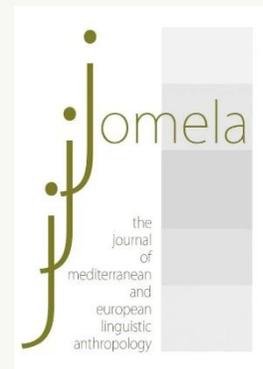


Cultural Discrepancy within the Russian-Speaking Community of Israelis

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Abstract

The objective of the research is to clarify the cultural varieties within the Russian speaking community of Israel as reflected in the mental semantic network. The word connections in the mental lexicon reveal the actual importance of the interconnections among objects and events. According to the results of free association experiments with Russian-Hebrew and Hebrew-Russian bilinguals, that have been held since 2014 (90 participants, more than 10,000 associations) the attitude to the Russian language and reflection of the culture changed under impact of narrowing of the language usage and transforming of the cultural preferences. The discrepancy in communication and culture between veteran immigrants and newcomers allows to discuss a case of intercultural communication. Immigrants from the former Soviet Union who still consider Russian to be their mother tongue make more than 15% of the population of the State of Israel. The Russian-speaking immigrants of all five waves have always taken part in social and business activities changing the cultural landscape of the country. The immigrants' waves reached the pick in 1991 (Lipshitz 1997: 471). The '1990s wave' immigrants participated in social and cultural life establishing new political parties and mass media, organizing schools, creating theaters and orchestras. They acquired Hebrew and absorbed the Israeli culture that affects their mother tongue.

The immigrants from the former USSR kept Russian active in their everyday communication; however, the language attrition is obvious in the speech of the veteran immigrants due to the narrow communication sphere and the influence of Hebrew. The most recent wave from 2014 called 'Putin Exodus' was triggered by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (Erofeev, Herbst 2019). The newcomers brought new cultural trends opening bookstores, coffee clubs and blogging platforms. Their Russian does not have the features of the attrition, their cultural and political preferences differ from those of the veteran immigrants. In our material, the difference is revealed in: (1) The set of the syntagmatic associations (2) Links to the ethnic and religious traditions (3) Quotations of literature, folklore and phraseology (4) Usage of rare words and terminology. References Erofeev, S., & Herbst, J. E. (2019) Putin Exodus: The New Russian Brain Drain. Eurasia Center, Atlantic Council. 45 p. Lipshitz, G. (1997). Immigrants from the former Soviet Union in the Israeli housing market: spatial aspects of supply and demand. *Urban Studies*, 34(3), 471-488.

Keywords: *Russian, Israelis, cultural discrepancy, immigration, folklore*

1. Introduction

1.1 *The Subject and Objectives of the Research*

The Russian-speaking immigrants have always taken part in social and business activities changing the cultural landscape of Israel. Immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU) who still consider Russian as their mother tongue make more than 15% of the population of the State of Israel (close to 1,300k (Countrymetrics 2018)). The immigrants' waves of the previous century reached the pick in 1991 (Lipshitz 1997: 471). In 2000s, the children who came to the country with their parent in 1990s, were identified as '1.5 generation' who prefer to maintain their Russian cultural identity along with Israeli culture even after 25 years in the country (Niznik 2011).

In 2000s, the pick of the waves of the immigrants' from FSU appeared in 2017 when 16,183 FSU immigrants make 56% of the total immigrants to Israel (CBS 2018). The wave had begun to increase in 2014 after the Crimea crisis; since it brought to Israel opponents of the Putin's policy, it has been identified as 'Putin Exodus' (Erofeev, Herbst 2019). Popular journalists, successful businesspeople, top professionals came to the country escaping the reconstruction of the Soviet Union. At the same time, refugees from the Eastern Ukrainian arrived looking for the fresh start in a friendly environment; more than 30,000 immigrants from Ukraine came to Israel between 2014 and 2018 (Sokol and Staff 2019). The contradictions between the veteran immigrants and the newcomers appeared in various spheres because of the difference in the life experience, the

cultural background and the attitude to Jewish culture and the identity of Russian Israelis.

The objective of the present research is to clarify the interconnection of the cultural preferences between the veteran immigrants of the '1990 wave' and the representatives of 'Putin Exodus' within the Russian-speaking community in the aspect of the Russian language attrition and attitudes to the Russian and Israeli cultural contexts.

2. Material and Methods

The research is conducted on the material of the free association test (Ovchinnikova, Yelenevskaya 2019) and blogs of the Russian Israelis. The free association test, which was held with native Russian speakers from Russia, allows for receiving impulsive reaction to Russian words that reveal understanding of the semantic connections in the Russian lexicon of the immigrants and links to Russian cultural context. The test discloses the attitudes and preferences of the Russian-speaking community members, which do not write blogs.

The similarity between the '1990s wave' and 1.5ers was studied on the output of the written free association test held in 2014-2016 (Ovchinnikova, Yelenevskaya 2019). Our respondents emigrated from Russia to Israel before 2010: 63 spent more than 10 years in the country, 21 arrived after 2006. The respondents received the stimuli list with 112 Russian words and a computer questionnaire with multiple-choice questions; the answers contain the personal details (age of immigration; education; occupation; where they speak Russian). Eighty-four respondents aged from 21 to 76 produced 9,408 associations. To uncover the difference between adults of the '1990s wave' and 1.5ers, we compared samples of the association sets generated by respondents of two age groups: below / over 36; 54 respondents did not reach the age of 36 at the moment of the test, 30 respondents were over 36. To evaluate the absorption of the Hebrew language and culture, we took into account the respondents' time of the arrival in Israel. The association sets were examined applying semantic and sociolinguistic analysis.

The opinions and attitudes of the Russian Israelis are disclosed in their posts and blogs in social networks and online media. Blogs and personal stories of newcomers were published on the website *Shakshuka.ru*¹. The source uncovers expectations, attitudes and relevant topics of 'Putin Exodus' representatives. *Shakshuka* had been delivered in 2015 and in two years became a well-known website among new Israelis. In May 2017, Russian-speaking community nominated the co-producer and editor of the website Alina Rebel as one of the "persons of the year". Alina Rebel is a Russian journalist who performed 'Putin Exodus' in 2014. Alina's project for sharing Israeli experience among new Israelis consolidated the journalists, businesspersons, intellectuals of 'Putin Exodus'. We found out the target audience, connections with the relevant cultural context, correspondence to events in Russia applying the discourse analysis to the blogs.

3. Brief Description of the '1990s wave' Immigrants and representatives of the 'Putin Exodus'

The '1990s wave' immigrants participated in social and cultural life establishing new political parties and mass media, organizing schools, creating theaters and orchestras. They acquired Hebrew and absorbed the Israeli culture that affects their mother tongue. Meanwhile, the immigrants avoid discussing their traumatic experience of absorbing new social norms and cultural customs. In the second decade of 2000s, their children, so called 1.5ers, made successful attempt to present their reflection of the trauma of absorption in the art, belletristic literature and verses written in Hebrew. The intention to bring into Hebrew-speaking cultural context troubles of the 'Russian street' shows the discrepancy in the social behavior between 'silent parents and articulate children' (Remennick 2018). The immigrants from the former USSR kept the Russian language active in their everyday communication. However, the language attrition is obvious in their speech. The 'silent parents' experienced narrowing of the Russian lexicon and syntax simplification due to the influence of Hebrew and limited functions of Russian in Israel. Russian is restricted to the needs of the life routine besides broadcasting in Russian of particular media and publications in Russian journals, newspapers, and websites.

The recent immigrants' wave was triggered by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2014 (Erofeev, Herbst 2019). Between 2014 and 2017, 44 959 immigrants from FSU (42.2% of the total immigrants at the period) arrived in Israel (CBS, 2018). Due to their active socialization, the newcomers became a perceptible part in the Russian-speaking community. Since the immigrants of 'Putin Exodus' were pushed to Israel by the political crises, they probably had not been deeply involved in the Jewish culture and customs before arriving in the country (Hanin 2016). They mostly do not support the Judaism religious ideology. Many of them associated themselves with the current global trends in mentality of the leftist intellectuals (Borisova-Linetskaya 2019). The immigrants prefer to introduce themselves as the 'qualitative Aliyah'. In the Israeli media, the opposition between veteran immigrants and 'Putin Exodus' is referred as the contradiction between the 'sausage Aliyah' and the 'cheese Aliyah'. The references emphasize the economic backgrounds of the contradictions simplifying the mismatch in the experience and mentality. The newcomers brought new global cultural trends opening bookstores, coffee clubs and blogging platforms. Their Russian does not have the features of the attrition; their cultural and political preferences differ from those of veteran immigrants.

Therefore, the Russian-speaking community in Israel includes representatives of the various social groups. To be precise, the immigrants of the '1990s wave' and the representatives of 'Putin Exodus' emigrated from different countries, their cultural backgrounds do not match, and they speak different idioms of the Russian language. The 1.5ers seems to be the peculiar group within

the community.

4. Cultural Discrepancy between the ‘1990s wave’ Immigrants and the 1.5 Generation

4.1 The Explication of Russian Language Attrition and Presentation of Russian Culture in the Free Associations

Analysis of the Russian association sets reveals the distribution of the semantic connections in the Russian lexicon and effect of the Hebrew language and culture on the language attrition. The semantic analysis of the associations sets shows essential differences in the semantic fields and word connections in the Russian lexicon of the Russian-speaking Israelis. The respondents aged over 26, who spent more than 10 years in Israel, belong to the 1.5 generation (see Table 1). 75 of the respondents completed at least a bachelor’s degree including 22 of the 1.5ers and 24 immigrants of the ‘1990s wave’. Among the latter group, 18 completed MA or MS degrees.

Respondents	Age: 20-35 years old	Age: 36-60 years old
Less than 10 years in Israel	18	3
More than 10 years in Israel	36	27
Representatives of 1.5 generation	24	0
Total associations	6,048	3,360

Table 1: Quantitative Description of Association Test Results

In the files of respondents, the Russian language attrition is obvious due to orthographic errors, using Latin transliteration instead of the Cyrillic script, reacting in Hebrew or by nonce words. Almost 65% of the files include errors. Almost all of the files of the 1.5ers contain associations in Hebrew, errors and nonce words. Producing the same associations on several stimuli words from the list reveals the narrowing of the Russian lexicon caused by the limited usage of the language. The 1.5ers sometimes reacted by basic words on five or even more stimuli words (e.g., ‘happiness, to love, war, money, people → peace’; ‘sick, clever, beautiful, stupid → man’).

One fifth of the associations database represents connection to the Jewish holidays, Israeli routine and nature. The respondents mentioned events from the Israeli history (‘Lebanon War’, ‘IDF’, ‘Arabs’, ‘Islam’, etc.). All of the respondents, who spent more than 10 years in the country, mentioned the war domain in their associations. The 1.5ers recollected wars and weapons

(‘bomb, bullet, battle’) almost eight times as frequent as the respondents aged over 35. The 1.5ers described their life in Israel, while reacting to the neutral stimuli words (‘village → Druse’; ‘to shout → Moroccan woman’). However, for their parents, the Russian stimuli words are mostly associated with the lifestyle in the FSU (‘monument → Lenin’; ‘war → the sacred’²³).

The stimuli words sometimes evoked associations with cultural codes and artefacts (see Table 2). For those, who spent more than 10 years in Israel, the Russian words represent a key to the Russian culture. The respondents aged below 36 produced more cultural associations than the respondents in their forties and fifties.

Associations	Produced by respondents who spent > 10 years in Israel	Produced by respondents who spent < 10 years in Israel
Total	7056	2352
Respondents below 36	430 (6.09%)	140 (5.95%)
Respondents over 35	359 (5.09%)	49 (2.08%)

Table 2. Cultural associations of the Russian Israelis

References to the culture mention historical events, art artefacts, folklore, and literature. The associations of Russian words with Israeli culture are of no importance in the mentality of the Russian Israelis. The immigrants of the ‘1990 wave’ associated Russian words with the world culture (‘man → Renaissance’, ‘clever → Elsie’, ‘to keep up → to be running for the Canadian border’⁴) as well as with the Russian culture. The cultural associations of the Russian Israelis of the ‘1990 wave’ correspond to the cultural life and activity that they remember from the FSU at the Noughties (‘old → bolshevik’, ‘good → Mayakovsky’, ‘stupid → penguin’⁵, ‘rich → oligarch’).

The associations of the 1.5ers reveal connections to Russian folklore, proverbs (e.g. ‘forest → wolf’; ‘bread → salt’), Russian customs (‘grandmother → pelmeni’ (meat dumplings)); ‘bread → borodinsky’), Soviet verses for children (‘uncle → Stepa’). The 1.5ers referred to masterpieces of the Russian literature (‘war → and peace’) and political slogans (‘homeland → mother’), to the Russian history (‘rich → boyar’) and popular Russian crime films (‘brother → 2’).

Thus, semantic network based on the mother tongue of the 1.5ers is adjusted to the Russian language usage within the Russian-speaking community; they use the language in family conversations to verbalize the popular topics. They brought the Russian customs of their childhood with them including the Russian classics and the protest culture of the perestroika

(the film “Brother-2”). Their Russian mostly functions in family and community communication while the current lifestyle is associated with Hebrew; however, they are able to connect the Russian words to the life routine of Israel. The well-educated immigrants of the ‘1990 wave’ preserved the quality Russian language as a key to the culture and experience since their Hebrew is poorer than Russian. In the free association test, the influence of Hebrew was unnoticeable.

Thus, the discrepancy is discovered in the degree of the language attrition, in the sphere of the communication in Russian, and involvement into the current everyday life and social events in Israel.

5. Cultural Discrepancy between veteran immigrants and ‘Putin Exodus’ representatives

5.1 *The Explication of Cultural Discrepancy between ‘Silent Parents and Articulate Children’*

Russian Israelis have published their blogs on the various websites including online TV channels, which broadcast in Russian for Israelis and the Jewish community all over the globe. The bloggers write about culture, politics, economics, Jewish customs and traditions; they discuss the relationships of different groups on the ‘Russian street’ and the contradictions between Russian Israelis and other communities in the country. In the first decade of the 2000s, the Telecommunication Group Cellcom delivered the project Tarbut.ru and announced annual competitions for Russian Israelis. After the competitions of artists and musicians, Russian writers and journalists received the opportunity to publish their poems, short stories and blogs on the Tarbut.ru website. Cellcom promised to translate the best 30 works and to publish them in Hebrew (Strana 2009). In the writings of the participants, the Russian language attrition appears in syntax simplification, substitutions of conjunctions, prevailing of simple words from the basic lexicon, distortion of the phraseology, Hebraisms. The language of the writings acquired some features of the colloquial speech (Naidich 2004). However, the competition had attracted a lot of gifted and already well-known poets and writers who have represented immigrants of the ‘1990 wave’ and 1.5ers (Mikhail Ziv, Alexander Averbukh, Aliona Gasparian). Some of them obtained the readers’ interest before immigration and continued following traditions of the Russian poetry in Israel. They use elegant tropes, describe a detail of the routine that triggers transformation of the inner world.

However, other voices of the 1.5 poets have sounded in Hebrew. Rita Kogan and Alex Rif produced the poetic monologues touching the immigration trauma and the inconsistent identity of young Russian women who resist the negative stereotyping by Israelis (Moshkin 2019). The poets spoke on behalf of their mothers who had silently survived through the horror of the first

years in Israel (Remennick 2018). The recent trend in the Hebrew poetry of the Russian Israelis transforms the image of the Russian woman into the lost soul suffering from the patriarchal and sexist everyday culture of Israeli men but attempting to pronounce her independence and spiritual freedom. The Rita Kogan also translated verses of Anna Akhmatova into Hebrew. The position of the poets is associated with the activity of the “Fishka” club in Tel-Aviv (Remennick and Prashizky 2016).

Thus, the attitude to the Russian language and culture of the ‘1990 wave’ immigrants and 1.5ers differs in their involvement in the cultural activity and willingness to be involved into the Hebrew-speaking cultural processes articulating the peculiar self-portrait of the inhabitant of the ‘Russian street’.

5.2 The Explication of the Cultural Preferences and Attitudes of ‘Putin Exodus’

The Russian-speaking immigrants, who arrived in Israel after 2014, are also identified as the ‘Aliyah of productive people’. They stepped in the politics and are eager to claim their rights and interests. The ‘qualitative Aliyah’ consider the immigration as a quest (Frakash 2016). While exploring the Israeli routine, the immigrants investigated the customs from the point of view of the curious and skillful traveler being aware of the possible traumatic effect. The bloggers shared their experience with those who would like to understand the challenge of the immigration and understand their protest against the Soviet ideology reconstruction in Russia. They intended to acquire the skills to absorb the everyday routine of a worker in an Israeli vegetable store nevertheless how far it appears to be from the Moscow lifestyle (Milgram 2016). The enthusiasm and openness lead them to acceptance of the Levantine patience and value of the simple life. Their ‘osim haim’ manifest was published on the website Shakshuka.ru and was shared by thousands of Russians all over the globe (Shustikova 2016). However, ‘Putin Exodus’ is also associated with the neglecting the character of the multicultural Israeli discourse and with misunderstanding of the current cultural context of the ‘Russian street’ (Chipka-ne 2018). Indeed, the reviews of the cultural events on Shakshuka.ru mainly described the concerts, show and exhibitions in the context of the world and Russian culture ignoring the clubs like “Fishka” and the activity of the Russian-speaking community.

While Russian 1.5ers have made attempts to explain the trauma of the ‘1990 wave’ immigrants, the newcomers kept their distance from the language and the culture of the ‘Russian street’. The newcomers’ point of view is evaluated as the position of the external observer who has no intention to deeply understand the Middle East Israeli routine. The reference to the Nekrasov’s verse about true patriotism shows the attitude to oppose any government in power (Borisova-Linetskaya 2019). The opposition to the power is an immanent feature of a behavior code of the Russian intelligentsia (Uspensky 1999: 13). The reminiscence of the White Guard

emigration (Rebel 2016) explained the inconsistent self-identification of the representatives of 'Putin Exodus'. On the one hand, they proclaimed humanity, tolerance and understanding of the Israeli multiculturalism; on the other hand, they preserved their special status in the country as external observers preferring to stay away from the mixed culture and religious traditions of the 'Russian street'.

Conclusion

The cultural discrepancy within the community of Russian-speaking Israelis reflects the contradiction of two different cultural codes in the Russian culture.

In the cultural context of the veteran immigrants, the Russian culture employs the literary language and its colloquial idiom, which was transformed because of the narrow communicative sphere and the influence of Hebrew. The culture of the 'Russian street' preserves the Russian traditions and absorbs the Jewish customs. The 1.5ers intend to include their culture in the cultural context of the country struggling for their identity.

The 'Qualitative Aliyah' associated the Russian culture with the literary language and behavior code of the 'Russian intelligentsia' that is irrelevant in Israel. While accepting Jewish customs, the newcomers perform the quest, rejecting the local culture and life style. The discrepancy appears to be the consequence of the complex multicultural landscape of Israel.

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Endnotes

¹ Israeli blog platform in Russian (2015-2019) <https://shakshuka.ru/>

² The reference to the famous Soviet song of the Second World War.

³ The combination of the stimuli word and its association exactly matches the Bill's speech in the Russian translation of "The Ransom of Red Chief" by O. Henry.

⁴ The reference to "The Song of the Stormy Petrel" by Maxim Gorky.