Review

Reviewed Work(s): Soviet Yiddish: Language Planning and Linguistic Development by Gennady Estraikh

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an excellent point with her analysis of the key concepts – *frim*, meaning religiously observant, and *haymish*, meaning not modern or alien to the community – and she suggests their importance in explaining priorities. Glinert, apart from his general introduction, reports on a study he has made of the views of Haredi educators on Yiddish. Joan Abraham complements this with an account of the case that was made by Belz schools when their curriculum was challenged by the Department of Education, and she reports on five discussions she had with Haredim about English and their language ideology. Miriam Isaacs reports her own observations of some Israeli Hasidic communities. Bryna Bogoch provides a survey of the role of Yiddish in Israeli government-supported secular and religious as well as Haredi schools in Israel, and she notes the paradox of the gender differences. As a bonus, and as a first hint of the major transformations that continue to take place in these outwardly traditional communities, Zelda Kahan-Newman presents the Yiddish text and English translation of a *badkhones*, an example of the genre of traditional songs sung to brides at weddings, but this one innovatively composed and sung by women.

Pious voices suffers from the usual problems of collections of articles: there is a great deal of repetition; there is no single voice or vision; and there are few cross-references. It is, nonetheless, an important pioneering study of a topic of central importance to the fields of language loyalty and multilingualism; it provides important new data and original views of the phenomenon of Yiddish language revival in Hasidic communities. One looks forward to more research on this topic, specifically on such intriguing puzzles as why only some Hasidic sects put this emphasis on Yiddish, and what prevents greater success in encouraging girls to adopt Yiddish.

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GENNADY ESTRAIKH, *Soviet Yiddish: Language planning and linguistic development.* (Oxford modern languages and literature monographs.) Oxford: Clarendon; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. Pp. x, 217. Hb $70.00.

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Soviet Yiddish occupies a special place in Yiddish linguistics. It is different from *klal*-Yiddish – 'rule'-Yiddish, or normative Yiddish – in having certain orthographic peculiarities and a quite striking oddness in the spelling of words of

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Hebrew-Aramaic origin. These differences, which were ideologically driven and enforced by the Soviets, are plain to see and visually startling even to neophyte readers of ordinary Yiddish. The older British spellings *gaol*, *kerb*, and *tyre* for *jail*, *curb*, and *tire* convey something of the effect to the American English speaker.

However, Soviet Yiddish is – we must now train ourselves to say "was" – different from other types of Yiddish in ways far more fundamental than orthography. It is as if Soviet Yiddish were an almost perfect clone of normal Yiddish, alike in most things but not in every detail: an orphan raised in a world completely different from the rest of Yiddish. The Soviet Yiddish language was Yiddish, of course: no one would ever have taken it for anything else (e.g. German or Russian), but neither could a reader or speaker of the other kinds of Yiddish ever feel altogether comfortable in the presence of this alien thing, even over the distance imposed by the medium of the written language. The differences in orthography and spelling strike the eye first, and Estraikh deals with these matters at length in *Soviet Yiddish*; but his richly detailed and thoroughly documented account of every aspect of Soviet Yiddish shows that the visual eccentricities were the tip of the iceberg, and what a complex and absorbing a history there is here for the linguist, the sociolinguist, and the student of the politics of language.

In the 19th century, virtually every Jew in Eastern Europe spoke Yiddish. It was the first language of most of them, and the only language for many, especially women. Yiddish could obtain food, lodging, and information from Hungary and Romania to the Baltic states, from Czechoslovakia through Poland and deep into Russia. There was linguistic assimilation among Jews, of course – to Polish, Russian, Romanian, Czech, and Hungarian in particular, and less so to Estonian, Lithuanian, and Latvian – and this increased as the nineteenth century passed into the twentieth. Even so, the 1897 census of Tsarist Russia reported that 97% of Russian Jews considered their mother tongue to be the "Jewish language," which ordinarily would have meant Yiddish rather than Hebrew. Only 1.3% claimed Russian as their first language, 0.9% Polish, and 0.4% German (p. 5). (Estraikh's book is packed with this kind of statistical data. He has condensed a mountain of archival research in Russian, Yiddish, English, and other sources – one of his book's sterling qualities.) In 1939, on the eve of World War II and with two decades of Soviet communism behind them, 41% of Russian Jews claimed Yiddish as their first language (a drop from 72.6% in 1926); at the same time, the percentage of those claiming Russian as their native language grew by over 200% (97).

Other countries of eastern Europe with large Jewish populations would show a similar decline in Yiddish in the same period, though I venture to guess that the decline would not be as sharp as in Russia. Russia under communism saw the heaviest kind of meddling in the lives of its peoples and their languages. Estraikh sets the stage by detailing the sociolinguistic environment of Yiddish in pre-revolutionary Russia, but the story of Soviet Yiddish begins with the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) and continues over the next two decades (1920–1940). Sta-

lin's increasingly undisguised and vicious anti-Semitism in the 1930s and the destruction wreaked by World War II on Jewish life and culture effectively shut the door on the future of Yiddish in the Soviet Union, and on its inclusion in Soviet linguistic policy and planning.

The focus in Estraikh's book, therefore, is on the interwar years, with supplementary observations on the state of Yiddish in the Soviet Union post-1945. The operative phrase for Yiddish in the post-war Soviet Union is "increasing marginalization": Yiddish printing was usually banned; instruction in Yiddish was not officially possible; and publishing in Yiddish was confined, by and large, to one pathetic party journal, *Sovetish heymland* ('Soviet Homeland'), which Estraikh estimates never had more than a hundred readers born after the war (174).

In the immediate aftermath of the Russian Revolution, however, Lenin had adopted remarkably liberal policies on language. His basic tenet was, at least on paper, that there be no special privileges for any one language. Let all languages flourish – Russian, German, Uzbek, Georgian, Yiddish. Thus, an educational system was established with Yiddish as the medium of instruction; committees were appointed to regulate normative usage; journalism and belles-lettres were encouraged; and institutes and university chairs were founded to advance the cause of Yiddish.

The most immediate change was lexical. All the *apparat*-words of Soviet communism had to be taken into Yiddish: *sovkhoz* 'State farm', *kombed* 'committee of the village poor', *sovnarkhoz* 'Council of National Economy', and so on. The Yiddish linguistic establishment argued back and forth in terms with which every student of language planning and "reform" is familiar. Should such words be taken over directly from Russian? Or should Yiddish loan-translations or calques be devised? Whatever solution was adopted, there were bound to be bitter disagreements. (When is anything about language planning in any language not accompanied by those?) As early as 1923, the Jewish Bureau was complaining that nobody could understand the language of the central Moscow Yiddish daily newspaper, *Der emes* ('The Truth') (47). Some very careful work on classes of neologisms and their acceptability was done by a leading Soviet Yiddish linguist, Ajzik Zaretski, and a surprising amount of this is still useful for the general student of language planning (47–50), as in fact much of Zaretski's other linguistic work is – though it is uncertain how much help this will be to any but a handful of linguists, since almost everything he wrote appeared only in Yiddish.

As I mentioned, Soviet Yiddish is best known for its orthographic peculiarities and its spelling of words of Hebrew-Aramaic origin. The former were fairly benign. Traditional Yiddish orthography, like the Hebrew on which it is based, has differently shaped graphemes for the word-final occurrences of a few phonemes: *f*, *m*, *n*, *x*, *t^s*. Yiddish spelling reformers, even in pre-Soviet times, had proposed abolishing the special final forms – some had gone so far as to advocate romanizing Yiddish orthography – so it was not a major departure from Standard Yiddish orthography when Soviet Yiddish adopted the change

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(though, characteristically, accompanied by much violent arguing). The more radical deviation involved the spelling of originally Hebrew-Aramaic words in Yiddish, where these constitute some 20% of the vocabulary, depending on speaker, style, and register. Words of Germanic origin are spelled "phonetical-ly," with all the vowels marked. The Hebrew-Aramaic words, in keeping with Hebrew and Semitic tradition, mark no vowels, so that *kosher* is spelled ⟨ks^{h}r⟩, *milkhome* 'family' is spelled <mlxmh>, and *Talmud* is spelled ⟨tlmwd⟩. For ideological reasons (under communism, the equation was Hebrew = religion = bad), Soviet ideologues were determined to get rid of the traditional Hebrew spellings, and in doing do, they drove a huge wedge between Soviet Yiddish and the rest of the Yiddish-literate world.

All this and much more is recounted here. I am impressed by the archival research that Gennady Estraikh put into his book and the care he has taken with his exposition. There is much here of interest and usefulness for sociolinguists of every variety. In every case where I am able to judge independently, he has his facts and arguments right. The work is very solid, comprehensive, and magiste-rial. I cannot think of many questions about Soviet Yiddish that this book has not answered for me. Almost all the sources are either in Yiddish or Russian, and few linguists other than Estraikh – a former journalist in the Soviet Union, with native fluency in both Yiddish and Russian – could have brought this off. My hat is off to him.

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PING CHEN, *Modern Chinese: History and sociolinguistics*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Pp. ix, 229. Hb $59.95, pb $21.95.

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China's program of language modernization has been as successful as that of any other nation, yet until Chen's book, we have not had a readable and comprehen-sive discussion of its reforms. Literacy has risen from about 10% in 1949 to around 80% today. Spoken Chinese dialects, from Cantonese through Hakka to Mandarin, vary as much as do the Germanic languages English, German, and Swedish; so it is a major achievement that 90% of Chinese people can now un-derstand Standard Mandarin, up from 40% in the 1950s (p. 8). The current re-forms have roots deep in the 19th century, but Chen discusses how early visions of reform became successful only in the past few decades. An unusual virtue of this compact volume is that it discusses language reforms throughout Greater China – not only in the People's Republic, including Hong Kong, but in Taiwan and Singapore as well.