

Meta-discourse of *chutzpah*

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それぞれの社会や文化を論じる際、キー・タームを使うことがある。一方で、文化をキー・タームで表しえるかどうかも常に存在する問題である (Bloch 2005)。これらは、いつも引用される言葉、社会を構成する人の心性に存在し、多くの場合に顕在するものと定義されてはいる (Geertz 1973, Ortner 1981)。

しかし、この文化のキー・タームは、動態的、歴史的、ポリティカルな面が論じられてこなかった。ある語彙の形態は変化せず、その文化社会的意味が変化するという一般現象が見逃されがちであった。

イスラエルでは、*chutzpah* フツパという表現をあちこちで耳にする。ヘブライ語源の名詞であり、その形容詞も良く使われる。誰かが並んでいる列をみだして割り込んできたり、人が話しているのに、知らん振りしていたりすると、「Eize chutzpah! : ひどいフツパ!」と、その行為に対して誰かが言う。また、イスラエル人自身「イスラエル人は、みんなフツパ的だ。」と論じる。フツパは、一般に英語には *utter nerve*, *effrontery*, *cheek*、日本語には、'あつかましさ、極端なずうずうしさ'、などと訳されていおり、英語や他のヨーロッパ言語にも借用語として入っている。ここでは、イスラエル文化において重要なキー・メタファーとされるフツパ *chutzpah* をケース・スタディとして、*chutzpah* をめぐるメタディスコースと、またフツパ的な言語行動や非言語行動を一般とするイスラエル・ユダヤの社会心理的な部分について論じる。最後に、アメリカ英語のフツパと比較し、そこに生じる違いについて考察したい。

1. Introduction

In Israel the concept of *chutzpah* [spelling variations: *khutspe* (transliteration of the Yiddish spelling), *chutzpa*, *chutzpah* (the spelling used most often), *hutzpa*, *chúzpe* generally translated into English as "utter nerve, effrontery"] is a frequent topic of discussion. The word *chutzpah* (of which the root - of Hebrew origin - is *ch-z-f*) is heard everywhere. Even some Israelis say that *chutzpah* is the key metaphor for Israel. "Eize *chutzpah*!", 'What *chutzpah*' is frequently heard in public places: on streets, in post offices, at bus stops, in cultural halls, etc.

People are often criticized for being *chutzpan* (*masculine, sing.*)/*it* (*femine sing.*) (*chutzpah* person), when they cut in line, behave in a rude way, show no consideration for others, etc. Newspaper articles also often use the term *chutzpah* to characterize

certain political acts. Overall, *chutzpah* is evaluated negatively.

Moreover, the term *chutzpah* is often heard not only in Jewish communities but also in non-Jewish communities. The majority of American college students can identify the term. However, the perception of *chutzpah* is not so negative as in Israel, and often becomes an object of jokes as well as heroic acts (e.g. Dirshvitz).

Israeli key terms such as *dugri* [straight] (Katriel 1986) and *freier/freierit* [free-er, 'sucker'] (Bloch 2003) have been well reported and discussed. On the other hand, probably because it has been so widely used outside of Israel, and beyond Jewish communities in the US, *chutzpah* has not been well-enough discussed as a linguistic and cultural key term. In discussing *chutzpah* three approaches are possible, i.e. discourse analysis, (contextual analysis), a sociological approach, and approaches to *chutzpah* as a cultural key term or root metaphor. Under the discourse analysis approach I will describe the social contexts in which the term *chutzpah* is used. Under the rubric of cultural key terms, I will question whether *chutzpah* is specifically Jewish and whether *chutzpah* can be interpreted as an Israeli key metaphor. Finally, citing parts of a few essays which include *chutzpah* expressions found in certain texts, I will compare the situational and semantic differences between Israeli forms and uses of *chutzpah* and those found in America and in American English, focusing especially on the question of whether or not the term *chutzpah* (and corresponding behaviour) has only a negative connotation.

2. Defining *chutzpah*

The term *chutzpah* is can be derived from the trilateral root *ch-z-f/p*. While the adjective *chazuf/a*, and the nomen agentis form *chuzpan/it* are sometimes heard, the nominal form *chutzpah* is the one most often used. In other European languages, too, the noun form *chuzpah/chutzpah* prevails. Many Israelis and Jewish Americans think that the term originates from Yiddish. A German colleague of mine said that he knows the word as a term borrowed from Hungarian. Some Americans also use the term, although they may be unsure where it comes from (Hook, p.c.).

In English-Japanese dictionaries, *chutzpah* is translated as: ずうずうしさ、あつかましさ(岩波) (口語) ひどい厚かましさ、鉄面皮 (研究社)

2.1. Category A: Simple *chutzpah*

Chutzpah as a behaviour has a variety of dimensions, i.e. from simple behaviour similar to *gasot* 'rudeness' to more complex behavior. Simple *chutzpah* behaviour, is, for example, to bother people in public, shout in public, etc. When arguing or fighting,

children often call each other:

- (1) Chutzpan! “person who has chutzpah”. (Masculine, Singular)
 Chutzpanit! “person who has chutzpah” (Feminine, singular)

This kind of endless arguing occurs when the interlocutors accuse each other regardless of what triggered their anger. This kind of verbal attack shows that Israelis actually consider *chutzpah* acts negatively, and referring to them as *chutzpah* could be source for accusation.

2.2. Category B: Inconsiderateness

On the other hand, the following examples I observed show more complex *chutzpah* labeling. In (2), a man’s behaviour is labeled as *chutzpah* because he refused to give a seat, while in (3), (4), and (5), a pick-up truck driver as well as a ticket office clerk’s and an officer at a security check’s inconsiderate acts are labeled *chutzpah*. In this category, *chutzpah* can be defined as behavior showing a lack of consideration for others.

- (2) A man refuses to give up an empty seat next to him, after an elderly woman asks him to do so. The woman yells at him, “Eize *chutzpah*”
- (3) A large pick-up truck blocks a narrow street so that other cars cannot enter. Seeing the situation, an elderly woman yells at the truck driver, “Eize *chutzpah*”.
- (4) There is only one entrance or only one line for a ticket office in front of a long line of people, who exclaim, “Eize *chutzpah*”.
- (5) There is only a single officer at a security check point and he tells people to open their bags but does not help close the bags after checking them. Several people start yelling at the security officer, “Eize Chutzpah! Ma ata oseh?” (‘What are you doing?’)

2.3. Category C: Rejecting accusations

The following situation indeed confused me, because a *chutzpah* act could be denied, by the person accused, by labeling the accuser’s behavior in turn as *chutzpah*.

- (6) When a couple cuts in line in front of a cashier, a woman behind the couple tells them not to cut in line, and the couple accuses the woman of committing *chutzpah* because she is not tolerant enough to let them cut in line.

A similar thing happened to me when a man cut in line in front of me at a train station ticket office and I said, ‘It’s my turn!’ and he harshly said to me “Chutzpanit!”.

2.4. Category D: Justification

It is said that the first text in which the word *chutzpah* was used was in a collection of records of the Sanhedrin, a Jewish juridical body, compiled in A.D. 40. [Can you cite chapter and verse for these anecdotes? They sound like urban legends...]

1. Episode 1: A man, having killed his parents, asks for mercy from the court, on the grounds that he has now become an orphan.

Episode 2: An abusive husband, asks his wife for help, while beating her.

Episode 3: A beggar begs for food, and the housewife there says there is black bread and *challa* bread. The beggar takes the *challa*:

Housewife: We also have black bread.

Beggar: I like the *challa* better.

Housewife: But the *challa* is much more expensive!

Beggar: But I like it better, good wife!

He devours the *challa*, (an act of *chutzpah*). [Maybe you should explain what *challa* is.]

In Episodes 1 and 3, the behaviours termed as *chutzpah* are, rather than being rude, behaviours of self-justification, i.e. not admitting ones own fault but blaming others for their [= whose? ones own?] faults. [I don't see how episode 3 fits this description.] As Lakoff describes three ways of derivative acts of apology, i.e. escaping, justification, and explanation (Lakoff 2001), the acts of *chutzpah* described above are acts of justification for the actors' own offensive behaviours.

3. Socio-psychological approach to *chutzpah*

Chutzpah is deeply related to the psychological situation of actors. People who indulge in *chutzpah* many times are those who cannot control their behaviour, who are being childish. Children should be gradually socialized not to have recourse to *chutzpah*, although their *chutzpah* is of a simple type, i.e. category A *chutzpah*.

According to the socio-psychological point of view, Israelis are not bound to outsiders, thus they tend to indulge in acts of *chutzpah* in the public sphere. For some the attitude characterized by the term *chutzpah* represents the Israeli Jewish character, which can be described as "being less engaged in social interaction". Israeli Jews' lack of empathy toward outsiders tends to manifest itself in the form of *chutzpah*." (Suleiman. p.c.)

On the other hand, Israelis refrain from engaging in acts of *chutzpah* when among insiders, i.e., with coworkers, friends and family members. A woman in her twenties describes the limits on *chutzpah* as follows:

We should never commit *chutzpah* among our family. There is no *chutzpah* among good friends, either.

It is said that if you care about A, you never want to demonstrate *chutzpah* in front of A. *Chutzpah*-like behaviour is only directed toward outsiders, as represented schematically in Figure 1.

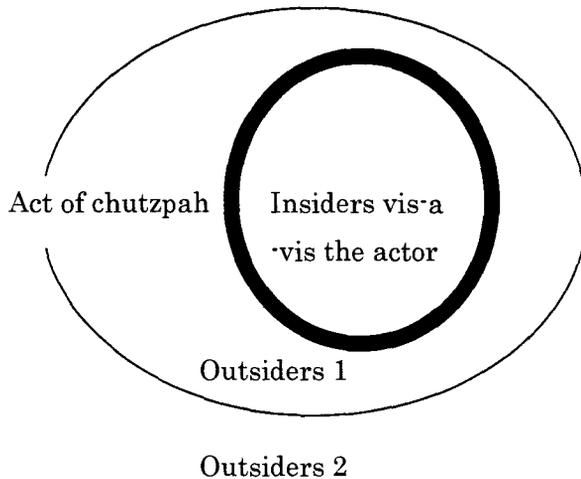


Figure 1: Acts of chutzpah

Acts of *chutzpah* occur in the boundary space between "Insiders" and "Outsiders 2". "Insiders" are Israeli-Jews while "Outsiders 2" are non-Israeli Jews.

4. *Chutzpah* as understood by speakers of English

English dictionaries define what is meant by *chutzpah* in the following ways: Gall, astonishing guts, cheekiness, cheap things, worthless things, nerviness, etc.

Sometimes English writers use the term *chutzpah* in order to criticize certain policies such as in 'it is *chutzpah* of North Korea to demand 5 abductees back from Japan'. However, in American English, *chutzpah* can also mean something positive, something which can be translated as 'courage, guts' as seen in Dershowitz's autobiographical book entitled *Chutzpah* and in (7) through (10) cited from websites.

(7) In my bio I said I was "a second generation welfare mother struggling to get out of poverty with grace – and a little *chutzpah*... In less than a year I am free, by God's grace, and maybe more than a little *chutzpah*, from any government assistance."

(8) *Chutzpah* is necessary in life, go on, I need *chutzpah* with girls, Aurelio ... Adam

and Eve. Now, we finally are experiencing what seems to be like a throwback to guts, gusto and *chutzpah* on the part of sane, rational individuals who are actually using their God-given reason.

(9) It takes a lot of *chutzpah* to brazenly admit to such an abuse of power, even if it is done just before midnight.

(10) I hope America wakes up and the majority of its citizens voting will see that Mr. Obama has the integrity, compassion, knowledge, smarts and *chutzpah* that is needed to lead this country back onto the right road.

From these contexts it is clear that in English *chutzpah* can be used for encouraging oneself or others. Even though the speaker or writer may feel that *chutzpah* is associated with rudeness or arrogance, s/he thinks that its use is necessary in order to reach his/her goal. This use of *chutzpah* occurs especially when writers or speakers describe themselves.

5. Conclusion

The term *chutzpah* represents a cultural characteristic of Israelis. Although *chutzpah* may be defined on several levels, from simple acts of rudeness to complex verbal behaviors showing inconsiderateness and self-justifications, at the same time *chutzpah* is deeply related to the contemporary psychological situation of Israeli Jews. In the routine speech of Israelis, *chutzpah* is perceived as negative, and engaging in it is something which people should avoid. In this sense, use of this term is a way of controlling and sanctioning. *Chutzpah* denotes a rude, inconsiderate, and selfish act.

The fact that Israelis themselves label their culture a "*chutzpah culture*" as well as the fact that Israelis can freely say out loud, "Eize chutzpah!" to others including politicians or powerful people can be interpreted as showing Israeli straightforwardness, their attitude of openness toward others, or even their egalitarianism. In this way, *chutzpah* is one of Israeli society's key metaphors, representing the socio-psychological attitude of Israelis in their everyday interactions and behaviors.

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