

# **WORDS, VALUES AND IDENTITIES:THE ISRAELI ARGOT (JARGON) OF PRISONERS**

**<sup>1</sup>TOMER EINAT & <sup>2</sup>ZOHAR LIVNAT**

Department of Criminology, Bar-Ilan University Ramat-Gan, Israel

Department of Hebrew and Semitic Languages, Bar-Ilan University Ramat-Gan, Israel

## **ABSTRACT**

The spoken discourse of male prisoners and especially their use of epithets, labels and categorization reflect the values, identities, social structure and hierarchy among the members of prison subculture, and is shown to be a valuable resource for its examination and understanding. 460 hours of interviews with 158 male prisoners in Israel provided a linguistic repertoire of over 500 argot words, part of it specific to this group. Analysis of excerpts from these interviews, in which the inmates use and interpret some of these words, enables the researchers to study the contribution of the argot to the reproduction of this subculture and the dynamics of certain aspects of identity construction and the way they are shaped through oppositions.

The encounter between the formally dominant Hebrew in Israeli prisons and Arabic creates a unique language, whose existence supports the endogenous model that offers the prison subculture as a phenomenon that develops as a result of the extraordinary reality of prison life.

**KEY WORDS:** Prison; subculture; argot; Israel; Hebrew; Arabic; identity; masculinity.