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THE PROBLEM OF EDUCATIONAL SPREAD'S FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES (CASE STUDY OF ISRAEL)

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Abstract

The present article investigates a very specific language situation, language policy and its implementation in the educational process in Israel, that is a country in the Middle East where there is a whole palette of languages (over 32 languages) and cultures. The authors carried out a thorough analysis of the development and domination of the today's leading languages in Israel (Hebrew, Arabic, English), dwelled upon historical factors that had influenced and shaped language dynamics in the country. The current research based on and supported by other similar researches in this area presents a unique case study of a dying language (Hebrew) revitalisation in the XXI c. as well as the domination of English, Arabic in the region, which in their place have pushed other existing languages (Ladino, Yiddish)

to the edge of their extinction. The current research argues that such a 'language mosaic' is not specifically driven by any pre-planned by the state language policy, but is a reflection of extra-linguistic factors which shape the objective reality in Israel.

Keywords

Language Policy, Language Situation, Israel, Hebrew, Arabic

1. Introduction

XXI c. can be characterized as a period when the tension between languages and cultures in different countries increases. As long as "the idea that nothing but education and its teaching system can be a guarantee of maintenance and development of the human civilization" (Talalova, 2003, p. 12), language situation and language policy in neighbouring states will be of enormous significance. In our opinion the countries in the Middle East and notably Israel are of particular interest because of a unique culture and language palette.

Israel's language policy didn't have an equal impact on the people's language practice through several historical stages. The strongest influence of the country's language policy was in the period of the Hebrew revival. That language was considered dead for centuries although the Jewish Diaspora used it to praise, examine religious texts and to communicate with coreligionists from other countries if they didn't have another common language. Notwithstanding the fact that Hebrew religious texts exist for more than three millenia and secular literature appeared as far back as in the XVIIth century, it was not until the early XXth century when the process of revival of Hebrew as a colloquial language began.

A number of studies focused on the history and development of the languages in the Middle East were carried out by I. Filshtinskij (1978), B. Kotik-Fridgut (2006), R. Landa (2005), R. Lapidus (2004), L. Talalova (2003), etc.

The current research argues that the unique nature of the language situation in Israel is supported by the objectivity of the extra-linguistic factors that have shaped the dominance and use of the major languages (Hebrew, Arabic, English) in the country.

2. The history of the revival of the Hebrew language

It was only one hundred years ago that the language situation was completely different in the area. The Ottoman Palestine was inhabited by Arabic-speaking peoples, Sephardi Jews speaking Ladino, as well as the Arabs and Ashkenazi Jews speaking Yiddish. As for Turkish, this language was used in official circles (Filshtinskij, 1978).

More than one hundred years ago Eliezer Ben-Yehuda founded the Committee of the Hebrew language (in 1890), in 1904 the first Jerusalem normal school was open, then in 1905 Gerzliya gymnasium was initiated in Jaffa, it was the first school in the world where teaching was in Hebrew. Less than a quarter-century later those institutions in the Middle East contributed to the expansion of the spheres of use of the Hebrew language which transformed from a literary language of an elite group of speakers into the language of a modern nation living in their own state (Heimets N. & Apshtain A., 2002, pp. 188-190).

According to statistics given by Fedorchenko (Fedorchenko, 1996, pp. 256-257) in the early XXth century Hebrew was spoken by just 40% of Palestinian Jews (approximately 34 thousand people), whereas 36% of those people spoke Yiddish, 18% used Arabic and 4% spoke Ladino; by comparison the second and the third waves of repatriates chose Hebrew as a colloquial language. The Jewish population of Palestine increased sevenfold during the Mandate period (from 84 thousand people in 1922 to more than 640 thousand people twenty-five years later), there were more and more people who considered Hebrew as the single common language in communal and cultural spheres. As early as in the later 1930s a wide educational system of teaching in Hebrew was organized, including 400 classrooms where 169 professors gave lessons and 5420 students were taught. Moreover, the British Mandate authorities recognized the official status of Hebrew in Palestine as one of the languages of public life (along with English and Arabic) that promoted creation of favorable conditions to use Hebrew not only in educational institutions but also in everyday life (Lapidus R., 2004).

2.1 Implementation of Zionistic language policy

The first generation of repatriates was regarded as a “desert generation”, this image was invented by an Israeli-Russian writer Asher Ginsburg (who assumed a pseudonym Ahad Ha'am that is “one of the people” in Hebrew). The writer drew a parallel between repatriates that moved to Israel and the Jews, the descendants of those who experienced the Exodus from Egypt to Israel more than three thousand years ago. They had to forget centuries of life in exile as the Jews led by Moses were obliged to wander in the wilderness for forty years in order to recover from their memories of slavery in Egypt before entering Canaan. The expression "galut mentality" ("galut" stands for "exile") was used to abuse someone, consequently it was generally thought that to look or to speak as a "galut Jew" was ignominious. It was assumed to hebraize names and surnames as a ritual of renunciation of the past and starting a new life, a lot of people did so in a big way. Thus, a Russian name Svetlana (this name has a meaning of "light, clear") was transformed in Ora or Orit ("or" stands for "light" in Yiddish), a German or a Yiddish surname Stein ("a stone") was

translated as Even, Sela or Zur. Others chose biblical names for themselves and their children (Fedorchenko A., 1996).

Therefore, the aim of Zionistic language policy was to establish and strengthen the status of Hebrew as both an official and colloquial language.

2.2 The results of the language policy

By the middle of the XXth century the Hebrew language demonstrated an unprecedented success of implementation of the language revival ideology, considering the fact that it was learnt exceptionally in formal education institutions and mainly by men for centuries. It is important to note that years of the Jews' persecution in the countries of the Jewish Diaspora was a critical factor for repatriates who came from Palestine to refuse language and cultural identification with the country of origin. They aspired to accept the Jewish national language, the Hebrew language that was some kind of a "backbone" for their new national and cultural identity (Vostokov V., Isaev V., Kovtunov A, etc., 1998).

The history of Hebrew's revival is recognized as the most interesting sociolinguistic phenomena of contemporaneity and perhaps one of the most successful attempts (there were lots of them) to recreate and "animate" a "dead" language in the last two centuries. Just over the period of one generation (that is forty years, from 1881 to 1921) a "core" of Hebrew-speaking young enthusiasts was formed, this language was a symbol of the national rebirth. On 29 November 1922 the British Mandate authorities recognized the official status of Hebrew for the Jewish population of Palestine. Thus, the Hebrew language acquired the legislative base, so the dream of life of Ben-Yehuda came true. However, it was a writer Ephraim Kishon who accurately reflected the specificity of the revolution that had place in the last hundred years in his famous aphorism "Israel is the only country where children teach their parents the mother tongue." (Kotik-Friedgut B., 2006).

The only real bearer of language policy is the Ministry of Education, since the policy it carries out is expressed in terms of figures that directly influence the language practice. So, it determines subjects (people) learning definite languages, the quantity of class hours, the languages needed for exams etc. The fact that it was not until 1995-1996 that the Ministry of Education firstly represented its policy on learning languages and published the corresponding circular letter, gives evidence that this problem was not a priority. More likely, officials of the Israeli Ministry of Education were under the necessity of defining and formulating their position because of the significant changes in language situation in Israel (Kotik-Friedgut B., 2000).

3. Modern language palette in Israel

Over the last few decades the changes in Israeli language practice caused by influx of repatriates led to another course of language policy that is a more tolerant attitude to multilingualism. Nowadays, Israeli language moves beyond the acceptance of multilingualism as distinct from the previous monolingualism ideology (the dominance of Hebrew). These days we can see a paradox: at the very moment when Hebrew became a mother tongue for all population it started to lose the role of a language due to which "everything can be told and created". The situation is like that following a general decadence of the Zionist theory in Israel and the concept of "the melting pot" consequently, that was previously a component part of that ideology (Karasova T. 1999).

At the present day the official languages in Israel are Hebrew and Arabic what can be explained by the state policy during the history of Israel and Palestine. In 1922 the British Mandate of Palestine recognized English, Arabic and Hebrew as the country's three official languages (necessarily in that order). Then, in 1949, there was an amendment according to which English lost its official status, whereas Hebrew became the first state language and Arabic took the second place (Nadel E. & Fishman J., 1977, pp.137-167). Thereafter the State of Israel has put a great deal of effort into strengthening the dominant status of Hebrew. Nowadays there are two educational systems in Israel, a Jewish one and an Arabic one. The both are borne by the State (Karasova T., 1999).

3.1 The status of Arabic in Israel

Following the first wave of repatriates about 632 thousand people moved from Arab countries to Israel (19% from the total number of repatriates between the period of 1919 and 1998). Among them there are almost 269 thousand people who came from Morocco, 130 thousand are from Iraq, 66 thousand came from Yemen, 54 thousand are from Tunisia, 38 thousand repatriates moved from Egypt, 37 thousand people are from Lybia, 26 thousand came from Algeria, 8 thousand repatriates moved from Syria and 4 thousand people are from Lebanon (Cooper R.L. & Conrad A.W., 1977),

It is important to note that since VII-IX centuries Arabic was colloquial for the **most** of the Jews who lived in those countries, replacing Aramaic. The adoption of Arabic permitted the Arab culture to influence the Jewish communities of the Southern and the Western Mediterranean. The Arab culture accumulated a considerable part of the ancient world and pre-Islamic East heritage due to numerous translations from Greek, Aramaic, Persian and Hindi into Arabic (Filshtinskij, 1978).

According to Israeli academicians (Ayelet Harel-Shalev, 2005), Arabic has got a low status in Israel as in the Jewish community in general as amongst descendants from Arabic-speaking countries who traditionally associated a high social status with the French or English languages. The Israeli legislation recognized Arabic as the second state language. It means that a part of Israeli TV and radio programs are broadcasted in Arabic, so they are translated from Hebrew. Besides, all sessions in the Jewish Parliament (the Knesset) are necessarily simultaneously interpreted into the second official language of Israel (Landa R., 2005).

Some magazines, books and newspapers are edited in Arabic. As for school, students of 7, 8, and 9 years study basics of Muslim population language and if they want they can deepen their knowledge and continue studying the language up to the graduation (12th year). Every pupil has a right to include Arabic into the list of exams for the matriculation certificate (Bagrut).

Anyway, the positions of Hebrew and Arabic are not equal on the state level. For instance, the laws adopted by the Knesset come into effect without being translated into Arabic (they are often translated later). Not all street name plates or traffic signs have Arabic versions (especially in Tel Aviv).

At the same time the Israeli government attempts to assign equal rights to the both official languages. So, on 21 November 2006 the members of the Parliamentary Committee on Education resolved unanimously that the Academy of the Arabic language should be founded (by analogy with the Academy of the Hebrew language) taking into consideration the fact of decline in language proficiency of the Israeli Arabs. At the present time we can see the following tendency: the young Israeli Arabs use Hebrew on daily basis more frequently than English. The Academy can help to overcome this tendency.

Since 2008 the Academy of the Arabic language, created under the parliamentary legislation, functions in Haifa (see at <http://www.arabicac.com>). It determines the development of Arabic in Israel providing a thorough analysis of different stages of its evolution and all lexical layers. The Ministry of Education finances the Academy and its President was eligible to appoint the first fifteen life academicians.

Today frequently do some periodicals in Arabic, oriented toward the Arabic-speaking population, appear in Israel. On 8 August 2007 the first issue of the Israeli newspaper Al-Fajr al-Jadid ("A new dawn") was published. The newspaper is edited in Nazareth, where Arab Christians live, in an edition of 23 thousand copies and it will be distributed mainly in Arab cities and villages of Galilee and Negev. It will be the major competitor of the

newspaper Al-Ittihad ("A Union") which has been issued for nearly 60 years, which is close to Communists and left-wing Arabic parties.

In October 2015 during the preliminary reading the Knesset drew the bill according to which the Arabic language learning will be necessary for all Israeli pupils. The initiative was signed by 25 from 120 members of Parliament. There were no opponents during the voting. "I want us to better understand our Arab neighbors and I'd like children not to quiver hearing Arabic speech," states Oren Hazan, the author of the bill, a deputy of the governing party Likud, "the situation when a lot of Israeli citizens are afraid of one of the state languages is not normal and it must be changed". The explanatory document submitted to the Knesset Secretariat says that because of a complicated situation that can be seen in the relationship of the Jewish and Arab population these latter years the knowledge of the Arabic language could help to find the right way and avoid excessive panic and wrong actions. According to a number of experts, there is another reason of the Arabic language's popularity amongst the Jewish youth, it is a high demand for army officers. A recruit speaking fluently Arabic has high chances to gain a recommendation letter for elite subdivisions of Military intelligence. For example, it is "8200" that specializes in wiretapping neighbouring Arabic countries of Israel. The service in this subdivision opens up great possibilities, in particular privileges when entering employment after obligated service in the army.

Nowadays, the Arab Jews comprise 20% of the country's population. There is a specific "Arab" department in the Ministry of Education that establishes educational program for school students whose mother tongue is Arabic. Though the majority of them study Hebrew a lot of pupils don't know it to an adequate degree. Now, according to the bill of 2015, Arab students will study Hebrew from the school's first grade as well as Jewish pupils will study Arabic. It will be the necessary part of the educational program at school. Nevertheless, the experts affirm that over the last years the interest for Arabic has been increasing. For instance, over the last five years more than 150 schools included Arabic that had been an extra course in the regular school program. It is referred to mostly the Northern District where numerous cities are populated by the Arabs. In the last year the number of upper-form students who passed the exam in Arabic for the matriculation certificate was nearly 10 thousand people.

4. Model of the educational spread in Israel

The multicultural population of Israel imposes their own rules concerning formation of the educational spread in Israel. There are four types of Israeli schools: state schools, state

and religious schools, religious schools (Haredi) and Arabic schools (Druse schools are often mistakenly included in the list of that kind of schools, though they are not so numerous).

A great majority of Israeli children attend state schools. As for religious and state and religious schools, they offer intensive Jewish educational programs, satisfying needs of the **Orthodox** Jewish youth. The education in Arab schools is in Arabic and considerable attention is paid on history, religion and culture courses. There are also a few bilingual schools where both Jewish and Arab children are taught, for example it is Gesher-al-Avadi school administered by the Center for Jewish-Arab Education “Hand in Hand”. Besides, there are some international, private and other types of schools that have their own educational systems. Furthermore, there are American schools with American educational system where education is in English and the graduates gain American graduate certificates. The Embassy of the Russian Federation has its school where there is Russian educational system and graduates pass the Unified State Exam, then the graduates obtain Russian graduate certificate, so lots of Russian-speaking families want their children to attend this school. Beyond that, there are French and English schools providing English or French instruction correspondingly. Some democratic schools teach pupils the basics of democratic society, the students are taught how to develop their personality and respect the rights of others. Some other types of schools exist in Israel: Waldorf schools, Kibbutz schools, Mofet schools (Mathematics- and Physics-oriented schools). The generally accepted educational system in Israel can be divided in three age groups at school: the primary school (1-6 grades), the secondary school (6-9 grades) and the high school (9-12 grades). The education starting from the senior group at kindergarten (from the age of 5) and till the 12th grade is compulsory in Israel.

The secondary education prepares students for the entrance examinations that involve various academic disciplines which are estimated by 5-point difficulty level scale. The students who passed the obligatory exams (Hebrew, English, Mathematics, Tanakh and Literature) as well as those who passed the exams with the total sum of difficulty points equal to 21 or more (including at least one 5-point difficulty level exam) obtain the matriculation certificate. In 2007 74,4% of Israeli school graduates passed exams and only 46,3% got the certificate. In Arab and Druse schools the results were 35,6% and 43,7% correspondingly.

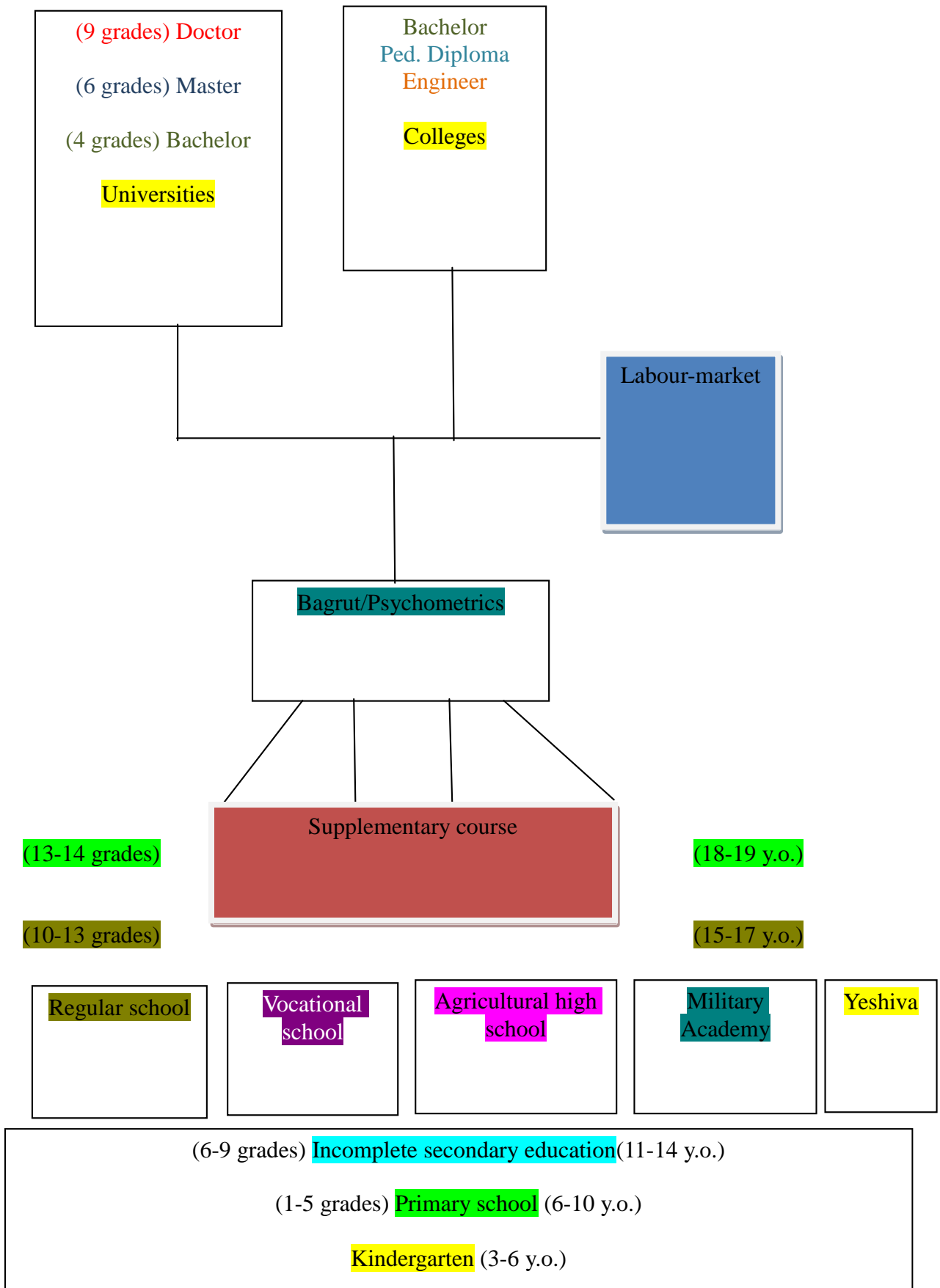


Figure 1: Educational system in Israel

The possibilities of continuation of education depend on several components: average marks on profile courses (in the matriculation certificate) and psychometrics marks. All enrollees pass the Psychometric Entrance Test organized by the Israeli National Institute for Testing and Evaluation. The test consists of 165 tasks examining logical thought processes in mother tongue (40% of questions), level of English proficiency (20%); mathematical abilities (40%). This exam is not only in Hebrew but also in English, Arabic, Russian, French, Spanish. The Admission Committee examines the documents of an enrollee and presents him a list of educational directions that they recommend.

5. Conclusion. Formation and development of the educational spread in Israel

Rapidly developing process of globalization in political, economic and cultural spheres along with strengthening of Israeli-American cooperation have secured a high status to the English language in Israel. Current research shows that Arabic can serve as a bridge between the Arabs and the Jewish in Israel, as well as between the Israeli and the Palestinian or any other Arab countries.

Our research shows that the formal politics doesn't have a decisive influence on the development of the language situation in Israel: though English is excluded from the list of official languages, it is used in different spheres of life even more than the official Arabic language; the status of Russian is not officially recognized but because of significant changes in demographic situation it is widely used in Israel.

The present research has proved the following hypothesis: the current language situation in Israel is characterized by political tolerance (the choice, usage and language expansion are shaped not by the government but an objective situation), individual plurilingualism (the majority of the Jews speak several languages) and multilingualism (different languages coexist in the country and are used in various spheres of life).

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