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Brogez: Ritual and strategy in Israeli children's conflicts

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INTRODUCTION

This study relates to two strands of research into children's communicative competence: the study of children's conflict behavior and the study of ritualized communicative activities through which children construct, maintain, and strategically negotiate their social world (e.g., Brenneis & Lein 1977; Lein & Brenneis 1978; Boggs 1978; Corsaro 1979; Morgan, O'Neill, & Harre 1979; Goodwin, 1980). A number of ethnographic studies have been specifically concerned with the analysis of culturally situated, ritualized, agonistic events. Notably, the series of studies concerned with the language form known as "sounding" or "playing the dozens" among black American youth in the United States (e.g., Abrahams 1962; Kochman 1972, 1981; Labov 1972; Mitchell-Kernan 1972), the study of verbal dueling among Turkish boys (Dundes, Leach, & Ozkok 1972), or the study of ritualized fighting among the Irish men of Tory Island (Fox 1977).

The interactional state referred to by speakers of Hebrew as *brogez* (a phonological reduction of *be rogez,* which means 'in anger') will be considered in this paper as a further example of the ritual regulation of conflict. The specific *brogez*-related forms and strategies identified in Israeli childhood culture will be discussed in detail with an emphasis on the growth of relevant aspects of children's communicative competence.

Brogez is an extremely common metacommunicative term in the cultural lexicon of Israeli children.[1] As such it is used as either a descriptive or a performative term:

1. In its use as a descriptive term, it refers to an agonistic state characterized by the suspension of ordinary interactional practices; it is a state of deliberate noncommunication involving two or more children. Thus, children can be heard saying things like "I am *brogez* with M. I'll never speak to her." Functioning descriptively, it can also be used to denote the act of establishing a state of *brogez,* as in "M. and N. had a big fight and then they made *brogez.*"

2. In its use as a performative (Austin 1962), *brogez* can be employed in constituting a state of *brogez* as when a child cuts off communication with another by explicitly stating "I'm *brogez* with you. Don't speak to me."

The study of *brogez* provides an ethnographic example which differs from the

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above-mentioned studies of ritual conflicts in two major ways: 1) The ritualization associated with *brogez* involves the resolution rather than the dispute phase of the conflict. 2) The term *brogez* denotes an interactionally defined social state which is interwoven in an ongoing conflict situation rather than a playlike speech activity that is interactionally set apart. We might formulate this difference by saying that while "sounding" and verbal dueling represent agonistic rituals, *brogez* is an example of a ritualized agonistic state.

Despite its association with the notions of violence and disruption in social relations, the social construction of a state of *brogez* is an organized, predictable, and stylized interactional activity among Israeli children. It is an important element of their peer-group culture, reflecting a culturally distinctive shaping of a communicative function which is fundamental to childhood universally – the expression and regulation of interpersonal aggression. Children's ability to participate in *brogez* sequences is predicated on their mastery of a set of communicative rules and strategies which establish it as a well-defined, bounded social state, and which specify the behavioral displays and occasion-specific identities (Goodwin 1980:685) associated with it. Knowledge of these rules, thus, forms part of children's communicative competence, that part of it that is sustained and transmitted with minimal interference on the part of adults.[2]

As we shall see, the particular conflict-resolution strategy utilized in *brogez* – the strategy of withdrawing from interaction "in a visible huff" (Goffman 1967:22) – rests upon the fundamental distinction between the physical and the social availability of persons in interaction (Schlegloff 1972:368). Children's grasp of the idea of social availability as an interactional state and the devices used to signal its presence or absence is the product of a gradual, often painstaking, process of social learning.[3] This basic element of the "grammar" of social interaction which usually remains "submerged," comes to the fore in the particular context of *brogez*, as it involves the suspension of ordinary interactional practices. It is basic to other aspects of children's communication competence as well, for example, the accomplishment of entries (Corsaro 1979). Thus, the study of *brogez* will take us from a localized interest in Israeli culture of childhood to a consideration of the growth of some fundamental aspects of communication competence.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This study has utilized the standard ethnographic procedures of nonparticipant observation and informant interviewing (Spradley 1979, 1981) in the lifeworld both I and my young informants inhabited – a Jewish, middle-class, small town in Israel.[4] Although the study was triggered by repeated, in situ observations of *brogez* events and children's spontaneous discussions of them, my particular interest in the cultural knowledge required for the appropriate enactment of a *brogez* script (Schank & Abelson 1977) recommended the use of interviewing

procedures designed to elicit children's own self-reflective accounts of *brogez*.[5] These accounts were particularly revealing given the fact that a state of *brogez* is defined in terms of behavioral avoidances: not playing together, not speaking to each other, not mentioning each other's name, and so on, so that the limitations of an outsider's, behaviorally based approach in this case are especially prounounced.[6]

The study of *brogez* is part of a larger ethnographic project which applies a folkloristic approach (Sutton-Smith 1982) to the study of the communicative rituals and strategies of Israeli children. The first phase of the project consisted of about a year of informal data gathering which involved many casual conversations with children recorded in the form of fieldnotes. At the end of this period I was able to identify a number of metalinguistically "named" communicative exchanges which seemed to punctuate much of the flow of children's social life. *Brogez* episodes stood out as highly recurrent and intensely experienced social moments of this kind.[7] They tended to form the topic of much discussion and gossip among school-age children and were spontaneously included in their running accounts – to each other as well as to "significant adults" – in relating their day-to-day triumphs and aggravations.

This exploratory phase was followed by a series of open interviews with school-age children which focused on the communicative episodes that had emerged as salient during the first phase of the study. *Brogez* was one of the topics thus explored. The interviews were conducted in a home setting, often in groups of two to four children, by myself and by university students.[8] The informants were roughly divided into three age-sets: five- to seven-year-olds, nine- to eleven-year-olds, and thirteen- to fifteen-year-olds. The reason for this division was that data gathered in the first phase of the study suggested that while all children consider *brogez* a taken-for-granted part of life, its meanings, its social uses, and the forms of ritualization attending its enactment vary for the three age groups. The social learning manifested by children's patterns of participation in *brogez* events will be considered in some detail. When not indicated otherwise, the reference will be to the conception of *brogez* among preadolescents (the middle age-set), whose participation in *brogez* episodes seems to be the most intense as well as the most elaborate of the three groups. Some of the children agreed to tape role-played disputes that were imagined as likely to end-up in *brogez*. Although they themselves later judged their performance as "*lo mamash amiti*" 'not really real', these segments provided useful illustrations of *brogez*-related formulaic expressions.

The data thus collected enabled me to reach a tentative formulation of the structure and functions of *brogez* episodes. Finally, I proceeded to discuss my account with a number of the older children, whose responses and comments contributed to the further clarification and refinement of various points. It should be stressed that the present account reflects children's "knowledge representation" of the *brogez* script as I have been able to abstract it from observing their

behavior, noting their spontaneous comments, recording elicited accounts of their experiences with this interactional form, and probing children's intuitions of the rules and strategies involved.[9]

THE INTERACTIONAL CONTEXT OF *BROGEZ*

In characterizing *brogez* as a social state, we will consider *brogez* events both as they are located within the context of ongoing interactions and as they realize a distinct interactional frame.[10]

Let us begin by locating *brogez* within the flow of events in which it tends to occur. The following account, taken from a taped interview with two twelve-year-old girls, will serve as an illustration of a *brogez* story typical for this age-set. It was told in response to the question: "Have you recently been involved in a *brogez?*" and referred to events that had occurred a few weeks earlier:[11]

H.: It was at G's party. M. and I were planning something about a class party. . .

J.: No.

H.: About spending the night at M's place, and A. was with L. at the same time.

J.: They were talking.

H. (demonstrating with her hand): I and M. here and A. and L. near the cupboard. This way. That was the distance between us. And they thought that we were gossiping about them because A. had all kinds of affairs with K. (a boy). So they. . .

J.: No. It's just the class invented that A. and K.

H.: Yes.

J.: And also K. is kind of tall and thin, so, so they say, so R. comes to me: "What is S.'s boyfriend called?" I told her: "Well, how?" "*Gavoha ver-saze/debil shekaze*" ('tall and thin and such an idiot').

H.: How?

J.: *Gavoha veraze, debil shekaze.* (Both laugh.)

H.: So she thought we were gossiping about her but we weren't talking about them at all. So L. said: "*Ken, be'emet*" ('yes, really' – a formulaic expression often used as a retort in a dispute when nothing better can be found). So I told her: "Tell me, what are you pushing your nose?. Is it your business?" So she said: "Yes, what are you pushing your nose?" "What am I pushing my nose? I was talking to M., not you." And so it started.

What followed was an acrimonious exchange of insults between H. and L. (who are generally recognized as good friends), which was terminated by L's angry retreat and which led to what H. described as a rather big *brogez*.

As the above account illustrates, *brogez* forms part of an agonistic interac-

tional sequence. The particular place it occupies in the sequential unfolding of fights and verbal disputes points to the role it plays in such contexts. Specifically, the declaration of a state of *brogez* usually follows a spell of open, animated verbal conflict triggered by an act of affront (either actual or imputed) by one of the parties involved. In facework terms (Goffman 1967; Brown & Levinson 1978; Hymes 1982), we can say that a dispute leading to *brogez* is typically triggered by a Face-Threatening-Act (FTA) that is performed by one child against another. It may be a threat to the other's negative face, as in the above example in which both "gossiping about" and "pushing one's nose" were interpreted as the violation of personal space or autonomy. Or, it may be a threat to the other's positive face, as in the following story told by a five-year-old boy in response to a request to tell about a *brogez* incident he could remember. This account is typical of the accounts given by the younger children in that it is much less elaborate in the description of the interactional moves leading to *brogez* or in the specification of *brogez* associated behaviors (see the following section). This particular *brogez* incident involved the boy himself and a girlfriend of the same age. It was triggered not by an imposition of any kind but by the girl's refusal to support the boy's views:

> "Yes. I and T. were *brogez*. She said there's no such thing called 'cream of lime' and I said that there is. So we became *brogez*. In the end she agreed. First I said I didn't want to make peace (*lo rotze lehashlim*), to teach her a lesson. Then we made peace (*sholem*)."

It is worth noting that the term "sholem" means peace in Yiddish and occurs in colloquial Hebrew only in this child-marked context. In contrast to the Hebrew term *shalom*, its use also introduces a rhyming effect between the *brogez/sholem* pair of antonyms.

The performance of an FTA by one child against another redefines the social situation in such a way as to suspend casual relations between participants, establishing an agonistic frame. Usually, the FTAs which trigger a *brogez* frame are uncontested acts of affront, either physical ("He hit me") or verbal ("He called me names"). In some cases, however, as in the two examples cited here, a process of imputation is involved. Neither whispering in the corner nor questioning the existence of "cream of lime" can be considered as intrinsically involving threat to face, but can be interpreted as affronts in given contexts. At such points the particular sensitivities, vulnerabilities, as well as strategic intentions of the participants come into play.

Although exchanges of accusations as to "who started it" may be heard as part of the dispute, and often come up as part of the clarification elicited in the mediating process leading to *sholem*, this did not seem to be a crucial matter. The language used by the children indicates this: They tended to talk of *brogez* as something that happens inadvertently, using such locutions as "*kara brogez*" '*brogez* occurred' or "*jatza brogez*" '*brogez* came out', or as a joint social

undertaking, in plural terms (''We made *brogez*''). Indeed, for an FTA to lead to *brogez,* it must not only be identified as such but also be responded to in kind. Most frequently, it is followed by an exchange of insults. The phase of the conflict some children referred to as ''the fight leading to *brogez*'' is perceived as internally structured in terms of the kinds of insults exchanged and the level of affect involved.

Children tended to draw a distinction between *klalot kashot* 'hard curses' and *klalot kalot* 'light/easy curses'. The latter include most formulaic curses – such as *idjot* 'idiot', *xamor* 'ass', *debil* 'idiot', *mefager* 'retarded', *mag'ila* 'disgusting', *masrixa* 'stinking' – except for sex-related ones, mainly *ben/bat zona* 'son/daughter of a bitch', which is considered a hard curse. Hard curses include, in addition, cursing which is personally directed at one's opponent, utilizing knowledge of particular vulnerabilities of the other child, including information previously divulged in the intimate context of secret-sharing. Disputes tend to begin with an exchange of light curses and escalate to a stage of hard curses. This escalation is accompanied by a subjective sense of mounting anger.[12]

A structural distinction between the first and the second phases of cursing relates to the likelihood of the occurrence of retreats in each phase. The term ''retreat'' refers to an explicit attempt by a party to the dispute to play down the conflict and terminate it before it escalates further. This can be done by interjecting comments such as: ''*Oof, hakol shtujot. Lo shave lariv biglal ze*'' 'Oof, it's all nonsense. Not worth fighting because of this'. These retreats, when they occur, are much more likely to occur at the phase of ''light curses.'' Notably, even in the most heated of disputes, such as the one reported by H. according to her own testimony, some sense of constraint with respect to swearing seems to be maintained. Thus, H. testified that she refrained from calling L. *shmena* 'fatsy' because the latter was very sensitive to this label ''and this would have finished everything.'' It also appears that, in contradistinction to the case of ''sounding'' (Labov 1972), parents and homelife tend to be kept out of the discourse. Any deprecatory mention of them constitutes a very hard curse.

Usually, when the level of mutual irritation reaches a peak, one of the disputants cuts off communications either by physically removing himself/herself from the scene, withdrawing in a huff, as Goffman calls it, or by only socially withdrawing, that is, explicitly declaring a state of *brogez*. Whether it has been verbally declared or implicitly signalled through nonresponsiveness (turning a cold shoulder) or physical withdrawal or all of the above, this phase of the conflict is described as being *brogez*.

The state of *brogez* gives participants a period of ''time out'' in which hostilities are kept up but not as intensively as during the dispute phase. Children explicitly said that it gives them an opportunity to calm down, which they considered to be a prerequisite for terminating the conflict. Thus, they claimed that mediation efforts rejected out of hand during the heat of the quarrel are more likely to be recognized and utilized by the antagonists during the *brogez* phase.

These, among other moves, could lead to *sholem* – an interactional phase of accentuated "peacefulness" and intensive mutual engagement by the *brogez* partners, which sequentially follows and is contrastively defined with reference to the *brogez* phase. Structurally, it should be still considered part of the agonistic cycle surrounding *brogez,* until it recedes into the flow of casual, expressively unmarked relations.

The following schema presents the flow of events in which *brogez* is embedded in terms of the kinds of acts comprising it and in terms of what Harre & Secord (1972:150) call the "arousal structure" of the episode, that is, "the flux of emotions treated as the meanings assigned to states of arousal":

casual relations – ⟨FTA(s) – *brogez* – *sholem*⟩ – casual relations
FTA(s) → Initial FTA + insults + (retreats)
Insults → light curses + (hard curses)

The place occupied by *brogez* episodes in the sequential unfolding of agonistic interactions points to its role in the regulation of conflicts among Israeli children. Children often indicated their intuitive awareness of this when they said things like "*brogez* always ends up in *sholem,*" or advised that adults should not interfere in *brogez* among children because they are sure to make *sholem* eventually.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF *BROGEZ*

As already suggested, a useful way of characterizing a state of *brogez* is in terms of the tension maintained between the physical availability and the social unavailability of the *brogez* partners relative to each other. Thus, *brogez* is not a spatiotemporally bounded speech event in the same way as "sounding" is. Rather, it is a socially bounded interactional state, punctuated by ritualized bracketing devices which serve to either institute or dissolve a state of *brogez.*

Since both parties to a dispute must cooperate in socially constructing the *brogez* frame, they must have available to them a set of signals through which to communicate their intention to declare, sustain, or terminate a *brogez* spell. This would be part of their scriptal knowledge of *brogez.* This section will be devoted to an account of the kinds of acts which perform these signalling functions for the children observed or interviewed in this study.[13]

Openings

The *brogez* frame is established through communicative acts which serve to institute a state of *brogez.* Let us refer to them as "openings." They constrain all subsequent conduct by the *brogez* partners in that any act that follows them is interpreted relative to the *brogez* frame, that is, as either sustaining or revoking it. Openings of *brogez* are described by the older children as a two-step sequence combining a verbal and a nonverbal element: The verbal ones are preopenings and the nonverbal ones are openings.

The verbal element involves an exchange of near-formulaic retorts which are not insults directed at the person of the opponent (like the insults mentioned earlier), but rather expressions of disdain with the interaction as such. They are viewed as signalling a further escalation of the conflict; so that while retreats are not likely to be attempted during the exchange of "hard curses" either, at this stage they are completely ruled out. One informant put it this way: "After you say this you must make *brogez* to finish the fight. This is the only way." Examples of such retorts are:

1. A: *lexi leaza/la'azazel* 'go to hell'
   B: *telxi at* 'You go'
2. A: *lo medaberet itxa* 'not speaking to you'
   B: *lo tzarix tovot* 'Don't need your favors'
3. A: *Al tedaber iti* 'Don't speak to me'
   B: *ani gam be'emet lo rotze* 'I also really don't want'
4. A: *ani od ar'e lexa* 'I'll show you yet'
   B: *lo mefaxed mimxa* 'Not afraid of you'
5. A: *Stom tape* 'shut the mouth'
   B: *al tagid li/ lo sho'el otxa ma la'asot* 'don't tell me/not asking you what to do"

B's counterretorts are stock phrases whose use does not involve any verbal agility so that a failure to produce one promptly entails severe loss of face. The chaining of pairs of retorts is more problematic, and the child who can do it scores an interactional point. Although this kind of interaction-related insults is recognized as taking disputants closer to the termination of the exchange, the general difficulty of resolving endings (Schegloff & Sacks 1973) is compounded here by an interactional norm which specifies that "having the last word is the most important thing," to cite a twelve-year-old informant. Remaining speechless is highly demeaning. An eleven-year-old girl described her frustration as she told me of a case in which she had said to another girl: "Go to hell" and received a reply she was unable to respond to: "Who you? I know." She explicated: "What could I say? Explain to her that I meant her, not me? It's dumb." The ingenuity of this counterretort is that it put the opponent in a state of double bind: offering a correction so as to clarify the insult intended felt dumb, as it meant dropping the agonistic stance, but so did the failure to recycle the insult.

How, then, can the altercation which leads to *brogez* be terminated when disputants are equally adept at providing retorts and counterretorts of the kinds illustrated above? The answer lies in the nonverbal component involved in a *brogez* opening. It is simply the act of physical withdrawal or disengagement which immediately follows a forcefully expressed retort when one of the disputants feels he or she has had enough. Clearing the scene must be done "with pride," as the above, out-manoeuvred informant explained when I asked her what could have been done to rectify the situation she had described to me.

Getting away with pride is partly a matter of composure – one must be quick but avoid appearing as if one is running away. At times, one can do even better and, in withdrawing, make the other appear "like a baby who has nothing to do only fight over such nonsense."

The younger children associate the declaration of *brogez* with a ritualized opening, which combines a stylized verbal and nonverbal element. An upturned thumb thrust in one's disputant's direction is the most common gesture associated with the declaration of *brogez*. It is often accompanied by the melodic chanting of the rhyme:

Brogez, brogez le'olam 'Brogez (2) forever' *Sholem, sholem af pa'am* 'Sholem (2) never'

While the chant and the gesture are seen as one complex, each of them can be used in and of itself to "bracket" a *brogez* frame.

The older children were all familiar with this pattern and seemed to enjoy telling about it as something "little children do," stressing that they would never use it themselves. "What are we, babies?" responded a ten-year-old whom I prodded about it. The same attitude was expressed with regards to the ritualized closings to be described later, whose styling is a reversal of the above opening pattern. The use of ritualized openings and closings seems to be restricted to the younger age group. In fact, several of my younger informants promptly responded to my initial question if they knew what *brogez* was by sticking out their thumb or by producing the above chant.

Finally, it is also possible to declare a state of *brogez* by explicitly asserting something like: "You're a liar. I'm *brogez* with you" (an overheard exchange). Asked about this pattern, children claimed that it is not common and would tend to be used by younger children, usually as a response to an offense performed prior to the particular exchange such as a lie or a piece of gossip (cf. Goodwin 1980). Unwilling or unable to enter into a verbal dispute they nevertheless formulate an accusation which they offer as their "reason for the *brogez*."

In sum, three major *brogez* opening patterns have been discerned:

(1) Interaction-related retorts + withdrawal
(2) Formulaic chant + upturned thumb gesture
(3) Accusation + explicit *brogez* declaration

The first pattern characterizes the older children's conflicts, the second is specifically associated with the youngest age group, and so is the third, though more loosely so. Regarding these opening patterns as interactional brackets, we note that the first differs from the other two in two ways. First, the exchange of interaction-related retorts must fit naturally within the interaction's discursive context, marking only a subtle shift in the exchange of insults preceding it. The retorts, and especially each new cycle, require a renewed demonstration of verbal agility. In the other two patterns, the interactional texture of the ongoing exchange is disrupted and no particular verbal capacity is required. Second, the

performance of a dignified withdrawal requires a proper assessment of one's current interactional position, proper timing, and the display of proper composure. None of these is required in the second and third patterns.

We are now in a position to say what it is, in rough terms, that the older children can do which the younger children are not as able to do as far as *brogez*-related behaviors are concerned: They are better at weaving together their communicative activities and at strategically withdrawing from interaction.

As noted, *brogez* openings are performative: They are used to constitute a conventionally recognized state of affairs. In declaring a state of *brogez*, a child exercises the right to define the social situation. An incident I had occasion to observe indicates the intensity with which the right to institute a state of *brogez* is held and the meaning it has for the children: An eight-year-old girl was utterly outraged at her ten-year-old brother, tearfully and vocally complaining: "I keep telling him I am *brogez* with him and he goes on speaking to me. He thinks only he can make *brogez*." The elder brother severely taunted his sister by denying her the right to institute a state of *brogez* as he purposely failed to observe the proper constraints holding within a *brogez* frame. This display of disrespect in effect cast her in the role of a "nonperson" (Goffman 1959) in the social world they both inhabited. This, it seems to me, was the primary reason for the outrage. Second, he managed to accomplish this humiliation by making friendly overtures so that on the face of it he appeared to be the nice guy while she emerged as the noncompromising aggressor.

In sum, for Israeli children, the right to declare a state of *brogez* is an inalienable "civil" right. Children have available to them *brogez* opening routines which allow them to handle conflict situations by declaring a phase of "time out." This form of containing conflict situations is very important since a child cannot choose to ignore the challenge implicit in an FTA directed against him or her, willingly forsaking the "right to have the last word" without entailing considerable loss of face. A child who fails to reassert himself or herself by responding to such a challenge is branded as *xalashlush* 'a weakling'. The enactment of *brogez* makes it possible for children to maintain face while at the same time avoiding physical violence.

Sustaining acts

The social state of *brogez* must be interactionally distinguished not only from a state of mutual engagement but also from a state of expressively neutral casual relations. The latter are typical of many relationships children have with many of their classmates. I have been witness to a protracted (several months' long) instance of *brogez* between a number of twelve-year-old boys which was never "officially" terminated. I had a discussion with some of them, and they said that they had lost interest in it and it was "not a *brogez* any more." The shift from a state of *brogez* to mere lack of mutual interest involved a suspension of the hostilities that constitute *brogez* sustaining acts.

Brogez sustaining acts can be divided into two general categories: The first category is acts designed to establish one's social nonavailability in the face of the almost continuous physical availability of the *brogez* partners who are usually members of the same social group. The acts involve a suspension of ordinary displays of social availability, both verbal and nonverbal. The older the children, the more elaborate was their portrayal of the kinds of behaviors that are to be avoided in *brogez*. This reflected their growing awareness of (and/or ability to verbalize) the behavioral clues which signal one's social availability and, it seems to me, their growing ability to make social distinctions finer than the one between friend and foe. The youngest children responded to the question "What don't you do when you are *brogez?*" by mentioning acts which are overtly marked for their "friendliness," such as "I won't play with him," "I won't let him ride my bike," "I don't go to his home."

Only a couple of the younger children mentioned "not speaking," none of them mentioned the nonverbal cues specified by the older children (see below). It appears that children of this age group have not yet constructed a full-fledged *brogez* script. They were attuned to its emotional coloring but were unable to demarcate the *brogez* frame. A reiterated remark was "*brogez ze kshekoasim*" 'brogez is when you are angry'. They contrasted *brogez* with being on friendly terms, not with being interactionally available. This categorical difference was brought home to me during a conversation with a five-year-old boy:

Q.: Can you tell me about a time when you were *brogez* with a friend of yours?
A.: No.
Q.: Why?
A.: If it's *brogez* then it's not a friend (*im ze brogez az ze lo xaver*).

I learned my lesson and switched to talking about "*brogez* with a kid" or referring to the specific instances he had mentioned, but whenever I slipped, I was promptly corrected.

Older children were able to discuss a much more elaborate and subtle repertoire of behavioral avoidances related to this phase of *brogez*, identifying behaviors associated with the signaling of social availability rather than friendliness. These included:

Not speaking.

Not sitting/standing close (unless they share a desk in school, which makes *brogez* more problematic as well as more newsworthy).

Not looking in the other's direction, avoiding eye-contact (a nonverbal cue).

Not mentioning the other's name.

Refusing to play on the same team.

Not helping in need. Examples included "if she needs a pen," "if she trips on the stairs," "if she's sick and needs someone to bring her the homework."

These avoidances cannot always be adhered to for instrumental reasons. This

is especially conspicuous with regards to verbal acts, such as addressing or speaking to the other, or mentioning him or her by name. A number of reference-avoidance strategies have been evolved to get around the problem: One can use the term *chilba* ('a bitch' in Arabic), which denotes "the person one is *brogez* with," in place of the name. Another strategy involves using the third person pronoun to talk about one's *brogez* partner in his or her presence, as if he or she were not there. A strategy which combines avoidance and baiting is the use of the female pronoun and inflections to talk about a *brogez* party who is male. When there is no choice but to relay a message to one's *brogez* partner, it can be done through an intermediary. In the absence of a third party, the message can be communicated through a pet or an object (e.g., a girl told me she used the wall for this purpose, saying "Wall, tell her that . . ."). Another strategy involves addressing one's *brogez* partner, but prefixing one's utterance with *chilba,* thereby suspending its interactional force, as in: "*Chilba,* you are standing in my way."

The second category of *brogez* sustaining acts is hostile acts designed to maintain a reasonable level of emotional arousal so as not to let the anger drain. These acts have to be performed without violating the constraints against non-engagement, so they tend to be indirect. The most common of these are "revealing secrets" and "gossiping against" one's *brogez* partner. The difference between the two activities is not quite clear-cut: The most injurious one seems to be the revelation of a secret entrusted to one in happier times. Children were quite explicit about the fact that "in *brogez* the secrets can come out." So much so that a thirteen-year-old boy told me that when he wanted to tell his best friend a "real big secret," he made him swear by God that he would not reveal it even in case they would become *brogez,* and many children testified that the knowledge that their secret might be revealed during a *brogez* spell made them think twice before they decided to tell it even to a close friend. The tactic of demanding to be told a secret for each one divulged is, partly, designed to arm oneself against the threat of having one's secrets revealed during *brogez.*[14] Gossiping about someone is a milder form of hostility, not associated with the violation of trust but with ridicule and the design to incite others against one's *brogez* partner (*lehasit*). The antagonists' efforts to incite others and win their support is the way the *brogez* spreads and becomes a group affair, helping to rechart the social map.

The only direct mutual engagement permitted in *brogez* involves blatantly hostile acts, such as hurling curses of the kind exchanged prior to the *brogez* phase, making faces, or sticking out one's tongue at one's opponent. The obscene gesture locally known as an "oriental gesture" (palm of hand turned up, middle finger sticking out) is considered an extreme act of aggravation. *Brogez* episodes vary in the intensity and kind of hostile flare-ups enacted in their course. They are not part of the definition of a *brogez* state in the same way that the avoidances described earlier are, although they are functional in sustaining a

discernible level of hostility. Thus, both types of sustaining acts are required for the *brogez* frame to be properly sustained.

Closings

Terminating a state of *brogez* is by no means less problematic than initiating it. Opening such a closing potentially entails loss of face and is therefore avoided by both parties. Some preliminary interactional work is required for *brogez* to be terminated and *sholem* declared. The three types of closing strategies I have been able to identify all combine preclosing and closing acts. They are: 1) mediation, 2) gradual rapprochement, 3) ritualized closings.

Mediation. A common way for *brogez* episodes to be terminated is through the intervention of self-selected mediators. Assuming the role of mediator entails considerable social rewards. For one thing, it is status enhancing. Effective mediators are liked and respected for their skill, and the experience seems to be self-enhancing. A thirteen-year-old boy described it, saying: "It's like sort of a public role. It's fun to feel like a politician." Beyond that, however, the very attempt at mediation (whether successful or not) solves an immediate social problem: It signals an attitude of neutrality in relation to the dispute while at the same time maintaining an attitude of involvement with and concern for the disputants. This is important since children are extremely pressured when they find themselves "in the middle of a *brogez*." For some, as they explicitly stated, making a move at mediation is a way of extricating themselves from this predicament.

A distinction is sometimes drawn between 'calming down' (*lehargi'a*) and actually 'mediating' (*letavex*). The former involves attempts at mitigation performed in the heat of the fight, before the actual onset of *brogez*. For example, remarks such as "What kind of a silly thing are you fighting about?" "Why are you saying all kinds of curses and things like that?" or, simply, "Stop fighting already" are often heard from the "wings" during an exchange of curses. Children know these attempts are not likely to succeed and explicitly say that serious attempts at mediation should be left for later, "when they have been *brogez* for a while and have already calmed down a little. Then I can show them it's all stupid anyway," in the words of a twelve-year-old girl. Seriously attempting to mediate at the stage when disputants are not ready for it is not only ineffective, but may also be hazardous, as the would-be mediator may be drawn into the fight, often by being accused of pushing her nose into others' affairs. As another twelve-year-old girl pointed out: "Sometimes it happens that when a girl tries to mediate, then she gets into the affair and then the three of them begin to fight." So that even these half-hearted mediating moves, which establish one as concerned but unattached, are fraught with social risk.

We see, then, that making a mediating move must be distinguished as a social act from actual mediation. There seems to be a rather standard arbitrating pro-

cedure. The first step depends on how well acquainted the would-be mediator is with the details of the case. If he or she is not, then the first step is to ask what happened, or, as some children put it, "to ask why and how." This is done with each disputant separately. Each thus gets an opportunity to present his or her version and then the mediator engages in a series of moves designed to downplay the conflict and to further calm down the parties involved. A typical response used to downplay the conflict is: "*bishvil siba kazot kedai lariv?*" 'for such a reason it is worth to quarrel?'

Two effective strategies for "calming down" and downplaying the conflict were mentioned by many children. One is the use of humor. For example, a ten-year-old boy, identified by his friends as an effective mediator, was reported to have "made everyone laugh" by telling a *brogez* partner, "*'teraga, 'teraga*" 'clam down, calm down', using an exaggerated Hungarian accent (heavy stress on first syllable instead of the usual pronunciation which involves primary stress on the third). Another example, given in a conversation with two twelve-year-old girls, involved the mediating methods of N., one of their classmates, who was acclaimed by many as a most effective mediator:

H.: First she calms you down and makes you laugh with all sorts of tricks she plays and then she says: "Tell me for this reason you are *brogez?*"

I.: Yes, and when I had this *brogez* with M., and I was angry, I was walking home with N. and she said: "Look, I'll tell A. [the teacher] about it. Say, if you were angry at me, someone clever, but to be angry because of such a stupid girl. I'll tell about it to A. It's not in order (*ze lo beseder*)." So, that because of a stupid girl like M. I should not be angry but at her I could be (both girls laugh).

Another mediating procedure involves a version of shuttle diplomacy: The mediator moves between the *brogez* parties, dropping conciliatory comments in their ears (e.g., "He said he really liked playing with you before you were *brogez*"). This is a reversal of the gossiping activities which sometimes trigger and often accompany a state of *brogez*. This activity is contrasted by children with that of the 'troublemaker' (*saxsexan*), who, in contrast with the mediator, is a negatively evaluated occasion-specific identity. Both the troublemaker and the mediator are known to embellish the facts so as to achieve their strategic ends. The troublemaker is said to "exaggerate in the direction of bad things" while the mediator is said to "exaggerate in the direction of good things." The first is branded for his or her inaccuracies, the second is excused and respected.

Other strategies available to mediators involve initiatives designed to reinstate communication between the *brogez* partners. The mediator may reduce the alienation between them by initiating a game in which both are asked to take part, inviting them both to his or her home, and so on.

Finally, the mediator proposes a 'solution' (*pitaron*), which is usually a plea to make peace and forget about the fight which is 'not worth it' (*lo shave et ze*).

Surprisingly few issue-related solutions were mentioned by the children. I believe this reflects their general sense that what they call "the reason for the *brogez*" is more its trigger than the motivation for it. Thus, children are often able to go into considerable detail about a *brogez* incident, but at the same time cannot recall what it was all about. Also, as one girl put it, "It starts with one reason but then, when they shout, they tell all the other reasons they have. They go: 'You did this to me and you did that to me, and you did this and you did that'."

The actual closing of a *brogez* sequence is ratified when the antagonists respond positively to the mediator's suggestions and agree to make *sholem*.[15]

Gradual Rapprochement. In the absence of mediators, the antagonists must rely on their own devices to effect a closing. This, again, is problematic as nobody wants to make the first conciliatory move, which is interpreted as a show of weakness: "Why should I be the first one to make *sholem?*" and "What am I, a sucker?" are typical responses, indicating the reluctance to initiate the peace process. The risk involved in making such a move is accentuated by the fact that, potentially, any peace gesture may be disdainfully rejected as the act of a 'fawning *chilba*' (*chilba mitxanefet*), or simply a "fawn." The institutionalized possibility of thus questioning the sincerity of any conciliatory act clearly compounds the difficulty of accomplishing a closing. Even my most eloquent informants could not enlighten me, or formulate for themselves, how they would determine whether the overtures of a *brogez* partner were sincere attempts at peacemaking or the empty gestures of a "fawn."

This supports my conclusion that, in contradistinction to openings, closings cannot be considered performative acts. For a state of *sholem* to be constituted, it must be ratified by both partners. There is nothing binding, or conventional, in the making of a peace offer, and it can always be rejected as *stam xanfanut* 'mere fawning'. Note that while the explicit *brogez* opening mentioned earlier is phrased "I am *brogez* with you," the comparable explicit *brogez* closing is phrased as "I want to be *sholem* with you." Thus, while anyone can constitute a state of *brogez*, thereby imposing the *brogez* interactional frame on another, any of the participants in it can prevent the *brogez* from being brought to a conclusion, thereby imposing its continuation on the *brogez* partner. These formal characteristics of *brogez* are important since they underline its serious, nonplaylike properties (despite the nonserious and frivolous characterization it is often accorded by adults). Given these properties, *brogez* does not fulfil two fundamental conditions of play as defined, for example, by Caillois (1961:6): "There is no doubt that play must be defined as a free and voluntary activity . . . it is necessary that they [the players] be free to leave whenever they please, by saying: 'I am not playing any more'." For at least one *brogez* partner (the noninitiator), the entry into a state of *brogez* is not strictly voluntary and, as

we have seen, neither of them can terminate a state of *brogez* singlehandedly by simply stating, "I am not playing any more."

Children accomplish unmediated closings either by using what I have labeled as the gradual rapprochement strategy or by employing ritualized forms. The first strategy, which presupposes a sophisticated understanding of the *brogez* interactional frame, is more common among the older children. Ritualized closings, like ritualized openings, are associated with the younger age-set.

The gradual rapprochement strategy can be described and understood only in relation to the first category of *brogez* sustaining acts discussed in the previous section – acts of avoidance which involve a suspension of ordinary communicative practices. The rapprochement consists of a gradual resumption of these practices until full communication is reinstated. Interestingly, while no sequential order could be discerned in children's suspension of interactional practices, the order in which they are resumed points to their relative interactional weight. Nonverbal signals of interactional involvement are the first to be resumed, for example, proxemic cues such as standing next to the other in line, postural cues such as facing the other (or not turning away from him or her). These are considered very tentative attempts at feeling out the scene. If they are allowed to pass, that is, neither provoke a disagreeable response nor earn their initiator the label of a "fawn," thus establishing the readiness of both parties for *sholem*, more overt moves can be made. These include being attentive to the other's observed need (e.g., "If I see that she is looking around for a red crayon, I'll hand her one"), directly addressing one's *brogez* partner, joining him or her in a game, and so on. This may or may not be accompanied by a request "*rotze lehashlim?*" 'want to make *sholem?*"

Two forms of a rather coercive approach were mentioned which seem to be strategically introduced when the *brogez* child is not confident his or her partner is quite ready to make peace. One was the use of the phone, which was specifically mentioned as a way of inducing the other to engage in talk. Thus, a girl told about the way a *brogez* incident was terminated: "She lives right next door to me but she called me up on the phone anyway to ask if I wanted to come play with her. Even if I didn't want to make *sholem* I was already talking to her anyway because my Mom answered the phone and said 'it's for you', so we were already talking on the phone. So that was that." Another strategy mentioned was to go to the home of the *brogez* partner, counting on his or her unwillingness to forego the rules of hospitality. As one girl said: "If I go to her home she has no choice. She has to make *sholem*. What will she do? Throw me out?"

We see that despite the fact that one can delineate the overall pattern of the gradual rapprochement strategy, it requires the ability to make rather subtle strategic choices and to respond appropriately to interactional feedback. Thus, it is interactionally more complex than any of the other strategies both in that it presupposes an elaborate conception of the *brogez* frame and it utilizes an elaborate, less standardized, communicative repertoire.

Ritualized Closings. Younger children invariably associate *sholem* with ritualized closing procedures. These typically follow an explicit question such as "*rotze lehashlim?*" 'want to make *sholem?*' or a suggestion "*bo nashlim*" 'let's make *sholem*'. Older children are familiar with this closing pattern but regard it as "babyish," as in the case of ritualized openings. Some of these closings are simply the reversal of the acts employed as ritualized opening acts. While the upturned thumb signals *brogez,* the upturned little finger signals *sholem.* This gesture is often accompanied by the chant *sholem, sholem le'olam* ('forever'), *brogez, brogez af pa'am* ('never') – a reversed version of the chant employed in initiating the state of *brogez.* At times the renewed contact is symbolized by interlocking the little fingers. Such interlocking may be accompanied by joint singing of the following rhymed chant:

zeret, zeret leshalom
little finger, little finger for peace
kol hariv haja xalom
the whole fight was a dream

An interesting ritual device reported by some of the children as a closing act involved the cooperative drawing of a Star of David figure in such a manner that each line is drawn by one of the *brogez* partners alternating in turn (the first line may be drawn by the mediator who helped terminate the *brogez*). Notably, this, as well as the other symbolic acts included in *brogez* closings, must be executed with a maximum of mutual participation and role equality, symbolizing the fact that a social condition of direct reciprocity has been reestablished.

Not all children were familiar with all these ritualized forms, which suggests that the grammar of *brogez* has several dialectal variations and that there may be other localized ritual forms that have simply not been encountered in the course of this study. The underlying pattern, however, remains the same.

The above findings can be conveniently summarized in Table 1.

We have moved from a consideration of the interactional context in which *brogez* episodes are embedded (in the preceding section) to a consideration of their internal structure in this section. We will conclude our discussion by elaborating on the social uses of *brogez* as a speech event.

THE SOCIAL USES OF *BROGEZ*

Conflict regulation

The major function of *brogez* is a regulative one – it functions as a standardized interactional mechanism for the regulation of conflicts among Israeli children. As such, it allows for both the expression and the containment of aggression. Fox's (1977) discussion of "the inherent rules of violence" is enlightening in this connection. Taking the case of Tory men fighting patterns as his point of departure, he argues that men "try to ritualize combat between members of the same community, much as animals do" (145), and that the principle of ritualiza-

TABLE 1. *Features of* brogez

Brogez phase	Strategy[a]	Contextual features
Preopenings	—Interaction-related retorts	Directly following dispute
	—Accusation	FTA not part of immediate context
Openings	—Ritualized openings:	
	formulaic chant	Younger children
	upturned thumb	
	—Explicit *brogez* declaration	
	—Withdrawal	Older children
Sustaining acts	—Nonavailability/unfriendliness signals:	
	not playing	Younger children
	not sharing toys	
	not talking, etc.	
	avoiding eye-contact	Older children
	not naming	
	maintaining proxemic distance, etc.	
	—Hostility displays:	
	cursing	
	obscene gestures	
	gossiping/inciting against	Older children
Preclosings	—Mediation	Older children, third-party initiated, preferred
	—Gradual rapprochement	Self-initiated
	—Explicit peace offering	Younger children
Closings	—Verbalized or implied consent to make peace	Older children
	—Ritualized closings:	
	formulaic chant	Younger children
	upturned little finger	

[a]Unless age or other context differentiation is indicated, these strategies may be either jointly or alternatively employed. In such cases, strategic choices seem to be mainly a matter of individual style.

tion is no less primeval than the principle of combat. He notes that Tory fights are never unstructured and that for him, as an anthropologist, they took on "the air of a ritual ballet; it was all choreographed, seemingly rehearsed, stereotyped" (p. 144).

My experience with *brogez*, as both observed and talked about, had a similar flavor, and I believe that the study of *brogez* clearly supports Fox's contention that fighting is ritualized "so that status competition can take place without anyone getting too badly hurt" (p. 145). Let me dwell on this for a moment. That status competition and social control are indeed at issue in the enactment of *brogez* was made particularly clear by children's responses to the question as to who they would not consider making *brogez* with. It emerged that a child who was far beyond one's social sphere, either much more or much less popular (*mekubal*, literally 'accepted') than oneself was not considered a natural candidate as a *brogez* partner. One reason is simply technical: Reduced contact reduces the occasions for conflict. But it was not only that. Specifically probing

children about making *brogez* with a marginal member of the group, I got replies like: "With her? What will I gain by it?" (*ma jetze li mize?*). Similarly, preadolescent girls and boys tended to rule each other out as candidates for *brogez* as they live in different social worlds, each with its own "pecking order."

The practice of inciting group members into joining one's side in a *brogez* incident, which was mentioned in the previous section, is motivated by a direct association between the size of one's following and one's perceived status within the group. Children both implicitly and explicitly recognize the dynamics involved. Thus, a ten-year-old girl told me she had made *sholem* with another child, remarking: "I saw that all the other girls were going to her side, so what's the point." Similarly, children are aware that *brogez* can take the form of a social contest between two powerful members of the group, especially girls, in their struggle for leadership. These incidents are typically said to be motivated by jealousy: "*hi kinta ba shehi malkat hakita*" 'she was jealous of her for being the class queen'. The important point to note here is that *brogez* does not only reflect status relations, but is also used as an interactional resource to challenge social status on some occasions and to consolidate it on others, to chart and rechart the social map.

Children are, furthermore, aware of the role of *brogez* in containing conflicts. This came out clearly in discussions of gender-related differences associated with *brogez*. Both sexes displayed detailed familiarity with the *brogez* script, but both boys and girls remarked that it was more a girls' affair and that boys often got into physical fights where girls would have declared *brogez*. The many instances of *brogez* involving boys that I have recorded suggest that this should not be taken to mean that boys do not engage in *brogez* but, rather, that, like other verbal activities such as gossip and secret sharing, *brogez* is associated with female behavior.

The important point for our present discussion is that *brogez* and fighting are conceptualized as alternative strategies for resolving conflicts in the social world of Israeli children. However, while *brogez* is considered as a mechanism which helps contain conflicts, fighting, however ritualized, always threatens to get out of hand.

It should be noted that the kind of interactional disengagement entailed in *brogez* is not universally considered a form of conflict resolution. For example, Kochman (1981:58–59) stresses that "blacks consider the danger of violence as greater when people are not communicating with each other than when they are, no matter how loud, angry, or abusive their arguments may become."

The manipulation of brogez *episodes*

Older children are aware of the social implications of *brogez*. Moreover, their *brogez* stories include incidents which clearly manifest manipulative uses of *brogez* as a social form. Most typically, these involve stories of rivalry among two girls (much more so than boys) who compete for a leadership position in

class. The competition involves repeated challenges which take the form of *brogez*. These *brogez* incidents differ subtly in tone from the ones described earlier. They readily become group affairs, are somewhat more impersonal in tone, and tend to fall into repetitive patterns involving the same groups of children.

Children's overall conception of *brogez* as an interactional episode can perhaps be best captured by exploring the distinctions they draw between *brogez* incidents they refer to with such epithets as "*brogez gadol*" ('big') or "*brogez retsini*" ('serious') on the one hand, and "brogez katan" ('small') or "brogez shtuti" ('nonsensical') on the other. Children spontaneously used these descriptions in discussing *brogez* episodes they had taken part in. I therefore tried to probe more systematically into the criteria they use for judging, "Wow, that was a big *brogez*" or for saying, "No, that *brogez* was just nonsense. I'll give you a better example."

The following criteria have emerged as significant in children's characterization of *brogez* incidents. Of course, they are not intended to provide a way to 'compute' the seriousness of *brogez* episodes but, rather, to suggest the kinds of considerations which enter children's assessment of them:

1. *Length of time* – *Brogez* incidents may last from several minutes to several months, but typically take a day or two. The longer period of time, the more serious the *brogez* is perceived to be.

2. *Degree of personalization* – The more personalized the *brogez* is felt to be, the more serious it is. This relates to the kind of cursing which preceded the onset of *brogez;* "hard curses," it will be remembered, tend to be more personal and, thus, more injurious.

3. *Persistence* – When partners to the brogez persist in their refusal to respond to their peers' mediating efforts, the *brogez* is felt to be particularly serious. Their friends, who usually have some control over the events in their role as mediators, are here denied this influential role.

4. *Number of children involved* – On the one hand, the involvement of many children in a *brogez* episode tends to make it a serious affair, particularly when it risks adult intervention; on the other hand, it renders it less personal.[16]

When *brogez* episodes are socially manipulated to test one's social standing, or challenge another's, they combine features of "big" and "small" *brogez* incidents: They tend to involve many children and stretch over relatively long periods of time. Mediation efforts, if there are any, tend to be ineffective. These qualities would make it a "big" *brogez* by most of the above criteria, and yet the relatively less personal air of these exchanges gives them a gamelike quality. I have recorded several comments about *brogez* incidents involving a large portion of the speaker's school class, which included an apparently contradictory statement such as "it was a very big *brogez* but it was all nonsense anyway." *Brogez* incidents which involve deep personal feelings are never described as nonsensical.

Finally, let me note that since the manipulation of *brogez* episodes must be predicated on a thorough understanding of the script underlying *brogez*, it is not surprising that this use of *brogez* has not been encountered in either the behavior or the accounts of the younger children.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The foregoing discussion has sought to delineate the structure and functions of the social-linguistic institution of *brogez* as it figures in the life and talk of Israeli children.

The *brogez* episode has been argued to function on two levels. On one level, it serves to regulate children's conflicts by giving participants a spell of "time out" in which hostilities and tensions are dealt with through ritually constrained interactional channels. These include a mechanism for achieving reconciliation in the form of consensually produced *brogez* termination acts, which lead to a state of *sholem*. On another level, though, the *brogez* episode can itself be manipulated, generating conflicts which serve as dynamic testing grounds for the social organization of the group, for assessing individuals' leadership as well as loyalty potential.

Fox (1977:146) suggests that ritualization of conflicts tends to occur "in any sort of 'steady state' situation, in any situation where animals or men have to live together as a group . . ." The social world of Israeli children, which is generally characterized by a strong emphasis on group cohesion and conformity, seems to be a good example of such a "steady state" situation where one would expect conflict to be ritualized so that aggression can be handled without disrupting the social order.

As the analysis of *brogez* indicated, the emphasis on ritualization by no means implies that children mechanically follow preestablished routines. The *brogez* script itself includes many "decision points" which require the ability to assess the interactional situation in subtle ways as well as to respond creatively to it. It is part of Israeli children's social knowledge and is acquired with age. A better understanding of it, therefore, can lead to a better appreciation of children's changing communicative resources.

With reference to *brogez*, preschool children were found to differ qualitatively from older children in their understanding of the episode: 1) They contrast *brogez* with friendliness rather than with the more abstract structural notion of social availability. This has direct implications for the kinds of actions which form part of their *brogez* scripts. 2) They rely heavily on *brogez* bracketing devices which are dropped by older children and replaced by subtler forms of strategic negotiation.

The teenagers interviewed for this study, while generally familiar with the patterns here described, were sometimes reluctant to even use the term *brogez* in describing their interpersonal conflicts. The strategy of cutting off communica-

tions is very common among them, too, but sheer nonresponsiveness and private gossiping have replaced most other sustaining acts, which, like the ritualized bracketing devices employed by the younger children, are labeled as "babyish."

Since the point of departure for this study was the metacommunicative term *brogez* itself, I have focused on what children refer to as the "*brogez* phase of the fight" and the ritualization attending it. Much of what I have documented is, therefore, complementary to rather than directly comparable in its descriptive detail with the studies of verbal disputes, verbal dueling, or "sounding" cited in the introduction. It may very well be that studies of verbal disputes or physical fights among Israeli children will reveal interesting patterns of coordination and ritualization, too. I would contend, however, that *brogez* provides the central script as well as the most compelling metaphor for conflict-related behavior in Israeli culture of childhood.

NOTES

1. Although *brogez* is explicitly associated with the world of childhood, the word is sometimes used by adults with reference to their own world, usually with humorous overtones, implying that the conflict is childish and trivial. This implication is retained even in the rarer cases in which *brogez* is used by adults in serious discussion. For example, following the July 1984 elections, a labor party politician publicly justified his party's consent to form a National Unity government by referring to the severe economic crisis the country was in, concluding: "These are no times to be playing at brogez." (*Yediot Axaronot* 28 July 84). When it occurs in the daily press, the word usually appears in inverted commas, which is the convention used for slang expressions (however, it is not listed in the *World dictionary of Hebrew slang* by Ben-Amotz & Ben-Yehuda, 1982). Let me note that children, too, may be heard to apply the label *brogez* to conflicts in the adult world, for example, talking about war or about divorce.

2. Corsaro (1981) discusses methodoligical issues associated with adults' entry into children's world.

3. As adults, we may be more attuned to the difficulties children have in recognizing signs of social nonavailability (Can't you see I'm busy?).

4. A comparable ethnographic exploration among Arab Bedouin children is underway. A pattern at least superficially similar to *brogez* has been identified which goes under the label of *mxarbak* 'being in a state of war'.

5. The use of accounts as a central methodological tool is urged in the writings of some proponents of the "new social psychology" (Harre & Secord 1972; Forgas [1979] contains both a description and a critique of this research). This approach has been applied in a number of studies of children's social world (e.g., Marsh, Rosser, & Harre 1978; Morgan, O'Neill, & Harre 1979). Saville-Troike (1982:245) comments on the paucity of studies utilizing interviewing as a research technique in the area of children's communication competence. I believe the macro unit of analysis considered here – a series of functionally related, often noncontiguous acts which have received a metacommunicative label within the culture – is relatively amenable to verbalization as the ethnographic interview probes "the limits of awareness."

6. This case seems even more problematic than Geertz's (1973) famous example of the wink, as it is not only a question of how to interpret a sign but also of determining what is to be interpreted.

7. The intensity and centrality of *brogez* incidents in the lives of children is probably responsible for the rather surprising fact that quite a number of adults were able (and more than willing) to volunteer detailed stories of *brogez* events they had experienced as children. At the same time, they were somewhat startled by my analytic treatment of this topic.

8. Over 150 children were consulted altogether with the help of university students, most of whom are practising teachers and/or parents. They are too many to mention by name, but I would like to thank all the individuals, young and old, who contributed to this project by supplying data, examples, and/or helpful discussions.

Some of the interviews were audio-recorded, but most were taken down in the form of fieldnotes. Given the open nature of the interviews, not all points were covered in all of them. I used all of the data at my disposal in a cumulative fashion, repeatedly drawing on my own as well as my students' fieldwork, gradually refining my interpretive account.

9. The notion of "script" has been applied in a number of studies concerned with various aspects of children's communication competence, which have followed a variety of research modes, for example, Mandler & Johnson's (1977) study of narrative competence and Nelson & Gruendel's (1979) study of children's dialogues.

10. Cf. Bateson (1972); Goffman (1974).

11. In order not to overburden the text, I have restricted direct citations of Hebrew examples to those cases in which they are phrased in formulaic or near-formulaic form. Other illustrative examples are given in their English translation.

12. Although, as its etymology indicates, *brogez* is intrinsically associated with anger, children noted that they would sometimes initiate "a fight that leads to *brogez*" without feeling angry, just to tease, but the cursing exchanges made everybody angry anyway.

13. There are some "dialectal" variations as far as the *brogez* rituals are concerned. Thus, not all children were familiar with the term *chilba*, a few used the word *xanupa* in its place, (same root as the word for 'fawn', *xanfanit*). While the role of the thumb and the little finger seems to be known to all, the Star of David closing ritual is not. A couple of rituals which were neither observed nor mentioned in our data have been brought to my attention by adults.

14. A study of Israeli children's gossiping and secret-sharing practices is in progress.

15. Third parties in the case of *brogez* actively interfere in the exchange: At one point they may seek to aggravate the situation by gossiping and inciting against the party they do not support, or they may try to resolve the situation by offering their services as mediators. In "sounding" (Labov 1972), third parties also participate actively but as audience and "referees" concerned with the disputants' level of performance.

16. The gravest *brogez*-related situation involves what is known as *xerem* 'ostracism' or 'excommunication', which is the whole group turned against one of its members. Several accounts of *xerem* which appear in my data involve children's resistance to accepting a new child or their decision to penalize a child for violating group norms. A *xerem* can be brought off only when it is organized by a child with strong leadership qualities and is very rare compared to *brogez* and infinitely more eventful. The theme in *xerem* shifts from that of dominance relations to the more basic issue of inclusion/exclusion, from a preoccupation with social hierarchy to the securing of social place.

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