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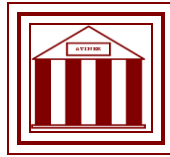
ATINER's Conference Paper Series
LIT2013-0501

Students' Attitudes towards Bilingual Children's Literature in Hebrew and Arabic

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This paper should be cited as follows:

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Abstract

The article presents the findings of a study of the attitudes of Arab and Jewish students towards bilingual children's literature. The focus is on whether bilingual children's literature contributes to the establishment of identity and whether it is important to include such works in the school curriculum. The underlying assumption was that the participant's identity --vis-à-vis the rift in Israeli society between Jews and Arabs-- would guide students' attitudes regarding these questions.
Sections from bilingual children's books in Arabic and Hebrew describing a cultural aspect were presented in an attitude questionnaire, which included 39 items with responses indicating agreement on a scale of 1 to 6.
Findings indicate that students from both sectors recognize both the contribution of bilingual works to the social dynamics in Israel as well as the importance of including bilingual children's literature in the curriculum.

Keywords: Children's literature, Hebrew-Arabic literature, identity, curriculum

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Theoretical Background

The Rift between Jews and Arabs
The identity *Israeli* has never welcomed all of Israel's citizens with open arms and, therefore, centres of alienation and resistance have formed (Yiftachel, 2002). The definition and inclusion of minorities as an integral part of society is perceived as a threat to the ideological framework of the nation-state (Garland, 1997). In this context, the structuring and labelling of identity are important, particularly in the case on a minority in a multinational society. Israel was established as the state of the Jewish people, and the definition of its citizens' identity is very significant. This definition is what determines basic civil rights, derived from the individual's religious and ethnic affinities (Chayder, 2006, 15). Thus, the state is faced with a dilemma whenever the integration of a non-Jewish population is required: to what extent is the Jewish state obligated to adjust its symbols, culture, and way of life to the fact that a far–from–negligible portion (20%) of its population is non-Jewish? (Ben Rafael & Peres, 2005). The rift between Jews and Arabs is unique among the numerous social divides that characterise Israeli society precisely because it diverges from the Jewish majority, which has its own rifts.

According to Rouhana (1997), the Israeli identity of the Palestinian citizens of Israel is limited to formal aspects, whereas their Palestinian identity is internalised and is characterised by an emotional and ideological connection. Rouhana (2007) claims, that these citizens emphasise their Palestinian identity precisely because the state authorities deny its validity and in reaction to the discrimination they experience within Israel. On the political level, the Palestinian identity is expressed in the demand for equal rights and for the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside the Jewish one. Palestinian Arabs in Israel are dissatisfied with their collective status: they preserve their Palestinian identity and, at the same time, they aspire for full citizenship in the Israeli state and its institutions. They wish to attain institutional self-management in order to manage their unique interests in the fields of education, culture, and religion, within the context of their Israeli citizenship, as well as rights equal to those enjoyed by the Jewish majority. Essentially, this type of self-management serves as a model for consensual democracy, which supports and strengthens the existence of two nationalities (in this case, Jewish and Palestinian) within one state and ensures true sharing of government, resources, and decision making processes for both nationalities (Rinawie-Zoabi, 2006).

The Issue of Identity
We all think we know what identity symbolises; hence, we rely on identity even when it conveys the opposite of what we mean: 'Anyone who assumes a complex identity finds himself marginalised' (Ma'aluf, 2010, p.11) One's identity is comprised of numerous and varied affinities, different spheres that together make up the whole identity (Shaked, 2006).

Identity is a relatively accurate term, which should not lead to misconceptions. Is a careful analysis truly necessary to prove that no two people are or could be--identical? Affinity with a religious tradition, a nationality, or a combination of the two, belonging to an ethic or linguistic group, to a more or less extended family, to a profession or an institution, or to a particular social group -- these are all components of the system that constitutes one's identity (Ma'aluf, 2010). Of course, not all of these affinities are equally important, at least not at any given moment; however, no single component is completely insignificant.

Individuals have the option to express themselves using different *voices* and thus reveal different aspects of their personalities at different times and according to the situation they face; however, it is important to note that the term *voice* also bears social and political implications, which should not be overlooked. The quality of the voice can be an indicator of owning the right to speak out, and of the type of speech, whether contextual, public, or promotional speech (Boa, 1999). According to Bakhtin (1981), every utterance is a unique expression of a socio-linguistic interaction within a particular social context: every utterance is dialogic and therefore it is defined by past utterances and the manner in which those were received by others. The *dialogue* is between two voices which may represent different social classes, ideologies, eras, or genres. Hence, the intersection of any two utterances imbues each with a unique presence and *voice*. Based on the assumption that bilingual texts demonstrate *ideological literacy*, allowing for the study of *others*, (Lindsay, 2006), Consequently, the literary text in its bilingual presentation no longer represents only the single hegemonic voice, in this case, Hebrew; rather, the text creates a dialogue of voices, if only due to its graphic presentation of both languages on the pages of the book. The dual representation, i.e., the duplication of illustrations as well as textual content, functions as an objective correlative for the establishment of identity. Content conveyed through graphic representation, in a non-verbal process, becomes a clear and distinct *body of knowledge* for a reader unfamiliar with the other culture, since it can be immediately translatable into one's own language (Hebrew). The *body of knowledge* is important, since previously it had been based on a combination of theory and facts, but in the bilingual text it is acquired through basic learning (Zamir, & Baratz, 2010).

The Connection between Language and Identity

Educational expressions of ideology may be construction of common educational public spaces which are common to members of different cultural communities, or, at an earlier stage, of different educational public spaces for members of cultural minority groups, in order to empower the community members and to prepare them for an intercultural dialogue from a position of strength, that is, to include an early stage of particular multiculturalism (Reingold, 2007).

The phenomenon of integration of ethnic groups found in the bilingual schools in Israel is part of a tendency seen in educational frameworks in general (Haviv-Barak, Bekerman, & Bilu, 2010). The programme of studies in the

bilingual schools replicates the political and social reality that exists outside the schools, i.e., it maintains the inferiority of minority students, in part through the use of the majority's language (Amara. & Schnell, 2003). In fact, students' motivation to learn the other group's language was induced by the educational environment, more specifically, through methods, textbooks, and teachers' attitudes and approaches (Inbar, Donitsa-Schmidt, & Shoami , 2000).

The language policy in Israel today is still motivated by ideology. Both Hebrew and Arabic are the official languages in Israel, but in fact, only the use of Hebrew is promoted: in practice, Israel operates as a monolingual state, and Hebrew is perceived as a metaphor for national security, while Arabic has a lower status among Jews, and there is no support for enforcing its use as a required language (Shohami, 1995). At the same time, there is a growing awareness of the need to alter Israeli society by adopting a multicultural ethos, in which multiplicity and difference gradually become legitimised. Multiculturalism is expressed not only in the multiplicity of different cultures, but also in an increasing awareness of the need to validate this multiplicity both officially and unofficially. There is a strong connection, or perhaps even a complete overlap, between identity and language. Language is the instrument for imposing a hegemonic identity, for creating social hierarchies, and for advancing a unique and different identity; it is the instrument used by groups in the margin to advance their *politics of identity*. According to Giles (1991), every type of interaction aims, consciously or unconsciously, either for convergence with or divergence from the recipient. In the convergence process, the sender wishes to approach or identify with a particular group and therefore will choose the form of linguistic expression closest to that of the recipient. By contrast, in the divergence process, the sender will preserve his or her manner of speech, thus creating a divide between oneself and the recipient.

Texts that belong to the genre of bilingual literature demonstrate the term *political literacy* (Ichilov, 2001). Through these stories, it is possible to examine the essence of the *other*, as well as children's acceptance of the other. Through the encounter with the text, the reader faces himself and his own world. The very act of observing the reflections of the human mind leads to the unveiling of something hidden and undefinable in one's awareness, resulting in revelation and clarity. Whether consciously or not, the encounter with the text acts as stimulus that forces the reader to consciously examine alternative evidence of what she is not and of what she may yet become.

Bilingual Children's Literature
A bilingual literary work constitutes a single organic unit, in contrast to literary works which were written in one language and then translated. The advantage of a text that is originally bilingual is that eliminates the need to transfer the text to another language (Shavit, 1996). Moreover, the mutuality of a bilingually written text creates a different set of rules, i.e., one text is not dictated by another. In the Jewish-Palestinian intercultural context, translation is conducted under asymmetrical conditions, due to the theological and colonial relationship between Hebrew and Arabic (Shenhav, 2012)

The fact that bilingual children's books exist in Hebrew and Arabic is an indication of a multicultural process; however, the paucity of such works emphasises that an Interlingua dialogue cannot simply be assumed. In fact, this paucity suggests that there may be processes of silencing and absence involved. Derrida (1982) refers to this sense of silencing as the unbridgeable gap between language and the referents it supposedly signifies.

Children's literature is considered one of the most proven means by which to educate and inculcate the young reader. The text communicates a message about the society's values and about the major principles that the ruling authorities wish to convey to children, in order to turn them into useful and obedient citizens of this society (Cohen , 1985). Therefore, children's literature constitutes a significant instrument that serves to implant ideologies and instil sociocultural values. These sociocultural values pertain to three points in time: the past, the present, and the future, i.e., the traditional values of the past, the ethics manifested in the present, and the desire to form the values of the future (by instilling values in today's children, who are the citizens of tomorrow) in order to create a better society (Stephens, 1992).

What is the source of the fear evoked by the prospect of learning about the To understand or communicate with the *other*, the instrument of choice is dialogue. Dialogue is one of the many ways by which to approach the *other*, to communicate with the enemy. Dialogue is based on the ability to recognise the difference and otherness of the addressee, an approach which in-and-of-itself contradicts the one-dimensional perception of the *other* as solely alien, threatening, and deserving of annihilation. Where there is dialogue, the perception of *enemy* is altered. Dialogue essentially makes it possible to familiarise oneself with the *other* and all of his or her unusual characteristics. Through dialogue, the self can discover and have access to the human component, the unconscious within, (Ehrlich, 2001). This is the message embedded in the literary work: the bilingual text in Hebrew and Arabic attempts to blur the distinction that defines the *other*.

Children's stories serve as an excellent point of departure for cultivating language skills, because they provide an experiential framework in which to practice and develop these skills. A bilingual text can expose the learners to the language by displaying the language graphically, while at the same time it emphasises the preservation of the language, which indirectly constitutes a statement about the preservation of cultural identity.

Bilingual literature helps extend the dialogue, which is considered a means by which to bridge the cultural gap and acquaint oneself with the image of the *other*.

The Goal of the Study

The goal of the study was to examine differences between students belonging to the minority group of Arab citizens of Israel and Jewish students who consider themselves Israeli in terms of their world views regarding the

principle of multiculturalism. Does exposure to bilingual literature affect their attitudes on the subject? Does exposure to bilingual literature have the capacity to create multicultural dialogue?

Research Questions

1. Can the inclusion of a bilingual story contribute to the process of forming an identity?
2. Does a bilingual text facilitate the development of a multicultural dialogue?
3. Is the inclusion of a bilingual text in the curriculum worth considering?

Methods

Research Tool
The research tool was constructed on the basis of a questionnaire that examined the attitudes of US teachers to bilingual books in English and Arabic (Al-Hazza, & Bucher, 2008). The questionnaire was translated into Hebrew and adapted to the topic of investigation. It was validated by two faculty members, one from the Arab sector and one from the Jewish sector. This survey of attitudes contained 39 items presented on a scale of 1 (complete disagreement) to 6 (complete agreement). The study made use of sections taken from bilingual children's books in Arabic and Hebrew which describe a cultural aspect.
The study included 274 participants from teacher training colleges. 140 participants were from the Jews Israel community, and the rest (134) were Arabs Israelis.

Findings

Data Analysis
Data analysis was conducted using the SPSS 18 software program. Independent samples t-tests were performed to compare the results of the two groups, Jewish students and Arab students.
Students' statements were divided into three groups, each representing a research category. The following two tables (Tables 1,2) include items on which a significant difference was found between the study groups.
The ranked responses to the items regarding the effect of a bilingual text on defining one's identity (Table 1) indicated that there is a strong sense of Jewish identity among the Jewish students, who are content with their position in Israeli society; also the standard deviations suggest relative agreement within the group on this matter. By contrast, the group of Arab students assigned a moderate ranking to the issue of/ bilingual text's effect of defining one's

identity; however, the responses in this group were more heterogeneous than the responses in the Jewish group. Both groups indicated weak agreement on the item about being born anew in a different country. The Jewish group's response on the item regarding emigration is worth noting.

Regarding the effect of a bilingual text on linguistic awareness (Table 2), both groups indicated a relatively strong agreement with the statements on this topic. Nonetheless, the mean score of the Arab group on each of the items was higher than that of the Jewish group. On the question of speaking Arabic, the gap between the groups was pronounced.

Discussion

The goal of the study was to examine the attitudes of Jewish Israeli students and of Arab Israeli students toward a bilingual book written in Hebrew and Arabic

Figure 1 describes the link between the research questions and the findings: a bilingual story induces linguistic awareness, which sets the conditions for acceptance and belonging, which are the foundations of identity. In fact, the manner in which students perceive bilingualism and their attitudes toward it are the underlying preconceptions that constitute the conscious basis that they bring to their interaction with the bilingual text. This conscious basis is brought into high relief when participants are required to examine their perceptions; thus, a bilingual story helps readers forge their perceptions in a more careful manner, and thus leads to a clearly defined identity.

Accordingly, on the bilingual text's ability to advance processes that could lead to Jewish-Arab coexistence or induce political thought, Arab students expressed stronger agreement than did Jewish students. This finding demonstrates the group's need to define its identity and sense of belonging and highlights the bilingual text's ability to strengthen the group members' self-perceptions and the group's definition of self-identity. The current study's finding regarding the ability of a bilingual text to increase one's acquaintance with the *other* has implications for eliminating alienation. Language is one of the clearest and most primal channels for communication between people and groups and it serves to join them into a cohesive society. The ability to communicate in a comprehensible manner can ease the way to creating common understandings, a shared system of values, and future objectives on which all parties can agree (Peleg, 2010).

The Arab group *empowers* the bilingual text, as its members apparently recognise the socialisation function of literature and particularly that of children's literature. Furthermore, findings indicate that Arab students believe it is important to know Arabic (4.74). This coincides with the finding of Amara (2006), which demonstrated the Arab sector's increasing awareness of the practical importance of knowing Arabic, as well as the opposite, i.e., the absence of Arabic language acquisition among the Jewish sector. Children's literature helps create a self-awareness which stresses in a pragmatic sense the

concept of multiculturalism (Zamir, & Baratz, 2010). Through the bilingual book, which is perceived to function as a cultural agent, it becomes possible to understand the [other's] desire to alter the multicultural policies that exist nowadays in the education system, so that instead of attempting to assimilate minority cultures within the mainstream culture, multicultural policies would aim to preserve unique cultural elements, by making them an integral part of education. Exposure to a bilingual text through literature inevitably contributes perhaps only modestly to multicultural openness. The literary experience affords the reader access to knowledge and experience, which inadvertently contributes to an awareness of the similarities and differences between cultures, thus raising the thresholds of sensitivity and tolerance towards others.

In regard to the inclusion of the bilingual literary work in the curriculum, both groups expressed agreement; however, agreement was moderate in the Jewish group and stronger in the Arab group. Students considered the text on a cultural topic a means for strengthening readers' attitudes. In the current study, it is important to consider students' responses regarding the inclusion of the bilingual text in the curriculum in the context of the multicultural schools operating in Israel.

Regarding students' emotional connection to the place where they live, results of Jewish students' responses demonstrated a bond with the State of Israel in contrast to results of Arab students' responses. There was a gap between Jewish students' responses (5.09) and Arabs students' responses (3.84) on the item 'I love living in Israel'. Given that this study did not focus directly on the issue of identity, it may be concluded that current findings shed light on the findings of Soen (2012), by demonstrating that students from the Arab sector did not feel connected to Israeli society (3.43).

Literature plays an active and influential role in a child's spiritual world. However, this influence is not isolated from other influences operating in the child's environment. The importance of bilingual children's literature is derived from this literary influence. The bilingual text in Arabic and Hebrew provides the child with a broad aesthetic experience not only through the very act of reading fiction, but also by exposing the child to the typography of the *other*, the different graphic dimension which characterises the foreign language. Given that a bilingual text does not pretend to represent the single voice of the ruler, but rather is comprised of a dialogue between different voices, bilingual literature can be perceived as demonstrating the concept of *fruit salad* (Audrey ,1992) in contrast to the hegemonic culture, which imposes itself on the *other*. Integration of bilingual literature in the educational curricula would strengthen the approach that seeks to educate towards multiculturalism in Israeli society, which in turn would strengthen Israeli society itself. It is worth mentioning that it is not only legitimate but also worthwhile to preserve the language of a cultural minority as part of its cultural capital, and that such preservation has far-reaching implications for civic education. According to a study by Haviv-Barak and al. (2011), bilingual teaching does not suffice when the goal is to improve intergroup attitudes; in fact, it might only help preserve the inferior status of the minority group. To create the conditions that would allow for a

positive reformulation of the relationship between the groups would require the implementation of pedagogical components and educational approaches as an inseparable part of the process. Hence, the inclusion of bilingual children's literature in the curriculum may provide a valuable experience.

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Table 1. *The Effect of Working with a Bilingual Text — Defining One's Identity*

Effects of Bilingual Text	Statement	Means (All Participants)	Jewish Group	Arab Group	t
Defining One's Identity	I love living in Israel	4.4 ± 1.48	5.09 ± 1.07	3.84 ± 1.56	7.07***
	A bilingual story emphasizes my alienation	3 ± 1.5	2.26 ± 1.32	3.64 ± 1.34	-8.01***
	I feel connected to Israeli society	4.3 ± 1.6	5.39 ± 0.99	3.43 ± 1.53	11.75***
	If I could start life over, I would choose to be born somewhere else	2.6 ± 1.7	2.24 ± 1.59	2.93 ± 1.88	-3.02**
	I am considering emigrating from Israel	2.1 ± 1.35	1.91 ± 1.22	2.29 ± 1.44	2.17*-

Table 2. *The Effect of Working with a Bilingual Text — Developing Linguistic Awareness*

Effects of Bilingual Text	Statement	Means (All Participants)	Jewish Group	Arab Group	t
	I like speaking Arabic	4 ± 2.12	2.05 ± 1.32	5.66 ± 0.97	-24.84***
	In Israel, it is important to know Arabic	4.4 ± 1.35	44.04 ± 1.29	4.74 ± 1.32	-4.20***
	In Israel, it helps to know Arabic	4.4 ± 1.27	4.23 ± 1.06	4.57 ± 1.41	-2.07*
	In Israel, Arabic has a strong political influence	3.8 ± 1.3	3.61 ± 1.08	3.97 ± 1.32	-2.15**

Figure 1. *Story—Language Levels: From Perception to Applicability*