Research on Language and Social Interaction
Vol. 22, 1988/89: 157-178

Haxlàfot: Rules and Strategies in Children's Swapping Exchanges

Tamar Katriel
University of Haifa

I. INTRODUCTION

Turner (1974) has pointed out two complementary directions in which one could proceed in attempting to apply a 'processual' approach to the study of social life: the study of social dramas and the study of social enterprises. In his own work, Turner has paid a great deal of attention to the processual unity of social drama, a unit of disharmonic, conflictual behavior, in whose unfolding fundamental aspects of society, which are normally overlaid by custom and the habits of daily interaction, are forced into the open. He stressed, however, that a proper study of group life should address the whole continuum of interaction within a group, including the less dramatic but no less important cooperative processual units of harmonic behavior, which he has dubbed "social enterprises." He characterized the nature and function of these analytic units as follows:

> Social dramas and social enterprises – as well as other kinds of processual units – represent sequences of social events, which, seen retrospectively by an observer, can be shown to have structure. Such 'temporal' structure, unlike atemporal structure (including 'conceptual', 'cognitive', and 'syntactical' structures), is organized primarily through relations in time rather than in space... In the intersubjective collective representations of the group one would discover 'structure' and 'system', 'purposive action patterns' and, at deeper levels, 'categorical frames'. These individual and group structures, carried in

> people's heads and nervous systems, have a steering function, a 'cybernetic' function, in the endless succession of social events, imposing on them the degree of order they possess, and, indeed, dividing processual units into phases. (Turner, 1974, pp. 35-36)

This characterization provides the general framework within which my ethnographic approach to the study of Israeli children's peer-group life has developed. Focusing on some natively 'named' and ritualized patterns of interaction that I had identified as central to the children's social life, I have attempted to delineate the processual structure and social functions of some conflictual patterns on the one hand (Katriel, 1985) and of some cooperative patterns on the other (Katriel, 1987). Of course, conflict and cooperation are not mutually exclusive social modalities: as Turner himself—following Simmel (1971)—points out, conflict can only proceed within a broader consensual fram. And as my own and other studies of cooperative conduct clearly indicate, cooperation does not exclude competition and conflictual moments. Thus, in constructing a mosaic of the social world of Israeli children as a communicatively constituted domain we must study both social dramas and social enterprises in a way that will be sensitive to both the conflictual and the cooperative elements in each of these processual frames.

Thus, like the study of Israeli children's sharing of treats in *xibùdim* (Katriel, 1987), the trading of collectibles in swapping exchanges (*haxlâfot*)[1] is an instance of a patterned social enterprise. In both cases, the symbolic materials employed are not words but things, which fits Turner's dictum that social enterprises are primarily economic in character. The objects children swap, like the words they exchange, are tools of social interaction, and children's engagement with them is both patterned and meaningful (cf., for example, Firth, 1973, and Leach, 1976, for general anthropological discussions of the communicative functions of nonverbal signs).

Being a distinctive part of peer-group culture, these interactional patterns provide a naturally occurring context for the enactment of symmetrical relations between children. As Youniss (1980) has persuasively argued, children's interactional experiences in contexts of relational symmetry provide a kind of social learning that simply

cannot be found in adult-child interactions. From an observer's point of view, the institutionalization of exchange in the semi-ritualized patterns of *xibùdim* and *haxlàfot* can serve as convenient clues to children's understanding of the fundamental idea of social exchange (Simmel, 1971).

Children's intense engagement in swapping activities, and the lively social commentary that attended them, was one of the first phenomena that caught my attention as I began to observe children's social exchanges in a middle-class town in Northern Israel. Having recognized the centrality of swapping collectible items in the lives of children during the year-long exploratory phase of the study (1980-1981), during which I kept note of the spontaneous stories and comments of the children I was observing, I then proceeded to explore the social institution of *haxlàfot* in greater detail. Clearly, children's swapping in *haxlàfot* does not cover all the trading Israeli children do, but rather refers to the stylized and ritualized patterns of trading collectibles that differ from the kinds of trading exchanges among children described, for example, by Mishler (1979) and Sluckin (1981).[2]

II. FORMS OF COLLECTING AMONG ISRAELI CHILDREN[3]

Children's collecting activities fall into two broad categories:

1. Faddish collecting, and
2. Long-term collecting.

The distinction between these forms of collecting can be inferred from the ways in which children engage with their collections, but a couple of the children consulted also elaborated on it in discussing the differences between 'eternal collections' (*osafim nitshi'im*), and 'faddish collections' (*osafim ofnati'im*). Let us briefly consider the differences between these two forms of collecting:

A. Faddish Collecting

Faddish collecting tends to be peer-oriented and highly transient. It generally involves a great deal of swapping conducted in public spaces. Very different types of collectible items can provide the materials for this form of collecting: various commercially produced cards (such as "Garbage Pail Kids"), stationery paper, stickers, etc. As children are well aware, although these items are definitely 'child-marked', serving to demarcate a distinctive domain of peer-group activity, such important features as the rarity of a particular item – which affects its market-value for swapping – are adult-controlled.

Children often start the faddish form of collecting through imitation of other children, and as a move towards social participation: "I saw the children were collecting these cards so I wanted to collect also." They are strongly motivated by a desire to "be like everybody else," or "be in" (*'lihjot ba'injanim'*, in native terms). Involvement in these collections is sometimes gender and age marked. Some items (e.g., paper napkins) tend to be collected mainly by girls "because they are more tender," according to the stock-account volunteered by the male informants. Other items, such as pocket-knives, we were informed, "belong to boys." The most faddish collections at the time of the study, such as stickers and commercial cards, tended to be shared by boys and girls alike. A child may outgrow his or her collection, come to consider it 'babyish', at which point it is often passed on to a younger sibling, relative or neighbor.

B. Long-term Collecting

The long-term, more stable form of collecting tends to involve items, such as stamps and coins, which are not specifically child-marked, and are often found in adult collecting as well. Children frequently begin to collect such items through the active encouragement and assistance of parents or older siblings rather than through the influence of their peers. These collections are assembled in a more sustained fashion than the faddish collecting described earlier. The

swapping associated with this form of collecting tends to be less of a public affair, and is generally centered around the home. Interestingly, my data indicate that although participants in these trading sessions are usually friends, these swapping sessions tend to be remarkably task-oriented. Their business-like air is only minimally tempered by the delight the children take in showing off their holdings and in appreciating each other's collection.

Finally, let me note that whereas a great deal of secondary play activity is found in relation to faddish collectibles (e.g., competitive games), no such activity has been observed or reported in relation to long-term collecting. In these, other dimensions of the collecting experience, however, become more salient, e.g., the opportunities it gives for interaction with family members, the sense of continuity and growth the collection provides, and the element of aesthetic appreciation it involves.[4]

In what follows I will focus on three forms of interactional activity that children associate with collecting: swapping (*haxlàfot*), the formation of partnerships (being *shùtaf*), and games involving collectible items. Notably, by taking children's interactional activities as the point of departure for this inquiry rather than the ways in which objects are organized into a collection (Stewart, 1984; Danet & Katriel, 1988), much of my attention has been drawn away from the core of the collection as a system of objects, and has gone to children's engagement with those dispensable, surplus items, the 'spares' that are actually exchanged and played with.

Taking an 'emic' perspective, I have tried to uncover the cultural logic that underlies children's collecting activities. My questions have been: What communication practices are typical of children's peer-related collecting experiences, and in what ways does children's immersion in the tangible language of social objects instruct them about the semantics of social life? The following account of *haxlàfot* exchanges, *shùtaf* arrangements, and playful engagements with collectible items is an attempt to respond to these queries.

The basic rules for swapping are the same for the two forms of collecting described earlier, but become socially more elaborate in the context of the dynamic swapping exchanges and playful activities associated with 'faddish' collecting. In developing this account,

I have been attentive to what Turner (1977) has termed the "exegetical meanings" of these communicative practices, i.e. the meanings assigned to them by the children themselves, as well as to their "operational meanings," i.e., the meanings that could be inferred from observing their activities. I will conclude with some remarks conceming the 'positional' meanings attending swapping exchanges, i.e., their relationship to other types of social enterprises found in Israeli childhood culture, especially in the context of *xibùdim* exchanges (Katriel, 1987).

III. SWAPPING EXCHANGES IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL LIFE

The central place that swapping occupies in children's collecting world can be gleaned not only from their ongoing trading activities, but also from the way they conceptualize their involvement in them. Some children's comments clearly indicated that for them 'collecting' and 'swapping' were near-equivalents.

Most children cite the social participation afforded by the give-and-take that attends collecting, and especially the fun of swapping, as a major reason to cultivate a collection. A twelve year old girl explained her decision to start collecting stationary paper in simple terms: "I saw kids were collecting and I wanted to, too." An eleven year old boy who collects "Garbage Pail Kids" cards explained: "I see kids playing with them and I don't want to be different." At the same time, risking his friends' disapproval, he insisted that they were stupid nonsense, to which one of them responded, saying: "It's not nonsense; it's being in." A ten year old boy expounded: "I prefer to collect things that all the kids collect because this way I can swap for things I don't have, and this is a great part of the fun. Otherwise, it would be boring." A nine year old girl expressed her belief that "most children want to collect what others have so that they can show others and swap with others", and a ten year old girl simply said: "In my spare time I love to swap. It causes me to have more friends." And an eight year old girl responded to the question if she knew anyone who collected something nobody else did, responded in a puzzled tone: "Why would they collect something if they couldn't swap it?"

Collecting items other children collect does not seriously hamper the sense of specialness which surrounds one's collection. As in the case of adult collectors, the child's close familiarity with his or her collection, memories of the way each item had been acquired, the work put into organizing and arranging the items, all produce an attachment to the collection as a form of personal expression. Participating in the peer-group collecting world balances two contradictory pulls – the pull towards social integration and the pull towards individuation. A similar balance can also be achieved within the family context. Since the family usually supports the child's collecting activity, the recognition of the child's distinctive interests within the multi-generational family unit serves both an affiliative and an individuating function. As we shall see, the theme of affiliation (experienced as a desire to engage in shared activity), and the theme of individuation (experienced as the force of personal desire and calculated utility) are complexly articulated in children's collecting and swapping exchanges.

The following analysis will focus on the norms that regulate participation in children's swapping exchanges, including the formation and working of partnerships, on their interactional form and sequencing, and on the ritualization or suspension of the sense of finality that attends the conclusion of a swapping deal.

A. Norms of participation

Interestingly, there is relatively little social discrimination in choosing collecting partners for the 'faddish' collections. Many children say they swap with kids they don't know: "Older, younger, anybody who has a card I need," in the words of a twelve year old boy. In observing children swapping in our village center, I have often heard them addressing each other with the customary form of addressing a child one does not know: "Kid, show me what you've got" (*Yeled, tar'e ma jesh lexa*). Following this opener, the child addressed pulls out a pack of cards and shows them to the inquirer, usually running them expertly through his or her fingers. It is also not unusual to see a six or seven year old child swapping cards with

youngsters twice his or her age. The easy access children have to a variety of potential partners in swapping exchanges stands out in particular if we take into account the fact that Israeli children's social life generally tends to be restricted to same-age peers, and, even more specifically, to members of one's school class (cf., Katriel & Nesher, 1986). The exchange patterns involved in *xibùdim*, in contradistinction, reinforce the privileging of the school class as the primary social unit.

Children usually claim that, as far as swapping is concerned "it makes no difference if he is a friend or not," in the words of a thirteen year old boy. Whereas the rules or exchange associated with *xibùdim* do not apply to close friend relations (for which equal sharing is the norm). In swapping exchanges, generally speaking, the ordinary patterns of holistic interactions and personal or group loyalties are suspended. Criteria of utility and self-interest are given precedence, although here and there such humanitarian feelings are cited as "taking pity" on a child who badly wants to swap a particular item, or the prerogative of a close friend to be offered a rare item in swapping. The unrestricted participation in *haxlàfot* thus goes hand in hand with the limited relational scope required for their enactment.

Despite the basic pattern of open participation in swapping exchanges, there are some considerations that mitigate against swapping with particular categories of children. Thus, the fear of being cheated causes some children to avoid swapping with children they don't know, or with older children who might take advantage of them. Also, the institution of *xaràtot* (regrets), which allows one to annul an exchange (see later), is workable only when children are in continuing contact. Finally, in those cases in which there is gender specialization in the kinds of items collected, the social 'mapping' of the swapping scene is accordingly affected. Since swapping exchanges are so common in children's lives, they do not only reflect but also crucially reinforce gender differentiation.

Participation in swapping exchanges establishes one's reputation as a potentially 'available' swapping partner in a general way, and also gives others an opportunity to assess the scope and value of one's holdings. Once in the swapping circle, a child's participation is taken for granted, and only routinized, minimal initiating

gestures (see below) are required for a swapping exchange to be enacted. Interestingly, alongside the rules that regulate children's participation in swapping exchanges, there evolved a playful activity which permits a child to dramatize his or her categorical renunciation of "availability" as a partner. Children speak about it as the game of "*ufi ufi*" (fly, fly). I've seen it only once, and at the time did not understand what was going on: a boy climbed a slightly raised rock at the corner of the playground area, and started throwing his "Garbage Pail Kids" cards in all directions. The other children ran quickly towards him and scrambled to catch as many cards as they could, at times fighting bitterly over a card. It was later explained to me that this 'game' is initiated by a child who is tired of collecting, and wants to give up on the whole thing. The game of 'ufi ufi' is clearly a complete reversal of children's ordinary collecting activities. It is a grand gesture of disengagement, countering the careful, systematic and sometimes obsessive pursuit of collectible items with a public, highly dramatic gesture of release, a celebration of disorder. At the same time, it is still in the mode of participation in the world of collecting, as the child's holdings are re-infused into the others' collections, and his or her disengagement revitalizes the collecting scene by triggering frantic demonstrations of the collecting spirit among those who rush to catch the dispersed cards. '*Ufi ufi*' is thus not only a mechanism for the suspension of participation but also an ironical meta-communicative statement on collecting as a social enterprise.

B. Partnerships

Children may begin their collecting career by being *shùtaf* (in a state of partnership) with an elder sibling. These familial partnerships provide a supportive context for children's initiation into the world of collecting. Being *shùtaf* involves shared ownership and identification with the collection, though the preferential status of the older sibling is usually maintained (e.g., it is he or she who will do the swapping). Then, as they become full-fledged, independent collectors, the youngsters sometimes form more symmetrical partnerships

with their peers. Many of the children interviewed had some experience with partnerships, and were willing to discuss their advantages and disadvantages with relish.

Listening to this talk, one can discern differences in the spirit and functions of these partnerships – some are more utilitarian and some more affiliative in spirit, although both business and relationship are cultivated to some extent in each given case. In what follows I delineate the interactional patterns associated with the formation and the maintenance as well as the breakup of partnerships.

When the *shùtaf* is predominantly utilitarian in spirit it is primarily motivated by considerations of expediency, i.e. by the recognition that two people can do better than one. In the words of a seven year old boy: "It's worth it (*kedai*) to be *shùtaf* with my brother because I get stickers more quickly and I also have a lot of spares." And a twelve year old boy acknowledged this principle and boasted: "A lot of kids wanted to shùtaf with me because they heard that I knew how to get cards."

This kind of partnership presupposes a comparable starting point as far as the partners' initial holdings are concerned. Comments about a (usually young) kid who had very few collectible items of a particular kind, and yet approached another child who had many more with an offer of partnership are made with a chuckle, and have become a standard joke. Such partnerships are only possible within the family. A seven year old boy expressed the problematics associated with forming partnerships in qualitative, not only quantitative terms: "It is hard to find a new *shùtaf* because you have to check what he has and see if it's worthwhile being his *shùtaf*."

The initial symmetry is expected to be maintained as long as the *shùtaf* is in effect: each child expects the other to invest as much effort and money (where applicable) as he or she does. In each case, some arrangements are made so that each child can actualize his or her ownership over the collection: usually, the integrity of the collection is maintained and it is in the home of one partner for one or two weeks, and then moves to the other's home for the same amount of time. A couple of cases were reported in which one partner kept half the collection, and the other kept the other half, and they arranged to meet regularly at a particular spot. These matters are

negotiated before the decision to form a partnership is made. For example, I've observed a child make an offer to another, saying "Want to be *shùtaf*?", and the child approached replied, "*Tov, aval bitnai shebashavua harishon etsli*" (OK, but on condition that the first week it's by me), trying to get something out of his bargaining position.

It is generally believed that partnerships are a precarious affair, that they are likely to lead to quarrels and eventually to break up. One source of tension is the rule that both partners have to agree to each swapping deal, and if one performs badly at swapping, the other may be annoyed. A ten year old boy said: "There are children who fight and hit (*holxim makot*) because the *shùtaf* swapped a card they didn't have two of." A feeling that the symmetry has been upset may be cause for tension as well. A twelve year old boy illustrated the problems that *shùtaf* can cause, referring specifically to card games: "One claims that he wins more and therefore he should keep the collection in his house longer, and he says: 'I've done more and I should have the cards longer. And you're losing all the time and if you weren't *shùtaf* with me then you would lose everything.' And so they fight, and there are problems."

Sooner or later, such problems lead to the breakup of the partnership. Children are forever attuned to this possibility. Some keep close track of who added what to the collection and when the *shùtaf* breaks up "each one takes what he has brought," as goes the near-formulaic expression. Another strategy has been reported by a ten year old girl, who said that she and her partner in a stationery paper collection "kept two of each type of item in case we want to divide up the collection." If none of these precautions have been taken, the standard solution is to "divide it half and half, and fight all the time who takes what," as an eleven year old girl put it. One seven year old boy presented a rather self-serving strategy: "If I stop collecting with *shùtaf* then I'll take the stickers and I'll give the doubles to the *shùtaf*." His older brother jeered at this, saying that he could not get away with it ("*lo jelex lexa*"). The symmetry, it appears, needs to be maintained throughout.

For some children the establishment of a partnership is a by-product of close friendship relations between them. A twelve year old boy described such a partnership: "I'm good friends with S. and

we spend a lot of time together, so we thought perhaps we'll be *shùtaf*." In these cases, the joint care of a collection both affirms and fosters close friendships, and the spirit that governs them differs from the businesslike spirit that governs the more utilitarian partnerships described earlier.

C. Performing *Haxlàfot*

Whether swapping takes place in chance encounters, or whether it takes place in the semi-institutionalized context of the school-yard or village center where children congregate for the explicit purpose of swapping, it involves the enactment of a largely recognized pattern of activity, and serves as an interactional locus in which children's interests and passions can be articulated.

The children often leave their core collection at home, and carry around only their spares, holding and fondling them rather conspicuously, so that others will consider them potential swapping partners. Such signals of a child's participation in the peer-group collecting world, however, do not yet guarantee that he or she will be interested in swapping on a given occasion. A child's readiness to swap needs to be further advertised, or negotiated. The swapping scene is inhabited not only by swapping partners, but also by onlookers who serve important functions as audience and referees. Children thus move in and out of their roles as swapping partners in an unproblematic way, maintaining their active participation on the swapping scene. Despite the fluidity of the scene, however, a consistent reluctance to swap on the part of a potential swapping partner may give rise to either speculation or outright consternation, or both. A thirteen year old girl, for instance, said: "A kid who comes with the collection and doesn't want to swap, it's a sign that he has very beautiful and valuable things. I will envy him and I won't pay any attention to him, I won't talk to him, and perhaps we'll gossip about him." Similar disapproval was expressed by a thirteen year old boy: "There are kids who don't like to swap or to tell that they've got spares, and we call them 'misers' (*kamtsanim*)." The only somewhat benevolent interpretation of a child's consistent refusal to take part in swapping

exchanges was a reference to the fear of cheating, which is more pronounced among the younger kids. A ten year old boy explained: "Kids who are afraid to be cheated only by cards."

Once they are enacted, the unfolding of swapping episodes manifests an underlying pattern of interactional regularity. The sequential organization of swapping exchanges can be described as a five-phase episodic sequence. Each of the phases is analytically distinguished by its episodic function: (1) initiation/invitation phase; (2) acceptance/display phase; (3) bargaining phase; (4) finalization phase; (5) appraisal phase. Let us consider these phases one by one:

1. *Initiation/Invitation Phase*

As noted, one's desire to initiate a swapping exchange is usually signalled expicitly. A ten year old boy thus described the swapping scene as follows: "We swap at school and in the neighborhood. Everyone walks around with the pack of cards in their hands and asks the kids if they want to swap." The more generalized bids for engaging in swapping are often formulated as "Want to swap?" or "Show me what you've got." These have the advantage of not disclosing what one is after since, as a seasoned thirteen year old boy explained, "it is better not to let the other kid know that there is a card that you want, because then he'll pretend he is not really sure he wants to swap it, or that he promised to swap it with his friends, and he'll make you beg and beg and then ask for a lot of cards in exchange. Believe me, I have already made this mistake." But when a child is hunting for a particular item, moving impatiently from one group to the other, the opener typically used is "Have you got x?"

2. *Acceptance/Display Phase*

A favorable response to a generalized invitation to swap often takes the form of the kids displaying their holdings so that they can "see if there is something that is worth swapping," as a ten year old girl explained. This phase of the swapping exchange involves the display and appreciation of the partners' exchangeable holdings. These mutual display sessions clearly serve as foci for the dissemination

of social information concerning who has what, and help children build a reputation around the ownership of impressive items. No less significantly, however, they serve as contexts for the articulation, as well as the alignment of personal tastes. A twelve year old collector of stationery paper described an instance of successful alignment as follows: "I want to swap and I say 'See how beautiful it is', and the other kid says 'Yes, it's beautiful' so we decide that it's valuable."

3. Bargaining Phase

It is at this point that negotiation and bargaining come in, as decisions concerning the relative value of the items exchanged have to be made. Although for some items there are general guidelines for determining value, based on such diverse criteria as rarity, size, or visual attractiveness, there is often quite a bit of room for interpersonal negotiation. Moreover, the value of an item is as much a product of the negotiation process as a determinant of it, since the assessment of worth is made on the basis of observations of other swapping exchanges, through ongoing participation in the world of childhood collecting.

Children clearly distinguish between the socially regulated assessments of value, and the subjective desire for a particular item, which has its obvious cost in bargaining situations. An eight year old girl expressed it thus: "If there is something that somebody wants very much then he will give a lot for it, and if it's nothing special then it's one for one." Children may coax and manipulate each other, sometimes pretending they don't want to swap so as to raise the 'price' even further. An eleven year old boy said coaxing might help: "If he doesn't want to swap a particular card, you offer him several cards for that card or you even start to flatter him. Sometimes it helps and sometimes it doesn't."

Practice at swapping seems to generate a measure of flexibility, so that rigidity in bargaining is considered a sign of immaturity. In one case I observed, a first grader became fixated on a card he wanted to get, and roamed around whining its name. Showing his cards around, it turned out that he had a card that one of the older boys wanted very badly. However, he would not swap it for anything

but the particular card he himself wanted, refusing to compromise although he was being offered several cards he didn't have. The older boy tried to coax him, leaving him in exasperation and coming back again, and finally shouted in anger: "You're a baby, you don't know how to swap."

One of the things that struck me most in observing children's swapping exchanges was that they were rarely a dyadic affair. It is clear that children like to watch others bargain and swap, and they keep track of "interesting" exchanges, whose recounting becomes part of the group's lore. Thus, on different occasions, several children independently told me rather dramatically of the kid who was so desperate to get a particular card that he paid eighty-six cards for it. The audience, however, is not passive, but plays an active role in the proceedings as both consultants and referees.[5] The role of the onlookers is acknowledged in such labels as *hamamlitzim* (the referees), who may either act in good faith or give deliberately misleading advice (in which case they may be called *jo'atsei sheker*, false advisers). A twelve year old girl described the advisers' role as follows: "If a kid wants to swap some stationery papers and doesn't want to pay so much for them, so they argue, and immediately somebody comes that will help to judge if it's really worth it. Sometimes he is for one side, so he'll persuade the other side to agree." A ten year old girl said she would decide about swapping "according to whether it is valuable, and also I ask the kids if it's worth it. When we swap, all the kids gather around me and want to say if it's worth it." Opinions may, however, be divided, in which case, according to a ten year old boy, "the majority decides. If, say, five kids say that that one is valuable and ten kids say that the other one is valuable, then the majority decides."

4. Finalizing Phase

Having concluded a swapping exchange is not the last word on it. There is still the question of how final the deal really is. What if a child comes to regret it? What if he or she finds that they were rash, and, in the heat of the moment, confused by the often conflicting advice of the onlookers, made a bad deal? Perhaps in

recognition of the precariousness of the swapping situation, an institutionalized way has evolved in Israeli child culture to either finalize or allow for the annulment of swapping deals. Having swapped an item, one can quickly announce either "*bexaràtot*" (with regrets) or "*bli xaràtot*" (without regrets). This term is exclusively and very commonly used for the context of swapping among children, although morphological or lexical variants have also appeared in the data, e.g. *im/bli hitxartujot* (from the same root-stem), or *im/bli axzàrot* (with/without returns).

In accounting for the institutionalized possibility of annulling a deal shortly after it has been concluded by declaring *bexaràtot*, children mention the need for safeguards in various situations. For example, when someone made a mistake and swapped an item he or she had no duplicate of; or, when a swapping deal was concluded and it then turned out that one item was damaged; or, when a kid recognizes that he or she has been carried away in the swapping exchange ("I came home and saw that I didn't like what I had swapped" is a sentence repeatedly heard in stories of bad deals). Given the varied circumstances in which flexibility is allowed by declaring 'with regrets', it is not surprising that it has become the interactionally unmarked option. Even when neither '*bexaràtot*' nor '*bli xaràtot*' is declared, a child still may be allowed to go back on a deal closely following its conclusion. The question as to whether a deal made can be revoked then becomes one of timing, goodwill and interpersonal negotiation.

The employment of the verbal formulas *bexaràtot/bli xaràtot* is marked by a magical flavor as well as a strong sense of manipulability. Children testified that they would be quick to finalize a swapping exchange if they felt they were getting a particularly good deal, especially when the other was unaware of the real worth of the items he or she was swapping. In the words of a ten year old boy: "The side that feels that the deal is very worthwhile will declare '*bli xaràtot*' (without regrets). If they hesitate they will say '*im xaràtot*' (with regrets)".

Some kids claim that the announcement of *bli xaràtot* has a thoroughly finalizing force, and a ten year old boy even claimed that having declared "*bli xaràtot*" (without regrets), he would not be

required to return an item even if it turned out that he had cheated! Other children, however, concede the force of personal pressure even in the face of this finalizing ritual statement. An eight year old boy said: "We have something called *'bli axzàrot'* (without returns). If somebody says *'bli axzàrot'* then nothing can help, only if the other kid cries." A nine year old girl said: "If I swapped and the friend says *'bli axzàrot'* then I cannot regret it. Sometimes I beg and I get it back."

In some places the finalizing ritual is more elaborate, and takes the form of a magical chant accompanied by a manual gesture of touching something (a piece of clothing or object) that's red in color in the child's vicinity. It is chanted in full or in part, and the young children I've heard using it rather expertly could say nothing more but that it means *"bli hitxartujot"* (without regrets). It runs as follows:

> *bli axzàrot / lexol haxà'im / nagati ba'adom / uvxol kadur ha'aretz / bli sòref xùkim / nagati ba'adom / uvxol kadur ha'aretz* (without returns / for all life / I've touched the red / and the whole planet / without burning rules / I've touched the red / and the whole planet).

5. *Appraisal Phase*

Having served as consultants during the bargaining phase, the onlookers' commentary following the conclusion of the deal serves an appraisal function. Not only the deal as a whole but also the swappers' performance is judged. One can hear supportive comments such as *"haja lexa kedai"* (it was worth it); or biting remarks, such as *"freier"* (a sucker) or a taunting *"avdu alexa"* (you have been taken). It seems to me that the onlookers' involvement serves not only to keep the action going, but is also an instrument for socializing children into the criteria of value and the norms for conduct associated with the performance of swapping.

Let me conclude this section by recapitulating the typical pattern of the sequential unfolding of an *haxlàfot* exchange in schematic form, employing the notation I have used in describing *brogez* exchanges (Katriel, 1985). The episode as a whole is placed within

episodic brackets (< ... >), and the finalizing and appraisal phases are in parentheses so as to indicate optionality. Thus:

< initiation – acceptance/display – bargaining – (finalizing) – (appraisal) >

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In describing and analyzing the rules and strategies associated by Israeli children with the social institution of *haxlàfot*, I have sought to delineate a particular experiential domain that is central to the childhood world I have been studying. Rather than taking a formal definition of collecting as my starting point, I have taken the children's lead and attended to the activities they referred to as collecting, as well as to the various activities they performed with collectible objects. It is clear that for children, much more so than for adults, collecting is a socially-centered experience, and that swapping exchanges as well as the games they play are not a by-product of their interest in the objects, but, at times, become almost the *raison d'être* of the whole enterprise.

Having delineated the communicative patterns associated with *haxlàfot* exchanges, as I have done with *brogez* and *xibùdim*, let me briefly try my hand at what Turner (1977) has called "positional analysis," sketching some of their interrelationships as culturally patterned social dramas and social enterprises. As they are operative in the same world of childhood, the *brogez* agonistic episodes and the *xibùdim* and *haxlàfot* cooperative episodes are socially distributed and interrelated in ways that disclose their differential as well as complementary sociocultural functions. Tracing the links between them, therefore, can take us beyond the insights afforded by the consideration of disparate cultural phenomena and can enable us to begin to appreciate the larger cultural configuration of communicative practices they form.

Generally speaking, social dramas mark interruptions in social enterprises, but, as is indicated by the interpenetration of *brogez* episodes on the one hand, and *xibùdim* and *haxlàfot* episodes on the

other, the relationship between them is more intricate than would be suggested by this image of mutual exclusion. Thus, the most intense cooperative efforts found in the context of childhood collecting, namely partnerships, are recognized as very likely to lead to fights that end in *brogez*, that is, in a state of non-communication which rules out the possibility of shared activity. Moreover, it turns out that much in the way that the rules of *xibùdim* can override the avoidance rules of *brogez*, in the sense that one's *brogez* partner when accidentally present is not ignored in the round of treats (Katriel, 1987), so the desire to engage in swapping with a *brogez* partner who happens to possess desirable items can motivate the cooling off of a *brogez* agonistic state. Several children explicitly said they would make *sholem* (peace) with a child in order to be able to swap with him or her (cf., Katriel, 1985, for a description of relevant peace-making procedures).

It is interesting to note the ways in which the rules of *xibùdim* and *haxlàfot* define culturally distinctive, but interrelated social enterprises. In children's actual experience, the rules of *xibùdim* and *haxlàfot* do not cross. Although both patterns deal with social exchange, the materials exchanged differ in kind: in *xibùdim* one exchanges 'consumables', whereas in *haxlàfot* one exchanges 'durables'. The difference between them, however, goes much further—it relates to the models of social exchange which underlie these two patterns. The exchange of treats in *xibùdim* follows a pattern of 'generalized reciprocity' (cf., Befu, 1977, p. 264), in which giving entails a diffuse obligation to reciprocate when necessary, and no attempt is made to maintain a precise balance of giving and getting. Giving, as it were, is directed to the group at large and is not fundamentally a matter of interpersonal relations, even when dyads are involved. Although children do in fact keep some track of their sharing of treats in *xibùdim*, only rather blatant or persistent breaches of the rules of sharing are noted and sanctioned. In *haxlàfot*, on the other hand, very close track is kept of what is being exchanged. Most deals are carefully concluded on the spot, and the notion of debt is invoked for those which are not. The effort to determine and negotiate the value of the items swapped is predicated on the desire to maintain 'balanced reciprocity' in each dyadic exchange (Befu, 1977, p. 264).

It appears, then, that by engaging in the ritualized patterns of *haxlàfot* and *xibùdim* children are socialized into complementary forms of exchange in a peer-group context of symmetrical social relations. As social enterprises, *xibùdim* exchanges provide daily opportunities for children to follow a pattern of generalized reciprocity, whereas *haxlàfot* episodes provide for interactional contexts governed by the rules of balanced reciprocity. In both types of socializing contexts, social learning occurs in which the brittle balance between the fulfillment of personal desires and the requirements of social participation is repeatedly dramatized. The social experiences provided by these childhood contexts of social exchange are both crucial since they concretize patterns of obligations and expectations that underlie much of social life. Therefore, let me suggest that in learning about social exchange as it relates to the tangible objects which populate their childhood world, children in fact learn important lessons about social interaction. The essential relationship between the concepts of interaction and of exchange has been pointed out by Simmel:

> Interaction is, to be sure, the broader concept, exchange the narrower one. In human relations, however, interaction generally appears in forms which lend themselves to being viewed as exchange. The ordinary vicissitudes of daily life produce a continuous alternation of profit and loss, and ebbing and flowing of the contents of life. Exchange has the effect of rationalizing these vicissitudes, through the conscious act of getting one for the other. (Simmel, 1971, p. 44)

Thus, in Israeli children's social relations, interaction often appears in the form of the concrete exchange of objects, whether these are 'consumables' as in *xibùdim* or 'durables' as in *haxlàfot*. It is partly through the language of objects (and its verbal accompaniments) that they acquire the rudiments of social interaction and practice its various forms. An ethnography of communication perspective, which acknowledges the multi-channeled nature of interactional exchanges, is thus required for a proper appreciation of the complex roles of both words and things in children's construction of their social life.

NOTES

1 The penultimate vocal stress in *haxlàfot* is a major marker of child register in spoken Hebrew (Katriel, 1986). Throughout the paper, wherever stress is given, it is a departure from adult usage.

2 Currently, the Hebrew version of the garbage pail kids (*xavurat hazevel*, the garbage gang) rules the market; additional imaginary card figures have included *dardasim* (Smurfs), *zarbuvim*, *dubonei ixpatli*, and others.

3 The analysis is based on 62 transcribed interviews with children aged 5 to 15, as well as on numerous casual conversations and observations of children in this age range (cf., Katriel, 1985, 1987, for further details concerning the research procedures). I am most grateful to all the children (and adults) who discussed childhood collecting with me, and to the many students in my Ethnography of Communication classes at the University of Haifa, who contributed to this study through interviewing and discussions.

4 The few studies that have dealt with children's collecting have employed a psychological framework (Burk, 1907; Whitley, 1929; Witty & Lehman, 1930). This paper adopts a folkloristic perspective on child culture (Sutton-Smith, 1982) as a route to understanding children's sociality as an assembly of situated practices.

5 Cf., Labov's 1972 account of the role of the audience in animating and evaluating performance in ritual insults among Black youths.

REFERENCES

Befu, H. (1977). Social exchange. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 6*, 255-281.

Burk, C.F. (1907). The collecting instinct. In G. Stanley Hall (Ed.), *Aspects of child life and education* (pp. 205-239). Boston: Ginn.

Danet, B. & Katriel, T. (1988). *No two alike: On the aesthetics of collecting*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Society for the Anthropology of Play, San Francisco.

Firth, R. (1973). *Symbols: Private and public*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Katriel, T. (1985). Brogez: Ritual and strategy in Israeli children's conflicts. *Language in Society, 14*, 467-490.

———. (1986). On the vicissitudes of word stress in modern Hebrew. *Anthropological Linguistics, 28*, 275-282.

———. (1987). "Bexibudim!": Ritualized sharing among Israeli children. *Language in Society, 16*, 305-320.

Katriel, T. & Nesher, P. (1986). Gibush: The rhetoric of cohesion in Israeli school culture. *Comparative Education Review, 30*, 216-231.

Labov, W. (1972). Rules for ritual insults. In D. Sudnow (Ed.), *Studies in social interaction* (pp. 120-169). New York: New Press.

Leach, E. (1976). *Culture & communication: The logic by which symbols are connected*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mishler, E. (1979). Wou' you trade cookies with popcorn? Talk of trades among six year olds. In O. Garnica & M. King (Eds.), *Language, children and society* (pp. 221-236). Oxford: Pergamon.

Simmel, G. (1971). *On individuality and social forms*. D.L. Levine (Ed.), Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Sluckin, T. (1981). *Growing up in the playground*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Stewart, S. (1984). *On longing: Narratives of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press.

Sutton-Smith, B. (1982). A performance theory of peer relations. In K.M. Borman (Ed.), *The social life of children in a chonging society* (pp. 65-77). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Turner, V. (1974). *Dramas, fields and metaphors: Symbolic action in human society*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

_____ (1977). Symbols in African ritual. In J. Dolgin et al. (Eds.), *Symbolic anthropology* (pp. 183-194). New York: Columbia University Press.

Whitley, M.T. (1929). Children's interest in collecting. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 20*, 249-261.

Witty, P.A. & Lehman, H.C. (1930). Further studies in children's interest in collecting. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 21*, 112-127.

Youniss, J. (1980). *Parents and peers in social development: A Sullivan-Piaget perspective*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.