

LINGUISTIC IDENTITY AND PSYCHO-SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF MULTILINGUAL IMMIGRANTS WITH TWO LINGUA FRANCAS

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There are approximately 600,000 Canadians who cannot speak neither English nor French: 12,475 of these are Russian-speakers from ex-USSR republics faced with an ESL/FSL immigrant context. These 'societal semilinguals'—who can speak neither official language— cannot integrate into the Canadian society and resort to forming small enclosed speech communities of their own. Inherent in these coping practices are many social and psychological problems. It follows that their psycho-social integration is key, more so when Canada's population and economic growth in the next fifty years depends on continued immigration and their integration. To this end, an integrated whole would produce more benefits than a nation of enclaves. This case study reports on the multilingual linguistic identity of 8 Russophones in Ward 10 of the city of Toronto, Canada. Through a combination of socio-demographic, linguistic, and migratory questionnaires as well as a social-psychology identity metric a portrait of the participants' linguistic identity is presented. The findings point to a hyper-use of Russian as a survival lingua franca, while English and French are relegated to purely instrumental purposes—ironically, as if the participants had never left their original countries. Interestingly, their psychological identity integration remained quite low regardless of length of residence. These results point to very strong identifications with their common denominator: the Russian language and culture regardless of country of origin within the ex-USSR. Moreover, this 'separatist' enclave acculturation outcome keeps these multilinguals socially and psychologically isolated in their speech communities. Individually they have trouble integrating their Mother-Tongue, Russian, and Canadian English into a cohesive linguistic identity. Socially, they constitute a large untapped source of growth for Canada, a country built on the back of linguistic and cultural diversity. Given the increased contact and mobility that characterizes our age this cultural impasse takes on international proportions while its solutions remain equally applicable to both Canada and the international scene.