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**HERITAGE-LANGUAGE TEACHING: A QUEST FOR BICULTURALISM?  
A CASE OF RUSSIAN-SPEAKING ADOLESCENTS IN ISRAEL**

**1. Introduction**

Bilingualism of immigrant children and adolescents is a fertile ground for research. Dozens of studies have been conducted in various countries to investigate problems of language acquisition and attrition in immigrant youths (see, e.g., Cummings 1981; de Bot, Clyne 1994; Genesee 1994; Valdes 2001), effects of bilingualism on their academic achievements (Bankston, Zhou 1995; Bialystok, Majumber 1998; García-Vásquez et al. 1997), further success in adult life (Chiswick, Miller 2001; Hernandez et al. 2008; Remennick 2012), and other related linguistic, sociological, psychological and educational issues. What still remains on the periphery of research is the relation between young immigrants' emerging bilingualism and biculturalism.<sup>1</sup> In many studies, the two phenomena are viewed as inseparable and developing in parallel, yet Grosjean noted that the relation between these phenomena is more complex than it may seem. Some individuals may be bilingual but monocultural; others bicultural but monolingual (Grosjean 2015: 572–573). The complexity of relations between language and culture partially explains why in spite of the intensity of research into bilingualism, there is still a lack of consensus on what it means to be bilingual and bicultural. In addition, definitions of these phenomena differ for adults and children.

The purpose of this paper is to report on a small-scale study of one-and-a-half and second-generation Russian-speaking immigrants to Israel from the countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU) and check their knowledge of the most basic facts about the history, geography and culture of Russia, as well as their openness to the culture of their parents. The idea to conduct this study emerged from the authors' teaching experience and participant observation of Russian-speaking Israelis.

In the last three decades millions of people speaking Russian and considering Russian culture their own found themselves outside the Russian-language social space. Exact numbers of Russian speakers outside the nation are difficult to compute, but according to some estimates, they reach 25–30 million people (Riazantsev, Grebeniuk 2014: 6). These are not only émigrés, but also Russian speakers residing in the independent states on the territory of the FSU. Although in the research literature people living outside the borders of Russia are often called "Russians" or "Russian speakers" and are considered to be a relatively homogeneous group, in reality the group is heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity, religion, social and educational status, and cultural allegiances. For some Russian is their first language (L1); for others, e.g., those who emigrated from Belorussia and Ukraine, it is their second language (L2), but many are balanced bilinguals. Finally, there are those for whom Russian is a non-dominant L2 used today as a lingua franca for communication with their ex-Soviet compatriots (see Laitin 1998: 29–31; Ryazanova-Clarke 2014). There is an overwhelming consensus among researchers analysing patterns of socialization of ex-Soviet émigrés that irrespective of their ethnicity, educational level, socio-economic status and the country of residence, they regard

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<sup>1</sup> Like linguists, parents in mixed families seem to be more concerned with potential benefits or drawbacks of bilingualism than biculturalism of their children. Thus, a prominent researcher into bilingualism, F. Grosjean, was asked by The Bilingual Family Newsletter to answer most frequently asked questions of the readers collected by C. Heller, the editor-in-chief of Multilingual Living Magazine. Only one out of eleven questions dealt with biculturalism (Grosjean 2009).

Russian language and culture as an essential component of their cultural capital and an integral part of their identity (see, e.g., Remennick 2007: 23–29; Fialkova, Yelenevskaya 2013: 18–19; Kliuchnikova 2015; Pikkarainen, Protassova 2015). As a result, many Russian-speaking parents see it as their educational task to help their children preserve and/or develop ties with Russian culture (Kopeliovich 2011; Perotto, Niznik 2014). Unfortunately, the majority of adults struggling to integrate in host countries have little time to educate their children. So, this task is often delegated either to grandparents or to professionals (Ringblom et al. 2017). Already in the early 1990s, in many countries where Russian speakers reside, émigré teachers founded afternoon schools. A selection of courses offered varied from country to country and often depended on the availability of teachers, headmasters' tastes and parents' demands. As a rule, these schools build their curricula to meet the needs of a young émigré in order to become successful and also “cultured” in terms of Russian and Soviet traditions.<sup>1</sup> In Israel, many private afternoon schools founded by Russian-speaking immigrants teach English and maths, logic and chess, art and music. And all of them offer Russian language courses.

As émigré instructors acquired experience in teaching children growing up away from metropolis, they came to realize that these students should be taught differently from those learning Russian as L1 or as a foreign language and began developing methods and course materials adequate for the task. As a result of intense discussions, the term “heritage language” (Valdes 2005) and the principles of teaching heritage speakers were integrated in the Russian-language pedagogy outside Russia (Polinsky, Kagan 2007.) Yet, at conferences dedicated to heritage-language learning, practitioners keep complaining that while new methodological approaches prove effective in teaching morphological and syntactic difficulties and expanding lexis, émigré children are often ignorant of the core concepts of Russian culture. Their knowledge of Russian values and traditions is often restricted to the *Olivie salad* known in western culinary as the “Russian salad”, and to some figures of Russian folklore, such as *Grandfather Frost* and *Snow Maiden*, as well as protagonists of the Soviet cartoons *Gena the Crocodile* and *Cheburashka* and post-Soviet cartoons such as *Smeshariki*. Possibly, these complaints come from teachers who concentrate on the language as a means of communication but tend to underestimate the importance of cultural components of language teaching. Trying to perfect their students' grammar skills, expand their vocabulary and develop fluency, some teachers rely on the family and community life to help heritage learners acquire knowledge about the country of origin.

After years of trial and error members of the international research community engaged in the study of immigrants have abandoned the rigorous binary approach of “either... or...” Numerous studies reveal that interest in the culture of parents does not prevent young immigrants from immersing in the culture of the host country (Portes, Zhou 1993; Phinney et al. 2001). Preserving heritage language does not inhibit child's development; just the opposite, it often contributes to the development of a more versatile and flexible personality (Cummings 1979.) Children well versed in two cultures demonstrate better cognitive skills, which is translated in higher academic achievements. They combine various elements of two cultures composing a third one, a hybrid in which they feel comfortable (Zhou, Bankston 1998; Caytas 2012; Protassova 2018).

## **2. Culture as an anthropological concept and a term in a layperson's discourse**

Hardly any paper dealing with bicultural and multicultural individuals refrains from giving a definition of culture. Yet, it has been firmly established that culture is one of the hardest concepts to define. Suffice it to say that already in 1952 the American anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn dedicated a whole monograph to the history of the concept and critical analysis

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<sup>1</sup> The notion of a “cultured person” as it is used in Russian implies good education, which is not restricted to professional knowledge and skills but primarily implies familiarity with Russian and West-European literature, music and art. The concept includes adherence to Russian politeness norms and accepted etiquette.

of 163 definitions (Kroeber, Kluckhohn 1952). Since the last three decades were marked by interest in multiculturalism, intercultural communication and hybrid cultures, more definitions were formulated but no consensus has been achieved yet. One has to admit, however, that the ongoing discussion about what culture is has not been futile, because the multitude of views and aspects discussed brought about two important research positions: one that finds a reflection in Brian Street's paradoxical statement that "culture is a verb." Following Thornton (1988: 26), Street criticizes the obsession of scholars with a desire to give a precise definition of culture. He posits that not only culture-related categories, but also the very term 'culture' itself, like these other ideas and definitions, changes its meaning and serves different and often conflicting purposes at different times. Culture is an active process of meaning making and contest over definition, including its own definition" (Street 1993: 25.) Those who champion this position argue against reification, fixity and essentializing of culture, because viewing it as a frozen combination of shared values, symbols and behavioural patterns is often used politically to reinforce social inequality, division into "us" and the "other" and stereotyping (Jones 2013: 238).

While changes in the human environment, including the ecological situation, social organization, technological progress and political developments all affect us, we would not be able to make sense of our constantly changing world and communicate with each other if we were not equipped with a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, life orientations, and moral and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people and which constitute the culture of the group (Spencer-Oatey 2008: 3). We are confronted with these conventions every day. Many of them are institutional and so we have to either adhere or face the consequences of violating them. And this necessity to live within the confines of material manifestations of culture led Jones to contest the comprehensiveness of Street's approach: "As much as culture is a verb, it is also, in a very real sense a noun, and for many people the solidity of its substance is hard to escape" (Jones 2013: 238). This second trend of thought which presupposes sharing of culture by at least two, but mostly by members of bigger groups, also points to the multiplicity of cultures in every society, in particular in complex societies, whose members simultaneously belong to different groups, each having its own codes and conventions (families, ethnicities, geographic regions, occupations, political parties, etc.). As a result, no population today can be adequately characterized as a single culture or by a single cultural descriptor (Avruch 1998: 18.) When this view of culture prevails then the title of Glazer's book "We are all multiculturalists now" (1998) is, indeed, applicable to all our contemporaries, whether we have always lived in the same locality or migrated and whether we are monolingual or multilingual.

While researchers in social sciences and humanities debate the meaning of "culture" and use it as a descriptive concept, trying to avoid evaluative statements, for lay people culture is related to education and accumulation of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Notably, it is this meaning that comes first in the authoritative Russian dictionary by Ozhegov which offers five definitions covering the use of the term *kul'tura* in Russian:

- a. The aggregate achievements of the humanity in production and social and intellectual life
- b. The level of social and intellectual development characteristic of someone
- c. Cultivation of a plant or breeding of some living organisms

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<sup>1</sup> In an oft cited book about the use of anthropology in business we read: "In everyday usage, the term refers to the finer things in life, such as the fine arts, literature, and philosophy. Under this very narrow definition of the term, the cultured person is one who prefers Bach to Lady Gaga; can distinguish between the artistic styles of Monet and Manet; prefers pheasant under glass to grits and red-eye gravy and twelve year-old scotch to beer; and spends his or her leisure time reading Kierkegaard rather than watching wrestling on television" (Ferraro, Brody 2016: 10.) Notably, in the 2001 edition of this book, "high" and "low" music tastes were marked by preference of Handel's music to hard rock (Ferraro 2001: 19), which serves to illustrate that our perception of culture is related to fashion and changes quickly.

- d. Plants, bacteria or organisms cultivated or bred in a laboratory
- e. A high level of something, high development, skill (2001: 257).

It also gives a definition of the noun *kul'turnost'* equivalent in its meaning to the second meaning of *kul'tura* and the adjective *kul'turnyi* derived from the noun *kul'tura* with four corresponding meanings.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, evaluative definitions prevail in these entries over neutrally descriptive. In the dictionary of the Russian lexis of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century the noun *kul'tura* appears only in combinations “mass culture” and “sex culture”. The definition of the former is also evaluative claiming that it is primitive by nature and often displays bad taste (Skliarevskaya 2006: 524–525). A variety of definitions appearing in dictionaries across languages also suggests that in different speech communities different aspects of culture prevail over others. Notably, the emphasis on the accumulation of knowledge as the main marker of culture in Russian dictionaries of the Soviet period is not surprising. Education of the masses was one of the communist ideals. In an atheist state “high” culture to some extent replaced religion and as Brudny (1998: 15) aptly observed, non-dissident intellectuals had a privileged social status. They were creators of Soviet symbols, and in the post-war period an idealized image of an intellectual was romanticized in Soviet literature, movie and urban folklore.

### 3. Socio-cultural context of the study

Until the 1990s, the hegemony of Hebrew in the public sphere in Israel remained almost unchallenged. The only exception was made for English. Its importance for competition in the globalizing economy became clear already in the 1970s, and so its role in business, trade, travel and science has been uncontested since then and gradually growing (Cooper 1985). Moreover, according to Spolsky (2013), tolerance of the growing use of English in various spheres was supported by it being the language of one of the biggest Jewish diasporas, the USA, which is also Israel's most powerful ally. Finally, as Zaban (2015) aptly observes, most of the English-speakers who immigrated after the war of 1967 had a strong Jewish identity and adopted the Zionist worldview.

Immigrants from the FSU who settled in Israel in the 1990s–2015 were quite different from the previous waves. They were predominantly secular, many were ignorant of the Jewish tradition and openly refused to abandon their language and culture, causing Israeli society to worry that a numerically strong group would create a cultural autonomy (Fialkova, Yelenevskaya 2007). Indeed, first-generation immigrants who arrived in Israel in the 1990s succeeded in creating numerous institutions catering to their cultural needs, such as conventional and electronic media, libraries and theaters, community centers and travel agencies, bilingual kindergartens and afternoon schools, and others. On the one hand, this created favourable conditions for language and culture maintenance in the community; on the other hand, as the second-generation immigrants have come of age there are signs that these institutions are in decline, as young people brought up in Israel have joined the mainstream in terms of language use and cultural needs. These needs are to a large extent determined by family socialization and their parents' success in integration. In the upward mobile families children are more likely to accept the parents' culture and learn more about it through studies and quality entertainment (Remennick 2012). In the last several years many members of one-and-a-half generation are interested in affirming their hybrid identity. They are aware that it differs from that of their parents but it also deviates from that of their Hebrew-speaking Israeli peers. Young Russian-speaking intellectuals have founded some NGOs and their activists organize various cultural events in order to involve their Russian- and Hebrew-speaking peers

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<sup>1</sup> In Webster's Universal College Dictionary, e.g., we find nine definitions, the first being “artistic and intellectual pursuits and products” (1997: 198). In the French Robert Dictionary numerous examples cited are divided between the literal meaning related to agriculture and metaphorical: development of certain faculties of the mind by means of exercising one's intellect (1972: 1068–1069).

in discussions and creative activities that could increase public acceptance of their right to be different (Prashizky, Remennick 2015; Dashevski 2016.)

#### **4. Attitudes to bilingualism and biculturalism in Israel**

The attitude to bilingualism in Israel depends to a large extent on what combination of languages a person has in his/her repertoire. English as a lingua franca of business, science and tourism has the highest prestige. It is studied as a compulsory foreign language at school from the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and until matriculation exams in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Those who still lack required proficiency for academic work have to take up to three semesters of English at the tertiary level. English is widely used in Israeli academia, business and entertainment industry, and is highly visible in the linguistic landscape of the country.

Arabic, the second official and most spoken language in Israel is much less popular among learners. In 1996 a three-year course of Arabic (grades 7–9) was made compulsory for all schools in the Jewish sector, with the exception of a small number of schools where the alternative to Arabic is French. However, there is resistance to compulsory Arabic studies on the part of students and parents (Ben-Rafael, Brosh 1991), who do not see the pragmatic value of Arabic. Moreover, this resistance is intensified by the continuing Israeli Palestinian conflict. As a result, the level of learners' achievement is low, and few students attain proficiency enabling them to communicate orally or read effectively. No wonder then that only 2% of the students are willing to continue studying Arabic in the last grades of high school (Shohamy 2010: 187).

Both Spanish and French are quite popular among learners since many Israelis have roots in French- and Spanish-speaking countries. Israelis belonging to both of these speech communities are heterogeneous in terms of their countries of origin and socio-economic status. Yet most of them, with the exception of the latest influx of immigrants from France, did not resist the melting-pot policies dominant in Israeli society in the period after immigration. As a result, many of the youngsters have lost the language of their parents and grandparents and affinity with the cultures of the countries of their origin. However, in 1996 the Ministry of Education admitted special importance of the study of French at school. Although Spanish is virtually non-existent in the school system, recently there has been a real boom in the interest in Spanish studies at the university level both among descendants of immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries and among young Israelis whose roots are elsewhere (see detailed analysis of the role of French and Spanish languages and culture in Israeli society in Muchnik et al. 2016).

Although Russian is the third most spoken language in Israel and most Israelis have at least some Russian words in their lexical repertoire, there are almost no Hebrew or Arabic speakers among learners of Russian in schools. Admitting the importance of Russian studies, the Ministry of Education decreed that only those who were born in the FSU could take from one to three years of Russian classes at school, thus closing the doors for the second generation immigrants and other students. In reality, this rule is not always observed and children born of Russian-speaking or mixed families can and do study Russian at school. At the tertiary level Russian is taught as a foreign language, but primarily as an elective course for beginners. Only Tel Aviv University offers a course of Russian for heritage speakers (Muchnik et al. 2016). Russian culture seems to have higher prestige in society than the language, at least among the educated classes. Partially this is thanks to excellent translations of Russian and Soviet literature and poetry works into Hebrew, many of which have been done by immigrants of the last wave. In addition, members of the mainstream society enjoy the theater and orchestras created by immigrants and frequent visits of Russian musicians and ballet dancers to Israel that have become an integral part of Israeli artistic life in the last 25 years.

The volume of this article does not allow us to review attitude to bilingualism of other substantial groups of immigrants, such as Ethiopian, Moroccan, Polish and Rumanian Jews. With the exception of Ethiopian Jews, who immigrated in the 1990s and continue speaking Amharic in families, young people of the other groups were socialized in Hebrew. Today, many

regret the loss of their families' cultural capital but only few are active in trying to revive their diasporic language and culture.

## 5. Material and method

Our research project was conducted in 2015 in five schools of metropolitan Tel Aviv. Our participants were 122 students aged 13–15. By the time of our field research all of the respondents had been studying Russian for at least a year at state-run schools which use the curriculum approved by the Israel Ministry of Education. More than half of the participants (54%) were born in Israel, others came from various countries of the FSU, primarily from Russia and Ukraine. By the time of the research all the subjects had lived in Israel for at least three years. For many participants Russian is a home language.<sup>1</sup> According to our observations, part of communication among peers from immigrant families is conducted in Russian (Niznik 2011), so in terms of regular use and fluency in at least some of the domains all of the subjects are bilingual.

The participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire developed for the project. It included eleven multiple-choice questions with four options each and one correct answer, and six open-ended questions. The questionnaire was in Russian but the participants were given a choice of answering open-ended questions either in Russian or in Hebrew.

The questionnaire was developed on the basis of a preliminary survey conducted among 25 adult immigrants from the FSU who were aged 25 or more at the time of immigration, received their education in Russian and consider it their mother tongue. Eighteen adults surveyed have academic degrees, the other seven have high school or college certificates.<sup>2</sup> Each participant of the preliminary survey was asked to write 15 sentences containing information on Russian history, geography and art which he/she considered to be “schoolbook classics” familiar to any resident of Russia. Eleven most often repeated statements were selected to be used in the questionnaire. Items 12–16 were not based on the preliminary survey; in them young respondents were asked to name prominent figures of Russian history, outstanding Russian politicians, writers, actors and musicians, and give titles of the three Russian movies they had seen. The last item of the questionnaire enquired whether a respondent was interested in visiting Russia and asked to provide reasons for a positive or negative answer. This questionnaire was similar to, although considerably easier, than numerous self-assessment quizzes posted on *Ru.net*. Some of them test general knowledge of the secondary-school curriculum, others spelling rules, still others concentrate on regional differences of Russian. These tests are very popular among internet users and are circulated in social networks and by email as viral messages (see, e.g., “How well do you know our planet?” [lifehacker.ru/2016/03/27/geography-quiz](http://lifehacker.ru/2016/03/27/geography-quiz), “How well do you know poetry from the school curriculum?” [rb.ru/test/71/](http://rb.ru/test/71/), “How well do you remember school curriculum?” [avtomarket.ru/forum/tusovka/62875](http://avtomarket.ru/forum/tusovka/62875)).

## 6. Results

The majority of participants (71%) answered open-ended questions in Hebrew. Among those who were born in Israel or immigrated before the beginning of schooling this proportion was still higher (86%). Notably, the language of communication in the family did not influence the

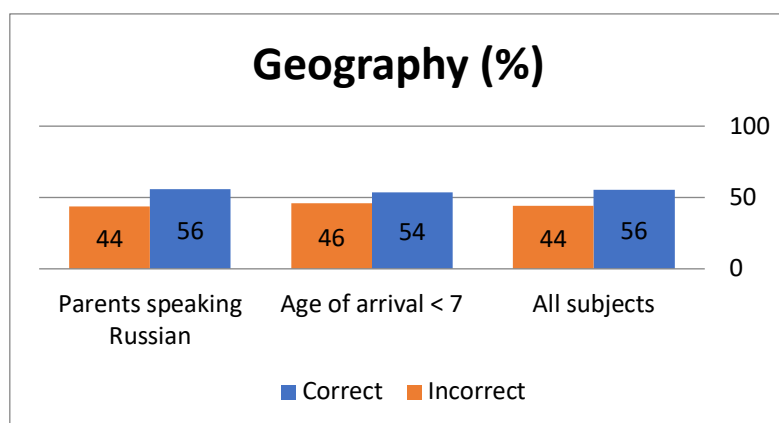
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<sup>1</sup> Even though Jewish families were dispersed throughout the USSR, they were primarily Russian-speaking. Switching from Yiddish to Russian which accompanied the process of urbanization was often viewed as part of emancipation. After the demise of the USSR the policy of de-Russification began in the newly formed states. Mastering official languages became essential for socio-economic success, yet recent immigrants to Israel from Baltic States, Central Asia and Ukraine still demonstrate high proficiency in Russian.

<sup>2</sup> Professional training in the UUSR was conducted at “institutes” which awarded academic degrees, and at colleges for junior engineers, nurses, kindergarten teachers, etc., which awarded certificates of “specialized secondary education”.

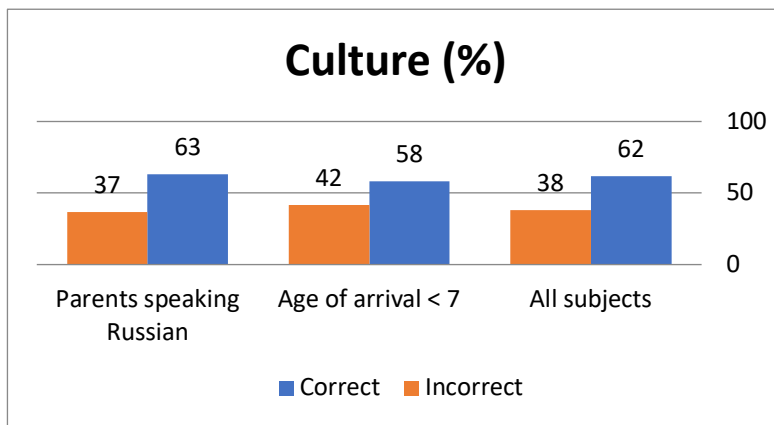
choice of language. We view this as confirmation that oral skills are not directly linked to reading and writing skills, in particular among heritage speakers.

Questions related to Russian geography (Fig1) were correctly answered by 56% of the respondents. They named the capital of Russia, and they knew that the Volga is a river, and that the territory of the country is situated in Eurasia. These answers were not related to the language of communication in the family or the length of life in Israel. The fact that almost half of the participants did not know the name of the Russian capital nor were they aware that the Volga is the largest river in the European part of Russian territory does not only testify to their poor knowledge of geography but clearly indicates that they are not familiar with most important cultural symbols of Russia.



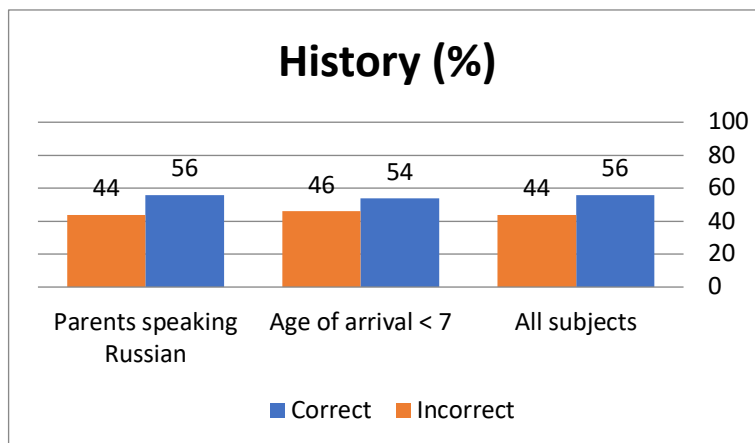
**Figure 1. Geography questions**

Questions directly related to Russian culture and internationally known cultural symbols were answered correctly by 62% of the respondents (Fig 2). They know that Alexander Pushkin is a poet, that the Red Square is in Moscow and is a place of important state and cultural events. They are aware that “Bolshoi” is an opera and ballet theater. Among those who were born in Israel or immigrated before age 7, the number of correct answers to these questions drops to 58%. Only 10% of the respondents could give the names of three Russian writers and poets. Alexander Pushkin is at the top of the list followed by Leo Tolstoy and Feodor Dostoevsky. It does not mean, however, that the students have read these authors. As we learned from informal conversations, they are only aware that these are important Russian writers. These names are mentioned in the texts that they read in Russian classes. They may have heard them from conversations of the adults who often summon these names as proof of the superiority of Russian culture over the local one. Two students mentioned the name of Boris Akunin, a contemporary author of detective and historic mysteries, set in pre-revolutionary Russia. His novels enjoy great popularity in Russia and in the diaspora, and some were filmed. To our surprise, not a single participant mentioned the classics of Russian and Soviet children’s literature, such as Korney Chukovskii, Samuil Marshak or Viktor Dragunskii, although their books are part of the standard reading repertoire in Russian-speaking families, and their books are usually available in Russian book stores in Israel. Moreover, excerpts from the books of these authors are included in Russian course books and are part of the Russian curriculum of Israeli state schools. Many students who filled out the questionnaire in Hebrew had trouble naming even one Russian author. Unfortunately, Israeli adolescents today do not have a taste for reading. Few spend their leisure time reading for pleasure; and even those who do are not tempted by Russian or West-European classics. At school Israeli adolescents are obliged to read fiction as part of their literature course. The only Russian writer included in the school curriculum is Anton Chekhov, but his short stories are studied only in the last grades of high school.



**Figure 2. Culture questions**

All three questions on Russian history were answered correctly by 56% of the participants (Fig 3). They knew that Leningrad and St. Petersburg are the names of the same city used in different periods of history; they dated correctly the October Revolution, and chose the “czar” as the head of Russia prior to the 1917 revolution which put an end to autocracy. Evidently, correct answers to these questions are not related to the students’ competence in the Russian language, the age of immigration or the language of communication in the family. It is curiosity and general knowledge, rather than affinity with Russian culture that determined the students’ success in answering questions on history.



**Figure 3. History questions**

Other open-ended questions required naming three Russian actors, three musicians, three prominent state figures and the titles of three Russian movies the respondents had seen. Half of the participants failed to complete these tasks. More than half (55%) managed to recall just one movie title. The leaders are cartoons for children: “Masha and the Bear” (a TV series created by Oleg Kuzovkov and produced by *Animaccord* Animation Studio, with the first episode released in 2009), “Gena the Crocodile” (Roman Kochanov’s movie released by the studio *Soiuzmul’tfil’m* in 1969). Most respondents who have seen the latter cartoon mistakenly gave as the title the name of another protagonist of the movie, *Cheburashka*. Some of the respondents named feature films. “A Diamond Arm”, directed by Leonid Gaidai and released by Mosfilm in 1969, was most frequently named. Among other movies mentioned by multiple respondents is another Gaidai’s movie, “Ivan Vasilievich Changes Profession”, released in 1973, and “Striped Trip” directed by Vladimir Fetin and released in 1961. All three are comedies still shown on various Russian TV channels and still popular among different generations of Russian speakers in the metropolis and in the diaspora. Post-Soviet Russian movies hardly appear in the questionnaires, the only exception being the cult movie “Brother” directed by Alexey Balabanov in 1997.



The data elicited from the questionnaires confirms observations of the practitioners working with Russian-speaking émigré children in various countries: their use of the Russian language is primarily restricted to the communication in the family; their exposure to Russian culture also occurs at home and is particularly intensive in pre-school years when children spend more time with parents and grandparents than when school begins. As a result, many young émigrés fail to acquire more mature vision of their country of origin and their knowledge of facts about it remains at the level of pre-schoolers.

We believe that this was the reason why many respondents were unable to name Russian actors: 54% failed to come up with at least one. Our informants seem to have been exposed to Russian movies at the age when actors and the parts they play blend into one for the young viewer. While the names of the protagonists ring the bell, the people who created children's favourite characters remained anonymous.

Famous musicians' names featuring in the questionnaires served as another proof of the family's impact on all the knowledge about Russia. The best known are pop-singers Alla Pugacheva (born in 1949) and Philip Kirkorov (born in 1967). They were named by 40% of the respondents. Besides their frequent presence on the Russian TV channels, their lives are extensively covered by gossip columns in the conventional and electronic media. Among younger Russian show-business stars participants named Dima Bilan (born in 1981), the winner of Eurovision contest in 2005, and Polina Gagarina (born in 1987), who won the second prize in Eurovision-2015. These choices suggest that like in literature, young émigrés remain ignorant about world renowned Russian artists, and even in the Russian pop-music their tastes are formed under the influence of their parents and the repertoire imposed on the viewers by Russian state TV channels available in Israel.

Respondents who managed to name three state figures make 54% of the total. Similar to what we observe in answers to the questions about Russian history, this knowledge is unrelated to the age of immigration or the language of family communication. Vladimir Putin leads the list of statesmen. There may be several reasons for this: many Russian-speaking Israelis have retained Russian citizenship and Putin's decisions concerning the rights of diasporans may have serious consequences for immigrant families, so these issues may be often discussed in Russian-Israeli homes. Moreover, Russia is an active player in Middle-Eastern conflicts and Putin's name is often mentioned in the Israeli conventional and electronic media. Putin's policies are often discussed informally. Finally, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict resonated in the diaspora, dividing it into Putin supporters and his fierce opponents.

Besides Putin, our informants named Stalin and Lenin, although the latter was less frequently mentioned. Unlike Putin, whose family name was given together with the first name and patronymic, the two Soviet leaders appeared only under their assumed names, without initials. We believe their appearance in the questionnaires is related to the knowledge of the school history course rather than familiarity with the Russian and Soviet history gained from reading. Quite a few respondents mentioned the name of the ex-foreign minister of Israel, Avigdor Liberman. The founding father and unchallenged leader of the party "Israel, our home", A. Liberman was born in Moldavia, often speaks Russian to his electorate and is associated with the "Russian" sectoral politics in Israel. Most likely, the participants who chose his name misunderstood the question.

The last two questions of the questionnaire: "Would you like to visit Russia" and "Explain why?" came as a surprise to us. We expected that Russian-speaking adolescents would display more curiosity about the country of origin; however, only 63% of the participants expressed desire to visit Russia. Among those who speak Russian at home this number goes up but only to 69%. Some students who wish to go to Russia have a positive image of the country: "I'd like to see the Kremlin and the Red Square", "Russia is a beautiful country"; others express interest in their roots: "I'd like to see where my mum and dad were born", "I'd like to see where I was born"; still others are dreaming about the reunion with the family members left behind: "I miss

my grandma”, “I want to see my grandpa again”. Notably, those who are interested in Russia but do not mention any specific reason related to their family, express their wish to see Moscow, even if their family comes from a different city or region, which suggests that their knowledge about Russia is very general and stereotypical. Even St. Petersburg, highly valued by international and domestic tourists, does not feature in the answers. Some write rather vaguely that Russia is an interesting country that has created great culture; others just show inclination to travel, saying that it is always “cool” to see something new. Respondents who lack interest in visiting Russia believe “there are more interesting places in the world.” Some students write that “it is dangerous [to travel] in Russia” and that there is “dictatorship in Russia.” We can only guess whether they transfer facts learned in the history course about the Soviet Russia to the current-day situation, or whether such statements reflect the mood in their family. Our observations suggest that adult immigrants who fail to integrate in Israel sometimes try to justify their decision to emigrate to themselves and their children by embellishing the image of the host country and depicting their country of origin as gloomy, dangerous and aggressive (cf. Birman, Trickett 2001; Tartakovsky 2009).

Some answers reflect the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The majority of respondents unwilling to visit Russia come from Ukraine. Some demonstrate alienation from Russia “My Fatherland is Ukraine, this is where I wish to go for a visit”; others are openly hostile, e.g., “I hate Russia”. This mood is also a reflection of the family talk and a rift between diasporas caused by the political crisis in their home countries (Fialkova and Yelenevskaya 2015).

## 7. Conclusions

The project reported in this article sought to find out whether there is a direct link between development of bilingualism and biculturalism in immigrant adolescents. It showed that for the studied group the answer is negative. Our research suggests that for the majority of Russian-speaking adolescents who receive all or most of their school education in Israel Russian culture and history remain *terra incognita*. They experience difficulties answering even the simplest questions about Russia. Their acquaintance with everything related to Russia is limited to what they learn in the family and see on Russian TV channels, primarily in the pre-school years. The result is a chaotic conglomerate of facts, names and titles. Students seem to be unable to place them chronologically or distinguish between classics and mass culture. Unfortunately, taking into account a limited number of hours allocated for second-language learning at school, teachers see their primary goal in developing students’ language competence and overlook the cultural component of language learning. Clearly, there is a need for up-to-date course books that could cater to the diverse needs of heritage language learners. These course books should not only focus on facts, but let students compare forms of address, politeness forms, differences in communication in formal and informal settings, and various customs and traditions in their country of origin and in the host society. Taking into account availability of multimedia materials and possibility of establishing virtual contacts with students in the metropolis and in other diasporic communities, cultural studies can capture interest and imagination of young language learners.

Our study provides several implications for further research. Taking into account that immigrant teachers have created many afternoon schools which are less bound by curricular restrictions than state schools and function primarily for enrichment, it would be useful to compare the cultural component of language teaching in state and private complementary schools and the success of students in both. It would also be useful to check the relation between the student families’ orientation to assimilation or integration and the students’ attitudes to heritage language learning. It is clear that ethnographic work with parents could help language practitioners get a better understanding of the family role in bringing up bilingual and bicultural individuals and help bridge the gaps between home and school education more effectively than today.

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