

Language testing/assessment in the context of migration and integration

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Background: Immigrants and Hebrew ideology

- **Israel has been an immigration country since the end of the 19th century as Jews, especially those from Eastern Europe, were encouraged to immigrate with the rise of a national movement of Zionism.**
- **This immigration ideology began during the Othman Empire, then during the British Mandate (1917-1947), continuing through the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, and till this very day (in the nineties from the former USSR, Ethiopia, but continuously from other countries, lately from France)**
- **In addition: asylum seekers and refugees.**

Hebrew language policy

- **As to language ideology and policy: from the earliest migration the policy was to first revive the Hebrew language, and then to impose it on the whole immigrant population forming collective group identity.**
- **Integration into the local culture via the Hebrew language**
- **Price: No maintenance of home languages**

*20% of the population are Arabs who use Arabic in their daily lives and as a medium of instruction in schools.

Language testing policy

- **Overall: Heavy testing culture**
- **Citizenship tests are not required for Jewish immigrants.**
- **Students in schools (K-12): tests for immigrants were conducted in Hebrew only**
- **Since 2014, (based on research of Shohamy, Levine, Spolsky, Inbar 2003), there has been a gradual shift towards defining the eligibility for accommodations and assessment policies, slowly moving towards bi-lingual testing for immigrants (external tests).**

Multilingual (ML) Tests

- In Shohamy et al. (2003) it was found that bilingual math tests (Hebrew-Russian) provided an advantage to immigrant students from Russia in comparison with a control group. Students tested in a monolingual Hebrew version did more poorly even after 12 years.
- The purpose of this exploratory research is to examine the perceptions and attitudes of immigrant test takers to bilingual tests (Bialystok, 2017).
- This is part of a new research sponsored by the the Israeli Ministry of Education of introducing a new ML educational policy).

The research question and design

- **What are the attitudes and perceptions of Russian immigrant students towards bilingual tests?**
- **Test takers were given two forms of the same test (in math and history) in 2 languages: Hebrew (L2 and the language of instruction) and Russian (L1).**
- **Following the test administration the students completed a questionnaire (in Russian or Hebrew) about their attitudes towards the bilingual testing experience.**

The research context

- A school populated by immigrants from the former USSR (80% of the school population).
- The sample: 43 students; grades 10-11; age: 15-18 (mean=16.25)
- 91% immigrated to Israel
- L1 Russian
- Duration in Israel: 6 months to 11 years (mean=2.96)
- Language of instruction Hebrew (following a period of intense Hebrew studies)
- Level in Hebrew: most participants approximate that it will take them a few years to acquire native-like Hebrew proficiency (36%: 3-4 years; 25% 5-6 years)

Findings

- **80% of the students expressed positive attitudes towards being tested bilingually.**
- **The bilingual versions were used mostly for understanding instructions and lexicon.**
- **Negative correlations between years of residence and the value they attributed to the procedure**

What was each version used for?

	Hebrew version	Russian version
Understand instructions	51.2%	62.8%
Understand words	60.5%	53.5%
Understand terms	48.8%	60.5%
Planning how to write the answers	48.8%	53.5%
Other	34.9%	58.1%

Advantages of BL testing: Students' comments

- “It was easier for me to understand the questions in my mother tongue’
- “I don’t think I would have succeeded in replying without the translation
There are words which I don’t understand in Russian or Hebrew so having the translation is very convenient”
- “First of all I understand the question faster and then I have more time to respond.
In addition I understand the terms”.
- “It was much easier for me to compose the answer – if I didn’t understand a word in the question in Hebrew I could read it in Russian”
- “There are lots of terms in Hebrew which I don’t know and the translation helped me understand the question”.

Strategies to overcome difficulties in learning Hebrew: Students' suggestions

- **Interact more with Hebrew speakers**
- **Watch movies and the news in Hebrew**
- **“I think there is a need to stop framing the students within the Hebrew textbooks because the most important element in learning a language is oral drilling. The main disadvantage of the school is that most of us are Russian speakers: we communicate in Russian and it slows down our progress in learning Hebrew.”**
- **Limit contact with Russian, but add Russian classes so that we don't forget the language**
- **Allow responses in Russian on tests**

Conclusions

- 1. While the assessment policy of external tests was Hebrew only, the current policy, based on research, is moving towards bilingual tests (and also instruction???).**
- 2. Not only are immigrant students performing better in content areas (past research), they also value the advantage of two languages in their math and history tests.**
- 3. Can facilitate integration and improve performance.**

Conclusions

3. Policy towards testing immigrant students is changing based on research.

4. Future research: additional verbal reporting and protocols, different language and cultural origins and additional content areas.

End

Findings

Good idea	%	N
To a large extent	45%	18
To a certain extent	35%	14
To a limited extent	15%	6
Not at all	5%	2

Bilingual effectiveness, duration in the country and self-assessed language knowledge

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Duration (years)	---				
2. Russian abilities	-.32*	---			
3. Hebrew abilities	.37*	-.12	---		
4. The bilingual test helped	-.56**	.38*	-.23	---	
5. The bilingual test was a good idea	-.04	-.14	-.07	.27	---

$p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$