find also dynasties of *batkhonim*, as, for example, the Kahana family, with Borekh Kahana (BK). Born in Israel, He is a young *batkhn* who is representative of the culture of the *yeshivah* and the current revival of the *batkhones* in Israel, Europe and United States. Born in Israel, he is connected to the *rebbe* of Spinka. He often recites *gramen* during family weddings or in his community. He is the *batkhn* with the most remarkable religious culture and deep knowledge of the traditional texts. He is famous for the beauty and accuracy of his voice.

Let us begin with an example of a couplet that is typical of the language used in the oral poetry of the *batkhonim*. It is an opening verse (*petikhe*) and invitation by the *batkhn* YG in one of his songs:

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[3] The recordings can be consulted in the collections of the National Sound Archives of Jerusalem. I wish to thank Yaakov Mazor of the Center for Jewish Music for his invaluable assistance.

*Leykhu neraneyno le-adoyshem norio le-tsur yisheyne / mir hobn dem shabes far unz a program gor a sheyne / le-koved ha-khosn ha-rav zeydl shmuel shmelke rozenboym / vos ir veyst al do atsind / az er iz dem rabi setsl's a kind / un shtamt aroys fun a gor heylign boym / mir zeynen ale lustig un freylekh / le-koved ha-khosn ha-doyméh le-meylékh.*

(Come, let us shout our joy to Adonay/ and acclaim the rock of salvation (Ps. 95, 1) / we have before us this shabbes a very fine program/ In honor of the bridegroom Rav Zeydl Shmelke Rosenboym whom, as you all know/ is a child of the Rabbi, may the memory of this Just be blessed / and stems from a very holy tree / we are all joyful and happy / in honor of the bridegroom who is likened to a king).

Like other religious communities, the Hasidim live in a situation of multi or pluri-lingualism characterized by internal diglossia founded on the use of two complementary languages: a higher variety of the oral and written language, the *loshn koydesh* for the sacred domains (prayers, commentaries, …) and the vernacular language, Yiddish, for exchanges in ordinary life or during study. There is also an external diglossia between Yiddish, Hebrew and several foreign languages, like Polish, Russian or English. It would probably be more accurate to speak of co-lingualism or ambi-lingualism, in the sense that many speakers are equally competent in Yiddish, Hebrew and one or more of the European languages. Each speaker uses the language of his choice depending on the situation and the need.

For each community, there is a linguistic code, a specific language configuration, whose use is determined by need and social context. The Hasidim are a typical case of displaced or dispersed linguistic communities. They were formed through successive waves of migration in the nineteenth century. Many were recomposed just before or after the Holocaust. These migrations must be taken into account along with the facts and practices of the spoken languages. Some of the older speakers may have preserved links with the dominant language or the dialect they spoke in Eastern Europe. Within the home, or in meetings with friends and relatives, some continue to speak the dominant language they used in Europe, like Hungarian, for example. Some of the Hasidic courts have links with communities in Antwerp or New York (Borough Park, Williamsburg, Crown Heights). Thus, the Bostoner came from United States to Israel quite recently, and both English and Hebrew remain present. Other communities now exist only in Israel and have lost all contact with the Diaspora. These socio-historic realities have an effect on the linguistic configuration of the different Hasidic communities.

Another aspect concerns the hierarchy of language. One can see what linguists call "additive bilingualism", that is a positive attitude toward certain languages or its opposite "subtractive bilingualism", which indicates a negative feeling toward one or more languages. For the group, the language is considered the most visible expression of its religious identity, a symbolic guide to its culture and a mode of differentiation from other currents of Hasidism. Cultural continuity is maintained notably by the preservation of one language to the detriment of others, which are depreciated. One decisive criterion is the relation to modern Hebrew. At one extreme, we find the Satmarer, who reject modern Hebrew and advocate the exclusive use of Yiddish. This negative attitude is explained largely by their fear that the majority language constitutes a threat to their survival and also by ideological / political bases of the community. For Satmarer, using Hebrew, the holy tongue, in everyday life is sacrilege and idolatry. Besides, modern Hebrew is connected with Zionist ideology. At the other end of the spectrum, are communities that have always had a positive relationship to Hebrew, like the Gerer.

Multi- or co- lingualism creates two types of alternation. The first is what is called code-switching; i.e., the distinct use of the two languages and the possibility for speakers to change codes depending on the situation, the audience or the content of the text. The linguistic models used in this type of poem, linked to a ritual, are governed by conventions, either implicit or explicit, and therefore have a degree of predictability. A fundamental question remains to know how, in that context and to what end the alternation operates, notably the switch from Hebrew to Yiddish. When, why, according to what strategies of persuasion, with what intentions, based on what situational criteria, aiming for what poetic effects? The phenomenon of interference or linguistic transfer are one of the most visible effect of co- or multi-lingualism. Each language inevitably influences the other. Two languages with no genetic relations unite to form a distinct grouping of related languages, what N. S. Trubetzkoy called a *Sprachbund*. The phenomenon of switching from one language to another is found at all levels of the speech chain. For example, when the *batkhn* speaks to the bride or to women in general, we note *gramen* often exclusively in Yiddish and sometimes fewer quotations from the sources in Hebrew or Aramaic. Here is good example (BK):

*Ikh hob a mayse gehert, tsu fartsayln iz dos vert / bay R' Elimeylekh Rudniker iz dos geven / zayn mame iz in bet gelegn / ir shvere matsev zolt ir beser nit fregen / ir shvere matsev hot yeder gezen / inmitn iz a zakh geshen / s'iz a kale gekumen tsu gayn / der matsev iz nishtane geveren ingantsn / R' Elimeylekh hot di kale arayngenumen tsu zayn mamen / biz zi iz gegangen*

*tsuzamen / mit di kale tantsn* (I heard a tale which is worth telling/ it happened to R. Elimelekh Rudniker/ his mother was ill in bed/ better not to speak about her difficult situation/ everybody could see it / suddenly something happened / a bride was passing / the situation changed completely / R. Elimelekh went with the bride to visit his mother / until she went / with the bride to dance )

The poems also exhibit what is called code mixing; i.e., the transfer of linguistic elements from one language to the other, whether in the vocabulary or within the sentences. There can also be a juxtaposition of Aramaic and Yiddish, as in this example from SH: *be-sayto de-shmayo / hostu bakumen di kalo…* (with the help of the almighty / you have have obtained your bride *). Mit a mazl toyv me-amikto de-libo* (with good luck form the depths of the heart). There are cases of syntactic, morphologic or phonologic interference or hybrid forms: (YG) *tomid le-gliklekh* (always happy). *Merokhek u-mekorev vet men kumen tsu gayn.* ( from far and from near we will come). It is even sometimes difficult to know exactly if this language full of Hebraisms or loan-words from Hebrew into Yiddish, keeps the structure of Yiddish or that of Hebrew. We can distinguish two concomitant aspects proper to Yiddish, which is a language of fusion (*shmeltssprakh*) formed from diverse components. Let us begin with the elements of the Aramaic-Hebrew component, the oldest substratum blended into Yiddish, what Max Weinreich called the *eyngeshmoltsn loshn koydesh* or merged Hebrew. The Yiddish spoken in the Hasidic communities and the language of the *batkhonim* are characterized by a large percentage of Hebraisms, larger than that encountered in other sociolects. Thus, we find a whole collection of terms borrowed from the traditional language of study *(lomdishe-traditsionele leshoynes/ lomdisher yidish / talmid khokhem loshn*), synagogue and house of study (*beys medresh loshn*) in particular concerning Jewish rituals and practices (*bar mitsve, shatkhn* (matchmaker), *kleyzmer* (musician), *rebbetsin* (rebbe's wife). Many sentences are composed of these kinds of terms, as, for example: (YG) *der ziveg zol oyle yofe zayn mit ale kavoynes ve-prushim/ loyt alerlei psotim un ale khidushim* (may the couple be crowned with success, with many intentions, explanations, according to all kinds of literal and new commentaries). *Khosheve kale, noo tsnuo va-khasudo /der heyliker boyre / azoy vet dos hobn a kiyem ad soyf kol ha-doyres* (dear bride, nice, modest and pious, the Creator, all will have an existence until end of all the generations). We also find terms borrowed from the language of *khasidut* that are integrated into the poems, like: *gashmyes* (corporal), *dveykes* (fervor, union), *tikn* (restoring, restoration), *hislayves* (enthusiasm), *hisboydeydes* (solitude), *dibek* (dibbuk), *gilgl ha-neyfesh*, (transmigration of the soul),

*hishteytfes* (participation), *hisoyreres* (spirituel awakening), *hishtadles* (initiative). Here is an example of this hasidic vocabulary in the Yiddish poem (YG): *ale simkhes mit zeyn hishteytfes bashaynen / bay uns un bay zikh un bay di gantse mishpokhe* (all the celebrations illuminated with his cooperation / at home and in all the family). A good example is the presence of term from Jewish mysticism and messianism, showing the penetration of cabbalistic terms into the vernacular language: *kavone* (intention, fervor), *goylem* (golem), *sfires* (sefirot), *shiyer kome* (mesures of God's body), sitre akhare ( *the "other side", evil*). Let take this other example (YG): *itst take bazo ha-sho/ ale ksorim zeynen do / keser toyre un keser kehune/ keser malkhes le-royv / un oykh keser shem toyv/ zet es dokh yeder bal bine* (in this hour / all the crowns are here / the Crown of the Torah / the Crown of priesthood / the Crown of kingship / and also the Crown of good reputation / each master of comprehension (kabbalah) can see it). Also, using the same metaphor, the bride and groom are often compared to a treasure of pearls, and here diamonds (*brilantn*) of the gardeners of Gan Eden (YG): *ir hot, keyn eynore, a sheynm gortn / limtso kazoys tsoyrekh lekhapeys b-neyres / ir arbet oyf dem on oyfhern / batog un banakht bagist ir dos mit heyse trern / un es kumen aroys, besras ha-shem, sheyne peyres / ales blishtshet sheyn un pedant / yedes eyne a briliant / ver es hot aza oytser heyst a reykhe* (you have, knock on wood, a beautiful garden / to find one another like this, must search / you work for that without end / by day and night you have water with hot tears / and it comes out, with God's help, beautiful fruits / all of them shine beautifully / each is like a diamond / anyone who has such a treasure is called a rich person ). They are also traces of *gemore loshn*, the language of study and of the *yeshivah*. A few examples: *adrabe* (on the contrary), *kavyokhl* (as if it were possible), *befeyrush* (clearly), *heykhe timtse* (how is it possible), *hesber* (explanation), *dafke* (precisely), *lav dafke* (not precisely), *khavruse* (group). Let us note also Aramaic terms from the language of Talmud (YG): *me-amikto de-libo* (from the bottom of the heart). *Khotsh s'iz mitsvas asé sheha-zman gromo* (Kiddushin 1, 7 et 29a: a mitsva whose observance depends on a certain time of the day or season of the year. From *gerama*, cause, indirect effect, in Aramaic), SH speaks of the bride as: *simono milso hi* (a good sign, a good omen, from Talmud of Jerusalem, Sanhedrin 1, 18c or Babylonian Talmud, Hor. 12a). We can distinguish a second grouping of Hebraisms which correspond to what is called *loshn koydesh mamesh* or whole Hebrew, the Holy language of the texts of Jewish tradition, including the Tanakh, the post-biblical literature or the prayers, which are integrated in the poem. Clearly, this type of reference varies with each speaker, depending on the level of his knowledge. It is a major indicator of his degree of religious

culture. One of the foundations of this poetry are the biblical quotations that appear throughout the texts, varying greatly in quantity depending of the *batkhonim*. In general, SH uses a great many quotations. He is also very good at linking, with subtlety and finesse, the personal stories of the bride and groom to the biblical context. The quotations illustrate of course, knowledge of the sacred texts but they also express a desire to base the wedding ceremony on scriptural authority and to constantly connect the present situation to a biblical context so as to suggest an uninterrupted line between the bride and groom and the biblical heroes, a seamless continuity between past and present. The description of the rebbe is also a good opportunity for using quotations. Example (YG): *be-shem ha-mekhutonim ve-khasdim ve-talmidei ha-yeshive/ vinshn mir le-moreynu ve-rabeynu shlite / azelkhe freylekhe shabosim / biz hundert un tsvantsig yor / boneykho kishsilei zeysim soviv le-shulkhonékho / u-reéh be-toyv yerusholoyim kol yemei khayékho / u-reéh vonim le-voneykho: sholem al Isroel* (in the name of the relatives, and the Hasidim and the learned from the yeshiva/ we wish our masters and rabbis / shabbes with joy / until 120 years / your sons will be like olive trees around the table/ may you see the happiness of Jerusalem / all the days of your life/ may you see the sons of your sons / peace to Israel). This type of poem is full of idiomatic phrases, expressions and proverbs. Here are a few of them (YG): *toykh tsoholo ve-rino, simkho ve-sosoyn* ( in joy). *Meylekh kal khay ve-kayom le-olmin* (living prince and existing for eternity, Daniel 6, 27). *Be-lev malé ditso khedvo le-royv, rufn mir…*(the heart filled with joy, we call…). *Be-lev nishbor ube-bekhi atsumo, betn mir…* (with great affliction and powerful tears). *Bli kéts u-bli soyf* (without an end*). Fun nisn biz nisn* (the whole year long). *Khosn doymeh le-meylekh* (bridgroom likened to a king). *Doyr yeshorim* (generation of the justs), *Shteyn ad soyf kol ha-doyres* ( last until the end of the generation). *Hobn a kyem le-mazel ule-brokho* ( to have an existence with good fortune and benediction*). Nakhas mi-sitra de-kedusho* (pleasure from the side of holiness), *khshuve kale, noo tsenuo va-khasudo* (dear bride, pretty, modest and holy). *Le-meylekh koyl godoyl ve-noro* ( to the king, full with greatness and fear). *Selakh no la-ovon* (forget the sin - Numbers 14, 19).*Vet ir makhn mitn grobn finger a dreydl* (to argue). *Di tayere verter: eym ha-bonim smeykho* (joyous mother of sons, Ps. 113, 9). *Bitkhilu u-rkhimu* (with reverence and affection, with great respect, veneration). We also find expressions taken from the Talmud like: *be-mido she-odem moyded moydedim loy* (with the same measure of punishment or reward given to somebody, a person must be judged ; Misnah, Sotah 1, 7). We also come across proverbs, as in this verse: *ir zolt hobn hatslukho, gezunt, parnoso, nakhas / she-tizkhu li-shtay shulkhonoys ke-akhas* (may you have success,

livelihood and satisfaction / and acquire knowledge and greatness). This is a quotation from the Talmud (Berakhot 8b) *lo kol adam zokhe lishtay shulhanot* (literally: "to deserve two tables"). *Azoy vi du shtayst haynt be-rum maylo* (as you stand here today on the heights, from Mishna Middot 3,6.*Tomid zeyn bi-shefal beyreykh* (always be modest, humble, discreet). This is an allusion to TB Sanhédrin 88b: "Who will have a share in the world to come ? The man who is humble". There are also common expressions borrowed from the vocabulary of Jewish mysticism, like: *ad bias meshiekh ben dovid* (until the coming of the Mashiah, son of David). *Bimheyro bi-yomeynu, be-koroyv bi-yomeynu* (soon in our days). *Malke or meylekh meshiekh* (Mashiah ben David, prince of Mashiah). *Pamelyo shel maylo* (the angels that serve the heavenly court). The most often cited is *agra debi hilulo mili* (TB Berakhot 6b) (allusion to the sweet and joyous speech of the *batkhn,* "It is a worthy thing to say kind words at a wedding"). *Pasakh be-kovoyd akhsanyo tehilo* (TB Ber 63b: opened his speech in honor of the hospitality to scholars). But what is most abundant are the fixed formulas and usual expressions, borrowed from the prayers and blessings said during the wedding ceremony, such as: *be-gilo be-rino* (in joy),*be-shem ha-mekhutonim* (in the name of the parents*),be-ezres ha-shem yisborekh* (with the aid of God), *toykh simkho ve-sosoyn* (in joy*), koyl simkho ve-koyl sosoyn, koyl khoson ve-koyl kalo* (voice of joy, voice of the bride and groom. (Jeremiah 7/ 34). Another element of the richness of these poems is the way in which they preserve dialectal features. In the vast area of Eastern and Central Europe where Yiddish-speaking communities were living, three main dialects were used:

- West Yiddish (Mayrev Yidish) – in this area, they would say: Kaafen flaash ( with a long a)

- Central Yiddish ( Tsentral yidish) - Koyfn flaysh .

- East yiddish (Mizrekh yidish): Keyfn fleysh.

North -East Yiddish: called "Lithuanian": Keyfn fleysh.

South- East Yiddish: called "Ukrainian": koyfn fleysh.

The Hasidic communities are linguistic laboratories for analyzing the dialectal forms that persist and those which change or disappear, and the linguistic evolutions that are the most visible. How do the dialects evolve and what had become of them through contact with Israeli society ? In addition, these Jews had been in contact with certain dominant languages-- such as Hungarian, Polish, Czech, German or Russian. Do these languages continue to be spoken and can we observe phenomena of interference ?

A first level of analysis concerns the pronunciation of sentences or words from the Aramaic / Hebrew component. Two features need to be differentiated: in the readings from the Bible and post-biblical or liturgical texts, the holy

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tongue is transmitted differently depending on the Ashkenazic or Sephardic background of the speakers. The Yiddish spoken by the Hasidim preserves its main phonological traits of "traditional Ashkenazi pronunciation", as well as old lexical and syntactic forms, as for example the recordings made in the *cheyder*. We see a remarkable preservation of ancient Ashkenazic pronunciation. Another aspect is the pronunciation of the Semitic (Hebrew or Aramaic) component of the Yiddish language. While some habits of pronunciation tend to diminish in Israel because of linguistic (inter)mixing and cultural contacts, the preservation among Hassidism of the pronunciation of Yiddish used in the communities of Eastern Europe is one of the major characteristics in contrast with language habits in the world at large. Let us take, as one example the phonological system in the poems of Yosef Grunwald. This *batkhn* came from the community of Debrecen in Eastern Hungary and preserves dominant features of the Central Eastern Yiddish spoken in this area. I will mention only few aspects of the pronunciation of the Semitic component. It should also be possible to analyze the poem by Shaul Hutterer and note the South Eastern Yiddish dialectal features from his area of origin, South Poland.

I will only stress a few characteristics from YG, first from the vowels:

We note a major distinction between:

-*Kamets* and *kamets alef* prononced u (short unaccented vowel, from which we get the term "U dialect" (Shlomo Birnbaum), in contrast with the Northeastern Yiddish (Lithuanian) "O dialect". In the texts of YG, thus we find: *brukhe* (benediction), *duvid* (David), *kuved* (honor),*bukher* (young man), *kusher* (pure), *shu* (hour). Sometimes, also with (oy) like *haftoyre*. In the Germanic component, we find *hubn* (have), and not *hobn*, *numen* (name) and not *nomen* or *zugn* (tell), *stut* (city), *vurtsel* (root) and with the long guttural (u) *uuser* (forbidden).

- *Patakh* is pronounced ( a) in closed syllable (a) short: *malke* (queen), *nakhes* (joy), *rak* (only), *mazl* (luck), *avade* (certainly), *dafke* (only, necessarily), *prat* (detail). Open syllable before long *ayn*: (a) like *maale*. Unless it's a closed syllabe like *ksav* (written).

- *Kibbuts* and *shurek* can be pronounced (u), like *suke* (booth), *tkufe* (era), *khurbm* (destruction) *rukhnies* (spirituality). But in the YG poem, we note: *malbishim* (clothes), *refie* (remedy), *bikh* (book), *khipe* (canopy), *gizme* (exaggeration), *sike* (booth), *shitef* (partner) and *zkhis* (merit), *bishe* (shame).

-*Khatef patakh:* short (a) in stress syllable: *khasene* (marriage), *khatoim* (sins). Or with a (u) long, like *tuunes* (fast).

- *Khatef kamats:* (u), like *khukhme* (wisdom), *khurbm* (destruction).

- *Khate -segol*: (e) or (ey). In the "U dialect", we note a distinction between two sub-dialects: the sere (Lithuanian Yiddish: (ey) / Central Yiddish and South East: (ay). In the poem of YG, we find forms with (ay) like *shaydem* (demons),*tayves* (Month of Tevet), *khaylek* (part).

- *Segol* in Central Yiddish and South East: (é,ey ), like *reyge* (moment), *peysekh* (Passover). The *ayn segol* is pronunced (ai ou ei ) in an open/ short syllable, *beyged* (cloth), *kheysed* (grace) *eytse* (advice), *meylekh* (king).

- *Kholem*: because of the interference between Yiddish and Hebrew, is pronounced like a sere (ey) (Lithuania) and (oy) (Central and South East Yiddish). In YG, we find: *soyfer* (scribe), *yesoydes* (foundations), *mekoyres* (sources), *oyses* (signs), *oytsres* (treasures), *moyre.* (fear), *khaloymes* (dreams), *soydes* (secrets).

As regards consonants, I will simply stress that:

- Ayn et alef are silent consonants.

- The pronunciation of the emphatic hard tes as (t), like *shevet* (tribe) and of the soft *tov* as (s), like *bays* (house).

- There is a difference between *shin* and *samekh*. In Lithuania, they say: *sir ha-sirim – sabesdiker losn*. Here, we could find *shir ha-shirim* and *shabesdiker loshn*.

- The *vov* is pronounced (u ) and the *melupm* (accentuated long u ), like *zun* (sun), *frum* (pious), *grushn* (coin).

- Among other phonological features, we note the diphthongs: the double *yud* is pronounced with (ay), like *drayen* (turn), *haybn* (raise*), shayn* (beautiful), *shnay* (snow), but also with *tsayt* (times), *layt* (people), *vayn* (wine), *vays* (white) like *vays* (know), *glaybn* (believe).

- The diphthong *vov yud* is (oy ) like *boym* (tree), *groys* (great), *hoyz* (house), *koyf* (buy), *loybn* (praise).

- In the lexicon, we find typical words, like *nadn* (dowry) (instead of *nidan), nist, nisht* (Eastern Yiddish) instead of *niks* (négation), *keygn* (Eastern Yiddish) instead of *geign* (against, anti).

In many of these poems, we are dealing with a displaced dialect, or to use the expression of A. Métraux, a "dialect at a distance". The Yiddish of Yosef Grunwald, who was born in Hungary, preserves many features of his native Yiddish dialect, despite evolutions or changes brought about by his emigration to Israel after the war. It is very important for each oral poem to bring out the phonological features, to see whether the dialects survived or, on the contrary, if they tend to disappear and be replaced by current language and pronunciation.

A third possible level of analysis concerns the other components of spoken Yiddish. I will only mention few features: gradually over time there is a penetration or impregnation of terms from modern Hebrew, but which are still a small percentage, and a great many formulas like: *gile shekhine, gile elyohu, be-sofo shel dover, sofkl sof, sof kol ha-doyres, leoyrekh yomim.* We observe a great many periphrastic verbs like: *goyzer zayn* (decree), *toyvl zayn* (immerse), *moytse kheyn zayn* (find favor), *mafker zeyn* (implore), *oyle li-gdule zayn* ( achieve distinction), *goyzer zeyn* (decree), *toyvl zeyn* (to immerse), *moyre hobn* (have fear), *hanoe hobn* (have pleasure), *kheyshek hobn* (be in the mood), *mekuyem vern* (to be fulfilled), *nitsl vern* (to survive), *nitsmekh vern* (to arise), *blozn shoyfer* (blow the shofar). On the other hand, of course, compared to the everyday language, there is no borrowing from languages like English or from international words. This fact shows an impermeability to foreign linguistics and cultural influences. Some texts exist in a written form. Some *batkhonim* write the whole poem or part of it, a kind of framework or basic structure, before the performance. In some cultural contexts, the hypercorrect spelling may be a reaction to the invasions of new linguistic features. In the case of these poems, we can note an absence of shared and verified orthographic norms. It is in writing that we see the greatest differences from one *batkhn* to another. Linguistic standardization and correct spelling seems to have diminished because of the fact that Yiddish is essentially a spoken language. In each poem where we find a written version, we can notice instability of grammar and spelling, showing that linguistic norms are not integrated or do not have priority. However, the *batkhonim* who distribute their texts in the community take greater care to follow orthographic norms. This phenomenon shows the existence of a certain linguistic acculturation, or what Moshe Taube, called a re-jargonization, a break-up or fragmentation into disparate communities or speakers, each with its specific way of writing. The paradox is that, on the one hand, Hasidic societies constitute linguistic islands impermeable to many outside influences and preserving features of the traditional Yiddish dialects, and, on the other hand, they are experiencing erosions of grammatical norms and orthography. The almost total lack of creation, circulation and production of texts can explain this linguistic fact.

The oral poetry of *batkhonim* are based on linguistic routines; i.e. ritualized situations, characterized by conventional exchanges and the use of stereotyped formulas. They illustrate the ritualization of the communicative mode during ceremonies instituted by tradition. Moreover, this verbal and oral art depends on the close attention of the public. The *mitsve tants* is the high point of the wedding ceremony. The *batkhn* must do his utmost to come up to the collective

expectations. The *gramen* like many oral traditions, are full of formulas and stereotyped forms of address, and are governed by rules and norms. Thus, there is a mobilization of rhetorical means, of a style inherited from a literary tradition and themes that attempt to delight the bridal couple, capture the attention of the audience and fulfill its expectations. Each performance is a challenge, a "joust of oratory" on which the *batkhn's* reputation depends. These creations are a good example of the intimate association, complex relation that existed between the oral and written modes of transmission. There is an influence of orality on the poetic structure, particularly through the use of redundancy, repetition of grammatical constructions, the formulas, even whole couplets, apart from the refrain. The thought patterns are additive. We find very often the word *un* (and) to link the sentences. The thought is also aggregative, in the sense that we find readymade phrases or many compilations. The woman is always a "modest women" or a "woman of valor". A bride is *noo tsnuo khasudo* (beautiful, modest and just). Groups of words, standardized expressions are regularly repeated to express the same idea. Preconceived schemes are used in expressing fundamental concepts. They are many proverbs, idiomatic expressions, metaphors and the repeated use of mnemonic devices, refrains, antitheses, alliterations and assonances. These elements are present, for example in the welcoming of guests, the address to the participants, the marks of deference, respect and praise, the stereotyped descriptions of the parents, the eulogy of the bride and groom, the listing of duties incumbent upon them and the wishes for happiness and success. For example (YG): *un es zol zeyn yosis olaykh élokoyekh / u-mesoys khoson al kalo / koyl simkho ve-koyl sosoyn* (and it is with joy of the bridegroom in his bride that God will rejoice in him). We can see a circular, concentric composition from the introduction (*petikhe*) whose purpose is to demand silence and establish the ethos of the *batkhn*, who often presents himself following a topos of oral literature, as a humble poet. The poem unfolds according to recurrent narrative patterns, notably around the invitations to the *mitsve tants*, which are in hierarchical order and correspond to a sort a mystic crescendo. We go from the periphery (distant relatives, friends, close family members…) to the center, to the heart (the rebbe, then the bride and the groom). The *batkhn* goes through his themes which are organized in units corresponding to the verses or stanza. Then comes the conclusion with the final formula: *zogtshet'm ale er gayt, er gayt* (say all: he is going, he is going). Here, for example, is a typical finale (SH): *un yets oylem lehisaneg be-taynugim / eyder men gayt tantsn rikudim / di mekhutonim benan shel kedoyshim tsuzamen ale be-shir ha-mayles / tsu zamen mit shabbes lifnei di kales / be-rino ube-tsoholo toykh emuney am sgulo / im*

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*shabbes malkeso bo'u kalo* (and now, audience, to enjoy the pleasures/ before beginning the dance/ the relatives, children of saints, all together with the song of degrees / all together on shabbat before the brides / in happiness and joy / in the faith of the chosen people / with the shabbat, come bride).

I would mention the use of repetitive rhetorical and stylistic figures propre to Hebrew poetry, like the *piyyutim* .

First, the remez (YG): *ikh bin tsu dem inyen ernst tsu getrotn / biz loyt meyn svore hob ikh di remozim getrofn / in di verter: zimro, zamru, yefazer /…/ fun zimro hob ikh gemakht a notrikn vi a mumkhe / zeydl mekhutn a kale reyzl ha-mekhutonim moyshe zeev rivke / un oykh bay zimro iz di zelbe zakh geshn / reyzl miskhasenes va-khosn zeydl / va-mekhutonim moyshe zeev rivke es iz poshet in eydl / un oykh ba yefazer hob ikh a notrikn gezen / reyzl friedman heyé zuges zeydl / hey vet ir makhn mitn groben finger a dreydl / fun ven on shteyt tsvey zayens in yefazer / der dogesh in zayn dopelt dem oys / der ynien kumt azoy pinktlekh aroys / ve-kol ha-ynien be-esres ha-shem istader* ( in the words zamre, zamru, yefazer, I found *remozim* / like an expert, I made a *notarikon* with *zimro* / Zeydl is related to the bride Reyzl, the parents are Moyseh, Zeyv, Rivke / the same thing happened with zamru / Reyzl and the bridegroom is zeydl / and the parents are Moyshe Zeyv Rivke, it is simple and good (noble) / and also with yefazer I saw a notrikn / Reyzl Fridman will be Zeydl's wife / and when he will search / where we can find two zayn's in yefazer / the dagesh doubles the letter / and everything is in order, with God's help).

Another tool is the *notarikon*. Here is an example of *gramen* sung before the khupe (YG): *khosn tayerer ! yets iz dokh di rekhte sho / tsu gedenken dem posek: eyn odom tsodik bo-orets asher lo yékhéto / khosn makht khezhbm ha-neyfesh ta'asé / men darf teshuve ton ba-makhshove, diber u-maysé* ( dear bridegroom ! / now is the good time / to remember the verse: there is not a just man on earth who has not sinned / "bridegroom" yields: you will examine your conscience / one must repent in thought, speech and acts. (SH): *un di kale (zol zayn) dayn gants leben a veg vayzer vayl elozr notrikn ééseh lo eyzer* (and you bride, all your life, will be a guide, because Eleazar is: "I will be a help for him". Genesis 2, 18). (YG): *visn zolstu az khosn makht: ve-khotosi negdi tomid* (you must know that bridegroom yields: my sin is always in front of me - Psalms 51, 5). (YG): *es zol shoyn mekayem vern di notrikn fun kale: ki le-shem ha-melukho* (the notarikon of the bride must be accomplished: to Adonay belongs the kingship, Psalms 22, 29).

We found also *guematria* like in this example: (YG) the abbreviation *shitl* (May his name be blessed for ever), forms the verse Tehilim 16, 8: *shivisi adoyshem le-négdi tomid* (continously, I place YHWH before me – Psalms 16,

8). A good example is given by (BK): Israel is formed with the letters lamed, yud and resh, alef, shin. The bridegroom is equivalent to 248 limbs and the bride to 253 limbs. The whole is equivalent to 501, which have the same numerical value as the word "couple". The husband and wife are compared to the couple formed by the Jewish people and God during the giving of the Torah (*kabbalat ha-Torah*). (YG): *ikh vel yets mesayem zayn / zogn a vort vos s'gayt nokh arayn / di nemen funem khosn mit di kale az m' khezhbn't es oys gematrye/ kumt es oys tsuzamen vi di dray ykrim fun di gramen / eyns iz mekhol gdol / der tsveyter iz shabes / der driter is ziveg yofe* (I will now conclude / and add a few words / the names of the bride and groom when you count them altogether / you find the three foundations of this rhymes / first is the great dance / the second is the shabbes / the third is the beautiful couple). A final example of gematria among many others (SH): *tsayl genoy di verter motso isho motso toyv va-yofék rotsoyn me-adoyshem / batreft genoy gor tashnov hey yor* (count the words: The one who found a wife found happiness and God's favor (Proverbs 18, 22) / and you will have precisely the year *tashnav* (1992), the year of the wedding). In the same poem, we find: *zkhoyr ve-shmoyr makht koyl khoson ve-koyl kalo* (remember and keep, make voice of the groom and voice of the bride).

There is also an anthropological dimension to oral poetry, which is governed by cultural rules, based on an underlying religious tradition, structured according to models proper to each community and systematically organized according to social needs or requirements of speakers. The *gramen* bear witness to categories of thought, religious references and symbolic values that structure Hasidic society. Hence the importance of what socio-religious linguists call ethno-poetics, that is, the relation between oral literature, forms of discourse and the anthropological system that underlies the act of speaking or the performance of the *batkhan*.

The matrimonial rite is composed of different phases:

-The *oyfruf* (*oyfrufenish, ofruf*), calling the groom to read the Torah on the Sabbath that precedes and follows the wedding.

- The *forshpil*, the Saturday night before the wedding.

- The *khosn mol*, the groom's dinner for the family.

-The *kaboles ponim* before the wedding ceremony, during which they sign the *ksube*. On that occasion, the *batkhn* may recite morality poems.

-The preparation of the bridal couple.

-The *basetzns* and *badekns* when the bride is seated in a chair and her face is covered by a veil.

- The procession to the *khupe* and the blessing under the *khupe* (*kidushin* and *sheve brokhes*) .

- The *yikhed* during which the bride and groom are led into a room alone, where they break their fast with a light meal.

-The wedding dinner, which the couple join after the *yikhed*.

- The *birkes ha-mozn ( bentshn ),* benediction after the meal.

-The *mitsve tants* or *kosher tants,* dance of the commandment or of purity.

Each phase has its recurrent themes: for example, during the *oyfruf* the *batkhn* compares often this Sabbath to the Sabbath of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. The marriage is seen as an individual redemption and compared to the *tikn* of the Jewish people. During the *kaboles ponim*, the *batkhn* emphasizes the integration of the groom into the community of the sages, the cooperation between the living and the dead and the invitation or involvement of the ancestors: (YG) *iz aroys a kruz ba-pamalye shel mayle / az dayn tate mit deyn zeydes ale / zoln geyn tsu di khasene fun der khosn kale* (a proclamation went out from God and his angels in heaven that your father and all your grandfathers should attend the wedding of the bride and groom). Sometimes, the angels are invited to join the ceremony (YG): *du host avade gedavnet haynt minkhe be-veys ha-kneses gdole/ un di malokhim poyalé tefiles hobn dos gefirt tsum heylign boyre/… a bas koyl hot geton fun himel aroys geyn / ha-khosn yankev bar moyshe men hot dir als moykhel geven* (you have certainly prayed minhe today in the great synagogue/ and the angels carried the prayers to the creator /…/ a heavenly voice came down from the sky / the bridegroom Jacob bar Moshe, you have been pardoned). This opening enables a passage from the secular time to the sacred time of the wedding. The rite of passage marks the period of transition between the *bokher* and the married man. The *batkhn* emphasizes the relation between the wedding day and *Yomkiper*. The bridal couple enters marital life with the whiteness and purity of pardon, and the groom is compared to the priest in the Holy of Holies (YG): *der hayntiger tog iz der ernster in dayn leben.* (this day is the most serious, solemn day in your life). One of the aims during the *mitsve tants* is to preach moral *lessons (muser ve-divrei khibushin*, morals, words of edification, exhortation). The *batkhn* recalls that a home must be built on solid foundations which include *shabbat, kashrut* and family. The wedding is a moment when the forces of evil try to attract the bridal couple, to seduce them and lead them astray. Hence the allusions to the *baldover* (Satan) and the means of fighting against him and the demons, like purity and adherence to the *mitsves*. The *batkhn* now repeats and connects traditional themes, among others, that marriage is made in heaven (SH): *ales iz in himel ongeshribn / afile*

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*di zman ha-khasene vos men hot oysgeklibn* (everything is written in heaven / even the chosen time of the wedding). Just as the bride and groom rejoice on earth, the righteous dance and rejoice in Gan eden (BK) *in thilim shraybt dovid ha-meylekh: ismakh isroel be-oysov, es vet zeyn freylekh /der zoyher fregt: farvos shtayt be-oysov es darf steyn be-oysu / der zoyher ha-koydesh entfert oyf dem: vayl di eltern fun himel freyen zikh mit em…. zey ale zenen yets tsuzamen mit unz mishtatef in mitsve tants.* (in the Psalms (149, 2) David writes: "Let Israel rejoice in him that made". The Zohar asks: why is it written "his" when it should be "their" / The Holy Zohar answers: because the ancestors in heaven rejoice with them / they are all associated with us in the dance). The symbolism of the date is also a way of making a link with the important events of the holy history (SH): *khmishoser bi-shvat be-gematrye azoy pirio yitén be-itoy / di ale remozim bistu haynt a goyve / az di khasene be-sho toyve.* (the marriage contract explicitly states that the wedding was signed the 15th of the month of shvat / this date is equivalent to the verse: "He will be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that bringeth forth his fruit in this season" (Psalms 1, 3) / of all these signs, you are today the recipient / and your marriage is placed under the sign of good luck). Elsewhere in the same poem, we read:*un nokh a remez far khosn kale be-veys akhas / yud vov shvat makht: be-sho toyvo u-mutslakhas.* (the word "hour" recalls that the day of the wedding is equivalent to wedding on the 16th day of shvat / it is also an allusion to the bride and groom who will live in their home/ 16th shvat equals "May it bring you happiness and prosperity"). The symbolism of the first name can also be used to link the couple to famous biblical figures (SH): *Elozer makht oyr zorua la-tsadik.* (Eleazar equals: the light comes up for the righteous, Ps. 97, 11). It can be done also with the bride's first name (SH): *un rokhl aleyn notrikn khane, rokhel nor rokhel be-gematrye va-yehi oyr / khane roshei teyves neyfesh khay hi un di sofei teyves meramez da take ishe* (and Rahel notarikon Hana, Rahel / Rahel in gematria*: fiat lux).* The *batkhn* takes the name of the couple and all the close family members and creates multiple associations with people and verses in the Bible, yielding a multitude of correspondences. (BK) begins with a quotation "the father is the foundation of the lineage" in order to enumerate the merits and virtues of the father of the bride who is compared to the patriarch: *un yets aba yesoyd berato / fun di kale der tate/ a godel a bal havono / raboys bonoys osu khoyl / s'iz do rabi'z in Tel Oviv zeyr voyl / ve-at olis al kulono* (and now, the father of the bride is the foundation of the lineage / a great master of understanding (kabbalah) / many daughters are strong / we find honored rabbis in Tel-Aviv / but you surpassed them all (Prov. 31-29). (BK): *vi er kumt nismale kol ha-bays oyre / oyre iz toyre / va-téré oysoy ki toyv /*

*al ha-toyro mosar nafesho / fardem nikre el shemo / zikhru toyras moyshe is a khoyv / asrei ha-am she kokho lo / a mentsh vos iz azoy / moyshe be-gematrie she-kokho lo / yets moyshe rabeynu / zayt mashpiye aleynu / ve-zoys ha-brokho* (when he comes all the house is full with light / light is Torah / and she saw that he (the tree) is good (Gen. 3, 6)/ he devoted his soul to the Torah / and it is why they called him Moshe (allusion to Avot 1, 1) / remember: the Torah of Moshe is a duty / happy are the people that are in such a case (Ps. 144, 15) / Moshe with *gematria kokho lo* / now *Moyshe Rabeynu* / have influence on us / and these are the benedictions).

Let us analyze, as an example, the structure and technique of Yosef Grunwald's poem. In general, the *mitsve tants* starts with an introduction to mark the transition between the end of the meal and the beginning of the rite. It prepares the start of the dance and the entrance of the guests. The first two lines include various quotations: first an excerpt from *kiryat la-khatan* Torah: *reshut la-khatan bereshit* inspired by Nehemiah 9: 5. Then *me-reshus meyromom al kol berokho ve-shiro*, a prayer said on Simchat Torah. The *khatan* Torah is the one who will come up to read the last *parashah* of the Torah and to recite the prayer *me-reshut ha-El ha-Gadol* and the *khatan reshit* or *khatan matkhil*, the one who begins the reading of the Torah scroll and recites the prayer *me-reshut meromam*. A *khatan* is then honored to be called to read the Torah. Sometimes, in certain communities, they even set up a *khupah* over the *bimah*. This ceremony is accompanied by singing joyous hymns like the *sisu ve-simkhu be-simkhat torah* that speak of the privilege of concluding and beginning the Torah and praise the *khatan*. Another custom is that the *khatanim* should entertain the members of the congregation. Last of all, I would mention a kabbalistic interpretation inspired by a Midrash that associates the word *morashah* (heritage) from Deuteronomy 33: 4 (*Torah tsivah lanu moshe morashah kehilat yaakov*: Moses commanded us a law, it will remain the heritage of the community of Yaakov) to the word *me'urasah* (betrothed, bride). Thus the *mitsve tants* is linked directly to Simchat Torah. A parallel is drawn between, on the one hand, the close of the reading of the Law and the start of a new cycle of recitation and, on the other, the end of childhood and the entry into adult life. The individual destiny of the couple is inscribed within a great cycle or religious life, and at the same time, is placed under the fundamental and protective sign of Torah observance. A brief reminder or a fragment of a quotation from a prayer opens a whole rich perspective of meaning and interpretation.

The first phase of the ritual corresponds to a prelude before the two key moments: the dance of the rebbe, then the dance of the bridal couple. This

phase is characterized by a more earthly, temporal aspect, marked by a selection of cheerful melodies (*lustig un freylekh*), in the style of wedding songs (*khasene lider*). The purpose of this sequence is to accomplish the *mitsvah* to rejoice in the bride and groom (*mitsvah lismoakh khatan ve-kalah vi-lirkod lifneyhem*). Each new dancer is introduced by a change of melodies, chosen from a lively, happy repertoire, and by the repetition of fixed formulas. The verse begins by calling the guest by name, and degree of kinship (*yets rufn mir, geyen mir oyfrufn, mir geyn atsunt rufn, rufn mir atsund gants voyl un fayn, bitn mir* ). One or more quatrains usually praise the moral and religious qualities of the person being called. The sequence ends with the invitation to the dance (*zogsht'm ale, er gayt, er gayt* ). In this phase of the *mitsve tants*, a central place is given to kinship, to the summoning of the ancestors and relatives who, by their presence create favorable conditions for the couple's earthly union. It is a proclamation of the kinship, intended to recall the links woven by the generations and a way of linking the couple to the chain of the generations (*goldene keyt* ). These texts are like genealogical poems: the *batkhn* has a social role of recounting kinship in order to weave together the links that unite all the members of the *kehile*. All the members of the community are invited one by one and become participants in the act, in the rite, of union. The ritual dance, like the words of the *badhan*, is part of the same intention to re-link the generations, to regroup the descendants of the two lines, to inscribe them and make them part of a common history, and in this way to prevent any weakening of the community. This mystic reunification takes on a collective connotation, which implies inviting the ancestors, the founder of the dynasty, the kinship or kin. It is a sacred duty for the entire community, including all the generations, and particularly the rebbe, who plays an eminent theurgical role in the divine process, to take part in this rite of reunification, a necessary condition for the union with the divine world. Thus, the Yiddish songs recited at the end of the ceremony become part of the overall traditional knowledge that the community considers it has received from the ancestors, the founders of the movement, the dynasties of rebbes, and which it is their duty to transmit from generation to generation, without discontinuity. This rite plays an important social role, not only in that it enacts many cardinal aspects of Hasidic culture, but also because it has a vital function, ensuring the continuity and cohesion of the group.

The invitation is made according to certain criteria: first age, then order of importance, degree of kinship and lastly where they come from. The general structure of the poem is the grandfather, the father of the groom, *di khosheve mekhutonim mi-tsad ha-khosn*, close relatives on the groom's side, from abroad,

from Israel, and the brothers of the groom. The next two phases mark the passage to a higher spiritual and mystical level, well expressed by the change of melodies, which are graver and more solemn. This progression is marked first by the dance of the rebbe with the bride. The eminent place of the rebbe within the community explains the serious tone of the poem, grave and austere, but also the choice of a specific melody. Unlike the other guests, the rebbe's name is not mentioned, a sign of his importance in the community and his pivotal role in the marriage ritual: the dance of the rebbe with the bride is an essential step in creating favorable conditions for the union of the couple. The ancestors of the community are all invited to the dance to come and bless the union of the couple. A third level corresponds to the dance of the bride and groom, which constitutes a sort of apogee of the *mitsve tants*. The poem takes on an edifying tone, typical of the *batkhn*'s traditional wedding songs. The moralizing evocation of the bride gives a general impression of sadness, intended to bring tears to the eyes of the audience. These two parts are in the tradition of *muser lider*, ethical poems whose origin goes back to old Yiddish literature. As a rite of passage, the *mitsve tants* plays a symbolic role in the separation of the bride and groom from their former status, marks their integration into the community and at the same time, assures the preservation and perpetuation of the group. The dance itself concretizes these changes in status, this social transformation that will witness the birth of new persons. The *batkhn* assures the passage, the transition that accomplishes this transformation in the couple's life without a jolt or break. The object of the *gramen* is to transmit knowledge and to internalize the codes of conduct, rules of life and models of behavior, around which the couple will construct their future life. The *badhan* is the chronicler, the historiographer of the community and his words assure the historical continuity of the group. He is part of the memory of the community and one of the guardians of its past. The oral account plays a preponderant social role in the life of the community, as an historical reminder and a collective linkage. The words are both carrier and founder of identity.

The dance of the bride and groom reveals the hidden, symbolic meaning of the *mitsve tants* and introduces a mystical significance. We know that Hasidic society is based on a rigorous separation of the sexes. The *mitsve tants* constitutes the only time the bride and groom dance together in public. This rite of initiation refers to the kabbalistic idea that exile is the consequence of disharmony between masculine and feminine principles, which are physically separated and turn their backs on each other. Redemption depends on the reunification of these two entities, hence the symbolic importance of the face to

face between the couple in the dance. It prefigures the union of masculine and feminine entities, a prior condition for redemption. The man and woman play a theurgical role in the process of union with the divine and the achievement of divine unity (*yikhed* ). This idea is expressed in a great number of texts, learned as well as popular. We could, for example, mention such kabbalistic works as this excerpt from Moses of Leon in Shekel ha-kodesh: "The secret of the Shema Israel: the bride returns to her groom for the purpose of uniting in a true unity". There are also proverbs, as in this quote from the treatise Yoma from the Talmud: "If a man and a woman are worthy of it, the shekhinah is with them". The *mitsve tants* visualizes and concretizes the kabbalistic idea of the divine unity of the masculine and feminine principle of the *sefirot*. The bridegroom is thus compared at several points of the poem to the king, the *meylekh*, representation of the male principle (*yesod* or *tiferet*) The feminine is symbolized by the queen, the *malka*, a traditional denomination found also in this poem to designate the *shekhinah*. Thus the dancing, singing and celebration join with other means to achieve reunification and anticipate redemption, in the same way, though to a different degree, as the study of Torah, union between oral and written, the observance of the *mitsvot,* prayer, notably the recitation of the *shema*. The coupling in the dance symbolizes the alliance of the *shekhinah* and the community of Israel, just as it prefigures the new marital life, the passage from childhood to adulthood, with the founding of a family and the consummation of the marriage.

Each poem of the *batkhn* is thus an example of what ethnologists call symbolic interactionism in the sense that it is an act of coded communication that presumes complicity in something known and shared. The words are a symbolic means of exchange that unite people. One could speak of an ethnolect in the sense that each community, while sharing some common linguistic features, cultivates its own linguistic particularities, both as a marker of religious identity and as a separation from the outside world, which is seen as threatening, as a source of loss and danger.

From this paper, of course too incomplete to draw any conclusion about the spoken and written Yiddish in Hasidic communities, different facts emerge. First, we observe a remarkable permanence and continuity of the traditional literary and poetic models, which does not exclude a diversity of style, rhythm, structure, language, and shows that *batkhones* is still a form of living creation in the Hasidic society. Second, the stability of the language of the *batkhonim* which, of course, undergoes evolutions (lack of grammatical rules and spelling…), but which keeps many traditional features (ashkenazic pronunciation, plurilingualism…). Between these two *batkhonim*, the main

differences concern the importance of the level of religious culture and the preservation of dialectal features. Yosef Grünwald represents a "popular" style of *batkhones*. His style is close to popular songs or *muser lider* and the dialectal features are still strong. With Shaul Hutterer, a *batkhn* of a high religious culture, we observe a softening of dialectal markers, a desire to perpetuate a classical vein of *batkhones*, inspired by the tradition of *piyyutim*. And also the skill, the mastery of a classical style, founded on repeated rhetorical means or fixed themes (*gematria, notarikon, remez*) and show that he comes from a framework of a long tradition characteristic of the Hasidic society. I hope I have made clear how much Hasidic communities are a rich field for socio-linguistic investigation, a living area for the study of Jewish customs and practices. It is imperative to explore this oral and written material, as many fields, Jewish folklore, interlinguistics, religious or social anthropology, history of traditional literature, could greatly benefit from an interdisciplinary study.

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(Translated by the author)