

Classical Text in Translation

The Tasks of Yiddish Philology

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Dedicated to the illustrious memory of the Jewish researcher and the noble scholar of the Jewish people and its language, Dr. Philipp Mansch of Lwów (1838–1890), who died a premature death and is unjustly forgotten.

Judeo-German developed, like any popular dialect,
according to unconscious and natural laws. No gardener
nursed and tended it, nobody cut back its wild shoots.
(Ph. Mansch 1888)¹

I

Of all sciences (*visnshaftn*), philology plays the greatest role in the national revival of oppressed peoples (*felker*). Philology is more than mere linguistics, more than a hollow theory for armchair academics, since it is a practical guide for the people. It comprises certain theoretical and historical elements, such as the history of the language and belletristic literature, the study of the general laws by which the language developed, and so on. However, the purposes and the educational significance of philology are to be found in the everyday life of the people. The first objective of an awakening people is the mastery of its own language so that it may be used in a better, broader, and more productive way in its national creativity (*shafn*). As long as a people remain “illiterate” in their own language, one cannot yet speak of a national culture (*natsyonale kultur*). A national culture consists not only of the poetic works of great writers, but also, and primarily, of the skill of its people to speak and write properly in their mother tongue. And indeed, philology teaches us how to write *properly*, to speak *properly*, and to use all aspects of our tongue *properly*. In the early establishment of a national culture, there exists a frightening chaos. The people’s language (*folks-shprakh*) is split into innumerable

¹ [In the original publication, the quotation from Philipp Mansch is in German: “So wie überhaupt jeder Volksdialekt, entwickelte sich das Jüdisch-Deutsch nach unbewussten natürlichen Gesetzen. Kein Gärtner hat es gehegt und gehütet, Niemand seine Auswüchse beschnitten und den wilden Trieb geleitet.” The word “Auswüchse,” however, is misprinted both in the 1913 edition and the 1966 reprint. Mansch’s expression “Judeo-German” was meant as a synonym for Yiddish. *Ed.*]

dialects, people of different regions speak differently, and each writer creates his own words. Only philology is able to bring order into this mishmash. Philology ascertains the root, the history, the development, and the meaning of every word and word form and thus teaches their correct understanding. General and clear principles are thereby introduced by scientific means rather than by personal guesses and inventions. A general dictionary and a general grammar are worked out, and the public school (*folks-shul*), the professional writers, and the press see that the dictionary and the grammar become mandatory for everyone. As long as a people does not own a philology – hence a grammar and a dictionary –, it remains far from a modern national culture.²

We shall see further on that this list of tasks for Yiddish philology is not yet complete. At this point, however, we are at the elementary steps, and the elementary steps of a national culture are the proper uses of the language, spoken and written. Thus it is not surprising that all oppressed peoples treasure their national philology (*natsyonale filolye*). Each people considers its heroes to be not only its political freedom fighters, not only its great poets and thinkers, but also those philologists who have laid the foundation for the construction of its national science of linguistics (*natsyonale shprakhvisnshaft*). Most peoples begin their cultural revival by establishing literary, philological, and ethnographic institutions. They establish publishing houses and publish ancient popular poetry (*folks-dikhtung*), and so on. Most awakening peoples start with philology. The only exceptions I know of are the Jews and a few other small and unfortunate peoples. It is a sign of our people's poverty that we have no national philology and no institutions dedicated to national philology.³

² I repeat that we must distinguish between *linguistics* and *philology*. Linguistics is a general science (*algemeyne visnshaft*), philology a national (*natsyonale*) one. Linguistics can deal with dead or completely arcane or primitive languages (*vilde shprakhn*). Philology must first ascertain that the language to which it is allied has cultural-historical worth at least with respect to the past. However, philology usually goes further and tries to ascertain whether its allied language also has significance for the future of the people. A person who does not believe in the endurance of the Yiddish language can, perhaps, be considered a Yiddish linguist, but not a Yiddish philologist. Linguistics deals with only the forms of the language, while philology deals with the cultural products of the language.

³ If you wish to see how unusual Jews are among other emerging or awakening nations, you have merely to note the role played by literary-philological institutions among the Finns, Latvians, and Estonians, and the associations (*matitsas*) of the Croats, Slovenians, Czechs, and Slovaks in establishing funds for public schools, popular literature, and philology [Borochov resorts to the Slovenian term *matica*, which, like *Matica Slovenska*, denotes an organization for the promotion of a Slavic language. *Ed.*]. The Flemish in Belgium have the Willem Fund and various scientific-literary institutions [Borochov erroneously takes the Dutch “Koning Willem Fund” to be Belgian. *Ed.*]. The Catalans in Northern [sic] Spain have the Floral Games. [The Yiddish text uses the phrase “*gezelschaft far blumen-shpil yon-toyvim*” = Society for the Floral Games Festival. Borochov refers here to the Catalan *Jochs Florals*, which were founded in 1859 by Manuel Milá y Fontanals, Victor Balaguer, Joaquín Rubió y Ors, and others, as a friendly competition of poets attached to the revival of the Catalan language. On the history of the *Jochs Florals*, cf. Francisco de P. Canalejas, *El Renacimiento de la poesía catalana*, Madrid 1872, and E. Moliné y Brasés, *La primera vinticinquena dels Jochs Florals*, Barcelona 1913. *Ed.*] The Ukrainians have the “The Literary Scientific Shevtshenko Institution” and so on. We Jews also have literary institutions in Germany and Hungary; scholarly periodicals in Berlin, Frankfurt, Paris, London; the Society for Jewish Ethnography and its journal in Hamburg and Vienna. [Borochov refers here to the *Gesellschaft für jüdische Völkskunde*, founded on

In spite of the fact that we have a remarkable poetic literature in Yiddish, we still cannot say that we have a true cultural awakening. First, we must teach our people to write *properly*. Only later will they learn to write *beautifully*. With us, the “renaissance” began with the cult of beauty, and every illiterate person became a poet. However, now we are beginning to be fed up with this; we are beginning to understand that our first aim is the education of our people. That is, we must first develop Yiddish philology, or rather, not just develop it, but above all recast it from the ground. Actually we cannot say that Yiddish philology is poor, nor that Yiddish philology does not exist. On the contrary, we have plenty of books, brochures, articles, and notices about the Yiddish language, belles-lettres, popular literature, and folklore. However, these philological writings have almost no significance for those who don’t know of their existence, and they are of no use to our intellectuals. Why is this so?

First, these philological writings are almost entirely written in foreign languages. Secondly, the philological literature lacks order; it does not have any guiding principle (*keyn shum firndikn, fihrenden, gedank*); it is scattered and chaotic; it addresses particular problems and details, such as the diminutive forms in Yiddish grammar, or the history of single books, and so on. And thirdly, almost all present works on Yiddish are of a purely “academic” character, are far from everyday life, and are not aimed toward any practical goal for education. The education-work (*kulturele dertsigungs-arbet*) is done mainly by the press (*tsaytungspublitsistik*) which cares above all on deciding whether Yiddish is a “people’s language” (*folks-shprakh*) or a “national language” (*natsyonal-shprakh*), an ugly “jargon” or a cultural means (*kultur-mitl*) worthy of our use. Most of the writers in scientific Yiddish philology are assimilationists alien to the Jewish people. In their scientific work they always try to prove that Yiddish is a genuine German dialect (*an ekht-daytsher dialekt*) and that Jews are the bearers of German culture in Slavic countries.

We don’t know for sure how old Yiddish is. But this is not unusual. It is impossible to know with certainty when a language came into existence. In any case, the Judeo-German language (*yidish-daytsh shprakh*) is at least six or seven hundred years old. Its origins lie before the thirteenth or fourteenth century, i.e. when German Jews started to

January 1, 1898, by Max Grünbaum, who also acted as editor-in-chief of the society’s journal *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für jüdische Volkskunde*, 1898 ff. Ed.] However, all the leaders of these institutions are either openly or covertly assimilationists and are far removed from Jewish life. Very little has been done in these subjects in the United States of America, Galicia, and Romania. In Russia, we had a literary institution that aimed at achieving a broad cultural movement; however, it died a premature death. In addition to the group that publishes the journal *Perezhitoye* [Our Experience or The Past. Ed.] we still have the Society for Jewish History and Ethnography in St. Petersburg [= *Yevreyskoye istoriko-etnograficheskoye obshchestvo*. Ed.]; however, because of restrictions and other factors, it cannot play a constructive role. Nor do we have a single philological work that could compare to those by Palacký and Vuk Karadzic. These authors are called the fathers of their native language; they exerted a strong influence on the Czech and Serbian language, respectively. [Cf. the online bibliography of František Palacký: <http://www.dejiny.nln.cz/Bibl/Palacky.html>. Ed.]

settle in Galicia (under the Galician King Daniel) and in Poland (under Duke Boleslav). Old Yiddish manuscripts that have survived date back to the thirteenth century.⁴

When comparing Yiddish with the German “thieves’ Latin” in the Middle Ages, Avé-Lallemant concluded that Judeo-German is eight hundred years old (*Das deutsche Gaunerthum*, 1862, vols. 3 and 4).⁵ Dr. Moritz Güdemann notes that Jews would write the double-vowel *ei* with two *yuds* (‏י‏) and estimates that this dates back to more ancient times (the eleventh to twelfth centuries) when Germans wrote a long *î* instead of *ei* (*Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der abendländischen Juden*, vol. 3, Vienna 1888).⁶ Since Yiddish used one *yud* for the short *i*, it made sense to use two *yuds* for the long *î*. In any event our language and literature are far from being young. Yiddish philology is itself four hundred years old.⁷ Since the philology of the languages of many nations (e.g. the Estonians, Latvians, Ukrainians, and Serbs) is at most seventy to eighty years old, and since other nations have indeed an even more recent philology, we have all the more reason to be ashamed that our national science has not yet attained a respectable form.

⁴ We have evidence from a manuscript kept in the Royal Library in Munich since 1876 [i.e. the Königliche Hof- und Staats-Bibliothek] as no. 420. [The text is mentioned on page 20 in *Beiträge*, by Joseph Perles (cf. *infra* in this footnote) as being a manuscript version of the *Small Arukh* originally from Regensburg. *Ed.*] This is an excerpt from the famous Talmudic dictionary *Aruk Shalem*. The manuscript uses many German words to explain Talmudic expressions. The German words, which were written in Hebrew characters, were assumed to be straightforwardly comprehensible. For example, “*srukin* which means cookies formed from a mold.” The word used is *lebkukhes* (*lekekhe*). (This means that the word *sruk* [in Hebrew *sarik*, Syrian cake] is explained by the Yiddish word.) In some instances, the German words are introduced by *belaaz* [in a foreign language] and sometimes by *beloshn ashkenaz* [in the language of Ashkenaz]; on other occasions they appear without the least comment and often with the word *bilshoneynu* [in our language]. But almost all instances use the phrase *shekorin* [which we call]. Max Grünbaum in *Jüdische Chrestomathie* [*Jewish Chrestomathy*; Borochov translated the adjective of the title as *yidish-daytsh* in order to differentiate it from “Jewish”. *Ed.*], Leipzig 1882, p. 463–479, believes that the manuscript dates from the fifteenth century. However, Dr. [Joseph] Perles in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der hebräischen und aramäischen Studien* [Contributions to the History of Hebrew and Aramaic Studies], Munich 1884, p. 20–56, proves on the basis of much evidence that the manuscript was written not later than in the fourteenth, and maybe in the thirteenth century.

⁵ [The exact reference is Friedrich Christian Benedict Avé-Lallemant: *Das deutsche Gaunerthum in seiner social-politischen, literarischen und linguistischen Ausbildung zu seinem heutigen Bestande*, Theil 3, Leipzig: Brockhaus 1862, pp. 56 and 198–207. *Ed.*]

⁶ [The exact reference is *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der abendländischen Juden während des Mittelalters und der neueren Zeit*. Vol 3: *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der Juden in Deutschland während des XIV. und XV. Jahrhunderts*, Vienna: Alfred Hölger 1888. Borochov alludes to Güdemann’s remarks on page 282 on the orthography of Ancient Germanic Judeo-German (*altdeutsches Jüdischdeutsch*). *Ed.*]

⁷ Martin Luther, Johann Agricola, and other Christian theologians of the early sixteenth century made occasional remarks relating to Yiddish. The famous Hebrew scholar and founder of Aramaic science, Sebastian Münster, gave Yiddish a prominent position in his *Hebrew Dictionary* (Basel 1523 [June]). [For further bibliographic details, cf. fig. 2 in the appendix. *Ed.*] He translated Hebrew words into Latin and frequently also into Yiddish. For example: *ykesh – laqueavit, irretivit Iud. dicunt: shtrukhlen, id est offendit; or ndb – Iud. dicunt villigen*, and so on. [For the exact wording of the two entries quoted from Münster’s dictionary, see figures 3 and 4 in the appendix to this essay. *Ed.*] The first manuscript dedicated to Yiddish dates from 1609: *Lectiois Hebraeo-Germanicae Usus et Exercitatio*. Its author was the great Christian linguist Johannes Buxtorf (the elder). In this small manuscript he lists the titles of twenty Yiddish books in his possession.

II

The scientific examination of our language suffers considerably from the deep-rooted prejudices against Yiddish that are dominant among our intelligentsia. To this day, many find the very idea of Yiddish philology amusing. Ignorant claims such as “Yiddish is a dirty jargon” (*shmutstiker zhargon*) and “Yiddish is a corrupted German dialect without a grammar and with no cultural worth” are heard today. Such claims were also uttered by reactionary pseudo-intellectuals just eighty or hundred years ago among the Greeks and Serbs who were full of hatred for their own people, and to some extent even today among the Ukrainians, Catalans, and others. However, life itself has undone the endeavors of these zealots who were moved by self-hatred. Modern Greek, Serbian, and languages of other peoples are being freed more and more from cultural enslavement and are rapidly progressing on the road toward national creativity. It is beneath the dignity of a scientifically trained philologist to engage in dispute with Yiddish-hating claims such as those mentioned above. Anyone who has the faintest notion of the science of linguistics knows full well that a language spoken and understood by millions of people must have an internal order and a lawful structure; otherwise, simply no one would understand it. What is called a “grammar” may be written out or not; a language has, in any event, its rules and its philological laws. The cultural value of a language is completely independent of whether or not the grammar has been written down. It is ludicrous that not only the deluded haters of Yiddish, but also its admirers, value its worth according to the scope of its grammar. The anti-Yiddishists criticize the grammar for being too scant, while some Yiddishists boast that the grammar can become very rich, filled with many pages of declensions and conjugations, rules and exceptions. This way of judging a grammar by weighing its grammar book is useless. Yiddish “grammar,” as we shall soon see, must by its very nature be scant and without many rules. There are rich, powerful languages with a grammar much shorter than Yiddish. Everyone knows that the structure of the English language is uncomplicated, how simple its structure, how rich its concepts, and how high its cultural worth. A Viennese acquaintance of mine, a professor of Oriental languages, would tell his students that “the entire Persian grammar may be inscribed on a calling card and can be learned within a quarter of an hour.” Persian is, however, a language of world renowned poets and philosophers. Our professor is right; yet his students study Persian from a very thick grammar, and I am sure that someone knowledgeable who wanted to could compose an even thicker grammar with additional rules and a lot of other exceptions, because every living language of a living people is a living organism (*lebediker organizm*), a free individuality (*fraye individualitet*) with its own laws and caprices. Simple and lucid as its structure may be, it still remains inexhaustible. No scientifically educated person would pride himself on knowing everything about a language. Yiddish has a simple structure, and yet, the aim of Yiddish philology is infinitely broad and endlessly deep as Yiddish is also a unique living organism unlimited in its creative freedom.

That the Yiddish grammar is poor, that it cannot sparkle with colorful, delicately carved forms, is not a disadvantage, but rather an advantage for the philologist. Yiddish has dropped many ancient German grammatical forms and declensions. Yiddish declensions and conjugations are quite simple. What was formerly expressed by a declension of the root is now expressed by a periphrastic construction. Instead of *mayse geshakh*, which we read in old Yiddish books, we now use *a mayse iz geshen* [something happened]. A review of the Yiddish literature from the fourteenth century, or earlier, to the present makes apparent that gradually one form after the other was lost, that the dative, imperfective, and conjunctive have disappeared, that Yiddish becomes increasingly poorer in forms as it replaces forms by concepts and declensions by periphrastic constructions. However, this is the rule in linguistic development: all inflected languages (*ale fleksive [verter-beygndike] shprakhn*) gradually lose various forms. The linguist formulates this process by saying that all inflected languages become more and more analytical. That is to say, their “grammar” becomes thinner. The very ancient languages are the richest in forms, too, and the young ones are the poorest in forms.⁸

Philology should be receptive to the voice of life. Life itself requires that the language become richer in concepts and poorer in forms. The simpler the forms, the easier it is for people. The cultural development of a simply constructed and, therefore, more elastic language proceeds more productively than an old-fashioned, richly embellished one with minutely entangled forms. Philipp Mansch was the only Yiddish philologist to note the analytical character of Yiddish. He also researched, with an acute sense for philosophical issues, the value of analytic, effort-saving tendencies in the grammar of Yiddish. Mansch’s Yiddish grammar (1888–1890)⁹ is not as scientifically rigorous as Gerzon’s (1902),¹⁰ but it is more profound and more original.

⁸ The rule for analytic language simplification is clear in Semitic and Aryan languages, both of which are Yiddish sources. The oldest Semitic language is Arabic which is exceedingly rich in forms, a thick, dense forest of different fantastic declensions. However, when we come to the newer stages of Semitic languages such as Hebrew and Aramaic, the ancient richness of forms gradually melts and ends up in a poverty of forms, as in New-Arabic. The oldest Aryan language, Sanskrit, possesses the richest forms. Latin, Greek, Bactrian, and (ancient) Slavonic have fewer declensions. If we compare Latin with the modern Romance Languages, Gothic with German, Church Slavonic with the more modern Slavic languages, old Greek with modern Greek, or Church Armenian with modern Armenian, from everywhere we get evidence for this remarkable principle. We can observe with our own eyes how German and Russian are losing declensions and replacing them with periphrastic constructions. German is gradually losing the imperfect, as has Yiddish, and replaces the Saxon genitive (’s) with “von.” The conditional has already been struck from the German grammar. Russian is losing some gerunds (-ushchiy, -yushchiy) and the superlative form with the prefix *nai-*. In the forefront of this thousand-year-long analytical development are the progressive, popular, and mostly analytical languages of our time: modern Persian, English, French, and Yiddish. The fanatical Hebraists who castigate Yiddish for the simplicity of this “detestable and mutilated jargon” should note that the Hebrew used by Bialik and Achad Ha’am is a thousand-fold simpler than biblical Hebrew or the language used in medieval *midrashim* [biblical commentaries], because Hebrew is also developing according to the same analytic rule as Yiddish and other inflected languages.

⁹ [Borochov refers to Philipp Mansch’s *Der jüdisch-polnische Jargon* which was published in *Der Israelit* at Lemberg (today Lwów in Poland) in 1888 (vol. 21, issues 18–23), in 1889 (vol. 22, issues 1–4, 6–7, 9–10, 12, 14, 18) and in 1890 (vol. 23, issues 1 and 3–8). *Ed.*]

¹⁰ [Reference is to Jacob Gerzon’s Ph.D. dissertation *Die jüdisch-deutsche Sprache. Eine grammatisch-lexicologische Untersuchung ihres deutschen Grundbestandes*, Cologne 1902. *Ed.*]

III

A great difficulty arises for the Yiddish philologist regarding whether our Judeo-German vernacular (*yidish-daytshe folks-shprakh*) belongs in the category of *fused languages* (*gemishte shprakhn*).¹¹ There is no truly pure language in existence worldwide. Hebrew has many Aramaic, Greek, and Persian elements; Russian has numerous Turkish and Finnish words. There are, however, languages whose mixed structure is most apparent: English melds Celtic, Germanic, and Romance elements; Japanese is a mixture of native Japanese and Chinese elements; Persian is a mixture of native Persian and Arabic elements. There are beautiful, mighty languages that are more mixed than Yiddish; none, however, is called a “dirty jargon.”¹²

Yiddish consists mostly of Germanic words, and almost all its forms are Germanic. In addition, it contains many Semitic (Hebrew and Aramaic) words and forms. The syntax and style are markedly Semitic. Within this mixture, we occasionally find Slavic (Polish and Ukrainian), Moldavian, Hungarian and, in America, English words and forms. Finally we find a small but very interesting element – the few Old French, Italian, and Portuguese words, for example *tsholnt* [a baked dish of meat, potatoes, and legumes served on the Sabbath], *fatsheyle* [kerchief], *bentshn* [corresponds to the Italian *benedire* = to bless], and others. Previously there were more of these words in Yiddish. We find in old Yiddish writings such words as *preyen* [corresponds to the French word *prier* = to beg, to invite], *orn* [or *oren* corresponds to the Italian word *orare* = to pray] and so on, which have disappeared from current usage. Almost without a doubt, these are remnants of the language that our forebears spoke before they turned to German. Because of these traces and for other philological and historical reasons, Dr. Güdemann (*Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der abendländischen Juden*, vol. 1¹³ [see note 6]) holds that originally, in the eleventh or twelfth century, Jews in Germany still spoke French.

Just as in other fused languages, when these different elements enter the Yiddish language they retain their independent structure as autonomous *organic* units. Yiddish is not a linguistic mishmash, not a hodge-podge, but a *language*, though a fused one. As soon as Germanic, Hebraic, and Slavic elements are absorbed into the vernacular,

¹¹ [“Fused” is the term suggested by Max Weinreich for Yiddish as a mixed or hybrid language. Borochof addressed here a hotly debated point of the science of linguistics, more specifically dealt with by Max Grünbaum in *Mischsprachen und Sprachmischungen*, Berlin 1885. Ed.]

¹² A telling example of language mixture is Turkish (Osmanli), an agglutinative language without inflections belonging to the Chinese-Mongolian family (the Ural-Altai group). Turkish historically combined with alien inflected languages: with Aryan, Persian, and Semitic Arabic. Yet this mixture is quite harmonious as well as very organic and productive. Turks speak a strange mixture of languages in ordinary life. And so, in the morning a Turk greets you with a phrase (*sabakh-i-sherifiniz kheyr olsun*), of which the first three words are Arabic with a Turkish suffix whose syntactic link is Persian, and the fourth word is Turkish. If you receive a postcard from a Turk that has a heading of the *Osmanian Federal Post*, the first three words are Arabic, they are connected in a syntactical order that is Persian, the fourth word is Italian, and the structure of the whole phrase is Turkish.

¹³ [Cf. Güdemann, *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der abendländischen Juden*. Vol. I: *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der Juden in Frankreich und Deutschland*, pp. 276–277. Ed.]

they cease to be Germanic, Hebraic, and Slavic. They lose the face they previously had and take another one: They become *Yiddish*. Their pronunciation is fitted to Yiddish phonetics, their declension is adapted to fit Yiddish grammar, and their position in the sentence is adapted to the Yiddish syntax. Hebrew words often have a different pronunciation in Yiddish than the usual Ashkenazi pronunciation.¹⁴ For example we have *tselokhes* [spite], *balebos* [proprietor, master], *sheygets* [gentile lad, impudent/smart boy], *melupn* [the vowel ך], *tomer* [if], *barmenen* [corpse], *krishme* [the prayer said upon going to bed, and as part of morning and evening payers], *tayne* [claim] instead of *tsu lehakhes*, *baal habaiys*, *shekets*, *mlupum*, *tomar*, *bar minan*, *krias shma*, *tayno*. Even our Hebrew pronunciation adapts to the Yiddish one; *tseyreh* is pronounced “ey”; *khoylem* is pronounced “oy”; the “lamed” [ל] has a hard pronunciation; and the accent is always on the penultimate syllable rather than on the last, (e.g. *bórukh áto* [blessed art thou] and so on). We give Hebrew words a different meaning in Yiddish (for example: *aderabe* [on the contrary, by all means] *hoyshtayne* [one of the bunch of willow twigs beaten against the reading desk of the synagogue to accompany a certain Sukkoth prayer], *klezemer* [musician (player)], and so on). Occasionally a word in Yiddish will be composed of elements from two different languages, such as Hebrew and German (*bagazlen* [to rob], *oyskhazern* [to repeat], *unterkhasmen* [to sign], *mit kol hameglekhkaytn* [with all (the) possibilities], *hefker-velt* [lawless world], *inyoney-gesheft* [business matters/affairs], *droshe-geshank* [wedding present]), or Hebrew and Slavic: *tsvuak* [hypocrite], *tsvuatshen* [to be hypocritical], *kolboynik* [jack of all trades; rascal], *hefker-petrushke* [everything is permitted], *bal-hakorobke* [tax collector]. We have changed some words so that their origin is barely recognizable. For example, Hebrew: דָּרְוֹעֵנֶן changed to דָּאוּוֹעֵנֶן [*davenen*, to pray]; כְּתוּבָה changed to קָטְאוּוֹעֵס [*katoves*, jest]; שְׂמוּעוֹת changed to שְׂמוּעֶסן [*shmuesn*, to shmooze, to chat]; אוֹיִס־מַחֲהוּיִן changed to אוֹיִס־מַעֲקֵן [*oysmekn*, to erase]. Germanic: *lekkukh* to *lekek*, [cake] *volfeyl* to *volvl* [cheap], *tinthorn* to *tinter*, [inkwell] *tsuomyeze* to *tsimes* [vegetable or fruit stew]. Slavic: *neboha* to *nebekh* [unfortunate], *dzyed* to *zeyde* [grandfather], and many others.¹⁵

The elements from different languages do not contradict each other in Yiddish. They carry out completely different functions, they are tied together and complement one another just as different functions do in a living organism. One of the goals of Yiddish

¹⁴ See in addition M. Veynger, “Hebreische klangen in der yudisher shprakh.” [This note was not numbered (as Borochov’s footnotes were); it was marked with an asterisk and signed “the editors.” The article referred to by Veynger was published in the same issue. The note is not in the 1966 reprint. *Ed.*]

¹⁵ The origin of “davenen” is explained in I[gnaz] Bernstein and [B.] W. Segel (in their dictionary *Jüdische Sprichwörter und Redensarten*, Warsaw 1908, [reprint Wiesbaden 1989], p.[16-]17) as the English word *dawn*. However, a more reasonable theory is the one presented here, based on L[eopold] Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge [der Juden historisch entwickelt. Ein Beitrag zur Altertumskunde und biblischen Kritik, zur Literatur- und Religionsgeschichte]*, 2nd edition, revised by N. Brüll] Frankfurt am Main 1892, page 454, and E. Vadasz in the Hungarian Jewish periodical *Magyar Zsidó Szemle*, 1908, no. 4. I explain “katoves” according to the great Yiddish grammarian Bakhur Ashkenazi Halevi (Eliyahu Levita) in his dictionary, *Sefer Ha-Tishbi* (Sefer Hatishbi L’ Eliahu Hatishbi, Isny, of 1541).

philology is to determine the functions performed by the Hebraic, Germanic, and Slavic words and forms in Yiddish. The common opinion which holds that Hebrew words express more lofty and abstract concepts whereas Germanic words everyday things is incorrect. We have *got* [God] and *gedank* [thought] – Germanic words which express abstract concepts, and *mekhutn*, *mishpokhe*, *keyle* [son-in-law's or daughter-in-law's father; family; dish or instrument] – Hebrew words for everyday matters as well as for many indecent words.¹⁶ It seems to me that we can explain the matter in the following way: ideas and relations pertaining to everyday life are expressed in words from German. The phenomena that arose from inner Jewish life are usually expressed in Hebrew. Forms and feelings of everyday life within the narrow family circle, as well as slurs and denotations of negative properties, are expressed in words derived from Slavic. Thus, the same notion expressed in words derived from different sources may have different nuances. For example: *got*, *reboyne-shel-oylem*, and *Gotenyu-tatenyu*. The first word (God) expresses a universal notion and is derived from German. The second (Lord of the universe) is Hebrew and expresses the relationship between God and the people of Israel. The third (dear beloved God, dear beloved Father), a Slavic form, expresses an intimate, childlike relationship to the almighty power. The three Yiddish words [for “simple”] *aynfakh*, *poshet*, and *prost* do not have exactly the same meaning, although it's hard to formulate the differentiating nuances.¹⁷ The word *nar* [stupid, derived from the German word *Narr*] refers to any human being; *tipesh* [from Hebrew] refers to Jews only; *baybak* [corresponds to “laggard”]. There are certainly many important exceptions to this rule, but generally Germanic words stem from the relationship between Jews and the European world; Hebrew and Aramaic words stem from Jewish communal life, from the *kheyder* [traditional Jewish religious school], from the *yeshive* [an institution of higher Talmudic learning], from the *tsadik's shtibl* [small Hassidic house of prayer]; and Slavic words from close contact with farmers, servants, *shabes-goyim*, and so on.

Superficially seen, we have two interesting exceptions to this rule as to the use of Hebrew words in Yiddish:

1. Words that signify a commercial relationship: *miskher* [trade], *skhoyre* [commodity; fabric], *mashkn* [pawn, pledge], *revekhn* [profit], *kern* [investment], *shtar* [deed; bill], *malve* [money lender], *khoyv* [debt], and so on, as well as some sharp expressions from the dark-dealing world, such as *shakhern* [to cheat, to swindle] (from *sakhern*), *ganvenen* [to steal], *gazlenen* [to plunder] (also perhaps *hargenen* [to kill]), and so on.
2. Those crude denotations that Jews, according to their traditional concept of the chosen people, use to designate to non-Jews, such as *goy* [gentile], *akum* [heathen],

¹⁶ *Takhtoynim* [underpants], *neveyle* [carcass], and so on. The practice of using Hebrew words to refer to the sexual organs and bodily functions originated in a feeling of shame and is similar to the European habit of “covering up” such matters by referring to them in Latin, also similar to the Turks using Arabic, and the Brahmins using Sanskrit, etc.

¹⁷ [The first is of Germanic origin, the second is of Hebrew origin, and the last is of Slavic origin. *Ed.*].

orl [non-Jew], *sheygets* [gentile lad], *shikse* [gentile girl], *lehavdl* [to distinguish between sacred and profane things mentioned successively], or *peygern* [to die (of animals)] instead of *shtarbn*, *khaslire hobn* [to marry (humorous, contemptuous)] instead of *khasene hobn*, etc.

The first category (commercial expressions) arose partially because in those days the German language did not have enough expressions of this kind. It is interesting to note that the Germans have borrowed from Yiddish such words as *Raibach* or *Rebbach* [profit], *Pleite* [bankruptcy], *Baisel* (*hayzl*) [dive], and the German “thieves’ Latin” is replete with Yiddish (Hebrew) words.¹⁸ This offered a point of reference for a large branch of Yiddish philology: many German scholars, in particular the distinguished linguist Avé-Lallemant, were led to Yiddish when studying the “thieves’ Latin.”

The second category (scornful expressions) results from the social isolation characteristic of simple people in all nations. Thus, Russian peasants use *okolevat’* [to peg out, to kick the bucket] instead of *umeret’* [to die], Ukrainian peasants say *zdochnuti* [to croak] instead of *umerti* [to die], German peasants say *fressen* [to gobble up] instead of *essen* [to eat] and *krepieren* [to peg out] instead of *sterben* [to die]. In the course of the *humanization* of a language, such typical scornful phrases disappear from the vernacular.

These three elements – Germanic, Hebrew-Aramaic, and Slavic – serve different functions in the language; however, the mixed nature of Yiddish is no barrier to its development. On the contrary, because of this mixed nature, our language is richer in words and possible expressions. However, there is a fourth, more intellectual element in our language, the youngest of them all; this fourth element contradicts the structure of the other elements and is not able to complement them. This element is called *daytshmerish*. It ruins our language and may reduce it to the degree of an ugly jargon. Let us take a look at this element.

IV

The majority of words and forms in Yiddish are of Germanic origin. This is why every high school student says that “Yiddish is corrupt German,” but whoever says so unfortunately does not know what German is. Yiddish is indeed derived from the German language, but not the German language that is required for the *attestat zrelosti* [the certificate that qualifies a high school graduate for university entrance]. Schiller’s and Goethe’s German is not the *stepfather* of Yiddish, but its *stepbrother*, and even a younger stepbrother. Yiddish is older than the language that our “intellectuals” consider to be proper German; it is, indeed, three or four hundred years older. Both are derived from Middle High German, and both are “corrupt.” Yiddish was “corrupted”

¹⁸ [The so called *Gainersprache*, *Ganovensprache*, or *Rotwelsch*. Ed.]

by Hebrew and Slavic influences; modern German by Latin and French influences. Yiddish became “corrupt” in the marketplace and in the Yeshiva; German in the universities and the bureaucratic chancelleries. Modern Yiddish contains many words from Old and Middle High German, words that are no longer in literary use. It often happens that a word or a grammatical form that our ignorant “intellectuals” consider corrupt German, is an old Germanic word or form that has been saved from oblivion by Yiddish. The first scholar who thoroughly studied such words and forms in Yiddish was Avé-Lallemant. In his footsteps followed Saineau,¹⁹ Landau,²⁰ and Gerzon.²¹ The latter even wrote a comparative-grammar of Yiddish and Middle High German and compiled a list of 424 remnant Germanic words that are very often found in contemporary Yiddish literature. However, *old* Yiddish literature is a treasure of even older Germanic expressions that are now extinct in both Yiddish and German.

Since Yiddish is not derived from contemporary literary German, but from Middle High German that is now extinct, Yiddish words greatly differ from modern literary German words. Our intelligentsia who wanted to clean up the Yiddish language by way of imitating the German literature were mistaken. They thought that Yiddish was “corrupt” and that it therefore needed to be “corrected.” And correcting meant, of course, germanizing. In the nineteenth century, our writers poured streams of *daytshmerish* into the Yiddish language. First of all, they started to bend Yiddish phonetics to resemble German phonetics. Where Jews say *af* [on], *ba* [at, by], *far* [for], *nor* [only], the “intellectuals” began to say *oyf*, *bay*, *fir*, *nur*. Where people would commonly say *dergreykhn* [to reach, to attain], *farrikhtn* [to repair], *baglikn* [to succeed, to have good luck], *shmartsn* [to smart], *hartsik* [cordial, hearty], *hant* [hand], *toyznt* [thousand], *fertig* [ready, finished], *undz* [us], *mentsh* [Man], *bentshn* [bless], *briv* [letter], an intellectual would “correct”: *erreykhen*, *ferrikhten*, *beglikn*, *shmertsen*, *hertslikh*, *hand*, *toyzend*, *fertig*, *unz*, *mensch*, *benshen*, *brif*. When they adopted new German words into Yiddish, the intellectuals didn’t yiddishize them, but rather brought with them their New High German pronunciation, that is, the literary German pronunciation.

Where people would have said *dertsung* [education], *antviklung* [development], they were taught to say *erziehung*, *entviklung*, and so on. By Germanizing the language, the *Maskil* [scholar] has also completely corrupted the Yiddish grammar. He created new, literary German plural forms for many words, (*lerer* [teachers] instead of *lerers*;

¹⁹ [Borochof may be referring to either of these contributions (or to all) by the Rumanian linguist Lazăr Șăineanu: *Studiu dialectologic asupra grăiului evreo-german* (Dialectological inquiries into the Judeo-German vernacular), Bucarest 1889; Lazar Sainéan (French spelling of Lazăr Șăineanu): *Essai sur le judéo-allemand*, in: *Mémoires de la Société de Linguistique de Paris*, 1903, vol. 12, p. 90–138 and p. 176–196; Lazar Sainéan: *L’argot ancien*, Paris 1907, and *Les sources de l’argot ancien*, vol. 1, Paris 1912. Ed.]

²⁰ [It is not evident which of the many contributions by Alfred Landau known to Borochof the essay refers to here; cf. e.g. Alfred Landau: *Zur polnischen Geheimsprache*, in: *Archiv für slawische Philologie*, 1900, vol. 20, p. 137–150 or id.: *Bemerkungen und Nachweise zum Wörterverzeichnis der Geheimsprache von 1735*, in: *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde*, 1900, vol. 4, issue 3. Ed.]

²¹ [For the reference to Gerzon, see above n. 10. Ed.]

direktorn [directors] instead of *direkters*; *kreftn* [forces] instead of *kreft*). He introduced many nouns to the neuter gender, a gender which almost didn't exist in Yiddish (especially in Lithuanian Yiddish). For example, *dos folk* [the people/people], *dos* (!) *raykhtum* [wealth], *dos glik* [happiness, good fortune]. He distorted the conjunction: instead of *er zetst iber* [he translates], *er iz ibergetsaygt* [he is convinced], *untergedrikt* [oppressed], he introduced the German forms *er iberzetst*, *ibertsaygt*, *unterdrikt*. There are many similar "reforms" by which our intellectuals, almost unconsciously, grossly complicated the neat and simple Yiddish grammar. This has caused many problems in contemporary Yiddish grammar with the plural and with the neuter gender. In his book *Yudishe gramatik*, Z. Reyzen²² had to introduce more than *fifty* rules that govern the formation of plural forms, and he was unable to make out all the gender rules. If this was not enough, the spelling the intellectuals imposed on Yiddish has become really awkward. The orthography in old Yiddish translations of the Bible and other ancient Yiddish books was originally at a low level. But instead of simplifying the complicated spelling, the Maskil made it more confusing by following literary German spelling. In German the *ie* is pronounced differently from the *i*, the *e* is different from the *eh*. In Yiddish, especially in Lithuanian Yiddish, we do not have these differences. However, the intellectual writes *eh* and *yeh*, which are not needed at all. Even where the Germans have stopped writing the silent letters, our intellectuals still use them. Since 1880, German uses the simplified *Judentum* [Jewry], *tun* [to do], and *tat* [did] whereas our intellectuals write to this day *Yudenthum*, *thun*, and *that*.

Many difficulties have been unknowingly introduced to Yiddish philology by the intellectuals. However we do not deny that some of our intelligentsia have benefited Yiddish. The main benefit is that they greatly *humanized* the language and *enriched* it by introducing many words which the common people would not have been able to create themselves in their poor language. And in spite of contorting the Yiddish phonetics in the German manner, the intellectuals sometimes helped to make our notions richer. For example, the verbal prefix *er-* is foreign to the people's vernacular. An ordinary Jew uses *der-* instead of *er-*: *dergreykhn* [to reach], *derhern* [to hear, detect], *derzen* [to spot, to notice], *dershrekn* [to frighten]. However, by introducing the German forms with *er-* into Yiddish, the intellectual doubled the nuances which Yiddish is capable of expressing: *ervartn* [to expect] and *zikh dervartn* [to wait long enough; to live to see], *ertsien* and *dertsien* [to bring up or to educate], *erfiln* and *derfiln* [to fulfill or to detect or sense] have different meanings. The "intelligent" words sometimes added an elevated character to our concepts. Examples are the non-Yiddish words *kunst* [art], *bodn* [ground, soil], *her* [mister]. The Yiddish words are *kunts* [trick or stunt], *boydem* [attic], *har* [lord, master]. But since the common people's expressions did not suit him, our intellectual introduced the German words, thus making Yiddish sometimes richer than German. German has only one concept: *kunst* [art], *künstlich* [artificial],

²² [Borochov refers here to Zalmen Reyzen's Yiddish grammar published in Yiddish in Warsaw in 1908. *Ed.*]

kunstvoll [artfully], whereas Yiddish possesses two concepts, higher and lower: *kunst*, *kintslekh* (higher) [art, artificial], and *kunts* [trick or stunt], *kuntsik* [tricky] (lower). The same occurs with the words *bodn* and *boydem*, *her* and *har*, *form* [form or shape] and *furim* [pattern], *kvele* [source] and *kval* [spring], *perzon* [person] and *parshoyrn* [person, character, *persona*], *daytsh* [German] and *taytsh* [meaning]. As to the humanization of the language, I have already discussed this matter. It relates to Yiddish losing its restrictive, chauvinistic expressions.²³

V

Understanding the positive and negative aspects of the language elements introduced by the intelligentsia is particularly important for Yiddish philology, since the task of philology does not end with the elementary study of the language. It cannot stop with merely creating a scientific grammar and a dictionary; rather, it must go further and *purify* as well as *enrich* the language. While the first generations of scholarly endeavors of all awakening peoples strive to humanize the language, subsequent generations are concerned with purifying their language of the unsuccessful scholastic elements. For all peoples there comes a time when purifying their language becomes the most urgent philological task. About fifty to sixty years ago, this task confronted the Latvians, Estonians, Serbs, Greeks, Czechs, Flemish, and the Finns. Now this task confronts the Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Catalans, Georgians, as well as us Jews. For all nations, the most difficult philological work consists in language purification. This work is so difficult because of the psychological immobility of the intellectual tradition. The writer and his habits, the editor, the critic, the public school teacher, the clerk in the government office, the proofreader, and the printer all fight against purifying the language. Also, the general public, i.e., the average person, objects to language purification and is adamant in his holy ignorance. The peoples mentioned above spent a lot of nervous energy purifying the language. The rationally justified reform of simplifying the language has been countered everywhere by ridicule and anger. People claimed that the purified words “sound vulgar, ignorant,” the new orthography “appears comical and incomprehensible.” Linguistic reforms among all nations were met with similar complaints. This is so because the old-fashioned intelligentsia holds on to the same mistake, viz., that the people talk in a “corrupt” manner, and that their language must be nurtured by foreign sources.²⁴

²³ The role that the intellectual *daytshmerish* played in Yiddish is very similar to the role that the *langue savante* [learned language] played in French. While enriching the people’s vernacular, the old French scholars simultaneously complicated it both in its forms and in its spelling. [This footnote is printed only in the first edition of Borochoy’s essay. *Ed.*]

²⁴ Thus modern Greek was considered “corrupted” ancient Greek, Flemish “corrupt” Dutch, Catalanian, a “bad” Spanish dialect. One tried to improve Finnish with Swedish, Latvian with German, Serbian with Russian, Czech with German, and so on.

Like other nations, we must reform our language. Our reform will succeed only if our intellectuals have the courage to do away with bad language habits and if they use a broad broom to sweep out all those *daytshmerish* elements that do not suit the Yiddish language, i.e., which do not enrich it. However, we should introduce new words from German provided they are “Yiddishized”; they must fit into the phonetic and grammatical forms of the language of our people. The most difficult task of all is to eliminate *daytshmerish* from the colloquial language. The easiest task is to eliminate *daytshmerish* from the written language. *Daytshmerish* writing in our books and newspapers spoil not only the written, but also the spoken language: We stop speaking Yiddish. True Yiddish sounds vanish from the vernacular. In Yiddish, we used to say *undz* [us], *undzer* [our], *mentshn* [men], *finster* [dark], *af* [on], *ba* [at, by]. Now we say in a “German” fashion *unz*, *menshn*, *finster*, *oyf*, *bay*. Even the name of our people and language, *yidish*, we do not write correctly, and it may happen that we will get used to the misnomer.²⁵

The reform of Yiddish spelling must follow, as far as possible, the *phonetic principle*, which is: “Write as you speak.” This is the fundamental principle in every spelling system. The other two principles, the *historical* and *etymological* ones, only supplement the phonetic principle, but do not replace it. It is taken for granted that a phonetic principle does not embrace the uttered word in all its audible nuances. Also, we must cast aside all local dialects and choose one as the only “correct” one. (We have chosen the Lithuanian dialect as the “correct,” that is, the literary, one). But every orthography has such shortcomings.

We must remember that the weaker a people, the greater the threat to the existence of its language. Thus, a language requires a reasonable, unambiguous, and consistent orthography. Future generations of French, English, and Russian will have to cope with their spelling difficulties; however, they have no choice. They must make an effort to overcome orthographic chaos. But in the case of a weak people where the young who are learning have a choice, the young could give up the mother tongue and choose a different cultural means. In such cases a complicated orthography would put the existence of the mother tongue in jeopardy. For this reason, the Hungarians, Czechs, Serbs, Ukrainians, and Latvians had to fundamentally reform their spelling. The Bulgarians and the Turks are now doing the same. We must follow the same path, too.²⁶

²⁵ We often find the following forms: *yud*, *yudish*, or *id*, *idish* [Jew/Jewish, Yiddish]. Both forms are erroneous. They do not express the proper sound of *yid*, *yidish*.

²⁶ A rather difficult question concerns writing Hebrew and Aramaic words that are used in Yiddish. Let us not devote too much time to this subject. However, I would like to note, first, that, for those words that have lost their Hebraic pronunciation, it is better to write them in Yiddish. For example: *tomer* [if], *balebos* [proprietor, boss], *moneshakh* [either or] (*mimah nafshakh*), *tselokhes*, and *barmenem* (*bar minan*). Secondly, wherever it is possible to write *mole* [in full spelling, with the letters ם and ן] in Hebrew, the Hebrew words in Yiddish should be written the same way. We do this even in front of a strong *dogesh* [a dot stressing or hardening a consonant] or in the plural. For example: *dor* [generation], *kol* [voice], *khoydesh* [month], *shoyresh* [(grammatical) root], *oyfn*

A broader task of our philology is to enrich the Yiddish language. The issue is not that Yiddish is poor in forms. The contrary is true, and this is an advantage embodied in the analytical character of our language. The language is rich in words and concepts. Yiddish is a language that by its very nature ought to keep its rich, expressive capabilities, since it is a mixture of three tremendously rich language families: Semitic, Germanic, and Slavic. This abundance, increased by the liveliness of the Jewish temperament, is manifested continually in Yiddish. For example, let's have a look at the notion of a simple person and the notion of a powerful man. Yiddish is rich in expressions: *a proster shalesh sudes*, *a proster khay vekayem*, *a proster boser vedom*, *a yid fun a gants yor*, *an aynfakher*, *a posheter mentsh* [a common person]. And *a gantser shalesh sudes*, *a marberebashe*, *a meykhes*, *a yakhsn*, *a ya tobi dam*, *a gantser makher*, *a takef*, *a sore*, *Avrom ovinus eynikl* [a powerful person], and other such expressions. Or, consider how a Jew expresses his disbelief in a story when he thinks it is not true: *narishe mayses*, *loy hoye veloy nivre*, *loy hoyu dvorim meoylem*, *lehadam*, *loy dubim veloy yaar*, *a mayse mit a ber*, *s'heybt zikh gornit on*, *nit geshtoygn nit gefloygn*, *afn himl a yarid*, *a nekhtiker tog*, *a bove mayse*, *in der velt arayn*, *a lign di mayse*, *rabe bar khones mayses*, *s'iz nit geven keyn porets un me hot keynem nit geshmishn*, *s'hot zikh getrofn (a vokh) unter varshe*, and similar expressions. The poverty of Yiddish is a result of certain socio-psychological factors. Wandering about on the streets for generations, being dragged along from market place to market place, Yiddish did not have the good fortune to be bred in chancelleries and refined in salons and universities. Therefore, Yiddish is poor in scientific ideas and lacks a sophisticated legal and political terminology. Yiddish nurtured itself on the naïve, natural feelings of the Jewish woman in front of her stove. For this reason Yiddish could not develop subtle expressions and psychological nuances. And, above all, Yiddish was severed from nature as were its people, so it could not develop a sound sense for natural phenomena. It lacks names for minerals, plants, and animals. Our language does not deal with the buzz of a locust, the whistle of a bird, and the howl of a wolf; it does not reflect the splendidly rich colors of early spring nor does it weep for the yearly death of nature.

The supreme tasks of Yiddish philology may be described in a different manner: the task of “nationalization” (*natsyonalizatsye*) and the task of “humanization” (*humanizatsye*) of the Yiddish language. Nationalizing Yiddish, turning it into a true national language, means purifying the language thoroughly and enriching it extensively, so it can express all aspects of Jewish creativity. Humanizing the language

[manner], *meshumed* [baptized Jew], *mekhutn* [son-in-law's/daughter-in-law's father], *doyses* [generations], *koyles* [loud noise] – with the letter *vov* [v], or *shier* [limit], *kitser* [summary], *mide* [habit], *sibe* [cause, reason], *kehile* [community], *megile* [scroll], *simonim* [signs] – with the letter *yud* [y]. Generally, writing Hebrew words in their own orthography highlights the linguistic role they play in Yiddish. I do not know if it is worthwhile to make remarks on the strange reform our radicals suggest, viz., to Latinize the Hebrew alphabet. From a national viewpoint, this is utter nonsense, but also just from a purely practical point of view, the Hebrew alphabet is much more appropriate than the Latin one. I think, e.g., that the Poles, the Czechs, and the Hungarians would be better off with the Hebrew alphabet than the poor Latin one. Also from a physiological point of view, it is better to write from right to left (than the opposite).

in a broad sense means turning it into a tool for incorporating the cultural values of the modern development of mankind into the Jewish people. Yiddish philology must assist in making the Yiddish language become *a national cultural-medium (mitl) and an educational-medium for the people and for intellectuals*. Meanwhile, Yiddish has developed on its own. It has already become in part a means for national culture, but it did not yet become a means for educational culture, nor a means for universal culture.

Our great writers sensed the need for enriching and cultivating the language of the people without resorting to the means of scientific philology. Mendele Moykher Sforim is the Columbus of the Yiddish language, and Yitskhok Leybush Peretz is its Napoleon. Mendele discovered Yiddish, and Peretz conquered the European worlds on its behalf. The unexpected blossoming of Yiddish poetry and literary criticism has uncovered an infinite number of sources of possible expression. All this shows that Yiddish can become a rich and powerful cultural and educational means for our people. Scientific philology with its own means ought to help to introduce order into this chaotic creative process. Mendele *nationalized* our language. His first literary grandchild, Sholem Aleykhem, wondrously *popularized* it, and Peretz *humanized* it. *These three great writers are the founders of the modern Yiddish language*. They share in this historical achievement. So let science have a portion of the heritage, too. Mendele discovered the language, so let us explore it. Peretz brought new countries to it, so let us bring order among them. Philology must excavate the hidden layers of the people's creativity, it must unearth the treasures of our national creativeness that lie scattered in western-European libraries. Old Yiddish literature has its classical works like the *Shmuel Bukh*, the *Mayse Bukh*, and the *Seyfer Hamides*, that have served as a paradigm (*muster*) for many generations and even used to be translated into foreign languages. The people possess a mass of words in their aphorisms, jokes, songs, stories, and riddles, and generally in their folklore, which philology should investigate and cultivate. These philological methods will enrich the language, and the people will become acquainted with their literary past and will learn to profit from its concealed wealth. However, this is a task which individuals cannot take upon themselves. Single persons may work on single branches, they may get the process started. Yet, only a social institution is likely to organize the work of philology in its whole breadth. As long as we have not unified our people's forces, as long as there is no national authority for the organization of philological endeavors, Yiddish philology will not be able to properly fulfill its tasks and aims.

Concerning Orthography

Here are the basic rules of the orthography that I use. First of all, as far as possible, it is *phonetic*, that is, I try to write as people speak. As no written language can equal the spoken word and contain all the sounds and nuances of human language, on the one hand, and as, on the other hand, too consistent a phonetic orthography would diverge

from today's commonly accepted spelling, I was forced to make many concessions with the predominant, though faulty tradition in order to avoid obscurities. I adopt the Lithuanian pronunciation as a basis, and I rely on the following general principles of Yiddish phonetics:

1. Yiddish tries to achieve ease of speech and avoids whatever may cause difficulty and strain in pronunciation. The most important rule is not the full-sound of words, but the speed of elocution.
2. Yiddish accents are the logically most important syllables (I use H. Chemerinsky's word for syllable, *traf*) of the word. In the majority of cases it is the root of the word, seldom the prefix that determines the meaning (*untervarfn* [abandon], *iberzetsn* [to translate]).
3. The less important vowels, that is, the unstressed vowels, are neutralized for easier pronunciation. Among the unstressed vowels is the *u*, which is the lowest in tone [ton]. On a higher level are the *o*, *a*, and *e* (the Russian Ы and Polish *y*). Still higher is the *e*. On the highest level, there is the *i*. (Musicians call it the head sound.) When you pronounce an *a* or *e*, the back of the tongue stays practically parallel to the palate, and the larynx is half opened. This is the easiest opening of the speech organs, therefore the middle vowels – *a* and *e* – are the easiest to pronounce. This is particularly true for Jews who speak in a sing-song manner and, therefore, prefer the intermediate vowels *a* and *e* rather than the vowels on the upper or lower half of the scale.

We thereby obtain the most important *law of neutralization* (*fartunklungs-gezets*) in Yiddish phonetics. In all true Yiddish words, which people have been using since immemorial times, the unaccented vowels are neutralized. The first level of neutralization is *a*, as in the majority of first syllables of words (*far-*, *ba-*, *fanander-*, *a-*, *ant-*) and as the vowels preceding a *khaf* [ɤ]. This is so, because the Yiddish *khaf* is uttered neither with the hard nor with the soft palate, but with the larynx; thus, speech becomes easier with the laryngeal sound *a*, *-lakh*. All other unaccented vowels are neutralized to *e* (second neutralization level). However, they are not all equal, so that *e* sometime sounds closer to *a* and sometimes closer to *e* or *u*. But the essence of the sound remains an *e* (the Russian Ы or the Polish *y*). Examples of the first two neutralization levels are:

1. *farikhtn* [to repair] from *ferrickhten*, *bagrobn* [to bury] from *begroben*, *antloyfn* [to escape, to flee], *avek* [away] from *hinvek* (*envek*), *aroyts* [out], *aheym* [home(ward)], *a yor* [a year] from *ayn yor*. Before *khaf*: *freylakh* [cheerful], *nebakh* [unfortunate] from *nyeboha*, *fartakh* [apron] from *fartukh*, *lekakh* [cake] from *lekkikh*, *retakh* [radish] from *rettikh*, *meylakh* [king] from *meylekh*, *mimoneshakh* [either or] from *mimah nafshakh*.
2. *arbeter* [worker] from *arbayer*, *tinter* [inkwell] from *tinthorn*, *kimpet* [childbirth] from *kindbet*, *borves* [barefoot] from *barvuoz*, *palmesn* [embalm] from *balsamiren*, *entfer* [answer] from *antwurt*, *barmenen* [corpse] from *bar minan*, *tselokhes* [spite] from *tsu*

lehakhes, *krishme* [the prayer said upon going to bed, and as part of morning and evening prayers] from *kries shma*, *tsores* [troubles] from *tsoroys*, *lopete* [spade] from *lopata*, *vedlek* [according to] from *vedlug*.

There is a third level of neutralization on which the vowel is completely elided. This happens in many true Yiddish words such as: *krishme* (*kries shma*), *broyz* [brewery] from *broy hoyz*, and *hentshke* [glove] from *hantshuokh*. This always happens where the suffix is comprised of liquid, half open sounds, *l* and *n*. In Yiddish, the non-accented vowels preceding the syllabic *l* and *n* are elided. For example: *zogn* [to say] but not *zogen*, *kepl* [head] but not *kepel* (the syllables are *zo + gn*, *ke + pl*), *volvl* [cheap] from *volfeyl*, *bronfn* [liquor] from *brantvayn*, *boyml* [oil] from *boymeyl*, *fertsn* [fourteen] from *fertsehn*, *khezhtbn* [account; calculation] from *khezhtboyn*.

The *l* is not syllabic after *n* or *l*. The *n* is not syllabic if it follows the one of these sounds: *n*, *m*, *nk*, *ng*, and after *l* which follows a consonant (*kl*, *gl*, *tl*, *dl*, etc.): *kerndl* [kernel; nucleus] from *kernel*, *shtilekhl* [quiet] from *shtilel*, *veynen* [to cry] but not *veynn*, *ramen* [to clean] but not *ramn*, *benken* [to long, to yearn] but not *benkn*, *klingen* [to ring] but not *klngn*, *viklen* [to wrap], *mozlen* [measles], etc.

In addition, the *n* is not syllabic in verbs of Hebrew or Slavic origin: *soseken*, *akhlen*, *ganven*, *blondzhen*, *sopen*. There are some exceptions: *khapn*, *poyeln*.

I write all true Yiddish words according to these phonetic rules. I also try to yiddishize neologisms in accordance with these rules. But sometimes I must halt in order not to become incomprehensible. In general, the spelling of the words follows the elocution of the people, not that of the intellectuals. Therefore I write *kinig* [king], *miglekh* [possible], *hant* [hand], *toyznt*, [thousand] *vint* [wind], *toplt* [double], *bataytung* [meaning], *briv* [letter]. Where people due to their elocution use an explosive sound instead of a spirant, I write the explosive sound: *mentsh* but not *mensch*, *bentshn* but not *benshen*, *undz* and not *unz*, *haldz* [neck, throat] and not *halz*, *fenster* [window] and not *fenster*, etc. Where they clearly enunciate the initial *yi*, which must not be neutralized, as it is always accented, I write two *yuds*: *yikh* [I], *yim* [him], *yir* [her], *yid* [Jew], *yidish*, *yingl* [boy]. In those words which are indeed neutralized if they are used proclitic I write *i* (*aleph yud* [אָ]): *in* [in], *iz* [is], *ist* [now], *iber* [above].

Yiddish has often kept the *svarabhakti* vowel which divides two non-syllabic sounds in German. This sound remained in many German dialects. I write this sound as the common person speaks it, that is *a* or *e*. For example *orem* [poor] but not *arm*, *varem* [warm] but not *varm*, *finel* [five] and not *finf*, *elef* [eleven] and not *elf*, *nahen* [nine] from *niun*, *tsehen* [ten] and not *tsehn*, *milakh* [milk] and not *milkh*, *kalakh* [calcium] and not *kalkh*, *velakher* [which] and not *velkher*. I make exceptions in those words that the intellectuals have expended so much effort to spoil: *hofnung* [hope] (it should be *hofenung*), *baderfnish* [need] (it should be *baderfenish*). I make other concessions in the following cases: when the spoken word differs from the written word. People say, e.g., *kerik* [back], but one writes *tsurik*, so meanwhile we follow the written way. Also, I write the nasal tones *nk* and *ng* in the usual manner.

However, I have the audacity to write: *farsheydn* [different], *geveyntlekh* [usual], *dafn* [to need; to have to] (not *darfn*), *me* [one (impersonal pronoun)] (not *men* or *m*) – but, on the opposite, I write *s'*, while it is often pronounced *s*. I do not write two identical letters: *eybikayt* [eternity], *er arbet* [he works] (not *arbaytt* or *arbaytet*).

When we reform the writing, we must remember the following points:

1. The writing must not differ too much from the etymologically established meaning of a word. E.g., we say *teylvays* [partly], *eyntsikvays* [singly, one by one]. However since in speech the adjectival form is *teylvayzer*, I write with the letter *zayen* [י].
2. Yiddish is used differently in different regions. Therefore the Lithuanian method of writing must not differ too much from the Polish or Vohlinian elocution. E.g., Polish Jews read two *yuds* after a consonant as *ay* or as a long *a*. Therefore, we should not write *beynken* [to long for, to yearn] but *benken*; if not, Polish Jews might read it as *banken* and thus misinterpret the word.