

*Modern*

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YIDDISH

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DICTIONARY

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URIEL WEINREICH

Professor of Yiddish Language, Literature, and Culture  
on the Atran Chair, Columbia University



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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

In the years since World War II, there has developed in the United States and other English-speaking countries a greatly increased interest in the Yiddish language, its literature, and the culture of its speakers. The language has become a subject of study on many levels, from colleges and universities to widely scattered informal groups. Translations from the Yiddish and scholarly investigations of the Yiddish language and the related culture have been actively pursued. This strong interest has made the lack of suitable reference books and study materials all the more acutely felt.

The principal purpose of the *Modern English-Yiddish Yiddish-English Dictionary* is to furnish the advanced student of Yiddish with access to the language of modern cultivated usage. It is meant to serve him as a guide to the correct and idiomatic employment of the language in speech and in writing. As an aid in the reading of Yiddish written materials, it is likely to be particularly helpful with nonfiction texts.

The Dictionary is designed in the main for persons who have a firm grounding in English and at least a rudimentary command of Yiddish and are eager to broaden their mastery of Yiddish vocabulary and phraseology. Accordingly, the Yiddish rather than the English material has been phonetically and grammatically analyzed, and English glosses have been used, wherever appropriate, to specify semantic detail. Likewise, the "Guidelines for Use of the Dictionary" has been presented in far more detail in English (pp. xiii-xliii) than in Yiddish (pp. 7-17).

Like any other language, literary Yiddish contains a number of orthographic, phonetic, grammatical, and semantic variants. The ones most likely to be encountered by the reader of Yiddish texts have been incorporated in the Yiddish-English part of the Dictionary. On the other hand, since the learner of the language will want to have firm recommendations as to his own usage, the English-Yiddish part includes variant forms only sparingly.

The growth of standardized Yiddish has been stimulated since the middle of the nineteenth century by the precipitous development of belles

lettres and the employment of the language as a medium of the press, of political movements, of educational systems up to the college level, of scholarly research, and occasionally of political administration. This rapid growth has taken place simultaneously in many countries, sometimes with only limited planning and coordination. The Dictionary may therefore also have significance for accomplished speakers and writers of Yiddish as a checklist of modern terminology in which innovation has been relatively decentralized. Where the author was faced with a multiplicity of competing innovations, he generally elected to recommend those that struck him as most felicitous from the point of view of precision, idiomaticity of patterning, and adequacy within a broader terminological framework capable of further expansion.

For a basic introduction to Yiddish grammar, the user of this Dictionary is referred to the author's *College Yiddish* (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1949; 4th revised edition, 2d printing, 1966; 399 pp.). For additional vocabulary, the reader may consult with great profit Nahum Stutchkoff's *Der oytser fun der yidisher shprakh* ("Thesaurus of the Yiddish Language"; New York: YIVO, 1950; 60 plus 934 pp.). Attention is also called to the unabridged Yiddish defining dictionary, the second volume of which (out of the projected ten) appeared in 1966.\*

Aside from special-purpose word lists and phrase books, the only English-Yiddish dictionary available to students has been Alexander Harkavy's work, first published in 1891 and later reissued several times without basic changes. It has long been inadequate, not only because of its age, but also because it was designed mainly for people knowing Yiddish and aiming at a mastery of English. Harkavy's modernized and more comprehensive Yiddish-English-Hebrew dictionary (New York, 1925; 2d edition, 1928) has been far more useful and, in a sense, can still serve as a key to the great works of Yiddish literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is, however, plainly deficient with regard to contemporary literary and newspaper usage and scholarly prose. Moreover, it lacks an English-Yiddish counterpart.

Apart from the vocabulary appended to *College Yiddish*, one of the author's early attempts at tackling lexicographic problems was his preparation of a small dictionary intended for the pupils of Yiddish schools on the elementary and high school levels. At the suggestion of Mr. Joseph Chromow, work was begun in 1948. A draft version was completed a year later but was never published. The author would like to take this opportunity to recall with gratitude the help of the late Mr. Chromow, Dr. Chaim Pomerantz, and Mrs. Rebecca Tcherikower, as well as that of Messrs. Israel

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\* Judah A. Joffe and Yudel Mark (eds.), *Groyser verterbukh fun der yidisher shprakh*, New York: Yiddish Dictionary Committee, Inc.

Silberberg and Mendl Hoffman, all of whom gave aid and encouragement while he was working on the school dictionary.

With the growth of interest in Yiddish studies, the need for a modern English-Yiddish, Yiddish-English dictionary for the advanced student became more and more apparent. Since the early 1950s the author has continually worked toward this end. The encouragement given by Professor Herbert H. Paper at an early stage of this work is gratefully remembered. When a fresh prospect for publication arose in 1964, the author greatly expanded and thoroughly revised his material until it was brought to its present form. The principles that governed the compilation of this Dictionary, in particular as concerns the portrayal of standard Yiddish and the direction of further development indicated by the choices of variants that were made, will be set forth in a paper, "Standard Yiddish in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century," to be published by YIVO as a separate booklet.

It is the author's pleasant duty to thank the large number of people who helped in the preparation and publication of the *Modern English-Yiddish Yiddish-English Dictionary*. Mr. Richard Zuckerman offered numerous helpful suggestions. Professor Max Weinreich contributed many citations from his files and recommendations about the choice of variants. Mr. Szymon Dawidowicz of the YIVO staff was of immeasurable help as an adviser in matters of essence and as a superb proofreader. But it was the selfless, expert assistance of Professor Mordkhe Schaechter which more than any other factor helped to ensure that the best modern usage was reflected in the Dictionary. The responsibility for any deficiencies must remain with the author; the credit for whatever virtues the Dictionary contains must be fairly shared with his collaborators, especially with Professor Schaechter.

Dr. Maurice Jacobs was always ready to meet the rigorous demands involved in this intricate work of typography, which required two alphabetical systems written in opposite directions. With great ingenuity and tireless effort, Mr. Philip Herstein, compositor of the book for the Maurice Jacobs Press, was responsible for giving the Dictionary the quality of its appearance.

The encouragement received from the late Mr. Aaron Fishman of Philadelphia is also recalled.

Finally, the author acknowledges his gratitude to his wife, Beatrice Silverman Weinreich, who participated in the work from beginning to end, and who lent a hand with every aspect of the work, from the subtlest problems of planning to the most tedious clerical routines.

Pressing a language into the mold of a bilingual dictionary of necessity results in a somewhat biased characterization of its structure and its resources. But the task cannot be shirked forever. One must begin somewhere and look to future editions for the progressive elimination of such inade-

quacies as are inevitable in a long-overdue first attempt. Future revisions, it is hoped, will make more accurate the profile of the language presented in the Dictionary, as well as reflect continuing changes in usage. The author will be grateful for criticisms and suggestions for improvement.

[March, 1967]

U. W.