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Yiddish

A Linguistic Introduction

Yiddish, the language of Ashkenazic Jewry, arose some 900–1,200 years ago as a result of contact with indigenous varieties of medieval German. Over the next few centuries, it grew to cover the second-largest language area in Europe, with Yiddish-speaking colonies being created in North and South America, Palestine/Israel, Australia, and South Africa. It is estimated that just before the Nazi genocide in the Second World War, there were between 11 and 13 million Yiddish speakers worldwide.

This broad yet comprehensive introduction provides an authoritative overview of all aspects of Yiddish language and linguistics. As well as looking at key features of its syntax, phonology, and morphology, Neil G. Jacobs discusses its history, its dialectology, and the sociolinguistic issues surrounding it. Presenting linguistic data in a way that is compatible with general theoretical issues, it will be welcomed by scholars of general linguistics, Germanic linguistics, and Jewish studies alike.

NEIL G. JACOBS is Associate Professor in the Yiddish and Ashkenazic Studies Program in the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, The Ohio State University. He is author of *Economy in Yiddish Vocalism: A study in the interplay of Hebrew and non-Hebrew components* (1990), and has published widely in the field of Yiddish linguistics, primarily in language history, phonology, and dialectology. He has also published in the areas of post-Yiddish ethnolects, Jewish cabaret, and Jewish geography, and edited the collection *Studies in Jewish Geography* (1998).

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To my teachers –
Robert P. Stockwell, Robert D. King, and Marvin I. Herzog

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Notes on transcription and symbols

1. Yiddish letters – general phonetic values

Yiddish letter	Phonetic transcription	YIVO romanization
א	–	–
אַ	[a]	a
אָ	[o]	o
ב	[b]	b
בֿ	[v]	v
ג	[g]	g
ד	[d]	d
ה	[h]	h
ו	[u]	u
וו	[v]	v
וי	[oj]	oy
ז	[z]	z
ח	[x]	kh
ט	[t]	t
י	[i]; [j]	i; y
יי	[ej]	ey
יִ	[aj]	ay
כ	[k]	k
כ (ך word finally)	[x]	kh
ל	[l]	l
מ (ם word finally)	[m]	m
נ (ן word finally)	[n]	n
ס	[s]	s
ע	[e]	e
פ	[p]	p
פֿ(ף word finally)	[f]	f

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Yiddish letter	Phonetic transcription	YIVO romanization
צ (ץ word finally)	[c]	ts
ק	[k]	k
ר	[r]	r
ש	[š]	sh
שׂ	[s]	s
תּ	[t]	t
ת	[s]	s
Di-/trigraphs		
דזש	[dž]	dzh
זש	[ž]	zh
טש	[č]	tsh

1. Letter ו in words of Hebrew-Aramaic origin may represent the following: [u], [o], and [oj].
2. When adjacent to וו [v], ו [u] is rendered וּ, thus: וווּ [vu] 'where', פרוּוון 'try'; syllabic י [i] adjacent to another vowel is rendered יִ, thus: העברע יִש [hebre-iš] 'Hebrew,' אִס אָצ יִרן [asoci-irn] 'associate.'

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Abbreviations

Yiddish dialects

AY	Alsatian Yiddish
CourlY	Courland Yiddish
CY	Central Yiddish
eCY	East Central Yiddish
eTCPY	eastern Transcarpathian Yiddish
eWY	easternmost Western Yiddish
EY	Eastern Yiddish
MWY	Middle Western Yiddish
NEY	Northeastern Yiddish
NWY	Northern Western Yiddish
PNY	Proto-Northeastern Yiddish
PSY	Proto-Southern Yiddish
PY	Proto-Yiddish
ScrY	Scribal Yiddish
SEY	Southeastern Yiddish
SL	Stam-Litvish (general Northeastern Yiddish)
StY	Standard Yiddish
SWY	Southern Western Yiddish
SY	Southern Yiddish
TCPY	Transcarpathian Yiddish
wCY	West Central Yiddish
wTCPY	western Transcarpathian Yiddish
wWY	westernmost Western Yiddish
WY	Western Yiddish
ZY	Zameter (Samogitian) Yiddish

Other linguonyms

eCG	East Central German
G	German

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Gmc	Germanic
HA	Hebrew-Aramaic
Intls	Internationalisms
L	Loez
LCAAJ	*Language and Culture Atlas of Ashkenazic Jewry*
MHG	Middle High German
NHG	New High German
OHG	Old High German
Pol	Polish
Sl	Slavic
StG	Standard German
TH	Tiberian Hebrew
wCG	West Central German

Grammatical terms

ACC	accusative
ADJ	adjective
ADV	adverb
AUX	auxiliary verb
C	consonant
DAT	dative
DET	determiner
DIM	diminutive
F	feminine
G	glide
M	masculine
N	neuter gender; nucleus (in phonological discussions)
NOM	nominative
NP	noun phrase
O	onset
OBL	oblique
P	person
PL	plural
PP	prepositional phrase
PREP	preposition
R	rhyme
REFL	reflexive
S	sentence
SG	singular
V	vowel (in phonological discussions); verb (in syntactic discussions)
VP	verb phrase

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Symbols

*	non-attested or reconstructed form
**	ungrammatical, non-occurring
$	Syllable boundary

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