

The “Orthodox” Orthography of Solomon Birnbaum

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Apart from the YIVO Institute’s Standard Yiddish Orthography, the prevalent system in the secular sector, two other major spelling codes for Yiddish are current today. *Sovetisher oysleyg* (Soviet spelling) is encountered chiefly among aging Yiddish speakers from the former Soviet bloc and appears in print with diminishing frequency since the end of the Cold War. In contrast, “maskilic” spelling, the system haphazardly fashioned by 19th-century proponents of the Jewish Enlightenment (which reflects now obsolete Germanized conventions) continues to thrive in the publications of the expanding hasidic sector.

As the one group that has by and large preserved and even encouraged Yiddish as its communal vernacular since the Holocaust, contemporary ultra-Orthodox (and primarily hasidic) Jews regard themselves as the custodians of the language and its traditions. Yiddish is considered a part of the inheritance of their pious East European ancestors, whose way of life they idealize and seek to recreate as much as possible.¹ The historic irony of this development—namely, the enshrinement of the work of secularized enlighteners, who themselves were bent on modernizing East European Jewry and uprooting Hasidism—is probably lost upon today’s tens of thousands of hasidic Yiddish speakers.

The irony, however, was not lost on Solomon (in German, Salomo; in Yiddish, Shloyme) Birnbaum (1898–1989), a pioneering Yiddish linguist and Hebrew paleographer in the ultra-Orthodox sector. This essay examines Birnbaum’s own “Orthodox” orthography for Yiddish in both its purely linguistic and broader ideological contexts in interwar Poland, then home to the largest Jewish community in Europe and the world center of Yiddish culture.

A Brief History of Yiddish Spelling

Like all post-exilic Jewish languages, Yiddish from its inception was written in Hebrew characters and consequently inherited orthographic conventions from both Hebrew and Aramaic, as well as from the written forms of Indo-European lan-

guages previously spoken by Ashkenazic Jewry, such as Judeo-French and Judeo-Italian.² Because of the genetic unrelatedness of Hebrew and most of Yiddish, the latter necessarily made more phonetic use of the Hebrew alphabet, since it could not employ a Semitic root-based etymological system for the Indo-European components that composed the vast majority of its lexicon.³

Orthographic conventions generally obtained during the period of the First Literary Standard, the literary language based on the Yiddish dialects spoken on Germanic territory, which began to decay in the 1820s with the general decline of Yiddish there. Traditional conventions fared less well, however, during the period of the Second Literary Standard. Based on varieties of Eastern Yiddish, this literary language emerged in the late 18th century when the previous standard proved inadequate for the needs of the majority of Yiddish speakers, who were now concentrated on Slavic territory.⁴

The early 19th century saw the emergence in Yiddish orthography of two opposing tendencies—simplification, on the one hand, and Germanization, on the other. The model for the latter trend was the *Biur*, Moses Mendelssohn's late 18th-century translation of the Pentateuch, with original commentary, into New High German (NHG), using the Hebrew alphabet.⁵ During the Haskalah, Yiddish orthography became encumbered with superfluous letters in an attempt to ennoble (if not supplant) the language by modeling its usage and spelling on that of contemporary German. Foreign elements were introduced to mirror German orthography; some of them, above all the use of the silent ן and ן, remain in widespread use today.⁶

Even among those writers who sought to cultivate Yiddish as a literary language for its own sake, it was difficult to discard maskilic notions of the "purity" of German compared with the "mongrel" nature of Yiddish. This sense of inferiority before a closely related language, coupled with the general prestige accorded German as a language of high culture in Eastern Europe, commonly resulted in the conscious patterning of Yiddish spelling, vocabulary, and syntax according to German literary norms—a phenomenon known derisively as *daytshmerish*.

The Germanization of Yiddish orthography was executed rather inconsistently and unsystematically, however, allowing many peculiarities of traditional Yiddish orthography to remain.⁷ Nonetheless, even those works by maskilim written in non-Germanized, popular (*folkstimlekh*) Yiddish, as well as traditional religious and devotional literature (for instance, biblical translations, edifying literature, and hasidic texts), generally followed these new conventions.⁸ Germanizing tendencies were intensified as a result of the influence of German socialists and anarchists on the Jewish labor movement in Eastern Europe and America toward the turn of the 20th century.⁹

One of the first to reject the *daytshmerish* spelling prevalent in early Yiddish periodicals (such as Alexander Tsederboym's pioneering newspaper, *Kol mevaser* [Odessa, 1862–1871]) was the prominent lexicographer Shiye-Mordkhe Lifshits. In the preface to his Yiddish-Russian dictionary of 1876, Lifshits observed that "Mendelssohn's rules are only for German, but are not suitable for Yiddish."¹⁰ Accordingly, he employed a phonetic system based on his native Berditchev (Southeastern

Yiddish. Despite its many virtues, this system proved inconsistent and inappropriate for other dialects.¹¹

Ber Borokhov, the Yiddish philologist and Poale Zion theoretician, was the next to approach the problem of orthography systemically. In his essay "The Tasks of Yiddish Philology" (1913), he primarily elaborated and gave scientific formulation to rules already proposed by Lifshits. Based on Northeastern pronunciation with some accommodation of other dialects, Borokhov's system failed to come into use until after the Bolshevik revolution, when two publications, *Naye tsayt* (Vilna) and *Letste naves* (Kiev) began to employ a similar system.¹² With a few variations, the orthography used by the classic writer Mendele Moykher Sforim, which rejected many of *Kol mevaser's* Germanized conventions, formed the basis of the system introduced in 1903 by *Der fraynd* (St. Petersburg), the first Yiddish daily in Russia. With some further changes, it prevailed as the most common system for the printed Yiddish word in Russia until the First World War.¹³

Not surprisingly, the other major impetus for orthographic reform and standardization came from pedagogues. Teachers in the Yiddish secular school movement complained that the peculiarities of Yiddish spelling and the abundance of competing systems constituted an unnecessary burden for children first learning to read and write.¹⁴ A singular, phonetically precise norm was desirable for use in the textbooks, juvenile literature, and other pedagogical materials being created to serve the Yiddish secular schools (first legalized by German occupation authorities in Eastern Europe during the First World War.)¹⁵ The creation of a unified system of spelling was thus taken up with great urgency by pedagogues, writers, language planners, and other interested individuals in the interwar years.

The orthographic reform movement was lent additional impetus by the atmosphere of iconoclasm and radical political change in Eastern Europe and by spelling reforms in co-territorial languages, most significantly the reform of Russian first proposed in 1904 and finally effected after the Bolshevik revolution.¹⁶ Yiddishists in Poland were also doubtless aware of the attempt to put an end to what was seen as orthographic chaos in Polish.¹⁷ Between 1917 and 1919, the labor of standardizing Yiddish spelling passed largely from the hands of individual researchers, writers, and teachers to the collective resources of commissions and conferences in Ukraine and Poland. Orthographic conferences were subsequently convened in Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, and Russia throughout the 1920s, and their proposals were published and discussed by scholars and language reformers across the borders. Three orthographic commissions were active in Warsaw alone during the years 1919–1921.¹⁸

During the interwar period, the debate over spelling and language reform culminated in the creation of three major "neo-traditional" orthographic codices. The first of these was SYO (Standard Yiddish Orthography),¹⁹ which was based on the system proposed in Zalmen Reyzen's *Gramatik fun der yidisher shprakh* (Vilna: 1920) and elaborated in Poland in the 1930s by YIVO and by TsYShO (Tsentrale yidishe shul-organizatsye [the Central Yiddish School Organization]). The second was the Soviet system (*Sovetisher oysleyg*), largely the work of the linguist and pedagogue Ayzik Zaretski and traceable to the 1913 proposals of Mordkhe Veynger,

who based his system on what he felt should be standard pronunciation rather than any of the three major dialectal varieties of Yiddish (Northeastern, or "Lithuanian"; Southeastern, or "Ukrainian"; and Central, or "Polish"). The Soviet codex was the only system conceived with official support and made binding by government decree. In contrast, the third system, the "Orthodox" or "traditionalist" system, was expounded exclusively and championed primarily by one person, Solomon Birnbaum.²⁰

All of these systems, which rejected the most blatant *daytshmerizmen*, are essentially phonemic and largely interdialectal, meaning that speakers of any of the three major Yiddish dialects can read them according to their own dialectal pronunciations.²¹ The Soviet system differed primarily in that it fully naturalized the spelling of the Hebrew and Aramaic component and eliminated final letters, at least in publications destined for Soviet readers.²² The "Orthodox" system, which defined itself in strict opposition to what Birnbaum labeled the "neo-maskilic" (SYO) and "Bolshevik" (Soviet) systems, sought to represent the maximum number of phonemic distinctions in all three dialects simultaneously and was also more purist in its approach, rejecting secular European influences as foreign and on the whole inimical to the Jewish way of life.

Solomon Birnbaum

One of three sons of Nathan Birnbaum, the chief organizer and initiator of the landmark Czernowitz conference for Yiddish held in 1908, Solomon Birnbaum literally grew up within the Yiddishist movement. The product of an acculturated middle-class home in Vienna, Nathan Birnbaum was the foremost leader of the Jewish nationalist movement in Austria prior to the arrival of Theodor Herzl on the scene but became disillusioned by what he deemed the spiritual barrenness of political Zionism. Soured by personal and ideological differences with Herzl, he withdrew from the movement (whose name he had coined) following the Second Zionist Congress in 1898. Meanwhile, contact with Yiddish-speaking Jewry during his itinerant Zionist activity in Eastern Europe inspired him to reappraise the diaspora, which he came to see as the site of a unique and venerable Jewish national culture. Having earlier denounced Yiddish as the corrupt language of the ghetto, he now became enamored of it as the language of unassimilated Jewry. Mastering the language (he was in his 40s at the time), Nathan Birnbaum worked increasingly as a publicist and politician to defend and promote the idiom and its blossoming secular culture. As early as 1904, he proclaimed the need to "awaken an open and conscious Jewish language-pride among Eastern European Jews" in order to combat the widespread perception of Yiddish as, at best, a "hand-maiden" of Hebrew and, at worst, a degenerate form of German.²³ Embracing diaspora nationalism, he became a leader in the movement for Jewish cultural autonomy within the framework of the multilingual Habsburg empire. In 1907, he even ran unsuccessfully for election as a Jewish national delegate to the Austrian Reichsrat from the Galician district of Buczacz.²⁴

Solomon Birnbaum was only six years old when his father left the Zionist move-

ment and 16 when his family relocated from Vienna to Czernowitz in 1908. Like his father a native speaker of German, he began to publish translations from Yiddish and to lay the groundwork for an innovative system of transcription into Latin letters as early as 1907.²⁵ His first publications addressing problems of Yiddish orthography and transcription into Latin letters appeared in Mordechai Fritz Kaufmann's (German-language) *Die Freistatt*, the ephemeral organ of the "pan-Jewish" movement dedicated to uniting German and East European Jews, to which his father had begun contributing articles with an increasingly religious bent.²⁶ Solomon acquired fluency in Yiddish while a student at the Czernowitz gymnasium, and he consequently adopted the Southeastern dialect of his peers.²⁷ He returned to the Austrian capital, however, in 1910 to study architecture. The following year, his father, now estranged from the secular "idolatry" of the Yiddishist movement after having undergone a religious awakening, moved his family to Berlin.²⁸ Both Nathan and Solomon eventually adopted Orthodoxy and became active in the Agudath Israel movement.

Serving as a soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army during the First World War, Solomon Birnbaum was wounded in the throat. During his convalescence, he completed a groundbreaking grammar of the Yiddish language, *Praktische Grammatik der jiddischen Sprache für den Selbstunterricht* (1918).²⁹ Although published as part of a series of self-instruction books (*Die Kunst der Polyglottie*) aimed at a popular audience, this grammar is deemed a classic of Yiddish linguistics.³⁰ Following the First World War, he abandoned his study of architecture for financial reasons and turned to Oriental studies (which his father had also studied years earlier before taking up law) at the universities of Vienna, Zurich, Berlin, and Würzburg.³¹ In his dissertation of 1921, titled *Das hebräische und aramäische Element in der jiddischen Sprache*, Birnbaum discarded the final vestige of maskilic orthography present in the 1918 *Grammatik*.³²

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, Birnbaum immediately emigrated from Germany, where he had taught Yiddish at the University of Hamburg since 1922. After arriving in England, he occupied a dual appointment as lecturer in Hebrew paleography and epigraphy at the School of Oriental and African Studies and as lecturer in East European studies at the School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies, both of London University. He remained in these positions until his retirement in 1958.³³ For more than two decades, Birnbaum continued to refine his orthographic and transliteration systems, striving to develop a modern, phonemically accurate and wholly consistent orthography based on the foundations of pre-Haskalah Yiddish literature and untainted by secular European influence.

Following in his father's path of religious return, Solomon Birnbaum repeatedly expressed in his writings the profound conviction that Yiddish, together with the sacred liturgical and scholarly language of Hebrew-Aramaic, represented the essential core of Ashkenazic religious and cultural life and thus necessitated careful cultivation. In his words:

Yiddish is of great importance for Jewishness. It can be appreciated in various ways. One can regard Yiddish with respect to its worth for the judaization of life, of the secular, especially with regard to its value for the separation from other peoples—that

is, other religious faiths. . . . It is said that language is a secular matter. In Jewish life, it is sanctified, along with all other parts of this world. As a result, it then influences the individual and helps him to sanctify life.³⁴

Sharing this conviction with another prominent Yiddish linguist, Matisyohu Mieses,³⁵ Birnbaum maintained that the Jewish religion and the way of life inspired by it was essentially responsible for the genesis and independent development of Yiddish. He denounced modern Hebrew, which draws primarily on biblical and mishnaic (not rabbinic) Hebrew and introduced a nontraditional pronunciation. To Birnbaum, modern Hebrew was an inorganic and "soulless Esperanto," the artificial engineering of secular enlighteners and nationalists with little or no regard for the sanctity and historical legacy of *loshn-koydesh*—the amalgam of rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic developed over the course of centuries. Similarly, the goal of the predominantly leftist Yiddishist movement to transform Yiddish into an instrument of progressive, secular culture was for Birnbaum a distorted paradox.³⁶ Yiddishists sought to make profane a language that had for centuries served as a medium to convey religious thought and feeling and consequently absorbed an element of holiness.

In an article appearing in a 1925 jubilee volume dedicated to his father by Orthodox leaders, Birnbaum formulated a joint critique of Yiddishism and Hebraism. For him, the two bitter rivals were but two sides of the same coin threatening Jewish religiosity, which constituted the *raison d'être* of the Jewish people and the source of its uniqueness:

Where the influence of religion ceases, the culture-creating process also stops and the profound particularities of peoples disappear, as we see among Jews and among other peoples. One look at Europe offers enough material for such observations. But the leftists have gone blind to the spiritual, and that camp of freethinkers among us that has made a banner of Yiddish uses the creation of religion against it, thinking that the force that created it is already old and decrepit, and the child can fend for itself. The "Yiddishist" war against religion, which most often also opposes Hebrew, sometimes blinds even one among us. Such a person sees only the danger of Yiddishism and sometimes he does not even understand the role of Yiddish, especially if he has unwittingly become infected with leftist opinions. This person does not see, because of his shortsightedness, that there is absolutely no difference between Yiddishism, on the one hand, and Hebraism, on the other. It is the same heretical nationalism in different dress. He does not see that the whole war between Yiddish and Hebrew, folk language and national language, is only a conflict between two brothers, that Hebrew is not *loshn-koydesh*—that for the Bolsheviks, Tchernichovsky and the Torah, forgive the comparison, are the same enemy.³⁷

Especially during the 1920s and 1930s, when Yiddish orthography was the subject of much popular and scholarly discussion in Poland, the U.S.S.R. and New York, Birnbaum argued in various forums against the major spelling systems then in use, on both ideological and scientific grounds. The Haskalah, he charged, was responsible for the inner slavery of the Jews to Gentile values, and its vilification of Yiddish was tantamount to the negation of *yidishkeit*.³⁸ The "new maskilim"—20th-century secular nationalists and socialists—had declared war on the "ugly, Germanized corrupt language" of the 19th-century "old maskilim" and to some

extent had actually improved on their predecessors' Germanized orthography (which Birnbaum dismissed as being "from a scientific standpoint . . . stupid"). These changes, however, had not rendered the language "more Jewish."³⁹ On the contrary, rather than build upon the language's native traditions, Yiddishists had further denuded it of its authentically Jewish character through the imitation of Gentile languages. Like the "old maskilim" whom they opposed, they lived "in a world which is not in its essence Jewish, or is only half-Jewish" and they had consequently lost, or were in the process of losing, the authentic Yiddish idiom suffused with religious culture.⁴⁰

Further, the determined efforts of Yiddishists had rid contemporary Yiddish only of its most glaring Germanisms and had unwittingly permitted new ones to creep into all linguistic spheres (except phonetics, which remained unaffected).⁴¹ Scores of NHG words had been adopted, often only with the slightest modification to make them appear more in harmony with the rules of Yiddish morphology and phonology.⁴² For instance, in the case of the term *antviklung* (cf. NHG *Entwicklung*, "development")—a borrowing prompted by a lexical gap—the word had been only slightly Yiddishized; in fact, *antviklung* would have been the proper Yiddish parallel, since all parts of the NHG model have Yiddish equivalents.⁴³ Worst of all, NHG words had displaced Yiddish cognates—for instance, the Yiddish *yugnt*, or "young woman," was used with the meaning of NHG *Jugend*, "youth"; and *visnshaft*, used in traditional Bible translations to mean "knowledge," had assumed the meaning of NHG *Wissenschaft*, "science" or "scholarship."⁴⁴

Orthodox Jews, Birnbaum lamented, shared in the maskilic denigration of Yiddish by concurring with the evaluation of it as a corrupt, mixed language spoken by no other people than the Jews and therefore inherently parochial, devoid of value and prestige. Yet Yiddish's intrinsic value stemmed precisely from its distinctiveness and its role in facilitating the Jews' religiously prescribed self-segregation from other peoples. In support of this claim, Birnbaum alluded to a well-known midrash, cited in various forms by halakhic authorities opposed to linguistic acculturation, that "among the reasons for which Israel was redeemed from Egypt, the Gemara includes language—that they did not change their language" and adopt Egyptian patterns.⁴⁵ But now, Birnbaum charged, whereas the Orthodox were careful in all matters linked to religious observance, they dismissively proclaimed "Language . . . not important!" and benightedly clung to the outdated maskilic spelling system. Unwittingly influenced by the Yiddishists as well, their Bible translations borrowed from the idiom of the freethinkers, "which has assimilation in its soul, their words, their forms, their syntax."⁴⁶

For Birnbaum, such transgressions represented a "victory for the secularists," who had made of Yiddish a European language in translation. Yet Birnbaum himself was not immune to contemporary currents, and he too romantically viewed language as the "true reflection" of the "soul" of a community and desired for Yiddish a "national orthography" based on premaskilic traditions.⁴⁷ Hence his caustic admonitions regarding Orthodox readers, writers, and printers whose unconscious idealization of the deformed "literary language" of the "enlighteners" constituted evidence of the inroads of the "assimilationist" mentality into "Orthodox psychology."⁴⁸ Birnbaum wrote:

Not long ago, one of the religious leaders of Polish Jewry reproached the language of Orthodox writers and was answered, "Perhaps we should write in the language of the *Tseyne-ureyne*?! After all, we cannot make laughing stocks of ourselves." Laughing stocks: that means that if the leftists laugh, you are laughing stocks. They are the true arbiters of propriety.

And what if they also laugh at beards and *peyes*, at kosher and *treif*, at *talis* and *tefillin*, and poke fun at God and the world?

"So what," I hear them answer. "What does one have to do with the other?" The former is meant for God, the latter for people. We can't, of course, be impractical."

Oh, if such a person only knew that with this reproach he demonstrates true impracticality. Above all, he detracts from the essence of Jewishness. . . .

And who are the maskilim, the old and the new ones? Imitators of European modes of thought, modes that are, moreover, already long past their prime in Europe proper.

And what are we? Imitators of imitators of outmoded styles.⁴⁹

In order to preclude the further decay of Orthodoxy through the mechanism of linguistic contamination, Birnbaum proposed a plan for language reform, of which orthography represented only the beginning. The hope for a purified language lay in the hands of the Orthodox youth, he maintained, who were not yet accustomed to the "impurity" of maskilic spelling and would therefore master his own system without undue difficulty. In response to detractors who claimed that his system was too complicated for the non-philologist, Birnbaum countered that it should actually be of great pedagogical value, since children learning Germanized spelling conventions "must learn countless rules and details that contradict what their ears hear and their mouths pronounce."⁵⁰

Organizers of the Beys-yankev (Bajs Jakow) schools for girls shared Birnbaum's concerns for the future of Yiddish in the Orthodox sector. They received the support of the influential Gerer rebbe, whose followers also constituted the backbone of support for the Agudah. The schools' organizers and activists recognized the special danger posed to girls by the non-Orthodox world: girls generally enjoyed a less intensive religious education (one typically limited to the home) and greater exposure to Polish language and culture than their brothers studying in *khadorim* and *yeshives*. This problem was already in evidence among girls in predominantly Hasidic Congress Poland and Galicia before the interwar period, especially within the upper bourgeoisie, and it became acute and generalized when Jewish girls began attending Polish state schools.⁵¹ So extensive was the penetration of the Polish language into Orthodox circles that when the *Beys-yankev-zhurnal*, the organ of the school movement, began to be published in 1923, it was virtually inconceivable to print it in Yiddish alone. A Polish supplement, *Wschod*, was included and not discontinued until years later.⁵²

The Gerer rebbe was himself a proponent of instruction in Yiddish for both religious and secular subjects in Jewish schools; while not opposing the teaching of Polish, he did not wish to see it become the Jews' primary language.⁵³ Most of the Beys-yankev schools provided supplementary afternoon classes in Jewish subjects for girls attending state schools. Some offered a full-day curriculum encompassing the state program in secular subjects (taught in Polish). The schools stressed

pride in Judaism, opposition to modern mores, and commitment to Yiddish not as a value in itself but as an integral component of Jewishness (*yiddishkeit*).⁵⁴

In a special issue of the *Beys-yankev-zhurnal* dedicated to the "month in honor of Yiddish and Jewishness" (June 1931), Birnbaum and his Agudah colleagues expressed grave dismay over both the growing linguistic polonization of Jewish youth and the quality of spoken and written Yiddish among them. In state schools, it was remarked, Jewish children were not only taught to respect the Polish language and culture above their own but were also discouraged from speaking their foreign "German jargon." Worse, Yiddish-speaking parents reinforced this deprecatory attitude by failing to attach importance to their daughters' competence in spoken and written Yiddish. They were satisfied when their daughters acquired the rudiments of Yiddish literacy—it was enough for them to be able to recite devotional texts and to write letters full of Polonisms and ignorant misspellings. Meanwhile, these same parents insisted that their daughters devote their energies to mastering Polish since, growing up in a Jewish milieu, "they'll know Yiddish anyway!" Hasidic mothers, in particular, were reproached for going so far as to speak Polish at home with their daughters.⁵⁵ As a result, the Orthodox girls of Poland not only preferred to speak Polish with teachers and friends in the Beys-yankev schools but also felt most comfortable expressing themselves in this non-Jewish language.⁵⁶

To counter these alarming trends, the *Beys-yankev-zhurnal* made various appeals to strengthen the pupils' intellectual and affective bonds to Yiddish. It emphasized Yiddish's role as the language of beloved grandparents and prior generations of pious and learned Jews and described it as the only vernacular fitting and adequate for the expression of the Jewish "soul" and the Jewish way of life. Teachers and students alike were called upon to resolve to speak only Yiddish whenever possible. Further, it was recommended that spelling and grammar, typically neglected or given only perfunctory attention by teachers, be taught in a systematic fashion on the model of Polish instruction in state schools. Only in this way would students come to accord Yiddish its due respect and regard it as a "real" language on par with Polish.⁵⁷ A modern language textbook, *Yidish loshn*, was specifically created by Beys-yankev pedagogues for this purpose.⁵⁸

Meanwhile, several months before the special issue of *Beys-yankev-zhurnal* came out, the Beys-yankev school system made the historic decision to adopt Birnbaum's system (with slight changes) for all grades, as well as for the journal.⁵⁹ Sore Sheni-irer, the founder of the Beys-yankev schools in Cracow in 1917, supported the decision, praising it as a means both to combat the pernicious maskilic influence and to eliminate the orthographic chaos then prevailing in the schools. Adopting Birnbaum's system, she felt, would express "our unified heart, our unified thought" to do God's will.⁶⁰ Thereafter Birnbaum was able to point to the success of his system in the largest Jewish educational system in interwar Poland, where the number of children far exceeded that of even all Jewish secular schools put together.⁶¹ Still, much to his annoyance, most Orthodox writers and publications, including *Dos yudishe togblat*, the main Orthodox daily in Poland, rejected the linguist's equating of form with content and refused to employ a spelling system different from that of the rest of the Warsaw Yiddish press.⁶²

The Principles of Birnbaum's Approach to Yiddish Standardization

Three key principles may be discerned in Solomon Birnbaum's approach to the standardization of the Yiddish language.⁶³ The first, *anti-daytshmerizm*, is a resolute opposition to NHG interference in the natural development of the language. Second, *yidishlekhkeyt* aims at preserving the distinctively Jewish character of the language by keeping external influences to a minimum. (Here it should be noted that, as a professional linguist, Birnbaum understood very well that language is not a closed system impervious to external influences; thus, he did not categorically reject foreign influences as negative. Though careful to avoid Germanisms, he employed internationalisms in his own writings in addition to introducing neologisms, especially in the technical fields of aviation, automechanics, and linguistics.)⁶⁴ Finally, *dorem-yidish* represents Birnbaum's preference for forms originating in the Southern (Central and Southeastern) dialects native to roughly three quarters of Yiddish speakers. He preferred them to forms originating in Northeastern (NE) dialect even though this dialect enjoyed great prestige throughout the Yiddish-speaking world in the period before the Second World War. In accordance with this last principle, Birnbaum rejected the pronunciation associated with *klal yidish*—the standard promoted in the secular sector and most commonly taught in academic settings today. The pronunciation of *klal yidish* is that of "purified" Lithuanian Yiddish, the speech of pre-First World War Vilna intellectual circles.⁶⁵ This type of speech is popularly summarized by the formula "NE Yiddish without *ey*," where other dialects have *oy*—for instance, Polish and Ukrainian *boym* (tree) instead of Lithuanian *beym*.⁶⁶

Birnbaum scoffed at the notion of orthoepy, or standard pronunciation, for Yiddish on the grounds that this, too, constituted the conscious modeling of Gentile language habits. Rejecting the argument that the diffusion of a single prestige-bearing dialect represents a natural and progressive sociolinguistic phenomenon, he encouraged each individual to retain his or her authentic, native dialect rather than assume a foreign one.⁶⁷ Thus he supported the maintenance of a normative *literary* language, which had long existed in Yiddish, but not innovation in the form of a universal pronunciation. Having no native dialect of Yiddish, Birnbaum permitted himself to exchange the Bukovinian (Southeastern) pronunciation he had adopted in his adolescence for that of Central Yiddish, the dominant pronunciation in the ultra-Orthodox circles in which he increasingly traveled. During summer courses for the Beys-yankev schools in 1930, he had overheard a student unfamiliar with his dialect unfavorably remark that "he speaks like a *goy*," and this provided the impetus for his own shift in pronunciation.⁶⁸

Birnbaum also brought linguistic proofs to discredit the establishment of a Lithuanian-based norm. He denounced as "dictatorial" those responses to the problem of Yiddish orthography that were based on Northeastern pronunciation, such as the ones proposed by Ber Borokhov and adherents of Zalmen Reyzen's "new orthography," which forms the basis for the spelling system championed to this day by YIVO. In particular, he protested the disappearance of distinct vowels, especially in the phonemically richer Central and Southeastern dialects, through their repre-

sentation with a common grapheme.⁶⁹ He also demonstrated that single graphemes commonly represent multiple vowels in SYO.⁷⁰

In order to remedy this situation, which especially complicates the pronunciation of words unfamiliar to the reader,⁷¹ Birnbaum sought to establish a one-to-one correspondence between grapheme and phoneme for the Indo-European component of the language. Thus, a speaker of any of the three major Yiddish dialects could more easily read using his own pronunciation, rather than a normative one. Birnbaum also facilitated the reading of the Semitic component by reversing the trend, beginning in the 19th century, toward increasingly "defective script."⁷² To achieve a more precise rendering of vowels in words of Hebrew and Aramaic origin, he suggested the retention of vocalization points (*nekudot*), as well as the introduction of a system of diacritics.⁷³

Invoking the principle of "vos vayter fun daytsh" (the farther from German, the better) as his guide, Birnbaum further maintained that even if a standard pronunciation was necessary, the fact that Northeastern Yiddish (NEY) and *klal-yidish* were phonetically so similar to New High German (NHG) made them both unsuitable for this role.⁷⁴ The greater affinity in vocalism between NEY and NHG than between the Southern dialects and NHG, he alleged, had facilitated the infiltration of Germanisms into the works of Lithuanian maskilim, whereas their southern counterparts generally wrote a purer Yiddish.

Birnbaum further objected to the standard of "purified" NEY pronunciation because of its association with secularism and the Haskalah, in contrast with the speech of the more hasidic South. NEY pronunciation was generally employed on both continents in the various networks of Yiddish secular schools, which were largely organized on the initiatives of *Litvaks* (Lithuanian and Belarusian Jews), regardless of the native dialects of both teachers and students.⁷⁵ To Birnbaum's chagrin, this rejection of native in favor of foreign norms, again attributable to the influence of the "assimilationist leftists," had been welcomed within the ranks of Beys-yankev students and teachers. Young speakers of Central Yiddish, he noted, all too frequently affected the Lithuanian pronunciation (with laughable results) because of the mistaken impression that it was somehow "purer," "more dignified," or "more correct" than that of their "non-intellectual" parents and home environment:

One can say that the center of today's Yiddishism is Vilna just as it was once a center of the old Haskalah. And Litvaks occupy in general a large place in the new Haskalah. The same holds true in Russia and in Minsk. Therefore a feeling begins to spread among Yiddishists that the Lithuanian dialect is more prestigious, more elegant, truly a language of intellectuals, as among other peoples. And our Polish, Eastern dialect is only a sort of folk dialect. And this skewed view has gradually insinuated its way in among us, where it is even more skewed. Moreover, is this imitating, this accommodation of Yiddishism, not really the greatest contradiction to the idea of traditional Jewishness?⁷⁶

That the members of YIVO in Vilna were all native speakers of NEY, or often adopted it because of its "modern" and "enlightened" connotations, only strengthened his opposition to its spread. Nonetheless, he considered NEY, in principle,

a legitimate historical development of the language and deemed it in no way inferior to any other dialect. In his eyes, it was merely grossly inappropriate for NEY to usurp the place of other dialects in the mouths of non-Litvaks.⁷⁷

Following the Second World War and the liquidation of Yiddish culture in the Soviet Union, Birnbaum directed his criticism almost exclusively at the proponents of SYO. He polemicized with them on the pages of *Yidishe shprakh*, YIVO's journal for language standardization.⁷⁸ Throughout his career, he continued to oppose what he saw as the tyranny of an "insignificant minority" (*nishtike miut*) of secular intellectuals determined to impose their own standard on the vast majority of Yiddish speakers.⁷⁹ According to Birnbaum:

There is no standard pronunciation in Yiddish. However, the members and friends of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research have strong views on the subject. They are convinced that Y[iddish] should not differ in this respect from the great Western languages, and so they are working to introduce a standard one. In their publications they speak as if it were already in existence, but that is wishful thinking—acceptance of their system being restricted to their circle. The original proponents of this "standard" were speakers of the Northern dialect and so, without further ado and without discussing the matter or giving any reasons, they decided that their own pronunciation was the "standard." . . . It is ironic that the partisans of the "standard"—all convinced democrats—should ask the majority of Yiddish-speakers to switch over from their own pronunciation to that of a minority, comprising only a quarter of Yiddish speakers.⁸⁰

A prominent Orthodox figure in a professional domain dominated by secularists, Solomon Birnbaum acted as an iconoclast both within the community of Yiddish linguists and in the religious world. While expressing resolute opposition to secular influences on Jewish life, linguistic or otherwise, he never clearly articulated boundaries between the realms and selectively chose which elements of the modern, non-Orthodox, and non-Jewish worlds to incorporate into his own life.

As a language planner preoccupied with opposing secular influence on Yiddish, Birnbaum most easily found an educated forum for his anti-SYO arguments on the pages of YIVO journals. His fervor for language purity and the cultivation of Yiddish as a standardized literary language was shared most passionately by those whom he commonly denounced as "enlightened" and "heretical" on the pages of Orthodox publications and whose linguistic norms he therefore rejected. For him, as for them, the form of a language was almost as important as its content. Meanwhile, within his own community, this view was commonly deprecated as either inherently laughable, because of Yiddish's lack of prestige among its speakers, or as simply fetishistic—that is, smacking of Yiddishism.⁸¹ This was the case despite statements by a number of rabbinic authorities (including Joel Teitelbaum, the Satmar rebbe) attesting to the importance of language as a quasi-sacred barrier to assimilation.⁸² As Miriam Isaacs observes of contemporary Yiddish-speaking hardim: "Affection for Yiddish is not to be confused with its status in the sense that would inspire what has been considered the refinement of the language or formal education; little attention is paid to orthography or literary development."⁸³

The fact that Solomon Birnbaum, like his father, was not a native speaker of Yiddish should come as no surprise to students of nationalism. Indeed, the very

fact was decisive in shaping his attitudes toward the language. Like many 19th-century East European nationalists,⁸⁴ most early ideologists of Yiddishism and Yiddish language planners were neither raised nor educated in environments where the language that they championed was the dominant tongue. Few leading Yiddish language ideologists can be considered "full" native speakers; more typically, they were products of either the Russian cultural sphere (as, for example, Borokhov and Prilutski) or the German (for instance, Max Weinreich and Zelig Kalmanovitch), even if they were exposed to Yiddish in varying degrees in their childhood.⁸⁵ It is understandable that Yiddish linguists and language planners did not emerge directly from among the romanticized *folksmans*, the "unreflective" carriers of the language. A combination of self-conscious alienation from the folk language and a secular cosmopolitan education was necessary to create the perspective of an outsider. This perspective, in turn, allowed for the appreciation of Yiddish as an instrument to advance Jewish nationalism and a cultural "renaissance," as well as an object of scientific study.⁸⁶

For both Nathan and Solomon Birnbaum, a process of ideological exploration began with the appropriation of Yiddish as a tool for the promotion of secular Jewish nationalism and of the cultural rapprochement between West and East European Jewry, and ultimately culminated in the adoption of ultra-Orthodoxy as the single authentically Jewish way of life. Rejecting the cultivation of "language for language's sake" as a Yiddishist (and, hence, Gentile) heresy, Solomon Birnbaum came to reappraise Yiddish for its instrumental value as a buttress to religious observance and as a protective wall surrounding Jewish cultural particularity. Of course, such an attitude, while explicitly supported by contemporary rabbinic authorities, was itself far from traditional. In pre-emancipation Ashkenazic society, where there was little reason to call into question the linguistic status quo, such an evaluation would have been inconceivable.

While espousing the self-segregating and anti-modernist position of ultra-Orthodox Judaism, Birnbaum retained much of the influence he had absorbed over the years through his contacts with the Jewish nationalist and secular spheres. His very devotion to scientific precision is largely, if not wholly, foreign to traditional Ashkenazic (especially hasidic) culture, for such a notion is itself a product of a secular education.⁸⁷ In fact, he never severed his intellectual ties with secular academia and even made a career within it. He employed his education in German-language universities in order to engineer an orthographic system expressly for the purpose of combating the inroads of secularism (especially via German) and assimilation into Jewish life. Indeed, while a determined opponent of the loss of Jewish distinctiveness, he channeled most of his energies against the German influence on Yiddish, rather than against the Slavic influence—or even against the greater danger in the interwar and postwar periods, the adoption of co-territorial languages by Jews.

Birnbaum's combined experience as a university-educated, native speaker of German and as a *ba'al teshuvah* (Jewish "convert" to haredi Judaism) undoubtedly contributed to a purist stance more radical than that of YIVO, the primary agency for Yiddish language reform in independent Poland and the post-Holocaust world. YIVO's Yiddishist members quite naturally rejected Birnbaum's fiercely negative

view of secularism. At the same time, other native speakers of German, above all YIVO's head, Max Weinreich, shared Birnbaum's distaste for Germanisms in Yiddish. Not surprisingly, native speakers of Yiddish and Russian were typically more tolerant (and perhaps less aware) in this regard and were willing to admit certain widespread Germanisms into the standard language then taking shape.⁸⁸

Further, Birnbaum urged the cultivation of an Orthodox creative literature aspiring to aesthetic goals in order to dissuade voracious readers raised in Orthodox homes from turning to the growing corpus of secular Yiddish belles-lettres. Such a literature, a highly controversial issue in Orthodox circles, did indeed begin to emerge in the 1930s, only to be prematurely cut down, together with the lives of most of its exponents, during the Holocaust.⁸⁹ Indeed, though his ideas about language were never accepted in wide circles, Birnbaum's efforts may be understood as part of a larger process apparent among Orthodox Jewry in interwar Poland: the adoption of modern forms of political and social organization (for instance, schools for girls, a daily press, youth groups, and party politics), all of which were pioneered in Jewish secularist circles, in order to safeguard its intensely religious way of life.⁹⁰

As mentioned previously, despite its numerous merits, Birnbaum's system failed to obtain lasting recognition. Over time, it was forgotten outside those circles that it would most benefit today—hasidic speakers of Central Yiddish. Instead, SYO (with some variations) represents the most common system in use, thanks primarily to YIVO's standardization efforts and prestige. Recently it has even made inroads into the religious sector because of its greater simplicity compared with the old maskilic system.⁹¹

Birnbaum's system continues to represent a tremendous scholarly achievement, although its ideological weight is significantly lessened in a post-Holocaust world where NHG influence and secular Yiddishism, no longer a mass phenomenon, have ceased to present a serious challenge to traditional piety. Of course, secularism and assimilation continue to exist as external forces potentially jeopardizing the stability of the ultra-Orthodox world. This, in turn, has caused Yiddish to assume even greater importance as a badge of distinctiveness and as a barrier to acculturation. Today, Yiddish is associated almost exclusively with the ultra-Orthodox way of life, whereas Hebrew, English, French, Spanish, and Russian are the dominant languages of Jewish secularists. It is precisely the shriveling of the secular sector within the Yiddish-speaking milieu since the 1950s that has neutralized the ideological weight of SYO. Today, Birnbaum's system is most likely to draw the attention not of Beysyankev pedagogues but of adult, non-hasidic students seeking to learn "non-standard" Yiddish.

Notes

1. On the relationship of ultra-Orthodox Jews to Yiddish, see Miriam Isaacs and Lewis Glinert, "Pious Voices: Languages among Ultra-Orthodox Jews," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 138 (1999); Lewis Glinert and Yoseph Shilhav, "Holy Land,

Holy Language: A Study of an Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Ideology," *Language and Society* 20 (1991), 59–86.

2. Orthographic conventions derived from Hebrew and Aramaic include the use of final letters, the use of the silent \aleph in word initial position before vocalic ν or ν , the rendering of the consonant /v/ with ν and of the diphthong /ey/ with ν (indeed, Birnbaum himself demonstrated this. See his "Tsvey vovn kekhol hagoyim," *Beys-yankev-zhurnal* 8, nos. 71–72 [1931], 32–33 and idem, "Fun daytshmerish biz der heyl in der midber," *Yidishe shprakh* 13, no. 4 [1953], 109–120), and the near complete retention of traditional Hebrew spelling for words or forms of Hebrew origin. From Laaz (the Judeo-Romance languages), Yiddish inherited the frequent use of word-final silent \aleph (perhaps a vestige of a formerly pronounced vowel) and the representation of /č/ via \aleph .

3. Further, roots from *loshn-koydesh* were commonly separated from Germanic-origin morphs by parentheses, different print faces, or apostrophes. In order to avoid mispronunciations by readers not well versed in *loshn-koydesh*, the practice of "plene spelling" (*ketiv male*) for Hebrew-Aramaic elements, that is, the use of ν and ν as reading guides to indicate vowels (a practice employed widely though unsystematically in post-biblical literature) became widespread in place of the biblical "defective spelling" (*ketiv haser*) of Hebrew. See Joshua Fishman, "The Phenomenological and Linguistic Pilgrimage of Yiddish: Some Examples of Functional and Structural Pidginization and Depidginization," in *Advances in the Creation and Revision of Language Systems*, ed. Joshua Fishman (The Hague: 1977), 299–300; David Gold, "Successes and Failures in the Standardization and Implementation of Yiddish Spelling and Romanization," in *ibid.*, 337.

4. The terms "First Literary Standard" and "Second Literary Standard," and the periodization presented here, are Max Weinreich's; see Gold, "Successes and Failures in the Standardization and Implementation of Yiddish Spelling and Romanization," 337.

5. See Yudel Mark, "Di geshikhte fun yidishn oysleyg gor bekitser," *Yidishe shprakh* 12, no. 1 (1952), 25.

6. For a detailed account of the evolution of Yiddish spelling, see Nokhem Shtif, "Tsu der historisher antviklung fun yidishn oysleyg," *Yidishe shprakh* 2, nos. 1–2, 8–9 (1928), 33–60; and Mordkhe Schaechter, "Fun folksshprakh tsu kulturshprakh: an iberblik iber der historye funem eynehylekh'n yidishn oysleyg," in idem, *Der eynehylekher yidisher oysleyg* (New York: 1999), 1–175.

Germanizing elements (many of which have fallen into disuse) include the use of silent ν (for instance, רויטה, "roth"; cf. NHG *Jahr*, *roth*) and ν , the latter commonly placed following /i/ or preceding syllabic /l/ and /n/ (for instance, צווישן, "zwischen"; cf. NHG *Viertel*, *zwischen*); ν to mimic unlauded vowels (for instance, געטער, "Loos, Meer") and consonants (for instance, וואסער, "Götter"); doubled vowels (for instance, גלאקן, "Glocken, Wasser"); the unnecessary diagraph ν instead of ν alone (for instance, פלאטץ, "Platz"); and the diagraph ν instead of ν (for instance, זעכס, "sechs") or because of the usual sound correspondence between /ch/ and ν .

7. Examples are the use of prosthetic \aleph to separate adjacent vocalic ν from consonantal ν , silent \aleph following a word-final vowel, and the use of the diagraphs ν and ν to represent diphthongs.

8. Zalmen Reyzen, *Gramatik fun der yidisher shprakh* (Vilna: 1920), 119; Solomon Birnbaum, "Two Problems of Yiddish Linguistics," in *The Field of Yiddish*, ed. Uriel Weinreich (New York: 1954), 68.

9. Mark, "Di geshikhte fun yidishn oysleyg gor bekitser," 26. The New York *Forverts*, which began publishing in 1897, is a prime example of this phenomenon. Its very name is not Yiddish but German (cf. NHG *Vorwärts*), and its spelling ν instead of ν mirrors the German *ts*.

10. Shiye-Mordkhe Lifshits, *Yidish rusisher verter-bukh* (Zhitomir: 1876), quoted in Shtif, "Tsu der historisher antviklung fun yidishn oysleyg," 47.

11. *Ibid.*; Reyzen, *Gramatik fun der yidisher shprakh*, 123.

guage," 72, 76, and Michael K. Silber, "The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition, in *The Uses of Tradition*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York: 1992), 68-69.

46. Birnboym, *Yidish un yidishkeyt*, 152.

47. *Ibid.*, 153.

48. Birnboym, *Yidishkeyt un loshn*; idem, "Di yesoydes fun yidishn oysleyg"; idem, "Tsvey vovn kekhol hagoyim," 32-33.

49. Birnboym, *Geule fun loshn*, 189.

50. Birnboym, "Di yesoydes fun yidishn oysleyg," 19.

51. Gershon Bacon, "La société juive dans le royaume de la Pologne du Congrès (1860-1914)," in *Société juive à travers l'histoire*, ed. Shmuel Trigano (Paris: 1992), 647, 656; Moyshe Prager, "Dos yidische togblat," in *Yidishe prese in varshe*, vol. 2, *Fun noentn over* (New York: 1956), 488-489. An illustration of this phenomenon is found in I.J. Singer's novel of Jewish life in pre-First World War Lodz, *The Brothers Ashkenazi*. Dinah, the daughter of an affluent family, receives a secular European education in a non-Jewish school. She comes to disdain what she deems the uncouth hasidic manners and Yiddish of her family and her yeshiva-educated spouse, preferring to speak Polish and to call herself Diana (I.J. Singer, *The Brothers Ashkenazi*, trans. Joseph Singer [New York: 1991]).

52. Yosef Fridnzon, "Batei hasefer labanot bet-ya'akov bepolin," in *Hahinukh vehatarbut ha'ivrit beeiropa bein shetei milhamot ha'olam*, ed. Tsvi Sharfshteyn (New York: 1972), 78.

53. Letter from Gerer rebbe to Rabbi Emanuel Carlebach, in *Osef mikhavim udvarim*, ed. Avraham Mordechai Alter (Jerusalem: 1966), 62.

54. See Gershon C. Bacon, *The Politics of Tradition: Agudat Yisrael in Poland, 1916-1939* (Jerusalem: 1996), 174-175.

55. Eliezer Gershon Fridnzon, "Dos loshn in moyl fun der mamen," in *Beys-yankev-zhurnal* 8, nos. 71-72 (1931), 4.

56. Birnbaum, far more concerned with the danger posed by Yiddishism than polonization, had long since advocated the development of an Orthodox belle-lettres prose and poetry that would be infused with a religious tinge. At the beginning of the 1920s, he had even translated a novel with a religious theme, Max Brod's *Tycho Brahes Weg zu Gott* (1915) into Yiddish, in the process introducing a number of new words into Yiddish rather than relying on direct borrowing from German (see Brod, *Tikho brahes veg tsu got* [Berlin: 1921]). In this way, he hoped to compete with the diverse body of secular literature in Yiddish whose reading resulted in "irreligiousness or at least a strong maskilic influence." See Birnboym, *Yidish un yidishkeyt*, 150.

57. See, for example, Yehude Leyb Orlean, "Yidish in der shul," in *Beys-yankev-zhurnal* 8, nos. 71-72 (1931), 11.

58. For endorsements of the textbook by Sore Shenirer and others active in the school movement, see Malke Kutner, "Ale lernin mir nor fun bukh 'yidish loshn!'" in *ibid.*, 10, nos. 94-95 (1933), 47.

59. Hiley, "Solomon Birnbaum," 6; "Yidish loshn far undzere kinder," *Beys-yankev-zhurnal* 9, no. 93 (1932), 5.

60. Sore Shenirer, "Yidishkeyt un yidish," in *ibid.*, 8, nos. 71-72 (1931), 8.

61. Denman, "Terumato shel Shlomo Birnbaum labalshanut hayidish," 254. In the year 1934-1935, a total of 581,497 Jewish children attended schools in Poland. The majority—about 61 percent—attended Polish schools. Khoyrev and Beys-yankev schools were attended by some 109,000 children (approximately 18 percent), while 54,829 (approximately 9 percent) attended secular Jewish schools. Another 11 percent attended other schools in the religious sector, including *khadorim*. See Khaym Shloyme Kazdan, *Di geshikhte fun yidishn shulvezn in umophengikn polyn* (Mexico City: 1947), 549.

62. According to Moyshe Prager:

With the strength of his authority (after all, a son of Nathan Birnbaum, the great *bal-tshuve*) and from his position as a linguist and Yiddish expert (Professor of Yiddish first at the University of Hamburg and later the University of London) he

actually forced the *Lodz Beys-yankev-zhurnal* to adopt his spelling. And thus began the internal Orthodox orthography polemic. . . . Although Solomon Birnbaum himself tried to defend his point of view on the pages of the *Togblat*, the Orthodox writers showed no desire "to march to a different drummer" in the field of Yiddish orthography ("Dos yidische togblat," 496-497).

The linguistic intricacies of Birnbaum's system seem quite lost on Prager (and likely many other Orthodox writers), who reduces all of its differences vis-à-vis the dominant system in the contemporary Warsaw press to replacing װ with ױ in unstressed syllables.

63. Mordkhe Schaechter, "D'r Shloyme Birnboym—der shprakh-normirer," *Yidishe shprakh* 22, no. 2 (1962), 33.

64. Mordkhe Schaechter, "Toponimik un verter-furemung bay D'r Shloyme Birnboym," *ibid.*, no. 3 (1962), 74-75.

65. More accurately, "purified" Lithuanian Yiddish refers to a pronunciation based on the dialect of Lithuania and Belarus, with a few modifications and clarifications of historical distinctions that fail to be observed in "provincial" speech in those areas. Essentially, this means the following: elimination of the "sibilant confusion" that most notably characterizes *sabesdiker loshn* (thus, a clear distinction between /s/ and /ʃ/, /z/ and /ʒ/, and /ts/ and /ʤ/); the pronunciation of the consonantal *yod* in a number of words (for instance, /jɪd/ and /jɪngl/ instead of /ɪd/ and /ɪngl/ for "Jew" and "boy," respectively); preservation of the distinction between the preposition װ, the converb װ, the verbal prefix װ, the particle preceding the infinitive װ, and the interrogative particle װ (all otherwise pronounced /tsu/); and pronunciation of the written vowel ױ as /oj/ at all times instead of as both /oj/ and /ej/ depending on the word in question. See Yudi Mark, *Gramatik fun der yidisher klal-shprakh* (New York: 1978), 15-16. All references to Lithuanian, Vilna, or Northeastern pronunciation hereafter refer to "purified" Lithuanian speech.

66. On the prestige of NEY Yiddish, see, for instance, Yudi Mark, "A por kurtse heores tsu Sh. Birnboym's notitsn," *Yidishe shprakh* 8, nos. 1-2 (1948), 15-19. On its history and diffusion, see Dovid Katz, "The Religious Prestige of the Gaon and the Secular Prestige of Lithuanian Yiddish," in *The Gaon of Vilna and the Annals of Jewish Culture*, ed. Izraelis Lempertas (Vilnius: 1998), 187-199 and idem, "Naye gilgulim fun alte makhloykes: di litvishe norme un di sikhshukhim vos arum ir," in *Yivo-bleter*, n.s. 2 (1994), 205-257.

67. B. [Shloyme Birnboym], "Zeyer gerekht!" *Beys-yankev-zhurnal* 8, nos. 71-72 (1931), 42-43; reprinted in Fishman, *Never Say Die!* 668-669.

68. Hiley, "Solomon Birnbaum," 6.

69. Shloyme Birnboym, "Di klängen un dos oysleygn fun yidish," *Yidishe filologye* 1, nos. 2-3 (1924), 176-180; idem, "Interdialektish," *Yidishe shprakh* 4, nos. 3-6 (1944), 104-109; idem, *Yiddish: A Survey and Grammar* (Toronto: 1979). He complained, for instance, that in SYO,

Polish and Southern ױ (oi) and Lithuanian ױ (ei) are today joined in one sign:

ױ, for example: ױײַט.

Polish and Southern ױ (ou) and Lithuanian ױ (oi) are today joined in one sign:

ױ, for example: ױױױ.

Polish ױ (ai), Southern ױ (ei) and Lithuanian ױ (ei) are today joined in one sign:

ױ, for example: בױײַט (idem, "Di klängen un dos oysleygn fun yidish" 176-177).

70. Thus, for example, *kop* (head) and *zogn* (to say) are written with the same vowel (ױ), as are *royt* (red) and *hoyz* (house) (ױ), although the sounds are differentiated "on the largest territory of Yiddish." Further, according to Birnbaum: "When I see a new word with ױ, I have to choose between four possibilities: should it be the vowel of נאָמען or of מאַן or of פֿענדרל or of גלאַק? Or a new word with an װ. Should I pronounce it like the vowel in פֿענדרל (pan) or like the diphthong of פֿענדרל (flag)?" (*ibid.*, 79; Birnboym, "Interdialektish," 105).

71. Similarly, Noyekh Prilutski pointed out that less sophisticated Jews of Congress Poland incorrectly pronounced the title of *Der moment*, the popular Warsaw daily that he helped

to found in 1910, as /mument/, since they were unfamiliar with this internationalism and accustomed to realizing the grapheme **u** in most cases as the vowel /u/ (See Prilutski, "Undzer ortografishe komisye (fun a referat)," in *Naye himlen: literarishe zamelbukh*, ed. Lipe Kestin (Warsaw: 1921), 88–93.

72. Birnboym, "Di klängen un dos oysleygn fun yidish"; idem, *Yidishkeyt un loshn*; idem, *Geule fun loshn*; idem, *Yiddish: A Survey and Grammar*.

73. Birnboym, "Di klängen un dos oysleygn fun yidish." For a chart demonstrating Birnbaum's system, see Denman, "Terumato shel Shlomo Birnbaum labalshanut hayidish," 254.

74. Birnbaum attributes this principle to M. Weinreich (see Shloyme Birnboym, "Fun daytshmerish biz der heyl in der midber," *Yidische shprakh* 13, no. 4 [1953], 110). Khayim Gininger, however, attributes the formula "vos vayer fun daytsh" to Noyekh Prilutski's article "Di yidishe bineshprakh," *Yidish teater* (April–June 1927); see Gininger, "A bukh tsu lernn di yidishe kulturshprakh" (review of Uriel Weinreich's *College Yiddish*), *Yivo-bleter* 32 (1949), 208.

75. Kalmen Vayzer, "Di debate arum aroysred in der yidisher veltlekhner shul in mizrekheurope," *Yidische shprakh* (forthcoming).

76. [Birnboym], "Zeyer gerekht!" 668.

77. Note Berliner, "Vegn litvishn dialekt in kongres-poyln," *Beys-yankev-zhurnal* 8, nos. 71–72 (1931), 42; Birnboym, "Zeyer gerekht!"

78. According to David Gold, "the debates [over orthography] of the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's took place exclusively in the non-religious, noncommunist sectors of the Yiddish-speaking community. On the one hand, it was felt that religious groups (hasidic and non-hasidic) would want to have little or no intercourse with secularists, and, on the other, communist circles were taboo to those associated with the YIVO and CISHO [TsISHo]" (Gold, "Successes and Failures in the Standardization and Implementation of Yiddish Spelling and Romanization," 351).

79. Shloyme Birnboym, "Finf notitsn," *Yidische shprakh* 8, nos. 1–2 (1948), 14.

80. Solomon Birnbaum, *Yiddish: A Survey and a Grammar*, 100.

81. A recent letter to the editor of the Monsey, New York–based journal *Mallos* protests as excessive the journal's policy of promoting the use of a cultivated Yiddish, with a minimum of English influence, among its hasidic readership. "I don't like the race to learn our Yiddish language with complete consistency," the correspondent writes, "to learn words that simply were not in use among the general public. That smacks of the old-style Yiddishism of the maskilim, who preached that we will only count as 'human beings' when we have a national language." The editorial board argues, in response, that the threat of Yiddishism has long since passed and that Jews now stand before the menace of "goyishism." In its words: "Never before have Jewish girls from the most pious families, hasidic homes, learned the Gentile language so perfectly as today." In defense of its position, it brings further arguments with regard to English that are almost identical with those expressed by the prewar Beys-yankev movement with respect to Polish ("Briv tsu der redaktsye," *Mayles* [Mallos], Iyar 5762 [2002]).

82. Shinhav and Glinert, "Holy Land, Holy Language."

83. Miriam Isaacs, "Yiddish in the Orthodox Communities of Jerusalem," in *The Politics of Yiddish*, ed. Dov-Ber Kerler (Walnut Creek: 1998), 90.

84. On this subject, see, for example, Miroslav Hroch, "The Social Interpretation of Linguistic Demands in European National Movements," *EUI Working Paper No. 94/1* (1994).

85. Borokhov was raised as a Russian-speaker because his father (a Hebrew teacher) desired the children to speak a Russian not recognizably influenced by Yiddish (see Yehuda Slutsky, *Ha'tonut hayehudit-rusit bereishit hamea ha'esrim* [Tel Aviv: 1978], 10). Whereas Prilutski often heard (and presumably spoke) Yiddish during his childhood in Kremeniec (Volhyn), he long felt aloof from the language and its culture. He received a Russian-language education in state schools and considered both Russian and Hebrew (his father, Tsvi, was an early enthusiast for the revenercularization of Hebrew) his mother tongues. Perhaps with a degree of false modesty, he claimed that his Yiddish was "poor and raw"

until he began to develop it as a Zionist orator and propagandist. See Noyekh Prilutski, "Der veg: a hintl zikhroynes," *Der moment* 176 (15 Aug. 1930).

86. Christopher Hutton, *Linguistics and the Third Reich: Mother-tongue Fascism, Race, and the Science of Language* (London: 1998), 198.

87. Use of the term "secular" is somewhat complicated. Despite their practicality, there has traditionally been much opposition to the introduction of *goyishe khokhmes*, that is, secular learning such as mathematics and the natural sciences, into the exclusively religious curricula of Orthodox schools. In their daily lives, the ultra-Orthodox make use of the most modern technologies, including satellite television and desktop publishing, and readily participate in the surrounding society, both economically and—at least in America, where there is no ideological opposition to the government—politically. Nonetheless, the pursuit of secular learning for reasons other than the strictly vocational or for the furtherance of religious practice seems still to be discouraged.

88. For a survey of views on Germanisms among YIVO speakers, see Rakhmiel Peltz, "The Undoing of Language Planning from the Vantage of Cultural History: Two Twentieth Century Yiddish Examples," in *Undoing and Redoing Corpus Planning*, ed. Michael Clyne (Berlin: 1997), 327–356.

89. Natan Cohen, *Sofer, sefer ve'iton: merkaz hatarbut hayehudit bevarsha, 1918–1942* (Jerusalem: 2003); Beatrice Lang Caplan, "In gayst fun toyre umesoyre: Orthodox Yiddish-Literature in Interwar Poland," lecture, YIVO (New York), Jan. 2001. The religious Yiddish-Hebrew writer known in Poland (before the Holocaust) as Yekhiel Feiner, and thereafter in Israel as the secular writer Katzetnik, represents an example of this prewar phenomenon.

90. On this phenomenon, see Gershon Bacon, *The Politics of Tradition*. Indeed, the early Orthodox press in Poland relied in part on "rented" hands—writers and editors originating outside of its circles—since there was a lack of qualified writers possessing the required ideology. See Prager, "Dos yidishe togblat," 451.

91. See, for example, *Der yid* and *Algemeyner zhurnal*. These newspapers have begun somewhat to "modernize"—that is, to eliminate some German influences in order not to remain "behind the times"—since most other contemporary Yiddish publications have abandoned Germanized orthographic conventions (personal communication with Mordkhe Schaechter, 9 Aug. 1996). See also Shikl (Joshua) Fishman, "Vos kenen mir zikh oplernen fun english?" *Der forverts* (8 March 2002).