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SOME REMARKS ON THE ROLE OF THE FIRST CULTURE FOR RUSSIAN-SPEAKING EMIGRANTS OF THE THIRD AND FOURTH WAVES¹

1. Introduction

The material and findings presented in this paper are the outcome of a three-year project sponsored by the Austrian Academy of Sciences (APART-Research program), a study of the linguistic and cultural behaviour of Russian-speaking emigrés of the third and fourth waves (my data concern the period between the years 1970 and 1994). My basic assumption was that from the moment of emigration onwards emigrants suffer from a continuous and varying degree of first language and culture loss, which manifests itself in an increasing lack of confidence with regard to the use of their former cultural habits and mother tongue.

In the following investigation Russian-speaking emigrants since 1970 are treated as one group: the question as to whether a fundamental difference can be found between the two groups of emigrants (pre-1986 vs. post-1986) with regard to their cultural and linguistic behaviour remains to be clarified in the course of my current project. One of the central issues resulting from my observations so far concerns the reasons for the difference in the behaviour of Russian-speaking emigrants after their emigration (and probably of emigrants in general): what are the factors that determine the splitting up of post-emigration linguistic and cultural behaviour into three different types — which I shall call here "assimilative", "anti-assimilative" and "bilingual/bicultural" (cf. Pfandl 1994)? Such a classification is, admittedly, only a schematic representation of the observed attitudes, and is hardly ever to be found in its "pure" form.

Let us take a look at the *assimilative type* first: emigrants of this type are eager to acquire the language and culture of their new country (L2, C2) as quickly as possible, at the same time trying if not to rid themselves of their own cultural and linguistic habits, at least not to make any conscious effort to retain and preserve them. Emigrants belonging to the *anti-assimilative type*, on the contrary, try to cultivate their own language and culture (L1, C1), and to limit the acquisition and use of the language and culture of their host-country (L2, C2) to an absolute minimum. Representatives of the *bilingual/bicultural type* attempt to acquire the

new language and culture, while at the same time consciously cultivating and preserving their own linguistic and cultural heritage. One of the issues yet to be clarified relates to a possible correlation between these types of behaviour and certain pre-emigrative attitudes.

In order to collect some representative and fairly reliable data concerning pre- and post-emigrative linguistic and cultural behaviour I devised a questionnaire which I distributed among Russian-speaking emigrés in Western countries, first by e-mail via three internet-groups.² The majority of answers came from the group called INFO-RUSS, while two further newsgroups (*soc.culture.russ* and *soc.culture.sov*) provided a few additional questionnaires. Very soon I had received about 40 answers by e-mail, but I had to admit that these answers were in no way representative: they were mostly given by men, who moreover were mainly from an University background, plus a majority of whom were employed in technological fields. So I then began to send out questionnaires by mail to all my Russian-speaking acquaintances all over the world.³ I ended up with 312 answers to my first questionnaire, plus 267 more to my second questionnaire (which I devised a few months after the first, when I could already draw on the findings and results of the first).

As is shown by the following statistics, the use of the internet at least helped me to achieve a fairly equal number of answers with regard to gender.

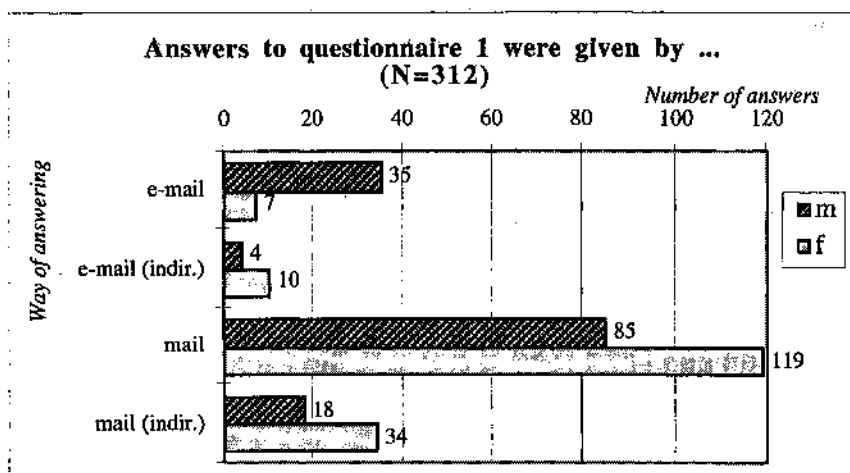


Fig. 1

The total result as shown by Fig. 2 indicates a slight majority of about 9% of female answers vs. male answers.⁴

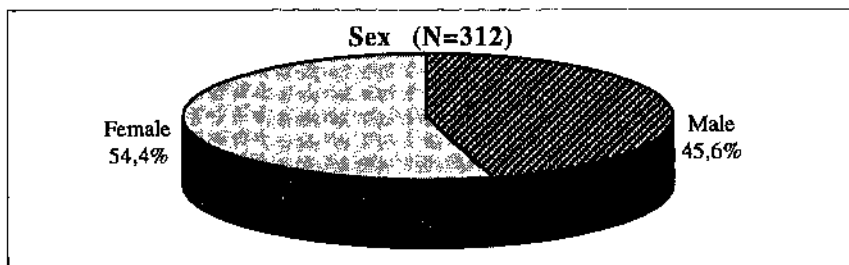


Fig. 2

Fig. 3 shows the countries in which the subjects interviewed are now living:

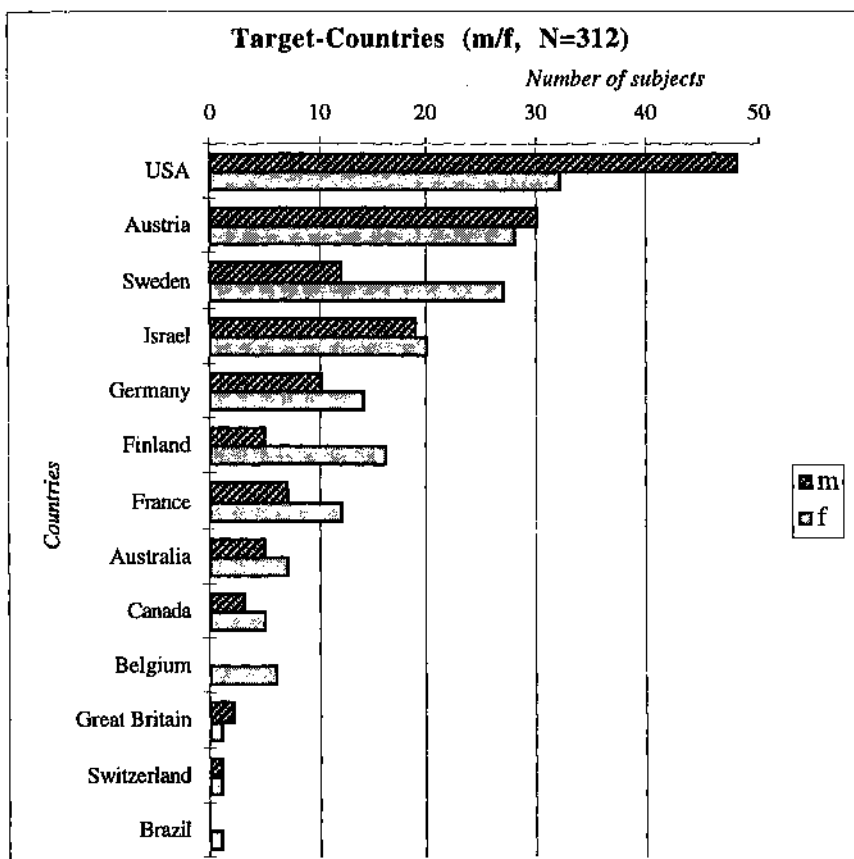


Fig. 3

As is evident from Fig. 3, this sample is well suited for a comparison of the differing behaviour and attitudes of emigrés in various countries, particularly with regard to the United States, Austria, Sweden, Israel, Germany and in part Finland and France. In other words, the main target-countries of the Russian emigration since the 70s are well represented.

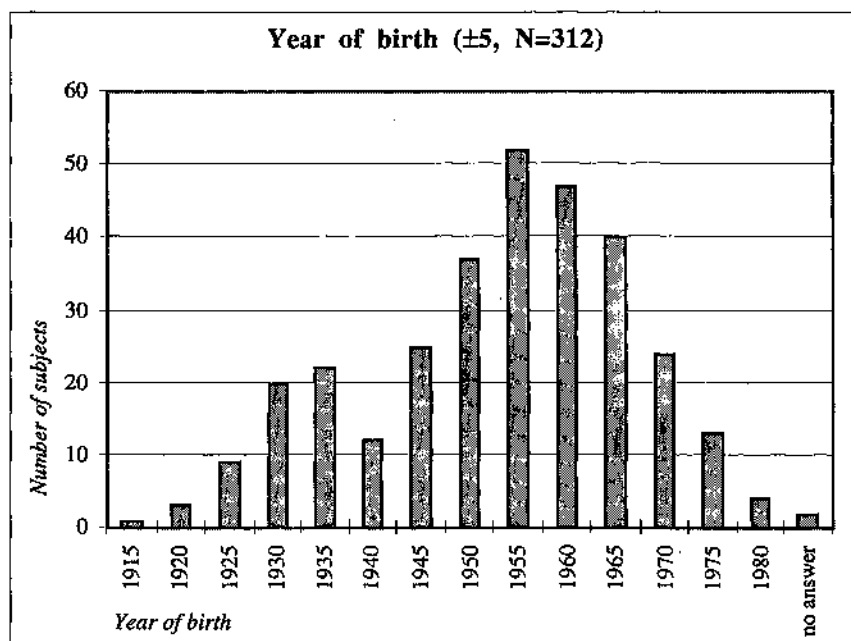


Fig. 4

Fig. 4 shows a fairly equally balanced distribution of the interviewees. Informants born later than 1977 were only included in the statistics in order to provide a counterbalance for the testees more advanced in years.

Fig. 5 mirrors a rather problematic issue of my investigation (and of any analysis of Russian emigration that aims at being representative): the waves are rather unequally represented quantitatively (see especially the gap for the years 1981 to 84 when emigration seems to have come to a halt). The unequal balance of my statistics mirrors the real number of emigrés in the third and fourth waves; this is reinforced by the fact that it is relatively easy to contact people who emigrated during the last decade, whereas people who emigrated during the 1970ies are much more difficult to come by.

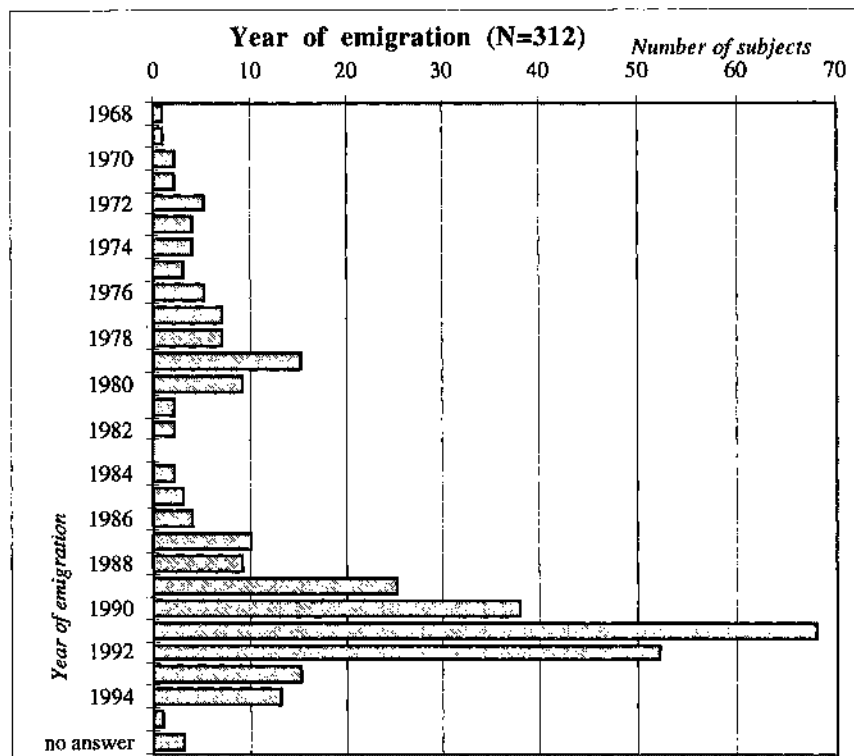


Fig. 5

Most of those questioned originally came from the former Soviet Republics of Russia and Ukraine, so we can suppose that at least for 248 of the 312 subjects Russian had been the dominant language. For the others, I can only assume that Russian was the dominant language as, in any case, completing the questionnaires requires a good knowledge of Russian.

As shown in Fig. 6, the level of education appears to be out of balance, showing an exceptionally high number of emigrés holding a university degree: however, we have to take into account the fact that amongst emigrés in general the percentage of University-educated persons is considerably higher than in the Soviet population as a whole, a phenomenon that is usually called, both in Russian and in English, "brain drain" (*утечка мозгов*). In addition to this, it is a fact that the number of people with university degrees was higher in the Soviet Union than in most Western European countries. In this graphic every column gives the percentage of the total result.

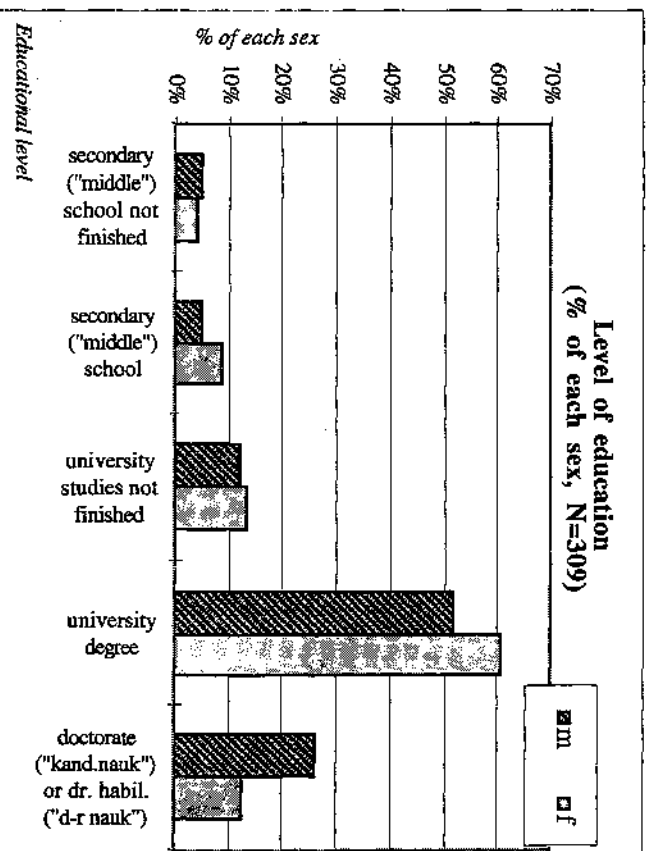


Fig. 6

Fig. 7 specifies the type of education of my interviewees.⁵

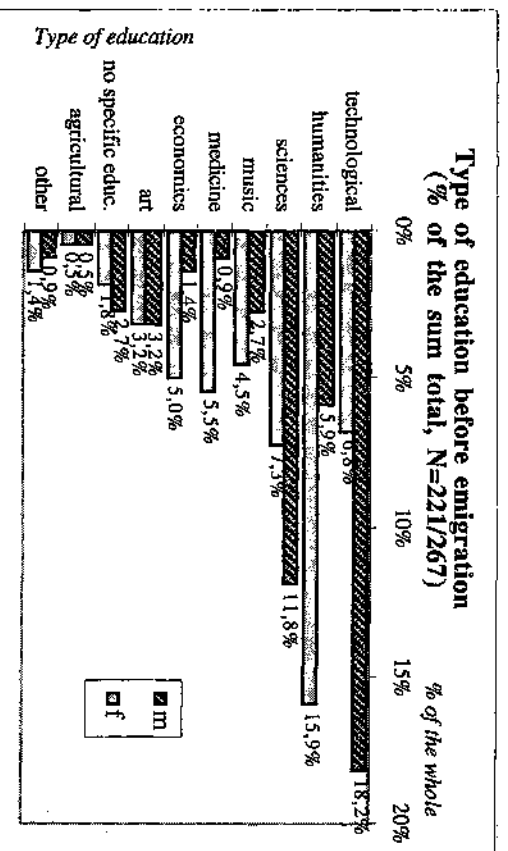


Fig. 7

The two questionnaires consisted of 100 and 120 questions respectively. They were devised according to the current sociological and sociolinguistic parameters (age, education, etc., domains, language use). To these were added questions about everyday life, linguistic and cultural habits, such as books, the media, food, as well as about people's knowledge of and attitude towards some stylistically marked lexical items and idioms of contemporary Russian. As a number of questionnaires were returned unsigned, I could not contact all my interviewees for my second questionnaire. Besides, I decided to leave out certain questions that might have seemed too personal and inquisitive. Thus I did not include typical questions of the kind "Which language do you use for thinking in, for dreaming in?" I also refrained from asking about the nationality as this would in many cases have meant asking people about their Jewishness. I did however ask for the reasons for emigrating, giving the following options: "economic", "political", and "other".

The question I was interested in was first of all: how do emigrés with differing pre- and post-emigrative conditions cope with their new lives with regard to their linguistic and cultural behaviour? This issue has been investigated in great detail with regard to the linguistic side, in particular as far as interferences are concerned; however, the role of the mother-tongue/L1 in covering the new reality and needs has not yet been analysed systematically. The most interesting recent contributions in this respect were published in the United States: Maria Polinsky has written two extensive papers on language loss and language acquisition (Polinsky 1995 and 1997); David Andrews has published five articles on the language of Russian-speaking emigrés, a summary of which can be found in Andrews (1997). Other important authors are Hans-Peter Stoffel (e.g. 1993), L. Kouzmin (e.g. 1988), V. Moskovič and V. Monblit (e.g. Moskovič 1988, Moskovič/Monblit 1993), Nadia Stangé-Zhirovova (e.g. 1996), Ludmila Protasova (e.g. 1996) and Natal'ja Golubeva-Monatkina (e.g. 1997). In an article in 1997 I also presented some results concerning the use of and the attitudes towards typically Russian "superstitions" (Pfandl 1997).

2. Daily linguistic routine

2.1. Note-taking

Let us now take a look at some of the results that point at a continued use of L1 and C1 (a high degree of L1-usage would seem to indicate an anti-assimilative, or possibly a bicultural attitude, just as using L2 for certain activities would seem to imply an assimilative attitude - but one does have to be very careful with generalisations). One such question had to do with the language used for note-taking in everyday life:

34. Which language do you use for noting down an appointment with your hairdresser at 5p.m. on Thursday, or for your shopping lists (butter, bread, milk etc.)?

a) Russian

b) both Russian and the language of the host-country

c) language of the host-country

But I had not taken into consideration that the wording of this question applies rather more to women, and that is why the percentage of men who claimed not to take any such notes was significantly higher. The result is shown in Fig. 8.

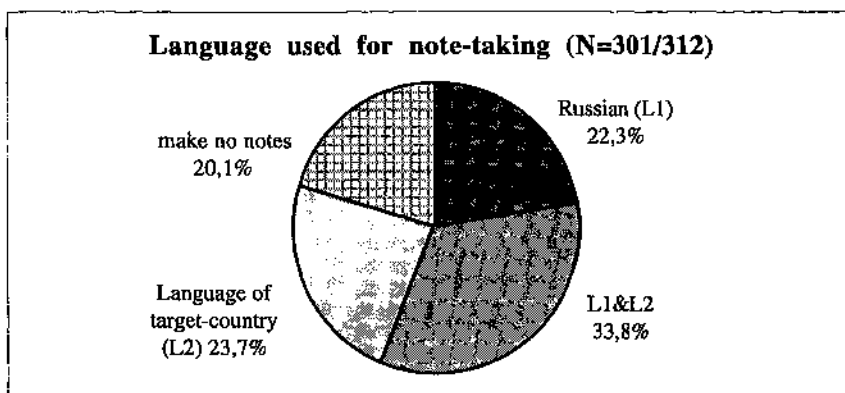


Fig. 8

The numbers are fairly evenly distributed: about one quarter of the subjects claim that they use their mother-tongue, another quarter the language of their host-country, about one third claim that they use either one. 20% predominantly male subjects declare that they never take notes.

Let us now try to find the parameters that influence this choice. The most obvious parameter, education, does not seem to play any significant role, and for several reasons I have decided not to use it in the following analyses. The absolute lack of correlation may be a result of the above-mentioned homogeneity of the group concerning the level of education, i.e., the fact that people with only primary or secondary school education are not represented. Rather unexpectedly, the language of note-taking does not correlate with the number of years spent abroad either (see Fig. 9 using a 5 year scale).

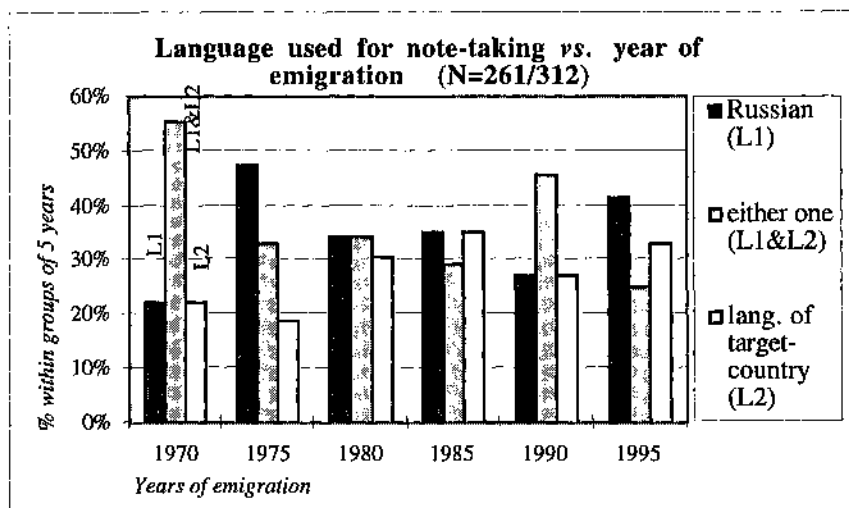


Fig. 9

Fig. 9 reveals an unexpected trend: at a first glance the results do not seem to be at all unusual; a computer calculation of the linear trend, however, indicates that the shorter the period spent abroad, the more frequently people will use both L1 and L2. Only recently emigrated subjects tend to use one language exclusively. This is an obvious contradiction to the expected results - one would expect that a prolonged stay in the target-country would inevitably lead to an increased use of L2.

For calculating correlations I used Spearman's bivariate correlation test, which measures the association between two sets of ordinal (ranked) data. The correlation coefficient r indicates the closeness of two variables; it runs from +1 (positive relationship: the higher variable a is, the lower variable b will be), 0 (no relationship) to -1 (negative relationship). However, only the probability test (p) will tell us whether this relationship is due to chance, or whether there is a significant degree of association for the ranks. The lower p is, the higher the probability is of a significant correlation.

Thus, the correlation test according to Spearman does not show any correlation for the parameters "language used for note-taking" and "year of emigration" ($r=0.01$, $p<0.92$).

If, on the other hand, we compare language-use with the age of emigration (Fig. 10), that is the age at which the subject left his/her home-country, we get a much clearer picture: the older the person was at the time of emigration, the more frequently he/she will use Russian for note-taking (Spearman: $r=0.35$, $p<0.00$).

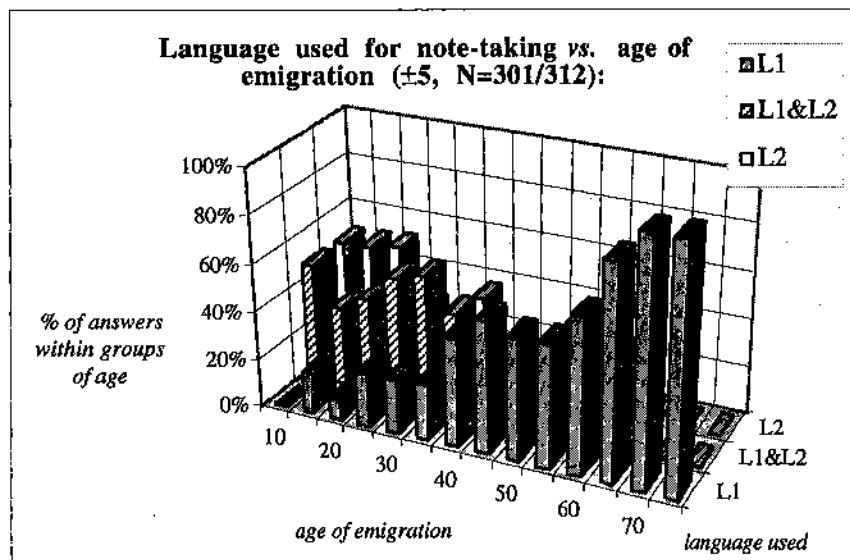


Fig. 10

A final look at the sex of the interviewees in Fig. 11 would appear quite telling: as already mentioned, men tend to claim more frequently than women that they do not take notes for that kind of information.

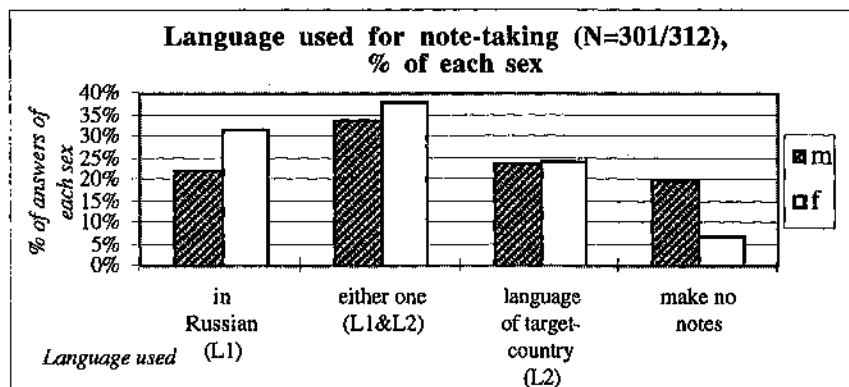


Fig. 11

However, statistics do not really prove that there is a difference between the sexes in this case. For this we have to use the Chi-square-test, which is used for analysing the distribution of data by comparing given data with expected data. The higher χ^2 is (which runs from 0 to ≈ 20), the closer is the relation between the two ranks. Again, the probability p indicates whether the difference between these two

ranks is due to chance. The lower p is, the higher the probability of a significant relationship between the two ranks. In our case, the Chi-square-test is $\chi^2 = 1.11$; $p < 0.57$, which means that there is no significant correlation between the language used for note-taking and sex.

Even though the Chi-square-test does not establish a clear connection, this result fits in with the general gender-specific behaviour pattern that manifests itself in my data. Thus, for instance, the results obtained from my questionnaires concerning the use of and the attitudes towards typically Russian "superstitions" show that women in particular consider these superstitions much more important and worth preserving after their emigration than men (see also Pfandl 1997). Thus a preliminary hypothesis suggests itself: the degree of anti-assimilative attitudes could be higher with women than with men. Let us put this hypothesis to the test by means of other issues presented in this paper.

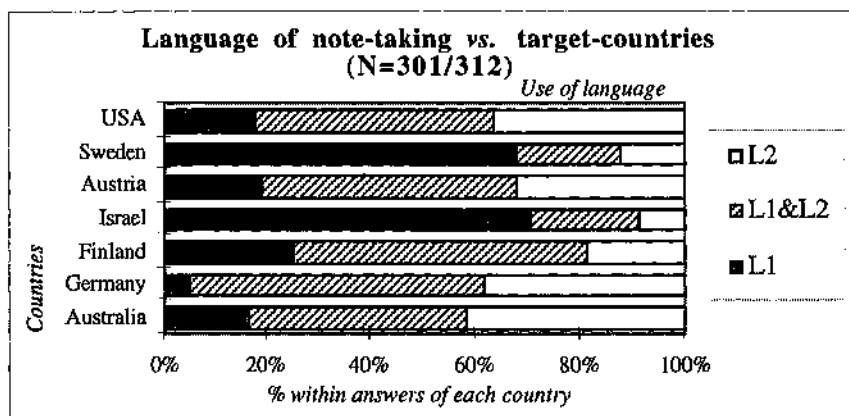


Fig. 12

Another comparison provides more information: let us take a look at the target-countries. As we can see in Fig.12, the biggest number of users of L1 live in Israel and Sweden, whereas in most other countries we do not find more than 25% L1-users. The fact that L2 is very rarely used in Israel can probably be explained by difficulties in using written Hebrew. On the whole, one does get the impression that the pressure to adjust is about equal in the United States, Austria, Finland, and Australia. The fact that my German informants show the least tendency towards using L2, should not however lead us to hasty conclusions - this should be attributed to the fact that for the most part these people are "Rußlanddeutsche" (members of the German ethnic group in Russia), whose mother-tongue was sometimes German and whose identity features differ from those of Russians in the USA or Russian Jews in Israel.

2.2. Problems with finding Russian words

One question that is very revealing both with regard to the identity of a person and his/her linguistic competence, reads:

94.3 Are you at times unable to think of the "correct word in Russian, while you remember the corresponding expression in the language of your host-country?"

- a) frequently
- b) sometimes
- c) rarely
- d) never

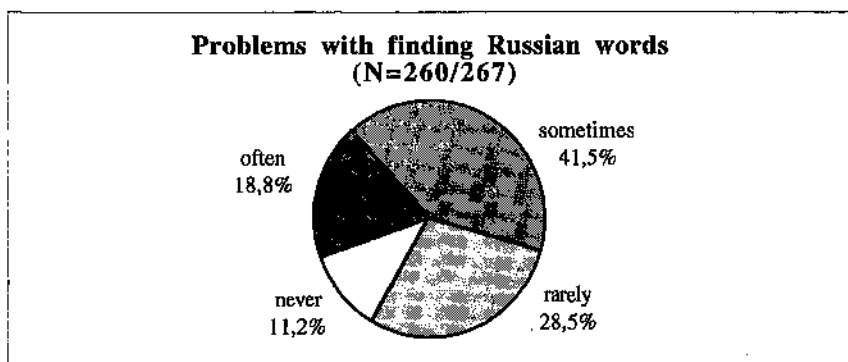


Fig. 13

The answers to this question yield a very distinctive picture (Fig. 13). It is interesting to note that indeed 11% of the subjects are of the opinion that they never need to look for the "right" Russian word. When I analysed the speech of 2 (out of 29) of these people I found that they actually never switch codes - this was, however, partly achieved by avoiding topics that relate to the target-country during the interviews.⁶ In this connection, let me pose the question whether a purist attitude as was doubtlessly exhibited by these two subjects, i.e., a voluntary limitation to utterances that can be achieved in L1 (to the exclusion of cognitive patterns specific to L2), does not also imply a limitation to the respective imported native culture and patterns of thinking? If, according to Wittgenstein, the limits of one's language are also the limits of one's (perception of the) world, will such a radical anti-assimilative position not impair the intellectual and linguistic development of such a person in coming to terms with her/his new life and surroundings?

Let us consider this question in the light of the age of emigration and the amount of time spent in emigration, i.e., the duration of emigration. The age of the subjects when filling in the questionnaire, i.e., from spring 1995 to spring 1996, is not really an indication: a thirty year old subject who has spent three

years in emigration cannot be compared to a thirty year old who emigrated 20 years previously.

I had expected to find that the older the subject was when he/she emigrated, the fewer difficulties they would experience with Russian lexemes, and the more time they had spent in the target-country, the more problematic they would find their own linguistic performance (in particular with regard to Russian lexemes).

These expectations were confirmed by my data with regard to the age of emigration (Fig.14). As we can see, subjects who emigrated at an earlier age more frequently admit to having these problems than subjects who emigrated at a more advanced age. The correlation test according to Spearman very clearly confirms this connection ($r=0.43$, $p<0.00$).

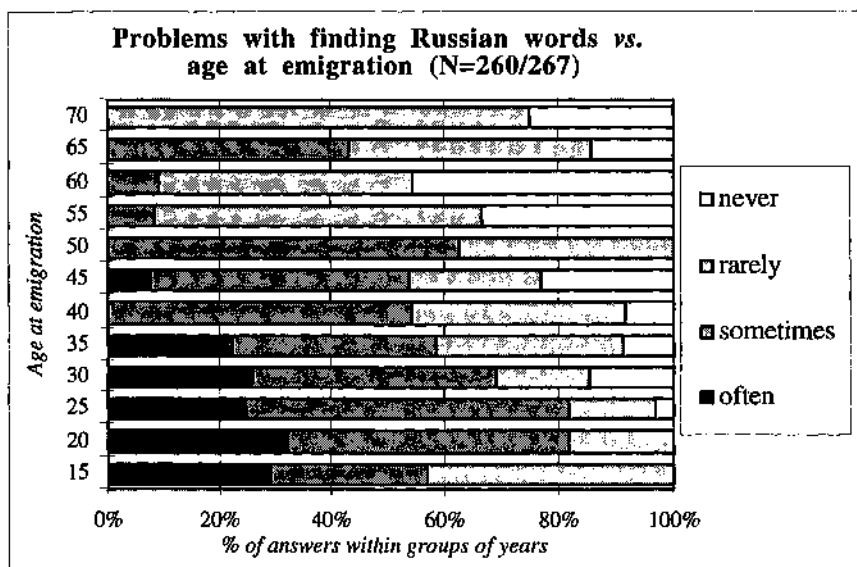


Fig. 14

If we compare these data with the number of years spent in emigration, the trend is the following (Fig. 15): the more recent the emigration, the more frequently the answer is "never"; the longer, the more frequently people chose "often". This is again confirmed by the correlation test according to Spearman ($r=0.16$, $p<0.01$).

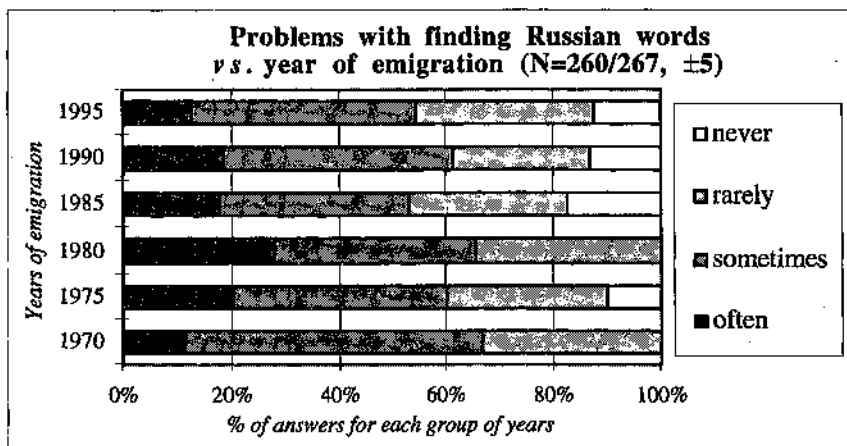


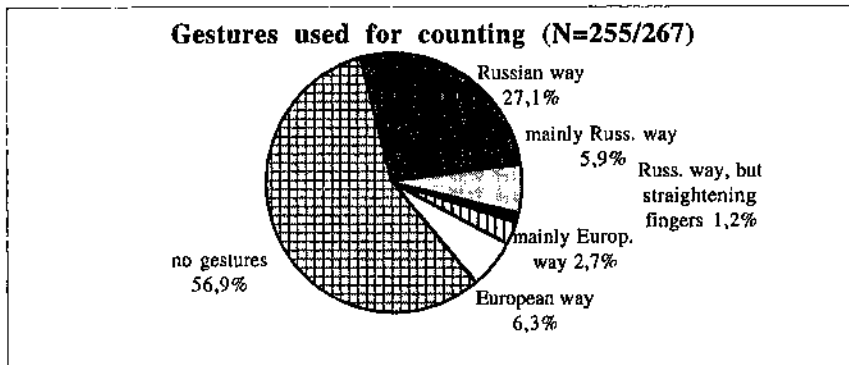
Fig. 15

There is no significant correlation to be found with the sex of the subjects; it is, however, the men who tend more frequently to reply "often" than women. Finally, there is also no significant correlation with regard to the educational level; the correlation test of Pearson, which is used for ratio (not ranked or interval) data is $r = 0.07$, $p < 0.25$.

2.3. Gestures used for counting

Let us now turn to some other questions concerning activities that would seem to indicate a certain type of behaviour. One of the questions in my questionnaire referred to the gestures used for counting: there is a typically Russian gesture (bending one's fingers starting with the little finger, then the ring-finger etc.) as opposed to the "Western" European gesture, starting at the other side with the thumb, then straightening the index finger, the middle finger and so on.

- 93.2. Count from one to four using your fingers: do you
- bend the little finger first, then the ring finger etc. ?
 - straighten your thumb, then your index finger etc. ?
 - mostly bend your little finger etc., as in a) ?
 - mostly straighten your fingers, as in b) ?
 - I do not use gestures

Fig. 16⁷

The total results are shown in Fig. 16. Almost 57% claim that they do not use gestures, 27.1% still use the Russian gesture, 5.9% mainly the Russian gesture, 2.7% use mainly, 6.3% exclusively the European gesture. There is no visible connection to be found to the age of emigration or the year of emigration, as shown in Fig. 17 (Spearman: $r = 0.07$, $p < 0.44$).

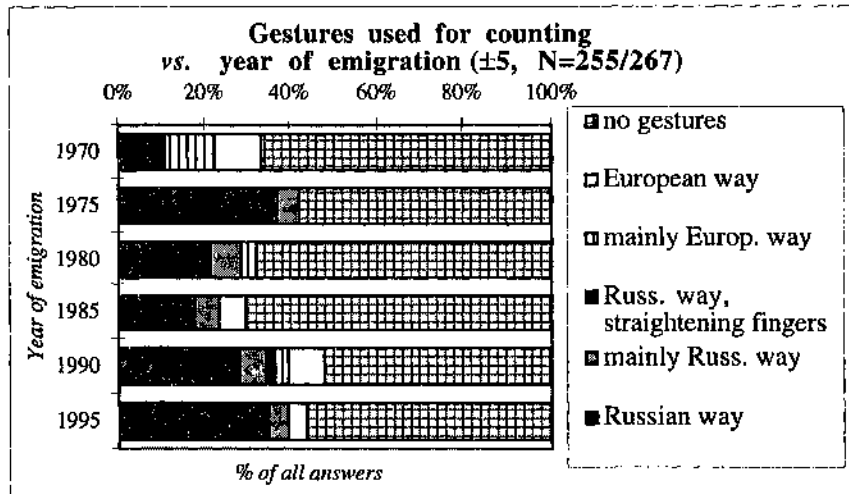


Fig. 17

Fig. 18 illustrates the behaviour within the sexes. Again we find that women preserve Russian gestures longer than men, i.e., men tend more towards the assimilative type, women towards the anti-assimilative type (Spearman: $r = 0.30$; $p < 0.001$). I would like to emphasize that the most significant result with regard to the sexes was achieved for this question.

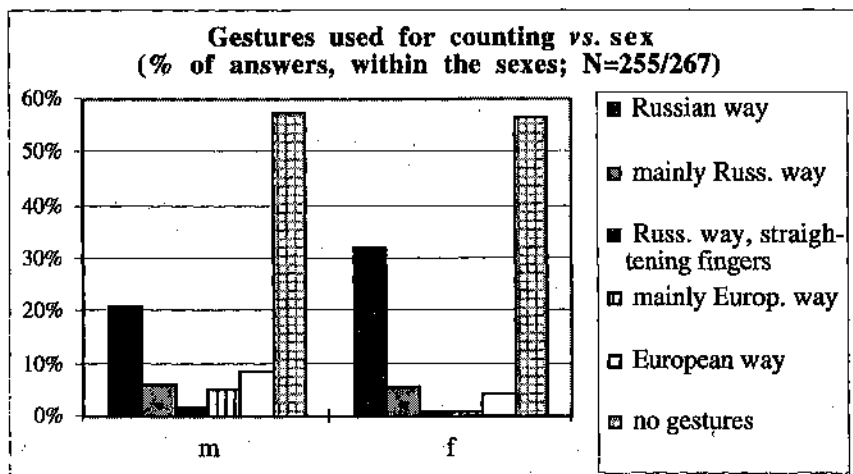


Fig. 18

The type of finger-counting is said to be highly culture-specific and takes a long time to be "unlearned". This also applies to our next issue, which deals with a closely related question.

2.4. Language used for doing mental arithmetic.

It is a well known fact that the language used for counting and calculating during one's childhood is very closely connected with the respective speech acts and tends to remain unchanged for a long time. Even people with a high degree of attrition of L1 will admit that they still count, do mental arithmetic and memorize phone numbers in their mother tongue. My question read:

93.1. Which language do you use for doing mental arithmetic and counting?

- a) Russian
- b) mainly Russian
- c) mainly the language of the host-country
- d) language of the country

The global result is shown in Fig. 19.

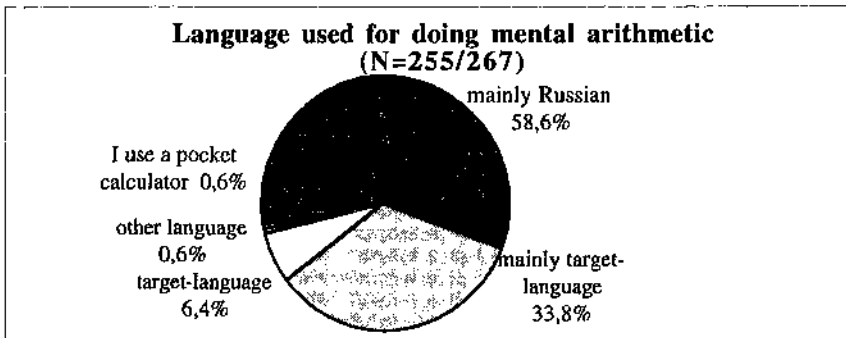


Fig. 19

As shown in Fig. 20, in this case there is a significant correlation with sex. Again we see that more women use L1, whereas men tend to prefer the language of the host-country (Chi-Square: 8.24, $p < 0.04$).

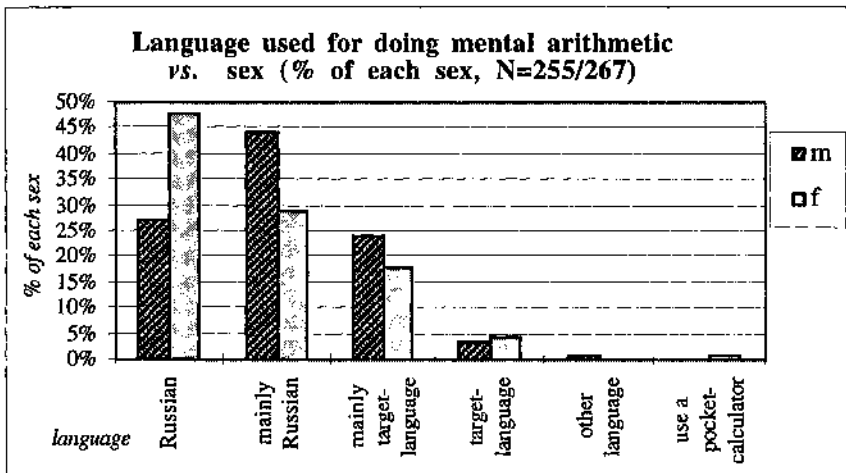


Fig. 20

The connection with the age (Fig. 21) of emigration is also clearly discernible and shows that the older a person was when emigrating, the more frequently he/she will use Russian (Spearman $r = 0.34$, $p < 0.00$).

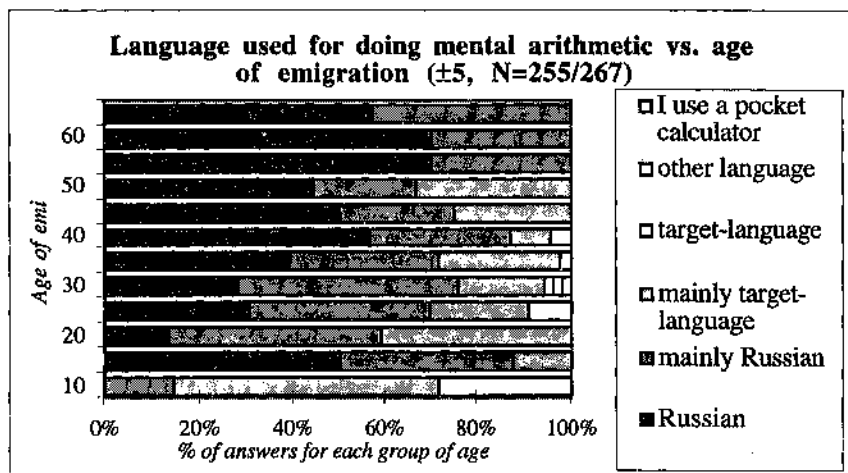


Fig. 21

2.5. Survey of culture-specific activities:

Let us now take a look at the results of the questions analysed, comparing the mutual correlations between them.⁸ The linguistic activities (note-taking - see 2.1., lexical gaps in L1 - see 2.2., mental arithmetic - see 2.4.) correlate significantly with each other to a high degree, whereas the type of finger-counting (see 2.3.) does not correlate at all with these activities. This may partly be a result of the large number of negative answers with regard to gestures, on the other hand finger-counting as such seem to be basically a different matter. This may partly be a result of the large number of negative answers with regard to gestures; on the other hand finger-counting as such seems to be basically a different matter. Vjach. Vs. Ivanov argues, that finger-counting (and verbal behaviour, H.P.) are located in the left hemisphere as opposed to gesturing, which is primarily located in the right hemisphere (cf. Ivanov 1978, 65). This question, however, requires further research.

3. Some attitudes

Let me at the end of my analysis touch upon another group of questions concerning metalinguistic and metacultural opinions:

39.1. *Is it valuable for an emigré to preserve his/her mother-tongue?*

a) *yes*

b) *no*

39.2. ...and to pass it on to his/her children?

a) yes

b) no

Both questions were almost unanimously answered positively, the first question even more so (97.7%) than the second (96.3%). With such a result, of course, I could not find any correlations with other parameters. Therefore I included in my second questionnaire two less obvious questions on the same topic:

99.1. One should acquire the language and culture of the host country as soon as possible (do you agree or not)?

a) I agree

b) I do not agree

c) I don't know, it depends on the circumstances

As expected, there was a lot of agreement on this question, too: only about 11% used the third, more differentiated answer. This agreement can be seen as indicative of assimilative or bicultural behaviour; negative answers to both questions would be taken to hint at the anti-assimilative type, but one of the two subjects is rather the assimilative type (as was shown in a case study). The slightly larger number of detailed answers given by women is not statistically significant.

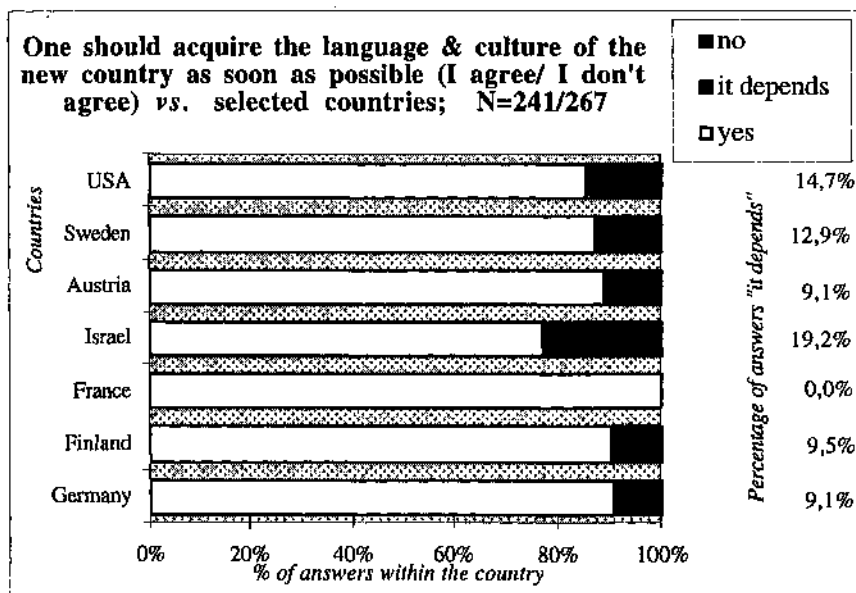


Fig. 22

Finally, as the other parameters do not provide any significant correlation, let us compare the answers for some target-countries (Fig. 22). The result is not unexpected: only in Israel is there some doubt as to this assimilative (but also bicultural) attitude *par excellence*. As we have already seen, it is Israel that offers people the best chance to preserve their pre-emigrative cultural identity, especially after the years 89-90. On the other hand, all 18 emigrés living in France agree with the statement that one should acquire the language and culture of the host country as soon as possible.

The following question again required a positive or negative reaction to this rather provocative statement:

- 99.2. *In the new country one should use one's mother tongue only if absolutely necessary*
a) yes
b) no
c) it depends

In this case, about 55% of the subjects of both sexes agreed. To agree to this question is a classic example of an assimilative attitude. When we consider this question in view of the age of emigration, it becomes obvious that the older the subject was when emigrating, the more willing he/she is to agree with this assimilative attitude. According to Spearman the correlation coefficients are $r=0.15$, $p<0.02$. On the other hand, the duration of emigration proves to be of no significance ($r=0.05$, $p<0.44$).

It should be mentioned, however, that I found when I talked to some subjects about this question that they had chosen "yes" without having considered the implications of the question. We should not forget that with some questions it is easier to agree than to disagree. As for the countries, in this case it is not Israel, but the USA which shows the highest number of negative answers, whereas only half of the subjects living in Israel agree.

4. Conclusion

1. My hypothesis was that the age of emigration would prove an important factor for the preservation of the habits acquired first: the older the person was when leaving his/her home-country, the more willing I expected them to be to maintain their own linguistic and cultural habits. Another important factor was the duration of emigration: it was to be expected that after a prolonged stay in the target-country, the imported cultural and linguistic habits would increasingly be replaced by the language and culture of the target-country. Both these expectations were confirmed by the results obtained with regard to the gestures used for counting and with lexical items, not, however, with regard to the language used for notetaking and for doing mental arithmetics - here it was only the age of emigration which turned out to be of significance, not the duration of emigration.

2. As to the individual attitudes towards the preservation of L1/C1: we encounter an assimilative attitude predominantly with people who emigrated at a more advanced age, whereas people who emigrated at an early age tend either to give more discriminating answers or to stick to L1. It is not to be excluded, however, that in these cases the results were influenced by people's general readiness to agree rather than to disagree.

3. Women in particular seem to be more resistant to assimilative behaviour, as was illustrated by questions 3 (gestures used for counting, $p < 0.01$), 4 (mental arithmetics; $p < 0.03$), and, to a lesser degree, 1 (note-taking, $p < 0.31$). They are more clearly oriented towards L1/C1, and thus either show anti-assimilative attitudes or create the conditions for bicultural behaviour by trying to consciously assimilate the new culture on the basis of their original culture and language. With men this seems to be less often the case, but this remains to be proven by case studies.

Translated by Ingrid Pfandl-Buchegger

Notes

- ¹ Paper presented at "The International Conference on Multiculturalism and Minority Groups: From theory to practice", The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, June 1997. I would like to thank Arno Heimgartner from the Department of Education at the University of Graz for his assistance with statistics, Tom Priestly from the University of Alberta, Canada, for some useful remarks, and my colleague Peter Grzybek for some critical observations. Any remaining errors are, of course, my responsibility.
- ² The complete Russian text of the two questionnaires can be requested by e-mail from the author (pfandl@kfunigraz.ac.at); it is still also available as a Postscript-file via FTP: type: ftp gewi.kfunigraz.ac.at; log in as user "anonymous"; send your e-mail address as password; type: cd pub/slalist; and type: get voprosnik1.ps and then get voprosnik2.ps.
- ³ I should like to thank some of them for their invaluable assistance, especially Maria Polinsky from California, Ekaterina Protasova from Helsinki, David & Nona-Karina Stern from Stockholm, Nadia Stange-Zhirovova from Brussels, Arkadij Purisman from Haifa, Ruprecht Baur from Essen and many others.
- ⁴ For technical reasons, in the figures the decimal point is rendered by a comma.

- 5 As this question was part of my second questionnaire and thus not answered by all the 312 persons who had filled in the first questionnaire, it was extrapolated with regard to the total number of subjects. The two numbers given under N usually refer to the number of valid answers and to the number of all the questionnaires received (including those which gave no answer to this question).
- 6 I analysed the speech of 2 women living in Israel and Belgium. The data were collected by face-to-face-interviews, which I partly recorded.
- 7 The answer "Russian way, but straightening fingers" was not included in the questionnaire but was given by 2 men (both living in the USA) and 1 women (living in France).
- 8 The exact statistics are:

MENTAL ARITHM.	-,3262		
	N(251)		
	Sig ,000		
NOTE-TAKING	-,3180	,5334	
	N(222)	N(216)	
	Sig ,000	Sig ,000	
GESTURE F.COUNT.	-,0097	-,0912	-,0939
	N(108)	N(105)	N(97)
	Sig ,921	Sig ,355	Sig ,360
LEX.GAPS IN L1	MENTAL ARITHM.	NOTE-TAKING	

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