'Arabic – What for?'
Jewish Students' Attitudes Towards the Arabic Language and Their Willingness to Learn It in Israel

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Although Arabic is one of Israel's two official languages, its status is problematic. Israel's monocentric proclivity excludes Arabic from everyday use. In 1997, Arabic language studies were introduced into the 7th–10th grade curricula as pupils' second foreign language, after English, in a program offering three weekly hours of instruction. In 2003, however, less than 50% of all pupils in grades 7 through 10 (who should have taken the Arab language under the new program) actually studied Arabic. Various studies have shown that pupils are poorly motivated toward Arabic studies, and harbor a negative attitude toward Arabic, which they perceive as the 'language of the conflict,' a language with limited usefulness, and a language whose status in the global cultural arena is at an ebb. The field study reported here was conducted in a comprehensive high school in an affluent northern Tel Aviv neighborhood. Its findings confirm research findings on this issue conducted several years earlier. Findings of this study show that pupils who elect to study Arabic have a tepid attitude toward the Arabic language. Pupils' parental origin and education have no significant effect on pupils' attitudes.

INTRODUCTION: ON THE RELATIVE WEIGHT OF ARABS AND ARABIC IN ISRAEL

Israel is a bi-national state for all intents and purposes. At December 2009, the Central Bureau of Statistics estimated Israel's population at 7.5 million , of whom 20.3% were Arabs (CBS 2009a). According to forecasts, Israel's population at the end of 2010 is expected to reach 7.6 million, with approximately 5.7 million Jews and 1.6 million Arabs, which means that the proportion of Arabs will increase to approx-

imately 21% (CBS 2009b, table 2.26). By 2030, the Arab population is expected to reach 23.5% of the population, according to the CBS medium forecast (ibid).

The cultural-linguistic situation in Israel is a derivative of these figures. Israel has a Jewish majority whose native language is Hebrew, and a growing minority of native Arabic speakers, including, of course, the country's Arab minority. In addition, however, there are more than a few Jews of Middle Eastern and North African origin, whose cultural background was shaped by Arab countries, and whose mother tongue is Arabic. Based on the CBS social survey conducted in 2006, 20.8% of the Jewish population is proficient in Arabic (CBS 2008, table 17).

Hebrew is Israel's official language. It is dominant both in terms of use as well as in public presence. However, Arabic is also one of Israel's two official languages. It is the language used by the Israeli Arabs in their daily communication as well as in their separate school system. Israel is one of the few non-Muslim states to grant Arabic official status. Nonetheless, while Israel's two official languages have equal standing under law, the situation in practice is different. As early as 1980, Prof. Amnon Rubinstein (Minister of Education in the 1990s) described the status of Arabic in Israel as 'problematic' (Rubinstein 1980, 76), despite repeated State declarations on the status of Arabic as the country's second official language (Benziman & Manzur 1992, 155). In everyday life, Arabic does not enjoy the status of a second official language, and its use is limited. In 2008, a group of MKs proposed a bill (that did not pass) to revoke the official status of Arabic. According to their bill, Hebrew would be Israel's sole official language, and Arabic, Russian, and English would be defined as secondary official languages (Ilan 2008).

In effect, the use of Arabic is limited to contact between the authorities and the Arab citizens, road signs, and the state name on stamps and currency.

In short, as stated recently by an Israeli researcher, although Arabic is an official language in Israel, and although the law dictates the comprehensive Hebrew-Arabic bilingual conduct of state authorities, in practice, Arabic's public position in Israel is marginal; Hebrew enjoys almost absolute dominance in Israeli public spheres (Yitzhaki 2008).

It has already been noted that the State does not treat Arabic as an official language in the media, although it is spoken by roughly 40% (!) of the population. A large number of local Hebrew-language TV channels operate in Israel, but not a single Arabic-language channel, although Channel 33 offers programs in Arabic in addition to its Hebrew-language and English-language programs. The number of viewers in Israel of TV channels broadcast by satellite from Arab countries is estimated at two million. The Voice of Israel (the State's broadcasting service) operates one channel devoted to Arabic-language broadcasts, with an estimated two million listeners (Bar Ilan University 2004, 4). One independent Arabic-language radio station, Radio Al Shams, has been in operation since 2003. According to a 2007 survey by the Second Authority, the station has over 300,000 daily listeners, or 50% of all Arab radio listeners in Israel (Mandel 2007).

In summary, although Israel's linguistic policy does not state this explicitly, it has consistently supported a monocentric approach, and Arabic-Hebrew bilingualism in the Arab sector. In the national arena, Arabic-Hebrew dualism is clearly skewed in favor of Hebrew (Spolsky and Shohamy 1996).

THE STATE AND ITS ATTITUDE TO ARABIC LANGUAGE STUDIES

In view of the above it, is not surprising that the Israeli State demonstrates an ambivalent attitude toward Arabic language instruction in the Jewish sector. The Public Education Law explicitly states that one of the goals of education is to 'become familiar with the language, culture, history, heritage and unique tradition of the Arab population and other population groups in Israel, and to recognize the equal rights of all citizens of Israel' (Ministry of Education 2003). Nonetheless, there is a great discrepancy between this general statement and actual practice in the field. Moreover, the above goal is noted *last* in the list of goals of education.

It appears that the Ministry of Education has demonstrated its increasing awareness of the importance of Arabic language in recent years. This is reflected in a long series of documents which clarify the importance of becoming familiar with the Arab-Muslim world, its cul-

tural heritage, and its religion, and the importance of this knowledge for creating a foundation for a dialogue of peace between Jews and Arabs living in the same territory (Brosh 1991). Since 1989, the official position of the Ministry of Education on Arabic-language instruction has been reiterated in General Director Circulars and letters (Bar Ilan University 2004, 6), the most recent of which was published in 1996 on this issue, entitled 'General Director of the Ministry of Education Circular in the Matter of Language Instruction in Schools.' This document lists the languages, the instruction of which is supported by the Ministry of Education, and the scope of classroom hours recommended for these languages at each age. This circular is considered the most detailed and up-to-date official document on linguistic policy in Israel, and it entered in effect in the 1997 school year (Narkis and Stevens 2004). According to this document, classroom hours for grades 5–7 are two hours a week (not mandatory); three hours a week (mandatory for grades 7–10, but pupils may choose French instead of Arabic); and 3–8 hours a week for elective studies in grades 11–12 (Bar Ilan University 2004).

Thus we may state that Arabic-language instruction in Israel poses an anomaly. Arabic is the second official state language, alongside Hebrew, yet Arabic is not taught as a second language but rather as the *third language.* In contrast to mandatory English studies, the study of Arabic is not really mandatory, both because pupils may elect French instead, and because new immigrants from the FSU (Former Soviet Union) and Ethiopia are permitted instead to study their native language (for a period of four years from their immigration) (Bar Ilan University 2004).

Therefore it is not surprising to find a sharp asymmetry in the proficiency of the official state languages, Hebrew and Arabic among the state's sectors. The 2006 social survey of the CBS indicates that while less than 13% of all Arab adults in Israel do not know Hebrew, slightly more than 79% of all adult Jews do *not know Arabic at all* (CBS 2008).

Until the 1990s, the proportion of pupils who studied Arabic in Hebrew-language schools was very low. In 1982, only 22% of all the Hebrew-language elementary school pupils studied Arabic, and only

7% of all high school students (Abu Rabia 1998). In the early 1990s, 40% of all Hebrew-language schools studied Arabic in grades 7–9 (Kraemer 1993; Koplewitz 1992). In the 1995 school year, 132,400 7–9 graders in Hebrew-language schools studied Arabic. In 1996, this number rose to 136,923 (Bar Ilan University 2004, 10), and in 2003 less than half of all 7–9 graders studied Arabic (approximately 47,000 in each grade), notwithstanding the declared mandatory status of Arabic-language studies. The number of 10th graders, a grade in which Arabic studies were mandatory, had already dropped to 19,000, or less than one-fifth of all 10th graders in the country (Chromachenko 2004). The number of Jewish high school students who sat for their matriculation exams in Arabic is very low and does not exceed 3,000 in any given year (Friedman 2005). The number of Jewish high school students who sat for matriculation exams in high-standard Arabic (5 units) in 2006 was a mere 2009 (Kashti 2009). As of now, about 60% of the Jewish students in junior high schools learn Arabic for three years (Alon 2008). However, a mere 2% of those learning Arabic in junior high schools continue studying this language in the senior high school (Amara et al. 2008).

In this context one should perhaps pay attention to the conclusion reached not long ago by one researcher of the subject (Uhlmann 2008): the official policy is subverted at the local level of practice. On one hand, there seems to have always been a general consensus among policymakers that Arabic should be made compulsory for Hebrew-speaking students. On the other hand, no less remarkable than such ongoing consensus is its failure to materialize in practice. This policy is repeatedly subverted at the local level of schools and school districts, and the policymakers have so far been unable to force the issue.

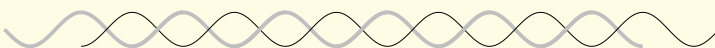### GENERAL JEWISH ISRAELI PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD ARABIC

Teaching a language is never merely a technical, pedagogical issue. Language and literacy are elements of what the French sociologist Bourdieu has dubbed back in the 1980s *cultural capital* (Bourdieu 1986). It is an uncontested fact that language plays a key role in social integration and socialization in cultural and social values (Bekerman and

Horenczyk 2004; Fishman 1970; 1997). As a system of symbols, lan-
guage shapes social identity, on one hand, and contributes to the sta-
bilization or revival of identity and ethnic/national loyalty, on the
other (Haarmann 1986; Smith 1998). In other words, language is a
[188]   primary socio-economic resource which nations use to unify or divide
national/ethnic groups into language communities, each loyal to its
own linguistically-related culture (Haslett 1989).

In view of the above it is not surprising that various studies that ex-
amined the topic of Arabic-language instruction in Hebrew-language
schools, found that pupils' fundamental attitudes toward Arabic are
disconcerting. Given the knowledge that attitudes towards learning
foreign languages are affected by socio-psychological factors within
the socio-political-cultural context (Gardner 1988), it is not surpris-
ing that Jewish pupils' motivation to study this language is limited.
On this point, Arab attitudes toward Hebrew and Jewish children's
attitude toward Arab are to some degree symmetrical. According to
Jewish pupils, Arabic is the 'language of the conflict.' The Jewish-Arab
historic conflict permeates all aspects of Israeli life. Arabic is the lan-
guage of the majority of the hostile geographic region in which Israel
is located; Arabic is also the language of Israel's unpopular, ethnically,
culturally, and religiously distinct minority (Abu Rabia 1998).

Moreover, going back to Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital
(Bourdieu 1986) it is easy to understand students' bias against the
Arab language. The capacity to speak Hebrew and write English is
necessary for appointments and promotion even at the university de-
partments of Arabic! The Jewish cultural capital is inflated even in this
area at the expense of the Arab cultural capital (Uhlmann 2008).

Attitudes toward language are actually a derivative of the Arab-
Jewish cleavage, which is the gravest, most complex of all the divides
that characterize Israeli society, which is *a priori* defined as a segmented
society (Soen 2003, 309–438). It is the gravest schism that characterizes
Israeli society because it is characterized by the clearest, unequivocal,
dichotomous distinction. In other words, all members of Israeli society
(with the exception of individuals of mixed origins, who account for a
statistically negligible portion of society) clearly and objectively belong
to one of the two camps divided by this chasm. The definition is clear-

cut and undisputable: either I am a Jew or an Arab. There is no room for wordplay or a graded definition of different degree of membership: it is a dualistic, emotionally laden distinction that is consistent with the definitions proposed by theoreticians who studied social schisms and separatism (Kerlinger 1984).   [189]

As a result of the protracted conflict and division, the Jewish sector developed negative attitudes towards the Arab culture, Arab language and Arabic speakers (Shohamy and Donitsa-Schmidt 1998; Bar-Tal 1996). Numerous negative stereotypes of the Arab minority and reservations regarding the civic rights of this minority arose among Jewish children. This phenomenon is similar to what has been found in Northern Ireland, another country torn apart by intractable conflict (Cairns 1996). For example, a study in 2004–2005 on two samples, one of 890 Jewish 10th-graders and the second of 590 Jewish 11th-graders, has shown that youngsters are tainted with harshly negative perceptions of Arabs. A large majority of the Jewish pupils attributed negative traits to Arabs, including inferior intelligence (87.2%), lack of education (86%), lack of culture (84.4%), and lack of cleanliness (83.7%) (Kupermintz et al., 2007). Moreover, 46% of the Jewish youngsters declared their anger toward the Arabs, and 31.4% declared their hatred for the Arabs. In a national democratic index survey conducted in Israel in 2007, 75% of the Jewish survey participants defined Arabs as having a proclivity toward violent behavior, 55% defined Arabs as lacking the ability to attain the level of cultural development of Jews; and 43% agreed with the statement 'Arabs are not intelligent' (Arian, Atmor, and Hadar 2007).

Narrow-mindedness, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia of a large proportion of the Jewish sector toward the Arab minority have re-emerged with force in response to the widespread demonstration and riots of the Arab sector in October 2000. Despite objective data that indicate deep-seated and broad discrimination against the Arab population, over 60% of the Jewish participants in a *Yediot Aharonot* (Israel's most widely read daily newspaper) survey conducted by Dahaf Institute on a representative sample of adults, claimed that there was no discrimination against Arab Israelis (Soen 2003, 396). Furthermore, 64% of the survey participants saw no wrong in the government's con-

duct and placed no blame on the government for these riots. Moreover, 74% of the Jewish survey participants defined the conduct of Israeli Arabs during the week of rioting as 'betrayal against the state,' in clear contradiction to the conclusions of the Orr Commission[1] (Orr Commission Report 2005).

All these findings however, are overshadowed by the following single dramatic finding: A 1994 survey commissioned by the Ministry of Education, of a representative sample of 3,700 high school students, found that 37% of the Jewish pupils declared emphatically that they hated Arabs. Two-thirds of the pupils expressed the clear position that 'Arabs should not be granted full civic rights' (Soen 2003, 399). In the Democratic Index survey conducted in 2007 on a sample of the general population, only 56% of all Jewish respondents expressed support or strong support for full equality of rights for Arabs in Israel (Arian, Atmor, and Hadar 2007). A harsh picture also emerges from another study, published in 2007 by Haifa University (Kupermintz et al. 2007), and based on a sample of 1480 Jewish students in 30 high schools. As it turned out, a mere 47.3% of the respondents expressed support for full equality of rights for Arabs in Israel. Only 49.1% held the opinion that Israeli Arabs are entitled to protest against injustice and discrimination. What is more, 29.8% expressed fear from Arabs and 31.4% expressed hatred towards Arabs. The conclusion of other researchers (Seginer 1996; Hertz-Lazarovitch and Kupermintz 1996), that the attitude of Jewish youngsters toward Arabs is strongly affected by the historic context does not diminish the predominance of negative stereotypes of Arabs among large strata of Jewish youngsters in particular, and among the general public. As already mentioned, this widely spread xenophobia and anti-Arab sentiment impacts attitudes toward the Arabic language and lessens the motivation to learn it (Shohamy and Donitsa-Schmidt, 1998; Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar-Lourie, and Shohamy 2009). The influence of socio-political factors on motivation to learn languages is widely recognized (Gardner 1988).

Motivation to learn a certain foreign language and attitudes towards its speakers have been analyzed in numerous studies. Findings have shown that attitudes towards foreign languages are influenced by

various factors, such as its socio-cultural significance, its role in the international arena, its instrumental and functional importance for the learner etc. (Schuman 1978; Pavlenko 2003; Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, and Shohamy 2004).

The conceptualization of motivation to learn the foreign language [191] was originally coined by Gardner and Lambert (1972) and subsequently adopted by many. Basically, it refers to two different types of motivation: *integrative* and *instrumental.* The first is described as a positive orientation towards the foreign language's group and a willingness to interact with its members. The latter concerns the pragmatic gains of learning the foreign language. In as much as actual achievements are concerned in terms of acquiring the foreign language, research findings are contradictory; they fail to show if any type of motivation is superior (Baker and MacIntyre 2000; Csizer and Domyei 2005; Petrides 2006).

If so, it is not surprising that a 1988 study on Jewish pupils' attitudes toward Arabic language found that the majority of respondents held negative attitudes toward both spoken and literary Arabic. Moreover, instrumental motivation was also found to be low. Respondents stated that Arabic is not important as a language of communication and therefore there is not a lot of point in studying it (Brosh 1988). Poor instrumental motivation was also found in a later study on pupils' attitudes toward Arabic (Ben Rafael and Brosh 1991).

Similar to the earlier study, this study also found that pupils viewed Arabic as a useless language, whose prestige was at low ebb. The pupils who held the most extreme negative attitudes were pupils of Middle-Eastern and North African origin, who emphatically resisted any degree of identification with Arab culture or with the Arabic language. This strong rejection of the Arab culture by Jewish pupils of Middle Eastern and North African extraction is seen to express their tendency to disassociate themselves from the perceived Arab characteristics in their own self-image and a desire to become more Westernized. Peres hypothesized that this expressed hostility expressed by the Oriental Jews toward Arabs was the result of perceiving similarity rather than dissimilarity between themselves and the Arabs (Peres 1971).

Subsequent studies (Kraemer 1993; Kraemer and Olshtain 1994)

reconfirmed these attitudes. Kraemer, who studied attitudes of 7–12 grade pupils in the Tel Aviv and Central region, found that respondents believed that Arabic had low status and that its instrumental contribution in facilitating employment was also limited. Finally, even its utility in security-related contexts (that is, the advantage of proficiency in Arabic for individuals seeking to work in security-related agencies) did not constitute a positive factor when weighing the considerations and deliberating whether or not to study the language. The majority of the pupils who study Arabic did not show interest in the language outside school, and did not even attempt to understand Arabic-language newscasts on TV (Kraemer 1993). In a study conducted shortly thereafter (Kraemer and Olshtain 1994), researchers found that pupils prefer French over Arabic studies because of the superior global status of French. A 2006 study among junior high school pupils who study Arabic found that 42.7% did not plan to continue studying Arabic in high school; 31.1% were undecided and only 26.2% decided to continue Arabic studies in high school (Him-Yunis and Malka 2006).

A factor analysis performed indicated that the two main factors that affect pupils' decision-making were intrinsic-individual factors (love of the subject and interest in Arabic studies), and extrinsic-situational factors (the status of the subject in school, and teachers' skills). In any case, the most important point that emerged from this study was that only one-quarter of all the junior high pupils who study Arabic plan to continue in high school. A study that was concurrently conducted among Arabic junior high school teachers in 2006 confirmed this disposition: 56.3% of the teachers declared that the subject had a poor image, 38.5% of the teachers believed that the security situation was the cause of high schoolers' negative attitudes toward Arabic (ibid).

On the other hand, a study conducted by the Tel Aviv University School of Education (Levy and Miro 1995) generated extraordinary findings. This study found that 55% of the 7th-grade respondents noted that they 'like Arabic' or 'like Arabic very much.' An even higher percentage was found among 9th-graders – 62% stated that they 'like Arabic' or 'like Arabic very much.' The significance pupils in this study

attributed to Arabic was also high, and was consistent with their positive attitudes. To the question 'Is it important to study Arabic?' 75% of the 7th-graders and 65% of the 9th-graders responded that it is important or very important. When they were asked about the potential benefits of knowing Arabic, pupils mentioned the possibility of communicating with Arabs of their own age and with the Arab public in general. They also noted the potential benefits during their military service. It should, however, be noted that the pupils in this study made no mention at all of the spiritual or intellectual wealth of Arab culture!

Another favourable response to the study of the Arabic language was found recently in a survey carried out by two Israeli researchers (Abraham Fund 2007). The survey was carried out in an attempt to analyze the effect of the project, 'language as a culture bridge' initiated by the Abraham Fund. 78% of the respondents stated they were happy to study Arabic. 71% of the respondents believed that acquiring the Arabic language might contribute to improvement of Jewish-Arab relations in Israel. About 52% of the respondents stated that their families encouraged them to study Arabic (ibid). The survey was carried out among 912 5th and 6th-graders in 17 primary schools in four towns in Israel.

Yet another survey, conducted during the late PM Yitzhak Rabin's administration, also is indicative of the importance of context for Arabic studies. During the second Rabin administration, when the peace process demonstrated significant progress, a survey conducted by Dahaf Institute in December 1994 posed the following question: 'In view of the progress in the peace process, do you think that Arabic studies in schools should or should not be made mandatory?' 65% of the interviewees stated that Arabic language studies should be mandatory and only 34% disagreed (Bar Ilan University 2004).

Finally, we can also infer the public's reserved attitudes toward Arabic language from interviews conducted by a *Haaretz* daily correspondent with Hebrew University students in 2007 (Rubinstein 2007). In these interviews, students were asked why they elected to study English, French, German, Japanese, or Chinese, rather than Arabic. One student's response was astonishing in its frankness: He stated, 'Foreign

language studies are like buying a key to a new house, filled with the treasures of science and culture. People who study Arabic also purchase a key, but they quickly discover that it is a key to an empty house: Ultimately, what can a person do with Arabic? – Be a Quran scholar or a [194] Shin Beth [Israel's secret service] spy.'

ATTITUDES TOWARD ARABIC LANGUAGE OF
STUDENTS WHO LEARN ARABIC: A CASE STUDY

In view of the above findings, the author decided to conduct a focus study of the attitudes of pupils who *chose* elective Arabic studies (I am deeply indebted to my student, E. Debi, who conducted the survey under my guidance in my seminar). As already mentioned, Arabic is not mandatory in the junior high school; pupils may choose either Arabic or French. In case they are newcomers to the country from either the FSU or Ethiopia, they may opt for their mother tongue instead.

Research Framework

This study was based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. One junior high school in north-east Tel Aviv was selected: All the pupils who chose Arabic language studies were included in the study. These 40 pupils were requested to complete a questionnaire that was distributed during one of their classes at school. On top of that, personal interviews were conducted with a number of pupils who completed the questionnaire. The students were asked to explain in their own words why they chose to learn Arabic, and tell the interviewer what their attitude toward that language was. They were also asked to tell the interviewer whether they liked their study, and why.

The findings of this study are rather interesting. The school is a magnet school for two elementary schools: one of which serves an area that is classified by the CBS as a high-SES neighborhood, and the second is classified as a middle-SES neighborhood. In this school, beginning in 7th grade, all pupils were required to study a second foreign language in addition to English. Pupils selected either French or Arabic, based on their own free will. The study questionnaire was distributed in this junior high school at the end of the school year to

8th- and 9th-grade pupils who studied Arabic, before the end of the second Initifada.² As already mentioned, some of the students were also interviewed.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire covered five themes. The first theme comprised a number of items from which it was possible to draw the respondents' socio-economic profile.

The second theme comprised nine items and was designed to tap into respondents' attitudes toward Arabic language. Items in this section were designed to discover the extent to which respondents found Arabic a pleasant, beautiful, rich, language, etc. (integrative motives, see Gardner and Lambert 1972), as well as the extent to which Arabic was perceived as a prestigious language, an important subject, an influential language in the world of politics, etc. Cronbach's alpha of this theme was 0.783.

The third theme comprised five items, and was designed to tap into respondents' will to translate their decision to study the language into actual time allotment. These items were designed to clarify the time respondents devote to their Arabic language studies compared to other subjects, and respondents' interest in participating in an Arabic-language after-school study group, etc. Cronbach's alpha of this section was 0.689.

The fourth theme comprised four items, and was designed to tap into the perceived usefulness of Arabic. These items were designed to discover whether pupils listen to Arabic language radio programs, watch Arabic language movies on TV, whether pupils think that the language is useful outside of school, etc. Cronbach's alpha of this section was 0.813.

The fifth theme comprised nine items designed to examine respondents' perceptions of the image of Arabic speakers. Items were designed to discover pupils' perceptions of the extent to which Arabic speakers contribute to world culture and to society, the importance respondents attribute to the language, etc. Cronbach's alpha of this section was 0.764.

To process the questionnaire, a five-item Likert-type scale, from 1

(greatest degree of agreement with the item) to 5 (lowest degree of agreement with the item) was used.

Research Questions

In view of the numerous (and sometimes conflicting) findings of previous studies, the researcher posed the following questions: First, does pupils' origin affect their motivation to study Arabic and their empathy toward the language? Second, does the educational attainment of pupils' parents affect their motivation to study Arabic and their empathy toward the language? Third, and most important, how is Arabic perceived by pupils who elected to study the language? In this respect a whole series of questions and statements was posed to the students in order to find out: What is their degree of empathy toward the language? What is the extent of their motivation to study the language? How useful is the language perceived to be? What is the contribution of the language, as they perceived it to be? What image does Arabic have?

Research Analysis

The most important question is, of course, how Arabic is perceived by pupils who chose to study it; this is of special importance, because, as mentioned time and again, the questionnaire was distributed to pupils who *elected* to study Arabic. It might be expected that this 'elective public' would express a high degree of empathy toward the language, strong motivation, and conviction of its usefulness.

Practical arguments that support the study of Arabic (instrumental motivation) appear in numerous websites that function as a platform for surfers' opinions in this respect, as in newspaper features (see www.nrg.co.il/online/1/A R T 2/149/485.html; http://news.walla.co .il/?w=/1/1016239/@@/talkbacks). For example,

> Maybe the study of Arabic – an official state language – should be instituted from elementary school to high school in Jewish schools. In Finland, civil servants are required to know Swedish because 6% of the population is Swedes. Holland requires proficiency in Flemish, because of the country's small Flemish minority. I also

think that, even if there were no Arabs in Israel, the study of Arabic is necessary because of the neighboring countries.

and

[Arabic] language which is not only official but also the native language of one-fifth of the country's citizens is effectively considered here as a foreign language, even the language of the enemy. The irony of this is that some of the country's soldiers also speak the enemy's language.

and

It's important to know Arabic so that when an Arab asks you something in Arabic, you will be able to understand (Friedman 2005).

or:

We are at war with the Arabs and so we have to understand them. And anyway, they are our neighbors.

In order to gauge the overall students' opinion of Arabic, a combined scale was devised based on the scores of twenty-six questions relating to the pupils' empathy towards the language, their motivation to learn it, its estimated usefulness, and its image.

The 'judgments' of our study group of pupils are interesting precisely for this reason. Thus, the weighted summated score of the Likert scale scores on language usefulness is extremely low (4.081; recall that the lowest score is 5). Pupils' average score of motivation to study the language was also rather low (3.850); empathy for the language was moderate (3.075) as was the image of the language (3.038) (table 1). In fact, none of the scores that were based on pupils' opinions was high! Overall, the study indicated that pupils' attitudes toward Arabic, a language that they themselves chose to study, were less than enthusiastic. This is consistent with the findings of some of the studies conducted in Israel, noted above. It is contradictory to the findings of other studies conducted.

TABLE 1   Motivation to study Arabic, attitude toward the language, its usefulness, and its image among the study group

Item	M	SD
Empathy		
How much do you like Arabic compared to other subjects?	3.525	1.198
I am sympathetic toward Arabic speakers.	2.325	1.023
Arabic is a pleasant-sounding language.	3.375	1.275
Arabic is not a beautiful language.	3.250	1.335
Arabic language textbooks are interesting.	3.050	1.358
Old-fashioned methods are used to teach Arabic.	3.000	1.219
Arabic is easy to pronounce.	3.300	1.159
Arabic is an important subject.	2.975	1.368
Total	3.075	1.241
Motivation		
Do you actively participate in Arabic lessons?	3.225	1.405
Would you like to participate in an Arabic language class in the afternoon?	4.350	1.051
How much time do you devote to your Arabic class, compared to other subjects?	3.975	0.800
Arabic is a difficult subject.	2.525	1.037
Arabic is necessary for academic studies.	3.825	1.299
Total	3.580	1.118

In this context, some positive statements made by the pupils during the interviews should be noted. Thus, a practical, instrumental attitude characterizes the following statement:

> I chose Arabic, first of all because it expands my personal knowledge. In addition, I think that everyone has to study Arabic because we live next to Arab neighbors. You have to know how to communicate with them. And most of all, I want to serve in the Intelligence Corps in the army. Whoever knows Arabic gets priority.

The following statement is rather candid:

> We live in the Middle East, surrounded by many Arab countries. Arabic is spoken in all of them. Studying Arabic lets you get to

TABLE 1   *Continued from the previous page*

Usefulness		
Do you listen to Arabic language radio programs?	2.525	1.132
I hardly watch Arabic language T V programs.	4.975	0.276
Do you watch Arabic language T V programs?	4.700	0.823
Arabic is also useful outside school.	3.125	1.522
Total	4.081	0.938
Image		
Arabic is an important subject.	3.150	1.331
Arabic contributes to world culture.	3.475	1.358
I do not want to come into contact with Arabic speakers.	3.025	1.405
Arabic speakers contribute to society.	3.250	1.032
Arabic speakers are friendly.	2.850	1.099
Arabic has a strong political influence on the world.	2.750	0.981
Arabic is a prestigious language.	3.725	0.987
Arabic has a rich literature.	2.625	1.148
Arabic is a rich language	2.500	1.359
Total	3.038	1.188

NOTES   Maximum score (negative) – 5; minimum score (positive) – 1. $N = 40$.

know our neighbors better. And anyway, whoever studies Arabic at a five-unit matriculation level gets an academic bonus from universities. Whoever studies Arabic will leave [school] in a better position for civilian life and for army life.

Also interesting is the following statement:

I study Arabic because it's an easy language. You need another language anyway. Arabic is the easiest.

A resignation of sorts is reflected in the following statement:

I don't believe many of the junior high graduates will really know Arabic and will be able to conduct conversation with Arab colleagues. We don't learn the Arab culture.

And again:

I myself decided to learn Arabic, but this language does not really interest my age-group very much. They think it is enough to study English. On top of that, my generation experienced Intifada and terror acts. My colleagues don't want to see Arabs; needless to say, they don't want to learn Arabic.

A completely different perspective is reflected in the following statement:

I study Arabic because I want to get to a level where I can speak the language with Arab kids in Israel.

And yet again:

My parents speak Arabic. I want to know the language they were born with better.

Finally, a statement that reflects an extraordinarily positive – and rare – attitude toward the language:

At home I watched movies that we rented, The Thief from Baghdad, and Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. I also heard some stories from The Thousand and One Nights. I really would like to be able to read these stories in the original.

All in all, the text of the interviews is a mixed bag. This way or another, the majority of positive statements were *instrumental.* In other words, they reflected a strongly utilitarian attitude toward language studies: whether related to a desire to serve in intelligence units in the army, or a desire to gain bonus points when applying for admission to university, or the desire to study an easy subject for matriculation exams. There were, however, also statements reflecting integrative motivation of pupils who noted their desire to communicate with their neighbors and learn more about Arab countries. Other statements – a minority – reflected empathy toward the language and the language's positive image: pupils' desire to learn their parents' language or their desire to read Arabic literature in the original.
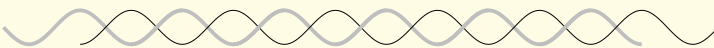
TABLE 2   Pupils' empathy toward Arabic and motivation to study Arabic, by origin of parents

Parents' origin	Israel	Ashkenazi	Mizrahi	Total
Empathy toward the language				
M – average	3.470	3.630	3.530	3.530
S D	1.260	0.990	1.190	1.180
Motivation to study the language				
M – average	3.730	4.000	3.880	3.850
S D	0.810	0.650	0.810	0.790
Total	8	15	17	40

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The picture concerning the impact of parental origin on pupils' attitudes toward Arabic is interesting in itself. A study conducted by researchers at the Tel Aviv University School of Education in 1995 among 1,500 7th–9th grades who study Arabic (Levy and Miro 1995) indicated that 40% of them have at least one parent who speaks Arabic. 16% of the pupils who studied Arabic also stated that one of their parents reads and writes Arabic. The profile of our study group, based on pupils' responses to the demographic items, is not categorical: 17 pupils (43% of the sample) are of clear Mizrahi origin (namely, Middle Eastern or North African descent); 15 (38% of the sample) are of Ashkenazi origin, and 8 pupils (12% of the sample) have parents and grandparents who were born in Israel (and whose origin is further unknown). In any case, 32 pupils (82% of the sample) noted that their family speaks Hebrew at home, 6 noted that their family speaks another language other than Hebrew or Arabic, and only two pupils (5%) reported that their family speaks Arabic at home.

The findings of our study also indicated that 65% of the pupils' parents have post-secondary education (a college or university degree), 20% have a matriculation certificate, and the remainder have lower education.

A recent study indicates that parental attitudes are one of the most important predictors of pupils' attitudes toward Arabic (Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, and Shohamy 2004). Since parents' attitudes were not examined in our study, an attempt was made to examine whether parental origin or education affected the respondents' attitudes toward

TABLE 3   Pupils' empathy toward Arabic and motivation to study Arabic,
by parents' education

Parents' education	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Empathy						
M – average	3.070	3.750	3.640	3.800	3.500	3.430
SD	1.060	1.300	1.070	1.470	0.500	1.170
Motivation						
M – average	3.690	4.330	3.670	4.330	3.670	3.840
SD	0.850	0.240	0.750	0.840	0.330	0.800
Total	1	5	8	11	15	40

NOTES   Column headings are as follows: (1) elementary, (2) incomplete high school,
(3) matriculation, (4) college, (5) university, (6) total.

TABLE 4   Spearman's correlations between the four examined variables

Variable	Empathy	Motivation	Usefulness	Image
Empathy		0.56*	0.21	0.43*
Motivation			0.47*	0.38*
Usefulness				0.42*
Image				

NOTES   *$P < 0.05$.

Arabic. Findings show that neither parental education nor origin has
any impact (tables 2 and 3).

Finally, using Spearman's correlations, the author tried to find out
whether empathy, motivation, image and usefulness of the language are
linked, in as much as the pupils' attitude to Arabic is concerned.

Table 4 shows that a correlation does indeed exist between empathy
and motivation (0.56) as well as between empathy and image of the
language (0.43). Motivation is also correlated with usefulness of the
language (0.47) and its image (0.38). And finally, usefulness is also
correlated with the image of the language.

CONCLUSIONS

The research conducted on a focus group of junior high school pupils
in a northern neighbourhood in Tel-Aviv posed several research ques-
tions: (1) Does pupils' origin affect their motivation to study Arabic

and their empathy toward the language? (2) Does the educational attainment of the pupils' parents affect their motivation to study Arabic and their empathy toward the language? (3) How is Arabic perceived by students who elected to learn the language? In this respect a series of questions and statements was posed to the students in order to gauge: What is their degree of empathy toward the language? What is the extent of their motivation to learn the language? How useful is the language perceived to be? What image does Arabic have?

The findings of this study, similar to the findings of various other studies conducted among Jewish pupils who learn Arabic, indicate a half-hearted, unenthusiastic attitude toward Arabic, even among pupils who elected to study the language. Israel is a bi-national state in which Arabs currently account for 20% of the population. According to the demographic dynamics, their proportion of the population is on the rise. Various sociological and psychological theories indicate that inter-group contact – properly conducted in an appropriate climate – encourages mutual attentiveness, conciliation, and mutual acceptance, and undermines exclusionary attitudes (Allport 1979; Pettigrew 1998; Jolly and Digiusto 2009; Miller 2002).

Language is considered a cultural bridge which contributes to such outcomes (Haarmann 1995; Slavin and Cooper 1999; Bekerman and Horenczyk 2004). Since language expresses identity, culture, and tradition, in addition to its function as a medium of communication, language proficiency ultimately enables an egalitarian dialogue. The assumption is that proficiency in Arabic and familiarity with Arab culture might ultimately reduce fears and apprehension, eliminate negative stereotypes and prejudice, reinforce commitment to democracy, and encourage tolerance.

Nonetheless, numerous studies have repeatedly shown – this study included – that unfortunately, a great many of the Jewish pupils have a rather tepid attitude toward Arabic language studies. Even pupils who choose to study Arabic often do so unenthusiastically, and are not motivated by a strong love of the language or strong inner conviction. The weighted summated score of the Likert scale scores on the Arabic language usefulness turned out to be extremely low (4.081). Pupils' average motivation to study Arabic also turned out to be low (3.850).

Empathy for the language (3.075) and the image of the language (3.038) turned out to be moderate.

The findings of the research indicate that neither ethnic origin nor educational attainments of the pupils' parents affect their motivation to learn Arabic and their empathy toward the language.

One point merits some discussion. The author's review of the many studies done in Israel on students' attitudes toward the Arabic language jumped back and forth between the first study conducted in 1988, studies done in the 1990s (some early before the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin and before the 2nd Intifada) and studies done two years ago. As mentioned, a relationship has been found between students' attitudes toward Arabs and the tension between the two national groups, Jews and Arabs. In this respect there are four important benchmarks – the first *Intifada* (1987–1993), the second *Intifada* (2000–2005), the Israeli Arabs' October riots of 2000, and the Oslo accords of 1993. The first three benchmarks had a negative impact on relationships between the two national groups. The fourth benchmark had a positive impact on them.

This is apparently why the Tel-Aviv University study, carried out before the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin (Levy and Miro 1995), revealed strong positive feelings toward the Arabic language. The positive attitude toward Arabic found in a study of 912 pupils in seventeen Jewish primary schools in Tel Aviv, Haifa, Jerusalem and Carmi'el (Abraham Fund 2007) is altogether another story. This study was carried out in a period of high tension between the two groups. Hence, one could expect a negative attitude toward Arabic. The author's guess is that the positive attitude revealed is not typical of all schools; rather it represents the success of a unique project initiated in 2004 by the Abraham Fund, encompassing 100 schools – 'Language as a Cultural Bridge.' The 17 schools studied by Tel-Aviv University were part of that Project.

Juxtaposing the findings of our study in an ordinary junior high school in northern Tel Aviv with the findings of the sample of the Abraham Fund project schools serves to show that things could change. Despite the obvious impact of tension on relationships and attitude, the goal of affording the Arabic language and Arab culture

public legitimacy, thereby advancing equality and a shared future for both national groups in Israel, is still obtainable.

NOTES

1 The Orr Committee: A State committee established by the government to investigate the events of October 2000, in which 13 Israeli Arabs were killed and scores were wounded by the police who opened fire on demonstrators.

2 Intifada: The Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation. There were two Intifadas: the first – between 1987 and the Oslo Accords reached in August 1993; the second (also known as *Intifada-Al-Aksa*) started in 2000 and ended in 2005.

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