The Importance of Learning Hebrew for Integrating and Promoting the Arab Population in the Israeli Job Market

Shirli Marom

Language is Israeli Arab society's main barrier to employment. This article aims to highlight the necessity of this population's need to fully master the Hebrew language in order to integrate into the work force and advance in employment. It will survey active employment programs in Arab society which take language into account, and provide recommendations for the actions required to promote this issue.

Foreword: Defining the Problem and its Dimensions

"Investment is required in Arab human capital and in Arab education. The education of Arabs in Israel has a crucial influence on their employment status, in terms of salary, job market participation rate, and unemployment level and in terms of their professions and labor productivity. We recommend significantly increasing the investment in education for the Arab sector (which currently suffers from under investment), at all levels of education, starting from day-care and kindergartens and culminating in higher education... In addition, emphasis should be placed on content that will assist future integration

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into employment, such as bolstering their command of Hebrew and English and acquiring skills mandatory for hi-tech industries”.

(From the main recommendations of the Eli Hurvitz Conference on Integrating Arab Citizens into the Workforce, Nekuda 18, pp. 9-10).

Poor command of Hebrew is one of the main barriers to preventing the Arab population from integrating into the Israeli job market. Although the motivation to go out to work is personal, the barriers are often communal. The language barrier is not a cultural barrier for individuals within the community, but a barrier for the community as a whole, preventing many people in Arab society from going out to work.

Hebrew is a requirement for employment and an important component in successful entry into the job market, as it is necessary for communication in the work place. Insufficient command of Hebrew lowers self-confidence, causing job-seekers in the Arab sector to refrain from applying for certain positions. Most businesses in the Arab sector are family based, so someone who cannot find employment where they live must work in large factories where it is important to know Hebrew. In addition, Arab women without advanced degrees who do not speak Hebrew on a daily basis find it very difficult to find work. This is because call centers and retail chains – the type of work places they tend to end up in – require a command of Hebrew.

Another problem pertains to how Hebrew is taught in Arab society: the Hebrew taught in Arab schools is not colloquial but literary, and does not include everyday speech. The teaching system focuses on grammar more than on dialogue. Also, the level of knowledge required to pass the matriculation test in Hebrew is insufficient for actual mastery of the language and joining the modern work place. A different problem is that in some Arab seminaries and colleges which award bachelor degrees,
classes are conducted in Arabic, meaning that the students will not have mastered Hebrew when they graduate. This is different from studying in Jewish universities and colleges. It is not only a question of not knowing Hebrew, but also a cultural gap expressed in lack of familiarity with Israeli mentality, i.e., the "employers' language" in the general sense includes Jewish-Israeli culture and mentality. This culture often conflicts with Arab culture and values, such as modesty. As people in the Arab sector are exposed to the Jewish population their Hebrew improves, as does their understanding of modes of expression and intonations that are less acceptable in Arab society.

Beyond the knowledge gap there is also the issue of self-confidence. Using the language in practice in the manner accepted in Jewish society requires understanding the Jewish-Israeli population in addition to knowing the language. Examples include speaking in a self-confident manner; expressing a sense of self-worth; initiating speech and not only responding to questions, and in general having the "courage to speak.". Some of the women interviewed for this article pointed out that even if Arab women are fluent in Hebrew, they are afraid to speak. Additionally, because Hebrew is a foreign language, people from this population often have difficulty expressing themselves fully and clearly.

Added to these issues is the accent, which can also be an obstacle for Arab job seekers: it may be an impediment in the eyes of employers, trigger prejudices and value judgments and sometimes be a barrier to certain jobs.

This article will survey the various means employed to overcome the language barrier by employment programs geared to the Arab sector. Employment programs developed by TEVET (Hebrew acronym for Impetus for Employment), JDC-Israel's employment initiative, aim to deal with the barriers that stand in the way of integrating the Arab sector into the workforce. This will be followed by recommendations for
further action to promote the issue of Hebrew within Arab society in the context of employment.

Before I joined the guidance centers I thought there were some employment barriers to integrating Arabs into the Israeli job market, but I always considered Hebrew to be a less significant barrier. Today, after almost a year and a half in this position, I can wholeheartedly say – this is THE barrier. Arab high school graduates can't speak Hebrew. I once thought they had difficulty with it, today I understand that it is an actual lack of knowledge. The Jewish population in Israel isn't rushing to learn Arabic; although it is an official state language, most of the population doesn't understand Arabic. Therefore I see no solution but to include the Hebrew language on the agenda of Arab society.

[Nibras Taha, Director of the Tira Vocational Guidance Cente]

Command of Hebrew in Arab society – Data

I am continually surprised by the extent to which the Arab people who live here don't speak Hebrew. I had to learn Hebrew, because I was born in the village of Mazra'a, and I had to speak Hebrew to take the bus, buy clothes, visit the doctor. When I enrolled at university for my bachelor's degree, I understood that in most sectors of Arab society, high school graduates don't speak Hebrew.

Safa Garb, Division Director of Arab Society and Infrastructure, TEVET

The following data are from a 2011 social survey conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics regarding command and use of Hebrew among the Arabic-speaking Israeli population:

- 98% of the Arab population speak Arabic at home, 4% speak Hebrew at home, as well;
- 79% of those employed speak Arabic at work, but only 20% speak only Arabic at work;
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- 79% of those employed speak Hebrew at work, 16% speak only Hebrew at work;
- Good command of Hebrew is more typical of those with high incomes than those with low incomes. Among Arabs with relatively low incomes (up to 2,000 NIS gross income per person in household), the percentages of those with a good mastery of spoken Hebrew and the ability to read Hebrew (at the level of "good" or "very good"), is 53% - 55% respectively. Among those with high incomes, the percentage is above 90%.
- Command of Hebrew and employment: the employment rate changes according to the level of command of Hebrew. Among those whose command of Hebrew is "very good" in all areas examined – writing, reading, speech and comprehension – 82% are employed. As the command of Hebrew decreases so does the employment rate, especially among those who have difficulty with speech and comprehension. Among those who barely understand or speak Hebrew, or who do not understand or speak it at all, only about 30% are employed. Among those whose command of reading and writing is weak, about half are employed.

Not knowing the language is a major obstacle to integrating Arab women into the Jewish job market. Many women are not required to speak any Hebrew in their daily lives, even though they studied it in school. As a result, they are unable, or fearful of, communicating in Hebrew (Abu-Asba et al, 2011). According to King et al (2009), Arab women exhibit greater ability to read and write Hebrew than speak it. This is because they learn Hebrew in school as a foreign language, but do not practice speaking it. According to researchers, this disadvantage is a barrier only if the aim is to integrate them into employment in Jewish society.

This research examined the effect of several factors on Arab women's participation in the work force. It was found that education has
the most influence on Arab women’s chances of employment. Research shows that 52% of unemployed Arab women cannot speak Hebrew, including 44% of the younger women, who are better educated. Some 50% cannot read or write Hebrew, including some 40% of the younger women. Almagor-Lotan points to the fact that lack of command of Hebrew greatly limits the ability of these women to find work outside of Arab society. In addition to integration into work places in Jewish society, this includes their ability to participate in vocational courses that are not adapted to the Arab population (Almagor-Lotan, 2009).

According to King and Ra’anan (2011), most unemployed Bedouin men ascribe their difficulty in finding work to the fact that they are unskilled, while Bedouin women are not as disturbed by being unskilled. The women tend to be more concerned that their education and command of Hebrew are insufficient. One of the barriers noted by researchers was the Hebrew language. Among the characteristics typical of job seekers who have difficulty integrating into the work force is lack of command of Hebrew, which is a major obstacle. Additionally, because Bedouin women have fewer computer skills and less command of Hebrew than Bedouin men, they make less use of the internet and newspapers in Hebrew to seek jobs. Therefore, the main obstacle to Bedouin women’s going out to work is their lack of education, lack of diplomas testifying to education and lack of Hebrew.

All those interviewed for this paper were in agreement regarding the Hebrew level of Arab high-school graduates: even students who had completed a 5-unit level matriculation in Hebrew are incapable of holding a conversation in Hebrew. This is because they have little practice in using the language. As one of the interviewees said: “They aren’t having difficulty – they just don’t know the language; they know English better than they do Hebrew.” Communication between Arab youth and Israelis in institutes of higher education is negligible and random, and there
is almost no contact between Jewish and Arab youth in high school. Language is a means of communication, and since they feel that Israeli society is not accessible to young Arabs, this situation is deteriorating. In Bedouin settlements in the South, where the percentage of those eligible for matriculation is the lowest in the country, the situation is even worse.

Hebrew is a very important topic, because the job market is mostly run by Jewish employers, and Arab employers also want to reach the Jewish consumer market. Although women comprise the main population in employment programs, this is true for men as well. The variant is mostly geographical location: in places where daily contact with Jewish society and businesses is greater, Hebrew language is more in use.

[Umayma Diab, vocational training counselor in the Arab sector]

**The Hebrew Language in Arab Employment Programs – Overview**

The directors of Arab sector employment programs noted a few ways of dealing with the above difficulties in response to questions raised in Almagor-Lotan's research (2009). Among these is job training tailored to Arab participants – developing suitable content in Arabic and adapting the content of employment preparation courses to the Arab job market. In parallel, in light of the Arab applicants' difficulty in Hebrew, one training component in the various programs will be a workshop teaching job-oriented Hebrew.

**Job-oriented Hebrew**

A job-oriented Hebrew course is intended to enrich the participants' knowledge of Hebrew while emphasizing terms vital to the work place. The basic assumption is that learning a language in an employment context is more relevant to the participants, therefore they will learn it
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better; the connection between Hebrew and employment is therefore self-evident. In employment programs, the job-oriented Hebrew course usually takes place over 10 – 12 meetings, each lasting three academic hours (30-36 hours total), and with some 20 participants in each group.

Useful and correct professional Hebrew is taught in the course, including Hebrew employment terms (see Appendix A). The course aims to equip participants with the ability and confidence to use the language as part of the process of becoming familiar with the world of employment, job searching, and integrating into a work setting. The course is based on the belief that vocational Hebrew is vital for entering the Israeli job market. Course subjects include: viewing employment as a value; looking for jobs; appropriate behavior during interviews; body language; matching employer and employee interests; how to be a working mother; how to succeed in a job and get ahead.

The course also serves as a vocational screening tool. During the course, the instructors evaluate the participants’ abilities, skills and the obstacles they face. This is in order to understand each participant’s employment potential, weaknesses and strengths (from a report written by Leena Abu Diba, instructor of courses in vocational Hebrew).

**The Idit Program**

The Idit program, conducted in Sakhnin from 2008 -2010, combined education with employment. The program aimed to create significant changes in the lives of Arab families in distress living in the periphery, and engender positive social mobility. Specifically, this program was offered to mothers seeking employment, and included a course to complete 12 years of schooling and vocational training, with the latter adapted to the needs of the group and the job market, taking into account the requirements of young mothers who join the work force.
A 50-hour course in vocational Hebrew was provided for participants learning office management and infant education in order to improve their language skills. The aim of the course was to strengthen the women's command of Hebrew, with emphasis on job market content that could assist integration and promotion in the workplace (Hassan-Daher, 2012).

The Atida Program

Atida is a program for Arab women who have completed 12 or more years of schooling. The project aspires to promote their integration into the Israeli job market in positions suited to their skills and ambitions, with fair and equitable job conditions. The project includes recruiting women and building a database of suitable employment candidates. The course is intensive and lasts two months (it includes a dynamic workshop, concentrated classes in Hebrew and computer use, and lectures on a variety of employment related topics). The course staff also contact employers and lay the groundwork for job placement. In addition, the course offers graduates individual and group counseling in the job search process and job integration.

Evaluation research was conducted during the first year of the program conducted in Nazareth. It was found that a low level of Hebrew was one of the main barriers to employment faced by the women (Sa'ar, 2011). Umayma Diab, a project instructor, noted that Hebrew was one of the major challenges, as Arabic and English are used more frequently in Nazareth than is Hebrew. As residents receive most services within the city there is no need to speak Hebrew on a daily basis, and it is therefore marginalized. This is a significant challenge for women who seek employment in the Jewish sector.

Initially, the program offered a 40-hour job-oriented Hebrew course. Later on, language instruction began operating on separate levels:
women who passed an entrance exam were ranked according to three levels. There was also a preparatory course for women whose level of Hebrew was very low. The preparatory course, and the course itself, were taught in Hebrew. The weakest group received a total of 100 study hours. In addition to job-oriented Hebrew, Atida also taught direct employment skills in Hebrew, such as writing CVs.

**Vocational Guidance Centers in the Arab Sector**

The government decided to establish vocational guidance centers for the Arab sector during 2010 – 2012, opening a total of 20 such centers throughout the country. On the individual level, the approach at the center is holistic, and involves taking into account all aspects of the individual's life with a focus on employment capabilities. Activities include imparting "soft skills", such as vocational guidance and consulting; preparation for independent job searching; preparation for job interviews and screening workshops; assistance with job integration; supporting and counseling employees to prevent their dropping out and help them towards promotion. Also offered are "hard skills", such as learning job-oriented English, job-oriented Hebrew, and computer skills and so on.

All vocational centers deal with the issue of language. Training provided to those attending the centers almost always includes Hebrew, stemming from the understanding that a reasonable level of Hebrew is crucial for integrating the Arab sector into the work force. Triple training – Hebrew, computers and soft skills – is usually a basic requirement for all those who register at the centers, regardless of the specific jobs they seek. position. Most of the job seekers applying to the centers are women.

During the first year of its operation, the vocational training center in Tira offered a 40-hour job-oriented Hebrew course focusing on vocabulary relevant for a typical, entry-level, worker. All participants had the same
level of education, and the course was conducted entirely in Hebrew by a Jewish teacher. Later on, the courses were taught by an Arab teacher. The goal was to teach graduates to write a resume in Hebrew; interview for a job in Hebrew; learn relevant vocabulary. It was decided that a 40-hour course was insufficient, and it was also recommended to adapt the course to specific occupations, i.e., first the place of employment needed to be located and a relevant employee candidate population identified. The next step was to improve job-oriented Hebrew language skills for this specific work setting.

**Online Courses**

**Open Door Project – from Education to Employment**

The Open Door website (http://opendoor.cet.ac.il) is the result of a collaboration between TEVET and the Jewish Agency’s absorption database, the Ministry of Education’s Adult Education unit and the Center for Educational Technology (CET). The website is part of TEVET’s plan to integrate new immigrants into Israel’s work force. It was initially intended for immigrants from Ethiopia who had varying levels of education.

The website aims to teach and strengthen Hebrew, focusing on content from the job market that will help integrate and promote immigrants from Ethiopia in the work place. Through the activities and texts offered on the site, users acquire job search tools; prepare for interviews; encounter various work situations and become familiar with terms common in the Israeli employment market. The work experience, literacy and culture of the immigrants were taken into consideration when developing the site, which was also tailored to their level of language learning.

Assif (2008) says the idea of developing a technology-rich study environment stemmed from the realization that vocational training entails teaching the candidate employee to use technological tools common in
the Israeli work place. An interactive site offers user-friendly familiarity with advanced technology; computer experience and practice; Hebrew practice and the opportunity to learn phrases, customs and norms of employment.

Leena Abu-Diba, a program employment enabler in the Eshet Chayil-Ra’ida program described below, uses the Open Door website during job-oriented Hebrew courses she conducts among the Arab population. She used the site to determine which topics her course should focus on and constructed the course accordingly. She incorporated video clips from the site, despite the difficulties caused by the fact that the site is not in Arabic and was set up for the Ethiopian community. Leena adapted the site content to Arab women, and the discussions of dilemmas from the world of employment are adapted to Arab society.

Five years ago I built a model for teaching job-oriented Hebrew specifically for Eshet Chayil-Ra’ida groups in Arab society, and these were upgraded over time. The goal of the program was to provide the women’s group with vocational guidance: we discussed employment in Hebrew with regard to terms, content and so on; used simple and correct Hebrew suited to today’s job market; acquired abilities and life skills necessary for integration into employment such as interviewing and writing a CV. The method is based on learning basic, fluent Hebrew, because language is a serious obstacle even for high-school and BA graduates.

[Leena Abu-Diba, employment enabler, Eshet Chayil –Ra’ida program, TEVET]

**Eshet Chayil - Ra’ida**

Originally this website was part of the Eshet Chayil program developed by JDC to integrate women of the Ethiopian community into the work force and prevent them from dropping out. Since the program components can be adapted to a variety of target populations, TEVET
decided to implement it among men and women in other sectors. The program was adapted for the Arab sector in 2006, where it is called Ra‘ida. Evaluation of the program in the Arab sector identified difficulties in placing participants in employment as a result of four specific categories of characteristics unique to this sector: lack of education, lack of Hebrew, lack of work experience, and difficult health situation (Hassan-Daher and Shtrosberg, 2011).

**The "Together with Employers" Courses**

Some employers, especially in fields of media and teleprocessing, place emphasis on the Hebrew language as part of their vocational training process. In Babcom, Ltd. for example, potential candidates attend a preparatory course that includes Hebrew classes (although participants are not guaranteed a job). Many interviewees noted that businesses interested in hiring employees from the Arab sector must realize that the screening, absorption and integration process must be modified slightly for this sector. This is especially true in the case of employers who would like to hire a large number of employees.

The Umm al-Fahm vocational guidance center has partnered with teleprocessing companies which hire operators. According to the center’s director:

"Our recruitment has become more goal-oriented: we hire people who have already shown greater command of the language during the screening process. Additionally, the workplace in itself has become a place to learn language: learning through experience",

*Ahad Mahajna, director of the Umm al-Fahm vocational training center*
The Rian Program: a Regional Program to Promote Employment among the Bedouin of the Negev

The primary goal of the Rian program for promoting employment among the Bedouin population of the Negev is to integrate them into the work force by responding to all aspects of the employment challenge. The program's liaison team is composed of Bedouin professionals who are familiar with opportunities, obstacles and requirements in the Israeli employment world. The program focuses on establishing multi-disciplinary employment centers in Bedouin settlements in the Negev where guidance from a regional team of experts is available. So far, regional headquarters have been established, as well as local centers in Hura, Segev-Shalom and Rahat.

The Rian program also partners with a number of employers:

• A customer service center was set up in the Bedouin settlement of Hora, on the ground floor of a mosque, in collaboration with Bezeq, Israel's largest telecommunications group. Mahmoud Al'amoor, director of the regional headquarters, says it was very difficult to find Bedouin women who could answer the phone in Hebrew. This led to the establishment of Hebrew courses in the center and a Bezeq preparatory course in Hebrew.

• A course for automated system operators opened this year in partnership with the ICL Corporation, the Manufacturer's Association and the Ministry of Economy, to provide solutions for the chemical industries. The course was spread over a five-day week and was conducted entirely in Hebrew. Although job-oriented Hebrew courses were mainly attended by women, this course enabled Arab men to attend a group, improve their Hebrew, and ultimately find a job (ICL tests were held at the end of the course). According to Rian program staff, cooperation between employer and program was
excellent: the course provided a solution for both Hebrew and job-oriented language while also involving the employer, who helped determine some of the content. All course participants received stipends.

Arabs must acquire the confidence to express themselves in Hebrew. Alongside the fear of speaking Hebrew lies the social-political aspect. My wish is for Hebrew to be taught by counselors who are able to identify barriers, such as political barriers, and deal with them.

Safa Garb, Division Director of Arab Society and Infrastructure, TEVET

**Personal Empowerment Courses**

There is a high percentage of unemployed women in many Arab settlements, almost all of whom lack a high-school diploma. It was clear that most of them would like to work, but do not know how to find employment and have never worked outside the home. All the unemployed women reported a difficult financial situation and blamed their unemployment on external factors, such as: lack of permission from the husband; lack of a appropriate childcare facilities for when the mother is at work; lack of a high school diploma. The purpose of the empowerment group, which is usually targeted towards women, is to reduce the number of unemployed women in Arab settlements. This is done by actively assisting them to participate in the job force, raising their employment awareness and clarifying the importance of their going out to work in order to help improve their financial situation.

**The Arab Unit in the Ma'avarim Program**

Part of the Ma'avarim program for employment promotion in the rural sector is an Arab unit that specializes in working with the residents of Arab villages that comprise some of the local councils in the North.
Activities are held in two Ma'avarim centers: in the Western Galilee and in the Jezreel Valley. The Arab unit's goals are focused on creating an employment community which includes making available services accessible to the Arab population; encouraging the population to complete their education and persevere over time; making cultural adaptations in job training to suit the population; and strengthening the bond between members. The unit provides long-term guidance specifically tailored to each participant. The guiding principle of “focus on the individual” is to work with a group wherein each member needs a long-term solution, and each has different conflicts and barriers and a different home situation.

As part of the guidance process in the Ma’avarim Arab unit, the employment mentors assess the applicants’ level of Hebrew (see appendix B: form for evaluating spoken Hebrew). Part of the mentor’s expertise lies in knowing when to speak Arabic to the applicants and when to speak Hebrew.

Siham Ka’abia, an employment mentor in the Jezreel Valley center, opened an empowerment course in Sheikh Danun. The program began with the Hebrew Café project, which had previously been opened in the village (see Hebrew Café on page [15] below for a project description). Needs were mapped on the basis of conversations with the project’s female participants, followed by a 14-session empowerment workshop in which 18 women participated. Since many of the women considered their incomplete education a significant barrier to their personal, scholastic and professional development, they also attended a course to complete their education.

Leena Abu-Diba developed a personal empowerment program that incorporates language classes called “Empowering Hebrew”, in which the counselor presents empowerment and skills content to Arab women in Hebrew. Leena reports that women sometimes join job-oriented Hebrew courses at the vocational guidance centers even though they are not yet ready, and for this reason she recommends beginning with personal
empowerment program. Populations receiving welfare subsidies, for example, need empowerment, and can benefit from having the course presented in Hebrew. The program includes acquiring an in-depth understanding of the structure of and information about the current Israeli job market, while developing basic employment-related skills and other basic abilities. The learning process affords the women opportunities for inner reflection and raises each woman's awareness of her own abilities, enabling her to identify relevant personal and vocational competencies and limitations. The course aims to focus on the personal employment vision and turn that vision into a concrete move and an organized plan on the way to achieving their goal. Abu-Diba reports wonderful results: empowered women who speak Hebrew.

On the other hand, Safa Garb says that the conclusion drawn from employment preparation courses for Arabs who applied to the employment center was that most of the courses should be given in Hebrew. The empowerment component of the courses should be in Arabic to enable participants to express themselves easily. Umayma Diab also recommends Arabic as opposed to Hebrew for personal empowerment meetings, as emotional issues come up and it is preferable that the participants feel comfortable speaking.

An attempt was made in the Umm el-Fahm vocational training center to provide personal empowerment content during a Hebrew language course. However, this course was less effective as they were unable to integrate participants into the work force afterwards.

Language related Issues in Employment Programs Intended for the Arab Population

"Sometimes we receive a request from employers to fill a large number of positions but we don't have enough people, not for lack of skills or talent, but simply because of the language limitation."

Ahmad Mahajna, director of the Umm al-Fahm vocational training center
Jewish or Arab Teachers? That's the Question

Umayma Diab feels that language teachers should be native Hebrew speakers. Therefore, the preference in employment programs is for Jewish teachers, because it is best to learn the language from someone for whom it is his mother tongue. Ahmad Mahajna also believes the teachers should be Jewish, but adds that it is best if they understand Arabic. They are then better equipped to help people from weaker populations who have difficulty comprehending Hebrew. However, it is ultimately the students who must make an effort and be motivated to acquire the language.

In contrast, Leena Abu-Diab thinks that Arab counselors have an advantage: “As a teacher I can better understand the participants' weak spots in the course and where the comprehension problems arise, as I myself identify the barriers relating to language and employment in Arab society. Language is also culture, and I can read their culture.” Additionally, Arab women participating in a job-oriented Hebrew course with a Jewish teacher are sometimes ashamed to say they did not understand something, to avoid embarrassing the teacher. Ilil Lustig, Employer Relations Liaison for the vocational center, deems it better to provide an opportunity to people from Arab society who are fluent in Hebrew and can teach it, as they can serve as role models.

The issue isn't the amount of hours given in the job-oriented Hebrew course, but a combination of as much training as possible conducted in Hebrew: a preparation for the employment world workshop, a computer course, various soft skills and training by the employer – if all these are carried out in Hebrew, we may see an improvement.

Mahmoud al-Amoor, Director of the Rian program in the South

Women's Groups versus Men's Groups

Young Arab men usually have more exposure to Hebrew than do Arab women. This is especially pronounced in Bedouin society, where women
rarely leave the house because of social conventions, while men go out more and can usually express themselves in Hebrew. Yet those interviewed noted that there is another set of problems in this sector, related to ego and honor. It is difficult for men to display weakness by asking for help. In conservative Arab settlements it is more difficult to arrange mixed courses for men and women. Also, in Arab culture it is difficult to get men to join a group; while women will join an empowerment group, men feel the need for more tangible achievements, and prefer to enroll in a course and finish it with a profession. Additionally, men usually have less motivation for "support groups", stemming from low self-esteem and fear of criticism: if a young man fails a job interview, the criticism from his family is likely to be very harsh, and he will need to be empowered.

The Effectiveness of Job-Oriented Hebrew Courses

We have a serious problem upgrading the level of Hebrew among job seekers. I don’t know what we can really change in a period of three months. I also don’t know how many of the courses we are offering to promote language acquisition are effective in teaching basic language to be used in the work place. We are aiming for that, but are not very successful. Learning a language should be a long process, especially among people with no prior knowledge.

Ahmad Mahajna, director of the Umm al-Fahm vocational training center

The courses currently available in employment programs for Arabs provide participants with the basics of the Hebrew language and bolster their confidence to attempt to speak it. Due to budget and time constraints they do not make much headway in learning more of the language. If the participants do not have sufficient command of Hebrew to get a job, the course will not make much difference. At most, these courses can help academics who already have a basic knowledge of the language, and who acquire job-oriented Hebrew terms during the course. Even though
the Hebrew course is given as part of the job-training package, language cannot be compared to computer skills, for example. This is why the effectiveness of these courses is in doubt. A language must be spoken, and it is difficult to teach adults in laboratory conditions. If people attend a course for a few hours and then go home and do not make use of the language, then the course has no real value.

The Rian centers in the South have a track called Ishraka (= the first light at daybreak). This program is intended for women who have completed 12 years of schooling and usually have a diploma, but are unable to integrate into the work force. A survey showed that part of the problem lay in language difficulties, yet the 60-hour Hebrew course proved to be ineffective – even those who could speak Hebrew, were unable to hold their own in job interviews. In one case, a very talented candidate with high potential was unable to obtain the screening committee's approval for an engineering studies track because she was embarrassed to answer the committee's questions. At the end of a three-month workshop, which included empowerment and Hebrew lessons, the participant's self-esteem was still low and she was unable to handle the situation. This begs the question – what is the value of language lessons if at the moment of truth the students lack the confidence to speak?

**Recommendations for Further Action**

*I'd like to create an understanding among applicants of the cultural differences between Arab and Jewish society: an understanding of the importance of language, an awareness of the codes of the Israeli mentality. Even if the applicant knows Hebrew, she still needs to adapt to Israeli organizational culture. For example – explaining things briefly, not at length. Arab culture must also be understood and frameworks should be found where Hebrew can be practiced, where a person could*
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Safa Garb, Division Director of Arab Society and Infrastructure, TEVET

The following recommendations have been formulated by those interviewed for this article, all of whom are professionals specializing in integrating the Arab population into the work force:

- Adapting the Open Door website to the Arab population: A suggestion was raised to build a site for online learning styled on the Open Door program, with content suited to Arab culture. This will enable people to practice at home, as the job-oriented Hebrew course is in itself insufficient and incapable of helping Arab women to advance to a better position. Cultural sensitivity means, for instance, removing military terms from the program, as well as other elements unacceptable in Arab culture. Teachers of job-oriented Hebrew can utilize the long-distance learning tool, which facilitates listening to the language and practicing, as homework for the participants. The teachers can explain what the participants should focus on, according to the level of each participant.

- Adapting the job-oriented Hebrew course for men: A course that will begin at a more advanced level, combining acquisition of advanced job-related life skills with advice on how to advance on the job.

- Spoken Hebrew workshop for high school students: A course for high school students with the emphasis on writing and verbal skills, also including group discussions and presentations. The purpose is not to learn Hebrew for the matriculation exam, but to be able to conduct a conversation. The students must also understand Jewish Israeli culture and not just fill out worksheets. This requires greater
exposure to Hebrew, and it is preferable that all language classes be conducted in Hebrew. It is also a good idea to create opportunities for encounters between Arab and Jewish youth, for example through joint hikes.

- **Partnerships with employers:** It is recommended to identify employers who support diverse hiring and create partnerships with employers with an agenda, i.e., those who would like to hire Arab personnel. In this way employees could learn professional Hebrew on the job, receive greater language support, and strengthen their self-confidence. Moreover, a database of relevant terms can be established together with the employer and taught to the candidates. Later on, to encourage promotion, courses for Hebrew reading and writing can be offered at the workplace, to allow workers to upgrade and expand their basket of skills.

- **Guidance on improving Hebrew:** Participants should be encouraged to be proactive and take responsibility for improving their lives with a focus on employment. To this end they should read Hebrew newspapers, listen to radio and watch television, particularly programs on finance and home economics, which include many employment terms. This will help them build a vocabulary and learn pronunciation. The internet is also an excellent tool, as are smartphone applications and so forth. The participants need to realize that this is a process that has to be experienced continuously over time. Additionally, Arab employment enablers in the various programs can provide personal examples and hold conversations with applicants in Hebrew. This will demonstrate how to use a language one has not completely mastered, and create a safe and supporting place to practice the language.

- **Hebrew Café:** Hebrew is the main barrier for most applicants, even those with degrees, diplomas and vocational training. Therefore,
following job-oriented Hebrew workshops there is a need to create continuity: volunteer lecturers can be enlisted for a series of Hebrew Café meetings where course graduates can practice Hebrew conversation. Also, the employment programs usually have an Employment Club, a forum for networking and discussing topics from the business world. A job-oriented Hebrew Club can be set up where weekly discussions will be held to discuss articles or issues from the world of employment. At the end of the day, the goal is to encourage perseverance and create opportunities for practice.

- Tutoring and mentoring: The premise is that language must be spoken, so we suggest establishing alternate frameworks to the Hebrew course. One possibility is internet tutoring of Arab job seekers by Jewish students. Another option is mentoring, for example, matching Jewish colleagues with Arab workers in collaboration with the employer.

- Volunteering in Hebrew: Another option was raised in Rian centers in the South – to enroll participants into volunteer programs that will require them to use the language. An employer will not want an employee who is incapable of contributing, but a volunteer framework could use the extra manpower, despite language difficulties. Volunteering in a Hebrew-speaking environment such as in hospitals or animal shelters, for example, could provide an excellent framework for language practice, an opportunity to become acquainted with the modern Israeli employer, and to practice sticking to a schedule. Furthermore, since women in Arab society come from a culture of volunteering, this may also be an opportunity for them to experience a work environment related to their professional fields of interest (for example, a place they would like to work in).

- Temporary work: The paradox is that sometimes women who did not complete high school, but worked in unskilled jobs such as house-
cleaning, can speak Hebrew better than high school graduates. Therefore, a start can be made in attempting to integrate people from Arab society into a steady job with a promotion horizon – which is the main goal of employment programs – by integrating applicants with poor Hebrew into temporary jobs in order to learn and improve their language skills. This process is relatively inexpensive, and following the temporary job the applicant can be upgraded to a better job or to study. This option is especially relevant for young applicants: it creates an interaction between a job and employment while learning a language ‘along the way’. This greatly improves the language level since the language is acquired in a Hebrew speaking environment.

- Cooperating with an authorized language teaching institute: Another recommendation is for the centers to open a course of several months duration focusing on spoken language. Currently classes are held once a week for three hours, encompassing 12 – 15 meetings, and this is not always sufficient (even a 50-hour job-oriented Hebrew course will not solve a problem that has existed for many years). Another option is to outsource and create a partnership with an institution experienced in teaching language, in order to structure a long-term, quality course. This year the Tira vocational center decided to conduct an intensive 120 hour course of spoken Hebrew, focusing on quality – not quantity – meaning more hours for fewer participants. The center formed a partnership with Berlitz, and even though the center is not a learning institute, parts of the course included parts of an educational curriculum for learning Hebrew (see Appendix C). The idea is to create two groups: a join low-middle-level group, and an advanced group. The low-middle level group will move up to the advanced group, and the advanced group will be placed in jobs; for this reason this is an evening course.
During the course of writing this article we discovered that recently the Arab, Druze and Circassian Authority for Economic Development in the Prime Minister's office has allocated a budget of 2 million NIS for Hebrew courses in the Arab sector, through the government employment services. The courses are intended for job seekers registered with the Employment Bureau and they will be run by Sakhnin College. The budget is for 400 and 200 hour courses, and 27 such courses have been approved in 11 towns across the country (according to Tania Leef – Special Event Liaison at the National Insurance Institute (NII) and Majed Masalha, the Government Policy Director in the Arab, Druze and Circassian sector's Authority for Economic Development in the Prime Minister's office).

In my opinion we must promote building an infrastructure that will be perpetuated: not invest in projects on a one-time or temporary basis but invest, for example, in a school for teaching Hebrew, a center that can serve more people over a longer period of time. I believe that this is the correct way of thinking, on an inter-organizational and national level: currently the resources are spread among all the different employment programs, and it will be more efficient to build one center that will serve the whole of the Arab population, or apply to a professional entity who will be responsible for teaching the language.

Ahmad Mahajna, director of the Umm al-Fahm vocational training center

Conclusions

We are Arabs, and what defines us is our mother tongue – Arabic. Yet, if we want to integrate into the Israeli job market and Israeli society in general, we must know Hebrew, because the gap is growing. Even though we insert many Hebrew words into our Arabic, this doesn't lead to command of the language. Personally, I would not like things to change only in the "incubator" of the course: I want people to start watching programs on Jewish television channels, to be part of Israeli existence.
We need to come out of our shell and integrate, emerge from behind the barrier of foreignness, encourage exposure to culture. Real social change is required in order to encourage voting during elections”.

Nibras Taha, director of Tira vocational training center

Hebrew is crucial for integrating Arab job seekers into the work force, because most job offers available through the employment center are from Jewish employers. Employment in Arab society will be very limited if it only takes into account Arab employers; as the majority population is Jewish, the majority of employers are also Jewish. While Arab employees are also part of the Israeli market, most employers require fluent Hebrew. If employees are interested in upgrading their positions and being promoted, they need to also improve their Hebrew reading and writing skills.

Many Arab employment program participants lack basic knowledge of Hebrew, which makes placing them in jobs very difficult. Even after participating in job-oriented Hebrew courses and Hebrew courses adapted to designated work places, Hebrew still poses an obstacle in job interviews. Staff liaisons dealing with this population sometimes find it difficult to counsel the participants, who lack basic training and cannot find appropriate employment near their homes.

The job-oriented Hebrew course is one tool among many: this course bolsters the self-confidence of participants regarding their level of Hebrew and teaches a vocabulary, but this is not enough. Work on the language must continue at other levels, and interaction between Arab and Jewish society must be encouraged.

Hebrew should be regarded as a tool and not a goal in itself, because when seen as a such it does not lead to concrete results. For this reason employers, also, must undergo a conceptual change: they must understand that since Hebrew is a primary obstacle, it must be integrated into all
vocational training in the same way that vocational training is provided for specific fields of employment. Employment programs can contribute by offering incentives and funding, and by providing overall guidance to employers after work hours. Having said that, it is important not to lower requirements in the name of cultural adaptation. A high professional standard should be set and appropriate output should be expected from employees from the Arab sector.

References (all sources are in Hebrew)


Assif, Yael (2009). Teaching methods: Open Door site for improving language skills and employment among adults of Ethiopian extraction. Hed Ha’ulpan HaChadash, 94.


JDC-Israel site – Promoting Employment in Arab Society:
http://www2.jdc.org.il/category/employment-Arab-community

Open Door site – from Education to Employment:
http://opendoor.cet.ac.il

TEVET site – Tnufa b’Ta’asuka (employment leverage):
http://www.tevet4u.org.il

Other Sources of Information

Study workshop for professional teams of infrastructure programs in Arab society on the topic of “Language and Employment Barriers”, held on May 9, 2012 in the center of the Authority for Promoting Employment, Education and Community in Sakhnin.
Study workshop for professional teams of the Authority for Promoting Employment on the subject of Community, held on June 13, 2011, in the center of the Authority for Promoting Employment, Education and Community in Ma’alot-Tarshikhah.

Personal interviews: Nurit Lapidot, Director of Programs, TEVET; Safa Garb, Division Director of Arab Society and Infrastructure, TEVET; Leena Abu-Diba, Employment Enabler, Eshet Chayil program, TEVET; Umayma Diab, Vocational Training Counselor in the Arab sector; Nibras Taha, Director of the Tira vocational training center; Ahmad Mahajna, Director of the Umm al-Fahm vocational training center; Ilil Lustig Goldner, vocational centers' Employer Relations Liaison; Mahmoud al-Amoor, Director of the Rian program in the South, regional program for promoting employment among the Bedouin population of the Negev, and the program staff; Staff of the Arab unit of Ma‘avarim Western Galilee and Ma‘avarim in the Jezreel Valley.

Appendices

Appendix A: Lexicon of Employment Terms. Prepared by: Umayma Diab, TEVET

Appendix B: Spoken Hebrew Evaluation Form

Appendix C: Syllabus for Learning Hebrew – Tira Vocational Guidance Center

Knowledge and guidance development – Atida project: Translated to Arabic: Jalal Hassan

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