

# Confronting the languages of statehood

## Theoretical and historical frameworks for the analysis of the multilingual identity of the Russian Jewish intelligentsia in Israel\*

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This paper reviews sociological analysis of the transformation of the link between language and identity among Soviet Jewish immigrants in Israel, focusing on their common desire for Russian language maintenance after their immigration to the State of Israel. The authors argue that although the immigrants acquire Hebrew quite fast, which improves their occupational perspectives and enriches their social life, the former Soviet Jewish intelligentsia's perception of the dominant Israeli policy of language shift to Hebrew is extremely negative: in their view it resembles the Soviet policy of language shift to Russian. However, because of the success of Soviet language policy in suppressing Yiddish and Hebrew, the contemporary cultural world of Russian Jews has been mediated mostly in Russian. Furthermore, the self-identification of today's post-Soviet Jewish intelligentsia combines the Jewish (mostly Yiddish) legacy and the heritage of Russian culture, which has been created partly by Jewish writers. Therefore, Russian Jews tend to consider Russian a more important channel than Hebrew for conveying their cultural values. The Soviet Jewish intelligentsia in Israel is striving to retain a multilingual identity: while they do appreciate Hebrew and the cultural values it conveys, they share a strong feeling that their own cultural-linguistic identity is of great value to them.

This paper reviews sociological analysis of the transformation of the link between language and identity among Soviet Jewish immigrants in Israel, focusing on their common desire for Russian language maintenance after their immigration to the State of Israel. We use Spolsky's (1989) sociolinguistic theory of second language learning (which proposes that language shift, loss,

maintenance, and spread may be seen as special cases of second language learning) to compare the socio-political predispositions of language shift and maintenance in the Soviet Union and in Israel, emphasizing the similarities of Soviet and Israeli policies of subtractive bilingualism as an essential component of state-building.

### **Language, nation-building and social identity**

Numbers of sociologists have emphasized the central role of language in creating social identities. Because language is inherently involved in socialization, the social group whose language we speak is an important identity group for us. Linguistic behavior is a major factor in the definition of social boundaries: language reflects, expresses and concretizes social entities, as contrastive self-identifications (Fasold 1987; the term is Fishman's 1972:52). In his book *The Politics of Linguistics*, Newmeyer (1986:5) stresses that "language is the most characteristic medium of social exchange; it must therefore both reflect and influence all facets of our social existence." Reflecting a voluntary choice of cultural resources, language is the prime arena for the game of social allegiances. The distribution of linguistic codes, their inter-switching and their relation to social networks all serve to express and delineate the extent to which social entities exclude each other and choose to represent genuine social divisions.

For the most part, the use of any given language in a specific population is associated with social conventions; more specifically, language is made of words and sentences that share different meanings — not necessarily common to all participants — in diverse contexts. In the words of Basil Bernstein, "the use of language provides important means of initiating, synthesizing, and reinforcing ways of thinking, feeling and behavior which are functionally related to the social group. It does not, of itself, prevent the expression of specific ideas or confine the individual to a given level of conceptualization, but certain ideas and generalizations are facilitated rather than others" (Bernstein 1959:312). Gumperz (1982), a leader of the ethnography-of-speech school, emphasizes the role of language not only in the creation and reproduction of social identities, and in communication, but also in the practice of control and domination. It may be stated further that as a social resource, language is also a base of power, a resource which is available to groups in their competition for access to the goods and services of, for example, a nation.

In general, ethnic groups regularly use language as one of their most significant identifying features. Defined as mother tongues, legitimate languages require the allegiance and loyalty due to the motherland itself (Fishman 1972). The national language is generally perceived by governments as the embodiment of the national spirit and as its most powerful means of social and cultural integration. Linguistic identities have, indeed, cemented nationalist movements. Nationalism affirms an aspiration for expansion, which often involves a linguistic dimension as well, as illustrated by pan-Slavism, pan-Arabism, or pan-Germanism. On the other hand, liberation movements that aspire to root out cultural dependency on those who dominate them may raise the banner of the use, or even the revival of, local or regional vernaculars. "The issue of language choice is most critical in the case of a newly independent state" (Spolsky 1998: 58); for example, by requiring all their citizens to pass examinations in Estonian, Latvian, or Lithuanian, the newly independent Baltic states are attempting to redress the balance of power for indigenous citizens over the large Russian minority populations that were dominant during the period of Soviet rule. In countries that have adopted multicultural ideology (Canada and Australia, for example), it is postulated that all citizens should have the right to enjoy their own culture, to practice their own religion, and use their own language, and should respect the rights of others to their own culture, religion and language. "The issue of respect is significantly meaningful because, since languages are not acquired in a vacuum, but rather as a function of attitudes, stereotypes, and ideologies, such factors play major roles in the acquisition, choice and maintenance of languages" (Epstein 1999: 41). The role of linguistic factors is especially important because in minority ethnic groups language is a major system-forming element, and national development is a function of opportunities for language study, use and development.

Various national movements have stressed language as a necessary and sufficient condition of nationhood. The contribution of intellectuals reviving national languages, especially writers using them, has been widely acknowledged in such movements. What makes national movements place such emphasis on language? Joshua Fishman, in *Language and Nationalism* (1972: 44–55), proposes three reasons. First, language provides the movement with a link to a glorious past. One of the major motivational emphases behind modern nationalism has been the retention of an ethnic past, because "both the link to greatness [and] the substance of greatness itself" can be found in such a past. Such considerations make the mother tongue "almost sacred" (Fishman 1972: 45, quoting Jaszi) particularly for those whose current greatness is far

from obvious. Second, language provides a link with authenticity: a national movement seeking a definition of the nation's "soul" can find it more readily in language than in political institutions or religion. As Fishman (1972: 49) puts it, "Political fortunes wax and wane; religions are often shared with other peoples. [...] In language, on the other hand, one has a secular symbol that can simultaneously draw upon and lean upon all of the sanctity that religion has given to texts". At the same time, it serves a new elite and a new set of goals. Third, linguistic differentiation and literary uniqueness enhance the claim of national movements to socio-cultural or political independence.

### **Israeli language policy: From Jewish multilingualism to the dominance of Hebrew as an instrument of nation-building**

The movement for the revitalization of Hebrew began in Eastern Europe and Palestine in the latter part of the nineteenth century (Even-Zohar 1981), influenced by European national movements, which viewed the language of a people as inseparable from its nationhood. There was, however, an essential difference between the Hebrew revival movement and the language movements associated with European nationalism. In the latter cases, the usual task faced by the language revival campaign was to find a way to add literacy functions and formal status to a spoken variety of a language. In the case of Hebrew, the goal was reversed: to add spoken functions to a language whose literacy status was already clear.

The remoteness of Jewish traditional settings from the nation-state idea, on the eve of the development of Zionism, is best illustrated by the nature of their linguistic variety and the dozens of Jewish languages existing throughout the Jewish world. Ben-Rafael (1994), following Birnbaum (1967), lists the major Jewish languages which were still alive at the beginning of this century: Parsic in Persia; Bukharic in Central Asia; Tatic, Armenic and Gurjic in the Caucasus and Georgia; Yevanic in Egypt and Greece; Italkian in Italy; Spanyolish, or Ladino, in the Mediterranean countries; Arvic and Temanic in Asia; Aravic in Eastern North Africa; Yiddish in Eastern Europe and Germany; Crimshak in the Crimea; Indo-Aryan and Dravidian Jewish languages in India; Karaite in Eastern Europe. In actual fact, Yiddish, Ladino and Judeo-Arabic were the principal languages which the revival of Hebrew was to confront, particularly Yiddish (Fishman and Fishman 1974). Ideologically, the Hebraists refused to allow any cultural role for Yiddish in Palestine.

The Zionist movement proclaimed its interest not just in peoplehood and territorial regeneration, but in the restoration of Hebrew as a national language. By 1910 the first graduates of Jewish schools in Palestine, fluent and comfortable in Hebrew, had begun to marry each other; and the first generation of children who spoke nothing but Hebrew in the home was born. In accordance with mainstream Zionist ideology, which antedates the State by almost half a century, Hebrew became the national and official language. Since Hebrew was not a national language of any immigrant group, the language came to symbolize the unity of the immigrants (for further discussion see Spolsky and Shohamy 1999).

Linguistic heterogeneity has long been a feature of the Jewish community in Palestine and Israel. Taking account of the principal languages claimed by respondents in the 1916–1918 censuses, Bachi (1956: 197) estimated that if any two Jews met at random during that period, the chance that they would share the same principal language was only about one in three. Hebrew was already the most common principal language by then (40 percent), followed by Yiddish (36 percent), Arabic (18 percent), and Ladino (4 percent). Recognized after the First World War by the British Mandatory Government as an official language alongside English and Arabic, Hebrew developed into the main public and private language of the Jewish community (Spolsky 1996:46). Hebrew was probably also the chief lingua franca among the Jews of Palestine by that time, for it was the language most likely to be shared by interlocutors who did not have any other language in common.

The dominant culture in Israel emphasized the imperative of building an integrated and culturally homogeneous nation; Hebrew, the renewed national language, was to be the matrix for the new setting. Among veteran European groups, this linguistic transformation was pursued by persistent attrition of the languages of origin, a process that began even before Hebrew had been fully mastered. Much like the *Ashkenazim*, the North African and Middle-Eastern communities turned to Hebrew without reservation, although this switch often implied less total and immediate abandonment of diaspora languages (Ben-Rafael 1994:221).

It should be mentioned that Israel does not simply pursue subtractive bilingualism. The obvious counter-example to this is the Arab minority, constituting about 17% of the population (about 1 million people). Although Hebrew is the official language of the country, Arabic is also recognized for certain functions (see Landau 1987; Ben-Rafael and Brosh 1991). Almost all Israeli Arabs teach their children Arabic as a mother tongue. In public schools

Arab citizens are educated in Arabic through twelfth grade, and there is no pressure on them to lose Arabic as their first language. There are also other (much smaller) minority languages in Israel spoken by non-Jewish communities, such as Armenian, Circassian, and Aramaic, although (unlike Arabic) these languages are not media of public education, given the small numbers of speakers of each of them in Israel. There is a general (probably universal) feeling among Jews and non-Jews that of course these minorities should retain their own native languages rather than switching to Hebrew (see Hallel and Spolsky 1993).

However, Israel practices subtractive bilingualism for communities which are immigrant and Jewish (e.g. Russian Jews, English-speaking Jews, French-speaking Jews). Israeli ideological beliefs suggest that people should have as their native language a language associated with their own religion, not someone else's religion, and this is why Jews are pushed to switch to Hebrew while non-Jews are not. Although in Israel language is the prime arena for the game of social allegiances (see Ben-Rafael 1994), it should be mentioned that religion is clearly more important than language in terms of social identity. Israel still has several hundred thousand Jewish native speakers of Arabic, and obviously their major social allegiance is with other Jews rather than with other native Arabic speakers. In general, a new immigrant who learns the national language not only participates in the process of education; he also acquires the potentials for acculturation. The new immigrant is able to identify with the national culture by learning the distinctive set of cultural symbols which constitutes the national language. Immigrants are able to think and speak in a new way with these common symbols. Immigrants who learn the national language acquire the technical tools to identify with, and participate and integrate into, the national society. The Hebrew language has been a significant symbol for promoting a national identity for a heterogeneous immigrant population (Katz 1982).

### **Soviet language policy: The dominance of Russian as an instrument of political and cultural imperialism**

Though carried out in a much more forthright manner, the policy of language acquisition planning in the Soviet Union is somewhat comparable to that in the State of Israel. Unlike many countries in the world (Israel being one of them), whose linguistic make-up was changed due to voluntary migration, Russian

multilingualism has historically been created by conquest and subsequent incorporation of speakers of different languages into a single political unit. It was the expansion of the Russian empire under the Czars, continued under Soviet rule, that made the Soviet Union a multilingual country. Nevertheless, the language acquisition planning and language status policies of the USSR shared many common features with those in Israel.

The promotion of language shift to Russian can certainly be considered as the ultimate goal of Soviet national politics. At the Sixteenth Communist Party Congress, Stalin declared that all existing national languages would fuse into one common tongue, in complete accordance with a basic tenet of Marxism-Leninism. In Soviet ideology, any way of becoming a member of the Russian speech community was equally positive in its long-range effect of creating a homogeneous “Soviet socialist nation” (Lewis 1972). Soviet bilingualism was subtractive, characterized by an unstable configuration where the dominant Russian language tended to supersede and eventually substitute for the mother tongue. According to the 1989 census, ethnic Russians accounted for only 50.8 percent of the population in the Soviet Union. However, Russian achieved a pre-eminent position in all the republics. Many schools for national minorities adopted Russian as the language of instruction instead of the native language in question, which was taught only as a subject of study. Since the 1930s, most Soviet languages have been written in Cyrillic letters, while only a few local alphabets have been maintained. Processes of language shift were indeed a social factor of great significance, given the fact that by 1979 about 16.3 million non-Russians had shifted to Russian as their first language. Russian was labeled the “second mother tongue” of those people who assimilated themselves. This term must not be confused with “second language”: a person who had shifted to the second mother tongue was monolingual, speaking Russian as his or her first language (Haarman 1992). The term “second mother tongue” was regularly used in publications dealing with politics or culture, and it served as a stereotypical expression in Soviet scientific literature (Shorish 1984). Clearly, the term emphasized the positive connotation of achieving a new identity and, at the same time, it avoided any negative association with language shift. Assimilation had become an increasingly important factor in Soviet society, and this phenomenon was described and evaluated in positive terms by Soviet ideologists. Soviet book publishing statistics for 1988, shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union, show that 76.6 percent of the year’s new titles were in Russian, as were 85.7 percent of the books themselves. The dominance of Russian was also evident in other domains of the press, for instance

magazines (84.6% of all issues and 83.9% of all copies) and daily newspapers (67.5% of all issues and 83.5% of all copies) (Haarman 1992; see also Rogers, 1987). Almost all official documents were distributed in Russian and only to a limited degree in other languages.

### Post-Soviet Jews: Language and identity

Stalinist centralism affected the status of practically all non-Russian languages, among them Yiddish and Hebrew. One of the most striking features of discrimination against the Jewish national minority in the Soviet Union had long been its cultural deprivation (see Yedidya 1991; Chernin 1995). In the first decade of the new regime, as assimilation became an increasingly important factor in Soviet society, socio-political Jewish activity, except in Bolshevik party circles or under its auspices, was gradually prohibited. Yet while Yiddish had its ups and downs — at different periods there have been theatres, printed literature, and even, in the 1920s and early 1930s, schools — Hebrew was always anathema to the Soviet authorities. Towards the end of the first decade of the Soviet era, Hebrew cultural activity went underground: as Levy Ulanovskii (1983:259), one of the most famous teachers of Hebrew in the USSR in the 1970s, put it, Hebrew was considered an “instrument of counter-revolutionary, subversive activity by Jewish religious clericals and Zionists.” At the end of June 1970 the prosecutor at the Kishinev criminal court argued, “while presumably created to study Hebrew and the history and culture of Israel, the Ulpan [intensive language course] in fact was a cover for an anti-Soviet organization” (cited in Korey 1973:248). In February 1971 an order to “remove from the public libraries all publications which might be of assistance in studying the Hebrew language” had been delivered (see Korey 1973:287). Anyone connected with Hebrew was automatically considered an enemy of socialism and was severely punished; until the end of the 1980s the teaching of Hebrew was considered a crime that carried a five-year prison sentence. Not only was Hebrew not taught in any school, there was also no Soviet Hebrew literature: no books, journals, or newspapers appeared in Hebrew. Simultaneously, the authorities made numerous attempts to create a Soviet-Jewish culture based on the Yiddish language which would be communist in content. These attempts mostly failed because Soviet Jews were unenthusiastic about a combination of Yiddish language and Communist culture that they regarded as absurd.

Although Yiddish, as opposed to Hebrew, first enjoyed support, in the

second decade the network of Yiddish educational, academic and cultural institutions went into steady decline. In the mid-thirties, the authorities began to liquidate first the Jewish elementary and high schools, and then Yiddish libraries, newspapers, museums, clubs, and so on. Between 1936 and 1938 numerous writers, artists, literary critics, and historians were arrested and later killed, among them such famous figures as Izi Kharik, Moyshe Kulbak, Zelig Akselrod, Max Erik, and Yisroel Tsinberg. *Evseksiia* (an autonomous Jewish circle within the Communist party) was destroyed along with its spokesmen; finally *Emes*, the only Jewish publication house in the USSR, was also liquidated. In 1948 all remnants of Yiddish cultural activity were destroyed, and Yiddish broadcasting was discontinued. On 12 August 1952, a group which included the leading Yiddish writers in the Soviet Union, among them Dovid Bergelson, Dovid Hofshsteyn, Perets Markish, Leyb Kvitko, Shmuel Perlov and others, were falsely accused and executed.

In general, the suppressive Soviet language policy towards Yiddish and Hebrew was successful. During more than three decades (from the end of the 1940s till the middle of the 1980s) none of the Jewish languages was taught in any school, nor was there any way for Jewish youth to learn those languages officially. As a result, the contemporary cultural world of Russian Jews was mediated mostly in Russian. In 1979, 83.3% of Soviet Jews declared Russian to be their native tongue and 97.0% had a perfect command of Russian (Moskovich 1987: 138). The Jewish past was not the only component of the Jewish Russian intelligentsia's cultural heritage. Brym and Ryvkina (1994: 27) have found in their survey that "while there is a widespread desire for a reanimation of Jewish life in Moscow, Kiev and Minsk, it is doubtful whether more than a third of the population wants to become personally involved." According to their data, "fewer than a fifth of the Jews in Moscow, Kiev and Minsk have a working knowledge of Hebrew or Yiddish, belong to or participate in a Jewish organization, have a Jewish upbringing, are giving a Jewish upbringing to their children, or celebrate the Sabbath or the High Holy Days. In absolute and comparative terms, and speaking here only of group averages, these results indicate that the cultural and organizational infrastructures of the Jewish communities of Moscow, Kiev and Minsk embrace only a small fraction of the Jewish population. Specifically, only 27 percent of the respondents feel that they are part of the Jewish community" (Brym and Ryvkina 1994: 26–27).

Today's Soviet Jewish intelligentsia, then, identifies itself with a unique combination of Jewish (mostly Yiddish) ethnic and cultural, but not religious, elements and the heritage of Russian culture, in whose creation Jewish writers

and artists have played an important role. The names of famous Russian painters, such as Isaac Levitan, Leon Bakst and Mark Antokolsky, poets like Boris Pasternak, Osip Mandelstam and Joseph Brodsky, violinists such as David Oistrakh, Leonid Kogan and Vladimir Spivakov, have occupied a prominent place in the cultural capital of every member of the Russian Jewish intelligentsia not because all these people were of Jewish origin, but because they were among the most important personalities who contributed to Russian cultural history as a whole. In the words of Shimon Markish (1996:199), “the result is that the Jew ‘from downtown’ (member of an intelligent profession — bookkeeper, computer expert, theoretical physicist, make-up man in a printshop, the best writer on a newspaper) often regards himself as a Russian intellectual as much as any other, without any reference to his ethnic origin.” As has been emphasized by Trier (1996; the paper is based on 8 months of fieldwork in Moscow, conducted in 1993/1994), most Post-Soviet Jews refer to Jewish language and culture as having been “lost” during the process of assimilation to Soviet life. In the Soviet Union, being a Jew was primarily a matter of ethnicity or nationality and had little to do with religion. Since many Russian Jews have never practiced Judaism, they do not consider claiming to be a nonbeliever or even adopting another religion to be a betrayal of their Jewish heritage. On the contrary, many Jews, particularly intellectuals, report that they have a strong sense of connectedness with Russian cultural life. Characteristic statements from these Jewish informants include: “My soul is connected to the Russian land,” “I have grown up with Russian culture,” “Russia is my destiny,” “I cannot live without Russian literature,” “Russian culture is unique,” “I am deeply devoted to Russian nature,” “My roots are here in Russia,” “I belong to the Russian intelligentsia.” Even though Russian Jews still regard Israel as a possible destination, should socio-political developments make it necessary to leave, they have territorialized themselves in Russia. Consequently, when Russian Jews leave for Israel they go “abroad” to a foreign and unfamiliar country; they do not return “home” (Trier 1996).

The newest wave of Russian immigrants has had a major impact on Israeli society because in several respects they are markedly different from their Russian predecessors (see Emmons 1997). First, they come from a different, post-glasnost and post-perestroika Russia. Second, before arriving in Israel, the new immigrants were generally not a part of a defined Jewish community. This point is of crucial importance because most of those who constituted the first wave of Russian speaking immigrants (the majority of this group arrived from 1971 till 1977) came from peripheral areas that in part were annexed by the

USSR prior to World War II, such as the Baltic States and Moldavia, but also western Ukraine and Georgia. In these areas assimilation was relatively low, because only a generation had gone by since coming under Soviet rule, or because they were far from the center, whose success in penetrating these regions was low. Thus, there were mostly religious or nationalist motives for emigrating to Israel. This wave by itself had neither a critical mass nor a segregationist ideology sufficient to produce a “Russian” enclave within Israeli society. It was characterized by far more readiness to integrate with Israeli society than the large and non-selective wave that followed it.

Today the Jews in Russia are a very dispersed community and most are not involved in Jewish affairs. Accordingly, most Russian Jews participate in their first Jewish communal experience only upon reaching Israel. These differences have brought significant change to Israeli society.

### **Language maintenance and multilingual identity: Post-Soviet Jewish intelligentsia in Israel**

The patterns of collective identification of the Soviet Jewish intelligentsia in Israel are strongly influenced by the group’s language identity. Indeed, the group appears to be one of the most heterogeneous ethnic units in Israel, and it might be more appropriate to define it mainly as a cultural-linguistic group, rather than as a group of differentiated “ethnic origin”. Treating languages as major symbols of culture and identity, Ben-Rafael, Olshtain and Geijst (1997) investigate former Soviet Jews’ attitudes toward their language of origin, compared to their attitude toward the language of the new society they are now entering. When asked about the relative saliency of various identities, Soviet Jews in Israel indicate that they are neither strongly motivated to embrace the new (Israeli) national identity nor strongly attached to their original national identity (Russian). It is Jewishness, binding the diasporic past to the Israeli present, that takes the lead: it appears in first position in 72 percent of profiles (Israeli identity appears in first position in 19 percent, Russian identity in only 9 percent). Although the Russian Jewish intelligentsia constituted an integral part of the Russian middle class and served as agents of Russian culture throughout the Soviet Empire, it should be emphasized that the research findings contradict the commonly-held point that “the Jewishness of the immigrants from the Slavic center of the Soviet Union, where Jewish and Zionist activity had been suppressed for three generations, was largely formal in

character, manifested by nationality registration in the citizen's internal passport, but cultural identity was distinctly Russian" (Leshem and Lissak 1999:143). Simultaneously, a different picture emerges when Soviet Jews evaluate their original culture and compare it with the culture of the setting into which they are being absorbed. When they are asked about their attitude toward the two languages (Russian and Hebrew) at their disposal, it is clear that, although the immigrants acquire Hebrew quite fast, which improves their occupational perspectives and enriches their social life, Hebrew is appreciated positively in some but not all respects (see Ben-Rafael, Olshtain and Geijst 1997, whose research was conducted in 1992; and Menahem and Gajst 2000: 308–309, who conducted two surveys in Tel-Aviv in 1992 and 1993).

Perceptions of Hebrew and Russian, 1992 (N=612)

<i>Attributes</i>	Hebrew	Russian
Respectable and cultural	89%	98%
Useful	33%	69%
International	8%	27%
Beautiful	65%	93%
Belongs to one's Jewishness	73%	84%

Adapted from Ben-Rafael, Olshtain & Geijst (1997:372).

Although Hebrew is viewed positively for the culture it conveys, for its relation to Jewishness, and for its esthetic character, Russian scores better on all these counts. The preference for Russian manifests itself in such aspects as the usefulness of the language and its international character. Of particular significance is the fact that Soviet Jews tend to consider Russian a more important channel than Hebrew even for the conveyance of Jewish values. In a sample that included 100 adolescent immigrants 13 to 19 years old who participated in a 1992 Summer Ulpan (intensive Hebrew language course), 82 percent reported that they were not enjoying speaking Hebrew and 59 percent reported that they were not seeking opportunities to speak Hebrew. However, 49 percent claimed that they wanted to speak Hebrew within their nuclear family (Kraemer et al. 1995:156). In other words, while Soviet Jews do appreciate Hebrew and the cultural values it conveys, they share a strong feeling that their own cultural-linguistic identity is of greater value to them. Other research, conducted recently by Kotik and Olshtain (1998:22–37), has also demonstrated high praise of the Russian language in all groups of immigrants, independently of their attitude toward Hebrew. Even young immigrants who have positive attitudes

toward their new country and its new language strongly approve of their mother tongue. Moreover, while the attitude to the country of origin, as revealed by evaluative indexes for “Russia”, was different, the subjective value of the “Russian language” was found to be high in all groups of immigrant adolescents (Olshtain and Kotik, 2000:212–215).

Age and education level are significant factors with regard to language behavior. The percentage of immigrant readers of Hebrew daily newspapers rises in inverse proportion to age: young people read more Hebrew newspapers. It should be noted, however, that no more than 20 percent of them read Hebrew newspapers at all (Lissak and Leshem 1995:29, using data collected in 1992–1993). Individuals who received higher education in the USSR, and thus achieved a high occupational status, invest more than other Soviet Jews in the acquisition of Hebrew and share a more assertive perception of their competence in the language and their use of it. They are also, obviously, the ones who report a stronger command of English (Ben-Raphael, Olshtain and Geijst 1997:378–379; for similar findings regarding Soviet immigrants in the United States see Chiswick 2000:292). Hence, while these better-educated people are acculturating more rapidly, despite the special difficulties they face, this stronger acculturation is coupled with a stronger retention of allegiance to their group of origin. In other words, social insertion and acculturation do not outweigh their wish to retain their former culture and identity.

The studies conducted by Ben-Rafael, Olshtain and Geijst (1997), Olshtain and Kotik (1998, 2000), Kraemer et al. (1995), and Menahem and Gajst (2000) concentrate on the interrelations of the dominant languages of the country of origin, on the one hand, and Israel, on the other. In other words, their studies analyze the interplay of Russian and Hebrew, while English is treated as the language of international communication. One can assume, however, that the complex language model the immigrants are exposed to consists not of three, but of at least six languages. For those immigrants who come not from Russia but from the other republics of the former Soviet Union, the scheme might include the language of the republic in question (Georgian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian etc.). Such individuals’ self-perception as representatives of the culture of a former non-Russian republic might differ from that of an immigrant coming from Russia, given that non-Russian cultures were frequently suppressed by the Soviet authorities, who aspired to replace them with cultural values based on Russian. This might be true even if such individuals were native speakers of Russian but dwelling in one of the non-Russian Soviet republics. In such cases the relative weight of local and Russian languages in an individual’s

cultural-linguistic identity would probably be different.

In addition, some immigrants, especially the elderly, have a considerable command of Yiddish, and even non-speakers might well have been exposed to it at home. Yiddish is highly valued by its speakers (see, for example, Verschik 1999), and even for non-Yiddish-speaking immigrants it might still play a special role. Many Jews (especially those living outside Russia proper) are multilingual. Finally the scheme of languages the immigrants are exposed to may include the language(s) they studied at school or in informal settings. Apart from English, such languages are mostly European languages such as French, German and Spanish, though there were even those who studied Japanese or Arabic. In sum, the linguistic behavior of Jews from the former Soviet Union involves a high degree of linguistic awareness: speakers enjoy their multilingualism.

Such tendencies point to a belief in additive bilingualism, but the dominant Israeli culture encourages not only acculturation but also assimilation. Though this dominant culture is more flexible than it was in the past, when it expected immigrants to give up their languages and cultures of origin for a new language, culture and identity, it remains inclined toward assimilation and, consequently, toward subtractive bilingualism. This is at variance with the wishes of the Soviet Jews themselves.

It is doubtful whether Russian immigrants to the United States have similar feelings, even though less than 10 percent of the ex-Soviet Jewish immigrants in the United States speak primarily English at home (see Chiswick 1993:274 and Chiswick 2000:288), and despite the fact that the United States has a far stronger policy of subtractive bilingualism than Israel does. There is evidence that Russian immigrants to the United States mostly accept the policy without complaining or appearing at all dissatisfied. It is not the case, then, that Russian immigrants *in general* resent subtractive bilingualism, but that they do so *in Israel*. Perhaps they do so because they feel that Russian represents a superior language and culture to Jewish-Israeli language and culture, while their American counterparts do not have this feeling about American culture. This is unusual: although it is mostly economic rather than cultural factors that motivate migration, most immigrants to new countries do not value the culture of the country they have left more highly than that of the country they are moving to. After all, if they did, why would they leave? Russian immigrants to Israel are different in this respect from other immigrants to Israel, who do not value the cultures of their countries of origin more highly than Israeli culture.

Such a world-view is usually evident only in special circumstances, such as

when the social, political, and economic order of a country with a relatively glorious past is collapsing. Under such relatively unusual circumstances, the people who are emigrating may nostalgically remember the glorious past of the country they are leaving and the status they had in it, and compare it to the considerably less glorious present of the country they are moving to (conveniently forgetting the dismal depths to which their country of origin has now sunk). A number of such cases can be found in Jewish history — most obviously the expulsion from Spain to the Ottoman Empire, where the Jews have kept Ladino, their version of Spanish, to the present day, and the expulsions from Germanic-speaking countries to the Slavic-speaking ones (perceived by those immigrants as less civilized), which led to Jews speaking Yiddish in areas where they were surrounded by Slavs. By the same token, Russian Jews have relied most heavily upon the “glorious past” in constructing their counter-nationalistic ideology — the “glorious past” of Russia, which stands in sharp contrast to the total collapse of the Soviet Union that caused their emigration and search for roots in other countries (Epstein and Kheimets 2001). At the same time, as suggested by Trier (1996), Israel was conceived by most Russian Jews as an “Oriental,” “non-European,” “semi-feudal” state ruled by religious laws. The Russian Jewish intelligentsia regarded Israeli culture as alien, and the socio-economic conditions in Israel were seen as undesirable. Israel tended to be perceived as a “homeland” in the sense of a refuge, to which Jews could retreat if the socio-political climate in Russia made emigration imperative.

As has been already mentioned, immigrants from the former Soviet Union arrived in Israel in two large waves, beginning slowly in 1966. This first wave gathered momentum, turning into mass immigration in 1971 and ending more or less at the end of the 1970s. About 200,000 people arrived during this period. In the 1970s the attempts by the new immigrants to maintain ties with their cultural homeland were frustrated by the Soviet regime, both at the formal level (there were no diplomatic relations with Israel) and informally: mutual visits of relatives and friends were forbidden, and postal and telephone communications were kept under surveillance by the authorities. Open cultural borders in the 1990s, the creation of Russian communities (Jewish and non-Jewish) in North America and Western Europe, and the mobility and reciprocal ability to travel among these communities have created a radically different situation, enabling the intelligentsia to emigrate while still preserving cultural ties with Russia.

Retention of Russian for reading newspapers, journals or books, or for watching TV and listening to the radio, is helped by the importation of materials from Russia, but also by the fact that Soviet Jews have been able to

develop Russian-speaking media locally. At the informal level Russian has attained the status of Israel's fourth language, after Hebrew and Arabic, the official languages, and English, the international language of communication. This informal status has been accorded formal recognition in the state's establishment of a Russian-language radio network, the screening of programs in Russian on public television, the holding of high-school final examinations ("matriculation exams") in Russian, and the subsidized publication of books in that language. The Russian-language press has expanded rapidly in Israel in the 1990s, and its publications now include more than fifty dailies, weeklies, and monthlies, with a large circulation. Besides providing information on community activity in the social, economic, and political spheres, these journals are also instrumental in determining the community's boundaries, symbols, and leadership, and in forming its attitude towards the broad society (Leshem and Lissak 1999:145–147). A supplementary Russian-language education system has also been set up in order to inculcate the cultural heritage and the mother tongue in the young generation and to spur the youngsters' intellectual development. A direct connection exists between the 1990s immigrants and performing artists from Russia's cultural centers, who pay frequent visits to Israel; in addition, cable television brings stations from Russia into the homes of hundreds of thousands of immigrants. Soviet Jews are eager to retain their language of origin as a language of the family, the community and cultural consumption. This creates a market for Russian cultural goods and appeals to cultural entrepreneurs. Many immigrant scientists support the idea of creating an alternative infrastructure of scientific research and higher education under the umbrella of an Israel-based international Russian-language university. In fact, a precedent for such an alternative institution of higher education and research has already been created in Germany, where the growth of the Russian-speaking population together with the lack of psychological assistance in the Russian language has created a demand for psychologists capable of working with Russian immigrants in their mother tongue. To address this need, a branch of the psychology department of Saint Petersburg University was founded in Berlin in 1996. On graduation, students receive a BA degree in psychology which is recognized by the German authorities.

Nor should it be forgotten that the preference for seemingly separatist models of behavior, such as the immigrants' insistence on maintenance of their native language, does not automatically support the ghettoization hypothesis. For example, although Russian-language newspapers devote considerable space to reprinting articles from the press in the former Soviet Union, thus

further strengthening the ties with the home country and the group of origin, translation of news items and articles from the Hebrew press is also an important part of the material presented. The Russian-language press apparently reflects the whole spectrum of approaches, from ghettoization to full integration (Lissak and Leshem 1995:28–32). By the same token, although schools founded by immigrant teachers from the former Soviet Union are sometimes characterized as non-integrative (due to the high proportion of new immigrants among their students), they provide their graduates with the matriculation certificate, the entry ticket to full integration into Israeli society and its labor market. Rather than expressing the Russian immigrants' desire for socio-cultural segregation, the success of these "Russian" schools is directly linked to the failure of the general education system to meet immigrants' needs (Epstein and Kheimets 2000).

Modern approaches to and discussions of multiculturalism or cultural pluralism result from the acceptance of the fact that cultural affinity is an integral part of human nature. Keeping one's connections with one's family and the culture one grew up in helps people maintain their personal identity, whereas denying one's culture and one's personal experiences can be destructive to the personality. At the societal level, to the extent that ethno-cultural consciousness can prepare the ground for the conversion of ethnicity into a political resource, it is the ideology of multiculturalism that can be used as the remedy for internal separatist tendencies.

## Conclusion

Spolsky's sociolinguistic theory of second-language learning proposes that language learning depends on previous knowledge, ability, motivation, and learning opportunities (Spolsky 1989:15). It further proposes that social context is relevant to language learning both in determining the attitudes and goals of the learner which lead to motivation, and in determining the learning opportunities, whether formal (e.g. educational) or informal, provided by those who interact linguistically with the learner. Spolsky (1991:139) states that although "studies of second language learning generally concentrate their attention on the individual learner, the social phenomenon of language shift ultimately depends on groups of individuals who learn a language, who do not learn it, or who forget it. Thus what appears as a change in social patterns of language use and knowledge can be shown to depend on individual success or failure in language learning."

The present study suggests that, although Russian immigrants acquire Hebrew quite fast, thereby improving their occupational perspectives and enriching their social life, the former Soviet Jewish intelligentsia's perception of the dominant policy of language shift to Hebrew is extremely negative: in their view it resembles the Soviet policy of language shift to Russian. However, because Soviet language policy successfully suppressed Yiddish and Hebrew, the contemporary cultural world of Russian Jews has been mediated mostly in Russian. Furthermore, the self-identification of today's post-Soviet Jewish intelligentsia combines Jewish (mostly Yiddish) legacy and the heritage of Russian culture, created in part by Jewish writers and poets. Therefore, Russian Jews tend to consider Russian a more important channel than Hebrew for the conveyance of their cultural values.

In addition, in Israel, especially in the higher classes, English constitutes a more important status symbol and boundary marker than Hebrew (see Ben-Rafael 1994). Thus, as has been argued by Kheimets and Epstein (2001), Israeli language policy, which, for ideological reasons, has traditionally perceived the acquisition of Hebrew by immigrants as its major goal, should be reformulated: apart from studying Hebrew, the immigrants who did not have an opportunity to study English beforehand must be provided with an access to this language, since without it they are unlikely to become equal members of the Israeli middle class.

The former Soviet Jewish intelligentsia in Israel is striving to retain a multilingual identity: they appreciate Hebrew and the cultural values it conveys, but they share a strong feeling that their own cultural-linguistic identity is of a great value to them. This identity may be based not only on Russian but also on other languages spoken in the former Soviet republics, Yiddish, foreign languages taught in school and university, and English. The immigrants are well aware of the crucial importance that English has in their professional career in their new country.

## Note

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## РЕЗЮМЕ

### *Против течений, поверх границ. Историко-социологический анализ языковой идентичности русскоязычной еврейской интеллигенции в Израиле*

Настоящая статья представляет собой теоретический анализ языковой идентификации постсоветской еврейской интеллигенции, проживающей в Израиле. Наличие в Израиле колоссального числа носителей русской культуры во многом способствовало кристаллизации русского еврейского общинного самосознания в Израиле. Вместе с тем, выбор русского языка как основного не означает автоматической приверженности идее секторального обособления. Местная русскоязычная пресса старается отражать весь спектр мнений общины по этому вопросу, колеблющийся от стремления к геттоизации до полной интеграции в израильское общество. Большинство иммигрантов молодого и среднего возраста довольно быстро овладевает ивритом, что помогает им в поисках работы и делает их жизнь более разносторонней и насыщенной. Вместе с тем, большинство живущих в Израиле представителей постсоветской еврейской интеллигенции, тем не менее, негативно относится к израильской государственной политике языковой ассимиляции, которая напоминает им об аналогичном принудительном подходе советских властей в отношении тотальной русификации. Именно в силу успешного проведения в жизнь в Советском Союзе подобной политики подавления национальных языков, в том числе иврита и идиша, советская еврейская интеллигенция считала русский своим основным языком.

В наши дни самосознание российской еврейской интеллигенции состоит из уникального сплава приверженности, с одной стороны, своим национальным корням, а с другой — русской культуре, в создании которой среди прочих принимали участие также и писатели, художники и музыканты — евреи. Другими словами, российская еврейская интеллигенция стремится к языковому равноправию и многоязычию, признавая иврит и базирующуюся на нем культуру, но, тем не менее, продолжая считать свое собственное культурное и языковое самосознание доминирующим.

## Resumo

### *Inter du modeloj de naciokonstruo: Teoriaj kaj historiaj kadroj por analizi la multlingvan identon de la rusjuda intelektularo en Israelo*

La artikolo donas superrigardon de sociologia analizo de la transformo de la ligo lingvidento inter sovetjudaj enmigrintoj en Israelon, fokuse je ilia komuna deziro konservi sian rusan lingvon post enmigro en la ŝtaton Israelo. La aŭtoroj argumentas, ke, kvankam la enmigrintoj akiras la hebrean iom rapide, kio plibonigas iliajn profesiajn perspektivojn kaj riĉigas ilian socian vivon, la iama sovetjuda intelektularo perceptas ekstreme negative la regantan israelan politikon pri lingvotransiro al la hebrea: laŭ ilia vidpunkto ĝi similas la sovetan politikon pri lingvotransiro al la rusa. Tamen, pro la sukceso de la soveta lingvopolitiko pri subpremo de la jida kaj hebrea, la nuntempa kultura mondo de rusaj judoj funkcias ĉefe per la medio de la rusa. Krome, la sinidentigo de la hodiaŭa postsoveta juda intelektularo kunigas la judan (ĉefe jidan) heredaĵon kun tiu de la rusa kulturo, parte kreita ĝuste de judaj verkistoj. Tial, la rusaj judoj emas konsideri la rusan kiel pli gravan medion por porti iliajn kulturajn valorojn ol estas la hebrea. La sovetjuda intelektularo en Israelo strebas krei multlingvan identecon: kvankam ili favore taksas la hebrean kaj ties kulturajn valorojn, ili dividas inter si fortan senton, ke ilia propra kultura kaj lingva idento estas tre valora al ili.

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