THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT ON ARAB TEACHERS IN HEBREW SCHOOLS

Hezi Y. Brosh, Ph.D.
Languages and Cultures Department
United States Naval Academy
Annapolis

ABSTRACT

The teaching of Arabic in Israel by a native speaker is unique; it has ramifications different from the teaching of, say, English by a native speaker. It is not just the nativity issue per se but, even more, the interaction between the native speaker and the status and role of the language in society in a given context. This paper investigates the extent to which language teachers from one ethnic group can integrate themselves into another ethnic group and still effectively teach their language. The paper describes how contextual variables impact the ability of the native language teacher to work in a nonnative educational network under conditions of cultural and political duress. In particular, the paper highlights the special circumstances confronting an Arab language teacher teaching Arabic in Israeli Hebrew schools, and the effects that this native teacher has on a learner's motivation to acquire the language in the first place.

Language is the main channel for social interaction between people of different cultures. It is steeped in the sociopolitical context in which those peoples interact. Effective language teaching, then, must draw upon a combination of both linguistic and sociocultural knowledge. Increased appeals to include culture in language teaching have spurred some to conclude that the most effective language teachers would be native speakers of that language, who not only can fluently produce spontaneous and creative oral and written discourse in the language but also possess an intimate knowledge of the language's sociocultural context (Kramsch 1993; Medgyes 1994).

Whereas applied linguistics focuses mainly on linguistic and pedagogical knowledge in measuring classroom success, additional attention should be given to both the motivations of the native language teacher and the extent to which these motivations are related to ideological, cultural, and sociopolitical factors. This paper describes how contextual variables impact the ability of the native language teacher to work in a nonnative educational network under circumstances of cultural and political duress. In particular, the paper highlights the special circumstances confronting an Arab language teacher of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in an Israeli Hebrew-speaking school from the seventh grade on.

Note that the teaching of MSA in Israel by a native speaker is unique; it has ramifications different from the teaching of, say, English by a native speaker, whether in Israel or in any other country. It is not just the nativity issue per se but, even more, the interaction between the native speaker and the status and role of the language in society in a given context.

THE SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

Israel is the only society in the Middle East where Jews constitute a political and ethnic majority. The subordinate ethnic group, the Arabs, represent a national minority (1.5 million, 20 percent of the total population). In the larger geopolitical region, however, the 6 million Israeli Jews are a minority, surrounded by approximately 200 million Arabic-speaking citizens of the 21 countries in the Middle East and North Africa. With the exception of Egypt and Jordan, with whom Israel signed peace treaties in 1979 and 1994, respectively, all the Arab countries, as well as the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, are officially in a state of hostility with Israel.

Geographically, Israeli Arabs (citizens of Israel, not to be confused with the Palestinian Arabs of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) live in specific areas in the north and in the center of Israel. Although they live side by side with Jews, the Israeli Arabs have their own distinct culture, language, and religion. The divisions and differences between the two groups—Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs—are reflected socially, culturally, geographically, and politically. Even the school system is divided into two principal networks, namely the Hebrew-speaking and Arabic-speaking networks. The Hebrew-speaking network includes two sub networks: the secular and the religious. (Although this last is divided into orthodox and ultra-orthodox religious schools, discussion of either religious school is beyond the scope of this paper, because they have no significance to the research question; therefore, the relevant comparison here is between the Arabic-speaking network and the secular Hebrew-speaking subnet work, referred to hereafter simply as the Hebrew-speaking network.)

Research investigating the intercultural relationship between Jews and Arabs (Ben-Rafael and Brosh 1995; Suan and Debi 2006) shows that within the Jewish population exist stereotypes of the Arabs as hostile, culturally inferior, and even primitive. These stereotypes lead many Jews to keep their distance from, and to have no interest in developing social ties with, Arabs. The belligerency between Israel and the Arab world constitutes a major obstacle to improving these relations; it causes many Israeli Jews to regard every Arab as an enemy. The belligerency likewise affects Israeli Arabs, who therefore find themselves in the difficult situation of being a "hostile minority." The Arab-Israeli conflict has had both a direct and an indirect impact on every aspect of Israeli life, including the study of languages (Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, and Shohamy 2004). It permeates all aspects of Arabic learning and teaching in the Hebrew-speaking educational network, such as national language policies, language status, motivation and attitudes of parents and students to study the language, and the integration of native Arab teachers into that network.

LANGUAGE EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND THE PLACE OF ARABIC

Israel is a country of immigrants with diverse ethnic groups. As such it is multilingual and offers a wealth of linguistic resources. Besides Hebrew, a variety of other languages, such as Russian, Arabic, Ladino, Yiddish, Amharic, French, Spanish, and English can be heard spoken on its streets by Israeli citizens. But Hebrew is Israel's national language, with the most prestige.

In the effort to achieve and sustain national unity, adherents of the official ideology of the state of Israel, Zionism, are committed to the "melting pot" policy, the integration into Israel of Jews of all origins. The policy requires that the various "returning Diasporas" melt into a single socially and culturally unified nation grounded in Hebrew, the "renewed" national language and the major carrier for all Jewish legacies. The use of other languages by Israelis is to be confined to a minor role if any (Ben-Rafael and Brosh 1991; Spolsky and Shohamy 1998, 1999).

In contrast, the dominant culture's attitude vis-à-vis the Arab minority is definitely pluralistic. It legitimizes the existence and development of an Arabic-speaking educational network—from kindergarten to teachers' colleges—where Hebrew is only the second language. This attitude extends to the recognition of Arabic as an official language of the state alongside Hebrew, permitting (in theory) Arabic speakers to address state agencies in this language (Rubinstein 1994; see also Saban and Amara 2004).

Table 1. Languages taught in the Hebrew and Arabic school networks.
Hebrew school network
L1   Hebrew: Grade 1 onwards
L2   English: Grade 3throughout the rest of the school system.
L3   MSA: 7th to 10th grade (optional in 11th and 12th grades. Schools may choose to offer French
or Russian instead)
Arabic school network
L1 Arabic: Grade 1 onwards
L2 Hebrew: Grade 2 throughout the rest of the school system (optional in the first grade)
L3 English: Grade 6 throughout the rest of the school system.
The new official language policy (Ministry of Education 1996) attributes social and economic utility to the

knowledge of languages but favors and supports the learning and use of Hebrew for communication in the public domain (for more about the Hebrew language policy, see Spolsky 2009). As a result, the knowledge of Hebrew has become essential for the Arabs' existence in Israel (Amara and Mar'i 2002; see also Al-Haj 1995**).** In order to function more fully in the Israeli society—to work, to go to university, to communicate with the authorities—Arabs need to know and use Hebrew. The language is taught as a compulsory second language in the Arabic-speaking educational network from the second grade to the end of high school.

As Hebrew becomes a more important asset for the Arabs, Arabic becomes a less important asset for Jewish Hebrew speakers. As Arabs acquire knowledge of Hebrew, Arabic loses its importance as a tool of communication between the two ethnic groups and as a bridge to another culture.

The other prestigious language taught in Israeli schools in addition to Hebrew is English. It is recognized as the world language, hence its importance in this era of globalization. In the Hebrew-speaking educational network, English is taught as the first foreign language, and it is compulsory from the fifth grade until the end of high school; some schools start teaching English at earlier grades. In the Arabic-speaking network English is compulsory from the sixth grade until the end of high school (Spolsky and Shohamy 1998; Shohamy and Spolsky 2003). The same language policy offers MSA to students in the Hebrew-speaking network as an *elective* foreign language from the seventh grade on, with either French or Russian as an alternative choice.

Taking into account Israel's geopolitical location in the heart of the Arab world, many Israeli citizens who are aligned with the political center consider knowledge of MSA as vital to national security, even to the actual survival of Israel in the Middle East. Knowledge of the language serves as both a "bridge to peace" and a "bridge to war." As a result, officials in the Ministry of Education have strongly encouraged the diffusion of Arabic in schools, and Hebrew-speaking students nationwide now study MSA, beginning in the junior high grades. The emphasis on MSA in the Hebrew-speaking schools is invariably justified by the "necessity" of communicating with the "alien," and of "understanding" the "other side." Underlying the inclusion of Arabic studies in Hebrew schools is the assumption that knowledge of MSA will give the Jewish youngster a better appreciation of his or her Arab neighbors, their civilization, and their life attitudes and will enable Israeli Jews to encompass, and indeed embrace, contemporary Arab society and its cultural world (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport 1996). Politicians and policy makers expect this emphasis to bring the two ethnic groups closer to each other, and to forward understanding, acceptance, and peaceful relations between them (Bekerman 2009; see also State Controller 1980).

In spite of the positive language policy of the political center, the Jewish-Israeli society in general has not perceived the study of Arabic to be important, nor has it attributed value to the culture that the language represents. For Israeli Jews, Arabic is the majority language of a predominantly hostile geographic region as well as the language of a growing minority that is highly identified with that broader regional majority (Spolsky and Shohamy 1999). Students have typically perceived Arabic to be the "language of the enemy," with no pedestrian utility. They have not been interested in learning Arabic, and they have tended to ignore the obvious connection between studying the language as a school subject and creating constructive relationships with Arab society (Ben-Rafael and Brosh 1991). The teaching of MSA is considered primarily as a means of knowing one's enemy. The language is learned in schools in a "sterile" environment, without any exposure to Arabs and Arab culture.

The Israeli language policy in relation to Arabic seems somewhat self-contradictory. On the one hand, the study of this language is encouraged among the Jewish students on the grounds of openness to the non-Jewish environment. On the other hand, the assimilatory attitude of the dominant culture toward the intra-Jewish ethnic cleavage prevents that linguistic policy from endorsing Arabic as the carrier of values and symbols for important Jewish groups. As a result, Arabic is dismissed by Jews as the Arabs' language, not as one belonging to the culture and history of Jews. Moreover, letting students elect to study a foreign language other than MSA reflects a kind of ambivalence on the part of the Ministry of Education in promoting the learning of Arabic (Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, and Shohamy 2004). The ambivalence demonstrates that reality is stronger than policy. The Ministry of Education understands that making Arabic a compulsory school subject in the existing sociopolitical context would be a waste of resources. In fact, out of 150,000 students who choose to study MSA in junior high school, only 2 percent continue to study the language in the eleventh and twelfth grades of high school (Amara et al. 2008). Additionally, Arabic is characterized by diglossia - a big gap between the spoken variety and the written one. This diglossic situation complicates the teaching of Arabic as a foreign language. In

elementary school students study the spoken variety – the Palestinian dialect, whereas from the seventh grade on they move towards studying MSA.

EMPLOYMENT POLICY REGARDING NATIVE SPEAKERSOF MSA

Before the establishment of the state of Israel and its war for independence in 1948, the Arabic language was studied in the Jewish *yishuv* ("community"). At that time there was a clear tendency to prefer Jewish teachers over Arab ones. In fact, in 1946 all Arabic teachers in Hebrew educational institutions were Jews. During and after the 1948 war, this tendency was reinforced due to security considerations. In fact, until 1966, those Arabs who remained within Israel were officially under Israeli military rule. Under such circumstances the idea of an Arab teaching in a Jewish school would have been preposterous in the eyes of either group. The policy began to change, however, following the Six-Day War in 1967. The Jewish population was now exposed to a wider Arab public, a public that did not know Hebrew, and to new markets and business opportunities. Arabic had suddenly become more useful and instrumental in the daily life of civilians, and the value attached to learning the language increased.

Unfortunately, there was now a shortage of Arabic teachers. In 1973 a government committee recommended for the first time that Arab teachers be incorporated into the Hebrew-speaking educational network (Shohat 1973). This new policy gained further support in 1976 from the educational committee of the Israeli Parliament (Knesset), and by 1980 there were 80 Arab teachers teaching Arabic in Hebrew schools, a full 10 percent of the total number of Arabic teachers in the country (State Controller 1980; Yonai 1992). These native language teachers taught mostly at the elementary level, where the academic emphasis was on spoken Arabic rather than MSA.

Sadly, this attempt to incorporate Arab teachers in the teaching of Arabic has rarely been successful. Besides facing prejudice from students and other teachers, many of these new Arab teachers have faced cultural and methodological difficulties—difficulties only exacerbated by the increasing interethnic tensions of the 1980s. As a result, many of them left after only a short time, returning to more palatable jobs in Arabic-speaking schools. Others were dismissed by school principals, sometimes even in the middle of the school year, thereby dooming the Arabic program in those schools for the rest of the year. One rather embittered principal interviewed, who had made such a decision, said:

> "If the Arab teacher is not capable of teaching, and the students do not benefit from him, he has nothing to look for here. The teacher himself understands this. If there is no good Arabic teacher, then we must abandon Arabic in our school. "

The decrease in the number of Arab teachers was further driven by the decision of the Ministry of Education in 1986 to cease the teaching of spoken Arabic in the elementary schools while encouraging the teaching of MSA in the junior and senior high schools. In 1995 the number of the Arab teachers had decreased to 7 out of a total of 1,138 Arabic teachers in the country (State Controller 1995).

After the peace treaties signed with Egypt and Jordan as well as the ongoing peace process in the Middle East, the Israeli public became more aware of the importance of the Arabic language. In 1994 the former Minister of Education and Culture, Amnon Rubinstein, presented at Givat Haviva a new plan for incorporating Arab teachers into the MSA courses in Hebrew schools:

> "We have established here in Givat Haviva [Educational Center for Peace, Democracy, Coexistence, and Social Solidarity] an experiment that I consider to be of revolutionary importance: namely, training Arab teachers for the teaching of Arabic in the Jewish sector. We have seventeen trainees in this course. At the end of this course we will be able to judge whether or not we have made any new breakthrough that will have benefits extending far beyond the teaching of Arabic. (Rubinstein 1994) "

The increase in efforts to incorporate Arab teachers into Hebrew schools corresponds with the growing recognition by professional educators that teaching the younger generation about tolerance and peaceful

coexistence with others is of utmost importance. Increased social interaction between Jewish students and Arab teachers can help build cross-cultural understanding by reducing racial stereotyping and discrimination in the short term and the cycle of violence and war in the long term.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The experiences of Arab teachers teaching MSA in Hebrew-speaking schools in Israel is an interesting and unique phenomenon which has important implications on language planning and language policy in Israel. This exploratory study investigates the extent to which Arab teachers can effectively integrate themselves in the Hebrew-speaking educational network and successfully teach MSA to Israeli Jewish students under the shadow of the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict. In order to attempt an answer to this question, one must first address many corollaries, a few of which are: What is the political center's employment policy regarding native teachers of MSA, and why? What are the perceptions and beliefs of the Arab teachers regarding their role in Hebrew schools? What is the relationship of native teachers of MSA with students, other teachers, and parents? How do issues of national identity affect these relationships? What is the impact of the language status and teacher status in Hebrew schools on the Arab teacher? What motivates a native teacher of MSA to teach in a Hebrew school?

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

I conducted this investigation from a qualitative perspective. I obtained the data from50 in-depth, open-ended, conversational-style, guided interviews as well as from official documents and classroom observations. The main group of participants was 12 Arab teachers who taught MSA in Hebrew-speaking schools. These teachers are certified teachers who have experience in teaching different subjects in Arabic-speaking schools including the Arabic language itself. Before starting their MSA teaching in Hebrew-speaking schools they received about 60 hours of training by the Ministry of Education and during their first year they were assigned an advisor to answer their questions and help them solve problems. In order to better understand the findings and to shed more light on this phenomenon from different angles I decided to interview additional small segments of participants who are connected in different ways to the issue at hand. These groups were: 4 Jewish inspectors of Arabic, 4 Jewish junior high school teachers of MSA, 3 Jewish junior high school teachers of other subjects, 3 principals who had Arab teachers working in their Hebrew-speaking schools, 8Jewish junior high school students who studied MSA with an Arab teacher, 5 Jewish students who studied MSA with a Jewish teacher, 4Jewish parents whose children studied MSA with an Arab teacher, 3 Arab supervisors, and 4 Arab student teachers who studied in colleges and universities for a teacher's diploma in MSA. I conducted the interviews over the last three years in different places: junior high schools, colleges, and universities in Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem. I administered all interviews in Hebrew. As many respondents refused to have their interviews recorded, and in order to create a relaxed environment for them to speak freely I agreed not to record the interviews and took, instead, as many notes as possible during each interview. I am well aware that unrecorded interviews in such a study are a major disadvantage when analyzing the data. Unfortunately this was my only choice.

During the interviews I asked the main group of respondents (the Arab teachers) to provide accounts of their perceptions and judgments concerning the policy of employing Arabs as MSA teachers in Hebrew schools; to speculate on their motivations, beliefs, and outlook regarding their role in the Hebrew school; and to discuss problems of cultural identity that might be created or aggravated by the sociopolitical context. Each of the respondents in the other segments of interviewees was asked relevant questions to his or her role as a parent, a student, a headmaster and so on to provide his or her account on how he or she sees this phenomenon of employing Arabs as MSA teachers in Hebrew-speaking schools and why. In order to make sense of the data, I organized and reduced it according to its relevance to the research questions. This technique is known as data reduction (Huberman and Miles 2002; Holliday 2007). Then I coded and mapped the identified common ideas, patterns, and themes. My next step was to interpret the data by attaching significance to the different ideas, patterns, and themes and then to synthesize and summarize them (Huberman and Miles 2002; Holliday 2007; Patton 2002).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section I describe and discuss my findings, addressing the following issues:
- The role of the Arab teacher in a Hebrew school
- The Arab teacher's relationship with students, other teachers, and parents
- The impact of teacher status and language status
- Motivation of the Arab teacher to work in a Hebrew school

I would like to mention that in this exploratory study the following discussion is based on a small number of interviewees in each segment of the respondents. As the interviews were not recorded some of the quotes (mainly the long ones) are not exact, and do not represent what the interviewee actually said, but a reconstruction from field notes.

The role of the Arab teacher in a Hebrew school

The Arab teachers I interviewed revealed that their perception of their role within the Hebrew-speaking educational network is linked inextricably with their identity, their self-image, and their social status. Their role is not only to teach the Arabic language and its culture as an academic subject, but also to act as an authentic cultural model. Especially because of this heightened role, they want to represent the Arab world positively. For example:

> "In addition to my educational mission, I feel that I am an ambassador of the Arab nation. I feel that any negative kind of behavior on my side will reflect negatively on the Arabs in general. "

Some Arab teachers asserted that, in light of the worsening conflict between Jews and Arabs, their role is of greater importance than ever. They hope to foster the means of a peaceful coexistence and to expedite the process of achieving it:

> "When I look toward the future, I want to see peace. Therefore, we should introduce the Jewish student not only to the Arabic language but also to the culture and to the Arab's way of life, both in the city and in the village. "

Many Arab teachers believe that their presence in Hebrew schools achieves an additional important goal: It contributes to mutual acquaintance and respect between the two ethnic groups, thereby reducing the use of stereotypes and other expressions of prejudice. The respondents themselves made this point clear. For example:

> "Jewish students assume that the Arab is little more than a dirty, unskilled laborer, and that he is both a thief and a terrorist. When I teach them and speak nicely to them, I am sure they will change their attitudes, and I will achieve my goal, which serves a purpose that is greater than merely teaching them to read and write in Arabic. "

Jewish students also see that Arabs are not all construction workers or cleaners, but that Arabs can be good teachers as well. The Arab teachers' presence in Hebrew schools acts in another positive direction as well: It often influences the perceptions and attitudes of the Arab teachers themselves toward Jews. One such respondent said:

> "My work at the Jewish school has moderated my political views and has changed my perception of students and other teachers. I have learned to respect them. "

There is evidence of this two-way influence in the reports of the Jewish teachers and school principals. They regarded the Arab teachers' presence, in and of itself, as an effective tool in curbing stereotypes and other expressions of prejudice among both Arabs and Jews. Students and teachers have the opportunity to see that not all the Arabs throw stones and hide explosives, and the Arab teacher has the opportunity to see that not all the Jews hate Arabs.

The Arab teacher's relationship with students, other teachers, and parents

As often as Arab teachers are able to win over students and parents, they face severe and sometimes permanent opposition. All Arab respondents agreed that, due to the conflict and the power relations between the Jewish

majority and the Arab minority in Israel, Arab teachers who teach in Hebrew schools are immersed in an unfavorable environment and therefore have significant difficulties and challenges to overcome. Yoram Meron, then the head of the Institute for Arabic Studies at Givat Haviva, observed that the Arab teacher faces a very difficult problem right from the start. Even in the schools in the *Kibbutzim* that are relatively sympathetic toward the Arab, the classroom is not with him. The classroom is against him.

The Arab teachers made it clear that in the Hebrew schools they are constantly reminded of the cultural differences between them and their colleagues and students. One major concern is that, as Arabs, they have not served in the Israeli army, an experience that in Jewish Israeli culture is an important rite of passage to adulthood and a prerequisite for respected social status. The shame of living as subordinates often generates in Arab teachers feelings of inferiority, fear, and resentment. It often makes them even give up their Arab identity markers. According to one of these teachers:

> "An Arab teacher is always aware of the fact that he belongs to the minority group; as a result he feels beaten. He cannot wear the clothes that he is used to, or listen to the music that he enjoys, or eat in the manner that he is accustomed to."

Belonging to the minority, the Arab teacher is plagued by internal conflicts, feelings of discomfort, and the sensation of being an alien:

> "On Jewish holidays or when *Hatikva* [the national anthem of Israel] is played on Independence Day and on Memorial Day, which commemorates the soldiers of the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces], I feel misplaced. I don't have the same feelings that they have. I try to adopt a similar appreciation, but it is not genuine, it feels insincere."

Some Arab teachers developed strategies to cope with these challenges. One such strategy is to stress their Arab identity from the outset:

> "I emphasize from the start where I am from, and the students are astonished, but slowly, slowly they get used to me. When I told the students at the beginning of the school year that I am an Arab, they did not believe me. They said, "Maybe you are Yemenite [a Jew from Yemen]," but slowly they got used to me and accepted me. The situation always remains sensitive."

Students and parents revealed yet another challenge faced by the Arab teacher in the Hebrew school: The teacher may have significant difficulty in separating the actual teaching of the subject matter at hand from presenting personal opinions regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict:

> "I tell them that we are human beings like them. When I saw films about the Holocaust, I cried. The Jews went through hard periods in their lives until they established their own state. But there is another people, the Palestinian people, who have also gone through difficult times, and the Jews should understand that, too. In the same way that the Jews established their state, so too should an Arab who fled Haifa in 1948 have a hope of coming back one day to his land."

Considerable stress is generated when Jewish students ask their Arab teacher to explain the actions of Arabs in the conflict. Interviews with Jewish students show that most of them do not differentiate between Israeli Arabs and the Palestinian Arabs of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Although the Arab teachers are Israeli citizens, they are often grouped together with the Palestinians and are assumed to have political and nationalistic views that they may not have. One Arab teacher remarked:

> "Even in a democratic and cultured country like Israel today, people do not differentiate between an Arab who is a citizen of Israel and an Arab from the territories. This is the peak of ignorance! I am an Israeli Arab, yet I was stoned by Jewish pedestrians while I drove my car with its Israeli plates! [Being able to distinguish an Israeli Arab from a Palestinian Arab] is a basic thing to know, and it is certainly more important than studying Arabic or formulas in geometry or math. "

An Arab in a Jewish neighborhood is considered an alien, if not an enemy, and an Arab teacher in a Jewish school is often treated much the same. The Arab teacher is perceived to be a representative of a hostile society. One of the Arab teachers explained:

"If there is an explosion and Jews are hurt, I feel as if I were to blame, even though I had nothing to do with it. We, the Israeli Arabs, have a big dilemma: Whenever Jews are hurt in an explosion, I don't feel comfortable, because I am an Arab. And when Arabs in the West Bank are killed in military operations, I don't feel comfortable either, because I am an Israeli. It is a lose-lose situation."

An Arab educator summarized:

"When an act of terrorism occurs, in the eyes of students, the Arab teacher is suspect number one. "

Yet even when the news was filled with stories of Arab violence in the ongoing conflict, some Jewish students reported feeling a degree of sympathy toward, and acceptance of, their Arab teacher. Such students can separate their attitudes toward Arabs in general from those toward their Arab teacher. They tend to see the Arab teacher as part of the school system, as some of them stated:

"It did not disturb me to study with an Arab teacher. On the contrary, I thought that if the school brings an Arab teacher to teach us Arabic, it means that he is better than a Jewish teacher.

Or:

I treated him as if he were a Jewish teacher."

Such attitudes among students were validated by what a few Arab teachers reported. In fact, precisely validating the preceding quote from a Jewish student, one of them stated:

"Personally, my students accept me. I have no problems; they treat me as if I were Jewish. "

Such an acceptance was not found among the Jewish teachers who were interviewed for this study, however. They revealed ambivalent attitudes toward the Arab teacher and expressed little enthusiasm for maintaining relationships that would extend beyond the required formal working relations at school. Although some believed that "working with an Arab teacher could enrich us with new knowledge," others argued that they did not want to be too friendly with an Arab teacher and did not want him or her to visit their homes. They reported that "in the teachers' lounge we have formal relations and that's it," or "I respect her as a colleague, but I don't want her as a friend."

The Arab teachers revealed a different picture in their interviews, however. They reported having a strong desire to initiate friendly contact with their Jewish colleagues, a contact that would reach beyond the formal relationships created at school. Such extended relationships, in fact, were reported to be important for the Arab teachers' successful incorporation into and survival at the Hebrew school. Some Arab teachers felt that their Jewish colleagues were ready to help them become a part of the school staff and were creating friendly relationships with them even outside the school setting. One of the Arab teachers said:

I went to parties and social gatherings, the principal was at my house, teachers were at my house, and I even gave my cell phone number to students for extra help.

Friendly relationships can be difficult to maintain, because many Arab teachers live in separate villages, far from the schools in which they work:

"I am part of the faculty, and I have many Jewish friends among the teachers. But it is hard for me to keep these friendly ties after school, because I live far away."

Another major challenge for Arab teachers is the common expectation among parents that teachers should be representatives of the society in which they teach, that they should identify with its goals and values, and that they should pass those values on to the students. In the eyes of many parents, Arab teachers seek to promote a culture that opposes the parents' fundamental ideas of community and morality. In interviews, parents expressed reservation toward the idea of their sons and daughters studying with an Arab teacher. Some of them were very determined that Arab cultural influences must be avoided. One parent said:

"We are in conflict with the Arabs, and I wouldn't like for my son, who is too young to judge for himself, to be exposed to the views and attitudes of an Arab teacher. "

A few parents expressed the more extreme sentiment that

> if the school wants to employ an Arab teacher, it is its business, but I will never agree to allow my son to study with an Arab teacher, who will poison him with unthinkable things. My son simply will not study Arabic.

It is clear that in such difficult circumstances, an Arab teacher cannot fully identify with Jewish students or establish a positive and successful means of interaction with them, with their parents, or with Jewish colleagues at school. Many Arab teachers feel that they must constantly assess their appearance and monitor their speech in order to look and sound ethnically "neutral." One principal summarized:

> "The Arab teacher must prove continuously that he is "good"; otherwise, he will be dismissed from school."

The impact of teacher status and language status

Another difficulty that often hinders the incorporation of Arab teachers into Hebrew schools is the considerable difference between Arabs and Jews in the prestige each group attaches to both the teaching profession and the Arabic language. Due to different paces of social, economic, and cultural changes taking place in the two ethnic groups, teaching is considered to be more prestigious in the Arab society than in the Jewish one. Arab teachers play a more authoritative role with their students and within the Arabic-speaking network of the national school system. In this respect the Arab teacher belongs to the social educational elite, an elite that propels the Arab society forward. As a result, the teaching profession in Arab society is still considered to be a dominant employment channel for the Arab academic population--men and women alike. The Arab respondents made it clear that an Arab teacher who decides to teach in a Hebrew-speaking school must be ready to quickly lose the reverence among students that he or she might have been accustomed to while teaching in an Arabic-speaking school. One Arab language supervisor said:

> "I know Arab teachers with Master's degrees who teach in Jewish schools. I met them after one or two years, and they regretted that they had wanted to teach there. They had no status! The students did not respect them or their degree. They felt very humiliated. In the Arab sector, the Arabic teacher is given more respect than the math and English teachers."

The low status of MSA as a school subject in Hebrew-speaking schools in contrast with the great value attached to it in Arabic-speaking schools is an additional obstacle that Arab teachers face. For them the language is a collective symbol of the vitality of their ethnic, national, and religious identity (Haarman 1986; see also Narkiss and Stavans 2005). Pinto (2007, 2009) goes even further, arguing that the Arabic language is the exclusive marker of identity of the Arab minority in Israel. Therefore, an Arab teacher who decides to teach MSA in a Hebrew school must be ready to tolerate the apathy or disdain with which the language is often regarded among students:

> "When I see how the Jewish students despise the Arabic language, I am personally offended. For me and for every Arab, the Arabic language is very important. It is our identity."

Motivation of the Arab teacher to work in a Hebrew school

Given the many difficulties the Arab teachers face in Hebrew schools, they have widely differing ideas concerning the virtues of working there. Some Arab teachers think that the possibilities of progress and professional development are greater in the Hebrew-speaking educational network compared with the Arabic-speaking one. More importantly, they feel that by working in Hebrew schools, they have a tremendous opportunity to truly make a difference in the minds of their students, one that they could never have made in the more comfortable job of working in their own villages, among their own people. They feel that their Jewish students will grow up to be more understanding and tolerant, that they will become "agents of peace."

Most of the Arab respondents who had worked in Hebrew schools, however, felt a need to explain that they now prefer to work in Arab schools:

> "In an Arab school the teacher feels better. He has a respected position and does not need to invest so much energy and patience in swallowing insults and humiliations. "

Some of the teachers reported that they considered their work in Hebrew schools to be temporary and that they would switch to an Arab school as soon as they had the opportunity. This raises also a pedagogical issue whether these teachers were adequately trained to teach a foreign language in a Hebrew-speaking school? This issue is out of the scope of this paper and deserves a discussion on its own.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Hoping to improve understanding of the commonality between Arabs and Jews among Jewish youth, the Israeli political center encourages the incorporation of Arab teachers into the Hebrew-speaking educational network. The teachers who rise to this challenge see themselves first and foremost as representatives of the Arab society and hope to contribute to social change, to a better understanding between Jews and Arabs, and, ultimately, to peace.

The actualities faced by most of these native Arab teachers teaching MSA in Hebrew schools, however, are far less glowing than one would hope. Due to the cultural divide and hostilities stemming from the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the fact that both Jewish students and Jewish parents look upon the Arabic language with disinterest and even hostility, Arab teachers face a tremendous number of obstacles. They function in an educational environment where the rules are not their own. The teachers are separated from their students by a lack of cultural understanding, the very thing they have endeavored to cultivate, and are often treated by those they wish to educate as an inferior or as an enemy. In these circumstances, it is difficult or indeed impossible for a native Arab teacher to effectively communicate his or her knowledge to students. It is even harder to create conditions and provide opportunities under which Jewish students are likely to cross the borders that delimit their narrow personal and social worlds.

Though the positive linguistic policy of the Ministry of Education guarantees the primary integration of native Arab teachers into Hebrew schools, it cannot ensure the success of those teachers. Succeeding in Hebrew schools depends largely upon the extent to which Arab teachers are motivated and are determined to emphasize their collective symbols and uniqueness, including their linguistic uniqueness, within the classroom. Arab teachers differ widely from one another in this respect. Whether moved by their own identity codes or reacting to their image of the dominant culture, some teachers demonstrate stronger ambitions than others to incorporate themselves into the other ethnic group.

At the theoretical level, it is argued that the political and sociocultural context offers an explanation for the extent to which a foreign language program offering a native language teacher would be popular or unpopular among students within the relevant ethnic group. This study demonstrates the significance of the context in determining the ultimate success of the native language teacher, since the educational system has no control over it. In a social setting characterized by circumstances of cultural and political duress between ethnic groups, native teachers can choose between two possible approaches, each of which influences their chances of success in opposing ways: (1) They can emphasize their cultural and linguistic allegiance in order to retain their own identity and serve as an authentic model to the students, and at the same time strengthen their own group boundaries; or (2) they can loosen their emotional ties and lessen their outward commitment to their own ethnic group in order to facilitate incorporation into the other ethnic group.

In the case of Arab native teachers in Israel, cultural (and political) authenticity on the part of the teacher seems to create many obstacles in the way of their success. Most Arab teachers tend to emphasize their national sentiments, viewing MSA as an important symbol of identity. They resolve to stop "hiding," to be what they really are, and to openly express their views and thoughts. This resolve is manifested in their solidarity with the Palestinian cause, in not trying to placate the Jewish majority by celebrating Jewish holidays as if those holidays were their own, and in protesting discrimination in all domains of life.

The practical experiences explored in this study show the difficulty of the challenge and, perhaps, the conditions of its failure as well. It seems that in the Israeli setting the difficulty of incorporating Arab teachers into Hebrew

schools is not yet recognized and the acuteness of that difficulty is not yet fully understood. Attempts to coerce Arab teachers to "not be themselves," in order to smooth relations between them and their students and colleagues, or to "throw them into the water and force them to swim" are not the right solutions and will ultimately fail.

Of course, one must hope that with time and patience will come familiarity, and that with such familiarity will come a greater understanding and intercultural respect. These, ideally, will create an improved context for the successful incorporation of Arab teachers into the Hebrew schools. On the other hand, it is important to realize that, unlike the failure of a Jewish teacher, the failure of an Arab teacher might have consequences harmful and extreme, far beyond being ineffective in teaching MSA. Sadly, the native language teacher's failure may serve to achieve goals directly opposite from those with which his or her hiring was intended, in terms of education, democracy, and the peaceful coexistence between Jews and Arabs.

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