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PERCEPTIONS OF ISRAELIS: APPLICATIONS IN THE HEBREW LANGUAGE CLASSROOM (H)

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A common experience shared by many instructors of Hebrew language at the university level is the attrition of a large number of students after they complete the beginner or intermediate courses. Studies have shown that many choose to take the class in order to fulfill a language requirement, because they perceive Hebrew to be an easy subject, or to build on prior basic Hebrew learned until Bar or Bat Mitzvah age. While many empirical studies of the Hebrew language class offer interesting findings and suggestions, many do not propose practical applications for the classroom. This paper will suggest possible activities in order to relate research findings on perceptions and identity in language learning to the front lines of the language class.

Perceptions and attitudes of the language learner toward the target language group members have been found to be a crucial element of language learning motivation. Prior studies have shown a link between positive attitudes toward native speakers and high levels of instrumental and/or integrative motivation and performance. In-depth interviews with students of Hebrew at York University in Toronto show a wide range of perceptions and stereotypes held toward Israelis. This paper will offer a comprehensive collection of activities to be implemented within a novice or intermediate unit that allows students to meet and become friendly with Israelis and hence, understand Israeli culture in a live, authentic way. Guest speakers of the same age as the students, gatherings and conversations with Israelis of various ages and backgrounds, letter correspondences, and web-based joint projects are some activities suggested by participants and outlined in detail. With a true connection to the people of Israel, perceptions of North American students toward Israelis can be enhanced and student attrition can be averted.