YIDDISH WRITING SYSTEM

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Abstract

The chapter presents a survey of the Yiddish writing system as it has evolved over the past thousand years, from the earliest available sources dating to the 11th century until today. It begins with an overview of the Hebrew script, which was also used by Jews up until the 20th centuries for the numerous languages that they adopted in the Diaspora, e.g. Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-French, Judeo-Persian, Ladino, Yiddish (much in the same way that the Latin script has been used for a plethora of languages in Christian Europe and beyond. The chapter then examines the unique features of Old Yiddish (approximately 1250-1500), which pioneered a number of orthographic conventions not attested in other Jewish languages, followed by those of Middle Yiddish (approximately 1500-1700), which exhibits various orthographic changes that reflect phonological developments in the language vis-a-vis the Old Yiddish period. It next considers the innovations seen in the 18th and 19th centuries, such as a strong tendency to incorporate Latin-script German spelling conventions (e.g. silent *h*, double consonants) into Hebrew-script Yiddish. The chapter concludes with a survey of the various developments that have occurred in the 20th and 21st century, namely the emergence of several distinct standardized orthographies (YIVO, Birnbaum, Soviet Yiddish), as well as contemporary Haredi (strictly Orthodox) Yiddish spelling, which has much in common with pre-standardized Yiddish orthographies from the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Keywords

Yiddish, Hebrew script, Jewish languages, orthography, writing system, YIVO, Hasidic Yiddish, Old Yiddish, Soviet Yiddish

1 Introduction

The chapter presents a concise overview of the Yiddish writing system as it has evolved over approximately the past thousand years, from the earliest available sources (dating to the 11th century) until today. Since Yiddish has been written in Hebrew script throughout its history, we start the overview with a brief summary of the origins and basic principles of the Hebrew alphabet and its application to other Jewish languages. The subsequent sections are focused

specifically on the Yiddish writing system and its development over the centuries with comparative references to other Jewish languages written with Hebrew letters as well as to Middle High German. In these sections we follow Max Weinreich's periodization of the Yiddish language, which consists of the following four stages: Early Yiddish (until 1250), Old Yiddish 1250-1500, Middle Yiddish 1500-1700, and Modern Yiddish from 1700 on (Weinreich 1980: 719-733).[1] Within Modern Yiddish we also distinguish several orthographic traditions, i.e. Yiddish orthography of the 18th–19th centuries; YIVO (Standard) Yiddish orthography; Shlomo Birnbaum's Yiddish orthography; Soviet Yiddish orthography; and contemporary Haredi Yiddish orthography.

1.1 Origins and basic principles of the Hebrew alphabet

The Yiddish alphabet is an offshoot of the Hebrew alphabet, which is an abjad script containing 22 basic consonantal forms. The Hebrew script itself developed out of the Phoenician script sometime around the 11th or 12th century BCE in the Levant. The Phoenician and early Hebrew scripts were written from right to left and had only one form of each letter (i.e. no distinction between capitals and lower case, and no different forms depending on the position of the letter within a given word). The scripts were purely consonantal at first, with no way of indicating vowels at all. Over the subsequent three or four centuries Hebrew scribes gradually developed a system for partial notation of vowels by adapting the symbols for /h/, /w/, and /y/ to denote word-final /a/ or /e/; /o/ or /u/; and /i/ or /ey/ respectively. When used as vowels, these originally consonantal-only symbols are termed *matres lectionis* (singular: *mater lectionis*).

During the 70 years of the Babylonian Exile, the captive Judeans came into intensive contact with the Aramaic language, another Northwest Semitic language closely related to Hebrew, which was the administrative language, *lingua franca,* and most widely spoken language of the Babylonian Empire at the time. Aramaic was written in another offshoot of the Phoenician script, an abjad with similar phonetic values to the Palaeo-Hebrew script but with very distinct letter forms. While in exile, the Judeans shifted from speaking Hebrew to Aramaic to a substantial degree and came to prefer the Aramaic script to such an extent that they abandoned the traditional Palaeo-Hebrew script in favour of it. Following their 70-year exile in Babylonia, they brought the Aramaic language and script back with them to Judea, where it eventually became the standard writing system for Hebrew. The old Palaeo-Hebrew script

[1] For a slightly different approach to the periodization of Yiddish, see Kerler (1993: 256-8).

remained in use only among the Samaritans, the descendants of the Judeans who had not been taken into Babylonian captivity; it eventually evolved into a separate abjad called the Samaritan Hebrew alphabet (see Yardeni 2002: 24-25), while the script originally used for Aramaic became known simply as the Hebrew alphabet, and Palaeo-Hebrew gradually fell out of use entirely.

The following chart illustrates the basic forms of the Hebrew (originally Aramaic) script. It is sometimes referred to as 'square' or 'block' Hebrew script because of the angular forms of the letters.

י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א
ר	ק	צ, ץ	פ, ף	ע	ס	נ, ן	מ, ם	ל	כ, ך
								ת	ש

Table 1: Hebrew square script

Note that some consonants have two allographs. In such cases, the variant on the right is used everywhere except in word-final position, while the variant on the left is restricted exclusively to word-final position. This idiosyncrasy of the Hebrew script is not an early feature but rather one that developed in the early centuries CE and has remained standard up to the present. It can be compared to the distinction between the standard form of sigma σ and its word-final allograph ς in Greek. See Cross (2003: 10) for a discussion of the emergence of the distinction between initial/medial and final forms in Hebrew.

As an abjad with limited use of *matres lectionis* (see below for further discussion of *matres lectionis* in post-Biblical Hebrew) the Hebrew script does not contain a complete system for representing vowels. As such, over the course of the first millennium CE Hebrew scribes developed a system of dots and dashes inserted below, above, and in the middle of consonants to indicate vowels. For example, the consonant בּ /b/ combined with the vowel marker ◌ַ /a/ beneath it to form the consonant + vowel combination ,בַּ pronounced /ba/. These vowel markers, called 'pointing' or 'vocalization', worked in conjunction with the consonants to form a complete phonetic system. If a given Hebrew text was fully pointed, a reader would be able to pronounce it with certainty regarding the vowels. However, in practice pointing was generally reserved primarily for the text of the Hebrew Bible, with authors tending to employ the abjad only for other Hebrew compositions. The reasons for this are twofold: first, the vocalization system was developed with the express intention of ensuring accurate intergenerational transmission of the pronunciation of the biblical text so that it could be recited correctly in the synagogue (which was deemed crucial given its sacred status); second, because

Hebrew authors were familiar with the language, indication of the vowels was not regarded as a necessity outside of the specific context of biblical recitation.[2] As such, elements of these two systems came to be adapted for use in postbiblical Hebrew texts, as well as in the orthographies of the various vernacular Jewish languages that emerged in the Diaspora, to be discussed below.

1.2 The Hebrew alphabet as used for Diaspora Jewish languages

Following the Romans' destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE and an unsuccessful rebellion over the following years, Diaspora Jewish population centres were established and grew throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe. Over the course of the first and early second millennium CE, these Jews adopted the local vernaculars of the places where they lived, but typically continued to write these vernaculars using the Hebrew script. This stems from the fact that Jews learned to read and write in Hebrew from a very early age, and in many cases never went on to acquire literacy skills in the Latin alphabet or any other writing system. As such, it was natural for them to use their main, or only, script for committing their vernacular languages to writing. Thus, in Jewish communities around the world, the Hebrew alphabet was not associated solely with the Hebrew language, but rather served as an overarching Jewish writing system regardless of the genetic status of the language in question.

In many cases the newly adopted vernaculars developed into particular Jewish varieties which exhibited marked differences from the non-Jewish sister languages. Some of the most prominent Jewish language varieties that emerged in these centuries are Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Persian, Judeo-French, and Judeo-Italian. Because the various languages came from a variety of different language families had so many different phonologies, they often had sounds that did not exist in Hebrew or Aramaic. Therefore, Jews writing these languages often developed diacritical marks derived from Hebrew pointing and cantillation marks to indicate consonants lacking in Hebrew. For example, the phoneme /dʒ/, which exists in Judeo-Persian but not in Hebrew, can be written in Judeo-Persian as ג֫; this is a combination of the Hebrew consonant ג (representing /g/ in Hebrew) and the vowel marker representing /o/ in Hebrew. Likewise, the

[2] An additional system of dots and dashes indicating musical notes was developed around the same period. This system of cantillation marks was used to indicate the correct melody for chanting the Torah and certain other portions of the Hebrew Bible in the synagogue; in addition, the cantillation marks served to indicate whether a given biblical word a) should be followed by a pause or b) represented a syntactic unit with the following word. Despite the fact that pointing and the system of cantillation marks were developed for the Hebrew Bible rather than for Hebrew texts more generally, they retained a key position in the context of written Hebrew owing to the centrality of biblical recitation and manuscript transmission.

phoneme /tʃ/, which exists in Judeo-French but not in Hebrew, is written in Judeo-French as קֿ; this is a combination of the Hebrew consonant ק (representing /q/ in Hebrew) and the Masoretic pointing symbol *rafe* (henceforth referred to as *rofe,* following its Yiddish pronunciation tradition), which was originally developed to mark the spirantized variants of Hebrew stops. By contrast, in Judeo-Provençal /tʃ/ is represented by גֿ, a combination of the Hebrew ג and the pointing symbol *rafe*. In Judeo-Turkish, in turn, /tʃ/ is represented by גְֿ, a combination of the Hebrew ג and the cantillation mark *segolta*, which was originally developed as a musical note for chanting the Hebrew Bible in synagogues. Similarly, pointing was also sometimes employed in Diaspora Jewish languages to denote vowel sounds, owing to the primarily consonantal nature of the Hebrew script. For example, the Judeo-Provençal phrase נוֹשְׂטְרִי דִּייבּ רִיי דַּלשֶׂגְּלִי *nost*(*e*)*re dieu rei dal seg*(*e*)*le* 'our God, King of the epoch' (Strich with Jochnowitz 2017: 520) makes substantial use of pointing for vocalization purposes.

Thus, the use of the Hebrew script for writing Yiddish was a natural consequence of the Jewish custom of using the Hebrew script for writing their various vernacular languages. While the origins of the Yiddish language itself sometime in the early second millennium CE are unclear (see for discussion), it is certain that the language was always written in the Hebrew alphabet, drawing on what was at that point already a long tradition of adapting it for use with Diaspora vernaculars. This includes the languages used by the ancestors of the earliest Yiddish speakers, whether Judeo-French, Judeo-Italian, Judeo-Slavic, or another Jewish vernacular.

2 Early Yiddish (until 1250)

Though there is no scholarly consensus regarding the geographical and linguistic origins of the Yiddish language, it is widely believed that the earliest forms of Yiddish existed already in the 11th century. Indeed, Hebrew texts of the 11th century contain references to לשון אשכנז *ləšon ʾaškənaz* 'the language of Ashkenaz' (Katz 2011), Ashkenaz being a biblical toponym (Gen. 10:3; Chron. 1:6; Jer. 51:27) that from the Middle Ages on referred to the German Jewish lands, such as the Rhineland with its Jewish centres in Speyer, Worms and Mainz (Grossman 1988; Marcus 2017). *Ləšon ʾaškənaz* remained a designation for Yiddish for almost a thousand years, with common attestations in Hebrew writings up until the end of the 19th century. However, the sources on early Yiddish are very scarce, which makes our knowledge about this period of the language problematic. The earliest traces of Yiddish can be found in the Hebrew biblical and Talmudic commentaries of Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yiṣḥaqi, 1040–1105). Indeed, Rashi's works contain about thirty individual glosses in a Germanic language written in Hebrew script,

which are identified by many scholars as an early form of Yiddish (see Röll 1966; Timm 1985; Heide 2002).

3 Old Yiddish (1250-1500)

The oldest extant dated Yiddish text is a brief rhymed blessing appearing in the Worms Maḥzor, an illuminated Hebrew *maḥzor* (holiday prayer book) dated to 1272 that was likely produced in Nuremberg (Beit-Arié 1985: 19) but was held for centuries in the Worms Jewish community. For an analysis of the Yiddish inscription, see Röll (1966) and Shmeruk (1985).

Image 1: Worms Maḥzor, 1272, Heb. 4° 781, vol. I, fol. 54r. National Library of Israel.

The Yiddish text, written in red ink inside the hollow spaces in large black Hebrew letters, exhibits orthographic conventions shared by many Jewish languages: Hebrew square or block script is employed; the Yiddish words are pointed (with black ink); the pointing is employed together with *matres lectionis* to provide a precise notation of the vowels; the letter ש *shin*[3] is used to denote a consonant which in later forms of Yiddish is distinguished as two different phonemes, namely /s/ and /š/ (see section 3.2.1 for discussion); final א *alef* signifies the neutral unstressed vowel schwa /ə/.

The second dated Yiddish source is found in Yiddish glosses in an anonymous abridgement of the Hebrew-Aramaic dictionary of Nathan ben Jehiel (1290). The third source

[3] From here on, we refer to Hebrew/Yiddish letters by their Yiddish names.

is a dozen Yiddish marginal additions and comments in a Hebrew *maḥzor* of the 13th-14th centuries which, despite their fragmentary nature, exhibit a number of features of the Yiddish writing system as we know it from the later sources, including the use of the letter *ayen* to mark the vowel /e/ (see 3.1.1). For details regarding the specific features of Yiddish in its earliest form in contrast to Middle High German see Timm (2004).

The discovery of the Cairo Genizah in the late 19th century brought to light an invaluable Yiddish manuscript referred to as the Cairo Genizah Codex or the Cambridge Yiddish Codex (ms. number T-S 10.K.22). The Codex is dated to 1382 and contains a collection of eight long texts in Old Yiddish. From this date onwards, we have a wide range of long and well documented Yiddish texts that show a surprisingly stable orthographic system with a moderate degree of variation spanning many centuries. As shown by Birnbaum (1979: 108-109), the Old Yiddish orthography cannot be ascribed to Middle High German spelling, but rather is a writing system of its own, though Erika Timm suggests that the Middle High German writing system exerted influence on Old Yiddish orthography (1987: 386-391). Indeed, occasionally the source of an Old Yiddish orthographic feature is unclear, and individual scholars have different opinions depending on whether their perspective is rooted in Jewish or Germanic historical linguistics. For example, while the use of the digraph וו (double letter *vov* ו) that marked the voiced labial-velar approximant /v/ in Old Yiddish can be ascribed to the Germanic digraph /vv/ or /uu/, its wide use in Mishnaic Hebrew and other Jewish languages suggests that it may be an independent development (see 3.2.2 for discussion).

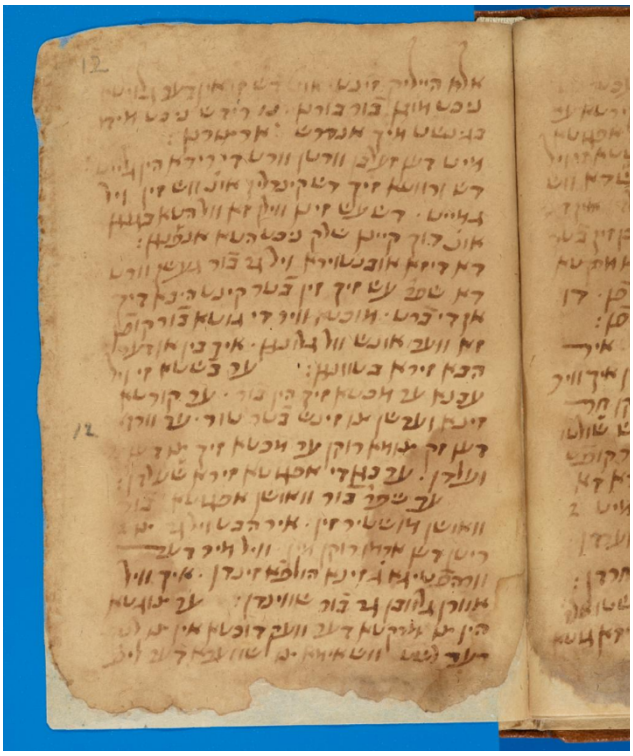

Image 2: Cairo Genizah Codex, 1382, T-S 10 K 22, f. 12r. Courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

Hebrew and Aramaic have both always been written in the same historical orthography that has been preserved in more or less the same form regardless of the significant phonological changes that have occurred in the languages over their thousands of years of existence. This writing system, codified in highly prestigious texts, has quite low levels of variation, and these are restricted primarily to the phenomenon of *plene* and defective spelling. *Plene* spelling refers to an orthographic style that liberally employs *matres lectionis*, while defective spelling uses them more sparingly. The Hebrew and Aramaic lexical component in Yiddish (as well as in other Jewish languages) follows this historical orthography (typically in the *plene* variant), with the exception of early 20th-century Soviet Yiddish (discussed in section 5.4). By contrast, lexical items not deriving from Hebrew or Aramaic tended to be spelt phonetically for the most part.

In the following sections we provide an overview of the basic orthographical principles of the Germanic component in Old and Middle Yiddish. Our description is based on Birnbaun (1979), Timm (1987), Katz (1987, 2004), Kerler (1993), Frakes (2004, 2017), Jacobs (2005), Weinreich (2008), and Beider (2015), as well as on general principles observed in the orthographic systems of other Jewish languages from the same period, which were likewise

written in the Hebrew alphabet. Examples from Old and Middle Yiddish provided in these sections are taken from Frakes (2004). Romanized transcriptions of Yiddish words accompanying these Yiddish examples should be regarded as rough approximations, given the lack of scholarly consensus on Old and Middle Yiddish phonology and orthography (see Frakes 1986 for discussion of this issue).

3.1 Characteristic features of Old Yiddish vowel orthography

As the Hebrew script is largely consonantal except when supplemented by pointing, the most challenging aspect of adapting Hebrew script for a Germanic language lies in the representation of vowels, which will be discussed in the following sections. (The representation of Old Yiddish diphthongs will not be discussed in the present chapter.)

3.1.1 *Plene* and defective spelling

Compared to the Yiddish of the 19th to 21st centuries, where vowels typically have their own symbols (discussed in section 5), in Old Yiddish texts it is common practice to follow the Hebrew tradition of defective spelling, whereby vowels are omitted in writing. However, this practice is inconsistent, with the *plene* variants of the same words also attested. This variation is illustrated in example set (1), which contains *plene* and defective versions of a number of high-frequency words containing stressed /a/ and /o/. This alternation between *plene* and spelling is a typical characteristic of Old Yiddish and the practice continues into Middle Yiddish (discussed in section 4).

(1)

	Plene		**Defective**		**English translation**
a.	גאַנץ	*gants*	גנצר	*gantsər*	‘whole’
b.	טראַכטן	*traxtən*	טרכט	*traxt*	‘think’
c.	קראַנק	*krank*	קרנק	*krank*	‘sick’
d.	וואַשיר	*waʂər*	ושר	*waʂər*	‘water’
e.	האָבן/הובן	*hobən*	הבן	*hobən*	‘have’

3.1.2 Use of *matres lectionis*

In the Hebrew writing system from the Bible onwards, there are four *matres lectionis*, i.e. consonants used as vowel markers: ו *vov*, י *yud*, ה *hey*, and א *alef* (see Ariel 2013 for further discussion of *matres lectionis* in Hebrew).

ו *vov* can appear as a *mater lectionis* in a word's medial or final position. It can indicate either /o/ or /u/. This ambiguity can be clarified only by means of pointing.

י *yud* can likewise appear as a *mater lectionis* in a word's medial or final position. It can indicate either /i/ or /e/. Again, only pointing can resolve this ambiguity.

ה *hey* is used as a *mater lectionis* in the final position and can represent the vowels /a/, /e/ and /o/. As above, the reading is ambiguous unless the text is pointed.

א *alef* appears only rarely as a *mater lectionis in* Biblical Hebrew, but in the Mishnah it is frequently used in word-final position to mark /a/, taking over some functions of final ה *hey*; though not very common, there are also cases of medial א *alef* to mark the vowel /a/ (Ryzhik 2013). Both functions of א *alef* are employed in most Diaspora Jewish languages, including Yiddish: in Old Yiddish a word's final vowel (usually /ə/) is typically marked with א *alef*, while medial and initial א *alef* can indicate /a/ in all historical forms of Yiddish writing. (See section 3.1.5 for discussion of the use of א *alef* to mark the vowel /o/ in Yiddish.)

The vowel א *alef* is also silent in certain positions. When it is word-initial and followed by ו *vov* or י *yud*, it serves to indicate that the latter should be read as vowels rather than as the semi-consonants /w/ and /j/ respectively. This convention can be traced back to Hebrew and is also found in other Diaspora Jewish languages. In Yiddish, the practice is attested in all historical varieties up to the present day. Old Yiddish examples include **איך** *ikh* 'I'; **אונ'** *un* 'and'; **אויס** *oys* 'out'.

Silent א *alef* in Old Yiddish is also used in the medial position, to separate the digraph וו *vov vov* /w/ (discussed in section 3.2.2) from a following ו *vov* marking a vowel, e.g. **וואו** *vu* 'where'; **וואושט** *wuʂt* 'knew'; **וואורצל** *wurtsl* 'root'; **וואוך** *wox* 'week'. This feature is retained later forms of Yiddish up to the present day.

Silent א *alef* in the final position is a characteristic feature of Old and Middle Yiddish. It is typically used in one-syllable words after a vowel or a diphthong (see Kerler 1993: 64). However, the use of final silent א *alef* was not a stable convention, but rather was subject to variation and was also frequently omitted even in Old Yiddish texts. Thus, for example, the

feminine definite article *di* is spelled in Old Yiddish texts as both דיא (with silent final א *alef*) and as די *di* (without final silent א *alef*). For further discussion on variation in the use of final א *alef* see Beider (2015: 176-7).[4] Occasional use of final silent א *alef* can be found in Yiddish texts until the early 20th century, and is still sometimes used in contemporary Hasidic Yiddish (discussed in section 5.5).

Example set (2) illustrates final silent א *alef* in Old Yiddish.

(2)

a.	וויא	*wi*	'where'
b.	זוא	*zo*	'so'
c.	זיא	*zi*	'she'
d.	דרייא	*dray*	'three'
e.	בייא	*bay*	'by, at, with'
f.	דיא	*di*	'the'
g.	דוא	*du*	'you'
h.	טוא	*tu*	'[I] do'
i.	יוא	*yo*	'yes'

3.1.3 Invention of ע *ayen* for /e/

Already in its early (i.e. 13th to 14th century) sources, one can observe a very specific orthographic convention that is restricted exclusively to Yiddish, namely the use of the consonant ע *ayen* as a new *mater lectionis* to signify the vowel /e/. For the first time ע *ayen* for /e/ appears as early as in the glosses of the prominent 11th-century biblical and Talmudic commentator Rashi, who refers to the animal מער קאץ *mer kats*, possibly related to the Old German *mericazza* (meerkat, *Suricata suricatta*). The same phenomenon is more widely attested in the Yiddish instructions found in a Hebrew *maḥzor* of the 13th to 14th centuries, e.g. אין דער ערשטן ספר *in der erṣtn seyfer* 'in the first book'. Here ע *ayen* signifying /e/ is used twice, once in the definite article *der* and once in the ordinal number ***er***ṣ*tn* 'the first'. The late 14th-century Cairo Genizah Codex contains the oldest extant collection of Yiddish literary texts that

[4] It is believed that the article *di* in Old Yiddish texts was typically spelled with final א *alef.* While it is true, that final א *alef* is a feature of pre-modern Yiddish texts, in many Old Yiddish text the spelling די *di* without final א *alef* actually prevails. For instance, in the Cairo Genizah Codex the spelling of the article appears without final א *alef.*

exhibit a fully developed distinctive system of Yiddish orthography with ע *ayen* being used steadily throughout the texts to signify stressed /e/, while pointing is used quite sparsely. For example, ע *ayen* for /e/ is employed in the words like עש *eş* 'it', דער *der* 'the', ער *er* 'he', לעגא *legə* 'would lie', ענטוורט *entvurt* 'answered', ווערדן *werdən* 'worthy', גזעשן *gəzeşən* 'sat' etc. Some degree of orthographic variation in Yiddish texts from the Cairo Genizah Codex is observed in the use of י *yud* that also serves to denote the stressed vowel /e/: הילט *held* 'hero'; הירא *herə* 'noble, lady'; רישליכן *reşlixən* 'swiftly'. The use of י *yud* for both /i/ and /e/ is a longstanding orthographic tradition originating from Hebrew and widely accepted in Jewish languages. In contrast, the use of ע *ayen* to denote the vowel /e/ is a completely original innovation in Yiddish orthography that does not have precedent in other Jewish languages. The origin of this revolutionary development in a Hebrew-script orthography remains a mystery. The only thing that can be said with certainty is that the consonant ע *ayen*, which originally (in Hebrew) represented the voiced pharyngeal fricative /ʕ/, is likely to have lost its consonantal value in the Hebrew pronunciation of early-Yiddish-speaking Jews, thereafter to be reinterpreted and deployed as a graphic symbol of the vowel /e/. Thus, from Old Yiddish glossae to modern Yiddish newspapers the letter ע *ayen* unambiguously denotes the vowel /e/ everywhere, except for Hebrew- and Aramaic-origin lexis in Yiddish where the historical Semitic orthography is preserved. For details on the use of ע *ayen* in Old and Middle Yiddish see Timm (1987: 124-135).

3.1.4 י *yud* for /e/

At the same time, the use of י *yud* to mark /e/ was also a stable component of Yiddish orthography over the course of many centuries, falling out of use only in the 20th century with the introduction of the YIVO and Soviet orthographies (see sections 5.2 and 5.4 respectively). However, in contemporary Hasidic Yiddish one can still encounter י *yud* for /e/ or /ə/, especially in the verbal prefix *ge-*, which is frequently spelled as גי (see section 5.5).

3.1.5 ו *vov* for /o/

In Old Yiddish the most common way to mark /o/ was with the letter ו *vov*. This is in line with Hebrew orthographic tradition, as well as with other Jewish languages written in the Hebrew script. For example, in Judeo-French glosses and whole texts of the 11th to 13th centuries, ו *vov* is systematically used to demote /o/: קְרִימוֹרוֹש *cremoros* 'terrifying'; דולור *dolor* 'pain'; לקולור

la color ‘the colour’ (see Rubin and Kahn 2021: 43-47). The following examples from the Cairo Codex (1382) demonstrate this convention in Old Yiddish: שולדא *šoldə* ‘ought’; שלופֿן *šlofən* ‘sleep’; מוכטא *moxtə* ‘could’; הוט *hot* ‘has’; לושן *losən* ‘allow’. This convention is completely lost in later Yiddish, wherein ו *vov* serves only to represent /u/, and א *alef* takes over as the sole marker of /o/.

3.1.6 א *alef* for /a/, /o/, and /ə/

The use of א *alef* for /a/ in word-initial position was a well-established tradition already in the Hebrew Bible, while the use of א *alef* for a final vowel (/a/ or /ə/) became common in Mishnaic Hebrew. While the use of א as a vowel marker in the middle of a word is found sporadically the Bible (Andersen and Forbes 1986:32, 49) and is attested somewhat more frequently in Mishnaic Hebrew (Ryzhik 2013), it did not evolve into into a common orthographic feature until several centuries later, with the rise of the numerous Diaspora Jewish languages. The most prominent example of these is Judeo-Arabic, wherein א *alef* in the language’s classical period, starting from the 10th century, was commonly used to denote Arabic *alif*, as in the word السلام אלסלאם *al-salām* [pronounced *assalām*] ‘the greeting’ (Khan 2017: 26). This convention is likewise attested in Old Yiddish (as well as in later varieties of the language), as illustrated in the following examples from the Cairo Genizah Codex: שאלן *ʂalən* ‘making noise’; וארווא *varwə* ‘color’; קאמן *kamən* ‘came’.

In Old Yiddish there is a tendency to mark final /ə/ with the letter א *alef*. In the later forms of Yiddish this final /ə/ is commonly marked with ע *ayen*. The following examples are from an poem appearing in the Cairo Genizah Codex: גוטא *gutə* ‘good’; חרצא *xertsə* ‘heart’; דיזא *dizə* ‘this’; לעגא *legə* ‘would lie’; אידלא *edlə* ‘noble’.

The second prominent feature of Old Yiddish orthography along with the use of ע *ayen* as a *mater lectionis* for /e/ is the use of א *alef* to mark the vowel /o/. In some instances, the intended sound of a particular א *alef* is clarified in the text with the vocalization symbol *khoylem* (a dot on the top left side of the consonant), e.g. יאֹר *yor* ‘year’ (Frakes 2017: 79). Orthographical doublets in Old Yiddish manuscripts that display alternation of א *alef* and ו *vov* further illustrate the use of א *alef* to mark /o/: זא/זו *zo* ‘thus, so’; זאל/זול *zol* ‘should’; האט/הוט *hot* ‘has’; מאל/מול *mol* ‘time’. The alternation of א *alef* and ו *vov* to represent /o/ was retained into Middle Yiddish (Timm 1987: 56).

3.2 Characteristic features of Old Yiddish consonantal orthography

3.2.1 ש *shin*

In the Hebrew writing system, the grapheme ש *shin* referrers either to /š/ or to /s/, which represent two distinct phonemes in that language. In a pointed text this ambiguity is resolved by adding a dot in the upper corner of the grapheme: שׁ stands for /š/, while שׂ stands for /s/. However, there is another Hebrew grapheme, ס *samekh*, which unambiguously represents the voiceless alveolar sibilant /s/. Given that /s/ and /š/ represent two different phonemes in modern Yiddish, it is not surprising that the grapheme ש *shin* stands for /š/, and the grapheme ס *samekh* stands for /s/ in contemporary Yiddish orthography (see section 5).

Conversely and strikingly, in the Germanic component of Old Yiddish texts the grapheme ס *samekh* is almost never used. Instead, the single grapheme ש *shin* represents what later became two distinct /s/ and /š/ sounds in this component. The convention of using ש *shin* in this manner is observed in Old Yiddish texts later than Rashi's 11th-century glosses (on the distribution of *shin* and *samekh* in Rashi see Timm 1985). It is noteworthy that at the same time, in the Hebrew/Aramaic component of Old Yiddish, as well as in non-Germanic proper names, ס *samekh* and ש *shin* are both used consistently with no overlap. A possible explanation for this Old Yiddish orthographic convention is a phenomenon observed in Middle High German, whereby it is assumed that Germanic /s/ was pronounced as a sibilant somewhere between /s/ and /š/ (Paul 2007: 170) which can be interpreted as a voiceless alveolar retracted sibilant (Adams 1975; for discussion of the overlap of these two voiceless sibilant phonemes in Middle High German and Old Yiddish see Timm 1985: 51-2 and 1987: 273). This phoneme is denoted by the symbol s̲ in our transcription of Old Yiddish. Supposedly, s̲ was perceived by Jews as the consonant /š/ and therefore the letter ש *shin* (rather than ס *samekh*) was used to represent it in Old Yiddish texts before 1500 with a high level of consistency. Similar phenomenon is observed e.g. in Middle High German loanwords in Slavic languages, whereby Germanic /s/ is spelled wish /š/ (Paul 2007: 170).

Example set 3 illustrates instances of ש *shin* apparently denoting /s̲/ in Old Yiddish:

(3)

a.	**עש**	*e**s̲***	'it'
b.	**אלש**	*alə**s̲***	'all'
c.	**אישט**	*i**s̲t***	'is'

d.	מו**ש**	*mu<u>s</u>*	‘must’
e.	מי**ש**טוט	*mi<u>s</u>tot*	‘transgression’
f.	גזע**ש**ן	*gəze<u>s</u>ən*	‘sat’
g.	או**ש**ר	*ou<u>s</u>ər*	‘beyond’
h.	אי**ינ ש**	*eyn<u>s</u>*	‘one’

The use of ש *shin* instead of ס *samekh* is not restricted to Old Yiddish but rather is attested in a number of medieval European Jewish Diaspora languages. For example, we find early Judeo-French קַ**ש**טנייר *castenier* ‘chestnut tree’, קְרֵימוֹרו**ש** *cremoros* ‘terrifying’ (Rubin and Kahn 2021: 43-4), Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) פא**ש**אר *pasar* ‘to pass’ (Bunis 2016: 383), Judeo-Occitan שֵׂירְקָונְ**ש**י *seχkuŋˈsi* ‘circumcized’ (Strich and Jochnowitz 2017: 534), and Judeo-Portuguese די ור**שאש** *deversas* ‘various’ (Strolovitch 2017: 565, 567). As in Old Yiddish, the use of ש *shin* in such instances may indicated that Jews perceived them as /š/ rather than /s/ (on retracted sibilants in Medieval Europe see Adams 1975; on the Proto-Indo-European sibilant /s/ see Vijūnas 2010). By contrast, in Judeo-Italian ס *samekh* is normally used to convey the consonant /s/, rather than ש *shin* (Rubin 2017: 334). Similarly, early Judeo-Slavic glosses of the 11th–13th centuries reflect a distinction between Slavic /s/ and /š/ sibilants, with ס *samekh* and ש *shin* used respectively (Pronk 2018).

3.2.2 Double וו *vov*

In Hebrew, both the grapheme ו *vov* and the digraph וו double *vov* can be used to denote the same consonantal phoneme. The phoneme may represent /v/ or /w/ depending on the historical period of Hebrew or the Diaspora Jewish language in question; for example, in medieval Judeo-French, וו double *vov* represents /v/ (Kiwitt and Dörr 2017: 156-7), while in Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Persian it represents /w/ (Khan 2017: 28; Borjian 2017: 255).).

The use of the single grapheme ו *vov* is older than that of its doubled counterpart, with the latter emerging only in the late biblical period and becoming widespread in the Mishnaic era. This development was concurrent with an increase in the use of *matres lectionis*, resulting in a need to distinguish the consonantal function of these letters from the vocalic one. Disambiguation was achieved by doubling ו *vov* and י *yud* in order to indicate that they were serving as consonants rather than vowels (Ryzhik 2013). Therefore, the digraph וו double *vov*

was a well-established element of the Hebrew writing system well before the emergence of Yiddish or other European Jewish languages.

Old Yiddish orthography differs strikingly from that of Hebrew and other Jewish languages by using single ו *vov* and וו double *vov* in initial position to denote two separate phonemes, presumably a voiced fricative /v/ and a bilabial glide /w/ respectively. This distinction is in line with Middle High German phonology, which has both of these sounds (Paul 2007: 28; Hall 2017). As an illustrative minimal pair one can look at the words ויל *vil* 'much, many' and וויל *wil* 'wants', which are consistently distinguished in Old Yiddish manuscripts. It is remarkable that Yiddish seems to be the only Jewish language to have innovated a phonetic distinction between initial single ו *vov* and וו double *vov*; this unique feature may have emerged under the influence of Latin-script German orthography, which used *v* to denote /v/ and the digraph *vv* to denote /w/.

Example set (4) illustrates the use of the digraph וו double *vov* representing /w/ in Old Yiddish.[5]

(4)

a.	וויל	*wil*	'want'
b.	וועג	*weg*	'way'
c.	וועלט	*welt*	'will'
d.	ווידר	*widər*	'again'
e.	ווי	*wi*	'how'
f.	וורטן	*wartən*	'await'
g.	וואו	*wu*	'where'
h.	עטווש	*etwəs*	'something'
i.	צווילף	*tswelf*	'twelve'
j.	ווייניג	*weynig*	'few'

At some point, presumably between the Old and Middle Yiddish periods, the bilabial glide /w/ shifted to the voiced fricative /v/, and the voiced fricative /v/ in turn shifted to the voiceless fricative /f/ (see 3.2.3 below). This sound shift is in line with Middle High German phonology

[5] For the examples in the following set (4) we chose cases of prevocalic glides for the sake of simplicity, because the issue of post- and intervocalic glides in that period is more debatable.

(for details see Paul 2007: 142-3, 154-6; Hall 2017). It is unclear when these phonological shifts occurred both in Middle High German and in Old Yiddish. With respect to the first shift, Yiddish orthography has remained conservative and has continued to employ the digraph וו double *vov* up to the present day, so it is difficult to establish when its pronunciation shifted from /w/ to /v/.

3.2.3 Initial single ו *vov*

Single *vov* in word-initial position in Old Yiddish manuscripts marks the consonant /v/, as shown in example set (5).

(5)

a.	ויל	*vil*	'much, many'
b.	ויר	*vir*	'four'
c.	ואטר	*votər*	'father'
d.	ואלק	*volk*	'people'
e.	ורווא	*vróuə*	'woman'
f.	ורייאן זיך	*vreyən zix*	'rejoice'
g.	ור בלייכֿן	*vərbleyxən*	'become pale'
h.	ורייא	*vray*	'free, cheerful'
i.	וינגרא	*vingərə*	'fingers'
j.	ועגשטר	*ven̲stər*	'window'
k.	ורייד	*vreyd*	'joy'

As mentioned above, at some point between the Old and Middle Yiddish periods, the voiced fricative /v/ shifted to the voiceless fricative /f/ (Timm 1987: 288). In contrast to the digraph וו double *vov*, which has survived in Yiddish orthography until the present day despite the sound shift /w/ > /v/, the initial single ו *vov* in these words was replaced with פ *pey* in the Middle Yiddish period (see 4.2.2), sometimes with the addition of a *rofe,* i.e. פֿ *fey*, to clarify the fricative nature of the sound. Since orthographic inertia is a characteristic of well-developed writing systems, it is reasonable to assume that the phonological shift may have preceded the change in spelling.

3.2.4 Initial ב *beys*

In Hebrew, the grapheme ב *beys* represents two different sounds depending on its position. When in word-initial position or following a consonant sound it represents /b/, whereas following a vowel sound it represents /v/. In Old Yiddish, word-initial ב *beys* could represent both /b/ (e.g. ב *bi* 'with, by', בריכטן *bəríxtən* 'to rule', ברונשטן *brunʂtən* 'fire') and /v/ (as in example set [6] below). The latter function is additional to single ו *vov*, which also served to represent word-initial /v/ (see 3.2.3). In the Cairo Genizah Codex, initial ב *beys* denoting /v/ is frequently marked with *rofe*, i.e. בֿ *veys*, to distinguish it from /b/. Usually the selection of ב *beys* or בֿ *veys* instead of ו *vov* was restricted to cases when the initial /v/ sound was followed by another ו *vov* representing the vowel /o/ or /u/. As such, it served as an orthographic workaround prompted by the practical need to avoid confusion with the digraph וו double *vov*, which would result from the co-occurrence of initial consonantal ו *vov* plus a vocalic ו *vov*. For instance, the preposition *vun* 'from, of' was consistently spelled in Old Yiddish with *beys* as בון in order to avoid the undesirable spelling וון, which would allow too many possible readings. However, ב *beys* was sometimes used to represent /v/ in other contexts, where it was interchangeable with ו *vov*; for example, the noun *votər* 'father' is attested as בֿטר as well as ואטר.

Example set (6) illustrates Old Yiddish words with initial ב *beys* representing /v/.

(6)

a.	בֿור מעשן	*vərmeʂən*	'foolishly'
b.	בֿולגט	*volgt*	'follows'
c.	בון	*vun*	'from, of'
d.	בור	*vur*	'in front of'
e.	בֿור דוון	*vərdouən*	'to endure'
f.	בֿור וונדט	*vərvundət*	'wounded'
g.	בֿורא	*vorə*	'forth'
h.	בֿוייער	*voyər*	'fire'
i.	בֿטר	*votər*	'father'

3.2.5 פ *pey* for /f/ and /p/

In Hebrew, the grapheme פ *pey* can represent either /p/ or /f/ depending on the position in the word. In word-initial position it always represents /p/ as Hebrew phonology does not permit

the phoneme /f/ in that position. By contrast, many Diaspora Jewish languages do have word-initial /f/ and use פ *pey* to represent it (often with *rofe*, i.e. פֿ, to make clear that it should not be read as /b/). Examples of this phenomenon include the Judeo-French פֿרירש *freres* 'brothers', פֿוַייש *fois* 'time' (Kiwitt and Dörr 2017: 156, 158); the Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) פֿרוטה *fruta* 'fruit', פֿלור *flor* 'flower' (Ladino; Bunis 2017: 382, 387), and the Judeo-Arabic פִּי אַלחִכְמַה *fī ʾal-ḥikmi* 'in wisdom'; פַּעֲלֵי הדיה *fa ʿalē hēḏi* 'these matters' (Khan 2017: 37). Because Yiddish does not seem to have had the phoneme /f/ in its first few centuries (see 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 for discussion of this point), this common Diaspora Jewish language orthographic convention does not seem to have been employed in Old Yiddish.

Conversely, Old Yiddish uses פ *pey* or פֿ *fey* (i.e. פ *pey* with *rofe*) to denote word-middle and final /f/, as shown in example set (7).

(7)

a.	שלופֿן	*ſlofən*	'sleep'
b.	אוף שטונדן	*ouf ſtundən*	'got up'
c.	גשפֿן	*gəſafən*	'created'
d.	צוולפֿטן	*tswelftən*	'twelfth'
e.	דו הילפֿשט	*du hilfſt*	'you help'
f.	רופֿן	*rufən*	'call'

When appearing without *rofe* in word-medial or final position, the letter פ *pey* is ambiguous in Old Yiddish because it can represent /p/ as well as /f/. Example set (8) illustrates the use of פ *pey* representing /p/.

(8)

a.	פויאר	*pouər*	'peasant'
b.	פולבֿר	*pulvər*	'powder'
c.	פוטער	*putər*	'butter'
d.	ייפטן	*yiptən*	'Egyptian'
e.	היפשי	*hipſə*	'entertaining'
f.	ליפליך	*lipləx*	'lovely'

The digraph פּפּ double *pey* was widely used from the late 15th century on (and became a distinct feature of Middle Yiddish, discussed in section 4), presumably to denote /pf/. In many cases a *rofe* is added above the second *pey*, i.e. פּפֿ /pf/.

Example set 9 illustrates the Old Yiddish use of פּפּ double *pey*.

(9)

a.	פּפֿערד	*pferd*	'horse'
b.	פּפֿעניג	*pfenig*	'penny'
c.	פּפֿונט	*pfunt*	'pound'
d.	פּפֿלעגן	*pflegən*	'be used to'
e.	פּפֿונג	*pfung*	'brooklime'
f.	פּפֿייל	*pfayl*	'arrow'
g.	קופּפֿן	*kopfən*	'heads'
h.	אנטפֿנגן	*antpfangən*	'receive, greet'

4 Middle Yiddish (1500-1700)

Two major demographic and societal developments characterize the transition from the Old Yiddish period to the Middle Yiddish period. First, over the course of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, Yiddish-speaking communities in Eastern Europe grew significantly, leading to the rise of Eastern Yiddish, a form of the language distinguished by Slavic phonological and lexical elements and geographically removed from the related Germanic languages which surrounded Yiddish speakers in the West. Second, a Yiddish printing industry emerged and grew to become a prominent vehicle for the consolidation of Yiddish orthographic conventions (though a standardized spelling system would only develop much later, in the 20th century; see section 5).

4.1 Three fonts

While Old Yiddish has come down to us in the form of manuscripts exhibiting two primary scribal styles (Square script and Ashkenazic – i.e. Central/Eastern European Jewish – cursive script), in Middle Yiddish the situation changed dramatically owing to the introduction of the Hebrew and Yiddish printing press in the early 16th century. As Hebrew and Yiddish printed materials spread throughout Europe, three main fonts came into use for both languages: (1)

Square; (2) Rashi, based on Sephardic semi-cursive handwriting and also called Rabbinic type; and (3) Mashket, based on Ashkenazic semi-cursive handwriting and also known by a variety of other names (Mashait, Vaybertaytsh, Tkhine ksav, Tsene-Rene ksav; see Zafren 1986). Some of the earliest examples of printed Yiddish materials appear inside Hebrew texts; for example, the Prague Haggadah (Hebrew handbook for Passover *seder*, or ritual meal) of 1526 contains a Yiddish version of *Adir Hu* (an Ashkenazic Passover hymn) printed in Square font.

Image 3: Haggadah, Prague, printed by Gershom Katz, 1526. Yiddish translation of *Adir Hu*. Square fonts. From the collection of the National Library of Israel.

Early on, Mashket became the preeminent printed font for Yiddish (see Zafren 1982, 1986), while the Square and Rashi fonts were more commonly used for Hebrew. In the first half of the 16th century, Mashket started to be used for Yiddish books published all over the Ashkenazic world, e.g. Cracow, Isny, Augsburg, Constance, Ichenhausen, Zurich, Venice, Mantua, Prague, Hanau, and Lublin. Image 4 illustrates the Mashket font, which remained in use until the 19th century.

Image 4: Yiddish translation by Michael Adam of the Hebrew text *Yosippon*, Zürich, 1546. Main text is printed in Mashket font in two sizes; title and page number are printed in square font. Source: Wikimedia Commons https://w.wiki/AFD8.

While Mashket predominated, Square and Rashi fonts also continued to be used for Yiddish over the course of the following centuries and indeed have endured until the present day in Haredi (strictly Orthodox) Yiddish-speaking communities (discussed in 5.5). The three typefaces were not typically used interchangeably, but rather served as a way of graphically distinguishing different parts of a given document, e.g. to make a visual distinction between a Hebrew section and a Yiddish one, or to separate a source text from its associated commentary. This practical use of different fonts was necessary because many Jewish printed works were multilingual (Frakes 2004: lxxii-lxxiii) and included different types of information.

4.2 Marking consonants in Middle Yiddish

4.2.1 ש *shin* vs ס *samekh* for /s/

From 1500 onwards, the letter ס *samekh* slowly began to appear in Yiddish texts alongside ש *shin* to represent the voiceless sibilant /s/. This marks a distinctive change from Old Yiddish orthography, in which only ש *shin* was used to denote /s/; see 3.2.1 above. According to Timm (1987: 274), ש *shin* and ס *samekh* in Middle Yiddish are used in free variation rather than constituting an etymologically based representation of different historical High German sibilants. Despite the introduction of ס *samekh,* ש *shin* continued to be employed to denote /s/ throughout the entire Middle Yiddish period and was sometimes used even as late as in the 18th century (see 5.1).

4.2.2 Initial פ *pey* for /f/ instead of ו *vov* or ב *beys*

The most conspicuous orthographic change between Old and Middle Yiddish is a result of the phonological shift whereby initial /w/ shifted to /v/ (e.g. ווייב *waib* 'wife' > *vaib*) and initial /v/ devoiced to /f/ (e.g. בֿטר/וטר *votər* 'father' > *fotər*). Middle Yiddish spelling reflects this shift by using פ *pey* or פֿ *fey* for all initial /f/ sounds, whereas single ו *vov* and ב *beys* (often with *rofe* בֿ) were used in earlier texts.

An early text where one can find initial פ *pey* employed systematically for /f/ is an illuminated *maḥzor* (holiday prayer book) manuscript dated to circa 1560 which contains a Yiddish translation of the Hebrew prayers. A page of the *maḥzor* with words exhibiting initial ף *fey* for /f/ is shown in Image 5. See Prager and Hill (1995: 85) for a description of the manuscript in the British Library collection.

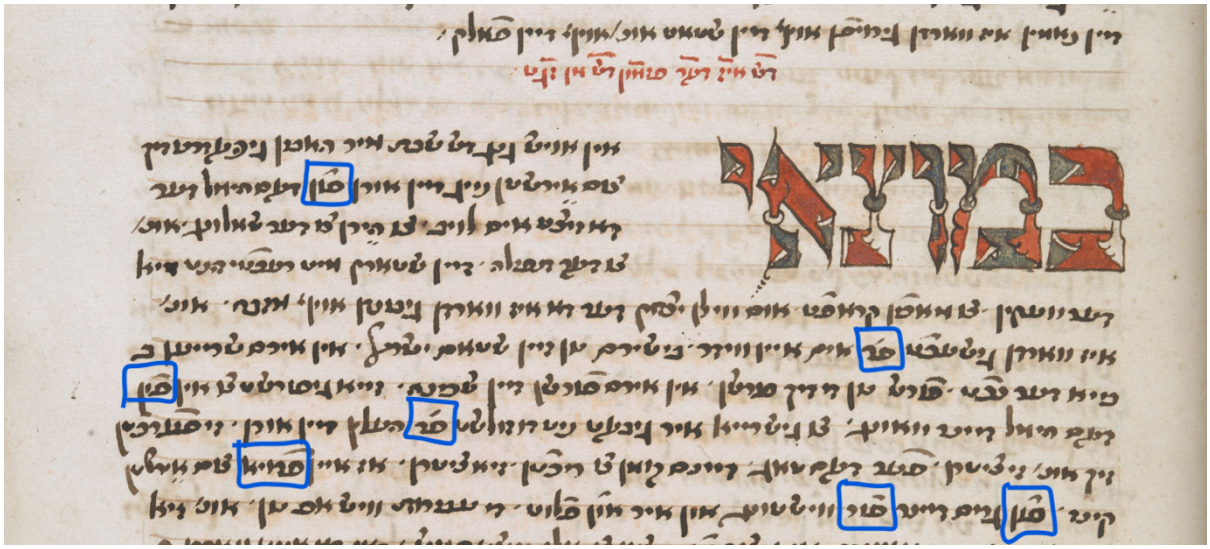

Image 5: Yiddish *maḥzor*, Cracow, circa 1560. From the British Library Collection: MS 27971, f. 7r. Words with initial *pey* with *rofe* are marked with blue boxes.

A number of Middle Yiddish sources from the late 16th century consistently exhibit this new convention using initial פ *pey* or ף *fey* for /f/, e.g. the Responsa of Solomon Luria, also known as the Maharshal (1575); a Yiddish translation by Jacob Koppelmann of the medieval Hebrew text 'Fox Fables' (1583); a Yiddish poem by Royzl Levi Fishl (1586); a letter from Samuel Meisel to his uncle (1588); a trilingual Hebrew-Yiddish-Italian glossary entitled *The Book Of Good Speech* (1590); and an anonymous Yiddish translation of Solomon ibn Verga's 16th-century Hebrew text *The Sceptre of Judah*. Interestingly, the early Middle Yiddish texts with regular initial פ *pey* for /f/ originate from Krakow, Brest or Poznan, i.e. from the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, while texts from Western and Central Europe (Munich, Venice, Verona etc.) tend to have the older ו *vov* or ב *beys* spelling. Examples of the latter include a Yiddish translation of the German medical tractate *Spiegel der Arznei* by Lorenz Fries (1583); the epic *Beria and Zimra* (1585); and a Yiddish translation by Simon Levi Ginzburg of Isaac Tyrnau's Hebrew work *Customs* (1593).

In contrast, later Middle Yiddish texts (from the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century) often exhibit variation in the use of initial פּ *pey* vs ו *vov* or ב *beys* within a single text. For example, a Hebrew-Yiddish dictionary by Moses Sertels ben Issachar Halevi (Prague, 1604) contains a rhymed preface in Yiddish, where one can find two different spellings of the same verb within one page: פֿר קאפֿין ***f**arkafən* and ור קאפֿין ***v**ərkafən* 'to sell' (cited in Frakes 2004: 498). Over the course of the 17th century the new initial פּ *pey* convention became the norm in most cases, but the older orthography was still retained for certain individual words. For example, the earliest extant edition of perhaps the most prominent and widely read Middle Yiddish text, the *Tsenerene*[6] (Hanau, 1622) typically employs initial פּ *pey* but the preposition *fun* is spelled either with בֿ *veys* or with פֿ *fey* throughout the text, i.e. בֿון and פֿון (cited in Frakes 2004: 544). Indeed, initial ו *vov* and ב *beys* forms can be found even in late 17th century Yiddish texts: for example, in a 1687 Yiddish translation of the Hebrew prayer after meals, one finds ור געבן ***v**argebən* 'forgive' (cited in Frakes 2004: 728).

As mentioned in 4.2.2, towards the end of the Old Yiddish period and throughout the Middle Yiddish period, פּפּ double *pey* can be used to denote /pf/. However, the same words in Middle Yiddish are also attested with a single פּ *pey*, often with *rofe*, e.g. פֿערד *ferd* 'horse'; פֿלעגן *flegn* 'be used to'; קאפּ *kop* 'head'. This may reflect a phonological variation and the later shift whereby /pf/ was falling out of use in Yiddish (it is not a feature of the modern language).

5 Modern Yiddish (1700 to the present)

5.1 Yiddish orthography in the 18th-19th centuries

Despite wide-ranging linguistic and cultural changes in the 18th century including the shift of the Ashkenazic cultural centre to the East (with particular centres in Krakow, Warsaw, Odessa, Lvov/Lviv, and Vilna), and the imminent birth of mass-produced literature, Yiddish spelling conventions remained conservative throughout this period (Kerler 1993).

However, by the 19th century, spelling conventions used for Yiddish words of Germanic origin became clearly distinguished from those used for words of Hebrew origin. By this time, the use of the initial ב *beys* for /v/ disappeared, as did the use of וּ *vov* with *khoylem* for /o/ in

[6] A Yiddish adaptation of the weekly Torah readings recited in Hebrew in synagogue, intended for Jews unable to understand the original.

Germanic-origin words.[7] Instead, the use of וו double *vov* for /v/, פּ *pey* with *dogesh* for /p/, and פ *pey* /f/ without *rofe* became standardized in all word positions, while the vowel /o/ came to be uniformly represented by the א *alef*.

The use of ע *ayen* in word-final position to indicate unstressed /ə/ is a hallmark feature of Modern Yiddish, though traces of this use can be found as early as the late 17th century, e.g. in the Tuesday Courier/Friday Courier, the first Yiddish newspaper printed in Amsterdam (1686-7), in the toponym מאשקווע *moskvə* 'Moscow', which is spelled with ה *hey* on the same page of the newspaper, as מאשקווה (Frakes 2017: 209). Silent א *alef* preceding י *yud* and ו *vov* in word-initial position was preserved throughout this period. Silent א *alef* was also used to disambiguate sequences of three ו *vovs*, e.g. וואו *vu* 'where'.

Throughout the 18th century and into the 19th century pointing was sometimes employed as it is in Hebrew, i.e. beneath or above the consonant preceding the vowel in question, e.g. הָאבן *hobn* 'to have', but over the course of the 19th century a more Yiddish-specific tradition developed, with the pointing symbols *pasekh* /a/ and *komets* /o/ appearing under the א *alef* to distinguish /a/ from /o/, i.e. אַ and אָ respectively. However, there are some late examples of Hebrew-style pointing, such as the 1881 edition of Nahman of Braslav's book of allegorical tales *Sipure Mayses*.

In this period the two different pronunciations of the digraph יי double *yud*, i.e. /ey/ and /ay/, are hardly ever distinguished in writing, continuing a tradition established earlier. A convention whereby י *yud* is replaced with א *alef* at the beginning of a word to avoid a letter sequence resembling that found in the Hebrew name of God became common in the second half of the 19th century, with the rise of modern Yiddish literature. The use of י *yud* instead of ע *ayen* in unstressed schwa-like vowels, for instance in the past participial prefix -גע *ge-* or -גי *gi-* is rare. If it occurs, it is used pervasively, as is for instance the 1881 edition of Nahman of Braslav's *Mayses*, published in Warsaw, or Isaac Meyer Dick's 1869 *Di ungliklikhe libe*, published in Vilna. Another orthographic characteristic that was very rare by this period is the use of the letter ש *shin* for /s/ in Germanic words. Again, Nachman (1881) and Dick (1869) are the only two works that occasionally and inconsistently still adhere to this traditional spelling convention.

[7] Generally, by this time, all those letters of the Hebrew alphabet that are phonetically redundant in Yiddish disappear from the language's Germanic component and are employed only in the Hebrew component. See section 5.3 for further discussion.

The second half of the 19th century was the time when the Jewish Enlightenment and assimilation were in full force. Thus, orthographic practices that are reflective of the influence of modern German pronunciation and spelling are very common in this period. For instance, many journalistic publications from different areas in the second half of the 19th century use the German-influenced prefix -פער *fer-* instead of the traditional Yiddish -פאר *far-*. Some publications even exhibit a Germanized /a/ instead of Yiddish /o/, e.g. Germanized האַבעָן *haben* 'to have' instead of Yiddish האָבן *hobn*, although this is rare in literary works. A German-influenced convention that was much more commonly adopted in this period is the addition of the letter ה *hey* after vowels where the German cognate has *h*, e.g. יאהר *yohr* 'year', איהרע *ihre* 'your (polite form)', צעהן *tsehn* 'ten' etc. Another Germanizing tendency, which is again more commonly found in journalistic writing than in literary works, is the doubling of consonants based on German cognates, e.g. זאָלל *zoll* 'should', געָקיממעָן *gekimmen* 'came', בעָססעָר *besser* 'better', גאססע *gasse* 'street'.[8]

The archaic orthographic feature that seems to have survived longest is the addition of a silent א *alef* at the end of short function words ending in a vowel, such as וויא *vi* 'how', דוא *du* 'you', זיא *zi* 'she'. It is only in the first half of the 20th century that we see the disappearance of this convention, presumably because it affected a set of closed class, frequent words, so archaic spelling could easily be retained. Note however that this spelling can still be observed in 21st-century Haredi (strictly Orthodox) Yiddish orthography (discussed in 5.5).

As a final point, it is important to observe that only towards the end of the 19th century do the particle verbs begin to be spelled as one word instead of two, e.g. איינשלאפן *aynshlofn* 'to fall asleep', אויסגיין *oysgeyn* 'to die', אריינקומען 'to come in' was adopted, with Nahman of Braslav (1881) and Dick (1869) again retaining the traditional spelling as separate words. It is noteworthy that in this respect, the convention appears to have been adopted very uniformly, as the only work with mixed spelling that we have found was a volume of the periodical *Kol Mevaser* from 1862, published in Odessa, which features the coordination: אַוועק געָיאָגט אוּן איינגעזעצט *avek geyogt un eyngezetst* 'chased away and imprisoned'.

Towards the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century Germanisms were largely abandoned. By this time Yiddish was becoming widely recognized as a worthy medium of literature for Ashkenazic Jews on a mass scale, with hugely popular writers such as

[8] These three conventions (use of /a/ instead of /o/, addition of ה *hey* in long vowels, and consonant doubling) are very common in Judeo-German spelling, i.e. German in Hebrew script. The discussion of Judeo-German orthography is beyond the scope of this paper.

Mendele Moykher Sforim, Sholem Aleichem, and Y. L. Peretz, who between them published over a hundred novels, collections of short stories, and other literary pieces. These authors adopted a more traditional spelling whose main driving principles were laid out by Sholem-Aleichem (1888). Despite advocating against the previously favoured Germanizing doubling of consonants, he advocated retaining the use of ה *hey* for long vowels, if it serves to avoid ambiguity, as in for instance זייער *zeyr* 'their' vs זעהר *zehr* 'very' or שטעהן *shtehn* 'to stand' vs. שטיין *shteyn* 'stone'. In addition, he insisted that the orthography retain the vowel distinctions typical of the Northeastern (also known as Lithuanian) dialect of Yiddish rather than those of the Mideastern (Polish and Hungarian) or Southeastern (Ukrainian) dialects. At the same time, archaic features such as word-final א *alef* were abandoned, and particle verbs were consistently spelled in one word.

5.2 YIVO 'Standard Yiddish' orthography

The YIVO (*Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut* 'Yiddish Scientific Institute') was established in Vilna (present-day Vilnius, Lithuania) in 1925 by the linguists Max Weinreich and Zalman Reisen and quickly became the most prestigious organization of Yiddish-language scholarship, a position that it has retained until the present day. It built on earlier efforts to establish a tradition of research into Ashkenazic Jewish history, folk traditions, and material culture by the historian Simon Dubnow towards the end of the 19th century, complemented by the findings of several ethnographic expeditions conducted by S. An-sky in 1912-14. Weinreich and Reisen's vision of a scholarly institute for Yiddish language and culture efforts fell on fertile soil, and very quickly a vast group of ordinary citizens came together to collect documents, objects, folklore, and research funds to support this endeavour.

In line with the YIVO's ambitious goal of acting as an unofficial, grass-roots-funded academy of sciences and humanities for the Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazic Jews, they started discussing a set of orthographic conventions that could, and indeed should, be adopted by every Yiddish-medium organization, educational institution, and publishing house. They published a set of rules for what they called Standard Yiddish spelling in 1937. Some of their tenets were in line with what was standard usage anyway, such as the use of אָ *komets alef* for /o/ in Germanic-origin lexis, but they also introduced some conventions that had not been in widespread use before, such as the systematic use of pointing symbols to mark פֿ *fey* /f/, פ *pey* /p/, and בֿ *veys* /v/ (Fishman 1977: 300). Similarly, they made the decision to distinguish

orthographically between several other pairs of consonants, by means of *dogesh*, i.e. כּ *kof* /k/ vs כ *khof* /x/, and תּ *tof* /t/ vs ת *sof* /s/, in contrast to earlier Yiddish spelling systems which had not done so systematically. They also introduced a systematic distinction between the diphthongs /ey/ and /ay/, spelling the former with ײ double *yud* and the latter with ײַ, double *yud* pointed by *pasekh.* The aspect of the new YIVO orthography that proved most controversial was the proposal to eliminate the silent א *alef* from all but one position, word-initially in front of a vocalic י *yud* or ו *vov* (see 3.1.2 for the role of word-initial א *alef* before י *yod* and ו *vov*). Nevertheless, the proposal was adopted along with the rest of the YIVO spelling reforms.

After the Holocaust, when YIVO was already operating in New York, the debate that ensued among linguists, lexicographers, and language planners associated with YIVO and beyond, on essentially this single point, was formidable, at times polemic, and dramatic to the point that Leyzer Burko's description of it in his 2019 dissertation (Burko 2019) is being adapted as a script for a modern opera by Alex Weiser and Mark Kaplan, nearing its completion (Kafrissen 2022), with the silent *alef* appearing in a singing part! Polemics aside, the YIVO's influence to this day cannot be overestimated. The official YIVO spelling is considered the standard that is enforced by all universities, scholarly publications, and literary editors, as well as Yiddish-language magazines and newspapers globally among all users of Yiddish outside the Haredi world. Moreover, the Romanization system developed by YIVO is the standard method of rendering Yiddish into the Latin script for educational and other purposes (see Table 2 below).

	Roman letter	Yiddish letter	Name of the Yiddish letter		Roman letter	Yiddish letter	Name of the Yiddish letter
Vowels	—	אַ	shtumer alef	Consonants	t	ט	tes
	a	אַ	pasekh alef		k	כּ	kof
	o	אָ	komets alef		kh	כ, ך	khof (langer khof)
	u	ו	vov		l	ל	lamed
	u	וּ	melupm vov		m	מ, ם	mem (shlos mem)
	i/y	י	yud		n	נ, ן	nun (langer nun)
	i	יִ	khirek yud		s	ס	samekh
	e	ע	ayen		p	פּ	pey
Diphth	oy	ויִ	vov yud		f	פֿ, ף	fey (langer fey)

	ey	ײַ	tsvey yudn		ts	צ, ץ	tsadek (langer tsadek)
	ay	ײַ	pasekh tsvey yudn		k	ק	kuf
Consonants	b	ב	beyz		r	ר	resh
	v	בֿ	veyz		sh	ש	shin
	g	ג	gimel		s	שׂ	sin
	d	ד	daled		t	ת	tof
	h	ה	hey		s	ת	sof
	v	וו	tsvey vovn	Complex Consonants	tsh	טש	tes-shin
	z	ז	zayen		zh	זש	zayen-shin
	kh	ח	khes		dzh	דזש	daled-zayen-shin

Table 2: The YIVO transliteration system is used almost universally today as a standard way of rendering Yiddish into the Latin alphabet.[9]

5.3 Solomon Birnbaum's 'Orthodox' orthography

In a parallel development to YIVO, the linguist Solomon Birnbaum developed the so-called 'Orthodox' orthography (Gold 1977; Schaechter 1999: 32), which differed from YIVO's in several important respects. First, Birnbaum's proposed system was conservative, seeking to maintain traditional spelling as much as possible. He rejected YIVO's standard on ideological grounds as secularizing and thus removing the Jewishness from Yiddish (Weiser 2016: xxxvi). On practical grounds, he objected to the fact that YIVO spelling favours Northeastern (Lithuanian) Yiddish pronunciation despite the fact that at the time about two thirds to three quarters of Yiddish speakers used Mideastern and Southeastern pronunciation. Instead, Birnbaum proposed a system of spelling conventions that represents the different vowels from all dialects with distinct graphemes. To illustrate, in the YIVO system קאָפּ *kop* 'head' and זאָגן *zogn* 'to say' are both spelt with אָ *komets alef*, which is unproblematic in the standard Northeastern pronunciation /kɔp/ and /zɔgn/, but it gives rise to potential confusion for Mideastern and Southeastern dialect speakers, whose pronunciation distinguishes these vowels as /kɔp/ and /zu:gn/, respectively (Weiser 2016: Fn 57, liv).[10] Accordingly, Birnbaum's proposed spelling reflects this distinction with only the latter bearing the *komets*: קאפּ vs זאָגן. His proposed orthography was adopted by the Orthodox school system Beis Yaakov in 1930, and thus, for the brief interwar period, it played an important role among religious Jews even if they failed to fully adopt its more intricate characteristics. (Beis Yaakov later abandoned

[9] Source: https://www.yiddishwit.com/transliteration.html (last checked 02/05/2024)
[10] As far as the Hebrew component was concerned, Birnbaum proposed full pointing to be obligatory for stressed syllables and in all cases where the vowel must be disambiguated for clarity of meaning.

Birnbaum's orthography; see Schaechter 1999: 33). One easily recognisable feature of Birnbaum's system is the adoption of י *yud* for unstressed schwa in the participial prefix -גי *gi-* and also in the adjectival suffix -ליך *-likh*, as opposed to the YIVO's -גע *ge-* and -לעך *-lekh.* Given its roots in traditional orthography, Birnbaum's system is closer to current-day Haredi Yiddish spelling (discussed in 5.5) than the YIVO system is.

5.4 Soviet Yiddish orthography

Roughly at the same time as the development of the YIVO orthography and Birnbaum's orthography, the Yiddish writing system underwent a very different standardization process in the early Soviet Union. Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, Yiddish was made the official language of the Jews in the newly established Soviet Union as part of a national policy of support for minority languages throughout the country (see Estraikh 1999). As an official Soviet minority language, Yiddish became subject to an extensive programme of language planning and reform, designed to ensure that it developed in line with communist ideology. This included the introduction of Russian technical and administrative vocabulary and the replacement of Hebrew-origin Yiddish vocabulary with Germanic equivalents (see Estraikh 1999 for details).

A major element of early Soviet Yiddish language planning was a radical overhaul of the traditional 19th-century orthography, which had been in use in czarist Russia. The purpose of this orthographic reform, as with the language planning project more broadly, was twofold: first, it aimed to simplify and standardize the Yiddish writing system in order to improve literacy rates, and second, it sought to sever the connection between Yiddish and Hebrew, as the latter was regarded as bourgeois and religious, and therefore incompatible with Soviet values (Shneer 2004: 42; Estraikh 2008: 1). Thus, much of the orthographic reform focused on the Semitic (i.e. Hebrew and Aramaic) component of Yiddish, which was highly problematic as it represented an obstacle to both of the main aims of the Soviet language planning project. As mentioned above, the Semitic component of Yiddish was always written as in the source languages, rather than phonetically according to the orthographic conventions that developed for non-Semitic Yiddish vocabulary throughout the Old and Middle Yiddish periods. This means that Hebrew and Aramaic words in Yiddish had only *matres lectionis* as vowel markers; there was no use of ע *ayen*, א *alef*, or diphthongs as in the non-Semitic component of Yiddish. For example, in the traditional spelling of the compound word ראש השנה *rosheshone* 'Rosh HaShanah, Jewish New Year', most of the vowels are unwritten or represented by a *mater*

lectionis. In addition, Semitic vocabulary in Yiddish featured six phonetically redundant consonants which were no longer used in the spelling of the language's non-Semitic lexical components (as discussed in section 5.1 above). These consonants are shown the first row of Table 3, with their phonetic counterparts (themselves used in both the Semitic and non-Semitic components) appearing in the second row. For example, the traditional spelling of the word חנוכה *khanike* 'Hanukkah' included the consonants ח *khes* and כ·*kof*, which never appear in Yiddish words outside of the language's Semitic component.

Semitic-only consonant	בֿ /v/	ח /x/	כ /k/	שׂ /s/	ת /t/	ת /s/
Universally used phonetic counterpart	וו /v/	כ /x/	ק /k/	ס /s/	ט /t/	ס /s/

Table 3: Semitic-only consonants used in Middle and Modern Yiddish, and their universally used phonetic counterparts

In 1920 two major spelling changes were announced in order to eradicate these orthographic idiosyncrasies of the Semitic component and bring it into line with the much more phonetic spelling rules for the other Yiddish lexical components. First, Semitic vocabulary was now to be spelt with a full complement of vowels, as in the non-Semitic component of Yiddish. Second, the redundant consonants were abolished and replaced with their phonetic counterparts, thereby reducing the total number of letters in the Yiddish alphabet. Thus, the traditional ראש השנה was now spelt ראָשעשאָנע *rosheshone*, with all vowels represented in writing. Similarly, the traditional חנוכה now spelt כאַניקע, with the redundant consonants ח and כ replaced by their phonetic equivalents כ and ק. These two changes had the practical effect of making Yiddish spelling completely phonetic, thereby furthering the expressed Soviet policy of increasing literacy rates and making it easier for Yiddish speakers to access the many state-sponsored literary works being produced in the language during this period. Simultaneously, the changes effectively severed the traditional orthographic link between Hebrew and Yiddish that had existed since the latter's earliest days. This too was in line with Soviet policy, as the erasure of the visual tie between Hebrew and Yiddish served to help disconnect contemporary Soviet Yiddish from a language which was perceived as incompatible with Soviet values.

In 1932 a third change was made which further distanced Soviet Yiddish orthography from other Yiddish spelling systems. This change consisted of the abolishment of the five

allographic ‘final’ forms of consonants used only in word-final position, which had been inherited from Hebrew (see section 1.1 above and Table 1). These word-final allographs had been used in Yiddish throughout its thousand-year history, as they were in other Diaspora Jewish written languages. As in the case of the two changes implemented in 1920, the eradication of the ‘final’ forms served to streamline the Yiddish spelling system, removing redundancies and making it more systematic and accessible. Simultaneously, it also served to make Soviet Yiddish orthography visually very different from the Yiddish orthographies used elsewhere in the world (as well as from Hebrew and other Jewish languages), as the word-final allographs are a prominent feature of Hebrew script: the effect of abolishing them can perhaps be equated roughly with the sense of disorientation that readers of Latin-script orthographies would likely feel if capital letters were to be taken out of use. Table 4 illustrates this change. An example of the difference is the Yiddish word for ‘man’, which is traditionally spelt מאַן *man*, with final ן *nun*. In Soviet Yiddish orthography, this word is instead spelt מאַנ *man*, with standard נ *nun*.

Traditional word-final allograph	ך /kh/	ם /m/	ן /n/	ף /f/	ץ /ṣ/
Soviet Yiddish equivalent	כ /kh/	מ /m/	נ /n/	פ /f/	צ /ṣ/

Table 4: Soviet Yiddish abolition of traditional word-final allographs

Taken together, these three major orthographic changes resulted in Soviet Yiddish becoming visually isolated from the Yiddish used throughout the rest of the world (Shneer 2004: 80): while the Soviet Yiddish orthography became universally used within the USSR, it remained unknown outside of Soviet borders. See Estraikh (1999: 115-26) for further discussion of the Soviet Yiddish orthographic reforms surveyed here.

During the 1920s, there were also proposals to replace the Hebrew-derived Yiddish alphabet entirely with the Latin alphabet, but these never caught on (Estraikh 1999: 127-31; Shneer 2004: 81-87). These proposals were part of a much broader trend in the first decade of the Soviet Union to develop Latin-script orthographies for all the national minority languages (Alpatov 2000). In the 1930s, Stalinist policy towards the minority languages dramatically shifted and became much more anti-Western, so the Latin-based orthographies which had been developed for minority languages were replaced with Cyrillic ones. However, there do not seem to have been any serious suggestions to replace the traditional Hebrew-based Yiddish

script with a Latin-based one. Rather, the Soviet Yiddish orthography outlined above continued to be used in all Soviet Yiddish publications until the 1990s; it survived for a number of years after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Estraikh 1999: 140) but was then replaced by the YIVO orthography as Yiddish speakers from the former Soviet states established international connections and became integrated with their counterparts in the rest of the world.

5.5 Haredi Yiddish orthography

In the 21st century, the Yiddish-speaking world can be divided into two main groups, Haredi (strictly Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox) and non-Haredi, often called 'secular'. In 'secular' circles, Yiddish is invariably written with the YIVO orthography developed in the 1920s and 1930s. The only exception to this is extremely minor and consists of the use of romanization (following the YIVO romanization system), which can sometimes be found in educational contexts as a learning aid for beginning students who are still learning to write the Yiddish script, and for communication by email on devices which are not equipped with a Yiddish keyboard. However, in Haredi communities the orthographic situation is quite different. Haredi orthography has developed from the 19th century without influence from the YIVO standard or Soviet Yiddish. Rather, in the 21st century the orthography used by Haredi Yiddish speakers continues to resemble more closely the orthography discussed above which was in use in the late 19th century and early 20th centuries in Eastern Europe before the YIVO orthography became dominant.

Contemporary Haredi Yiddish, in contrast to its secular counterpart, is a flourishing language which is still widely acquired as a main language by children and is used in spoken and written settings in all walks of life, including the home, education, work, etc. Within the Haredi world, Yiddish is most widely spoken by adherents of the Hasidic spiritual movement (see Biale et al. 2018 for detailed discussions of Hasidic history and culture). Written Haredi Yiddish can be found in published and unpublished genres such as novels for adults and children, comic books for children, newspapers, nonfiction for adults and children, and more. While in broad terms Haredi Yiddish orthography is based on the same principles as the Yiddish orthography of the 19th century described above, there are certain characteristics that can be ascribed to it, which concern the vowels, the pointing system, consonants, and particular religious-based orthographic features.

The use of vowels and diphthongs in contemporary Haredi Yiddish is broadly the same as that seen in 19th-century Yiddish as opposed to YIVO Yiddish. The letter א *alef* is used for

both /a/ and /o/, and in contrast to the YIVO orthography, which makes use of vocalization symbols to distinguish /a/ from /o/, i.e. אַ *pasekh alef* vs אָ *komets al*ef, Haredi orthography does not typically differentiate between the two. For example, the Haredi Yiddish spelling מאמע *mam*e 'mother' can be contrasted with its YIVO counterpart מאַמע (with *pasekh alef*) while the Haredi Yiddish spelling באבע *bobe* 'grandmother' can be contrasted with its YIVO counterpart באָבע (w*ith komets alef*). While ע *ayen* represents /e/ as it does in the YIVO orthography, it is used more frequently in Haredi writing, appearing in positions where it would not be found in YIVO. In this respect it is particularly commonly employed in the penultimate position representing schwa, such as before the plural and infinitive suffix ן- *-n*. An example of this practice is the Haredi Yiddish spelling האבען *hobn* 'to have', which can be contrasted with its YIVO equivalent האָבן. With respect to diphthongs, the digraph יי double *yud* is used to represent both /ay/ and /ey/, in contrast to YIVO where the former is marked by *pasekh* and the latter is not, i.*e.* יַי /ay/ vs יי /ey/. For example, the Haredi Yiddish spelling מיין *mayn* 'my' can be contrasted with the YIVO spelling מײַן.

Another feature of Haredi Yiddish orthography is the use of silent א *alef* to separate the consonant וו /v/ from the vowel ו /u/ when the latter two occur in succession, as in וואו *vu* 'where' or וואוינען *voynen* 'to live'. This is in keeping with traditional Yiddish orthography, in contrast to YIVO orthography, which instead typically employs the symbol ו *melupm vov* to represent the vowel /u/ appearing in conjunction with the consonant ו *tsvey vovn* /v/, e.g. ווּ *v*u 'where' and employs unmarked ו *vov* to represent /u/ when appearing as part of the diphthong /oy/ following the consonant double וו *vov*, e.g. ווינען *voynen* 'to live'.

In Haredi Yiddish texts the vowels י *yud* /i/ and ו *vov* /u/ are sometimes used interchangeably. This is because the most widely spoken varieties of Haredi Yiddish, /u/ is typically pronounced as /i/. For example, the word קומען 'to come', which is pronounced as *kumen* in Standard Yiddish and in the language's historical Northeastern (Lithuanian, Latvian, and Belarusian) dialect, is pronounced as *kimen* in the most commonly spoken variety of Haredi Yiddish, which is based on the historical Mideastern (Polish and Hungarian) dialect. See Jacobs (2005) for discussion of Yiddish dialects and also Belk, Kahn and Szendrői (2022) for Hasidic Yiddish. Therefore, one may see e.g. the word for 'to come' spelt as קימען, with a י *yud* instead of a ו *vov*, reflecting its pronunciation of *kimen*. One may also see the converse phenomenon whereby ו *vov* is employed instead of י *yud*; for example, the word צי *tsi* 'whether' is sometimes spelt as צו *tsu*, despite the fact that it is still pronounced as *tsi*. While Haredi Yiddish does not have a standardized orthography in the strict sense of the word (see further below), there is a general agreement that ו *vov* and י *yud* should be employed as in traditional Yiddish spelling

systems despite the fact that they are phonologically identical for most Haredi Yiddish readers, and school children are taught that correct spellings must be learnt by heart for words containing one or the other letter. For example, children learn early on that there are two words pronounced *in*, one spelt with a ו *vov* and one spelt with a י *yud*. The two words in question are און 'and' and אין 'in', which in Standard Yiddish are pronounced as *un* and *in* respectively. Although Haredi Yiddish speakers are aware that these orthographic conventions exist, it is common to see the two vowel letters interchanged in both private writing and published works.

In contemporary Haredi Yiddish the diphthong /ey/ is typically written as עי *ayen yud* when the word in question is innovative or borrowed, e.g. דעיע *deye* 'this' (an innovative Haredi form; see Belk, Kahn, Szendrői, and Yampolskaya 2022), בעיבי *beybi* 'baby' (a loanword from English), and בעיל *beyl* 'bail' (another loanword from English). This can be contrasted with earlier Yiddish orthographies and with the YIVO orthography, in which the diphthong /ey/ is written as ײ double *yud*. The strikingly different Haredi Yiddish spelling convention is, as in the case of the interchange between ו *vov* and י *yud* discussed in the previous paragraph, most likely rooted in phonological factors. In the most commonly spoken varieties of Haredi Yiddish, the diphthong pronounced as /ey/ in Standard and Northeastern Yiddish is instead pronounced as /ay/. For example, the word ניין 'no', which is pronounced as *neyn* in Standard and Northeastern Yiddish, is pronounced as *nayn* in most varieties of Haredi Yiddish. Therefore, innovative and borrowed words which have only recently been incorporated into the language and have the sound /ey/ would likely be misread if spelt with ײ, because readers would mistakenly associate them with the /ay/ diphthong. The spelling עי *ayn yud* avoids this pitfall by ensuring that readers will interpret the diphthong correctly as /ey/. The combination עי *ayen yud* does exist in YIVO orthography, but it serves a different function, being reserved for diaeresis of /e/ and /i/ (which is rare in Yiddish), e.g. העברעיש *hebreish* 'Hebrew'. Note that in the YIVO usage, the יִ *yud* is marked with *khirek*, unlike in Haredi Yiddish.

The consonant ה *hey* is also sometimes used following a vowel, as in יאהר *yor* 'year', in contrast to YIVO יאָר *yor*. This is rooted in 18th- and 19th-century *daytshmerish* orthographic conventions, whereby Yiddish orthography was adapted to better correspond to German Roman-alphabet spelling conventions, e.g. German *Jahre* 'year' with silent *h* following the vowel. Nowadays when used in Haredi Yiddish orthography, some speakers and writers report that they understand the use of silent ה *hey* to mark the presence of a long vowel, but this may be a folk explanation as the use of the silent ה *hey* does not necessary seem to correspond to the actual presence of a long vowel in the spoken equivalent of the words in question.

In contemporary Haredi Yiddish, the traditional vocalization system is not usually employed except in children's literature, in which it is the norm. This reflects the conception (shared by contemporary Israeli Hebrew) that pointing is a learning aid which helps children acquire and develop their literacy skills, after which time it is no longer needed. Reading materials for children are typically fully vocalized, even though in the Yiddish vowel orthography (apart from words deriving from the language's Semitic component) makes this unnecessary. Consider for example the following extract from the popular Haredi Yiddish children's book series *21 under 1 Roof*, which is intended for a readership of children aged approximately 7 to 12. As the extract shows, every word exhibits full pointing despite the presence of vowels.

(11)

אִיר מַאמָע הָאט אִיר גֶעגֶעבֶּן **דִי מַאטֶעמַאטִיק אִיבּוּנגֶען בִּיכְל** וָאס דִי לֶעהֲרִין הָאט זֵיי גֶעגֶעבֶּן צוּ מַאכֶן אִין דִי וַואקַאצְיֶע טָעג.	*ir mame hot ir gegebn di matematik ibungen bikhl vos di lererin hot zey gegebn tsu makhn in di vakatsye teg.*	'Her mother had given her the mathematics exercise book that the teacher had given them to do in the vacation' (Rappaport 2018: 164).

It is also important to note that where vowels are concerned, the Haredi Yiddish pointing convention differs from its YIVO counterpart. While in YIVO orthography vocalization symbols are placed beneath the letter א *alef* to distinguish אַ *pasekh alef* from אָ *komets alef*, in Haredi Yiddish the symbols are placed beneath the consonant *preceding* the א in question. This can be seen by comparing the second word in the above extract, מַאמָע *mame* 'mother' from its equivalent spelling in the YIVO orthography, which would be מאַמע.

In Haredi Yiddish texts written for adults, there is typically no pointing at all, except on very rare occasions to help readers interpret a Hebrew-origin lexical item thought to be particularly ambiguous. In such cases, the vocalization symbols may be placed before the vowel, as discussed in the previous paragraph, or under the vowel, as in the YIVO system; for example, one may see the word מאשין *mashin* 'machine' pointed as either מַאשין (the more typically Haredi option) or מאַשין (as in YIVO orthography).

The general lack of pointing extends to the *dogesh* and *rafe* markers which are used in YIVO orthography to distinguish otherwise identical graphemes with different pronunciations. Hence, whereas YIVO orthography differentiates between פּ *pey* and פֿ *fey* by means of a *dogesh* in the former and a *rofe* over the latter, in Haredi Yiddish orthography there is no graphical

distinction between the two. For example, in Haredi Yiddish the words פאר *far* 'for' and פאר *por* 'pair, couple' cannot be distinguished from each other graphically, but rather rely on context. Conversely, in the YIVO orthography these two words are spelt differently, as פֿאַר *far* and פָּאָר respectively, with the /f/ differentiated from the /p/ (in addition to the /a/ being differentiated from the /o/, as discussed above). Similarly, the set of consonant pairs used in Yiddish words of Hebrew origin which in YIVO orthography are distinguished by means of a *dogesh*, i.e. ב /b/ vs בֿ /v/; כ /k/ vs כֿ /x/, and ת /t/ vs תּ /s/, are spelt identically in Haredi Yiddish. For example, compare Haredi יום טוב *yontef* 'Jewish festival' with YIVO יום טובֿ, Haredi כלה *kale* 'bride' with YIVO כּלה, and Haredi תורה *toyre* 'Torah' with YIVO תּורה.

With respect to consonants, Haredi orthography generally corresponds to other Yiddish spelling systems. The main characteristically Haredi feature (which resembles 19th-century *daytshmerish* spelling) is the use of ג *gimel* at the end of a common adjectival suffix which ends in ק *kuf* in YIVO orthography, e.g. Haredi שבתדיג *shabesdig* 'appropriate for the Sabbath' vs YIVO שבתדיק *shabesdik*.

Haredi Yiddish is characterized by substantial borrowing from English, and the spelling conventions can differ from those of YIVO for transliterating loanwords. As in other areas, the incorporation of loanwords into Haredi Yiddish more closely resembles 19th-century Yiddish spelling conventions. For example, double consonants in English words and names are often reproduced when transliterated into Yiddish script, especially in the case of double *l*, e.g. -אן קאלל *on-kall* 'on call'; קאלעדש *kalledsh* 'college', קאפיטאל הילל *kapital hill* 'Capitol Hill', all with double ל *lamed*. The same is true of Jewish surnames adopted from German and other languages, e.g. פאללאק *pollak* 'Pollack'. In other respects, English borrowings and those from other languages are typically reproduced phonetically according to Haredi Yiddish orthographic convention, e.g. עדיוקעישן *edyukeyshn* 'education' (from English); קאמיוניקעישן *kamyunikeyshn* 'communication' (from English); פארקינג לאט *parking lat* 'parking lot, car park' (from English); סעילסמאן *seylsman* 'salesman' (from English); טרעפיק *trefik* for English 'traffic'; סעניאר *senyor* 'señor' (from Spanish); פאנטשא ראמירעז *pantsho ramirez* 'Pancho Ramirez' . Note that ע *ayen* is typically used to render the English phoneme /æ/, e.g. סקענער *skener* 'scanner'.

Another characteristic feature of 21st-century Haredi Yiddish is the use of *geresh* to separate a grammatical suffix from the rest of the word, e.g. די מאמע'ס *di mame's* 'the mother's', with the *geresh* marking the possessive suffix ס *s* (as in English) or מיט'ן *mit'n* 'with the', with the *geresh* marking the contracted form of the definite article following the preposition מיט *mit* 'with'. *Geresh* is also used in the same way to isolate the Semitic component of a word from its Germanic affixes, e.g. גע'גנב'ט *ge'ganv't* 'stolen', with the Semitic root גנב 'steal' marked off

graphically from the Germanic past participle prefix and suffix. When *geresh* is used to separate a suffix from a word whose base ends in a final allograph, the final form of the allograph is frequently retained despite the fact that it is no longer at the end of the word, e.g. די פעלדמאן'ס *di feldman's* 'the Feldmans'. In such cases, the *geresh* seems to be treated as if it were a word divider, with the suffix regarded almost as an independent word. All of these practices can be found in 19th-century Yiddish writing, but not in the YIVO orthography.

Haredi religious principles exert an influence on Yiddish orthography used within the community. For example, the initial combination יי double *yud* is never used as it resembles orthographically one of the common ways of referring to God in Jewish texts. Instead, an א *alef* is used. This practice is illustrated in the Haredi spelling of the words איד *(y)id* 'Jew', אידיש *(y)idish* 'Yiddish', and אינגעל *(y)ingel* 'boy'[11], compared to the YIVO spelling ייִד *yid*, ייִדיש *yidish*, ייִנגל *yingl* (note also the ◌ִ *khirek yud* in the YIVO spelling). Similarly, combinations involving ה *hey* and י *yud* are never written out in full as these two letters appear next to each other in the Tetragrammaton. Instead, one of the two is omitted and its absence is indicated by *geresh*, e.g. חי *kha*y' 'animal'[12] instead of חיה *khay*e. Within the same line, there is a general principle to avoid writing out the word for 'God', so it always appears with a dash replacing the middle letter, i.e. ג-ט *g-t*.

While, as mentioned above, Haredi Yiddish does not have an official standard orthography corresponding to e.g. the YIVO orthography or official national orthographies for other Germanic languages, the tendencies described above can be considered an unofficial standard as they are taught in Yiddish-speaking Haredi schools and most writers of Haredi Yiddish employ them relatively systematically. Where there are two different conventions in use within the Haredi Yiddish-speaking world, there seem to be patterns of convergence whereby one variant is becoming more common than the other. This has become easier to analyse in recent years with the growth of Haredi Yiddish writing online; the increased visibility of Haredi Yiddish on the internet has likely in turn sped up the subconscious drive towards an towards unofficial standardization as writers mirror the spellings that they see online when composing their own texts. See Benedict (2021) for further discussion of the unofficial standardization of Haredi Yiddish orthography.

6. Conclusions

[11] In words such as these, some speakers pronounce the initial /y/, while others do not.
[12] This word has a homonym, Chaya, a popular female given name.

In this historical overview of the Yiddish writing system, we have seen that most of the basic principles of Yiddish orthography were established very early on and many of them have endured for nearly a millennium. The changes that Yiddish spelling has undergone over the centuries can best be explained with reference to a paradigm advanced by Fishman (1977: 302). In Fishman's view, the various Yiddish orthographies represent a tension between two different poles, namely closeness to Hebrew or distance from it, and conversely closeness to German or distance from it. From this perspective, the traditional spelling which obtained until the middle of the 19th century, and to some extent the contemporary Haredi orthography, exhibit closeness to both Hebrew and German, while the YIVO and (to an even greater degree) Soviet orthographies aim to distance themselves from both. The Germanizing spelling of the late 19th century emphasized its closeness to German and distanced itself from Hebrew, while Birnbaum's system did the opposite, namely distance itself from German and emphasize its closeness to Hebrew.

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