

THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL AND LINGUISTIC PILGRIMAGE OF YIDDISH
(SOME EXAMPLES OF FUNCTIONAL AND STRUCTURAL
PIDGINIZATION AND DEPIDGINIZATION)¹

JOSHUA A. FISHMAN
Yeshiva University (New York)

The second in a series of case studies of societies in which the mother tongue is merely the process language but not target language of education. This paper reviews the changes in Yiddish orthography which have paralleled its users' views as to its proper functions. Hebrew and German have both served as models and as anti-models for Yiddish orthography, resulting in four recognizable clusters of orthographies over a period of nearly one thousand years of printed use: both toward Hebrew and toward German, toward Hebrew but away from German, toward German but away from Hebrew, and, in most recent days, away from Hebrew and away from German. Change in orthographic models has always accompanied change in lexical and syntactic models as well and, all in all, been indicative of users' views as to the internal diglossia and the external diglossia relationships into which Yiddish should be involved.

Introduction

The present paper is the second (see also Fishman and Luders-Salmon, 1972) in what I hope will ultimately be a series of case studies of the *normative* (i.e., preferred and institutionalized) *educational use of non-status varieties or languages* in speech communities with language repertoire in which more statusful varieties are also definitely present. The purpose of this series is to provide examples of educational-linguistic contexts that many teachers *know* to exist but which so rarely seem to get *written up* that when they are, they appear to be reversals or departures from the purportedly invariant allocation of the status language/variety *and it alone* to formal educational functions. Thus, it is my hope *to combat a myth which claims that good schools are necessarily monolingual and acrolectal institutions*. This myth is not only erroneous but also injurious. It harms not only educational planning in those parts of the world in which education has long *been* bilingual or bidialectal but also in those areas where bilingual/bidialectal education *could* greatly facilitate the educational process and foster its influence among segments of society that otherwise (and quite rightfully) consider modern, formal education to be foreign, artificial or divisive, if not all three at once.

The myth that I would like to counteract is not merely counter-educational in the "developing" and "disadvantaged" nations and regions of the world, but it is also injurious to the relatively "wealthy and "advantaged" of the world, among whom it fosters both insensitivity and intolerance toward the genuine repertoire of language varieties and societal functions

that all complex communities reveal. Both language and society are ever so much more multifaceted than many schools seem to admit, and, as a result, the mutual and deleterious estrangement of schools from the parents and students whom they serve is furthered.

Like most myths, the one that I would like to counteract through papers such as this stems from a confusion between what is self-serving and what is true. Thus, it is claimed that with the onset of modern mass education in nineteenth-century Western and West-Central Europe only a single H-like variety of the official national language was admissible as target-and-process language of national school systems. This myth further claims (and, to an extent, legitimizes itself accordingly) that the monolingual/acrolectal situation sketched above was merely a continuation of an earlier classical or traditional educational pattern. In that prior period too, this myth maintains, only an H variety, often a classical language not the mother tongue of either students or teachers, was normatively admissible as target-and-process language. Thus, modern bourgeois/mass education and earlier aristocratic/elite education are purportedly alike in their linguistic policies which proscribed their respective L-like varieties for such functions as writing, reading and serious advanced study. While the myth grants that a variety of the L of one period often became the preferred H of the next, as a result of major social change and upheaval, the monolingual/acrolectal exclusivity of the school purportedly remained unchanged in principle.

Upon closer examination this view appears to be more a superposed normative wish than an accurate statement of the normative facts in either period of history. Indeed, the documentable incidence or normative education acceptability for other-than-H-like-varieties (i.e., of varieties/languages not at all most-statusful, not at all most closely related to the central integrative symbols/processes, and not at all most closely related to the most powerful roles of society) is not at all negligible. My concern here is not only that valid recognition be given to the *informal* language of students to each other, or to the language of teachers to elementary students, although such concerns too must not be deprecated. My concern is also that we recognize the *large number of cases in which an H variety remained (and remains) the target language without thereby ever becoming the normal language of instructions or school discourse*. It would be salutary, indeed, for all teachers of speakers of Black English, teachers of speakers of White English, and teachers of speakers of various kinds of Creole and Pidgin English, to know that the worldwide number of schools in which H-written texts are constantly read and discussed in an L-variety much more familiar to students and teachers, is truly legion. Indeed, education in much of Norway, England, Spain, Greece, much of the Arab world and the United States to boot, would be impossible were not the monolingual/acrolectal myth more honored in the breach than in the observance. Certainly, the myth as such was fully rejected in the Eastern European Ashkenazic cast to which I will now turn. Here we find that a "phenomenological pidgin" (see below) was normatively established in the company of a sanctified classical language, and so firmly was this the case that not even the coming of the Messiah was expected to alter its functional co-allocation to the domain of education.²

The Case of Yiddish

If we hold to Hymes' three-factor theory of pidginization (*reduction, admixture, and intergroup use*; Hymes, 1971), it is not at all evident that Yiddish ever fully merited the designation of a pidgin. It is primarily the absence of any evidence of a

crystalized (i.e., of a set or stabilized) *reduction* stage which leads me to question the appropriateness of this designation for Yiddish, but the *intergroup function* was also very marginal in the case of Yiddish and this too calls into doubt the designation of Yiddish as a pidgin. Thus the primary characterization remaining is that of *admixture* and this, indeed, is a characterization of which the Yiddish speech community itself has always been aware, to such an extent that segments of it themselves viewed the languages as a pidgin. Indeed, from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of this century it was not uncommon among Eastern European Jews to refer to Yiddish as *zhargon* and this designation is still encountered (though much more rarely) to this very day. Although this was not always a pejorative designation (e.g., Sholem Aleichem often referred to Yiddish by this name, as did religious and other writers who were well disposed toward its written use for important purposes), it did show widespread cognizance of the fusion nature of the language. Not uncommonly, this fusion nature, related as it was not only to the recorded and remembered history of dispersions and expulsions suffered by the speech community, but also to awareness of the etymological components from Hebrew-Aramic, coterritorial and contiguous languages, led to a more or less negatively tinged view of the language on the part of many of its speakers. This negative view re admixtures is relatable to Stewart's dimensions of Historicity (Stewart, 1968) in the sense that where Historicity is viewed as crucial, admixtures—because of their greater recency—are likely to be more sensitively and negatively discriminated. Thus whether or not Yiddish *was* a pidgin, it has always been widely evaluated as such, both within the speech community and without. In the history of Yiddish this phenomenological pidginization has been more important by far than whatever the linguistic facts of the case may be.

Contrast Languages

If it is the phenomenology of the speech community—rather than the typological expertise of linguists—which is crucial in determining the functional allocation of varieties, and this phenomenology in turn is frequently contrastively influenced by comparisons with the other varieties within the community's repertoire. At least two such contrast languages have always influenced the phenomenological (attitudinal, affective) and the functional position of Yiddish.

1. **Hebrew.** This classical and sanctified tongue has usually been viewed as a source language for all eternal Jewish pursuits. Thus, even when it was viewed as Classical in Stewart's sense (i.e., when it was regarded as possessing Historicity, Standardization and Autonomy but lacking Vitality), it was considered no less crucial as an object of study. Up until the latter part of the nineteenth century, Hebrew (and its sister-variety Aramic) was virtually the only target language for study of the *Bible*, the *Talmud* (*Mishnah* and *Gemora*), the *Commentaries* and the *Prayer Book*, i.e., of those texts which simultaneously defined the purpose and curriculum of the Jewish community's far-flung elementary, secondary and tertiary schools. It was only when varieties of Jewish education arose that devised curricula other than the traditional ones that Yiddish could be viewed in a school-context other than contrastively vis-a-vis Hebrew. In this contrast Yiddish was not merely viewed as a dialect (or, at best, as vernacular) relative to a classical, but it was, as will be seen, often considered to be a pidgin relative to a classical. Nevertheless, every shred of evidence we have about the earliest stages of Yiddish (Weinreich dates

Earliest Yiddish as roughly from circa 1000 to 1250; Mark does not use that designation and dates Old Yiddish from circa 1000 to 1348) indicates that it was quickly admitted to the function of *language of instruction*, i.e., of the language to be used in order to make the holy texts understandable to students whose mother tongue it was.

Interestingly enough, this instructional use for Yiddish provided it with a name or label in the community that may even predate the name "Yiddish" itself. Among the earliest extant references to Yiddish are those utilizing the designation *loshn-ashkenaz* (the language of Ashkenaz, i.e., of the land across the Rhine, or of the Jews dwelling therein) and *taytsh*. The latter is derived from some form of *tiutsch* (later *deutsch*), i.e., the local name for the local language in those parts. Among gentiles this noun was related to a verb which meant to render meaningful by translating into the vernacular. In Yiddish it came to mean "meaning" or "translation into Yiddish." The Yiddish translation of traditional texts is referred to as *ivre-taytsh* (even today, in traditionally-oriented Yiddish publications), although by now this designation generally stands for an archaic variety of Yiddish. The version of the *Bible* for women is known (to this very day) as the *taytsh-khumesht*, since women usually knew no Hebrew and, therefore, could not read the *khumesht* (*Pentateuch*) in the original. The designation *yidish* did not come to be the most common designation, at least not in print, until quite late (eighteenth century).³ Certainly the role of Yiddish as the language of traditional instruction, of oral and written translation of sanctified texts, of scholarly disputation and, at times, of responsa and commentaries, had become firmly established centuries before.

The purpose of the above sketch is to counteract the view that where a firm diglossia relationship exists, the L variety cannot be willingly and normatively admitted for formal and advanced educational purposes. Indeed, it can, provided the H variety is also given the deference which it is felt to deserve in the domains appropriate to it. In the nineteenth century, Yiddish was often viewed and referred to as the "handmaiden" or "servant" of Hebrew among carriers of "enlightenment" seeking to reach the masses. Traditional circles used other but similarly L-implicating designations, not so different from those formerly applied to Aramic or other post-exilic Jewish languages (Weinreich reviews the evidence with respect to several such in detail; in press). Thus the deference distinction made it possible to accomplish two desirable goals simultaneously:

- a) To preserve the H status of Hebrew (a status which ultimately preserved it for twentieth-century revival as a spoken language) and, yet,
- b) To enable members of the community to pursue studies in their mother tongue (this being no small matter in a community that prized universal male education).

Thus, one *spoke* Yiddish even for the most statusful functions, while one read and wrote Hebrew, even for obviously secular purposes. Traditionally, writers of Yiddish were almost as few and far between as speakers of Hebrew, although many males knew more than enough to do both in both languages.

2. The Co-territorial Vernacular(s). The very fact that Yiddish came into being is itself testimony that there was an initial period of close contact with the Non-Jewish co-territorial population. Although that contact was sufficient to lead to the well-nigh complete displacement of the Loez (Laaz). The Jewish language spoken immediately before settlement in the general area of Lorraine (Loter), was *not* sufficient to make the *intergroup* communicative norms that *loshn-ashkenaz* originally followed (or shadowed) predominant also for *intra-group* purposes. Strong intra-group norms (particularly in

conjunction with the infinite array of traditional practices requiring an extensive nomenclature not available in co-territorial languages) rendered any non-Jewish variety contrastively undesirable and non-functional for such purposes. This view long made non-Jewish varieties unacceptable for any educational purposes since education was long completely Jewish by definition. The process was not necessarily a conscious one at all and the distinction between "German" and "Yiddish" (designations that became common only centuries later) need not have been in the minds of many (if any) speakers. Nevertheless, the structural and functional differences between *intergroup* and *intra-group* varieties of *loshn-ashkenaz* must have come into being quite early.

After the development of Yiddish from German-stock-upon-a-substratum-of-Hebrew-Aramic-and-Loez (Laaz), no further post-exilic language developed among Ashkenazic Jews. Why that is need not concern us here, although it represents a fascinating problem for between-group as well as within-group sociolinguistic analysis. What might well concern us here, however, is the fact that German too became a conscious-model for part of the Yiddish-speaking community. Even among German Jews, German was not admissible into the synagogue as the language of worship or into the schools as the language of instruction until far into the nineteenth century, by which time the majority of Ashkenazim had left Germany behind them for more than four centuries and had no more need of German than we do. Yet, unwelcome as it was "for Jewish purposes," German remained a model which intruded upon Yiddish in the written language specifically and in the view that Yiddish was a pidgin more generally. For us to understand this development we must realize that German, in most of Central and in much of Eastern Europe, from the mid-sixteenth century and into the twentieth century, was *the* world language, *the* practical language of wider communication, *the* language of science, technology and modernity; in short, it was not only in contrast with Hebrew but also in contrast with German that Yiddish was viewed as being merely pidgin. Whereas German could not compete with Yiddish in so far as being the Handmaiden of Hebrew, Yiddish could not compete with German in so far as non-sanctified respectability was concerned. Thus, two contradictory contrastive processes entered into the relationship between Yiddish and the languages with which its users most frequently compared it. On the one hand, Yiddish was energetically de-Germanized (lexically) for contact-with-sanctity purposes. On the other hand, it often seemed that in writing, particularly for more secular purposes ("secular literature"), it was just as energetically Germanized. At the same time Yiddish was both propelled toward and away from Hebrew with which it also had a "double approach-avoidance" relationship. All of these processes can be most easily illustrated via orthographic examples, although lexical and phraseological examples abound and are more than amply cited by Weinreich (1968; in press).

Toward Hebrew Developments

Yiddish (like all other post-exilic Jewish languages) seems to have been written in Hebrew characters from the outset.⁴ As a result, perhaps, it generally adopted several Hebrew orthographic conventions: use of final letters, use of silent aleph before words beginning with vocalic vov/u/ or yud/i/, the almost complete retention of traditional Hebrew spelling for words or forms of Hebrew origin, etc. Indeed, even words of non-Hebrew origin were long spelled in ways as to stress similarity with various Hebrew orthographic conventions, e.g., minimally representing vowels, the practise of writing Yiddish with Hebrew

vowel points (even though this was, generally speaking, superfluous, one Yiddish orthography developed its own vowel indicators via letters and letter combinations), and, finally, writing the indefinite article as part of the noun to which it pertained, a visual pattern prompted by the absence of separate indefinite articles in Hebrew. In general, writing Yiddish developed in a community with a very definite body of spelling conventions derived from another language (Hebrew) and these were only slowly and partially adapted to the genetically unrelated and less prestigious language.

Away-from-Hebrew-Developments

Wherever Germanic-origin grammatical morphs were added to Hebrew origin roots, there was long the convention of separating the two by parentheses, different type-face or apostrophes (a separation between the holy and the profane). In addition, since the Yiddish reader (particularly if female) could not always be expected to know Hebrew well, the practice of "full spelling" became rather widespread for Hebrew words in Yiddish, since such spelling helped the reader pronounce words correctly that he might otherwise have mispronounced if the more traditional "defective spelling" of Hebrew were utilized. The entire practice of established letter-indications for vowels in Yiddish is a development away from Hebrew. When carried to its extreme, as it was by Soviet Yiddish publications, this led to a "naturalized spelling" of words of Hebrew origin so that these were spelled like any other Yiddish words, i.e., with complete vowel representation much beyond what was called for by the "full spelling" in Hebrew. The Soviets also discontinued use of final letters, thus making a major visual break with the tradition of Hebrew writing. The Yivo's reintroduction of a largely abandoned and originally Hebrew visual differentiation between /p/-/f/ (as well as between /s/-/t/ and /b/-/v/ and /kh/-/k/ in Hebrew-origin words), in a fashion no longer followed by modern Hebrew, may also be seen as an away-from-Hebrew attempt.⁵

Toward-German Developments

For the longest time—indeed to this very day in some circles—Yiddish was (has been) spelled with attention to German orthographic conventions. As a result, the Yiddish syllabic /n/ and /l/, both of which are grammatical indicators, were long (and often still are) spelled according to German conventions that call for a vowel before either. Under nineteenth-century "enlightenment" pressure, Yiddish spelling became replete with silent h's and unneeded e's in order to mirror German usage. Yiddish /v/ has been written *f* /i/ has been written *ie*, and various other similar practices might be noted, not always necessarily because of original modeling on German, but such modeling certainly helped retain these conventions when the original dialectal reasons no longer obtained. Basically, the entire phonological principle in Yiddish spelling (as opposed to the etymological principle which dominated Hebrew spelling) may be viewed as a de-Semitization or Westernization, if not only a Germanization, of older Jewish writing conventions. A more definitely German influence has been that which led Yiddish writing to recognize word-boundaries in print on a German model, particularly as conjunctions and the definite article are concerned. To this list may be added a few lexical items that, though derived from Hebrew, have generally been "naturalized" by most Yiddish writers, e.g., *balebos*, *shmuesn*, *klezmer*, *shekhtn*.

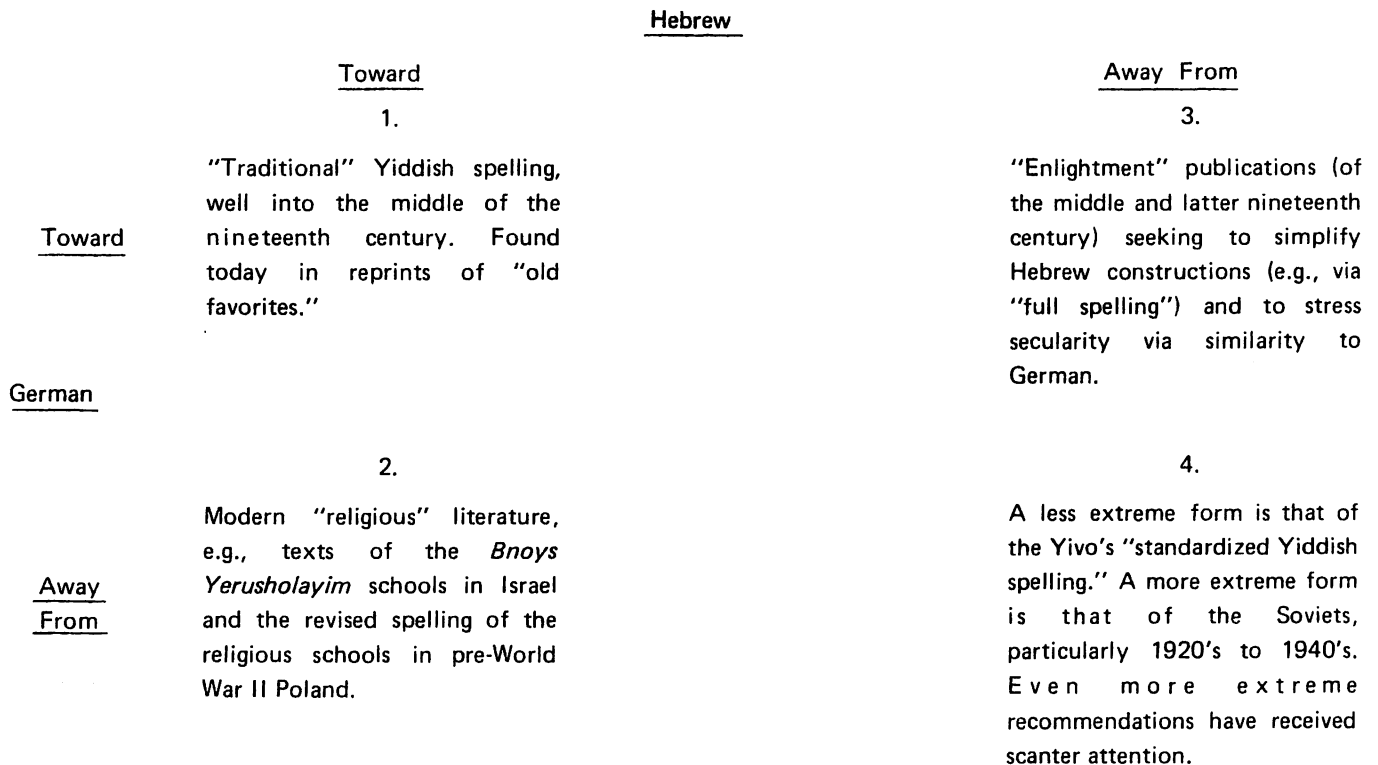
Away-from-German-Developments

Modern (twentieth-century) pro-Yiddish movements and their linguistic guardians adopted the slogan "further from German." The past half-century of Yiddish linguistic effort is marked by a strong *auslau* effort (to use Kloss's concept; 1967) vis-a-vis German. This is particularly true in lexical matters, but of necessity has had its orthographic counterparts as well. Thus the dropping of the several German spelling conventions just enumerated above has been a prime goal of almost all modern Yiddish orthographic schools (Schaechter, 1972).

Bipolar, Double Approach-Avoidance

Lest it seem that "further-from-German" *necessarily* meant "toward Hebrew" or vice versa, in the socio-cultural development of Yiddish orthography, it should be stressed that this was not the case. All four possible positions came into being, as indicated by Figure 1 below, although the modern period tends to be one of "away" movement on both dimensions, just as the earliest period was one of toward modeling on both.

Figure 1
Four Systems of Yiddish Orthography



Away from Pidgin Mentality

Yiddish has classically had a double inferiority complex. Vis-a-vis Hebrew it was but a companion, accessory or handmaiden; vis-a-vis German it was a fusion language without historicity, autonomy or standardization. Its centrality to the entire Jewish educational experience for nearly a thousand years of Ashkenazic history did not save it from being viewed as a pidgin. Only certain modern Jewish cultural movements (arising during the first quarter of the twentieth century) have dared view it as worthy in its own right. As such, it was declared to be "a Jewish national language" at a language conference in 1908 attended by most major Yiddish writers and language activists. As such, it became not only the *medium* of instruction but also the *object* of instruction in modern Jewish schools (usually with a socialist or non-partisan ideology, but sometimes with a Zionist or Communist ideology). As a result, the traditional Hebrew-Yiddish diglossia was disturbed by such schools (as well as by other modern Jewish movements). Jewish education in the twentieth century has been increasingly monolingual: either in Hebrew, in Yiddish, or in the co-territorial vernacular. In many "Yiddishist" schools Hebrew sources were initially not studied at all, later studied only in Yiddish translation and abbreviation, and, more recently, have been reintroduced in abbreviated and simplified Hebrew versions. These are the very schools in which the orthographic and the more general linguistic independence of Yiddish has been most stressed. Thus functional changes in Yiddish (vis-a-vis education) and structural changes in Yiddish (vis-a-vis models and anti-models) have tended to go hand-in-hand (Fishman, in preparation).⁶

Summary and Conclusions re Yiddish

The case of Yiddish reveals that a phenomenological pidgin may be treated very similarly to a pidgin/creole defined in accord with linguistic criteria. Like the latter it may be held in lower repute by its own users, relative to other varieties in the community's repertoire that seem to be more homogeneous because their history is unknown or sanctified.

Like many phenomenologically and/or linguistically defined pidgins/creoles, Yiddish came into more diversified educational and symbolic high cultural use only as a result of fargoing socio-cultural-political change in its speech community. This change invariably required both disruption of the classical diglossia pattern (Hebrew=H; Yiddish=L) which has previously existed, as well as the structural modification of the language to render it more fit for the new functions assigned to it. In this respect Yiddish illustrates that phenomenological pidgins must experience processes very similar to those experienced by all modern vernaculars before-and-when are assigned wider functions.

Nevertheless, unlike most phenomenologically and/or linguistically defined pidgins/creoles, Yiddish was admitted into important educational functions of a traditional sort from the very outset. However, this did not keep it from being viewed as of lesser worth than either of the contrast languages with which the community commonly compared it vis-a-vis the domain-appropriate functions of those languages. Only with movements striving for education-for-modernization did some portion of the Yiddish speech community abandon the phenomenological pidginization that had hitherto generally marked users' views of this language and which had restricted the functions for which it was presumably fitted.

General Summary and Conclusions

Before bringing this presentation to a close I would like tentatively to raise the question of when a co-occurrence like the one presented above is not only likely to obtain (since the co-occurrence of L and H in school is really so frequent as to be the disguised rule rather than the exception that is often made out to be), but when is it likely to be the *preferred, avowed and institutionalized practice*. It seems to me that a more vernacular-like *process* language and a more vernacular-distant *target* language are likely to co-occur normatively when two other desiderata are met: (1) When the admission of the L-like variety as the process language of the school does not threaten the functions of the H-like variety as target language and as language of even more statusful role-relations than those controlled by the school per se. Thus, the H-like variety continues to be very much normatively needed and wanted, both in school and out of the school, and the L-like variety is viewed not as a threat, but rather, as an avenue for attaining the target, even, as sometimes happens, when the L variety too is elevated to writing; (2) When "mastery of H by all students" (idyllic though that would be) and "good education for all students" (idyllic though that would be) are *not considered to be identical goals*, even if they do tend to be viewed as increasingly overlapping as higher education is approached and reached. Indeed, when put to the acid test, such communities opt for "good education for as many as possible" rather than for elitist education for the few, i.e., for H as a sub-target in a hierarchy of targets rather than for H as the prime and only target.

Finally, let me admit that a relatively delicate balance of forces is involved. As long as teachers and students are from the same speech community, share the same behavioral (including language behavior) norms and values, role-access is high, role compartmentalization is low, and disturbing outside influences are kept to a minimum, the balance can maintain itself without great difficulty. If it is upset and the well known of L-displacing-H-so-as-to-become-H-itself is established, then the former L will inevitably also change rapidly in structure, rather than merely in function. Such change, in accord with whatever models and antimodels are in socio-cultural (and therefore in linguistic) vogue, will repeatedly reveal the extent to which particular networks of users have or have not rejected the earlier allocation of societal roles and language functions that formerly obtained in the speech community as a whole, when L was not yet widely written and not yet widely viewed as a target in the education system.

Footnotes

¹This paper was originally prepared for a conference on Creole Languages and Education, organized by the University of the West Indies, July 24-28, 1972. The author is deeply indebted to M. Schachter and D.L. Gold for critical reactions to an earlier draft of this paper. [Editor's Note: This paper will be reprinted in Joshua A. Fishman (ed.), *Advances in the Creation and Revision of Writing Systems*; The Hague: Mouton, 1974.]

²Not only was it believed that Jews would continue speaking Yiddish on weekdays (but the Holy Tongue on Sabbaths) when the Messiah came, but that one of the means by which the good Lord had compensated Moses for not permitting him to enter the Promised Land was to let him see into the future and thereby to witness little boys studying the *Pentateuch* in the original accompanied by an oral Yiddish translation. Thus, Yiddish and Hebrew were viewed as symbiotic not only in the

present, but in the past and future as well. Accordingly, some orthodox Jews spoke (and some still speak) Hebrew on Sabbaths and Jewish holidays, both in order to intensify the holiness of such days as well as to maintain oneself in readiness for the Messianic age.

³The earliest extant printed reference to *yidish* is in *kine af gzeyres-ukraine* (Lament on the evil events in the Ukraine), Amsterdam, c. 1649.

⁴Italic ("Judeo-Italian") written in Latin letters dates only from the nineteenth century, and so, it seems, does Dzhudezmo when written in Latin characters.

⁵Yivo orthography calls for, respectively: $\aleph - \bar{\aleph}$; $\eta - \bar{\eta}$; $\beth - \bar{\beth}$; $\daleth - \bar{\daleth}$.

⁶The following four spellings of *Kibed av ve-em* (honoring one's mother and father) illustrate the four major present-day orthographic approaches in Yiddish with respect to Hebraisms:

| | | | | | |
|----------------------|---|----|----|----|----|
| traditional | : | אב | אמ | אב | אמ |
| Simplified ("full") | : | אב | אמ | אב | אמ |
| Soviet (naturalized) | : | אב | אמ | אב | אמ |
| Yivo (standardized) | : | אב | אמ | אב | אמ |

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