

## **Russian-speaking Israelis: Paradoxes of identity in the mirror of language use**

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Russian is the third most spoken language in Israel after Hebrew and Arabic although it has no official status. In the country where elimination of the use of diaspora languages was the cornerstone of the language policy, Russian-speaking immigrants of the 1990s were the first group that openly insisted on the maintenance of the language of the home-country. This paper explores changes in the status and function of the Russian language in Israel in the last 30 years. Due to a more tolerant attitude to multilingualism and the necessity to accommodate various needs of newcomers, Israeli establishment did not prevent the growing use of Russian in the public sphere.

Relying on the monitoring of Russian-Israeli Internet sites, interviews and participant observation, I will discuss controversies in Israel's language policy, tensions accompanying the presence of the Russian language on the political arena, in education and in the workplace. In the period of intense commodification of language, competent bilingual individuals are viewed as an asset for the country's economy and Russian proficiency is in demand on the job market, in particular in such language-intensive domains as legal services, advertising and tourism. Russian-speaking Israelis are also mobilized by government organizations as agents of cultural diplomacy. However, attitudes to the Russian language and culture among Russian-speaking Israelis themselves are highly controversial and often spark heated debates about loyalties and belonging. Concerns about Middle-Eastern politics and Israel's security situation make some immigrants apprehensive of Russia's role in the regional conflicts, which transfers political fears to the rejection of Russian culture and values.