

## **Immigrant Families: Mothers' and Fathers' Proficiency in a Host-Country Language and Psychological Well-Being of Daughters and Sons**

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### **Abstract**

The study examined the association between immigrants' adaptation – as reflected by host-country language proficiency (based on self-ratings) – and their children's psychological well-being in two countries: Germany and Israel. The findings stressed the importance of child gender in the study of parent-child dyads. Our separate analyses of boys' and girls' subsamples revealed results undetected when we analyzed the subsamples of both genders together. Specifically, we found that self-reported paternal proficiency in the German language was positively associated with their daughters' psychological well-being, whereas maternal proficiency in German was positively associated with their sons' well-being. No association was found in our Israeli sample between immigrant language proficiency and their children's psychological well-being during the first three and half years following migration. Further analyses demonstrated that in Germany, the quality of father-daughter communication mainly accounted for the association between paternal language proficiency and their daughters' psychological well-being; while maternal psychological well-being mediated at least partially the association between maternal language proficiency and sons' psychological well-being. The results are discussed in light of the differences and similarities in the settings of the two countries.

## **Immigrant Families: Mothers' and Fathers' Proficiency in a Host-Country Language and Psychological Well-Being of Daughters and Sons**

### **Introduction**

Most studies about parent-child relationships among immigrant families focus on mother-child dyads. The rare studies that examined both mother-child and father-child interaction in immigrant families found that parents' gender plays an important role in the association between parental adaptation in the host country and their children's psychological well-being (Costigan & Dokis, 2006; Crockett, Brown, Iturbide, Russel, & Wilkinson-Lee, 2009; Qin, 2009; Suárez-Orozco & Qin, 2006; Updegraff, Delgado, & Wheeler, 2009). This paper focuses on the effect of immigrant fathers' and mothers' adaptation (as reflected in host-country language proficiency, based on self-ratings) on their daughters' versus sons' mental status. We consider parents' as well as children's gender crucial variables in the study of parent-child relationships. The relevance of gender in this context can be deduced from gender schema theory (Bem, 1985). Bem (1985), which proposed that socially prescribed gender schemas for maleness and femaleness are based on cultural definitions of accepted gender roles and behaviors. These gender schemas guide individual behavior from early childhood. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that gender schemas also lead to differing relationship pattern in each of the following dyads: mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter and father-son. Likewise, the developmental perspective (Maccoby, 1990, 1998) – which stated that boys and girls play different social roles when they interact with each other and when they interact with opposite-gender individuals – led us to expect distinct association patterns across the four parent-child dyads.

Consequently, our study of parent-child relationships in immigrant families took into account the gender of children and parents. We examined the impact of immigrant mothers'/fathers' adaptation, as reflected by host-country language proficiency (based on self-ratings), on their daughters'/sons' psychological well-being. We also investigated two mediating mechanisms that might underlie the association between parental proficiency in the host-country language and children's psychological well-being, namely 1) parents' psychological well-being; and 2) the quality of parent-child communication. These issues were examined within two different social settings: among Jewish immigrants from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) living in Israel, and among ethnic German

immigrants from the FSU living in Germany. Thus, the study implements a cross-national comparative design.

### **Theoretical background and previous research**

Host-country language is a powerful instrument used by immigrants to acquire and integrate the cultural norms, values, and beliefs of their new social environment. The acquisition of the new language is an important objective for immigrants; it influences many aspects of their integration in the host society, and has been described as an indicator of a broader process of social integration (Mesch, 2003). This process is especially relevant for permanent immigrants, making a long-term personal investment in the host country and aspiring to being proficient in the host-country language (Chiswick & Miller, 1995; Van Tubergen & Kalmijn, 2009). The acquisition of host-country language has been found to be strongly and positively associated with immigrants' labor market achievements, economic success, social integration, political participation and life satisfaction (Amit, 2010; Chiswick, 1998; Chiswick & Miller, 2002; Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Remenick, 2004).

A substantial number of studies have examined the effects of host-country language proficiency on immigrant well-being (Amit, 2010; Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Remenick, 2004). The current research aims to add to this body of knowledge by studying the effect of immigrant language acquisition on their children's psychological well-being. To the best of our knowledge, this subject has not received extended attention in the existing research literature. Previous research has found that immigrant parents not proficient in the host-country language tended to use their children as interpreters. It has been suggested that immigrant parents prefer to be assisted by their children rather than by adult interpreters, because they trust their children and feel comfortable with them (Morales & Hanson, 2005). Children who take on the role of interpreters in immigrant families are referred to in the literature as "language brokers." Although several researchers view this role in positive terms (Ponizovsky, Kurman, & Roer-Strier, 2012; Wu & Kim, 2009), others articulate concerns about the negative consequences the role may have on child mental health. Specifically, questions have been raised about the stress and burden that a child with the responsibilities of a language broker may experience (Love & Buriel, 2007; Morales & Hanson, 2005). It is plausible, then, to suggest that parental proficiency in the host-country language reduces the stress their children may experience (as language brokers). *We expected that children of parents who report a higher level of language*

*proficiency would express a higher level of psychological well-being than children whose parents reported a lower level of language proficiency (Hypothesis 1).*

Previous studies have also suggested that the role of language broker in immigrant families is predominantly filled by daughters (Morales & Hanson, 2005; Weiskirsch, 2005). It is plausible, then, to suggest that girls may be more exposed to on-going demanding situations and stressors than sons. Therefore, *we expected that daughters would be more affected by parental language proficiency than sons (Hypothesis 2).*

We further hypothesized two mediating mechanisms through which parental language proficiency might influence the psychological well-being of children in immigrant families. The first considered mediator was parental mental health. Previous studies have demonstrated that immigrants with a high level of host-country language proficiency also reported a high level of life satisfaction and better psychological well-being (Amit, 2010; Remmenick, 2004). At the same time, parental psychological well-being has been found to be positively associated with their children's psychological well-being (Harker, 2001; Kaufman, & Uhlenberg, 1998). In sum, *we expected that parental language proficiency would be positively associated with their psychological well-being; parental psychological well-being, in turn, was expected to be positively associated with their children's psychological well-being (Hypothesis 3).*

The second mediator investigated was the quality of parent-child communication. This has a special significance in immigrant families, because parents remain one of the very few stable entities for their children after immigration. Previous studies have demonstrated that good family relations have had a positive impact on the psychosocial adaptation and well-being of immigrant children (Lee & Chen 2000). We consequently assumed that the parent-child communication in immigrant families would be influenced by parental proficiency in the host-country language. Lack of knowledge of the host-country language might indicate poor parental social integration in the host country (Morales & Hanson, 2005). Given that children are known to integrate within the new social environment more quickly than their parents (Qin, 2009; Suárez-Orozco & Qin, 2006; Updegraff et al., 2009), we expected that a low level of parental language proficiency could ignite a parent-child conflict and impair parent-child communication. Several studies have found language proficiency among immigrants to be related to family interactions, particularly to parent-child relationships (Chiswick, Lee, & Miller, 2005; Portes & Hao, 2002; Tseng, & Fulignu, 2000). Previous studies have also

demonstrated that problems in parent-child communication – such as lack of openness, difficulties in discussing important issues and talking about problems, and insults and conflicts – were often associated with a low level of children's psychological well-being (see Patterson, 1982 and Akcard et al. 2006 et al. 2006 for USA; Landman-Peeters et al. 2006 for the Netherlands; Shek 1998 for Hong-Kong). Landman-Peeters et al. (2006) suggested that children who experienced problematic parent-child communication were more likely to report symptoms of poor mental health, since problems in communication between adolescents and both parents can be considered as a stress indicator. In sum, following the above- presented discussion, *we expected that parental language proficiency would be positively associated with the quality of parent-children communication in immigrant families; the quality of parent-child communication, in turn, was expected to be positively associated with children's psychological well-being (Hypothesis 4).*

### **Setting: Israel and Germany**

Israel and Germany as host countries share several characteristics. Both countries are ethno-national states with policies for the re-settlement of immigrants with certain ancestral ethnic characteristics, and provide such migrants with immediate citizenship and support. Both countries have absorbed a substantial numbers of immigrants in the last few decades (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Horenczyk, & Schmitz, 2003; Shuval, 1998). However, while Israel is defined as a society of immigrants in which a third of the Jewish population are first-generation immigrants and most others descendants of immigrants (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov, 2012), the percentage of first-generation immigrants in Germany does not exceed one-tenth of the population (Eurostat, 2012).

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, FSU ethnic Germans who relocated to Germany and FSU Jews who arrived in Israel were immediately entitled to citizenship upon arrival in their respective host countries. Between 1989 and the end of 2002, Israel received about 900,000 FSU Jews and their non-Jewish family members, equaling more than 15 percent of the Jewish population. During the same period, Germany received about 1.8 million ethnic Germans from the FSU, equaling about 1.5 percent of the population. These two groups of immigrants from the FSU differ not only by their relative demographic shares in the host-society populations but also by socio-demographic parameters. In the FSU, the ethnic Germans were less educated than the Jews, and tended to reside in rural areas, whereas the Jews mostly lived in the major cities of the FSU (Haberfeld, Cohen, Kalter, & Kogan, 2011).

Following migration to the respective host countries, it seems that FSU Jews in Israel were more likely to create Russian-speaking enclaves in Israel than ethnic Germans in Germany. For example, findings from a previous study showed that the percentage of Russian-speaking homes in Israel with access to Russian TV channels, Russian radio programs, and newspapers in Russian was higher than in Germany (Remennick, 2004; Titzmann, Silbereisen, Mesch, & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2011). In addition, FSU Jewish immigrants in Israel had a greater tendency than German FSU immigrants in Germany to participate in intra-ethnic social and political activities (Al-Haj, 2004; Slonim-Nevo, Mirsky, Nauck, & Horowitz, 2007; Titzmann et al., 2011).

## **Method**

### **Samples**

The samples included families of emigrants from the FSU to Germany and Israel. The two groups were selected according to the following criteria: a) date of immigration within 8 months of the commencement of the study, b) regions of origin were the European parts of the former Soviet Union (Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, & the Baltic states), and c) families consisted of two heterosexual, biological parents with at least one adolescent child (aged 11-18).

Starting May-October 2001, data on the respondents were collected in three waves: 6-8 months following their immigration (wave 1), 2-2.5 years following their immigration (wave 2), and 3-3.5 years following their immigration (wave 3). The final 'wave 3' samples included 134 FSU immigrant families in Germany (57% with adolescent daughters) and 64 FSU immigrant families in Israel (52% with adolescent daughters). No statistically significant difference in adolescent gender distribution between Germany and Israeli samples was found ( $\chi^2(1, N = 198) = 0.46, p = .49$ ).

### **Procedure and Data collection**

In both countries, data were collected through a self-reported questionnaire in Russian. Each of the parents and one adolescent child completed the self-report questionnaire. Informed consent was obtained in each case before the completion of the questionnaire. In Israel, bilingual interviewers were in charge of providing and collecting the questionnaires and answering respondents' questions. In Germany at wave 1, 40 families also received and completed the questionnaires in the presence of the interviewer, while all other families in Germany received and sent back the self-report questionnaires by mail<sup>1</sup>. At waves 2 and 3, all the families in Germany received and sent back the self-reported

questionnaires by mail. The questionnaires were adapted to enable the families to answer them without assistance as reported previously by Slonim-Nevo et al. (2009).

*In Israel:*

The original sample was drawn from the Israeli population register. One hundred and eighty three families who met the stated criteria were contacted. 63 of these families declined to take part in the study, resulting in a response rate of 66% (an additional 16 families had to be excluded from the analyses because of missing data). Of the first wave of 104 families, 75 (72%) were assessed after two years (wave 2). The remaining families were excluded because of divorce or separation, or because one of the parents could not be located or refused to participate in the research. The wave 3 (after another year) sample comprised 64 families (62%). Families that were not intact were excluded. No statistically significant socio-demographic differences were revealed between families who remained in the study throughout its course and those who dropped out prior to its conclusion.

*In Germany:*

The first forty families were located through immigrant dormitories in the vicinity of Chemnitz. When no more families could be located, the study was widened to other federal states. The research team obtained the requisite authorisation from 27 regional boards in Germany to mail self-reported questionnaires to the immigrants. The immigrants, it should be noted, are traditionally housed in dormitories during their first 6-12 months in Germany.

In the first wave, in addition to the first 40 families (visited personally), 293 families were contacted by mail, and 186 took part in the study (64% response rate). After excluding those with missing data, the first-wave sample comprised of 212 families. After two years (wave 2), 149 (70%) families were evaluated. Attrition of the remaining 64 families was due to divorce or separation, or because one of the partners could not be located or declined to participate in the study. The sample at wave 3 (after another year) comprised of 134 (63%) families. Fifteen families dropped out of the study because they declined to participate or could not be located. No statistically significant socio-demographic differences were recorded between the families who remained in the study and those who dropped out prior to its conclusion.

A detailed description of the socio-demographic background of samples is included in a previously published article based on this research (Slonim-Nevo et al., 2009)

## **Measurements**

Psychological well-being was assessed with the Brief Symptom Inventory scale (BSI; Derogatis & Spencer, 1982; Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983). The scale consists of 53 items assessing nine symptomatic dimensions among youths and adults (e.g., somatization, obsession-compulsion, depression, etc). Responses to each of the 53 items were recorded on a scale ranging from 0 to 4. A General Severity Index (GSI) based on the mean values of all subscales (Derogatis & Spencer, 1982; Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983) was investigated in this study. A high GSI score indicates a low level of mental well-being. In the present study, the internal consistency of the scale was determined using Cronbach's alpha. The values of Cronbach's alphas for the GSI ranged from 0.94 to 0.96 for the adults in Germany; from 0.91 to 0.97 for the adults in Israel; from 0.94 to 0.95 for the adolescents in Germany and from 0.94 to 0.95 for the adolescents in Israel.

Language proficiency was measured by four questions. The respondents were asked to indicate (on a 4-point scale, ranging from 1=not at all, to 4=very well) how well they understand, speak, read, and write Hebrew or German. Averaged, the responses yielded one scale ranging from 1-4, with higher numbers indicating higher levels of new language proficiency. The values of Cronbach's Alpha in the two countries ranged from 0.79 to 0.89. The exclusion of an item did not lead to any meaningful improvement of the values of Cronbach's Alpha in any wave whilst estimating separate analyses for Israel and Germany, among fathers and mothers.

Quality of Parent-Adolescent Communication (PAC) was measured by a 20-item scale developed by Barnes and Olson (1982). Fathers and mothers stated their opinion on the degree of openness and conflict experienced in their relationships with the target adolescents. The total scale ranges from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating better communication. The values of Cronbach's Alpha in the two countries ranged from 0.78 to 0.83

## **RESULTS**

### **Descriptive statistics**

Descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 demonstrated that the average level of mothers' language proficiency, as reported by their self-ratings, improved with time spent in both host countries, but the



average level of fathers' language proficiency improved only in the German sample. During the entire study period, FSU immigrants to Germany reported a higher level of proficiency in German than did FSU immigrants to Israel in Hebrew (among mothers:  $t(187) = 5.42, p < .001$  in wave 1,  $t(187) = 5.92, p < .001$  in wave 2,  $t(187) = 5.05, p < .001$  in wave 3; among fathers:  $t(186) = 4.77, p < .001$  in wave 1,  $t(186) = 6.35, p < .001$  in wave 2,  $t(186) = 5.66, p < .001$  in wave 3).

The results also revealed that in the Israeli sample, the psychological well-being of FSU immigrant children – as reflected in the General Severity Index – was slightly lower in the first year after arrival than the psychological well-being of FSU immigrant children in the German sample. Although the difference was not found to be statically significant ( $t(196) = 0.67, p = .50$ ). However, over time the psychological well-being of the immigrant children in Israel improved while the mental health of the immigrant children in Germany declined (see Table 1).

#### **Correlations between the two variables within each time point**

In order to examine whether immigrant children's psychological well-being was associated with their maternal/paternal proficiency in the host-country language, we calculated Pearson's correlations between the two variables for each time point, among girls and boys together and among girls and boys separately. Table 2 displays Pearson's correlations between children's psychological well-being and maternal/paternal self-reported language proficiency, 2-2.5 years since migration (wave 2), for Israel and Germany separately, and the results of the same analyses for data collected 3-3.5 years since migration (wave 3). We also ran the analysis based on the data collected in the first wave (less than one year after migration). Unsurprisingly, no correlation between migrant children's psychological well-being and maternal/paternal proficiency in host-country language was found 6-8 months after immigration (wave 1).

#### *Germany:*

Analysis of the association between maternal self-reported language proficiency and children's psychological well-being (irrespective of child's gender) revealed no statistically significant correlation between these two variables at both time points: 2-2.5 and 3-3.5 years after arrival to Germany (Table 2). However, the analysis of the association between maternal language proficiency and children's psychological well-being for boys and girls separately revealed a different picture. The results showed

that 3-3.5 years after migration, boys' psychological well-being was quite strongly correlated with their mothers' level of language proficiency (Table 2). A higher level of maternal proficiency in the host-country language was related to a higher level of sons' psychological well-being (lower GSI index). However, no correlation was found between maternal language proficiency and daughters' psychological well-being at both time points.

Analysis of the association between paternal self-reported language proficiency and children's psychological well-being (irrespective of child's gender) also demonstrated no statistically significant correlation between these two variables 2-2.5 years after migration, and a relatively weak (but statistically significant) correlation 3-3.5 year after migration to Germany (Tables 2). Testing the association between paternal language proficiency and immigrant children's psychological well-being for boys and girls separately revealed the importance of child's gender. The results suggested that there was a strong correlation between paternal proficiency in German (as the host-country language) and the psychological well-being of daughters at both time points (Table 2). The higher the level of parental language proficiency, the higher the level of psychological well-being of daughters (lower GSI index) was. In contrast, no correlation was found between sons' mental well-being and paternal language proficiency.

Our results demonstrate clearly that child gender is a crucial variable in understanding the association between maternal/paternal self-reported proficiency in host-country language and immigrant children's psychological well-being. The German results indicate that boys' psychological well-being is associated with maternal language proficiency, while girls' well-being is associated with paternal language proficiency. These results provide support for the first hypothesis, suggesting that parental proficiency in host-country language is associated with their children's psychological wellbeing.

*Israel:*

We found no statistically significant correlation between maternal/paternal self-reported proficiency in host-country language (Hebrew) and immigrant children's psychological well-being in Israel at both time points. Testing the associations for girls and boys separately did not change the results. Consequently, the results in Israel did not support our first hypothesis. We discuss the differences in

the results related to our first hypothesis between Israel and Germany in the 'Discussion and Conclusions' section.

### **Linear Regression Models:**

As no bivariate correlations were found in the Israeli sample, we proceeded with further analysis only in the German context. In the next step of our analyses (linear regression analyses), we tested for mediating mechanisms that might underlie the associations between parental self-reported proficiency in the host-country language and immigrant children's psychological well-being. Two mechanisms were hypothesized regarding this relationship. We considered the level of parental psychological well-being and the quality of parent-child communication, as mediating the association between parental proficiency in the host-country language and immigrant children's psychological well-being. We tested these hypotheses using a series of linear regression models, while taking into account results presented earlier. Since paternal language proficiency was found to be associated with daughters' well-being only, and maternal language proficiency was found to be associated with sons' well-being only, we tested our hypotheses about the mediating mechanisms only for two types of dyads: mother-son and father-daughter.

Previous bivariate analysis (via correlations) demonstrated that the association between paternal proficiency in German and their daughters' psychological well-being was already evident 2-2.5 years after arrival in Germany, while the association between maternal proficiency in German and their sons' well-being appeared only 3-3.5 years after arrival in Germany. Thus, in the preliminary analysis we estimated models predicting daughters' psychological well-being at 2-2.5 years after migration and models predicted sons' and daughters' psychological well-being 3-3.5 years after migration. However, the models predicting daughters' psychological well-being at 2-2.5 years after migration (wave 2) were characterized by a poor model fit in terms of level of significance and explanatory power, despite a bivariate correlation between daughters' psychological well-being and fathers' language proficiency (demonstrated in Table 2). Taking these findings into account, we decided to proceed with the multivariate analysis only for wave 3 (3-3.5 years after migration).

As possible control variables, we tested the age and education of parents as well as several indicators of occupational and economic position of parents; however, these exerted no significant effect on children's psychological well-being. Although children's proficiency in a host country

language is beyond the scope of this manuscript, we tested the robustness of our model (presented in Tables 3 and 4) while controlling for children's proficiency in German. Inclusion of a 'children's proficiency in a host country language' variable into the models did not change the results reported in the next sections.

For all models collinearity statistics were estimated, and multicollinearity was not indicated as a problem in any of the models.

#### *Sons' psychological well-being in Germany: 3-3.5 years since migration*

The results presented in Model 1 (Table 3) demonstrated that the GSI of immigrant sons tended to decrease (i.e. psychological well-being tended to improve) with a rise in maternal proficiency in the host-country language as reported by self-ratings. The findings presented in Model 2 (Table 3) showed a positive relationship between maternal psychological wellbeing and their sons' GSI. Moreover, the coefficient of maternal language proficiency seriously decreased in size and weakened in terms of level of statistical significance (from  $p = 0.006$  to  $p = 0.043$ ) once the psychological well-being of the mother was factored into the equation. Thus, maternal psychological well-being, at least partially, mediated the relationship between maternal proficiency in German and their sons' GSI (The bivariate correlations between each mediator and dependent/independent variable are presented in Appendix Table 1). Model 2 explained 25.6% of the variance in the sons' GSI. These results confirmed the third hypothesis. The results presented in Model 3, however, indicated that there was no effect of quality of mother-son communication on the son's GSI<sup>2</sup>. The coefficient of maternal language proficiency became statistically insignificant in Model 3, apparently due to a decrease in one degree of freedom.

#### *Daughters' mental well-being in Germany: 3-3.5 years after migration*

Table 4 displays the coefficients of linear regression equations predicting daughters' mental well-being (GSI index). The data presented in Model 1 demonstrated that daughters' GSI tended to decrease with a rise in self-reported paternal proficiency in German. In other words, daughters' psychological well-being was inclined to improve with the level of paternal proficiency in German.

In order to examine whether paternal psychological well-being mediates the association between paternal language proficiency and daughters' psychological well-being, we added paternal psychological well-being (GSI index) to the equation in Model 2. The results of Model 2 demonstrated

that paternal psychological well-being did not exert a statistically significant effect on their daughters' GSI.

To test the second mediating mechanism underlying the association between the main variables, we added a 'quality of paternal communication with daughter' variable to Model 3. The quality of paternal communication with daughters exerted a statistically significant effect on the psychological well-being of their daughters, as presented in Model 3 (Table 4). Specifically, daughters' GSI tended to decrease with a rise in the quality of father-daughter communication. Moreover, the effect of paternal proficiency in German became statistically insignificant after inclusion of the father-daughter communication into Model 3<sup>3</sup>. Apparently, paternal proficiency in the host-country language affected their daughters' well-being indirectly; through the quality of father-daughter communication. In other words, the quality of father-daughter communication fully accounted for the association between paternal proficiency in the host-country language and immigrant daughters' psychological well-being. These results confirmed the fourth hypothesis. Model 3 explained 16.3% of the variance in the daughters' GSI.

Comparing the findings presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4, we cannot say that daughters' GSI was more affected than sons' GSI by parental language proficiency, as was suggested by our second hypothesis. However, we can see that girls' GSI was already associated with parental language proficiency 2-2.5 years after migration, while boys' GSI was affected by parental language proficiency only 3-3.5 years after migration.

In sum, 3-3.5 years after arrival in Germany, the psychological well-being of immigrant sons showed evidence of being affected by their mothers' proficiency in German, while the psychological well-being of immigrant daughters showed evidence of being affected by their fathers' proficiency in German. The results revealed that two mechanisms were underlying these relationships. Maternal psychological well-being mediated the relationship between maternal language proficiency and sons' psychological well-being, while the quality of father-daughter communication mediated the relationship between paternal language proficiency and daughters' psychological well-being.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

The current study examined associations between immigrants' adaptation, as reflected in their host-country language proficiency (based on self-evaluation), and their children's psychological well-being in Germany and Israel. These two countries absorbed substantial numbers of immigrants from the FSU—Germany accepted mostly ethnic Germans, and Israel accepted mostly Jews. Due to the huge difference in the size of the total populations in the two countries, FSU Jews comprise almost one-seventh of the total population of Israel, whereas FSU Germans are a very small fraction (about 1.5%) of the population of Germany. These numerical differences have a substantial impact on the social life and patterns of integration in the respective host countries, and on the importance and urgency of new-language acquisition.

In Israel, FSU immigrants have created ethnic enclaves which supply most of their daily needs (e.g., shops, restaurants, theatre, newspapers, TV, entertainment events, extra-curricular educational activities and even job opportunities) (Mesch, 2002). In Germany, the FSU ethnic community and cultural life is significantly less developed (Dietz, 2000). In such different social settings, it is obvious that acquisition of the new language is context specific and carries a different weight in the first years following migration. The lack of association that was found (in our analysis) in the Israeli sample between immigrant self-reported proficiency in the new-country language and their children's psychological well-being can be explained by the relatively small social cost that FSU immigrants seemed to pay in their first years in Israel for poor proficiency in Hebrew. By contrast (as is shown in our results), in Germany – where the knowledge of German is considerably more important for any level of social integration – a relationship between low level of parental language proficiency and poor psychological well-being of the children already manifested 2-2.5 years after immigration (among daughters).

Our findings supported the developmental perspective (Maccoby, 1990; 1998) and the gender schema role theory (Bem, 1983; 1985). The gender schema role theory suggests that children organize and absorb information in general, and information about the self in particular, according to cultural definitions of maleness and femaleness. Gender-schematic processing that "is derived from sex-differentiated practices of the social community" (Bem, 1983, p.603) serve largely as the basis for children's acquisition of sex-appropriate preferences, attitudes and behavior. Thus, following the logic of the gender schema theory, patterns of relationships in parent-child dyads should vary not only by gender of parent but also by gender of child. Indeed, our findings highlighted the importance of child

gender in the study of parent-child dyads. Our separate analyses of the boys' and girls' subsamples revealed results that were hidden when we had analyzed both genders together. Specifically, we found that reported paternal proficiency in the German language was positively associated with their daughters' psychological well-being, whereas maternal proficiency in German was positively associated with their sons' well-being. Interestingly, our findings with regard to the father-daughter and mother-son dyads harkened back to the classical Freudian concept of the Oedipus complex (Freud, 1924) and the contention that mothers play a greater role in the psychic lives of their sons while fathers play a greater role in the psychic lives of their daughters. However, we would like to focus rather on the specific mechanisms that were responsible for the association between parental adaptation as reflected in new-country reported language proficiency, and child mental health in each dyad. Our results revealed not only that associations between parental level of new-language proficiency and child's well-being in Germany were found merely for two out of four types of parent-child dyads (father-daughter and mother-son), but also that the mechanisms underlying these associations seemed to be different in each of the two types of dyads. A discussion of the mechanisms for each of the dyads is in order.

Our main results demonstrated that the quality of father-daughter communication fully accounted for the association between paternal language proficiency and their daughters' psychological well-being. Paternal proficiency in the host-country language was positively associated with quality of father-daughter communication (as reported by fathers). In turn, the way fathers perceived their communication with daughters played a central role in the daughters' psychological well-being. The influence of paternal proficiency in the host-country language already started to affect daughters a couple of years after migration. In contrast, the association between parental language proficiency and child psychological well-being in the mother-son dyad only manifested itself three years after migration. The variable that, at least, partially mediated the association between maternal language proficiency and sons' psychological well-being was maternal psychological well-being. Specifically, maternal language proficiency was positively associated with maternal psychological well-being, which, in turn, affected their sons' psychological well-being.

Previous research literature provides possible explanations as to why daughters become affected earlier than sons by parental proficiency in the new language, and why parent-daughter communication is responsible for the association between paternal language proficiency and daughters'

psychological well-being. Updegraff and colleagues (2009) found in Mexican immigrant families a stronger association for girls than for boys between parent–adolescent relationships and child adjustment. Our findings with regard to the differences between boys’ and girls’ psychological well-being were in line with their results. These researchers proposed that girls might be more sensitive than boys to conflict with parents, and more engaged than boys in family roles. Consequently, they suggested, parent-child relationships—especially in father-daughter dyads—are stronger predictors of girls’ psychological well-being, moods, and depression than that of boys.

Walsh and Horenczyk, (2001) provided additional explanations for the mechanisms underlying the association between parental adaptation and well-being of children in a host country. The authors examined gender differences in immigrant adaptation, and suggested that female adaptation was influenced by the quality of their connection with others. However, male adaptation was less dependent on relations with others and, rather, was influenced by personal competence and success (Walsh & Horenczyk, 2001). It seems that the importance of communication with parents that we found among daughters – but not among sons – corroborated the idea that for their psychological well-being in general daughters have a need to feel meaningful and receive support from people around them. This is particularly the case after immigration. This line of thinking also finds support in Kendler et al.’s (2001) study of stressful life events and their depressogenic effects. The researchers found that women (in comparison to men) were more sensitive to the impact of problems related to getting along with individuals in a close network, while men were more sensitive to the impact of work-related problems.

The limitations of this study are three-fold. First, respondent attrition resulted in a relatively small number of cases in the third wave (especially in Israel). This type of limitation is common in longitudinal studies. Second, at wave 1 in Germany the method of data collection (personal visits versus contacts by mail) was confounded with region (vicinity of Chemnitz versus all other regions). Although the results of our statistical analyses (reported in footnote one) lead us to believe that there was no systematic bias driven by the difference in the methods of data collection, we could not absolutely reject the possibility of any influence of this difference on our results due to of the overlap between methods and regions. Third, the latest data were collected only 3-3.5 years after arrival in the host country. As we pointed out above, this could explain why no correlation was found between parental Hebrew proficiency and children’s mental health in Israel. It is also possible that after a longer



period, processes noted in Germany will start to affect parent-child dyads in Israel as well. It would be interesting to examine the adaptation of immigrants as reflected in language proficiency and its consequences on immigrant children in Israel over longer time spans, as well as to test present findings in other social and cultural contexts in a comparative perspective. As a line for future research, we also suggest focusing on the mother-son relationship, since the relevant literature on immigrants focuses specifically on parent-daughter relations and lacks annotation for the mother-son dyads.

#### Notes

1. We checked mean differences in the main variables between families that were visited at home at wave 1 (the first 40 families) and families that were contacted by mail. We found no statistically significant differences that could be associated with different methods of data collection. Specifically, at wave 1 no significant differences between families visited personally and contacted by mail were found in fathers' language proficiency in German and in GSI of children. The language proficiency at wave 1 among mothers visited personally was slightly higher than that among mothers contacted by mail. However, this difference can be hardly associated with different methods of data collection, since also at wave 3 (when all families were contacted by mail) the language proficiency of mothers visited personally at wave 1 was found to be slightly higher than that of mothers who had been contacted by mail at wave 1.
2. The effect of mother-son communication on son's GSI is also statistically insignificant in the model that does not include mother's wellbeing.
3. The effect of paternal proficiency in German became statistically insignificant after inclusion of father-daughter communication also in the model that does not include parental well-being.

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**Table 1: Descriptive statistics, Mean (Standard Deviation), one way ANOVA for Repeated Measures**

	Germany				Israel			
	Wave	Wave	Wave	<i>F</i> ( <i>df</i> )	Wave	Wave	Wave	<i>F</i> ( <i>df</i> )
	1	2	3		1	2	3	
Mother's language proficiency	2.35 (0.59)	2.51 (0.54)	2.60 (0.54)	$F(2, 260) = 23.51$ $p = .00^a$	1.88 (0.44)	2.00 (0.59)	2.15 (0.54)	$F(2, 112) = 10.74$ $p = .00^b$
Father's language proficiency	2.13 (0.48)	2.33 (0.49)	2.36 (0.50)	$F(2, 262) = 24.53$ , $p = .00^c$	1.77 (0.43)	1.87 (0.40)	1.90 (0.49)	$F(2, 104) = 2.34$ , $p = .10$
Child GSI	0.42 (0.33)	0.50 (0.38)	0.50 (0.42)	$F(2, 264) = 4.68$ $p = .01^c$	0.46 (0.41)	0.51 (0.48)	0.36 (0.35)	$F(2, 126) = 3.33$ , $p = .04^d$

a. Statistically significant differences were found between waves 1 and 2; between waves 2 and 3; and between waves 1 and 3 (Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons,  $p < 0.05$ ).

b. Statistically significant differences were found between waves 1 and 3; between waves 2 and 3 (Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons,  $p < 0.05$ ).

c. Statistically significant differences were found between waves 1 and 2; and between waves 1 and 3 (Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons,  $p < 0.05$ ).

d. Statistically significant difference was found between waves 2 and 3 (Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons,  $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 2: Pearson's Correlations between BSI of children (by general severity index) and mothers'/fathers/ language proficiency, by country and child's gender**

	Germany			Israel		
	ALL	BOYS	GIRLS	ALL	BOYS	GIRLS
<b>WAVE 2 (2 to 2.5 years since migration)</b>						
Mother's language proficiency	-0.028	-0.044	0.018	-0.056	0.007	-0.102
Father's language proficiency	-0.069	0.198	<b>-0.251*</b>	0.129	0.209	0.055
<b>WAVE 3 (3 to 3.5 years since migration)</b>						
Mother's language proficiency	-0.135	<b>-0.360**</b>	0.070	-0.016	-0.097	-0.084
Father's language proficiency	<b>-0.194*</b>	-0.050	<b>-0.338**</b>	0.153	0.351	-0.103

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

**Table 3: Linear Regression Models predicting BSI of BOYS (by general severity index), in GERMANY, WAVE 3 (3 to 3.5 years since migration)**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	<i>B (SE)</i>	$\beta$	<i>B (SE)</i>	$\beta$	<i>B (SE)</i>	$\beta$
Intercept	1.103**		0.712**		1.024*	
Mother's language proficiency	-0.267** (0.093)	-0.360**	-0.188* (0.091)	-0.254*	-0.173 (0.093)	-0.234
Mother's general severity index	--	--	0.438** (0.145)	0.371**	0.405** (0.150)	0.343**
'Mother to child' communication	--	--	--	--	-0.092 (0.103)	-0.111
$R^2$	0.130		0.256		0.267	
<i>N</i>	56		56		56	

\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.01$

**Table 4: Linear Regression Models predicting BSI of GIRLS (by general severity index), in GERMANY, WAVE 3 (3 to 3.5 years since migration)**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	<i>B (SE)</i>	$\beta$	<i>B (SE)</i>	$\beta$	<i>Model 3</i>	$\beta$
Intercept	1.260**	--	1.174**		1.757**	--
Father's language proficiency	-0.289** (0.097)	-0.330**	-0.271** (0.100)	-0.309**	-0.149 (0.115)	-0.170
Father's general severity index	--	--	0.110 (0.138)	0.090	-0.007 (0.148)	-0.006
'Father to child' communication	--	--	--	--	-0.239* (0.120)	-0.285*
$R^2$	0.109		0.116		0.163	
<i>N</i>	74		74		74	

\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.01$

**Appendix Table 1: Pearson's Correlations between possible mediators and dependent/independent variables: Germany, wave 3.**

	Mother's language proficiency	Father's language proficiency	GSI of sons	GSI of daughters
GSI of mothers	-0.287*	--	0.441**	--
GSI of fathers	--	-0.228*	--	0.161
Mother-son communication	0.253 <sup>a</sup>	--	-0.274*	--
Father-daughter communication	--	0.569*	--	-0.394**

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ;

a.  $p = 0.058$