

The Status of Arabic Language in Israel

Arabs in Israel Update | Prof. Uzi Rabi and Arik Rudnitzky | 15.05.2011

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A. From the Editors' Desk

We are pleased to publish a new issue of the “Arabs in Israel” Update series, devoted to the **Status of the Arabic Language in Israel**.

In recent years, Arab community critics have expressed concern in view of the increasing tendency of Arab citizens, especially adolescents and young adults, to incorporate Hebrew phrases and words into Spoken Arabic, and, on occasion, to even prefer the use of Hebrew over Arabic in everyday situations. These critics caution that this process will undermine the status of Arabic among the country’s Arab population. Concerns for the fate of Arabic language epitomize greater concerns for Arab national identity in Israel, as Arabic is one of the significant components of this identity.

In the political arena, several bills have been submitted by right-wing Knesset parties in recent years, seeking to establish the status of Hebrew as the country’s sole official language and consequently to revoke Arabic's status as one of the country’s official languages. Such legislative initiatives are viewed by both Jewish and Arab left-wing Knesset members as prejudicial to the status of Israel’s Arab citizens.

Nevertheless, several prominent initiatives aim to reinforce the status of the Arabic language in Israel. The Academy of the Arabic Language (*Majma’ al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyya*) was established in January 2008, following a Knesset-approved bill. Proposals were also developed for a new certified academic institution in the Galilee, where the language of study will be Arabic. In December 2009, Minister of Education Gideon Saar announced his intention to reinforce the status of the country’s Arab education system by bolstering the status of the Arabic language.

The current issue is divided into two sections. **The first section** contains a review of several opinion editorials on two central topics: (1) the status of the Arabic language in Israel, a Jewish national state; and (2) language and identity in Arab society. The editorials are summaries of lectures delivered at the conference on *Status of Arabic Language in Israel: Language Policy, Language, and Identity*, which was held on March 23, 2011 at Tel Aviv University by the Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation.

The second section of this issue contains policy positions and items from the media on a wide range of aspects concerning the status of Arabic in Israel and the connection between language and identity in the Arab society in Israel, including opinions on the declining status of Arabic as an official state language. Special emphasis is given to translations of items from the Arabic press, which is generally inaccessible to non-Arabic readers.

We welcome our readers' suggestions of websites that are relevant to this topic, where this issue of "Arabs in Israel" Update might be posted. Please contact us:

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The editorials reflect the opinions of their authors only.

This is an abridged version of the issue originally published in Hebrew on March 15, 2011: <http://www.dayan.org/kapjac/files/ArabicStatus-HEB.pdf>

We wish to extend our thanks to Ms. Renee Hochman, who translated the material to English, and to Ms. Efrat Lachter, student of Political Science and Communications, and Mr. Nidal Khamaisi, student of Sociology, Anthropology, Statistics and Operations Research, both of Tel Aviv University and employees of the Program, who assisted in collecting the materials and translating them into Hebrew.

The Editors

B. Opinion Section

Meital Pinto* Minority language and language policy: The case of Arabic in Israel

Language rights appear in Section 82 to the *Palestine Order-in-Council* (1922) and in other laws. As other rights, language rights are subject to the interpretation of the courts, which may restrict or expand their application. A narrow judicial interpretation may confine comprehensive language rights to the literal meaning of a specific legislation, while a broader and purposive interpretation may extend the application of minimal language rights, transforming them into more comprehensive rights.

It has been argued that language rights have unique features that distinguish them from other human rights considered to be universal rights, and that courts should be extremely cautious in interpreting language rights in view of these unique features. Such judicial restraint is expressed in the minority opinion of Justice Cheshin in the *Adalah* Supreme Court case¹ that discussed a petition to require municipalities with a mixed population of Jews and Arabs to add Arabic to municipal signs. Based on the majority opinion of Chief Justice Barak and Justice Dorner, the Supreme Court granted the petition and ordered the respondents to add Arabic script to street signs. Although judicial restraint was expressed only in Justice's Cheshin's minority opinion, it resonates loudly in public discourse on the status of the Arabic language in Israel. I would like to challenge this position and offer an alternative approach to language rights that emphasizes the similarity between language rights and other human rights.

First I present the three arguments that highlight the allegedly unique features of language rights, which justifies a narrow interpretation of these rights. The first, the positive right claim, argues against a broad and purposive interpretation of language rights because such a broad interpretation imposes heavy obligations on public agencies due to the required allocation of scarce public resources.

The second claim is the political compromise argument. Language rights, such as those anchored in Section 82 of the *Palestine Order-in-Council*, which protect the Arabic language only, are typically selective in providing comprehensive protection exclusively to the language of a single linguistic minority, and do not apply to all linguistic minorities. Due to their selective nature, language rights have been considered a historical product of political negotiations and compromise designed to achieve a balance of powers between the majority and the protected linguistic minority. According to this position, the political-historical nature of language rights distinguishes them from other human rights that are ostensibly based on general

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¹ Supreme Court 4112/99 *Adalah Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel v. Tel Aviv-Jaffa Municipality*, PD 56(5), 393 (2002).

fundamental principles rather than specific political compromise. Such language rights are an outcome of political compromise, and the courts should be exceptionally cautious to avoid interpretations that extend beyond the fragile political balance that these rights reflect.

The third argument is the cultural and collective rights argument. Language rights are typically classified as collective rights or cultural rights. Rights in these categories frequently deter liberals who believe that human rights protect only individuals and that recognition of collective rights may sanction coercive practices by groups toward their individual members. Furthermore, language rights are considered cultural rights because they protect the essential value of language as a marker of identity – an object of identification and indication of cultural uniqueness for minority groups. Cultural rights provoke unease among members of the majority culture, who feel that such rights encourage isolationist tendencies of the minority group and increase their disassociation from the majority group. Misgivings about recognizing the value of a minority language as a marker of its speaker's cultural identity takes a slightly different form in nation states, due to the critical role of national language in establishing and consolidating national identity. Members of the majority group assign a key role to their language in consolidating and maintaining national identity and therefore tend to view minority languages as a threat to their national identity. Israel is a case in point of a national state in which Hebrew is assigned an important role in establishing and maintaining Jewish-Zionist identity. Due to these apprehensions and the fact that language rights are considered collective rights, it is argued that judicial restraint should apply in their interpretation, or they should not be recognized all together.

The features of language rights may be compared to features of other human rights whose broad interpretation is less controversial. Freedom of religion is an example of a right that is generally considered a universal, constitutional right that provides protection that should be broadly interpreted. Based on a comparison of the features of language rights and the features of freedom of religion, reflected in the literature and Israeli case law, it can be argued that both rights share several common features. These features support the arguments that call for a narrow interpretation when applied to language rights, yet the courts frequently cite these very same features when applying a broad interpretation to freedom of religion. From a normative perspective, the conceptual similarity between language rights and freedom of religion requires at least a reexamination of the narrow interpretative approach to language rights.

Elana Shohamy*
Arabic as a minority language?
Linguistic landscape as a test case

What are the criteria used to define a language as a minority language? In contrast to the bureaucratic definition of “a number of speakers” of the total population of a nation state, I argue that a minority language should be examined on the basis of other measures of language, including variability over time and vitality, independent of the bureaucratic concepts and political agendas of the nation state. In Israel, Arabic is defined as an official language alongside Hebrew, and yet Arabic is viewed and treated as a minority language, or in other words, as a marginal language that finds little expression in Jewish Israeli society where Hebrew is the major language. Arabic is treated as a marginal language for several historical and political reasons: At the establishment of the state, state policy called for segregation of the Arab population that remained in Israel, which was considered marginal in comparison to the Jewish majority. Language was considered a key means to achieving this goal, especially since the Arabs were considered a threat to national security. Although Israeli citizenship was granted to the Arabs who were in Israel in 1948 and their children, their citizenship, like their marginalized language, was considered “second class”. Although Arabic is the language of instruction in schools in the Arab community in Israel, its marginal status is reflected in the lack of its representation in Jewish society in general, and particularly in universities, where there is no representation of Arabic – either as a language of instruction, a language of study, or as a language used in tests and study materials despite the large number of Arabic speaking students who attend universities. The absence of Arabic in higher education institutions creates little motivation for Arab-speaking high-school students to study their language and in fact, many subjects in Arabic high schools are taught in Hebrew in preparation for academic studies.

The marginal status of Arabic is causing what is known as “benign neglect” of the language, and its decline, and poses a threat to the continued existence of the language. For this reason I argue that “minority language” is a bureaucratic term based on a nation state's political interests, according to which certain communities are defined as marginal, and speakers are associated with languages without taking into account measures such as vitality and variability over time

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The languages of Israel: Policy, ideology and practice (W. B. Spolsky, 1999); *The power of tests* (Longman, 2001); *Language policy: Hidden agendas and new approaches* (Routledge, 2006); *Encyclopedia of language and education, Volume 7, Language Testing and Assessment* (ed. with Nancy Hornberger, Springer, 2008); *Linguistic landscape: Expanding the scenery* (ed. with Durk Gorter, Routledge, 2009); *Linguistic landscape in the city* (ed. with Ben Rafael and Barni, Multilingual Matters, 2010).

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Support for these arguments comes from the concept of linguistic landscape, which has become accepted in the past decade as a key measure of language status, extending beyond bureaucratic “top-down” definitions. According to Landry and Bouhrhis (1997), a linguistic landscape includes representations of language in space, especially on billboards, names of buildings, instructions, etc. A study by Ben Rafael and others (2006) documented linguistic landscape in a number of cities in Israel and found that Arabic is represented as a major language in homogeneous Arab cities. The advantage in using linguistic landscape to measure language status is that it facilitates an understanding of language as a “bottom-up” phenomenon focusing on language practices, independent of political, typically top-down, practices. Many studies in and outside Israel have made extensive use of linguistic landscape as a measure of socio-linguistic realities in cities, neighborhoods, and commercial areas, as well as in public institutions such as hospitals and schools.

In our recent study (Shohamy and Ghazaleh-Mahajneh, in press), we found that Arabic has a critical and dynamic status in the major Arab city of Umm El-Fahm, based on linguistic landscape measures, reflected in the city's public spaces, commercial centers, schools, and other spaces. We therefore argue that Arabic is a majority language in this urban space while Hebrew is a minority language.

In our study we also examined the difference between the linguistic landscape in the town in contrast to the complete absence of Arabic at Haifa University in Israel, where native Arab speakers account for 25% of the student body. We also conducted a series of interviews with Arabic-speaking students about linguistic landscape representations at the university, which these students considered to be a reflection of exclusionary and discriminatory policy. Given the representations of Arabic in many spaces and communities in Israel, we recommend using the term “participating language,” instead of minority language. Participating language is a concept that originates from a positive starting point, and reflects the inclusionary rather than exclusionary aspects of a language and its speakers. Use of this term may increase motivation to study Arabic and may encourage a more equitable implementation of the language's official status, especially in spaces that are shared by Arabic speakers, such as universities, in which grave language discrimination exists. Linguistic landscape may also serve as the means to enhance the currently marginalized status of the language and its speakers, impose equality, and increase Arabic speakers' motivation to study their own language – and perhaps, may even contribute to coexistence.

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Alon Fragman*
Teaching Arabic to Hebrew speakers:
What have we learned so far?

Findings from two recent studies by Fragman and Russak on the acquisition of unfamiliar sounds in Arabic and Arabic spelling acquisition by Hebrew-speaking middle-school pupils, attest to a particularly disturbing situation: Pupils find it extremely difficult to acquire the sounds and master the writing of Arabic letters, with little improvement observed in acquisition between 8th and 10th grades (Fragman & Russak, 2010; Russak & Fragman, in preparation). Findings of these studies point to a small increase of only 19%-25% in orthographic knowledge (based on a words taken from a 7th grade textbook), which implies that pupils incorrectly spell 80% of the words that they have been exposed to from their first year of study of the written form of the language. These errors include confusion of orthographically similar Arabic letters (such as خ, ح, ج) and similarly sounding letters (such as ص, س), errors involving letters whose sounds do not exist in Hebrew (ث, غ), errors involving letters with four forms (such as ع), failure to properly distinguish short and long vowels, errors in identifying stresses (*Shadda*), and errors in letters that appear infrequently in Arabic (such as ظ, ض).

These findings contradict the hypothesis that the etymological similarity between Hebrew and Arabic should help Hebrew speakers learn Arabic. Although several features exist in both languages, they are prevalent to a different extent, and this fact has considerable influence on the acquisition of Arabic by native Hebrew speakers.

Findings of a study by Abu Rabia (2006), Ibrahim (1996), and others on the acquisition of written Arabic by native Arabic speakers also points to similar difficulties experienced by native speakers, at least until 9th grade. The researchers attribute the cause to the complex orthography of Arabic. According to Saiegh-Haddad (2007), the diglossic nature of Arabic also has a significant impact on the acquisition of written language.

According to findings of the Foreign Service Institute of the US Department of State (Jackson and Kaplan, 1999), at least 575 to 600 hours of study in small groups are required to attain a high level of linguistic performance in a foreign language that shares similar orthographic features and structures to the learner's native language. There is no doubt that the scope of study of Arabic language in middle schools is much more limited, and this may partially explain the poor results. Nonetheless, the findings of these studies, at the very least, point to pupils' failure to achieve the basic targets of the official curriculum of written Arabic and their lack of significant progress over time in the acquisition of letters, sounds, and common word patterns, which are an essential condition for meaning-making and significant learning.

If the goals of Arabic language instruction are not attainable, perhaps new goals should be defined? How can we increase exposure to Arabic, increase language practice, and improve teaching methods? Perhaps we should first teach all children in

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Israel Spoken Arabic, through which they will acquire a foundation for the written language?

Teaching Arabic essentially requires pupils to become familiar with a different society and its culture, while typically, these aspects are not taken into account in the instruction of other subjects. The current findings indicate a disturbing phenomenon of pupils who exhibit a plateau effect in learning, which may increase their frustration and emphasize disassociation. In this manner, an injustice is committed against the teachers of Arabic who work hard to implement the curriculum, as well as against the pupils.

More than the question of what Hebrew-speaking Israeli pupils have learned to date from mandatory Arabic language curricula, we should ask whether Ministry of Education policy makers should not learn from these findings and take action to create genuine progress in this field.

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Abdul Rahman Mar'i* **Young Arabs in Israel: Arab identity, Hebrew language?**

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 is considered the 20th century event that had the most important impact on the Middle East in general, and on the lives of Palestinian Arabs in particular. This event generated far-reaching changes on three levels:

1. **Political** – A new state was added to the geo-political map of the region, whose religion, nationality, and language were different from other states in the region.
2. **Socio-economic** – Many of the Palestinians who were members of the educated and economic elite left the country or were expelled from their homes. As a result, families became divided, and the individuals who remained were mainly from the lower socio-economic groups, which facilitated their subjugation by the State of Israel.
3. **Linguistic** – Hebrew became the language of the majority in Israel, while Arabic became a minority language.

This situation created the problem of the Arab minority in Israel. It is my intention to focus on two aspects of this new reality that affected Palestinian Arabs: Israeli identity and the extensive use of Hebrew. Arabs in Israel do not have a single identity: Their identity comprises a mixture of Arab, Palestinian, Israeli, and other identities. These identities are based on more than 40 secondary definitions that can be classified using the principle of framing.

Hebrew has functioned as an important agent in shaping the profile and identity of Arabs. This formative function was performed through the study of Hebrew as a mandatory language of study in Arab schools, which was designed to create understanding between Jews and Arabs and reinforce Arab loyalty to Israel. Pupils studied materials related to Judaism to a greater extent than they study materials related to Arab culture. The study of Hebrew works of prose and poetry contributes to pupils' identification with individuals representing the Israeli milieu. In contrast, Hebrew schools reject the study of Palestinian poetry or literature as a whole, to prevent pupils' exposure to the world, culture, and identity of their Palestinian fellow nationals on the other side of the Green Line.

The two major agencies in charge of Hebrew culture and language instruction, on the one hand, and on shaping Palestinian identity in Israel, on the other hand, have been the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Prime Minister's Office. In the first years of statehood, these agencies operated under directives of the military government. Indeed, since independence to the present, Israeli educators and

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politicians have deliberated on the question of whether to teach the Arabs in Israel as Israelis, as Arabs, or as Israeli-Arabs.

While Hebrew is being taught in schools, Palestinian place names and the names of landmarks have become Hebraicized. New Hebrew names were given to Palestinian sites and many young people today are not familiar with the original Arabic names.

Hebrew has become an integral part of the repertoire of young Arab people in Israel. The State is interested in teaching Hebrew; and even workplaces prohibit employees from speaking among themselves in their native Arabic. Sometimes, offenders are dismissed, even though Arabic is one of the state's official languages.

In their everyday speech, Arabs in Israel use words and phrases and sometimes even complete sentences that are translated directly from Hebrew and adopted seamlessly into spoken language. In the first years of independence, such words were taken from the fields of agriculture and construction, primarily because these two fields were sites of encounter with Hebrew speakers. As the sites of encounter broadened, so did the extent of the borrowed words which penetrated into the language from all areas of life. Hebrew has become so strongly embedded, not only in spoken language but also in written Arabic and websites, to the extent that we can now point to a new intermediate language used by Arabic speakers, which I call "Arabrew" – a mixture of Classic Arabic, Spoken Arabic, and Hebrew.

Furthermore, Arab authors such as Anton Shammas, Salman Masalha, Naim Araidi, Sayed Kashua and others, write in Hebrew, attesting to their mastery of Hebrew and the integration of Arab intellectuals in Israeli culture. Nonetheless, others have addressed the issue of writing in Hebrew and expressed their sense of alienation and strangeness when writing in a language other than their native tongue. In his poem "Profile", Anton Shammas writes:

*And I speak another language
Not from my mother, not in my blood
...
And my body comes and is questioned in a different language
Devoid of love
Another language seeps through my body
And presses on my brow from the inside*

Salman Masalha writes:

*I write in the Hebrew language,
Which is not my native language,
In order to become lost in the world.
Whoever does not get lost will not
Find the whole.
Because we all have
The same toes on our feet. And the same large toe
That guides us in walking inch by inch.*

Mahmoud Kayyal*
The Academy of Arabic Language in Israel:
Current status and challenges of the future

The initiative to establish an Academy of the Arabic Language came from several Arab intellectuals in the Northern-Galilee and Central-Triangle regions, who were disturbed by the state and status of Arabic. These intellectuals observed the gradual marginalization of Arabic in the public and institutional linguistic arena. Some also complained that the status of Arabic had also deteriorated among Arabic speakers themselves. In response, at the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century, they established the “Academy of Arabic Language” (in Arabic: *Majma’ al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyya*), as a non-profit association. The volunteer association, which received negligible government support, focused mainly on the organization of workshops and seminars on topics related to Arabic language.

Dissatisfaction with the limited scope of the organization’s operations, its lack of appropriate budget, and the inequality between this organization and the Academy of the Hebrew Language (established by law in 1952), provoked several intellectuals and public figures to work toward similar legislation that would establish the foundation for an academy for the Arabic language, which would engage in all aspects of Arabic. After much pressure, on March 12, 2007, the Knesset passed the “Supreme Institute for the Arabic Language” law. According to this law, the conceived institution would engage in research of the Arabic language in all periods of history, and all language forms; terminology, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, transliteration, and spelling, language innovations and adaptations to new technologies; drafting general and subject-specific dictionaries; research of language in Arab culture including literature and poetry. The institution would maintain ties and exchange information with the Academy of the Hebrew Language and other institutions on the study of Arabic and Hebrew languages in and outside Israel, and collaborate with the Ministry of Education and institutions of higher education, and provide consultancy services in its areas of operations. Finally, the institution would publish studies and papers, and organize conferences on the areas of its operations.

After the law was passed, the government, with the specific involvement of then Minister of Science, Culture and Sports Ghaleb Majadele, appointed 15 of the Academy’s first members (of the 23 provided in the law), mainly from among the non-profit association “The Academy of Arabic Language” and from among Arabic language and literature researchers and professors. It was, however, only in 2008, after the appointed members convened and elected an executive board, that the Supreme Institution of the Arabic Language officially commenced its activities as the “Academy for the Arabic Language.”

In its first years of operation, the Academy benefited from government support that allowed it to create a proper foundation for future activities, including the

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establishment of offices, secretarial services, a library, etc. The Academy began to operate on several levels to achieve its goals. Among other things, it launched long-term projects, including a project to prepare a dictionary of modern Arabic, and a project to collect terms and concepts from various language academies in the Arab-speaking world. The Academy also provides support to academic research efforts on the Arabic language, and publishes an academic journal and other academic publications on Arabic language and literature, including pamphlets on terminology in various fields. The Academy also launched a website, established a library containing hundreds of volumes on Arabic language and literature, and has organized a series of academic seminars. It also initiated and organized various events in schools and public institutions designed to bring pupils and the young generation closer to the Arabic language. The Academy awards scholarships to students of Arabic, and has taken upon itself to commemorate Palestinian author Emile Habibi.

Nonetheless, the Academy faces many challenges that will undoubtedly affect the nature of its operations and its very existence, including:

- a. As a result of its complete dependence on government support, the institution's future is entirely dependent on the government's good grace (in fact, the government recently decided to cut the Academy's budget).
- b. Government agencies motivated by political and ideological considerations continuously undermine the status of Arabic in Israel, and have initiated laws and regulations that adversely affect the status of the Arabic language.
- c. Arabic language academies outside Israel are reluctant to cooperate with the Academy because of their opposition to any normalization of relations with Israel.
- d. The special situation in Israel, in which Arabic is a minority language in a state whose official language is a regional and global minority language.
- e. The division between the Academy for the Arabic Language and several Arabic language instructors and researchers. The latter, after their applications for affiliate or administrative positions at the Academy were rejected, established a rival institution at the Al-Qasemi Academic College of Education in the city of Baqa Al-Garbiyya, which is also named the Academy for the Arabic Language.

Mohanad Mustafa*
**Arab Students and the Obstacle of Hebrew:
The Individual and the Collective Experience**

In the past two decades, research into higher education among Arabs in Israel has focused on quantitative and qualitative aspects of access to higher education. More recently, research is being conducted on Arab students' adjustment and adaptation to university studies, including both academic and social and cultural dimensions of adjustment. The main argument of this stream of research is that it is impossible to detach academic adjustment from the issues that affect socio-cultural adjustment. The argument of these studies, and of this author, is that although the study of Hebrew language is an academic issue, it has cultural and social implications that affect Arab students' adjustment to Hebrew Israeli universities.

Adjustment of Arab students to the Israeli academic arena is a complex issue: On the one hand, Hebrew is the official language of teaching, research, and study at Israeli universities; On the other hand, Arab students are engaged in a process of "disassociating" themselves from Hebrew, and this impedes students' ability to adjust, at least academically. Furthermore, I argue that English is not the major problem for Arab students in higher education institutions (which is an understandable difficulty, as it is students' second foreign language after Hebrew, while it is the first second language for Hebrew speaking students); The major obstacle is Hebrew. In contrast to Jewish students who are occasionally required to master English to read scientific texts in their studies, Arab students are forced to deal with two foreign languages – Hebrew and English.

Students' estrangement from Hebrew is expressed on several levels:

- a. **Political** – In the last decade, growing isolationism and differentiation has increased the division between the Arab and Jewish populations. Each group tends to live in a separate space, isolated from the other group, and the contacts between the groups have decreased steadily over time. Furthermore, the Arab middle class is mainly employed within Arab society.
- b. **Media consumption** – Consumption of Hebrew media sources by the Arab public is in decline. Arab society's access to satellite media from the Arab world in Arabic has become predominant in the last decade. Youngsters tend to view current events programs, entertainment, and even sports programs that are broadcast on Arab media. As a result, exposure to Hebrew, which was formerly the main language of media consumption by Arabs in Israel, has declined.
- c. **Utility** – This dimension comprises two facets: First, the growing number of alternatives available to Arab students, including higher education studies outside

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Israel, especially in Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, and Europe, reduce the significance of Hebrew for students and increase the significance of other languages such as English. Second, as a result of obstacles to employment in the Israeli economy, the majority of the Arab middle class is employed in Arab society and therefore has little use for an advanced command of Hebrew beyond an ability to understand communications of the central government.

- d. **Academic** – The Arab education system in general, and Arabic language studies in particular do not prepare Arab pupils for academic studies in Israel.

The obstacle of Hebrew language in Israel's higher education institutions has produced three effects that must be addressed:

1. Arab students' difficulties to adjust to the social and academic environment at university.
2. Arab involvement in higher education and research in Israel (graduate and doctoral degrees) is limited.
3. Penetration of Hebrew into everyday conversations between Arab students due to the inferior status of Arabic and the obstacle of Hebrew.

C. From the Press and the Media

Arabic language as a component in national and religious identity

- **Op Ed: “Is our Arabic language in the country in danger?”**

Sheikh Raed Salah, head of the Northern Faction of the Islamic Movement in Israel: “If we wish to maintain our identity, we must protect the Arabic language. If we wish to protect the Arabic language, we must love the Arabic language in order to protect it out of love and not out of necessity, out of a sense of belonging and not as a matter of spontaneity.”

“This is not merely about words, or about replacing the word “Inshalla” with the word “b’seder” [...] When we surrender our tongues to the daily invasion of Hebrew phrases, this means that our land, our homes, our holy places, our identity, and our learning are also surrendered, and each of the elements of our existence – as individuals, as a society, and as a nation – are under assault.”

“A war is being waged against the Arabic language, which reminds us of the war of the French Governor in Algeria, who said, “We must eliminate Arabic, the language of the Quran, from their midst and uproot the Arabic language from their tongues, so that we shall defeat them”.”

“The crisis is a crisis of honor, not a crisis of language. It is a crisis of the speakers of the language, not a crisis of words. It is not Arabic that has weakened, it is ourselves, its sons; We have become weak and negligent in protecting her. [...] Our language is in danger, true, but it is not her fault: We are the guilty ones.” (www.pls48.net, January 20, 2011)

- **Prof. Muhammad Amara: Hebraicization is a linguistic ideological process that is detrimental to the identity of Arab society**

Prof. Muhammad Amara, language researcher and lecturer at Bar Ilan University and Beit Berl Academic College: “Hebraicization of the Arabic language is ideological. From this perspective, it cuts through the dimension of language and reaches the individual, his culture, his system of values, which are in a state of dissolution, which is what is happening today. We are losing the social discipline that regulates society’s conduct, resulting in the denigration of society's values and religious prohibitions.”

“Arabic faces many challenges: internal, regional, and global. The most pronounced challenge facing the language is the process of Hebraicization (*‘Abranah*) and globalization. The use of the term ‘Hebraicization’ is not accidental. This is a linguistic ideology that erodes components of identity. It is not expressed only in the use of the language.”

“The influence of Hebrew is evident in all aspects of Palestinian society in Israel: inside the home, in schools, on the street, in the workplace – everywhere. Only the mosque turrets and cemeteries have not yet been harmed.” (www.bokra.net, January 18, 2011)

- **Editorial: “We will not respect those who do not respect our language”**

“It is not surprising that the Hebrew state hastens to wage a battle against us through our history, culture, and language. Nations are not defeated when their land is conquered, but when its sons' reasoning and consciousness are subjugated, and when their culture is erased. Unfortunately, [the State] is quite successful in its mission. Anyone who closely observes how we use the Arabic language will be amazed to see how far we have removed ourselves from it, and how much we turn to use the Hebrew language in our everyday lives. [...]. Even correspondence between Arab local governments and their residents have begun to be conducted in Hebrew.[...] to say nothing of the extensive everyday use of Hebrew. Some of its colloquialisms such as “b’seder” have become an inseparable part of our language and our exchanges.” [...]

“Some of us have begun to consider Hebrew speech as a source of pride and a cause for boasting. The disgrace is reflected in the use of Hebrew in billboards in commercial places, restaurants, and shopping malls. The use of Hebrew alongside Arabic might be accepted with understanding, but disregard of [the mother tongue] is a contemptible thing. We believe that as a public, we must remain loyal to our language and our culture. It has nothing that we should be ashamed of. On the contrary, this language was the language of the cultural world hundreds of years ago.” (Kull al-Arab, December 12, 2010).

- **Seminar in the Bedouin city of Rahat on the event of the 34th anniversary of Land Day: Our language is our identity.**

Dr. Yousef T. Jabareen, General Director of Dirasat – Arab Center for Law and Policy: “In effect, Israel has not changed the rules that establish the status of the Arabic language, so as not to enrage various international organizations. But in practice, it has instituted a policy of intentional effacement and exclusion of the Arabic language...” Dr. Jabareen spoke on the absentee status of the Arabic language in Israel, and emphasized the fact that no Arab university or research center exists in the country.

Mohanad Mustafa, a researcher at Dirasat Center: “One of the projects of the Zionist Movement was to Hebraicize [place] names, and not only to conquer them geographically. What characterizes this conduct is that it is also a battle over historical memory. Language plays an important part in the conflict on the memory of place.” (<http://www.dirasat-aclp.org/arabic/index.asp?i=673>, April 8, 2010).

Opinions on the declining official status of the Arabic language

- **Enraged responses in Jaffa to a local high-school principal's plans to prohibit the use of Arabic in the classroom.**

Nadia Hilo (Jaffa resident and former Labor MK): “Forty-five percent of the pupils of the school are Arabs. Their language should be respected, and the existing social diversity should be respected.” [...]

Ahmad Masharawi (Jaffa resident and former member of the Tel-Aviv-Jaffa City Council): “It is inconceivable that an Arab pupil will not be able to speak in his

mother tongue. The demonstration sends a clear message to anyone who participates in the growing wave of racism in Israel. We will not allow the seeds of racism to be sown, especially in Jaffa [...]. We will not allow our Arab identity in Jaffa to be erased. They must respect our identity and our language, and no one can take it [*sic.*] away from our existence. Speaking in Arabic is a right, and we will not relinquish this right.” (Sinara, December 31, 2010).

- **Marzuq Halabi, author and legalist, in an op ed: “Arabic imposes fear and dread”**

“The decision on the legal status of the Arabic language was made as early as the Mandate Period, when three languages – Hebrew, Arabic, and English – were designated as official languages in government actions. A slight amendment to the regulations revoked the official status of English, and retained the provisions involving Hebrew and Arabic [...] In practice, the Arabic language has been pushed to the sidelines, not only because of government practices that give clear preference to the Hebrew language, but also because of the silence of the Arab minority, which was engaged in its survival and in strengthening its civil status. [...]”

“Marginalization of the Arabic language emphasizes the exclusion of the Arab minority from Israeli society, and limits young Arabs' ability to become an integral part of it. For example, academic programs are conducted in Hebrew: This [situation] constitutes an obstacle that prevents tens of thousands of young Arab women and men from acquiring an academic education. [...]”

“The attempt to efface the Arabic language completely will polarize Jewish fears and dread that their neighboring language arouses in them. There are countless examples of incidents involving Arabs who were requested to "speak only Hebrew" in the work place or in other settings. [...] Giving legitimacy to a language that is spoken by 20% of the State's citizens will reduce the sense of cultural oppression felt by the Arab minority. [...] The bill [to cancel the official status of the Arabic language] of [MK Limor] Livnat is not designed to protect Hebrew, which enjoys hegemony under the protection of the dominant policy. It is designed to undermine the Arabic language and destroy everything that has managed to flourish in Arab culture in Israel.” (www.ynet.co.il, June 7, 2008).

- **MK Limor Livnat: The Hebrew language is a national asset; we must continue to safeguard it**

A new bill presented to the Knesset would leave Hebrew as Israel's exclusive official language, making Arabic only a secondary language – along with English and Russian. The law was initially drafted by Likud MK Limor Livnat [...] “Particularly in these days - when extremist organizations among Arab Israelis are trying to turn Israel into a bi-national state, and, consequently, into a bilingual state in which Hebrew and Arabic would become official languages with equal status – it is urgent to ratify by law the unique status of the language of the Bible, the Hebrew language,” Livnat said. “These days, we are celebrating 60 years of national revival. The Hebrew language is a national asset second to none in importance, and in the spirit of the Declaration of Independence we must continue to safeguard it as did our fathers and their fathers before them for thousands of years.” (Jerusalem Post, 19 May 2008)

Concerns over the declining status of Arabic among the Arab youth

- **Poet Tamer Masalha in an op ed: “Cultural Genocide”**

“Whoever wishes to restrict Arabic to the home and the street, wishes to make it disappear from the public sphere, and chip away at Arab identity, and undermine our ability to conduct a discourse on rights with the Jewish majority. [...] The Arabic language should not be reduced to a marginal cultural issue.[...] Arabic is also mathematics, biology, and history. Whoever forgoes the instruction of physics in Arabic forgoes the instruction of Arabic literature and poetry, and seeks to destroy the language which, despite its problems, is alive and animated – just like the Palestinian minority that insists on existing and flourishing despite the difficulties. [...] Strengthening the mother tongue is the foundation for strengthening the academic achievements of the Arab minority and strengthening Hebrew as a second language that should be mastered at native-speaker level.” (Ha’aretz, October 8, 2010).

- **Salman Masalha, poet and translator, op-ed: “Arab, speak Hebrew.”**

“We should discuss the language issue with all due seriousness, independent from any related national sensitivity. [...] Everyone knows that the Arabic language taught in schools, by its very nature, is likened to Hebrew or to any other foreign language. In other words, it is not the native language of Arab children. Their native language, the language spoken at home, is categorically different from standard Literary Arabic that is taught in school. This is true for all Arab countries. [...] Nevertheless, it is possible to create an educational revolution here. The positive results of such a revolution will be felt in a few short years. What is needed for this purpose is the courage to place the ultimate educational demand on the table: The Arab and Druze departments in the Ministry of Education should be cancelled forthwith, and the curricula should be unified into a single uniform core curriculum for everyone. The program should include 80% of the study materials that are required for a modern, progressive education. The remaining portion could be used for cultural emphases determined by specific groups.” (Ha’aretz, September 27, 2010).

- **The motivation to establish the Academy of the Arabic Language: Fear of decline of the Arabic language among the youngsters**

Last week, Arab-Israeli educators, teachers, and intellectuals announced the establishment of the “Academy of the Arabic Language” in Israel. This new organization, which was established in response to the cries of dismay of many Arabs in view of the declining status of Arabic among Arab youngsters, will soon be registered as a non-profit association. [...] In recent years the Arab sector has been greatly concerned about the declining status of the Arabic language among the youngsters, whose accelerated Israelization has also entailed a superficial command of Literary Arabic and the “Hebraicization” of their spoken language. Apprehension at the decline of the language is connected to the broader process of mobilization to preserve and bolster Arab-Palestinian national identity.” (Ha’aretz, December 30, 2001).

On the Establishment of an Arab University in Israel

- **Op ed: “Wanted – An Arab University”**

Dr. Yoad Eliaz, head of Indimage, a developer of curricula for mixed and Arab schools in Israel: “The arguments voiced against the establishment of an Arab university in the Galilee include, for example, the fact that the region has many colleges including one or two Arab teacher training colleges. For Arab students, however, a Hebrew academic institution is not the same as an Arab academic institution, and a teacher training college is not the same as a university.”

“The Arabic language is shunned in Jewish academic institutions. At one college in the Galilee, regulations do not allow teachers to teach in Arabic even if the teacher and all the students in class are Arabs. In the Hebrew academic institutions, Arab students’ have an inferior starting point compared to native Hebrew speakers, and therefore they must work much harder to reach the same achievements as the Jewish students.”

“Many of the Arab children who grew up and attended school in mixed cities in Israel don’t even know how to read or write Arabic. All the pupils in the Arab education system are well aware that if they want to continue to university, the Arabic language has no value for this context, and sooner or later they will be compelled to acquire a high level of Hebrew.”

“Do Arab society and culture have a future in Israel? Will Arab literature, poetry, theater, and films have a place in Israel? Will the Arab citizens of Israel finally become first-class citizens; Will they receive fair representation in Israeli society; Will their status and their dignity be reinstated after 60 years? The answers to all these questions depend on the decision to establish an Arab university.” (**Ha’aretz**, January 16, 2008).

- **Ramez Jaraysi: “We are working to establish an academic Arabic-language institution that will develop into a university.”**

Nazareth Mayor, **Ramez Jaraysi**, and others are working to promote the establishment of an academic Arabic-language institution in the city. If established, it will be the first Arab academic institution in Israel. Although approved in past by the Minister of Education, the establishment of the institution has been delayed for the last decade.

Jaraysi: “We are talking about an academic institution that will develop into a university. We are the stage of discussions and ideas. This is to be an institution built on excellence, whose applicants will not only be those who are not accepted by other institutions, but it will be a multi-cultural institution open to all... [...] Studies will be conducted in Arabic, but probably in other languages as well.”

Jaraysi says, “Every time the issue of an academic institution in Nazareth comes up, opponents ask: ‘Why is there any need for an Arab academic institution at all?’ This is a question that is designed to evade the fact that the state neglected to establish an academic institution in the Arab sector, and it is a question that was not raised when five colleges were established in Tel-Hai, Yizre’el Valley, Jordan Valley, and other places. [...] The Arab public is here, and that is a fact. Whoever ignores this is like an ostrich that buries its head in the sand.: (**Ha’aretz**, December 31, 2007).