

LANGUAGE AND POLITICS IN MODERN PALESTINE

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ABSTRACT

The struggle for Palestine between Arabs and Zionists has not been only political and military in nature, but linguistic as well. The paper traces the history of this neglected aspect of the struggle for Palestine and shows clearly that the political gains made by Zionism at the expense of Palestine Arabs were matched by corresponding gains made by Hebrew at the expense of Arabic. The historical facts concerning this matter are studied and analyzed in sociolinguistic terms.

Ben Yehuda (1858-1922), a Russian Jew who came to Palestine towards the end of the last century, is generally credited with starting the movement which eventually led to the revival of Hebrew. His major contribution is seen to have been the introduction of Hebrew in the Jewish educational system in Palestine. This was such an important step that by 1910 the revival movement was considered a success. After World War I, the Hebrew University and other Jewish institutions of higher education were established in Palestine and they all adopted Hebrew as their language of instruction.

Under the British mandate, Zionism made substantial gains in Palestine the most important of which was securing the Balfour Declaration in 1917. On the linguistic front, Hebrew scored a similar major victory when in 1922 it was made one of three official languages in Palestine, the other two being Arabic and English.

Palestine remained officially trilingual until 1948 when the Zionist

state of Israel was established and a law was issued abolishing the official status of English. Thus, theoretically at least, Arabic and Hebrew are still equally official languages in the country. But how equal are they in fact? A detailed and well documented examination of the status of Arabic in Israel shows unequivocally that it is much inferior to that of Hebrew. This situation did not arise accidentally but has been a natural result of Zionist ideology and of the policy pursued by the Israeli government towards Arabic and its speakers. The paper thus provides ample evidence for the thesis that the language question in Palestine cannot be viewed separately from the political question since the battle for Hebrew was always more of a political than a linguistic issue. Towards the end of the paper, it is argued that linguistic inequality, reflected by the different positions enjoyed by Arabic and Hebrew, is but a reflection of political and socio-economic inequality between the speakers of the two languages.

Language is of profound political importance and, hence, the centrality of language in the political life of any community or group hardly needs to be underscored. Language has often been a major component of nationality and nationalism and, consequently, has played a decisive role in the development of nationalistic movements as well as in the formation of new nations and the creation of new political entities. What gives language an added force is that, in addition to its being a major element in nationalism, it is also incorporated into other elements of nationality and national feeling such as literature and educational institutions. In view of these facts, it is something of a surprise to discover that in the vast literature which has been written on Palestine, very little attention has been given to the question of "linguistic Politics" (Friedrich, 1975:231) or "Political linguistics" (Hertzler, 1965:285), a sub-discipline of sociolinguistics concerned with the linguistic struggle which accompanies or precipitates political struggle, and with the political implications of language. Seen in this light, the struggle for Palestine, as will become clear in the course of this paper, has been a struggle between Arabic and Hebrew as much as it has been a struggle between Palestinian Arabs and Zionist Jews.

In this paper I shall examine the battle between the Hebrew and Arabic languages in Palestine since the rise of the Zionist movement in the last quarter of the nineteenth century until the present. It is hoped that this examination will reveal the close and intricate relationship between linguistic and political questions in the history of modern Palestine.

Whereas Arabic remained the chief and dominant language in Palestine from approximately the time of the Arab conquest in the seventh century A.D. until 1948, Hebrew ceased to play any significant role in the life of the country, and even ceased to be a living spoken language, since about 200 A.D. after the Romans had occupied Jerusalem and destroyed the second temple. About a century ago, however, a movement seeking to revive Hebrew as a living spoken language was started by Eliezer Ben Yehuda (1858-1922), a Russian Jew who, under the impact of European nationalism, realized the strong connection between linguistic and national revival (Rabin, 1973:67-68).

Certain myths and exaggerated stories have developed around Ben Yehuda and the revival movement which are often exploited for propagandistic purposes. The revival of Hebrew is sometimes presented by the propagandists as another showpiece of the miraculous achievement of Zionism. It is not my intention or purpose here to dispel such myths and exaggerations. Suffice it to say that Hebrew never died completely as a spoken language as it continued to be used by Jews as a language of prayer and worship, and as a *lingua franca* among Jews from different countries who spoke different languages. Hebrew also continued to be used to write a massive religious and secular literature throughout the ages. Long before the revival movement, there were also many periodicals published in Hebrew in different parts of the world. Ben Yehuda himself made use of such a periodical published in Vienna to publicize his views on the necessity for reviving Hebrew. Thus, before the revival, Hebrew was spoken, read, and written by a great many Jews all over the world. The revival had and succeeded in achieving a limited objective, namely, to re-establish Hebrew as a mother tongue since those Jews who spoke it before the revival always acquired it as a second or foreign, not a native, language.

Was there any connection between the movement to revive the Hebrew language and the Zionist movement? The answer is unreservedly

positive and the evidence for this is not lacking. Ben Yehuda himself made it clear on several occasions that Zionism and the love of Hebrew and the desire to revive it were closely connected. Indeed, he was the first Zionist ideologist to state the "connection between Jewish national revival and Hebrew speech" (Rabin, 1973:68). On the basis of this fact, it is safe to conclude that 'linguistic Zionism' antedates political Zionism (cf. Fellman, 1973:15-16).

Ben Yehuda made his first appeal for the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language in his famous article 'A Weighty Question' which he published in a Hebrew periodical in Vienna in 1879. In that article we find the linguistic and political aspects of Zionism spelled out for the first time. Ben Yehuda restated his position more succinctly in the introduction to his monumental *Hebrew Language Dictionary* where he tells us how he came to the conclusion that "just as the Jews cannot really become a living nation other than through their return to the land of the Fathers, so too, they are not able to become a living nation other than through their return to the language of the Fathers" and how he finally realized that "without two things Jews could not become a nation, and these were: the land and the language" (quoted in Saulson, 1979:16-17).

It is interesting to compare Ben Yehuda's position with that of political Zionism. Hertzl's *Judenstaat* appeared in 1895, i.e., sixteen years after Ben Yehuda's above mentioned article. Yet, in his book, Hertzl flatly rejected the idea of reviving Hebrew and making it the official language of the proposed state, rhetorically asking, "who amongst us knows enough Hebrew to buy a railway ticket?" (quoted in Rabin, 1973:69). It was, no doubt, Hertzl's influence which made the Zionist Organization ignore for many years the place of Hebrew in the movement and to avoid any mention of language in *The Programme* formulated by the First Zionist Congress held at Basle in 1897.

History, however, was on Ben Yehuda's side and proved his brand of Zionism to be more viable. The incessant and hard work of Ben Yehuda and his associates contributed to the gradual revival of Hebrew as a spoken language. Their success in introducing Hebrew into the educational system of the Jewish community in Palestine and the use of Hebrew as the language of instruction in that system was perhaps the most crucial factor in the success of the revival movement. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the success of the revival movement was no longer in question and all Zionists were now ready not

only to accept it, but to defend it and fight for it.

With the early success of the revival movement, political Zionism and linguistic Zionism became one integrated movement just as they had been originally conceived by Ben Yehuda. From now on, the Zionist movement fought for Hebrew as staunchly as it fought for any other aspect of Zionist ideology. As early as 1911 we find a leading Zionist educationist in Palestine writing in an attempt to justify the use of Hebrew as a medium of instruction, but the substance of his arguments is hardly educational:

The language of instruction in the Jewish schools of Palestine must be only Hebrew... the national regeneration of our people in the land of our history can only begin with the revivifying of our language...

But purely from motives of practical pedagogy, it is equally certain that only Hebrew can serve as the language of instruction. Only Hebrew can overcome the confusion of languages under which Palestinian Jewry, collected from all parts of the world, is suffering, expel the numerous corrupt dialects which are not capable of a cultural development, and fuse into one homogeneous people the children of Lithuania, Poland, Roumania,... etc. Only the Hebrew language can in Palestine supply the natural soil for the intellectual and moral training of the younger generation... (Thon, 1911:89-90).

In a similar vein, a pamphlet entitled 'Concerning the War of Languages in the Land of Israel', published in Berlin in 1914 by the Zionist Central Office of publication, stated categorically that "one looks upon the victory of the Hebrew language as *a typical political phenomenon* which, along with its establishment and influence, must be taken note of in the days ahead" and that "in our present approach to create Hebrew speaking schools in our ancestral land, we have assumed, *not just educational, pedagogical work, but also a grand political mission* the results of which are important to all branches of our work in the East" (quoted in Saulson, 1979:9-10; emphasis added).

A good illustration of the political nature and significance of the revival of Hebrew is an incident which took place in Palestine in 1913. The incident, known as the 'Language War', was precipitated by a German Jewish organization which wanted to set up a technical school in Haifa in which the language of instruction would be German. This

announcement sparked angry demonstrations and strikes in the Jewish schools, and the whole project was thus foiled (for a more detailed account of the 'Language War' see Avidor, 1957:19). As Rabin (1973:75) puts it, it is hardly wrong to "consider the Language War episode as the first proof that indeed there had come into being in Palestine a Jewish nation, on a predominantly linguistic basis". Such is the primacy of language in the formation of nations and nationalities that Rabin's statement would not constitute an exaggeration. Additional support for this conclusion may be adduced from the fact that before the advent of Zionism and before an association had been established between Hebrew and Zionist political ideology, the traditional Jewish schools (*heder*) in Palestine used Yiddish, Ladino, or even Arabic as languages of instruction with Biblical Hebrew taught as a school subject. Other Jewish schools used as a medium of instruction the language of the agency sponsoring the school (usually German, French, English, or Russian). A change in this situation was brought about by Zionist ideology, and language was a crucial factor in the success of this ideology which made Hebrew the language of instruction in all Jewish schools in Palestine.

The Language War of 1913 settled once and for all the language question within the Jewish community in Palestine, but the war of languages in the country as a whole was to continue for some time to come. As far as the Jewish community was concerned, there was no doubt after the Language War as to what the language of the future state would be. Therefore, when the Hebrew University was inaugurated in Jerusalem in 1925, it was taken for granted that Hebrew would be the language of instruction at this university (Bentwich, 1961:3-14, 23-25, 160-161). Again, that the decision to make Hebrew the language of instruction in the schools and at the university was a political decision rather than an educational one becomes obvious from two well known incidents in Palestinian education under the British Mandate.

The first incident involved a proposal made in 1922 by the British authorities to establish a British university in Jerusalem for the people of Palestine. The idea was rejected and strongly resisted by the Jews on the grounds that the proposed university "was to teach through a medium other than Hebrew and because it was to spread a culture other than the Jewish" (Tibawi, 1956:123).

The second incident arose when attempts were made in 1931 to open an agricultural school for both Arabs and Jews in Palestine. The project

was to be financed by an endowment made by Sir Ellis Kadouri who, in the early twenties, bequeathed some £ 100,000 for the purpose. As envisaged by the Director of Education in Palestine, the proposed school was to teach in Arabic to Arab students and in Hebrew to Jewish students during the first part of the course. During the second part, English was proposed as the medium of instruction for both groups. Arab and Jewish students of the school were also to carry out the same practical work and to share the same dining and sleeping facilities. This plan, approved by the High Commissioner Sir Herbert Samuel, was rejected by the Zionist Executive who objected fiercely to sending Jewish children to a school "in which Jews were not taught in Hebrew throughout" (Tibawi, 1956:123-124). In the face of this Zionist resistance, the Mandate authorities had to give up their original plan and the result was two separate schools for the Arabs and the Jews

These two incidents are excellent illustrations of a well known sociolinguistic principle which stipulates that linguistic arguments are often invoked as pretexts to conceal something more profound. In the two incidents related above, there is little doubt that the real reason behind the Zionist rejection of the university and the agricultural school as proposed by the British authorities was an ideological rather than a linguistic one. The Zionists had long been planning and actively working for a Jewish state in which they wished to have no partners. There is at least one authority that believes the agricultural school incident belies Zionist claims in the desire of Arab-Jewish sharing in agricultural know-how (Zureik, 1979:44).

Nor did the British seem anxious to bring the Arab and Jewish communities in Palestine any nearer. The Mandate was in effect the government of the Arab community only whereas the Jewish community was virtually autonomous, particularly in the field of education. Thus, whereas the British authorities controlled the Arab schools and determined what should be taught in them, the Zionist Organization was left in complete control of the Jewish schools (Bentwich 1965, 21). In this way, the school system in Palestine "acquired some definite racial and linguistic characteristics" (Tibawi, 1956:27). It is hard to believe that such a situation could have arisen by accident and was not an integral part of the British plan to facilitate in every possible way the establishment of the Jewish national home embodied in the Balfour Declaration of 1917.

The British Mandate, however, was of some benefit to Arabic. Under Ottoman rule, Turkish had been the language of instruction in all but the

lower elementary government schools. Even Arabic was taught to Arab children through Turkish (Tibawi, 1926:19-20). When Britain replaced Turkey in Palestine at the end of World War I, Arabic was made the language of instruction in place of Turkish in the government-controlled schools. These schools catered mainly for the Muslim Arab community since the Jewish and Christian communities were given an almost free hand in running their own schools. This policy was apparently in pursuance of the British interpretation of Article 15, paragraph 2 of the Mandate for Palestine which was adopted by the League of Nations on July 24, 1922: "The right of each community to maintain its own schools for the education of its own children in its own language,..., shall not be denied or impaired". The unmistakable intention behind this article was the protection of foreign schools in the country, including those of the Zionist Organization. And it was as a result of this article that "the government schools in Palestine became in many respects practically Arab schools" (Stovansky, 1928:225; cf. also Tibawi, 1956:135).

It must have become abundantly clear by now that the language question in Palestine cannot be viewed separately from the political question, and vice versa. The British Mandate authorities did everything in their power to facilitate the establishment of a national Jewish home in Palestine as was promised by the Balfour Declaration. It was natural, therefore, that the Hebrew language should have shared in the gains made by political Zionism in Mandatory Palestine. When the Peace Conference in San Remo agreed in April 1920 to a British request to insert the Balfour Declaration in the peace treaty, the two co-presidents of the Hebrew Language Council in Palestine were quick to remark on the importance of this event for Hebrew. In a 'Memorandum to the Zionist Leadership' which they submitted in July 1920, they wrote: "There is no doubt about it that, from now on, the Hebrew language will be *one* of the dominant languages in Palestine in the general political sense, and the one and only dominant one among the Jews in their dealings with one another and with the British Government". They also estimated that the work of their Council in the future "needs to be increased sevenfold from what it is now to keep pace with the requirements of the language that will grow with the Balfour Declaration's beginning to take effect" (in Saulson, 1979:58-60).

In 1922, the same Ben Yehuda and Yellin, now co-presidents of the Hebrew Language College, which was a precursor of the Hebrew Language Academy, submitted another memorandum, this time to

Herbert Samuel, the British High Commissioner in Palestine. After pointing out the importance of Hebrew for the Jewish people and Zionism, and after reminding him of a promise he made during a conversation with Ben Yehuda to make Hebrew one of the 'governing' languages in Palestine, they express their hope that:

The day is near when the Hebrew language will become one having equal rights along with English and Arabic in the municipality and in the government offices from the highest to the lowest, on the trains and in the customs houses, in the post and telegraph, the police and courts, in official orders and government announcements, on ticket stubs and receipts, and on coins and stamps (quoted in Fisherman and Fishman, 1975:501).

The authors of the memorandum then proceed to propose the following to the High Commissioner (in Saulson, 1979:64-65):

1. The Hebrew language be utilized in all official texts even in localities where there are few Jews or no Jews at all for if, today, no Jews are there, tomorrow they will arrive.....
2. The Language College views as a national insult the place to which our language has been relegated – for the most part, *beneath* the two other languages – in as much as the country by international agreement, has been designated a National Home for the People of Israel. Therefore the Language College believes that the more appropriate focus is that given to the three languages in the official edition of the Royal Decree, where the three languages are not arranged one below the other but rather along-side one another.
3. ..., anything not classified secret or top priority should have its Hebrew translation submitted to the inspection of the Language College so that the translation might be approved in every respect of linguistic accuracy.

However, the first recorded attempt to make Hebrew an official language in Palestine was a memorandum submitted to the British Government in 1916 by the Zionist Organization. The memorandum requested that Hebrew in Palestine be made equal to Arabic and English in

every respect (Fisherman and Fishman, 1975:501).

Before the end of 1922 Hebrew was made one of the official languages in Palestine. The new position of Hebrew was embodied in Article 22 of the Mandate over Palestine: "English, Hebrew and Arabic will be the official languages in Palestine.. All Arabic notices or inscriptions on postal stamps or currency in Palestine must be repeated in Hebrew, and vice versa". In pursuance of the provisions of this Article, Article 82 of the Palestine Order in Council (the local legal code enforced by the mandatory authorities) states: "All ordinances, official notices and official forms of the Government and all official notices of local authorities and municipalities in areas to be prescribed by order of the High Commissioner, shall be published in English, Arabic and Hebrew. The three languages may be used in debates and discussions in the Legislative Council, and, subject to any regulations to be made from time to time, in the Government offices and the Law Courts". The article thus makes a distinction between central and local government in language matters (Stoyanovsky, 1928:258). The three languages must be used by the central authority whereas their use by the local authorities was to be prescribed by the High Commissioner who, at a later time, designated any area in which Jews constituted at least one fifth of the population as a trilingual area, i.e., an area in which Hebrew would be an official language besides Arabic and English.

There is little doubt that the Zionist ideology constantly guided and inspired the organized efforts and careful steps which transformed Hebrew from a half-dead language into one of the official languages of Palestine. The battle for Hebrew was more of a political than a linguistic one. Both the Zionists and the British worked hand in hand on the linguistic front as they did in the political and other fields. The British authorities admitted unequivocally that the recognition of Hebrew as an official language in Palestine was made "in pursuance of the establishment in that country of a national home for the Jewish people" (Papers presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, 1922:10; quoted in Stoyanovsky, 1928:259). Just as the Balfour Declaration and the British Mandate marked the active beginning of the loss of Palestine to Zionism, the recognition of Hebrew as an official language marked the actual beginning of a gradual process whereby Arabic began receding and Hebrew began gaining supremacy. In other words, the political and linguistic gains have been contemporaneous. The same type of arguments and maneuvers that were used to further Zionist political aims were employed to help assist Hebrew against Arabic and its speakers. The

following case will suffice as an illustration of this contention.

In accordance with the provisions of Article 22 of the **Mandate** (quoted above), all inscriptions on Palestinian stamps, money, and official documents and papers began to appear in the three official languages. The Hebrew inscription, however, was followed by the initial letters *alef-yod*, which are the initials of *Eretz Israel* (Land of Israel). The Arabs protested and in 1926, the Supreme Court of Palestine was asked for an injunction against the administration prohibiting the use of the above initials as being contrary to the provisions of Article 22. But the court, composed wholly of British jurists, was of the opinion that:

‘the form of the word Palestine in each language was a matter of administrative discretion’ and consequently refused to grant the injunction. Moreover, it could hardly be maintained that the words ‘repeated in Hebrew’ used in the above article 22 merely mean ‘repeated in Hebrew characters’; what was obviously meant is ‘repeated in the Hebrew language’. Palestine’ in Hebrew is, and has always been, called *Eretz-Israel* (Stoyanovsky, 1928:259).

The Executive Committee of the Palestine Arab Congress then petitioned the Permanent Mandates Commission in its ninth session with regard to the same issue. The British representative stated that the Palestine Administration had agreed to the Hebrew inscription on the ground that “the Hebrew name for” the country was the designation ‘Land of Israel’. The rapporteur of the Commission took the same view when he stated that the government had simply approved an ‘existing custom’ (Stoyanovsky, 1928:260).

It appears that Hebrew made even greater gains than those officially granted to it by the Mandate. A Syrian intellectual, who was later to become the president of the Damascus Arabic Language Academy, visited Palestine in 1922–1923. Upon his return to Damascus he wrote expressing his astonishment at the linguistic situation in Palestine. He observed how the standard of Arabic in the country was quite low, and expressed his bewilderment because all signs on shops and stores were written in English followed by Arabic then Hebrew. To make things worse, the English and Hebrew parts were written in a good script and beautiful calligraphy, whereas the Arabic part was written with ill-formed and badly shaped letters, let alone the numerous syntactic and spelling

mistakes of which he gives many appalling examples (Na'ouri 1979:145-146).

Palestine remained officially trilingual until 1948 when Israel was established. The only official change regarding linguistic legislation since that time has been the repeal of the status of English as an official language. Thus, Paragraph 15 (b) of the order of the Rules of Government and Law of 1948 states that "Any provision in the Law requiring the use of the English Language is repealed" (*Laws of the State of Israel I, 10*). Thus, theoretically at least, Israel has two official languages, Hebrew and Arabic. How equal or unequal are the two official languages?

Israel is, by definition, a Jewish state in which Arabic can never have a status equal to that of Hebrew in spite of all claims to the contrary. In fact, although the official status of English has been repealed by Israeli law and that of Arabic upheld, the actual everyday practice shows that English is second only to Hebrew in almost all spheres of life, from street signs to passports and university education. Arabic, on the other hand, has fallen into a neglected and, at times, suppressed minority language. In 1960, this feeling on the part of Arabs who still reside in Israel made a group of their dignitaries appeal to the President of the United Nations General Assembly. Their appeal was later published under the title *Violations of Human Rights in Israel* (Arab Information Center, New York, 1961). The authors of this appeal did not forget to include language in their list of complaints. After noting that "Little attention is paid to the teaching of the Arabic language and to the history of the Arabs" in Israel (P. 18), the appeal goes on to say (PP. 19-29):

(The Arabic) language disappeared from almost every government department. The official gazette in Hebrew appears punctually as soon as legislative enactments are promulgated, but the Arabic copy appears two or three months later... Communications addressed to the government in Arabic are left without reply for an inconsiderate period, and when answered the reply is usually sent in Hebrew which very few Arabs read or understand. Government forms which have to be filled up for one purpose or another are printed in Hebrew, and it is with great difficulty that an Arab can obtain a form in Arabic if it existed... statements of Arabs accused with criminal offences and of Arab witnesses are recorded... in Hebrew and the deponents are made to sign the Hebrew record although they do not know Hebrew.

The question regarding the status of Arabic in Israel has been repeatedly debated in the Israeli parliament and in the press (see Fisherman and Fishman, 1975:510 ff.). The following statement by Abdul Aziz Azzou'bi, M.P., addressed to the Knesset in 1966, testifies eloquently to the highly inferior position which Arabic holds in Israel (in Fisherman and Fishman, 1975:514-515):

We are concerned with one of the most important requests of all the Arabs in the State, whose number approximates 300,000, an issue which reflects the attitude of the State to these citizens and their language. All nations are proud of their language and love it and we also love our language and are proud of it and will not give it up...

Every Arab can submit a legal claim and appear before the court at any level in Arabic; but for routine and practical purposes our language is disappearing from use, something which offends the right and honor of these citizens and educates the Jewish citizens negatively and even negates the respect for Arabs among them,.... Why must an Arab citizen run from attendant to attendant in the central bus station in Tel-Aviv when thousands of Arab citizens pass through it each week, in order to find out where the bus to Nazareth or Ramla waits? Why isn't there even one Arabic word in the Tel-Aviv train station, nor in Haifa either, to denote the timetable of the trains...? Why are all the signs which direct and show him to behave in the Dan buses written in Hebrew and English only...? Why can't an Arab send a telegram from the telegraph office in Tel-Aviv in Arabic, except in Hebrew Latin letters,...? More serious than all this is the sad fact that the Arabic language is disappearing from the scene throughout the country, from its highways and streets, entrance to Arab villages. Tens of approach roads which were paved to Arab villages bear no sign in Arabic. By the direction of an adviser a beautiful, large sign was set up at the entrance and exit of Nazareth with Hebrew and Latin letters. Members of the Knesset, this is a gross insult, whether intentional or not, to the feelings and honor of the Arab citizens of the State. There is no doubt that this fact does not promote understanding between the two peoples.

The insult to Arabic and its speakers in Israel is not limited to those

places where it is totally absent, but extends to other areas where its presence is merely symbolic. Thus the only word in Arabic script which appears on Israeli coins and stamps is the word 'Israel'. And even this single word is written in such poor calligraphy the like of which would not be seen in comparable places anywhere in the Arab countries. It is also often the case that there is a lot more English than Arabic on, say, an Israeli postal stamp. Thus, on stamps issued to commemorate certain occasions, the occasion is usually stated in Hebrew and English, but never in Arabic.

The status of Arabic as an official language still derives from Article 22 of the Mandate and the subsequent Article 82 of the Palestine Order in Council. But this status is as shaky and uncertain as the status of the Palestinians who are claimed to be citizens of Israel. Neither the Palestinians nor their language enjoy anything like the equality which they are claimed to have with the Jewish citizens and their language. The Israeli leaders are not even apologetic about the fact that their state is a Jewish one as "indicated by the Law of Return and by the Hebrew Language" (Ben Gurion quoted in Fisherman and Fishman, 1975:508). Some knowledge of Hebrew, but not Arabic, is required by the Israeli citizenship law as a condition for becoming a citizen of Israel. In case any doubt remains with regard to the assertion that Arabic and Hebrew are not, and in fact cannot be equal in Israel, it is dispelled by the Israeli legal authorities. In a case which involved an Arab citizen in the 1950s, the defendant complained that certain announcements had not been published in Arabic, which is an official language according to the law. This complaint was rejected by two lower courts and the defendant appealed to the High Court. At the appeal, the relieving president of the court stated, "I am convinced that one can no longer demand the publication of the announcements in Arabic, as this is a change to which the by-laws are subject following the establishment of the state". And the Chief Justice asserted, "it is true that we are not prepared to listen to the claim which comes from the appellant nor to his reason, that the announcement about the decision of the city council had to be published in Arabic too.... It is doubtful if an obligation such as this even exists today..." (Fisherman and Fishman, 1975:519).

The inferior position of Arabic can be seen even more vividly in the educational system. Here, it can be easily seen that the authorities have done everything in their power to undermine the position of Arabic. In the first place, Hebrew is an obligatory subject in all, including Arab

schools, but Arabic is an optional subject in Jewish schools and with a status much inferior to that of English. English is an obligatory language in all schools in Israel from the fifth year onward. In the ninth year students in the literary stream are permitted to choose a second foreign language, the usual options being Arabic and French. Arabic, however, is selected by so few students that their number hardly shows up in the statistics (Kleinberger, 1969:322). By contrast, all Arab schools must teach Hebrew from the third year onward. Moreover missionary schools catering for Arab students only are “not obliged to teach in Arabic, but may use their own language as medium of instruction” (Kleinberger, 1969:310). And whereas Hebrew schools are open to Arab children, Jewish children may not attend Arab schools. Finally, Arabic is not used as the language of instruction except in Arab schools run by the State, whereas Hebrew is used in all institutions of higher education. It is easy to imagine the tremendous disadvantages at which Arab school graduates are put as a result of this policy. The following table (based on Zureik, 1979:158) shows the total number of hours devoted in the Israeli syllabus to Hebrew and Arabic in the arts and science streams of Arab and Jewish schools.

		Jewish schools	Arab schools
Hebrew	Arts	768	512
	Science	608	512
Arabic	Arts	000	824
	Science	000	824

It is instructive to know that in June 1972 the Israeli Ministry of Education announced a decision to make spoken Arabic compulsory in all schools from the sixth grade onward. One year later, Yigal Allon, the then Minister of Education and Culture, announced that the plan had been dropped “due to the already over-crowded curriculum and absence of the necessary personnel” (Fishman and Fishman, 1978:261, footnote 28).

A word should be said in this context about Arabic literature in Israel. Whereas the Jewish writers have their own union which receives grants from the government, the Arab writers have no such sponsorship

available to them and, until 1972, were even denied membership of the Hebrew Writer's Union under the pretext that the Hebrew Union was for writers in Hebrew only. This is another instance of a linguistic argument being used to justify a policy the sole purpose of which is to discriminate against the Arab writers in order to isolate and exclude them. How else can one interpret this argument when one knows that some Arab writers, like the late Rashid Husain, did in fact write in Hebrew at times yet were denied membership of the Union, whereas some Jewish members of the Union never write in Hebrew, but in Yiddish or some other language (Zureik, 1979:183)? It is significant to know that the recommendation made in 1972 to admit Arab writers to the Union was made on the grounds of "political advisability" (Fishman and Fishman, 1978:130).

That Arabic, in spite of its official status in theory, is much inferior to the other official language, Hebrew, is not a matter for disputation. Being the language of an unwanted minority, Arabic is also unwanted and oppressed. Here, then, is another good case of linguistic inequality being merely a reflection of political and socio-economic inequality and of the power structure within society. The language of those who are politically weak, socially inferior, and economically deprived, those who, in other words, can at best be second class citizens, cannot be but a second class language. Linguistic and socio-political boundaries in a given society usually coincide and the Israeli society is no exception:

Because of the centrality of language in group integration and maintenance, it has often been a bone of contention between majority and minority nationalities and nationalistic groups within a country. Language is usually the first object of attack on the part of a political power which is seeking to suppress the individuality of the rising cultural and political consciousness of a suppressed or minority people, seeking to denationalize them. The dominant majority... tries to extinguish the language of the subject people.... (Hertzler, 1965:237-238).

In the final part of this paper, I shall present evidence to substantiate the claim that the popular and official Israeli attitude to Arabic is largely negative and, at times, suppressive.

A good illustration of this negative attitude is provided by the following incident in which an Arab citizen and a Canadian visitor were involved (Lehn, 1980:6):

On one occasion I was riding with a Palestinian journalist in his car. He is a resident of East Jerusalem, and he was showing me around his city. At one point,..., he made a wrong turn. As soon as he had completed the turn, he realized that he was heading the wrong direction in a one-way street. He stopped immediately and started to back up, whereupon a traffic officer blew her whistle and he stopped. She came over to the car and spoke to him in Hebrew; he responded in English, apologizing for his inability to speak Hebrew... The officer then asked for the registration of the vehicle.... She then told him that he had made a wrong turn. He responded that he realized he had and apologized for having done so, noting that the change to oneway had been made only a few days ago (.....) and that the sign to this effect was in Hebrew only which he could not read. Her response was that Jerusalem is an Israeli city, and that Israelis speak Hebrew (.....). Why had he not learned Hebrew? (I wondered if she knew that Arabic was also an official language in Israel and that, in any case, we were in occupied East Jerusalem).

Israeli publications addressed to tourists make no mention of Arabic and inform prospective visitors, proudly and unequivocally, that the "tongue of Israelis is Ivrit (Hebrew), although hotel staff, shop assistants and most people that you will meet on the street do speak English. In all cities and on highways, signs are in both Hebrew and English". (*Israel Holidays*, London, October 1979-April 1980:16).

Long before the State of Israel had been established, European Jews made it abundantly clear that just as they wanted a Palestine free from Arabs, they also wanted it free from Arabic. Commenting on the vocabulary lists of the Language Council, the first Hebrew language 'academy', Jacob Fichman wrote the following in 1910 (in Saulson, 1979:143):

What has been chosen from our literature, etc., has been chosen with good taste; however I am certain that our language will not digest the new names of palants, especially those which have been taken from the Arabic language. They will be like atrophied limbs. Despite the fact that the Arabic language is our sister language in the family of Semitic languages, it has no foundation or root in our psyche. One of the members of the Council rightly noted that the Arabic lan-

guage is precisely the language farthest from our spirit... our language is not comfortable in welcoming Arabic influence... Similarly, I do not understand why we have to coin words accepted by most of the languages of Europe, like *Constitution, Republik, Telefon*...

Fichman's article, from which the above quotation has been taken, is entitled 'Purity of the Language'. I think that it is clear from the quotation that Fichman's purpose was not to defend the purity of Hebrew as much as to attack Arabic Impurities and welcome European influences. We may note in passing that the leaders of political Zionism have always been anxious to associate themselves and their state with Europe and the West in general.

In addition to the political motives behind the arguments contained in Fichman's quotation, there is also a psychological one. Jews, particularly those coming to Palestine from European and Western countries, have always considered the Arabs inferior to themselves. "In culture the Jews are, as a rule, superior to the other elements of population" in Palestine (Yellin, 1911:155). This superiority complex has apparently passed to Jewish immigrants from the Arab countries who, we are told, "tend to discard Arabic as a language of communication" (Kornbluth and Aynor, 1973:19) "lest they be identified as belonging to immigrant groups of low prestige" (Herman, 1968:500). According to another source, "Many Jews dislike Arabic and readily drop it" (Hofman and Fisherman, 1972:353). Two separate field studies (Lambert et al., 1965 and Herman, 1968) have shown that Jewish students associate Arabic with low prestige and negative personality traits. On the official side, attempts have been made repeatedly by some Israeli M.P.s to eliminate the theoretically official status of Arabic (Fisherman and Fishman, 1975:504-507). The failure of these attempts, however, does not change the fact that mainly because of Zionist and Israeli ideology. "Even Arabic, a language officially protected and needed for very practical purposes, is largely being neglected if not curtailed... in the process of sociocultural and political-operational integration" (Fishman and Fishman, 1978:251). This is hardly surprising to anyone who is convinced that "the renaissance of Hebrew was the product of ideological endeavor" (Eisenstadt, 1967:36), and that the ideology which gave rebirth to Hebrew is one that is not tolerant of other ideologies or languages, least of all Arabic.

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