**Proposal for conference presentation -- characteristics of argumentative thinking of Haredi students**

The ultra-Orthodox yeshiva is an unusual educational institution in the State of Israel. From the age of 13, young Haredi boys study in a yeshiva, devoting all their time to learning Talmud, without studying general studies like mathematics, sciences or English.

Although according to the Haredi ideal a man is supposed to continue learning all his life in the yeshiva, in recent years more and more Haredi men leave the yeshiva, turning to higher education in their twenties and thirties. The question then arises – **what are the thought characteristics with which yeshiva graduates arrive in academia, and what cultural baggage do they bring with them? In what way are these characteristics different than those of general educational system graduates?** The present study focuses on argumentation, i.e., thinking patterns involved with making arguments, supporting them and coping with counter arguments.This is done while paying attention to the social-cultural context, in an attempt to trace Haredi thinking features stemming from their unique background.

We chose to focus on argumentation since it involves a central skill both in the yeshiva and in academic studies. In academia researchers and students deal with argumentation when trying to support theories, drawing conclusions from findings, and accepting or rejecting interpretations and explanations. The argumentative text is also central to yeshiva studies (Schwartz, 2015). Talmudic "give and take" includes understanding of argumentation processes in the Gemara, proposing assumptions, supporting them, raising doubts and refuting arguments. Nevertheless, at issue are two different argumentation cultures, both in terms of the limits of discourse, its goals and the context in which it takes place, and in terms of practice – in the Haredi yeshiva argumentation discourse is conducted primarily orally and in pairs, whereas in academia writing is the central medium for argumentative discourse between researchers.

The cultural context is of great importance for understanding and analyzing argumentative discourse (Siegel, 1999). Cultural values and norms are an important component in designing argumentative discourse, and they depend on society, time and place (Perelman, 1999). Examining the cultural context is particularly important regarding a population with a unique background, such as Haredim. For that reason, the analysis we conducted attempted to take into account Haredi socio-cultural background, and the manner in which it is echoed when they write an argumentative essay in an academic context.

**Research questions** – What are the features of argumentative thinking of Haredi students in academic writing? In what way are these features different from those of public educational system graduates? What connections are there between Haredi cultural background and the features of argumentative thinking?

**Methodology**

**Research population**

In order to examine which thinking patterns are unique to Haredi students and which patterns are shared by them and by students who are graduates of the public educational system, we formulated a comparison between the two populations, 80 Haredi students and 80 students who are graduates of the public educational system, who were studying in pre-academic preparatory programs. It is important to note that the purpose of this comparison was not to test "who is better", but rather to attempt to characterize the argumentative thinking patterns of Haredi students as compared to public educational system graduates, assuming that the comparison would sharpen and emphasize these patterns.

**Research tools**

In order to characterize the features of argumentative thinking, we made use of an argumentative writing task (Uccelli, Scott & Dobbs, 2013). This refers to an accepted model in argumentative writing tests in academia, both in terms of selection into the higher education system in the State of Israel (psychometric and matriculation) as well as abroad (the SAT and similar tests). For this purpose, we requested the 80 Haredi students and the 80 public education graduates in the pre-academic preparatory programs to write a one page argumentative composition. We chose two writing tasks from the psychometric test which serves for student selection in Israel's higher education system.

**Analysis model**

We based data analysis on the theoretical model of Nussbaum & Schraw (2007) for argumentation analysis. The reason for this was that the model focuses on a contraposition and coping with it, which was a central component in the compositions we gathered. We based the evaluation process of the compositions on two analytic methods. The first method, **Top-down**, includes evaluation of compositions by means of two indicators of argumentative composition analysis presented by Nussbaum & Schraw. The second method is a **Bottom-up** analysis, i.e., setting up the argumentation features from within the material itself, with the intention of discovering thinking patterns that we did not predict from the outset.

**Findings**

Examination of the findings yields several central differences between Haredim and public education graduates. In terms of the quantity of arguments, no clear difference was evident between Haredim and public education graduates. Nevertheless, public education graduates tend to present arguments in a more explicit and deeper way compared to Haredim. Haredim tend to present arguments briefly, in one sentence or half a sentence, without expansion and detail.

In terms of the argumentation structure, we can say that Haredi writing is more similar to associative, oral argumentative discourse than to a composition having a logical structure that takes the reader into consideration. While public education graduates are strict about an opening clause that presents the issue, about division into paragraphs and conjunctions whose purpose is to emphasize the connection between the different parts of the argument, Haredim are not attentive to these aspects.

An additional feature of Haredi writing is associativity. Whereas public education graduates generally present arguments logically, some of the Haredim tend to link arguments associatively, without a clear structure or making use of examples or discussions not directly connected with the issue. An additional outstanding feature among the Haredim is that in a large portion of the compositions, their position is presented at the end of the composition, as a decision of the issue. Compared with public education graduates, who mostly present their attitude right at the beginning, Haredim also tend to use collective expressions – "we", "we must". Possibly that's how they attempt to enlist the reader onto their side. This contrasts with public education graduates, who tend to formulate in a remote manner, and to give a more objective tone to the argument.

Haredim also tend to formulate in a decisive manner, and to provide more authority to their arguments by means of generalized expressions like: "everyone knows", "it's clearly known", "no one disagrees", apparently in order to present a consensus and presumed agreement regarding their arguments. Among public education graduate writers, use of decisiveness is exceptionally rare, and even more so, public education graduates tend to qualify their statements with words like "likely", "possibly", etc.

**Conclusions and discussion**

In general, based on analysis of the data, we can state that there is a Haredi argumentative writing style that includes a unique grouping of thinking features. Though this style is not shared by all Haredi writers, its features are especially prominent in light of the comparison with public graduates, where these features are almost nonexistent. Whereas public graduates present their arguments in quite a set pattern, which was learned structurally in the framework of the public education system, Haredim write in a more "spontaneous" way – without being based on a clear, uniform structure, along with a wealth of argumentative features unique to them. We will now try to elucidate the findings revealed in the compositions, in terms of an examination of the Haredi cultural background in the yeshiva's argumentative discourse.

The argumentative discourse in the yeshiva is primarily conducted orally, whereby the different arguments in the Talmud are presented briefly, and the readers interpret and expand on them in paired discourse (Schwarz, 2015). A possible echo of this is the tendency of Haredim to present their reasoning briefly, possibly based on the habit that the text does not stand on its own, but rather constitutes a basis for subsequent oral discussion and expansion.

In terms of the associative structure of the argument, it seems that for some of the Haredi writers, their writing reflects a relatively raw stage of argumentative thinking, without processing and attempting to impose logical order onto things. The composition sometimes reminds one of a synagogue discourse, where for the sake of proving a certain argument, the speaker uses a story or an example not directly connected with the issue. This is consistent with the yeshiva style of argumentative discourse, which at times tends to be associative (Schwarz, 2015). An additional structural aspect is the tendency of Haredim to present their position at the end of the discussion (as opposed to public education graduates), as a conclusion after give and take, similar to the usual course of Talmudic discourse.

It's possible that the Haredi tendency to present decisive arguments reflects a different epistemic perception regarding the manner in which it is proper to support arguments. It seems that Haredim view decisive arguments as convincing and more supported than qualified arguments, as opposed to what is acceptable in academia. This finding fits the tendency of students who learn in pairs, to take extreme positions in order to sharpen the debate (Blum-Kulka, et al., 2002). Even so, it is unclear whether this tendency actually attests to undeveloped epistemic perceptions, or whether the issue referred to is only a matter of style. In another part of the study we examine students' epistemic perceptions, which is likely to shed light on this issue.