

# Searching for a New Identity: The Acculturation of Russian – born Adolescents in Israel

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The beginning of 1990 witnessed a great change in the history of Israeli society.

This was the turning point which initiated the so-called – “ha aliya ha gdolya” the great wave of immigration - the huge influx of Jews and the members of their families from the FSU to Israel.

During the past decade almost a 1 000 000 people have immigrated to Israel and the so-called “Russians” have become the largest Jewish ethnic group in the country. At the same time cultural adaptation and the process of “shopping” for a new identity have become a mutually painful issue for both immigrant and native Israeli. The reason for this lies mainly in the unique character of this tremendous wave of immigration, which no doubt differs greatly from the previous ones.

This wave of immigration was neither Zionist nor traditionally Jewish. During their lives in the FSU, Soviet Jews were strongly exposed to Russian culture and therefore following immigration to Israel continued to assert their cultural identity (Ritterband, 1997).

The process of forging a new identity is a complicated process, which has a number of practical manifestations, which lend to describing it in concrete terms. ‘Any national culture is based first and foremost on language, and national identification includes mastery of this language as a fundamental prerequisite. In this sense, the Russian language is the absolute basis of Russian culture, of *Russianness*, and the most important tool of the individual’s socialization in the Russian cultural tradition’ (Brill Olkot & Semyonova, 2001:144,145). This point is strongly supported by other scholars: ‘Linguistic behavior is one of the major factors in the definition of the social and cultural boundaries’ (Ben Rafael, 1994: 367). ‘Social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through the language. The old ethnic ties found their linguistic expression in loyalty to the language of origin and the new ethnic identities rely on linguistic symbols to establish new speech conventions’ (Gumperz, 1982)

Several studies provide data on language and identity dilemma of Soviet Jews in Israel. The research conducted by Ben Rafael et. al.(1997) focused on the collective identity, socio-cultural insertion and language preferences of the newcomers. The target population was in the 20-55 age bracket. It was found that Soviet Jews are attached to their original culture and identity. Their social mobility is viewed both as a sign of future assimilation as well as a powerful asset providing their autonomy. The authors see a high probability for Russian Jews to become a new socio-cultural entity, which will effect the aspirations of other communities in Israel. Similar results were reported by the Ministry of Absorption (Rosenbaum - Tamari & Demiam, 1996). Immigrants were found eager to acquire Hebrew mostly for utilitarian reasons while at the same time reporting a very strong commitment to the Russian language and culture.

A profound and comprehensive research on the determinants of language choice of Soviet immigrants was conducted by Donitsa-Schmidt (1999). Some of the findings are different from those of Ben Rafael. Regarding the identity of the new-comers, both researchers found Jewish identity to be the primary one, however, where Ben Rafael et. al (1997) claimed that Israeli identity preceded the Russian one, Donitsa-Schmidt claimed just the opposite. This phenomenon may be explained by the hesitant identity of the newcomers and by the fact that the respondents reported various concepts of identity (Donitsa-Shmidt, 1999,p.242).

Donitsa-Shmidt concludes that although the research reveals the positive attitude of the subjects towards maintenance of the Russian language and culture there are clear indications of a language shift process, mostly reported by the younger generation that is involved in formal education and compulsory army service.

Donitsa-Shmidt considers the future of the Russian community similar to the other immigration waves to Israel, i.e. despite the conditions favoring their language maintenance they will ultimately relinquish their language. At the same time there are no predictions as to the future cultural identity of the immigrants, which is extremely important for the future of the community.

Though Donitsa-Shmidt draws her conclusion based mostly on research with young people, surprisingly little research has been done on the process of acculturation of children and adolescents. Most of the studies focusing on immigrant youth were conducted during the first years of immigration. In 1992 a pilot study was carried out on 100 adolescent ulpan students from the FSU (Kraemer, Zisenwine, Levi-Keren & Schers, 1995). The results revealed a very positive attitude to Hebrew, though in terms of their identity, the subjects considered themselves first Russian, then Israeli and only in the third place Jewish.

In 1993, in order to examine the “identity shopping” dilemma of Jewish teenagers from the FSU, Markowitz studied the case of seventeen (14-17 year-old age bracket) Jewish newcomers in a boarding school for arts in Mizpe Ramon. They came to participate in the *Na'ale* project. (Markowitz, 1997). She reported their hesitant identity: the answer to the question of “who am I” was still unclear to them. The teenagers believed they are very different from their *sabra* schoolmates yet in almost no time they started to behave very much like the native born Israelis with whom they truly believed they didn't have much in common.

As for Jewish adolescents from the FSU, in the USA a study that was conducted by Birman on acculturation of Jewish public school students of Russian origin and their parents in Baltimore, Maryland (Birman, 2001) presented surprising results. Birman discovered that the adolescents identified more with Russian culture than their parents did and that they maintained their Russian identity over time.

All the aforementioned researchers without exception point to a very strong Russian identity and attachment to Russian culture for both adolescents and adults. As far as the immigrant youth is concerned there is little research to rely upon making it difficult to analyze and predict the acculturation process of Russian youth in Israel.

## 1. Research question

The present study investigates the acculturation process for first generation Russian Jewish adolescents in Israel. The relevant traits that have been examined are: identity, language use, language preference and ethnic and social insertion.

In Israel, where Russian immigrants comprise thirteen percent of the total population, the question of how, and to what extent, the newcomers are to be integrated into the new society and what should be the pace of this integration cannot be underestimated. Their cultural adjustment in particular has a serious impact on the life of the state itself in that it challenges and changes its social structure, collective identity and ethnic boundaries, educational system and cultural life.

The present study focuses on adolescents of the so-called “generation 1.5” (Garcia-Coll & Magnuson, 1997), i.e. those who immigrated with their parents during childhood.

The research was conducted in 2001 and the data was collected via semi-structured interviews in the homes of the interviewees. The subjects had arrived to Israel not less than six and not more than eleven years earlier (1) and were strictly of European origin (*Ashkenazi*). All the respondents hailed from the Tel-Aviv area and were in the 13-16 year-old-age brackets. One hundred twenty two participants took part in the survey.

## 2. Characteristics of the sample

The characteristics of the sample were as shown in Figure 1. Some features of the sample are characteristic for the target population in general; others result from the sample procedure.

At the time of the survey no reliable data existed on the social and educational level of the subjects, since only adolescents were interviewed and they did not always know what education their parents had received and what job positions they occupied. Nevertheless, based on interview responses one can conclude that for the most part they came from highly educated white-collar families, a phenomenon typical of this immigration (Gold, 1992, Ben Rafael, 1997).

Figure 1. Characteristics of the sample

Gender	male	56 %
	female	44 %
Republic of origin in FSU	Russia	30 %
	Ukraine	36 %
	Belarus	13 %
	Moldova	8 %
	Baltic Republics (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia)	3 %
	Central Asia (2)	7 %
	Caucasus	3 %
Place of origin in FSU	Central city	48 %
	Peripheral town (3)	52 %
Place of residence in Israel	Russian enclave	43 %
	Mixed ethnic population	57 %
Number of Russian origin students in class	Less than 40%	52 %
	Approximately one half	33 %
	More than 60%	15 %

### 3. The process of acculturation; the case of Israel

The term “acculturation” is widely used to describe the process of cultural insertion and the identity forging process of the immigrants (Berry, 1980, Szaposhnic & Curtines, 1980, Nguyen, Messe, & Stolak, 1999).

Berry (Berry, 1980:9) quoted the two classical definitions of acculturation:

“Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups..... acculturation is to be distinguished from cultural change, of which it is but one aspect, and of assimilation, which is in times a phase of acculturation. It is also to be differentiated from diffusion....” Redfield et.al. (1936).

Another classical definition was formulated by the SSRS in 1954. Acculturation is defined as “... cultural change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems.... Its dynamics can be seen as the selective adaptation of value systems, the processes of integration and differentiation, the generation of developmental sequences and the operation of role determinants and personality factors” (p. 9, 10).

Berry (Berry, 1980) suggests that there may be a three-phase course of acculturation - contact, conflict and adaptation, where the first is necessary, the second is probable and the third is inevitable. As for relations with the dominant society and culture, Berry distinguished four types of acculturation, the first two of which are: assimilation, relinquishing cultural identity and moving into a larger society; integration, which implies maintenance of cultural integrity as well as the movement to become an integral part of a larger social framework. The two mentioned above are characterized by a positive attitude to the dominant culture. The other two types - rejection and de-culturation describe a negative relationship to the dominant society. Rejection refers to a self-imposed withdrawal from society and becomes one of the classical forms of segregation. Loss of original identity along\_with feelings of alienation characterize de-culturation. Under such circumstances these groups are beyond cultural and psychological contact with either their traditional culture or the dominant one.

The pace and character of cultural adaptation depend to a great extent upon the nature of the dominant culture. Ben Rafael (Ben Rafael, 1994: 13-17) suggests two principle models of the latter: the first one is unifying where all cultural symbols are perceived as a whole and all differences are secondary and doomed to disappear. The second model, a pluralistic one, accepts social, cultural and linguistic differences.

Israeli society presents an interesting case of gradual switching from one type to another, though the process is still not completed. The process of nation building involved the forging of a new social identity which would define and unite the nation. Under these conditions Hebrew became an ideological instrument and not simply a means of communication. The founders of the country preached the idea of “one nation - one people - one language”. Nation, state and language were almost synonymous (Shoamy, 1994). Tremendous official and unofficial pressure on new immigrants and strong government support resulted in the fact that Hebrew became the only legitimate state language. In the early 1970s the situation started to change: the growing influence of English as an international lingua franca (Spolsky, 1996), along with two linguistically important waves of immigration including a relatively small but influential group of English speakers in the 1970s and the mass migration of Russian speakers in 1990 (Spolsky, 1996) began to corrupt the unquestionable and monolithic monopoly of Hebrew. In addition, a more tolerant attitude in the “civilized” democratic countries to ethnic minorities as well as the painful consequences of forced assimilation of the North African Jews in the 1950s contributed to the gradual development of a more balanced and pluralistic approach to the problems of acculturation.

The Ministry of Education announced what they termed “A New Language Education policy”. The policy recognized the legitimate right of each community to learn the other’s language. Not only was the prime importance of Hebrew proclaimed, but also of Arabic as both a mother tongue and language of instruction. English was distinguished as the first foreign language, Russian and French as the languages of special importance. New immigrants from such disparate places as the FSU and Ethiopia were to be encouraged to retain their languages while learning Hebrew. In light of the new policy a special program for Russian study was approved in 1998 . Russian had been taught prior to this time but only to new immigrants. The new program made the process more systematic and enabled more students to be involved in it.

It should be emphasized here that in spite of the new policy things did not change instantly. A few principals and officials still share a very hesitant attitude to the problem of language maintenance plus limited finances do not encourage them to implement the new policy.

#### **4. A model of acculturation**

The immigrant experience and the process of acculturation and adjustment has been a focus of interest in a number of social disciplines, which lead not only to several definitional problems but to a certain theoretical diversity. Searly and Ward mention three main frameworks in this connection: a) clinical perspectives, b) social learning models and c) social cognition approaches. (Searly & Ward, 1990). Clinically oriented models study primarily the role of personality, life events, changes and social supports, which facilitate or inhibit the process of adjustment.

Social learning models are focused mainly on the acquisition of culturally appropriate skills and behaviors through contact with hosts, cross-cultural experiences and training. Cultural distance is regarded as one of the major factors of adjustment.

Social cognition models emphasize the importance of expectations, values, attitudes and perceptions in the cross-cultural adjustment process.

The present research examines the range of socio-cultural variables of the adjustment process and is based on the two latter models.

Currently, there are two distinct approaches to the process of acculturation: a linear, bipolar approach and a two-dimensional approach (Phinney, 1990, Nguyen, Mess, Stollak, 1999). The linear (also called the uni-dimensional or bipolar approach) places one culture against another and assumes an inverse relationship between the ethnic and host cultures. Thus, the strengthening of one is at the expense of the other. Uni-dimensional scales eliminate the possibility of independent parallel involvement in each culture. This approach nearly eliminates the phenomenon of bicultural people. In contrast to the bipolar approach, the bi-dimensional approach (or two-dimensional approach ) views

acculturation as a process in which both the relationship with the minority and dominant culture should be considered separately and relations between them may be independent. In some studies the term “orthogonal” is used (Oetting & Beauvais 1991, Birman, 1994, Birman 2001), since the bi-dimensional approach stresses an orthogonal relationship between acculturation to the vernacular and the host culture. There are a number of studies based on this pattern. (Eliias & Blanton 1987, Berry, 1980, 1991, Sanches & Fernandes, 1993, Dona & Berry, 1994, Nguen et.al.1999, Birman, 2001). The orthogonal or bi-dimensional approach has proved itself as the one that approaches the acculturation process in a more complex and comprehensive way.

The present study measured acculturation within a two-dimensional framework, enabling us to investigate the integration into two cultures separately. Five dimensions of acculturation formulated by Padila (Padila, 1980) were seen as the most important and salient in determining acculturative change.

The first two dimensions are *language familiarity and usage*; and *cultural heritage*, i.e. knowledge of a wide variety of cultural artifacts and materials characterizing both cultures and preference of one culture’s characteristics over another. The three remaining characteristics refer to the ethnic factor. These are *ethnic identity and pride*, *interethnic interaction* and *interethnic distance*. The present research focuses mainly on language. The issue of cultural heritage is connected with verbal culture and has been examined as the use of language for cultural needs. Thus, the first two dimensions were united in the one – language familiarity and use.

To investigate this issue the concept of domains was included (Fishman, Cooper and Ma, 1971). Fishman et al. suggested five domains: family, friendship, religion, employment and education. Instead of employment a school domain was used, since for the adolescents the domain of employment is almost irrelevant. The domain of religion was eliminated as all the subjects are secular which is typical of the Russian community in Israel. Three out of five remain: family, friendship and school.

## **5. Language familiarity and usage**

### *5.1. Language maintenance vs. language shift*

One of the key questions in the process of acculturation is language maintenance vs. language shift or, as Lambert described it, (1974,1975) additive and subtractive bilingualism. Additive bilingualism is defined as acquisition of a second language while maintaining the first. Subtractive bilingualism means favoring the development of a second language at the expense of the first. The first phenomenon is mostly characteristic of majority group members and the second is typical for the minority ones (Cummins & Swain, 1986).

Bilingualism means code-switching which implies in turn code-choice. Researchers name a number of factors that influence this choice along with a variety of models of bilingualism. Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977 ) suggested the term “ethnolinguistic vitality” to systematize and describe the factors that influence the probability of language maintenance or shifts for a particular group. Three groups of factors are considered to be of major importance: 1. Demographic factors 2. Status factors 3. Institutional support.

As for the demographic situation the case of the Russian population in Israel seems to be the most favorable for language maintenance because of both the size of a group in absolute numbers and its proportion to the total population, as has been already mentioned above.

Status factor seems more problematic. Though the founders of the state were mainly from Russia as well as the original writers, musicians, etc., modern Israeli society is much more Western-oriented. Institutional support remains quite problematic as noted earlier.

Studies of bilingualism highlighted the variety of code-switching. Spolsky (1988:100) warns that “If we count as a bilingual only someone with equal and native command of two or more languages we exclude the vast majority of cases and are left with the least interesting”. Based on a review of literature Ben Rafael presented various classifications of bilingualism. The first one is by Weinreich, who distinguishes four main types: 1) a mother tongue influenced by legitimate language; 2) a mixture of the two; 3) a legitimate language influenced by the mother tongue; 4) genuine bilingualism. Haugen identifies switching as an alternate use of the two languages; interference, which is the application of the two systems to the same item; and integration, when sentences of one language become a part of the second language. According to Grosjean the occurrence of code switching relates to social norms: ‘In some bilingual or multilingual communities code switching is the norm rather than exception...

Bilinguals just explain that... some notions are just better expressed in one language than another...' (Quoted by Ben Rafael,1994:21).

Spolsky (1988:112) pointed out the two necessary conditions for the choice of language for communication:

1) Use (speak, write) a language which you know.

2) Use (speak, write) a language the person you want to communicate knows. In other words in order to use the language one should have a command of the language well enough to express oneself to a target audience able to communicate in this language. In the situation when these two conditions have been met Spolsky proposed a competence model to predict the language choice of the participants in the communication. The model consists of five typicality conditions that are indicators of both language proficiency and speech situation:

Typicality condition 1: Prefer to use the language you know best to the topic concerned.

Typicality condition 2: Prefer to use the language that you believe the person you are addressing knows best for the topic being discussed.

Typicality condition 3: Prefer to use the language you used the last time you addressed this person.

Typicality condition 4: Prefer the language that includes or excludes a third party.

Typicality condition 5: Prefer to use a language that asserts the most advantageous social group membership for you in the proposed interaction.

The dilemma of language choice as was already mentioned is first and foremost connected with the question of proficiency. No special proficiency language test was given to the subjects, but they were asked to evaluate their Hebrew and Russian. In addition the interviews were taken in Russian, which made it possible to examine the speech of subjects in Russian. Since already from initial interviews it was quite obvious that the Hebrew of the subjects was much better than their Russian different questions were asked concerning the two languages.

The first question asked was "What language is easy for you to speak?" For the vast majority the answer was Hebrew (see Table 1). While being asked the question: " Does your Hebrew differ from the Hebrew of other Israeli teenagers?" the majority - 66,6 % answered "no", and those who answered "yes" believed that the only difference to be the accent. Such a high level of Hebrew proficiency can be explained by the fact that most of their schooling was carried out in Hebrew. Even in "Russian" schools of the "Mofet" (Russian) school network the language of instruction is Hebrew.

**Table 1**

	<b>Language Proficiency</b>			
	<i>Easy to Speak</i>	<i>Russian Self Evaluation</i>	<i>Hebrew Interference in Russian</i>	<i>Parents Hebrew</i>
	Hebrew – 1	Range "1-4" - 1		
	Both – 2	Range "5-7" - 2		
	Russian - 3	Range "8-10" - 3		
<b>Mean</b>	1.5	2.1	2.5	2.2
<b>STD</b>	0.8	0.6	0.7	0.6
	<b>Hebrew Differs from Israelis</b>			
<b>%</b>	34			

As for their command of Russian, the situation differs greatly. A 100% scale was suggested to the subjects for the purpose of self-evaluation. The most popular range was from 50 to 70 (see Table 1). The reasons lie in an almost total absence of writing skills as well as very poor reading skills. Some of the adolescents mentioned that members of their families or even private tutors taught them reading

and writing, however the studies were abbreviated and not systematic. In a few cases problems with “locating the proper word” were admitted.

The language data of the interviews demonstrates that the problems being faced while speaking Russian were typical of language attrition and not of learning a foreign language. The subjects intrinsically understood this and while being asked whether Russian was, for them, a foreign language (see Table 2).

Table 2

	Attitude to the Language		
	<i>Mother Tongue</i>	<i>Russian is Foreign</i>	
	Hebrew – 1	Yes – 1	
	Both – 2	No - 2	
	Russian – 3	Don't know – 3	
<b>Mean</b>	2.3	2	
<b>STD</b>	0.9	0.3	
	<i>Problems with Parents Lack of Hebrew</i>	<i>Problems Speaking Russian Outdoors</i>	<i>Want Their Children to Know Russian?</i>
<b>%</b>	3	5	100
	Cultural Needs		
	<i>Favorites in R</i>		<i>Problems Watching TV In Russian</i>
	<i>TV</i>	<i>Music</i>	
<b>%</b>	62	66	16

Mistakes typical for foreign learners even of a very advanced level such as those in the use of cases in different parts of speech and in verb aspects are quite rare. The most frequent mistakes are in syntax. Russian syntax is quite similar to Hebrew, which make it difficult to distinguish the problem.

In almost every interview mistakes in the link between main and subordinate clauses can be found, for example: *Ja ne znaiu, esli ia budu zdes'zavtra* instead of *ia ne znaiu, budu li ia zdes' zavtra* – ‘I don’t know if I’m here tomorrow’. Another group of mistakes is lexical, mainly in word combination. The speech of the subjects is full of calques from Hebrew. They experience difficulties as well while looking for equivalents for various abstract notions. For these notions they prefer to use Hebrew even while speaking Russian - *hinuch, tarbut*. The phenomenon of word borrowing is a well-known phenomenon for linguists and deserves special attention while analyzing the language of immigrants. Leonard Blumfeld proposed a three-tiered hierarchy classification of borrowings in any language:

1) words that remain foreign but are used in the borrowing language, such as saloon in English, where the “n” is pronounced with a French accent 2) semi-foreign words, that show some adaptation to the new language, such as the English term “preciosity” from the French “preciosite” and 3) foreign words which have entered the borrowing language altogether and are indistinguishable in behavior from native words. (Bloomfield 1933: 444-453) All three categories are characteristic of Russia emigre language and particularly in the language of the interviewed adolescents. «*U nas raznye minagim*» - We have different *customs* - the word *customs* is used in Hebrew and preserves the Hebrew grammatical characteristics of the plural masculine noun. *Kogda moi roditeli govoriat na ivrite, byvaiut fadikhot* – “When my parents speak Hebrew they make embarrassing mistakes” - Hebrew borrowing from Arabic which is very typical for colloquial Hebrew is used in this instance while all the Hebrew grammatical categories are preserved (feminine plural noun). The second case is well represented too: *u nas v tichone* - in our high school - where the Hebrew word *tichon* - meaning high school assumes the characteristics of the Russian Prepositional Case.

There are a few examples of the final category as well. The most popular one is *pokupat v supere*, meaning “to shop in the supermarket” used in the interviews as *kogda my pokupaem v supere*. Hebrew adopted the word supermarket as *super* and this is the way it is widely used by Russians. This word is easily understood even by those who have no knowledge of Hebrew (or English).

While analyzing different types of borrowings based on Weinreich’s conclusions, Andrew distinguishes two main types of lexical borrowings (Andrew 1998: 28). The first type is one-word nominal sentences, for example **beseder** – OK in Hebrew, *be’emet* - really, and *mamash*, also really. The final word’s meaning can change depending on the context. The second type - common nouns widely used to designate new items and concepts lacking in the other culture. In the interviews *bagrut* would be used rather than *vypusknye examiny* - final exams in Russian, *tichon* rather than *starshie klassy* - high school in Russian, *can’on* - rather than *yniversalnyi magazin* - shopping mall in Russian. All these borrowings reflect to a certain extent social and cultural differences between the two societies and have slightly different meanings in Hebrew than they do in Russian.

There is another classification of borrowings made from a structural perspective and suggested by Huggen, Weinreich and quoted by Andrew (1998:29). The first group is comprised of direct loans, such as *beseder*, *mamash*. The second group is called by Weinreich “semantic extensions” in which the meaning of a pre-existing word is expanded on the basis of a foreign model. There are only a few examples of such phenomena in immigrant speech. While being interviewed one of the respondents talking about his family duties included blowing up balloons for his baby brother. He used the word *balloon* - Hebrew borrowing from English with the same meaning. In Russian there is another word for it - *shar*, *sharik*. *Balloon* or in Russian *ballon* is used for the container in the shape of a cylinder. Another example, far more frequent is the Hebrew word *salon* meaning living room. In Russian it would be *gostinnaia* or *bolshaia komnata*. Salon in Russian has a meaning very close to English and French – in reality, it was borrowed from the French language.

The third group is word borrowings involving compound words and phrases. The first one of this type is called “loan transitions” in which all the elements of the phrase are reproduced according to the donor language. In the interviews only one of this type was found - *dat’ otnosheniye* - literally *latet yahas* - meaning ‘to pay serious attention to...’. The second and most popular of this type is one in which the component part of a given expression retains its lexical meaning, however, the particular combination of elements involved is due to the influence of a second language. There are numerous examples of this, such as *vsat kurs* - meaning ‘to take a course’ - in Russian - *zapisat’ cia na kurs*, *davat uvazhenie* - a direct translation of the Hebrew *latet kavod* - to respect - in Russian - *okazyvat uvazhenie*, *dumat vperiod* - to think in advance - in Russian - *dumat zaranee*.

Another example of interference - “hybrid compounds” - the addition of a native affix to a foreign root. It is mostly typical of adjectives and verbs: *militantnoe povedenie* - for militant behavior (from Heb. *militanti* - militant) - *voinstvennoe povedenie* in Russian *hitnaagutnye problemy* (from Heb. *hitnaagut*) - for behavioral problems - *povedencheskie problemy* - in Russian. As for the verbs such expressions were reported as *protipulit’* or *prometopelit’* from Hebrew *tipul* - care or *letapel* - to take care - in Russian *pozabotit’ cia* and on *mebalbelit mne golovy* - from Hebrew *lebalbel* - to confuse

Russian spoken by the teenagers was influenced not only by Hebrew, but also by southern dialects of Russian. Those immigrant youth hailing from northern and central Russian families frequently used the words and expressions typical for the south of Russia and for the Ukraine, for example *logit’* instead of *klast’* - to put, or the misuse of the preposition *za* - *Ja za eto ne znaiu* instead of *Ja ob etom ne znaiu* - I don’t know about it, *Ja za ei skuchaiu* instead of *Ja po nei skuchaiu* - I miss her. It should be mentioned that the respondents themselves are no doubt aware of this phenomenon.

When being asked: “How come?” With the accompanying statement “These are not your parents who speak that way and it has nothing to do with Hebrew....” the answer was: “*Had you been surrounded by Ukrainians you would speak even worse.*”

Though the majority of respondents have certain proficiency problems with Russian they share a very positive attitude to the language. Hebrew is easy to speak, but for more than half Russian is still their mother tongue. The vast majority believe that even though they have problems speaking Russian it is not a foreign language for them.

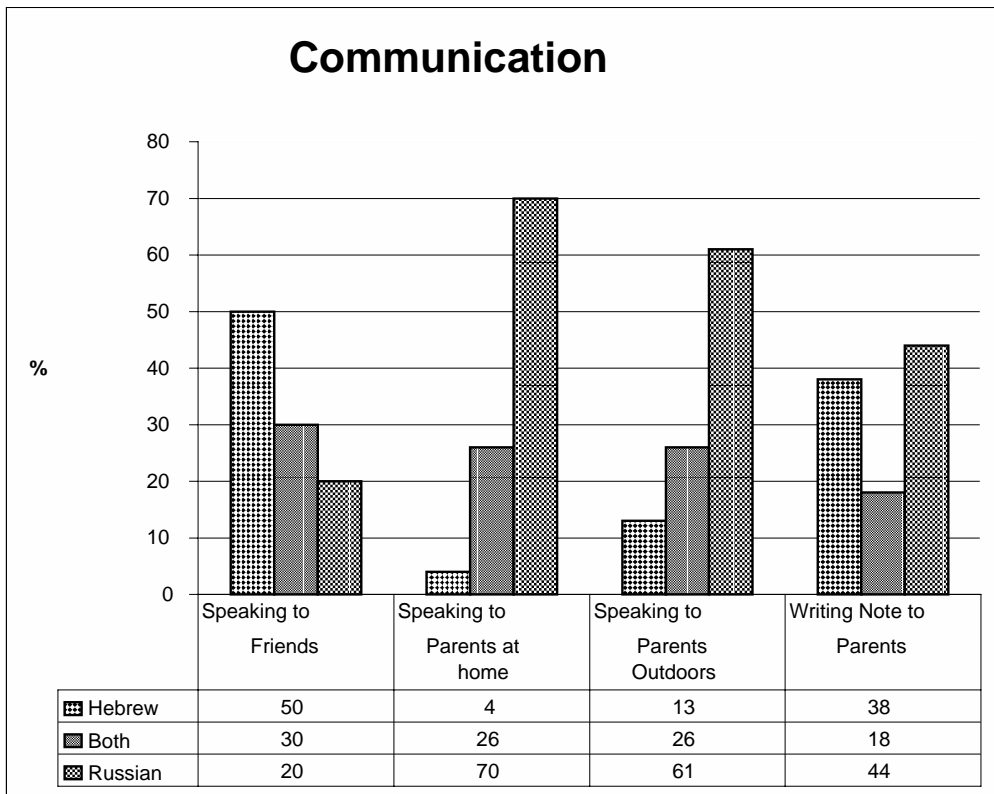
Elina, 16 years old - *Not that I always feel it’s my mother tongue, but I know for sure it’s my mother tongue.* Natasha, 13: *How can Russian be foreign for me! I live in it, I was brought up in it.*



## 5.2. The attitude to the Russian language

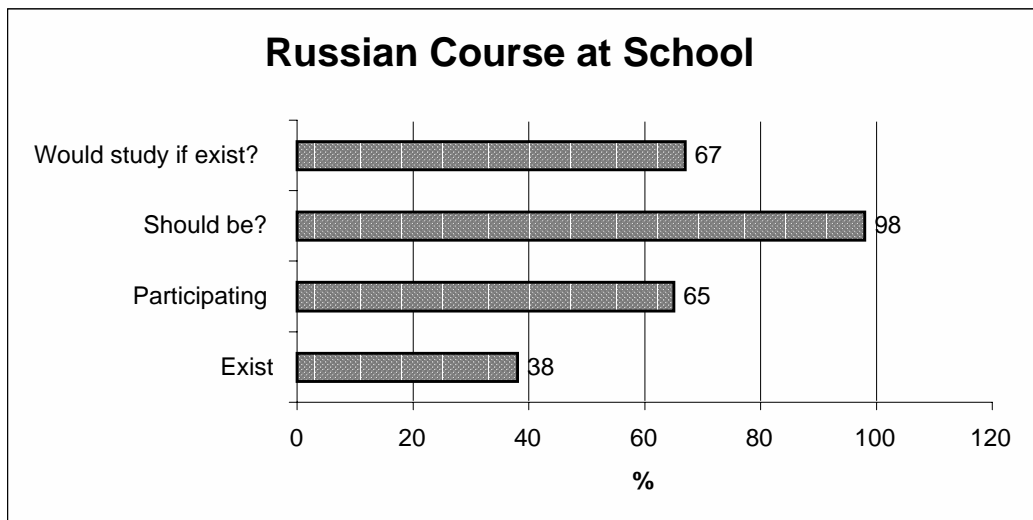
The teenagers felt no problem speaking Russian outside the home. This is the language they use for communication with their parents and grandparents and things do not change when they are in public. (See Graph 1 & Table 2) They are not ashamed to speak Russian nor are they ashamed of the fact their parents lack a knowledge of Hebrew. Stas, 16: *Why should be I ashamed of my language? I don't care what others think about it.* Some of them, for example Misha, 16, and Stas, 15, see it as an advantage: *Had it not been for my parents' lack of Hebrew, I would have forgotten my Russian long ago.* Igor, 16: *There is little chance they (his parents – M.N.) would understand anything listening to my teachers at school so there is nothing I would be punished for.*

Graph 1



The majority (88,8%) claim they would like to improve their Russian (see graph 2), 97.7% believe Russian should be taught at schools together with French and Arabic and that students should have a right to choose which languages they prefer to learn. Finally, all of the respondents (100%) wanted their children to speak at least some Russian. For some of them it is important for purely pragmatic reasons: Ilia, 15, and Jonathan, 16 exclaimed *another language, why not?*; some see in Russian a symbol of their cultural roots which they would like their children to be aware of by saying *they should know where they come from* (Genya, 14), for some it is the only way to keep family and relatives together - *without Russian how would they (children - M.N.) communicate with their parents and their relatives*(Lilia, 13)? But in practice things look slightly different. For example in some schools where Russian is taught there are some who preferred not to take it. In fact only 61,5 % participate at the moment or would participate if they had a chance to take a Russian course at school.

Graph 2



### 5.3. Language as means of communication

As mentioned above, most schooling is done in Hebrew. Russian is used quite rarely and mainly as a “secret” language where teachers and/or Israeli-born classmates are not supposed to understand the conversation (see typicality condition 4 in the competence model of Spolsky noted earlier).

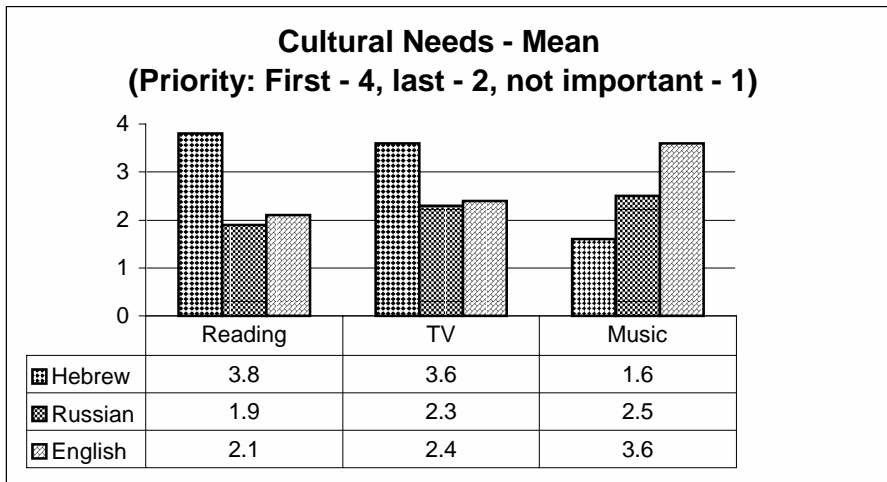
Most Russian youth speak Hebrew even to their Russian-born friends or the two languages simultaneously. Many claim they tell Russian jokes in Russian (there is a long history of Russian anonymous humorous short stories - anecdotes, some of them difficult to translate). In addition, some respondents claimed they would curse in Russian (typicality condition 1). From those who speak both languages some said they spoke Russian when being spoken to in Russian and spoke Hebrew when being spoken to in Hebrew (typicality condition 2). Still others did not specify any particular reason for their language choice.

As for the family domain Russian is used exclusively or both Hebrew and Russian languages simultaneously. Still, none of the respondents claimed they spoke pure Russian. Many admitted there was a great amount of Hebrew interference in their speech while others believed there is interference, yet insignificant (see Table 1). This is the data on oral communication. In fact, notes to parents were composed by 35.5% in Hebrew and by 20% in either Hebrew or Russian (see Graph I) - others simply were unable to compose such notes in Russian. Those who would do it in Russian claimed, “It would be a broken Russian – a real shame”.

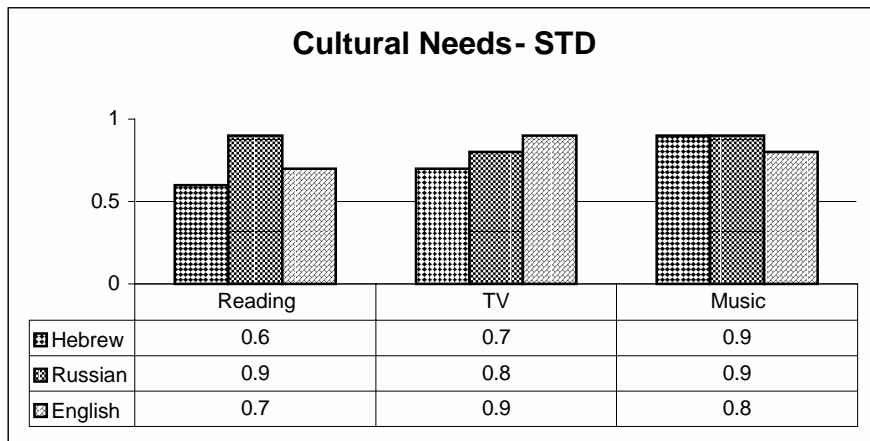
### 5.4. Cultural language needs

There are two really popular language-centered leisure activities among Russian youth - watching TV and listening to various types of music. As for the TV, Hebrew broadcasting is the most popular, though Russian is second priority, and 68.8 % even have their favorite Russian TV programs. The majority of those who prefer not to view Russian language TV do not avoid it because of language difficulties. Indeed, only 22,2 % (see Table 2) have problems comprehending Russian language TV. Ze’ev, 15, explains: *Russian TV does not relate in any way to my life. Why would I watch it?; It is not that I don’t understand the language, I simply have no idea what they are talking about on Russian TV.* In addition to Hebrew and Russian, there is almost an equal number of those who watch TV in English, but it should be mentioned that they were talking about MTV (the music channel) or American and English movies with subtitles (see Graph 3,4).

Graph 3



Graph 4



As for music, the majority prefer American; Russian is second priority and Israeli – the third. Later, while being asked about the importance of the English language in their life, a few felt that they needed English and would like to learn it in order to understand the lyrics of the songs. Regarding Israeli music some of those who did not enjoy it, claimed it is too oriental for the Russian ear. “*I can’t stand this Mizrahi* (oriental style - M.N.). *We are Europeans; it’s not for us* - Liuba, 14.

Although reading is the most language oriented, in our case it is not really a leisure activity. Most reading is done at school, which is why it is done mostly in Hebrew and only sometimes in English and rarely in Russian. Material read in Russian is mostly short newspaper articles, advertisements and TV program schedules (Hebrew newspapers are quite rare in Russian homes). Some of the girls recalled reading recipes. But as far as literature was concerned fewer than 10% read at least one book in Russian from beginning to end, and the majority of those they did read were children’s literature. Russian classical literature is terra incognita for them.

Most of the respondents speak good colloquial Russian, though with Hebrew interference. Their Russian lexicon is limited by family domain. Communication with family and relatives is the only way to master their command of Russian since schooling and the majority of language-oriented activities are done in other languages, mostly in Hebrew. Due to their poor reading and writing skills they have almost no access to written Russian. The subjects share a very positive attitude towards Russian: they see no problem speaking it beyond the confines of their own homes yet enjoy the advantages of

knowing another language. Despite this fact, they do little if anything to improve their Russian proficiency (see Graph1).

In the case of Russian adolescents we deal with the additive bilingualism which is slowly but surely transforming into the subtractive one, i.e. with a language shift rather than with language maintenance which makes it quite possible that the classical three generation theory (stating that the native language is usually completely lost by the third generation of newcomers) to be valid in the case of Russian newcomers to Israel.

## 6. Ethnic identity and pride

Searching for identity and self-definition is one of the most important psychological tasks for the adolescent. It is an integral part of recognizing one's place in the world as a part of a complex network of human relationships. According to Fishman (Fishman 1989:33) "if the notion of ethnic identity requires heightened ethnic consciousness, then it may be very well be that ethnic identity logically requires not only boundaries (contrast) but opposition across boundaries for such identity to be most fully articulated". Isajiw (1974) distinguishes between internal and external boundaries "a boundary from within, maintained by the socialization process, and a boundary from without, established by the process of inter-group relations" (p.22). "The boundary from within" reflects one's association with his or her ethnic group, and with the values associated with family, siblings and other members of the ethnic community. "Boundary from without" arises from interaction with members of the other, usually dominant ethnic group.

The subjects were asked to self define themselves as Russian, Jewish and Israeli according to the priority.

It should be mentioned, however, that the term "Russian" is used for all the newcomers from the FSU, therefore when the respondents claim they are "Russian" it does not contradict their being Jewish or Israeli. There were a great variety of answers, which probably proves that there is no one mainstream tendency in this sphere. However, the Russian component turned out to be the most important one, the second one being the Israeli (though the difference is negligible) and the third Jewish (see Graph 5).

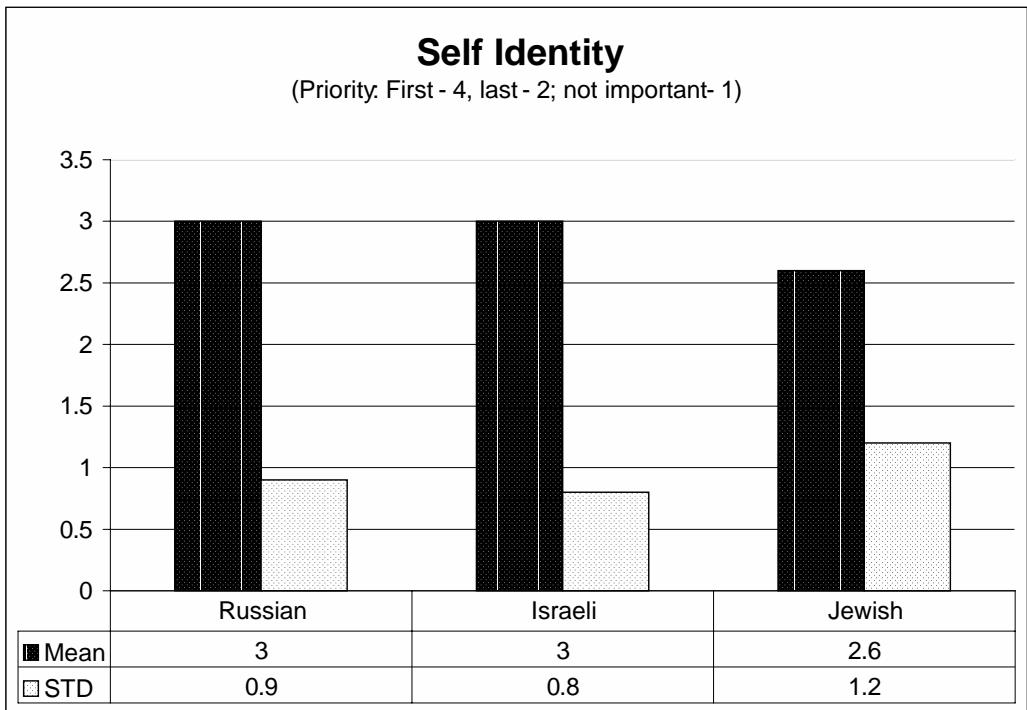
At the same time findings show that adolescents possess fairly strong Russian and Israeli identities, which are higher than their Jewish identity. These findings contradict those of Ben Rafael et.al. (1997) and Donitsa Smith (1999) in which Jewish identity was found as the primary one. This may be explained by the nature of the target population. These two surveys were conducted among adults who most likely had experienced discrimination as Jews in the FSU. At the same time it was far more difficult for the adult immigrant to be absorbed in the new society than for the youth, which is why in Donitsa Smith's research study (unlike Ben Rafael's) Israeli identity is merely in third place. *It is important to note that Ben Rafael's study reveals a high percentage of "no responses" to the questions concerning identity.*

Those for whom being Russian was of high priority explained it by their Russian roots, their affiliation to Russian cultural tradition, a different perception of being cultural and even by a different physical appearance. Sasha, 14: *We came from the Russian families; we have Russia backgrounds and are surrounded by Russian. We eat Russian food and celebrate Russian holidays.* The issue of different values and different perceptions of upbringing was stressed as well. Elina, 16: *Can you imagine in the Russian kindergarten the whole group searching for the toy, that one (child) lost?! No way!*

Israel is quite an informal society and Russia is very formal. It takes a long time till the newcomers get used to it. Misha, 15: *We would never dare to treat the adults whoever they are - parents or teachers the way they (the local kids - M.N.) do.* This "*hosser kavod*" (meaning a lack of respect - was mentioned by many of the respondents and even those who acknowledged that Russians are starting to behave exactly the same way blame it on the general atmosphere in Israeli schools. However there were those who felt just the opposite. Genya, 14: *Russian culture is mainly literature, museums, architecture and Israel is much more advanced in technical things.* Ze'ev, 15: *I feel Israeli, but it doesn't really matter - you were not born here - you are different.* Arie, 15: *There in Russia, we were told we are Jews, they don't like and do not need us, here in Israel they say - you are Russians,*

go back to Russia. Lilia, 13: *Look, we are different, no doubt. But it's wonderful we are not the same. I like it this way.*

**Graph 5**



Jewishness, which is almost as important as being Russian for the respondents, is mainly seen as “built-in” knowledge for them, divorced from language, culture, religion and tradition. Ze’ev, 15, and Maya, also 15: *I’m a Jew. I was a Jew there; I’m a Jew here.* Igor, 16: *I’m a Jew, no matter what. I was a Jew there, I’m a Jew here and if one day I decide to move somewhere else I’ll stay the same Jew.*

Being Israeli for the majority means being an Israeli resident and speaking Hebrew. Gil, 14: *I spent most of my life here. I know Hebrew much better than Russian.*

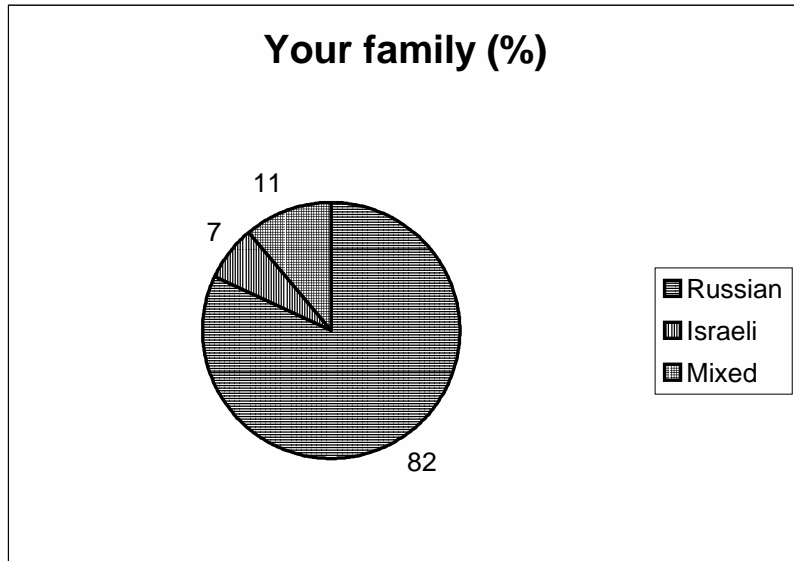
Russian passed on first and foremost by the family. The majority believes their families stay purely Russian (see Graph 6). Though almost all of the subjects believe that Russian families are much more conservative than the local ones they view it as an advantage rather than disadvantage. Inna 13: *Israelis do not know how and don’t want to look after their children.* Gera, 14: *Russian parents care a lot about the grades you get at school.* Genya, 14: *I’m never allowed to stay outdoors the way the locals are.* Dani, 15: *In Russian families the process of study is the high priority.* Vitia, 14: *In Israeli families they don’t bother to teach their kids.* “*Musar ve tarbut*” (morality and culture - Heb.) are much better among Russians. Arkadi, 14: *In Israeli families they don’t teach their kids good manners, they don’t force them to learn, to do something useful. Local kids can watch TV or play the computer all day long.*

Russian food and celebration of the Russian holidays, mainly of the New Year are another manifestation of Russian families. Sasha, 14: *We buy food in these special Russian shops where they sell hazir (pork-Heb.) and everything else, you know. Israelis wouldn’t do it.* Korina, 14: *I like the New Year. It has nothing to do with the religion as they (the locals - M.N.) blame us. It’s just so beautiful.*

Not only do the teenagers believe that the Russian family gives them an advantage of better upbringing and education, they also feel that by being born in Russia they get a head start here, much because of the language. Jonathan, 14: *Language is a wealth and I know three of them - Hebrew,*

Russian and English. Genya, 14: *Petersburg is so beautiful and I'm proud I was born there.* Stas, 15: *Due to the fact that I was born there I'm exposed to another "ashkafat olam" (Heb. -world outlook) another system of values, music, literature, another people.* Dina, 16: *If I travel I would say I'm from Russia, Russians are not hated as much as Israelis are - you know how they behave abroad?!*

Graph 6



No doubt that the vast majority of the respondents see their Russian roots as something completely positive. Still, 54.4 % believe they do not differ at all from Israeli teenagers. Though it is not the overwhelming majority this result is quite surprising in light of the facts given above. It may be explained by the interpretation of the first immigrant experience when being different for youth meant being inferior and sometimes an object to be made fun of and by answering this question they relate to the superficial aspect much more than to the essence.

More than the half of the respondents do not care if their future spouse would be of Russian origin or not. Perhaps this is due to the romantic spirit of youth with its perception of love as something sudden and unpredictable: Dorina, 13: *I would like to fall in love with somebody from Russia, but I can't predict my feelings.* On the other hand it may be a confirmation of the response to the previous question - those who do not believe they are different from native Israelis see no reason not to marry one of them. There is no doubt, however, that these results leave little chance for preserving the ethnic distance and retaining Russian identity in the future generation.

The degree of ethnic pride and inter-ethnic interaction and distance is significantly influenced by the feeling of real and/or perceived discrimination (Padila, 1980). This feeling renders interaction and supports ethnic distance. Most of the respondents (see Table 3) believe there is discrimination against Russians in Israel but the number of those who suffer from it personally is far less evident. Many believe discrimination is inevitable whenever there is a minority: Misha, 16: *I never come across it, but theoretically it should be - Russians are a minority.* Sima, 15: *In the class of my friend Aliona who attends a "Mofet" school there are two Moroccan girls and they suffer from the discrimination. "Ze lefi ech a rov poel"* (It depends on the way the majority behaves - Heb.). Many blame discrimination for the fact that there is a large number of deprived Russians who, despite the fact they hold academic degrees, must contend with physical labor. Igor, 16: *Just take a Russian and an Israeli who receive "minimum" (the minimal wage allowed by Israeli Law -M.N 17.56 NIS per hour) - there is nothing to compare. Russians would be much more educated and cultural.* Many see the real source of tension in this fight for job positions: Vitia, 13: *Israelis think that Russians take their jobs and even those who are not ready to work that hard are blaming Russians for seizing their jobs. Others believe that Russians do have better jobs and they are being hated for this.* Natasha, 13: *Russians have better*

education that's why they work in the universities and in good private companies. Dorina, 13: Russians are smarter, they have more opportunities to find a good job.

**Table 3**

	<b>Social Insertion</b>		
	<b>Friends Mostly</b>	<b>Discrimination</b>	<b>Russian Achievements</b>
	Israeli - 1	Yes – 1	
	Both - 2	No – 2	
	Russian - 3	None of above - 3	
<b>Mean</b>	2.3	1.3	1.5
<b>STD</b>	0.9	0.5	0.8
	<b>Choice of Friends (Reason)</b>		
	Comfort. with Israelis	Comfort. With Russians	No Special
<b>%</b>	3	43	54
	<b>Differ from Israeli born</b>	<b>Want Their Partner to Be Russian?</b>	
<b>%</b>	49	52	

Some claimed they had suffered discrimination upon arrival, but now it has gone. Maya, 14: *I remember something like this, but when I started to speak good Hebrew it somehow disappeared.* It should be mentioned that even for those who acknowledged the discrimination it is not a very painful issue. Even those who experience it claim they know how to deal with it and they do not pay special attention to it. The majority truly believe discrimination is not a serious obstacle which really impedes the achievements of Russians as a group. The vast majority of the respondents are convinced Russians have achieved a lot in various spheres of Israeli life, mainly in politics, science and hi-tech. At the same time few of the subjects recalled the negative manifestations of the mass immigration from Russia, such as alcoholism, growing crime and prostitution, though even those who mention it (about one percent of the respondents) promptly pointed out that those negative secondary effects merely accompany all the impressive achievements of the group.

## **7. Gender**

Recent research tends to view gender as an ambivalent factor in the process of acculturation except for the cases of cultures in which men are more likely to get jobs and women stay at home (Phinney, 1990.) Little research is available on the issue which suggests that females are more involved in ethnicity than males and more oriented to their ancestral culture (Ting-Noomey, 1981, Booling, 1994 , Demos 1988, Pfandl - 1997) At the same time in some studies it was found that language shifts emanated from women who are more sensitive to the issue of power because of their subordinate position in society. For this reason females turned out to be less conservative than men.

The present study presents women as the preservers of ethnicity. Even though almost no difference was found in language use, females felt more Russian and less Israeli than the males (see Table 4), and tend to believe Russian is their mother tongue, though the self-evaluation of their Russian language proficiency does not differ from those of the boys. More females believe their Hebrew differs from the Hebrew of Israeli born and they themselves differ from Israelis. Simply put, they feel alien to a greater degree than the boys do.

Table 4

Cross-Results	ALL Subjects	Ethnic Environment		Gender	
		Israeli	Russian	Male	Female
<b>Russian Self Evaluation</b>	2.1	2	2.2	2.1	2.1
Level: Low - 1, Average - 2, High - 3					
STD	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.6	0.5
<b>Speaking to Friends</b>	1.7	1.7	1.3	1.8	1.6
H - 1, Both - 2, R - 3					
STD	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.8	0.7
<b>Mother Tongue</b>	2.3	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.3
H - 1, Both - 2, R - 3					
STD	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.9
<b>Easy to Speak</b>	1.5	1.6	1.7	1.6	1.3
H - 1, Both - 2, R - 3					
STD	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.8	0.6
<b>Self Identity</b>					
Highest-4, 2-nd- 3, 3-rd-2, Not Import-1					
<i>Russian</i>	3	3	3	2.8	3.1
STD	0.9	0.8	0.8	1	0.8
<i>Israeli</i>	3	3.2	2.7	3.2	2.8
STD	0.8	0.7	0.5	0.8	0.7
<i>Jewish</i>	2.6	2.5	3	2.5	2.7
STD	1.2	1.1	1.4	1.1	1.3
<b>Discrimination</b>	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.2
Yes - 1, No - 2, Other - 3					
STD	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.4
<b>Differ from Israeli born (%)</b>	49	52	50	50	48
<b>Hebrew Differs from Israelis (%)</b>	34	48	17	29	41

## 8. Ethnic environment

Another factor that was believed to be relevant is ethnic density of the environment. Ethnic density is considered to be a factor affecting the process of acculturation (Shapoznic & Curtines, 1980, Padila, 1980). The two groups were compared in that respect - the first - those who live in a Russian enclave and who are surrounded by more than 60% of classmates of Russian origin as opposed to those who live in areas with a mixed population with less than the 40% of Russian born students in the class. Those who belong to the former group feel less Russian and less Israeli but more Jewish than those of the latter. It may be explained by the fact that family values are preserved in a Russian environment better than in an Israeli one bearing results similar to those of the adults. In the Israeli environment strong Russian identity can be a result of contrastive self-identification and strong Israeli identity - the result of the environment. Those of the second group feel alienated to a greater



degree. They believe their Hebrew differs from the one spoken by the locals, they feel they differ from the local teenagers and finally most of them believe there is discrimination against Russians in Israel. At the same time they use more Russian with their Russian-speaking friends - it is their secret language and they enjoy the advantage (see Table 4)

## **9. Orthogonality**

The language acculturation of the subjects does not seem to be an orthogonal process. The gradual loss of Russian reduces the number of activities done in this language and increases the number of activities accomplished in Hebrew. The situation is different with the process of the new identity shopping. The adolescents felt Russian and Israeli to the same degree. They look and behave very much as Israelis but at the same time they think about nearly everything Russian positively: they adore Russian culture (though they know really little about it), they think of Russians as more cultural, European and educated people in comparison to Israelis, are proud of their Russian roots and are not ready to surrender them. They like borsht but also falafel and humus and they gratefully accept both hanuka gelt and New Year's presents.

## **10. Limitations of the study**

The present study involved only subjects from the Tel-Aviv area considered to be the most economically stable part of the country. No data was gathered on peripheral areas where due to economical problems ethnic and cultural conflicts can be more serious.

No second-generation representatives participated in the survey, which makes it almost impossible to find out to which extent they are involved in the identity forging process of their children.

The length of residence in the country, a factor which can be relevant to the study, was excluded since all the subjects have lived at least six years in Israel and the range of time periods living in Israel was not significant enough to draw conclusions. The majority of the subjects can hardly recall their lives in the country of origin.

Future research on acculturation should involve both adolescents and their parents and should be conducted in various parts of the country. By doing so future research will distinguish more precisely those factors that greatly influence the process of forging ethnic and cultural identity of the newcomers.

## **11. Conclusions**

Soviet Jews (or Russians - as they are often called in Israel) seem to follow the well-known pattern of acculturation of the various immigrant groups in Israel.

Being immersed in Hebrew almost from the moment of arrival in all walks of life but at home immigrants gradually relinquish their language of origin. Lack of institutional support makes it quite a difficult task for them to master Russian, a language now used mainly at home and sometimes with Russian speaking friends (home and friends' domains). At the same time they have almost no problem expressing themselves in Hebrew

The use of Hebrew prevails in almost all the domains (but home). According to Fishman's (1989) domain definitions only the use of two separate codes within a single society, each for different purposes, different domains and different functions leads to what he calls bilingualism with diglossia and becomes a key to language maintenance. But the moment the home domain is penetrated, language shift is almost inevitable. The present study proves that such a penetration has already started. In addition it is highly likely that at least half of the future families of the newcomers would be mixed which in turn would seriously decrease their chances of retaining the language of origin.

At the same time, as already mentioned, they share a very positive attitude to their Russian roots and think of their Russian origins as a huge advantage. It seems they would like to preserve their Russian identity, which makes them feel like a part (and in some cases one of the finest parts) of the Ashkenazi elite of the country.

The strong Israeli identity of the respondents proves that they consider themselves a legitimate part of the new country, but the fact that about a half of them believe they differ from Israeli born and prefer to be surrounded by Russians proves that there is still a way to go.

The present study fully confirms Fishman's statement that language shift of immigrants has commonly proceeded more rapidly than has their re-ethnification (Fishman, 1989:191).

## Notes

1 A period of eleven years was chosen since this was the period when the last wave of immigration started. It was important that subjects should not have resided less than six years in the country, due to the fact that following four years in Israel a student stops being an "oleh" - a new immigrant. According to Ministry of Education guidelines a student should be fully involved in the educational process once having completed this initial period.. Hence after six years he is supposed to be fully adopted by the Israeli school system.

2 In Central Asia there are both Ashkenazi and Bucharian Jews. As was noted earlier only Ashkenazi Jews participated.

3 Only Moscow, St. Petersburg and the capitals of the FSU republics are considered here as central cities.

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