

## **Jewish Russian and the field of ethnolect study**

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### ABSTRACT

This article demonstrates how the field of Jewish interlinguistics and a case study of Jewish Russian (JR) can contribute to the general understanding of ethnolects. JR is a cluster of post-Yiddish varieties of Russian used as a special in-group register by Ashkenazic Jews in Russia. Differences between varieties of JR may be explained in terms of differing degrees of copying from Yiddish. The case of JR allows the general conclusions that (i) the diffusion of ethnolectal features into mainstream use is facilitated not only by a dense social network but also by a relatively sufficient number of speakers with a variety of occupations; and (ii) in addition to matrix language turnover and lexical and prosodic features, an ethnolect may be characterized by new combinability rules under which stems and derivational suffixes belong to the target language (here Russian) but their combination patterns do not. (Ethnolects, Jewish languages, Jewish Russian, language contact.)

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present article is to demonstrate the relevance of Jewish Russian (JR) for a general understanding of ethnolects.<sup>1</sup> In what follows, the term “Jewish Russian” refers to a range of post-Yiddish varieties rather than to one particular variety (cf. Gold 1985:280 on varieties under the heading of Jewish English). It is most likely that JR emerged in the second part of the 19th century as a result of a language shift from a variety of Yiddish to Russian. Because motivation and degree of acquisition of Standard Russian varied among Jews, some used to speak JR as their second language (L2) or even first (L1). Nowadays, JR functions as a linguistic repertoire that Russian Jews can draw on to joke, to show in-group solidarity, and to present a recognizable linguistic portrayal of another Jew. For the sake of simplicity, I will not discuss JR outside Russia, first because of the lack of data and, second because of the more complex input affecting its development among emigrant populations.

The article is organized as follows. First, various paradigms of Jewish languages and ethnolect research will be presented. Then I will examine general questions concerning ethnolects as formulated by Clyne 2000 and try to demon-

strate how JR fits into the overall picture. Third, I will analyze the reasons for the diffusion of ethnolectal features of JR.

The data for discussion come from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including scholarly literature, demographic censuses, news media, fiction, and participant observation of interactions that involve the uses of JR as spoken by two generations of speakers. The first generation's L1 was a variety of Northeastern Yiddish as spoken in eastern Belarus. The second generation did not speak any Yiddish or any Slavic language other than Russian but used JR either as their main variety or as an ethnolect in addition to Standard Russian. Occasionally, I also had a chance to hear varieties of JR spoken by descendants of Ukrainian Jews.

#### RESEARCH PARADIGMS

There are different ways in which speakers can create an independent (ethno)linguistic profile. Needless to say, there are also nonlinguistic ways to set a distinct profile, such as clothing, a code of nonverbal behavior, or musical preferences (cf. Androutsopoulos & Georgakopoulou 2003 on youth urban culture).

Thomason 1997, 2001, 2003 has emphasized that, more often than not, speakers' linguistic creativity is not taken into account. Speakers' creativity and changes that are introduced by deliberate decision may even lead to results that are different from "normal" contact-induced change (Golovko 2003). This has been especially stressed in the context of mixed language formation, since the purpose for a new mixed language is a new group identity. Language crossing (Rampton 1995) – the use of a variety that is not seen as "belonging" to the speakers – represents another possibility of (ethno)linguistic behavior that contradicts mainstream patterns (see also Auer & Dirim 2003 on spontaneous acquisition of Turkish by non-Turkish mainstream youths in Germany, and Hieronymus & Dirim 2003 on mixed discourse of urban youths in Germany). A refusal to acquire the majority language may also lead to the emergence of a distinct variety of that language, as illustrated by Hinnenkamp 1980. Jaffe 2000 describes the use of a mixed discourse (Corsican and French) for humorous purposes. In a similar way, transitional varieties in the process of language shift may be reconceptualized and used as speakers' only variety, or as a register (Androutsopoulos 2001, Kostinas 1998). However, the emergence of an ethnolect does not always occur as the result of a deliberate decision.

Clyne 2000 has attempted to bring ethnolects into a broader framework of language contact and sociolinguistics and has formulated several research questions that will be considered below in connection with JR. He defines ethnolects as "varieties of a language that mark speakers as members of ethnic groups who originally used another language or distinctive variety" (Clyne 2000:291) and divides them into single and multi-ethnolects.

The body of literature on particular ethnolects is constantly growing. The past decade has witnessed increased interest in ethnolects that arise as immigrant ver-

naacular varieties of majority languages in western European urban centers (Androutsopoulos 2001, Auer & Dirim 2003, Hinnenkamp 2003, Kostinas 1998). However, JR arose in different sociolinguistic circumstances, among a population that differs socioculturally in many respects from immigrant groups in contemporary western Europe.

A relevant theoretical question is whether the speech of the first generation in a situation of language shift may be classified as ethnolectal. Clyne (2000:86) claims that, theoretically, owing to incomplete second language acquisition (SLA), it is not useful to base ethnolect research on samples from the speech of first-generation bilinguals. For instance, Wexler 1981a describes Ashkenazic German as a transitional variety between Yiddish and German (and not as an ethnolect) that survived for a century and a half. This, however, is an area of disagreement in the ethnolect literature, and some scholars do view first-generation varieties or transitional varieties as ethnolects (see Boberg 2004). It is also possible that L2 learners may opt for constructing new and mixed linguistic identities, instead of seeking complete acceptance by mainstream speakers (Pavlenko 2002:285). Therefore, it is not always exactly clear what “imperfect acquisition” means. The question remains open, and it may be unwise to automatically exclude first-generation speakers from an inquiry.

In addition, there is a field of study that is sometimes vaguely referred to as “Jewish language research” and sometimes as “Jewish intralinguistics/interlinguistics” (Gold 1981, Spolsky & Benor 2006, Wexler 1981b). It deals with the formation and development patterns of Jewish languages and also pays attention to ethnolects – that is, varieties that have resulted from language shift away from a Jewish language. It should be mentioned that there is no consensus on what constitutes a Jewish language, to begin with.

The opinion that a Jewish language has to contain at least some items of Hebrew-Aramaic origin (Rabin 1981) has become unpopular in the light of abundant contradicting evidence (Gold 1985:280; Wexler 1981b:120 ff.). On the other hand, the definition of a Jewish lect proposed by Gold (1981:33) appears too broad: He calls a lect a Jewish lect “to the extent it furnishes its Jewish users with the means of expressing all that a person as a Jew needs to express by language.” It remains unclear what a “person as a Jew” means; besides, ethnolectal features may be used unconsciously; that is, a speaker does not deliberately look for ways to express his or her experience as distinct from that of mainstream speakers. If an ethnolectal variety is exclusively marked by specific prosodic characteristics – that is, suprasegmental phenomena (as is the case with many post-Yiddish ethnolects) – it is unclear how this may refer to specific “Jewish experience” (Gold 1985:282). At the same time, Myhill’s (2004:151) statement that Jews are no longer creating new Jewish languages may be also too extreme.<sup>2</sup>

Whatever the differences among various scholars concerning the definition of Jewish languages may be, there is no doubt that Yiddish is a Jewish language

and that various post-Yiddish varieties are Jewish ethnolects (also see Fishman 1987 on post-exilic Jewish languages and Yiddish). Jacobs (2005:303) employs the useful cover term “Post-Yiddish Ashkenazic speech” and defines post-Yiddish ethnolects as lects arising via shift from Yiddish. Therefore, it appears logical that these ethnolects share many common features (Jacobs 2005:303, 304).

To date, a cluster of ethnolectal varieties called “Jewish English” has enjoyed more scholarly attention than any other Jewish ethnolect (e.g., Benor 2000, 2004; Clyne et al. 2002; Gold 1985; Jochowitz 1968; Steinmetz 1987; Tannen 1981). Fishman (1985:19) claims that English or Jewish ethnolects thereof are probably the most widespread Jewish languages. However, the main emphasis of Fishman 1985 is on Jewish languages that have supplanted Hebrew in the chain of consecutive language shifts (type 1 in Wexler’s classification, to be discussed below), rather than Jewish ethnolects (see also Fishman 1987 on that kind of Jewish languages). The notion of post-Yiddish (in fact, post-Eastern Yiddish) varieties of English has gradually become synonymous with Jewish English (Gold 1985: 281). Still, there exist studies on other post-Yiddish Jewish ethnolects (the term proposed by Jacobs), albeit not so numerous as those on Jewish English (for a detailed bibliography see the Jewish Language Research website <http://www.jewish-languages.org>; also, Jacobs 2005 discusses some relevant sources on Jewish Dutch and Jewish German).

A typology of Jewish languages proposed by Wexler (1981b, 1987:6–7) provides some useful distinctions among Jewish languages, including ethnolects.<sup>3</sup> His classification consists of four types.

Type 1 comprises Jewish languages that are links in the chain of language shifts from Hebrew (e.g., Yiddish, Judezmo).

Type 2 is defined as Jewish languages by default, which arise when Jewish speakers continue using a certain variety while non-Jewish speakers shift to another variety. Although Fishman (1985:12) criticizes the concept of Jewish languages by default, it is nevertheless intriguing for ethnolect study in general to ask whether there are cases of ethnolects by default. Theoretically, this could be considered a way of ethnolect formation, although not frequently encountered.

Type 3 comprises Jewish languages created for the purpose of translating Hebrew/Aramaic texts. These languages closely follow the syntax and derivational patterns of the original and are usually not employed for spoken functions. Wexler (1987:7) labels this type “Judeo-calque languages.” Jacobs (2005:295) refers to the calque tradition as a general practice in many Jewish culture areas (see also Kahan-Newman 1990 on Yiddish scribal language, where Yiddish morphs strictly correspond to Hebrew morphs). Wexler (1987:8, 99–113) discusses at length Judeo-Slavic calque languages that existed in the Slavic lands in the 13th through 16th centuries, especially the so-called Codex 262, which is a morph-for-morph translation from Hebrew into a variety of Eastern Slavic. It is not clear what the correspondence between Type 3 and ethnolects may be. Some definitions (e.g., Androutsopoulos 2001) position ethnolects as vernaculars (ap-

parently this is also true for ethnolects in modern Western Europe); however, it may be instructive to consider distinct written varieties in this regard.

Type 4 results from language shift from a Jewish language to a non-Jewish language – ethnolects in the classic sense (Jewish Polish, Jewish English, etc). Varieties of JR belong to Type 4.

A different research paradigm that is concerned with ethnolects is that of World Englishes (Kachru 1965, 1982). For some reason, there are few if any contributions on English Jewish ethnolects to the journals *World Englishes*, *English Worldwide*, *American Speech*, and the like, though contributions on varieties of Jewish English appear from time to time in *American Speech* (Appel 1957; Gold 1984, 2000; Labov 1998; Steinmetz 1981). As a parallel to World Englishes, one could think about World Russians, as Russian is widely spoken as an L2 or L1 outside its heartland, and varieties of Jewish Russian theoretically could be considered within this paradigm. Unfortunately, there is no such field, but rather a number of isolated studies under the very broad headings of “Russian in diaspora” or “post-Soviet Russian” (e.g., Mečkovskaja 2005, Zemskaja 2001), which might include, at least in theory, studies of ethnolect formation, but in reality the main focus remains elsewhere. These studies are often descriptive and do not specify whether there are Jews among Russian speakers; some even exclude Russian-speaking Jews from the sample (see the criticism of Zemskaja 2001 by Fialkova & Yelenevskaya 2003:43).

The body of the literature dedicated to Russian in Israel is constantly growing (Kheimets & Epstein 2001, Moskovich & Moonblit 1993, Spolsky & Shohamy 1999, Zuckermann 1999; on Hebrew as a lingua franca in Israel, see Myhill 2004:104–105). The situation of Russian in Israel reveals great complexity: There are speakers whose Russian does not differ from non-ethnolectal mainstream (educated) varieties of Russia’s Russian, and there are speakers of post-Yiddish ethnolectal Russian, as well as speakers for whom Russian is an L2 or even L3 (Moskovich & Moonblit 1993). At the same time, Ivrit (or, as it is commonly called, Modern or Israeli Hebrew; see Zuckermann 2003), contrary to purists’ and revivalists’ claims, has been substantially influenced by Yiddish and numerous Slavic languages; the latter have affected Ivrit either via Yiddish or directly (see Blanc 1956; Moskovich & Guri 1982; Zuckermann 2003), since the first speakers of Ivrit were mainly speakers of Yiddish as L1 and/or of some Slavic language.

In conclusion to this section, the following may be stated. There exist several more or less isolated research paradigms for studies of Jewish languages, World Englishes, and, less systematically formulated, Russian in diaspora (with no specific reference to Jewish varieties of Russian). To the best of my knowledge, ethnolects of Russian are usually not included there. Research on Russian in Israel exists somewhat apart from the more general research on Russian in diaspora. This is quite reasonable, because the field has its clear focus and limitations: a preoccupation with the social, linguistic, and cultural processes currently

ongoing in Israel. The study of Russian in Israel is a part of complex sociocultural research on recent immigrants in Israel that includes several aspects, such as new experiences, and the sociodemographical and general cultural profile of new immigrants (Kheimets & Epstein 2001; also see extensive references in Fialkova & Yelenevskaya 2003). Still, attempts at finding connections and common ground between these different fields may prove useful. An inquiry into post-Yiddish ethnolects of Russian as spoken in Russia can provide links between the field of Jewish languages and a general theory of ethnolects.

#### JR AND GENERAL ISSUES IN ETHNOLECT RESEARCH

As already mentioned, JR is understood (similarly to Jewish English) as a cluster of ethnolects that resulted from the shift from Yiddish to Russian. The shift started in the mid-19th century among educated Jews and continued among other sectors of the Jewish population well into the first part of the 20th century. It has to be stressed that, although the shift to Russian was much desired by some (see Estraikh 1999), this was by no means a single linguistic behavior pattern. Many Yiddish-speaking Jews gradually shifted from Yiddish to Russian in response to everyday needs rather than because of admiration for the Russian language and culture.

Was JR created consciously? In the ethnolect literature, the creation of an ethnolect (or just a separate ethnolinguistic profile) as a marker of a new separate identity is often mentioned (Auer & Dirim 2003, Kostinas 1998); however, if that were the only path of ethnolect formation, there would be few ethnolects. Another possibility is that “transitional” ethnolectal features that have resulted from a shift to the majority language may become reconceptualized by later generations of speakers and become a marker of a group identity, either exclusively across all domains or for in-group purposes only (see Kostinas 1998:142 on Rinkeby Swedish as an example of opposition to the mainstream).

There are insufficient data to claim that the creation of JR was a deliberate choice. However, not all speakers who belong to the same community behave in the same way. Were there Jews who spoke Standard Russian as their only variety? Were there Jews who strongly wished to speak Standard Russian but whose speech nonetheless displayed ethnolectal features? Were there Jews who were able to move along the continuum between Standard Russian and JR? Probably during the process of the shift there existed a variety of motivations, strategies, repertoires, and pragmatic goals; therefore, I assume that the answers to all these questions are positive.

In the same vein, it would be a mistake to claim that nowadays the ethnolect has become extinct among Russian Jews. Figures of the recent Russian Federation census of 2002 (see the official site on <http://www.perepis2002.ru/index.html?id=11>) suggest a language shift: Of 229,938 (Ashkenazic) Jews who live in the Russian Federation (as opposed to 537,000 in the previous

census of 1989), 228,813 claimed to be proficient in Russian, while the number of speakers of Yiddish and Ivrit (undifferentiated in the census) was 30,019. However, it would be premature to conclude from this that Russian Jews do not have any ethnolect: Censuses deal with anonymous, self-reported data and seldom allow for claiming a multiple identity or several mother tongues, and so the answers depend on the definition of “language” as well as on the wording of the questions.

A more accurate way to put it is that many Jews speak Standard Russian as their L1, but this is not necessarily their only variety: Occasionally they may draw upon JR for specific purposes (irony, in-group solidarity, etc.). The question today, as opposed to during the initial period of language shift, is not a person’s ability to speak Standard Russian but rather individual preference. Some Russian Jews prefer always to communicate in a variety of JR that is pragmatically and prosodically marked.<sup>4</sup>

To a certain extent, but not entirely, the sociolinguistic conditions in which JR emerged are comparable to those of American Jewish English formation. After the revolution of 1917, all anti-Jewish regulations were abolished, and a great number of mostly Yiddish-speaking Jews settled in major Russian industrial and cultural centers. Settling in a totally strange and unfamiliar, predominantly Russian-speaking environment bears similarities to trans-Atlantic immigration.

What makes the situation of JR distinct from that of Jewish English is the fact that the latter was influenced by the differences between various branches of Judaism, which resulted in differences between Jewish English lects (see especially Benor 2004 and Gold 1985). Because the massive shift from Yiddish to Russian mostly occurred during the Soviet period (although it had started somewhat earlier in certain segments of society; see Estrakh 1996, 1999), because the social climate was one of secularization and atheism, and because distinctions among Reform, Conservative, and other branches of Judaism had not become rooted in the Russian Empire, the fine distinctions within Judaism did not trigger differentiation in JR.<sup>5</sup>

Different varieties of JR are characterized, first of all, by varying degrees of copying from Yiddish (see Johanson 1993, 1999 on code-copying framework in explaining language contact). Second, to render it more precisely, the shift occurred from different dialects of Eastern Yiddish; therefore, certain variations at the phonological or lexical level are noticeable – for instance, JR *mišpóxa* < N(orth)-E(aster) Y (iddish) *mišpóxe* ‘family, relatives’, cf. JR *mišpúxa* < S(outh)ern Y (iddish) *mišpúxe* ‘ibid.’; JR *tsóres* < NEY *tsóres* ‘troubles’, cf. JR *tsúres* < SY *tsúres* ‘ibid.’.

These circumstances probably shed some light on the question formulated by Clyne (2000:86) concerning the reason for differences between features marked as ethnolectal – that is, why some ethnolects are marked by morphosyntactic features while others are marked by lexical or prosodic features. JR shows that the mentioned differences may be present not only in completely different eth-

nolects but also in various instances of what may be grouped within the same ethnolect for the sake of simplicity. Some instances of JR are marked only in lexical features, while others are striking examples of the transference (copying) of Yiddish morphosyntax. All this may be accompanied by Yiddish intonation (so called rise-fall intonation; see U. Weinreich 1956). Notably, certain samples of JR are marked by intonation alone, as compared to Standard Russian (see examples in Moskovich & Moonblit 1993, Verschik 2003). Therefore, we are dealing with different degrees of copying, which is one of the central issues in the code-copying framework (Johanson 1993, 1999).

As Johanson 1993 claims, usually the input is much more complex than merely L1 and L2 in non-first generation. According to Johanson, there is a range of native and nonnative varieties of both languages A and B, the so-called Alpha and Beta lects. This means that, in certain circumstances, some speakers are exposed only to nonnative varieties of the L2 (cf. Thomason 2003). The degree of copying depends not exclusively on objective factors such as the nature of the input or the availability of L2 and L2 proficiency, but also on speakers' attitudes (Thomason 1997) and immediate pragmatic goals. It is perfectly conceivable that a deliberate use of an ethnolect as a register or for self-identification purposes may even trigger exaggeration of ethnolectal features.

In the case of JR, different dialects of Yiddish serve as the former L1, which explains at least some of the variation in JR phonology and lexicon. The same speaker may alternate between Russian that practically does not differ from the Standard Russian of educated speakers, on the one hand, and on the other, at least one variety of JR. Differences in ethnolect marking may be related to interaction with other groups (Clyne 2000:86), but not exclusively: I believe that they are also related to in-group communication, according to the situation, the linguistic preferences of interlocutors, and so on.

Apart from so-called Matrix Language Turnover (Myers-Scotton 1993) or, in other terms, phenomena that can be attributed to language shift (Thomason 2001), certain ethnolectal items are marked by new combinability rules. JR provides examples in which both stems and derivational suffixes belong to (monolingual) Russian, but a combination of them does not. In the terms of Johanson 1993, 1999, this is an instance of selective copying: Certain elements are copied from the L1, but not their combinational properties. Wexler (1987:171, 1994:216) stresses the uniqueness of the Slavic component in Yiddish and mentions that the assignment of Slavic derivational suffixes to Slavic noun stems in Yiddish very often differs from Slavic patterns. Although Wexler's book on Jewish-Slavic contacts does not deal with Jewish languages of Type 4 (languages like JR), this feature also appears to be relevant for post-Yiddish ethnolects (Verschik 2003:145).

New combinability rules exist not only in derivation but also in the formation of new fixed expressions and idioms. Consider, for instance, JR *otkaznik* 'refusenik' < *otkaz* 'refusal' + agentive suffix *-nik*, and the subsequent idioms *sidet*'



~ *byt' v otkaze* 'to get a negative answer to one's petition for the right to leave the USSR and to suffer the consequences', lit. 'to sit ~ to be in (the state of) refusal'. Clearly, (Jewish) English *refusenik* is modeled on JR *otkaznik*. Kabackhi & Doyle (1990:277) mention both *refusenik* and *otkaznik* in their analysis of nouns with the suffix *-nik* in English, but, unfortunately, they make no reference to JR. However, the JR link is crucial here because Jews were one of the few ethnic groups that had the broad right to seek permission to emigrate from the Soviet Union. The term became very popular and was used by Jews and non-Jews alike in the 1970s and 1980s (Pavlenko, p. c. 2005).

Combinations of non-Slavic Yiddish stems and Russian derivational suffixes are also rather common: *peisax-ov-k-a* [Passover-suffix-suffix-NOM SG] 'a kind of Passover wine'; *xazer-š-a* [pig-feminine suffix-NOM SG] 'Jewish woman who is married to a non-Jew and has no interest in Jewish matters'; *goj-k-a* [gentile-suffix-NOM SG] 'non-Jewish woman', *goj-s-k-ij* [gentile-suffix-suffix-NOM SG MASC] (often derogatory) 'belonging to or characteristic of gentiles', *goj-ets* [gentile-masculine suffix] 'gentile' (ironic). Or consider a derivation from an anthroponym: Yiddish *Xaje* (a female name) > JR (derogatory) *xaj-k-a* [stem-suffix-NOM SG] 'a rude (Jewish) woman who quarrels all the time'. The origin of certain items present in JR may be ambiguous: Wexler (1987:76) mentions that *peisaxovka* is known also in Polish, and it has been borrowed from the latter into Yiddish.<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere I have mentioned a possible link between JR and various Slavic terms denoting Jewish customs (Verschik 2003:140). However, it may very well be that speakers of JR who do not know any Slavic languages but Russian and have heard some Yiddish in their childhood "reinvent" these items by combining components available to them.

Another possibility for ethnolectal marking that has remained relatively unexplored is the copying of pragmatic patterns and speech habits from the former L1 of a community. Even if the copying/transfer in question involves semantico-syntactic transference in the sense of Clyne 2003, this is not the whole story, and what seems to be semantico-syntactic transference at first glance may actually be pragmatic transfer. Some varieties of JR differ from Standard Russian only in that they employ Yiddish-like pragmatic devices. "Psycho-ostensive" expressions (or, as Jacobs 2005:278 has it, a system of formulaic utterances for warding off, invoking, etc., traditional to Ashkenazic culture as a whole) are but one example.<sup>7</sup>

In his detailed description of psycho-ostensive expressions in Yiddish, Mati-soff (2000: xiii) emphasizes the impact of Yiddish on American English and, quoting Harshav 1992, introduces the notion of "Jewish rhetoric" – a special discourse of storytelling and argument widely employed by Jews. Yiddish is extremely rich in formulaic language that manifests the speaker's attitudes. For some speakers, this may be the only ethnolectal feature that distinguishes their speech from that of non-Jewish Russians. Consider the following: *moj sosed, čtoby on byl tak zdorov, opjat' priglasil k sebe million rodstvennikov* 'my neigh-

bor, may he remain so healthy, again invited a million relatives to his place' < *majn šoxn, zol er zajn azoj gezunt, hot vajter farbetn tsu zix a miljon krojvim* 'ibid.'. The parenthetical insertion *čtoby on byl tak zdorov* 'may he remain so healthy' reveals the speaker's ironic attitude. Apparently, the relatives of the speaker's neighbor make a lot of noise and cause inconvenience. Or another example: *čtoby ja tak znala gore, kak ja znaju, o čem on govorit* 'how on earth should I know what he is talking about?', lit. 'I should know so much about grief/troubles if I know what he is talking about'; cf. Yiddish *zol ix azoj visn fun tsores vi ix vejs, vos er redt* 'ibid.'. The basic assumption here is that everybody prefers not to know about troubles, if possible, let alone to wish for them. That is why drawing an equivalence between the alleged wish to know about troubles and the contents of somebody else's speech emphasizes that the speaker really does not have a slightest idea about the latter.

Because the next two questions raised by Clyne (2000:86) are related, I will consider them together. Question (2) is concerned with the specification of social factors that are responsible for ethnolect creation and maintenance: Does geographic concentration leading to dense social networking and a common specific religious affiliation play a crucial role? Question (3), about the impact of the social network, is a logical continuation of question (2).

Specific religious affiliation definitely accounts for some varieties of Jewish American English (Benor 2000, 2004; Gold 1985; Jochowitz 1968, Weiser 1995). It is not, however, a crucial factor for JR. A certain degree of geographic concentration is necessary for a speech community to emerge; however, I would like to emphasize the importance of a critical mass of speakers in ethnolect formation. Although not all ethnolectal features can be attributed to transfer through shift, the latter seems to be the main path for ethnolect creation. In the theoretical framework elaborated by Thomason & Kaufman 1988, the size of a shifting group is considered to be one of the factors that, combined with other factors, determines whether transfer from L1 to L2 would leave a trace in the target language (TL) as a whole. If a shifting group is small and/or acquisition is incomplete, the trace in TL is likely to be negligible. Like every other model, this one refers to ideal situations, and, theoretically, speakers' attitude may facilitate retention of an ethnolect even if a speech community is small; nonetheless, a sufficiently large number of speakers is necessary, although this remark sounds trivial. Of course, it is impossible to say precisely what number is sufficient. Gold (1985:291) acknowledges, albeit implicitly, the importance of critical mass for the formation of Jewish English.

Apparently this criterion was fulfilled when Jews started shifting to Russian. For instance, in St. Petersburg 14,800 (42% of Jews) indicated Russian as their mother tongue in 1910 (Iukhneva 1984:208–10, quoted in Estraiikh 1996:221–22). The same pattern was followed in Moscow and other important urban centers. This explains why there exists JR but no such thing as, say, Jewish Estonian. Even if some Jews who are native speakers of Estonian do exhibit intonation

patterns uncharacteristic of mainstream Estonian, they are a tiny minority within a minority (248 Jews out of 2,145 Estonian Jews reported Estonian as their mother tongue in the census of 2000). Apparently their belonging to the upper middle class and their full integration into Estonian society, combined with their small numbers, do not facilitate the reconceptualization of nonstandard features as a basis for creating a distinct ethnolinguistic profile. Probably a mainstream speaker of Estonian would attribute this rather infrequently encountered intonation to idiolectal usage rather than to a “foreign accent.”

A sufficient number of speakers, together with geographic concentration, facilitates the creation of social networks. Question (3) is partly linked to question (4) on the pathways of diffusion of ethnolectal features into mainstream usage (Clyne 2000:87). Dense social networks of ethnolect speakers can account in part for such diffusion. I will consider the spread of ethnolectal features in the next section; here I discuss the impact of networks.

Without doubt, social networking has played a significant role in the emergence and maintenance of JR. A parallel was drawn above between rapid Jewish settlement in major Russian urban centers after 1917 and Jewish immigration to the United States. Unfortunately, there is no research dedicated to Jewish social networks in Russia, but it appears logical that in a strange environment and amidst a Russian-speaking majority, many Jews did try to maintain their family connections<sup>8</sup> and/or to establish links with others who originated from the same town or area (somewhat similar to the institute of *landsmanshaft* in traditional immigration centers). The preservation of previous social networks, combined with a sufficient number of speakers, resulted in creation of a self-sufficient environment where certain segments of the second generation had little input other than their parents' L2 Russian and varieties of JR.

This is not to say, of course, that in order for an ethnolect to emerge and to be maintained, all speakers must live their lives in this kind of self-sufficient environment. Describing Jewish Austrian German in Vienna, Jacobs 1996 warns against extreme generalizations, claiming that there were Jews whose German was not different from that of their non-Jewish compatriots, and, at the same time, on the other extreme there were varieties of Jewish Austrian German hardly distinguishable from Yiddish. The caution against extreme generalizations and the call for a more subtle approach to various patterns of linguistic behavior is also valid in the case of JR. Nonetheless, the existence of a self-sufficient environment with little exposure to non-ethnolectal varieties of Russian has facilitated the preservation of JR and, indirectly, the diffusion of ethnolectal features into mainstream usage.

#### DIFFUSION OF ETHNOLECTAL FEATURES

Clyne (1999, 2000:87) assumes that ethnolects play a significant role in the transfer of lexical items into mainstream varieties. A similar idea was expressed by

Gold (1985:288): Many items that today are already elements of non-Jewish American English have in fact been borrowed (copied, transferred) via Jewish English. In the case of lexical items, an ethnolect can be viewed as a mediator (see Kostinas 1998:137–38 on lexical borrowing from a range of former L1s into Rinkeby Swedish and, subsequently, into the speech of Swedish adolescents), but this does not exclude direct lexical borrowing in the usual sense.

According to Thomason & Kaufman 1988, in language shift, we expect the transfer of phonology and morphosyntax rather than of lexical items. Most likely, lexical items are transferred into the L2 if they refer to concepts and phenomena that are lacking in the target culture. On the other hand, lexical borrowing in the classical sense does not presuppose language shift. In that case, the lexical items to be borrowed first also refer to new cultural and material realities, customs, clothes, cultural and religious concepts, and so on (sometimes called “cultural borrowings”). Discourse markers and lexical items that have a strong expressive connotation are also good candidates for transfer from an L1 into ethnolects (as demonstrated by examples in Kostinas 1998:137). In any case, Thomason & Kaufman 1988 claim that non-basic vocabulary is borrowed in the beginning.

Jacobs (2005:305) discusses transferred lexical items of Yiddish origin in post-Yiddish ethnolects as a frequent phenomenon that presents a challenge to the thesis of Thomason & Kaufman 1988. However, Thomason and Kaufman do not completely reject lexical borrowing in language shift; they just indicate that this is not what usually happens first. As mentioned above, in her later works, Thomason 1997, 2001 emphasizes the role of speakers’ attitudes and of change by deliberate decision.<sup>9</sup>

Lexical items of Yiddish origin that are not so-called cultural borrowings have entered monolingual Russian and fully participate in derivation. One of the best examples would be Russian *xóxma* ‘joke, prank, pun’ < (? JR *xóxma* ‘ibid.’) < Yiddish *xóxme* 1) ‘wisdom, wise saying’; 2) ‘joke, pun’. Note that in Russian and in JR the meaning ‘wisdom’ is absent. Consider derivatives *xoxm-áč* ‘a witty person, prankster’, *xoxm-ít’* ‘to play tricks, to make jokes’. The lexical item has no Jewish connotation in mainstream Russian. Apparently the change in meaning has occurred in JR, but there is no way to establish this with total accuracy. It is not clear how it is possible to distinguish between lexical borrowing in the classical sense and borrowing via ethnolect.

On the other hand, JR contains lexical items of non-Yiddish origin. These do not contain explicit Yiddish components; that is, they consist of Russian stems and derivational suffixes (see the above examples of new combinability rules). If these lexical items enter Standard Russian, the probable source is JR, not Yiddish.

Apparently, nonlexical features have been transferred into mainstream usage via JR. The transfer of nonlexical items in language shift perfectly fits into the model offered by Thomason & Kaufman 1988. It is extremely unlikely that non-Jewish Russian speakers would have borrowed Yiddish word order, government

rules, and discourse organization devices directly from Yiddish. All these structural and pragmatic features became parts of JR as a result of language shift from Yiddish. Without doubt, JR has played the role of middleman here. Some instances of semantic, morphosyntactic, semantico-syntactic, and/or pragmatic transference have lost their “ethnic” coloring and are perceived as somewhat ironic or casual, but perfectly acceptable in informal communication. Consider an expression that has become fixed: *sprašivajetsja vopros* ‘a question arises’, lit. ‘a question asks itself’ < Yiddish *fregt zix a frage*, cf. Standard Russian *zadajetsja vopros* ‘ibid.’. Probably the ironic use of the verb *imet* ‘to have’ in some contexts can also be ascribed to the influence of JR: *čto ty imeješ’ mne skazat’?* ‘what do you wish to tell me?’, lit. ‘what do you have to tell me’, cf. Yiddish *vos hostu mir tsu zogn* and Standard Russian *čto ty xočeš’ mne skazat’?* ‘what do you want to tell me?’.

Does clustering in certain occupations facilitate the spread of ethnolectal features into mainstream language usage? Apparently the answer is positive, but this is not the only conceivable pathway. (On Jewish professional jargons and the spread of terms into non-Jewish use see Jacobs 2005:279–85; however, there are no studies dedicated to the connection between the spread of professional or specialized terms and JR.) In the case of JR, however, it is hard to point to any particular occupations. Its speakers belong to various social strata and professions. Some varieties of JR are spoken by people with little formal education, while others are spoken by highly educated, upwardly mobile Jews. It goes without saying that many speakers have the habit of skillful code-switching between Standard Russian and JR. A concentration of ethnolect speakers in certain occupations may also result in subsequent borrowing of lexical items specific to an occupation.

However, occupation is less relevant for the diffusion of phonological, prosodic, morphosyntactic, and pragmatic features. The more speakers of an ethnolect there are, and the more diverse their occupations are, the greater is the probability for outsiders to be exposed to the ethnolect. Thus, both concentration in specific occupations and involvement in a variety of professions may prove significant for the spread of ethnolectal features.

The roles of news media, humor, comedy, and popular culture have often been mentioned as a vehicle for the further spread of ethnolectal features. Matisoff (2000:xiii) emphasizes the impact of Jews on American humor. Androutsopoulos 2001 discusses the relevance of popular culture, best summarized in the title of his article: “From the streets to the screens and back again.” Less, if anything, has been written about JR in this respect. Humorous and satirical sketches definitely have their share of stereotyping and (over)generalization. Ideally, it would be interesting to draw a distinction between auto-stereotypes and stereotypes produced by outsiders. However, it is not clear whether or how it is possible to distinguish between the two. The latter may be but are not necessarily hostile; both may be inaccurate (see Wexler 1994 on stereotyped Judeo-Slavic speech).

Numerous leading Russian comedians are of Jewish origin and use ethnolectal features for comic purposes. For instance, the famous Russian comedian Mikhail Zhvanetski has several sketches written and performed in a variety of JR.

Instances of JR are widely used in anecdotes. Weinreich (1956:638) presents a well-known joke in which the particular JR (or just Jewish) intonation turns a claim into its opposite (see also Verschik 2003:143). In the joke, Stalin receives a telegram from Trotsky. He is glad because Trotsky has admitted his mistakes: "You were right and I was wrong excuse me." However, Kaganovich explains that there is no reason for joy because the telegram should be read with the proper intonation, which renders the utterance into its opposite: "If you really believe that you were right and I was wrong, there is nothing to discuss further." Pragmatic patterns (including psycho-ostensive expressions), as well as syntactic properties copied from Yiddish into JR, are also widely employed in humor. The obvious "foreignness" of such constructions helps to create an effect of an outsider's view and thus to emphasize the absurdity of the situation (see examples in Verschik 2003:144).

Some elements of Yiddish expressive formulaic language have become part of monolingual mainstream Russian via JR. These are word-for-word translations (semantico-syntactic transference) – like *ne beri (sebe) v golovu* 'don't worry about it, take it easy', lit. 'don't take in your head' (< JR < Yiddish *nem (zix) nit in kop* 'ibid.') – that have lost their specific JR connotation. Apparently it is not a coincidence that such expressions become attractive for ethnolect speakers and, later, for mainstream speakers. Matisoff (2000:110) observes that if an L1 is rich in psycho-ostensive resources, after the shift to an L2 speakers may feel a serious gap if the L2 does not have the same kind of resources. This is not to say, of course, that Russian lacks expressive formulaic language – there are definitely some areas of overlap with Yiddish; still, the expressive means are not identical across the languages.

The role of fiction in the spread of ethnolectal features is also not to be underestimated. Isaac Babel's prose is one of the best examples of an author skillfully employing a variety of JR (so-called Odessa language<sup>10</sup>) for creative purposes (Sicher 1986:71–81). The variety he uses is abundant in various kinds of transfer from Yiddish, mostly syntactic and pragmatic, but also lexical. Nowadays this type of JR sounds heavily marked, and probably few people speak like this, except for obvious comic purposes. Another, lesser-known instance of the use of JR in fiction is the prose of Efraim Sevela. The use of JR in fiction has not been studied in the context of ethnolect and Jewish languages research, although there exists a solid body of work in literary theory (on Babel and other prominent Jewish Russian authors, see the bibliography in Sicher 1986).

It is not clear what are the necessary prerequisites for an ethnolectal feature to enter the mainstream use; neither is it clear why certain ethnolectal features become markers of stereotyped (and auto-stereotyped) speech and others do not. For instance, Yiddish uvular [R] is common among many speakers of JR (al-

though not exclusively among them), and gradually has turned into a universal marker to designate a Jewish speaker for Jews and non-Jews alike. Apart from uvular [R], there are other phonological features characteristic of many JR speakers – for instance, non-reduction of [o] in unstressed position – but for some reason it is the realization of [R] that has been chosen most frequently to portray Jewish speech.

There are also lexical items that enjoy the status of ethnic markers. Consider the emphatic particle *taki* (*da*) ‘still, nevertheless, yet, definitely (yes)’ in Russian. The cognate particle *taky* exists in Ukrainian, whence it was borrowed into Yiddish. Apparently its distribution differs in Yiddish and in Russian: In the former the particle is used more frequently. The even more expressive version *taki da* ‘definitely yes’ comes from Yiddish *take jo* ‘ibid.’. The combinational and frequential properties of the particle (see Johanson 1999 on these terms) have been transferred from Yiddish into JR and attributed to the Russian lexical item *taki*. The ultimate result is that the particle *taki* (*da*), together with uvular [R], has become a marker of Jewish speech. At the same time, it is widely employed by non-Jewish speakers of Russian for expressive purposes.

The last point to be considered is the transfer of Ukrainisms and Polonisms via Yiddish into JR and, later, into mainstream Russian. The impact of various Slavic languages on Yiddish is tremendous; the latter has borrowed Slavic lexical items, syntactic patterns, phonemes, and other elements (see overview in Krogh 2001) from Slavic languages other than Russian, predominantly Polish, Ukrainian, and Belorussian. Contacts with the Russian language started as late as in the mid-19th century. Unknowingly, speakers of JR introduced lexical and semantic Slavicisms from Yiddish into their Russian. The particle *taki* < Yiddish *take* < Ukrainian *taky* is just one example. One may ask why the patterns of its distribution could not have been borrowed directly from Ukrainian or even have emerged independently in Russian. Theoretically, borrowing or independent development is possible, but the reason to suspect JR origin is the fact that the particle is perceived both by insiders and outsiders as a marker of Jewish speech. Clearly, numerous Slavicisms in Yiddish were transferred to JR and remained properties of it without entering common Russian. Nevertheless, this case demonstrates that a post-A ethnolect of a language B facilitates transfer of features of a language C into B, even when C (i) has been in contact with A and (ii) is related to B. That is how certain Polonisms and Ukrainisms via Yiddish entered JR and even non-Jewish varieties of Russian.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is obvious that JR presents a relevant case for a general study of ethnolects. JR shows that not only interference through shift (or ML Turnover) and prosodic features but also pragmatic features and new combinational patterns may mark an ethnolect. Dense social networks, together with geographic concentration,

are factors that facilitate the emergence and maintenance of an ethnolect. At the same time, a critical mass of ethnolect speakers and, as a consequence, the creation of self-sufficient ethnolect communities play a substantial role in ethnolect preservation and maybe even in the spread of ethnolectal features into mainstream usage.

It would be logical to expect that involvement in particular professions may leave a trace in the lexicon, but there are characteristics of JR other than lexical (i.e., structural and pragmatic) that have to some extent spread into common colloquial Russian. It is possible that a variety of occupations and varying social and educational status among ethnolect speakers, as in the case of JR, facilitate the diffusion of ethnolectal features. Some JR features have already lost their ethnic coloring and become a part of spoken mainstream Russian. JR shows that certain phonological and pragmatic features have become a symbol of Jewish speech in the eyes of both insiders and outsiders. It remains to be seen what factors determine why one particular feature and not others gradually enters the mainstream variety. It has been pointed out frequently that popular culture plays a substantial role in the spread of ethnolectal features. This is also valid for JR. Finally, JR may have mediated in introducing some Ukrainisms and Polonisms into mainstream Russian.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This article draws on some data from Verschik 2003; however, the perspective here is different, since the field of ethnolect study was not considered in the earlier paper. I would like to express my gratitude to Sarah Bunin Benor (Hebrew Union College, United States) and to Aneta Pavlenko (Temple University, United States) for reading and commenting on the draft of this paper. I also wish to thank the anonymous reviewers.

<sup>2</sup> There are no objective criteria for deciding whether two similar varieties are separate “languages.” Of course, one could say that the speakers are the ultimate authority on this question. No doubt the speakers’ opinion is an important piece of information; however, I cannot see how popular perception can be objective. For instance, speakers of Estonian Yiddish believe that they are speaking Standard Yiddish (Verschik 1999), although any Yiddish linguist would disagree with this claim. In the same vein, Russian Jews may claim that there is no separate “JR language” (indeed, there is no glottonym), but nevertheless, many would agree that there is a special “kind of speech” that Jews choose to employ from time to time.

<sup>3</sup> Later Wexler changed his view and claimed that many Jewish languages, Yiddish and Ivrit among them, are a result of relexification (Wexler 1993). Still, I believe that relexification is not relevant for the emergence of JR and for the present discussion. The classification cited here (Wexler 1981b, 1987) is useful because it provides a framework for discussion on relations between Jewish languages and ethnolects.

<sup>4</sup> The following case may be instructive in this respect. It happened in 1999. A colleague of mine with whom I have worked as a teacher of Yiddish, and with whom I communicate in Yiddish only, received a phone call in Russian. After he had finished the conversation, I made an observation that his Russian sounded like Jewish Russian (intonation, uvular *r*, discourse strategies, etc.). He smiled and said very distinctly and cautiously in Standard Russian: “I can speak as Russians in Moscow do.” Then he rapidly switched back to JR: “But I don’t want to, I wish to speak as a Jew.”

<sup>5</sup> Nowadays such differentiation may appear gradually; but since the discourses and speech practices of some Hasidic sects, Reform, and other types of Judaism have been imported from abroad (the United States or Israel), the potential impact should be ascribed to a variety of sources (Ivrit, English, varieties of Jewish English).



<sup>6</sup> Wexler (1987:115–16) stresses that the origin of Slavic terms denoting Jewish customs and holidays remains obscure: These terms may be a result of non-Jewish misunderstanding of Jewish traditions, or innovations introduced by Slavic-speaking Jews or Judaizing sects.

<sup>7</sup> Of course, as Yiddish received tremendous Slavic impact, it is logical to look for possible connections between Yiddish and Slavic psycho-ostensive expressions; unfortunately, I know of no such studies.

<sup>8</sup> This, of course, is not true of Jews who deliberately sought acculturation and assimilation and for whom perfect acquisition of Standard Russian was a desirable goal.

<sup>9</sup> The connection between Yiddish lexical items (many of them are of Hebrew-Aramaic origin in Yiddish) in Russian underworld slang and those in JR remains largely unexplored. Use of Hebrew-Aramaic elements (often via Yiddish) for crypto-functions is an often-described phenomenon (see M. Weinreich 1980:181 on the rise of a “secret” style within Yiddish speech where Hebrew-Aramaic lexical items prevail; also Jacobs 2005:279–85 and extensive references therein). According to Jacobs (2005:280–81), there is a certain overlap between Jewish and non-Jewish specialized jargons. As Jews had an access to Hebrew-Aramaic component, which non-Jews did not have, it was probably a “one-way street”: Non-Jews received Hebrew-Aramaicisms as “ready-made packages” (Jacobs 2005:281). The shape of such lexical items in Russian reveals that they entered underworld slang via Yiddish (see description in Fridman 1931, but be aware of his erroneous analysis of Yiddish-origin items).

<sup>10</sup> Odessa language is a more complex case than other varieties of JR. Apart from the dominant impact of Yiddish, the impact of Ukrainian is prominent as well, which probably amounts to a more direct Slavic influence than the transfer of Slavic (other than Russian) lexical and structural elements via Yiddish into JR. Apparently non-Jewish residents of Odessa also used this variety of JR.

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(Received 19 October 2005; revision received 21 February 2006;  
accepted 26 February 2006; final revision received 13 March 2006)

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