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DISCRIMINATION AND THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY:

FSU AND ETHIOPIAN IMMIGRANTS IN ISRAEL

**Thesis for Master of Arts Degree**

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March 2019

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**INTRODUCTION[[1]](#footnote-1)**

In a globalized world, where national borders and identities are blurred, the discourse about belonging, identity and the effect of global migration flows on world societies has become more and more relevant. Alongside the struggle to define their own hybrid identity, one of the main challenges of immigrants in modern times is the process of integration into the host society. While traditionally, scholars have focused on objective integration indicators, such as economic success (e.g. Borjas, 1994; Chiswick, 1998; Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2011), over the past few years, subjective parameters have been considered to be of no less importance to the understanding of the immigrant’s assimilation process (e.g. Raijman & Pinskey, 2011; Amit, 2012; De-vroome et al., 2014).

 Discrimination against others, based on their skin color, race, gender, religion or belief, is considered to be a major social problem. According to the literature, there are two main sources of discrimination: prejudice, and cultural or economic threat (Quillian, 1995; Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2007). Although the two sources can be viewed as distinct, in practice, both theories influence one another. Discrimination, as an important indicator of social integration, can be measured as an objective parameter, in terms of compared income and labor market participation, or as a subjective parameter, by the reported experience of the individual who is the subject of discrimination. It is important to investigate the subjective experience of discrimination, as it can affect the individual’s (in our case the immigrant’s) social participation and can even influence his or her mental and physical health (Liebkind et al., 2004; Berry & Sabatier, 2010).

 Studies on the subject of destination language proficiency among immigrants have led to a wide consensus, supported with empirical evidence, that the acquisition of the host country language is crucial to a better and more successful integration process (Chiswick, 1998; Chiswick & Miller, 2001; Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; De-vroome et al., 2014). Not only is the acquisition of the new language an important tool for basic communication, it is also viewed as a meaningful form of cultural capital and a symbolic asset, which can entail social power and hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1991). The acquisition of the new language can improve the immigrant’s social skills and perceived social status and hence reduce his or her experience of discrimination.

Here, we aim to investigate **the effect of destination-language proficiency on perceived discrimination within two distinct immigration groups in Israel: Former Soviet Union (FSU) immigrants and Ethiopian immigrants**. By conducting a logit regression analysis, using data from the New Immigrants Survey (2010–2011) and the Israeli census of 2008 conducted by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, we analyze the role that destination-language proficiency (alongside all other relevant factors) plays in the story of the social integration of the two investigated immigration groups.

The comparison between the two groups allows us to discuss the impact of the country of origin as well as its economic, political and historical background on the human capital of its emigrants, and thus the impact on how well they start life in their new environment. While the set of personal characteristics, which are affected by origin and background, can vary within each group, immutable group visibility, i.e. skin color, is a common characteristic of the whole Ethiopian group. Unlike the Ethiopian group, FSU immigrants can blur their origin by, for example, speaking fluent Hebrew and adjusting their accent; by doing so, they can avoid prejudiced and stereotyped negative feedback on their social performance. Taking this issue under consideration is crucial to our analysis of origin-based and racial discrimination.

Our results present an interesting outcome regarding the impact of language proficiency on the immigrant’s experience of discrimination. We have found that only in formal interactions or situations where power is involved, Hebrew proficiency takes an important role in reducing perceived discrimination. These formal social spheres were found to have the highest rates of reported discrimination, indicating that where discrimination is found to be relatively high, language proficiency has a significant influence. In addition, our results confirm the findings from previous studies comparing the two investigated groups, showing that there are fundamental differences regarding reported levels of discrimination alongside reported levels of Hebrew proficiency. FSU immigrants experience less discrimination due to their origin and have reported higher levels of Hebrew proficiency in comparison to the Ethiopian group. Finally, we have not found differential effects of Hebrew proficiency on perceived discrimination between the two investigated groups, due to statistically insignificant results in the regression analysis regarding the Ethiopian sample.

**BACKGROUND**

1. **The Setting: Former Soviet Union and Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel**

The story of the formation of Israel, through the Jewish return from the diaspora, is viewed as a prototype of immigrant society, since it was formed mostly by immigrants and is largely inhabited by those immigrants and their descendants (Semyonov et al., 2015). The fact that Israel has a high proportion of foreign-born citizens has drawn the attention of many social researchers and demographers in particular. The Israeli “law of return” grants any immigrant from Jewish ancestry and their non-Jewish family members Israeli citizenship and the right to settle in Israel. The motives that drive these immigrants are mainly religious and ideological, although many have found settling in Israel to be an opportunity to improve their sense of belonging and their economic condition (Amit, 2011; Semyonov et al., 2015).

The present study aims to investigate the two most recent and large-scale groups of immigrants to arrive in Israel: immigration flows from the FSU and Ethiopia. Since 1989, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, nearly one million immigrants from FSU countries have migrated to Israel. FSU immigrants are today’s largest group of immigrants followed by the Ethiopian group, which consists of nearly 85,000 immigrants who have arrived in Israel since 1980 (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

These two immigrant groups are fundamentally different in many respects. As discussed above, in the past three decades FSU immigrants arrived in Israel in mass numbers, mainly due to new economic opportunities and political uncertainty in their country of origin (Remennick, 2004; Amit, 2012). It is considered to be a highly educated and skilled group, as 60% of the newcomers had an academic degree and a professional occupation prior to migration. However, studies point out that, mainly due to a lack of Hebrew language proficiency and therefore less contact with native Israelis, the occupational integration of FSU immigrants has not been very successful, as the majority of them make their living with low-skilled jobs (Remmenick, 2004); their struggle to close the earnings gap with the native-born population is still an on-going process. Immigrants from the FSU who arrive at a younger age are more capable of bridging this economic gap, as their process of cultural integration has been found to be significantly better compared to older cohorts of immigrants (Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2011). Besides its human capital impact on Israeli economy and society, the post-Soviet immigration has influenced the country’s demographic composition, as their share in the population has reached 40% in some cities.

While FSU immigrants came from a relatively developed, industrialized country, the majority of Ethiopian immigrants came from rural areas and a nomadic culture. After Ethiopian Jews’ “Jewishness” was recognized in 1973, the opportunity to immigrate to Israel—which fulfilled their religious aspirations and their desire to escape hunger, economic sanctions and civil war—became within reach. Upon arrival, they had no formal education or economic resources, and as they were perceived as a vulnerable population group, they were sent to absorption centers in order to learn Hebrew and other skills beneficial for social integration (Offer, 2004).

Scholars have shown that, although the Ethiopian immigrants received some initial guidance, there are major gaps between them and other Jewish ethnic groups regarding educational and occupational attainments: they have lower levels of education, lower employment rates, and are more likely to have low-skilled occupations (Semyonov et al., 2015; Offer, 2004; Amit, 2012). In addition, the Ethiopian group is a visible ethnic group, hence it faces another obstacle in the process of economic and social integration (Pendakur & Pendakur, 2002). Nevertheless, a recent study comparing the self-identity of three ethnic groups in Israel (Amit, 2012) found that the Ethiopian immigrants defined themselves more as Israeli than did the two other groups (FSU and those from Western countries), which appears to reflect their wish for social integration by all means.

1. **Theoretical Analysis**

2.1 *Perceived Discrimination*

Forms of discrimination on the basis of race, gender, social status or any other characteristic are viewed as serious social problems. Discrimination results in excluding individuals from social opportunities available to others based solely on innate or personal characteristics that associate one to a specific social group. Discrimination, when it occurs, is often not directly observable but manifests itself indirectly and can be experienced in many forms and areas of social life.

 Exploring the experience of individuals who are potentially at risk of discrimination, rather than those who hold prejudices and tend to discriminate against others, has become the interest of social-psychology theoreticians in the past few decades. Crocker and Major (1989) suggested that members of stigmatized or negatively stereotyped groups face attributional ambiguity to their actions on a regular basis. According to this concept, one can interpret feedback from advantaged group members toward a disadvantaged group member as reflecting purely on his/her behavior and skills on the one hand, or being related to prejudice and discrimination on the other hand. In this sense, the integration process of immigrants could be negatively affected by the ambiguity of feedback if they believe that discrimination exists against their social group members. Steele and Aronson (1995) were the first to argue that the threat of stereotyping is related to the reduction of intellectual and social performance. Members of stigmatized groups who feel themselves to be at risk of confronting social stereotypes, due to their belonging to a specific group, are likely to be more anxious about their performance and as a result not to achieve their full potential. A crucial dimension of perceived discrimination and the interpretation of feedback is visibility. Visible group characteristics, such as skin color, religion and accent, have a large impact on individuals’ awareness of others’ judgments or feedback (Steele & Aronson, 1995); their visibility leads them to perceive themselves as being subjected to constant social discrimination.

Scholars have shown that the perception of oneself as a target of discrimination is reliably associated with low levels of social integration, as an outcome of developing a sense of alienation and rejection from the destination country’s native society. Moreover, it also documented that reported dissatisfaction with life, high levels of stress and anxiety, and even poor health are associated with feelings of discrimination (Liebkind et al., 2004; Berry & Sabatier, 2010).

Cultural assimilation is a multi-dimensional concept that can be investigated from many angles. Reported experienced discrimination is an important indicator of integration, although most studies have focused on other perspectives. One main point of view is the focus on economic success and levels of participation in the labor market as an indicator of social integration (Chiswick, 1998; Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Silberman et al. 2007; Amit, 2010; Semyonov et al., 2015). Others have focused on another point of view: that of subjectively reported levels of national identification (De-vroome et al., 2014) or life satisfaction in the host country (Amit 2010; Amit & Bar-Lev, 2014). De-vroome et al. (2014) have shown that immigrants who perceive themselves as targets of discrimination are more likely to report low levels of national identification and are less socially integrated. Raijman and Pinskey (2011) have used “perceived discrimination” as the dependent variable in their qualitative study of Christian immigrants in Israel who came from the FSU. They have shown that non-Jewish immigrants perceive themselves as a greater target of discrimination, in many social aspects, than the Jewish group of immigrants. These results not only shed light on the Israeli immigration case, but also highlight the importance of immigrants’ personal characteristics as markers of group distinction, which therefore play a significant role in group boundary construction.

By comparing the experience of discrimination of two major (and culturally distinct) ethnic groups of immigrants, we can add an important layer to the story of social assimilation and social composition in Israel. The set of macro-level characteristics that an immigrant carries from his or her home country are referred to in the literature as the “origin effect” (Van Tubergen & Kalmijn, 2005). These factors, which include the ethnicity and cultural background of the immigrant, are considered in this paper as the main category of comparison.

Multiple theories attempt to explain the reasoning behind exclusionary attitudes toward immigrants. Ultimately, the explanations can be divided into two perspectives of threat to an out-group: economic competition on one hand, and cultural preferences along with prejudice on the other hand. According to the economic approach, individuals who hold a vulnerable position in the labor market can develop negative attitudes toward out-group members who pose a real economic threat to them—for instance, taking over their jobs. The economic threat, which is affected by the competition over scarce resources, may be against individuals, groups, or both, and can be based on reality or perceived by the individual (Quillian, 1995; Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2007). If so, negative attitudes toward individual immigrants are likely to impact ethnic antagonism (between groups) when a specific ethnic group is composed of more individuals of the same socio-economic status, as they pose a threat to a specific labor market sector.

The cultural approach suggests that fear from intruding national and cultural ideas and values that can endanger the local and homogeneous culture is the main reason for the adoption of negative sentiment toward out-group members. Scholars who hold the cultural approach claim that national identity has the strongest impact on popular sentiment and that the sense of cultural threat (derived mainly by nationalist politicians or religious fundamentalists) eventually leads to cultural segregation, negative sentiment toward out-group members, prejudice and discrimination (Quilian, 1995; Fetzer, 2000). In addition, anti-immigrant attitudes are more likely to arise when immigrants come from nations of different historical civilizations. Furthermore, inter-group conflicts between societies increase when there are more identity differences based on different languages, religions, customs and history (Rustenbach, 2010).

The large-scale waves of immigration to Israel in the 1990s have changed the face of Israeli society, which has become less hegemonic, even more heterogeneous, and highly divided. FSU immigrants, as they arrived en masse, were the first to suffer from social alienation and discrimination. Although they were subjected to social discrimination due to their cultural background, high socio-economic achievements and, mainly, to cultural resemblance to the Ashkenazi society (Jews of European descent), they could have absorbed into Israeli society more easily than other groups of immigrants (Smooha, 2008).

Meanwhile, Ethiopian immigrants came from a distinct side of the world, carrying with them a set of values and customs that are culturally different to those of Israelis. Their encounter with Israeli society revealed new mechanisms of exclusion and discrimination based in part on cultural differences, but mainly on race. Their blackness, which was a new appearance in the Israeli environment, was (and still is) the key element to their experience of social discrimination, the questioning of their Jewishness, and their cultural acceptance (Ben-Eliezer, 2004). Therefore, based on the background presented here of the two immigration flows, we expect to find higher rates of reported experienced discrimination among the Ethiopian group.

* 1. *Destination Language Proficiency*

Boundaries between groups are the source of social alienation, negative attitudes, prejudice and eventually discrimination toward ethnic minorities, i.e. immigrants and their descendants. These boundaries, as discussed above, are based on fear and can be bridged by successful integration and meaningful contact and interactions between individuals from both groups. Social contact gives information on one’s personal characteristics, and positive contact should lead to a better inter-group perception, which can reduce prejudice and hence reduce discrimination (Pettigrew, 1998; Rustenbach 2010). If we take this analysis one step further, we can argue that language is the key to meaningful social connections, better communication, and a main factor in the process of integration into a host society.

 Clearly, language skills are an important form of human capital. The acquisition of a new language (the country of destination’s native language) plays a central role in the integration of immigrants in their new social and economic environment (Chiswick, 1998). In recent years there have been a number of studies in the demographic field that focused on the role of language proficiency. Dustmann and Fabbri (2003) have analyzed the determinants of fluency in English for non-white immigrants in the U.K. and how it relates to their economic success and labor market performance. They found that for all groups, language proficiency is associated with higher employment probabilities and with higher earnings. From another point of view, De-Vroome, Verkuyten and Martinovic (2014) have shown that for both Moroccan and Turkish groups of immigrants in Holland, Dutch language proficiency, perceived discrimination, and contact with natives proved to be important conditions for national identification (as their indicator for assimilation).

Israel, as a country that was formed by massive flows of modern immigrations, has drawn the attention of immigration researchers. Destination-language proficiency has been found to have a great positive effect on immigrants’ earnings and economic incorporation in Israel (Chiswick, 1998). Regarding this topic, when we compare the country of origin of post-1990 immigrants, the findings show that FSU immigrants are more likely than all other groups to become economically active, while Ethiopian descendants are the most disadvantaged group in terms of attainment of high-status occupations and earnings (Semyonov et al., 2015). Alongside economic success, social integration in the form of national identity, life satisfaction and a sense of belonging to the host country are found to be influenced by levels of Hebrew proficiency, for all groups of immigrants including those from the FSU, Ethiopia, France and other Western countries (Remennick, 2004; Amit 2009; Amit 2012; Amit & Bar-Lev, 2014).

As discussed above, visibility is one of the main obstacles of the immigrant’s process of assimilation into the host society. Three domains of visibility need to be taken under consideration: skin tone and origin-visible characteristics per se; accent and language proficiency; and the influence of origin on appearance. While the first domain is unchangeable, the other two can be bridged over time and with the immigrant’s abilities and ambition to adapt (Hersch, 2011). Smooha (2008) has argued that the physical resemblance of FSU immigrants to long-time native Israelis provided them with a better starting point in the new environment, compared to the 1950’s north-African immigrant flows to Israel. In addition, FSU immigrants are already “appearance advantageous” compared to other visible immigrants (Ethiopian in our case); by acquiring Hebrew language and accent, they can hide their origin and hence be less exposed to stereotype-based negative attitudes.

Researchers have shown that levels of destination-language proficiency are different between groups of immigrants. For instance, Van Tubergen and Kalmijn (2005) have focused on the macro-level determinants that affect an immigrant’s destination-language speaking ability. They have shown that the country of origin’s characteristics played a central role in the acquisition of the new language, such as having a modernized economy and advanced educational system, which had a positive influence. In this sense, the origin effect should give the FSU group an advantage over the Ethiopian group. It is also argued that distance—physically (between the countries of origin and destination) and linguistically—is a key factor when the effect of the country of origin is examined (Chiswick & Miller, 2001; Van Tubergen & Kalmijn, 2005). Geographic distance has a negative effect (because of potential remigration), an issue that has no influence in this paper due to the similarity of distance of the two countries of origin and the low possibility of remigration of the two groups, owing to the nature of the Israeli “law of return,” which grants Israeli citizenship to any Jew upon formal immigration. It is important to mention that, between the two groups, FSU immigrants have higher rates of continuing migration, mainly to North American countries. The “continued immigrants” are mainly young and educated middle-class immigrants that seek to better their socio-economic status, and find an answer to this quest by emigrating from Israel (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008). As this group mainly consist of higher-educated immigrants, it is more likely that their Hebrew proficiency is already higher than their less educated peers.

Linguistic distance is more complex because of the uniqueness of each case. If we are to compare the linguistic distance between Hebrew and Amharic and Hebrew and Russian, it could be argued that each language is close to Hebrew but from different directions. On the one hand, Hebrew and Amharic are from the same linguistic family tree, the Semitic family. Thus, according to the historical evolution of languages, as discerned by linguists, Hebrew is linguistically closest to Amharic and Arabic (Beenstock et al., 2001). On the other hand, Russian, which is from a distinct linguistic family (the Balto-Slavic) than Hebrew, has had a significant influence on the structure of modern Hebrew because of the first massive immigrations from Eastern Europe to Israel (the Ashkenazi immigration), beginning at the end of the 19th century, which formed the first society of modern Hebrew speakers.

Alongside group level and origin effect, it has been found that individual characteristics have no less importance when it comes to the acquisition of new language. Educational level (which to some extent reflects the effect of wealth), age at migration, and duration of residence in the country of destination (the exposure effect) are crucial when destination-language proficiency is examined (Chiswick & Miller, 2001). Altogether, after taking into consideration the group level and origin effect, we would expect that individual characteristics, the exposure effect and the level of education (which is partially affected by the origin effect) would have greater influence on the results of levels of Hebrew proficiency.

Individuals who desire to assimilate and have an interest in having social interactions with those in the receiving country will have a stronger motivation to learn the country’s language. Motivation to learn a second language is positively correlated with the individual’s attitude toward the people who speak this particular language (Gardner et al., 1999). If so, immigrants who find the local society to be open and receiving will be motivated to learn the local language. Mesch (2003) found that among FSU immigrants in Israel, perceived attitudes of the society toward immigrants were significantly related to Hebrew proficiency. Accordingly, the interrelationship between the main variables of this paper may be bidirectional: On one hand, language proficiency may affect the immigrant’s experience of discrimination. On the other hand, as discussed above, perceived discriminatory attitudes toward immigrants can influence the immigrant’s motivation to learn the local language. Regarding this issue, we cannot distinguish here between the two cases, as our data are cross-sectional, yet it is taken under our consideration.

 Here, we aim to investigate **the association between destination-language proficiency and perceived discrimination among the FSU immigrants as opposed to the Ethiopian immigrants**. In light of evidence showing that destination-language proficiency has a major effect on the integration process of immigrants, the goal is to reveal the layers behind ethnic discrimination while examining whether the role of language proficiency differs between the two ethnic groups of immigrants.

In light of the various theories discussed above in the context of the FSU and Ethiopian immigrations in Israel, we present several research hypotheses, as follows:

1. Hebrew proficiency will be negatively related to perceived discrimination for both groups. The more fluent the immigrant is in Hebrew, the less he or she will subjectively experience discrimination in all areas of social life.
2. The association between Hebrew proficiency and perceived discrimination will be weaker among Ethiopian immigrants than among FSU immigrants, due to greater ethnic visibility of the former group.
3. Origin effect will predict perceived discrimination. Ethiopian immigrants will report experiencing more discriminatory attitudes than FSU immigrants.
4. The immigrant’s socio-economic status, i.e. level of education and occupational status, will negatively predict perceived discrimination. The higher the immigrants’ level of education and the greater their likelihood is of employment, the less they will report experiencing discrimination.
5. Hebrew proficiency will be positively correlated to the immigrant’s socio-economic status. The higher the immigrants’ level of education and the greater their likelihood is of employment, the more fluent they will be in Hebrew.
6. Hebrew proficiency will be negatively correlated to the year of immigration and positively correlated with age (birth cohorts). The longer the immigrants have been in the country and the younger they are, the more fluent they will be in Hebrew.

**METHODOLOGY**

**1. The Data**

Data for the present analysis were taken from the New Immigrants Survey (2010–2011) and the Israeli census of 2008 conducted by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics. The New Immigrants Survey is the first survey of its kind following the massive waves of immigration that began in the early 1990s. The main purpose of the survey was to examine the integration of immigrants since 1990 by analyzing their social and economic life and the characteristics that affect the process and pace of integration. The study is based on a representative sample of FSU and Ethiopian immigrants aged 25-75. For both groups, the criteria for determining layers were republic (FSU) or country (Ethiopia) of origin and year of immigration (arrived after 1990). The sample consisted of 3,104 immigrants, of which the FSU group was 81% (2,515 immigrants) and the Ethiopian group was 19% (589 immigrants).

**2. Variables**

The New Immigrants Survey provided information regarding demographic and immigration characteristics, and the 2008 census completed the model with additional socio-economic and labor force activity information.

 The dependent variable in this study is divided into five different variables of perceived discrimination. The five questions were dichotomous, asking whether the immigrant has faced discrimination due to his/her origin. The immigrants were asked questions regarding facing discrimination (1) at work, (2) at a government office, (3) at shopping places, (4) at places of entertainment and (5) at any other place.

The independent variables are as follows:

 *Hebrew language proficiency.* This was an index calculated from three questions regarding the level of speaking, reading and writing Hebrew. The language proficiency scale ranged from (3) “do not know at all how to speak, read or write in Hebrew” to (15) “fluent in speaking, reading and writing Hebrew.” Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient was found to be high (R=.96). As we considered this variable to be our key independent variable, any information that was missing at least one language fluency indicator (speaking, reading or writing) was omitted from the sample.

 *Religion.* This was a dichotomous variable (dummy variable) indicating whether the respondent is Jewish or not (Jewish=1, not Jewish=0).

 *Education level.* This was rated on a scale of 1-3. Since the distributions of education levels between FSU and Ethiopian immigrants are so different, we have constructed two scales with different values, one for each group. For FSU immigrants, the scale was from 1-3: (1) no diploma from primary, intermediate or secondary school; (2) high-school diploma and post-secondary; (3) undergraduate degree and higher. For Ethiopian immigrants, the scale was from 1-3: (1) no diploma; (2) primary or intermediate school diploma; (3) secondary school and above. Since the minimum age for our sample was 25 years, in theory, all respondents have had enough time to complete post-secondary or undergraduate studies.

 *Occupational status*. This was a dichotomous variable (dummy variable) indicating whether or not the respondent was employed, and if so, whether they were employed full- or part- time.

 *Year of immigration.* This was acontinuous variable thatindicated the year that the immigrant arrived in Israel, from 1990 to 2008.

 In addition, age(five-year cohorts) and gender (male=1) were included in the multivariate model. A binomial logistic regression was used in the multivariate analysis, since the dependent variable is dichotomous. A series of regression models was conducted for FSU and Ethiopian immigration groups separately in order to investigate the differences in log odds coefficients between the two groups.

**FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

The first section of the findings is descriptive. Table 1 summarizes the background, socio-economic and immigration characteristics of the two investigated groups. After comparing the two groups, we can conclude that they do not significantly differ in age and gender ratio, although the FSU immigrant group has a greater proportion of women than the Ethiopian immigrant group (about 58% and about 53% respectively). Regarding religion, there is a significant difference in the percentage of Jewish descendants in the two groups: 96.8% of the Ethiopian immigrants are Jewish but only 68% of FSU immigrants are Jewish (χ2= 4.9, *p<*0.01*)*.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 1**. **Characteristics of FSU and Ethiopian Immigrants** |  |  |
| Variables FSU Ethiopians Significance level |
| *Background variables* |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Age  |  | 52 | 49 |  | \*\*\* |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Male (%) |  | 42.3 | 47.4 |  | \*\* |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Jewish (%) |  | 68 | 96.8 |  | \*\* |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Socio-economic variables* |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| High Education (%)Medium Education (%) | 39.744.7 | 17.214 |  | n/an/a |  |
| Low Education (%) | 15.6 | 68.8 |  | n/a |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Employed (%) | 66 | 56 |  | \*\*\* |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Immigration variables* |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Age at Migration | 38 | 34.6 |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Years Since Migration |  | 13.1 | 13.8 |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| N=3104 |   | 2515 | 589 |   | -  |   |
|  \*\* *p* < 0.05; \*\*\* *p* < 0.01 |  |  |  |  |

 Findings from Table 1 show that, consistent with the literature, there is a significant difference in educational level between the two groups. Even after the adjustment of the education variable for each group (as described earlier) we can still see a great difference; about 40% of FSU immigrants are highly educated while only about 15% of them reported to have a low level of education. By contrast, only 17% of the Ethiopian immigrant group is highly educated, while about 69% do not have any diploma (‘low educated’ in the equivalent education scale). Occupational status is another important social-status variable and, as we can see, the difference between the groups in this case is found to be significant (χ2= 21, *p<*.01*)*: 66% of FSU immigrants and 56% of Ethiopian immigrants reported that they have a paid job.

 Differences between the two groups regarding immigration characteristics, i.e. age at migration and number of years in Israel (years since migration), are not significant. Although, it is important to note that the mean age at migration is high for both groups (when immigration and the assimilation process are considered): 38 for FSU immigrants and about 35 for Ethiopian immigrants.

 The respondents in the New Immigration Survey were asked to note whether they perceived discrimination in the past year due to their origin, in five different areas of social life: discrimination at the workplace, in a government or public office, at stores and shopping places, at places of entertainment, or at any other place. The differences between FSU and Ethiopian immigrants in the experience of discrimination are summarized in Figure 1.

 In all areas of social life, there is a significant difference between the two groups on reported experienced discrimination. We see from the chart that Ethiopian immigrants have reported, in each area, higher rates of experienced discrimination compared to the FSU immigrants. At their workplace,[[2]](#footnote-2) at government offices and at shopping places, the difference between the groups is around 15%–20%, while at places of entertainment or at any other area of social life the difference is around 10%.

 It is noticeable that when the encounter is more formal and is involved in the interaction (at work or in front of a government official), the perceived discrimination rates are the highest, for both groups. In general, around 22%–42% of the Ethiopian immigrants have experienced perceived discrimination in at least in one area of social life, while for the FSU immigrants group the percentages are significant lower, around 10%–26%. All mentioned differences between the groups regarding the perception of discrimination, in each of the discrimination indicators, are statistically significant (*p<.*01). These results are as we anticipated and in accordance with hypothesis 3.

 **Figure 1: Percentages Reporting Perceived Discrimination, by Place of Origin**

Another analysis treats the differences between the groups regarding Hebrew proficiency independent variables. Figure 2 represents the Hebrew proficiency scale, with the percentages of each level of proficiency ranging from 3 (none) to 15 (fluent), divided into the two immigration groups.

 Figure 2 shows that FSU immigrants have a significantly higher level of Hebrew proficiency compared to the Ethiopian immigrants (χ2= 183.14, *p<*.01*)*. While about 21% of Ethiopian immigrants do not know Hebrew at all and about 17% of them know very little (4), only about 9% and 7% of the FSU immigrants fall into the same two categories, respectively. Although there is no significant difference in the highest level of fluency (about 12% of the Ethiopian immigrants and 14% of the FSU immigrants), we can still see larger portions of FSU immigrants with a higher score of language proficiency.

 In order to analyze the correlation between the independent variables of the research we present in Table 2 and Table 3, a correlation matrix was performed for the two immigrant groups separately. Table 2 displays the correlation matrix between the research variables for the Ethiopian immigrants group and Table 3 for the FSU immigrants group. Both tables show that our main independent variable (Hebrew proficiency), is significantly correlated with all the independent variables. Significant correlations between socio-economic status and Hebrew proficiency are not fully in accordance with our fifth research hypothesis.

 **Figure 2: Hebrew Proficiency Percentages, by Place of Origin**

Table 2 shows that for the Ethiopian immigrants, Hebrew proficiency is positively correlated with education and occupation status. Table 3 shows that for FSU immigrants, Hebrew proficiency is also positively correlated with occupation status, however it is negatively correlated with education. Although the correlation is rather small in size and could be negligible, a possible explanation may lie in the immigrant’s background, i.e. the origin effect. As discussed in the background section above, FSU immigrants are considered to be a highly educated group and for that reason, less educated FSU immigrants may have perceived their language proficiency, rather than their former studies and diplomas, as a key factor and opportunity for more successful and better social mobility.

 For both groups, Hebrew proficiency is positively and significantly correlated with age (birth cohorts) and negatively and significantly correlated with year of immigration. Thus, the younger the immigrants are and the longer they have been in Israel, the higher the level of their Hebrew. This last finding is in accordance with our sixth research hypothesis.

|  |
| --- |
| **Table 2. Correlation Matrix Between the Research Variables for Ethiopian Immigrants****(total N=589)** |
| Variables | Hebrew  | Education | Age | Year of Immigration |
|   | Proficiency |   |  |   |  |   |  |
| Hebrew  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Proficiency | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Education | 0.69\*\* | 1 |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Birth Cohort | 0.64\*\* | 0.46\*\* | 1 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Year of | -0.29\*\* | -0.23\*\* | 0.06 | 1 |
| Immigration |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|  \*\* *p* < 0.05; \*\*\* *p* < 0.01 |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |

The statistical analysis that we conducted for this research was a multivariate logistic regression, performed for each immigration group separately in order to compare coefficients and thus, the influence of each predictor on the reported experience of discrimination was examined.

|  |
| --- |
| **Table 3. Correlation Matrix Between the Research Variables for FSU Immigrants****(total N=2515)** |
| Variables | Hebrew  | Education | Age | Year of Immigration |
|   | Proficiency |   |  |  |   |  |
| Hebrew  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Proficiency | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Education | -0.14\*\* | 1 |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Birth Cohort | 0.68\*\* | -0.38\*\* | 1 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Year of | -0.32\*\* | 0.11\*\* | -0.04\* | 1 |
| Immigration |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|  \*\* *p* < 0.05; \*\*\* *p* < 0.01 |  |  |  |  |  |

Five regression models were conducted, with each model representing a different form of discrimination; hence each model represents a different dependent variable. Model A: Discrimination at work, Model B: Discrimination at government offices’, Model C: ‘Discrimination at shops’, Model D: ‘Discrimination at places of entertainment,’ and Model E: ‘Discrimination at other places.’ In addition, for each model, we conducted a simple regression version, which includes only our main independent variable, Hebrew proficiency, before proceeding to the full model. Table 4 displays the findings from the regression analysis.

According to Table 4, Hebrew proficiency was found to negatively predict perceived discrimination in Model A, Model B and Model C for both groups, while it is found to be significant only for the FSU immigrant group in Model A and Model B, after controlling all the variables in the full model. These findings partially support our first research hypothesis. Hebrew proficiency is negatively and significantly associated with the experience of discrimination at work and at government offices for the FSU immigrants. For Ethiopian immigrants, the association with Hebrew proficiency was similar, though the results were not statistically significant. Findings from Model D, as they were found to be statistically insignificant, do not support our first hypothesis: they are opposite in sign to the expected direction of our prediction for Hebrew proficiency in perceived discrimination, for both groups. Model E also shows insignificant findings with respect to our main topic of research. In general, lower levels of statistical significance that were found in regressions on the Ethiopian immigrant sample may be due, in part, to the relatively smaller sample size of this group.

Age was found to be a statistically significant factor only for FSU immigrants in Model A. According to these results, belonging to a younger cohort will predict higher reported rates of discrimination at the FSU immigrant’s workplace, yet not in other social life areas. Religion was found to be statistically insignificant for predicting perceived discrimination, across all models.

An interesting result was found through Model A to Model D regarding gender. For FSU immigrants, being a man predicts higher rates of perceived discrimination in all social areas that were specified in the survey. For Ethiopian immigrants, these results are statistically significant only in places of entertainment (as presented in Model D).

Findings from all models show that occupational status (whether the immigrant has a job or not) does not significantly predict changes in reported perceived discrimination. On the other hand, surprising findings are presented in all models regarding level of education. For immigrants with a low education level, the results are not statistically significant, yet they are for immigrants with a high educational background. Table 4 presents findings that contradict the fourth research hypothesis.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 4.** **Logit Analysis of Perceived Discrimination for FSU and Ethiopian Immigrants** |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Predictors* |  | *Model A* |  | *Model B* |  | *Model C* |  | *Model D* |  | *Model E* |  |
|   |   | Ethiopia | FSU | Ethiopia | FSU | Ethiopia | FSU | Ethiopia | FSU | Ethiopia | FSU |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Hebrew proficiency** | -0.08 | -0.05\*\* | -0.08 | -0.02\*\* | -0.01 | -0.01 | 0.02 | 0.02 | -0.07 | 0.04 |
|  |  | (-0.04) | (-0.02) | (-0.01) | (-0.02\*\*) | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.12\*\*) | (0.09\*\*) | (-0.01) | (0.03) |
| **Demographics** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Age (categories) | 0.02 | 0.07\*\* | 0.1 | 0.01 | 0.03 | 0.01 | 0.08 | 0.14 | 0.06 | -0.02 |
| Gender (male=1) | 0.29 | 0.28\*\* | 0.22 | 0.26\*\*\* | -0.09 | 0.24\*\* | 0.6\*\* | 0.43\*\*\* | 0.22 | 0.16 |
| Religion (Jewish=1) | 0.17 | 0.04 | -0.47 | 0.09 | -0.74 | 0.06 | -0.69 | 0.02 | -0.73 | 0.01 |
| **Socio-economics** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Education  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Low |  | 0.38 | -0.08 | 0.24 | -0.02 | 0.26 | -0.03 | 0.01 | -0.11 | -0.22 | -0.12 |
| High |  | 0.86\*\* | 0.19 | 0.83\*\* | 0.48\*\*\* | 0.28 | 0.42\*\*\* | 0.5 | 0.43\*\* | -0.08 | 0.3\*\* |
| Employed (yes=1) | 0.47 | 0.28 | -0.24 | -0.06 | 0.04 | -0.01 | 0.26 | -0.02 | 0.36 | -0.08 |
| **Immigration** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Year of Immigration | 0.03 | -0.01 | -0.01 | -0.01 | -0.01 | -0.03\*\* | -0.01 | -0.05\*\* | -0.01 | -0.02 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| (Constant) |  | -15.3 | 2.34 | 2.865 | 4.84 | 6.87 | 9.77\*\* | 2.25 | 7.63\*\* | 2.63 | 6.06 |
| a. \*\* *p* < 0.05; \*\*\* *p* < 0.01 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| b. The table presents the logit regression coefficients.c. Each model represents a different independent variable. Model A: discrimination at work; Model B: discrimination at government offices;  |
| Model C: discrimination at shops; Model D: discrimination at places of entertainment, and Model E: discrimination at other places.  |  |
| d. In parentheses: the score of Hebrew proficiency in a simple regression model, without controlling all other independent variables. |

 Models B to E show that a high level of education positively and significantly predicts the experience of discrimination for FSU immigrants, when the reference group (medium level of education) is held constant. With the exception of the workplace, in any other area of social life, a high level of education will predict higher reported rates of discrimination for FSU immigrants. For Ethiopian immigrants, similar surprising and significant results are presented in Model A and Model B: A high level of education predicts higher rates of reported discrimination at work and at government offices.

In addition, the year of immigration is negatively related to the experience of discrimination. This negative relation is significant for FSU immigrants according to the findings in Model C and Model D. For FSU immigrants, the earlier the immigrant arrived in Israel, the more they reported on experiencing discrimination at shops or places of entertainment.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Language, although considered to be a complex communication system, is the basic and key element in humans’ meaningful interactions. Moreover, the acquisition of destination language by immigrants has proven to be a meaningful and important human-capital resource when social integration, economic and earning gaps, sense of belonging to the host country, or national identification are examined (Chiswick, 1998; Chiswick & Miller, 2001; Remennick, 2004; Amit, 2012; De-vroome et al., 2014; Amit & Bar-Lev, 2014). In recent decades, the experience of discrimination and the influence of discriminatory feelings on one’s social participation and integration has started to draw the attention of social science researchers. It is agreed by most scholars that discriminatory feelings have a direct negative influence on many aspects of social performance, alongside personal mental and even physical health (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Liebkind et al., 2004; Berry & Sabatier, 2010). We decided to investigate how human capital—specifically destination-language proficiency—influences the immigrant’s experience of discrimination. Furthermore, from the same point of view, as the discussed literature mainly focuses on objective parameters of social integration such as earnings, here we try to reveal another layer of the immigrant’s social integration using a subjective parameter.

In order to measure the influence of host country language proficiency on the experience of discrimination, and how it differs between immigrants from different origins, we conducted a multivariate logit regression analysis, comparing the experience of FSU and Ethiopian immigrants in Israel, taking into consideration their cultural differences and the effect of country of origin on the immigrant’s innate characteristics and acquired skills.

In the examination of our main findings against the hypotheses of the research, we see that hypothesis 1 is partially supported: the level of Hebrew proficiency is negatively associated with perceived discrimination for FSU immigrants in their workplace and government offices, as presented in Models A and B. For Ethiopian immigrants, the results in Models A, B, C and E are in accordance with the hypothesis and we can see, as predicted, a negative prediction of Hebrew proficiency for perceived discrimination. However, these results are not statistically significant, which prevents us from making a comparison of coefficients of the two groups. Results from Model C are in accordance with hypothesis 1, and results from Model D contradict the hypothesis; however both models, regarding the influence of Hebrew proficiency, are not statistically significant for either group.

As discussed above, due to partially significant results, we could not compare the coefficients of Hebrew proficiency between the two groups in all the models, therefore it was difficult to examine hypothesis 2. In this regard, we assume that with a larger sample size for Ethiopian immigrant group, we could have had more significant results in our models. Hypothesis 3 is fully supported by our main findings; according to Figure 1, in all areas of social life, Ethiopian immigrants have reported higher rates of perceived discrimination in comparison to FSU immigrants. The differences between the two groups range from around 10% to around 20%. Findings from Figure 1 and Table 4 also reveal that where there are high levels of reported perceived discrimination, language proficiency has a greater influence. The highest levels of discrimination were reported by immigrants at their workplace and at government offices. Simultaneously, Models A and B, which represent these areas of social life, show statistically significant results for language proficiency in reducing perceived discrimination for FSU immigrants and the same (however insignificant) negative connection for Ethiopian immigrants. Another possible explanation could be in the nature of the interaction; language proficiency has a significant effect in reducing perceived discrimination if the discriminatory attitudes take place in a more formal interaction, where power may be involved.

Hypothesis 4, which deals with the immigrant’s socio-economic status, was not supported in all five models, for both groups. While the results for occupation status and lowest level of education were found to be statistically insignificant, the statistic relation between the highest level of education and perceived discrimination is found to be in opposition to the literature and to our hypothesis. The present findings indicate that a higher level of education predicts higher rates of perceived discrimination for Ethiopian immigrants in Models A and B, and for FSU immigrants in all models except Model A. A possible explanation for these results could be the awareness of social stratification and power among more educated individuals. This positive relation for FSU immigrants is relevant in all areas of social life except at the workplace, which could support the later explanation: Where level of education is not relevant in the interaction, more educated individuals will be more sensitive to discrimination. For Ethiopian immigrants, the same results were found to be relevant also at their workplace, which indicates that for this group, perceived discrimination is even more institutional and their origin and skin color play a significant role.

The immigrant’s socio-economic status did emerge as a significant predictor of Hebrew proficiency for Ethiopians, as predicted in hypothesis 5 (Table 2). For FSU immigrants, occupation status was found to be positively correlated with Hebrew proficiency and—contrary to our hypothesis—education level was negatively related with language proficiency, although the correlation is rather weak (Table 3). Regarding hypothesis 6, the study’s results fully support the claim that among both groups, the longer the immigrants have been in the country and the younger he/she is, the more fluent he/she will be in Hebrew.

Our full analysis examines five different spheres in which immigrants can experience discrimination. We can conceptually divide the five models into two: institutional discrimination, which takes place in a more formal interaction (at the workplace and at government offices); and discrimination that can occur in an informal interaction. The first conceptual group, theoretically, has implications for labor-market consequences, income and socioeconomic status. Results from the multivariate logit regression show that host country language proficiency is significantly associated with reduced chances of perceived discrimination, especially in this social sphere. If this is true, although our integration indicator is subjective, we are able to relate it to other objective and subjective indicators.

 In the end, the Ethiopian sample size limited us from comparing the effect of language proficiency of the two groups, since results for this group were found to be statistically insignificant. Although comparing the influence of destination language proficiency between the two groups was one of the main goals of our research, our analysis sheds light on the relevance of the origin effect (socio-economic background, different characteristics and even skin color), as well as the acquisition of new human capital, thereby adding to the story of social stratification and origin-based discrimination. We assume that further investigation, concentrating on the second generation of the two investigated groups, would reveal another aspect of the ethnicity effect on the integration process of immigrants and the role of language proficiency among native-born immigrants’ descendants.

1. I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Barbara Okun, my research advisor, for her patient guidance, encouragement and meaningful critiques of this research work and academic journey. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2 Respondents who were currently unemployed could have had a job in the past year, in which case he/she could have experienced and reported discrimination. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)